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Strategic Plan
For
Main Street Highland Park

2015-2020



Heritage
Consulting Inc.

Prepared by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction | 3 |
| What is a mission statement? | 4 |
| Suggested revised mission statement | 4 |
| What is a vision statement? | 5 |
| Suggested new vision statement | 5 |
| Main Street Highland Park Four Strategic Goals | 7 |
| Role of work plans | 8 |
| Organization — strategic goal and projects | 10 |
| Economic Restructuring— strategic goal and projects | 13 |
| Promotion--strategic goal and projects | 17 |
| Design— strategic goal and projects | 20 |
| Short, Medium and Long Term Goals | 22 |
| Credits | 27 |

Introduction

Downtown Highland Park is a commercial district catering to shoppers in the Highland Park NJ community. The Main Street Highland Park Main Street Board of Directors, volunteers, and staff work hard to enhance the downtown district by promoting its high quality retailers and special events; beautifying Raritan Avenue; helping existing business to expand while recruiting new ones; and marketing and communicating about the downtown and the organization throughout the year. The downtown commercial district is the historic and current heart of Highland Park. It defines the local “sense of place” and reflects the community’s history.

Main Street Highland Park is a hybrid of two different programs. They have access to property tax funds for downtown services and projects as a Business Improvement District (BID). This state authorized program is set up by and accountable to the Highland Park City Council. As a member of Main Street New Jersey, they follow the Main Street Four Point Approach™ which is a volunteer-driven, historic preservation-based, economic development program. The Main Street program is a nationally successful model for revitalizing downtowns entirely dependent on grants, donations, and volunteer muscle. Since 2002, Main Street Highland Park has blended both to form a highly effective public-private partnership to revitalize downtown Highland Park.

The Main Street Approach™ stresses historic preservation as the underlying design principle for the revitalization effort. Main Street efforts nationwide aim to maximize the economic potential of each historic commercial district while preserving its authentic character. For Highland Park, the volunteer-led committees are critical to the success of the program, and involve stakeholders— residents, business owners, or property owners— in making decisions about the future of the downtown. These stakeholders participated in all facets of the research leading up to the creation of this new Strategic Plan. This Plan represents the next phase in Main Street Highland Park’s organizational development.

Consulting Services from Main Street New Jersey

The State Coordinating Program provided staff assistance and consulting services to the Main Street Highland Park as part of the State’s effort to enhance the growth, effectiveness, and sustainability of participating Main Street New Jersey organizations.

Heritage Consulting Inc. is a Philadelphia-based consulting firm with a contract with Main Street New Jersey to provide technical assistance to Highland Park. The firm led a three-phase Strategic Planning effort. Donna Ann Harris of Heritage Consulting Inc. worked collectively with Rebecca Hersh, the Main Street Highland Park Executive Director, to develop this Strategic Plan. There was active participation by Main Street Highland Park Board members, business

owners, merchants, many citizens that serve on Highland Park's Boards and Commissions, the Mayor, and City Council members. Research was conducted over six months and included three distinct activities, which are outlined below.

1) SWOT Analysis. Held on June 24 2014, this three-hour long evening meeting involved the input of 40 participants, including Main Street Highland Park Board members, committee chairs, downtown merchants, property owners, City Council members, the Mayor, Planning and Zoning Board members, and Redevelopment Commission members. During the meeting, we discussed the current conditions of both the downtown shopping district and the Main Street Highland Park organization. A summary memo was prepared that offered observations and recommendations for solving several specific problems in the short- and mid-term.

2) Online Consumer and Stakeholder Survey conducted for three weeks from July 15, 2014 to August 8, 2014. This survey was an extraordinary success with more than 503 responses, and 432 people completing all questions. These responses represented a statistically valid sample of the Highland Park population. The survey provided critical demographic and market data about the current downtown district shoppers. A 124 page report prepared by Heritage Consulting Inc. was circulated to the Main Street Highland Park Board in late August 2014.

3) A Visioning and Strategic Planning Workshop was held on Wednesday evening, October 29, 2014. This session was two and a half hours long and included eighteen Main Street Highland Park Board members, business owners, committee chairs, key volunteers, the Mayor, and several members of Highland Park Boards and Commissions. Prior to the workshop, all participants received copies of the Online Consumer and Stakeholder Survey Report and an executive summary. This workshop began with a brief summary of the results of the Online Survey. During the workshop, all participated in a visioning exercise to help the assembled group visualize the future of downtown five years from now. Finally, we used the visioning exercise to identify specific strategies to implement projects toward the realization of this long-term vision of downtown.

What is a Strategic Plan?

Board Source[™], a national nonprofit organization whose mission is to advance the public good by building exceptional nonprofit Boards and inspiring Board service, defines a Strategic Plan as a written document that defines an organization's over-arching strategies and major areas of work for the next five years to achieve the organization's mission.

