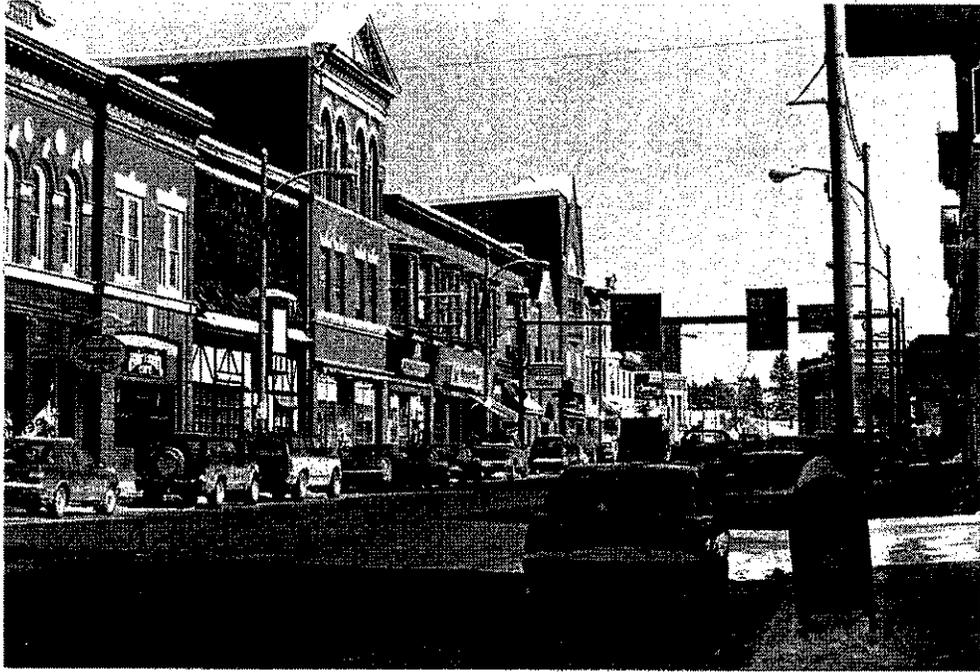


DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION ACTION PLAN

SKOWHEGAN, MAINE

COPY



Prepared For:

The Town of Skowhegan and the Downtown Business Association

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TABLE OF CONTENTS
DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION ACTION PLAN

Section I.	Introduction	1
Section II.	Overview of Downtown Skowhegan	2
Section III.	Organizational Issues and Opportunities	5
Section IV.	Economic Issues and Opportunities	7
Section V.	Marketing and Promotion Issues and Opportunities	11
Section VI.	Design Issues and Opportunities	12
Section VII.	The Downtown Revitalization Strategies and Action Plan	14

SECTION I. INTRODUCTION

As with many older downtowns, Skowhegan has seen the economic role of its "Main Street" change over the years. Historically, downtown Skowhegan served as the retail and service center for a large geographic area extending northward toward the Canadian border. This role began to change with the "suburbanization" of the town's retail sector. Commercial uses first began to spread along Route 201 north and south of downtown. The 1970's saw the construction of two suburban style shopping centers on the northern fringe of the community adjacent to Route 201. These centers included a large supermarket, discount department stores, and a number of smaller convenience and comparison goods stores. With this, downtown's role as the retail center of the town and region was reduced. In the past year, this pattern of change was further reinforced with the construction of a WAL-MART on the northern edge of the community.

In spite of these changes, downtown has continued to function as a retail and service center, although in a very different role. A number of long-term retail establishments remain in downtown. In addition, new retail and service uses have located in the area, changing the business mix. With the Somerset County Courthouse located on the edge of downtown, the downtown continues to serve as the legal center for the region.

Over the past two years, the Town and the Downtown Business Association (DBA) have begun to look at ways to revitalize downtown's role as an economic center. This effort received a boost in 1994 when the Town, at the urging of the DBA, applied for and received a Quality Main Street (QMS) grant from the Maine Department of Economic and Community Development. The grant enabled the community to analyze downtown and develop a program for revitalizing downtown Skowhegan. This action plan summarizes the findings of that work, establishes objectives for the revitalization effort, and sets forth a detailed strategy for carrying out the revitalization program.

The downtown revitalization strategy contained in this action plan establishes a coordinated program for reinvigorating the economy of downtown Skowhegan. The strategy includes four interrelated components:

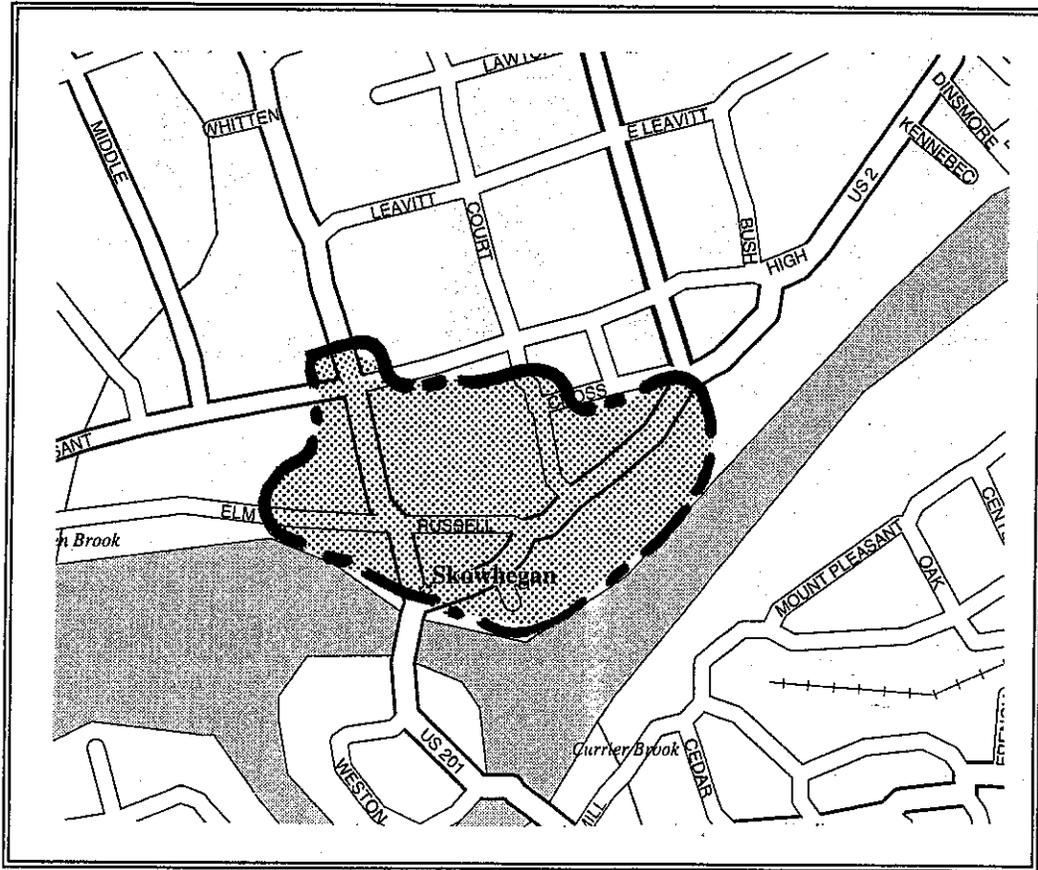
- Organizational Strategies
- Economic Revitalization Strategies
- Strategies Relating to Design, Traffic, and the Physical Environment of Downtown
- Marketing and Promotional Strategies

The underlying precept of the overall strategy is that the community, working together and incrementally over time, must address all four of these components if the downtown revitalization program is to be successful in the long run. There is great temptation to focus on just one or two areas, but attention to all four components is vital to the effort.

