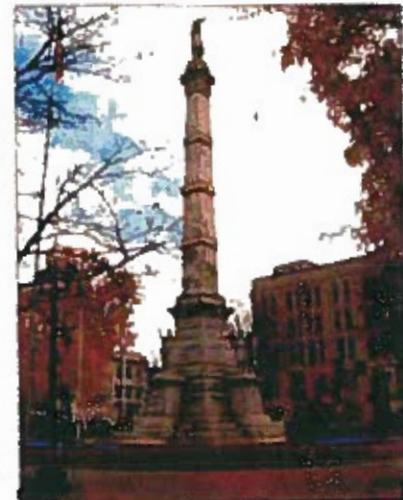


# Economic Development Plan for the Easton, PA Central Business District

May 2006



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## SUMMARY

While economic forces over the last several decades have eroded its historic position as a center of commerce for the Lehigh Valley region, the City of Easton's Central Business District (CBD) has significant assets and great potential for the future. Current and pending private and public investments indicate renewed interest in the CBD and will generate momentum for additional positive change. The purpose of the Economic Development Plan is to provide guidance for the Greater Easton Development Partnership (GEDP) and the city as they work with partner agencies, organizations, and the private sector to promote the continued revitalization of the CBD. It provides:

- A unifying vision and strategic initiatives to achieve a prosperous and sustainable economy for the CBD; and
- A plan for action by the GEDP, the city, and their partners to achieve the vision.

### Study Area

The study area for the Economic Development Plan includes Easton's traditional downtown (bounded by Bushkill Creek to the north, the Delaware River to the east, the Lehigh River and Washington Street to the south, and 6<sup>th</sup> Street to the south) and the Bushkill Creek corridor west to the Simon Silk Mill property. The plan has three geographic focus areas within the larger study area:

- The Northampton Street corridor from Larry Holmes Drive to 6<sup>th</sup> Street
- The waterfront (Larry Holmes Drive) from Bushkill Drive to 3<sup>rd</sup> Street
- The Bushkill Creek corridor from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> Streets

### Existing Conditions and Trends

A comprehensive assessment of physical, demographic, and real estate market conditions and trends was conducted by the consultant team to provide a realistic foundation for the vision and action plan. This assessment identified many advantages enjoyed by Easton and its CBD: a strategic location at a major gateway to Pennsylvania, with easy access to the New York City/northern New Jersey market; a magnificent natural setting at the confluence of the Delaware and Lehigh Rivers; established visitor attractions such as the State Theatre, Crayola Factory, and National Canal Museum; Lafayette College; a dedicated city administration, professional staff, and citizens working to make Easton a better place; and a rich heritage, including an historic downtown with a strong sense of place. While Easton's population experienced a gradual decline between 1960 and 2000, current population estimates indicate a recent population increase that will likely continue in the future as the city (and Northampton County as a whole) benefit from out-migration from the New York City metropolitan area.

The market analysis conducted as part of the existing conditions and trends assessment revealed three key opportunities:

- **Market-rate housing**, capitalizing on the demographic trends and the attractiveness of Easton's CBD for selected segments of the population;
- **Increased visitation**, focused on strengthening existing attractions (Crayola Factory, State Theatre, National Canal Museum, etc.) and the CBD's status as a destination by attracting more visitors from the city, region, and beyond; and
- **Employment**, reinforcing Easton's traditional role as a regional employment center by capturing a "fair share" of Northampton County's projected future job growth.

The existing conditions and trends assessment identified three additional issues as being critical to the economic future of the CBD. These issues are:

- The need to build **organizational/institutional capacity** for implementation, particularly given the city's fiscal constraints and the limited staff resources available to the GEDP;
- **Quality-of-life factors** that affect economic development, such as crime, poverty, and the perception that the CBD is an unsafe place; and
- The need for **positive public relations** and a **proactive marketing campaign** to counteract the negative image of Easton's CBD that has developed over the years.

### **Vision and Strategic Initiatives**

The economic development Vision for the future of the CBD builds on the results of the existing conditions and trends assessment, previous planning efforts sponsored by the city, and the momentum generated by current and pending investments. Simply stated, the Vision is:

*A Central Business District that capitalizes on its assets – a strategic location, magnificent natural setting, visitor attractions such as State Theatre and Two Rivers Landing, and rich history and heritage – to reinforce its role as a regional destination that attracts new residents, visitors from inside and outside the Lehigh Valley, and workers.*

Three strategic initiatives are proposed in support of the Vision to increase the downtown population, thus strengthening opportunities for existing retailers and generating demand for additional quality retailers, destination restaurants, and other supporting services. Targeted towards the key opportunities identified by the market analysis, these initiatives are:

1. Promote new market-rate housing;
2. Increase visitation to existing attractions; and
3. Reinforce Easton as a regional employment center.

## **Action Plan**

The action plan lays out a framework for coordinated action by the GEDP, the City of Easton, and other public and private partners to achieve the economic development vision. The proposed actions are organized into three general timeframes: short-term (year one), mid-term (years two to four), and long-term (year five and beyond).

### **Short-Term Actions (Year One)**

The short-term actions focus on four critical areas that need to be addressed to lay the groundwork for implementation of a coordinated economic development strategy in subsequent years. Three of these areas relate to the key issues identified by the existing conditions and trends assessment.

- **Quality of Life:** Take immediate steps to address quality-of-life issues, including an increased focus on crime and security; enhanced code enforcement and maintenance; and improvements to the physical appearance of the CBD.
- **Capacity Building:**
  - Define roles, responsibilities, and partnership arrangements for plan implementation, starting with a downtown economic development summit sponsored by the GEDP and the city
  - Use the city's upcoming update to the Zoning Ordinance as an opportunity to revise regulatory requirements and procedures to facilitate economic development in the CBD
  - Develop a complete commercial property database and a data collection and monitoring system to obtain critical market data for the CBD on an ongoing basis
  - Identify financial and other incentives to be used to "jump-start" priority revitalization projects through public/private partnerships
- **Marketing:** Develop a unified marketing and communications strategy to reach the three target markets (residents, visitors, and businesses) and highlight the progress being made in downtown revitalization, using mechanisms such as media releases, city newsletters, a dedicated website, etc.
- **Catalytic Projects:** Identify and conduct financial feasibility studies for "catalytic" residential/mixed-use projects (i.e., projects that will have the greatest effect in generating momentum for additional private investment).

### **Mid-Term Actions (Years Two to Four)**

The mid-term actions address the three strategic initiatives/target markets (market-rate housing, increased visitation, and increased CBD employment). They also include priority capital investments to support the target markets.

- **Market-Rate Housing:**
  - Based on the financial feasibility studies, initiate catalytic residential/mixed-use projects in the downtown core through public/private partnerships (target: 100 to 150 new housing units in the mid-term timeframe)
  - Provide incentives as necessary for catalytic projects to reduce investment/developer risk
  - Assist in marketing catalytic projects as part of the broader CBD marketing campaign

- **Increased Visitation:**
  - Initiate a retail recruitment strategy (marketing, incentives, etc.) to attract destination retail stores and restaurants (target: a cluster of eight to ten restaurants occupying a minimum of 20,000 square feet in the 300 and 400 blocks of Northampton Street)
  - Drawing on successful models from other cities, explore creation of an “artists’ relocation program” to attract artists to move to Easton and its CBD
  - Building on ongoing marketing efforts, develop a working partnership designed to increase visitation to Easton’s existing attractions
- **Increased CBD Employment:**
  - Undertake an “industry cluster analysis” to identify types of office/employment uses that could be attracted to the CBD, with a likely focus on governmental functions and related professional and business service firms
  - Develop and implement a business recruitment strategy targeted towards the office/employment types identified by the industry cluster analysis (target: 25,000 to 50,000 square feet of office absorption in the mid-term timeframe)
- **Supporting Capital Investments:**
  - Implement streetscape improvements along 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and Northampton Street connecting to Lafayette College’s ongoing revitalization initiatives, with the objective of promoting increased interaction between the college and the downtown core
  - Implement trails and other recreational improvements along the Bushkill Creek corridor, connecting to the Lafayette College revitalization area and trails along the Delaware and Lehigh riverfronts
  - Redesign Centre Square to improve its function as a community gathering/activity space
  - Implement visual improvements and cleanup to two major gateways to the CBD: S. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street/Lehigh River Bridge and US 22/N. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street

#### Long-Term Actions (Year Five and Beyond)

Long-term actions are considered important to the long-range future of the CBD, but are likely to be deferred until the mid-term strategic initiatives have been successfully implemented. Because the action plan is considered to be a flexible guide to decision-making that can be adjusted to respond to changing circumstances, this does not preclude earlier action on selected projects (e.g., if significant developer interest emerges in waterfront area redevelopment).