Strategic plans for nonprofit organizations are created through a process that builds on research to accumulate wisdom about the organization, its environment, and economic potential. This

process involves stakeholders to ensure that the resulting Strategic Plan contains a comprehensive understanding of the organization's preferred future.

What is a mission statement?

A mission statement articulates where the organization is now, not at some desired point in the future. An ideal mission statement identifies why the organization exists, who benefits, what the organization does and, finally, how it does what it does. A good mission statement conveys how the organization relates to its public and communities; why and how it enhances the well-being of others and improves quality of life; and, finally, what service it provides. A mission statement should be easily memorized, as it becomes a part of the "elevator speech" about the organization.

New mission and vision statements

We asked participants during the Visioning and Strategic Planning workshop to review the existing mission statement of the organization to determine if it is still valid, and to note if any changes were necessary. There were several different mission statements being used by the organization on a variety of platforms (web site or publications). The original mission statement used on the incorporation papers could not be found. We used the version that appeared on the organization's web site for the workshop exercise, as it was the clearest. There were many comments made, so we provided a new mission statement to compliment the new overall direction of the organization.

Current Main Street Highland Park Mission Statement

Main Street Highland Park (MSHP) is a non-profit community development organization that manages the downtown Business District for the benefit of the merchants, business owners and residents of Highland Park. As a dedicated advocate for the downtown, Main Street leverages its budget resources and relationships on behalf of its constituent members to bring about change that would not otherwise be possible.

New Mission Statement

Main Street Highland Park (MSHP) is a non-profit community development organization that manages the downtown for the benefit of merchants and business owners of Highland Park. Our work creates an attractive and welcoming shopping experience for all who shop, visit, or reside here. As the dedicated advocate for the downtown, we leverage our financial and human resources and relationships for positive and transformative change in downtown.

What is a vision statement?

A vision statement describes the preferred future of both the organization and downtown after five years of work towards fulfilling the dreams of stakeholders. The vision statement should

focus on the community impact and the power of the organization to transform downtown. A good vision statement is ambitious enough to force people out of comfortable routines, and is conceptual but practical, taking advantage of fundamental trends from consumer research. A vision statement should be clear enough to articulate the visual changes in downtown.

Suggested Main Street Highland Park Vision Statement

Short version

By 2020 downtown Highland Park will be recognized as a thriving commercial district where Middlesex County residents find exciting independent shops, restaurants, and entertainment venues in existing and new environmentally friendly mixed-use buildings.

Long version

Our Vision for Downtown Highland Park in 2020.

By 2020 downtown Highland Park will be recognized as a thriving commercial district where Middlesex County and community residents find exciting independent shops, restaurants, and entertainment venues.

For the last five years, MSHP worked in close partnership with the Borough's Redevelopment Agency to assist them to complete a new downtown environmentally friendly retail/residential mixed-use building on vacant land located in middle of our downtown. This HPRA project has served as a true catalyst, and this new building joins other mixed use projects now in construction by private sector developers on the revitalized Raritan Avenue. All of these new businesses and buildings have significantly increased the Borough and County tax base, created new jobs, and generated a positive buzz about our downtown and future.

One of the new buildings under construction will house a local version of a national concept restaurant where diners will find several multi-ethnic restaurants, a specialty supermarket, beer and wine bars, and perhaps a rooftop fine dining restaurant. This prospective project will also have a multi-season outdoor dining area.

In the past five years, we worked closely with downtown property owners to bring more than two dozen new or expanded businesses into the heart of our community. High on our list of recruit opportunities is a small theater, fresh produce market, more specialty shops, several upscale men and women's clothing boutiques, an expanded Jack's Hardware, and finally an ice cream and desserts shop. These businesses reinforce our restaurant and evening entertainment niches. These independent business or franchises support the work of Main Street Highland Park through sponsorship and advertising coop programs.

We are known for our colorful planters that are planted seasonally, adding to downtown's festive atmosphere. The long sought improvements to "the Wall" as you enter Highland Park have finally been completed by the private sector developer of the property. The banners that were put up for the new poles have been found and reinstalled. The ordinance of 2% for public art spurred an international competition. The final three Welcome to Highland Park signs were finally installed. New way finding signs were installed, helping people know where to go. All of the new construction has an educational component.

Our Spring Street Fair and autumn in the Park have reached maximum capacity and have been expanded to be two day events. The Friday Farmers' Market hours were expanded in 2015. Small Business Saturday, Planting Day, and our 5K run are all highly anticipated events. Our volunteer appreciation event is a highlight of the year. These events, along with those organized by the Borough and others, fill the sidewalks and parking lots virtually year-round. We continue our traditional and new media communication campaigns that regularly market to more than 10,000 area residents about the exciting events, shops, and activities happening in downtown.

