

Business District Assessments and Strategies

An analysis of each of the downtowns and business districts is presented below. This analysis includes an assessment of strengths and weaknesses, and a preliminary vision for each district. This assessment also provides direction, and specific strategies to continue and enhance redevelopment efforts.

These analyses and recommendations are based upon: results of the focus groups conducted in each of the business districts and downtowns, comments during the visioning sessions, discussions with the Hillsdale County Chamber of Commerce's Economic Growth Group, consultant field surveys, and a review of past reports.

The limited size of most downtowns and business districts in Hillsdale County is a key concern as local resources are scarce. Support for full-time staff, to lead and manage district improvement efforts, will be unlikely. This leads to the conclusion that success may be most likely with a shared and cooperative approach. As part of the management plan, it is proposed that a reconfigured Hillsdale County Industrial Development Commission should provide technical and financial support for all participating downtowns and business districts. The focus of these efforts should be toward real estate development for key properties within the various business districts and Downtowns. It should also provide staff support to various TIFA and Downtown Development Authorities. An advisory board, comprised of all participating jurisdictions, should also be established.

Village of Allen

Strengths

- Accessible location along US 12 at State Route 49.
- US 12 is designated as a "Heritage Trail." Such a designation brings increased attention and notoriety that can be used as a catalyst for business activity.
- Allen is noted as the "Antique Capital of Michigan", with three primary clusters of antique and related businesses spanning about one mile just west of the core of Allen's business district. These three clusters include over 50,000 square feet of antique space representing, at peak season, over 900 dealers. These three clusters include:
 1. The 1st cluster west of the center of the township consists of about ten private antique shops, many of which are in converted homes or part of a residence;



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2. West of the 1st cluster is Preston’s Antique Gas Light Village consisting of many individual homes, appealing architecture in a campus like setting;

3. The most westerly cluster on US 12 is the Allen Antique Mall and Convention Center which is the largest group of antique businesses and includes the Outpost Grill and Restaurant.

- While there is a lack of an association for the many antique businesses (previous association fell apart in about 1997), there is a new core of people more open to working together and cooperation. They realize “...we are competing against other communities not each other...”
- Antique business is increasing at Allen Antique Mall and Preston’s Antique Gaslight Village that was vacant for several years, before Mr. Preston purchased the property about four years ago;
- Several historic homes in the area, including two of the original Sears homes;
- Historic Society that wants to expand its building;
- Several special events are held around the antiques shops, including an annual garage sale in May (Detroit to Chicago), Friday night Bike Night behind the Outpost Grill and Saturday night auctions.

Weaknesses

- Lack of a business association, coordinated promotion, and marketing for the antique businesses/dealers;
- Lack of consistent hours for antique businesses, except most are open Friday, Saturday, Sunday;
- Some antique shops are merely hobbies and hold inconsistent hours.
- Limited and poorly defined business district, other than the antique shops.
- Lack of a gas station and bank;
- Grant for a streetscape plan was denied by the State several times as US 12 was being improved;



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- While parking is available on the shoulder, it is not clearly understood that parking is permitted;
- Lack of township zoning;
- Route US 12 traffic is too fast and discourages patronage at the antique centers;
- Lack of a hotel or bed and breakfast to support the antique businesses. The closest is Hillsdale, Jonesville Bed and Breakfast and Coldwater facilities;
- Fire station is volunteer, which causes high insurance rates;
- Junk cars in yards;
- Several homes need demolition, major repair, or need painting
- No water and sewer system (council turned down consultant feasibility study re: water and sewer) A septic system limits growth within the community, and affects the quality of life;
- Allen Township experienced slow population growth from 1990 to 2000, experiencing an increase of 6.8% (increasing from 1,412 to 1,631 during this period);

Vision

Allen continues to be the “Antique Capital” and fully lives up to this image. A family, couple, or individual will consider Allen a destination, and upon leaving easily say they had a great experience, great entertainment, and great food. There will also be an image of quality that has evolved, given local attention to detail, cleanliness, and value.

Strategies

- Establish an Allen Antique Business Association of all antique dealers and businesses to 1) jointly market and promote the district as one unified Antique District and 2) create a unified voice for accomplishing the district improvement strategies;
- Create Village entrance signage to the effect of: “Welcome To Allen, Antique Capital Of Michigan”;

Allen continues to be the “Antique Capital” and fully lives up to this image.



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- Establish core business hours for all businesses;
- Create marketing materials in cooperation with the Hillsdale County Chamber of Commerce to promote the district, such as advertising in antique publications as a District, rather than as individual businesses;
- Establish and maintain a dedicated website for Allen, with pertinent business, entertainment and historical information linked with Hillsdale County Chamber of Commerce's site;
- Establish association membership dues to support the cost of the advertising/promotion campaign;
- Work with the responsible authorities to lower and/or enforce the speed limit to slow down traffic;
- Improve crosswalks and signalization within the first cluster of antique businesses to enhance pedestrian activity;
- Work with the responsible authorities to enact on-street traffic and parking control signage that indicates that parallel parking is allowed, by possibly painting parking spaces on the street;
- Enact a zoning ordinance to control development within the township;
- Establish a program to address nuisance abatement issues;
- Reapply for State funding to support a streetscape program emphasizing an antique theme;
- Select and contract with a consulting firm to conduct a feasibility study for a water and sewer system to eliminate development constraint and allow Allen community to reach its full economic potential;
- Long term: work with nearby communities with an antique emphasis, and become the focus of a larger regional destination.



