

TOWSON REVITALIZATION PARTNERSHIP

COMMITTEE REPORT TO COUNCILMAN VINCE GARDINA

December, 2003

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Charles E. McMahon, Chairman

Kate Brewer

Harvey Brooks, Jones Lang Lasalle Americas

Karin Brown, Baltimore County Office of Planning

Jack Cannella, Heritage Properties

Suzan Doordan, Towson Business Association

Jennifer Haire, Baltimore County Public Library

George Hale, Baltimore County Revenue Authority

David Harnage, Towson University

John Hopkins, RESI

Nancy Horst

Katy Kenarick, Baltimore County Office of Community Conservation

Bebe Kernan, RESI

Ed Kilcullen, Towson Manor Village Community Association

Steve Lafferty

Lynn Lanham, Baltimore County Office of Planning

Lisa Marquardt

Dean Merritt, Burkleigh Square Community Association

Stanley Pianowski, Board of Liquor License Commissioners

Scott Rykiel, Mahan Rykiel Associates

Andrea Van Arsdale, Baltimore County Department of Economic Development

Nancy West, Baltimore County Office of Law

PJ Widerman, Baltimore County Office of Community Conservation

Rick Wisnom, Baltimore County Code Inspections and Enforcement Division

Don Wright, Greater Towson Council of Community Associations

TOWSON REVITALIZATION PARTNERSHIP

DRAFT COMMITTEE REPORT TO COUNCILMAN VINCE GARDINA

INTRODUCTION

"I would like to see Towson become a vibrant business Core that will be an attraction for area residents and businesses."

Councilman Vince Gardina, January 13, 2003

The Towson Revitalization Partnership was formed in January, 2003 to address the persistent vacant property problems in Towson and to recommend ways the public and private sector could join together to promote revitalization efforts. During its strategic planning sessions, the Committee had a unique opportunity to examine the facts and to debate the merits of many current issues impacting Towson, including the vacant Crown and Shell gas stations, the proposed entertainment complex near Towson Circle, Senator Brochin's SB 204 concerning the transfer of liquor licenses to restaurants in Towson and the proposed Starbuck's at York Road and Burke Avenue.

The Committee also heard detailed presentations by Andrea Van Arsdale on the County's economic development programs, by Stanley Pianowski on liquor license rules and regulations, by Chuck McMahon on the Towson Development Opportunity Plan and by George Hale on parking facilities in Towson. Tom Vidmar also reported that the Towson Commercial Revitalization District has been included in the first phase of County Executive Jim Smith's 'Community Clean Site Initiative', a joint effort by DEPRM, the Office of Community Conservation, the Department of Economic Development and the Maryland Department of the Environment designed to identify and evaluate sites within revitalization areas that may be petroleum contaminated.

The mission of the Towson Revitalization Committee is to develop near term and long term solutions to the issues that stand in the way of making our downtown a truly vibrant place. The issues and recommendations contained in this report are the product of a collaborative effort among property owners, local business and neighborhood leaders, representatives of the Towson area hospitals and universities, and members of key County agencies. This report will be presented to Councilman Gardina for his endorsement, and is intended to serve as the blueprint for the development of legislative, policy and fiscal initiatives aimed at reversing the decline of the Towson Core and creating real opportunity for change.

I. CODE ENFORCEMENT

“Outside there are more problems: Shops and restaurants, once part of the bustling vitality of this area, this seat of government and commerce in Baltimore County, are now closed and the spaces vacant.”

Michael Olesker, The Sun, February 13, 2003

The Committee explored the approach to code violations and enforcement within the Towson Commercial Revitalization District.

Issue: Adverse Impact of Neglected Commercial Property

The continued deterioration of commercial property exteriors and storefronts throughout the Towson Commercial Revitalization District is inhibiting potential new investment and development. National retailers and corporations lured to Towson by strong demographics are unwilling to overlook its run-down appearance. The “broken windows” and abandoned structures we see in Towson on a daily basis are metaphors for continuing neglect, failure and a loss of control¹.

