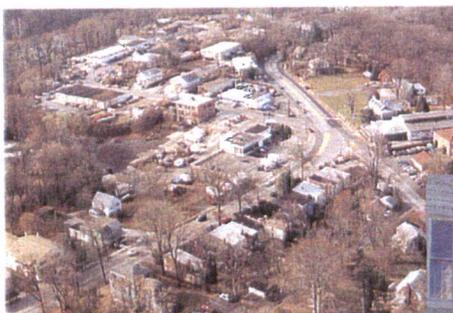
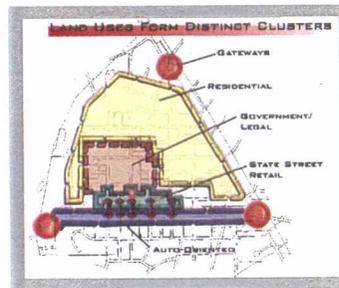
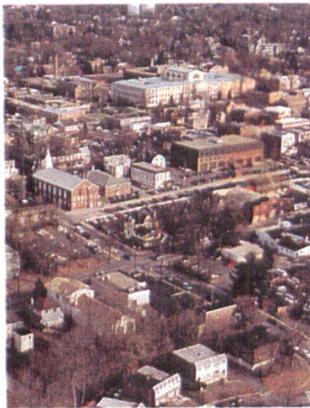


Downtown Media Strategy

A Plan for the Business Core

Prepared for:
**The Borough of Media, Pennsylvania &
The Media Business Authority**

February 1999



Prepared by:
**Urban Engineers, Inc.
Planning Group**



in association with:
The Atlantic Group

Downtown Media Strategy

A Plan for the Business Core

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Downtown Media Strategy

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Introduction

The Borough of Media, PA, is seeking to determine how Downtown Media can function most effectively for its citizens, commercial property owners, business operators and regional consumers. As a result Urban Engineers and The Atlantic Group were commissioned to analyze current conditions and to prescribe measures to achieve those ends.

Both firms have long histories of assisting communities in the region. Urban Engineers, Inc. (Urban) has been providing planning, engineering and construction services in this region for nearly 40 years. The Planning Group at Urban has provided advice to many communities and organizations regarding strategic plans, downtown improvements and transportation issues.

The Atlantic Group has worked with West Chester, Harrisburg, Manayunk, Lower Merion, (including Ardmore and Bryn Mawr), University City and Center City, Philadelphia, Wilmington, DE., and Woodbury, Haddonfield and Atlantic City, NJ. The firm has also served as Downtown managers, earning awards for Red Bank and Millburn, NJ.

The project was launched by Mayor Robert McMahon, with the support of the Borough Council. The Steering Committee was co-chaired by Debbie Krull and Joyce Doubet and was supported by Zubair Kahn, Executive Director, Media Business Authority. More than 65 business and resident representatives participated in meetings; 123 business operators were interviewed as well as 140 pedestrians—shoppers, office workers and others.

While many of the details in this report are directed at the retail sector, the team is mindful of the importance of the public and private office component. The law firms and financial companies are important, for example, because their activities support the care and maintenance of the real estate they occupy as well as produce revenues for the Borough. Of all potential consumers, their Downtown work forces are the most likely to make purchases in the workday environment. These men and women are important forces in communicating to others in their towns of residence about the strengths and limits of Downtown Media. Further, these firms attract business visitors from throughout the region. Similarly, the government sector represents an enormous potential market for goods and services.

Finally, the diversity reflected in the mix of development in Downtown Media is a strength in itself. Every Downtown purpose tends to strengthen other purposes.

While not imposing rigid boundaries on the project, the report views Downtown as including Baltimore Pike, State Street, the Delaware County government complex and intersecting streets in the commercial blocks.

The objective of this program is to create a more profitable environment for business that will benefit the Borough through increased revenues and added convenience and choice for residents. While it is not possible to recreate the commercial center that suited the economy of a generation ago, it is possible by accommodating contemporary commercial requirements to produce a marketplace that will thrive in the decade ahead.

Findings

Demographics and Market Potential

Media is strategically located in an affluent trade area of more than 48,000 persons with household incomes that are 158.5% of the State's and 123.4% of Delaware County's (Exhibit 1). Comparing Media with Delaware County, the Borough's retail sector performs strongly in terms of its share of population.

Exhibit 1

Media Trade Area Household Incomes		
	Population	Median Household Income
Swarthmore	6,157	\$54,965
Brookhaven	8,567	\$40,014
Media	5,957	\$31,607
Middletown	14,130	\$51,013
Total	48,040	
Average		\$46,075
Delaware County		\$37,337
Pennsylvania		\$29,069

Source: US Bureau of the Census, 1994

With only 1.1% of the County's population, Media has a disproportionate share of retail establishments (as high as 5.8%) in all ten categories used by the U.S. Census of Retail Trade; sales are high especially in building materials, eating and drinking establishments and food stores (Exhibit 2, following page). These data reflect the position of Media as a center of trade for consumers in surrounding municipalities.

In retail performance, Exhibit 3 illustrates the relationship of retail sales per establishment with number of establishments in a location. Middletown, with the largest concentration of stores and many with the benefit of marketing associated with shopping mall management, substantially outperforms stores in competing jurisdictions.

Exhibit 3

Media Trade Area Retail Performance				
	State Rank In Retail Sales	Sales (\$1000s)	Number of Establishments	Sales per Establishment
Nether Providence	384	\$22,315	32	\$697.34
Swarthmore	337	\$33,040	37	\$892.97
Brookhaven	153	\$118,412	66	\$1,794.12
Media	129	\$141,729	116	\$1,221.80
Middletown	23	\$589,032	145	\$4,062.29

Source: US Census of Retail Trade, TAG

Major forces driving high sales performance are agglomeration and marketing in support of enterprises sharing identifiable locations. Increased concentration of businesses must be matched with competitive advertising and other professional communications support.

Media's retail performance represents an important foundation upon which to build a stronger business district. Of 493 municipalities in Pennsylvania, the Borough ranks 129 in retail sales. While sales per establishment are not so strong as might be expected by the affluence of the region, the 116 establishments represent a sales volume in excess of \$141 million, a considerable asset to the community.

Exhibit 2

Media Retail Trade Comparisons

	Building Materials	General Mds.	Food Stores	Auto Dealers	Gasoline Service	Apparel	Furniture	Eating & Drinking	Drug/ Proprietary	Misc.*
Delaware County										
# Establishments	111	61	411	118	186	283	227	893	136	643
Sales (\$1,000's)	\$ 133,391	\$431,083	\$884,314	\$804,946	\$230,316	\$223,944	\$195,758	\$368,012	\$242,630	\$787,582
Media										
# Establishments	5	2	13	7	5	9	9	30	4	37
Sales (\$1,000's)	\$ 7,265	D	\$ 36,361	\$ 27,844	\$ 7,157	\$ 5,255	\$ 1,210	\$ 19,305	\$ 5,785	D
Media's Share (%)										
Number	4.5	3.3	3.2	2.7	2.7	3.2	1.8	3.4	2.9	5.8
Sales	5.4	D	4.1	3.5	3.5	2.29	0.6	5.2	0.2	D

*Includes (partial list): Liquor stores, used merchandise; sporting goods and bicycle shops; book stores, stationery; jewelry; hobby/toys/games; camera/photography; gift/novelty/souvenir; luggage/leather; sewing; catalog; fuel; florist; tobacco; news; optical; pet; computers.

