Downtown Assessment: Ipswich, Massachusetts

January 2014

The Town of Ipswich Department of Planning and Development contracted with FinePoint Associates to conduct an assessment of the retail environment in the downtown in the Fall of 2013. The purpose of this study is to evaluate how conditions in downtown Ipswich compare to the benchmarks of successful downtowns and to provide suggestions for steps that can be taken to improve commercial vibrancy. This assessment included: several visits to the downtown for observation and data collection, comparative analysis with other downtowns, best practices research, a survey conducted at the 2013 Chowder Fest, conversations with downtown business owners and staff, and meetings with Planning and Development Director, Glenn Gibbs, Assistant Planner, Kathy Connor, and Town Manager, Robin Crosbie, for insight and guidance.

FinePoint Associates has identified several key factors that contribute to the success of a downtown commercial district as illustrated in the diagram below. In the following report, we have made observations regarding the downtown in each of these categories and provided recommendations for strategies to be considered.

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Appendix A: The Ipswich Visitor Center Gallery and Gift Shop Proposal

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Category 1: Business Mix

Benchmark

A. The business district has a critical mass and good mix of merchandise and service offerings, comparable with other desirable downtowns.

Ipswich

Customer Satisfaction with Offerings: When it comes to the mix of businesses in downtown, it appears that there is some room for improvement. In a recent survey conducted by FinePoint Associates at the 2013 Chowder festival, customers expressed somewhat marginal satisfaction with the variety of businesses in downtown. Business mix received an average satisfaction rating of 3.7 (out of 5), showing that customers were less satisfied with business offerings than they were with atmosphere or the ability to find parking.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Customer Satisfaction Average Rating¹</th>
<th>(scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Atmosphere, a place where you want to spend time</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to find parking</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mix of businesses you would like to visit</td>
<td>3.7</td>
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According to planning department staff, residents frequently express the desire for a bakery in downtown. Two survey respondents, unsolicited, also added comments about their desire for a bakery.

Destination Potential 10+10+10 Rule:

Some research² has indicated that for a downtown to be a destination, the minimum critical mass required in 3 blocks is: 10 places that serve food, 10 destination retail shops and 10 places open after 6 PM (preferably entertainment). Ipswich does not meet this critical mass threshold and the restaurants and retail establishments are fairly spread out rather than concentrated. Only a small percentage of establishments are open after 6 PM.

Business Density: We compared Ipswich to four other downtowns for analysis purposes. Downtown Ipswich has a smaller number of businesses per resident than Newburyport and Manchester, the same number as Salem and more than Winchester.

Retail Density: Downtown Ipswich has less retail businesses per capita than all of the other downtowns except for Winchester. For example, the population of Ipswich is 25% less than Newburyport, however, Downtown Ipswich has less than ½ the amount of retail businesses.

¹ Results are based upon 60 surveys completed October 19, 2013.
² Study of 400 downtowns, Destination Development International
Business Offerings: Compared to all of the other downtowns, Ipswich has less of the following business types per capita:
- Clothing & Accessories (e.g., women’s clothing, shoe stores, children’s clothing)
- Furniture & Furnishings (although Ipswich has antique furnishings classified as Misc. Retail)

Compared to 3 of the other downtowns, Ipswich has less of the following business types per capita:
- Food & Beverage Stores
- Health & Personal Care Stores (e.g., beauty/cosmetics, health supplements, drugstores)
- Professional, Scientific & Technical Services

Compared to 2 of the other downtowns, Ipswich has less of the following business types per capita:
- Electronics
- Sporting Goods, Hobby & Books
- Arts, Entertainment & Recreation (e.g., fitness, recreation, performing arts, theaters)
- Real Estate, Finance, Insurance, Health Care
### Benchmark

B. Business clusters offer customers opportunity for comparative shopping, crossover shopping and market segment targeting.

### Ipswich

Downtown Ipswich has several existing and burgeoning business clusters that could potentially be expanded; examples follow.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Existing/Potential Cluster</th>
<th>Related Businesses/Activities</th>
<th>Comments/Potential Complementary Businesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Restaurants &amp; Entertainment</td>
<td>Several restaurants including: Greek and Italian fine-dining, bistro featuring local rum and ale, Asian, pub, pizza, coffee &amp; ice cream shop, a frozen yogurt shop coming soon and more.</td>
<td>Most developed cluster -- variety of cuisine and price points, some offer live entertainment, and Brew pub scheduled to open next year. Additional entertainment options, browsing retail, joint promotion and outdoor dining options might help to create more of a restaurant scene. Complementary restaurant options might include: health-focused/organic, Mexican, farm-to-table, sandwich/salad café, bakery café, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women Specialty Retail and Services</td>
<td>Foreign Affair, Gifts 4 Soul, jeweler, nail salons, hair salons, spa services</td>
<td>Lacks depth in women’s clothing and accessories; these types of businesses often do better if comparative and crossover options are available (e.g., Newburyport has 7 women’s clothing stores and 2 shoe stores)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreation</td>
<td>River, canoeing/kayaking nearby, cyclists coming through town, Crane’s Beach, Ipswich Cycle Bike Store</td>
<td>Sporting goods, athletic wear store, outdoor store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children &amp; Families</td>
<td>Toy store, library, Zumi’s coffe &amp; ice cream shop, frozen yogurt coming, kids instruction (martial arts, dance), schools, balloons.party supplies at gift shop</td>
<td>Children’s clothing, high end children’s consignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Improvement</td>
<td>Paint store, wallpaper, hardware, furnishings, lumberyard</td>
<td>Home furnishings, accents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day-to-Day Errands</td>
<td>Banks, post office, Zumi’s coffee shop, Family Dollar, hardware, library</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Potential Strategies and Activities to Consider

