

BURGIS ASSOCIATES, INC.

COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT CONSULTANTS

25 Westwood Avenue
Westwood, New Jersey 07675
Phone (201) 666-1811
Fax (201) 666-2599
e-mail: jhb@burgis.com

Community Planning
Land Development and Design
Landscape Architecture

**CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT REVITALIZATION PLAN
BOROUGH OF HASBROUCK HEIGHTS
BERGEN COUNTY, NEW JERSEY**

SUMMARY OF BACKGROUND STUDIES REPORT

JULY, 2000



BURGIS ASSOCIATES, INC.

COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT CONSULTANTS

25 Westwood Avenue
Westwood, New Jersey 07675
Phone (201) 666-1811
Fax (201) 666-2599
e-mail: jhb@burgis.com

Community Planning
Land Development and Design
Landscape Architecture

To Whom It May Concern:

We have been retained by the Borough of Hasbrouck Heights to prepare an improvement plan for the Boulevard downtown area. As a member of the business community, we are contacting you to discuss some of our preliminary findings and obtain your views, concerns and suggestions for the improvements to the Boulevard.


Please read through the enclosed synopsis of our initial findings. We will be contacting you within the next week to arrange an informal meeting, at a mutually convenient time to discuss these issues further.

It is our viewpoint that the planning for the business area improvement plan should be a collaborative process and we look forward to your participation.

Sincerely,


(Joseph H. Burgis PE, AICP)

cc: Michael Kronyak, Borough Administrator



INTRODUCTION

The Borough of Hasbrouck Heights retained Burgis Associates, Inc. to provide technical assistance in the preparation of an improvement plan for the borough's Central Business District (CBD). The borough proceeded with this endeavor recognizing the need for the development of a comprehensive and coordinated long-range plan to guide the growth, development and physical improvements which are necessary to ensure the continued vitality of the community's business district. The objective of the study is to provide a blueprint for the upgrading of the downtown area which would serve as the basis for guiding improvements of the district in the twenty-first century.

The accompanying document represents a summary of the preliminary draft of the first phase of an anticipated three-step process which will culminate in the adoption of a comprehensive plan for the revitalization and upgrading of the borough's central business district. The report is designed to identify progress to-date on this study, presenting background data on the CBD. The data regards information on existing land use and intensities-of-use. It includes information on the number of parking spaces serving the district and an assessment of the actual number of spaces necessary to adequately serve the district. It also includes preliminary comments on the character of the district and its physical attributes and the elements which require improvement.

Members of our firm will be contacting store owners to review some of this information on a one-to-one basis and get individual comments regarding their perceptions of the existing CBD and their views on an enhanced business district. Once these meetings and interviews take place, a draft Central Business District Plan will be prepared and circulated for comment. This document is being circulated to store owners and to property owners in the district, to apprise them of progress to date.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS AND ANALYSIS

Study Area

The study area included the Boulevard corridor as well as an area extending a half block to the east and west of this street. The area is bound by LaSalle Avenue to the north, Raymond Street to the south.

Analysis of Existing Conditions

The analysis of the area's existing conditions reveals a number of features that merit attention. One's initial impression is simply that the Hasbrouck Heights business district is a conventional linear business corridor that is typical of many New Jersey municipalities. On the positive side is the fact that this corridor has a number of distinctly traditional downtown characteristics. This is exemplified by a development pattern which includes a combination of small lot sizes, side line to side line building arrangements, compatible building heights, narrow street width and sidewalk dimensions, modest linear dimension of individual blocks, and the complementary retail character of the stores along these streets. The fully developed land use arrangement along Boulevard, coupled with the limited number of open parking lots or driveways serving parking lots which would disrupt pedestrian movement and cause conflicting turning movements on Boulevard, the specific mix of retail and personal service establishments, and the availability of bus service, all serve to reinforce the traditional downtown character of the area.