Source: U.S. Census of Retail Trade, 1992.

D = Data withheld.

Business Operators Survey

A team of interviewers surveyed 123 Downtown Media business operators in November, 1998. The responses indicated a strong desire to add more muscle to Downtown's business attraction program (Exhibit 4). Additional parking ranked second.

Exhibit 4

Business Operators: What are Downtown Media's Greatest Needs?		
1	Attract more strong businesses	35
2	Additional parking	24
3	Landscaping, flowers	21
4	Organize cooperative media advertising	21
5	Organize businesses to open for longer hours	20
6	Professional public relations, marketing	20
7	Five-year business plan for commercial revitalization	17
8	Improve appearance of public areas	16
9	Improve the appearance of buildings	15
10	Brighter pedestrian lighting	14
11	Organization of business and property owners to implement the plan	14
12	Organize direct mail advertising	14
13	Improve traffic flow	13
14	More special events to attract customers	11

Several respondents supported various forms of cooperative marketing and others suggested improvements to the appearance of Downtown—add landscaping and flowers; improve appearance of public areas; improve the appearance of buildings; and brighter pedestrian lighting. In addition, suggestions were made regarding management of Downtown including:

- organize businesses to open for longer hours;
- adopt five-year business plan for commercial revitalization; and
- organization of business and property owners to implement the plan.



Restoration of historic storefront appearance can greatly improve the character of a retail area.

“Free Saturday” parking led the list of suggestions for parking improvements followed by special locations for merchants and employees (Exhibit 5). Overall, there was less agreement on parking remedies. Some, for example, want more time on meters and others want less, probably reflecting different locations and types of businesses. Only a careful professional analysis of the detailed differences of needs by locations can produce a parking plan that will satisfy existing enterprises and attract new ones.

Exhibit 5

Business Operators: Suggestions for improving parking.		
1	Free Saturday	25
2	Locations, merchants, employees	21
3	No meters	18
4	Mini lots	18
5	Directional signs	10
6	More time	10
7	Deck	8
8	Study, Plan	7
9	Lower meter price	6
10	Acceptable	5
11	Less time	4
12	Enforce	3
13	More meters	2
14	Increase ticket amount	1

Business operators expressed a willingness to work on committees devoted to these needs, with the largest group agreeing to help with improving appearance (Exhibit 6). Because business self-help is the most important ingredient in the economic advancement of Downtowns, these expressions will prove to be essential to improving Downtown Media’s economic performance.

Asked what store types are needed to increase pedestrian traffic flow, a grocery store was cited by operators most often, followed by a shoe store, affordable clothing stores, childrens clothing and toys, book store, chains (like malls), butcher, sporting goods, health food, restaurants, music store, pet store and lingerie.

Exhibit 6

Business Operators' Interest in Working on Committees	
Parking	7
Filling vacancies, improving retail mix	11
Building appearance, public spaces, trees, lighting, directional signage	15
Customer attraction	13
Events	9
Advertising, marketing	9
Hours of operation	8

Consumer Survey

One hundred forty pedestrians were interviewed on State Street to test the preferences and practices of those who are using Downtown Media. About half were employees in Downtown and slightly more than half were women. Seventy percent are regular users, coming to Downtown more than three times a week.



Three public discussions were held with residents and business leaders.

Pedestrian interviewees rated Downtown Media against 14 conditions typically perceived by men and women in town centers. Highest marks, "very good", went to public events and activities, followed by cleanliness and customer service. Lowest rated (Exhibit 7) were: activity at night; hours shops are open; and entertainment, movies, culture. In the second tier of ratings, parking availability and variety of stores were seen as almost equally deficient.

Asked whether Downtown Media is changing, 35% said it is getting better, but 43.6% said it is about the same, getting worse (4.3%) or didn't know (16.4%).

In an open-ended question: "What changes would lead you to use Downtown Media more?", 34% of the interviewees said: more variety of entertainment; night life and attractions; cultural night life, including jazz, classical or general music scene. The second most frequent answer cluster focused on parking and the third on later store hours and shops open on weekends.

Suggested store types needed in Downtown Media included (in order): grocery store, unique stores like in Chestnut Hill, antique stores, affordable clothing, shoe stores, more varied restaurants, movie theaters.

Exhibit 7

Consumer Survey: How do you rate Downtown Media in terms of these factors?	
"Fair/Poor" Responses	
Activity at night	61
Hours shops are open	59
Entertainment, movies, culture	56
Parking availability	50
Variety of stores	49
Variety, quality of restaurants	41
Traffic flow	41
Appearance of buildings	17
Lighting for pedestrians	15
Appearance of streets and other public areas	11
Cleanliness	11
Public events, activities	8

Commercial Area Image Analysis

The Commercial Area Image Analysis is a quantified assessment of the 20 conditions common in Downtowns that together shape the impressions of consumers, prospective tenants and investors and visitors. Each block was tested against all 20 conditions, producing a matrix that reveals the locations and conditions that most require attention. In Media, eleven specific locations in and around State Street were reviewed.

Lowest ranked conditions were:

- Pedestrian lighting—brightness, tint, frequency
- Pedestrian direction signs
- Auto direction signs
- Parking direction signs
- Street signs—easy to read
- Parking area appearance

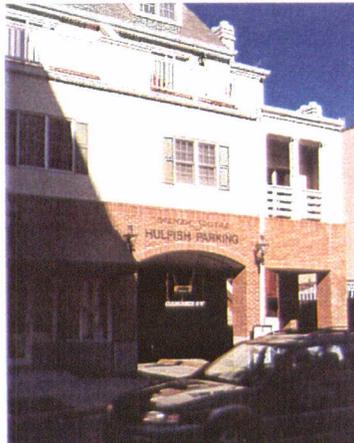


Lowest rated locations were: State Street, Jackson to Monroe; West Front; and Orange Street, State to Front.

Separate appraisals were made of Baker and Jasper Streets and the blocks on Baltimore Pike that

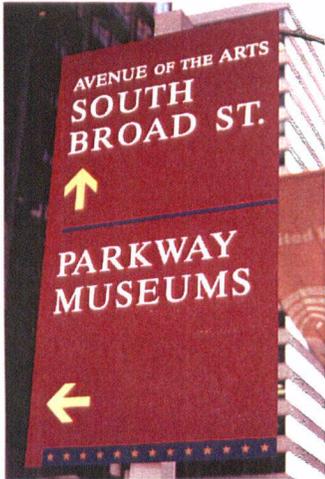
are built to “highway strip” specifications. Baker and Jasper Streets have been converted to significant sources of short-term parking. This means that many visitors are strongly influenced by these views of Downtown Media and they are not the best. Attention needs to be given to the following:

- Upgrading the appearance of the rear of commercial buildings
- Pedestrian scale lighting
- Parking direction signs
- Some landscaping, possibly in the form of planted “bump-outs” near corners



New retail space can attract missing stores, where shops, offices, residential and parking are combined.

