



DOWNTOWN WILKES-BARRE: APPLICATION TO DCED FOR MAIN STREET DESIGNATION

Diamond City Partnership
June 29, 2020

**SECTION 1:
NAME AND DESCRIPTION OF THE COMMUNITY
APPLYING FOR DESIGNATION**

Name and Description of Community Applying for Designation:



The Diamond City Partnership (DCP), Wilkes-Barre's nonprofit downtown management organization and the management association for the Downtown Wilkes-Barre Business Improvement District (DWBBID), hereby requests that DCED designate the commercial core of Downtown Wilkes-Barre, Luzerne County as a Keystone Main Street.

Downtown Wilkes-Barre is the central business district of the City of Wilkes-Barre, Luzerne County.

The City of Wilkes-Barre, located within DCED's Northeast Region, is one of the principal cities of the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre Metropolitan Statistical Area.

Luzerne County's largest municipality and county seat, the City of Wilkes-Barre is estimated to have a current population of 40,806, representing 12.8% of Luzerne County's total population of 317,646 (*source: US Census estimates as of July 1, 2018*). This represents a decline of 1.7% from the city's 2010 Census base population of 41,498.

Located within the New York Major Trade Area, Wilkes-Barre has been assigned a Ranaly City Rating of 3-BB, defined as "Secondary Major Significant Local Business Center," meaning that it is the Basic Trading Center for its region.

The City of Wilkes-Barre is currently participating in DCED's Strategic Management Planning Program (STMP), and is receiving assistance from DCED in implementing a financial recovery strategy with short- and long-term objectives.



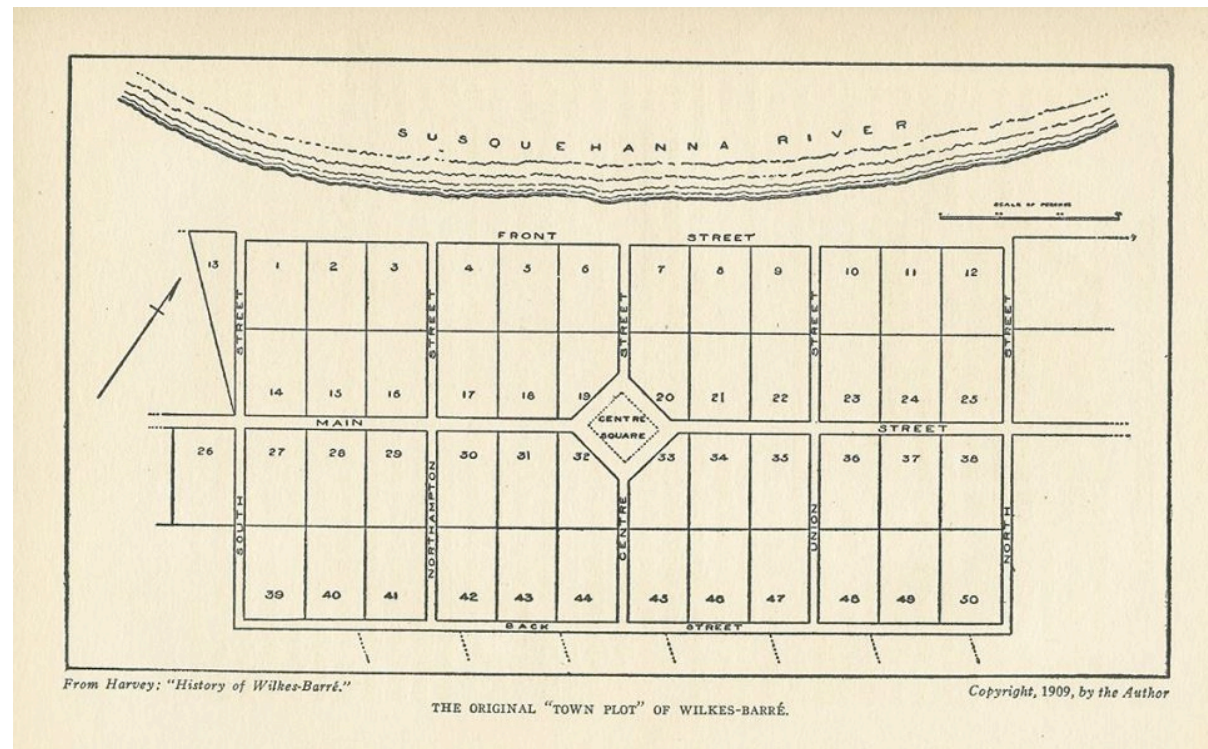
Downtown Wilkes-Barre,
looking southwest

Downtown's Origins

Downtown Wilkes-Barre possesses a remarkably coherent built form with its origins in the original 1770 town plan of its New England founders:

- Eight equal square blocks were each divided into six three-acre house lots.
- At the center of the grid, a two-acre "Centre Square" (now Public Square) was placed on the diagonal; it contained civic functions like the market, meetinghouse, and courthouse.
- The riverbank, dedicated to public use, was dubbed the "River Common."

As the town grew, new streets subdivided the original blocks. However, the 1770 plan's organizing grid, large blocks, and public spaces have guided Downtown's development for more than 200 years.



1770 Wilkes-Barre Town Plan

Downtown's Growth

During the 19th century, the anthracite mining industry transformed Wilkes-Barre into a major city:

- The canal (and later the railroads) was pulled inland to the rear of the business district, and industry followed.
- The commercial core moved away from the river and toward Public Square and Main Street.
- The River Common became the setting for Wilkes-Barre's most gracious homes.
- By 1930, the City Beautiful movement had inspired a grand new courthouse at one end of an enhanced River Common, the redesign of Public Square as a formal park, and the building of a monumental bridge across the Susquehanna at Market Street.



Downtown Wilkes-Barre, 1931

Downtown's Growth

In Wilkes-Barre, as in other American cities and towns, Downtown was the place to shop, conduct business, and be entertained during the streetcar age.

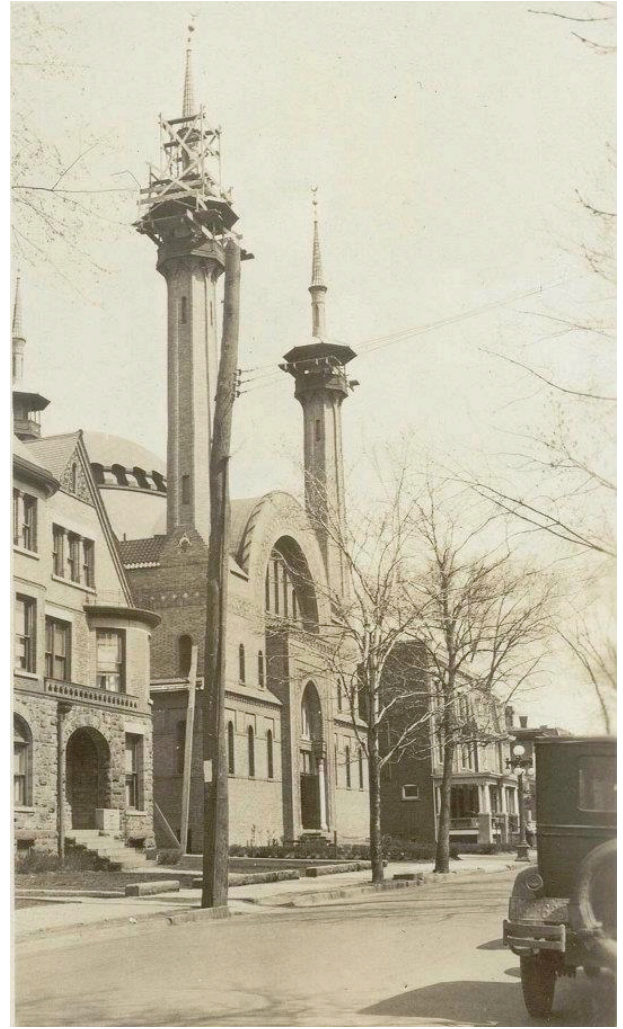
South Main Street was the mass-market retailing destination for everyone in the Wyoming Valley, and Public Square was the unquestioned center of the city.





East Market
Street: 1919

Downtown: the setting for the structures in which the community took the most pride.



The Downtown of Popular Memory

Many local residents fondly recall the downtown Wilkes-Barre of the 1950's and 1960's, when a trip Downtown was a very special occasion.

However, by this time, Wilkes-Barre's city center – although still the bustling business hub of the Wyoming Valley - was an increasingly tired and congested place, struggling to adapt to the need to modernize and accommodate the automobile.

The car, changing lifestyles, and suburban competition were already beginning to take their toll on Main Street – and the trends were not promising.



June 20, 1972: “Water Everywhere”

On June 20, 1972, Hurricane Agnes caused the swollen Susquehanna River to overflow its banks and overtop the levees protecting the City of Wilkes-Barre.

Together with much of the Wyoming Valley, all of Downtown Wilkes-Barre was flooded – and most of the downtown wholesale district burned to the ground. The city center was left in a state of ruin.

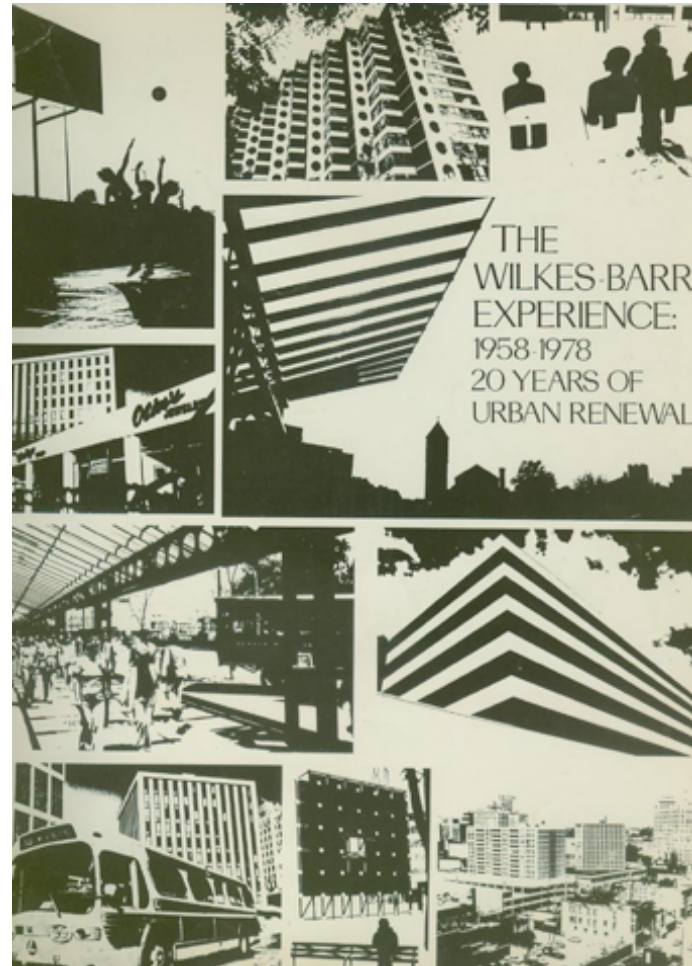
The 1972 Agnes Flood was the largest natural disaster in the history of the United States up to that time.



Downtown and Urban Renewal

After the flood waters receded, the cleanup began. Wilkes-Barre took the opportunity to double down on its urban renewal program, undertaking massive site clearance and redevelopment projects which, in the span of ten years, transformed its downtown.

The city's Victorian retail core was largely erased: 143 buildings were razed. In their place rose new office towers, retail complexes, apartments, and parking garages. A steel and glass sidewalk canopy joined the three downtown department stores, and parks and streets were completely rebuilt.



1980: A Downtown “Reborn”



Downtown's post-flood revival didn't last long.

Urban renewal turned out to be a bandaid. . .not a cure.

Redevelopment tried to make downtown more like the suburbs – but downtown couldn't play the suburbs' game. The emphasis on physical change ignored fundamental weaknesses in downtown's market position.

Soon, suburban competition had destroyed most of downtown's traditional retailers – and mergers and moves were badly eroding downtown's corporate sector and civic leadership. Basic issues of cleanliness, safety, and business retention were being ignored.

By 2000, downtown was again in crisis.



Downtown Wilkes-Barre's public environment, circa 2000.



A community acts to save its downtown.

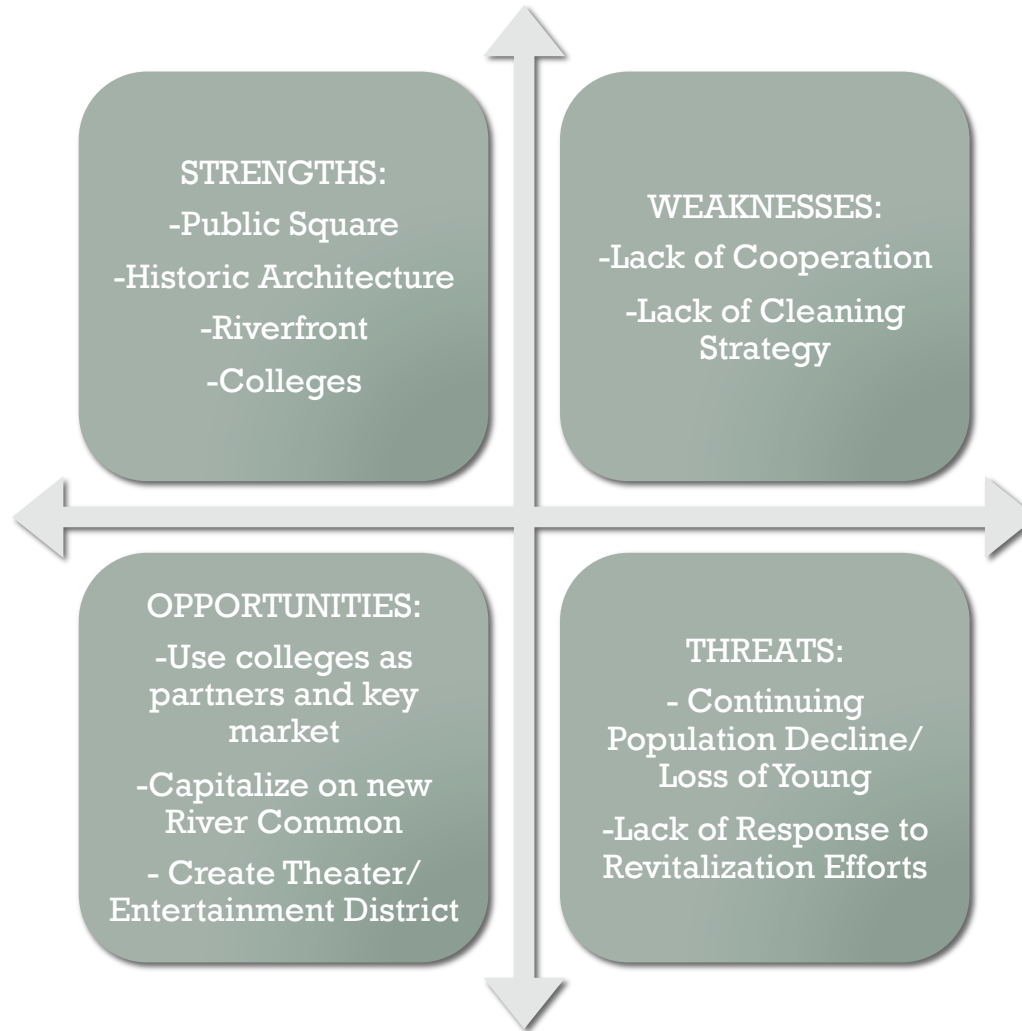
In early 2001, the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber, the Downtown Wilkes-Barre Business Association, and other entities organized a facilitated visioning session on the future of downtown. More than 1,000 people participated in the four meetings, which were facilitated by the Pennsylvania Downtown Center.

The result was a new consensus vision for downtown, built around six specific “strategies for change” and grounded in the Main Street “Four-Point Approach.”

A new non-profit organization – the Diamond City Partnership – was created to implement the six strategies – starting with the formation of a Business Improvement District.



2001 Downtown Visioning Sessions: SWOT Analysis



DCP: caretaker of our vision for downtown

The Diamond City Partnership was created to serve as Wilkes-Barre's downtown management entity. Its \$380,000 annual budget is largely funded via the Downtown Wilkes-Barre Business Improvement District, which has been operational since 2007.

