

E. The Broadway¹⁷ Commercial Corridor

The commercial district along Broadway is Gloucester City's traditional "Main Street Commercial Corridor." Over the past decades, this corridor, like other Main Streets throughout the country, has suffered decline due to a complicated cycle of disinvestment. Original businesses have left the downtown area for more lucrative retail opportunities in established malls and designated retail zones that have ample parking and support facilities to meet the new demands of today's consumer. An increase in the number of two-income households has also made traditional downtown shopping from 9 to 5 an obsolete phenomenon.

The Broadway Corridor study area extends from the southern entrance of the City, starting at Little Timber Creek to the tip of Broadway as it passes under the Walt Whitman Bridge. However, the focus of this corridor analysis will be on the initial enhancement of a 5-block area that will serve as a prototype for the balance of Broadway.

Recommendations will also be made to identify the entrance to the community along its north and south gateways, and to improve signage styles, storefront treatments, and lighting at other portions of Broadway. The mere concentration on a 5-block area is only to assure that something can be accomplished within a reasonable amount of time which can then serve as an example for the rest of the corridor. Supporting this approach is the ability to enhance this area by the improvement of two publicly-controlled properties -- the Broadway School and the Municipal Building. The Broadway Elementary School could be used as an "incubator project" to stimulate the redevelopment of that block by identifying an alternate use that would be compatible with the surrounding retail and commercial operations. Improvements to the existing municipal building could include upgrading the plaza around the adjoining War Memorial, creating a new plaza in the open area in front of the Collective Savings Bank, landscaping the edge of the municipal parking facility, and underwriting the facade restoration of several storefronts as prototype examples. All such improvements would capitalize on the existing upgraded portion of Monmouth Avenue between the railroad station and Broadway.

Given these conceptual approaches, it is necessary to understand that the restructuring of the Broadway Commercial Corridor is a deliberate, step-by-step intervention process in which both the public and private sectors have a unique role. The public sector must act expeditiously in identifying the problems, developing a consensus with local leaders, and providing the necessary zoning and redevelopment legislation that would support the rehabilitation of the downtown areas. This can be accomplished by initiating the following actions:

- Developing a Special Improvement District in which there is a partnership between the land owners, merchants, and the governing body;

¹⁷ For purposes of this report, Broadway encompasses north and south Broadway.

- Providing the proper land use regulatory controls to help guide appropriate design changes for individual properties. Essentially, the municipality assumes some of the responsibilities carried out by the "mall manager," regulating facades, lighting, signage, etc. All this can be accomplished through appropriate zoning and site plan review procedures with the cooperation of the overall business community;
- Providing funding for street enhancements, banners, lighting, murals, gateway identification signs, all of which would support the development of a common theme to give a visual identity to Broadway as a commercial corridor and further support the private sector investment.

The rehabilitation process is a cooperative venture in which the public and private sectors coordinate their efforts in accordance with an overall plan to rejuvenate the retail areas of the City. Downtown revitalization does not happen overnight. It is a gradual process that begins with concentrated actions that eventually build local capacity to tackle more larger and complicated revitalization problems.

The rebuilding of the Broadway Commercial Corridor "Main Street" or the Route 130 corridor of Gloucester City can only be accomplished by comprehensive planning and by providing full time professional management for the implementation of the strategic plans being presented herein. These concepts will be discussed in subsequent sections of this report for each of these areas through a series of recommended revitalization programs.

1. Broadway Commercial Corridor Economic Plan. By Location

Restructuring the economy of Gloucester City's downtown is based upon the relationship between the commercial activity and the value of real estate. The true value of the downtown real estate is not based on the architectural detail or historic significance. Value is determined by revenue generated, and revenue generated is determined by the level of commercial activity in the district. If the activity is low, rent revenues drop and property values decrease. The goal of the Broadway Commercial Corridor Plan is to stimulate the improvement of commercial activity, enhance the real estate attractiveness of the area and restructure the "look of Broadway" as an attractive theme and viable retail corridor of Gloucester City.

An evaluation of Gloucester City's retail sales shows that between 1987 and 1992 retail sales dropped from \$38,849,000 to \$35,138,000.¹⁸ This represented a decline of 9.6%. Similarly, in 1987, the number of employees in retail trade employment was 467 versus 357 in 1992, a decline of 23.6%. The average number of employees per establishment dropped from 8.6 in 1987 to 7.3 in 1992, representing a decline of 15.2%. When one evaluates the number of employees in the retail trades in Gloucester City, it represents a significant number of individuals. Thus, any action to support or improve retail trade conditions would enhance the economy of the City.

The comparison of the declining employee rate per retail establishments with the increase in average pay per employee probably reflects an increase in minimum wage and possibly a strategy among retailers of doing more with less. Thus, the increase in the average pay per employee from \$9,961.00 in 1987 to \$14,218.00 in 1992, a change of 42.7%, is a probable index of "retail trade shrinkage" when compared with the declining number of employees.

