

DOWNTOWN FRAMINGHAM ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN

Prepared for the Framingham Planning Department and the
Framingham Downtown Economic Development Task Force

by

Community Design Partnership/Strategies

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is a climate of optimism and opportunity in Downtown Framingham today. A number of public investment projects are in the planning, design, or construction stages, notably design of the Route 126 underpass and the Downtown Common. New private investment is showing interest in Downtown and vacancies are dwindling. Both town government and the community have been organizing to focus attention on the revitalization of Downtown. This Economic Development Strategic Plan was commissioned by the Town of Framingham to provide a blueprint for coordinated action by public and private entities and individuals to revitalize the downtown commercial district.

The Plan is organized to provide town officials and the community with an analysis of Downtown today, a vision of Downtown tomorrow, and an action plan of specific steps to be taken in the areas of organization, economic development, physical improvements, and image improvement.

Time Frame and Planning Area

This plan focuses on steps that Framingham can take now and in the next three to five years to revitalize Downtown. The emphasis is on the coordination of a continuing series of initiatives, rather than one or two big projects.

Downtown was divided into three planning areas for this project:

- The **Downtown Spine** - the Concord Street/Hollis Street corridor.
- The **Downtown Core** - the predominantly commercial area around the Spine with its edges defined by Pearl Street, the museum and library block, the Avery-Dennison complex, and to the southeast and south, Taylor, Gordon, Clafin, and Cedar Streets.
- The **Downtown Neighborhood** - the area within a one-mile radius of Town Hall.

Community Participation in the Planning Process

A downtown revitalization plan must have the support of the community as a whole in order to be successful. In preparing this plan, several methods were used to engage the Framingham community in a discussion about the future of Downtown:

- **Task Force** - A Task Force composed of residents, business owners, town officials, and town staff met regularly with the consultants and reviewed the interim and final reports.
- **Public meetings** - The first public meeting was organized as a planning workshop. Community members divided into small groups to discuss Downtown's best and worst aspects and to create a vision for a revitalized Downtown ten years from now. At the second public meeting, the consultants presented preliminary recommendations and then received comments and suggestions from the participants. The final Plan was presented at a meeting of the Board of Selectmen.
- **Surveys** - Survey questionnaires for downtown businesses and for the community as a whole were distributed in English, Portuguese, and Spanish.

- **Meeting, interviews, and focus groups** -The consultants met with organizations such as Downtown Solutions and the Brazilian Business and Community Council; interviewed business and community leaders; and held informal focus groups, in Spanish and Portuguese, with representatives of the Hispanic and Brazilian communities.

The Downtown Vision

Through the community participation process, a vision of a revitalized Downtown Framingham emerged:

- Downtown is clean, well-maintained, safe and convenient — in fact and in perception.
- Traffic moves steadily through Downtown intersections.
- Parking is clearly marked, convenient, and available.
- Downtown is pedestrian-friendly.
- Downtown serves the neighborhood and celebrates the diverse character of the neighborhood.
- Downtown shops have attractive signs, window displays, and storefronts.
- New retail businesses, restaurants and entertainment options for day and evening, new downtown employee groups, and new residents in upper-story apartments expand the downtown market and create day and evening activity.
- Downtown preserves the variety and uniqueness of small businesses.
- Downtown attracts shoppers and patrons from all over Framingham and nearby communities.

Plan Recommendations

Based on the analysis of existing market opportunities and physical conditions, the results of the community participation elements of the planning process, and the experience of communities that have successfully revitalized their downtowns, recommendations were developed in the areas of zoning and land use, organization and management, targeted economic development and promotion, and physical improvements. Implementation of these recommendations will improve and enhance the image of Downtown.

Land-Use Plan

The land use plan recommends modifications to downtown zoning in order to consolidate retail and office uses around the Downtown Core area, emphasize the identity of Downtown through attractive gateways and clearer boundaries, provide more housing opportunities, and de-emphasize heavy industry. Consolidation of business uses in the center encourages shoppers to park their cars and walk around the district, promotes the redevelopment of empty space, and encourages the creation of a community of interests among retailers and other businesses Downtown. The recommendations include permitting multi-family and upper-story housing Downtown, as well as the creation of a special district for mixed-use waterfront development in anticipation of eventual relocation of the railroad switching yards.

Organization and Management

A downtown revitalization plan needs full-time, paid, professional staff to implement the downtown plan and coordinate the activities of a network of linked public and private groups. The Plan recommends that the Economic Development and Industrial Corporation (EDIC) take on the leadership role in downtown revitalization, with

responsibility for business recruitment, program administration, permitting assistance, and coordination. Downtown Solutions and a new downtown business organization would work closely with the EDIC. Recommendations include:

- The Town should hire an experienced professional to direct the EDIC with two years' salary funding in place; provide some capital to the EDIC for operations and programs; organize an advisory committee made up of downtown business and community representatives to assist the EDIC board
- Downtown Solutions should concentrate on events programming, seasonal beautification and decoration programs, media relations to improve the overall image of Downtown, and neighborhood issues. The group should secure nonprofit status and pursue private funding through memberships and sponsorships. With these funds it could hire a part-time events coordinator and develop events and media programs for Downtown.
- A new business organization, under the umbrella of Downtown Solutions or the Chamber of Commerce, if desired, should be organized to focus on joint promotion of Downtown as a shopping area while offering services specifically tailored to the needs of business owners.
- Other Downtown institutions, such as the Danforth Museum and the Library, should be included as partners in joint grant proposals promoting Downtown as a cultural center.

Economic Development

Downtown does not capture enough of the sales potential in the neighborhood, from the downtown workforce, or from special groups such as commuters and patrons of cultural institutions. Thousands of people pass through Downtown every year who rarely stop to buy anything. At the same time, economic anchors such as the Brazilian business cluster and Fabric Place attract regional customers and could become the foundation of a broader customer base for Downtown.

The economic development recommendations emphasize strengthening the existing markets and businesses, recruiting new businesses that can serve overlapping market segments, and developing cross-promotions among the different businesses and business clusters in Downtown.

- Provide assistance to potential new businesses through a space and site locator service, a permit streamlining program, and the packaging of incentives.
- Pursue the feasibility of recruiting a movie theater and a farmers' and crafts' market for Downtown. These businesses could attract patrons from a wide range of income and ethnic groups.
- Expand the downtown neighborhood market by permitting multi-family and upper-story housing.
- Provide technical assistance and loans to help existing small businesses succeed.
- Develop promotions specifically targeted to downtown workers, train commuters, and patrons of cultural institutions.
- Recruit more businesses with employees
- Coordinate business promotions and hours with events programming.
- Develop a program of joint advertising and cross-promotions for all downtown businesses in a variety of media including Portuguese- and Spanish-language media.

Physical Improvements

Improvements to the physical environment are crucial to changing Downtown's image and to enhancing its potential as a pedestrian-friendly place. Attractive and well-maintained public spaces send a message that the Town cares about the Downtown. This gives private owners more confidence that it is worthwhile to make their own investments. Recommendations include:

- Enhance the predictability of vehicle circulation and steady progress of traffic Downtown through implementation of the short term transportation improvements recommended in the *Route 126 Corridor Study*, and through pursuit of speedy MBTA action to move the train platform.
- Ensure that the design of the Route 126 underpass project respects, preserves, and enhances the pedestrian environment.
- Organize a parking management system for Downtown and enforce it.
- Improve maintenance of the Pearl Street garage and enhance the pedestrian environment between parking spaces and Downtown destinations by improving lighting, landscaping, and identification of pedestrian routes.
- Pursue the possibility of building a new parking garage or deck Downtown.
- Enhance the pedestrian experience Downtown by streetscape improvements such as planting of more street trees, installation of pedestrian-scale lighting, restriction of curb cuts, discouragement of blank walls in buildings, and installation of low walls or fencing with landscaping where parking lots abut the sidewalk.
- Focus streetscape improvements first on the Downtown Spine, the Howard Street connection between the Dennison complex and Downtown, and the gateways to the Downtown area.
- Make storefronts and shop windows the center of attention by harmonizing and updating designs and displays through a storefront signage loan program.
- Develop design guidelines for the planned Downtown façade improvements and storefront signage program.
- Advocate for improved maintenance of the rail yards on the shores of Farm Pond and the eventual relocation of the yards.

Identity and Image

Consolidation of Downtown's commercial activities in a defined area, identification of its gateways with design elements, streetscape and other physical improvements, and an enhanced business mix will all enhance Downtown's image. However, it is essential to communicate that Downtown Framingham is a safe, vibrant, interesting multicultural commercial district.

- Promote and celebrate Downtown's historic, traditional yet diverse character with a tag-line or slogan.
- Develop a logo or graphic that communicates this identity and use it throughout Downtown and on promotional materials.
- Organize a sustained media campaign to keep revitalization efforts before the public.
- Enhance immigrant community participation in town affairs by providing foreign-language assistance.
- Encourage and assist immigrant businesses in providing English-language storefront and store window signage to broaden their clientele.

- Enhance the pedestrian or bike patrol police presence Downtown, especially during special events.

Action Plan

The Plan provides an implementation schedule for the short term (within 12 months), the middle term (12 to 36 months), and the long term (36 months and longer). For the convenience of the various implementing groups, action items are also organized by implementing entity.

Short term activities focus on organization, fund-raising, staffing, promotion, rezoning, and continuation of beautification and programming efforts:

Public sector actions

- Appointment of an advisory committee for the EDIC that will also serve as a Downtown Task Force to monitor implementation of the revitalization plan
- Preparation of a financing plan to hire an EDIC director and to provide seed money for programs
- Organization of a business inventory and site-finder database
- Preparation and implementation of a parking management program
- Preparation of design guidelines and initiation of a storefront signage improvement assistance program
- Assurance in projects slated for imminent construction of conformity with plan objectives to create a physical identity for Downtown
- Preparation of rezoning plan to implement the recommended land use plan
- Consolidation of downtown maintenance responsibilities under one manager
- Recruitment of a Portuguese and Spanish speaking permanent Town Hall employee
- Passage of a by-law permitting sidewalk cafes
- Preparation of a downtown development and business brochure (with Downtown Solutions)
- Development of an identifying slogan and graphic logo for Downtown for use on all Downtown-related materials (with Downtown Solutions)
- Pursuit of the relocation of the summer farmers' market from the St. Tarcisius parking lot to a more central downtown location (with Downtown Solutions)

Private sector actions

- Completion of Downtown Solutions organization as a nonprofit with a schedule of membership dues, and pursuit of private sponsorship for events and programs
- Organization of a downtown business association
- Initiation of a regular media relations program for Downtown
- Preparation and distribution of a simple brochure on downtown businesses with discount coupons
- Continued organization of special events
- Collaboration with the Planning Department on downtown issues
- Planning and implementation of a seasonal decoration and beautification program
- Promotion of a program for merchants to light shop windows at night

Middle term activities focus on business recruitment, technical assistance, and physical improvements to the most visible parts of Downtown.

Public sector actions

- Passage of rezoning plan to implement the recommended land use plan
- Hiring of an EDIC director and provision of seed funding for EDIC programs
- Development of a downtown redevelopment assistance package for reuse and redevelopment of vacant business or light industrial space in Downtown
- Recruitment of small high-tech start-ups through the Town's web page and publications
- Pursuit of funding and commissioning of a feasibility study for a permanent farmers'/crafts market
- Recruitment of new retail and service businesses such as a movie theater, "white tablecloth" restaurant, and commuter service businesses
- Development of storefront façade design guidelines and initiation of a façade improvement assistance program
- Planting of street trees to the edges of the expanded Central Business District
- Improvement of the pedestrian environment between parking areas and shops (with the private sector)
- Implementation of interim intersection improvements at the 126/135 intersection
- Monitoring of the Route 126 underpass design to assure protection and enhancement of the pedestrian environment

Private sector actions

- Hiring of a part-time events planner for Downtown Solutions
- Development of an all-season series of entertainment events for Downtown
- Continuation of the coordination of promotions and events with cultural institutions and with merchants
- Assistance to Town government in marketing the storefront signage and façade improvement assistance programs
- Promotion and dissemination of information on small business technical assistance available to local businesses
- Development of a program of joint advertising and cross-promotions for downtown business
- Creation of discount programs for train commuters
- Improvement of the pedestrian environment between parking areas and shops (with Town government)
- Coordination of promotions with Downtown Solutions events and cultural institutions
- Creation of a program to welcome new businesses

Long term activities focus on the continuation of business assistance programs and events programming initiated in earlier years, and investigation of permanent management and financing options such as a Business Improvement District. The results of downtown programs will become more and more evident three or more years into the revitalization program. Implementation of large projects such as expansion of streetscape and façade improvements throughout the Downtown and possible construction of a new parking garage or deck have a long term horizon because of

their high cost.

Public sector actions

- Continue business recruitment and business assistance programs
- Explore the feasibility of a Business Improvement District (with the business group)
- Install closely-spaced, pedestrian scale lighting along the Downtown Spine
- Expand streetscape improvements over time to the entire Downtown Core area
- Obtain funding and build a new parking garage or deck Downtown

Private sector actions

- Continue events programming, beautification program, and coordination of business and neighborhood issues
- Continue joint promotion and cross promotion of downtown businesses
- Continue small business assistance programs
- Explore the feasibility of a Business Improvement District (with the EDIC)

Costs and Financing

Public and private financing are both essential to the Downtown Framingham revitalization effort. Public financing will be the key to physical improvement of streets and public properties, the funding of an EDIC director, and for seed money for programs to assist businesses. The commitment of public funds leverages private investment because it signals a municipal commitment to the Downtown.

There is no one source of funding for a downtown revitalization plan of this kind. A variety of public funding sources can be used or pursued for specific aspects of the Plan, such as Community Development Block Grant funds, state transportation funds, state Municipal Incentive Grant funds, state Community Development Action Grants, Mass Turnpike Tourism promotion grants, Massachusetts Cultural Council Cultural Economic Development grants, Massachusetts Development Finance Administration funding, and Tax Increment Financing programs. Some Town resources will likely prove necessary. Programs should emphasize loans rather than grants, in order to create a revolving fund with continuing income.

The commitment of private funds to the revitalization program is also essential through matching funds for improvements to private properties, sponsorship of programs and event series, membership dues for Downtown Solutions and the new business organization, and business funding of joint promotions and advertising.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	INTRODUCTION	1
2.	DOWNTOWN FRAMINGHAM TODAY	5
	A. Planning Area Boundaries	5
	B. Location and Demographics	6
	C. The Physical Environment: Organization and Perceptions	10
	D. The Institutional and Entrepreneurial Environment	13
	E. Current Development Activity Downtown	17
	F. Downtown Framingham: The Current Scene	17
3.	THE DOWNTOWN FRAMINGHAM MARKET	18
	A. Trade Area, Sales Potential and Market Segments	18
	B. Business Inventory	21
	C. Downtown Anchors	23
	D. Business Clusters	24
	E. Business Survey	25
	F. Downtown Framingham's Market Potential	27
	G. Creating a Culture for Downtown Development	27
4.	THE COMMUNITY SPEAKS	29
	A. Why go Downtown?	30
	B. What's best about Downtown?	30
	C. What's worst about Downtown?	31
	D. How is Downtown as a shopping area?	32
	E. What should be the top three improvements to Downtown?	33
	F. What kinds of new businesses should be in Downtown?	33
	G. What kinds of downtown activities attract people?	34
	H. The Community Vision	35
5.	OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS	36
	A. Management and Organization	36
	B. Economic Development	36
	C. Physical Environment	37
	D. Identity and Image	38
6.	DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION STRATEGY: GOALS, ACTIONS FINANCING OPTIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION	39
	A. Recommended Land Use Plan	40
	B. Management and Organization	41
	C. Economic Development	50
	D. Physical Improvements	57
	E. Identity and Image	62

7.	ACTION PLAN	64
	A. The Short Term - 12 Months	64
	B. The Middle Term - 12 to 36 Months	67
	C. The Long Term - 36 Months or Longer	68
	D. Public Actions	69
	E. Private Actions	70

BIBLIOGRAPHY	72
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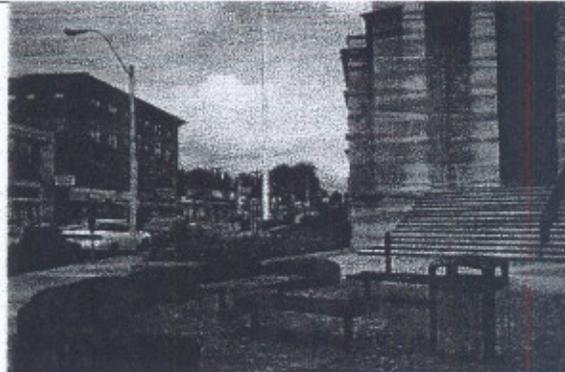
EXHIBITS

1.	Focus Area	<i>between pages 6 and 7</i>
2.	Spatial Organization	<i>between pages 10 and 11</i>
3.	Existing Land Uses	<i>between pages 12 and 13</i>
4.	Recommended Land Use Plan	<i>between pages 40 and 41</i>
5.	Streetscape Improvements	<i>between pages 60 and 61</i>
6.	Signage and Storefronts	<i>between pages 60 and 61</i>

APPENDIX

1.	Demographic and Market Statistics
2.	Downtown Framingham Business Inventory
3.	Community Surveys
4.	Business Survey
5.	Funding Sources
6.	Newspaper Articles on the Planning Process
7.	Downtown Framingham Vision 2000 Charrette
8.	Revitalization and Economic Development Examples from Other Communities

I. INTRODUCTION



The revitalization of Downtown Framingham has already begun. Town government has begun important initiatives to resolve long-standing problems. Interested citizens are ready to go to work on concrete projects to make Downtown more successful. Hard-working newcomers are building businesses. The economic climate is good.

- **Immigrant entrepreneurs** from all over the world have joined traditional businesses along Downtown's retail corridor, the Concord Street - Hollis Street spine.
- **Downtown Solutions**, an organization of downtown residents and business owners, sponsored a series of successful events during its first year of operation in 1997, and is organizing as a nonprofit corporation.
- **The Brazilian Business and Community Council** also emerged in 1997, giving a voice to Downtown's most visible immigrant business community.
- **The MBTA** has completed the design of a new commuter rail platform and parking area to be located west of the current station. Construction is expected to begin in 1998. The new location will reduce the frequency of traffic tie-ups in Downtown.
- **The Town** has invested in the design and installation of new public signage, in redesign of the Downtown Common, and in traffic improvements for Downtown. State funding for design of the Route 126 underpass was authorized in the 1994 Transportation Bond Bill and recently released. Design will proceed in 1998.
- In early 1998, the old **Avery-Dennison manufacturing complex** was sold for redevelopment as office space, potentially bringing some 2,000 new workers to the downtown market.
- A group of **local architects and designers**, after months of brainstorming in a downtown "charrette" or workshop, presented their long term vision of Downtown to the public in January 1998.

The Need for a Plan

Despite these encouraging signs, Downtown needs a revitalization plan to serve as a road map, so that current and future initiatives will be coordinated, community-based, strategic, and effective. The Framingham Planning Department, advised by the Downtown Economic Development Task Force, commissioned the team of Community Design Partnership and Strategies to prepare this Downtown Framingham Economic Development Strategic Plan.

• Community Process

The Plan is based on a community process encompassing surveys, public meetings, interviews, and focus groups. It included outreach and discussions with the Brazilian and Hispanic communities in Portuguese and Spanish.

• Strategic Analysis

Based on a demographic and market analysis, a physical analysis, an organizational analysis, and the results of the community process, the Plan identifies the opportunities and constraints affecting the revitalization of Downtown Framingham and provides strategies for making the most of the commercial district's opportunities and mitigating its constraints.

• Action Plan

The Plan provides a blueprint for implementing the strategies through a series of specific actions to be taken by the public and private sectors in the short, medium, and long term.

Attracting People Downtown

The presence of people makes downtown commercial districts successful, and the districts that attract people are the successful ones. The job of a downtown revitalization program is to reveal or create value and enhance quality of life in order to attract people to downtown. It brings vitality to the street on a pedestrian scale and creates an environment in which people can have enjoyable experiences. No one type of improvement is sufficient. A successful downtown commercial district requires a complex integration of several necessary variables:

• The Market Environment: Location, Demographics, and Economic Conditions

The district must offer goods and services that potential customers want to buy, at a price they can afford, in a way that is either cheaper, more convenient, more attractive, or more entertaining than the offerings of the competition.

• The Physical Environment: Organization and Perceptions

Much more than decoration or architectural style, the design and organization of the physical environment of downtown, as well as the way that it is cared for, are central to how safe, comfortable and oriented people feel when they are there, and whether they want to come back.

- **The Institutional and Entrepreneurial Environment**

Public and private individuals and organizations manage enterprises, programs, and plans. Effective organization is crucial to downtown success, as is an efficient partnership between the public and private sectors, each concentrating on what it does best.

The "Five M's" of Downtown Revitalization

- **Management**

Manage the downtown as if it were a single commercial entity, like a mall

- **Market Knowledge**

Know your market niche and who your customers and target markets are

- **Marketing**

Market and promote downtown so that downtown businesses can communicate with their target customers

- **Maintenance**

Make downtown appealing by keeping high standards in the physical maintenance of both public and private properties

- **Money**

Create a financing mechanism that provides adequate, predictable, and reliable funds to implement the downtown plan

(Source: Dolores P. Palma, 1995)

Principles for the Downtown Framingham Revitalization Plan

Downtown Framingham is a complex environment, economically, socially, politically, and physically. It has experienced many of the trends affecting small downtowns everywhere: the movement of retailing to malls and commercial strips, the decline of traditional manufacturing employment, disinvestment followed by renewed vitality with the arrival of entrepreneurial immigrants. The experience of the many successful downtown revitalization efforts all over the country provides a guide for the process that Framingham is now undertaking.

