Clinton Square / Downtown Albany: Where Albany Comes Together

Fall 2011 Graduate Planning Studio Report

University at Albany Department of Geography and Planning

Master’s in Urban and Regional Planning Program
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Acknowledgements

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The First Church of Albany generously allowed Planning Studio Community Advisory Committee Meetings and public presentations to be held in the Church’s spacious Parlor Room, which was crucial to the success of the Planning Studio because it enabled downtown residents, property owners and other interested parties and stakeholders to have input into the planning process. Denise Lobdell, the Church Coordinator/Receptionist, could not have been more helpful and pleasant whenever we contacted her to schedule and make arrangements for meetings at the Church.

Last but not least we would like to thank all those who attended and participated in one or more of the Community Advisory Committee Meetings that were held at the First Church over the course of the Planning Studio-- the names of whom are listed on the following two pages.
Attendees, Advisory Committee Meetings

Norma Jean Ballou, member, First Church of Albany

Steve Barnes, *Times-Union* columnist and downtown resident

Judy Bresselor, New York Planning Federation

Wendy Burch, Albany County Historical Assoc.

Dylan Carey, Congressman Tonko’s Office

Jack Church, TenBroeck Mansion

Norene Clarke, Albany Housing Authority

Tess Collins, Proprietor, McGeary’s Pub

Megan Daley, City of Albany, Capitalize Albany

James D. Folts, First Church Trustee

Herb Ellis, downtown property owner

Chris Hodson, Steuben Athletic Club

Susan Holland, Historic Albany Foundation

David Hruby, resident, Quackenbush Condominiums

Jocelyn V. Jerry, First Street resident

Dan Kelleher, Albany Downtown BID
Philip LaBatte Jr., First Church Trustee

Michael Klein, Albany Parking Authority

Constance McClendon, Mount Olive Missionary Baptist Church

Maggie Mancinelli-Cahill, Capital Repertory Theater

Zalat Mazwood, resident, North Pearl Street

Sandy Misiewicz, Capital District Transportation Committee

Edward Monthie III, First Church Trustee

Lynn Nraltols, resident, condominium owner

John Paarlberg, Pastor, First Church of Albany

Dominick Purnamo, proprietor, Yono’s and DP restaurants

Bob Radliff, Community Loan Fund

Seth Rosenblum, Rosenblum Companies

Darren Scott, Albany Housing Authority

Georgette Steffens, Downtown Albany BID

Paul Stewart, Commununity Loan Fund

Mike Urgo, downtown business (Jonathan’s Pizza) and property owner

Michele Vennard, Albany County Convention and Visitors Bureau
Carol Whittaker, downtown resident, homeowner

Michael Yevoli, Commissioner, Albany Department of Development and Planning
Introduction

What is a Planning Studio?

Each fall semester the University at Albany’s Masters in Regional Planning (MRP) Program conducts a Planning Studio focusing on an area or neighborhood in the Capital Region that poses significant issues, challenges and opportunities. Planning Studios are a formal part of the University at Albany’s MRP curriculum, and provide students nearing completion of their professional training with an opportunity to apply what they have learned in a real-world context under faculty supervision. The students function very much in the same manner as professional planners would in carrying out tasks outlined in a Scope of Services, and delivering work products and reports to a specified client group. A second aim of our Planning Studios is to provide advice and assistance that enables client groups to achieve desired changes in their communities.

In 2008 and 2009, successive Graduate Planning assisted the Arbor Hill Implementation Team in refining and implementing recommendations contained in the Arbor Hill Neighborhood Plan; in 2010, the Planning Studio focused on the Sheridan Hollow neighborhood. (Links to these and other UAlbany Graduate Planning Studio reports can be found at http://ualbanyplanners.org/projects.aspx.)

The Fall 2011 Planning Studio that is the subject of this report focuses on an area downtown Albany we refer to as Clinton Square—an area that encompasses areas of downtown between and contiguous to Sheridan Hollow and Arbor Hill that were not covered in the prior two Planning Studios. In this 2011 Planning Studio we have chosen a fairly expansive study area that recognizes the important inter-connections between the downtown Albany commercial core and surrounding neighborhoods. The study area boundaries are defined roughly as follows: State Street on the south; the railroad bridge viaduct near Livingston Street on the north; the Hudson River on the east; Hawk Street to the west. The exact boundaries of the study area are shown in Figure 1.
Why Focus on Clinton Square?

Clinton Square is a major center of employment. It is also the lynchpin of the city’s cultural and entertainment district, and a major gateway into the city. Unfortunately, the area lacks a sufficiently coherent and compelling sense of place as to make people want to gravitate to the area. The fragmented physical fabric of the area, with its criss-crossing streets and multiple traffic movements creates an environment that is unwelcoming (and even downright hostile) to pedestrians. Walking from office buildings on Broadway near Clinton or from Quackenbush to businesses and restaurants on Pearl Street is unpleasant and often challenging. The core area of Clinton Square also lacks an attractive, visually compelling public space to which people naturally gravitate, such as to during lunch breaks or after work when the weather is nice. Rather than linger in the area, people tend to navigate through the area as quickly as possible-- venturing into the area only when they have a previously scheduled commitment, and then promptly leaving after that commitment is fulfilled. The fact that the current environment discourages
people from lingering and exploring adjacent offerings clearly undermines the goal of creating a vital commercial, cultural and mixed-use downtown district.

**History and Background**

The City of Albany’s European colonial history dates back to when Henry Hudson, in 1609, sailed 150 miles north from Manhattan to establish trade with a Native American settlement along the west bank of the Hudson River for the Dutch. Soon after came the establishment of a European settlement and trading – primarily fur trading – between those in the upper Hudson River Valley and New Amsterdam (New York City) began to thrive. In 1652, the Dutch fur-trading community – known as Fort Orange – and the surrounding area were incorporated as the Village of Beverwyck. In 1664, New Netherland (later renamed New York) was taken from the Dutch by the British and, at that time, the name Beverwyck was changed to Albany.

Three of the city’s oldest streets – State Street, Broadway, and North Pearl Street – date back to the early Dutch Village of Beverwyck. These streets were the center of early Albany’s civic activity, and were lined by the first churches, government buildings, and the homes and businesses of many of the city’s most prominent personages. State Street – the southern boundary of the Planning Studio’s study area – was the central street in the original four by four Dutch Gothic gridiron block structure of the Beverwyck Settlement. State Street ran west from the bank of the Hudson River to the “fort” – a stronghold for the early population located just east of the site where, in 1899, the New York State Capital Building was constructed. The four-by-four block structure was highly functional in that it prescribed a high-density living arrangement that was well suited for defense against both hostile parties and cold weather. The basic structure of downtown Albany that exists today was notably shaped by that original gridiron structure.
Albany was officially chartered as a municipality by provincial Governor Thomas Dongan in 1684; at the time the city’s population was a mere 500 people. By 1790 its population was nearly 3,500, representing an increase of almost 700% since when the city was granted its charter. In 1797, Albany was officially designated as the capital of New York State, making it the center of state government. By the beginning of the 19th Century, Albany had established itself as a thriving city—not only as the center of state government, but also as center for trade and manufacturing.

When Albany’s Charter was established in 1684, Patroon Street was the city’s northern boundary. In 1815, to accommodate the city’s growing population, that boundary was extended northward to what we know as Clinton Avenue, but at the time was known as Patroon Street, and North Pearl Street was extended from State Street to Clinton Avenue. Around 1830, at the urging of a number of prominent city residents hoping to improve the functioning and appearance of the increasingly busy intersection of North Pearl Street and Clinton Avenue, a 200 ft. by 60 ft. area along North Pearl Street between Clinton Avenue and Orange Street was established and named Clinton Square. By the mid 1800s, Clinton Avenue had become one of Albany’s most densely populated and prestigious residential streets.

Albany was now a stopping point along the shipping route between the French city of Montreal to the north and New York City to the south. Completion of the eastern terminus of the Erie Canal at the Albany Basin in 1825, at a point just north of modern day Colonie Street, connected the Hudson River to the Great Lakes, in so doing further elevating Albany’s status as a center for trade and transportation. In 1831, the Mohawk & Hudson Railroad (later known as the Albany & Schenectady Railroad) began operations as the first railroad in New York State with a 16 mile route between Albany and Schenectady. By the late 1800s, Albany had bustling railroad operations involving a number of railroad companies. In 1899-1900, Union Station (now called Kiernan Plaza) was constructed on Broadway and became the city’s main railroad station. Sadly, this grand historic structure sits vacant today.
During the years following the Civil War, commercial interests began building taller and more massive edifices along North Pearl and State Streets- the former Kenmore Hotel and the building occupied by the Steuben Athletic Club being prime examples. Also constructed during this period (in 1897) was the richly designed and elegantly embellished First Trust Company Building at the intersection of State and Broadway.

By the end of the 19th Century the area between State Street and Clinton Avenue was a thriving business and residential district. By 1900, the city’s population had reached nearly 95,000 (just a few thousand less than the population today)—with most of that population concentrated close to the Hudson River. However, the city’s growth slowed markedly in the decades that followed, particularly between 1930 and 1950 due to the pressures of the Great Depression and the World War II.

The end of World War II and the return of the nation’s soldiers led to a period of accelerated suburbanization and out-migration from older central cities across the country, and Albany was no exception. Between 1950 and 2000, Albany’s population declined by almost 40,000 residents. Among the factors contributing to the out-migration was the commitment of massive amounts of federal funding to construct a network of largely toll-free interstate highways, making it increasingly easy for people employed in cities like Albany to live in outlying suburban locations. Another major factor was the construction of grandiose and monumental state-funded building projects, like the construction of Empire State Plaza in the 1960s and 1970s which required the demolition of 1500 buildings and the dislocation of 7000 residents of downtown Albany.

The first plan to put forward the idea of constructing an interstate highway through Albany along the edge of the Hudson River (what later became I-787) was prepared by the New York State Public Works Department in the 1950s. As shown in the plan, the divided highway would connect with I-87 (the New York State Thruway) a few miles south of downtown Albany and head north, paralleling to the Hudson River’s west bank. Construction of the highway began in the early 1960s. I-787 today is widely lamented
for the fact that it cuts downtown Albany off from one of its more important resources and amenities-- the Hudson River. Imagine, if you will, what the Clinton Square Area and Arbor Hill would be like today if Clinton Avenue led all the way to a greenway promenade along the river’s edge. Neighborhoods up and down both sides of Clinton Avenue would be regarded today as among the most desirable places to live in the city because of their water views and convenient public access to the river. What happened instead was that the Clinton Square area was fractured and cut off from the river by the construction of interstate on-and-off ramps at Broadway, and North Pearl and Orange Streets, inundating the area with automobile traffic.

Not everyone was oblivious to the harm that cutting the city off from the Hudson River. Even before construction of I-787 had reached as far north as downtown Albany, physical planning schemes began to emerge that proposed development projects to reconnect the downtown to the waterfront. A plan prepared in 1962 by Candeub Fleissig and Associates proposed a major building project containing a 10,000 seat convention center, trade center, sporting rink, riverfront hotel and apartments that would span over I-787 to the edge of the Hudson River. A plan prepared for The New York State Temporary Commission on the Capital City in 1963 contained many of the same elements.

Construction of the Empire State Plaza began in the early 1960s, and was completed in 1976. The 98.5 acre site was assembled by using eminent domain. While the intent of the Empire State Plaza project was to revitalize the city, the removal of such large proportions of its downtown housing stock and resident population had the affect of substantially narrowing the mix of land uses around the downtown central business district (CBD), limiting the generation of activity to nine-to-five weekdays. On the plus side, Empire State Plaza became the biggest tourist attraction in Albany. Empire State Plaza remains the most dominant and defining feature of Albany’s skyline. However its “space-age” design, so bold and modern at the time, seems increasingly dated, and its allure as a tourist destination is waning.
As construction of Empire State Plaza was nearing completion, another major government project, this one new federal office building, was being planned that would have an even more direct impact on the Clinton Square area. The Leo O’Brien federal building was constructed in 1974 along the north side of Clinton Avenue between North Pearl and Broadway. The cold modernist design of the federal building is in stark contrast to its surroundings. The extreme setback of the building from Clinton Avenue further underscores its relative disassociation from its surroundings, as does the decision of the building’s designers to compensate for the grade change along Clinton Avenue by placing the building on a platform, thereby presenting a blank, unwelcoming wall along Broadway.

Between 1980 and 1984 the Downtown Albany Development Corporation (DADC), a privately-funded not-for-profit organization, analyzed data and prepared reports aimed at assisting private developers in carrying out projects that would economically revitalize downtown. Although its reports were largely ignored by city officials, the Albany Strategic Planning Commission issued a report in 1985 that articulated four strategies for jump-starting downtown Albany’s development, all of which resonate today: (1) adopt land use policies that encourage mixed-use development that would bring about 24 hour activity; (2) develop and provide adequate parking in convenient locations; (3) implement a long-term strategy aimed at developing the city’s cultural resources and making them a central part of the city’s overall economic development strategy; and (4) form public-private partnerships and initiate redevelopment efforts that build connections between the city and its most important resource— the Hudson River.

In 1996, Capitalize Albany issued its Economic Development Strategy for the city. That same year James Moore, a graduate student in Architecture at the University of New York at Buffalo, produced a Masters Degree thesis that analyzed existing conditions in the lower Clinton Avenue area and put forward some bold design ideas for revitalizing the area. The recommendations and proposals put forward by Capitalize Albany and James Moore had much in common, including their encouragement of mixed-use
development, the renovation and adaptive reuse of existing buildings to produce a variety of housing types, and supportive infill development on vacant sites, the provision of variety of housing types. Both reports also urged that efforts be made to reconnect the downtown to the Hudson River. Moore took this idea the farthest by putting forward a comprehensive scheme that called for a thorough redesign of I-787 and its interface with Lower Clinton Avenue. Moore proposed that I-787 be reconfigured into a tree-lined, grade-level boulevard with traffic signals designed for a reduced speed limit of 45 mph. With on- and off-ramps currently intruding into Clinton Square removed, Clinton Avenue could be transformed into a grand boulevard leading to and terminating at a pedestrian promenade and marina along the western bank of the Hudson River.

