

A Report:

**The STATE OF DOWNTOWN
ENGLEWOOD**

presented to:

The Englewood Economic Development Corporation

**Prepared by
N. David Milder**

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I. INTRODUCTION

DANTH, Inc. is pleased to again have the opportunity to assess current conditions in Downtown Englewood and comment both on your revitalization process and the progress you have made. This is our third report on the state of your downtown.

For the past 26 years, DANTH, Inc. has focused on the revitalization of downtowns throughout the New York - New Jersey Metropolitan area as well as those in California, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Vermont. Within New Jersey, the firm has had assignments in Bayonne, Cranford, Englewood, Elizabeth, Leonia, Teaneck, Trenton and West New York. David Milder, the president of DANTH, has written extensively on the subject, including 1 book, 2 monographs, over 50 technical reports and several articles in journals such as Urban Land, Main Street News, and the Urban Almanac. His book Niche Strategies for Downtown Revitalization is available through the American Planning Association, The Council for Urban Economic Development and the International Downtown Association.

Since 1994, DANTH has completed a number of assignments for the Englewood Economic Development Corporation. DANTH's May 1994 report was included in your document The Downtown Englewood Revitalization Corridor: The West Side of Downtown Englewood, which was issued in March 1997. In September of 1997, DANTH prepared An Assessment of the Downtown Revitalization Strategy, which was presented at a meeting of the Englewood City Council. In September 1998 DANTH prepared and presented to the Englewood City Council A Report: Englewood, NJ: The State of the Downtown.

Because of Mr. Milder's work for the EEDC and the frequent visits it has required, he is very familiar with your downtown and the city's efforts over the years to revitalize it.

II. OVERALL ASSESSMENT

A. Bricks and Mortar Show The Tide Has Turned on the West Side!

Today, after more than 25 years of effort by local leaders, the array of economic forces on the West Side are no longer headed for decay and decline, but toward sustained prosperity and growth. The Great Redevelopment Divide has been passed. The private sector most definitely has become interested in this part of the downtown. It is quickly losing its image as "the wrong side of the tracks." Evidence of this incredible passage is easy to find.

- The Completed Group USA Project. Completed at the end of November 1999, this strategically critical project brought 3 well-regarded national

retailers -- Group USA, Mikasa and A Children's Place -- to the West Side. Other quality retailers will no longer have to be "urban pioneers." The project was able to attract these merchants because it provided the large-sized, Class-A retail spaces that the West Side had lacked. Initial reports by merchants indicate brisk sales. In fact, sales at A Children's Place have been so strong that the store has been upgraded from a "B" to an "A" classification.

- Group USA II. Based on its belief in the downtown and the success of its first project, Group USA has proposed another downtown project. It is now before the Planning Board. It would entail constructing another multi-use building next to its current one. The new structure would combine 30 residential units with 30,000 SF of commercial space --enough room certainly to accommodate at least one or two retail chains on the ground floor. This will provide a new, strong and revitalized street wall running from James Street to MacDonald's along the north side of Palisade Avenue. Together, the two Group USA projects can be expected to generate significantly stronger pedestrian flows going to and from the shops in Palisade Court. This will help end that shopping center's functional isolation from the rest of the West Side.
- Former DiStasio Property. Within a few weeks, site approval will be sought for a third and strategically very important project. It is located across West Palisade slightly west of Group USA at the corner of Armory Street, the street that in years past was primarily known for its "quality-of-life" problems. The proposed project would provide, at minimum, another 35,000 SF of commercial space that could accommodate at least two more retail chains. The project would encompass the former DiStasio property and an adjoining one-story building that currently has four small stores. While the new project will have some on-site parking , it will also benefit from the newly leased Elks Club parking lot on Bennet Road, to which it will be connected by a walkway. Combined with Eagle Paint, this project would greatly strengthen the blockface running from Armory Street to the Monument along this southern portion of West Palisade Avenue. It also reinforces the upward movement along Armory Street which in turn helps functionally integrate Mackay Park into the downtown.
- Palisade Court Option. There is an opportunity for Treeco to exercise an option associated with its development of Palisade Court that would result in the renewal of the area running from CVS to City Hall along the north side of West Palisade Avenue. This would mean that all of the north side of West Palisade, from James Street to North Van Brundt, is revitalized with new buildings and retailers. This project would do much to help connect the eastern and western parts of downtown by presenting a strong and visible magnet to draw pedestrians on East Palisade across the tracks and Van Brundt
- The Lincoln Building. Under a City grant, this building has recently undergone substantial façade improvements that have significantly improved its appearance. The building immediately to the west of the Lincoln Building, which now has the new JCC store as a ground floor tenant, shortly will be undergoing a gut rehabilitation that will substantially improve the six apartments it has on its upper

floors. This work will be subvented in part by a grant from the NJ Dept. of Community Affairs

