

NORRISTOWN, PA

Downtown Retail Strategy

January 2017



NORRISTOWN—DOWNTOWN RETAIL STRATEGY

developed by Downtown Works, LLC

January 2017

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About Downtown Works

Consulting firm Downtown Works conducts retail market analyses, creates strategies, and develops merchandise mix plans for commercial districts, both large and small, and for individual developments. Our team guides clients in the launch of recruitment programs and ensures their successful implementation. We have created strategies for organizations, developers, and universities in cities across the U.S.; representative clients include the Downtown Seattle Association, the Nashville Downtown Partnership, the University of Washington, the Iowa City Downtown District, and developer Urban Villages.

Downtown Works was founded by Midge McCauley, who has been at the forefront of the urban retail industry since her days working with legendary retail developer and real estate visionary Jim Rouse. Among other appointments, McCauley has served on the Board of the International Downtown Association (IDA) and of the Woodrow Wilson House presidential museum. She is an active member of the Urban Land Institute (ULI) and its Urban Revitalization Council.

www.dtownworks.com

NORRISTOWN—DOWNTOWN RETAIL STRATEGY

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INTRODUCTION

Visit commercial districts large and small across the U.S., and you will find a good deal of variation in the health of retail. Competition for consumer dollars is fierce; today more than ever, districts and operators must offer a unique, high-quality experience to gain customer attention and loyalty.

Thriving districts tend to be marked by a mix of quality daytime and nighttime operators, with a strong emphasis on locals and regionals. Numerous factors in the enabling environment—streetscaping, building quality, access, parking—help set the stage for attracting and retaining this type of mix (see sidebar below, “Retail Guiding Principles”). Places that lack a vibrant retail scene do so for a variety of reasons, and in most cases for more than one reason; these can include population decline, poorly designed buildings, low maintenance standards, and operators that have not evolved their businesses to stay relevant as consumer tastes and habits change.

In the Fall of 2016, team members from retail consultancy Downtown Works were engaged by the Municipality of Norristown for a retail study to assess Downtown Norristown through the lens of retail, analyze the demographics and psychographics of its trade area, and provide recommendations for enhancing the experience it offers. Our assessment and recommendations follow.

Retail Guiding Principles

Successful urban shopping/dining districts tend to be marked by a significant number of the following attributes:

- Retail is contiguous—not broken up by other uses (i.e., professional offices, parking structures, expansive office lobbies) or blank walls.
- Service uses are located on side streets, not on prime shopping/dining streets.
- The mix of uses balances daytime and nighttime operations.
- The mix of operators is weighted in favor of unique, local/independent operators.
- Streets are not wide (no more than two lanes of traffic each way), with storefronts along both sides, and they are not blocked off to vehicles—stores do best when they are visible to both pedestrians and those traveling past in vehicles.
- Ample parking is accessible on-street and in nearby lots/garages. On-street parking spaces are parallel, not angled.
- Access to the area includes transit options, but transit lines do not run on primary retail street(s). Pedestrians are kept on the street, not taken off of it via elements such as sky bridges or underground tunnels.
- Streets and sidewalks are well-cared for—they are free of trash and debris, and kept clean with frequent power-washing (women in particular are especially sensitive to cleanliness, and if they won't use an area few will).
- Streets/sidewalks are well-lit.
- Streetscaping elements—street furniture, trees, plants and flowers—help create an inviting pedestrian experience without blocking storefronts and signage.
- Buildings are human-scaled with lots of transparency at the street level.
- Storefronts are well-branded, signed and maintained.

DOWNTOWN ASSESSMENT

DOWNTOWN ASSESSMENT

STRENGTHS

Enabling Environment

- Norristown is an **authentic** downtown, not contrived; its **bones and scale are good for retail**.
- **Location is a plus**, many go past it or through it en route to work, etc. It has a SEPTA commuter rail line to Center City, and is proximate to a confluence of major highways.
- Parking is plentiful.
- There are **opportunities** for catalytic **mixed-use development** along Main Street.
- The planing of the new justice center is bringing momentum/attention to downtown Norristown.
- The **residential** surrounding downtown is largely **well-kept**.



These two storefronts on Main Street are examples of attractive retail spaces in Downtown Norristown.

Operations

- There are a **small handful of quality operators** in Downtown Norristown.

People

- Several **landlords and business operators** seem to be very **committed** to Norristown.
- **Municipality leadership** and many in the **community** are very **engaged**.



Norristown's scale and bones are good for retail, as evidenced by building stock along Main and Dekalb.



Longtime operator August Moon and newer ones Banh Mi Bar & Bistro and Five Saints Distillery find Downtown Norristown good for business. Five Saints will soon be adding a full-service restaurant to its operation.



