

Chapter III. Bristol Downtown Improvement Plan

I. Introduction

The town of Bristol has an active, generally healthy downtown area with tremendous potential. The purpose of this Downtown Improvement Plan is to identify the business center's strengths, weaknesses and opportunities and to develop recommendations, which will further strengthen and improve the downtown environment.

A number of small commercial centers in New England have experienced difficulties because of factors such as competition from large chain stores and malls, neglect of the downtown area, sprawl, and



failure to appreciate and capitalize on the downtown's best assets. On the other hand, many communities have been able to retain a vibrant downtown business district or have succeeded in revitalizing their downtown area, raising property values and spurring new private investment. The town of Bristol can learn a great deal from the experience of other towns, both in maintaining the best aspects of its downtown and in building on them to create an economically vibrant and aesthetically pleasing downtown area.

Rollins

Threats to Vitality

Fortunately, Bristol is not at the point where it needs major revitalization. External threats upon the economic well being of the community do in fact continue to exist. However, the most serious threats to the vitality of Bristol's central business district may lie within its own boundaries. These include, but may not be limited to:

- Lack of initiative in implementing the 1982 Downtown Improvement Plan;
- Stores which are not as attractive as they could be, interiors as well as exteriors;
- The lack of advertising and self-promotion;
- Traffic congestion;
- Indifference on the part of some business men and women;

- A perceived shortage of convenient parking;
- Failure to preserve building architectural style and character;
- An unattractive streetscape, with little visual relief from paved spaces.

A downtown revitalization effort may be as limited as the removal of trash lying in sidewalks and streets, painting of buildings and the addition of extra off-street parking spaces. In other cases, the revitalization program may be much broader, to include the creation of a pedestrian mall, the encouragement of new retail and office development, and the restoration of historic buildings.

Just as physical improvements may vary, so will the source of their support. Certain business district improvements will rely on local private initiative, while others will depend upon local government support and still others may represent a public-private cooperative effort.

It is important to remember that what makes a downtown area alive and economically sound is not its improved structures, the provision for vehicle parking, nor other services alone, but people. The satisfaction of the users of the business district is the key to a successful downtown revitalization effort, for without people to utilize the downtown area in many different ways, it is a hollow shell.

Plan's Purpose

The Downtown Improvement Plan is not aimed at major change or clearance of existing structures, but seeks to encourage rehabilitation through a public/private partnership, stimulated through efforts to make downtown Bristol a more attractive place to work, shop and to invest in new business development.

II. Improvement Plan Objectives

The primary objectives of the Downtown Improvement Plan are:

- To provide for a more efficient use of the land; stimulate a viable economic climate; provide for an improved visual image; improve parking conditions and relieve existing pedestrian-vehicular conflicts.
- To reinforce existing commercial activity by unifying the Central Business District and by encouraging new retail and professional activity complementary to the existing townscape environment;

- To create a positive downtown image, reflecting an atmosphere conducive to patronage by local residents, shoppers from surrounding communities and tourists;
- To provide downtown pedestrian improvements in aesthetics and amenities, including landscaping, lighting, sidewalks and street furniture.

III. Downtown Study Area

The downtown study focus is on the area of Central Square, South Main Street, and Pleasant Street where commercial activity is most concentrated. The area extends from the Tapply Thompson Community Center (30 North Main Street) to My Tavern/Extra Care Hair Styling (50 South Main Street); to the east just beyond Riverview Suite (20 Spring Street) and to the west just beyond the Venture Print/Shear Definition stores (30 Lake Street) and the Post Office (See *Map I. Bristol Downtown Study Area*)

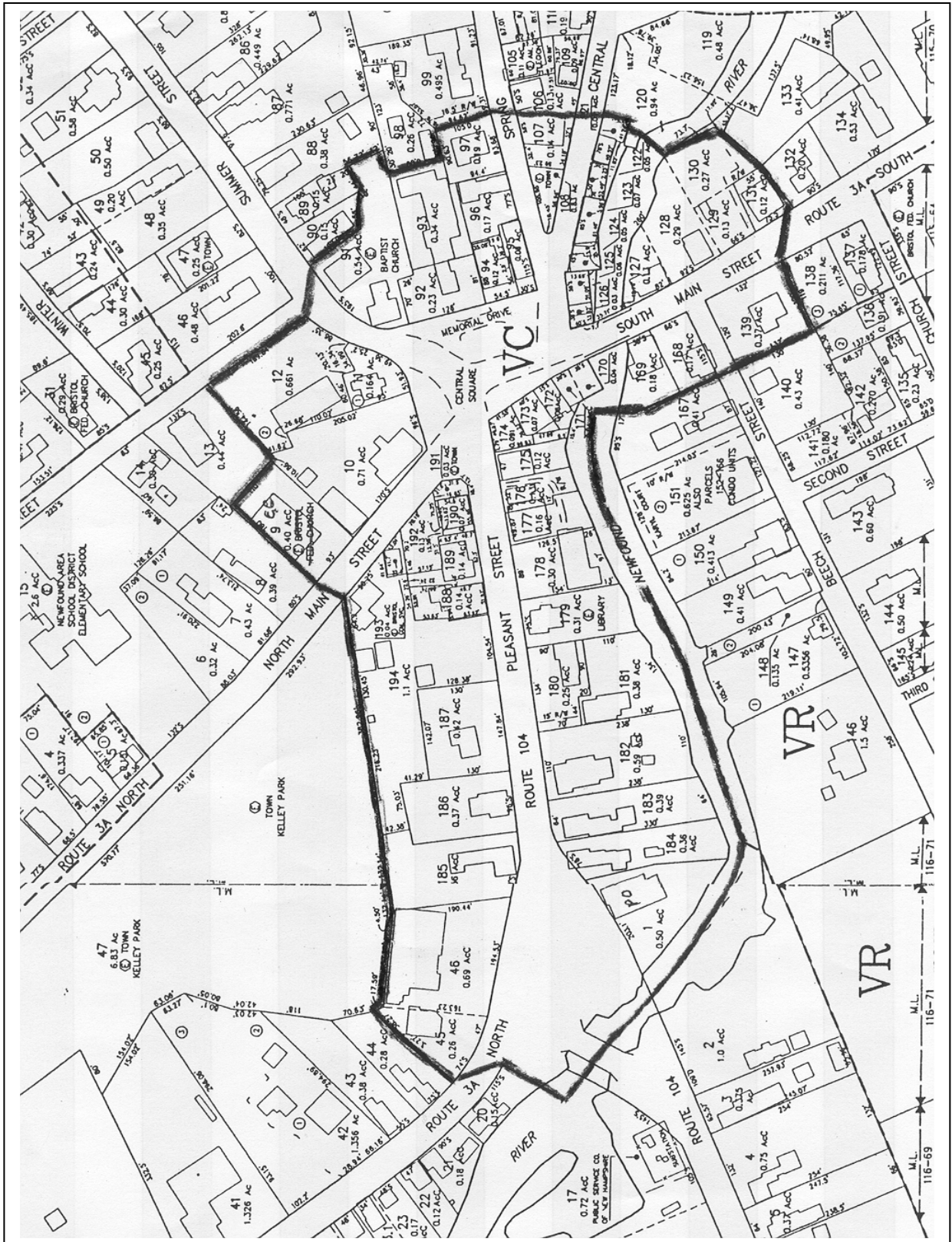
Concentrating community improvement efforts on this central downtown area will yield significant results that will generate improvement activity beyond its boundaries to adjoining areas of the business community. Since compact, commercial development is essential to the survival of downtown, full utilization of the downtown area should have a higher priority than development outside the central business district.

IV. Existing Land Use

The downtown area generally consists of a core of historic commercial buildings surrounded by older residential neighborhoods, a linear pattern of mixed uses, consisting primarily of newer commercial buildings and residential structures along Lake Street (Route 3A), Summer and Pleasant Streets (Route 104), and along South Main Street (Route 3A). In addition to the concentration of commercial and residential uses, the downtown includes such community facilities as the Library, Post Office and Community Center. Close by the Downtown Study Area are the Fire/EMS Station, the Elementary and Middle Schools and Kelley Park.

The most prominent of Bristol's many natural features are Newfound Lake and the Newfound River. About two-thirds of the lake lies within the town limits, with the Newfound River, the outlet of the lake, meandering through the built-up area. It was the river with its abundant waterpower potential that greatly influenced the growth of the village as a center of manufacturing and commerce.

Map I. Bristol Downtown Study Area



Historic Prospective

Throughout the years, Bristol has remained the prime center of commercial development within the Newfound Region and has long been recognized as a tourist center and summer resort.

