



Wilmington, IL Downtown Asset and Comparative Analysis

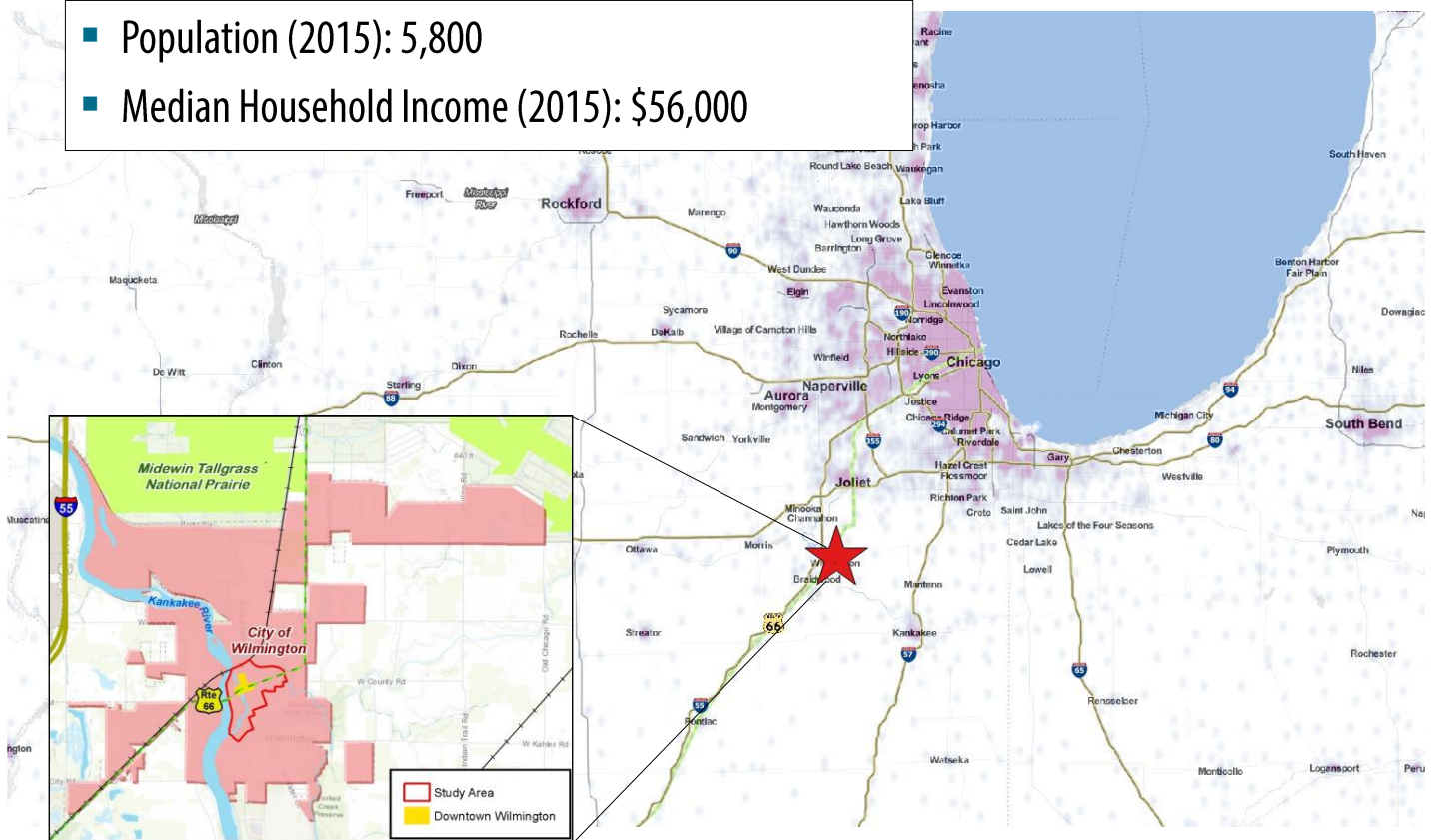
July 27, 2017

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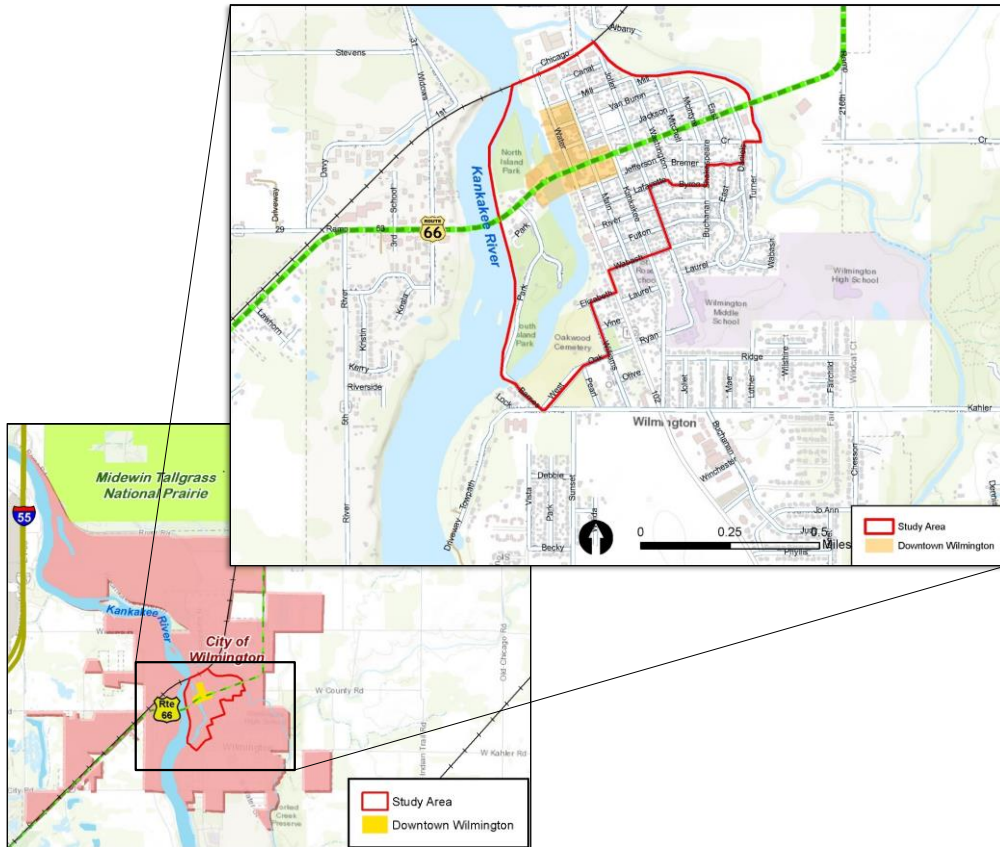
Wilmington, IL Overview

- Population (2015): 5,800
- Median Household Income (2015): \$56,000



Source: ESRI, US Census, SB Friedman