CHALLENGES

Buildings

- There is a **lack of retail continuity** due to uses/structures—such as the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) building and adjacent parking garage—that result in **dead zones**.
- Some of the **building product** along Main Street consists of **suburban-style strip malls with parking fronting the street**; this is **inappropriate** for a downtown/main street setting as it **breaks up the continuity of retail** along the street-face.
- In numerous cases **buildings** are in a **state of disrepair**; these conditions are a **major impediment** to getting quality operators **to locate** in Downtown Norristown.

Operations

- There are too many **inappropriate uses** (i.e., professional offices, services) along Downtown Norristown’s primary commercial corridor; many of these would be optimally located on side streets rather than on Main.
- With a handful of exceptions, the **branding** of operations is **sub-par**, neither eye-catching nor visually enticing. Many operations are **tired** in appearance and **in need of a facelift**.
- There are some stretches with numerous vacant spaces in a state of disrepair.

“Curb appeal” can account for nearly two-thirds of first-time sales at shops and restaurants.

Other

- There seems to be uncertainty of the completion date and no visible marketing of the condos at Courthouse Square.

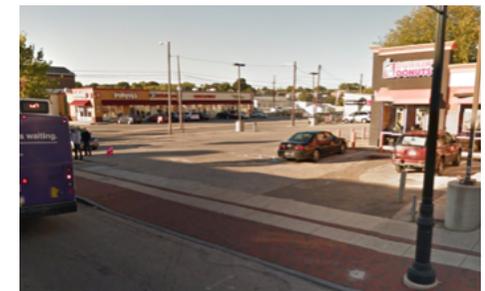
See the Recommendations section (pages xx-xx) for means of addressing the challenges noted above.



The building housing the DEP and the adjacent parking garage break up the continuity of retail space along Main Street.



The building product on Main at Barbadoes consists of low buildings with parking lots fronting the streets. Downtowns should have buildings that front streets to preserve the continuity of retail and provide an experience that encourages pedestrian activity.



STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

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Property owners, developers, brokers, municipality officials, business operators, residents—all have a stake in a city. Our team interviewed nearly twenty stakeholders to learn their perspectives on Downtown Norristown and to better understand the city’s background, outlook, assets, and challenges. Overall, the stakeholders **see the promise in Downtown Norristown.**

Common Threads

Competitive Edge

- **Location** and **access** are tremendous assets.
- The **Zoo** is a **great asset**, it draws lots of visitors. Likewise, the **theaters** are assets and are well-regarded.
- Norristown needs to be set apart from other communities; **don’t turn it over to nationals.**
- **King of Prussia** is filled with all the stores people want.

“I know this town could be turned around.”

-stakeholder interviewee

Enabling Environment

- **Storefronts really need to be addressed**, they are in need of a facelift.
- **Parking is plentiful and affordable**
- Today, the **focus** should be on **downtown, not the river**, but better **connection** to the river should be made.

Opportunity

- Opportunities exist with the lot at Main and DeKalb Streets.
- Are **not confident** that **existing landlords** have the **ability** or **inclination** to make the **proper investments** that will make downtown better.
- The **redevelopment** of the **Justice Center** is an important opportunity to **improve** the **pedestrian experience** in downtown.
- **Something should be done with the former jail** on Airy Street; it could be a draw if a developer with success in creative reuse got involved.
- Norristown needs **more residential units right in downtown**; there should be a push for market-rate residential above storefronts and with in-fill development.

Other

- The current **municipality’s leadership** has **great intentions** for downtown, and they make themselves **accessible** to the community.
- A **lack of safety** is more perception than fact.

“I’ve never felt unsafe in Norristown.”

-stakeholder interviewee

CONTEXT

CONTEXT—NORRISTOWN *VIS-À-VIS* OTHER AREA RETAIL

Our team visited numerous surrounding communities and developments to understand Norristown’s context and competition. We consider Norristown to be most akin to its sister riverfront former-mill towns—Manayunk, Conshohocken and Phoenixville. These towns were thriving centers of commerce, but after the mills closed the main streets suffered. Over time, each of these lost its manufacturing base adjacent to the Schuylkill River. Today, these towns are embracing (or attempting to embrace) their proximity to the waterfront.

In each case, the commercial district of Norristown, Manayunk, Conshohocken and Phoenixville is close to but not fronting the waterfront, and market-rate residential has been built in or very close to the commercial core. For these towns, the success of their commercial corridors was kick-started with redevelopment of buildings and the introduction of buzz-worthy restaurants.

Norristown has lagged behind in both the creation of downtown market-rate residential and in commercial redevelopment. Today, the municipality is poised to change that dynamic. The city’s proximity to the behemoth King of Prussia Mall should be considered an asset, not a liability, as people come from all over to shop there. If Norristown develops a unique and compelling dining and shopping environment, a portion of these same visitors would patronize it. Even more importantly, Norristown sits at the center of a dense population that is inclined to seek out unique shopping and dining experiences. With a commuter rail station in the heart of downtown, Norristown is highly accessible, and the coming turnpike slip ramp will make it even more so. Conditions are ripe to attract investors and developers with a sensitivity to the history of the community and a portfolio of successful small to mid- size redevelopment projects.