During the early days of Bristol's development, the land use appeared prudent and visually attractive. In an 1890 publication "Central New Hampshire and its Leading Businessmen", George F. Bacon wrote, "As enterprising as Bristol Village is, it is not more so than its appearance would indicate, for signs of thrift and prosperity abound on every side, both in and along the public streets and on private grounds. There are many finely appointed stores containing costly and varied stocks, for the village is a purchasing center of no mean importance and the local merchants cater very liberally to their many customers. Many of the stores are lighted by electricity, and as the same agent is used for illuminating the streets, travel after nightfall is as safe and enjoyable as at any other time. There are many concrete sidewalks throughout the village, and the streets are generally well-shaded and pleasant."

Downtown Today

Over the course of time, land use in the downtown area has become more diverse. Land uses of a non-mercantile character, such as automobile service stations, residential and certain semi-public facilities tend to fragment the Central Business District, making compact pedestrian shopping somewhat difficult and significantly diluting the business district's overall strength.

Although most of the commercial space within the downtown area is currently occupied, inadequate maintenance of some of the buildings, some inappropriate signage, poorly maintained sidewalks and an overall impression of too much pavement take away from the potential attractiveness of the downtown area. If an expanded commercial base is to be obtained, an effort must be made to improve those aspects of the downtown area, which detract from its potential. Further, new commercial development should be encouraged to locate downtown rather being dispersed throughout the town. Such dispersed business development generally does not attract shoppers to the downtown area and does not permit the convenience of one-stop shopping that clustered pedestrian scale shopping allows.

In conclusion, Bristol has many positive advantages, which should be preserved and strengthened. Central Square along with its fine 19th Century buildings and the Newfound River should not be ignored; fuller advantage of these attractive features should be taken. Land use within the Central Business District is vital to the well being of the entire community. The downtown area is an expression or reflection of what a

community thinks of itself. Opportunity exists to strengthen the retail and business center with expanded commercial activity, as well as personal and professional services.



Pedestrian Park

V. Central Business District Conditions and Analysis

Along with the construction of mills near the Newfound River and the corresponding growth of the labor force came a demand for goods and services. During the mid-1800's, many of Bristol's downtown commercial buildings, particularly those on Central Square were constructed to keep pace with the needs of an expanding industrial community.

Many of Bristol's commercial buildings are classified as fine examples of the Victorian Commercial style, reflecting several stylistic trends including details and features drawn from the early Italianate style. These buildings exhibit a wonderful individualism, which gives Bristol's downtown area a charm and character impossible to duplicate today.

Bristol is fortunate to have many fine Victorian structures in its downtown area. Considered individually, these buildings are more solidly constructed and elaborately detailed than any structure likely to be built in the downtown area or adjacent to the downtown area today. Considered collectively, these buildings project an image of the town. Preserving and enhancing the many fine buildings in the business district will constitute a major step toward recapturing the vitality that once characterized downtown Bristol.

Building Conditions

Currently, the attractiveness of a number of buildings in the Bristol downtown area is diminished by such factors as inadequate maintenance, use of inappropriate architectural elements and poor signage. If an expanded commercial base is to be sought, improvements must be made in these problem areas.

The buildings in Central Square and along Pleasant Street are the most important physical features of Bristol's central business district, economically, functionally and aesthetically. It will do little good to improve vehicular movement, add new parking areas and landscaping, if the buildings themselves are in bad repair, have siding which is not in keeping with the building's architecture and have poor signage. Buildings are the downtown area's major physical resource and, therefore, are important to the success of any downtown revitalization program.

Careful building renovation can change the signs of deterioration within the business district and increase rental values. The warmth and character of Bristol's revitalized downtown area can attract customers from many miles, resulting in new demand for the community's retail space. Improvements to individual buildings goes far beyond its own walls, to the extent that it contributes to the overall image of the area. However, it should be remembered that each structure that is remodeled, departing from the character of the business district, and not compatible with its surroundings could cause serious visual harm to the streetscape.

Rehabilitation can result in not only increased property values, but also additional business. Regular customers, noticing the change, feel that a merchant cares about making their experience more pleasant and comfortable, while new customers will be encouraged to stop in and survey the merchandise. And, as an added incentive, a single well-executed renovation project will frequently be the catalyst for similar work along the street.

Building rehabilitation or renovation does not necessarily mean major changes or expenses. It is recognized that not every building needs major work; even minor repairs, fix-up and paint-up can make a big difference.

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Renovation involves a general upgrading of a building's external appearance. It can consist of accentuating the existing features of the building through painting, replacement or other treatment; the addition of design elements which may or may not have appeared on the original building, but which are in keeping with the building's character, and a general revamping of signage.

Renovation should not be confused with restoration or historic preservation in which meticulous care is taken to return a building to the design and condition in which it existed at a particular point in time. Rather, renovation is a contemporary solution that emphasizes long-term,

yet economical improvements. It respects the architectural features that enhance the building and removes those that detract or conceal it, such as false fronts. The height, width, original proportions, construction materials, textures, lines and width of an existing building are some of the factors, which must be taken into account prior to starting a renovation project. Also, old photographs, if available, can be very helpful in assessing the building's potential and making decisions about the type of changes to undertake.

Storefronts

Because the storefronts are most directly in view of passersby and shoppers every effort should be made to retain or recapture the storefront architectural character.

Fortunately, very few storefronts in Bristol have been "remodeled" or

altered in general design over the years. It is recommended that the architectural character of individual storefronts be reappraised and that any restoration or renovation to be done, be in a form which is compatible with the design of the rest of the building, as well as with that of the total downtown area. While the storefront is but one of the many variables that affect business, an attractive storefront will always reinforce a successful venture.



The storefront's original design is the best blueprint for a renovation project. Reduced to its essential elements, the storefront is actually defined by a horizontal lintel and two vertical piers. In any renovation, these features should always be retained. The width of the storefront pier should approximate the spacing between openings on the upper floors. In this way, each level will relate to the other and the building will "read" as a unified whole. Similarly, the lintel, which defines the top of a storefront, should never be removed or altered. This horizontal strip unifies the facade and gives "scale" to the street frontage of a building.

Original details and materials should always be retained. Decorative features such as columns or brackets, which are often repeated across the face of a building, give unity and character to the storefront. If it is impossible to preserve these and other features such as cast iron paneling, try to approximate the original design with different materials. For instance, wood is often a good substitute for an original cast iron storefront. On an older building, aluminum and porcelain siding or

detailing should be avoided because they contrast too greatly with 19th century building materials.

Always avoid new materials that do not relate to existing materials, exterior clutter such as small signs and other objects attached to surfaces, and irrelevant lighting fixtures. Where glass area must be reduced, use solid panels of a material already present on the exterior. Preserve, where possible, porches, steps, entry doors, or platforms when they still have character worth saving.

When planning a storefront renovation, always remember that the storefront is a part of a larger structure and its design should relate to the building's overall character. Secondly, a commercial block may contain more than one storefront and, for the best effect; each individual shop should harmonize with its neighbor.

A hazard to be avoided is that of choosing an "historical revival look" or the popular cedar shakes cover-up that is neither historically correct nor good design in the first place. It is recommended that the original styles of Bristol's Main Street buildings should be sought or maintained, not redesigned, to out-of-place "fake colonial" or some other design. Contemporary building designs should be considered only as an alternative where no strong local styles exist.

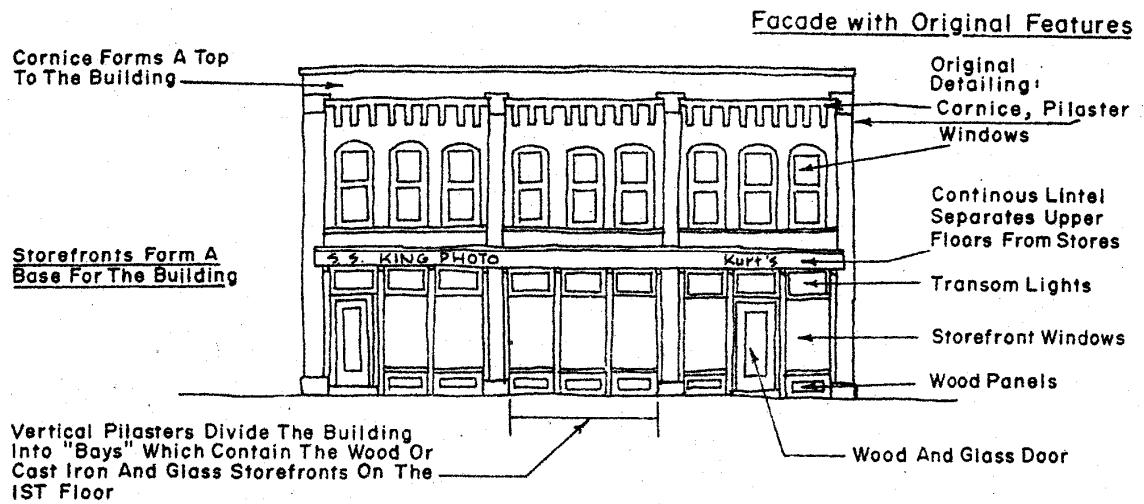
It should be pointed out, however, that new, well-designed modern buildings can make a positive visual contribution to the downtown area, even though the business district is made up of predominantly 19th century buildings and should not be discouraged.

