

Downtown Revitalization in Urban Neighborhoods and Small Cities

By Barbara Wells

Northeast-Midwest Institute

INTRODUCTION

Downtown redevelopment is a critical component of smart growth strategies to preserve open space, create mixed-use neighborhoods, provide a variety of transportation options, and fully use existing infrastructure. Many communities in both metropolitan and rural areas are working to restore the vitality of their downtown cores through infill development – the creative use of vacant or underused land and buildings.

Successful infill development relies on numerous design principles, including:

- Engaging citizens in identifying a community vision for growth.
- Strengthening pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods that offer a mix of activities within walking distance of homes.
- Reclaiming blighted and abandoned areas to restore the community's economic and social fabric.
- Connecting neighborhoods to regional transportation and land use systems.
- Providing public open spaces for recreation and landscapes for civic buildings.
- Integrating new buildings with the architectural character of the neighborhood, reflecting the best examples of local architecture.

Communities from Chicago's urban neighborhoods to New England's small towns are meeting the twin challenges of deteriorating town centers and sprawling development through downtown revitalization. The following examples illustrate the approaches and results of their efforts.

BREA, CALIFORNIA

Features: Located in the northeast corner of Orange County, Brea and surrounding cities are affected directly by the movement of residents and jobs to the “inland empire” counties of San Bernardino and Riverside, where land and housing are less expensive. The city began losing retail and commercial businesses in 1974 when the 57 Freeway was completed just east of downtown. Abandonment of aging housing stock followed, until vacant buildings dominated the once thriving area.

Challenge: Into the 1980s, downtown Brea was the site of numerous vacant structures originally built for oil field workers. Most of these houses were in poor condition. Some had never been tied into the city sewer system and still were served by aging septic systems. The city initiated several condemnation proceedings, ultimately assembling and clearing 55 acres of land for redevelopment.

Turning Point: In October 1989, the Brea City Council hosted a charrette to create a downtown master plan that would reflect the community’s vision of a new city center. The charrette elicited comments on the role, location, and design of various elements of downtown. This exercise resulted in a vision document on the community’s goals and values and created a framework for master planning and development.

Approach: The charrette process revealed several opinions and findings. In particular, residents felt that:

- Downtown should be the community’s symbolic focal point.
- High quality design and development are needed.
- Downtown should appeal to Breans of all ages and backgrounds.
- Downtown should be linked visually and functionally to the Brea Mall and the Civic Center.
- The plan should highlight historic preservation, including the city’s oil industry heritage.
- Downtown should be a 24-hour destination.
- Diverse housing options should be provided downtown.
- Traffic facilities should not carve up downtown activities, but vehicular traffic must be well served.

The ideas and choices articulated during the charrette, along with the few existing site constraints, allowed a resource team to follow up with a conceptual plan that included renderings of village-style development.

Much of the residential element has been structured around the city’s affordable housing program, known as “Housing Breans.” Created in 1993, the Housing Breans Advisory Board, composed of five members from a cross-section of the city, promotes affordable housing opportunities. The city’s motivation to build affordable housing is threefold. First, economic trends here and elsewhere show that business eventually follows the workers. Second, affordable housing is key to maintaining a balanced community that includes young people, retirees on fixed incomes, and middle-class families with specific housing needs. Third, the diversity of downtown is vastly enhanced by mixed-use development that incorporates affordable housing.

Results: The Charrette sponsors have succeeded largely in recasting Brea as its citizens had envisioned, despite a punishing recession in the early 1990s. Residential construction and rehabilitation, as well as new commercial and institutional buildings, have been completed and occupied. While more development is on the horizon, downtown already is alive with new activity that is well integrated with the existing neighborhood and commercial uses.

The city has seen more than 400 new units of affordable housing constructed since 1981 — a combination of new single-family homes and condominiums, rehabilitated apartments, and homes developed by Habitat for Humanity. Strong public involvement required developers to meet affordability standards with various types of subsidies and gap financing. The city also provided assistance directly to renters and homebuyers through a senior subsidy program, a homebuyer assistance program, rehab loans and mortgage credit certificates.