Downtown Wilmington Study Area



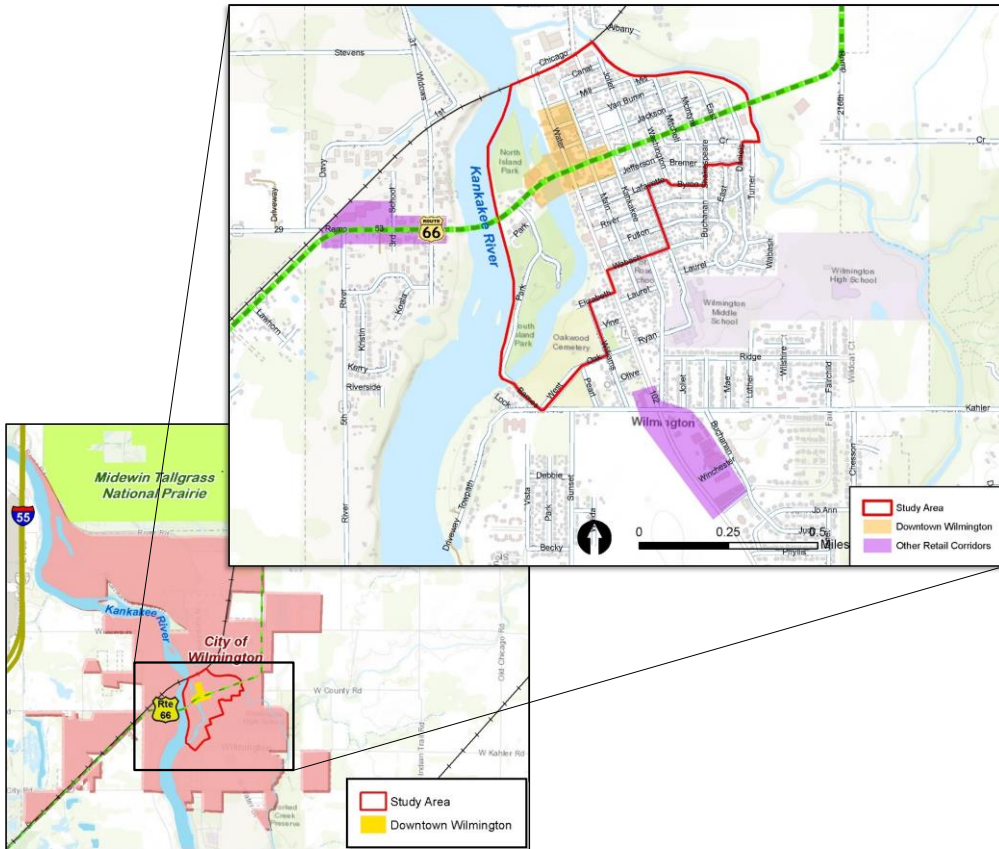
Source: ESRI, SB Friedman

Wilmington Locational Strengths

- Proximity to Midewin Tallgrass National Prairie
- Kankakee River runs alongside downtown business corridor and adjacent Island Park
- Downtown intersected by Historic Route 66

