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Indiana Downtown®

LaPorte

Downtown Action Agenda 2006

Indiana Downtown® – A Collaborative Offering of:
The Indiana Association
of Cities and Towns
and
HyettPalma, Inc.

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Indiana Downtown® is an affiliate program of *America Downtown® -- New Thinking. New Life.*, a technical assistance program that was created by the National League of Cities and HyettPalma, Inc., in 1992.

Created in 2001, *Indiana Downtown®* is a technical assistance program offered by the Indiana Association of Cities and Towns, in conjunction with HyettPalma, Inc.

Making Downtown Renaissance A Reality

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January 30, 2006

The City of LaPorte
and Members of the Process Committee
801 Michigan Avenue
LaPorte, IN 46350

RE: LaPorte Downtown Action Agenda 2006

HyettPalma, Inc., is pleased to present to you the following report titled: ***LaPorte Downtown Action Agenda 2006***, completed under the program titled ***Indiana Downtown®***.

This document includes the community's vision for Downtown as well as the findings of a comprehensive analysis of Downtown's commercial markets. The vision and market analysis findings were used to define a specific economic enhancement strategy for the Downtown project area. The recommended strategy was specifically designed to enable Downtown to attain the community's defined vision as well as the identified market opportunities.

Thank you for the opportunity to lend our firm's expertise to this very important project. We hope you will keep us informed of your success and know that we stand ready to assist in any way we can as you proceed with LaPorte's Downtown enhancement effort.

Sincerely,



Doyle G. Hyett



Dolores P. Palma

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 1

I. Project Overview 5

II. Downtown LaPorte Today 8

III. Resident and Business Surveys 18

IV. Downtown LaPorte Tomorrow 24

V. Downtown Market Analysis 29

- Downtown Retail Opportunities
- Downtown Office Opportunities
- Downtown Housing Opportunities

VI. Course of Action 44

VII. Partnership for Success 70

VIII. Implementation Sequence 76

IX. Appendix 80

- Retail Report®

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Introduction

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INTRODUCTION

In 1992, as America's largest membership organization representing the elected officials of this nation, the National League of Cities (NLC) decided to assume a more aggressive role in the areas of Downtown enhancement and local economic development. That role would involve offering technical assistance to local elected officials concerned about the economic success of their Downtowns.

To fill this role, the National League of Cities approached HyettPalma, Inc. Together, NLC and HyettPalma designed an advanced new pilot program. The new pilot would offer on-site, technical assistance to a limited number of communities.

The new Downtown pilot was presented under the banner of *ACCEPTING THE CHALLENGE: THE REBIRTH OF AMERICA'S DOWNTOWNS*. It was structured to guide local governing bodies -- working in partnership with local business owners, property owners and concerned citizens -- in rethinking ways to rebuild our nation's Downtowns.

Availability of the Downtown pilot was limited to eleven cities over a period of two-years. In addition, the pilot required the local governing body in each participating community to be the agency that contracted with NLC for services. This was done to ensure the involvement of the governing body from the very start of the local Downtown enhancement effort.

Once the pilot was completed, NLC and HyettPalma evaluated its effectiveness and whether or not to continue offering Downtown technical assistance. Based on the evaluation, and specifically on the advice and needs expressed by the pilot's local officials, a new comprehensive technical assistance program was developed titled *AMERICA DOWNTOWN® -- NEW THINKING. NEW LIFE*.

After several years of tracking the *America Downtown®* program's success, the leadership of the Indiana Association of Cities and Towns (IACT) determined that a similar technical assistance program would be of benefit to communities in Indiana. Therefore, in 2000, IACT approached NLC and HyettPalma about developing such a program. With the backing of NLC, *Indiana Downtown®* was unveiled as an IACT program in the Summer of 2001.

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Modeled after the *America Downtown*® program, *Indiana Downtown*® was launched as a pilot program that would run for a two-year period and assist ten communities. After that time, the pilot was designed to be evaluated by IACT and HyettPalma, with the assistance of local elected officials from the ten participating communities. Based on the response and recommendation of local elected officials from the pilot communities, *Indiana Downtown*® was made a permanent member service offered by IACT.

Indiana Downtown® brings together the local government insight of IACT and the Downtown expertise of HyettPalma, Inc. Together, they offer individualized assistance and a combination of strengths not available anywhere else. *Indiana Downtown*® was structured to provide the help local officials need to create a brighter future for their Downtowns.

Indiana Downtown® provides direct, hands-on help to city and town officials and community leaders who want to start, refocus, or energize their Downtown enhancement efforts. In 2005, the City of LaPorte became a member of the *Indiana Downtown*® program. The program's strengths are built on the following convictions.

- The assistance provided is implementation-oriented – not another Downtown plan or study but an aggressive course of action that local officials and community leaders can start to implement immediately.
- The recommendations made for each Downtown are pragmatic – tailored to local resources so that they can be realistically implemented.
- The solutions offered are success-oriented – designed to improve each Downtown's economy so that the results are long-lasting.
- The on-site assistance is inclusive – providing a forum that brings public and private sector constituents together to identify Downtown issues, define a Downtown vision, and take needed actions in partnership.

IACT is committed to providing Indiana communities with the assistance they need to implement their enhancement efforts once their Downtown Action Agendas have been completed. An integral component of this implementation

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process is incorporating state technical assistance programs and funding resources. To do so, IACT is working with representatives from Indiana Main Street, the Indiana Department of Commerce – Community Development Division, the Indiana Department of Tourism, and the Governor's Office. Through *Indiana Downtown®*, IACT will continue to seek further avenues of assistance to help Indiana cities and towns revitalize their Downtowns.

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Project Overview

I. PROJECT OVERVIEW

In 2005, the City of LaPorte determined that a Downtown enhancement strategy was needed to further revitalize Downtown LaPorte. The **LaPorte Downtown Action Agenda 2006** was defined with involvement from the City government, the local business sector, representatives of non-profit organizations, and members of the community. The **LaPorte Downtown Action Agenda 2006** shown in the following pages incorporates the desires, preferences, and concerns expressed by the people of LaPorte for their Downtown.

Based on the desires and concerns expressed by the people of LaPorte – combined with a realistic analysis of Downtown's market potentials – a **Course of Action** was defined for public and private sector implementation. The **Course of Action** is meant to enable Downtown LaPorte to reach the vision defined locally, to overcome the key issues it faces, and capture the identified market potentials.

Finally, this document contains advice regarding a private-public partnership. This is the vehicle that would be responsible for implementing the **Course of Action** in a timely and quality manner.

A map of Downtown LaPorte, as defined for this project, is shown on the following page.

Downtown La Porte



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Downtown LaPorte Today

II. DOWNTOWN LAPORTE TODAY

The following is a snapshot of Downtown LaPorte's current condition.

Strengths

Downtown LaPorte has a number of strengths at this time that can be leveraged to compound the area's success. Among those are the following.

- The City of LaPorte is the county seat of LaPorte County, with the County Courthouse and affiliated county functions located in Downtown. This has made Downtown the county's hub of not only government, but also of professional services and finance.
- Anchors traditionally found in a Downtown continue to be located in Downtown LaPorte. This includes City Hall, the library, the post office, and banks.
- Downtown also includes – or has in proximity to it – several other significant activity generators. These include LaPorte Hospital, the YMCA, and nearby Civic Auditorium.

These anchors and activity generators attract employees and users to Downtown on a regular basis. And, as a group, those individuals comprise "built-in" markets, which should be viewed as potential customers for Downtown businesses.

Also in Downtown's "plus column" are the following facts.

- Downtown's exceptional architecture, which has earned it a listing on the National Register of Historic Places as a historic district, makes Downtown highly appealing and distinctive.
- Downtown has a mixture of long-time businesses as well as new businesses and energetic business owners.

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- The City government has recently made significant streetscape improvements in Downtown and has initiated the Central Station Plaza project.
- Downtown has experienced recent private sector investment, in the form of building improvements. And, investors involved in those improvements have expressed an interest in further involvement.
- The City's elected officials are supportive of and committed to Downtown's enhancement.
- A number of non-profit organizations and governmental entities are hard at work on initiatives aimed at strengthening Downtown and its economic future.
- A variety of incentives have been created to stimulate private sector investment in Downtown.
- Four major traffic routes traverse Downtown, affording its businesses the critical necessities of visibility, accessibility, and potential customers.
- Downtown is fortunate to be located in a community that is experiencing substantial re-investment, in terms of both commercial and residential development.
- Downtown is fortunate to be located within a region that is experiencing growth and new investment.

Concerns

Those participating in the **Action Agenda** process were asked to voice the concerns they hold regarding Downtown LaPorte's future. The concerns raised repeatedly were:

- Traffic and parking;
- Business mix;
- Business turn-over;

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- Downtown's appearance, including building conditions;
- Public safety; and
- Level of re-investment.

Desires

Similarly, those participating in the *Action Agenda* process were asked to express their desires, regarding results that should be brought about by the enhancement effort. The desired results most often mentioned were:

- Make Downtown a destination that attracts additional users;
- Create an environment that stimulates private investment;
- Change pessimistic or skeptical attitudes that might exist about Downtown;
- Identify the best business mix for Downtown;
- Increase the marketing of Downtown;
- Clearly define the "rules" that apply to Downtown – e.g., regulations, review processes, etc. – so that investors know what they are;
- Increase communication and coordination among involved organizations and governmental entities; and
- Given that major commercial development is about to occur in LaPorte, there is a need to take the "right actions:"
 - That keep Downtown strong and allow it to co-exist with those developments; and
 - That enable Downtown to benefit from the additional people those developments will draw to LaPorte.

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Image

Those participating in the *Action Agenda* process agreed that, ideally, Downtown would have the following image.

*A historic, quaint, and vibrant Downtown
That is progressive, forward thinking,
And a welcoming and comfortable place to be.*

*A cultural and fine dining Downtown
That is hip, energetic, creative, enticing,
And pedestrian-friendly.*

*An animated and friendly place
That has a wide ethnic diversity –
Of businesses, restaurants, customers, business owners, and residents.*

*A place where it's clear –
Everyone has pride and works together.*

*A great selection of specialty shops with
Creative and enticing windows that rival those in Chicago,
Making you unable to resist going inside.*

*A Downtown that makes you say,
"I'm glad I came!
I shopped till I was broke!
I want to come back!
I'd like to move here!"*

*The comeback Downtown that
Increases the joy of the community's
Residents and visitors alike.*

*Downtown LaPorte –
A destination discovered!*

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Guidelines

Based on Downtown's strengths, as well as the community's desires, concerns, and preferred vision for Downtown, HyettPalma recommends that the following guidelines be embraced as part of implementing the **Action Agenda**.

1. Timing

The City of LaPorte is on the brink of major development that will considerably alter the commercial face of the city. This includes:

- On the west, the transformation of Maple Lane Mall into LaPorte Town Square, with an upgraded K-Mart and grocery store, plus big box and smaller shops;
- On the east, the transformation of Wal-Mart into a supercenter; and
- To the north of Downtown, development of NewPorte Landing, a mixed-use commercial and residential complex, whose first phase will include big box, department, and grocery stores, plus smaller businesses.

