

6th Inning: Downtown Butler

Overview—Revitalization of Downtown Butler

In the Butler Area Resident Survey conducted in July 2008, the statement “Revitalization of Downtown Butler is critical for the Greater Butler Area” received the highest overall ranking among 27 wide-ranging statements regarding the Quality of Life and Community Development in the BAMM Plan area. Similarly, the 37 people who agreed to participate in the Key Person interview process, ranked the downtown’s revitalization as the second most important issue that needed to be addressed in the BAMM Plan, just behind “Addressing BASA issues.” Survey respondent and Key Person interview comments included phrases such as “Hub of the entire region,” “Image for the whole area,” “Heart of the County,” and “Key issue for the whole area.”

Regardless of whether they lived in the City, East Butler Borough or one of three BAMM Plan townships, almost everyone agreed that a successful revitalization of the downtown is essential to the future of not only the BAMM Plan area, but also the Greater Butler area as a whole. Consequently, the BAMM Plan Steering Committee designated downtown Butler as an area to be addressed in much more depth by one of the six Working Groups.

During the formation of the Downtown Butler Working Group, it was determined that this group as originally envisioned, would in fact only be duplicating much of what was already being addressed by Butler Downtown’s Board and Committees. Consequently, the Downtown Butler WG was disbanded, with members invited to join one or more of Butler Downtown’s committees. The BAMM Plan downtown planning effort capitalized on the existing Main Street planning activities of Butler Downtown, and the organizational structure that was already in place.

Main Street Approach

“Butler Downtown” is a grassroots revitalization initiative started by and involving local citizens and people representing business, education, government, and community organizations. Butler Downtown applied for Main Street designation in August 2006, and received designation as a Main Street Community in 2007, and is following the directives of the **Main Street program**, a nationally-recognized four-point approach to downtown revitalization, as promoted by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

In 2007, a search began for a Main Street Manager, and Butler Downtown’s first manager was hired in August 2008. Butler Downtown committees were designated for each of the four points, and significant progress is being made. That progress includes:

- Downtown Facade Improvement Guidelines were prepared in anticipation of a Façade Improvement Program, which is underway.
- A Butler Downtown web site was created (<http://butlerdowntown.org>), funded by a grant from Pittsburgh’s Sprout Fund.
- A new logo was designed and adopted. (logo)
- Assistance was provided to the BAMM Plan process with business and residential surveys.
- Butler Downtown worked successfully with the City to reinstate the LERTA tax abatement program in the downtown. Approvals from the County and School District are still being pursued.
- A mural (depicting dreams and inventions to highlight the inventiveness of Butler’s past, especially the automotive history of the City) is now portrayed on the brick wall of the

building attached to Butler County Ford, thanks to the PA Downtown Center (PDC) internship program and many community volunteers and donors. (picture of mural)

Mission

The mission of Butler Downtown, as stated on its web page, is:

“To advance the sense of place, quality of life and economic vitality of our downtown business district and traditional neighborhoods through the Main Street Program four-point approach: design, organization, promotion, and economic restructuring.”

Vision Plan

Butler Downtown has adopted the following Vision Plan:



VISION PLAN

Amid the natural beauty of the hills of the Appalachian Mountains, the historic City of Butler sits in a valley just north of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Founded in 1803, Butler was primarily farmland during the 19th century. By the turn of the 20th century, Butler grew rapidly into an industrial town. Butler’s role in manufacturing began with Franklin Glass and the Pullman-Standard Company; continued with constructing the Austin and Bantam cars and designing of the Jeep for World War II; and Armco Steel. As a result, Butler attracted numerous ethnic groups, many establishing their own neighborhoods and places of worship.

Downtown Butler combines small town personalized service and big-city self-sufficiency as well as access to a wide range of goods, services, and shopping centers. As the county seat, downtown Butler aims to build a healthier and more vibrant district by highlighting its historic character, enhancing its streetscape, and encouraging economic investment to create a destination that is a...

- Neighborhood Center...showcasing the current distinctive housing and restoring attractive, downtown living quarters in upper floors for the area’s residents.
- Shopping Center...expanding independently-owned business offerings, dining experiences, and cultural venues creating an exciting downtown destination daytime and evening attracting both local and regional residents.
- Economic Center...infusing its economy with new employment opportunities for current residents, area graduates, and newcomers, making downtown the center of the County’s healthcare, commercial, service, and technological sectors.
- Tourism Center...promoting direct access to spectator sports and cultural events, industrial heritage and historic sites, area parks and recreational opportunities while offering a welcoming hospitality that will support all community amenities.

Private and public groups have pledged to partner to make the vision of downtown Butler a reality.

Butler—a place to work...a place to relax...a place to call home.



The goals identified by Butler Downtown are:

- Keeping current businesses thriving,
- Attracting new businesses and jobs,
- Creating a more aesthetically-pleasing downtown,
- Involving the community through volunteerism, and
- Improving the quality of life for residents.

It is recommended that the Oversight Committee support and continue to work with Butler Downtown as they pursue their goals and work programs, which are discussed below.