In addition to the new construction, the Brea Redevelopment Agency has undertaken rehabilitation projects to serve very low-income families. The most ambitious example is the South Walnut Apartment Complex, located close to downtown, that was converted from five deteriorated and overcrowded apartment complexes with multiple owners to a nicely rehabilitated, and now well managed, 51-unit apartment complex. The \$4-million project is complete and occupied by very low-income tenants. In addition to a clean and safe environment, the complex provides a community center with computer facilities, on-site tutoring, and other services for tenants.

MAIN STREET MARKET MIDDLETOWN, CONNECTICUT

Features: Middletown, a city of 43,000 residents, has a long history of planned growth and continues to balance commercial and residential development while protecting open space. The city's Main Street serves as an artery, with long blocks branching out into residential neighborhoods. Main Street buildings have housing on their upper floors, above the ground-floor commercial and retail space. Located on the scenic Connecticut River, the city is home to Wesleyan University. The city is served by Middletown Area Transit bus service and Connecticut Transit out of Hartford.

Challenge: Since the 1950s, the city's historic downtown had slowly faded and become underused.

Turning Point: Middletown's renaissance began when a private developer converted one of the three large department stores downtown into a pedestrian walkway known as Main Street Market. Shoppers once had to take a long walk around the store to reach Main Street from the parking lot, but a new passageway on the building's first floor now connects the lot with Main Street. The bright, attractive walkway features a cluster of thirty shops, including a restaurant, natural foods shop, jewelry store, and even an office of the department of motor vehicles. The space is divided into varied blocks ranging from 250 to 5,000 square feet.

Approach:

- The city's zoning laws require that retail businesses occupy the first floors of Main Street buildings, contributing to pedestrian interest.
- Downtown development mixes commercial, retail, residential, and government uses.
- Special attention is given to creating "pedestrian bridges" – attractive, walkable areas – between Main Street anchors.
- A goal of riverfront development will be to preserve the natural beauty and pedestrian access of the riverfront area.

Results:

Entertainment Cluster: The Main Street Market spurred Main Street's revival, attracting numerous restaurants. A 12-screen, 2,000-seat movie theater followed, occupying a gutted stretch of the street where an adjacent empty lot and underused two-level parking arcade afforded ample parking.

Police Headquarters: When the city outgrew its police headquarters a few blocks from downtown, it constructed a new building modeled after Middletown's original Victorian-era city hall on the site of an old Sears department store. Zoning regulations called for providing retail development on the building's first floor on Main Street, and so a new restaurant moved in to occupy all 7,000 square feet. As a result, the headquarters became a pedestrian bridge between the movie theater and the rest of downtown.

Artists' Cooperative: Two years ago, the city had a tax foreclosure on an old 12-unit apartment building on Main Street. The city forgave the building's delinquent taxes and found a developer

to convert the building into artists' cooperative housing, with apartments on the upper floors and a gallery on the first floor. Now the cooperative will draw area artists to yet another anchor of Main Street.

Riverfront: Middletown is beginning work on a development plan for the riverfront, creating a natural corridor on 85 acres between a beautiful bridge and Main Street. The land is both publicly and privately owned. It will include some infill development, but the main goal is to show off the beauty of the space.

KINZIE INDUSTRIAL CORRIDOR CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Features: Located one mile west of Chicago's Loop and stretching for about six blocks along Lake Street, the Kinzie corridor has direct access to three Interstate highways and also sits adjacent to the Chicago El and bus lines. After World War II, the west side area was a thriving industrial hub that brought employment opportunities to area residents and supported considerable commercial activity.

Challenge: The area must deal with the results of decades of decline. The Kinzie corridor took a severe hit during the 1968 riots and has struggled ever since, as properties were abandoned and residents fled.

Turning Point: Chicago is making a major commitment to bringing good jobs and quality, affordable residential tracts back to the west side – a strategy that includes revitalizing the Kinzie Industrial Corridor area.

Approach: A key element of Chicago's strategy includes acquiring former manufacturing parcels, usually taken for back taxes, that adjoin sites the city already owns. Ultimately, the city would like to assemble a 70-acre tract that could be used to meet modern manufacturing needs.

- The city is using \$4 million of its Section 108 funding for infill-related activities in the Kinzie corridor area for site acquisition, site preparation, and environmental testing.
- The city is planning significant infrastructure improvements, such as street improvements and enhanced site access. Officials also will include street and alley closures as needed in order to accommodate manufacturers' acreage needs. A planned streetscaping project along Lake Street will make the site more attractive from the adjacent El line, as well as provide an aesthetic buffer for nearby commercial and residential areas.
- The corridor lies within a federal empowerment zone, state enterprise zone, and a Chicago tax increment financing district, which all carry investment incentives that will be marketed to prospective new site users.