- **Be prepared for the long haul.**

Downtown revitalization is a five to ten-year process.

- **Don't put all your eggs in one basket.**

No single project or program is going to make all the difference. Downtown revitalization needs a multifaceted approach that keeps something going on all the time.

- **Define the boundaries of Downtown.**

Don't encourage strip or neighborhood arterial commercial and office development that steals potential tenants from Downtown.

- **Know the priority locations.**

Focus public investment and activity first where it has the most visibility and the potential to leverage private investment: the Concord-Hollis corridor, Howard Street, Union Avenue, Waverley Street.

- **It's ONE Downtown.**

Enhance connections between Concord and Hollis Streets with design elements and transportation improvements.

- **Retention comes before recruitment.**

It's easier to retain an existing business than to recruit a new one.

- **Don't be too stingy.**

Provide enough initial funding to give new managers a chance to concentrate on something besides raising money to pay their salaries and to give new programs a chance to work.

- **Commuters are just one part of the mix.**

Don't let commuter vehicle needs dominate all decisions about traffic and parking Downtown.

- **There's more parking than meets the eye.**

Coordinated management and redesign of public and private parking lots will make the most efficient use of existing parking.

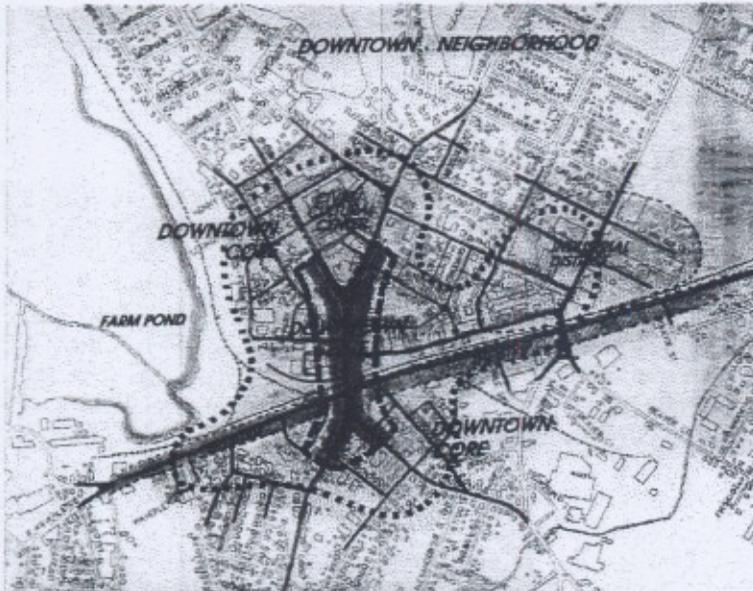
- **Enhance predictability but not blandness.**

Increase predictability in security, parking, and traffic without sacrificing historic character, individuality, and spontaneity. One of the things that people like about malls is that they know what to expect. It's also one of the things that they increasingly dislike about malls. The predictability that shoppers value is related to convenience and security — the expectation that they can find a parking space, that traffic will be manageable, and that the shopping area will be clean and safe. Downtown can benefit from enhancing this kind of predictability. On the other hand, Downtown's main asset is its unique community character — historic buildings, one-of-a-kind shops, customer service, and individual business owners whom shoppers can get to know personally.

- **Communicate.**

The complex nature of Framingham town government requires extra effort to maintain communication among all the town departments, boards, commissions, committees, town meeting members, and citizen groups that can affect what goes on Downtown.

2. DOWNTOWN FRAMINGHAM TODAY



A strategic plan for downtown economic development requires a clear understanding of current conditions and how downtown functions now. This analysis of Downtown Framingham is based on a variety of sources including previous plans and studies, press accounts, interviews, planning department documents, state and federal information sources, commercial sources of data, and on-site analysis.

A. Planning Area Boundaries (see exhibit I)

The boundaries of Downtown Framingham are not well defined. Even its general location was not obvious to some Framingham residents recently queried by a design firm preparing a wayfinding plan for Downtown. For the purposes of this study, we have defined a set of three planning areas for the Downtown: the Downtown Spine, the Downtown Core, and the Downtown Neighborhood.

- **The Downtown Spine** is the Concord Street - Hollis Street corridor from the Memorial Building to Burkis Square. It is bisected by the railroad line and Route 135/Waverley Street, an auto-oriented commercial road.
- **The Downtown Core** is the predominantly commercial area around the Spine. Its edges are defined by Pearl Street; the Danforth Museum, Callahan Senior Center and Library block; the Avery-Dennison complex; Taylor, Gordon, and Claffin Streets; and Cedar Street.
- **The Downtown Neighborhood** includes the area within a one-mile radius of Town Hall. This area contains residential neighborhoods as well as commercial, industrial, and institutional uses. The area within a half-mile radius of Town Hall will be considered to be within walking distance of the Downtown Spine commercial corridor.

B. Location and Demographics

The demographic and business data used in this report were provided for 0.5 mile, 1-mile, and 3-mile radii from Town Hall (known as "ring studies") by National Decision Systems, a demographic and marketing information company. Based on 1990 U.S. Census data and a variety of information sources, the company makes current and projected estimates for certain types of demographic and market information. However, current estimates are not available in the ring studies for all types of information, and it is necessary sometimes to depend on somewhat outdated 1990 census data. In this report, data designated as "current" refers to 1997 estimates from the National Decision Systems ring studies. Data from the 1990 census, also from the ring studies, is identified as such. (See the Appendix for the full statistical report.)

Location

In terms of traditional market demographics and traffic counts, Downtown Framingham has a promising location. Demographics within a 3-mile radius are typically used by chain retailers. Within a 3-mile radius of Town Hall, the nearly 27,000 households were estimated to have a 1997 median income of \$55,065 and an average household income of \$68,788. Unlike many small downtowns, which have very little traffic, approximately 22,000 vehicles drive the Concord Street - Hollis Street corridor daily, potentially open to the marketing messages of signs and store window displays.¹ However, Downtown Framingham is also only two or three miles from the second biggest retail center in New England: the Golden Triangle, with its many malls and the varied retail offerings along Route 9. With 644 retail stores within a 3-mile radius of Town Hall, there are no empty retail categories or significant unmet needs in this area.

Downtown has several potential markets: neighborhood residents, downtown workers, commuters, residents of other neighborhoods and nearby towns, as well as special groups such as immigrants and patrons of cultural and community institutions. Framingham is at the center of MetroWest and its Downtown could attract MetroWest residents who enjoy an urban ambience.

Population Characteristics: Neighborhood Residents

Population	Radius Miles		
	0.5	1.0	3.0
1980 Census	4,595	16,476	58,380
1990 Census	4,716	17,335	63,276
1997 est.	4,689	17,380	65,973
2002 est.	4,917	18,175	70,308
Projected growth 1990-2002	4%	5%	10%

The Downtown Neighborhood, within a one-mile radius of Town Hall, had a 1997 estimated population of 17,380 in 7,025 households and is projected to grow slightly in the next five years. It is a multi-racial and multi-ethnic community: 76 percent white, 9 percent black, 4 percent Asian, and 11 percent other races. Hispanics, who can be of any race, make up 21 percent of the Neighborhood population. In the 1990 census, half of the Hispanics in the Downtown Neighborhood were identified as Puerto Rican. The Brazilian immigrant population in the Neighborhood is somewhat difficult to quantify for a

number of reasons. The census does not have a category for Brazilians, they tend not to identify themselves as Hispanic because they are not Spanish-speakers, a large proportion arrived after 1990, and many are undocumented. It has been estimated that 5,000 to 6,000 Brazilians live in Framingham, predominantly in the greater downtown area.

¹ Rizzo Associates, *Route 126 Corridor Study*, Phase I (January 9, 1997), pp. 7-9.

The 1997 estimated median household income in the Downtown Neighborhood was \$40,183 and the average household income was \$52,682. The 1990 census found that approximately 11 percent of the households were below the poverty line and the unemployment rate was 7 percent when the town-wide rate was 5 percent. Given the improved economy since the census was taken, with a 3.3 percent unemployment rate for all of Framingham in 1997, it is likely that these rates are now much lower. About a quarter of the working age population in 1990 held managerial or professional jobs, while nearly 50 percent held jobs in sales, administrative support, and services.

The estimated 1997 age distribution shows a fifth of the population under 18 years of age and 15 percent of the population age 60 or over. The median age is 32. This is somewhat younger than the median age within a three-mile radius (36 years), despite the population of elderly residents in the Neighborhood.

There are many single-person households in the Downtown Neighborhood. In 1990, 35 percent of all households were made up of singles. Within easy walking distance of Town Hall, a half-mile radius, the proportion rose to 40 percent. Single persons are often attracted to the variety of activities in successful downtown centers. Fifteen percent of all households in 1990 were female-headed families.

Housing within the Downtown Neighborhood is predominantly renter-occupied. In 1990 only 30 percent of occupied housing units within a one-mile radius of Town Hall were occupied by their owners. Within a half-mile radius of Town Hall, three quarters of the occupied housing units were rental units.

Downtown Workers

In 1997, 680 businesses employing 9,177 people operated within a half mile of Town Hall and 15,768 employees in 1,168 businesses worked within one mile. Traditionally, downtown retailers depended heavily on sales to downtown workers. Many of the large employers still operating as late as the 1980s have downsized substantially or closed down. The remaining Avery-Dennison facilities now employ only a few hundred people. The medical center has cut jobs since it was purchased by Columbia/HCA. The former GM plant, located south of the Downtown Core, once employed 3,600 people. Now occupied by Adesa, a car auction firm, it has about 250 full-time and 100 part-time employees.

There is not much overlap between downtown workers and downtown neighborhood residents, judging from 1990 census data on how people get to work. In 1990, 8 percent of residents within a half-mile of Town Hall walked to work, while 5 percent who lived within a mile of Town Hall did so. Although this is an imperfect measure of how many downtown residents also work Downtown, it likely reflects a general reality. This means that downtown workers constitute potential additional sales for downtown merchants.

Commuters

According to 1995 traffic counts presented in Rizzo Associates' *Route 126 Corridor Study*, some 1,500 vehicles per hour travel the Downtown Spine in the morning and afternoon peak hours. Over 800 people a day use Framingham station to ride the commuter train to work. Both automobile and rail commuters include residents of neighboring towns, such as Ashland, as well as Framingham residents.

Special Populations

Immigrant and ethnic communities and the patrons of cultural, civic, and community institutions constitute populations of special interest for downtown revitalization. Downtown has attracted immigrants since the 19th century. Russians, Indians, Southeast Asians, Salvadorans, and Chinese are part of the current mix, as well as the more visible Puerto Rican and Brazilian populations. In addition, Downtown is home to cultural and community institutions that attract large numbers of patrons from all over MetroWest.

Brazilians

The Brazilian community, which began to arrive in force only 10 to 12 years ago, is particularly visible because of its commercial presence in Downtown. As noted earlier, five to six thousand Brazilians are believed to live in Framingham and there are reportedly more than 200 Brazilian businesses in town, many of them small enterprises off the street.² Along the Downtown Spine, Brazilian entrepreneurs began to rent vacant storefronts starting in 1992, and there are now a variety of businesses, from snack shops to jewelry stores and professional services. Most of these businesses cater primarily to the regional Brazilian community, but some are beginning to see more non-Brazilian customers.

Although many Brazilian immigrants still see themselves as transients who will return home, as they stay longer and bear children who are citizens, an increasing number opt to stay in the United States. They then invest their money in property and businesses here, rather than in Brazil, and eventually become citizens themselves. As the community has become more settled, it has begun to take a greater interest in local affairs. For example, in 1997 the community began to organize itself through the creation of the Brazilian Business and Community Council.

Hispanics

As noted earlier, Hispanics make up an estimated 21 percent of the Downtown Neighborhood population. Although they are predominantly Puerto Rican, a community that has been in Downtown Framingham for several decades, immigrants from Central America, Mexico, and other parts of Hispanic America have also arrived in recent years, generally after having lived elsewhere in the United States. Puerto Ricans, of course, are U.S. citizens, and members of the Hispanic community estimate that at least 70 percent of their community in Framingham either has citizenship or permanent residency status. Although there are several Hispanic businesses in and around the Downtown, this community has a less prominent commercial presence than the Brazilians. At present there is no organization to give a voice to the members of this heterogeneous community, but efforts are underway to create a new organization to bring them together.

Patrons of Cultural and Civic Institutions

The four institutions at the northern end of the Downtown Core — the Danforth Art Museum/Art School, the Callahan Senior Center, the Framingham Library, and Fisher College — all attract substantial numbers of people to the Downtown on a daily basis. The Library, Art Museum, and College are open both day and night. In addition, the

² Joel Millman, *The Other Americans* (New York, 1997), 229.

Downtown Core includes numerous government offices that draw people into the area. All these institutions are potential generators of pedestrian traffic and sales in the Downtown.

- The **Library** is open 67 hours a week, has over 50,000 card holders (38,000 from Framingham), and hosts about 600 meetings per year. A count of patrons of the adult section a few years ago found that about 8,000 people come through the door weekly during the six busiest months of the year. The Library also runs special programs, such as literacy and job counseling programs, which bring additional populations Downtown. There are 65 employees (22 full time)
- The **Danforth Art Museum** attracts approximately 25,000 patrons annually from Framingham and the 14 contiguous towns in greater MetroWest, in addition to 4,000 students in the Art School. Museum visitors and students use the building during both the day and evening. The Museum hosts special events such as receptions, patron parties, and films, and can be rented out on Sundays for birthday parties. There are 15 museum employees and 30 contract instructors in the art school.
- **Fisher College** has a total of 200 students, of whom 50-60 are on campus at any one time. Half are from Framingham and half from other MetroWest communities. All students are commuters and the average age is 30. Classes are held from nine in the morning to eight at night. The College also hosts adult education seminars and workshops, support groups (which can attract 100 people at a time for evening meetings), and holds a social service fair twice a year. There is no food available on campus (even vending machines), and some students patronize downtown restaurants for lunch.
- The **Callahan Senior Center** is open during the day and serves 50 to 250 clients daily (depending on programs). Up to 200 volunteers work at the center every year and the Center hosts 65 classes and programs, including computer training and retirement planning. A substantial portion of the clientele comes from the surrounding neighborhoods. About seven years ago the Center did a study which showed that its clients patronize downtown businesses such as the bakery, the drug store, and the bank, as part of their downtown visit to the Senior Center.
- The many **town and state offices** in Downtown also attract a varied clientele: the town offices, Registry of Motor Vehicles, Post Office, Social Security office, state Department of Employment and Training.
- There are also a number of **churches** in the Downtown Core that have services and activities on weekends and weekday evenings. These include St. Stephen's on Concord Street, St. Tarcisius on Waverley Street, and a number of small congregations. The Greater Framingham Community Church, which has a congregation of some 330 families, is purchasing the old post office building at the corner of Franklin and Park Streets. The churches draw their membership from all over Framingham and other MetroWest communities.

C. The Physical Environment: Organization and Perceptions (see exhibit 2)

The characteristics and uses of the physical environment influence how people perceive it. If Downtown is perceived as run down, poorly maintained, uninviting, and unpredictable — a place that no one cares for and cares about — people will tend to avoid it.

Spatial Organization

Specific nodes, links and boundaries are necessary for people to be able to understand and appreciate a place. As pointed out in the recent Wayfinding and Streetscape Study, people first must be able to find Downtown, and then know when they are there. Once they are in the Downtown, people will look for distinct sub-districts and clear links between them.

The Downtown Spine

The corridor from Concord Square to Burkis Square is the commercial spine of downtown. From the Memorial Building one can see Burkis Square and vice versa. The Downtown Spine is continuous and consistent, with the exception of the railroad crossing, the two major roads running parallel to the tracks (Howard Street to the north and Waverley Street to the south), the Downtown Common, and two parking lots.

• Architecture

In general the architecture of the Downtown Spine is of consistently high quality, and in good condition. The Concord Square and Irving Square Historic Districts encompass the Downtown Spine, as well as adjacent parcels, featuring some 41 commercial, institutional, and civic structures. The majority of these buildings were built between 1880 and 1930; most are masonry structures standing 2 to 4 stories high and designed in the Classical Revival styles popular at the turn of the century. Of special note are the Arcade and Hemenway Buildings, facing one another at Concord Square, and the H.H. Richardson-designed railroad station. The two commercial blocks both feature internal arcades — semi-public interior streets lined with storefronts.

• Streetscape

With the exception of Fabric Place parking lot and the Downtown Common, Concord Street retains a strong edge of mostly multi-story buildings, some with handsome architectural details. Excluding the Store 24 parking lot, the street edge on Hollis Street is also intact, although on average the buildings are not as tall. Street trees have been planted along the Downtown Spine from Town Hall to Burkis Square. The light standards are highway-style cobra lights spaced far apart.

• Storefront Signage and Shop Windows

Many of the stores on the Downtown Spine have inadequate and outdated signage that communicates poorly with potential shoppers, giving a tired and unharmonious appearance. Likewise, shop window displays often lack

excitement and professionalism. Many of the Brazilian and Hispanic businesses have signage only in Portuguese and Spanish, which communicates well to their principal target markets but also may deter potential shoppers who do not speak those languages.

- **Open Space**

The Downtown Common is the major public space in the Downtown Core and is centrally located. At present it has unrealized potential as a community gathering space because the trees are overgrown and the amenities are worn. A new design is currently being completed. A small park at Burkis Square is owned by the adjacent apartment house on Irving Street, and a small sitting area is located in front of the Memorial Building. Another small park is located in front of the Senior Center at the intersection of Sanger, Thompson, and Pearl Streets. The downtown shores of Farm Pond represent major, underutilized open space potential.

- **Uses**

Like the architecture of the Downtown Spine, the uses are generally consistent and appropriate to a commercial district. Retail uses occupy most street level spaces, with offices in floors above. A variety of civic and institutional uses are distributed throughout the Downtown in special buildings. Notable exceptions to this use pattern are several storefront churches and storefront "back offices," which can give the impression of vacancies. Very few businesses in the Downtown are open at night. There are no businesses that offer entertainment or "white tablecloth" restaurants. Evening activity is concentrated at the library, museum, and college, all of which are at the northern edge of Downtown and have their own parking facilities.

The Downtown Core (see exhibit 3)

- **Organization and physical character**

Beyond Concord Square and Burkis Square, the continuous commercial spine disintegrates within a block or so: Concord Street and Union Avenue divide around the Town Hall to the north, and Irving Street curves away from Hollis Street to the south. Currently, outside of the Downtown Spine, the Downtown Core gives a disorganized impression of semi-industrial buildings interspersed with residences, a jumble of parking lots with wide curb cuts and no landscaping, and strip commercial development, especially along Waverley Street. The connections between these areas and the Downtown Spine is often very pedestrian-unfriendly. This is particularly significant in the case of institutions or governmental offices on the periphery of Downtown, where there is no attractive link to the main corridor. In addition to professional offices, there are also some commercial uses on Union Avenue and Concord Street north of the Downtown Core, such as Friendly's and Dunkin Donuts, which attract potential customers away from Downtown. The one-mile radius surrounding the Downtown Spine has a far less consistent physical fabric. It includes a mix of residential neighborhoods, industrial structures and complexes, auto-oriented strip development, parking lots, and Farm Pond.

• Uses

Several distinct functional zones exist within this otherwise very mixed area. Just north of the Downtown Spine is a civic/cultural district including the Memorial Building, the Library, the Danforth Museum, and the Callahan Senior Center. The Dennison complex on Howard Street is a significant center of office, institutional, and civic uses. Waverley Street is a classic strip retail corridor, with a high percentage of auto-related businesses.

Circulation and Traffic

The Downtown Spine is Route 126, a major north-south traffic route for residents of Framingham and other towns traveling to and from Route 9 and the Mass Pike. It carries substantial traffic throughout the day, including truck traffic. Waverley Street (Route 135) is a major east-west route through Framingham. Congestion on these routes is exacerbated by the railroad line running parallel to Waverley Street. Because of the location of the commuter rail station, trains block the intersection while loading and unloading passengers. This problem should be resolved with the imminent construction of a new MBTA platform 700 feet to the west of its current location. Amtrak passenger trains, freight trains, and switching movements from the rail yards in several locations on the periphery of Downtown also cause delays.

• Railroad Crossing and Traffic Flow

Traffic flow in Downtown Framingham has been studied three dozen times since 1898. As part of an initiative to improve access to the General Motors property located south of the downtown commercial area, the MetroWest Chamber of Commerce in 1992 revived efforts to find a solution. State Senator David Magnani included \$500,000 in the 1994 Transportation Bond Bill. After much lobbying, funds were released and in 1996 the Town commissioned Rizzo Associates to conduct a study of alternative solutions to the intersection dilemma, working with a citizens advisory committee. The preferred and recommended alternative that emerged from this process consists of a two-step program of improvements. First, a series of short term improvements in the traffic signal system, lane markings, traffic island removal, and installation of Intelligent Transportation Systems technologies should be pursued and implemented. Second, the consultants and the committee recommended construction of a two-lane underpass to take traffic under the railroad tracks. The Board of Selectmen adopted the Route 126 Underpass Conceptual Plan in January 1997.

It is clear that the unpredictability of delays at the rail crossing combined with the heavy volume of downtown traffic is an obstacle to shopper convenience. People who live outside the Downtown avoid it, if possible, because of the chance of being delayed for a long time at the rail crossing. As noted above, the new MBTA platform will eliminate the problem of commuter trains stopped in the intersection during the peak vehicle traffic period. Rizzo engineers have indicated that they believe that the short term improvements could resolve about 50 percent of the traffic problems at the intersection.

