

Brandon

Downtown
Economic
Development
Strategy
2008

Introduction

More than 150 people attended the April 4th, 2007 downtown summit meeting held at the Town Centre. The results of summit lead to a May 14th Brandon City Council decision to established a task force to address the need for an organization to guide development and create new opportunities for downtown Brandon. This task force was to review the recommendations of the spring 2007 downtown summit meeting and make recommendations to council on establishing a new organization to achieve meaningful and recognizable success for our downtown area.

The downtown task force gathered info and reviewed the summit recommendations. The task force then recommended to Council that a board be created to develop a strategy for the implementation of the priorities determined at the summit meeting and further proposed council grant a mandate to this group allowing the creation of a new development corporation for downtown, the Brandon Downtown Development Corporation.

Renaissance Brandon, as the downtown development corporation has become known, was granted authorities from the municipality to conduct activities related to downtown business development such as the ownership of property, granting of loans, establishment of incentive programs and retention of proceeds to create unique partnerships between the public and private sectors in bringing greater life to downtown. The Renaissance District was defined as 6th Street to 13th Street & Pacific Avenue to Lorne Avenue; this district is use synonymously with the word downtown throughout the organizational plan.

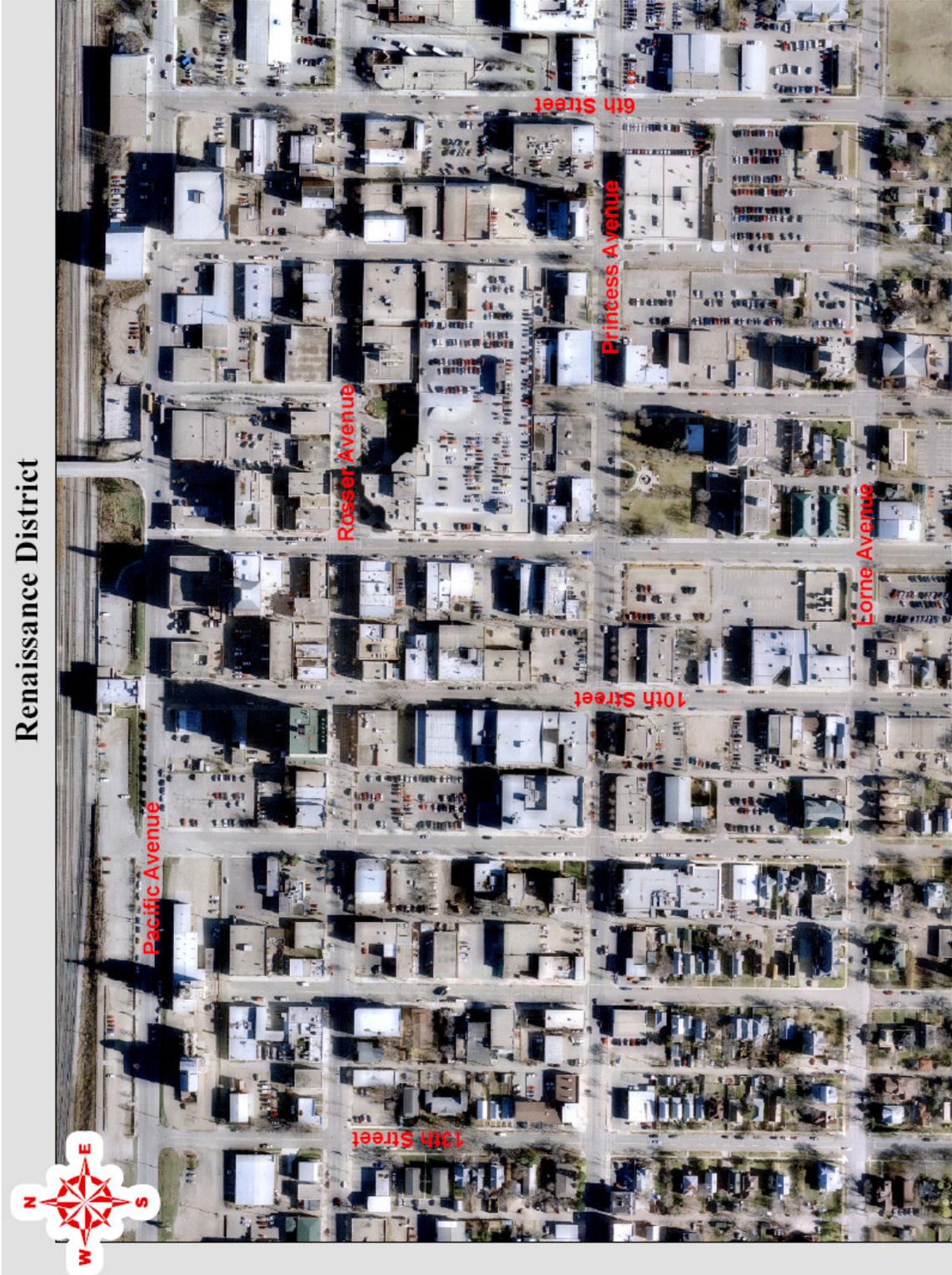
The incorporating board members were:

Dave Burgess
Vince Barletta
Doug Paterson
Marlow Kirton

Rod Lindenberg
Wayne McLeod
Jeanne Millis
John Zeke

The following report summarizes the tasks ahead for the Brandon Downtown Development Corporation, some of the methods and techniques used by successful downtown revitalization organizations and outline of the actions to be undertaken in pursuit of the organizations goals and objectives.

Renaissance District



Understanding Downtown Development Practices

The What and Why of Revitalization¹

Downtown revitalization is strengthening the social, physical and economic value of a community's commercial center. The primary goal of downtown revitalization efforts is to improve the livability and quality of life in a community by expanding and attracting employment, shopping and social activities to the commercial center. (See Appendix A for a history of Downtown Brandon)

It is important to point out that downtown revitalization is not simply retail development. Instead, it is community development, which fosters economic growth and improves the quality of life for residents. To successfully revitalize its downtown, a community must have a long-term plan, some financial backing, and commitments from property and business owners, local government officials, and local residents. Most importantly, downtown revitalization requires a willingness to be innovative.

Communities looking to revitalize their downtowns often do so for a variety of reasons. Revitalization helps to: improve the image of the downtown, make use of existing buildings, offer residents a more concrete sense of place, provide residents with more retail options and services, provide greater employment opportunities, expand the local tax base, prevent building abandonment and increase safety in the community.

The Main Street® Four Point Approach²

The four point approach and the accompany eight principles of success were developed by the National Trust for Historical Preservation in Washington DC and are employed widely by economic developers throughout North America.

1. Organization establishes consensus and cooperation by building partnerships among the various groups that have a stake in downtown. This will allow the revitalization program to provide effective advocacy of the downtown. Diverse groups from the public and private sectors must work together to create and maintain a successful program.
2. Design takes advantage of the visual opportunities inherent in the downtown by drawing attention to all its physical elements: public and private buildings, storefronts, signs, public spaces, landscaping, merchandising, displays and promotional materials. Its aim is to stress the importance of design quality in all these areas, to educate people about design quality and to expedite design improvements in the downtown.
3. Promotion takes many forms, but the primary aim is to create a positive image of the downtown to rekindle community pride in their downtown. Promotion seeks

to improve retail sales events and festivals and to create a positive public image of the downtown in order to attract investors, developers and new businesses.

4. Economic Restructuring strengthens downtown's existing economic assets while diversifying its economic base. This is accomplished by retaining and expanding existing businesses to provide a balanced commercial mix, by converting unused or underused space into productive property and by sharpening the competitiveness and merchandising skills of downtown business people.

Why Downtown Brandon

Why create a Development Vision now?

As with many similarly scaled cities, (less the 100,000 population) the historic function of the downtown as the primary retail and employment centre has played a critical role in the success of the entire region. Over many years the tide has turned away from downtowns yet today sees a growing interest returning, a move away from suburbs and a demand for high density, “greener” communities. A comprehensive vision for the Renaissance District will provide clarity and guide future initiatives. Providing clarity establishes development parameters and certainty for property owners, businesses, developers and residents.

Why support a healthy Renaissance District?

Healthy downtowns facilitate vibrant cultural activities, incubate local independent businesses, accommodate a variety of lifestyle choices and make efficient use of municipal services and infrastructure. These attributes are unique to downtowns because they have the necessary density of people, mix of uses, and variety of activities that enable vitality.

Healthy downtowns promote sustainability and an efficient use of municipal resources - Downtowns are urban environments and therefore redeveloping these areas supports the principles of sustainable development. Downtown infill and redevelopment projects promote a concentration of growth and a wise use of existing community resources and infrastructure.

Healthy downtowns Accommodates a Variety of Lifestyle Choices – Downtown Brandon has the potential to provide alternatives in terms of housing types, services, products, and entertainment which is very different from those found in other areas of the city.

Healthy downtowns offer symbolic and profile importance - Downtown is should be a reflection of community accomplishments, economic health, pride, ideals, and values. Most importantly, it should be possible to see the image of the entire city and its quality of life based on the health and quality of its downtown.

