

THE DOWNTOWN ITHACA 2020 STRATEGIC PLAN

*Draft 3.1
BASIC TEXT AND GRAPHICS ONLY
(rough draft for public discussion)*

**(A plan for the Revitalization, Development, Management, and
Promotion of the Downtown Ithaca Business Improvement District
for the period 2010 – 2020)**

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**Prepared by
The Downtown Ithaca Alliance**

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STRATEGIC PLAN EXECUTIVE HIGHLIGHTS

1. Downtown's strength lies in its diversity of people. Downtown will be successful if it is able to fully actualize this commitment to diversity. There should be an ongoing commitment to diversity in downtown programs, policies, and actions that permeate every sector and every activity.
2. Downtown Ithaca must maintain its regional share of retail activity. To accomplish this, downtown will add 90,000 square feet of new retail during the period 2010 – 2020.
3. Downtown Ithaca must maintain its regional share of office space. To accomplish this, downtown will add another 200,000 square feet of new office space during the period 2010 -2020.
4. Downtown Ithaca is one of the primary centers for new housing development in both the City and the region. During the period 2010 – 2020 downtown will seek to add between 300-500 units of urban housing.
5. Seek to fully utilize Six Mile Creek by developing a trail into the gorge and making downtown the hub for trail activity.
6. Continue a program of new in-fill development and redevelopment of current low-density sites. Based on a volumetric study conducted in 2008/9, it is projected that during the period 2010 -2020 the downtown could potentially attract up to 10 new projects totaling at least 500,000 square feet of space and a projected investment of at about \$100 million.
7. During the period 2010 – 2020, downtown Ithaca will look to meet its new development parking needs, first and foremost, through attention to walking, bicycling, and other alternative transportation modes.
8. This plan relies on a dense urban core tempered with a pedestrian friendly street-level environment.
9. This strategic plan calls for the recruitment and placement of at least ten (10) new pedestrian foot traffic generating projects to be located in downtown during the period 2010 -2020.
10. This strategic plan calls for a careful review and possible realignment of downtown parking management and Commons maintenance.
11. This plan proposes a program to undertake opportunistic land banking of key downtown properties.
12. This strategic plan calls for amendments to current downtown zoning to improve the viability of key downtown parcels for future in-fill and redevelopment activity.
13. This strategic plan calls for the Downtown Ithaca Alliance to work collaboratively with other commercial districts on issues and programs of mutual interest.
14. This plan calls for the creation of new and improved transportation links between downtown and Cornell University/Collegetown as well as Ithaca College, including possible enhanced shuttle service and possible fixed rail service.
15. This plan calls for the review and improvement of financial tax abatement incentives to assist downtown projects to meet and fill funding gaps.
16. This plan calls for the creation of additional meeting and conference space to help attract small and mid-sized conferences to the community, perhaps in conjunction with the State Theater.
17. This plan calls for the addition of a fourth hotel project during the period 2010 - 2020.
18. This plan calls for the City and County to explore the concept of a new joint City of Ithaca/ Tompkins County Administration building to be located in downtown.

19. This strategic plan calls for the community to work closely with the institutions of higher education to partner with future downtown projects during the period 2010 – 2020.
20. This plans calls for the community to collaborate on the creation of a downtown teen activity center.
21. This plan suggests exploring the modification of the 100 West State and 300 East State blocks for inclusion into the pedestrian mall and/or periodic temporary closure to accommodate special events and community activities.

INTRODUCTION & HISTORY OF DOWNTOWN STRATEGIC PLANNING

The Ithaca Downtown Partnership created the first Downtown Strategic Plan in 2000. Known as the “Downtown Ithaca Development Strategy: 2000 – 2010”, this document was a distillation of existing reports and studies that had been undertaken in the previous decade, studies dealing with such subjects as the retail market, downtown design, and Commons improvement. The 2000 Development Strategy provided numeric goals for retail space, office space, and new housing units. It introduced entertainment, cultural arts, and tourism as key elements of a downtown strategy. It provided a blueprint for growth and development in downtown, offering investors and residents alike a vision of the future. This Strategy was subsequently revised in 2004. The revised Strategy added sections on historic preservation and downtown character. It also revised upward key housing goals.

Since the first strategic plan was prepared in 2000 both downtown and the Ithaca community have experienced substantial change. Downtown has added significant new private and public investment. Over \$100,000,000 was invested in downtown during this period, most likely the largest decade of investment in the history of downtown. This downtown growth provided 150,000 square feet of new office space, increasing the 2000 supply by 50%. This growth added over 225 new units of downtown housing, again increasing the 2000 supply by well over 50%. Downtown grew upward, as new buildings sought to fill out allowable zoning heights.

But downtown was not the only place growing during the decade of 2000 – 2010. Much of the new commercial development in the County occurred along State Route 13 in both the City of Ithaca and the Village of Lansing. An initiative to open the southwest portion of the City to big box development resulted in the construction of about 800,000 square feet of new retail development, including a Wal-Mart, Lowes, Barnes & Noble, Bed Bath & Beyond, and Home Depot. In Lansing, new big box stores included Target, Dicks, Best Buy, and Borders. Well over 1,200,000 square feet of new retail development was added to the community outside of downtown, nearly all within a five mile drive. A new 14-plex movie theater was added at the Pyramid Mall. The Mall subsequently changed its name to the “Shops at Ithaca” in an effort to re-position itself in the regional marketplace. New hotel lodging was added along major arterials- in the village of Lansing (Homewood Suites), the town of Ithaca (Country Inn and Suites), and along Route 13 in Ithaca (Hampton Inn).

Cornell University commissioned its own long term strategic master plan to help guide it in the next 50 years. This plan identified the East Hill Plaza area in the Town of Ithaca as a preferred major residential, office, and commercial growth node for the University. Several years prior to the Cornell master plan, Ithaca College undertook its own planning process for the future of the College. The plan focused growth and development within the South Hill campus.

These changes and these plans fundamentally change the dynamics of the Ithaca community. They affect where and how people journey to work. They affect where and how people shop, recreate, and chose to entertain themselves. They affect how people use their community and their downtown.

The future of downtown is shaped by such decisions. Decisions by past generations to build a Route 13 by-pass, to relocate Ithaca College to South Hill, to build a new hospital on West Hill, to relocate the community Post Office to Warren Road, to locate museums and venue venues in scattered locations throughout the County, and to open up the Route 13 Southwest park area to big box development all had impacts and consequences on the way Ithaca grew and was used by area residents.

Recognizing the extensive changes that were occurring through the City and the County in the past decade, the Downtown Ithaca Alliance Board of Directors authorized a process to create a new strategic plan. This plan was to take these many changes and trends into consideration and prepare recommendations that would address this new community landscape.

This plan is intended to provide the downtown, City, and greater Ithaca community with a blueprint for the future. It outlines the goals and tasks that should be undertaken to ensure that downtown Ithaca will be a strong, vibrant, dynamic, and sustainable district in the year 2020 and beyond. It provides a vision and blueprint of what could be possible for downtown if the needed community resources and will are applied to the City center over the period 2010 – 2020. It is also intended to be the area plan for the downtown district that will be part of the City's formal Comprehensive Plan being redone by Parsons-Brinckerhoff.

METHODOLOGY

Downtown strategic plans draw their inspiration from the passion, opinions, and dreams of the community. Downtown is the heart and soul of the Ithaca community, the geographic center and historic nexus of commerce and community life. Downtowns are successful when they are used... when people choose to live, work, shop, dine, and play in them. A downtown strategic plan needs to seek out and articulate the desires, wants, and needs of its community.

This Downtown Ithaca 2020 Strategic Plan was developed after extensive input and conversation with the downtown, City, and greater Ithaca community, the people who will ultimately determine the success of downtown Ithaca. Beginning in 2008, the Downtown Ithaca Alliance systematically undertook a series of community conversations to collect input and thoughts about the future of downtown. This input was obtained in several ways:

- (1) **Scientific Surveys:** To better understand the changing marketplace, the Downtown Ithaca Alliance worked with WB&A Market Research, a private survey research firm with offices in downtown Ithaca, to conduct two statistically significant surveys... one of the Tompkins county marketplace and one of external major metropolitan areas that serve as sources of downtown Ithaca visitors and tourists. These studies gauged market trends and public perceptions of downtown and helped to shape some of the findings and recommended action items.
- (2) **Community Survey:** The Downtown Ithaca Alliance sponsored its own community input survey during six months in 2009 designed to give residents an opportunity to register their opinions and thoughts about downtown Ithaca present and in the future. Over 250 surveys were completed on-line or using paper forms that were later converted to electronic format. While this exercise was not intended to offer scientific results, it provided additional insight into the opinions of people who were committed and interested enough to take the time to complete the survey questionnaire.
- (3) **Outreach Meetings with Interested Community Groups & Organizations:** During a yearlong period spanning 2008 and 2009, the Downtown Ithaca Alliance conducted conversational visits and meetings with nearly two dozen groups and organizations interested in the future of downtown. A list of these groups is included in the appendix. Hundreds of participants were asked to reflect on their vision for downtown in the years ahead. They identified issues and challenges to address and opportunities to be investigated.
- (4) **Meetings with Downtown Stakeholders:** Several meetings were held in the downtown for BID stakeholders to provide their vision for downtown in the year 2020.
- (5) **Public Meetings:** A formal public input meeting was held at the Tompkins County Public Library in 2009 to solicit input from public members who had not already had an opportunity to express their thoughts

and ideas. Participants were asked to both provide oral and written comments on a wide range of topics that would be addressed in the 2020 Strategic Plan.

(6) Use of Existing and Former Plans:

- (a) In 2007, the City of Ithaca, working with the Downtown Ithaca Alliance, contracted with Toronto based Urban Marketing Collaborative to produce a Downtown Retail Market Study. This study examined the retail landscape and determined that downtown was able to support an additional 95,000 SF of new retail space. The report also discussed factors and issues that would affect the health and vitality of retail in downtown. Findings from this report were used in shaping the recommendations in this Strategic Plan.
- (b) In 2008 and 2009, Cornell MPA graduate student Brianna Olson authored a Volumetric Study of Downtown Ithaca. This study was designed to assess the opportunity for future growth in the BID and surrounding downtown blocks. The results of this study helped to verify the capacity of downtown to physically accept additional residential and office development. The analysis also underscored the importance of downtown maintaining and growing its base of consumers and patrons from throughout the region.
- (c) The existing Downtown Development Strategy: 2000 -2010 and the City of Ithaca Zoning Code were also used as benchmark documents for this Plan.

This 2020 Strategic Plan has been compiled and prepared by the staff of the Downtown Ithaca Alliance. The DIA Board of Directors took an active role in the drafting process, participating in a half-day retreat aimed at establishing broad goals and big ideas. The Board of Directors also reviewed recommendations section by section over four different meetings. To help provide a visual context for the Plan, Holt Architects was retained to provide drawings to illustrate development opportunities and key concepts.

The DIA Board of Directors has authorized the Plan to be released in draft form to the public for presentation and feedback. Input from public presentation sessions will be used to further revise the plan prior to it being finalized for approval by the DIA Board of Directors and subsequently sent to the City for its review and approval.

A SUMMARY OF QUANTITATIVE GOALS IN THE 2020 STRATEGIC PLAN

New Downtown Retail Space Goals (2010-2020)	78,000 SF
Ongoing Retail Occupancy Rate	95%
Additional new National Retailers (2010-2020)	2-4
New Downtown Office Space Goals (2010-2020)	200,000 SF
Number of Possible New Office Buildings (2010-2020)	1-2
New Downtown Employee/Job Goals (2010-2020)	600
New Downtown Housing Unit Goals (2010-2020)	500
New Downtown Residents Goals (2010-2020)	750
Total SF of In-Fill & Redevelopment Space Possible	1,430,000 SF
Desired New Projects (2010-2020)	Modernized/Updated Commons
	Expanded Commons to 100 W. State Block
	Downtown Business Incubator
	Iconic Art at Entrances to the Commons
	Six Mile Creek Walk
	Downtown Multi-Use/Meeting Center
	Joint Community/University Downtown Welcome Center
	1-2 additional Hotels
	Fixed Rail Trolley/Shuttle to Collegetown
	Teen/Youth Activity Center
	Restored State Theatre

COMMUNITY AFFIRMATIONS: WHAT WE BELIEVE

- Downtown Ithaca is the physical, economic, cultural, social, and emotional center of our community.
- Strengthening and maintaining a strong and vibrant Downtown Ithaca is a worthy community goal that will require community resources and attention.
- There will be times when Downtown Ithaca will require extra-ordinary attention and resource allocation to ensure that it can meet the goals and objectives set by this strategy. The community affirms that there will be occasions when supporting a strong and vibrant downtown will necessitate such extra-ordinary attention and resource allocation.
- Downtown is a primary place in our community where we would like to continue to grow and develop.
- We seek a downtown that has a unique character and feel: one that blends together distinctive yet functional architecture with street-level pedestrian-oriented commerce, and both automotive and public transit access with pedestrian friendly spaces and a strong, independent business community.
- Downtown is an inclusive and inviting place for all and we will ensure that policies and resources exist to reinforce this goal.
- As hard as we try, downtown cannot be all things to all people. There are too many other market-driven options. Downtown must choose where and how it wants to compete in the marketplace.
- Downtown is inseparably linked to the neighborhoods of Ithaca and to other commercial districts as well the County as a whole.

KEY SURVEY FINDINGS: 2008/2009

WHAT THE DATA TELLS US...

1. Roughly half of Ithaca marketplace residents consider themselves regular users of downtown.
2. Users tend to be younger, more affluent, and have lived in the community for shorter lengths of time. People living closer to downtown are also more likely to use it on a regular basis.
3. Restaurants (food and beverage) are the single largest draw.
4. The perception of limited selection and variety continue to be the key reason local residents do not choose to patronize downtown more often.
5. Parking is perceived as an issue on two fronts: it is believed to be scarce and hard to access, and it is believed to be expensive.
6. Tourists and visitors hold very different opinions from local residents. While local residents refer to the limited selection and variety of convenience and comparison goods, visitors note the unique, one-of-a-kind shops and restaurants.
7. Tourists are not overly concerned about parking or safety; local residents have more concerns about both.
8. Walkability is considered by the community to be one of downtown's key assets.
9. Increased downtown housing is seen as an important goal by residents.
10. Downtown character seems to be more related to streetscape and pedestrian scale than to building height and mass.
11. A large number of local residents will shop downtown more frequently if we offer more of the day-to-day goods and services they seek.

KEY GUIDING DOWNTOWN PLANNING PRINCIPALS

- Maintain and expand downtown pedestrian viability, scale and walkability.
- Seek to eliminate blank walls and empty zones that slow and deter pedestrian travel.
- Physically link downtown to both Collegetown and the West End/Inlet Island by both pedestrian and transit means.
- Adopt a proactive downtown in-fill development strategy.
- Continue to require mixed-use projects.
- Cluster traffic generating uses in close proximity to each other within the downtown core.
- Maintain street-level retail uses in key locations.
- Integrate Six Mile Creek into the fabric of downtown.
- Ensure that retail businesses remain clustered and are able to take advantage of traffic generating uses.
- Be a leader in sustainable community development, emphasizing both the central downtown location and use of sustainable practices.
- Work to reduce dependence on the automobile in downtown while continuing to grow and develop the downtown core.
- Ensure a smooth transition between the higher density downtown commercial district and surrounding lower density residential neighborhoods.

DOWNTOWN ITHACA: THE BIG IDEAS

1. Mixed-Uses

One of the most important concepts guiding the Downtown Ithaca 2020 Development Strategy is the need for mixed-use projects and mixed-use streets. The history of Downtown Ithaca, like all other downtowns, is one of mixed-use development. The typical project was a four-story building with ground floor retail and upper floor office and residential uses. Service businesses and meeting hall/public assembly spaces were also a part of these mixed-use buildings.

Like most other cities, Ithaca began adopting a more monolithic, one-dimensional approach to some of its new buildings during the second half of the 20th century. Parking garages were built only for parking, as evidenced by the Seneca and Green garages. Office buildings were built solely for office tenants. Governmental buildings were built to serve one purpose- government. The result impacted street-level activity and movement. Without street-level retail, whole blocks became uninviting to pedestrians.

A return to mixed-use projects enables street-level pedestrian patterns to be strengthened and in some cases re-built. This strategy recommends that new downtown projects always have mixed-uses, if at all feasible. This includes office buildings, housing projects, governmental buildings, and parking structures.

A return to mixed-use streets ensures that there will be a blend of activities and will result in more people interacting with each other and more opportunity for them to conduct multi-task trips. By clustering varying uses in close proximity to each other, people are able to live more sustainable, efficient, and dynamic lives.

2. A Dense Downtown Core

Downtown density and downtown success are inextricably connected. The history of downtowns, including downtown Ithaca, is one of dense development. In the era preceding automobiles, density came naturally. Walking distances were kept reasonable by locating residences, goods, services, and entertainment all in close proximity to each other. Downtowns were completely filled and tended not to have vacant lots or areas set aside for parking.

The advent of the automobile changed the notion of density in many communities. Parking lots consumed large proportions of downtown real estate. Eventually, the automobile facilitated the growth of suburbs and edge cities, resulting in disinvestment in the central city. Rather than build vertically, developers found it easier and more profitable to build outside of downtown altogether. During the latter part of the 20th century, urban development often sought to mimic suburban building- with single purpose, low-rise buildings.



This artist's rendering shows the Night and Day building on the Ithaca Commons with additional floors, as part of a strategy that calls for a dense urban core and mixed-use buildings.

The importance of density to a downtown relates to the limited amount of real estate available for development and the need to generate sufficient foot traffic for the businesses of the downtown district. Vertical growth, while more expensive, is also more environmentally sound. Less land is consumed and more people are served per acre. Within the boundaries established by the community for height, dense development helps to provide downtown with the core residential, employee, and visitor base it needs to survive and thrive as a commercial district. Density does not make sense everywhere in a community. There is a need for neighborhoods with only single family, duplex, and small multi-unit homes. Downtown offers one location where density can benefit all, concentrating foot traffic where it is needed, and allowing for the efficient and cost effective delivery of services.

Density is a key component of the 2020 Downtown Development Strategy.

3. A Focus on Reducing Automotive Usage in Downtown

Looking toward the future, downtown Ithaca seeks to take a lead role in reducing the need for automotive usage in the center city. Downtown Ithaca has been and aspires to remain a center for regional commerce, including professional office, retail, dining, service, entertainment, government, health, and finance. In the past, these downtown uses have been facilitated by automotive travel. Looking into the future, investment into appropriate infrastructure can help to reduce dependence on automobiles for a number of these uses. We will aspire to be a zone known for its innovative and effective non-car transit solutions. We will continue to work with and provide for automotive parking for current and future uses that require it, but will pro-actively seek to reduce downtown dependence on the automobile whenever possible. This includes encouraging and facilitating additional transit shuttles, exploring a trolley or other dedicated fixed rail line between downtown, Cornell University, and Ithaca College, and promoting the use of transportation demand management whenever feasible.

