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HOW DOES THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT IMPACT SMALL BUSINESS GROWTH? A CASE STUDY IN EAST GREENWICH, RHODE ISLAND

BY

STEVEN ANTHONY CAMPO

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND

2023

DOCTOR OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION DISSERTATION

OF

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2023

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this dissertation was to identify practices that ensure decisions about soft infrastructure investments in downtown districts of small-medium sized cities in America have their desired impact on the economy and the community. Many American cities and towns recognize the need to successfully revitalize downtown centers. While there is evidence that soft infrastructure like landscaping, pedestrian walkways, benches, and lighting can impact businesses in downtown districts, investments in soft infrastructure in downtown districts do not always have the desired economic impact. One possible reason for the mixed results is small and medium sized cities may not have formal processes in place to engage stakeholders.

The impact of strategic investments into the built environment of business zones are the result of many interrelated variables that are difficult to capture using a single research method. The dissertation researched characteristics of downtown investments into the built environment across four U.S. cities that made soft infrastructure investments in downtown districts that were successful (4) or failed (1, where one city was had two attempts). The dissertation also introduced ChatGPT to capture an electronic voice for stakeholders that may not have otherwise had input into the decision-making process.

To build on the findings and the relevant literature, the research used community interaction field theory as a theoretical lens to conduct a case study on soft infrastructure investments in East Greenwich, Rhode Island. The case study method was used to provide a deeper understanding of the community interaction

field theory approach by examining its use in context. Community interaction theory encourages stakeholder involvement by encouraging dialog, shared knowledge, and shared ideas. It is proposed as an approach in the case study of downtown East Greenwich, RI, because the relationships between people are very important in driving outcomes that help communities and economies thrive. The dissertation applied a process that was used in other community-related decision-making contexts to incorporate current views of the town's residents, merchants, property owners, and business and political leaders as part of a case study of East Greenwich, RI.

The findings are based upon a survey, one-on-one interviews, and four focus group meetings conducted during spring 2023 among local stakeholders in East Greenwich. It leveraged a subjectivist paradigm to get the point of view of policy makers and entrepreneurs. Doing so allowed the research to draw on existing knowledge and reconsider the lenses through which we typically perceive decisions about downtown infrastructure (Flick, 2014).

The results showed that the approach recommended in community interaction field theory can provide valuable information that may improve the success of community projects, including downtown revitalization investments in soft infrastructure. In the specific case of East Greenwich, RI, it revealed new insights that can be included in the design process and helped avoid a top-down decision-making process that may have lacked community buy-in. The approach provides useful feedback to the town and provide valuable lessons for other small towns and cities striving to revitalize their downtown districts. It recognizes

that there is not a fixed formula for downtown revitalization and provides scaffolding that should increase the likelihood of successful outcomes as it democratizes downtown revitalization decision-making processes.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Cities, towns, and local business organizations (e.g. the East Greenwich Chamber of Commerce) have made strategic infrastructure investments into soft physical infrastructure, like landscaping, walkways, and lighting, to attract and support entrepreneurs and small businesses as a way to grow their local economies (Feldman, 2014). Investments that support small businesses are deemed critical to policy makers as small businesses stabilize communities and enable millions of people to access the American Dream (Kuratko, 2011).

Unfortunately, the results of investments into the built environment are often difficult to predict and quantify because they are embedded in a system with many different variables that impact the local economy. Further, less is known about the impact of investments in small towns and medium-sized cities and main street or downtown areas than is known about large cities (Robertson, 1999). As a result, it is difficult for business owners and policy makers to evaluate the relative importance of infrastructure investments vs. other potential areas and programs that may compete for limited resources.

The context of interest in this case is decision-making about infrastructure investments in downtown districts in small and mid-sized cities. Downtown districts provide a diverse and interesting shopping experience due to unique features such as historical buildings and related themed areas (Padilla & Eastlick, 2009; Robertson, 1997; Runyan & Huddleston, 2006). These features

lead to a sense of attachment to the community which the downtown represents (Runyan & Huddleston, 2006).

Streetscape investments and downtown revitalization efforts can change the image of downtown areas and increase public awareness of the area among residents and visitors, which can help improve the flow of capital goods, ideas and people (Audretsch, et al., 2015) and strengthen linkages between the stakeholders within a region (Hirschman, 1988). Due to the potential implications of these infrastructure investments, community stakeholders have a vested interest in the decision-making process. Unfortunately, there are not clear guidelines for decision-making in this context.

The current study goes beyond the idea of business zones as receptacles for activities, where things happen to them and in them, to identify ways spaces can be planned and enhanced to attract small business investments and support business growth. With the enhancements of streetscapes, for example, historic lighting, trees, and sidewalks are improved upon, which incentivizes ground-floor activities such as restaurants, antique stores, and entertainment and cultural amenities. In other words, it encourages a mixed-use which usually includes living spaces above these ground level retail stores (Giusti & Maraschin, 2017).

Downtown spaces can encourage community. For example, in virtually every city and town in Italy, residents can be seen performing the “passeggiata” which translates into English as stroll. Every evening before dinner, these neighbors take an evening walk usually at the town’s center. The passeggiata is a rather

culturally specific and historically contingent practice of everyday life in Italy (Gabbert, 2007). During the summer months, residents of the town of East Greenwich take an enchanting “Main Street Stroll” where you will see men, women and children, often along with their pets, strolling along the downtown area. This healthy, open-air activity can be seen on any Thursday throughout the entire summer season. Many Main Streets, however, look “tired” and are in need of a soft infrastructure improvements to increase their impact on the economy and the community.

Downtown and town center shopping areas play a crucial role in the economic health of towns and cities worldwide (Robertson, 1999). Downtown districts are decidedly different from other locations, like strip malls, when it comes to their retail mix. For example, downtown centers often consist of locally owned small shops selling unusual specialty items, not chain stores selling goods that are widely available nationally. Further, these shopping areas depend on food and beverages, and entertainment to be of service as an anchor rather than depending on large department stores. The retail mix often makes for a pedestrian-friendly central business district that holds a special appeal to teenagers, young families seeking affordable housing near good employment opportunities, and to senior citizens looking for a special sense of community within walking distance (Mitchell, 2001; 2005).

The objective of this dissertation is to apply a community-based structure to inform soft infrastructure investments to improve downtown attractiveness, which

should stimulate small business growth. Community voices are relevant is decisions about downtown infrastructure. The research identifies the complexities that should be considered when making decisions about investments into the built environment that enhance business activity via an interdisciplinary literature review. It aims to capture voices from the community stakeholders to inform community investments.

East Greenwich, Rhode Island

East Greenwich, Rhode Island was selected for the case study because it is one of the communities where decisions about the downtown area are relevant. East Greenwich has historic houses, a commercial district within walking distance, a nice community feel, great waterfront and a top-notch public school system (U.S. News and World Report, 2022). Downtown (Main Street) East Greenwich, referred to as the Hill & Harbour district, is a small area where it is easy to live and it is a place where one never has to leave town if one doesn't want to. There is a lot of foot traffic in the downtown area, making it a great place for small businesses to thrive. The community is just a few minutes away from the highway and only twenty minutes away from Providence to the north and twenty minutes away from the beaches to the south. Quality of life in East Greenwich is arguably one of the best in Rhode Island.

The state of Rhode Island has an acute need for community efforts related to business, including downtown businesses. While the U.S. is among the leading countries for its ease of doing business, not all fifty states are ranked equally.

The state of Rhode Island, for example, is consistently ranked one of the worst places to do business when compared to the other states and has been stuck in the bottom ten overall of Forbes Best States for Business for fourteen straight years (Forbes Best States for Business, 2019). In addition, the state has the lowest rate of new entrepreneurs in the country with just .12% of its population starting a new business (CNBC Yearly Listing of Business climates in the United States, 2020). Further it is worthy to note that when it comes to U.S. state investment on capital spending including construction and of the purchase of buildings, equipment and land and of major alterations, Rhode Island invests the least of all fifty states at just 6.6% (McNichol, 2019). If the state can improve its business-friendly environment while investing in infrastructure in key areas, more businesses will open and continue to operate which can result in an improved economy.

Soft Infrastructure Decisions in Downtown East Greenwich

Like a lot of downtown areas, East Greenwich has buildings on both sides of the street with a distance between them of about 70 feet, leaving just enough space for sidewalks, street parking and yet yielding a minimum crossing distance for pedestrians with greater visibility. Minimal road width encourages cars to travel slower, reducing the rate of accidents. In addition, street width is an indicator of the built environment as to how walk-friendly your streets are (Litman, 1999). In sum, infrastructure investments should make East Greenwich and other like towns a better place to live, work, and play (Giusti & Maraschin, 2017).

Micro-scale features of the built environment which include street and sidewalk width, the presence of amenities like benches, stoplights and crosswalks are associated with higher levels of pedestrian activity, meaning if the area is walk-friendly, more people will come. By contrast, if the built environment acts as a constraint to walking, few people will be expected, all else held equal (Rodriques, et al, 2009). Research suggest that pedestrian-friendly amenities are related to an expected increased pedestrian count (Rodriques, et al, 2009). According to Congiu, et al, 2019, the improvement of pedestrian safety in an area could also support a more active lifestyle. Qualities of the roadscape, distant visibility, and sense of enclosure and safety, encourage pedestrians to walk. Other built environment qualities affecting walking include the presence of shelters from rain, wind, or sun, along the street.

The beginning of the first revitalization investment in Main Street in downtown East Greenwich began with the town council lifting the cap on liquor licenses in order to grant Ruby Tuesday, a chain restaurant opening in a shopping center west of the downtown area, a full liquor license. Bill Sequino, long-time East Greenwich town manager, said that was the beginning of a long process that revitalized the downtown area. When the liquor license cap was lifted, the town council felt it was only fair and equitable to grant licenses to vendors looking to open establishments on Main Street.

The town lifted the cap one license at a time, making for a slow, deliberate development of restaurants and bars on Main Street. Sometime after, the state

repaved Main Street, installing sidewalks, soft lighting, and trees. At about the same time, as the state improved upon the infrastructure on Main Street, two East Greenwich women, namely Barbara Tuffs and Judy Baily of Baily Farms, partitioned and convinced the State of Rhode Island to sell a building on Main Street that was boarded up to the town for one dollar. The town council then went out to bond for $2.1 million to renovate this old building which is now the beautiful and current town hall.

Up the hill and one street over was the location of the old town hall which they immediately moved to the newly renovated building on Main Street. This move instantly brought people to the downtown area. In a follow up move, the town leaders relocated the school department from its current location in the adjacent city of Warwick to the old unoccupied town hall building. This not only brought even more people closer to Main Street but also saved the town some forty thousand plus dollars annually in rent. With the location of the municipal departments and the restaurants forming along Main Street, this was the real start of the revitalization in the downtown district. Main Street also benefited from the development of the nearby waterfront which thrived with the newly granted liquor licenses and their allowance to have live music. People would come to have dinner on Main Street, Sequino said, and then walk down to the waterfront.

The town also appointed a Main Street coordinator and with the help of the East Greenwich Chamber of Commerce, Main Street became a vital and thriving downtown area that attracted many of its residents and tourists from many other

towns throughout Rhode Island. Around 2012 the town, working side by side with the Chamber, started sidewalk dining. All summer long, people could dine outside and then head to the waterfront to enjoy music. The close relationship with the Chamber proved to be to the betterment of Main Street by conducting concerts, having young children paint on the sidewalk, and so many other activities which brought people of all ages to the downtown area. Sequino said that the town swept the streets twice a week whether it needed it or not and also cleaned the snow from the sidewalks after the state plowed the main road. This practice, along with good overall maintenance, kept the downtown area clean, and with its curb appeal, maintained an active and lively downtown area.

Informing Soft Infrastructure Investments in Downtown Districts

Investments in the soft infrastructure components of the built environment have the goal of providing elements to improve pedestrian safety (Congiu, et al, 2019), community, and economic growth in downtown districts. However, the return on these investments is not always consistent. For example,

The uncertainty of the return on streetscape investments leads to the following research questions:

- What factors influence the economic/financial/and image impact of public investments in streetscape infrastructure in downtown areas, and how does it affect entrepreneurial activity?
- What community factors should be in place when we invest in streetscape infrastructure in downtown areas?

- What common mistakes should be avoided?

Given the mixed results of previous streetscape investments and their potential importance to economic growth and community well-being, a sound answer to these questions is significant to policymakers, political and business leaders, and economists.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Soft Infrastructure and Entrepreneurship

Research indicates that physical infrastructure can impact the success of entrepreneurial efforts that create, build and launch a business to solve problems, make a profit, and fulfill a need (Kuratko, 2011). Creating an environment that supports entrepreneurs is important in small and mid-sized towns because entrepreneurs create new industries that keep economies strong and prosperous (Kressel. et. al., 2012). As such, they have been associated with economic development, transformation, and growth (Henderson 2002). Further, Kuratko (2011) suggested that entrepreneurs provide the “social glue” that brings together both high-tech and “Main Street” activities. A lack of viable infrastructure to attract and support entrepreneurs could limit economic growth (Cumming, et al 2014).

Economic theories of infrastructure investments tell us that an increase in spending by the government in infrastructure (including roads, railways, airports, sewage plants, utilities, hospitals, street lights) normally results in greater economic activity in the short term by stimulating demand and in the long term by increasing overall productivity. While public infrastructure investment has a short-term impact on employment, it often leads to increased economic growth

which, in turn, according to economic theory, leads to increased employment in the long run.

Research shows that there is a degree of uncertainty in measuring success in infrastructure investment in small local areas. On the international and national level, strong indicators such as the impact on GDP, job growth, and property values are just some ways of determining the turn of such infrastructure investments. Measuring a small area of a city, however, is often difficult to measure since these areas are often grouped together with other sections of the city/town when recording economic factors. Areas with the same zip-code-level is, perhaps, the smallest area that can be more easily measured for economic outcomes (Renkow, 2010).

When governments invest in infrastructure, the impact and knowing who ultimately realizes the benefits from these investments is a difficult question to answer in any straightforward way (McIntosh, 2018). It takes many indicators to measure an areas' sustainable performance (Rodrique, 2019). To better measure performance, one must measure a great number and variety of indicators including financial and non-financial factors (McIntosh, 2018).

Infrastructure investments in small areas are often difficult to predict and quantify because they are embedded in a system with many different variables that impact the local economy. While many research studies have concentrated on national and statewide infrastructure investments, there are limited cases where it has been measured locally. For this reason, less is known about the

impact of investments in small towns and medium-sized cities and main street or downtown areas than is known about large cities (Robertson, 1999). Further, the perspectives of multiple stakeholders need to be considered in any model that aims to define or capture success.

Community Interaction Field Theory

In a community setting, it is imperative that town officials work closely not only with state officials but with local business leaders, property owners, and organized groups when investing in public infrastructure. This means that for the project to be worthwhile and successful, it needs to be more than a top-down decision-making process. Community interaction field theory, which was first introduced in the 1970's by Wilkerson, states that all stakeholders need to be involved (Korsching & Allen, 2004). In this case, stakeholders will include business and property owners, political leaders, and all residents of the community in question. Wilkerson suggests that social fields, networks, or ties are the most important features of communities, and it is essential to consider the density, strength and reach of these networks. It is from this natural flow of interactions that community emerges and is the basis of the well-being of the community/residents/town (Kures & Ryan, 2012; Ryberg-Webster & Kinahan, 2014).

According to community interaction theory, relationships are more important than any given person, entity, or organization (Ryberg,-Webster & Kinahan, 2014). When people in a community come together and share things, outcomes

are improved. It can be derived from this theory that it is great to build knowledge but greater value is gained if we pool knowledge together and share ideas. This means it is desirable to have bidirectional, not unidirectional, relationships when it comes to communities.

Wilkersons' community interaction field theory (Korsching & Allen, 2004) was used as a theoretical lens through which to examine the importance of the many community members that are essential to successfully design, fund, and implement infrastructure in the downtown district. Community interaction field theory states that interests are generalized and intrinsic and are not specialized and that special interests fields do not serve the community well. Communities cut across organized groups and across other interaction fields in a local population. In other words, you can have people in church groups, business groups, and sports groups, but they all share one thing in common, that is a community field.

Community interaction field theory takes on a holistic approach as it stresses that communities combine the locality-relevant aspects of the special interest fields and integrates other fields into a generalized whole. It does this by creating and maintaining linkages among fields that otherwise are directed toward more limited interest. As this community field arises out of the various special interest fields in a locality it, in turn, influences those special interest fields and asserts the community interest in the various spheres of local activity (Wilkerson, 1991).