- **Waterfront Development:** Develop an improved riverfront park along the Delaware and Lehigh Rivers in conjunction with boulevard enhancements to Larry Holmes Drive, thus creating a “showpiece front yard” for the CBD
- **Lehigh River Gateway Redevelopment:** Redevelop underutilized commercial uses in the vicinity of the S. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street/Larry Holmes Drive intersection for residential/mixed uses
- **Passenger Rail Service:** Work to establish future passenger rail service from New York City/Northern New Jersey to Phillipsburg/Easton, starting with participation in the current I-78 Corridor Transit Study currently being led by the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority

In addition to the short, mid, and long-term timeframes, the action plan incorporates a recommended phasing strategy for addressing the three geographic focus areas:

1. First and foremost, address the Northampton Street corridor and quality-of-life issues in particular to support existing investment being made in the downtown core, such as the Eastonian condominium project, and to reinforce key anchors such as the State Theatre and Two Rivers Landing/Crayola Factory.
2. Second, address the Bushkill Creek corridor to leverage ongoing and pending investments being made by Lafayette College and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and link them to the Northampton Street corridor and downtown core.
3. Address the Delaware and Lehigh riverfronts, which are underutilized assets, over the longer term.

With its strong assets and the momentum for change generated by current investments, Easton's CBD is well positioned for revitalization. This Economic Development Plan outlines the steps that can be undertaken by the GEDP, the city, and public and private sector partners to enable the CBD to reach its full potential. Implementing the plan will require not only concerted and coordinated action by a range of partners, but also public investments for improved downtown services, capital improvements, and incentives needed to move private development projects forward. As the catalyst for economic development in the greater Easton area, the GEDP will require increased staff and other resources if it is to successfully lead the overall effort. The result will be a revitalized CBD that once again serves as a thriving center of activity, attracting residents, visitors, and workers from Easton, the Lehigh Valley region, and beyond.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Similar to downtowns throughout the country, the City of Easton's Central Business District (CBD) faces the challenge of "reinventing" its economy in the face of suburban competition, limited regional growth, and national socio-economic trends. The CBD has considerable assets to support revitalization, and economic development plans and initiatives over the past decade or so have helped to generate significant public and private sector investment. At the same time there are significant challenges to overcome if its potential is to be fully realized. The purpose of the Economic Development Plan is to provide a framework for action by the Greater Easton Development Partnership (GEDP), the City of Easton, and other public and private partners to guide and sustain the continued revitalization of Easton's CBD. This framework includes:

- A unifying vision and strategic initiatives to achieve a prosperous and sustainable economy for the CBD; and
- A plan for action by the GEDP, the city, and their partners to achieve the vision.

The study area for the Economic Development Plan includes Easton's traditional downtown (bounded by Bushkill Creek to the north, the Delaware River to the east, the Lehigh River and Washington Street to the south, and 6<sup>th</sup> Street to the south) plus the Bushkill Creek corridor west to the Simon Silk Mill property (Map 1). The plan has three geographic focus areas within the larger study area:

- The Northampton Street corridor from Larry Holmes Drive to 6<sup>th</sup> Street
- The waterfront (Larry Holmes Drive) from Bushkill Drive to 3<sup>rd</sup> Street
- The Bushkill Creek corridor from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> Streets

While the Bushkill Creek corridor is not part of the traditional downtown, it is included in the study to address its potential to support revitalization of the CBD, taking in account the considerable investment being made in the corridor by Lafayette College and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the recommendations of the *Bushkill Creek Corridor Enhancement Study*, prepared by LandConcepts in 2003.

The planning process for this Economic Development Plan consisted of four overall tasks:

1. **Task 1 (Understanding the Situation):** A comprehensive assessment of physical, demographic, and real estate market conditions and trends pertinent to the economic future of the CBD was conducted by the consultant team, focusing on key issues and opportunities for economic revitalization.
2. **Task 2 (Strategy Development):** In January 2006, an Economic Strategy Charrette (workshop) was conducted with GEDP representatives and key stakeholders to review the results of Task 1 and establish strategic directions for the economic future of the CBD.
3. **Task 3 (Preliminary Action Plan):** In this task the strategic directions established in Task 2 were developed into a preliminary economic development action plan.

4. *Task 4 (Economic Development Plan)*: In this task the results of the previous three tasks are integrated into a comprehensive Economic Development Plan.

Chapter 2.0 of this plan presents the results of the first task, including an overview of physical conditions (the CBD's context and location, natural resources, and built environment), demographic and market trends (population, consumer spending, tourism/visitation, and residential and commercial development activity), and development opportunities related to the market and physical conditions. It also addresses three key issues that emerged during the planning process as critical to the economic future of the CBD:

- The need to build organizational and institutional capacity for implementation
- The need to address quality of life factors
- The need to market a more positive image of Easton and its downtown

Chapter 3.0 presents an overall economic development vision for the CBD's future with supporting strategic directions. The strategic directions comprise broad initiatives directed toward three target markets – market-rate housing, increased visitation, and increased CBD employment – selected based upon the market study results. Given the key finding of the *Economic Development Review of the City of Easton* (Keystone Municipal Services, January 2006) that the city lacks a clear statement of where it is headed and what its vision is of the future, this chapter is vitally important to establishing a unifying framework for efforts to revitalize the CBD. It can also inform a more comprehensive future effort to develop a vision and direction for the city as a whole as recommended by the Keystone Municipal Services study.

Chapter 4.0 lays out a plan for coordinated action to achieve the economic development vision for the CBD. Consistent with its mission "to be the catalyst for vibrant, successful economic development throughout the Greater Easton Area," the GEDP has the primary responsibility for moving the plan forward in partnership with other agencies. At the local level, the City of Easton will need to marshal its resources to address quality-of-life issues in the downtown and to provide incentives for priority development projects. At the regional level, the Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation will need to continue its support of GEDP and economic development in Easton by providing assistance in implementing the identified initiatives and actions. Other public and private sector entities (e.g., the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, County of Northampton, Greater Lehigh Valley Chamber of Commerce, Two Rivers Landing/Crayola Factory, State Theatre, Easton Redevelopment Authority, etc.) will also have important roles to play as described in the action plan.

# 1. Study Area



## Easton, PA Study Area

Legend  
Study Area Boundary



Vanessa Rabinovitch & Todd, LLC  
Economic Research Associates

0 250 500 1,000 Feet

## 2.0 EXISTING CONDITIONS AND TRENDS

This chapter presents an overview of existing conditions in Easton's CBD, including physical conditions (context/location, natural resources, and built environment), demographic and market trends (population, consumer spending, tourism/visitation, and residential/commercial development activity), development opportunities related to the market and physical conditions, and three other key issues considered critical to the economic future of the CBD. Supporting maps and tables are provided at the end of the chapter.