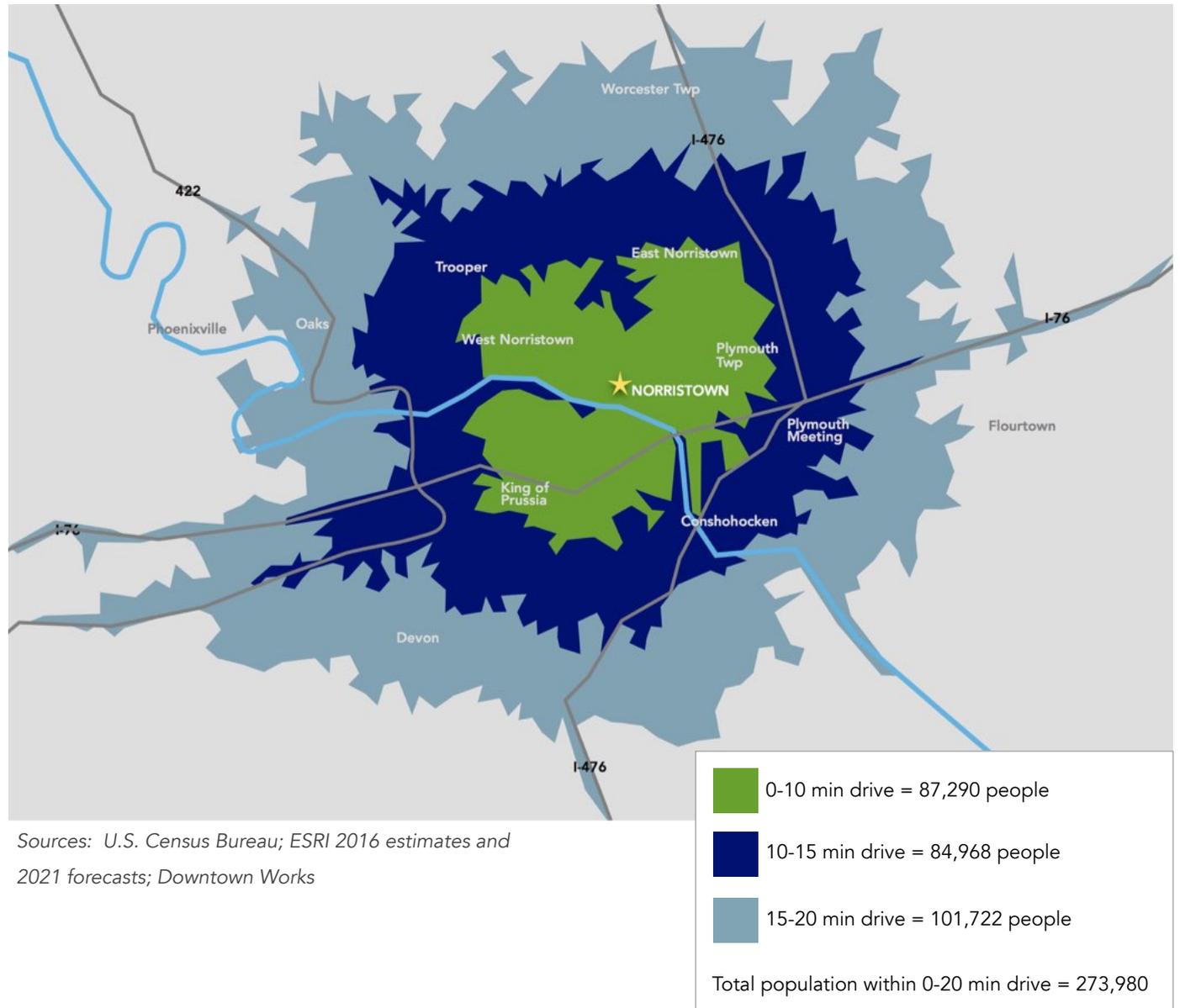


TRADE AREA

Trade Area Population

The total population residing within a 20-minute drive of Downtown Norristown is 273,980.

