

# SUSTAINABLE DESIGN ASSESSMENT TEAM



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## The American Institute of Architects Sustainable Design Assessment Program



### Introduction

In November 2009, the community of Allentown, PA submitted a proposal to the American Institute of Architects (AIA) for a Sustainable Design Assessment Team (SDAT) to assist the city and its citizens in addressing key issues facing the community. The issues included economic development, urban design, mobility, revitalization, connectivity, and civic engagement. The AIA accepted the proposal and, after a preliminary visit by a small group in June 2010, recruited a multi-disciplinary team of volunteers to serve on the SDAT Team. In September 2010, the SDAT Team members worked closely with local officials, community leaders, technical experts, non-profit organizations and citizens to study the community and its concerns. The team used its expertise to frame a wide

range of recommendations, which were presented to the community in a public meeting. This report represents a summary of the findings and recommendations that were presented to the community.

### The Sustainable Design Assessment Team (SDAT) Program

The Sustainable Design Assessment Team (SDAT) program focuses on the importance of developing sustainable communities through design. The mission of the SDAT program is to provide technical assistance and process expertise to help communities develop a vision and framework for a sustainable future. The SDAT program brings together multidisciplinary teams of professionals to work with community stakeholders and decision-makers in an intensive planning process. Teams are composed of volunteer professionals representing a range of disciplines, including architects, urban design professionals, economic development experts, land use attorneys, and others.

Today, communities face a host of challenges to long-term planning for sustainability, including limited resources and technical capacity, ineffective public processes and poor participation. The SDAT approach is designed to address many of the common challenges communities face by producing long-term sustainability plans that are realistic and reflect each community's unique context. Key features of the SDAT approach include the following:

- **Customized Design Assistance.** The SDAT is designed as a customized approach to community assistance which incorporates local realities and the unique challenges and assets of each community.
- **A Systems Approach to Sustainability.** The SDAT applies a systems-based approach to community sustainability, examining cross-cutting issues and relationships between issues. The SDAT forms multi-disciplinary teams that combine a range of disciplines and professions in an integrated assessment and design process.

- ***Inclusive and Participatory Processes.***

Public participation is the foundation of good community design. The SDAT involves a wide range of stakeholders and utilizes short feedback loops, resulting in sustainable decision-making that has broad public support and ownership.



- ***Objective Technical Expertise.***

The SDAT Team is assembled to include a range of technical experts from across the country. Team Members do not accept payment for services in an SDAT. They serve in a volunteer capacity on behalf of the AIA and the partner community. As a result, the SDAT Team has enhanced credibility with local stakeholders and can provide unencumbered technical advice.



- ***Cost Effectiveness.***

By employing the SDAT approach, communities are able to take advantage of leveraged resources for their planning efforts. The AIA contributes up to \$15,000 in financial assistance for each project. The SDAT team members volunteer their labor and expertise, allowing communities to gain immediate access to the combined technical knowledge of top-notch professionals from varied fields.



The SDAT program is modeled on the Regional and Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT) program, one of AIA's longest-running success stories. While the R/UDAT program was developed to provide communities with specific design solutions, the SDAT program provides broad assessments to help frame future policies or design solutions in the context of sustainability and help communities plan the first steps of implementation. Through the Design Assistance Team (DAT) program, over 500 professionals from 30 disciplines have provided millions of dollars in professional pro bono services to more than 180 communities across the country. The SDAT program leverages the pivotal role of the architectural community in the creation and support of sustainable livable communities.

The following report includes a narrative account of the Allentown SDAT project recommendations, with summary information concerning several principle areas of investigation. The recommendations are made within the broad framework of sustainability, and are designed to form an integrated approach to future sustainability efforts in the community.



# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**Alan Mallach**

## The Charge To The SDAT Team

The SDAT team was charged by the Allentown community to come up with ways “to strengthen the functionality and sense of place while increasing the sustainability of our center city.” More specifically, the charge asked the team to look at four areas:

- Improving transportation options.
- Creating a more visually appealing streetscape.
- Improving the use of downtown buildings.
- Increasing market rate housing in center city.

These four areas are closely related to one another. The area that the SDAT team was asked to look at included downtown proper – the Hamilton Street corridor – and the two adjacent historic districts, Old Allentown and Old Fairgrounds.



## THE SETTING

Allentown has a linear downtown, stretching out along Hamilton Street from 3rd through 12th Streets. While there are some downtown-related uses on parallel streets, they are few; downtown uses are found almost entirely along Hamilton Street and on the closest blocks of cross streets. Hamilton Street turns in on itself, turning its back on the rest of the city. For a visitor, arriving in downtown Allentown seems almost accidental, as there are few visual clues – either explicit, in the form of wayfinding signage, or implicit, in terms of clear changes in the urban fabric – to herald the approach of downtown. As discussed later, much of this is the result of redevelopment decisions made over the past fifty years that drastically changed the basic dynamics of downtown Allentown.

Although the distance from 3rd to 12th streets is not great, Hamilton Street changes its character dramatically over that stretch. Indeed, one



could almost argue that there are four separate “Hamilton Streets” as one travels west from the Lehigh River:

- A government center area or ‘civic zone’ between 3rd and 5th Streets, containing the center of city and county government, as well as state and federal courthouses.
- A cultural district centered at 6th Street, and including Symphony Hall, the Allentown Museum and the Baum School of Art.
- A business core centered at 9th Street, including an emerging restaurant district, and
- A mixed-use neighborhood-scale district from 10th through 12th Streets.

These uses are not continuous, as the area immediately around Center Square, with its many vacant and underutilized buildings, breaks up the continuity of the street. The weakness of those blocks tends to undermine the vitality of other activities taking place along Hamilton Street.

Hamilton Street has important assets, as well as serious problems. Its most prominent assets include:

- A strong and largely intact texture of historic buildings along Hamilton Street west of 5th Street. Within this area, more recent buildings tend to be compatible with the historic fabric of the street, while the number of vacant lots and parking lots breaking up the fabric is small, particularly by comparison with similar downtown streets elsewhere.

- As a result, Hamilton Street offer a compact, visually stimulating and walkable environment
- Hamilton Street contains key activity clusters drawing people from around the Lehigh Valley to downtown Allentown, including the city’s arts institutions and the emerging cluster of restaurants around 9th Street.
- A close physical relationship between downtown and the adjacent historic districts – particularly Old Allentown.

Downtown Allentown and the historic districts are fortunate to have a strong city government committed to their future, as well as strong leadership and commitment from many private sector organizations, including the Chamber of Commerce and the Old Allentown Preservation Association. Mobilizing and sustaining that commitment and leadership will be critical to the future of Allentown’s city center.

That said, significant problems stand in the way of the area becoming a vibrant, sustainable downtown:

- Low building utilization. A number of buildings, including some major ones such as the First National Bank building on Center Square, are completely empty, while many other buildings are occupied only at the ground floor level, with the upper floors empty.
- A weak retail environment on Hamilton Street. While retail vacancies are not unusually elevated, many storefronts accommodate low-end or marginal businesses that have invested little in their stock or appearance. There are few retail businesses in downtown Allentown that would appear to attract people from outside the immediate vicinity.

- While the building fabric is rich and historic, current levels of maintenance – of both buildings and streetscape – are often inadequate, reducing the appeal of downtown as a destination.
- Poor visibility and connectivity to other parts of the city, even areas that are close-by. Although downtown appears to have ample parking, parking areas are not clearly positioned or signed relative to user destinations.



Finally, numerous comments made clear that downtown Allentown suffers from a serious perception or image problem. It is widely perceived as unsafe by people from outside the immediate area, a perception which, while arguably at odds with reality, is powerful. While downtown Allentown draws many people for specific events – such as concerts at Symphony Hall or summer festivities in the PPL plaza at 9th Street – the combination of these negative perceptions with the limited number of other attractions inhibits their further exploration of downtown.



The present and future of Hamilton Street and of Old Allentown are closely related to one another. The strength or weakness of one strongly affects the other. The relationship between downtown and the Old Fairgrounds neighborhood, while strong, is less powerful. In many respects, planning for downtown and Old Allentown should be seen as a single undertaking, with a particular focus on strengthening the linkages between the two. Despite their proximity, the parking lots and dilapidated buildings along Turner Street, particularly between 7th and 9th Streets, tend to act as a barrier separating the two areas.





## TWO CENTRAL ISSUES

Before delving into specific recommendations, it is worth highlighting two central issues which emerged during the course of the SDAT team visit.

First, Allentown has gone through significant changes in recent decades, becoming a more racially and ethnically diverse community. Today, over \_\_\_% of the city's population is Latino, a share that has grown sharply in recent years. The changing population has created strains and tensions that need to be addressed. Recognizing this and building on this diversity for the future is central to building a stronger Allentown. How to do this, and how to integrate the city's new residents into a diverse city is an important, perhaps the most important, question facing local political, community and business leaders.

Second, downtown Allentown has to take stock of what it is today, and what it can be in the future, not what it was in the past. Nostalgia for a day when downtown Allentown was the retail center of the Lehigh Valley and shoppers thronged the aisles at Hess' Department Store and dozens of other retailers is understandable, but those days will not return. With the Lehigh Valley Mall barely two miles north of Hamilton Street, downtown no longer serves that function. With resources for investment limited, the city needs to identify the key niches that Hamilton Street can fill in the future, and target resources systematically around the opportunities that exist.

# **ISSUE 1: CREATING A REGIONAL DESTINATION**

**James Lima**

In order to rebuild Hamilton Avenue into a regional destination, we recommend that the city and its partners pursue a series of complementary strategies, building on the assets and strengths that are present in the downtown.

## STRATEGIES

**Grow the downtown restaurant cluster.** The city should pursue a district approach – building a critical mass of restaurants and related activities in the blocks centering on 9th street. This should include fostering co-operative marketing of restaurants, other facilities, and special events to increase peoples’ length of stay, adding variety and diversity to the district.



**Build on the assets of Hamilton Avenue from 10th to 12th Street.** This area can be enhanced as a neighborhood-oriented service retail area, with stronger linkages to the Old Allentown and West Walnut neighborhoods, with a distinctly different retail

mix than the rest of Hamilton Street. Upgrading buildings for higher-quality mixed use, with housing over commercial uses, as well as streetscape enhancements should be encouraged.

**Build downtown’s arts identity – raise the profile of the arts community.** This is discussed in detail in the following section.



**Capture new business opportunities.** Restoring the historic Americus Hotel as a destination offers a unique opportunity for downtown Allentown to capture a larger share of the regional hospitality, conferencing and special events business. With its location in close proximity to the arts cluster, it offers important synergies with arts-related activities. The city should aggressively explore the economic feasibility of a public-private partnership to restore the Americus Hotel to productive use.

**Increase downtown housing choices.** Creating more market rate housing in downtown Allentown will strengthen the city center housing market generally, increase economic diversity in the area, foster reuse of vacant or underutilized buildings, and add activity and purchasing power to Hamilton Avenue. While not the only strategy that should be pursued, it may be the single most important one. At the same time as downtown living options are increased, incentives should be offered to encourage more home ownership and rehabilitation in Old Allentown, while a marketing campaign should be initiated to promote center city – downtown and the

historic districts – to the region as an attractive desirable place to live. This is discussed further in a later section of this report.

## BUILDING THE BASE

While each of these strategies might be thought to be a separate initiative, it is critical that they be seen as a single, carefully coordinated, whole. All of those involved in downtown, including restaurant owners, arts organizations, city government, large and small employers, should be engaged in a coordinated marketing effort that builds synergy between arts events, dining options, special events and more.

To be sure, marketing is not enough. As we discuss in later sections of this report, major changes may be needed to improve the visibility and connectivity of downtown, while financial incentives are likely to be needed to jump-start critical elements of the strategy, such as the restoration of old buildings into market-rate housing. Without a coordinated marketing push, however, those efforts can easily founder in light of the widespread negative perceptions currently affecting downtown.



# **ISSUE 2: BUILDING A HAMILTON AVENUE ARTS DISTRICT**

**JOSHUA BLOOM**

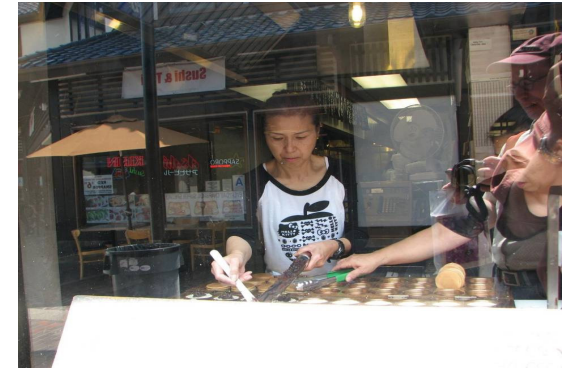
## INTRODUCTION

Arts districts around the country show similar patterns of evolution: while arts districts can be seeded, they tend to spring up organically in places where property is cheap and where a few artists have already taken up residence.

Over the long term, arts districts are transitional uses. In their early stages, a few artists are attracted to large, cheap, raw spaces where they can do their work largely unregulated. Those early arrivals can function as a catalyst that later develops into a district reflecting its artist inhabitants. As the pioneers make improvements to buildings, rents and property values may slowly begin to escalate, and at some point the district begins to move from “startup” to “establishment”: downtown workers start to move into loft apartments and a Starbucks opens across the street from the independent coffee place.



