

The Village of Walden

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION STRATEGY



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Presented to:

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The primary purpose of the Downtown Revitalization Strategy is to guide the Village and business owners in their decision making in order to capitalize on Downtown's assets and strengthen commerce in the *Historic Downtown Walden* Business District [see map of district on page 2]. The Strategy will also help guide redevelopment and in-fill development in manner that will strengthen the Downtown core and preserve its unique historic character.

The Village of Walden Board of Trustees commissioned this report in August of 2001 and the Downtown Revitalization Strategy has been developed through a variety of meetings with the Village Board, Joint Board, Walden Local Development Corporation, Town of Montgomery Chamber of Commerce, Historical Society of Walden, Industrial Development Agency, Community Council, and Walden Department of Parks and Recreation. In addition to these meetings, a Business Owner Survey was sent out to all Downtown Business Owners and three hundred (300) Resident Surveys were mailed to Village Residents. Also, a detailed Downtown building and business inventory was conducted to acquire a better understanding of existing Downtown business, to identify market clusters, and opportunities to attract new businesses to complement businesses presently operating in Downtown Walden. In preparing this report, A. SORENSEN ASSOCIATES completed the following research:

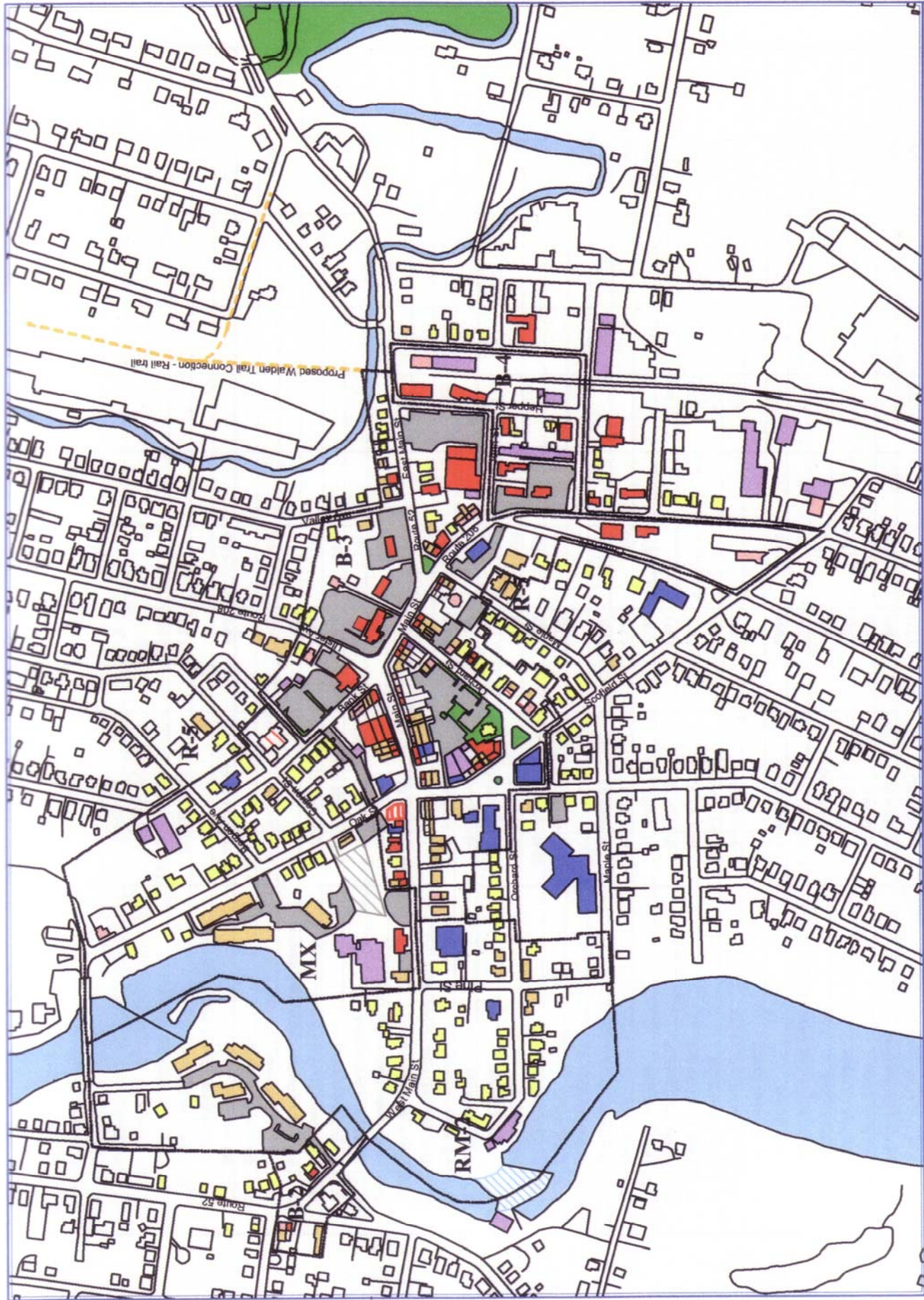
- All reports and studies previously prepared by the Village of Walden and Walden LDC were reviewed;
- An inventory of existing businesses in Downtown Walden was completed;
- Creation, tabulation and analysis of the Business Owner Surveys;
- Creation, tabulation and analysis of the Resident Surveys;
- An assessment of existing Downtown Zoning and recommendations;
- Inventory of buildings in Downtown and assessment of occupancy rates;
- Analysis of demographic and socio-economic information available through the U.S. Department of Commerce Census Bureau;
- Analysis of trade area specific socio-economic retail trade profile of Village/Town [the primary trade area] as prepared by CACI;
- Walden Trails Connection research; and
- Field work as conducted by A. SORENSEN ASSOCIATES during the months of August - December of 2001.