Results:

Clearwater Fisheries: A new occupant in the corridor, Clearwater Fisheries will construct a 31,000 square foot building at Lake and Western Streets for seafood processing and distribution. The company's \$6.5-million investment will create between 30 and 55 new jobs.

Northern Greenhouse: Northern Greenhouse will expand its existing wholesale landscaping business onto an adjoining parcel, at Wood and Wolcott Streets, providing 40 new jobs.

Standard Equipment: As part of its operational expansion and modernization, Standard Equipment will use 14,000 square feet at the corner of Lake and Damen Streets for a truck and Zamboni maintenance facility (with the latter serving the nearby United Center Arena). The \$1.5-million investment will provide ten new jobs.

DOWNTOWN 2000 LAWRENCE, KANSAS

Features: With 85,000 residents, Lawrence combines small-town hospitality and big-city attractions and enjoys national recognition and historical significance. Lawrence has a vibrant downtown shopping, dining, and entertainment district and is home to the University of Kansas, a university of 25,000 students that is ranked one of the nation's most beautiful campuses. In 2000, the National Trust for Historic Preservation named the city one of its Dozen Distinctive Destinations. By 2020, the city expects its population to increase by 30 percent; therefore, planning to accommodate growth while preserving the area's open space is a high priority.

Challenge: Despite a relatively strong downtown area, the heart of downtown Lawrence was underused and poorly designed for pedestrian traffic.

Turning Point: In January 1998, a local business owner named Jeff Shmalberg sought to build twenty new parking spaces for his dry cleaning business. His effort evolved into Downtown 2000, a \$25-30 million project to construct a parking garage where vacant buildings once stood, surrounded by mixed-use development. As the Sierra Club recently reported, "For better or worse, cars are a part of the American lifestyle, and communities can hardly ignore the needs of drivers. But what planners can do is balance these needs with those of pedestrians and cyclists to create areas that encourage residents to park and walk – or even leave their cars at home. In the case of Lawrence, they are integrating the new parking garage with adjacent development that will include loft-style apartments, room for dozens of retailers and new office space."

Approach:

- Since the 1980s, Lawrence has fought off efforts to develop strip malls on the outskirts of town, and so only a few big-box retailers compete with the downtown for retail development. Thus, demand for retail space downtown is high.
- As Downtown 2000 grew, local developers with expertise in planning and marketing became involved to ensure quality design and generate business interest. The project also involved hundreds of residents and local leaders in planning the redevelopment.
- The local bank that owned 40 percent of the vacant parking land sold it to the project in exchange for spaces in the parking garage.
- Tax increment financing (TIF) is supporting the infrastructure for the garage, street, and sidewalk improvements (in Kansas, private buildings are not eligible for TIF).

Results:

Parking Garage: Construction of the parking garage will be completed in the summer of 2001.

Residential, retail, and office development will follow, with one four-story building featuring two floors of retail and loft apartments upstairs.

Arts Center: The city is building a \$7-million arts center across the street from the garage.

PUBLIC MARKET PORTLAND, MAINE

Features: Maine has a long tradition of downtown public markets. Portland, a city of 62,500 people, proved to be an ideal location for a market to showcase Maine's produce and food products.

Challenge: The project sought to redevelop an old surface parking lot into an architecturally appealing, year-round public market.

Turning Point: In 1995, Owen Wells and Elizabeth Noyce noted the success of public markets on the West Coast and decided to spearhead construction of such a market in Portland. They called on Ted Spitzer, a nationally recognized expert on public markets, to conduct a feasibility study and create a concept plan. To assist with the design, Mr. Spitzer retained Hugh Boyd, A.I.A., of Montclair, New Jersey, a specialist in public market architecture. Their research demonstrated the potential for an indoor, year-round public market located in the downtown. The decision was made in May 1996 to implement the project and Mr. Spitzer was hired to make it a reality.