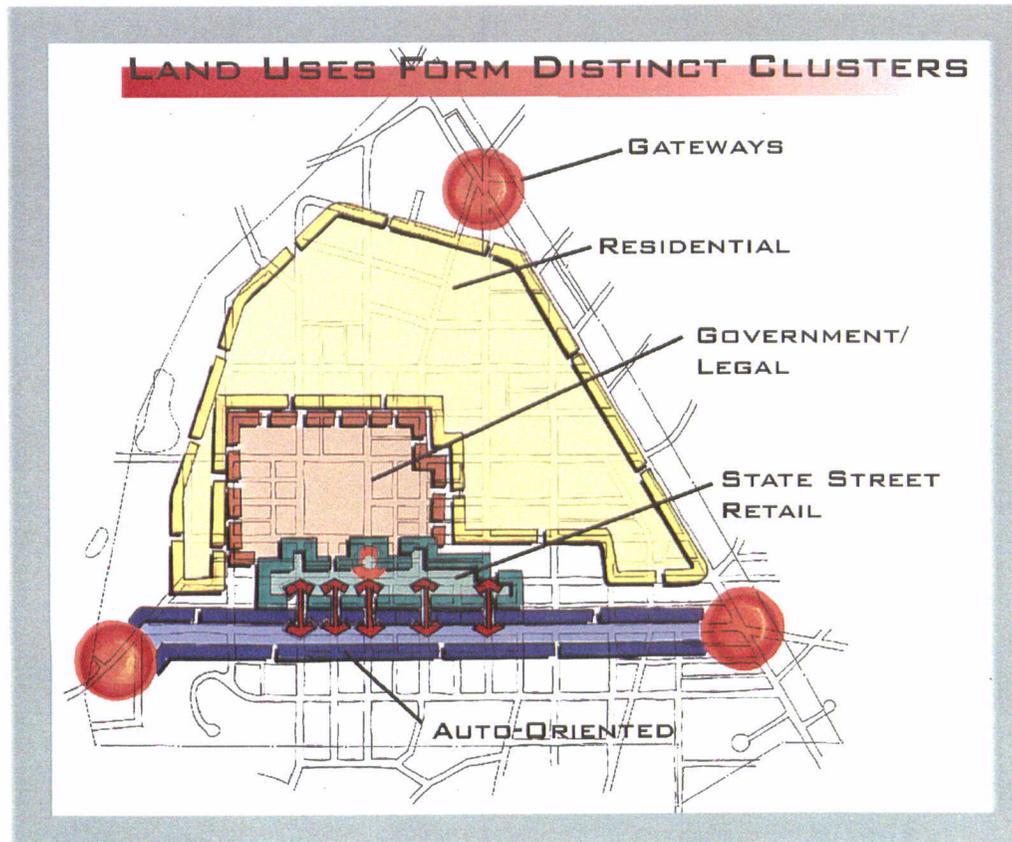
The scarcity of parking direction signs is a major shortcoming. Expanding the customer base—a vital step in attracting strong businesses—requires attention to the needs of people who are not familiar with Media. Inability to find parking readily is a major irritant to shoppers and a reason often cited in surveys regarding why shoppers avoid Downtowns. The current signage implies that the only parking available to those traveling on Baltimore Pike is at the municipal garage, when, in fact, all of Baker, Jasper and State Streets are available.



Motorist scale "wayfinding" signs can improve visitor confidence.

Many blocks fronting on Baltimore Pike have been designed to suggest that they comprise a separate place from Downtown, one where shoppers are not encouraged to move from block to block in the important ritual of multiple destination trips. When a Downtown does not appear walkable, the potential economic synergy is lost. Thus, the built-to-the-sidewalk blocks (like State Street) receive little or no economic benefit from the latter-day investments in commercial development. They are nearby, but they are isolated by parking lots in front of buildings and by great gaps between developments. Media's strip development might as well be in another town.

It is possible to build modern, marketable real estate that encourages pedestrian movement. Whole centers, like Reston VA's recently created town center, have been created that way. Downtown Princeton is dominated by shops with residences and offices above, parking out of sight in the rear and an unbroken line of four- and five-story buildings, new with old. In Media, the Commerce Bank on Baltimore Pike is a recent and encouraging exception to the trend to create acres of macadam in front of single story buildings. It is a handsome building with parking in the rear that should serve as a model for future redevelopment in Media.



Existing and Prior Business Services

Zubair Kahn, Executive Director of the Media Business Authority, provided the project team with a summary of existing and prior business services for Downtown Media. There is evidence of past facade upgrades and use of Federal funds for various physical improvements such as crosswalks in some locations. A plan for facade improvements has been completed, a marketing kit is in process, and there is a business operators' newsletter and a logo. Gateway signs have been created, there are holiday lights and a mural was created at Plum Street. There is a popular program of public events that has begun to attract broader corporate sponsorship.

Opportunities

There are five opportunities that Downtown Media needs to capture in order to become a center known for its regional attractions and local convenience. The action steps that follow are designed to capture these opportunities:

- Media is the commercial center of an affluent region
- An increasing share of that regional market attends the theatre here, the basis for a far stronger after dark market
- Diverse County activities bring thousands of potential customers daily into the heart of Downtown
- High traffic counts on Baltimore Pike represent added potential spending not yet realized
- There remains substantial underutilized commercial land which could be attractively redeveloped to extend and complement State Street.



The site design of commercial properties on Baltimore Pike is not conducive to pedestrians because of the placement of parking in front along the street.

The Decision Process

Because the perspectives, insights and energy of the business community, working with the public sector, are so important to Downtown revitalization, this project was designed to encourage the maximum degree of participation by the economic stakeholders and other key Media citizens. Several project elements reinforced this approach:

- A seventeen-member Steering Committee was formed with which the project team met several times in the process of gathering perspectives and refining options. Debbie Krull and Joyce Doubet co-chaired this group.
- Three well-advertised community meetings were held, which permitted group discussions of Downtown Media's strengths, problems and opportunities as seen from local perspectives, resident as well as business.
- Business operators were surveyed in their places of business and consumers were surveyed on the sidewalks.

Action Steps: Downtown Management

The action steps required to make Downtown Media the bustling, prosperous center of the trade area include three overall concepts—management of the day-to-day services required for a competitive commercial center (including business attraction); planning for growth (described later as the Vision Plan); and a system to encourage widespread participation in and responsibility for Downtown management on the part of business and property owners.

The recommended management actions should be regarded as a menu which can be gradually adopted over a period of several years as support for each action by business leaders emerges. The Vision Plan is proposed as a first-year foundation step that will guide growth for the next five years and help unlock state financial support for streetscape improvements.

Business Attraction

1. Media's Potential

Drawing more strong businesses to Media is the number one objective of local business people as expressed in the community meetings and surveys. This section analyzes Media's current position as an attraction for such enterprises and reviews some of the benefits not yet present that prospective owner/operators typically find persuasive.

