

2. Financial Incentives for Redevelopment of the Broadway Commercial Corridor

In this section of the report, several financial incentives are outlined that can be used to economically restructure retail corridors such as the Broadway Commercial Corridor. These incentives can take various forms, from minimal efforts reflected in design assistance to actual grants or loans for physical improvements. The incentives detailed here were principally designed to help increase interest in business and property investment by reducing risk, cutting the time of approvals, and providing a common theme to serve as a catalyst for all improvements in a designated area. The incentives include:

a. Design Assistance

Design assistance serves to educate owners who want to do "something," but really do not have the expertise to obtain their goals. It also serves to help owners and professionals quickly understand the goals and objectives of the downtown proprietors as to the design objective or "theme" that they wish to embrace. Traditionally, design assistance would be provided for facade treatment of buildings, the style of signage, window treatment, lighting, landscaping, outside display, and rules governing the form and substance of window treatment. This list can be expanded depending on the needs of specific clusters of retail businesses within the Broadway Corridor.

b. Matching Grants

A simple program of providing small matching grants to properties in target areas can be very successful in getting physical improvement projects off the ground. Typically, grants are more effective than low-interest loans in the first year of a corridor project because many business and property owners are wary of debt and skeptical of the revitalization process. A matching grant typically allows them to overcome their original reluctance to participate and potentially paves the way for larger investments in the future as a corridor redevelopment project matures. The matching grant program should be targeted to properties within close proximity or directly contiguous to the prototype area around the Municipal Complex, the Broadway School, Dooley's Tavern, and, to a limited extent, key blocks between those facilities.

A time limitation on the issuing of matching grants is very important and depends upon the amount of progress made in the first, second, and third years of a project. If the five-block area between the Municipal Complex and the Broadway School is substantially rehabilitated during the first two to three years, then a portion of the Matching Grant Program could be diverted to the rest of the Broadway Corridor. There should, however, be a "cut-off point" as to when the matching grant process is eliminated and low interest loans are initiated. Usually, the latter starts when the stimulus of the Matching Grant Program has served its purpose of "starting up" the revitalization process of an area.

In addition, the concept of "Matching Grants" should be kept competitive. Grants should be allocated to those blocks where groups of merchants organize and combine their grant requests for the rehabilitation of entire blocks within the designated target areas.

c. Low-Interest Loans

Low-interest loans are critical to the economic restructuring of a corridor area. Usually these loans are initially reserved for physical improvements that deal with specific elements of the corridor's goals and objectives. In the case of the Broadway Commercial Corridor, low-interest loans would be used for facade treatments, signage, window lighting, and providing customer parking for individual or collective groups of merchants within a designated target area.

In the secondary phase of the corridor redevelopment process, the scope of the low-interest loan program can be widened to provide funds for business expansion. Such loans can receive higher priorities if groups of merchants collectively apply for loans along contiguous portions of Broadway. For example, loans for expansion under a typical corridor redevelopment process may not be covered as part of a Phase I development process except when the expansion is part of a comprehensive redevelopment of an entire block of merchants purchasing property to create a parking lot, develop a collectively significant facade treatment, provide window treatment, etc.

d. Regulatory Relief

Regulatory relief is a critical component in producing incentives for economic development in designated corridors. A program to simplify regulatory processing for site plans, use variances, and similar permitting can be a substantial incentive to individual or group investors attempting to redevelop portions of the Broadway Commercial Corridor. Such regulatory relief can be provided after the process is tested and it becomes evident that components of the existing system may be streamlined to advance the redevelopment time-table. Another technique is to reduce fees for permits in designated areas. Still another technique that has been well-received in other areas is for the City's professionals to provide assistance in processing the necessary applications for required regulatory relief as well as providing design assistance to obtain "the architectural theme" that is designated for a particular corridor.

e. Tax Relief

One of the most common methods of tax relief is a system of abatements or credits for new development or rehabilitation of a designated area. To qualify for tax exemptions or abatements, an area must be deemed as "an area in need of rehabilitation or an area in need of redevelopment consistent with the appropriate laws in the State of New Jersey." These laws, as well as other techniques, will be discussed in a section entitled "Implementing the Strategic Plans."

f. Special Improvement District

Creation of a Special Improvement District (SID) provides a formal mechanism to financially support a corridor project by allowing the municipality to levy an assessment on property in a designated district and directly channel funds back into the special improvement area. The availability of such funds provides direct monies to deal comprehensively with the problems of the corridor. A SID fee would enable merchants to compete with malls and shopping centers which have fees that are used for mutually beneficial purposes. A SID fee would provide funding for such activities as:

- Seasonal advertising;
- Advertising for special events and holidays;
- Banners depicting sales or seasonal changes;
- Sponsorship of civic events in downtown area;
- Developing a common logo for the Broadway Commercial Corridor;
- Promoting the convenience, service, variety, uniqueness or exclusiveness of the retail function in the corridor area;
- Funding special events to emphasize the uniqueness of the Broadway Commercial Corridor. Such events would involve providing music, food, and beverages, underwriting specialized activities attractive to families and children, and providing free gifts for the occasion as a memento of the day.

Only through such designated funds can such events be carried out in a manner to build up the image of the Broadway Commercial Corridor and to create a strong understanding of its assets, customers, and marketing direction. The business community then becomes an effective organization because it is funded and its leadership can take decisive action in conjunction with the governing body through a variety of efforts.