Recommendation

There was a strong preference for an approach that would increase the community’s awareness of owners’ legal obligations to maintain their property, and to promote voluntary compliance with the law. To effectively deal with uncooperative violators, there must also be a clearly articulated willingness to enforce the law. Upon reasonable notice, the County must be prepared to avail itself to all rights and remedies permitted under the Investment Property Act of the Baltimore County Code. The Committee urges the County to adopt a proactive policy of code violation enforcement within the Towson Commercial Revitalization District.

The Committee recommends that a Property Code awareness campaign be prepared and delivered by certified mail to all property owners within the Towson Commercial Revitalization District. The campaign materials would be transmitted by the authority of the appropriate Baltimore County department head and would contain the following information.

- ♣ A copy of the Baltimore County ‘Business Assistance Programs’ flyer produced by the Department of Economic Development, along with a similar summary of any State programs aimed at commercial revitalization.
- ♣ A copy of the Investment Property Act section of the Baltimore County Code.
- ♣ Legal notice that after a specified time period (the Committee suggests 60 days from the date of the letter) properties within the Towson Commercial Revitalization District would be subject to random inspections and that code violations would be prosecuted.

Immediate and conclusive follow-up by the Code Inspections and Enforcement Division may be necessary to demonstrate a commitment to enforce the law. Inspection and enforcement efforts should initially focus on the most obvious and intrusive violations.

(Sample Letter to Property Owners within the
Towson Commercial Revitalization District)

Dear Towson Property Owner:

Your Baltimore County government supports many community revitalization efforts within Towson and throughout Baltimore County. Most recently the County's efforts have been focused on older business districts along the Liberty Road Corridor, in Pikesville, Dundalk, Essex and Towson. We expect that these initiatives will help to enhance Towson's image and vitality, strengthen property values and create opportunity for redevelopment.

An important part of this initiative involves you, as a property owner, in supporting revitalization efforts within Towson's Core. I encourage you to review the enclosed information developed by the Baltimore County Department of Economic Development. You will see there are a number of business assistance programs designed to promote private investment and keep our vital commercial centers strong. These programs offer design assistance, low interest loans, and tax credits for commercial properties. I encourage you to contact the staff of the Baltimore County Department of Economic Development to take full advantage of these programs.

As part of a concerted revitalization effort, a group of local business and community leaders, representatives of local institutions (Towson University, GBMC, Sheppard Pratt, Goucher College and St. Joseph Medical Center), area professional associations (Towson Business Association, Greater Towson Committee and the Baltimore County Chamber of Commerce), and key government agencies have joined together to form the Towson Revitalization Partnership. Their purpose is to serve as an advocate and catalyst for redevelopment within the Towson Commercial Revitalization District. As part of their strategic initiatives, the Towson Revitalization Partnership examined the building maintenance requirements applicable to property owners under the Investment Property Act, Section 7-5 of the Baltimore County Code, and has requested the County's assistance in adopting a proactive approach to code enforcement.

The Towson Revitalization Partnership found that persistent property maintenance problems and violations of building codes have an adverse effect on property values and the character of our community. In an effort to raise the awareness of property owners' legal rights and responsibilities, enclosed is a copy of the Investment Property Act that outlines the legislative findings, the purpose, definitions, penalties, and maintenance requirements of the Code. If you have any questions about Code requirements, please call the Baltimore County Office of Code Inspections and Enforcement at (410) 887-3373 for assistance.

On _____ (sixty days from the date of the letter) the Office of Code Inspections and Enforcement will begin conducting random inspections within the Towson Commercial Revitalization District to determine which properties may require attention. (Need to indicate that code violations may generate citations) I encourage you to take advantage of the existing business assistance programs and to lend your support to the Towson Revitalization Partnership initiatives. If you need further assistance please feel free to contact my office at (410) 887-_____.

Sincerely yours,

Department Head

II. PARKING AND TRANSPORTATION

"Is there really a parking problem in Towson? It depends."

George Hale, March 10, 2003

The Committee explored parking and transportation issues within the Towson Commercial Revitalization District. Discussions covered existing conditions, development patterns and future parking and transportation needs. Much thought was given to how improvements to parking and transportation within the Core could enhance revitalization efforts.