1. Business Mix Strategies

1.1. Encourage additional business development in downtown.
   1.1.1. Create promotional materials (suitable for hard copy and digital transmission) that market the
downtown as a good place to do business, provides information about trade area demographics,
attractions and visitors, and promotes the image of a business-friendly town. Distribute materials to
Realtors, building owners and distribute through Visitor Center, Town website, Cultural website, etc.

1.1.2. Explore potential to create business incubator, co-working space or makerspace in downtown,
(particularly in area near Ipswich Ale) to encourage location of start-up companies. Ipswich has many
ingredients that might make it a good location to attract start-up companies –attractive community,
near the ocean, good commuter train access, schools, etc.

1.1.3. Develop an agreement among building owners/Realtors
to send an e-mail blast to downtown
stakeholders/business owners when space becomes available in the downtown so they can reach out to
and make referrals to appropriate tenants.

1.2. Promote greater density of retail (and restaurants).
   1.2.1. Establish zoning that prioritizes first floor space in the core of the district for retail and restaurants.
   (One option might be to allow retail and restaurants by right and allow office only by special
permit.)

1.2.2. Explore the potential for the “Made in Ipswich Concept” venture. A resident recently floated a
proposal to the planning department to develop a “Made in Ipswich” enterprise. Encourage and assist
this individual to develop a more comprehensive feasibility study and implementation plan for this
endeavor. Consider how this concept might be combined with tasting room and brewery tours at
Ipswich Ale, which the company is obligated to conduct at least nine times per week. *The Sam Adams
Tasting and Tour Center, a small brewery facility in Jamaica Plain, attracts 75,000 visitors per year. (Potential
option for the state’s Downtown Initiative Grant in FY15.)*

1.3. Promote the development of entertainment venues and encourage businesses to provide live
entertainment.
   1.3.1. Continue the efforts begun in 2013 to provide venues for live music and dancing including the coffee
house at Meeting House Green and the weekly outdoor dancing on the Riverwalk on Tuesdays
(Downtown Tuesdays).

1.3.2. Continue to pursue opportunity for Town Hall adaptive reuse project (property that was sold by the
Town for re-purposing as an arts and retail center including a theater, but is now in litigation because
the development has not taken place as planned). Explore options to advance the original proposal or
developing new plan/recruiting new developer.

1.4. Encourage higher density and concentration of businesses comparable to smart growth planning
principles.
   1.4.1. Review current zoning to determine if flexibility exists to achieve desired density. Consider minimum
height and density requirements as deemed appropriate.
Category 2: Market Relationship

Benchmark

A. The community’s tourism activities are aligned with the downtown in a mutually supportive relationship. A good downtown supports tourism and tourism supports the downtown. (Shopping and dining in a pedestrian-friendly environment is the top diversionary activity for tourists.)

Ipswich

Ipswich has several attractions that generate visitors including:
- Ipswich Visitor Center (6,000 + visitors per year)
- Heard and Whipple Museum (estimated 1,500 per year)
- First Period Home Tours
- Crane’s Beach (250,000 + annual visitors, 5 miles from downtown)
- Foote Brothers Canoe Center (3 miles from downtown)
- Wolf Hollow Sanctuary (2 miles from downtown)
- Russell Orchards (2 miles from downtown)
- Marini’s Farm (2 miles from downtown)

Some downtown businesses (particularly restaurants) are likely capitalizing on the visitor traffic generated by these attractions. However, there could be a stronger promotional link between these attractions and downtown. Downtown businesses could be more assertive in marketing to visitors of these attractions. And local economic development benefits would increase if promoting the downtown and encouraging local spending was part of the underlying policies and goals of the organizations that operate the attractions.

There is evidence that the Town, in the past year, has begun a conscious effort to bring visitors into the downtown and encourage them to stay, but more needs to be done on that front.

In particular, the Visitor Center is not used as effectively as it could be to promote downtown businesses.

Benchmark

B. Effective strategies are in place to make consumers (local residents and visitors) aware of the shopping, dining and service options available in downtown. Information is readily discoverable in cyberspace.

Ipswich

Downtown Ipswich has a fairly good online presence.

- There are several websites that promote the Town of Ipswich including: IpswichVisitorCenter.org, Town.Ipswich.ma.us, IpswichArts.com, HistoricIpswich.com and others. Downtown businesses are listed on several of these sites including the Ipswich Visitor Center and the Ipswich Arts websites.

- Many downtown businesses also are visible through national travel and restaurant sites. For example . . .
  - TripAdvisor.com – lists 39 restaurants and 1 lodging establishment and 10 Things to Do in Ipswich
  - Yelp.com – has listings for approximately 400 businesses located close to the center of town.

- Most of the businesses have their own website.
However, information pertaining to the downtown is not as easily discoverable on the Internet as it could be.

- Although downtown businesses are listed on local websites that promote the Town, it is not clear how comprehensive or up-to-date these listings are.