The district also contains a number of features that detract from the traditional downtown character and design of the district, thereby diminishing the overall integrity and design of the area and adversely affecting the local shopping experience. These critical elements relate to the area's small physical size, the detached single-family residential development pattern of the immediately adjoining area, limited availability of parking, discordant design elements, types of stores, and related items that, when taken together, impact the district's perception as a pleasant and attractive place to work, shop, or visit. The areas of concern are as follows:

1. **Size and Orientation:** The business district is small. It is only seven acres in area and effectively is on only one street. This represents a significant limitation. This is compounded by the location of adjoining detached single-family residential development to the east and west of the corridor, which restricts commercial growth, and the modest linear dimension of individual blocks.

The area's small lot arrangement, modest area, and adjoining residential development represent a significant impediment to the district's growth and expansion. These factors also impede the ability to encourage the development of retail uses with a substantive amount of floor area. At present, the largest retail establishment in the district is the 9,000 square foot Rite Aid. The next largest facility is the 8,200 square foot telecommunications/computer store at 172 Boulevard. Most storefronts are less than 2,000 square feet. The accompanying table depicts the range of floor spaces in commercial and office buildings in the CBD.

**Table 1
Range of Floor Areas In Establishments
Central Business District**

Floor Area (square feet)	Number of Establishments
0-999	18
1,000 to 1,999	40
2,000 to 2,999	19
3,000 to 3,999	10
4,000 to 4,999	5
5,000 to 5,999	5
6,000 to 6,999	1
7,000 to 7,999	1
8,000+	4
Median	1,765 square feet

Block dimension also impedes growth. Most blocks are only 200 feet long, which in conjunction with the limited depth of the commercial district restricts the ability to encourage larger stores which can then serve as a suitable anchor for the district. Successful central business districts which draw from an area which is larger than just their own municipality typically are larger in

area and encompass multiple blocks in all directions. Districts confined to a few linear blocks, particularly with limited parking and an inability to attract a suitable anchor store, are likely to remain neighborhood districts with limited ability to enhance market share.

2. **Segmented District:** The district's lot arrangement and land use pattern effectively segments the character of the shopping experience and further limits its pedestrian scale and orientation. There is what may be referred to as the retail core area (Kipp Avenue and southward), which is characterized almost exclusively by retail and service commercial uses and is heavily pedestrian oriented due to the small lot size pattern and adjoining storefront arrangement with limited interruption of storefronts, and the area to the north of Kipp Avenue which is typified by a more spread-out development pattern on larger lots, as well as a more varied mix of land uses including many which are not pedestrian oriented.

3. **Lack of distinct usage characteristics:** Many CBD's are known by their particular usage characteristics. For example, Ridgewood's downtown has built a reputation on its large number of restaurants, Piermont is known for its art galleries, and Lambertville, Nanuet and Chester for antique shops. Even smaller business districts such as Westwood are developing specific market reputations, in Westwood's case for their increasingly eclectic mix of retail shops and upscale clothing stores. Hasbrouck Heights, on the other hand, lacks a discernable image or particular market niche which it can trade off to enhance its image. This is an issue which must be addressed if the CBD is to broaden its commercial base.

Many active business districts also contain a variety of uses which complement each other, enabling one business to feed off another. For example, Westwood's movie theater provides a significant amount of pedestrian movement in the evening hours. Restaurants have geared their menus accordingly, serving after-dinner fare which keeps people in the area after-hours. In Piermont the plethora of restaurants, craft and antique shops has served to complement each other as people combine shopping and dining as part of a day's outing.

4. **Lack of a Focal Point or Anchor:** The district does not have an apparent focal point that draws shoppers to the area. There is no single large-scale anchor store in the business district that would serve as a magnet for people, or more critically, which can attract other stores that feel they can draw sufficient customers from people shopping at the anchor store. The Borough of Westwood represents a prime example. Their business district had functioned as a primarily localized commercial area until, amongst other things, the Gap moved in and served as an anchor for the area. Other stores immediately followed, confident that the Gap would draw people to the area. The district witnessed a profound shift in the type of stores and the extent of drawing power from surrounding communities, and today Westwood serves as a regional commercial hub for all of the towns in the Pascaack Valley section of the county.
5. **Limited Parking:** The business district lacks sufficient parking to accommodate need. A parking analysis of the area reveals that the district contains a total of 890 parking spaces, including 470 spaces on Boulevard and side streets, and 420 on-site parking spaces. The study noted that only a small number of establishments provide off-street parking for customers and employees, notably the three banks in the district, the Rite Aid pharmacy, and the Heights Medical office building.

