



ENHANCING RETAIL IN DOWNTOWN WEST CHESTER (PA)

ULI Philadelphia
Technical Assistance Program

January 11-12, 2012



**Urban Land
Institute**
Philadelphia
Serving Eastern and Central
Pennsylvania, Southern New
Jersey, and Delaware



On Behalf of the Borough of



and



March 15, 2012

Mr. Malcolm Johnstone
Executive Director
West Chester Business Improvement District
P.O. Box 3109
West Chester, PA 19381

Dear Malcolm,

Enclosed is the final report of the ULI Technical Assistance Program (TAP) for West Chester Borough, Chester County, Pennsylvania. On behalf of our colleagues, we thank you and your staff for the background information, your support in arranging and hosting the TAP, and for working with us throughout the January 11-12 sessions.

Your specific questions for the TAP Panel focused on: what could be done to strengthen the retail mix in downtown West Chester; what obstacles were impeding development downtown; the effect of attracting national or regional chains to downtown on current businesses; the impact of increased tourism on retail; design features to consider when attracting chains; and recommendations for best practices and implementation strategies, including parking management. The pending development proposal for the “First Block” around the historic Chester County Courthouse, as well as the impact of high rise mixed-use or residential buildings on the scale and character of downtown development, were also raised as key issues.

The enclosed report addresses these questions. It represents the objective, professional opinion of a panel of experts in a range of fields, including planning and architecture, real estate development, retail and residential market positioning, and parking and wayfinding. The resulting findings and recommendations were summarized at the conclusion of the TAP and are detailed in this report.

We hope that this report will be of benefit to both the BID and the Borough of West Chester. We hope to maintain a dialogue with you as you review the findings and recommendations, and to respond to any questions or concerns. Thank you for your interest in the ULI Philadelphia’s Technical Assistance Program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Richard G. Bickel'.

Richard G. Bickel, FAICP
West Chester TAP Co-Chair

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Margaret B. Sowell'.

Meg B. Sowell, CRE
West Chester TAP Co-Chair

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Executive Summary



On January 11-12, 2012, the Philadelphia District Council of ULI – the Urban Land Institute held a Technical Assistance Program (TAP) in West Chester, PA.

The West Chester Business Improvement District (BID), through the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, requested that the TAP Panel study how to strengthen the retail mix and attract high-quality development downtown -- addressing questions about attraction of national and regional chains, design controls on retail properties, the impact of increased tourism, and strategies for parking management.

The TAP Panel consisted of 14 professionals with expertise in city planning, economic development, real estate development, retail strategies, parking, wayfinding, and architecture.

The TAP opened with a walking tour of downtown West Chester's First Block, including a question-and-answer session with the designated developers of the "Mosteller" site -- the vacant half-acre site located on the corner of Gay and Church Streets. This was followed by a series of small group interviews with more than 50 local stakeholders, representing entities such as the Borough of West Chester and its BID, Chester County, the Chester County Historical Society, Chamber of Commerce, West Chester University, as well as a variety of local property owners, business leaders, preservation organizations and developers. These interviews provided a solid background and community input for the TAP Panel's deliberations and subsequent recommendations.

On the second day, the TAP Panel discussed the initial questions in light of their respective areas of expertise and the information they had gleaned, and presented initial recommendations which are detailed herein.

Through an intense roundtable discussion, the TAP Panel identified several existing challenges that it gleaned from observations and stakeholder interviews. Key challenges included:

- Gaps and vacancies in downtown retail mix.
- Lack of high-quality residential property downtown.
- Perception of conflict between development and community character.
- Inefficient use of parking.
- Interests of stakeholders are not well aligned behind the BID.



View of downtown West Chester

The TAP Panel then formulated recommendations to guide the West Chester BID and the Borough, categorized according to four focus areas of Retail Market, First Block Development, Governance, and Parking and Wayfinding. Key recommendations included:

- Strengthen the retail mix by purposefully attracting qualified proprietors.
- Restore retail vibrancy by increasing downtown residential density.
- Enhance street cleaning services to provide a superior downtown experience.
- Align stakeholder interests by equitably distributing the costs of providing downtown services.
- Improve perception of parking by optimizing utilization of spaces.

The following report explains each of these challenges and recommendations in detail, providing a framework for West Chester to increase the vibrancy of its downtown, maintain its historic character, and welcome beneficial economic development.



Example of current wayfinding signage

Introduction/Background

About ULI

The Urban Land Institute (ULI) was established in 1936 as a nonprofit educational and research institute and is supported by nearly 30,000 members representing all aspects of land use and development disciplines. ULI's mission is to provide responsible leadership in the use of land in order to enhance the total environment and to create and sustain thriving communities.

In 1947, ULI began providing advice to nonprofits and government agencies that needed help in planning and development. Its Advisory Services Panels bring together objective planners, developers, lenders, architects, and related professionals to evaluate a community's needs and make recommendations on implementation. The TAP is a smaller-scale, localized version of this important community outreach service. None of the professionals involved receive monetary compensation for this work, and each one signs an agreement to avoid any conflict of interest.

