



Project Report

Bala Cynwyd Retail Strategy

Prepared for

**Township of Lower Merion
Ardmore, PA**



Submitted by

Economics Research Associates

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General & Limiting Conditions

Every reasonable effort has been made to ensure that the data contained in this study reflect the most accurate and timely information possible. These data are believed to be reliable. This study is based on estimates, assumptions and other information developed by Economics Research Associates from its independent research effort, general knowledge of the market and the industry, and consultations with the client and its representatives. No responsibility is assumed for inaccuracies in reporting by the client, its agent and representatives or any other data source used in preparing or presenting this study.

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Introduction

Economics Research Associates' Downtown Works (ERA|Downtown Works) practice group was hired by the Township of Lower Merion to develop *Strategy and Implementation Recommendations* for Bala Avenue. In this Executive Summary, ERA|Downtown Works documents the research and findings of several evaluation factors and recommends critical steps to set retail revitalization in place.

Bala Avenue is a retail street within Bala Cynwyd, in the Township of Lower Merion. The Main Line refers to the first-ring suburbs west of Philadelphia that developed along the regional rail lines. The Bala Avenue commercial district is located between Montgomery Avenue and City Avenue, both of which are major arterial roads for commuter traffic traveling into and out of Philadelphia, as well as traffic circulating within the Main Line region. The study area for this project is the original commercial district of Bala-Cynwyd.

The demographics of both the larger Main Line region and Bala Avenue market areas are strong. The high median and average income levels of permanent residents in the area indicate that the surrounding markets have significant disposable income. Concurrently, psychographic (lifestyle patterns), indicate that market area residents do spend money on themselves, their children and grandchildren, as well as their homes.

In order for Bala Avenue to become a successful retail district the issues of the current mix of tenants, as well as the lack of reinvestment in storefront conditions and design need to be addressed. In this report, ERA|Downtown Works examines these issues and provides *Merchandise Mix* recommendations. ERA|Downtown Works believes a proactive and organized recruitment effort is necessary to bring strong local and regional operators to Bala Avenue. ERA|Downtown Works also recommends *Storefront and Signage Design Guidelines* to help shape a distinct identity that is in tune with Bala Avenue's unique strengths and potential.

Assessment

Physical Conditions

Bala Avenue is situated between the busy thoroughfares of City Avenue and Montgomery Avenue in Bala Cynwyd, PA. The building stock on Bala Avenue is comprised of two and three story structures that are a mix of newer architecture and historic buildings. The properties that run approximately two blocks down either side of Bala Avenue are predominantly between 900 and 1,500 sq. ft. in size. The buildings are built up to the sidewalk, and there is potential for residential apartments above the storefronts. Beyond the concentration of retail and office uses along the first two blocks of Bala Avenue, there are set back converted residential properties, and some larger office buildings leading up to the bustling thoroughfare of City Avenue.

Business offices are currently occupying some of the prime locations for retail operations or professional services. Office uses do not represent ideal tenants on a primary retail street. ERA|Downtown Works recognizes that this is a characteristic of the project area

that should be accounted for with regards to the *Retail Strategy*. While occupation by offices is certainly preferable to vacant spaces, it is hoped that, in time, these office uses will move to a secondary location such as second floors or side streets, and the subsequent vacancies will be filled in with appropriate retail uses.

ERA|Downtown Works analyzed all the retail uses in the project area. Storefronts were evaluated in four categories including, window display, signage, maintenance, and façade. The properties assessed on Bala Avenue had both strengths and weaknesses in the aforementioned categories.

Some retailers, such as Salon Capelli, display their merchandise and/or services very well. The displays are updated, ideally bi-monthly or monthly, and are clean. As a general rule, displays should be neither cluttered nor sparse, and should face the exterior so that pedestrians can be attracted into the store. Interior facing merchandise is not conducive to



having a pedestrian oriented streetscape. Signage is also an important part of the success of a retail operation. All signage in the storefront including temporary, window, awning, etc. should be clean, well maintained, clearly written, succinct and highly visible to foot and vehicular traffic. Salon Axia is one of the better-signed stores on Bala Avenue. The permanent signage on the clean glass windows is prominent, but

not overstated and the temporary signage displaying store hours is basic and does not detract from the storefront. Other retailers, such as Walls and Windows, have stores that are meticulously maintained. The windows are clean, sidewalks are swept routinely (ideally twice a day), cash wraps and windowsills are tidy, and building components are working, clean, and/or carefully painted. Many of the buildings display their original architecture, which adds a unique character to the building stock. It is important that the façade elements (i.e. fenestration, awning, etc.) and designs (colors, materials, etc.) are cohesive and support a unifying vision.



The overall physical condition on Bala Avenue ranges from excellent to poor. Areas that need improvement are delineated below:

Signage

- Abundance of temporary posted signage
- Excessive information
- Cramped or small lettering
- Inappropriate neon signage
- Faded signage on awnings

Display

- Dirty and obscured windows
- Poorly maintained merchandise
- Cluttered display of merchandise
- Outdated and inappropriate displays
- Lack of display

Maintenance

- Trash and cigarette butts strewn in grass
- Planters not well maintained
- Damaged or deteriorating siding or awnings
- Dirty unkempt windows
- Overgrown landscaping

Façade

- Incongruous materials
- Poorly maintained design details
- Crumbling and dirty stone work
- Overstated sign band
- Peeling and weathered exterior paint work

Retail Uses

ERA|Downtown Works assessed the different uses found on Bala Avenue to determine current supply in relation to the potential customer markets. There are nine retailers, 15 retail services, four restaurants, and five offices. The ratio of the store types is somewhat skewed. The area would benefit from fewer retail services and more retail stores selling merchandise. The overall commercial district would benefit additionally if the individual stores that constitute each category were improved. This will be discussed in further detail later. A more specific breakdown of retail uses is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1: Retail Use Breakdown

Bala Cynwyd - Number of Stores by Merchandise Type				
RETAIL		9	OFFICE	5
	Antiques	1	SERVICE	15
	Home Appliance/Interiors	2	Hair/Nail Salon	5
	Apparel	1	Dry cleaning/Laundry	2
	Children's	1	Health (appointments, doctors)	1
	Flower Shops	2	Automotive	2
	Jewelry	1	Printing	2
	Gifts/Stationary	1	Miscellaneous	3
ENTERTAINMENT		1	VACANT	3
RESTAURANT		5		
	French	1		
	Italian/Pizza	1		
	Café	3		
			TOTAL STOREFRONTS	38

The number of vacant properties in relation to the overall number of storefronts is relatively low. While vacant properties are usually considered to be detrimental to the health of a retail market, vacant properties on Bala Avenue should be viewed as an opportunity to recruit new retailers who might better serve the surrounding residential market. However, it is important to note that if the same property remains vacant for an extended period of time (excess of six months), then it will pose as a threat to the overall success of the surrounding retail market.

