

MIT Department of Urban Studies and Planning Spring 2005  
**11.439 Revitalizing Urban Main Streets**

**Initial Planning Tasks for Projects**

Session 4

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During this initial assessment phase, our goal is to identify the major issues and challenges constraining each commercial district's improvement and to determine key assets and opportunities on which to build revitalization efforts. In addition to reviewing prior reports and documents, we suggest that your planning work over the coming weeks incorporate the following tasks, although for Hyde Jackson Square the tasks should add to, not duplicate, their existing market research:

- **Conduct a detailed physical analysis of the District.** Before beginning the physical survey, take a walk around the District to get a good sense of it. Use the information gathered during the field trip as a foundation for your survey and concentrate on the following characteristics:
  - **Architecture:** What kinds of buildings make up the District? Do they have a recognizable style or age? How many stories are they? What is the condition of the buildings? What is the appearance of store facades and signage? Do they appear to have been recently renovated? Are they older? Attractive or unattractive and why? What image do they convey?
  - **Streetscape:** What are the public spaces of the District like? Evaluate streets, sidewalks, parks/open space, parking lots, and other areas of the public realm. Are streets wide or narrow? Are sidewalks wide enough for pedestrian traffic flow and do they contain street furniture such as benches, trees, planters, and trash cans? Are sidewalks concrete, brick, asphalt, or other materials? Are there parking lots and where are they located with respect to buildings in the District?
  - **District Image:** How does the District look as a whole? Where does the District end? What is its core? Does it have clearly demarcated gateways? Are there landmarks in the District? Where are the "holes" in the District? Which parts of the District have special meaning for residents and users, if any? Which parts of the District appear to be the safest or the most dangerous and why?
  - **Traffic/Pedestrian:** Are street crossings safe? What are traffic conditions like at different times of the day/week and how does this influence pedestrian activity? Your perceptions should be supplemented with conversations with people who use the neighborhood often, i.e. shoppers and business owners. Some inquiries of this nature should therefore be included either in the intercept or business surveys that groups will carry out.
- **Conduct a detailed inspection and observation of the commercial activity of the District.** This inspection should include an inventory of businesses and square footage by store and business category and a comparison with competing business districts and possibly comparable size shopping centers. The inventory is designed to analyze the District's economic role and major retail and service niches, and any unique economic niches/roles. As a foundation for your work, use the reports to be read for the market research class and the

Hyde Jackson Square Commercial district profile. For Hyde Jackson, this task may require more analysis of the existing profile and further analysis of the restaurant niche.

- **Profile key demographic characteristics and market segments for the district's trade area population.** Beyond summarizing census data, significant demographic shifts since the 2000 Census should be identified via stakeholder interviews and other data sources. Surveys and interviews can also identify important customer segments. The market potential beyond the current trade area for important customer groups should also be quantified, e.g., the Boston Hispanic market for HJMS.
- **Conduct interviews with key stakeholders** to better understand shared and conflicting goals for the District, perceived problems and strengths, and the status of current and past revitalization efforts.
- **Conduct an intercept survey** of people in the District to help identify the market served by the District, consumer's perception of the District, the major destinations and reasons why people come to the District, etc. Ideally surveying would take place at different times of day at different locations to get a diverse and representative sample. For HJMS, which has already done a survey, the team may want to do more analysis of their existing survey data.
- **Analyze consumer spending potential and sales gap by major store categories.** This analysis helps identify spending areas where there is substantial "leakage" of local spending and thus where there may be opportunities to expand existing businesses or start/attract new businesses. While limited data availability for neighborhood districts is an obstacle here, it is possible to make reasonable estimates of the sales gap for key spending categories.
- **Conduct a business survey** to understand business trends and experience, gain merchants' knowledge of their market and their view of key District issues, understand the level of their involvement with revitalization efforts, and assess their needs, interest and support for different initiatives. While the survey is likely to take longer than four weeks to complete, getting it started quickly will ensure we have this input for later planning and may provide some preliminary findings for our first phase of work.

**Priorities for each team and the details of these tasks will be discussed in upcoming classes.**