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Small Town Urban Revitalization: The Effect of Pullman Square on Downtown Huntington, West Virginia

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Small Town Urban Revitalization:
The Effect of Pullman Square on Downtown Huntington, West Virginia

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by

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Abstract

Small Town Urban Revitalization: The Effect of Pullman Square on Downtown Huntington, West Virginia

By Amy Blankenship

After many years of being the center of shopping, business and entertainment, the downtown began to decline nationally. This decline began after the end of WWII and ran concurrent to the beginning of suburbanization and the emergence of large, indoor shopping malls. Many cities began to realize the importance of a healthy downtown and implemented strategies to revitalize their downtown. This thesis focuses on the emergence of Pullman Square in Huntington, WV, its effect on the downtown, and how it has spawned other retail development and revitalization strategies throughout the city center.

Key Words: West Virginia, Huntington, Pullman Square, downtown revitalization, city center

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Chapter One

Introduction

The Importance of the Downtown

Historically, the downtown has been a pivotal place for important human interaction, business development, culture and history, and “all cities see a healthy core as integral to their overall heritage, tax base, sense of community, identity, economic development and image” (Robertson 2001, 9). There are many common characteristics shared by downtowns. Many are near the city's historic beginnings, include the city's important and historic buildings, and are often near a body of water (Robertson 2001). The downtown should also reflect the values held important by the city. Donovan Rypkema believes that for the downtown to remain an important aspect of cities in the 21st Century, they must maintain two roles: they must remain a place for the public to gather and also contain the buildings that hold "symbolic meaning" for the city. This idea helps to explain why most of the world refers to the downtown as the “city center,” a phrase Rypkema believes better describes the downtown as it “should be the center of the city in many ways” (2003, 10).

The downtown was often a gathering place for people to meet and celebrate their city's culture and diversity. Rypkema explains that it is one of the only places where such people as a bank president and homeless person would come into direct contact; therefore the downtown becomes a place where we can learn diversity first-hand (2003). Also, as our society continues to try to build strong family values, rebuild our communities, celebrate diversity and reduce crime to create secure communities, a strong “sense of place” is crucial to begin addressing these concerns, and the downtown can be this place where the community can come together to

conquer these challenges (Gratz 2000). However, as important as the downtown can be for a city and community, the past fifty years have seen a decline in many once bustling city centers.

As people again begin to realize the importance of a healthy, active downtown, many different strategies have been implemented to help revitalize these city centers. Many of these strategies seem to have been developed after studying the wants and needs of the community today and then developing on the city's strengths. Like many small towns in the United States, Huntington's downtown also declined during the age of suburbanization. Although previous renewal projects had been attempted, a noticeable difference in the downtown truly could not be seen until the emergence of Pullman Square. The purpose of this thesis is to review popular revitalization strategies used by the city and determine what effect Pullman Square has had on the downtown of Huntington, West Virginia. Much of the research for this thesis is based on personal interviews conducted with business owners and industry professionals, as well as field work and observations of strategies implemented by the city of Huntington.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Decline of the Downtown

In the 1950s, the downtown was the place to shop and gather as a community. During the decades after World War II, downtowns of all sizes began a downward spiral as a result of impending suburbanization. There were many ideas as to why suburbanization occurred, including home mortgage insurance, the emergence of the interstate highway systems, and racial tension. There were two main theories that people used to explain this event. One was called the natural evolution theory. As employment typically concentrates at the center of a city, residential development begins at the inside and moves outward. The city center is the first to be developed, which helps to minimize costs. Therefore, suburbs began to grow as land inside the city filled up, and the more affluent residents could afford larger houses there (Mieszkowski & Mills 1993). Another theory focused on the social problems in cities, including “high taxes, low quality public schools...racial tensions, crime, congestion and low environmental quality” (Mieszkowski & Mills 1993, 137). Therefore, the affluent residents continued to migrate to the suburbs, which lead to even further deterioration of the downtowns.

As the suburbs continued to grow and people moved outside of the city, other developments and shopping malls began to develop near the suburbs as people no longer wanted to travel all the way downtown to shop. As development ensued, the downtown continued to decline as the suburbs boomed. The increase of automobile use and construction of new highways began to make the function of the downtown less important, as many functions that had once been exclusive to the downtown, such as retail, offices, government facilities, post offices, etc., were now being decentralized to the suburban periphery (Robertson 1999). Even

though the downtown had always been the center of business, eventually even the workplace itself moved as office parks were developed in the suburbs (Norquist 1999). Also, William Goldsmith, a Professor at Cornell University, stated that “the United States today is a geography of privilege and despair -- well-off people live in the suburbs; poor people live in the central cities [which] are becoming more hostile, and there is a general collapse of social services” (“Doughnut City” 1996, 15). Therefore, the middle-class suburbanites did not wish to come into contact with the number of diverse people found downtown. They began to view the city as a potentially dangerous place.

However, crime is not the only factor keeping people from frequenting the downtown. They also “fail to attract people because they do not offer enough unique amenities that differ from those found closer to home in the suburbs” (Robertson 1997, 385). The mass emigration of retail stores from the downtown began in the late 1950s starting a cycle where businesses were forced to either close or relocate due to the decline in the number of visitors to the downtown. This event happened concurrent to the development of large shopping centers and enclosed malls also outside of the city (Robertson 1997).

Problems Facing the Downtown

There are differences between small and large cities. Small cities are more human-scale, meaning they do not have the skyscrapers and large amounts of people on the sidewalks as would be found in a larger city. They do not have some of the problems as larger cities, such as traffic congestion or high crime rates. They also may be located closer to residential neighborhoods and may also contain many of the city’s historic buildings (Robertson 2001). The differences in the cities also have an effect in the types of problems they face.

One of the most serious problems facing the downtown during this time of decline was in attracting new development, as “the image of downtown as an obsolete place with vacant storefronts, poorly maintained buildings and sidewalks, and empty streets began to prevail in the minds of many individuals” (Robertson 1999, 274). As commercial developers were used to developing on suburban sites, they found the downtowns unfamiliar in regards to site and building design, parking and finance. As decline began to scare away prospective development, many lacked confidence in developing in the downtown (Robertson 1999).

Small-city downtowns do not have the same kind of active nightlife as large-city downtowns, as most of their activities do not go beyond typical business hours during the weekdays. Therefore, it was difficult to attract people to the downtown during the evenings and weekends, and the downtowns continued to be inactive most of the time. The downtowns also saw much competition from the suburban shopping malls and large discount retailers, such as Wal-Mart and Target. Typically, the decline of a small-city downtown coincided with the opening of a regional mall (Robertson 1999).