Retail service uses constitute approximately 40 percent of the merchandise mix, which is somewhat high but is generally acceptable in a neighborhood-oriented retail district. There should be a conscious effort made to not recruit any more retail services, as there is currently a need for more stores carrying retail goods. Additionally, in the area there are



The newly opened Café Shira, offers all Kosher cuisine which caters to the growing Orthodox Jewish population, as well as other area residents.

two restaurants and three cafes. While these operations may meet the demand for food and beverage service in the area, a few of the existing restaurants and cafes need to work on their design, display, and menu options. Two of the cafes appear to be successfully serving the area market. Taming of the Brew has done an excellent job with their signage, display and menu options. The cafe is also internet ready, which is an attractive element for area residents.

The newly



There are currently five office uses on the main retail portion of Bala Avenue. This represents 12 percent of the overall existing merchandise mix. In order for office uses to



be congruous with the surrounding retail, they should be held to the same design standards as the retail properties. Similar to food and beverage uses, office spaces should focus not on window displays, but rather on clean and open windows that show interior activity. As efforts are made to upgrade the retail merchandise mix of Bala Avenue, offices are an acceptable temporary use. To the right is an example of an office use in Narberth. The store front appears complementary to the surrounding retail and does not stand out from the adjacent storefronts.

Stakeholder Interviews

ERA|Downtown Works interviewed Bala Avenue stakeholders. Stakeholders include people who work, live, own property, or frequently visit the Bala Avenue area. There were several consistent issues evident in the interview processes. They are noted below:

- There is not ample signage to alert traffic on the major thoroughfares that there is a commercial district along Bala Avenue
- There is insufficient parking, and a lack of signage to direct cars to what parking is available
- Cars move down Bala Avenue far too quickly, inhibiting comfortable pedestrian traffic

- Kosher-oriented retail would be successful with expanding Orthodox Jewish community
- Building owners and store owners need to invest in their properties not only for singular improvement but for the benefit of the surrounding retail
- Storefronts need to be maintained and designed consistently
- Historic architectural details need to be cleaned, restored, and highlighted properly
- The movie theatre needs to be restored on the interior and exterior and should act as the focal point for the street
- Area residents are educated and affluent
- New tenants would bring vitality to the area
- Business steadily declining over past decade
- The area needs additional retail in varying categories such as: apparel, restaurants (Kosher and non-Kosher), stationary, small chain stores
- The parking lot needs to be better lit and appropriately signed
- The BMW dealership (and adjacent lot) take up far too much space and blocks the view into the rest of the street
- Narberth is a good example to emulate

Analysis

ERA|Downtown Works evaluated both demographic and psychographic data. Together this information, along with the physical assessment and stakeholder interviews helps inform the ideal *Merchandise Mix Plan and Implementation Strategy*. ERA|Downtown Works identified a primary and secondary market of customers for the commercial district.

Figure 1: Bala Avenue Market Areas



Demographic Findings

ERA|Downtown Works researched demographic information that is relevant to the retail success in Merion Cynwyd. The Township of Lower Merion had a population of approximately 60,000 people according to the 2000 US Census. The Township makes up an area of 23.64 square miles, and is bounded by the City of Philadelphia, the Boroughs of Conshohocken and West Conshohocken, and the Townships of Upper Merion and Whitemarsh in Montgomery County and by the Townships of Haverford and Radnor in Delaware County. The Borough of Narberth, which is one-half square mile, is in fact a separate political entity although it is completely surrounded by the Township. The table below displays the population and household figures for 2005 and 2010.

Table 2: Population and Households

	Primary Market	Secondary Market
Population		
2005	16,497	23,410
2010	16,642	23,897
Percent Change	0.88%	2.08%
CAGR 1/	0.18%	0.41%
Households		
2005	5,946	9,260
2010	6,039	9,505
Percent Change	1.56%	2.65%
CAGR	0.31%	0.52%
Average Household Size		
2005	2.48	2.46
2010	2.46	2.45

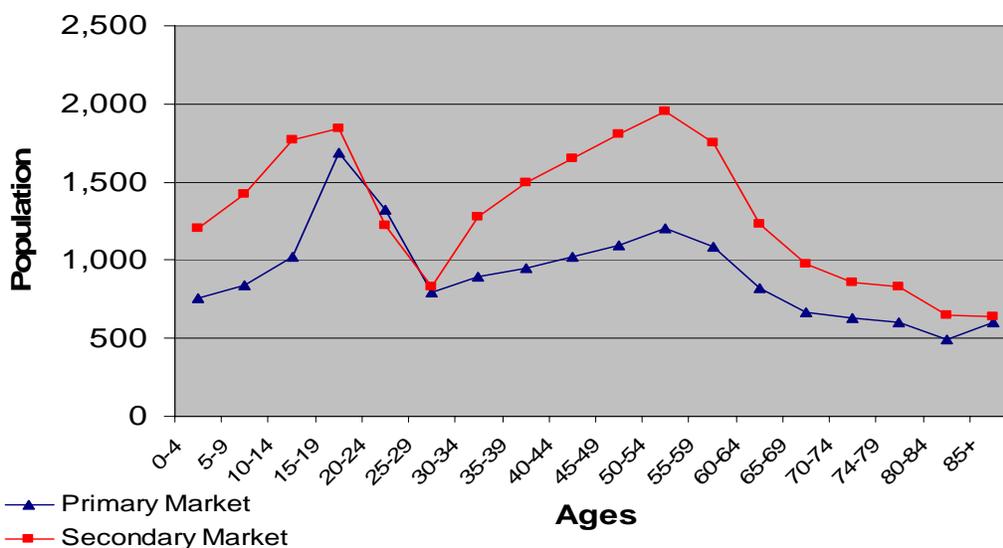
Notes:

1/Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR)

Source: ESRI Business Data and Economics Research Associates, 2006.

The average household size in both the primary and the secondary market is 2.5 people. The most populated age brackets are the 15 to 24 age group, and the 50 to 54 age group. These figures indicate that there is a family based population. The table below displays the population breakdown by age.

Figure 2: Population Breakdown By Age



It is also important to note that there is a very large Orthodox Jewish population that lives in the neighborhoods that adjoin the Bala Avenue and Merion-Cynwyd shopping districts. Local Rabbi Shrega Sherman estimates that there are 2,500 Orthodox Jewish households

within this area. Typically, Orthodox Jewish households are much larger than the average sized household. While these families typically shop at big box retailers for soft and hard goods, (and thus do not frequent the neighborhood retail for apparel or household purchases), they do heavily utilize area food and beverage services that are Kosher. Merion-Cynwyd has several restaurants that cater to this market, and recently Bala Avenue has added Café Shira to serve area residents that observe the Orthodox Jewish faith. This market comprises such a large portion of the area resident market that it is important to include retail and food uses that can and will be utilized by this group.

