

**REVITALIZING DOWNTOWN
COMMERCIAL CENTERS
IN
SUBURBAN BOSTON**

by

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Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning on May 24, 1984 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degrees of Bachelor of Science in Urban Studies and Planning and Master in City Planning

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the technique for downtown revitalization in small and mid-sized suburban cities. Despite the decline that downtown commercial centers experienced in terms of retail sales, building conditions, cultural activities, and community enthusiasm, cities and towns have renewed their interest in the future of downtowns because of their importance in the local community and the metropolitan region.

In this thesis, I propose that one way to understand a community's revitalization plan is as a response to the decline in the economic function of the downtown. Based on my examination of the downtown revitalization plans in the cities of Everett, Malden, Medford, and Melrose, I have defined three strategies that communities use to counteract the economic decline of their downtown: the competition strategy, the substitution strategy, and the consolidation strategy. I have distinguished each strategy by the focus on a customer base for the downtown businesses and the desire to either increase or maintain the level of business sales.

Though the downtown revitalization plans in the case study cities are either in progress or recently completed, I have offered a preliminary assessment of the positive and negative features of strategy implementation to date. Overall, the revitalization plans have positive effects on the city and local residents. The existing merchants, however, may not always achieve their desired level of retail sales in the downtown.

Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Phillip L. Clay, Associate Professor of Urban Studies and Planning

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INTRODUCTION

In the past thirty years, many older cities and towns have turned their attention to the future of their commercial centers. Whether the commercial centers are described as downtowns, central business districts, or “Main Streets,” they have all faced the changes brought about by population movements, technological advances, and competition from shopping malls and other shopping centers. In response, many communities have focused on revitalization as the tool to reverse commercial center decline in terms of factors such as retail sales, building conditions, cultural activities, and community enthusiasm. Based on successful revitalization projects throughout the country, communities have abandoned the earlier pessimistic view that commercial centers would disappear altogether.

In this thesis, I will examine the technique for revitalization in one particular type of commercial area — the downtowns of small and mid-sized suburban cities.¹ Because of their location, I argue that suburban downtowns offer a distinctive perspective for the analysis of revitalization. Originally created as independent commercial centers, suburban downtowns have developed, and, in many cases, have retained their own characteristics and identity. At the same time, they are close enough to large cities to be strongly influenced by regional forces. Consequently, the revitalization plans for these downtown commercial centers are influenced by factors in the metropolitan area in which they are located.

¹

Though the focus will be on downtowns in small and mid-sized suburban cities, some of the conclusions can be applied to other commercial areas. The downtown areas in isolated or large cities and neighborhood commercial centers, however, require the analysis of a number of factors not discussed in this study.

With this issue in mind, I will examine the plans that have been prepared to revitalize suburban downtowns and consider the effect of these plans on the community. I will present four case studies for the contiguous cities of Everett, Malden, Medford, and Melrose, all of which are defined as inner core suburbs in metropolitan Boston. These communities experienced their greatest period of growth prior to World War II, and, at one time, supported viable downtown commercial centers. Many of the buildings in each downtown are historically significant, though modern structures were also built over time. These communities are distinguished from the newer suburbs in Massachusetts by their densely settled residential neighborhoods and the lack of open, developable space. Like Boston, each community also lost population in the decade between 1970 and 1980 as was common in many older industrial cities. The final factor which unites these communities is their proximity to the same sources of competition (i.e., the Meadow Glen Mall, the Assembly Square Mall, the Northshore Mall, and the Burlington Mall). Of course, each community and its downtown, while sharing certain characteristics, are also distinguished in their own right, both in terms of development history and the image portrayed to residents and outsiders. I will more thoroughly discuss these issues in the case studies for each city.

Thesis Organization

In Chapter One, I describe the trends that have led to the decline of downtown commercial centers and the factors that have brought about the renewed interest in downtowns.

In Chapter Two, I discuss the important issues raised in the literature on downtown revitalization and suggest that one way to understand a community's revitalization plan is as a response to the decline of the economic function of the downtown. I propose that there are three strategies which communities use to combat the threat to the economic viability of the downtown: the competition strategy, the substitution strategy, and the consolidation strategy.

In Chapters Three through Six, I present case studies for the cities of Everett, Malden, Medford, and Melrose that illustrate the use of these strategies in downtown revitalization. In the case studies, I discuss the problems that have been identified, the solutions that have been developed, the

specific elements in the revitalization plan, and offer my personal assessment of the positive and negative features of the strategy implementation to date.

In Chapter Seven, I conclude with a summary of the major points of this thesis and hypothesize about the conditions under which each revitalization strategy can be effective and its likely impact on the community.



DOWNTOWN COMMERCIAL CENTERS IN TRANSITION

The decline of downtowns occurred as downtown centers lost their dominance as the multi-functional center of a community. Originally, downtowns served as the "heart" of a community composed of both residents and businesses. Developed at major crossroads, downtowns grew to provide a number of resources: retail goods and services; government buildings, churches, and schools; entertainment activities; and even residential dwellings. Residents and businesses patronized downtown areas because they were often the only choice.

Yet, downtowns also formed an integral part of a city or town's identity. The downtown was referred to as the "Main Street" of community: the place to hold parades and important events. This social function has always been an important component of commercial centers. A sense of community is created as people socialize on street corners or receive personalized service from the local merchants. Though the strength of the social identity of a downtown varies from place to place, most communities consider this characteristic an important component of the downtown. Despite the fact that downtowns developed in a haphazard manner, they were able to serve residents and businesses in both an economic and social capacity in a central location.

However, over time, decentralizing trends, such as technological advances and suburbanization, led to the loss of the central dominance of downtowns.¹ Greater mobility to shop for goods and services at more competitive prices was first supported with the extensive growth of street car

¹

Anthony Downs, "The Future of Downtowns," *Michigan Municipal Review*, November 1978, p. 241.

transportation, and later with the dominance of the automobile. The captive market that had sustained downtowns was no longer captive.

The impact of decentralization was felt in a number of ways. The population of the United States, which had formerly moved to the cities, was now moving out of congested inner city areas. Encouragement came from federally subsidized mortgages and substantial housing construction in newly created suburbs. People not only moved out of the downtown itself, but adjacent residential neighborhoods lost population. The federal government also paid for highway expansion to facilitate the growth and development of newer suburbs. Soon, entertainment and cultural facilities relocated out of congested downtown areas.

These factors alone, however, did not eliminate the viability of downtown commercial centers of inner city and suburban communities. Ultimately, the competition to the retail and service functions of downtowns from regional shopping centers and suburban strip developments was the deciding factor "These new retailing centers [performed] many consumer services once monopolized by the central business district and in turn [captured] a sizeable portion of the consumer dollar"²

Regional shopping malls and suburban strip developments provided four major advantages over downtown commercial centers:

- 1.) longer store hours in the evenings which allowed greater convenience to families and working people,
- 2.) easier pedestrian accessibility which allowed consumers a view of their destination after they parked their cars,
- 3.) easier vehicle accessibility in terms of convenient parking and traffic patterns, and
- 4.) a more logical arrangement of retail outlets which made the shopping trip more enjoyable for the consumer.³

Regional shopping malls also centralized management which imposed uniform store hours and provided a security and maintenance force. In addition, enclosed shopping malls were immune to

²

Larry Bramblett et al., *Thoughts on the Revival of Downtown USA* (Athens: University of Georgia, Institute of Community and Area Development, 1973), p. 7.

³

ibid., p. 9-11.

the effects of unpleasant weather. These features represented a major threat to older downtown commercial centers in Massachusetts. As a result, customers were attracted away from the downtowns.

The New Hope for Downtown Commercial Centers

Though cities and towns experienced dramatic new technological and demographic changes that diminished the vitality of downtowns, many downtown centers never disappeared. A primary reason can be attributed to the role downtowns play as the "heart" of a city and the important ways they serve the community. For one, downtowns contain a large investment measured in physical buildings and infrastructure. The deterioration or replacement of this investment would be financially impossible. Second, downtowns often provide a major source of tax money and employment in small labor-intensive businesses. Third, the downtowns also act as "the focal point for many aspects of life in the general community"⁴ Unlike shopping centers, downtowns are part of a community twenty-four hours per day.

No shopping center, not even a Taj Mahal, like Copley Place, will ever capture the community spirit. Downtowns will always exist, will always be able to somehow stay alive, to somehow compete with the most fancy of shopping malls.⁵

Though downtowns vary in terms of economic outlook and prosperity, their strength as the major focal point of the community allows them to function even during difficult times.

In addition to the recognition and appreciation of the community functions of commercial centers, downtowns have been recognized for their capacity to attract new investment in the metropolitan area in which they are located. In metropolitan Boston, for example, suburban cities have been absorbing the pent-up demand for office space and housing. Downtown commercial centers, often

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Downs, p. 241.

⁵

Interview with James Yule, Executive Office of Communities and Development, Boston, Massachusetts, April 5, 1984.

amenable to a variety of uses, can benefit from this trend. On a regional level, downtowns can also benefit from recentralizing trends such as:

- 1.) the high cost of energy which may restrict the continued growth of new suburban areas,
- 2.) the increasing cost of new housing which may shift some of the demand for housing closer to downtown retail centers,
- 3.) the shift to smaller households who may be more favorably inclined to city living at higher densities,
- 4.) the impact of regulation which may increase resistance to further suburban growth due to higher costs and time-delays,
- 5.) the interest in the historic past which may increase interest in the preservation of older housing and commercial structures, and
- 6.) the rise in tourism both by U.S. residents and foreign visitors which may positively impact domestic travel.⁶

The recognition of factors such as these have renewed interest in the viability of downtowns. Though these trends will not benefit all commercial centers equally, they have reinforced the view that downtowns have the potential to perform useful functions in their communities. Over time, cities and towns will be able to counteract the negative impacts of the demographic and technological changes on downtowns.

In the next chapter, I will provide an overview of the literature on the subject of revitalization and present three strategies that explain how cities and towns are revitalizing their downtowns.

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Downs, p. 241.



DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION IN THE 1980'S

A Review of the Literature

The renewed interest in the future of downtowns has resulted in the publication of many books and articles to guide cities and towns in the process of revitalization. These publications range from very comprehensive books such as the *Downtown Improvement Manual* by Emanuel Berk to very specific articles such as "Tax Increment Financing: A Tool for Redevelopment" by Fred S. Knight. One important issue that is advanced in the literature is that all downtown commercial centers, despite having faced many of the same problems, each have their own characteristics that have shaped their structure and will shape revitalization.

Nevertheless, the literature also presents a number of general goals that should be considered by all cities and towns regardless of the revitalization strategies they implement. They are:

- 1.) to develop realistic plans for the downtown based on its individual strengths,
- 2.) to minimize the inherent handicaps of the downtown,
- 3.) to initiate promotional and management activities in the downtown, and
- 4.) to recognize the complexity of downtown revitalization and the necessity of involving both public and private sector groups.

The first goal stressed in the revitalization literature is that cities and towns should realistically develop a revitalization plan that builds on the downtown's strong points.¹ In the past, a number of communi-

¹

Anthony Downs, "The Future of Downtowns," *Municipal Michigan Review*, November 1978, p. 255.

ties prepared plans that did not harmonize with the existing downtown, and, not surprisingly, many of these plans failed. Cities and towns must come to terms with the strength of the shopping malls, and realize that they will continue to be a major source of competition for certain goods. Consequently, a downtown's revitalization plan must emphasize the special characteristics of the downtown that will enhance its attractiveness to potential users, and, at the same time, be realistically implemented. A downtown's special characteristics may range from the presence a historic landmark or structure to a merchant that offers specialty goods or services that are not found in shopping centers.

The second issue that is frequently discussed is that the community should minimize the downtown's deficiencies as a commercial center. For example, the physical layout of many downtowns, established prior to the widespread use of automobiles, can be a detraction to drive-in customers. Communities must try to eliminate these types of problems which hinder the success of a revitalization strategy. To do this, cities and towns should try to create the following key ingredients:

adequate parking at low cost to shoppers, excellent building maintenance, constant clean-up activities, good patterns of pedestrian circulation, equally good patterns of vehicle circulation and allowances for deliveries (even during construction periods), high level personal and property security, some reasonable aesthetic control over signs and other decoration....²

Although this list is ambitious for many downtowns, it represents the framework on which to build the revitalization strategy. The attraction of a new department store, for example, is not part of a good revitalization plan if parking is not available for the customers.

The third objective emphasized in the literature is the necessity of having good downtown management and promotional activities. Downtown revitalization will not achieve its desired goals if the community is not aware of the improvements or changes that have occurred. One of the most adamant supporters of proper management and promotion of the downtown is the National Trust for Historic Preservation which has developed the "Main Street Center Program" to revitalize small downtown centers.

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ibid., p. 256-257.

Of the four components included in the Main Street revitalization program (organization, promotion, design, and economic restructuring), promotion is the factor that gets shoppers to the downtown and gets them to return.

Main Street's identifiability and quality must be greatly improved and communicated to consumers throughout the trade area and beyond.... But attracting potential customers to the downtown area is only half the battle.... Downtown's economic revitalization...depends in large measure on each merchant's taking every opportunity to make positive symbolic gestures to each and every potential customer.³

The final goal focuses on the importance of understanding the complexity of the revitalization process. In the 1980's, revitalization must include the cooperation of many groups and the knowledge of a number of technical skills. Though revitalization is often supervised by the local city planning agency, the private sector should be called upon to generate ideas and, if possible, finance projects. The complexity of revitalization also calls for the development of skills such as market, traffic, and visual analyses, and shoppers and business surveys. The revitalization handbooks can be used for such diverse tasks as implementing a sign ordinance to changing the zoning laws. Government no longer works alone as the facilitator of projects. Instead, planning together with the private sector has become the status quo.