Current assets upon which to build a business attraction program in Media include:

- a. More than a hundred stores, a large share of which are within a walkable environment that encourages multiple destination shopping
- b. On-site consumers in law offices, banks and brokerage firms (that also draw their own clients), plus 3,000 County office workers
- c. A distinctive, positive appearance on most blocks with active trolley service on State Street
- d. Crowd generating events
- e. An active theatre on State Street and some restaurants open in the evening
- f. A good location in the region, strengthened by the Blue Route
- g. A safe environment

Here are some of the other critical features that owners of strong retail enterprises are seeking:

- a. New commercial space built to current market requirements
- b. Many shops open regularly at night and Sundays
- c. A strong marketing program for the location
- d. A reputation for good parking, especially on weekends

The most important force in attracting strong new businesses is making the location a more prosperous setting for existing businesses. Working on parking, expanding marketing and comparable measures are valuable for both goals. Further, bringing strong new businesses to Media adds additional customer attractions for existing businesses. Each strong new business is like an added magnet for Downtown Media, adding new purveyors of goods and services that draw more people here. Helping existing businesses and attracting new ones are complementary and symbiotic activities.

2. Business Attraction Targets

In the late 1990s, only the most devastated urban commercial areas are plagued by high vacancy rates. This is the period in which, helped by a buoyant economy, well-organized Downtowns are reestablishing themselves as attractive places to purchase goods and services that are distinctive from shopping malls and strip centers. The old, slightly run down look will not do; a mediocre selection of businesses will not do. Quality, variety, leisure choices and curb appeal are the essential ingredients. Media can raise its score on all four of these.

The commercial space built prior to World War II typically has limited appeal to national chains, although there are exceptions. The Woolworth chain left many buildings with contemporary appeal, large enough, prominent enough to attract nationals, including some of Woolworth's own new chains. For the most part, however, older retail spaces will have greater appeal to independents who don't make location decisions on the basis of formulas.

Of those, the businesses that will produce the greatest strength for Downtown in terms of attracting multiple destination customers will be independents who create branches. They know what they are doing and they know the region. Like the chains, however, they are most likely to be drawn to locations that meet the four tests listed in the previous section—modern space, night and Sunday operations, professional marketing and positive parking reputation.

A mix of chains with independents in Downtown is a plus, although it may require measures to stimulate construction of contemporary space, a point discussed later. After six or seven years of hard work and a very strong marketing program (\$250,000 annually), Manayunk drew Pottery Barn in a brand new building, plus Restoration Hardware, Platypus, Kiln Time and others. Despite a reputation for tough traffic and parking problems, retailers were attracted to good pedestrian counts and the large number of businesses open at night and on Sundays. Good restaurants were another source of strength and in the past two years a six-screen movie house opened.

A strong office presence is important as well. Plans for new development should always include upper story space for office firms who can benefit from Downtown's location, a center of legal activity and, for the financials, well-to-do investors.

As the surveys show, there is a real need for additional restaurant variety in Media. This center

needs to be known as “the place” for dining, an important supplement to theatre attendance, although not dependent upon this amenity. The prospects are very good. Virtually all of the growth in retail enterprises in the past decade have been in the category “eating and drinking establishments”. As our earlier data indicate, Media is relatively strong in this category, but not nearly as strong as it should be, taking into account its amenities, setting and location among affluent customers. An important element in securing additional quality restaurants will be the availability of sufficient liquor licenses.

Media needs to be one of those places where people have enough choices that they are not concerned about whether one favored place is crowded; there are other attractive ones nearby. This is the single most important action step required to meet the widely expressed view that Media’s Downtown is not active enough at night. In addition, it is also an essential element in encouraging more retail establishments to open evenings. The opening of Iron Hill Brewery in West Chester, for example, has already stimulated night retail hours.

The action steps that follow are well-tested, generally in similar Downtowns, and are adaptable to Media. Specific techniques that either have not been attempted in Media, or have not yet been applied in the fashion recommended, are included.



Current “gateway” sign at Route 252 is barely visible on the right.



3. Marketing Materials and Information

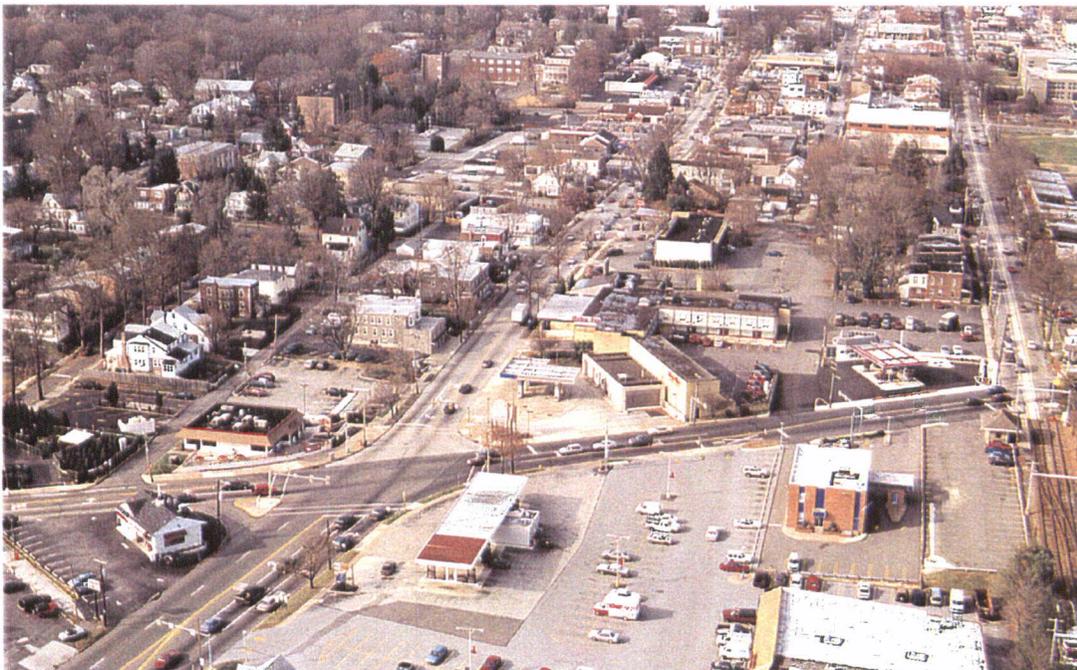
Real estate professionals serve wide areas and realize relatively little from the typical lease of a small commercial property. They welcome a Downtown strategy that helps them earn their fees and they are typically glad to share information. Downtown Media needs to make available demographic and economic information that helps realtors (as well as prospective developers and tenants) understand your specific location's advantages. Earlier in the report we published some of the basics—household income, trade area data, retail performance—as illustrations of facts that require a fresh packaging and interpretation at least twice a year. Additional data estimating purchasing power and forecasting growth can be secured inexpensively from national data firms. Production of such information is an essential part of the marketing that separates the savvy Downtowns from the unorganized ones.

In addition, a current inventory of commercial space and all of the details regarding price, etc. needs to be published quarterly.

The best marketing kit starts with an attractive, distinctive folder into which the above information can be included along with:

- clippings and other evidence of Downtown progress
- results of the annual consumer survey
- descriptions of current and planned business services
- how to benefit from financial incentives
- lists of existing firms, both retail and service, along with recent rivals
- testimonials from current owners
- the brochure regarding how to get permits, and
- evidence of crowd generating events.