About the West Chester Business Improvement District

Established in 2000, the West Chester BID funds and implements programs that reflect its three general goals of increasing customer traffic and sales; retaining, expanding, and recruiting viable businesses; and advocating the interests of downtown to government agencies.

The BID's Board of Directors represent a variety of business and organizational interests within the municipality. The West Chester BID is the only one of its kind in Chester County, and was ranked the "most sustainable BID" in the state in a 2011 study by the Center for Rural Pennsylvania.

For this TAP, the BID charged ULI Philadelphia with determining how to best strengthen the retail mix and guide future growth in the downtown, with consideration to West Chester's current retail climate and the effect of proposed developments. The TAP looked at the area of West Chester within the BID's boundaries, with a special focus on the "First Block" at the center of downtown, bordered by Market Street, Church Street, Gay Street, and High Street.

Program Schedule and Objectives

The West Chester TAP was led by Panel Co-Chairs Richard G. Bickel, FAICP and Meg B. Sowell, CRE. West Chester BID Executive Director Malcolm Johnstone provided background materials to brief the Panelists. The BID asked Panelists to address the following specific questions:

- What can be done to strengthen the retail mix downtown?
- What are the obstacles that are impeding good development downtown?
- If national or regional chains are attracted downtown, how will current retailers be affected?

- Are there design features that should be considered when attracting chains (i.e. size, quality, condition, etc.)?
- How will increased tourism affect retail?
- What are other suggestions for strategies, parking management, best practices, etc.?

After a welcome by West Chester Mayor Carolyn T. Comitta, Panelists walked around the First Block, featuring a tour of the Mosteller site by the designated development team of Eli Kahn and Jack Loew. Panelists then divided into teams to conduct a series of 45-minute stakeholder interviews.

By Panelists' request, the second day of the TAP began with an added stakeholder interview with representatives of West Chester University. This session was followed by a roundtable de-briefing, during which Panelists shared the observations gleaned from the walking tour, stakeholder interviews, and the qualitative and quantitative information provided. After agreeing on a set of key challenges, Panelists divided themselves according to their expertise to begin formulating recommendations for each focus area. The entire TAP Panel then reviewed these conclusions in the context of the TAP's initial charge.

At the end of the two-day session, the TAP Panel presented these findings to an audience of stakeholders, elected officials, and community members. Their feedback, along with the TAP Panel's initial findings and recommendations, was used to shape this final report.

Interview Results

The TAP Panel gleaned the following information and perspectives from the more than 50 stakeholder interviews it conducted:

- The downtown needs some additional impetus to continue the renaissance it has enjoyed in recent years.
- Downtown West Chester's existing residential population cannot support additional high-end retail.
- West Chester loses business to Exton and other outside shopping centers because the downtown lacks stores which provide basic everyday needs such as food and clothing.
- Vacant and poorly-maintained storefronts create a negative retail and pedestrian experience downtown.
- Much of the existing downtown building stock is not suited to retail use.
- Disagreement regarding the development proposal for the Mosteller site stems from a concern that it is not consistent with the community's historic character.
- Structures like the Farmers and Mechanics (F&M) Building and the North Wing of the Chester County Courthouse have already set a precedent for downtown development that approaches the Borough's existing height limit.
- The Old Courthouse and the Post Office are two historic downtown buildings that could be the subject of creative re-use proposals.
- Borough politics can be contentious and parochial, and do not always reflect the long-term best interests of West Chester.
- Historical Architectural Review Board (HARB) oversight is generally appreciated as a safeguard of the Borough's character, but in some cases can seem arbitrary or onerous to businesses.
- Although most of West Chester University's 12,000 undergraduates do not live downtown, they do shop, dine, and spend leisure time in the Borough.
- There is little programming for college students in downtown West Chester other than the bar scene, and the trash and disorderly conduct associated with drinking are seen as a problem by Borough officials, residents, and some business owners.
- There is no consistent or formal program to provide for downtown weekend street cleaning.
- Although major institutions have a stake in the downtown, they are not currently active in the funding and oversight of West Chester's BID.
- Poor wayfinding and a lack of communication about parking policies have created the perception of a parking problem.

- Contrary to public perception, there is sufficient street and garage parking in downtown West Chester to support the Borough’s needs.
- The difficulty of finding on-street parking in the downtown has a chilling effect on customers’ propensity to linger and shop at local businesses.



Chester County Courthouse Annex

Key Challenges

The TAP Panel identified the following as key issues which should be addressed in order for West Chester to ensure the long-term viability of its downtown and to strengthen the retail mix, attracting good development, and adopting best practices in downtown management:

Gaps and Vacancies in the Downtown Retail Mix.

West Chester’s retail mix is challenged by gaps in the types of services it provides and by the number of vacancies in its downtown. These factors combine to create a disjointed street experience for residents and visitors alike, thereby limiting the Borough’s appeal as a shopping destination. Whereas the centrally-located First Block should

ideally anchor West Chester’s retail fabric, its current underutilization only contributes to these weaknesses. In terms of variety, downtown retail is dominated by boutique shops that do not serve customers’ daily shopping needs; additionally, the current retail mix does not sufficiently capture the student market at nearby West Chester University.

