

HyettPalma

Cool Cities Blueprints for Michigan's Downtowns

Big Rapids

Downtown
Blueprint
2006



Cool Cities Blueprints for Michigan's Downtowns

Blueprints for Michigan's Downtowns, part of the Cool Cities Initiative, is a partnership effort between the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA), the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), and the Michigan Municipal League (MML) to continue to assist communities and their Downtown revitalization efforts. Blueprint action plans are an investment in a community that creates new private jobs and investment.

MML originally brought this innovative planning concept to the attention of the MEDC and MSHDA. With MML's partnership in place, the MEDC and MSHDA have, for three rounds, each put \$100,000 into the program. Those funds pay for 50% of the Blueprint fee with the 50% match coming from the Blueprint communities. When housed in the MEDC, the Community Assistance Team (CATeam) designed the program. Now housed in MSHDA, the CATEam continues to manage the program. HyettPalma is the consultant for the Downtown Blueprint program, working directly with each community to define its Downtown Blueprint.

The 11 communities selected during the first round of the program in 2003 were: Adrian, Battle Creek, Brighton, Buchanan, Cheboygan, Davison, Grand Haven, Jonesville, Middleville, Mt. Pleasant, and Norway.

The 11 communities selected during the second round of the program in 2004 were: Charlotte, Fremont, Highland Park, Houghton, Howard City, Imlay City, Ionia, Linden, Menominee, Saline, and Wayland.

The 8 communities selected during the third round of the program in 2005 were: Big Rapids, East Tawas, Grass Lake, Iron River, Romeo, Utica, Vassar, and Whitehall.

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1600 Prince Street • Suite 110
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

Phone 703 683 5126
Fax 703 836 5887
E-mail: info@hyettpalma.com
www.hyettpalma.com

May 31, 2006

The City of Big Rapids
and Members of the Process Committee
226 N. Michigan Avenue
Big Rapids, MI 49307

RE: ***Big Rapids Downtown Blueprint 2006***

HyettPalma, Inc., is pleased to present to you the following report titled: ***Big Rapids Downtown Blueprint 2006***, completed under the program titled ***Cool Cities Blueprints for Michigan's Downtowns***.

This document includes the community's vision for Downtown as well as the findings of a comprehensive analysis of Downtown's commercial markets. The vision and market analysis findings were used to define a specific economic enhancement strategy for the Downtown project area. The recommended strategy was specifically designed to enable Downtown to attain the community's defined vision as well as the identified market opportunities.

Thank you for the opportunity to lend our firm's expertise to this very important project. We hope you will keep us informed of your success and know that we stand ready to assist in any way we can as you proceed with Big Rapids's Downtown enhancement effort.

Sincerely,



Doyle G. Hyett



Dolores P. Palma



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Process Committee Members

At the request of HyettPalma, Inc., a Process Committee was formed to oversee this project. HyettPalma would like to thank the members of the Downtown Big Rapids Process Committee, listed below, for all their time, hard work, and dedication in preparing for and participating in completing 'the ***Big Rapids Downtown Blueprint 2006***.

Ed Burch, Mayor, City of Big Rapids
Terry Harper, Big Rapids City Commissioner
Tom Hogenson, Big Rapids City Commissioner & Mecosta County Medical Center
Public Relations Director
Steve Sobers, Big Rapids City Manager
Bill Stanek, Heartwoods/Living Waters, Downtown Business Association (DBA) President
Kathy Straley, Fairman's Apparel, DBA President-Elect
Bob Patterson, Patterson's Flowers, DBA Vice-President
Lori Bell, Chemical Bank, DBA Secretary
Tom Klimek, Optometric Associates, DBA Treasurer
Shelly Armstrong, Ferris State University, Associate Vice President of
Marketing and Communications, DBA Executive Board
Sharon Frederick, The Pioneer Group, DBA Executive Board
Dawn O'Neil, Dream n' Stitches, DBA Executive Board
Carleen Rose, Old Pioneer Store and Emporium, DBA Executive Board
Debbie Szot, Kopy Korner, DBA Executive Board
Jack Batdorff, Chairman, The Pioneer Group
Paul Bullock, Mecosta County Administrator & Chair, Mecosta County Economic Development
Corporation
Rick Duffett, Ferris State University, Vice President of Administration and Finance
Mike Fleitman, Director, Mecosta County Economic Development Corporation
Tom Langdon, Superintendent, Big Rapids Public Schools
Karl Linebaugh, President, Chemical Bank
Julie Martin, Artworks Co-Director
Mark Sochocki, Director, Big Rapids Housing Commission
Anja Wing, Executive Director, Mecosta County Area Chamber of Commerce



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Project Overview



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I. PROJECT OVERVIEW

This document presents the community's economic vision for Downtown Big Rapids, as well as the findings of a market analysis conducted for Downtown.

The boundaries of the project area are shown on the following page of this document.

The vision and the market analysis results were used as the foundation upon which to develop an economic enhancement strategy for Downtown Big Rapids. The economic enhancement strategy was specifically crafted to further strengthen Downtown and to guide its future development – keeping with the community's vision and the market analysis findings.

The assignment was completed as part of the ***Cool Cities Blueprints for Michigan's Downtowns*** technical assistance program, a partnership of the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA), and the Michigan Municipal League (NIML). The ***Big Rapids Downtown Blueprint 2006*** was completed by HyettPalma, Inc., with the involvement of the Process Committee formed by the Village to oversee the project.

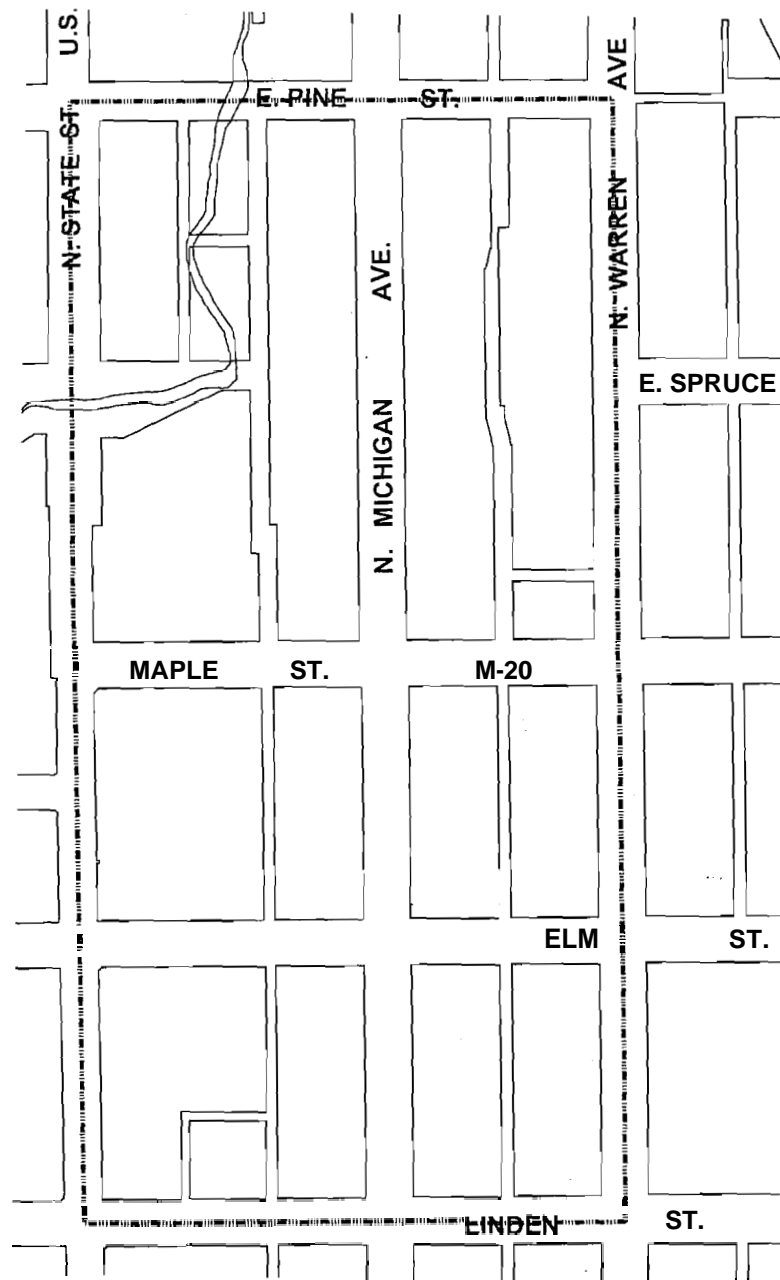
The methodology used to define the ***Big Rapids Downtown Blueprint 2006*** was developed by HyettPalma, Inc., and has been used extensively by the firm in Downtowns throughout the United States. To date, it forms the basis of the technical assistance programs titled:

- ***America Downtown@ -- New Thinking. New Life.***, created by the National League of Cities and HyettPalma in 1992;
- ***Indiana Downtown@***, created by the Indiana Association of Cities and Towns with HyettPalma in 2001; and
- ***Blueprints for Pennsylvania's Downtowns***, created by the Pennsylvania League of Cities and Municipalities and HyettPalma in 2004.

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Downtown Big Rapids





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Downtown Big Rapids Today



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II. DOWNTOWN BIG RAPIDS TODAY

Following is a snapshot of Downtown Big Rapids as it exists today, along with a synopsis of the desires and concerns expressed by the community during the ***Downtown Blueprint*** process.

Strengths

Downtown Big Rapids is relatively healthy at this time due to a series of characteristics that can be viewed as strengths, including the following.

- Downtown contains a mixture of long-term and newer businesses, with more businesses opening as space becomes available. Downtown contains businesses that act as regional draws. And, Downtown Big Rapids still has a department store, a traditional anchor now long gone from most Downtowns.
- Downtown is home to a variety of anchors, in addition to the department store and a variety of strong, specialty shops. These include a four-screen movie theater, City Hall, Mitchell Creek Park, and a pocket park.
- A number of historic buildings in Downtown Big Rapids have been renovated in a manner that is of high quality and that respects Downtown's architectural styles. These include the \$7,000,000 restoration of the Nisbett-Fairman Buildings by the Big Rapids Housing Commission.
- The Pioneer Group is in the process of moving its corporate headquarters to Downtown, thereby bringing an additional 64 employees to Downtown and demonstrating confidence in Downtown's future.
- Artworks has made a commitment to Downtown by recently purchasing the building in which it is located, thereby ensuring a continued strong presence of the arts in Downtown Big Rapids.
- The City government has made a commitment to Downtown by expanding City Hall and locating the Public Safety Building in Downtown.

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- Downtown is kept very clean, a fact that is recognized by year-round community residents and students alike.
- A variety of anchors that draw large numbers of people are located in proximity to Downtown, including the Mecosta County Building, the Big Rapids Community Library, the post office, Riverwalk, and Hemlock Park.
- A bit farther afield, Downtown has the opportunity to cultivate as customers those at Ferris State University, at the Mecosta County Medical Center, those traveling on US 131, and those shopping at Perry Street businesses.
- The national chains on Perry Street have made Big Rapids a regional shopping destination, a position from which Downtown Big Rapids also has the opportunity to benefit.
- Downtown is fortunate to have a very active Downtown Business Association (with a part-time director), a Downtown Development Authority (with an assessment rate of two mills), and a Chamber of Commerce that is involved in Downtown's enhancement. In addition, Downtown has the support of the City Commission and of the community's leadership.

The perception locally is that:

- Downtown Big Rapids is on the upswing;
- Good things have happened in Downtown, successes have been realized; and
- The time is right "to do more" for Downtown's further enhancement.

Concerns

When asked about their concerns for Downtown's future, community members most often cited the following:

- The influx of office uses rather than retail businesses in the first floors of Downtown structures;

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- Business turnover;
- The buying public's lack of understanding about where Downtown is (not on Perry Street) and what Downtown offers;
- Parking;
- Downtown's aesthetic appeal; and
- Downtown's few, large vacant buildings.

Desires

Those participating in the ***Downtown Blueprint*** process consistently cited the following as their desires for Downtown's future:

- Make Downtown a "destination" of quality, stable businesses;
- Make connections between Downtown and Riverwalk, Ferris State University, and Perry Street shoppers;
- Create a "theme" that Downtown "can hang onto;"
- Create the "right" mix of retail;
- Increase the number of retail businesses in Downtown;
- Identify Downtown's customer base and appeal to a full-spectrum of customers – "not just students and seniors;"
- Keep Downtown unique by "not losing its small town feel;"
- Create a coordinated marketing plan for Downtown;
- Build on Downtown's successes – "what should we do next?";

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- Maintain cooperation, leadership, and a "passionate commitment" regarding implementation of the *Downtown Blueprint*;
- Create a "strong story" for Downtown that avoids criticism, so that the *Downtown Blueprint* is implemented; and
- Funding to make the needed improvements in Downtown.

Image

Those participating in the *Downtown Blueprint* process were asked to define the image that should be created for Downtown Big Rapids as a result of the enhancement effort. A synopsis of that image is shown below.

*A friendly, personal, and comfortable Downtown
That is truly distinctive,
That has a small town feel, and
That is thought of as “great” by people of all ages.*

*A Downtown full of energy and activity with
People walking, stores open, places to sit outside, and
Evening entertainment.*

*The Downtown of a university town,
A Downtown with a beautiful Riverwalk;
The city's link between Ferris State University and the Riverwalk.*

*A Downtown where you'll find a great many choices –
Choices of things to buy, do, and see.*

*A Downtown with a wide variety of
Retail shops and restaurants
That attracts and welcomes a wide diversity of customers.*

*The most vital Downtown in the region;
One that looks active and lively and is
A fun place to be, shop, visit, and eat.*

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*The city's social place to gather,
A destination that makes you say,
"Let's go Downtown . . . you can't afford to miss it!"*

*A Downtown where people love to linger,
Where you want to spend all day,
That makes people say, "How cool!
I'm glad I came!
I'll be coming back with a friend!"*

Guidelines

Based on Downtown's current situation – as well as on the concerns, desires, and preferred image voiced by the community – HyettPalma recommends that the following guidelines be used to foster Downtown's enhancement.

1. ***This Time Is Different***

It is realized that plans and studies have been completed for Downtown Big Rapids in the past – and that the desired results were not quite realized. Despite that fact, those in Big Rapids must come to understand that this **Downtown Blueprint**, and the process used to complete the **Blueprint**, are very different from what was done in the past since:

- The process used to complete the **Downtown Blueprint** was highly inclusive, involving literally hundreds of community members, meaning that the recommendations included in the **Blueprint** are based on the community's desires and concerns;
- The **Downtown Blueprint** is not a plan or a study but a five-year, strategic course of action specifically designed to address the unique opportunities facing Downtown, as well as the specific needs of Downtown Big Rapids;
- The **Downtown Blueprint** addresses every major issue facing Downtown Big Rapids and recommends specific steps for addressing each of those issues;

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- The ***Downtown Blueprint*** recommendations are highly pragmatic, being geared to local capabilities and sensibilities;
- The ***Downtown Blueprint*** is highly action-oriented, implementation-oriented, and success-oriented;
- The methodology used to define the ***Downtown Blueprint*** has been used as the basis of a national Downtown technical assistance program since 1992 and as the basis for three Statewide Downtown technical assistance programs with great success; and
- The methodology used to define the ***Blueprint*** has been proven to yield substantial results, as can be seen from the benchmarks tracked by communities chosen to participate in the ***Cool Cities Blueprints for Michigan's Downtowns*** program.

2. "Theme"

Some locally desire to create a physical "theme" for Downtown. If this is done, the theme should be:

***Preservation of Downtown's older architecture,
Pedestrian-orientation, and small town feel.***

However, it must be realized that creating an economic theme for Downtown Big Rapids – a clear reason for being – is at least as important as a physical theme.

Downtown's economic theme should be:

***A quality collection of
Independently owned
Specialty shops, including
Retail, food, art, and entertainment businesses.***

3. Don't Suburbanize

Over time, the edges of Michigan Avenue within Downtown have been "suburbanized," meaning old buildings have been demolished and new buildings have been set back from the sidewalk with parking placed in front. This

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suburban pattern of development should not be continued, since it robs Downtown of its pedestrian-orientation and unique physical appeal. Instead, Michigan Avenue's zero lot line structures (those built at the sidewalk line) should be retained. And, when opportunities arise, the streetwall should be recreated on Michigan (from Linden to Pine) by building new structures at the sidewalk line with parking in the rear.

4. *Center of Community Life*

Downtown is and must remain the center of community life in Big Rapids. This means that the community's major special events and community-oriented entertainment should be held in Downtown. And, any anchors serving the community – such as a new library building – should be located in Downtown.

5. *Commercial Area Linkage*

It is understood that there is a desire locally to “link” the community's three commercial areas – north, east, and Downtown. If this is done, it should be remembered that:

- Each of these three areas must have its own identity – in terms of physical and economic “themes” – so that they can co-exist and all be successful; and
- The north and east commercial areas have unique issues that should be addressed with tailor-made actions – they cannot be addressed by “copying” actions that are implemented in and for Downtown.

6. *Pro-Business AND Pro-Quality*

The word locally is that, while the perception might have been that City Hall was not “easy to deal with” in the past, this perception is changing for the better. Therefore, it is important that City Hall make it known that local government is highly pro-business AND pro-quality – and that City Hall delivers on that promise.

7. *Attitudes*

It has been said locally that an attitude of “this is good enough” prevails in the community. It is clear to HyettPalma that the community's leadership wants Downtown to be further enhanced and believes in the potential to make that happen. Therefore, the ***Downtown Blueprint*** should be embraced and

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aggressively implemented as a means of demonstrating that Big Rapids can “have more, better, and nicer” in its Downtown.

8. *History Can Propel Commerce*

It is important to save, appropriately renovate, and reuse a Downtown's older buildings – as is being done in Downtown Big Rapids – as a way of making that Downtown a distinctive alternative to the competition. In addition, saving Downtown's older architecture is important since heritage tourism (comprised of tourists who choose to visit historic areas) is the fastest growing segment of the hospitality industry. And, surveys have shown that heritage tourists spend more days at a destination and spend more per day than other types of tourists.

9. *Someone Might Complain!*

Those involved in implementing this ***Downtown Blueprint*** must realize that – at any given point of implementation – someone might “complain” or take issue with what is being done. This is the norm. However, the complaints of a few must not be allowed to derail implementation of the ***Downtown Blueprint*** since the recommendations it contains:

- Are based on the concerns and desires most frequently voiced by the community; and
- Were specifically tailored to be in the best interest of Downtown as a whole.

10. *Downtown Expansion*

The boundaries of Downtown should not be changed to make the area larger at this time. Instead, the current boundary lines should be held in order to strengthen demand and values within Downtown and, thereby, encourage and justify reinvestment and redevelopment in Downtown. When this occurs to a substantial degree, resulting in the significant enhancement of Downtown, then the expansion of Downtown might be considered. At that time, natural market forces should be reinforced by encouraging commercial development along State Street (where there is tremendous room for redevelopment) and along Michigan, to the north of Pine Street.

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11. *As Downtown Goes . . .*

It is a fact that a healthy, thriving Downtown stands as a symbol of the quality-of-life enjoyed by a community's residents. And, the more successful a Downtown becomes, the healthier and more sought after the entire community becomes. This has led to the adage "as Downtown goes, so goes the town." Therefore, the further enhancement of Downtown Big Rapids should be made a priority of the entire community's leadership – and not of just those in Downtown – since all segments of the community will prosper as a result of Downtown's increased vitality.

12. *Public "Education"*

Those involved in Downtown's enhancement should embrace the above guidelines and espouse them publicly at every possible and pertinent opportunity. In that way, the general public will become more informed about the best ways to approach and view Downtown's enhancement, and more clearly understand the benefits of an economically healthier, more vibrant, and increasingly sustainable Downtown.

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***Resident
&
Business
Surveys***



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III. RESIDENT& BUSINESS SURVEYS

As a part of this project, two surveys were conducted to gauge the health of Downtown Big Rapids, as perceived locally. These were a survey of owners/managers of all non-residential uses located in Downtown and a telephone survey of residents living in Downtown's primary retail trade area. A summary of the survey responses follows.