At least once a year, real estate people should be invited to a breakfast where the Mayor and existing business operators explain what and who are new in Downtown, what can be expected, financial incentives, etc.



Baltimore Pike brings visitors to Media. The sense of "arrival" is lost in among the parking lots and signage of the commercial activity.

4. Financial Incentives

In managed shopping centers, leasing experts offer financial incentives to stores that are critical to the desired retail mix. In Downtowns, three forms of financial incentives have been successfully tested to get the strong businesses they seek. The process of applying financial incentives begins with the local business attraction committee drawing up a short list of strategically desirable businesses, ones that will help attract others or will generate desired crowds, or some other objective worth investing in. If, for example, a shoe store is considered an important gap to fill in order to attract County employees and/or others in the region, the committee could commit financial resources for any of the following purposes:

- To help adapt an older building to serve a desired new tenant's space requirements, a mixture of loan and grant, usually administered by a local bank, could make Media more attractive than an alternative site.
- The same financial incentives could be applied to changes in the facade or to the signage.
- With respect to the exterior, the design costs are absorbed by the Downtown entity as an additional financial incentive and to assure that the resulting exterior changes complement the streetscape and meets adopted design guidelines (see Vision Plan).

Red Bank, New Jersey's Downtown non-profit corporation has been contributing to facade and sign redesign for about five years, paying about half the costs in grants. With two to three new completions annually, the effect is quite impressive. In Media, attention should also be given to the rear of stores facing Jasper and Baker Streets.

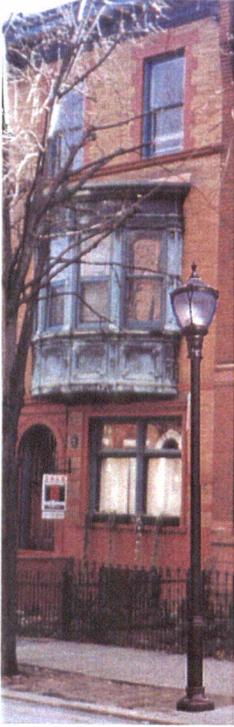
New Orleans is among those Downtowns which provide real estate professionals and developers with a financial incentive, usually \$5,000, for attracting a strategic business selected by the Downtown business people as one they feel is essential to local business expansion objectives.



While some of the rears on the alley streets look good... others often give an uninviting appearance.

5. Hours of Operation

Everyone understands that most Americans are at work or traveling during the “traditional” hours for shopping. The adults who are available to shop during that period—retirees, parents with pre-school children and nearby office workers—deserve special attention, but the far larger segment seeks goods and services one or two nights a week, on Saturdays and Sundays. Lease requirements keep managed shopping centers open when customers want to shop and customers flock there because they can count on a large number of stores being open when they need to spend.



Pedestrian scale lighting is lower and more frequently spaced to emphasize the sidewalk.

Knowing this, the operators of strong businesses, including the national chains, are reluctant to try to do business in a location where the place is dark every night and empty on Sundays. Customer attraction and business attraction are obviously linked.

Center City District has made Wednesday night the shopping, dining, entertainment and cultural events evening, a success resulting from an annual investment in sophisticated advertising, free parking and quality entertainment on the sidewalks, with special emphasis on the holiday season. Customers flock and business operators love it.

Red Bank, NJ had only 22 stores open Sunday when the improvement district’s committee determined to make the Downtown of this small community competitive with the surrounding mall by offering a concentration of sales and service that worked on Sunday. It took advertising and entertainment and some arm twisting to get some skeptical merchants to try it, but suddenly it clicked. Eighty businesses eventually opened, some after it was clear others were doing well, and many said that Sunday had become their second best day in sales volume.

Each commercial area has its own potential in terms of expanded hours. As happened in Red Bank, local operators need to make decisions that make sense locally and back it up with entertainment, advertising and promotions. This effort is needed in Media, in part as an important element in attracting strong businesses.

6. Public Art

Downtowns are covering ugly blank walls, especially next to parking areas, with remarkably attractive murals, converting blight into a memorably pleasant view. Others are investing in various bits of public art such as figures by sculptor Seward Johnson representing some architectural personality—the weary shopper, playing children, or a student studying by a small fountain. It is sometimes possible to get sponsorship for such a project that is distinctive.

7. Market Days

It may prove possible to convert the Armory to a public market, a smaller version of Philadelphia’s popular Reading Terminal Market. As a first step, however, the concept can be tested by setting aside a block weekly where growers can sell their produce and other food they create directly to consumers. Six or eight regular vendors make a lively cluster and would probably draw many from the County complex as well as other shoppers. More places to buy food in Media was among the top ranked needs in the pedestrian consumer survey.

We have never seen one of these fail. In one area where several white collar commuter suburbs organized markets, consumers knew which was operating each day of the week and would drive to the one that corresponded with their needs. There is an often-overlooked force in retailing where knowing the producer is an important intangible element in making the purchase.



In Millburn, NJ, we surveyed market patrons and found that they typically visited one or two retail shops in Downtown in connection with their trip to the market. Patrons said the market added positively to Downtown's image and provided a needed convenience.

Burlington, VT leases well-designed carts to vendors offering goods approved by the Downtown management entity. Other Downtowns simply require that carts meet their design standards and goods to be sold are approved. Market days offer commercial opportunities for local businesses (e.g., flowers, food) in the context of a unique offering—farm produce—and free entertainment.

8. Communications, Marketing and Research

The need to inform the many newcomers in a growing region about Media, to remind business people of its benefits, to build on special assets and to let the world know about new businesses and activities warrants a sophisticated program of communications, marketing and research. Some of the elements are already in place. A business operators' newsletter exists, public events are held, there is a logo and slogan and there are dedicated volunteers working with Zubair Kahn.

The typical shopping center's million dollar annual budget for marketing is a reminder that the enormous draw of these places is not entirely due to free parking. A strong, professional and continuing message is needed to catch the attention of consumers who increasingly feel that they have less and less free time.



Financial incentives are often needed to support front and rear facade improvements.

Some of the changes suggested here require simply building on this work, expanding it and financing it adequately. Some require new approaches that have worked elsewhere:

a. Advertising, Public Relations & Marketing

Interviewed in their places of business, operators told our team that they saw considerable need for cooperative media advertising and many support direct mail advertising for Media. Downtowns of this scale have had considerable success with both approaches. These are tasks that require staff time for organization as well as actual support by advertisers. These programs provide an important basis for promotions, special sales and other attractions that might appeal, for example, to County employees as well as other regional consumers.

Developing a multi-year plan, perhaps with the assistance of a professional in the field, would be a good way to engage prospective participants in a program that will achieve the best returns on investment. Nine operators specifically said they would work on an advertising committee.

Targeted marketing for special groups will be important. Several thousand office employees, both private and public sector, are potentially excellent customers where the walks are short, as they are in Media. Hundreds of jurors a month must eat when called to serve here. Thousands of regional residents come to Media at night for the theatre. Two nearby institutions of higher education have concentrations of students, staff and visitors. In developing the marketing plan, these groups deserve special attention. Their proximity alone will not assure that Media is getting the economic benefit it should derive.