DCP's work plan, which follows the Main Street approach, encompasses:

- **Place Management:** sidewalk cleaning, graffiti removal, supplemental security, façade grants, and beautification
- **Place Marketing:** special events, online and print marketing
- **Place Development:** planning, business recruitment and retention, data collection, and surveys



Major Capital Projects: 2001-2010

The strengths and opportunities identified in 2001 led to a series of major capital projects during the next several years. These included:

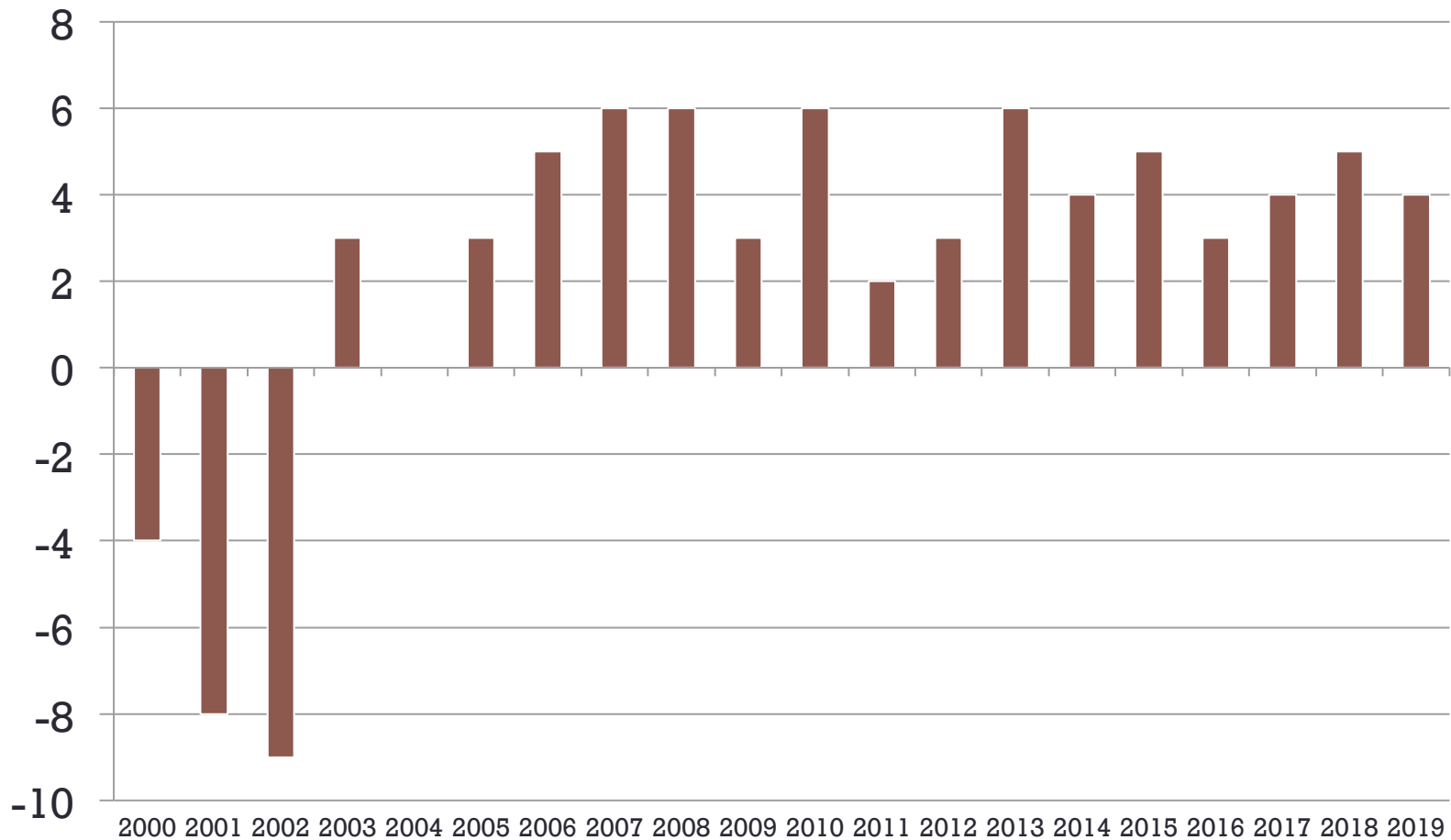
- The 2004 transformation of a vacant Woolworth's into the "Innovation Center" technology incubator.
- "Northampton & Main," a \$32 million mixed-use infill project incorporating a 14-screen multiplex cinema, residential units, and street retail, in 2006.
- The replacement of urban renewal-era streetscapes with new sidewalks, street trees, and streetlights throughout the downtown core in 2006-07.
- A shared Barnes & Noble bookstore, serving King's College and Wilkes University, on the ground floor of the Innovation Center, in 2006.
- The completion of the new \$30 million River Common park in 2009.
- A new Intermodal Transportation Center and 760-car parking garage, in 2010.



Storefront Occupancy Trends: Downtown Wilkes-Barre, 2000-2019



■ Net Gain in Occupied Storefronts

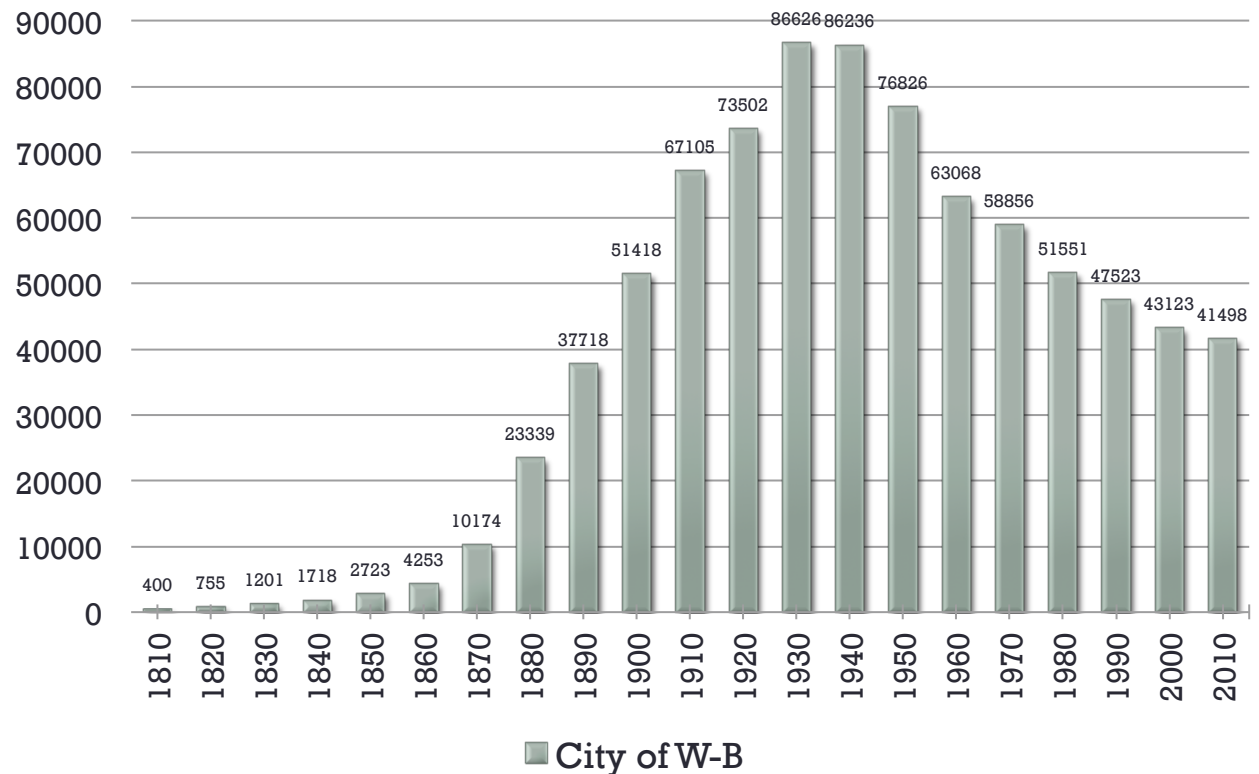


Downtown Wilkes-Barre in Context

The City of Wilkes-Barre has experienced eight consecutive decades of population loss. However, as the chart shows, that population loss has finally begun to slow and level off during the past decade.

With a land area of only seven square miles, the city is landlocked with little room to grow and an aging and stagnant residential base. Downtown revitalization presents a critically important opportunity for the city to add population and economic activity.

Wilkes-Barre's Population, 1810-2010



Source: US Census Bureau

Downtown Wilkes-Barre in Context

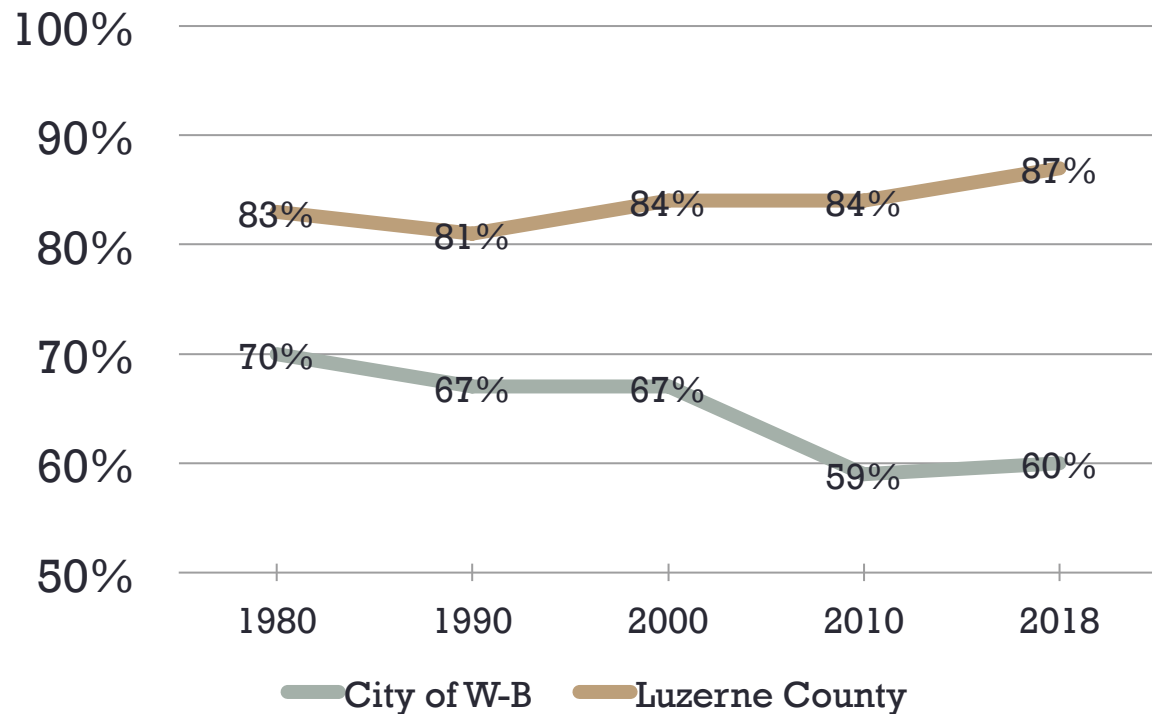
The City of Wilkes-Barre is one of Pennsylvania's "legacy cities": urban centers whose industrial-age strength has been replaced by a long-term struggle for economic relevance.

This is clear from the chart mapping changes in Wilkes-Barre's median household income as a percentage of Pennsylvania's MHI over the past three decades: unfortunately, the city as a whole has become steadily more impoverished over time.

The city's strongest economic asset is downtown, which contains King's College and Wilkes University, half of all the jobs in the City, and recent higher-income residential growth. While downtown revitalization is only one part of the solution to the larger challenges facing the city, it provides Wilkes-Barre with its best opportunity to "build from strength."



Median Household Income as % of statewide figure: 1980-2018



Source: US Census Bureau

Downtown Wilkes-Barre in Context

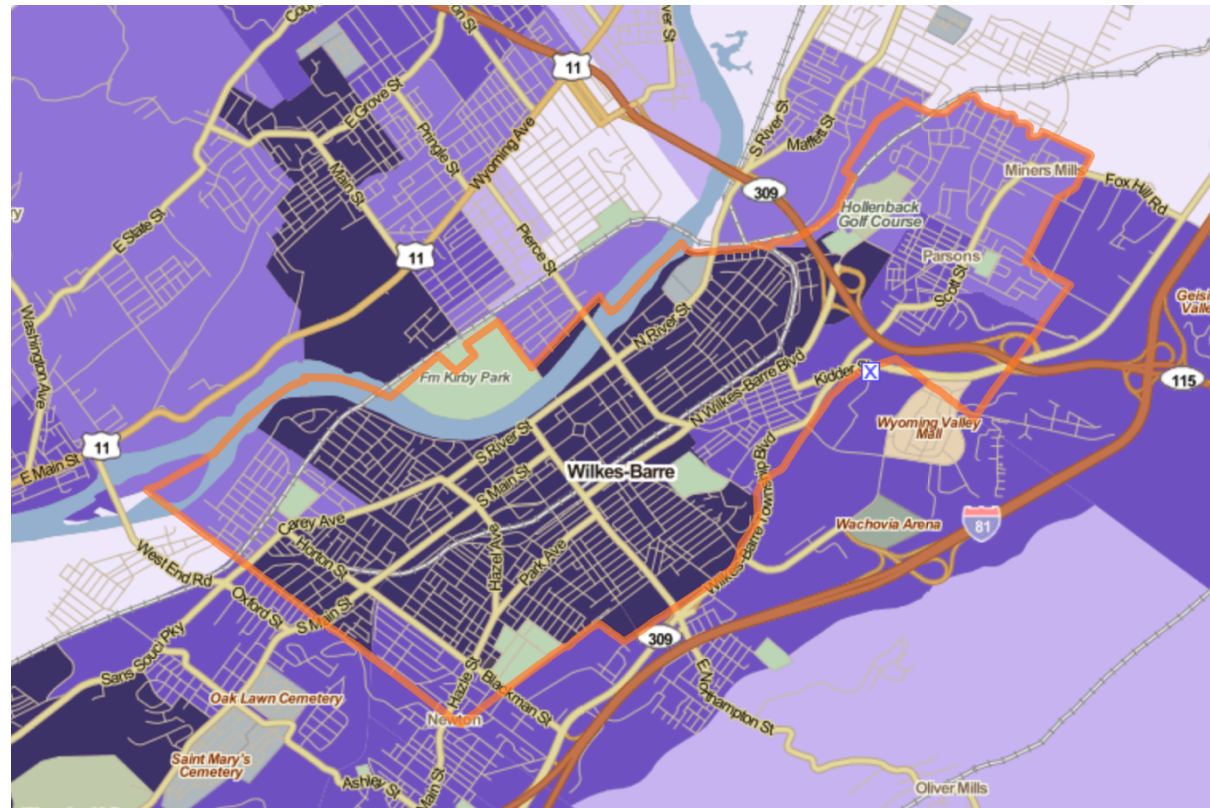
The poverty rate in the City of Wilkes-Barre is currently 29% - more than twice Luzerne County's rate of 13.8%. The citywide poverty rate has increased from 18% in 2000 (source: ACS 2012-2017).

Most alarmingly, as of 2015, 48% of all children in the City lived in poverty.

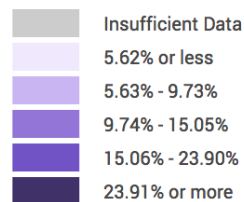
Currently, 32% of all households in the City receive Public Assistance or SNAP; by way of comparison, this is true for 13.7% of all U.S. households.



DIAMOND
CITY PARTNERSHIP
OF WILKES-BARRE, PENNSYLVANIA



COLORS ▾ RANGES ▾



Percent of People in Poverty by Census Tract

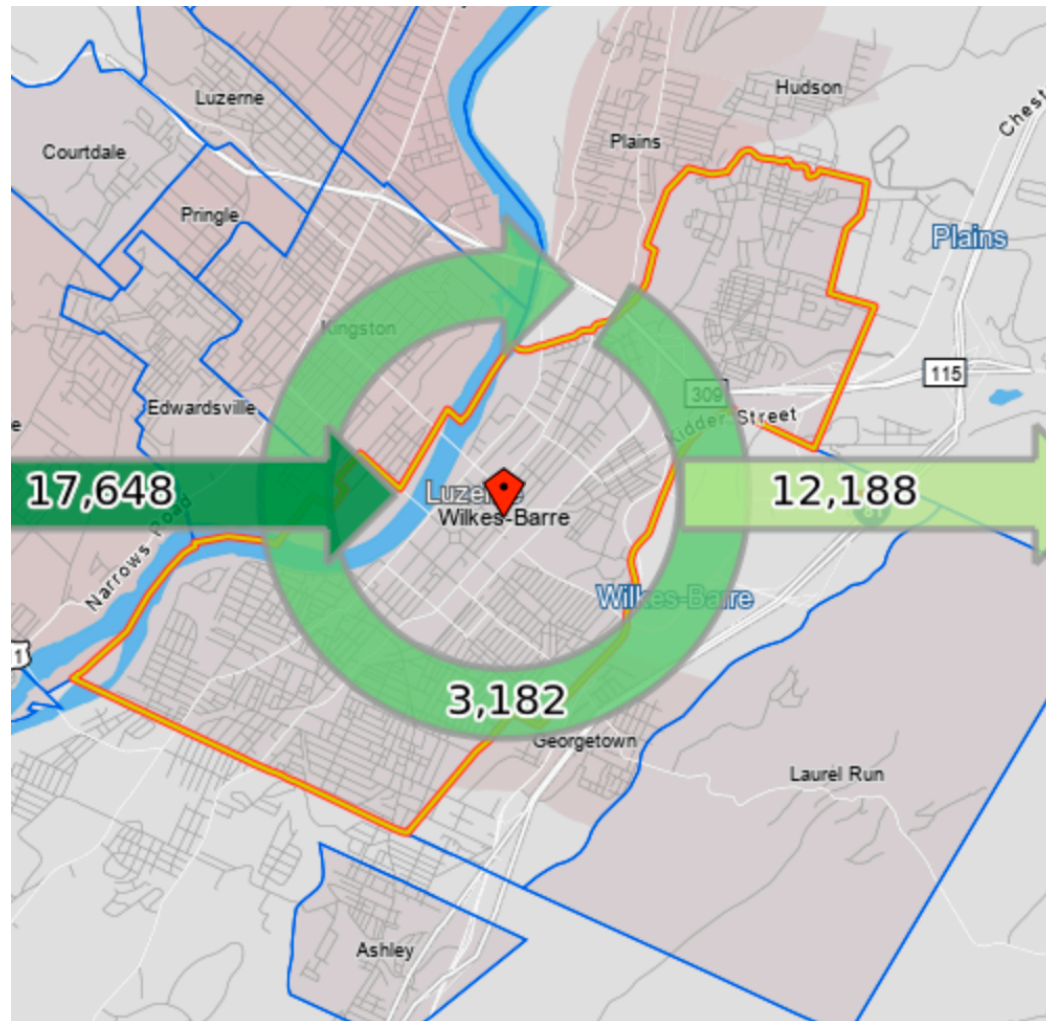
Source: Policy Map

Downtown Wilkes-Barre in Context

Today, 79% of wage-earning Wilkes-Barre residents reverse-commute to suburban worksites every work day, while 85% of the city's jobs are held by suburban residents who travel into the city for work – most of them heading to Downtown.