One reason multiple stakeholders need to be included in an intentional way is to avoid too much influence from special interest groups. Special interest groups are an organized class of individuals that make policy-related appeals to government (Singhal, 2008). They try to shape policies and often gather information they can provide for elected officials. Wilkerson's theory expresses that the more groups there are, the least likely any one group could gain a corrupting influence over the government. Ideally, Wilkerson states, each voice is powerful enough to be heard. Too often, special interest group politics diminishes American democracy because sometimes these organizations are so powerful that their voices are able to crowd out all the others. While it's true that it is hard to accommodate the interest of all groups, Wilkerson's theory declares that it is only when all voices are heard that community projects can be highly successful.

Downtown Revitalization Cases

In the literature on city planning evaluation of downtown revitalization, there are some approaches focusing on policymakers' perceptions of what is critical for the feasibility of their downtowns. Policymakers perceive that suburban sprawl of the 1950s has made the downtown centers less important. More simply put, competition from businesses outside the downtown areas is affecting the viability of their downtowns (Giusti & Maraschin, 2016). The idea of attracting people to the Main street is difficult because people do not perceive the downtown area to be economically or socially viable because businesses in downtown centers are

not performing at optimum levels and quality employment is scarce (Giusti & Maraschin, 2016). What follows is an in-depth look at four cities in the United States that have revitalized their downtown areas with degrees of success and failure.

Downtown Bryan, Texas

Downtown Bryan, like many city centers throughout the U.S. suffered its demise during the 1960s demographic shift. The downtown areas deteriorated until nothing was left but vacant old buildings and little promise of any lively activity (Burris, 2009). As late as 1997, downtown Bryan was still a ghost town with rundown streets, dilapidated buildings, and little to draw people (Giusti & Maraschin, 2016).

In 1992 the city of Bryan began its revitalization by creating the Main Street Project. This enabled an institutional structure charged with improving the downtown center. In 1996, private developers converted an historic theatre followed by the city of Bryan rehabilitating two important buildings centrally located on Main Street. Roughly nine years later in 2001, a Comprehensive Downtown Master Plan, which for one year gathered input from a series of forums involving merchants, property owners and other stakeholders, was completed.

The master plan provides a working blueprint for making downtown Bryan a better place to live, work and play (City of Bryan, 2001). Main ingredients included in the master plan are streetscape improvements (historic lighting, trees,

furnishings and sidewalk improvements); restoration of historic buildings; incentives to attract ground-floor activities such as restaurants, antique stores, and entertainment and cultural amenities; revision of zoning to encourage mixed use; definitions of design principles , ordinances, and guidelines; marketing; and special events (City of Bryan, 2001).

As planning evolved, the arts were already taking root in the downtown area. Early on, entrepreneurs saw its potential and set up art galleries, boutiques and cafes. The master plan's implementation began immediately with $25 million invested in the downtown infrastructure and landscape improvement (City of Bryan, 2015). In addition, the town included a façade matching grant program enticing and encouraging downtown property owners to fix up historic properties.

Results of the revitalization efforts

Population. The total population in downtown Bryan remained almost unaltered during the period of 2000-2013. While the number of households remained almost stable during this period, the population of downtown Bryan increased in two main age groups, 18-24 years and 45 years and older. The group of elderly (65 years and older) remained relatively stable. The downtown area, however, had not succeeded in attracting new residents after revitalization. Further, there has also been no evidence of new demographic groups such as highly educated young professionals or empty-nesters (Giusti & Marashin, 2016).

Socioeconomic patterns. The data presented in this case study showed an unequal distribution of per capita income by race and ethnicity in the downtown

area (White non-Hispanic $23,801; Hispanic $11,258; Black $3,724) in 2013. Downtown is a relatively low-income area, a condition that remains unchanged since the revitalization efforts. It should be noted, however, that the United States experienced a strong economic downturn beginning in the year 2007, which had widespread impacts on both business and family income (Giusti & Marashin, 2016).

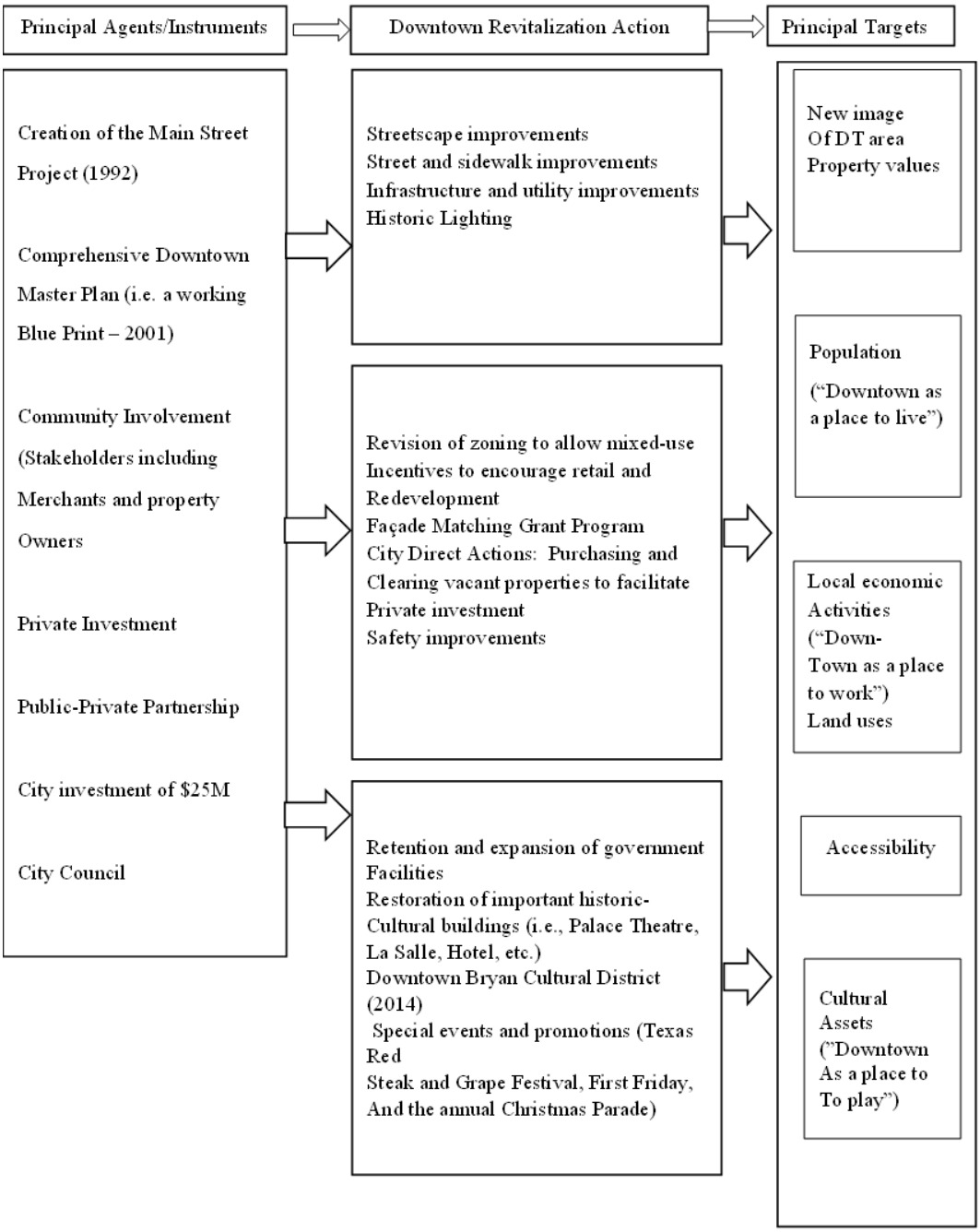
Property values. The impact of downtown Bryan revitalization on property values were assessed. First, the land values in downtown are higher than the rest of Bryan indicating that the downtown area is a valuable location. Second, we find the highest values around the areas that received the main infrastructure interventions during revitalization. Third, as described in the Downtown Master Plan, the land-value indicator shows reversion of the depreciation of properties in the downtown area that existed by the year 2000. The revitalization efforts, through all the infrastructure investments, made a powerful contribution to this reversion (Giusti & Marashin, 2016).

Local economic activity: businesses and employees. In the years 2003 and 2015, a comparison of the number of businesses and employees in downtown Bryan shows that a total increase of 53 businesses and 1564 employees. It is important to note that public administration is its main economic strength, responsible for roughly one-third of all employees and businesses there. Obviously, public administration performs well in this downtown area. During this same period of time, 2003-2015, downtown attracted professional services and

arts and cultural venues. The information sector was also boosted when a major information technology and data center business located in several downtown buildings. In addition, the downtown attracted a number of business incubators related to technology, publicity, creative, and collaborative businesses. This case study revealed that retailing is not downtown's economic strength, which instead, is anchored by the public administration sector. Finally, there is a trend toward diversification, including information, professional services, and arts and entertainment (Giusti & Marashin, 2016).

Cultural assets. Downtown Bryan has a significant number of cultural assets including theatres, art galleries, event venues, parks and public resources In addition, downtown Bryan has many historic assets designated by the National Register of Historic Places (Downtown Bryan Association, 2014). Since 2001, and as a direct result of the revitalization, downtown Bryan hosts many cultural events attracting thousands of visitors. To name a few, First Friday cultural event attracts 3,000 visitors monthly, Texas Red Steak and Grape Festival attracts 20,000 visitors annually, downtown Christmas parade attracts 2,000 visitors annually and downtown street and Art Fairs attract 500 visitors monthly. All of these events take place in downtown public spaces and showcase the revitalized center providing much welcomed exposure for the merchants (Giusti & Marashin, 2016). In 2014, Texas Commission on the Arts (TCA) designated downtown Bryan as a Cultural District. This designation helps to improve the marketing in order to generate business, attract tourists, and to stimulate culture.

Figure 1. Principal features of downtown Bryan revitalization process



Land use and accessibility. Downtown Bryan is low-density where residential use is predominantly single-family with very little multifamily use and revitalization has not changed this state of affairs. Even though the zoning regulations on

downtown and its neighborhoods were adjusted to be more flexible to include permitting mixed use, this strategy has yielded hardly any results. The landscape improvements tackled by the revitalization were pedestrian oriented which limited traffic flow. In turn, this limiting of cars' circulation influenced the types of retailers on Main Street and in its neighborhoods. Main Street and its immediate neighborhoods is no longer empty or vacant as it was before the revitalization. The northwest portion of downtown, however, still remains with vacant parcels and empty buildings.

This uneven pattern of development shows that the Master Plan for revitalization has only been partially successful and that more investing is needed. To this end, in 2008, the City of Bryan purchased seven blocks in the north downtown and targeted it for new high-density, mixed use development. The city cleared the land making it build ready, and in 2015 was successful in selling a portion of the seven blocks of property to a local company for development. Finally, after almost 15 years since the beginning of the revitalization efforts, this appears to be the birth of the catalytic development of the entire downtown area. (Giusti & Marashin, 2016).

Key Success Factors for Downtown Revitalization in the City of Bryan

The revitalization project in Bryan, Texas invested in infrastructure and landscape was the main factor in reversing the deserted image of downtown Bryan. It clearly raised its profile and public awareness of the downtown area among residents and visitors. This new image, amplified by many local cultural

events that were promoted by the Downtown Bryan Association, helped to facilitate the marketing of a “new downtown.” Just one of the benefits of the revitalization impact was the strong growth of downtown Bryan land value in recent years. It was concluded that the landscape improvements and city marketing were the main cause of the increasing land values in that period (Giusti & Marashin, 2016). The downtown area also observed some level of diversification, mainly in the sectors of information, professional services, arts and recreation, and restaurants.

The city of Bryan established a Comprehensive Downtown Master Plan which provided a working blueprint for making the district a better place to work, live and play. Prior to establishment of the plan and for at least one year, the city gathered input from a series of forums that included all stakeholders. The city invested in streetscape improvements including historic lighting, landscaping, street furniture and more. Further, the city revised its zoning laws to encourage mixed-use which incentivized ground-floor activities such as restaurants, retail stores, and entertainment and cultural amenities. In addition, the city included a façade matching grant program enticing and encouraging downtown property owners to fix up historic properties. By establishing a comprehensive plan, including all stakeholders, and using regulations to encourage and entice small business growth, the city of Bryan was successful in its revitalization process.

King Street, downtown Charleston, South Carolina

The city of Charleston is a tourism destination offering a wide array of attractions. Charleston has the largest preserved historic district in the United States, nearby beaches, forts and gardens, and a temperate climate. These assets attract more than four million visitors annually (Litvin, 2004). Its beauty and charm have earned Charleston a number of accolades including being ranked in National Geographic Traveler's "The Top 50 Places of a Lifetime America." In contrast to many U.S. downtowns which are perceived as inconvenient, obsolete, and typically lifeless during nights and weekends, Charleston's core has remained attractive and highly pedestrianized (Robertson, 1993, 1995).

King Street, (downtown) Charleston had started to look rundown when the City undertook a revitalization project in order to maintain its downtown's attractiveness and to preserve its urban retail character. Charleston had been prosperous with a well-preserved central core that city officials valued highly and were motivated to protect. Nevertheless, in the late 1990s, the city leaders and merchants recognized that its main street, King Street, required attention and revitalization work (Litvin, 2004). Finding the right balance between being an attractive place to live and being an historic city attractive for tourists to visit, is challenging (Litvin, 2004). Admittedly, sustainability does not just happen by chance. Moreover, too much development, and the city is in danger of losing its cultural foundation. Too little development, and business opportunities are

forgone. To counter this, cities should think like a business and take a proactive role. That is, cities should not turn to planning as a result of downturns, rather turn to planning to circumvent an economic downturn (Kotler, et al. 1993).

Prior to project construction beginning in the year 2000, an extensive review process was taken by the city. This included a design charrette (a meeting in which all stakeholders attempt to resolve conflicts and map solutions), which included downtown merchants, the merchant association, city planners, and city architects. This meeting enabled the various parties to better understand each other's goals and financial limitations and led to a general sketch of the project (Crotts & McNitt, 1998). The revitalization included such streetscape priorities such as improved sidewalks, planting of trees and flowers as well as replacement of curbs, laying of brick cross-walks at major intersections, burying of all utility wires, and installation of new 'old style' street lighting.

Project evaluation

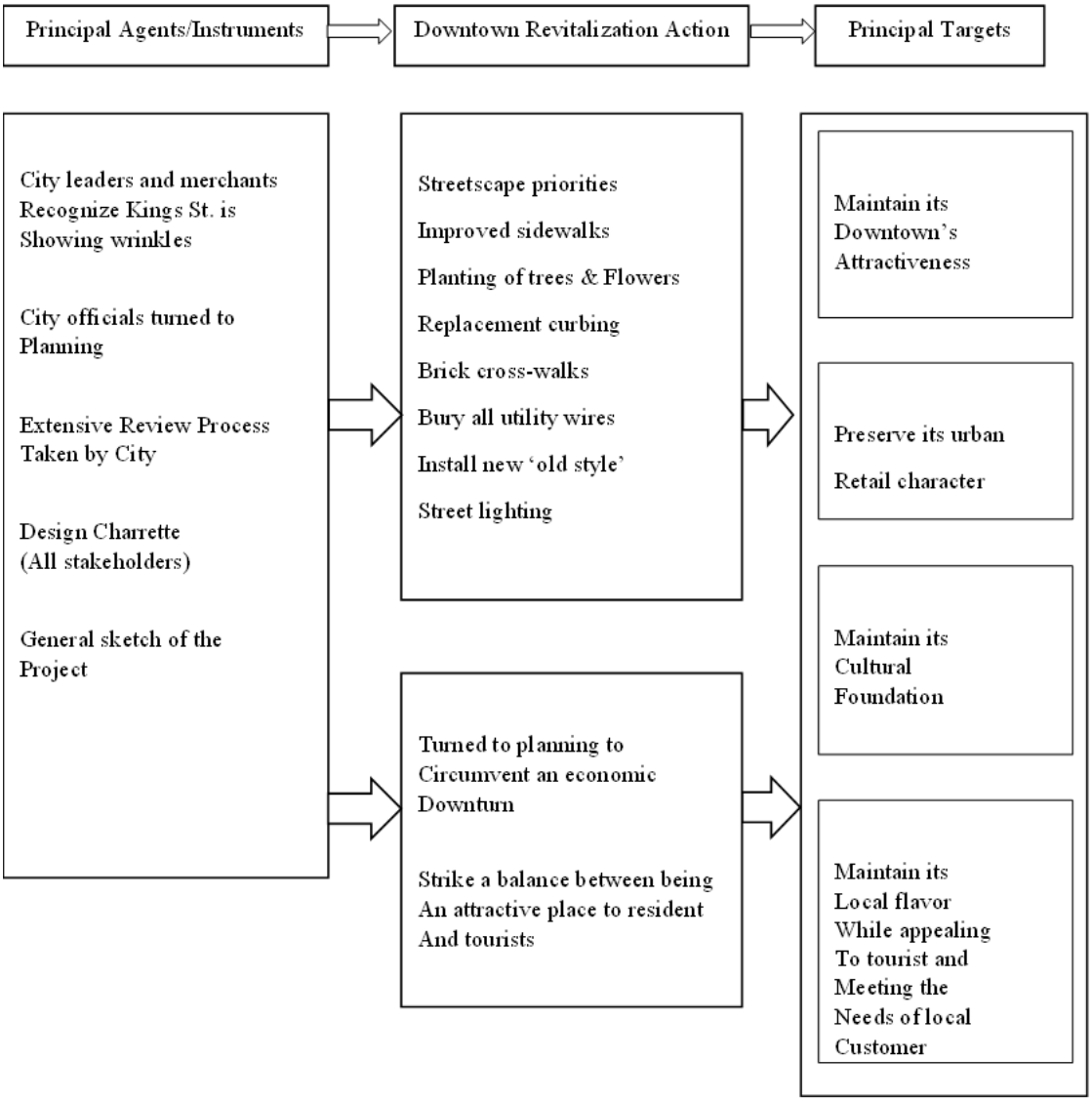
Merchants were asked to evaluate the streetscape revitalization by giving it a grade on a scale of A to F, with C representing an average grade (Crotts & McNitt, 1998). None of the merchants gave the project a failing grade. When asked to forecast the future, all of the merchants from the King Street sections foresaw better times ahead. An interesting shift in the merchants customer based had occurred after the revitalization. The customer base went from 56% tourist and 44% local customers to 72% tourist versus 28% local.