- The downtown could benefit from being featured more prominently as a **shopping and dining destination** on the local websites.

- There appears to be some google business listing errors and, at the time of this report writing, there is a google error that is attaching the All About Ipswich.com website (which refers to Ipswich, England) with businesses in Ipswich.

- Although, many downtown businesses have websites, it does not appear that many of the businesses actively use other social media (i.e., Twitter, facebook) to communicate with potential customers.

The lack of “demarcation” and way-finding signage may also be inhibiting potential customers from understanding all that the downtown has to offer. The composition (extent and boundaries) of the downtown district is not clearly delineated. It appears that many would-be customers do not appreciate that downtown Ipswich extends beyond the short stretch on Market Street as illustrated by a comment posted on the Internet which said: “downtown Ipswich, all 2 blocks of it”. There are no visual clues to inform the user that there is more to see if they turn the corner.

There is a very good chance that potential customers are not aware of all of the offerings that are available in the downtown. There is no comprehensive up-to-date directory describing businesses by category and no business directional signage.

Ipswich has several unique elements that might pique interest in downtown but are not obvious to people passing through, such as the Riverwalk and the fact that Ipswich has their own microbrewery and rum distillery.

**Benchmark**

C. There is a lively schedule of events in and near the downtown that successfully generate foot traffic, create a bond between residents and the district, make potential customers aware shopping and dining options, & encourage patronage at local businesses.

**Ipswich**

There are many events held in and near the downtown including Downtown Tuesdays, farmers market, art show, chowder festival, Halloween Happenings, Santa Claus & Christmas parade, first period home tours, and more. Many new events have been recently introduced under the direction of the new Recreation and Cultural Director. With strategic planning and coordination with business owners, these events hold the promise of having a significant potential economic impact on the downtown.

The survey conducted by FinePoint at the 2013 Chowder Fest showed several positive impacts.

- The event generated foot traffic and attracted attendees with disposable income.

- Approximately 50% of the respondents reported household incomes over $125,000.

- The event attracted visitors from beyond the
local area. 41% of the respondents live outside of zip code 01938.

- The event helped increase awareness of local businesses. 34% said they noticed business in the area they did not previously know were located there.

- A large percentage of attendees visited downtown businesses. 60% of the attendees named specific downtown businesses they visited before or planned to visit after the event. The most frequently mentioned businesses included: Zumi’s, Coastal Green Grocer (had a booth at the event), Choate Bridge Pub, Green Elephant and Family Dollar.

On the other hand, a few retail business owners I spoke with did not feel that the Ipswich events have had much impact on increasing the patronage of downtown businesses. Comments regarding past events included the following: “When events occur at EBSCO parking lot, people do not venture into the district”, “Downtown Tuesdays doesn’t seem connected to the businesses”, “Last year Santa Claus was dropped off at the main intersection but the parade went up Green Street to Town Hall away from the downtown businesses”, “I only got 3 customers during the Christmas stroll; I am not sure if the problem was with the type of event or the marketing.”

It is clear that there is great momentum with many with new and recurring events; some fine-tuning could increase the economic impact. It does not appear that there is sufficient coordination between event planners and downtown business owners to attain the maximum potential economic impact. The more that downtown is viewed not only as a venue to hold an event but as a shopping destination the better. And, the more that the location and timing of events can be orchestrated with business marketing efforts so as to boost downtown sales the better. I believe that the economic impact of the events could be increased if local businesses were more proactive about capitalizing on the opportunities and if event planners fully embraced the promotion of downtown as a goal of the events. That said, the activities initiated in 2013 through the efforts of the Town’s new Recreation and Cultural Director (e.g., coffee house at Meeting House Green and Downtown Tuesdays) have the potential, as they grow, to have a noticeable impact on patronage of local businesses, especially restaurants.

### Potential Strategies and Activities to Consider

2. **Market Relationship Strategies**

   2.1. **Create stronger promotional links between tourism efforts, attractions and downtown**

      2.1.1. Facilitate the development of a joint tourism/downtown business entity (task force, committee) to create a unified vision and insure coordination and mutual support between entities working on tourism/visitor attractions and downtown businesses

      2.1.2. Use the Visitor Center to market the downtown, and thus support the efforts of private business.

         2.1.2.1. Create downtown marketing materials for distribution at the Visitor Center (e.g., map illustrating all of downtown, directory, kiosk).

         2.1.2.2. Explore the idea of creating some kind of a product showcase where businesses could highlight products & offerings. (See proposal for Ipswich Visitor Center and Gallery in Appendix A.)

      2.1.3. Downtown merchants should work cooperatively with each other and the Town to attract visitors into the downtown.
2.1.4. Consider opportunities to route the foot traffic from the commuter train to the Explorer Shuttle through the downtown.

2.1.5. Businesses should work with historic tour providers to include a drive-by/drive-thru of the downtown as part of the tour to acquaint visitors with the downtown area and potentially entice them to visit businesses area after the tour (e.g., businesses could provide promotional offers/coupons via the tours).

2.1.6. Create a **Cultural District** that incorporates existing and to-be-developed historic, artistic and recreational activities and uses in and the downtown. Explore the potential for obtaining a Massachusetts Cultural District Designation for the downtown.