### 2.1 Physical Conditions

Easton is a small city located in the Lehigh Valley area of Pennsylvania that covers less than four square miles (approximately 2,400 acres). According to 2002 data, land uses include residential (806 acres, 33% of the City's total land area); commercial (59 acres, 2%); industrial (64 acres, 3%); transportation, communications and utilities (756 acres, 31%); warehousing (46 acres, 2%); public or institutional uses (222 acres, 9%); and parks/recreation (415 acres, 17%). The study area for the Economic Development Plan includes the CBD (located in the east central part of the city between the Delaware River and 6<sup>th</sup> Street) and the Bushkill Creek corridor between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Streets (running along the northern edge of the CBD and extending west towards the western city boundary). The study area encompasses approximately 310 acres of land, including 150 acres in the CBD and 160 acres in the Bushkill Creek corridor.

Easton and its CBD possess some major physical assets that many other cities of similar size lack, including a strategic location and rich natural and historic resources. Other important factors related to the physical environment of the CBD include zoning and the condition and use of existing buildings. Physical conditions in the CBD are summarized below.

#### Location (Map 2)

- Easton benefits from a strategic location at the "gateway" to the Lehigh Valley and Pennsylvania via I-78 from New York City and other points to the east. Other key roadway linkages in and near Easton and its CBD include US Route 22 to the east and west, State Route 611 to the north and south along the Delaware River, and State Route 33 to the north (connecting to I-80). Northampton and 3<sup>rd</sup> Streets provide the CBD with excellent east-west and north-south roadway access to the regional highway network.
- Easton's location provides easy access to outdoor recreational resources and other destinations such as the Poconos and Delaware Water Gap.
- Easton is located at the hub of a historic rail transportation system that carried both passengers and freight up to the 1980s. Although Easton is no longer served by passenger rail, the rail infrastructure remains in place and the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) and New Jersey Transit have trackage rights that

extend close to the Lehigh Valley region. Reestablishing passenger rail service would greatly enhance the accessibility and marketability of the Easton CBD.

- Prior to the advent of the railroad the Delaware and Lehigh Rivers and Canals served as the major transport routes for goods and people. Easton became a commercial and transportation center of national importance because of its location at the crossroads of these two river/canal systems. Today the City is located at the center of the Delaware and Lehigh Canal National Heritage Corridor, established in 1988 to preserve and interpret the rich history of the six-county region.

### **Natural Resources (Map 3)**

- Easton's location at the confluence of the Delaware and Lehigh Rivers surrounded by steep hillsides provides a magnificent natural setting. However, the Lehigh and Delaware riverfronts are underutilized and remain isolated from the CBD.
- A tributary of the Delaware River, Bushkill Creek is another significant waterway that completes the definition of the CBD by water on three sides. The 2003 *Bushkill Creek Corridor Enhancement Study* identified the Bushkill Creek Corridor as "a tremendously underutilized asset" that "can provide an exceptional open space resource and recreational opportunities within the City and connect to an extensive regional trail and bikeway system."
- The regulatory (100-year) floodplain associated with the Delaware River, Lehigh River, and Bushkill Creek is a significant constraint to riverfront development in the CBD. While not a regulatory constraint, the 500-year floodplain covers a significant portion of the CBD inland of the 100-year floodplain.
- Steep slopes make walking difficult in portions of the CBD and form a significant physical barrier between the CBD and Lafayette College (located on College Hill across Bushkill Creek from the downtown) and the Northampton County Courthouse complex (also located on a hill above the downtown core).

### **Built Environment (Maps 4, 5)**

- Most of the CBD is located within the Easton Historic District, a relatively intact Victorian commercial/residential center containing a historic building stock that represents the dynamic growth and wealth of Easton in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A designated local as well as National Register district, the Easton Historic District is an important asset that, combined with the outstanding natural setting, creates a distinctive "sense of place" for the CBD.
- Most of the CBD is zoned Business Regional Trade (B-RT). Other zoning designations include Residential High Density (R-HD), Business General Office (B-GO), the Riverside Drive Development District (R-DD – former Urban Renewal Area) along Larry Holmes Drive, and Industrial General Limited (I-GL) along the Bushkill Creek Corridor.
- The zoning districts covering the CBD are conventional "Euclidean" (single-use) districts that do not provide sufficient flexibility to accommodate the mix of uses characteristic

of healthy and economically diverse downtowns. For example, the Business Regional Trade (B-RT) district does not permit residential uses other than mid-rise, high-rise, and mixed residential/business buildings, thus making the inventory of historic single-family dwellings covered by the zoning ordinance nonconforming uses. Further, the Business General Office (B-GO) district does not permit any single-family uses (other than mixed residential/business by special exception) while the Industrial General Limited (I-GL) district is an obsolete zoning district applied to the Bushkill Creek Corridor. The city has secured funding to revise its Planning and Zoning Code, which is a critical step in ensuring sufficient flexibility in zoning and codes as specific elements of the Economic Development Plan are implemented.

- Based on a preliminary building inventory prepared by the City of Easton Department of Planning & Development in association with Lafayette College, downtown Easton contains approximately 982,500 square feet of commercial building stock in roughly 85 properties. It should be noted, however, that complete information on gross building area as well as sales or leasing data is not available for numerous properties in the inventory. This suggests the need for development of an accurate database (linked to the City's GIS database) that provides a detailed, thorough inventory of properties in the CBD. This inventory would be used both as a marketing tool oriented towards prospective investors or users and as a way to understand market trends in specific uses such as retail and office over time.
- The majority of buildings in the CBD are in good to excellent condition. Vacant interiors – specifically vacant storefronts – tend to have the strongest negative effect on the downtown area. While many buildings could use fresh paint and new windows, very few could be considered dilapidated or beyond repair. Most of the architecturally outstanding structures appear to be well cared for. However, many commercial properties in the CBD have building footprints that are insufficient in size for today's retailers, suggesting that flexibility in combining storefronts may be required as a means of attracting new retailers to the downtown.
- A number of buildings – primarily on the 400 and 500 blocks of Northampton Street – have been restored but stand vacant awaiting tenants. In addition, several buildings around Centre Square and in the 200 block of Northampton Street have recently been converted to apartments with ground floor restaurants. The northeast quadrant of the CBD and the adjacent portions of North Third and Northampton Streets have a strong urban fabric with a diverse mix of commercial uses and outstanding 19<sup>th</sup> century architecture. In the southern portion of the CBD, particularly along Larry Holmes Drive, suburban-style buildings from the Urban Renewal era of the 1960s and 1970s contribute little to the historic urban form of Easton.
- Most buildings in the Bushkill Creek corridor are undistinguished warehouses or similar industrial/commercial with associated parking lots. Lafayette College's new Williams Visual Arts Center demonstrates that there is potential for adaptive reuse of these buildings. The Simon Silk Mill complex contains some outstanding examples of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century industrial buildings that are candidates for renovation.

- Of the estimated 982,500 sq. ft. of commercial building space identified in the preliminary inventory, about 619,000 (63%) are classified as "for lease," "for sale," or "for sale or lease," based on visual surveys conducted by Lafayette College as part of creation of the inventory database. This space is distributed as follows:
  - Roughly 160,000 square feet are vacant and "available for lease" according to the data.
  - Another 26,000 square feet are available "for sale or lease."
  - About 265,700 square feet in various buildings are identified as available "for sale" according to the data.
  - The remaining space (approximately 167,000 square feet) was not categorized.

If the inventory is accurate, it reflects a portrait of a business district in significant transition, with apparent occupied space totaling approximately 363,500 square feet. Based on visual surveys, the majority of the vacant space is located on the upper floors of buildings. A more precise survey of the CBD's building stock will allow for thorough analysis to understand trends and nuances related to leasing activity/absorption, building sales, property conditions, and the like.