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Village of Camden

Strengths

- Location on State Route 49 and close proximity to I-80/90 create opportunities and visibility;
- Contiguous business district from Wales to Maple, on Main Street (49)
- High occupancy rate, although there is a 1st floor residence in the heart of district and some marginal businesses;
- Several facades in good condition;
- Some upper floor housing;
- Anchors include Itschers Market, post office library, bank;
- Club House restaurant attracts families from areas beyond Camden;
- Strong mix of service businesses;
- Increased business in summer, as the result of lake residents;
- An off-street parking lot behind the grocery;
- Nearby Amish community contributes to 1/3 of business at grocery. Grocery has a buggy hookup in rear to encourage business;
- Camden Village Council recently adopted a set of five strategic goals aimed at guiding improvements in housing, parks, downtown, the business community, and community safety. These goals included:
 1. Development of a housing plan, which deals with maintenance and improvement of existing buildings, attracting new housing, and demolition of abandoned buildings.
 2. A safety awareness program, including Neighborhood Watch and M-49 traffic safety.



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3. A plan to increase usage of public spaces, including improvements to park facilities, festivals, and events.
4. A plan to enhance the downtown area by improving facades, signs, landscaping and by carrying out beautification and public improvements programs.
5. Develop a plan to identify businesses likely to flourish in the Village, and attract and retain investors.

Weaknesses

- Relatively low population and disposable incomes of residents of the community to support business development. Population of the Village and Township are only 550 and 2,088 respectively according to the 2000 census, representing about a 5% increase since 1990;
- While there is a Local Development Finance Authority for industrial development, there are no comparable entities nor financial incentives for the business district;
- Lack of retail business, other than the grocery market;
- Several buildings show signs of deterioration;
- Sidewalks need repair;
- Sidewalks cluttered with signs and soda machines;
- Irregular hours of stores;
- Some buildings with inappropriate façade treatments (market);
- No cross markers for pedestrian flow;
- Lack of landscaping;
- Lack of a pharmacy;
- Lack of a zoning ordinance in the Village to control and focus development at the business district;



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Vision

Camden will be an aggressive small hometown community with an identity associated with the Amish community, antiques, community services, and improved school athletic facilities.

Strategies

- Continually work toward implementation of the five strategic goals approved by the Village Council and monitor progress in achieving these goals.
- There is one business that sells Amish furniture and an Amish bakery outside the business district. Part of the improvement effort should build upon these, and other Amish businesses, to create a regional attraction;
- Seek funds to prepare a streetscape plan for the district, including replacing the cobra head street lighting with more decorative lighting;
- Enact a zoning ordinance with design standards and maintain focus on businesses within the business district;
- Secure State funds to implement the previously prepared sanitary sewer, storm sewer, and water master plans;
- Clean up trash along rural roads, and enforce nuisance abatement issues;
- Seek technical and financial support from the future expanded Hillsdale County Industrial Development Commission;
- Work with proposed Convention and Visitors Bureau to attract business by promoting the nearby lakes;

Camden will be an aggressive small hometown community with an identity associated with the Amish community, antiques, community services, and improved school athletic facilities.



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City of Hillsdale

Strengths

- A one half million dollar streetscape project is in the final planning stages in a key area of downtown Hillsdale (M-99 from Broad Street and Bacon Street north to Carlton Road and Manning Street). Specific project elements include: new streetlights, benches, trash receptacles and street trees. Pedestrian spaces will be significantly enhanced, and surface treatments will include plain concrete sidewalk with concrete unit pavers. Additionally, a new safer pedestrian crossing will be constructed at the intersection of Bacon Street and M-99.
- In an effort to preserve the historic downtown business district in the city of Hillsdale, the City’s Tax Increment Finance Authority recently (April, 2005) launched a new downtown building facade improvement program. Buildings in the TIFA district, which include all of downtown Hillsdale and some surrounding areas, will be eligible for grant funding to assist in the renovation or restoration of their storefronts. Grants will provide matching funds up to \$5,000.
- Organizational activity seems to be increasing in downtown Hillsdale. One example of this is a new informal “Cool Cities” group that is meeting to explore opportunities for projects that would aid in attracting and keeping young residents. Also, an informal group of people is meeting to address the possibility of a particular type of state designation that would allow for state tax credits for historic building rehabilitation.
- Greenspace is a very important element of the streetscape. Flowers, either in hanging baskets or pots, add vibrancy and life to the downtown. The local garden club is involved in downtown beautification and installs hanging pots every summer to spruce up the downtown.
- The downtown bookstore and the annex are beginning to gain traction as a destination and downtown draw. Much more can be done, but the direction of change is regarded as being positive. Similarly, the Roxy Theater seems to be on an upward trend toward a higher level of attractions, drawing more people to downtown.



Organizational activity seems to be increasing in downtown Hillsdale.