Frequency of Trips

Residents surveyed reported that they now come to Downtown with considerable frequency, with 68% saying they come to Downtown Big Rapids between one and seven times a week.

Over one-fifth of those surveyed (21%) said they come to Downtown with moderate frequency – defined as from one to three times a month.

And, 11% said they seldom come to Downtown Big Rapids.

Purpose of Trips

Trade area residents were asked the main reasons they now come to Downtown Big Rapids. The top reason cited was "shopping" – mentioned by 43% of residents surveyed.

The next most frequently mentioned responses were cited far less frequently. These were "eating in restaurants" (17%) and "banking" (15%).

Therefore, a full three-quarters of residents (75%) said they now come to Downtown Big Rapids for one of the above three reasons – to shop, eat in restaurants, or bank.

The remaining reasons mentioned by residents for coming to Downtown were:

- Work (5%);
- Using service businesses (5%);
- Conducting personal business (5%);
- Entertainment (4%);

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- Visiting friends or family (2%);
- Passing through (1%); and
- Other – government business, post office, live there, religious services, passing through, etc. (3%).

Shopping Area of Choice

Residents surveyed were asked where they currently do most of their family shopping at this time, other than grocery shopping. The two most often cited locations were Big Rapids Township (41%) and the City of Big Rapids (37%).

Of those citing the township, 23% said they do most of their shopping at Wal-Mart and 18% do so at Meijer.

Of those citing the City of Big Rapids, 25% said they do most of their shopping in Downtown, 8% on Perry Street, and 4% said they shop within the City in-general.

These figures indicate that Downtown Big Rapids is holding its ground in relation to Wal-Mart, and that the City is fairly well holding its ground in relation to shopping opportunities available in the township.

The remaining 22% of residents surveyed said they do most of their shopping:

- Out-of-town (20%), which included primarily Grand Rapids (10%) as well as Mount Pleasant, Ludington, Traverse City, Reed City, Lakeview, Midland, Cadillac, and Edmore; and
- On-line (2%).

When asked why they choose to shop in a particular area, the top reason cited by residents was the convenience offered, mentioned by 48%.

The next most frequently given response was the variety/selection offered (22%).

The remaining 30% of respondents said they choose a shopping area based on:

- Closeness to their home (12%);
- Price (12%);

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- Closeness to work (2%);
- Parking (1%); and
- Other – friendliness, to support local businesses (3%).

Downtown Characteristics

Trade area residents and Downtown business owners surveyed were asked to rate a list of nineteen Downtown characteristics as being "good," "fair," or "poor" at this time.

All but two characteristics were rated "good" by a majority of residents. And, eleven characteristics received this rating from a majority or significant percentage (up to 46%) of business owners. Those eleven characteristics rated "good" by a majority or significant percent of business owners were among those rated "good" by a majority of residents. Those eleven characteristics were:

- Feeling of safety (95% residents, 79% business owners);
- Cleanliness of the area (90% residents, 61% business owners);
- Helpfulness of salespeople (89% residents, 77% business owners);
- Knowledge of salespeople (81% residents, 59% business owners);
- Quality of service businesses (75% residents, 64% business owners);
- Attractiveness of the area (75% residents, 47% business owners);
- Attractiveness of buildings (69% residents, 46% business owners);
- Quality of retail goods (68% residents, 65% business owners);
- Prices at service businesses (58% residents, 47% business owners);
- Availability of parking (57% residents, 46% business owners); and
- Prices at restaurants (52% residents, 51% business owners).

The six characteristics rated "good" by a majority of residents, but not business owners, were:

- Business hours (75% residents, 44% business owners);
- Restaurant quality (57% residents, 44% business owners);
- Parking convenience (56% residents, 38% business owners);
- Retail prices (55% residents, 42% business owners);
- Traffic circulation (54% residents, 40% business owners); and
- Variety of service businesses (51% residents, 37% business owners).

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And, the two characteristics not rated "good" by a majority of residents were:

- Variety of retail goods (36% residents, 10% business owners); and
- Variety of restaurants (32% residents, 17% business owners);

Downtown Improvements

Trade area residents and Downtown business owners were asked to rate a list of eighteen possible Downtown improvements as being "very important," "somewhat important," or "not important" at this time.

Three improvements were rated "very important" by a majority or significant percent of residents. The same three improvements received this rating from a majority of business owners. These improvements were:

- Recruit retail businesses (64% residents, 96% business owners);
- Increase retail variety (63% residents, 76% business owners); and
- Increase restaurant variety (50% residents, 68% business owners).

It is interesting to note that all three of these improvements are related to the variety/selection offered in Downtown. And, 22% of those surveyed said variety/selection was the main factor determining where they choose to shop.

It should be remembered that 48% of those surveyed said that convenience determines where they shop. And, the resident ratings of the characteristics and possible improvements shown above indicate that those surveyed are pleased with Downtown's convenience at this time (parking availability and convenience, traffic circulation, business hours, helpfulness and knowledge of employees).



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Downtown Big Rapids Tomorrow



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IV. DOWNTOWN BIG RAPIDS TOMORROW

A series of discussions, focus groups, and meetings were held to define the community's preferred vision of Downtown Big Rapids – as it would ideally exist in the year 2011. A compilation of the thoughts and preferences expressed during those sessions is shown below.

By the year 2011, Big Rapids would have the most vital Downtown in the region. Downtown Big Rapids would have great businesses, be a fun place to be, and be a social place to gather with friends.

Downtown would be a destination, with a wider variety of businesses, a greater number of varied retail businesses, and a greater diversity of customers. Downtown's business mix would make it a "destination" – where there's always something special to buy, see, and do.

People would know where Downtown is and it would be easy to get to, easy to navigate, and inviting to spend time in.

Downtown would look healthy and active in a manner to which people can relate. People would choose to linger in Downtown (rather than running in and out of one store and then disappearing), Downtown would enjoy heavy pedestrian use, tables and chairs would be out on sidewalks, and people would visit and mingle in Downtown – all of which would give Downtown a lively, social appearance.

Downtown would have more retail businesses and room for retail expansion. "Key" stores – the ones the community wants – would be recruited to Downtown. "Sufficiently capitalized" businesses would be recruited for and attracted to Downtown. Downtown's businesses would all be as well-maintained as possible and would attract and serve a variety of age groups, including youth.

Downtown would look beautiful and distinctive – there would be no question that "this is Downtown Big Rapids." Downtown's ambience and atmosphere would be very appealing. Its streets and buildings would be very clean and highly attractive. Downtown would also be beautiful, in terms of trees, flowers, and

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landscaping. And, Downtown would be made more comfortable, with benches and restrooms that are available to the public.

Downtown's history and historic architecture would be capitalized upon. Downtown's history would be researched, documented, and made more visible through historic markers on buildings. More of Downtown's buildings would be restored to create a visual continuity. The rears of buildings would look as attractive as the fronts. Rear entrances to businesses would be more visible, more inviting, and lighted. Alleys would be clean and well-lighted. And, public art would be present throughout Downtown.

Downtown would act as the "link" between Ferris State University (FSU) and the Riverwalk. It would more actively serve and attract those at FSU and it would capitalize on the Riverwalk by attracting its users.

Downtown would offer a wide variety of uses, including:

- Food markets – meat, fish, produce, wine, cheese, gourmet, organic, etc.;
- Special, unique retail boutiques;
- Restaurants, specialty food shops, coffeehouses, and outdoor seating;
- The arts and entertainment – movies, theater, art center, etc.;
- A farmers market;
- Professional offices, service businesses, and banks;
- Government services – post office, library;
- Lodging; and
- Housing.

Downtown would be able to attract a wide variety of users, including:

- Residents of the city, county, trade area, and Canadian Lakes area;
- FSU students, parents, faculty, staff, and visitors;
- Cottagers, resorters, and RVers;
- Sportsmen – fishing, hunting, golfing, tubing, boating, snowmobiling, cycling;
- Day-trippers from Grand Rapids and Traverse City;
- Bus tours; and
- Multiple generations, from kids to retirees.

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Downtown would be marketed to the above potential customers using strategies that are effective in conveying "where we are and what we have" Downtown.

Those working toward Downtown's further enhancement would have "unity of purpose," provide strong leadership "to withstand criticism," and foster strong communication among all involved so there is a "good understanding of what we're doing and what's going on." There would be good communication among all interested parties and the City and Downtown business owners would work together closely. The strong relationship and communication with FSU would be on-going. And, the community's leadership would demonstrate a "passionate commitment" to Downtown's improved future.

By the year 2011, all of the above improvements, leadership, and commitment would add up to propelling Downtown Big Rapids toward the following image.

***A friendly, personal, and comfortable Downtown
That is truly distinctive,
That has a small town feel, and
That is thought of as "great" by people of all ages.***

***A Downtown full of energy and activity with
People walking, stores open, places to sit outside, and
Evening entertainment.***

***The Downtown of a university town,
A Downtown with a beautiful Riverwalk;
The city's link between Ferris State University and the Riverwalk.***

***A Downtown where you'll find a great many choices –
Choices of things to buy, do, and see.***

***A Downtown with a wide variety of
Retail shops and restaurants
That attracts and welcomes a wide diversity of customers.***

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*The most vital Downtown in the region;
One that looks active and lively and is
A fun place to be, shop, visit, and eat.*

*The city's social place to gather,
A destination that makes you say,
"Let's go Downtown . . . you can't afford to miss it!"*

*A Downtown where people love to linger,
Where you want to spend all day,
That makes people say, "How cool!
I'm glad I came!
I'll be coming back with a friend!"*

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Downtown Market Analysis



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V. DOWNTOWN MARKET ANALYSIS

To ensure long-term economic results and success, Big Rapids's Downtown enhancement effort must be market-driven. This means that the effort must be one that results in all of Downtown's investors -- business owners, property owners, developers, patrons, the local government, etc. -- being able to realize an increasing return on their investments. This can only be achieved via an enhancement effort that is based on a sound, realistic understanding of Downtown's economic potentials. The following chapter quantifies Downtown's economic potentials in terms of retail, office, and housing development.

Downtown Retail Opportunities

Retail Trade Area – Downtown Big Rapids's primary retail trade area has been defined as the geographic area from which the majority of retail customers are currently drawn and the geographic area which presents the greatest opportunity in the immediate future for gaining additional retail customers. Based on current customer travel patterns, discussions with local business leaders and government officials, and the opinion of HyettPalma, Inc., Downtown's primary retail trade area has been identified as the area shown on the attached map.

Retail Economic Indicators – Downtown's primary retail trade area can be currently characterized by the following economic indicators.

THE PRIMARY TRADE AREA HAS AN ESTIMATED POPULATION OF 74,030 – WITH AN ESTIMATED 28,215 HOUSEHOLDS (Source: ESRI estimate)

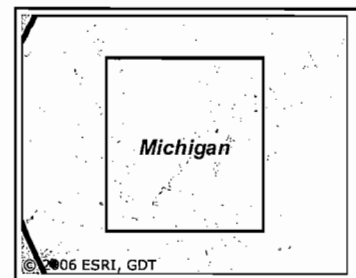
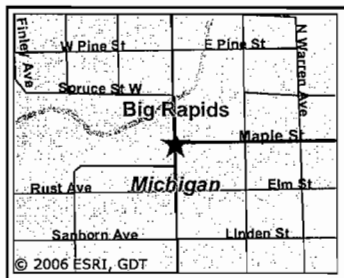
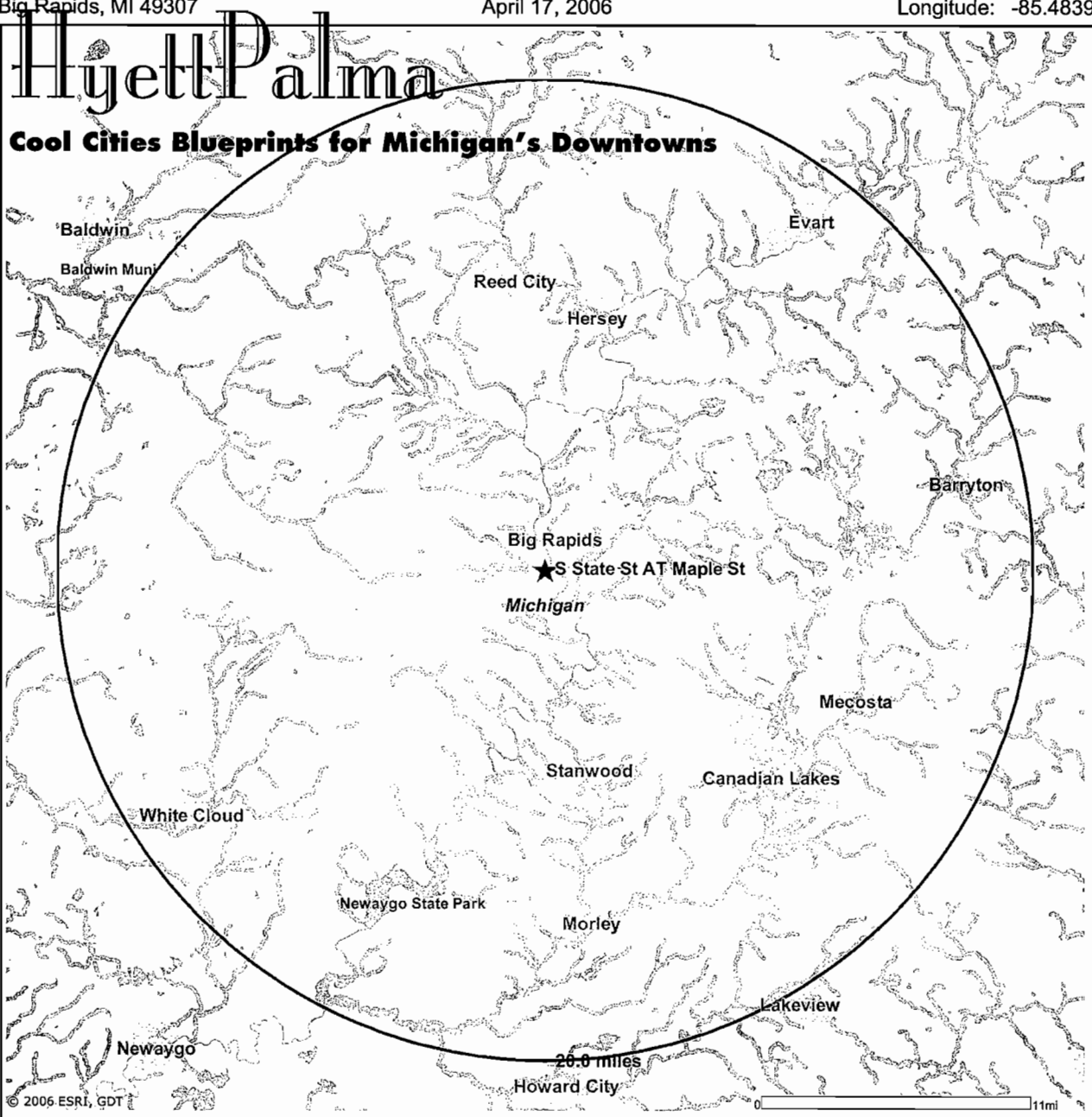
THE PRIMARY TRADE AREA POPULATION IS ESTIMATED TO INCREASE TO APPROXIMATELY 77,482 BY 2010 – WITH AN ESTIMATED 29,896 2010 ESTIMATED HOUSEHOLDS (Source: ESRI estimate)

Site Map

S State St AT Maple St
Big Rapids, MI 49307

April 17, 2006

Latitude: 43.6982
Longitude: -85.4839



Big Rapids Downtown Blueprint 2006
Cool Cities Blueprints for Michigan's Downtowns
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THE AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD SIZE IS 2.48 PERSONS, WHICH IS SLIGHTLY LESS THAN THE NATIONAL AVERAGE OF 2.59 (Source: ESRI estimate)

THE TOTAL COMBINED INCOME OF HOUSEHOLDS WITHIN THE PRIMARY TRADE AREA IS APPROXIMATELY \$1,335,000,000 PER YEAR (Source: ESRI estimate)

THE AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD INCOME FOR THOSE IN THE PRIMARY TRADE AREA IS APPROXIMATELY \$47,315 AND IS PROJECTED TO INCREASE TO \$53,242 ANNUALLY BY 2010 (Source: ESRI estimate)

Current Retail Businesses – Downtown Big Rapids currently contains 57 retail businesses, which occupy approximately 178,000 square feet of building space. The retail inventory was completed by the Downtown Big Rapids Process Committee and is shown on the following pages.

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Downtown Big Rapids Retail Businesses

SIC CODE	BUSINESS TYPE	# BUS.	TOT. SQ. FT.
<u>52</u>	<u>Building Materials and Garden Supplies</u>		
5211	Lumber and Building Materials	1	3,000
<u>53</u>	<u>General Merchandise</u>		
5331	Variety Store	1	3,000
<u>54</u>	<u>Food Store</u>		
5411	Grocery Store	1	3,037
5461	Retail Bakery	1	2,100
<u>55</u>	<u>Automotive Dealers and Service Stations</u>		
5531	Auto/Home Supply	1	2,500
5541	Gas Service Station		
<u>56</u>	<u>Apparel and Accessories</u>		
5621	Women's Apparel	1	2,500
5651	Family Apparel	2	21,414
5661	Shoes	1	2,000
5699	Miscellaneous Apparel	1	2,960
<u>57</u>	<u>Furniture and Home Furnishings</u>		
5712	Furniture Store	3	17,900
5719	Misc. Home Furnishings	1	4,500
5731	Radio/TV/Electronics	2	3,500
5734	Computers/Software	1	1,500
5736	Musical Instruments	1	4,126
<u>58</u>	<u>Eating/Drinking</u>		
5812	Eating Places	5	12,072
5813	Drinking Places	1	11,000
<u>59</u>	<u>Miscellaneous Retail</u>		
5912	Drug Store	1	2,500
5932	Antiques	1	2,000

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Downtown Big Rapids Retail Businesses

SIC CODE	BUSINESS TYPE	# BUS.	TOT. SQ. FT.
59	<u>Misc. Retail (Continued)</u>		
5942	Books	1	3,400
5944	Jewelry	2	4,152
5945	Hobby/Toys/Games	1	6,500
5947	Gift/Novelty	3	4,675
5949	Sewing/Piece Goods	1	2,000
5992	Florist	1	6,388
5999	Miscellaneous Retail	11	19,994
	<u>Select Support Services</u>		
7231	Beauty Shops	7	13,884
7241	Barber Shops	1	825
7251	Shoe Repair/Shine	1	800
7832	Motion Picture Theater	1	8,390
7841	Video Rental	1	5,320

TOTAL NUMBER OF RETAIL BUSINESSES	57
--	-----------

TOTAL SQUARE FEET OF OCCUPIED RETAIL BUSINESS SPACE	177,937
--	----------------

TOTAL NUMBER OF VACANT RETAIL SPACES	7
---	----------

TOTAL SQUARE FEET OF VACANT RETAIL BUSINESS SPACE	13,839
--	---------------

Source: Downtown Big Rapids Process Committee

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Retail Potential – Currently, within Downtown's primary trade area, the total estimated demand for retail products is approximately \$408,000,000 per year. This demand is shown on the following graphs. A complete presentation of retail product demand for the primary trade area is shown in **THE RETAIL REPORT®**, contained in the Appendix of this document.

As a conservative estimate, it is assumed that Downtown Big Rapids retail businesses now generate an average (blended figure) of approximately \$175 per year per square foot in retail sales.