- Based on review of the preliminary inventory and windshield observations, it would appear that available space is focused in the following locations:
  - *Northampton Street:* Northampton Street is one of the geographic focal areas of the plan. Based on partial data only (i.e., information was available on only nine of 23 properties in the city's database), the street contains 121,000 sq. ft. of commercial space, of which 59,900 sq. ft. (49.5%) are available for sale or lease. Reported rental rates in buildings available for lease range from \$7 to \$16 per sq. ft. Appropriately, the GEDP's Main Street program will focus its retail revitalization efforts on this corridor.
  - *Centre Square:* Of approximately eight properties surveyed on the square – the symbolic heart of downtown Easton – about 25,000 sq. ft. are available for lease (likely including both street- and upper-level space). Lease rates are reportedly in the range of \$13 to \$15 per sq. ft.
  - *South 3<sup>rd</sup> and South 4<sup>th</sup> Streets:* The inventory provided partial data for five properties along this primary entryway to the CBD (paired access to Route 22), identifying 22,500 sq. ft. of property available for lease or sale out of an inventory of 130,000 sq. ft. Two of the CBD's largest buildings – and iconic structures in their own right – are the Alpha Building (60,000 sq. ft.) and The Plaza on Centre Square (48,000 sq. ft.), located on Centre Square at South 3<sup>rd</sup> Street. Reported commercial rents fall at the upper-end of the range noted above (\$13 to \$15 per sq. ft.).
- The building inventory provides only limited information on vacant space in the other two geographic focus areas: the Bushkill Creek corridor and the waterfront (Larry Holmes Drive).

- Because Easton is a developed city, future development opportunities are associated with previously developed properties that are vacant or utilized for low-level uses such as surface parking and storage. As shown on the Susceptibility to Change Map (Map 5), significant concentrations of these properties are located along the waterfronts of the Lehigh River, Delaware River, and Bushkill Creek. Other vacant or underutilized properties are scattered throughout the CBD, representing site-specific infill opportunities. As shown on Map 5, a number of such projects are planned or underway and will generate momentum for additional reinvestment in the CBD.
- Easton's stunning geographic setting ensures that visitors from every direction are greeted with a dramatic entry to the city. From a distance, church steeples and Victorian townhomes project the image of a historic and dignified city. Crossing the Lehigh and Delaware Rivers provides scenic vistas while the approach on US 22 along Bushkill Creek is a unique experience. The Northampton Street Bridge is a national engineering landmark and provides a classic vista of Centre Square's victory column.
- Despite the city's outstanding natural setting, the gateways and corridors leading into the CBD are in need of improvement. The S. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street gateway across the Lehigh River is framed by automobile-oriented uses and a hotel of marginal quality. The US 22 gateway on N. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street is characterized by industrial uses, a confining highway embankment, and an uninviting overpass. Entering the city from the west on Northampton Street, the visitor encounters check cashing operations and the parking lot of the Central Fire Station.
- With its victory column, Centre Square serves as a unifying visual element for both the Third Street and Northampton Street corridors. The square itself, however, is an island separated from the surrounding urban fabric by an expansive traffic circle and parking at the corners.
- Larry Holmes Drive follows the Lehigh and Delaware Rivers and serves primarily as a high-speed bypass for Route 611. This road is fronted by many surface parking lots and divides the city from its waterfront.

## 2.2 Demographic Profile and Market Conditions

The objectives of the Economic Development Plan include the following:

- Provide GEDP and the City with a realistic assessment of market conditions;
- Assist the City in understanding the market dynamics associated with revitalization initiatives; and
- Assess overall development potentials as a basis for identifying specific strategies to implement the plan.

These objectives are intended to inform public policies and the critical decisions that city leaders must make as they continue to focus on downtown revitalization and implement strategies to strengthen the economy of the city as a whole. To meet these objectives, the consultant team examined demographic and economic trends and characteristics for various jurisdictions, including the city in its entirety, the two other largest municipalities in the

Lehigh Valley (Allentown and Bethlehem), and Lehigh and Northampton Counties. Growth trends and forecasts were reviewed for specific factors such as population, households, age composition, employment, household incomes, retail sales, and other appropriate economic indices.

This analysis focused on those variables that “drive” demand for various uses such as new housing, supporting services such as retail, and employment sectors such as office. It was used to inform subsequent testing of specific uses to guide the implementation strategies included in the Economic Development Plan. The following text synthesizes key findings based on research from public and private data sources.

Relevant data are detailed in Tables 1 through 21 and accompanying graphics at the end of the chapter.

### **Population and Households**

- Easton’s population has exhibited a gradual decline since 1960 as a result of outward population growth and suburbanization of Northampton County. In fact, the City’s population decreased from 31,900 in 1960 to approximately 26,200 in 2003 – a decline of 18% and a loss of 5,800 residents. (By comparison, Bethlehem lost only 2,800 residents – a 4% decline – and Allentown lost 2,400 residents – or 2% – during this period). The 2000 Census reported 1,000 vacant housing units in the City, more than 10% of the City’s housing stock.
- Current (2005) population estimates prepared by ESRI Business Information Solutions (a demographic forecasting service) suggest that the City’s population has increased since the 2003 state count to almost 27,300 residents in 10,000 households, a gain of 1,000 over the past two years. (As detailed below in Table 15, however, a review of historic building permit activity does not support a population increase of this magnitude).
- Like many municipalities across the United States, it is likely that any recent increases in population in Easton can be attributed to diversifying racial and ethnic composition, particularly an increase in the number of Hispanic/Latino residents. These immigrant groups may or may not be counted depending on immigration status (see Table 8).
- Over the next five years, ESRI forecasts that the City’s population will increase by more than 1,450 residents in 675 households to 28,700 (a growth rate of 5%). The state projections for 2010 suggest a far smaller increase to 26,300 (a growth rate of only 0.3%). A critical means of ensuring that downtown revitalization in Easton is successful is to increase the number of downtown housing units, whether in new construction or rehabilitation/conversion of existing structures. Of course, new housing may also occur on vacant/undeveloped sites. According to the Planning Department, in 2002 Easton contained approximately 70 acres of vacant land that may or may not be developable due to environmental factors.
- During the stakeholder interviews, it was noted that Northampton County appears to be benefiting from outward population growth/movement from the New York City metropolitan area, in part as a result of lower-priced housing. This anecdotal evidence

was confirmed by U.S. Census estimates released in March 2006 that Northampton County has grown by more than 20,000 residents (7.5%) since 2000. Presuming this trend continues over the next five years, it could be expected to benefit Easton and the demand for new housing in the downtown area.

- In 2005, the City's median household income was \$39,990. Easton households are slightly wealthier than their Allentown counterparts (\$38,300), but less affluent than households in Bethlehem (\$43,400). The City's most affluent neighborhoods include those on College Hill near Lafayette College. Over the next five years, household incomes in Easton are forecast to increase by almost 20% to \$47,700, suggesting real income growth above the current rate of inflation. This is a key determinant in the locational decisions of retailers.

### **Consumer Spending**

- As illustrated in Table 14, Easton and Allentown households exhibit similar expenditure patterns but both jurisdictions lag behind their Bethlehem, Northampton County, and Lehigh County counterparts. For example, Easton households spend \$12,422 per year on groceries, eating out, clothing, furniture, entertainment, personal care products, and computers. By comparison, Bethlehem households spend \$13,700 and households in Northampton County spend \$16,500 per year on retail goods.
- Based on the consumer spending data Easton's "buying power" totals approximately \$125 million per year for the City's approximately 10,000 households. Of course, these expenditures can be spent anywhere. The challenge is to identify appropriate implementation strategies that reinforce the capture of these expenditures among existing (and new) downtown retailers.
- As a means of putting these expenditure levels into perspective, \$125 million in annual retail spending supports approximately 500,000 sq. ft. of retail space, which is slightly more than the size of Palmer Park Mall in Northampton County (this presumes annual sales performance of \$250 per sq. ft., which is considered a threshold sales level for investment-grade tenants and properties).
- Over the next five years, increases in both the number of households and household incomes in Easton could be expected to generate an additional \$34 million in new buying power. It is estimated that this added buying power could support up to 135,000 square feet of retail space, irrespective of location.