Another major problem of the declining downtowns is the large number of abandoned or vacant retail buildings. The most severe example of this is the emergence of a “white elephant.” A white elephant is “a large, strategically located, vacant building which exerts a potent impact on a downtown” (Robertson 1999, 275). These eyesores can have a devastating effect on small-city downtowns as they destroy any evidence of street life in the surrounding area.

The Importance of a Strong Sense of Place

A strong sense of place is very important, especially for the health and longevity of smaller cities. It creates a destination and helps to maintain the distinct character of the city. It also serves to attract people and encourage them to spend time downtown, in turn increasing its

economic strength. Also, it seems that now days Americans may want “a livable community center” (Bradley 1996, 10) again, like many years ago. The old idea of the downtown as simply the central business district is being replaced with the idea of the downtown as a gathering place for the community.

Kent Robertson and Bill Ryan feel that there are seven important elements in defining a strong downtown sense of place. First, the downtown is different from other commercial developments. He states that “a distinctive business district provides a welcome alternative to its competition and can build on its intrinsic historical, cultural, and physical assets” (2004, 17). Therefore, the downtown also reflects the community’s unique cultural heritage. Also, the downtown should be multifunctional, with multiple functions such as shopping, entertainment, eating, work, housing, etc., all within walking distance. This enforces the idea that the downtown should be pedestrian-friendly, as it is best experienced on foot and the foot traffic is good for downtown businesses. As a sense of place plays largely on human activity, the presence of people on the sidewalks will help the downtown look more alive. The people should be encouraged to linger, as the downtown’s image and businesses will be boosted the longer people spend downtown. Finally, people should feel connected to the downtown and their community, as the more it is used the more likely it is to maintain its vitality.

History of Revitalization Efforts

Downtown revitalization efforts began in the United States as early as the 1950s, and have been grouped into three phases. The first phase, in the 1950s and 1960s, was concentrated on the downtown adapting to the changing transportation environment, as the automobile continued to gain popularity. Public transportation was either replaced or complemented the automobile-centered patterns. Also, “radial expressways and widened arterial roads were meant

to channel flows of cars towards downtowns, increasingly well provided with parking space. However, automobile accessibility alone would not ensure a booming CBD” (Filion 2004, 329).

Soon policymakers began to believe that to maintain retail activity in the downtown, efforts to clean up the downtown’s appearance must be made. During this phase, which ran from the late 1950s to the early 1980s, consisted mostly of removing eyesores in the downtown and updating old buildings to look more modern, so as to appeal to the shoppers of the time. During this phase, indoor shopping malls that were already found in the suburbs were introduced to the downtowns. It was believed that by replicating the feel of shopping in the suburban malls, the downtowns would be able to compete with the suburbs (Filion 2004).

Finally, in the 1970s, these earlier efforts were abandoned as it was recognized that the early strategies were ineffective, and possibly were the cause of the downtown’s decline. Planning began to emphasize the “preservation or enhancement of the uniqueness of the physical features of downtowns within rapidly suburbanizing metropolitan regions and the targeting of markets where CBDs enjoyed competitive advantages” (Filion 2004, 329). It was finally realized that the downtowns could not compete with the suburbs, but could survive by emphasizing their distinctiveness in terms of their activities, aesthetic environment and pedestrian-friendly layout (Filion 2004).

Modern Revitalization Strategies

Pedestrianization

As mentioned previously, there should be a focus on making the downtown pedestrian-friendly. Some of these ways include improving deteriorating sidewalks, better public safety and improving the streetscape, by adding flowers, trees, benches, and attractive lighting and pavement to add to the aesthetic appeal (Faulk 2006). Also, many city downtowns developed

pedestrian malls. These are characterized by a pedestrian-friendly environment and are automobile-free. They are typically located along a downtown corridor, usually a few blocks long, where pedestrian traffic is given priority. The main objective of pedestrian malls throughout the United States was to help revitalize the declining downtown retail base (Robertson 1997).

The main approach to this effort was to close off these blocks from automobile traffic, and add to the aesthetic appeal by adding such items as benches, lighting, fountains, and others as mentioned previously. Initially, there was much enthusiasm for these kinds of malls by the public; however, once the newness wore off, most people went back to shopping at the malls and the downtown economic market began to decline again. Thirty years after their initial implementation, it was determined that for pedestrian malls to be successful, they would either need to be located near the financial core in large cities, or university towns with a large amount of foot traffic. This approach did not work for many cities, as many streets were opened back up to automobile traffic. Unfortunately, many pedestrian malls failed to bring people back downtown and revitalize the downtown economically (Robertson 1997).

Historic Preservation & Waterfront Development

The buildings located in a city's downtown "represent the most visible manifestation of a downtown's image" (Robertson & Ryan 2004, 18). Basically all small-city downtowns have many old commercial buildings that are not found anywhere else in the city. Renovation of these buildings, and other "white elephants," can contribute greatly to a positive sense of place (Robertson 1997), and are often a main focus of revitalization efforts. Some common types of white elephants can include old movie theaters, department stores and warehouses. As they are large and very visible to the public, they can have a great negative effect on property values and

cause a cycle of deterioration in the surrounding areas. The rehabilitation of these buildings is a main issue in revitalizing downtowns (Faulk 2006).

Many cities also rely on waterfront development to help revitalize the downtown. Although its function has most likely long been over, many small-cities were established near a waterway. Many downtowns have used this opportunity to take advantage of their unique natural and historic attraction that is not located in commercial or suburban areas. People are naturally attracted to the water which can also add to their sense of place. Unfortunately, many views to the river are hidden from the downtown in many cities, which can cause an under-appreciation and underutilization by the local residents and city officials (Robertson & Ryan 2004). A nice view of the riverfront could add to the aesthetics value and attract people to the downtown.

Parking & Transportation Enhancements

Accessible transportation and parking are both essential for downtown revitalization. Transportation enhancements are important, and address such issues as traffic congestion, travel time, parking and safety. Public transportation also plays a large role. In many small cities, public transportation is less available as in larger cities. This causes a longer wait time, which also can be a deterrent for people to use public transportation to travel downtown. Also, as traffic congestion can be a problem, it is not as large a problem for smaller city downtowns, where parking is more of an issue (Faulk 2006).

Parking is very important to the success of downtowns; however, it should not detract from the unique aspects that make the downtown appealing. Although adequate parking within walking distances of businesses is necessary, it should not hinder comfortable downtown walking. As mentioned previously, a high number of pedestrians help to promote sales for many

downtown stores and restaurants, and also supply traffic to many service providers. However, since the majority of visitors to the downtown arrive in their own automobile, it is important to balance a pedestrian-friendly setting with the increasing demand for public parking that is convenient (Robertson 2005).