East Carson Street on Pittsburgh's South Side was an urban Main Street program pilot project in the 1980s. From its many vacancies and arts-district beginnings, East Carson Street eventually became a club and party district and a regional destination. In recent years, with the opening of the Southside Works mixed-use development (and its national tenants like Cheesecake Factory and Urban Outfitters), the neighborhood has entered a new phase of evolution from its arts and entertainment revitalization origins.



Real estate development is limited in Allentown and Hamilton Street is in little danger of short-term gentrification. At this early stage of advancing the arts and entertainment strategy, the greatest challenge is visibility. Nevertheless, it is helpful to visualize how an arts and entertainment district in downtown Allentown can be a catalyst for a different kind of downtown ten or twenty years hence.

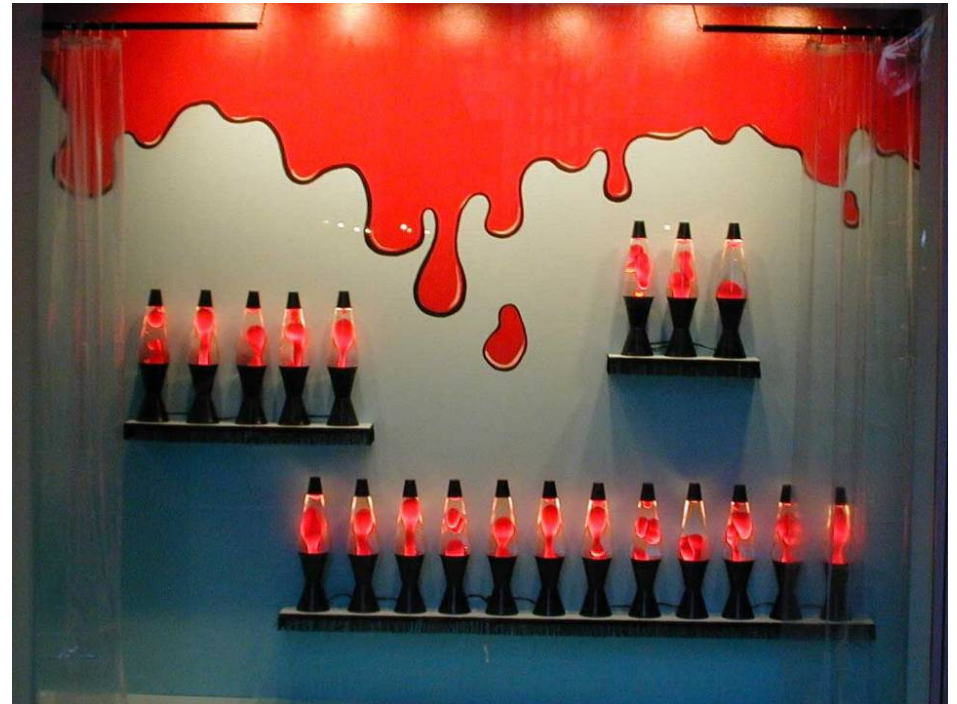
## MAKE THE ARTS VISIBLE

In order to stimulate the development of an arts district, Hamilton Street should make the arts visible on the street. Low-cost and short timeline projects can make the arts visible in public spaces and in commercial buildings. The main ingredient is creativity – or initiating a series of programs that foster creativity among the existing arts community in Allentown.

A central element in making the arts visible is to activate the streets by creating visual interest and thereby bringing new visitors, new customers, and interactivity. The Main Street program can begin by activating vacant storefront windows with props and creative designs:

- Provide a design team to help with window displays
- Involve local artists in a window display challenge
- Recruit a local visual merchandising professional (e.g., from a mall retailer) to help out as a volunteer
- Get set designers from a local theater group involved
- Work with a local thrift store to set up a props lending program

Examples include Design Philadelphia's ([designphiladelphia.org](http://designphiladelphia.org)) window display competition in Old City, where artists are assigned a store window as their "canvas" and the creations are judged and awarded prizes; and Faneuil Hall Marketplace in Boston, which hires an artist to create visual interest in its vacant retail spaces. The adjacent images are examples of disguised vacancies at Faneuil Hall.



*Lava lamps at Faneuil Hall Marketplace, Boston, Mass. Photo credit: Joshua Bloom*



*Everything red, in a window at Faneuil Hall Market Place, Boston, MA. Photo credit: Joshua Bloom*

In the public realm, there are tremendous opportunities to involve local artists in designing ephemeral installations on Hamilton Street. Short-term, inexpensive installations can be as effective in cultivating an arts environment as more expensive, hard to implement, sculptures and monuments. Ephemeral installations create constantly changing visual interest and in that way can encourage people to visit and interact with Hamilton Street more frequently. Like any downtown improvement, the best of these types of installations are authentic, organic, and “of the place.”



*Giant doily, Seattle, WA. Photo: Joshua Bloom*



*Fairy door in Ann Arbor, MI. Photo: cstieb via Flickr. Creative Commons license.*

In Pioneer Square, Seattle, artists hoisted a super-sized doily and hung it over an otherwise problematic public square. The doily helped to generate new kinds of visitors and interactions in the square, mitigating the impact of existing social disorder. In Ann Arbor, Michigan, artists installed a series of “fairy doors” on the exteriors and interiors of downtown buildings, creating a sort of ongoing treasure hunt throughout downtown, while the Knitta people – guerilla knitters who make surprise appearances in cities around the country – recently knitted

a colorful cozy for a tree in Center City, Philadelphia.



*Knitted tree cozy, Philadelphia, PA. Photo: Joshua Bloom*

Many of the seeds of an arts district are already present in Allentown. To support those organic beginnings, the City, the Hamilton Street Main Street program, and their partners should

work to align both regulations and

financial incentives so they all support and reinforce the arts strategy. Several other cities have consciously aligned their incentives, regulations, and subsidies in order to foster an arts district. Examples of such alignment – some of which would be led by the City and others by Main Street – include a blend of programs:

- Couple any façade improvement incentives with design guidelines that encourage colorful, activated, non-traditional approaches to storefront design;
- Incorporate motion and colorful lighting into new signs;
- Establish zones for artist live/work/gallery spaces;
- Establish a moving assistance fund to help artists move to the district;
- Provide building acquisition assistance for artist/owners.

By establishing and aligning a menu of design and financial incentives, the arts aspects of Hamilton Street can be expressed and inculcated in authentic and lasting ways.

## MANAGING THE DISTRICT

Multiple organizations claim ownership of the revitalization agenda of downtown Allentown and Hamilton Street. However, the various organizations do not have a structured way to partner with each other, and territorial behaviors can impede progress.

The SDAT team did not have the opportunity to make a study of Allentown's organizational landscape. However, the team noted that there are at least six players who touch Hamilton Street's development, some more directly than others:

- City government, particularly the Department of Community and Economic Development)
- Allentown Redevelopment Authority
- Chamber of Commerce / Main Street program
- Allentown Economic Development Corporation (AEDC)
- Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation (LVEDC)
- Lehigh County

Having multiple partners can be a strength. However, it became clear to the team that downtown lacks a single work plan – a single agenda where multiple partners can play coordinated planning and implementation roles.

We recommend organizing the agenda of activities for Hamilton Street so all of the tasks are part of a single plan. The plan should live within one organization, but be shaped by all of the partners. Each partner's work affects one piece of the comprehensive

work plan. For illustration purposes, the following matrix is organized according to the Main Street Approach™ and its four areas of work. Each task/activity should have a single checkmark in a box along that row, indicating the lead organization.

	Design					Promotion					Economic Restructuring					Organization				
	FACADES	PUBLIC SPACE	CLEANING	VISUAL MERCHANDISING	ART INSTALLATIONS	EVENTS	MARKETING	IMAGE DEVELOPMENT	PUBLIC RELATIONS	MEDIA	REAL ESTATE	SMALL BUSINESSES	BUS. RECRUITMENT	FINANCING	MARKET ANALYSIS	ADVOCACY	COMMUNITY POLICING	MEMBERSHIPS	NETWORKING	FUNDRAISING
City/DCED																				
Redevelopment Authority																				
Chamber/ Main Street																				
AEDC																				
LVDEC																				
Lehigh County																				

# **ISSUE 3: PRESERVING ALLENTOWN**

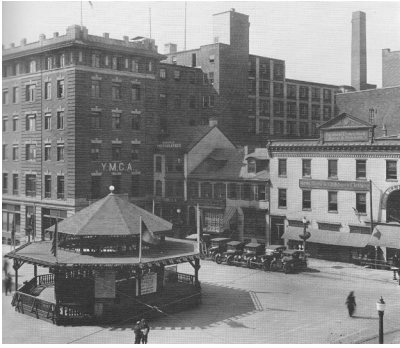
**Marcel Quimby, AIA**

## BACKGROUND

Allentown boasts a wealth of historic buildings and resources that would be the envy of any community. These resources help make Allentown a unique city, and the protection of these resources is critical to maintaining that distinctive identity. The City of Allentown demonstrated its commitment to the continued protection of Allentown's historic fabric with the 1978 adoption of the Historic District Ordinance, when Old Allentown was designated as the first of the City's three current districts. Since then, the Old Fairgrounds (designated in 1981) West Park (designated in 2001) Historic Districts have been created. The Ordinance was adopted to preserve the historic and architectural character of the exterior facades of structures in the historic districts by requiring that any exterior changes made to properties within the districts that can be seen from the public right-of-way be done in a manner that is in keeping with the architectural and historic character of the building and the district, thus maintaining the overall historic integrity of the district.

The Ordinance provided for the formation of the Allentown Historical Architectural Review Board (HARB). HARB is responsible for advising the City Council regarding alterations or additions to resources located within a historic district; developing and continuing an effective program of historic preservation with the Bureau of Planning and other appropriate agencies that may be able to provide assistance; proposing the establishment of additional historic districts and revisions to existing historic districts; advising the City Council, other municipal agencies, and property owners in matters involving sites, structures and buildings of historical or architectural significance;





and encouraging those owning buildings in an historic district to consult with the HARB concerning such physical aspects promoting maintenance that is in keeping with the general historic and architectural character of the district.



While the City of Allentown is a clear leader in historic preservation, it needs the added support of outside, non-profit advocacy groups to lend their voice and expertise in the on-going effort to preserve Allentown's historic fabric. Government is only part of the equation in the formation of a good

community preservation program. In addition to HARB, a number of non-profit associations have been formed to help further protect the historic integrity of Allentown's neighborhoods. The Old Allentown Preservation Foundation, the Old Fairgrounds Neighborhood Association, and the West Park Civic Association all work to specifically protect their respective neighborhoods. The Allentown Preservation League and the Lehigh County Historical Society are also active in the community. These groups come together to form an Allentown Preservation Week Coalition, which holds an annual Restoration and Rehabilitation awards program.

## OBSERVATIONS

Despite a large number of significant historic resources, Allentown's downtown core is not currently listed as a historic district. While a number of historic resources have undoubtedly been lost over the years, the number of contributing resources and the overall intact nature of the historic fabric of downtown Allentown make it a natural fit for historic district designation. Downtown currently faces a number of challenges. There is an obviously high level of building vacancy and under-utilization, particularly on the upper floors of historic buildings with ground floor retail uses. Many of the existing retail uses are marginal, low-end operations, and many of the storefronts are occupied by social service agencies. The streetscape lacks character, and Center Square in particular – once the traditional center of downtown – has fragmented and unusable open areas and an uninviting and frequently confusing pedestrian environment. A number of buildings are beginning to fall into disrepair,





and without design guidelines in place, there is an increased risk of inappropriate infill development as well as the threat of demolition by neglect.



The relationship between the downtown and its surrounding neighborhoods is also highly problematic. There are two historic neighborhoods immediately to the north (Old Allentown and Old Fairgrounds), but they feel disconnected from the downtown,



not least because of the physical barriers imposed by the numerous parking lots and parking decks paralleling Hamilton Street one block to the north. Connections between the downtown and the residential neighborhoods must be re-established if there is to be any hope of downtown



regaining its role as the commercial core of Allentown. Although both neighborhoods have a rich historic character and an excellent housing stock, rehabilitation has



lagged because of low market values in the current economic climate.

Unlike the dwindling downtown area, the 7th Street retail corridor has shown significant revival in recent years, in part fueled by a dynamic Main Street program. It appears to have become the default neighborhood shopping street for the residents of the Old Allentown and Old Fairgrounds neighborhood,



serving in many respects a more economically and ethnically diverse market than downtown. It is likely that the growth of this corridor, because of its proximity to Hamilton Street, has drawn away some business activity from downtown. While many citizens confirmed their tendency to shop the 7th Street retail corridor, very



few could recall the last time they made purchases in the downtown retail core. Ideally, retail activity in both commercial cores should complement each other rather



than detrimentally compete, but the downtown commercial district has a long way to go before this balance can be achieved.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Pursue designation on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) for a 'Downtown Allentown' Historic District for Hamilton Street.** Listing on the NRHP will provide owners with eligibility for certain tax provisions (owners of properties listed in the National Register may be eligible for a 20% investment tax credit for the certified rehabilitation of income-producing certified historic structures such as commercial, industrial, or rental residential buildings). Given the large number of income-producing properties present within in a predominantly commercial district, providing owners with the option of utilizing Incentive Tax Credits can be a power marketing tool when encouraging downtown core revitalization. Federal tax deductions are also available for charitable contributions for conservation purposes of partial interests in historically important land areas or structures.
- **Pursue local historic district designation for a Downtown Historic District.** Local designation is instrumental in helping to preserve the character and integrity of the downtown district. Local designation will allow HARB to advise against further demolition and inappropriate renovation of the downtown fabric, and will provide design guidelines that will help promote appropriate infill and rehabilitation for buildings within the district. Local designation will also allow property owners to take advantage of any tax incentives, grants, or credits offered by the State of Pennsylvania through the State Historic Preservation Office.
- **Build upon the existing façade grant programs.** For example, the Old Allentown Preservation Association provides private homeowners with façade grants up to \$5000 for owners committed to restoring a home's façade to the appearance appropriate to the era of its construction. Expand similar programs to the other historic districts, using public/partnerships as appropriate.
- **Educate property owners, developers, architects and contractors about preservation best practices and opportunities.** The City should take a lead role in this education through workshops, demonstration projects, outreach and advocacy, publications, and websites. Showing what is considered acceptable and what is considered not acceptable is important because historic preservation and design review are visually oriented. Inform property owners of some of the financial benefits and opportunities provided through preservation incentives in order to encourage participation in those incentive programs.
- **Regularly survey and inventory Allentown's historic building stock.** Every passing year brings potential additions to historic districts (both residential and commercial) as new resources become eligible for inclusion (when following the 50-year age rule established by the National Park Service). There are state and federal grants available to help with this, and volunteers and interns (from local schools and universities) can also help. Maintain an easily accessible catalogue of vacant buildings that are available for renovation. Use the catalogue to market the redevelopment potential of these properties to prospective owners.
- **Expand the existing Preservation Awards program.** A city-wide awards program that recognizes stellar restoration, rehabilitation, and infill design and construction will bring attention to the potential embodied in adaptive reuse and historic preservation while simultaneously educating the public and developers as to what exemplary preservation efforts can look like.

