

MIT Department of Urban Studies and Planning Spring 2005  
**11.439 Revitalizing Urban Main Streets**

Outline for March 9 Presentations on District Assessment

The following outline is a guide for thinking about organizing and presenting your initial assessment and a proposed planning agenda for each District. Your assessment can and should integrate **prior studies, research and data on the districts, your conversations with key stakeholders** (names provided to you by each Main Street manager) and your **initial physical survey of the district**.

The outline has four key components: **existing conditions; local visions and goals; implications for the planning agenda; and proposed planning agenda items**. While we will use class discussion to articulate and expand upon these latter two items, your thinking and recommendations in these two areas will initiate and advance the discussion.

**I. Existing Conditions**

A. Economic

- i. The existing economic composition of the District, e.g., major retail/service niches, key anchor businesses, convenience vs. comparison goods role, how the district compares to other nearby and competing business centers
- ii. The customer market and potential market growth opportunities, e.g. , market area served by the District, its size (number of households, income and spending), and its composition (age, income, racial mix). The current market segments/customer groups that the District serves and the ones that it does not serve, market segments with strong growth potential, stores and products types where there is large un-met demand and/or sale leakage in the market area.
- iii. Indicators of problems and under-utilized resources, e.g., declining population and income, vacant/under-utilized buildings, marginal/poorly managed businesses, low pedestrian traffic, image/perceptions of the District

B. Physical. *The overarching goal for your physical assessment work is to gain an understanding of the District's physical strengths and shortcomings. Your findings will be augmented by the results of the customer intercept survey, business survey, and interviews.*

- i. Building Survey. Examine and digitally photograph the *street facades* of District buildings. Also record number of stories; primary uses; upper story/storefront condition; your impression of building's architectural significance; role the building plays in District image.
- ii. Public Realm/Streetscape. This includes streets, sidewalk, street furniture (lighting, signs, benches, trashcans, bus stops, etc.), parking areas, and open space. Use the Main Streets reading as a guide. Include assessment of street and sidewalk conditions, positive and negative features of the pedestrian experience, condition and usability of street furniture, location/usage/condition of public transit, and assessment of usability, usage, and condition of parking areas and open space.

- iii. Urban Design. Provide an analysis of gateways, landmarks, public spaces, possible development opportunities and other areas of interest in the District. Look at barriers to pedestrians, areas perceived to be unsafe, and other impediments to revitalization. Also look at the missing “teeth” in the District; how much of the sidewalk edge is composed of vacant buildings, parking lots and/or vacant lots?

**II. Community Vision and Goals for the District.** This will initially draw on your interviews with key stakeholders along with what you have learned from the initial Main Streets applications and tour. Try to encompass the goals/vision for the District’s desired economic role, it’s physical character/improvements, and it’s role as a civic and community center. As you learn more about community views from the surveys and the community walkthrough, you can update this section based on more comprehensive understanding of District conditions and community views.

**III. Implications of community goals and your analysis of existing conditions for the revitalization agenda.** This is the link between your analysis and the proposed planning agenda. What are the major barriers to the District advancing its vision? What are the district’s key assets and opportunities that can be leveraged to advance its vision? What do existing economic and physical conditions suggest about potential paths to and possible challenges to achieving desired changes? This section provides a way to help set priorities, be more strategic and build the case for the proposed agenda items that you recommend in the final section.

**IV. Key revitalization agenda items and proposed planning work for our class to advance them.** These findings will be the conclusion of your assessment work and will provide a cogent and focused framework of agenda items for student groups to formulate more detailed plans of action for the remainder of the semester. Students should especially emphasize agendas that closely interrelate physical improvement and economic development. This proposed agenda will be reviewed with the local Main Streets District before final planning tasks are decided upon.