Although important, parking should not be given a higher level of importance than the main reasons that attract people to the downtown. People decide to visit the downtown for its variety of entertainment and attractions, not because there is plenty of parking available. Some places that should be avoided when planning for parking include streets with a high number of pedestrians, directly on major commercial streets, and also in the middle of groups of downtown core functions or businesses and services. Large lots should be placed behind main buildings, which will still provide a large amount of parking, yet not distract from the downtown itself (Robertson 2005).

It is also important to listen to what drivers want when it comes to parking. Many drivers prefer parking located on-street, and also either positioned at an angle or parallel spaces. They also prefer visibility to these spots, so that they are able to see their destination from their automobile, and also vice versa. This adds to their sense of personal safety. Parking located on-street also benefits pedestrians as it helps create a barrier between them and on-coming traffic, causing the vehicles to also have to slow down (Robertson 2005).

Aesthetics should not be disregarded when developing parking structures. New downtown parking structures should fit in with the surrounding environment and also be attractive. As parking garages tend to be large structures, they can have large blank walls that create “dead zones” and tend to interrupt the flow of pedestrian traffic. Therefore, large, blank walls should be avoided. Also, making public parking spaces more visible can increase people

awareness of their availability. Many downtown developers believe that ample parking is available downtown, but that there is not proper signage making the public aware of the locations (Robertson 2005).

Office and Housing Development

The development of additional office space and downtown housing is another way to help drive revitalization. Many small-town downtowns now find a need for more office space as their economies have changed to more of a service base from the initial retail base (Robertson 1999). Also, the office sector has always been a large part of downtown employment, providing additional people to visit downtown stores, restaurants, and other businesses (Faulk 2006), helping to boost the downtown economy.

The development of housing has recently become a common element in downtown revitalization. A residential population definitely adds to the amount and types of goods and services necessary in the downtown area (Faulk 2006). Attracting people to live downtown can enhance the amount and diversity of visitors in the evenings and weekends. A residential base in the downtown can also increase the market for many shops, restaurants and services to help increase the population during these hours. Housing located downtown can be marketed to many types of people who would like to live downtown, especially young professionals who may already work in the downtown (Robertson 1999). Since the decline of the downtown began with a decrease in the residential population, a growing downtown population should include increasing housing and the residential population. These changes in the housing, population and business activity are good indicators of a healthy downtown (Faulk 2006).

Cultural & Unique Retail Development

Another revitalization strategy used by downtowns is the use of cultural activities and amenities. These can help strengthen the city's image which attracts people to visit the downtown, and also help to support economic development. This can including building such facilities as museums, art galleries, concert halls and also the development of arts districts in the downtown. These types of cultural activities can draw people to the downtown and also play a role in where people decide to work or live. They are also a draw to new businesses as the arts tend to draw a certain group of people to the downtown that may not otherwise visit. Cultural activities of all kinds can be an important way of emphasizing a city's unique amenities and attract visitors (Grodach 2007). James McKellar of York University states, "If you look at why downtowns have succeeded, you find it's not because private developers invested in office buildings, it's because the tax payers invested in culture" ("Doughnut City" 1996, 15).

Also, as Roberta Gratz states, "individualized merchant stores are at the heart of many downtowns...combinations of local merchants give a downtown personality" (2000, 28-29). This idea introduces the strategy of implementing festival marketplaces as a form of downtown revitalization. Festival marketplaces contain a mix of unique shops, restaurants and entertainment. The mix of retail in this marketplace is different, as they usually contain many locally-owned small shops that sell unusual items that you may not be able to necessarily find at a mall. Festival marketplaces also highly depend on food and entertainment as an anchor for the surrounding businesses rather than a large department store. They also are aimed at a more specialized market, including the young, well-educated affluent in the area, where most suburban malls are aimed more toward the suburban middle-class (Robertson 1997). Also, as entertainment is an element of these festival marketplaces, they also can serve as a place for

cultural festivals and gatherings, therefore merging the idea of the city's culture to help reinforce the downtown's importance.

Factors of Successful Downtowns

An important method of gauging the success of a downtown is to listen to what the residents feel is important. Many feel that a successful downtown is very important to them. They want to see the traditional idea of the downtown, such as an active retail scene with a busy pedestrian-friendly environment, a central location for jobs, and a place for cultural activities. They are attracted to activities that highlight the downtown's historic character, including its architecture, and also open, green spaces and events and festivals (Filion 2004). Steve Guttman, president of Federal Realty Investment Trust, has bought many stores in downtowns, and stated, "Customers are getting tired of malls. People want to be outside. There is entertainment value in being outside on the street on a nice day" (Bradley 1996, 9). Also, many residents feel that a strong residential population located downtown is important, and also a diverse array of activities to accommodate 24-hour activity. Many people also feel that the downtown should highlight its distinctiveness, including many locally-owned shops, a mix of entertainment and the arts, and, of course, food. Interestingly enough, many people have a negative feeling about a large, indoor shopping mall being located in their downtown. This notion can be interpreted as a desire to preserve the distinctiveness of their downtown even in a modern urban environment (Filion 2004).

Chapter Three

Background

History of Huntington, WV

The town of Guyandotte was settled in 1799, before the city of Huntington was ever established. In 1809, it became the county seat, and soon became an important stop along the ‘James River and Kanawha Turnpike.’ Later, in the 1860s, Collis P. Huntington, a well-known railroad tycoon, visited Guyandotte and had hoped to locate a new railroad terminus there.

However, after being fined by the mayor for hitching his horse to a post in front of a local hotel, he was livid, and decided to place his new terminus about 4 miles west, where Huntington is located today (Rhodes 2007).