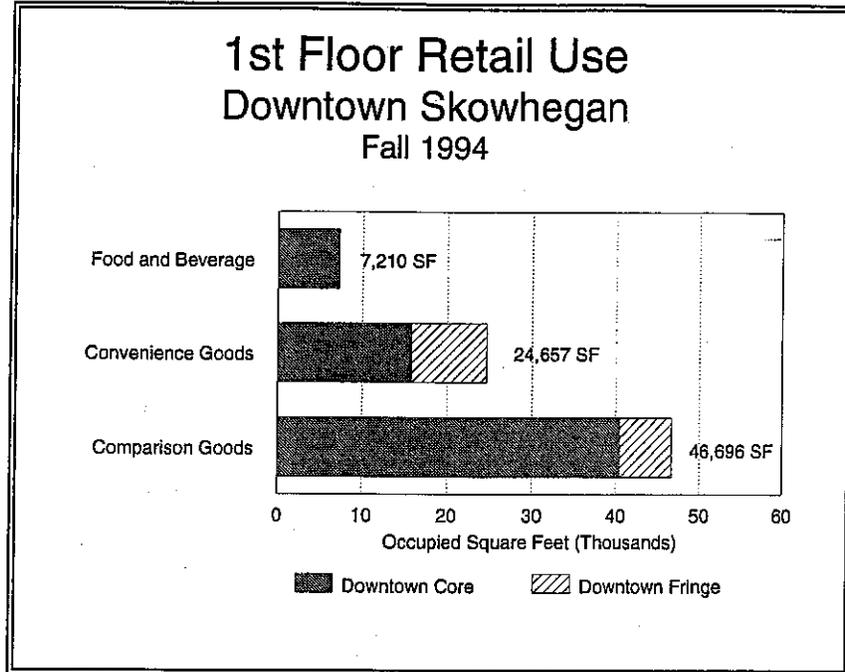
The overall strategy is based upon a long-term commitment to working to improve downtown Skowhegan. The program envisions that a large number of separate but interrelated activities will occur over a number of years, each building on the others to fundamentally change the way the downtown functions. This is not an easy mission, but it is one that Skowhegan can achieve.

SECTION II. OVERVIEW OF DOWNTOWN SKOWHEGAN

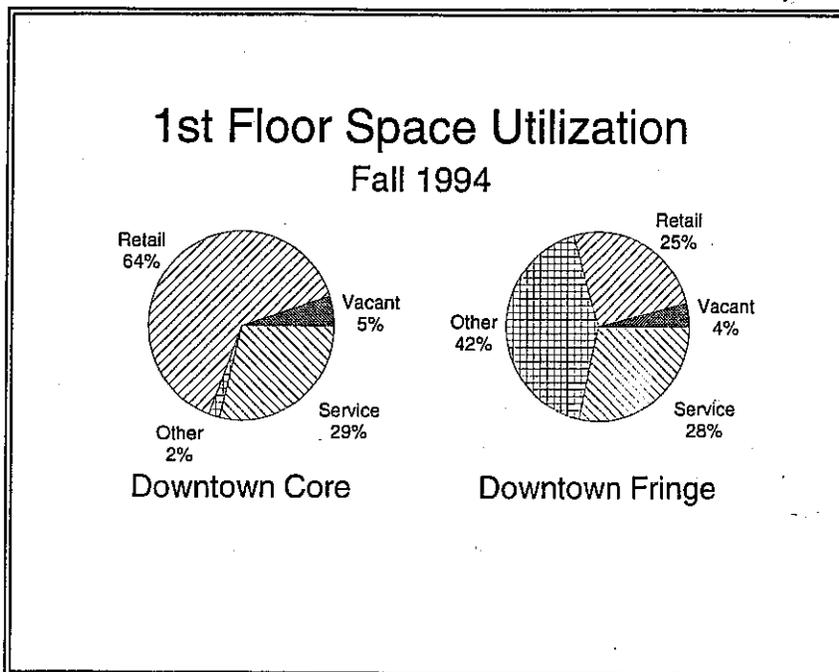
Downtown Skowhegan means different things to different people. For the purpose of this effort, downtown is considered to be the historical center of the community, including Water Street from the bridge eastward to Town Hall and the Post Office, Russell Street, Court Street, Madison Avenue north to High Street, and a portion of Elm Street.



The core of downtown Skowhegan, including the main retail district, includes almost 100,000 square feet of first floor space. Of this area, approximately $\frac{2}{3}$ is occupied by retail uses. The fringe of downtown includes an additional 60,000 square feet of first floor area. Usage of this space is much different than in the core, with only $\frac{1}{4}$ used for retail purposes, 30% used for services, and much of the space used for other purposes.



The downtown area contains almost 80,000 square feet of first floor space used for retail purposes. This space is divided between convenience retail and comparison retail uses. Almost 25,000 square feet, or 31% of the occupied retail space, is used by convenience goods stores, including three hardware stores and a drug store. Approximately 47,000 square feet, or almost 60% of the retail space, is devoted to a wide range of comparison goods. Over 7,000 square feet, or almost 10% of the occupied first floor retail space, is devoted to food and beverage service.



Downtown Skowhegan currently fills three distinct but interrelated economic roles:

- The downtown serves as a convenience retail and service center for residents of Skowhegan and other nearby portions of the trade area. The area offers a wide range of goods and services to meet the daily needs of people who live or work in reasonably close proximity to downtown Skowhegan. This sector includes the drug and hardware stores, video stores, beauty and barber shops, cleaners, banks, etc.
- The downtown also serves as a comparison goods retail center. Approximately $\frac{2}{3}$ of downtown retail space is devoted to the types of merchandise for which people tend to comparison shop, including apparel, gifts, jewelry, etc.
- In addition to these roles, the Town in general and downtown specifically serves as the legal center of Somerset County as the result of it being the county seat. This results in a large number of law offices being located in and around downtown.

The market analysis conducted as part of the downtown revitalization study contains additional information about the downtown district and its current space utilization and economic function.

SECTION III. ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Successful downtowns are more than a collection of individual businesses located in close proximity to one another. A key element of success is creating a downtown that functions as an interrelated business center. By that we mean an area that is recognized by consumers as a "place" rather than as just individual businesses. This requires coordination and cooperation among downtown businesses, and for this to happen some form of downtown organization is necessary.

A. Organizational Issues

Downtown Skowhegan is fortunate that this need has already been recognized and a successful organization, the Downtown Business Association (DBA), is already in existence. Over the past few years, the DBA, working in conjunction with the Town, has created a sound basis upon which to build. The organization has worked to improve the environment of downtown through a cooperative building-cleaning program and the installation and upkeep of flower baskets on the light poles throughout the downtown. The DBA has successfully organized and manages special events such as "Midnight Madness" and the "Holiday Stroll" and cooperative advertising programs.

While the Downtown Business Association has created a very successful beginning for the revitalization effort, a key finding of the revitalization study was that the current capacity of the DBA to undertake additional activities and programs is limited. This limitation is an important barrier to an expansion of the downtown revitalization effort.

In addition to the capacity limitation, other organizational issues were identified. Historically, the DBA and the Skowhegan Chamber of Commerce have operated independently, although their activities and interests clearly overlap. At the same time, it is important to recognize that the interests of the two organizations diverge on certain topics. This lack of a cooperative working relationship between the organizations is a potential barrier to the long-term success of downtown revitalization.

B. Organization Opportunities

The current focus on revitalization of the downtown business districts creates an important opportunity for the Downtown Business Association (DBA) to reassess its organizational structure with the objective of enhancing its capabilities to lead the revitalization program. Currently, most of the activities of the DBA are managed and carried out by a small group of dedicated business people working on a voluntary basis. This program provides an opportunity to expand the level of involvement in the DBA within the downtown business community and to refocus the volunteer efforts on creative activities by developing staff support to handle the routine, administrative tasks of the association.

At the same time this program, combined with changes at the Chamber of Commerce, create the opportunity for the two organizations to forge a cooperative, working relationship on downtown revitalization activities that are of interest to both groups. The officers of the DBA should explore ways to develop this relationship and utilize the talents and resources of the Chamber in the revitalization program.

SECTION IV. ECONOMIC ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Successful downtown revitalization requires that a clear economic role for downtown be established based upon market opportunities and a program to capitalize on those opportunities.

A. Economic Issues

The market analysis conducted in conjunction with the downtown revitalization effort examined the economic functioning of downtown Skowhegan. The following summarizes the findings of that analysis. Additional details can be found in the market analysis report.

1. *The Skowhegan Trade Area*

Skowhegan functions as the retail and service center for a 14-town primary trade area, including Skowhegan, Norridgewock, Madison, Anson, Canaan, Cornville, Solon, Embden, Bingham, Moscow, Pleasant Ridge, Athens, Harmony, and Brighton. Skowhegan businesses typically draw 75% to 80% of their customers from this area. It appears that a number of downtown businesses rely even more heavily on this trade area for their customer base than do the Skowhegan shopping centers. While businesses involved in the sales of comparison goods draw quite uniformly from different parts of the trade area, the draw of customers from the Norridgewock, Madison, Anson part of the trade area is limited in terms of convenience goods.

It is also important to recognize that Skowhegan businesses currently draw a limited number of customers from the communities to the south, including Fairfield, Oakland, Smithfield, and Waterville. While this is not surprising given the range of retail and service establishments available in Waterville, it does establish an important market limit.