4. Transition at the Edges of Downtown

Downtown Ithaca is not a place unto itself. It is the central place of both the City and County. As such, downtown is a permeable place, accessed by arterial highways and surface roads as well as bike and pedestrian routes. It is also located adjacent to many of the City's urban neighborhoods- Fall Creek, Southside, South Hill, and East Hill. While there is a definite zoning boundary that delineates downtown, there is a need to recognize that the edges of downtown and its adjoining neighborhoods are transitional. Zoning in these edge areas should reflect this transitional nature. The tallest buildings and highest density development should not be located in these transition zones. Rather, the heights and density should begin to scale down toward the neighborhoods.

5. Preference for Pedestrians

One word describing downtown emerged most often from meetings and input sessions with interested community and neighborhood persons—pedestrian. The community wants a downtown Ithaca that has a walkable scale and is considered pedestrian friendly.

What constitutes a pedestrian friendly downtown?

- New and existing buildings located within easy walking distance of each other;
- A downtown footprint that allows for easy pedestrian access to all buildings, facilities, and parks;
- Walking and biking trails that link downtown with other parts of the City;

- An absence of barriers, hazards, or other sidewalk problems that constrain walking or wheelchair accessibility;
- Pedestrian scale signage and lighting;
- Ample pedestrian amenities such as benches, water fountains, trash and recycling receptacles, and bike racks;
- Pedestrian scale public art;
- Continuous blocks populated by active storefronts;
- Easy intersection and mid-block crossings
- Multiple uses of sidewalk space

The concept of a pedestrian friendly downtown Ithaca should be a part of any downtown plan, private project proposal, public facilities, or public space project.

6. The Retail Street

The single greatest measure of a successful downtown is an active and vital retail district. The exodus of retail businesses has created dull, uninviting streets in many cities. Ithaca has successfully retained its core retail businesses. A key concept in the 2020 Development Strategy is the need to protect, preserve, and enhance this retail core. Decisions about future downtown planning and development need to reflect the importance of a strong and vital retail district to the community.

A strong retail district has several key characteristics:

- Continuous uninterrupted storefronts;
- Clear sight lines from stores to the buildings across the street (combined with enough activity to not look barren);
- A blend of retail and food and beverage businesses;
- Clustering of businesses that have the same patron base;
- Multiple foot traffic generators.

7. The Commons as a Transit-Oriented Hub

Downtown Ithaca is the primary community transit center for the TCAT system. Downtown has four major transit stops, at both Cayuga and Aurora Streets and at the two principal hub stops at Seneca Street and Green Street. Separating these four stops is the Ithaca Commons.

This 2020 Development Strategy considers the Commons to be an integral part of the downtown transit hub system. Rather than view the four bus stops as separate entities, the 2020 Strategy asserts that there is one single hub complex, connected by the Commons.

This notion of a single transit-oriented hub in downtown is significant for several reasons. The Commons becomes a key part of the public transit system, and serves as the pedestrian connection between stops. Planning should consider how transit, pedestrian, and vehicle parking interface with each other and make appropriate linkages. Signage and amenities should facilitate interfaces between these travel modes. As part of the transit system, the Commons also becomes eligible for federal or state public transit funding.

8. In-Fill Development

Consistent with density, in-fill development serves to maximize existing downtown real estate. Downtown Ithaca is considered a mature downtown- its real estate is predominately developed and there remains only limited pockets of unused or underutilized real estate. In-fill is the process of utilizing these spaces for development.

In-fill development tends to be more expensive to the real estate developer than traditional open space development. Construction staging is more difficult and costly. Land acquisition is often more difficult and expensive. Vertical construction is also generally more costly than horizontal green field development.

However, the benefits of in-fill development are numerous. In-fill development is environmentally conscious, utilizing core, centrally located spaces. In-fill acts to complete the streetscape, filling voids and holes. In-fill development either happens on vacant spaces or it replaces low density, one-story structures. Downtown Ithaca has a surprising number of in-fill development sites potentially available for building. When the community adds in the expense of providing public services, in-fill development becomes a cheaper option than green field development. Public policy and City planning decisions should encourage and facilitate in-fill development.

One strategy to facilitate in-fill development and higher-density redevelopment is a program to acquire and land bank key properties. Such a program would create a fund of public and possibly private monies to be used to control and hold important parcels and properties that become available. By land-banking the properties, site assembly can be facilitated and desired projects can be pursued. This activity would require investment from the Ithaca Urban Renewal Agency and from other stakeholders, both public and private.

9. Clustering Destinations

A fundamental aspect of downtown Ithaca's strategy for vitality and sustainability is the need to cluster pedestrian foot-traffic generating uses into downtown within walking distance of each other. A 2005 study of successful small city downtowns by Gary Ferguson found that the most highly regarded American small cities were able to cluster many foot-traffic generating, destination attractions into their city centers. These were attractions that required users to make conscious pre-determined decisions to visit. The average for the study was 35 different destinations per city. These destinations were also within walking distance, creating a dense mass of pedestrian uses that supported and supplemented each other. By clustering destinations, these cities were able to sustain high levels of foot traffic



There are four components to this clustered-destination redevelopment project in downtown Princeton NJ. They include parking, housing, street-level retail and a public park.

Photo and source: timhaahs.com

that supported retail and dining.

To achieve such a high level of foot traffic generator concentration, the Ithaca community will need to recognize and endorse the benefits that accrue from clustering destinations in the center city. Sometimes this may mean paying a premium for a project that might otherwise be built for less money in a green field location. Sometimes this may mean passing on a donation for property in a remote or disconnected location.

Currently downtown has at least 18 different destination foot traffic generators in its downtown. (See list in Section (p 18). It is a goal of this strategy to retain these existing foot traffic generators and to seek to grow this list during the period 2010 – 2020.

10. Downtown as a Community Center

To many people of the community and the region, their downtown Ithaca experience is created by their attendance at a special event. The DIA took over downtown community events at its inception in 1997 and has worked to expand the scope and offering of events for the community. Hosting events in the focal center of the community is a key part of the mission of downtown. Events bring residents together to celebrate, learn, exchange, and recreate. Downtown’s geographic location and access make it an ideal site for community events. Downtown remains committed to being the focal center for the major events, community celebrations, nonprofit and organizational gatherings, and organized community expressions.

11. A Leader in Green & Sustainable Practice

Downtown Ithaca should be a leader in the community effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, reduce automobile usage, and promote green/sustainable practices. Downtown’s central location and historic collection of existing infrastructure makes it the green and sustainable location for growth. Development activities should reinforce this natural advantage. The downtown should also serve as a showcase for the community’s broader interest in green and sustainable practices.

DOWNTOWN CHARACTER

Character is an oft-used but seldom defined term that pertains to Downtown Ithaca. What is a downtown's character and who defines it?

During the public input sessions and neighborhood workshops that preceded the drafting of this strategy, the question of defining a desired character for downtown was discussed at each session. Several key themes emerged:

- Downtown should be a pedestrian friendly environment, easy to traverse and navigate on foot.
- Downtown should feel urban. It should be different from other parts of the community.
- Tall buildings are appropriate for downtown, within some rational range, provided they promote an environmental character that is pedestrian friendly and conducive to retail.

These grassroots messages suggest important character traits that should form the foundation for downtown growth, development, and management:

“Downtown is a pedestrian-friendly place”

More than any other characteristic, Ithacans want their downtown to be a place where pedestrians are valued and given preference to, in the built environment, and in public spaces. The existence of the Commons pedestrian mall provides a special base for this character trait. Free of vehicles, except for emergency and maintenance calls, the Commons offers a central traffic free zone that serves as a haven for pedestrians as well as a focal center for pedestrian based activity.

While opening a street to exclusive use by pedestrians is a straightforward way to promote pedestrian friendly character, the remaining downtown streets and blocks remain open to vehicular traffic. How is pedestrian friendliness maintained and enhanced in places where automobiles are present? To promote pedestrian friendly character, the following actions are recommended:

- Wherever possible, slow street-level vehicular traffic to a speed limit that enables car and pedestrian to see each other in advance, and allows for appropriate avoidance steps. When traffic moves too quickly on surface streets, it becomes more difficult for drivers to identify and react to pedestrians who leave the sidewalk without warning.
- Clearly marked and identified crosswalks should be present at all intersections and, as permitted, at mid-blocks. Pedestrians tend to seek out the easiest and fastest way to travel from one point to another. Mid-block crossings facilitate this movement. The City of Ithaca should seek to put marked pedestrian crosswalks at mid-blocks where people actually choose to cross. The mid-block crossing of Green Street between the Green Garage and Cayuga Place is an excellent example. When the sole pedestrian crossing for this block was located at the Green and Cayuga intersection, this block experienced a disproportionately higher amount of jaywalking. The mid-block crossing at Cayuga Place appears to have channeled much of that jaywalking into a safe and convenient crossing.
- Wherever possible, use cones that contain signage indicating that vehicles must yield to pedestrians in crosswalks. These cones, already in use in other parts of the community, are placed in intersection crosswalks to slow traffic and protect walkers.

- Wherever possible as roadways are rebuilt and/or resurfaced, install sidewalk “bump outs” that narrow the pedestrian crossing distance at intersections. An existing example is the Green Street mid-block crossing at Cayuga Place.
- Continue to add accessibility ramps at all downtown intersections to ensure that sidewalks are accessible to wheelchairs and strollers.
- Work toward the creation of a district-wide pedestrian signage system that directs people on foot to key downtown attractions and landmarks. Use the existing TCAT four sided pedestrian signs as a model or starting point.
- Retailers and shopkeepers should be enabled to use limited sidewalk space in front of their establishments for displays, planters, and/or sandwich board signs. When done in moderation, such use of the sidewalk provides interest and excitement to the pedestrian domain and should be encouraged.
- Sidewalks and public spaces should always allow ample space for pedestrian movement. Currently, that estimate of minimum space is five (5) feet of unobstructed clearance. Wherever possible, this width should be increased to allow for multiple uses.
- Whenever opportunities present themselves, blocks should be shorter rather than longer to promote more visibility and pedestrian movement.
- Tree grates should be routinely repaired or replaced to prevent trip hazards and injuries.
- Seating areas or bus stops should be located in a manner that does not constrict or impede pedestrian traffic flow. They should not be located in narrow sidewalk areas.
- Pedestrian amenities should be added whenever repairs or sidewalk reconstruction is undertaken. Such amenities include, but are not limited to, trash receptacles, pedestrian scale sidewalk lighting, flower beds/planters, benches, and bicycle racks.
- The Six Mile Creek walkway should be completed from Clinton Street, east into the gorge and ultimately to the Wildflower preserve. The Six Mile Creek walkway should also be extended in a northwesterly direction to Route 13.
- The Cascadilla Gorge trail should be connected to downtown using signs, markers, painted lines, or other visual cues.
- Extending the pedestrian, car-free zones, even on a seasonal or temporary basis, should be explored for the 100 West State Street block and/or the 300 East State Street block.

When new projects or buildings are proposed, it is important to make sure they also adhere to pedestrian friendly principles and concepts. Among these are:

- Buildings should be constructed to sidewalk lot lines to avoid private plaza setbacks that blur and erase block faces.
- Building landscaping should consider and reflect existing and desired pedestrian travel patterns.
- Buildings adjacent to Six Mile Creek should connect to and reinforce the Six Mile Creek river walk.
- Provision of ground floor retail/foot traffic generating uses.

“Ground Floor Retail/Commercial should be Preserved”

The essence of a vital, healthy downtown center is a strong retail marketplace. Every great downtown has a strong retail and restaurant core on its street-level. The loss of street-level retail, restaurants, and traffic generating commerce is perhaps the greatest single loss a downtown can experience.

Downtown Ithaca has traditionally maintained a solid diverse retail core that in 2009 hovers around 80 retailers, 50 food and beverage operations, and at least 25 service oriented businesses. These street-level businesses provide a dynamic that helps to define the character of our downtown. Street-level retail provides for window-shopping opportunities. Restaurants provide color, delectable smells, and a stream of patron traffic. Absent these establishments, downtown's character would be very different and much less desirable.

To preserve and grow our retail and restaurant core, the following actions are recommended:

- Allow private outdoor dining wherever possible, making sure that City fees for sidewalk rent are compatible and consistent with the market.
- Encourage new downtown buildings to be mixed-use, with ground floor retail/commercial.
- Encourage storefronts in the primary and secondary Commons to remain retail/commercial and not be converted to office or other low-traffic uses.

“Downtown should feel Urban”

What is an urban feel? It depends on the observer. To a new resident moving from New York City, downtown Ithaca is small and a scaled down urban environment. To a new resident from more rural areas of upstate New York, Ithaca seems thoroughly urban.

When community residents suggest that downtown Ithaca should be urban in character, they are likely to be considering some of the following:

- Downtown buildings are larger, taller and more massive than other community buildings;
- The built environment in downtown is denser than elsewhere in the community. Buildings are close together. They fill out their tax parcel footprints.
- The downtown environment is characterized by concrete and hardscape rather than softer surfaces and finishes found in rural or suburban locales.

Feeling urban does not mean that downtown needs to suffer from urban design flaws experienced elsewhere. To maintain a dynamic urban character, it is suggested that the following design guidelines be considered:

- Blank walls at the street/pedestrian level should be avoided. Where they currently exist, efforts should be undertaken to soften or eliminate the blank expanses. Examples of blank walls include the Tioga and Aurora Street walls of the Seneca Parking Garage.
- Mixed-use projects should always be adopted over single-use projects. Mixed-use projects would feature street-level active commercial/retail space.
- Dead spaces along key retail commercial blocks space should be avoided. Along with blank walls, dead spaces are created by ground floor uses that do not generate foot traffic or encourage pedestrians to want to continue their walking or window shopping journey. Office uses or uses that focus inward are examples of dead spaces that interrupt pedestrian retail journeys.
- Recognizing that downtown Ithaca is a collection of buildings constructed over a 175-year span, there is no single period or architectural style that defines downtown. New projects are part of the ongoing evolution of the community that began in the early 1800's and continues today.
- Historic architecture should be preserved where feasible. The various styles of the past help to provide design character to our downtown.

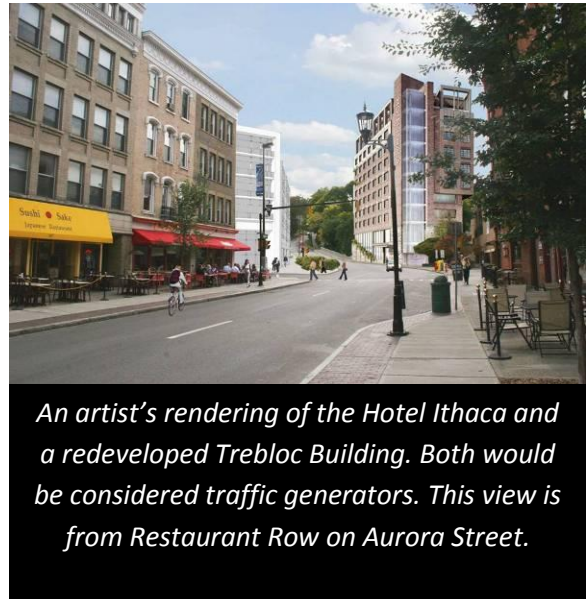
- Over time, consideration should be given to expanding or replacing low density, single story structures that do not efficiently use their zoning envelope, and appear out of character with a more densely built downtown.
- Downtown is bordered by residential neighborhoods. As downtown development, redevelopment, and in-fill approach these neighborhoods, it is important that zoning and building heights/masses transition to reflect the more residential character of the abutting neighborhood.

THE CONCEPT OF PEDESTRIAN TRAFFIC GENERATORS

Research has shown that the great small city downtowns of America share a key characteristic- the ability to cluster numerous disparate pedestrian traffic generators together within easy walking distance.

Why are some downtowns more successful than others? What causes a downtown to be healthy and vibrant?

A 2005 study of eleven great American small city downtowns conducted by Gary Ferguson found that one shared attribute of successful downtowns was the clustering of many pedestrian traffic generators within walking distance of each other. These attractions were each able to lure pedestrian traffic to their own particular activity, be it a museum, a civic building, or an entertainment establishment. When they were clustered, however, their impact appeared to multiply. By concentrating traffic generating uses within close proximity of each other, the downtown was able to reap overlapping synergistic benefits. Patrons to one attraction were more likely to frequent others. This results in an increased length of stay and the likelihood of increased expenditures within the downtown district. In simple terms, the more traffic generators, the better. The more diverse and varied the traffic generators, the better.



An artist's rendering of the Hotel Ithaca and a redeveloped Trebloc Building. Both would be considered traffic generators. This view is from Restaurant Row on Aurora Street.

In many respects, the clustering of traffic generators in a walkable downtown district replicates or simulates downtowns of old. Most of our downtowns were plotted and set up in times pre-dating the automobile. Walking was the predominate mode of transportation and clustering uses within easy walking distance was both practical and efficient. Clustering resulted in strong, overlapping pedestrian traffic patterns. A trip to the post office was also likely to be a trip to the five and dime store. A trip to the library may have also resulted in a stop at the candy store. A night out at the theater was also an occasion to patronize a local restaurant.

Foot traffic generators are key to the success of a downtown commercial district. Without pedestrian traffic, retail businesses will not survive. A thriving downtown retail district is most likely to be characterized by:

- A concentration of many traffic generating uses
- The mix of use types (retail, service, entertainment, government)
- A blend of day and night uses
- Sidewalks large enough to allow for multiple use

Existing Pedestrian Traffic Generators

Downtown Ithaca's collection of pedestrian traffic generators (discrete and/or groups of properties and operations that generate significant regional destination foot traffic) currently includes the following 18 entities:

- City Hall
- County Courthouse & County complex
- Downtown banks
- Hilton Hotel
- Holiday Inn
- Moosewood Restaurant*
- Public Library
- State Theatre
- Town of Ithaca Building
- Cinemapolis
- CSMA
- Downtown churches
- History Center
- Kitchen Theater
- Post Office
- Restaurant Row
- TC3 Extension Center
- Urban Outfitters*

*Typically individual retailers or restaurants would not be considered traffic generators unless they have extra-ordinary drawing power or marketing appeal that cause them to serve as anchor businesses.

Goals for Future Pedestrian Traffic Generators

A primary goal of the Downtown Ithaca 2020 Strategic Plan is to adopt a strategy of clustering pedestrian traffic generators in downtown, in an effort to provide a large enough base of patrons and customers to support the type of downtown commerce that area residents desire.

To build this foot traffic base, there is a goal to increase the number of downtown pedestrian traffic generators by adding at least an additional 10 during the period 2010 – 2020. Some cities, such as Madison and Boulder average over 35 traffic generators in their downtown districts. The goal for downtown Ithaca is to increase this number to at least 28.

Accomplishing this goal will require the support and commitment of civic and elected leaders, along with nonprofit and cultural community leaders. The decision to locate a community traffic generator often turns on economic factors that might steer projects away from downtown. Helping leaders understand that these attractions provide more benefit to the community when they are clustered versus in disparate locations will be a key objective of the Downtown Ithaca Alliance.