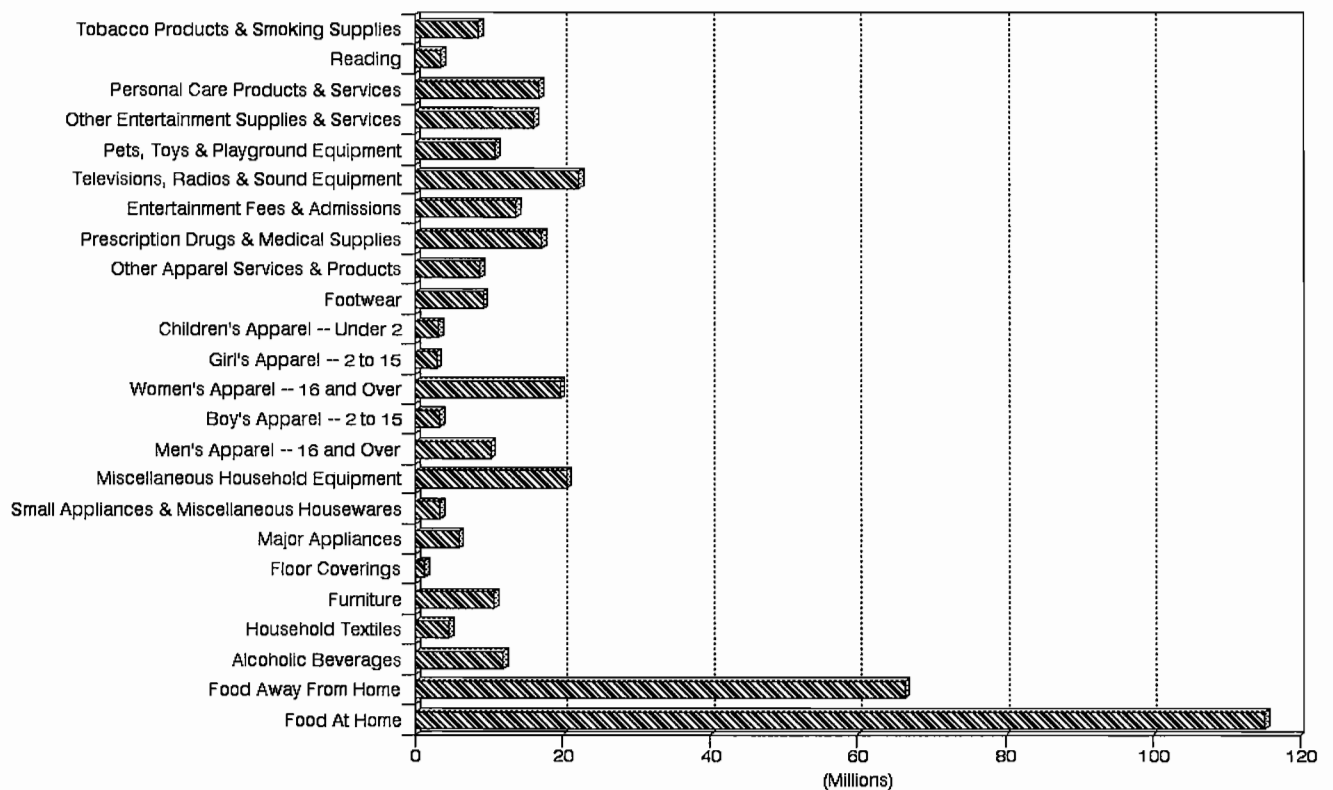
Since Downtown currently contains approximately 178,000 square feet of occupied retail space, Downtown Big Rapids should currently be generating approximately \$31,000,000 in retail sales per year.

By dividing the project area's estimated annual retail sales – \$31,000,000 – by the total estimated demand for retail products within the primary trade area – \$408,000,000 – it can be concluded that Downtown Big Rapids may currently be capturing approximately 7.6% of the retail sales potential within the primary trade area. And, the balance of the demand is being captured by businesses within other parts of the primary trade area and/or by businesses in other trade areas.

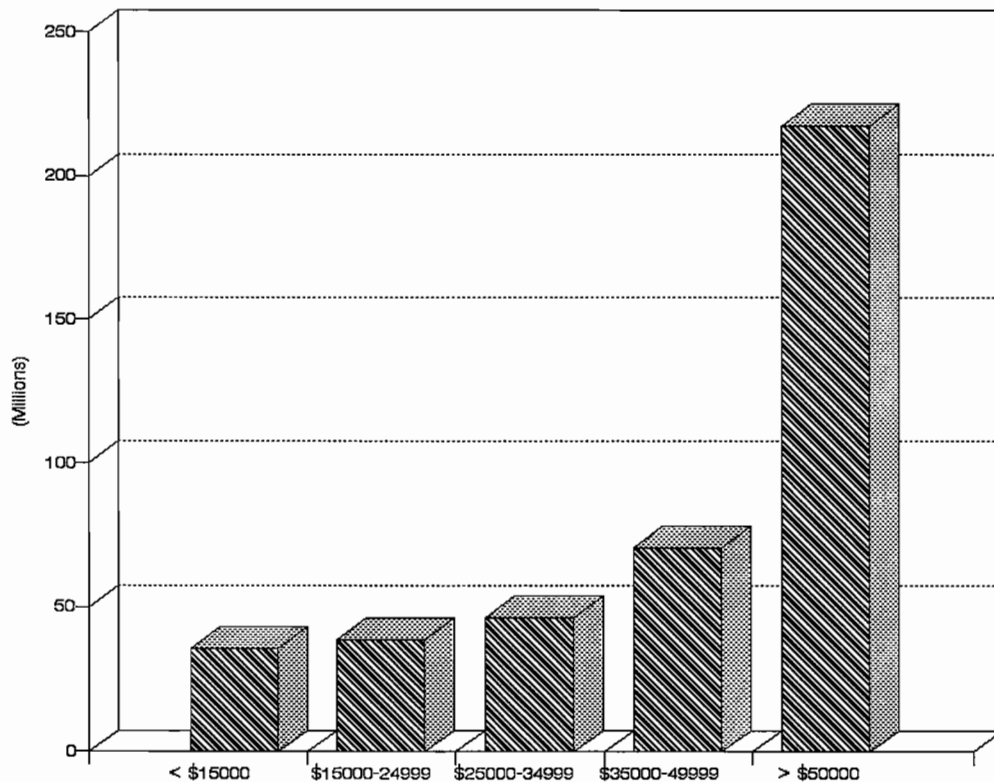
Taking steps to further enhance Downtown Big Rapids, and barring a significant decline in the national or regional retail economy, it is conservatively anticipated that Downtown may have the potential to increase its share of retail sales in its primary trade area from the current level of approximately 7.6% to between 8% and 8.5% by the year 2011. This should be considered a goal of the economic enhancement program.

If Downtown Big Rapids is able to increase its market share to between 8% and 8.5% by the year 2011, it is possible that the project area may be able to increase its total capture of retail sales to between \$33,000,000 and \$35,000,000 by the year 2011 – considered in constant 2006 dollars.

TOTAL PRODUCT DEMAND BY PRODUCT TYPE



TOTAL PRODUCT DEMAND BY INCOME GROUP



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This increase in total retail sales could potentially support the development of between approximately 12,000 and 23,000 net square feet of additional retail space by the year 2011 – which could include expansions or sales increases by existing Downtown Big Rapids retail businesses and/or the construction of some limited amount of new retail space.

It must be noted that Downtown's ability to gain a larger market share will be contingent on efforts to enhance its business climate, enhance and expand its existing businesses, and recruit additional retail businesses to the area. If such efforts are aggressively and diligently implemented – on an on-going basis – the actual growth in Downtown's market share could potentially be much higher than projected. Conversely, by the year 2011, Downtown Big Rapids's market share could be much less than projected above if efforts to enhance the area and expand/recruit businesses are not diligently and continually pursued.

NOTE:

No attempt was made to determine the condition of vacant space. Therefore, no judgment is made concerning the marketability of space based on condition.

Retail Business Development – Based on the findings of this retail market analysis, the opportunity exists to enhance and expand certain types of retail businesses that are currently located in Downtown Big Rapids. In addition, the opportunity also exists to attract additional businesses to Downtown. A list of the types of retail businesses recommended for potential enhancement, expansion, and attraction is presented in the chapter of this document titled ***Course of Action***.

Downtown Office Opportunities

Office Market Indicators – Several key economic indicators that characterize the current office operations within Downtown Big Rapids follow.

- Downtown Big Rapids currently contains a total of 46 various office occupants occupying approximately 133,000 square feet of building space.
- Downtown Big Rapids is the traditional professional services center of the City.

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- Downtown's occupied office space serves, primarily, the personal needs of those who live within the broader community.
- Downtown is the seat of county government.
- Downtown has recently experienced renewed, significant support for Downtown as the center of professional services, as best evidenced by The Pioneer Group moving its corporate headquarters to Downtown.
- The most significant concentrations of offices include media, finance, insurance, health services, legal services, membership organizations, and government.

Current Office Uses – The variety of office occupants found in Downtown can be seen in the following table, in which office tenants are listed by SIC numbers. The office inventory was completed by the Downtown Big Rapids Process Committee.

Office Potential – It is anticipated that most of Downtown's office market growth will continue to consist of office uses which serve, primarily, the personal needs of those who live in, or in proximity to, Downtown Big Rapids's primary trade area. Communities nationwide have experienced the fact that – as improvements are made in the overall economic and physical conditions of their Downtowns – an associated increase in demand for office space normally follows. This is also expected to hold true for Downtown Big Rapids. In addition, demand for office space is anticipated to increase due to natural household growth in the area, which is projected for the immediate future.

Therefore, it is estimated that approximately 15,000 to 25,000 square feet of additional office space could potentially be supported in Downtown Big Rapids between now and the year 2011. This should be considered an economic goal for the enhancement effort.

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Downtown Big Rapids Offices by SIC Code

SIC CODE	BUSINESS TYPE	# BUS.	TOT. SQ. FT.
<u>27</u>	<u>Publishing</u>		
271	Newspapers	1	10,000
<u>47</u>	<u>Transportation Services</u>		
472	Passenger Trans. Arrangement	1	2,000
<u>60</u>	<u>Depository Institutions</u>		
602	Commercial Banks	4	19,882
<u>63/64</u>	<u>Insurance</u>		
631	Life Insurance	1	2,000
641	Insurance Agents/Brokers	5	11,028
<u>65</u>	<u>Real Estate</u>		
654	Title Abstract Offices	2	4,909
<u>72</u>	<u>Personal Services</u>		
727	Funeral Home	1	5,604
<u>73</u>	<u>Business Services</u>		
737	Computer/Data Processing	1	3,500
738	Misc. Business Services	3	5,300
<u>80</u>	<u>Health Services</u>		
801	Offices/Clinics of Doctors	4	9,035
802	Offices/Clinics of Dentists	1	3,500
808	Home Health Care	1	1,250
<u>81</u>	<u>Legal Services</u>		
811	Legal Services	5	11,122
<u>83</u>	<u>Social Services</u>		
833	Job Training Services	2	5,764
<u>86</u>	<u>Membership Organizations</u>		
861	Businesss Associations	3	1,704
865	Political Organizations	1	2,000
869	Other Memb. Orgs.	1	2,361

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Downtown Big Rapids Offices by SIC Code

SIC CODE	BUSINESS TYPE	# BUS.	TOT. SQ. FT.
<u>87</u>	<u>Engineering/Management Services</u>		
871	Engineering/Architecture	1	1,800
<u>89</u>	<u>Services Not Elsewhere Classified</u>		
899	Services	2	10,500
<u>91</u>	<u>General Government</u>		
919	General Government	1	9,000
	<u>Offices Not Elsewhere Classified</u>		
	Not Elsewhere Classified	5	10,575
TOTAL NUMBER OF OFFICE BUSINESSES		46	
TOTAL SQUARE FEET OF OCCUPIED OFFICE BUSINESS SPACE			132,834
TOTAL NUMBER OF VACANT OFFICE SPACES		1	
TOTAL SQUARE FEET OF VACANT OFFICE BUSINESS SPACE			2,164

Source: Downtown Big Rapids Process Committee

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It must be noted that the actual growth in Downtown's office demand could be higher if Downtown is able to attract general offices, or back office operations from outside the area, to attract office occupants currently located elsewhere in the community, or to experience significant expansion by current Downtown office operations.

NOTE:

No attempt was made to determine the condition of vacant space. Therefore, no judgment is made concerning the marketability of space based on condition.

Office Business Development -- A listing of office types recommended for recruitment and expansion in Downtown Big Rapids is presented in the chapter of this document titled ***Course of Action***.

Downtown Housing Opportunities

The ***Downtown Blueprint*** project area contains approximately 76 dwelling units at this time, of which approximately 48 are designed for and occupied by senior residents. And, Downtown Big Rapids is also fortunate to be bordered by residential neighborhoods.

Approximately 100 residents occupy Downtown's homes.

While Downtown Big Rapids currently has a sizable number of units in the upper floors of Downtown buildings, it appears to offer opportunities in the immediate future for additional upper floor housing. And, as the market for retail and office space in Downtown is further strengthened, the demand for housing in upper floors and in newly constructed mixed-use buildings will unquestionably surface, particularly along Perry, in the area north of Downtown, and, potentially, within development projects which enable a view of the river from any floor.

As has been found throughout the nation during the past three decades – regardless of community size or location – as a Downtown's physical environment and mix of businesses is improved, it is very likely that the demand for housing in and near that Downtown will also increase. This can also be expected in Downtown Big Rapids.

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Every effort should be made, consistent with the ***Downtown Blueprint***, to introduce more quality housing – both market-rate and affordable housing – in and in proximity to Downtown Big Rapids.

As market conditions allow, every effort should be made to introduce:

- More loft apartments in the upper floors of appropriate existing structures throughout Downtown – market rate and affordable;
- Mixed-use projects – market-rate and affordable – if redevelopment takes place in or near Downtown; and
- Both owner-occupied and rental units.

In addition, specific programs offered through the Michigan State Housing Development Authority – which are further described in the *Appendix* of this ***Downtown Blueprint*** – should be considered to assist with the development of housing in and near Downtown Big Rapids.

Rather than placing arbitrary or artificial limits on the number of housing units appropriate for Downtown Big Rapids – and in neighborhoods near the commercial district – it is suggested that the absorption of units in the marketplace be used as the indicator of demand. And, that every effort be made to develop the greatest number of quality units possible in and near Downtown when market conditions allow.



Cool Cities Blueprints for Michigan's Downtowns

Course of Action



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VI. COURSE OF ACTION

This chapter includes a ***Course of Action*** specifically formulated to help Downtown Big Rapids attain the community's vision, take advantage of the economic opportunities revealed through the market analysis, and become more economically successful and self-sustaining.

The specific, recommended ***Course of Action*** is shown following a reiteration of the guidelines which HyettPalma suggests be embraced as the basis of this ***Downtown Blueprint***

1. This Time Is Different

It is realized that plans and studies have been completed for Downtown Big Rapids in the past – and that the desired results were not quite realized. Despite that fact, those in Big Rapids must come to understand that this ***Downtown Blueprint***, and the process used to complete the ***Blueprint***, are very different from what was done in the past since:

- The process used to complete the ***Downtown Blueprint*** was highly inclusive, involving literally hundreds of community members, meaning that the recommendations included in the ***Blueprint*** are based on the community's desires and concerns;
- The ***Downtown Blueprint*** is not a plan or a study but a five-year, strategic course of action specifically designed to address the unique opportunities facing Downtown, as well as the specific needs of Downtown Big Rapids;
- The ***Downtown Blueprint*** addresses every major issue facing Downtown Big Rapids and recommends specific steps for addressing each of those issues;
- The ***Downtown Blueprint*** recommendations are highly pragmatic, being geared to local capabilities and sensibilities;
- The ***Downtown Blueprint*** is highly action-oriented, implementation-oriented, and success-oriented;

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- The methodology used to define the **Downtown Blueprint** has been used as the basis of a national Downtown technical assistance program since 1992 and as the basis for three Statewide Downtown technical assistance programs with great success; and
- The methodology used to define the **Blueprint** has been proven to yield substantial results, as can be seen from the benchmarks tracked by communities chosen to participate in the **Cool Cities Blueprints for Michigan's Downtowns** program.

2. "Theme"

Some locally desire to create a physical "theme" for Downtown. If this is done, the theme should be:

***Preservation of Downtown's older architecture,
Pedestrian-orientation, and small town feel.***

However, it must be realized that creating an economic theme for Downtown Big Rapids – a clear reason for being – is at least as important as a physical theme. Downtown's economic theme should be:

***A quality collection of
Independently owned
Specialty shops, including
Retail, food, art, and entertainment businesses.***

3. Don't Suburbanize

Over time, the edges of Michigan Avenue within Downtown have been "suburbanized," meaning old buildings have been demolished and new buildings have been set back from the sidewalk with parking placed in front. This suburban pattern of development should not be continued, since it robs Downtown of its pedestrian-orientation and unique physical appeal. Instead, Michigan Avenue's zero lot line structures (those built at the sidewalk line) should be retained. And, when opportunities arise, the streetwall should be recreated on Michigan (from Linden to Pine) by building new structures at the sidewalk line with parking in the rear.

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4. *Center of Community Life*

Downtown is and must remain the center of community life in Big Rapids. This means that the community's major special events and community-oriented entertainment should be held in Downtown. And, any anchors serving the community – such as a new library building, should be located in Downtown.

5. *Commercial Area Linkage*

It is understood that there is a desire locally to “link” the community's three commercial areas – north, east, and Downtown. If this is done, it should be remembered that:

- Each of these three areas must have its own identity – in terms of physical and economic “themes” – so that they can co-exist and all be successful; and
- The north and east commercial areas have unique issues that should be addressed with tailor-made actions – they cannot be addressed by “copying” actions that are implemented in and for Downtown.

6. *Pro-Business AND Pro-Quality*

The word locally is that, while the perception might have been that City Hall was not “easy to deal with” in the past, this perception is changing for the better. Therefore, it is important that City Hall make it known that local government is highly pro-business AND pro-quality – and that City Hall delivers on that promise.

7. *Attitudes*

It has been said locally that an attitude of “this is good enough” prevails in the community. It is clear to HyettPalma that the community's leadership wants Downtown to be further enhanced and believes in the potential to make that happen. Therefore, the ***Downtown Blueprint*** should be embraced and aggressively implemented as a means of demonstrating that Big Rapids can “have more, better, and nicer” in its Downtown.

8. *History Can Propel Commerce*

It is important to save, appropriately renovate, and reuse a Downtown's older buildings – as is being done in Downtown Big Rapids – as a way of making that Downtown a distinctive alternative to the competition. In addition, saving Downtown's older architecture is important since heritage tourism (comprised of

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tourists who choose to visit historic areas) is the fastest growing segment of the hospitality industry. And, surveys have shown that heritage tourists spend more days at a destination and spend more per day than other types of tourists.

9. *Someone Might Complain!*

Those involved in implementing this ***Downtown Blueprint*** must realize that – at any given point of implementation – someone might “complain” or take issue with what is being done. This is the norm. However, the complaints of a few must not be allowed to derail implementation of the ***Downtown Blueprint*** since the recommendations it contains:

- Are based on the concerns and desires most frequently voiced by the community; and
- Were specifically tailored to be in the best interest of Downtown as a whole.

10. *Downtown Expansion*

The boundaries of Downtown should not be changed to make the area larger at this time. Instead, the current boundary lines should be held in order to strengthen demand and values within Downtown and, thereby, encourage and justify reinvestment and redevelopment in Downtown. When this occurs to a substantial degree, resulting in the significant enhancement of Downtown, then the expansion of Downtown might be considered. At that time, natural market forces should be reinforced by encouraging commercial development along State Street (where there is tremendous room for redevelopment) and along Michigan, to the north of Pine Street.

11. *As Downtown Goes . . .*

It is a fact that a healthy, thriving Downtown stands as a symbol of the quality-of-life enjoyed by a community's residents. And, the more successful a Downtown becomes, the healthier and more sought after the entire community becomes. This has led to the adage “as Downtown goes, so goes the town.” Therefore, the further enhancement of Downtown Big Rapids should be made a priority of the entire community's leadership – and not of just those in Downtown – since all segments of the community will prosper as a result of Downtown's increased vitality.

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12. *Public "Education"*

Those involved in Downtown's enhancement should embrace the above guidelines and espouse them publicly at every possible and pertinent opportunity. In that way, the general public will become more informed about the best ways to approach and view Downtown's enhancement, and more clearly understand the benefits of an economically healthier, more vibrant, and increasingly sustainable Downtown.

Public Improvements

The following improvements should be made to Downtown's public spaces in order to improve Downtown's overall curb appeal.