On March 10, 2003 George Hale, Executive Director of the Baltimore County Revenue Authority presented an overview of the role of the BCRA along with current statistics on the demand and availability of paid surface parking lots, metered parking and parking garages within the Towson Core.

"If you had parking on both sides (of the street), you could create a more pedestrian friendly environment."

Wes Guckert, President of The Traffic Group, speaking on the Charles Street Development Corporation's plan to restore parking along Charles Street in mid-town Baltimore.

Issue: Impact of High-Volume, High Speed Traffic on York Road

High-volume, high-speed traffic along York Road divides the Towson Core along its north-south axis, creating an edge that divides the business district in two. This traffic pattern inhibits pedestrian movement from one side of York Road to the other, causing increasing isolation of the retail businesses fronting on York Road. This division also deters economic expansion east of York Road, where there is a relatively limited daytime population base. Much of the traffic on York Road today is not bound for destinations within the Core. The original intent of the Towson Bypass to redirect this high-volume, high-speed traffic around the business Core does not appear to be working.

Recommendation

Engage a traffic consultant to evaluate the pattern, speed and volume of vehicles on both York Road and the Towson Bypass, and to develop recommendations to improve traffic flows. Optimal traffic patterns would promote the use of the Towson Bypass for through traffic, and provide a convenient, low-speed road network to destinations within the Towson Core. The traffic study should consider the following possible improvements.

- ♣ Add parallel parking and short term loading zones along both sides of York Road within the pedestrian Core to improve access to York Road retail businesses and to provide traffic calming.
- ♣ Change the timing of traffic signals to slow traffic on York Road. This should also reinforce the use of the Towson Bypass while improving the safety of pedestrians within the Core.
- ♣ Where reductions in traffic volume within the Towson Core are achieved, consider replacing certain traffic signals with stop signs to improve local traffic flow.

- ♣ Discourage the use of Virginia Avenue as a high-volume bypass.
- ♣ Expand the powers of the parking enforcement patrol to issue tickets for illegal double-parking within the Core.
- ♣ Improve the lane configuration at the York Road and Burke Avenue intersection to make the Bypass the “default” route for traffic.
- ♣ Use pavement textures, crosswalk markings and other traffic calming devices to slow traffic within the Core.

Issue: State Ownership of York Road Right-of-Way Limits Revitalization Efforts

Within the Towson Core, York Road has traditionally been a pedestrian-oriented commercial "Main Street". As development has intensified over the years along arterial roadways like York Road, the State Highway Administration response has been to accommodate, not redirect, increased traffic volumes. In the 70's Baltimore County had the foresight to construct a partial bypass road network to the west of the Towson Commercial Revitalization District that was planned to relieve traffic within the Core. As early as 1994, business advocates were calling for the return of York Road to its role as Towson's "Main Street". Efforts by the previous administration to negotiate a York Road/Towson Bypass swap with the State Highway Administration lacked the necessary political will and were ultimately unsuccessful.

In order to fuel the engine of economic growth along our "Main Street" (that is, to create opportunities for improved retail shopping, dining and entertainment), Baltimore County must have the authority to establish the character, safety and function of York Road within the Core.

Recommendation

The County Executive should secure the endorsement of our State and County elected representatives and communicate the County's request to swap a portion of York Road (potentially Burke Avenue to Washington Avenue) with the Towson Bypass (potentially Burke Avenue to York Road) so that the portion of York Road in the Towson Core is under Baltimore County ownership. A commitment to achieve this objective should be obtained from the governor, and the need for County and State cooperation should be instilled at the highest level of the respective agencies charged with negotiating the swap.

Issue: Inadequate Wayfinding and Directional Signage

There are no effective wayfinding or directional signage systems in place to identify key destinations in and around Towson and to assist in the efficient flow of vehicular and pedestrian traffic.