New Brunswick's downtown organization has a successful program by which they participate in briefing jurors, handing out dining and shopping materials and answering questions from many who had never been there before. Theatre patrons are often seeking dining choices and, where shops are open and lighting good, will browse before and after shows. Attention to such segments will produce a successful marketing strategy.

b. Recognition

Regardless of what is accomplished collectively in Downtown through its staff and organization, the most important factor in creating an outstanding regional center will be the work of the individual business operators and commercial property owners. While there has been some effort in the past to recognize outstanding work in the Downtown, this needs to be a sustaining activity.

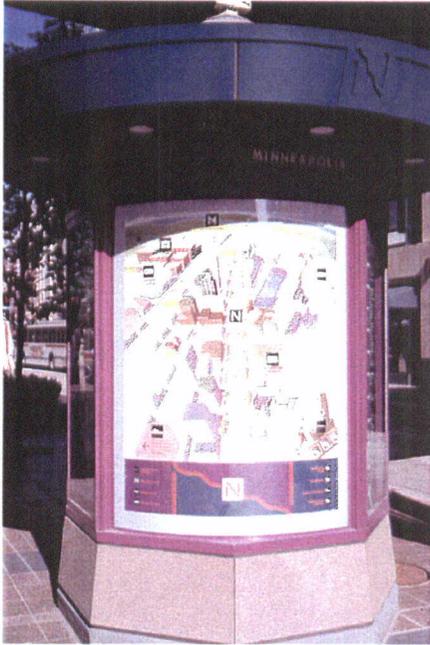
Awards for the best new facades, awnings, lighting and/or signs; for special promotions; for extra service to Downtown or to some other local need; for securing a desired tenant; for a business expansion or for some other desired contribution to the overall good should be regular features of the Downtown annual schedule. Many Downtowns hold a dinner or reception with this as an important feature, assuring that the awardee gets good press treatment.

c. Community Newsletter

Residents share various interests in Downtown. It is a convenience for them. It importantly shapes public perceptions of their hometown because it is the most visible feature. After schools, it most affects residential property values. A measure of success in Downtown is the

degree to which the residents associate it with pride in their community.

We have had very good results from an annual newsletter to residents. This is an open opportunity to let citizens know what has transpired during the past year and what is anticipated in the next and is a vehicle for a consumer survey.



d. Kiosks

Colorful kiosks providing maps and information on public destinations and businesses are important pieces of information that should be available throughout Downtown. Key locations in Media's case will be the parking concentration on Baker and Jasper Streets and at the municipal parking structure. Some Downtown organizations realize a small revenue stream through the placement of the names of the stores and restaurants on the kiosks.

9. Targeting Public Events

Business operators and consumers agree that special events are the most successful aspect of Downtown Media's management. While some questions were raised about location and timing, this does not detract from the overall support for this phase for which Zubair Kahn has been able to raise voluntary supplementary funding from some of the larger companies.

In the context of this success, however, it may be useful periodically to review and replan the yearly schedule, consulting systematically with business operators both to broaden the base of involvement and to sharpen the program through added perspectives. Strategic questions should be regularly raised such as how best to attract County workers, families with children, area college students, arts and culture enthusiasts or other segments to which an introduction or reintroduction to Media may be indicated.

Some Downtowns have switched emphasis from a few very large events to regular, smaller ones in an effort to build an impression in the region that "there's always something going on" at Friday middays or Saturdays or even Sundays. Temporary street vending, an opportunity for local merchants, invited outsiders who can feature flowers, produce and snacks, music and other performers adding a festive air that draws and retains crowds.

Reading's improvement district organizes local restaurants on Thursdays in the summer to serve lunch outdoors at different locations, providing music and drawing office workers and others who look forward to this weekly event.

These are not intended to be copied, but to illustrate how special events can be targeted to specific market segments considered local priorities.

10. Parking

Several problems plague Downtown Media with regard to parking. There is insufficient information regarding its location. There is misuse of on-street spaces by owners and employees. There is a need to fine tune meter requirements and there is a need to think strategically about the next need for parking resources in the context of planned growth. Specifically, the action steps required are:



Media lacks useful, attractive signs that identify parking and other destinations.



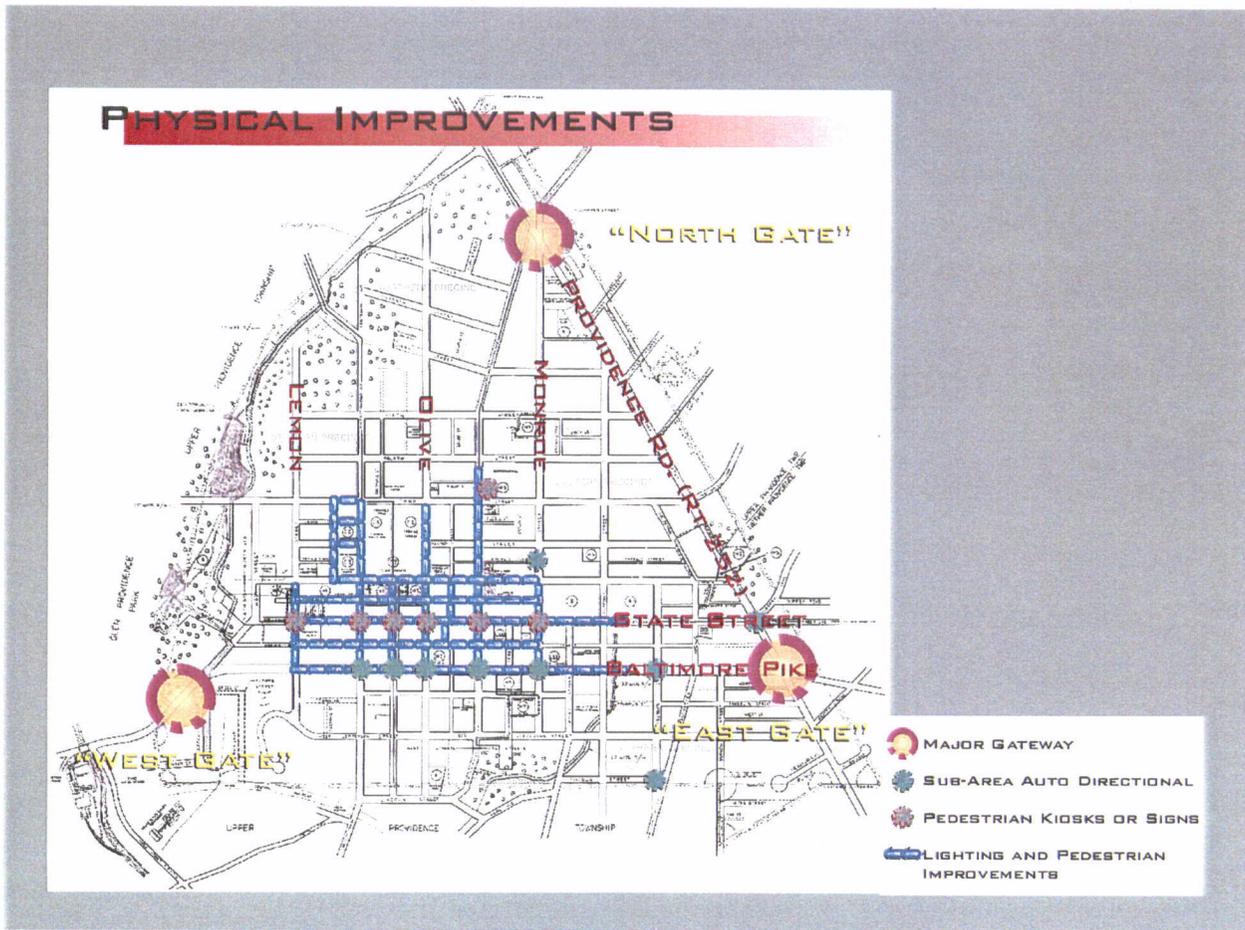
Signage to parking area is inconsistent.