- **Investigate preservation best practices in similar communities around the country.** For example, Lowell, MA, a declining industrial town with widespread vacancies in the upper floors of commercial buildings and former industrial buildings, created an Artist Overlay District in their commercial core. The overlay district allowed allows artists and craftsmen to live and work in the same space, a multiple use that is not typically allowed under municipal zoning regulation. Between 1998 and 2000, the new Artist Overlay District was instrumental in rehabilitating four distressed historic structures, which ultimately resulted in the creation of 60 new downtown units. Camden, New Jersey was suffering from row after row of residential blight in their historic row house neighborhoods. Camden revised their building code to allow for a “Rehab Code”, which works with the existing characteristics of a building instead of requiring that work done to an existing building meet the same codes as a newly constructed building. The Rehab Code thereby makes adaptive use more feasible and encourages urban reinvestment in formerly suffering districts. Further details on these case studies as well as additional best practices can be found in The National Trust for Historic Preservation’s “Rebuilding Community” publication.

Historic Preservation should not be regarded merely as a way of maintaining the nostalgic feel of a community, but should instead be used as a planning tool to maintain the unique charm of a community while allowing for its continued growth and development. Preservation is perhaps the greatest act of overall sustainability; the greenest building is the building already built.



# **ISSUE 4: PLACEMAKING- THE PUBLIC REALM**

**Robert Herman, AIA**

*The street is the river of life for the city. People come to these places not to escape from the city, but to partake of it. - William H. Whyte*

## INTRODUCTION

The SDAT team's charge is "to strengthen the functionality and sense of place while increasing the sustainability of our center city". This section will analyze the public space component of the downtown and propose ideas to enhance the sense of place within the public realm of downtown, including the streets, pathways, plazas, and parks and their respective edges, whether built or natural. Particular emphasis will be paid to ideas that improve the imageability, usefulness and attractiveness of Hamilton Street, re-establish the principal connections between Hamilton Street and the contiguous neighborhoods, reinforce the primacy of Center Square as the heart of downtown, and elevate the legibility and sustainability of the existing or proposed districts connected by Hamilton Street.

## BACKGROUND

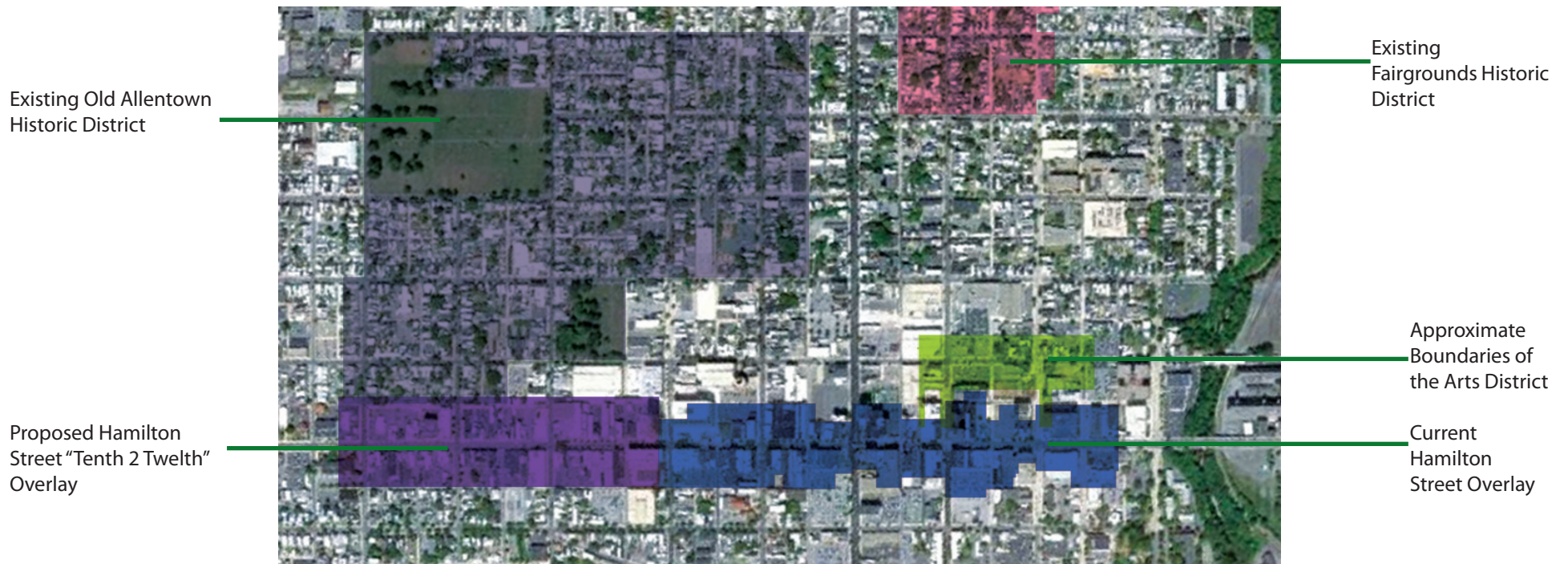
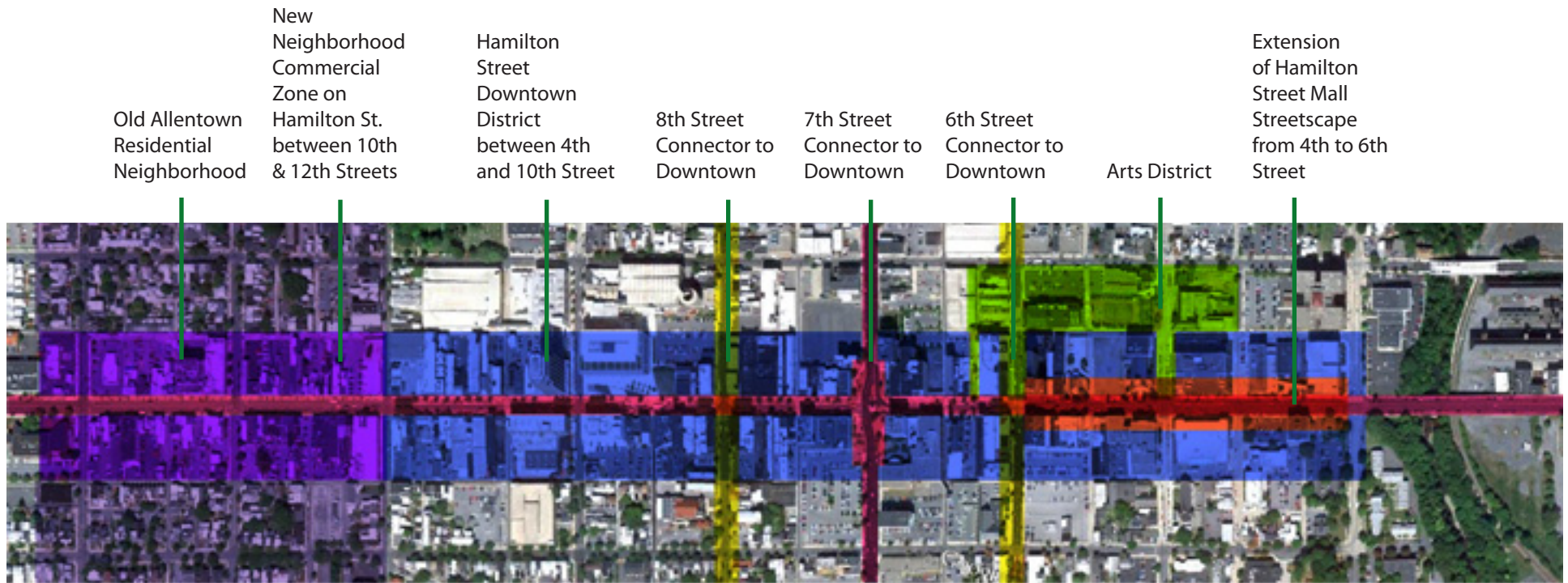
As with other cities established before World War II, Allentown's fabric is one of compact neighborhoods surrounding a mixed-use downtown along a traditional main street. Over the last several decades, Allentown's once dynamic downtown has experienced economic leakage to its outlying edges, and its historic neighborhoods have struggled as their residents become increasingly transient and economically challenged: a condition that only exacerbates both the real and perceived decline of the downtown.

As with other cities faced with the competition from automobile-driven big box category killers, regional shopping centers, and suburban office and housing development patterns, Allentown responded by mimicking the suburban mall, uprooting much of its downtown to accommodate parking around its perimeter and creating a mall-like treatment along the Hamilton Street corridor. The result has not only created a highly linear and distended main street; but, as with all suburban malls, an island surrounded by parking. Traditional downtowns that followed this model, of course, didn't succeed at beating enclosed malls at their own game, but can only succeed when they do what they do best, which is to be concentrated, walkable, authentic mixed-use neighborhoods ballasted by traditional downtown anchors--their courthouses, cultural centers, museum, theatres---and well connected to their larger communities. Traditional downtowns are also good models of sustainable living. Downtown Allentown has excellent bones, well-positioned to be a downtown for the 21st century.

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

Since its founding in 1762, Allentown has grown with the prosperity of the Lehigh Valley. With the development of the Lehigh Canal in the 1830's, Allentown developed a robust industrial base in heavy manufacturing, iron processing, beer brewing, silk textiles, and transportation.

The original plan for the town was comprised of forty-two city blocks laid out in a conventional grid iron. These blocks, which establish the armature of the current



downtown and adjacent historic neighborhoods, are typically rectangular, 500 feet along the north-south axis and 250 feet along the east-west axis. In recent years, the original pattern has been modified in the downtown area, where some larger developments have required the consolidation of two smaller blocks into larger (two block-sized) development areas.

The quality and scale of the architecture of today's downtown reflects its importance as a regional center. Long renowned as a retail core anchored by several large department stores, downtown also was an important place for business, for government, and for culture, each contributing significant buildings to the physical fabric of the central business district. The city's architecture represents every important American architectural movement from colonial/ Federalist to contemporary modernism. Among the downtown's many surviving architectural landmarks are the 1896 Central Market Hall/Symphony Hall (Palladian Classical-revival); the Allentown Art Museum (a Neo-classical adaptive reuse of the First 1902 Presbyterian Church and its Robert Venturi Post-modern addition); the 1934 Classical Moderne Allentown Post Office and the 1899 Centre Square and Soldiers & Sailors Monument.

Hamilton Street has excellent urban qualities. Its 70-72 foot clear space between facing buildings, with buildings ranging in height from two stories to ten stories and taller, creates a strong sense of space, a key factor in creating inviting public spaces and high real estate values. The buildings are typically aligned to the sidewalk. There are notable exceptions to this rule: buildings with intentional landmark qualities, like

the Zion Reformed United Church and the historic County Courthouse; and buildings that are set back to create plazas or arcades along the street, like the new PPL Building/ Plaza and the new Butz Building arcade.

The Hamilton Street Mall area (6th to 10th Streets) has wide sidewalks that range between 28 feet at the street intersections and midblock pedestrian crossings and 16 feet between the crossings where the vehicle areas of the street widens to accommodate parallel parking. The vehicle areas of the street are typically two lanes with two-way traffic along Hamilton Street from Center Square north and two lanes of one-way traffic from Center Square south, widening to three travel lanes as it extends north and south from this area. Within the Mall, landscaping is composed of deciduous trees at 40 foot centers between the street intersections and tighter clusters of trees near the street corners, creating an effective shade canopy for pedestrians. The sidewalk paving in this area is also distinct from the rest of downtown, with a combination of brick and concrete that establishes a repeating pattern lending scale and pattern to the streetscape.