At the same time, it is also important to recognize that the customer base for downtown businesses includes other Skowhegan businesses and people who work in or near downtown Skowhegan. While the importance of this sector of the market varies from business to business, 20% to 40% of a number of businesses' customers are drawn from other businesses, people who work in downtown, or people who stop in downtown on their way to or from work.

In addition to the Primary Trade Area, Skowhegan draws an additional group of customers from a large, but sparsely settled, Secondary Trade Area extending northerly along Route 201 to the Canadian border. Communities on the fringe of the Skowhegan Trade Area such as New Portland to the West and Hartland and St. Albans to the East contribute some customers to Skowhegan businesses but in relatively small numbers.

This suggests that downtown business growth must come from capturing a larger share of the spending generated by residents of the trade area.

2. *Characteristics of the Trade Area*

The Skowhegan Primary Trade Area has approximately 28,100 residents and has experienced slow growth over the past 15 years. The Secondary Trade Area has approximately 1,400 year-round residents.

Income within the trade area is relatively low. The estimated median household income in 1994 was only \$25,750. In 1990, the U.S. Census reported that the median income of the trade area was only 80% of statewide median. The large percentage of households with lower incomes restricts the retail spending potential of the trade area population.

While the number of jobs in the Skowhegan area grew over the last ten years, this growth was primarily in nonmanufacturing positions. As of December 1994, over 10% of the resident labor force was unemployed, a level significantly higher than the statewide average.

3. *Retail Expenditure Potential*

The residents of the trade area, together with seasonal residents and tourists, generate significant retail spending potential, much of which is already captured by Skowhegan businesses.

- **Convenience Goods Potential** - The trade area generates in excess of \$60,000,000 per year in retail potential for convenience goods (groceries, health and beauty aids, prescription drugs, hardware, etc.), much of it from supermarket sales. This category offers limited market supports for downtown revitalization.
- **Comparison Goods Potential** - The trade area generates \$32,000,000 to \$35,000,000 of retail sales potential for comparison goods (apparel, furniture, jewelry, gifts, etc.). While much of this potential is absorbed by department stores and other general merchandise stores, it also provides the market supports for specialty stores.
- **Restaurant Potential** - The trade area generates approximately \$17,000,000 to \$18,000,000 in spending potential in restaurants, bars, and similar establishments.
- **Bus Tourist Potential** - The 8,000 to 9,000 bus tourists who stop in Skowhegan generate \$100,000 to \$120,000 in retail spending potential on retail purchases such as gifts, souvenirs, and sundries.

4. *Existing Shopping Patterns*

While consumers in the Skowhegan Trade Area report doing most of their shopping for day-to-day needs with trade area merchants, a significant group reports travelling out of the trade area for certain types of comparison goods. This is most common for apparel and shoes, but also occurs for other specialty goods.

It appears that prior to the opening of the Skowhegan WAL-MART in the fall of 1994, approximately 25% of the comparison goods potential was leaking out to other retail centers. Undoubtedly, the new WAL-MART is capturing a percentage of these sales. However, the impact of the new store is not yet clear. Much of the leakage appeared to be in specialty store areas rather than in the general merchandise category.

B. Economic Opportunities

Realistically, the market supports for a revitalized retail district in downtown Skowhegan are limited. At the same time, there are selected opportunities that can be used to support downtown activities.

- **Convenience Goods** - The market supports offered by convenience goods are quite limited. Large scale grocery operations are not compatible with downtown. The market is probably saturated in terms of hardware and drug stores. There do appear to be some limited opportunities in specialty foods and in fresh bakery goods. At the same time, it is important to recognize that retaining the existing convenience goods stores is important to the downtown.
- **Comparison Goods** - The market analysis suggests that there is considerable leakage of comparison goods spending potential out of the Skowhegan Trade Area. A major component of this leakage is in the apparel area. While this is a very competitive market segment and the success of independents is spotty, market supports exist for the establishment of additional apparel stores in Skowhegan, primarily in the areas of women's and children's clothes. While the new WAL-MART will provide competition in this area, careful positioning should allow one or more small apparel stores to succeed. In addition to general apparel, specialty clothing such as uniforms or bridal/formal wear could provide additional market supports.

The available offerings in a number of other merchandise areas are limited. These provide opportunities for supporting downtown revitalization and include:

- good quality radio, TV, and electronics
- sporting goods
- books and magazines
- toys, hobbies, and games
- cards and stationery
- arts and crafts supplies
- crafts and gifts

Given the competitive environment, capitalizing on these opportunities will require a well-run operation with creative marketing.

- **Bus Tourists** - Skowhegan's role as a lunch stop for bus tours brings additional spending potential into the community. While the total potential is small (\$100,000 to \$120,000), it does represent something of a special market. Spending of this group is focused on souvenirs, gifts, limited apparel, and daily needs (toiletries, prepared food, tobacco products, etc.)
- **Restaurants** - During 1993, restaurants in the Skowhegan Economic Summary Area had total sales of \$14.5 million. This represents about 85% of the estimated sales potential. This suggests that there are limited opportunities for new or expanded restaurants within the downtown. One area that might offer sufficient supports is for a downtown coffee shop/family restaurant.

SECTION V. MARKETING AND PROMOTION ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The third component of downtown revitalization involves the marketing and promotion of downtown and its businesses.

A. Marketing and Promotion Issues

During the course of the downtown study, a number of issues arose dealing with the marketing and promotion of downtown Skowhegan.

A major issue involves consumers' awareness of downtown as a business district. It appears that a significant group of consumers has limited awareness of the range of goods and services available in downtown. As importantly, consumers appear to think of downtown in terms of particular stores or businesses when they do consider downtown.

People who work in or near downtown are an important source of customers for many downtown businesses. However, little focus is placed on encouraging this group to do more of their business in downtown.

A third important issue involves bus tours that stop in downtown Skowhegan for lunch. While the Town and Chamber of Commerce encourage tour operators to stop in Skowhegan, many downtown businesses report seeing little impact from these 8,000 to 10,000 visitors.

B. Marketing and Promotion Opportunities

Three key opportunities appear to exist for the marketing and promotion component of the downtown revitalization program. Primary among these is the opportunity to make trade area consumers aware of downtown as a business district with a wide range of goods and services. In the long term, this is probably a key element of a successful revitalization program.

At the same time, downtown has the opportunity to market itself directly to segments of the overall market that have a greater potential of becoming downtown shoppers. A major group of potential customers is the people who work in or near downtown, including people in the legal and legal support professions, hospital employees, and workers at the manufacturing businesses on the fringe of downtown. Attracting this group of consumers to downtown should be viewed as a major opportunity.

Bus tourists represent something of an untapped market for many downtown businesses. While their time in downtown is very short, a marketing program designed to encourage them to visit downtown stores may be very productive.

SECTION VI. DESIGN ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Successful revitalization also depends on creating an environment that is inviting and comfortable for customers and downtown workers and visitors. This includes areas such as traffic, parking, and the overall appearance of the district.

A. Design Issues

As part of the downtown analysis, customers who use downtown as well as shoppers throughout the trade area were interviewed about their shopping patterns and perceptions of downtown. These surveys identified a number of design-related issues and concerns:

1. *Traffic*

The current traffic flow through downtown Skowhegan does not contribute to a pleasant shopping environment. The routing of northbound Route 201 traffic onto Water and Russell Streets introduces a high volume of through-traffic into the center of the downtown district. This impact is exacerbated by the number of large trucks passing through downtown. Consumers see this as an undesirable situation that detracts from downtown as a business district.

2. *Parking*

While there is generally an adequate supply of parking in the downtown area, management of the use of the available parking is seen as an important issue. Almost half of the consumers interviewed during the study did not feel that downtown has convenient parking, and one in six downtown customers reported having difficulty finding a place to park. The root of this issue appears to be in how the available parking in downtown is utilized. Concerns include the use of on-street parking by downtown workers, the allocation of off-street parking between customers and employees, and the ability of customers to easily get to available off-street parking areas.

3. *Pedestrian Movement*

Unlike most areas in Maine, motorists in Skowhegan generally yield to pedestrians in downtown crosswalks. In spite of this, some consumers view downtown as not particularly pedestrian friendly or safe. This perception is heightened by the high traffic volumes, number of large trucks, and weaving movements required by the one-way traffic pattern.

4. *Visual Environment*

The visual environment of downtown Skowhegan is seen as being uninviting by some consumers. While many of the buildings have exceptional architectural character, modernizations have obscured and, in some cases, destroyed the visual character of the buildings. This factor, combined with standard public improvements, creates an environment that does not contribute to attracting customers to downtown.