Based on other aspects of this plan, future traffic generators might include, but not be limited to the following:

- Charter School
- Finger Lakes Wine Center
- A Night Club
- Teen Activity Center
- New History Center
- New City/County administration facility
- Welcome Center/Visitor Center
- Hotel Ithaca
- A new future hotel
- An artist incubator or clustered studio project
- A music club
- A second national retail chain store
- A brew pub

GUIDING DOWNTOWN GROWTH

Determining Downtown Growth Capacity

By most measures downtown Ithaca is considered a mature downtown. Unlike many city centers with acres of surface parking lots and unused open space, downtown Ithaca’s geography is primarily built out. Common perception suggests that there is little remaining developable space. However, a 2008 study conducted by Cornell University CIPA student Brianna Olson determined that there is significantly more developable property in downtown than conventionally imagined.

Planning for 2020 requires an understanding of the capacity for downtown growth. If downtown is to be *considered one of the key City locations for future housing and office growth, it is critical to know how much volume can be accommodated given different scenarios.*

Olson’s volumetric capacity study of downtown estimated growth potential using two different scenarios: (1) utilizing already vacant or un-built property and (2) utilizing properties with low-density single story properties.

When only considering vacant or unbuilt properties and using current zoning, downtown Ithaca has an estimated 528,000 square feet of development potential. The largest parcels available for development in this scenario are:

<u>Location</u>	<u>SF Potential</u>
Bank of America drive thru site	94,000 SF
State Theatre block	90,000 SF
Dewitt Mall/Seneca Place block	88,000 SF

There are a total of 10 parcels that can be developed on vacant or unbuilt property in downtown. In general the volume of these unbuilt parcels is modest, ranging in size from 8,000 to 94,000 square feet. In the CBD zone, parking is “as of right” and does not create any regulatory hurdle for development.



An artist’s conception of a redeveloped Bank of America drive-thru. This image looks across Seneca Street toward the Ithaca Commons

When the redevelopment of underutilized or low-density parcels is added into consideration, the volume of developable space in downtown Ithaca increases to 1.8 million square feet. A total of 20 parcels are considered candidates for both in-fill and redevelopment. Unlike in-fill sites, redevelopment sites require the removal or replacement of some existing structure(s). These parcels tend to be considerably larger than in-fill sites. The largest parcels available for development in this scenario are:

<u>Location</u>	<u>SF Potential</u>
State Theatre block	200,000 SF
Bank of America drive thru site	199,000 SF
Trebloc block	170,000 SF

Within the downtown CBD zone, parking is not a regulatory consideration for development. Some of the redevelopment parcels, however, fall outside of the existing CBD zone and do currently require on-site parking. On-site parking would reduce the volume of possible projects and result in suburban style projects not appropriate to an urban center.

Estimating a Desirable Future Development Volume

Volumetric studies enable an estimation of the housing and office growth capacity for downtown in the years ahead. Based on the development track record of the previous ten years and assuming current market conditions that favor the financing of residential development over office development, it is possible to posit that three-fourths (75%) of new downtown development will be residential. If 50% of the in-fill and redevelopment property opportunities are developed, this results in the potential for 1,075,000 SF of new residential units and 355,000 SF of new office space.

There are some fundamental questions that need to be addressed about downtown development.

- Why develop downtown Ithaca at all?
- How much development is necessary for downtown to be successful?
- How much development is desirable?
- How much will (or should) the city and the broader community rely on downtown to be a pivotal center for housing and office development?
- A recent analysis of Tompkins County housing needs estimated a ten demand of 4,000 units. How many of those units should be centered in downtown?

Why Develop Downtown Ithaca At All?

This is a basic question that underlies all subsequent queries. There are several reasons why downtown development should occur:

1. Downtown Ithaca is not a static place. Throughout its history, downtown has continued to grow and evolve. This growth tended to be linked to the national and local economies. When times were robust, the downtown grew, adding new buildings and uses. Looking forward, it is likely downtown will continue to have opportunities for growth and development.
2. Downtown is one of a select few places in the City where residential and office growth can occur. Multi-family residential development and office development are not very compatible uses with the City's residential neighborhoods. This leaves only other commercial districts where such growth is possible. The Southwest Park area has reached its GIES capacity for commercial development but remains a place where residential development can occur. Collegetown can also accommodate more residential development and limited office development, but much of the residential development in the Collegetown district tends to be dedicated to student housing. The West End and Waterfront districts are also candidates for development. For the City to continue new growth and investment, downtown will necessarily need to be one of the places where such growth can occur.
3. The community's commitment to sustainability and smart growth suggests that downtown should be a key location for future development. Locating development in the community core allows for the most

efficient use of existing infrastructure. The costs and burden of extending services to the periphery of the community is negated with central growth. Police and fire services are centralized in downtown, resulting in easier and less expensive servicing. Rebuilding the urban core is a cost effective and sustainable policy for the Ithaca community and perhaps the most important reason for continued downtown growth.

How much development is necessary for downtown to be successful?

This seems like a straightforward and easy question but it remains most difficult and elusive. There are several responses:

1. Downtown development contributes substantially to the sustainability of the downtown commercial marketplace. The underlying strategy of the 2000-2010 Downtown Development Strategy was to generate new local foot traffic for downtown through a number of activities, including the development of new residential and office products. This methodology continues to be relevant for downtown Ithaca in the future. New foot traffic generated by residential and office development can provide ongoing, daily customers and patrons to the businesses of the downtown core.
2. It is not likely that the kind of downtown local residents profess to want can be sustained solely on new urban development projects. The number and volume of retail and food and beverage businesses that the public desires will require a customer base that's in excess of any likely combination of new downtown development. This was substantiated by Urban Marketing Collaborative in their 2008 Retail Market Analysis of downtown Ithaca.
3. The question of how much development is necessary is better cast as *"How much urban housing and office space is preferred by the community and how much suburban/highway sprawl is desired?"*

How much development is desirable?

How much development does our community desire is a key question. This question is also difficult to quantify.

1. There are community residents who moved to Ithaca because of its small city scale. There would be reluctance on the part of these residents to support growth that would substantially change or alter the character of the community they chose as their home.
2. There are community residents who are concerned about sprawl and its homogenizing effects on the character of their community. They would be more willing to concentrate growth and development into the central core rather than watch it creep outward along community arterial roads and highways.
3. There are community residents who prefer to see development occur in nodes, as specified in the Tompkins County Economic Development Strategy. Nodes could include villages and hamlet centers as well as the City's urban core.
4. There are community residents who prefer a market-driven approach to development. These residents do not seek limits on growth but prefer to let prevailing market conditions dictate where and how much growth will occur.
5. Community consensus on the amount of desired growth in downtown and elsewhere has not been clearly defined. Levels of support ebb and flow based on a number of interrelated issues and conditions. For this reason, it is important for the public to have ongoing discussions and dialogues about its long-term vision for its community.

6. Based on the numerous outreach sessions conducted prior to the drafting of this Strategic Plan, there appears to be strong community support for continued downtown growth, within a framework that recognizes key issues of community character.

How much will or should the city and the broader community rely on downtown to be a pivotal center for housing and office development? Downtown can be an important growth node for the community during the period 2010 – 2020. It has the capacity to accept new growth, limited at some point by the financial capacity of the community to provide additional parking or public transit.

This capacity has an upper limit and, unless the City chooses to further revise its zoning, that upper limit will govern how much growth can be assigned to downtown.

Downtown Growth Nodes

A review of the possible in-fill and redevelopment sites suggests that there are distinct growth corridors and nodes in downtown. Looking forward to 2020 downtown growth is likely to be concentrated into the following areas:

(1) The West State Street Corridor

It has been a planning goal of the City to encourage the West State Street corridor to fill in with development and commerce to serve as a key link between downtown and the West End commercial area. There are several large redevelopment sites that are adjacent to this corridor that can be used for housing and mixed-uses projects. The area has also emerged as a location for service oriented nonprofit organizations. The largest of these sites is Block 14, a predominately publicly owned block that has been identified by the City as a preferred location for a future parking structure to service this corridor. A parking structure may be important in keeping West State Street employees from parking in the adjacent residential neighborhoods. This corridor was re-designed and new streetscape added early this decade.

(2) The Clinton Street southern border of downtown

The southern part of downtown has already undergone major redevelopment with the Creek Walk, Cayuga Garage, Cayuga Place, the Tompkins County Public Library, and the soon to be built Cayuga Green #3 residential building. South of Clinton Street there are additional commercial parcels that may over time become possible candidate sites for more intensive development. Parcels both to the southeast and southwest of Cayuga/Clinton Street intersection provide possible future development opportunities for housing and mixed-uses that could utilize the adjacent Cayuga parking garage.

(3) The portion of downtown east of Aurora Street

A major location for future downtown growth will be the downtown parcels east of Aurora Street. The list of possible development sites in this area includes: the former Strand Theater site (now two surface parking lots); the entire Trebloc block bounded by East State, Aurora, and Green Street; the Challenge Industries site at the base of State Street hill, and future redevelopment opportunities in the Gateway campus.

(4) Selected sites on the northern border of downtown

The northern border of downtown has several possible redevelopment sites: the former Tompkins County library building site, and the northwest corner of Tioga and Buffalo Streets, which is currently home to HSBC Bank and County property. These sites appear most appropriate for housing and/or governmental uses.

(5) Primary and secondary Commons in-fill/redevelopment

There are some select development opportunities for both in-fill and redevelopment in the primary and secondary Commons areas. The Commons is the densest area of downtown and the area that has the most distinctive collection of historic building facades. Due to historic fires and the still lingering effects of urban renewal, there are several candidate sites that can be redeveloped for more density or simply in-filled with new construction. One-story buildings that were added to replace older buildings destroyed in fires are likely candidates for redevelopment. Among the key sites are: the 100 West State Street vacant lot, the area surrounding the State Theater in the block bordered by West State, Geneva, Green, and Cayuga Streets, the current Bank of America drive-through area at Tioga and Seneca Streets, and the current Tompkins Trust Company drive-through site on Seneca Street.



An artist's rendering of how a vacant lot on the 100 block of West State Street would look if it were redeveloped.

The Importance of Transit to Parking

Downtown is a place where people come to work, shop, dine, conduct commerce, and recreate. It is also a place where a growing number of people choose to live. A key goal of the community is to ensure that these people can access downtown, traveling readily and efficiently to their daily or periodic destinations. While parking is a part of this process, it is but one portion of the transportation system.

Downtown Ithaca currently has the parking supply to accommodate some, but not all, anticipated future growth. Even though CBD zoning does not mandate parking requirements, the marketplace will inevitably dictate the necessity for some additional parking to support projects. Financial institutions that lend money for these projects will want to be certain that there will be sufficient parking to ensure their success.

As the community moves into the 2010-2020 period, the existing parking supply will tighten, as new development generates new demand. The preferred scenario for meeting this demand will be for the City and the DIA to work in consort with TCAT, Cornell University, Ithaca College, and others to devise useful, cost effective programs to reduce parking demand from key downtown user groups- particularly, but not limited to, employees workers and students. By reducing parking demand through such transportation demand management tools as guaranteed rides home, park and ride lots, incentivized bus service, and enhanced shuttle, new projects can take advantage of existing capacity.

Should this approach still leave a shortfall in parking supply, at some point during this period the City will need to plan for the addition of another parking structure to help accommodate parking needs that arise from future

growth. How this garage would be financed or if it is a solely public venture, a public/private venture, or a solely privately owned venture is to be determined.

The size of a possible new parking structure project will also depend on the success of the community in instituting a transportation demand management program that is accepted and used by downtown employees and patrons.

Incentives for Development

The pressures for development to be located on the periphery of a community are very strong. Land is open and undeveloped. The cost of land is usually significantly less expensive than core urban parcels of similar size. Ownership of larger tracts tends to be in one party rather than split among multiple owners, such as is the case in downtown. Zoning regulations and ordinances affecting development tend to be less demanding in many peripheral locations than may be the case in downtown. Urban construction also tends to be more difficult and expensive, requiring more vertical construction and limited staging areas.

In the development business, time represents money. The comparative ease of assembling, financing, permitting, and constructing a project in a peripheral location often results in development gravitating away from downtown to the easier peripheral locations... unless a community is willing to work to reduce these hurdles and help level the development playing field between the center city and the periphery.

Some communities are active in assisting developers with site assembly. Land banking has been a tool used by both large and small communities to ease the burden of site assembly. Ithaca's ownership of the surface lots adjacent to the current Tompkins County Public Library, for example, helped pave the way for the three-building Cayuga Green project. There is a continued need to explore ways to land-bank key properties and parcels as they become available to help facilitate urban development. Such land banking could be accomplished by the public sector using the Ithaca Urban Renewal Agency, or by the private sector using the nonprofit local development corporation created several years ago by the Downtown Ithaca Alliance.

Permitting can be a difficult and challenging process for developers. Permits generally exist for very important community reasons- health and safety, planning and community appearance, and improving the general community welfare just to name a few. Each item itself was put into place for what was deemed to be a significant community enhancement. When these various permits and obligations are combined, however, they can present a daunting hurdle to would be developer. Some communities, both large and small, have worked to streamline their permitting and regulatory processes in order to simplify and speed up the time it takes to meet these various obligations. Ithaca has been working toward a one-stop process that provides the applicant with a single case manager. The City's PCC process helps to bring various departments together for a combined look at project proposals. There is a need to continue to refine this process so that a developer can be handed a checklist and timetable for regulatory review and would have one principal point of contact with the City.

Financial incentives will remain an important part any downtown development strategy as long as financial gaps exist in projects. A financial gap is the amount of money that is needed to make a proposed real estate development project financially viable and supportable, over and above what is supportable from the marketplace. The presence of a gap does not mean a project is flawed or faulty. Rather, it simply indicates that to achieve the stated project goals, additional incentive funding needs to be provided.

In robust markets, gaps may not exist. In the past, Collegetown projects have not needed gap incentives because the rents they could command were sufficiently high enough to generate a return for the investor in an acceptable amount of time. In downtown, housing rents have been lower, resulting in projects that are not financially viable without incentive gap assistance. Over time markets evolve and gap financing may no longer be needed.

Developers and public officials may debate the extent of the gap incentives needed. The public generally must adopt a reasonable expectation for a rate of return for a project and use that to help determine the necessity for assistance. Public sector officials must also verify and substantiate rent assumptions and other key factors that are used in development pro forma statements.

At this time, financial incentives still appear to be needed to support downtown development projects. This holds true for smaller upper story rehabilitation projects on the Commons, as well as larger new construction redevelopment projects. Without a method to fill gaps, projects will not go forward. It is crucial that downtown have access to financial tools to help reduce and close project gaps, if the desired development is to be attracted. These tools should include, but not be limited to:

1. Tax Abatement and/or Payment in lieu of taxes
2. Empire Zone benefits (to the extent they remain available from the State)
3. Access to federal New Market Tax Credits
4. Ithaca Urban Renewal Agency loan and/or grant incentives
5. CDBG economic development funding
6. NYS Restore New York or other State programs

Today, without access to these and other programs, downtown development would slow or stop. Incentive programs also need to be designed to deliver quantifiable tangible benefits to a project. While it is reasonable and expected that the City and the community would attach some benefits considerations and requirements onto public incentive programs, the cost of providing these benefits need to be factored into the overall project cost. For example, if a development project with a gap of \$250,000 receives a community incentive package for \$250,000 but with requirements that will cost the project \$150,000, then the net value of the incentive package is only \$100,000 and the project will be unable to bridge the gap, preventing it from moving forward. To meet the needs of the community and the needs of the project, the incentive package for this example should be \$400,000.

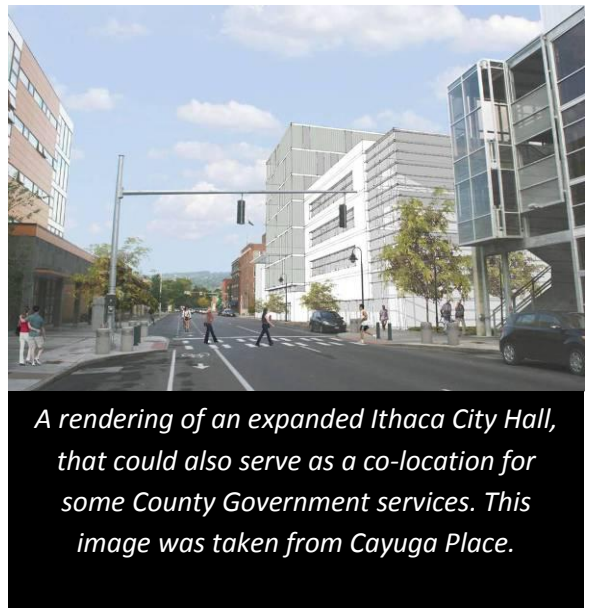
Key Downtown Business Sectors

Looking toward 2020, there are several key business sectors that should receive priority attention by the Downtown Ithaca Alliance, the City, and community partners:

1. Continued Retail: Street-level retail remains a crucial part of the downtown experience. (See retail section)
2. Medical and Health: During the period 2010 – 2020 the Ithaca population will continue to age commensurate with the national aging trends, creating increased need for medical and health

related services. It is important that portions of these services are located in the urban core of the community.

3. **Technology Businesses:** Spin-off technology businesses from Cornell University currently have two principal places to locate: the Cornell Business and Technology Park and downtown. Currently there are a number of technology-based businesses that have chosen to locate in downtown Ithaca. Most are small and not yet able to build their own facility or reside in the larger spaces available in the Business and Technology Park. There is a need to build upon this interest in downtown as a place for young, start-up companies.
4. **The Nonprofit Sector:** The nonprofit sector is major segment of the local Ithaca/Tompkins County economy. Nonprofit organizations seek community visibility and for that reason alone many have chosen to locate in downtown Ithaca. Building upon this strength and asset, downtown should seek to attract more nonprofit organizations, cluster nonprofits together for cost efficiency, and become known region-wide as the preferred center for nonprofit businesses.
5. **Government:** Local government, despite the lackluster economy of 2009, will continue to grow and provide needed services to the people of the City, Town, and County. Local governments (City and County) are major community employers and property owners. Downtown benefits from these hundreds of public employees and from occupancy in considerable downtown real estate. It is important that City, Town, and County governmental offices remain and grow in downtown. The City and the County should also examine the feasibility of co-locating facilities in downtown as a way to improve cost effectiveness and improve inter-agency communications.
6. **Lodging:** Downtown currently has two existing hotels and one planned new hotel plus an inn. This represents a critical mass of lodging rooms for visitors and conferences/meetings. Building on its strengths, downtown should be open to the opportunity for another hotel, should the marketplace present it. An additional hotel could be a replacement for a dated facility elsewhere in the market or it could help fill an underserved niche. By co-locating in close proximity to other downtown hotels, a fourth hotel would enhance the region's opportunities for conferences and meetings.