2.2. **Make Downtown Ipswich and information about businesses easier to find in cyberspace**

2.2.1. Sponsor a workshop or series of workshops on how businesses can effectively use social media (facebook, Twitter) and the Internet to market their businesses and maintain customer base.

2.2.2. Hire an intern to review Downtown Ipswich web presence, make sure businesses are on google maps, correct google errors, and make suggestions for updates to ipswicharts.com website and/or creation of new downtown website or addition to town website.

2.2.3. Feature Downtown Ipswich under the “Attraction” Section of the Ipswich Visitor Center Website (IpswichVisitorCenter.org) to entice potential visitors to explore the downtown. Include a write up about the downtown that highlights it as a shopping and dining destination. This should present downtown as a place to visit -- a destination. Elsewhere on the site, there are individual business listings; however, it is not clear which of these businesses are in the downtown. It would be helpful to highlight the downtown as a walkable commercial district where visitors could come to enjoy strolling, browsing, eating and getting a great view of the river.

2.2.4. Add quick link on the Town website to the Ipswich Visitor Center website (IpswichVisitorCenter.org) which keeps an updated calendar of events and has numerous links to relevant sites including HistoricIpswich.org. This action should help drive traffic to the Visitor Center website and increase the website’s standing and visibility in google searches. The Town website should also link to the websites currently linked to the Visitor Center website.
2.3. Effectively communicate information about the downtown and available shopping, dining & and service options to potential customers when they are in the vicinity
2.3.1. Create kiosks in strategic locations that include a map of the district illustrating the entire commercial area that comprises downtown and provides information about the businesses by category, akin to a mall directory. The train station is a key location for a kiosk or at least a large attractive map on the waiting platform wall. (After completing a review of the draft version of this assessment report, the Town submitted a $10,000 grant request to the state’s Downtown Initiative Program for funds to design a kiosk and other way-finding signs.)

2.3.2. Develop a walking tour and map of downtown that could include business listings and be distributed at the Visitor Center

2.4. Create stronger links between events and downtown businesses
2.4.1. Create a policy that encourages events to promote local businesses and local purchasing. Perhaps a policy statement or memo of understanding could be created and included as part of the process to obtain a permit for the events asking the event planners to make efforts to promote the downtown as appropriate. Some of the ways that events might help to support downtown include:
• Providing and promoting satellite entertainment/activities at locations in the downtown to draw potential customers in and through the district when events are held at Riverwalk or EBSCO parking lot;
• Distribution of promotional marketing materials at events (business directories, coupons, etc.)
• Booth available as showcase for downtown businesses.

2.4.2. Re-establish, relocate and expand the farmers market at the Memorial Green on South Main Street.

2.5. Encourage additional mixed-use development (including housing) in and near the downtown.
More residents create market potential and add to the liveliness of downtown.
Category 3: District Experience

Benchmark

A. The physical layout and concentration of commercial activity supports synergy. The businesses are strategically located. You know when you have arrived in the district.

Ipswich

It feels like there could be a greater density and concentration of businesses. Businesses are somewhat spread out. The downtown doesn’t appear to be a cohesive whole, particularly beyond Market Street. For example, Ithaki, is very good restaurant with a strong draw, but does not feel very connected to the rest of the downtown. More unifying design elements might help the user perceive all sections as part of the downtown and encourage more crossover patronage and get people to turn corners.

Retail businesses are mixed in with professional service businesses; there is not a strong concentration of retail in the core of the district. Many first-floor businesses don't generate a lot of walk-in customers (insurance, dance studio, lawyers, real estate) and are not open the same hours as stores and restaurants. This situation may diminish the retail leasing environment.

There is not a strong sense of “gateway” or “entrance” into the downtown. It feels more like you are driving through somewhere then you have arrived somewhere. The traffic is very fast particularly on South Main Street and there is neither regulations or design elements that would encourage drivers to slow down and take notice as they enter the downtown area.

Benchmark

B. The district is aesthetically appealing and looks vibrant, open and inviting to customers. Storefronts and signage are attractive. Windows allow customers to see into the businesses. There is life “after five” in the district (evening ambience, vitality, security).

Ipswich

Downtown Ipswich is a charming commercial district with many historic buildings, attractive storefronts, and beautiful vistas from the Riverwalk. Colorful flower baskets hanging from street lamps add to a pleasant atmosphere. In the recent survey, respondents indicated they were more satisfied with the “atmosphere” of downtown Ipswich than they were with the “business mix” or the “parking”.

However, there are some elements that lessen the positive visual impact. Multiple, heavy looking overhead utility lines detract from the aesthetic of downtown and some storefronts are less than appealing and in need of renovation.

Window display is not a particular strong point of downtown Ipswich. With a few exceptions the window displays do not do much to tempt vehicle traffic to stop and explore the area or to encourage strolling. Many businesses have covered their windows with shades that give the impression the district is closed for business. Many businesses have no window display but simply have paper signs, equipment or stacks or merchandise in the window. For example, Family Dollar has large display windows facing Market Street but they have arranged their merchandise so that the back of the shelving units face out of the window. Passersby see are trash that has fallen behind the shelves and an occasional cigarette advertisement sign.