Since the 1980s, every planning effort that has addressed downtown Albany has recognized the need to improve connections between the downtown and the waterfront. But the idea of altering the form and function of I-787 to reconnect to the waterfront has only recently been considered as a serious proposal among key players and decision makers in and around the Capital Region. In 2002, the City of Albany’s North Waterfront Redevelopment Strategy was produced. This recommended redevelopment strategy, prepared for the City by Saratoga Associates, called for making minor alterations in the routing and elevation of I-787. The main reason for altering I-787 was to enable the construction of bridge just north of Colonie Street that would span the highway and lead to a newly dug harbor/marina connected to the Hudson River at the old site of the Erie Canal’s eastern terminus.

In 2011, the Stakeholder’s Group released a plan that presents multiple schemes by which to turn I-787 into a tree-lined, lower-speed boulevard to improve access to the riverfront and the overall quality of the urban environment (See Figure 2). The Capital District Transportation Committee has also produced a “Big Ideas” document that considers the possibility and potential cost of the inevitable alteration of I-787 to accommodate the reconnection of downtown Albany to the waterfront. CDTC’s receptivity to giving serious consideration to reconfiguring I-787 is understandable given the fact that I-787’s
infrastructure is nearing the end of its lifespan. The time is close at hand when decisions absolutely must be made as to whether I-787 will be rebuilt exactly as it was (thereby perpetuating its negative effects), or to invest in a reconfigured infrastructure that will greatly benefit the city and its residents in the long run.

![Figure 2: Proposed 2011 Stakeholder's Scheme for I-787](image)

Last but not least, two recent reports and plans are noteworthy in that they provide insights and recommendations that can help guide priority-setting and decision-making: the 2007 Sustainable Design Assessment Team (SDAT) Report and Albany’s first comprehensive plan (*Albany 2030*) completed in 2011. Interestingly enough, a number of the key themes emphasized in SDAT report are echoed in the *Albany 2030* plan. Among these are the following: building a stronger downtown by creating a larger downtown resident population; promoting moderate-to-high density mixed-use development; encouraging and supporting preservation and reuse of historically, architecturally and culturally significant buildings; combating the negative effects of vacant and abandoned
buildings; strengthening connections between the downtown Albany and the Hudson River; and encouraging and promoting greater use of alternative modes of transportation (walking, bicycles and transit).

The planning efforts summarized above are a testament to the ongoing, sustained efforts that have been made to stem downtown Albany’s decline and make it once again a thriving urban center. Having studied and considered the succession of ideas put forward in these various documents, and having conducted detailed studies of the area to assess its strengths and weaknesses, the Clinton Square Planning Studio team is optimistic about the area’s future prospects of the area. The multi-faceted strategy outlined in this report, we believe, offers a feasible and effective strategy for achieving the brighter future.

**Capitalize on Albany’s Historic Resources**

**Establish an Historic Walking Trail**

Given the rich collection of historically and culturally significant structures and sites within the immediate vicinity of Clinton Square, a historic trail and interpretive signage program could be set up to act as a regional attractor to Albany’s downtown core.

Other cities similar in size and age to Albany have created interpretive walks to promote their historic resources. Boston’s Freedom Trail visits 16 individual sites along its length, introducing visitors to historic structures, such as Paul Revere’s House, and places that are significant in the founding of our country, including the site of the Boston Massacre. Philadelphia’s Constitutional Walking Tour, Williamsburg’s Great City Walks, Seattle’s Historic Walking Tours, and other walks all provide a wealth of information on the history of their respective cities.

Formally establish historic walking tours can be offered and experienced in ways that meet a range of interests and preferences. One way of taking such walking tours is casually on one’s own, at a time of one’s choosing and at one’s own pace. Self-guided
tour through Albany’s downtown historic district would be inexpensive to get up and running and to maintain. All that would be needed would be to prepare and distribute an attractively designed brochure that lays out a convenient walking route, locates historic sites along the route, and provides informative and entertaining background information about the historic events and personages associated with the various sites.

Others with more specialized interests, less knowledge of history, and/or less confident about venturing out on their own might prefer to join a group tours led by staff persons/volunteers with in-depth knowledge of local history whose accounts can help make history come even more alive. The existing Albany Visitor’s Center could serve as a convenient starting and end point for such accompanied tours, as well as for the distribution of brochures to people wishing to take the tour on their own.

The routes of some the most successful historic walking trails in this country are marked with a painted colored stripe along sidewalks; Boston’s Freedom Trail is delineated with a continuous line of red bricks inlaid into sidewalks. The placement of walking trail markers at various strategic points can also be helpful in guiding visitors along the route and making sure they don’t get lost. The placement of interpretive markers and plaques at historic sites along the route is another common feature.

It is important to note that the routes of many of the most successful historic walking trails pass by and incorporate places where people can stop, rest, and refresh themselves with something to eat and drink along the way. The locations of such establishments and places of respite are often clearly noted on the trail map included in the brochure given to people taking the tour. Incorporating such rest areas and commercial establishments into the route of the walking trail, and noting them on the trail map, has two benefits. First, it helps increase the likelihood that taking the tour (particularly on hot summer days) will be a pleasurable experience. Second, it helps assure that the walking trail produces positive economic spin-off benefits for the community that hosts the trail.

One additional exciting feature that could greatly expand the popularity of the historic walking trail would be to install a [murmur] storytelling network, a new method of
connecting people with the history of their cities. The first “[murmur]” network was established in the Kensington Market area of Toronto in 2003; since then “[murmur]” networks have spread to other Toronto neighborhoods as well as to other cities such as Calgary, San Jose, Edinburgh, and Dublin. The following quote from the [murmur] website explains the concept and approach.

[murmur] is a documentary oral history project that records stories and memories told about specific geographic locations. We collect and make accessible people’s personal histories and anecdotes about the places in their neighborhoods that are important to them. In each of these locations we install a [murmur] sign with a telephone number on it that anyone can call with a mobile phone to listen to that story will standing in that exact spot, and engaging in the physical experience of being right where the story takes places. Some stories suggest that the listener walk around, following a certain path through a place, while others allow a person to wander with both their feet and their gaze.

The stories we record range from personal recollections to more ‘historic’ stories, or sometimes both—but always are told from a personal point of view, as if the storyteller is just out for a stroll and was casually talking about their neighborhood to a friend…

All our stories are available on the [murmur] website, but their details truly come alive as the listener walks through, around, and into the narrative. By engaging with [murmur] people develop a new intimacy with places, and ‘history acquires a multitude of new voices… (http://murmurtoronto.ca/about.php)

Although technologically advanced, a [murmur] system like that installed in Toronto is remarkably inexpensive to set up and maintain. Rather than requiring a major capital expenditure, what the establishments of a [murmur] network requires is a considerable investment of time and effort on the part of people with close connections to and
affection for the people and histories of particular places. Once established, a [murmur] network basically runs itself. Small unobtrusive signs installed at individual sites provide a phone number that when dialed tells a recorded story about the site where the caller is located.

In addition to making heritage walking tours come alive for visitors and tourists, [murmur] systems could have an important added benefit. Because the stories on [murmur] are able to be accessed by any caller, it would provide a way for people who live and work in Albany to learn about their city’s remarkable history and distinctive character—and in so doing very possibly increase their attachment to and affection for their home town.

Some of the historically, architecturally and culturally significant sites that could be included in the downtown Albany Historic Trail are identified and briefly described in below. Dozens of other sites could also be added.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Year Built</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Arcade Building</td>
<td>1928</td>
<td>One of Albany’s first and most successful shopping arcades. Currently vacant.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Building Name</td>
<td>Date</td>
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<tr>
<td>First Church in Albany</td>
<td>1797-1799</td>
<td>Designed by Albany architect Philip Hooker, the Church took influence from 18th century models in England. The building has been redecorated multiple times, most notably by the Tiffany Company.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kenmore Hotel</td>
<td>1876-1878</td>
<td>Notable for its High Victorian Gothic elements, the Kenmore building has changed uses multiple times over its 130-year history.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Building</td>
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<tr>
<td>Palace Theater</td>
<td>1929-1931</td>
<td>Originally a bustling movie theater until the city of Albany bought the building in 1969. Extensive renovations in recent years have brought the Palace back to its original splendor.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quackenbush House</td>
<td>1736</td>
<td>One of Albany’s oldest remaining structures, the Quackenbush House is one of two gable-fronted Dutch houses left in the City.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saint Joseph’s</td>
<td>Roman Catholic Church</td>
<td>1856-1860</td>
<td>Designed by renowned architect Patrick Keeley, this Gothic Revival landmark is visible throughout most of the City.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saint Mary’s</td>
<td>Roman Catholic Church</td>
<td>1867-1869</td>
<td>The third church to stand on this location, the current version features white marble trim and a weathervane of the archangel Gabriel.</td>
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<td>Steuben Athletic</td>
<td>Club</td>
<td>1886-1887</td>
<td>Originally Albany’s first YMCA building, this building features broad Romanesque arches and decorative stonework.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stephen and Harriet Myers House</td>
<td>1847</td>
<td>This unassuming Greek Revival house was built for Stephen and Harriet Myers in the late 1840s during the height of their activity with the Vigilance Committee. With the help of their fellow collaborators, the Myers residence served as the hub of the Underground Railroad in the region. Listed on the National Historic Register in 2004.</td>
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<td>Name</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ten Broeck Mansion</td>
<td>1797-1798</td>
<td>Built for Abraham Ten Broeck and his wife while he was mayor of Albany. The property was donated to the Albany County Historical Association in 1948 by the Olcott family, who owned the structure for nearly a century.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Union Station (Kiernan Plaza)</td>
<td>1899-1900</td>
<td>Built at the nexus of a number of major railroad lines, Union Station would later be refurbished into an office space in the 1980s.</td>
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Improve Sense of Arrival

Currently, the experience of arriving in Clinton Square from the I-787 exit ramp forces motorists to make an abrupt transition from high-speed auto travel to a densely developed urban setting—a transition that is jarring and uncomfortable for both visitors and residents alike. Coming down the chute of the exit ramp heading toward Clinton Avenue, motorists are presented with an overhead indicating that there is a traffic light ahead, but not warned that they are also about to enter an area where there is a good deal of pedestrian activity. As one approaches the traffic light at Broadway it is also difficult for visitors to get oriented and know how to proceed—a situation aggravated by the lack of recognizable, appropriately placed way-finding signs. For example a sign pointing right (north) to the Albany Visitor Center at Quackenbush Square is placed alongside the extreme left lane of the Clinton Street exit ramp. The problem with placing the sign in this location is that motorists in the right and center lanes, who could conceivably act on this information by turning right to the Visitors Center, are likely not to notice the sign; whereas motorists who have the best chance of noticing the sign will be unable to make use of this information by turning right because they are in the extreme left lane and unable to turn right against two lanes of traffic. (See Figure 3)

Figure 3: Motorists’ view of Clinton Square from Clinton Street I-787 Exit Ramp
The addition of a formal gateway arch would reinforce the distinct identity of Clinton Square as an important destination, and make the experience of having arrived memorable. The archway (as shown below) should be located where motorists enter into Clinton Avenue just above Broadway. The gateway arch ought to include lettering identifying Clinton Square, should be embellished with appropriate detailing, and should be lighted at night. Materials and details would be expected to be sensitive to the context. Because of its appreciable span it is likely to require a flat arch or relatively horizontal character. Ideally it would be integrated with other improvements and alterations to the roadways, walkways, and park entrances and elements in its immediate vicinity.

Another way of making the approach into Clinton Square more memorable would be to apply a mural to the side-wall of the massive multi-level parking structure that is the principle feature people see as they drive along the Clinton Avenue I-787 exit ramp. Ideally the mural should evoke and reinforce some unique aspect or feature of Albany’s history and/or geographic location. Figure 4 shows the parking structure as it currently appears to motorists entering Clinton Square from the I-787 Clinton Avenue exit ramp. Figure 5 illustrates what motorists might be presented with if the side of parking structure were enhanced with a mural.
Yet another memorable gateway treatment could be applied to the railroad trestle over Broadway near Livingston to communicate a sense of arrival to motorists approaching downtown Albany from Menands, Watervliet and other communities to the north (as illustrated in Figure 6).
High-Quality Public Spaces Can Transform the District

Wallenburg Park

Wallenburg Park, the official name of the fragmented parkland and green space that drivers encounter immediately after exiting off the Clinton Avenue off-ramp, is the heart of the area we call Clinton Square. What happens within this space—whether it continues to be largely ignored and underappreciated or embraced and given new life through thoughtful spatial adjustments and redesign—is therefore extremely important and will go a long way toward determining the future not only of the immediate area but also the future of downtown.
Unfortunately, the quality of experience offered within Wallenburg Park is undermined considerably by traffic passing through and encircling the park.
A number of possible alterations to roadways and traffic patterns in the Clinton Square area were considered—including some fairly major, even radical ways of reshaping highway and traffic patterns in the vicinity. This open-minded approach to the possibility of reshaping the Clinton Square Area seemed appropriate given the fact that I-787 is reaching the end of its useful life. Before too much longer state and federal highway officials will need to decide whether rebuild I-787 the same way as it is today, or replace it with a very different kind of highway. Either way, major federal and state appropriations will be needed in the not too distant future, which makes it timely that we contemplate what some of those longer range changes might be.