B. Design Opportunities

The downtown revitalization effort creates the potential to begin to address these issues. First and foremost of these is traffic flow through the downtown. The traffic analysis done as part of the downtown study catalogued the existing traffic conditions and problems in downtown (see DeLuca Hoffman Associates' traffic study). The analysis of alternative traffic patterns suggested that the "best" solution for the downtown includes upgrading High Street to serve as an alternative to Water and Russell Streets, returning Madison Avenue to a two-way pattern, and eliminating the one-way loop in the downtown. At the same time, the analysis recognized that these changes, particularly returning to two-way traffic, raise a number of important issues that need to be resolved prior to moving forward with any improvements. These include the impact on the Village Candlelight building, on-street parking changes, and access to off-street parking facilities.

Management of the available parking supply in the downtown is a second opportunity that should be pursued. While this is a contentious issue, the revitalization effort creates the vehicle to bring all stakeholders to the table to find a solution that meets the widest range of needs.

Changes in downtown traffic flow may also enable the Town to provide for enhanced pedestrian movement and safety. In addition, upgrading of the sidewalks and crosswalks with a focus on the mid-block crossing should be a priority for the revitalization program.

Upgrading of the downtown environment through improvements to individual buildings will be a long-term effort and must be grounded in the economics of the downtown. An opportunity does exist to work with owner occupants to begin to make simple and inexpensive improvements to building facades and signs that are in keeping with the architectural character of the structures.

SECTION VII. THE DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION STRATEGIES AND ACTION PLAN

Downtown Skowhegan, as with many older downtown districts, has both strengths and weaknesses. This downtown revitalization strategy establishes a coordinated program for reinvigorating the economy of downtown Skowhegan. The strategy includes four interrelated components:

- Organizational Strategies
- Marketing and Promotional Strategies
- Economic Revitalization Strategies
- Strategies Relating to Design, Traffic, and the Physical Environment of Downtown

The underlying precept of the overall strategy is that the community, working together and incrementally over time, must address all four of these components if the downtown revitalization program is to be successful in the long run. There is great temptation to focus on just one or two areas, but attention to all four components is vital to the effort.

The overall strategy is based upon a long-term commitment to working to improve downtown Skowhegan. The program envisions that a large number of separate but interrelated activities will occur over a number of years, each building on the others to fundamentally change the way the downtown functions. This is not an easy mission, but it is one that Skowhegan can achieve.

A. Downtown's Economic Role

At one point, downtown Skowhegan was the retail and service center for the region. Over the past decades, personal mobility and the growth of outlying shopping centers have significantly eroded this role. Today, the downtown functions both as a "neighborhood commercial center" meeting some of the day-to-day needs of the Skowhegan area and as a "limited specialty retail and service center" for a larger trade area.

This downtown revitalization strategy is built on three future economic roles for downtown:

- Maintaining and even expanding downtown's role as a "neighborhood commercial center" that meets the day-to-day needs of local residents and downtown workers.
- Expanding downtown's role as a "specialty retail and service center" by capturing a larger percentage of spending generated by the year-round population of the Skowhegan trade area.

- Making Skowhegan more attractive to tourists passing through on Routes 2 and 201 with a special focus on bus tours.

None of these roles by itself creates the necessary market supports for a revitalized downtown. But in combination, these roles offer opportunities to support an economically viable downtown business district. The strategies set forth in this section establish a program to capitalize on these opportunities.

B. Organizational Strategies

Successful downtown revitalization requires that a wide range of activities occur over a sustained period. While Town staff can play some role in this, the overall revitalization strategy is built on the recognition that there is a need for a downtown organization that can champion downtown and coordinate the revitalization program. The Downtown Business Association (DBA) has already begun to play this role and this program proposes that the ability of the DBA to serve this function be strengthened and expanded.

1. Organizational Objectives

To this end, the following organizational objectives are established:

OBJECTIVE #1 - Revise the organizational structure of the Downtown Business Association to expand the number of business people and downtown property owners actively involved in the organization.

OBJECTIVE #2 - Enhance communication between the DBA and downtown businesses and property owners with a special emphasis on new businesses and their owners/managers.

OBJECTIVE #3 - Develop an ongoing source of funding to support the administrative activities of the DBA to allow its role and functions to expand.

OBJECTIVE #4 - Establish staff support for the DBA to handle administrative and ongoing functions to allow members to focus on revitalization activities.

2. Organizational Work Plan

To accomplish these organizational objectives, the Downtown Business Association will need to undertake the following short-term activities:

- **Organizational Review** - By July 1, 1995, the Executive Committee of the DBA will review the Committee structure of the organization and recommend changes to align the responsibilities with the components of the revitalization program. Consideration should be given to creating four working committees with the following responsibilities:
 1. **Membership and Development Committee** - This Committee should be charged with recruiting new members, identifying members to serve on the Board and Committees, raising funds to support ongoing operations, and maintaining communications with the membership.
 2. **Promotion Committee** - This Committee should be charged with marketing downtown as a unified, quality business district through coordinated advertising, special events such as Midnight Madness and the Stroll, and developing an overall image for downtown.
 3. **Design Committee** - This Committee should be charged with initiating and overseeing the physical aspects of the revitalization program with a focus on coordinating the DBA's activities with the Town's.
 4. **Economic Revitalization Committee** - This Committee should be charged with initiating and overseeing the portions of the strategy relating to economic revitalization.

The Executive Committee will establish a clear statement of purpose for each of these standing committees based upon their review.

- **Committee Operations** - By September 1, 1995, each Committee will be operational with a full complement of active members and a clearly defined work program for the coming year.
- **Communications with DBA Membership** - By the end of 1995, the Membership and Development Committee will have reviewed the organization's communication programs, developed a revised program for keeping members informed about the DBA and its activities, and initiated the revised program.
- **Contacts with New Businesses** - By the end of 1995, the Membership and Development Committee will establish a program for contacting new businesses in the downtown, property owners, and other downtown interests. Consideration should be given to a joint activity with the Town such as a business visitation program in which a representative of the DBA and a representative of the Town formally call on new downtown interests to make them welcome, let them know they are important to the community and downtown, and solicit their involvement in the DBA and the revitalization program.

- ***Administrative Funding*** - By July 1, 1995, the Executive Committee will develop a budget for supporting core administrative functions of the organization and a program for raising the necessary funds. The Executive Committee, in conjunction with the Membership and Development Committee, will raise the necessary funds.
- ***Administrative Operations*** - By September 1, 1995, the DBA will have a part-time staff assistant to handle the day-to-day administrative activities of the organization and the DBA office. The Executive Committee will develop the appropriate job description and duties, recruit and hire the staff assistant, and find an appropriate space in which to house the person.
- ***Liaison with Other Organizations*** - During 1995, the Executive Committee will establish working relationships with organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce and develop a program for maintaining and enhancing these relationships.

Over the long term, the organizational component will focus on maintaining and expanding the organizational capacity of the DBA. As downtown revitalization moves forward, it is highly likely that the level of administrative support will need to grow.

C. Economic Revitalization Strategies

1. Economic Revitalization Objectives

A key component of the downtown revitalization program is improving downtown's economic functioning through attracting more customers and spending into the district. To this end, the following economic revitalization objectives are established:

OBJECTIVE #5 - Maintain the existing core of stores in downtown and enhance their economic performance.

OBJECTIVE #6 - Expand the range of retail merchandise available in downtown Skowhegan with a focus on the gaps identified in the market analysis.

OBJECTIVE #7 - Enhance downtown's image as a place to do business by promoting the successes of downtown businesses and the DBA.

OBJECTIVE #8 - Support the retention of existing non-retail uses and the establishment of new uses which bring potential customers into downtown Skowhegan.

OBJECTIVE #9 - Capitalize on Skowhegan's role as the county seat and legal center of Somerset County to support downtown revitalization.