Lack of High-Quality Residential Property Downtown.

Walkable small towns across the United States are attracting baby boomers and young professionals as choice places to live. In this regard, the Panel remarked on the lack of high-quality housing in West Chester’s downtown as a limiting factor for its growth. Economic data reveals that West Chester and its surrounding communities have retained high-income residents and high property values throughout the recession, so demand for this real estate product is expected to be strong. The TAP Panel identified the development of downtown housing as an opportunity for the Borough to increase its tax base and attract additional retailers by expanding the local customer base.

Perception of Conflict Between Development and Community Character.

The rash of recent and proposed development in downtown West Chester has generated public backlash and spawned a movement to reduce the Borough’s zoning height ordinance from 90 feet down to 60 feet. Although the Panel strongly supports the goal of preserving West Chester’s historic character and small town feel, it concluded that such a change would be a poor instrument for achieving this goal. Since the downtown already

includes buildings that reach the current limit, prohibiting developments on the basis of height alone could endanger the feasibility of worthwhile projects without necessarily offering protection against other poor design features.

On the topic of historic preservation, the Panel concluded from its stakeholder interviews that the Borough's HARB can sometimes be excessively rigid in the application of property maintenance and demolition regulations. These policies can present a challenge to West Chester where time delays and development cost increases impact the value of preserving non-integral historical assets.

Perception of a Parking Problem.

Despite the fact that the Borough has recently significantly invested in the construction of municipal parking garages, the perception persists that downtown parking is inconvenient and limited in supply. Based on stakeholder interviews and its own expertise, the TAP Panel agreed that this perception discourages potential customers from parking downtown and shopping at their leisure. It identified the Borough's antiquated meter system (which accepts only quarters) and parking wayfinding signage as other real impediments

to convenient parking for impulse buyers. Poor communications and relations between Borough's Parking Authority personnel and motorists were reported to be compounding factors in the negative perception of parking in West Chester.

Interests of Stakeholders Not Well-Aligned in Support of the BID.

In the view of TAP Panelists, West Chester's BID has a remarkable track record of success in revitalizing the Borough's downtown. Unlike other BIDs, however, it does not have strong ties to major institutions in the Borough even though West Chester business owners and institutions share a common stake in the growth and prosperity of the downtown.

The Panel agreed that there is an opportunity to better align these interests under the mantle of the BID. Specifically, interviews revealed widespread demand for weekend street and sidewalk cleaning in the downtown. This service is commonly provided by BIDs elsewhere, but West Chester's BID is unable to offer it due to a lack of funding.

In regard to institutions, Panelists agreed that West Chester University's lack of formal ties to the BID was surprising given the significant benefit it derives from its proximity to downtown student housing, shopping, and dining. While interviews indicated that West Chester's nightlife scene is comprised of a more diverse clientele than community members may perceive, student revelers from West Chester University do contribute to the need for weekend street cleaning. Therefore, the TAP Panel saw an opportunity for the University to be more involved in the leadership and funding of the BID in addressing stakeholders' concerns.



View of Municipal parking garage

Recommendations

After interviewing stakeholders and carefully considering the Borough's challenges and opportunities, the TAP Panel responded to its initial charge with a series of recommendations in four key areas: Retail Market, First Block Development, Governance, and Parking and Wayfinding. The following section offers detailed explanations of actions West Chester and the BID might pursue to meet the goals of strengthening the retail mix, attracting good development, and improving the appeal of its downtown.

Retail Market

Primary Recommendations

Strengthen Retail Mix by Purposefully Attracting Qualified Proprietors.

With an affluent customer base that spans diverse age groups, West Chester has the potential to support a wide range of retail development. In order for businesses to be successful, however, recruitment must be purposefully focused on those retail categories which are inadequately represented in the borough. Panelists and stakeholders identified mid-market grocery, clothing, and footwear stores as businesses not well represented in the Borough. As the success of Starbucks and Iron Hill Brewery in West Chester indicates, retail in West Chester can include some diversity among national and regional chains in addition to sole proprietors, although building typologies and the size of the local market still naturally favor small businesses. Where devel-

opments include larger chains, they should do so with careful respect to the town's existing architectural and historic fabric.

Streamline Retail Recruitment with Expert Assistance and Data-Driven Strategies.

With the right tools, a business district can actively guide development according to a retail strategy. Engaging a professional retail recruiter can assist a BID by continuously monitoring the local retail mix, engaging prospective businesses, and organizing promotional campaigns to attract new customers. Alternatively, the BID can reach out to the retail brokerage community for help in courting specific tenants, although this approach is not likely to offer the same breadth and dedication as retaining a professional recruiter. With or without external assistance, the BID can bolster its retail strategy by collecting detailed data -- customer demographics, sales per square foot, and pedestrian counts -- and by maintaining an updated inventory of businesses and vacant properties. This information can be used to concentrate new businesses in optimal areas, to attract new customers, and to craft a persuasive business recruitment package.