The Main Street office continues to be the "go to" place for those who wish to locate or expand downtown. Redevelopment of vacant parcels by the Redevelopment Agency and property owners continues, and we offer a variety of incentive programs to encourage property owners to restore and invest in their buildings and build on vacant land.

By 2020 the Main Street Highland Park budget will be \$375,000. The majority of the budget is from an assessment on the property owners, the geographic boundaries of which were expanded in 2018 after years of working with property owners to fine tune the services they receive. Additional funding supports a full time events coordinator, an expanded matching grant program for façade improvements, arts programming, and select public improvements such as the gateway to New Brunswick. Seventy five thousand dollars is raised each year from a highly diverse number of revenue sources including an annual county grant. Our residential membership program has grown significantly since 2015 when it began, and we now boast 250 residential members who in 2020 contributed \$40,000 to our budget.

Finally we were elated when Main Street Highland Park won the Great American Main Street Award from the National Main Street Center, a testament to our years of hard work.

Strategic Goals

The goal-setting portion of the October 29, 2014 workshop helped to take the long-term vision and create a specific future direction for the downtown to be accomplished in the next five years. Committee members formulated goals that fit neatly within the traditional purview of the Main Street Four Point Approach™. Board and Committee members prepared a brief statement of their committee's overall goal for the future. They were asked to be specific about

the outcome of five years' work. The following are the future strategic goals for downtown Highland Park as prepared by each of the teams at the October 29, 2014 evening workshop.

2015-2020 Main Street Highland Park Strategic Goals

- By 2020, grow the Main Street Highland Park budget to \$375,000 through a comprehensive fundraising effort; expand the current boundaries of the Business Improvement District; communicate regularly about the excitement happening in downtown; and involve hundreds of volunteers in our work.
- Manage the business mix by retaining and expanding retail, restaurant and service businesses; recruit complimentary new businesses to strengthen the nightlife and restaurant niches. Create a venture fund to invest in downtown properties or undertake studies to encourage appropriate rehabilitation and new construction. Continue to provide educational workshops for business owners and encourage them to expand their hours.
- Make the downtown business district thrive by consolidating or transforming existing MSHP events and expand the footprint and hours of the much loved Farmers Market.
- Coordinate with Borough officials on all planning, zoning, redevelopment and code enforcement issues, add new incentives and public art programs to continue to beautify downtown.

The four Strategic Goals serve as the bridge to the new vision for the future of the heart of downtown Highland Park. All of the short and longer-term projects, individually and collectively, move the organization towards making this vision into a reality by allocating all of its financial and volunteer resources accordingly.

The activities and programs that Main Street Highland Park will implement in the future through a combination of Board, staff, committees, partners, and individual task force volunteers, all must be aligned to achieve at least one (1) of the four the (4) above Strategic Goals. If a project does not *clearly* meet any of the Strategic Goals, the project should neither be staffed nor funded, as the organization has a finite number of volunteers and financial resources.

Role of Work Plans

Work plans for each project are completed by the volunteer committees and are approved by the Board. The plans provide detail on how to implement an effective project. Every work plan contains the following elements: who (person or partner organization), what, when, how much expense, how much revenue, volunteer hours, staff hours, anticipated results, and the Strategic

Goal(s) met. Collectively, these work plans become the substance of the materials submitted to the Borough by Main Street Highland Park in addition to the proposed budget for support each year. Work Plans can be used to sell sponsorships, support fundraising efforts, volunteer recruitment, partner identification and recruitment.

Staffing and volunteers

This Strategic Plan sets out a very ambitious improvement agenda for the Main Street Highland Park over the next five (5) years. All of these activities are important and worthy, but the Main Street Highland Park Board must reach agreement about how it will staff them.

While there are already some volunteers involved with the organization, there are not enough to implement even a small portion of these activities. The current staff cannot take on any more duties, as it is already significantly overstretched. The hiring of an event coordinator is critical for the continued success of the organization's ambitious agenda.

If the Main Street Highland Park Board, along with teams of new volunteers, is to be responsible for implementing these tasks, then the Board must continue to invest substantially in volunteer and fundraising infrastructure. Leadership for any new volunteer and fundraising effort must come from the Board itself, primarily in the form of promoting volunteer recruitment throughout the teams and organization as a whole.

Conclusion

This 2015-2020 Strategic Plan for downtown Highland Park is a review of the past performance of the organization and a representation of its bright future. This Strategic Plan contains new mission and vision statements. The four Strategic Goals mentioned above organize the rest of the document and should be used to guide all of the organization's work in the next five (5) years, which is the useful life of this planning document.

Organization Team

Strategic Goal: By 2020, grow the Main Street Highland Park budget to \$375,000 through a comprehensive fundraising effort; expand the current boundaries of the Business Improvement District; communicate regularly about the excitement happening in downtown; and involve hundreds of volunteers in our work.