2. *Economic Revitalization Work Plan*

To accomplish these objectives, the Downtown Business Association will undertake the following short-term activities over the next year:

- ***Business-to-Business Communications*** - To assure that the DBA and Town are aware of any proposed business changes, possible relocations or closings, or concerns of the business community, the Economic Revitalization Committee will establish an informal system to assure that each business in downtown is personally contacted once or twice a year to check on business conditions and identify any concerns in the business community.
- ***Business Assistance Program*** - The DBA will serve as a liaison between downtown businesses and sources of business assistance. To accomplish this, the Economic Revitalization Committee will:
 - Survey downtown business owners to determine their business assistance needs (i.e., cash flow management, personnel administration, TQM programs, etc.)
 - Work with the Town's Economic Development Department to identify sources of business assistance and make DBA members aware of these opportunities.
 - Publicize special business assistance programs that occur in the area.
 - Promote and sponsor training programs and similar activities of interest to downtown businesses.
- ***Assistance Team*** - The Economic Revitalization Committee will develop a team of people who can be quickly mobilized to work to retain an existing business in downtown. Members of the team should have a wide range of professional and business skills and should be willing to work with an existing owner or a potential new owner to keep a business in downtown. The role of this group should be advisory.
- ***Business Environment*** - The DBA's Economic Revitalization Committee will work with the Town to enhance the business community's and the public's perception of the business environment in downtown. This should include regular meetings between the DBA, the Town Manager, and Selectmen to review downtown revitalization issues and the creation of a business visitation program

in which a representative of the Town and a representative of the DBA visit each downtown business on a regular basis to get firsthand information about business conditions and make businesses aware of their importance to the community. In addition, the Economic Revitalization Committee should work with the Promotion Committee to create regular media coverage about the successes of the DBA and individual downtown businesses. The goal of this effort should be to create a positive image of downtown Skowhegan as a place to do business. The information could focus on increased sales at a particular business, the level of activity surrounding certain periods (Christmas sales, etc.) or the success of promotional activities (The 1994 Holiday Stroll had x% more participants than the previous year).

- ***Expansion of Existing Downtown Businesses*** - The Economic Revitalization Committee will encourage existing downtown businesses to explore expanding the range of goods they offer to fill identified gaps in the retail mix.
- ***Business Financing*** - The DBA will work with the Town's Economic Development Department to identify potential sources of business financing and to assure that downtown businesses are aware of these programs.
- ***Availability of Micro-Loan Funds*** - The Economic Revitalization Committee will work with the Town to assure that loans available through the Town are made available to support downtown revitalization activities and that downtown businesses and property owners are aware of these loans.
- ***Recruitment of Businesses into Downtown*** - Over the long run, successful downtown revitalization will require that additional business activities occur in downtown. To encourage this, the Economic Revitalization Committee will:
 - Develop information and materials that can be used in recruiting new businesses.
 - Identify businesses already in operation in the Skowhegan trade area that would be beneficial to be located in downtown.
 - Identify central Maine businesses that have potential for establishing a branch location in Skowhegan.
 - Establish a program for personally contacting these prospects on a regular basis and encouraging them to locate in downtown Skowhegan.
- ***Establishment of New Businesses*** - A significant potential for business growth and retention in downtown is in the establishment of new start-up businesses in downtown or the purchase of existing businesses by new owners. A major role

of the Economic Revitalization Committee will be to identify potential entrepreneurs, encourage them to consider starting/buying a business in downtown, and work with them to secure financing, space, etc. While this is truly a long-term activity, the Committee should start work in this area during 1995.

Over the longer term, the DBA will need to maintain the expanded level of economic revitalization activity. The Committee will need to provide for repeating the short-term activities on a regular, recurring basis. In addition, the Economic Revitalization Committee should undertake the following initiatives over the next two to three years:

- ***Expansion of Entertainment and Cultural Activities*** - Retaining and expanding the type of uses which bring a broad cross-section of people into downtown will be important to the long-term vitality of the downtown. The Economic Revitalization Committee should explore the following:
 - Expanded use of the movie theater.
 - Renovation of the opera house in the municipal building and its use as a performing arts center.
- ***Retention of the Courts on the Fringe of Downtown*** - While the District Court has some negative impacts on downtown, the location of county government near downtown also has positive benefits. The Economic Revitalization Committee should work with the State and Town to assure that court functions are located on the fringe of downtown in a manner that provides adequate parking for these uses without compromising downtown customer parking.
- ***Ancillary Legal Uses*** - The Committee should investigate if there are unmet needs of the legal community for temporary office space, meeting/conference facilities, technology access, etc. that could be used to support a new or expanded business in downtown.
- ***Local Products Showcase*** - The Economic Revitalization Committee should identify consumer products that are produced in the region and investigate the feasibility of establishing a retail outlet in the downtown focused around these items and possibly other Maine-made goods. This could be either an outlet type store or regular retail operation.

D. Promotion and Marketing Strategies

1. Promotion and Marketing Objectives

The third component of the downtown revitalization program is an active program to market the downtown as a quality commercial area and to promote the individual businesses within downtown. To this end, the following promotion and marketing objectives are established:

OBJECTIVE #10 - Develop an image of downtown as a distinctive shopping and service district.

OBJECTIVE #11 - Create awareness with consumers living in the Skowhegan trade area of the range of goods and services available in downtown.

OBJECTIVE #12 - Increase the number of events and activities that attract people into downtown Skowhegan.

2. Promotion and Marketing Work Plan

The task of promoting and marketing downtown Skowhegan as a commercial district should be delegated to the Promotion Committee. This group should undertake the following activities in addition to assuming responsibility for ongoing activities such as the Holiday Stroll or Midnight Madness. In the next year, the Committee will address the following:

- **Downtown Image** - The Committee will develop a downtown logo and related marketing theme that will be used by the DBA and its members in promoting the downtown district. The logo should be able to be used in a wide variety of situations and should reflect a local theme. It is important that the logo be a "quality" image for the downtown.
- **Promotion of the Range of Goods and Services Available in Downtown** - The Promotion Committee will develop a directory of categories of goods and services that are available in downtown and where they can be found. The emphasis in the directory should be on the types of goods rather than on specific businesses. The directory should be printed as a companion to the walking map of downtown. This information should then be used in joint advertising programs that focus on downtown as a commercial district.
- **Joint Promotion/Advertising Activities** - The Promotion Committee will develop joint advertising opportunities that are designed to build consumers' awareness of what can be found in downtown Skowhegan. The best possibility may be to build around special themes (i.e., fifty things you can get your valentine in downtown Skowhegan -- flowers @ _____, candy @ _____, the right card @ _____).

_____, a special gift @ _____, _____, or _____, the latest romantic movie @ _____ and _____, the "I love you" tattoo @ _____, a quiet dinner for two @ _____, etc.). The objective of these promotions should be to get people thinking about "downtown Skowhegan" rather than just the individual businesses.

- **Target Marketing** - The Promotion Committee will develop a program for targeting specific segments of the overall market. This should build on existing activities of individual businesses and target groups of consumers with similar characteristics or interests. This might include:
 - Worker appreciation days in which people who work in or around downtown get special discounts.
 - Town days targeted at residents of the communities in the outlying portions of the Skowhegan trade area.
 - Wal-Mart customer days on which a special discount is given to people who have made a purchase at the Skowhegan Wal-Mart in the past 24 hours.
 - Hospital appreciation days to attract hospital employees to come downtown.
 - Special promotions targeted at women during major sporting events such as the Super Bowl, Kentucky Derby, or NBA playoffs.
- **Bus Tourist Promotions** - Tour buses currently bring almost 10,000 tourists per year to Skowhegan for their lunch break. The Promotion Committee will develop an information packet (i.e., walking map, directory of goods, etc.) that can be given to each tourist when they leave the bus or arrive at the Village Candlelight. In addition, the Committee should explore promotions including discount coupons or special promotions that might appeal to tourists that could be included in the packet.

Over the longer term, the next two to three years, the Committee should evaluate all promotional and marketing activities and determine which are effective and should be continued and which are not and should be discontinued. In addition, the Promotion Committee should continue to expand marketing activities including:

- **Cross Shopping Promotions** - The Committee should explore ways to encourage the customers of one downtown store to make additional purchases at other stores in the downtown district.

- ***Increased Special Events*** - The Promotion Committee should investigate expanding the number of specific events (i.e., the Stroll) to approximately one per quarter (spring event, Midnight Madness, fall event, the Stroll).
- ***Coordinated Sign Program*** - The Promotion Committee in conjunction with the Design Committee should develop voluntary standards for business signs in the downtown. The objective should be to work gradually towards a consistent sign theme to reinforce the concept of the downtown as a distinctive commercial district.
- ***Mini-Events*** - The Committee should develop a program of mini-events in the downtown to encourage downtown workers to get out in the area and to bring people to downtown. These events should probably focus on summer lunch hours and on Saturday mornings. Where possible, these activities should have a community connection -- the local dance school, the Middle School band, etc.
- ***Other Downtown Activities*** - The Promotion Committee should work with other groups to hold events/activities in the downtown area.

E. Design Strategies

1. Design Objectives

The fourth component of the downtown revitalization program involves creating an environment in the district that is attractive and in which the customer feels comfortable and safe. Unlike other components of the program, the design component will require close coordination between the Downtown Business Association and the Town of Skowhegan. The DBA's Design Committee should be responsible for coordinating the activities of this component.