A rendering of an expanded Ithaca City Hall, that could also serve as a co-location for some County Government services. This image was taken from Cayuga Place.

7. Downtown Growth Nodes

	West	South	East	North	Commons
Positive Attributes	-West State Street redone -Within 2 blocks of Commons -Renewal in process - State St low traffic/noise -Health/non-profit sector	-Large tracts -Six Mile Creek -Proximity to Cayuga Garage -Cayuga & Clinton high traffic -New Spencer St	-Large tracts -Single ownerships -Confluence of East & South Hills -Adjacent to new development -Adjacent to Commons	-Key Corner locations -Northern gateway to downtown -Near to DeWitt Park & Mall	-Central to most locations - Proximity to State Theatre -Proximity to shops and employers -Mixed-use opportunities
Challenges	-Corridor bordered by residences -Parking will become an issue - Set back & other zoning issues	-Existing businesses in place -Abuts neighborhood - Set back & other zoning issues	-Zoning heights may not be appropriate -View shed concerns	-Abuts residential neighborhood - Existing businesses	-Tight, dense environment -Small sites - Assembly more difficult -Lower zoning heights
Current Zoning	B-2d; B-2c	B-4	CBD-60	B-1b; B-1a	CBD-60
Possible Uses	Mixed-uses Housing Office Entertainment Retail	Mixed-uses Housing Entertainment Convenience retail	Mixed-uses Housing Office Retail Entertainment Hospitality	Mixed-uses Housing Government	Mixed-uses Housing Office Retail Entertainment Hospitality
Key Parcels	-Block 14 -Health Club area -Medical Bldg block	-Pritchard area -Auto body/sound studio area	-Gateway/BSU -Strand Block -Trebloc Block	-HSBC/County area -Old Library site	-State Theatre block/Journal -West end of Green Garage -Bank Drive-thru

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO DOWNTOWN ZONING

Editors Note: The proposed amendments are at an early discussion stage. Prior to public discussion, it will be the intent of the DIA to meet with parcel owners to discuss these options and proposals.

(1) Commons- 60 feet with provision for upper story setback

The existing zoning height for properties fronting the Commons is 60 feet; a number that generally reflects the prevailing height of most Commons buildings. This proposed amendment would allow for additional height of up to two (2) stories if accompanied by a twenty (20) foot setback for the new stories and the provision of a community benefit as defined in #2.

(2) Incentive zoning- extra height for community benefits (affordable housing/ mixed income)

Under this amendment, any property in the downtown CBD zone could be granted additional height, up to two floors or 25 feet, if a proposed project provided a designated community benefit. A designated community benefit would be the provision of affordable or mixed-income housing and a commitment to a mixed-use project with ground floor retail. A provision of 10% affordable housing would result in one additional floor. A provision of 20% affordable housing would result in two additional floors. This provision is not meant to provide an incentive for owners to tear down significant historic properties. A review procedure to ensure that significant historic properties are retained is suggested.

(3) East downtown – The Trebloc Block - 85 feet

This block is bounded by Green Street, East State Street, and Aurora Street. Current zoning is for 60 feet of height. Due to its location between the Gateway and the Hotel Ithaca projects, it is recommended that this zoning height be amended to 85 feet.

(4) East downtown- Gateway 3rd bldg – 60 feet

The Gateway property extends beyond the Gateway Plaza office building into the gorge where a one story industrial building currently rests. Anticipating its appeal for a residential building, the rear portion of the Gateway property is recommended for a 60-foot height. At 60 feet, this structure would remain well below the rim of the gorge.

(5) Seneca Street corridor – Strand site (75 feet); Bank of America site (100 feet); 100 East Seneca Street mid-block site (85 feet); Women’s Community Building (60 feet)

The Seneca Street corridor represents a key development node for the community in the years ahead. This corridor has a distinctly urban character. It provides opportunity for four development parcels. The recommended zoning heights for these parcels are: the former Strand site (75 feet, up from the current 60 feet); the Bank of America drive-through site (100 feet); the current Tompkins Trust Company drive-through site (85 feet); and the Women’s Community Building site (60 feet).

(6) Green Street corridor- Green garage (85 feet); Tompkins County Public Library site (100 feet); Sunoco gas station site (100 feet); Ithaca Journal area site (85 feet)

The Green Street corridor represents another important development node in downtown. Like Seneca Street, the Green Street corridor from the Ithaca Journal/Holiday Inn to the Tuning Fork has a predominately large building urban character. The recommended zoning heights for the four development parcels along this corridor are: the parcel at the west end of the Green Garage (85 feet); the current Library site (100 feet); the gas station site at the southwest corner of Cayuga and Green (100 feet); and the Ithaca Journal/Ithaca Photo site (85 feet).



A rendering of a redeveloped Ithaca Journal/Ithaca Photo site on Green Street. This view is from the Tompkins County Public Library.

(7) West State Street corridor- Block 14- (60 feet); Medical building site (60 feet); 100 West State block empty lot- (60 feet); Health club site- (60 feet)

The West State Street corridor has long been a City priority for in-fill development. There are four potential development sites in, or adjacent to, the downtown BID: Block 14 (Geneva/Seneca/Albany/West State); the south side of the 200 block of West State Street, currently home to a medical practice; the parking lot on the north side of the 100 West State block; and the health club site in the 300 West State block. It is recommended that all of these sites be zoned for 60 feet of height.

(8) South downtown sites- Pritchard site (60 feet); body shop site (75 feet)

The commercial properties located on the south side of Clinton Street at the Clinton/Cayuga intersection represent possible future redevelopment sites. Their proximity to the Cayuga Street Garage makes them accessible to public parking. It is recommended that the heights of the Pritchard site be changed to 60 feet and the body shop area be changed to 75 feet.



A redeveloped Cayuga and Clinton Street intersection. Tiered building heights help minimize the impact of transitioning from a residential area into the urban core.

(9) North downtown sites- HSBC site (75 feet); old County Library site (60 feet)

The northern section of downtown has redevelopment sites: the current HSBC bank and surrounding area site, along with the site of the old County Library. The HSBC area site is recommended to be rezoned to 75 feet. The old County Library site is recommended for 60 feet.

(10) CBD zoning – to utilize downtown public parking

It is recommended that “all of the above development sites” be included in the downtown CBD zone. A key provision of the CBD zone is its reliance on downtown public parking to substitute for any on-site requirements. Given the desire for a downtown district with a dense urban character, the use of public parking instead of on-site parking is preferred. Hence, a CBD designation for these would be appropriate. Currently, the Pritchard, body shop, HSBC, old library, Women’s Community Building, Block 14, medical building site, and health club sites do not have CBD zoning designation.

(11) Retail on ground floor- primary & secondary Commons

Maintaining a critical mass of retail in downtown is considered a key community desire for the central business district. To ensure that such a critical mass is maintained, it is recommended that zoning be amended to limit the use of ground floor units with street frontage in properties on the primary and secondary Commons to retail and/or other active pedestrian generating uses.

(12) Seneca/Green Sidewalks

To increase the pedestrian appeal and utilization of sidewalks on both Green and Seneca Streets within the BID, it is recommended that sidewalk widths be increased to 15 feet.

DOWNTOWN'S COMMITMENT TO ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION

Just as the human body depends upon its circulatory system for sustaining life, so do cities depend on their transportation systems for survival. Transportation systems move goods and commodities into and out of the community... the food we eat, our personal and household needs, the items we require to function on a daily basis, the goods we as a community produce and export to others. Transportation systems move people into and out of the city as well as around the community. Transportation is a part of our daily lives and its ability to function efficiently and effectively is crucial to us on both a personal and a community level.

For much of the twentieth century our transportation system was defined by the automobile. Roads, bridges, intersections, divided highways, parking lots and garages, and parking meters are all vestiges of the automotive age. Ithaca was no exception. The downtown was defined and shaped by the car. Streets were designed to accommodate parking. Garages were built to capture and collect parked autos. Development financing was and continues to be predicated on the proven availability of parking for tenants.

While the automobile has shaped the physical appearance of the downtown, Ithaca has also established a record of working to make its center city less dependent and subservient to the automobile. The addition of the car-free, Commons pedestrian mall in 1975 helped to focus community attention toward the merits of a pedestrian friendly downtown. The consolidated transit operator, TCAT, manages one of the most successful small city bus systems in the country, with its central hub in downtown- at both Green and Seneca Streets. The proximity of Cornell University to the center city has helped Ithaca to achieve significantly higher than average walk to work figures. Approximately 40% of Ithacans walk to work (typically to Cornell or downtown).

During the period 2000 -2010, there were two notable trends pertaining to downtown transportation. One was the upgrading and expansion of parking facilities in the downtown to accommodate desired new growth. The second was a growing effort to reduce dependence on the personal vehicle.

For many years, parking garage repairs and capital improvements had been deferred, resulting in a backlog of issues and problems with the two original parking garages at Seneca and Green Streets. During the period 2000 – 2010 substantial repairs were made to the Seneca Garage. The Green garage underwent both a renovation and a re-build following its forced closure due to Building Department concerns about structural integrity. A third garage, the Cayuga garage, was built to accommodate the Seneca Place project and to provide capacity for future development. Excess capacity currently exists for new downtown development, thanks to the investment of the City during this period.

Concurrently, work was being undertaken to reduce dependence on the automobile. The City and Tompkins County MPO organized meetings to investigate ways to implement transportation demand management programs in downtown, similar to efforts already in place on the Cornell University campus. Ithaca Car Share was launched as a tool to provide easy periodic access to a vehicle. Downtown currently has two Car Share locations. The Route 10 bus was converted into a shuttle service between Cornell and downtown and its hours are gradually expanding. Bike lanes were added to major arterial streets.

Looking forward, downtown desires to be at the forefront of efforts to reduce auto dependency while maintaining its needed supply of parking necessary for residential and commercial development. There is a

commitment to seek alternative ways to reduce auto dependency, thus freeing up existing parking spaces. Downtown's commitment is to first examine and pursue tools and programs to encourage use of alternative transportation methods, including but not limited to, enhanced car share, car and van pooling, park and ride, guaranteed rides home, enhanced shuttle service, a fixed rail route or similar dedicated service between Cornell and downtown, and incentives for TCAT bus ridership. If these non-auto solutions are unable to provide the necessary parking spaces for future development, then the City and DIA will examine way to increase the supply of parking accommodate desired new growth.

A goal of the downtown community is to make alternative transportation the primary mode of travel during the next decade. To achieve this goal, it will be necessary to focus attention and resources on the commuter- the people who work downtown and use their car to travel to work on a daily basis. The DIA, City, County, and other interested parties should work together to forward transportation demand management (TDM) projects that will target these commuters. As appropriate, the DIA will take a leadership role in advancing this agenda.

Tools for reducing auto usage should rely on positive rather than punitive incentives. In a captive environment such as a college campus, it may be feasible to adopt policies that require or mandate certain actions. For example, campuses can price parking at high rates or discourage driving by limiting parking opportunities because they have no local competition. Disgruntled employees or students have no choice but to follow the policies or seek work or a school environment in another far away city. In downtown, there is not a single employer and there is considerable competition in the region from other businesses and commercial districts. Hence, a program of positive incentives aimed at achieving voluntary participation is more appropriate.

As success in alternative transportation increases, there is a desire to decrease the downtown land space devoted to surface level parking. In-fill development sites will absorb some of this surface parking, but the loss of such parking will need to be off-set by either alternative transportation measures or other structured parking. One such surface parcel that is desired to be returned to commercial use is the ground floor parking at the Green garage.

The pedestrian orientation of downtown should extend into the nearby residential neighborhoods. Pedestrian and bicycle routes in downtown should extend from the downtown commercial district into the neighborhoods to facilitate easy travel by both commuters and consumers.

Whenever downtown projects, both public and private, are planned, there should be an automatic and natural emphasis and priority extended to pedestrian needs.



Kenosha, WI, uses a trolley system to link part of the city that's being redeveloped with a commuter train station, the transit center for the city bus system and Kenosha's harborfront area.

Source and photo: ktransit.com

DOWNTOWN & DIVERSITY

The City of Ithaca has a rich diversity of residents and students. This diversity spans across race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, and income. Nowhere is this diversity more pronounced or more welcome than in downtown.

As the geographic and emotional center of the community, downtown is a natural melting pot for Ithaca's diverse population. Over 10,000 people live within the neighborhoods that surround downtown, within a one mile walking distance of the Commons. To these people downtown is their commercial and social center.

Diversity is a characteristic to be nourished and protected. It adds a vibrancy and vitality that one dimensional communities or districts do not possess. There are several important ways to nurture diversity:

- Ensure that all people are made to feel welcomed to downtown;
- Ensure that there is a diverse group of property and business owners in downtown;
- Ensure that there is a diverse work force in downtown;
- Ensure that there is a diverse group of residents living in and around downtown.

Attached to this strategic plan is a copy of "Downtown & Diversity: Our Commitment", a statement prepared and circulated to the business community in 2007. It helps to address the goal of ensuring that all people are made to feel welcomed to downtown. Its tenants are appropriate and timely today and in the years to come and apply to everyone who is a stakeholder and/or a user of downtown.

Increasing minority ownership of businesses and/or property requires both the dedication of time and resources by the downtown community and the city. It is necessary to identify both needs and opportunities that may benefit minority investors and entrepreneurs. It is likewise necessary to identify and communicate with minority investors and entrepreneurs, helping to match them with needs and opportunities.

Creating a diverse workforce requires the support of the employers of downtown plus the cooperation of the minority community. It involves a commitment to workforce diversity by large and small businesses alike, and also the tenacity and ability of minority leaders to be able to assist in outreach into the targeted group.

Diversity in housing means that all people can find a place to live in and near to downtown. Affordable housing remains a key community issue, not only in downtown but throughout the City and the entire County. In downtown, construction of affordable is even more challenging due to the inherent costs of downtown development. Working together, the City, County, Cornell University, INHS, and others will need to devise programs and policies that help developers to undertake affordable and blended housing.

THE ITHACA COMMONS

The Commons has become an endearing landmark and iconic brand for the Ithaca community that needs to be managed and maintained as such.

Goals:

- A. Maintain the Commons as iconic brand for Ithaca, recognizing that brands are never static and require constant nurturing and refinement.
- B. Maintain and grow the Commons as a symbol of the pedestrian friendly, walkable, sustainable orientation of our community.
- C. Ensure that the Commons is able to balance and accommodate its co-equal functions: to serve as a place of commerce, to serve as a civic center, and to serve as a community traffic-free zone for enjoyment.
- D. To be the community's central gathering place.
- E. To have a schedule of routine maintenance, repair, and capital replacement.
- F. While the Commons is the heart of downtown, it is only a portion of downtown. The Commons needs to be creatively and visually connected to the other key areas of downtown, the City, and the County.

Strategies:

- (1.0) Protect and grow the Commons brand both locally and externally.
- (2.0) Ensure that commerce remains a crucial function of the Commons.
- (3.0) Update the look and function of the Commons.
- (4.0) Ensure that there is a long-term plan for the capital replacement, repair, and maintenance of the Commons.
- (5.0) Enliven the Commons as a public space, visually and functionally. Provide as many reasons as possible for people to visit the Commons and feel comfortable in this special place.
- (6.0) Update the infrastructure and systems that support the Commons and its abutting buildings.
- (7.0) Monitor the Commons on an ongoing basis to ensure that it continues to appropriately perform the functions it was designed to accomplish.
- (8.0) Provide for in-fill development and upper story re-use of Commons properties.

Action Items:

- (1.1) Undertake capital improvements that will modernize and update the Commons.
- (1.2) Continue to use the Commons name in marketing and outreach, both locally and to external markets.
- (2.1) Use the Common Advisory Board to help ensure that the interests of commerce and recreation remain equally understood and respected.
- (2.2) Provide opportunities for appropriate signage that can support commerce on the primary and secondary Commons, including but not limited to sandwich board signs, building signs that are perpendicular to the façade, and way-finding signs.
- (3.1) Implement a planned approach for updating the Ithaca Commons. Utilizing the Sasaki Associates work, ensure that a comprehensive plan for Commons modernization and updating is prepared and approved. Such a plan would define and describe how the Commons would relate and connect to the rest of

downtown (points north, east, south, and west) and would recommend a feasible funding scenario for implementation.

- (4.1) Work to develop a plan that prescribes and documents a long term approach for Commons capital replacement, Commons annual and periodic repairs, and Commons routine maintenance.
- (4.2) Assess the cost effectiveness, efficiency, and service delivery capability of the current primary and supplemental maintenance of the Commons by both the City Department of Public Works and the Downtown Ithaca Alliance ambassadors, to determine if there are other more cost effective and productive approaches for providing needed daily maintenance.
- (5.1) The current Commons has functional and visual shortcomings that need to be identified and incorporated into a new plan for updating and modernization.
- (5.2) Plan and implement programs that help to enliven, beautify, and add color to the Commons. These programs should include, but not be limited to, two and three dimensional public art, light pole banners, flags, decorative fabrics, improved landscaping, and improved landscaping planters.
- (6.1) On an ongoing basis, inventory out-of-date, broken, and missing Commons infrastructure items, systems, and services.
- (6.2) Any updating and modernization plan and project for the Commons should contain a section devoted to infrastructure improvement. Such infrastructure improvement should include, but not be limited to, potable water delivery, run-off water collection and storm sewers, sanitary sewer upgrade, gas, electric, and fiber service delivery to abutting buildings, electrical servicing of the Commons, water servicing of the Commons, and wifi and Internet service.
- (6.3) Work to provide free Wi-Fi service on the Commons.
- (7.0) Undertake periodic monitoring and evaluation of the Commons during the period of this plan to ensure that it continues to meet expectations and can perform the functions and goals it is charged with accomplishing.
- (8.0) Work to provide for additional in-fill development and upper story re-use at key underutilized locations in the primary and secondary Commons.
- (8.1) To the extent possible, work to coordinate in-fill development to coincide with Commons modernization and updating construction.



The pedestrian mall in the university town of Iowa City, IA, minimizes visual shortcomings by keeping infrastructure such as seating and plantings on either side of the walkway.

Photo Credit: Sean Marshall

DOWNTOWN RETAIL

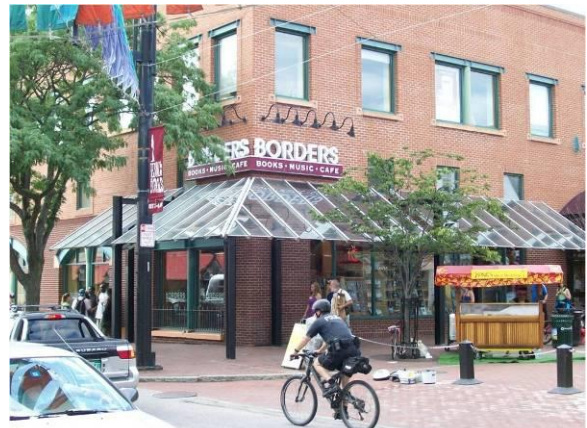
The public's measure of a successful downtown is its street-level retail. Retail remains the face of downtown and is one of the key determinants of downtown character. Retail is itself a form of entertainment and is intimately linked to such other aspects of downtown as housing, cultural arts and tourism.

