Section Five: The Action Plan

The National Trust for Historic Preservation has been helping revive downtowns since 1977. In 1980 they created the National Main Street Center focus on the problems of downtowns. Since creating the National Main Street Center they have assisted over 850 communities throughout the United States. At the heart of their success has been their four point program for downtown revitalization. The following action plan for Hudson’s downtown and waterfront borrows heavily from the National Main Street Program’s formula for success and the consulting team’s experience in assisting over thirty northeastern communities since 1982. We consider the waterfront to be an integral part of the downtown and for purposes of this report have used the term interchangeably.

The Four Point Approach

"The key to the success of the Main Street Approach™ is its comprehensive nature. By carefully integrating all four areas into a practical downtown management strategy, the Main Street Approach™ produces fundamental change in downtown’s economic base:

Organization

Organization means building consensus and cooperation between the groups that play a role in the downtown. Many individuals and organizations have an important stake in the economic and cultural viability of the district. The Main Street Four-Point Approach™ builds a framework for sensible volunteer-driven programming and organizational structure that matches a community’s assets and potential.

Promotion

Promotion involves marketing the downtown’s unique characteristics to shoppers, investors, new businesses, tourists and others. Effective promotion creates a positive image of the downtown through retail promotional activity, special events, and ongoing programs to build positive perceptions of the district (downtown).

Design

Design contributes to improving the downtown’s image by enhancing its physical appearance—not just that of buildings, but also of street lights, window displays, parking areas, signs, sidewalks,
promotional materials, and all other elements that convey a visual message about what the downtown is and what it has to offer.

**Economic Restructuring**

Economic restructuring means strengthening the existing economic base of the downtown while diversifying it. Economic restructuring activities include helping existing downtown businesses expand, recruiting new businesses to provide a balanced mix, converting unused space into productive property, and sharpening the competitiveness of downtown businesses.”

Over the past twenty years Hudson has had a number of different organizations that have been indirectly responsible for the economic health and vitality of the downtown. What the City needs now is an organization that has a single purpose ‘revitalizing the downtown and waterfront.’ The organization should be independent, bringing together the resources of City government, the Columbia Hudson Partnership, the Hudson Community Development and Planning Agency, the Chamber of Commerce, merchants associations and the Hudson Opera House. “. . . the new organization should:

- Establish a clear focus unhindered by past history.
- Develop a consistent program, unhampered by the constraints of local politics.
- Unite a wide range of community interest in a neutral environment.
- Serve as a visible symbol of renewal, new activity and a future for the downtown.”

**Organizational Structure**

“ In some communities, the Main Street program is governed by a large board of directors, with a smaller executive committee, providing day-to-day guidance. In others, a board of advisors and directors divide responsibilities for overseeing the program. Sometimes a program will share a board with another organization. Much will depend on local priorities, on the roles existing groups play, on human and financial resources.”

Hudson has a strong nucleus of groups and individuals already working toward a better downtown and waterfront. Hudson’s board should be made up of individuals with fresh ideas, a ‘can do’ attitude and a variety of skills and experience necessary to move the downtown forward. Board members might include people in politics, planning, grant writing, finance, marketing, law, real estate, engineering, architecture, public administration, as well as, merchants, shoppers and downtown residents.

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Board of Directors

"The board has ultimate responsibility and accountability for the program. Although it may delegate daily management to the manager and committees, it cannot delegate the responsibility.

The board must always represent the larger view of why downtown revitalization is crucial for the entire community. It serves as an advocate of revitalization in order to insure a comprehensive understanding of the principles, community acceptance and involvement in the process, private-sector commitment, and ongoing private sector initiative."  

Main Street Organizational Chart

MAIN STREET PROGRAM ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

COMMUNITY

MAIN STREET PROGRAM BOARD OF ADVISORS

MAIN STREET PROGRAM BOARD OF DIRECTORS

PROGRAM MANAGER

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

DESIGN COMMITTEE
PROMOTION COMMITTEE
ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING COMMITTEE
OUTREACH COMMITTEE

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**Downtown Management**

The City should consider creating a position for a person to manage the development of the downtown and the waterfront. The person in this position's only responsibility would be to oversee the daily operations revitalizing the downtown and waterfront. "The program manager is the central coordinator of this volunteer-driven organization, overseeing daily operations, providing hands-on-involvement critical to a successful program. The manager also provides the communication link between the committees, ensuring that activities in all four points of the Main Street approach are synchronized. Like a shopping center manager, the Main Street manager initiates and coordinates a wide range of projects, from supervising promotional activities to assembling market information. Most important, though the manager's role as the full-time advocate for the downtown and as an authority on information, resources and programs related to the revitalization effort.

Like the board's responsibilities, the manager's duties evolve as the program's goals and opportunities change, but one characteristic remains constant: the manager focuses exclusively on the downtown."

Hudson's downtown manager could start out as a part-time position, perhaps funded by a combination of grants, donations and City resources. The manager's office could be located in the offices of Columbia Hudson Partnership, the Hudson Community Development and Planning Office or the Chamber of Commerce until it had the resources to afford its own space.

**Volunteer Committees**

The Hudson Opera House has been very successful in organizing a grass roots support for revitalizing the downtown and waterfront. Well over a hundred people were active in the organization's efforts to define the mission and develop a work plan. Over the past several months the committees have lost some of their momentum and in some cases disbanded. The volunteers need to be recontacted and reorganized into a committee structure similar to the one described above. The newly constituted committee or the City cannot and should not try to take on the revitalization effort by themselves . . . it is simply too much work needs to have support and stakeholder involvement from the ground up.