Expand the team

- Work with the Team chair to identify skills needed for the committee and create job descriptions for specific volunteer jobs, Recruit, train and orient new volunteers to their volunteer assignments as described in work plans.

Create work plans for all team projects

- Create work plans for all events so that the Board can track all events and activities on a monthly basis. All event committees/teams should review the profit/loss for their event/activity as soon as it is complete, and adjust the work plan for the event next year.

Board leadership

- Work with Main Street New Jersey to provide board training at least every other year to ensure that each board member understands their roles and responsibilities as a Main Street board member and BID representative.
- Contact Main Street New Jersey about conducting a brief training workshop and overview of the Main Street Four Point Approach™ for any Board member or volunteers to provide baseline orientation to our work.
- Work with the Executive Committee to understand the succession issues for the organization. Work with Main Street New Jersey to gain their recommendations for training or mentoring to bring likely officer candidates into more responsible positions so they can step into leadership positions in the next year.
- Work with the Executive Committee to understand how eliminating some events (as discussed in Promotion Team section below) will have an impact on earned revenue and decide how to address any shortfall in 2015 and thereafter.
- Apply for the Great American Main Street Award from the National Main Street Center before 2020.

Budget and fundraising

- By 2020, the annual operating budget of the Main Street Highland Park will be \$375,000. To meet this budget target, we need to raise over seventy five thousand dollars (\$75,000) each year from individual donations, grants, fundraising events, a residential membership program, sponsorship, advertising, vendor fees, and other earned and contributed revenue.
- The specific fundraising area that Main Street Highland Park has not yet exploited is fundraising primarily from the residents who benefit from the many MSHP events and a revitalized downtown. A residential investor (membership) campaign should be seriously considered.
- To meet the budget target in 2020, the MSHP Board will need to grow its capacity to raise funds from the private sector. Board and staff will participate in fundraising training of various kinds to expand our skills, so we can confidently raise more money each year, to meet this ambitious budget goal of raising \$75,000 in five years.
- Because the private sector fundraising goals of the organization for the next five years are ambitious, we will create a standing committee of the Main Street Highland Park Board dedicated to coordinating the overall fundraising and revenue diversification efforts of the organization.
- Review existing earned revenue sources and determine if sponsorships or fees could be increased on some events, and implement as needed.
- Consider seeking Middlesex County grant support for downtown Highland Park projects.

Expand the BID

- Develop a work plan for the effort to expand the existing BID. Identify and obtain any funding needed for this multi-year effort. Begin to cultivate property owners in the expanded district to understand their needs and how to meet them through the BID. Show them the benefits they are already receiving, in addition to the planters, the side walk beautification, etc. Obtain advice from Main Street New Jersey about BID expansion as needed.

Volunteers

- Expand the volunteer pool through aggressive recruitment at Main Street-sponsored events, and by publishing volunteer job descriptions on Facebook, Twitter, and the MSHP e-newsletter.

- Identify committee members to develop simple volunteer job descriptions for specific volunteer tasks (writer, designer, accountant, etc.). Once complete, promote these opportunities on the website, Facebook page, and e-blast newsletter. Place volunteers in a fulfilling job as they come forward. Host a brief, fun, orientation meeting for new volunteers.
- Consider holding an all team work plan training session to create simple work plans for each project, so that Teams could complete these work plans at their next regularly scheduled meeting.
- The Main Street Highland Park Staff will review the current volunteer database and make sure information is complete in each record (name, home phone, cell phone, email, address, etc.).
- By 2020, the volunteer appreciation event will be considered an important annual event in town.

Communications

- Continue the well-regarded communication efforts to promote the organization and downtown. Continue the monthly E-newsletter; regularly update the website; and continue the social media efforts (Facebook, Twitter etc.), other promotion, and public relations efforts.
- Regularly evaluate the marketing efforts by conducting surveys at events, online, and through broad outreach to downtown customers.
- Update the website, branding, and business recruitment materials as needed.

Economic Restructuring Team

Strategic Goal: Manage the business mix by retaining and expanding retail, restaurant and service businesses; recruit complimentary new businesses to strengthen the nightlife and restaurant niches. Create a venture fund to invest in downtown properties or undertake studies to encourage appropriate rehabilitation and new construction. Continue to provide educational workshops for business owners and encourage them to expand their hours.

Expand Team membership

- Expand the Economic Restructuring team expertise through strategic recruitment of committee members, or through developing relationships with area economic development agencies, Rutgers University departments, or other area commercial real estate brokers. Create job descriptions for specific volunteer jobs. Recruit, train and orient new volunteers to their volunteer assignments. Help new volunteers identify a specific event/task they will execute from the team work plans.

Create work plans for all team projects

- Create work plans for all Economic Restructuring Team events/activities so that the Board can track all them on a monthly basis. All event committees/teams should review the profit/loss for their event/activity as soon as it is complete, and adjust the work plan for the event next year.