- Design a parking trail-blazer sign system (coordinated with other directional signs) that makes clear the extent of parking locations, especially from Baltimore Pike. Produce detailed costs and design specification through the Vision Plan and incorporate this information in an application for state financial assistance.
- Set aside the top level of the parking garage for the use of street level businesses by permit at a price well below the meter charge.
- With professional guidance, fine tune meter requirements to keep abreast of the current needs of businesses.
- Include parking in the Vision Plan so that new parking resources are shared by day and evening users of all new businesses in consolidated locations, thereby avoiding the great waste of land that occurs when each building must create its own parking.
- Explore free parking on weekends.

11. Visual Improvements

In terms of improving the appearance of Downtown, several important steps are required, all of which can be incorporated in a Vision Plan:

- Both the public realm at Baker and Jasper Streets and the private buildings there need improvements. The Vision Plan will deal with the details of lighting and other amenities here. The business incentives will be available to upgrade rear as well as front facades.
- Baltimore Pike needs to acquire a look that helps advertise State Street as well as attract quality developers and investors. A main feature will be including these highly visible blocks in the pedestrian lighting plan. While driving through Media, even before more redevelopment occurs, travelers should be reminded that this is a special place, unlike any other in the trade area.
- While considerable progress has been made in terms of holiday lighting, more needs to be accomplished to make it wholly inclusive and a memorable setting.
- Design guidelines need to be adopted and followed to assure that future architectural changes affecting new and old buildings produce results that are compatible with the existing setting. This should be one of the Vision Plan products.



12. Research

As shown earlier (Exhibit 3), Media represents combined annual sales of more than \$141 million. No commercial enterprise of the complexity and scale of Downtown Media should proceed long without a careful research program. Through this project, the team has illustrated the value of periodically collecting the views of business operators and pedestrians who are, mostly, regular users of Downtown.

We suggest the following research steps in order to stay abreast of consumers and businesses:

1. Annually: survey Media residents (by mail) and business operators.
2. Bi-annually: survey theatre patrons (Hedgerow as well as The Media), office managers and restaurant patrons at night.
3. At about five-year intervals, commission a telephone survey of consumers throughout the five-town trade area.

The theatre and restaurant patron surveys will extend information collection to a fairly broad region and have considerable value in terms of the goal of making Media livelier in the evenings. Only a regional telephone survey, however, will secure full information needed about the practices and performances of the trade area consumers, especially that key component—those who do not now use Media.

Vision Plan for Growth

Media will work better for its residents, regional shoppers, Downtown employees, business operators and commercial property owners if it grows in accordance with carefully crafted physical plans. This is the necessary route to produce some additional retail space that will attract chains, additional office tenants and even some Downtown residents. Properly planned, it can produce the space for additional quality restaurants with ample room for outdoor dining. In producing such a plan it would be well to explore the prospects for a small, quality hotel and perhaps a movie house of four to six screens. The key to such mixed uses will be a parking system shared by day and night users.

The edges of Downtown Media at Baltimore Pike are underdeveloped, devoting land to one story structures and surface parking. It is not within the scope of this project to propose what should be built. Suffice it to say that Downtown Media will perform more satisfactorily for all of the groups mentioned above if the Borough agrees on a plan that makes sense to investors and helps the business district. Change occurs continually in commercial areas. In some cases towns are regularly reacting to someone else's piecemeal proposals that in the end add up to very little local benefit. Some towns, however, decide to shape their own destiny. Media should do this.

The plan itself, a vision of how the Borough wants its commercial area between State Street and Baltimore Pike to grow, should have these objectives:

1. Identify growth opportunities—marketable new commercial space, entertainment, dining to strengthen the Downtown destination.
2. Integrate existing assets—e.g., municipal building, armory—with the larger growth strategy
3. Shape the future rather than react.

It should have some products that can be applied and produce results in a year or two and some that will take five years or more to realize. It needs to be the product of a mix of expertise: urban designers, landscape architects, transportation specialists and redevelopment experts.

It should produce the following results for the commercial area:

1. Plan future parking requirements and new growth together so that they support one another
2. Create streetscape enhancements on all blocks, including Baker and Jasper Streets.
3. Adopt urban design standards that complement existing architecture. Build to the sidewalks and eliminate gaps between buildings so that new and old blend for pedestrians. Arrange new growth where it will best help existing properties and businesses. Make the most efficient use of land with multi-story buildings (minimum three stories) and shared parking.
4. Develop a coordinated signage system with directional signage from major routes, gateway identifications, vehicular directions, parking trailblazers, pedestrian direction signs and information kiosks.

Redevelopment in the blocks between State Street and Baltimore Pike is promising for several reasons. There is a strong office market which can be accommodated in buildings three to six stories, with retail or restaurants on the first floor. The existing development includes many properties that, because they are occupied by one-story and/or obsolete buildings, do not produce for investors at a rate that multi-story buildings (like the new one on State Street) can. The setting is attractive for office tenants to the extent that it is designed to be compatible with the most desirable of existing development and is oriented so that office employees can readily enjoy the commercial center when not at work.

Such a vision should require no more than six months to complete and should be guided by a steering committee of seven to nine persons comprised of business and property owners, Council and planning board members and other residents. The product can be adopted by the Borough in its planning and zoning and in design standards shaping the size and massing of buildings, parking requirements and general architectural appearance.

Governance, Finance & Priorities

Because Downtowns succeed as the result of both cooperative actions and those by individual entrepreneurs, it is important that as many as possible of the decisions affecting the commercial area be made by the property owners and business operators and that there be widespread opportunities to participate in this continuing decision process. The Media Business Authority is a government entity, reflecting the State law that authorizes it. It is financed by a mercantile tax that reflects the relative volume of business, although the costs are not shared by all corporations. The revenues are supplemented by contributions from some exempt businesses and some entrepreneurial income. Zubair Kahn serves as the executive in a part-time position.