Within the greater downtown study area for this report, defined by the red boundary above, a narrower “downtown core” was determined for the purposes of analysis and comparison with similar retail areas. That area, defined on the above map in orange, is the area of downtown Wilmington with the highest concentration of businesses. It is generally centered around the Water Street / Baltimore Street intersection, and includes the main business clusters immediately north, east and west of that intersection.

Three Major Business Corridors



Source: ESRI, SB Friedman

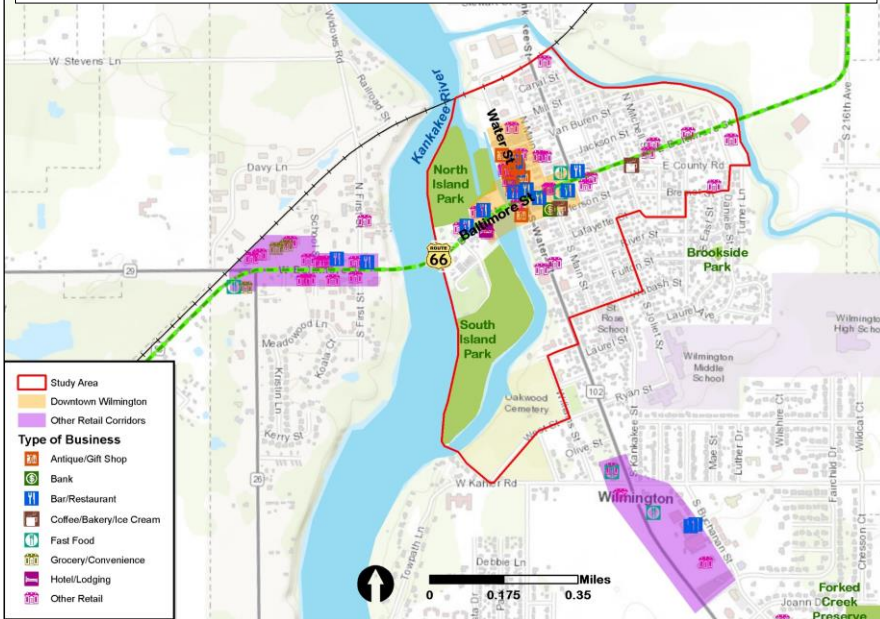
Business Corridors

- **Downtown Corridor:** Clustered along two blocks of Water Street, north of intersection with Route 66/Baltimore Street
- **Western Retail Corridor:** Half-mile west of downtown along Route 66/Baltimore Street
- **Southern Retail Corridor:** Half-mile south of downtown on Route 102/Water Street

There are three main business clusters in Wilmington – a Western retail corridor, Southern retail corridor and Downtown. The two non-Downtown retail corridors feature larger stores and more convenient parking options. The Downtown retail corridor mainly consists of smaller boutique shops.

Wilmington Overall Business Mix

- Downtown business mix has high concentration of tourist-focused retail but lacks sufficient draw for residents
- Western and southern retail corridors have a more resident-focused business mix with higher numbers of service and grocery businesses, allowing residents to avoid downtown for basic needs



Source: ESRI, Reference USA, SB Friedman

Wilmington Business Mix Comparison

(# of Businesses per 1,000 residents)

Western/Southern Retail Corridors (Orange) Downtown Wilmington (Purple)

Entertainment 0.2

Organization/Association 0.2

Food & Liquor 1.4

Institution 0.2
0.7

Professional Services 2.1
0.5

Personal Services 2.9
0.9

Retail Shop 2.1
2.6

Eating and Drinking 1.2
1.7

The business mix of Wilmington's outlying retail corridors is better suited to residents than its downtown core. The abundance of antique shops but relative lack of services and practical retail causes it to be mainly used for tourist purposes. A more vibrant downtown with a wider array of retail, restaurant, service and institutional uses would appeal to both resident and tourist visitors. Wilmington's business mix is analyzed in further detail on pages 17 and 18 of this report.

Hidden Downtown Activity Generators

- Main downtown activity generators for residents are either outside the downtown core or along its perimeter.
- Wilmington's strongest resident activity generators—the park district building, Mar Theatre and the library – are not obvious from the main roads. Better visibility of these assets would help bring visitors to downtown.

