

“DOWNTOWNS ARE A BEAUTIFUL MESS”

~ Walker Evans, Photographer (1962)

“The mall is a machine for shopping. In contrast, the pieces of the downtown shopping machine lie about unassembled . . . (Mall) Designers also know that the average shopper, strolling along at three or four feet per second, walks past a storefront in about eight seconds. That's how long a shop owner has to grab a consumer's attention with an arresting window display. Downtown merchants must live with the same eight-second rule, but they can also sell to passing motorists--and the window of opportunity for "merchandising to the car," is less than a second.” - from *What Main Street Can Learn From The Mall*

LESSONS LEARNED

OVERALL

- ◆ Making streets more pedestrian-friendly is the closest thing you have to a silver bullet for improving your community.¹
- ◆ 3.6 million Americans stay home on any given day because they lack transportation. The economy cannot be maximized if buyers are unable to reach retail destinations.²
- ◆ Businesses on tree-lined streets show 12% higher income streams.³
- ◆ The overriding imperative is to lose no opportunity to make a sale.⁴

MANCHESTER

- ◆ Streetscape improvements were not begun until downtown was severely distressed. (1996)
- ◆ Retailing on Elm Street was virtually dead.
- ◆ Streetscape allowed downtown to capture benefits of Verizon Center, Fisher Cat Stadium, retain Art Institute. A nightlife was created.
- ◆ Today - Restaurants are doing well. Upper Story residential uses are returning, upper floor office occupancy is low (recession impact), retailers are struggling.

KEENE

- ◆ Streetscape project implemented because the downtown was tired. (1980s)
- ◆ More than \$54 Million in redevelopment projects including Chamberlain Block, EF Lane Hotel and Railroad Yard.
- ◆ The first revitalization efforts failed. Benches broke and trees died.
- ◆ Today - There are no ground floor vacancies. Upper floors are healthy with mix of office and residential uses, large scale redevelopment continues.

LITTLETON

- ◆ Streetscape improvements combined with a sewer replacement project. (2009)
- ◆ One retail business sustained over \$40,000 worth of damage when raw sewage leaked into the basement.
- ◆ Three businesses closed before construction began, four have closed since. No one said the streetscape played a role in the closings any more than the economy did.
- ◆ Today - Retailers were asked, knowing what you know today, would you still do this project? 100 percent responded - YES.

1- Myrick, Philip, How Your Community Can Thrive - Even in Tough Times (2008); 2- Complete Streets Spark Economic Revitalization (2010); 3- Burden, Dan, Urban Street Trees- 22 Benefits, Specific Applications (2006); 4- Lagerfeld, Steven, What Main Street Can Learn From The Mall (1995)

CONCORD

OVERALL

- ◆ Downtown is healthy today, but fragile.
- ◆ About 15,000 people work within one mile of downtown, providing ready access to a captive daytime market population.
- ◆ There is a diversity of shops and services available in downtown.
- ◆ Restaurants in downtown are performing well.
- ◆ Cultural facilities, such as Red River Theatres and Capitol Center for the Arts, have replaced department stores as anchors to downtown activities.
- ◆ Management of the downtown scene is a critical element common to essentially all successful downtowns.

INTERCEPT SURVEYS

- Top Three Things People Like About Downtown
- ◆ It is convenient.
 - ◆ The stores are locally owned and there is a mix of stores.
 - ◆ It is historic.
- Top Three Things People Dislike About Downtown
- ◆ The act of parking. (backing into traffic, parking next to SUVs)
 - ◆ Vacant storefronts.
 - ◆ Lack of nightlife.
- Greatest request
- ◆ Sunday & evening hours.

FOCUS GROUPS

- ◆ Restaurants are performing quite well considering the downturn. Most are experiencing stable sales.
- ◆ Downtown has been impacted by the recession. It is stressed.
- ◆ Rising vacancies are apparent both in retail space and upper floor office space in older buildings.
- ◆ Retailing in downtown is fragile-- anxiety is rising and many stores are underperforming. Some report sales are improving.
- ◆ Nightlife is scarce.
- ◆ Downtown looks tired.
- ◆ There is a strong sense of community in Concord. People are involved, there is optimism, residents appreciate downtown businesses.

How to Succeed in Today's Business Climate

Excerpt from *How Your Community Can Thrive — Even in Tough Times*
by Philip Myrick

- **We are defined by our homegrown culture and character.** To thrive in the coming years we have to do a better job of protecting local resources. This affects not just the spirit of our hometowns but the fate of our planet;
- **Bigger is not better.** Oversized development can crush the fine-grained urban fabric that makes communities attractive.
- **Community partnerships offer the best way forward.** To succeed, any project must become a working partnership with the people of a community.
- **A plan can never substitute for a vision.** Revisit your community's values, and do some visionary thinking about where you want to go in the future. Take a close look at your community's assets and resources and carefully consider what you want your city or town to be known for in the future.
- **Take over the streets.** Streets are the most prominent and prevalent public space in any town. A walkable downtown or neighborhood shopping district quickly becomes a magnet for both public life and economic expansion, thus enriching your community in several ways at the same time.
- **Quality over Quantity.** The roaring economic growth of recent decades is not in our best interest. To make the planet healthier for us and all the species with which we share it, we can no longer define success in terms of ever expanding GDP. Instead, we must learn to live better with less, by focusing on creating great communities and emphasizing quality over quantity – quality of life, place, environment, and society.

COMMUNITIES FEATURED IN THE STUDIES

Asheville, NC	Madison, WI
Athens, GA	Portland, ME
Boise, ID	Rochester, MN
Burlington, VT	San Francisco, CA
Charlottesville, VA	San Luis Obispo, CA
Chattanooga, TN	Santa Barbara, CA
Fort Collins, CO	Savannah, GA
Halifax, NS	Santa Fe, NM
Iowa City, IA	State College, PA
Kingston, ON	Victoria, BC
Knoxville, TN	West Palm Beach, FL
Long Beach, CA	Wilmington, NC

FRANK NUMBERS

Franklin, Virginia (2009)	Frankfort, Indiana (2009/2010)
Population: 8400	Population: 8400
Financial Investment: \$21 ml	Financial Investment: \$18 ml
Net new businesses: 101	Net New business: 33
Net new jobs: 453	Net new jobs: 185
Vacancy rate at start: 43%	Vacancy rate at start: 11%
Vacancy rate today: 3%	Vacancy rate today: 1.55
(Included streetscape and waterfront enhancements, good design grants, business recruitment and events marketing)	(Included building and urban design rehabilitation, facade improvements and festivals)