- 87,290 people within a 0-10 minute drive
- 84,968 people within a 10-15 minute drive
- 101,722 people within a 15-20 minute drive



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau; ESRI 2016 estimates and 2021 forecasts; Downtown Works

Demographics: Residents within a 20-minute drive of Downtown Norristown

	0-10 min drive	10-15 min drive	15-20 min drive	Total pop.
2016 est. population	87,290	84,968	101,722	273,980
<i>2021 est. population</i>	88,633	87,382	104,255	280,270
2016 households (hh)	34,220	33,976	37,182	
2016 avg hh size	2.50	2.40	2.51	
2016 est. avg hh annual income	\$78,246	\$125,439	\$157,667	
2016 est. annual hh income:				
<\$15,000	10.4%	4.6%	5.1%	
\$15-34.9	18.4%	10.9%	8.9%	
\$35-49.9	13.2%	8.8%	6.8%	
\$50-74.9	18.2%	15.4%	11.3%	
\$75-99.9	13.6%	14.0%	11.6%	
\$100k+	26.4%	46.3%	56.3%	
2016 population by age:				
15-24	11.0%	12.1%	17.9%	
25-34	15.7%	14.0%	9.1%	
35-44	14.4%	12.9%	10.8%	
45-54	12.8%	14.1%	14.2%	
55-64	12.0%	13.7%	13.8%	
65-74	8.3%	9.4%	9.4%	
75+	7.1%	8.2%	7.8%	
2016 pop. by race/ethnicity:				
white	57.1%	78.9%	78.8%	
black	20.4%	7.3%	5.6%	
asian	8.5%	10.4%	12.5%	
other	10.1%	1.2%	0.9%	
two or more races	3.9%	2.2%	2.2%	
2016 pop. by educational attainment:				
some college, no degree	16.1%	13.5%	11.2%	
associate degree	6.7%	5.4%	4.4%	
bachelor's degree	22.0%	30.4%	34.4%	
graduate/professional degree	13.0%	26.9%	34.6%	

Key Statistics

- Today, about 15% of the population within both the 0-10 minute drive and 10-15 minute drive times is between the ages of 25 and 34; their consumer spending is rising.
- About 40% of residents within each of the three drive times are between the ages of 35 and 64; these ages are strong years in terms of earnings and consumption.
- Estimated 2016 average household incomes of \$125k in the 10-15 minute and \$158k in the 15-20 minute drive times are high (by comparison, the actual average income for all US households was \$72.5k in 2014).
- Overall, the population is well-educated. Within 10 minutes, 35% hold a bachelor's degree or graduate/professional degree. 57.5% within 10-15 minutes and 69% within 15-20 hold a bachelor's or graduate/professional degree.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau; ESRI 2016 estimates and 2021 forecasts; Downtown Works

2. Enterprising Professionals—8.8% of all households (HH)

7.6% of HH within a 10 min. drive

13.3% of HH within a 10-15 min. drive

5.8% of HH within a 15-20 min. drive

- Young, well-educated, climbing the ladder in STEM occupations
- Half of households are married couples, 30% single households
- Move frequently for job growth and therefore many choose to rent
- Are early adopters of **new technology**
- Dress in **trendy clothing**
- Stay youthful and **healthy**; eat **organic** and **natural** foods, **run**, do **yoga**
- Read magazines and newspapers, as well as digital books
- Spend 6% less than national average on apparel, 38% more on entertainment & recreation, 35% more on food

3. Urban Chic—6.6% of all households (HH)

0% of HH within a 10 min. drive

3.9% of HH within a 10-15 min. drive

15.3% of HH within a 15-20 min. drive

- Professionals, well-educated; median age 42.6
- Busy and well-connected; avid readers
- **Travel** extensively both domestically and internationally
- Stay fit, eat **organic**, drink imported **wine**, appreciate good coffee
- Environmentally aware; actively recycle, maintain a “green” lifestyle
- Shop in **upscale stores**; also **Trader Joe’s**, **Whole Foods**, **Coscto**
- Visit museums and art galleries
- Top group for **Apple devices**; used for shopping, banking, news
- Spend 22% more than national average on apparel, 87% more on entertainment & recreation, 74% more on food

4. In Style—6.2% of all households (HH)

10.6% of HH within a 10 min. drive

6.4% of HH within a 10-15 min. drive

2.0% of HH within a 15-20 min. drive

- Married couples, primarily without kids
- Well-educated, enjoy traveling, read extensively
- Support arts, theater, concerts, museums
- **Active, health-conscious**
- Prefer **organic** foods; in many cases grow their own vegetables
- Invest in home remodeling/maintenance
- Attentive to price—use coupons, especially mobile coupons
- Have lots of tech gadgets
- Spend 19% less than national average on apparel, 25% more than national average on entertainment & recreation, 19% more on food

5. Exurbanites—3.9% of all households (HH)

1.4% of HH within a 10 min. drive

1.0% of HH within a 10-15 min. drive

8.9% of HH within a 15-20 min. drive

- Married couples approaching retirement; have high incomes
- More than half have a bachelor’s degree or higher
- More interested in **quality** than cost; take pride in their homes and foster a sense of personal style
- Prefer natural, **organic products**, contract for home care services
- Support public TV/radio
- Choose late-model luxury cars, SUVs
- Spend 14% more than national average on apparel, 82% more on entertainment & recreation, 65% more on food