Understand the current market downtown

- Update the existing business inventory including first and second floor businesses in the district at least yearly. Maintain this data on the business directory portion of the Downtown Highland Park web site.
- Utilize the retail market analysis data provided regularly by Main Street New Jersey to provide advice to merchants and property owners about the changing demographics in Highland Park, and opportunities for business expansion.

Consumer and Stakeholder Survey

- Post the recently completed Consumer and Stakeholder Survey on the Downtown Highland Park's web site, and widely disseminate it to existing merchants. Work with them to alter their product mix to appeal to the current downtown shoppers as noted in this report.
- The Consumer and Stakeholder Survey noted that the vast majority (85%) of current shoppers live in Highland Park. Use this information to refine any advertising for Main

Street Highland Park, and make existing merchants aware of this information so they can adjust their media buys accordingly.

- Review existing marketing materials for business recruitment and retention purposes in the downtown. Create new materials as needed using data from the new survey.

Staffing

- An overwhelming percentage (96%) of survey respondents noted that Main Street Highland Park's primary organizational objective was to retain and recruit new businesses. In order to undertake that work, staff time must be significantly redirected away from event planning and execution towards to business recruitment and retention activities.
- The Board should review the Executive Director's job description to identify which events and activities can be jettisoned to free up time for assisting the Organization Team with fundraising and assisting the Economic Development team with business recruitment and retention tasks.

Create a venture fund

- There are several development opportunities downtown. The MSHP Board should consider creating a small fund to be used to purchase real estate options on key properties as they come on the market to assure that these buildings are rehabilitated for quality uses downtown. This fund could also be used for planning, engineering, or feasibility studies to ensure that key parcels or buildings become catalysts for downtown.

Educate and retain existing businesses

- Continue to regularly visit existing businesses to keep up to date with their concerns, hear about any possible business expansion plans, and to alert them to any Main Street Highland Park created business promotions and events. Make connections for business owners to service providers to help them be better business people.
- Encourage all new business owners to undertake a business plan. Help connect them to the local Small Business Development Center for assistance in developing quality business plans.
- Conduct additional workshops as needed with area merchants to help them use the survey information to expand their product lines or refocus their business to take advantage of downtown customer preferences.

- Produce a series of workshops or seminars for area business owners to help them improve their business skills. Work with the area Small Business Development Center to identify speakers after polling merchants about topics of interest.
- Work with the local Small Business Development Center to identify business owners who have prepared quality business plans who might be looking for a Highland Park location. Connect these business owners with business plans with landlords when vacancies occur.
- Provide undisputed facts to existing business owners about the benefits of staying open later and expanding hours on weekends. Help them understand that expanding and changing hours is a long term commitment and not a quick fix. Work closely with the Promotion Committee to create events that reinforce expanded hours, such as First Friday, encouraging retailers to be open at least until 7PM on those nights.
- Tell existing merchants about the survey results that clearly show that new places to eat and drink that are open later would be successful with current downtown shoppers. These consumers want shops that are open nights and weekends, on both Saturday and Sunday.
- Continue to feature individual businesses on the Facebook page and in the E-newsletter.

Recruit new complimentary businesses

- Since there are so few currently vacant storefronts, work with the property owners when a vacancy occurs. When a space does become available, recruit new businesses, especially restaurants to diversify the current restaurant niche.
- Target specific business types for recruitment from the Online Consumer and Stakeholder Survey completed in 2014 once a vacancy is identified.
- Strengthen relationships with property owners and area commercial real estate brokers that represent commercial properties in downtown. Use the recently completed Online Consumer and Stakeholder Survey to explain the businesses most desired here in Highland Park.
- Fill gaps in the current streetscape by working closely with property owners and the Highland Park Redevelopment Agency to build quality mixed-use buildings with retail on the first floor and housing above.
- The Economic Restructuring Team should partner with the Design Team on any discussions with the Redevelopment Agency, Planning and Zoning Boards, and Code Enforcement (as appropriate) on new construction infill in the district.

- Work with the Promotion Committee to energize vacant spaces in the downtown with popups shops, artist events, tables and chairs, or events to fill the gaps in the streetscape.
- Get to know area commercial real estate brokers and area Economic Development agencies to learn more about their impressions of the downtown real estate market in Highland Park. Invite them to speak to business and property owners on a regular basis.
- Work closely with the landlords to understand their motivations and offer assistance when a vacancy occurs.
- Continue to host welcome ceremonies and ribbon cuttings when new businesses open in downtown.
- Gather all the useful information about starting a business in Highland Park on the organization's web site and refer new business owners to this information. Make this information widely available, especially at the local small business development center and other county and regional economic development entities.
- Main Street Highland Park staff will assist the Economic Restructuring Team volunteers in making calls and visits to prospective tenants for underutilized spaces in downtown.