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Village of Walden

Source: Orange County Water Authority and A. Sorenson Associates



- Open Space / Park
- Water Body
- Spillway
- Zoning District
- Industrial
- Multi-Family Residential
- Single-Family Residential
- Industrial / Warehouse
- Retail
- Other
- Current Home
- Walkway
- Parking
- Proposed Parking

Scale: 1" = 425'



2.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Time and time again, the evidence has been accumulated that demonstrates that downtown revitalization does not occur as the result of a single instance. Rather, it occurs when a multitude of forces come together that dictate the investment of private capital for positive economic gain. The Walden Downtown Revitalization Strategy provides a framework in which the public, private and not-for-profit sectors can work together to create an environment that attracts new investment Downtown and draws customers from throughout the surrounding region. The revitalization effort for Downtown must be multi-faceted, dynamic and sustained over a long period of time.

Efforts must be made immediately to protect and improve the historic character of the Downtown Business District. To this end, incentives must be provided to accelerate building facade renovations. Such renovations must respect the architecture of these historic buildings [see Section 6.3]. The Village also needs to step up its Code Enforcement efforts and work with building owners to improve the facades of three prominent buildings that are Downtown. [see Section 6.5]. Finally, as new development occurs it must be used to strengthen the integrity of the historic core and not suburbanize it [see section 6.10]. These efforts, coupled with recent streetscape enhancements, will enable the Village market Downtown as “*Historic Downtown Walden.*”

With its image defined, the Village must strive to attract new businesses to *Historic Downtown Walden* and simultaneously create a variety of events and attractions to draw customers Downtown. The Village must also develop several niches that will attract customers to visit Downtown for a variety of reasons time and time again. Niches are based upon specialization and typically focus on one segment of the retail market and/or cultural, historic, or recreational activity. Through these efforts, *Historic Downtown Walden* could become a much sought after destination that will be known for its historic buildings and unique stores, restaurants, cultural attractions including a *Knife Museum* and recreational activities such as the proposed *Walden Trail Connection* [Section 6.8].

The Village’s recent streetscape enhancements have transformed Municipal Square into a clean, well-maintained, aesthetically pleasing, comfortable and safe environment. Efforts must also focus on developing Municipal Square into a well-known community center where events and activities are held throughout the year. It is here, for example, that a *Farmer’s Market* could be developed to attract hundreds of visitors to Downtown Walden on a given Friday evening or a New Year’s Eve event held. These activities - coupled with niche recreational and cultural attractions - could result in more activities to serve shoppers such as restaurants, a gourmet coffee shop or a bakery. *Based upon the results of the Resident and Business Surveys, these are businesses that residents and business owners also want Downtown.* *Historic Downtown Walden* has a number of competitive advantages including: a Retail Trade Area with a “Spending Potential Index” above the national average [and an SPI that is increasing]; a high traffic volume [over 10,000 AADT] through Downtown; a pedestrian friendly, historic, and walkable Downtown; unsurpassed public gathering spaces such as Municipal Square; and several well-established regional retail anchors. **These assets must be promoted and built upon!**

For example, the Village and business community could work together to enhance an existing retail cluster of “Furniture & Home Furnishing” establishments in Downtown. This cluster includes great regional retail destinations such as Millspaugh’s, Sohn’s and Gridley’s that already anchor Downtown. It would be most Downtown Marketers dream to have one of these retail anchors. Historic Downtown Walden has three such anchors. *Historic Downtown Walden* could develop into an upscale niche Furniture & Home Furnishing center that could also include a variety of new bedding & bath accessory stores. While most people would like to attract national retailers, such efforts would not work because of the population base needed to support these larger businesses. Instead, the Village should strive to incubate stores that are comparable to these stores or attract smaller regionally-based stores.¹ Home grown businesses would add to the uniqueness of *Historic Downtown Walden* making it an even more inviting shopping destination.