Approach:

- Mr. Spitzer founded Market Ventures, Inc., (MVI) to develop and manage the operations of the market.
- Planning occurred through the fall and winter of 1996-1997, to develop architectural plans and find the best mix of tenants.
- The market's signature design elements included a pedestrian skybridge linking the market with the new Public Market Garage, and a massive granite fireplace located at the center of the L-shaped building. Throughout the design process, efforts were made to utilize Maine-made materials and skilled local tradesmen.
- As construction progressed in 1997, Mr. Boyd worked with each vendor to design the layout and appearance of their stalls to support and enhance their products.

Results:

The Portland Public Market was designed and completed within three years, creating a major downtown attraction that showcases local produce and products.

OLD TOWN LANSING, MICHIGAN

Features: Old Town is home to Lansing's largest collection of historic buildings and for more than twenty years has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Over the years, the city and other entities have assembled a variety of economic development resources, such as natural resources funds and enterprise zone designation, to fund revitalization.

Challenge: Old Town is the oldest part of Lansing. Once a thriving retail center, Old Town's economy went downhill as cars drew people out to shopping malls in the 1960s and 1970s. In the 1970s and 1980s, the city tried several approaches to revitalize the area's dilapidated buildings, including demolishing them to encourage new construction, but nothing worked.

Turning Point: In the mid-1990s, Mayor David Hollister made Old Town a top priority, changing its name from North Lansing. Soon after, in 1995, Old Town was designated a National Main Street community, and in 1996 the Main Street Program began providing design guidelines and greater coordination to continue the area's revitalization.

Approach:

Old Town is a special focus of the city's master plan, which promotes mixed-use development. The area has become a model of traditional neighborhood development.

- The revitalization of Old Town Lansing is the result of a concerted effort of the Main Street Program (funded by the Local Initiative Support Corporation, corporate grants, and membership dues), state and city development offices, and the state economic development corporation. Although these groups are not centrally organized, they have worked together to assemble tools and programs to foster redevelopment.
- The Main Street Program is driven by property and business owners rather than outside developers. Through its committees on promotions, economic restructuring, and design, merchants and neighbors create and carry out projects. For example, the design committee has developed voluntary design guidelines and works with individual property owners to make improvements.
- The committee also convinced the city to improve the streetscape. The economic restructuring committee supports existing businesses, recruits new ones, and advertises vacant buildings. The promotions committee sponsors special events, including biennial festivals, to draw people into the neighborhood.
- Redevelopment has occurred incrementally to address specific needs and take on opportunities to improve the area.

Results:

Growth: In the past five years, the Main Street Program has attracted \$10 million in private investment, 25 new businesses, and 100 new jobs.

Park: A park with a fish ladder, developed fifteen years ago after the city purchased and demolished a run-down strip club in the middle of Old Town, has become an attractive amenity for the Old Town neighborhood.

River Trail Extension: The river trail extension connects Old Town to the rest of downtown Lansing.

Convention Bureau: An old warehouse has been converted into an area convention bureau.

Mixed-use Development: Condominiums, as well as restaurants, cafes, and shops, are being constructed in the neighborhood.

Mackinac Chapter of the Sierra Club: In June of 2000, the chapter became the first tenant to occupy a restored two-story townhouse in Old Town.

DOWNTOWN 2000

PETERBOROUGH, NEW HAMPSHIRE

Features: Peterborough is a small New England town of 5,500 people. The downtown area features a confluence of two rivers, which historically had received little attention. This green space, combined with a number of historic buildings, is the foundation for an attractive downtown.

Challenge: By the mid-1990s, there was little activity and no growth in downtown Peterborough. The area had lost businesses to local malls built in the 1980s, and major employers such as Brookstone and Ball Bearing had left the area or reduced their operations.

Turning Point: Five years ago, a community activist spearheaded creation of Downtown 2000, a private, nonprofit corporation, to provide an impetus for downtown revitalization. An offshoot of a broader community planning process, Downtown 2000 began as an advocacy group, was drawn into specific projects, and now faces a crossroads in determining how to continue and grow.

Approach:

- Downtown 2000's first major project was creating a park downtown. The Toad Stool Bookshop (owned by Yankee Publishing) had closed, leaving behind an empty building surrounded by a parking lot, bad trees, dirt, and a railroad. Downtown 2000 hired a planner, raised money, and created River Park to provide a focal point for the area.
- By building a walkway under an existing highway bridge and creating a river walk to better connect downtown businesses, the city will provide pedestrians with a safe and appealing means of getting around. The town's Riverwalk Committee is working to develop the walkway in segments.
- Working with the town, Downtown 2000 became involved in the town's capital improvement plan, promoting pedestrian-friendly streetscaping. The town initially gave Downtown 2000 a line item in its budget to fund new sidewalks, and today sidewalk construction is a permanent part of the budget.
- A newly appointed Historic Commission will call attention to threatened historic structures to promote preservation.