The district looks fairly life-less in the evening hours. Many businesses are not open in the evening and do not maintain any lighting.
Benchmark

C. The downtown provides attractive and comfortable opportunities for people to recreate and socialize. There are people spaces, social gathering spots, opportunities that can accommodate activities, performers, vendors etc. The district streetscape invites people to stay, stroll, sit, hangout. There is an interface between customers and the street.

Ipswich

The Riverwalk is a wonderful asset in Downtown Ipswich. It offers beautiful vistas and a lovely place to stroll. The downside is the downtown does not feel as well connected to the Riverwalk as perhaps it could. Downtown users might not know the Riverwalk is just steps away and Riverwalk users might not be encouraged to venture from the Riverwalk into the commercial area. There may be opportunity to extend the Riverwalk and/or otherwise open up river access around Market Street to better integrate the downtown and further capitalize on this asset.

Downtown Ipswich lacks people spaces and social gathering spots intertwined with the commercial enterprises. The downtown should make it comfortable for people to stay and hang out. There should be opportunities for people to gather outside, sit and eat an ice cream, chat with a neighbor, people-watch, read, listen to a street-front musician, etc. Ipswich needs outdoor “living room” type areas intermingled throughout downtown.

There appears to be very few, if any spaces, in the heart of the district, that have been activated with small scale events (e.g., street musicians, vendor cart).

There is no outdoor dining available in the downtown. Outdoor dining adds a great deal of vitality and curb appeal to a district. Large windows that help make diners part of the street scene can also add to a welcoming environment -- Salt Kitchen and Rum Bar is a good example.

Benchmark

D. There is adequate and well identified, lit and maintained parking with a good parking management system in place and good pedestrian linkages to businesses.

E. Public transit is available and there is good pedestrian linkage between transit and downtown businesses.

F. Pedestrian and bike friendly amenities exist. There is minimal sidewalk interruption to promote pedestrian flow.

Parking: Parking lots located behind stores in downtowns are a great idea, especially if the entrances/exits cause minimal sidewalk interruption. However it is vital that sufficient measures are taken to ensure customers can easily find the parking and perceive a safe and pleasant on-foot route to their business destinations.

There is large parking lot on Hammatt Street that accommodates about 275 vehicles. The lot is comprised of more than a dozen parcels owned primarily by the Town and three property owners. It functions as a single parking lot, but there is difficulty coordinating the management between the private and public ownership (especially snow removal), and some property owners restrict the use of the spaces they own to their customers.

A number of factors exist that may be inhibiting customers from Hammatt Street parking lot. It is not well identified and there is not adequate way-finding signage to direct downtown users to this lot. On the positive side, the sidewalk interruption on Market Street is minimal and does not interrupt pedestrian flow; the entrances and exits to the
Parking, however, are not attractive or efficient. The parking lot appears to be a sea of somewhat unorganized spaces with poorly maintained striping and no landscaping or aesthetic treatments. There is no separation between pedestrians and vehicles and the route for pedestrian to get to businesses seems confusing and unfriendly. The back entrances to the stores and businesses are not attractive (except for Ipswich Bank) and the parking configuration exaggerates the perception of how far customers have to walk to get to downtown businesses.

Public Transit: Ipswich enjoys great access with the existence of the commuter train (49 min. from North Station in Boston). The pedestrian linkage between the station and the downtown could be improved with better pedestrian amenities, way-finding signage and unifying design elements that visually draw pedestrians into all parts of downtown.

As mentioned earlier, there is a missed opportunity not to have a business directory kiosk and more information about the downtown at the train station.

The Ipswich Explorer is a great complement to the commuter rail providing bus service to Crane’s Beach, Russell Orchards and Wolf Hollow on weekends and holidays June through September. I spoke with representatives of three downtown businesses that reported very little or no customer activity related to the Explorer bus riders. The routing of the riders from the train station might be one issue because they walk from the train station across the Riverwalk to the Visitor Center. While this is efficient, it does not bring the riders in contact with many downtown businesses.

Pedestrian and Bike Amenities: There are limited pedestrian amenities in downtown Ipswich and, as previously mentioned, the downtown would benefit from improvements such as sitting areas and way-finding signage. Providing bike racks may help to encourage other modes of transportation and present a welcoming environment for recreational cyclists.

**Potential Strategies and Activities to Consider**

3. **District Experience Strategies**

3.1. **Make the downtown appear more “open for business” and welcoming to customers**

3.1.1. Encourage business owners to maintain window transparency and allow customers to see into the businesses instead of covering the windows with blinds, equipment, storage or signs.

3.1.1.1. Enact/enforce zoning regulations that requires minimum percentage of storefront to be uncovered glass.

3.1.2. Encourage “light after dark” to promote “life after dark”/support night time activity in the downtown

3.1.2.1. Consider implementing ornamental street tree lighting to enliven the district at dusk and for a range of hours into the evening.

3.1.2.2. Encourage business owners to keep some level of storefront/window display lighting on into the evening. Many businesses owners have hanging sconce lighting fixtures illuminating their signs. Perhaps the town could create a program to provide business owners with low cost high efficiency light bulbs.