Use Urban Design to Create a Consistent Retail Experience.

West Chester's historic architecture and small-town feel are among its greatest competitive advantages in the larger Chester County retail landscape. In order to better understand how to capitalize on these assets, the Borough should appoint a member of the business community with a retail background to its HARB. It should seek to strike a balance between preservation and economic

growth by ensuring that businesses are not overburdened by historic repair requirements. Likewise, permitting some alteration of façades, windows, vestibules, and steps to make them optimal for retail could support downtown entrepreneurship. Finally, the BID should work with the Borough and property owners to devise interim uses for vacant storefronts, filling gaps in the retail fabric with vinyl window wraps, art exhibits, seasonal displays, and short-term “pop-up stores.”

Secondary Recommendations

Several additional steps can support the goal of strengthening West Chester’s downtown retail:

- **Focus on First Block.**
 As the core of the business district, First Block should present a unifying pedestrian experience that entices visitors to explore the rest of downtown West Chester. With the proposed Mosteller development offering an opportunity to connect retail clusters and expand the local customer base, the town should prioritize filling vacancies on this block.
- **Focus on Pilot Shopping Promotions.**
 Focused promotions are an effective means of building the demand needed to support later retail operating hours. Marketing an extended-hours “block party” for one or two of the strongest shopping streets in downtown can attract new customers and business owners’ support.
- **Direct-Market to Customers.**
 Instead of relying solely on publications and word-of-mouth, the business community should develop a medium for directly informing

customers of news and events. Making better use of the existing BID newsletter(s) and mail/email list is one centralized strategy for achieving this goal.

- **Encourage Entrepreneurship.**
 The BID can offer support services to budding businesses in downtown West Chester by facilitating advisory partnerships between experienced retailers and new tenants. The University can be an additional resource in helping to incubate and guide homegrown businesses, following the examples of the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton Small Business Center (<http://wharton.sbdc.upenn.edu>) and Temple University’s Small Business Development Center (<http://sbm.temple.edu/sbdc/>).



View of the “First Block”

First Block Development

Primary Recommendations

Restore Retail Vibrancy by Increasing Downtown Residential Density.

An appropriate mix of residential and commercial development is the foundation of an active downtown. However, the potential expansion of West Chester’s retail market presently is limited by a lack

of middle and up-market housing. Unlike existing student housing, the target demographics for this type of residential development are the two groups that real estate trends indicate are leading the demand for living in walkable downtowns: baby boomers and young professionals. By directing growth to an established town center, increasing the Borough's tax base, and giving small businesses more "feet on the street," downtown residential growth is consistent with sound planning and economic principles. The development proposal for the First Block's Mosteller site – currently zoned mixed-use Town Center -- represents a good first step towards these goals by providing luxury housing and marketable retail space at the center of downtown.

Integrate New Development with Historic Fabric by Scaling Buildings with Respect to Street Character.

Since a variety of building heights and architectural styles are represented in downtown West Chester, the Borough should adopt a contextual approach rather than a "one-size-fits-all" standard for evaluating potential developments. As a general rule, the highest portions of buildings should be concentrated on street corners, while mid-block sections should respect the character and height of surrounding structures. The historic Farmers and Mechanics (F&M) Building at Market and High Streets is an optimal example of how these guidelines can be effectively applied in downtown West Chester. The proposed Mosteller site development should use the F&M Building as a model for its height, massing, and aesthetic, blending into the First Block by complementing nearby architectural styles. Several stakeholders raised the issue about street widths not being a major concern.

Maintain an Active Downtown by Incorporating Public Uses in Iconic Buildings.

The chance to re-use two of the most recognizable historic buildings in downtown constitutes a valuable opportunity for West Chester. The iconic 1846 courthouse, which was retained by Chester County during the sale of the adjacent courthouse complex, is large enough to comfortably accommodate multiple uses. Due to its central location and historical importance, the Borough should work with the County to incorporate a public use in the building to accompany the non-profit office space use that has been proposed there. Uses that might fit well would be a West Chester Visitors Center or as a new location for the Chester County Historical Society Museum. Likewise, the U.S. Post Office building on Gay Street stands out as an ideal space for the location of an urban grocery store to improve the downtown retail mix. If offered with suitable incentives (transfer of property for a nominal fee, subsidized lease), the Post Office's size, central location, loading docks and proximity to structured parking could appeal to Trader Joe's or a store with a similar business model. Developed in this way, both buildings have the potential to restore some of the center of gravity to downtown West Chester that was lost with the exodus of county and judicial functions to outlying sites.

Secondary Recommendation

Enhance Street Cleaning Services to Provide a Superior Downtown Experience.