6. Metro Renters—3.8% of all households (HH)

3.2% of HH within a 10 min. drive

8.6% of HH within a 10-15 min. drive

0.0% of HH within a 15-20 min. drive

- Young singles starting their careers; median age 31.8
- Most are degreed; 25% hold graduate degrees
- Incomes aren’t high, but they spend a large portion of their wages on rent, clothes, and the latest technology
- Are avid, though price-sensitive, shoppers and diners
- Shop at **Trader Joe’s** and **Whole Foods**, prefer **organic** foods
- Prefer **environmentally safe** products
- Shop for clothes at Banana Republic, The Gap, and Nordstrom
- Go out to drink **wine** at bars and restaurants
- Socializing and social status are very important
- Are in to **yoga**, pilates and downhill skiing
- Use **Apple devices** for news, entertainment, shopping, social media
- Spend 21% less than national average on apparel, 4% more on entertainment & recreation, 11% more on food

FOCUS AREA

FOCUS AREA

Diversity of activity—a mix of office and residential uses along with dining, shopping and cultural options—combined with pedestrian-oriented streetscapes, well-designed/human-scaled buildings, and user-friendly public spaces makes for vibrant urban districts.

When beginning a retail-recruitment effort in an area where shop and restaurant offerings have declined in quantity and quality, as is the case in Norristown, it's important to concentrate on a relatively small set of blocks rather than scatter new operations throughout the entire downtown. This is critical as smaller, clustered operations collectively anchor places, creating zones that attract consumers. It's also important not to “over-retail” an area—not all streets within the district must or should have an emphasis on shop and restaurant uses. Ultimately, however, operators decide precisely what location is right for their business.

For this project the **focus area** for concentrating retail efforts is defined as:

- Main Street, from Cherry to Mill
- Dekalb Street, from Lafayette to Penn

Of particular importance at this stage are the vacant lots at the corner of Main and Dekalb. A developer with a solid track-record for producing successful mixed-use buildings in an urban setting should be sought to create a catalytic product here.



Frequently, the problem in a downtown district is that many operators have not updated their overall look and feel, and therefore come across as outdated. This can make it hard to compete with artificial shopping experiences or new higher-end districts simply because they are more current and eye-catching (shopping malls tend to require tenants to remodel every 7-10 years). Operators can take steps to improve the experience they offer, which enhances the experience offered in the district as a whole.

- Window display, interior merchandising—educate through workshops and in-store merchandising consultations.
- Facade, signage—discuss improvements with operators and their landlords; explore the possibility of grant/loan programs.
- Exterior maintenance—discuss with landlords and suggest they include requirements in leases and enforce them.

Recommend all operators—both new and existing—read Paco Underhill’s “Why We Buy, the Science of Shopping.”



facades



signage



What makes a great retailer?

Great retailers have distinctive facades that draw people in; signage that is succinct and eye-catching; engaging and frequently changed window displays; and a sought-after selection of focused merchandise in appropriate quantities.

The above retail principles are further detailed in “What Makes a Great Retailer” found in the appendix.



windows



interiors



MERCHANDISE MIX PLAN

MERCHANDISE MIX PLAN

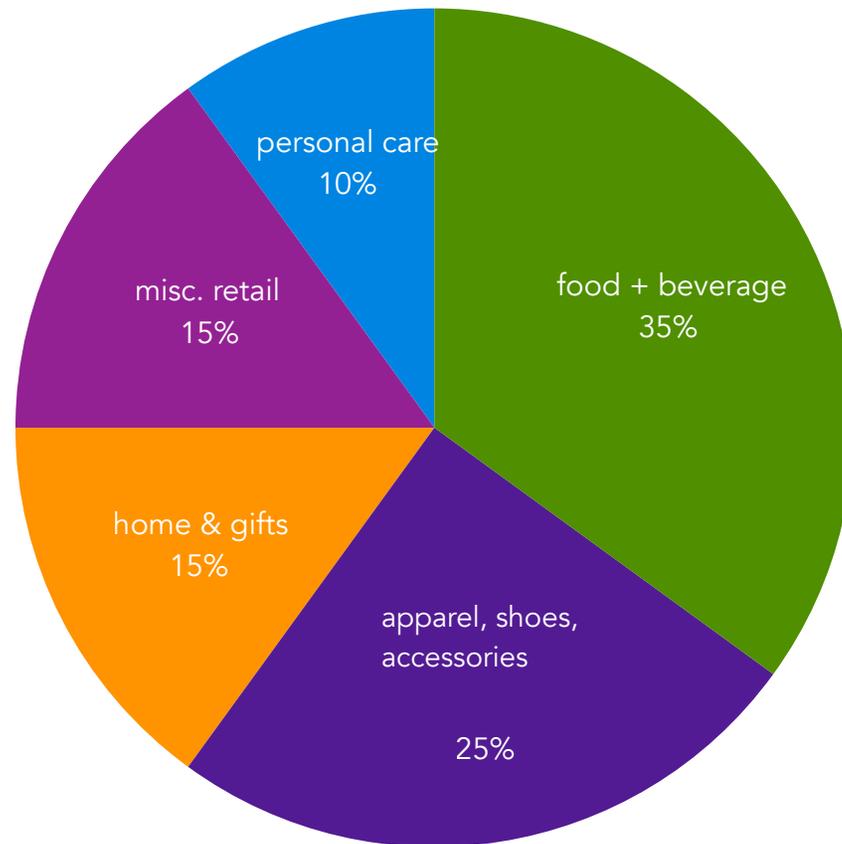
Downtown districts with unique, clustered and contiguous collections of shops and eateries are well-patronized by area residents. At the same time, they can serve those who live and/or work in the immediate vicinity as well as visitors.