Monitor the district

- Continue to supply Main Street New Jersey with the district's Reinvestment Statistics as required and widely promote any successes in attracting new business, new investment, and new jobs in the downtown district. Consider offering an Annual Report and make these impressive statistics widely available.

Promotion Team

Strategic Goal: Make the downtown business district thrive by consolidating or transforming existing MSHP events and expand the footprint and hours of the much loved Farmers Market.

Expand team membership

- Work with the Team chair to identify skills needed for the committee and create job descriptions for specific jobs. Recruit, train, and orient new volunteers to their volunteer assignments. Help new volunteers identify a specific event/task they will execute.

Create work plans for all team projects

- Create work plans for all events so that the Board can track all events on a monthly basis. All event committees/teams should review the profit/loss for their event as soon as it is complete, and adjust the work plan for the event next year.

Collaborate with the Borough

- Create mutual expectations between MSHP and the Borough about downtown events sponsored by each entity. Jointly market any event to spread scarce advertising dollars, and document increased foot traffic downtown.

Expand the hours for the Farmer's Market

- Universally loved, the Highland Park Farmers Market was a favorite of Survey participants who wanted longer hours (until 7PM) or an additional market on the weekend. Work with market vendors for 2015 to meet customer expectations.

Review existing MSHP events

- Survey respondents were clear that filling vacancies and business recruitment, rather than event planning, should be the key activities of the organization. Staff time must be redirected away from event planning and implementation to free up time for business recruitment and retention.
- The following events were rated lowest (in descending order) by current downtown shoppers: Kwanza, Win the Window, Menorah Lighting, Earth Day, Winter Art Bazaar, National Night Out, Small Business Saturday/Tree lighting, downtown Halloween Party, and Autumn in the Park.

- Use the following criteria to eliminate any existing MSHP event that is not performing: The Promotion Team will use the following criteria for deciding which event(s) should be eliminated or placed with a partner organization.
 - Create metrics or performance measures for existing events to see how they support MSHP's mission including number of attendees and money spent at businesses because of event (direct economic impact).
 - The selected events should support MSHP's broader goals, such as creating events that help businesses to stay open later in the evening.
 - Service to Highland Park residents' quality of life.
 - What is the weighted average for each of these to see if they are still worth doing? Will the event help with directing money and staff time?
- Once all of the existing events have been reviewed using this criteria, decide which event(s) might be better off with a new partner organization. Approach the partner about taking on the event and provide files and support if they agree.
- Eliminate any other event that does not meet the above criteria and explain the rationale to volunteers who have worked on the event in the past.
- Conduct simple evaluations of each Main Street Highland Park-sponsored special event, to determine volunteer and attendee satisfaction.
- Coordinate with other downtown event sponsors to help them understand who shops in the downtown now and encourage them to make changes to their events to better target the primary customer demographics.

Expand existing events

- Scale up the already successful Art in the Park and Spring Street Fair events, so that they grow to be two day events.

Rethink vacant spaces for promotional activities

- Work with the Promotion Committee to energize vacant spaces in the downtown with popups shops, artist events, tables and chairs, or events to fill the gaps in the streetscape.

Market and advertise the downtown

- Review and revise the advertising and marketing efforts for all events and activities as needed.

- Continue the aggressive effort to collect email addresses and add these names to the e-blast list so that it continues to grow beyond the 5000 current names. Continue to send out regular e-blasts to this large and vibrant readership.
- Continue to invest in social media. Maintain an active presence on Facebook and Twitter. Considers adding other social media platforms as they become available.

Design Team

Strategic Goal: Coordinate with Borough officials on all Planning, Zoning, Redevelopment, and Code Enforcement issues. Add new incentives and public art programs to continue to beautify downtown.

Expand team membership

- Work with the Team chair to identify skills needed for the Team and create job descriptions for specific volunteer jobs. Recruit, train and orient new volunteers to their volunteer assignments. Help new volunteers identify a specific event/task they will execute from the Team's work plan.

Create work plans for all team projects

- Create work plans for all Design Team activities so that the Board can track them on a monthly basis. All event committees/teams should review the profit/loss for their event (if any) as soon as it is complete, and adjust the work plan for the activity next year.

Maintenance of streetscape and green spaces.

- Continue to maintain and beautify downtown through planting flowers, hanging baskets, banners, snow removal, and regularly clean the downtown sidewalks.