The TAP Panel's interviews indicated consensus among stakeholders that weekend nightlife produces trash and other refuse that limits the downtown's curbside appeal for other business activities. Although some proprietors sweep their sidewalks

and university student groups organize occasional clean-ups, only a formalized weekend service can maintain the consistent cleanliness standards that West Chester desires for its business district. Where communities have BIDs, street-cleaning frequently falls under their purview of services. As indicated in the Governance and Parking recommendations on the following pages, the West Chester BID can investigate several feasible options for funding a weekly street-cleaning enterprise.

Governance

Primary Recommendations

Improve Communication Among Stakeholders to Build Support for Downtown Initiatives.

West Chester residents, business owners, and elected officials all share the goal of continuing the Borough's renaissance and making it a great place to live, work and play. Even so, a poor understanding about market conditions and local plans can unnecessarily segment public opinion and generate opposition to worthwhile projects. For example, while there is relative consensus that the Borough should work to eliminate vacant storefronts and attract more retail, there is less support for permitting the new development and increasing the supply of downtown housing that are necessary precursors to achieving that end. The West Chester BID could take a more active role in public education and mobilization of the business community to ensure that development proposals with public merit receive well-informed consideration. Key issues to bring to public attention include the role of development in West Chester's future, the appropriate use of his-

toric preservation in maximizing the value of homes and businesses, and information indicating how individual projects will advance long-term stability and improvement goals.

Align Stakeholder Interests by Equitably Distributing the Costs of Providing Downtown Services.

The West Chester BID has earned accolades for its expert planning and financial management but its limited funding leaves it vulnerable to Borough budget cuts -- threatening its long-term ability to respond to changing needs. As a result, the Borough should consider amending the BID's enabling legislation to provide for the inclusion of major institutional stakeholders like West Chester University and Chester County Hospital, possibly as voluntary or cooperating members. In the former case, since the University reaps the benefits of an accessible downtown, Panelists agreed that it would be more equitable for these institutions to assume a larger stake in the leadership and funding of the BID. The leading role assumed by the University of Pennsylvania in the University City District offers a positive example of how such a partnership can be mutually beneficial for the institution and the community. The additional revenue generated by this assessment is one potential source of funding for the street cleaning services recommended above. An assessment paid to the BID by the University, for example, is one potential source of funding for the street cleaning services recommended above.

Parking and Wayfinding

Primary Recommendations

Improve Perception of Parking by Optimizing Utilization of Spaces.

When it comes to parking, perception is reality. Since West Chester's investment in parking garages has provided more than enough spaces downtown, the persistent public perception that there is insufficient parking clearly indicates that the Borough's parking problem is one of wayfinding and optimal utilization rather than quantity. Currently, limited on-street parking is fully occupied during business hours while abundant garage parking nearby is underutilized. This creates a situation in which potential impulse shoppers are discouraged from stopping in West Chester due to the perceived difficulty of finding a parking space.

To reverse this situation, the Borough should increase the price and shorten the time limits for on-street parking only, thereby providing an incentive for those who can use garages to do so while also leaving street parking available for high turnover.

Invest in Wayfinding to Make West Chester an Attractive and Accessible Destination.

The other half of the solution to West Chester's parking problem consists of directing motorists to the garages where they can park affordably for long periods of time. The BID has already taken steps toward this goal by prominently noting the locations of municipal garages on downtown maps in the West Chester Downtown Guide and the *West Chester Fig* magazine. Since first-time visitors and impulse shoppers are unlikely to have these re-

sources, the Borough should make a corresponding investment in larger street signage which directs drivers to parking facilities from the moment they enter town. While West Chester already has decorative street banners and a good network of historic interpretive signs, it should complete its branding campaign by providing distinctive gateways and pedestrian wayfinding signage in the downtown.



Current parking payment kiosk

Secondary Recommendations

A few additional actions could help West Chester make the most of its assets by improving pedestrian and vehicle accessibility:

Invest in Modern Payment Technologies.

While the perception that West Chester has a shortage of parking spaces is incorrect, there is a legitimate need to modernize parking payment systems downtown. Unlike municipal garages, the Borough's metered parking accepts only quarters, and therefore does not reflect the diversity of payment methods now used by motorists. The Borough's efforts to provide real-time parking availability to consumers' smart phones is an excellent example of how technology can make a visit to West Chester more convenient and compelling.

Improve the Image of Parking in West Chester.

While West Chester's Parking Services and Enforcement Department has dedicated and well-informed staff, the Panel's interviews revealed a serious lack of communication between the Borough and its

citizens on parking policy. Parking Services should seek to improve its image by initiating a public information campaign, experimenting with parking promotions and sponsoring community events.

Market Parking as an Asset for New Development.

Given how construction of parking adds to the cost of a project, downtown West Chester's surplus of parking is an asset for prospective developers and downtown residents. The Borough should encourage development that increases walkability, promotes usage of existing parking, and integrates new parking into mixed use buildings rather than having additional stand-alone parking structures.

Make Parking Pay for West Chester.

Parking is currently a significant source of revenue that will increase if the Borough raises on-street prices to encourage use of municipal garages. It should consider designating this funding stream for projects that reinvest in downtown, including wayfinding upgrades, façade and sidewalk improvements, and other streetscape enhancements.