While this arrangement has produced good results, the question at this point concerns whether this system is entirely adequate to take on the important additional tasks described in this report. Based on experience with other commercial centers of comparable scale, we believe some modifications are required:

1. To enlist more stakeholders and to increase the sense of responsibility among the commercial property owners and business operators, we propose that an additional seven to nine non-voting members be added to the board's deliberations. These members should be elected at an annual meeting of stakeholders at which other business might usefully include a review of the past year, a discussion of the next year's priorities, and an awards ceremony. The combination of existing Authority members and this addition should be comprised primarily of business operators and commercial property owners, with resident, County and municipal government representation.
2. Committees should reflect the results of the business operators survey. That is, they should be asked to make a two-year commitment to one of the following groups:
 - Parking
 - Business Attraction
 - Vision Plan—building appearance, public spaces, lighting, signage, development
 - Advertising, marketing customer attraction, including events
 - Hours of operation
3. Helping manage the recommended tasks and staffing these committees is a demanding and time-consuming requirement, suggesting that an increase in the amount of compensated time granted the executive would be a realistic step toward implementation.

For comparison, two budgets from slightly larger centers than Downtown Media are provided to illustrate the staff and budget support that highly successful, award-winning downtown management entities require (Exhibit 8). It is important to recognize that professional staff, volunteer activity and adequate revenues are all essential—two out of three won't produce a successful program.

Media has worked out a financing system that is based on the volume of business transacted. It does not, however, tap all of the types of corporations that are important to the Downtown economy and the \$600 tax cap does not distribute costs to reflect the size of the larger businesses or the benefits to larger properties. The largest contribution to the costs of the Authority equals \$1.64 per day, roughly the equivalent of a fast food burger.

Exhibit 8

Illustrative Downtown Organizations, Small Suburban Communities		
Organization Form: Non-Profit Corp.	Downtown Millburn (NJ) Development Alliance	Red Bank (NJ) RiverCenter
Number of First Floor Businesses	174	250
Annual Budget (mainly assessment)	\$160,000	\$239,000
Staff Personnel	2	2.5
Director's Salary	\$52,000	\$52,500

The financing system that is being applied in a growing number of businesses areas to share costs among those benefitting from business services is applied to the property tax, thus including all taxable properties. These options may be acceptable to supplement the existing revenue system:

- The Borough could request presently exempt commercial properties to make multi-year voluntary agreements to support, for five-year periods, the services that benefit all properties and businesses;
- The State's Business Improvement District legislation could be used to supplement the existing system, distributing costs based on the relative assessed valuation of commercial properties. There are 1,200 of these in the U.S., including Ardmore and Manayunk, devoted to increasing business transactions and property values. The typical charges for these business attraction and marketing activities equal fifty cents to \$1.50 per day for small operators.

The additional investments required for economic growth and business prosperity are summarized in Exhibit 9 and described earlier in the report. The Business Authority's projected 1999 budget is \$73,600. Financing for the additional activities listed would amount to a total of \$50,500 annually. The cost of a Vision Plan—parking, development, streetscape and cost estimates needed to apply for State funding for streetscape implementation—represents a one-time cost of \$85,000.

A second one-time cost of \$5,000 is allocated to design a distinctive and consistent sign system for drivers and pedestrians.

Exhibit 9

Preliminary Estimated Costs for Business Services	
1 Annual costs not covered in current Business Authority Budget	
Facades, fit-up, other incentives	\$ 25,000
Business attraction marketing	\$ 5,000
Market Days	\$ 2,500
Sidewalk entertainment	\$ 2,000
Special group marketing (e.g., juries, county, theatres, etc.)	\$ 2,500
Expanded holiday decorations and maintenance	\$ 2,500
Cooperative advertising	\$ 5,000
Surveys, research, publication	\$ 1,000
Marketing technical assistance	\$ 10,000
Total	\$ 55,500
2 Vision Plan (first year, non-recurring)	\$ 85,000
3 Design of signs, kiosks (non-recurring)	\$ 5,000

In terms of timing, Media will want to phase in the management services and assure, through ample discussion in committees and the expanded Authority board, that there is support for each new initiative. The Vision Plan is an important first-year investment because it will quickly produce the detailed costs and concepts required to secure as much as \$1-2 million in State financing to unify the Downtown blocks, create a setting attractive to developers, create a new image visible from Baltimore Pike and add to the center's night time appeal.

Exhibit 10

Preliminary Estimated Costs for Business Services			
Principal Steps	Year One	Year Two	Year Three
Organization/election	■		
Revenues/budget	■	■	■
Parking, top deck	■		
Parking, weekends	■		
Parking, direction sign design	■		
Install signs	■		
Marketing assistance	■		
Marketing/kit/realtors	■	■	■
Business incentives; priorities, financing	■		
Market Days	■	■	■
Cooperative ads	■	■	■
Newsletter surveys	■	■	■
Hours operation	■	■	■
Holiday lights	■	■	■
Vision Plan	■		
State funds application	■		
Adoption of design elements, codes	■		
Demonstration block	■		
Lighting, signs, landscaping	■		
Redevelopment	■	■	■

State Funding Potential

Following recent discussion with two representatives of the State's Department of Community and Economic Development, and after reviewing materials received from DCED, we suggest that Media focus particular attention on two State grant programs. They are:

1. Communities of Opportunity

"This program provides state-funded grants for community revitalization and economic development activities to occur on a local level. Specifically, this program assists communities in becoming competitive for business retention, expansion and attraction."

Eligible applicants include local governments, redevelopment authorities and housing authorities.

Eligible activities include community revitalization and economic development and/or the development or rehabilitation of housing.

2. Community Revitalization

"This program provides grant funds to support local initiatives designed to promote the stability of communities and to assist communities in achieving and maintaining social and economic diversity, ensuring a productive tax base and a good quality of life."

Eligible applicants include local government, municipal and redevelopment authorities and agencies, industrial development agencies, non-profit corporations incorporated under the laws of the Commonwealth.

Eligible activities include construction or rehabilitation of infrastructure, building rehabilitation, acquisition of structures, revitalization or construction of community facilities, purchase of machinery and equipment, planning of community assets, public safety, crime prevention, recreation, training, acquisition of land, buildings and right of ways.

The last application deadline for these funds was March 18, 1999. A total of \$15 million was available during this quarterly funding period. Previous approvals have included grants for vision planning, façade improvements and pedestrian-scale lighting.

DCED's Oliver Bartlett manages this program (717-720-7352). When the outlines of a grant request are clear enough, we recommend that a small Media delegation meet with Mr. Bartlett for a preliminary discussion.

Grant applications can be submitted specifically for the above two programs, or they can be submitted under the "Single Application for Assistance" format. Applicants are requested to state which DCED staff person, if any, they have been working with during the proposal preparation process.

3. Penn/DOT's "TEA-21" program - Transportation Enhancement Act 21st Century.

The department's FY-99 application deadline was November, 1998. Approximately \$40 million in grant funds was available, and submitted proposals greatly exceeded this amount. The next application period is expected to be ten to twelve months away, with the available funds estimated to be \$40 million.

Who Benefits and How?

While the retail sector has been the principal focus of these recommendations, it is important to reiterate that added strength in any sector benefits all others. These are some of the anticipated benefits and beneficiaries:

Retail, Service and Restaurant businesses

- Customer attracting new businesses
- Cooperative advertising and targeted promotions
- Improved reputation for parking

Office businesses

- Improved environment for clients, visitors, employees

Commercial property owners

- Stronger tenants
- Improved downtown reputation
- Enhanced property values

Local government

- Improved revenues

Residents

- Greater convenience
- Improved appearance
- Protection of property values
- Shared costs of government
- Added jobs and business opportunities