Discussion/conclusion/limitations/recommendations

A significant point of discussion connects to the trend towards a tourism-dependent retail economy which drifts away from local patronage. This shift towards an almost entirely tourist-oriented economy is quite evident by the plethora of souvenir, tee shirts, and craft shops. Building to this dominant tourist focus, cruise ships are docking at Charleston where the downtown is just a short stroll away. This shift towards tourism seems to work well. But does it come at an expense? What happens if the locals have no reason to shop in this market area? A shopping district must maintain its local flavor to remain viable (Litvin, 2004). A successful retail core in an historic city requires a fine balance of engaging retail facilities that appeal to tourist, along with a variety of merchants that provide and appeal/satisfy the needs of local customers (Orbasli, 2000, 2002).

Since the King Street merchants predicted considerably more reliance on tourism, city planners must carefully view this trend with care and caution if the downtown center is to remain viable for both tourists and locals. It is important to point out that many cities, historic cities in particular, have shifted toward tourism as an engine of economic growth. This trend has been accelerated in the U.S. following the devastating events of September 11, 2001. As a direct result of this tragic event, and as a show of American patriotism, many tourist are choosing to vacation in historic American cities like Charleston (Litvin & Alderson, 2003).

Figure 2. Principal features of Kings Street, downtown Charleston, South Carolina



Charleston does not wait for the area to deteriorate before they revitalize. Instead, they begin the revitalization process as soon as the area starts showing wrinkles. A lesson to learn from this case is that cities should turn to planning to circumvent an economic downturn and not turn to planning as a result of downturns.

Prior to construction, the city conducted an extensive review which included a design charrette which included all stakeholders. The revitalization included such streetscape priorities as landscaping, sidewalk and crosswalk improvements, burying of all utility wires and so much more. The city is also extremely cognizant of maintaining a healthy balance between tourists and local patronage. This is an important lesson to take away here because if you have too many tourists you are in danger of losing your cultural foundation. In other words, a downtown shopping district should appeal to tourists but must also satisfy the needs of the local customers. Cities and towns must strive to maintain their local flavor, thereby, preserving its retail core.

Downtown Santa Monica, California

This case study is particularly interesting and informing because the city's first revitalization project, built in the 1960s, was an utter failure. In the 1980's, on the contrary, the downtown shopping district was completely redeveloped and was such a success that it became nationally recognized for its revitalization plan. This case provides insight into the planning policy, practice, and theory related to downtown shopping areas taking into account economic, social, and design issues.

Santa Monica is a small city (about eight miles square) and is a desirable part of the Los Angeles coastal area. The downtown Santa Monica pedestrian mall, named the Third Street Promenade, is a three-block long strip located three blocks from the ocean. Third Street Promenade has been Santa Monica's main

shopping district since the start of the 20th century. In the 1950's, Third Street was a bustling commercial strip filled with commercial activity. By 1965, the downtown area, like most throughout the U.S., became old, shabby and obsolete. (Pojani, 2008).

The First Revitalization Effort to Improve the Promenade

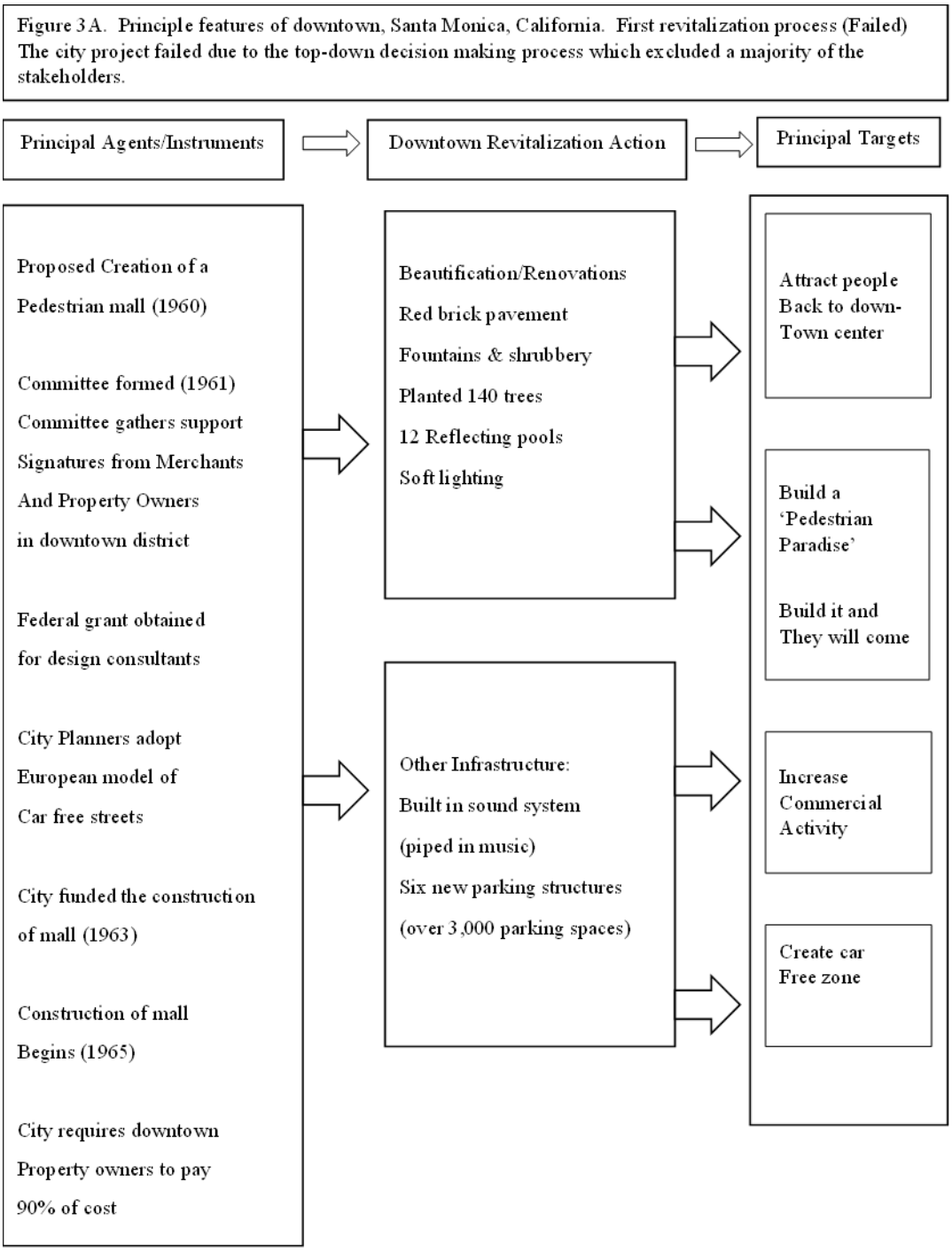
The history of the first revitalization began in 1965 when the city converted its main downtown shopping area into a pedestrian mall. Downtown pedestrian malls at that time, were envisioned as ways to bring shoppers back to the center of cities/towns. Many cities had attempted to copy European models of car-free streets (Hardwick, 2004). City planners believed that by applying the European formula/recipe to run-down American downtowns, they could restore the neglect, abandonment, and disinvestment that occurred over the decades. The problem was, however, that people were already well set into a car-oriented suburban lifestyle. These pedestrian malls were not able to change street patterns and stimulate the people into new habits. There was simply no reason to go to these downtown shopping areas. That is because these areas lacked attractive retail, entertainment and other activities.

The Third Street Promenade had provided little to differentiate it from the competition. Specifically, its retail mix consisted of old-fashioned department stores and average national chains, low-end discount stores, and fast food shops which were unappealing, especially to the younger generation. An interesting and contributing factor to the Third Street Promenade revitalization failure was

that it was a one act play. There was no committee or body of any kind created for the purpose of steering its future course. Instead, the assumption was that the shopping zone would self-adjust to the need for change over the years (Pojani, 2008).

The Successful Revitalization of the Third Street Promenade

In 1980, a new plan to revitalize the Third Street district was being prepared, only this time envisioning it as a human-scale center of community life (Zane, 2005). What ensued was nearly 100 meetings soliciting input from planners, designers, property owners and residents. In 1984, the city created a non-profit agency composed of architects, businessmen, merchants, and lawyers. This agency coupled with Santa Monica's mayor played a key role in the process of remaking the shopping area. It was agreed upon that the focus of the open-air mall would be on the establishment of an assortment of outdoor restaurants.



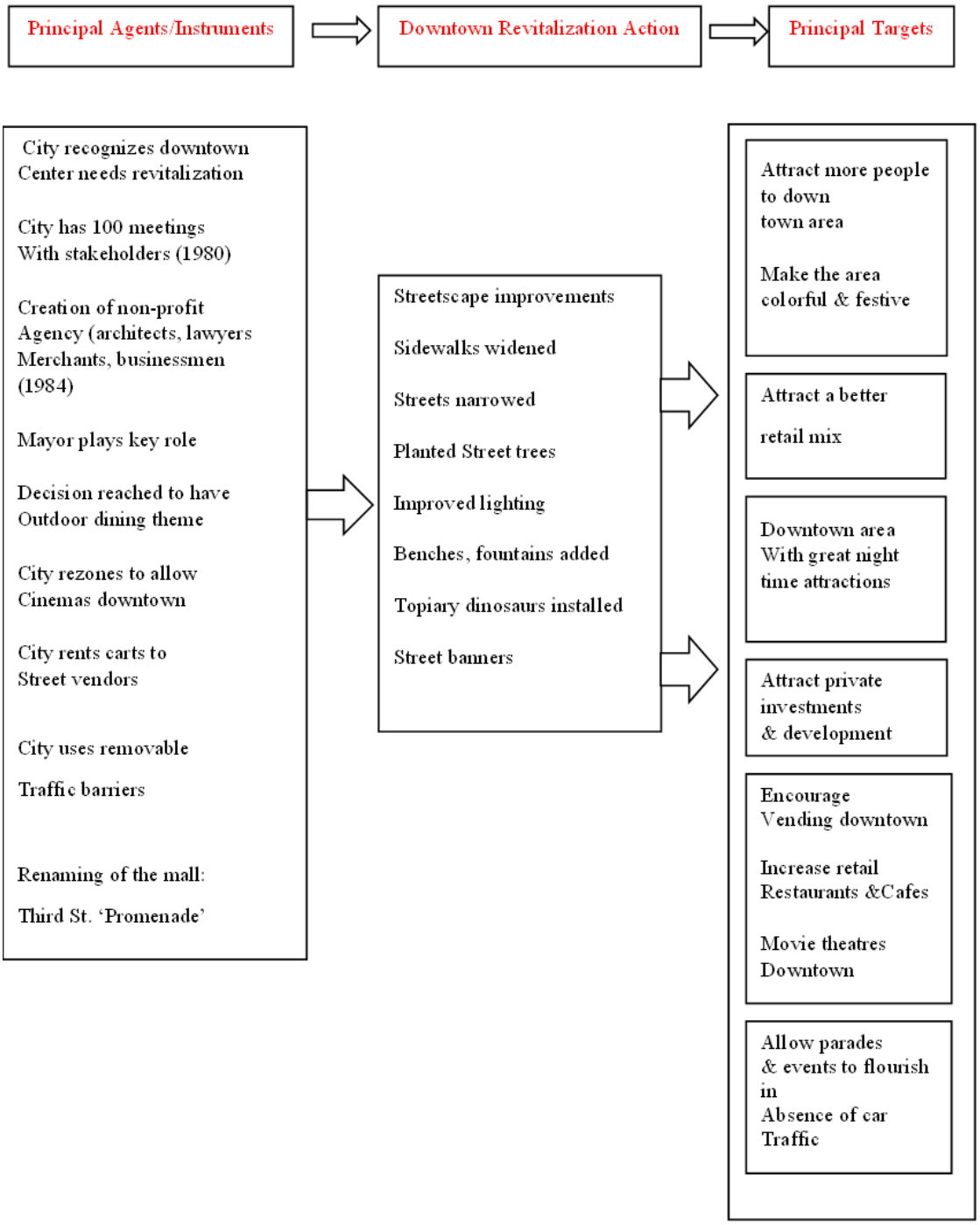
The outdoor dining theme was unknown anywhere in car-oriented Los Angeles, where sidewalks are too narrow to accommodate this concept (Pojani, 2008). When construction started, sidewalks were widened and streets were

narrowed. Street trees were planted, lighting was improved, and benches, fountains, and topiary dinosaurs were installed. Further, the street was decorated with banners which helped create a theme throughout the Promenade that was colorful and festive. Moreover, the city used its zoning power to shift and encourage cinemas to locate in the newly revitalized downtown district. In the absence of zoning changes, movie theatres would have never chosen the downtown area because of its history of failure and while at the same time there were already first-run zones in other parts of the city. Movie theatres were seen as a major draw and as the biggest companies in the multiplex business located downtown, millions of dollars in investments came with it (Pojani, 2008).

Adding to the revitalization, the city had decided and rented carts to street vendors to encourage vending on the Promenade. Removable traffic barriers were also used on certain days and at certain times which allowed parades, events, and other activities to flourish in the absence of car traffic.

Today, downtown Santa Monica is thriving as it has become one of the region's biggest attraction. There are over 60 stores, 25 restaurants and cafes, and 21 movies screens (Pojani, 2008). With new businesses having opened, with 40,000-60,000 people visiting the mall each day, and with surveys showing that 17% of the residents come to the Promenade at least once per week and 82% come at least once per month, the revitalization is a success story (Pojani, 2008).

Figure 3B. Principle features of downtown, Santa Monica, California. Second revitalization process (Successful)



Key Success Factors

Santa Monica's efforts are noteworthy because the city used its zoning law powers to help to control the design of its downtown area but also to help bring in millions of dollars in investment with the movie theatres, not to mention a great nighttime attraction for all. The city went even further than just redirecting the major business of movie theatres to the downtown area by also controlling the mix of businesses in the district. Perhaps the biggest lesson the city learned from its first revitalization project was not to leave the future of the redesigned downtown to fate. Instead, the city created an entity for the sole purpose of maintaining and strengthening the Third Street Promenade.