- The Krieger Building. Located across West Palisade from the Group USA Building, this structure had its façade renovated two years ago. About \$25,000 of the \$58,000 cost of the project came from the City's Neighborhood Preservation Program.

In 1994, the West Side was dominated by tired, worn-out structures that provided small, low-quality retail and office spaces for marginal businesses in an unfriendly and scary environment. Because of the projects described above, by the end of 2001, this will not be the case. Instead, large portions of the West Side will be new or renovated and occupied by quality business operators.

Retailers have two questions that they usually ask quickly about a potential site: 1) Who else is there? and 2) How are they doing? In years past, there was "no one else there" on West Palisade and how they were doing consequently was a moot point. In contrast, by the end of 2001, it is very likely that there will be at least six to eight high-quality national retail chains on West Palisade Avenue and, if the current trend continues, they will be reporting strong sales volumes. These nationals will make it easier to attract high quality independent merchants to the West Side -- but the property owners will have to make a real effort to recruit them and there must be appropriate spaces left for them to lease.

The West Side soon will join the East Side in having retail prospects searching for locations, but not having enough quality space or parking to satisfy all of them.

New Challenges for the West Side. As the West Side passes over the Great Redevelopment Divide into desirability, the challenge shifts from kick-starting economic development to controlling and channeling it. New issues will emerge, while some old ones will require much more definitive responses than they have received in the past:

- The West Side must not be "Malled Over." Successful downtowns differentiate themselves from malls in the types of shops and ambience they provide. Shoppers are tiring of the cookie cutter merchandise and environments that most malls provide. They are drawn to downtowns because of their convenience and their uniqueness.
- Having too many retail chains will maul West Palisade Avenue (double entendre intended)
- The West Side must attract more high quality, independent retailers. The \$.99 store is not what West Palisade needs. Recruitment efforts should focus on drawing to West Palisade the types of shops now found on North Dean and East Palisade.
- In cities of Englewood's size, "charm and quaintness" are in and downtowns that exhibit these characteristics are very successful

- Consequently, interesting architecture, reasonable scale and a pedestrian friendly environment are real assets. These should be maximized on West Palisade
- Controversy can be anticipated about the preservation of some of the remaining buildings on West Palisade. Certainly, from an economic development perspective, old buildings with charm and architectural significance should be preserved because they strengthen the areas surrounding them. For example, DANTH is now on assignment in Carlisle, PA, and its Historic District is one of the downtown's biggest selling points. However, older buildings often have neither charm nor architectural significance nor quality leasable spaces and the costs of renovations to overcome these defects can be enormous. Consequently, older buildings sometimes have to go. Whether a particular building deserves to be preserved or condemned frequently is a matter of great debate.
- On West Palisade, the City has worked both to rehabilitate and renovate old buildings (e.g., Eagle Paint, Krieger and Lincoln) and to build new ones (e.g., Group USA I and II)
- Invariably, issues such as "mallng," scale and preservation are best dealt with when the debate is civil, reasoned and not dominated by zealots on either side
- The City has done an impressive job dealing with the "quality of life" issues on the West Side. Its Mackay Park and Armory Street Projects have received deserved national recognition. CCTV has been installed to cover portions of the West Side and police patrols in the area have increased. Unfortunately, the job is not complete. Part of the housing rehabilitation has not been completed. Loitering has returned visibly to portions of West Palisade Avenue and its persistent pattern suggests that other and less benign criminal activities may be involved.

B. The East Side Is Thriving

The East Side continues to thrive. The past year has seen some "churn" among the retailers. Randi Lynn and Willa's have been sold. La Parma opened and closed. Ben & Jerry's, Portage, Dean Place, Main Street, Zan's, and Mediterranean Grill opened. Too much churn indicates decline. However, some churn is invigorating for a downtown, since it provides possible entry for new ideas and stronger competitors. The amount of churn on the East Side over the past year was healthy.