The number of available spaces contrasts with the need for parking in the area. An analysis of parking need based on standard planning design criteria suggests that the business district requires a total of 1,320 parking spaces for all business uses and apartments in the area. This is

the number of parking spaces which would be required based on the gross amount of floor spaces in the district, which is estimated to be 239,300 square feet of non-residential space (this excludes church and other quasi-public uses parking needs). This shortfall of 430 spaces represents a critical deficiency. The lack of off-street parking is a deterrent for shoppers who expect parking to be provided in a location reasonably convenient to the shopping district. It impacts nearby residents as shoppers park in front of residents homes on side streets off of Boulevard. The plan must address this issue.

6. **Physical Character:** The central business district is characterized by a number of nominal architectural features and discordant design elements. Examples are noted below. Photographs on the accompanying pages illustrate the accompanying examples.
 - a. Buildings in the business district generally lack a distinct architectural motif. There is no particular architectural style which defines the area. There is a bank with a Greek Revival style, buildings with brick colonial styling, modernist office buildings, and a number of buildings with no discernable style. There is no pronounced elements which would serve to represent an identifying or unifying theme. Some architectural features apparently have been covered by recent facade renovations.
 - b. The existing 'cobra head' light fixtures located along Boulevard are more common to highway lighting than a downtown business district.
 - c. The district lacks a common public open space area which can be utilized for public gathering or otherwise used as ancillary space to provide a respite for shoppers.
 - d. Existing signage is comprised of discordant themes lacking any unifying elements.
 - e. The district lacks a unifying physical focal point.
7. **Lack of a Marketable Theme:** The borough's central business district has no distinct identity in the marketplace that distinguishes it from other downtowns and shopping districts.
8. **Existing Land Use Pattern:** The analysis of existing land use and physical conditions is designed to provide an inventory of the types of land uses and enable an evaluation of current conditions in the borough's business district. The analysis reveals the following about the business district, which extends for approximately 3,050 feet along Boulevard between Raymond Street and LaSalle Avenue:
 - a. The land use analysis categorized uses into ten different categories. They include two residential categories and separate categories for retail, personal services, office uses, restaurants, automotive uses, vacant land, public/quasi public, and a miscellaneous category. The retail use category was refined more precisely into three subgroups, including shopper goods, convenience goods, and 'other' retail.
 - b. There are 164 individual uses in the business district, of which 124 are non-residential. For the purposes of this study, upper floor apartments in a mixed-use property are treated as a separate use. The nonresidential land uses are categorized in the following table.

Table 2
Land Use by Number and Percent of Uses
Central Business District

Land Use	Number of Uses	Percent of Total
Retail		
Shoppers Goods	26	20.5
Convenience Goods	9	7.1
Other Retail	2	1.6
Subtotal Retail	37	29.8
Personal Services	21	16.9
Office	44	35.5
Restaurants	9	7.3
Automotive	3	2.4
Miscellaneous	6	4.8
Public/Quasi-Public	4	3.2
TOTAL	124	100.0

These nonresidential uses contain approximately 302,900 square feet of floor area. The following table shows the distribution floor area by land use category.

Table 3
Land Use by Floor Area
Central Business District

Land Use	Floor Area (square feet)	Percent of Total Floor Area
Retail sales	75,100	24.8
Personal service	25,900	8.6
Office	107,100	35.3
Restaurant	12,300	4.1
Automotive	7,400	2.4
Miscellaneous	75,100	24.8
Public/Quasi-Public	63,600	21.0
Total	302,900	100.0

The following comments are offered with respect to the district's land use pattern and arrangement:

- 1) There are 37 retail sales establishments in the study area, mostly small neighborhood business establishments. Retail uses represent the second largest single land use in the central business district (after office use) with 75,100 square feet. Excluding church usage, this category represents a third of all development in the district. There is no discernible concentration of particular retail uses, but stores selling shopper goods comprise the vast majority of retail uses. The Rite Aid pharmacy is the only large chain store, and is the largest retail establishment within the study area.
- 2) There is no store that acts as a retail anchor, drawing people from beyond the immediate area.
- 3) Personal services comprise 25,900 square feet of floor area. Barber shops, hair salons, and nail salons are the predominant forms of this land use category. There are seven hair salons, four nail salons, and three barber shops. Other types of retail services include a print shop, dry cleaning, and a laundrette. All but one of these personal service establishments is located south of Kipp Avenue.