The Development of a Revitalization Strategy

The revitalization literature provides an abundance of information for communities that are interested in the steps they should take to carry out revitalization. It offers, for example, advice on how to set goals, prepare a plan, secure funding, and implement projects. Cities and towns are looking at the downtown from the perspective of its importance to the community and its potential role in the city. As a result, there are many different motivations behind downtown revitalization plans and many different ways to structure the revitalization process.

3

National Trust for Historic Preservation, *National Main Street Center Training Program* (Washington, D.C.: Preservation Press, 1981), pp. 21-22.

In this thesis, I suggest that one way to understand the revitalization process is as a response to the changes in the economic function of the downtown. Of all the historic functions a downtown performed, its economic function as a business center which provided goods, services, employment, and tax revenue to the community was usually the most dominant feature. Demographic and technological changes, however, had a major impact on the economic stability of the downtown; new sources of competition lured away customers and, almost without exception, resulted in a decline in retail sales. This affected merchants who relied on the downtown for their livelihood, city officials who wanted to avoid tax and job losses from these labor intensive small businesses, and residents who wanted an attractive and viable commercial center.

Cities and towns recognize that downtown commercial centers cannot regain their dominant position; over time, for example, the downtown has become more of a convenience center rather than a destination center for comparison items like clothing and furniture. Yet, I propose that cities and towns have sought to counteract the economic decline of their downtowns in their revitalization plans through the use of three strategies. The first strategy I will call the competition strategy; the second, the substitution strategy; and the third, the consolidation strategy.

I have distinguished these strategies by a community's desire to either increase or maintain the level of business sales and by the market potential of the downtown. From the examination of the case studies, I propose that cities and towns can implement more than one strategy at a time through the initiation of different projects; however, one strategy is usually dominant.

In the competition strategy, cities and towns try to increase the level of business sales in the downtown by re-attracting all or some of the "lost" customer base that patronizes alternative shopping centers. I argue that the cities of Melrose and Medford are basically implementing a competition revitalization strategy.

In the substitution strategy, cities and towns try to increase the level of business sales by developing a "new" captive customer base for the businesses in the downtown, rather than focusing on the "lost" customer base as in the competition strategy. I propose that Malden and Medford exemplify the adoption of a substitution strategy.

In the consolidation strategy, cities and towns try to maintain the level of business sales in the downtown and focus the revitalization plan to serve the “existing” customer base that patronizes the downtown, rather than striving to expand the current customer base. I argue that Everett, most closely, has followed a consolidation strategy.

In the last part of this chapter, I will present a more detailed explanation of the revitalization activities that are practiced when each of these strategies are used.

The Strategy of Competition

The competition strategy for downtown revitalization originated with the urban renewal programs of the 1960’s. The problems of downtowns were seen as physical problems; downtowns were prevented from achieving their potential because of the blight caused by old, deteriorated streets, sidewalks, buildings, and residential neighborhoods. In addition to protecting the existing investment in buildings, a goal of urban renewal was to attract people to the retail and service businesses downtown. Almost every major city in Massachusetts took advantage of urban renewal funds.

One major component of urban renewal was to build new facilities in the downtown to attract both residents and people from the suburbs. In Boston, as in many other larger cities, a new Government Center complex and apartment buildings for upper income residents were constructed as part of the restructuring of the city. These projects, ultimately attracting more people to downtown areas, occurred at the expense of major demolition of homes and businesses. Whereas some cities achieved notable and successful projects, other cities were left with empty lots.

Today, communities have abandoned the grandiose plans developed in the heyday of urban renewal and created more realistic projects. Still, communities have tried to compete by either emulating the successful features of their competition or differentiating themselves to offer a viable alternative.

Cities and towns that emulate the success of shopping malls in downtown commercial centers have attempted several kinds of projects. For example, many communities have created downtown

pedestrian malls by closing street traffic and pursuing one of three alternatives: creating an exposed pedestrian mall, establishing an auto-restricted zone, or, in the extreme case, constructing an enclosed downtown shopping center.⁴ Often, these plans included the construction of a "ring road" that by-passed the major downtown streets. Unfortunately, in a majority of these projects, the pedestrian mall developments did not substantially affect retail sales volumes in downtowns.⁵ Still, exceptions do exist as in Boston's Downtown Crossing anchored by two major department stores, Filene's and Jordan Marsh.

Communities also try to develop the competitive capacity of the downtown by promoting its special attractions. In theory, distinguishing the downtown from the shopping centers and shopping malls will allow it to attract more customers.

The business of the new downtown is the capture of customers and visitors, and the stimulation of as many frequent return visits as possible. It should do this because it is not a mall, because it is historic, and because it has specialties that sub-centers cannot offer.⁶

Boston and Newburyport, for example, have focused on their waterfronts as a theme around which to structure downtown revitalization. Lowell, in a different context, has organized downtown revitalization around its history as the first industrial mill city in the nation. Today, the city of Lowell contains both a Heritage State Park and a National Historic Park. But, the tourist dollars in Lowell will not greatly impact the economic strength of the downtown; instead, many residents are expected to patronize the downtown area because of the new attractions and investment.

In sum, I feel that a small city or town may not be able to develop a major attraction, but it can focus on a historically significant building or site or offer a special good or personalized service. The

4

Will York, "Main Street Under Cover," *Municipal South Magazine*, September-October 1978, pp. 6-9.

5

Glen Weisbrod, "Can Ma and Pa Compete Downtown? Business Impacts on Downtown Improvements," *Urban Land*, February 1983, p. 22.

6

David A. Wilcox, "Attractions Management is Key to a Revitalized Downtown's Success," *Journal of Housing*, July 1980, p. 378.

ultimate goal is to increase the economic strength of the downtown by increasing retail sales.

The Strategy of Substitution

The theory behind the substitution strategy is that an increase in the number of people who are in the downtown during the day or evening and in close proximity to the retail and service businesses should increase the retail sales and economic strength of the downtown. The number of people can be increased by developing one or more of the downtown's specialized functions: the office space function, the convention-hotel function, the entertainment-cultural-recreational function, institutional functions such as hospitals and universities, the non-office government functions like courts and police, the communications function, and the residential function.⁷ If the revitalization attracts a portion of the "lost" market as well, it is considered a positive side effect, but not the main goal.

Today, two of the most dominant means of attracting a new market in small and mid-sized suburban communities are the expansion of the residential function and the office space function in the downtown which increases the number of residents and the number of employees respectively. In the first case, the creation of a middle and upper income residential base in the downtown had its precedents in the urban renewal program. Residents in newly constructed apartments were expected to spend their money in the downtown, as well as generate additional tax revenue for the city. In Boston, for example, the West End urban renewal project was one infamous case of creating upper income residential use in the downtown.

The current interest in residential dwellings downtown is not limited to middle and upper income people, but includes any captive market for the retail and service businesses such as elderly, low income, or handicapped residents in subsidized housing. Assuming that the financing is available for such projects, downtown housing is particularly amenable to the reuse of buildings. Lowell and Waltham, for example, have both converted former mill buildings into apartments for the elderly.

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Downs, p. 241.

The second way to develop a “new” customer base lies in the expansion of the number of employees, usually in office-related positions, to create a daytime population that utilizes the downtown. Anthony Downs sees this as a major role in new downtowns. He states, “The office space function, rooted in the need for face-to-face contact, has become the clearly dominant function in regional downtowns....”⁸ In Boston, which is experiencing great demand for office space, the suburban communities may attract some of the market potential. This has already occurred to some extent, particularly in suburbs within easy access to Boston. Suburban communities can often provide cheaper rents for the office functions that are not required in central locations.

In sum, I argue that this strategy embodies the goal to “substitute” the loss of the former customer base with a new customer base to increase the economic strength of the downtown.

The Strategy of Consolidation

The consolidation strategy is used by communities that focus on the maintenance of the downtown for the shoppers that still patronize the commercial center. The number of customers may be lower than in the past, but, rather than devise a means to re-attract this market or a “new” market, the downtown will subsist on the strength of its present customer base.

One characteristic of the consolidation strategy is evident when the community reduces the number of businesses in the downtown. In Birmingham, Alabama and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, for example, market studies supported the fact that two neighborhood business districts could no longer support the abundance of stores located within them. As a result, the cities made the decision that the areas did not have significant futures as retailing centers.⁹ Rather than try to rebuild the entire retail base of the commercial center, the cities selected only a portion of the buildings for revitalization

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Ibid.

⁹

Lawrence Hall et al., “No Lost Causes: Three Strategies for Salvaging Neighborhood Shopping Districts,” *Planning*, March 1983, pp. 12-17.

attention and the rejuvenation of the retail sector. The remaining structures were scheduled for renovation or redevelopment to contain new uses.

Alternatively, the consolidation strategy is characterized by the retail sales level of the downtown rather than the number of businesses. The loss of customer dollars may be absorbed by the individual businesses, or the marginal businesses may leave the downtown and be replaced by non-retail establishments. Overall, I suggest that a consolidation strategy may be a very viable alternative for a commercial center that was not severely impacted by retail sales losses or high vacancy rates and where the merchants can still prosper with business from the existing customer base.

In the next four chapters, I will show that the downtown revitalization plans for the cities of Everett, Malden, Medford, and Melrose respond to the changes in the economic function of the downtown and utilize the strategies of competition, substitution, and consolidation. The appendix contains maps of the four downtowns and their location in the metropolitan Boston area.



EVERETT SQUARE REVITALIZATION

In a 3.36 square mile area, just north of Boston, the City of Everett has developed its reputation as a working class, industrial community. Incorporated as a separate town from Malden in 1870, the community prospered because of its proximity to Boston via bridges and railroads over the Mystic River. Settled as a streetcar suburb to Boston, Everett did not experience substantial growth until after it was established as a city in 1892. During that period, the city achieved the highest rate of population growth of any suburb in the state, growing from 2200 residents in 1870 to 48,000 residents in 1930. Its industrial base has also grown; today, Everett contains over 90 manufacturing firms including a General Electric factory, an Avco Research laboratory, and a Monsanto chemical plant. The concentration of industry has kept the property taxes in the city among the lowest in the state for the community's current 37,195 residents.

Changes in the Economic Function of Everett Square

The intense development in Everett at the turn of the century supported the growth of the commercial core of the city known as Everett Square. Though not a concentrated downtown, the commercial center lies at the intersection of four major streets: Broadway, Norwood Street, Chelsea Street, and School Street. City government buildings, the main library, the post office, schools, offices, and housing are all located within the downtown area. The only additional commercial

center in the city, Glendale Square, contains a number of convenience goods and service establishments for North Everett.

Everett Square faced the same problems of many small commercial centers in metropolitan Boston. Though, in the past, the downtown attracted a number of department stores (i.e., Kresge's, Woolworth's, Grant's) and supermarkets, the competition from the shopping malls and easy access with automobiles weakened the retail strength of the downtown. In the period from 1972 to 1977, for example, the number of general merchandise stores declined in Everett from sixteen to seven.¹ Consequently, Everett Square has experienced a transition from a retail center to a service center. In 1979, office-using businesses and service establishments together occupied 56.2 percent of the available floor space. In contrast, 18.1 percent of the commercial floor area was composed of general merchandise stores, apparel and accessory shops, and miscellaneous retail establishments.²

Still, Everett Square has retained a relatively stable mix of businesses. The downtown has never experienced any substantial vacancies and the local residents have continued to patronize the downtown. But, the age of the buildings has, in a number of structures, detracted from their appearance. And, the availability of more parking facilities and easy traffic circulation has been cited as a major need by the users of Everett Square.

The Development of Revitalization Strategies for Everett Square

The 1965 Master Plan for Everett first directed attention to the problems in Everett Square. The report identified many of the trends having a negative impact on the community: population and employment losses, deteriorated buildings, traffic congestion, and limited new investment. Despite

1

U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Census of Retail Trade, Massachusetts*, 1972, 1977.

2

John Brown Associates, *Everett and Glendale Squares: A Program for Revitalization and CARD Plan*, prepared for the Mayor's Office of Planning and Community Development, Everett, Massachusetts (Boston, 1980), p. 14.

these factors, a positive economic forecast was given for Everett based on its broad non-residential tax base. However, a prime weakness was identified in the retail sector of the city.

The vitality of retailing in Everett appears to have been undermined in recent years as evidenced by a decline in employment and the relatively low levels of sales over the years. Everett's present business centers suffer substantially from the lack of attractive stores with "eye appeal," a lack of adequate off-street parking for employees and shoppers, and an over-all run-down appearance. Efforts to improve the "physical look" with which to support and maintain the continued economic viability of Everett's business areas should be considered as part of the overall economic and development program.³

As typical of the urban renewal approach, the solution was defined in terms of a physical improvement of the business areas. For Everett Square, the "city center" concept was advanced as the means to provide a concentrated downtown for the city's shopping, office, civic, cultural, and entertainment activities and to counteract the employment and sales decline noted above. Following "modern shopping center design principles,"⁴ the plan called for establishing anchor points at the end of the central area of the downtown and creating over 700 new off-street parking spaces. The parking areas would be linked by a perimeter road that would disperse the traffic along the major street, Broadway. The proposal also included the construction of a new police headquarters and new high-rise market-rate and public housing and the expansion of the library and an elementary school.

The features of this original downtown renewal plan are characteristic of the competition strategy through emulation of shopping centers and shopping malls. The emphasis on new structures, shopping center design principles, and the establishment of anchor points illustrate the goal to have Everett Square compete as a shopping area. The reference to new high-rise housing also indicates the value placed on a captive market, a feature of the substitution strategy.

As it turned out, most of the 1965 urban renewal proposals were never carried out due to slow action on part of the city and the disfavor given to urban renewal activities as the decade pro-

³

Metcalfe and Eddy, Inc., *Everett Master Plan Summary Report*, prepared for the Everett Planning Board and the Massachusetts Department of Commerce (Boston, 1965), p. 5.

⁴

Ibid., p. 10.

gressed. The city also realized that the financial costs for new facilities and parking to make Everett Square competitive with other shopping areas would be too high. Though the 1965 Everett Master Plan is now obsolete, the city did construct a new police headquarters, but on a different site than originally planned. And, two projects are still being pursued: the expansion of the library and the rehabilitation of the Vocational School to elderly housing.