Results:

Depot Square: River Park attracted business, including the purchase and development of rundown old warehouses along the river that were converted into the Depot Square commercial area.

Main Street Church: When fire destroyed the interior of a church on Main Street, the owner had the choice between selling it or tearing it down. Downtown 2000 stepped in to purchase and rehabilitate the church, preserving an important historic building.

ALBINA CORNER PORTLAND, OREGON

Features: The Albina Corner project is located on Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, the main street of several inner-city neighborhoods that form the core of Portland's federally designated enterprise community. The three-quarter-acre site is adjacent to a bus line and near a major light rail station.

Challenge: By 1993, the area faced serious deterioration of the existing commercial strip along King Boulevard. The Albina Corner site housed an old car lot, a car wash, and a small, vacant office building that dated back to the 1920's.

Turning Point: The project was made possible in large part because of a zoning change approved in 1993 by the city's planning commission. The neighborhood urged adoption of the Albina Community Plan, which allowed for high-density housing and mixed-use development, including apartments over ground floor retail shops.

Approach:

Albina Corner is a mixed-use project including 48 units of low-income housing built over 12,000 square feet of commercial space, including a child-care center.

- The project uses shared parking in order to reduce the number of spaces required; skeptical lenders were convinced that this would work only when they were shown photos indicating that apartment parking lots remained virtually empty during the work day.
- The building was set back two feet from the allowable boundary to widen the sidewalks at its corner location and invite pedestrian traffic.
- A central courtyard has been built over the first floor shops, open to the sky; the three floors of residential units are located around it. The courtyard has trees, a fountain, built-in seating, and enough room for children to play.
- The first-floor commercial enterprises, including a bank, coffee shop, and art gallery, support the project, covering much of the maintenance costs, while providing residents on the upper floors, especially senior citizens, with handy access to banking and other services.
- The \$4.4-million project was financed through a complex combination of 11 different public and private construction and take-out loans from banks and other sources. Low-income housing tax credits also were used. Funding to initiate the project came in the form of a \$100,000 grant from the Oregon housing trust fund.

Results: Albina Corner has become a real "gateway" project for the Albina community, and is one of the first transit-oriented developments completed outside of Portland's downtown area. With minimal advertising, the apartments were leased within six weeks, well ahead of schedule, and 90 percent of the commercial space was leased prior to construction.

NORTH MACADAM AREA PORTLAND, OREGON

Features: Near downtown Portland and adjoining the Willamette River and other residential neighborhoods, the North Macadam area is a 145-acre, mostly vacant tract. It includes a former steel fabrication plant, a barge construction operation, and several other industrial sites.

Approach: The area's five major property owners plan to redevelop the properties themselves.

- They have created a street grid for the area to serve pedestrians, bicyclists, mass transit, and cars alike. Property owners also have sought zoning changes, away from industrial uses, in order to reinforce the street plan they have devised.
- As part of their effort, owners have encouraged the city to carry out a transportation analysis for the area, consistent with the mixed-use commercial-residential vision they have mapped out. This analysis is examining the area's capacity, developing options for expanding and improving access portals to the area, exploring various transit mixes for the area (including an extension of Portland's light rail system), and considering new transit alternatives (such as a streetcar line through the area).

Results:

Housing and Commercial Development: Construction is underway to launch new site uses that eventually will include 1,725 units of mixed-income and affordable housing (about 65 percent as rental units), and 1.5 million square feet of commercial and office space — a \$460-million investment that is expected to generate 8,000 new jobs.

Extension of Portland Waterfront Park: Portland plans to extend the Waterfront Park through this site, preserving open space and creating increased access to the Willamette River.

Women's Health Center: One of the property owners in North Macadam, the Zeidel family, is working with the Oregon Health Services University to establish a Center for Womens' Health on that site.