These developments will have an impact on Downtown – either positive or negative. To ensure that the impact is positive, Downtown's enhancement must become a top priority of the community now. Time is of the essence and there is no time to waste. In addition, the Mayor and Council of LaPorte should be commended for bringing the **Indiana Downtown** program to LaPorte at this critical point in time.

2. Perspective

Downtown is facing a variety of issues, all of which must be addressed in order to bring about its enhancement. In doing so, it will be very important to keep each issue in perspective, rather than allowing any single issue to dominate the enhancement effort and its initiatives.

3. Professional Advice

It is important to involve volunteers in the enhancement of Downtown and in implementing the **Action Agenda**. However, care should be taken to obtain professional advice before making decisions on actions that will affect

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Downtown's economy, image, and success – whether those issues involve parking-related actions, landscaping materials, etc.

4. Turn-over

It must be recognized that business turn-over is a natural occurrence in a commercial district whose base is small, independently owned businesses. Small business owners routinely decide to go in and out of business for reasons that often have little or nothing to do with business profitability – reasons such as getting married or divorced, getting burned out, retiring, etc. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that a market does not exist or Downtown cannot support a particular type of business, just because that type of business was located in Downtown at one time and closed.

5. Distinctiveness

The local desire to link Downtown to other commercial areas is admirable. However, in doing so, care should be taken to ensure that Downtown retains its distinctiveness in terms of:

- Style of public improvements;
- Design guidelines and building appearance;
- Business mix;
- Customer service;
- Image; and
- Marketing.

6. Organizations & Entities

A good number of non-profit organizations and governmental entities are now involved in Downtown's enhancement. To garner the highest level of results from their involvement, each one must:

- Have a clearly defined role in terms of Downtown's enhancement;
- Commit to implementing the **Action Agenda** recommendations that pertain to their mission and reason for being;
- Keep their advice and recommendations regarding Downtown's enhancement within their area of expertise; and

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- Be willing to coordinate and communicate with the other involved organizations and entities.

7. Anchors

As was said earlier, Downtown is fortunate to still contain its traditional anchors, such as the post office, library, City Hall, and banks. The importance of retaining these anchors in Downtown must be recognized. In fact, 31% of residents surveyed as part of this **Action Agenda** said the main reason they come to Downtown LaPorte is to bank (20%) or go to the post office (11%).

In the future, if the creation of any new anchors that serve the community's general populace is considered, these should be located in Downtown.

8. Preservation

Those who saw to having Downtown listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a historic district should be commended, since that designation brings with it prestige and marketing opportunities. In addition, those involved in implementing this **Action Agenda** should recognize the importance of Downtown's preservation as an opportunity to:

- Keep Downtown distinct, making it different from the competition;
- Attract investors – business owners, real estate developers, etc.;
- Attract customers and residents; and
- Attract heritage tourists – who tend to stay longer and spend more than other types of tourists.

However, it must also be realized that these opportunities will only exist if Downtown is enhanced in a manner that respects and protects Downtown's historic architecture – this mean appropriate façade improvements and new construction that is designed to be compatible with the old.

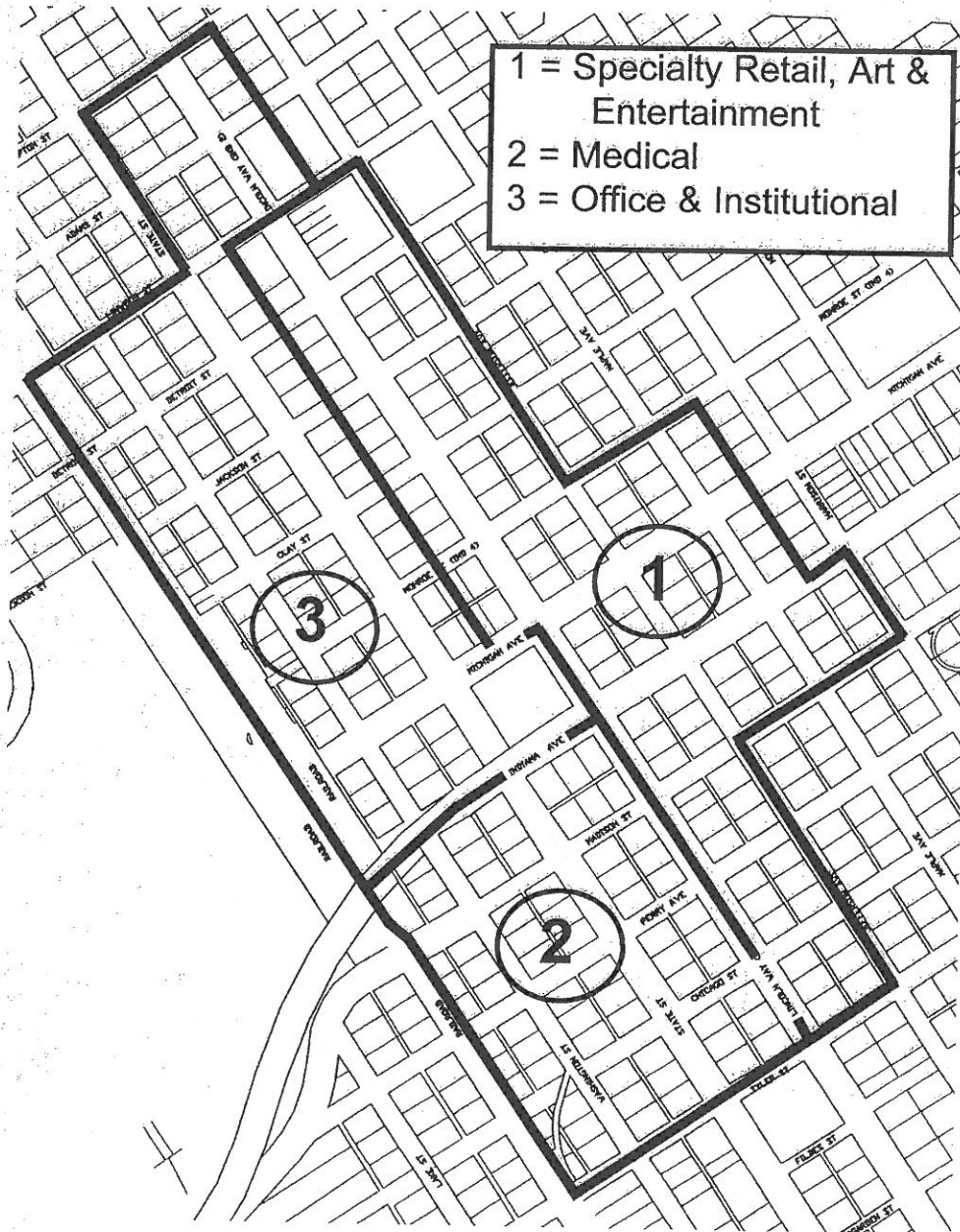
9. Districts

The **Action Agenda** should be used to create the following three districts (shown on the following map), which are in-keeping with the natural market forces at play in Downtown.

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Downtown La Porte Development Districts



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- District #1: Specialty Retail, Food, Art, & Entertainment District – This portion of Downtown is its most pedestrian-oriented. It contains Downtown's largest collection of intact historic structures and most of Downtown's specialty businesses. A cluster of specialty retail, food, art, and entertainment venues should be created in this district's first floor spaces. Housing should be located in the upper floors of this district's buildings. This district and its unique businesses present the greatest opportunity to make Downtown more of a destination.
- District #2: Medical District – This district includes LaPorte Hospital and associated professional office and service businesses. This is a well-defined area in which "the die is cast." The attempt here should be to contain growth and increase density so that the needs of the hospital and its associated uses are met without encroachment that will damage surrounding neighborhoods and dilute the district's compact formation of associated medical uses.
- District #3: Office & Institutional District – This district contains County government facilities, as well as county-related uses, such as attorney offices, restaurants, etc. This district can be considered to be in transition, as witnessed by the adaptive use of structures originally built for industrial and warehousing uses that required proximity to a railroad. The east end of Lincolnway is contained in this district and is also in transition, with auto-oriented buildings taking the place of older buildings and making it very different from the remainder of Lincolnway. This should remain a district of office and institutional uses. In addition, it should be recognized as the area that will link Downtown's specialty district (District #1) to NewPorte Landing.

10. Focus Area

The Downtown enhancement effort should be focused on District #1 for the foreseeable future, since this is the portion of Downtown that presents an opportunity to make Downtown more of a destination. In focusing on this district, particular emphasis should be placed on Lincolnway, in terms of business development and real estate development actions.

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Resident and Business Surveys

III. RESIDENT AND BUSINESS SURVEYS

As a part of this project, two surveys were conducted to gauge the health of Downtown LaPorte, as perceived locally. These were a survey of owners/managers of businesses located in the project area and a telephone survey of residents living in Downtown's primary trade area. A summary of the survey responses follows. The summary was written by Laura Gibbons, Government Affairs Manager of the Indiana Association of Cities and Towns.

Use of Downtown

Residents of Downtown's primary trade area reported coming to Downtown with great frequency – 54% said they come to Downtown between 1 and 7 times a week. This frequency can be seen in the following:

- 30% said they come Downtown daily;
- 10% said they come Downtown 3 to 6 times a week; and
- 14 % said they come Downtown once or twice a week.

Another 25% reported coming to Downtown with moderate frequency as described below:

- 1-3 times a month (17%); and
- 6-11 times a year (8%).

The remaining 21% of those surveyed said they seldom come to Downtown LaPorte. These responses included:

- 1-5 times a year (7%);
- Almost never (11%); and
- Never (3%).

Purpose of Trips

When asked why they currently come to Downtown LaPorte, the top two reasons cited by residents surveyed were "banking" (cited by 19%) and "shopping" (cited by 14%). The next two reasons given with similar frequency were using the "post office" (cited by 11%) and "eating in restaurants" (cited by 10%). Therefore, 54%

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of residents surveyed currently come to the Downtown area for one of these four reasons.

The remaining 46% of residents surveyed gave the following reasons for coming Downtown. These were:

- Work There (9%);
- Government Business (8%);
- Service Businesses (6%);
- Personal Business (5%);
- Library (5%);
- Passing Through (5%);
- Live There (4%);
- Visiting Friends or Family (2%); and
- Other (2%) – YMCA, Museum, Entertainment.

Shopping Area of Choice

Those surveyed were asked where they do most of their family shopping at this time, other than grocery shopping. Almost one-fourth (24%) of residents surveyed said that they do the majority of their shopping at Wal-Mart in LaPorte. Another 13% of residents surveyed said that they prefer to do the majority of their shopping at Meijer in Michigan City.

In addition to the 37% of residents that choose to shop at LaPorte's Wal-mart and Michigan City's Meijer, another 30% of residents cited that they will travel to nearby cities, in general, to shop. These included Michigan City (12%), Valparaiso (10%), and Chicago (8%).