The industrial employers which once anchored city neighborhoods may have moved to suburban business parks, but downtown's evolving live-work environment can help to increase the numbers of those who both live and work in Wilkes-Barre City.

Downtown's diverse economic base provides opportunities for all skill and wage levels and - unlike jobs in suburban business parks - downtown jobs can be reached on foot or via public transit – a critically important factor for residents without access to automobiles.



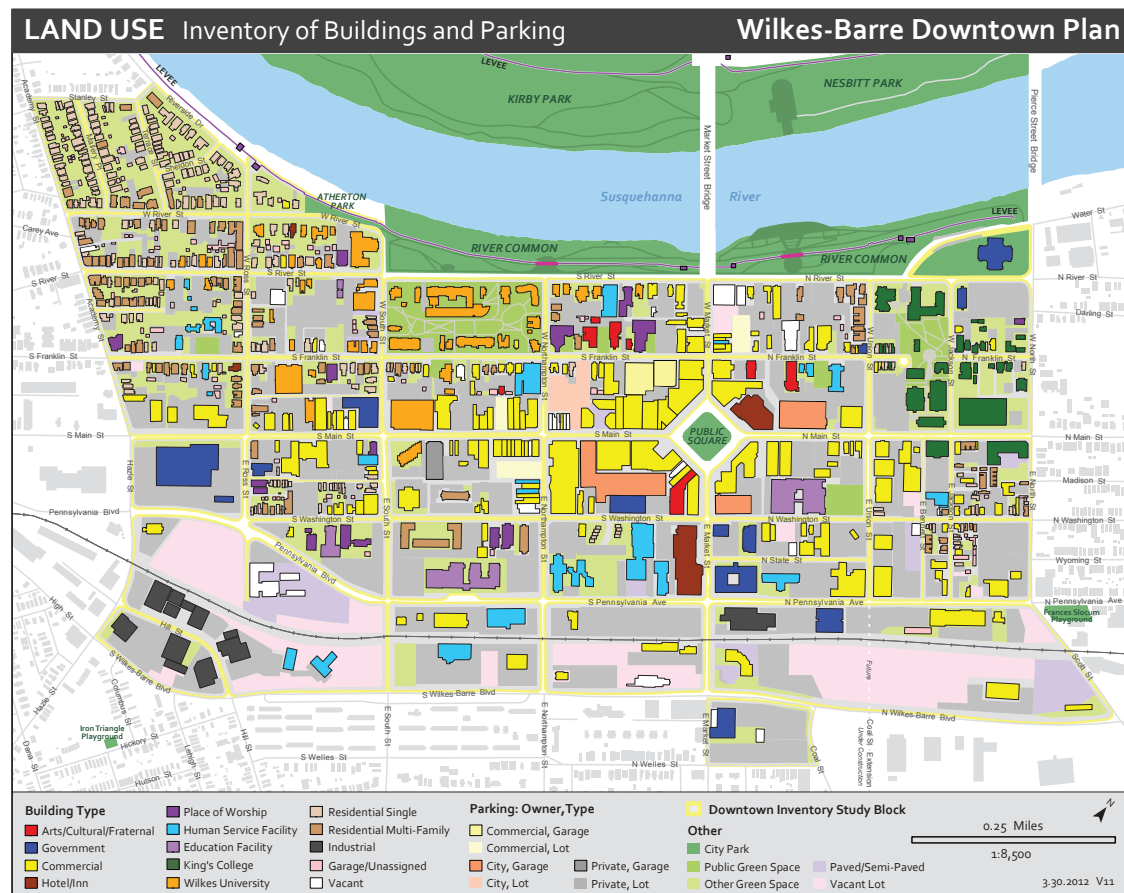
Downtown Wilkes-Barre: Land Use

Downtown Wilkes-Barre's current land use patterns are organized around the traditional commercial core, which is centered on Public Square and the axes of Main and Market Streets.

The campuses of Wilkes University (shown in orange) and King's College (shown in green) anchor either end of the core commercial district. The Luzerne County Courthouse sits at the north end of the River Common, while Franklin Street is the site of many civic institutions.

The F.M. Kirby Center for the Performing Arts is on Public Square, and the Movies 14 cineplex is on East Northampton Street.

The former railroad/industrial district at downtown's eastern edge is now largely suburban and auto-centric.

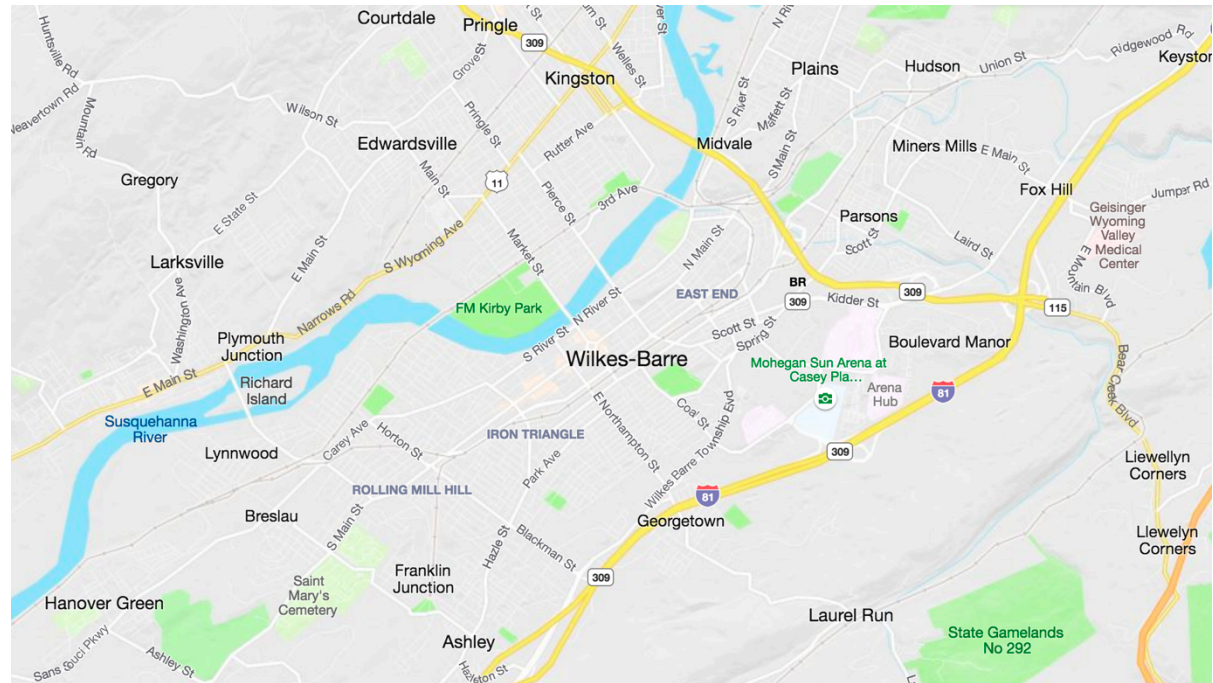


Downtown Wilkes-Barre: Transportation

Downtown Wilkes-Barre originally grew in relationship to the Susquehanna River, and to the railroads and highways following the river's path.

Today, Downtown is challenged by the lack of a direct link to the backbone of today's regional transportation system - Interstate 81. After 50 years of stymied effort, there is still no roadway connecting the central business district directly to the Interstate highway system.

The construction in the 1990's of Exit 168 and Highland Park Boulevard in Wilkes-Barre Township were supposed to provide that link; however, the last phase - a new road segment spanning Downtown's former railroad yards, and connecting the terminus of Coal Street to Union Street - has never been funded.



Downtown Wilkes-Barre: Zoning Districts



Over time, downtown's urban fabric has been badly eroded by demolition and the demand for parking.



Building Density: 1934



Building Density: 2014



Downtown Wilkes-Barre: Underutilized Sites

A number of underutilized downtown parcels offer opportunities for new development. Some are vacant lots presenting infill opportunities, while others are vacant historic structures, like the Irem Temple and railroad station, whose reuse has become a community priority.

It is important to focus on those sites which offer the best opportunity to create a mixed-use “zone of walkability” that will foster an active street life, maximize returns to downtown’s overall revitalization effort, and preserve the historic structures which contribute so much to the community’s character.



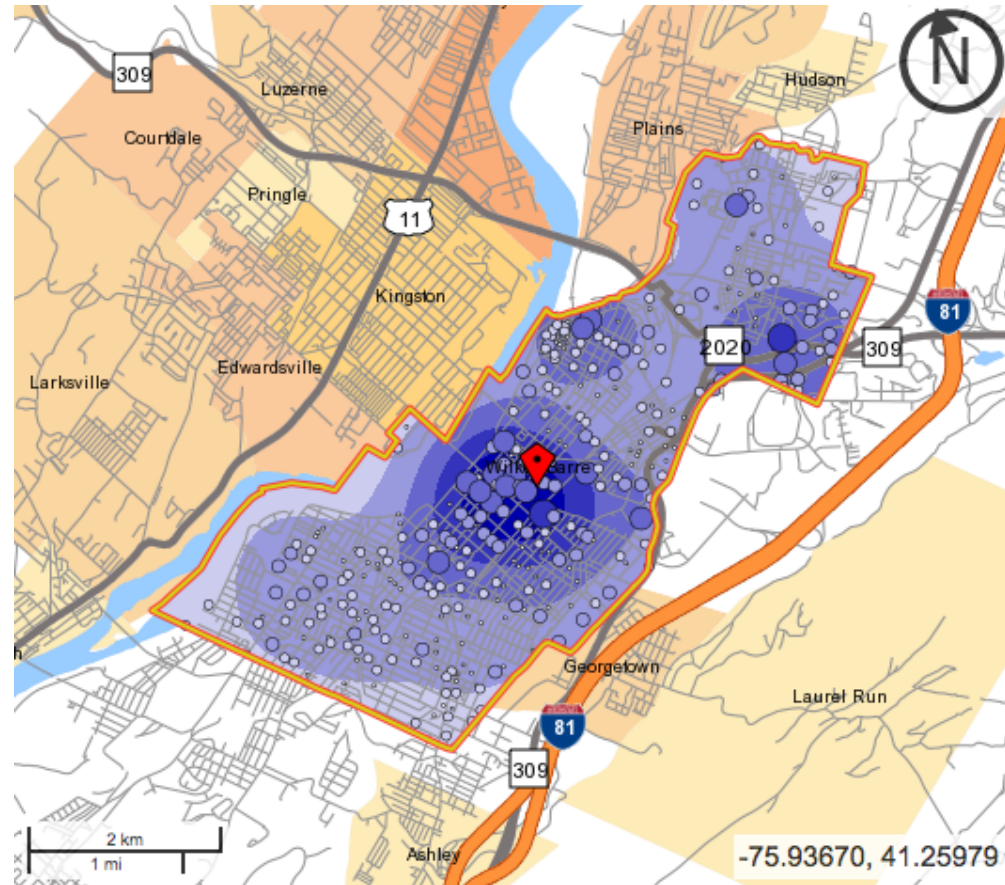
Substantive Assets: Downtown as Job Center

Total downtown employment is currently estimated at 11,400 (source: *US Census LEHD On the Map; Claritas Business-Facts Summary 2017*).

According to U.S. Census data, Downtown Wilkes-Barre currently contains 46% of all the jobs in the City of Wilkes-Barre, and 1 of every 10 jobs in Luzerne County.

It is also a regional employment hub: Downtown is the largest single employment destination for City residents, and for residents of Luzerne County as a whole. At the same time, 32% of people who work in Downtown reside outside Luzerne County.

All told, downtown jobs provide more than \$433 million in annual wages to residents of Northeastern Pennsylvania.



Source: US Census On the Map

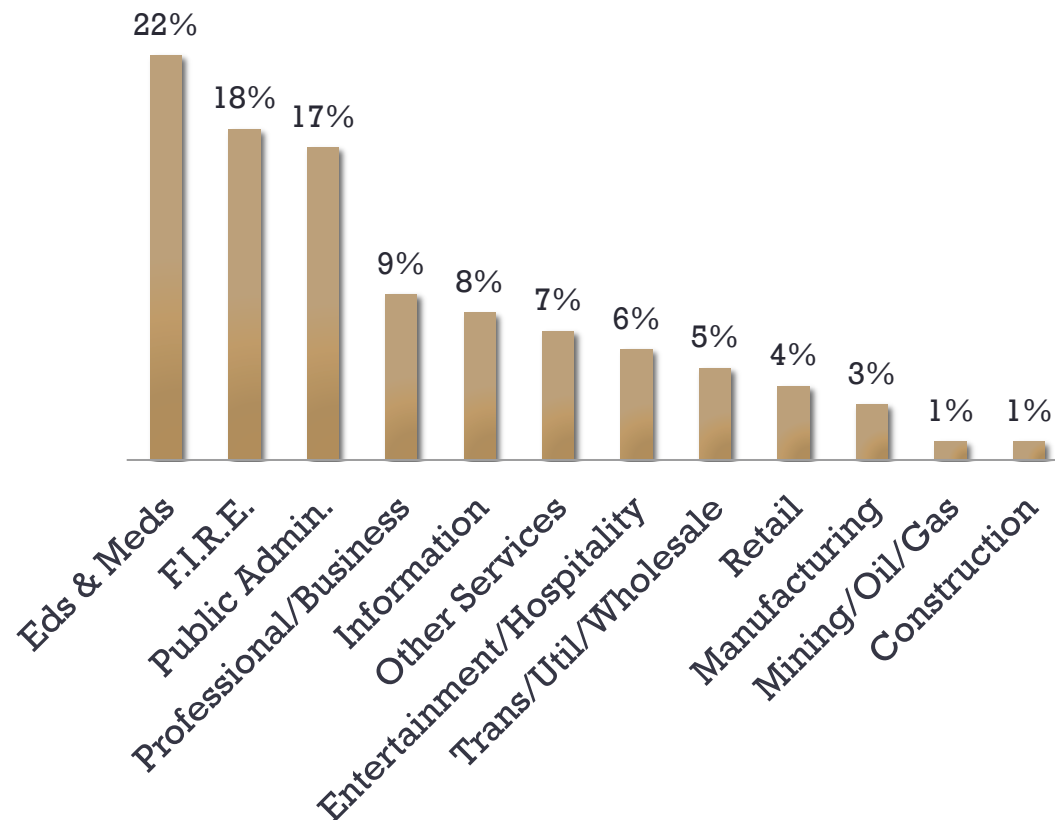
Substantive Assets: Downtown as Job Center

Employment in downtown Wilkes-Barre is dominated by jobs in “Eds & Meds” (the two colleges); office-serving businesses (including the “FIRE” sector “ of finance, insurance, and real estate enterprises; information services; management, and professional and technical services); and government.

Downtown’s relatively small employment share in retail and wholesaling is clear evidence of downtown’s dramatic shift away from its traditional function as the Wyoming Valley’s shopping center to a new function as a place linking businesses to clients; competitors, vendors; the colleges that provide resources, interns, and future restaurants; and amenities such as restaurants, shops, and recreational amenities.



Downtown Jobs by Sector



Source: Claritas Business-Facts Locations 2017 Q4

Substantive Assets: Downtown as Job Center

Downtown Wilkes-Barre's major private-sector employers include:

- Corporate headquarters for AllOne Health, Berkshire Hathaway Guard Insurance, Bohlin Cywinski Jackson, Lackawanna Insurance Company, LSEO, Mobiniti, Pepperjam, Quad Three Group, and Rosenn Jenkins & Greenwald;
- Regional or significant offices for Baker Tilly, Chubb Agribusiness, Community Bank N.A., Highmark Blue Cross/Blue Shield, M&T Bank, PNC Bank, and Verizon Wireless;
- The offices of Wilkes-Barre's two daily newspapers – *The Times Leader* and *The Citizen's Voice* - and the main studios of WBRE-TV (NBC) and WYOU-TV (CBS) and the Wyoming Valley studio of WNEP-TV (ABC).



Substantive Assets: Downtown's Startup Sector

Downtown houses a significant cluster of startup tech and tech-enabled businesses, anchored by successful incubator graduate companies Pepperjam, LSEO, Mobiniti, and Synergistic Networks, and built on Downtown's designation as a **Keystone Innovation Zone**.

Downtown's startup sector is centered on two incubator facilities (the Innovation Center at Wilkes-Barre and the Wilkes Enterprise Center); two coworking spaces (the THINK Center and the Hub); and a business accelerator operated by Pepperjam cofounder Kris Jones.

At present, 32% of all Information sector jobs in the Scranton/W-B MSA are located in Downtown Wilkes-Barre.