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- Hillsdale is the County seat and retains the County courthouse and offices downtown. This reinforces the perception of strength and position of the downtown within the local and larger community.
- Hillsdale City offices, including fire and police, are downtown, further underscoring the central business district's importance.
- Chamber offices are adjacent to the downtown, visibly linking this vital support organization to the downtown. They are in a fantastic restored historic building, reinforcing the notion that history is important to the business community and a valuable asset upon which many things can be built. In many ways the offices of the Chamber is the front door to the community, so recent efforts to create attractive and distinctive office space will pay dividends in the future.
- Although limited by the size of the community, there are a number of financial and philanthropic supporters for the downtown movement including (but not limited to): the Hillsdale County Chamber of Commerce, City, County, Hospital, downtown merchants, and “corporate buddies” from the City’s other business districts and developments.
- There is a volunteer spirit in Hillsdale, a “can-do” attitude that, properly nourished, can carry the downtown revitalization effort forward. There was high attendance from both the public and private sectors at the informational and planning meetings, demonstrating a positive attitude, a willingness to work on challenges, and a commitment to the “long haul.”
- Hillsdale has terrific flat iron buildings, and the majority of the historic buildings in the downtown are structurally in good shape. The set-back and general rhythm of the street are intact, and foster a genuine sense of place that is an incredible asset.
- There are several absolutely stunning industrial properties directly adjacent to the downtown that pop with opportunity. Additionally, the Keefer Building is a major landmark in the community, and could reclaim its former glory given the proper opportunity.



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- The new Library, which is immediately adjacent to the downtown, has taken design cues from nearby historic buildings, and fits nicely into the downtown architectural community. The Library is a major traffic generator for the downtown area, and is an asset both visually and economically
- The County Courthouse dominates the downtown and is a gorgeous structure. The lawn surrounding the building provides a nice urban park setting and natural pedestrian gathering space.
- Several merchants have invested heavily in their buildings, making sensitive rehabilitations, and installing historically appropriate signage that makes a statement.
- Street lighting is regular and pedestrian oriented. Even at night, the core of the downtown is well-lit and feels safe.
- On-street parking is available, and additional parking lots surround the downtown provide overflow parking. Downtown brochures indicate that there are 625 available parking spaces on the street, in public lots, and within private lots. Like many downtowns however, the issue is often the proximity of the available parking, not the absolute number.
- Downtown Hillsdale appears to have a good mix of retail, commercial, and service providers already established in the downtown that serve local residents, business to business, and regional consumer needs.
- There are very few vacancies in the downtown, though first floor spaces are not always devoted to the best and highest use.
- Upper floor housing and utilization has increased, and may be the beginning of a trend, which is an encouraging development.
- There are multiple traffic generators in and near the downtown core, including the County and City offices, the Chamber, the Library, the Post Office, and several banks branches.
- There are several nearby industrial buildings that provide an opportunity for redevelopment in conjunction with the downtown revitalization movement. Potential uses for these buildings (as discussed elsewhere) include a business incubator and artist live-work units or studios that could enhance downtown activity.



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- As the County seat, and having the County offices downtown, there is a higher demand for office space than in other nearby communities.
- There is a definite sense of place created by the historic downtown buildings that serves as a magnificent backdrop to holiday events.
- Being the County seat, Hillsdale is recognized as the center of County civic life.
- Hillsdale property owners have retained storefront windows rather than reducing their size, which is an incredible asset to the merchants. Many are using these windows to showcase their goods and services, which provides life and interest to the streetscape.
- Despite sometimes negative attitudes, downtown Hillsdale actually has some enviable strengths. There are also many resources available to it, and those should be explored and capitalized upon to drive the revitalization process.

Weaknesses

- Wayfinding signage in the downtown is marginal and needs attention.
- Sidewalks are wide to accommodate pedestrian traffic and street furniture, but maintenance has been deferred. This can give an unkempt impression and should be corrected.
- Most businesses are closed after 5:00pm.
- The Keefer building is a key property downtown that is not utilized to its full potential, and casts a negative shadow on downtown.
- More needs to be done to re-energize stakeholders in the revitalization process. Some initial impressions include the observation that prior revitalization efforts have been shouldered and undertaken by few people. More stakeholders need to be recruited to carry out actions steps identified through the planning process, assigning individual tasks, budget line items and timelines to each activity.
- Deteriorating condition of infrastructure, particularly streets, are an impediment to economic development in the City.



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Vision

Downtown Hillsdale will continue to grow as the center of governance, commerce and general business activity for all of Hillsdale County. It will also continue to grow as a place to live, and the cultural focus for arts-related activities.

Strategies

- Identify and compile a user-friendly listing of available financial incentives and programs specifically beneficial to downtown merchants. Information should be made readily available to the public in a variety of methods: pamphlets, directories, workshops, one-on-one mentoring, speaker's bureaus, newsletters, websites, peer networking opportunities (especially for start-up businesses), and more.
- Build on these efforts, and develop concepts further and more specifically. Future steps can include pursuing funding for a downtown Blueprint Study through the MEDC, and finding out more about becoming a Michigan Main Street Program. Access available resources through MEDC, and visit the National Main Street Center at www.mainstreet.org. Organize trips to nearby communities with successful Main Street programs such as Niles and Marshall and network with program managers, merchants and city officials.
- Keep City and County offices in the downtown. Moving them could signal a policy shift away from the importance of downtown, and could irreparably damage momentum for the revitalization movement. These offices provide daily traffic, both from employees and those coming into the offices to conduct business. They can be a decisive swing factor for the revitalization effort.
- In concert with strategies discussed elsewhere, the creation of an Art, Culture and Entertainment District should extend into downtown Hillsdale if possible. Such a district could be a physically defined space oriented toward land uses with an arts and culture focus. Associated live-work units for artisans in such a district would be an obvious plus.
- Continue to build membership in the designated downtown organization, either identified through the Chamber, or by creating a separate non-profit to deal specifically with downtown issues.