One outgrowth of the 1965 Everett Master Plan was the establishment of a full-time planning agency, the Office of Planning and Community Development, acting in the name of the City's Mayor. In 1979, this office commissioned a study to develop a revitalization plan for both Everett Square and Glendale Square and established these areas as Commercial Area Revitalization Districts.

The City's objectives in the revitalization of Everett and Glendale Squares are:

- (a) the prevention of physical decay;
- (b) the maintenance and enhancement of Everett's tax base;
- (c) the encouragement of existing retail, service and office-using establishments to remain, upgrade and expand (if feasible) in their present locations;
- (d) the provision of increased off-street parking and other public amenities related to the use and enjoyment of shopping and otherwise using downtown;
- (e) the discouragement of commercial enterprises from moving into previously non-commercial areas; and
- (f) the reuse of certain existing public buildings for commercial, residential and other uses as appropriate in each case.⁵

As specified in these objectives, the revitalization goals for Everett Square have evolved to resemble the goals embodied in the consolidation strategy. The maintenance of existing businesses is given first priority followed by the expansion of these businesses. The focus is on the physical upgrading of the infrastructure and buildings to avoid vacant structures and disinvestment in the downtown. And, as stated by the director of the Office of Planning and Community Develop-

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John Brown Associates, p. 4.

ment, the downtown goals are to plan for the people in the community and to serve that relatively stable market.⁶

The goals for downtown revitalization are undoubtedly influenced by the importance that is placed on the industrial businesses in Everett. These businesses and corporations are integrally related to the city's future prosperity. Consequently, the Office of Planning and Community Development has focused on project development in this area; five Urban Development Action Grants (UDAG's) have been received to upgrade facilities and purchase equipment for the industrial businesses in South Everett. Though the downtown is important to the city, it is just one of the areas of concern.

At the present time, changes may still occur in Everett Square because the downtown is not isolated from the activities in the Boston metropolitan area. Market forces have been and will be allowed to operate. This increases the potential for the development of office space or additional housing in Everett Square, a feature of the substitution strategy. Market forces are also likely to increase the growth of retail and service businesses in Everett Square which already have a strong market demand: food stores, eating and drinking establishments, and general services, such as hairdressers, barbers, amusement parlors, and repair stores. Overall, the businesses in Everett Square are likely to remain predominantly service establishments and there may be some new office and residential development. Currently, however, the strategy of revitalization is focused on the needs of existing customers.

Elements of the Revitalization Plan

The specific features of revitalization for Everett Square are summarized below to show how actual activities correspond to the goals for revitalization described in the preceding section. Six elements are discussed for each case study:

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Interview with Robert Norton, Mayor's Office of Planning and Community Development, Everett, Massachusetts, April 2, 1984.

- 1.) Parking,
- 2.) Traffic Circulation,
- 3.) Beautification,
- 4.) Retail and Service Businesses,
- 5.) Office Uses, and
- 6.) Residential Uses.

In Everett Square, the major emphasis has been placed on the physical renovation of the downtown through the beautification of the buildings and the upgrading of the infrastructure. No major construction projects are planned and the uses of the downtown are expected to remain the same. The Office of Planning and Community Development has been the major initiator of many of the activities. This organization has pursued funding from a number of state and federal agencies including the Massachusetts Executive Office of Communities and Development (EOCD) and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Public Works (DPW). In addition, the city worked cooperatively with the Everett Chamber of Commerce to create the Economic Development and Financial Corporation. This organization has made approximately \$150,000 available for the revitalization of Everett and Glendale Squares.

The specific elements of the revitalization plan are outlined below in more detail.

Parking: The 1965 Everett Master Plan and the 1980 revitalization and CARD report stressed the need for on-street and off-street parking. An estimate of 810 parking spaces existed in Everett Square in 1979, with the increased need forecast at 180 new spaces.⁷ Everett has addressed this need with the opening in 1983 of a new parking facility with a capacity of 80 spaces. However, no additional parking lots are planned.

Traffic Circulation: Broadway will continue to serve as the major access road through the downtown area. To minimize the problems of congested circulation, the city has proposed replacing the signals at the major intersections in 1984. School Street, which was to be closed to all traffic, will become a one-way street.

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John Brown Associates, p. 18.

Beautification: Beginning in June 1984, Everett Square will undergo a major street and sidewalk improvement project. The project includes: the repair or replacement of sidewalks, the planting of new trees, the upgrading of new street lights, the enhancement of the green space by the Parlin Library, and the installation of new benches, trash receptacles, and bus shelters.

The Office of Planning and Community Development also received EOCD funds to operate a Commercial Facade Improvement Program which is designed to encourage merchants to improve the appearance of their facades, signs, and storefronts. To date, a limited number of businesses have participated in this program, which provides approximately 50 percent of the cost of the project up to a specified limit. Storefront rehabilitation plans are now proceeding in three major businesses: Almy's, Kipo's Pizza, and the Deluxe Rail restaurant. One major historic renovation project occurred in 1983 in the Evans Building, a fully occupied retail and office building. The Office of Planning and Community Development did not initiate this project, but informed the building owner of available financial resources for historic rehabilitation.

Retail and Service Businesses: With the exception of the Commercial Facade Improvement Program, the businesses in Everett Square have not been involved in a unified revitalization project. A summer sidewalk sale, organized by the Chamber of Commerce, has been the only joint promotional activity. Many of the retail and service establishments have been stable businesses in Everett Square. Recently, however, the Star Market supermarket closed; an Osco Drugstore will occupy the premises beginning in June 1984.

Office Uses: Because of the office space shortage in Boston and its surrounding suburbs, Everett has the potential to absorb some of the demand. As expressed in the 1980 CARD plan, "Everett should be in a good position to capture significant portions of Near Northshore office demand.it is possible that the demand for office space in the city could reach the 5,000 - 10,000 square foot mark annually during the next five years...." ⁸

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ibid., p. 34.

In terms of actual additions to the office space in the city, Everett has not achieved its potential as defined above. Still, some building renovation has resulted in new office space; two noteworthy public buildings that were rehabilitated are the former Everett Post Office and the old police station. Though the new square foot rent levels are high compared with existing office space in Everett Square, the renovated buildings have been relatively successful in attracting tenants. In the future, more building renovation, rather than new office construction, is expected to occur in the downtown. The Everett Chamber of Commerce reported, however, that a developer had considered constructing an office building on the Revere Beach Parkway, approximately one quarter of a mile from Everett Square.

Residential Uses: The 1965 Everett Master Plan proposal to construct new, high-rise apartment buildings to contribute to the walk-in market potential of businesses in the area never materialized.⁹ In the 1960's, the Everett Housing Authority built one elderly public housing building, Sacro Plaza. And, the Fairfield Whitney Vocational School elderly housing developement, though long delayed, has secured the necessary financing and approvals.

Residential use, however, is concentrated in the neighborhoods around the downtown commercial area. In addition to one, two, and three-family housing, boarding houses and apartment buildings line many of the side streets. Everett Square has an estimated concentration of 10,000 to 12,000 people who provide a viable local market within a five minute walk from the downtown.¹⁰ Many residents also travel to Everett Square by the local bus service along Broadway.

An Assessment of Everett Square Revitalization

The majority of revitalization activities are just getting underway in Everett Square. The Office of Planning and Community Development is proceeding with plans for building and infrastructure

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Metcalf and Eddy, Inc., p. 10.

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Interview with Robert Norton, April 2, 1984.

improvements beginning in June 1984. To date, except for the historic renovation in such structures as the Evans Building and the Post Office, the physical character of the downtown has not been or will not be substantially impacted. Overall, Everett Square is likely to retain its character as a community-oriented downtown.

As the changes occur in Everett Square, revitalization is expected to have a positive impact on the viability of the downtown. Already, private investment in facade and sign improvements have been stimulated through the matching grant program and the public expenditures that will take place. The city benefits from this as the downtown property owners continue to pay taxes and retain their investment. Merchants, who provide personalized service and know how to accommodate the customer, are expected to continue to do a healthy business in the downtown and not be displaced by the new downtown investment. Residents and customers will be able to find convenience goods and services downtown, as well as encounter more attractive conditions.

A likely negative impact may be felt by businesses that would like to expand their competitive advantage and attract more customers. Though merchants recognize that Everett Square, because of its limited major highway access and developmental history, cannot compete with shopping centers, they would still like to see the downtown maximize its potential advantages. One view expressed by the Chamber of Commerce, for example, was that the new parking facility should have had two levels rather than one. But, part of the problem lies with the merchants. The Chamber representative stated, "the biggest competitor right now is themselves. Generally, in the retail business, most retailers can't see beyond the cash register....It's very competitive and (has) long hours" ¹¹

In sum, the revitalization strategy for Everett Square impacts merchants who may not achieve the retail sales levels they would like. Still, businesses should remain viable based on the precedents that have been established in personalized service offered at a fair price. In addition to the local residents who patronize Everett Square, downtown employees also help to support the local

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Interview with Harry B. Coholan, Everett Chamber of Commerce, Everett, Massachusetts, April 12, 1984.

establishments. As the revitalization plans proceed, merchants and local residents are likely to support the changes occurring as long as businesses are not negatively impacted and turnover remains low. Because the revitalization activities will not largely alter the character of the downtown, it is likely to upgrade the image of Everett Square and be considered a success.

Summary

Everett Square has most closely followed the strategy of consolidation for their downtown. Over time, the downtown experienced a change in its function as a retail center as shopping centers and malls lured away customers. Though the early revitalization strategy was intended to improve the competitive advantage of Everett Square, the city moved away from this focus. Instead, the city has focused on the value of the existing local and employee customer base and sought to implement projects that allow the downtown to offer convenient goods and services in an attractive environment. Business establishments that continue to cater to the local market are expected to prosper, but not experience any major increase in retail sales.

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MALDEN CENTER REVITALIZATION

Incorporated as town in 1649 and as a city in 1881, Malden grew from a small agricultural community to a regional city known for the strength of its retail center and the manufacture of goods. The shoe industry, in particular, prospered with such notable manufacturers as Converse Shoe and the Rubber Shoe Company. Over time, Malden has switched from a reliance on heavy manufacturing to light manufacturing. The population, like that of many older communities, has declined in the past 30 years. As a predominantly middle-class community today, Malden contains 53386 persons.

Changes in the Economic Function of Malden Center

Malden Center, the downtown of the city, was originally considered a destination spot that was a feasible alternative to downtown Boston for shopping.¹ The downtown was known for its Jordan Marsh store, shoe stores, restaurants, and furniture stores. After 1950, however, Malden began to lose its status as a quality retail center. The most repeated factor leading to this decline has been the convenience of shopping centers and shopping malls. The Northshore Mall, which opened in 1958, and the Northgate Shopping Center, which opened in 1964, are two of the first major competition sources for Malden Center.

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Malden Planning Board, *Comprehensive Master Plan 1970 - 1990, Volume Two, "The Plan"* (Malden, 1970), p. 377.-

The decline of the physical condition of the structures was also a major detraction from the downtown area. In 1980, an estimate of 66 percent of the structures were identified to be in need of minor cosmetic repair and 12 percent were considered substandard.² These two factors — outside competition and lack of re-investment — had a strong effect on the morale of businesses. A number of vacancies occurred in downtown buildings, evident in structures today. Between 1972 and 1977, for example, the number of retail establishments in Malden decreased from 415 to 319.³

Malden was able to retain a shopping base consisting primarily of local residents. Despite the loss of its regional status as a retail center and population losses, Malden has always been known as a city of neighborhoods which has allowed it to maintain its “old-time cohesiveness”⁴ In addition to the convenience of downtown goods and services, businesses provide personalized service and some merchandise not found in other locations. Thus, the typical shopper — a female either in the late teens or over age 50 — remains fairly loyal to the downtown stores.⁵ Beyond its role as a retail and service center, Malden Center historically contained local government office buildings, churches, cultural facilities, and a transportation center. These uses generated additional traffic in the downtown.

The Development of Revitalization Strategies for Malden Center

Malden, in contrast to the other case study cities, actively pursued urban renewal funds in the

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Phillips/Norwalk Company, *Central Business District Retail Market Analysis, Malden, Massachusetts*, prepared for the Malden Redevelopment Authority (New York, 1980), p. 12.

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U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Census of Retail Trade, Massachusetts*, 1972, 1977.

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Interview with David R. FitzGerald, Malden Redevelopment Authority, Malden, Massachusetts, March 23, 1984.

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Phillips/Norwalk Company, p. 23.

1960's. Guided by a very powerful Mayor, who was in office for almost twenty years, the Malden Redevelopment Authority (MRA) was created and successfully secured urban renewal funding for a number of projects. Nearly every area of the city, including the downtown, was targeted for an urban renewal project. Motivated by the recognition of the downtown as a "major focal point of the community" and its importance as "a social and economic part of Malden's life,"⁶ the city wanted to improve the competitive position of Malden Center.

The objective of The Plan, therefore, is to encourage only regional types of commercial uses in the Downtown area of the city. The concentration of such uses in Downtown will make the area a type of one stop shopping center, similar to highway oriented shopping centers, and increase its attractiveness in Malden's general region.⁷

The community renewal program prepared in 1970 identified the problem as the obsolete structure of the downtown. To eliminate this problem, clearance and redevelopment of approximately 110 acres in the downtown Malden area was proposed. The implementation of the plan would result in the displacement of approximately 579 families. Planned new land use objectives were as follows:

- 1.) redevelop northern portion of clearance area with high density residential uses,
- 2.) redevelop Pleasant Street Mall with retail and office uses and ancillary parking facilities,
- 3.) anchor western end of mall with new Government/Transportation node and eastern end with improved Educational/Cultural/Religious node,
- 4.) develop new and improved heavy commercial uses in southern portion of Project Area, and
- 5.) encourage private higher density residential redevelopment in non-project portion of planning area.⁸

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Malden Planning Board, p. 377.