Adhering to these guidelines and respecting the integrity of the building need not restrict individual expression. Storefronts can vary tremendously to express the nature of the business and the identity of the owner. This can be accomplished by the introduction of small elements such as signs, awnings and window boxes.

The Facade

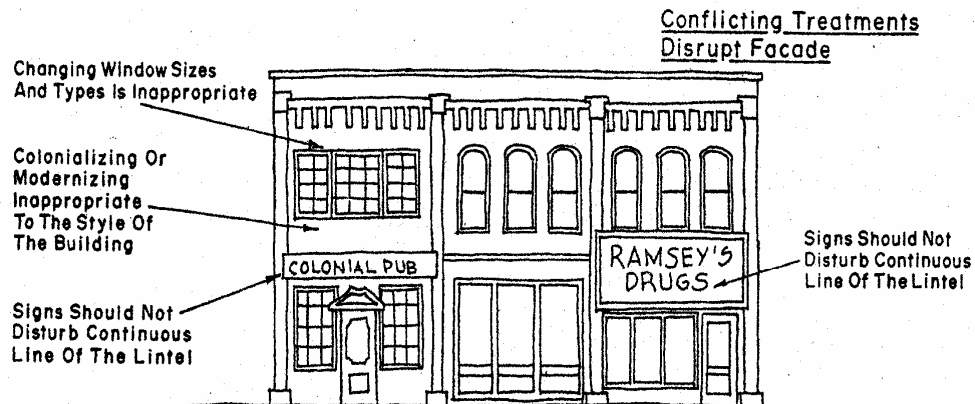
The figures on the following pages illustrate design options. *Figure III-1* shows appropriately renovated buildings on which the original details, materials and scale have been retained. Furthermore, this design reconciles two competing forces--the identity of the individual store and the design of the building as a whole.

Figure III-1



Figures III-2 and III-3 illustrate examples of how the addition of inappropriate details and materials can erode the original character of the building. Usually this produces a visually complicated appearance, which obscures rather than accentuates the identity of each storefront. On a well-designed commercial block, a balance is struck between the building's total design and that of the storefront.

Figure III-2



Each Storefront Is Of A Different Type; This Disrupts The Continuity Of The Continuity Of The Building Facade.

Figure III-3



Attractive storefronts are always designed as part of the building that contains them. By relating to the style and detailing of the upper floors, the storefront becomes an integral part of the total building and actually makes a bolder, more cohesive statement.

Three basic rules should govern commercial improvements and also apply to home renovations.

- (1) Any change or addition should be compatible with the original design of the building.
- (2) Whenever possible, retain original details and materials. If it becomes necessary to introduce new elements, or to mix old and new parts, they should harmonize with what already exists.
- (3) Never try to make a building look older than it really is by using details from earlier periods. The result will always look somewhat artificial.

Awnings and Canopies

Awnings and canopies have traditionally been used in business areas to give shoppers protection from the weather, as well as to protect window merchandise from the sun. In addition, awnings and canopies can provide color, a three-dimensional appearance to a facade and vitality to the downtown area. Properly designed and maintained awnings can add to the character of the street and commercial area.

Canopies and awnings can be used effectively on buildings to lessen the contrast of less attractive structures. However, care should be taken not to cover up handsome materials or important details through the use of such

canopies and awnings and it should be understood that metal and wood canopies tend to dominate storefronts, and are simply foreign to some commercial architecture. The use of compatible awnings, which may vary in color, but not in basic design on a number of buildings, can help to tie the buildings and street together.

Colors

One of the most important decisions building owners make is the choice of exterior color. This is of particular importance in the case of a wood-frame building where the combination of wall and trim colors usually decides its basic character, making it appear cheerful or gloomy, light or heavy, restful or busy. In the case of a brick building, although the basic wall color has already been established unless the brick is painted, the choice of color for window trim, doors and other features can still have a decisive influence on the character of the building.

The many brick buildings provide Bristol's business district with a fine textural character. Several fine brick buildings dominate Central Square. Great care should be given to the continued maintenance and improvement of these structures.



Minot Sleeper Library

Many times, older brick buildings were painted when they were built to seal their soft brick from the weather, while oftentimes others have been painted later in their lives. Where brick surfaces are already painted, there is no real need to remove the paint. It generally may remain and be repainted, so long as the alternative of the natural brick is not easy to obtain. Where brick buildings have never been painted, the natural unpainted brickwork should be kept.

It is recognized that choosing of a building color is an individual and personal choice, but it has its effect on the general character of the street. A good color scheme should be neighborly, as well as effective in itself, so that both the building and the street environment benefit. Choice of color is most significantly a part of the total design effort and must be considered with discretion.

Several colors on a building should be avoided. The most effective architectural color schemes usually contain a very limited number of

colors, perhaps one or two at the most. In the Victorian era, the later 1800's and very early 1900's, painting was usually done using earth colors, hues tending towards browns, soft greens, and beiges. Bright colors and whites were rarely used. Victorian buildings, therefore, are perhaps most appropriately, or at least authentically, painted using subdued colors. Special care should be taken in choosing the basic wall color of frame buildings, especially if the building has been renovated using aluminum or vinyl clapboards. Off-white on older buildings or white on newer ones nearly always looks right on a clapboard building, but sometimes a darker-toned color can also be very effective, especially if the window trim is off-white or very light in tone.

Windows

Next to the materials of the building, the windows' shape, size, placement, and decorative trim constitute the major element in creating the character of the building. As such, the windows should be preserved and protected against needless alteration, boarding up, or elimination.

It is a good basic rule that, if the original windows cannot be saved and it is necessary to replace them, the new windows should be the same size and type as the originals or at least as close as possible. The practice of "blocking-up" or "blocking down" existing window openings to fit a smaller standard window should be avoided if at all possible, as it does more than any other single thing to change the basic appearance of a building and seldom for the better.

When designing new window treatments, it is important to relate the proposed design to the facade of the whole building. Colonial windows with small frames, however attractive, can disrupt the continuity of a building front which is composed of large plate glass windows.

Siding Materials

Wood has been the most traditional siding material on Bristol's buildings. Wood is easily worked, has natural insulating qualities, and is adaptable, plentiful, relatively inexpensive and resistant to denting. It can be patched, refinished, and repainted or stained. For these reasons, every reasonable effort should be made to keep original wood siding on downtown commercial and residential buildings. If replacement is absolutely necessary, new wood clapboards will look better than any synthetic material and will, with care, last longer.

Brick is also a traditional, durable, attractive siding in the downtown area. Care should be taken to preserve the brick facings, avoiding unsightly patching and incompatible materials when repairing these surfaces.

In some applications, vinyl, aluminum or similar synthetic sidings may be considered as an alternative to wood or masonry. When used properly, these synthetic materials can make otherwise unkempt, unpainted buildings more attractive. Care should be taken to choose quality materials and installers. Particular attention should be paid to preserve or replicate original trim and moldings.

If changing the siding materials on a building is being considered, the alternatives available should be compared carefully. The following list summarizes the basics:

Wood Clapboards:

- Always historically appropriate--can last over 100 years if kept up.
- Require painting every 5-10 years and minor periodic maintenance.

Wood Shingles (Not Shakes):

- Used originally on Shingle Style and Queen Anne Style homes conditionally appropriate on homes of other styles - must be used with original trim.
- Can last to 100 years with maintenance.
- Require painting or staining every 5-10 years and minor upkeep.

Synthetic Siding (Vinyl, Aluminum, etc.):

- Conditionally appropriate, if 4" horizontal "Boards" are used and original trim is retained.
- Life expectancy may be longer than wood clapboards but long-term effects on structure beneath untested.
- May require periodic painting after 15 years; may dent or scratch; potential rot problems in structure behind; potential fire hazards.