Parking

There are currently approximately 2,800 parking spaces Downtown, including 288 metered, on-street spaces. Seventy percent of the spaces are restricted in one way or another (to employees, customers, or residents). Parking opportunities are not well-marked, most parking lots lack landscaping or attractive lighting, and pedestrian

connections between parking and destinations are also poorly defined. There is no parking management program.

There are three distinct parking issues in Downtown. First, parking for commuters is insufficient, a problem which will be mitigated when the MBTA creates 96 new commuter parking spaces in the near future. Second, many business owners and their employees do not have assigned parking. Finally, visitors perceive parking as scarce and unattractive, particularly if they expect to find parking directly in front of their destination. Signage indicating the location of parking, improved appearance and maintenance of the lots, and good pedestrian connections to destinations are all essential to overcoming this problem.

Maintenance

The maintenance of streets and other public spaces is crucial for the image and perception of Downtown. As is often the case, maintenance responsibilities for public spaces are divided among several municipal departments. The Department of Public Works is responsible for all trash barrels and street sweeping, and the Tree Warden within the DPW takes care of the street trees. Buildings and Grounds maintains the Pearl Street garage and the plantings around the Memorial Building, while the Department of Parks and Recreation is responsible for maintaining the Common.

Security

There is a perception, which is factually incorrect, that Downtown is a high crime area. Between 1991 and 1996, assaults, burglaries and acts of vandalism declined from twenty to thirty percent (depending on the category), according to the Framingham Police Department. The lack of metal grates on storefronts indicates that business owners do not experience a high risk of vandalism or break-ins. However, several circumstances contribute to the image of Downtown as unsafe. Very few businesses currently stay open past dark and street lights are widely spaced. A dark and closed-up downtown can feel dangerous and forbidding. In addition, the presence of Salvation Army clients congregating on Concord Street waiting for the doors to open at the time of the evening rush hour reinforces already existing fears, whether or not those fears are justified.

D. The Institutional and Entrepreneurial Environment

Local municipal agencies and private organizations are active in the Downtown, but there are no municipal staff dedicated to downtown issues, no public-private partnerships, nor is there any downtown management entity.

Town Government

Land use, zoning, and economic development policy and implementation is fragmented among several Town agencies and groups. Although property owners report that town departments are very helpful, there is no organized effort to help businesses navigate town regulations and permitting requirements such as a booklet, a streamlined permitting process, or a particular staff person assigned to this task, nor are there bilingual staff members to assist business people with limited English language skills.

- The **Planning Department** oversees physical improvements, the Community Development Block Grant Program, and economic development programs and planning. The CDBG program has approximately \$700,000 annually, of which approximately two-thirds is committed to housing programs, social service programs, and administration. The balance can be available for downtown improvements and programs. There is no Planning Department staff assigned exclusively to economic development or to downtown revitalization. A Community Development Committee composed of residents appointed by the Board of Selectmen advises the Planning Department on the CDBG program.
- The elected **Planning Board**, which has a separate staff, focuses on development projects, reviews subdivision approvals, and proposes zoning changes for Town Meeting approval.
- The **Standing Committee on Planning and Zoning**, composed of elected Town Meeting members, proposes zoning changes for vote by Town Meeting. A two-thirds vote of Town Meeting is required for passage of zoning changes.
- The **Economic Development Industrial Corporation (EDIC)** was formally incorporated in 1995 through a Home Rule Petition passed by the state legislature and signed by the Governor. The charter permits EDIC activity in commercial as well as industrial and manufacturing areas. The EDIC's plan for 1998 focuses on downtown development. The corporation consists of seven members appointed by the Board of Selectmen with expertise as follows: one member experienced in financial matters, one experienced in real estate, one experienced in municipal government, two experienced in industrial development and two members from the community at large. The EDIC has no staff or funding, and has yet to undertake a major project.

Land Use Regulation

The Downtown Core is zoned primarily Central Business (CDB) and Business (B), with peripheral areas zoned for General Manufacturing (M-1), Office and Professional (P), and General Residence (G). New multi-family residential uses are currently not permitted in Downtown. Special permits from the Zoning Board of Appeals are required for 2-family housing, restaurants, uses over 8,000 square feet of gross floor area, drive through and car wash uses, and certain other uses under 8,000 square feet. The Planning Board can grant exemptions from parking requirements in the Central Business and Business Districts.

The zoning bylaw, as of July 1997, provides for no functional difference between the Business and Central Business Zones, despite differentiating them on the zoning map. The Business districts extend beyond the Downtown Core on Union Avenue, Concord Street, and Hollis Street. Scattered business and retail uses, many of them auto-dependent, are located on these streets outside of the Downtown Core and can detract from the concentration of activities in the central business district.

Both the Concord Square and the Burkis Square areas are Historic Districts.

Framingham has a demolition delay ordinance to make sure that buildings of historic merit cannot be taken down without review.

Private Organizations

In 1997 there was considerable organizational momentum in Downtown Framingham. Two new successful private groups emerged, Downtown Solutions and the Brazilian Business and Community Council. Previous downtown organizational efforts included two small merchants' organizations, the Marketplace at Framingham and the Southside Business Association. During 1995-1996, a part-time downtown coordinator worked with the Marketplace group to develop a revitalization program, but the small size of the group and the limited time and funding available for the coordinator proved to be obstacles. Both of these associations have now been subsumed by Downtown Solutions.

- **Downtown Solutions**, an ad-hoc group of residents, business owners, property owners, and social service representatives, started in January 1997. The core organizing group has about eight members, while the mailing list has over 200 names. The Planning Department provides staff assistance to Downtown Solutions. The group has put on several very successful events including a Community Supper, a Downtown Cleanup, a Sidewalk Chalk Art Festival, and a business outreach and dinner program preceding a community meeting for discussion of this revitalization plan. Some of these events have attracted hundreds of people, including residents of North Framingham, and merchants who opened their stores during the events had excellent sales.

- The **Brazilian Business and Community Council** was organized by a Brazilian shop owner in 1997. A coalition of business people and church leaders, the BBCC serves the needs of its community by providing information on issues such as immigration law, business assistance, liaison with non-Brazilian businesses and town government, cultural programs, and youth programs.

- The **Southern Middlesex Opportunity Council**, a social service agency and affordable housing provider, has its headquarters in the Dennison building, which it recently sold to an office developer. The agency also owns about 50 residential buildings in the Downtown, including 14 which it is readying for resale to first-time homebuyers.

- Other **social service agencies** include the Salvation Army and SMILES (South Middlesex Latin Emergency Services), an agency providing day care and other services to the Hispanic community. A Community Development Corporation has recently been formed as an initiative of SMILES. A Boys and Girls Club is expected to offer programs at a community center in the old Hollis Street Fire Station.

- Discussions are now underway about the formation of a **Latin American Community Council** to unite and serve as a voice for the currently unorganized Hispanic community.

Investment and Financing

In recent years, most new investment has been private as new small businesses have set up operations in the Downtown. Town programs that seek to assist or give incentives for economic development in the Downtown include the following:

- **Economic Opportunity Area** designation - Downtown has been designated an EOA by the state, which makes it eligible to use Tax Increment Financing and other incentives. No EOA projects have yet been undertaken.
- **Microenterprise Loan Fund** - Administered by SMOC, this \$40,000 fund of Community Development Block Grant monies has not been successful for a number of reasons. Initial program requirements were very restrictive and funds could only be used as collateral to secure a bank loan. Although direct loans are now permitted, the regulations are still somewhat restrictive. Small business counseling and program marketing have not been effectively included in the program. The Planning Department has recently assumed administrative responsibility for this program.
- A **Store Signage and Façade Improvement Loan Fund** is being developed by the Planning Department. Community Development Block Grant funds of up to \$110,000 are expected to be available for downtown store signage and façade improvements to business and property owners who provide matching private funds.

A new private loan program has been developed by the MetroWest Chamber of Commerce and a consortium of lending institutions. Several technical assistance programs are available in the area to people interested in starting businesses and looking for ways to fund that effort.

- **Frederick A. Rubin Micro-Loan Fund** - This fund offers loans of \$2,000 to \$10,000 at an interest rate of prime plus 2 percent with flexible collateral requirements and a promise of speedy processing. This is a very new program for the entire MetroWest area -- not just Framingham. Two loans have been granted so far. The program is administered by SMOC.
- **Center for Entrepreneurs at Framingham State College** - This ten-week program recently graduated its first six entrepreneurs. The program covers all aspects of starting and running a successful business.
- **Technical Assistance at the MetroWest Chamber of Commerce** - Free counseling is available from the Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE) on Tuesdays and Fridays and from the Small Business Development Center of Clark University on Thursdays.

Public investments in physical improvements include:

- **Streetscape and Wayfinding Improvement Plan** - Implementation of this \$185,000 project is underway. Installation of signage identifying Downtown and directing people to parking areas will help define the identity of Downtown and make it less confusing to visitors.

- **Downtown Common Redesign** - Redesign of the Common is nearing completion. The currently tired appearance of this important public green space in the Downtown sends a negative message. A new piece of public art is also expected to be sited on the Common. Implementation of the new design will make this space more welcoming.
- **Hollis Street Fire Station** - This \$870,000 adaptive reuse project is under design. Rehabilitation of the fire station into a youth community center will provide a strong institutional anchor and potential generator of pedestrian traffic for the Hollis Street end of Downtown.
- **Transportation Improvements** - In addition to the relocation of the MBTA Station, planned or proposed transportation improvements include intersection improvements, the reconstruction of Waverley Street, improvements to Dennison Crossing, and a tunnel for Route 126 passing under the railroad tracks at the Route 135 intersection.

E. Current Development Activity Downtown

Several projects in the pipeline are expected to bring new patrons into Downtown. The most important of these is the sale in January 1998 of the 610,000 s.f. Dennison complex by SMOC to an office developer. Redevelopment of this space could bring as many as 2,000 new employees into the downtown market. A high-tech communications company has expressed interest in a vacant 80,000 s.f. building near the Dennison complex. The Greater Framingham Community Church is purchasing the old Post Office building at the corner of Franklin and Park Streets. The congregation has a membership of approximately 330 families from the MetroWest area who will come Downtown on Sundays and on weeknights for programs.

Osco Drugs is seeking permitting before the Planning Board for a store in the Kendall Building. The company plans to buy the building, retain the façade, and renovate the interior. According to the current owner of the building, Osco plans to invest more than \$2 million in the project. The project would include the purchase by Osco of the Fabric Place front parking lot (to be shared) and construction of a drive-through window at that location. The potential for left turns from the southbound lane of Concord Street into this drive-through space has created concerns about safety and traffic congestion which have yet to be resolved.

F. Downtown Framingham: The Current Scene

Downtown Framingham has many of the ingredients for a successful downtown commercial district: good income demographics and population mix, entrepreneurial immigrants, and a solid base of cultural and civic institutions. The physical environment of the Downtown Spine is consistent and in good repair with high potential for the creation of a pedestrian-friendly district attractive to more shoppers. Traffic counts are high and there are a number of worthwhile initiatives underway. The commitment of Town government and private citizen groups can provide the organizational momentum for a successful revitalization effort.

3. THE DOWNTOWN FRAMINGHAM MARKET



This market analysis is structured to define the opportunities available to existing and prospective businesses in Downtown Framingham. In addition to an analysis of standard demographic information and retail sales potential for the Downtown, quantitative and qualitative information was provided by interviews with business owners, building owners, and representatives of institutions and agencies; an on-street storefront-to-storefront building survey; and a survey of businesses. An arms-length market analysis in Framingham must recognize the impact of the concentrated regional commercial growth along major arterials. However, a more nuanced understanding of the constraints and opportunities affecting the business climate in Downtown Framingham emerges from an examination of the experience of local business people.

A. Trade Area, Sales Potential and Market Segments

For the purposes of this study we have drawn detailed demographic information from concentric rings of 0.5, 1.0, and 3.0 miles from a center point at the intersection of Union Avenue and Concord Streets at Town Hall. The full ring studies are available in the Appendix.

Sales Potential

The retail sales *potential* in this area is very high. However, Downtown Framingham's location a few miles from one of the largest concentrations of retail business in the country means that it is not likely that there is a particular underserved retail need in this market.

The annual retail demand within a half-mile radius of Town Hall is \$20.2 million; within a mile radius it is \$77.1 million; and within a three-mile radius, the demand is \$352.5 million. These numbers are the demand that can be expected given the household economic characteristics, not the actual sales. It is worth noting that the entire one-mile radius is located south of Route 9.

The annual retail demand per person decreases from \$5,400 in the three-mile radius to \$4,400 in the half-mile radius. This relatively low reduction of demand per consumer when moving closer to the Downtown Core is the reason that many retailers

are again looking closely at more urban locations. Demand per consumer does not decline in a linear fashion and strong markets, as yet untapped, exist within central business districts.

Downtown Market Segments

The three-mile demographics, which franchise retailers use to locate their stores, would be encouraging to major retailers, but the "mallng" of the MetroWest area over the last four decades places Downtown Framingham in a position familiar to most older, urban downtown areas — in the shadow of chain retail and dependent on local markets and special niches. In Downtown Framingham the boundaries of the trade area are quite different based on the type of trade. For example, the trade area of one downtown electronics business reaches as far away as Brazil, while a nearby luncheonette may draw from an area no larger than the one-half mile radius from Town Hall. Even with the understanding that the example of a market in Brazil is clearly the exception rather than the rule, it illustrates the need to think beyond typical geographic trade area definitions. Downtown Framingham must actively expand its share of consumer expenditures in the markets it already serves while pursuing the potential market of people who use the Downtown but spend little money there. Framingham can look to four basic market segments for a retail strategy:

- **The Downtown Neighborhood Market** - Neighborhood residents, defined as the over 17,000 people living within a one-mile radius of Town Hall, constitute an obvious market segment. It is this "convenience" retail which should be most easily maintained and encouraged. Projected growth within the Downtown Neighborhood is expected to be more modest than within the three-mile radius in the next few years, and there are fewer opportunities for the creation of new housing within the Downtown Neighborhood than within the three-mile radius. A well-planned increase in market-rate housing in the Downtown would strengthen this market, as well as provide more activity Downtown. Creation of market-rate apartments, perhaps for users of commuter rail, could stimulate more night-time activity and a wider business mix. Promotion of homeownership in the neighborhood through first time homebuyer programs can also reduce the proportion of transient renters.
- **The Downtown Workforce Market** - The more jobs — commercial, industrial, and institutional — that are located within the Downtown, the larger the impact of this market on the local economy. There are 15,768 jobs within one mile of Town Hall, and 9,177 within one-half mile. These sales opportunities are in the downtown area, exclusive of the Route 9 area, and are within walking or very close driving distance to the Downtown. This captive market exists 250 working days each year and was the foundation of downtown retail business in the past. The value of this market component should be greatly enhanced through the redevelopment of the Avery-Dennison complex with its 600,000 s.f. of space. Current low vacancy rates in the office market west of Boston make other vacant buildings on the periphery of Downtown increasingly attractive to developers, as recent reports of developer interest indicate. The challenge is to make the physical connections between the Dennison and other office locations and the Downtown Spine inviting to new office workers.

• **The Cultural and Institutional Market** - Thousands of people every year, from neighboring towns as well as all of Framingham, go to the central library, the Danforth Museum and Art School, Fisher College, and the Callahan Senior Center. These people have already made the decision to use Downtown Framingham and constitute a mostly untapped potential market for Downtown. If encouraged, these visitors may purchase food, services, or retail goods. This market is not as mature as the neighborhood residential and downtown employee markets and requires active marketing to be more fully realized.

• **The Commuter Market** - Commuters are also an underdeveloped market of downtown users, but those who pass through Downtown must be persuaded that it is worth their while to stop there. A few businesses near the train station have targeted this commuter market, but for many train commuters Downtown Framingham represents parking frustrations and picking their way through unattractive back streets from the parking garage to the platform.

• **The Regional Destination Market for Specialty Items and Services** - The most obvious examples of this market are Fabric Place and the cluster of Brazilian businesses. There are households within many miles of Framingham with good incomes that travel to Downtown Framingham to shop at Fabric Place. This indicates that if given a reason, area residents will come to the Downtown Core.

The concentration of Brazilian businesses attracts regional patrons seeking the specialty goods and services that they offer. Several successful Brazilian business owners have stated that more than two-thirds of their customers come from outside of Framingham, including some out-of-state patrons. This constitutes a comparative advantage not available in many other downtowns. Other destinations that are singular to the Downtown and attract visitors include Town Hall, the Post Office, the Registry of Motor Vehicles, and, to some degree, the hospital, though it is located just outside the Downtown Core area.

How does Downtown Framingham compare in demographics to other downtowns?

The strength of Downtown Framingham's fundamental demographics can be illustrated by a comparison of one-mile radius figures to four other downtown areas that are generally considered successful and have been mentioned by Framingham residents as models.

What these comparisons show is that Downtown Framingham's problem is not that there is insufficient demand. There is plenty of money in Framingham, including the Downtown Neighborhood, but there are also many, many places to spend it.

One-Mile Radius of Downtown Centers

	Framingham*	Waltham*	Newburyport**	Portsmouth, NH**	Salem, MA **
Population	17,465	24,593	9,720	9,018	21,893
Average household income	\$52,682	\$54,902	\$54,430	\$48,330	\$46,499
% Households with income >\$50K	40%	42%	42%	37%	35%
Total businesses	1,168	1,767	696	1,167	1,309
Total employees	15,768	17,487	5,277	9,908	15,355
Retail sales demand	\$77,080,000	\$119,692,000	\$54,177,000	\$47,655,000	\$107,590,000
Total restaurant sales demand	\$10,932,000	\$17,574,000	\$7,156,000	\$6,241,000	\$13,400,000
Total clothing sales demand	\$10,023,000	\$15,324,000	\$5,793,000	\$5,037,000	\$10,599,000

* 1997 estimates

** 1994 estimates

B. Business Inventory

An inventory of businesses in the Downtown Core area was prepared by a store-by-store and building-by-building survey of the study area during October-December 1997. It covers nearly 400 business spaces, institutions, and residential buildings with an estimated total of nearly 600,000 square feet of street-level space (not including the Dennison complex). The inventory includes the name and address of each business, the business type, and the estimated square footage of street-level spaces. The complete inventory is available in the Appendix, as is a map of the streets that were inventoried. A few streets that fall within the Downtown Core, but which are entirely residential, were excluded from the inventory. The vacancy and underutilization

rates discussed below result from direct inspection of the business space in the study area.

Vacancies and the vacancy rate

The storefront vacancy rate for the Downtown Core as a whole is 15 percent of the total square footage, which is significant. However, a vacant retail strip mall at 350 Waverley Street accounts for over one-third of the vacant square footage. Filling that space would reduce the vacancy rate to about 10 percent. Other significant vacancies include the former West Coast Video, located in the 20-36 Concord Street block that also houses window treatment production space for Fabric Place. This vacancy and the back-office uses in this block create a blighted appearance at a crucial connection point between Concord and Hollis Streets in the Downtown Spine. There are also three important vacancies on Howard Street. These vacancies detract from the appearance of the pedestrian route which the new employees housed in the redeveloped Dennison complex would take to reach shops and services on the Downtown Spine.

Vacancies do not tell the whole story of downtown business uses. Observers of the Downtown might assume a much higher vacancy rate than actually exists because some first floor uses are underutilized.

Underutilization of storefront space

The highest and best use, as well as the traditional best use of first floor storefront space is retail or service retail. There are certainly exceptions to this generalization, but successful downtowns have a high proportion of retail and service retail uses at street level. First floor storefronts were counted as underutilized if they did not contain retail or service retail uses. Although somewhat subjective, the underutilization rate gives a glimpse of the percentage of space that is available for reuse at higher rents if traditional first floor users were available. The uses which may be displaced are in many cases important to a downtown but would be more appropriately housed in upper story or other non-storefront locations.

Based on these criteria, the street level underutilization rate for the Downtown Core is 21 percent. An example of such a use is 80 Hollis Street. For many years this was the site of the retail branch of Landry Bicycles. When Landry Bicycles moved to Route 9, the use changed from retail bicycle sales to bicycle storage and office space for the new retail store. The new use, though important, does not provide the same benefit to the surrounding businesses as a retail shop, but is also not as detrimental as an actual vacancy. Storefront churches are another typical example of underutilized space. Although they are not vacancies, they are usually quiet during shopping hours, do not bring activity to the street, and often have curtained or shaded windows that may give an impression of vacancy to the casual observer.

Use of the inventory

This business inventory can be used as a planning, marketing, promotion, and recruitment tool. In addition to the hard copy contained in this report, the computer file will be available in the Framingham Planning Department and should be updated regularly. Existing businesses can use the inventory for cross-marking purposes. Prospective businesses can be provided with information on the number and type of businesses in the Downtown. Further analysis of the inventory can provide important

information for planning and recruitment purposes. For example, automobile-related uses in the study area totaled over 51,000 square feet, or 9 percent of the available first floor space, a high proportion for a downtown area. This kind of information can be used in determining potential re-zoning and can help point to market saturation for particular types of businesses.

C. Downtown Anchors

The concept of downtown anchors has changed dramatically over the past three decades. Historically, downtown anchors in small- and medium-sized communities consisted solely of retail uses, particularly department stores. With traditional downtown uses changing rapidly, downtown anchors now take different forms. Any use that generates a high number of visits for the area is now considered an anchor. Government offices, cultural institutions, a popular restaurant, or any other traffic generator can now be considered an anchor.