1. *Streetscape*

The streetscape improvements made along Michigan Avenue in the 1980s are in need of updating since, after over twenty years, they are looking tired and worn – especially in comparison to the recently renovated buildings along Michigan. To address this issue, a comprehensive streetscape plan should be designed by a professional landscape architect having considerable experience in Downtowns. The streetscape plan should focus on Michigan Avenue and on the entrances to Downtown on State and Maple and include:

- Pedestrian-scale, "historic" lighting that complements Downtown's older architecture and provides a sufficient level of light that allows for both ambiance and public safety – and do away with the highway-oriented cobra light standards;
- Benches, trash receptacles, and planters that are coordinated and in keeping with Downtown's older architecture – coordinated in terms of style and color;
- Street trees that do not block store windows or business signs, such as the male ginkgo tree, and electricity so that trees can be lighted at night;
- Flowers in on-street planters and/or hanging baskets, along with an irrigation system for ease of maintenance;

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- Customized banners for streetlight poles, changed seasonally;
- The undergrounding of all utility wires; and
- Sidewalks and crosswalks that are attractive plus designed for ease of maintenance and snow removal.

The streetscape plan should be designed to:

- Improve Downtown's visual appeal while stressing minimalism;
- Contain elements and materials that are easy to maintain;
- Allow pedestrian and motorist interest to remain on Downtown's businesses; and
- Establish standards that can be used as a guide by the City and by other entities that might have reason to make improvements in Downtown, such as MDOT.

2. Alleys

Downtown's alleys should be improved by:

- Screening dumpsters;
- Ensuring that they are well-paved and lighted; and
- Paving all parking areas – private and public – to lessen the presence of dirt.

3. Michigan Avenue

It is understood that Michigan Avenue is to be resurfaced in the summer of 2006. At that time, steps should also be taken to:

- Replace existing crosswalks with materials that are more visible and more easily maintained – such as reflective striping; and

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- Add “pedestrian crossing” signs at all crosswalks.

4. Wayfinding

Ferris State University (FSU) has created a “wayfinding system,” which is a series of professionally designed signs leading motorists to campus and to specific locations on campus. The City has made a start at wayfinding with signs on Perry and State that direct motorists to Downtown and with signs that mark Downtown’s public parking lots. Now, the City should take the next step and have a comprehensive, coordinated wayfinding system professionally designed for Downtown. That system should be designed to reflect the physical and economic “themes” being created for Downtown (as defined in this document) and should include signs that:

- Direct motorists to Big Rapids;
- Direct motorists to Downtown;
- Welcome motorists at the entrances to the City and Downtown;
- Direct motorists to Downtown public parking lots;
- Identify public parking lots (without specifying the number of spaces in each lot); and
- Thank motorists for visiting Downtown Big Rapids.

5. Connect with Riverwalk

In an effort to enable them to share users, Downtown and the Riverwalk should be “connected” by:

- Wayfinding signs that direct motorists to Downtown from the Riverwalk, and vice versa, on the primary driving route between the two; and
- Ensuring the presence of adequate sidewalks and lighting along Maple, as the primary pedestrian route between the two.

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6. *Connect with FSU*

At this time, it appears that students prefer to drive between Ferris State University and Downtown. However, to encourage greater connection between the two for those on foot and bicycle:

- Adequate lighting and walks should be maintained on Michigan Avenue; and
- The trail between Downtown and FSU should be completed.

7. *Town Green & Pocket Park*

Large public parking lots now exist on both sides of Michigan Avenue, just to the south of Pine Street. To create a focal point in Downtown, and to lessen the visual impact of these parking areas, consideration should be given to creating a semblance of a Town Green here. This should be done by:

- Retaining a landscape architect to design the Town Green;
- Beautifying and softening the area with greenery, a fountain, and public art;
- Creating a multi-purpose and movable staging area where special events could be held;
- Possibly linking both sides of Michigan Avenue with greenery or other techniques, but not closing Michigan Avenue;
- Possibly connecting the Town Green with Mitchell Creek Park; and
- Retaining as many public parking spaces as possible.

In addition, the pocket park that now exists on the west side of Michigan Avenue should be redesigned so that it looks and functions as a more visible small park.



Cool Cities Blueprints for Michigan's Downtowns

Private Property Improvements

The following steps should be taken to encourage Downtown's private property owners to make improvements needed to the exteriors of their buildings.

1. Design Guidelines

Design guidelines should be prepared to guide the appropriate renovation of all existing buildings and the construction of new infill buildings in Downtown. The guidelines should be prepared by a qualified architect or architectural historian with extensive experience working in Downtowns.

2. Design Assistance

Preliminary design assistance, provided by a qualified architect or architectural historian, should be provided to any Downtown building owner who desires to undertake renovation or new construction projects consistent with the Downtown design guidelines.

3. Façade Grants

In place of the existing revolving loan program, a program should be created that offers grants to owners who want to improve the front and/or rear façades of Downtown buildings. The program should offer matching grants of up to \$5,000 to \$7,500 per building to owners willing to undertake façade improvements that are consistent with the Downtown design guidelines.

4. Historic Tax Incentives

Historic tax incentives, whether federal or state, should be sought for all appropriate renovation projects undertaken in Downtown. Information concerning all available historic tax incentives should be given to all Downtown property owners and, when appropriate, these incentives should be explained to interested property owners to ensure that they are sought at every reasonable opportunity.

5. Historic Districts

Having a Downtown listed on the National Register of Historic Places has proven to be a prestigious designation that can be used to market an area to heritage tourists. Therefore, Michigan's State Historic Preservation Officer should be contacted to discuss the possibility of obtaining such designation for Downtown.

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Big Rapids. (It should be noted that listing on the National Register does not curtail an owner's ability to demolish a structure that is located in the district.)

During the ***Downtown Blueprint*** process, community members repeatedly stressed their belief in the importance of Downtown's history, small town feel, and older buildings. Community members also repeatedly expressed their pleasure with Downtown buildings that have recently been lovingly restored by their owners – and expressed a strong desire for more of the same to occur in Downtown. Therefore, if the community truly wishes to see Downtown's older architecture saved, appropriately renovated, and reused, consideration should be given to creating a local historic district. Typically, in such districts, when an owner decides to make exterior changes that require a building permit, those changes must be reviewed by a historic district commission. And, in such districts, the City has the power to delay – not prohibit – demolition of a contributing building for a certain amount of time, as specified by ordinance. Local historic districts have been shown to protect real estate investments and, thereby, increase the value of the buildings they contain. Therefore, if it is determined the local historic district should be pursued, the drive for that designation should be initiated by Downtown's property owners, and not by City Hall.

6. MSHDA Incentives

The Michigan State Housing Development Authority has a number of incentive programs in place – both old and brand new – that the City should become acutely familiar with and take as much advantage of as possible. More information concerning incentives is included in the MSHDA memo contained in the *Appendix* of this ***Downtown Blueprint***.

7. Abatements

It is HyettPalma's view that, except where seriously deteriorated properties are involved, tax abatements are not needed and should not be offered to attract business prospects and real estate investors to Downtown Big Rapids. Instead, given Downtown's health, the other incentives mentioned above should be sufficient to interest investors in Downtown Big Rapids. In addition, the generous offering of tax abatements can lead a City down a dangerous path, by hurting its future ability to reinvest in and address the needs of its Downtown.

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8. Problem Properties

Some locally are concerned about the condition of several of older buildings in Downtown Big Rapids. It is critical that an overall effort be made to induce owners of all Downtown properties to condition their building space, ensure that it has a continued, productive life in Downtown and, thereby, abate any negative economic vibes being transmitted by deteriorated buildings. It is a fact that substandard buildings negatively impact all surrounding real estate, regardless of how much effort is made to enhance the properties surrounding them.

Investors should be attracted through implementation of the overall marketing campaign, recommended for Downtown later in this chapter, and by getting the word out about the Downtown enhancement effort.

In cases where properties have experienced severe disinvestment – to the point where the private sector shows no interest in them – the City should act as a good agent by either:

- Incentivizing the properties to make them more attractive to private investors;
- Acquiring the properties and transferring them to private owners; or
- Acquiring the properties and putting them to public use, such as for open space, parking, etc.

Housing

There appears to be a prevailing attitude locally that housing in a given Downtown only appeals to students or seniors – and that those who could afford to live elsewhere would choose to do so. This could not be further from the truth, as has been seen in Downtowns across Michigan and across the nation, where quality Downtown apartments and condos have been snatched up by people of all ages and means, usually before they are even completed. And, not only has quality Downtown housing proven to be of interest to a wide segment of the market, but adding housing to a Downtown's mix of uses has proven to benefit that Downtown's businesses, and as a result, its economic success and vitality.



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Therefore, additional quality housing units should be created in and adjacent to Downtown Big Rapids by:

- Creating additional upper story housing in Downtown, including pursuing pertinent incentives offered by MSHDA;
- Creating housing units that attract and appeal to a diversity of age and income groups – and not just students and seniors; and
- Encouraging the restoration of historic homes located in neighborhoods adjacent to Downtown, and their return to single-family dwellings.

As Downtown's appeal increases, and with the advent of the Riverwalk, it can be expected that the appeal of homes in areas adjacent to Downtown and the Riverwalk will also increase.

Parking

The following actions should be taken to address Downtown parking.

1. System

The current system of parking time limits, both on-street and in public lots, is complicated and confusing. To make it more user-friendly, a parking specialist – with Downtown experience – should be retained for a day or two to review the system and advise the City on how it can be streamlined in terms of the mix and location of time limits. The goal should be to make the system easier for the public to understand and use while obtaining turnover where needed. (Please note that HyettPalma is not recommending that a lengthy or costly parking study be completed for Downtown.) It is suggested that the parking professional be retained after The Pioneer Group's corporate headquarters is fully open and operational.

2. Public Parking Management and Turnover

Based on discussions with the Big Rapids Police Department, it appears that most of Downtown's parking violators are the normal suspects found in any Downtown – employers and employees who park – and over-park – in on-street spaces intended for use by Downtown spenders.

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The overall intent of the Downtown Big Rapids parking management system should be to:

- Provide adequate and convenient short-term, on- and off-street turn-over in public parking spaces for Downtown spenders;
- Provide longer-term, perimeter on- and off-street public parking spaces for Downtown employers and employees, when appropriate space cannot be provided on-site by building owners;
- Make every reasonable accommodation for Downtown public resident parking, when appropriate space cannot be reasonably provided on-site by building owners; and
- Make it very difficult and uncomfortable for those who work in Downtown to abuse the parking management system by parking in public on- and off-street spaces designated for spenders, meaning the most convenient spaces near businesses.

It is strongly recommended that the Police Department make a “special” effort to target enforcement toward those who repeatedly violate the parking time limits in on- and off-street spaces near shops – particularly 2-hour spaces. Consideration should be given to increasing the fines charged to repeat violators. For example, if an employee violates the system by over-parking in a customer space more than once per week, the second and each additional offense should carry a fine that is double or triple the fine during the specified time period – in this case per week. Again, the intent of the management system should be to target repeat violators, not penalize the Downtown spender who happens to stay a little longer than expected.

As an alternative to the current parking time monitoring system, which entails marking tires with toothpicks, consideration should be given to recording tag numbers, either by hand or by hand-held computer.

3. Paving

To encourage their maximum use, all Downtown parking lots – public as well as private – should be paved, lighted, landscaped, and striped.

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4. Future Supply

In the future, if additional parking spaces are needed in Downtown, there will only be two ways of creating that needed supply – by going out (creating more surface level lots) or by going up (building a parking ramp). It is strongly suggested that:

- Additional parking lots or a parking ramp should not be created on Michigan Avenue;
- Consideration should be given to building a parking ramp on an existing surface parking lot, when demand warrants; and
- A parking professional should be retained, at that time, to identify the optimum location of the ramp.

Business Development

The following steps should be taken to strengthen Downtown's business mix, ability to attract customers, and economic vitality.

1. Outdoor Dining

Food establishments in Downtown should be allowed to offer outdoor seating to their patrons. Restaurants should be allowed to serve alcoholic beverages at outdoor seating, as long as they do so consistent with Michigan law.

Care should also be taken to ensure that all outdoor areas used for dining – particularly those on public right-of-way – are free of food waste and that no food wastes are stored on the public right-of-way, such as at busing stations or other forms of servicing areas.

2. Grocery Store

Instead of the return of a large, traditional grocery store, the business development effort should be used to attract and recruit small, specialty markets. These should include:

- A fish market;
- A wine and cheese shop;

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- Gourmet food items; and
- Organic food.

3. Farmers Market

A farmers market should be created in Downtown that:

- Is located on the parking lot in front of City Hall, which could potentially be accomplished as part of the Town Green previously recommended in this **Downtown Blueprint**;
- Includes prepared food, arts, crafts, and entertainment in addition to produce;
- Is open on Saturday mornings; and
- Is managed by a market master, to ensure that it is of high quality and professionally run.

4. Public Safety

The City now has an officer assigned to Downtown, and Downtown is patrolled by foot, bike, car, and horse. In addition, the City and FSU have developed and are continuing to nurture the cooperative working relationship of their security forces. Both of these initiatives appear to have reduced public safety issues in Downtown considerably. Therefore, they should be continued into the future.

While there is some local concern related to the potential conflict between late night business hours and residential tranquility, this issue should be addressed by appropriate police action, not through the restriction of business placement.

5. Hours

Business owners should understand that college students, who comprise half the city's population, are extremely nocturnal by nature. And, with the advent of big box retailers on Perry Street, the community's full-time residents are being conditioned to expect later store hours. Therefore, Downtown's business owners should consider shifting to later hours – for example, opening an hour later in the morning and staying open an hour later in the evening – to accommodate the shopping desires and expectations of area residents.

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6. Windows

All first floor business owners should use their windows to the maximum extent possible as a marketing tool by:

- Changing window displays AT LEAST once every two weeks; and
- Regularly keeping display window lights on until at least midnight.

7. Wireless

All pertinent businesses, such as lunch places and coffeehouses, should offer wireless zones for laptop use. And, the City should consider making all public spaces in Downtown – such as the Town Green and pocket park – wireless zones as well.

8. Economic “Theme”

As was stated earlier, it is equally important for Downtown Big Rapids to become known for an economic “theme” as for a particular physical ambience. Downtown’s economic image and reality should be as follows.

- Michigan Avenue is the most pedestrian-oriented portion of Downtown. First floor spaces here should be filled with specialty retail, food, art, and entertainment businesses. Doing so will increase Downtown’s ability to act as a destination that entices customers to come, stroll, linger, and shop at a variety of shops on a given trip. This clustering of specialty businesses in first floor spaces is so important to Downtown’s ability to draw customers that consideration should be given to rezoning Michigan, from Linden to Maple, so that the ability of office businesses to locate in these spaces is limited.
- The upper floors along Michigan should be filled with office businesses and housing.
- A goal should be to recreate the pedestrian-orientation of the third block of Michigan, from Maple to Pine. This would mean encouraging the redevelopment of existing strip malls and structures that are now set back from the street with zero lot line structures that are located at the sidewalk

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line with parking at the rear. This should be encouraged as demand increases in Downtown.

- The balance of the Downtown project area is auto-oriented, rather than pedestrian-oriented. Appropriate uses for this area include convenience retail businesses, offices, service businesses, and food establishments.

9. Systems

Clear systems are needed in terms of business retention and business recruitment in Downtown so that those seeking assistance know where their “first stop” should be. Logically, either the Downtown Business Association (DBA) or the Chamber of Commerce should function as the starting point for existing Downtown business owners seeking information, for business prospects seeking a Downtown location, or for those interested in investing in Downtown real estate. The DBA and Chamber leadership should come together to decide which entity should serve as the first-stop-shop for Downtown retention and recruitment.

Regardless of whether the DBA or Chamber takes the lead, business retention in Downtown should include:

- Staff being available to meet one-on-one with any Downtown business owner seeking information or assistance; and
- Providing owners with the needed assistance or placing them in touch with appropriate service providers.

And again, regardless of who takes the lead, the business recruitment effort in Downtown should entail those initiatives shown below.

10. Recruitment

The following course of action should be employed to create new businesses in Downtown Big Rapids.

- Top List

The initial targets for business enhancement – meaning both existing business re-orientation and new business placement – should include:

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- Food markets;
- Fine dining with entertainment;
- Coffeehouse with entertainment;
- Optical products and services;
- Amenities for Downtown's residents -- e.g., dry cleaning, tailoring, physical fitness facilities, etc.;
- Art films;
- Art galleries and studios;

- Full List

Following is the complete listing of businesses and other uses appropriate for Downtown Big Rapids.

Prepared Food

- Fine Dining Restaurants;
- Moderate Priced Restaurants;
- Sandwich Shops;
- Bistros;
- Coffee Houses;
- Delis;
- Bakeries;
- Candy/Ice Cream/Yogurt Shops;
- Pubs/Taverns -- with Atmosphere/Operation Welcoming to Families; and
- Ethnic Foods -- i.e., Italian, Greek, French, Chinese, Mexican, etc.

Food for Home

- Small market;
- Organic Grocer;
- Gourmet Grocer;
- Health Foods;
- Meat/Fish Market; and
- Wine/Cheese Shops.

Entertainment

- Live Theater;
- Entertainment in Restaurants -- i.e., piano player, guitarist, small combos, dancing, etc.; and
- Movie Theater.

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Specialty Retail

- Antiques;
- Art Galleries, Framing and Supplies;
- Bike Shop (Sales and Rental);
- Books;
- Cameras and Photo Supplies;
- Casual Apparel and Accessories;
- Computers/Software;
- Florist;
- Gifts, Stationery and Cards;
- Small Hardware;
- Home Decorating Products and Design Services;
- Music (Recorded and Sheet);
- Musical Instruments;
- Newsstand;
- Office/School Supplies;
- Optical Products;
- Sewing Supplies;
- Shoes, Dress and Casual;
- Small Variety Store;
- Sporting Goods;
- Toys, Games and Crafts;
- Traditional and Costume Jewelry;
- Wall Coverings and Paint; and
- Women's Apparel and Accessories.

Convenience Retail/Select Services

- Barber Shops;
- Beauty Shops;
- Dance Studio;
- Dry Cleaners/Tailor Shop;
- Pharmacy;
- Physical Fitness Facility;
- Shoe Repair/Shine; and
- Video Rental.

Offices

- Accounting, Auditing, Bookkeeping;
- Advertising;
- Child Care Services;
- Commercial Banks;
- Computer and Data Processing;
- Credit Reporting and Collection;

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- Credit Unions;
- Dentists Offices and Clinics;
- Doctors Offices and Clinics;
- Engineering, Architectural Services;
- Fire, Marine Casualty Insurance;
- General Government;
- Health and Allied Services;
- Home Health Care Services;
- Individual and Family Services;
- Legal Services;
- Library;
- Life Insurance;
- Management and Public Relations;
- Medical Service and Health Insurance;
- National Security;
- Newspapers and Other Media Outlets;
- Passenger Transportation Arrangement;
- Personnel Supply Services;
- Photographic Studios;
- Post Office;
- Print Shops;
- Public Order and Safety;
- Real Estate Agents and Managers;
- Residential Care;
- Savings Institutions;
- Security Brokers and Dealers;
- Subdividers and Developers;
- Tax Services; and
- Title Abstract and Insurance Offices.

Housing and Other Uses

- Housing above first floor uses;
- Housing as infill on redeveloped lots, underutilized lots and surface parking lots;
- Museums;
- Churches in buildings designed as churches, not storefronts; and
- Hotel facilities, if market conditions prove feasible in the future.

- *Internal*

Every existing business owner in Downtown Big Rapids should be strongly encouraged and assisted, as possible, to meet the identified needs and desires of the marketplace through line expansions and contractions, or through the opening of new doors or expansion of existing floor space. This form of business

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creation is known as internal business recruitment. And, it is often the most cost-effective, efficient, and profitable form of business creation. Therefore, every effort should be made, initially, to encourage more internal business creation.

- External

The seeking of business prospects located outside of Downtown, alone, will not likely result in the range of goods and services desired by trade area residents and visitors. The implementation of all enhancement initiatives described in this **Downtown Blueprint** will, however, better condition the marketplace to understand and participate in creating the overall mix of businesses sought for Downtown Big Rapids. If outreach, alone, were the answer, a broader range of businesses would likely have already been attracted to Downtown.