Bala Cynwyd has a notably affluent population. The residents in Bala Cynwyd and the surrounding Main Line townships are among the wealthiest in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, as well as in the nation. The average household income in the primary market is over \$125,000. In the secondary market, the average household income is nearly \$160,000. Table 3 compares the median and average household incomes of Bala Cynwyd’s markets, the Philadelphia metropolitan area, Pennsylvania, and the United States.

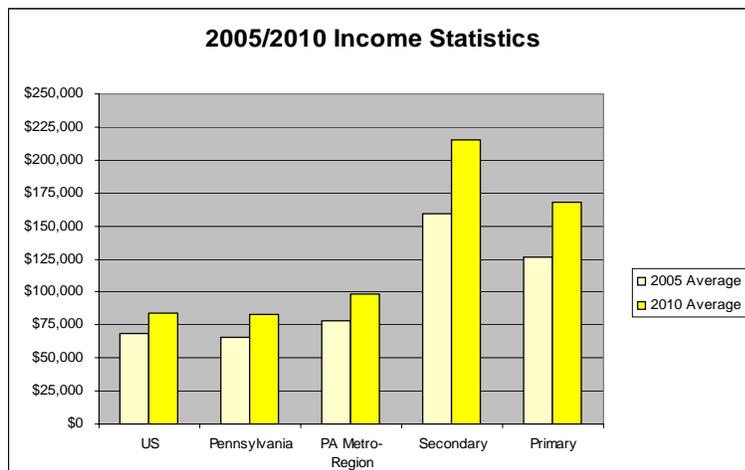
Table 3: Average and Median Household Income

	United US	Pennsylvania	Philadelphia PA Metro-Region	Secondary	Primary
2005 Median	\$49,718	\$48,534	\$57,382	\$103,000	\$76,912
2005 Average	\$68,668	\$65,608	\$77,893	\$158,927	\$126,267
2010 Median	\$58,351	\$58,656	\$68,896	\$131,682	\$97,443
2010 Average	\$84,308	\$82,755	\$98,007	\$214,910	\$168,191

Source: ESRI Business Analyst, 2005, Economics Research Associates, 2006

Figure 3 directly displays the average income comparisons in a visual format

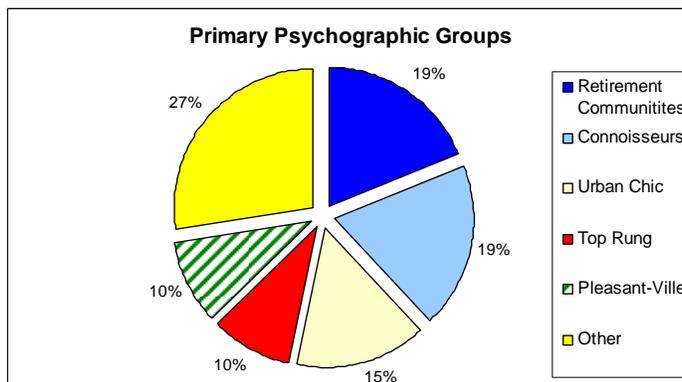
Figure 3: 2005-2010 Income Statistics



Psychographic Findings

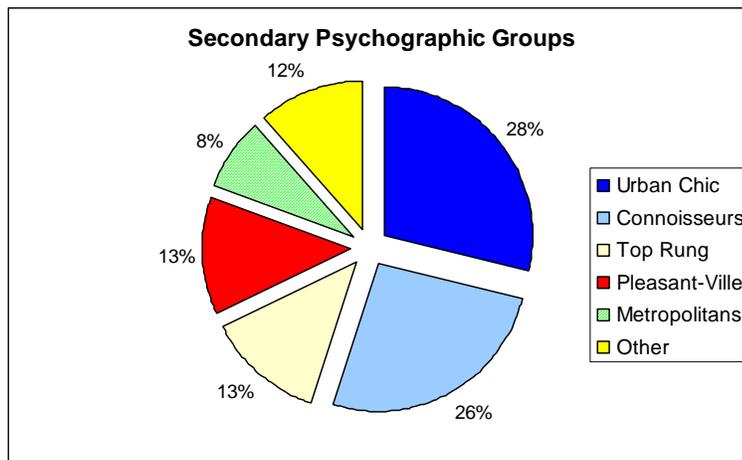
Lifestyle patterns of area residents can be better understood by analyzing psychographic data, such as Tapestry[®] Segments.¹ Tapestry information combines demographic information with spending patterns to help define the characteristics and lifestyle choices of various demographic segments living in a defined area. Tapestry data points out residential and lifestyle preferences, spending trends, preferred activities (athletics, travel, entertainment), and additional lifestyle choices. This information is a useful tool in deciphering what types of retail would be most successful for the residential market surrounding Bala Avenue. The following psychographic profiles are based on national trends and demographics; however, the profiles are attributed to the market areas based on 2005 U.S. Census data from a defined area. Figures 4 and 5 illustrate the proportion of households in both the primary and secondary market.

Figure 4: Primary Market Psychographics



¹ ESRI Business Analyst 2005 Data. Community Tapestry: The Fabric of America’s Neighborhoods. This resource uses proven segmentation methodology introduced more than 30 years ago, and classifies U.S. neighborhoods based on their socioeconomic and demographic composition.

Figure 5: Secondary Market Psychographics



The psychographic information shows that the primary and secondary market residents are rather similar. Residents in both study areas are affluent, well educated, and have similar spending patterns. The psychographic groups most prevalent in the primary market are the “Retirement Communities”, which makes up 19 percent of the total households in the study area, and the “Connoisseurs” which also make up 19 percent of the total households in the study area. The third largest group is the “Urban Chic”, which constitutes 15 percent of the total households in the primary market study area. The Retirement Communities group is made up of well-educated retirees that have a median age of 51 years, though a third of residents are above 65 years of age. They have a median net worth of \$172,000. Retirement Community residents like to travel, renovate their homes, and spend money on grandchildren. This is a segment of the population that is somewhat unique to the Bala Cynwyd area, as there is a larger population of retirees in Bala than in the surrounding Main Line towns. However, it is important to note that this group is less likely to accumulate consumer goods for themselves, as they are beginning to downsize and divest.

Connoisseurs are the second wealthiest Tapestry segmentation and the typically the highest spenders. Nationally, they spend more on vacation and travel than any other group. The national median age for Connoisseurs is mid-forties and low forties for Urban Chic residents. Urban Chic residents prefer living in urban communities and are typically politically and civically involved in their communities. Urban Chic residents also enjoy upscale shopping.