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ibid.

⁸

Doxiadis Associates, Inc., *Community Renewal Program, Malden, Massachusetts* (Washington, D.C., 1970), p. 74.

To facilitate the new development described above, the renewal plan called for the re-routing of traffic circulation around the downtown. One major plan was the Route 60 by-pass of Pleasant Street. Pleasant Street could then be converted into a pedestrian shopping mall complete with a cover, heating, and air-conditioning.⁹ To offset the loss of parking spaces and to facilitate easy automobile access, new parking would also be required.

Like Everett, the elements of the downtown urban renewal plan for Malden Center followed the strategy of competition. The creation of a pedestrian mall and anchor establishments were designed to re-attract customers from a regional market to the downtown. To supplement this market, the development of high density residential uses on the fringes of the downtown was also proposed. Malden, however, did not implement the revitalization plans for the downtown renewal area as originally planned in the 1970's. The city, rather than working on the downtown as the first project, started using renewal funds, first, in the neighborhoods, and, then, in the industrial areas with the intention of culminating city revitalization in the downtown. The MRA wanted the early renewal projects to provide additional properties to the city's tax base and much-needed employment to Malden residents.¹⁰ Malden also spent large amounts of money to upgrade the city's infrastructure such as street, water, and sewer system improvements. The revitalization of the downtown was going to be "the final frosting on the cake" after the problems of the neighborhoods and industrial area had been addressed.¹¹

In 1972, Malden began to focus on the downtown just as renewal funds were becoming more and more limited. They did, however, finish a small project on one end of Pleasant Street. The city constructed a new Government Center, closing off through traffic. Next to this new Government Center, the Heritage House elderly apartments were built on cleared land.

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Malden Planning Board, p. 378.

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Peter O'Neil, "Malden '82/Renaissance Revisited," in Malden Business Festival '82, a supplement to the *Malden Evening News*, October 5, 1982, p. 3.

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Interview with David R. FitzGerald, March 23, 1984.

The downtown plan being carried out in the 1980's has many of the same features of the urban renewal plan developed in the 1960's.¹² The need for improved traffic patterns, new parking facilities in each quadrant of the downtown, and the rehabilitation of the infrastructure are all being pursued as described in the original 1970 feasibility study on the future of Malden Center. Many of the same objectives are similar: to restore decaying structures, to expand the tax base, to combat unemployment in the city, and to halt the outmigration of quality businesses in Malden Center.¹³ Malden approved the location a new rapid transit station in Malden Center, for example, as a way to meet these goals and to bring new activities to the downtown.

A major difference in the planning strategy has resulted, however, from the increasing emphasis placed on new office and residential construction in and around the downtown. Malden, due to its location and the accessibility of the MBTA station, could benefit from the pent-up demand for housing and office uses in the regional market. The executive director of the MRA acknowledged the difficulty of regaining the competitive retail position Malden once enjoyed in the past.¹⁴ Though retail and service businesses will not enjoy the former prosperity of the downtown as a regional center, businesses will be preserved rather than cleared to make room for new uses as proposed in the urban renewal plan. The economic function of the downtown is expected to be strengthened because of the addition of more day and evening users. Overall, the strategy has shifted from competition to substitution.

The desire to expand the office and residential uses in the downtown arises out of two major concerns to the city of Malden: the negative impact of Proposition 2-1/2 and the decline in population of the city. Proposition 2-1/2 strongly affected Malden, more than the other case study cities, in its ability to provide community services. As a result, the city is eager to see new development in the

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ibid.

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Malden Redevelopment Authority, *Middlesex Office Plaza UDAG: Detailed Project Description* (Malden, 1982).

¹⁴

Interview with David R. FitzGerald, March 23, 1984.

downtown that adds to its tax base. Malden also wants to see the population rise because the city's entire financial structure is based on having a population over 50,000 residents. Downtown revitalization is expected to help alleviate these problems and help increase the economic strength of local businesses. Consequently, the goals for revitalization are to:

create an atmosphere in which both consumer and vendor confidence is restored in Malden's downtown, increase sales revenue to local merchants, increase tax revenue to the city and take advantage of current energy costs by revitalizing Malden's convenient public transportation as well as capitalizing on Malden's proximity to downtown Boston.¹⁵

Elements of the Revitalization Plan

The activities pursued in the revitalization plan for Malden Center correspond to the goals discussed above. The early problems of inadequate parking and poor traffic circulation have been almost eliminated. The current emphasis has been placed on attracting new uses to the downtown in the residential and office sectors. In conjunction with this, the MRA has initiated a small beautification program and infrastructure improvements. To finance these projects, Malden has received more Urban Development Action Grants (UDAG's) when compared to any city of its size in the state. Combined these grants total \$9,000,000, and all but one have been applied to projects in the downtown. An estimate of \$60,000,000 has been leveraged from the private sector.¹⁶ The city has also contributed substantial portions of its Community Development Block Grant entitlement funds to downtown revitalization projects.

The specific components of the revitalization plan are discussed in more detail below.

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Malden Redevelopment Authority, *Middlesex Office Plaza UDAG: Detailed Project Description* (Malden, 1982).

¹⁶

Peter O'Neil, "Federal Funds Help Revive Malden," in *Prospect '84*, a supplement to the *Malden Evening News*, January 31, 1984, p. 25.

Parking: As stated earlier, Malden has pursued the goal to have parking garages in every quadrant of the downtown. The Central Business District Garage, which recently opened in the southeast quadrant, has the capacity for 600 spaces. The Jackson Street Garage, under construction in the southwest quadrant, will hold 660 spaces. In the northwest corner, 170 public parking spaces are available in the Malden Towers apartment building. The parking lot in the northeast corner has not yet been built. In addition, most new construction will also include a component for parking.

Traffic Circulation: The Route 60 by-pass of Pleasant Street was a major accomplishment for the MRA. As a result, the city has proceeded with the goal to create a pedestrian-oriented mall along Pleasant Street. Concern from the merchants and businesses along this street, however, has forced the MRA to modify the plans for the pedestrian mall. Instead of being completely closed to traffic, Pleasant Street will become an auto-restricted area.

Beautification: Malden has sought to improve the physical characteristics of the downtown by upgrading the buildings and infrastructure along Pleasant Street. To achieve this goal, the MRA secured a \$230,000 Urban Development Action Grant for a Downtown Facade Improvement Program. Loans will be made at a five percent interest rate to ten pre-selected downtown businesses. The money that is paid back will be used to finance other facade renovations in the downtown. The improvement of public areas will occur in conjunction with the auto-restricted pedestrian mall along Pleasant Street. Plans include the installation brick sidewalks, new curbing, trees, and benches by the end of 1984.

Retail and Service Businesses: In anticipation of the influx of office employees and residents, new retail speciality stores and restaurants are expected to open. Already, some new retail and service businesses have located in the downtown. The MRA, for example, received a UDAG for \$100,000 to invest in the development of a 19,000 square foot retail building that contains the new Memory Lane restaurant, a medical facility, and offices for a computer company. And, the premises vacated by the Jordan Marsh department store has been converted into a number of smaller retail establishments. The recently sold Granada Theatre building has also been considered as the site for approximately thirty small specialty stores.

A small turnover of businesses has been observed to date by the Malden Retail Merchants Association, organized as a sub-group within the Malden Chamber of Commerce. However, the downtown revitalization plans have not yet had a major impact on businesses sales or promotional activities. In the future, though, the president of the Malden Retail Merchants Association expressed optimism about retail sales increases.¹⁷

Office Uses: The 1980 Office Market Analysis prepared for the MRA stated that the downtown could support substantial office development. A number of favorable characteristics in Malden Center were responsible: the proximity of the MBTA rapid transit station, the likelihood of lower costs of new office space when compared to Boston, the ease of access to Malden stores and services, an excellent labor pool, and the construction of new parking facilities in the downtown.¹⁸ Malden has actively pursued the development of office activity in the downtown, both with new construction and with renovation. Two major office developments have been planned to anchor each end of Malden Center. They are the new four-story, 320,000 square foot Metro Plaza which will contain the Bank of New England's Computer Operations Center and the Middlesex Office Plaza, a 165,000 square foot office development under construction. To date, no major tenant has been found for the Middlesex Office Plaza development.

The Bank of New England's decision to locate in Malden Center was an important coup for the city of Malden. The city competed with 75 other sites before their designation as the location for the Computer Operations Center. The major point which attracted the Bank of New England was the availability of a large labor force and the lower costs of this labor force compared to its major competitors: Cambridge and Quincy.¹⁹

¹⁷ Interview with Albert Sparks, Malden Chamber of Commerce, Retail Merchants Association, Malden, Massachusetts, April 6, 1984.

¹⁸ Phillips/Norwalk Company, *Central Business District Office Market Analysis, Malden, Massachusetts*, prepared for the Malden Redevelopment Authority (New York, 1980), pp. 13-14.

¹⁹ Interview with Stephen M. Wishowski, Malden Redevelopment Authority, Malden, Massachusetts, April 2, 1984.

The combination of all these factors, together with Malden's willingness to assist new development, provides a good climate for office development. The city received a \$2,493,000 UDAG grant to help finance the construction of the Bank of New England building and the adjacent Jackson Street garage. And, a UDAG was also sought for the Middlesex Office Plaza. Other notable office developments that are completed or are being planned in Malden Center are:

- 1.) the City Center office development, a 27,000 square foot office condominium built on the former site of the old city hall and aided by a \$300,000 UDAG,
- 2.) the expansion of the Leader Associates Building to include 10,000 square feet of second story office space with a \$150,000 UDAG, and
- 3.) a proposed 400 car underground garage next to a 150,000 square foot office building built over the air rights of the MBTA rapid transit station. Two state legislators for Malden acquired \$2.8 million in state transportation bond funds to finance the construction of the underground garage.

As a result of these developments and some mixed-use office/retail buildings, Malden will more than exceed the estimate of 301,000 square feet of new office space in the downtown predicted as the likely level of office space absorption between 1980 to 1985.²⁰

Residential Uses: Since the construction of the Heritage House elderly apartment building in the late 1960's, Malden has had the goal to increase the number of housing units in the downtown. However, rather than build new elderly housing, the city has concentrated on increasing the number of middle-income and upper-income resident. The construction of market-rate housing will add to the tax base of the city, unlike public housing which is tax-exempt.

The new downtown construction projects are one means to advance this goal. The following list provides a summary of the noteworthy new developments.

- 1.) The Malden Towers apartments recently opened with 206 luxury units. A \$3,000,000 UDAG helped to finance the construction, street improvements in the area, and the costs for an on-site garage for 378 cars.
- 2.) The developers of Malden Towers are also proceeding with plans to build Malden Gardens, an 18-story residential, parking, and retail complex. A UDAG grant of \$1,250,000 will be available to help pay for the costs of construction. The Malden Garden apartments will be the tallest structure in the downtown commercial area once completed.

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Phillips/Norwalk Company, *Office Market Analysis*, p. 14.

- 3.) The Pleasant Regency apartments will be constructed at 157 Pleasant Street with 80 units, a 130 car garage, and 11,000 square feet of office space. A \$1,100,000 UDAG will help to support this project.

An Assessment of Malden Center Revitalization

After a period of over twenty years, the city of Malden is finally realizing its goals for the revitalization of Malden Center. In the past year, a number of projects were finalized such as the Malden Towers apartments and the Central Business District Garage. Other projects have reached the construction stage, most notably, the Bank of New England's Computer Operations Center. Together, the completion of all these projects will have a substantial impact on Malden Center. Over 2000 new employees and 500 new residents will expand the number of both day and evening users in Malden Center. Retail businesses are expected to prosper from these new customers and vacancies should disappear. Some new establishments, like the Memory Lane restaurant, have already opened in the downtown area in anticipation of the influx of new customers.

The positive impacts will be felt most strongly in terms of new investment taking place in the city. As stated earlier, Malden is deeply concerned about its financial stability and maintaining the population level. Creating tax-paying businesses and increasing the number of residents in the downtown are tangible accomplishments for the city. Though it is still too early to evaluate, the expansion of businesses and the residential base, in theory, will also increase retail sales for the businesses in Malden Center and spur new business expansion. Thus, the city and existing merchants should all benefit.

However, the MRA, which is guiding the downtown revitalization process, has also recognized that some negative impacts have occurred or are likely to occur. For one, the new development will probably cause a turnover in existing businesses. The executive director of the MRA stated:

I would envision over the next ten years maybe as many, if not more, than fifty percent of the [businesses] will not be here because there is going to be a need for specialty shops....²¹

Many of the long-term merchants with low rents and low volume sales may be especially threatened by the new outlook for Malden Center if they cannot adapt to or do not want to adapt to the changes that will impact their businesses. Overall, from the MRA perspective, however, downtown revitalization can have substantial positive effects for merchants who take advantage of new opportunities.

The second area in which downtown revitalization will have a major impact is on the physical scale of Malden Center and the users that have traditionally patronized the downtown. To date, much new construction has surpassed the traditional five or six-story level; the impending construction of the 18-story Malden Gardens will make it the tallest structure in the downtown. Also, office and residential structures will bring a number of new users to the downtown that may have different retail needs than the existing customer base. Malden will face the challenge of integrating these dual markets. Though the MRA will prevent new development from expanding into the neighborhoods, it is likely to impact residents nonetheless who value the small town characteristics of Malden Center. On the other hand, some local residents may be attracted to the downtown that did not patronize the area before.

Summary

The original plans for the revitalization of Malden Center proposed that the downtown should follow a competition strategy to regain its position as a regional shopping area. However, in the last thirty years, irreversible changes have affected the competitive power of suburban downtown areas, including Malden Center. Today, the city has switched its emphasis to the strategy of substitution which capitalizes on Malden Center's proximity to Boston via automobiles and the MBTA. Major new construction of office and residential buildings is already occurring. As a result, downtown businesses are expected to prosper providing that sales increase due to the new downtown users.