The design objectives for revitalizing downtown Skowhegan are:

OBJECTIVE #13 - Revise traffic flow in the downtown area to minimize the need for through traffic to use Water Street.

OBJECTIVE #14 - Improve the public's perception of pedestrian safety and convenience in the downtown.

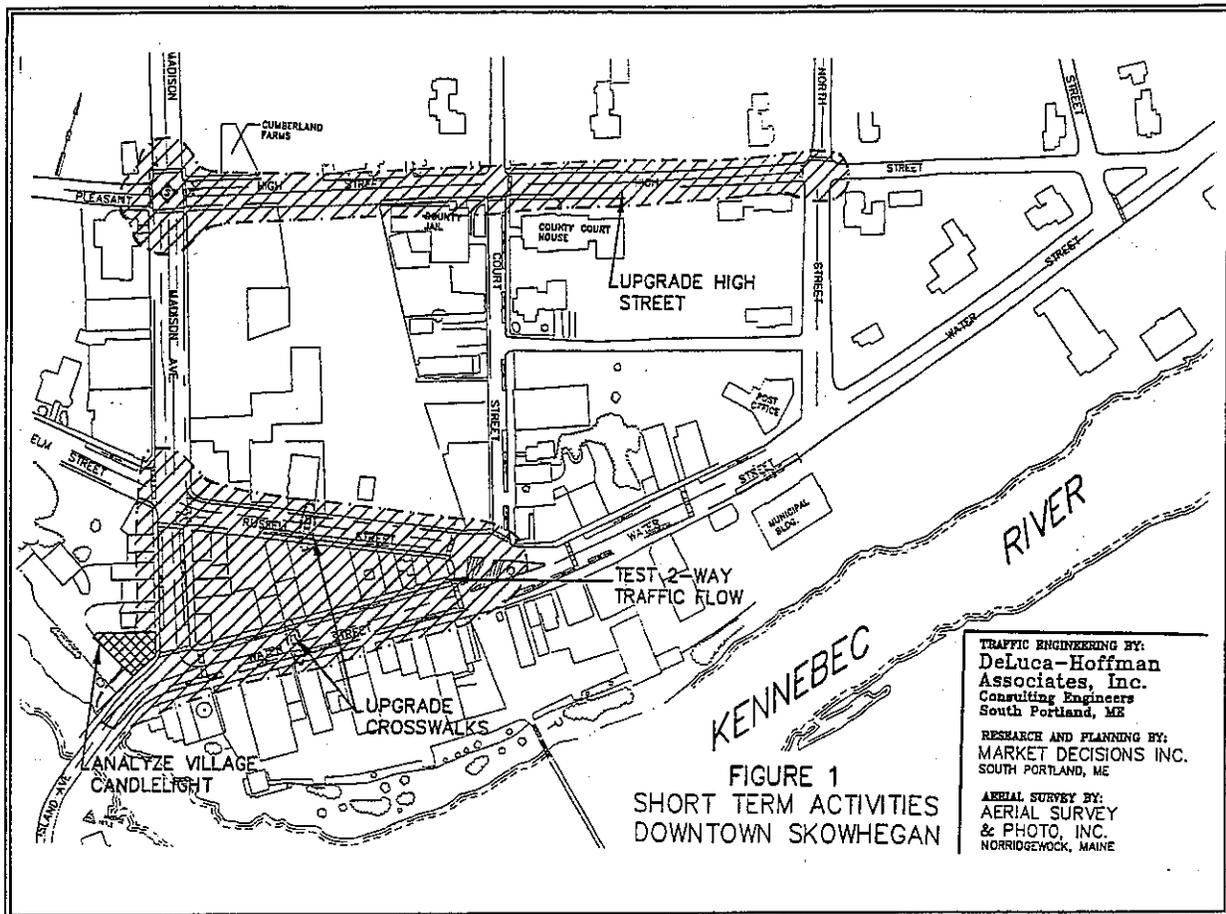
OBJECTIVE #15 - Improve the management of on- and off-street parking.

OBJECTIVE #16 - Upgrade the physical condition and appearance of buildings within the downtown district.

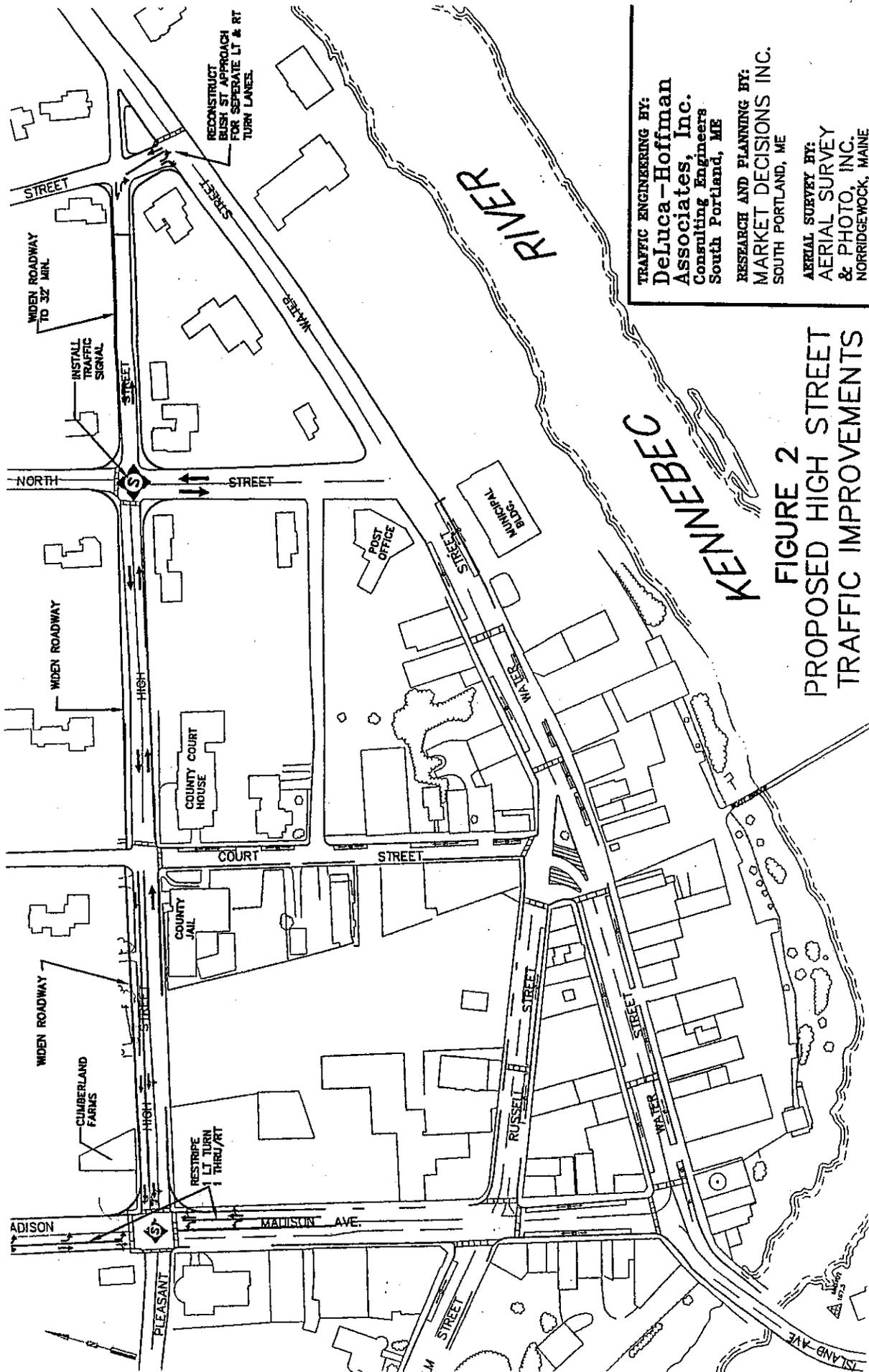
OBJECTIVE #17 - Create a distinctive visual environment in the downtown which identifies it as a unique commercial district.

2. Work Plan

To accomplish these objectives, the Downtown Business Association and the Town will need to undertake the following short-term activities (see Figure 1) within the next year:



- **Village Candlelight Analysis** - The Town will work with the owner of the Village Candlelight to assess the historical significance of the structure, the ability to structurally modify the building to allow changes in the Madison Avenue traffic flow, and the redesign of the building facade.
- **Testing of Revised Traffic Flow** - The Town will work with the Maine Department of Transportation to conduct a full scale test of the proposed traffic pattern which would convert Madison Avenue back to a two-way street. This test should be done under conditions as close to those that will exist under the proposed improvements and for an extended period of time to allow motorists to adjust to the new pattern. The Town, DBA, and State should then carefully evaluate the results of the test to determine if the Town should move forward with the improvements.
- **High Street Improvements** - The Town will work with the Maine Department of Transportation to upgrade High Street as proposed in the plan for improved downtown traffic flow (see Figure 2).