Asphalt Shingle or Sheets, Formstone:

- All are inappropriate siding materials for older buildings.

Signs

Signs are one of the most prominent visual elements on the street. If well designed, signs add interest and variety to a building's facade while enlivening the street scene. On the other hand, signs more than any other single feature can detract from even the most attractive storefront and clutter its surroundings.

First and foremost, a sign should be visible and legible. To achieve this it is not necessary to install a particularly large or flashy sign. A sign will be far more effective if, instead, you concentrate on choosing appropriate enlivening the street scene. On the other hand, signs more than any other

single feature can detract from even the most attractive storefront and clutter its surroundings.

First and foremost, a sign should be visible and legible. To achieve this it is not necessary to install a particularly large or flashy sign. A sign will be far more effective if, instead, you concentrate on choosing appropriate details and a proper location.

In designing the sign itself, place a premium on simplicity and directness of message. Graphic symbols or simple verbal messages are generally most effective. Try to choose sign materials that will harmonize with the building's design. Generally, on a 19th century building, a wooden sign with raised letters will look the best. Besides treated natural wood, other suitable sign materials that can best withstand the variances of New Hampshire climate include metal or plywood, prepared and painted. Plastic signs with applied or integrated lettering and glass-illuminated signs are usually less appropriate.

A sign is most effective when few colors are used and light colored letters are placed on a matte, dark background reducing reflected glare. Messages are most easily read when lettering mixes upper and lower case form. For nighttime use, signs should be illuminated from an indirect light source. This will reduce glare and ensure that attention is properly focused, not on the sign, but on a lighted window display or on the activities indoors. Another acceptable alternative is to place the light source behind the letters to create a silhouetted effect.

Figure III-4



Figure III-5

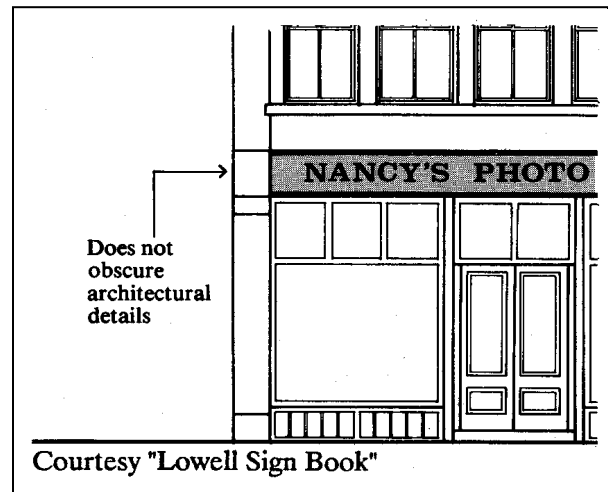
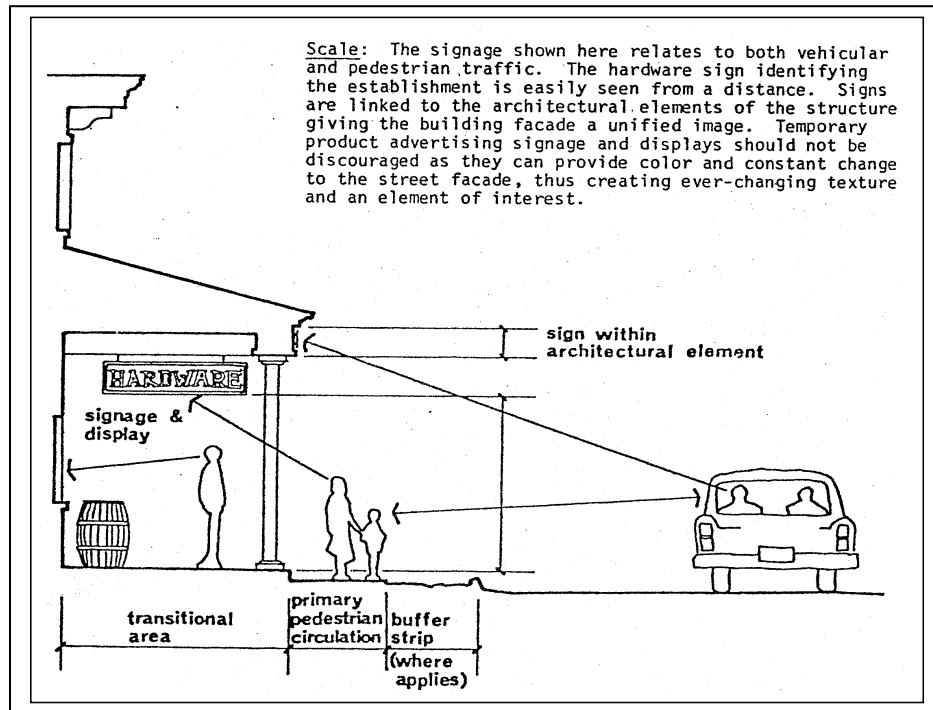


Figure III-6



When trying to determine how large a sign should be and where it should be placed, always refer first to the storefront and then to the design on the building as a whole. A sign should never be large enough to overpower the shop nor should it obscure a building's architectural features. As a general rule, when a building has a lintel (horizontal beam) locate your sign directly on it. If the sign is to project out from the building place it just above the lintel. See *Figures III-4, III-5, and III-6*, for effective use of signs.

Projecting signs are acceptable where their scale and method of support appear to be complementary to the building. They cannot endanger or impede pedestrians or vehicular traffic and may not extend over the vehicular right-of-way.

Fortunately, Bristol has been spared of a large number of inappropriate advertising signs. Because of the visual impact of signs, Bristol has a sign ordinance for the visual appearance of the town. Its object is to provide for the regulation and restriction of signs that are confusing, distracting, or impair visibility, and to protect scenic views and the character of the area. The sign ordinance leaves room for a variety in sign design. It includes requirements regarding maximum size, height and number of signs. The owner of any sign, which is in, or falls into disrepair, has to repair, replace or remove it.

Although not addressed by the ordinance, what is desired is excellence of lettering; careful color coordination with the building; good mounting; materials which are compatible with the building; lighting which is creative without being overwhelming; and, where effective, the use of plaques, logos, and decorative devices.

The use of signs sharing space with national brands of soft drinks or the like should be strictly discouraged.

Streetscape

A streetscape consists of three elements; manmade features such as buildings, fences, lights, sidewalks and streets; natural features like trees lawn and plants; and the users, cars, bicycles, and pedestrians. Two things determine the quality and flavor of this setting: first, the individual elements themselves, the buildings, sidewalks, trees, etc., and secondly, the way in which these elements relate to one another. Because a streetscape is such a diverse entity, improving it requires coordinated public and private efforts.

A downtown revitalization program should be a combined effort of the town and the private sector. The town may wish to budget for such improvements as tree planting, sidewalk repaving and special lighting fixtures keyed to the architecture of surrounding buildings and scaled to pedestrian height, while a merchant association or chamber of commerce may provide for benches and planters. These amenities are the very features which have made modern shopping centers so pleasant. By introducing such elements into downtown Bristol, the area will become more vital and attractive to shoppers and residents alike.

The building owners and shop operators, as part of the private sector, have a role to play in the town's revitalization program. They must carry out building renovation, storefront and sign improvements. These are just a few examples of streetscape improvement projects that can be undertaken publicly, privately or jointly. Streetscapes are public space, but they are part of everyone's shared experience and, consequently, their appearance and maintenance should be a common concern and a collective responsibility.

VI. Downtown Parking

Adequacy of parking is a major factor in attracting new commercial activity and revitalization to Bristol's downtown area. In a meeting of the committee preparing this section of the Master Plan and the downtown merchants, the merchants expressed a perception that parking is inadequate in the downtown area. This parking study was undertaken to determine how this perception compares with the actual situation and to

try to project future parking needs in the study area. To assess the adequacy of existing parking facilities, an inventory of existing spaces and an occupancy study were made.