Therefore, as a first step before aggressive outreach for new business prospects, all actions of the **Downtown Blueprint** should be well underway, including the use of the marketing effort described below to let the marketplace know what is happening in Downtown and what additional businesses are being sought for Downtown. This will help to stimulate growing interest in being located in a progressive, improving, and economically "safe" environment.

As previously noted, either the Downtown Business Association (DBA) or the Chamber of Commerce should function as the starting point for business owners seeking information, for business prospects seeking a Downtown location, or for those interested in Downtown real estate. When identified, these prospective investors should be assisted in finding appropriate space and navigating all systems required locally to open a business and/or purchase a building in Downtown Big Rapids.

When prospects are not forthcoming, then prospects should be sought from throughout the greater trade area and throughout central, northern, and western Michigan. Prospects should be sought in-person, not through mass- or blind-mailings. Prospects, when identified in the field, should be invited to visit Downtown Big Rapids and examine building space. Every effort should be made to assist these business prospects in making the decision to open a new establishment in Downtown Big Rapids. An effective recruitment strategy is to look for appropriate businesses that have already opened more than one outlet – either in one community or in multiple locations – since these owners have already determined how to manage more than one. And, those leading the

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recruitment effort should not be shy about encouraging businesses to relocate to Downtown Big Rapids and letting owners determine if that is a wise business decision.

Marketing

The following overall marketing strategy should be implemented to enhance Downtown's image and ability to attract additional customers, business prospects, and investors.

1. Overall "Theme"

Those participating in the ***Downtown Blueprint*** process repeatedly expressed a desire to see an overall "theme" created for Downtown; one for which Downtown could become known and, thereby, one that would make Downtown distinctive. When asked what makes Downtown Big Rapids special, those participating in the ***Downtown Blueprint*** process repeatedly singled out one factor – the friendliness found in Downtown. Due to this consensus, the overall image created for Downtown Big Rapids should stress Downtown's friendliness as a way of making Downtown unique in the minds of the buying public – and, those who own and work in Downtown businesses must deliver on that promise every single day. A slogan that should be considered to create this overall image for Downtown is:

***Downtown Big Rapids –
The Downtown with a Great Big Heart.***

2. Story Placement

A relentless effort should be made to get stories about Downtown placed with all major print and electronic media located throughout the region. Doing so is extremely important to recreate Downtown's image, pique the interest of the buying public, and get the attention of business prospects and investors. The story placement effort should include:

- Working closely with *The Torch*, which is the FSU paper, to get stories placed in that publication regularly;
- Working closely with *The Pioneer*, to also get stories placed in that paper on a regular basis; and

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- Seeking the guidance, advice, and assistance of The Pioneer Group in devising and implementing a campaign to get stories placed with other media throughout the region.

3. Columns

The Chamber of Commerce and The Pioneer Group should be asked to run a “news from Downtown column” as a regular feature. The columns should generate excitement about Downtown by detailing the successes being realized in Downtown. And, they should be written by City/DBA staff working with Downtown.

4. Web Presence

Web sites are now maintained by the Downtown Business Association, the City of Big Rapids, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB). It is extremely important that Downtown have an on-line presence – and that Downtown is portrayed on-line as an irresistible destination – if a goal is to attract additional students, local residents, and tourists to Downtown. Therefore, consideration should be given to:

- Creating a Downtown section on the Web sites of the Chamber, City, and CVB; and
- Revamping the DBA Web site to be more externally oriented, so that it is used primarily to market Downtown, generate excitement about Downtown, and attract customers and investors to Downtown – and secondarily to promote the DBA.

5. Special Events

The two Downtown events that draw the largest number of attendees at this time are the evening Festival of Lights Parade and Downtown Trick or Treating, both of which are sponsored by the DBA. In addition, the DBA holds a variety of other events in Downtown that draw smaller numbers.

Since the production of events is extremely labor-intensive and weather-sensitive, it is suggested that:

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- The DBA should reevaluate its event schedule with the goal of holding fewer events, but events that become annual, signature events for which Downtown and Big Rapids become known;
- The signature events should be truly special and unique to Downtown Big Rapids;
- Consideration should be given to amplifying the Christmas and Halloween events now held in Downtown so they become unique, signature events that draw large numbers each year;
- Once the above occurs, consideration should be given to creating a third signature event in Downtown;
- All of Downtown's signature events should be highly family-oriented and should stress Downtown's overall theme of being extremely friendly; and
- All special events now held in Big Rapids – but not in Downtown – that draw large numbers should be moved to Downtown, whenever possible, in order to solidify Downtown's role as the center of community life in Big Rapids.

6. FSU

The following steps should be taken to cultivate FSU students (and their parents) as Downtown customers:

- Downtown should be discussed at each freshman/parent orientation session;
- At a minimum, the Downtown brochure mentioned below should be included in all orientation packets given to students and their parents;
- The Bulldog Bonanza event, sponsored by the Chamber, should be held in Downtown, from 10:00 PM to 2:00 AM, with students bussed from and to campus and Downtown businesses staying open for them;

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- Ads that portray Downtown's inviting image should be run on a regular basis in programs produced for events held at Williams Auditorium;
- Image ads should be run in *The Torch* on a regular basis throughout the year, along with the "news from Downtown" column mentioned earlier; and
- Periodic focus groups should be held with FSU students, as was done during the **Downtown Blueprint** process, to keep a finger on the pulse of what students like, dislike, and would like to see improved in Downtown.

It should be noted that making Downtown more appealing to students will not only benefit Downtown's businesses, but will also be of benefit to FSU, since it has been found that a healthy Downtown serves as a strong tool in student recruitment.

7. Kiosk

The information kiosk now in place in Downtown should be kept current and well-maintained or removed.

8. Concerts

A free, summer concert series should be held in Downtown, either in the pocket park or in the Town Green discussed earlier. The series should include a variety of music types, so that a variety of generations are attracted to Downtown, and should be widely publicized.

9. Brochure

A Downtown brochure should be printed that:

- Is professionally designed;
- Conveys Downtown's image and positions Downtown as an enticing destination;
- Includes all of Downtown's businesses and attractions – ideally, at no charge; and

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- Is widely distributed at all locations where the area's year-round residents, students, and tourists tend to gather – including the stores on Perry Street.

10. Advertising

In addition to advertising done by individual business owners – which should be done weekly all through the year – the following types of advertising should occur to market Downtown and its businesses:

- Image advertising – to recreate and cement Downtown's image as incomparably friendly, unique, and enticing;
- Cross-marketing – to enable Downtown's businesses to share customers (such as the movies and food establishments) and to make connections between Downtown and FSU and Downtown and the Riverwalk; and
- Collective advertising – that would feature participating businesses in an effort to display Downtown's variety and depth of offerings.

The above advertising should be done all year long, and not just in conjunction with special events and holidays.

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Partnership for Success



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VII. PARTNERSHIP FOR SUCCESS

The most successful Downtown enhancement efforts nationwide are those implemented by a partnership of a community's public, business, non-profit, and residential sectors. For Downtown Big Rapids to reach its full potential, Downtown's key leaders and constituents from those sectors ***must*** continue to:

- Plan together and implement together – in partnership;
- Embrace a shared direction and a unified voice;
- Provide the strong and committed leadership needed for implementation to occur; and
- Take effective and quality ***action*** – and stimulate others to take such action – that is in the best interest of Downtown as a whole.

This is essential for Downtown success. The following actions are recommended to allow this to occur in Downtown Big Rapids.

Existing Entities

The following entities are now, and should continue to be, involved in Downtown's enhancement:

- The Downtown Development Authority (DDA);
- The Big Rapids Downtown Business Association (DBA);
- The Mecosta County Area Chamber of Commerce;
- The Big Rapids Housing Commission;
- The Greater Big Rapids Convention & Visitors Bureau;
- The Mecosta County Economic Development Corporation;
- The Mecosta County Community Foundation;
- Ferris State University;
- The City government; and
- The County government.

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Lead Role

The DBA should assume the lead role, in partnership with the City government, in seeing that this ***Downtown Blueprint*** is implemented. And ideally, to pull the DBA and the City more closely together in this effort, the following would occur:

- The DBA board and the DDA board would be one and the same; and
- The Mayor and a City Commissioner would be added to the DBA/DDA board, by virtue of their offices but as voting members.

Staff

The DBA is now staffed by a part-time director, who is compensated for this role with DDA funds, and who is also a City employee. It must be recognized that, by virtue of completing this ***Downtown Blueprint***, a considerable amount of additional work will have been created for all involved in Downtown's enhancement. Since only so much can be accomplished by a part-time staff member and by well-meaning volunteers, it is suggested that:

- The City should hire a professional having experience with Downtowns;
- This professional should be assigned to work with the DBA's part-time director to implement the ***Downtown Blueprint***; and
- The City should also have this professional work with the community's two other business districts – to the north and east – to assist with the enhancement of those areas.

It must be noted that, as it relates to Downtown, the retained professional should focus on implementing the portions of the ***Downtown Blueprint*** related to business development and spurring private property improvements. And, volunteers should continue to take the lead on doing special events and marketing.

Downtown Partnership

The Process Committee, formed by the City at the request of HyettPalma to oversee the ***Downtown Blueprint*** process, was comprised of the heads of the entities listed above and constituted a remarkable cross-section of leadership

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from both Downtown and from Big Rapids as a whole. HyettPalma believes that, by working as a group, those on the Process Committee could move Downtown's enhancement forward with great speed. Therefore, it is suggested that the Process Committee be kept in place as the Downtown Partnership which:

- Should initially meet to discuss the ***Downtown Blueprint*** and determine which of the entities listed above should assume responsibility for implementing each of the ***Blueprint*** recommendations;
- Would meet quarterly for at least the timeframe covered by the ***Downtown Blueprint***, which is a period of five years;
- Can and should provide the strength and leadership needed to tackle tough Downtown issues, overcome any criticism of the enhancement effort which arises, see that the ***Downtown Blueprint*** is implemented in a timely and quality manner, and stimulate greater investor confidence in Downtown Big Rapids; and
- Keep the enhancement effort on track.

Funding

The DDA currently generates approximately \$20,000 per year through a two mill assessment. This level of funding is not sufficient to make the improvements needed in Downtown. Therefore, this funding level should be augmented in the following manner.

- The City should give serious consideration to creating a Tax Increment Finance Authority (TIFA) in Downtown. This would allow the increased property tax revenues generated in Downtown, due to reinvestment, to be captured and dedicated to Downtown improvements. And ideally, if a TIFA is created, the TIFA board, DDA board, and DBA board should all be one.
- The City should consider making an annual allocation of general funds toward implementation of this ***Downtown Blueprint***. This should be palatable since the amount of property tax revenues generated in Downtown has increased substantially, with the renovation of the Nisbett-

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Fairman Buildings, the Schuberg building, and The Pioneer Group corporate headquarters, to name just a few.

- In addition, a community-wide fundraising campaign should be launched to garner revenue that might be needed to implement the ***Downtown Blueprint***, above and beyond the level of funds generated by the DDA, TIFA, and City allocation.

The community-wide fundraising campaign should target the following potential funding sources:

- State, County, and Township governments;
- Federal programs;
- Non-profit groups;
- Industry, corporations, and major employers;
- Business owners, commercial property owners, and real estate developers;
- Banks, utilities, and institutions;
- Area foundations;
- Service clubs; and
- Any individual, entity, or institution that stands to benefit from an enhanced Downtown Big Rapids.

Document

Documenting the successes that are realized as a result of the ***Downtown Blueprint*** will be very important for increasing optimism about Downtown's future, lessening criticism of the enhancement effort, and increasing investor confidence in Downtown. Therefore, Downtown's successes should be documented by producing a DDA/DBA/TIFA annual report and by tracking the

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following benchmarks annually, which is required to be a part of the ***Cool Cities Blueprints for Michigan's Downtowns*** program:

- Total taxable value of property in Downtown;
- Number of new jobs created;
- Dollar amount of new private investment;
- Public improvements and their costs;
- Economic development tools utilized;
- List of business openings;
- List of business closings;
- Total number of businesses in Downtown;
- Total number of housing units;
- Occupied retail space (sq. ft.);
- Vacant retail space (sq. ft.);
- Occupied office space (sq. ft.);
- Vacant office space (sq. ft.);
- Occupied residential space (sq. ft.); and
- Vacant residential space (sq. ft.).

Adopt

The ***Downtown Blueprint*** should be adopted by the DDA and the DBA – and by the TIFA, if created – as the official Downtown guide. And, it is hoped that the

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Big Rapids City Council will adopt the ***Downtown Blueprint*** as the Downtown element of the City's comprehensive plan.



Cool Cities Blueprints for Michigan's Downtowns

Implementation Sequence



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VIII. IMPLEMENTATION SEQUENCE

This document contains numerous actions recommended for revitalizing Downtown Big Rapids. This chapter shows the recommended actions that should be carried out during the **first year** of the enhancement effort.

Toward the end of each year, the implementation sequence should be updated. And, within four to five years, consideration should be given to updating the entire ***Big Rapids Downtown Blueprint 2006***, depending on the level of program accomplishments realized.



Cool Cities Blueprints for Michigan's Downtowns

Year-1 Implementation Sequence Big Rapids Downtown Blueprint 2006

Partnership and Management Actions

1. Formal adoption by the DDA and DBA – and TIFA, if created – of the ***Big Rapids Downtown Blueprint 2006*** as the official guide for the further economic enhancement of Downtown Big Rapids.
2. Formal adoption by the City Council of the ***Downtown Blueprint*** as the Downtown element of the City's comprehensive plan.
3. DBA assumes aggressive lead role, in partnership with the City, in ***Downtown Blueprint*** implementation.
4. Hire a Downtown director.
5. Form Downtown Partnership, meeting quarterly to keep the effort on track.
6. Seek additional funding for enhancement effort.
7. Document results of enhancement effort via annual report and by tracking benchmarks.

Public Improvements Actions

1. Prepare a comprehensive streetscape plan for Michigan Avenue and the entrances to Downtown on State and Maple, including the considerations and elements recommended in the ***Downtown Blueprint***.
2. Implement streetscape improvements ASAP, including coordination of improvements with any MDOT traffic flow improvements.
3. Enhance alleys, as per recommendations of ***Downtown Blueprint***.
4. Enhance Michigan Avenue crosswalks at time of resurfacing.
5. Design Downtown wayfinding system and install ASAP.
6. Design and install Downtown/Riverwalk connector.
7. Design Downtown/FSU connector and install any needed improvements ASAP.
8. Design Town Green and enhanced Pocket Park and implement plan ASAP.



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Year-1 Implementation Sequence Big Rapids Downtown Blueprint 2006 (Continued)

Private Property Improvements Actions

1. Prepare design guidelines.
2. Provide preliminary design assistance.
3. Create program and offer façade grants.
4. Give information concerning historic tax incentives to all Downtown building owners.
5. Consider listing of Downtown on the National Register of Historic Places.
6. Seek all available MSHDA incentives to further enhance Downtown.
7. Abate problem properties, as per recommendations of the ***Downtown Blueprint***.

Housing Actions

1. Create additional Downtown housing, as per recommendations of the ***Downtown Blueprint***.

Parking Actions

1. Examine and enhance Downtown parking system, as per recommendations of the ***Downtown Blueprint***.
2. Target repeat parking violators, as per recommendations of the ***Downtown Blueprint***.
3. Enhance Downtown's existing off-street parking lots as needed, as per recommendations of the ***Downtown Blueprint***.

Business Development Actions

1. Allow outdoor dining on sidewalks.
2. Create and operate Downtown farmers market.
3. Continue current public safety initiatives in Downtown and coordination of efforts with FSU security personnel.
4. Work with and encourage merchants to offer more "market-driven" business hours.
5. Work with and encourage merchants to enhance window displays, as per recommendations of the ***Downtown Blueprint***.



Cool Cities Blueprints for Michigan's Downtowns

Year-1 Implementation Sequence Big Rapids Downtown Blueprint 2006 (Continued)

Business Development Actions (Continued)

6. Work with and encourage merchants to create wireless zones, and create wireless zones in all public spaces, as per recommendations of the ***Downtown Blueprint***.
7. Establish first-stop-shop for Downtown retention and recruitment, as per recommendations of the ***Downtown Blueprint***.
8. Create and recruit businesses, as per recommendations of the ***Downtown Blueprint***.

Marketing Actions

1. Employ Downtown theme slogan, as per recommendations of the ***Downtown Blueprint***.
2. Place stories.
3. Create and run "news from Downtown columns."
4. Enhance Downtown Web presence, as per recommendations of the ***Downtown Blueprint***.
5. Enhance Downtown events, as per recommendations of the ***Downtown Blueprint***.
6. Cultivate FSU students and parents as Downtown customers, as per recommendations of the ***Downtown Blueprint***.
7. Maintain or remove Downtown kiosk.
8. Hold Downtown summer concert series.
9. Prepare Downtown brochure and distribute.
9. Institute Downtown advertising, as per recommendations of the ***Downtown Blueprint***.



Cool Cities Blueprints for Michigan's Downtowns

Appendix

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Cool Cities Blueprints for Michigan's Downtowns

MSHDA Memo



STATE OF MICHIGAN

JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

MICHIGAN STATE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
LANSING

MICHAEL R. DeVOS
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

DATE: May 1, 2006

TO: City of Big Rapids

FROM: Steven Willobee, Community Assistance Team Specialist
Amy Korp, Community Development Specialist
Michigan State Housing Development Authority

SUBJECT: City of Big Rapids Blueprint
Hyett Palma Site Visit, April 18 – 21, 2006

Office of Community Development (OCD)

The Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA), Office of Community Development (OCD) has a variety of funding resources available for use by non-profit organizations and local units of government to address affordable housing and downtown revitalization needs. OCD utilizes funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and MSHDA resources and is referred to as the Housing Resource Fund (HRF). HRF funds are used to support local housing and community development activities, with an emphasis on projects that ensure sustainable and livable communities in Michigan.

The commercial market in downtown Big Rapids is steady. It is realistic to believe Big Rapids could increase downtown commerce with programs encouraging loft/apartment rentals above storefronts. Firm use of local rental codes, consistent use of solid zoning practices, and expanded marketing of the community and downtown will keep growth manageable and positive. MSHDA resources could be used to help accelerate the pace of improvement and ensure that a good mix of affordable and market rate rental housing is integral within the community.

MSHDA's Rental Rehabilitation Program, which could focus resources on upper-story levels of existing buildings to increase the number of downtown residents, would be most applicable for Big Rapids to initially pursue. The following is a description of the Rental Rehabilitation Program:

Rental Rehabilitation in a Downtown Area

The Rental Rehabilitation HRF component is designed to help a local unit of government provide funding assistance to improve investor-owned properties. Investor/owners are required to contribute a minimum 25 percent of the total project cost for each rental unit being rehabilitated. MSHDA provides up to \$25,000 in hard rehabilitation costs and up to \$10,000 for lead-based paint related costs for each rental unit. Rents are then controlled for 51 percent of the units and must remain affordable for a period of five years. The other 49 percent of units can be rented at market rates.



Rental Rehabilitation, continued

The MSHDA funds utilized in each project are held as a lien against the property during the five-year affordability period. While the local unit of government would have some flexibility on how the lien is structured, generally MSHDA's lien is forgiven at the end of the affordability period. All properties must be rehabilitated to meet at a minimum the HUD Section 8 Housing Quality Standards and local codes. Tenant incomes, on the affordable units, must be re-certified annually.

In addition to MSHDA's HRF funds, Big Rapids could also encourage downtown business owners to utilize the Property Improvement Program (PIP). The PIP loan can be used to finance renovations to both owner occupied and investor owned residential properties. Depending on the borrower's income, type of property, loan amount and other factors, the PIP loan carries an interest rate of between 4 and 8 percent and can be repaid over as much as 20 years. The PIP loan can be used to account for the owner/investor minimum match of 25 percent required in MSHDA's Rental Rehabilitation program.

Other MSHDA programs Big Rapids could eventually utilize to support the neighborhood surrounding the downtown include:

Homebuyer Assistance

The Homebuyer Assistance HRF component is designed to expand the homeownership opportunities for low to moderate-income homebuyers through acquisition and either rehabilitation or new construction of single-family homes. All homebuyers are required to receive pre-purchase homeownership counseling. Resale/recapture provisions are required to ensure long-term affordability of assisted units and are enforced through a lien on the property. Two basic models of homebuyer assistance are listed below.

