Downtown Revitalization Strategies for Dunellen, NJ

Downtown Improvement Districts, Main Street Program, Arts & Culture

Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy
Redevelopment Studio
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- **Dunellen Community**
- **Julie Grof**, Dunellen Liaison
- **Stuart Koperweis**, Economic Development Strategists, LLC.
- **Cassandra Oliveras-Moreno**, Mason Gross School of the Arts
- **Duda Penteado**, Community Artist
Presentation Overview

1. Dunellen Overview
2. Downtown Improvement Districts
3. Main Street Program
4. Arts & Culture
5. Final Thoughts
Economic Potential in Dunellen

**Significant Enhancements:**
- New Transit Hub development to provide mixed commercial and residential space, adding significant ratable
- Improved pedestrian access from train station to downtown

**Significant Economic Potential:**
- Dunellen estimated total income spent on retail = $59,000,000
  - Groceries
  - Dining out
  - Entertainment
  - Apparel
  - Pharmaceuticals

Image Source: K. Hovnanian  
Community Outreach

Survey Background and Breakdown:
- Distributed to approximately 100 businesses in downtown area, located predominantly on North Avenue and side streets
- Bilingual (English and Spanish)

Community Newsletter:
- Newly created
Downtown Transit Hub Survey – Results

Results & Challenges:

- Parking location and accessibility
- High commercial property taxes (like many other NJ municipalities)
- Rent steadily increasing for most commercial tenants
- Substantial loss in tax base provided by Art Color Print
- “I would visit Downtown Dunellen more if...”
  - “There were a wider variety of goods and services”
  - “It were a better place to hang out and be active”
  - “It exuded a safer feeling at night”
  - “The overall aesthetic appearance was more attractive”
  - “Accessibility options were improved”
Downtown Improvement Districts (DIDs)
Overview

Authorized by the **Pedestrian Mall and Special Improvement District Act (1972)**, DIDs are an increasingly popular revitalization tool in the U.S. and NJ.

- 1,000+ across the United States
- 90 improvement districts in NJ across 69 municipalities
- 8 currently in Middlesex County
- 30% NJ residents live in a municipality with a DID

An organizing and financing tool used to **stimulate** and **maintain local economic development**, DIDs can encompass a broad interpretation of eligible activities, financing methods, and naming nomenclature.
Improvement Districts in Action

Typically, property owners within an improvement district pay an **assessment** to support the majority of the improvement district budget, in conjunction with other financing streams including grants and sponsorships.

**Eligible improvement district services in NJ include:**
- Maintenance
- Public Safety/Hospitality
- Business Development
- Marketing
- Capital Improvements
- Landscaping
- Community Service
Potential Dunellen DID

From Madison Avenue to Jefferson Avenue along North Avenue, with blocks just north and south on Washington Avenue.
DID assessment fees may be calculated using proportional assessed values of commercial, industrial, and multi-family properties in the potential improvement district.
## Traditional Financing Model

### Total Number of DID Parcels: **58**

**DID Parcel Assessment:** **$11,695,300**

**Budget Share:** **60%**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposed DID Budget</th>
<th>DID Assessment Rate</th>
<th>Average Assessment Fee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$50,000</td>
<td>0.26%</td>
<td>$517</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000</td>
<td>0.51%</td>
<td>$1,034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$200,000</td>
<td>1.03%</td>
<td>$2,068</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: New Jersey Department of Community Affairs, “Community Asset Map”, 2017
Main Street Program
Main Street Program Overview

Background:
- Established in the 1980s
- Emphasizes historic preservation
- Over 1,000 nationally; 18 in NJ

By 2017, the 1,000+ national Main Street Programs:
- Generated $4.5 billion in local reinvestment,
- Aided in opening 6,000 net new businesses,
- Created 30,000 net new jobs,
- Catalyzed the rehabilitation of 8,700 historic buildings,
- Encouraged 2.7 million volunteer hours
Main Street “Four Points” Approach to Community Revitalization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic Vitality</th>
<th>Design</th>
<th>Promotion</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leverages entrepreneurs and capital</td>
<td>Leverages the built history and place</td>
<td>Leverages the cultural history and present</td>
<td>Leverages an engaged public</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**News:**
- Proposed NJ State Historic Tax Credit
- Free Main Street Workshops in Montclair (4/23) and Red Bank (4/25)

Table Source: https://www.mainstreet.org/mainstreetamerica/theapproach
Metuchen, NJ

Metuchen is in the Main Street Program and has a DID.

- $150,000 budget (2016)
- Received matching grant from “In Our Backyards”
- $3.5 M from “Middlesex County Cultural and Arts Trust Fund” to create the Metuchen Arts District
- Adopted the Complete Streets Program
- Public Art Team organizes art projects throughout the community (ex: murals and public art displays highlighting the multiculturalism of the town)

Arts & Culture
Placemaking aims to create strong public spaces using strategies that increase interactions and strengthen connections between people in existing spaces.

**Placemaking Benefits:**
- Supports local businesses
- Builds social capital
- Empowers citizens to drive change
- Provides cultural opportunities
- Attracts investments
- Strengthens community identity
- Fosters youth engagement
- Small scale and short term

**Placemaking Resources:**
- Project for Public Spaces
- Fantastica
- Better Block Foundation
The RABP is an arts and culture corporation that manages the Rahway Improvement District.

### Six Key Elements and Programs of the RAPB

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The “Art Building”</th>
<th>A Gallery Space and local Exhibition Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classes</td>
<td>Crafting, Performing and Fine Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artwork Display Program</td>
<td>Venue program for display, filmmaking, and live music; rehearsal space rentals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCPAC</td>
<td>Local performing arts center. Listed on the State and National Historic Register</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer Concert Series</td>
<td>Annual concert event in partnership with UCPAC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Culture Crawl</td>
<td>A free one-day arts festival in Downtown Rahway</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Image Source: [https://rahwayishappening.com/arts-guild](https://rahwayishappening.com/arts-guild) and [http://newjerseyisntboring.com/rahway-culture-crawl](http://newjerseyisntboring.com/rahway-culture-crawl)
Placemaking Strategies for Dunellen

Other strategies include: sidewalk libraries, digital placemaking, murals, chalk art, pop-up shops in vacant stores, “parklets”, painting rail bridges, community gardens, festivals, Sunday Scrabble, and many more.

“Rail Line Dancing”
Dancing events in the commuter parking lot on the weekends.

Community Street Quilt
Patchwork of painted intersections to help improve pedestrian safety.
Example: Montclair, NJ

Pop Rocks
Closing down section of North Ave. for temporary installations to relax, play and gather.
Example: Vancouver, Canada

Seat, bench and planter installations
Providing seats, benches and planters to create pocket spaces and engage the community in the implementation of these projects.

Example: Montclair, NJ

“Rail Line Dancing”

Community Street Quilt

Pop Rocks

Seat, bench and planter installations

Example: Vancouver, Canada
Final Thoughts

1. Downtown revitalization can further Dunellen’s motto “small enough to know you, and large enough to serve you.”

2. DIDs, the Main Street Program, and arts and culture strategies are viable revitalization tools independently and in conjunction with one another.

3. Based on our research and conversations with downtown revitalization experts, fortifying a DID with the Main Street Program could be a powerful approach for Dunellen.
Additional Information

Should you like additional information downtown revitalization strategies and/or this presentation, please contact:

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