**Make Wallenburg Park the Focal Point of the District**

Wallenburg Park can be the defining focal point of the Clinton Square District. This can be done in two ways: first, by expanding and redesigning the park to make it more inviting; second, by encouraging future development and land use changes that create a stronger sense of place and create cross-flows of pedestrian movement that activate and enliven the space.
The most immediate problem with Wallenburg Park—a condition that significantly diminishes its current value and appeal—is that interior portions of the park are not visible from the perimeter of the park. People are generally made uncomfortable and reluctant to enter a public space if its interior cannot be readily observed. Another basic deficiency is the general lack of upkeep and maintenance. More attention needs to be paid to pruning of trees and vegetation, as well as to maintaining and repairing broken pavers—all of which would go a long way toward making the park more inviting. Planting of flowers and bushes, and selective planting of small trees in selected locations (along with selective removal of older, decrepit trees) could visually enhance the park at a relatively modest cost.

The small public space alongside the Federal Building on the opposite side of Clinton Avenue is particularly uninviting. As shown in Figure 11 there are no places to sit and nothing visually appealing to look at. Some modest enhancements could make this space much more welcoming, such as by adding a visual focal point such as a fountain, and providing places to sit as shown in Figure 12.
The second factor that diminishes the quality of Wallenburg Park is that the building edge surrounding the park is characterized by great disparities in the building height and mass. These physical disparities and discontinuities undermine the ability of people to perceive the park as a comfortably enclosed public space. As a result, it remains ill-defined and nondescript—an unmemorable collection of leftover fragments of open space to be moved through as quickly as possible, rather than one which people might want to spend time in and enjoy.

More clearly defining the boundaries and edges of Wallenburg Park will require a long-term sustained effort that makes sure that future development surrounding the park that conforms to a narrower range of building setbacks, heights and proportions. In the short run, screening and camouflaging some of the most grossly out-of-scale current elements could be helpful in addressing and remediating some of the stylistic outliers in the short
run. Ideally over the course of many years the overall composition of downtown buildings will better delineate the perimeter of the park in a way that enlivens and energizes the space.

**Thinking Longer Range**

Most critical to making Wallenburg Park a more memorable place would be to completely remove the I-787 off- and on-ramps and replace them with at-grade connections at the eastern end of Clinton Avenue. If this were to happen it would be possible to close Von Tromp Ave. entirely and significantly expand Wallenburg Park to the south.

Once the I-787 on-ramp is removed and Wallenburg Park is expanded, a cascading water feature could be added in the general area currently occupied by Von Tromp Ave. The park itself could then be completely redesigned and re-landscaped to make it a more inviting space. This redesign should include a new grading plan to make negotiating the grade change from Broadway to Pearl less physically challenging, as well as a revised configuration of paths and walkways to make it more inviting and welcoming.

Attractively designed benches should be placed at park entrances, along pathways leading into and through the park, as well as along the edges of the park. Beautification treatments already in place along lower Clinton Avenue should be extended along the Pearl and Broadway sides of the park. More inviting park

*Figure 13: Imagining what Wallenburg Park could become following removal of I-787 on-ramp*
entryways, more attractive seating areas and better lighting would also help.

Last but not least, the addition of a well-designed pedestrian plaza along the western edge of the park (along the east side of Pearl Street) would help visually connect Wallenburg Park to the pedestrian plaza on the opposite side of Pearl Street in front of the row of buildings that includes McGeary’s Tavern.

The public space framed by historic structures that front on Clinton Square and Patroon Street (in front of McGeary’s) is a precious, human-scaled space that can be much better used to strengthen and expand the public pedestrian realm of Wallenburg Park. Unfortunately, this space is currently often cluttered with parked cars, thereby preventing its public use and enjoyment. Figure 14 depicts how this space it could be used if reclaimed as a pedestrian precinct. A major obstacle needs to be overcome, however, for the full potential of this public space to be realized. Wireless internet service is widely available throughout many parts of downtown Albany, but appears to be entirely lacking in this wonderful and compelling public space. This gap in wireless internet service obviously needs to be corrected.

Figure 14: Easily achieved transformation of Clinton Square/Patroon Street into a vibrant public space
Create an Intimate Public Square at Foot of Maiden Lane

Public squares have functioned for thousands of years as gathering spaces for urban residents. They serve many possible functions: socialization, commerce, recreation, play, relaxation, entertainment, community celebrations, and public protest. The many purposes public squares can serve are what make them so essential and magical. The placement of movable tables and chairs in a public square might be all needed to prompt large numbers of people to take a deep breath, sit down, relax and savor being part of a larger community. The backgrounds and ages of people using a given public space will inevitably vary at different times of the day. In the morning the space might be occupied by older people reading newspapers; at mid-day it be office workers; after 5 pm and in the early evening there might be more young people in their 20s and 30s. Introducing live music and other forms of entertainment into a public space, as well as food vendors, can dramatically increase the number of people drawn to the space. The variety of uses a public space accommodates, and the variety of users it attracts, is a good measure of its success, because it signifies the extent of community and public benefit.

Relatively small public spaces (as small as 125 feet by 100 feet) can be just as successful as much larger public spaces. Much more important than the size of a space is that it be framed by architecturally and/or historically significant buildings on two or three sides that lend character to the space. Ideally these buildings should contain ground-floor businesses that generate pedestrian activity and also benefit commercially from activities taking place in the square. The fourth side of the square should open onto an adjoining street, so as to provide passers-by with clear views into the space—and thereby encourage them to venture into the space. Public squares of this kind can also be designed to be either elevated somewhat above, or somewhat below the adjoining street level, which can distinguish and set the public space somewhat apart from the surrounding environment and make it seem more special.
The nicely scaled open area at the end of Maiden Lane which opens out onto Broadway appears optimally suited to be transformed into just this kind of intimate and versatile public square. Not only is this nicely framed space within easy walking distance from downtown shopping, restaurants and bars, but it also overlooks the pedestrian bridge that people take to and from the Corning Preserve.

A creative redesign and makeover of this currently under-appreciated public space could very easily jump-start a significant amount of private investment in the surrounding area—such as in renovating the Arcade Building (which looks out directly onto the public space) to accommodate cafes, restaurants and shops on the ground floor and housing on the upper floors. Indeed, the entire area immediately surrounding to this public space has the potential to evolve into a vibrant and unique urban residential enclave within the downtown—further strengthening the argument for creating a distinctively designed, high-amenity public space in this particular location.

Overhead lighting could be strung to create a special ambiance within the square and also to encourage people to linger and savor the space at night. Designing and installing appropriate lighting might possibly be a project that could be affordably undertaken by the RPI School of Architecture’s Lighting Design Department’s Graduate Program. A lighting scheme implemented in Torino, Italy (see Figures 15) demonstrates how a unique, warm and safe-feeling urban public space can be created through a creative approach to lighting. The versatility of the Torino public space is enhanced by movable seating and tables, which enables the space to accommodate temporary art installations, concerts and performances, weekend farmers markets, or anything else that suits the neighborhood. Closer to home, movable tables and chairs in public spaces have also proven to be the preferred solution, and extremely popular in public parks and spaces in New York City.
While drawing attention to the unique attributes and potential of the public space at the foot of Maiden Lane, we also want to point out that the urban fabric of the entire area south of Pearl Street between State Street and Columbia Street is a comfortably scaled setting that would lend itself well to being transformed into a unique and appealing pedestrian-oriented urban neighborhood. The streets within the area are narrow, and many of them paved with cobblestone, giving the precinct a European feel reminiscent of Albany’s past. James Street, which runs north and south, is the spine of the neighborhood. Other public ways threading through the district are Maiden Lane, Steuben Street, Pine Street and Columbia Street.

One of the first and most crucial steps in terms of realizing the potential of this somewhat overlooked enclave would be to transform Maiden Lane into a pedestrian precinct (service delivery vehicles for Maiden Lane businesses only) that lures and leads people from S. Pearl to the proposed new public square at the foot of Maiden Lane. As we envision it, the narrow, raised sidewalks that currently exist along the sides of Maiden Lane should be removed and the entire width of the right-of-way should be reconstructed and covered with an attractively textured, durable paving surface. Stringing lights across Maiden Lane as well as over the public square at the foot of Maiden Lane (as previously shown in Figure 15) will enliven the district at night, provide a comforting sense of

Figure 15: Public square in Torino, Italy
enclosure and increase the feeling of safety. Eventually the Maiden Lane public square and pedestrian walkway leading up to S. Pearl could be expanded to include Pine Street and James Street, creating an extended pedestrian precinct that would make this unique residential enclave even more appealing to prospective downtown residents.

**Tri-Centennial Park**

Tri-Centennial Park was built in 1986 on the site of a former surface parking lot around the time that Norstar Bancorp (no longer in existence) renovated and occupied the former Union Station (now known as Kiernan Plaza). The park is thoughtfully designed and landscaped, and includes various sculptures and monuments— a sculpture of former Albany Mayor Thomas Whalen III, the Albany City Seal, and a globe commemorating the 20th anniversary of Albany and Tula, Russia’s “sister city” status. The park has also served as a temporary home for various art pieces that have been displayed short-term in the park.

Centrally located within the downtown Albany area, the park is a popular warm-weather gathering place for downtown workers. Its benches and long, curved steps provide ample places to sit, chat, and people-watch. The downtown Albany BID holds a summertime fundraiser for the annual Sculpture in the Streets event at the park. Each fall, the *September in the City Art Fair* is also held there, featuring live music and local artists selling paintings, photographs, and crafts.

While Tri-Centennial Park sees its share of use during the warmer months, there is a potential to make it of greater value to the general public. Unfortunately, the existing benches and stairs in Tri-Centennial Park are not conducive to eating one’s lunch in the space, and aside from the fixed-in-place and fairly uncomfortable tables and chairs currently at the foot of Maiden Lane there are few other options. In the short-term, tables and chairs could be added to make it a more attractive location for downtown workers to
eat lunch. The Downtown BID and the City could also agree and work together to make the park available to musicians wishing to provide lunch-time performances in the park. In this regard, it is worth recalling that Tri-Centennial Park was the original location of the *Alive at Five* summertime concert series.

In the longer-term, prospects for continuing investment in programming, physical improvement and maintenance of Tri-Centennial Park are likely to improve as a result of the redevelopment and occupancy of Kiernan Plaza by the College of Nanoscale Engineering, which is directly across the street from the park. Tri-Centennial Park is not simply a stand-alone public space, but also serves as the “front yard” of Kiernan Plaza, functioning as the ceremonial plaza and entrance leading to the building. The College of Nanoscale Engineering and the firms occupying the complex should be approached and asked to partner with the City and the Downtown BID to develop a long-term plan and approach for the continued improvement and maintenance of this uniquely positioned public space.

**Increase Connections to the Corning Preserve and Hudson River**

Improving access to the Hudson River waterfront is essential to the revitalization of downtown Albany, because it can provide the key to attracting an expanded downtown residential population. Currently, the only point of access from downtown to the Corning Preserve is provided by the pedestrian bridge at the foot of Maiden Lane on Broadway. Unfortunately, this lone pedestrian access point is at least partially obscured by the Dormitory Authority and General Services Administration buildings, which dominate the streetscape. The visibility of the bridge is further compromised by the fact that it is set back a considerable distance from Broadway. Moreover, the plaza leading to the stairs of the pedestrian bridge is often used as a loading dock and parking area—undermining the pedestrian-oriented purpose for which it was designed.
This important pedestrian link to the Corning Preserve can be strengthened and visually reinforced by installing an archway, to serve as a ceremonial “Gateway to the Hudson” between the Dormitory Authority and General Services Administration buildings.

Distinctive lighting fixtures could be installed along both sides of the archway, and parallel rows of trees could be planted to guide people to the steps of the walkway.

Adding a new, bolder crosswalk leading from the bottom of Maiden Lane across Broadway can also help draw pedestrians directly to the Gateway Arch. Constructing the arch out of wood, as shown in Figure 16, would be a way of making historical reference to the lumber district that once thrived in downtown Albany.

![Figure 16: Proposed gateway arch to Corning Preserve and Hudson River](image)

The fact that there is currently only one access point from downtown to the Corning Preserve represents a major deficiency that needs to be corrected, because it significantly limits public access to and enjoyment of the preserve. It is also undesirable and needs to be corrected for another important reason. With only one point of access, people who venture out to and explore the Corning Preserve must always circle back and leave the Preserve at the same point at which they entered—making it significantly less interesting by making it difficult to vary the experience.

High priority needs to be placed on establishing additional pedestrian connections to the Corning Preserve north of the current lone connection at the foot of Maiden Lane. For
example, a second pedestrian bridge over I-787 could be constructed in the mid-downtown area at the foot Columbia Street (See Figure 17); a third point of pedestrian access somewhat further north could be established at the foot of Colonie Street. This Colonie Street point of access is discussed at greater length later in this report in the section titled “Make Downtown Albany a Regional Destination.”

One final project that needs to be put high up on the “to do” list is to provide a way for people on foot and on bicycles to gain access to, derive pleasure from the city’s proximity to the Hudson River. Decades ago, before the construction of I-787, residents of Albany and Rensselaer could cross back and forth between the two communities via three different bridges. One of these bridges, the Livingston Street Bridge, had a walkway along its south side that made it possible for people to cross the river (See Figure 18). After I-787 and the Dunn Memorial Bridge were completed two of the three bridges were removed, and only the Livingston Street Bridge remained. The Livingston Street Bridge still stands today and continues to perform the critical role of carrying Amtrak passenger trains traveling between Albany and cities to the west and north. However, after years of being neglected and under-maintained the walkway had to be closed to bicyclists and pedestrians for safety reasons. Moreover, the Livingston Street Bridge itself has reached
the end of its useful life and is slated to be replaced in 2017 as part of New York State’s High Speed Rail initiative.