An extensive number of hair and nail salons is often looked upon as one indice into the relative economic strength, or weakness, of a community's local business district. In this instance the number of such facilities may presage an area of concern. This, of course, is compounded by a number of the other issues highlighted here, such as the small lot arrangements which preclude larger establishments, the lack of parking, etc.

It is noted that the U.S. Bureau of the Census will be releasing its Retail Trade Data For Local Municipalities this fall. Once this data is published we will evaluate it to see what it has to say about the relative strength of the local economic situation.

- 4) Offices are the most numerous land use in the business district, by number and square footage. There are 44 separate office uses encompassing 107,100 square feet of floor area. This represents 35 percent of all floor space in the district, and nearly half the square footage if the quasi-public places of worship are not included in the assessment.
- 5) The land use survey found nine restaurants, generally located in the central portion of the business district between Hamilton and Kipp Avenues. Restaurants constitute five percent of the nonresidential floor space in the business district.
- 6) There are three quasi-public uses. These are the Corpus Christi Church and school, the Corpus Christi community center, and the Euclid Lodge. The only public use in the study area is the local post office. The church and community center, located directly across from each other between Kipp Avenue and Washington Place act, in part, to break up the continuity of shopping activity along Boulevard, dividing the central business district into two distinct areas.
- 7) Three service stations are located in the business district, one of which has fuel pumps located within the street right-of-way.
- 8) There are approximately 121 dwelling units in the study area, of which 100 are apartments on upper floors of mixed-use buildings, and 21 are in multifamily housing units. The two multifamily residential properties are both located north of Kipp Avenue. Upper floor apartments

are found in 38 of the 83 buildings in the central business district, and are located mostly to the south of Kipp Avenue. Residential uses are the predominant use of the upper floors of buildings in the business district.

- 9) A number of vacant stores were found in the study area. A total of ten commercial spaces were vacant. There is only one vacant building lot in the business district.

The following preliminary conclusions can be drawn from the existing land use analysis:

- a. The land use survey found that, for the most part, buildings are well maintained. There is no significant conditions of deterioration evident in the district.
 - b. The district does not contain a mixture of stores which encourage window shopping and could represent a catalyst for pedestrian movement through the district.
 - c. The commercial area located to the north of Kipp Avenue functions as a secondary commercial district. This area contains a significant number of office uses as well as other uses that are not traditionally associated with central business districts, such as funeral homes, multifamily residences, service stations, and a church with a community center. A separate zone designation may be appropriate here.
10. Streetscape Elements: The term 'streetscape elements' is a planner's term used to describe ancillary features found along the street. It regards architectural features, street paving, sidewalks, signage, benches, kiosks, trash receptacles, banners, etc.

The following is noted:

- a. **Architecture:** The central business district contains mostly one and two story buildings built in a variety of architectural styles. The buildings are situated in a linear fashion along Boulevard. Many of the buildings have been renovated to include new building facades that hide the original building design, at least on the first floor. Renovations with new facades often lack any significant architectural features, although shingle-sided buildings are somewhat common. Clearly, the buildings lack a common architectural theme which would serve to integrate the district with a unified theme. The scale of development, mostly one and two stories with a few three story structures, is appropriate for the district. Additional second story elements would add to the character of the district.

The forthcoming second report will give consideration to developing design guidelines for future building renovations. This will help to create a distinct character for the business district. The feasibility of establishing an architectural design review committee will also be evaluated.