## CENTRE SQUARE

Laid out by William Allen in 1762 as part of the original town plan, Centre Square occupies a unique position in the urban fabric of downtown. The square is approximately 150 feet wide by 300 feet long and is located at the crossing of Hamilton Street and 7th Street, the historic arterials connecting downtown to the larger Lehigh Valley. Like most squares in early American communities, the square once served as



*Among some of Centre Square's present liabilities are its uninteresting and uninviting street furniture, including the concrete benches and tables, trash receptacles, information kiosks and occasionally overwhelming placement of signs and directional signals. A handsome and historic focal point for the center, the monument is inaccessible on many levels.*

a market place and outdoor assembly area. In 1899, the Soldiers and Sailors Monument, the neo-classical sculpture occupying the center of the square, was dedicated to the 47th Regiment of the Pennsylvania Volunteers who served the Union during the Civil War. Over the last century, Centre Square has become increasingly influenced in form and activity by the automobile. Redesigned in 1987 as part of the Hamilton Mall retrofit, the square is now largely a vehicular nexus and a pedestrian transition area.

Centre Square today is anchored by buildings ranging in height between two

stories to ten stories and of various ages and architectural styles. Within the last several decades, the uses along its edges have changed, with financial institutions replacing retail stores on its east and west sides. The space offers few amenities, and does not appear to be much used outside of special community events.

Centre Square is not the only downtown public open space. Other significant urban open spaces are the Art Park (120 foot by 240 foot) south of the Baum Art Center sandwiched between Symphony Hall and the Allentown Art Museum; the Art Walk, and the plaza at the PPL Center.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HAMILTON STREET

**Expand Old Allentown and/or Fairground districts to include historic areas adjacent to the downtown that are currently unprotected.** The preservation and revitalization of these adjacent neighborhoods is important to ensuring the protection of development investments in the downtown area and to create vital linkages to the residential areas adjacent to the central business district. By expanding these areas,



the individual historic properties within the larger zone will be better protected from inappropriate modifications to or destruction of their character defining features; will benefit from historic preservation tax credits and other preservation/rehabilitation incentives as discussed in other sections of this chapter; and can enjoy the attention of local preservation advocacy initiatives and events. See map.

**Extend the existing Hamilton Street streetscape to 4th Street.** The current streetscape of the so-called Government District is of lesser quality and pedestrian amenity than the rest of the Hamilton Street Mall area. The city should improve streetscape within this area, matching sidewalk widths, hardscape, street lighting, landscaping and traffic calming strategies of the current Hamilton Street between 6th and 10th Streets.

**Extend the streetscape design within and surrounding the new downtown Arts Park to better unify the Arts District.** As one of the identified and imageable sub-districts within the downtown, the Arts District should be unified as a distinct district through unique streetscape, building scale and architectural design. As with the rest of downtown, the Arts District should be a mix of uses and should include arts related institutions and businesses (museums, theatres, galleries, art and music supply, etc) and arts-related commercial (restaurants, bars, studio space); and specialized housing (studio-style live-work), as well as uses necessary for vibrant and sustainable neighborhood (markets, coffee shops, local services, etc.) The scale of this area should reflect its location as a transition zone between the more intensive uses

on Hamilton Street and the scale of the residential neighborhoods immediately north of the Arts District. The streetscape of the new Arts Park should be used as the new standard for this sub-district, whose boundaries have been recently identified in the 2004 Cultural Arts and Entertainment District Master Plan.

**Enhance the urban space of Hamilton Street by focusing on improving street level/storefront portions of buildings fronting the Street.** Hamilton Street has a fairly intact street wall comprised of good quality historic architecture. The city should continue (and expand) its program for architectural rehabilitation, emphasizing storefront replacements that are compatible with the historic fabric of the respective buildings.

**Continue to implement (and expand as required) design standards for infill buildings and historically noncontributing existing buildings.** These buildings reinforce visual coherence, formal continuity and pedestrian attractiveness of Hamilton Street, enhance the connections to the adjacent neighborhoods, improve the spatial quality and functionality of Center Square, and promote the imageability of the other sub-districts of the downtown. Allentown has recently implemented design guidelines for the Hamilton Street Overlay, an important tool in improving the visual appearance of buildings within the overlay area.

The city should expand these standards to include other areas in the downtown in a manner that reinforces the unique urban qualities of each sub-district within the

downtown. This may require the creation of additional overlays and standards for the Hamilton Street area between 10th and 12th Streets; the “Arts District”; and the north-south connecting corridors (5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th Streets). The city, its economic development team, and design/preservation review board(s) should work closely with developers, architects, and property owners to ensure high quality building rehab and infill. As Allentown’s Main Street, Hamilton Street should be the first priority in enhancing the visual appearance of the buildings that front it. The next highest priority should be the primary north-south routes to Hamilton Street, which include 7th Street, 5th Street, 8th Street and 6th Street. These standards should address at a minimum:

- First floor transparency, including discouraging use of security shutters.
- Shade and weather protection for pedestrians through the development of well-designed awnings, marquees and arcades.
- Articulation of building surfaces, through careful use of material textures, colors, relief, etc.
- Use of public art.
- Incorporation of effective and attractive building lighting (see Public Art Master Plan section below).
- Appropriate utilization of the adjacent public right-of-ways for café space, outdoor retail, etc. to create “gentle nudging” within the public realm.

The design standards should also address building alignment and height in order to achieve a desirable ratio of height-to-width within the downtown’s public right-of-ways and to ensure that intersections are anchored with buildings of appropriate height.

Based on the existing width of the street right-of-way, buildings less than three stories should be discouraged. Although building setbacks are generally discouraged, any future public plazas should be designed with building enclosures that offer a sense of place.

Standards should also address parking design within the central business district. High concentrations of both surface and structured parking within the downtown create long street faces that are unattractive, unfriendly to pedestrians and add little to the life of the street. Until growth within the downtown requires new parking beyond what is presently needed in the east end of downtown, the city should discourage any additional structured or surface parking in the downtown. This may require changes to the ordinances to reduce or waive parking requirements within the CBD and deny parking uses on land cleared as a result of demolition of a building.

The city should also work with current parking lot owners to arrive at strategies to buffer parking lots that are adjacent to public sidewalks, plazas, parks, and residences with landscaping or other appropriate screening and that parking structures facing public streets or other spaces be architecturally treated, employ living walls and/or enhanced through public art. (see parking pictures)

When additional parking becomes necessary, the city should require that the parking is either below grade or sited to the interior of the block and effectively screened by either new or existing development.



*Top left: An example of a simple planted wall on a government parking structure in Maryland. The stainless steel armature can be retrofitted on existing structures along with planting medium and drip irrigation.*



*The new Santa Monica Civic Center garage, by Moore Ruble and Yudell, provides 900 parking spaces and is the first LEED-certified parking structure in the world. Its skin utilizes a steel framework holding colored glass panels that shade the structure and create an everchanging pattern of form and color to passing pedestrians and motorists.*



*A "planted" parking structure located in downtown Miami, by Arquitectonica, shows retail space at street level and a grove of tree on it highest parking deck, shading cars and reducing heat island affect.*



Janet Echelman's "Her Secrete is Patience" in Phoenix, AZ

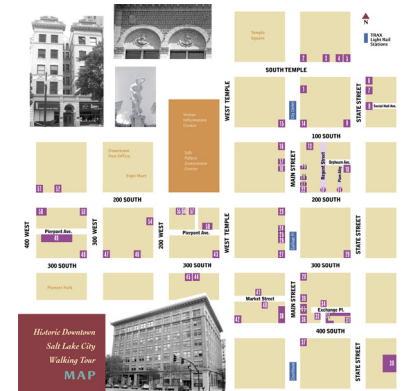
temporary art installations (which could be administered by the Allentown Arts Commission or a formally created public arts board). A highly successful temporary public art space design is currently be installed in Salt Lake City. Implemented by the Utah Chapter of the AIA, the Capital Theatre "Fluid Adagio" project is a small infill public art initiative on the site of the future Ballet West studio expansion to the historic Capitol Theatre that has elicited entries from all over the world.

**Revise sign ordinances to ensure the use of well-designed, area-specific and pedestrian-oriented signs.** Appropriately scaled and attractive signs increase awareness of the business and activities of a community and provide a sense

**Encourage temporary use of vacant lots.** Until vacant lots are filled in, the city should encourage the creation of temporary uses that make them more attractive and productive areas of the downtown. Desirable temporary uses are community gardens (these could be administered by any of the several community garden organizations already existing in the Lehigh Valley area) and

of vitality to the downtown area. The city should develop sign ordinances that encourage the use of signs that enhance rather than distract from the architecture of the downtown and Hamilton Street. Sign standards should address the careful application of night-time lighting. Backlit or plastic box signs or vinyl signage should not be permitted.

**Create comprehensive, well-designed and unified downtown wayfinding and identity signage.** As part of upgrading the image of downtown, the city should develop an enhanced wayfinding system. This system should include well-designed directional signage as well as downtown identity signs to educate both residents and visitors of the unique history and/or cultural opportunities of Allentown. This system should also include building provenance plaques for individual building sites that could be part of downtown walking tour and information kiosks for event posters.



Salt Lake City's Walking Tour Stop Sign Number 39--one of nearly sixty information signs in front of downtown's most significant historic structures.

**Rehabilitate the downtown streetscape between 4th and 10th.** Although nearly 30 years old, the Hamilton Street streetscape remains largely visually appealing. However, the city should consider a more effective approach to the maintenance



*As the east gateway to the downtown, this section of Hamilton Street (between 4th and 6th Street) should be redesigned to complement the Hamilton Street streetscape from 6th to 10th, emphasizing such pedestrian-friendly features and wide sidewalks, landscaping, pedestrian-scaled lighting, and public art.*

Allentown district boundaries to include this section of Hamilton Street and develop specific design standards to reinforce it this area as a character district distinct from the rest of downtown. A new streetscape design in this two block area should also be considered to reflect the more intimate scale of this neighborhood center and highly encourage pedestrian activity. This design should consider:

of the sidewalk and evaluate replacement of the street lighting with more energy efficient and visually appropriate fixtures.

### **Enhance the streetscape between 10th to 12th Hamilton Street.**

This two block section of Hamilton Street has character distinct from the more “downtown” feel of Hamilton Street from 10th Street east. The architecture transitions rapidly to small two- and three- story commercial blocks and the nature of the businesses and services are more clearly local in nature. While already serving to some degree as the neighborhood commercial center for the Old Allentown district, this role should be reinforced. The city should consider expanding the Old

- Adding mid-block crosswalks to both encourage and reflect the pedestrian nature of this commercial neighborhood
- Increasing traffic calming through bulb-outs and/or raised tables at intersections and mid-block crossings
- Adding landscaped medians to alter the scale of the street (this would require eliminating one lane of traffic)
- Changing street lighting from current cobra-head style fixtures to pedestrian-scaled fixtures compatible with the historic character of the area or creating unique street lighting elements like the High Street lighting arches that frame Columbus, Ohio’s Short North District
- Creating well-designed seating areas, neighborhood information kiosks, historic interpretive markers, etc. at appropriate locations
- Adding pedestrian-oriented public art
- Develop a downtown walking tour with building markers at interesting and/or historic buildings or sites

**Enhance the Artswalk.** Artswalk represents a positive and creative approach to developing inner-block pedestrian connections between Hamilton Street and the arts district forming around the Baum School, Symphony Hall and the Art Museum. The city should look at refining the physical space of the walk through additional public art, by adding more permeable edges to the building walls fronting the walk, and by integrating paving materials from the connected streetscapes along Hamilton Street and the arts district. It is important with both existing and future urban pathways that the design of the street/path walls conform to the urban design principles and strategies outlined in the infill design standards recommendation above.



*Top left: These sculptures enhance the median areas of Salt Lake City's Broadway Avenue Arts District and pay playful homage to local such local cultural icons as Utah's beehive.*

*Top right: "Dance Steps" is an interactive art piece by Seattle's Jack Mackie, providing brass numbered foot prints for various dance steps like the "Foxtrot Weave".*

*Bottom right: Another example of interactive artwork is this treasure hunt in downtown Oswego, where pedestrians are challenged to find the Oswego "Star".*

**Create a downtown public arts master plan and program.** Public art is a vitally important component of community identity and cultural tourism development. The city should engage a public art master plan consultant to create a plan and program for comprehensive deployment of public art along Hamilton Street, its major plazas, the Arts District and the gateways into the downtown. The plan should include the development of major themes that build on the assets of the community; identify sites for public art installations; and create an implementation process for funding, artists selection, installation and ongoing maintenance. The city should also identify the organization responsible for the administration of the plan and program. This may include an expansion of the role of an existing entity like the Allentown Arts Commission or the creation of a new entity specifically designed to implement this program.

The master plan should also address approaches for using public art to create a distinct downtown environment. Although Allentown already has a variety of art within the public realm ranging from artist-designed street furniture to traditional memorials like the Soldiers & Sailors Monument in Center Square, the city should also consider ways of engaging the entire physical space of downtown as public art. “Light” as a unifying theme for this approach (an idea that emerged during the team’s meeting with the Eastern Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Institute of Architects) is one example of how to use art as a new way of seeing Allentown’s downtown. This concept already has one outstanding precedent: the illuminated Art Deco crown of the historic PPL Tower, a beacon to Lehigh Valley. Within a planned process, the



*The PPL Tower demonstrates the effectiveness of traditional building lighting in creating a community beacon. Another approach is using the building skin to create backlit abstract art. The facade of the new Gucci Building, top left, is a glass and light art piece by James Carpenter.*

city could facilitate other creative approaches to illuminating both existing and new architecture (see examples) as well as to create discrete pieces of public art in which light plays a substantial role in form giving.

Allentown’s history and setting are rich in potential public art concepts or themes, including the American Revolution, the Liberty Bell, the history of the Lenni Lenape, the local Pennsylvania German heritage; the area’s industrial heritage, the city’s ethnic diversity; and the Lehigh River riparian habitat and watershed.