Recommendations

Organization (Executive) Committee

The Organization Committee of a Main Street (MS) program is charged with the management of the organization, volunteer development, funding, communications, and partnerships. Butler Downtown uses its Executive Committee to serve this function. The activities proposed for this committee are as follows (with priorities A—to be accomplished in 1-2 years; B to be accomplished in 3-5 years; and C—to be accomplished in 6+ years):

- (A+) Butler Downtown should incorporate this BAMB Plan Downtown Chapter with its PA Downtown Center 5-year plan. The resulting document should be utilized as **Downtown Butler's Revitalization Strategy** to identify and organize specific activities and implementation strategies, and to help coordinate downtown revitalization efforts. Annually update this Strategy to reflect accomplishments, new initiatives, and additional efforts.
 - (A) Butler Downtown should consider **hiring additional staff** to assist the Main Street Manager with implementing activities and/or programs.
 - (B) Identify specific projects that may require **additional professional help** and seek their assistance. Examples could include:
 - Preparing a Streetscape Plan.
 - Undertaking a market analysis.
 - Preparing an RFP for a developer for a specific project.
 - Owning, rehabilitating, and leasing a downtown building to new businesses.
 - Designing a sculpture or mural.
 - Designing and implementing a wayfinding signage system.
- (A) Continue to build a **solid volunteer base** using all media venues to recruit interested people. Keep the volunteers busy with work that is interesting to them and provides them with the satisfaction of having accomplished something beneficial. Set up a **comprehensive volunteer management system**, including orientation, training, benefits, recognition, and termination policies and procedures to not only keep expectations clear, but also to assure that Butler Downtown operates as a professional entity.
 - Work with Community Service agencies to support downtown revitalization efforts.
 - Recruit residents of the BAMB Area who do not live in the downtown to become active volunteers.
 - Utilize Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Church Youth Groups, and other organizations to get young adults active in the downtown.
- (A) **Pursue a sustainable budget** through donations and pledges. The National Main Street's recommendation for a budget is that 1/3 of the funding should come from

governmental sources, 1/3 from memberships, and 1/3 from other sources such as fundraising, festival proceeds, or grants. *As Butler Downtown has evolved, its budget is closer to 1/3 5-year pledge supporters, 1/3 annual contributors, and 1/3 other sources such as fundraising events, merchandise sales, government grants, foundations, etc.*

- (A) Develop a **packet of information** including a new Butler Downtown brochure to begin solicitations for additional financial support for the downtown revitalization program. This should include a list of “What’s in it for me?” from the potential donor or member’s point of view. For a donation or membership, each person should receive something of value, such as:
 - Business/organization listing and/or link on Butler Downtown website
 - Acknowledgement in certain press releases throughout the year
 - Opportunity for “Business Spotlight” on Butler downtown website
 - Window cling
 - Email updates on Butler Downtown news, information, and events
 - Invitation to annual meeting

- (A) Through an **Investors Subcommittee**, develop a sustainable budget to supplement State funds now, and to continue the MS program when State funds are gone.
 - Identify and contact potential new contributors through direct mailings and personal contacts.
 - Continue to add donors to the web site with links to their businesses to further promote their generosity.
 - Continue current donor meetings to receive feedback on how Butler Downtown is doing and how the organization could do a better job. Face to face meetings are necessary to help build and maintain these relationships.
 - Continue to send year end Thank You letters to donors, along with an annual report.

- (A) Identify local and western PA **foundations** with missions similar to those of Butler Downtown for possible grant applications. A standard letter should be prepared to assist in these solicitation efforts.

- (A) Although **State and Federal funding** may be restricted at this time, programs will have funding in them at some point in the future and Butler should be prepared to request grants. Funding for specific projects should be pursued through:
 - Department of Community & Economic Development (DCED) Main Street and New Communities Programs;
 - PennDOT Transportation Enhancement Program (TEP);
 - Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds through the City’s entitlement program, as administered by RACB;
 - PA economic development programs for specific job creating projects;
 - Neighborhood Assistance Program (NAP);
 - Federal Stimulus Programs that could be applicable;
 - Tax Increment Financing (TIF);
 - Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credits (20%) for revitalization of buildings on the National Register of Historic Places, within a designated National Historic District, or 10% tax credits for buildings that are eligible for the National Register (built prior to 1936);
 - Housing Redevelopment Assistance Program, which could result in a Revolving Loan Fund, and/or
 - A variety of other programs that may evolve in this changing economy.

- (B) Pursue **fund-raising programs** such as “adopt a street light (bench, planter, etc.), buy a brick, purchase a banner or trash receptacle, etc. One unique annual event should be planned as a major fundraiser for Butler Downtown.
- (B) Explore the creation of a **private, for-profit investment group**, composed of local and regional individuals with a vested interest in the downtown, to purchase, renovate, lease and/or sell properties within the downtown.
- (C) Pursue a **Business Improvement District (BID)** Feasibility Study. A free BID Feasibility Study could be available to Butler Downtown in the first 5 years of the Main Street program through the PA Downtown Center. It is generally agreed that a BID would not be politically and economically feasible for a few years, or until after a substantial amount of public investment was made in the downtown; however, it is one of the few methods to assure continued financing of a downtown revitalization program.
- (C) Consider pursuing **Certified Local Government (CLG)** status. Small grants are available to CLG communities, plus more points are given in review of applications.
- (A) Establish a **speakers’ bureau** of board members and volunteers to speak at other organizations’ regular meetings to educate the general public about Butler Downtown and its role in the revitalization process.
- (A) Continue to strengthen existing **organizational relationships** and develop new relationships that benefit the downtown revitalization mission, and result in synergies that are mutually beneficial, including:
 - Coordinate tourism activities closely with the **Butler County Tourism & Convention Bureau** (www.visitbutlercounty.com) to assure that all possible efforts are being made to coordinate with key activities and events (stores & restaurants stay open later, special promotions, etc.). There are numerous events planned for future years, and there are venues needed to assure that visitors have a pleasant experience. (This topic is addressed more completely under the Promotion Committee.)
 - Work with elected officials to better understand the workings of the **Redevelopment Authority of the City of Butler (RACB)**, especially as its activities affect the downtown. This includes the Centre City project and the West End Connector. Request representation on the RACB Board and that a representative of RACB sit on the Butler Downtown Executive Committee.
 - Work closely with the **Community Development Corporation of Butler County (CDC)** to identify properties available for sale or lease in the downtown, to recruit businesses to the downtown, to identify and offer incentives and financing opportunities to prospective businesses, and to otherwise facilitate economic development efforts in the downtown. The CDC should be represented on the Economic Restructuring Committee.
 - Maintain membership in the **PA Downtown Center** and attend regular sessions to stay abreast of programs, funding, innovative strategies, relationships, and other mutually beneficial services.
 - Continue to establish and maintain **liaisons with local merchants** to understand their needs, educate them about Butler Downtown programs and incentives, acquire their