Goals for Downtown:

- A. Aim for a 5% turnover rate and a 5% vacancy rate.
-An ongoing goal for downtown is to achieve and maintain a 95% occupancy rate for street-level units.
- B. Strive to retain core retail businesses and maintain a critical mass of street-level traditional retail.
-An ongoing goal for downtown is to attract at least five new street-level businesses each year.
- C. In order to maintain a critical mass of retail and restaurant businesses, downtown should strive to maintain at least the current percentage of the total retail/restaurant square footage of the County. Currently, downtown has about ____ % of the total retail/restaurant square footage of the County.
- D. Utilizing the findings from the 2008 Urban Marketing Collaborative retail study, work to add new inventory to support the projected 90,000 SF of new retail and food & beverage businesses. Since 2008, approximately 12,000 SF of new retail has been filled. This leaves about 78,000 SF of space to be filled from the Cayuga Garage and from new yet to be built projects.
- E. Increase the amount of downtown retail space by at least 20% by the year 2020.
- F. Achieve a balance between retail and food & beverage.
- G. Achieve a balance between independent and national/chain businesses.
- H. Understand and meet the retail needs of the downtown marketplace and its key market segments.

Strategies:

- (1.0) Regularly track retail supply and demand and strive to increase both the inventory of retail space and the number of active retail businesses.
- (2.0) Help retain existing businesses, particularly long standing businesses that have gained a following and a respect from the community.
- (3.0) Work to increase the number minority businesses in downtown both in terms of ownership and management and in consumer appeal.
- (4.0) Ensure that food & beverage and retail uses are located so as to promote cross traffic.
- (5.0) Re-design the Commons and downtown pedestrian linkages to better promote the shopping experience.
- (6.0) Continually evaluate the needs of retailers to ensure that public infrastructure, policies and programs support rather than deter retailing.
- (7.0) Ensure that downtown retailing is able to cater to both a unique boutique market and a local convenience market.



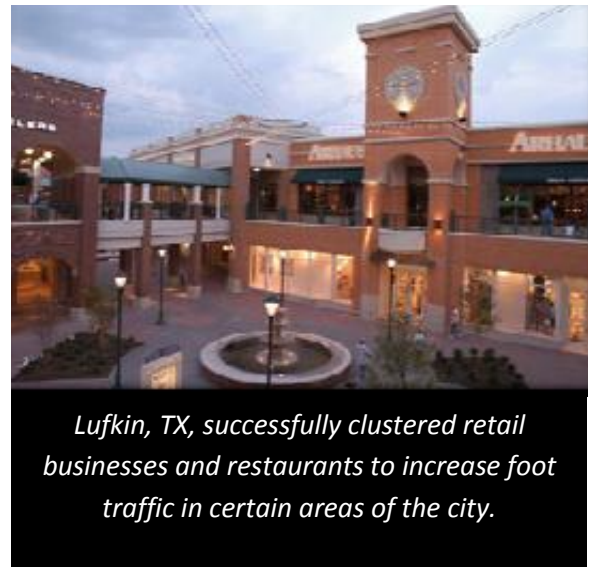
This Border's Books on the Church Street Pedestrian Mall in Burlington, VT, is a national retailer that also serves as an anchor store for the mall.

Photo: DIA

- (8.0) Achieve a blend of local and national tenants.
- (9.0) Downtown Ithaca should become the food & beverage hub of our region. Downtown’s existing food and beverage business base should be considered an asset to grow and nurture.

Action items:

- (1.1) Ground floors in key areas should be devoted to retail.
- (2.1) Enact a succession-planning program.
- (2.2) The Downtown Ithaca Alliance should explore the creation of a virtual downtown retail marketplace that would enable downtown businesses to expand their reach using the Internet.
- (2.3) Install electronic kiosks on the Commons capable of providing year round directions and offers to downtown patrons.
- (2.4) This Downtown plan adopts a “traffic generator” strategy that seeks to cluster as many pedestrian foot traffic generating attractions and uses within walking distance of the center of downtown- Tioga at State Street. Such a strategy calls on community groups and organizations to be cognizant and responsive to the importance of clustering attractions to achieve a greater community good.
- (3.1) Recruit and/or nurture minority entrepreneurs to open and operate downtown businesses of all types. Utilize funding from the Ithaca Urban Renewal Agency to assist in this task. Each year seek to add at least one new business owned by or catering to minority persons.
- (3.2) Work to create a program that provides incentives to encourage diversity in downtown business ownership.
- (4.1) Ground floor units fronting onto the Commons and secondary Commons should be reserved for traffic generating retail, restaurant and/or service type businesses.
- (4.2) The Downtown Ithaca Alliance will work with merchants and restaurants to gradually shift hours of operation to better match their customer bases, particularly extended evening and weekend hours.
- (4.3) The Downtown Ithaca Alliance will work to establish a cross promotion program between downtown “traffic generators” and the retail/restaurant businesses of the district.
- (4.4) Prepare a downtown street-level business-clustering plan to assist in locating both retail and food & beverage businesses so as to maximize cross traffic.
- (5.1) In the redesign and in the construction of a Commons modernization project, ensure that both pedestrian flow and the pedestrian shopping experience are considered.
- (6.1) The Downtown Ithaca Alliance, the City, Cornell University, and the Town of Ithaca should work together to ensure that, to the greatest extent possible, there is compatibility between commercial districts. Plans for commercial development should encourage compatibility rather than competing uses.
- (7.1) Given its status as a commercial center for downtown residents and abutting urban neighborhoods, efforts should continue to attract convenience goods businesses such as a pharmacy, bakery, food market, dry cleaner, and other similar businesses.
- (8.1) Work to attract another 2-4 national tenants to complement the existing retail inventory.
- (8.2) Work to create a visual arts cooperative similar to the successful Handwork craft cooperative.



Lufkin, TX, successfully clustered retail businesses and restaurants to increase foot traffic in certain areas of the city.

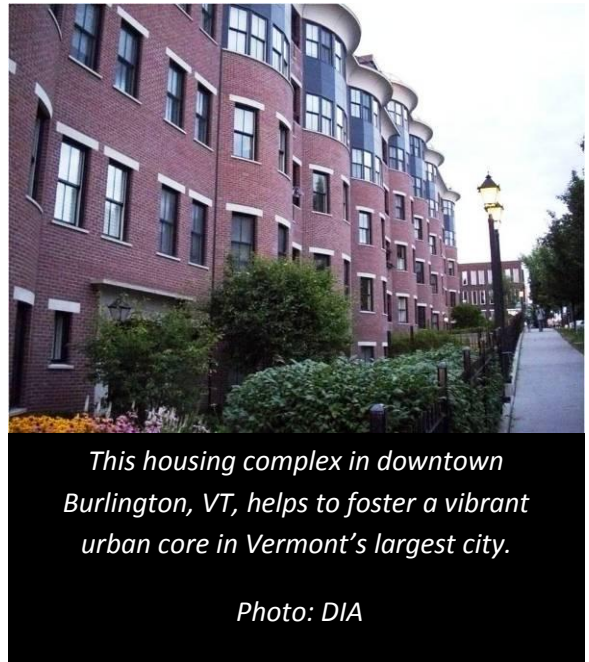
- (8.3) Encourage Cornell University to locate a CU Bookstore annex in downtown.
- (8.4) Work with the Discovery Trail or a subset of it to locate a retail store in downtown.
- (8.5) According to community respondents, the ideal downtown retail mix would expand and grow existing businesses, encouraging new independent stores, and provide a limited yet important number of national, name brand stores.
- (9.1) Work to locate food & beverage operations so that they will complement retail businesses.
- (9.2) Maintain an inventory of food & beverage that is at least comparable to the current percentage of the overall greater Ithaca supply.
- (9.3) Continue to strategically grow the number of food & beverage businesses, including attracting at least one national operation.
- (9.4) Diversify the restaurant base of downtown by attracting more ethnic and specialty restaurants.
- (9.5) Continue to promote and grow opportunities for private outdoor café style dining, including promoting efforts to extend the outdoor dining season by utilizing heated winter outdoor dining.

DOWNTOWN HOUSING

People want to live in a dynamic urban environment.

Goals for Downtown:

- A. Subject to future demand studies, add up to another 500 units of housing to downtown.
 - a. By the year 2020, increase the total number of downtown residential units (new and rehabbed) by up to 500 over 2009 levels. Currently there are approximately 400 units of downtown housing. Prior housing demand studies support the need for this increased level of housing.
 - b. By 2020, increase the number of residential units in rehabilitated upper story buildings by adding at least 50 additional units.
- B. Create a vibrant downtown residential community that lives in harmony with the other office, retail, and entertainment uses of downtown.
- C. With the assistance and support of the community, strive to create mixed income projects.
- D. Nurture a community commitment and will that facilitates the building of new downtown residential properties and projects. Downtown will become recognized as the region's best option for sustainable and green living, not just due to its LEED construction but even more significantly due to its status as the central place for transit, goods and services, entertainment, and employment.
- E. Downtown Ithaca needs to have the amenities most desired by urban residents—convenience goods such as nearby groceries, pharmacy, bakery, and laundry.



Strategies:

- (1.0) Monitor and assess the market for downtown/urban housing to ensure that projects meet the prevailing demand.
- (2.0) Ensure that downtown zoning is appropriate for the desired building density sought for potential future downtown development sites.
- (3.0) Downtown residential projects should be mixed-use, integrating other street-level uses into projects.
- (4.0) Downtown projects should strive to offer mixed income units, even on a limited basis, as financially feasible.
- (5.0) As long as funding gaps exist, there will be a continued need for the public sector to financially support and incent downtown housing. Downtown Ithaca is an expensive place to build affordable housing. The community will need to assist developers in producing affordable housing by providing appropriate financial and regulatory incentives.
- (6.0) Downtown Ithaca is a multi-use environment. Therefore, there is a need ensure a healthy, open, and ongoing dialogue between housing and entertainment uses and users.

- (7.0) Downtown is becoming the City’s newest residential district. There is a need to ensure that residents are able to meet and work together for common goals and objectives.
- (8.0) Families will choose to live in downtown if its schools are considered strong and viable. Downtown Ithaca needs to ensure that downtown area schools are both strong and vital. Attract and sustain downtown schools that will attract and serve families who choose to live in the urban core.

Action Items:

- (1.1) Undertake periodic market supply and demand studies to monitor and gauge the evolving marketplace for downtown residential living. These studies should be undertaken at least every five years.
- (1.2) Educate the community to appreciate that downtown is one of only two major areas in the City that is capable of handling significant numbers of new non-student oriented housing.
 - (2.1) Existing zoning ordinances for downtown should be modified to allow for the efficient and economically viable development of multi-family housing projects. Two primary changes would involve expanding the CBD zoning to include potential future development sites and to modify zoning heights to accommodate possible residential development.
 - (2.2) Ensure that downtown district zoning has transition zones along the edges of the district to help maintain and promote the scale and character of the surrounding lower density residential neighborhoods.
 - (3.1) Residential projects in the downtown Ithaca BID should be mixed-use in nature, including such other uses as retail, food and beverage, entertainment, service or office.
 - (4.1) When financially feasible, residential projects should strive to provide mixed-income housing.
 - (5.1) Density bonus incentives should be utilized to promote and stimulate mixed income projects.
 - (5.2) Downtown Ithaca projects, including residential projects, continue to require subsidy to cover capital funding gaps. The high costs of urban construction, coupled with the typical downtown Ithaca rent levels, combine to create these project gaps that need to be filled in order for a project to proceed. It is estimated that the typical per unit gap averages \$_____. At a \$30,000 per unit level, the community would need to be able to deliver \$9,000,000 in total incentives and subsidies to stimulate the development of 300 total new units.
 - (5.3) The Urban Community Benefits Tax Abatement Program, approved by both the City and the County, should be revised to enable it to better produce desired outcomes. Since its revision in 2007, there has no new use of this program.
 - (5.4) Affordable housing represents an important but expensive community residential goal. Provision of affordable housing requires some level of public support and subsidy. Given the already present project gaps in conventional projects, it will be necessary for the community to provide subsidy assistance and/or development incentives to help achieve affordable units.



An artist’s rendering of a mixed-use building in Boston, MA, includes both housing and street-level retail.

Source and Photo: wrecaportal.com

- (6.1) An initiative should be undertaken to create an ongoing dialogue between downtown residents and entertainment/food & beverage businesses. There is a desire for the downtown district to include all types of uses. This will necessitate efforts by both businesses and residents to learn how to co-exist responsibly together.
- (7.1) Given the growing number of downtown residents, Downtown Residents Council should be created to provide liaison between the City, Downtown Ithaca Alliance, and downtown inhabitants.
- (7.2) Efforts should be undertaken to improve resident participation in the DIA, and its activities.
- (8.1) The presence of strong and sustainable downtown area schools is important in building a non-student downtown residential community.
- (8.2) Work with the New Roots Charter School and CSMA to help them access the resources of downtown and to have them linked to families living in the greater downtown area.
- (8.3) Work with the downtown Beverly J. Martin School to help them access the resources of downtown.

DOWNTOWN OFFICE SECTOR

Downtown is the acknowledged center for office businesses in our region.

Goals:

- A. Maintain and grow downtown Ithaca as the region's office center.
 - a. The goal for office growth is to increase the supply of downtown office space by up to 200,000 square feet by the year 2020.
 - b. The goal for job growth is to add an additional 600 employees to the downtown workforce by the year 2020.
 - c. Based on the volumetric study appended to this plan, downtown Ithaca has the capacity to add another 1-2 major office buildings by 2020.
 - d. Downtown Ithaca should strive to be home to at least 50% of the region's commercial office space.
 - e. Downtown should be recognized as a green and sustainable location for office space.
- B. Downtown should be easily accessible by workers via the automobile, public transit, and other modes of transportation. By 2020, encourage up to 25% of all downtown employees who currently use cars to switch to non-automotive transportation.
- C. Ensure that downtown office space is situated on the upper floors of buildings, reserving the street-level floors for pedestrian traffic-producing commercial businesses.

Strategies:

- (1.0) Undertake projects and programs to promote downtown Ithaca office development.
- (2.0) Undertake projects and programs to grow the downtown employment base.
- (3.0) Ensure that downtown businesses and employees have the tools and environment they require to effectively compete in the 21st century.

Actions Items:

- (1.1) Amend downtown zoning to facilitate the development of these additional office buildings.
- (1.2) While this plan does not designate actual locations for new office space, it is preferred that new office space will be located in the center of downtown in proximity to existing or new downtown parking garage facilities and/or transit hubs and not at the transitional edges of downtown.
- (1.3) New downtown buildings should be mixed-use, blending office use with retail and/or other commercial/foot traffic generating uses.
- (1.4) Work to create appropriate and effective financial incentives that will and facilitate encourage downtown office development.
- (2.1) During the period 2010-2020, downtown Ithaca should work with private developers to create for-sale, office condominium space for the marketplace.
- (2.2) Continue to attract technology and creative economy businesses that value and appreciate locating in a dynamic urban environment.
- (2.3) Work with Cornell University and/or other stakeholders to create a downtown business incubator project to nurture new start-up businesses.

- (2.4) Explore the creation of a non-profit center that clusters nonprofit organizations and provides efficiencies in nonprofit operation.
- (2.5) Work with the region's three institutions of higher education, Cornell, Ithaca College, and TC3, to attract additional office employees and office space into downtown.
- (2.6) The City of Ithaca and Tompkins County should investigate the feasibility of a new joint City/County administrative office building to be located in downtown.
- (2.7) Work to recruit and centralize health care and medical facilities in the downtown district.
- (3.1) Work to create downtown daycare options within walking distance of the Commons.
- (3.2) Provide opportunities and incentives for downtown employees to utilize alternative, non-automotive transportation in order to reach the goal of encouraging up to 25% of all downtown employees who currently use cars to switch to non-automotive transportation by 2020.
- (3.3) Create a downtown office worker database that can be updated regularly and allow for easy communication with downtown employees.
- (3.4) Attract more service businesses for workers and employees such as dry cleaning.

DOWNTOWN ENTERTAINMENT

Entertainment drives downtown economies. People everywhere enjoy coming together in a central place to socialize, recreate, and have a good time.

Entertainment is a broad inclusive category of activities, performances, and recreational activities. In this strategy, cultural arts are a differentiated subset of entertainment.

Goals:

- A. Downtown Ithaca should be the first thought and top of mind choice for residents in our region when they think about entertainment.
- B. Downtown should be the off-campus community alternative for students and staff seeking entertainment activities.
- C. Downtown should acquire a sufficient critical mass of entertainment in downtown to attract both residents and visitors.
- D. Create a breadth of entertainment options so as to be able to attract people of all ages and cultures.

Strategies:

- (1.0) Develop more family entertainment venues for people of all ages.
- (2.0) Add and market downtown Ithaca entertainment opportunities to students.
- (3.0) Make the downtown environment more receptive and accommodating to entertainment uses.
- (4.0) Add at least three new entertainment venues, particularly entertainment venues for young professionals.
- (5.0) Ensure that entertainment and residential uses can co-exist.
- (6.0) Utilize existing downtown venues and facilities to extend and enhance the entertainment experience.
- (7.0) Use downtown as a venue for more community special events.

Action Items:

- (1.1) Entertainment for families covers a broad spectrum. Work to introduce such family oriented attractions such as an ice cream parlor, an Internet café, additional art galleries, a bowling center, and other activity businesses that relate to families.
- (1.2) Explore the feasibility of creating a downtown Ithaca teen activity center with other community partners.
 - (2.1) Include students in community entertainment outreach and marketing, utilizing tools most suited to reaching students.
 - (2.2) Work with Cornell, Ithaca College, and TC3 to increase the number of student activities and programs from the college campuses that can be moved into downtown Ithaca venues, including the Commons and the State Theatre.
- (3.1) Install a Commons-wide central PA system that can be used for announcements, emergencies, and other event related uses.
- (3.2) Improve and modernize outdoor venues for performance, as part of the Commons update plans.
 - (4.1) Add at least one small format music, jazz, and/or comedy club, possibly by locating it in an underutilized restaurant or other existing space.
 - (4.2) Introduce one or more brewpubs into downtown.