The John Harms Center for the Performing Arts completed its expansion to 1,400 seats and with its new air conditioning is able to operate 12 months a year.

Brokers representing quality retailers continue to visit the East Side and wish they could find locations there for their clients.

Personal observation strongly suggests that the pedestrian traffic along East Palisade has increased significantly over the past year.

C. The Downtown Overall

Downtown Amenities. Since 1998 the downtown has experienced a number of physical improvements to its streetscapes. The net result is a significant improvement in the downtown appearance which, in turn, has created a more attractive environment for pedestrians and strolling shoppers.

- The Palisade Avenue Sidewalk and Lighting Projects are helping to create an inviting environment for pedestrians throughout the downtown through the installation of historic acorn lighting fixtures and "stamped" concrete sidewalks. Most of the work in the West Side has been completed, with the remainder scheduled for completion in 2000. Work on the East Side is scheduled to start and be completed in 2000
- All of Palisade Avenue, both east and west, is scheduled to be repaved in 2000

Parking. DANTH has been working in downtown Englewood since the late Winter of 1994. Parking has been an issue throughout this entire period. The time has come to squarely face this issue in a bold and systematic fashion, even if that means a parking deck.

The City has been extremely inventive on the West Side. By the Spring of 2000, 110 new parking spaces will have come on line in the leased Elks lot on Bennet and the municipal lots on James and Williams Streets. Using the Mackay Park lot for long-term employee parking is now under consideration.

On the East Side, there are plans to renovate Lot "A." Depending on the configuration, which might include a one or two tier parking deck, this project could cost between \$400,000 and \$2,000,000.

Linking The Downtown To The Redevelopment Around Route 4 and I-80. The City has recently designated 150 acres in this part of Englewood as an Office Enterprise Zone. There is reason to believe that this location has already generated substantial interest within the development community. In order to fully identify and channel this interest, the City is holding an investment conference in late March of this year to which important developers, real estate brokers and bankers in the region have been invited.

For the downtown, the redevelopment of the Office Enterprise Zone represents many possible advantages. For example, the new office workers constitute an important potential addition to the noontime customer base. Also, the zone's parking, with proper linkages such as a monorail or fast van shuttle service, might provide overflow parking for patrons of the Harms and downtown retail shops during evening and weekend hours.

Now is the time, before the redevelopment of the area takes off, to identify:

- How the redevelopment of the Zone can help the downtown
- In turn, how the downtown can help the redevelopment of the zone
- The linkages that will be required to facilitate this symbiotic growth

Traffic Problems Caused By Supreme Oil. As the revitalization of downtown Englewood has progressed, the operations of this industrial firm have resulted in increasingly negative impacts on local traffic. Supreme Oil generates significant truck traffic on S. Dean Street and these 18 wheelers often block traffic as they enter or leave the facility. They also strangle traffic flow on S. Dean when they double park in the street. However, the largest negative impact of Supreme Oil is caused by the operations of the long tanker train on the Conrail track that daily causes traffic on Palisade Avenue, both East and West, to come to a standstill during the critical lunchtime shopping hours. It is questionable whether these operations of the company are consistent with the health, safety and welfare of the community. An effective action plan needs to be formulated to deal with the traffic problems caused by Supreme Oil.

Downtown Housing. A 1998 survey done by the Rouse Corp for the Brookings Institution and the Fannie Mae Foundation found that one of the fastest growing segments of the nation's housing market is downtown housing in major cities.¹ However, the growth of downtown housing is not restricted to large cities:

- Aiken, SC (30,000) is using financial incentives to attract more housing downtown. Additional housing is a prime engine of the downtown's revitalization strategy
- Downtown artist's housing has been key elements of revitalization strategies in Eureka, CA (27,000) and Peekskill, NY (19,500)
- Asheville, NC (61,000); Bangor, ME (33,000); Burlington, VT (39,000) and Sheboygen Falls, WI (5,800) have also seen substantial growth in downtown housing

In New Jersey, downtown housing projects are appearing in such communities as Westfield, Cranford, Elizabeth, Hoboken, and South Orange. In New York, multi-unit housing structures long have been integral parts of the downtowns in such communities as Bronxville, Scarsdale, Pelham, and Garden City.