Cooperation with local government

- Create mutual expectations between MSHP and the Borough elected officials and departments about beautification, bike lanes, lighting, banners, and traffic speed along Raritan Avenue.
- Continue to monitor the downtown with respect to code enforcement. Continue to develop relationships with code enforcement personnel and elected officials to encourage them to enforce existing laws especially related to storefront signage to reinforce high quality design in our district. Supply information about code violations in the district as needed.
- The Design and Economic Restructuring teams will cooperate and fully support the Highland Park Redevelopment Authority to build a new four story environmentally friendly apartment building to fill one of the gaps in the streetscape downtown. The new building will add new retailers and residents to downtown.
- Continue to monitor any planning and zoning submissions as they relate to downtown and coordinate with the Planning and Zoning Boards as appropriate.

New capital projects

- Continue to budget, plan, and complete capital projects in the downtown on a yearly basis.
- Work closely with the private developer who will be responsible for repairs and enhancements to “the Wall” as you enter Highland Park.
- Work with the Borough to locate banners once installed on the new poles. When found, reinstall.
- Complete installation of the three remaining Welcome to Highland Park signs.
- Identify funding for new way finding signs or computer monitors to direct cars to parking lots, and pedestrians to shops and restaurants.
- Use some of the expanded BID funds to expand the existing matching grant program for façade improvements, arts programming, and select public improvements such as the gateway to New Brunswick.
- For all capital projects in downtowns, create an educational component for area residents.

Provide good design advice and develop incentives as needed

- Continue to provide good advice to any district property owner or business owner by becoming the “go-to” office for assistance with signage, façade, or exterior improvements by maintaining abundant materials including examples and vendors.
- Work with the Borough to institute a “2% for public art” program for downtown projects, and solicit artists worldwide through design competitions.

Adopted Strategic Plan for Main Street Highland Park Short, Medium and Long Term Goals 2015-2020

MSHP Board activities

Within six months

- Review work plans from all Teams, suggest changes and adopt them so Teams can begin work.
- **PRIORITY** Create a standing committee of the MSHP Board to coordinate the overall fundraising and revenue diversification efforts of the organization.
- **PRIORITY:** Identify sub-committee leadership who will to spearhead a residential membership/investor campaign this year. Contact with MSNJ to bring a trainer to help.
- **PRIORITY** Host an all team/Board work plan training session

Within one year

- Host Board training session, contact MSNJ to set a date.
- Host a Main Street 101 training as needed for Board and volunteers.
- Work with MSNJ on succession issues, identify training needs for potential officer candidates and get training.
- Discuss how eliminating events may impact the organizational budget and make revisions as needed to the 2015 adopted budget.
- Identify fundraising training needs for the Board and attend training.
- Review the Executive Director's job description and make changed based on this Strategic Plan.

Within two to three years

- Make progress towards expanding the BID

Within four or five years

- Apply for the Great American Main Street Award
- Raise 75K annually from residents and diverse revenue sources
- Expand the BID.

Organization Team

Within six months

- Identify skills needed, create volunteer job descriptions, recruit, train and orient new volunteers

- PRIORITY Create work plans for projects, submit to Board for review, revision, adoption. Committee chair to make reports monthly to Board on progress.
- Review existing earned revenue sources and determine if sponsorships or fees could be increased on some events.
- PRIORITY Develop simple volunteer job descriptions for specific volunteer tasks, recruit and orient.
- Continue communication efforts using traditional and new media

Within one year

- Develop a work plan for the effort to expand the existing BID.
- Review and update volunteer data base.
- Continue to host annual volunteer appreciation event yearly.
- Expand the volunteer pool through aggressive recruitment
- Evaluate marketing efforts annually.

Within two to three years

- Consider seeking Middlesex County grant support for downtown Highland Park projects.
- Make progress towards expanding the BID.
- Update the website, branding, and business recruitment materials as needed.

Within four or five years

- Conduct a successful campaign to expand the BID

Economic Restructuring Team

Within six months

- Expand the Economic Restructuring team.
- Identify skills needed for the Team, create volunteer job descriptions, recruit, train and orient new volunteers
- PRIORITY Create work plans for projects, submit to Board for review, revision, adoption. Committee chair to make reports monthly to Board on progress.
- Post the recently completed Consumer and Stakeholder Survey on the Downtown Highland Park's we site, and widely disseminate.
- Continue to visit district merchants to keep them up to date on MSHP activities.

Within one year

- Update the existing business inventory including first and second floor businesses in the district at least yearly.
- Utilize the retail market analysis data and provide advice to merchants and property owners about the changing demographics in Highland Park

- Work with merchants who wish to alter their product mix to appeal to the current downtown shoppers as noted in the survey report.
- Refine any MSHP advertising based on survey conclusion, and make existing merchants aware of this information.
- Discuss how to move staff time away from event planning and execution towards to business recruitment and retention activities.
- Conduct additional business workshops.
- Provide undisputed facts to existing business owners about the benefits of staying open later and expanding hours on weekends. Work with the Promotion Team to develop events to reinforce longer hours.
- Explain survey results about new dining opportunities.
- Continue to feature area businesses on Facebook page and e-newsletter.
- When a vacancy occurs, supply property owner with names of qualified tenants with business plans.
- Strengthen relationships with property owners and area commercial real estate brokers.
- Work with the Promotion Team to energize vacant spaces downtown.
- Work closely with the landlords to understand their motivations and offer assistance when a vacancy occurs.
- Continue to host welcome ceremonies and ribbon cuttings.
- Staff to assist the Economic Restructuring Team volunteers in making calls and visits to prospective tenants.
- Continue to supply Main Street New Jersey with the district's Reinvestment Statistics as required.