The success of the revitalization can also be attributed to the fact that the city envisioned the mall as more than just a shopping district. The shopping area was just one piece of an entertainment and dining zone, with many theatres and its own special forms of entertainment. The lesson here is that Santa Monica's success does not signify that downtown areas can succeed anywhere. It does reveal, however, that well planned out designs and ongoing community involvement can figure into the recipe that can facilitate the difference between success and failure

In the first attempt, Santa Monica city planners copied the European model of car-free streets. They believed by applying the European recipe to their city's deteriorated downtown, they could restore the neglect, abandonment, and disinvestment that occurred over the decades. To their demise, however, people

were well set into a car-oriented suburban lifestyle. The newly created pedestrian mall was not able to change street patterns and stimulate the people into new habits. Compatibility with culture is an important success factor.

Further, the planners failed to differentiate its downtown shopping center from the competition. Specifically, the retail mix of shops were unappealing, especially to the younger generation. Contributing further to the failure was the fact that it was a one act play. Meaning that there was not one committee created for the purpose of steering its future course. Above all, perhaps, was the city's failure to ascertain the dimensions of all stakeholders' needs and wants. That is, city planners failed to include all the merchants, property owners, residents and other stakeholders. The result was a top-down decision-making process. They failed because they did not recognize for a community project to be successful, the city must include and work with all stakeholders, and every voice must be heard.

The second revitalization was 100 meeting soliciting input from all stakeholders. Next, the city created a non-profit agency composed of lawyers, architects, businessmen and merchants. This agency coupled with Santa Monica's mayor played a key role in the process of remaking the shopping area. Community stakeholders agreed upon an outdoor dining theme as the focus for the open-air shopping mall. The city invested in streetscapes, specifically, landscaping, benches and fountains, lighting was improved, to name a few things included in the construction project. The street was decorated with banners

which helped create a theme throughout the downtown center that was colorful and festive. The city rezoned the downtown district to allow for cinemas which was disclosed during the meetings as a major desired activity. The results suggest communication and community involvement is a key success factor. While there is no single perfect recipe for success when it comes to revitalizing downtown districts, Santa Monica provides evidence that including all stakeholders, having plenty of meetings and planning sessions, and agreeing upon a great theme along with making your area pedestrian-friendly can impact the success of downtown revitalization efforts.

Downtown Leavenworth, Washington

Sometimes entire industries that economically drive a city or town become obsolete, disappearing seemingly overnight. Leavenworth, Washington (USA) experienced a declining resource-based economy (economy based on natural resources) which resulted in a decaying city. Leavenworth responded to its collapsing, resource-based economy by looking at, creating, and metamorphosing into a thriving, model theme town.

Leavenworth is a small town of nearly 4,000 residents just east of Seattle with the Cascade Mountains in its backdrop. In the late 1800s, it was the site of a Great Northern Railroad switchyard. The local economy was given a boost in the early 1900s with the construction of a sawmill, followed soon thereafter by a local fruit industry, primarily apples and pears. By the end of the 1920s, however, the railroad depot relocated to another town, the sawmill closed, and

winter frosts demonstrated to be a restricting element for orchard production. By 1930, Leavenworth's population was declining, buildings fell into disrepair, and divisive civic issues ensued, sharply fracturing the community (Frenkel & Walton, 2000).

Theme towns in the United States became popular in the 1960s as a creative remedy for economic hard times. While this phenomenon was not new, the concept drew on a number of ideas from the past like the tourist aspects of ethnic districts such as Little Italy's and Chinatowns, and the idealized cultural landscapes first presented at Disneyland (Clay, 1980). Drawing on this phenomenon, lies the fascinating story of how a collapsed resource-based community transformed into a thriving, model theme town. Facing bleak economic times, local business and political leaders reached out to the University of Washington's Bureau of Community Development in Seattle for advice about reviving their town. This action resulted in a two year study called Leavenworth Improvement for Everyone (LIFE), which began in 1963. It is important to note that citizen committees were formed as a pathway to build consensus and community solidarity.

After two years of members meeting regularly, the town adopted a theme. Shortly thereafter, two major entrepreneurs became convinced that this theme could work in town. Next, the Chamber of Commerce offered its backing, and soon afterward, the City council gave the idea a green light. The assumption was that if the theme was to be successful, it had to be perfectly iconic, a

flawless resemblance, a “real” copy of the reality being represented. Such obsessions have genuine economic outcomes, and authenticity is frequently the chief selling point for tourists in the United States (MacCannell, 1989).

Leavenworth is presently a town that bills itself as a “Bavarian Village,” a place where visitors can stroll, shop, and dine to the sound of accordions and German brass bands or simply take in the scenery of the Mountains in the backdrop. The Bavarian theme was a success despite the fact that Leavenworth lacked any discernible Bavarian roots or ties. Perhaps it was easier to metamorphose into a Bavarian village since they did not have to sanitize a local history, package a heritage or exploit an indigenous culture.

The town’s notoriety was connected only to its perceived genuineness, its persuasive realness and authenticity (Frenkel & Walton, 2000). Leavenworth became a successful model for other aspiring theme towns to emulate. Political and business leaders from across the U.S. and other countries came to this small town to see what worked and how. Leavenworth soon saw itself as a leader in theming, shifting from the imitator to the imitated (Frenkel & Walton, 2000). Today, after thirty years of Bavarian facades having become an integral part of Leavenworth, the town has been cast, for better or worse, for tourism.

There is no question that the town is economically doing better now than it did in the past. Leavenworth has elements of attractiveness that at the present time, are responsible for its development level of tourism in its downtown area. This is a sizeable achievement given that in recent years, many cities desire to

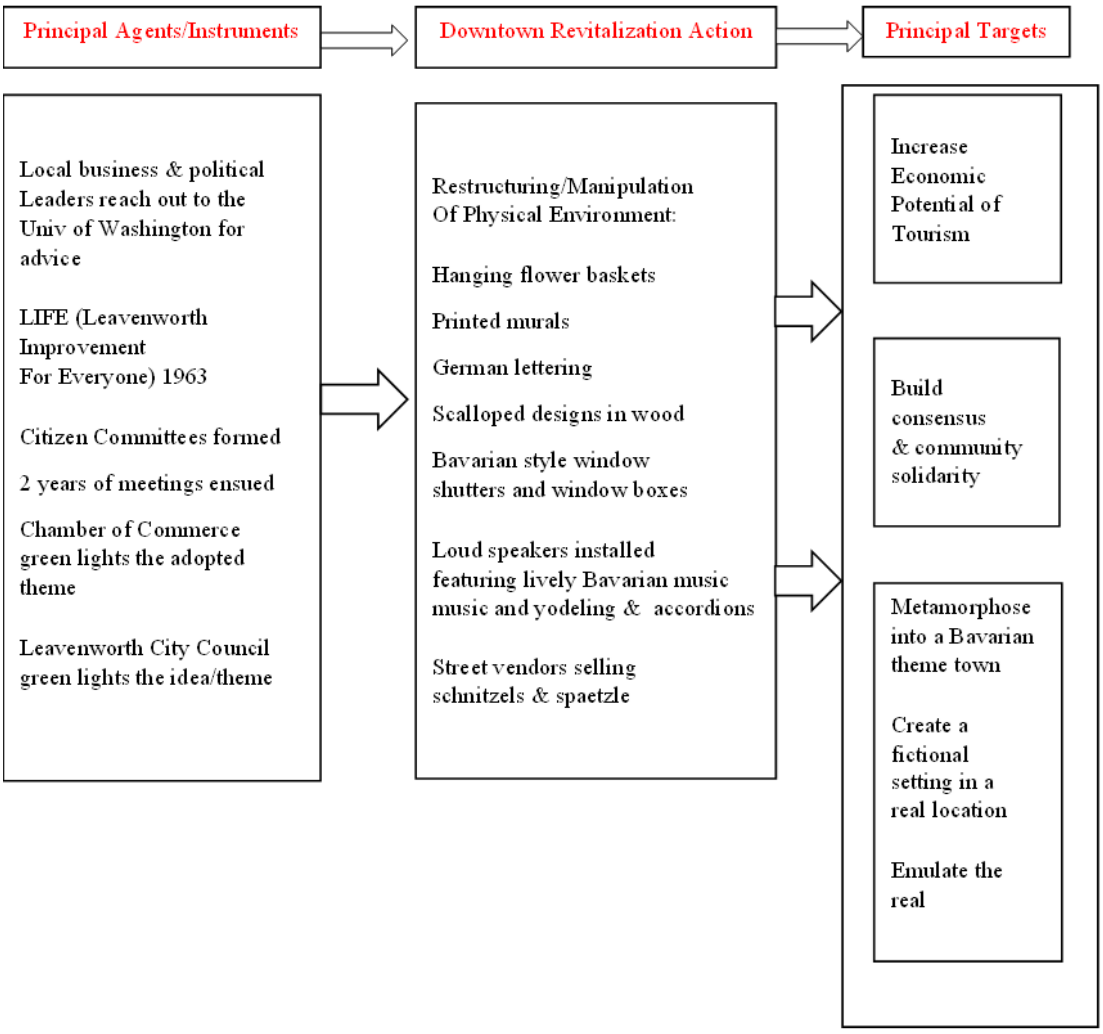
acquire global recognition through tourism (Garbea, 2014). In fact, quarterly sales-tax figures collected from the Washington State Department of Revenue confirm Leavenworth's retail success. However, it is not clear that the city's core tourism product improves the quality of life for local residents. Parking downtown is scarce and shopping prices are inflated leaving residents to shop in other less busy areas (Frenkel & Walton, 2019). When tourism expands at the same time that traditional industries decline, tourism can be perceived as disrupting the local culture that is entwined with these industries (Carroll, 1995). When a natural resource-based economy significantly declines, however, tourism growth can represent a potential solution (Petrezelka et al 2007).

Key Success Factors

When the town's resourced-based economy collapsed, the local leaders turned to their local university for help. This resulted in a two year study called Leavenworth Improvement for Everyone (LIFE). An important part of this study included citizen committees which helped form a pathway to build consensus and community solidarity. The town then conducted regularly meetings for two years before adopting a Bavarian theme. An important takeaway here is that the city recognized that if they are creating a Bavarian village, then to be credible, it must be perfectly iconic, a flawless resemblance, a "real" copy of the reality being represented. Such obsessions have genuine economic outcomes, in view of the fact that authenticity is frequently the chief selling point for tourists in the U.S.

Because of the projects perceived genuineness, Leavenworth is a successful model for other aspiring theme towns to emulate.

Figure 4. Principal features of downtown, Leavenworth, Washington Revitalization process



Conclusions from the Cases

Two global scale tensions affecting downtown revitalization are: (1) the decentralization of economic activity reinforcing competition with downtown businesses, especially in local retail which had performed less than optimal in

downtown, and (2) the strong suburban housing trend which makes it challenging to increase the downtown population (Giusti & Marashin, 2016).

Some recommendations made that may be applicable to other cities are:

(1) Cities should monitor changes and trends in both the downtown and the overall city as an integrated system.

(2) Cities should consider that it may need more than 15 years to observe all the expected results after implementation of a revitalization program.

(3) City planners should consider competitive advantage, authenticity, and ask themselves why people would want to live, relocate, visit, invest, or start or expand a business in downtown areas.

(4) There is no single/perfect recipe/formula for success when it comes to revitalizing downtown districts since each area differs in population, wealth, weather patterns, natural assets and many other factors. Recipes for downtown revitalization successes in one decade often spells failure in the future decades as different generations of people develop different wants and needs.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

An examination of how the built environment impacts small business growth and fosters entrepreneurial activities emphasizes that the entrepreneur is a part of a complex social system. A mixed method case study method was used to capture stakeholder voices about how soft infrastructure investments would impact East Greenwich. The case study approach permits the researcher to come to a systematic analysis of people's wants, needs, and related activities in their social settings (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Hindle, 2004). This case study is useful for generating hypotheses that can be tested in future studies and can contribute to the cumulative development of knowledge of the revitalizations of downtown areas.

A great advantage of a case study is that it allows a close examination of the problem. It can give an in-depth view on real-life situations and test perspectives directly in relation to phenomena as they unfold in practice (Haugh, 2007). For example, Stephen W. Litvin examined the revitalization of Charleston, South Carolina, (2004) using a qualitative approach to conduct his research in this community.

For the proposed research, I modified Litvin's (2004) research methods to fit my Focus Groups (3-4) which were comprised of 5-6 people. Based on Litvin's research, a moderator asked stakeholders about their perceptions of infrastructure investments in East Greenwich (see Appendix A). The scope of

the exploration included infrastructure investments over the past twenty plus years and current infrastructure planning associated with a $5 million investment in downtown. I also adapted the methodology used by Giusti and Maraschins (2017) to study downtown revitalization in Bryan, Texas. Secondary data and survey data were included in the analysis. The benefit of the case study is that the different perspectives and sources of information allowed me to talk to people about a real situation in context identifying idiosyncrasies when there are a lot of factors at play and when there are not clear boundaries.

The population of interest for the survey is residents in East Greenwich. They will be asked to provide attitudes and opinions, as well as their perceptions of the infrastructure investments (actual and proposed) in East Greenwich, RI. Although East Greenwich, RI is the main unit of analysis, the recommendations draw from other sources of data and information over a longer period of time. Different sources of data are an important part of an approach that aligns with community interaction field theory, which is important.

The primary qualitative data collection method used was focus groups. The moderator had a script that prompted discussion among participants. If any of the participants need clarity about any of the questions, this structure will allow the moderator flexibility in asking the same questions in a different order or to clarify. The focus groups were 5-6 people and will include a purposive sample of business leaders from the town, residents, the town council president, town manager, town planner, local business owners, waterfront development

committee members, state leaders and tax payer organizations. The results were transcribed and coded for themes.

The primary quantitative data collection method used was a survey. The survey instrument is included in Appendix B. The sample was a convenience sample of households in East Greenwich who were recruited using a direct marketing email list. From the literature review of other cases, I was able to identify key indicators of successful, and less successful, soft infrastructure investments.

The case study method uses an inductive, iterative approach. The approach, but not the results, is generalizable to other towns. The goal is to find takeaways from analysis of the data from different sources. Case studies are widely used because they might offer insights that may not be achieved with other approaches (Eisenhardt, 1989). Key themes and factors were prepared as part of an overall model and directives for performing a similar approach in other markets. The goal is to provide practical knowledge, so the data collected from multiple sources should be close to real-life situations so the data has value and is realistic. The details are important to make sure the results are useful to policy and practice (Flyygjerg, 2006).

Often used in exploratory research, case studies can help the researcher to generate new ideas. Typically, case study research utilizes a diversity of evidence from different sources, such as interviews and observation, documents, and artifacts, which goes beyond the range of sources of evidence that might be

available in historical study (Rowley, 2002). A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context.

An important strength of case studies is the ability to undertake an investigation into a phenomenon in its context; it is not necessary to replicate the phenomenon in a laboratory setting in order to understand the phenomenon. Case studies, therefore, are a valuable way of looking at the world around us (Yin, 1994). The case study method allows in-depth, multi-faceted explorations of complex issues in their real-life settings. The value of case studies is well recognized in the fields of business, law and policy (Crowe, et al. 2011).

Idiosyncrasy is a mode of behavior or way of thought peculiar to an individual. It has been defined as an individualizing characteristic or quality (Werthner & Trudel, 2009). Learning should be viewed as a process of changing conceptions (the cognitive structure) and not to simply accumulate knowledge. What people choose to pay attention to or what they choose to learn will depend on their cognitive structure at any one point (Werthner & Trudel, 2009). Idiosyncratic variables are ingredients that fabricate/construct variations in human responses to the problem situation and, therefore, should be accounted for (Werthner & Trudel, 2009).

It is evident from the literature that researchers have many things in mind when they talk about case studies (Gerring, 2004). Gerring goes on to define the case study as an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of similar units. He further states that a unit implies a spatially bounded phenomenon. If the phenomenon a researcher studies has loose

boundaries around a phenomenon and is not bounded by certain parameters (i.e., a specific place or time), it may not necessarily be a case study.

For example, a unit is a nation, state, political party, or person which is observed at a single point in time or over some established period of time. A case study of France likely offers better evidence for an argument about Europe than for an argument about the world (Gerring, 2004). The case study of East Greenwich should offer better evidence for similar cities and towns throughout the United States. The boundaries in this case study are very clear since I will only be interviewing stakeholders of East Greenwich. These are clear boundaries that could be loosened to include people who visit the downtown East Greenwich area but live out of town and are not stakeholders.

Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling which focuses on gaining information from participants who are convenient for the research to access (Flick, 2014). Researchers can subjectively select people at random who are happy to be involved and become part of the research. Since the sample is not chosen through random selection, however, the sample will not be fully representative of the population being studied. A representative sample, on the other hand, is a subset of a population that investigates to accurately reflect the characteristics of a larger group. The sample is not representative, so the quantitative results are also not generalizable (Flick, 2014).