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- Create a Downtown Manager position, and develop a volunteer management system (to be coordinated by that Downtown Manager). The purpose of this management system will be to identify, recruit, train, and manage volunteers who are responsible for implementing the action steps identified in these strategies. The Downtown Manager can wake up every day and make the downtown his/her agenda and focus.
- A comprehensive and multi-year infrastructure plan is needed for the City. A special millage dedicated to infrastructure improvements is recommended to finance and implement the plan.

Design Strategies

- Work with the City to fix downtown sidewalks, and more purposefully define pedestrian connectors across streets and to and from the downtown from surrounding residential areas and outlying “draws”, particularly Hillsdale College. Physical elements to accomplish this include: brick pavers, pavement markings, signage and similar improvements to more clearly define pedestrian spaces. The downtown should be physically linked to other attractions for walkers bicyclists and joggers
- Review local zoning on several levels including:
 1. Signage controls to make sure that regulations accomplish desired objectives and are not onerous.
 2. Minimum residential dwelling sizes should be reduced in downtown areas to make sure that they are consistent with an urban downtown environment, rather than a suburban-scale residential area. Minimum dwelling sizes in downtown areas should be scaled back to the 700 to 800 square foot range to encourage more average-sized apartments that would be attractive to young couples and/or single residents of all ages.
 3. Parking requirements to ensure urban, rather than suburban, requirements are instated;
 4. Minimum maintenance standards and enforcement strategies to keep downtown buildings from falling into disrepair, and negatively influencing the downtown market;
 5. Design review guidelines and review board to review proposed alterations to downtown buildings. Encourage build-



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ing owners to rehabilitate their properties (using local, state and national financial incentives to make improvements more financially appealing), discarding inappropriate additions such as aluminum slip covers in favor of a more traditional and original look.

6. Signage guidelines to encourage signage that enhances the historic atmosphere rather than suburban styles that often overpower and detract from older buildings.

- Celebrate Hillsdale's architectural heritage (especially the flat iron buildings) by working with local schools to use the downtown's built environment as a virtual classroom. Reinforce local history, and create a learning environment by conducting fun activities like an architectural scavenger hunt to find design elements.
- Downtown street lighting is good through the core, and should be extended in phases in concentric circles until all side streets and outer areas of the downtown district are equally lit. In extending this streetscaping, also consider street furniture placement, greenery, and sidewalks to create pedestrian gathering spaces in strategic locations throughout the downtown. Not only will this make the downtown district more appealing and user-friendly, properly identifying these areas is a critical piece of the economic development strategy building pedestrian traffic and maintaining pedestrian flow to downtown businesses.
- Introduce an integrated wayfinding signage system that incorporates the downtown logo or brand, which should also be prominently featured on downtown gateway signage. Directional signage should direct both pedestrian and vehicular traffic to parking, County and City offices, the Chamber, Library and other popular sites.
- Holiday lighting make the downtown a special place, and Hillsdale should continue these traditions. This festive atmosphere should not be limited only to certain times of the year however. Hillsdale should consider adding lights to trees throughout the year, changing banners and other elements to keep the downtown vibrant and alive through all seasons and times of day. Adding white lights to downtown trees can make the downtown sparkle in August, just as easily as December.
- Maintain existing on-street parking and enforce time limits. Identify and designate nearby lots to accommodate regular



Celebrate Hillsdale's architectural heritage (especially the flat iron buildings) by working with local schools to use the downtown's built environment as a virtual classroom.

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traffic, and educate merchants and employees to park in these lots, rather than in front of stores and in other prime consumer spaces. Keep turnover rates high to encourage shoppers. Work with private lot owners to identify opportunities for sharing spaces, especially those lots whose usage is designated primarily for certain days or time, such as a church lot that may be used by merchants during the work week and by the congregation on Sundays and evenings.

Economic Development Strategies

- Conduct a market analysis, including merchant and consumer surveys, identifying state and national trends, local and regional demographics, and existing and potential business clusters. Further inventory downtown businesses and properties and compile a computerized list, to facilitate updating, of all owners, contact information, land use, zoning, square footage, rental/sale prices, and historic information.
- A clustering plan is presented to help establish more specific districts within the Downtown. The intent of the clustering strategy is to ensure over time, that businesses are positioned to share customers as much as possible. This sharing is achieved by creating a convenient, complementary and compatible mixture of goods and services that serve customer needs and shopping patterns. This strategy is also aimed toward creating synergy among businesses and complementary relationships. A map showing the two recommended Clusters follows.
 1. The Pedestrian-Oriented Cluster is west of Howell Street. This cluster includes specialty retail, restaurants, entertainment and other uses that encourage high levels of pedestrian activity. Offices would be located in appropriate upper story spaces. Auto oriented uses would be discouraged in this cluster. There should also be a more defined connection between this cluster and the bike path.
 2. The General Business Cluster is east of Howell, including Broad Street. This cluster recognizes the future impact of Broad Street traffic becoming one-way. Government offices, first floor offices, single destination activities and businesses more dependent upon automobile traffic would be encouraged



A clustering plan is presented to help establish more specific districts within the Downtown.

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to locate in this cluster. Second floor housing is encouraged in both clusters.