### **Residential Development Activity**

- As illustrated in Table 15, the City issued an average of 17 building permits per year for new residential dwelling units between 2000 and 2004, accounting for only 1% of all new residential development in Northampton County. (For the 10-year period between 1993 and 2002, the City issued an average of 24 permits per year for new housing starts.) Notably, according to HUD, not a single permit for new residential development was issued in Easton in 2004. While the limited availability of land has some effect, it is likely that the City's weakened economy and fiscal conditions play an equally significant role in limiting the amount of new housing.

By comparison, revitalization efforts in Bethlehem have sparked momentum in the residential sector, with almost 800 new dwelling units permitted between 2000 and 2004 (155 permits per year). Greater population growth as a result of ongoing suburbanization in Northampton County has led to significantly greater development activity, with more than 1,700 permits issued on an annual basis in the County since 2000.

- According to property tax information supplied by the City, the study area for the Economic Development Plan contains about 530 housing units on approximately 20.8 acres of land, an average density of about 25 units per acre. This is considered a fairly dense development pattern for a city the size of Easton.
- The property tax information also indicates that residential uses in the study area have a current assessed value of more than \$10.5 million, equating to a per-unit assessed value of only \$19,956. This limited valuation reflects the number of multi-family units in the downtown area and also suggests that Easton's municipal valuation is not at 100% of fair market value.
- An accurate and detailed inventory of available properties, whether vacant or undeveloped sites for new infill construction and/or existing buildings that might be appropriate for rehabilitation, is critical. As noted in the Action Plan (Chapter 4.0), the use of financial incentives for specific projects, particularly those involving undercapitalized developers or property owners, will help to "jumpstart" near-term development opportunities. The objective should be to create a "critical mass" of revitalization projects beyond the incremental activity represented by current projects such as the Eastonian condominiums.

### **Employment Trends and Forecasts**

A critical barometer in evaluating demand for various types of real estate is employment growth. The following text and Tables 16 and 17 at the end of the chapter highlight relevant employment trends and forecasts for Northampton County as provided by various sources, including the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Department of Labor, the U.S. Census, and Woods & Poole, Inc., a demographic forecasting service.

- Northampton County gained 11,500 new jobs between 1995 and 2005 while Lehigh County – the region's dominant economic engine – added more than 32,000 new jobs. Not surprisingly, Northampton lost 6,400 Manufacturing jobs (consistent with national trends), but gained 4,400 jobs in Wholesale/Retail Trade. Gains were even greater in the Services sector (7,400 jobs), reflecting the growth of professional and business services, education, and medical jobs.
- Based on employment forecasts prepared by Woods & Poole, Inc., a demographic forecasting service based in Washington, D.C., Northampton County is expected to add about 12,500 new jobs in various sectors over the next 10 years. The largest gains are forecast in Services, Government, and Retail Trade.

One of the critical challenges that the City of Easton faces with respect to economic development is the attraction of high-quality, well-paying jobs. Significant job creation

among such sectors as Retail Trade and Services – characteristic of Northampton County’s changing job market between 1990 and 2005 – do not typically translate into high-paying jobs. Thus the GEDP, City (and other municipal officials from throughout the Lehigh Valley), and appropriate private-sector business groups such as the Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation need to continue economic development efforts that focus on attracting high-quality jobs to the region and to support public policies that reinforce the respective roles of Easton (and Allentown and Bethlehem) as the region’s employment and economic centers.

### **Tourism and Visitation**

Promoting Easton as a visitor destination is an established strategy for the revitalization of the CBD, as reflected in initiatives such as the Delaware and Lehigh Canal State and National Heritage Corridor and the Crayola Factory at Two Rivers Landing. This strategy seeks to capitalize on Easton’s location, historic and natural assets, and easy access to the northwestern New Jersey, New York City, and Philadelphia markets.

Easton benefits from key attractions that draw visitors to the downtown area, including three facilities that are especially important to the economic vitality of the CBD:

- *State Theatre Center for the Arts:* Built in 1910 to replace the 1873-era Northampton National Bank, this vaudeville theatre was expanded in 1925; its interior design includes elaborate frescoes and gilding. Between 1930 and 1960, the theatre evolved as a movie palace and, in later years, hosted rock concerts during the 1970s. By 1981, the facility was threatened with demolition. A non-profit organization was established to oversee a renovation, which commenced in 1986 with \$1.2 million in funds raised by the organization. The fundraising campaign raised another \$2.5 million in 1990 to undertake a comprehensive artistic renovation. Today, the theatre has more than 100 shows per year and sells 120,000 tickets annually, an increase over the 100,000 tickets sold in 1999-2000. Plans are underway to undertake additional improvements to the theatre’s public and support spaces.
- *The Crayola Factory:* Opened in 1996, this 20,000 sq. ft. facility is located at Two Rivers Landing on Centre Square in downtown Easton. The museum reports annual visitation on the order of 330,000 to 351,000 over the past six years. Attendance peaks during July and August at 62,000 to 70,000 per month, drops off substantially during the fall to 13,000 to 19,000 per month, and ramps up in the spring due to school groups, ranging from 22,000 to 34,000 per month between March and May.
- *National Canal Museum and Heritage Area:* This museum showcases the industrial, transportation, and cultural history of the Lehigh Canal and Delaware River areas of Pennsylvania. The facility, which contains a 10,000-volume library and a 50-seat auditorium, provides lectures, tours, films and educational programs. It also oversees the hiking trails alongside the canal, and offers boat rentals and canal boat rides. It shares space with The Crayola Factory at Two Rivers Landing. Estimated annual attendance is reported at 325,000, although there is reason to believe that the actual figure is lower.

Smaller attractions include:

- *Northampton County Historical & Genealogical Society*: The society is a tax-exempt institution overseeing several facilities, including the Illick Research Library, Nicholas Children's Museum, Kressler Memorial Gardens, and the County Museum. There is a 5,000-volume library. Attendance is estimated at 3,000 visitors per year. The former Sigal's department store on Northampton Street is currently being renovated to house the Historical and Genealogical Museum and Northampton County archival collection.
- *Lafayette College Art Gallery/Williams Center for the Arts*: Located on the campus of Lafayette College, this small, 1,000 sq. ft. gallery hosts a variety of art exhibits, including 19th and 20th Century American and British portrait and historical paintings, Abraham Lincoln and Marquis de Lafayette memorabilia, and 20th Century contemporary prints. Attendance is reported at 8,600 per year.

### **Commercial Development Activity**

Available information on Easton's commercial (office and retail) inventory is limited to the city's property tax database. As a rule, smaller communities like Easton do not track commercial market activity such as leasing/absorption, rental rates, and available inventory.

Notably, the available information does not contain data on the indices critical to understanding the overall health of the market, including leasing activity/absorption, vacant space, average rents, tenant characteristics, operating expenses, etc. Therefore, the consultant team used a number of other sources to assemble property data, including interviews with individual property owners and developers, the Lehigh Valley EDC, Lehigh County Board of Realtors, ESRI Business Information Systems, and the U.S. Bureau of the Census. Key findings are summarized below.