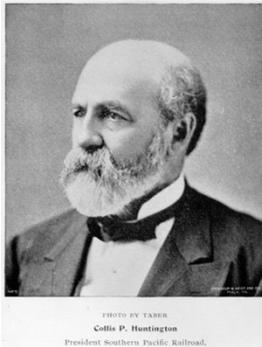


Figure 3.1: Collis P. Huntington
Source: www.sphts.org

One of the first settlers in the area, James Holderby had purchased some land along the Ohio River in the 1820s. In 1869, Collis Huntington visited what was called Holderby’s Landing, and chose the site for his new terminus for the Chesapeake and Ohio (C&O) Railroad. The name was later changed to Huntington in 1871. Huntington continued to thrive, and “by the 1950s, Huntington had established a firm industrial base owing

to coal, steel, chemicals, glass, and train assemblies,” (Rhodes 2007, 155), and is also home to one of the largest universities in the state, Marshall University (Figure 3.2). Unfortunately, Huntington’s population has declined over the years. According to the

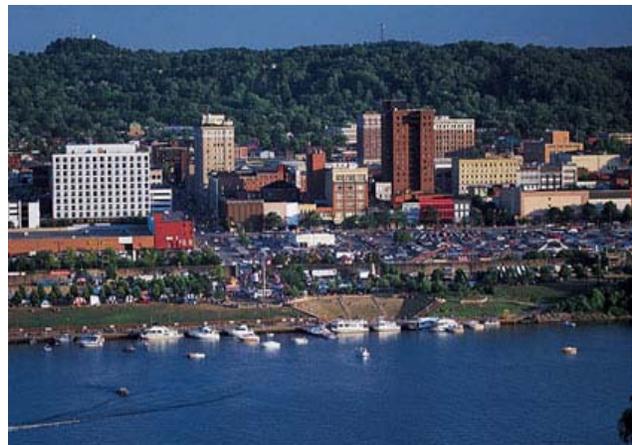


Figure 3.2: Huntington, WV
Source: www.forbes.com

U.S. Census Bureau, the population of Huntington was 54,844 in 1990, 51,475 in 2000, and estimated at 49,007 for 2006. Although in decline, Huntington is still the second largest city in West Virginia (Rhodes 2007).

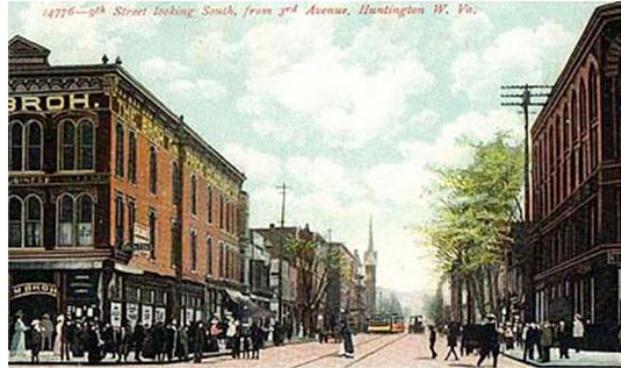


Figure 3.3: Early Downtown Huntington – 9th Street & 3rd Avenue
Source: www.epodunk.com

Huntington’s Downtown Decline

Huntington has been no stranger to the kind of decline seen by downtowns of all sizes. What once was the center of shopping and business, with large department stores, drug stores

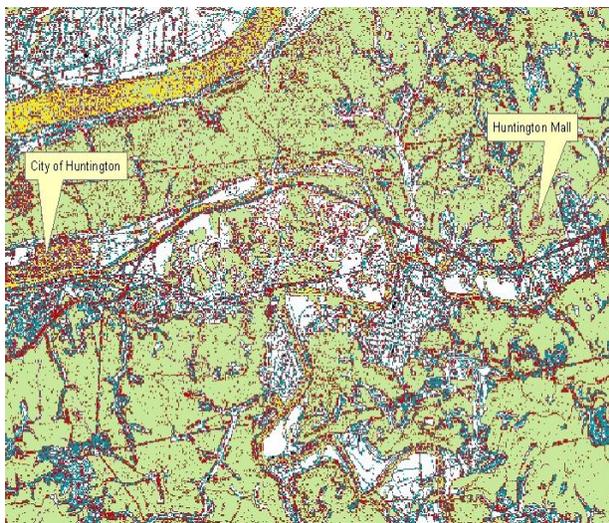


Figure 3.4: Topographic Map of Barbourville, showing the Huntington Mall

and other retail specialty stores, became somewhat deserted, leaving behind many abandoned and vacant buildings throughout the downtown. Most people moved out to suburban developments or residential neighborhoods, and the main shopping center was the Huntington Mall built in 1981, and was approximately 15-20 minutes away in

Barbourville. The mall was initially to be developed downtown; however, many prominent citizens and business owners protested and did not want a large shopping mall located directly downtown. So, it was still built, but not in downtown Huntington. The Huntington Mall, along with all of its business, patrons, and income-potential, began to benefit the Village of Barbourville, and downtown Huntington continued to decline.

For many decades, the city had hoped to revitalize the downtown. According to Gerald McDonald, president of the Huntington Area Development Council, an “urban renewal effort in the 1970s sparked some growth,” but not enough to draw people and business back downtown (2008). Actually, according to research done by Dr. Howard Adkins, it appears that this urban renewal plan may have actually negatively affected many businesses of the downtown area. To compensate building owners for the cost to upgrade and update their businesses, many either raised their rent, or forced businesses out during property improvement. Although an average of \$3,500 was given to each displaced business, many still did not survive, and therefore, were unable to return after improvements were made. Retail businesses comprised approximately 41% of the displaced firms. It was believed that retailers should have been able to survive their displacement and/or relocation; however, 64% of these businesses were discontinued. Restaurants and bars were also affected as they accounted for 61% of the retail businesses discontinued, primarily due to the lack of available locations with good pedestrian volume (Adkins 6).

Emergence of Pullman Square

Even though at the end of Huntington’s \$30,000,000 urban renewal project approximately 90% of the downtown was redeveloped, it still did not fill the void of city center, such as the center of shopping, entertainment and human interaction. It was a functional downtown again, even though many businesses did not return, but not a true city center. Also, during this time, rumors of the “Superblock,” a potential office park, retail and river development, spread but never was developed. Finally, in 2002, ground broke for the new development of an establishment called Pullman Square, locating itself on the former potential

home of the Superblock. Its opening in 2004 has changed downtown Huntington and sparked new interest in ways that have not been seen in decades.



Figure 3.5: Pullman Square

Source: Author Photo

Pullman Square is “a \$54 million retail and entertainment complex (that) includes a state-of-the-art, 14-screen movie theater, a variety of restaurants and retail stores and offices” (www.cityofhuntington.com). Bill Dargusch of Metropolitan Partners, the company that owns and developed Pullman Square, calls it a “Lifestyle Center.” Lifestyle Centers are typically characterized by pedestrian activity and also act as a gathering place, and incorporate the outside and green space as part of the center. Although they may not have realized how successful Pullman Square would be for Huntington, they knew the success of these types of facilities, as seen with Easton Town Center in Columbus, Ohio, which was the second Lifestyle Center in the United States. Metropolitan Partners has developed centers of this type before, at different scales, and all have proven to be successful.