- Survey Hillsdale College students to better understand and identify business opportunities Downtown that relate to their needs. This survey should also identify any student concerns and perceptions regarding their visits to Downtown such as safety, walking distance, and any other issues.
- Create a downtown website to showcase upcoming events, volunteer postings, and other “information clearinghouse” pieces.
- Based on the above information, put together a business recruitment package that can be distributed to potential investors and entrepreneurs. Identify recruitment team members to follow up on leads and maintain open and regular communication with interested parties.
- Conduct project-specific feasibility studies for the 3-story Keefer Building property at 104 N. Howell to assess its redevelopment potential. Possible alternate uses for the Keefer Building might include use as an historic Bed and Breakfast/hotel that could be marketed to Hillsdale College visitors and weekenders; artists lofts and live/work space; or senior housing.
- As discussed further in the Economic Renewal Corridor section, prepare a redevelopment plan for the industrial and warehouse structures along the fringes of Downtown.
- Work with merchants to develop consistent hours of operation to build consumer confidence that they can stop once and visit multiple businesses. Ask them to collectively stay open one night a week to try to attract different demographics, focusing advertising efforts to the biggest potential target market (which should be identified in the market analysis).
- Identify existing financing tools (and develop programs to fill any gaps) to assist merchants with building rehabilitations and business expansions.
- Using the market analysis and current conditions information, develop a truly market-driven economic development strategy that responds to current needs, strengths and opportunities for growth.



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- As mentioned, use the arts as part of the economic development strategy, potentially working with Hillsdale College to recruit national artists for exhibitions or artists-in-residence programs, create a co-operative gallery for local artists to displays their works, and/or recruit businesses that foster creative projects such as a ceramic studio or culinary school/restaurant that serve as both an attraction and business.
- Keep City and County offices in the downtown. These offices are major traffic generators and are a critical piece of the economic development landscape.

Promotions Strategies

- Work with a professional graphic artist to develop a logo/brand for the downtown, and encourage merchants and government officials to use it in publications. Develop collective marketing materials to reduce costs to individual merchants and reinforce the impression with consumers of the downtown as a destination of rather than individual sites.
- Create a website for the downtown organization to build awareness for downtown shopping options, history, and upcoming events. In addition to this interactive option, submit regular stories to the local newspaper, and develop brochures and maps highlighting downtown amenities, business clusters, and recreational opportunities.
- Use the market analysis to identify demographics currently shopping or missing (but wanted) in the downtown, and use this information to develop an appropriate events series to serve those market segments.



Village of Jonesville

February 2004, the Village of Jonesville completed a *Jonesville Downtown Blueprint 2004* under the Blueprints for Michigan Downtowns program. To help ensure a comprehensive approach to addressing the business districts in Hillsdale County, a selected summary of the Blueprint report for Downtown Jonesville prepared by the consulting firm HyettPalma is provided on the following pages.



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Strengths

- Retail shop and food establishments, while not large in number, draw customers to Downtown;
- Multi-generational businesses, which helps stabilize Downtown;
- Independently owned businesses offer excellent customer service;
- Sauk Theater, which is a regional draw, provides high quality performances;
- Village Hall, which not only acts as an anchor, sets a good example of quality historic building renovation and maintenance as well as quality window displays;
- Carl G. Fast Memorial Park, which is viewed as THE Village park and which serves as a New England Town Green and the center of community life;
- Location at the intersection of US-12 and M-99, which a considerable number of motorists travel daily;
- Nearby expanded library, as well as the post office, which are additional anchors and draws;
- Nearby mixed-use structure, which includes condos and retail, and stands as a symbol of investor confidence in the area;
- Surrounded by quality housing with residents who walk Downtown and pride themselves on this fact;
- Jonesville DDA has a track record of success.

Weaknesses

- Two large vacant structures Downtown, Old Jonesville Inn and the Kiddie Brush and Toy building;
- Many Downtown buildings have vacant upper floors;
- Other identified issues for Downtown include creating a stronger business mix and economic identity, as well as marketing.



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Vision

A part of the Blueprint process, participants expressed a desire to see Downtown have the following image:

- “A Downtown that is unique, unusual, quaint, pretty, and well maintained” – a beautiful example of Small Town USA.
- A historical Downtown – “we’re here 175 years and counting” – where you can park, walk, and enjoy a myriad of experiences, including retail, food, entertainment and culture.
- A Downtown that has good products, a good image, good service, and is a warm, welcoming place.
- A Downtown where you find smiling faces; a place that says, “We’re a family,” “You’re welcome here and please stop in.”
- A Downtown where there’s so much to do for the whole family that you come for a quick stop, and end up spending the day.
- A Downtown you tell your friends about, a Downtown you come back to again and again.
- “A real Downtown that no place else is quite like.”

Strategies

The Blueprint report provides a comprehensive course of action for enhancing Downtown Jonesville including specific strategies for:

- Public improvements to “fine tune” Downtown’s public spaces;
- Business development to attract more retail, greater diversity of retail, contiguous retail, food, arts, and entertainment establishments through the enhancement of existing businesses and the attraction of additional appropriate businesses
- Real Estate Development focused on using upper floors of Downtown buildings, renovation of the Old Jonesville Inn, adaptive reuse of the Kiddie Brush and Toy Building, and Façade improvements;



“A Downtown that is unique, unusual, quaint, pretty, and well maintained”

... a place that says, “We’re a family,” “You’re welcome here and please stop in.”