And, in the most recent year, 15 different downtown startups received more than \$600,000 in KIZ tax credit awards.



Substantive Assets: Qualified Opportunity Zone

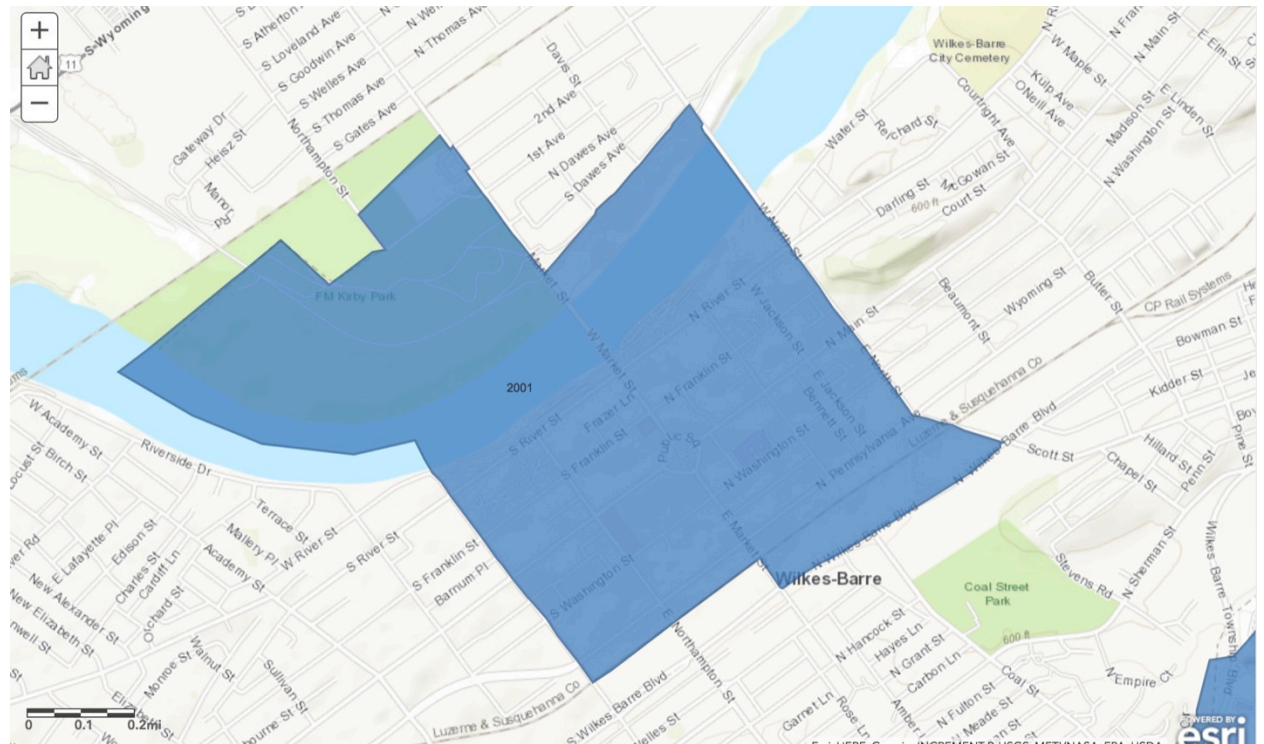
Census Tract 2001, which encompasses the majority of Downtown Wilkes-Barre, has been designated as a Qualified Opportunity Zone.

There are three major benefits to investing in an Opportunity Zone:

- Temporary deferral of capital gains invested in opportunity funds through 2026;

- Step-up in basis increases 10% if held 5-years plus and an additional 5% if held for 7-years plus;

- Permanent exclusion of new capital gains if the investment is held for over 10-years.



Substantive Assets: Downtown's governmental sector



Downtown is a regional governmental center, with 1,996 Downtown workers employed in the public administration sector.

Wilkes-Barre is the seat of Luzerne County. The landmark Courthouse and two annexes are located at the northern end of the River Common. Another county office building is located several blocks away at East Market Street and North Pennsylvania Avenue, while county human services are located on North Pennsylvania Avenue.

Downtown houses multiple state offices, including the Northeast regional offices of the Department of Environmental Protection, the Liquor Control Board, and the PA Lottery; along with offices for the Bureau of Disability Determination; the Wilkes-Barre Workers Compensation Office of Adjudication; the Unemployment Compensation Board of Review; the Department of Public Welfare; and Luzerne County CareerLink.

The Max Rosenn US Courthouse, at the corner of South Main and West South Streets, houses Federal district and bankruptcy courts for the Middle District of Pennsylvania. The Stegmaier Federal Building, a renovated former brewery at Downtown's eastern edge, houses non-judicial Federal offices for the Wilkes-Barre area.

Wilkes-Barre City Hall and Police Headquarters are located at East Market and North Washington Streets, while the city's Fire Headquarters is located on East Ross Street.



Substantive Assets: King's College

Downtown is home to King's College and Wilkes University, as well as Luzerne County Community College's Wilkes-Barre Center and Geisinger Commonwealth School of Medicine's Wilkes-Barre office. These academic institutions bring more than 4,700 undergraduates, 3,000 graduate students, and 400 community college students to Downtown during the academic year.

King's College, whose campus anchors Downtown's northern end, was founded in 1946 by the Congregation of Holy Cross.

It is a private Catholic college, offering 41 majors and 3 master's degree programs. In 2018, King's enrolled 2,269 undergraduate and 300 graduate students. 50% of students live on campus, and 50% live off campus.

King's has 152 full time faculty members, 339 full time staff, and 77 part time faculty members.



Substantive Assets: Wilkes University

Wilkes University, whose campus anchors Downtown's southern end, was founded in 1933.

Wilkes is a private research university offering 41 majors, 25 master's degree programs, and four doctoral programs.

In 2018, Wilkes University enrolled 2,455 undergraduate and 2,677 graduate students. 40% of full time students live in residence halls, while 60% live off campus.

Wilkes University has 193 full time faculty members, 420 full time staff, and 149 part time staff.



Substantive Assets: LCCC and GSCOM

Luzerne County Community College (LCCC) is a public two-year community college, founded in 1966, and offering associate degree, certificate, and diploma programs. Its main campus is located in Nanticoke, 7 miles south of Wilkes-Barre. About 400 students take classes at LCCC's Wilkes-Barre Learning Center, located at 2 Public Square - one of LCCC's eleven satellite learning centers. Classes are offered both day and evening. Both credit and credit-free classes are offered.

Geisinger Commonwealth School of Medicine (GCSOM) was founded in 2008, and covers 17 counties of northeastern and north central Pennsylvania. Its four regional campuses are the heart of the GCSOM distributive model of medical education, which provides medical students with early clinical experiences in diverse settings.



Substantive Assets: Boscov's Department Store

Downtown Wilkes-Barre's retail sector is dominated by Boscov's Department Store.

Boscov's predecessor was founded in 1879. The current structure, which dates largely to the 1950's, covers 190,000 square feet of selling space on five floors, straddling the city block from South Main Street to South Franklin Street. It also incorporates a 390-car parking garage and a basement restaurant.

Boscov's is the downtown business most frequently patronized by all categories of respondents to DCP's 2018 Perception & Use Survey. In that survey, 36% of downtown workers and 33% of city residents reported that they "regularly" shop at Boscov's, while another 40% of downtown workers and 43% of city residents reported that they "occasionally" shop there.



Substantive Assets: the F.M. Kirby Center

Located at 71 Public Square, the F.M. Kirby Center for the Performing Arts is the Wyoming Valley's primary performing arts facility. Its Art Deco auditorium seats 1,800, with additional facilities on the building's lower level.

Originally opened as a movie theater in 1937, it was renovated into a not-for-profit cultural center in 1986.

The Kirby Center was ranked #93 on concert industry publication *Pollstar's* worldwide list of theaters based on ticket sales for 2018, with more than 85,000 tickets sold and more than 100 events held - hosting events, on average, once every three days.

The Kirby Center is home to the Northeastern Pennsylvania Philharmonic, and is Greater Wilkes-Barre's home for popular concerts, traveling Broadway musicals, ballet, opera, and art films.



Substantive Assets: Downtown Live Music Venues

Downtown Wilkes-Barre has a long tradition of hosting live music performance. For example, Downtown Wilkes-Barre was the site, in 1951, of the Cavalcade of Dixieland Jazz – which was one of America’s first jazz festivals.

Downtown’s live music tradition continues today in a variety of venues (in addition to the F.M. Kirby Center).

At one end of the spectrum, St. Stephen’s Episcopal Pro-Cathedral is a nationally recognized venue for organ, choral, and concert music, through its long-running “Music from St. Stephen’s” concert broadcast series. It also hosts the King’s College choral training course of the Royal School of Church Music, which attracts 150 choristers from across the USA each summer.

At the other end of the spectrum are popular live music venues such as Karl Hall on North Main Street.



Substantive Assets: Wilkes- Barre Movies 14

In 2006, the Wilkes-Barre Chamber spearheaded the development of a mixed-use infill project, anchored by a 14-screen multiplex cinema, and incorporating 21 loft condominiums and street retail, on the site of what had been a collection of surface parking lots and vacant buildings on the first block of East Northampton Street.

In 2019, Wilkes-Barre Movies 14, operated by R/C Theatres, attracted 6,000 patrons per week to Downtown Wilkes-Barre. The movie theater has fostered surrounding restaurant and residential development.

19% of all respondents to DCP's 2018 Perception & Use Survey reported that they "regularly" patronize Movies 14, while another 44% reported that they "occasionally" do so.



Substantive Assets: Sordoni Art Gallery

Established in 1973, the Sordoni Art Gallery at Wilkes University offers students and the local community a creative learning experience by providing rich programming, workshops, lectures, and year-round exhibitions featuring diverse, internationally recognized artists.

In 2017, the gallery relocated to a 3,000 square foot space at 141 South Main Street, in the midst of Downtown's nascent "arts district." The new gallery was designed to accommodate significant exhibits and serve as an anchor for the second block of South Main Street.

The Sordoni's inaugural exhibition in its new space – an exhibition of works by Andy Warhol titled "15 Minutes: From Image to Icon" - attracted more than 3,000 visitors during its run.



Substantive Assets: Circle Centre for the Arts

The Wyoming Valley Art League, founded in 1954, has almost 250 members. Its home is the Circle Centre for the Arts - named for the building's unusual shape - at rear 130 South Franklin Street.

The Circle Centre was constructed in 1914 as the home of the Luzerne County Medical Society, which still maintains its office in the building.

In 2011, the WVAL bought the 5,100-square-foot structure and completely renovated the interior, converting the building's circular library and auditorium into two large galleries, and adding a classroom and a workroom with two screen-printing presses for members to use.

The WVAL is currently undertaking a capital campaign to add an elevator and make the Circle Centre for the Arts fully ADA-accessible.



Substantive Assets: Osterhout Free Library

The first public library in Northeastern Pennsylvania, the Osterhout Free Library was founded as the result of a bequest by merchant Isaac Smith Osterhout.

Since 1887, the Osterhout's Main Branch has been housed in an 1849 Gothic Revival structure at 71 South Franklin Street originally built to house the First Presbyterian Church; additions were made in 1908, 1966, and 1982.

The Osterhout added one of the first children's departments in the nation in 1904. It has three branches in addition to the Main Branch.

In 2016, the Osterhout had 205,264 items in its catalog, and it lent out a total of 166,547 items.

32% of all respondents to DCP's 2018 Perception & Use Survey reported that they "regularly" or "occasionally" patronize the Osterhout's Main Branch.



Substantive Assets: Luzerne County Historical Society

Founded in 1858, the Luzerne County Historical Society (LCHS) is Pennsylvania's oldest county historical society. Its mission is to preserve and promote the collective history and heritage of Luzerne County.

Fully half of LCHS' patrons come from outside the Greater Wilkes-Barre area, with that figure rising to 75% during the summer months.

The LCHS occupies two buildings on South Franklin Street in Downtown: its Museum, built in 1893, and located behind the Osterhout Free Library; and the Bishop Memorial Library, a former residence, built in 1875, which now houses the LCHS archives, library, and offices.

These historic buildings no longer accommodate the LCHS's needs, and the organization intends to seek new facilities – possibly outside of Downtown.



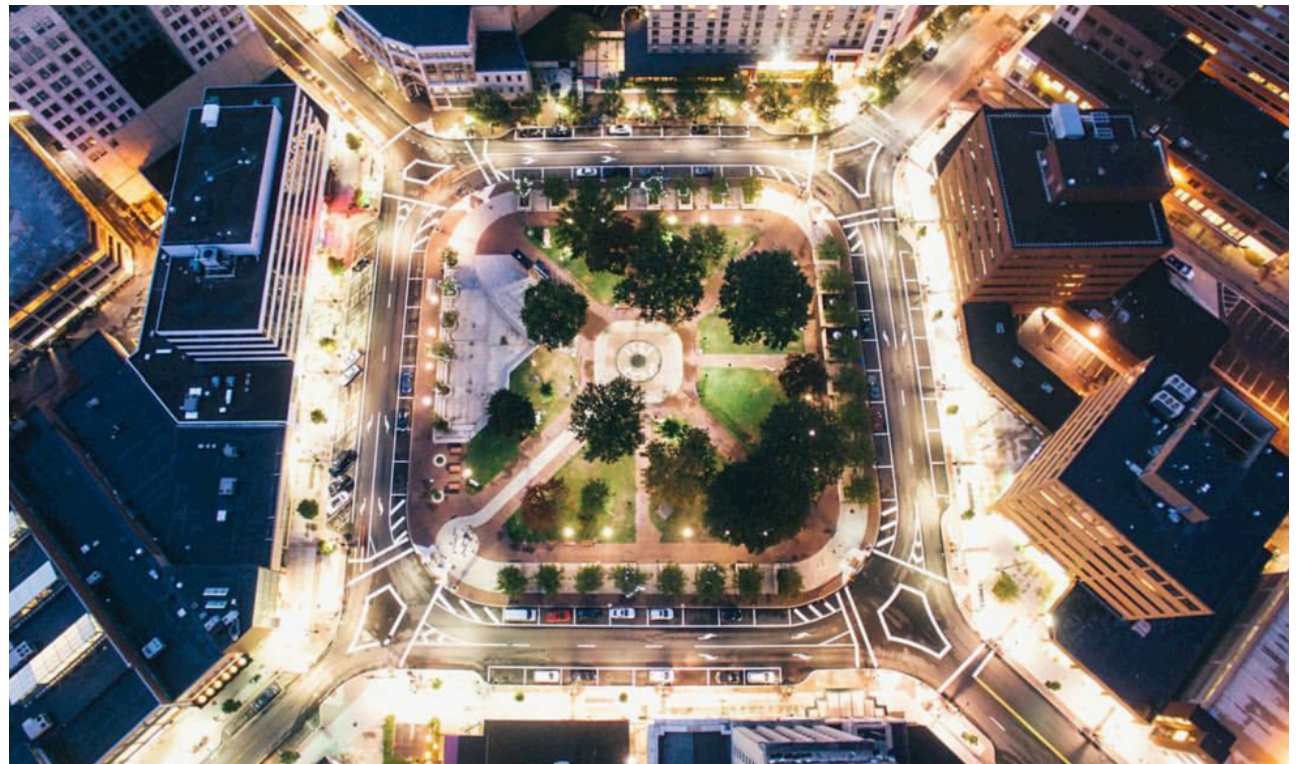
Substantive Assets: Public Square

Public Square, a 2-acre park set diagonally into the downtown street grid, is quite literally Wilkes-Barre's civic heart.

Laid out in 1769 as part of the original town plat, Public Square was once the site of the original Luzerne County Courthouse and Wilkes-Barre's first church, market house, and jail.

Following the construction of the current County Courthouse in 1909, Public Square became a public park. Its current configuration dates to a comprehensive redesign in the mid-1970's after the Agnes flood.

Today, Public Square accommodates the City's weekly Farmers Market, major festivals and holiday commemorations, multiple historic markers and monuments, and a variety of public celebrations, performances, and protests. At the same time, 40 years of hard use have left the park worn out and showing its age.



Substantive Assets: Farmers Market & Fine Arts Fiesta

Public Square hosts two extremely popular Downtown events: the City's weekly Farmers Market, and the annual Fine Arts Fiesta.

Farmers Market hosts approximately 35 farmers, along with many other prepared food vendors, each Thursday from June through November. 37% of all respondents to DCP's 2018 Perception & Use Survey reported that they "regularly" patronize Farmers Market, while another 40% reported that they "occasionally" do so.

The Fine Arts Fiesta, Pennsylvania's oldest community arts festival, is held over four days in mid-May. It's estimated that 60,000 people attend each year's Fiesta. 78% of all respondents to DCP's 2018 Perception & Use Survey reported that they had attended the Fine Arts Fiesta during the prior year.



Substantive Assets: The River Common

The River Common dates to 1769, when Wilkes-Barre's original town plan dedicated 38 acres of the Susquehanna riverfront to public use. It was originally set aside for common grazing, but, by the 19th century, the Common was formally landscaped as a public park.

In 1940, the River Common was cut in half by a flood control levee, essentially creating a wall between the city and its riverfront.

Another devastating flood in 1972 triggered a new levee-raising effort, which became an opportunity to reconnect Downtown and the river.

The redesigned park, completed in 2009, includes a promenade, two portals through the floodwall, an amphitheater, and multiple lawns and event spaces. The River Common is now home to a full range of activities, overseen by the volunteer Riverfront Parks Committee and its partners.