In the secondary market the Connoisseurs and Urban Chic groups make up over 50 percent of the household population. The “Top Rung” category constitutes 13 percent of the population. Top Rung residents are more subtly wealthy than Connoisseurs; nationally, their median home value is \$1 million. These residents are mostly in their lower 40’s.

“Pleasant-ville” residents represent 13 percent of the secondary market household population. These residents are prosperous single-family homeowners that have older children. Pleasant-ville residents are predominantly in their late 30’s. Home improvement is a priority for these residents and their shopping tastes are eclectic, ranging from national chains to boutique retailers.

There are a number of other lifestyle categories that are represented in the primary and secondary markets. In the primary market, “Other” constitutes 27 percent of the household population, and in the secondary market, “Other” constitutes 12 percent of the household population. The categories identified are “Metropolitans”, “College Towns”, “In Style”, “Wealthy Seaboard Suburbs”, and “Old and Newcomers.” More detailed descriptions can be found in the Appendix.

An assessment of the two study markets finds that collectively, the population is very well educated, affluent, and leads active lifestyles. While the majority of residents are middle-aged, established adults (40 – 60 years old) in their prime earning years, there is a portion of the population that makes up the young adult category (20-24 years old). Both of these groups have disposable income and are likely to spend a large portion of their earnings on items that are not considered necessities.

Competitive Areas

The Main Line towns are in close proximity to one another, and offer a wide variety of retail experiences, ranging from small-town main-street style retail to big box shopping. ERA|Downtown Works evaluated the respective commercial districts and shopping centers that could be potential competitors to the Bala Avenue site. However, a good number of the “competitive” sites are automobile centered shopping areas. Due to the fact that Bala Avenue is geared to a pedestrian environment, these other areas will not pose as direct competition as they are fundamentally very different both in scale and in purpose.

The Bala Avenue commercial district will however be competitive with its neighboring commercial district in Merion Cynwyd, as well as with other small-scale retail areas such as Narberth. These shopping districts can be regarded only as direct competition because their target retailer is very similar to the ideal retailer for Bala Avenue. Each of these areas are likely to cater to their respective primary markets for customers.

Narberth

The town of Narberth offers a unique mix of small scale, neighborhood-oriented retail. The Merchandise Mix in Narberth consists of mostly local operators and uses include neighborhood services, such as dry cleaners, a movie theatre, apparel and antiques, high-end interior design, and two Japanese grocery stores. There are also several restaurants/pubs along the street that are frequented by area residents. The retail rents are approximately \$20 to \$21 per square foot. Narberth has considerable pedestrian and vehicular traffic. The wide sidewalks and one-way traffic on Haverford Road provide a



very comfortable walking environment. Downtown Narberth is not bordered by any main thoroughfares such as City Avenue or Montgomery Avenue, so through traffic to these main streets is minimal. Additionally, the community (residents in conjunction with local officials) has made a concerted effort to enforce the slow traffic speeds (25 mph) that create a more comfortable pedestrian environment. The street is well maintained; sidewalks are swept, pots are planted and many are seasonally updated. The storefronts are distinguished from one another with unique signage and varied display formats, yet are congruous as a whole in design concept. In addition, there is a well-utilized Septa R5 train station in Narberth and an ample amount of appropriately signed parking lots.



Along Montgomery Avenue in Narberth there is another cluster of retail. These stores include an eclectic mixture of several local high-end women's apparel boutiques as well as big box stores, service uses, and quick food retailers.

Merion-Cynwyd

Merion-Cynwyd is a small commercial district adjacent to Bala Cynwyd that primarily serves area residents. The merchandising mix includes apparel, accessories, children's clothing, restaurants, and personal services such as dry cleaners and salons. The retail building stock in Merion Cynwyd lacks the historic charm of the Bala Avenue structures. It is a mix of strips of retail and set back residential homes that have been converted to commercial uses. The retail fronts the busy thoroughfare of Montgomery Avenue, and thus does not provide an ideal environment for pedestrian traffic. However, the proximity to Montgomery Avenue provides high visibility and accessibility. While Merion-Cynwyd is likely the most competitive region to Bala Avenue, it is important to note that the type of retail in Bala will differ slightly. Merion-Cynwyd is a larger commercial district, and has a wider breadth of retail services and goods that Bala Avenue does not (such as a grocery market, pharmacy, two deli's, and a number of apparel stores). Rents in the area range from \$15 to \$30.



Ardmore and Suburban Square

Downtown Ardmore is presently undergoing a retail revitalization. The current retail mix consists largely of personal services such as nail and hair salons, as well as specialty stores. The strong retailers in Ardmore are destination stores, such as Jacques Ferber Furs, Main Line Seafood, Lonni Rossi Designs, and Rittenhouse Electric. Ardmore has a great deal of accessibility and visibility due to its location on the busy thoroughfare of Lancaster Avenue (route 30). However, as with Merion



Cynwyd, this can mean that the speed of cars on Lancaster Avenue can hinder a pedestrian friendly atmosphere. Rental rates in Ardmore range from the high teens to the high \$20's. A Retail Recruiter has been retained to lead the retail recruitment effort, which will be initially concentrated on filling in vacant properties. The function and advantages of a Retail Recruiter will be delineated later in the report.

While Suburban Square shopping center should not be considered direct competition for Bala Avenue, it is important to note how the center acts as an advantage for retail in Downtown Ardmore. Suburban Square is one of the best performing shopping centers in the Delaware Valley Region and has historically been a landmark in the area. The square offers a mix of local operators such as Toby Lerner, Asta De Blue and Kitchen Kapers, as well as national retailers such as Apple, J.Crew, City Sports, Coach, etc. The rents in Suburban Square are proprietary information, but they exceed the rents in most retail districts or centers in the area. Due to its immense popularity, the presence of Suburban Square can help to lure strong retailers into Ardmore.

Wynnewood Square Area

Wynnewood Square is along Lancaster Avenue/Route 30 and is just to the east of downtown Ardmore. Tenants include the chain eatery Vinnie Testa's, Super Fresh Grocery, Salad Works, and a Five Below store. This is an automobile centered strip mall, with a large surface parking lot directly facing the retail. The rents per square foot in this area range from approximately \$24 to \$30 dollars.

Whole Foods Market Plaza

Retail in the Plaza centered around the Whole Foods includes an upscale and popular Chinese Restaurant, dry cleaners, a new fish market, and a hair salon. The Whole Foods store reports rent of \$30 per square foot. This particular Whole Foods store is one of their smallest at about 13,000 square feet. The stores are now typically built at around 45,000 square feet. The retail surrounds a mid-sized parking lot that is constantly active due to the presence of the Whole Foods market. There are small sidewalks for pedestrians, but due to the layout of the parking lot and the heavy flow of traffic entering the Whole Foods market, the area is not an ideal pedestrian environment.