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- Marketing Downtown as a distinct and distinctive area;
- Continuation of the current management structure that is working to improve Downtown.

City of Litchfield

Strengths

- An active Downtown Development Authority (DDA) provides financial support for businesses. This financial support supplements part of the cost for awnings and rent in the early months of a new business. The DDA is currently involved in a streetscape project that is intended to eventually encompass the entire downtown area. The TIFA also focuses on industrial development.
- Town square serves as an excellent focal point for the District;
- Concerts are held in the central green area, although they are not considered to be as successful as perhaps they could be;
- Three off-street public parking lots, with a total of about 75 parking spaces;
- Cohesive district comprised of a wide range of retail and services, including the multi-generational Wolfinger hardware store and Litchfield Outdoor that are destination businesses;
- Major industrial corridor along M-49, south of downtown;
- Located at the intersection of two arterial state roads, M-49 and M-99;
- One of the few business districts in the County with a franchise fast food restaurant (Subway);
- Lighthouse Village camping facility is located nearby. During summer weekends, upwards of 1,500 people are at this



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facility. This seasonal concentration of people in close proximity is seen as a potential opportunity, as more people could be drawn to Litchfield for food and entertainment.

- City of Litchfield newsletter.
- City of Litchfield’s population is increasing. The city had a 10% increase from 1990 (1,317) to 2000 (1,458). Further, the City median household income increased 86% during this period, from \$21,122 to \$39,292. This increase is partly the result of the new Hawthorn Heights subdivision, which created more disposable income to support the business district.

Weaknesses

- Lack of marketing or promotional materials for the Downtown;
- Gas station and abandoned auto service breakup an otherwise cohesive pedestrian oriented downtown;
- Several vacant store fronts are evidenced by a 20% vacancy rate and a high turn-over rate. However, some amount of turn-over might be attributable to the local programs that assist new start-up businesses with free rent, thus providing opportunities for more marginal ventures to open that are less likely to succeed.
- Several buildings need façade improvements.

Vision

Litchfield becomes a unique and vibrant destination, attracting nearby industry employees, campers and community residents;

Strategies

- Review current zoning regulations regarding permitted uses in various districts, along with the establishment of downtown design standards. Permitted downtown uses should exclude uses that are entirely auto-oriented.

Town square serves as an excellent focal point for the District;



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- Work with the Hillsdale County Industrial Development Commission to find a new use for the vacant factory building on the fringe of Downtown;
- Secure funding to enhance the town square as a community focal point and activity center. Promote more activities in the town square;
- Work with the Hillsdale County Chamber regarding small business support services for new and existing businesses to increase their chances for success;
- Downtown Development Authority should work with Hillsdale County Industrial Development Commission to review current financial incentives and technical assistance. Consider expanding the façade improvement program beyond signage;
- Prepare marketing information, in cooperation with the Hillsdale County Chamber of Commerce and local realtors, to promote the district and the financial incentives for building improvements;
- Work with the Hillsdale County Industrial Development Commission and local realtors to attract businesses to the district that are complementary to the existing businesses. Conduct further market analysis to identify more specific niches that will be successful;
- Continue efforts to secure more affordable housing for community residents;
- Implement the proposed streetscape program for Downtown;
- DDA should continue to develop deeper relationships with businesses within the Litchfield Industrial Park to identify needed goods and services, to attract employees, and to serve the industries;
- Develop a marketing program for Downtown Litchfield targeted to the campground patrons, such as Lighthouse Village, Litchfield Industrial Park and nearby communities. It should emphasize the unique and variety of service and the amenities of a town square.



Business District Assessments and Strategies

Village of North Adams

Strengths

- Compact district, although there are several vacancies; some of the vacancies are recent;
- Relatively good mix of neighborhood retail, including grocery and furniture mart. Although the hardware store recently closed, there is a good mix of service businesses;
- Horse and Carriage Bed and Breakfast is a draw;
- Heritage Days is held within the District;
- Local restaurant is clearly a destination that draws locals, and others, from outside the area.
- The North Adams School District is one of the few that is adding students as a result of the schools of choice program (another is Jonesville).

Weaknesses

- Lack of organization to support improvement of the business district, although there is interest in forming such an organization;
- Lack of financial and technical assistance to encourage business district improvement;
- Located only about five miles from both Hillsdale and Jonesville, the two largest downtowns in the county, and is located about five miles from Wal-Mart. Unlike these other commercial centers, North Adams is not an arterial road, and therefore attracts minimal through traffic. It will be difficult for North Adams to compete for goods and services beyond basic resident needs and specialty items;
- Adams Township's experienced slow population growth, about 6%, from 1990 to 2000, growing from 2,339 to 2,498 respectively;
- Lack of adequate code enforcement – abandoned cars in heart of district;



Business District Assessments and Strategies

- Several buildings need façade improvements;
- Sign clutter throughout district;
- Residential uses break up the business district, a result of the lack of a zoning ordinance (Adams Township does have zoning);
- There are some indications that, due to the age of many residents, some housing and business turn-over, and loss of support for local businesses, may begin to occur;
- Vacant 2-story agricultural building within the District;

Vision

North Adams will be a close knit community with unique businesses. North Adams will become a destination, rather than competing with nearby commercial centers.