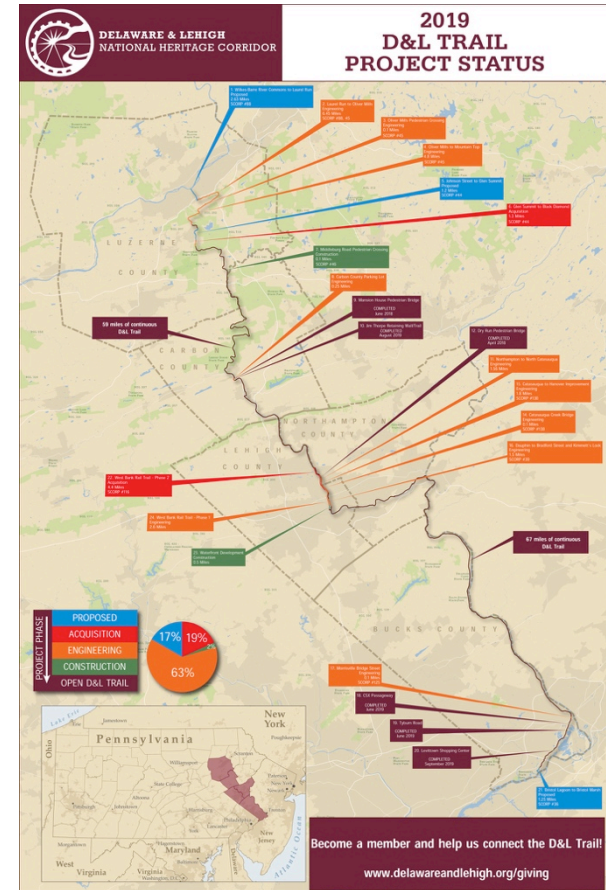


Substantive Assets: Delaware & Lehigh Trail

The Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor (D&L), established by Congress in 1988, is focused on a multi-use trail spanning 165 miles from the mountains of northeast Pennsylvania through the Lehigh Valley and Bucks County.

The northern terminus of the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor, Wilkes-Barre was the center of the Wyoming coal field, and the ultimate goal of the Corridor's canals and railroads.

The D&L has designated the River Common as its official northern end point, and planning is currently underway to complete the final 2.63 miles of the D&L Trail from the current end point atop Wilkes-Barre Mountain in Laurel Run to Downtown Wilkes-Barre.



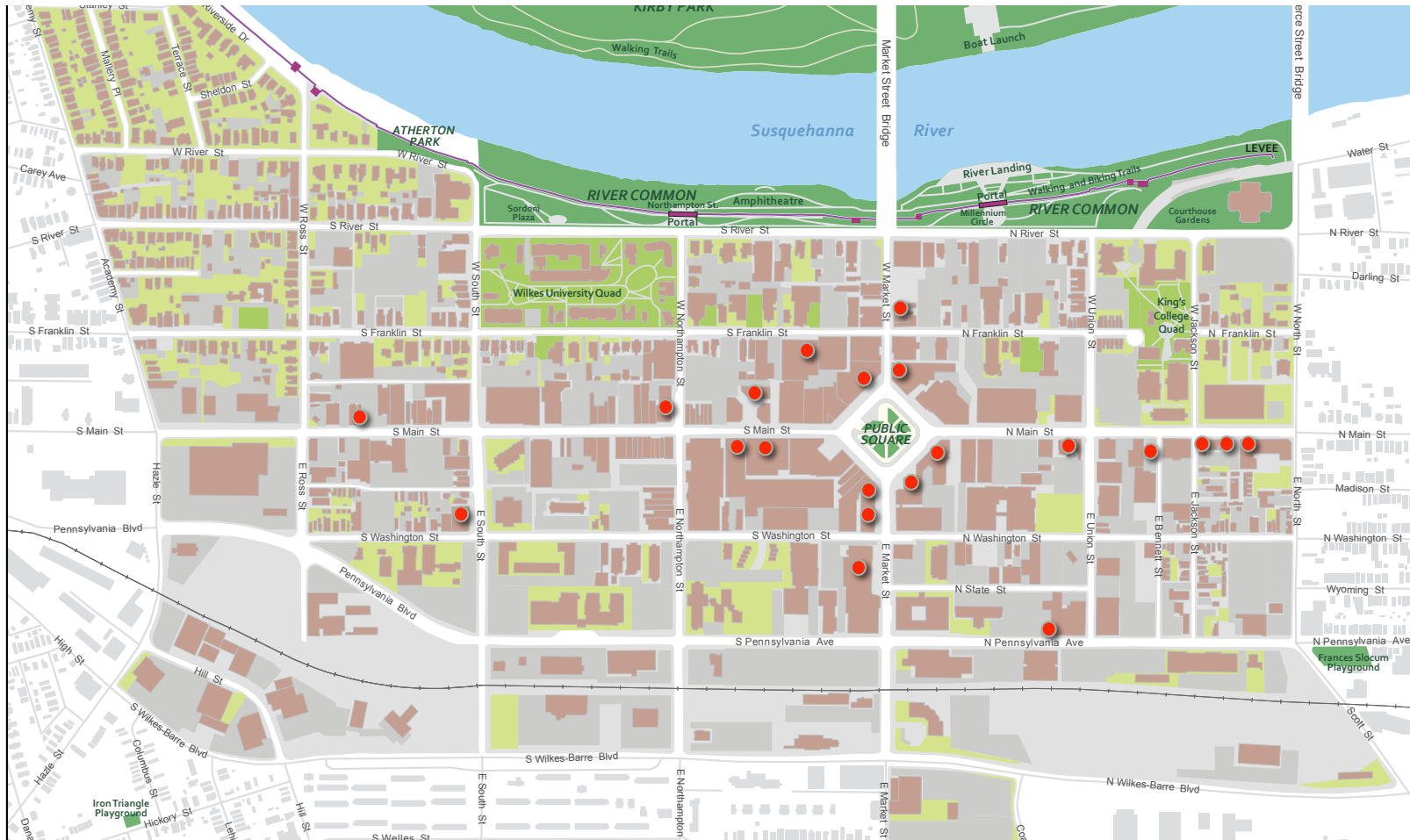
Substantive Assets: Downtown's “Restaurant Row”

In 2005, there were 17 restaurants in Downtown Wilkes-Barre. As of 2020, there are 40 different places to eat, and Downtown has become the region’s “Restaurant Row,” featuring cuisines from around the world.

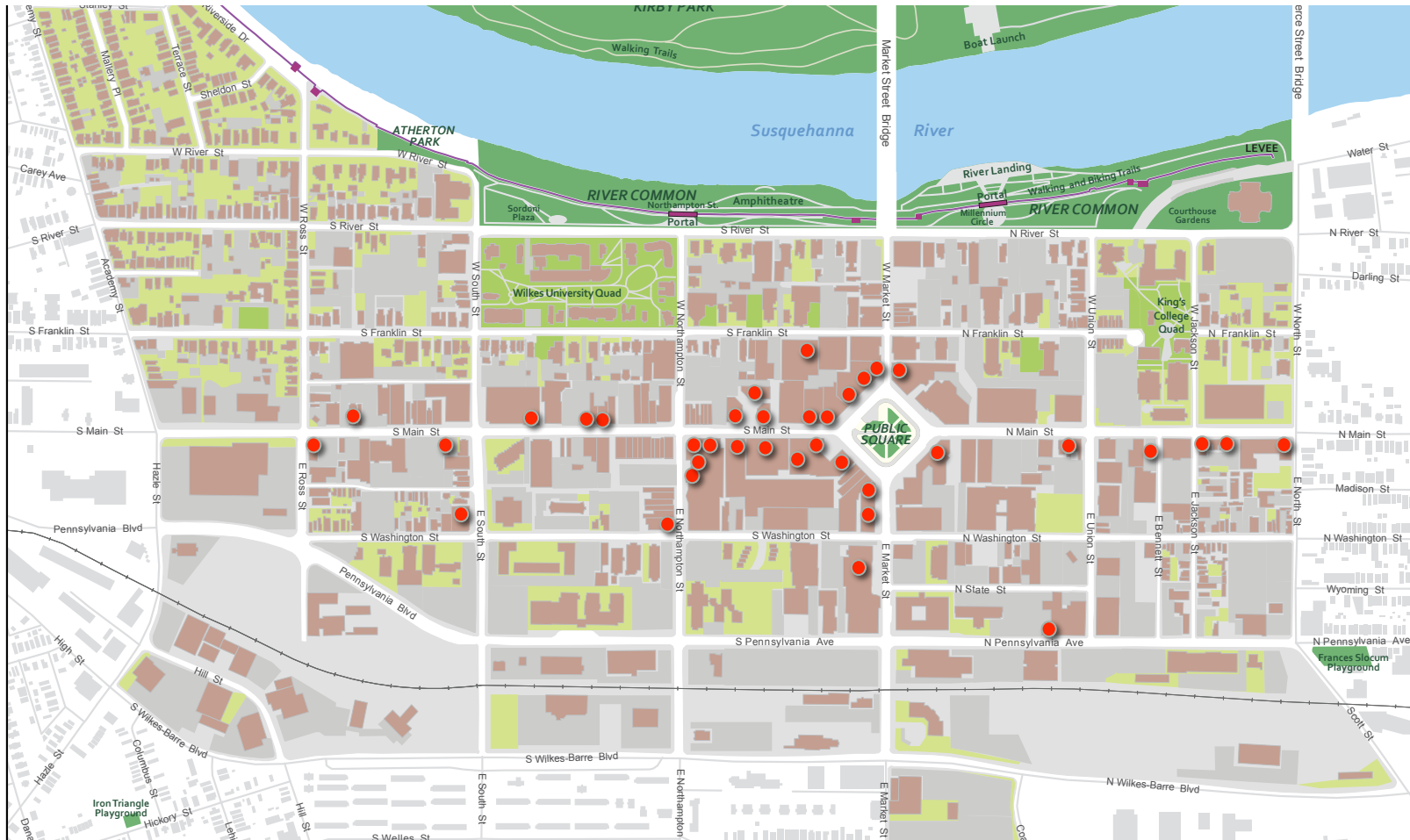
According to DCP's 2018 survey, 84% of respondents agree that “Downtown has a good selection of places to eat” – and a similar percentage report regularly visiting Downtown to dine.



Downtown dining options: 2005



Downtown dining options: 2020



Substantive Assets: Downtown's Historic Architecture

While the past four decades have taken a steep toll on Downtown's historic buildings and streetscapes, enough remains that Downtown Wilkes-Barre's historic architecture is routinely cited as one of its primary assets. 83% of all respondents to DCP's 2018 Perception & Use Survey agreed that "Downtown has quality historic architecture."

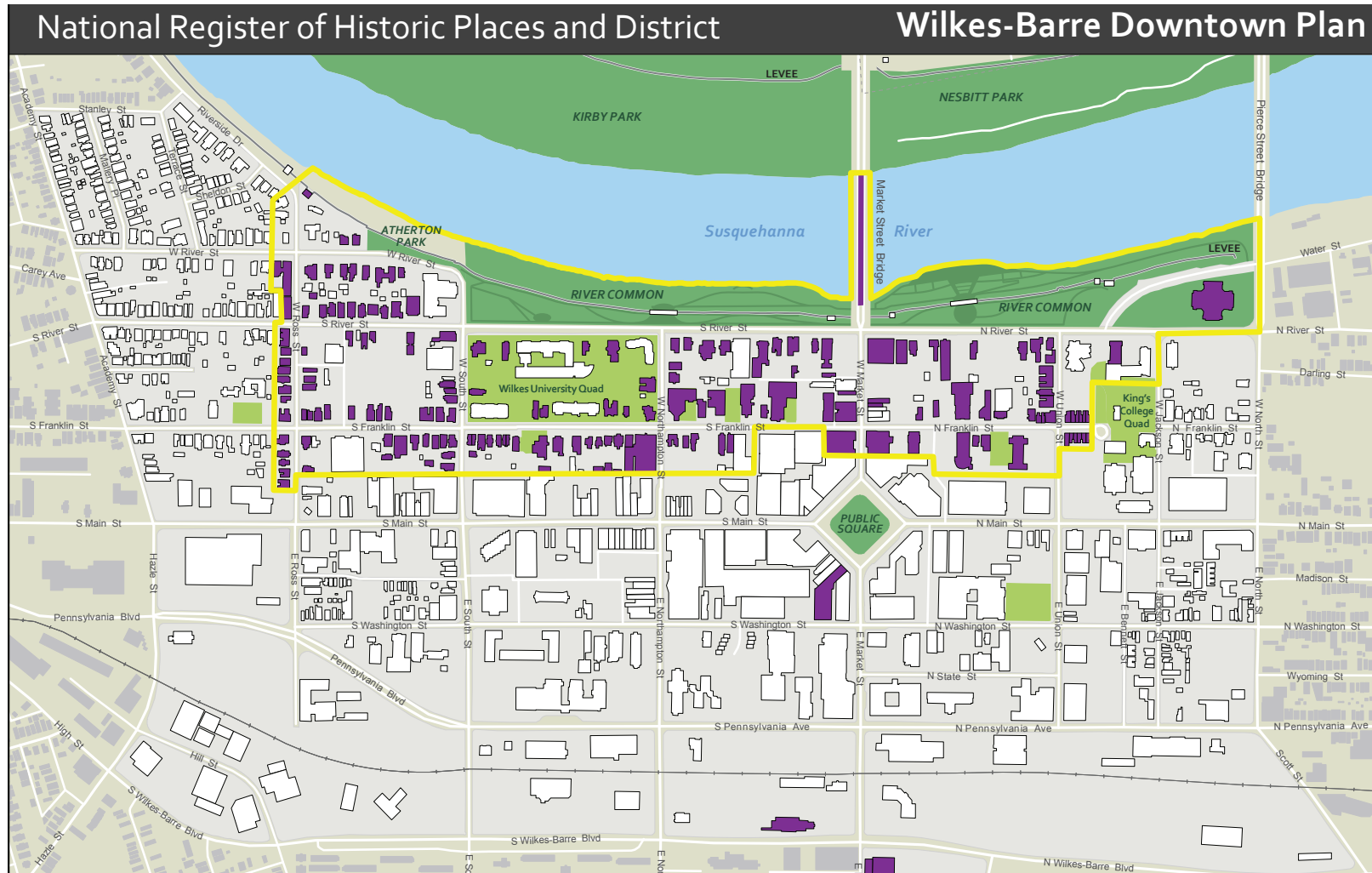
However, the City has no local historic district guidelines and/or protections in place at this time.

Downtown includes a National Register-listed District – the River Street National Historic District, designated in 1985 – as well as three other individually-listed structures: the F.M. Kirby Center for the Performing Arts; the Lehigh & Susquehanna Railroad Station; and the Stegmaier Brewing Complex.

A map illustrating all extant National Register-listed properties and districts in Downtown Wilkes-Barre follows on the next page.



Substantive Assets: Downtown's Historic Architecture



Substantive Assets: Residential Development

During the past decade, downtown Wilkes-Barre has emerged as a contender for the region's "walk-to-everything" neighborhood of choice.

The quality, uniqueness, and live-work setting of downtown housing is attracting residents who would otherwise not choose to live in the city of Wilkes-Barre.

While the average value of an owner-occupied city home sales price is \$81,000, the average downtown home sales price is \$168,000 (EnviroNics).

From 2010 through 2018, 216 market-rate apartments and condominiums have been produced in ten different downtown residential projects. Most have waiting lists, and more residential units are now under construction.

This residential growth provides the customer base for our newest downtown businesses.



Substantive Assets: Residential Development

Downtown is differentiated by its walkability..