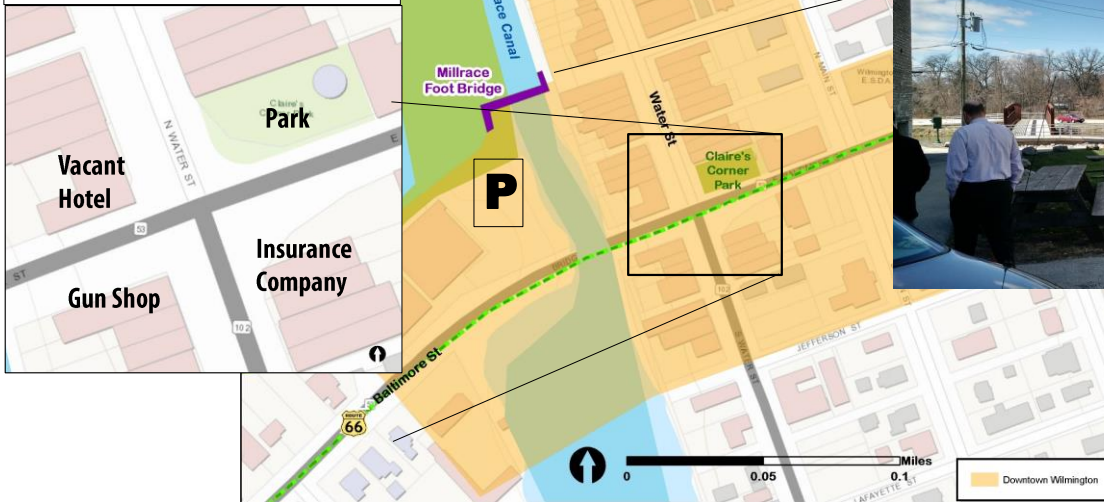


There are activity generators for both residents and tourists in and around downtown but their impact is diminished by an understated presence. The Visitor Center, for example, is located inside the park district building and would be difficult to find for a downtown visitor that did not already know it was there. Another key downtown asset, the Mar Theatre, has a similar visibility issue – without the benefit of signage or a location on the main road, a passerby could easily miss this attraction. Clear and visible signage would be one way help to showcase existing downtown attractions. A centrally located, new development downtown would also be highly effective in creating activity in the downtown core.

Underutilization of Major Downtown Assets

Three of the four uses at downtown's main intersection could be improved upon to create a more inviting atmosphere for all who pass through. Well-kept storefronts that complement the existing, inviting park would provide greater appeal.

Footbridge from parking lot brings people to downtown, but the non-descript downtown side could be made more lively. Additionally, opening businesses to the riverfront would greatly enhance the asset's worth.



Source: ESRI, Reference USA, SB Friedman

The two main entry points to the Water Street business corridor – the intersection of Baltimore Street and Water Street and the parklet on the eastern end of the Millrace footbridge – could be improved upon to better create a sense of place in Wilmington's downtown. The vacant hotel on the northwest corner of the Baltimore Street/Water Street intersection is one of the most visible sites in downtown Wilmington. Rehabilitation of the property and finding suitable tenants would help to cultivate a greater sense of place there. Similarly, having businesses open up to the millrace that runs behind Water Street and improving upon the downtown parklet entrance from the footbridge would provide a much more inviting atmosphere for those entering downtown via the footbridge.

Challenges to Development



- Downtown business mix caters more to tourist crowd than residents



- Downtown lacks a truly catalytic activity generator; existing activity generators are located outside of the downtown core



- Businesses face away from the riverfront, decreasing the river's value as an asset



- The most prominent building at the entrance to the downtown business district – the former Eagle Hotel – is vacant and deteriorated

It is *SB Friedman's* understanding that parking downtown is an issue for many Wilmington residents. This issue was not evaluated as part of this report, though it appears as though better wayfinding signage and promotion of the two existing downtown parking lots would help to improve the issue.

Downtown Wilmington has a good structure for becoming more well-visited and an active downtown, but is limited by several factors that affect its ability to reach that goal:

- The tourist-focused downtown business mix allows residents to travel to Wilmington's other business corridors for their services
- Its activity generators are not clearly visible from the main road
- Main access points to downtown are underutilized as assets that could help contribute to a greater sense of place

Improvements to the business mix, activity generator visibility and main entry points would improve the vitality of the area.

Examples from Comparable Cities



Examples from Comparable Cities



Source: SB Friedman and US Census
Population and Median Household Income figures are 2015 figures