Strategies

- There are several prominent vacant buildings south of the business district that could potentially be redeveloped and increase the employment base within the business district’s market area. These buildings include three SKD buildings and a former school facility. The industrial buildings should be targeted for redevelopment in cooperation with the Hillsdale County Industrial Development Commission. An adaptive reuse strategy should also be sought for the school building, perhaps converting the property into housing;
- Establish a business association to help promote the district and serve as a supporter for district improvements;
- Seek technical and financial support from the proposed Hillsdale County Industrial Development Commission;
- Enact a zoning ordinance, with design standards, to maintain a focus on businesses within the business district;

North Adams will become a destination, rather than competing with nearby commercial centers.

Relatively good mix of neighborhood retail, including grocery and furniture mart.



Business District Assessments and Strategies

Village of Pittsford

Strengths

- Visible location at the intersection of Pittsford Road, previously called Main Street, and State highway 34;
- Two restaurants in the District;
- Kelly’s Furniture, a regional attraction that wants to expand, is on the fringe of the District;
- Located near Lost Nations;
- Community has a medical doctor.

Weaknesses

- Village and business district is divided between Jefferson and Pittsford Townships, creating a greater challenge in developing unified development programs and strategies;
- Lack of a critical mass of businesses within the District;
- Two vacant spaces, which is high considering the relatively small size of the district;
- Dilapidated homes within the heart of the District. Residences in the district are allowed, as the result of the lack of a zoning ordinance in the Village;
- Large pole sign remains from the vacated Herb Lady business, another result of the lack of zoning code;
- Several metal buildings that detract from the appearance of the District;
- Feed and grain storage building in the heart of the district needs exterior improvement;
- Lack of any retail in the District, other than Kelly’s Furniture;
- Grocery store closed September, 2004 (on M-34, just south of District next to Kelly Furniture);



Business District Assessments and Strategies

- Library needs more room for expansion;
- Pittsford Township’s population was relatively stable from 1990 to 2000, experiencing only a .5% increase.

Vision

Pittsford will be a friendly small town America that provides basic and quality services to area residents, and provides restaurants that serve as a destination.

Strategies

- Attracting a new grocery store, to replace the business that recently closed, is a high priority. Owner operators of groceries in other communities should be approached about opening a second store in Pittsford. If these efforts are unsuccessful, the proposed Hillsdale County Industrial Development Commission should work with the community to consider acquiring a property and providing necessary incentives to attract a grocery, including establishing a TIFA;
- Promote Pittsford business along route 127;
- Enact a zoning ordinance to control development within the Village;
- Seek technical and financial support from the proposed Hillsdale County Industrial Development Commission.

City of Reading

Strengths

- Location on State Route 49 makes the city busy enough to generate traffic, but not too congested;
- Active and aggressive Tax Increment Financing Authority (TIFA) with professional administrator engaged in both the industrial park and business district. TIFA has paved three parking lots whose owners gave property to city who paved it for parking. TIFA also has a low interest loan program for store front improvements;

Pittsford will be a friendly small town America that provides basic and quality services to area residents, and provides restaurants that serve as a destination.



Business District Assessments and Strategies

- Reading Chamber of Commerce, although it is not affiliated with the national chamber;
- Downtown Streetscape Plan has been prepared for Reading, although it has not yet implemented;
- State is scheduled to improve streets and gutters in 2009, representing an opportunity to coordinate with streetscape improvements;
- Contiguous business district with a critical mass and attractive brick facades;
- Reading Days 3-day summer festival includes the Downtown;
- Ray's restaurant has regional notoriety as the result of USA Today's designation as one of small town America's best hamburgers;
- Good mix of businesses providing personal services;
- Off-street parking lots;

Weaknesses

- Lack of a business association;
- Lack of any marketing materials regarding financial incentives from TIFA;
- Lack of adequate signage for off-street parking lots;
- Grocery store has recently closed;
- High vacancy rate, particularly the prominent/visible gateway buildings at both ends of the district – 3-story brick building and adjoining 2-story brick building at the northwest corner of Cherry and Main (49) and the 2-story Opera House building at north side of Michigan, east of 49. Both of these buildings are vacant and deteriorated. A weak commercial market and subsequent low rents make project feasibility difficult; there is insufficient projected income to support debt service for property renovation. There is a lack of public equity financing to help fill the gap, exacerbating the problem;

Ray's restaurant has regional notoriety as the result of USA Today's designation as one of small town America's best hamburgers.



Business District Assessments and Strategies

- While currently adequate parking is available, there could be a shortage if occupancy increases significantly;
- Lack of retail businesses. Most businesses are service oriented;
- Lack of a pharmacy in the district;
- Anecdotal information exists to document a high, but unmet demand for housing;
- City of Reading and Reading Township have both experienced a stable population from 1990 to 2000; both increased by only .6% and .7% respectively.

Vision

Reading will become a vibrant Downtown with attractive pedestrian focused streetscape improvements. All buildings will be improved and filled with more retail businesses. Reading will become a destination and attract summer visitors.