The remaining 33% of residents surveyed cited various shopping preferences in LaPorte and outside the area. This can be seen in the following:

- Lighthouse Place Mall in Michigan City (5%);
- Kohl's (5%);
- Wal-Mart in Michigan City (5%);
- Southlake Mall in Merrillville (2%);
- Michigan City and Merrillville (2%);
- Droeges (2%);

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- K-Mart (2%);
- Kabelin's Hardware (2%); and
- Other (8%) (Marquette Mall in Michigan City; Sam's Club in Merrillville; Walgreens; Super Wal-mart in Valparaiso; New Buffalo, Michigan; Stein-Mart; Sears; House of Stitches; and Salvation Army).

When asked their reason for choosing a particular shopping area, a majority of residents (63%) surveyed cited one of two reasons. These were variety/selection offered (mentioned by 35%) and price (cited by 28%). Convenience (cited by 19%) was also an important factor, which residents mentioned for choosing a particular shopping area.

The remaining 18% of those surveyed said they choose to shop in a particular area due to:

- Parking (7%);
- Close to home (6%);
- Service (4%); and
- Close to Work (1%).

Downtown Characteristics

Residents and business owners surveyed were asked to rate a list of 19 Downtown characteristics as being "good," "fair," or "poor" at this time.

Three characteristics were rated "good" by a majority or significant percentage of residents. These three characteristics were also rated "good" by a majority or significant percentage of business owners. Those three characteristics were:

- Feeling of safety (55% residents, 46% business owners);
- Cleanliness of area (47% residents, 52% business owners); and
- Knowledge of salespeople (46% residents, 44% business owners).

Three characteristics rated "good" by a majority or significant percentage of business owners, but not by a majority of residents, were:

- Helpfulness of salespeople (37% residents, 65% business owners);

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- Business hours (29% residents, 51% business owners);
- Quality of service businesses (36% residents, 48% business owners).

As revealed above, both residents and most business owners were pleased with downtown's security, cleanliness of area, and knowledge of salespeople at this time. However, residents were less satisfied than business owners with the quality of service businesses, helpfulness of salespeople, and business hours.

Downtown Improvements

Residents and business owners were asked to rate a list of possible Downtown improvements as being "very important", "somewhat important," or "not important" at this time.

Eighteen improvements were rated "very important" by a majority or significant percentage of residents. Of these, eight were rated "very important" by a majority or significant percentage of business owners. The list of improvements desired by residents was:

- Improve availability of parking (78% residents, 81% business owners);
- Recruit additional retail businesses (77% residents, 80% business owners);
- Improve convenience of parking (77% residents, 84% business owners);
- Keep stores open later in the evenings (74% residents, 26% business owners).
- Improve the quality of retail goods (73% residents, 48% business owners);
- Increase the variety of retail goods (72% residents, 70% business owners);
- Improve traffic flow (71% residents, 63% business owners);
- Keep stores open later on Saturdays (68% residents, 27% business owners);
- Increase the variety of restaurants (67% residents, 62% business owners);
- Open stores on Sundays (64% residents, 23% business owners);
- Physically improve buildings (64% residents, 59% business owners);
- Improve the quality of restaurants (62% residents, 42% business owners);
- Improve the quality of service businesses (56% residents, 21% business owners);

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- Improve the variety of services businesses (54% residents, 36% business owners);
- Improve customer service (54% residents, 33% business owners);
- Improve feelings of security (52% residents, 30% business owners);
- Increase the knowledge of salespeople (50% residents, 22% business owners); and
- Improve the cleanliness of area (46% residents, 39% business owners).

As revealed above, residents surveyed were concerned about the overall improvement of Downtown. Their desires included enhancing Downtown's variety and selection (retail, service, and restaurant offerings), Downtown's convenience and accessibility (parking, traffic flow, business hours, and customer service) and Downtown's ambience (safety, cleanliness of area, and building appearance).

Although business owners did agree with residents that improvements needed to be made in the areas of parking, traffic flow, buildings, and variety and selection (retail and restaurants), they appeared less concerned with the need to improve Downtown's service businesses, business hours, customer service, and the overall appearance of Downtown.

When residents were asked if there was anything else that could be done to encourage them to patronize Downtown, parking and increasing Downtown's variety and selection topped the list. This mirrors the top two improvements residents cited as very important. When asked what specific businesses residents would like to see Downtown, the majority of respondents cited clothing stores, restaurants, and a department store.

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Downtown LaPorte Tomorrow

IV. DOWNTOWN LAPORTE TOMORROW

A series of discussions, focus groups, and meetings were held to define the community's preferred vision of Downtown LaPorte -- as it would ideally exist in the year 2011. A following compilation of the thoughts and preferences expressed during those sessions was written by Laura Gibbons, Government Affairs Manager of the Indiana Association of Cities and Towns.

By the year 2011, Downtown LaPorte would be a place where people of all ages can experience the energy, fun, and special offerings that make Downtown LaPorte a unique destination.

Downtown would have a great mix of businesses to cater to every need. It would be a place to find specialty and quality every day items at popular retailers. Downtown would have an assortment of fine dining, cafes, al fresco dining, and ethnic restaurants that tempts the taste buds. Art and entertainment Downtown would keep nightlife and weekends fun and fulfilled.

By the year 2011, Downtown would be an easy place for motorists to drive to and park. Truck traffic would be diverted from Downtown and pedestrians would feel safe to enjoy their downtown stroll, business activity, or shopping spree. Pedestrians would be able to cross Lincolnway safely without trying to beat the clock. And, motorists would be able to exit their cars parked on-street without hesitancy.

Accessible and convenient parking would be plentiful Downtown. Customers would always have a place to park and spaces would be identified for Downtown employees and residents. If more parking is needed Downtown, no historic structures would be demolished for these parking needs.

Downtown's ambience would be quaint and welcoming with an overall look that is cohesive and appealing to the eye. Downtown streetscape would continue to flourish and have year round appeal.

Buildings in Downtown would be alive with no boarded up windows or sleepy look. Historic buildings would be preserved, maintained, and updated to maintain Downtown's historic integrity. Overall improvements would be substantial and

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long-lasting to keep Downtown functional and ready for business. Upper stories would be rehabilitated for housing to create a new market for Downtown living.

By 2011, LaPorte would have the following uses to draw people Downtown, including:

- Government offices;
- Specialty and retail variety (including women's, men's, and children's clothing, hardware, fabrics, crafts, shoe store, books, music, bakery, kitchenware, home furnishings/accessories, neighborhood grocery, meat market);
- Restaurants (variety of independent, ethnic, family, fine and casual dining, outdoor dining);
- Service and professional offices (including financial and medical offices);
- Minority owned businesses;
- Housing;
- Community college or state university extension;
- Entertainment for young adults;
- Gathering place/park/green space with fountain;
- Outside entertainment (public art, concerts, street musicians & vendors);
- Farmers market;
- Places of interest for visitors; and
- Children's museum.

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By 2011, LaPorte's thriving Downtown would be able to attract the following users:

- Local residents;
- County government users;
- Hospital patrons and employees;
- Antique buyers;
- Visitors and passers by;
- Museum goers;
- Lake traffic;
- Indiana Dunes tourists;
- Cultural tourists;
- Chicago residents with second homes in LaPorte and nearby areas;
- Notre Dame alumni;
- Orchard customers;
- Outdoorsmen;
- Michigan City's Lighthouse Mall shoppers
- Restaurant-goers;
- Golf course users;
- Symphony patrons; and
- Civic auditorium users.

Downtown would be a destination marketed widely to entice new and old residents, customers, and visitors to comeback for more. Everyone would be aware that Downtown LaPorte has everything you want to shop for, experience art and culture, and enjoy the entertainment and attractions suited for the whole family.

By 2011, Downtown La Porte would be a destination and have the following image:

***A historic, quaint, and vibrant Downtown
That is progressive, forward thinking,
And a welcoming and comfortable place to be.***

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*A cultural and fine dining Downtown
That is hip, energetic, creative, enticing,
And pedestrian-friendly.*

*An animated and friendly place
That has a wide ethnic diversity –
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*A place where it's clear –
Everyone has pride and works together.*

*A great selection of specialty shops with
Creative and enticing windows that rival those in Chicago,
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*A Downtown that makes you say,
"I'm glad I came!
I shopped till I was broke!
I want to come back!
I'd like to move here!"*

*The comeback Downtown that
Increases the joy of the community's
Residents and visitors alike.*

*Downtown La Porte –
A destination discovered!*

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Downtown Market Analysis

V. DOWNTOWN MARKET ANALYSIS

To ensure long-term economic results and success, LaPorte's Downtown enhancement effort must be market-driven. This means that the effort must be one that results in all of Downtown's investors -- business owners, property owners, developers, patrons, the local government, etc. -- being able to realize an increasing return on their investments. This can only be achieved via an enhancement effort that is based on a sound, realistic understanding of Downtown's economic potentials. The following chapter quantifies Downtown's economic potentials in terms of retail, office, and housing development.

Downtown Retail Opportunities

Retail Trade Area

Downtown LaPorte's primary retail trade area has been defined as the geographic area from which the majority of retail customers are currently drawn and the geographic area which presents the greatest opportunity in the immediate future for gaining additional retail customers. Based on current customer travel patterns, discussions with local business leaders and government officials, and the opinion of HyettPalma, Inc., Downtown's primary retail trade area is shown on the attached map.

Retail Economic Indicators

Downtown's primary retail trade area can be currently characterized by the following economic indicators.

THE PRIMARY TRADE AREA HAS AN ESTIMATED POPULATION OF 46,650 -- WITH AN ESTIMATED 18,401 HOUSEHOLDS (Source: ESRI estimate)