- In 2005, businesses in the City of Easton generated roughly \$1.1 billion in annual sales volume across a range of categories, including wholesale and retail trade, manufacturing, construction, professional and business services, finance and insurance, lodging, arts and entertainment, transportation, education, utilities and others. These businesses employ approximately 8,250 persons. Wholesale and retail trade comprises the lion's share of this economic activity – \$539 million in annual sales volume (48%).
- The ESRI data was segmented to better understand economic activity in downtown Easton, defined as the CBD from Bushkill Creek to the Lehigh River, and from the Delaware River to 7<sup>th</sup> Street. In 2005, businesses in the CBD generated roughly \$484.3 million in annual sales volume and employed almost 4,700 workers. Public administration (government) accounts for the largest share of employment (1,500 jobs), with Wholesale/Retail Trade, Information, and Health Care/Social Services comprising the second and third largest activity generators, respectively.
- According to the property tax database, the study area includes approximately 1.5 million sq. ft. of land (34.5 acres) devoted to commercial retail, service, or professional uses, located on 17 commercial streets and around Centre Square.

Another 4.1 acres support cultural and entertainment uses, such as the State Theater and Crayola Factory, and 8.65 acres of land are devoted to government, warehousing or vacant/underutilized parcels.

- Because the database provides only partial data on the amount of commercial space in the study area, an accurate analysis cannot be undertaken at the present time. For example, there is no precise way to gauge actual productivity of retailers in downtown Easton (sales per sq. ft.) as a means of understanding which retail/merchandise categories are healthy by benchmarking them against industry standards.
- Based on limited information on rents provided by stakeholders and the property tax database (generally ranging from \$7 to \$16 per sq. ft.), annual sales performance (using industry standard ratios of approximately 10% of rent-to-sales) would be approximately \$70 to \$160 per sq. ft. This would suggest that many of the downtown's retailers are marginal and undercapitalized, as investment-grade retail typically performs in the range of \$250 and higher on a per square foot basis in today's retail economy.
- Sales performance and degree of capitalization are two measures considered critical in identifying future opportunities for retail development. More detailed testing will be required as specific revitalization initiatives move forward.

## 2.3 Development Opportunities

Near-term development opportunities in the Easton CBD are based on a combination of economic (market) and physical factors. The degree of market demand potentially available for different uses (e.g., new housing) as discussed above is key to identifying these opportunities. Physical factors that influence the ability of market potentials to be realized include the amount of vacant or underutilized land available, buildings that may lend themselves to reuse or as redevelopment sites, and amenities such as the CBD's natural waterfront setting and historic building fabric. In addition, publicly provided amenities such as parking, streetscapes, or gateway improvements can be used to leverage investment by the private sector.

### Market Opportunities

A market analysis has been conducted to identify market opportunities. This analysis provides the foundation for the economic development plan by identifying the range of uses that are considered to be supportable in the local market. In addition, the market analysis is used to:

- Identify economic indicators, such as employment growth, that affect demand for real estate;
- Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of Easton: what do developers and "outside eyes" (investors, tenants) look for? ;
- Test market potentials and indicate strategies to implement the plan; and
- Inform public policies and decisions critical to revitalization, including incentives.

There are two fundamental ways of testing the potential for real estate development. The first is the market analysis, which identifies appropriate indices or "drivers" designed to measure and create fundamental sources of demand for housing, workplace uses such as office space, community and supporting uses such as retail centers, and the like. In other words, it identifies how much market is available to support such uses.

As GEDP and its partners move toward implementation of the action plan outlined in Chapter 4.0, the second way of testing the potential success of real estate – financial analysis – will be critical. Beyond the preliminary financial analysis of a potential catalytic project provided as a separate part of this study, additional studies will be required to measure the feasibility (in the eyes of a developer or investor) and to identify the capacity of a specific use or project to support various costs such as land acquisition. Moreover, the studies identify how much a developer might be willing to contribute to funding certain public objectives identified in the plan (e.g., constructing public realm elements such as civic spaces, utilities, other infrastructure improvements, etc.) Such feasibility studies are intended to demonstrate to the private sector that specific uses and/or sites such as redevelopment of certain buildings or parcels in downtown Easton are attractive investment targets/locations.

Importantly, if the financial analysis reveals that certain uses are not feasible, it will help inform decisions that GEDP, the City of Easton, and its partners must make on the use of incentives that may be necessary to mitigate the risks associated with those uses. This information will also help the city and its partners make public investments to leverage the desired types of private development identified in the plan, particularly in locations that may be considered less marketable today.

#### **Market Opportunity: New Housing**

A critical mass of housing is key to the ongoing revitalization of downtown Easton. Housing strengthens downtown Easton as a destination, enhances adjacent neighborhoods, fosters demand for other uses such as convenience/service retail, and reinforces the CBD as a viable business address with a proximate labor supply and consumers with disposable incomes. New, market-rate housing must successfully compete in the marketplace to attract both owner and renter households to downtown. At a minimum, any new housing will require high-quality unit amenities and finishes as a means of capturing a greater share of this market segment. As called for in the Action Plan (Chapter 4.0), quality-of-life issues – including crime/security, cleanliness, panhandling and homelessness – must be addressed to improve the overall marketability of the CBD. Moreover, expanding the number of jobs in downtown Easton (the third target market, Easton as a regional employment center) will contribute to the overall demand for new housing.

As previously noted, anecdotal evidence and recent U.S. Census estimates suggest that Northampton County is benefiting from outward population growth/movement from the New York City metropolitan area, in part as a result of lower-priced housing. In fact, according to IRS data, between 1999 and 2004 more than 31,000 persons migrated to Northampton County. Lehigh County residents comprised fully one-third of this total, followed by five counties in northern New Jersey (18%), such as Warren, Hunterdon, and Middlesex. Presuming this trend continues over the next five years, it could be expected to

benefit Easton and the downtown housing market. Housing price points lower than other locations in Northampton County to enhance marketability of the CBD are a key to this strategy.

Forecasts prepared by ESRI Business Information Solutions project that the City of Easton as a whole would gain about 650 new residents in the 45-59 year old cohort during the 2005-2010 period. This may bode well for the downtown housing market given that these residents are typically in their peak earning years and entering the "empty nester" stage of their lives. The success of the Eastonian condominiums will be indicative of the potential for additional downtown housing.

Presuming that the quality-of-life issues are successfully addressed, and that specific strategies are in place to identify candidate buildings, provide an appropriate package of financial and/or regulatory incentives (particularly for undercapitalized developers or property owners), and attract the interest of prospective developers and residents through a coherent marketing strategy, the market analysis suggests that 175 to 250 units (about 50 units per year on average) appear to be supportable over a five-year period in a combination of new construction and historic rehabilitation projects. Market potentials are likely to include a combination of rental/for-sale product oriented to young professionals and for-sale units for empty nesters.

#### **Market Opportunity: Enhanced Visitation**

Easton is blessed with an array of visitor and cultural attractions that serve as anchors for the downtown. As discussed, major facilities include the Two Rivers Landing complex, which is home to the Crayola Factory and the National Canal Museum, and the State Theatre Center for the Arts, a magnificent historic structure that anchors the Northampton Street corridor outside of Centre Square. Smaller venues include Lafayette College's Williams Center for the Arts, the Northampton County Historical and Genealogical Society library, and others. In addition, Easton is located at the center of the Delaware and Lehigh Canal National Heritage Corridor, established in 1988 to preserve and interpret the rich history of the six-county region.

A small city such as Easton is quite fortunate to generate such significant visitor traffic – on the order of 400,000 or more persons per year – to its CBD. The challenge, however, and a key recommendation of the action plan, is to initiate a multi-pronged strategy that 1) addresses the quality-of-life issues identified elsewhere in this plan and 2) crafts a clear and cohesive marketing package to "sell" the city's existing visitor and cultural attractions in the performing arts. The consultant team does not believe that Easton needs any additional visitor attractions; rather, it should market what it has more effectively. As the quality-of-life issues are resolved, visitors (such as patrons to the State Theatre and Crayola Factory) will feel more comfortable spending time in the downtown. Extending the visitor's length of stay will enhance market demand for supporting services such as restaurants and better-quality retail and, over the longer term, promote some additional overnight visitation that benefits the city's lodging facilities.