With the Livingston Street Bridge no longer available as a pedestrian/bicycle crossing, the only way for to cross the Hudson River between Albany and Rensselaer on foot or by bicycle is via the Dunn Memorial Bridge--on a narrow, exposed sidewalk squeezed between the bridge’s multiple traffic lanes and the north-facing edge of the bridge. In truth, crossing the river on Dunn Memorial Bridge as a pedestrian or cyclist is an unpleasant and often harrowing experience. It can also be physically taxing, because the bridge greatly increases the distance people have to walk or ride their bicycle because the sidewalk follows the same circuitous, looping on and off ramps traveled by cars and trucks. The effort pedestrians and cyclists have to expend to cross the bridge is also significantly increased by the steep grades at both ends of the bridge required to reach the bridge’s highly elevated mid-section—grades which it should be noted are out of compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Engineering and design work is being undertaken by the New York State Department of Transportation to determine what kind of bridge will replace the current Livingston Street Bridge. It is critically important that design plan the NYS DOT approves call for the inclusion of right-of-way for the use of pedestrians and bicyclists that is parallel to the
railroad tracks but separated from them by means of fencing. The Common Councils of both Albany and Rensselaer, the Albany and Rensselaer County Legislatures, and the Hudson River Valley Greenway and Greenway Conservancy have already voted in support of restoring a pedestrian walkway at the Livingston Street Bridge location.

A coalition of pedestrian and bicycle advocates, local residents and neighborhood organizations, under the name of the Livingston Street Bridge Coalition, is actively working to build broad public understanding and support for accommodating pedestrian and bicycle access in whatever bridge ends up replacing the current Livingston Street Bridge. Their belief, which members of the Clinton Square Studio share, is that restoring a walkway across the Hudson is a key step in toward creating a regional network of trails that will open up access to the waterfront for the benefit of residents throughout the Capital Region—and at the same time help promote tourism activity and economic development in the downtowns of Albany and Rensselaer. One further social and economic benefit is important to note. Making it possible for people on foot and on bicycles to cross the Hudson River in the area of the Livingston Street Bridge will be of particular benefit to people living in the distressed and all too often neglected area of Albany north of Clinton Avenue—in the North Broadway, Arbor Hill and West Hill areas of the city. Indeed, providing such a unique recreational and transportation opportunity at the Livingston Street Bridge location could serve as a significant catalyst for increased investment in the area.

Railroad companies have traditionally resisted the placement of pedestrian walkways and bicycle lanes in proximity to railroad tracks; the idea has also been resisted by many transportation planners and engineers. However, experience in Portland, Oregon, where a bicycle/pedestrian lane has been incorporated into a railroad bridge across the Willamette River, clearly demonstrates that it can be done successfully and safely (See Figure 19). Successful projects elsewhere in the country involving the placement of walkways and trails parallel to active rail lines can also be cited as precedents. Information regarding such precedent-setting projects can be obtained from members of
the Livingston Street Bridge Coalition (www.facebook.com/LARBC) and from Parks and Trails New York (www.ptny.org/advocacy/LivingstonAve)

Figure 19: Pedestrian/bicycle lane paralleling railroad trestle over Willamette River, Portland OR
Expand Downtown’s Residential Population

Throughout most of the Twentieth Century, upper floors of multi-story buildings in downtown Albany not devoted to governmental and institutional uses were primarily occupied by offices—whereas space on ground floors was typically devoted to retail use. Unfortunately, those once reliable sources of demand for downtown space have weakened considerably. According to a report prepared by the firm of C.B. Ellis, slightly more than 20% of downtown Albany’s commercial office space now stands vacant. The highest vacancy rate was found with regard to Class B and C space, which comprises a high proportion of the downtown’s commercial building stock. Class A space downtown had a much lower vacancy rate, but was nevertheless judged to be potentially vulnerable because it has tended to be more expensive than comparable Class A space in the suburbs.

Vacancies of ground floor retail spaces have also increased. With fewer people working in downtown offices, and relatively few people living downtown, there have simply not been enough people downtown spending money at pedestrian-oriented ground floor retail and service establishments. Given that reality, by far the most promising way of making use of vacant downtown office space is to encourage its conversion to housing.

The Demand for Downtown Housing

Real estate experts throughout the country are noticing a significant shift in housing preferences in terms of where and how people want to live. This shift in housing preferences and demand is being reinforced by demographic changes, social trends, and economic factors. In fact, surveys of young people in their 20s and 30s have found that a high proportion of them want to live in urban neighborhoods served by public transportation (rather than in auto-dependent, low-density suburbs), within walking distance of essential services, shopping, restaurants and entertainment. These preferences are further reinforced by concerns that young people have concerning the long-term
impacts of carbon emissions on global climate change. In the minds of these young people, an important reason why living in a mixed-use, walkable transit-friendly urban neighborhood (like downtown Albany) is so appealing is that it is a way to minimize one’s “carbon footprint” and adopt an environmentally responsible lifestyle.

This new generation of environmentally conscious Americans is graduating from college and entering the workforce at a time when it is difficult to find meaningful employment that pays a living wage. At least in part because of this challenging employment situation, young people today recognize the importance of reducing the amount of money and time they have to spend traveling between where they live and where they work. The best way of doing that is to live in an urban center that has good, frequent public transportation. Choosing to live in an urban center, rather than in the suburbs, has been made all the more plausible due to the fact that a growing proportion of young adults now expect to postpone having children until after they have established their careers. In the past, young people in the U.S. got married at a much younger age and had children fairly early on in their married lives. Once they started having children they often felt the need to move to single family homes on private lots in suburban communities with public schools that were regarded as superior to city schools.

With child-rearing delayed, young people today tend to place much less importance on weighing the comparative qualities of city vs. suburban schools, and are now are much more inclined to want spend the early years of their careers living in urban settings close to gathering places, restaurants and entertainment venues that enable them to meet and interact with young people their age. The American Dream of living in a suburban house with a white picket fence around it is no longer what most young people aspire to. The American Dream has evolved.

Meanwhile, the “baby boom” generation is entering retirement, and increasingly looking to “downsize” as their children have left the nest. Today’s suburban housing stock consisting of mostly of detached, single-family homes on spacious lots with lawns that
require regular mowing in summer (and driveways that need to be shoveled winter) are increasingly ill-adapted to the needs and interests of senior citizens. No longer requiring private lots for their children to play on, or needing to live in suburbs with highly rated school systems, many of these senior citizens now place more value on proximity to services, cultural resources and living in a vibrant community. The high cost of driving relatively long distances for doctor’s appointments, as well as for entertainment, is also becoming an increasing financial drain for many seniors. Even if they can afford the cost of maintaining and operating a car, as they progressively age a growing number of them recognize that at some point they will probably no longer be able to safely drive a car. Anticipating that possibility is leading a growing proportion of seniors to place increased value on living in a place with good public transit that will enable them to maintain an active life-style.

Living in an attached dwelling, as opposed to detached home, can offer many advantages. But are Americans willing to contemplate making such a change? When Arthur Nelson surveyed 1,455 Atlanta, Georgia residents about their housing preferences, 40% told him they would trade their detached home in the suburbs for a smaller one if it enabled them to secure reduced energy bills, greater availability and frequency of public transportation, closer proximity to a variety of shops and amenities and a greater sense of community. Based on this survey data and other recent studies of housing preferences, Nelson estimates that 38% of future housing demand will be for attached housing types (apartments, condominiums and townhouses); 37% of the demand will be for detached homes on small-lots; and only 25% of the demand (the smallest share) will be for large-lot single-family detached housing.

Surveys and forecasts pertaining to commercial real estate point in the same direction. In another survey conducted by Nelson, non-residential developers given 13 types of markets to invest in and were asked to pick those with the least risk. Places judged by developers to pose the least risk were areas in close proximity to public transit in central
business districts and pedestrian-oriented business districts in urban areas and inner-ring suburbs.

**What this means for Albany**

In November of 2006, Zimmerman/Volk Associates, Inc. were hired by the Capitalize Albany Corporation and the Downtown Albany BID to perform a Downtown Albany Residential Market Study. Utilizing a complex methodology that examined factors beyond simple supply and demand, the report’s conclusions further validate what Nelson and others have discovered and predicted based on studies of other areas.

- There is sufficient market demand to support the development of just over 2,400 new downtown housing units-- which comprise 23% of the 10,400 existing market-rate housing units in the city.

- 44% of the downtown housing demand is for multi-family rental units; 32% of households would prefer to own a condominium in a multi-unit structure and 23.4% would prefer to own a single-family attached unit (rowhouse or townhouse).

- Households comprising the potential target market for downtown housing units are young single individuals and childless couples in their 20s and 30s (52%), “empty nesters” and retirees (39%) and various other types of urban-oriented, culturally-oriented households.

In the years immediately following completion of the Zimmerman/Volk study in 2006, a number of significant economic changes occurred in the region (including most notably the expansion and growth of the nanotechnology industry) necessitating a January 2011 update of the 2006 residential market study. This update concluded that the potential
downtown residential market in Albany had actually increased from 2,440 households in 2006, to 3,750 households in 2011—a roughly 35% increase.

Residential conversions of the following existing buildings have already added a total of 110 new housing units to downtown Albany:

- 518 Broadway – 9 apartments
- 522-524 Broadway – 14 apartments
- 17 Chapel – 24 condominium units
- 49 Sheridan (The Monroe) – 43 apartments
- 4-6 Sheridan (Gateway Apartments), 13 apartments
- 60 State Street – 11 apartments

Figures 20 and 21: 518 Broadway—viewed from across the street and close-up of window sign advertising new downtown residential housing
Progress is clearly being made in making downtown Albany a more appealing place to live. However, many potential residential conversions and development opportunities remain to be taken advantage of.

485A Tax Incentives for Downtown Housing

Section 485A of the New York State Real Property Tax Law is a local option offered to any city, village or town outside of New York City. Once enacted, it provides a declining 12 year, partial-tax exemption to commercial properties that are converted to residential or mixed use. The option works by exempting 100% of the increase in property tax assessment due to conversion during the first 8 years, then subsequently increases it by 20% in years 9-13. These savings in property taxes are passed on directly to purchasers of the newly converted units. The 17 Chapel condominium project was the first development in Albany to receive this exemption.

Capitalize Albany Corporation and the Mayor’s Office should put together a development information package that loudly spells out the advantages of the 485A exemption, along with other possible exemptions or tax credits that downtown projects might be eligible for (such as Historic Preservation Tax Credits, Low Income Tax Credits, etc.). Over time, as the incentives become better known, it should be easier to put together the financing needed for yet to be completed conversion projects.

Make Downtown More Pedestrian-oriented

Earlier in this report we described the current shortcomings of Wallenburg Park and recommended ways it could be improved and made a focal point of the district. We emphasized that high quality, well-maintained and well-managed public spaces can play a significant role in making downtown Albany a memorable place that people want to spend time in, and live in. We also made the point that small public spaces (i.e. much
smaller than Wallenburg Park) can also play a significant role in transforming and revitalizing downtown Albany. We noted, for example, that the small, under-appreciated public space at the foot of Maiden Lane could be transformed into a unique-designed, lively public square that could be the catalyst for creating a vibrant and distinctive urban residential enclave within the downtown.

Successful public spaces draw people from surrounding areas—the vast majority of them on foot. This means that equally as important as the design of a public space itself is making the surrounding areas more walkable, and improving pedestrian connections to the public space. Another lesson that can be learned by observing successful public spaces is that the amount of activity (and public benefit) generated by a public space can be highly dependent on the amount of pedestrian activity taking place in surrounding areas.

Making downtown more hospitable and interesting at the pedestrian scale, thereby increasing the amount of pedestrian activity, holds the key to making more people want to live downtown. Generating more pedestrian activity will help overcome any concerns people might have regarding the safety of living downtown. As the amount of pedestrian activity increases downtown people will become more comfortable choosing live downtown. Downtown will feel safer; indeed it will be a safer place. Second, increasing the amount of pedestrian activity will encourage more ground floor retail and service establishments to open—which in turn will also make downtown a more attractive place to live. One of the major potential attractions of living downtown is the prospect of living within easy walking distance of a variety of commercial and retail establishments as well as restaurants. However, without a high level of pedestrian activity there simply won’t be sufficient market demand for such establishments to open and stay in business, let alone proliferate and flourish. For all these reasons, making downtown Albany more pedestrian-friendly is critically important to attracting more people to want to come to and live downtown.
**Widen Sidewalks and Make Streetscape Improvements On Chapel Street and Sheridan Avenue**

As noted previously, a number of conversions of former commercial buildings to housing units have taken place along Chapel Street and Sheridan Avenue; however the streetscape adjoining these newly developed housing units is uninviting and fundamentally inhospitable to pedestrians. Sidewalks along the corridor are much too narrow. Crosswalks are not sufficiently delineated and there is a notable absence of pedestrian-oriented lighting and landscaping.

![Figure 23: Chapel St. sidewalk behind First Church](image)

Figure 23 shows a member of the Planning Studio team standing on a four-foot wide sidewalk behind the First Church of Albany. Elsewhere sidewalks are only six feet wide --barely wide enough for a couple to walk side-by-side. These are the same sidewalks residents of the new developments on Chapel Street and Sheridan Avenue must use to walk to attend events at the nearby Palace Theater.

- Residents of new housing developments on Chapel Street and Sheridan Avenue walking to the Palace Theater face yet another challenge when they reach Clinton

![Figure 24: Existing configuration of Chapel St./Clinton Ave. intersection](image)
Avenue. At present, the crosswalk at the Clinton Avenue/Chapel Street intersection is aligned with the west side of Chapel Street, but there is no STOP sign to stop traffic heading east down Clinton Avenue before the crosswalk. There is a raised median in the middle of Clinton Avenue immediately east of the Pearl Street/Clinton Avenue intersection, but this median ends somewhat short of the intersection (see Figure 24). As a result, cars making left turns onto Chapel Street from Clinton Avenue typically begin their turns well before the Chapel Street intersection, by angling diagonally across Clinton Avenue – a traffic movement that increases the likelihood of head-on collisions with eastbound traffic and makes crossing Clinton Avenue all the more risky for pedestrians.