Even this new and broadened definition of anchors leaves Framingham with a deficit. The major retail anchor is Fabric Place, which is a high quality destination anchor that most communities would try to attract. Certain long-time businesses, such as Katie-Joe's Bakery and Panza Shoes, have loyal customers, but newer residents of Framingham who live outside the Downtown Neighborhood may not know about the customer service and high-quality goods that they offer their patrons. The Library and the Danforth Museum are nontraditional anchors that attract tens of thousands of visits a year from all parts of the community. Town Hall and the train station continue to be busy centers of activity. Town Hall attracts visits during the traditional workday and for evening meetings, and the train station has high usage during the morning and evening rush hours.

There are many reasons for area residents to travel to Downtown Framingham. It is worth noting, however, that with the exception of Fabric Place and Town Hall, these attractions are located on the periphery of the Downtown Spine, as will be the case with the new train platform. When the Hollis Street Fire Station becomes a community center, it will then serve as the anchor for the southern end of the Downtown Spine. Programs to take advantage of the non-retail anchors and coordinate activities with retailers are as important as recruitment of more business anchors.

D. Business Clusters

Business clusters are groups of businesses that serve the same or related markets. They attract customers disproportionately because they offer competition and variety within a particular category of goods and services during one shopping trip. Grouped businesses are very beneficial because they generate several stops for each visit to the downtown.

The most obvious business cluster in Downtown Framingham is composed of Brazilian businesses. There are 24 street-level Brazilian businesses in the Downtown Core, 23 of which are on the Downtown Spine. (This number does not include several Brazilian storefront churches on the Spine, which add to the general impression of a concentration of Brazilian-oriented activities.) Brazilian business owners draw Brazilian customers from all over the region and even from outside of Massachusetts.

As noted earlier, several successful Brazilian business owners said that two-thirds or more of their clients come from outside Framingham. These customers know that they can find a variety of businesses in Downtown Framingham where they can make their needs known in their own language. For example, people buying electronic equipment or getting personal services want detailed explanations or want to be sure that, for example, a hairdresser understands their preferences. The presence of so many compatriots makes Brazilian customers feel confident they will understand and be understood.

Other groupings that may be considered business clusters are personal services, medical services, and social services. Although the presence of social service agencies and their clientele in the Downtown is controversial, many of these clients are also potential customers.

E. Business Survey

Information from the business inventory was supplemented by a survey of downtown businesses. The survey was prepared in consultation with the Task Force and translated into Portuguese and Spanish by Community Design Partnership. The Framingham Planning Department distributed the survey and tabulated the responses, although the consultants have examined the originals, especially the open-ended questions. Because the Planning Department determined that some business owners might be averse to identifying themselves, the survey did not ask for the name and address of the business. Thirty-nine businesses responded to the survey, approximately ten percent of the businesses in the Downtown Core area.

How long have existing businesses been in the area?

Of those who responded, 12 percent have been in business for less than one year, 18 percent 1-4 years, 29 for 5-10 years, and 41 percent for more than 10 years. Seventy percent of respondents had been in business for five or more years. The percentage of those who had been in a Downtown Framingham location for five or more years dropped slightly, to 59 percent. It is likely that a business that has survived in the Downtown for five or more years has a strong understanding of the market and how to reach it. This should be considered an asset that is available for new businesses considering locating within the area.

Rents and building ownership

Only 9 percent of the respondents owned their own building. The remaining 91 percent pay an average of \$1,120 in rent each month for an average space of 1,790 sf. The average rental figure has limited utility, but discussions with real estate agents, building owners, and business owners indicate that the average rental rate for first floor commercial space is \$10 to \$12 per square foot. This rate is in line with most downtowns that contain a minimum of franchise and chain retailers. In contrast, retail space on Route 9 can bring more than \$20 per square foot. Upper story rental rates Downtown are lower, closer to \$6 or \$7 per square foot, but rates vary depending on the presence of elevators or other amenities. Rents are currently on the rise. Some business owners complain that landlords are raising rents without correcting building deficiencies.

Why did these businesses locate Downtown?

The survey respondents indicated that they chose a downtown location primarily to be close to customers (50 percent), because of low rents (21 percent), or because of proximity to major roadways (18 percent). The remaining 10 percent cited a combination of reasons, including proximity to suppliers, a business-friendly atmosphere, purchase of an existing business in the Downtown, proximity to the Brazilian community, and rail and bus access. Surprisingly, only one business cited the rail and bus lines as a locational factor. These responses especially indicate the importance of the local neighborhood and downtown employee market and the attraction of low rents for new businesses.

How many employees do they have?

The respondent businesses have small numbers of full-time employees. Forty-four percent had only one or two employees (including themselves), 24 percent had three or four, and the remaining 32 percent employed more than four persons. Half the businesses employ fewer than four part-timers, and half employ four or more. Thirty-eight percent of the respondents have two or more family members working in the business.

What are the best days for business?

The busiest time of day for downtown retailers is the lunch hour (noon to 3 p.m.), and evening hours from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. Mornings are not a particularly active time. No direct pattern emerged for the busiest day of the week other than the traditional Saturday shopping day. The mid-day busy period highlights the importance of downtown workers as customers. Lunch hour purchases are a major part of retailers' sales.

Sales trends, capital sources, and business optimism

For 41 percent of the business survey respondents, sales have increased by an average of 18 percent over the last year, while 21 percent noticed a decrease in sales. Only 35 percent of respondents obtain their capital from traditional financial institutions. Most depend on personal savings or other sources. Many of these downtown businesses are optimistic about the future: 41 percent plan to expand their businesses in the next year.

Special circumstances affected the Brazilian business cluster in late 1997. Brazilian business owners stated that their sales had declined in the previous quarter because of fear about immigration agents who were said to be present in the Downtown. Recent Congressional action favorable to immigrants seeking legal status may allay some of those fears.

Who are their customers?

Business owners were asked to give their impression of their customer base. A low number of patrons are teenagers or over the age of 65. The most often cited age bracket was 20-34 (which, as it happens, was underrepresented among the respondents to the community survey). Business respondents estimated that equal numbers of their customers are downtown residents and residents from elsewhere in Framingham, while fewer were identified as downtown workers or residents of nearby towns. Membership in a specific ethnic community was also cited by many businesses — further evidence of the growing number of ethnic-owned businesses in the Downtown.

How do they like Downtown as a place to do business?

Business owners were asked to rate a series of attributes of Downtown as Excellent, Good, Fair, or Poor. The results show that the respondents have particular concerns about traffic and parking, pedestrian-friendliness, cleanliness, and appearance. They were slightly less likely to be worried about safety than respondents to the community survey, perhaps because their daily presence in the Downtown has shown them that the security fears of many who live elsewhere in Framingham may be overblown. Business respondents also overwhelmingly rated the promotion or advertising of Downtown as Fair to Poor.

Category	Excellent/ Good	Fair/Poor	No Answer
cleanliness	38%	59%	3%
pedestrian-friendliness	38%	62%	0%
traffic flow	15%	82%	3%
customer parking	18%	82%	0%
employee parking	29%	62%	9%
safety	47%	53%	0%
store hours	59%	35%	6%
appearance	32%	59%	9%
quality of businesses	47%	47%	6%
variety of businesses	41%	47%	12%
promotions	12%	71%	17%

Are business owners interested in business organizations?

Only 15 percent of the respondents are members of the MetroWest Chamber of Commerce. However, 47 percent indicated interest in joining a downtown business association. The respondents showed interest in the following services from a downtown organization:

group promotions/advertising	44%
window display assistance	26%
business planning	26%
tax advice	24%
legal assistance	21%
assistance with banks	21%
financial planning	18%
translation services	18%

A business organization offering promotion of the commercial district as a whole, as well as services to its members, could attract members from the downtown business community.

What is the relationship between businesses and town government like?

The ratings of Town departments by the respondent businesses were very positive. The Police, Fire, Health, and Planning Departments, and the Board of Selectmen all received high ratings. Several respondents commented favorably on the recent increase in attention to the Downtown from Planning Department staff.

When asked if they would be interested in additional assistance from the Town, respondent businesses ranked low interest loans and storefront improvement

assistance as most desirable, followed by permitting assistance and sign improvement assistance.

F. Downtown Framingham's Market Potential

The market potential for Downtown Framingham is good. Undoubtedly there are significant market constraints — small in number but substantial in effect — including competition from nearby malls and Route 9, the low number of business anchors, capital shortages for small businesses, and the downtown image, which encompasses everything from security and traffic to the need for aesthetic improvements. Nonetheless, the underlying neighborhood demographics are very solid, there are many visitors to Downtown from outside the neighborhood who could become customers, and many long-time traditional businesses in the Downtown have loyal customers who appreciate their customer service orientation.

There are several other ways in which Downtown Framingham is positioned for success if a well-organized program of improvements, promotion, and recruitment can be implemented. Business commentators have increasingly noticed consumer boredom with the experience of malls and strip retail, which gives Downtown an opportunity to attract these shoppers, who are looking for more individuality, liveliness, and variety. In addition, although the Brazilian business community is very visible in one sense, it can also be seen as a hidden asset. With the proper cross-promotional programs, this immigrant business cluster could potentially bring many regional customers to all downtown businesses, not just Brazilian businesses.

G. Creating a Culture for Downtown Development

If Framingham wants to attract appropriate new businesses to its Downtown, the Town must think like potential developers, anticipating their needs and organizing to meet those needs. The amount and quality of retail and office development along major arterials in Framingham show that Town officials have been successful in meeting the needs of developers outside of Downtown Framingham. What will the development community be looking for in Downtown? Interviews with property and business owners, the business survey, public meetings, and the business inventory process indicate a business focus on the following issues:

Property values

Downtown Framingham property values provide an attractive opportunity for developers. However, affordable acquisition costs also mean rents commensurate with these property values. Several downtown property owners expressed concern about the percentage of their square foot rental income that goes toward paying property taxes. As property taxes rise faster than rents, a decreasing amount of operating income remains available to pay debt service on the property. The owner of one of Downtown's most successful businesses, commenting that he could not sell his building for a sufficiently attractive price, characterized his position as "stuck but committed" in Downtown Framingham.

Vehicular access

As noted elsewhere in this report, accessibility is a major issue for any downtown. Prospective developers and business owners expect that local officials can quickly apprise them of all planned improvements and changes to traffic patterns around their proposed development. Developers will come to their own conclusions on whether the access is adequate. The access issue most frequently raised by the Downtown Framingham business owners was how proposed projects, such as the Route 126 underpass, would affect their specific businesses, not the Downtown as a whole.

Consistency from the municipality

Developers want consistent answers and continuity in the officials working on their projects. They expect public officials to follow through on their commitments. Developers faced with conflicting information from different municipal departments or boards may decide to make their investments elsewhere. A number of business people interviewed for this study mentioned poor cross-departmental communication as a serious concern in Framingham. Perceived differences between municipal boards with appointed or elected members and the appointed officials in staff positions were particularly noted.

Permit streamlining

It is a truism that for developers, time is money. Any efforts to reduce response time and to coordinate development and permitting reviews among departments will be highly appreciated. In many cases, a quick "no" can be very helpful in letting a prospective developer understand the Town's expectations.

Subsidy

The development community is moved by money. Access to local, state, and federal funding is of great importance. Developers can be attracted to Downtown by officials willing to offer and pursue subsidies for their projects.

Knowledge of the development business and of Downtown

Developers are looking for public officials who speak their language and can provide them with specific local knowledge. Understanding the risk and difficulty of putting together a development deal is a valuable asset for economic development officials. This expertise, which has proven adequate in dealing with the major retail and office development along Route 9, must also be in evidence Downtown. By the same token, developers will rely on local officials who can demonstrate detailed knowledge of the Downtown market and development environment. Local officials can then help shape new developments to advance community goals for Downtown.

4. THE COMMUNITY SPEAKS



The perceptions, experience, and hopes of the Framingham community for the Downtown were solicited through interviews, a community survey with 371 responses, a downtown business survey with 39 responses, two public meetings attended by approximately 150 people in total, focus groups conducted in Portuguese and Spanish with members of the Brazilian and Hispanic communities, and meetings with organizations such as Downtown Solutions and the Brazilian Business and Community Council. The surveys were distributed in English, Portuguese, and Spanish and speakers of Portuguese and Spanish were accommodated in the public meetings. People were asked what they liked and disliked about Downtown, what kinds of improvements they

thought most important, and what kinds of activities and new businesses are needed.

While many participants in the public meetings, interviews, and focus groups were downtown residents or business owners, respondents to the community survey were more likely to be residents of other parts of Framingham. They were also somewhat older, richer, and more likely to be women and living in family households than Framingham residents as a whole. The survey questions, tabulated responses, and analysis of the respondent groups are in the Appendix.

There was a significant convergence of opinion among the groups, although there were certain issues of more interest to some groups than others. To many in the community, the positive attributes of the Downtown include its multicultural character, cultural institutions (with their night time activity), its small business variety, and its historic architectural character. One of the Brazilian shop owners specifically mentioned Downtown as an area of business opportunity. The negative attributes of Downtown were more lengthy and focused on Downtown's image problem: Downtown as a environment that is inconvenient, physically unattractive, and potentially unsafe. The visions for the future emphasized the need for evening activities, restaurants, and cafes, specialty retail, market rate rental housing and owner-occupied housing, and a much improved physical environment.

Downtown residents and business owners were somewhat less likely to be concerned about safety than people who live outside the Downtown, and members of immigrant groups were slightly more likely to be positive about the physical condition of Downtown. Members of the Brazilian community were concerned about a perceived lack of trust and understanding between the Brazilian and American populations. They particularly mentioned the need for more language assistance in municipal departments and a Portuguese-speaking police officer during these transitional years

when there are many Brazilian immigrants with limited English skills. Downtown residents also had specific concerns. They tended to be more interested in having retail necessities locate Downtown, such as a supermarket.

A. Why go Downtown?

Of course, residents of the Downtown Neighborhood and people who work there patronize at least some downtown businesses. But, downtown institutions — the library, the museum, and Town Hall — along with commuting patterns, draw many other Framingham residents into the downtown area. Sixty-three percent of the 371 respondents to the community survey go to the library or the museum, the highest percentage response, followed by the 53 percent who go to Town Hall. Less than half (45 percent) shop Downtown, and only 16 percent (60 respondents) work Downtown. While 40 percent commute by vehicle through the Downtown, another 18 percent use

commuter rail (though there may be some overlap in these figures). Approximately a third of the respondents said they also went to the post office, the bank, or to a restaurant. These responses show the crucial importance of downtown institutional anchors in bringing people to the area.

“When you go downtown, you get to see and possibly meet people who also live in Framingham, so there’s a community feel to it. Also the multicultural feel is attractive....I would definitely prefer to support locally owned businesses and avoid Route 9 traffic if the downtown area offered good quality goods and services. For example, we love Annie’s One Stop for our laundry. We used to go all the way to Nobscot, but Annie’s is more convenient and does a great job.” *(Female, 35-44, two-person household with \$50K to \$74K, lives in other Framingham, works downtown, goes to the library/museum and to the laundromat.)*

“I like the way the downtown area is designed....With some clean up and dress-up it would be awesome....It would be lovely to keep the old town charm and revitalize by utilizing the culture of our newer residents from other countries....Encourage the ethnic differences already influencing the town so that when you go there it will feel like visiting Brazil, Puerto Rico, India, etc....How about something like the Mexican section of Los Angeles or Japanese section of San Francisco? AND whatever you do don’t get rid of the Fabric Place — it’s the greatest!! Panza Shoe is also the best.” *(Female, 60 or over, two person household with over \$75K income, living in other Framingham, and a frequent visitor to downtown for commuting, shopping, library/museum, Town Hall, restaurant.)*

B. What’s best about Downtown?

The survey respondents to this question mentioned a wide variety of points — while some made a point of saying “nothing.” A fifth of the respondents liked the “diversity” and “ethnic businesses” Downtown, while another 20 percent focused on aspects of Downtown’s physical and community character: the architecture, scale and density, walkability, small business community, small town feel, and the fact that it is “not a mall.” The library and museum, as well as the generally convenient location were mentioned by substantial numbers, and several long-time businesses were singled out by name, such as Fabric Place, Katie-Joe’s, and Panza Shoes.

In the public meetings and focus groups, participants mentioned many of the same positive aspects of Downtown including its multicultural quality, the cultural institutions and their night time activity, the variety of unstandardized small businesses, and the touches of green, such as street trees, the Common, and the shores of Farm Pond.

Business owners also valued the small business diversity of Downtown as well as mentioning more business-oriented positive aspects. The location, relatively easy access, and large number of people who pass through Downtown were seen as among the best aspects of Downtown.

C. What's worst about Downtown?

"I try to avoid going through downtown at night. It reminds me of Boston -- everyone hanging out. It's scary." *(A 35-44 female with a household of more than 4 people and an income over \$75K, living outside of downtown, who works in Framingham and goes frequently to downtown to work, commute, shop, and go to the library/museum, Town Hall, and state offices.)*

More than half the respondents to this question in the community survey mentioned traffic, parking, or pedestrian safety issues as the worst thing about Downtown. The other criticisms of Downtown revolve around the condition of its physical environment, concerns about safety, an unsatisfactory business mix, and some respondents' discomfort with immigrant and lower-income populations in the Downtown. These comments indicate that many of the respondents perceive the Downtown as a problematic environment where they are at risk of unpleasantness of one kind or another. As one respondent said, it is "not inviting."

Participants in the public meetings had many of the same complaints: traffic and parking problems, an unsatisfactory business mix, the unharmonious and outdated appearance of signs and storefronts, poor maintenance, and lack of sufficient night time activity. The generally poor safety image of Downtown was also discussed, particularly in relation to loitering around the Salvation Army, Store 24 and the Common. Downtown residents were concerned about the lack of activities for teenagers and voiced a need for a supermarket.

Members of the Brazilian community in public meetings and focus groups agreed with many of the concerns expressed by other survey respondents and meeting participants. However, they reiterated many times that their top priorities are to have a Portuguese-speaking person in Town Hall and on the police force, to assist people with limited English language skills, and to increase the availability of English as a Second Language classes.

Business owners disliked many of the same aspects of Downtown mentioned by community survey respondents and public meeting participants: traffic and parking problems, an "old and tired" appearance, security concerns, and poor maintenance. They also noted that Downtown has a bad image or reputation. Among those who pointed to the visibility of social service agency clients as a problem were several Brazilian merchants.

Cross-cultural issues were also evident in the survey replies. A few business owners saw the immigrant businesses and populations as a problem, while some Brazilian business owners felt that non-Brazilians hesitated to patronize Brazilian businesses. But this is a two-way street. Several respondents to the community survey noted that shops without English-language signs made them feel that their business was not desired or welcome.

D. How is Downtown as a shopping area?

When given the opportunity to rate Downtown as Excellent, Good, Fair, or Poor on a variety of attributes, the overwhelming majority of survey respondents found the area fair or poor on everything except prices, which were rated somewhat more favorably.

Attribute	Percentage Ratings of Fair or Poor	
	Community Survey	Business Survey
quality of businesses	64	47
variety of businesses	64	47
prices	55	n/a
business hours	57	35
quality of restaurants	69	n/a
variety of restaurants	75	n/a
cleanliness	69	59
safety	69	53
appearance	83	59
pedestrian-friendliness	71	62
convenience of parking	75	n/a
availability of parking	79	n/a
customer parking	n/a	82
employee parking	n/a	62
traffic flow	n/a	82

These ratings do not reflect a commercial district that is competitive with other retail options available to the community survey respondents. It is worth noting that although a majority of respondents to both surveys agree on the need for improvements in physical appearance, management, pedestrian-friendliness, and traffic and parking, business owners may not be aware of the overwhelming importance of the appearance issues to many potential customers. Significantly, more respondents to the community survey than to the business survey found the appearance of Downtown to be fair or poor. In addition, business owners, perhaps understandably, were somewhat less likely than the community survey respondents to see the business mix as inadequate.

"Appearance is very important yet isn't the most essential quality which attracts people to downtown. The mix of businesses, especially quality retail stores, will encourage pedestrian traffic. Safety and appearance are like maintenance issues. Without them people won't go downtown, but these factors alone won't get people to visit our area." (*Female, 45-49 who lives Downtown in a two-person household with an income range of \$50-75K, who uses commuter rail, and shops, visits the library and museum, Town Hall, and the post office in Downtown.*)

E. What should be the top three improvements to Downtown?

Community survey respondents were asked to rank the most important improvements (from a list of fourteen) that are needed in the Downtown, where "1" is the top priority. The improvements that received 20 or more votes under each priority category are as follows:

Priority One

improve feeling of safety (68)
 improve traffic flow (60)
 improve pedestrian environment (28)
 improve business mix (26)
 improve cleanliness (23)

Priority Two

improve cleanliness (80)
 improve physical appearance (40)
 improve business mix (29)
 improve traffic flow (29)
 improve feeling of safety (27)
 improve parking availability (26)
 improve parking convenience (21)
 improve restaurant quality (20)

Priority Three

improve cleanliness (61)
 improve physical appearance (39)
 improve pedestrian environment (32)
 improve business mix (29)
 improve feeling of safety (26)
 improve traffic flow (25)
 improve parking availability (23)

A few issues were repeatedly chosen as high priorities. The survey respondents' priorities reflected opinions heard in public meetings and interviews as well. Participants in the public meeting, when asked to envision an improved Downtown ten years from now, also spoke in detail about a more attractive physical environment, better traffic, parking, and public transit management, and a business mix with more entertainment and specialty retail.

The results are clear. To attract more people, Downtown has to be and feel safer, cleaner, more attractive, and more pedestrian friendly, with more predictable traffic and parking and an improved mix of businesses. The good news is that it is in the power of town government to make security, maintenance, and physical improvements to the public sphere, and to give incentives for private improvements and business recruitment.