Recommendation

Engage a graphic design consultant to prepare a wayfinding and directional signage system for the Towson area, including pedestrian-oriented signage within the Core. The consultant should be provided with a copy of the report prepared on wayfinding and directional signage in Towson by the former Towson Partnership (Nancy Horst has the

Partnership archives) as a baseline for the scope of work. Consideration should be given to the geographic boundaries for the signage system and the measures required to implement the plan.

The new Wayfinding and Directional Signage System plan must, at a minimum:

- ♣ Establish a uniform design for all signage using a Towson logo (possibly the "T" logo created for the Dulaney Valley Road bridge at the Beltway) or a similar unifying theme.
- ♣ Incorporate universal graphic symbols (such as a blue P for parking, etc.)
- ♣ Add Beltway signage that indicates the preferred route to major destinations (universities, hospitals, shopping, government center, etc.), and promotes the use of the Towson Bypass and other high capacity roads.
- ♣ Clarify street signage (e.g. East Pennsylvania Ave. vs. West Pennsylvania Ave.).
- ♣ Enhance the safety of pedestrian traffic with clearly marked crosswalks at the roundabout and other major crossing points.
- ♣ Expand the powers of the parking enforcement patrol to issue tickets for jaywalking and failing to yield pedestrian right-of-way.
- ♣ Encourage pedestrian traffic with well-located area maps and pedestrian wayfinding signs ("You are here").

Issue: Lack of Transit Alternatives

Reliance on the car as the principal form of transportation, together with the lack of transit alternatives serving Towson creates traffic congestion within the Core.

Recommendation

Identify the present use and possible overlap of shuttle bus services serving local hospitals, universities, government, senior centers and businesses. Form a coordinated effort to provide a free local shuttle that will facilitate easy access to key points in the area, that makes best use of services already in place, and that increase transit options for the community.

Issue: Inhibited Pedestrian Circulation within the Core Area

The deterioration of sidewalks, lack of maintenance and inconsistent design within the Towson Core area inhibits pedestrian movement.

Recommendation

Inventory the sidewalks and streetscape improvements within the Towson Core and develop a comprehensive system for redevelopment/replacement and long-term maintenance. Incorporate design standards and features of the SHA streetscape program recently completed along York Road.

Issue: Parking Fees and Hours of Operation

The cost of parking, parking fines, and the variety of hours of operation and rates are seen by some as negative factors in the promotion of Towson as a destination for retail shopping, dining and entertainment.

Recommendation

Engage a parking consultant to evaluate (with support from the Baltimore County Revenue Authority and the Department of Economic Development) parking rates, hours of operation, enforcement policies, and the availability of the existing parking inventory on weekends and evenings. Recommendations should be formulated to promote the availability of parking in Towson on weekends and in the evening.

The parking study should investigate:

- ♣ Free metered parking after 6:00pm, both on and off-street
- ♣ Free metered parking on Saturdays (Sunday is currently free)
- ♣ Reduction in the amount of fines for meter violations
- ♣ Shared parking arrangements of privately owned lots, especially after 5:00pm

Issue: Parking Garages within the Pedestrian Core

Redevelopment efforts in the Core of Towson will require the construction of additional multi-story parking garages. Parking garages should be designed as integral components of new development projects to avoid creating street frontage that is devoid of pedestrian activity. Given the rising cost of land in the Towson Core, restrictive IRS regulations on the use of tax-exempt bonds to assist private firms, the complexities of land assemblage, and the high costs of construction, the development of affordable public parking will be increasingly difficult to accomplish.

Recommendation

In conjunction with the preparation of a Master Plan, the Committee should identify and prioritize sites where the development of a public parking garage would create the greatest public benefit (beyond supporting development in the immediate vicinity), and work with the Baltimore County Revenue Authority to create a development strategy that will incentivize new mixed-use development in the Towson Core. Additionally, the Committee, the County Executive, the Department of Economic Development and the Baltimore County Revenue Authority should clearly define the policies needed to support additional public investment in new parking facilities in Towson.

III. COMMUNITY RESOURCES

*“Towson has much to offer, but it currently does not have a sense of vitality.”
Larry Ryan, a Towson resident, in a March 2003 letter to the Editor*

The Committee explored resources available to the business, consumer, residential and institutional communities within the Towson Commercial Revitalization District and examined ways of leveraging those resources to enhance revitalization efforts.