- (4.3) Cluster additional full service restaurants into the downtown core, including at least one national chain restaurant.
- (4.4) Continue to financially stabilize and complete the restoration of the State Theatre.
- (4.5) Expand the State Theatre to add additional programming and income producing space.
- (4.6) Work with both Cornell and Ithaca College to facilitate remote parking for major sporting events in downtown linked by shuttle buses.
- (4.7) Explore the feasibility of adding or expanding science based attractions or programs in downtown, growing upon such already existing features such as the Sagan Planet Walk and the Science programs in the former Lost Dog Café.
- (5.1) Implement an ongoing program to pull together entertainment and hospitality businesses and residential projects and downtown residents. Adopt responsible hospitality as a goal for food and beverage operators and work to ensure harmony between downtown residents and food and beverage establishments.
- (6.1) Investigate ways of utilizing downtown theaters and cinemas during daytime hours.
- (6.2) Work to link the new Kitchen Theater with the central entertainment core of downtown.
- (6.3) Work with existing downtown food & beverage businesses to add nighttime entertainment activities, including music and art.
- (7.1) Help to package and market traffic generating events and activities produced by other downtown based arts organizations and private businesses.
- (7.2) Increase the frequency of outdoor special events, particularly smaller events and events organized by other groups and organizations.
- (7.3) Institute and sustain a street performance (busking) program for downtown.
- (7.4) Explore converting the 100 West State Street block into a car-free zone, whether permanently or on a temporary basis for events and community activities, including, but not limited to, performances at the State Theatre.



Downtown Jacksonville has become a center for arts, culture and entertainment by establishing new restaurants, nightclubs, galleries, museums and theaters.

Source: downtownjacksonville.org

CULTURAL ARTS

Downtown is the community's stage to showcase our cultural arts prowess.

Cultural arts are a subset of entertainment, in this strategy comprising theatre, dance, museums and visual art.

Goals for Downtown:

- A. Downtown Ithaca will be become known to residents of Ithaca, Tompkins County and the Ithaca metropolitan area (MSA) as the primary non-campus destination for community cultural art activities, events, and programming. It should be the place people think of when they want to find off-campus cultural arts.
- B. Together with entertainment, downtown Ithaca will be known throughout our region as a major center for cultural arts activities, events and programming, and be deemed the best drive and/or walking destination to experience the offerings.
- C. Downtown will be readily known as a great place to see and experience public art. Visitors and users of downtown should experience public art on each and every visit.
- D. Downtown should be a place where artists and performers desire to work, show, perform, and live.
- E. Cultural art activities and venues should be located within walking distance of each other to facilitate cross-promotional foot traffic.

Strategies:

- (1.0) Downtown cultural arts should continually seek to focus, highlight, and celebrate our cultural diversity.
- (2.0) Support and strengthen our existing downtown cultural arts institutions.
- (3.0) Recruit or nurture new cultural art programming and venues as need and opportunity permit.
- (4.0) Make downtown a regional center for the visual arts.
- (5.0) Integrate campus cultural arts programming and activities into downtown wherever and whenever possible.
- (6.0) The cultural arts and downtown commerce should become close partners, sharing foot traffic and patron/customers whenever possible.

Action Items:

- (1.1) The Downtown Ithaca Alliance needs to encourage, highlight, and promote the commitment of downtown Ithaca cultural arts programming to community diversity.
- (2.1) Support the continued restoration of the State Theatre building and the ongoing financial stabilization of State Theatre, Inc. Assist the State Theatre in securing community partners to help underwrite the likely gap between earned income and Theatre operation expenses.
- (2.2) Encourage more cross-promotional opportunities between the State Theatre and the other attractions and the commercial interests in downtown.
- (2.3) Work to integrate the State Theatre into its surrounding block by facilitating new development projects that will both strengthen the block and the Theatre.
- (2.4) Work to ensure that the Kitchen Theater remains linked into the downtown cultural arts scene. Ensure that the Kitchen Theater will be a key downtown presenter and venue that is cross-promoted with other downtown attractions and commerce.

- (2.5) Work with the New Roots Charter School to showcase their student talent and performances in downtown venues.
- (2.6) Work with the Community School of Music and Arts to both stabilize and expand its presence and outreach in the downtown community. Assist in promoting CSMA events and cross-promoting it with other downtown attractions and commercial interests.
- (2.7) Facilitate the evolution and growth of a joint downtown ticketing program for all downtown and community venues. Such a project could include the Community Arts Partnership and the State Theatre along with Cornell, Ithaca College, and TC3, working to add multiple outlets or branches for the purchase of tickets.
- (2.8) Assist the History Center in growing its attendance and becoming an even more popular venue for residents and visitors.
- (3.1) Identify and work with groups and individuals who can bring new cultural arts programming and venues to downtown. This use should become one of the priorities for Ithaca Urban Renewal Agency loan fund programs.
- (3.2) Work with one or more of the institutions of higher education (Cornell, Ithaca College, TC3) to create a satellite visual arts studio or center in downtown Ithaca.
- (4.1) Continue and expand First Fridays Gallery Night, growing it into a well-known and anticipated monthly event. Integrate galleries, restaurants, merchants, and artists into a program that is appealing to area residents as well as regional visitors. Work to make First Fridays Gallery Night a cherished community institution.
- (4.2) Continue the annual Art in the Heart of the City outdoor sculpture program.
- (4.3) Build the downtown Ithaca permanent outdoor public art collection. By 2020, establish a base collection of at least 25 permanent pieces that are either municipally or privately owned.
- (4.4) Add major iconic art pieces to the entrances to the Commons by 2020.
- (4.5) Expand the downtown mural initiative. By 2020, downtown should have at least ten permanent (or semi permanent) murals, either private or public. Key public locations for murals are parking garage walls and stairwells, and major alleys.
- (4.6) Facilitate the development of a shared arts studio/gallery project where multiple artists can cluster their studio spaces together under one roof and create a major visitor attraction. This project is also known as an arts incubator.
- (4.7) Collectively or independently, encourage more artists to open downtown studios. A goal will be the opening of at least 10 studios by 2020.
- (4.8) Include public art or design in any major public projects to redo street and sidewalks, plazas, bridges, or public buildings.
- (4.9) Help the galleries of downtown to sell more works of art, through technical assistance and programming assistance.
- (5.1) Work with Cornell, Ithaca College, and/or TC3 to encourage them to bring more of their own student based or student directed cultural arts programming to downtown venues. Such a move would assist



Iconic public art such as these dinosaurs on the Third Street Promenade in Santa Monica are permanent fixtures. They're sculpted vegetation, so they require little maintenance.

Photo: drclue.com

the institutions in growing their audience base and would be one way to bring additional people into downtown Ithaca for selected dates.

- (6.1) Whenever possible work to include and/or integrate cultural arts programming into the major downtown Ithaca festivals.
- (6.2) Cross-promote downtown cultural arts venues and their events on a regular basis with downtown retailers and food & beverage operators.

ENHANCING THE DOWNTOWN ENVIRONMENT

Downtown must be a welcoming, friendly, attractive, colorful, stimulating, and safe environment.

Goals:

- A. Users should value and appreciate the aesthetic, unique urban beauty of downtown Ithaca.
- B. Downtown's environment should be a key reason why people want to visit, work, shop, and live in the center city.
- C. Downtown's environment should always reflect the highest possible commitment to cleanliness, attractiveness, maintenance and repair, and safety and security for all.
- D. The downtown environment should showcase the community's interest in and commitment to sustainability and green environmental practices.

Strategies:

- (1.0) Maintenance, repair, and capital replacement must be standard features in an ongoing downtown Ithaca management and oversight plan.
- (2.0) The downtown environment needs to be attractive.
- (3.0) The Downtown environment needs to be functional.
- (4.0) Downtown should showcase and reflect the community's interest in sustainability and green practices.
- (5.0) The downtown environment must be safe and secure for all in fact and in perception.

Action Items:

- (1.1) Undertake a study to evaluate downtown environmental management service delivery by both the City and the Downtown Ithaca Alliance. The purpose of the study would be to inventory services needed, assess services provided, and determine if there are better ways to deliver needed services.
- (1.2) Devise an updated specific plan for the maintenance and management of the Commons.
- (1.3) Investigate increasing the Downtown Ithaca Alliance role in day-to-day Commons maintenance.
- (1.4) Devise updated specific plans for the maintenance and capital replacement of downtown garages.
- (2.1) Assess the current flower and planting program on the Commons and throughout downtown with an eye toward adding more color for prolonged periods of time.
- (2.2) Entrances to the Commons should be improved to provide distinctive, iconic public art as well as improved and functional time, temperature, and information kiosks.
- (2.3) Gateways into the downtown district should receive prominent visual upgrading. The entrances are:
 - The Tuning Fork area (from Rt. 79)
 - Green Street @ Cayuga Street (from the west and Rt. 13)
 - Clinton Street @ Cayuga Street (from the south)
 - Court or Buffalo Streets @ Cayuga Street (from the north)
 - Aurora Street @ the Green Street Bridge (from IC/Rt. 96B)
 - Buffalo Street @ Aurora Street (from Cornell and East Hill)Specific improvements at these gateways should include banners, signs, plantings, and public art.
- (3.1) Explore the use of electronic kiosks at the entrances to the Commons to replace or supplement the current maps and directories.

- (3.2) The Commons should be considered a transit hub for downtown. With bus stops on all sides, the Commons serves as a connecting pedestrian center.
- (3.3) Improve pedestrian signage connecting the Creek Walk, Dewitt Mall and Park, the Gateway area, and the West End to the Commons.
- (3.4) Conduct a study of downtown light levels to determine if there is a need for brighter and more directed pedestrian lighting, both in public spaces and in parking garages.
- (3.5) Widen sidewalks in the secondary Commons areas to allow for better pedestrian movements.
- (3.6) Expand the availability of public restrooms for downtown visitors and patrons, either as part of the Commons redesign or in some other part of downtown.
- (3.7) Adopt a snow removal plan for the Commons that is both functional for snow removal crews and provides for maximum pedestrian movement between businesses and sides of the Commons.
- (4.1) Incorporate more green practices into the daily maintenance of downtown.
- (4.2) Investigate ways to improve downtown public recycling on the Commons.
- (4.3) Explore ways for businesses to participate in green practices such as food scrap composting, food oil recycling, and other office related conservation.
- (4.4) Investigate the use of alternative energies such as solar, geothermal or wind for highly visible and symbolic downtown demonstration projects. Provide interpretive signage to help showcase the installation and technology.
- (4.5) Market downtown as an environmentally friendly and sustainable showcase.
- (4.6) Switch downtown public lighting to LED varieties, when feasible.
- (4.7) Install decorative low energy usage LED lights around pavilions/stages, lampposts, and selected trees on a year round basis.
- (5.1) Re-create a dedicated downtown/Commons police unit.
- (5.2) Assist the Ithaca Police Department in agency-wide training for officers on issues pertaining to downtown, including, but not limited to, the various quality of life issues that can arise in a downtown pedestrian environment.
- (5.3) Install video cameras at key locations to help expand the reach of the Police Department and to act as a deterrent to crime. Key locations include the parking garages, the Commons, and alleyways.



Downtown Ithaca's Ambassador program plays a key role in beautifying and enhancing the environment of the entire urban core.

Photo: DIA

OTHER DOWNTOWN INFRASTRUCTURE (NON-COMMONS)

For downtown to serve as the center of the community, its infrastructure must be able to functionally accommodate the many people who use downtown and must present an aesthetically positive image.

Goals:

- A. Downtown Ithaca will be recognized and perceived to be more than the three blocks of the Commons.
- B. Downtown's Six Mile Creek waterfront will become a well used, well known amenity for the community.
- C. Downtown infrastructure will receive regular, scheduled maintenance, repair and replacement.

Strategies:

- (1.0) Parking garages are the single largest public infrastructure investment in downtown Ithaca. Work to protect, preserve, and enhance these valuable and expensive community assets.
- (2.0) Adopt a strategy for regular, planned downtown infrastructure maintenance and repair.
- (3.0) Adopt a strategy that plans for capital replacement of infrastructure at pre-determined times, similar to citywide road re-paving and replacement plans.
- (4.0) Continue to enhance and add to non-Commons downtown infrastructure.

Action Items:

- (1.1) Develop a capital repair and replacement plan for all existing downtown Ithaca garages.
- (1.2) Explore ways to improve daily parking garage maintenance, in an effort to reduce litter and graffiti.
- (1.3) Plan for the eventual development of a new downtown-parking garage to accommodate vehicles from future development.
- (2.1) Develop capital repair and replacement plans for the secondary Commons, Dewitt Park, and creek walk areas.
- (2.2) The Downtown Ithaca Alliance should explore a contractual arrangement with TCAT for the maintenance of downtown outdoor bus stop areas.
- (4.1) Improve the surfaces of the secondary Commons, repairing and/or replacing brick sidewalks.
- (4.2) Improve crosswalks and curb cuts throughout downtown Ithaca to better assist pedestrian movement and facilitate wheelchair mobility in downtown. Add audible crosswalk devices as funds become available. Pay attention to sidewalk and crosswalk surfaces to facilitate wheelchair use. Increase sidewalk widths.
- (4.3) Five foot sidewalks should be considered too small for the core urban district. Special priority should be given to widening sidewalks along Seneca (Cayuga to Aurora) and Green (Cayuga to the tuning Fork) streets.
- (4.4) Ensure that downtown is served with the most up to date and functional telecommunications infrastructure. Whenever construction in downtown public right of ways occurs, encourage utilities to upgrade their infrastructure.
- (4.5) Plan for and work to complete the Six Mile Creek river walk. Plan to extend the trail from downtown through the gorge to the wildflower preserve. Explore the feasibility of extending the trail in the opposite direction toward Route 13.

- (4.6) The Post Office is a major part of downtown's critical infrastructure. Work to ensure that the Post Office remains a permanent part of downtown. Work to improve the visibility of the Post Office with pedestrian level signage.
- (4.7) Improve the pedestrian street crossings at the Tuning Fork area, particularly from the Challenge Building.
- (4.8) Explore the feasibility of adding extensions of the pedestrian mall into the 300 East State block and the 100 West State block. At East State Street, evaluate the 1999 Commons Re-Design Plan recommendation to add an enlarged pedestrian sidewalk in front of Viva Taqueria. On West State Street, examine the feasibility of creating a flexible street that could be readily opened and closed to vehicular traffic.
- (4.9) Improve the look and lighting of the area on Green Street around and under the Aurora Street Bridge.
- (4.10) Examine ways to improve the aesthetic appeal of the Seneca Street streetscape between the tuning fork area and Albany Street, utilizing landscaping, trees, new lighting, and other infrastructure amenities.
- (4.11) Plan to upgrade and improve Dewitt Park, including the re-seeding or hardscaping of the street edges of the Park.
- (4.12) Undertake special event programming in the Six Mile Creek walking area.
- (4.13) Examine how the rear of buildings work and interact with pedestrian and the public. Evaluate lighting levels and dumpster/compactor practices, particularly in the area south of the Commons adjacent to the Green Street Garage.
- (4.14) Work with the Finger Lakes Independence Center and the Disability Advisory Board to conduct an updated audit of downtown disability barriers and issues.
- (4.15) Explore the feasibility of creating a pedestrian connection linking the Commons and the Dewitt Park/Dewitt Mall area.

TOURISM AND VISITORS

Tourism and visitors represent a key part of the downtown retail economy.

Goals:

- A. Retain and continue to grow downtown Ithaca's position as a major destination for tourists and visitors to our community.
- B. Lengthen tourist stays in downtown and the community.
- C. Achieve a balance between serving the needs of visitors and meeting the needs and interests of local residents.
- D. Continually seek to improve and enhance the downtown Ithaca visitor experience.
- E. Grow downtown's capacity to work with and attract conferences and meetings.
- F. Protect and enhance the "Commons" brand.
- G. Capture a greater percentage of area and regional visitors to downtown Ithaca.
- H. Downtown will be known and appreciated for its unique collection of independent, one-of-a-kind businesses.

Strategies:

- (1.0) Market downtown to visitors already traveling in the Finger Lakes/Central New York region.
- (2.0) Work collaboratively with the Tompkins County Convention and Visitors Bureau on tourism attraction, focusing on cities and markets within a two hour drive time of Ithaca and allowing the CVB to reach out to more costly, distant markets.
- (3.0) Improve downtown as a visitor destination.
- (4.0) Add additional activities and venues for visitors to help prolong their stays.
- (5.0) Better link downtown Ithaca with other major tourist destinations and draws in the region.

Action Items:

- (1.1) Pro-actively reach out to tourists and prospective visitors, expanding the use of Internet and new media tools as well as utilizing more traditional methods such as rack cards/brochures.
- (1.2) Collaborate with other regional attractions to cross-promote downtown Ithaca.
- (2.1) Undertake initiatives to help downtown hotels increase occupancy rates, particularly in the off-season.
- (3.1) Update and modernize the Ithaca Commons.
- (3.2) Improve way-finding signage into downtown, particularly helping visitors find and access downtown from the major entry highways into the community.
- (3.3) Add to the existing pedestrian-scale way-finding signage, to help direct people on foot to the various attractions and venues in downtown.



This pedestrian-level map and directory is one of several that are located along the Charlottesville pedestrian mall

Photo: DIA

- (3.4) Improve parking directional signage that identifies parking garages and directs visitors to the nearest parking facility.
- (3.5) Create and maintain remote, portable downtown information kiosks that can be strategically located at key visitor destinations.
- (3.6) Replace or supplement the existing Commons maps and directories with interactive electronic kiosks.
- (3.7) Work with the CVB and Tompkins County Strategic Tourism Planning Board to improve and enhance the existing downtown visitor center.
- (3.8) Continue the downtown façade improvement program in an effort to showcase and highlight the architectural heritage of downtown.
- (4.1) Connect downtown to Collegetown and Cornell University through more frequent shuttles and/or fixed rail trolleys, or other public transit to enable visitors from Cornell to more easily access and experience downtown. Undertake a study to determine feasibility for such an enhanced connection.
- (4.2) Create a joint community/Cornell/Ithaca College/TC3 downtown welcome and visitor center.
- (4.3) Work with the Discovery Trail or one or more of its members to create a downtown museum store/center that can assist in marketing the museums that are not located in the heart of downtown.
- (4.4) Support and grow the Finger Lakes Wine Center.
- (4.5) Over the next decade, look to attract one or more additional hotels to downtown Ithaca, to further solidify downtown as an overnight visitor destination.
- (4.6) Work with the lodging industry and with the institutions of higher education to create a downtown meeting/conference center to accommodate small and mid-sized groups. Investigate how the State Theatre can be integrated into such a facility.
- (4.7) Market downtown as a pedestrian campus for conferences by utilizing the resources of the various downtown hotels and venues.
- (4.8) Work to constantly monitor, evaluate and enhance customer service throughout downtown, including at businesses, services, and attractions.
- (4.9) Work with the History Center and other interested parties to develop a downtown Ithaca History Trail that uses interpretive signage to highlight the noteworthy history and personalities of Ithaca.
- (4.10) Work with the Martin Luther King Jr. Committee to advance a walk that celebrates and highlights both the life of Dr. King and Ithaca's diversity throughout its history.
- (4.10) Develop the Six-Mile Gorge creek walk into a pedestrian and bicycle path that can be used by both residents and visitors and that can be marketed to visitors as a downtown attraction.
- (5.1) Form strategic partnerships with other Ithaca area attractions to cross-promote with visitors.
- (5.2) Form strategic partnerships with other regional and upstate attractions to cross-promote with visitors.



An electronic kiosk in a Rochester, MN, mall is directly connected to the local convention and visitors bureau. It provides real-time information about local events, shopping, and dining, along with other information such as direction.