F. What kinds of new businesses should be in Downtown?

Community survey respondents to this question offered a large number of possibilities. Some looked back to Downtown's past, focusing on Woolworth's or a department store, or mentioned stores for necessities, like a supermarket, hardware, or discount store. Many more, however, saw the retail identity of Downtown as an area of speciality shops, restaurants, cafes and coffee shops — a shopping experience with an entertainment edge.

Participants in public meetings agreed. They wanted to maintain the small business character of Downtown with businesses, such as arts and crafts stores, that are not

mall oriented. Cafes, an ice cream shop, a full service deli, and artists' studios were also mentioned.

Business owners also suggested speciality retail and entertainment, such as a bagel or card store, an indoor farmers' market, a movie theater, and a video game center. The benefits of having a major retail name were also mentioned, as was a need for stores serving children and teens. Several Brazilian merchants suggested a Brazilian shopping mall and a Brazilian festival.

G. What kinds of downtown activities attract people?

"We need a mall alternative! I would come downtown for something that Shoppers World and Natick Mall can't or don't currently provide.... (I cite Portsmouth, NH and Northampton, MA as examples of vibrant downtowns with unique business mixes.) We should lure/recruit unique stores by providing aggressive local and state income and property tax incentives. We should be just as aggressive and enthusiastic to recruit new shops to locate/relocate in downtown as we were in getting Staples to locate in Framingham...ideas for stores include....Stores tied to corporations with locations in Framingham (i.e. Bose demonstration store, IDG/Lycos Internet related stores.)"

(Male, 20-34, who lives outside of downtown in a two-person household and works outside of MetroWest or Boston, goes downtown seldom to go to Town Hall or to a restaurant.)

"I would much prefer to shop in a local, vibrant, interesting downtown than a sterile mall where the \$\$ leave the area. Framingham would benefit from available parking, an exciting mix of funky restaurants, reasonable shopping." *(A 35-44 female with a household of more than 4 people and an income over \$75K, living outside of downtown, who works in Boston/Cambridge. She goes downtown occasionally for shopping, the library/museum, and Town Hall. She sees Newton as a good model.)*

When given a list of possible activities ranging from a farmers' and crafts' market to children's events, survey respondents were generally positive. Meeting participants emphasized concerts and theater, live music in clubs, and other evening activities. They also mentioned the need for more activities, both structured and unstructured, for children and teens. In general, the potential for Downtown to provide *experiences* — entertainment, international/ethnic contact, pleasant cafe or restaurant dining, strolling past attractive window displays, a sense of community centeredness — rather than simply goods and services, seems crucial to attracting a broad group of residents to the Downtown.

The percentage of survey respondents who said they definitely or possibly would frequent downtown for a series of activities is as follows:

farmers' and crafts' market	89%
movie theater	83%
multicultural festivals	73%
music events	85%
sidewalk cafes	84%
ethnic restaurants	80%
children's events	66%

In the case of the market, movie theater, music events, and sidewalk cafes, 60 to 62 percent of the respondents indicated that yes, they would come Downtown for these activities.

Many community survey respondents wrote additional comments — some quite lengthy and thoughtful — indicating the real interest that respondents have in a revitalized Downtown. The comments ranged widely, from people who saw nothing good about Downtown — as a neighborhood stigmatized by poverty and immigrant populations — and were certain it was unsafe, to many who appreciated the increasing ethnic diversity of Downtown and saw it as an opportunity. Among the other

communities cited as positive models for downtown revitalization were Natick, Waltham, Northampton, and Davis Square in Somerville.

H. The Community Vision

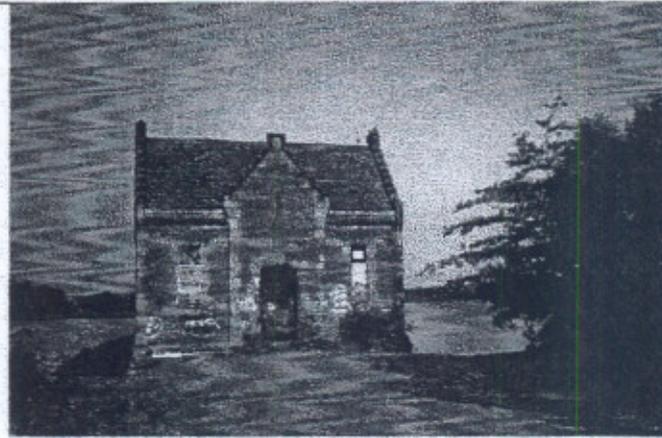
"The downtown can't compete with the Route 9 malls for discount, mass-market goods and services. It needs to offer unique, high-quality goods and services in a pedestrian-friendly environment, and it needs to promote and celebrate art and culture. Route 9 is nearly bereft of culture and hostile to pedestrians.... Also needed is good public transportation (for example: the buses should be coordinated with the commuter rail so people are not stranded for long periods after getting off the trains.)" *(Male, 20-34 in a two-person household making \$25K-\$49K, living in other Framingham, occasional visitor to downtown for shopping, library/museum, or a restaurant.)*

Downtown residents, who already patronize businesses in the commercial district, would like to see more business variety, more entertainment and night time attractions, and an overhaul of the physical appearance of Downtown. They are very aware of Downtown's poor image, which many of them believe is undeserved, but they also demand improvements.

Potential, but not current, downtown shoppers want an atmosphere that offers the variety and uniqueness not available in chain-dependent mall environments, but with the safety, convenience, and high maintenance and design standards that they expect from malls. They can go elsewhere to shop, but many of them would like to have the downtown alternative.

Business owners are pleased to see Downtown coming back, but many of them remain skeptical about revitalization plans. In particular, they are looking for signs of investment in the public realm in order to feel comfortable that any private investment they might make in the appearance of their stores or buildings will have a good chance of paying off.

5. OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS



There is a climate of opportunity in Downtown Framingham today, but there are also many problems that Downtown must overcome in order to take advantage of that opportunity. Based on the economic and physical analysis, as well as the community process, the following summary delineates the assets/opportunities and liabilities/constraints that affect the downtown revitalization process in Framingham.

A. Management and Organization

Despite the growing organizational capacity evident in Downtown, there are still management and communications deficiencies that must be resolved to make the revitalization program a success.

Assets and Opportunities

- Downtown Solutions
- Brazilian Business & Community Council
- Economic Development and Industrial Corporation (EDIC)
- Town government initiatives

Liabilities and Constraints

- no downtown merchants' association
- no downtown economic development/EDIC staff
- no downtown management entity
- complex communications among the numerous government entities with impact on downtown planning and development
- no permit streamlining or small business assistance efforts
- no Portuguese-speaking town official to assist Brazilian business community

B. Economic Development

There is economic opportunity and potential in Downtown Framingham, based on the sound demographics, traffic counts, and number of visitors to the area. In

addition, there is an increasing consumer desire to return to an older-style of community-based retail. At the same time, the lack of an integrated economic development program for Downtown means that, with the exception of a few specific niches, Downtown does not capture a high proportion of the sales potentially available, given the assets existing in the downtown commercial district.

Assets and Opportunities

- strong retail sales potential in the Downtown Neighborhood based on household demographics
- good traffic counts
- daily commuter base
- downtown worker populations
- cultural and civic institutions attract many people
- regional customers drawn by Fabric Place and Brazilian business cluster
- local business anchors such as MetroWest Bank and CVS
- long-time retailers with loyal customers (such as Panza Shoes, Katie-Joe's Bakery, and AutoBrite Car Wash)
- consumer boredom with mall and strip commercial shopping
- shortage of space in the office market west of Boston

Liabilities and Constraints

- nearby mega-retail competition
- capital shortages for small businesses
- no district promotion or advertising
- low number of business anchors
- no clear downtown market identity except for Brazilian cluster
- poor downtown image, including everything from security and traffic concerns to aesthetic improvements
- few but prominent vacant storefronts
- too many underutilized storefronts
- vacant office/industrial buildings on downtown periphery
- little night-time activity, except cultural institutions
- no "white tablecloth" restaurants or evening entertainment
- vacant upper stories of some buildings
- new housing not permitted in commercial zone

C. Physical Environment

The overwhelming message sent by businesses, residents, and potential customers is that they need the Town to show it cares about Downtown Framingham by investing in appearance, maintenance, and security.

Assets and Opportunities

- historic architecture in good condition
- continuous street edge in Downtown Spine (few parking lots or vacant lots on the street)
- planned relocation of train platform
- planned intersection and road improvements
- streetscape and wayfinding plan implementation

- Downtown Common redesign
- Hollis St. Fire Station project under design
- storefront signage and façade improvement program in development
- Farm Pond potential

Liabilities and Constraints

- unpredictability of traffic flow
- insufficient commuter parking and perceived lack of employee and client parking
- dated signage and window displays
- auto-oriented character of Waverley Street in Downtown
- division of Concord and Hollis Street by railroad tracks
- poor lighting at night
- uneven maintenance standard in public and private spaces
- inadequate landscaping on streets and in parking lots
- poorly defined pedestrian connections (between street and parking lots, Spine and Core)
- inconsistent seasonal decoration and beautification efforts

D. Identity and Image

Because Framingham has several village centers, Downtown does not have symbolic importance as the only historic center in the town. (Framingham Centre is another place entirely.) The physical boundaries of the downtown commercial district are not clear. Moreover, the new diversity of Downtown and its old historic and civic character have not yet coalesced into an easily understood identity that contrasts effectively with the malls and Route 9. An obstacle to a new, coherent, positive identity for Downtown Framingham is its problematic image. To many people, Downtown is a place where they are at risk for unpleasant experiences of one kind or another. These can range from simply finding it hard to park or observing litter, to fear of being a crime victim.

Assets and Opportunities

- Diversity in age, household type, ethnicity, and national origin
- Affordability
- Multicultural flavor
- Historic character
- Community policing station

Liabilities and Constraints

- Indistinct downtown boundary definition
- Perception of crime and lack of safety
- Perception as primarily a social service center
- Cross-cultural misunderstandings
- Low owner-occupancy rate in the Downtown Neighborhood
- Multi-centered nature of Framingham

6. DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION STRATEGY: GOALS, ACTIONS, FINANCING OPTIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION

Goals

What kind of place should Downtown Framingham be? The surveys, interviews, focus groups, and other discussions on the future of Downtown Framingham, as well as the analysis of the downtown economic, physical, and social environment, coalesced into a series of goals for the revitalization of Downtown. On many issues there was a significant level of agreement among downtown residents, downtown business owners, residents from elsewhere in Framingham, and town officials. The community wants to see an attractive, vibrant, pedestrian-friendly commercial district that serves the surrounding diverse neighborhood while attracting shoppers from the rest of Framingham and elsewhere through physical improvements, greater variety in retail offerings, and improved traffic flow and parking options. On a few issues, such as changes in downtown housing options, substantial disagreement remains.

Actions

A strategy is designed to make the most of assets and opportunities, while minimizing liabilities or constraints. The actions recommended under the categories below respond to the opportunities and constraints identified in light of the plan's goals. Some of these actions require only organization, communication, and energy, while others depend on significant funding. It is important that the multiplicity of smaller actions continue while bigger projects are under development. Some of the recommendations discussed in this chapter are listed under several thematic headings. This redundancy is intended to reinforce the way in which downtown revitalization activities are interconnected.

Financing Options and Sources

Both public and private financing are essential to the Downtown revitalization effort. Public financing will be key to physical improvements to the public realm, the funding of staff, and as seed money for assistance to the private sector. However, the private sector must also be persuaded to invest in Downtown revitalization. Our conversations with business owners indicate that many are waiting for the investment of public resources in infrastructure as a sign of municipal commitment to the Downtown. (A list of funding sources can be found in the Appendix.)

Implementation

The public/private revitalization partnership must also continue at the level of implementation. There is no substitute for a committed Town government willing to invest funds and staff time in downtown projects. At the same time, there will be no success without a similar commitment from the private sector.

A. Recommended Land Use Plan (see exhibit 4)

Goal

Consolidate the Central Business District and rezone for appropriate uses

Actions

- **Expand the Central Business District (CBD)** to include cultural institutions north of Town Hall and the Dennison complex on Howard Street. This action would reinforce the value of these assets as part of downtown. The zoning standards for the CBD should be developed keeping in mind the underpass and other transportation improvement plans.
- **Permit multifamily and upper story housing.** The provision of new, market-rate housing in the Downtown Core is probably one of the most contentious issues surrounding downtown revitalization in Framingham. Many people in Framingham do not wish to see an expansion of the type of housing that now exists in the Downtown Core or on its immediate fringes, and they assume that any new housing permitted in the area would soon exhibit the characteristics they dislike about the existing housing: a high level of rental properties, absentee ownership, and subsidized tenants. Other Framingham residents see the provision of market-rate housing in the Downtown Core as a prerequisite to the creation of a livelier, more active Downtown. Survey respondents and participants in public meetings strongly voiced both points of view.

A detailed study of the downtown housing market was beyond the scope of this study. However, the Town should seriously consider the benefits of expanding housing options in the Downtown Core. This recommendation is based on the experience of many successfully revitalized downtowns. A mix of housing, business, and retail in a commercial district provides a stronger base of neighborhood consumers, creates more activity at all hours of the day, and through that activity, creates a safer environment. Improvements in the appearance and maintenance of Downtown Framingham, along with the presence of the commuter rail station, the library, the museum, and retail services, could make Downtown attractive to market rate renters or buyers. Since one priority market for downtown housing is always people who work downtown, the more successful Downtown Framingham is in attracting tenants for existing office and light manufacturing space, the stronger the likely market for market rate housing.

- **Downzone peripheral commercial corridors** from Business (B) to General Residence (G) to support and strengthen a consolidated Central Business District. Business zoning for the major streets leading into the Central Business District, such as Concord, Hollis, and Union, encourages the location of uses that can detract from the density and pedestrian-orientation of the downtown commercial district. Consolidation of business uses in the center encourages the redevelopment of empty space and the creation of a community of interests among all the retailers and other businesses in the Downtown. More retail and service options crowded into a consolidated space

will also give shoppers more incentive to park their cars and walk.

- **Create a Downtown Gateway Overlay District** on Waverley Street with design guidelines and incentives for new development and renovations in order to present an attractive and appropriate entrance to Downtown. The approaches to Downtown on Waverley Street have the character of a commercial strip and do not signal to visitors that they are entering a central business district. Design guidelines for new investment in this area will, over time, create a more defined streetscape and entrance corridor to the Downtown.

- **Downzone the manufacturing district (M)** to light manufacturing, with office and commercial uses permitted, to encourage emerging business uses and prevent inappropriate adjacent uses.

- **Downzone the business district south of Lincoln Street** to consolidate the office and professional district (P) around the hospital. Permit multi-family and upper-story housing.

- **Create a special district for mixed-use waterfront development** in anticipation of switching yard relocation. State rail plans may require that a rail line to Lowell and Marlboro remain on this site. Removal of the yards could still provide development and other improvement opportunities.

Financing

- None required.

Implementation

- Planning Department
- Planning Board
- Town Meeting

B. Management and Organization

Downtown revitalization requires careful management and a partnership between the public and private sectors. The Urban Land Institute's *Downtown Revitalization Handbook* found that successful revitalization programs are managed by an organization (public, quasi-public, or private nonprofit) with full-time, paid staff: "A variety of groups should be responsible for implementing different portions of the plan; however, one organization must be responsible for coordinating the plan's implementation."¹ Among the groups that have successfully led downtown revitalization efforts are:

- dedicated downtown programs within municipal governments
- downtown development authorities
- nonprofit development corporations, which can be quasi-public agencies or completely private

¹ Susanna McBee, *Downtown Development Handbook*, Second Edition, (Washington, DC: Urban Land Institute, 1992), 16.

- downtown merchants' associations or partnerships
- Main Streets organizations
- Business Improvement Districts

In Massachusetts successful programs have been led by municipal governments and public agencies, partnership organizations, and Main Streets organizations. The first Massachusetts Business Improvement District is currently being organized.

Effective Downtown Partnership and Main Streets organizations have many similarities. The strategies they use can serve as models for Downtown Framingham's revitalization program, even if Framingham does not have an official Main Streets program. They have strong participation from businesses and the support (financial and otherwise) of municipal government. A salaried, professional director or program manager leads the revitalization effort under the direction of a board of directors representing public and private stakeholders. Commitments for two years of salary as well as some operational funding, from private and public sources, should be in place before hiring a director. Volunteer committees must still expect to expend significant time and effort to move the program forward. The National Main Streets Center is an excellent source of publications and information on successful downtown revitalization strategies, as is the International Downtown Association.

Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) have been very successful elsewhere in the country but still face certain obstacles in Massachusetts. A BID is an organization of property and business owners in a defined geographic area. Created and financed by property owners through an assessment collected with property tax, a BID typically provides services such as marketing, maintenance, parking management, enhanced security, graffiti removal, and public improvements. The Massachusetts law permitting the establishment of BIDs requires that property owners must submit an improvement plan to the municipality. After approval of the plan, the Collector/Treasurer collects the fees, which are then disbursed to the BID. At least 60 percent of owners representing 51 percent of assessed property must agree to the plan.

Currently, Massachusetts law permits property owners to opt out of a BID even after municipal approval. This option threatens the stability of financing. The Washington Street Improvement Committee in Boston is the first attempt at a BID in the state. The Committee is seeking a home rule petition to eliminate the provision for opting out of the BID, which could be a model for other communities. In the future, Framingham may wish to consider a BID, but at present it is unlikely that downtown property owners have sufficient confidence in the revitalization effort to be willing to assess themselves for services and improvements.

In Framingham, previous efforts to hire and sustain a downtown manager foundered because of inadequate funding and lack of a clear plan. It is crucial that the Town proceed with deliberation in this regard, because another failure would deepen skepticism about the Town's commitment and capacity to develop a revitalization program. Sufficient funding and a strong organizational base must be secured first, even if that means postponing hiring a manager for a year.

Case Study: Downtown Waltham

The story of Waltham's ten-year downtown revitalization effort shows the importance of continuing leadership and focus, a willingness to make investments, and the incremental nature of a downtown revitalization program. Key components of this successful program have been the following:

- strong leadership and commitment to the downtown from the mayor
- a good plan implemented piece by piece
- the creation of a part-time downtown economic development planning position
- rezoning for mixed use development and liberalized parking requirements
- streetscape improvements
- PWED grant from the state for a parking garage/deck
- one hour free on-street parking with strict enforcement
- arrival of a strong developer (after several potential projects failed)
- restaurant development along Moody Street through private market activity
- good luck

By the year 2000, the City will have leveraged the creation of a mixed use residential retail project, small-screen cinema complex, and restaurant development with millions of dollars of investment in physical improvements. Although there are some important similarities between Waltham and Framingham, such as the difference between an older, mill and factory-based downtown with an increasingly multi-ethnic population, and newer, suburban-style development, there are also some key differences. Waltham has a strong mayor form of government and receives almost twice as much federal Community Development Block Grant money as Framingham.

- Late 1980s: creation of a downtown revitalization committee, preparation and acceptance of a plan, economic development planner position created
- Early 1990s: Rezoning of the downtown corridor to give the downtown more definition and limit commercial encroachment into residential areas; permit mixed-use projects; liberalize parking requirements. Upper-story apartments in downtown commercial buildings are permitted.
- \$1m spending over 2 years in CDBG funds on streetscape improvements.
- Search for a developer for a vacant department store (Grover-Cronin); initially finds Bradlees, which then goes bankrupt.
- \$2m PWED funding for a parking garage with a HUD Section 108 Loan and some Chapter 90 (state road improvement) funds.
- Attempts to attract a movie theater and an ice cream store initially unsuccessful.
- Mid-1990s: new developer buys Grover Cronin for a mixed-use project with market rate apartments and ground floor retail. City extends streetscape improvements to this area.
- Developer helps secure investment in new movie theater. City transfers parking funding to serve this project.
- The City receives grants to improve visual and physical access to the Charles River downtown.
- Finally, the City is committed to \$1m completion of the riverwalk, with CDBG funds if other funds not forthcoming.

**Case Study:
Boston Main Streets Program**

Four-Year Program Typical Financing Structure:

\$245,000 plus donated services from the City:

- Funds for program managers, physical improvements, promotion, and technical studies. Much of the program funding and contracted technical assistance is paid from CDBG funds.
- Donated City services for technical assistance

\$40,000 plus donated technical expertise from a corporation:

- Funds plus expertise

[Value unknown] Services from the National Main Streets Center:

- Training and evaluation

\$200,000 in matching funds from Property Owners:

- Matching funds for physical improvements to private properties

\$60,000 from Fundraising:

- Increasing levels of funding for program expenses (including the manager's salary in the last two years) are projected to come from fundraising

Total Program Cost: \$545,000

In addition, the City makes transportation improvements and other investments according to its regular capital program, for example, redesign and reconstruction of a public parking lot in the Codman Square Main Street District.

The present Framingham downtown effort is being led by the Planning Department and Downtown Solutions, which are the logical candidates for the leadership and coordination role in downtown revitalization. However, neither is ready to take on this role as currently constituted.

Downtown Solutions

As a combined neighborhood association and downtown association, Downtown Solutions has demonstrated its ability to organize successful events and to serve neighborhood residents through the Neighborhood Watch program. Nonetheless, the lack of strong participation from a critical mass of downtown businesses remains a serious weakness. Although residents and businesses have many common interests, businesses have specific needs that can best be served through a more focused group. Because a program for improving the downtown commercial district is sufficiently complex in itself, a manager cannot be expected also to be in charge of neighborhood issues such as the Neighborhood Watch program. Organization of a downtown business and property owners' association is crucial to the success of revitalization. This group can operate under the umbrella of Downtown Solutions or another organization such as the MetroWest Chamber of Commerce, but it should have a separate identity.