²¹ Interview with David R. FitzGerald, March 23, 1984.

The potential for negative impacts arise if the character of Malden changes because of the extent of new development.

5

MEDFORD SQUARE REVITALIZATION

The city of Medford, five miles northwest of Boston, originally prospered because of its ideal location on the Mystic River. The port of Medford served as a transfer point for ships and river vessels, and, later, became a well-known ship-building center in America. In addition, the rum and molasses trade established the Medford Square area as a business center. Incorporated as a city in 1892, Medford has grown into a densely populated residential and business city. Yet, Medford still contains some of the only undeveloped land in the inner core suburbs of Boston near the Wellington Circle industrial area.

Though the importance of the shipping and distillery businesses declined, Medford retained its prosperity due to its access to railroads and major highways. Today, one of Medford's biggest assets is the proximity of Route 93. The city has also diversified its economic base; it contains manufacturing and wholesale businesses in the Wellington area and the Meadow Glen Mall, a highly successful mall built in the 1980's. However, Medford, following the trend of many older cities, has lost population since the 1960's. In the decade between 1970 and 1980, for example, the population dropped 9.8 percent to 58,074 persons.

Changes in the Economic Function of Medford Square

Medford Square, situated directly on the Mystic River, prospered as the predominant commercial center in the city. In addition to business establishments, major institutional uses have

developed in the downtown including the City Hall, the post office, and the public library. The Salem Street Burying Ground, eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, is also located in Medford Square.

By the 1970's, Medford Square displayed a number of the characteristics typically found in a stagnant downtown. The three major problem areas were the poor traffic circulation, inadequate parking, and the "general lack of a progressive retail image"¹ The traffic problems were consistently cited as a crucial factor, compounded by the intersection of five major roads: Salem, High, Forest, and Main Streets and Riverside Avenue. Route 93, located right on the border of Medford Square, attracted a substantial amount of through traffic. In addition, Medford Square also served as a center for bus transportation in the Boston metropolitan area. A major reason for limited parking was the use of downtown spaces by people who used the express bus service into Boston. Thus, much of the parking in existence was not available to the patrons of downtown businesses. Parking facilities behind the buildings, as well, were not easily accessible. The traffic and parking problems also added to the third factor, the decline in retail strength of the downtown. A number of larger department stores in Medford Square closed and were not replaced.

Medford Square, however, did not achieve the overall level of decline found in many other communities such as Malden and Melrose.² Providing a mix of comparison and convenience goods, Medford Square retained local customers that patronized its stores and services. As stated in a 1975 retail and office analysis conducted by the Economics Research Associates, Medford Square held its position in overall retail sales and showed an increase of 16.7 percent in comparison sales between 1967 and 1972.³ Today, though vacant storefronts are found in Medford Square, it still has a number of viable establishments such as the Ruth's clothing store and the Almy's department store.

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Economics Research Associates, *Market Analysis - B & M Railroad Right-of-Way Redevelopment Project, Medford, Massachusetts*, as cited by Medford Office of Community Development, *Medford Square Commercial Area Revitalization District Report* (Medford, 1980), p. 3.

2

Interview with John P. Matthews, Office of Community Development, Medford, Massachusetts, March 28, 1984.

The Development of Revitalization Strategies for Medford Square

Medford, unlike other cities, did not pursue an intensive urban renewal program to revitalize the downtown. The downtown did not reach the depth of decline to justify major rebuilding, and the city was opposed to the focus of urban renewal. However, in 1977, the city, through the Medford Square Study Committee and the Office of Community Development, began to study the potential for revitalization in the downtown. These groups recognized the negative effects from the problems of traffic congestion, parking, and the demise of major retail establishments cited above. The impact of the competition from local shopping centers such as the Fellsway Plaza, the Wellington Circle shopping area, and the Meadow Glen Mall was also increasing.⁴ In addition, the results of a marketing research study in 1980 indicated that shoppers and residents visited Medford Square less frequently than in the past. Shoppers would be willing to make more frequent trips provided that the downtown contained the goods and services they desired.⁵

As a result, the revitalization plan that was developed focused on the improvement of the competitive advantage of Medford Square and embodied the goals of the strategy of competition. The city did not ignore the needs of the existing customers, but wanted to increase the level of retail sales for local businesses by attracting more customers to the downtown. Having enjoyed a relatively stable past, the current problems in the downtown were not seen as insurmountable. The market analysis thus concluded:

The growth of retail in the shopping centers...can only be countered in a CBD such as Medford Square by a general upgrade of businesses, implementation of an aggressive promotional campaign and by making shopping for both comparison and convenience goods convenient and appealing to patrons.⁶

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Economics Research Associates, *Market Analysis - B & M Railroad Right-of-Way Redevelopment Project, Medford, Massachusetts*, as cited by Medford Office of Community Development, *Medford Square Commercial Area Revitalization District* (Medford, 1980), p. 4.

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ibid.

5

Becker Research Corporation, *Medford Residents Evaluate Medford Square* (Boston, 1980), p. ES-33.

A major point that was stressed concerned the benefits of convenient goods and services to residents that could more easily be found in Medford Square than other shopping centers and shopping areas. Thus, a goal of the competition strategy focused on highlighting this special feature of Medford Square.

It is important to recognize that areas such as Medford Square have significant strong points and economic viability. This is directly related to the characteristics of the trade area population, the convenience of shopping close to one's home and the range and price of goods and services offered. As the suburban shopping centers have grown and become more congested, the relative convenience of community shopping districts, such as Medford Square, has increased.⁷

In implementing the competitive strategy, Medford is addressing the problems of poor traffic circulation, inadequate parking, and a declining retail environment as cited above. But, the city has also developed new goals capitalizing on its locational advantage due to Route 93 and its close proximity to Boston. In the downtown, as throughout the city, Medford has been amenable to new office, residential, and hotel construction by the private sector. The Wellington area, in particular, has attracted substantial interest. Two major developments there are currently under construction: a \$20 million Anheuser-Busch warehouse and a 189-unit condominium complex. In January 1984, an estimate of \$50 million worth of construction was underway or recently completed in the city of Medford as a whole.⁸ This figure includes a number of projects in Medford Square.

Consequently, the city has also adopted the goals of the substitution strategy by bringing in a captive new market. As stated by the director of the Office of Community Development, four major markets will be catered to in the downtown:

- 1.) the elderly residents living in subsidized housing on the fringe of Medford Square,

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Economics Research Associates, *Market Analysis - B & M Railroad Right-of-Way Redevelopment Project, Medford, Massachusetts*, as quoted in Medford Office of Community Development, *Medford Square Commercial Area Revitalization District* (Medford, 1980), p. 4.

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ibid.

8

Steve Puleo, "Private Business Alive in Medford," in Prospect '84, a supplement to the *Malden Evening News*, January 31, 1984, p. 30.

- 2.) the daytime employees in newly constructed office buildings and on the second floor of existing and renovated structures,
- 3.) the evening users who are attracted to local restaurants, the proposed new hotel, and Chevalier Auditorium, and
- 4.) the customers from surrounding communities who will shop in local establishments.⁹

Elements of the Revitalization Plan

The individual characteristics of the downtown revitalization plan for Medford Square harmonize with the goals of both the competition and substitution strategy as discussed above. The Medford Office of Community Development has used Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds as well as the resources from the Federal Highway Administration, the Massachusetts Department of Public Works, and the state/federal Urban Systems program to finance the re-routing of traffic onto a ring road, the construction of a new garage, and the creation of a pedestrian mall on Riverside Avenue. Medford Square, to a lesser extent than Malden Center, also plans to have non-retail uses in the downtown. These include the existing Harvard Community Health Plan medical facility, a new hotel, and a new auditorium. However, in contrast to Malden, private investors have initiated development without the benefit of tax concessions or special arrangements.

The specific elements of the downtown revitalization plan for Medford Square are discussed in greater detail below.

Parking: The goal to increase the number of parking spaces remains a very important component of Medford Square revitalization. In 1977, the estimated demand for parking spaces was from 860 to 1100 spaces in the long range.¹⁰ At that time, a new parking garage was planned along with the conversion of other sites to surface parking.

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Interview with John P. Matthews, March 28, 1984.

¹⁰

David A. Crane and Partners, memo to Medford City Council, November 28, 1977.

To date, Medford has followed through with the plans to create more parking. In April 1984, the first new parking garage opened on Governor's Avenue with a capacity for 176 automobiles. Another downtown garage is currently being planned for Medford, though the site has not yet been selected. According to the director of the Office of Community Development, the major concern now is parking management of the existing spaces. During the summer of 1984, a commission will be established to set the prices and manage both on- and off-street parking spaces.

Traffic Circulation: In the fall of 1983, Medford completed two major improvement projects in the downtown designed to improve traffic patterns and attract shoppers. They are the construction a Ring Road that channels traffic around Medford Square and the establishment of the Riverside pedestrian mall on the former Riverside Avenue. The Ring Road diverts traffic at the intersection of the five major streets passing through Medford Square. As a result of the changes, the city was able to convert Riverside Avenue into an auto-restricted pedestrian mall. The mall is entirely closed to traffic, but provides an access lane for the use of buses in Medford Square.

These projects have received varying degrees of support from both merchants and residents. On the one hand, the view is presented that "...improvements to the public environment - the new Riverside Avenue pedestrian mall with its special amenities and decreased traffic - will once again create an exciting place to shop and work in downtown Medford"¹¹ On the other hand, the diversion of traffic from Medford Square and the creation of the mall has been blamed for further weakening downtown businesses. Unfortunately, the improvements were completed just before the winter of 1983, the time of year that is most difficult for downtown merchants due to inclement weather. The spring and summer of 1984 will hopefully be a better period during which to judge the success or failure of these public improvements.

Beautification: With funds from the Community Development Block Grants, Medford initiated a storefront improvement program offering a 50 percent rebate to eligible businesses that rehabilitated their signs or facades. The program, which has sought to emphasize the original architectural

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DACP Associates, *Medford Square Facade Kit* (Boston, 1980), pp. 4-5.

characteristics of buildings and upgrade the quality of signs, has been well received by owners and merchants. Still, not all of the building owners in Medford Square have taken advantage of the program; the property owners most willing to participate are the ones whose businesses are in the least need of change.¹²

Retail and Service Businesses: In the mid 1970's, the Economics Research Associates market analysis forecast a latent demand for 65,000 square feet of retail space in Medford Square. Yet, no new retail construction has occurred to meet this demand. Rather, establishments have changed due to natural business turnover. For example, the closing of the Liberty supermarket on Riverside Avenue prompted the transformation of the building into a small six store shopping mall, known as Riverside Square. Today, both shoppers and existing merchants still see the need for more establishments such as restaurants, department stores, and a hardware store.

Office Uses: The proximity of Medford Square to Route 93 and Boston has increased its attraction as a site for office development. Most of the projects, whether new construction or renovation, are privately initiated. Some of the noteworthy developments are:

- 1.) the 1982 construction and 1984 expansion of the Harvard Community Health Plan (HCHP) medical facility which will employ a total of 175 people and attract a substantial number of its 20,000 members to Medford Square,
- 2.) the \$2,000,000 conversion of the former Medford Light Guard Armory into office condominiums expected to sell for approximately \$110 per square foot, and
- 3.) the renovation of the upper floors of the Craddock Building and the Ward's Building for small business office use.

The Office of Community Development has also stated that the corner of Riverside Avenue and the Ring Road may be a potential site for new office construction.¹³ No final plans, however, have yet been made.

Residential Uses: The development of high density multi-story apartment dwellings on the fringes of Medford Square has occurred since the mid 1960's. The majority of the early develop-

¹²

Interview with John P. Matthews, April 12, 1984.

¹³

Ibid., March 28, 1984.

ments consisted of housing for elderly persons; over 400 units are found in the Saltonstall apartment building and 121 Riverside Avenue. And, in 1982, the Old Medford Vocational School was renovated as a 75 unit elderly apartment building.

At the present time, a number of new renovation and construction projects are taking place with the focus on the provision of market-rate housing units. Two projects scheduled for completion in 1984 are the Old Medford High School which will be the new site for 110 rental apartments and 100 High Street which will contain 55 condominium units.

Additional Uses: The city of Medford has plans for two additional developments in the downtown that will extend the hours for evening use of Medford Square: the construction of a hotel and the rehabilitation of the Chevalier Auditorium in the former Medford High School. The Medford Office of Community Development is in the process of finalizing a UDAG for the construction of a 200-room hotel on a site behind Medford City Hall. Two other hotels are also planned for Medford, one in Wellington Circle and the other adjacent to the Meadow Glen Mall. The Chevalier Auditorium, a 2000-seat elliptical theatre, will undergo renovation in the summer of 1984 with funds received by the Office of Community Development from the state of Massachusetts.

An Assessment of Medford Square Revitalization

The Medford Square revitalization plan, when compared with the plans of the other case study cities, encompasses the greatest diversity of activities. Medford has not only tried to enhance the competitive capacity of the downtown with the focus on improved parking, traffic circulation, building conditions, and the installation of a pedestrian mall, but the city has encouraged a range of new uses for the downtown to expand its capacity beyond that of a retail center. These include office, residential, hotel, and entertainment uses. Retail and service businesses will still play a role in catering to the local residents, yet their businesses should also be enhanced by the new users. The positive impacts of these activities should be beneficial considering that new investment adds to the tax base, increases business sales levels, and upgrades the image of Medford Square for residents and existing users.

One area of concern, however, arises from the ultimate impact of pursuing the competition strategy and its ability to attract customers. As expressed earlier, a major disagreement over the actual effect of the creation of the pedestrian mall has surfaced in Medford. The city has pursued the strategy of competition, in this case, by seeking to emulate the successful features of shopping malls in their downtown. Yet, whether the provision of additional parking and the presence of a mall can improve the economic strength of Medford Square is questioned. Neither the Chamber of Commerce nor the city has yet initiated any new promotional activities for the downtown area to advertise its special features though this may occur in the future.