3.2. **Encourage higher concentration and strategic location of businesses.**

3.2.1. Suggestions are as noted under “Category 1: Business Mix Strategies” as follows.

1.2.1 Establish zoning that prioritizes first floor space in the core of the district for retail & restaurants.

1.4.1 Review current zoning to determine if flexibility exists to achieve desired density. Consider minimum height and density requirements as deemed appropriate.
3.3. Create public spaces that encourage interaction, areas for social gathering, sitting areas, areas that could accommodate performers, vendors, etc.
   3.3.1. Allow business owners to place tables and chairs on sidewalks whether or not they serve food (following design standards and rules)
   3.3.2. Design and implement public streetscape improvements that provide benches, sitting areas and small pocket park spaces that could accommodate small scale activities.

3.4. Facilitate the creation of outdoor dining, patios, and sidewalk sitting areas.
   3.4.1. Look for opportunities where sidewalk dining might be feasible; review regulations and make changes as necessary to promote outdoor dining as deemed appropriate.
   3.4.2. Consider implementing a “Parklet” model (similar to Seattle, Milwaukee, San Francisco) that would allow business owners (for a fee) to replace public parking spots with attractive outdoor dining.

3.5. Draw customers into downtown, help them find parking and businesses
   3.5.1. Improve Hammatt Street Parking Lot. Redesign entrances, layout and add aesthetic landscaping elements.
   3.5.2. Design and implement way-finding signage system including gateway welcome signage, business directory kiosks, and directional signage to identify where parking is located, the train station the downtown sub areas, businesses, visitor center, museum, etc. (see parenthetical comment at recommendation 2.3.1)
   3.5.3. Encourage business owners to open up and improve back entrances accessible to parking areas (Hammatt Street and all rear parking area.)

3.6. Bring more public transit riders (commuter train and Explorer bus) into the downtown.
   3.6.1. Consider opportunities to route pedestrians through the downtown (e.g., designate Explorer Bus drop-off location in the downtown center, encourage riders to walk up Market Street or Down South Main Street back to train station.
   3.6.2. Create strong pedestrian linkage between public transit and downtown; implement unifying design elements that visually draw users to all parts of downtown

3.7. Create a sense of “arrival”. Encourage through traffic to stop in the downtown.
   3.7.1. Consider regulations or design elements that would slow the traffic down and encourage them to take notice as they enter the downtown area.
   3.7.2. Design and welcome signage and other gateway treatment to distinguish arrival. As previously noted, reinforce the boundaries and composition of the district with unifying design elements.

3.8. Make the river a bigger part of downtown
   3.8.1. Extend the Riverwalk; open up and intermingle river access with downtown commercial enterprises
   3.8.2. Explore ways to make stronger connection between Riverwalk and downtown commercial enterprises
Category 4: Inside the Business Experience

Benchmarks

A. Businesses offer quality goods and services appropriate for the market segments that the downtown serves.
B. Displays and interior layouts are functional and attractive.
C. The businesses give customers a reason to shop bricks & mortar stores versus the Internet.

Ipswich

Competition, both online and offline, is a challenge for merchants in all downtowns. Consumers have many choices in the marketplace. One of the ways that many businesses today maintain their foothold is to make shopping more of an experience, something more than a mere acquisition trip. That’s why more and more grocery stores have food demonstrations and tasting stations. Customized customer service is another way that businesses are able to maintain their customer base. Keeping in constant contact with customers, notifying them when their favorite line of clothing comes in for Spring, willingness to take special orders, or just remembering their name and preferences can help to create a bond with customers.

Some of the businesses in Ipswich are successfully providing this type of experiential shopping and high quality customer service. Green Elephant, a toy and game store in downtown, appears to provide a “shopping experience” with creative sidewalk displays and an atmosphere where kids play while parents or grandparents shop.

Zumi’s coffee shop also focuses on creating an experience rather than just selling coffee and snacks. This business serves as a social gathering place, a “living room” and a resource for the community. The environment is comfortable and social. Customers appear to feel at ease alone working on a laptop, sitting with a group of friends or with kids in tow. There is often live entertainment, the business owners seem to be involved in community activities and you can even drop off your batteries for recycling.

Some of the other restaurants also appear to have a strong following and are known for their unique offerings and atmosphere.

The businesses in downtown represent a broad range with regard to the quality of display and interior layouts as well as how well the merchandise and services meet the needs of the market. Some businesses would likely benefit from technical assistance in these areas.

One large and obvious market segment that does not appear to be well-tapped is the 1,200 EBSCO employees. There does not appear to be a large amount of EBSCO employees in the downtown during the day. One reason might be the existence of a subsidized cafeteria that reduces the employee’s desire to venture out. The Coastal Green Grocer might be getting lunch-time trade from EBSCO; the business is well located and the offerings appear to be in line with young professionals.

Some businesses I talked to said that they do get some EBSCO customers but not very many (especially compared to how many total employees there are). The jewelry store offers a discount on certain days upon showing an EBSCO badge. It is not clear how many other businesses do something similar. Gifts 4 Soul, a women’s clothing and accessory store, expressed a desire to create this type of discount program but has not worked out the details to implement it. A coordinated effort where all (most) merchants participated in providing a discount on the same specified days might be a worthwhile strategy.
**Benchmarks**

- D. Business hours are appropriate, posted and reliable
- E. Businesses offer friendly and knowledgeable customer service
- F. Customer conveniences are provided as appropriate (e.g., acceptance of credit cards, shipping, etc.)
- G. Promotions and customer loyalty programs attract customers and keep them coming back

**Ipswich**

There is very little consistency with regard to business hours; every business has different opening and closing times. Some businesses do not have posted hours; consumers could easily go to a business expecting them to be open and be disappointed. Although studies show that 70% of consumer spending happens after 6 PM; most businesses in the downtown, except for the restaurants, close at 5 or 6 o’clock. Many businesses are closed Sunday and Monday.