An inventory of parking spaces within the downtown study area indicates that there are 131 parking spaces available to the general public, including those in the parking lot between Central Square and the Bank of NH and in the municipal lot on Pleasant St. adjacent to the Masonic Temple (*See Table III-1*). About 172 more spaces are available in off-street lots dedicated to patrons of a particular establishment such as the Post Office of Liquor Store, but employee use reduces the number of

Table III-1: Bristol Downtown Parking Survey- 2001

| <i>Location</i> | <i>Description</i> | <i>Parking Spaces Available</i> | <i>Week-day Average of Spaces Occupied</i> | <i>Week-end Average of Spaces Occupied</i> |
|--------------------|--|---------------------------------|--|--|
| Central Square | West side, diagonal parking | 11 | 8 | 8.8 |
| Central Square | Between Central Square and Bank of NH | 13 | 6.3 | 9.3 |
| Central Square | Center | 14 | 9.6 | 9.3 |
| Central Square | South side, near Barber shop | 8 | 3 | 5.1 |
| Central Square | South side, in front of Mica building | 4 | 1.5 | 1 |
| Central Square | East side, in front of Bristol Market | 8 | 2.6 | 3.3 |
| Masonic Temple Lot | South side of Pleasant Street | 12 | 1.6 | 1.7 |
| North Main Street | West side, diagonal spaces near BCC | 7 | 5.4 | 3.7 |
| North Main Street | East side in front of bank | 5 | 2.8 | 3.5 |
| Pleasant Street | South side, Cumberland Farms to corner | 9 | 6.3 | 7.3 |
| Pleasant Street | North side from Sound Advice to Dead River | 10 | 4.3 | 7 |
| South Main Street | West side, from the bridge to My Tavern | 8 | 4.7 | 5.7 |
| South Main Street | East side, all spaces by Diner | 12 | 4.7 | 7.8 |
| Spring Street | South side, 6 diagonal and 1 parallel spaces | 7 | 4 | 2.7 |
| Spring Street | North side, marked spaces | 3 | 2.2 | 2.5 |
| TOTAL | | 131 | 67 | 79 |

available spaces in these lots to approximately 116 (*See Table III-2*). Parking areas not dedicated to business use, such as the Baptist Church lot and Town Square Apartments lot are not included in this count because they are not generally available to patrons of downtown businesses. The dozen or so spaces behind Pleasant Street businesses have also been omitted from the count because they are used exclusively by owners and employees.

| Table III-2: Dedicated Off-Street Business Parking | | |
|---|---------------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>Location</i> | <i>Total Spaces</i> | <i>Employee Spaces (Est.)</i> |
| Post Office | 23 | 8 |
| Liquor Store/Venture Print | 38 | 6 |
| Minot-Sleeper Library | 8 (approx.) | 2 |
| Premium Glass | 10 (approx.) | 3 |
| Cumberland Farms | 6 | 0 |
| My Tavern | 19 (approx.) | 6 |
| Behind Bank of New Hampshire | 18 | 9 |
| Dead River Company Lot | 23 | 10 |
| Newfound Professional Building | 27 | 12 |
| TOTAL | 172 | 56 |

A thorough occupancy study of the 131 parking spaces available to the general public was carried out in August of 2001, presumably one of the busiest months of the year. Thirteen surveys were taken on weekdays and six surveys were taken on weekends. Generally, the surveys were taken at mid-morning or mid-afternoon. The results of these studies form the basis for Table III-1, which shows the average occupancy in various locations. The average occupancy of the parking spaces surveyed was 51% on weekdays and 60% on weekends. This is considerably below the 85% to 90% occupancy which is considered an indication of the need for additional short-term parking. However, getting a more accurate assessment of the parking situation in downtown Bristol requires going beyond the overall averages and looking at several factors that are hard to quantify.

Other factors, which must be considered in trying to reach some conclusions about Bristol's parking situation, include:

1. Some of the parking spaces included in the survey are not conveniently located. For example, most people looking for a parking space clearly do not see the Masonic Temple lot, with an average occupancy of 13%, as a convenient location. Focusing on the 58 spaces located in Central Square (the first six rows in *Table III-1*) shows an average weekday occupancy of 53% and a weekend occupancy of 63%, slightly higher than the overall averages, but still not at a level suggesting the need for more spaces. The three spaces on the north side of Spring Street showed an average occupancy of 83%, the highest in the survey.
2. Special events can cause parking problems that don't show up in the data. Notably, the Saturday night auctions held by Charlie Reynolds and the Sunday pancake breakfasts at the Legion Hall tend to create

an unusual demand for parking. It should be noted, however, that parking for weekend events like this is supplemented by the use of off-street parking in places such as the Bank of NH and Dead River parking lots.

3. A number of available spaces are deficient in some way. For example, many spaces on Pleasant Street are too short to accommodate a large vehicle. Backing out of the spaces on the west side of the Square is inconvenient and can be dangerous, especially if traffic is high. The spaces in the center of the Square require passengers leaving or returning to their cars to cross two lanes of traffic if they are doing business on the west side of the Square. Finally, some spaces are inaccessible if you're coming from the wrong direction or require a long detour when you pull out.
4. Shoppers like to be able to pull up directly in front of the store they plan to visit. When they have to cross a street or walk by several storefronts to get to their destination, they have the perception that parking was inconvenient, even though the actual distance walked was not great. Likewise, merchants tend to see a parking problem when the spaces directly in front of their store are filled, even though space is available nearby.
5. The volunteers performing the parking survey observed that parking is anything but a static situation, with cars constantly pulling in and out of parking spaces. This means that spaces are constantly opening up, even at busy times. On the other hand, the volunteers also observed that some spaces are effectively taken out of circulation by all-day parking.

Given all of the considerations discussed here, it would appear that although more parking is always desirable, modest measures such as more strongly discouraging employees and apartment tenants from taking up prime downtown parking places are probably adequate at this time. It would probably be more important to address the convenience and quality issues described in Paragraph 3 before trying to increase the number of available spaces. Another quality issue that is not mentioned above, that needs to be addressed, is the virtual total lack of handicap parking spaces in downtown Bristol.

Should the downtown revitalization plans outlined elsewhere in this plan be successful, parking needs can be expected to increase and this need will have to be addressed. As a part of long-range planning, the town should consider acquiring land near Central Square when it becomes available to establish an off-street parking area. Based on a national survey, shoppers are reluctant to walk more than 300 feet to conduct their

business, so a suitable area would have to be within this distance from Central Square. Of the several locations that might be suitable, the area behind The New U/Dead River Oil Company off Pleasant Street would be particularly appropriate. This area would be most visible and accessible to motorists utilizing businesses along Pleasant Street and on Central Square.

Traffic Circulation

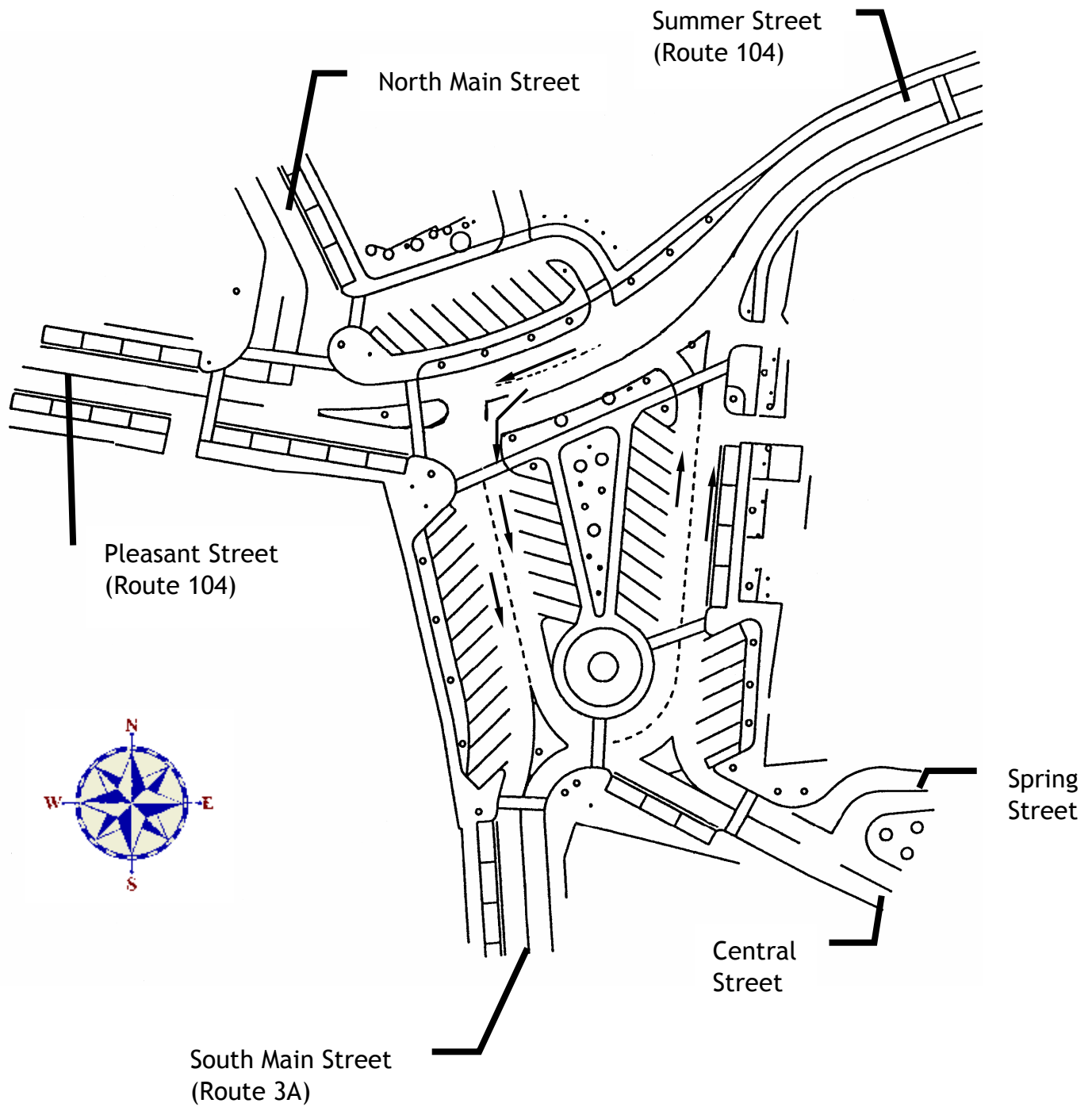
Vehicular traffic in a central business area has an important impact on the activities that take place in this area. In downtown Bristol, the various businesses depend on automobiles and trucks to transport their patrons and necessary supplies into the downtown area. Vehicles passing through on Routes 104 and 3A generate additional traffic. It must be recognized that vehicular traffic detracts from the environmental quality and beauty of the downtown area, competing with and disrupting the flow of pedestrian traffic, the real lifeblood of any business area.