Conclusions

West Chester is a historic Borough and County seat that has evolved to become a destination community in the Philadelphia region. With the construction of its first hotel, the addition of 20,000 square feet of Class A office space, and the debut of its own shopping and dining magazine, it is well-positioned to enjoy a renaissance. Even so, the TAP Panel identified several challenges that West Chester must address in order to capitalize on this

momentum, including gaps in its retail fabric, a lack of high-quality downtown housing, inefficient use of parking, and insufficient stakeholder mobilization.

The TAP Panel has proposed several action steps that would address these issues, including developing downtown housing, strategically recruiting new retail, and improving wayfinding and accessibility. It has also suggested ways to facilitate a higher level of cooperation between the public sector and stakeholders who are invested in the long-term success of the downtown.

As such, the details provided in this report offer a framework for bringing West Chester a more vibrant downtown, a new growing community of residents invested in its wellbeing, and a new era of growth and prosperity.

Community Stakeholders Interviewed

Victor Abdala, Co-Owner, Stancato Abdala.

Ron Bailey, Commissioner, Chester County Commission.

Christopher Blakey, Vice President, Univest; BID Board of Directors.

Jason Birl, Director, West Chester Redevelopment Authority.

Deborah Brandt, Founder, Moxie House-Fig-West Chester Publications.

Dr. Matthew J. Bricketto, VP for Student Affairs, West Chester University.

Holly Brown, Councilwoman, West Chester.

Bruce Cavin, Partner, Architectural Alliance.

Karen Cavin, Owner, The 5 Senses.

Kiki Comerford, Owner, Kiki Boutique.

Patrick Comerford, Owner, Jane Chalfant Inc.

Carolyn T. Comitta, Mayor, Borough of West Chester.

Tom Comitta, President, Tom Comitta & Associates.

Robin Conlon, Owner, FastFrame.

Ryan Costello, Chester County Commissioner.

Xavius daSilva-Thompson, Director, Borough of West Chester Parking Authority.

Katie Doherty, President, Chamber of Commerce of Greater West Chester.

Jane Dorchester, Historian, Jane Dorchester Architectural.

Terence Farrell, Chester County Commissioner.

Bob Grabus, Development Advisor, Economic Development Council of Chester County.

Fred Gusz, Member, BID Board of Directors.

Matthew Holiday, Chief of Staff, PA State Rep. Dan Truitt (R-156).

Malcolm Johnstone, Executive Director, West Chester Business Improvement District.

Cassandra Jones, Borough Councilmember.

Eli Kahn, President, E. Kahn Development Corporation.

Nina Kelly, Director of Communications, Chester County Conference & Visitors Bureau.

Jack R. Loew, President, J. Loew & Associates.

Rob Lukens, Ph.D., President, Chester County Historical Society.

Blair Mahoney, Executive Director, Chester County Conference & Visitors Bureau.

Mary Manning, Owner, Visual Expansion Gallery.

Richard K. May, Vice President, RKM Advisors; Member, BID Board of Directors.

Ernie McNeely, Manager, Borough of West Chester.

Adam Munro, Regional Sales Manager, Inns of Distinction, West Chester Hotel Warner.

Lance J. Nelson, Managing Partner, MacElree-Harvey Law.

Jordan Norley, Borough Councilmember.

Ray Ott, Principal, Ray Ott & Associates; Member, BID Board of Directors.

Mark G. Pavlovich, Ph.D., VP for Advancement, West Chester University.

Timothy Phelps, Executive Director, Transportation Management Association of Chester County.

Rachel Phillips, Customer Relations, Moxie House-Fig-West Chester Publications.

Steve Pinkson, Principal, SP&O-Graphic Design.

Greg Radford, Principal, Greg Radford Architects; Member, BID Board of Directors.

Mike Reese, VP Branch Manager, Fulton Bank.

Sandra Ripper, Owner, Sunset Hill Jewelers & Fine Arts Gallery.

Mary Ann Rossi, Attorney, MacElree-Harvey Law.

Bill Scott, Borough of West Chester Councilmember.

Gary Smith, Director, Economic Development Council of Chester County.

Roy Smith, Chairman, The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, National Trust of Historic Preservation.

Tony Stancato, Co-Owner, Stancato Abdala.

Carol Tjaden, Owner, Ruby Slippers Boutique.

Jackie Van Grofski, CIC Associate, Arthur Hall Insurance; Member, BID Board of Directors.

Thomas Walsh, Realtor, Century 21 Alliance.

Adam Wetzel, Owner, SideBar Restaurant; Member, BID Board of Directors.

Kathleen Wileczek, CPA, Accountant, Maillie Falconero CPA; Member, BID Board of Directors.

Mark Yoder, Executive Vice President, Chamber of Commerce of Greater West Chester.

Mike Yoder, Former Mayor, Borough of West Chester.

Scott Zukin, Vice President, Zukin Realty.

Stanford Zukin, President, Zukin Realty.