buy-in and support of the program, and help address issues or problems that they encounter. This could include a special task force to assist merchants and property owners with dealing with local government issues and regulations, and could include a representative from the City.

- (A) Continue to organize and conduct **monthly Board meetings**, at which all committees report on the status of their efforts. Conduct an **annual meeting** to which the public is invited.
 - (B) Consider starting a **revitalization award program**, with awards being made to businesses or property owners making substantial investments and improvements to their buildings or properties. Before and after pictures should be documented (for future grant requests) and included on the web site to encourage others to follow suit.
- (A) Consider adding a **“Safe, Clean, and Green” Committee** to the Main Street structure to address safety, cleanliness, lighting, and perception issues in the downtown. This is a critical component of downtown revitalization; if people do not feel safe in the downtown, they will not come downtown. The PA Elm Street Program provides detailed advice on activities for this committee.

Design Committee

The Design Committee of a Main Street program is charged with planning and zoning activities; physical improvements in the downtown including streetscape, banners, signs, trees, flowers, benches, and trash receptacles; parking and transportation issues; visual merchandising; facades; and code enforcement. It is often helpful to have architects, planners, and other design professionals on this committee if possible. A representative from the City’s planning and zoning office would also be helpful.

The Design Committee has been very active in the past, and much work has already been done on various aspects of an overall Master Plan for the downtown. There has also been discussion about hiring a consultant to undertake this Downtown Master Plan. However, before that is done, and to assure that limited funds are spent judiciously, all aspects of past and current planning efforts should be compiled into a **Main Street District Master Plan**, much of which is being done within this Chapter. The Main Street Executive Committee and Design Committee should then determine and prioritize the next steps and delegate tasks to sub-committees for implementation. Steps that could be undertaken by the Design Committee include:

- (A+) Expand the Butler Downtown **Façade Improvement Program** and continue working with RACB to combine the Butler Downtown Façade Program with the existing RACB façade grant program to leverage dollars and simplify the process. (A brochure has been completed that explains the façade program, and MS staff distributed the brochures door to door, and will continue to recruit interest in the façade grant program.)
 - Retain the services of an architectural volunteer or student to **create renderings for DT blocks** to provide visual ideas to business and property owners about what can be done to enhance their buildings and/or storefronts.
 - Continue to **streamline the process of design review** for façade applications. This should include educational seminars with City staff to explain proper procedures before projects are started, so that they are followed from the beginning of the project.
 - Continue working with Council and RACB to utilize the Façade Program in the **entire Main Street district**, not just along Main Street.

- Emphasize **rear and side entrances** in those instances where these entrances are more accessible from parking lots or pedestrian walkways than the front entrances, and allow funds to be used for improvements to those entrances. Where possible, attractive sitting areas, green spaces, courtyards, or shared parking could be included in rear entrance redesigns.
 - Encourage property owner and merchants to consider connections or **doorways between businesses** where possible, to provide safe and easy passage from one store to the next without having to go outside.
 - Assure that **historic buildings** are preserved and restored to their original conditions whenever possible, using grants and tax credits as leverage.
- (A) Continue to work with PennDOT and the City to acquire funding for an SR 8 (Main Street) **Transportation Enhancement Project (TEP)** to be hopefully coordinated with the **resurfacing project**, which is tentatively scheduled for FY 2010-2011, but may be later due to economic issues. This project includes resurfacing SR 8 from US 422 to the General Butler Bridge. If additional federal Stimulus funds become available, Butler Downtown should strongly encourage PennDOT to pursue funds for this project. If/when funds are provided to the TEP program, a grant request should be made as well.
 - Assure that PennDOT is aware of and agrees to design elements that could be included in the resurfacing project, such as special treatment for crosswalks (stamped and/or colored asphalt), bump outs, curb replacement, etc.
 - Participate in any planning meetings with PennDOT and the City regarding the project to assure that Butler Downtown activities and ideas are incorporated.
- (A) As part of compiling and implementing a Main Street District Master Plan, DCED is encouraging the group to **get stakeholders involved** and begin to **identify projects**. Information should be compiled onto base maps of the downtown, to include the following:
 - Any potential green space or hardscape **plaza areas** to add to the Main Street area.
 - Buildings that could accommodate future **murals**.
 - Potential new or improved **parking lots** (including landscaping).
 - Opportunities for **shared parking**.
 - Identifying parking **lots for downtown employees**.
 - Improved or new **pedestrian crossings**, including stamped and colored asphalt to differentiate them from the roadway.
 - Enhancing **alleys** and/or converting them to pedestrian use for access to Main Street from parking areas. Although deliveries would still be permitted on these alleys, they could be upgraded with lighting, trees or planters, bollards to restrict traffic, stamped concrete, etc.
 - A **typical streetscape section** that identifies sidewalk and landscape design parameters, so that managers of development projects can be provided with design criteria for the public space fronting their private project. (Although this is a piecemeal approach to streetscape design, it should be used as an alternative until funding for an overall streetscape project is acquired.)
 - Discussions with the City, BASA, and the PA American Water Company regarding replacement of any **underground utilities** prior to any streetscaping program, and identification of areas where underground utilities require replacement.
 - Discussions with the electric and other utility companies to see if **electric and cable lines** can be placed underground, and identification of areas where this could occur.
 - The **status of critical projects** such as the Penn Theater renovation and Center City development.
 - Projects that require the expertise of a developer and could benefit from the **preparation of an RFP to recruit a developer** for that specific project. This could require professional assistance.
 - All buildings or storefronts that require **new tenants and/or rehabilitation** and/or façade improvements.
 - Areas where **handicapped accessibility** needs to be considered.