It is the recommendation of the economic restructuring plan for the Broadway Commercial Corridor to encourage small, visible physical improvements early in the revitalization process that will be affordable investments that will draw attention and create follow-up investments from other property owners. Accordingly, any financial incentives offered by the City through various mechanisms should be geared to accomplish these goals.

The strategy for the economic restructuring of the Broadway Commercial Corridor must be carried out in increments, at designated locations where the recommended improvements can serve as prototypes for the entire corridor. To accomplish this, four nodes for enhancement have been selected:

- Morris Street and Broadway -- From the Broadway School up to Morris Street;
- Monmouth Street and Broadway -- Generally, the area between the Municipal Complex and Collective Bank at Monmouth Street;
- Cumberland Avenue and Broadway -- The historic buildings at Cumberland and Broadway have been designated as a first phase project to showcase design recommendations to upgrade the appearance of the area and to experiment with organizing a Broadway Main Street Organization which can "market the street."
- The ACME and related retail shopping center -- A gateway to Gloucester City from the south.

¹⁸Refer back to information in Figure E-5, located on page ECON-13.

a. Morris Street and Broadway

Within this corridor, it is recommended that the Broadway School be used as an "incubator project" which would stimulate the economic development of the immediate surrounding areas. The school, which will soon be vacated, could be available for an economic redevelopment project. The emphasis should be placed on attracting a use which would revitalize the surrounding real estate. In essence, if the school could be used to attract more people and dollars to the downtown area it would stimulate the revitalization of the surrounding real estate. In conjunction, surrounding areas can be enhanced in accordance with the recommendations presented in Figure E-23, which demonstrates a potential prototype project that can be undertaken in this area. The enhancements included in the plan are:

- The use of ornamental, open grid fencing complementary to wrought iron fence styles prevalent in the Historic District;
- Themed storefront/facade and awning treatments;
- The creation of pedestrian plazas in front of the Broadway School and at the terminus of Plum Street;
- Stylized signage for commercial uses including wall murals;
- Streetscape improvements including street trees, pedestrian level lighting compatible with the historic area and attached to existing poles, and new standard stylized bus shelters.

b. Monmouth Street and Broadway

Figure E-24 identifies the design modifications that can be made to enhance the visual attraction to this important area. The improvements projected for this portion of the corridor capitalize upon the previous improvements made on a portion of Monmouth Street east of Broadway to the railroad station. As the perceived City Center, such improvements reflect good civic design, which would further support merchants' efforts to strengthen the retail market and the image of the entire district.

This concept plan affords an excellent opportunity to:

- Capitalize upon the existing architectural and historic resources located along Monmouth Avenue;
- Enhance the setting of the Collective Bank property by upgrading the area in front of the bank and the street edges along its property lines with ornamental fencing, lighting, landscaping, etc.;
- Landscape the parking lots behind the municipal building and the adjacent bank;
- Introduce the use of replicated ornamental iron fencing throughout the area to create a visual linkage from one property to the next;

- Rehabilitate the existing storefronts to replicate their original facades;
- Add street light banners, street trees, etc. along Monmouth Avenue and Broadway;
- Create a revitalized setting for the War Memorial next to the municipal building by linking both with a plaza along Broadway;
- Use the "back" of the existing War Memorial to paint a mural depicting the City's veterans;
- End the pedestrian islands with ornamentation to capitalize upon their unique design.

c. Cumberland Avenue and Broadway

Dooley's Tavern was built in 1754 and provides an authentic backdrop to improve the area along Broadway and Cumberland Avenue. As shown in Figure E-25, this high visibility area, at a critical intersection along the Broadway Commercial Corridor, offers an excellent redevelopment opportunity to capitalize upon a significant historic resource by using it as a cornerstone in the upgrading of this area. Additionally, the roadway configuration, combined with the location of the Mary Ethel Costello School, affords an excellent opportunity to reorganize an obsolete street pattern and collectively enhance this important intersection by:

- Developing a new, small park by closing a portion of the street and expanding the existing area;
- Creating a small plaza in front of the existing school by reorganizing the existing parking area along Cumberland Avenue and dedicating the remaining open space to seek historic restoration funds for Dooley's Tavern and its upgrade,
- Utilizing the wall mural program to highlight the history of the City;
- Reorganizing the area parking, both public and private, and creating a shared parking facility.

d. The ACME and Related Retail Shopping Center

The shopping center containing the ACME and related retail operations is a gateway to the City from the south and has great potential for improvements with minimal expenditures. As shown in Figure E-26, simple modifications on signage, additional landscaping, and linkage of the two facilities, plus treatment of the rear of the property along Jersey Avenue would substantially enhance the appearance of these facilities at an important location in the Broadway Commercial Corridor.