Choosing Comparable Cities

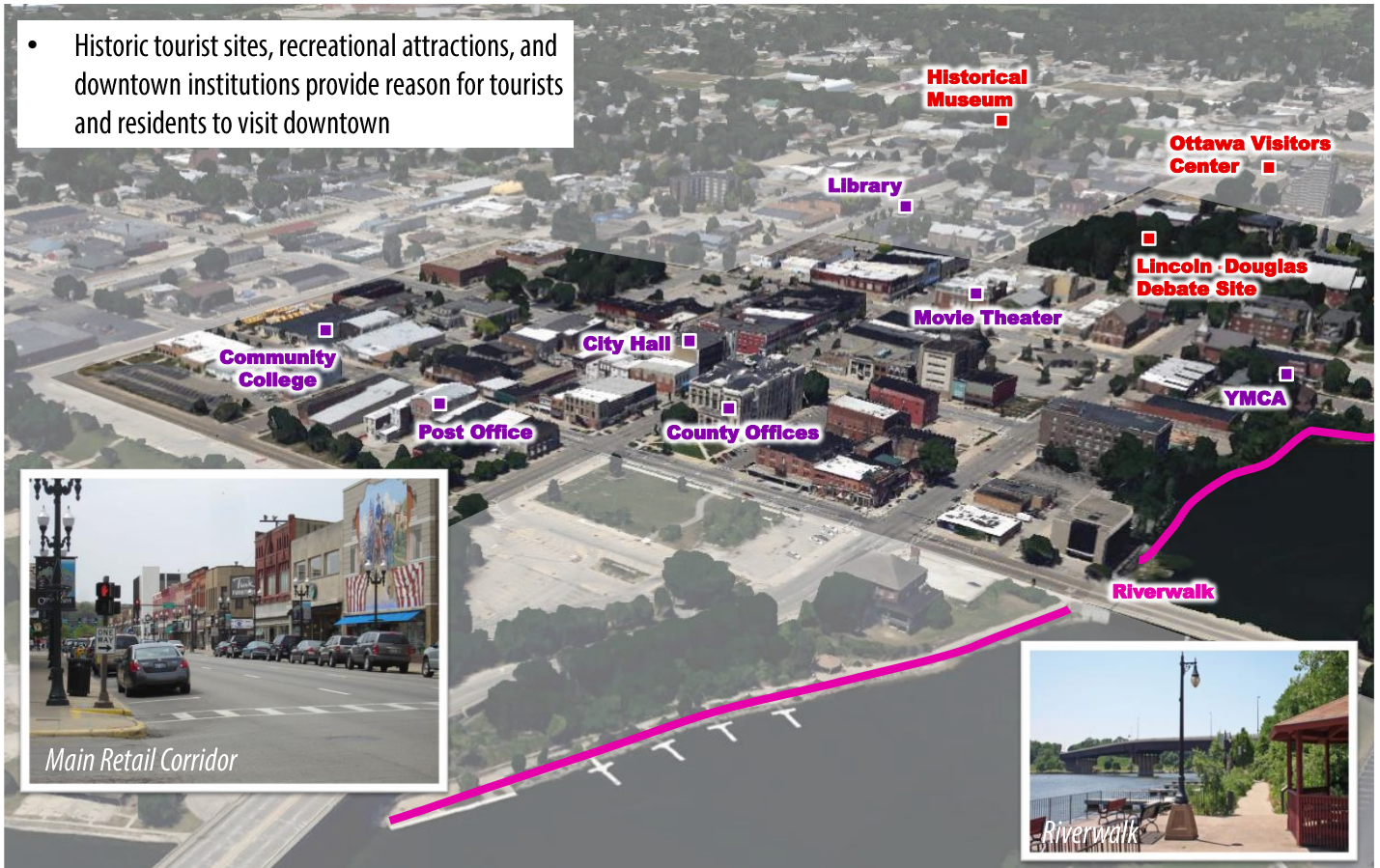
Cities Considered	Population (2015)	Median Household Income (2015)	Downtown Attributes	Reason chosen
<i>Wilmington, IL</i>	<i>5,800</i>	<i>\$57,900</i>		
Ottawa, IL	18,600	\$46,500	Diverse business mix; Riverwalk; Municipal offices	Diversity of uses downtown that appeals to both residents and tourists
Dixon, IL	15,200	\$48,000	County seat; Municipal/County offices; Riverwalk; Illinois Main Street	
Sterling, IL	15,200	\$39,700	Illinois Main Street	
St. Joseph, MI	8,300	\$55,000	Diverse business mix; Historic attractions	
Princeton, IL	7,700	\$44,700	Downtown recreational center; Canal access	
Metropolis, IL	6,400	\$31,900	Home of Superman; Museums; Restaurants and boutique retail	
Prairie du Chien, WI	5,800	\$37,900	Access to Mississippi River	
Genoa, IL	5,200	\$53,600	Illinois Main Street	
LeClaire, IA	3,900	\$77,100	Tourist attractions; Boutique restaurants and retail	Well-integrated downtown
Galena, IL	3,300	\$48,500	Historic architecture; Museums	
Galena, KS	3,000	\$38,100	Route 66 Main Street	Example of capitalizing on Route 66 assets
New Hope, PA	2,500	\$74,200	River connection; Diverse business mix	Aspirational; Utilization of assets

Source: SB Friedman, US Census

Four comparable cities were chosen out of a list of 12 with similar attributes. The comparable set was ultimately chosen based on cities with either similar populations, median household incomes or assets comparable to Wilmington. The cities were also evaluated based on whether or not they had qualities that Wilmington could aspire to achieve.