Once this information is compiled on maps, Butler Downtown should **prioritize projects** and work with local partners to **pursue funding**, as well as technical and professional help where needed.

- (A) Continue working with the City of Butler Shade Tree Commission to **landscape the bridge on Monroe Street**. As a key gateway into the community, this area should be landscaped, signed, and lighted to provide an exciting and aesthetically pleasing entranceway into the downtown.
- (A) Continue to work with the Butler Freeport Community Trail group to create a mechanism and plan for the **Butler Freeport Trail** to come through downtown Butler. This not only involves determining a route for the bicyclists, but also the provision of appropriate services and facilities for them. Bike racks, drinking fountain, benches, picnic tables, sandwich and ice cream shops, bike repair and parts shops, and other facilities should be provided to entice bicyclists to linger in, and return often to the downtown.
- (A) The Signage Sub-Committee should develop the parameters of an **overall signage system** that includes wayfinding, directional, venue, kiosk, business, gateway, and event signage. This Sub-committee should work with the other BAMB Plan municipalities on area-wide directional and wayfinding signage. Professional assistance could be required to undertake this project, which should include:
 - Continue efforts with **PennDOT** to understand restrictions for signage along State Routes such as Main Street (PennDOT publication 46) and to relocate signs and clear up some of the clutter.
 - Continue to update the **inventory** of existing gateway and roadway signs in the downtown in an effort to identify ways to **clean up existing signage**, consolidate signs so that fewer poles are required, remove outdated signs, and coordinate required and new signage.
 - Develop **directional signage first** to get people into the downtown safely and quickly, then proceed with gateway, venue, and business signage.
 - The proposed Intergovernmental Cooperative Agreement described in **Chapter 8** includes a recommendation for **working jointly** on a coordinated wayfinding signage program throughout the entire BAMB Plan area.
 - Develop proper signage denoting **public and private parking areas** in the downtown, as well as directional signage to the public parking areas.
 - If some parking areas are available for public parking on certain days and times, signage should clearly explain those exceptions.
 - Use **Historical markers** for significant buildings and sites in the downtown through a standardized marker program. This should be coordinated with the wayfinding signage system, and could also be part of a walking or trolley tour.
 - Assure that **building addresses** in the downtown are prominently and clearly displayed as part of a private business and property signage system that coordinates with the overall signage system.
 - Design and maintain **key gateways** to the downtown to announce one's arrival into a very special place.
 - Use **banners** hanging from light poles in the downtown. Typically, businesses and individuals will sponsor these types of banners as part of a fund-raising and promotional activity.
 - **Informational kiosks** should be provided at key locations downtown to identify locations of buildings, businesses, government offices, parking, restaurants, etc. with a "You are here" designation to provide orientation to visitors. This should be coordinated with the wayfinding signage.
- (A) Expand the **mural program** in the downtown, to create additional murals for blank walls on key buildings. Butler Downtown successfully applied to the PA Downtown Center Internship Program for a mural program for the summer of 2009. A mural was completed for

the building attached to Butler County Ford (across Wayne Street from Natili's), and was deemed to be a major success. The program should be continued.

- Identify **existing murals and/or ads** on downtown buildings which could be restored by local artists and/or college student programs.
 - Talk to and compile a **list of property owners** who are willing to have exterior walls of their buildings used for future mural projects. (The Mayor has a list of people who are interested in having murals.)
 - Pursue adding murals to **bridges and overpasses**.
- (C) Assign personnel to work with the Oversight Committee for the BAMB Plan and transportation agencies to continue to pursue **alternatives routes for truck traffic** that now goes through the downtown.
 - (C) Consider restarting the **Historic Architectural Review Board (HARB)**, which had been perceived as a problem, although it is there to provide help and guidance for property owners to undertake proper renovations. Educate property owners regarding the HARB and the process.
 - Conduct **educational seminars** so that people understand the proper way to renovate buildings. City staff members have conducted numerous sessions with various organizations to explain the review process, and are willing to continue to do so. There is a lot of misinformation among property owners regarding proper procedures to follow for renovation projects. Often, not until the property owners think they are done with the preliminary process, are the proper staff contacted and the critical procedures identified, causing much consternation and extra cost. Butler Downtown should encourage property owners to start their processes with the right contacts.
 - (B) Work with local nurseries, parks agencies, the Succop Conservancy, the Shade Tree Commission, and local Master Gardeners to **initiate a “Butler in Bloom” program** modeled after the America in Bloom program, to:
 - Encourage property owners to plant flowers and create gardens,
 - Encourage clean-ups, remove graffiti,
 - Develop environmental solutions to storm water retention and energy efficiency,
 - Recycle,
 - Involve the community, and
 - Emphasize heritage appreciation. (www.americainbloom.org)
 - (B) Develop a **Downtown Information Center**, possibly at the Penn Theater storefront. Staff it with volunteers or part-time paid staff.
 - Also consider an informational center at the Multi-Modal Transit Center on the West End.
 - (C) Initiate efforts to establish the **Jeep Public Art Project**.
 - Partner with local art organizations to create a community pride and fundraising project. Several communities have used frogs or fish as symbols of their community and did fund-raising events to purchase, design, and auction these items. Butler could use a simple version of a **Bantam Jeep** for such a fund-raising project. (There are books available on the City of Erie's frog and fish that summarize how the programs operated.)
 - Consider partnering with **another City that claims a Jeep heritage** (Toledo OH could be one) and develop competitions or events sharing around a Jeep theme.