Framingham Planning Department

Town commitment and resources are essential to the success of downtown revitalization in Framingham. Many of the needed improvements identified by community and business respondents to our surveys can only be made through municipal action and funding. However, the Framingham Planning Department has a small staff with many responsibilities. There is no one who can give the time and focus that downtown management requires. The one existing municipal agency appropriate for this task is the Economic Development and Industrial Corporation, the EDIC.

Economic Development and Industrial Corporation

Goal

Administration, management, business retention and recruitment by leveraging public resources.

Actions

- **Capitalize on the existence and funding capability of the EDIC** by using it as a partnership organization and providing professional, experienced staffing. The EDIC can take on the coordination and management role for downtown revitalization and economic development.
- **Create a Downtown Advisory Council to the EDIC board:** the Planning Director and representatives of Downtown Solutions, business and property owners in Downtown, the Brazilian Business and Community Council, and the Chamber of Commerce
- **Hire a director** with economic development, administrative, marketing, communications, and organizational skills to perform the following tasks:
 - develop and implement a **capitalization plan** for the EDIC
 - **retain and recruit businesses**
 - maintain **communications** with downtown property owners and businesses
 - **write grant proposals** for additional funding
 - administer downtown business **incentive, loan, and improvement programs**
 - create and maintain **informational resources**
 - provide **permitting assistance** and a streamlining process for new businesses
 - **assist Downtown Solutions** and other downtown organizations on business issues
- **Allocate block grant funding and/or town revenues and seek private contributions** from the larger downtown businesses for 18 months to two years' salary and benefits for an experienced director. Creation of a director position for the EDIC will provide the town with a staff person to focus on downtown revitalization and economic development issues. It is important that this position be given adequate funding and responsibility to attract an experienced and capable person, including 18 months to two years of guaranteed funding for salary and benefits, and that the position carry a job title on the level of "director" or "manager," rather than "facilitator" or "coordinator."
- **Provide for consistent availability of foreign language assistance** (Portuguese, Spanish) so that the EDIC can communicate effectively with immigrant business owners

- **Provide the EDIC with some operational revenue**, for example, from sale or lease of town-owned property, to fund programs. Capitalization of the EDIC is essential to its success. Possible capitalization strategies include the following:
 - **state funding** through the legislature
 - **transfer of town-owned property to the EDIC** which could generate sales or lease revenue. Old schools, tax title property, former municipal buildings, and vacant land should all be considered. This approach has been used in other communities.
 - pursuit of possible state **Municipal Incentive Grant funds** that could match a local commitment
- **Potential major projects:**
 - package incentives for **redevelopment of large vacant sites**
 - commission a feasibility study of a **year-round farmers/crafts market**
 - recruitment of a **movie theater**
 - obtain PWED funding for a **parking garage/deck** in Downtown

Financing

- CDBG
- Private contributions from major downtown businesses
- Town-owned property for operational revenue
- Tax Increment Financing through Economic Opportunity Area designation
- PWED, CDAG, HUD Sect. 108 funds for projects that retain or increase jobs
- State Department of Food and Agriculture assistance for farmers' market feasibility study
- Mass Turnpike Tourism grants (linkage with the Danforth Museum)
- Municipal Incentive Grants

Implementation

- Planning Department
- Town Manager
- Board of Selectmen
- Town Meeting

Public Works/Parks Department

Goal:

Enhanced and consistent maintenance of public spaces through consolidated management and accountability.

- Maintenance responsibilities for the downtown public realm are fragmented. Downtown needs a consistently high maintenance standard and clear lines of accountability for maintenance.

Actions

- **Consolidate all downtown public maintenance activities** under one manager in town government for a consistent maintenance program and so that businesses and residents have only one person to contact with their concerns about public maintenance issues
- **Provide a hotline** or single number to call in town government about all downtown maintenance issues

Financing

- Town funds

Implementation

- Town Manager

Downtown Solutions**Goal:**

Strengthened program of advocacy, advice, activities, and events

- Downtown Solutions should build on its successes, in particular its success in putting on events and enhancing Downtown's image. It has a pivotal role to play in attracting more participation in downtown revitalization activities, in assisting the Town in creating guides to Downtown businesses and permitting/licensing requirements, in recruiting new businesses, and, especially, in events programming. Downtown Solutions should seek to create its own funding sources and seek continuing business sponsorship for events. It is important that a strong level of volunteer activity continue. When it has sufficient funding, Downtown Solutions should hire a part-time events coordinator to plan, seek funding for, and implement a regular and dependable series of entertainment events in the Downtown, such as concert or movie series.

Actions

- **Organize as a nonprofit organization**, completing the efforts already underway
- **Create a sliding scale of membership fees** for businesses, nonprofits, and individuals
- **Initiate a permanent communications link** with the Brazilian Business and Community Council and the new Hispanic association, the Latin American Community Council, that is said to be organizing
- **Start a systematic media relations** program to keep good news about Downtown in the news
- **Commission a slogan and design of a logo** to identify the downtown commercial district (not just for the Downtown Solutions organization) that then can be used on all marketing materials for Downtown
- **Assist the Planning Department in preparation of a downtown development brochure** and a guide to setting up a business in Downtown and obtain translations in Portuguese, Spanish, and other languages, if needed
- **Explore financial assistance** from large corporations in Framingham
- **Program a regular and recurring multi-season series of downtown events** and beautification and coordinate them with activities at the museum and library, as well as with merchants
 - For example, the Art School and merchants could collaborate on a program of art in the shop windows for a specific period and then a shop

window "gallery" walk could be programmed to entice people Downtown.

- **Initiate a program to activate blank storefront windows** by approaching business and property owners and institutions such as the museum/art school, library, school system
- **Develop a series of lunch time and/or evening entertainment events** such as a concert or movie series with business sponsorship
- **Hire a part-time events organizer** to manage the events program
- **Advocate for improvements** before town meeting, town boards, agencies such as the MBTA, and private businesses such as CSX (formerly Conrail)
- **Organize the beautification program** for greater consistency and professional maintenance
 - plan for **multi-season decorations**
 - obtain pro bono assistance for coherent and harmonious **planting design**
 - collect money from sponsors, provide signs acknowledging their support, and hire professionals to **plant and maintain planters**

Financing

- Private sector
- Town funds contribution for development brochure and business guide

Implementation

- Downtown Solutions

Downtown Business Organization

Goal:

Promote Downtown as a commercial district and meet business needs

- As noted earlier, downtown revitalization requires a high rate of participation and commitment from downtown businesses. But business owners have many pressing demands on their time, and those who have seen other revitalization efforts come and go may be skeptical about investing their time and energy in yet another organization. Therefore a downtown business organization must focus on how it can serve the needs of businesses by helping them to communicate with their markets through joint advertising and promotion, and helping them to enhance their business skills.

Actions

- **Form a local business' association** to focus on business needs, which could be an independent organization or under the larger umbrella of Downtown Solutions or the MetroWest Chamber of Commerce.
- **Recruit members** from the Brazilian, Hispanic, and other immigrant communities through the Brazilian Business and Community Council and other organizations, and be sensitive to the need to overcome language barriers

- **Encourage merchants to light shop windows at night**
- **Disseminate information** on existing technical assistance programs and organize programs of speakers and trainers
- **Develop a program of joint advertising and cross promotions** with downtown businesses, including Brazilian/Hispanic media and WKOX (Hispanic radio)
- **Create a program to welcome new businesses**
- **Develop a downtown discounts program** for commuters when they show their commuter card and for downtown employees
- **In the long term, explore feasibility of a Business Improvement District**

Financing

- Private sector

Implementation

- Downtown Solutions
- Chamber of Commerce
- Brazilian Business and Community Council

Downtown Task Force**Goal:**

Monitoring of plan implementation

Actions

- **Make the Downtown Task Force a continuing committee with the responsibility to advise town government** on pursuing implementation of the Strategic Plan and to report annually to Town Meeting on progress. The Task Force could also function as the Downtown Advisory Council to the EDIC. The Task Force should meet quarterly or biannually.

Financing

- None required

Implementation

- Planning Department
- Board of Selectmen
- Town Meeting

C. Economic Development

Goal:

Improve the business mix by recruiting businesses that can serve diverse markets.

- There was little controversy about the fundamental economic development goals of downtown revitalization. Most people would like to see Downtown's traditional commercial atmosphere retained (rather than, for example, redeveloping the existing buildings into modern, many-story, office/retail blocks), but they also want it to serve a wider and more diverse range of markets.

Recruiting a Movie Theater

Independent movie theaters have been reemerging in suburban and urban downtowns. On the North Shore, five communities have independent cinemas in close proximity to one another and to multi-screen theaters: Beverly (1 screen); Salem (3 screens); Marblehead (2 screens); Rockport (1 screen); Gloucester (2 screens). All of these are located downtown, with the exception of the Gloucester theater, which is a short distance from downtown.

The mix of movies at the independents includes first run films, second runs, children's programming, and art films. All the theaters have several common elements: off-pricing (one to two dollars below multiplex prices), showing more movies than the number of screens to vary the selection, and a special ambience with quality refreshments, old movie-house charm, owners collecting tickets, and tuxedoed doormen.

Thomas McNulty, owner and operator of the Warwick Theater in Marblehead has operated a successful downtown theater for two decades. He said there is no structural reason that an independent cinema could not be successful in Downtown Framingham. With strong demographics within a short driving distance and, as the area is currently served only by screens in outlying areas or nearby towns, there is potential for a niche market.

If the Town is serious about attracting a theater, certain steps must be taken, according to Mr. McNulty. Funding assistance can jump-start the process, as occurred successfully in Salem, where the city offered a public, low-interest loan to qualified independents willing to reopen a recently closed Sony Cinema. Second, an appropriate location must be found. A former theater is ideal, but retro-fits of non-theater buildings have been successful in many instances. Finally, supporting businesses must exist or be developed around the theater. Restaurants and other entertainment will offer movie-goers options for activities before and after the show.

Because of Downtown Framingham's unusual combination of assets, drawing higher income residents to and through the Downtown as commuters and patrons of the cultural institutions, as well as regional customers to Fabric Place and the Brazilian business cluster, it is possible for the Downtown to serve a wider range of market segments than might commonly be supposed. However, success is more likely with new businesses that have overlapping target markets.

Examples of businesses that can attract overlapping market segments are a movie theater and a farmers' and crafts' market. Responses to the community survey showed extensive support for both of these types of businesses. Currently there are two summer farmers' markets in Framingham: one in the St. Tarcisius parking lot, which is held on Saturdays, and one on Route 9. The St. Tarcisius market should be relocated to a more central downtown location while the EDIC pursues the feasibility of construction of a year-round market. The St. Tarcisius market is already in Downtown, but in a location where shoppers are likely to park in

the church parking lot, make their purchases, and then get in their cars again to leave Downtown. If the market were to be located in a more central spot, such as the streets around the Downtown Common (which could be closed off during the Saturday market) or the Registry of Motor Vehicles parking lot, shoppers would be more likely to walk to shops on the Downtown Spine. Combining Saturday farmers' market days with Downtown Solutions events and special merchant promotions would be important to get market shoppers moving into downtown retail businesses.

Many downtown residents would like to see a supermarket in their neighborhood. Although one may be needed for other reasons, a modern supermarket would not be the best project to advance the goal of downtown revitalization. Supermarket chains today prefer to build stores of at least 60,000 s.f. with generous surface parking. There may be a suitable location for such a store on the Waverley Street strip but not in the Downtown Core. Because supermarket trips are overwhelmingly auto-dependent, they would not be as likely to generate pedestrian traffic on the Downtown Spine and elsewhere in the commercial district as other types of uses.

Actions

- **Prepare an economic development brochure** to market Downtown which highlights the favorable demographics and traffic counts of the area, reasonable rents and real estate prices, business incentives, and program of public improvements
- **Build on existing business assets**
 - **assist ethnic businesses** in expanding to serve a wider market with English-language signage and promotion
- **Provide activities and new businesses** that can attract people from diverse income groups, such as
 - **a community farmers' and crafts market** (start by relocating the summer farmers' market now at the St. Tarcisius parking lot to a more central downtown location)
 - **a second-run or art movie theater** that could also have special movie showings for specific ethnic groups
- **Enact an ordinance which encourages sidewalk cafes** and provide expedited permitting

Financing

- CDBG
- Town funding
- Private sector

Implementation

- Planning/EDIC
- Planning Board
- Downtown Solutions assistance in preparing brochures

The Downtown Neighborhood Market

Goals:

Expand the neighborhood market population
Enhance night-time market opportunities
Retain and support existing businesses

- Neighborhood residents are the basic market segment of any commercial district. Of the over 17,000 people who live in the Downtown Neighborhood — within a one-mile radius of Town Hall — only 27 percent live within a half-mile radius. A larger population within easy walking distance of the Downtown Spine, or living above retail spaces, would add to the viability of the downtown commercial area.

Actions

- **Provide for market rate housing** in the Downtown Spine and Downtown Core

- **Provide technical assistance and low-cost capital** to help small businesses survive and prosper.

Small business owners are typically undercapitalized and often are new to business ownership. Most of the Brazilian business owners in Downtown Framingham had no previous experience, either here or in Brazil, before they opened businesses in Framingham. Respondents to the business survey indicated interest in low interest loans and in business, tax, and legal planning, as well as window display assistance. Possible ways to meet technical assistance needs include disseminating information about existing programs to help small businesses, or exploring the siting of a business assistance program in the downtown with Framingham State College. The Chamber of Commerce has already begun a small business assistance program. Constant marketing of existing programs can make a big difference in participation. In the case of Brazilian and Hispanic businesses, provision of technical assistance in Portuguese and Spanish would attract many more participants. Organizations such as the Massachusetts Association of Portuguese Speakers (MAPS) should be contacted.

Financing

- CDBG
- Rubin Fund
- Private sector, perhaps low-interest bank revolving funds
- Small Business Administration

Implementation

- Planning Department/EDIC
 - Planning Board
 - Merchant's Association
 - Chamber of Commerce

Downtown Housing: The Salem Example

From the late 1960s through the 1970s, the redevelopment of downtown Salem, Massachusetts, won many awards for block after block of impeccably restored buildings and attractive streetscapes. However, physical improvements did not in themselves bring renewed economic vitality. In the 1980s urban planners realized that while physical improvements set the stage for revitalization, private investment follows people into an area as much as it follows the infusion of money. Therefore, one of the major challenges facing Salem's post-urban renewal central business district was to get more people downtown, because people would create a market which would generate private investment.

Many initiatives were created to bring people downtown, including promotion of the tourism economy, implementation of a creative parking policy, pursuit of an increased presence in the downtown by Salem State College, and more aggressive special event planning. One important facet of the program was to encourage housing development in the business district.

Housing was permitted in downtown, but the biggest obstacle to housing development in existing buildings was a requirement for 1-1/2 parking spaces on site for each housing unit. Salem modified its zoning ordinance to permit developers of existing buildings to meet their parking requirements if the units which they created were within 1000 feet of an off-site municipal parking facility. This allowed sharing of parking between businesses during the day and residences at night.

The results were dramatic. In a relatively short period, over 500 market rate housing units were created in downtown Salem. The urbanites who live in these units work during the day and use the parking at night, in a perfectly complementary manner to business use of the same parking during the day. The new residents have brought vitality and presence to the downtown.

Framingham has many of the same factors that made a difference in Salem. There are attractive downtown buildings with empty upper story space. There are also development sites close to the downtown commuter rail station. Market rate housing in Framingham can add another important component to downtown revitalization.

The Downtown Workforce Market

Goals:

Promote downtown businesses to existing employees
Recruit new businesses for empty office and light industrial space

- The second foundation of a commercial district is the market composed of the employees of businesses in the district. Downtown Framingham has always depended greatly on the downtown workforce market and suffered as a result of

shutdowns and downsizings during the last 10 to 15 years. The recent sale of the Dennison complex on Howard Street is a favorable development in this regard. However, retail and service businesses must market to employees and not simply assume that they are a captive market.

Actions

- **Encourage redevelopment of vacant industrial and office space** by making potential buyers aware of available economic development incentives and programs such as TIF, MDFA, PWED, CDAG and Town plans for public improvements to link these areas to the Downtown Spine. Incentives can be used to ensure high-quality redevelopment.
- **Seek small high-tech startups for upper story and office space** through the Town's web site and professional publications
- **Provide a space/site locator service focused on Downtown** on the Town's web site
- **Provide permit streamlining and assistance**, and develop a booklet on how to open a business in Framingham
- **Develop joint promotions targeted to downtown employees (for example, special discounts or coupons)**

Financing

- Tax Increment Financing
- Massachusetts Development Finance Administration
- CDAG
- PWED
- HUD Section 108 loans
- Private developer contributions

Implementation

- Planning Department/EDIC
- Business Association

The Cultural and Institutional Market

Goal:

Encourage patrons who are already in Downtown to shop there

- As has been repeatedly noted, thousands of people come to downtown Framingham every year, park their cars, and walk to a cultural or civic destination: the Library, the Danforth Museum and Art School, the Callahan Senior Center, and Fisher College. But most of these people do not do much shopping downtown, with the exception of Senior Center patrons.

Actions:

- **Coordinate promotions and activities with museum, library, and college events**, such as the Museum's annual art sale

- **Recruit a "white tablecloth" restaurant** by approaching successful restaurateurs in other suburban locations with information on Downtown and offer incentives such as loan funds and permitting assistance

Financing

- Massachusetts Cultural Council - Cultural Economic Development Program (in partnership with the Danforth Museum)
- Massachusetts Turnpike Authority tourism promotion grants

Implementation

- Downtown Solutions
- Planning Department/EDIC
- partnerships with institutions

The Commuter Market

Goal:

Encourage more commuters to stop Downtown

-The key to attracting commuter business is service and convenience. Although the new commuter rail platform and parking area will be beneficial to Downtown in terms of traffic flow, its location on the western periphery of the Downtown Core will require even more creative efforts to encourage commuters to patronize downtown businesses.

Commuters who drive through Downtown to and from the turnpike or other arterial roads can be attracted with the programs designed to improve the Downtown in general. As they see the district's appearance improve, the location of parking become more clear, and the business mix become more varied, they will begin to stop more often on their way home from work. Well-marked parking options are a key issue, because in a district like this one, where the enhancement of the pedestrian environment is an essential aspect of the overall plan, commuters must be persuaded to park their cars and then walk to their destination.

Actions

- **Promote service businesses to train commuters**
- **Upgrade the physical environment in the parking garage**, on the pedestrian route between the garage and the platform, and in the vicinity of the platform
- **Recruit commuter service businesses** to locate in the route between the parking garage and the platform, and in the vicinity of the new platform
- **Develop special joint promotions for train commuters** (e.g., discounts when they show their commuter pass, coupons)
- **Coordinate weekly late shopping hours** with evening hours at Town Hall, so that commuters with municipal business may be encouraged to stop and shop

Financing

- CDBG
- Chapter 90
- Private sector

Implementation

- Business Association
- Downtown Solutions
- Planning Department/EDIC

Regional Destination Market**Goals:**

Encourage more Fabric Place and Brazilian shoppers to patronize other downtown shops
Recruit more businesses that complement these strong anchors

- Fabric Place and the Brazilian business cluster function as retail/service anchors in the Downtown and draw customers from throughout the region. The more those customers are aware of other retail options in Downtown Framingham, the more they are likely to extend their stay Downtown and spend more money. This is particularly true if there are other businesses that complement these anchors, for example, more home furnishing stores to complement Fabric Place.

Actions

- **Develop joint promotions in Brazilian immigrant media** (newspapers, cable) for all downtown retailers
- **Promote downtown businesses to Fabric Place customers**
- **Recruit and assist complementary businesses**, such as other Brazilian businesses and home furnishing businesses

Financing

- Private sector

Implementation

- Business Association
- Planning Department/EDIC

Activities and Programming**Goal:**

Attract more people to Downtown for special events

- Many respondents to the community survey saw the potential for Downtown to provide pleasant experiences — unique entertainment, multicultural contacts, strolling in a pedestrian-friendly environment, and a sense of community centeredness — that are not available in regional or strip malls. Special events give downtown merchants an opportunity to communicate with a wider market. Retailers are also increasingly turning to entertainment as a way to forestall the effects of catalogue and internet shopping.

Actions

- **Create a menu of events and activities Downtown**, coordinating with downtown businesses and institutions, that encourage people to feel comfortable there
 - **concerts; a movie series outdoors in summer and in Town Hall in winter; children's events**
 - **continue and enhance the multicultural fair** showcasing all the immigrant groups represented in Framingham's past and present so that all can feel included
- **Hire a part-time events coordinator**
- **Coordinate these events with merchants** by encouraging sidewalk sales, staying open at night, distributing coupons and promotion, etc.

Financing

- Private sector - seek business sponsorship
- Downtown Solutions dues
- Town funds

Implementation

- Downtown Solutions
- Business Association

D. Physical Improvements

Business owners, neighborhood residents, and visitors to Downtown from other parts of Framingham want the district to look like a place the Town cares about. Improvements in the appearance of the Downtown Spine will be essential to changing Downtown's image as a run-down commercial center. Moreover, public improvements give private investors confidence and reduce the risk that the impact of their private investments could be wasted. For example, many municipalities have found that there are many more takers for façade improvement loans after public streetscape improvements are underway.

The priority areas for physical improvements in terms of visibility and impact are 1) the Downtown Spine; 2) Howard Street; 3) Waverley Street gateways; 4) Union Avenue route from the Danforth Museum to Concord Square; 5) the rest of the Downtown Core.