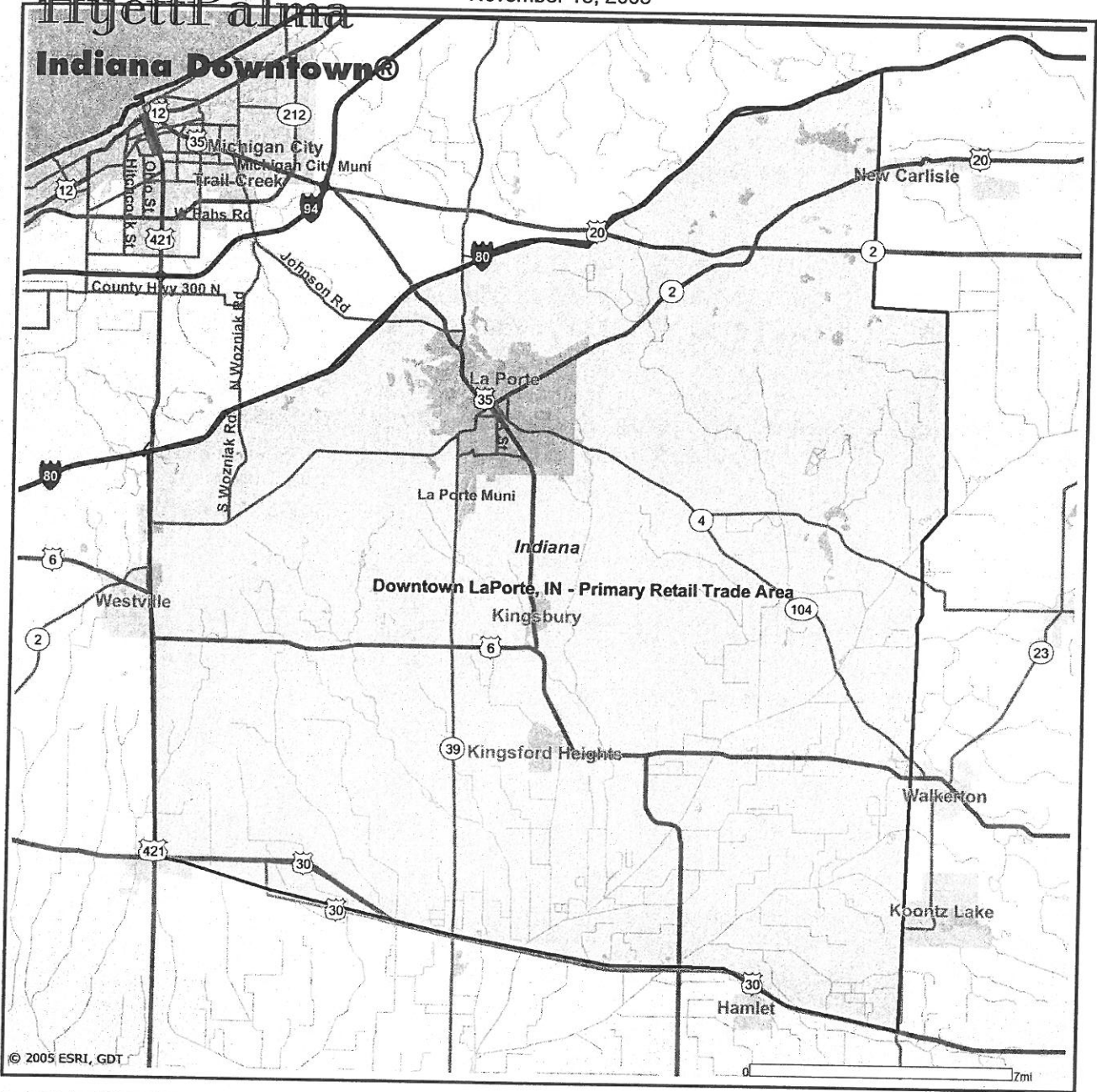
THE AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD SIZE IS 2.50 PERSONS, WHICH IS SLIGHTLY LESS THAN THE NATIONAL AVERAGE OF 2.59 (Source: ESRI estimate)

Site Map

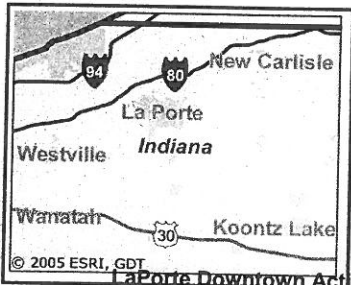
Downtown LaPorte, IN - Primary Retail Trade Area

November 15, 2005

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THE TOTAL COMBINED INCOME OF HOUSEHOLDS WITHIN THE PRIMARY TRADE AREA IS APPROXIMATELY \$1,018,000,000 PER YEAR (Source: ESRI estimate)

THE AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD INCOME FOR THOSE IN THE PRIMARY TRADE AREA IS APPROXIMATELY \$55,346 AND IS PROJECTED TO INCREASE TO \$62,749 ANNUALLY BY 2010 (Source: ESRI estimate)

Current Retail Businesses

Downtown LaPorte currently contains approximately 96 retail businesses, which occupy approximately 408,980 square feet of building space. The retail inventory was completed by the Downtown LaPorte Process Committee and is shown on the following pages.

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Downtown LaPorte Retail Businesses

| <u>SIC CODE</u> | <u>BUSINESS TYPE</u> | <u># BUS.</u> | <u>TOT. SQ. FT.</u> |
|-----------------|--|---------------|---------------------|
| <u>52</u> | <u>Building Materials and Garden Supplies</u> | | |
| 5211 | Lumber and Building Materials | 1 | 14,870 |
| <u>54</u> | <u>Food Store</u> | | |
| 5411 | Grocery Store | 3 | 18,850 |
| 5431 | Fruit/Vegetable Market | 1 | 6,972 |
| 5461 | Retail Bakery | 1 | 1,500 |
| 5499 | Miscellaneous Food | 1 | 4,600 |
| <u>55</u> | <u>Automotive Dealers and Service Stations</u> | | |
| 5531 | Auto/Home Supply | 1 | 8,800 |
| <u>56</u> | <u>Apparel and Accessories</u> | | |
| 5651 | Family Apparel | 2 | 4,830 |
| 5661 | Shoes | 1 | 1,150 |
| <u>57</u> | <u>Furniture and Home Furnishings</u> | | |
| 5712 | Furniture Store | 3 | 46,500 |
| 5713 | Floor Covering | 2 | 7,320 |
| 5722 | Home Appliances | 2 | 5,750 |
| 5731 | Radio/TV/Electronics | 2 | 2,864 |
| 5734 | Computers/Software | 3 | 5,310 |
| 5736 | Musical Instruments | 1 | 2,300 |
| <u>58</u> | <u>Eating/Drinking</u> | | |
| 5812 | Eating Places | 12 | 38,799 |
| 5813 | Drinking Places | 11 | 19,581 |
| <u>59</u> | <u>Miscellaneous Retail</u> | | |
| 5912 | Drug Store | 1 | 4,675 |
| 5921 | Liquor Store | 2 | 5,828 |
| 5932 | Antiques | 8 | 37,183 |
| 5941 | Sporting Goods | 2 | 7,215 |
| 5942 | Books | 1 | 2,000 |
| 5943 | Stationery | 1 | 3,000 |

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Downtown LaPorte Retail Businesses

| SIC CODE | BUSINESS TYPE | # BUS. | TOT. SQ. FT. |
|-----------|--|--------|--------------|
| 59 | Misc. Retail (continued) | | |
| 5944 | Jewelry | 4 | 8,310 |
| 5945 | Hobby/Toys/Games | 4 | 13,160 |
| 5947 | Gift/Novelty | 2 | 4,000 |
| 5992 | Florist | 2 | 9,884 |
| 5993 | Tobacco Stand | 3 | 6,835 |
| 5994 | Newsstand | 1 | 2,000 |
| 5999 | Miscellaneous Retail | 10 | 17,681 |
| | Select Support Services | | |
| 5112 | Office Supplies | 1 | 2,300 |
| 7216 | Dry Cleaners/Tailors | 1 | 2,760 |
| 7231 | Beauty Shops | 3 | 1,853 |
| 7841 | Video Rental | 2 | 5,300 |
| | Amusement and Recreation Services | | |
| 7991 | Physical Fitness Facilities | 1 | 85,000 |

TOTAL NUMBER OF RETAIL BUSINESSES 96

TOTAL SQUARE FEET OF OCCUPIED RETAIL BUSINESS SPACE 408,980

TOTAL NUMBER OF VACANT RETAIL SPACES 14

TOTAL SQUARE FEET OF VACANT RETAIL BUSINESS SPACE 32,389

Source: Downtown LaPorte Process Committee

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Retail Potential

Currently, within Downtown's primary trade area, the total estimated demand for retail products is approximately \$298,000,000 per year. This demand is shown on the following graphs. A complete presentation of retail product demand for the primary trade area is shown in **THE RETAIL REPORT®**, contained in the Appendix of this document.

As a conservative estimate, it is assumed that Downtown LaPorte retail businesses now generate an average (blended figure) of approximately \$160 per year per square foot in retail sales.

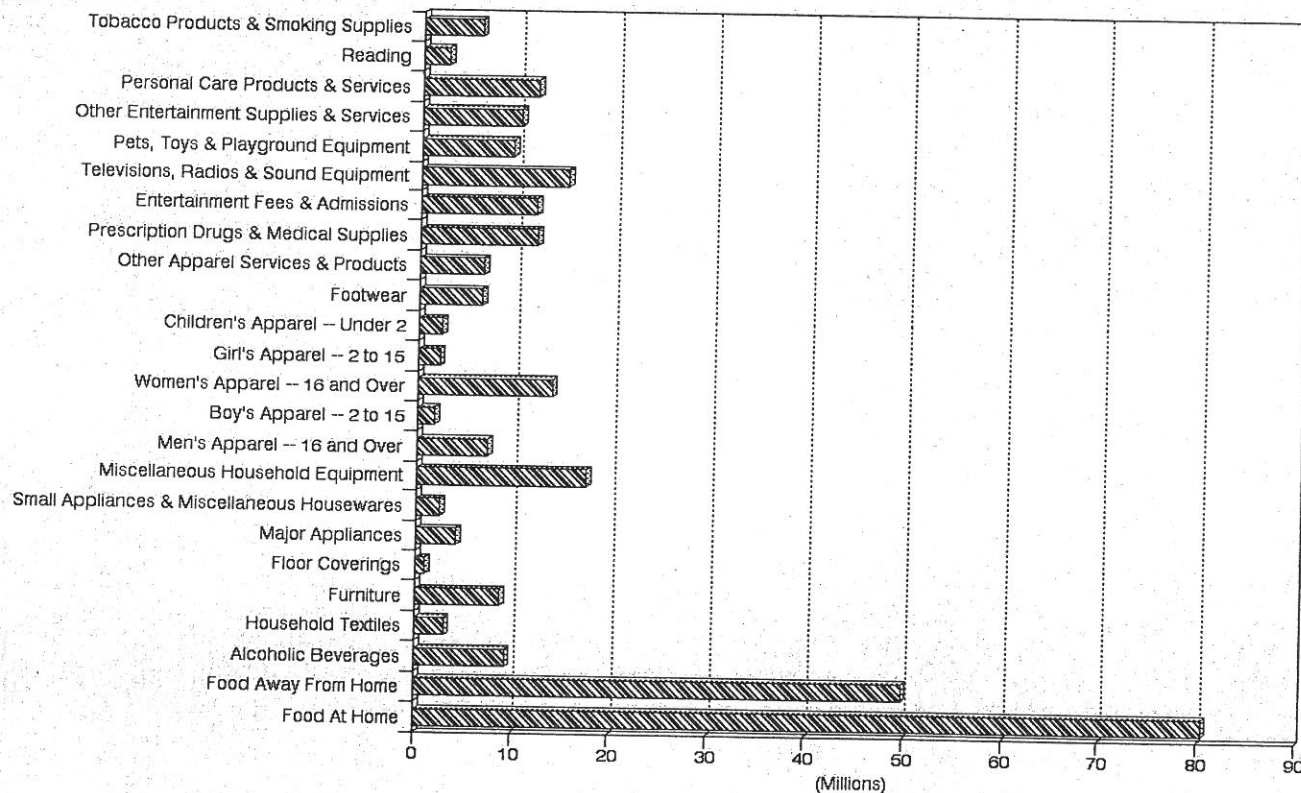
Since Downtown currently contains approximately 409,000 square feet of occupied retail space, Downtown LaPorte should currently be generating approximately \$65,000,000 in retail sales per year.

By dividing the project area's estimated annual retail sales -- \$65,000,000 -- by the total estimated demand for retail products within the primary trade area -- \$298,000,000 -- it can be concluded that Downtown LaPorte may currently be capturing approximately 22% of the retail sales potential within the primary trade area. And, the balance of the demand is being captured by businesses within other parts of the primary trade area and/or by businesses in other trade areas.