Wynnewood Shopping Center

The Wynnewood Shopping Center is located across from the Wynnewood train station. This big box center has a great deal of surface parking surrounding the retail on all sides. The center was built in 1954 and was renovated in 2000. It is approximately 260,000 square feet and currently managed by Federal Realty. The mix consists of mostly big box national chain stores including Old Navy, Bed Bath & Beyond, Borders Books and Music, and a 98,000 square foot grocery store (Genuardi's). The smaller format stores include GNC, Wachovia, Cingular and quick service food uses. This development resembles a typical strip center, the signage is uniform in color and style and storefronts are distinguished by signage and window displays and not by building material. The area is not particularly pedestrian friendly, as the cars tend to move quickly though the parking lot to get to different areas of the center. While there are sidewalks for pedestrians, the speed and volume of traffic prevents the area from becoming a comfortable walking environment.

Bala Cynwyd Center

The Bala Cynwyd Center is located at the intersection of City and Belmont Avenues in Bala Cynwyd. The primary anchors are LA Fitness, Acme Market, and Lord & Taylor. Other uses include Olive Garden, Foot Locker, Dress Barn, and Wachovia. The center is situated on City Avenue, a major North/South artery. The volume and speed of traffic along City Avenue make this road very difficult to cross and prevent a high volume of pedestrian traffic from entering the area. There is a very large parking lot that separates the center from City Avenue and its other bordering streets. The parking lot is however broken up by well-maintained plantings that can be seen in the photo above. The property displays typical strip center characteristics such as contiguous stucco siding and box signage. Stores are differentiated only by their sign design and window displays.



City Avenue

City Avenue is primarily made up of strip retail with large surface parking lots, big box stores (a Target is slated to open within the next year), gas stations, and office uses. The merchandise mix includes health and fitness stores, pet supply stores, soft goods retailers, and chain home furnishing stores. Adjacent to City Avenue, the Pathmark Center's rent is approximately \$17 per square foot.



Most of the mix represents moderately priced regional and national operators. The adjacent Saks and Lord and Taylor department stores represent the high-end retail in the area. The mix in the strip centers is not complementary to the upscale department stores. The retail in the area is oriented to vehicular traffic to the detriment of pedestrian traffic, a very different experience from Bala Avenue.

Recommendations

ERA|Downtown Works evaluated retail uses, demographic and psychographic information, physical conditions, competitive areas, and stakeholder comments for the Bala Avenue project area. After evaluating and synthesizing the information collected from these data sources, ERA|Downtown Works can effectively offer recommendations and strategies regarding physical improvements, the district identity, a merchandise mix, and retail recruitment strategy for the Bala Avenue commercial district.

Physical Condition

ERA|Downtown Works identified three steps for physical improvements that would enhance the Bala Avenue retail district. These steps include:

1. Renovating façades and creating consistent design standards for storefronts and signage.
2. Plan, design, and install streetscape improvements.
3. Development of residential apartments and condominiums above first floor retail.

Building Improvements

Perhaps the most crucial step in the revitalization of Bala Avenue will be the improvements in the building façades, storefronts and signage. The historic building stock in the area should be properly rehabilitated and highlighted as the unique architectural details set the area apart from neighboring Main Line towns. It would ultimately be beneficial for business and property owners to invest both time and money in their properties. The exterior design of the individual stores is what attracts (or discourages) a consumer from entering the store. Renovating inappropriate façades and storefront additions would include making structural and esthetic improvements to the building itself, creating clever and appropriate signage, as well as making sure that awnings are clean and properly maintained. Dirty or chipped paint, missing pieces of molding, and untidy windows should all be repaired and restored. High-quality and durable materials, such as brick, stone, and glass, are recommended for future building renovations or new construction.

ERA|Downtown Works would also strongly suggest that the Township discourage or prohibit vinyl siding, exterior insulation and finish systems (EIFS), or poured concrete for renovations or on new construction. These materials would not fit well with the existing properties and would create a lack of visual continuity along the street. Cohesive design elements help to craft a district identity and are important in maintaining a standard for existing stores and new retailers that might come into the area. It is important to note however, that while cohesive elements are important, homogenization should be discouraged. This type of construction and design is common with shopping centers, and should not be present on Bala Avenue.

Additional attention needs to be paid to windows and display areas, particularly those that face pedestrian and street traffic. As a general rule, windows should be clean, unobstructed, and constitute at least 75 percent of the storefront. Solid or blank façades or completely obstructed windows should not be present in a commercial district. Displays should be carefully crafted to reflect the merchandise and nature of the store, and these displays should be rotated bi-monthly. Posted paper signage in display spaces and on facades should be removed. Remaining signage should be clear, easy to read, and visually interesting.

It would be beneficial for eye-catching signage to be placed at the gateway to Bala Avenue to visually mark where the commercial district begins, alerting passing traffic that there is a retail district along the street. Such measures will help in attracting potential shoppers to the area. Bala Avenue differs from other commercial districts on the Main Line in that traffic does not generally have to move through the area. In other towns such as Merion-Cynwyd and Bryn Mawr, their location along the major arteries of Montgomery and Lancaster Avenues ensures that there is a high volume of vehicular traffic. Ideally, the

condition of the buildings along Bala Avenue will improve enough that there should not be a need for signage

Streetscape Improvements

While the physical condition of the buildings should be the primary area of focus for a redevelopment effort, the streetscape conditions should also be addressed. Proper measures should be taken to improve the pedestrian and vehicular traffic patterns on the street. The speed of traffic on Bala Avenue caused by cars moving from Montgomery Avenue to City Avenue creates an unsafe and uncomfortable retail and/or pedestrian environment. ERA|Downtown Works does not specialize in traffic management or transportation planning, but does support further exploration and implementation of traffic calming measures. Some of these include traffic light timing, speed enforcement, and additional traffic sign posting. This is particularly important along Bala Avenue because the size of the buildings, the wide width of the sidewalks, and the two-lane street with parking on either side, make the area fit to a pedestrian scale. With the exception of Narberth, Bala Avenue is the only retail street in the Township that has the proper characteristics to be a truly pedestrian scaled environment.

ERA|Downtown Works has reviewed the 2000 Bala Avenue Master Plan, as prepared by Wallace, Roberts and Todd for the Neighborhood Club of Bala Cynwyd. Their recommendations include improving the connections between the Bala Avenue commercial district and the surrounding neighborhood as well as other area amenities including the Bala Gym, the Post Office, and the two SEPTA rail stations that flank Bala Avenue. The report also includes recommendations to improve parking operations in the municipal parking lot behind the BMW dealership, as well as the parking lot that is adjacent to the Bala Gym. ERA|Downtown Works concurs with their recommendations to improve signage so that these lots can be utilized more effectively. Entryways need to be carefully delineated and lighting needs to be improved to promote pedestrian safety. The proper utilization of the lots would be ultimately beneficial to the area as a whole, as it would alleviate parking pressure along Bala Avenue.