### **Market Opportunity: Regional Employment Center**

As previously noted, Northampton County is expected to add about 12,500 new jobs in various sectors over the next 10 years. The largest gains are forecast in Services, Government, and Retail Trade.

The office demand analysis conducted for this plan suggests two potential scenarios. In the first, known as a Fair Share Scenario, downtown Easton maintains its current share of county employment (approximately 4%). This scenario suggests that about 500 new jobs will be created in the downtown over the next five years, which could be expected to translate into demand for approximately 75,000 to 100,000 sq. ft. of commercial office space.

In an alternative scenario, known as the Induced Demand Scenario, momentum generated by ongoing and continued successful revitalization initiatives in the CBD will increase the downtown's share of regional employment. Based on national experience in small city revitalization, this scenario suggests that CBD's fair share will grow, perhaps substantially. A reasonable expectation would be 750 to 1,000 new jobs, which translates into demand for approximately 150,000 to 200,000 sq. ft. of commercial office space in the form of new construction and/or renovations of existing buildings. Absent significant intervention (such as a new government agency locating in the CBD), however, it is unlikely that the induced market potentials could be achieved in the short-term in Easton.

### **Market Opportunity: Supporting Retail and Restaurants**

New housing, enhanced visitation (more visitors and longer stays), and increased employment will generate support for additional retail and restaurant activity in the CBD. Concurrent strategies that address quality-of-life issues as well as the provision of specific financial and regulatory incentives should enhance the CBD's marketability and overall drawing power for additional retail development over time as well.

As previously noted, it is estimated that increases in households and household incomes in Easton could be expected to generate an additional \$34 million in new buying power over the next five year, supporting up to 135,000 square feet of retail space. A successful marketing and tenant recruitment strategy for downtown restaurants should seek to capture a minimum of 20% of this new retail spending. This could be expected to result in an additional \$6.5 to \$7.0 million in new spending downtown, translating into roughly 25,000 to 30,000 sq. ft. of new space. (In addition, successful implementation of the economic development initiatives outlined in this plan could also be expected to result in improved sales among existing retailers).

## **Physical Opportunities (Map 11)**

### **Private Development Opportunities**

The urban form of Easton's CBD shapes the opportunities that exist for private sector development to meet demand for the different uses identified by the market analysis. Much of the CBD is located within the Downtown Historic District, which limits exterior alterations to buildings but provides an attractive context for development that occurs as infill or adaptive reuse. Recent or pending development projects can generate momentum for additional investment. Because Easton is a fully developed city, the most likely candidates for development are previously developed properties that are vacant or utilized for low-level

uses such as surface parking and storage. Referred to as uses most susceptible to change, these properties are identified on Map 11. As described below, the largest concentrations are found along the southern and northern edges of the CBD outside of the Downtown Historic District.

Because the neighborhoods to the north of Northampton Street are densely built, most development in the northern portion of the CBD will take place through the renovation of existing properties. The Eastonian condominium project is the most highly visible current example of adaptive reuse in the downtown, but several other properties along Northampton Street and around Centre Square are also undergoing renovation. Future large-scale residential or mixed-use conversion opportunities exist with properties such as the Hotel Lafayette and the Verizon Building on North Fourth Street. The recent closure of the Rite-Aid on Centre Square provides the opportunity to develop market-rate housing at an outstanding, highly visible location.

There are also a few vacant properties and surface parking lots on the north side of downtown that are available for infill construction. The largest vacant lot north of Northampton Street is the Governor Wolf property on Larry Holmes Drive between Spring Garden and Church Streets. This property is proposed to become an intermodal transportation hub with commercial and residential uses as well.

The urban fabric south of Northampton Street, particularly along the Lehigh River and Larry Holmes Drive, reflects past urban renewal efforts and the decline of manufacturing in Easton. Designated as the Riverside Drive Development District, this area contains many surface parking lots and large, underutilized parcels that could be redeveloped for new uses. The natural setting near the confluence of the two rivers makes this part of the CBD desirable for new residential construction. However, floodplain constraints would make development difficult but not impossible as ground floor commercial uses or concealed parking could be used to elevate residential units above the 100-year flood elevation.

Additional development opportunities exist in the southwest quadrant of the CBD. Surface parking lots provide the opportunity for new construction of residential or office properties. Some existing buildings could also be renovated or demolished to make way for mixed-use residential and retail development (e.g., the Marquis Theater and other single-use commercial properties near Larry Holmes Drive between Third and Fourth Streets). New office space in this area could take advantage of the municipal parking garage between Pine and Ferry Streets.

With the Williams Visual Arts Center, Lafayette College has made significant investment along North Third Street which should catalyze further investment along the northern edge of the CBD. Snyder Street and Bushkill Drive contain many underutilized properties with development potential that can capitalize on their adjacency to Bushkill Creek. Lafayette College is preparing a master plan for property acquisition and redevelopment along the south (Snyder Street) side of the creek. This pattern of underutilized properties extends along Bushkill Creek west to the Simon Silk Mill Property, which is a prime candidate for adaptive reuse. The distance of this property from the CBD, however, limits its potential as a catalyst for downtown investment.

## Public Amenity Opportunities

Amenities that could be developed through public sector action to support private investment include visual improvements to major CBD entrances (gateways) and corridors (streetscapes), as well as parkland, recreational trails, and community gathering spaces. The 1995 *Center City Revitalization and Corridor Linkage Strategy* (LDR, 1995) proposed comprehensive urban design improvements throughout the CBD to promote revitalization. Targeted improvements based upon analysis conducted for this Economic Development Plan are shown on Map 11 and integrated into the action plan presented in Chapter 4.0.