To start, the **emphasis should be on getting food operators** to locate in Norristown, as they will create the buzz that leads to other operators taking an interest.

The Merchandise Mix is a **goal to work towards**, not a specific end-point, and it takes time to build a cohort of stores, eateries, and personal services. Additionally, no district will ever have a zero vacancy rate, as spaces turn over all the time for a variety of reasons, and reducing the amount of streetfront space taken up by non-retail uses is a long-term process.

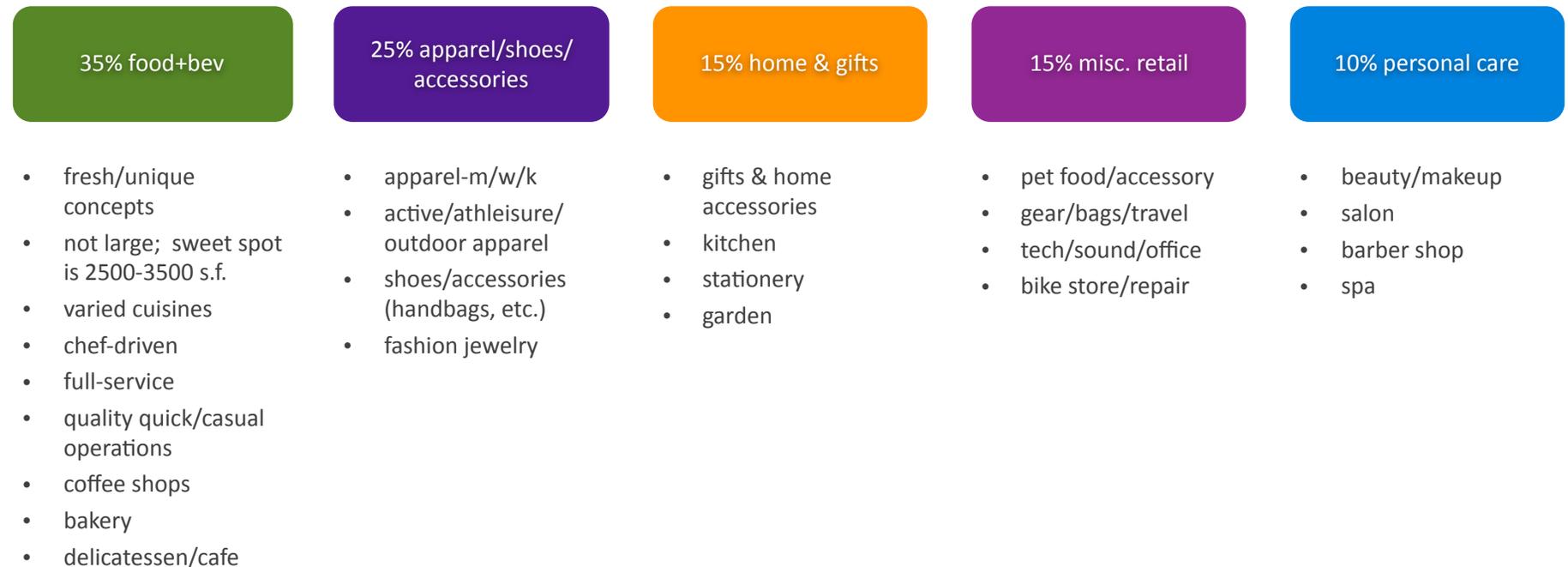
More details on uses to seek for the focus area in Downtown Norristown are on the following page.

Ideal Merchandise Mix for the Focus Area in Downtown Norristown



The mix of operations in Norristown’s focus area should be a balance of **high-quality**, daytime and nighttime uses emphasizing **independent, unique** operators with a history of success; any nationals should be solely those not already found nearby in the market. The goal is to have as much **contiguous, well-branded** retail as possible in downtown Norristown, with **distinctive** shops and eateries.

Services—such as dry cleaners or copy shops—are important as they serve district residents and works; as much as possible, these should not be located on blocks within the focus area, rather on side streets.