![Figure 24: Car turning left from Clinton Ave. onto Chapel St. in front of on-coming car](image)

The Clinton Avenue/Chapel Street crosswalk could be moved to the east side of the Chapel Street/Clinton Avenue intersection, and the current Clinton Street median above North Pearl extended somewhat to the west to provide a safe mid-point refuge for pedestrians crossing Clinton Avenue near Chapel Street. Extending the Clinton Avenue median to the Chapel Street/Clinton Avenue intersection would have the added advantage of forcing drivers turning left onto Chapel Street from Clinton Avenue to slow down and
make more of a 90 degree left turn—rather than cutting diagonally across Clinton Avenue well before the intersection.

Figure 24 shows a new sidewalk under construction along the side of 17 Chapel Street at the time that project was nearing completion. Although wider than other sidewalks in the area, this sidewalk nevertheless feels uncomfortably narrow when juxtaposed against the outer wall of such a tall building. Figure 25 shows what that same section of sidewalk could look like if the sidewalk were widened somewhat and streetscape amenities were added.
The sidewalk alongside the entrance to 17 Chapel Street is needlessly narrow. Also there is a fire hydrant stands inconveniently close and in front of the entrance (See Figure 26). Figure 27 shows how this section of sidewalk could be made more welcoming and convenient for people entering and leaving 17 Chapel: wider sidewalk; fire hydrant moved away from entrance; addition of pedestrian scale lighting and bicycle rack.

Figure 26: Perspective view of what Chapel St. corridor could look like if recommended streetscape improvements were applied along both sides of street

Figure 26: Monroe Street entrance to 17 Chapel St.—existing conditions

Figure 27: 17 Chapel St. entrance—Recommended streetscape improvement
Crosswalk markings at the intersection of Chapel Street and Sheridan Avenue, as well as at other intersections in the study area, are so faded as to be barely discernible—and therefore easily ignored by motorists. Re-striping crosswalks is an easy fix and should be made a high priority. Making sure that electronic pedestrian crossing lights (a more costly fix) are installed at all main intersections that do not currently have them is equally important.

Before ending this section on the importance of creating a pedestrian friendly downtown environment we feel we need to draw attention to one of the most obviously negative aspects in downtown Albany—a condition that really needs to be addressed before another year passes. What we are referring to here is the streetscape environment pedestrians experience in front of the Capital Repertory Theater adjacent to the bus stop/shelter in front of the theater. Figures 28 and 20 show what pedestrians and those waiting for a bus in this area see. Imagine having to stand and wait next to this darkened, shadowy space at night.

Figure 28: Unsightly opening in Capital Repertory Theater structure fronting onto Pearl St.
North of Clinton Avenue—Proposed Mixed Use Infill Development

Once a thriving area of industries, businesses and commercial entities, the area along Broadway and North Pearl Street above Clinton Avenue has seen better days. Not only are a number of key parcels vacant, but there are also a number of abandoned and deteriorated buildings, including a crumbling police precinct building. On the positive side of the ledger, the Albany Housing Authority has obtained funding to demolish, rebuild and significantly upgrade a portion of the Ida Yarborough public housing complex. In recent years the area has also seen a number of positive changes in recent years, such as the renovation of a former elementary school (Public School No. 5) into the Quackenbush Apartments (see Figures 30 and 31). The newly thriving warehouse district that is developing along Broadway north of the railroad trestle underpass, which has attracted a number of popular drinking and dining establishments, is yet another positive development.
Figure 30: Quackenbush Apartments front entrance

Figure 31: Quackenbush Apartments-- side balconies with views of spire of St. Joseph's Church

Figure 32: Theater District Apartments on North Pearl Street

Figure 33: Attractive, well-maintained rowhouses on North Pearl Street
The distinctive urban fabric that currently exists between North Pearl and Broadway should be taken advantage of to create a residential enclave capable of attracting a variety of household types and age groups. Within this area there is a tremendous opportunity to create a medium density residential neighborhood through a combination of new infill development and adaptive reuse of existing underutilized buildings.

The surface parking lot across the street from the Post Office facility on Broadway is the perfect site for the kind of transformative project which could propel the revitalization of this area (see Figure 34). This parcel of land (bounded by Livingston Avenue, North Pearl, Wilson Street and Broadway) is for sale as of the time this Planning Studio report is being written, and could easily accommodate a multi-story, mixed use building with a grocery store, structured parking and mixed-income housing on the upper floors. The property is currently owned by Pearl Properties LLC, a subsidiary of the Chrys Group, a local unit of Merrill Lynch. The assessed valuation of the property as of 2010 was $27,400.
Mixed use developments with grocery stores on the ground floor and housing on upper floors have become increasingly common in downtown locations in other cities. A multi-story, mixed use development (ground floor grocery store, housing on upper floors) was recently completed in downtown Saratoga Springs. Figure 35 shows a similar type of development in downtown Portland, Oregon.

Incorporating a full-service grocery store into this development should be an important goal since it is essential to attracting new downtown residents. A downtown grocery store is also needed to address the needs of long-time residents of Arbor Hill and Sheridan Hollow, who for decades have suffered from a lack of easily accessible sources of healthy, affordably priced food. Without a downtown grocery store the downtown core will remain a “food desert”—thereby undermining its appeal as a place to live.

City officials and housing and economic development agencies in Albany should make a concerted effort to secure housing subsidies to enable 20% of the housing units included
in proposed mixed-use development to be set aside for low and moderate income households. Providing mixed-income housing in the development would counter-balance the concentration of low income residents currently in the adjacent Ida Yarborough Homes, and could also possibly provide interim housing for Ida Yarbrough residents while their project is being redeveloped.

**Establish a Community Garden**

Attracting a full-service grocery store would significantly improve local residents’ access to sources of healthy food. Establishing a community garden would further enhance access to healthy food, and have the added benefit of improving the social cohesion and appearance of the neighborhood.

Planting, tending and harvesting food is a gratifying experience, and has particular value and meaning to children. Community gardens are also places where people who live get to know each other and become friends by working together side by side. In this way, community gardens provide an excellent means for building a sense of community.

Among the empty lots north of Clinton Avenue we considered as a possible site for a community garden, the vacant lot at the corner of North Pearl and Colonie (see Figure 36) seems to have the greatest potential due to its relatively large size and proximity to the Ten Broeck and Arbor Hill neighborhoods.

Capital District Community Gardens was recently awarded a grant to build eight new gardens in Albany. Were Capital District Community Gardens to be engaged as a partner in the project, a community garden could be established in the Clinton Square area in the very near future.
Former Church of Holy Innocents

Located at 275 North Pearl Street, this English Gothic Revival church was constructed in 1849, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1978, and as of the time of this writing was believed to be structurally sound. Hope House, Inc. of Albany had originally intended to use the building to house the organization’s administrative offices—but that plan never materialized. Two other structures on the grounds (side chapel and an additional house) appear beyond repair.

The Holy Innocents church structure itself could serve a useful contemporary purpose if it were reused as an Urban Agricultural Center associate with the community garden proposed for an adjacent site. Such an Urban Agricultural Center could offer instruction and assistance to aspiring gardening enthusiasts and help expand participation in urban gardening. Additionally, the structure could be utilized as a storage facility for implements and supplies used in community gardening. It could also possibly serve as a place where residents could market their freshly grown produce. If plumbing in the building were repaired and upgraded, the structure to possibly eventually incorporate a greenhouse addition, which could provide downtown residents with the possibility of engaging in year-round gardening.
Preserve and Integrate St. Joseph’s Church into the Life of the Community

Preserving and reusing the structure of St. Joseph’s Church, which hosted its last religious service in 1993, is critically important to revitalizing the residential area north of Clinton Avenue. This iconic structure contributes so much to the area’s identity and sense of place that it simply cannot be allowed to continue to deteriorate and be put at risk.

Since 1860, St. Joseph’s Church has been the centerpiece of Downtown Albany and dominant focal point of the Ten Broeck Historic District and North Albany. Now officially owned by the City of Albany, responsibility for the care of the church structure in recent years has fallen to the Historic Albany Foundation (HAF), which has made a commendable effort to maintain the structural integrity of the building. However, HAF’s resources are inadequate to the magnitude of this task over the long run, given the costly repairs needed to ensure the church structure’s lasting presence.

Figure 37: St. Joseph’s Church
At one point a developer proposed to invest a considerable amount of money repairing St. Joseph’s with the intention of operating a brew-pub/nightclub within the structure. Residents of the surrounding neighborhood spoke out strongly against this type of reuse, and the proposal was dropped. In an effort to gauge community sentiment regarding other possible ways of reusing the structure HAF conducted a series of community meetings. Unfortunately these meetings failed to achieve consensus on a preferred reuse.

One plausible and desirable way of re-using St. Josephs would be as a performance space for musical performances and theater productions, complementing the other arts and cultural venues nearby (Palace Theater and Capital Rep.) The exquisite interior of the church could significantly enhance the dramatic effect of such performances. The former sanctuary could also accommodate exhibitions of artwork and sculpture, as it did in Fall 2011 when the structure hosted an exhibition of works of art by local school children. Examples of adaptively re-used churches and institutional structures elsewhere suggest that such an arts-oriented conversion and reuse could be feasible, and have a salutary effect on the surrounding Ten Broek neighborhood and downtown Albany. The successful conversion of the Delaware-Asbury Church in downtown Buffalo into a musical performance space, spear-headed and financed by Buffalo-based musician Annie DiFranco, is one such example that comes to mind.

The former St. Joseph’s Academy building on North Swan Street (not far away from St. Joseph’s Church) is in the process of being converted into housing and work spaces specifically targeted to artists, which could greatly enhance the feasibility of an arts-related reuse for the church—since that arts-focused constituency could help generate political and financial support for an arts-related reuse and make creative use of the space once improvements are made. The City of Albany and Capitalize Albany should make available whatever appropriate financial tools and incentives it has at its disposal to encourage and reward such an arts-related undertaking.
Make Clinton Square a Regional Destination

Efforts aimed at attracting more people to live downtown are currently stymied by the fact that there are presently insufficient commercial and service establishments downtown to meet the needs of downtown residents. Indeed, the lack of such downtown businesses is itself a serious impediment to enticing more people to live downtown. This raises the proverbial “chicken or egg” question: which needs to come first, more downtown commercial establishments or more downtown residents? Unfortunately, there appears to be no satisfactory way of answering this question, since it is impossible to do one without the other. The only way of overcoming this hurdle, it would appear, is to undertake projects that attract more people downtown from the surrounding region—thereby creating the increased market demand necessary to attract and support retail and service establishments that could also serve the needs of the resident population. By making downtown Albany a regional destination, we fulfill two major objectives: a.) we strengthen the downtown economy; and make downtown Albany a more appealing and convenient place to live.

To identify potentially suitable businesses or attractions that would increase the regional draw of downtown Albany, we examined the findings of a survey sent to New York State employees who work in Albany. The survey, developed by the Downtown Albany BID, aimed at uncovering reasons why people came downtown, and why they didn’t come downtown more frequently. The answers those surveyed provided are displayed in Figures 38 and 39.
Figure 38: BID Survey Responses-- Reasons for not coming downtown
Figure 39: BID Survey: Why people don't come downtown more often

The most frequently cited reason people said they come downtown was to experience its cultural and entertainment venues--the Palace Theater, museums, galleries and playhouses. In other words, people come downtown to engage in activities and enjoy experiences that aren’t available in their suburban settings. The implication is that the best way to attract people to downtown Albany is to introduce activities and experiences that are unavailable elsewhere in the region.

Three Projects to Make Downtown Albany a Regional Destination

Establish a Downtown Public Market
Aaron Pohl-Zaretsky, a public market consultant and the publisher of publicmarketdevelopment.com, defines a public market as “a year-round, carefully crafted, intentional and diverse medley of owner-operated shops, stalls and/or "day-tables." Although somewhat useful, this definition isn’t adequate to explain what a public market is to someone who’s never actually visited one, because there is nothing like a thriving public market to shake people out of their doldrums and make them feel happy to be alive.

What is it about public markets that make them so special? For one thing, there is the sensory stimulation produced by its lively combination of sights, sounds, smells and textures. Then too there is bustle of human activity that results when local farmers and food producers have the opportunity to market their products in a centralized high-energy venue. Providing local farmers and local food producers rooted entrepreneurs with stalls in a centralized venue that has a regional draw is like giving them all microphones to raise their voices and speak proudly about what is so special about their products. Buying a chicken or maple syrup from a local producer isn’t anything like buying those same products at a supermarket. There the transaction is purely commercial and impersonal. In transactions at public markets, by way of contrast, shoppers and sellers are much more likely to interact and relate to one another on a much more personal and meaningful level. People buying some locally produced product from the person who produced that good is often likely to inquire about the farm and place where the food was produced, and/or possibly comment on and compliment the seller on how beautiful and fragrant the arugula or cheese is that they are buying. Intermixed with such pleasantries one is also likely to hear exchanges of additional entertaining tidbits: information about the product, how it was grown; raised or made; exchanges of personal stories, family recipes and childhood memories; and unabashed and humorous banter. In short, transactions in public markets can represent much more than simply the simple exchange of a given amount of money for a given product. Rather, the net effect of such “feel good” interactions is to contribute substantially to the “social capital” of the region,” by evocatively reminding people what is special about the city and region in which they live and work, thereby strengthening people’s attachment to and affection for the place they call “home.”
Public markets have been successful in numerous cities in the U.S. and Canada because they provide an ever-changing mix of theatrics and human drama that attracts and entertains visitors from far and wide, while at the same time meeting the shopping needs of local residents. Among the public markets that immediately come to mind are Pike’s Place Market in Seattle, the West Side Market in Cleveland, the Reading Market in Philadelphia, Findley Market in Cincinnati, the Public Market in Milwaukee and the St. Lawrence Market in Toronto, Ontario.