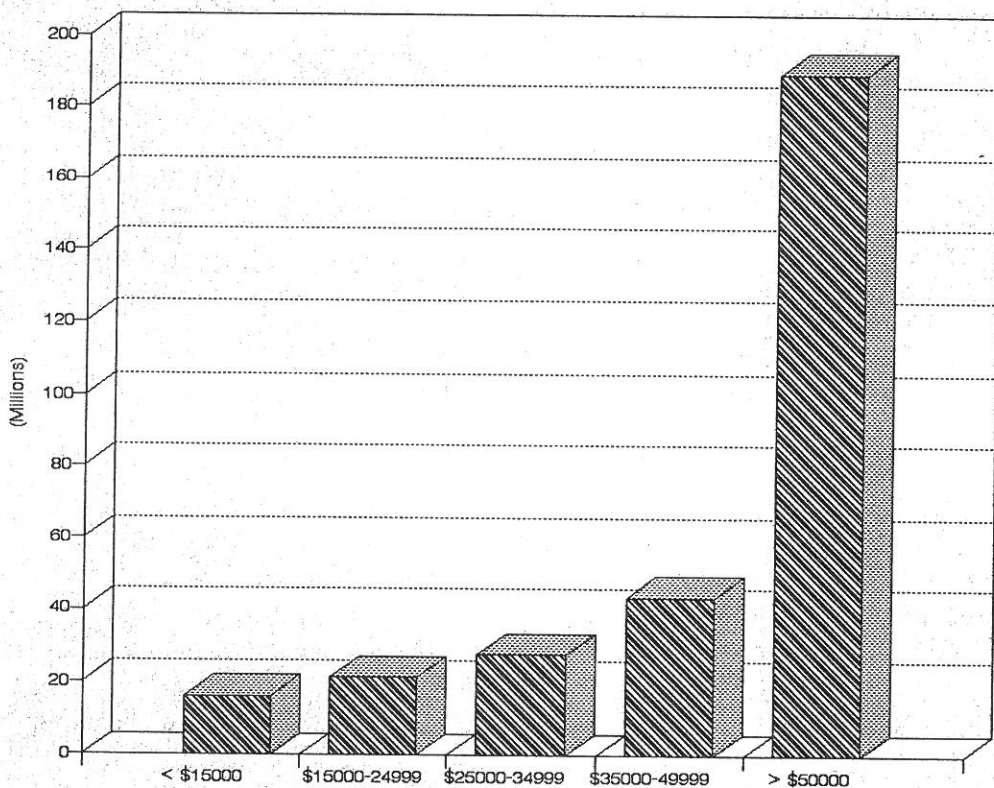
Taking steps to further enhance Downtown LaPorte, and barring a significant decline in the national or regional retail economy, it is conservatively anticipated that Downtown may have the potential to increase its share of retail sales in its primary trade area from the current level of approximately 22% to between 24% and 25% by the year 2011. This should be considered a goal of the economic enhancement program.

If Downtown LaPorte is able to increase its market share to between 24% and 25% by the year 2011, it is possible that the project area may be able to increase its total capture of retail sales to between \$72,000,000 and \$75,000,000 by the year 2011 -- considered in constant 2006 dollars.

TOTAL PRODUCT DEMAND BY PRODUCT TYPE



TOTAL PRODUCT DEMAND BY INCOME GROUP



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This increase in total retail sales could potentially support the development of between approximately 44,000 and 60,000 net square feet of additional retail space by the year 2011 -- which could include expansions or sales increases by existing Downtown LaPorte retail businesses and/or the construction of some limited amount of new retail space.

It must be noted that Downtown's ability to gain a larger market share will be contingent on efforts to enhance its business climate, enhance and expand its existing businesses, and recruit additional retail businesses to the area. If such efforts are aggressively and diligently implemented -- on an on-going basis -- the actual growth in Downtown's market share could potentially be much higher than projected. Conversely, by the year 2011, Downtown LaPorte's market share could be much less than projected above if efforts to enhance the area and expand/recruit businesses are not diligently and continually pursued.

NOTE:

No attempt was made to determine the condition of vacant space. Therefore, no judgment is made concerning the marketability of space based on condition.

Retail Business Development

Based on the findings of this retail market analysis, the opportunity exists to enhance and expand certain types of retail businesses that are currently located in Downtown LaPorte. In addition, the opportunity also exists to attract additional businesses to Downtown. A list of the types of retail businesses recommended for potential enhancement, expansion, and attraction is presented in the chapter of this document titled ***Course of Action***.

Downtown Office Opportunities

Office Market Indicators

Several key economic indicators that characterize the current office operations within Downtown LaPorte follow.

- Downtown LaPorte currently has approximately 72 various office occupants occupying approximately 1,064,988 square feet of building space.

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- Downtown LaPorte is the seat of County government and, as such, is the professional services center of the region.
- Downtown's occupied office space serves, primarily, the personal needs of those who live within the community and primary trade area, with the most significant concentrations of offices ranging from publishing, finance, health services, educational services, membership organizations, professional services, and government.

Current Office Uses

The variety of office occupants found in Downtown can be seen in the following table, in which office tenants are listed by SIC numbers. The office inventory was completed by the Downtown LaPorte Process Committee.

Office Potential

It is anticipated that most of Downtown's office market growth will continue to consist of office uses which serve, primarily, the personal needs of those who live in, or in proximity to, Downtown LaPorte's primary trade area. Communities nationwide have experienced the fact that -- as improvements are made in the overall economic and physical conditions of their Downtowns -- an associated increase in demand for office space normally follows. This is also expected to hold true for Downtown LaPorte.

Therefore, it is estimated that approximately 60,000 to 80,000 square feet of additional office space could potentially be supported in Downtown LaPorte between now and the year 2011. This should be considered an economic goal for the enhancement effort.

It must be noted that the actual growth in Downtown's office demand could be higher if Downtown is able to attract general offices, or back office operations from outside the area; to attract office occupants currently located elsewhere in the community; or to experience significant expansion by current Downtown office operations. Also, if one or more of Downtown's currently vacant and/or underutilized building spaces is appropriately renovated, additional uses, including office occupants, can be anticipated to locate in Downtown LaPorte.

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Downtown LaPorte Offices by SIC Code

| <u>SIC CODE</u> | <u>BUSINESS TYPE</u> | <u># BUS.</u> | <u>TOT. SQ. FT.</u> |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------|---------------|---------------------|
| <u>27</u> | <u>Publishing</u> | | |
| 271 | Newspapers | 1 | 16,000 |
| <u>60</u> | <u>Depository Institutions</u> | | |
| 602 | Commercial Banks | 5 | 37,200 |
| 606 | Credit Unions | 1 | 1,040 |
| <u>62</u> | <u>Security and Commodity Brokers</u> | | |
| 621 | Security Brokers | 2 | 1,925 |
| <u>63/64</u> | <u>Insurance</u> | | |
| 641 | Insurance Agents/Brokers | 3 | 3,264 |
| <u>65</u> | <u>Real Estate</u> | | |
| 653 | Real Estate Agents/Mgrs. | 2 | 3,620 |
| 654 | Title Abstract Offices | 2 | 5,131 |
| <u>72</u> | <u>Personal Services</u> | | |
| 722 | Photographic Studios | 3 | 5,086 |
| <u>73</u> | <u>Business Services</u> | | |
| 731 | Advertising | 3 | 7,386 |
| 738 | Misc. Business Services | 1 | 1,000 |
| <u>80</u> | <u>Health Services</u> | | |
| 801 | Offices/Clinics of Doctors | 5 | 43,043 |
| 802 | Offices/Clinics of Dentists | 2 | 13,470 |
| 805 | Nursing/Personal Care | 1 | 14,800 |
| 806 | Hospitals | 1 | 350,000 |
| <u>81</u> | <u>Legal Services</u> | | |
| 811 | Legal Services | 8 | 14,530 |
| <u>82</u> | <u>Educational Services</u> | | |
| 823 | Library | 1 | 38,824 |
| <u>83</u> | <u>Social Services</u> | | |
| 832 | Individual/Family Services | 2 | 12,149 |

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Downtown LaPorte Offices by SIC Code

| SIC CODE | BUSINESS TYPE | # BUS. | TOT. SQ. FT. |
|-----------|---|--------|--------------|
| 86 | <u>Membership Organizations</u> | | |
| 861 | Businesss Associations | 1 | 1,625 |
| 864 | Civic/Social Organizations | 2 | 2,950 |
| 865 | Political Organizations | 3 | 3,610 |
| 866 | Religious Organizations | 5 | 31,583 |
| 869 | Other Memb. Orgs. | 1 | 60,000 |
| 87 | <u>Engineering/Management Services</u> | | |
| 872 | Accounting/Bookkeeping | 2 | 10,120 |
| 89 | <u>Services Not Elsewhere Classified</u> | | |
| 899 | Services | 11 | 37,090 |
| 91 | <u>General Government</u> | | |
| 919 | General Government | 4 | 349,542 |

TOTAL NUMBER OF OFFICE BUSINESSES 72

TOTAL SQUARE FEET OF OCCUPIED OFFICE BUSINESS SPACE 1,064,988

TOTAL NUMBER OF VACANT OFFICE SPACES 7

TOTAL SQUARE FEET OF VACANT OFFICE BUSINESS SPACE 15,690

Source: Downtown LaPorte Process Committee

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NOTE:

No attempt was made to determine the condition of vacant space. Therefore, no judgment is made concerning the marketability of space based on condition.

Office Business Development

A listing of office types recommended for recruitment and expansion in Downtown LaPorte is presented in the chapter of this document titled **Course of Action**.

Downtown Housing Opportunities

The Downtown project area currently contains a number of apartment units in the upper floors of Downtowns buildings and a plethora of housing surrounding Downtown, including multi- and single-family homes and historic and contemporary dwellings.

Since Downtown LaPorte is centrally located, it is surrounded by people living in neighborhoods that are adjacent and in proximity to Downtown, who enjoy the convenience of being able to walk or drive a short distance to the heart of Downtown LaPorte.

As has been found throughout the nation during the past three decades plus – regardless of size – as a Downtown's physical environment and mix of businesses is improved, it is very likely that the demand for housing in and near Downtown will also increase. This can also be expected in Downtown LaPorte. Every effort should be made, consistent with the implementation of the **Downtown Action Agenda**, to introduce more quality housing – particularly market-rate housing – in and in proximity to Downtown LaPorte.

Several properties in Downtown have upper floors that do not have any housing units and are used for either storage or no purpose at this time. Based on successful housing development in similar Downtowns throughout the state and nation, the potential for development of additional Downtown housing units, particularly market-rate, loft-style units above shops or in large, older, underutilized buildings, should be explored with and promoted to property owners and interested developers.

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As market conditions allow, every effort should be made to introduce:

- Loft apartments in the upper floors of existing structures throughout Downtown;
- Townhouses and garden-style housing – market-rate and affordable – at the edges of Downtown; and
- Both owner-occupied and rental units.

A concerted effort should also be made to protect and enhance housing in Downtown's valuable adjacent neighborhoods. These units will always be home to extremely important patrons of Downtown LaPorte.