Comprehensive Downtown Network: Ottawa, IL

- Historic tourist sites, recreational attractions, and downtown institutions provide reason for tourists and residents to visit downtown



Ottawa's institutions are all clustered in or near its downtown core. The main institutions for residents – City Hall, County Offices and the Post Office – are located within a 1-block radius at the center of town. Tourist attractions are located towards the north end of downtown. The attractions are complemented by a diverse business mix and a Riverwalk amenity along the Illinois River on the east side of downtown. Taken together, the city presents an example of how a city can capitalize on its assets to form a well-integrated downtown with a diverse range of activity.

Well-Located Downtown Attractions: LeClaire, IA

- Museums and riverfront attractions connected to downtown core, creating an integrated activity area that allows for a thriving downtown



In order to get to the main attractions in LeClaire along the Mississippi River, visitors need to pass through the downtown business district, which helps to generate downtown activity. These attractions are centrally-located activity generators that force visitors to encounter other businesses and downtown offerings to reach them, creating a positive impact on the surrounding area. The incentive for visitors to stop and patronize downtown businesses is greatly increased when they do not have to go out of their way.

Capitalizing on Assets: New Hope, PA



New Hope is mainly a tourist destination for the New York City and Philadelphia metropolitan population. It has a population of only 2,500 but is able to support numerous businesses along its downtown corridor. Two enhancements that help New Hope to capitalize on its assets are:

1. That it provides several options for riverside dining, and
2. That its main intersection provides an appealing entry point into the downtown core.

New Hope is able to utilize these assets to better create a sense of place in its downtown.

Showcasing Route 66: Galena, KS



Galena brings tourists traveling via Route 66 into its downtown by utilizing two assets that make its status as a destination along the route clear for passers-by. For visitors arriving from the west, the gateway mural located at its central intersection is an easy-to-see marker that helps establish Galena's sense of place. For visitors arriving from the north, an old gas station that was renovated into a small restaurant and gift shop is an identifiable Route 66 destination – one of the trucks that sits in its parking lot was the basis for a character in the Disney-Pixar Route 66 movie *Cars*.

Business Mix Comparison

(Number of establishments per 1,000 residents)

DOWNTOWNS / RETAIL CORRIDORS						
	Wilmington Downtown	LeClaire, IA	New Hope, PA	Galena, KS	Ottawa, IL	Wilmington Other Corridors
Eating and Drinking	1.7	3.1	12.8	2.0	1.3	1.2
<i>Restaurant</i>	<i>0.5</i>	<i>1.3</i>	<i>8.4</i>	<i>1.0</i>	<i>0.6</i>	<i>0.3</i>
<i>Bar</i>	<i>0.5</i>	<i>1.0</i>	<i>1.2</i>	<i>0.0</i>	<i>0.3</i>	<i>0.2</i>
<i>Fast Food</i>	<i>0.5</i>	<i>0.0</i>	<i>0.4</i>	<i>0.3</i>	<i>0.3</i>	<i>0.7</i>
<i>Coffee/Bakery/Ice Cream</i>	<i>0.2</i>	<i>0.8</i>	<i>2.8</i>	<i>0.7</i>	<i>0.2</i>	<i>0.0</i>
Retail Shop	2.6	2.8	30.0	1.7	2.6	2.1
<i>Antiques/Gifts</i>	<i>1.4</i>	<i>1.5</i>	<i>6.4</i>	<i>0.0</i>	<i>0.1</i>	<i>0.0</i>
<i>Art</i>	<i>0.0</i>	<i>0.3</i>	<i>4.8</i>	<i>0.0</i>	<i>0.1</i>	<i>0.0</i>
<i>Houseware/Garden/Electronics</i>	<i>0.3</i>	<i>0.3</i>	<i>1.2</i>	<i>1.0</i>	<i>0.4</i>	<i>0.7</i>
<i>Clothing/Shoes/Jewelry</i>	<i>0.3</i>	<i>0.3</i>	<i>9.6</i>	<i>0.0</i>	<i>0.5</i>	<i>0.2</i>
<i>Other</i>	<i>0.5</i>	<i>0.5</i>	<i>8.0</i>	<i>0.7</i>	<i>1.6</i>	<i>1.2</i>
Personal Services	0.9	0.0	7.6	1.0	2.4	2.9
Professional Services	0.5	1.5	9.6	2.3	2.7	2.1
Institution	0.7	1.3	2.0	2.7	0.6	0.2
Food & Liquor	0.0	1.0	2.8	0.7	0.3	1.4
Organization/Association	0.2	0.0	0.4	0.7	0.7	0.0
Entertainment	0.2	0.0	1.2	0.0	0.2	0.0
TOTAL	6.7	9.7	66.4	11.0	10.8	9.8