Source and photo: blog.cws.net

TRANSPORTATION & PARKING

Downtown Ithaca is a regional transportation hub of the community. All modes of transit and movement converge in downtown.

We want to be known as a downtown district that is at the forefront in encouraging and blending multi-modal transportation.

Goals:

- A. Ensure that downtown Ithaca continues to be easily accessible.
- B. Increase the number of downtown employees who use alternative, non-automotive means of transportation, making it the preferred mode of travel to work.
- C. Ensure that downtown will have sufficient parking capacity, first from transportation demand management strategies and then, if needed from adequate parking supply for cars, bicycles, and mopeds/motorcycles, to accommodate the desired density development over the period 2010-2020.
- D. Be a national leader in seeking creative and effective ways in meeting the travel to work and parking needs of downtown commuters as well as people living and recreating in downtown.

Strategies:

- (1.0) Explore alternative transportation options for moving people into and out of downtown Ithaca.
- (2.0) Maintain and enhance existing transportation routes into and out of downtown.
- (3.0) Improve and enhance parking management in all of downtown's garages.
- (4.0) Ensure that downtown will have sufficient parking spaces to accommodate desired future growth.

Action Items:

- (1.1) During the period 2010 – 2020, a downtown transportation plan should be commissioned to determine the future supply and demand needs for both alternative transportation and for automobile, bicycle, and motorcycle/moped parking.
- (1.2) Work to expand opportunities for bicycle commuting, including providing adequate public bike storage and shower facilities/opportunities.
- (1.3) The existing Route 10 shuttle service has proven to be a highly successful route for TCAT. Over the years, the hours of operation for this route have slowly increased. There is a need to increase the duration of the Route 10 service to seven days a week- 7:00 a.m. to midnight or beyond.
- (1.4) While there is bus service between Ithaca College and downtown Ithaca, there is no shuttle program. There is a need to launch a shuttle service connecting Ithaca College and downtown similar to the Route 10 service.



On-street bicycle parking in Baltimore, MD, is part of a plan that encourages residents and visitors to use alternative and mass transit.

*Source and photo: R.F. Layman,
baltimorespokes.com*

- (1.5) Explore ways to create free shuttle service between the campuses and the city center.
- (1.6) The presence of shuttle services to both Cornell and Ithaca College could allow downtown to become an off-campus location for visitor/guest parking. This opportunity provides downtown with direct access to campus visitors but also provides the campuses with an easy, low impact parking solution for many of their programs, events, and activities. The City, DIA, and Cornell/Ithaca College should work together to plan for better utilization of downtown parking.
- (1.7) Providing a more permanent, fixed transit alternative between downtown and Cornell/Collegetown continues to be a desire of many community members. A financial and physical feasibility study of a fixed rail loop connecting downtown and Cornell/Collegetown should be undertaken, as a preliminary step in investigating this option for enhancing service between these two community centers.
- (1.8) The community should also continue to examine the financial and physical feasibility of a Pod Car (personal rapid transit) demonstration program connecting downtown Ithaca with the East and South Hills as one additional possible alternative transit option.
- (1.9) To encourage more downtown employees to utilize public transit, the Downtown Ithaca Alliance should work with TCAT, the City, the County, and other stakeholders to institute a guaranteed ride home program.
- (1.10) To encourage more downtown employees to utilize public transit, the Downtown Ithaca Alliance should work with TCAT, the City of Ithaca, Tompkins County and other stakeholders to explore creation of a park & ride program that enables commuters to efficiently and cost effectively leave their vehicles at remote lots and utilize shuttle buses/vans to travel into the center city.
- (1.11) The downtown community should work with the County, City, TCAT, and others to explore ways to increase ride share and van pooling in downtown.
- (1.12) Communities such as Ann Arbor, MI offer financial incentives for downtown commuters to use public transit for their everyday travel to work routine. The community should explore possible ways to extend financial incentives to downtown commuters to encourage frequent use of the TCAT system.
- (1.13) For purposes of planning, funding, and day-to-day use, the Commons should be regarded as downtown Ithaca's transit hub and should be an integral part of the downtown transit system. As the pedestrian connection between the major downtown bus stops, the Commons serves a special role in the TCAT system. The community should therefore look to federal transportation funding as one possible source



A free shuttle connects downtown Burlington, VT, with college campuses.
Photo: DIA



The availability of mass transit through T-CAT provides opportunities to further reduce the use of automobiles in downtown Ithaca.
Photo: DIA

for the modernization and updating of the Commons.

- (1.14) To aid in pedestrian movement, there should be better highlighting and distinguishing of downtown cross walks.
- (1.15) To aid in pedestrian movement, the initial pedestrian way-finding signage program begun by TCAT should be expanded throughout downtown and the west end.
- (1.16) The success of the Green Street mid-block on-demand street crossing signal should be replicated elsewhere in downtown at key pedestrian intersections.
- (1.17) Work with Car Share to improve business utilization of this service.
- (1.18) Work to create more access to bike lockers and showers for bike riders.
- (2.1) To assist in channeling and controlling parking in the downtown, it is important to maintain and enhance a CBD zone that specifically exempts on-site parking as a requirement for development. This action helps to concentrate parking into central public facilities rather than disperse it throughout downtown in a decentralized, low-density manner.
- (2.2) Visitors report that signage leading motorists from our key arterial highways into downtown is minimal and insufficient. There is a need to improve the highway signage that directs vehicles to downtown from Routes 13, 79, 96, 89, 34, and 366. Such a vehicular way-finding signage program should be undertaken in conjunction with the Tompkins County Strategic Tourism Planning Board and the State DOT.
- (2.3) Undertake a program to upgrade the streetscape of the major arterials in downtown, in particular Green and Seneca Streets. Sidewalks along their corridors need to be repaired and in some cases widened. Trees, benches, and bicycle racks need to be added.
- (2.4) Create better pedestrian routes from downtown into the adjacent neighborhoods, including widening sidewalks and creating bump out sidewalks at intersections to improve pedestrian safety, slow vehicles, and encourage more walking and biking.
- (2.5) Work with the City in ways to slow down vehicular traffic in downtown, to reduce the likelihood of accidents and to promote increased walking and biking.
- (2.6) New and/or rebuilt bridges in the downtown area (such as the Cayuga and Clinton Street bridges) should include pedestrian amenities that act to encourage walking. These amenities would include, but not be limited to, historic low level street lamps, wide sidewalks, decorative and protective railings, and pedestrian signage.
- (2.7) Further enhance and perfect a regular construction communication plan and procedure for all transportation construction projects. Such plans should engage affected stakeholders at an early stage to allow for stakeholder input and planning.
- (3.1) Take municipal parking management and maintenance to a new, higher level by either contracting for private management or creating a new and distinct parking department or Authority charged with the exclusive task of managing and maintaining our public parking.
- (3.2) Improve the internal signage system for all downtown parking garages, particularly the Green Street garage. Funding was not available to provide adequate signage inside the Green garage. Such signage would direct people to exits, stairwells, and elevators.



- (3.3) Improve the external parking signage system in downtown to help people locate the next/nearest public parking facility. Infrequent users of downtown report difficulty in identifying and locating our downtown garages. A system of directional signs in downtown could readily solve this shortcoming.
- (3.4) Parking rates should continue to reflect the importance of attracting shoppers to downtown Ithaca. Routinely benchmark small cities that have strong downtown retail (such as Burlington, VT). Places like Burlington have tended to provide rate structures that encourage downtown shopping. This is most frequently accomplished using free parking for one or two hours and/or discounted parking rates for short-term users.
- (3.5) Existing garage parking spaces also need to be managed to encourage and promote downtown shopping, dining, and patronage. When possible, convenient spaces on lower levels should be allotted to short-term users. The second floor of the Cayuga garage provides an excellent successful example. The City of Ithaca should consider working with Seneca Place on the Commons and the Hilton Garden Inn to re-evaluate the parking space allocation plan for the Seneca garage.
- (3.6) As funding permits install digital parking capacity signs in the downtown garages. Such signs enable motorists to quickly understand the availability of parking in a given garage and help to prevent overloading of garages.
- (3.7) Studies conducted by WB&A Market Research for the Downtown Ithaca Alliance show that downtown parking availability and access remain key negative perceptions among area residents, despite current excess capacity. The City and DIA should jointly work to market the parking garages of downtown to area residents.
- (3.8) Downtown Ithaca bus stops are among the busiest and the most visible in the entire TCAT system. There is a need to ensure that these bus stops receive frequent maintenance and cleaning, for the benefit of TCAT patrons and for the benefit of the surrounding community. The Downtown Ithaca Alliance and TCAT should work collaboratively to ensure that this higher level of maintenance occurs. One option would be for TCAT to contract with the DIA for cleaning services.
- (3.9) The City and DIA should work with TCAT to facilitate the installation of electronic technology at the major downtown bus stops/stations that will enable riders to better monitor routes and arrival/departure times.
- (3.10) Improve parking security through the use of garage security cameras, light level assessments and lighting retrofitting, and other management/maintenance tools.
- (4.1) Even with efforts to increase the percentage of commuters using public transit, there will continue to be a need for urban vehicle parking. Proposed new downtown development will first utilize excess existing parking capacity but at some point there will be a need for addition public parking to accommodate expected new housing, office space, entertainment, and retail. A transportation study for downtown will need to be undertaken at some point during the 2010 – 2020 period to determine if there are other ways to free up existing parking capacity by encouraging more people to use alternative forms of transportation and, if appropriate, to determine when, where, and how a new parking garage facility should be built. Historically, planners have considered the Block 14 parcels on West State Street as a possible future site for a new garage to service the growing West State Street area. If another new garage is needed this site, as well as other candidate sites, should be assessed. Any new parking structure should be designed for mixed-use, with street-level uses such as retail or other commercial space factored into the design.
- (4.2) The City and DIA, working with the MPO and TCAT, should establish annual tracking data to monitor and evaluate transit, parking, and alternative transportation utilization in downtown.

SERVING YOUTH

In some communities, whole generations have grown up without any reference to or affinity with a downtown. We have an opportunity in Ithaca to make downtown a place where the youth of our community want to discover and build lasting memories.

Goals:

- A. To re-acquaint the youth of Ithaca and Tompkins County with an authentic downtown experience and to provide our youth with positive enduring memories of downtown that will serve them throughout their lives.
- B. To regard the youth of our community as key users and consumers of downtown and create spaces and attractions that will meet their interests and needs.
- C. To create a family friendly downtown.
- D. To make downtown a place where youth as well as all other members of the community are welcomed.

Strategies:

- (1.0) To engage youth in the planning, promotion, and management of downtown Ithaca.
- (2.0) To engage youth in learning about business and entrepreneurship.
- (3.0) To provide youth with desirable downtown places for recreation, entertainment, shopping, and dining.

Action Items:

- (1.1) To continue to work with high school youth on festival, music, and special event programming, including, but not limited to, the Rock the Arts festival.
- (1.2) To engage youth in downtown Ithaca's public art and gallery art projects.
- (1.3) A Downtown Youth Advisory Council should be created to advise the Downtown Ithaca Alliance and the City of Ithaca in downtown planning, promotion, and management issues.
- (2.1) The DIA and other community partners should explore the creation of a downtown based "Junior Achievement" or other similar business entrepreneurship training program.
- (2.2) The DIA should work with area high schools and area institutions of higher education to regularly host and coordinate mentoring and shadowing programs with the downtown business community.
- (2.3) Continue to work with area youth in summer ambassador-related projects in conjunction with the Ithaca Youth Bureau and the Workforce Center.
- (2.4) Support and assist our downtown schools, including, but not limited to, New Roots Charter School and CSMA.
- (3.1) The DIA will work with other community partners to explore the feasibility of creating a center for youth activities in downtown. In meetings with high school students, this is one of the most asked for items.
- (3.2) Continue to seek and pursue stores and dining that relates to youth and students.

SERVING SENIORS

*Downtowns must work for everyone, especially our senior citizens.
Our seniors bring to us a lifetime of downtown memories and experiences.*

Goals:

- A. Downtown Ithaca should be a place that senior citizens live and visit with ease and facility.
- B. Promote inter-generational activities in downtown.
- C. Position downtown Ithaca to be accommodating and inviting to people of all ages, including seniors.

Strategies:

- (1.0) Improve outreach and communication with seniors.
- (2.0) Create more daytime activities for seniors.
- (3.0) Promote inter-generational activities.
- (4.0) Improve mobility and access issues for seniors and for people with disabilities.

Action Items:

- (1.1) Work with the Senior Center, McGraw House, and other nearby senior living facilities to enhance communications and seek volunteers.
- (2.1) Work with downtown attractions such as Cinemapolis, the Community School of Music and Arts, and the Kitchen Theatre to offer more activities and daytime events targeted to seniors.
- (3.1) Investigate ways to encourage inter-generational interaction in downtown Ithaca festivals and events.
- (3.2) Ensure that downtown is welcoming to people of all ages and promote inter-generational cooperation and interaction.
- (3.3) Create a downtown Senior Advisory Council that would be tasked with providing insights and input from a senior citizen perspective to downtown management and development.
- (4.1) Work with the Finger Lake Independence Center, Lifelong, Tompkins County Office for the Aging, and other stakeholders to identify problem surfaces, intersections, and curb cuts that might hinder mobility for seniors and people with disabilities.
- (4.2) Work to ensure that seniors and other members of the Ithaca community feel safe and secure when visiting downtown.

THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Universities and colleges have become the new community partners, eclipsing major corporations as the key stakeholders who can work with localities to build civic infrastructure for the future.

Goals:

- A. Work to ensure that each of Ithaca's three institutions of higher education has a role to play in building a stronger, sustainable, and dynamic downtown center.
- B. To create the type of downtown and positive downtown experience desired by the faculty, students, and staff of Cornell, Ithaca College, and TC3.
- C. To help these institutions better connect with the community and access the resources of the community for their benefit.
- D. To emulate and replicate innovate projects such as Seneca Place on the Commons (Cornell) and Tioga Place (TC3), both of which have assisted the community and each sponsoring institution.
- E. Each institution will appreciate and promote the importance of a strong and healthy downtown to their own mission working with students, parents, alumni, faculty and staff.

Strategies:

- (1.0) Engage Cornell University in participating in additional projects that will help the university address key campus issues and needs.
- (2.0) Engage TC3 in exploring additional projects that would help it make use of the rich amenities of the downtown Ithaca community.
- (3.0) Encourage Ithaca College to undertake one or more downtown projects that will enable the College to address key campus issues and needs.
- (4.0) Explore projects that could involve and partner two or all of the institutions, ensuring that downtown Ithaca projects make fiscal sense to each institution.

Action Items:

- (1.1) Work with Cornell University on a project that would assist it in providing needed urban-style housing for graduate, post-graduate, and faculty personnel.
- (1.2) Work with Cornell University to explore the feasibility of a community-based business incubator.
- (2.1) Work with TC3 to explore possible academic subject-based collaborations with downtown projects, including but not limited to theater, the wine center, and other hospitality-based enterprises.
- (2.2) Work with TC3 to explore housing-related opportunities for students in downtown.
- (3.1) Work with Ithaca College to explore a downtown project that would address campus needs and provide the College with a strong and visible community presence. Such a project might include, but not be limited to, thematic housing for students, graduate student, or faculty urban housing, and academic subject-based collaborations relating to business, the arts, and/or communications.
- (4.1) Explore the development of a university/college/community welcome center that would highlight the importance of education to Ithaca.
- (4.2) Explore collaborations and affiliations with existing or new downtown arts projects and programming.

- (4.3) Work to bring campus arts programming into the downtown Ithaca community, in order to maximize the spin-off benefit of convening student participants, and the ability to better reach community audiences.
- (4.4) Explore how any or all of the institutions can assist or support a downtown community-based conference/meeting center that would supplement campus facilities and service a key community need.
- (4.5) Explore participation in a downtown community arts incubator that would cluster art studios together in a single project and/or provide possible live/work space for artists.
- (4.6) The downtown community and the institutions should work together to augment campus tours with downtown community tours that could help prospective students and their families better understand and appreciate the diverse and cosmopolitan offerings of the Ithaca community.
- (4.7) Work with the campuses to devise targeted, specific on-campus ways to introduce students and staff to downtown Ithaca events, programs, and offerings.
- (4.8) Work with the three institutions of higher education to create and install iconic sculpture pieces at or near Commons entrances.

WORKING WITH OTHER CITY DISTRICTS

Downtown Ithaca and other commercial districts do not operate in isolation. Each affects the sustainability and viability of the other.

Goals:

- A. To ensure that planning for commercial district growth and development throughout the City is done in a manner that promotes district compatibility and sustainability.
- B. To ensure that planning for commercial district growth and development through the County is done in a manner that promotes district compatibility and sustainability.
- C. To work to minimize the proliferation of development sprawl.
- D. To physically link downtown with other commercial districts.
- E. To collaborate with other commercial district when mutual benefit can be achieved.
- F. To serve the city and the region with community events.

Strategies:

- (1.0) Utilize the City of Ithaca comprehensive plan to promote district compatibility and sustainability. Work to ensure that the growth and development of all commercial districts is done in a manner that complements each other, rather than creates a competitive, zero-sum environment that will ultimately injure districts and cost the community.
- (2.0) Work with the Town of Ithaca to promote district compatibility and sustainability in its comprehensive plan and future development initiatives.
- (3.0) Undertake collaborative activities and programs with other commercial districts that provide mutual benefits.
- (4.0) Seek to minimize development that contributes to sprawl and work to promote the development of new nodes that are also compatible with current commercial districts including downtown, and are deemed to be sustainable.

Actions Items:

- (1.1) Work with the City and other districts on “district plans” that will identify and promote niche markets for each separate area.
- (2.1) Work with the Town of Ithaca and stakeholder entities such as Ithaca College and Cornell University to ensure that nodal growth in the town is compatible with a strong and healthy downtown.
- (3.1) The Downtown Ithaca Alliance will explore collaborative marketing opportunities with Collegetown and the West End/Inlet Island businesses that can demonstrate benefits accruing to both downtown and these other districts.
- (3.2) Work to obtain more frequent transit links using either a shuttle, trolley, or other alternative public transportation for day and evening hours between downtown and Collegetown/Cornell.
- (3.3) Explore the feasibility of improving transit links between downtown and the West End/Inlet Island.
- (3.4) Work to improve the visual and physical streetscape linkages between downtown and the West End/Inlet Island and Collegetown.
- (3.5) Work with the Tompkins County Strategic Tourism Planning Board, the Convention and Visitors Bureau and other stakeholders on a countywide visitor way-finding signage system to help direct tourists to downtown and other area attractions.

- (3.6) Evaluate the potential for future BID expansion, either through boundary expansion or contracting with other nearby or adjacent districts.
- (4.1) Work collaboratively with community planners from throughout Tompkins County on a plan for growth nodes that can be compatible with existing districts and that can be sustained and supported by community infrastructure, and transit.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Downtown's unique, indelible character is derived from its 200 years of history. Preserving and showcasing elements of that history are important to the community.