Healthy downtowns offer opportunity for economic development and return on investment. A healthy Renaissance District improves real estate values, lowers vacancy rates, enhances spending activity, increases tax assessment, stabilizes existing businesses and attracts new business.³

Who Benefits from the *Main Street* Approach?

Commercial Property Owners

- Increased occupancy rates
- Rent stability
- Longer lease arrangements
- Increased property values
- Reduced vandalism
- Better downtown image
- New uses for downtown buildings
- Upper floor expansion

Business Owners

- Safety issues addressed
- Increased sales
- Improved image
- Increased value of business
- Coordinated efforts between businesses
- Increased traffic
- Promotion and advertising of the downtown
- Healthier business mix
- New market clusters
- Sense of community pride

Local Residents & Consumers

- Enhanced marketplace (better shopping and the benefits of shopping locally)
- Sense of pride in downtown
- Increased social and cultural activities
- More tax dollars stay in the community
- More communication to the downtown stakeholders
- Political advocacy for community concerns
- Home values increase

Preservationists

- The Main Street Approach reinforces the common goal of preservation
- Increased awareness and credibility
- Education of the public and downtown stakeholders
- Improved economic feasibility of preservation

Culture Groups

- Public Sites for community events
- Location for offices and performance spaces
- Increased safety

Municipal Government

- Increased public relations for City Government
- Viable downtown increases tax base
- Attractive downtown is a draw for business and industry
- Creates a common partnership with other government agencies
- Increases community pride
- Supports other redevelopment activities

Utilities

- Expansion of business activity including longer business hours
- Healthier businesses increase utility usage
- Provides example of community support⁴

An effective downtown plan will serve as a decision-making tool through which intelligent choices and decisions can be made quickly. There should be no surprises. For example, it should become relatively easy for stakeholders, such as private developers, to predict whether opportunities they are pursuing will be considered as consistent or inconsistent with the objectives of Renaissance Brandon. An effective plan is easily accessible, transparent, simple and easily understood by all stakeholders. Perhaps the most important message of all was the call for action, a paradigm shift from the old;⁵

Delays > Frustration > Inaction > Downtown Decline

To the new dynamic

Action > Optimism > Investment > Downtown Enhancement

The Vision

The Renaissance District will be a vibrant, diverse, and exciting mix of retail, cultural, entertainment and residential activities. A desirable place to live, work and enjoy.

The Mission

To create meaningful and recognizable successes in the downtown area that establishes downtown as a destination in the minds of individuals, families and investors.

Guiding Principles

A safe, family-friendly environment
Year-round activity with a mix of daytime and night-time uses
A complimentary and successful mix of retail shops and services
A balance of residential, office, retail, and entertainment uses
Sustainable and visually appealing architecture, public spaces, and amenities
Adapt to changing circumstances and opportunities

Strategic Goals

- Downtown as a Destination
- Stimulate new development in the Renaissance District
- Foster a community friendly environment in the Renaissance District
- Creating a safer environment in the Renaissance District

Plan of Action

First and foremost for the new corporation is the development of the organization, its rules of operations, the policies and procedures that will guide members of board through the process of defining themselves. There must be in place the tools to allow for intelligent choices and decisions to be made quickly and clearly.

Create the organization

- Community involvement in setting direction
- Establish a catalytic development group
- Create the public/private partnership
- Establish the district

Obtain the necessary funding in an amount that allows Renaissance Brandon to make a difference

- City of Brandon
- Provincial of Manitoba
- Government of Canada
- Western Diversification
- Philanthropic

Establish Renaissance Brandon's Strategic Goals

- Downtown as a Destination
- Stimulate new development in the Renaissance District
- Foster a community friendly environment in the Renaissance District
- Creating a safer environment in the Renaissance District

Define Renaissance Brandon's parameters of operation and quantify the toolkit available to the board for meeting the strategic goals.

- Issuance of grants
- Property ownership and development
- Loan guarantor
- Equity partner

Develop specific policies for and procedures for

- Guaranteeing of loans
- Granting of monies
- Acquiring outright ownership of property
- Acquiring equity stakes in property
- Investment of cash on hand
- Conflict of interest

- Methods used to evaluate potential project
- Recruitment of non directors for committees
- Public reporting process
- Annual report

Create a fair and impartial project evaluation matrix

Develop measurements of success

- Increase population
- Increase tax roll
- Increase vehicular & pedestrian traffic
- Decrease Vacancy rate
- Amount of private equity invested

¹ Shields, Martin & Farrigan, Tracy. Pennsylvania State University. The Centre for Rural Pennsylvania,

² National Trust for Historic Preservation, Washington D.C.

³ Downtown Moncton, 2006

⁴ A Resource Book for Downtown Ephrata, 2004

⁵ Palma, Doris P. Hyett Palma Inc.