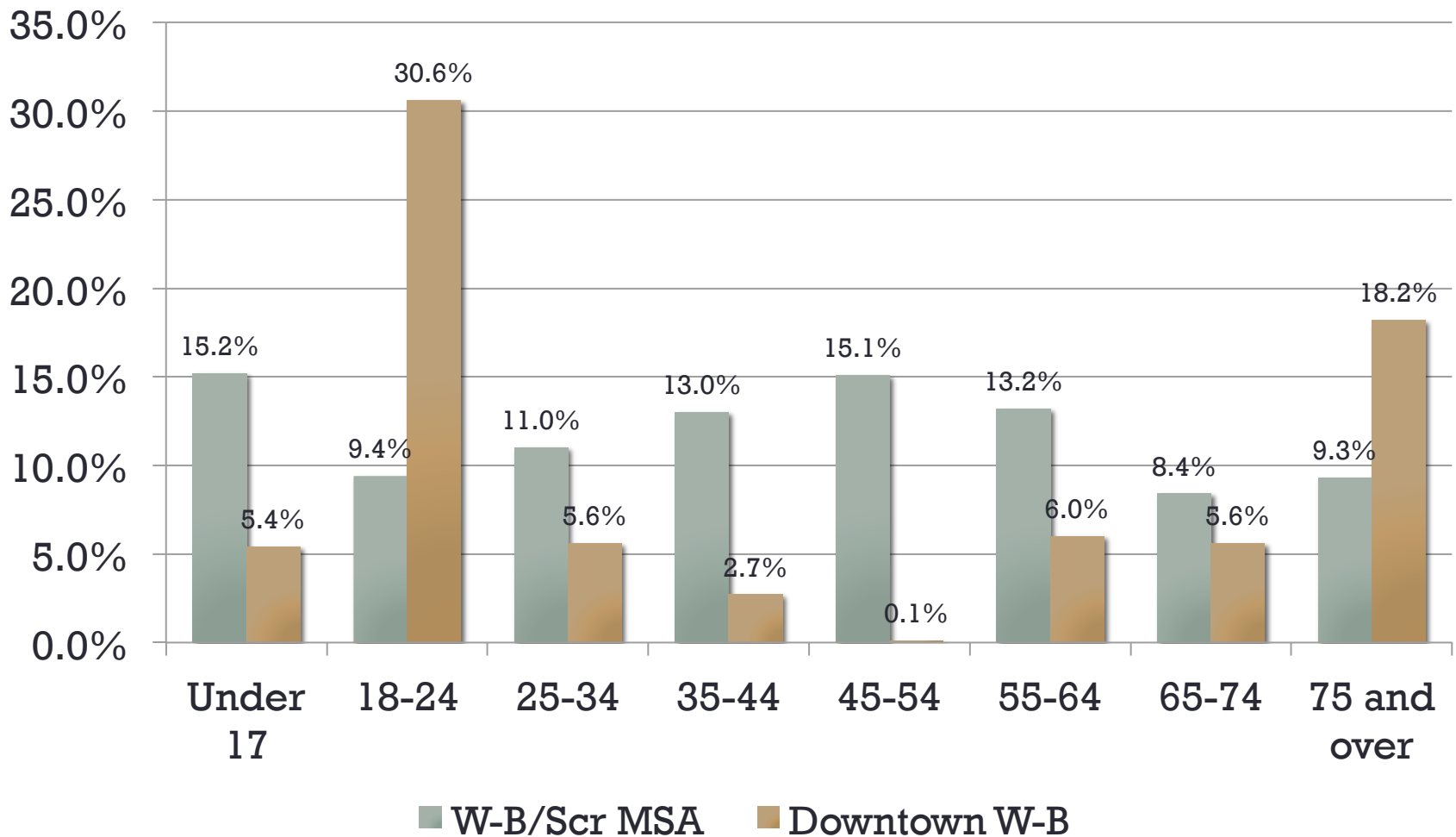
Real estate website WalkScore.com ranks addresses and neighborhoods with labels that range from “Walker’s Paradise” (places with WalkScores of 90 to 100) where errands do not require a car, to “Car-Dependent” (WalkScores of 0-49), where almost all everything requires a car.

According to WalkScore, Downtown Wilkes-Barre is a “Walkers Paradise,” with a Walk Score of **92**. In comparison, the city as a whole has a Walk Score of 61.



Apartment, 65 Public Square

Downtown residential profile: the median age is 22



Source: US Census Bureau

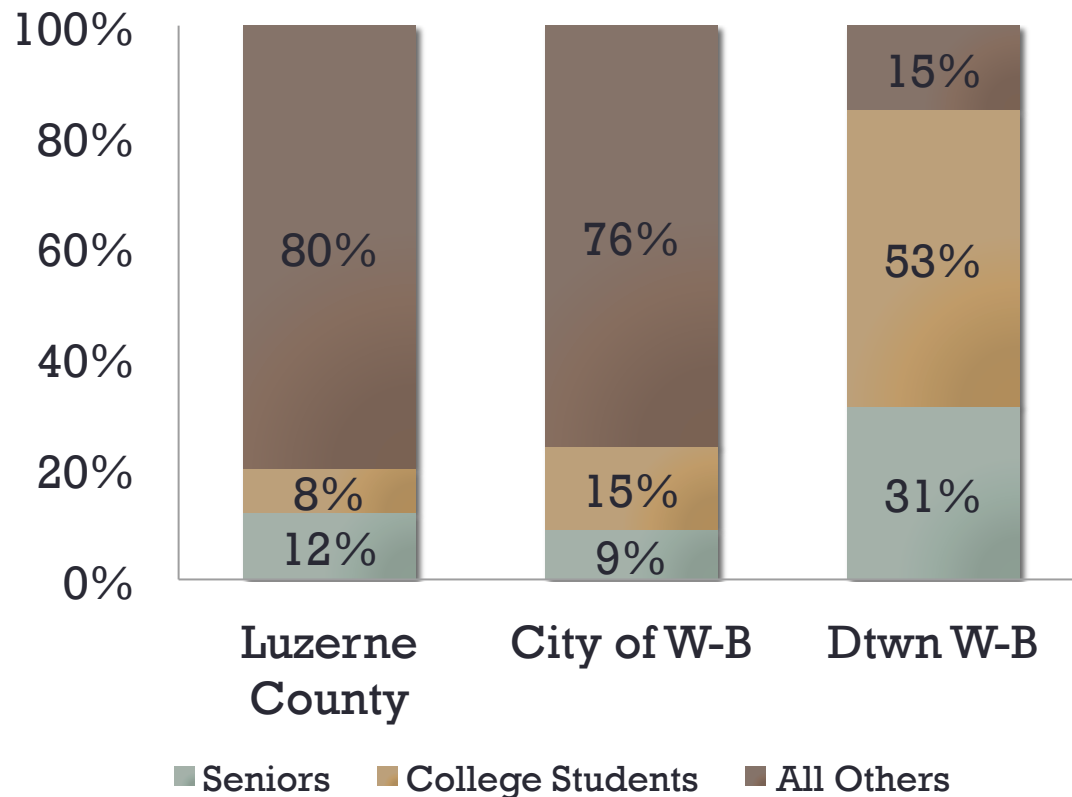
Downtown in Context: Income and Poverty

Viewed as a neighborhood, Downtown's median household income is \$15,653. However, its demographic profile is very different from the rest of the city or county:

- **58%** of Downtown residents are enrolled in college or graduate school.
- **23.8%** of Downtown residents are age 65 or older.
- Downtown is home to **20%** of the City's elderly residents living in poverty.

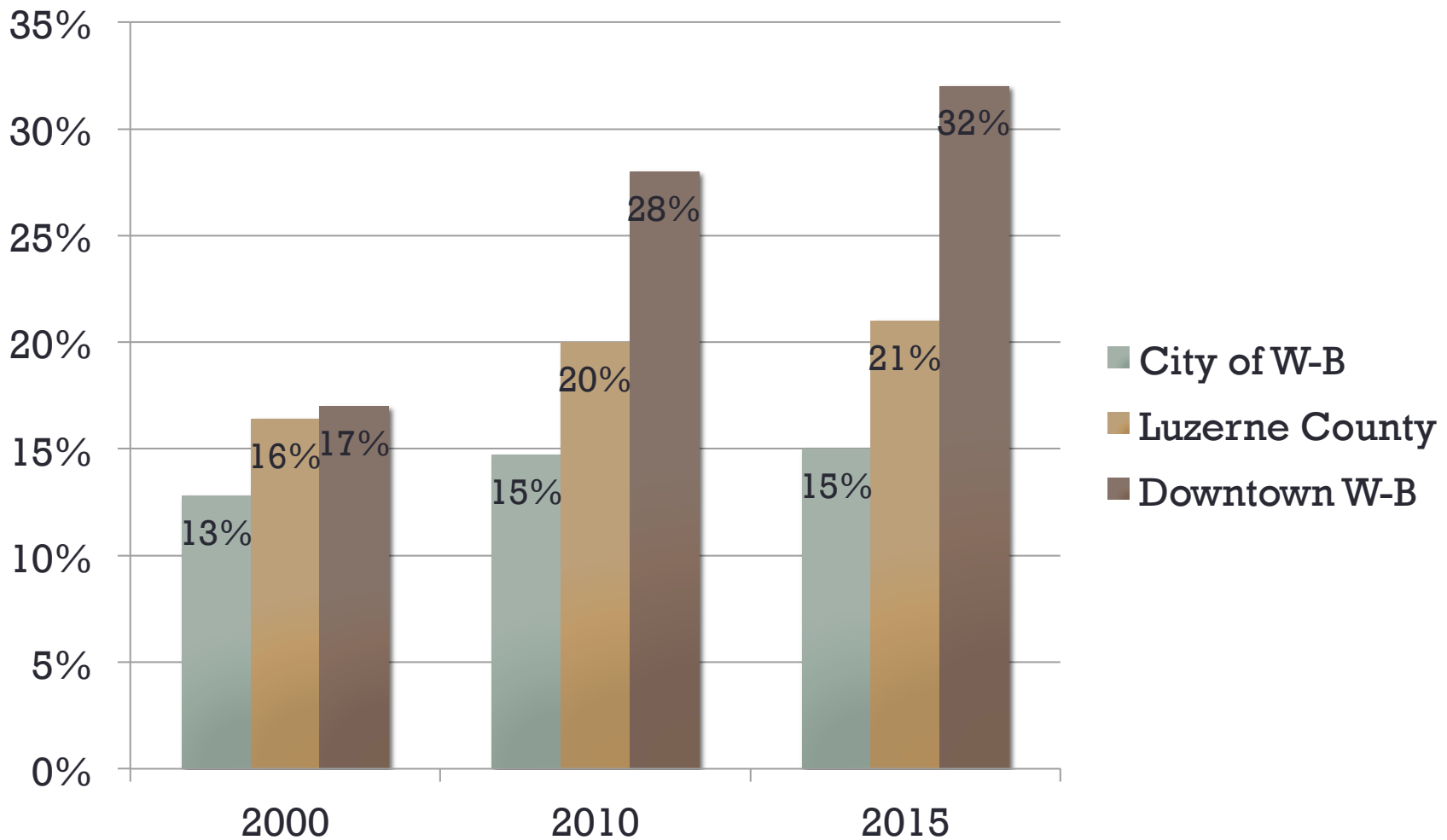


Individuals in Poverty: Demographic Comparison



Source: US Census Bureau

Educational Levels: % of residents aged 25 and over with Bachelors Degree



Source: US Census Bureau

Current Downtown Developments:

Several large downtown projects - some public, and others private - are currently underway, about to start construction, or in the planning phase:

- The phased rehabilitation of Public Square.
- The rehabilitation of the historic First National Bank building at 59 Public Square.
- The rehabilitation of the historic Irem Temple, a grand former Shriners lodge dating to 1907.
- A new 102-room Avid hotel on the first block of South Main Street.
- Gateway Center - a 107-room Hyatt Place hotel and mixed-use development on the site of the demolished Hotel Sterling at West Market and North River Streets
- The rehabilitation of the historic 1868 Lehigh & Susquehanna Railroad Station.

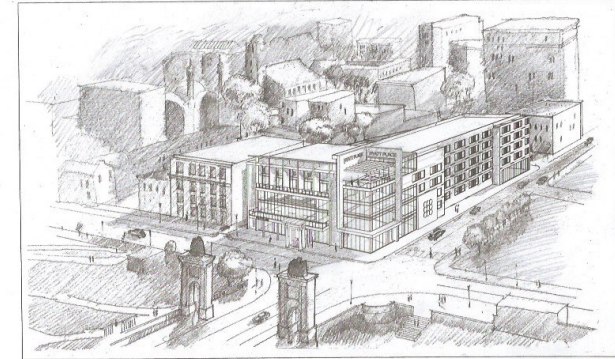
Each of these projects advance - or have the potential to advance - our Transformation Strategies and elements of the Downtown Plan.



Wilkes-Barre Public Square
Amphitheater Seating - Daytime Event
Bohlin Cywinski Jackson
August 25, 2016



CONCEPTUAL EXTERIOR REVISIONS - NORTH HAMPTON STREET
SPHERE INTERNATIONAL - AVID HOTEL
OCTOBER 7, 2016
WILLIAMS KINSMAN LEWIS ARCHITECTURE



GATEWAY CENTER
WILKES BARRE, PA
April 26, 2022
hemmler + camayd architects



QuickFacts**Wilkes-Barre city, Pennsylvania**QuickFacts provides statistics for all states and counties, and for cities and towns with a **population of 5,000 or more**.**Table**

| All Topics | Wilkes-Barre city, Pennsylvania |
|--|------------------------------------|
| Population estimates, July 1, 2019, (V2019) | 40,766 |
| PEOPLE | |
| Population | |
| Population estimates, July 1, 2019, (V2019) | 40,766 |
| Population estimates base, April 1, 2010, (V2019) | 41,535 |
| Population, percent change - April 1, 2010 (estimates base) to July 1, 2019, (V2019) | -1.9% |
| Population, Census, April 1, 2010 | 41,498 |
| Age and Sex | |
| Persons under 5 years, percent | ▲ 6.3% |
| Persons under 18 years, percent | ▲ 22.3% |
| Persons 65 years and over, percent | ▲ 15.8% |
| Female persons, percent | ▲ 51.1% |
| Race and Hispanic Origin | |
| White alone, percent | ▲ 73.4% |
| Black or African American alone, percent (a) | ▲ 13.8% |
| American Indian and Alaska Native alone, percent (a) | ▲ 0.4% |
| Asian alone, percent (a) | ▲ 2.1% |
| Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, percent (a) | ▲ 0.3% |
| Two or More Races, percent | ▲ 4.5% |
| Hispanic or Latino, percent (b) | ▲ 19.1% |
| White alone, not Hispanic or Latino, percent | ▲ 63.1% |
| Population Characteristics | |
| Veterans, 2014-2018 | 2,021 |
| Foreign born persons, percent, 2014-2018 | 9.4% |
| Housing | |
| Housing units, July 1, 2019, (V2019) | X |
| Owner-occupied housing unit rate, 2014-2018 | 47.9% |
| Median value of owner-occupied housing units, 2014-2018 | \$74,600 |
| Median selected monthly owner costs -with a mortgage, 2014-2018 | \$1,020 |
| Median selected monthly owner costs -without a mortgage, 2014-2018 | \$474 |
| Median gross rent, 2014-2018 | \$730 |
| Building permits, 2019 | X |
| Families & Living Arrangements | |
| Households, 2014-2018 | 15,379 |
| Persons per household, 2014-2018 | 2.45 |
| Living in same house 1 year ago, percent of persons age 1 year+, 2014-2018 | 80.2% |
| Language other than English spoken at home, percent of persons age 5 years+, 2014-2018 | 18.7% |
| Computer and Internet Use | |
| Households with a computer, percent, 2014-2018 | 80.3% |
| Households with a broadband Internet subscription, percent, 2014-2018 | 69.8% |
| Education | |
| High school graduate or higher, percent of persons age 25 years+, 2014-2018 | 83.0% |
| Bachelor's degree or higher, percent of persons age 25 years+, 2014-2018 | 15.9% |
| Health | |
| With a disability, under age 65 years, percent, 2014-2018 | 13.1% |
| Persons without health insurance, under age 65 years, percent | ▲ 9.2% |
| Economy | |
| In civilian labor force, total, percent of population age 16 years+, 2014-2018 | 56.7% |
| In civilian labor force, female, percent of population age 16 years+, 2014-2018 | 54.1% |
| Total accommodation and food services sales, 2012 (\$1,000) (c) | 133,897 |
| Total health care and social assistance receipts/revenue, 2012 (\$1,000) (c) | 580,868 |
| Total manufacturers shipments, 2012 (\$1,000) (c) | 279,474 |
| Total merchant wholesaler sales, 2012 (\$1,000) (c) | 167,941 |
| Total retail sales, 2012 (\$1,000) (c) | 4,517,930 |
| Total retail sales per capita, 2012 (c) | \$109,544 |

| | |
|--|------|
| Mean travel time to work (minutes), workers age 16 years+, 2014-2018 | 18.0 |
|--|------|

Income & Poverty

| | |
|--|----------|
| Median household income (in 2018 dollars), 2014-2018 | \$35,485 |
| Per capita income in past 12 months (in 2018 dollars), 2014-2018 | \$19,330 |
| Persons in poverty, percent | ▲ 27.5% |

BUSINESSES**Businesses**

| | |
|---|-------|
| Total employer establishments, 2018 | X |
| Total employment, 2018 | X |
| Total annual payroll, 2018 (\$1,000) | X |
| Total employment, percent change, 2017-2018 | X |
| Total nonemployer establishments, 2018 | X |
| All firms, 2012 | 2,756 |
| Men-owned firms, 2012 | 1,446 |
| Women-owned firms, 2012 | 829 |
| Minority-owned firms, 2012 | 501 |
| Nonminority-owned firms, 2012 | 1,912 |
| Veteran-owned firms, 2012 | 190 |
| Nonveteran-owned firms, 2012 | 2,147 |

GEOGRAPHY**Geography**

| | |
|----------------------------------|---------|
| Population per square mile, 2010 | 5,945.3 |
| Land area in square miles, 2010 | 6.98 |
| FIPS Code | 4285152 |

About datasets used in this table

Value Notes

▲ Estimates are not comparable to other geographic levels due to methodology differences that may exist between different data sources.

Some estimates presented here come from sample data, and thus have sampling errors that may render some apparent differences between geographies statistically indistinguishable. Click the Quick Info ⓘ icon to the left of each row in TABLE view to learn about sampling error.

The vintage year (e.g., V2019) refers to the final year of the series (2010 thru 2019). *Different vintage years of estimates are not comparable.*

Fact Notes

- (a) Includes persons reporting only one race
- (b) Hispanics may be of any race, so also are included in applicable race categories
- (c) Economic Census - Puerto Rico data are not comparable to U.S. Economic Census data

Value Flags

- Either no or too few sample observations were available to compute an estimate, or a ratio of medians cannot be calculated because one or both of the median estimates falls in the lowest or upper interval of an open ended distribution.
- D Suppressed to avoid disclosure of confidential information
- F Fewer than 25 firms
- FN Footnote on this item in place of data
- N Data for this geographic area cannot be displayed because the number of sample cases is too small.
- NA Not available
- S Suppressed; does not meet publication standards
- X Not applicable
- Z Value greater than zero but less than half unit of measure shown

QuickFacts data are derived from: Population Estimates, American Community Survey, Census of Population and Housing, Current Population Survey, Small Area Health Insurance Estimates, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, State and County Housing Unit Estimates, County Business Patterns, Nonemployer Statistics, Economic Census, Survey of Business Owners, Building Permits.