Many people are now interested in living downtown:

- People who work downtown
- Well-off singles, empty-nesters, DINKs (double income, no kids families)

¹ See Lawrence Houstoun, "Urban Awakening," Urban Land, October 1998, Volume 55 Number 10, pp. 34-41

- People who use public transportation to commute to work
- People who like such amenities as museums, theaters, restaurants, cinemas, etc.
- People who enjoy pedestrian friendly environments
- Senior citizens because downtowns have amenities, public transportation, pedestrian friendly environments and are usually close to hospitals and medical and legal services
- Artists who are looking for large, relatively inexpensive working/living spaces and are prepared to be "urban pioneers."

More housing is good for downtown revitalization because:

- More residents help create a built-in demand for many retailers and entertainment functions. They can be especially important for the attraction and development of good restaurants
- More downtown residents help create a more interesting and safer environment after dark
- Downtown residents, in Jane Jacobs' terms, take "possession" of the area they live in; they help make sure it is properly maintained and kept safe
- In many mixed-use projects, it is the residential component that makes the project really financially viable
- Empty upper stories can be the sources of social and physical problems
- In older buildings, rehabilitated apartments can enable a property owner to wait and go after better retail tenants for street-level commercial spaces

More market-rate housing is being proposed for downtown Englewood than previously anticipated. This trend should be applauded and encouraged. It will help to create and maintain a healthy and vibrant downtown Englewood.

DANTH is not alone in encouraging more downtown housing. Practically every consulting firm that specializes in downtown revitalization has come to a similar conclusion. Even major nonprofits that have long been involved in the revitalization of downtowns, such as Regional Plan Association, the National Main Street Center, the International Downtown Association, the Urban Land Institute, etc., are strong advocates of increased downtown housing. Conferences sponsored by these organizations are replete with sessions on the virtues of downtown housing and how to get it developed. Similarly their printed publications are full of articles on this subject.

Niche Marketing. It is well-known that the proposal to build a Home Depot near Route 4 led to a rancorous dispute within the community and the eventual withdrawal of that proposal. Less appreciated are the problems that have arisen in its wake. One is the downtown's niche marketing program.

In our 1998 report on the state of the downtown, DANTH reported on the advantages of a niche marketing program for downtown merchants and noted some initial steps that had been taken. During 1999, the Chamber of Commerce, working with the EEDC, designed and implemented an effective advertising campaign for the downtown's wedding niche. This campaign was intended to be a model for similar cooperative marketing campaigns for the downtown's home center, specialty women's apparel, entertainment and children's clothing niches. Unfortunately, the wedding niche campaign faltered and no other niche marketing campaigns were developed. The dispute over Home Depot had apparently fragmented participants to the point that cooperative ventures became impractical.

This is very unfortunate since all of the downtown merchants would benefit greatly from these niche marketing programs. Ironically, such a campaign for shops in the home center niche would be extremely timely and rewarding.

Home Depot is a very large, very powerful and very successful retailer. A review of its behavior in other locations shows that its decision to enter a market area is usually very serious and determined. They don't quit or easily take defeat.

The boundaries of the "trade area" for one of their superstores will not be congruent with those of any particular political jurisdiction. Moreover, there are usually a number of locations that will enable Home Depot to penetrate the same market area. Consequently, if defeated on one location in the market area, Home Depot can be expected to look for another nearby, though perhaps in another community. In other words, Home Depot might achieve many of its goals with a location in Teaneck, Leonia, Bergenfield or Fort Lee almost as well as with the Route 4 site. It is only logical to assume that Home Depot will be looking for such an alternative site.

Whether some retailers may be prone to feeling the competitive pressures of a Home Depot will be determined by the boundaries of the superstore's trade area and not the borders of the political jurisdiction these merchants are located in. In other words, the shopkeepers in downtown Englewood who are liable to feel increased competition from a Home Depot will do so whether the superstore is in Englewood or in a nearby community.