To incubate or attract such businesses, the Village could offer a variety of financial incentives such as loans, small grants, and perhaps the use of Empire Zone benefits [see Section 7]. It must also promote the Village’s buying power and enlist the larger retailers that anchor Downtown to assist in the business attraction effort. While home grown businesses should be the focus, regional retailers should not be totally ignored. For example, *Portico Bed & Bath* and *Bath & Body Works* are two regional stores whose preferred locations include 2,000 - 4,000 sq. ft retail spaces in downtowns. These too, should be explored for Downtown. During the course of this study, three (3) new businesses opened in Downtown Walden: 1) Toys and Gifts, 2) Cranberry Cottage, and 3) Temporary Services agency. Also during this time period, one business Main Street Computers closed. Such changes are to be expected in any retail setting whether an enclosed shopping center or traditional Central Business District like Walden’s Downtown. It should be noted that the business retention and attraction efforts will be on-going and are part of the Downtown Revitalization process.

Promotion: All of the competitive advantages noted above must be promoted. Promotional efforts can be used to change consumer perceptions about Downtown and also used to develop the *Historic Downtown Walden* marketing image. As one enters Walden, signage that directs motorist to “Historic Downtown Walden” should be placed on Route 52 and 208. When holding the Farmer’s Market, elegant signs and banners should be used to promote the event. It is recommended that the Village design a LOGO for the Farmer’s Market and Historic Downtown Walden that can be used in all promotional materials. Existing business should be enlisted to include the words “come to my store in *Historic Downtown Walden*” in their ads. Directional signage to off-street parking areas should also reinforce *the Historic Downtown Walden* theme. Window displays should also be high-quality and help to promote the new positive image of Downtown. The goal is to create a brand for Downtown that transcends a particular business and creates a positive image for the entire business district.

¹ Through Sullivan County’s Main Street Redevelopment Center, numerous businesses have been incubated to fill vacant retail space on Main Streets throughout the County. Such stores include: The Oracle Bookstore, The Keeping Room [gift shop], The Feast [deli/gourmet food], The Kitchen [restaurant], Delaware River Trading Company, Gusar’s Pharmacy, Second Hand Rose [antiques] and many more new businesses.

Making Shopping Downtown Walden Fun: Business Owners can also use a number of techniques to enhance customer loyalty and frequency of visits to Downtown. For example, a “*Frequent Buyer Program*” could be developed that would allow customers to earn credits for a free item based upon purchases over a period of time. Another way to build customer loyalty is develop “*Discount Coupon*” for your business that is given to the customer at the time of their purchase - for use during a second visit. Another program that could be developed jointly among Downtown Walden Businesses is a “*Downtown Passport*”. Customers would get a passport with discount coupons to participating businesses Downtown. Every time they made a purchase at a participating business they would get their passport stamped. When they got stamps from five or ten businesses, they would be entitled to a free gift - such as a Historic Downtown Walden canvass shopping bag. When the new Walden Trail Connection is constructed, businesses might offer a discount to bicyclist. Numerous other creative possibilities exist, the goal is to make the shopping experience fun for the shopper and encourage them to return again and again.

Downtown Marketing Brochure: Using the Downtown Report® as a foundation, the Village now has the resources to quickly develop a *Historic Downtown Walden Shopping Guide* and map. The guide would list all of the businesses Downtown, their addresses, phone numbers and include a map to guide the visitor. This brochure would be a companion to the proposed Downtown Directory as shown in Section 6.4 of this report.

Business Recruitment/Retention: The Downtown Business/Building Inventory and Market Analysis are two tools the Village now has to attract and/or grow new businesses. It is recommended that the Walden LDC take the leading role in this effort which is a natural follow-up to their “Feeling Good About Walden Campaign”. This effort must be closely coordinated with the Village and IDA since they will be offering the financial incentives to these small businesses. Efforts also must be made to retain existing businesses Downtown and to this end, the Village’s Community Development Programs including the “Commercial Loan Program” should be used to assist existing businesses.

Highlights of Resident and Business Owner Surveys:

- Top Rated Condition in Downtown: “Sense of Security” by Both Residents and Business Owners
- Business Owner Top Five Initiatives by Order of Importance: Fill Vacant Storefronts, Recruit New Businesses, Enhance Variety of Retail, Streetscape Enhancements, and Market Downtown.
- Sixty-three Percent (63%) of Village Residents Visit Downtown 3 or More Times a Week
- Top Five Reasons Residents Visit Downtown: Post Office, Banking, Driving Thru, Shopping and to Visit the Library.
- Top Five Businesses Residents Would like to See Downtown: Bakery, Movie Theater, Drug Store, Deli/butcher Shop, and Women’s Apparel Shop.
- Top Five Businesses Other Businesses Would like to See in Downtown Walden: Specialty Shop, Restaurant, Antique Shop, Café and Hardware Store.
- Nearly Half (46%) of Walden Business Owners Live in the Village of Walden.
- Business Owners #1 Suggestion for Improving Downtown Is to Improve Building Facades.
- Primary Reason Residents Shop in Other Locations Is Greater Variety and Selection
- A Majority of Downtown Walden Businesses (69%) Have Been Opened Ten Years or More.
- Traffic Volume Was the Second Highest Rated Condition in Downtown by Business Owners.
- Approximately 20% of Downtown Business Have a Gross Revenue of over \$750,000 Annually.

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