From a real estate standpoint, downtown revitalization was not the main purpose of Pullman Square. Dargusch states that “a standalone retail project that could be financially successful was our first priority.” The fact that Pullman Square has become beneficial to the city is a positive outcome, or residual result, as “obviously, the success of Pullman Square is going to be measured ultimately as being part of the Huntington market instead of by itself” (Dargusch, www.stjames.com). Even the name seems to illustrate the mutual beneficial relationship between Huntington and Metropolitan Partners, as it connects Huntington’s history as a prominent rail city with the real estate business that brought it here. A successful impact on the marketplace, Dargusch believes that the future is bright for Pullman Square and Huntington, and a good measure of success is whether or not it has a positive effect on the downtown. They have good ideas for the future and development still in store.

Chapter Four

Methodology

Several research methods were used, such as GIS, interviews and field work. Interviews were conducted with both industry professionals and business owners, and also the activity and strategies used downtown were observed. Revitalization strategies and their effects vary greatly from city to city, as each city's needs and desires are unique to the city and residents themselves. Therefore, personal interviews with those who are involved in the decision-making and who receive the effects of the change are very valuable for my research, as both positive and negative effects are more substantially noticed and magnified in a small city opposed to a larger one.

GIS was used to analyze the movement of downtown businesses both before and after the establishment of Pullman Square. First, the downtown that was to be analyzed needed to be defined. The most densely concentrated area of businesses downtown was chosen, locating the retail and service businesses along the streets from 7th Street to approximately 12th Street, and Veteran's Memorial Boulevard, along the riverfront, to 5th Avenue.

For analysis in ArcMap, the businesses were divided into three different groups: *Old Businesses*, which included those that were in existence prior to Pullman Square's opening in 2004; *New Businesses*, including the businesses which opened after Pullman Square; and *All Businesses*, which include all businesses now located within the study area, including the new Pullman Square businesses. A Garmin eTrex Legend GPS unit was used to capture the location of the businesses and then import them into ArcMap for analysis. The point locations were overlaid on top of aerial photography, using the 2003 Orthophotos of Huntington, WV, which were taken before Pullman Square was developed.

Chapter Five

Analysis and Discussion

Spatial Analysis

For my GIS analysis, I chose to use four different spatial statistics tools. First, I used the Mean Center tool to locate the Central Business District (CBD) of each group of businesses. The mean is an important measure of central tendency, as it locates the center of a distribution of points. The mean center takes this idea and projects the points onto a coordinate system to locate the average location (McGrew 52). As the set of X and Y points are displayed two-dimensionally, the mean center can be calculated by averaging these values (McGrew 2000). This statistic is “useful for tracking changes in the distribution or for comparing the distributions of different types of features” (ESRI). By tracking the mean center of the businesses downtown, we will be able to determine whether a change in the center of the downtown has occurred and in which direction it has shifted, therefore determining the effect of Pullman Square.

Effect of Pullman Square on the Downtown City Center
Huntington, WV 2008

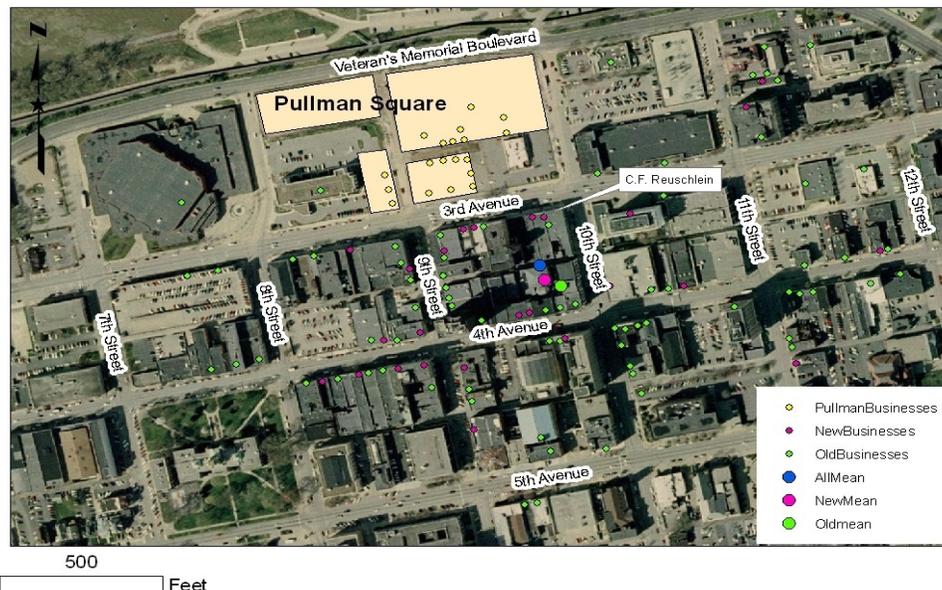


Figure 5.1: Mean Center

After performing the mean center for each of my three groups, it was possible to see that the center of the new businesses began to shift both slightly north and west, a shift toward Pullman Square. Also, the new center of all businesses combined saw a shift north toward Pullman Square and also to the west, a distance of almost 30 meters.

As the mean center is simply the spatial equivalent of the mean, standard distance is the spatial equivalent of standard deviation. Therefore, “standard distance measures the amount of absolute dispersion in a point pattern” (McGrew 2000, 56) and measures the compactness of the points, providing a value that represents the dispersion of the points around the mean center (ESRI). By measuring the compactness of the businesses downtown, we may be able to determine whether new businesses are coming in and locating closer to Pullman Square now than previously. Next, I used the Standard Distance tool to calculate standard distance which is then shown as a circle whose center is the mean center.