*Top left: Fort Worth's Avenue of Light by artist Cliff Garten is a series of six 36-foot tall illuminated towers along Lancaster Avenue, powered by energy efficient LED lights.*

*Bottom right and left: These two public art installations demonstrate how even mundane building types---in this case, parking structures---can become intriguing additions to the public environment through the addition of colored lighting.*



**Encourage community-wide sustainable urban ecology, public health, energy efficiency, and quality of life initiatives.** Sustainability strategies will benefit Allentown because they save money and make the city a better place to live, work and play. These strategies include: High performance infrastructure (multimodal street design, bioengineered stormwater management systems, heat island mitigation, etc.); enhanced energy and life-cycle efficiency of municipal buildings; flexible zoning and building codes to allow site-specific alternative energy sources (photovoltaics, wind power, ground source); planning policies and urban design measures that decrease citizen and visitor reliance on the automobile (safe, walkable street design and appropriate mix of uses); and incentives to increase energy efficiency of homes and businesses.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CENTRE SQUARE

### *Short-term recommendations*

The city should prioritize minor repairs and enhancements to upgrade the current condition of the Centre Square while formulating long term plans for major improvements to this important public space. These near term recommendations, which could be completed within one year, are:

- Repairing or replacing the damaged or missing portions of the pavement.
- Replacing the street furniture with either new and more appropriately designed fixed furniture or movable tables and chairs designed for public outdoor spaces.
- Relocating signage obscuring the Soldier and Sailors Monument
- Installing lighting to effectively illuminate the statue at the top of the monument.
- Implementing a comprehensive programming plan and schedule to ensure the most effective and coordinated use of all the downtown public spaces (Art Park, PPL street plaza, Art Walk, etc.) relative to the community and downtown cultural and economic redevelopment objectives. This should be implemented by either the arts commission or another art planning entity.



*Top: As shown by this historic postcard, Centre Square once was a center for a variety of uses that engage the square along its edges. As the heart of the community, Centre Square should be revitalized as the market and the living room for Allentown. Cafes and bistros like the ones above would transform the square into a regional destination and tourist stop.*

### ***Long Term Recommendations***

As the physical center of downtown and the larger community, Centre Square should also be a vital social and cultural center for the city. The structure of the space is very good. The sense of enclosure provided by the existing architecture is excellent and several of the buildings facing into the square are architecturally distinctive and provide an appropriate level of civic presence. The memorial creates an effective focal point to the space. Other conditions, however, detract from its ability to be more engaging on several levels. These include the lack of appropriate uses along its perimeter, the lack of connectivity between the fronting buildings and the square, the lack of spaces within the square that invite sitting, waiting, talking; and the lack of regularly programmed activities in the space (Saturday markets, café's, food/coffee vendors, brown bag concerts, etc.) that would draw people to the space as a destination.

*The Short North is a Columbus, Ohio mixed-use neighborhood spanning High Street, Columbus' Main Street that stretches between downtown and Ohio State University. Known for its pubs, galleries, bistros, and coffee shops, the street is visually differentiated from the rest of High Street by its pedestrian-scaled streetscape and its seventeen unique steel arches that span the street for about four blocks of the district.*

*The partial image shows a treatment for the Tenth 2 Twelfth section of Hamilton Street.*



The potential redesign of Centre Square affords the opportunity to address those deficiencies and enhance the community's image both to its residents as well as to the regional community. The city should consider a design process that engages the broader community using one of the following approaches:

- A community charrette. A locally-based community charrette could be administered by the Eastern Pennsylvania Chapter of the AIA (in partnership with other planning entities like APA or ASLA) as a follow-up to the Allentown AIA SDAT. The advantages of this approach include creating an opportunity for local architects and environmental planners to demonstrate their capabilities to solve urban planning and design capabilities and, at the same time, to build capacity within the local design community to implement large-scale planning initiative.
- A design competition. A Centre Square design competition could create enormous energy within the community. Design competitions for public spaces similar to Centre Square have not only fomented international attention but have helped to create highly respected and successful public space designs.

Whichever approach is used, the process should address the following:

- Develop ways to spatially unify Centre Square, e.g., consider changing the street texture in this area or create a speed table at the crosswalks and the area enclosed by the crosswalks (a speed table is where the street is raised to the level of the sidewalks and are often paved in materials that complement the pedestrian areas).
- Utilize the pedestrian areas of the Square more effectively. Consider placement of permanent retail kiosks within the Square to enliven the space and create a destination. These kiosks could sell coffee, newspapers/magazines, small food items, or flowers. One could also be used for visitor information.
- Provide better seating areas that encourage conversation, eating, etc.
- Investigate alternative traffic movements through square, including two-way on west side of Hamilton
- Incorporate appropriate interpretation of the historic site and monument.
- Change uses around perimeter to allow cafes, market spaces, performance venues, etc.



*Brussel's "The Sequence" by public artist Arne Quinze is an example of an urban environmental art installation that redefines its space. A competition for the redesign of Centre Square or a vacant lot in the downtown could consider an approach similar to this.*

*Permanent retail kiosks could be placed in the corners of the square to help visual anchor the space and provide activity destinations within the space. The kiosks could be used for the sale of food, coffee, magazines, flowers, or art.*



*Smaller kiosks could be situated at the corners of the intersection to provide resident and visitor information in the pedestrian path. Like the retail kiosks, these could be artist-designed pieces or elements within a larger spatial solution for the square.*



Thomas Heatherwick of Heatherwick Studio has designed a series of brass newspaper kiosks called "Paperhouse" that become kinetic sculpture within the streetscape. Kiosks similar to these could be used in Centre Square to encourage pedestrians to "stay awhile".



A permanent café kiosk on the main street of downtown Santa Cruz, which specializes in "healthy and locally grown foods", is a major attraction to the both downtown workers and tourists.

# **ISSUE 5: LINKING DESTINATIONS**

**Christian Luz**

## BACKGROUND

The transportation and parking system in Allentown is robust and, as a whole, operates well given the current demands on the system and available roadway capacity. The following provides a brief description of the various components of the transportation and parking system followed by an assessment of the operations, a long-term vision and short, mid and long-term recommendations for improvement. The study area is bisected east to west by Hamilton Street from 4th Street to 12th Street, respectively. The approximate north and south boundary of Downtown Allentown (the study area) is about one block north and south of Hamilton Street between Linden Street to the north and Walnut Street to the south.

## ASSESSMENT

Within the study area are at least four components of the transportation system including the roadways, parking, transit and non-motorized transportation (pedestrians and bicycles). These four systems are addressed in the following sections.

### *Roadways*

There are two major routes into the downtown, Interstate 78 (I-78) from the south and State Route 22 (SR 22) from the north. From those two primary routes, there are five separate linkages into the downtown comprised of South Pike Avenue or Lehigh Street from I-78, 15th Street or 7th Street (County Trunk 145), or American Parkway from SR 22. Locally there are two additional routes connecting to Hamilton Street and downtown including Cedar Crest Boulevard and Hanover Avenue. Upon arrival

from the west on Hamilton Street, the traffic operation is two-way comprised of one lane westbound and two lanes eastbound with on-street parking on both sides. Between 11th and 6th Streets, the traffic operation on Hamilton Street changes to one-way eastbound in a two-lane roadway section with on-street parking on both sides. From 6th Street to 4th Street, Hamilton reverts to two-way traffic operation comprised of one lane westbound and two lanes eastbound with on-street parking on both sides.



Linden Street (County Trunk 222) is a westbound two-lane roadway with parking on both sides. Walnut Street is a two-way street west of 10th Street where it becomes one-way eastbound to 14th Street.

The north/south roadway system is grid like in orientation and includes several one-way pairs most notably 10th and 9th Streets, running northbound and southbound, respectively and 8th (SR 2055) and 7th Streets, also running northbound



and southbound, respectively. Seventh Street is a three-lane County roadway where it intersects Hamilton Street at Center Square. The final significant one-way pair is comprised of 6th Street northbound and 5th Street southbound. There are multiple one- and two-way local streets providing local access, alleyway linkages throughout the study area as well.



There are a series of traffic signals along Hamilton Street from 12th Street to 4th Street that control the flow of traffic. Common complaints from the public refer to the perception that the traffic signals do not appear to be coordinated for the flow of traffic on Hamilton Street and as a result can create congestion and significant queuing on Hamilton Street.



Due to the multiple entryways into the downtown, combined with the one-way street system, negotiating the streets of downtown can be confusing to both infrequent and frequent visitors. There is also a noticeable lack of consistent signage and/or wayfinding from either I-78 or SR 22 to assist drivers and a lack of arrival clues and signalization exacerbate the ability to logically circulate throughout the downtown once one arrives.

Traffic flow is further hampered by trucks that stop in the travel lanes for loading or unloading of supplies to merchants and businesses. This, along with frequent bus stop locations reduces the travel lanes to one and creates congestion that significantly affects the smooth flow of traffic through the Hamilton Street corridor.

### ***Parking***

The public parking system is managed, supervised and administered by the Allentown Parking Authority (APA). In total APA has 33 off-street facilities, of which five garages are located in the study area and provide 2,689 spaces plus 13 surface lots in the study area that provide another 1,176 spaces for a total of 3,865 spaces. There are another few hundred spaces located on-street along Hamilton and the intersecting streets within the study area. Rates run from \$55 to \$65/month for off-street parking permits and \$20/year for neighborhood residential parking permits. The APA also offers a range of programs to engage local businesses, employees and shoppers and educate them more about parking in the APA facilities. For example, free parking in the Spiral Deck garage is offered after five pm on weekdays.



There is an excess of off-street parking available with about 60 percent of the available permit spaces sold, leaving about 40 percent available for new employees. Informal surveys taken by the consultant indicate that the on-street parking is relatively stable at about 65 percent occupancy throughout the study area. There are a few block faces within the study area, such from 8th to 9th Streets, where the parking becomes full for short periods; but overall, empty parking spaces are easily found throughout the downtown.

Several of the APA's parking garages are not user-friendly, including the Spiral Deck, Linden Deck and Walnut Deck garages. These three garages are relatively dark, as well as confusing and difficult for the infrequent parker to use. The Government Deck and

Transportation Center garages have been constructed more recently (2007) and are more welcoming to users than the Spiral, Linden and Walnut Deck garages. The Transportation Center is the easiest garage to use and incorporates an intermodal transportation center, a convenience store and a Dunkin Donuts. The Center is located at 6th and Linden Street near the Allentown Art Museum, Baum School of Art and Allentown Symphony Hall and is a self-parking facility that does not require an attendant.

Most of the off-street parking is located one or two blocks off Hamilton Street but the one-way street system in conjunction with poor and inconsistent signage makes it difficult for the drivers to easily locate and use the facilities.





PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION: MEETING THE  
NEEDS OF A GROWING LEHIGH VALLEY

## Summary Brochure



**Gannett Fleming**  
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**BreconHill**  
CONSULTING

### **Transit**

The Lehigh and Northampton Transportation Authority (LANTA) provides transit service in the downtown core area along Hamilton Street. LANTA operates the Metro system, a network of 30 fixed bus routes throughout Lehigh Valley providing daily, later evening, Saturday and Sunday services. Ridership has increased over 75 percent since 1997 and about 17 percent over the past few years. LANTA developed a service plan overview that includes a Core Service Area Improvement Plan that contains a series of recommendations designed to enhance and improve the LANTA fixed routes serving the core areas. These upgrades include service levels, headways hours of operation and priority corridors.

Hamilton Street is a Trunk Corridor, the highest priority designation and critical to the entire system. After the Transportation Center was constructed, most of the transfers that occur along Hamilton Street were relocated to the

Transportation Center, reducing the amount of dwell time on the street. This has reduced congestion along Hamilton, but bus stops still continue to slow traffic and cause congestion. The LANTA has additional recommendations planned that will be addressed in a later section of this chapter.

### **Non-motorized Transportation**

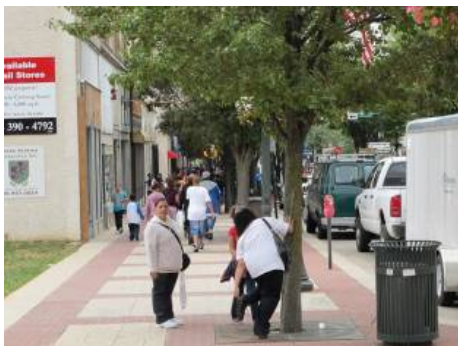
The non-motorized transportation system consists of pedestrian sidewalks and bicycle paths/routes. The City has a bicycle plan (Trailways Plan) that is being implemented on Walnut and Linden Streets. Currently, there is little bike traffic on Hamilton Street and may, in part, be due to the fact that there are few bicycle storage facilities (bike racks) located in the parkway or sidewalks. The sidewalks are in generally poor condition and are often non-compliant with the American with Disabilities Act (ADA). Confusing and inconsistent audible traffic signals are installed at the west end of the corridor. Additionally, there are several intersections that incorporate an "all red" signal phase for pedestrian crossing, while other intersections incorporate pedestrian crossing



phases which appear nonconforming and promote unsafe and illegal pedestrian crossings at the intersection crosswalks.

## VISION

The transportation system should not act as a barrier to economic development. To prevent this from happening, traffic must be able to circulate with acceptable levels of congestion. The infrequent driving visitor must be able to locate their destination and a parking space that provides a safe and secure experience within a reasonable walking distance to their destination. Once the driver becomes a pedestrian, the pedestrian route must be clear of obstructions and provide a safe and secure environment to walk from the parking facility to one's destination. Downtown employees must be



able to take transit, park a bicycle or an auto in a secure location, and walk along a secure route to their destination.