Construction of Residential Units

While ERA|Downtown Works was retained to advise only on retail strategy, it is important to acknowledge that the Bala Avenue shopping district would benefit greatly from the construction of residential apartment/condominium housing in the area. Additional area residents would bring increased spending into the area, and would undoubtedly help to revitalize the Bala Avenue commercial district, particularly if the merchandise mix were improved to reflect the needs and lifestyle of the market. Residential units would not only promote retail growth in the area but would also promote pedestrian safety.

The two SEPTA train stations that flank Bala Avenue at either end also provide an ideal amenity to support additional residential units in the area. The pedestrian scale of the street, combined with the convenience of nearby mass transit and retail makes the area very suitable for both young professionals and recent retirees who are looking for a comfortable and convenient suburban apartment. ERA|Downtown Works has found through previous

studies that ground floor retail with residential space located above is extremely beneficial to retail districts.

District Identity

Residents and visitors of Lower Merion Township often suggest that it is difficult to decipher where one town begins and the other ends. Part of the difficulty in differentiating between towns is the lack of a clear sense of identity. A retail based town center is useful in fostering distinction.

Bala Avenue has the attributes to establish its own identity since it has a very popular retro art-house movie theatre, in addition to eclectic building stock. With a proper merchandise mix and physical improvements, Bala Avenue has the potential to become more of a Main Line destination. Unlike some of the neighboring strip-mall retail centers that surround Bala Avenue, the building stock along the street is charming, unique, and has some historically significant architecture. The movie theatre should become an attractive focal point of the street, to act as the keystone of the neighborhood. Small and unique shops should be encouraged as they help to define the type of retail that should populate the area. Shops such as Walls and Windows and Details Lighting have incorporated color and tile work that reflect the original Egyptian Revival style architecture that is a hallmark of the building. Unique and clever signage that highlights the more unusual attributes of the building stock should also be encouraged.

In areas such as Bala Cynwyd that have fragmented retail design, a common set of *Storefront and Signage Design Guidelines* can be immensely beneficial. Imposing guidelines is an effective way to unify the efforts of retailers and property owners. Guidelines will also help with the proper utilization of façade grants should they be issued. *Storefront and Signage Design Guidelines* are currently being created for Ardmore. These guidelines will outline good retail design practices that can be applied to other areas in the Township and tailored to the areas specific needs. ERA|Downtown Works suggests that the Ardmore guidelines be adapted for use in Bala Avenue.

Merchandise Mix

A large part of what ultimately determines the strength and vitality of any retail district is the merchandise mix. The proper grouping of stores offers a balance of interesting retail categories, with a limited range of price points and appealing merchandise. Even if an area has a cluster of a particular type of store (such as a jewelry district, or interior design centered retail) it is important that the retail in the commercial area is not repetitive and offers complementary merchandise. It is also crucial that the merchandise mix properly fit the existing and potential markets' lifestyles (psychographics).

Currently, Bala Avenue has two distinct personas. A portion of Bala Avenue is made up of retail uses that cater to the immediate neighborhood population, such as a dry cleaner, beauty salons, and the small cafes. The other portion of Bala Avenue retail is made up of destination interior design retailers that draw customers from some distance. ERA|Downtown Works finds that this is an appropriate mix for Bala Avenue presently, as

the street is limited in what it can offer due to its size. Ideally the retail along Bala Avenue would extend from Montgomery Avenue to City Avenue, as both are major arteries that carry traffic between Philadelphia and the Main Line.

Potential Retail Uses

ERA|Downtown Works believes that varied types of neighborhood retail uses (those that sell goods) and services (those that sell services) would be beneficial to Bala Avenue. ERA|Downtown Works has outlined retail categories that are under-served, adequate, or well-served on Bala Avenue. Retail categories that are **under-served** should be aggressively recruited to add to the existing merchandise mix. **Adequate** retail categories have a presence on the street and could be expanded, but are not top recruitment priorities. **Well-served** categories have the maximum desired presence on Bala Avenue and should not be recruited.

Table 4: Merchandise Mix Recommendations

Retail Category	Underserved	Adequate	Well-served
Soft Goods			
Apparel: Children/Teens	X		
Art/Framing	X		
Bookstore/Newstand	X		
Card/Gift	X		
Food Markets		X	
Home Accessories		X	
Jewelry		X	
Optical Shop	X		
Personal care: specialty lotions & soaps	X		
Pharmacy/Convenience	X		
Shoes	X		
Retail Service			
Dry Cleaner		X	
Hair Salon			X
Nail Salon			X
Tailor		X	
Restaurants			
Café			X
Delicatessons	X		
Full Service Restaurant	X		
Quick Service and Pizza	X		

Source: Economics Research Associates/Downtown Works

An ideal merchandising mix for Bala Avenue should consist of local or regional independent-operators who will have a vested interest in their property. Bala Avenue will likely experience success with more neighborhood-oriented retail, as well as with food and beverage operators that can take advantage of the movie theatre patrons. Currently, the merchandise mix in Bala Cynwyd is somewhat skewed. There is a noticeable lack of soft goods retailers (clothing and other textile goods) and an abundance of service retail (dry cleaners, nail salons). The condition and quality of this retail is limited due to the fact that merchandise is not displayed properly, storefronts are not well maintained, window displays are not updated, and the signage is not carefully executed. All types of retail and retail services should be in good physical condition and should carry current merchandise. While retail services may not have merchandise to display, storefronts should still be well maintained, esthetically pleasing, and should be held to the same standards as the retail operators.

Bala Avenue already has a collection of relatively successful interior design stores such as Walls and Windows, The Baby's Room, and Details Lighting. Bala Avenue could position itself as a successful interior-decorating destination if it continues to attract these types of retailers. As an interior design destination, Bala Avenue could develop a clearer district identity, and could cater to an affluent niche market.

It is also important to note that Bala Avenue was formerly a destination for children's apparel and accessories. While these types of uses no longer exist on the street (with the exception of The Baby's Room), ERA|Downtown Works finds that children's related retail might be an appropriate retail category for Bala Avenue to pursue yet again. Research of psychographic data suggests that the large retiree community that resides in the area is very likely to spend a portion of their disposable income on grandchildren. Thus, it seems likely that children's boutiques along Bala Avenue would be successful, because they could cater to both younger families as well as retirees.

ERA|Downtown Works recommends that Bala Avenue upgrade the tenant mix on the street so that it more closely reflects the surrounding communities' lifestyle choices and price points. Bala Avenue is uniquely fortunate in that it's surrounding residential markets have significant disposable income and are apt to spend money on themselves, their home, their children, etc. These types of shoppers will be more likely to frequent Bala Avenue if the retail there reflects their lifestyle more closely.