Downtown Bristol has a long history of traffic congestion and confusion, particularly at the Central Square intersection. The street pattern within the downtown area and the through-traffic highway intersections create problems that need to be addressed.

Traffic control and/or a redesign of the traffic pattern should be considered, not solely for the benefit of the motorist, but for the aid and safety of the pedestrian. The main goal of providing traffic improvements is to achieve an efficient and convenient movement of vehicles in harmony with pedestrian traffic, while improving the aesthetic and environmental quality of downtown Bristol. A secondary goal of a redesign would be to provide at least as much parking as currently exists while reducing the deficiencies noted earlier in some of the existing downtown parking.

Figure III-7 based on a plan suggested by Michael W. Bannan, illustrates a possible redesign of Central Square, but represents only one of several possible designs.

Figure III-7 Conceptual Central Square Design



VII. Street Treatment and Pedestrian Amenities

A better balance between a man-made and natural environment should exist in downtown Bristol. Presently, buildings and pavement dominate much of the landscape, particularly at Central Square and along Pleasant Street.

Steps should be taken to restore a pedestrian scale and beauty to Bristol's downtown area. These improvements would stimulate shopping and building occupancy, as well as improve the quality of life for local residents. Just as pedestrian amenities are a major selling point of most shopping centers and malls, Bristol's commercial area can become more attractive to both shoppers and residents by providing a more harmonious and hospitable pedestrian environment. Pedestrian amenities refer to features that make the landscape pleasant, attractive and comfortable.

There are existing downtown amenities, which add to Bristol's visual appearance. Perhaps the most obvious and dominant is the small curbed rectangular park within Central Square, which contains the Soldiers Monument and other monuments honoring Bristol's Revolutionary and World War I soldiers, along with the town's flagpole, ornamental shrubs and large spruce tree. Other visual amenities include the nicely maintained lawn area and trees on the east side of the Square in front of and to the side of the Beno House or old Bartlett House; the small green area adjacent to North Main and Pleasant Street, near the police parking space; the grass area north of the Square between the bank and the old Sleeper Tavern and the small lawn area in front of the Library.



Additionally, green space and landscaping around the Bristol Community Center on North Main Street and the Federated Church on South Main Street contribute significantly to the appearance of downtown. The Newfound River, although not very visible and not being utilized to the downtown's best advantage, can also represent a considerable amenity for the downtown.

On the negative side, a number of amenities often present in downtown areas are lacking in Bristol. Among these are benches, special lighting fixtures, plant containers, litter receptacles, special paving surfaces and street tree plantings.

Sidewalks

A viewing of sidewalks in the downtown area was conducted to establish the present conditions of sidewalks, curbs and edges. The condition of individual sidewalks varies, but in overall terms,

the condition of sidewalks in the downtown area was found to be generally acceptable. There is, however, a lack of adequate delineation or curbing at some locations, which would provide improved pedestrian safety, and a lack of definition between traffic and pedestrian movement, particularly along portions of Pleasant, Summer and Lake Streets. The surfaces and

edges of sidewalks on side streets away from the downtown area are in less favorable condition. In most need of attention are the sidewalks on Summer Street. There is no sidewalk on the west side of South Main Street from Beech Street going south and no delineated sidewalk on Central Street.

Sidewalks should be provided where traffic volumes are high enough to warrant a sidewalk for minimum pedestrian safety. Poor sidewalks generally detract from the appearance of the downtown, as well as the community's neighborhoods. Inadequate sidewalk conditions should be corrected with improvements and general maintenance provided on a regular basis. In addition, sidewalks along the town's business streets should present a pleasant and comfortable environment, including such features as street trees, special lighting and benches for shoppers' comfort.

Special attention should be given to the large expanse of pavement within the Central Square area. The introduction of a wider walkway of

Figure III-8

Lighting and planters provide a buffer between pedestrians and traffic. In areas with widened sidewalks, street side seating can also be accommodated.

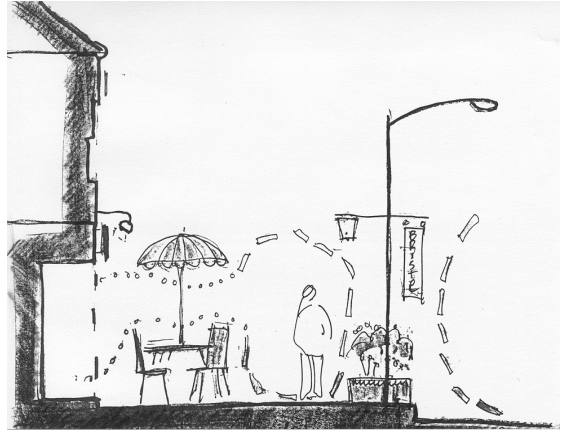
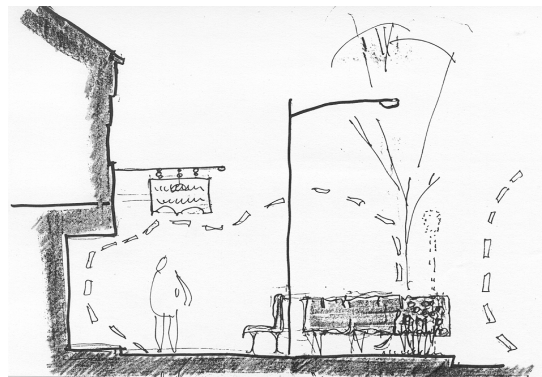


Figure III-9

"Bump-outs" (sidewalk extension illustrated to the right of the street lamp provide an added measure of pedestrian safety at intersections and cross walks, elevating the street walkers so they are more noticeable to drivers. Bump-outs can also increase the usable sidewalk space for lighting, benches etc.

Illustrations by: Wes Flierl



textured material on the west side of the Square so as to accommodate appropriate tree plantings and other pedestrian amenities would do much to soften and improve the visual appearance of the Square and this approach to the downtown area. In addition, by projecting the sidewalk out beyond the parking spaces at certain street corners or at crosswalk locations, not only is street crossing made safer, but areas are created for street trees, planters and benches. Consideration must be given to snow removal during the winter months when planning for such areas.

Surface Material

The texture of the ground surface or walk areas is an essential visual element of the downtown area. Texture can be given to the ground surface through the use of a wide variety of materials, each having its own values and uses.

Surfaces such as cobblestone, brick and stone are quite dominant and tend to attract attention to the area. These surfaces are not only functional, but also interesting and pleasing to the eye.

The choice of materials can go far in creating a unique character within the central business area, as well as for individual areas within it. The more traditional use of asphalt sidewalk surfaces on Bristol's Main Street is acceptable; however, in addition, natural stone tiles or brick material with contrasting colors and textures may be interrelated and coordinated to provide interesting and varied areas within the downtown area.