LIST OF RESOURCES AND ASSOCIATED ISSUES

1. **Residential neighborhoods** in and around the Core are Towson’s #1 resource.
 - a. neighborhoods include single family homes, town homes, garden apartments and mid-and high rise condominiums and apartments.
 - b. The 50,000+ residents of Towson’s neighborhoods comprise largest potential customer base.
2. **Seat of county government**
 - a. brings thousands of workers into the Towson Core, and many others who come to Towson for court dates, hearings, licenses, etc.
3. **Concentration of institutions**

Towson is a:

 - a. medical center (Sheppard Pratt, GBMC, St. Joseph)
 - b. center for education (TU projected student population of 15,000 – 20,000, almost 2,000 at Goucher College and 350 at Medex School)
 - c. corporate center (Black & Decker, VIPS, Nottingham Properties, LaFarge, Whiting-Turner)
 - d. legal/financial (concentration of courts, seat of government)
 - e. shopping center

LONG-TERM GOALS:

1. **Attract residents of nearby communities to shop, stay and play in Towson.**
 - a. Make Towson more lively, attractive and pedestrian-friendly.
 - i. Baltimore County Government:
 1. Examine variety of development regulations (condemnation, zoning classifications/overlays, two-tier taxation to enable Towson to compete in the regional marketplace.
 2. Replace current liquor license laws with regulations that make economic sense.
 3. Ensure funding stream
 - a. Dedicated funding from parking revenues
 - ii. Baltimore County Government:
 1. Examine variety of development regulations (condemnation, zoning classifications/overlays, two-tier taxation to enable Towson to compete in the regional marketplace.
 2. Replace current liquor license laws with regulations that make economic sense.
 3. Ensure funding stream
 - a. Dedicated funding from parking revenues
 - b. Private sector
 - i. Agglomerate parcels to realize a cohesive whole
 - ii. Invest, partner with county/state to improve infrastructure, attract merchants, tenants

- c. Engage all partners: Baltimore County government, business & commercial interests, residents, institutions, NGO's.

2. Bring college students to Towson Core

- a. Make physical connections between town/gown more pedestrian/bike friendly
 - i. Continuous sidewalks
 - ii. Safer crosswalks, with pedestrian-centered amenities & safety devices.
 - iii. Educate drivers.
 - iv. Transfer of York Road and Bosley Avenue between state/county

3. Attract new 'customers' to Towson

4. Ensure that current residents, customers, workers, students, remain

Short term – what will entice people into Towson?

Merchandizing efforts: get merchants to buy into marketing efforts, encourage creativity in purchasing advertising, etc. Improve the retail tenant mix within the pedestrian Core.

1.
 - a. Market shopping experiences by topic or group – (ex.: “Towson is home to Second Hand Rosies - 6 stores in three blocks!” or “Towson – intellectual capital of Maryland - Six bookstores in two blocks!”)
 - b. Black & Decker store – open to the public and/or Towson outlet.
 - c. Towson University/Goucher College bookstore
 - d. Engage Rouse, Heritage/Cordish, Towson Commons (owners) in Towson-wide marketing efforts
2. Build on successful programs such as TBA's Spring Festival, Farmer's Market, Towson At Night Concerts and TDC's Towson Gardens Day
 - a. Outdoor movies in the summer linked with restaurant specials, Moxley ice cream cones, etc. (block off streets?)
3. Towson library – attracts some 45,000 customers a month
 - a. Partner with businesses, TBA, GTC, area colleges and schools to 'get the word out' about resources available at Towson Branch: educational programs as well as books, CDs, DVDs, videos, internet access, coffee bar, etc.
 - b. Make garages part of this effort:
 - i. Display map blowups of Towson with resources marked
 - ii. Partner garage parking with advertising, shopping, parking passes
 - iii. Train parking personnel to give directions, recommendations for dining, shopping, courts, etc.