Effect of Pullman Square on Downtown Retail Locations Huntington, WV 2008

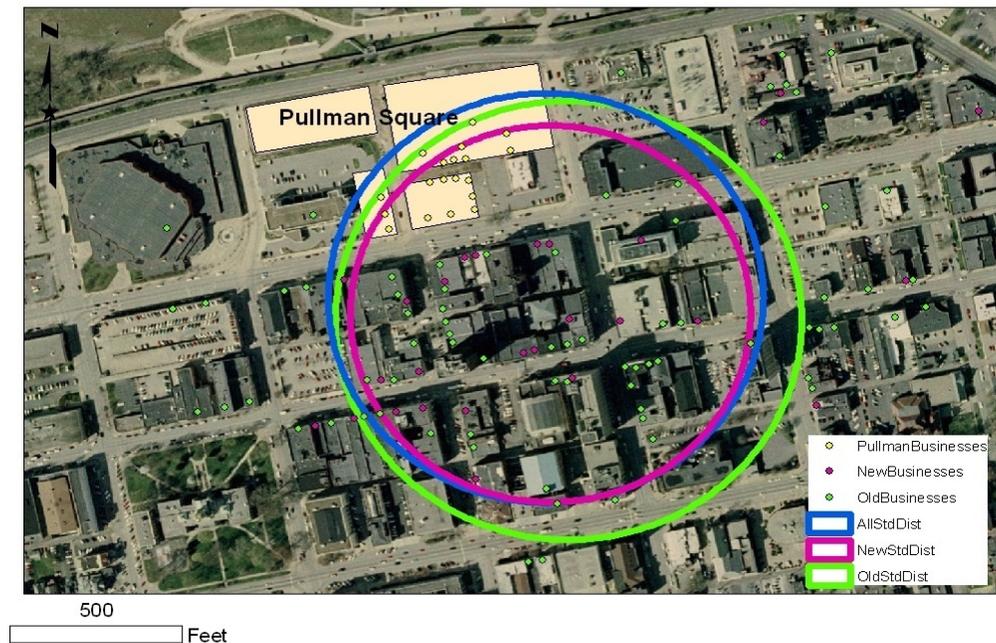


Figure 5.2: Standard Distance

As you can see from the above figure, the standard distance of the old businesses has a large range, and the points are further dispersed around the center. The standard distance of the new businesses became much more compact, as many of the newer businesses are locating closer to Pullman Square. Finally, by comparing the standard distance of the old businesses and that of the new businesses, we can see a definite shift in direction and also in compactness, as many of these businesses seem to be locating closer to the center, and closer to Pullman Square.

The standard ellipse is similar to standard distance in that it is used to describe patterns of dispersion of a group of points. These ellipses “summarize the location and magnitude of spatial dispersion around a mean center as well as the directional orientation of that dispersion,” (Crawford 2005, 66) and show “patterns of spatial expansion or contraction” (Crawford 2005, 81). It measures and determines whether a group of features show a trend in a certain direction (ESRI). Therefore, this measurement may show whether or not there is a noticeable trend in which direction businesses are locating, and whether or not it is toward Pullman Square.

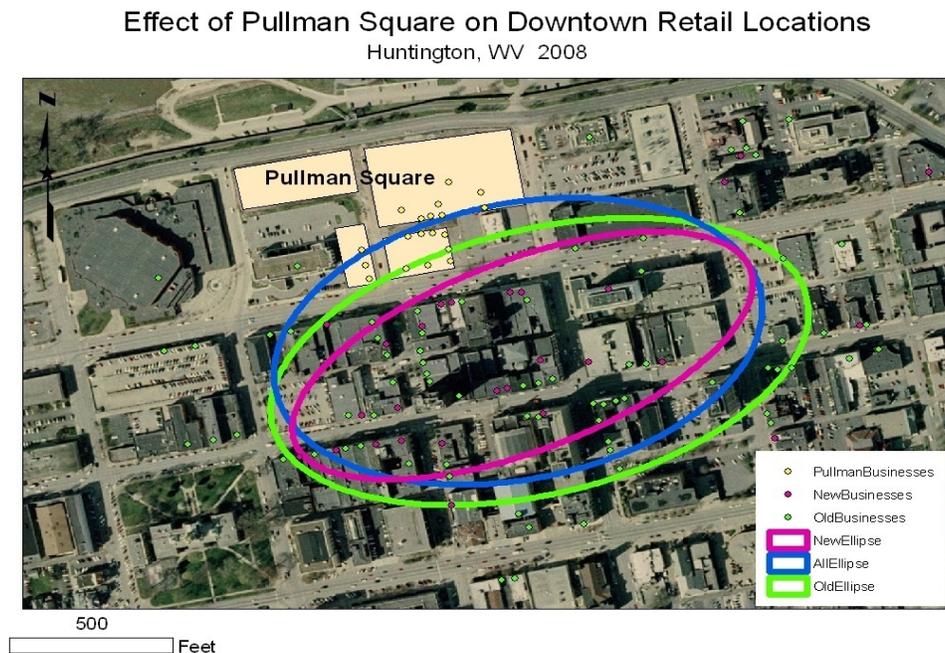


Figure 5.3 Standard Ellipse

When comparing the ellipse of the old businesses with the new businesses, the new businesses become much more compact, but also there is a directional shift in the ellipse, which again suggests that new businesses are being attracted to locate close to Pullman Square. Also, looking at the ellipse of all of the businesses, compactness again can be seen, as well as a directional shift to the north, toward Pullman Square.

Finally, I chose to use the Nearest Average Neighbor tool. This “index is expressed as the ratio of the observed distance divided by the expected distance,” where the expected distance “is the average distance between neighbors in a hypothetical random distribution” (ESRI). The analysis gives a z score value, which measures the statistical significance of the clustering. A score of less than 1 tells us that there is clustering, and if the score is more than 1, then the points are dispersed. The Nearest Average Neighbor tool analyses only the individual points of the businesses in relation to each other; therefore, reinforcing the boundary of the downtown as defined by me. Like many of the other measurements, the possibility of clustering could show that businesses are locating in a certain centralized area closer to Pullman Square, where dispersion could show that Pullman Square does not have much of an effect on business locations.

Also, the boundaries of the study area itself affect the value of the Nearest Neighbor measurement. My defined downtown is small and compact; therefore, the Nearest Neighbor measure could show some exaggerated clustering. First, I received a z score of -2.27 for the old businesses, which tells us that the pattern is clustered and not random. An explanation to this clustering is that all stores are lined along only a few streets and avenues in the downtown area; therefore, clustering is expected. However, the z score for the new businesses was 1.28, which exhibits some dispersal and possible randomness. As there have been many empty buildings

downtown, the incoming new businesses have been filling in the vacancies; therefore the new businesses could appear to be more dispersed than the already existing businesses.

When combining both old and new businesses, excluding Pullman businesses, I received a z score of -4.74, which shows even more clustering than before. Finally, I combined all businesses, including Pullman businesses, and received a z score of -4.55. All of Pullman Square represents a new cluster of businesses itself, however located away from the old businesses. As all the businesses in Pullman Square are purposely clustered into a certain area, I would have expected the z score to be less than the group without the Pullman businesses. I suppose there are a couple of explanations for this. First, as mentioned previously, the stores are all located along a certain number of streets, and then by “filling in” where there were vacant buildings, this now shows even more clustering. However, it could also show that the new businesses, and possibly older, unsuccessful businesses, are intentionally locating in this area, so as to be closer to Pullman Square.