Figure 40: Newly built public market in Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Figure 41: Findlay Public Market, Cincinnati, OH
By functioning as regional destinations that attract tens of thousands of tourists and visitors each year, public markets contribute mightily to their respective regional economies. Public markets also function as incubators for the creation and growth of small, locally-based businesses because they typically exclude large retailers and chain stores from outside the region. Rather, their core purpose is to provide a cost effective way for locally-based small businesses and micro-enterprises to compete with larger companies that benefit from economies of scale. Without a public market, a small regional food producer normally has two ways to try to sell his goods. He/she can set up a farm stand along the side of the highway and hope to attract people driving by to stop. Or he/she can pay a distributor a fee to deliver his goods to grocers and restaurants—but this fee and the associated cost of transportation will significantly reduce the income the farmer derives, as will the likelihood that the retail outlets and restaurants receiving the goods will insist on paying the wholesale price so as to make a profit themselves. By offering local food producers the opportunity to rent various types and sizes of commercial spaces (including very small spaces) for various durations of time, public markets enable local food producers and start-up businesses to improve their profitability by sells their goods directly to an expanded customer base without various middlemen taking bites out of the profit margin.

Public markets reflect the culture and characteristics of the places in which they are located, which is one reason why they are so popular with tourists. Put another way, public markets are highly popular with visitors and residents alike because of the unique, somewhat quirky and place-specific experiences they offer. Most people who travel to Seattle make a point of going to and shopping at Seattle’s Pike’s Place Market, and when they return home you can be fairly sure they’ll tell people about seeing fish being thrown around by the fish mongers—not the kind of thing you’re likely to see at a Price Chopper or Hannaford. Each public market reflects the distinctive character and products indigenous to its region. At the public market along Baltimore Harbor you’ll find soft-shell crabs on offer. At the Reading Market in Philadelphia, you’ll find fresh produce as well as jams and jellies being sold by Amish farm families based in nearby Lancaster County. You’ll also be sorely tempted to consume a legendary Philly-Cheese Steak
sandwich—an important part of the dietary routine of Philadelphians. Among the tasty foods you’ll surely find on offer at Buffalo’s Broadway Market will be Kielbasa and Roast Beef on Kimmelweck-- foods that are emblematic of the city’s historically large Polish and German populations.

In addition to their economic benefits, public markets contribute to a number of environmentally and socially beneficial outcomes. By stimulating the production and marketing of locally produced food, public markets help keep farmland in agricultural use, and in that way counteract sprawl. Limiting sprawl on the metropolitan fringe in turn reduces vehicles miles traveled, gasoline consumption and greenhouse gas emissions. Last but not least, increasing the supply and availability of locally grown food makes healthier types of food more available to city residents, thereby encouraging healthier eating habits and improving the health of area residents in the long run. When you add up all these benefits, it is easy to understand why public markets have proven so popular and enduring in cities and towns throughout the world.
Economic Spin-off Benefits of Public Markets

Only small, locally owned businesses are typically allowed in public markets. This means that almost all the dollars spent in public markets remain and are spent in the local economy. In contrast, most of every dollar spent in a national chain store gets transferred and spent elsewhere, far away from where it was collected.

The fact that money earned in public markets is recycled through the local and regional economy helps explain, for example, why the Pikes Place Public Market in Seattle earned such high praise following an audit of a $6,000,000 grant it received from the Federal Government for building renovations. According to the federal auditors, the government’s investment in the public market produced one of “the most successful community economic development projects in the history of the U.S., by turning one time capital support into long term, permanent, well paying jobs” (Federal Office of Technological Assessment).

In a 2007 study entitled Estimating the Economic Impact of Public Markets, The Project for Public Spaces (PPS) measured the local economic impact of several markets with varied mixes and sizes and of vendors. Using an analysis tool developed by the Economic Institute at Loyola University called the Sticky Economic Evaluation Device (SEED), the study estimated the direct as well as indirect economic impacts of public markets. A secondary goal of this study was to identify and evaluate specific variables and factors affecting the degree of economic impact.

The study identified different types of public markets: large regional market, mid-size indoor market, small outdoor farmers’ market. They also identified and classified public markets by the composition and mix of vendors (producers, non-producers including produce re-sellers, prepared food vendors) and by city/economy type: large city, small city, small town). By isolating these variables, the study was able to identify which type of market and vendor mix was likely to perform best in a certain size city/economy. The total economic impact of each type of public market was calculated by measuring the
direct and indirect spending of vendors, along with induced economic impacts (i.e. spending generated by the direct and indirect economic activity of supplying firms).

In large part because producers serving larger cities are less likely to live in the same location as the public market in which they operate in, it was found that they had the least amount economic impact on the local economy (7%). Non-producers had the highest percent of expenses within the local economy (86%), followed by “Others or Crafts” (80%) and Prepared Food Vendors (78%). Total Market Management expenditures were highest in large city economies (almost $3 million), followed by small cities (just over $500,000) and small towns (just under $18,000).

Figure 43 outlines and compares the multiplier effects of different types of vendors in large cities, small cities and small towns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vendor Type</th>
<th>Large City Markets</th>
<th>Small City Markets</th>
<th>Small Town Markets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Producers</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Producers</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepared Food Vendors</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Vendors</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 43: Multiplier effects of public markets, by city type and vendor mix

For purposes of applying the findings of the above cited study, Albany would be considered a “small city.” Thus, as shown in the table above, if a public market were established in Albany, every dollar earned at the market by a Producer Vendor (farmer or fisherman) would be likely to generate an overall regional economic impact of $1.60. The multiplier effect for Prepared Food Vendors would be $1.65.
As shown in Figure 44 above, in a small city like Albany the overall regional economic multiplier effect produced by a public market would be $1.86.

The data presented above makes it possible for us to estimate the total amount of spending that could be generated by an Albany Public Market, and the impact such spending would have on the regional economy. For ease of computation let us assume that $100,000 is spent annually on managing and operating the public market, which in turn would produce an economic multiplier within the region as a whole of $186,000. Let us further assume that the public market contains 10 producers, 5 non producers, 10 prepared food vendors, and 5 other vendors.

Figure 45 presents estimates of the economic spin-off benefits various types of public market vendors would generate for Albany and the Capital Region as a whole. It
indicates that annual spending of $266,632 annually at an Albany public market could produce a total spin-off economic impact on the local economy of $1,603,545.

The above financial analysis fails to take account of the other ancillary benefits associated with public markets alluded to earlier, such as:

- Increased tourism and generation of tourism-related dollars
- Improved quality of life and enhanced community image
- Increased property valuations of surrounding properties
- Increased property tax collections by the City of Albany

**Proposed Site for Downtown Albany Public Market**

The site we believe is ideally suited to accommodate an Albany Public Market is one of the largest and favorably located underdeveloped parcels in downtown Albany. Moreover, it is under unified ownership. Owned by the First Church of Albany, the property is currently used as a surface parking lot—a use which is unfortunate because it creates a void in the streetscape of North Pearl Street which discourages pedestrian flow between Clinton Square and State Street. A management company currently leases the parking lot from the church, and leases parking spaces to businesses during the week. It also charges people who park there at night. The entire site is paved, with only a small structure for the on-site parking attendant. On Sundays, weather permitting, the church often offers drive-in services for worshipers.

Among the site’s favorable attributes, in addition to its size and central location, are its proximity to an I-787 interchange at Clinton Avenue and its substantial frontage on North Pearl Street (highly favorable to bringing in a high volume of pedestrian traffic). It is also located in close proximity to the significant amount of new housing development that has taken place in its immediate vicinity.
Figure 46: Proposed site for Albany Public Market

Figure 47: Bird's eye view of church parking lot-- proposed site for Albany Public Market
**Achieving the Goal of Establishing a Public Market**

As desirable as a public market might be, getting such a market built and up and running will require considerable effort on the part of many people. The first step that needs to be taken is to establish a coalition of committed stakeholders willing and able to work together to achieve this worthy goal. No single entity, individual or organization is capable of accomplishing the task along. What will be required instead is a collaborative effort, through which different entities and organizations contribute to different aspects of the project.

The following is a list of entities and organizations with a stake in seeing a public market materialize in downtown Albany, along with a brief discussion of their interests and what they might contribute to the process.

**The First Church of Albany** owns the land, the concerns and interest of the First Church’s Board of Trustees are of paramount importance. As a place-based, non-profit entity that is heavily engaged in meeting the needs of its surrounding community, the church not only needs to receive a fair economic return for making its land available, but also needs know that the city will benefit from having a public market on the site, and a public market the support of downtown residents and businesses.

**Downtown Albany Business Improvement District (BID)** was a key participant in and contributor to the Clinton Square Planning Studio from the very beginning. Given the Downtown BID’s core mission of working with downtown businesses and property owners to create an economically vital and successful downtown, it is important that the BID continue to play a leading role in the implementation phase. Moreover, the BID’s marketing and political expertise can also prove helpful in moving the project forward.

**City of Albany and Capitalize Albany Corporation** – The City of Albany’s recently completed *Albany 2030* Comprehensive Plan envisions a desired future which includes a sustainable and mixed-use downtown, with more people living downtown and a more balanced mixture between commercial and residential uses. The proposed public market
could become an integral part of that vision, making downtown Albany a much more appealing place to live and shop. Given that compatibility of aims, we hope that entities like the city’s Department of Economic Development and Planning and Capitalize Albany will aggressively and enthusiastically support the downtown public market project. Their involvement and advice could also be important in helping to identify and avoid potential regulatory hurdles (zoning, parking, building code, etc.) that might stand in the way of implementation.

**The Community Development Loan Fund (CDLF)** is a non-profit entity that is active in providing financing to small entrepreneurs hoping to start businesses or expand their businesses. In conjunction with its loan-making activity, CDLF also provides training to new start-up businesses as well as offers expert advice related to preparing business plans. Despite the perceived risks of making such loans, it has an extremely high repayment rate due to the close relationships they establish with borrowers over and above simply servicing the loans. Their business savvy, and the track record they have established with small businesses make them a key player in the effort to establish a public market that itself would be composed of scores of small, independent local business. The CDLF might be in a position to become a major provider of small business loans to vendors and small businesses wanting to establish themselves in the public market.

**Seth Rosenblum and The Rosenblum Companies** developed 17 Chapel Street—a precedent setting condominium project which inspired subsequent residential conversions and development projects in downtown Albany. A public market in close proximity to the 17 Chapel Street project would contribute significantly to the long-term success of 17 Chapel Street and other recently completed residential conversions. It would also encourage further development of downtown housing, thereby helping to achieve the threshold residential population necessary to bring about an expansion of downtown retail and service offerings. The development expertise of Seth Rosenblum and Rosenblum Companies could be instrumental in putting together a financially feasible development proposal for a public market.
Albany Parking Authority (APA) -- Parking is frequently an important issue that must be addressed when any major new development project is proposed. Michael Klein, Executive Director of the Albany Parking Authority, attended and actively participated in Clinton Square Planning Studio Advisory Committee Meetings, and we hope will continue to be engaged as the project moves toward implementation. The Parking Authority’s expertise will be important to make sure that parking facilities in the surrounding area are capable of meeting the additional parking demands generated by the public market. It is even conceivable that the APA could help finance development of the public market if it were planned and designed to be physically combined with a revenue-generating parking structure operated by APA. The Parking Authority’s ability to issue bonds to finance parking facilities which are paid back with revenues generated by those facilities could prove extremely helpful in this regard.

The Maiden Lane Parking Company currently manages the surface parking lot on the parcel of land owned by the First Church of Albany that is proposed site for the public market-- under terms of a lease with the First Church of Albany. As this report is written, we do not know the number of years into the future Maiden Lane’s lease with the Church will remain in force. What we do know is that the First Church depends on the income generated from the parking lease to meet their expenses.

If the term of the church’s lease with Maiden Lane Parking Co. extends a number of years into the future, proceeding with the development of a public market on the site will require convincing Maiden Lane to agree to have the lease terminated. This in turn suggests that It would be prudent to involve the parking company in the project (possibly as a partner), and to plan for the inclusion of parking for the church, the market, patrons of the market, and businesses in the surrounding area as part of the overall project. Not only would this provide a rationale for breaking the current lease, but it would provide income to the church during the development stage and bring in private investment to cover some of the upfront capital expenses.

Palace Theater, Capital Repertory Theater and Proctors-- The Palace and Capital Repertory Theaters are two of downtown Albany’s premier arts and entertainment venues.
Located with a stone’s throw of one another, they essentially bookend Wallenberg Park and Clinton Square. The continued financial viability of these two cultural/arts institutions depends on their being able to attract large audiences to their performances and productions. Unfortunately, neither venue is thriving as much as it should be, despite the high quality of their offerings. One reason, we suspect, is that many potential theater patrons who live outside Albany are reluctant to venture downtown Albany for evening performances because of the lack of 24/7 activity, and the dearth of pedestrian activity at night.

The Palace and Capital Repertory have recently formed an alliance with Proctors of Schenectady, which is now handling their marketing and ticketing operations. This arrangement has helped reduce the overhead administrative costs of both the Palace and Capital Rep. and provided an efficient way of coordinating and scheduling events among the three venues. This three-way alliance of arts and entertainment venues also means that patrons wanting to find out what performances are scheduled at the three venues, and possibly order tickets, need only go to the Proctors website instead of having to contact the three separate entities individually.

The Palace and Capital Repertory Theaters could benefit significantly from the increased pedestrian activity and vitality that a public market would generate, because it would make the area in which they are located a much more lively and appealing destination. It is therefore very much in the interest of these three cultural institutions to play an active role in working with other partners to advance the public market—even though it is not strictly speaking an arts and entertainment project.