Economic Restructuring (ER) Committee

The Economic Restructuring Committee of a Main Street program is charged with developing and maintaining market information; retaining existing businesses in the downtown; recruitment

of new businesses to the downtown based on market information; identifying and recruiting new economic uses to the area; and identifying, understanding, and promoting financial incentives to entice businesses to the downtown. Creation and retention of jobs, provision of housing options, promoting home ownership, and providing community programs to promote the economic well being of the downtown, are also roles that the ER Committee assumes.

To this end, the Butler Downtown ER Committee has undertaken several efforts to improve the viability of the downtown from an economic development perspective. It should continue or initiate the following efforts:

- (A+) Continue efforts to **evaluate existing and new tax and incentive programs**, and make recommendations to City Council for changes. This could include hiring a consultant to run the numbers for programs that could increase business and spark building improvements, while still generating tax revenues for the City.
 - The ER Committee has investigated the **LERTA program** (Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance Act) and has successfully proposed to City Council that the LERTA program be reinstated in Butler. This will allow buildings and business owners to receive abatements on increased City property taxes resulting from property improvements for up to 10 years. However, efforts must continue with Butler County and the Butler School District to acquire agreement on abating their new real property taxes as well for approved projects.
 - Continue to pursue resolution of issues with the **Mercantile and Business Privilege Taxes** as well.
 - Continue to **research tax and other incentive programs** used by other communities and, if appropriate, attempt to implement them in Butler as well.
 - Investigate and get a solid understanding of **Tax Increment Financing (TIF)**, how it can be used to promote improvements in the downtown, what the Centre City TIF involves and when it is triggered, and explore opportunities to use this financing mechanism to improve Downtown Butler.
 - Maintain an on-going relationship with **City Council** so that new ideas can be presented and considered to improve the bottom line for downtown businesses.
 - Compile a **list of programs, incentives**, and other reasons for locating businesses in the downtown and provide this to businesses and prospects. This information should also be made readily available on line. Amenities should include: Pullman Park, the Rails to Trails, Hospital improvements, local museums, the Succop Conservancy, BC3, LERTA, availability of existing infrastructure, etc.
- (A) Work on developing a comprehensive and accurate **inventory of businesses and buildings in the Downtown Main Street district**. Update, enhance, and expand the **RACB building inventory**, which was completed in 2006 for Main Street buildings only, to include the entire Main Street district. Business information should be added as well. This list must be updated on a regular basis and should be provided to the CDC for assistance in marketing the available properties.
- (B) Increase activities for **business retention** in the downtown.
 - Cultivate relationships with current business owners by establishing a **Business Retention team** for the downtown. The ER committee should work closely with the CDC which has a Retention & Expansion Program for businesses throughout the County. Guidance and training can be provided by the CDC. Face time with merchants is absolutely critical.
 - Gather **market data** through a zip code survey of area businesses, and provide that data, as well as data collected through the BAMB Plan process, to the PA Downtown Center. The PDC will utilize their market software programs and services to provide more detailed market data to Butler Downtown, based on the information provided to them, as well as proprietary sources to which PDC has access.

- Depending on the date of the available market data, and given that the 2010 Census is underway, it may be worthwhile to **retain a Market Analyst** to clearly interpret what the market and demographic data means to downtown Butler, and to identify how the data should affect the Butler Downtown work program.
 - **Identify niche markets** for downtown Butler based on market research and existing businesses.
 - Review **national trends** that could affect how downtown Butler pursues new business, including (based on Boulevard Strategies' *Top 10 Retail Trends and Issues to Watch for in 2010*):
 - 63% of Americans say the ways they spend and save have changed forever.
 - Former "shopaholics" are **buying less**; trading down (buying less expensive versions of products, more store brands, cooking instead of eating out); and seeking deals (using coupons, shopping sales, shopping at discount stores).
 - **Share, barter, borrow programs** proliferate. Increasing numbers of shoppers are checking prices, consulting consumer reviews, and purchasing via their phones.
 - **1-touch shopping is replacing 1-stop shopping** for many young adults.
 - **Sales of e-books** surpassed sales of hard covers on Amazon.com in December 2009.
 - **Big Lots** is accelerating store openings and moving into "A" locations.
 - **Upscale food trucks** (Vegan tacos, gourmet cupcakes, Belgian waffles) swarm the streets of NYC.
 - Chain stores with **the most "sizzle"** include American Apparel, Apple, Best Buy, BW3, Cabela's, Game Stop, J Crew, PetSmart, and Urban Outfitters.
 - Wal-Mart's next conquest is to be the Wal-Mart of the web and take on Amazon.com.
 - **Store brands** outpaced branded package goods in 2009.
 - Every chain is experimenting with **smaller prototypes**, which will result in vendors being cut out.
 - The **55-64 age group** has the highest rate of new business activity and a deeper pool of entrepreneurial talent than ever.
 - **Restaurants and DIY crafts** are among the most popular retail start-up businesses. Two of three restaurants close within 3 years, while arts and crafts retailers create multiple income streams.
 - **Small businesses** account for 80% of the job growth in the US. Shopping centers are becoming more receptive to independents than in the past. **Parking and rising debit card fees** are key issues for small retailers.
- (B) Based on the above market information, Butler Downtown should work with the CDC to develop a recruitment program to **identify and attract business entrepreneurs**. This program should include venues to attract retiring Baby Boomers who still want to do something with their talents and could start a business from their hobbies. Butler Downtown should consider assisting with the existing **Small Business Incubator** on the north end of Main Street and/or starting another incubator in the downtown, in conjunction with BC3 and StartingGate (company with an existing incubator in Crawford County--info@starting-gate.com). **Arts Incubators** are very popular right now, providing retail, living, and/or work space for artists of all types, including dance, music, photography, yoga, hand-made jewelry, and recording studios. Some art incubators sell shelf space, wall space, and studio space to generate revenues.
 - Pursue opportunities with SCORE and SBDC to assist new entrepreneurs in starting these small businesses.
 - Continue to expand WiFi opportunities within the downtown as an attraction to new businesses and shoppers.
 - (B) Develop a recruitment program targeted specifically to **alumni of Butler High School** encouraging them to return home and locate their business or start a new business.
 - Attend class reunions with recruitment information.