Strategies

- Working in partnership with a reorganized Hillsdale County Industrial Development Commission, local officials should continue to work with current property owners to redevelop: 1) 3-story building at northwest corner of Cherry and Main and 2) Opera House building along Michigan. The current condition of these highly visible properties discourages other investment in the district, and should be the district's priority. The purpose of the development team is to assemble all necessary partners, including Reading TIFA, Hillsdale County Chamber of Commerce, Hillsdale County Industrial Development Commission, and others, to work together on a regular basis to prepare a redevelopment strategy, and ensure that the process is moving forward on a timely basis. If necessary, the development team should consider the feasibility for the Reading TIFA or the newly created Hillsdale County Industrial Development Commission to acquire the property and seek developers and/or redevelopment partners. This development team approach could also serve as a model for dealing with other strategically critical properties within the County;
- Continue working with the State to provide financing for the streetscape plan improvements;

Reading will become a vibrant Downtown with attractive pedestrian focused streetscape improvements.



Business District Assessments and Strategies

- Supplement the current business improvement loan program with a façade grant program, with design standards, to further encourage building improvements;
- Encourage 2nd floor housing above the store fronts, and expand the current TIFA loan program to include a portion of the cost of renovating 2nd floor apartments as eligible activities;
- Prepare marketing information, in cooperation with the Hillsdale County Chamber of Commerce and local realtors, to promote the district and the financial incentives for building improvements;
- Work with the Hillsdale County Industrial Development Commission and local realtors to attract businesses to the district that are complementary to the existing businesses. Conduct further market analysis to identify more specific niches that will be successful;
- Evaluate angle parking along Main Street to increase on-street parking, as there appears to be sufficient pavement width;
- Work with the Hillsdale County Chamber of Commerce’s Convention and Visitors Bureau to expand the summer and recreation business in the area, while also promoting the Reading business district;
- Continue to explore efforts to develop an “antique focus” to capitalize on the draw of Allen Township to the north. Visitors to Allen Township might be drawn to Reading to extend a visit to the area for antiques.

Somerset Township

Strengths

- Somerset’s business district is the Lake Shore market strip center. This commercial center is at 100% occupancy.
- Good mix of retail and services with adequate off-street parking;
- Several nearby attractions such as, Flavor Fruit Farm, a cider mill, and a community park;



Business District Assessments and Strategies

- Ten miles from Michigan Speedway;
- Somerset Township is the fastest growing township in the county. Population increased 25% from 1990 to 2000 (3,416 and 4,277 respectively), largely because of development around several lakes. Lake Somerset is nearly built-out. Some lots remain and cost about \$100,000 for a “buildable” lot. The homeowners association on Somerset Lake is in the process of updating covenants to better control building activity.

Weaknesses

- There are several businesses scattered ½ mile from the commercial center, just east of Waldron Road. The commercial area is expanding without a focus or relationship to the primary commercial center. Design standards and a review of the current zoning are needed to cluster commercial around the center;
- Lack of an organization to market and promote improvement of the business district;
- Lack of a water and sewer system limits growth and the quality of life.

Vision

Somerset Township’s Commercial center will continue its planned growth to provide a full range of quality retail and personal services for residents of Somerset and nearby communities.

Strategies

- Review the current zoning map and regulations to control development around the commercial center of the community;
- Establish a merchants association to promote the district, including targeting patrons of the Speedway;
- Township should select and engage a consulting firm to determine the feasibility and cost for a sewer system. This step and the implementation of the system are key prerequisites for the Somerset community to reach its full economic potential.



Somerset Township’s Commercial center will continue its planned growth to provide a full range of quality retail and personal services for residents of Somerset and nearby communities.



Business District Assessments and Strategies

Village of Waldron

Strengths

- Village has a web site to promote activities and businesses;
- Labor Day celebration includes activities at the four corners;
- Amish population presents opportunity for specialty items;
- District includes a grocery store with a deli, the core business in the District;
- Waldron has identified an industrial park site based upon its proximity to Interstate 80/90. Success with this industrial park could increase jobs and housing in the community, and thereby increase demand to support the business district.

Weaknesses

- Waldron is located at the southeast corner of the County, and its business district is three miles from the nearest arterial road (US 127), therefore has minimal through traffic. This issue is exacerbated by the relatively low population and disposable incomes of residents of the Village to support business development. Village and Township (Wright) populations are only 591 and 1,788 respectively according to the 2000 census, representing a slight drop from 1990 census population figures;
- Lack of a zoning ordinance in the Village to control and focus development at the four corners;
- Lack of a critical mass of businesses;
- Lack of organization and financial assistance to support improvement of the business district;
- Vacant 2nd floors of several buildings contribute to an abandoned appearance;
- Lack of natural gas services.



Business District Assessments and Strategies

Vision

Waldron will continue as a friendly small town community. Employment base will increase, to support its business district that will improve in terms of appearance, variety of retail, and community services.

Strategies

- Complete planning, acquisition, and development of the identified industrial park;
- Several buildings were built in 1906 and are approaching 100 years. Waldron should build on this anniversary as an opportunity to rally support, and begin a major improvement program for the district;
- Encourage 2nd floor housing above the store fronts. Establish a TIFA loan program to include a portion of the cost of renovating 2nd floor apartments;
- Work with the Amish community regarding opening up specialty businesses;
- Seek funds to prepare a streetscape plan for the district;
- Seek technical and financial support from the proposed Hillsdale County Industrial Development Commission;
- Work with the Hillsdale County Industrial Development Commission to develop the industrial park. Use proximity to I-80/90 as a major strength to attract industrial prospects.

The success of Waldron’s ability to improve its business district is largely dependent upon its ability to attract more jobs, increase its population base, and establish and promote specialty businesses.

Waldron will continue as a friendly small town community.