Special Lighting

Downtown lighting, like lighting of other areas of the community, is considered primarily for the safety of traffic movement and crime prevention, with the chosen lighting coming from fixtures mounted on poles high in the air. Such lighting serves these purposes well, but is not in keeping with the pedestrian scale of the downtown business district.

Special lighting not only enlivens downtown at night, but also contributes to its structure and appearance during the day. As such, lighting equipment should be considered street furniture. If, for example, light poles are spaced regularly and fairly close together along a sidewalk, they can help to create visual rhythm with other elements of the street, such as trees. Where the lighting is not designed to fit in harmoniously in terms of scale, siting and design, it will only add to visual clutter.

The choice of special lighting equipment should take into account its contribution to the overall image of the central business district. As one of the most visible elements in the daytime downtown landscape, lighting systems must blend in well with all other furnishings of the sidewalks, as well as being compatible with the buildings along the street.

Contemporary lighting posts and fixtures fit well in an updated well-landscaped setting of pedestrian areas, designed in good taste so that they will have timeless appeal. Where the downtown architecture and history of Bristol are being stressed, lighting of older design may well be most appropriate. If possible, the lighting should be selected to match that which was originally used along the Main Street. If this is not possible for reasons of practicality or cost, a number of manufacturers produce outdoor lighting equipment that tastefully captures the flavor of older communities.

Street Trees and Plants

One aspect of the character of typical New England towns has traditionally been the trees, which have lined the main streets. This can be readily verified by studying old photographs of Bristol. Over the past several decades, trees have died or found themselves in the path of "progress".

Some of these trees have died from old age, but many have died either from disease, abrasion, excessive pruning, or suffocation from pavement or air pollution. Various types of trees can withstand varying amounts of pruning. Trees excessively pruned to make way for power lines frequently die or become visually unpleasant. A nurseryman should be consulted to determine how much pruning a particular tree can take.

Street trees, planted in paved areas, must have three to five feet of unpaved area to allow irrigation and aeration. Ideally, the trunk size of a newly planted tree should be 2 1/2 inches in diameter for the tree to survive in a heavy traffic area. Trees should be established with a clear trunk to seven feet, and should be selected for specific areas. Suitability for a particular situation depends on the exact downtown location and microclimate. Horticultural advice is recommended. Sampling the subsoil is necessary when planting in the existing ground. The County Soil Conservation Service office can assist with this task.

Trees and plants in the central business area perform several functions. When planted between vehicular and pedestrian areas, they absorb traffic sounds. Plants act as receptors of dust, absorb fumes and gases, provide shade in summer, insulation in winter and, when properly placed, they aid to control, direct and guide vehicular and pedestrian traffic.

The main objective of the use of trees and plants in the Bristol downtown area is for aesthetic value. With the use of a skilled designer, plants of many varieties can become an effective tool with which to reinforce the desired image of the central business district by providing a visual linkage to unify its man-made and natural environment.

Trees should be selected on the basis of their height. They should be in scale with their surroundings. Carefully selected trees can complement buildings and other surroundings. It is essential that adequate space be left for large trees at the planning stage. Where space is limited, smaller varieties should be used. Spacing should be measured when grouping trees, particularly if a canopy effect is desired. The optimum planting distance varies according to species and variety, although 10 to 30 feet is usual depending on tree spread.

Shrubs can be used as freestanding plants, but more often are planted in groups to create hedges and screens. The primary considerations, which should go into selecting a shrub for one of these uses, are the plants' natural growing height and whether it is suitable for being cut back and trimmed to encourage bushiness. Other factors should be considered if a particular visual effect is desired.

Importantly, consideration should be made for which town agency will care for these plantings.

VIII. Plan Recommendations

The Bristol Downtown Improvement Plan proposes a significant number of recommendations that private business, organizations and local government must undertake to achieve a pedestrian scale and attractiveness to the central downtown area. A downtown is, after all, supposed to be a pedestrian area, and the more attractive it is to people on foot, the more successful it is likely to be.

The recommendations will provide stimulation for new business and shopping activity, provide for improved use of Bristol's limited downtown land area and will provide for the broadening of the community's tax base.

The following recommendations are all part of a comprehensive plan for downtown revitalization. Yet, each proposal stands by itself and advances the development of the total plan. No attempt has been made to arrange the proposals in order of priority. Logically, however, Central Square redesign should be done early on, even if construction follows later, because many of the other proposals would be influenced by this new design.

(1) Central Square Redesign

The current traffic pattern at the intersection of Route 3A and 104 (Central Square) does not work very well. Moreover, the Square is dominated by paving and its function is primarily to serve vehicles.

An alternative to the design of Central Square should be considered. The

plan shown in *Figure III-7* should be given primary consideration, but must have NH Department of Transportation final approval. It is recommended that the Square be redefined to establish a larger, more appropriate and functional green. Currently, the excessively large expanse of asphalt paving within the Square, dominated by traffic circulation and parked vehicles provides an adverse visual impact upon the Square.

Redesign of Central Square to a more pedestrian scale will help to create a greater identity for the town center and serve as a focal point of the community.

(2) Central Square Pedestrian Improvement

To provide for an improved pedestrian scale shopping environment, it is recommended that the sidewalk on the west side of Central Square be widened by about five feet to provide additional space for street trees, pedestrian scale decorative lighting fixtures of an appropriate design and in harmony with the downtown, benches and other amenities

Paving material recommended is brick pavers that will provide scale and texture to enrich the pedestrian environment. An alternative to full pavers is a single or double row of pavers at the granite curbing. Trees suitable for sidewalk planting should be incorporated with this theme.

(3) Downtown Historic District

A Historic District Commission should be established to oversee the historic district, now included in the National Register. Its function would be to provide some guidance to individual property owners and the town with regard to the appropriateness of proposed building renovations, signage, street lighting, etc.

(4) Treatment of Business Area Storefronts

Under the direction of the Historic District Commission, storefronts and buildings in the downtown area should be restored or enhanced in their appearance in keeping with their original architectural character.

(5) Business Signs

Since signs in the downtown area are an important element in the visual image, downtown businesses should install signs that are in keeping with the downtown character. The Historic District Commission should guide this effort.

In more recent years, several signs have been installed which are inconsistent with the Old New England Village character. Compatible, easy-to-read signs should be a goal.

(6) On-Street Parking

Property owners and employees of downtown businesses should not utilize prime on-street parking spaces, thus making parking more difficult for prospective shoppers. It is essential that employees, building owners and apartment tenants use off-street parking areas or parking spaces not generally used by Bristol shoppers.

(7) New Parking Facility

With no unoccupied land available in close proximity to the Bristol downtown shopping center, the land area to the rear Dead River Oil Company buildings seems to be the most appropriate location for future municipal parking.

It is recommended, as a contingency plan, that the town make arrangements to acquire this land area. If acquisition is not feasible in the near future, first option purchase rights should be established for future purchase.

The lot should be paved and marked to accommodate about 42 parked vehicles. Appropriate landscaping and lighting should be installed, as well as appropriate signs directing downtown shoppers to the parking area should be erected. Other areas for consideration are lots 139, 180 and 123 (See *Map I* on Page 4).

(8) Streetscape Improvement

The lack of definition between vehicular traffic and pedestrian movement, with the relatively large open areas along portions of Pleasant, Lake and South Main Streets creates an interruption or gap in the streetscape scale of Bristol's downtown area.

It is recommended that this gap be softened at locations in front of Buzzy's store, in front of Premium Glass and Cumberland Farms, and between the parking area and sidewalk at the NH Liquor Store by the introduction of curbed islands or green space with appropriate plantings. This effort will create a more comprehensive downtown unit that will help in re-establishing the pedestrian scale and provide a soft green texture along the downtown streets. *Figures III- 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14* illustrate how the visual appearance of the downtown area would be enhanced by the implementation of some of the plan's recommendations.

(9) Pleasant Street Sidewalk Improvement

Sidewalk and curbing improvements made along Pleasant Street in the section between Lake Street and Central Square should be continued all the way to Central Square. The curbs should be granite, and crosswalk areas should be clearly delineated.

(10) Bristol Special Events

Special events within the community bring people to the area and gives visitors a positive impression of the community, increasing the likelihood that they will return. The Bristol business community should become more involved in sponsoring or co-sponsoring with other community organizations new events. Each successful event held in the downtown area generates substantial numbers of potential customers for Bristol businesses. Musical groups, art shows, farmer's market, along with special promotion and business sales are each possibilities.