- b. **Sidewalks:** The sidewalks in front of buildings generally range from 15 feet in the central retail core, to five feet at the northerly and southerly portions of the business district where there is a narrow planting strip between the sidewalk and the curb. Generally, the sidewalks appear to be in good to fair condition. Some areas are beginning to exhibit cracking or discoloration due to weathering and will require replacement in the near future. The variation of the condition of the sidewalks gives the area a patchwork

appearance.

The forthcoming report containing specific recommendations will address the following:

- 1) The introduction of a consistent thematic paving design incorporating elements such as brick pavers, colored concrete and/or scoring patterns, especially in the area between Raymond Street and Kipp Avenue. The brick paver strip along the curb in front of the Rite Aid pharmacy is one example of this type of pavement treatment. A pavement treatment would not only renew the pedestrian surface areas, but would transform the sidewalk into an element that helps to create a unifying design character for the borough's central business district.
 - 2) The provision of outdoor seating in those segments of the sidewalk which are typified by twelve to fifteen foot wide dimensions. This is another element which has been used successfully elsewhere to enhance pedestrian activity and life to a business district.
- c. Signage: Each business has its own signage that is unrelated to the signage on adjoining businesses, even at the same building. Consideration is to be given to implementing a coordinated signage system which would serve as another unifying element for the borough's business district. Issues relating to size, color, lettering, wall and projecting signs, placement, and stylized framing will be addressed.
- d. Banners: The banners along the length of Boulevard provide an element of color to the district. They can also be used to identify a particular site, location, special events, or an area of special interest. The banners can be changed on a seasonal basis. Poles used to hang banners may also be used to support other seasonal displays, plantings or lighting. Details will be provided.
- e. Street furniture: The survey found that a number of benches and refuse receptacles are provided throughout the area, but that there is no other type of street furniture in the area. Improved coordination between the location of the benches and trash cans is necessary.
- f. Street Lights: Two types of street light poles are found in the CBD. Some lights poles have a stylized design, although many of these appear rusted or damaged. Many of these have been replaced by standard cobra-head light poles. Both types of light poles are found in approximately equal numbers in the central business district. Consideration should be given to the use of pedestrian stylized fixtures which are more appropriate to a CBD than those presently in the district. Recommendations will be offered in the upcoming report..
- g. Street Trees: The business district includes a large number of mature trees, especially in the area between Raymond Street and Kipp Avenue, as well as the block between Madison and LaSalle Avenues. Most of the trees in these two areas are London Plane trees. Some new trees have been planted in the area to the north of Kipp Avenue which has experienced office and residential development fairly recently. The trees help to create a established character for the borough's central business district, and should be carefully maintained.

- h. Traffic calming devices: The use of distinctive pavement treatment for pedestrian crosswalks could be used as a means to slow vehicular traffic through the district and provide an aesthetic amenity.

PRELIMINARY PLANNING GOALS (for review purposes)

The Borough of Hasbrouck Heights Central Business Plan will serve as a general guide for the physical, economic and social development of the Borough. It is designed to guide the development of the central business district in a manner which promotes the public health, safety and general welfare. The following enumeration presents broad planning goals which form the basis for the planning and design recommendations which comprise the Plan component of this report. These goals and objectives will also form the basis for discussion with the community regarding the direction the 'plan section' of this document is to take.

1. To establish a heightened sense of community pride in Hasbrouck Heights by creating a cohesive and attractive business district.
2. To provide a comprehensive and coordinated long-range plan to guide the growth, development, and physical improvements which are necessary to ensure the continued vitality of the Borough's business district.
3. To establish a prioritized list of improvements which are to occur over time.
4. To expand the commercial base of the Borough, with an emphasis on retail sales and service uses serving the residents of the community and immediate surrounding communities.
5. To enhance the physical appearance of the business district through comprehensive and integrated streetscape improvements, building renovations, and related physical improvements.
6. To encourage the cooperation of merchants, property owners, residents and government in the overall revitalization of the business district.
7. To encourage public and private investment in the area.
8. To encourage uses and activities which will bring vitality to the area and an increased pedestrian presence.

These represent some of the planning and design issues which are evident, and which require planning responses if the community's business district is to fulfill its promise. These issues will be the subject of the discussion with the planning board, members of the business community, and residents, as we proceed with this planning program.