**Proprietors of Downtown Restaurants**—Tess Collins of McGeary’s Pub, Dominic Purnamo of Yono’s Restaurant and dp Bistro, and Mike Urgo (owner and operator of Jonathan’s Pizza) attended various meetings of the Planning Studio Advisory Committee. Owners and managers of other downtown businesses and restaurants unfortunately did not take part, despite being invited. These individuals and businesses need to recognize that they too have an important stake in the process.
Although it might seem counter-intuitive, introducing a public market into downtown Albany could benefit downtown restaurants and bistros. The reason is simple: public markets attract people who enjoy and are drawn to flavorful food. It therefore stands to reason that downtown restaurants would benefit from the throngs of people drawn to the food on display at the public market. Downtown restaurants might also find it beneficial to use the public market as a convenient nearby source of farm-fresh local produce.

**Historic Albany Foundation**-- Susan Holland, Executive Director of the Historic Albany Foundation, was an active participant in the Clinton Square Studio planning process. She and Historic Albany Foundation’s members need to continue to be involved as the project moves forward. Indeed, one of the reasons for wanting to establish a public market in downtown Albany is to encourage increased private investment in restoring and adaptively reusing architecturally and historically significant buildings surrounding the site. Historic Albany Foundation’s involvement is also essential to assure that the plan and design of the public market is compatible with its surroundings.

**Regional Food Producers and Suppliers**-- In many respects, the most important stakeholders in the process of planning and achieving a downtown Albany public market are the regional food producers and suppliers on whom the success of the public market ultimately depends. The public market can only succeed if a sufficient threshold number of credible and capable small businesses are eager for the opportunity to sell their goods and products in a public market in downtown Albany. At least a handful of these interested vendors need to be actively involved in the initial coalition of stakeholders working to plan the project.

A list of potential vendors a study should probably be compiled to determine whether the stream of locally produced agricultural products is sufficient to supply a year-round public market in Albany in addition to farmers’ markets already in operation. Such a study could be inexpensively carried out by a graduate student enrolled in the University at Albany’s Masters in Regional Planning Program as an Independent Study Project. A good starting point for this inventory of agricultural producers and products has recently been provided by list of Farm Stores and Stands recently compiled by the Albany County
Department of Economic Development and Planning. Albany County’s inventory lists 20 farms as operating in Albany County, plus another three Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms. The New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets may also have a database of New York State farms and food producers that could be consulted.

Farmers and food producers who currently sell their products at the Troy Farmers Market one day a week might welcome the opportunity to sell their produce on a more regular basis at a downtown Albany public market. These vendors might also provide leads regarding the names and locations of additional producers who might be potentially interested in operating at the Albany market.

While Troy’s farmers market operates year-round—outdoors in summer and fall, and indoors in a building called “the Atrium” during winter-- other farmers’ markets in our region are held outdoors and cease operating during cold winter months. Such outdoor markets are also typically limited to operating no more than one day per week. Vendors at these outdoor venues might be particularly interested in securing a year-round outlet for selling their goods.

**Seek Expert Advice**

Once a coalition of interested and committed stakeholders has been established, the next step is to seek and obtain the assistance of a professional consultant experienced in the development and operation of public markets. One of the most widely recognized sources of consultant assistance pertaining to public markets is the Project for Public Spaces (PPS), based in New York City. PPS has been involved in the development of scores of public markets in cities across the country and is well qualified to provide the kind of strategic advice that Albany needs to move this project forward from concept to reality. Toward that end, the Downtown BID should invite Fred Kent, Executive Director of PPS, to come to Albany for a day or two to meet and speak with members of the coalition and local officials so as to chart a path forward.
A Multi-Story, Multi-Use Development with Structured Parking Across from the Public Market

As noted earlier, the vast majority of the ground floor commercial space in downtown Albany consists of relatively small spaces. As a result, most of the commercial space in existing buildings is ill-suited to serve the needs of commercial enterprises and uses that desire or require fairly large amounts of open, undivided space. Indeed, the absence of fairly large units of commercial space capable of accommodating uses capable of attracting fairly large numbers of people is one of downtown Albany’s most serious weaknesses.

A large-scale, multi-use development project—one that will inevitably require new construction—is badly needed to address this current shortcoming. Such a project, in combination with a nearby public market, would catapult downtown Albany into a prominence as a major center of commercial and recreation-related activity. The perfect site for such a new development is directly across the street from the site proposed above for the public market, and currently consists of three separate parcels, which ideally would be developed in combination: the parcel occupied by the Capital Repertory Theater and its associated parking structure; the vacant parcel of land behind the Capital Repertory Theater bordered by Von Tromp and Broadway currently used for surface parking; the parking garage and vacant building that fronts onto Columbia and backs up onto the surface parking lot. (See Figure 48)
The structure that currently houses the Capital Repertory Theatre is arguably the worst eyesore in downtown Albany. The future viability of this fine theater company and its ability to grow as a popular venue for live theater require that the Capital Rep secure a better home. The inefficiently used and poorly maintained surface parking lot behind the theater along Von Tromp and Broadway is yet another eyesore. Surface parking is far from the highest and best use for such a centrally located, visually prominent downtown parcel. Given the close proximity of these properties to the I-787 off-ramp, the combination of these three parcels should present an extremely appealing development opportunity to a savvy and far-sighted developer-- given the right combination of public and private-sector encouragement and support.

A variety of uses offering a range of experiences should be included in the proposed multi-use development. Among the components that could be incorporated into the project are: a substantial amount of commercial retail space planned and designed to attract nationally recognized retailers; a central atrium adjoining a sports facility and a climbing wall that extends 2-3 stories in height; a new and much improved theater facility

Figure 48: Wrap-around site proposed for new, multi-use, multi-level development
for the Capital Repertory Theater; a multi-screen movie theater and/or a new, greatly improved theater facility for the Capital Repertory Theater; a food court; and a multi-story parking structure that provides direct pedestrian connections into the development at multiple levels.

Obviously, such a development project cannot and should not proceed unless and until the Capital Repertory Theater is can be assured that it will secure a significantly improved theater space—either with the proposed new multi-use development project or on equally satisfactory downtown site not far. If a satisfactory and workable alternative site cannot be found, then inclusion of the Capital Repertory Theater in the new project should be an absolute requirement.

A major aim of the project should be to enliven the surrounding streetscape on all three sides of the project (along Pearl, Von Tromp and Broadway). This can be done by placing theater marquis for the Capital Repertory Theater and movie theater complex in prominent locations, and by wrapping major anchor retail spaces around all three sides of the project so that they look out onto and are visible at street level from Pearl, Von Tromp and Broadway.

A national retailer which could prove particularly receptive to locating in this proposed downtown development project is *Urban Outfitters*. We have targeted *Urban Outfitters* for three reasons. First, the company has proven successful in the downtowns of other small and medium-sized cities and college towns in the Northeast (such as in the Northampton, MA Historic District, and on the Church Street Mall in Burlington, VT.). Another admirable feature of the company is that their business model has called for catering to foot-traffic rather than to people in cars. The company’s products have also proven particularly popular among young, environmentally conscious, college educated young people. As a result, the company has become somewhat of a niche retailer in places where colleges and universities are located. (Note: Albany has a number of colleges.) Finally, the company’s products are in high demand, the company is growing, and it has no retail outlets near Albany. Attracting *Urban Outfitters* to a suitably sized new retail space should therefore be quite possible, especially inasmuch as they would be
presented with the opportunity to occupy a lengthy stretch of frontage at a premier downtown location served by multiple CDTA bus routes.

The aforementioned recommended mix of uses and venues, combined with conveniently located and easily accessed parking, would effectively address the two main concerns expressed by respondents to the Downtown BID’s Perception and Use Study. Structured parking incorporated within the project will answer the concern expressed by 70 percent of survey respondents that a shortage of parking was a major reason for not coming downtown. For those respondents who said that didn’t come downtown because they could find the goods and services they desired conveniently elsewhere, the development will provide an equally potent answer—by providing truly unique experiences and venues very different from what is available elsewhere.

There is a very clear rationale for incorporating an atrium and rock climbing gym/sports complex into the development, because they will give special meaning to the geography and outdoor character of our region. Albany is located less than an hours’ drive from four nationally prominent and popular mountain ranges, and outdoor enthusiasts represent a large segment of the population of the Capital Region—many of them recreational climbers who would be attracted to take advantage of an indoor rock climbing wall/ sports complex. The few rock climbing facilities currently within the region tend to be quite small and fairly unsatisfactory as training walls. By way of contrast, in Seattle a major outdoor outfitter operates a large indoor climbing facility that is highly visible from Interstate 5 and attracts large numbers of new visitors to its store located in a shopping center. The store also provides spaces where shoppers can try on gear, train and try a new sport.
The rationale for including a multi-screen movie complex within the development is equally clear: for downtown Albany to remain the regional center for culture and entertainment in the region it absolutely must have a multi-screen movie theater. The recent experience of downtown Schenectady, which now hosts a multi-screen movie complex, is instructive. As Schenectady’s experience has shown, such a multi-screen cinema complex when combined with a live entertainment venue like Proctors (or in Albany’s case the Palace Theater) inevitably has a positive symbiotic relationship with downtown restaurants. Restaurants and bars in downtown Albany already benefit immensely from their proximity to the Palace Theater and the Capital Repertory Theater, and the addition of a multi-screen movie complex would significantly magnify that effect. People who attend evening shows often first partake in dinner at one of the various dining establishments within walking distance. By adding a new, state-of-the art movie theater downtown Albany will become an even more compelling entertainment destination. The direct and indirect economic benefits, and the increased property tax revenues collected by the City due to the enhanced values of surrounding properties, make this project a potential “win-win” for both the city and the downtown business community.

A key element in achieving this multi-use development (as noted in the preceding section related to the proposed downtown public market) might very well be the willingness of
the Albany Parking Authority to enter into a public/private partnership arrangement to help finance the structured parking component of the project. The revenue bonds the Authority could potentially issue to finance the parking structure component of the project could be paid back using parking-generated revenue. The Parking Authority could also potentially play an important role in managing and operating the parking element of the project. Parking revenue collected by the Authority could also be maximized by making use of APA’s fairly new “Parking Incentive Program” (PIP), which enables the Authority to enter into lease agreements with downtown developers and property owners wishing to secure parking for their tenants-- as well as with residents and businesses occupying space in downtown properties. (The APA’s Parking Incentive Program is discussed in greater detail in the section at the end of this report titled “Policy Recommendations and Implementation.”

**Establish a Hudson River Estuary Aquarium in Albany**

The Hudson River Estuary is an expansive and unique habitat where fresh river water and Atlantic Ocean saltwater mix. The ocean’s tidal pulse is felt throughout the Hudson River Valley as far north as Troy, and is one of the largest tidal estuaries in the world. The estuary is both the ecological and economic lifeblood of the Hudson River Valley, supporting a tremendously diverse population of species, habitats and ecosystems. Animal and plant life in the estuary supported human settlements well before Henry Hudson’s voyage up the river. The Hudson River also became a vital part of America’s development in the early 19th Century, linking the east coast to the Midwest with the creation of the Erie Canal.

Nevertheless, as industrial and urban development intensified, the Hudson River became increasingly polluted with an array of chemical and biological waste that not only made it unsuitable for swimming, but also increasingly prompted health warnings to fisherman. Efforts aimed at significantly improving water quality of the river began in the early 1970s, spurred in large part by public attention drawn to the ecological importance of the river by folksinger Pete Seeger. Seeger, who lived most of his life in the Mid-Hudson
region close to the river, organized an effort to recreate and build an authentic Hudson River sloop, named Clearwater, which sailed up and down the Hudson River as well as the length of the East Coast. Carrying fellow folksingers and musicians, the passengers held public concerts in each port of call in which the theme of environmental restoration was continually emphasized. The sloop Clearwater was also used as a floating environmental classroom, taking young school children out so that they could experience the river first-hand and view the beautiful scenery of the Hudson River Valley from the unique vantage-point of the river.

Over the past 40 years water quality in the Hudson River has markedly improved. Due largely to passage of the federal Clean Water Act in 1972, major discharges of chemical and biological pollutants into the river have been eliminated or substantially reduced. Prior to the Clean Water Act, it was commonplace and legal for industries to discharge toxins into the river. Thankfully, a large portion of such environmentally irresponsible practices have been significantly curtailed, and a monumental and costly clean-up project (the largest ever undertaken) underway to dredge and remove the layers of PCBs from “hot spots” along the riverbed from Fort Edward south.

The Hudson River is a unique environmental resource that Albany needs to embrace, celebrate and defend—because it is so central to its identity. Developing a state-of-the-art aquarium overlooking the Hudson River in Albany would be an especially appropriate way of emphasizing and communicating to people elsewhere how closely Albany’s history is tied to the Hudson River. Aligning the identity of the city more closely would also have the added benefit of significantly increasing the pride Albany residents feel with regarding their city.

**Benefits of a Hudson River Estuary Aquarium**

An aquarium is just the kind of unique, specialized facility that is needed to inject new life into Downtown Albany and shake it out of its doldrums. An aquarium would represent a game-changing new destination that would sweep aside the negative
psychology and unflattering perceptions of Albany that have to-date stymied progress toward revitalizing downtown. An exciting state-of-the-art, creatively designed and programmed aquarium would dramatically change people’s perceptions of Albany. The widespread publicity and “buzz” it would generate would make people want to come spend time in the city. In short, introducing aquarium into downtown would make a definite “splash.”

A Hudson River Estuary Aquarium in Albany would undoubtedly be a popular regional attraction and would provide an educationally meaningful field trip destination for area school children. In that regard it is worth noting that the Center for K-12 Estuarine Education currently has a need for office space and could be an excellent contributor to programming at the aquarium. The proximity of the site to the River and Corning Preserve would allow aquarium educational programming to spill out into the natural environment. With directional and informational signage pointing out relevant facts and information about ecosystems, an outdoor Hudson River Walk could create a unique, exciting and educationally valuable experience.