Panelists

Jackie Balin

Associate, Fameco Real Estate

Ms. Balin joined Fameco Real Estate, L.P. in 2010 as a sales associate specializing in both Landlord and Tenant Representation in Center City, Philadelphia. She currently represents Crumbs Bake Shop, Panera Bread, Walmart, LA Fitness, Susquehanna Bank, and Checkers. Her landlord assignments include AMC Delancey, Dranoff Properties, APF Properties, Core Management, and RD Management. Prior to joining Fameco, Ms. Balin was a Leasing Associate for Boca Raton-based Investments Limited, where she represented a portfolio of over two million square feet of commercial space in the Palm Beach County market. Ms. Balin graduated from Washington University in St. Louis.

Richard G. Bickel, FAICP

Director, Planning Division, Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission

Mr. Bickel is an urban planner with more than 40 years of practical experience in local government, county, and regional land use and transportation planning. As Director, Planning Division, at the DVRPC, he manages the work of more than 50 staff involved in Smart Growth and Intermodal Planning studies, reports and technical analyses. In 2005, he received a Governor's Award for Local Government Excellence from the PA Department of Community and Economic Development. He has also been recognized by the Planning Accreditation Board as the AICP Outstanding Site Visitor (practitioner) for 2009, and was elected to the AICP College of Fellows in 2010. He has a B.A. in Sociology and Master of Urban and Regional Planning from the University of Pittsburgh. He previously served as Director of Long Range Planning at SEPTA and Chief of Community Planning and Associate Director, Transportation Planning, at the Montgomery County Planning Commission.

Philip Dawson

Associate, Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission

Mr. Dawson is a city planner specializing in community and economic development. He currently works at the DVRPC's Office of Smart Growth, where he helps administer the region's Classic Towns program. Mr. Dawson is a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, where he obtained his Bachelor's Degree in Urban Studies and Spanish, and an Accelerated Master's in City Planning, during which time he interned for the Philadelphia Zoning Code Commission and Philadelphia City Planning Commission, and served as the Chair of Penn's Urban Studies Undergraduate Advisory Board. He also served as the inaugural chair of the SEPTA Youth Advisory Council from 2009-2011. Mr. Dawson is a contributor to an upcoming publication on progressive real estate development.

W. Joseph Duckworth

Partner, Arcadia Land Company

Mr. Duckworth is a partner at Arcadia Land Company, a leading developer of new urbanist and conservation development communities, and President of Bryn Eyre, Inc., where his current projects include a 3,000-acre new town development. Mr. Duckworth was previously named National Builder of the Year by Professional Builder magazine and "Entrepreneur of the Year in Real Estate" by Philadelphia Business Journal. He has served as Chair of the Chester County Planning Commission, and currently sits on the Board of Trustees of the Natural Lands Trust and the Board of Overseers for the University of Pennsylvania School of Design. Mr. Duckworth is also a professional lecturer who has served as a faculty member of the Mayor's Institute on City Design. He has a B.S. from Carnegie-Mellon University and an M.B.A. from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania.

Virginia Gehshan, FSEGD

Principal, Cloud Gehshan Associates

Ms. Gehshan works with clients in environmental identity, architectural signage, and wayfinding. She teaches in the Industrial Design department at the University of the Arts and has lectured nationwide. Ms. Gehshan graduated cum laude from Cornell University with a B.S. in Design and Environmental Analysis. Along with Jerome Cloud, she received the 2010 Fellow Award from the Society for Environmental Graphic Design. As past president and board member of SEG, Ms. Gehshan has played a central role in the development of the profession, and has led many award-winning projects for signage and wayfinding, interpretive systems, digital displays, and map design.

Jacob A. Gordon, Esq.

Vice President of Policy and Downtown Initiatives,
Cooper's Ferry Partnership

Mr. Gordon graduated from University of California, San Diego in 1999 with a Bachelor of Communications and received his law degree from University of Pennsylvania in 2003. A native of New Jersey, he moved to Camden in 2007 after almost three years in Los Angeles as an attorney with O'Melveny & Myers. Since 2007, Mr. Gordon has served as a project manager and General Counsel for Cooper's Ferry Partnership. In 2011, he assumed the Vice Presidency and was appointed Executive Director of the Camden Special Services District. He currently oversees numerous initiatives related to the downtown, including waterfront special events, policy initiatives, and housing initiatives, and has worked to implement a network of connected pedestrian and bicycle access improvements known as the Camden GreenWay, which would offer safe non-motorized transportation options for residents and visitors.

Timothy H. Haahs, PE, AIA

President/CEO, TimHaahs Engineers/Architects

Mr. Haahs serves as President of Timothy Haahs & Associates, Inc., a multi-disciplined engineering and architectural firm specializing in master-planning for campuses, urban and high density areas, and transit related projects, and providing design services for parking and mixed-use buildings. His approach to master-planning high density and urban areas is to integrate parking solutions with the pedestrian experience, creating active and vibrant "people places." Tim holds a B.S. and M.S. in Civil/Urban Engineering from the University of Pennsylvania, and later became a Licensed Architect in Maryland. He was recognized as Entrepreneur of Year by Ernst & Young in the Real Estate and Construction category, Philadelphia Region, in 2006. He is currently serving in the capacity of Director of the International Parking Institute and was recently named Delaware Valley Engineer of the Year.