Ideally, the street system would be two-way traffic with on-street parking where feasible and include a coordinated wayfinding and parking signing program. Traffic flow would be facilitated by a coordinated signal progression plan so that congestion was minimized. Transit



would be provided in a manner that does not inhibit traffic flow and provides an amenity to those using the service.

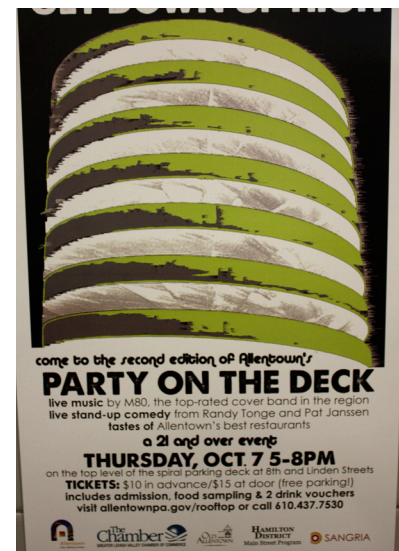
## Short Term Recommendations (1-3 years)

### Roadways

- Implement a traffic study to determine the optimal signal timing necessary to reduce congestion and maintain smooth traffic flow along Hamilton Street.
- Conduct a loading zone study to determine if on-street loading zones can be moved to service locations on adjacent block faces or in alleyways instead of on Hamilton Street. If loading zones cannot be created on adjacent block faces or in alleyways, ensure sufficient curb space is available for loading to occur without blocking travel lanes or consider limiting the hours to which loading can occur to off-peak commute periods.
- Conduct a wayfinding study to design and implement a series of directional signs to create a sense of arrival at entry points and to identify key destinations and locations of visitor parking facilities.

### Parking

- Implement a signing program, as part of the wayfinding program, to globally and uniformly address and direct visitors to existing off-street parking facilities.
- Improve the lighting and customer experience within the Spiral, Linden and Walnut Deck garages.



- If necessary, create additional loading zones at the curb side on block faces where needed and feasible.

### **Transit**

- According to LANTA, evening bus service will be enhanced, routes will be retimed to create more reliable running times and additional passenger amenities, such as shelters and greater frequency of buses will be implemented.
- In addition, traffic engineering improvements such as signal retiming will be implemented.

### **Non-motorized Transportation**

- Specific bicycle routes on Hamilton Street are not recommended although bicycle traffic should continue to be permitted in the street.
- Bicycle storage facilities (bike racks) should be located in convenient areas throughout the Hamilton Street corridor to promote bicycling.
- Sidewalks should be repaired and improved to ADA standards.
- Traffic signal pedestrian phases should be uniform along Hamilton Street and allow for safe and convenient pedestrian movement across streets.



- Evaluate a bicycle sharing program for the downtown that would make bicycles available to visitors, workers and residents for quick trips around town for a small fee. Under the plan, bicycles are



stored in specially designed stations and can be accessed with an approved credit card. Think Community Car, but with bikes.

## **Mid-range Recommendation (3-6 years)**

### **Roadways**

- Conduct a transportation study that would evaluate the feasibility of converting one or more of the existing one-way pairs, including Hamilton Street, from one-way to two-way traffic operation.

### **Parking**

- Conduct a comprehensive parking study to determine the long-term priorities for the APA, recommend operating and other policy guidelines for on- and off-street facilities, as well as, include a maintenance plan and /or a replacement or reconstruction program for the Spiral, Linden and Walnut Deck garages.

### **Transit**

- LANTA will implement additional frequency enhancements, more passenger amenities, additional traffic engineering improvements (signal retiming) and more transfer options in the Transportation Center.

- As part of the transportation study, evaluate the option of relocating transit service from Hamilton to adjacent streets to improve traffic flow.

### ***Non-motorized Transportation***

- Include improvements to the non-motorized transportation system in the traffic study to identify linkages with the Trailways Plan.
- Implement the bicycle sharing program.

## **Long-Term Recommendation (beyond 6 years)**

### ***Roadways***

- If feasible, implement the two-way traffic operations plan for Hamilton Street.

### ***Parking***

- The Spiral, Linden and Walnut Deck garages will need to be replaced or significantly reconstructed. It is recommended that they be demolished and studies performed to determine if the garages should be reconstructed as part mixed-use developments in their present location or a new site. A comprehensive parking study recommended and developed in the mid-term would identify the site options, approximate number of spaces and mixed-use opportunities.

### ***Transit***

- Depending on availability of resources and funding, LANTA will implement bus rapid transit along Hamilton Street which will increase and improve passenger service throughout the Hamilton Street trunk route.

# **ISSUE 6: CHANGING THE HOUSING MARKET**

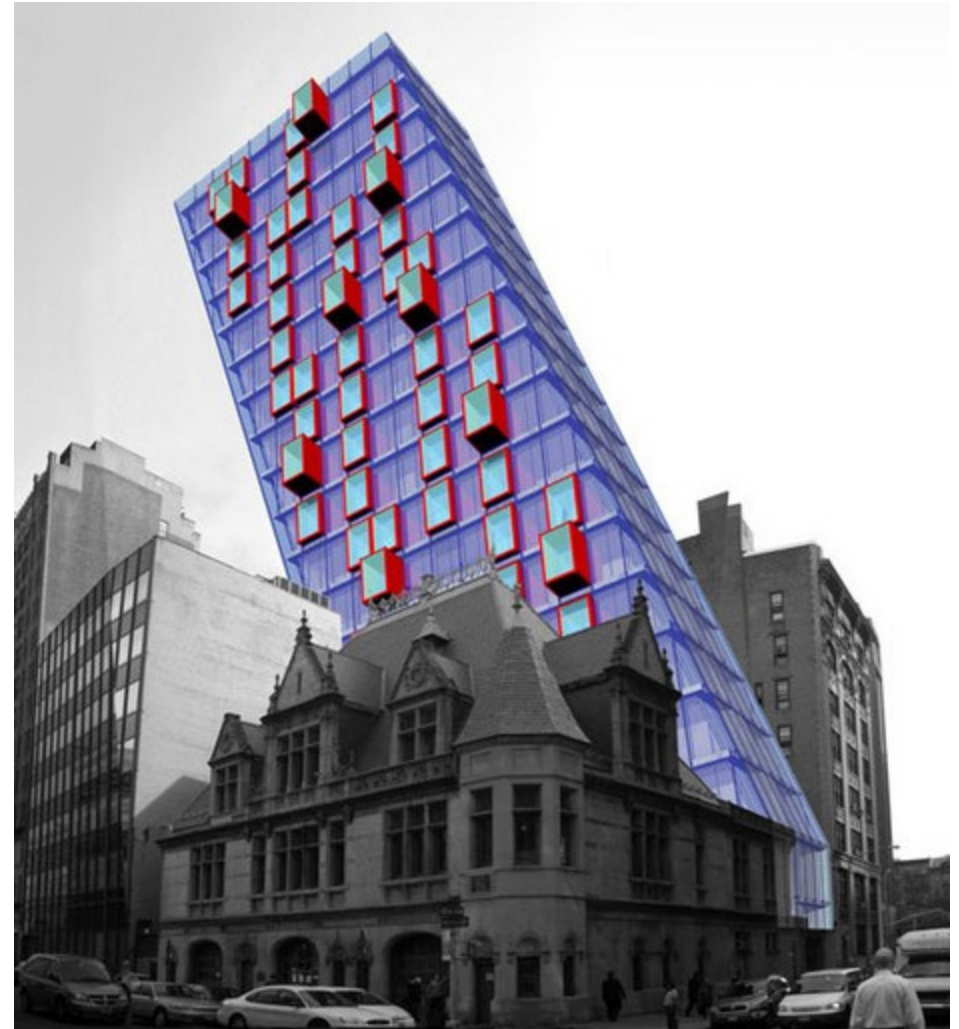
**Eve Picker**

## INTRODUCTION

Allentown is a diverse community – racially, ethnically and economically. Over the past decades, as in many other American cities, the Hispanic community has grown in the inner city, while the much of the non-Latino community has left, leading to the disinvestment and impoverishment visible in downtown Allentown today.

Downtown is poor and ringed with poverty. Housing is a tool that could help shift wealth to the downtown district. Many other American cities are experiencing a revival of downtown living. Those who move downtown want the convenience of a lifestyle that requires less driving. They love living in historic buildings that have been renovated into lofts that maintain historic charm. They want to be able to dine, shop and recreate right at their front door. This demographic can help to increase reinvestment in downtown Allentown. With careful planning they can be enticed to occupy once-vacant buildings, shop at once-vacant stores, dine at restaurants and bring downtown back to life.

We propose that the city strategically plan to change the housing market on Hamilton Avenue. Market rate housing will bring dollars to downtown. Reuse of historic buildings will provide a better housing mix and lead to a greater diversity of residences. Finally, reuse of vacant structures will increase activity on the street and draw a more diverse retail mix.



## HOW?

While Allentown's local government agencies have tried to ignite the downtown housing market, very little has been accomplished. It is expensive to build housing and to reuse historic structures in any city. If one builds in a strong market, one can hope to cover the costs with rental income or sales that are high enough. In Allentown,



however, the housing market is weak while the construction costs are still as high as anywhere else.

This is an asymmetrical equation. Currently, the Allentown market cannot generate enough cash flow to cover the costs of developing or reusing buildings, or building new ones. An environment

needs to be created that encourages and supports developers in order to jumpstart the housing market.

## WHERE SHOULD WE START?

There are many opportunities for the conversion of historic structures into housing on Hamilton Avenue. The city should seek out the projects that would return the biggest impact or the biggest bang for the buck. These are the buildings that should be redeveloped, and this is where planning must begin.

Some private redevelopment has begun on Hamilton Avenue between 8th and 9th Streets and is likely to continue, if only slowly, on its own. The city should focus on

areas that have had no investment in them as yet, but have the potential to make the greatest impact. Center Square is the perfect location. It is a critical visual entry point into downtown but is surrounded by vacant buildings. These are the most difficult and most important projects to tackle.



The city should also focus on the low hanging fruit, buildings that are ready to be redeveloped. These include:

- Buildings already owned by the city.
- Buildings that have the potential to make the biggest impact.
- Buildings clustered together to create a critical mass of redevelopment and investment.
- Buildings that can be reused to create products of the highest quality.

To this end, a first tier of housing development is proposed and should be completed within the next four years. In all, nine buildings in a variety of sizes, both historic redevelopment and new buildings, should be tackled, creating one hundred and sixteen new housing units on Hamilton Avenue. We believe that that number represents a good balance between creating the critical mass needed, and the need to avoid adding more supply than that for which demand may exist.

These projects are clustered together in three groups quite purposefully. Grouping projects together will ensure that they build upon each other. The first building will draw pioneers willing to try out living downtown. With each additional building there will be increased confidence in downtown living. Over time a larger and less pioneering market will be drawn upon. Grouping projects is also more likely to draw private investment.

As buildings are redeveloped, and the area changes, so will the value of the housing market and Hamilton Avenue. With increased value, other developers may be willing to take the risk of investing in redevelopment. The city's confidence and early pioneering work is something they can lean on.

It is important to create a critical mass of housing. It is easier to do that if we focus on several proximate locations rather than spread out over the entire downtown. The chart that follows is a summary of the projects that we are proposing the city focuses on.

	Historic Rehabilitation	New Building	Number of Units	Square Feet	Projected Cost
<b>Schoen's Building</b>	22	0	22	45,000	\$6,800,000
<b>Hamilton Row</b>	28	18	46	55,000	\$8,250,000
<b>12 N. 7 St.</b>	8	0	8	10,000	\$1,500,000
<b>First National Bank site</b>	0	40	40	55,000	\$8,100,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>165,000</b>	<b>\$24,650,000</b>

The first project on our list, The Schoen's Building, should be redeveloped into a contemporary loft building. It would yield twenty-two housing units and parking could be provided on the lot next door, along with a great first floor retail use. This building is around 45,000 square feet and will cost approximately \$6,800,000 to redevelop.



*Left: The Schoen's Building today. Right: An example of what a rehabbed Schoen's Building interior could look like.*



*709-713 Hamilton Avenue.*



*703-707 Hamilton Avenue.*

The second project on our list, Hamilton Row, consists of six small buildings in the 700 block of Hamilton Avenue. Each building has a street frontage of approximately twenty-five feet and is approximately eighty feet deep. 703, 705, 709 and 713 Hamilton Avenue are historic structures that should be renovated and redeveloped. 707 and 711 are inadequate infill buildings that should be replaced with new buildings of the same height as the historic ones.

Approximately forty-six housing units would be constructed, twenty-eight in the historic buildings and



*The historic buildings of Hamilton Row should be renovated to this high standard.*

eighteen new ones. The infill structures might provide some flexibility in the interior unit layout and could also provide for common lobby areas for several buildings. There is a large surface parking lot directly behind this row of buildings that would provide plenty of parking for new housing units. The first-floor storefronts would all be upgraded both physically and in tenancy. The total square

footage constructed for this project would be approximately 55,000 square feet at a cost of approximately \$8,250,000.



*New infill provides an opportunity to build something a little more contemporary, although it should still emulate the scale of the existing historic buildings.*

The third project on our list, 12 N 7th Street, is also part of the Hamilton Row cluster. It backs onto the same parking lot as the row on Hamilton and its redevelopment will help to stabilize the corner of 7th Street and Hamilton Avenue. This is a beautiful historic structure that should be saved. It is only approximately 10,000 square feet and may yield approximately eight housing units. We anticipate that it will cost approximately \$1,500,000 to renovate.