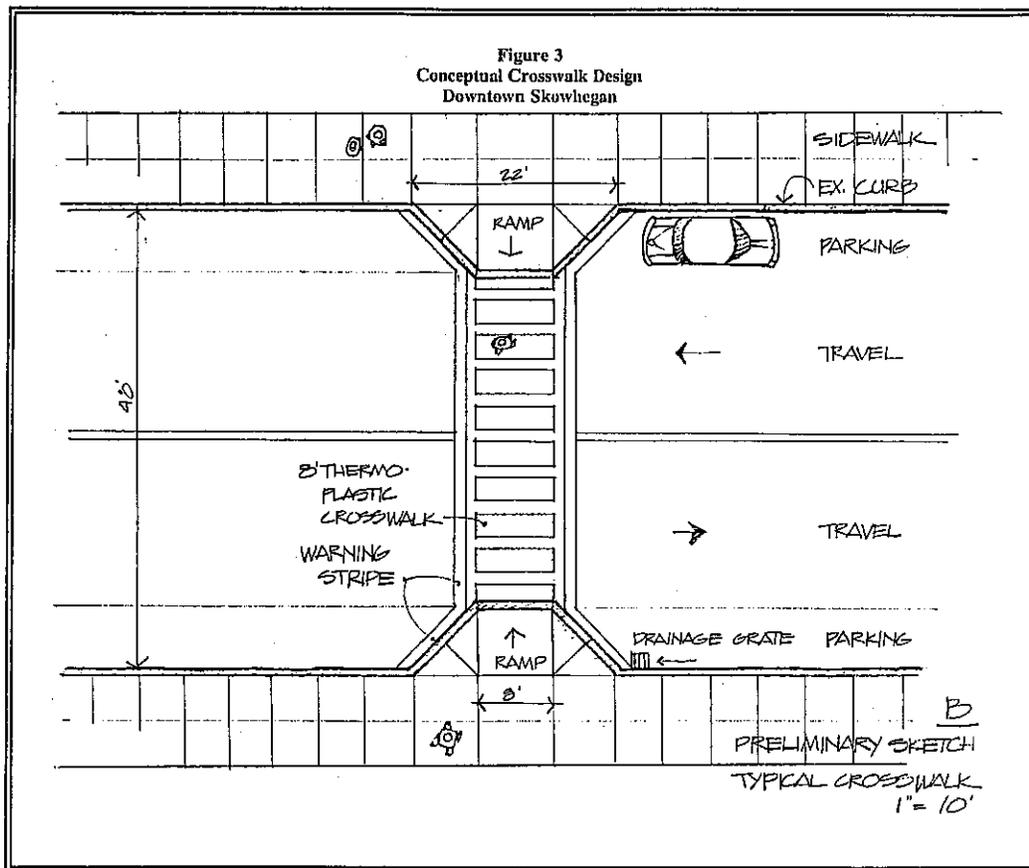
TRAFFIC ENGINEERING BY:
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 Consulting Engineers
 South Portland, ME

RESEARCH AND PLANNING BY:
MARKET DECISIONS INC.
 SOUTH PORTLAND, ME

AERIAL SURVEY BY:
AERIAL SURVEY & PHOTO, INC.
 NORRIDGEWOCK, MAINE

FIGURE 2
PROPOSED HIGH STREET
TRAFFIC IMPROVEMENTS

- Pedestrian Crosswalks** - The Town will reconstruct the mid-block crosswalks on Water Street and Russell Street to create attractive and highly visible pedestrian areas. These improvements should be designed to serve as a model for other public improvements in the downtown area. A conceptual design for the crosswalks is shown in Figure 3. Prior to proceeding with the project, the DBA, Economic Development Staff, and Public Works Department will finalize the proposed design and exact locations.

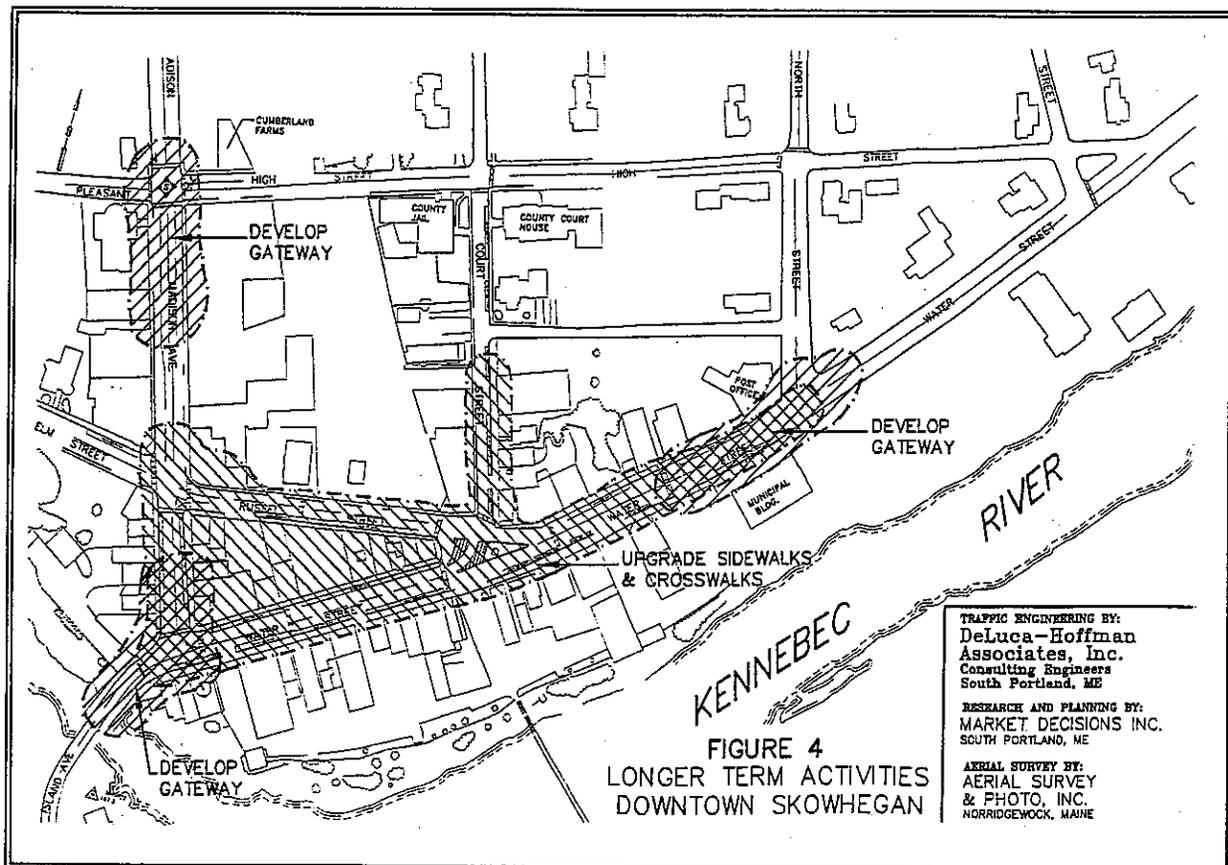


- Parking Management** - The Design Committee will work with the Town of Skowhegan to develop an improved program of parking management in the downtown area. This program will address the following areas:

 - Improved enforcement of on-street parking regulations to assure that these spaces are available for customer parking.
 - Review of the designation of off-street parking areas as short- and long-term parking to assure that the most convenient spaces are available for customers.

3. Development of a cooperative attitude among downtown businesses to self-police employee parking activities.
 4. Improved signage directing customers and other downtown visitors to the municipal parking lots.
- **Facade Improvements** - The Design Committee will develop voluntary design guidelines for facade improvements in the downtown. The focus of the guidelines will be on incremental improvements. The DBA will host workshops for downtown building owners and businesses on facade improvements.
 - **Demonstration Facade Program** - The Design Committee will identify and work with one property owner to carry out a demonstration facade improvement program based upon the design guidelines. The demonstration project will be carefully documented for use as an education/promotion tool with other owners.

Over the longer term, the Town and Downtown Business Association will work together to enhance the physical environment to downtown Skowhegan. Within the next two to three years, the following additional activities (see Figure 4) should be undertaken:



- **Traffic Improvements** - If the test of the proposed traffic improvements is successful, the Town should work with the Maine Department of Transportation to implement the changes. The preliminary concept is shown in Figure 5.