Superstores are sufficiently powerful that they do not have to be demonized. The ability to successfully cope with them is enhanced by a realistic view of their powers and abilities. While there is some sound and systematic research on the impact of Wal-Marts on downtown retailing², there is little

² See for example: N. David Milder, "The Superstore Quandary," Urban Land, July 1999, Vol. 56 Number 7, pp. 46-49

comparable research on Home Depot. After a computerized library search of articles and books and a similar search on Lexis-Nexis, DANTH has concluded the following about the probable impacts of a Home Depot:

- The home improvement market is growing, but sales are consolidating in the hands of a few strong chains such as Home Depot and Lowe's
- Home Depot's first year in a market can bring a big hit and quickly knock out weak businesses, especially lumber and small hardware stores. Most hardware stores report around a 25% reduction in sales after a Home Depot opens, but some have encountered 70% drops. Sales for small hardware stores typically rebound after Home Depot's debut year, but usually never reach prior levels. Small hardware stores feel the greatest competitive pressure when they are in the middle of a battle between Home Depot and another large home center such as Lowe
- A few stores even do better after a Home Depot opens. For example, when a Home Depot opened 1,000 feet away from a hardware store in Quincy, MA, the owner was expecting a 25% drop in business. For a year prior to Home Depot's opening they had prepared, featuring low prices and service. So the year Home Depot opened, sales *increased* by 17%, which was followed by a 35% increase the following year. Growth has plateaued off now at about 15% a year.
- Many shops are not impacted by Home Depot even though they sell the same broad types of products because they offer different merchandise lines to different market segments. For example, both Home Depot and Lighting By Gregory sell lamps and light fixtures, but before the Planning Board the owner of Lighting By Gregory recently stated that the Home Depot would have little direct impact on his business (though he still opposed the project).
- Niches are the solution to surviving the arrival of a Home Depot. More than one store can be in one of these niches. When this happens, they function as specialized shopping centers. The more shops in the niche, the stronger it is
- *Upscale Customers.* One hardware retailer successfully developed a niche based on upscale patio furniture and fireplace equipment - items the regular Home Depot didn't carry. This required strong advertising aimed at upper-income households. Many downtown Englewood shoppers are affluent
- *Convenience.* Convenience is a huge issue for today's shoppers. They have less time and make fewer shopping trips. Their shopping trips are more task-oriented and involve less browsing. New shopping centers and those being remodeled are being designed to facilitate quick in and out trips by consumers. The most time-pressured, convenience-conscious shoppers are those with higher incomes. Home Depots often do not offer a lot of convenience for such time-pressured

shoppers. Many downtown Englewood shoppers are time-pressed and convenience-conscious

- *Special Products and Special Services.* One hardware store in Braintree, MA has been able to withstand Home Depot's competition in paints, though it did not do as well in hardware and lumber. The store offered the "right" paints. As one contractor put it "If I'm doing a job in Boston, I can't afford to have the wrong paint." The store also installed a paint-matching system that has helped it compete with Home Depot's lower prices.

Organizing and marketing downtown Englewood's home center niche will help to make it real and competitively effective. Shops in the downtown's other niches should also become more engaged in joint marketing and promotional efforts.

Englewood's Public-Private Partnership. In our last report on the state of the downtown, completed in September 1998, DANTH stressed the value and importance of Englewood's public-private sector partnership. This partnership projected an image of Englewood having an effective and consensual leadership that is capable of acting expeditiously with the private sector. This image was crucial for interesting developers, real estate brokers and retailers in downtown development projects. The ruckus about Home Depot threatens this very important and very positive perception within the development community.

This erosion must not be allowed to happen. Especially, since the revitalization of the West Side has proceeded, so far, unaffected by the vicissitudes of the Home Depot proposal. Group USA is now before the Planning Board with its proposal for a second project and a site review for the proposed Armory Street retail project will begin shortly. If these two projects obtain their approvals and permissions with suitable consideration and speed, then steps should be taken to place articles on the resiliency of the Englewood process in publications read by the development community (e.g., The New York Times, Real Estate Weekly, etc.).

A note of caution! At the time this report is being written, there is no observable reason to believe that either the Group USA II Project or the Armory Street Project will meet the same kind of intense opposition that the Home Depot Project encountered. However, should one or both of these projects confront such heated opposition and be defeated, then the revitalization of downtown Englewood will be severely endangered. Serious developers and retailers will then be very prone to perceiving downtown Englewood as a risky environment for investment. This erosion of Englewood's reputation as a place to do business is also very likely to result in reduced interest by the private sector in the redevelopment of the Office Enterprise Zone's 150 acres.