Using the Hudson Opera House's volunteer list and adding as many willing people as possible the Board should form the following committees to advance the planning and implementation effort.

**Outreach Committee:** This committee reaches out into the community to promote the program and pull in resources either people or money. Typical activities include: fund raising, membership development, volunteer recruitment, public relations and newsletters.

**Design Committee:** This committee could be responsible for working on revisions to the zoning ordinance, setting up a design control district, visiting other communities to see what they have done, collecting ordinances from other communities, utilizing local designers creating a “Design Assistance Team” for assisting merchants and building owners with signs, awnings, lighting,

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paint selection, facade improvements, window displays and the City with streetscape and parking improvements.

Promotion Committee: The promotion committee already has a lot to work with ... the arts festivals, fireman's parades, house tours, etc. The committee could also be involved in cooperative retail programs, cross marketing programs and niche promotions. It could sponsor retail promotions and events (running races, boating, African American food festival) for existing Warren Street merchants. Offer discount cards for shopping downtown. It could help reinforce the positive aspects of Hudson's image or create a new one. It could work with the design committee to create a logo for the downtown and waterfront. The list goes on!

Economic Restructuring Committee. The market study, that is included in this report is a starting point for the committee. The committee could begin by finding out the needs of existing businesses ...how they doing? what are their strengths? how can they get help? Next the committee could develop a program to attract new businesses, increasing the mix of goods and services. The committee could work with the promotion committee to pool economic and human resources for joint advertising campaigns and promotions. The committee with assistance from the City and existing development agencies could establish a revolving loan fund for fixing up underutilized or vacant downtown buildings. It could prepare a developer's kit outlining the opportunities of developing the waterfront. The Opera House revitalization project could be the first demonstration project.

What's Next?

- The Board of Directors seems to be in place. Make sure you have the right mix of 'doers' representing a cross section of community interests.

- The Board needs to hire a staff person to head up the revitalization of the waterfront and downtown. If this person is somebody already working in the community they should not have any 'skeletons in the closet'. If they are from the outside, check them out carefully, you need a person that is passionate, tireless, motivated and understands the needs of the downtown. Don't select a person for this position with skills or experience in one area for example: grants, engineering, marketing ...you need a generalist. There will be plenty of opportunities for people with specialized skills to get involved.

- Begin organizing your committees. The Hudson Opera House should be able to share some of its experience and contacts in getting the committees back up to speed.

- After you have re-established the organization meet with them and review the mission of the organization ... the Vision Plan is the perfect model. Bring the committees 'up to speed' on new developments, for example the development of plans for the Hudson Petroleum parcel.

- Assign each of the committees with the task of coming up with an action plan for the next 12 months. For example: the promotional might create a description of events that are already
taking place and plan ways to make them more successful and maybe try one or two new events. They might create a media relations plan. The media has been a great supporter of the project thus far. They should be kept informed - provide them with story ideas, meet with the staff reporters and tell them what your doing etc.

- Take a field trip, have the board visit another successful downtown or waterfront. Talk to the downtown organization, City officials find out how they did it.

- Start a “Sister City” relationship with another City just starting a program to revitalization its downtown. Share resources, share people and ideas.

- Invite a National Main Street Center representative from Washington to come to Hudson and speak to your committees and local media.

- Contact land trust organizations (Trust for Public Lands or Scenic Hudson) and find out what kind of assistance they can provide you with in securing waterfront land parcels.

**Now Get to Work**

"Now that you have an understanding of the elements of downtown revitalization, its time for Hudson to put the pieces together.

It’s important to know that over the past 13 years, on average four of every five Main Street programs succeed. But what constitutes success? Success can only be measured locally, based on the vision and program of work with quantified accomplishments. However, there are several common characteristics of successful revitalization programs:

- A clear vision of what the community can become, based on what local residents, businesses and government want it to be.

- A willingness to take risks and to experiment. Successful programs try new things.

- A committed group of volunteers - both leaders and workers.

- An appreciation for the role of historic preservation in downtown revitalization -- with preservation prominent in the plan of action for the organization.

- A collaborative, cooperative working relationship between a broad range of public and private sector groups and individuals, all working toward a common goal of downtown’s revitalization and economic growth.

- A commitment to the long haul because revitalization is an ongoing, long term effort.
Measuring Success

Everything the revitalization organization can be measured. Here are some ideas about measuring the success of Hudson’s revitalization committees:

Organization:

- Number of New Members
- Number of Active Volunteers
- Increase in Funds
- Numbers of Grants for Special Projects
- Number of Successfully Completed Projects for the Year

Promotion:

- Number of Attendees at Special Events (% change from previous year)
- Number of Vendors at Special Events (% change from previous year)
- Number of Participating retailers (% change from previous year)
- Dollars Spent in Participating Stores (% change from previous year)
- Column Inches and Broadcast Minutes in Press Coverage

Design:

- Number of Design Improvements During the Past Year
- Dollar amount of Design Reinvestment
- Number of Attendees at Design Workshop
- Number of Storefront Renderings Completed for Downtown Property Owners

Economic Restructuring:

- Number of Business Expansions
- Numbers of net new businesses
- Numbers of Ways that Market Data has been Distributed to Property Owners - Businesses
- Number of net new jobs

Summary

Like many other older cities, Hudson has experienced demographic changes, increased competition and disinvestment. Like other cities Hudson, is faced with problems of drugs, crime and loss of identity. The difference between Hudson and many other older cities is that it is ready to make a change. The City is at the cross roads, it has citizens, property and business owners who are committed to constructive change, it has a plan to move the downtown and waterfront into the next century. The time has come to build bridges, break down political barriers and put the great City of Hudson first!