An upgraded tenant mix will help Bala Avenue to gain higher sales per square foot. Higher sales/rent levels indicate increased sales volumes, and ultimately make a retail district more attractive to potential retailers. One of the primary goals of the merchandising mix strategy is to achieve higher sales/rent levels by attracting knowledgeable retailers with experience in merchandising. Having new retailers periodically enter the existing mix is crucial to maintaining the vitality of the area. Additionally, rent levels are typically determined by the amount of sales generated by the

retailer.² It is typical for building owners to invest more in their property if they are receiving higher rent

ERA|Downtown Works suggests that Bala Avenue would benefit from the addition of retail uses such as stores selling children's soft goods and interior design stores, as well as a better mix of restaurant uses. Due to the fact that there is already a relatively large concentration of retail services in the neighborhood (nail and hair salons, dry cleaners) ERA|Downtown Works advises that additional retail services would not be beneficial to the merchandise mix.

Some of the desired retail uses are already present on Bala Avenue. However, a number of the retailers and/or building owners are not adequately maintaining their properties and offering the appropriate types of retail. In order for stores to be successful, they need to be correctly merchandised and updated.

Additionally, it is important to mention what types of retail would not be beneficial to the Bala Avenue retail mix. This would include additional convenience retail that can be found in the nearby Merion-Cynwyd neighborhood, as well as national chain stores, which can be found in the nearby Suburban Square shopping center. It is also important that no additional office uses are brought into the neighborhood occupying primary street locations. The prime storefronts on Bala Avenue should ideally be occupied by retail uses only.

Recruitment Strategy

The implementation of design guidelines, and an improved merchandise mix will positively affect the retail on Bala Avenue. The *Merchandise Mix Plan* becomes most successful when experienced and dedicated retailers are brought into the area to complement and revitalize the existing mix. ERA|Downtown Works finds that simply placing a "For Lease" sign in available space does not typically attract the best possible retailers for a given district. Rather it is with the help of a retail recruiter that quality retailers can be brought in to help revitalize retail conditions in the area. A retail recruiter will spend a considerable amount of time working to find retailers that would thrive in the commercial district and best fit the proposed mix. This person will see that the *Merchandise Mix Plan* comes to fruition by selling prospective retailers on the vision for Bala Avenue. The retail recruiter also connects interested parties with the necessary broker or landlord for negotiation and deal making. It is important that the retail recruiter is familiar with the study area, and can work on establishing relationships with business owners, property owners, and brokers in Bala Cynwyd. The retail recruiter should be cognizant of existing retail lease terms and the landlords intentions.

² Street-front retail stores and restaurants should produce enough sales to be able to pay a rent that equals 8-10% of gross sales. A general rule of thumb in the retail industry is that stores doing less than \$250-300 per square foot annually are often unstable and potentially troubled.

The primary focus of recruitment will be on established and successful independent-operators that have at least one retail operation. Downtown Works finds that retailers who have already tackled the difficult task of opening a store, will be more likely to open an additional retail location. However, it is important to note that while retailers with one or more locations are more attractive candidates for recruitment, Downtown Works does not recommend over looking a well-qualified entrepreneur that is looking to open their first store. The small-scale spaces on Bala Avenue would be a prime destination for an expanding retailer to open a very manageable second or third store, as well as an ideal location for a new retailer to begin their career.

The first priority of recruitment should be to infill vacant properties, as vacancies detract from the continuity of the area and make the district seem less desirable to perspective retailers. After the vacant properties have been addressed, the retail recruiter should identify the retailers who have between one and three years left on their lease and are most limited in their contributions to the district as a whole. This might include retailers that are not maintaining their properties adequately, those using a prime Bala Avenue location as office space, as well as retailers who are not selling merchandise that is tailored to the sophisticated and affluent residential market.

It is evident that The Township is committed to improving retail throughout the Township. ERA|Downtown Works suggests that at this point Bala Avenue utilize The Township of Lower Merion's skilled Retail Recruiter, who can work to prospect and secure the most appropriate retailers for Bala Avenue. The Recruiter's experience in other areas of the Township will help her to adapt the retail strategy to the specific needs of Bala Avenue. The use of a centralized retail recruiter would prevent redundant recruitment efforts, including outreach to potential retailers and property owners.

Conclusion

ERA|Downtown Works acknowledges that Bala Avenue will have some limitations to its growth. There is the issue of the prime corner location and large parking lot space taken up by the BMW dealership at the intersection of Montgomery and Bala Avenues, and there is currently a limited amount of building stock ideal for retail. However, Bala Avenue does have many strengths that will encourage retail growth even with its present challenges. These strengths include the existing and potential customer markets, a prime location between the major thoroughfares of Montgomery and City Avenues, train stations that anchor each end of Bala Avenue, and proximity to Philadelphia. Yet without careful consideration and implementation of the Merchandise Mix plan, Bala Avenue retail will likely not experience revitalization.

The four major steps needed to the revitalize the Bala Avenue retail district are:

1. Work with the Township Retail Recruiter to expand her duties to include Bala Avenue (as detailed in the above sections)
2. Establish a close working relationship with building owners and encourage compliance with the strategy

3. Establish Storefront and Design Guidelines to ensure the emergence of esthetically pleasing and cohesive retail design
4. Consider mixed use developments for the area to eventually connect Montgomery and City Avenue.

It is important to remember that the revitalization process will take time, but all efforts will be maximized if existing retailers, business owners, and brokers are flexible and cooperative throughout the process. Ultimately, by completing these steps, Bala Avenue can experience successful retail revitalization.

Appendix I: Bala-Cynwyd Tapestry Descriptions

Retirement Communities – 19% - 1250 households

Congregate housing, which commonly includes meals and other services in the rent, is concentrated in this market. Although retirement communities can also offer owner-occupied housing and nursing care facilities, most are characterized by congregate housing.

Scattered throughout the United States, and dwelling mainly in cities, Retirement Communities residents include well-educated retirees, almost a third of whom are aged 65 years or older. Although their median household income is a relatively modest \$44,400, their median net worth tops \$175,000. Good health is a priority; many Retirement Communities residents visit their doctors regularly, use Weight Watchers for diet control, exercise on a stationary bike, and take vitamins and dietary supplements. Among other activities, these busy seniors spend their leisure time playing golf, attending ice hockey games, and listening to all-news and jazz radio. They like to spend time with their grandchildren and spoil them with toys, and they usually have ongoing home improvement projects.