Vehicle Circulation**Goal:**

Enhance predictability and steady progress (not speed) through downtown

- The traffic problems caused by the 126/135 train crossing require no elaboration. However, it is important to emphasize that it is the unpredictability and long duration of the train crossing that is the principal problem for Downtown, not the fact that downtown traffic cannot travel at high speeds. It is beneficial for downtown business to have many motorists drive through the area at a slow enough speed to observe the stores. However, the goal is to persuade them

to park their cars and walk to a store or service business. Therefore, preservation and enhancement of the pedestrian environment in any downtown road project, including the proposed underpass project, is essential to the revitalization of Downtown.

Actions

- **Advocate for quick MBTA action** on relocation of the train platform and provision of new commuter parking
- **Pursue funding for intersection and Intelligent Transportation System improvements** to coordinate train and traffic movements, as suggested in the Rizzo Associates Route 126 Corridor report
- **Ensure that the design of the proposed underpass project respects, preserves, and enhances the pedestrian environment.**

Financing

- State transportation funds

Implementation

- Planning Department

Parking

Goal:

Provide convenient parking options appropriate to different users

-There are several different parking problems in Downtown Framingham, each of which may require a different solution. Commuters require all day parking, take up the spaces in the Pearl Street garage, and spill into other spaces. Some business owners and their employees lack assigned parking, but do not need to park directly adjacent to their businesses. Shoppers and potential shoppers often do not know where public parking exists, though the implementation of the streetscape signage program should mitigate this problem. The unappealing environment between parking and the destination can still deter potential shoppers, however.

Actions

- **Organize a parking management system** for Downtown and enforce it.
- **Advocate for the speedy implementation of the MBTA project** with its 96 additional commuter spaces.
- **Improve maintenance of the Pearl Street garage.**
- **Coordinate the cost of commuter parking, the cost of regional bus system (LIFT) trips, and LIFT schedules to promote more LIFT use** by train commuters (current LIFT schedules and fares do not provide sufficient incentives for use by commuters).
- **Improve directional signage for existing parking** (under implementation)

- **Improve the pedestrian environment between the parking space and the destination** (shorten the psychological distance with better lighting, landscaping, marked pedestrian routes, etc.).

- **Build a new parking garage/deck Downtown.**

- Possible locations include the surface lots between Town Hall and the Police Station, behind the Arcade Building, next to the old Post Office, the Fabric Place lot, behind the Salvation Army on Howard Street, or the area behind AutoBrite Car Wash. Any new parking facility located on a major street such as Union Avenue, Concord Street, or Howard Street should be designed with street level retail space. Blank walls or open garage decks at street level should be avoided because they detract from a pedestrian-friendly environment.

Financing

- CDBG
- Chapter 90
- Transportation bond
- PWED
- Mass ReLeaf (including coordination of private funding for street tree planting)

Implementation

- Planning Department
- Downtown maintenance manager

Streetscape (see exhibit 5)

Goal:

Enhance the pedestrian experience

- A well-designed commercial streetscape is comfortable for pedestrians. It has a clearly delineated edge, sufficiently wide sidewalks, a regular succession of windows and doors, amenities like trees and benches, and lighting scaled for pedestrians.

Actions

- **Install pedestrian scale lighting** that is closely spaced and distinctive in design
- **Extend tree planting** beyond Memorial Hall to the north and to the Hollis Street Fire Station to the south in order to mark the limits of the Downtown Spine
- **Upgrade the streetscape along Howard Street** to strengthen the pedestrian connection with the Dennison complex. Improvements should include trees, sidewalks, restriction of curb cuts and definition of the street edge, and discouragement of blank walls in buildings.
- **Improve the pedestrian experience from the cultural institutions to Downtown:** plant street trees, limit curb cuts and install low walls or fencing with landscaping where there are parking lots abutting the sidewalk.

- After making streetscape improvements to the Downtown Spine and the Howard Street corridor, **extend tree planting, pedestrian scale lighting, curb cut restrictions, and definition of the street edge** to other streets in the Downtown Core.

Financing

- CDBG
- Chapter 90
- Private contributions

Implementation

- Planning Department

Signage and Storefronts (see exhibit 6)

Goals:

Make storefronts and shop windows the center of attention by harmonizing and updating designs and displays

- In a retail district it is important to focus attention on the shop window. Upgrading signbands and other signage is the single most urgent improvement that can be made to Downtown Framingham's storefronts in the short term, followed by better window display design. Although the building façades can also benefit from improvements, most are in reasonably good condition. Experience has shown that the bigger private investment required of property owners in a façade improvement program is often not forthcoming until they see some public investment in infrastructure first. In addition, it is essential that design guidelines be developed before any signage or façade improvement programs are marketed to businesses. Without guidelines, there is no guarantee that improvements will complement one another, and decisions of the grant-awarding committee may appear arbitrary. During the first two years, Framingham should concentrate its limited funds on business signage/window display improvements rather than façade improvements. Because these improvements are less costly, more could be completed in a shorter time. The program should also depend more on low-interest or no-interest loans than grants, in order to create a revolving fund for continuing funding.

Actions

- **Give first priority to a storefront signage improvement program** by retaining a graphic design/architecture consultant to develop design guidelines for storefront signbands, awnings, and window displays and to consult with businesses in preparing individual improvement plans. The Town should allocate the CDBG funding contemplated for a façade improvement program to this signage/window display program for the first two years of the downtown business design improvements program.
- **Use shop windows for activities programming** and coordinate with seasonal beautification efforts
- **Activate street level windows where there are non-retail uses or vacancies** (with the art school, school system, others, for displays) — for example, Fabric Place workshop, Landry's bicycle

- **Develop downtown design guidelines** for planned façade improvement program

Financing

- CDBG
- Private sector

Implementation

- Planning Department/EDIC
- Downtown Solutions
- Business Association

Regulations and Advisory Elements**Goals:**

Provide downtown gateways with a defined and harmonious visual identity

Actions

- **Enact a Downtown Gateway Zoning Overlay District** for the Waverley Street gateway area with design guidelines to encourage improvement in the visual image and preferred uses over time. (See the Land Use recommendations.)

-The guidelines should be enacted with the consultation of an advisory committee including property and business owners.

Financing

- None required

Implementation

- Planning Department
- Planning Board
- Town Meeting

Farm Pond Shores**Goal:**

Improvement of present condition of the rail yards
Long-term redevelopment to complement Downtown

- Many communities are reclaiming waterfronts from industrial and transportation uses. Farm Pond represents tremendous potential for Downtown Framingham and it is important that the Town be included in any discussions about the use of that area. The state transportation plan envisages the continuation of rail lines linked to Marlborough and Lowell in that area. However, it may be possible to move the rail yards and work around the remaining line. Town representatives must develop continuing relationships with the railroad company and transportation officials to improve current conditions and work towards future relocation or minimization of rail yards. This may be a very long-term process with many frustrations in store for those who undertake it.

Actions

- **Create a waterfront redevelopment zoning district** (see Land Use recommendations)
- **Form a committee to advocate continuously on this issue** so that the Town's needs and desires for more access to the Farm Pond shore must be taken into account in planning for this space. The group should meet with CSX, state transportation officials, and legislative officials on an ongoing basis. The focus of this committee should be on relocation of the rail yards, not on the nature of any redevelopment efforts.

Financing

- None required

Implementation

- Planning Department

E. Identity and Image

Goal:

Communicate an image of Downtown as a safe, vibrant, interesting multicultural commercial district.

- Everyone agrees that Downtown has an identity and image problem. The revitalization effort must define and communicate an identity for Downtown which is true to its historic, urbanized, and multicultural character. By emphasizing its small business atmosphere and a commitment to customer service, Downtown can distinguish itself from the chain retail dominated malls and Route 9. The community survey showed that many people who seldom shop downtown now are intrigued by its international flavor and the potential for an old-fashioned, walkable, community-oriented commercial district. However, it is important to make more members of the community feel comfortable in Downtown and to dissipate their fears about issues such as parking and safety.

Actions

- **Promote and celebrate downtown's historic, traditional yet diverse character** with a slogan or tag-line such as "Framingham or Downtown Crossroads," "Framingham or Downtown Main Street," or "Cosmopolitan Framingham."
- **Develop a logo or graphic identity** that communicates this diverse international identity and use it throughout Downtown and on promotional materials
- **Organize a sustained media campaign** to keep revitalization efforts before the public, publicize the safety record of Downtown, and give a personal face to downtown by showcasing individuals who live and work there

- **Enhance immigrant community participation in downtown affairs:**
 - **Hire Town Hall employees** who can speak Portuguese and Spanish; hire a Portuguese-speaking police officer
 - **Provide more ESL training for adults**
- **Encourage and assist immigrant business** in providing English-language storefront and store window signage to attract English-speaking customers
- **Continue working with the Salvation Army** to provide a better waiting space for clients
- **Light shop windows at night** to enhance perceptions of security
- **Install pedestrian-scale and more closely-spaced lighting** in Downtown
- **Promote a porch light program** in residential neighborhoods (Neighborhood Watch)
- **Increase pedestrian or bike police patrols** for Downtown events, especially in the evening

Financing

- Town funding of employee positions
- CDBG or private funding of graphic identity design
- CDBG, Chapter 90, town funding, or other state transportation funds for pedestrian scale lighting

Implementation

- Downtown Solutions
- Planning Department/EDIC
- Town Manager

7. ACTION PLAN

Downtown revitalization is a long-term process which requires balancing a variety of initiatives in the areas of organizational and economic development, image enhancement, and promotion or marketing of the downtown district. This action plan identifies activities for implementation in a series of time frames, from the short term (twelve months) to the very long term (three or more years). The important thing is to continue the momentum begun with activities in 1997 and the completion of this plan, while laying the groundwork for the more difficult, complex, and expensive tasks ahead.

A. The Short Term - 12 months

Activities for the remainder of 1998 should focus on strengthening organizational capacity, improving communication and participation, making improvements to the most visible areas, assuring that existing projects conform to plan objectives, and preparing for the next steps in implementation and financing. This focus will help the revitalization program get the most return for the money and energy available.

Business participation

It is essential that the recent efforts made in attracting the interest of the downtown business community be continued and expanded because business participation is a key ingredient of successful downtown revitalization. In this regard, the special role of the Brazilian business community must be reiterated. This is an entrepreneurial immigrant population that attracts many customers from outside Framingham and is beginning to organize itself through the Brazilian Business and Community Council. There is an interest in expanding their clientele to attract more non-Brazilian customers to their businesses. However, Brazilian business owners have made it clear that their community needs a sign that the Framingham community is willing to give them transitional help in participating more effectively. The sign they are looking for is the provision of a Portuguese-speaking Town Hall employee and police officer and expansion of English as a Second Language courses for adults.

Events and image enhancement

While planning goes forward to seek staff and financing for more long-term projects, efforts must continue to keep the good news about Downtown in the media and bring more people to the district. Publicity about safety and fun events that bring more people Downtown to see for themselves can keep up the momentum. It is important that people within the community start thinking about Downtown as a place where success can happen. Smaller, successful programs with the maximum visual impact are more important than over-ambitious efforts that fall short and then communicate failure. For example, be sure that summer beautification efforts can be successfully maintained.

Staffing

It is more important to develop a financing plan which provides for eighteen months to two years of funding for a downtown staff person than to attempt to hire staff without sufficient funding. Using small amounts of Block Grant to fund staff for a short time is not the best investment. This means that in the short term, downtown revitalization efforts will continue to depend on the energy of volunteers and the willingness of town government to commit existing staff time to downtown issues. Downtown Solutions and town government must realistically assess what can be accomplished.

Actions

Implementing Group

Communication and Participation

Organize a downtown business association

Downtown Solutions and
Chamber of Commerce

Initiate a permanent communications link with the Brazilian Business and Community Council and the Hispanic business community

Downtown Solutions

Recruit a Portuguese and Spanish speaking permanent employee for Town Hall

Town Manager; Board of
Selectmen

Set up a continuing Downtown Task Force for oversight and reporting on plan implementation that can also serve as the Downtown Advisory Council to the EDIC

Board of Selectmen

Start a media relations program to keep good news about Downtown in the news

Downtown Solutions Marketing
Committee

Develop a slogan and logo to identify Downtown and use it on all materials

Planning Department,
Downtown Solutions Marketing
Committee

Prepare a downtown development brochure and guide to setting up a business in Downtown

Downtown Solutions and
Planning Department

Complete organization as a nonprofit entity, set up a schedule of membership dues, and explore financial and other assistance from large corporations in Framingham

Downtown Solutions
Coordinating Committee

Promotion

Prepare a simple brochure on downtown businesses with discount coupons

Downtown Solutions Marketing
Committee/new business group

Coordinate weekly evening hours at Town Hall with weekly evening shopping hours

Town government; new
business group

Continue organization of downtown special events. Consider entertainment events for summer 1998 such as outdoor concerts or movies.

Downtown Solutions

Land Use

Rezone to implement the recommended land use plan

Planning Department; Planning
Board; Town Meeting

Form a Downtown Farm Pond Committee to advocate with CSX and transportation officials on maintenance and future uses of Farm Pond shores Downtown

Board of Selectmen; Planning
Department

Economic Development

Prepare a funding plan for an EDIC director's position and seed money for programs	Planning Department; Board of Selectmen; Town Manager
Set up a downtown business database with information provided in this plan and keep it updated	Planning Department
Move the Saturday farmer's market from the St. Tarcisius's parking lot to a more central downtown location and coordinate with Downtown Solutions activities and merchants	Planning Department with Downtown Solutions assistance to approach Dept. of Food and Agriculture
Prepare and pass a by-law permitting sidewalk cafes	Planning Department; Board of Selectmen

Physical Improvements

Assure conformity with plan objectives to create a physical identity for Downtown in projects slated for imminent construction	Planning Department
Develop design guidelines for the central business district, the Waverley Street gateway areas, and for a storefront signage and façade improvement program	Planning Department
Design and initiate a storefront signage improvement grant/loan program with guidelines	Planning Department
Develop a parking management plan	Planning Department
Complete installation of directional signage for downtown parking	Planning Department
Consolidate public maintenance for Downtown under one manager and provide a hotline for downtown maintenance issues	Town Manager
Initiate program to activate blank storefront windows with assistance of museum/art school, library, school system, etc.	Downtown Solutions Beautification Committee
Plan for seasonal decorations and do long-range planning for 1999 season by obtaining design assistance, organizing a fee program, signs, and maintenance	Downtown Solutions Beautification Committee

Image

Encourage merchants to light shop windows at night	Downtown Solutions; business group
Initiate a porch light program for downtown neighborhoods	Downtown Solutions Neighborhood Committee
Continue working with the Salvation Army on an alternate waiting area for clients	Planning Department

B. The Middle Term - 12 to 36 months

Action	Implementing Group
Economic Development Hire an EDIC director; provide initial operational funding	Planning Department; Town Manager; Town Meeting
Feasibility study of a permanent farmers/crafts market	EDIC/Planning; Dept. of Food and Agriculture
Develop a permit streamlining process	EDIC
Recruit a second run/art movie/foreign film theater	EDIC
Develop a downtown redevelopment assistance package for reuse and redevelopment of vacant business or light industrial space in Downtown, including maintenance of the site locator	EDIC/Planning Department
Recruit small high-tech start-ups through the Town web page, professional organization publications, etc.	EDIC
Recruit a "white tablecloth" restaurant	EDIC
Recruit commuter service businesses for Downtown	EDIC
Seek funding for a new parking facility Downtown	EDIC
Promote existing small business technical assistance programs and develop programs specifically to serve downtown businesses	Business group; Chamber of Commerce; EDIC
Initiate joint advertising and cross-promotions with downtown businesses, especially Fabric Place and Brazilian businesses, and create a welcome program	Business group
Coordinate promotions with museum, library, and college events, such as the Museum's annual art sale	Business group; Downtown Solutions
Create a discount program for train commuters when they show their commuter card at local stores	Business group; Downtown Solutions
Physical Improvements Plant street trees to the edges of the expanded Central Business District	Planning Department; DPW
Improve the pedestrian environment between the parking space and the destination through lighting, painting, landscaping, and directional signage	Private owners; Planning Department
Improve the maintenance of the Pearl Street garage	Downtown maintenance manager

Pursue better coordination of LIFT and train schedules and pricing in order to promote more LIFT use and less commuter parking	Planning Department; EDIC
Implement the interim intersection improvements and Intelligent Transportation Systems at the 126/135 intersection	Planning Department
Assure sufficient attention to protecting and enhancing the pedestrian environment in the design of the 126 underpass project	Planning Department
Provide guidelines and develop workshops in shop window display design for store owners	Downtown Solutions; business group
Promotions	
Develop a series of entertainment events such as concerts, for both lunchtime and evening – outdoors in summer, in locations such as churches, Town Hall, building lobbies, etc., during cold weather	Downtown Solutions Marketing Committee
Continue and enhance coordination of special events with merchants and cultural institutions	Downtown Solutions; business group; museum, library, college, senior center
Organize funding and hire a part-time events coordinator for Downtown	Downtown Solutions

C. The Long Term (36 months and longer)

Action

Implementing Group

Build a new parking garage downtown	Planning Department
Install closely-spaced, pedestrian scale lighting along the Concord Street - Hollis Street Downtown Spine	Planning Department
Make streetscape improvements to Howard Street from Concord Street to the Dennison complex including street trees, pedestrian scale lighting, reduction of curb cuts, and delineation of the street edge where needed; extend streetscape improvements over time to the entire Downtown Core	Planning Department
Continue to pursue access to Farm Pond shores	Downtown Farm Pond Committee
Continue recruitment and business assistance programs	EDIC; business group
Continue events and beautification programming	Downtown Solutions
Explore the feasibility of a Business Improvement District	EDIC; business group

D. Public Actions

Short Term:

Town Manager

- Recruit a Portuguese and Spanish speaking permanent employee for Town Hall
- Consolidate public maintenance for Downtown under one manager

Board of Selectmen

- Set up a Downtown Advisory Council to assist the EDIC and make it a Task Force for oversight and reporting on implementation of the downtown plan
- Pass a by-law permitting sidewalk cafes

Planning Board

- Approve rezoning to implement the recommended land use plan

Planning Department

- Prepare a financing plan for hiring an EDIC director and for EDIC operating funds, and prepare a job description
- Develop a slogan and logo to identify Downtown and use it on all materials (with Downtown Solutions Marketing Committee)
- Prepare a downtown development brochure and guide to setting up a business in Downtown (with Downtown Solutions)
- Organize a business inventory and site-finder database with information provided in this plan
- Move the Saturday farmer's market from the St. Tarcisius's parking lot to a more central downtown location and coordinate with Downtown Solutions activities and merchants (with Downtown Solutions assistance to approach Dept. of Food and Agriculture)
- Prepare a by-law permitting sidewalk cafes for passage by the Board of Selectmen
- Assure conformity with plan objectives to create a physical identity for Downtown in projects slated for imminent construction
- Develop design guidelines and initiate a storefront signage improvement grant/loan program
- Develop a parking management plan

Medium Term

Town Manager

- Hire an EDIC director
- Fund EDIC programs

Board of Selectmen

- Approve funding for a director and initial programs for the EDIC
- Form a Downtown Farm Pond Committee to advocate with CSX and transportation officials on maintenance and future uses of that area

Town Meeting

- Approve hiring of an EDIC director
- Approve capitalization of the EDIC
- Rezone to implement the recommended land use plan

Planning Department

- Plant street trees to the edges of the expanded Central Business District
- Advocate for implementation of interim intersection improvements and Intelligent Transportation

Systems at the 126/135 intersection

- Assure sufficient attention to protecting and enhancing the pedestrian environment in the design of the 126 underpass project
- Initiate a façade improvement loan/grant program using design guidelines
- Improve the pedestrian environment between the parking space and the destination through lighting, painting, landscaping (with private owners)

EDIC

- Obtain funding and commission a feasibility study of a permanent farmers/crafts market (seek assistance from the state Department of Food and Agriculture)
- Recruit a second run/art movie/foreign film theater
- Develop a downtown redevelopment assistance package for reuse and redevelopment of vacant business or light industrial space in Downtown, including maintenance of a business and site locator database
- Recruit small high-tech start-ups through the Town web page, professional publications, etc.
- Recruit a "tablecloth" restaurant when space is available
- Recruit commuter service businesses

Long Term

EDIC

- Explore feasibility of a Business Improvement District (with business group)
- Continue business recruitment and business assistance programs

Planning Department

- Build a new parking garage Downtown
- Install closely-spaced, pedestrian scale lighting along the Concord Street - Hollis Street Downtown Spine
- Make streetscape improvements to Howard Street from Concord Street to the Dennison complex including street trees, pedestrian scale lighting, reduction of curb cuts, and delineation of the street edge, and gradually extend improvements to the entire Downtown Core

E. Private Actions

Downtown Solutions

Short Term

- Complete organization as a nonprofit entity, set up a schedule of membership dues, and explore financial and other assistance from Framingham businesses (DTS Coordinating Committee)
- Organize a downtown business group (with the Chamber of Commerce)
- Initiate a permanent communications link with the Brazilian Business and Community Council and Hispanic businesses
- Start a media relations program to keep good news about Downtown in the news (DTS Marketing Committee)
- Develop a slogan and logo to identify Downtown and use it on all materials (DTS Marketing Committee with the Planning Department)
- Prepare a downtown development brochure and guide to setting up a business in Downtown (with the Planning Department)
- Prepare and distribute a simple brochure on downtown businesses with discount coupons (DTS Marketing Committee and new business group)
- Continue organization of downtown special events, and make sure that merchants know about them in advance. Consider entertainment events for summer 1998 such as outdoor concerts or movies.
- Assist the Planning Department in moving the summer farmers' market from St. Tarcisius parking lot

to a more central downtown location and program events for market days

- Initiate a program to activate blank storefront windows with the assistance of the museum/art school, library, school system, etc. (DTS Beautification Committee)
- Plan for seasonal decorations (DTS Beautification Committee)
- Plan for the 1999 spring planting season by obtaining design assistance, organizing a fee and sign program for merchants, and lining up a maintenance crew for planters (DTS Beautification Committee)
- Encourage merchants to light shop windows at night (with new business association)
- Promote a porch light program for downtown neighborhoods (DTS Neighborhood Committee)