Goals:

- A. Highlight and showcase the historic character of downtown Ithaca.
- B. Identify, document, and work to preserve for future generations downtown's most important historic resources.
- C. Celebrate the range of downtown architectural history, recognizing that downtown was built over a period of years and its architecture covers a number of historical periods, including contemporary times.
- D. Create a development strategy that preserves the key architectural elements of past generations while allowing for continued evolution and new growth. New development will be compatible with the historic character of downtown.

Strategies:

- (1.0) Make use of historic preservation incentives to ensure that downtown Ithaca's significant architectural heritage from past generations can be passed along to future generations. Renovate aging downtown buildings.
- (2.0) Work to highlight the history and personalities of downtown and the Ithaca community for the benefit of the community and for the education of its visitors.
- (3.0) Include historic preservation in the marketing of downtown Ithaca.

Action Items:

- (1.1) Continue façade improvement programs as funding allows, assisting in preserving and showcasing the unique architectural features of downtown Ithaca properties.
- (1.2) Conduct an inventory of downtown buildings and spaces to identify and document outstanding historic elements that should be preserved.
- (1.3) Facilitate the renovation of historic downtown properties, utilizing State and Federal tax credits.
- (1.4) Special attention should be devoted to historic preservation of key Commons buildings and facades. Work to complete the restoration of all historically significant primary and secondary Commons facades.
- (1.5) Adopt downtown design guidelines. Such guidelines should help establish and define building character, assure a common architectural vocabulary, and promote a downtown that is retail friendly and pedestrian friendly.



Downtown and the City of Ithaca have successfully used grant monies to restore the facades of buildings on the Commons, preserving their historic nature.

Photo: DIA

Such guidelines should act to guide and should not constrain future growth.

- (1.6) Encourage in-fill development that is compatible with existing historic structures but does not necessarily seek to replicate or simulate historic architecture.
- (2.1) Collaborate with Historic Ithaca, Inc. and others on additional projects to preserve and restore key downtown properties.
- (2.2) Collaborate with the History Center, Historic Ithaca, area schools, and others on a project to highlight and showcase the individuals, personalities, key businesses, and events of downtown Ithaca's past. Work to create a History Walk with interpretive kiosks that could become both a visitor attraction and community resource.
- (2.3) Work with the History Center to grow and expand its physical presence in downtown.
- (3.1) Work with the City of Ithaca and State of New York to install highway signage referencing downtown Ithaca as an historic site and attraction.
- (3.2) Integrate and include historic preservation in downtown marketing to both visitors and area residents.

DOWNTOWN AS A REGIONAL CENTER

In a countywide nodal development strategy, downtown Ithaca is the largest, most central, and most diverse concentration of people, commerce, and community life.

Downtown Ithaca is a special place in our region, one that requires special attention and commitment.

In a broader regional context, Ithaca is the southeastern gateway to the Finger Lakes region. It is the most likely point of entry into the Finger Lakes region for visitors from the downstate metropolitan New York City area. As a gateway to the Finger Lakes region, Ithaca has one of upstate New York's largest concentrations of hotels and restaurants. Downtown Ithaca has been and should continue to be a key destination and stopping point for the visitors and tourists to our region. Looking forward, downtown should strive to become a hub for Finger Lakes visitation, with visitors choosing to use downtown as their overnight lodging base.

As the central place in our geographic trade area, downtown Ithaca serves as a community hub in a fashion that no other district can. This unique status is aided by the topography of our community and a regional road system that converges in downtown. It is further supported by the historical and current siting of local governments in the downtown core and with the presence of the County Courthouse, which also drives the location decisions of professional offices. Downtown Ithaca continues to be the financial center of the community.

Beyond government and finance, downtown Ithaca has remained the commercial heart of the community and a major retail, dining, entertainment, and service center. It is and has been the social and emotional center of the City of Ithaca and Tompkins County... the place where citizens come to celebrate and express joy, or conversely, where citizens come to express their concerns and plead their causes. It is both the civic center of the County and the place where Ithacans come for community events.

Such a special place carries with it obligations and responsibilities. The downtown district is obligated to meet the needs and requirements of its regional residents. Likewise, the region is responsible for supporting and maintaining the downtown district.

While many downtown centers across America have eroded over the past century, they remain symbols and representations of the health and vitality of a community. Studies by the Federal Reserve Bank have confirmed the relationship between a strong central core and the overall health and vitality of the broader region. For these reasons, downtown Ithaca is inseparably linked to Tompkins County and the greater Ithaca region.

Goals:

- A. Create appropriate local financial tools to permit and assist downtown density efforts and downtown development projects.
- B. Strengthen relationships with other communities in the region.
- C. Promote and encourage farmland preservation throughout Tompkins County.
- D. Promote and support measures to contain and reduce sprawl.
- E. The region's civic and political leadership will increase their interest in and commitment to the health and vitality of downtown Ithaca.

- F. Downtown will be easily and readily found by visitors from our region, the rest of the state, and around the world.

Strategies:

- (1.0) Collaborate on regional efforts to contain and reduce sprawl.
- (2.0) Collaborate on regional efforts to promote farmland preservation and the open space view sheds that help provide rural character to our region.
- (3.0) Ensure that there are appropriate and adequate economic development tools for encouraging and promoting downtown Ithaca development. Help to ensure that there is a level economic playing field between urban and peripheral development, to the greatest extent possible.
- (4.0) Collaborate on regional efforts to strengthen traditional County villages, hamlets, and town centers.
- (5.0) Seek regional support and collaboration for downtown Ithaca growth and development.
- (6.0) DIA, City, County, and State officials will work together to provide downtown Ithaca with directional and way-finding signage for attractions and parking.

Action Items:

- (1.1) Highlight the issues and dangers of regional sprawl and work collaboratively to seek specific tools to limit and reduce the incidence of sprawl, including, but not limited to, possible financial incentives and planning workshops and training.
- (2.1) Work collaboratively with rural communities to support efforts to promote farmland and view shed preservation. Carefully assess the proposed locations of future projects to ensure that they do not contribute to the loss of farmland or critical view sheds.
- (3.1) The City of Ithaca, Tompkins County, and Downtown Ithaca Alliance should work together to craft appropriate and useful financial incentives that fill the gaps that constrict and preclude downtown development. Downtown projects typically have substantial funding gaps that have historically steered developers and investors to peripheral locations where the costs of development do not create financial barriers. There is a need for financial incentives, such as tax abatement and relief from construction sales tax, to help lessen the downtown funding gap.
- (3.2) The Tompkins County tax incentive program for downtown projects was created as a fiscal tool to help fill financial gaps that can prevent downtown projects from moving forward. The new program calls for consideration of a checklist of community benefits, over and above the leveraging of new downtown investment. The review process also allows for additional benefits to be requested. It is imperative that this consideration of community benefits not result in a program that fails to deliver the needed gap funding to make downtown projects viable. The DIA and City, in conjunction with the IDA, should



The City of Philadelphia undertook an initiative to install directional and “you are here” signage throughout its urban core. The signage serves both pedestrians and motorists.

Source and photo: rethinkcollegepark.com

undertake an economic assessment of this program and its impact on both the community and on downtown development.

- (4.1) The density tax abatement program managed by the Tompkins County Industrial Development Agency can benefit other traditional village centers in the County that might benefit from a gap-financing tool to facilitate development projects. The DIA and City should work with the County IDA and/or other villages and town centers to facilitate their use of this tool.
- (4.2) Tompkins County and the Downtown Ithaca Alliance should collaborate on technical assistance/training programs to assist villages and hamlets within the County with revitalization and commercial development.
- (5.1) Conduct regular outreach and communication with the political jurisdictions throughout the County to promote the need for broad-based support of downtown Ithaca revitalization and development.
- (6.1) Undertake a program to locate, permit, fund, and install directional and way-finding signage pertaining to downtown.

MARKETING DOWNTOWN IN THE YEARS AHEAD

Downtown Ithaca has an incredible story to tell, one that is changing and improving every day. Our job is to pass this story along in a compelling and memorable way to consumers and investors.

Goals:

- A. Strive to make downtown Ithaca the best small city downtown in America.
- B. Strive to make downtown Ithaca the best small city urban place to live in America.
- C. Strive to make downtown Ithaca a must-see visitor and tourist destination.
- D. Strive to make downtown Ithaca a place where local people want to work, shop, dine, and visit on a regular basis.

Strategies:

- (1.0) Encourage local residents to frequent downtown for shopping, dining, and entertainment.
- (2.0) Encourage tourists and visitors to include downtown Ithaca as a must-see part of their trip.
- (3.0) Promote downtown as the most desirable place to live in the region.

Action Items:

- (1.1) Each year, produce a downtown marketing plan designed to reach key target audiences.
- (1.2) Each year, undertake a systematic program of press releases and stories that highlight downtown projects, programs, and assets.
- (1.3) Work to co-promote shopping, dining and entertainment, leveraging the patron base of one group to benefit and support others.
- (1.4) Work to co-promote shopping, dining, and entertainment with the foot traffic generators of downtown, taking advantage of the regular pedestrian traffic generated by these uses.
- (2.1) Market the Commons brand to visitors and tourists, highlighting the pedestrian mall and the unique shopping and dining establishments.
- (2.2) Co-promote downtown with regional tourist destinations such as state parks, museums, and other attractions.
- (2.3) Ensure that downtown Ithaca is well represented on the internet in places where the traveling and shopping public looks to make travel and buying decisions.
- (2.4) Work to attract visitors and tourists who are already in the Finger Lakes region, leaving attraction of tourists from other regions and states to the Tompkins County CVB.
- (3.1) Highlight and promote the desirability of downtown living by showcasing properties, amenities, and the quality of life that can be experienced living in downtown.

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

What happens if we do not act?

This strategic plan provides a blueprint for building and sustaining a strong and dynamic downtown Ithaca. This is this type of downtown that community residents want.... one that they can look to with pride and use regularly, and one that can both survive and thrive into the decades to come.

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If the lessons of urban economics have taught us anything over the past half-century, it is that downtowns are never static. They are in a constant state of flux, their futures shaped not only by changes occurring within the urban core itself, but also from the even more numerous changes that happen in the region and the world.

What happens if we, the people of Ithaca, choose not to act to continue to nurture and grow our downtown urban core? What are justifications for taking action to make downtown a stronger and more sustainable place?

Growing Competition from the Regional Marketplace

The obvious and most visible reason for communities to devote resources and attention to a strong downtown is the threat or the presence of regional competition. This rationale has been evident in recent Ithaca history. The Ithaca Commons was built in 1975 in anticipation of the then soon-to-be constructed regional Pyramid Mall.

In the past, competition from other districts and centers tended to be retail oriented: shopping malls, highway strip centers, and more recently big-box retail. The tremendous impact of retail competition on a downtown cannot be minimized. Many downtowns across America have been inalterably weakened and changed due to competition from outlying retail centers. Downtown Ithaca, while still retaining its retail critical mass, has certainly been affected by its regional competitors.

Competition, however, is not limited to the retail sector. In Ithaca, a failure to invest in a sustainable downtown will likely lead to further growth of regional retail competition and competition with other sectors such as office, entertainment, and tourism... the very sectors that help sustain the downtown Ithaca economy. Rather than concentrating in the urban core, office space will disperse and decentralize throughout the region, seeking lower density locations with surface parking lots. Rather than focusing entertainment uses into the downtown center, a failure to act could help foster a similar dispersion of arts, cultural, and entertainment uses that traditionally cluster in the center of a city.

In Ithaca, tourism already has a somewhat decentralized orientation, based in part on the natural features of the community. State parks, waterfalls, and Cayuga Lake are spread throughout the area.

Some communities struggle with the notion that downtowns should receive support or preference over other commercial centers in their regions. These communities typically subscribe to the thought that market dynamics, not government preference, should determine the strength or viability of a commercial center. The market, however, has proven to be a cruel arbiter of most downtown centers.

A Tendency Toward Decentralization

In the past fifty years American cities have experienced a continual trend toward decentralization of population, businesses, and attractions. While this tendency toward decentralization has been moderating over the past decade, the power of suburban and peripheral growth is substantial. Left unchecked or unchallenged, investment and development often drifts to the edges of a community where development costs tend to be less. In Ithaca, the same tendency exists. Without attention paid to downtown revitalization, development will likely drift to the edges of the community, not the center. With the commitment of the community, Ithaca can take the lead in making its downtown a place where someone could choose a car free lifestyle.

The Fickleness of Private Investment

For the period 1985 to 2003, there was only limited private investment in downtown Ithaca. Most of the private investment in the community occurred outside of downtown in the northeast sector or along Route 13. There is no guarantee that private investment will occur in downtown Ithaca without encouragement and incentive. Real estate development is a private venture. Developers tend to opt for opportunities that are easy to tackle, quick to execute, and as risk-free as possible. Green field development is often the default decision. Without a community commitment to downtown redevelopment, this fickleness can re-emerge.

Following the Sales Tax

Some communities are content to let sales tax revenues drive redevelopment decisions. Cities that rely purely on sales tax revenues to set development policies are likely to settle for big box development, highway strip mall retail, and automotive dealerships. These uses are significant sales tax generators. Downtown retailers are not usually major sales tax producers. Downtown revitalization is undertaken not for its sales tax bonanza, but for property tax increases, for employment opportunities, for sustainable growth practices, and for a strong central core.

Losing the Downtown Vibrancy Edge

A failure to act, to implement a 2020 plan, could result in the loss of the vibrancy that downtown Ithaca has worked so hard to acquire. Outdoor cafes, specialty retail shops, and one-of-a-kind restaurants are driven by foot traffic. If the community is unable to commit to a plan that builds downtown Ithaca's foot traffic, there is a risk that the very attributes that the public wants in their downtown could fade.

Unsustainable Development

The most sustainable development is downtown development. Downtowns are central, dense, and concentrated. They are already served by infrastructure and can be easily serviced by their municipalities. Downtown development promotes walkability and public transportation. Suburban, green field development may be easier to develop, but is far less sustainable for communities.

The Role of the Internet

The Internet has changed the nature of retailing and the way we work and play. These changes can, and have had negative impacts on downtowns. Bookstores, music stores, and clothing stores have been challenged by Internet competition. The Internet also allows employees to work from home, avoiding the traditional

downtown office. Without a plan, downtowns may suffer from Internet competition. With a proper strategic plan, downtown Ithaca can become a place where people want to visit, want to work and want to live.

Attracting and Retaining Young Professionals

The exodus of young professionals from upstate New York has been frequently chronicled over the decade. While young people come to upstate to attend college, they then leave to seek employment and a desirable lifestyle elsewhere. Ithaca has the ability to combat this trend, due to its university-influenced technology job base and our cosmopolitan quality of life. Downtown Ithaca is a key part of this cosmopolitan lifestyle opportunity. A strong and healthy downtown will help retain and attract young professionals. A failure to nurture and develop our urban core will deter our ability to retain and attract young professionals.

Growth of Other Regional Nodes

A failure to nurture downtown Ithaca is also likely to lead to an accelerated growth of other regional development, whether that development is in the form of nodes or other types of sprawl. This strategic plan suggests that downtown needs to keep pace with its suburban competitors in terms of retail activity, office space development, and housing starts. Ceding all growth to the periphery of the community will lead to a weakened urban core.

DEFINING THE ROLES FOR STRATEGIC PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

The DOWNTOWN ITHACA ALLIANCE (Business Improvement District)

- (1) Serve as a catalyst and facilitator for both project and program development.
- (2) Serve as the keeper of the vision for downtown.
- (3) Serve as the organization charged with the day-to-day responsibility of moving this strategy forward.
- (4) Attract, retain, and grow businesses in downtown Ithaca.
- (5) Engage the local and regional community in the cause of a strong and vibrant downtown.
- (6) Work to build partnerships to accomplish the many items and activities included in this plan.
- (7) The DIA assists in marshalling the private leadership needed to advance this ten year strategy

The City of Ithaca

- (1) The City of Ithaca is the owner and steward of downtown's public space.
- (2) The City is the provider and sometimes the contractor of essential services for the downtown community.
- (3) The City is the one entity that can coordinate and integrate the activities of downtown, the other commercial districts, and the residential neighborhoods.
- (4) The City is responsible for ensuring that downtown Ithaca and its other commercial districts develop and co-exist in manner that is complementary.
- (5) The City is charged with marshalling the elected and appointed public leadership that is needed to advance this 2020 plan.
- (6) The City is a partner with the Downtown Ithaca Alliance in attracting, retaining, and growing downtown businesses.
- (7) The City is one possible source of incentive funding and support needed for priority projects and programs.
- (8) The City is a key property owner and major downtown landowner.

Other Community Stakeholders

- (1) Tompkins County is a key downtown property owner and employer. It is a provider of financial incentives for downtown projects. The County has a role in promoting sustainable, regional development throughout the community that contributes to a strong urban core. County programs such as the Strategic Tourism Planning Board help to support downtown initiatives and programs.
- (2) The Town of Ithaca is an important institutional property owner and employer in downtown. It is also the political jurisdiction that physically rings the City. Much of the growth outside of the City is likely to occur within the boundaries of the town. How the Town of Ithaca chooses to grow and develop will have profound impacts on downtown Ithaca in the years ahead.
- (3) The institutions of higher education, Cornell University, Ithaca College, and Tompkins Cortland Community College, are key community stakeholders who all benefit from a strong and vibrant downtown. Each has a particular role in helping to define and advance projects and activities that will support downtown Ithaca and benefit the goals of their institution.
- (4) TCAT is the provider of public transportation services and helps to move people into and out of downtown on a daily basis.

- (5) Tompkins County Area Development serves as the agent for County economic development and assists the County in formulating and implementing programs and incentives to assist downtown projects and businesses.
- (6) The Tompkins County Chamber of Commerce and its Convention and Visitor Bureau (CVB) serves as the face and leadership of the regional business community and can engage the business community in a dialogue about the future of downtown Ithaca. The CVB provides tourism and convention promotion for the community, including downtown, and is a critical partner for downtown tourism development and marketing.
- (7) The Arts and Culture community is a key partner in advancing the cultural arts and entertainment portion of the strategic plan. Key stakeholders include, but are not limited to, the State Theatre, the Kitchen Theatre, the History Center, Historic Ithaca, Inc., Community School of Music and Arts, the Tompkins County Public Library, the Community Arts Partnership, and the Women's Community Building.
- (8) The Greater Ithaca Activities Center, the Multi-Cultural Resource Center and other community organizations devoted to diversity and equity are stakeholders in working to ensure that downtown Ithaca grows as a place that is open and inviting to all. The Finger Lakes Independence Center serves as a similar stakeholder for persons with disabilities.
- (9) There are numerous other groups and organizations that either have downtown locations, support and advance particular aspects of the strategic plan or that have an interest in a strong and viable downtown for our community.
- (10) The State and Federal government also have an important role in promoting and maintaining a vibrant downtown. State offices should be encouraged to locate in downtown. Federal agencies, including but not limited to the Post Office and the Social Security office, should remain and grow in downtown.