3. Summary

Supporting the revitalization of the Broadway Commercial Corridor requires a comprehensive effort to secure its economic position in the community. As previously indicated, the action requires a public/private partnership to support economic restructuring programs through the adoption of:

- A Special Improvement District Program;
- A redevelopment/rehabilitation program;
- Supporting the preservation of design assets, such as facades reminiscent of an architectural era consistent with the heritage of the downtown area;
- A cooperative public/private program to secure sector improvements, such as lighting, tree planting, and signage;
- A program to provide promotional incentives for local merchants to act collectively;
- A public/private partnership working collectively with the municipality to provide shared parking for merchants who have parking and extend the courtesy to others for an affordable fee;
- A comprehensive parking plan utilizing a system of designated parking areas to service downtown merchants;
- A plan endorsing design techniques which deal with store-front design, encouraging changes that include: dramatic colors, awnings consistent with an overall theme, and business identification signs which are creative and sensitively designed, with proportions and colors that will reflect a theme consistent with the historical style of the downtown area;
- The implementation of a special features plan that identifies focal points with lighting and wall murals which are eye-catchers both for residents and visitors. Such special attractions could be used to merchandise the theme of an area while at the same time reflecting the history of a City in the theme of the art work itself. Murals have been successfully used in many cities to give vitality and a common theme to corridor projects in an economic and timely fashion. As such, they are an excellent short-term tool to create excitement and visual focus on designated, strategic areas in the City;

- A plan to encourage and require window treatments that inject vitality to the entire district. By working collectively, merchants in the redevelopment corridor have the ability to control the visual impact of the entire area if each merchant works with his/her neighbors to use a common theme for the entire district and to upgrade their window displays accordingly. By working with professional window display designers, downtown business organizations can provide a dynamic change in the appearance of any redevelopment corridor. Well-lit, attractive window displays would make the Broadway Commercial Corridor an attractive place to walk through, shop, and meet people, and would enhance the entire image of the City. In addition to all of these attributes, the power of collective window treatments affords a formidable merchandising opportunity.

The economic restructuring of any downtown corridor requires a cooperative effort among the local merchants' group; civic and citizens' groups such as the Historic Preservation Commission; the Planning and Zoning Boards; and, most importantly, the governing body. Working together, an organization can be created that will systematically organize and manage an implementation program to realize the recommendations that are set forth herein.

F. Hunter Street Development

The Hunter Street Development consists of 55 housing units for seniors and handicapped residents. Although, traditionally considered a component of the Housing Element of the Master Plan, such a housing development in the West Broadway District of the City is also an important component of the Economic/Strategic Element for the following reasons:

- The implementation of the process resulted in the clearance of the old mill site as well as adjoining properties, which were inconsistent land uses with the surrounding residential area.
- Clearance of the site paves the way for a project that can result in 55 dwelling units targeting intergenerational occupants.
- These units can provide relocation resources for other programs targeted to reduce housing density in specific areas, and provide land for parking and similar projects.
- Part of the Hunter Street site affords an opportunity to provide community facilities in what is otherwise a dense residential neighborhood. Upgrading an adjacent lot and evaluating the position of the site from Division Street to Jersey Avenue along 7th Street for potential uses as a community facility benefits the entire surrounding neighborhoods.

As a Strategic Plan project, the Hunter Street Development represents an opportunity to provide affordable housing to residents of the community who may otherwise not be able to afford it.

Equally important, however, is the relocation flexibility that such housing affords as the community proceeds to redevelop the West Broadway District. Invariably, relocation resources will be necessary as part of the redevelopment process and the Hunter Street Development can serve to fill that need for eligible residents. As such, the availability of relocation resources serves to support the City's overall economic redevelopment program, where invariably, the reconfiguration of land uses will require relocation activity.

V. IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGIC PLANS

A. Introduction

Implementing the Strategic Plans detailed in this Element represents one of the more important components of the Master Plan. Without proper implementation, it would be unlikely that Gloucester City could reap the benefits of the Strategic Plans.

To understand the implementation process, this section will describe the following subjects:

- The Land Use Plan and Implementation Matrix;
- The Tools of Implementation;
- Comprehensive Grants Processing;
- The Process for Initiating Implementation of the City's Master Plan and Strategic Plan Components.

Collectively, these elements provide the strategy and methods for implementing the Strategic Plans.

B. Land Use Plan and Implementation Matrix

The Comprehensive Land Use Plan, illustrated in Figure E-27, is a map that identifies the location of the strategic plan recommendations. In turn, the recommendations highlighted in the Land Use Plan are reflected on the Implementation Matrix, as shown in Figure E-28.

The map and matrix set forth the land use relationships in the City and identify the individual Strategic Plans that form the foundation of the Master Plan implementation process. Simultaneous with the implementation of the Strategic Plans, there are recommendations for programs to implement the Comprehensive Plan elements in the areas of housing, code enforcement, recreational facilities improvements, traffic and circulation improvements, and infrastructure improvements. Collectively, these efforts are mutually reinforcing and will ensure that the redevelopment of Gloucester City will proceed in accordance with the Comprehensive Plan.

This coordinated approach is critical in this era of limited resources at the national, state, and local levels. Gloucester City must prove to its public and private partners that the policies established by the governing body are mutually reinforcing and designed to maximize the economic benefit derived to the community in an efficient and environmentally sensitive manner. Comprehensive land use policies that are reinforced by appropriate zoning and redevelopment strategies will assure the private sector that its investments are guaranteed long-term protection.

By creating a climate that is understood by federal, state, and county agencies, as well as the private investment community, historic organizations, and environmental groups, the City can market its assets as part of a wide range of comprehensive redevelopment processes.