Middle Term

- Hire a part-time events planner
- Coordinate promotions with museum, library, and college events, such as the Museum's annual art sale (with business group)
- Develop a series of entertainment events such as concerts, for both lunchtime and evening -- outdoors in summer, in locations such as churches, Town Hall, building lobbies, etc. during cold weather (DTS events coordinator and Marketing Committee)
- Continue and enhance coordination of special events with merchants and cultural institutions

Long Term

- Continue events programming, beautification program, and coordination of neighborhood and business issues (working with EDIC and business group)

Business Association

Short Term

- Organize and institutionalize the group, possibly under the umbrella of Downtown Solutions or the MetroWest Chamber of Commerce
- Prepare a simple brochure on downtown businesses with discount coupons (with DTS Marketing Committee)
- Encourage merchants to light shop windows at night

Middle Term

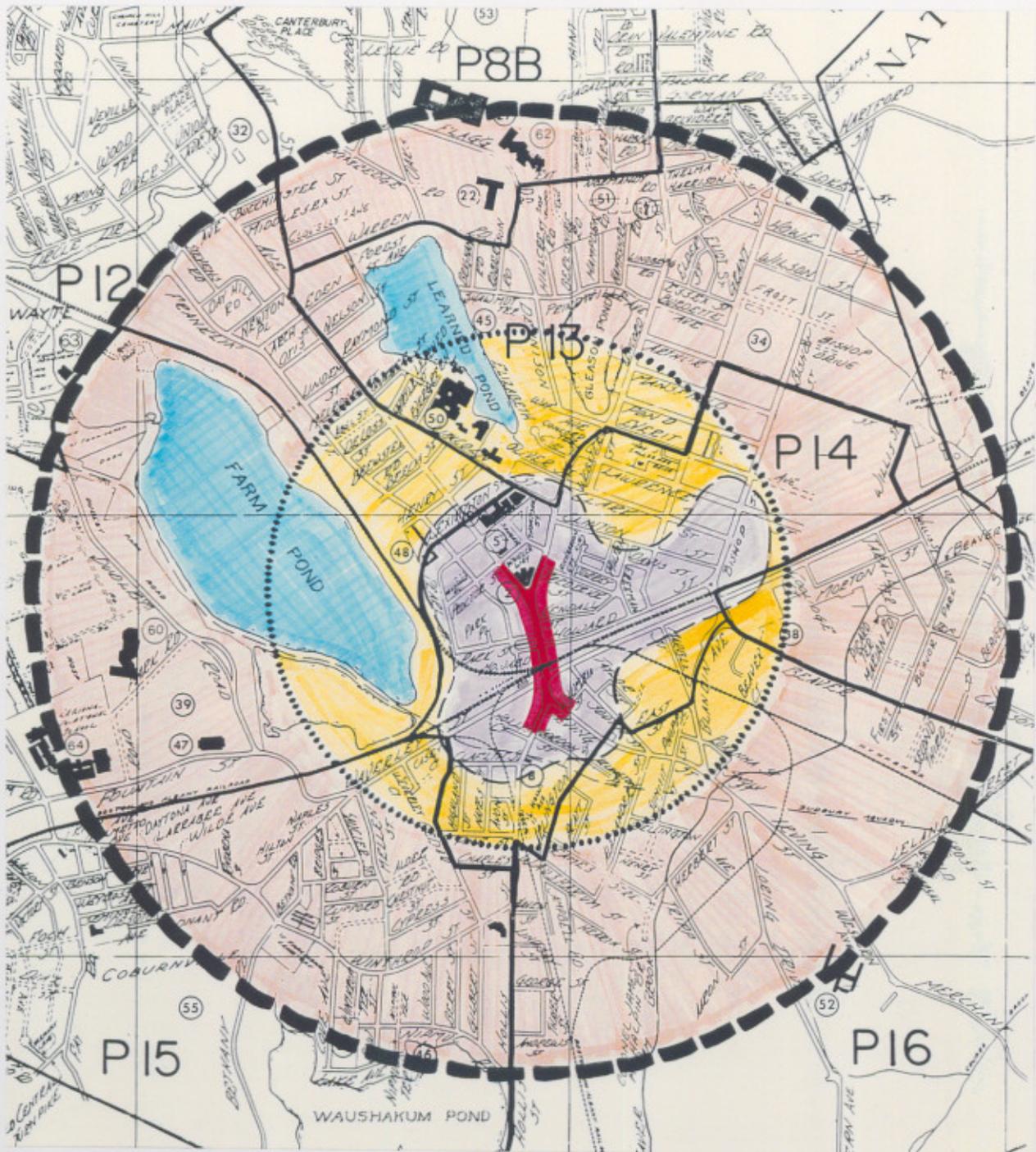
- Assist the Planning Department in marketing the storefront signage and façade improvement program
- Promote and disseminate information on small business technical assistance programs and other business assistance (with Chamber of Commerce)
- Develop a program of joint advertising and cross-promotions with downtown businesses, especially Fabric Place and Brazilian businesses
- Coordinate store promotions with special events at the museum, library, and college, such as the Museum's annual art sale
- Create a discount program for train commuters when they show their commuter cards
- Improve the pedestrian environment between private parking areas and destinations (building entrances and the street) with enhanced lighting, painting, and landscaping
- Coordinate store promotions with Downtown Solutions events
- Create a program to welcome new businesses

Long Term

- Continue joint promotion and cross promotion of downtown businesses
- Continue offering information and services to assist businesses
- Explore the feasibility of a Business Improvement District

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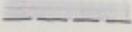


**DOWNTOWN FRAMINGHAM ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN
FOCUS AREA**

DOWNTOWN NEIGHBORHOOD 
• ONE-MILE RADIUS OF TOWN HALL

WALKING DISTANCE IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD 
• HALF-MILE RADIUS OF TOWN HALL

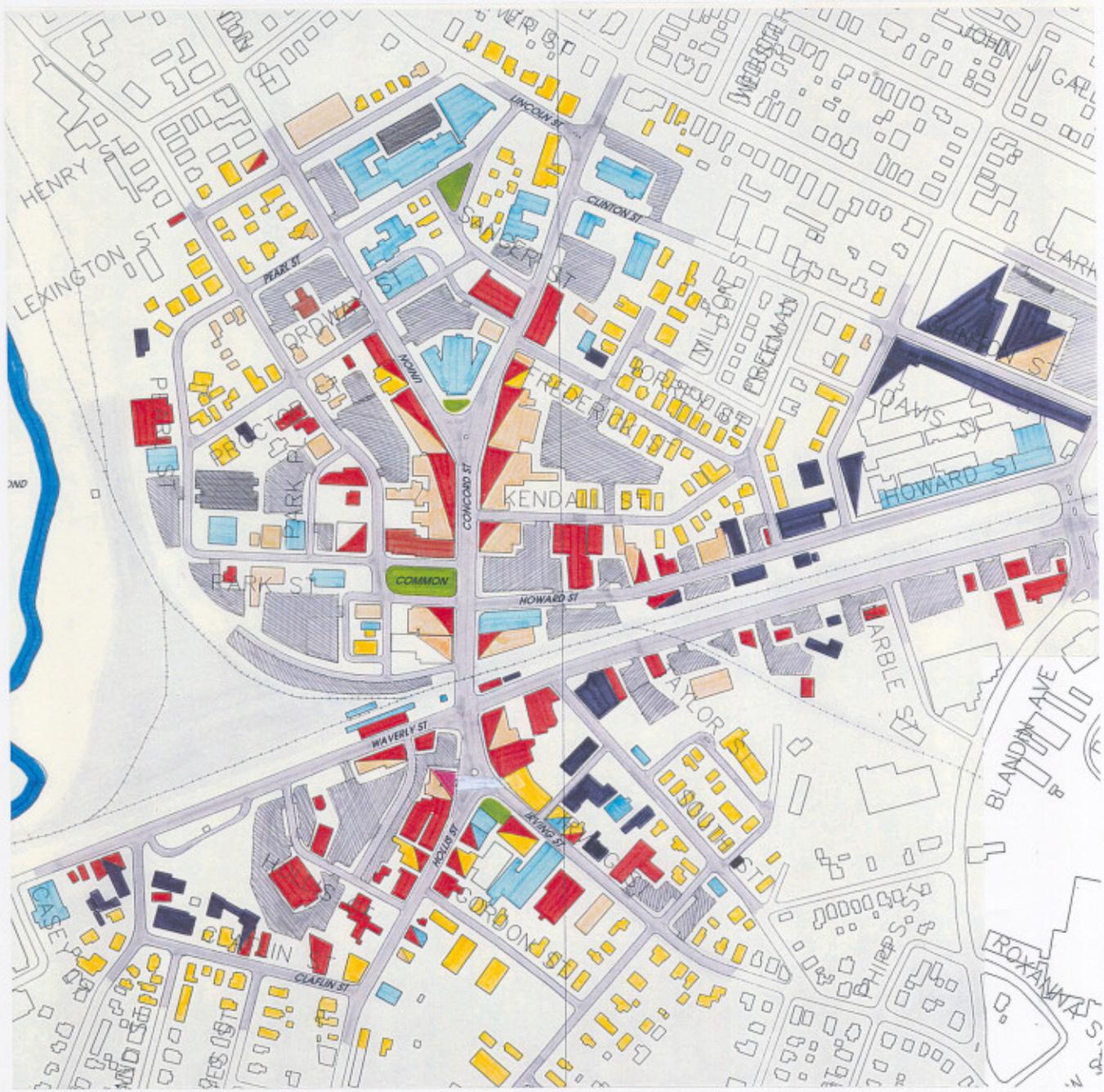
DOWNTOWN SPINE 

DOWNTOWN CORE 



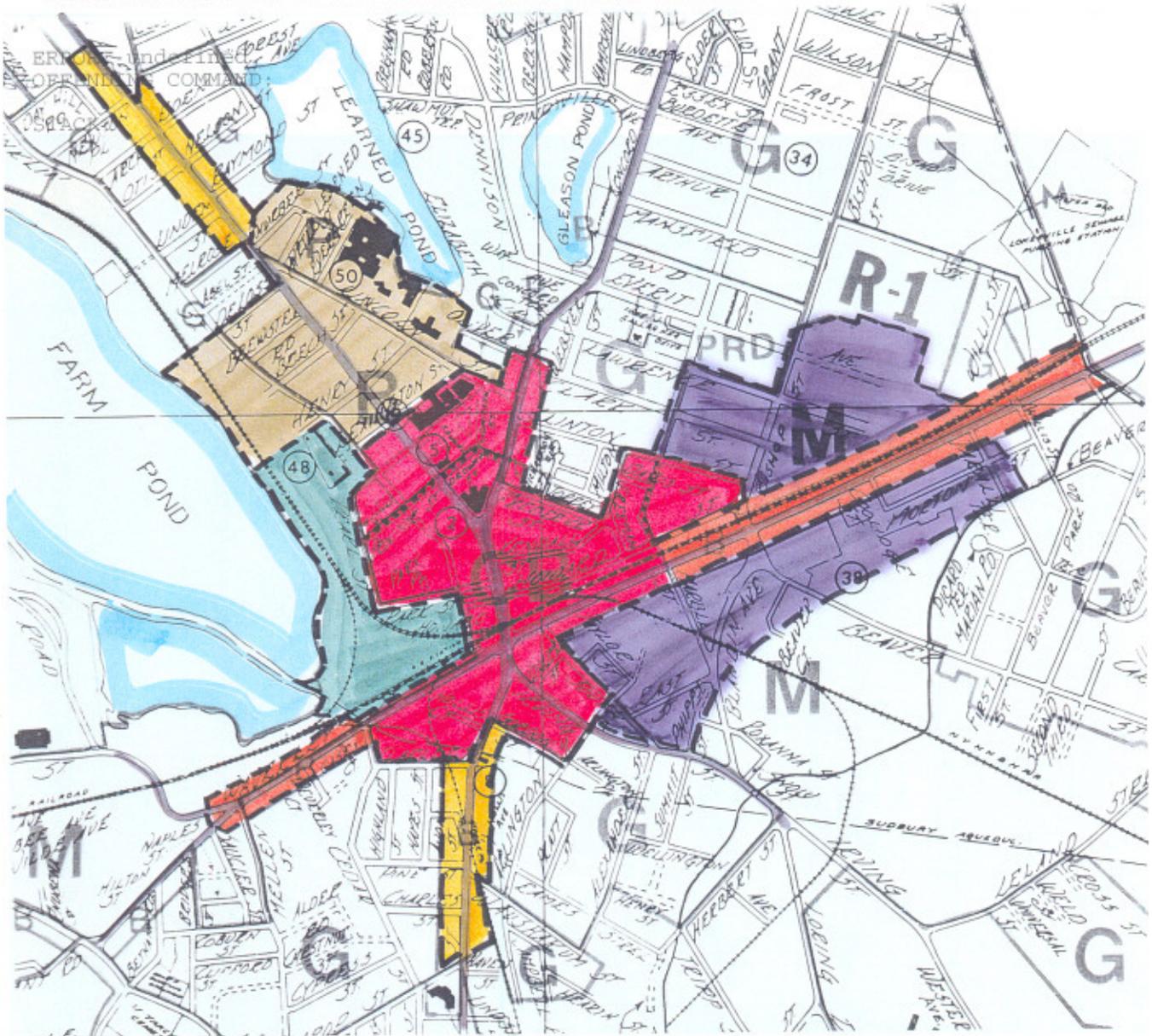
DOWNTOWN FRAMINGHAM ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN
SPATIAL ORGANIZATION

Downtown Framingham is most readily understood as consisting of a series of adjacent use zones, surrounded by downtown neighborhoods and Farm Pond to the west. The **Downtown Spine** is the commercial corridor of the downtown, which extends along Concord Street from just north of Concord Square to just south of Irving Square. The **Downtown Core**, surrounding the downtown spine, is a less organized periphery of mixed uses - housing, commercial, retail, offices, light manufacturing and institutional establishments. Within the downtown core are several distinct functional zones, such as the **Civic/Cultural Center**, consisting of the Framingham Library, the Danforth Art Museum/Art School, the Callahan Senior Center and Fisher College. To the east of the downtown spine is the **Industrial District**, which includes the Dennison Complex and other light industrial uses. Running through the downtown spine parallel to the railroad tracks is **the Strip**, the automobile-oriented Waverly Street.



**DOWNTOWN FRAMINGHAM ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN
EXISTING LAND USES**





**DOWNTOWN FRAMINGHAM ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN
RECOMMENDED LAND USE PLAN**

- | | |
|--|--|
|  <p>CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Expand CBD to include cultural institutions to reinforce the value of these assets as part of downtown. •Expand CBD to include Dennison complex to strengthen connection to downtown worker base. •Permit multifamily and upper-story housing to bring 24 hour population to downtown. •Target area for incentive and improvement programs for improvement of businesses, traffic and streetscape. |  <p>DOWNTOWN MANUFACTURING DISTRICT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Downzone manufacturing districts (M) to light manufacturing with office and commercial uses permitted to encourage emerging business uses and prevent inappropriate adjacent uses. |
|  <p>DOWNTOWN GATEWAY OVERLAY DISTRICT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Create design guidelines and incentives for new development and renovations in order to present an attractive and appropriate entrance to downtown. |  <p>OFFICE AND PROFESSIONAL DISTRICT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Downzone business district south of Lincoln St. to consolidate office/professional district. •Permit multifamily and upper-story housing to bring 24 hour population to downtown. |
|  <p>PERIPHERAL COMMERCIAL CORRIDORS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Downzone from Business B to General Residence to strengthen the Central Business District. |  <p>SPECIAL DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create special district for mixed-use waterfront development in anticipation of switching yard relocation. •Form citizen committee to advocate for relocation. |



EXISTING CONDITION



AFTER IMPROVEMENTS

**DOWNTOWN FRAMINGHAM ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN
STREETScape IMPROVEMENTS**

Before and after views of Howard Street, near Freeman Street, looking west.

Basic streetscape improvements such as new street trees and sidewalks, improved street edges and new pedestrian-scale street lighting, coupled with facade, signage and fencing improvements to existing businesses will reverse negative perceptions of this street, and encourage continued investment in adjacent and nearby properties. Employees of local businesses (such as those in the Dennison complex) will be more likely to walk downtown to have lunch or shop.

Community Design Partnership / Strategies



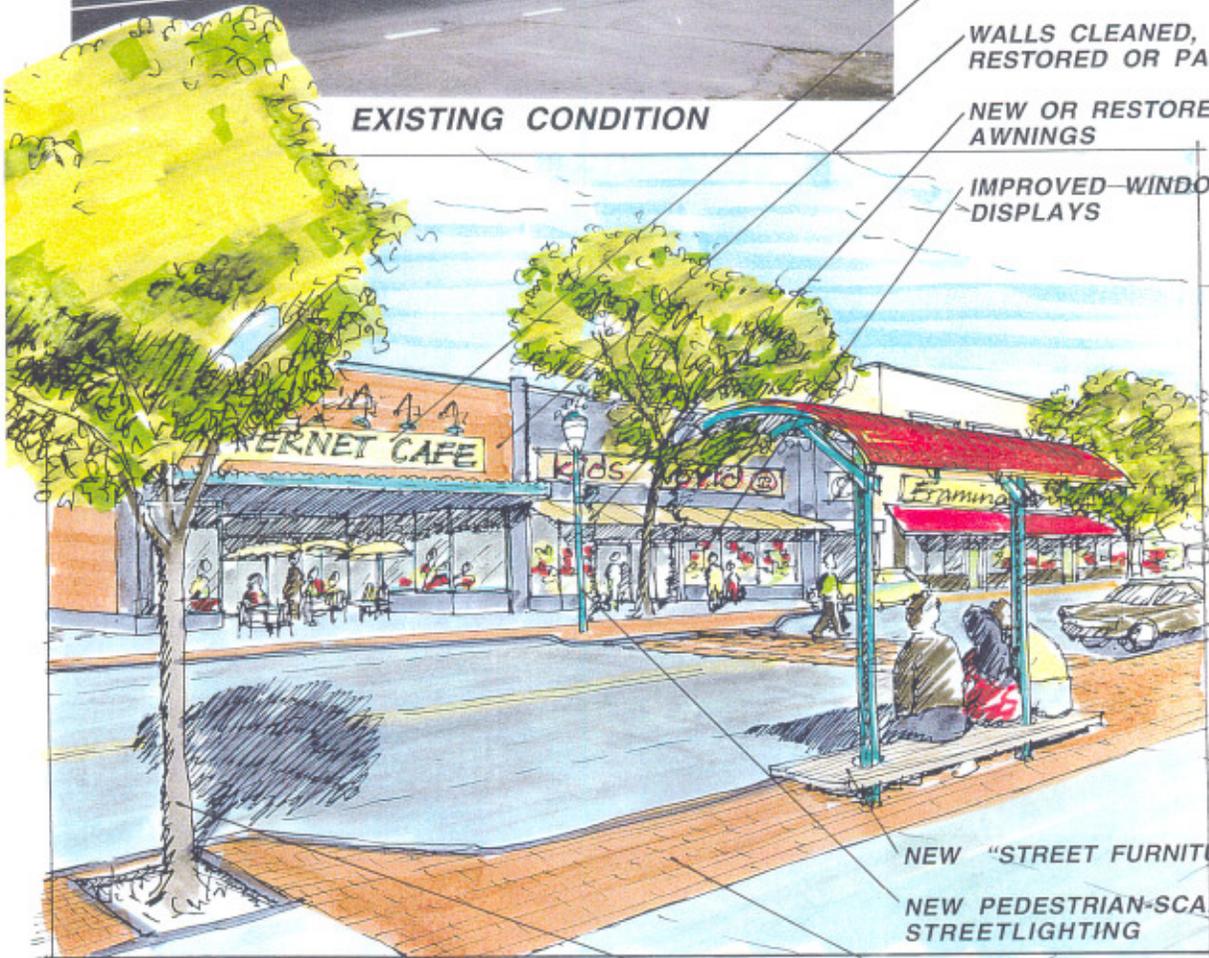
EXISTING CONDITION

NEW SIGNAGE AND SIGN LIGHTING

WALLS CLEANED, RESTORED OR PAINTED

NEW OR RESTORED AWNINGS

IMPROVED WINDOW DISPLAYS



AFTER IMPROVEMENTS

NEW "STREET FURNITURE"

NEW PEDESTRIAN-SCALE STREETLIGHTING

STREET-EDGE IMPROVEMENTS AND CROSSWALKS

NEW STREET TREES

**DOWNTOWN FRAMINGHAM ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN
SIGNAGE AND STOREFRONTS**

Before and after views of Concord Street, south of the Common.

The health and attractiveness of the downtown core is made most visible by individual storefronts. In tandem with recruitment of new businesses and new marketing efforts, signage and storefront improvements are an essential step toward revitalization. Well considered guidelines are required to assist individual shop owners and ensure a coherent design identity. Financial incentives and technical assistance are also key ingredients to a successful signage or facade program.

Community Design Partnership / Strategies