III. PLANNING AND IMPLIMENTATION

Across the nation, downtown Englewood has an enviable reputation for its success and its model downtown revitalization program. An article on it was featured last summer in the magazine of the National Main Street Center.³ Peter Beronio, Englewood's Community Services Director, is constantly requested to make presentations on it. In just the past year he has done so at conferences sponsored by the National Main Street Center, Main Street New Jersey, the International Downtown Association, Downtown New Jersey and the International Council of Shopping Centers.

One of the keys to the success of the Englewood model is its staff's ability to develop comprehensive plans that are viable and consequently implemented. In May 1994, DANTh submitted a series of strategic recommendations aimed at stimulating the revitalization of the downtown, especially the West Side: make the downtown more pedestrian friendly; provide more parking; provide larger and better retail spaces, and address the major quality of life problems on the West Side. DANTh also argued that the redevelopment of the Krantz properties (now the Group USA Building) could spark the revitalization of West Palisade Avenue.

Working under the direction of Bob Benecke, the City Manager, Ken Albert, the City Engineer and Planner, and Peter Beronio forged a very comprehensive set of plans to implement DANTh's strategic recommendations. Their plans were presented to the City Council in September 1997. Reviewing these plans in February 2000 shows that an enormous amount of the work they called for either already has been completed or will be soon during the coming year.

1. Humphrey Street Building. This formerly vacant and deteriorating eyesore has been demolished. Its redevelopment awaits movement on a possible project on West Palisade at Humphrey Street
2. Armory Street. The revitalization of this street has done much to alleviate quality of life problems in the downtown. It properly has received national attention. However, the buildings at 23, 24 and 26 Armory still need rehabilitation. The City owns 24. Propitious owns 23. An individual owns 26
3. Mackay Park. The rehabilitation of this park was completed in 1997. It has helped improve quality of life problems while providing open space for local residents and an asset for the downtown
4. Elmore Avenue. The health of residential areas in and near the downtown has a great influence on it's well-being. The reconstruction of this street near Mackay Park in 1996 greatly improved the surrounding neighborhood

³ N. David Milder, "On The Right Track. Englewood, New Jersey: A Model Comprehensive Revitalization Program", Main Street News, July 1999, Number 155, pp. 1 -7

5. Englewood Avenue Intersection (Wides Corner). In a neighborhood abutting the downtown, a traffic signal has been installed at this key intersection and curbs, sidewalks and lighting have been installed to provide an safer and more attractive environment. However, many of the storefronts need rehabilitation. Placing this area in the SID might help improve its prosperity
6. Mattlage Place. Bordering on the west of the Englewood Avenue intersection. Infrastructure improvements were completed in 1996
7. West Palisade Avenue Traffic Islands. The reconstruction and re-landscaping of these islands along a key downtown gateway is scheduled for completion in 2000.
8. Liberty Square Project. Mostly done, but City will make it ADA compliant in 2000.
9. West Palisade Avenue Sidewalks and Lighting. About 80% done. Will be completed in 2000.
10. East Palisade Avenue Sidewalks and Lighting. Will be completed in 2000
11. Reconstruction of James Street, Charles Street and Grove Street. Completed
12. Depot Park Play Area. Completed, using private funds.
13. Parking Lot "A". Work will begin in 2000
14. James Street Parking Lot and Parking Lot "H". Will provide more shopper parking. Now under construction and expected to be substantially completed by the Spring of 2000
15. Parking Lot "B". Was reconstructed in 1996 to provide a landscaped and lighted area
16. The Krantz Building. Now the Group USA Building. And this project has indeed sparked new interest by developers and retailers in the West Side
17. The Krieger Building. Renovations of this building were completed in 1999
18. DiStasio/Kiddie World Property. A proposed project for this site is about to go before the Planning Board
19. The Gurunathan Building. Strategically located across James Street from Group USA, this building remains problematical in its tenants, appearance and the loiterers it attracts

Even a cursory perusal of these results suggests a strong and direct correlation between the success of these plans and the overall health of downtown Englewood.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Parking Deck. Build the parking deck on Lot A that has long been needed. As we demonstrated with a photograph in our last report, such a deck need not be ugly nor create a retail discontinuity. Old Town in