Susan M. Huffman, AICP

Owner and Principal, S. Huffman Associates

Ms. Huffman has been principal of S. Huffman Associates since 1982. The firm assists public and private clients in determining the market demand for proposed development projects in cities and inner-ring suburbs. Its areas of special expertise include market studies for neighborhood commercial revitalization and for market rate housing in areas where revitalization is beginning. The firm has worked throughout the MidAtlantic region and has had extensive experience in revitalizing areas of Lower North Philadelphia. Ms. Huffman has an M.C.P. from the University of Pennsylvania and a B.A. from Smith College.

Richard Linderman, AIA, NCARB, LEED-AP
The Linderman Group Architects, Inc.

Mr. Linderman, who formed his company in 1980, is an architect registered in PA, NJ, NY, OH and CA, and is certified by the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards. He has more than 50 years' experience with commercial development design with projects ranging from restaurants to architectural coordination of the \$400 million Philadelphia International Airport expansion. He has been certified as an accessibility plans examiner by the International Building Code Council and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Mr. Linderman is a graduate of Carnegie Mellon University. He is actively engaged in many organizations, including the Chester Business Association, Nether Providence Historic Commission, the American Institute of Architects, Philadelphia Design Advocacy Group and the Delaware County Coastal Zone Task Force.

Sarah Peck
Principal, Progressive Housing Ventures, LLC.

Sarah Peck is President and owner of Progressive Housing Ventures, a real estate development company based in Malvern, PA that builds new housing in older suburban locations. Previously, Ms. Peck served as President and CEO of Rouse/Chamberlin Homes, where she oversaw the development of nearly 2,000 homes in 20 communities. She also served for 10 years as a Director of the Federal Home Loan Bank of Pittsburgh and was the founding president of the Housing Partnership of Chester County. Ms. Peck has written and spoken about suburban infill development as a contributing author to ULI and the Tri-state Real Estate Journal and as an Adjunct Professor at West Chester University. Ms. Peck received a B.A. from Yale University in 1978 magna cum laude and a Masters in Urban Planning from the London School of Economics in 1979.

Peter J. Porretta, AIA, LEED AP, BD+C
Principal Architect, Lighthouse Architecture

Mr. Porretta brings a unique sensibility to architectural design. Growing up in a family construction business, he learned early to appreciate the full scope of talents needed to execute an architectural concept through the challenges of the construction process to completion. Mr. Porretta holds a Bachelor of Architecture Degree from Clemson University and an M.B.A. from Rowan University. He is a National Council of Architectural Registration Boards certified Architect, a Construction Specifications Institute Certified Construction Specifier, a CSI Certified Construction Contract Administrator and a United States Green Building Council Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Accredited Professional.

Eileen T. Reilly
Retail Recruiter, Chestnut Hill Business Improvement District

With more than 20 years of experience in various areas of marketing and sales, Ms. Reilly assumed the post of Retail Recruiter for the Chestnut Hill, PA Business Improvement District in 2010 and is responsible for implementing the first fully developed and targeted retail recruiting program in the City of Philadelphia. In the past two years, the Chestnut Hill commercial district has seen a 25 percent decrease in vacancy. Since 2010, there has been a 35 percent increase in restaurants and a 16 percent increase in retail. Ms. Reilly has acted as a new business liaison and initiated several creative marketing initiatives to support the retail corridor. She holds a B.A. in English from the University of Scranton.

Adam M. Silverman
Attorney, Cozen O'Connor

Mr. Silverman joined Cozen O'Connor's Philadelphia office in 2009 in the Business Law Department. A member of the Real Estate Practice Group, he concentrates his practice in the area of commercial real estate and related transactions. Mr. Silverman has represented regional and national developers in a wide array of matters, including the development of high-rise office towers, shopping centers, warehouses, and mixed use developments, as well as portfolio acquisitions, joint ventures, and merger transactions. He also represents lenders and borrowers in matters ranging from structured project finance to secured and securitized loan transactions. Mr. Silverman is admitted to the PA and NJ Bars and is a member of the American Bar Association, the Philadelphia Bar Association. He earned his undergraduate degree from George Washington University and his law degree from Temple University.

Margaret B. ("Meg") Sowell, CRE
President, Real Estate Strategies, Inc.

Ms. Sowell has nearly 40 years of experience in economic development and real estate. During her career, she has been a government official, private developer, and advisor to public agencies and private companies. She has prepared economic development plans and market feasibility studies for cities, redevelopment areas, business incubators and Transit Revitalization Investment District areas. Ms. Sowell recently prepared the market analysis for a mixed-use, mixed-income development located at 9th and Berks Streets, adjacent to the Temple SEPTA station. Several years ago, she was market analyst on a consulting team that prepared a master plan for Asociación de Puertorriqueños en Marcha's target area.



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