The iterative process is at the heart of examining and reexamining the data and connecting them with emerging insights, progressively leading to a deeper understanding. By employing the iterative process to generate meanings from

this studies qualitative data, one may better understand the evidence and how it helps to answer the research questions.

Research Context

Downtown Main Street is approximately ¾ of a mile long with merchants on both sides of the street, many of them with residents living above their stores. Many of the merchants are active members of the East Greenwich Chamber of Commerce. Both members of the Chamber and non-members were solicited to participate in one of the three focus groups. Rather than solicit participants through sending a letter to them in the mail, the researcher went from business to business along this ¾ mile strip. The purpose of the research study was made clear to each merchant, emphasizing that it was to gather insights about their opinions related to downtown Main Street in East Greenwich. Each business owner was told that they were being recruited to participate because they are considered stakeholders in decisions about the East Greenwich downtown and it is helpful to get input from different stakeholders about decisions that impact the town. It was explained to all business owners that the stakeholders of East Greenwich were considered to be the business and property owners, political and business leaders and all of its residents. If they agreed to participate in the study, they were informed that it would take 90 minutes and the focus group meeting would be held on Main Street, minimizing travel time. They were informed that the meetings would be recorded, but that the recordings will be exclusive to the research team and all information that comes from the focus groups will be reported without identifying the participants. The result of the

focus groups was a diverse group of business people including merchants from retail specialty stores, bankers, doctors, the town historian, the East Greenwich town planner, the town council president, realtors, and more. Key questions explored were their attitudes towards the revitalization of Main Street, their current assessment of Main Street today, their future expectations for the revitalization and their perception of its impacts upon their businesses. Specifically, aesthetics, investments in both hard and soft infrastructure, zoning changes, and connecting the downtown Main Street to the waterfront were explored.

Generative Artificial Intelligence

> *"Artificial Intelligence is another voice in the room that needs to be challenged with separate trusted sources of information, and most importantly, using human knowledge & wisdom" (James E. McGwin Jr., Innovation Coach, U.R.I., 2023).*

ChatGPT is a large language model which can understand and generate human like text using OPENAI's latest GPT (generated pre-trained transformer) model GPT4. The model is trained on immeasurable amounts of articles, data-books, websites and other origins. It then uses this data to analyze ones input and construct an output. To illustrate, if you input data (ask ChatGPT a question), it will construct an output (give you an answer).

While it certainly can write essays about a wide range of topics, its scholarly writing still has a long way to go (Thorp, 2023). Thorp goes further to state that an AI program cannot be an author. The previous statement is not a

philosophical declaration, rather an assertion that AI is incapable of knowing what it is saying. That is despite the fact that Google software engineer, Blake Lemoine, stated that he detected sentience in one of their language systems, and further contended that the company's language model has a soul (Chalmers, 2023). In a follow-up statement, however, a Google spokesperson said that that they reviewed Blake's concerns and have informed him that the evidence does not support his claims.

AI draws on many different sources to construct its output yet seeks to answer user questions with accuracy. For example, I asked the same exact question at two different points in time and got a different response. While both replies were materially equal, ChatGPT gave a unique and novel answer each time which it purports to do. There is a randomness in the answers generated, therefore, and it always responds differently. ChatGPT can also answer follow-up questions, admit its mistakes, challenge incorrect premises, and reject inappropriate requests (Fergus, et al 2023). It is important to point out that while ChatGPT can generate outputs that are novel in the sense that they have never been seen before, it may struggle to generate truly original ideas. The reason for this is that ChapGPT relies on patterns learned from existing text data, and may not have the capacity to give rise to truly novel ideas that break away from these patterns (Uludag, 2023).

Why include ChatGPT?

ChatGPT technology presents us with opportunities and challenges while possessing the potential for positive and negative impacts for organizations and

individuals. It has sizeable power to advance academia in both daunting and exciting new ways (Lund & Wang, 2023). It is salient, however, to think about how to use this technology in an ethical and responsible manner. Scientists must commit and recommit to careful and meticulous attention to details. We should expose how we, as academics and professionals, can work side by side with this artificial intelligence to improve out work, especially as we race to generate new scholarly knowledge, rather than to abuse and misuse it (Lund & Wang, 2023).

With unprecedented attention given to ChatGPT, numerous researchers have been motivated to investigate it from countless directions. There are greater than 500 articles with ChatGPT in their titles or mentioning it in their abstracts, according to Google scholar (Zhang et al, 2023). ChatGPT is not going away, rather it is here to stay. This is despite the fact that its biggest limitation is that while it sounds highly believable, it's only right 50, 60, 70% of the time (Lourie, 2023). Training models are driving the technology which allows it to take in data without any oversight. Therefore, it can take in information from a site that is totally made up and later will use it as a source when answering questions. Should researchers rely on this tool if it is wrong some of the time? Oved Lourie, Director and Field Chief Technical Officer of Worldwide AI operations for IBM, asks "how can you not include it?"

In an interview, Lourie opined on the uses of ChapGPT; his opinion was generally positive but he warned of the risks to intellectual property. Before this tool existed, researchers would go to the library and then go to the internet. ChatGPT is a potential source, and not just another source. It is a brand new

medium smart enough to be a source and because of its eloquence users may be convinced of its trustworthiness. Lourie reminds us that there are few safeguards in place, rather it's open space and, therefore, it's incredibly dangerous, especially in the wrong hands. ChatGPT is fully public and everything that you input into it goes into the public domain. It can also recognize if the same person is asking the questions and it can give different answers to the same questions posed by different people.

To conclude, ChatGPT has the ability to improve search and discovery but like any other source, it must be verified.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Survey Results

A voluntary survey was sent to an email list of East Greenwich residents that was purchased from a direct marketing firm. The purpose of the survey was to see what is most important to the residents when the town revitalizes its downtown area in the near future. A list of email addresses was obtained and 1525 emails were sent out to East Greenwich residents who are considered stakeholders in this up and coming project. Sixteen people started the survey but did not complete it. Ninety eight East Greenwich residents participated and completed the survey.

Five specific questions are highlighted to demonstrate how the survey contributed voice of the homeowner stakeholder group. These five questions resulted in extreme responses, indicating high agreement within the respondents about the level of importance or agreement with the statement.

Most respondents (76%) felt affordable parking in downtown Main Street was very (33%) or extremely (43%) important. While most downtowns throughout America have metered parking, East Greenwich removed its meters years ago during its first revitalization. Moreover, according to interviews with town leaders by the author of this paper, while there is a two-hour limit to each parking space on Main Street, police do not enforce this law resulting in some people parking for many hours at a time. In addition, cars parked illegally are generally

overlooked and not ticketed as well. While parking may be limited at times, these rules, or lack of enforcement, seem to benefit the merchants and no one is left with a fine for visiting the downtown area. It seems to serve the merchants and the residents of the town well.

Research shows that cities and towns should focus on natural assets when looking to revitalize sections of their towns. East Greenwich is looking at expanding its downtown Main Street area to the very nearby waterfront on its next revitalization project. When asked if investing in this idea was a waste of money, 50% of participants either disagreed or strongly disagreed. On the other hand, only 10% agreed or strongly agreed. Main Street is naturally connected to two streets that lead to the waterfront; one on the south end (Kings Street), and the other on the north end (First Avenue). Kings Street and First Avenue would require no major hard infrastructure additions, needing only sidewalks, crosswalks and aesthetic improvements to make it appealing and naturally connect to the waterfront.

With regard to the connection project, 62% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed when asked if connecting Main Street to the waterfront would decrease their quality of life. Research shows that many downtown areas that have been connected to their waterfronts have resulted in a better local economy and what appears to be a better quality of life. During the course of this research investigation, the author found that the few people who felt it would decrease their quality of life were residents who live on kings Street and other side roads. The major complaint was that their property value would go up which, in turn,

would increase their property taxes, thereby, making living in East Greenwich more expensive. Ten percent either agreed or strongly agreed with the decreased quality of life.

When asked about whether the downtown Main Street area was a valuable asset, 81% of the participants agreed/strongly agreed with only 1% strongly disagreeing and 1% somewhat disagreeing. Research by this author has shown that many downtown areas throughout the U.S. have a higher assessed value compared to other parts of town. The residents sampled agreed with the research.

When asked about whether revitalizing downtown Main Street was a waste of money, 67% of participants disagreed/strongly disagreed. While only 3% strongly disagreed, an additional 16% agreed or somewhat disagreed that it is a waste of money. The one lesson from these survey results is that while the majority of people generally think the same, others do not, making it impossible to please everyone.

Some additional responses that could inform decision-making about soft infrastructure investments in downtown East Greenwich include:

- 78% of the respondents felt that soft lighting was important
- 84% responded that landscaping was important
- 56% of the participants reported that street furniture such as benches in the downtown area was important. Street furniture is the least important out of the three possible improvements.

- Maintenance, including cleaning of the sidewalks and picking up trash, was high on participants list for what Main Street needs. In fact, 89% of the participants responded that maintenance is important.
- 92% of respondents were in favor of connecting Main Street to the waterfront; 88% thought it would make East Greenwich more desirable to pedestrians; and most respondents thought it would attract business owners, create employment opportunities, and improve the town's image.
- Only half of the participants agree that connecting the downtown area to the waterfront will improve their quality of life, and most felt it would increase traffic.
- 92% of the participants agreed that natural landscaping can ensure that East Greenwich citizens enjoy the natural and ecological landscape.
- 82% felt that the downtown center should be revitalized. 87% of the participants feel that revitalizing the downtown center would bring improvements to the community.
- This survey also found that the majority of participants feel at home when visiting Main Street while at the same time feeling connected to this East Greenwich downtown center. When asked if they strongly identify with the East Greenwich downtown center, the feeling was less than feeling at home and connected, but still positive.

Overall, 74% of the participants feel that the downtown center means a lot to them. This coincides with the fact that they also feel connected and feel at home when visiting downtown Main Street. An overwhelming majority (87%) agreed that they enjoy visiting the downtown center with their family and friends. Further, 61% feel they have built connections with other people by visiting Main Street. Finally, 83% of the participants feel that people who are similar to them also like to visit the East Greenwich downtown center. Only 10% of the participants feel there is no sense of commitment in their community. Conversely, 67% disagree that there is no sense of commitment in their community.

Focus Group Results

Focus Group Composition

The first focus group had 6 participants. Five out of the six people owned or worked in businesses located on Main Street and one participant was the town historian. Everyone in the group seemed comfortable and relaxed and all were congenial, appearing as if they could talk to each other all day about the topics presented in the focus group. The attendees all had community ties with strong roots to East Greenwich, many with lifelong ties to the town. This group all referred to themselves as “townies.”

The second group which had six participants included a mix of business owners, the East Greenwich town manager and a practicing chiropractor. They were all friendly and open to discussion. This group did not consider or refer to themselves as “townies” and did not necessarily grow up in East Greenwich.

They are transplants, folks who came to East Greenwich and discovered its charm.

The third group included four participants, the East Greenwich Town Council President, the Executive Director of the E.G. Chamber of Commerce and two business owners whom both own property, run businesses and live on Main Street. This was a very intimate group where everyone knew each other rather well and there was little disagreement among them. Because of the dynamics of this group, a narrower range of topics were discussed but a deeper discussion ensued with the topics that did come up.

The fourth and final group included six participants, all local residents comprising a local lawyer, local dance instructor, a former East Greenwich School Committee Chairwoman, registered financial advisor and bank personnel trainer in financial investments, and a "professional volunteer." This group was very different than the other three focus groups because they appeared to have a different set of needs and wants. Below is a chart of the general comments of each focus group. Please see Appendix C for greater detail.

Results of focus groups

A careful review of data from the four focus groups disclosed that there was agreement among them and they had the same ranking of Mild for the following: (1) seasonal decorations, (2) street furniture, (3) adding loading zones and (4) conformity of store front signs. The groups also were in agreement and had the same ranking of Moderate for the installation of additional landscaping.

The four groups were in agreement and they had the same ranking of Strong for the following: (1) planting of additional flowers, (2) bigger trash cans, (3) increased overall maintenance, (4) addressing electrical wires, (5) street and sidewalk improvements, (6) more pedestrian friendly, and (7) maintaining historic charm.

The four focus groups also disclosed issues which conflict or a strong potential for conflict centralized. These were: (1) improvement of lighting, (2) additional parking, (3) whether or not to enforce 2 hour parking law and (4) connecting Main Street to the waterfront. Regarding street lighting, while all group members wanted new lighting, some people focused on soft, aesthetic lighting while others wanted bright lights for additional security. When it came to enforcing the two hour parking law, about half were against it citing it's nice not to tag customers while others felt it would free up much needed parking spots. The people in favor of enforcing the two hour limit were almost exclusively Main Street retailers. The most interesting issue was that of adding parking. All group members agreed that more parking is needed but then, all in the same breath, they agreed that it is really perception and not a real issue.

The biggest differences in the groups were regarding the decision whether or not to connect Main Street to the waterfront. Two of the four groups were favorable to connect while one group thought it should continue to operate as two separate business districts. Yet another group thought that the connection should be allowed to happen naturally. That is, the town should change the zoning to allow and encourage the properties on the connecting road (King

Street) to enjoy a mixed-use with commercial on the ground floor and residential above.

With Main Street stores at nearly 100% occupancy, new merchants wanting to locate on downtown Main Street will naturally look to this side street to do business. As King Street builds it ground floor towards retail, there will be that natural flow and connection to the waterfront. Then, the town can tie in Kings Street to Main Street with matching décor. This will cause a natural flow for people walking on Main Street to continue casually shopping on Kings Street eventually ending up at the East Greenwich waterfront.

Table 1. Presence of Agreement, Disagreement and Conflict regarding how to Revitalize Downtown, East Greenwich, Rhode Island.

Issue (Streetscape Improvements)	Level of Agreement/Disagreement/Conflict
Improvement of Lighting	Conflicting
Planting of additional Flowers	Strong
Bigger Trash Cans	Strong
Street furniture	Mild
Increased Maintenance	Strong
Add Seasonal Decorations	Mild
Landscaping	Moderate
Issue (Infrastructure Improvements	
Electrical Wires	Strong
Parking (Additional)	Conflicting
Street & Sidewalk Improvements	Strong
Need Loading Zones	Mild
2 hour parking – Enforce?	Conflicting
More Pedestrian Friendly	Strong
Issue (Connect Main St to Waterfront)	
Rezone and Connect to Waterfront	Conflicting
Conformity of store front signs	Mild
Maintain Historic Charm	Strong

The following were one time surprises/ideas that emerged from the focus groups:

Relocate the Fire Station

Build Bridge to East Greenwich waterfront from nearby Goddard Park

Build a Tunnel that would connect Queen St. (adjacent to King St.) to Waterfront

Install Clever Lit Crosswalks

Install Transient boat docking

Install a Boardwalk

Results from Generative Artificial Intelligence

Prompts that were informed by the research questions were used in ChatGPT 4. ChatGPT4 was given a passage, and asked whether the multiple stakeholder approach the best means of analysis for this topic. The AI Response follows:

“The multiple stakeholder approach can be a useful means of analysis for a topic like climate change, as it allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the various perspectives, interests, and concerns of the different groups involved. However, it is not necessarily the "best" means of analysis for every situation or topic.

Other approaches that could also be useful for analyzing a topic like climate change include:

- Systems thinking: This approach involves examining the complex, interconnected systems that contribute to and are affected by climate change, and identifying leverage points for intervention or change.
- Risk assessment: This approach involves identifying and assessing the risks associated with climate change, such as the risk of extreme weather events, sea level rise, or food and water scarcity.
- Scientific inquiry: This approach involves applying the scientific method to better understand the causes and effects of climate change, and to develop evidence-based solutions.

Ultimately, the most appropriate approach will depend on the specific research question or problem being addressed, as well as the available data,

resources, and expertise. It may also be beneficial to use multiple approaches in combination to gain a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the topic."

The response is relevant to the methodological approach, and informs the first research question. An additional response indicated:

"When engaging in a community project, it is generally best to engage as many stakeholders as possible to ensure that the project meets the needs of the community and has the greatest chance of success. This includes community members, local organizations, businesses, and government officials, among others.

Engaging a wide range of stakeholders can help to ensure that different perspectives and needs are taken into account in the planning and execution of the project. It can also help to build support and buy-in from the community, which can be critical for the success of the project in the long run.