The aquarium could also become a center for research and training related to a variety of water-related environmental issues, and be home to a variety of public and non-profit environmental organizations concerned about the environmental health of the Hudson River and Hudson Valley. The New York Department of Environmental Conservation might find it advantageous to house a portion of its Hudson River research activities at the aquarium site. Riverkeeper, a non-profit environmental organization whose mission is to protect the Hudson River, might also want to occupy space at the location.

The positive impact that a fresh water aquarium can have on a small city has been powerfully demonstrated in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Chattanooga and Albany share a number of similarities. Both are moderate sized cities located on major rivers which were keys to their establishment in the first place. Over time the city/river connection in both cities was progressively undermined—and as both cities turned their backs on their
respective rivers their downtowns entered a prolonged period of economic decline. All that changed in Chattanooga once the Tennessee Aquarium in 1992. In its first year, the aquarium drew more than 1.1 million visitors—50 percent more than planners had forecast—and in its first ten years of operation attracted 11,300,000 visitors.

In 2007 construction of a second aquarium building (this one called Ocean Journey, featuring saltwater exhibits) was completed and opened next to the original structure. A public plaza constructed between the two facilities opens onto a grand staircase leading down to the river’s edge. Parallel to the staircase is a cascading water feature that tempts and encourages not only children but people of all ages to take off their shoes and wade into the water at various levels.

Locating the aquarium on the shore of the Tennessee River has produced a number of benefits. First, it has strengthened and reinforced the city’s historic connection to the river. Second, placing the aquarium on the Tennessee River has benefited city residents by dramatically expanding public access to the river, thereby expanding opportunities to enjoy the river. Third, the aquarium’s waterfront location has produced a visually prominent, readily recognizable landmark that has also significantly strengthened and elevated the identity of that city. Indeed, Chattanooga’s aquarium has become so central to the identity of the city that the aquarium structure itself has come symbolize and represent Chattanooga in very much the same positive way as the Sydney Opera House has come to symbolize Sydney, Australia.

Last but not least, the increased visitation brought about by Chattanooga’s Aquarium has stimulated a significant amount of investment in new downtown development—new businesses and restaurants, new downtown housing, entertainment venues, hotels, etc. The aquarium has also generated a range of employment opportunities—some very specialized and some less so. The Tennessee Aquarium itself has created 160 full time jobs, and 200 part time summer jobs. It also generates about $19 million a year from admission charges and gift shop sales. Its broader effect on the city and region has been
far greater. A 2012 article in the Chattanooga Times Free Press reports that the aquarium contributes $77.4 million a year to the overall economy.

Chattanooga’s aquarium is a non-profit organization governed by a 14-member Board of Directors. It receives no direct annual public funding from the city or county, although it has received federal and state government research grants, and received one-time funding as part of the city’s $120 million 21st Century Waterfront. Broad-based popular support is what has made the Chattanooga aquarium financially feasible. The Aquarium makes people proud of their city. This well-spring of affection and good will has made it possible to obtain significant funding support from a broad and diverse array of sources. Private foundations, corporations and countless individual donors have given more than $75 million for capital campaigns, first to build and then continually improve the aquarium. Indeed, its Board expects to raise an additional $20 million over the next several years to help sustain and upgrade the aquarium for the future.

**Where the Albany Aquarium should be located**

To celebrate and reinforce Albany’s geographic and historic association with the Hudson River the aquarium should be located as close as possible to the River. Aligning the identity of the city more closely with the river would also have the added benefit of building a strong sense of place and identity that Albany residents can take pride in.

One of the most opportune locations or the aquarium in that regard is the site currently occupied by the abandoned 400,000 sq. ft. Central Warehouse structure just north of the CSX railroad right-of-way and the Livingston Street railroad bridge. The waterfront aquarium we are proposing has a strong, direct physical connection to the River. Colonie Street runs along the northern side of the structure; and vacant land connects the site to the Hudson River near the Livingston Avenue Bridge.
The scheme we propose envisions that access to the Albany Aquarium could be provided using Colonie Street, which is currently blocked to traffic at a railroad crossing (an infrequently used low-speed freight line). Using Colonie Street as the entranceway to the aquarium would have the added benefit of providing Albany residents living north of Clinton Avenue with convenient access to the riverfront.

Colonie Street is also adjacent to the Livingston Avenue Bridge, currently owned by the CSX Railroad and used by Amtrak trains on a daily basis. As noted previously in this report, the Livingston Street Bridge is in need or significant reconstruction or complete replacement. A coalition of bicyclists and advocates of parks and trails argue that replacement or reconstruction of the Livingston Avenue Bridge presents a unique opportunity to incorporate a pedestrian and bicycle crossing across the Hudson River at this strategic point.

Figure 50 illustrates what public access to the Hudson River along Colonie Street could look like if the present barrier to passage were removed so that pedestrians and bicyclists could cross the tracks to reach the riverfront.

Figure 50: Illustration of possible Colonie Street entrance to proposed aquarium
An Alternative Possibility Worth Exploring

Having long ago been abandoned, and experienced a major fire that firefighters had considerable difficulty putting out, the massive poured-concrete Central Warehouse structure has unfortunately become one of the most recognizable features of Albany’s current skyline-- a looming presence that the thousands of motorists who drive past or into Albany on I-787 cannot help but notice. Indeed, seeing the decrepit-looking exterior of the Central Warehouse, one can’t help but form a negative impression of Albany.

With walls three feet thick, the Central Warehouse building seems almost indestructible. A development corporation purchased the property in 2007 in the hope of converting the structure into housing; however the high costs associated with the undertaking prevented the plans from being carried out. Demolishing and removing the building is estimated to cost over $1 million.

Insufficient information is currently available to know whether it might be feasible or economically advantageous to use and incorporate portions of existing structure into an aquarium facility. Some cost savings might conceivably be achieved by constructing the new aquarium on the foundation of the old Central Warehouse, which would probably be strong enough to support whatever weight-loads the new structure might impose. In the absence of an over-riding economic argument for reusing the existing structure, we are inclined to believe that the greatest positive impact on the city (in terms of producing a facility that functions successfully as an aquarium from the standpoint of the visitor experience, and that therefore succeeds as a regional draw) would be to design and construct an altogether new facility.

On the other hand, if engineers were to determine that the Central Warehouse structure could feasibly be hollowed out to accommodate the aquarium that option might be worth considering. If that were the case, the visual prominence of the Central Warehouse could be become an asset. The huge exterior walls of the structure could then serve as the canvas for a large-scale, four-sided aquatic mural, or as the backdrop for an exciting and
colorful computer-generated visual display with an aquatic theme. Artists and designers could have a field-day coming up with creative and appropriate designs that would enhance the landmark status of the aquarium.

Figures 51 and 52 show the extensive amount of public open space that has been created adjacent to and surrounding the Tennessee Aquarium in Chattanooga—a significant added public benefit of developing the Aquarium.

**A Strategy for Establishing a Hudson River Estuary Aquarium in Albany**

The most obvious barrier to developing a waterfront aquarium is the high cost of such a major undertaking. Developing the aquarium would necessitate the acquisition of multiple properties, the demolition and removal of a mammoth structure, and the redesign and overhaul of two city streets among other changes and improvements. However, funding sources for these initial expenses are potentially available. For example, the property in question will need to be tested by the Environmental Protection Agency for contaminants. If contamination is found, the site could be designated as a Brownfield, and become eligible for federal and state funding as a Brownfield Opportunity Area for testing and remediation.
The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation could also be a valuable partner given their research and conservation efforts focused on the Hudson River. Other entities that might potentially provide funding and assistance include the Beacon Institute for Rivers and Estuaries, the Nature Conservancy, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and Riverkeeper.

The Tennessee Aquarium in Chattanooga benefited from funding from a wide array of public and private funding sources as a significant amount of funding came through private donations from locally based corporations and individual philanthropists. That should also be case in Albany. Building a coalition of individuals, organizations and business community representatives supportive of and committed to the project is crucial to the success of the endeavor—as is leadership and support from elected officials at the local and state level. It may seem like an impossibly high mountain to climb, but Chattanooga has shown it is possible, and well worth the effort.

Policy Recommendations and Implementation

**Adopt a Downtown Mixed-Use Overlay District**

Current zoning in downtown Albany is based on the notion that different land uses should be spatially separated from one another, and that integration and mixing of different types of uses should be greatly discouraged. In line with that concept, most of downtown Albany’s Central Business District is zoned C-3 for “general commercial use”—which dictates that the upper floors of downtown buildings should be occupied by commercial offices, and not be housing. Not only is what the zoning is calling for not increasingly unlikely in the market place, it is also no longer in the long-term best interests of the downtown area. This impediment could be removed by adopting a *mixed-use downtown overlay zone* (i.e. that would overlay the existing zoning) that would permit conversions of upper floors of downtown buildings to housing, and/or to a mix of housing and office space) without having to go through the time-consuming and costly process of applying...
for a zoning variance from the Zoning Board of Appeals—and running the very real risk of possibly being turned down.

The mixed use overlay zone within the Downtown Mixed-Use District could also specify that every residential development of three or more stories should include ground-floor retail space—a provision that would help assure a visually lively streetscape that is engaging to pedestrians and generates pedestrian activity. Such zoning provisions could be made even more specific by prohibiting blank walls and requiring display windows and entrances to business establishments at sidewalk level so as to create a more visually interesting and stimulating streetscape that encourages pedestrian activity. A notable example of a city which has incorporated such design-oriented, mixed-use requirements into its downtown zoning is Portland, Oregon. Indeed, such zoning provisions are widely credited as having made that city’s downtown streetscape much more visually engaging to pedestrians, having significantly increased 24/7 pedestrian activity due to having residents living in proximity with commercial uses.

Create a Downtown Development Ombudsperson Position

People considering making a substantial investment in a significant development project (new construction, renovation or adaptive re-use) want and need to know ahead of time what the rules are that their project will have to meet. They also need to know that they will be dealt with fairly and even-handedly. Uneven treatment and playing favorites is anathema to building a healthy and competitive investment climate.

Webster’s Dictionary defines an Ombudsman as “a government official (as in Sweden or New Zealand) appointed to receive and investigate complaints made by individuals against abuses or capricious acts of public officials…. one that investigates, reports on, and helps settle complaints.”

Given the large number of public agencies, boards, commissions and public officials with a degree of “say” in what happens in downtown Albany, it can be difficult to know exactly what people and entities are responsible for what actions. And what recourse is
there for a property owner/ developer caught in a maze of conflicting interpretations rendered by public entities that are not on the same page. A dedicated downtown Ombudsman acts as liaison between an array of government agencies officials and the public. In matters of development, the Ombudsman can help facilitate discussions between the proper government entity and a developer when regulatory or permitting issues arise.

In Louisville, a business Ombudsman is responsible for the following services:

- Resolving problems and complaints for businesses
- Helping all parties identify and evaluate options mutually beneficial actions
- Helping businesses open or expand their operations
- Helping address concerns that have not been resolved by other metro offices
- Recommending changes in policies or procedures beneficial to area businesses
- Handling questions concerning services, process, contacts or general suggestions

Currently, the Downtown Albany BID serves as a de-facto ombudsman for the area, since it represents the businesses within their district. However, the function we envision the Ombudsman fulfilling exceeds considerably what the BID is currently able to do. Creating a dedicated position, and placing this responsibility in the hands of a highly capable and respected individual, will give this function the focus and importance it deserves. Once the Ombudsperson is in place, people will know who they can go to if and when they feel they may have been mistreated as they have made their way through the public approval process. Creating a full-time Ombudsperson position should help not only make public approval processes more streamlined and even-handed, but also build needed trust and confidence.

Parking and the Role of the Albany Parking Authority
Under zoning currently in place in downtown Albany, off-street parking for businesses within the C-3 Central Business District is not required. In many ways, this is a positive position to take if there is a desire to enable residential conversions and expansion of the downtown residential population to take place. Indeed, requiring developers to provide on site parking for new residential housing units that are created could present a nearly insurmountable obstacle not only to residential conversions of existing buildings but indeed kind of new development in the downtown area.

On the other hand, availability of nearby parking (or the lack of it), often weighs heavily in the minds of people who would otherwise be open to living downtown, and for that reason is often a major factor affecting the marketability of downtown housing. A well thought-out, forward-looking downtown parking program and policy therefore needs to be developed that anticipates the future parking needs and demands likely to be generated by this welcome market trend.

The Albany Parking Authority (APA) has created a “Parking Incentive Program” that offers discounted, long-term parking rates to downtown employees, residents and property owners. In effect, this program enables developers of downtown conversion projects to offer off street parking to new and current residents at a discounted price. As laudable as this program is, a number of the parking areas and facilities currently operated by the APA, especially its out-dated surface parking lots, are in serious need of upgrading, and even some of its newer, larger structures could benefit from design and aesthetic improvements that would make them more welcoming and comfortable to use.

Rather than viewing its mission as solely the provision and operation of public parking facilities, we would like to suggest that the Albany Parking Authority could actually play a much more proactive and leading role in jump-starting the rejuvenation of downtown Albany as not only a place to work, dine and go to the theater, but also as a place to live and shop. What we are suggesting is that the APA could strategically partner with a private sector developer to help finance and bring about a major development project that could significantly transform downtown Albany. The key ingredient the Parking Authority brings to the table is its ability to finance new structured parking facilities by
issuing revenue bonds that can be paid back with the revenue it generates from the new parking spaces that are created. If APA-financed parking facilities were planned ahead of time to be coordinated with another privately financed development, it could go a long way toward making that development more financially feasible and marketable. Two major downtown projects proposed and discussed earlier in this report (a year-round public market, and a multi-story, multi-use development on the site bounded by Pearl, Von Tromp and Broadway currently occupied by the Capital Repertory Theater and a surface parking lot) could specifically benefit from this expanded Parking Authority role in leveraging strategically desirable downtown development projects.