



Streetlights

The Newsletter of the Maryland Downtown Development Association

Promoting the Vitality of Maryland's Downtowns and Traditional Business Districts

October 2005

MDDA Annual Meeting to be Held in Annapolis on November 18th

On Friday, November 18th MDDA will hold its Annual Membership Meeting at the historic Governor Calvert House Conference Center at 58 State Circle in Downtown Annapolis. This will be our first membership meeting in over two years, so your attendance would be greatly appreciated. We're proud to announce that the keynote speaker for this event will be Maryland's Secretary of Business and Economic Development, **Aris Melissaratos**.

The meeting will start at 10AM and last until 2PM. And yes, a free lunch buffet *will* be served. There is ample parking at garages throughout the downtown area. Please RSVP by sending an e-mail to marylanddowntown@earthlink.net or by calling 410-889-6241. We hope to see all of you there!

Remember!

There will be a Main Street Maryland training session on "Promoting Your Downtown" on October 11th in Taneytown. For more information contact Yvette Wilson at 410-209-5800.

Can Downtowns Curb the Growth of Chain Stores?

Recently, the issue of chain store development in historic business districts raised its head in the Hampden neighborhood of Baltimore. A group of local store owners and activists have decided to spearhead an effort aimed at keeping national chain stores off 36th Street, the area's main historic commercial district. Sighting the recent rise in rent for commercial space, the ensuing loss of two locally-owned businesses, and a general "loss of character", the group is hoping that Baltimore will follow the example of San Francisco and a handful of other cities and towns that have successfully kept chain stores out of traditional business districts.

Depending on your point of view, chain stores like McDonalds, the Gap, and Barnes & Noble are either community assets that contribute taxes and foot traffic to downtowns, or they are symbols of gentrification and the loss of an unique local character. For those who agree with the concerned citizens in Hampden, there have been some notable recent successes in stopping chain stores through the use of municipal ordinances.

In the language of these ordinances, chain stores are typically referred to as "Formula

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Businesses”. A formula business is defined as a business that is required by contractual or other arrangement to maintain a standardized array of services or merchandise, and standardized architecture, uniforms, logos, or interior decor. The vast majority of chain stores easily fit the formula business definition.

An example of how these ordinances work can be found in Coronado, California. This city of 24,000 adopted two ordinances limiting the expansion of chain restaurants and retail outlets. The Formula Restaurant Ordinance provides that the city shall allow no more than 10 such “formula” establishments within city limits. Any new formula restaurant must obtain a special use permit and must meet stringent design standards. The city’s Formula Retail Ordinance requires that formula retail stores also obtain a special use permit. Approval hinges on a variety of factors, including a demonstration that the store will contribute to an appropriate balance of local and regional, as well as small and large businesses.

A group of local property owners challenged the Formula Retail Ordinance in 2001, only to have the California Appeals Court uphold the ordinance. In its decision, the court stated that the law did not violate the U.S. Constitution’s commerce and equal protection clauses, and was a valid use of municipal authority. See www.smrpc.org/landuse/documents/Coronadocourtcase.pdf for the court opinion.

In one of the most well-known instances of a formula business restriction, San Francisco has enacted an ordinance that adds formula businesses to the list of uses that require neighborhood notification. Whenever such a business applies to open up in a neighborhood, local residents must be notified. After notification, there is the option of requesting a full public hearing on whether or not the business should be allowed to open. In addition, formula retail establishments are barred entirely from the city’s Hayes Valley business district and are automatically required to undergo a public hearing and review process in the city’s Cole Valley neighborhood. See www.newrules.org/retail/sanfran.html for the text of the San Francisco ordinances.

For some, creating so many bureaucratic hoops for these stores risks giving a city the reputation of being unfriendly to business. But for historic main streets and downtowns, maintaining a unique sense of place has become an important goal. Whether Hampden will keep chain stores off 36th Street is yet to be seen. One thing is certain, the trend of local officials and activists working to curb the growth of these sorts of stores is only growing.