That being said, it is important to balance the desire for broad stakeholder engagement with the need to ensure that the decision-making process remains efficient and effective. In some cases, it may not be necessary or feasible to involve every stakeholder in every decision or aspect of the project. In these cases, it is important to communicate clearly with stakeholders about the decision-making process and ensure that their voices are heard in some way, even if they are not directly involved in every aspect of the project."

Once ChatGPT4 had the background information, it was prompted with the following question: what community factors should be in place when we invest in streetscape infrastructure in downtown areas?

AI Response: When investing in streetscape infrastructure in downtown areas, it is important to consider several community factors that should be in place to maximize the benefits of the investment. These factors include:

1. Strong local leadership: A strong and committed local leadership is essential to ensure the project's success. This includes both elected officials and community leaders who are invested in the project and can provide the necessary support.

2. Engaged community: The community should be actively involved in the planning and design of the streetscape project. This can help ensure that the project meets the community's needs and preferences and fosters a sense of ownership and pride in the community.

3. Collaboration and partnerships: Collaboration and partnerships between various stakeholders, such as businesses, residents, community organizations, and government agencies, can help ensure the project's success by providing diverse perspectives and resources.

4. Access to funding: Adequate funding is necessary to implement a streetscape project successfully. This includes both public and private funding sources, such as grants, loans, and contributions from businesses and community members.

5. Strong local economy: A strong local economy is necessary to ensure that the project can have a positive economic impact. This includes a thriving downtown business district, a diverse mix of businesses, and a stable job market.

6. Access to transportation: Easy access to transportation, including public transportation, is important to ensure that the project is accessible to all members of the community.

7. Maintenance and upkeep: Proper maintenance and upkeep of the streetscape infrastructure are essential to ensure that the project remains attractive and functional over time.

By considering these community factors, stakeholders can ensure that the investment in streetscape infrastructure in downtown areas will have a positive impact on the community's economic and social well-being."

The next question was: What common mistakes should be avoided?

AI Response: "When investing in streetscape infrastructure in downtown areas, there are some common mistakes that should be avoided, such as:

1. Lack of community input: Failing to involve the local community in the planning and design process of the streetscape infrastructure can lead to a lack of buy-in and support for the project.

2. Overemphasis on aesthetics: While the visual appeal of streetscape infrastructure is important, it should not be the sole focus. Functionality and practicality should also be taken into consideration.

3. Insufficient budget: Underfunding the project can lead to substandard quality and design, which can negatively impact the community's perception of the investment.

4. Disregard for existing businesses: Investing in streetscape infrastructure can disrupt existing businesses in the area. It's important to minimize disruptions and to provide support to affected businesses during and after the project.

5. Failure to consider long-term maintenance costs: Streetscape infrastructure requires ongoing maintenance and upkeep. Failing to consider these costs during the planning process can lead to deteriorating infrastructure and a negative impact on the community over time.

6. Lack of coordination with other projects: Failing to coordinate with other ongoing or planned projects in the area can lead to overlapping or conflicting investments, wasted resources, and delayed completion.

By avoiding these common mistakes, community leaders can ensure that their investment in streetscape infrastructure will have a positive impact on the community and promote entrepreneurial activity."

Question: is it easy to measure success in infrastructure investment in small local areas? (NOTE: I asked this question twice and each time received a different answer).

AI Response: "Measuring the success of infrastructure investment in small local areas can be challenging, as it may involve a range of factors and outcomes that are difficult to quantify.

Infrastructure investment can take many forms, such as building roads, bridges, water and sewage systems, public transit, and community facilities. The success of such investments may depend on factors such as their impact on economic development, public safety, health and well-being, environmental sustainability, and community resilience.

In small local areas, measuring the success of infrastructure investment may be particularly difficult, as the scale and scope of the investment may be relatively limited compared to larger urban areas. In addition, small local areas may face unique challenges, such as limited resources, demographic changes, and economic volatility, which can affect the outcomes of infrastructure investment.

Despite these challenges, there are ways to measure the success of infrastructure investment in small local areas, such as:

1. Assessing the economic impact: This involves measuring the direct and indirect economic benefits of infrastructure investment, such as job creation, increased business activity, and improved access to markets and resources.

2. Evaluating public safety: This involves measuring the impact of infrastructure investment on public safety, such as reductions in accidents, crime rates, and emergency response times.

3. Monitoring health and well-being: This involves measuring the impact of infrastructure investment on health and well-being outcomes, such as access to healthcare, recreational opportunities, and healthy food options.

4. Tracking environmental sustainability: This involves measuring the impact of infrastructure investment on environmental outcomes, such as reduced pollution, increased energy efficiency, and improved resource conservation.

Overall, while measuring the success of infrastructure investment in small local areas can be challenging, it is important to evaluate the outcomes of such investments to ensure that they are achieving their intended goals and benefiting the local community."

Evaluation of the Approach

When engaging in a community project, all stakeholders should be given a chance to voice their concerns, wants and needs. It's only when all voices are heard that a community project can be truly successful. An important point of discussion relates to the trend away from local patronage and towards a tourism-dependent retail economy. Sacrificing the market to tourists is a major concern of the residents of East Greenwich; this feeling is justified since a shopping district must maintain its local flavor in order to remain viable. A delicate balance of diverse retail businesses, restaurants and cafes, along with cultural and professional services are ideal to prepare a downtown area that can provide something for everyone.

There are several limitations that should be considered when evaluating the findings of this research. The first limitation being that all participants in both the quantitative and qualitative research were promised anonymity. There is always a concern when collecting data that some answers given may have been politically motivated. To illustrate, merchants unhappy, let's say, with the street

cleaning or trash pick-up may have indicated a stronger than actual negative assessment of the program in order to send a message to the town. With the focus groups, however, this concern was hopefully mitigated by having the meetings performed by an independent professional moderator.

Since all merchants on Main Street are not likely to benefit equally from the revitalization program, this may present another limitation. It is only natural for those who will benefit the most from the project would speak and act most favorable towards the revitalization. Those merchants who did not recognize the direct benefits, on the other hand, would be more critical.

Despite these limitations, several key factors made this study informative, effective and successful. Having a mix of participants who were dreamers and pragmatists allowed for a variety of perspectives. Further, the inclusion of both "townies" and "transplants" – that is, those that have grown up in town and those that have moved there – allowed the researcher to capture a diversity of insights. This is an ideal outcome for a qualitative research study.

Case Summary

This study concludes by presenting several recommendations that could prove pertinent to other cities and towns:

1. Monitor Changing Downtown Trends: Cities should consistently monitor shifts in trends within their downtown areas to adapt to evolving needs.

2. Democratize Revitalization Processes: The revitalization process needs to be democratized, involving all stakeholders rather than relying on top-down

decisions. Guarding against any single group's or developer's agenda is essential to prevent undue influence and promote inclusivity.

3. Serve Diverse Age Groups: Downtown districts should cater to the needs of residents of all age groups, creating an environment that appeals to everyone.

4. No Universal Recipe for Success: Cities must recognize that there is no one-size-fits-all recipe for creating a successful downtown pedestrian mall. What works today may not work for future generations, making adaptability crucial.

5. Develop Master Plans: Cities should formulate master plans that evaluate strengths and leverage natural assets, serving as adaptable blueprints. Engaging local professionals such as architects, lawyers and engineers can enhance community involvement and revitalization efforts.

6. Preserve Cultural Heritage: Cities with cultural heritage should maintain walkable downtown areas with accessible attractions, amenities and shopping opportunities.

7. Strategic Use of Removable Barriers: Temporary barriers can be strategically employed without disrupting traffic flow to and from work.

8. Proactive Revitalization: Cities should adopt a proactive approach, and should avoid waiting until downtown areas lose their appeal and viability before initiating revitalization efforts.

9. Retain Local Flavor: A crucial consideration is the shift towards a tourism-dependent economy. City leaders must preserve the local essence to sustain downtown viability.

10. Offer Unique opportunities: Downtown districts should offer experiences distinct from the suburbs, including waterfront development, cultural activities, historic preservation and pedestrian-friendly features.

11. Invest for Economic and Quality of Life Growth: City investments in downtown areas should not only drive economic prosperity but also enhance residents' quality of life.

Incorporating these recommendations can contribute to the vitality and long-term success of downtown areas in cities and towns.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The conclusion summarizes the answers to the following questions:

- What factors influence the economic/financial/and image impact of public investments in streetscape infrastructure in downtown areas, and how does it affect entrepreneurial activity?
- What community factors should be in place when we invest in streetscape infrastructure in downtown areas?
- What common mistakes should be avoided?

It also summarizes the key findings from the application of community interaction field approach to inform the downtown revitalization efforts in the case study of East Greenwich, Rhode Island.

Factors that Influence Impact of Public Investments in Streetscape Infrastructure

Public investments in streetscape infrastructure in downtown areas can have a significant impact on the economic, financial and image viewpoint of a city. These investments can effect countless elements that in turn affect entrepreneurial activity. What follows below are key factors that should be considered when investing in streetscape infrastructure.

Investments in streetscape infrastructure including street and sidewalk improvements, historic lighting, pedestrian-friendly walkways, planting trees and flowers and installing public art, can contribute to the overall aesthetic appeal and

image of the city and enhance its reputation as an attractive and lively place to conduct business. These investments can create public spaces where residents and visitors can get together and participate in events. This promotes a sense of community which potentially can attract entrepreneurs interested in establishing businesses that serve local residents' needs and wants.

Improved streetscapes can enhance the tourism experience and attract more visitors to the downtown area. This is extremely important because a great way to measure a downtown districts success is not only in terms of economics and quality of life, but by the number of pedestrians who actually visit the zone. Increased foot traffic can lead to higher visibility for restaurants, cafes and business retail merchants. Entrepreneurs, especially in the retail sector will welcome the increased number of visitors, likely increasing their sales revenue and profits.

Public investments in streetscape infrastructure can lead to changes in local regulations and zoning policies. These changes can create a more business-friendly environment, making it easier for entrepreneurs to start new businesses or adapt existing ones to changing market dynamics.

Well-designed streetscapes can improve public safety by encouraging more pedestrian activity and community involvement. A safer environment can lead to increase perceptions of security, attracting more people to the downtown area and positively impacting merchants. Entrepreneurs may feel more comfortable establishing in a safe and secure environment.

Streetscape investments, when designed properly, can serves as a unique selling point for the downtown area, helping in marketing efforts to attract tourist, residents and businesses. A revitalized streetscape can foster a culture of creativity by providing spaces for public art, events and cultural activities. This, in turn, can create an environment that could potentially attract entrepreneurs in innovative and technology industries, contributing to a diverse business ecosystem.

Community Factors

When investing in streetscape infrastructure in downtown areas, several community factors should be taken into consideration to ensure the success and sustainability of the project. These factors can contribute to the overall effectiveness of the investment and the positive impact on the community. What follows below are some important community factors to consider when investing in streetscape in downtown districts.

Before investing in revitalization projects in downtown areas, community engagement and input is essential. To have a successful community project, the local residents, merchants, business and political leaders, and all other stakeholders should be included in the planning and decision-making process. The city must solicit their input and ideas to ensure that the improvements align with their needs and preferences. Further, infrastructure should be designed with inclusivity in mind. Meaning that accessibility to all age groups, including people with disabilities should be achieved by ensuring that sidewalks, ramps and crosswalks accommodate everyone.

Cities should turn to their natural assets (oceans, lakes, mountains, etc.) when investing in streetscape infrastructure whenever possible. It is important to preserve the historical and cultural identity of the downtown district. They should incorporate design elements that reflect the city's heritage and character to maintain a sense of place and authenticity. Incorporating public art and sculptures, landmarks and other design elements will make the area distinct and more memorable for visitors.

Another factor that should be considered is how the streetscape inprovements will affect local businesses. It is necessary to form a committee that can serve as support for local merchants and to steer the downtown area's future course. It is essential to keep in mind design elements that enhance the business environment, such as outdoor dining areas, which can attract more visitors and contribute to the economic vibrancy of the area both during the day and nighttime.

A long-term maintenance and management program is essential to ensure the revitalization is not short-lived. A commitment to keep the downtown area clean, neat and well maintained will serve to keep the districts attractiveness over time. Cities must ensure that the community has the resources and commitment to do so. A final factor cities should consider is collaborating with local organizations and developers to leverage their expertise and resources. Partnerships can enhance the effectiveness of local projects and create a more holistic approach to community development.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

Planners in small-medium sized cities often make common mistakes when engaging in downtown revitalization investments. These mistakes can impede the success of the revitalization efforts and limit the positive impact on the community. What follows below are some common mistakes that planners should be aware of when investing in community projects.

A common mistake repeated that should be avoided is lack of community engagement. Failing to involve all stakeholders in the planning process can lead to community projects that do not fit and serve the needs and desires of the local residents. Further, disregarding and ignoring the input and needs of local merchants can lead to disconnection between revitalization efforts and the commercial ecosystem. In addition, overlooking the need for inclusive designs that accommodates all age groups, including people with disabilities, can limit the engagement of certain community members.

Focusing solely on aesthetic improvements without addressing underlying issues such as economic challenges, parking and retail mix, can lead to superficial changes that do not last the test of time. Failing to preserve and enhance the unique historical, cultural and architectural identity of the city's downtown district can result in a generic and run-of-the-mill revitalization.

A key mistake that some cities and towns make are over-regulation of an area. Excessive regulations and zoning restrictions can discourage the development of new businesses and creative enterprises. Another mistake worth mentioning is ignoring small-scale improvements. Focusing solely on large-scale projects while neglecting small incremental improvements can miss opportunities

to make positive changes that build community support. Finally, planners who attempt to copy strategies of other countries should understand that changes to those strategies must be made to adjust for American culture.

Contribution and Limitations

This paper contributes to the literature by accentuating the important role of stakeholder involvement and comprehensive perspectives in achieving successful community projects. This necessitates not only community members but also local politicians who must be receptive to the wants and needs of residents. For example, if there is a desire among residents to integrate a side street into the main downtown district, the town council must be open to rezoning the area accordingly. Another key insight from the study is the call to attention for effective communication. Consistent and reliable two-way communication throughout revitalization projects is essential. This serves to ensure that information flows coherently between all groups involved, leading to better outcomes and a more engaged community.

Furthermore, this study pioneers the integration of AI. By introducing AI into community revitalization efforts, this paper significantly advances the existing literature. This innovation is introduced in the paper, paving the way for future research and exploration of AI's role in the renewal of downtown areas throughout the country and across the globe. Therefore, this research enhances the understanding of successful revitalization projects by calling for inclusivity, effective communication and the novel integration of AI. These contributions hold value for both practical implementation and academic discourse.

This paper acknowledges certain limitations. Data collection, especially from focus group meetings, was insufficient, leading to divergent preferences among various groups regarding issues such as connecting Main Street to the waterfront. Conducting further focus groups is needed to exhaustively explore new ideas and ensure comprehensive coverage.

The quantitative survey used in the study had limitations in terms of generalizability to the broader population. Its scope was insufficient to discern differing needs and preferences across age groups. In addition, an inherent constraint became visible related to incorporating surveys due to the early stages of AI refinement. While AI was introduced in the study, its limitations at this time hindered the possibility of running more extensive surveys. Time constraints further impacted this study. Despite the approval of an available state grant, the funds were not yet accessible, delaying its implementation and averting the examination of actual results.

Looking forward, this study emphasizes the need for conducting additional research on small to medium-sized cities, particularly directing attention towards historic towns. Additionally, it recommends to explore the potential of AI as a tool for revitalization efforts.

Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

AI adds value to the process used to get feedback from different stakeholders as part of a community interaction theory by gathering data from a wide source of information for relevant stakeholder's opinions/ideas. Officials working on a revitalization project may not be trained in advanced research,

which could result in countless hours and increased costs in facilitating the project. Turning to AI can change that. It can serve to cut down the lengthy time it takes to gather the in-depth research needed, from months or years to just days. In addition, everything input into AI is in the public domain. Meaning that every city or town that has used AI will have its information input into AI which then can be shared with other city revitalization projects.

The main current limitation of AI is its inability to distinguish credible sources from untrustworthy sources. In time, however, programs will be written that allows AI to learn how to decipher between the two. The future of AI is promising and some would say even certain. Going forward, in order to use AI as part of the community interaction field theory approach, parameters need to be designed on how to use AI, how to limit the information obtained, how to filter the information to the project in question and how to safeguard its use. Once refined, AI can be a form of science communication for the future. It is cost effective, efficient and has a wide accessibility for community driven projects.