Urban Revitalization at Work

As Gerald McDonald stated, Pullman Square has acted “as a magnet” for the downtown, both in terms of attracting people and businesses, and has also caused “a dramatic pull down 3rd Avenue and up the 9th Street plaza.” He explained, “When you put a \$60 million development in, it becomes the platform for everything else around it, and causes spinoffs of



Figure 5.4: Walkable & Drivable Pullman Square
Source: Author Photo

development near the facility, such as the 9th Street plaza.” In Pullman Square, Huntington finally found the right mix of retail and entertainment, and also the right developer. It created a



Figure 5.5: Skywalk from parking garage to Pullman Square
Source: Author Photo

different niche for the community than what has always been found here (McDonald 2008). It seems to have created that sense of place that experts feel is so important to downtown revitalization. It gave the community a place to come together, and also celebrate the city’s history, as much of Pullman Square is reminiscent of early Huntington.

Ask anyone in town and they know about Pullman Square.

It has transformed the downtown into the center of entertainment and again made it a gathering place for the community.

After much reading and researching different downtown revitalization strategies, it is easy to notice many of the ways that both Pullman Square and Huntington have been trying to make this transformation. First, both Pullman Square and the areas immediately surrounding it are quite pedestrian-friendly. Not only are the sidewalks wide and prominent, Pullman Square itself is walkable, allowing only light traffic through (Figure 5.4). One of the parking garages



Figure 5.6: Benches in Pullman Square
Source: Author Photo

has a skywalk allowing people to easily get from the garage to the main building easily (Figure 5.5). Also, the atmosphere of Pullman Square is



Figure 5.7: Attractive lighting
Source: Author Photo

aesthetically pleasing. The “square” itself includes many benches on which to sit and relax (Figure 5.6), attractive lighting (Figure 5.7), flowers during the appropriate time of year, and a



Figure 5.8: Fountain
Source: Author Photo

fountain as a nice centerpiece (Figure 5.8). Not only is it a nice place to visit for shopping, it is a safe, attractive place to relax.

Downtown Huntington has also been involved with historic preservation, busy remodeling many of the older buildings in the vicinity of Pullman Square. Dr. Joseph Touma, who owns many downtown buildings including the strip directly across from Pullman Square on 3rd Avenue, named Pullman Center, has been updating the buildings to give them the neoclassical look of Pullman Square (Figure 5.9). C.M. Love Hardware, on the corner of 10th Street and 3rd Avenue, has also begun updating their building, beginning by revealing the old, historic brick underneath the current exterior so as to qualify for tax breaks during this process (Figure 5.10). Also, some “white elephants” along the plaza have begun to get a new look, including updating the exterior and new windows. Many of these buildings will be



Figure 5.9: Pullman Center
Source: Author Photo



Figure 5.10: C.M. Love Hardware being remodeled
Source: Author Photo

used as office space or for housing, as apartments and condominiums, another aspect of successful downtown revitalization.

As people now want to experience the excitement and convenience of living in the city, cities around the world are developing new residential housing as people steadily move back into the downtown. There have been some recent

developments of housing in downtown Huntington in the form of condominiums and upscale loft apartments. Typically, these types of urban housing developments are appealing to younger people who may work downtown, retirees, or simply people who want to be closer to the downtown action. One such development is the St. James Condominiums (Figure 5.11). Michael Rafey, President of the Swiss Capital Group, passed on an opportunity to purchase real estate in New Orleans to purchase the St. James building. He stated that “the data on Huntington’s growth and prospective growth is excellent”



Figure 5.11: St. James
Source:
www.stjamescondominiums.com

(Brannan 2007). Businessman John Hankins, previous owner of the building, says that “Pullman was the catalyst that attracted the development” (www.stjamescondominiums.com). Also, Gary Pommerenck, President of C.M. Love Hardware (Figure 5.10), is planning seven upscale loft apartments above the store. They should be ready to be rented toward the end of first quarter 2008 (Brannan).

The city has also made many transportation enhancements over the past couple of years. First, 3rd Avenue, which has always been one-way only, was suddenly transformed for two-way

traffic (Figure 5.12). The 9th Street plaza, which was completely closed off to all traffic, was finally opened up for two-way traffic (Figure 5.13). These changes in the traffic flow of the downtown make for easier travel and also easier access to important retail activity. Also, Pullman Square itself is not completely closed to



Figure 5.12: 2-Way 3rd Avenue after enhancement
Source: Author Photo

automobiles. The good mix of being both pedestrian-friendly and automobile-friendly works very well for the area. Additionally, the Tri-State Transit Authority operates a free bus to Pullman Square, so residents can always find their way downtown. And, to add to the historic



Figure 5.13: Drivable 9th Street Plaza
Source: Author Photo

feel, the bus is painted to look like an old trolley car that used to run through the downtown.

Undoubtedly parking had to be improved, and many spaces were added along 3rd Avenue and the 9th Street plaza to accommodate the large influx of people visiting Pullman Square. Many new spaces were created

on the street, including both parallel and angled spaces. Again, close, on-street parking is important to patrons for both ease of accessibility and safety reasons. Some short-term parking is also available in Pullman Square. However, the two new parking garages made the most difference to parking downtown. Located behind the main buildings, so as not to distract from the aesthetics of Pullman Square, the garages contain a large amount of the parking spaces for the downtown. There is always good signage, pointing visitors in the right direction for parking (Figure 5.14), and also alerting them to when the garage is full.



Figure 5.14: Parking Garage Sign
Source: Author Photo



Figure 5.15: Mural on Parking Garage
Source: Author Photo

There is also a large mural painted on the side of the garage to help avoid a “dead zone” which could possibly interrupt pedestrian flow (Figure 5.15). It also still reminds them that they are at Pullman Square and exhibits that safe, inviting feel of the center.

Pullman Square seems to have the feel of a festival marketplace with its unique mix of retail shops and restaurants, some locally-owned that you would not necessarily find at a mall, and some are well-known national chains; both of which help to attract visitors. It seems that both business owners and building owners alike understand this aspect of downtown revitalization. Again, Dr. Joseph Touma, who owns the buildings directly across from Pullman Square, is quite particular with what types of businesses he allows in his buildings. According to Joe Chapman of C.F. Reuschlein, Touma “receives calls daily from different businesses wanting to rent or lease his buildings,” such as restaurants, law firms, or accountants; however, he has vowed not to have this type of business on the ground floor. Chapman explained that Touma “wants to fill his storefronts with unique retail businesses that will draw people downtown to shop, allowing offices to locate in the upper floors” (2008). It appears that Dr. Touma understands what works and how best to help revitalize the downtown by providing a unique shopping experience that one cannot find by going to the mall.