Magnets, Neutrals & Inhibitors

Operators with high standards and an explicit identity should be sought for downtown Norristown. The focus should be on “magnets”—quality operators that will get others interested in locating in Norristown. Each deal should leverage the next; at minimum, deals that inhibit other quality operators from locating nearby are to be avoided.

Alternate/Interim Uses

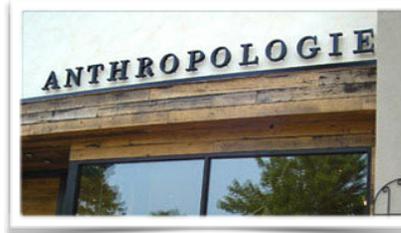
Though long-term store and restaurant operations are the goal, when needed other uses can activate space.

Pop-up shops have become de rigueur in cities across the U.S. This could take the form, for example, of a second location of a gift store from a neighboring town for a period during the holiday season. Or a store by a new entrepreneur who tests a concept at low-risk. Operators of pop-ups typically spend little money on setting up a store; instead, they rely on creativity to create a temporary storefront presence that draws the eye of passersby, and an interior space that offers a compelling shopping experience. Successful pop-ups can be precursors to more lasting stores. This route can also benefit the landlord, who does not spend money upgrading a space until they have a tested tenant in hand.

With any alternate use, landlords should keep lease terms relatively short so spaces can become available for long-term shops and restaurants.



- well-executed independent concepts
- nationals that put just one or two stores in a market



As an example, an operator such as Anthropologie would be considered a *Magnet*—when it locates somewhere other quality shop and restaurant operators take notice. High-quality, well-known and well-respected local or regional stores or restaurants also serve as magnets.



- local operators that are of reasonable quality
- national stores that already exist in the market but with few locations



Starbucks would be considered a *Neutral*—while quality operators would locate next to a Starbucks, their interest in a district would not be piqued because of it.



- poor quality local operators
- fast food outlets
- too many banks
- low-end outlet/discount stores



Some operators are considered *Inhibitors* because quality operators would stay away from a space or a given block because of their presence. Quiznos is an example—this type of operator should be located on side streets or secondary streets, not on a district’s key shopping/dining blocks.

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following nine recommendations describe actions that will help downtown Norristown reach its full potential as a vibrant retail district.

Recommendation #1— Hire & Train a Downtown Advocate

Norristown has the best chance of reaching its full potential as a retail district if a **Downtown Advocate for Investment in Redevelopment and Retail** is hired to seek out developers and to prospect for high-quality uses in line with the Merchandise Miz.

The Downtown Advocate identifies and develops relationships with operators, ones adept at creating a compelling shop or eatery, that appeal to the target market groups. The recruiter acts as a matchmaker between prospects and downtown's property owners and their brokers. Early on, the Advocate meets with landlords to discuss the strategy and begin building their trust. The recruiter must be:

- an expert at recognizing quality store and restaurant operators
- enthusiastic about Norristown
- detail-oriented
- tenacious yet engaging

In cases where landlords cannot reject a tenant that is not the highest and best use for the focus area, the Advocate can encourage alternative strategies such as shorter-term deals and performance clauses that allow the space to be recaptured when more fitting tenants are found.

Downtown Advocate Role

- salaried (not commission-based)
- develops and nurtures relationships with developers, property owners, existing operators, and potential operators
- serves as a “Match Maker”—brings viable prospects to landlords and/or their real estate representative
- keeps track of key vacancies, short-term leases, lease expirations; advises on recaptures of ground level space for retail
- enters all prospecting and property data in a tool such as SalesForce or Knack for his/her use and to build institutional memory
- works with relevant municipality agencies to help facilitate the opening of shops and restaurants

Process

The Retail Advocate is tasked with finding developers and operators for Downtown Norristown, with an emphasis on the focus area.

Following hiring, the training process for the retail recruiter includes:

Initial Training: Provide the Retail Advocate with intensive training on leasing terminology; landlord relations; prospecting philosophy, approach, and best practices; and the process for “handholding” a retailer through to the opening of their operation (leasing, permitting, etc.).

Developer Relations: Together with the Retail Advocate, seek out and meet with developers to garner interest in the opportunity in Norristown.

Landlord Relations: Together with the Retail Advocate, meet one-on-one with landlords and their brokers to share the retail strategy, seeking their support for the plan. We discuss opportunities and issues with their properties and tenants (referring to the qualitative assessment), and emphasize how critical the street-level tenanting is to their building as well as to the district as a whole. We also provide landlords with suggested lease clauses that are considered best practices in terms of retail leasing.

Prospecting: Prospect with Retail Advocate, seeking out and engaging quality, independent, well-branded operators from throughout the region. Prospecting is conducted in person, not by phone or e-mail. Just as in a mall, downtown stores and restaurants come and go over time, making the recruiting effort an ongoing, continual process of building a pipeline of potential operators.

As part of our process, we advise on the development of a succinct marketing image pieces for use by the recruiter. We continually review prospecting efforts and strategize regarding key opportunities.