Key Findings from the East Greenwich, Rhode Island Case

The town of East Greenwich, Rhode Island has effectively developed an exceptional downtown district that attracts a significant number of pedestrians during both the day and nighttime. Through proficient planning and skillful management, the town's leaders have managed to strike a harmonious balance between catering to tourists and serving the local community, all while preserving the town's cultural heritage.

Recognizing the need for proactive measures, the town is taking action to address the evolving needs of the downtown area before any signs of decline become apparent. Plans are underway to implement comprehensive streetscape improvements, encompassing enhancements to streets, sidewalks, and various other aspects, with the aim of not only maintaining but also enhancing the town's physical attractiveness.

East Greenwich stands out as a place where living, working and enjoying leisure activities seamlessly intersect. The town's leaders, both in government and business, have demonstrated a keen understanding of its competitive strengths. Their commendable proactive approach and ongoing efforts are noteworthy, as they continue to guide the town toward a successful future.

Every town and city, including East Greenwich, must continuously assess why people would choose to reside, work and engage in recreational activities within their community. This self-analysis remains crucial, particularly since the factors influencing such decisions may evolve over time. By effectively responding to these questions, political leaders position themselves to exert meaningful influence over the path of their town's future.

Contributions/Limitations/Future Recommendations

This paper contributes to the literature by accentuating the important role of stakeholder involvement and comprehensive perspectives in achieving successful community projects. This necessitates not only community members but also local politicians who must be receptive to the wants and needs of residents. For example, if there is a desire among residents to integrate a side

street into the main downtown district, the town council must be open to rezoning the area accordingly. Another key insight from the study is the call to attention for effective communication. Consistent and reliable two-way communication throughout revitalization projects is essential. This serves to ensure that information flows coherently between all groups involved, leading to better outcomes and a more engaged community.

Furthermore, this study pioneers the integration of AI. By introducing AI into community revitalization efforts, this paper significantly advances the existing literature. This innovation is introduced in the paper, paving the way for future research and exploration of AI's role in the renewal of downtown areas throughout the country and across the globe. The current dissertation research enhances the understanding of successful revitalization projects by calling for inclusivity, effective communication and the novel integration of AI. These contributions hold value for both practical implementation and academic discourse.

This paper acknowledges certain limitations. Data collection, especially from focus group meetings, was insufficient, leading to divergent preferences among various groups regarding issues such as connecting Main Street to the waterfront. Conducting further focus groups is needed to exhaustively explore new ideas and ensure comprehensive coverage.

The quantitative survey used in the study had limitations in terms of generalizability to the broader population. Its scope was insufficient to discern differing needs and preferences across age groups. In addition, an inherent

constraint became visible related to incorporating surveys due to the early stages of AI refinement. While AI was introduced in the study, its limitations at this time hindered the possibility of running more extensive surveys. Time constraints further impacted this study. Despite the approval of an available state grant, the funds were not yet accessible, delaying the implementation of revitalization efforts and preventing the examination of actual results. Generally, the results would be evident over a fifteen year time period, but immediate impact of the diverse stakeholder impact was not directly observed.

Future Research

Looking forward, this study emphasizes the need for conducting additional research on small to medium-sized cities, particularly directing attention towards historic towns. Additionally, it recommends to explore the potential of AI as a tool for revitalization efforts. Community interaction field theory approaches could be utilized to engage stakeholders around decisions in other communities, including Main Street Grant Program that was announced by Governor Dan Mckee in February 2023. The funds from the Rhode Island Commerce Corporation specifically aimed at improving streetscape infrastructure. These grants are committed to the revitalization of walkable, downtown districts. The money is to be used for enhanced sidewalks, street furniture, improved lighting, infrastructure improvements, training for zoning board members, and so much more.

According the Rhode Island Secretary of Commerce, the focus of the investments is to generate long-term economic development. Main Street revitalization grants are expected to range from $25 – 500 thousand. Many of

the 39 cities and towns in R.I. are fortunate to have architectural and historical landmarks, great parks, beautiful beaches and sandy shores. Cities blessed with heritage as a selling point are preferred when looking to develop their tourism product (Robertson, 1995). Rhode Island cities can benefit from a community-based approach to decision-making.

Community input can also be sought in a systematic way for the proposed bike lane on Hope Street, which is drawing mixed reactions from its stakeholders. Hope Street is an area full of shops and restaurants where cars are normally parked on both sides of the street. The first study of the bike path was commissioned in March of 2021 by a bike advocacy group, namely Bikes for People. According to RI News Today, the bike advocacy group failed to inform participants that Hope Street was being selected for a bike lane, while a spokesman for the Providence planning department said that the city had zero input in drafting the questions. A second study which was reported by the Providence Streets Coalition, another bike advocacy group, reported that more than 60% of respondents support an “urban trail” on Hope Street. Meanwhile, when asked about how the community residents were notified, the city planning and development department said it didn’t know.

A trial run of the bike lane was scheduled for and was installed and operational from October 1 through October 8 of 2022. The bike path has two lanes with yellow bollards marking it off from the street and marking the two bike travel lanes. It turned out to be a rainy week and not many bikers were said to have used the temporary lane. Many owners and residents were hoping that the

targeted Hope Street bike lane would be done away with. They were even against the temporary lane since it would take away much needed parking from this very popular shopping street. Losing a week's worth of business for many of these small business owners should not be considered lightly since it is their livelihood and often their means to support their families.

More than 130 people posted their comments on the "Next Door" forum of Hope Village. Below are just a few of the comments posted.

Comment 1: "I feel this trial is merely a ploy to get the path permanently installed. I feel a true trial should be October through the end of December. We will all have a better evaluation of the impact on businesses, safety, and impact on neighboring streets. The trial does not consider out street festivals and snow removal. Let's be honest and do a comprehensive trial.

Comment 2: "I'm at a loss to understand why those quieter nearby streets can't be used."

Comment 3: I'd love to know who the 600 people that were surveyed about it were. I know it was neither myself nor my neighbors."

Comment 4: "The street is narrow and busy. With all the shops lining the street there is heavy pedestrian traffic not to mention the limited parking. I believe it will negatively impact the businesses and will be dangerous for pedestrians and cyclist alike."

Comment 5: "It also seems unwise to layer new infrastructure on top of neglected infrastructure. Until we can repair sidewalks and adequately remove

snow, it seems counterproductive to install a trail which will itself require maintenance."

Comment 6: "Unfortunately, there aren't enough bike riders to warrant all of these bike lanes."

Comment 7: Let's follow this to the future. The experiment is made permanent. How many bikers will use the lane in a snow/ice event? Will the bollards be removed for the whole winter or just when snow is predicted? Will the plows go curb to curb or just up to the bollard? This experiment needs to be tested out in many circumstances."

Comment 8: "Good ideas, but sadly, in reality, they don't work."

Comment 9: "Any change to the neighborhood should have a majority consensus of those it will impact most."

According to community interaction theory, relationships are more important than any given person, entity or organization. It is when people in a community come together and share things that outcomes are improved and community projects become successful. To be clear, this means it is desirable to have bidirectional, not unidirectional relationships when it comes to communities. This way for the project to be worthwhile and successful, it needs to be more than a top-down decision-making process. It is important to note that this theory states that interests are generalized and intrinsic and are not specialized and that special interest fields do not serve the community well. Ideally, each voice is powerful enough to be heard. While it's true that it is hard to accommodate the

interests of all groups, it is only when all voices are heard that community projects can be highly successful.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
Focus Group Script

Welcome to our focus groups. I want to start by each of you introducing yourself and tell us what you do.

Ice Breaker Question:

Think about an outside place that makes you happy when you go there.

What about it makes you feel happy?

1 When you think of downtown East Greenwich, what words come to mind?

-Can you share why?

-What makes you think of that word? Reactions?

-What makes you think of those words

2 When you visit the downtown Main street area, what stands out, what about it do you enjoy?

3 Do you think that information infrastructure (wifi, manned information booth, bulletin board, newsletter, etc.) will benefit the downtown community? (Or do I start with asking: What do you think will benefit the downtown community? Then ask about the information infrastructure question

4 How can infrastructure investment attract more retail and professional services to our community?

5 Start with Can infrastructure investment attract local economic development and then ask if so how and why?

How can infrastructure investment promote local economic development?

-Can you share why?

6 What are the most important features you feel the downtown area has and should have?

7 Think about the way downtown looks. What come to mind?

8 How do these things make downtown East Greenwich different from other areas?

9 How does it impact the time you spend in downtown EG?

10 What changes would you like to see to the EG downtown area?

11 How will the changes impact the community?

12 What are your thoughts on offering incentives to new and expanding businesses?

13 What makes EG appealing to new/our businesses?

14 How does EG invest in growth of existing businesses?

15 What could EG do to make the downtown area more appealing for people from town? From out of town? Businesses?

16 How would you describe your connection to downtown EG? Maybe put this more at the beginning? (Thought: get their feelings about downtown at the very beginning to help understand their remarks throughout the session)

17 How do you feel when you walk around East Greenwich? Maybe put this more at the beginning?

18 What do you think about this proposal design?

19 What message would implementing this design send to:

- Neighbors?
- Business owners?

- People from other communities?

20 How will local leaders respond if you share your ideas and opinions with them?

APPENDIX B

On-line survey questions

1 Age (13-15) (16-19) (20-24) (25-30) (31-40) (41-54) (55 & older)

2 Gender (Male) (Female) (Other)

3 Educational attainment/level

high school or less, some college, associate's degree,

bachelor's degree, graduate or professional degree

4 Employment status

(full-time student, self-employed, full-time, part-time, unemployed)

5 Are you a parent? Yes or No

6 Are you a business owner? Yes or No

7 Do you work outside of the home in East Greenwich? Yes or No

8 How often do you visit the downtown/Main Street area in East Greenwich?

Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Frequently/Often, Always, Very rarely,

Very often, Almost always

9 How important to you is installing pedestrian-scale lighting (attractive, soft lamp light, etc)?

Very important, Important, Somewhat important, Neither Important nor unimportant, Somewhat unimportant , Unimportant, Highly unimportant

10 How important to you is installing street furniture (benches, etc.)?

Very important, Important, Somewhat important, Neither Important nor unimportant, Somewhat unimportant , Unimportant, Highly unimportant

11 How important to you is the presence of trees/shrubbery/flowers in the downtown area?

Very important, Important, Somewhat important, Neither Important nor unimportant, Somewhat unimportant , Unimportant, Highly unimportant

12 How important to you is having festivals and events?

Very important, Important, Somewhat important, Neither Important nor unimportant, Somewhat unimportant , Unimportant, Highly unimportant

13 How important to you is having maps (maps that include walking trails and key places such as museums, parks, etc.) available? Very important, Important, Somewhat important, Neither Important nor unimportant, Somewhat unimportant , Unimportant, Highly unimportant

14 How important to you is having newsletters available? Very important, Important, Somewhat important, Neither Important nor unimportant, Somewhat unimportant , Unimportant, Highly unimportant

15 How important is Maintenance (Examples: washing sidewalks, trimming trees, removing litter and graffiti)?

Very important, Important, Somewhat important, Neither Important nor unimportant, Somewhat unimportant , Unimportant, Highly unimportant

16 How important is affordable parking?

Very important, Important, Somewhat important, Neither Important nor unimportant, Somewhat unimportant , Unimportant, Highly unimportant

17 How important is opening a community cultural center (i.e., a place with a Performing arts center, Museums, Worship Centers, Heritage Centers and Libraries)?

Very important, Important, Somewhat important, Neither Important nor unimportant, Somewhat unimportant , Unimportant, Highly unimportant

20 How important is opening a community arts center (i.e., Venues for musical performances, Workshop/gallery space for local and regional artists and Educational facilities)?

Very important, Important, Somewhat important, Neither Important nor unimportant, Somewhat unimportant , Unimportant, Highly unimportant

For the questions below, please list your level of agreement with each of the following statements.

21 Infrastructure investment that connects Main Street to the waterfront will improve your quality of life.

Strongly agree, Agree, Somewhat agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Somewhat disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree

22 Infrastructure investment that connects Main Street to the waterfront will attract visitors and tourists.

Strongly agree, Agree, Somewhat agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Somewhat disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree

23 Infrastructure investment that connects Main Street to the waterfront will make East Greenwich more desirable to pedestrians.

Strongly agree, Agree, Somewhat agree, Neither agree nor disagree,

Somewhat disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree

24 Infrastructure investment that connects Main Street to the waterfront will make East Greenwich more desirable to business owners.

Strongly agree, Agree, Somewhat agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Somewhat disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree

25 Infrastructure investment that connects Main Street to the waterfront will create employment opportunities.

Strongly agree, Agree, Somewhat agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Somewhat disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree

26 Infrastructure investment that connects Main Street to the waterfront will improve the image of the town.

Strongly agree, Agree, Somewhat agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Somewhat disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree

27 Infrastructure investment that connects Main Street to the waterfront will increase property values.

Strongly agree, Agree, Somewhat agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Somewhat disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree

28 Infrastructure investment that connects Main Street to the waterfront will waste money.

Strongly agree, Agree, Somewhat agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Somewhat disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree

29 Infrastructure investment that connects Main Street to the waterfront will increase traffic.

Strongly agree, Agree, Somewhat agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Somewhat disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree

30 Infrastructure investment that connects Main Street to the waterfront will decrease my quality of life.

Strongly agree, Agree, Somewhat agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Somewhat disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree

31 Infrastructure investment that connects Main Street to the waterfront will support local businesses. Strongly agree, Agree, Somewhat agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Somewhat disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree

32 Urban natural landscape maintenance can ensure that citizens enjoy the natural and ecological landscape.

Strongly agree, Agree, Somewhat agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Somewhat disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree

33 The downtown center is a valuable resource.

Strongly agree, Agree, Somewhat agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Somewhat disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree

34 The downtown center should be revitalized.

Strongly agree, Agree, Somewhat agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Somewhat disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree

35 Revitalizing the downtown center would only benefit a small group of people.

Strongly agree, Agree, Somewhat agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Somewhat disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree

36 Revitalizing the downtown center is a waste of money.

Strongly agree, Agree, Somewhat agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Somewhat disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree

37 Revitalizing the downtown center would bring improvements to the community.

Strongly agree, Agree, Somewhat agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Somewhat disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree

38 The downtown center provides me with the space to do what I like

Strongly agree, Agree, Somewhat agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Somewhat disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree

39 I enjoy the downtown center more than other sections of East Greenwich.

Strongly agree, Agree, Somewhat agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Somewhat disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree

40 I feel home when visiting the downtown center.

Strongly agree, Agree, Somewhat agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Somewhat disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree

41 I feel connected to the downtown center.

Strongly agree, Agree, Somewhat agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Somewhat disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree

42 I identify strongly with the downtown center.

Strongly agree, Agree, Somewhat agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Somewhat disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree

43 Visiting the downtown center says a lot about who I am.

Strongly agree, Agree, Somewhat agree, Neither agree nor disagree,

Somewhat disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree

44 I feel a sense of belonging to the downtown center.

Strongly agree, Agree, Somewhat agree, Neither agree nor disagree,

Somewhat disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree

45 I feel familiar with the downtown center.

Strongly agree, Agree, Somewhat agree, Neither agree nor disagree,

Somewhat disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree

46 The downtown center means a lot to me.

Strongly agree, Agree, Somewhat agree, Neither agree nor disagree,

Somewhat disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree

47 I like visiting the downtown center with my family and friends.

Strongly agree, Agree, Somewhat agree, Neither agree nor disagree,

Somewhat disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree

48 I have built connections with other people by visiting the downtown center.

Strongly agree, Agree, Somewhat agree, Neither agree nor disagree,

Somewhat disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree

49 People who are similar to me also like to visit downtown center.

Strongly agree, Agree, Somewhat agree, Neither agree nor disagree,

Somewhat disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree

50 There is no sense of commitment in my community

Strongly agree, Agree, Somewhat agree, Neither agree nor disagree,

Somewhat disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree

APPENDIX C

Focus Group 1.

