

Hyde Jackson Square Main Streets Areas of Research for MIT Students

HJSMS has done a significant amount of research on the commercial district. We would like the MIT class to help us figure out how to take the work we have done to the next level. There are four main areas that we would like the class to explore:

1) What role for HJSMS in the two major developments in the district?

There are two major developments that are about to occur in the district. They will have a major impact in the district. There is a fear that the effect of this additional development on the commercial district could be commercial gentrification, pushing out long time business owners in the area, losing the unique (Latino) character of the district, and taking away customers that shop at existing stores. The hope is that the developments will enhance the district in a number of ways, including bring more customers to existing stores, and add to the unique character of the area. HJSMS wants to figure out what the best tools are for making sure the positive occurs, and not the negative.

The first of the two developments is Jackson Square, an 8 acre site that is adjacent to the "T" stop and is currently owned by the city. Developers are likely to build up to 60,000 square feet of new first floor retail space, as well as hundreds of units of housing, and a new community center. An RFP response for this land was due on January 24th 2005. The city will likely pick a master developer sometime during the class. No matter which developer is selected, HJSMS needs to figure out the best way to position itself so as to positively influence the development. .

The second is the sale of the Blessed Sacrament Church, which is part of the disposition of Catholic Churches around the state. This historic church is literally in the middle of the commercial district, and is directly on Centre St. There are X acres of land around the site that may be developed for housing and other uses. Proposals for developers of the site are due in early April 2005. Again, regardless of which developer is selected, HJSMS needs to figure out the best way to position itself so as to make sure that the views stakeholders of the commercial district are heard and shape the future use.

Questions we would like addressed by the class are as follows:

- a) How do we make sure developers of these two projects follow the development priorities that we have already ratified?
- b) What are some of the best practices of Main Streets groups for influencing such developments, both at the predevelopment and development phases, as well as over the long term life of the project?
- c) What is the success of written agreements with developers? Joint marketing agreements? Other forms of collaboration and influence? What are the most effective points of leverage? Is it a viable to receive organizational funding as part of the negotiations with developers?

- d) What are the design suggestions that the class could make to shape the physical nature of the development, and make sure that the new development fits in with the current district? How should parking be addressed?

2) How do we enhance the Restaurant Cluster?

The HJSMS district has nearly 20 restaurants, which are clearly a strength of the district. Many of the restaurants are Latino, and therefore they positively reflect the unique character of the district. Our belief is that the restaurants create a regional draw for the district, and could be used to strengthen other stores in the area. One restaurant, Bella Luna/Milky Way, is a widely known landmark, for some the only place they know in all of Jamaica Plain.

We have already done a detailed survey of restaurant customers, and we have held a breakfast where the results were presented to the neighborhood. The main idea that came from the breakfast was for restaurants in the area to do some sort of joint marketing. We need to figure out how to implement that suggestion. Ideally, we'd love a design for a joint marketing ad, as well as research on the cost of such ads in local and regional newspapers or other media. Other questions we'd like answered are:

- a) How do we implement the ideas that have already been recommended as part of our restaurant survey?
- b) What marketing hook is best for building on the restaurant base? Do we emphasize the Latino aspect of the restaurants? Does that leave out the restaurants that are not Latino? How about a phrase such as: *Come to Hyde/Jackson for the Latino Food Experience, and More!*
- c) The survey we conducted revealed that only a small portion of restaurant customers shop at other stores in the district. How do we get restaurant customers to shop at other stores? How should restaurant marketing tie into marketing the entire district?
- d) Do the existing restaurant owners and other merchants in the area want to participate in such a joint marketing effort? What are their concerns about such an effort, and what is the best way to get them involved?
- e) What media outlets should we target in a joint marketing efforts?
- f) What is the market potential for additional restaurants in the district? What types of restaurants would add the most to the district? Are there any looking to expand that we should target? What is the best means of targeting new restaurants?
- g) What are the best practices of other districts with a similar restaurant niche?
- h) How do we get existing restaurateurs to better serve the both the Latino and non-Latino markets (only a few do a good job of that now)?
- i) How do the demographics of restaurant customers compare to the demographics of general district users (ie, compare the shopper's survey and the restaurant survey.)
- j) How can design be used to pursue these goals?

3) How do we further pursue the idea that Hyde/Jackson is a Latino oriented district (ie, “The Heart of Latino Life in Boston”)?

Tied into the previous two questions is that the district’s uniqueness comes from being Latino oriented. This creates both positives and negatives. On the one hand it is what makes the district different from most other districts. It means that the area is a regional draw. On the other hand, there is a fear that this pushes other potential customers away from the area, including whites and African Americans that live within walking distance of the area.

There is ambivalence among the board and other stakeholders as to how aggressively to market the area as a Latino district. We would love the thoughts and recommendations from the class on this topic. Additional questions are:

- a) Is there a way to market the district in such a way that it emphasizes the Latino nature, yet does not exclude other ethnic groups?
- b) How have other ethnically oriented districts dealt with this issue? (China town and the North End are clearly not for those ethnic groups only)
- c) What are other types of stores to pursue that would add to the mix of Latino oriented stores?
- d) What are good avenues to pursue additional Latino customers?
- e) In what ways does a Latino district appeal to non-Latino customers? What is the best way to attract non-Latinos to such a district?
- f) How can design be used to pursue these goals?

4) Anecdotal evidence suggests that sales in the district are down. Why is that? And what is the best way to turn that situation around?

A number of merchants have expressed that, economically speaking, things are not going so well in the district. There are a number of theories as to why this is the case, but no solid answers. One theory is that crime is up in the area, and therefore less people are coming to shop in the area. Another theory is that the demographics of the neighborhood are changing, and less people buy what the merchants are selling. That demographic change is that less Latinos, and less low-income individuals live in the area. We would like the class to explore why there appears to be a recent economic decline in the area, and offer possible solutions to the issues that are uncovered.

5) What should be the role and agenda of the design committee?

The design committee is struggling to find an agenda. Up until now, the main role of the committee has been to select storefront improvement projects for funding. Most of that

funding has been used. Therefore, the committee is not sure what to tasks pursue at this time, or what levers it has to influence the design of the district.

The design committee has worked on other issues, such as designing the signs that are now on all of the streets throughout the district, as well as on trash clean-ups. The signs are now put up, and the board has said it wants to de-emphasize the clean-ups.

Additional questions:

- a) Are there design guidelines it could develop to inform the new developments?
- b) Do we know where the guidelines are that were developed years ago? Are those still used?