- Identify a member of each graduating class who is a successful local entrepreneur and is willing to assist with this effort.
 - Develop an electronic mailing list of alumni and send Butler Downtown information to them on a regular basis.
 - Attempt to have class reunions at the Grand Ballroom and target downtown events to capitalize on the reunion attendees.
 - Provide packets of information to all reunion attendees.
- (A) Continue to increase **communications with RACB**, and work with City Council to require more transparency and accountability from RACB, especially regarding projects in the downtown that affect the Main Street program.
 - Educate RACB as to how the Butler Downtown Committees can be a resource to RACB.
 - Try to work with RACB to identify what role they see for Butler Downtown in the revitalization of the downtown.
 - (B) **Support the Centre City project** and work with RACB and others to assure that the project is implemented. Help recruit hotels, businesses, and residents to the project, as well as BC3. If the project does not proceed soon, determine how Butler Downtown might play a more active role in recruiting a developer.
 - (A) **Support the Penn Theater project** and encourage its timely completion so that the Theater can serve as a major attraction in the downtown.
 - (B) Support the **West End Connector** and the **Bantam Factory Building** renovation project. The Connector is critical to providing needed access to and from the downtown, and would help provide additional foot traffic.
- (B) Develop and promote **downtown residential opportunities**, as well as other appropriate uses for upper floors, such as individual and professional offices.
 - Identify available housing options within the downtown, create an **inventory** of data on the available housing, and work with the Promotions Committee to promote downtown housing.
 - Educate the community on the **Upstairs Downtown program** (Chicago) and how upper floor utilization can be an asset.
 - Investigate CHIP/HOME/CDBG funding for downtown housing opportunities.
 - Encourage upscale housing.
 - Pursue opportunities for providing appropriate space for BC3 and Beauty School students to live downtown.
 - Address zoning and historic district ordinance issues with the City, and update these ordinances appropriately to allow for practical renovations to enable housing on upper floors of buildings in the downtown.
 - Work with the City to better understand and address **building code issues**. Building and accessibility codes are State laws (PA Dept. of Labor and Industry), and accessibility is also a federal law. The City has no ability to modify them. See: (www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/uniformconstructioncode/10524.) When renovating an existing structure under current law, the owner/developer has the choice of using either the International Building Code or the International Existing Building Code (but not both). The City's third party inspection agency and City staff are available for building walk-thrus to address issues during initial planning phases of any projects.
 - The City has a Commercial Flow Chart checklist (**Appendix 6-1**) that illustrates the process for change of use and major commercial renovation, as well as a Non-Residential Construction Document Review checklist (**Appendix 6-2**), and a Sewage Facilities Planning Module Flowchart checklist (**Appendix 6-3**). Butler Downtown should provide the appropriate checklists to business and property owners anticipating projects.
 - More information and education is needed regarding the **appeals process** and other alternatives to identifying affordable ways to renovate buildings. There are three forms of appeals:
 - Appeal to the Zoning Code (City administrators)
 - Appeal to the Building Code (City administrators)

- Appeal to the Accessibilities Code (State administers)
Appeals are only used as a last resort when no other solution can be found. When renovating a commercial building, **State law requires that a design professional be involved** in the project in most cases. Design professional should be aware of appeal processes and should identify affordable ways to renovate buildings. City staff members are available to work with developers or building owners regarding options that are available for their projects that are code compliant.
- Butler Downtown could play a major role in helping to educate building owners by providing seminars and workshops, as well as by assuring that they are steered in the right direction from the very inception of their projects.
- Work with building owners and developers to understand that the **PA American Water Company** has no involvement in deciding which buildings are to be sprinklered. The International Building Code (which is a State law) decides that issue. The meter fees are regulated by the Public Utility Commission (PUC), so any fee modifications would need to be addressed through that State agency. This could also be a subject of a seminar sponsored by Butler Downtown.
- (A) Continue to work with **BC3** and local investors to identify opportunities for bringing students and classroom facilities into the downtown. When this happens, **venues attractive to students** should be pursued, including coffee shops, sandwich shops/ delis, music/video/book stores, computer services, WiFi, stores that offer clothing for the college crowd, etc.
- (A) Work with City Council and Administration to evaluate the pros and cons of having the City adopt a **City Manager** form of government. Help the City provide education to residents so that everyone is evaluating the situation from a position of accurate information. Butler Downtown can help by researching other communities of similar size in PA that have City Managers and investigating the positives and negatives within those local governments. This information should be presented to City Council so that educated decisions can be made about this potential opportunity.
- (C) Explore opportunities for **recruiting film companies** to Butler, utilizing the State's Film Tax Credit as an incentive.