Connoisseurs – 19% - 1244 households

Second in wealth to Top Rung among the consumer markets, but first for conspicuous consumption, Connoisseurs residents are slightly older, with a median age of almost 45 years, and closer to retirement than child rearing. Their neighborhoods tend to be older bastions of affluence where the median home value tops \$511,000. Growth in these neighborhoods is slow. Residents rate first among Tapestry's segments for conspicuous consumption and spend more for personal travel and vacations than any other Tapestry segment. They also work actively for political candidates or parties, participate in civic activities, and donate to charities.

Urban Chic – 15% - 1011 households

Urban Chic residents are professional couples living an urbane, exclusive lifestyle. They are homeowners; many are city dwellers with a preference for expensive homes in high-rise buildings or townhomes (median value tops \$472,000). Median age is 41 years. They travel extensively and embrace city life by visiting museums, attending dance performances and shopping at upscale stores. Civic-minded Urban Chic residents volunteer to work for political parties. Being news junkies, they read multiple newspapers each day and listen to news talk and public radio.

Top Rung – 10% - 627 households

Top Rung residents are the wealthiest consumer market—representing less than 1 percent of all U.S. households. Their median household income tops \$170,000; three and one-half times the national median. Their median home value is approximately \$1,000,000. These residents are in their peak earning years, 45–64, primarily in family households with no children or older children. Their median age is 43 years. With the purchasing power to indulge any choice, Top Rung residents are the best market for the purchase or lease of luxury or imported cars. They travel in style, both domestically and overseas, for business

and pleasure. They set aside time in their busy lifestyles for exercise and community activities.

Pleasant-ville – 10% -627 households

Prosperous domesticity distinguishes the settled homes of Pleasant-Ville neighborhoods. Most residents live in single-family homes built in the 1950s with a current median value of \$272,000. Located throughout the United States, these households are headed by middle-aged residents — most have children, some are nearing early retirement. Median age is almost 39 years. Home improvement is a priority for these residents of older homes, though they employ contractors and other maintenance services to complete the work. Shopping choices are eclectic, ranging from upscale department stores and warehouse stores to big box stores and discounters

Other: Old and Newcomers – 8% - 529 households

Old and Newcomers neighborhoods are in transition, populated by renters who are starting their careers or retiring. Many householders are in their twenties or above the age of 75. The median age of 36 years simply splits this age difference. Spread throughout U.S. metropolitan areas, Old and Newcomers neighborhoods have more single-person and shared households than families. Many residents have moved recently. Mid- or high-rise apartment buildings constructed in the 1970s dominate the housing market. The purchase choices of Old and Newcomers residents reflect their unencumbered lifestyle as singles and renters. Compact cars are preferred by these non-family households. Cats are the preferred pets because of apartment living. Among markets with median household income below the U.S. level, this segment has the highest readership of books. Depending on their age, they play sports such as racquetball and golf in addition to jogging or walking.

Other: College Towns – 7.8% - 514 households

Neighborhoods in College Towns represent on- and off-campus living. This market has a strong presence of college students; nearly 42 percent are enrolled in college and one-third of these students still live on campus. The median age is 25 years, with a high concentration of 18–24 year olds. Housing is a mix of low-income, multiunit rentals and single-family detached homes with married couples. The median home value is \$119,900. Convenience is the primary consideration for food purchases; residents frequently eat out, order in, or eat ready-made or easy to prepare meals bought from the closest grocery store. Owning a laptop or desktop computer and being able to access the Internet are necessities. In their leisure time, they enjoy playing sports, attending rock concerts and college football games, and going to the movies and bars. MTV and Comedy Central are their favorite cable television channels.

Other: Metropolitans –6.7% - 445 households

Metropolitans residents favor city living in older neighborhoods populated by singles or childless couples. These neighborhoods are an eclectic mix of single- and multifamily structures, with a median home value of \$183,000. Residents include both Generation Xers and retirees, most of whom are prosperous with a median household income of more than \$55,000. Busy and actively living the urban lifestyle, Metropolitans residents participate in

yoga, attend rock concerts, and visit museums. They listen to jazz, news, talk, and sports radio and rent foreign videos. They travel for business or pleasure, belonging to three or more frequent flyer programs. They participate in numerous civic activities such as volunteering for environmental causes.

Other: Urban Rows—1.7 % - 111 households

Row houses are characteristic of Urban Rows neighborhoods, which are found in large cities in the mid-Atlantic region. Built decades ago, few of these homes have undergone gentrification. The median home value is \$62,600, and most of the homes are owner occupied. Vacancies are above average however. The median age is 33 years. Because many homes have been in the family for generations, only a small proportion of households have a mortgage. Major improvements need to be made on many homes, but Urban Rows residents generally can afford minor or critical repair work only. They rarely eat out. Although cable television service is available in most of these neighborhoods, many residents do not subscribe. When Urban Rows residents watch TV, news and game shows are the most popular programs. They enjoy reading the tabloids and listening to news radio stations. Basketball is a favorite sport.

Other: In Style—1.3 % - 84 households

In Style residents live in the affluent neighborhoods of metropolitan areas. More suburban than urban, these households nevertheless embrace an urban lifestyle, favoring townhomes over traditional single-family houses. Professional couples are predominant in these neighborhoods. Labor force participation is high and most households have fewer children than the U.S. average. Their median age is approximately 38 years. Technologically savvy, In Style residents own cell phones, PDAs, and fully equipped PCs. Home remodeling and yard work are contracted out. Physical fitness is integral to their lives; they subscribe to Weight Watchers for diet control, work out in regular exercise programs, and take vitamins.

Other: Wealthy Seaboard Suburbs—1.2% - 79 households

Wealthy Seaboard Suburbs residents remain established quarters of affluence characteristic of coastal metropolitan areas. Neighborhoods are older and slow to change, with median home values that exceed \$372,000. The labor force is professional. The households consist of married couples living alone or with older children. Their median age is 42 years. Residents maximize their leisure time by relying on contractors and home services to maintain their homes and gardens. They enjoy visiting local beaches and traveling frequently. They are computer savvy but use the Internet for convenience, not entertainment.

Other: Family Foundations— .8% - 52 households

The bedrock of this market is family life — married couples, single parents, grandparents, young children, and adult children. This small urban market can be found in large metropolitan areas. Their neighborhoods are composed of row houses or single-family detached, primarily pre-1960s, owner-occupied houses. There is a gradual decline in population through attrition, but little turnover in the neighborhoods. Unemployment is

above average, although 30 percent have completed some college classes. Their median household income is \$41,800. Family Foundations residents are active in their communities; they attend church services, serve on church boards, help with fund-raising projects, and participate in civic activities. Most of their consumer expenditures are for home maintenance and family; baby products and clothing are priority items in their budgets. Basketball is a favorite sport of Family Foundations residents; they enjoy playing and attending college and professional games.

Appendix II: Samples of Signage