TRINITY RIVER PROJECT

DALLAS, TEXAS

Features: Dallas was born on the Trinity River and has grown up around it. The river runs through the heart of the city, from the northwest corner, past downtown and southeast to the county line. Early in the city's history, the Trinity was an important element of the economy, but over time it has been relegated to a flooding concern. While the Trinity was not considered an important resource, residents and businesses are beginning to see its potential as a greenway coursing through Dallas instead of as a water body that needs little except flood management.

Challenge: Explosive urban development in the Trinity watershed over several decades has both increased water volume and decreased water quality. The initial response, as in most cities, was to separate the built and natural environments by engineering the river channel to prevent flooding and by building the city to minimize the waterway's presence. In the early 1990s, however, flooding was still an issue in Dallas, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was contemplating additional investments in the levee system. At the same time, the state highway agency was developing plans to redevelop a set of major highway intersections near downtown, known as the "mixmaster."

Turning Point: As it became apparent that funding, scheduling, and design needed to be better coordinated, civic leaders conceptualized a comprehensive Trinity effort to incorporate the river as a central environmental and community asset. In 1994, the City Council formed the Trinity River Corridor Citizens Committee (TRCCC), and Mayors Steve Bartlett and then Ron Kirk supported the work and the recommendations of the Committee. The TRCCC developed a vision for what the corridor should mean to Dallas and the role the Trinity River will play in making Dallas a "world class" city. With the approval of a public referendum in 1998, the vision of the Trinity River Corridor became the official policy that will guide development and restoration on the river for the next two decades.

Approach: The Trinity River Project is a major infrastructure investment program that will address flood threats from the river, enhance an environmental asset for the city, and redevelop several major roads in the corridor. The project is investing more than \$1 billion in federal, state, and local funds, including a \$246-million bond referendum, to transform the river corridor.

- Most of the project funding will improve transportation and flood control structures, including an entirely new highway segment, an unusual project in a downtown area. The Trinity Parkway will handle traffic while the "mixmaster" – the intersection of two major highways downtown – is being rebuilt over the course of 15 years to provide additional access to downtown. Proponents of these highway projects note that air quality improvements are anticipated as a result of relieving some of the current intense congestion.
- In addition to automobile access, rail access has been dramatically improved via the growing Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) system.
- A master plan, presented by the TRCCC to the City Council in 1997, envisions 6,000 acres of parkland that will protect both the river and the forest. It will have an extensive trail system, 20-25 miles of equestrian lanes, a multi-purpose park center, and numerous other amenities to make the park an environmental and educational asset to Dallas. The state legislature in 1989 created the Trinity River State Park, a 200-foot strip on each side of the Trinity River, with a total park area of 1,200 acres.

MANCHESTER, VERMONT

Features: Manchester, a town of barely 4,000 nestled in the foothills of the Green Mountain National Forest in southwestern Vermont, is a gold coast tourist town. Built around the ski industry since the 1940's, the town subsequently nurtured a popular summer resort atmosphere centered around arts and music. Like many New England communities, Manchester's economy was hit hard by the recession, the energy crisis, and regional disinvestment from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s. Reinvestment in the late 1980s was spurred by the upsurge in tourism and recreational activities, and it brought an influx of wealthy retirees, many of whom hailed from out of state. These newcomers have been generous contributors to both educational and recreational facilities in Manchester, helping to maintain the city's outward image as a well-heeled small town.

Challenge: In recent years, the town has attracted factory outlet stores. Like the towns of Kittery and Freeport, Maine, national brand name retailers and discount outlets have flocked to Manchester's historic downtown, bringing jobs but also attracting tourists and traffic. At the same time, local residents now must travel half an hour to Bennington or Rutland in order to shop at the everyday department stores that no longer can afford downtown Manchester rents.

Turning Point: When the town commissioned a study of its commercial zone build-out potential in 1993, many town residents were shocked to learn that existing zoning ordinances and regulations would allow even further expansion of the town's outlets, making Manchester one of the state's largest retail centers. Residents and town leaders subsequently began to take a hard look at how the town's regulatory authority can be used to help diversify the economy, offer more affordable housing, and preserve Manchester's streetscape for pedestrians — residents and tourists alike.