Rather than placing arbitrary or artificial limits on the number of housing units appropriate for Downtown LaPorte – and in neighborhoods near the commercial district – it is suggested that the absorption of units in the marketplace be used as the indicator of demand. And, that every effort be made to develop the greatest number of quality units possible in and near Downtown when market conditions allow.

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Course of Action

VI. COURSE OF ACTION

This chapter includes the specific actions recommended to:

- Attain the community's preferred vision for Downtown LaPorte;
- Enable Downtown to capture the economic opportunities revealed in the market analysis conducted as part of this *Downtown Action Agenda*; and
- Further strengthen Downtown's economy and viability.

The recommended actions follow the guidelines, which were stated earlier and are reiterated below, since these guidelines are critical for the successful implementation of the recommended actions.

HyettPalma recommends that the following guidelines be kept in mind while implementing the *LaPorte Downtown Action Agenda 2006*.

1. Timing

The City of LaPorte is on the brink of major development that will considerably alter the commercial face of the city. This includes:

- On the west, the transformation of Maple Lane Mall into LaPorte Town Square, with an upgraded K-Mart and grocery store, plus big box and smaller shops;
- On the east, the transformation of Wal-Mart into a supercenter; and
- To the north of Downtown, development of NewPorte Landing, a mixed-use commercial and residential complex, whose first phase will include big box, department, and grocery stores, plus smaller businesses.

These developments will have an impact on Downtown – either positive or negative. To ensure that the impact is positive, Downtown's enhancement must

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become a top priority of the community now. Time is of the essence and there is no time to waste. In addition, the Mayor and Council of LaPorte should be commended for bringing the *Indiana Downtown* program to LaPorte at this critical point in time.

2. Perspective

Downtown is facing a variety of issues, all of which must be addressed in order to bring about its enhancement. In doing so, it will be very important to keep each issue in perspective, rather than allowing any single issue to dominate the enhancement effort and its initiatives.

3. Professional Advice

It is important to involve volunteers in the enhancement of Downtown and in implementing the *Action Agenda*. However, care should be taken to obtain professional advice before making decisions on actions that will affect Downtown's economy, image, and success – whether those issues involve parking-related actions, landscaping materials, etc.

4. Turn-over

It must be recognized that business turn-over is a natural occurrence in a commercial district whose base is small, independently owned businesses. Small business owners routinely decide to go in and out of business for reasons that often have little or nothing to do with business profitability – reasons such as getting married or divorced, getting burned out, retiring, etc. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that a market does not exist or Downtown cannot support a particular type of business, just because that type of business was located in Downtown at one time and closed.

5. Distinctiveness

The local desire to link Downtown to other commercial areas is admirable. However, in doing so, care should be taken to ensure that Downtown retains its distinctiveness in terms of:

- Style of public improvements;
- Design guidelines and building appearance;
- Business mix;
- Customer service;

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- Image; and
- Marketing.

6. *Organizations & Entities*

A good number of non-profit organizations and governmental entities are now involved in Downtown's enhancement. To garner the highest level of results from their involvement, each one must:

- Have a clearly defined role in terms of Downtown's enhancement;
- Commit to implementing the *Action Agenda* recommendations that pertain to their mission and reason for being;
- Keep their advice and recommendations regarding Downtown's enhancement within their area of expertise; and
- Be willing to coordinate and communicate with the other involved organizations and entities.

7. *Anchors*

As was said earlier, Downtown is fortunate to still contain its traditional anchors, such as the post office, library, City Hall, and banks. The importance of retaining these anchors in Downtown must be recognized. In fact, 31% of residents surveyed as part of this *Action Agenda* said the main reason they come to Downtown LaPorte is to bank (20%) or go to the post office (11%).

In the future, if the creation of any new anchors that serve the community's general populace is considered, these should be located in Downtown.

8. *Preservation*

Those who saw to having Downtown listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a historic district should be commended, since that designation brings with it prestige and marketing opportunities. In addition, those involved in implementing this *Action Agenda* should recognize the importance of Downtown's preservation as an opportunity to:

- Keep Downtown distinct, making different from the competition;

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- Attract investors – business owners, real estate developers, etc.;
- Attract customers and residents; and
- Attract heritage tourists – who tend to stay longer and spend more than other types of tourists.

However, it must also be realized that these opportunities will only exist Downtown is enhanced in a manner that respects and protects Downtown's historic architecture – this mean appropriate façade improvements and new construction that is designed to be compatible with the old.

9. Districts

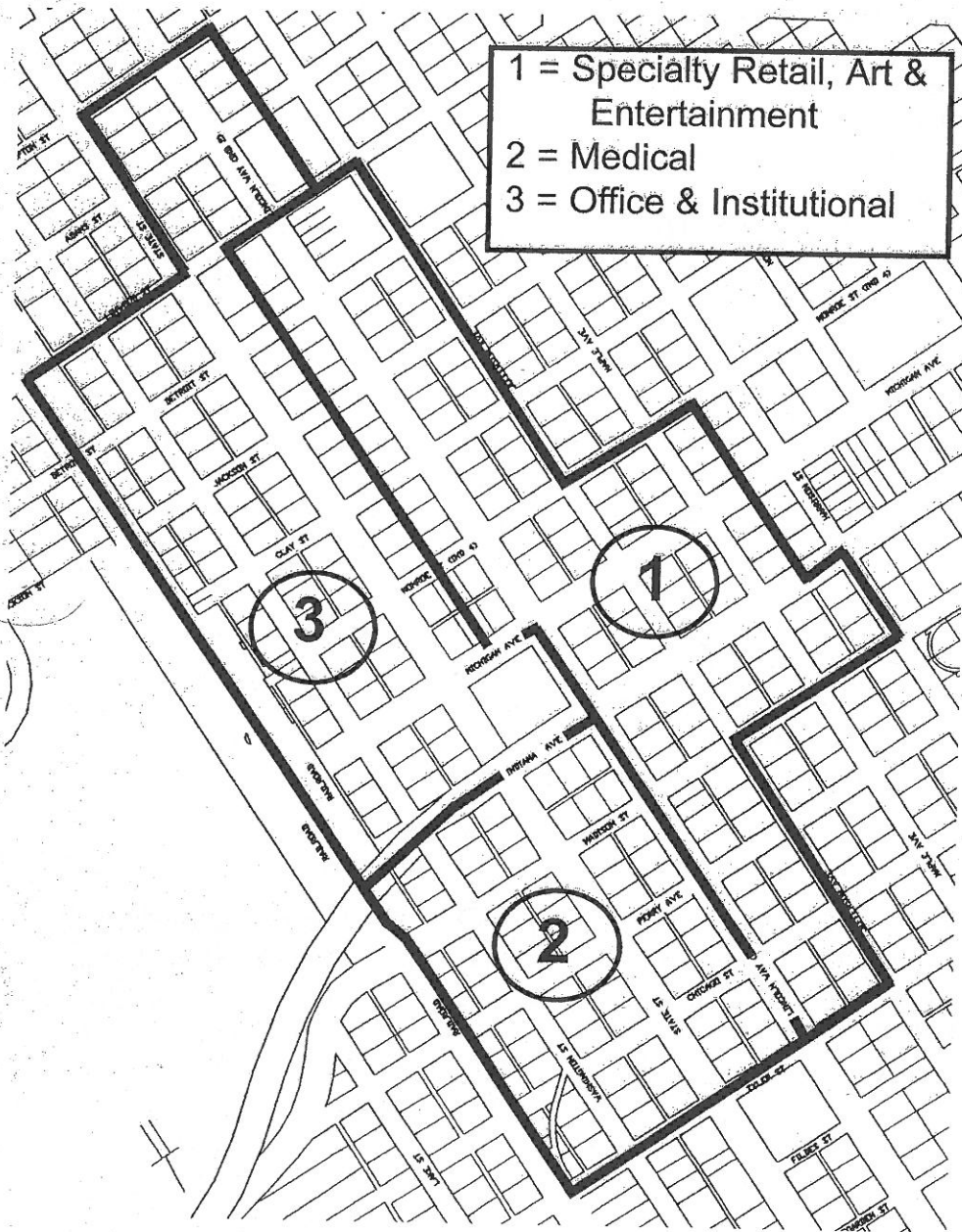
The **Action Agenda** should be used to create the following three districts (see map on the next page of this **Action Agenda**), which are in-keeping with the natural market forces at play in Downtown.

- District #1: Specialty Retail, Food, Art, & Entertainment District – This portion of Downtown is its most pedestrian-oriented. It contains Downtown's largest collection of intact historic structures and most of Downtown's specialty businesses. A cluster of specialty retail, food, art, and entertainment venues should be created in this district's first floor spaces. Housing should be located in the upper floors of this district's buildings. This district and its unique businesses present the greatest opportunity to make Downtown more of a destination.
- District #2: Medical District – This district includes LaPorte Hospital and associated professional office and service businesses. This is a well-defined area in which "the die is cast." The attempt here should be to contain growth and increase density so that the needs of the hospital and its associated uses are met without encroachment that will damage surrounding neighborhoods.

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Downtown La Porte Development Districts



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- District #3: Office & Institutional District – This district contains County government facilities, as well as county-related uses, such as attorney offices, restaurants, etc. This district can be considered to be in transition, as witnessed by the adaptive use of structures originally built for industrial and warehousing uses that required proximity to a railroad. The east end of Lincolnway is contained in this district and is also in transition, with auto-oriented buildings taking the place of older buildings and making it very different from the remainder of Lincolnway. This should remain a district of office and institutional uses. In addition, it should be recognized as the area that will link Downtown's specialty district (District #1) to NewPorte Landing.

10. Focus Area

The Downtown enhancement effort should be focused on District #1 for the foreseeable future, since this is the portion of Downtown that presents an opportunity to make Downtown more of a destination. In focusing on this district, particular emphasis should be placed on Lincolnway, in terms of business development and real estate development actions.

Public Improvements

The City of LaPorte has recently made significant improvements to Downtown's public spaces, in the form of decorative sidewalks, street corner bump outs, planters, street furniture, and banners. Now, the following additional, minor public improvements should be made to further improve Downtown's appeal to consumers and investors.

1. Banners

Customized banners should be designed, purchased, and installed in Downtown. These banners should reflect Downtown's unique image and character, be adequate in number, and changed seasonally. Banner placement should be concentrated in District #1 – the Specialty Retail, Food, Art, & Entertainment District.

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2. Landscaping

An “adopt-a-planter” program, operated by a committee of the BID, is in operation in Downtown. It is understood that this committee works with a landscape firm in determining planting materials to be used. In doing so, it is suggested that:

- Planting materials be chosen that add the maximum amount of color to Downtown year-round;
- Planting materials continue to be changed seasonally – meaning year-round – to bring variety and freshness to Downtown; and
- Those adopting the planters be urged to adhere to the landscaping plan so that Downtown has a coordinated and well-planned appearance.

In addition, the City should continue to maintain the planters to ensure a consistent level of quality in this regard.