4. Towson University
 - a. Encourage TU, Goucher to open book store/exchange in Towson
 - b. Incorporate Tiger cards, etc., into more businesses in Towson
5. Communication:
 - a. Combine similar businesses for spot advertising
 - b. Work on web sites – coordinate and link
 - c. Encourage town/gown communication
6. Open space:
 - a. urge county/private purchase of such spaces as Shell station, proposed Joppa Road site of McDonalds.
 - b. Encourage shared use of institutional open space
7. Make town center more pedestrian-friendly
 - a. Continuous sidewalks
 - a. Safer crosswalks, with pedestrian-centered amenities & safety devices.
 - b. Educate drivers.
8. Spruce up our town
 - a. Work with TBA & merchants to adopt-a-tree, piece of the sidewalk, etc.
 - b. Work with citizens to adopt-a-tree, piece of the sidewalk, etc.
9. Build on customers & employees of Towson's medical centers, county government, legal and corporate offices.
 - a. Make Towson a one-stop-shopping/service experience
 - i. Feed, entertain and serve these workers
 - ii. Keep 'em here after work
 1. services: child care, service stations, etc.
 2. make it all more walkable and accessible.

IV. REVITALIZATION STRATEGIES

The Committee deliberated many issues and options to formulate our recommendations to create renewed energy with the Towson Commercial Revitalization District. The Committee developed short-term and long-term recommendations that we believe are necessary to effect change. The loss of businesses in the Core requires a long-term approach but short-term strategies must be deployed to reverse the current direction.

SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

Issue: No Long Term Vision for Towson

The Committee acknowledges the efforts of the Office of Planning and the voluntary efforts of the local business community in developing an area land use plan, but the Committee can find no evidence that a long-term vision for the Towson Commercial Revitalization District exists. The visioning process becomes an important asset when trying to market the area as well as building community support and acceptance of the ideas.

Recommendation

Engage a professional planning firm to guide appropriate input and develop a master plan for the development of the Towson Commercial Revitalization District. The master planning effort should focus on developing the long-term land use program, development envelopes, comprehensive design guidelines, visual preferences, historic preservation inventory, traffic management and parking solutions.

Issue: Need for a Cohesive Marketing Effort

The marketing program for the Towson Commercial Revitalization District should reflect the long-term development strategies as defined by the formal planning process.

Recommendation

Develop formal marketing materials to reflect the concepts defined through the Towson Commercial Revitalization District master planning effort. Minimally, the materials should include artistic renderings of the master plan concepts as well as mass communication materials that can easily be understood by laypersons interested in this community.

Issue: Availability of Liquor Licenses for Economic Development

Initiatives to enhance the opportunities for restaurant and entertainment venue development in the Towson Commercial Revitalization District have struggled due to the lack of liquor licenses. Recent legislative initiatives have helped but the Committee believes that the issue requires additional examination and attention.

Recommendation

The Committee suggests that a blue ribbon commission be enacted to examine this important issue and develop a long-term solution to this critical problem.

LONG TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

Issue: Inadequate Revitalization Tools

The Committee concluded the tools currently available to assist in redevelopment activities are very limited. In many communities, government has established organizations that work exclusively on economic and business development through redevelopment initiatives. These organizations provide linkages between property owners and developers to continually evolve the business community. These organizations have available, through enabling legislation, tools that assist in land assembly, incentives and support services to promote long-term redevelopment initiatives for the community.

Recommendation

The Committee and Baltimore County, in conjunction with state and local elected officials should examine alternative strategies to enhance the tools available to support redevelopment. The Committee believes that a close examination of techniques used in other localities and states could serve as an effective means to identify appropriate strategies. The Committee also recommends serious consideration be given to establishing a redevelopment authority with land acquisition authority. While the Committee acknowledges that this is a sensitive topic, we believe that with proper presentation of the purpose and intent, and the judicious application of such authority, the public good and ultimate results will outweigh the inevitable short-term objections.

Issue: Determine the Community Needs

Many ideas have been examined related to the proper mix of business development within the business district. At this point, there appears to be little data indicating the preference of the citizens that live around and frequent the Towson Core. The Committee believes that understanding and responding to the desires of the community will enhance the success of development initiatives.