*12 N. 7th Street*

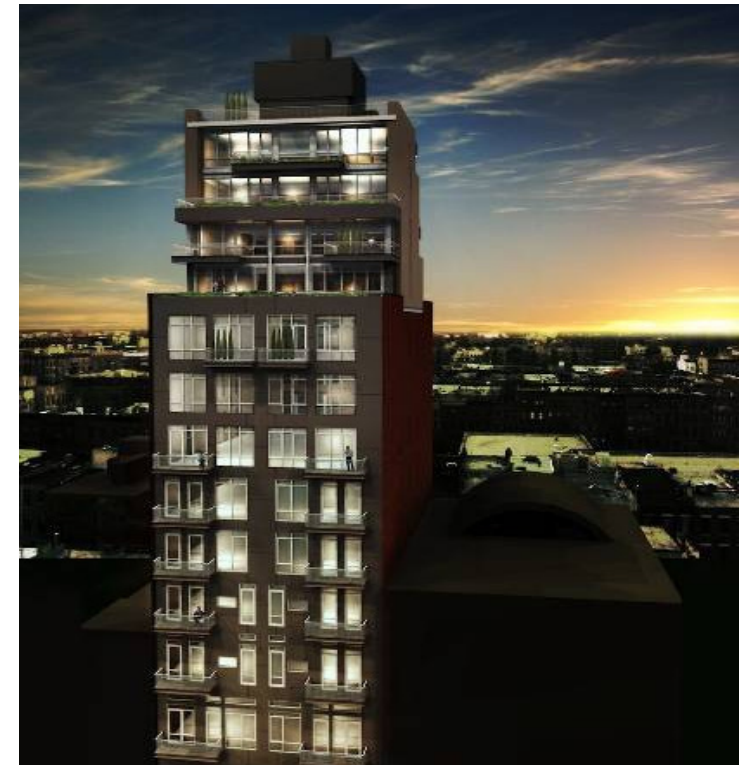


*Historic structures such as 12 N. 7th Street can be converted into stunning living spaces.*

The final project on our list, First National Bank, presents a bigger problem. The existing building's floor plate is large and unwieldy and difficult to divide into livable housing units. It sits on a prime site at the entry to downtown and presents a spectacular opportunity to build a new housing high-rise. We are proposing a building that houses at least forty new units but the appropriate scale should be investigated more thoroughly with an architect's assistance. Our proposal would be approximately 55,000 square feet and would cost approximately \$6,100,000 to build.



*First National Bank Building*



*Build a new structure at the entry to downtown on Hamilton Avenue and 7th Street*

**RUNNING THE NUMBERS: THE PROFORMA**

Approximately \$24,650,000 will be needed to build these projects. A developer would typically provide 10% - 20% of this in equity in a market rate development. One of the incentives that the city might provide to entice the developer is lowering the equity requirement to 5%. This is not an uncommon incentive for an Urban Redevelopment Authority to provide for development in a targeted neighborhood. The following costs will need to be financed:

<b>Cost of projects:</b>	<b>\$24,650,000</b>
<b>Less developer equity of 5%:</b>	<b>(\$1,232,500)</b>
<b>Amount to be financed:</b>	<b>\$23,417,500</b>

This is set against the income stream that will be generated by the new housing units and retail spaces. We are going to assume that these housing units are rentals, since condominiums are likely to be built only once the market has been established. The current market indicates that the average rental income will be approximately \$1000 per month per housing unit. Therefore the anticipated income stream from this cluster of units might look like this:

<b>Annual income generated at \$1000 per unit per month</b>	<b>\$1,392,000</b>
<b>Annual income generated from the storefronts</b>	<b>\$128,400</b>
<b>Annual gross income generated</b>	<b>\$1,520,400</b>
<b>Less 40% in operating expenses</b>	<b>(\$608,160)</b>
<b>Annual net income generated</b>	<b>\$783,840</b>

This income stream can support a loan of approximately \$9.5 million at a 5.5% interest rate, amortized over a 20 year term. We need \$23,417,500 to build our 116 residential units. Therefore our financing gap is as follows:

<b>Cost of projects</b>	<b>\$24,650,000</b>
<b>Less developer equity of 5%</b>	<b>(\$1,232,500)</b>
<b>Less amount to be financed</b>	<b>(\$9,500,000)</b>
<b>Financing gap</b>	<b>\$13,917,500</b>

This financing gap must be raised in anticipation of the developers who will tackle these projects. It must essentially be given to the developers to make their projects viable.

**FINDING THE DOLLARS**

There are many creative financing tools that can be used to make projects like these viable. A partnership between private developers and the city is essential for market changing projects to occur. Over time the market will change and these incentives can be reduced or perhaps even disappear. For now these incentives are essential for the successful revitalization of Hamilton Avenue and downtown.

The following are a few ideas for the type of incentives that might make these projects feasible. There are many more that should be investigated. Redevelopment authorities all over the country use them and federal and state funds, and perhaps philanthropic dollars, are available to support them.

**1. Give the buildings away.** Perhaps the best incentive for a developer is to take ownership of any of these buildings at no cost. With a financing gap hovering around 55%, these buildings currently have minimal, if any, market value. Finding ways to turn them over to developers who will turn them from liability to asset is essential.

Over time the city will be repaid in a variety of ways:

- Taxable buildings adding to city revenues
- Occupants who spend their money downtown
- Investment that will drive others to invest

**2. List the historic structures on the National Register.** The city can ensure historic buildings are developer ready by proactively listing them on the National Register of historic buildings. Once the building is listed, or included as part of an historic district, the developer can look for an historic tax credit partner for his/her project. Approximately \$2,120,000 could be raised for these projects through historic tax credit partnerships.



**3. Provide matching façade grants.** Our three project clusters include eleven facades. The city should create a matching façade grant program providing up to 50% of the cost of renovating historic façades. If the average cost per facade renovation is \$80,000, then our eleven facades

would require \$440,000 in funds. The city should increase the current \$200,000 pool of funds available for these projects and others.

#### **4. Create a vacant upper floor incentive program.**

Another incentive that would encourage redevelopment of historic buildings is a vacant upper floor loan program. This loan program would provide second mortgages with reduced interest rates, and perhaps even deferred payments, until the project

is stabilized. The city

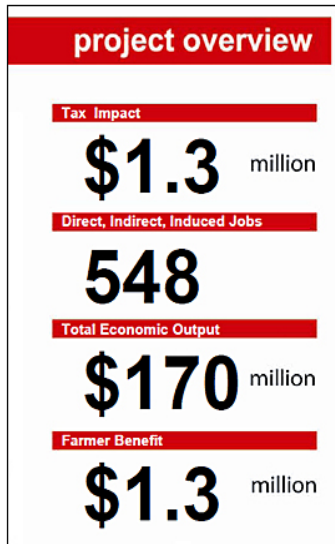
should consider creating a fund of around \$3 million and provide loans for projects that ensure that upper floors on Hamilton Avenue become occupied.

Developers would be able to borrow 50% of the project costs or \$50,000 per residential unit. Our project clusters would use approximately \$1.4 million of these funds for the Schoen's building, the Hamilton Street Row and 12 N. 7th Street.



# the VACANT UPPER FLOORS project

a study examining residential adaptive reuse in downtown buildings  
sponsored by the pittsburgh downtown living initiative, june 2004



**5. Explore using New Market Tax Credits.** The New Market Tax Credit Program (NMTCP) can raise as much as 39% of the project cost for housing projects in low income communities, such as the Hamilton Street corridor. This program permits taxpayers to receive a credit against federal income taxes for making qualified investments in designated communities. This is a competitive program but could be an excellent fit for Allentown’s proposed downtown housing projects.

**6. Create a housing trust fund.** The city should consider creating a housing trust fund, which might be able to generate resources through ground leases, with the opportunity for downstream income; state, federal and philanthropic funding. The trust fund would make loans to developers of housing in downtown Allentown at below-market rates.

**7. Facilitate parking solutions.** Developers of downtown buildings must have ample parking nearby. Parking can make or break a housing project. The city should work with developers to provide parking solutions for any proposed housing developments. The following solutions should be considered:-

- Free vacant lots

- Free parking in under-utilized parking structures
- A discounted residential parking program
- Free parking for residents at parking meters



#### INCREASE HOME OWNERSHIP IN OLD ALLENTOWN

In tandem with development of a critical mass of housing in downtown, the city should mount a strategy to increase homeownership in the Old Allentown Historic District. This strategy should have two distinct elements to it:

**Encourage qualified neighborhood renters to become home owners.** Many existing renter households in Old Allentown could become homeowners – either of the house they currently occupy or one nearby – with the right support and assistance. Most of these households already occupy single-family houses, rather than apartments. To that end, the city should ensure that good-quality homebuyer education and counseling are readily available in the area, and provide a program of small loans or grants to ensure that homes are in decent condition when they are acquired. The city may also want to explore an initiative to encourage landlords to sell single-family rental properties to qualified tenants.

**Encourage middle income households to buy and rehab houses.** There are likely to be many middle-income households in the Lehigh Valley, including many of those moving into the area from elsewhere, who might be interested in the opportunity to live in a historic district, either by buying a house in move-in condition or by rehabilitating a house in need of improvement. If this market could be tapped, it could significantly increase the level of investment – both financial and psychological – coming into the Old Allentown area.

Realizing this potential will require that the city focus on three distinct elements:

- Making the process of buying and rehabilitating houses in the neighborhood as easy as possible
- Marketing the assets of the neighborhood to the region, through a concerted, multifaceted marketing strategy
- Providing financial assistance to cover the ‘market gap’

This last item is particularly important. House prices in Old Allentown today are too low to justify major investment in rehabilitation from a standpoint of economic return; in other words, the combined cost of acquisition and rehabilitation is likely in most cases to exceed the post-rehab fair market value of the house. While some buyers do so despite this disparity, they tend to be highly committed to the community and to historic preservation. Unfortunately, such buyers tend to be few and atypical of homebuyers as a whole. In order to motivate larger numbers of buyers to buy and rehabilitate houses for owner-occupancy, the city should offer financial incentives

that compensate for this gap, such as soft second mortgages, tax abatements and/or an equity protection insurance program.

### Housing Strategy Timeline

1 to 3 Years	3 to 5 Years	5+ Years
Add 40 Downtown Units	Add 80-100 Downtown Units	Continue
Initiate Downtown/Old Allentown Marketing Campaign	Continue	Continue
Initiate Incentives for Homebuyers & Rehabbers in Downtown Allentown	Continue	Continue

# **ORGANIZING FOR SUCCESS**

**Alan Mallach**

In the preceding sections, we have offered an extensive – perhaps overly so – menu of new approaches, strategies and specific action steps that Allentown should consider as it thinks through how to regenerate its downtown area. We recognize that the city cannot do everything that might make sense – certainly not all at once. As the city considers our recommendations, therefore, we would like to suggest some ways to approach the choice of strategies and action steps.

**Choose, prioritize, focus, execute.** Allentown is already doing a lot. An energetic city government, with a dynamic redevelopment agency and a creative economic development corporation, has put a wide range of strategies and programs in place. Activities such as the city’s code enforcement initiatives have been seen as regional, even national models. We do not want to suggest that our ideas should simply be layered on top of the full range of existing activities. The city and its partners, rather, should make a concerted effort to be selective, and prioritize strategies and activities to adopt, and then execute. As strategies are considered, a series of key questions should be asked:

- What impact will it have?
- Is it the most effective strategy available to have that impact?
- Are the available resources adequate to achieve the desired impact?
- Do the city and its partners have the technical and managerial capacity to achieve success?
- Is there a long-term commitment to its success?

**Concentrate resources around strategies.** Resources are limited. Spreading resources thinly across a wide range of geographies and activities tends to pacify constituents, but lead to little sustainable or long-term change. In choosing strategies, the city should make sure that resources will be available to execute them successfully; once they have been chosen, those resources should be dedicated to them for as long a period as is realistically feasible. For those constituencies that will see fewer resources going toward their priorities as a result, a serious effort must be made to help them understand the benefits that the entire city will realize through the proposed targeted strategies.

An example might be the proposed market-rate housing ‘package’ described in the previous section. There are many buildings downtown that potentially lend themselves well to adaptive reuse for housing. Creating a critical mass in a single location in downtown is, we believe, critical for building the self-sustaining revival of downtown that should be possible. If the city scatters its resources among individual buildings in different locations – each individually worthy – that critical mass may not be achieved. Moreover, with demand for market-rate housing demand in downtown potentially modest, at least at the moment, scattered development may fragment that demand, preventing it from having a catalytic effect.

**Build ongoing partnerships.** No city government, however dedicated or capable, can do everything it would like to do; moreover, top-down public-driven efforts are likely to create short-term impacts without leading to sustained private

investment and long-term change. The only way that long-term change can be achieved is through building broad partnerships for change – involving public, private and non-profit entities – and engaging a wide range of individuals and organizations as true partners, not merely as people expected to carry out strategies dictated from above. The Seventh Street Main Street program and the Old Allentown Historical Society (check name?) are good examples where individuals outside government have exercised leadership and initiative.

This does not mean that dozens of scattered, fragmented individual initiatives should be encouraged. Efforts need to be linked and coordinated if they are to have the impact desired. What it does mean is first, that strategies should be arrived at – and coordination achieved – through cooperative, participatory processes. Those processes should not be one-shot activities designed to achieve a specific outcome or lead to a particular decision, but an ongoing effort.