If you would like to learn more about various cities across the country that have stopped chain store development, see www.newrules.org/retail/formula.html

Tips on Developing Better Parking Downtown

Dr. Kent Robertson, the director of Community Development at Saint Cloud State University in Minnesota, has developed a list of “core principles” for developing a parking plan for a healthy, pedestrian-friendly downtown. The following is a sampling of these principles:

- 1. Understand the Proper Role of Parking:**
Parking must always be viewed as subservient to the needs of the functions that draw people downtown. People do not venture downtown because there is ample parking, but for the wide variety of entertainment, restaurants, services and jobs located in the downtown area.
- 2. Strategically Locate Parking Facilities:**
Avoid placing parking lots or garages on major commercial streets, along corridors with high pedestrian flow, or in the middle of clusters of core functions, such as stores or entertainment venues. Look to place parking behind buildings or at the edge of downtown, if possible.
- 3. Value the Utility of On-Street Parking:**
Drivers tend to prefer on-street parking spaces, particularly if their stay is for two hours or less. On street parking also benefits pedestrians because it buffers them from moving street traffic while slowing down vehicles as well.
- 4. Make Better Use of existing Spaces:**
Parking shortages are often a function of perception and a lack of awareness as to where parking exists. Before adding spaces, a detailed inventory of the use and location of existing parking should be conducted. These inventories often reveal unoccupied spots, even at the busiest times of day. Increasing awareness of existing open spaces should be a higher priority than building new ones.

5. Plan for Parking Comprehensively:

Downtown parking should never be planned in a vacuum. Parking should always be considered in its downtown context, factoring in its contribution and impact on traffic patterns and flow, the pedestrian experience, density levels, activity patterns, aesthetic and historic qualities, and the overall sense of place.

If you want to learn more about Dr. Robertson’s principles of downtown parking, visit www.uwex.edu/ces/cced/lets/may05ltb.pdf

Cities in Western Maryland Receive DHCD Funds

On August 24th & 25th, major grants from the Department of Housing & Community Development were presented to Frostburg, Oakland, Cumberland and Hagerstown. A significant portion of these funds will directly impact the downtown areas of each of these cities.

In Frostburg, a \$100,000 Community Legacy grant will be used for the Frostburg Main Street Revolving Loan Fund. Community Legacy funds were also received by Oakland to redevelop the Pritts Building site in the city’s downtown area. Cumberland and Hagerstown received over \$800,000 from the Heritage Preservation Tax Credit program. This will be used to restore a variety of historic commercial buildings in and around those cities’ downtown areas.



Website of the Month

www.stamfordreview.com

The Stamford Review is a new publication dedicated to issues in downtown development, land use, architecture, and urban affairs.

The most recent issue, which can be downloaded for free from the above website, includes articles that address the revitalization of small towns, architectural preservation in Manhattan's historic business district, retail revitalization in Cleveland, the implications of a massive Ikea development on Brooklyn's waterfront, and the community revitalization efforts of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

MDDA Workshop Focused on Online Maps for Downtown

On August 26th, MDDA held an educational workshop in Bowie with Jim Blakeslee, president and founder of Geocentric, a software company based in Bethesda that specializes in creating interactive maps and guides.

Mr. Blakeslee explained and critiqued various web-based maps that are currently being used by local governments, merchant associations, and non-profit groups to promote their respective downtown areas. Members got to see how online maps that are hard to navigate, filled with outdated information, or that simply take too long to download, can leave a visitor with the wrong impression of their downtowns. "The Internet is usually a consumer's first source for information about a downtown destination", Mr. Blakeslee said. "Hence, its important to have an easy to use, up to date, fully interactive map on your website that allows visitors to explore your

downtown quickly and in their own way."

If you would like more information about Jim Blakeslee and Geocentric's mapping services, contact him at 301-960-4724, or online at www.geocentric.com.

MDDA Looking for Board Members

MDDA is looking for current members who would like to join our Board of Directors. If you are interested in being an active part of our organization, please contact us at 410-889-6241 or at marylanddowntown@earthlink.net

Maryland Downtown Development Association

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