Acquisition/Development/Resale (ADR) This model is designed to help a community or nonprofit organization acquire vacant land or problem properties, build new single-family homes or thoroughly rehabilitate existing homes, and resell the properties to income eligible buyers. Generally ADR is used to help revitalize neighborhoods by rehabilitating homes in disrepair. In areas where a significant market demand has been established, ADR can be used to add high-quality, affordable new construction homes to a neighborhood.

Homebuyer Purchase/Rehab (HPR) This model provides assistance for income eligible homebuyers to obtain financing to purchase a home as well as the needed moderate rehabilitation. It combines down payment assistance and rehabilitation activities while assuring affordable financing to the buyer.

Neighborhood Preservation (reserved for high capacity grantees)

The Neighborhood Preservation HRF component is designed to assist local efforts to comprehensively address neighborhood revitalization. It is designed to maximize community impact and reverse patterns of disinvestment by funding neighborhood improvement activities in support of affordable housing within a targeted residential area. Revitalization may occur through the use of public facilities improvement, neighborhood beautification, demolition, and/or neighborhood marketing and education. Neighborhood Preservation is normally funded along with other housing components targeted at the same neighborhood.

Community Assistance Team (CATEam)

For any community in the state of Michigan wishing to build strong economic stability, the Michigan State Housing Development Authority offers one-stop community development and revitalization assistance. The Community Assistance Team (CATEam) Specialists work with Michigan communities large and small to provide economic and community development expertise on financial assistance and state incentives, development tools and organizations, as well as strategic planning.

Technical Assistance from the MSHDA CATEam is available to assist the City of Big Rapids with the following programs and incentives:

Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)

Grants are available for public infrastructure improvement projects that create private jobs and private investment in the downtown. These grants can be used for public infrastructure improvements such as, public parking, water/sewer upgrades, public alley improvements, public utility relocation, and streetscape enhancements. Typically, these funds are allotted at \$10,000 - \$20,000 per new full-time job created, a funding ratio of 2 to 1, private to CDBG funds, with a minimum local match of 10% and, of the new being jobs created, 51% must be held by low and moderate income people.

Grants are also available through the Community Assistance Team Downtown Improvement Initiatives Program. This program is designed to assist communities in three areas; Land Assembly, Downtown Facade Improvement and Signature/Vacant Building Acquisition. These programs are intended to stimulate private investment in a Downtown District with blight removal, building/housing renovations and job creation.

Facade Improvement Initiative To make physical improvements to building facades within a traditional downtown district.

Land Assembly Initiative To acquire and demolish blighted properties within a traditional downtown district to improve the area and prevent any additional deterioration within the district.

Signature/Vacant Building Initiative To assist in the acquisition of vacant or underutilized traditional downtown signature buildings for rehabilitation purposes that must result in job creation.

Brownfield Redevelopment

The Michigan Brownfield Redevelopment program has been a vital component in the state's economic development efforts to reuse Brownfield sites in the revitalization of Michigan's downtowns. The Brownfield Redevelopment Program is a resource that allows communities to use Tax Increment Financing (TIF) to clean Brownfield sites. This program also administers the Single Business Tax (SBT) Credit Incentives. The goal of these programs is to assist in making the proposed project economically feasible by providing incentives to overcome additional and extraordinary project expenses caused by the existing Brownfield conditions. If you feel a project may qualify for this program, the CATeam is available to provide assistance and information on how to use these tools in your downtown revitalization efforts.

Historic Preservation

The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) has resources available to assist the City of Big Rapids in preserving existing historic structures. They are able to assist in the identity of historic resources in the community and provide you with information on tax credit programs available. This agency would also be able to advise you on the historic nature of downtown buildings that make up the uniqueness of your community and provide you with some ideas in which you could make them a more visible asset to the community. Facade and architectural design assistance may also be available through SHPO as well. The CATeam works with SHPO and would be available to assist the City of Big Rapids with these endeavors.

For additional economic development information, please contact Steven Willobee at 517-241-0128. For additional housing information, please contact Amy Korp at 517-335-2307. We would be happy to answer any questions.

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Cool Cities Blueprints for Michigan's Downtowns

The Retail Report®

HyettPalma

Making Downtown Renaissance a Reality

THE RETAIL REPORT®

**Downtown Big Rapids
Primary Retail Trade Area**



Making Downtown Renaissance a Reality

1600 Prince Street • Suite 110
Alexandria, Virginia 22314
Phone 703 683 5125
E-Mail: info@hyettpalma.com

THE RETAIL REPORT®

THE RETAIL REPORT, presented within this document, was specifically prepared for Downtown Big Rapids, Michigan. This document presents information concerning the characteristics of the Downtown Big Rapids primary retail trade area. The report was prepared in 2006 by HyettPalma, Inc.

THE RETAIL REPORT presents:

- The current demographic and socio-economic characteristics of customers in the Downtown Big Rapids primary retail trade area;
- A five year projection of changing demographic and socio-economic conditions in the Downtown Big Rapids primary retail trade area;
- A projection of the number of retail dollars that residents in the Downtown Big Rapids primary retail trade area spend on retail goods; and
- A projection of the total retail spending potential for 24 classes of retail goods sought by customers in the Downtown Big Rapids primary retail trade area.

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DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS



Demographic and Income Profile

S State St AT Maple St
Big Rapids, MI 49307

Site Type: Radius

Latitude: 43.6982
Longitude: -85.4839
Radius: 20.0 miles

Summary	2000	2005	2010
Population	70,670	74,030	77,482
Households	26,378	28,215	29,896
Families	18,084	19,008	19,697
Average Household Size	2.53	2.48	2.46
Owner Occupied HUs	20,346	22,130	23,654
Renter Occupied HUs	6,032	6,085	6,242
Median Age	34.5	36.5	37.6

Trends: 2005-2010 Annual Rate	Area	State	National
Population	0.92%	0.66%	1.22%
Households	1.16%	0.94%	1.27%
Families	0.71%	0.76%	1.00%
Owner HHs	1.34%	1.07%	1.46%
Median Household Income	1.75%	2.27 %	3.25%

	2000		2005		2010	
Households by Income	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
< \$15,000	5,313	20.1%	5,085	18.0%	4,885	16.3%
\$15,000 - \$24,999	4,231	16.0%	4,050	14.4%	3,888	13.0%
\$25,000 - \$34,999	3,953	15.0%	3,984	14.1%	3,967	13.3%
\$35,000 - \$49,999	5,067	19.2%	5,220	18.5%	5,423	18.1%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	4,764	18.0%	5,455	19.3%	5,829	19.5%
\$75,000 - \$99,999	1,742	6.6%	2,248	8.0%	2,545	8.5%
\$100,000 - \$149,999	959	3.6%	1,543	5.5%	2,336	7.8%
\$150,000 - \$199,000	201	0.8%	312	1.1%	512	1.7%
\$200,000+	198	0.7%	316	1.1%	512	1.7%
Median Household Income	\$34,159		\$37,476		\$40,863	
Average Household Income	\$42,084		\$47,315		\$53,242	
Per Capita Income	\$16,072		\$18,682		\$21,226	

	2000		2005		2010	
Population by Age	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
0 - 4	4,367	6.2%	4,681	6.3%	4,844	6.3%
5 - 14	10,003	14.2%	9,347	12.6%	9,346	12.1%
15 - 19	6,629	9.4%	6,111	8.3%	6,177	8.0%
20 - 24	6,880	9.7%	7,287	9.8%	7,540	9.7%
25 - 34	7,832	11.1%	8,309	11.2%	8,727	11.3%
35 - 44	9,649	13.7%	9,588	13.0%	8,994	11.6%
45 - 54	8,784	12.4%	9,946	13.4%	10,747	13.9%
55 - 64	7,288	10.3%	8,201	11.1%	9,479	12.2%
65 - 74	5,335	7.5%	6,111	8.3%	6,591	8.5%
75 - 84	3,018	4.3%	3,405	4.6%	3,748	4.8%
85+	883	1.2%	1,042	1.4%	1,291	1.7%

	2000		2005		2010	
Race and Ethnicity	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
White Alone	66,179	93.6%	68,467	92.5%	71,103	91.8%
Black Alone	2,058	2.9%	2,607	3.5%	2,876	3.7%
American Indian Alone	465	0.7%	493	0.7%	522	0.7%
Asian Alone	417	0.6%	583	0.8%	801	1.0%
Pacific Islander Alone	26	0.0%	35	0.0%	43	0.1%
Some Other Race Alone	311	0.4%	405	0.5%	481	0.6%
Two or More Races	1,214	1.7%	1,439	1.9%	1,656	2.1%
Hispanic Origin (Any Race)	998	1.4%	1,285	1.7%	1,549	2.0%

Data Note: Income is expressed in current dollars.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000 Census of Population and Housing. ESRI forecasts for 2005 and 2010.



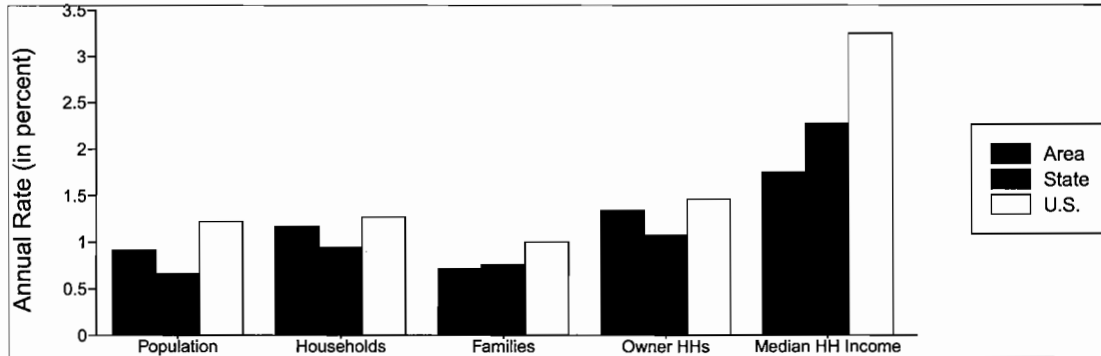
Demographic and Income Profile

S State St AT Maple St
Big Rapids, MI 49307

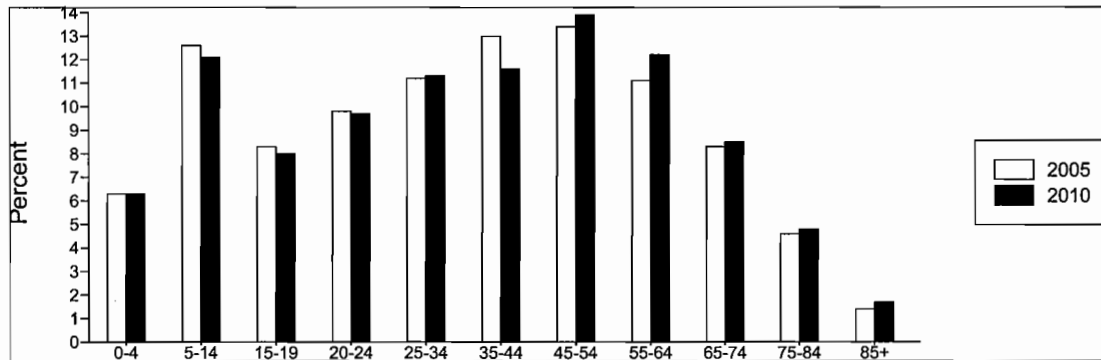
Site Type: Radius

Latitude: 43.6982
Longitude: -85.4839
Radius: 20.0 miles

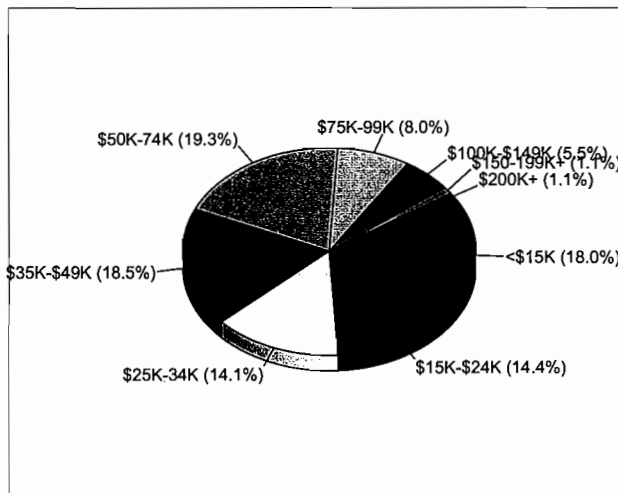
Trends 2005-2010



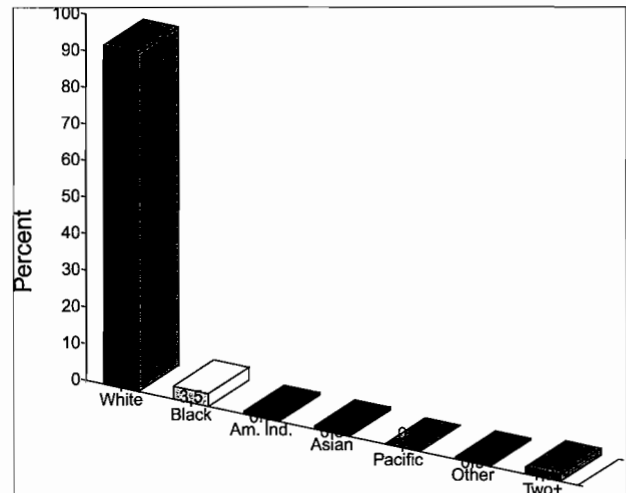
Population by Age



2005 Household Income



2005 Population by Race



2005 Percent Hispanic Origin: 1.7%



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PRODUCT DEMAND BY INCOME GROUP

**DOWNTOWN BIG RAPIDS'S RETAIL TRADE AREA
COMPUTATION OF TOTAL RETAIL PRODUCT DEMAND
BY INCOME GROUP**

Household Income	# Hlds.	\$ Per Hld.	Total \$ Demand
< \$15000	5,085	7,019	35,691,615
\$15000-24999	4,050	9,633	39,013,650
\$25000-34999	3,984	11,594	46,190,496
\$35000-49999	5,220	13,518	70,563,960
> \$50000	9,874	21,979	217,020,646
TOTAL DEMAND FOR PRODUCT			= \$408,480,367

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Labor, Consumer Expenditure Survey; ESRI BIS; and HyettPalma, Inc.

DEFINITION OF PRODUCT:

Food at home, food away from home, alcoholic beverages, household textiles, furniture, floor coverings, major appliances, small appliances and miscellaneous housewares, miscellaneous household equipment, men's apparel, women's apparel, boy's apparel, girl's apparel, children's apparel, shoes, other apparel products and services, prescription drugs and medical supplies, entertainment fees and admissions, televisions, radios, sound equipment, toys, play-ground equipment, entertainment equipment, personal care products and services, reading products, tobacco products and smoking supplies.

PRODUCT DEMAND BY PRODUCT TYPE

**DOWNTOWN BIG RAPIDS'S RETAIL TRADE AREA
COMPUTATION OF TOTAL RETAIL PRODUCT DEMAND
BY PRODUCT TYPE**

PRODUCT	DEMAND
Food At Home	115,350,291
Food Away From Home	66,401,090
Alcoholic Beverages	12,141,832
Household Textiles	4,770,203
Furniture	10,834,910
Floor Coverings	1,324,356
Major Appliances	5,904,665
Small Appliances & Miscellaneous Housewares	3,381,871
Miscellaneous Household Equipment	20,719,051
Men's Apparel -- 16 and Over	10,314,795
Boy's Apparel -- 2 to 15	3,532,525
Women's Apparel -- 16 and Over	19,759,183
Girl's Apparel -- 2 to 15	2,997,620
Children's Apparel -- Under 2	3,254,470
Footwear	9,233,782
Other Apparel Services & Products	8,913,760
Prescription Drugs & Medical Supplies	17,367,428
Entertainment Fees & Admissions	13,637,709
Televisions, Radios & Sound Equipment	22,285,558
Pets, Toys & Playground Equipment	10,994,723
Other Entertainment Supplies & Services	16,193,247
Personal Care Products & Services	16,816,652
Reading	3,567,792
Tobacco Products & Smoking Supplies	8,782,854
TOTAL DEMAND BY PRODUCT TYPE	= \$408,480,367

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Labor, Consumer Expenditure Survey; ESRI BIS; and HyettPalma, Inc.

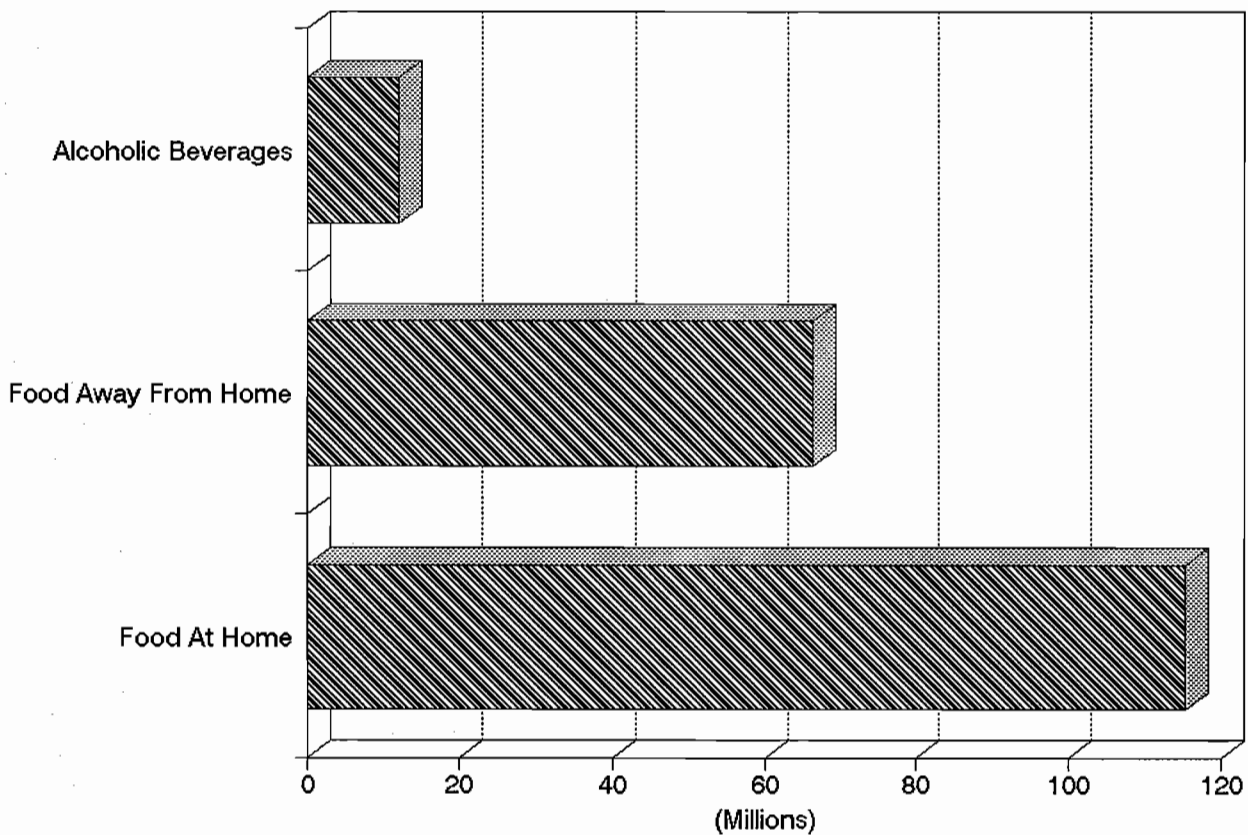
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DEMAND FOR FOOD PRODUCTS

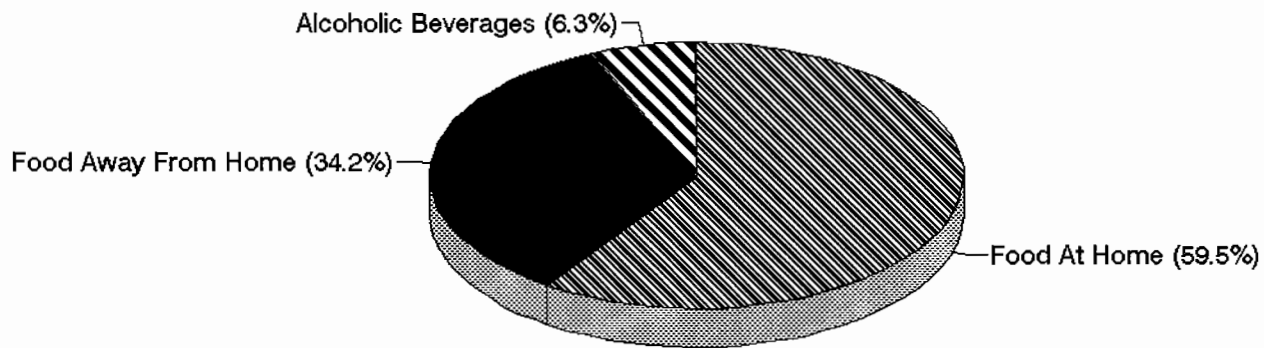
FOOD PRODUCTS

\$ DEMAND BY PRODUCT TYPE



FOOD PRODUCTS

% DEMAND FOR EACH DOLLAR





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**DOWNTOWN BIG RAPIDS'S RETAIL TRADE AREA
COMPUTATION OF DEMAND BY RETAIL PRODUCT**

PRODUCT: FOOD AT HOME

Household Income	# Hlds.	\$ Per Hld.	Total \$ Demand
< \$15000	5,085	2,429	12,351,465
\$15000-24999	4,050	3,164	12,814,200
\$25000-34999	3,984	3,575	14,242,800
\$35000-49999	5,220	4,033	21,052,260
> \$50000	9,874	5,559	54,889,566
TOTAL DEMAND FOR PRODUCT			= \$115,350,291

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Labor, Consumer Expenditure Survey; ESRI BIS; and HyettPalma, Inc.