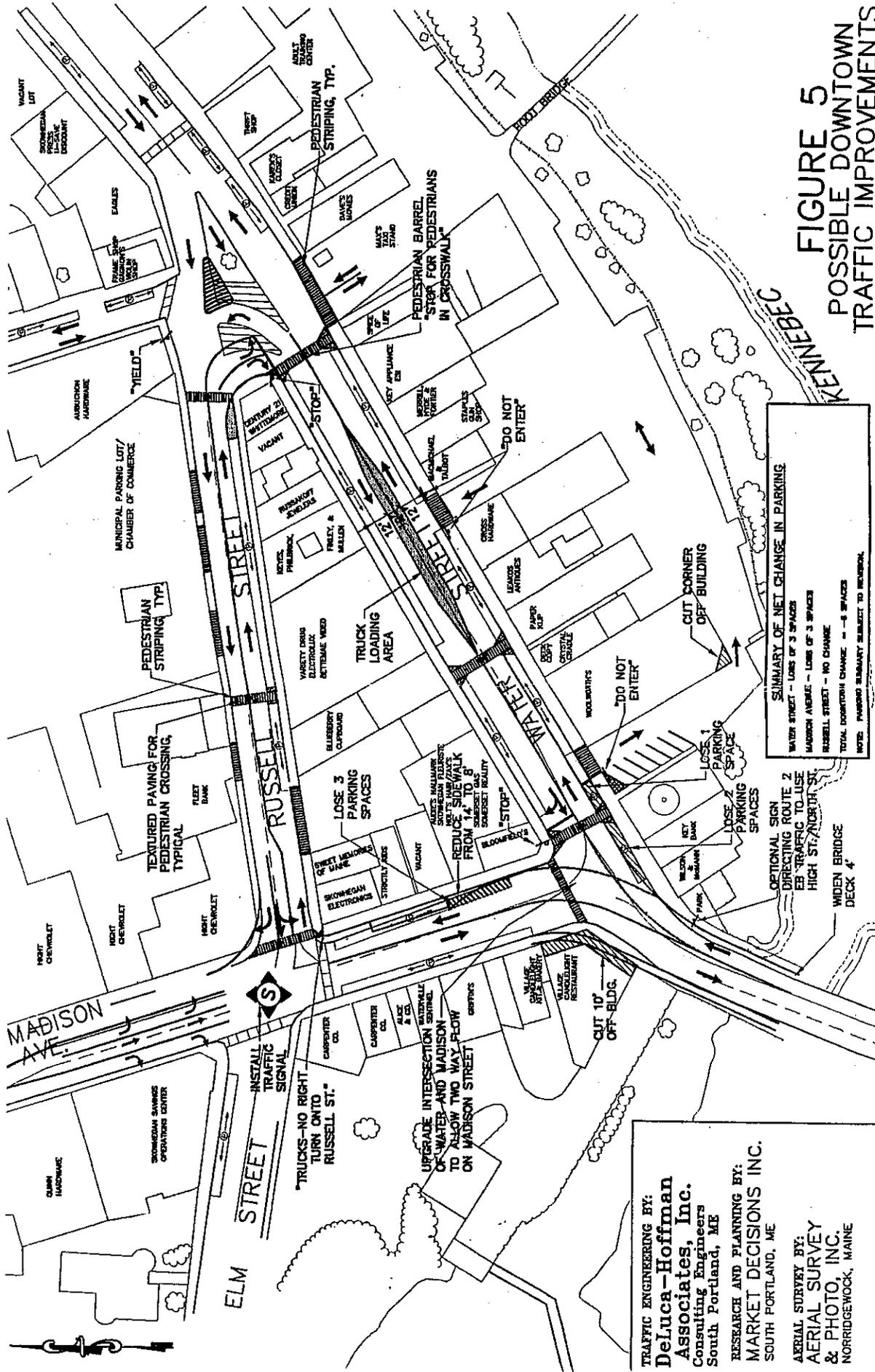


FIGURE 5
POSSIBLE DOWNTOWN
TRAFFIC IMPROVEMENTS

SUMMARY OF NET CHANGE IN PARKING

WATER STREET	- LOSS OF 3 SPACES
MADISON AVENUE	- LOSS OF 3 SPACES
RUSSELL STREET	- NO CHANGE
TOTAL DOWNTOWN CHANGE	- 6 SPACES

NOTE: PARKING SUMMARY SUBJECT TO REVISION.

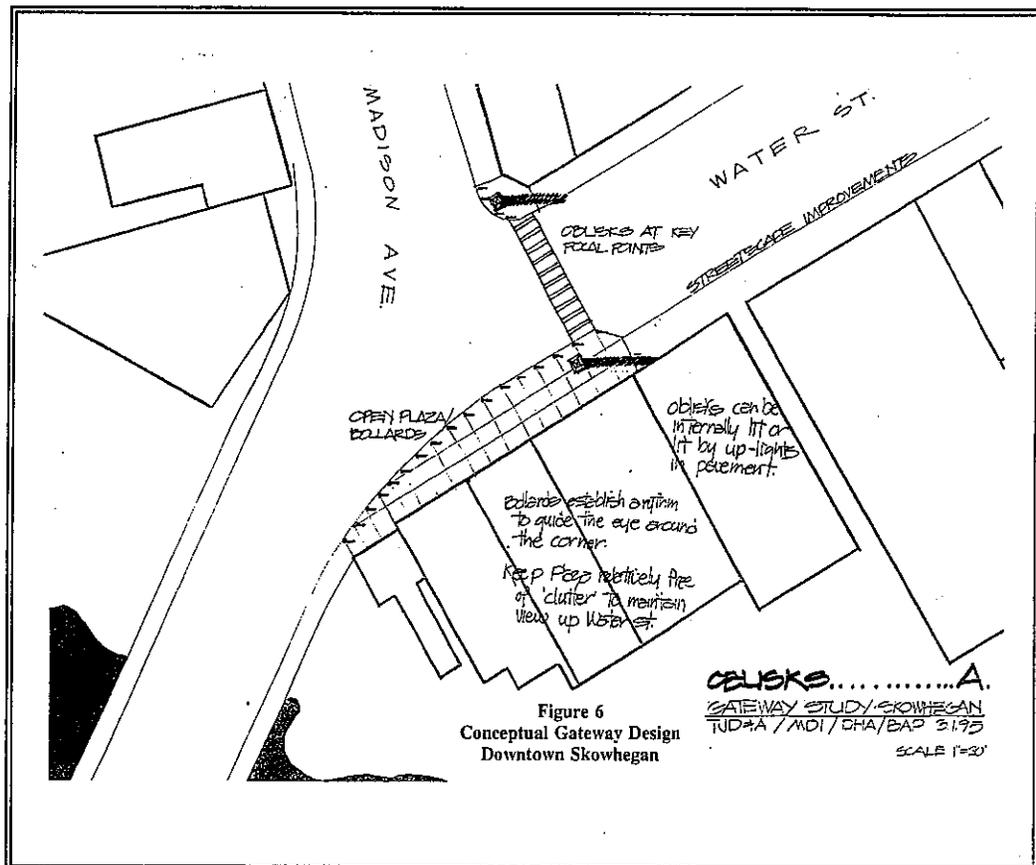
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- **Downtown Gateways** - The Town and DBA should work together to create attractive gateways to the downtown district at the following locations:
 - Madison and Water
 - Madison and High
 - Water and North

These gateways should be visually distinctive and allow customers and visitors to recognize that they are entering a distinctive place. The gateways should include appropriate signage and visual elements that are consistent with the other downtown improvements. The exact nature of these gateways will need to reflect the final traffic pattern. A conceptual design for gateway improvements at Madison and Water Street is shown in Figure 6. Once the final design of the traffic improvements is done, the Town and DBA should conduct a design study to develop detailed proposals for the three gateways.



- **Coordinated Sign Program** - The Design Committee, in conjunction with the Promotion Committee, should develop voluntary sign standards for businesses in the downtown (see promotions work plan).

- ***Building Facade Improvements*** - The Town and the DBA should work together to create a pool of funds to provide low interest loans and possibly grants to building owners and businesses to make facade and sign improvements that are consistent with the DBA's voluntary guidelines.
- ***Sidewalk Reconstruction Program*** - The Town should commit to the reconstruction of sidewalks and crosswalks in the downtown in a manner that is visually consistent with the demonstration crosswalks. The Town should continue to seek community development and other funding for this work. If, however, outside funding is not secured, the Town should undertake these improvements as part of its capital improvement program.

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