Within two to three years

- Review existing marketing materials for business recruitment and retention purposes in the downtown. Create new materials as needed using data from the new survey.
- Create a venture fund.
- Encourage all new business owners to undertake a business plan.
- Connect business owners with quality business plans with landlords that have vacant spaces.
- Target specific business types for recruitment from the survey when a vacancy occurs.
- Get to know area commercial real estate brokers and area Economic Development agencies.
- Gather all the useful information about starting a business in Highland Park on the organization's web site, and make referrals to local SBDC as needed.

Within four or five years

- Work closely with property owners and the Highland Park Redevelopment Agency to build quality mixed-use buildings.
- Partner with the Design Team on any discussions with the Redevelopment Agency, Planning and Zoning Boards, and Code Enforcement (as appropriate) on new construction infill in the district.

Promotion Team

Within six months

- Identify skills needed, create volunteer job descriptions, recruit, train and orient new volunteers
- PRIORITY Create work plans for projects, submit to Board for review, revision, adoption. Committee chair to make reports monthly to Board on progress.
- PRIORITY Expand the hours for the Farmer's Market.
- Determine how staff time should be redirected away from event planning and implementation to free up time for business recruitment and retention.

Within one year

- Create mutual expectations between MSHP and the Borough about downtown events sponsored, jointly market them.
- Conduct simple evaluations of each Main Street Highland Park-sponsored special events.
- Follow criteria to identify which events will be eliminated from annual calendar
- Place some events with partner organizations
- Scale up the already successful Art in the Park and Spring Street Fair events
- Work with the Promotion Team to energize vacant spaces in the downtown
- Review and revise the advertising and marketing efforts for all events and activities as needed.
- Continue the aggressive effort to collect email addresses.
- Continue to invest in social media efforts and expand.

Within two to three years

- Coordinate with other downtown event sponsors to help them understand who shops in the downtown.

Design Team

Within six months

- Identify skills needed, create volunteer job descriptions, recruit, train and orient new volunteers
- PRIORITY Create work plans for projects, submit to Board for review, revision, adoption. Committee chair to make reports monthly to Board on progress.

Within one year

- Continue to maintain and beautify downtown.

- Create mutual expectations with Borough elected officials and departments about beautification.
- Continue to monitor the downtown with respect to code enforcement, deepen relationships with officials and supply information as needed.
- Continue to monitor any planning and zoning submissions.
- Continue to budget, plan, and complete capital projects.
- Continue to provide good advice to any district property owner on design matters

Within two to three years

- Cooperate with other Teams and support the Highland Park Redevelopment Authority to build one or more mixed used buildings downtown.
- Work closely with the private developer on repairs to “the Wall.”
- Complete installation of the three remaining Welcome to Highland Park signs.
- Identify funding for new way finding signs for the district.

Within four to five years

- Use some of the expanded BID funds to expand the existing matching grant programs.
- For all capital projects in downtowns, create an educational component.
- Work with the Borough to institute a “2% for public art” program.

Credits

Donna Ann Harris wrote this 2015-2020 Strategic Plan for Main Street Highland Park.

Donna Ann Harris is the principal of Heritage Consulting Inc., a Philadelphia-based consulting firm that works nationwide in three practice areas: downtown and commercial district revitalization, historic preservation and nonprofit organizational development. Prior to starting her firm eleven years ago, Ms. Harris was state coordinator for the Illinois Main Street program for two years and the manager of the Illinois suburban Main Street program for f the years. During her tenure, Ms. Harris served 56 Illinois Main Street communities, led a staff of 12 and managed a budget of over a million dollars. Prior to her Main Street career, Ms. Harris spent 15 years as an executive director of three start-up and two mature preservation organizations, each with its own organizational and fundraising challenges.

Since starting her firm, Ms. Harris has worked with state, regional and local Main Street programs in 23 states. She has written six feature articles in the National Main Street Center's quarterly publication *Main Street Now*, and is a regular contributor to their *Main Street Week* blog. Ms. Harris has authored scholarly articles in the American Association for State and Local History's *History News* and the National Trust's *Forum Journal*. Ms. Harris's book *New Solutions for House Museums: Ensuring the Long Term Preservation of America's Historic Houses* was published by AltaMira Press in 2007. Ms. Harris is a Certified Main Street manager.

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