**Become a community for everyone.** Lastly, Allentown faces a difficult challenge in addressing its changing population, and the effects of those changes. The growth in Allentown's Latino population – particularly around downtown – has led to main strains in the community's fabric. This is both a function of the effects of ethnic change and difference, and the fact that many of the more recent arrivals tend to be poorer than the people they have replaced. This may be contributing to an increase in rental housing, more property maintenance and code issues, and reduced ability of the population living near downtown to support the Hamilton Street

business district. The city is already actively addressing some of these issues, and we have offered some additional suggestions that may be useful.

The issue is larger, though, than coming up with strategies to address specific problems. The issue is the vision of Allentown as an inclusive community, a community for everyone. Allentown today is a very different city than it was a hundred years ago, or even twenty years ago. That reality should not only be acknowledged, it should be embraced. It is the city's future.

## TEAM ROSTER

## Allentown, PA Sustainable Design Assessment Team Members



### **ALAN MALLACH, FAICP – TEAM LEADER**

Alan Mallach is a non-resident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution in Washington, DC and a senior fellow at the National Housing Institute in Montclair, New Jersey. He is the author of many books and articles on urban planning, housing, and community development,

including *Bringing Buildings Back* and *Building a Better Urban Future: New Directions for Housing Policies in Weak Market Cities*. He served as director of housing and economic development for Trenton, N.J. from 1990 to 1999.

Alan has been involved in the design assistance program for many years, most recently leading projects in Detroit (2008), and Albany (2007).



### **MARCEL QUIMBY, FAIA, NCARB – ADAPTIVE REUSE AND PRESERVATION**

Marcel is a distinguished leader in Dallas' preservation community. Her experience ranges from complex restoration projects such as the Newton County Courthouse, which will be substantially reconstructed, to extensive historic resource nominations such as the Downtown Dallas National Register nomination.

Also in downtown Dallas, she has prepared a preservation plan for Dallas' historic Municipal Building and served as the preservation planner for the Downtown Parks

Master Plan. Her work experience includes the development of ordinances, training for Landmark Commissions and the preparation of preservation criteria for numerous cities across Texas. She is a former Landmark Commission member and has served on its Designation Committee for over twenty years, is a former Advisor to the National Trust for Historic Preservation and a former President and active member of Preservation Dallas and AIA Dallas. Her leadership skills and commitment to the community earned her Preservation Dallas' highest honor—the Dorothy Savage Award. Historic research, programming new uses and solving preservation and architectural problems are her passions.

### **CHRISTIAN LUZ, PE, AICP – TRANSPORTATION AND PARKING**

Mr. Luz is President of LMG and has extensive experience in the conduct all types of transportation planning, parking studies, financial feasibility and traffic engineering studies. Mr. Luz has conducted hundreds of transportation planning and parking

feasibility studies and one of his specialty areas includes development of financial analyses including pro formas necessary to support and/or address financing options for parking and transportation infrastructure improvements. His clients include downtown community colleges, universities, corporate and medical campuses, retail centers, shopping malls and centers, municipal economic development corporations, institutional and private sector clients, transit agencies, metropolitan planning organizations, including dozens of cities and parking authorities. His leadership,



experience and continued involvement in professional societies and research keep Mr. Luz on top of current state-of-the-art traffic and parking practices. Some of Mr. Luz's accomplishments include:

- Awarded the Bernard Dutch Award for outstanding contributions to the parking industry.
- Facilitator for "Best Practices for Campus Transportation and Parking" sponsored by the Society of College and University Planners
- Served on technical committee for the International Transportation Institute's update of the 2nd edition of "Parking Generation Manual".
- Provided parking and transportation planning expertise on two recent ULI publications, "Ten Principles for Reinventing Strip Shopping Centers" and "Ten Principles in Transit-Oriented Development" and served as a consultant for the publication "Parking Standards" recently published by the APA.
- Served as the technical advisor on preparation of an update to the Urban Land Institute's "Shared-Parking Manual" a joint effort of the International Council of Shopping Centers, Institute of Transportation Engineers and Urban land Institute publication.
- Immediate Past Chair of the NPA-Parking Consultants Council and is co-author of "Parking Geometrics" publication and the Editor-in-Chief for the 4th Edition of "The Dimensions of Parking" the "bible on parking" prepared for the NPA and Urban Land Institute.
- Provides on-going expert technical assistance to the National Main Street Center, the International Downtown Association, and the Urban Land Institute on parking and transportation issues for redeveloping commercial districts across the country.

- Past adjunct at Northwestern University Traffic Institute, and is actively involved in parking issues and research as a frequent guest lecturer for the International Parking Institute, the Urban Land Institute and the National Parking Association (NPA).
- Past Vice Chair of the Institute of Transportation Engineers Parking Council.

#### **ROBERT HERMAN, AIA, LEED AP – URBAN DESIGN**

Robert Herman is an architect with EDA, Inc., an architectural, planning and interior design firm based in Salt Lake City, Utah. He directs EDA's facility master planning, and urban design projects as well as its civic, cultural and educational facility design studios. He is chairman of EDA's sustainability group. Bob is a



past president of AIA Utah and the current president of The Utah Foundation for Architecture and the Built Environment. Most recently, he served as Utah's champion for AIA150 (the American Institute for Architect's sesquicentennial anniversary), helping to coordinate two of AIA's Blueprint for America initiatives: "Downtown Rising", a comprehensive planning project for Salt Lake City's central business and cultural district; and the Mountain Green DAT, a five day visioning charrette for a new town center for a rapidly growing northern Utah community. Additionally, he has served on the steering committee for the 1988 RUDAT in Ogden, Utah and as a local team member for the 2005 Cache Valley AIA Sustainable Design Assessment Team (SDAT).

Bob is a member of University of Utah's College of Architecture + Planning Advisory Board. An active advocate for the arts, he has also served on the Utah Symphony Board of Directors, the Ballet West Board of Trustees, the Utah Arts Council Community Arts Advisory Committee, Weber State University's Department of Visual Arts Advisory Committee, the Egyptian Theatre Foundation Board of Trustees, and the Utah Governor's Awards for the Arts Advisory Board, among others. He also is a planning commissioner for Ogden, Utah and chaired the recent update of the city's Comprehensive Plan. He has lectured locally and nationally on issues related to historic preservation, sustainable design and planning, urban planning, and public art master planning. He is a frequent lecturer and studio critic at the University of Utah's College of Architecture and Planning and has been an adjunct faculty member of Weber State University's Department of Visual Arts. Bob lives in Ogden, Utah with his wife and two sons.



#### **EVE PICKER – DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT**

Eve Picker's expertise in inner city regeneration, specifically downtowns, has earned her much recognition in the Pittsburgh community at large, and nationally as well. Pittsburghers have called her their 'folk hero'. Her professional interests lie in the

redevelopment and revitalization of the inner city and its neighborhoods. She is committed to good design and making a positive contribution to the public realm with every project.

Eve has led a varied professional career, as architect, city planner, urban designer, non-profit development specialist, real estate developer, publisher, event coordinator and economic development strategist. All of these have provided her with a rich understanding of how cities work, how deals get done, how downtowns can be revitalized, what policy needs to be in place, and the type of marketing that creates the buzz necessary for regeneration.

Eve began her career as an architect and then urban designer, working for architectural ateliers all over the world - Sydney, Vienna, New York, Princeton and Pittsburgh. After relocating to Pittsburgh, Eve became a senior urban designer at the City of Pittsburgh Planning Department at the same time launching a non-profit Community Development Corporation. There she developed their first residential project. This project was an abandoned house, gutted by fire that others were ready to tear down. While continuing her urban design and strategic planning work as a consultant, Eve began to tackle a portfolio of blighted buildings, the next always more difficult than the last.

In 1997 Eve launched no wall productions, inc. She built an entrepreneurial real estate company focused on downtown and urban neighborhoods that others have ignored, transforming neglected buildings into highly desirable loft-style residences and offices, and using that experience to provide innovative consulting and marketing within her agenda of "all things urban". In 2001 Eve launched we do property management, inc., to manage her portfolio, and to provide 3rd party management and brokerage

services as well. She had found that real estate agents were unwilling to market her edgy lofts, in edgy neighborhoods, so she set about creating a marketing plan that was guerilla-like and effective. Her occupancy rates are always close to 100%.

Eve's projects have set the stage for future residential development in Downtown Pittsburgh, have forced new policy to be adopted in areas such as building codes and parking, and have created a new marketplace. She has created a marketplace where none existed before. Pittsburgh's downtown currently has numerous larger residential projects under construction - a sign that downtown has arrived, while for years, Eve's projects were the only ones. Her projects have been recognized in numerous ways, as has she, including publication in Dwell magazine, an AIA honor award, Coolspace Locator awards, Pittsburgh magazine Superior Interior awards, SBN Magazine Pacesetter, Top 50 Pittsburgh Post-Gazette business leader and one of PA's 50 Best Women in Business. She has been asked to speak at international forums, including CEOs for Cities, Urban Land Institute and International Downtown Association, been interviewed on national radio shows, been published nationally and has served on several AIA RUDATS.



#### **JOSH BLOOM – MAIN STREET/DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION**

Josh Bloom is a principal at the Community Land Use and Economics Group (CLUE Group) is a small, specialized consulting firm that helps community leaders create vibrant downtowns. CLUE Group

works with local and state governments and nonprofit downtown revitalization organizations to develop practical and innovative downtown economic development strategies, cultivate independent businesses, identify regulatory and financial barriers to revitalization, and strengthen downtown management programs.

Josh teaches communities how to revitalize their commercial centers by first gaining an understanding of their local economies and then helping them apply that knowledge to a series of market-driven and achievable projects. He has particular interests in using research on local customers to deepen the picture painted by traditional demographic data sources, and in cultivating sustainable clusters of chain and independent businesses. Before joining the CLUE Group, Josh spent ten years as a program officer at the National Trust for Historic Preservation's National Main Street Center. While he works in communities of all sizes, he was instrumental at the Main Street Center in expanding the program's urban reach to cities that included Boston, Cleveland, St. Louis, Los Angeles and others. He is a former molecular biologist (really). And he is a trained preservation carpenter, having completed a two-year course of study at the North Bennet Street School, a highly regarded trades school in Boston.

#### **JAMES LIMA – REAL ESTATE ANALYSIS**

James Lima has extensive private and public sector experience in the planning and implementation of large-scale, mixed-use development. Prior to joining HR&A, he was Senior Director of Development in the



New York regional office of a residential REIT, AvalonBay Communities, Inc.. Prior to joining AvalonBay, Mr. Lima was NYC Mayor Michael Bloomberg's appointee as President of the Governors Island Preservation and Education Corporation (GIPEC), a public corporation overseeing the planning, redevelopment and operations of the 172-acre former military facility in New York Harbor.

Mr. Lima also served as Senior Vice President for Special Projects at the NYC Economic Development Corporation where he managed initiatives focused on growth of the City's central business districts and increasing public access to the City's waterfront. Prior work as Assistant Commissioner at the NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) and at Forest City Ratner Companies centered around new construction of affordable housing and retail development throughout NYC. Development frameworks were established for numerous large-scale projects through a highly collaborative process involving many government agencies, as well as local community and elected leaders.

Mr. Lima is Assistant Adjunct Professor in the Columbia University Master of Science in Real Estate Development Program, where he teaches "Public-Private Partnerships in Real Estate Development." James earned a B.A. from Columbia College with a major in architecture and urban studies, and stayed on at Columbia to complete the Master of Science in Real Estate Development Program. James is a member of the Board of Directors of the Columbia College Alumni Association, and serves on the Board of the planning and urban design journal "Places."

## AIA STAFF:

### ERIN SIMMONS

Erin Simmons is the Director of Design Assistance at the Center for Communities by Design at the American Institute of Architects in Washington, DC. Her primary role at the AIA is to provide process expertise, facilitation and support for the Center's Sustainable Design Assistance Team (SDAT) and Regional and Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT) programs. In this capacity, she works with AIA components, members, partner organizations and community members to provide technical design assistance to communities across the country. To date, Erin has served as staff lead on over 35 design assistance teams. Prior to joining the AIA, Erin worked as senior historic preservationist and architectural historian for an environmental and engineering firm in Georgia, where she practiced preservation planning, created historic district design guidelines and zoning ordinances, conducted historic resource surveys, and wrote property nominations for the National Register of Historic Places. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in History from Florida State University and a Master's degree in Historic Preservation from the University of Georgia.

### JOEL MILLS

Joel Mills serves as Director of the Center for Communities by Design at the American Institute of Architects. He provides process expertise, facilitation and support for the Center's Sustainable Design Assistance Team (SDAT) and Regional and Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT) programs. In this capacity, he works with AIA components, members and partner organizations to provide technical assistance to communities across the country on sustainability and urban design. His expertise is in civic health

and governance, and includes community-based technical assistance, process design, facilitation and training across a number of fields including juvenile justice reform, local government, education, family strengthening, civic media and emergency management. During the 1990s, Mr. Mills spent several years supporting international democratization initiatives by providing technical assistance to parliaments, political parties, local governments, civic and international organizations. His scope of work included constitutional design and governing systems, voter and civic education, election monitoring and administration, political party training and campaign strategy, collaborative governance, human rights and civil society capacity building. He maintains active memberships in the International Association of Facilitators (IAF), the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), and the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (NCDD). His work has been featured on ABC World News Tonight, Nightline, CNN, The Next American City, Smart City Radio, The Washington Post, and other major media sources.

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