Overall, the goals to attract some of the "lost" customer base and a new customer base to Medford Square should not conflict. The scale of new development in Medford Square is not nearly as large as that pursued in Malden Center to cause a large business turnover or affect the hometown character of the downtown. Nevertheless, in the future, the city may face the pressure to approve additional new construction because of its ideal location close to Route 93 and Boston.

Summary

The initial interest in Medford Square revitalization arose in the late 1970's to combat the problems of traffic, parking, and retail sales decline. Medford Square retained a relatively stable customer base, but wanted to attract a greater percent of local residents to the convenience of goods and services in the downtown. Thus, the city pursued activities characteristic of the strategy of competition. At the same time, the city followed the strategy of substitution by encouraging the development of a new captive customer base in the downtown. New uses will include office space, residential dwellings, a hotel, and an entertainment auditorium. Though some downtown businesses have disapproved of the construction of a pedestrian mall and its impact on business, other businesses feel it will have a positive effect.



MELROSE CENTER REVITALIZATION

Seven miles north of Boston, the city of Melrose was established as an independent town from Malden in 1850. The commercial center developed on Main Street, which was once a major north shore road from Chelsea to Reading. Throughout the 19th century, Melrose did support a small industrial base, however, this feature became less dominant as the city became a major residential suburb of Boston. Today, the community prides itself on its residential character. Sixty percent of the housing units are owner-occupied, compared with fifty percent in the Boston SMSA. The existing open space in the community is either preserved for parkland or considered geographically unsuitable for new development.

Changes in the Economic Function of Melrose Center

The downtown commercial center of Melrose, like Everett, has always served as a community center, focusing primarily on the needs of the local residents. Though the physical structures were rebuilt a number of times in the 19th century due to major fires, the last major rebuilding effort took place in the 1880's and 1890's, just before Melrose was incorporated as a city in 1899. Except for some modernization of structures over time, many of the buildings constructed in that period still stand.

Though Melrose is still considered an inner core suburb of Boston, it's downtown is somewhat exclusive due to the lack of access via major transportation arteries. Major highway interchanges —

for Route 93 and Route 1 — lie within one mile of Melrose's downtown, but local roads provide the only transportation there. The commuter train stops at Wyoming Hill, one block from Melrose Center, and a small commercial area has developed to serve the needs of these commuters. Thus, Melrose Center has catered to the goods and service needs of local residents.

Melrose did not turn its attention to the problems of the downtown until the early 1970's. Prior to this time, the city enjoyed relative prosperity because the population had been steadily rising at least five percent per decade in the period from 1930 to 1970. Yet, between 1970 and 1980, the population fell an unprecedented 9.4 percent. The problems were noticeable in the business sector as well. In the years between 1968 and 1973, the city lost 20 percent of its jobs with the major portion of the losses in manufacturing businesses.¹

Though aware of the changes in population level and employment stability, the city seriously questioned the future of the downtown after a 1973 fire in a major downtown structure. City officials created the Melrose Redevelopment Authority, who in conjunction with the Planning Board, and, later, the Melrose Historical Society and the Victorian Melrose Society, generated the interest in revitalization for Melrose Center. Based on work by these groups, the problems of the downtown were defined in terms of a "downward spiral" of disinvestment in which "present conditions directly threaten the character and integrity of the city as a whole"² At that time, approximately 40 percent of the structures were underutilized, and there had been no major improvements on downtown buildings.

The problems in Melrose Center were classified according to three major groups:

- 1.) the physical structure of the downtown,
- 2.) the economic structure of the downtown, and

¹ Minot, DeBlois & Maddison, Inc., *Market Trends and Development Potentials, Downtown Area, Melrose, Massachusetts*, prepared for the Melrose Planning Board (Boston, 1975), p. 27.

² Melrose Planning Board and City Planner, *Melrose Downtown Turnaround, A Plan Aimed at Increasing the Level of Investment in Downtown Melrose* (Melrose, 1976), p. 1.

3.) the negative attitudes among both residents and merchants.

The first problem area, the physical structure of the downtown, was attributed to the early development of Melrose Center which made it less amenable to vehicle circulation. Rather than being concentrated in a cohesive area, Melrose Center spread out one half of a mile along Main Street. This not only limited pedestrian access through the front and back entrances of businesses along Main Street, but led to poor automobile circulation at major intersecting streets. In addition, parking spaces were limited on the streets, and lots behind stores were not often used.

The second problem, the economic structure of the downtown was criticized on the grounds of the loss of prime commercial functions to shopping centers, a weak retail mix, and minimal investment in maintenance and renovation. Though uncontrolled population and technological changes caused the first two factors, merchants and landlords were given the responsibility for the decay of stores and their attractiveness. The Melrose Downtown Turnaround plan asserted:

No matter how strained the economic conditions there is no excuse for weeds, signs for business that have gone elsewhere, paper signs in windows, and an unkempt, littered appearance which characterizes backyards and alleys. Numerous outside merchants have claimed that they couldn't run a smart shop in an area which looked like our present downtown.³

The final problem area cited was the lack of overall direction and responsibility for the downtown and the pessimistic attitudes of landlords, merchants, and shoppers. The Downtown Turnaround plan stated that Melrose Center needed the support of all parts of the community for revitalization to proceed. Thus, the report proposed a major downtown improvement effort, led by the Melrose Planning Board and the Melrose Redevelopment Authority, to bring shoppers back and improve the overall condition of the downtown.

The Development of Revitalization Strategies for Melrose Center

To alleviate the physical, economic, and attitudinal problems identified in the downtown, the

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ibid., pp. 4-5.

Melrose planning agencies established the goal to create a downtown "community service district" which would provide a multitude of central services needed by the homes and neighborhoods in the city.⁴ This goal, characteristic of the strategy of competition, focused on the major asset in the city: its residential base. Shoppers within a fifteen minute radius of the downtown were identified as a possible market for Melrose Center. The 1979 Commercial Area Revitalization District plan reaffirmed the desire to have a more competitive downtown.

The overall long-term objective of revitalization activities is to recapture a larger percentage of the potential consumer market in Melrose and to create more permanent employment in the downtown service sector.⁵

The decision to concentrate on the local market potential was based on the 1975 market study which described downtown Melrose as a large neighborhood or small community shopping center.⁶ The 1972 U.S. Census of Retail Trade revealed that the downtown's greatest retail sales were received by the supermarket, drugstore, and furniture/appliance businesses. In contrast, "shoppers goods" sales in Melrose had the lowest overall volume when compared with eighteen surrounding communities.⁷ This occurred despite the fact that the median family income in Melrose increased 65 percent between 1960 and 1970. Thus, the market study concluded:

A community retail center could be developed in conjunction with the rehabilitation of the existing downtown area with city improvements to access, parking, and other support facilities along with the development of additional attractive stores to re-attract shoppers to the downtown area.⁸

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ibid., p. 1.

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Melrose Redevelopment Authority, *Commercial Area Revitalization District Report* (Melrose, 1979), Appendix C.

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Minot, DeBlois & Maddison, Inc., p. 68.

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ibid., p. 59.

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ibid., p. 82-83.

To meet the goal to expand the competitive capacity of the downtown, Melrose originally proposed to emulate the successful features of the sources of competition by encouraging strip development along Main Street financed with urban renewal funds. The Melrose Redevelopment Authority, for example, suggested the development of a junior department store as an anchor in the downtown with a new parking facility constructed on cleared land. The parking lot would be located directly on Main Street.

This proposal, however, never received enough community support or funding to make it a viable option for the downtown. Melrose, like Everett, did not have the locational advantages, nor the financial resources, to compete on the same scale with regional shopping areas. The city was close to a number of regional attractions that were easily accessible to its residents: the Burlington Mall, the North Shore Shopping Center, the Liberty Tree Mall, and the Redstone Shopping Plaza. As a result, the goal for downtown revitalization evolved into a plan to focus on the special characteristics of the city as a way to attract more customers. Because of the presence of many 19th century buildings in the downtown, Melrose adopted a Victorian theme for downtown revitalization.

Elements of the Revitalization Plan

The majority of revitalization activities in Melrose Center have been structured around the historic Victorian character of the buildings in the downtown. The city has established the downtown as a historic district and organized an intensive effort to renovate storefronts and improve signs. Though Melrose did not have the funds to pursue major new development, the city made a conscious effort to leverage as much private money as possible with the public money it received from the Executive Office of Communities and Development (EOCD) Small Cities Program and the Massachusetts Department of Public Works (DPW). Private resources have also brought a small amount of new uses to the downtown in terms of new office and residential buildings. However, renovation, rather than new construction, has predominated.

The specific elements of the revitalization plan for downtown Melrose are presented in more detail below.

Parking: An important goal identified in the Melrose Downtown Turnaround plan was to improve the parking lots behind Main Street businesses, rather than new construction of parking facilities. The city has followed through with this goal, but, to meet the demand for more spaces, one new parking facility was constructed on the former Transiron site. To attract local shoppers, the city also removed parking meters along Main Street.

Traffic Circulation: Melrose did not divert the flow of traffic around Main Street to the extent originally envisioned in the Downtown Turnaround plan. However, to reduce congestion at major intersections, the city has improved the access and attractiveness of parking lots behind Main Street establishments.

Beautification: To guide the renovation and new construction that was planned for Melrose Center, the city used a Victorian theme for revitalization based on the predominance of the 19th century buildings in the downtown. Public expenditures on the downtown infrastructure were also made with regard to the Victorian theme. The city, for example, installed old-fashioned street lights and brick sidewalks. However, the most successful program, with the greatest physical impact, was the facade and sign improvement program, funded by the EOCD Small Cities program. Nearly every building owner in the downtown has adopted the Victorian motif on either their sign or their storefront. With the assistance of the historic societies in the city, a major portion of Melrose Center was also established as a historic district.⁹

Retail and Service Businesses: The participation of many downtown businesses in the facade and sign improvement program was considered a major success in revitalizing Melrose Center. A number of building owners were able to take advantage of federal tax credits and programs to complete major improvements. Two large historic rehabilitation projects are the Coolidge School renovation into luxury apartments and the three-story Greenwood building renovation. A number of buildings owners have also renovated some of the more modern structures in the downtown.

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Melrose Historic District Study Committee, *Proposed Downtown Melrose Historic District, Preliminary Report* (Melrose, 1979).

Within the past four years, the Melrose Chamber of Commerce has itself become more active. Though the Chamber of Commerce still does not have a full-time director, it has begun to organize activities to strengthen the downtown and unite the businesses. The major event sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce is the Victorian Fair that draws an estimated 8,000 to 10,000 persons to the downtown.

Office Uses: In 1975, the opportunity to increase the office market in Melrose did not look very promising. The downtown area of Melrose was judged capable of supporting only 6,000 square feet of new office space in the period between 1975 and 1980.¹⁰ The 1975 Minot, DeBlois, and Maddison market analysis stated:

The outlook for office development or other commercial development in the City of Melrose is not particularly strong during the balance of this decade due primarily to the location of Melrose vis-a-vis the regional demand for office and other commercial space and the relatively modest local market potentials.¹¹

However, in the period between 1975 and 1980, Melrose has been able to expand new office space in the downtown, primarily through the renovation of buildings which contain mixed office and retail use. An estimate of close to 20,000 square feet of new office space has been developed for small businesses.¹² Some of these projects include:

- 1.) the Greenwood building which contains 10,000 square feet of office space and 5,000 square feet of retail space on the ground floor,
- 2.) 441 Main Street which contains 5500 square feet of office space on the second floor for the use of "Pay-by-Phone," and
- 3.) the Cunningham building which contains 7,000 square feet of new office space on the second and third floors.

Residential Uses: The 1975 Minot, DeBlois, & Maddison market analysis reported that the downtown could absorb approximately 150 new housing units annually for a 10 to 15 year period.¹³

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Minot DeBlois & Maddison, Inc., p. 86.

¹¹

Ibid., p. 84.

¹²

Interview with Ronald Nolte, City Planning Office, Melrose, Massachusetts, April 24, 1984.

Multi-family housing, both market-rate and subsidized, was expected to be the most popular type of new construction. In actual new housing development downtown, however, Melrose did not meet the estimated demand. Only one new high-rise apartment building, the Deacon Congregational Homes, was constructed with 104 elderly units. Other new housing has come on the market as a result of building renovation. These projects include:

- 1.) the Coolidge School which contains 49 luxury condominiums,
- 2.) 340 Main Street which contains 40 market-rate condominiums,
- 3.) Ingalls Court which will contain five luxury apartments, and
- 4.) the currently available Washington School which will contain either eighteen market-rate condominiums or congregate housing for 40 elderly persons.

An Assessment of Melrose Center Revitalization

The city of Melrose has completed many of the projects that were planned as part of the revitalization of the downtown. The combination of public and private investment has transformed the physical condition of Melrose Center from a disjointed and deteriorated complex of buildings to a unified and attractive Victorian downtown. Melrose has successfully met its prime objective to stimulate investment, leveraging more than five times the amount of public expenditure. And, for the first time, the city has attracted outside investors who are establishing new small businesses in the downtown.¹⁴

The physical renovation of Melrose Center has also prompted a new sense of community pride in a downtown which is attractive not only to residents, but serves as a role model to other communities who want to initiate revitalization.¹⁵ The Victorian Fair, for example, has been the direct result of

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Minot, DeBlois, & Maddison, Inc., p. 49-50.

¹⁴

Interview with Ronald Nolte, April 11, 1984.

the new interest in Melrose Center. Residents, too, were involved with revitalization from the beginning; local historical societies, for instance, had a major role in shaping the Victorian character of the downtown. Now, the attractive storefronts and old-fashioned gas street lights enhance downtown Melrose for both residents and existing customers. And, the city, despite its locational disadvantages, has attracted some small business office development and moderate and luxury apartment dwellers to the city to create a small new market for the downtown.