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- Research
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- Business Opportunities
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FIND DATA

- QuickFacts
- Explore Census Data
- 2020 Census
- 2010 Census
- Economic Census
- Interactive Maps
- Training & Workshops
- Data Tools
- Developers
- Publications

BUSINESS & ECONOMY

- Help With Your Forms
- Economic Indicators
- Economic Census
- E-Stats
- International Trade
- Export Codes
- NAICS
- Governments
- Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD)
- Survey of Business Owners

PEOPLE & HOUSEHOLDS

- 2020 Census
- 2010 Census
- American Community Survey
- Income
- Poverty
- Population Estimates
- Population Projections
- Health Insurance
- Housing
- International
- Genealogy

SPECIAL TOPICS

- Advisors, Centers and Research Programs
- Statistics in Schools
- Tribal Resources (AIAN)
- Emergency Preparedness
- Special Census Program
- Data Linkage Infrastructure
- Fraudulent Activity & Scams
- USA.gov

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SECTION 2: 5-YEAR STRATEGY NARRATIVE

Diamond City Partnership: Mission and Vision Statements:



DCP's Mission:

- *The Diamond City Partnership is Wilkes-Barre's not-for-profit downtown management organization: the caretaker of our community's vision for Downtown Wilkes-Barre.*
-

DCP's Vision:

- *Downtown Wilkes-Barre will use its key assets – its colleges, its historic architecture, its riverfront and Public Square, and its walkable mixed use character – to become Northeastern Pennsylvania's "walk-to-everything" urban neighborhood of choice; the region's college neighborhood; its "Innovation District" and major employment hub; and a regional hub of arts, culture, dining, and entertainment: a clean, safe, vibrant, and attractive city center that's a point of pride for the entire region.*

5-Year Strategy: SWOT Workshops

Every four years, DCP conducts a comprehensive Perception & Use Survey to understand what the public thinks about Downtown.

In 2015, the survey was followed by workshops involving DWBBID ratepayers, members of the Downtown Residents Association and Downtown Wilkes-Barre Business Association, college representatives, local service clubs, and DCP's board.

During the workshops, we conducted a downtown SWOT ("strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats") analysis, and asked participants to prioritize potential action items.

Our Downtown Action Plan is a direct result of the survey results and this public outreach and feedback.



2015 SWOT Analysis: Downtown Wilkes-Barre



STRENGTHS:

- Restaurants
- Walkability
- Farmers Market
- River Common
- Historic architecture
- Colleges
- Movies 14
- Convenience of mixed-use environment
- F. M. Kirby Center
- “Live/Work” residential neighborhood
- Proven success of new downtown residential projects
- Major regional employment center

WEAKNESSES:

- Feels “Unsafe”
- Impact of loitering and uncivil behaviors
- Impact of concentration of social services
- Condition of Public Square
- Impact of addicted population
- Lack of “Quality Retail”
- Perceived lack of parking
- No “critical mass” of revitalization energy (too many “missing teeth” and vacancies)
- Lack of “visitor infrastructure”
- Not enough pedestrian traffic or active street life
- Lack of attention to placemaking and to fostering high-quality “walkable urbanity” at street level
- Weak public-sector planning capacity

OPPORTUNITIES:

- Growth of downtown’s colleges and universities
- Socioeconomic trends favor walkable mixed-use neighborhoods
- Competitive price point re: NYC and Philadelphia
- Growth of downtown startup community
- State incentive programs targeted to downtowns:
 - **Keystone Innovation Zone:** offers startup businesses the opportunity to claim up to \$100,000 in PA tax credits.
 - **CRIZ:** allows state and local tax revenue derived from a site to be used to pay debt service for the new development.
- Development of regional trail system with Downtown as its hub
- Recent investments in resident-focused retail (like downtown market)

THREATS:

- The “Wilkes-Barre is Dangerous” issue
- Greater Wilkes-Barre’s overall market weakness
- Growing concentration of poverty within city
- Corporate consolidation
- Continued demolition of historic buildings
- Context of saturated retail environment
- Regional alternatives to Downtown Wilkes-Barre
- Erosion of Downtown’s role as a “Regional Center”
- Lack of funding for social services
- Impact of E-Commerce on traditional downtown uses

Six Transformation Strategies for Downtown Wilkes-Barre:



STRATEGY 1: Downtown Wilkes-Barre will be a safe, clean, and attractive place to live, work, shop, and visit.

STRATEGY 2: Downtown Wilkes-Barre will be the region's college neighborhood.

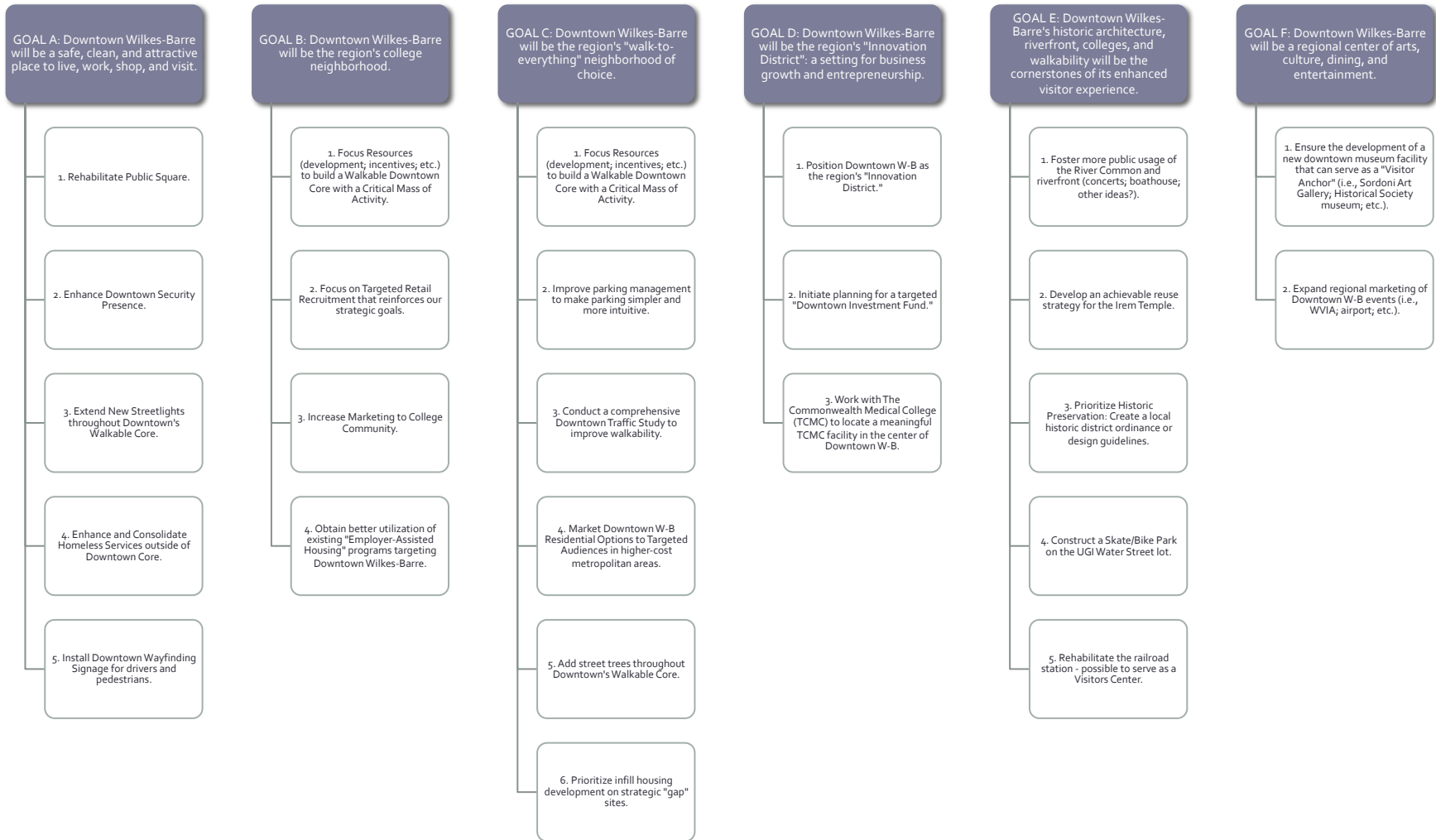
STRATEGY 3: Downtown Wilkes-Barre will be the region's "walk-to-everything" urban neighborhood of choice.

STRATEGY 4: Downtown Wilkes-Barre will be the region's "Innovation District:" its hub for business, startup activity, and entrepreneurship.

STRATEGY 5: Downtown's historic architecture, walkability, riverfront, and colleges will be the cornerstones of its enhanced visitor experience.

STRATEGY 6: Downtown Wilkes-Barre will be a regional center of arts, culture, dining, and entertainment.

Each Transformation Strategy is associated with specific goals emerging from our Downtown planning process



TRANSFORMATION STRATEGY #1:

Downtown Wilkes-Barre will be a safe, clean, and attractive place to live, work, shop, and visit.



Goals:

A. Rehabilitate Public Square.

B. Enhance Downtown security presence.

C. Extend new streetlights throughout Downtown's walkable core.

D. Improve coordination of services to "street population" within Downtown.

E. Install Downtown wayfinding signage for drivers and pedestrians.

F. Provide supplementary cleaning, graffiti removal, and maintenance via DWBBID Clean Team.

G. Improve Downtown curb appeal through beautification.

TRANSFORMATION STRATEGY #2: Downtown Wilkes-Barre will be the region's college neighborhood.



Goals:

A. Focus collegiate resources (capital projects; initiatives; etc.) to build a walkable Downtown core with a critical mass of activity.

B. Focus on targeted retail recruitment that reinforces our strategic goals.

C. Increase marketing to college community.

D. Obtain better utilization of existing "Employer-Assisted Housing" programs targeting Downtown Wilkes-Barre.

TRANSFORMATION STRATEGY #3:

Downtown Wilkes-Barre will be the region's "walk-to-everything" urban neighborhood of choice.



Goals:

A. FINISH A BLOCK: Focus public and private resources (development; incentives; etc.) to build a walkable Downtown core with a critical mass of activity.

B. Improve parking management to make parking simpler and more intuitive and encourage "park once and walk" behavior.

C. Conduct a comprehensive Downtown Traffic Study to improve walkability and bikeability.

D. Market Downtown W-B residential options to targeted audiences in higher-cost metropolitan areas.

E. Add street trees throughout Downtown's walkable core.

F. Prioritize infill housing development on strategic "gap" sites.

TRANSFORMATION STRATEGY #4: Downtown Wilkes-Barre will be the region's "Innovation District:" its hub for business, startup activity, and entrepreneurship.



Goals:

A. Position Downtown W-B as the region's "Innovation District" through marketing, focused recruitment and retention, and incentive programs.

B. Initiate planning for a targeted "Downtown Seed Investment Fund."

C. Develop Opportunity Zone strategy for Downtown Wilkes-Barre.

C. Work with Geisinger and Geisinger Commonwealth School of Medicine (GCSOM) to locate a meaningful GCSOM or Geisinger facility in the center of Downtown W-B.

TRANSFORMATION STRATEGY #5: Downtown's historic architecture, walkability, riverfront, and colleges will be the cornerstones of its enhanced visitor experience.



Goals:

A. Foster more public usage of the River Common and riverfront.

B. Develop an achievable reuse strategy for the Irem Temple.

C. Prioritize Historic Preservation: Pass a local historic district ordinance or design guidelines, and continue to incentivize façade rehab projects.

D. Construct a Skate/Bike Park on the UGI Water Street lot.

E. Rehabilitate the railroad station - possibly to serve as a new Visitors Center.

F. Raise the bar for the design of Downtown's built environment.

TRANSFORMATION STRATEGY #6:

Downtown Wilkes-Barre will be a regional center of arts, culture, dining, and entertainment.



Goals:

A. Ensure the development of a new downtown museum facility that can serve as a "Visitor Anchor."

B. Expand regional marketing of Downtown Wilkes-Barre anchor destinations and events.

C. Foster the growth of a well-defined Downtown "arts district" with a critical mass of arts activities.

Section 2: 5 Year Strategy Narrative

By every objective measure, Wilkes-Barre has made enormous progress with its downtown revitalization efforts since the first PDC-facilitated visioning sessions were held in February of 2001.

As a result, it's reasonable to ask why DCP is now seeking Keystone Main Street designation for Downtown Wilkes-Barre.

There are several big reasons:

Downtown Wilkes-Barre's revitalization has made great strides – but structural issues mean that long-term success is far from assured:

Downtown's progress during the past fifteen years is undeniable. However, the downtown economy remains fragile.

Wilkes-Barre is the quintessential weak-market city: Census data makes it clear that the city continues to bleed jobs and investment to suburbs and other communities, its neighborhoods continue to decline, and concentrated poverty continues to increase.

The past seven decades have demonstrated that economic regeneration doesn't occur naturally. Our precarious position means that, despite all of the progress, relatively modest economic reversals – such as the loss of a moderately-sized office employer - can generate outsized negative impacts in the downtown economy.

As a result, we must be very intentional in making moves to strengthen the economic health of our downtown – and, by extension, our city and region.

We continue to struggle with key elements of our downtown revitalization strategy, such as historic preservation and the renewal of Public Square.

The people who participated in the 2001 Visioning Sessions' original SWOT analysis identified four key “strengths” for Downtown Wilkes-Barre:

- Public Square
- Historic Architecture
- Riverfront Development
- Institutions of Higher Education

The word clouds from DCP's 2018 Perception & Use Survey (see Section 7: Image Development Report) make it clear that – more than 15 years later - the public continues to view these four elements as fundamental downtown assets.

While we've made undeniable progress in leveraging our riverfront and our center city colleges during the past 15 years, we continue to struggle with the other two elements.

The City of Wilkes-Barre still provides no local protections for historic buildings, and some of Downtown's most character-defining historic structures, such as the Irem Temple, the Lehigh & Susquehanna Railroad Station, and Coughlin High School, are in danger of being lost.

The high quality of our historic architecture is one of our downtown's primary assets – yet it continues to be eroded through disinvestment, lack of resources, and thoughtless planning.

And, while the perimeter of Public Square has seen dramatic improvement, the 2-acre park itself remains a missed opportunity in the heart of our downtown.

Since 2015, DCP has been working with three successive mayoral administrations to develop a strategy and implement phased improvements to Public Square. We have made good progress, and the modest changes of Phase 1 have dramatically improved the Square's function and appearance - but much remains to be done.

Main Street designation will provide an opportunity for assistance in addressing these areas of weakness, and in helping us to “move the needle” for expectations when it comes to historic preservation, and to the design and functioning of Downtown Wilkes-Barre's signature public open space.

Our organizational structure is in need of a refresh, and we need to deepen our revenue sources and our bench of volunteer board and committee members so that we can build a foundation for the next phase of revitalization.

With the exception of some modest changes made in 2007 when the Downtown Wilkes-Barre Business Improvement District was created, DCP's current board structure has been in place since 2001.

This structure, which worked well for many years, is increasingly ungainly. The board's size – there are currently 40 named seats listed in the bylaws – is too large to be effective. It's possible that many of those board seats, which represent elected officials, should really be *ex officio*.

Similarly, we'd like to do more to involve the newest generation of downtown property and business owners so that we can begin building a bench of future board leadership.

Downtown Wilkes-Barre needs to do better when it comes to design and the quality of downtown's physical environment.

Simply put, we need to do more to enhance Downtown Wilkes-Barre's "curb appeal."

Successful downtown planning is, in large part, about placemaking – creating a place where people want to be. However, much of downtown's current streetscape and physical environment remains glaringly deficient.

If we want Downtown to be competitive, DCP, the City, property owners, and businesses must work to raise the bar in terms of Downtown's built environment.

DCP's 2018 survey reinforces the need to focus on curb appeal: while 84% of respondents agreed that "Downtown has a good selection of places to eat," only 52% agreed that "Downtown has a pleasant, walkable urban environment" and only 42% agreed that "Downtown is a place I like to take out-of-town guests."

We need to make a conscious effort to turn this around. In an era when high-quality places attract investment, we need to make a concerted effort to improve our built environment.

Since 2007, DCP's Design Committee has administered a foundation-funded Façade and Storefront Improvement Grant program. While it has resulted in modest improvement, too much of our built environment remains substandard. Considering the amount of new investment over the past decade, there have been too many missed opportunities.

And, too often we aren't "connecting the dots" between Downtown destinations and centers of activity – and the resultant gaps leave Downtown visitors reluctant to venture down the street.

Rehabilitating facades and systematically improving the quality of the built environment and the pedestrian realm are crucial if we wish to shape our central business district into a place where people will truly want to spend their time and where businesses will choose to locate.

We believe that Main Street designation can provide an opportunity to change that narrative and enhance Downtown placemaking. The development of a downtown capital investment plan can help us to identify where future public and private investments can provide the greatest opportunities to advance the 5-Year Strategy.

We currently lack a dedicated entity that can acquire and rehabilitate blighted properties either within Downtown Wilkes-Barre or throughout the City of Wilkes-Barre.