Promotions Committee

The Promotions Committee of Butler Downtown is responsible for retail promotions, special events in the downtown, and creation and promotion of a positive image for downtown Butler. Maintaining a positive image is critical to getting people to shop, open a business, and/or live downtown. This Committee has been successful in many endeavors so far and has additional activities and ideas to pursue. Recommendations include:

- (A) Develop a **promotion and marketing plan**. A new **logo** has been designed and adopted for the downtown. **(logo)** This logo should continue to be used in all Butler downtown activities, and Butler Downtown members should be encouraged to use the logo on their letterhead and in their marketing efforts, as well.
 - Efforts should be made to tie the Butler Downtown logo in with the **BAMM Plan area**, and various activities and strategies that BAMM Plan municipalities will be promoting.
 - Continue to develop streamlined **multi-media marketing processes** for disseminating news and promoting events regarding the downtown.
 - Create a monthly video featuring local businesses, targeting those that are financial supporters of Butler Downtown.

- Continue with Facebook and Linked-In, and consider adding Twitter and Wiki connections as well.
 - **Continue to expand and enhance the website**, which has recently been substantially improved. Linking local businesses, organizations, and programs to the Butler Downtown website is critical. Additional information on specific businesses, especially supporters of Butler Downtown should be included.
 - Update and improve the Butler Downtown **brochure**, including a map of the downtown business district.
 - Work with the **Butler Eagle** to have a regular column bylined by Becky Smith about Main Street and Butler Downtown.
 - Work with the BAMB Oversight Committee to tie into a **5-municipal web site** (when/if created).
- (A) **Create a “Downtown Business Brand”** for downtown Butler to improve the public perception of the downtown; something that evokes an emotion and engages all five senses. Think of Campbell’s Soup: the red and white label, cherubic children, and the phrase “Mmm, Mmm, Good!” Build on the strengths and assets of the City and the downtown to create this brand, and then market it.
 - Undertake an **image development campaign**, with or without professional assistance to identify the desired relationship between the consumer and downtown Butler. (Reference *Main Street News* # 181, November 2001, as published by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. This article presents a five step process for Butler Downtown to follow.)
 - If/when BC3 provides classroom space and/or student housing in the downtown, consider promoting a **“college town” image** to attract young professionals into the area, and to recruit the types of businesses that college-age adults desire.
- (A) **Strengthen existing retail.**
 - Continue to attempt to engage downtown business owners in **monthly round-table** discussions to address issues of concern to them. Hold a **kickoff breakfast** with business owners to bring them up to speed on Butler Downtown plans, and recruit their support and participation. Show them what Butler Downtown is doing for them.
 - Create both **print and web directories** of downtown businesses, identifying services and products that they sell or provide.
 - **Coordinate promotions** and special business hours among retail businesses to increase foot traffic in the downtown area for key events (College World Series, Butler Blue Sox, concerts at Pullman Park).
 - **Improve parade day activities** to promote shopping in the downtown.
 - **Raise awareness** of façade improvement programs.
 - Pursue **common business hours**. (This was pursued over the holidays in December 2009, targeting Mondays and Thursdays as nights to be open later.) Special events should be held on those evenings to entice shoppers to come downtown and to encourage business owners to stay open. This is a very sensitive issue among small retail shop owners. Possibly opening later in the mornings should be encouraged where possible, to offset the additional work hours later in the day.
 - Continue to promote the **national 3/50 program and the American Unchained Program**, which are shown on Butler Downtown’s web site. Consider adding contests or give-aways to encourage greater participation in these programs.
 - Continue the **“Laugh It Up Downtown”** or similar type of event annually as a Butler Downtown fundraiser.
 - Develop a series of **workshops for retailers** including:
 - **E-commerce retailing.** More and more shoppers (especially the younger generations) are shopping electronically. If Butler’s businesses are not taking advantage of this electronic era, they will likely not be in business much longer. (This is a critical area that the Promotion Committee must work on with downtown retailers.)
 - **Enhanced window displays.** The front windows tell a story of what is inside a building. Most retail and business owners are not experts at aesthetically displaying their wares in the windows, and service businesses have even a greater problem in that they do not have