Recommendation

Engage a professional market research firm to collect and analyze the data that can be used to develop a clear statement of market demand within the Towson Commercial Revitalization District. The specific focus of the market demand study should address the following concepts.

- ♣ Through telephone and written surveys, focus group meetings, nationally recognized data and other strategies proposed by the consultant; analyze and document the market demand for retail, restaurant and entertainment venues within the Towson Commercial Revitalization District. Specifically, the Committee

wishes to understand the market demand for the categories of business initiatives by understanding the expectations of the constituencies of the Towson Commercial Revitalization District. Care should be given to document the findings in both specific recommendations and empirical data to support the recommendations.

- ♣ Through telephone and written surveys, focus group meetings, nationally recognized data and other strategies proposed by the consultant, analyze and document the market demand for housing within the revitalization district. Specifically, the Committee wishes to understand the demand for market housing in the Towson Commercial Revitalization District to serve a broad constituencies including college students, young professionals, retired individuals and other persons that may wish to live in the urban setting.
- ♣ The Towson Commercial Revitalization District is planning a revitalization strategy to encourage future development for economic growth, service enhancement and community stabilization. The Committee assumes there are other communities similar to the Towson community that have and are faced with similar challenges. The Committee wishes to understand the circumstances of these similar communities and the strategies that have been used to enhance the residential and business environment of the community. Specifically, the Committee wishes to collect detailed information on the conditions, business development strategies, government participation and other variables that have contributed to successful revitalization efforts.

Issue: In-place Incentive Programs Fall Short of Their Potential

Many of the incentive programs that have been used to promote redevelopment have been successful but in some cases the outcome has been less than optimal. The Committee believes that the existing incentive programs may not provide the direct impact to the property owner and therefore, the property owners have chosen not to participate.

Recommendation

The Committee recommends that the County approach the property owners within the Towson Commercial Revitalization District to solicit feedback, identify property owner incentives that are desirable, and formulate financially viable options to encourage redevelopment of commercial properties.

V. IMPLEMENTATION

“Developing a vision for Towson will take planning and patience. That said, I believe the vision can encompass the critical issues of adequate parking, storefront revitalization, proper marketing and promotion, improved public spaces and new residential development. The beauty of our timing is that we are working with new, inspired County, State and private sector representatives. The possibilities are endless!”

Suzan Doordan, Towson Business Association, February 4, 2003

The Committee recognizes that planning is the first step to realizing change.

Issue: Effective Implementation Requires an Empowered Agent of Change

Many of the prior planning efforts and economic incentives created for the Towson Commercial Revitalization District have failed to yield desirable results.

Recommendation

The Committee recommends the establishment of a full-time, well-capitalized private organization charged with all aspects of planning, marketing, financing and implementing revitalization strategies within the Towson Commercial Revitalization District. For the purpose of this report, we have designated the name ‘Towson Renaissance’ to refer to this organization. Towson Renaissance would be a public/private partnership guided by a Board of Directors comprised of senior level representatives from key Towson area constituencies.

- ♣ Baltimore County Government
- ♣ Baltimore County Revenue Authority
- ♣ Greater Towson Council of Community Associations
- ♣ Towson Business Association
- ♣ Greater Towson Committee
- ♣ Towson University
- ♣ Goucher College
- ♣ St. Joseph Medical Center
- ♣ Greater Baltimore Medical Center
- ♣ Sheppard Pratt

The Board would establish strategic direction; approve fiscal and transactional matters presented by the Executive Director and staff, and serve as a liaison to their respective organizations and the community at-large. The Executive Director selected to lead Towson Renaissance must be experienced in all facets of planning, real estate development, finance, public policy, marketing, and must have excellent managerial, communication and organizational skills.

Some of the operational responsibilities of Towson Renaissance would include:

- ♣ Engage consultants and guide the preparation of traffic studies, signage system plans, market studies, master plans and site-specific development plans that are consistent with the established revitalization strategies.