However, despite the improvements and investment in Melrose Center, it is unclear whether the goal to attract more customers will be achieved. The president of the Melrose Chamber of Commerce, for example, stated the storefront and sign improvements did not draw more customers to Melrose Center.¹⁶ Despite this factor, the improvements would help the merchants in the long run as a business investment even though rent level have risen in downtown Melrose and no new promotional activities have been planned.

On the other hand, a sense of pessimism still exists in regard to the downtown. One storeowner, for example, felt that the improvements marked the "last hurrah" for downtowns. No matter what activities were pursued, small business owners could not compete in terms of variety and price in the area of shoppers goods. As of yet, it is still too soon to judge the overall impact of the revitalization of Melrose Center on business viability and retail sales. At the very least, however, the downtown is not likely to lose more customers or experience more disinvestment.

Summary

Melrose has adopted the strategy of competition to attract a larger portion of the local consumer

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The Community Opportunities Group, a consulting firm, reported that the town of Wakefield admired the downtown revitalization in Melrose and wanted to learn more about Melrose for their own downtown revitalization effort.

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Interview with Felix Pesta, Melrose Chamber of Commerce, Melrose, Massachusetts, April 24, 1984.

market to their downtown. Strongly affected by population changes and new sources of competition, the downtown deteriorated physically and experienced a number of vacancies. Though the early focus for revitalization was to emulate the successful characteristics of shopping centers and malls, the revitalization plan that was implemented stressed the special features of the downtown as a historic Victorian center. Consequently, Melrose Center enjoyed new investment in the buildings and infrastructure. Some new residential and office uses have also been attracted to the downtown. However, the ultimate impact on business vitality and the level of retail sales is subject to debate.

7

SUMMARY AND EVALUATION

The goal of this thesis has been to examine the revitalization plans in downtown commercial centers in suburban cities and towns. Communities have developed a renewed interest in the future of their downtowns out of the recognition of their significance to the local community and the opportunities they offer cities and towns as a result of their location in the metropolitan region. On a local level, downtowns serve as a centralized site for a substantial amount of investment in terms of businesses, physical structures, and public institutions. Communities can build on the strengths of downtowns to advance their goals. On a regional level, downtown commercial centers in suburban communities are likely sites for new investment that is occurring in the metropolitan area in which they are located. In the Boston area, for example, the demand for office space and housing is being partially absorbed by the outlying suburbs. Downtown commercial centers, which were historically oriented to a diversity of uses, are in a position to benefit from their regional location.

In developing a revitalization strategy for the downtown, cities and towns have reacted not only to the distinct characteristics and goals of the community, but to the multitude of changes that downtowns have experienced. I have argued that one way to understand the revitalization process is as a response to the changes in the economic function of the downtown. Population changes, technological advances, and new sources of competition often reduced the level of retail sales in downtowns and threatened the stability of the downtown tax base, employment, and existing investment. As a result, cities and towns have had to react.

From the analysis of the downtown revitalization plans for the cities of Everett, Malden, Medford,

and Melrose, I have identified three strategies that describe how communities respond to the changes in the economic function of the downtown: the competition strategy, the substitution strategy, and the consolidation strategy. Each strategy is differentiated by the focus on a customer base for the downtown businesses. I have also distinguished between the competition and substitution strategy which strive to improve the economic strength of the downtown and the consolidation strategy which focuses on maintaining it.

The competition strategy is one means enacted by cities and towns that wish to increase the economic strength of a downtown. The goal is to compete with shopping centers and malls for some or all of the "lost" customer base. Communities that adopt this strategy pursue revitalization activities that either emulate competitive shopping areas, such as building a downtown pedestrian mall, or capitalize on the special characteristics of the downtown, such as emphasizing its historic past.

The substitution strategy is also pursued out of the desire to increase the economic strength of a downtown. Yet, rather than attract the "lost" customer base, the focus is on attracting new customers by creating "captive users" A common tactic is the build-up of the specialized function(s) of the downtown such as office space, residential dwellings, or hotels.

The final response, the consolidation strategy, is developed to maintain, rather than increase, the economic strength of a downtown by focusing on the needs of the existing customer base. Communities enact revitalization plans to upgrade the physical quality of the downtown, and respond to a decline in retail sales by cutting back the number of businesses or absorbing the losses.

My examination of downtown revitalization in Everett, Malden, Medford, and Melrose indicates that a diversity of opinions exist about the ultimate success of implementing each strategy and the effects on the different interest groups that are concerned with the downtown: city officials, the merchants, the existing customers, and the residents of the community. It is important to recognize though that the revitalization plans in each community are either recently completed or in progress, a factor which makes it difficult to measure the success of each strategy in achieving the desired results. Therefore, in the sections that follow, I will summarize the important factors to consider in strategy implementation based on my preliminary evaluation of the case studies.

The Strategy of Competition

The successful implementation of the competition strategy represents an attainable goal for most communities that implies moderate change in the downtown commercial center. If successfully implemented, the competition strategy will positively affect nearly every interest group associated with the downtown. Retail sales will be likely to increase, thus insuring the health of the businesses of existing merchants and attracting new merchants to any vacant storefronts. Though rents may rise for merchants that undertake renovations or improvements, increased sales will offset this. As businesses thrive, they will continue to pay property taxes to the city and perhaps employ city residents. A likely side effect will be the improvement of the overall image of the community, reflected in the downtown. Residents will have a more functional and attractive downtown even if they are not the ones who patronize it. And, existing shoppers will be positively affected if the goods and services they desire are still available or if a greater variety of goods exist.

However, in order to achieve these positive effects, I feel that three requirements are necessary. The first requirement is that communities implement "competitive" projects that will actually achieve the goal to attract shoppers. Though communities can either emulate the positive characteristics of the shopping centers in downtowns or differentiate themselves, it is becoming increasingly more difficult to increase retail sales and attract shoppers by duplicating the conditions found in competitive areas. Downtowns are at a disadvantage in more than one respect (i.e. parking and weather vulnerability). A number of merchants in Medford Square, for example, opposed the creation of a downtown pedestrian mall citing the failures in other cities. Consequently, I would argue that competitive revitalization activities that focus on differentiating the downtown based on its strengths are more likely to succeed.

The second important component is the necessity of having promotional activities and management for the downtown. The development of a Victorian theme around which to plan the renovation and revitalization in Melrose, for example, did not lead to an increase in retail sales and customers. The merchants, through the Chamber of Commerce, should consciously reach out for customers and focus the downtown to serve its customer base. An effort may also be required to update the marketing techniques and provide goods which customers require.

The final requirement is the availability of key ingredients to accommodate shoppers (i.e. adequate parking facilities, good traffic circulation, and clean-up activities.) Because the competition strategy is directed at re-attracting customers, customers will judge the downtown by the same criteria that are used for shopping centers and malls. A new downtown attraction will not achieve its purpose if it is physically neglected or inaccessible.

In sum, I feel that the competition strategy can be successfully implemented if the goals are realistically set, and the three requirements described above can be met. The strategy is likely to work best in a community that actively tries to differentiate the downtown from other shopping areas. Locational issues are most important if the new customer base is sought from a regional area. If negative impacts occur, however, they are most likely to affect merchants who do not experience an increase in retail sales.

The Strategy of Substitution

The strategy of substitution, one of the most difficult strategies to achieve, is also likely to produce the most rewards and changes in a downtown. A major prerequisite to the strategy is the ability to develop one or more of the specialized functions of the downtown (i.e. the office space function, the convention/hotel function, the residential function, and the non-office government function such as courts and police) and create a captive customer base. To do so, a city or town must possess good locational accessibility and, in many cases, be willing to try something new in the downtown. Both Malden and Medford meet these criteria; Everett and Melrose are less well situated but have also increased specialized functions in the downtown commercial center.

The question, however, of whether positive or negative impacts will take place depends on the scale of new development. In most every downtown area, some specialized function has been encouraged, most often in office and residential uses. In most cases, positive impacts will occur to downtown interest groups as new investment is generated and new customers are attracted. Yet, a major effort to increase the specialized functions of a downtown, as in Malden Center, raises the issue of whether the character of the downtown will be negatively affected. Though Malden is just at the

beginning of their revitalization process, my examination of the revitalization plan shows that negative side effects can occur for merchants, existing customers, and residents.

One of these side effects is likely to occur if a dual market between the existing customers and the new customers develops and cannot be served harmoniously. A second side effect may be an increase in business displacement. Though business turnover occurs in all downtowns, turnover is likely to be accelerated when major new investment and the promise of increased retail sales is offered and rent levels are raised. Merchants may be unable or unwilling to adapt to the changes taking place. The final side effect arises from the physical changes to the downtown which may reduce its small town characteristics. In a community such as Malden, for example, the new growth and development may overshadow the features that make it amenable to long-term residents.

In sum, I propose that the substitution strategy, though offering the opportunity to raise additional tax revenue and increase downtown investment, may also alter the original character of the downtown if pursued in excess. The strategy is likely to work best in a community that has good locational accessibility in the metropolitan area and is willing to see new uses develop in the downtown. The city or town must also try to balance new downtown development with the historical character of the commercial center.

The Strategy of Consolidation

Of the three strategies, the consolidation strategy will require the least amount of change for a community, but it also promises the lowest level of reward. If successfully implemented, positive effects will be felt by the city which maintains a stable though not increasing level of economic investment in the downtown, the existing customers which have access to the stores they patronize, the residents which see an upgraded downtown, and the merchants which retain viable businesses.

Dissatisfaction, however, may occur because the consolidation strategy does not seek to increase the level of retail sales nor the number of customers in a downtown. Depending on the specific characteristics of a community, this feature may be its major drawback, particularly for downtown merchants. Everett merchants, for example, voiced this concern. The adoption of this

strategy requires the individual merchant to have the goods and services that are desired by a local community. Often, this accelerates the transformation of the downtown to a convenience goods and services center with limited shoppers goods.

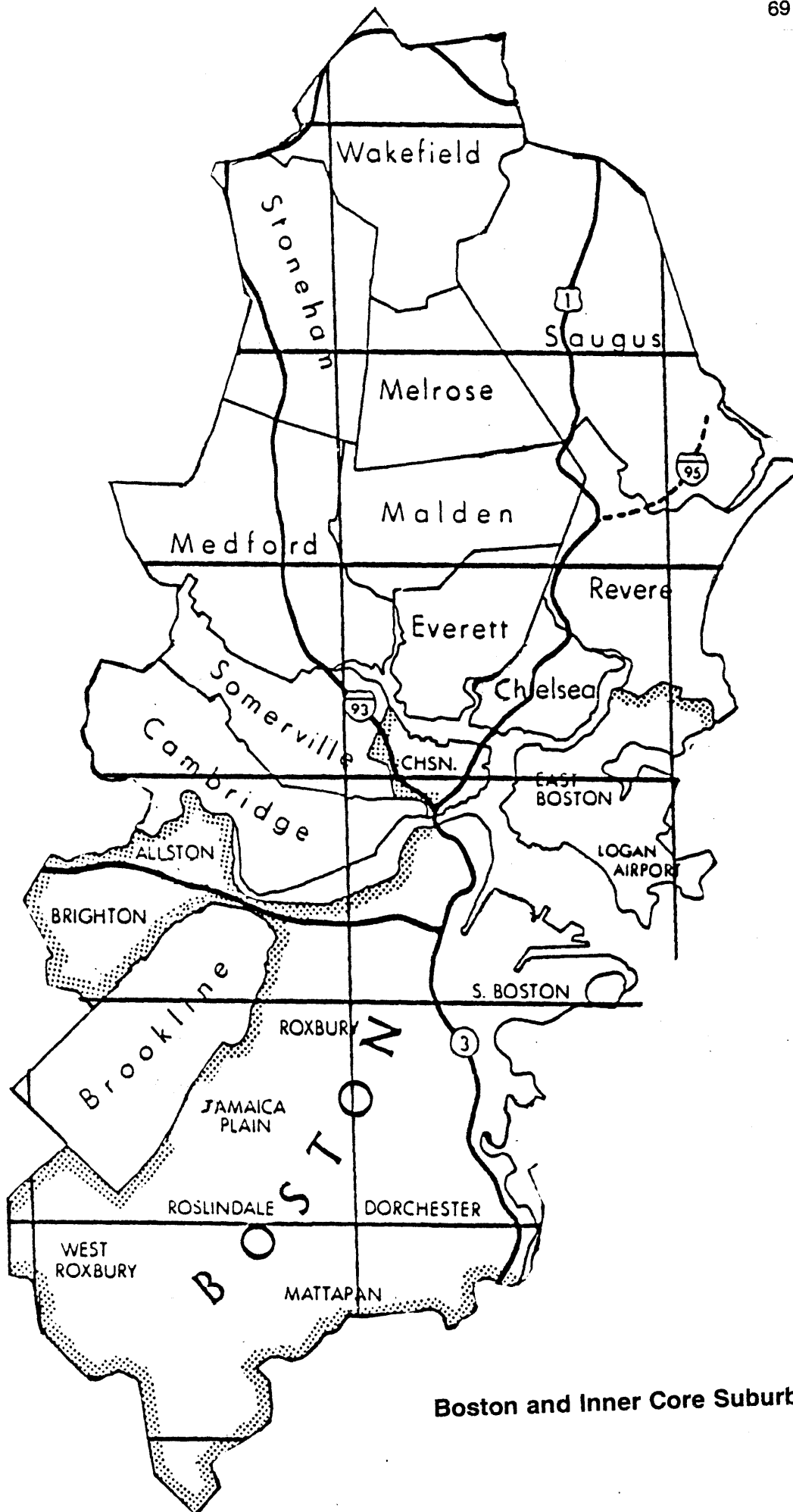
In sum, I feel that the consolidation strategy is likely to work best either in a commercial center that was not seriously impacted by changes in the economic strength of the downtown and can still prosper with a somewhat reduced level of sales or in a commercial center that has experienced a number of vacancies and in which consolidating the number of businesses only reduces the number of unattractive physical structures.