- products to display. The Promotion Committee should identify local graphic artists and interior designers who can sponsor classes, visit stores, and provide suggestions as to how to spruce up front window displays. Contests could be held to generate some excitement and friendly competition.
- Provide services and space for **Baby Boomers** who are projected to be turning hobbies into businesses as they approach retirement from careers while still wanting to remain active.
 - Develop a **joint advertising program** with downtown businesses to reduce individual costs and to target a wider audience.
- (A) Continue to promote **Butler's heritage and assets**, and coordinate activities closely with the Butler County Tourism & Convention Bureau, the Historical Society and local museums.
 - Work with the Tourism Bureau to promote the **Bantam Jeep Heritage Festival** scheduled for August 12-14, 2011, as well as other planned and future activities. (See the detailed list of planned future events in Chapter 5.)
 - Line up restaurants, lodging, and retail shops to remain open and offer special sales or activities that are coordinated with events at the Festival.
 - Provide alternative venues, transportation services to and from downtown and the event locations, and unique shopping experiences.
 - Consider advertising the Festival in other communities with Jeep manufacturing facilities, such as Toledo OH.
 - Continue to promote and enhance **walking and trolley tours**, building on the successes of last year, and coordinating with the Historical Society, local museums, and historic sites. A series of tours could be offered, such as:
 - upper floor/apartment tours,
 - museums and historic commercial buildings,
 - churches,
 - buildings with towers (Butler has an impressive sky line),
 - garden tours,
 - a scavenger hunt on the walking tour to find objects in display windows, offering prizes for winners,
 - a scavenger hunt on the trolley to find architectural design elements on buildings on the tour, and/or
 - tours to educate about proposed projects (if/when appropriate) such as the Center City project, Penn Theater and the West End.
 - Create a "What's Happening Downtown" **event calendar** (partnering with existing area calendars), including the Arts Council and the Tourism Bureau (which has a very detailed calendar). Check out the "thisishappening.org" calendar for Pittsburgh. Electronic notices of events should be sent out to potential participants and all downtown businesses.
 - Promote **Butler Freepport Trail** and its development of bike paths, as discussed under the Design Committee.
 - Continue to expand Wi-Fi opportunities in the downtown, now that Diamond Park is served.
 - Help promote local museums, historic groups, and other non-profits with their fundraisers in the downtown.
 - **Coordinate activities** with Pullman Ball Park promotions.
 - Discuss the potential for a kiosk for downtown at the Ball Park.
 - **Coordinate activities** with other historic sites and museums outside the downtown, such as the Succop Conservancy, The Mansion, etc.
 - Continue to promote the **Grand Ballroom at Cornerstone Commons** as a conference and banquet facility and promote opportunities for downtown businesses to capitalize on the people that attend functions at the facility, before and/or after each event.
 - (A) Work with the Executive Committee to promote the Main Street program and create an **engaged community** of volunteers and supporters.
 - Create a **database** of members with contact info, skills, and interests.

- Identify "**volunteer wranglers**" to organize members, and create an orientation process to bring new volunteers up to speed.
 - Continue to use **social media** to foster communication, as discussed under the Organization Committee.
 - Hold **member events**, such as Butler Downtown Happy Hours at downtown restaurants and bars. Have appreciation parties to thank volunteers after special events.
 - **Develop a process** for reviewing and approving member-generated projects.
 - Continue to promote the **reusable tote bag**, which has been designed for retailers to sell. They can add their logo with any large independent order.
- (B) Consider offering a "**First Impressions Program**," which is designed around the "secret shopper" concept that pairs two communities together, selects teams of people from each community, and then sends each team to the other community on an unknown day to assess the community on criteria such as friendliness, wayfinding, ease of circulation, appeal of facades and window displays, parking, feeling of safety, etc. Analyze the results of these evaluations to determine how best to promote the downtown and improve the shopping experience in downtown Butler.

Safe, Clean, and Green Committee

The Safe, Clean, and Green Committee of the PA Elm Street Program is designed to address crime and safety issues; streets and alleys in terms of lighting, trash, and traffic; initiate Block Watch groups or Courtesy Patrols where needed; assure that adequate parks and green space are provided; keep the downtown clean; and address tree planting and other green initiatives.

Butler Downtown has not officially adopted this Committee yet. However, it serves a purpose in the communities that have, addressing these critical issues that sometimes fall between the cracks.

The following recommendations are made:

- (A) Butler Downtown should **add a Safe, Clean, and Green Committee** (the fifth point under PA's Elm Street program) to the other four committees. This Committee could lessen the burden on some of the other committees that have picked up these issues, and would also assure that critical issues, such as safety, are adequately addressed.
- (A) Address the issue of **sprinklers and meter fees** to resolve the problem with renovation of buildings in the downtown. Fees should be more comparable to those of other water districts.
- (A) Work with the City police department to identify ways to better **address safety** in the downtown. Even the perception of an unsafe environment is a problem. Some options include:
 - Establishing a **Block Watch** program for the downtown.
 - Creating a **Courtesy Patrol** of volunteers who, in coordination with the Police Department, walk the streets in special tee shirts or vests to provide eyes on the street and provide an added sense of security, especially to visitors. People who walk for exercise could be recruited to walk a designated path on a routine basis so that, not only are they getting their exercise, but they are providing a community service. During festivals or special events, the Security Patrol could provide information and answer questions for visitors.

- Consider employing a firm such as “**Block by Block**” of Louisville KY which provides the training, insurance, program parameters, etc. for a local task force of workers who walk the streets and collect litter, sweep sidewalks and alleys, shovel snow, water plants, answer questions, provide “eyes on the street,” and undertake other activities needed in the downtown. Local people are hired, trained, and supervised by “Block by Block” for a fee, generally paid from a SID, BID, or DID account.
 - Walk the downtown at night to **identify “dark spaces”** where public street lighting is inadequate or private lighting is not available. Work with the City to address public lighting issues (bulb replacement, additional light poles, better lighting fixtures). Pursue grants (such as from Home Depot) to purchase energy efficient light bulbs and encourage property owners to use them to light up back and front entrances and other dark areas. It may also be worth pursuing lighting on motion detectors to discourage activity in unwanted areas.
 - Encourage businesses to **light up** interior and exterior spaces to some degree at all times.
 - Encourage neighborhoods adjacent to the downtown to organize themselves with Block Watch programs, and work with the City and RACB to pursue Elm Street programs and funds for these neighborhoods.
- (A) Work with the City of Butler’s Shade Tree Commission to **coordinate and pursue green projects and initiatives.**
 - (A) Organize a regular maintenance program to assure that the downtown is always clean and safe. Coordinate this activity with the City and with private property owners.
 - Continue to organize a Great American **Clean-up** and/or **Make a Difference Day** (coordinated with the Shade Tree Commission). Recruit local waste management companies to provide trash roll-offs free of charge. Use Community Service people to assist.
 - Coordinate clean-up activities with **Earth Day** activities.
 - Assure that **snow removal** is part of the maintenance program.
 - Address maintenance of **parking lots** as well as alleys, streets, and sidewalks.