

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In January of 1999, a five person team of graduate and undergraduate students in the Urban and Regional Planning Practicum class at Michigan State University met with representatives from the St. Johns Downtown Management Board and identified six issues of concern within downtown St. Johns. These issues were later formulated by the team into the general goal statements listed below:

- Identify demographic/economic trends impacting the Downtown Business District.
- Evaluate the retail and office uses in the Downtown Business District.
- Conduct a general comparative analysis of St. Johns and 3-4 similar communities.
- Conduct a traffic circulation analysis.
- Provide design and functional recommendations that will improve the aesthetic and functional qualities of the Downtown Business District.

Strengths and Weaknesses

One of the first steps in conducting the market analysis was to identify the strengths and weaknesses of downtown St. Johns." Some of the strengths of St. Johns include:

- Current identification of the "Mint City"
- The re-opening of the Sugar Bowl
- The construction of the new courthouse
- The level of commitment of downtown business owners and residents

Some of the weaknesses include:

- The opening of US 27
- The proximity of St. Johns to Lansing
- People living to the south of St. Johns will continue to go to Lansing to satisfy their daily and periodic needs

Comparison Communities

The Michigan cities of Greenville, Hastings, and Marshall were selected ~s comparison cities for St. Johns based upon similar socio/economic characteristics, population size, traffic circulation, and business mix. Positive attributes that have been identified from the analysis of comparison communities that could be adapted to the City of St. Johns include:

- | | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| • Improvement of alleys | • Creation of more specialty shops |
| • Improvement of rear business entrances | • Development of a theme |
| • Improvement of rear parking | • Addition of pedestrian amenities |
-

-
- Improvement of public signage to guide automobile traffic
 - Addition of green space

Retail Analysis

Once the strengths and weaknesses of St. Johns were determined the team identified the St. Johns primary and secondary trade areas. To identify the market demand for specific goods and services, data was gathered and analyzed from several sources, including a consumer survey, and the *Lifestyle Zip Code Analyst*. Additionally, data of comparison communities was collected and used to identify potential businesses for downtown St. Johns. From this analysis, a list of potential businesses for downtown St. Johns was developed.

Aesthetic/traffic Circulation Analysis

In addition to knowing which businesses are appropriate for recruiting within downtown St. Johns, the future success of the downtown will be influenced by the pedestrian environment in the district. The MSU team conducted an analysis of existing problems within downtown St. Johns and identified areas of potential improvement based on observations from other communities. Recommendations to improve the pedestrian and vehicular environment seek to establish an attractive, well-landscaped parking and alley environment that will encourage shoppers to utilize rear store entrances.

Finally, aesthetics within a downtown are important in creating a place that people want to gather for social events and increasing the day-to-day satisfaction of shoppers. Some of the recommendations that have been developed to increase the aesthetic environment of downtown St. Johns include:

- Developing design guidelines for building facades and business signs
- Creating an urban park
- Developing uniform sign age to promote the downtown
- Installing pedestrian amenities through a streetscape program
- Using landscaping to buffer industrial sites from the core downtown area
- Developing a community clean-up day

Action Agenda

A summary of all recommendations made by the MSU team is provided in an Action Agenda located at the end of the document. The Action Agenda has been developed to help St. Johns meet its goals, and facilitate the implementation of individual programs suggested in this report. The recommendations include both short-term and long-term activities.