Source: SB Friedman, ReferenceUSA

Business Mix Comparison

(Number of establishments per 1,000 residents)

		DOWNTOWNS / RETAIL CORRIDORS					
		Wilmington Downtown	LeClaire, IA	New Hope, PA	Galena, KS	Ottawa, IL	Wilmington Other Corridors
BUSINESS TYPES	Eating and Drinking	1.7	3.1	12.8	2.0	1.3	1.2
	<i>Restaurant</i>	<i>0.5</i>	<i>1.3</i>	<i>8.4</i>	<i>1.0</i>	<i>0.6</i>	<i>0.3</i>
	<i>Bar</i>	<i>0.5</i>	<i>1.0</i>	<i>1.2</i>	<i>0.0</i>	<i>0.3</i>	<i>0.2</i>
	<i>Fast Food</i>	<i>0.5</i>	<i>0.0</i>	<i>0.4</i>	<i>0.3</i>	<i>0.3</i>	<i>0.7</i>
	<i>Coffee/Bakery/Ice Cream</i>	<i>0.2</i>	<i>0.8</i>	<i>2.8</i>	<i>0.7</i>	<i>0.2</i>	<i>0.0</i>
	Retail Shop	2.6	2.8	30.0	1.7	2.6	2.1
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	<i>Clothing/Shoes/Jewelry</i>	<i>0.3</i>	<i>0.3</i>	<i>9.6</i>	<i>0.0</i>	<i>0.5</i>	<i>0.2</i>
	<i>Other</i>	<i>0.5</i>	<i>0.5</i>	<i>8.0</i>	<i>0.7</i>	<i>1.6</i>	<i>1.2</i>
	Personal Services	0.9	0.0	7.6	1.0	2.4	2.9
	Professional Services	0.5	1.5	9.6	2.3	2.7	2.1
	Institution	0.7	1.3	2.0	2.7	0.6	0.2
	Food & Liquor	0.0	1.0	2.8	0.7	0.3	1.4
	Organization/Association	0.2	0.0	0.4	0.7	0.7	0.0
	Entertainment	0.2	0.0	1.2	0.0	0.2	0.0
	TOTAL		6.7	9.7	66.4	11.0	10.8

Wilmington UNDER-represented business category

Wilmington OVER-represented business category

Source: SB Friedman, ReferenceUSA

Relative to the other retail corridors analyzed in this report, Wilmington is underrepresented in the Restaurants, Coffee Shops, Art Stores, Personal and Professional Services, and Food & Liquor business categories in its downtown core while it is overrepresented in the Antique & Gift store category. The comparison is indicative of downtown Wilmington's status as a tourist-centric downtown – business corridors with higher percentages of service-oriented and typical retail stores serve a greater variety of both resident and tourist customers. Wilmington may want to consider tools to bring more service-oriented business to its downtown in order to provide a greater appeal for residents. Downtowns that cater to both tourists and residents typically see greater levels of activity than those that only cater to one category.

Downtown Institution Comparison

		DOWNTOWNS				
		Wilmington	LeClaire, IA	New Hope, PA	Galena, KS	Ottawa, IL
BUSINESS TYPES	City Hall		✓	*	✓	✓
	Fire Department	✓			✓	*
	Police Department			*	✓	*
	Community/Recreational Center	✓				✓
	Library	*	✓	*	✓	*
	Post Office	✓	✓		✓	✓
	Other Govt. Offices					✓
	Museum/Historic Attractions	*	✓	✓	✓	*
	Visitor & Welcome Center	✓ (inside Park District Building)	✓	✓		✓
	Theaters	✓		✓		
	Churches	*	✓		✓	✓
	Educational Institutions					✓

* Institution is located nearby, but not in, downtown core

Source: SB Friedman, ReferenceUSA

Downtown Institution Comparison

		DOWNTOWNS				
		Wilmington	LeClaire, IA	New Hope, PA	Galena, KS	Ottawa, IL
BUSINESS TYPES	City Hall		✓	*	✓	✓
	Fire Department	✓			✓	*
	Police Department			*	✓	*
	Community/Recreational Center	✓				✓
	Library	*	✓	*	✓	*
	Post Office	✓	✓		✓	✓
	Other Govt. Offices					✓
	Museum/Historic Attractions	*	✓	✓	✓	*
	Visitor & Welcome Center	✓ (inside Park District Building)	✓	✓		✓
	Theaters	✓		✓		
	Churches	*	✓		✓	✓
	Educational Institutions					✓

* Institution is located nearby, but not in, downtown core

Source: SB Friedman, ReferenceUSA

Wilmington UNDER-represented institutions

Compared to other cities included in this analysis, Wilmington is missing key elements from its institutional inventory that would create greater levels of activity in its downtown core. The location of City Hall in Wilmington’s southern corridor and the library outside of downtown is a drawback for downtown activity generation. For tourists, Wilmington does have a Visitor and Welcome Center, but it is located inside the park district building and would be difficult to find for tourists who did not already know it was there. Other towns studied in this report have visible, stand-alone visitor centers that help to bring tourists into town. Additionally, of the cities in this report, Wilmington is the only one without a museum or main historic attraction in the downtown core. The Gemini Giant, one of Wilmington’s main tourist attractions, is located a half mile east of downtown along Route 66.