DEFINITION OF PRODUCT:

Food at grocery stores or other food stores.

**DOWNTOWN BIG RAPIDS'S RETAIL TRADE AREA
COMPUTATION OF DEMAND BY RETAIL PRODUCT**

PRODUCT: FOOD AWAY FROM HOME

Household Income	# Hlds.	\$ Per Hld.	Total \$ Demand
< \$15000	5,085	976	4,962,960
\$15000-24999	4,050	1,400	5,670,000
\$25000-34999	3,984	1,827	7,278,768
\$35000-49999	5,220	2,209	11,530,980
> \$50000	9,874	3,743	36,958,382
TOTAL DEMAND FOR PRODUCT			= \$66,401,090

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Labor, Consumer Expenditure Survey; ESRI BIS; and HyettPalma, Inc.

DEFINITION OF PRODUCT:

All food at restaurants, carryouts and vending machines.



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**DOWNTOWN BIG RAPIDS'S RETAIL TRADE AREA
COMPUTATION OF DEMAND BY RETAIL PRODUCT**

PRODUCT: ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES

Household Income	# Hlds.	\$ Per Hld.	Total \$ Demand
< \$15000	5,085	208	1,057,680
\$15000-24999	4,050	190	769,500
\$25000-34999	3,984	313	1,246,992
\$35000-49999	5,220	413	2,155,860
> \$50000	9,874	700	6,911,800
TOTAL DEMAND FOR PRODUCT			= \$12,141,832

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Labor, Consumer Expenditure Survey; ESRI BIS; and HyettPalma, Inc.

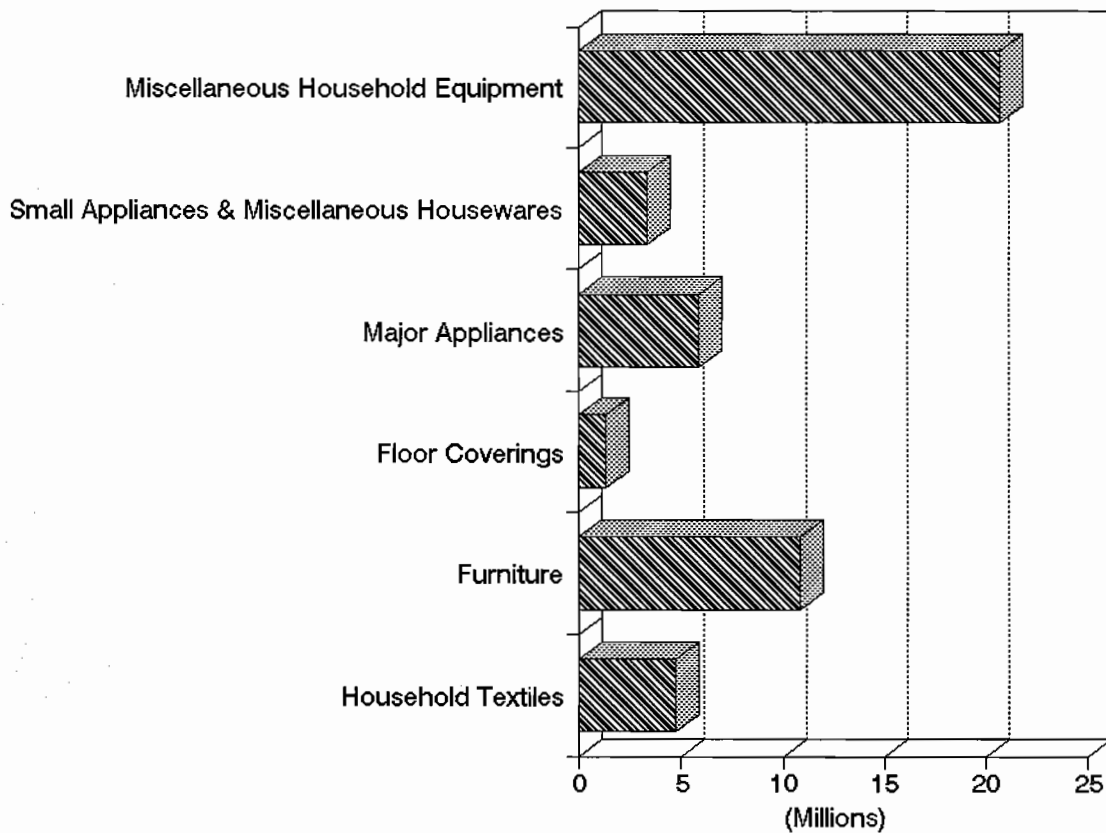
DEFINITION OF PRODUCT:

All alcoholic beverages.

DEMAND FOR HOME PRODUCTS

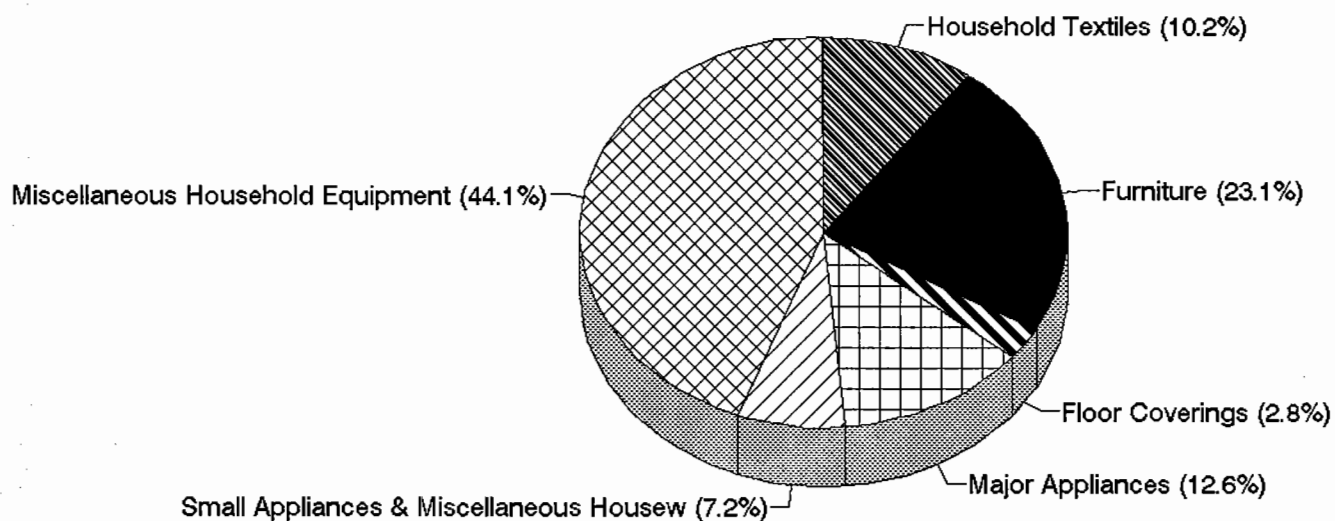
HOME PRODUCTS

\$ DEMAND BY PRODUCT TYPE



HOME PRODUCTS

% DEMAND FOR EACH DOLLAR





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**DOWNTOWN BIG RAPIDS'S RETAIL TRADE AREA
COMPUTATION OF DEMAND BY RETAIL PRODUCT**

PRODUCT: HOUSEHOLD TEXTILES

Household Income	# Hlds.	\$ Per Hld.	Total \$ Demand
< \$15000	5,085	59	300,015
\$15000-24999	4,050	116	469,800
\$25000-34999	3,984	140	557,760
\$35000-49999	5,220	145	756,900
> \$50000	9,874	272	2,685,728
TOTAL DEMAND FOR PRODUCT =			\$4,770,203

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Labor, Consumer Expenditure
Survey; ESRI BIS; and HyettPalma, Inc.

DEFINITION OF PRODUCT:

Bathroom, bedroom, kitchen, dining room, and other linens,
curtains and drapes, slipcovers, pillows and sewing
materials.



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**DOWNTOWN BIG RAPIDS'S RETAIL TRADE AREA
COMPUTATION OF DEMAND BY RETAIL PRODUCT**

PRODUCT: FURNITURE

Household Income	# Hlds.	\$ Per Hld.	Total \$ Demand
< \$15000	5,085	132	671,220
\$15000-24999	4,050	191	773,550
\$25000-34999	3,984	209	832,656
\$35000-49999	5,220	285	1,487,700
> \$50000	9,874	716	7,069,784
TOTAL DEMAND FOR PRODUCT =			\$10,834,910

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Labor, Consumer Expenditure Survey; ESRI BIS; and HyettPalma, Inc.

DEFINITION OF PRODUCT:

All indoor and outdoor furniture.



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**DOWNTOWN BIG RAPIDS'S RETAIL TRADE AREA
COMPUTATION OF DEMAND BY RETAIL PRODUCT**

PRODUCT: FLOOR COVERINGS

Household Income	# Hlds.	\$ Per Hld.	Total \$ Demand
< \$15000	5,085	10	50,850
\$15000-24999	4,050	15	60,750
\$25000-34999	3,984	18	71,712
\$35000-49999	5,220	37	193,140
> \$50000	9,874	96	947,904
TOTAL DEMAND FOR PRODUCT =			\$1,324,356

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Labor, Consumer Expenditure Survey; ESRI BIS; and HyettPalma, Inc.

DEFINITION OF PRODUCT:

Carpet, rugs and other soft floor coverings.

**DOWNTOWN BIG RAPIDS'S RETAIL TRADE AREA
COMPUTATION OF DEMAND BY RETAIL PRODUCT**

PRODUCT: MAJOR APPLIANCES

Household Income	# Hlds.	\$ Per Hld.	Total \$ Demand
< \$15000	5,085	57	289,845
\$15000-24999	4,050	137	554,850
\$25000-34999	3,984	145	577,680
\$35000-49999	5,220	225	1,174,500
> \$50000	9,874	335	3,307,790
TOTAL DEMAND FOR PRODUCT			= \$5,904,665

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Labor, Consumer Expenditure Survey; ESRI BIS; and HyettPalma, Inc.

DEFINITION OF PRODUCT:

Refrigerators, freezers, dishwashers, stoves, ovens, garbage disposals, vacuum cleaners, microwaves, air conditioners, sewing machines, washing machines, dryers, and floor cleaning equipment.



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**DOWNTOWN BIG RAPIDS'S RETAIL TRADE AREA
COMPUTATION OF DEMAND BY RETAIL PRODUCT**

PRODUCT: SMALL APPLIANCES & MISC. HOUSEWARES

Household Income	# Hlds.	\$ Per Hld.	Total \$ Demand
< \$15000	5,085	43	218,655
\$15000-24999	4,050	85	344,250
\$25000-34999	3,984	114	454,176
\$35000-49999	5,220	122	636,840
> \$50000	9,874	175	1,727,950
TOTAL DEMAND FOR PRODUCT =			\$3,381,871

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Labor, Consumer Expenditure Survey; ESRI BIS; and HyettPalma, Inc.

DEFINITION OF PRODUCT:

Small electrical kitchen appliances, portable heaters, china and other dinnerware, flatware, glassware, silver and serving pieces, nonelectrical cookware and plastic dinnerware.

**DOWNTOWN BIG RAPIDS'S RETAIL TRADE AREA
COMPUTATION OF DEMAND BY RETAIL PRODUCT**

PRODUCT: MISCELLANEOUS HOUSEHOLD EQUIPMENT

Household Income	# Hlds.	\$ Per Hld.	Total \$ Demand
< \$15000	5,085	259	1,317,015
\$15000-24999	4,050	361	1,462,050
\$25000-34999	3,984	519	2,067,696
\$35000-49999	5,220	610	3,184,200
> \$50000	9,874	1,285	12,688,090
TOTAL DEMAND FOR PRODUCT =			\$20,719,051

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Labor, Consumer Expenditure Survey; ESRI BIS; and HyettPalma, Inc.

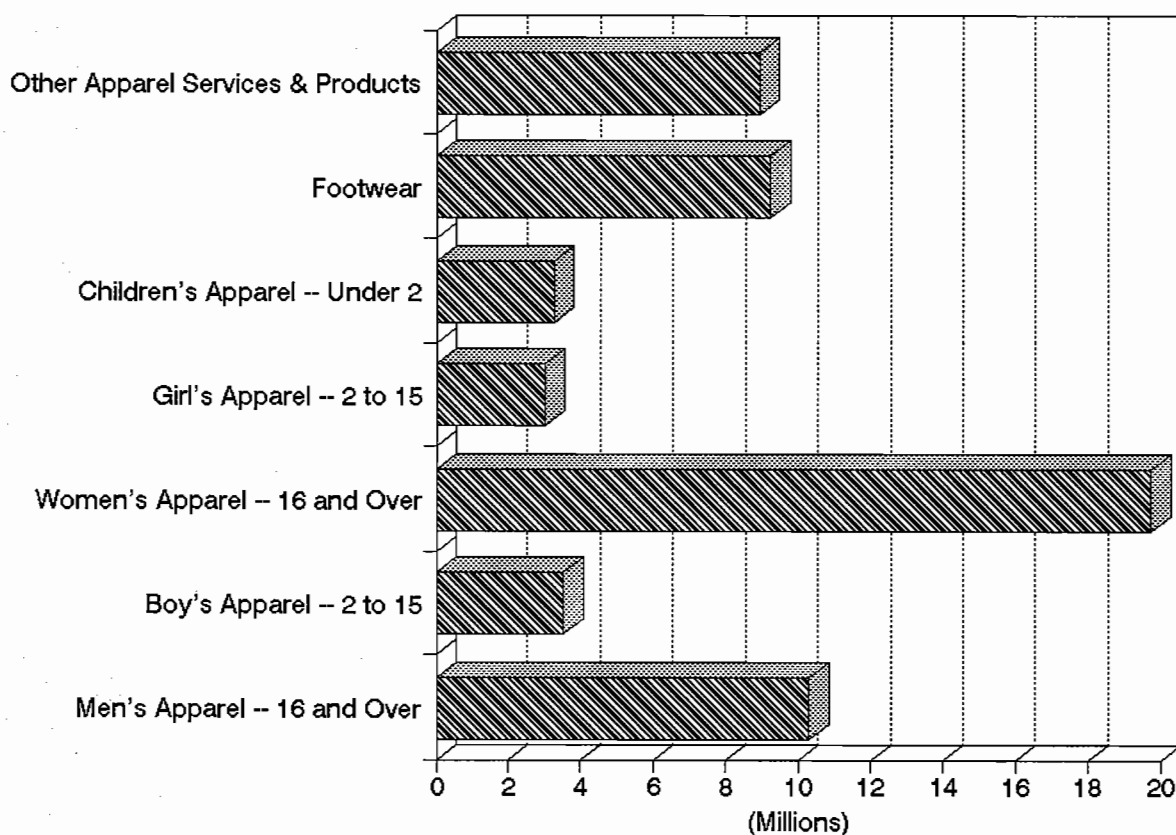
DEFINITION OF PRODUCT:

Typewriters, luggage, lamps, light fixtures, window coverings, clocks, lawnmowers, garden equipment, hand and power, tools, telephone devices, computers, office equipment, house plants, outdoor equipment, and small miscellaneous furnishings.

DEMAND FOR APPAREL PRODUCTS

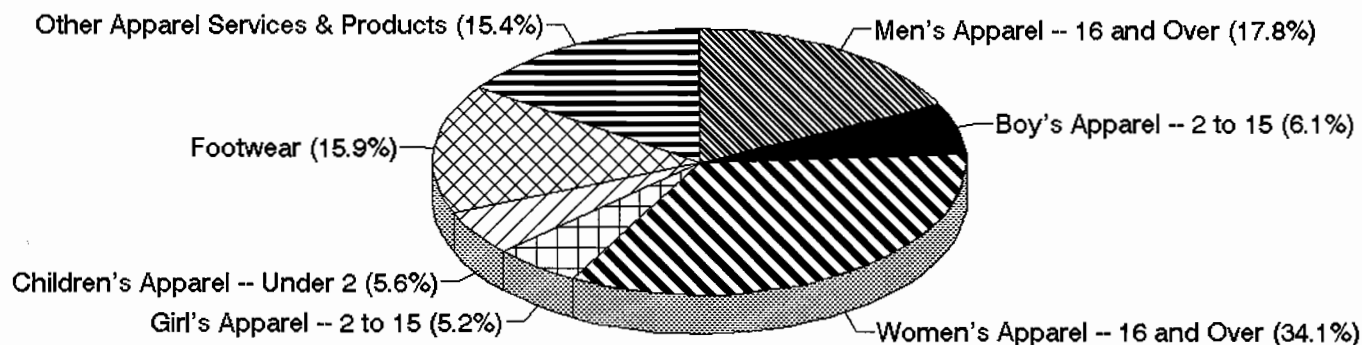
APPAREL PRODUCTS

\$ DEMAND BY PRODUCT TYPE



APPAREL PRODUCTS

% DEMAND FOR EACH DOLLAR





Making Downtown Renaissance a Reality

**DOWNTOWN BIG RAPIDS'S RETAIL TRADE AREA
COMPUTATION OF DEMAND BY RETAIL PRODUCT**

PRODUCT: MEN'S APPAREL -- 16 AND OVER

Household Income	# Hlds.	\$ Per Hld.	Total \$ Demand
< \$15000	5,085	147	747,495
\$15000-24999	4,050	186	753,300
\$25000-34999	3,984	247	984,048
\$35000-49999	5,220	331	1,727,820
> \$50000	9,874	618	6,102,132
TOTAL DEMAND FOR PRODUCT =			\$10,314,795

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Labor, Consumer Expenditure Survey; ESRI BIS; and HyettPalma, Inc.

DEFINITION OF PRODUCT:

All apparel items and accessories, excluding footwear.



Making Downtown Renaissance a Reality

**DOWNTOWN BIG RAPIDS'S RETAIL TRADE AREA
COMPUTATION OF DEMAND BY RETAIL PRODUCT**

PRODUCT: BOY'S APPAREL -- 2 TO 15

Household Income	# Hlds.	\$ Per Hld.	Total \$ Demand
< \$15000	5,085	61	310,185
\$15000-24999	4,050	93	376,650
\$25000-34999	3,984	108	430,272
\$35000-49999	5,220	109	568,980
> \$50000	9,874	187	1,846,438

TOTAL DEMAND FOR PRODUCT = \$3,532,525

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Labor, Consumer Expenditure Survey; ESRI BIS; and HyettPalma, Inc.