Several businesses do not accept credit cards (e.g., Choate Bridge Pub, Riverview Restaurant, Zumi’s, Salon 36).

Some of the businesses in downtown occasionally coordinate with cross promotions (e.g., Foreign Affair, Gifts 4 Soul and Hair Crafters). Downtown businesses could likely benefit from technical assistance in this area. Some type of organizational vehicle would be helpful in promoting coordination among businesses (e.g., downtown merchants association, downtown partnership, downtown roundtable, women business owner association).

**Benchmarks**

- H. Businesses have up-to-date websites and significant web-presence.
- I. Businesses use e-commerce to supplement bricks and mortar sales.
- J. Businesses communicate with customers using social media Facebook, twitter, etc.

**Ipswich**

Many downtown businesses have websites and fairly good representation online at sites like Trip Advisor and Yelp (as mentioned under category 2).

At least one or two businesses are currently contracting with ReachLocal to provide services to build a website, provide google search optimization and online advertising as part of a 3-month trial. It could be helpful if these businesses shared their experience with other downtown businesses. If it turns out to be a worthwhile investment, perhaps it might be possible to get a discounted package if several downtown businesses sign up.

A few businesses supplement brick and mortar sales with online sales. Two examples include: Fisk & Freeman, specializing in antique English furnishings and ‘ippys Clog and Sandal Company (located inside of Central Shoe repair) that specializes in wooden clogs made in Sweden.
Potential Strategies and Activities to Consider

4. Inside the Business Strategies

4.1. Sponsor educational/technical assistance workshops for business owners

4.1.1. Suggestion as cited in 2.2.1: Sponsor a workshop or series of workshops on how businesses can effectively use social media (facebook, Twitter, Internet) to market their businesses and maintain customer base.

4.1.2. Create a Best Retail Practices Program. Sponsor 1 or 2 workshops on best retail practices, specifically focusing on storefront, window display, interior layout and how to select an appropriate product mix or menu of services to fit the market. Accept applications from workshop participants and select a small number to receive one-on-one technical assistance from a retail consultant and a small matching grant to implement improvements. Fund this action with monies allocated in FY14 Planning and Development Budget for economic development assistance.

4.1.3. Sponsor a workshop on customer services for business employees and owners.

4.2. Identify appropriate local resources that could be helpful to downtown businesses.

4.2.1. The Salem Enterprise Center is a great resource and offers many workshops for small businesses. Make sure business owners are aware of this resource and try to get the businesses to sign up for their e-mail list so they receive announcements about available classes and programs.

4.2.2. Host a “resource fair” for downtown businesses. Identify and invite appropriate public/non profit business assistance providers and for-profit business service providers to showcase offerings to business owners.

4.2.2.1. In advance, follow up with the owner of Gifts 4 Soul to determine if her ReachLocal trial yielded a positive result. If so, contact a ReachLocal representative about presenting at the business resource fair and negotiate a discounted price for downtown business owners based upon the number of businesses that sign up.

4.3. Assist businesses to better meet the needs of customers and capitalize on market opportunities.

4.3.1. Assist businesses to effectively market to EBSCO Employees.

4.3.1.1. Facilitate coordination among business owners to create “EBSCO shopping days” where on certain days of the month, all merchants offer special discounts/services for EBSCO employees.

4.3.2. All business owners should post their hours on their storefront as well as on their google online listing their website.

4.3.3. Encourage business owners to extend hours into the evening to attract after-work patrons. Facilitate a coordinated effort among business owners for extended hours on the same night to create predictable schedule for customers (e.g., businesses in downtown open later on Thursdays).
Category 5: Business District Management/Organization

Benchmark

There is an entity that keeps abreast of conditions and advocates for downtown businesses with public sector and non-profit entities regarding public services, government policies and tourism activities. There is effective coordination/cooperation among businesses on promotions, events and other issues.

Ipswich

There does not appear to be an entity that serves the function of coordinating joint efforts among downtown businesses and advocating for downtown in regards to public sector services and policies. One business owner said that the businesses have made some attempts to organize; however, they need help. The Ipswich Partnership, a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization created in 1995 for the purpose of revitalizing the downtown still exists and its Board of Directors meets quarterly. Still, the Partnership does not currently play a very active role in downtown redevelopment activities.

The specific role of the Ipswich Chamber of Commerce as it relates to the downtown is unclear. In general, a local Chamber of Commerce is often not the most effective organization to manage a downtown and advocate for downtown businesses. The regional or town-wide focus of a Chamber of Commerce can inhibit its ability to focus efforts on a single commercial district. The primary goal of Chamber is to serve its members while the goal of the goals is to promote all downtown businesses.

Potential Strategies and Activities to Consider

5. Business District Management/Organization Strategies

5.1. Explore options for effectively advocating for downtown and enhancing cooperation among businesses.

5.1.1. Facilitate a session with business owners to determine problems/issues/opportunities they see in downtown and, if appropriate, form a task force and/or committee(s) to work on most pressing concerns. Test the waters to see if there is sufficient interest and leadership to form a permanent downtown business organization, and if so, explore whether that objective might be best met through the organizational structure and tax status of the existing Ipswich Partnership.”