Recommendation #2— Engage Top-Notch Developers

Conditions are ripe to **attract investors and developers** with a sensitivity to the history of the community and a **solid portfolio** of small to mid- size ground-up and/or redevelopment projects. Only developers who have produced **quality mixed-use product** in an **urban setting** should be sought. *Early on, encourage development of the vacant lots at the corner of Main and Dekalb; development here of high-quality products would be a major catalyst for improving downtown.*

Recommendation #3— Support/Encourage Retail-Friendly Design

Hire a retail-centric architect to **develop retail design guidelines**. This will help ensure that new construction and remodels of existing buildings/spaces are designed in a manner that promotes the visibility of retail space, that offers the right sizes of spaces, and that enables operators to brand their spaces. Additionally, take steps to ensure that strip-center like product is not allowed on key downtown streets.

Recommendation #4— Make Zoning Changes

Consider making changes to zoning that would **prohibit non-retail uses on the ground floor**, at minimum along the focus area of Main and Dekalb streets.

Recommendation #5— Explore Incentives

Incentives can be useful tools for attracting tenants. These often come from landlords in the form of **interior fit-out, low initial rent rates, and tenant allowances**. Incentives from the Municipality in the form of **forgivable loans** and/or **facade improvement grants** should also be considered.

Recommendation #6— Improve the Streetscape

The **street-scaping** in Downtown Norristown should be **improved** with street furniture, more plantings and flowers.

Recommendation #7— Encourage Completion of the Courthouse Square Building

Work with the owner/developer of the Courthouse Square building—**encourage/support completion of the condos** and the **leasing of the ground floor retail space**.

Recommendation #8— Ensure Redevelopment of the Justice Center Creates Connections Along Main Street

The new justice center and attendant public space should be **designed to relate well to the street**, in order to **create connections** along Main St. between Dekalb and Swede. If at all possible, there should be retail fronting the street along Main.

Recommendation #9— Encourage More Residential in the Downtown

Residents bring activity to a district, both by putting feet on the streets but also with lights on at night. **Encourage as much market-rate residential as possible be built in downtown Norristown**, and as well as **redeveloped in existing buildings**. New buildings in the retail focus area should be in line with the scale of existing ones, with ground floor retail, employing setbacks above the first one or two floors, and with appropriate height restrictions.

NEXT STEPS & MEASURING PROGRESS

NEXT STEPS

Recruiting

- Hire and provide training for a Retail Advocate to serve as the steward for the retail program in downtown Norristown
- Develop a marketing “image” piece for use by the recruiter. This should be eye-catching and succinct; more detailed information can be made available online.
- Meet one-on-one with landlords to discuss the retail program and their individual properties and tenancies.
- Reach out to potential developers.
- Develop database: the recruiter should enter all data regarding prospecting in a tool such as Salesforce or Knack to support his/her work and to build institutional memory.

MEASURING PROGRESS

Progress with a retail program does not happen overnight, yet over time a district can be improved with an active and sustained recruitment effort.

early on (first several years) measure:

- ▶ # of prospects generated
- ▶ # of prospect visits
- ▶ # of deals in negotiations

later (about 3-5 years in) measure:

- ▶ # of leases signed
- ▶ # of operations opened

over time, measure:

- ▶ increase in rental rates
- ▶ growth in sales tax
- ▶ growth in property tax

APPENDIX

1. *Design considerations.*
2. *What makes a great retailer?*
3. *Market data tables.*

Design Considerations

Retail space should drive development concepts, as buildings designed with ground level facades that relate to the street and that are differentiated from upper levels—and with a mix of historic and contemporary styles—play a critical role in creating a vibrant urban district that is attractive to both operators and consumers. And no matter the offering—be it sporting goods, Korean BBQ, handbags, or chocolates—the visual appeal of a store or restaurant has a tremendous impact on a retailer’s bottom-line. **To provide operators the greatest chance for success, the design of buildings should adhere to the following guidelines:**

- Retail should be differentiated and distinct from upper floors.
- Spaces should be built out to the sidewalk/right of way; no setbacks, arcades, plazas, or other features should be built into storefront areas.
- Avoid generic designs that come with storefront systems (see page 2 for examples); these lead to a bland environment that does not interest passersby.
- Retail storefronts should promote visibility; they should be emphasized, transparent (no tinted windows), treated as the retailer’s major identity/brand, and designed to engage pedestrians (see examples on page 3).
- Signage should emphasize retail identity and call attention to retail.
- Landscaping elements (trees, plants, flowers) make an important contribution to creating a vibrant retail district; they should be carefully chosen to enhance the pedestrian and consumer experience without blocking views to storefronts.

Generic storefront systems to **AVOID** as they do not capture interest from those passing by on foot or by vehicle, and give retailers little to no opportunity to distinguish their brand (and notice how many are vacant!).