DEFINITION OF PRODUCT:

All apparel items and accessories, excluding footwear.

**DOWNTOWN BIG RAPIDS'S RETAIL TRADE AREA
COMPUTATION OF DEMAND BY RETAIL PRODUCT**

PRODUCT: WOMEN'S APPAREL -- 16 AND OVER

Household Income	# Hlds.	\$ Per Hld.	Total \$ Demand
< \$15000	5,085	359	1,825,515
\$15000-24999	4,050	419	1,696,950
\$25000-34999	3,984	503	2,003,952
\$35000-49999	5,220	591	3,085,020
> \$50000	9,874	1,129	11,147,746
TOTAL DEMAND FOR PRODUCT			= \$19,759,183

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Labor, Consumer Expenditure Survey; ESRI BIS; and HyettPalma, Inc.

DEFINITION OF PRODUCT:

All apparel items and accessories, excluding footwear.



Making Downtown Renaissance a Reality

**DOWNTOWN BIG RAPIDS'S RETAIL TRADE AREA
COMPUTATION OF DEMAND BY RETAIL PRODUCT**

PRODUCT: GIRL'S APPAREL -- 2 TO 15

Household Income	# Hlds.	\$ Per Hld.	Total \$ Demand
< \$15000	5,085	42	213,570
\$15000-24999	4,050	71	287,550
\$25000-34999	3,984	90	358,560
\$35000-49999	5,220	88	459,360
> \$50000	9,874	170	1,678,580
TOTAL DEMAND FOR PRODUCT			= \$2,997,620

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Labor, Consumer Expenditure Survey; ESRI BIS; and HyettPalma, Inc.

DEFINITION OF PRODUCT:

All apparel items and accessories, excluding footwear.

**DOWNTOWN BIG RAPIDS'S RETAIL TRADE AREA
COMPUTATION OF DEMAND BY RETAIL PRODUCT**

PRODUCT: CHILDREN'S APPAREL -- UNDER 2

Household Income	# Hlds.	\$ Per Hld.	Total \$ Demand
< \$15000	5,085	68	345,780
\$15000-24999	4,050	88	356,400
\$25000-34999	3,984	96	382,464
\$35000-49999	5,220	96	501,120
> \$50000	9,874	169	1,668,706
TOTAL DEMAND FOR PRODUCT =			\$3,254,470

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Labor, Consumer Expenditure Survey; ESRI BIS; and HyettPalma, Inc.

DEFINITION OF PRODUCT:

All apparel items and accessories, including footwear.



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**DOWNTOWN BIG RAPIDS'S RETAIL TRADE AREA
COMPUTATION OF DEMAND BY RETAIL PRODUCT**

PRODUCT: FOOTWEAR

Household Income	# Hlds.	\$ Per Hld.	Total \$ Demand
< \$15000	5,085	208	1,057,680
\$15000-24999	4,050	217	878,850
\$25000-34999	3,984	285	1,135,440
\$35000-49999	5,220	333	1,738,260
> \$50000	9,874	448	4,423,552
TOTAL DEMAND FOR PRODUCT =			\$9,233,782

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Labor, Consumer Expenditure Survey; ESRI BIS; and HyettPalma, Inc.

DEFINITION OF PRODUCT:

All footwear, except for children under 2 and special footwear used for sports such as bowling or golf shoes.

**DOWNTOWN BIG RAPIDS'S RETAIL TRADE AREA
COMPUTATION OF DEMAND BY RETAIL PRODUCT**

PRODUCT: OTHER APPAREL SERVICES & PRODUCTS

Household Income	# Hlds.	\$ Per Hld.	Total \$ Demand
< \$15000	5,085	154	783,090
\$15000-24999	4,050	188	761,400
\$25000-34999	3,984	219	872,496
\$35000-49999	5,220	278	1,451,160
> \$50000	9,874	511	5,045,614
TOTAL DEMAND FOR PRODUCT =			\$8,913,760

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Labor, Consumer Expenditure Survey; ESRI BIS; and HyettPalma, Inc.

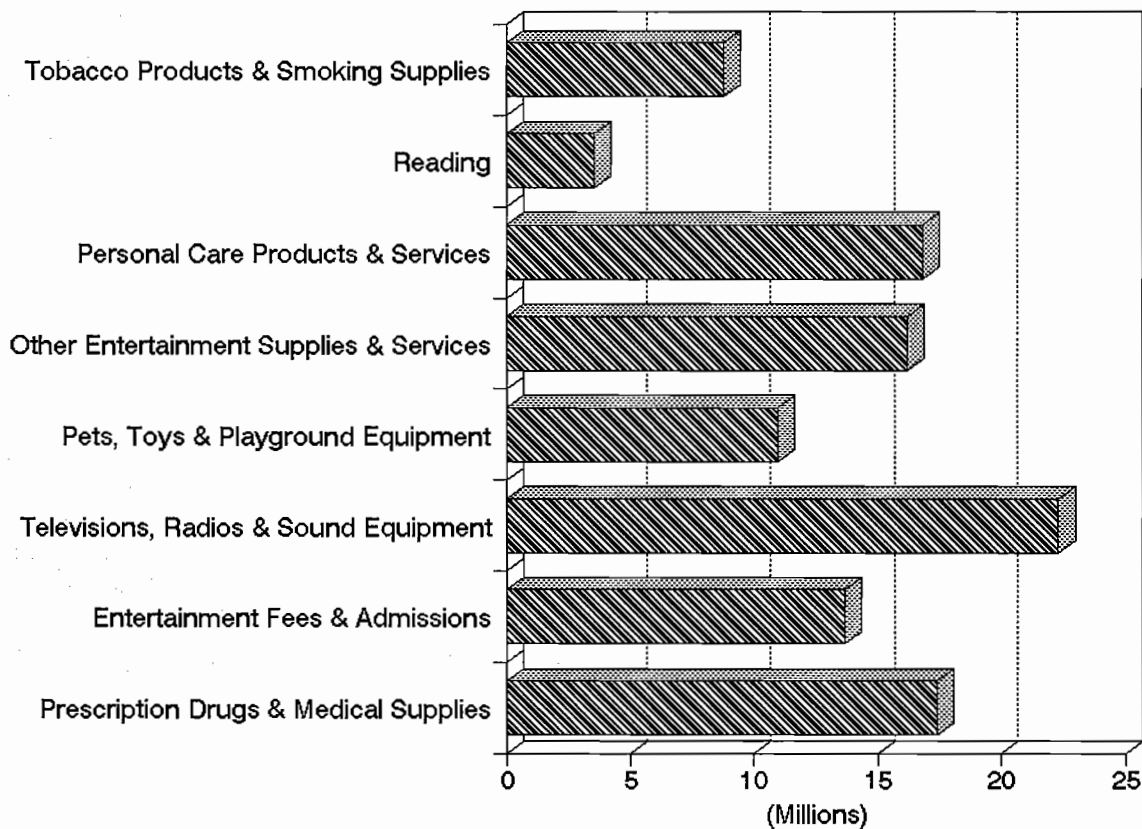
DEFINITION OF PRODUCT:

Material for making clothes, shoe repair, alterations, sewing patterns and notions, clothing rental, clothing storage, dry cleaning, and jewelry.

DEMAND FOR PERSONAL CARE AND ENTERTAINMENT PRODUCTS

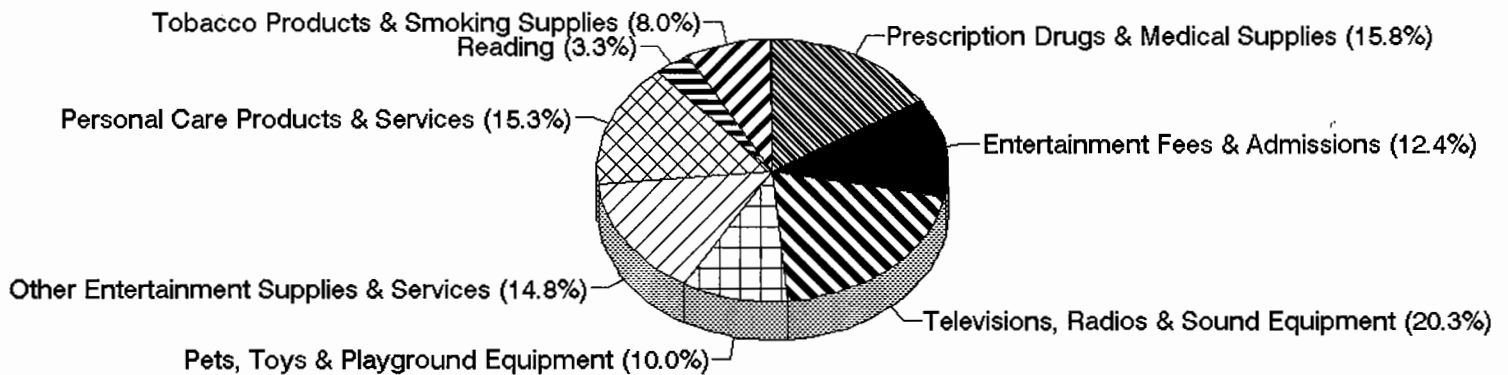
PERSONAL CARE/ENTERTAINMENT

\$ DEMAND BY PRODUCT TYPE



PERSONAL CARE/ENTERTAINMENT

% DEMAND FOR EACH DOLLAR





Making Downtown Renaissance a Reality

**DOWNTOWN BIG RAPIDS'S RETAIL TRADE AREA
COMPUTATION OF DEMAND BY RETAIL PRODUCT**

PRODUCT: PRESCRIPTION DRUGS & MEDICAL SUPPLIES

Household Income	# Hlds.	\$ Per Hld.	Total \$ Demand
< \$15000	5,085	396	2,013,660
\$15000-24999	4,050	586	2,373,300
\$25000-34999	3,984	614	2,446,176
\$35000-49999	5,220	641	3,346,020
> \$50000	9,874	728	7,188,272
TOTAL DEMAND FOR PRODUCT =			\$17,367,428

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Labor, Consumer Expenditure Survey; ESRI BIS; and HyettPalma, Inc.

DEFINITION OF PRODUCT:

Prescription drugs, over-the-counter drugs, dressings, medical appliances, contraceptives, eyeglasses, hearing aids, rental medical equipment, and medical accessories.

**DOWNTOWN BIG RAPIDS'S RETAIL TRADE AREA
COMPUTATION OF DEMAND BY RETAIL PRODUCT**

PRODUCT: ENTERTAINMENT FEES & ADMISSIONS

Household Income	# Hlds.	\$ Per Hld.	Total \$ Demand
< \$15000	5,085	153	778,005
\$15000-24999	4,050	183	741,150
\$25000-34999	3,984	263	1,047,792
\$35000-49999	5,220	356	1,858,320
> \$50000	9,874	933	9,212,442
TOTAL DEMAND FOR PRODUCT =			\$13,637,709

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Labor, Consumer Expenditure Survey; ESRI BIS; and HyettPalma, Inc.

DEFINITION OF PRODUCT:

Admissions to sporting events, movies, concerts, plays, and movie rentals.



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**DOWNTOWN BIG RAPIDS'S RETAIL TRADE AREA
COMPUTATION OF DEMAND BY RETAIL PRODUCT**

PRODUCT: TELEVISIONS, RADIOS & SOUND EQUIPMENT

Household Income	# Hlds.	\$ Per Hld.	Total \$ Demand
< \$15000	5,085	400	2,034,000
\$15000-24999	4,050	562	2,276,100
\$25000-34999	3,984	669	2,665,296
\$35000-49999	5,220	752	3,925,440
> \$50000	9,874	1,153	11,384,722
TOTAL DEMAND FOR PRODUCT =			\$22,285,558

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Labor, Consumer Expenditure Survey; ESRI BIS; and HyettPalma, Inc.

DEFINITION OF PRODUCT:

Television sets, video recorders, tapes, video game hardware and cartridges, radios, phonographs and components, records and tapes, musical instruments, and rental of the same equipment.



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**DOWNTOWN BIG RAPIDS'S RETAIL TRADE AREA
COMPUTATION OF DEMAND BY RETAIL PRODUCT**

PRODUCT: PETS, TOYS & PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT

Household Income	# Hlds.	\$ Per Hld.	Total \$ Demand
< \$15000	5,085	167	849,195
\$15000-24999	4,050	220	891,000
\$25000-34999	3,984	312	1,243,008
\$35000-49999	5,220	362	1,889,640
> \$50000	9,874	620	6,121,880
TOTAL DEMAND FOR PRODUCT			= \$10,994,723

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Labor, Consumer Expenditure Survey; ESRI BIS; and HyettPalma, Inc.

DEFINITION OF PRODUCT:

Pets, pet food, toys, games, hobbies, tricycles and playground equipment.

**DOWNTOWN BIG RAPIDS'S RETAIL TRADE AREA
COMPUTATION OF DEMAND BY RETAIL PRODUCT**

PRODUCT: OTHER ENTERTAINMENT SUPPLIES & SERVICES

Household Income	# Hlds.	\$ Per Hld.	Total \$ Demand
< \$15000	5,085	133	676,305
\$15000-24999	4,050	360	1,458,000
\$25000-34999	3,984	424	1,689,216
\$35000-49999	5,220	480	2,505,600
> \$50000	9,874	999	9,864,126
TOTAL DEMAND FOR PRODUCT			= \$16,193,247

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Labor, Consumer Expenditure Survey; ESRI BIS; and HyettPalma, Inc.

DEFINITION OF PRODUCT:

Indoor exercise equipment, athletic shoes, bicycles, camping equipment, sporting goods, and photographic equipment and supplies.



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**DOWNTOWN BIG RAPIDS'S RETAIL TRADE AREA
COMPUTATION OF DEMAND BY RETAIL PRODUCT**

PRODUCT: PERSONAL CARE PRODUCTS & SERVICES

Household Income	# Hlds.	\$ Per Hld.	Total \$ Demand
< \$15000	5,085	284	1,444,140
\$15000-24999	4,050	414	1,676,700
\$25000-34999	3,984	482	1,920,288
\$35000-49999	5,220	561	2,928,420
> \$50000	9,874	896	8,847,104
TOTAL DEMAND FOR PRODUCT =			\$16,816,652

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Labor, Consumer Expenditure
Survey; ESRI BIS; and HyettPalma, Inc.

DEFINITION OF PRODUCT:

Services and products for hair, oral hygiene products,
cosmetics, and electric personal care appliances.

**DOWNTOWN BIG RAPIDS'S RETAIL TRADE AREA
COMPUTATION OF DEMAND BY RETAIL PRODUCT**

PRODUCT: READING

Household Income	# Hlds.	\$ Per Hld.	Total \$ Demand
< \$15000	5,085	58	294,930
\$15000-24999	4,050	85	344,250
\$25000-34999	3,984	95	378,480
\$35000-49999	5,220	114	595,080
> \$50000	9,874	198	1,955,052
TOTAL DEMAND FOR PRODUCT =			\$3,567,792

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Labor, Consumer Expenditure Survey; ESRI BIS; and HyettPalma, Inc.

DEFINITION OF PRODUCT:

Books, newspapers and magazines.



Making Downtown Renaissance a Reality

**DOWNTOWN BIG RAPIDS'S RETAIL TRADE AREA
COMPUTATION OF DEMAND BY RETAIL PRODUCT**

PRODUCT: TOBACCO PRODUCTS & SMOKING SUPPLIES

Household Income	# Hlds.	\$ Per Hld.	Total \$ Demand
< \$15000	5,085	216	1,098,360
\$15000-24999	4,050	302	1,223,100
\$25000-34999	3,984	327	1,302,768
\$35000-49999	5,220	347	1,811,340
> \$50000	9,874	339	3,347,286
TOTAL DEMAND FOR PRODUCT =			\$8,782,854

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Labor, Consumer Expenditure Survey; ESRI BIS; and HyettPalma, Inc.

DEFINITION OF PRODUCT:

Tobacco products and smoking accessories.

The Retail Report®

USER GUIDE

The Retail Report is a business development tool customized for your Downtown. In it, HyettPalma has targeted the kinds of retail businesses that Downtowns across the country are attracting.

The Retail Report brings effective data to your business development efforts in a user-friendly format. Tables, graphs and charts interpret and present information critical to your Downtown's future. And, the report is customized for YOUR Downtown, containing information unique to your Downtown.

In The Retail Report, demographic and socio-economic data are amplified and taken to a new level of detail. Households in your trade area are segmented by income bands, and consumer spending habits are analyzed by these income groupings. This allows you to determine which income groups to target in your business development program.

Business prospects will expect to review information like this prior to making a commitment to Downtown. The Retail Report shows them your Downtown -- and your Downtown enhancement program -- are one step ahead of the competition.

The following pages list numerous ways you can use The Retail Report to improve the economy of your business district.

What Does The Retail Report Tell You ?

The Retail Report reveals what you can expect the customers in your defined retail trade area to spend in 2006.

The Retail Report shows the number of dollars residents of your trade area spend each year on over 100 different types of products -- products such as food at home, food away from home, furniture, appliances, apparel, prescription drugs, toys, reading material, etc.

The Retail Report is not a listing of national figures or projections; it is a customized report that gives you accurate and definitive information for your own trade area.

A demographic and socio-economic profile of trade area residents is included -- both a snapshot of their characteristics today and a five year projection of their changing characteristics.

Who Can Benefit By Using The Retail Report ?

Current owners of businesses within a given trade area;

Business owners who are thinking of opening a store in the trade area;

Entrepreneurs who are determining what type of business to open or who are deciding on a business location;

Bankers and others who are deciding whether or not to invest in specific types of retail businesses;

Downtown directors and other economic development professionals whose work entails business retention, entrepreneur development and business recruitment; and

Downtown revitalization leaders, Downtown directors, economic development professionals, and local elected officials who want sound information that lets them speak with certainty about their Downtown's potential to sustain specific types of retail businesses.

How Can Downtown Directors and Economic Development Professionals Use The Retail Report ?

To attract customers to Downtown by creating a mix of strong businesses which appeal to trade area residents.

To raise the confidence of investors in the profitability of your business district.

To help existing businesses become more profitable -- so that Downtown's rate of business turnover is lessened.

To fill building vacancies with the types of retail businesses that can succeed and thrive in your district.

To strengthen existing businesses and lessen business closings by:

- showing existing business owners what trade area residents are spending their money on;

- helping business owners determine how to cater to those shopping preferences -- and capture more shopping dollars; and

- enabling them to develop a business plan that is based on realistic market data.

To improve the variety and selection of retail goods offered in the business district by:

- showing existing business owners that there is money to be made by expanding or revising the types of retail goods they sell;

- showing existing business owners that there is money to be made by opening additional types of retail businesses in the business district; and

- targeting specific types of retail businesses -- so that you can actively recruit those businesses having the greatest potential to succeed and remain in your Downtown.

To attract additional businesses to the business district by:

providing definitive data that shows a market exists for the retail goods they sell.

How Can Business Owners Use The Retail Report ?

Business owners frequently ask, "How much money do residents of Downtown's trade area spend on the retail goods I sell?" Or stated another way, "How do I know there's money to be made in Downtown?"

The Retail Report allows you to answer these questions with certainty and authority by quantifying:

what the market is for particular retail products;

the spending potential of residents in your trade area for particular retail goods; and

the current "economic pie" -- how much money is being spent on various retail goods by residents in your Downtown's trade area.

To better plan, manage, and grow your business -- by using the information in The Retail Report, business owners can:

set annual benchmarks for how much of the "economic pie" they intend to capture for their business -- measured in anticipated gross sales receipts for YOUR Downtown;

set an annual budget based on their gross receipts benchmarks;

make informed budgeting decisions about how much to spend each year on inventory, overhead, advertising, staff, etc.; and

complete a business plan that persuades their banker to extend a commercial loan to them.

How Can Entrepreneurs Use The Retail Report ?

The Retail Report shows the sales potential within a given trade area for over 100 types of retail businesses. This would be invaluable in order to:

- compare the markets for a variety of different retail products;
- determine what type of retail business to open;
- complete a realistic business plan before opening that business; and
- persuade bankers and investors that a strong market exists for the type of retail business being opened.