Approach: Manchester's situation is instructive because a backbone of its economy – brand name retail outlets – runs directly counter to the vision held by many of the residents of how a small Vermont town ought to look and function. The 1997 Town Plan targeted consumerism as one of the biggest threats to the town's survival: "Manchester clearly sees the need to guard against threats to our quality of life which stem from retailing trends. Our entire society is debating the effects of consumerism in general, and two phenomena which have worldwide implications for cultural homogenization: *big box retailing and name brand retailing* of goods and services." Manchester's infill development strategy, therefore, is to diversify the town's retail economy in order to provide residents with living-wage jobs, educational opportunity, and affordable housing.

- A 30-year-old law restricts commercial and retail development to the downtown core, favoring high densities downtown and residential and open space on the periphery. The town's sewer and water system accommodates this land use pattern.
- A design review process holds all new development proposals to high-quality design and construction standards, including harmony with predominant architectural styles, character, and historical attributes. This design review process also applies to standards for signage and lighting, which often can spell the difference between tasteful and tacky tourist destinations.
- The town recently adopted a "goal-based regulatory" strategy to give it latitude with certain zoning requirements in order to design a livable, pedestrian-friendly community. For example, the use of conditional use criteria allows the city to reject a project if it fails to

mitigate off-site problems such as traffic circulation. The planning committee reviews projects as much on the basis of how they look and feel, as on how they function. Using a goal-based regulatory approach to zoning and permitting, the town has the authority to emphasize and value the impact of a project's aesthetics and function in a community.

- To achieve a more balanced mix of business downtown, Manchester has proposed establishing three categories of commercial establishments based on their clientele, products, and services. The categories cover businesses that provide “every day” products and services of value to the resident community; those providing higher-end products, but which are locally owned and not found to foster the intense consumer activity associated with the outlet shopping; and those that depend on “nonresident, visitor, and tourist traffic attracted to Manchester, and/or whose promotion of national brand names diminishes the uniqueness of what Manchester has to offer tourists and other visitors.” Companies in the latter category would be subject to permitting constraints in order to enable the town to achieve its other goals of traffic management, affordable housing, and economic development.

CENTER IN THE SQUARE ROANOKE, VIRGINIA

Features: Roanoke, Virginia, is a city of almost 100,000 residents. Its downtown area includes the Roanoke Farmers' Market and numerous historic buildings.

Challenge: In the late 1970s, downtown Roanoke and the area's arts community were in a dismal state. Downtown was deteriorating and emptying out as shoppers fled to the safety and convenience of suburban malls. Cultural organizations, located in the suburbs, were inaccessible by public transportation and unpatronized by a broad cross-section of Valley residents. None of these organizations had a permanent home with adequate facilities to accomplish their dreams.

Turning Point: The formation of a business league in 1976 led to a comprehensive revitalization project called Design '79. In a storefront office in a very visible window on Roanoke's busiest street, Design '79 positioned an architect who was drawing plans for possible downtown improvements. Citizens were encouraged to observe and offer suggestions. Four months of call-in television broadcasts coupled with a panel composed of more than 100 citizens created a public wish list. Center in the Square was the resulting centerpiece of Design '79.

Approach:

- The Center in the Square founders selected a site in a vacant 1914 feed and seed warehouse on the corner of Roanoke's Farmers' Market, reinforcing and bolstering one of downtown's natural strengths. More than 50 organizations were invited to move into Center, and only five accepted the challenge to move downtown.
- To open the original facility, partnerships were forged with individuals, regional businesses, and local, state, and federal governments. Pledges to purchase and remodel the building were quickly obtained.
- In 1988, the Center obtained donations and pledges to purchase and remodel an adjoining building for additional space, now called Center on Church, which was completed in 1990.

Results:

Center in the Square: In its first weekend of operation in 1983, Center in the Square welcomed 40,000 visitors. The organizations housed there have flourished, as have the surrounding historic market area and downtown Roanoke. Center in the Square has helped revitalize Roanoke's downtown market area, attracting new businesses, residents, and tourists to the region, and strengthening the central business district.

Opera Roanoke and Roanoke Ballet Theatre, Inc.: In 1997, the Center added these two beneficiary organizations, which had been struggling to afford their housing. The Center pays the rent and maintenance costs for their space at the Jefferson Center.

Economic Growth: Center in the Square has helped attract more than 240 new businesses that have opened in the Farmers' Market District since the Center opened. Investments in the immediate market area over the past sixteen years total \$350 million for construction and renovation projects, including The Hotel Roanoke & Conference Center, the Norfolk Southern Building and the First Union Tower.