Given Wilkes-Barre's weak-market context, many of DCP's goals for Downtown – transforming Public Square into a great civic space; “connecting the dots through infill development; expanding the variety of downtown housing product; preserving historic structures and streetscapes; fostering a stronger demand for employer-assisted housing – are only likely to be achieved in the short term through action by some sort of non-profit development entity, such as a community development corporation.

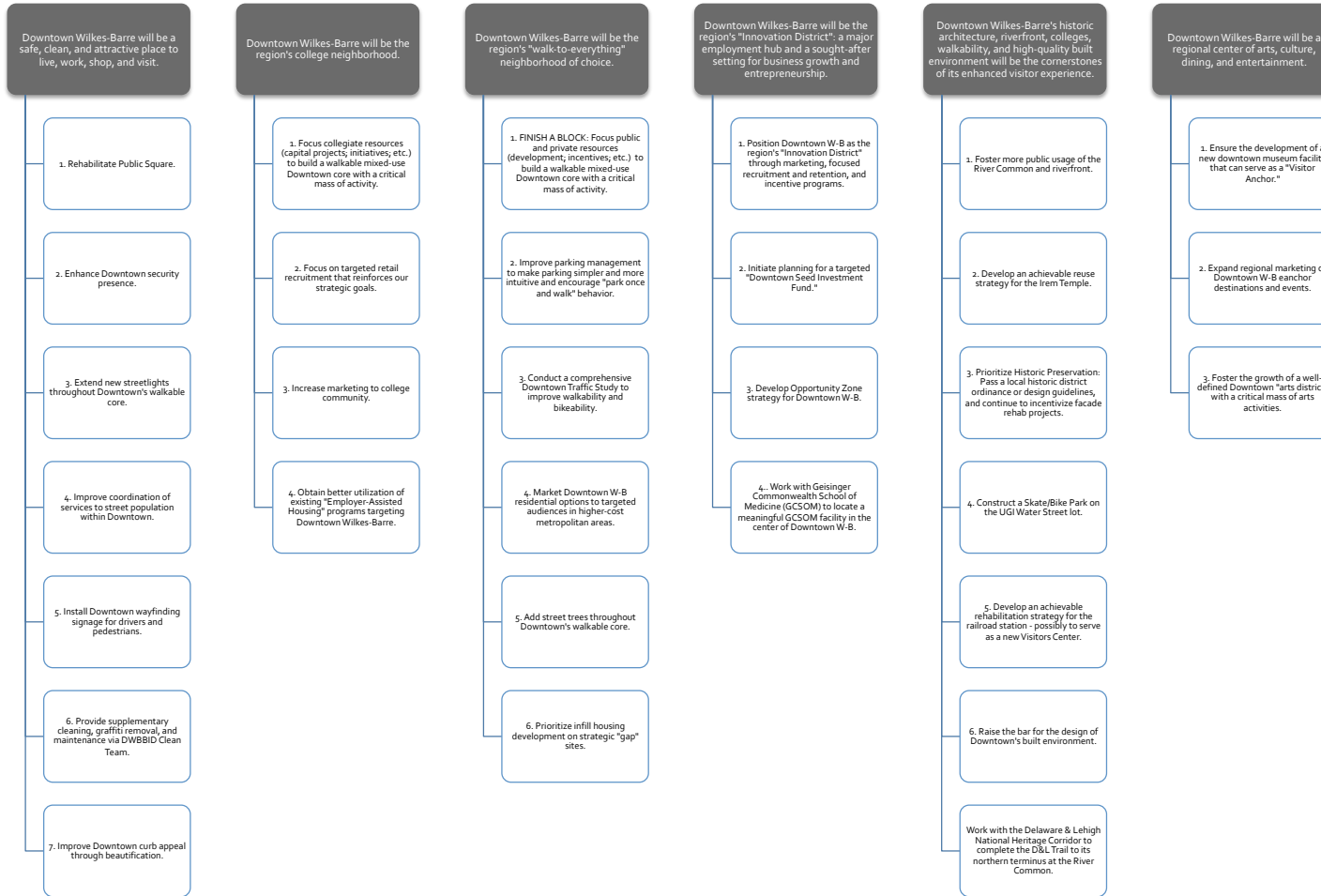
However, while some nonprofit real estate initiatives (primarily focusing on low-mod housing) do operate within the City of Wilkes-Barre at this time, there is currently no municipal Redevelopment Authority, land bank, or downtown-focused community development corporation.

Therefore, we hope to use designation as an opportunity to explore the options for creation of new place-based development initiatives that can help to advance our 5-Year Strategy.

Downtown Wilkes-Barre Five Year Strategy



Executive Summary: Transformation Strategies and Goals



Downtown Wilkes-Barre Five Year Strategy



| TRANSFORMATION STRATEGY | GOAL | OUTCOMES/ MEASURES OF SUCCESS | OUTPUTS (CONTROLLED) | 2020 OBJECTIVES: ORGANIZATION | 2020 OBJECTIVES: DESIGN | 2020 OBJECTIVES: PROMOTION | 2020 OBJECTIVES: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT |
|---|--|--|--|---|--|--|--|
| <p>Clean, Safe, and Vibrant</p> <p>(Downtown Wilkes-Barre will be a safe, clean, and attractive place to live, work, shop, and visit.)</p> | 1. Rehabilitate Public Square. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More non-event usage of Public Square. • Increased user ratio of females to males. • Better public perception of Square in P&U Survey. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rehabilitation of Public Square. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with City to develop funding strategy for Phase 2 of rehab plan (NAP; DCNR; LSA) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete construction on phase 1 scope of work (DCP, City, BCJ) • Organize Phase 2 public workshop to identify key elements of Phase 2 scope of work (with City and BCJ). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue Promotion Committee events on Square (with DWBBA). • Develop written Petroglyph Scavenger Hunt Brochure. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine cost of Certificate of Occupancy for First National Bank building (with City). |
| | 2. Enhance Downtown Security Presence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in crimes within Zone 4. • Better public perception of safety in P&U Survey. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # of detail hours worked. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue DCP funding of supplementary weekend details. • Coordinate with weekday downtown beat patrol. • Review 2019 DWBBID crime stats with WBPDP. | | | |
| | 3. Extend new streetlights throughout Downtown's walkable core. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better public perception of safety in P&U Survey. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # of new streetlights. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create plan for streetscape improvements on 3rd block of S. Main with City. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor ongoing TAP and MTF streetscape projects within Downtown core. | | |
| | 4. Improve coordination of services to street population within Downtown. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better public perception of safety in P&U Survey. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # of VOA Give Hope Team placements. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organize stakeholder meetings with VOA Give Hope Team. • Develop case for ongoing funding from LC Human Services. | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin discussions with City and social service agencies regarding suitable parameters for permanent men's shelter. |
| | 5. Install Downtown wayfinding signage for drivers and pedestrians. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased visitation to Downtown attractions. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # of wayfinding signs installed. | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restore damaged vehicular wayfinding signs. | | |
| | 6. Provide supplementary sidewalk cleaning, graffiti removal, and maintenance via DWBBID Clean Team. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better public perception of cleanliness in P&U Survey. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # of trash removed. • # of graffiti tags removed. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to manage Clean Team operations. • Implement pilot TerraCycle program. • Determine Clean Team capital needs for Implementation Grant. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct Clean Team painting of worn meter posts, light poles, etc. | | |
| | 7. Improve Downtown curb appeal through beautification. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better public perception of curb appeal in P&U Survey. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # of hanging baskets and planters maintained. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure sponsorships needed to fund expanded beautification program. | | | |

Downtown Wilkes-Barre Five Year Strategy



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|--|---|---|---|---|-------------------------|---|---|
| <p style="text-align: center;">College Town</p> <p>(Downtown Wilkes-Barre will be the region's college neighborhood.)</p> | 1. Focus collegiate resources (capital projects; initiatives; etc.) to build a walkable Downtown core with a critical mass of activity. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better student perception of downtown environment in P&U Survey. Increase in ped count #'s. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$ from King's and Wilkes invested in projects within Downtown. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop plan for 2nd block of S. Main St. in conjunction with Wilkes. | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> | |
| | 2. Focus on targeted retail recruitment that reinforces our strategic goals. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> # of new storefront businesses in targeted sectors. Better public perception of downtown retail in P&U Survey. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> # of prospects contacted. | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan 2020 Holiday Pop-Up Shops (with Chamber and City) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop target 2021 retail recruitment list (with Chamber) |
| | 3. Increase marketing to college community. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better student perception of downtown retail in P&U Survey. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> # of new marketing initiatives. | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meet with King's and Wilkes representatives re: additional marketing strategies (with DWBBA and City) | |
| | 4. Obtain better utilization of existing "Employer-Assisted Housing" programs targeting Downtown Wilkes-Barre. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> # of college-educated residents per US Census stats. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> # of households utilizing EAH programs in Downtown W-B. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Convene meeting with goal of improving local EAH programs. (King's, Wilkes, hospitals, GCSOM) | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify "opportunity properties" for additional owner-occupied housing within Downtown core. |

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| <p>"Walk-to-Everything" Neighborhood (Downtown Wilkes-Barre will be the region's "walk-to-everything" neighborhood of choice.)</p> | <p>1. FINISH A BLOCK: focus public and private resources (priority development sites; grants; development incentives; etc.) to build a walkable downtown core with a critical mass of activity.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> # of Downtown residents per US Census stats. % occupied properties within walkable core. Increase in ped count #'s. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$ invested/projects completed in targeted focus areas of Downtown (i.e., Public Square, 2nd block of S. Main, West Market St.) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop plan for 2nd block of S. Main St. in conjunction with Wilkes. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop plans for façade rehabilitation of 116 S. Main Street (with WU). Develop plans for façade rehabilitation at 23-35 W. Market Street. Provide design review oversight of Sterling site development. | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with H&N to advance Sterling site development. Seek reuse strategy for American Furniture building on E. Northampton St. |
| | <p>2. Improve parking management to make parking simpler and more intuitive and encourage "park once and walk" behavior.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher occupancy rates in off-street parking facilities. Improved survey results | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completion of a comprehensive parking operations study encompassing on-street and off-street facilities. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine pathway to obtain study of baseline parking data and operational improvements (with City; Parking Authority). Pursue funding of study through DCED. | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revisit strategies to promote existing Parking Authority validation program. | |
| | <p>3. Conduct a comprehensive Downtown Traffic Study to improve walkability.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in annual pedestrian #'s. LONG TERM: completion of Coal Street extension. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completion of traffic/walkability study utilizing best practices. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pursue funding of study through PADOT or DCED. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participate in bi-county Downtown bicycle/pedestrian network study (with City; MPO). | | |
| | <p>4. Market Downtown W-B residential options to targeted audiences in higher-cost metropolitan areas.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> # of Dtnw. residents per US Census stats. % increase in Dtnw. MHI. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeted promotion of Downtown W-B in target markets | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to support Downtown Residents Association (DRA) as the advocate for the collective interest of those calling Downtown W-B home. | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify possible strategies for promoting Downtown Wilkes-Barre in target markets. |
| | <p>5. Add street trees throughout Downtown's walkable core.</p> | <p>Better public perception of public environ. in P&U Survey.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> # of street trees planted in Downtown. | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pursue street tree replanting in Downtown (with Shade Tree Comm. and PSU Extension) | | |
| | <p>6. Prioritize infill housing development on strategic "gap" sites.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> # of new housing units developed # of Dtnw. residents per US Census stats. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategy for new infill housing development in Downtown. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research establishment of a Community Development Corporation or other vehicle to facilitate this work. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify possible infill housing locations. | | |

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| <p style="text-align: center;">Innovation District</p> <p>(Downtown Wilkes-Barre will be the region's "Innovation District": a major employment hub and a sought-after setting for business growth and entrepreneurship.)</p> | <p>1. Position Downtown W-B as the region's "Innovation District" through marketing, focused recruitment and retention, and incentive programs.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in total downtown employment. # of downtown KIZ firms. KIZ job growth. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> # of ENGAGE contacts. # of prospects assisted. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to participate in W-B Connect initiative. | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to use DCED "ENGAGE" initiative to connect with Dtown tech startups. Continue to market Downtown W-B through Penn's Northeast. Continue to work with partners on creating a pipeline for life sciences technology transfer/ commercialization activities (with APKCFEE; GCSOM). Continue to maintain and distribute an inventory of available downtown office and retail space. Continue to provide a single point of contact for those interested in downtown investment. Continue to provide one-on-one Technical Assistance to existing and prospective downtown businesses. Focus on priority retention targets. |
| | <p>2. Initiate planning for a targeted "Downtown Seed Investment Fund." SHOULD THIS CHANGE?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$ invested in Downtown startup businesses | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to support creation of TecBridge Seed Fund (with TecBridge) | | | |
| | <p>3. Develop Opportunity Zone strategy for Downtown W-B.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> New OZ investments in Downtown W-B. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hold initial roundtable to determine Opportunity Zone strategy (with Chamber; City) | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore development of new 20,000 SF floorplate office building in Downtown core. |
| | <p>4. Work with Geisinger and its School of Medicine (GCSOM) to locate a meaningful facility in the center of Downtown W-B.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creation of a new Geisinger or GCSOM facility in Downtown W-B. | | | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue conversations with Geisinger and GCSOM to discuss potential opportunities (with City; Chamber) |

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| Asset-Based Placemaking (Downtown Wilkes-Barre's historic architecture, riverfront, colleges, walkability, and high-quality built environment will be the cornerstones of its enhanced visitor experience.) | 1. Foster more public usage of the River Common and riverfront. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased visitation to River Common. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> # of River Common events. | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocate for completion of Courthouse Gardens with Luzerne County. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to partner with Riverfront Parks Committee and Visit Luzerne County on events. | |
| | 2. Develop an achievable reuse strategy for the Irem Temple. | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commence Phase 1 of restoration of Irem Temple | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide technical assistance to Irem Temple Restoration Project (ITRP). | | | |
| | 3. Prioritize Historic Preservation: Create a local historic district ordinance or design guidelines, and continue to incentivize façade rehab projects. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fewer demolitions of historic structures. Increase in # of rehabilitated structures. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Passage of local historic preservation ordinance. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with City to finally pass an historic district ordinance or design guidelines that control demolitions. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocate for preservation of Engel/Frank Clark facades as part of Sphere development. Investigate strategies for architectural lighting of key landmarks. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with W-B Preservation Society to reprint "Walk Wilkes-Barre brochure. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify "high-priority" façade rehabs (23 W. Market St.; 3 S. Main St.; 2nd block of S. Main St.) |
| | 4. Construct a Skate/Bike Park on the UGI Water Street lot. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced damage to Public Square and River Common from skateboarders and trick bikers. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Construction of skate/bike park | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with skate/bike community to create working group to pursue development of a public skate/bike park. Pursue buy-in from City or County re: operation of facility. | | | |
| | 5. Develop an achievable reuse strategy for the railroad station - possibly to serve as a Visitors Center. | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commence rehabilitation of railroad station. | | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confirm rehabilitation strategy with current owners (owners; DCP) |
| | 6. Raise the bar for the design of downtown's built environment. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better public perception of downtown public and built environment in P&U Survey. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> # of façade grants awarded. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopt more comprehensive façade grant guidelines (with PDC). Plan application for DCED Façade Grant funds. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review design of Sphere Intl.'s development plan for Northampton & S. Main Streets (with City). Review design of development proposed for Sterling site. Meet with PADOT to discuss maintenance of Market Street Bridge. | | |
| 7. Work with the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor to complete the D&L Trail to its northern terminus at the River Common. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> # of visitors to Downtown Wilkes-Barre due to D&L Trail. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completion of D&L Trail from W-B Mountain to River Common. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with D&LNHC, DCNR, and City to finalize trail alignment. | | | | |

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| <p style="text-align: center;">Arts, Culture, Dining, & Entertainment</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(Downtown Wilkes-Barre will be a regional center of arts, culture, dining, and entertainment.)</p> | 1. Ensure the development of a new downtown museum facility that can serve as a "Visitor Anchor." | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in visitors to Downtown W-B. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decision to pursue a new downtown museum. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meet with Historical Society to review their facilities planning objectives (with LCHS). | | | |
| | 2. Expand regional marketing of Downtown W-B anchor destinations and events. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> # of subscribers to DCP social media channels. Increased "This Week" Open Rate | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in Sales | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and incentivize "curb appeal" enhancements for downtown international dining district. Fund schematic redesign of Midtown Village courtyard to show owner and encourage café dining. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distribute Farmers Market reusable shopping bags (sponsor: Highmark). Update printed Downtown Map/Directory (with DWBBA). Develop branding and "Passport" for downtown dining district. Continue to manage the "This Week in Downtown" E-newsletter. Continue to use social media and online resources to reposition downtown and target potential consumers and visitors. Continue to grow Small Business Saturday in Downtown (with DWBBA and Chamber). Continue to place Downtown ads in Luzerne County Visitors Guide (with DWBBA). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pursue recruitment of complementary new restaurants in dining district. |
| | 3. Foster the growth of a well defined Downtown "arts district" with a critical mass of arts activities. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased visitation to "Art Block" gallery walk event. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A full season of monthly "Art Block" events. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Submit application for Art Block to PCA. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with Art Block committee to place installation art on Art Block. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan for 2020 "Art Block" events in conjunction with Sordoni Art Gallery and other second-block arts venues. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore potential for future storefront gallery on 2nd block of S. Main Street. |