Finally, adding to this unique atmosphere, many of the city’s annual festivals have been moved to Pullman Square and 3rd Avenue. The annual Chilifest (Figure 5.16), Hot Dog Festival, Ribfest, and other cultural activities are now taking place and integrating into the Pullman Square atmosphere, and also the unique amenities of Huntington’s riverfront. Also, during

spring and summer months, one can find weekly concerts outside on the Pullman Stage as the audience sits around the square, relaxing and sipping on coffee. The downtown has finally become the city center again and a pivotal place for entertainment and celebrating the diversity of the community.



Figure 5.16: Chilifest at Pullman Square
Source: www.chilifestwv.com

Case Study: C.F. Reuschlein

It seems obvious that Pullman Square has attracted many new businesses to the downtown since its opening. Its large pedestrian volume has allowed other unique specialty stores to be successful, especially located right across the street. When a long-time established business such as C.F. Reuschlein moved, for their fifth time, from their location on 4th Avenue to 3rd Avenue directly across from Pullman Square a little over a year ago, I felt that it would be important to look further into the reasons for the move and how the move has affected their business.

The store was originally owned by H.L. Homerich when it was opened in 1914 on 3rd Avenue. C.F. Reuschlein was an apprentice there, and when Homerich retired in 1932, Reuschlein, now a partner, purchased the store. He eventually incorporated the business into his own name in 1947 after Homerich's death in 1943. When the Huntington Urban Renewal Authority purchased the entire block where Reuschlein's was located in 1973, to be the future site of the Superblock, they relocated to 4th Avenue, where they remained until just over a year ago. Joe



Figure 5.17: Historic C.F. Reuschlein Clock
Source: Author Photo

Chapman, who worked at the store at the age of 14, eventually bought the store and is currently still the president and owner (McMillan 49).

For over 30 years, C.F. Reuschlein remained at their 4th Avenue location. However, as businesses around them began to close or move over the past few years, such as Nick’s News and Chili Willi’s, they became one of the only businesses left open during normal business hours. There was no longer enough foot traffic to sustain them and bring in new customers, as the only people walking by during store hours were those who worked at the Court House and other nearby businesses. They became simply a destination business, relying solely on their regular customers, who were mostly of an older age bracket. Finally, they had to make a



Figure 5.18: C.F. Reuschlein at new location
Source: Author Photo

decision. “We could either stay where we were, surrounded by vacant buildings, and die a slow death,” stated Debbie Merritt, “or we could cross our fingers and move.” They knew that the location across from Pullman Square (Figure 5.18) could provide the kind of foot traffic that they needed (Chapman and Merritt).

They just recently celebrated a full year at the new location, and business could not be better for them. Within the first year, they noticed a large increase in customers, this time of all ages. Finally, they were appealing to the newer generations. They learned from businesses at Pullman Square that on warm days, opening their doors will invite people to come in and browse, something they did not experience at the other location. They also know that the clean, inviting, safe feel of Pullman Square is definitely a pull for people, and therefore, customers. Debbie Merritt explained how during Christmas this past year, one of the vacant storefronts was a bit unappealing to look at while shopping downtown.

All of the businesses on the street banded together and helped to clean the windows, and decorate the storefronts with Christmas trees, wrapped gifts with each business's name on the gift tag, and other festive décor. The various businesses took pride in keeping their street clean, and in the process, attracted customers to their stores.

By focusing on just this one individual business, we have seen how a location near Pullman Square can change the number and type of customers. Locating near Pullman Square brings a different group of people to the downtown that may not have come before, allowing a different mix of unique businesses to survive in the downtown. Also, by being a part of this type of effort, they are also building a sense of community, which is also a large part of urban revitalization.

Chapter Six

Conclusions

As I observe the downtown of Huntington, besides the physical development of Pullman Square and other revitalization efforts, there is one main difference in the past four years. People of all ages are coming back to the downtown. It is becoming a gathering place again and an important part of the city – a true city center. It has always been the center of business and government facilities, but now is the center of entertainment, and starting to become the center of retail action again.

Pullman Square, like other Lifestyle Centers around the United States, is geared toward attracting the young, educated, affluent residents of the city. This has helped to attract other unique retail stores to the downtown that would not have survived previously without this influx of shoppers. Also, the success of Pullman Square has spawned other revitalization efforts throughout Huntington’s downtown, including preservation of historic buildings, transportation and traffic enhancements, the development of downtown housing, and many others previously mentioned.

Kent Robertson writes, “the decline of small city downtowns took decades to occur, and revitalization efforts always take many years of small, steady, incremental steps” (2001, 20). Huntington has seen continual, gradual development along 3rd Avenue and along the 9th Street Plaza. However, there are still many vacant buildings located on the Plaza, and many are run-down and covered with graffiti (Figure 6.1). There is a strong change from the safe, clean feel of Pullman Square to the dirty, possibly dangerous feel when walking on the 9th Street Plaza and



Figure 6.1: Graffiti-covered building on 9th Street Plaza
Source: Author Photo

alleys, and the run-down, graffiti-covered buildings only add to the feeling. I did see one building on the Plaza that appears to have received a facelift, including new windows and an exterior similar to that of Pullman Center. Hopefully this will spawn some additional improvements of the buildings along 9th Street.



Figure 6.2: Keith Albee Theater
Source: www.city-data.com

Although Pullman Square did attract a number of businesses to the downtown area, Gerald McDonald added that one negative effect is that it has also drawn some of the businesses that were once located on 4th Avenue and other places in the downtown to 3rd Avenue. Fourth Avenue has always historically been an integral part of Huntington’s downtown. Mr. McDonald feels that Pullman Square has not had quite as much effect on bringing businesses to 4th Avenue as it has on 3rd Avenue, and that some additional development is necessary, such as the development of an Arts District centered around the historic Keith Albee Theater (Figure 6.2). Many downtowns are using Arts Districts as a revitalization strategy and center for cultural activities, which is a huge draw for people.

We can simply say that Pullman Square has acted as a “magnet” to draw both new business and other possibly less successful businesses closer to the downtown, but through spatial analysis, we are able to show this trend. All analyses show in some way how businesses over the past few years have decided to situate much closer to the area where Pullman Square is located than ever before. So much, in fact, that it seems that the actual city center has shifted, as well as creating a more compact downtown, especially through the movement of old businesses to new, closer locations. The emergence of Pullman Square has had a dramatic impact on both the economic development of the downtown and on the residents of Huntington.

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