Summary

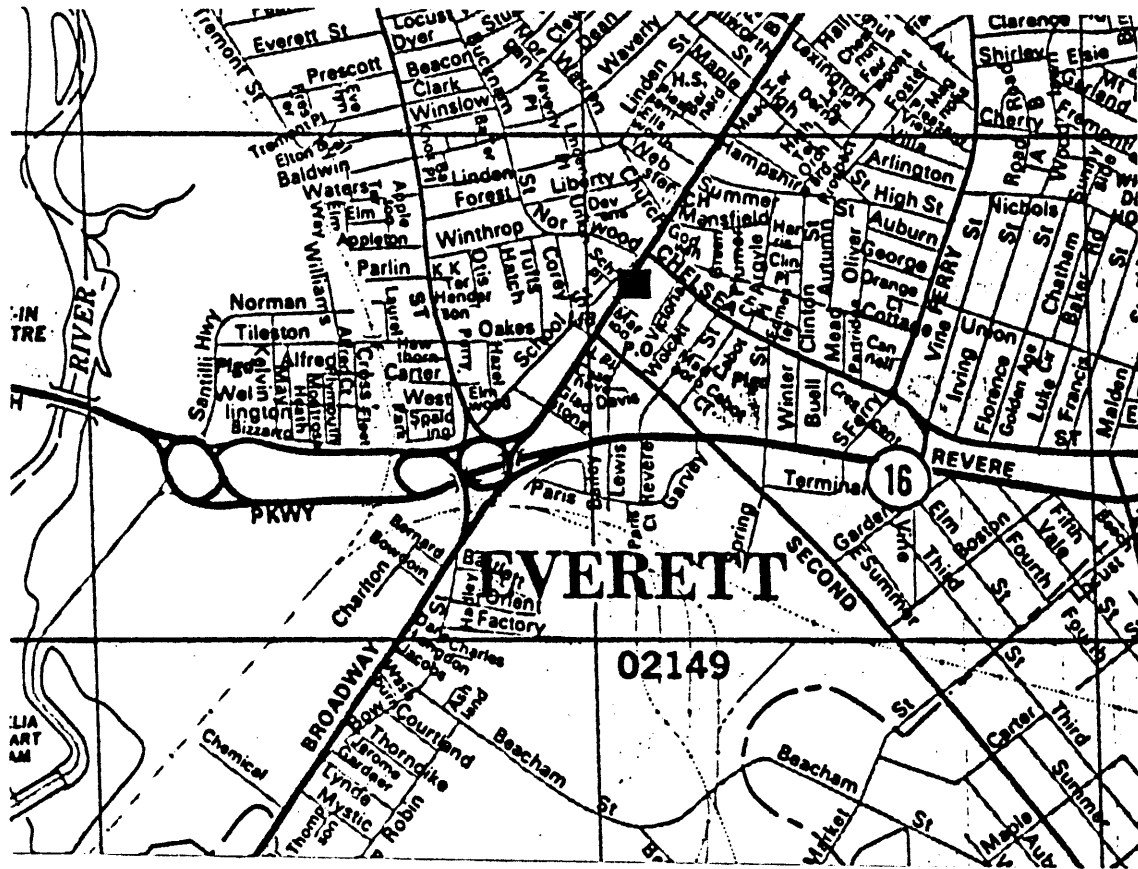
By examining the revitalization plans for the downtown commercial centers of Everett, Malden, Medford, and Melrose, I have illustrated three strategies that are differentiated in terms of a community's response to the changes in the economic function of the downtown. Other cities and towns can consider whether these strategies apply to their own revitalization plans and begin to hypothesize about the success of the strategies of competition, substitution, and consolidation. However, until enough time has passed to actually measure the changes in retail sales, business turnover, and the number of customers that patronize the downtown, the actual impact of these strategies cannot be fully judged.

APPENDIX

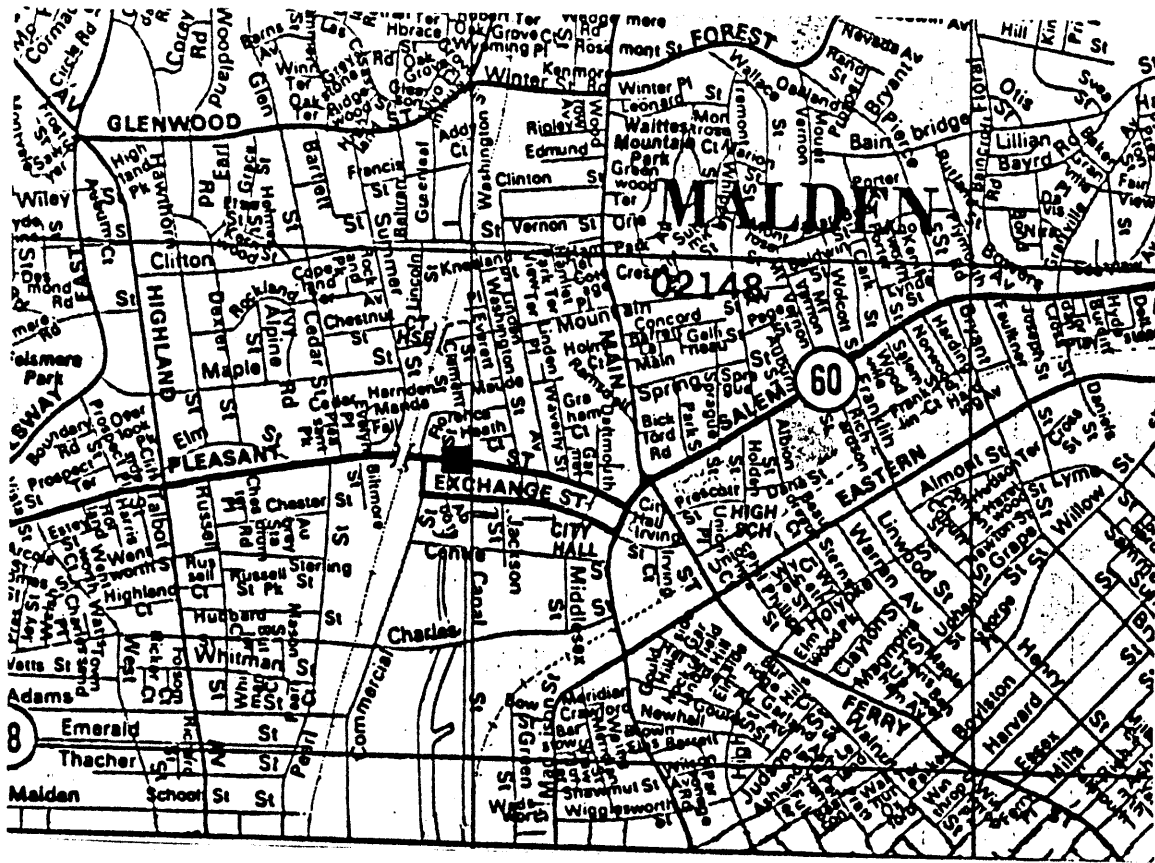
The following maps are taken from the Arrow Street Map Atlas for Metropolitan Boston published by the Arrow Publishing Company, Inc. The first map shows the location of Everett, Malden, Medford, and Melrose in relation to Boston and other inner suburbs. The next four maps indicate the streets surrounding each downtown area.



Boston and Inner Core Suburbs

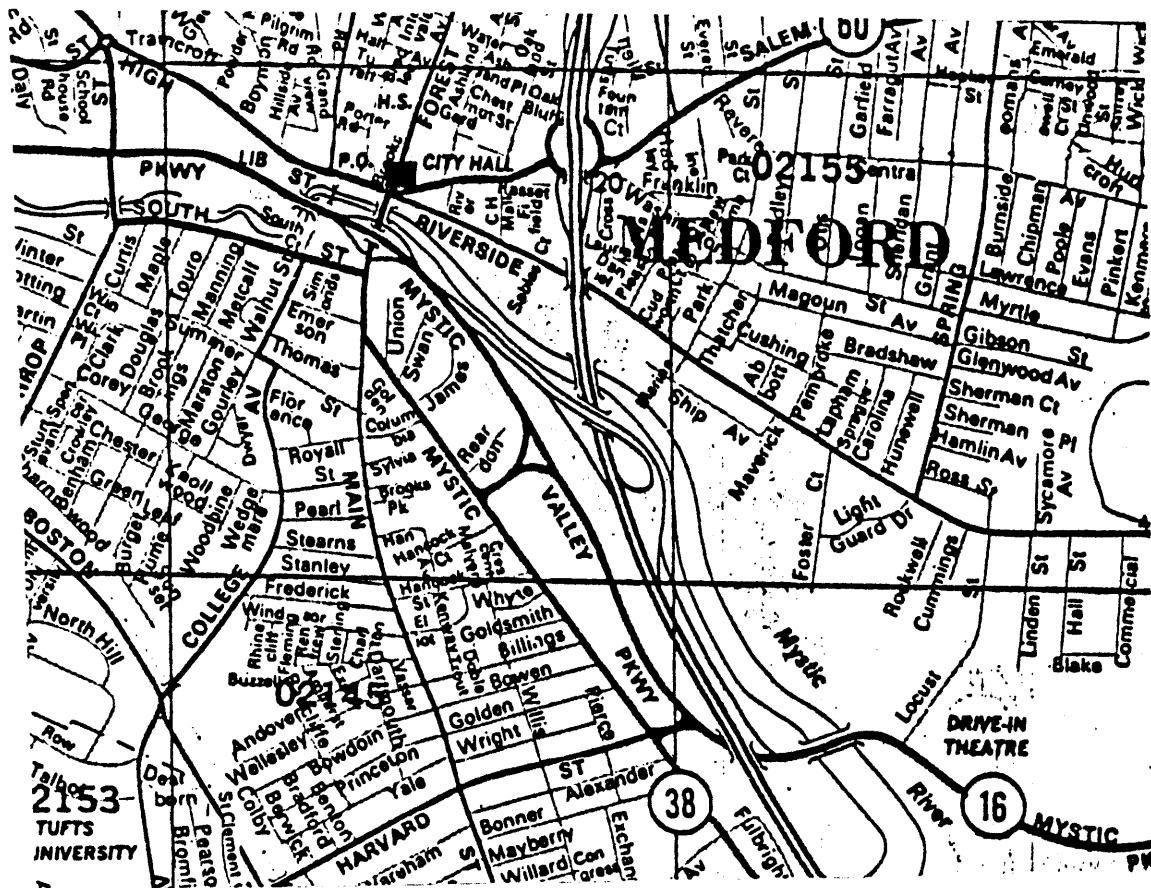


Everett Square ■



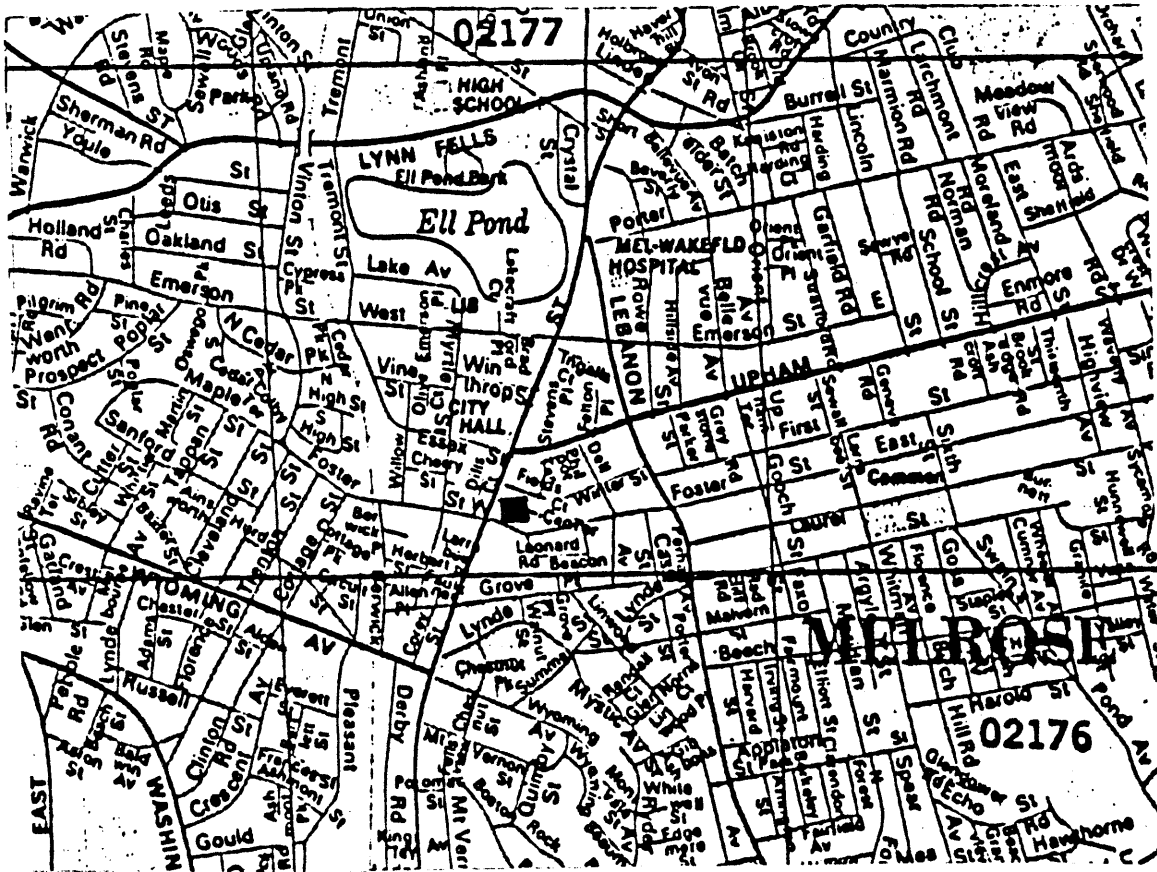
Malden Center





Medford Square





Melrose Center



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