Alexandria, VA, the Gas Lamp District in San Diego, CA and Old Pasadena, CA -- all known for their concerns about historic preservation -- have garages that don't look anything like garages. Downtown Cranford, another design concerned community, is about to build a similar structure as part of its Cranford Crossing project. The deck would also help meet parking demand on the West Side. To the degree that it stimulates better businesses to come into the block between Van Brunt and Humphrey Street on W Palisade, it also will help integrate the two sides of the downtown

2. Way-finding System. DANTH suggested this in our last assessment. Given the scattered locations of your parking resources, a good signage system is needed to maximize their use. A good system would also help people find downtown attractions. Way-finding systems make people feel more at ease and comfortable downtown, accordingly they are an important "customer service," just like adequate and easy to find parking. The graphic design is critical to the effectiveness of a way-finding signage system. Consequently, DANTH doubts that it can be designed in-house by the City's staff.

3. More Downtown Housing. It is perhaps time to develop a formal plan for developing more housing in and around the downtown. Such a plan would identify how many existing units could be improved, how many new units could be added and where they should be located.

4. Quality of Life Issues. DANTH recommends better coordination between CCTV surveillance and the deployment of police patrols. Also, police in such cities as New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Dallas Police have used a series anti-loitering techniques very successfully. These techniques are probably transferable to Englewood. George Kelling's new book Fixing Broken Windows also is filled with ideas that the local police might use to address this problem. Furthermore, the 3 houses on Armory Street should be rehabilitated. This would alleviate the remaining "visual signs of disorder" on this street

5. Linking The Two Sides Of Downtown. As suggested in last report, this is becoming easier to do as the West Side strengthens. But the Conrail tracks and Van Brunt still constitute a pedestrian moat. Better retailers and better looking stores on the block between Van Brunt and Humphrey Street would be a big help.

6. The Mental Health Building. Move the mental health agency out of its current building on W. Palisade. Formulate a rehabilitation plan for that building, which is now greatly underutilized and is of architectural interest

7. Niche marketing. It is very important from a number of perspectives that the City and the Chamber again work closely on effective niche marketing campaigns.

8. Cinema. If the Group USA II and the Armory Street projects happen, then the West Side will no longer need the customer flow that would be generated by a 10 screen, 2,600 seat movieplex. But, entertainment remains as one of the niches that most experts agree will

strengthen downtowns over the next several decades. Downtown Englewood already has a significant entertainment niche. Adding a 5 or 6 screen, 600 seat cinema that focuses on independent films would make this niche more robust, while not stressing parking resources or congesting traffic. Theater operations of this sort also tend not to attract the youth market. DANTH recommends that a feasibility study for such a project be conducted, with a prime task being to find an appropriate location for the movieplex.

9. The Gurunathan Building. A physical rehabilitation plan for the Gurunathan Building should be created within the next six months. It should be based on a evaluation of highest and best uses for the property given the context of its downtown setting. Given its location opposite Group USA I and the new Armory Street retail project, it is important that this property be improved

10. Place the Wides Corner Area in the SID. Properties within a SID do not have to be in one contiguous area. This area is too small to support a SID by itself. Participating in an existing and effective SID would be advantageous to the businesses in this small commercial area that borders on the downtown.

11. Supreme Oil. Whether the firm needs to be jaw-boned or relocated, an effective action plan is needed to eradicate the traffic problems this firm is causing in downtown Englewood. DANTH recommends that that such an action plan be formulated and implemented as quickly as possible.

12. Create Linkages to Rte 4 Developments. DANTH recommends formulating a plan that would first identify feasible economic, promotional and transportation linkages between the downtown and the redevelopment of the Office Enterprise Zone and then detail how they can be created. We also recommend thinking outside of the box and entertaining some apparently very bold ideas. For example, while a shuttle van service between downtown and the Office Zone is an obvious possibility, an elevated monorail running above the Conrail right of way might also be feasible and more advantageous. Aeromovel, for example, has a pneumatically propelled system which has been built for similarly short runs at relatively affordable prices. Developers might be attracted to bringing the stations into their buildings or constructing their buildings adjacent to a station. The plan should also detail how parking might be "shared" given different usage patterns in the two areas. An analysis of the economic functions each area would specialize in and how they might compliment each other would also be useful. The State has Smart Growth Grants that would pay for such a study.