- ♣ In partnership with Baltimore County and the Maryland Department of Transportation, develop a transit master plan for the Towson area that is consistent with the established revitalization strategies.
- ♣ Establish and promote a tax increment financing district for the purpose of funding infrastructure within the Towson Commercial Revitalization District that is critical to the established revitalization strategies.
- ♣ Secure capital for, and administer financing programs aimed at attracting private investment within the Towson Commercial Revitalization District.
- ♣ In partnership with the Baltimore County Revenue Authority, identify and develop parking garages within the pedestrian Core that are designed to be integrated with private, mixed-use development projects. This development effort would be undertaken under the proposed County policy guidelines recommended in Section II of this report, as a means to incentivize additional private investment in Towson.
- ♣ Guide local, regional and national marketing efforts.
- ♣ Acquire property critical to revitalization efforts within the Towson Commercial Revitalization District, manage the property on an interim basis, and secure development partners willing and capable of delivering high quality projects consistent with the established Master Plan and revitalization strategies.

Case Study: Downtown Silver Spring (<http://downtownsilverspring.com>)

Silver Spring, Maryland is one of the largest unincorporated cities in the Washington, DC metropolitan area. In the 50's and 60's, Silver Spring was a major suburban shopping district. Shoppers abandoned Silver Spring in the late 80's as newer and more glamorous suburban shopping malls opened in nearby Bethesda and Rockville. As recent as 1995 office vacancies in Silver Spring exceeded 30%, crime was on the rise and residents had grown increasingly frustrated with ambitious urban renewal proposals that went nowhere.

In 1996, newly elected Montgomery County Executive Douglas Duncan made the revitalization of Silver Spring a top priority. Today, Downtown Silver Spring is a private/public redevelopment effort led by PFA Silver Spring, LLC in partnership with Montgomery County. Over \$400 million in private, State and County investment is today fueling Downtown Silver Spring's rebirth with new retail, restaurants, movie theaters, office, hotel and residential development. Montgomery County has invested over \$24 million in the restoration of the historic Silver Theater as the new home of the American Film Institute. An additional \$140 million in state and county funds have been spent on property acquisition, demolition, environmental remediation, parking garages and infrastructure. Across the street, Discovery Communication's new \$150 million headquarters will eventually house 1500 employees.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Committee would like to thank the following people for their input and participation during the process of developing this report.

Ginny Barnhart, Pope & Hughes
Kathy Farrell, Souris' Saloon
Roy Finklestein, 408 York Road
Sean Flanagan, St. Joseph Medical Center
Harris George
Wynee Hawk, Greater Baltimore Medical Center
David Ianucci, Baltimore County Department of Economic Development
Lawrence Julio, Apartment Services, Inc.
Bonnie Katz, Sheppard Pratt
Bob Latshaw, Greater Towson Committee
Debra Rubino, Goucher College
Jim Thompson, Baltimore County
Tom Repsher, DMW
Herb Sheppard
George Schoenberger, Office of the County Executive
Rory Turner, Maryland State Arts Council
Tom Vidmar, Baltimore County DEPRM
Joan Hatfield, Baltimore County Chamber of Commerce

Special thanks goes to Rick Wisnom, Lynn Lanham, Nancy Horst and David Harnage who chaired the focus groups that produced this report, and to all the members of the Committee who generously contributed their time and expertise to making Towson a better place.

The Chairman and Committee also offer their sincere appreciation to Susan Thompson, Chief Assistant to Councilman Gardina, for her tireless work and support.

Footnotes

¹ "Comeback Cities" by Paul S. Grogan and Tony Proscio, 2000
... *Atlantic Monthly* in March 1982 published an article by James Q. Wilson and George Kelling called "Broken Windows". Kelling and Wilson used the "broken windows" metaphor to stand for a set of broader observations about the relationship of all manner of physical disorder and crime on city streets. Deteriorating physical conditions, they believed, spawned further disorder, which in turn licensed certain kinds of antisocial behavior, which in turn attracted more serious forms of crime. According to Kelling and Wilson, disorder produces fear, and the inevitable response from fear is withdrawal...