The first focus group had 6 participants. Five out of the six people owned or worked in businesses located on Main Street. One participant was the town historian whom had written a couple of book and hundreds of articles about East Greenwich. Everyone in the group seemed comfortable and relaxed and all were congenial, appearing as if they could talk to each other all day about the topics presented in the focus group. The attendees all had community ties with strong roots to East Greenwich, many with lifelong ties to the town. This group all referred to themselves as “townies.” When asked about how they feel about the community on Main Street in downtown East Greenwich, the following themes emerged that everyone seemed to agree on:

- Nice mix of businesses
- Welcoming community
- Friendly, positive view, nice to see big storefront windows
- Quaint, small New England town
- Good restaurants that folks visit together
- Feeling of safety in East Greenwich, nice to see kids walk around town together
- Family friendly, good mix of families and singles in the area
- Nice to have local/independent business, rather than franchises
- Very pretty
- Local business owners have a stake in the town

- Vibrant, especially in the last few years
- Desirable area-waterfront, schools, etc.
- Changes over the decades (mostly positive)
- Only problem is parking, which is a “geographical problem”
- Would lose the charm of E.G. to level it of for easier parking/walking
- Parking issue: visitors park in front of businesses and walk to their destinations
- Want more of a mix of stores (like Wickford)
- Want to see Main Street become more pedestrian friendly
- Looks a little tired
- Unsightly wires across the street takes away from the look of the street
- Would like to see electrical wires put underground
- Missed opportunity to make use of the waterfront
- Fire station that is located in middle section of Main Street is in a terrible location. Fire trucks are disruptive to Main Street, it’s a nuisance.

Aesthetics

- Need more flowers and better maintenance of them
- Need to clean street lanterns
- Street poles need repair
- Weeds in curbs and sidewalks need more maintenance
- Dept. of Public Works needs to get more focused on cleaning Main Street
- Emphasis on curb appeal

- Architecture-need to pretty up the “ugly” buildings on Main Street
  - Discussion ensued of a few good restoration examples which maintained the historic charm of the original buildings
  - Importance of historical restorations, desire to turn back the clock, visually, for an older-style look.
  - Wickford held up as an example
- Agreement on the big difference these little aesthetic changes can make
  - Desire for this even if the changes are not the most economical
  - Acknowledgement of the difficulty of requiring business owners to do these thing-private ownership makes a difference
- Issues with pet owners not picking up pet waste-this is a repeated point of discussion
- Proposal of dog bag stations around town with signage reminding people to pick up waste.
- Town signage with business names for clarity-some individual businesses have signage that is difficult to read or easy to miss when driving
- Business owners sometimes feel that their ideas and opinions are not always welcome

Infrastructure

- Issues with hanging garbage bags on poles on street
  - Poor quality, insufficient to hold garbage
- Individual businesses should be responsible for cleaning up garbage outside their own businesses

- Idea being that the business generates the trash, and should have a hand in managing it
- Flower pots that don't get taken care of get taken away
- Several people mention that the flowers are not well taken care of by the town
- Agreement that the flowers are nice and should be maintained
- Now considering both hard infrastructure and soft infrastructure
- Like the lamps on the street, but want them to be regularly cleaned and maintained
- Too cloudy and dark for some, while others prefer darker lighting
- Best solution is to have adjustable lighting
- Mixed feelings—do we want a historical look, or the safest/brightest situation possible?
- No major, earth-shattering complaints about the soft infrastructure (just that it be well-maintained), more interest in hard infrastructure
- Would like a parking garage
- Work with the shape of the hill, make it look nice and historical
- Question about whether they really want to accommodate more people; don't want to commercialize too much
- Attendees are townies, and the emphasis is on accommodating the folks who live in EG
- Fear of going so far in commercializing EG that they cater to tourists at the expense of the locals

- Acknowledgement that things change over time, and you can't keep EG the same always
  - Need to adapt and evolve
- Desire to see "downtown" main street extend longer
- Town missed good opportunities for parking and other improvements
  - Sense that the locals and longtime business owners have insight, ideas, and experience that the town officials don't listen to or forget about
- Argument that if parking were really that big of an issue then people wouldn't come to EG
  - The strong businesses thrive, and the people come
  - The only people who complain about the parking are unaware of the options—signage would help
- Theatre—its lot is poorly maintained
  - Events always result in blocked roadways and diminished visibility

Connecting Main Street to the waterfront

- Natural relationship between the waterfront and Main Street
- Elevation/gentrification of the harbor homes
  - More expensive, more desirable
  - People buying these houses and discovering Rhode Island
- Making the harbor "prettier" and "nicer" will naturally attract people to Main Street
  - Make it easier with a pedestrian bridge? (Queen Street)
  - Hills can be difficult or off-putting for pedestrians

- Make the Main Street Stroll a loop—starting at the waterfront, going onto Main Street, and back (or the other way)
- Make a clear purpose for people to go from the harbor to Main Street
  - Pepper some commercial businesses along the way to draw people along
- Downtown EG as a gem, a privilege to live there
- Need to have businesses/attractions along the way from one part of town (harbor) to the other (Main Street)
  - Or transportation? Trolley? Pedi-cab? Something quaint and old-fashioned

Key Takeaways

1. Clean/maintain Main Street (garbage, debris; should be a dedicated Public Works employee to do this)
2. Parking on Main Street is perceived as a problem, but isn't actually a problem
3. "Tasteful architectural integrity"
4. Connect the waterfront to Main Street
5. "Baby steps": pretty-up Main Street (flowers, trash, weeds, etc.)

Focus Group 2.

The second group which had six participants included a mix of business owners, the East Greenwich town manager and a practicing chiropractor. They were all friendly and open to discussion. This group did not consider or refer to themselves as "townies" and did not necessarily grow up in East Greenwich. They are transplants, folks who came to E.G. and discovered its charm. When

asked about their impressions of Main Street and how they would characterize the area, the following responses were given:

- Nice little town, “throwback”
- Families, children; people in EG look happy
- Affluent, desirable school district
- Mixed in with those with financial challenges, those who struggle
- “A tale of two East Greenwiches”
- Depends on the time of day—Main Street changes
- Something for everyone
- Dynamic, but with a small-town feel
- Visible palpable socioeconomic disparities in town
- Feels like two different places—North end and South end
  - Different characteristics, big differences
- Pedestrian accessibility affects town
- Clear, pronounced differences among different geographies to townies
  - Different “feel” or vibe at each end
  - Energy shifts at each end of Main Street or at different times of day
- Struggle to get tourists/shoppers/visitors to the far south end (as far down as CVS, say)
- Over time, EG has evolved and become a “destination”
  - Many nighttime visitors are out-of-towners, and are not always well behaved
- “quaintness” has changed/diminished over the last 3-4 years

- Exacerbated by the proliferation of bars (especially lower-end or less expensive bars)
- Specific mention of bars in the middle of Main Street
- Attendees mention troublemakers, police calls, drinkers, smokers, crude dancing
- Seasonal, and at night

- Main Street is “tired,” especially when it comes to its infrastructure
- Wires across the street
- Parking
- Late-night clubs—some “bad eggs”

- Despite the “bad eggs,” attendees say they feel safe and comfortable in EG generally
- Overall positive impression of EG

Aesthetics

- Generally good, positive
- Attendees notice public works employees watering flowers
- Some “tired” building facades, crumbling walls (did not mention which ones)
- Attendees like the historic nature of the buildings, like when people invest in beautification of buildings
- Comparison made to Jamestown

- Generally charming downtown area in EG
- HOWEVER: trash on the street, “spaghetti in the sky”

- Even those who pick up trash need to walk a distance to find a trash can to use

- Trash is tricky from a municipal perspective—individual people and businesses generate trash, and need to keep up with it themselves

Infrastructure:

- Sidewalks are “deplorable,” broken and poorly patched
  - Not only aesthetic, but also a matter of safety and accessibility
  - Cracked and uneven sidewalks are a hazard, people trip on them
- Positive experience: reached out to town Council about handicap parking spaces, had an issue fixed quickly
- Issue of Main Street being a state road, different responsibilities and options available to the town
  - Sense among the group that someone needs to neaten and refurbish the infrastructure, but lots of passing the buck and pushing responsibility onto others
- Different regulations for different businesses—makes enforcement tricky
- Difficulty of visibility when driving
- Need ticketing for cars parked too long, but also difficulty in enforcing this
- Changes over last 20 years—over-abundance of valet parking specifically
  - They agree it’s a problem, but no solutions proposed
- Growth of EG is “at odds with tradition,” no perfect recipe for balance between encouraging the growth and maintaining the tradition
  - EG may be “a victim of its own success”—such a destination now that it has become unmanageable

- Natural ebb and flow of downtown area
  - Used to be lots of hair salons and bridal shops, now lots of real estate
  - Bad businesses will close
  - Good businesses will thrive
  - It's less about parking and more about the strength of the businesses themselves
  - Zoning/regulatory issues pertaining to parking
- Want to see more of a mix of businesses, more of a blend
- Want to see stronger relationships among local businesses
- Point out misconception about parking, perception of a parking problem in East Greenwich
  - Great opportunity for businesses: people park in one lot farther away, walk by stores, shop and engage with the businesses
  - People need to walk—there is plenty of parking in town, but not always directly in front of the stores
  - Habits/desires to get as close as possible to one's retail destination of choice; different for restaurants and shows, or other more leisurely activities
  - Townies walk or know what to expect with the parking situation, perhaps? But some townies then complain to town council (no consensus on this)
- Middle of Main Street is very congested
- Proposal of "strategically-placed times/metered parking"
  - Loading zones that become parking at certain times

- Legislate delivery times—safety concerns around driving around parked delivery vehicles

- Good parking is being credited with success of businesses
  - Some business owners regard sharing their parking lots with shoppers and restaurant-goers as a “service to the community” of EG
  - Find success when business owners communicate the parking options to customers—avoids confusion and results in satisfied customers
- Desire to modernize infrastructure, while keeping a distinctly historic look/feel and quaintness
  - General agreement on this
  - Desire for balance between the modern and the traditional
- Positive view of the relative lack of chain stores in EG

Connecting Waterfront and Main Street

- Group is clear that they do not see a particular need for more of a connection between Main Street and the waterfront
  - Okay with keeping the harbor separate from Main Street
  - Each area is regarded as its own entity, with its own character, no need to combine them
  - Unclear on what the connection would even look like, little sense from the group on how to resolve this
  - Content to let the two areas remain distinct, each with its own attractions
- Acknowledgement that sometime restaurants on the waterfront might feel like the “step child” compared to those on Main Street

- Trolleys come up again—to provide access for folks who cannot navigate the hills on foot
  - Costly and complicated, but possibly desirable?
- Provide kiosks with maps? Stationary maps with the downtown area shown to guide people?
  - To show visitors the possible destinations, and to give a sense of the space
- Make the walk up the hills an attraction themselves? Something to do and see as part of visiting the downtown EG area?

Key Takeaways

1. "Resto-mod" approach—keep the historical aesthetic, with modern/updated infrastructure
2. Historical/eclectic look with modern updates
3. Same as above (general consensus on the resto-mod idea)
4. Be patient and push forward, excited to see new developments—"wait and watch"
5. Echoing points 1, 2, 3
6. Keep it realistic, look for points of compromise; stay balanced and grounded

Focus Group 3.

The third group included four participants, the East Greenwich Town Council President, the Executive Director of the E.G. Chamber of Commerce and two business owners whom both own property, run businesses and live on Main

Street. This was a very intimate group where everyone knew each other rather well and there was little disagreement among them. Because of the dynamics of this group, a narrower range of topics were discussed but a deeper discussion ensued with the topics that did come up. When asked about how they feel about the community on Main Street in downtown East Greenwich, the following themes, which echoed the sentiment of the first focus group, emerged with everyone agreeing on the following:

- More maintenance is needed
- Some buildings need painting
- They noticed trash is overflowing and buildings are messy, not pretty
- Aware that represents a growing town
  - But growth is no excuse for not taking care of trash overflowing
- Clean the lanterns more often
- Scary when dark
- Like the energy of the town
- Do not feel that Main Street represents the beautiful town that E.G. is
- Love the town
  - Love participating in parades
- Restaurants have made the town more alive
- Active members of the town
  - Never want to leave East Greenwich
- Enjoy going downtown and connecting/knowing people
- The town feels comfortable and welcoming

- Sense of togetherness wanted for holidays
  - Decorate the same on Christmas and other holidays to bring the community together

Infrastructure

- Pedestrian bridge from Goddard Park to East Greenwich waterfront
- Find location for a parking garage
  - First floor could be retail
- Whole parking issue is perception but not really needed
- Add more benches
- Add more flower beds-town needs to provide them
- Burry the utility lines (if not, make sense of the wires)
  - Make wires more aesthetically pleasing
- Enhance with flowers and planters
- Add seasonal decorations
- Develop the old Post office (at north corner end of Main Street)
- Wish all the buildings and storefronts had conformity
- Install lights on bushes in Town hall
- Enhance the historic nature of the town so that people can connect with its rich history
- Add lighting
- Add trees

Connecting Waterfront and Main Street

- Enhance the boat docks and make the waterfront more walkable

- Kings Street is the choice to connect Main Street to waterfront
- Need coffee shops, etc. on first floor of buildings on Kings Street
- Visual connection so it's all part of the downtown
  - Can't have two business districts
  - Add small businesses along the way, it will feel more connected
  - King Street continues as extention of Main Street
  - Transportation connections (Add a trolly)
  - Aesthetically tie in to Main Street – with similar businesses/looks
  - Install same lamp posts, flower boxes, etc. so it is aesthetically tied to Main Street
- No one wants to make the walk
- Change zoning regulations on Kings Street
  - Let it develop on its own (naturally)
  - Don't force a connection between the waterfront and downtown
  - Then connect later to Main Street (when people want it)
- Possible zoning of opportunity
  - Rezone Kings Street (allowing mixed use)
  - Incentivize (give tax credits to encourage first floor retail use
  - Natural occurrence, then connect King Street to Main Street

Key Takeaways

1. Maintenance-Clean Main Street (garbage, lamp posts, etc)
2. Parking on Main Street is a perceived problem. If find location to build a Garage, first floor would be ideal as retail

3. Connect Main Street to the Waterfront, but naturally
4. Group was clear that they would like to see Main Street connected to the Waterfront but it should occur naturally:

- Rezone
- Incentivize
- Naturally connects

The fourth and final group included six participants, all local residents comprising a local lawyer, local dance instructor, a former East Greenwich School Committee Chairwoman, registered financial advisor and bank personnel trainer in financial investments, and a "professional volunteer." This group was very different than the other three focus groups because they appeared to have a different set of needs and wants. When asked about how they feel about the community on Main Street in downtown East Greenwich, the following themes, which echoed the sentiment of the other focus groups, emerged with everyone agreeing on the following and with one new idea surfacing:

- Old town feeling, historical
- Charming, feels like home
- Lively
- Nice retail mix of old and new shops: Blending of the old with the new-how nice that a town can blend-honor the old and welcome the new
- Safe town
- Sense of pride and community
- Proud sense of ownership

- Issue: more maintenance is needed
- Street lighting: Poor visibility for pedestrians
- Need better sidewalks
- For older signs to keep the character
- Install flags and banners
- One new idea: Add window boxes with a friendly competition to see who has the most interesting and decorative flower boxes

Infrastructure

- Poor street lighting
- Need more parking
- Widen sidewalks and have diagonal parking but on one side of the road only
- Brick sidewalks
- Light up Crosswalk: when step off sidewalk onto crosswalk, let the weight of your foot trigger/light up the crosswalk so that cars can readily see better
- Crosswalks: light up with red, white and blue, rainbow colors, seasonal colors, Christmas colors (using programmable LEDs)
- Water treatment center should be moved away from waterfront

Connecting Main Street to the waterfront

- Want more bridges and tunnels for easy access points to waterfront from different locations on Main Street
- All of the group was very positive towards connecting to the waterfront

- Transient Boat Docking: To allow boats to pull up and dock and be able to walk to Main Street (to bring in more people)
- Install a boardwalk like Hampton Beach with shops and restaurants along the boardwalk (supported by transient docking)
- Train Stop: There used to be a stop in East Greenwich, need it back to help promote tourism
- Connect to waterfront with small loop and larger loop: Connect by King Street and by Queen Street or by Rocky Hollow, for example

Key Takeaways

- Loop Main Street to waterfront back to Main Street with a small loop and a bigger loop (supported by transient docking, bridges, tunnels via King Street, Queen Street, First Ave/Rocky Hollow)
- Love to connect to waterfront but #1 concern is to “pretty-up” and revitalize Main Street (then work on waterfront revival)
- Beautify main Street: Flowers, planters, clever lit crosswalks, new roads and sidewalks to attract people
- Sidewalks are key: Make Main Street more pedestrian friendly while allowing parking on one side of street only (widen sidewalks and narrow the road)

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