Takeaways for Downtown Wilmington

- Successful downtowns appeal to both resident and tourist visitors. Wilmington should aspire to be a place for both through downtown place-making strategies that help capitalize on its existing assets and create new activity.
- Potential Wilmington place-making strategies:
 - ▶ Diversify downtown business mix by attracting service-oriented and resident-focused businesses.
 - ▶ Create gateway and/or wayfinding signage schemes that clearly signal to visitors that they have arrived at a destination. Make it clear where existing activity generators are and consider moving activity generators to more central locations. Identify and explore opportunities to accommodate institutional activity generators in the downtown core.
 - ▶ Increase the attractiveness of the Water Street/Baltimore Street intersection. Redevelop/restore vacant hotel property on northwest corner. Identify other existing downtown properties suitable for redevelopment.
 - ▶ Enhance use of the riverfront. Create a more attractive walkway along the Kankakee River millrace behind Water Street. Make footbridge entrance to downtown more welcoming.

Strategy Implementation

Diversify downtown business mix

- Engage existing and potential business owners in the general retail, restaurant and service-oriented sectors in discussions about downtown corridor to gauge interest
- Assess downtown property inventory to understand available properties for business attraction
- Identify and establish funding tools (e.g. Business District and Tax Increment Financing) that could be used to help grow the downtown business community
- Establish funding programs (e.g. façade improvement grants, loan programs, tax abatements) to attract private investment, downtown programming of events and infrastructure investments

Develop institutional activity generators downtown

- Identify available, appropriate sites in downtown core
- Explore models that include private investment (e.g. commercial development) with public institutions and services
- Develop program and conceptual plan for desired institutional activity generators
- Identify and establish financing tools to help bring institutions to downtown opportunity sites (GO bond, revenue from private development etc.)

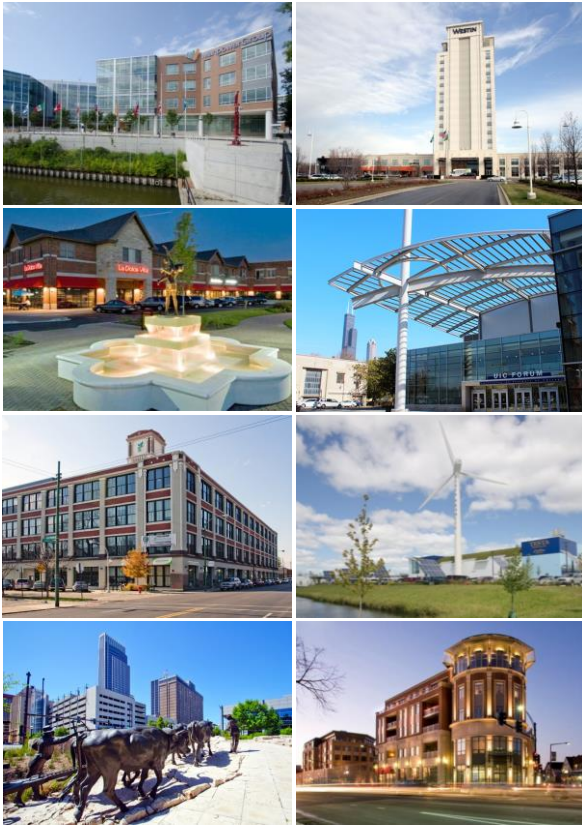
Strategy Implementation

Renovate and restore existing developments

- Identify priority properties for revitalization based on historical significance and visual impact in the downtown
- Prepare an MOU with property owners
- Conduct outreach to local restaurateurs, retailers and professional service business to secure anchor tenants that are more resident-focused
- Assess opportunity for use of historic tax credits to rehab the properties
- Identify and establish other appropriate financing tools as needed (TIF, BD)
- Reach out to development community to execute the project(s)

Enhance use of the riverfront

- Develop conceptual plans for use of riverfront and enhancements to riverfront access points that include outdoor seating, public easements and addresses service/garbage removal
- Obtain buy-in from property owners regarding use of the riverfront and securing public easements
- Establish regulatory framework that requires public easements on riverfront (according to plan) along with any new development or substantial rehab on riverfront properties
- Assess funding opportunities for creation of riverwalk and other related improvements (TIF, state and federal grants)
- Identify and establish financing tools for implementation and maintenance of riverwalk



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