3. Wayfinding

The City has erected “Welcome to LaPorte” signs that are distinctive in their design. This should be built upon by erecting additional wayfinding signs that include:

- Signs that direct motorists to “Historic Downtown LaPorte” from all major roadways;
- Signs placed at the entrances to Downtown that welcome motorists to “Historic Downtown LaPorte;”
- Signs that direct motorists to Downtown’s public parking facilities; and
- Signs that mark those facilities as being for public use.

Recently, the City installed street name signs in Downtown that are distinctive and that reflect Downtown’s historic nature. The wayfinding signs recommended

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above should also reflect Downtown's historic, quaint, and creative character and be consistent with the street name signs.

Parking & Traffic

Downtown traffic and parking concerns should be addressed in the following manner.

1. Parking

Parking studies were completed for Downtown in the 1990s and, more recently, the City has appointed a Parking Committee to deal with the subject.

Parking concerns in Downtown LaPorte appear to revolve around two issues:

- Parking management, which entails how existing spaces are being used and regulated; and
- Parking supply, which relates to the number of spaces that exist in Downtown – and the perception that there is a deficiency of supply in certain sections of Downtown.

These issues must be addressed ASAP in order to stimulate private sector investment in Downtown. In doing so, the goal should be to ensure that the needs of the following markets are accommodated, in this order:

- Customers and patrons of Downtown – who need convenient parking that turns over frequently;
- Downtown workers – who need the availability of all-day parking;
- Downtown residents – who need convenient, 24-hour parking, and which should not hinder commerce or cause the loss of historic structures; and
- Infrequent users of Downtown (such as jurors) – who have no choice but to seek long-term parking, albeit infrequently.

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The parking needs of the above markets should be accommodated through the following actions.

- Downtown uses that attract large numbers of individuals – such as City Hall, the County Courthouse, the hospital, the library, and the YMCA – should assume and act on their responsibility to provide adequate parking for their users. This should apply whether their users are patrons or employees.
- Developers of housing units in Downtown should assume and act on their responsibility to create parking on-site, when possible, or to arrange for residents to use off-street spaces (whether in public or private facilities).
- The City should seek the advice of a parking professional – who has experience with Downtown historic districts – to address Downtown's parking issues, rather than relying strictly on the opinions of laypeople.

The parking professional should be specifically asked to consider and advise the City regarding the appropriateness of taking the following actions.

- District #1 is the portion of Downtown in which customer and patron demand for turn-over parking is the highest. Therefore, to accommodate the parking needs of this market in District #1:
 - Signs should be erected on-street that read “Free 2-Hour Customer Parking;”
 - An increased fine system should be instituted to deter abuse of the two-hour time limit;
 - This district should receive the highest level of attention from parking enforcement personnel and, therefore, the highest level of parking enforcement;
 - The method of enforcement used should be that which is most effective in stimulating turn-over and discouraging abuse of the two-

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- hour time limit – such as recording license plate numbers by using hand held computers;
- The City requirement of two parking spaces for each housing unit should be done away with in this district – but only as it relates to housing created in currently existing structures;
- All methods of maximizing parking supply in this district should be considered, including:
 - Making any improvements needed to enhance the condition, feeling of safety, and use of parking lots;
 - Eliminating the striping of on-street spaces;
 - Creating additional on-street angled parking wherever possible; and
 - Eliminating “no parking” zones wherever possible;
- And, in the future, consideration should be given to creating a parking deck in a location that is most convenient for the customers and patrons of District #1.
- The demand in District #3 is primarily for all-day parking with minimal turn-over. Actions that should be considered for this district include:
 - The City should continue to encourage the County to provide parking to accommodate the needs of its users – as is being done with parking at the depot;
 - Parking time limits in this district should be enforced on a spot basis;
 - Consideration should be given to allowing 3-hour on-street parking;

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- Consideration should be given to increasing the number of off-street parking spaces for which permits are issued to workers and residents of this district – with the number determined via demand analysis conducted by the parking professional mentioned above.
- In District #2, the demand is for both all-day and turn-over parking. With the hospital being the biggest traffic generator in this district, the actions needed appear to be straightforward. Namely:
 - As has been the case to date, the hospital should be expected to accommodate the parking demand of its workers, clients, and visitors in proximity to its campus; and
 - The hospital should seriously consider building a parking deck, as the continued development of sprawling, surface level parking lots will place available parking farther and farther away from the hospital's facilities.

2. Traffic

With four major routes traversing Downtown – US 35, SR 2, SR 4, and SR 39 – the community is concerned with the noise and pollution created by through truck traffic, as well as with the safety of pedestrians crossing streets. It is understood that an “economic development corridor” is being planned to address this issue, the creation of which is expected to occur in approximately 15 years or so. Since such alternative routes make it possible for all traffic to avoid a Downtown – and not simply truck traffic – it will be very important to make Downtown as strong, vibrant, and irresistible as possible between now and when the new corridor is built, so that motorists cannot help but be drawn to Downtown.

In terms of pedestrian-safety, the City should continue to work with INDOT to ensure that:

- Downtown's crosswalks are as safe, visible, and convenient as possible;
- Downtown's light timing makes crossing the street safe and convenient for pedestrians;

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- Downtown traffic is moving at reasonable speeds;
- All walk/don't walk signals are in good working order; and
- In the near future, the current walk/don't walk signals should be replaced with countdown signals, which show the number of seconds remaining before lights change from green to red.

Real Estate Development

The following actions should be taken to encourage and stimulate private real estate investment in Downtown LaPorte.

1. Problem Properties

Downtown properties that are experiencing disinvestment – or lack of needed investment – should be addressed by taking the following steps. It should be noted that the goal of doing so should be to stimulate private sector investment that returns structures to productive use, rather than losing historic structures to demolition.

- Every effort should be made to work with the owners of all Downtown properties to ensure that all buildings are Downtown assets and contributors to the overall quality and character of Downtown's environs. Special attention should be given to working with the owners of distressed or deteriorated properties, working to enhance the problem real estate. This special attention should include the offering of any available incentives to stimulate timely enhancement action.
- If owners of problem properties – meaning deteriorated or substandard – do not wish to take the necessary steps to correct deficiencies, then assistance should be extended to the owners in an effort to find buyers for the property who will purchase the real estate and correct deficiencies. In association with this initiative, the Redevelopment Commission should consider – when deemed appropriate in specific cases – the acquisition and repair of problematic properties, with the marketing of the properties following renovation, or the marketing of problem properties with the

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condition that new owners make the necessary repairs to render the properties sound.

- If the owners of problem properties refuse to repair deficiencies or market the real estate to others who will make the necessary repairs, then the Redevelopment Commission, to the maximum extent of its powers granted by the State of Indiana, should consider taking possession of the problematic properties, including but not necessarily limited to the use of Indiana receivership legislation (*IC 36-7-9, Chapter 9, Unsafe Building Law.*)

And, early on in the process, the Redevelopment Commission should work with the Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana (HLFI) to determine if any of HLFI's programs can be of help in dealing with Downtown problem properties.

2. Housing

To create an additional element that will bolster Downtown's health and success, the greatest number of housing units possible should be created in the upper floors of buildings located in District #1. While there appears to be significant private sector interest in doing so, certain circumstances appear to be hindering action. To mitigate those circumstances, the following actions should be taken.

- As was stated earlier, the parking requirement pertaining to Downtown housing units should be done away with – but, only as it relates to creating housing in currently existing buildings.
- It is understood that housing is not a use now allowed in Downtown by right. This should be rectified by creating an overlay zone for District #1. In this zone, upper story housing in existing buildings would be a use that is allowed by right.

In addition, emphasis should be placed on creating market-rate and owner-occupied housing units in Downtown. And, the City should continue its efforts to encourage owners to rehab the greatest number of housing units located in neighborhoods adjacent to Downtown.

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3. Depot

The City is encouraged to continue in its efforts to:

- Develop this structure for use as offices and meeting space;
- Create a public plaza in front of the depot; and
- Create an adjacent parking area of approximately 200 spaces.

4. Design Guidelines

There is interest locally in creating design guidelines that would apply to exterior building improvements made in Downtown. This is an excellent initiative that should be pursued to protect the integrity of the structures located in Downtown's National Register Historic District. In doing so, it is suggested that the guidelines should:

- Be customized for and specifically tailored to address Downtown's architectural styles;
- Clearly lay out the "do's and don'ts" for making façade improvements in Downtown – with both text and illustrations;
- Address appropriate infill construction as well as existing façades;
- Be defined by a professional preservation architect or architectural historian having experience with Downtown historic districts; and
- Reflect, respect, and further the urban, historic development patterns of Downtown – rather than allowing or promoting building styles or setbacks typically found in suburban settings.

In addition, adherence to the design guidelines should be required as a condition for receiving any financial incentives that are made available in Downtown, such as grants or loans.

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Finally, the following items should be built into the design guideline effort:

- The review body – established to determine if proposed building improvements or infill construction is in-keeping with the guidelines – should include a preservation architect or architectural historian (again, experienced with Downtown historic districts) so that professional expertise is brought to the review process;
- The City's Historic Preservation Commission should be involved in the review process;
- Consideration should be given to offering preliminary design assistance – that is consistent with the guidelines – to those seriously interested in making building improvements in Downtown; and
- Ideally, the preliminary design assistance would be provided to the investor free-of-charge.

5. Building Codes

The City should continue to enforce all building codes in Downtown. Consistent with the desires of the Fire Department, an annual inspection program should be instituted. The goal of doing so should be to ensure that all Downtown buildings meet minimum thresholds for life safety and structural integrity. However, this should be done keeping in mind the unique needs and conditions of historic structures.

Business Development

The following steps should be taken to make Downtown's business climate as appealing to investors as possible and to enable Downtown to attract additional customers.

1. Public Safety

The highest possible levels of public safety should be maintained in Downtown. This should be accomplished by making every effort – as budgetary allocations allow – to increase the visibility of bike, foot, and vehicle patrols in Downtown.

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2. *Business Retention*

Every effort should be made to continue strengthening Downtown's existing businesses, to ensure that they better serve the needs of the marketplace and that the businesses are made as profitable as possible.

- **Business Counseling** – Maximum use of the services provided through the SBDTC counseling programs should continue to be used by all Downtown businesses. This is a very valuable and useful tool to further strengthen the operational practices of small businesses.
- **One-On-Ones** – One-on-one consultations and discussions should be continuously provided to individual Downtown business owners by qualified Downtown staff or other retained professional assistance to ensure that appropriate support or assistance is given to every interested Downtown business owner, ensure that assistance is tailored to the specific needs of each business, and that all of Downtown's business owners are aware of the overall enhancement efforts actions and any assistance which may be available to further strengthen their business or business operational practices.
- **Business Hours** – Downtown's existing business owners should be encouraged to operate their businesses during appropriate market-driven business hours. In the case of Downtown LaPorte, as more evening business offerings are developed – particularly dining and entertainment establishments – and as more housing is developed in and near Downtown, it is likely that the demand for more evening offerings from a wider range of business types will surface. This has certainly been the case in other communities operating successful Downtown enhancement initiatives. And, it must be kept in mind that the American buying public is becoming much more nocturnal in its buying practices. This is being driven, primarily, by the operating hours maintained by chain stores, shopping centers, and big boxes, as well as the increasing practice of shopping as a family event. With all of these factors in mind, every Downtown business owner should make a constant effort to examine hours of operation by talking with their customers to ensure that they are open for business when their targeted customers have the opportunity to

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frequent their business. And, in the case of Downtown LaPorte, this will likely mean that some businesses in the near future should consider remaining open during reasonably extended evening hours.