(11) Newfound River Improvement

To assure preservation and enhancement of the Newfound River's aesthetic quality, the town should make every effort to encourage the cleanup along the river through the center of town, particularly along the area between the Post Office and the Library. To make visual improvements, brush and other undesirable growth should be cut, providing a clean grass area along the riverbank. Easements from property owners could lead to the development of a scenic walkway along the river maintained by the town.

The development of this passive type of recreational use will enhance the downtown area. Appropriate signage should be provided on the street to direct people to the walkway.

In addition, clean-up efforts should be made in the area of the Newfound River falls east of South Main Street and just off Central Street. This is a beautiful natural area that could become a public attraction given appropriate attention.

(12) Improvements to Other Streets and Pathways

Improvements to other streets leading to and from the downtown area have been carried out and should be continued as a part of the town's improvement program. Things that should be done to improve the street's attractiveness fall generally into upgrading the physical condition of sidewalks, curbs, streets and the addition of street trees along the sidewalks. Mowing and maintenance of grass strips along the street or between the street and sidewalks by abutting property owners is most important to the attractiveness of any street.

(13) Street Tree Planting Program

The town should encourage and assist with a street tree-planting program to provide shade in summer, as well as to improve the town's visual appearance. Such a program should involve coordination between various interested groups and the town with regard to the selection of appropriate species, tree locations, etc. Tree planting would be appropriate in the

downtown area.

Financial support may come from public and private sources, such as the Chamber of Commerce, Conservation Commission, Historical Society, Garden Club and Women's Club. One method of support may be financing of plant material from private donations with the town bearing the planting expense. The town should budget for tree care on an annual basis.

IX. Implementing the Plan

In preparing this plan, it quickly became obvious that most of the recommendations made in the 1982 Master Plan were excellent, but that very few of them ever came to pass. Likewise, the suggested steps for implementation made at that time seemed logical and well thought-out, but for the most part they simply did not work. Clearly, then, the real challenge in achieving downtown revitalization is not on reaching agreement on what needs to be done, but on finding a way to get it done.

There are two strategies which might be used to achieve downtown revitalization. One is to work with the resources already in place to implement the recommendations contained in this Master Plan. This would involve, among other things, seeking outside funding for the project and following through on its completion. The other approach is to apply for acceptance into an economic development program such as New Hampshire Main Street Program and to use their methods and procedures. There are clear advantages and disadvantages to either approach. Working with the resources in place (the Town Administrator, the Selectmen and the Planning Board) potentially allows for more immediate action and allows for more direct control by town officials over the project. On the other hand, this approach might not be as comprehensive as the Main Street program, which requires involvement by merchants, property owners, government officials and civic leaders. More significantly, perhaps, the poor record of progress using internal resources only in the past cannot be overlooked.

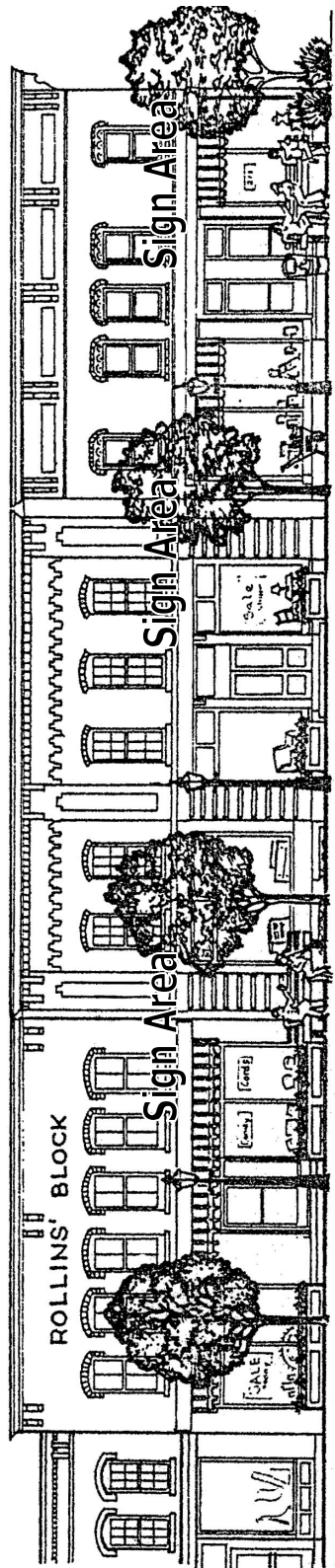
The principal advantages of the Main Street approach would be the guidance and support it would provide and its proven record of success. Participation in Main Street would almost guarantee a comprehensive approach, involving organization, promotion, design and economic restructuring. One of the disadvantages of the Main Street approach is the fact that acceptance into the program is not automatic. In fact, only two towns of Bristol's size were admitted into the pilot Main Street Village program in 2001. Failure to gain acceptance into the program would obviously delay implementation of the downtown revitalization project. Also, a half-time Executive Director would have to be hired, adding to the

overall cost.

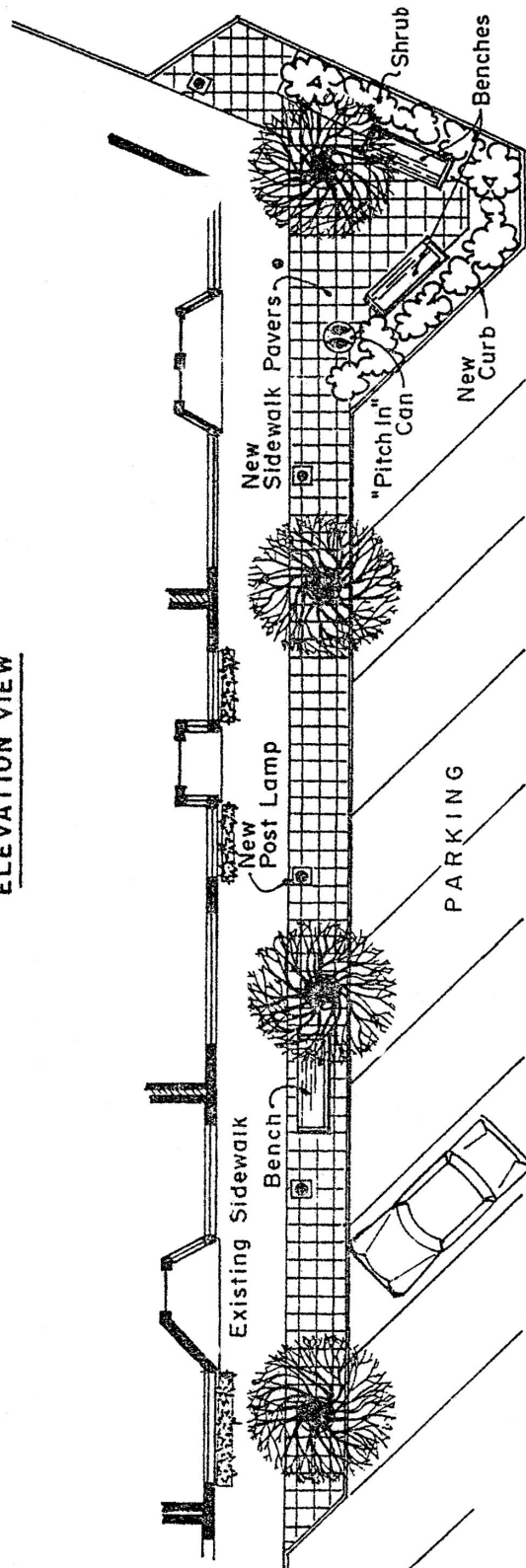
When the committee working on this section of the Master Plan first considered how to implement its recommendations, it came down on the side of using the Main Street approach. This decision was based largely on the long record of inaction in implementing the existing Master Plan using just our own resources. Since that time, however, a new Town Administrator, Bill McChesney, has been hired. Mr. McChesney is enthusiastic about downtown revitalization and has extensive experience in planning and funding such projects. He has researched funding opportunities from various sources, such as the Federal Community System Preservation Funds, as well as funds available through state agencies such as the NH Department of Transportation.

The Planning Board feels confident that the town now has in place the means to implement a downtown revitalization program. This fact, combined with the uncertainty and delay involved with application to the Main Street program, leads us to recommend implementation using our existing resources. We urge that the Selectmen direct the Town Administrator to plan and direct the implementation of the recommendations made in this Master Plan. Revitalization of our town center will require a good deal of hard work on the part of many people, but we feel one of Bristol's highest priorities must be to achieve the potential offered by its historic downtown.

Figure III - 10



ELEVATION VIEW



PLAN VIEW

CENTRAL SQUARE PEDESTRIAN IMPROVEMENT