5.1.2. Examine the activities/role of the Chamber of Commerce with regard to downtown; explore potential to bolster role and effectiveness if appropriate.

5.1.3. Explore feasibility of creating a Business Improvement District (BID). The state legislation covering BIDs has recently changed to exclude the “opt out” clause for businesses and this change may make it a more viable strategy to consider. The existence of several large businesses (i.e., EBSCO and financial institutions) could make it easier to get consensus in downtown Ipswich.
Appendix A

Proposal for Public/Private Partnership to create
The Ipswich Visitor Center Gallery and Gift Shop (IVCGAGS)

The IVC is in need of an upgrade.

It seems the volunteers currently working in the IVC are largely the same people who have been there since it opened. These lovely people are aging out and passing on. Those people still working have trouble dealing with electronics, and handling heavier duties.

The gallery space is under-utilized. It was envisioned as a place for new, untried artists to display their work, and it has served well for several years as such. However, as the gallery can only be open when the artist is present (the IVC volunteers understandably don’t want the responsibility of opening it, and are not equipped to transact sales), it is not open most of the time that the IVC is open. This is a disservice to the visitor as well as the artist. Ipswich residents have all but given up on visiting the gallery except for occasionally attending openings. With little oversight from the gallery director, artists are unaware of expectations for the space, including locking doors and cleaning up after their shows.

The solution? A whole new public/private partnership between the Town of Ipswich, the Hall-Haskell House Committee, the IVC and Time & Tide Fine Art (Kristina Brendel).

Here’s the idea.

The back room stays much as it is for the time being. The volunteers will still be there to greet visitors and help direct people to points of interest.

The front room (the current gallery) becomes a professionally staffed gallery and gift shop. Art on the walls will be tourist driven – images of Ipswich landmarks and landscapes produced by local artists. Other items for sale will be made by local craftspeople. We may need to expand to include artists up and down the north shore, but the closer to Ipswich the better.

In addition, local businesses will have “reference items” in the shop. These items will represent the type of merchandise available in larger variety in shops in Ipswich. This gives the staff the opportunity to send visitors to our local businesses. (This idea has been pitched to several business owners in town and has been met with enthusiasm.)

Another feature of this new arrangement will be a video element. A flat-screen tv (already acquired) will have a continuous loop of videos. These can include nature as well as arts and historic videos. The Gallery and Gift Shop will be run by paid staff, who are well versed in Ipswich’s attractions and activities. This staff will be able to provide visitor information when a volunteer is not available.

The IVCGAGS will serve 3 distinct groups.

The most obvious group is tourists. The IVC currently offers brochures from local businesses and attractions. Volunteers are there to answer questions and give directions to Ipswich’s treasures. This is a fine service. However, there is so much more we can offer the 25-125 people who come through the door every day. A gallery and gift shop carrying items created locally and available in Ipswich’s
shops and galleries will entice tourists to slow down and visit our town’s businesses. Art and craft items can be purchased right there at the IVC, and the gallery personnel can direct tourists to shops where they might see a larger selection of goods.

The second group is local artists and businesses. By carrying local goods, we obviously give artists a boost. But the second part, the promotion of local businesses could be the larger service.

The third group served is the Ipswich public. The final piece of the puzzle is this: The IVC will become the clearinghouse for all activities happening in Ipswich. At present there are a vast number of entities producing truly wonderful activities throughout town. From The Trustees’ programs at Appleton Farms and the Crane Estate, to the Polish Picnic, to theatre offerings from The Actors Company, to kids programs at the public library. And there is no one place where people can go (either physically or online) where they can find out about all this.

This third aspect of the IVCGAGS may have the largest impact on the community at large. This is an ambitious part of the plan and will include refinement of the current IVC website, constant updating and heavy promotion of via social media, traditional media and other promotional opportunities.

**Finances**

The IVCGAGS will be run as a business. Startup funds will have to be procured, either by grant or loan. The staff will be paid out of the proceeds from sales. The manager of the Gallery and Gift Shop (Kristina Brendel) will continue to work as an enthusiastic volunteer, paid only if the business clears a profit.

Fixtures, supplies and inventory would be purchased by Kristina Brendel unless other arrangements are made for items of permanent value to the Hall Haskell House or the IVC, such as a professional gallery hanging system or improved lighting.

As the purpose of the business is to serve the community, the Gallery and Gift Shop would rent the Hall Haskell House for $1 per year, replacing the Chamber of Commerce rental agreement, which expires July 1, 2014. The Gallery and Gift Shop would be responsible for renting out the upstairs offices, or using them for the benefit of the Visitors Center. Funds from office rental would be used to offset expenses associated with the design and distribution of maps and brochures that promote Ipswich, our assets, and marketplaces.

Any profits from this endeavor, only after payment of all expenses, will be divided as follows: 50% to the Manager, the remainder split between IVC and HHH Committee. Until such time as a prophet is realized, all revenues would flow exclusively into the operation. (As the highest purpose would be to direct visitors and locals to area businesses, sales are likely to be much lower than if our desire was simply to sell as much as possible in the Gallery and Gift Shop. At the same time, promotional expenses would be the same as a traditional shop. Therefore profits are likely to be very low.)