- **Bi-Lingual Business Signs and Advertising** – The LaPorte trade area is projected to experience a continued increase in the number of Hispanic households living in the area. With this growth, it can be expected that more Hispanic businesses will open in Downtown and that more Hispanic customers will frequent these and other businesses located in Downtown. To ensure the compatible and convenient operation of Downtown's businesses in such a manner that all customers are appropriately served, consideration should be given to the use of more bi-lingual business signs and advertising by all of Downtown's businesses, including both Hispanic and non-Hispanic businesses.
- **Enhanced Customer Service** – One of the most pronounced ways Downtown's existing businesses can continue to distinguish themselves from the newer, more coordinated offerings of malls, strip centers, big boxes, lifestyle centers, and power centers is by offering customers the highest levels of customer service possible. This should include things as small as letting customers use in-store restrooms to the delivery of purchases to customer's homes. Enhanced customer service is one of the least expensive, cost-effective, and productive methods small businesses can employ to enhance their bottom-line and, at the same time, attain a loyal customer following over time.
- **Parking** – Business owners should require employees to park off-street or in remote on-street areas of Downtown and should do so themselves, to set a good example. Prime on-street spaces, particularly in District #1, should be reserved for customers and patrons, not employers and employees.
- **Windows** – Every Downtown business, regardless of business type, should maintain attractive ground floor window displays at all times. Window displays should be changed at least every two weeks and lighting should remain on in display windows until at least 11 PM each evening of the week.

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- **Business Signs** – Downtown businesses should maintain business signs to the highest levels of aesthetic quality to present to the buying public the most attractive and informative “face” of each business and Downtown’s collection of businesses. Consideration should also be given to installing more projecting signs to ensure maximum pedestrian and vehicular viewing, and enhance Downtown’s overall public safety by making business establishments more visible to public safety personnel.

3. *Pro-Business/Pro-Quality*

To ensure a pro-business/pro-quality stance, the City should assess all of its review and application processes and take any steps necessary to:

- Streamline those processes; and
- Help quality investors understand and navigate those processes.

In addition, the City should:

- Uphold, maintain, and adhere to high standards of quality in all of its actions; and
- Adhere to the design guidelines that are created for Downtown.

4. *Farmers Market*

There appears to be a great desire for a farmers market on the part of the community. Therefore, one should be created in Downtown that:

- Is of high quality;
- Includes a great variety of products, including produce, food, art, crafts, and entertainment; and
- Is held on Saturday mornings in or near District #1.

Possible locations that should be considered include the Courthouse Square, a parking lot, or a side street sidewalk.

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5. Business Recruitment

A concerted effort should be made to attract and place an appropriate range of businesses throughout Downtown.

- **Top List** – The following types of businesses should be initially sought for Downtown:
 - Restaurants, including fine and casual dining, with maximum outdoor seating;
 - Entertainment, free-standing and in restaurants and drinking establishments;
 - Art galleries, supplies, and classes;
 - Apparel for women and children, particularly casual;
 - Home decorating accessories and design services;
 - Music and books;
 - Cameras and supplies;
 - Optical products and services;
 - Small movie theater; and
 - Professional offices.

- **Full List**

Following is the full listing of businesses and uses appropriate for Downtown LaPorte.

Prepared Food

- Fine Dining Restaurants;
- Moderate Priced Restaurants;
- Sandwich Shops;
- Bistros;
- Coffee Houses;
- Delis;
- Brew Pubs;
- Bakeries;
- Candy/Ice Cream/Yogurt Shops;
- Pubs/Taverns -- with Atmosphere/Operation Welcoming to Families; and
- Ethnic Foods -- i.e., Italian, Greek, French, Chinese, Mexican, etc.

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Food for Home

- Convenience Grocery;
- Green Grocer;
- Gourmet Grocer;
- Health Foods; and
- Meat/Fish Market.

Entertainment

- Live Theater;
- Entertainment in Restaurants -- i.e., piano player, guitarist, small combos, dancing, etc.; and
- Small Movie Theater.

Specialty Retail

- Antiques;
- Art Galleries, Framing and Supplies;
- Bike Shop;
- Books;
- Cameras and Photo Supplies;
- Casual Apparel and Accessories;
- Children's Apparel;
- Computers/Software;
- Florist;
- Gifts, Stationery and Cards;
- Home Decorating Products and Design Services;
- Men's Apparel;
- Music (Recorded and Sheet);
- Newsstand;
- Office/School Supplies;
- Optical Products;
- Radio/TV/Electronics;
- Sewing Supplies;
- Shoes, Dress and Casual;
- Small Variety Store;
- Sporting Goods;
- Toys, Games and Crafts;
- Traditional and Costume Jewelry;
- Wall Coverings and Paint; and
- Women's Apparel and Accessories.

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Convenience Retail/Select Services

- Barber Shops;
- Beauty Shops;
- Dance Studio;
- Dry Cleaners/Tailor Shop;
- Pharmacy;
- Physical Fitness Facility;
- Shoe Repair/Shine; and
- Video Rental.

Offices

- Accounting, Auditing, Bookkeeping;
- Administration of Educational Programs;
- Administration of Public Health Programs;
- Administration of Veterans' Affairs;
- Administration of Economic Programs;
- Administration of Utilities;
- Advertising;
- Child Care Services;
- Commercial Banks;
- Computer and Data Processing;
- Courts;
- Credit Reporting and Collection;
- Credit Unions;
- Dentists Offices and Clinics;
- Doctors Offices and Clinics;
- Engineering, Architectural Services;
- Executive Offices of Government;
- Fire, Marine Casualty Insurance;
- General Government;
- Health and Allied Services;
- Home Health Care Services;
- Individual and Family Services;
- Legal Services;
- Legislative Bodies;
- Library;
- Life Insurance;
- Management and Public Relations;
- Medical Service and Health Insurance;
- National Security;
- Newspapers and Other Media Outlets;
- Passenger Transportation Arrangement;

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- Personnel Supply Services;
- Photographic Studios;
- Post Office;
- Print Shops;
- Public Order and Safety;
- Real Estate Agents and Managers;
- Residential Care;
- Savings Institutions;
- Security Brokers and Dealers;
- Subdividers and Developers;
- Tax Services; and
- Title Abstract and Insurance Offices.

Housing and Other Uses

- Housing above first floor uses;
- Housing as infill on redeveloped lots, underutilized lots and surface parking lots;
- Museums;
- Churches in buildings designed as churches, not storefronts; and
- Hotel facilities, if market conditions prove feasible in the future.

• *Internal Recruitment*

As a first effort to create additional businesses in Downtown, consideration should be given by all of Downtown's business owners to expand existing operations to accommodate identified new demand or underserved segments in the marketplace. This should be encouraged by broadening or contracting offerings in existing businesses or by existing businesses opening new businesses in Downtown. This method of enhancing business operations in a commercial district is known as internal business recruitment.

• *External Recruitment*

When existing businesses do not respond to needs of the marketplace through existing business enhancement or the opening of new doors, consideration should be given to seeking new Downtown businesses through prospecting. Prospecting should be done through direct, purposive outreach, not blind mailings or other non-personal contact. The most appropriate method by which to prospect is to look for appropriate business prospects of the type desired for Downtown and encourage those prospects to visit Downtown LaPorte, provide assistance to prospects in finding appropriately conditioned building space, and

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encouraging the prospects to open an additional business in Downtown or relocate to Downtown.

Prospects should be sought for Downtown LaPorte from throughout the primary trade area, northwest Indiana, eastern Illinois, and southwest Michigan.

The types of businesses being sought for Downtown LaPorte should also be communicated to the investment community through the overall Downtown marketing initiatives, described below.

Marketing

A well-rounded and multi-faceted marketing campaign, having the following elements, should be created and implemented to establish Downtown as a destination that attracts customers, residents, and investors.

1. Markets

Given its location and projected mix of uses, Downtown LaPorte has the potential to attract customers and clients from a range of markets. These markets include:

- Downtown workers and residents;
- Users of Downtown's anchors, such as the hospital, library, civic auditorium, YMCA, post office, City Hall, and banks;
- County government facility users;
- Downtown event attendees;
- Year-round local and county residents;
- Second homeowners in the area;
- Day-trippers from Chicago;
- Heritage tourists;

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- Outdoor enthusiasts – hunters, golfers, lake and park users;
- Travelers on the four major routes that traverse Downtown; and
- Lodging facility guests.

2. Story Placement

An all-out effort should be made to get positive stories about Downtown and its enhancement placed with all major print and electronic media throughout the region, as well as in the Chicago area. This should be done on a regular and on-going basis in order to pique the interest of potential customers, visitors, and investors.

3. Web Presence

Web sites are now being operated by the City of LaPorte, the LaPorte Urban Enterprise Association, the Greater LaPorte Chamber of Commerce, the Greater LaPorte Economic Development Corporation, and People Engaged in Preservation. Each of these sites should contain a Downtown section that is designed to interest people in visiting, patronizing, living, and investing in Downtown LaPorte.

4. Billboards

Since four major traffic routes go through Downtown, consideration should be given to placing billboards along those routes – 5 to 10 miles outside of the city – to entice motorists to stop in Downtown. The billboards should reflect Downtown's historic character and quaint image.

5. Downtown Brochure

A professionally designed Downtown "lure brochure" should be produced and widely distributed throughout Downtown, the city, and the region, as well as at all major locations that area residents and visitors tend to frequent in numbers. The brochure should list all of Downtown's businesses and attractions, focusing on District #1, Downtown's Specialty Retail, Food, Art, & Entertainment District – since this district, and its unique businesses, present the greatest opportunity to make Downtown more of a destination. The brochure should stress Downtown's historic character and quaint image in both text and photos.

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6. Referral Cards

Easy-to-read cards should be produced that list all Downtown shops and what each carries. These cards should be placed at cash registers in Downtown's businesses, so that customers asking where to find a particular product or service can be easily and readily referred to appropriate Downtown businesses.

7. Advertising

Three types of advertising should be conducted for Downtown. First, "image ads" should be developed that promote Downtown as a whole, depict its allure as a destination, and are run all year long. Second, Downtown businesses and anchors that have an opportunity to share customers should advertise jointly – such as the Civic Auditorium and Downtown food establishments. And third, but very importantly, every Downtown business owner should advertise his or her own business on a regular basis throughout the year.

8. Events

Several special events are held in Downtown annually. These include the Sunflower Fair, the Santa Parade, Sidewalk Sale Days, and the granddaddy of them all – the Fourth of July Parade, when LaPorte is declared Indiana's capital for the day. It is safe to say that the Fourth of July Parade is certainly a signature event for which LaPorte is widely known. Efforts should be made to grow the Sunflower Fair and Santa Parade so that they, too, become signature events that draw increasing numbers of attendees each year. This should be accomplished by adding art, food, and entertainment to each event – to strengthen the events as well as Downtown's image as a destination for food, art, and entertainment.