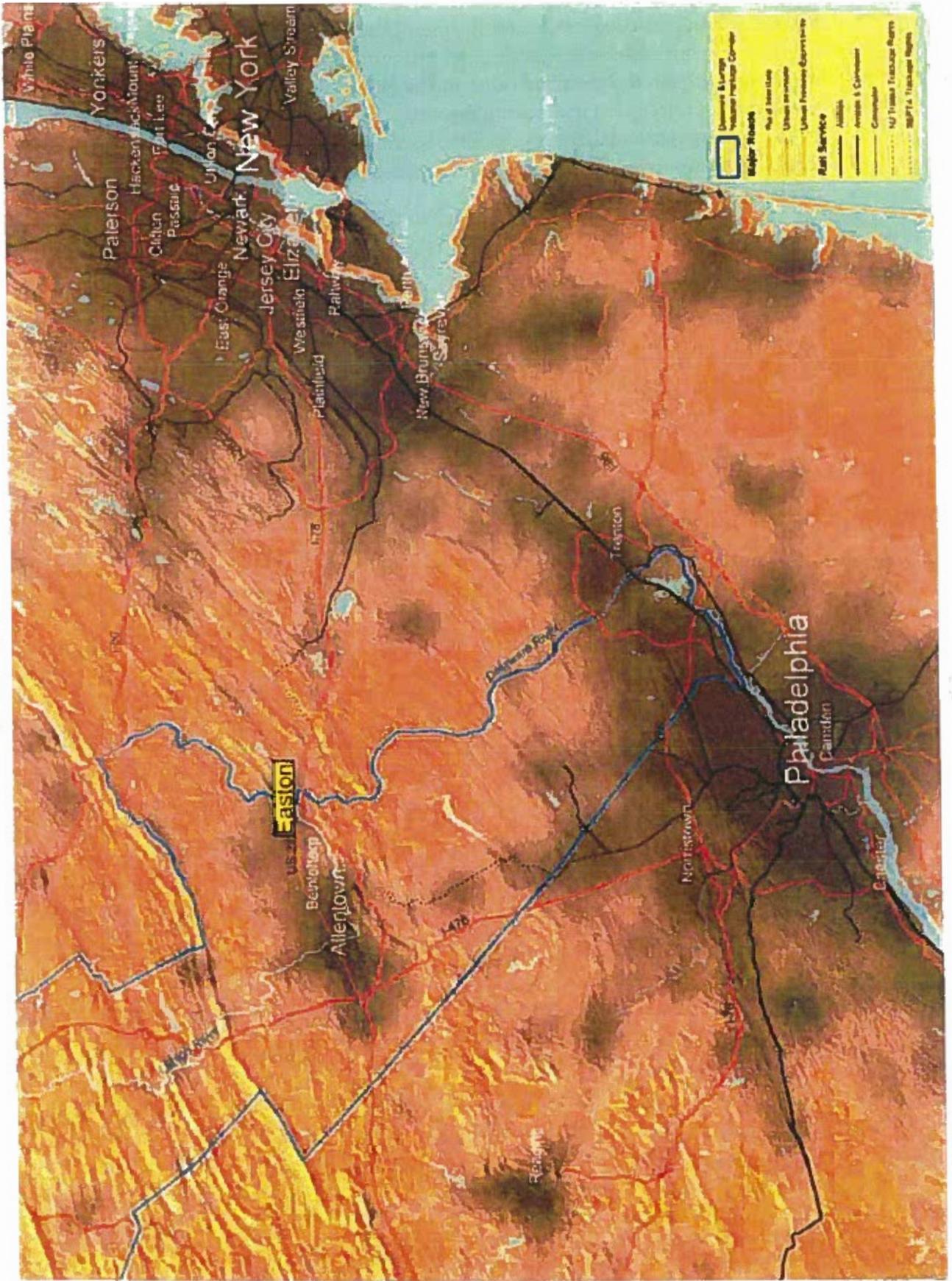
## 2.4 Key Issues

In addition to the physical and socio-economic conditions and trends summarized above, three key issues emerged early and repeatedly during the planning process as being critical to the economic future of the CBD. These issues are:

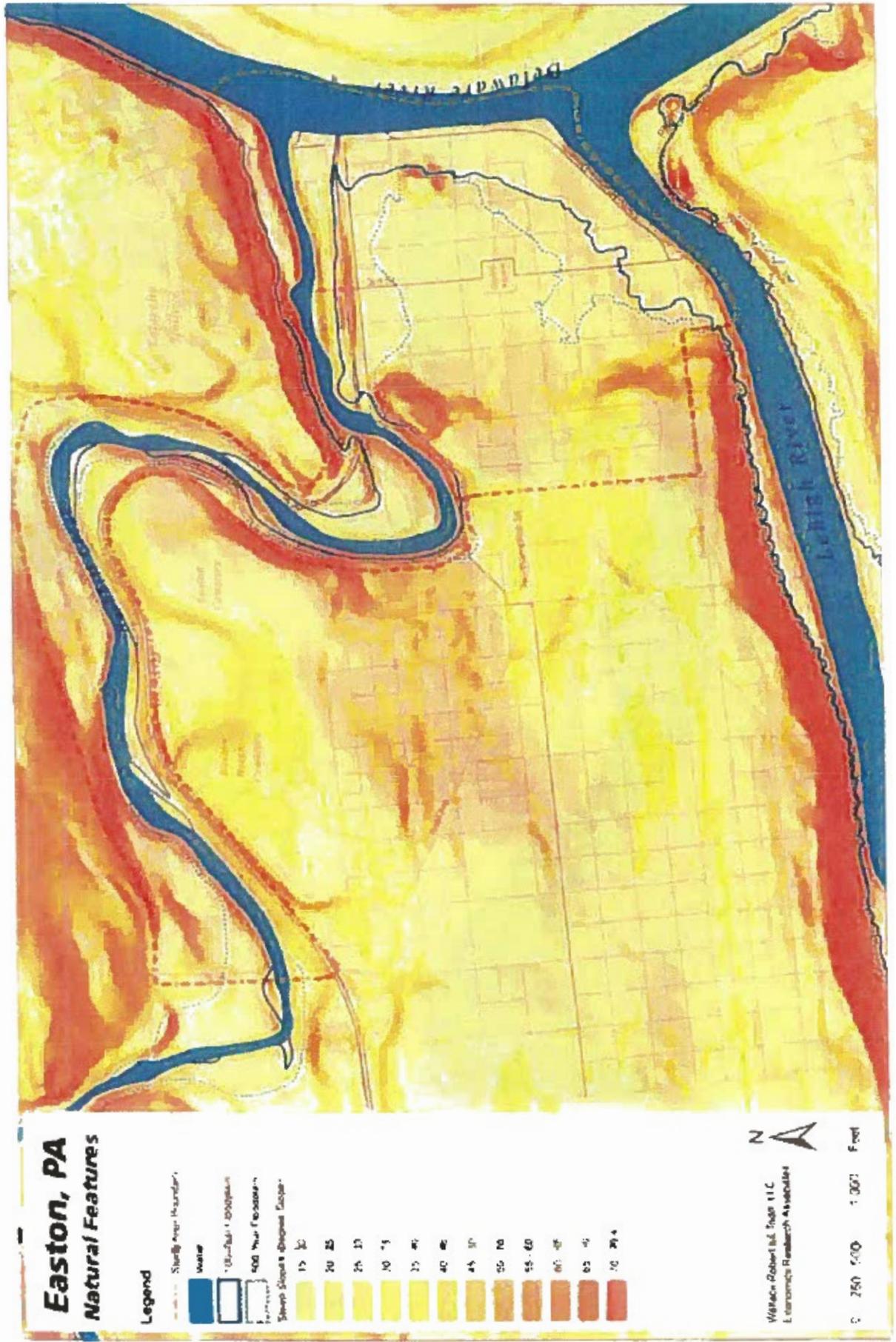
- *Organizational/institutional capacity for implementation:* Easton has made significant progress in building its economic development capabilities during the last year through restructuring of the former Easton Economic Development Corporation into the Greater Easton Development Partnership (GEDP). Moreover, commercial revitalization will be supplemented with the designation of Easton as a "Main Street" community. However, concerns have been raised by stakeholders regarding the availability of local resources (staff and funding) to support these, and other, economic development initiatives. Of particular concern is the financial/fiscal condition of the City of Easton, which obviously will have an important role to play in specific implementation strategies. The capacity issue suggests the need for the implementation program to leverage both public and private partnerships, identify creative sources of funding and incentives (both directly from the City of Easton as well as the various economic development entities in the Lehigh Valley, such as the Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation), and focus on key, early-on actions that can be accomplished and that help to build momentum for subsequent elements of the Economic Development Plan.
- *Quality-of-life factors that affect economic development:* Three related issues – crime, poverty/homelessness, and the perception that the CBD is an unsafe place – are consistently identified by stakeholders as threats or obstacles to the revitalization of downtown Easton. While these issues are beyond the direct purview of the Economic Development Plan and GEDP's mission, they must be engaged as part of a comprehensive community effort if the CBD is to be successfully revitalized. It should be noted that some progress is being made to address these issues through various initiatives, such as the West Ward's Elm Street/Comprehensive Services Program. Significant work remains to be done, however, and will require coordination among various city departments as well as effective leadership from the city administration and other levels of government as appropriate.
- *Marketing/public relations:* This issue largely relates to counteracting the poor image of Easton that has developed over the years and which is reinforced by press coverage that tends to focus on negative events. Improving the overall image of the City of

Easton, and in particular its Central Business District, is key to successful revitalization. Discussions with stakeholders during the planning process have focused on "getting the word out" through the press and other media on positive developments in the city, such as the many projects that are moving towards fruition and the positive trends revealed by the demographic analysis. A proactive, coordinated, and ongoing marketing strategy is needed to improve Easton's image and promote the city to prospective businesses, residents, and visitors.

## 2. Location

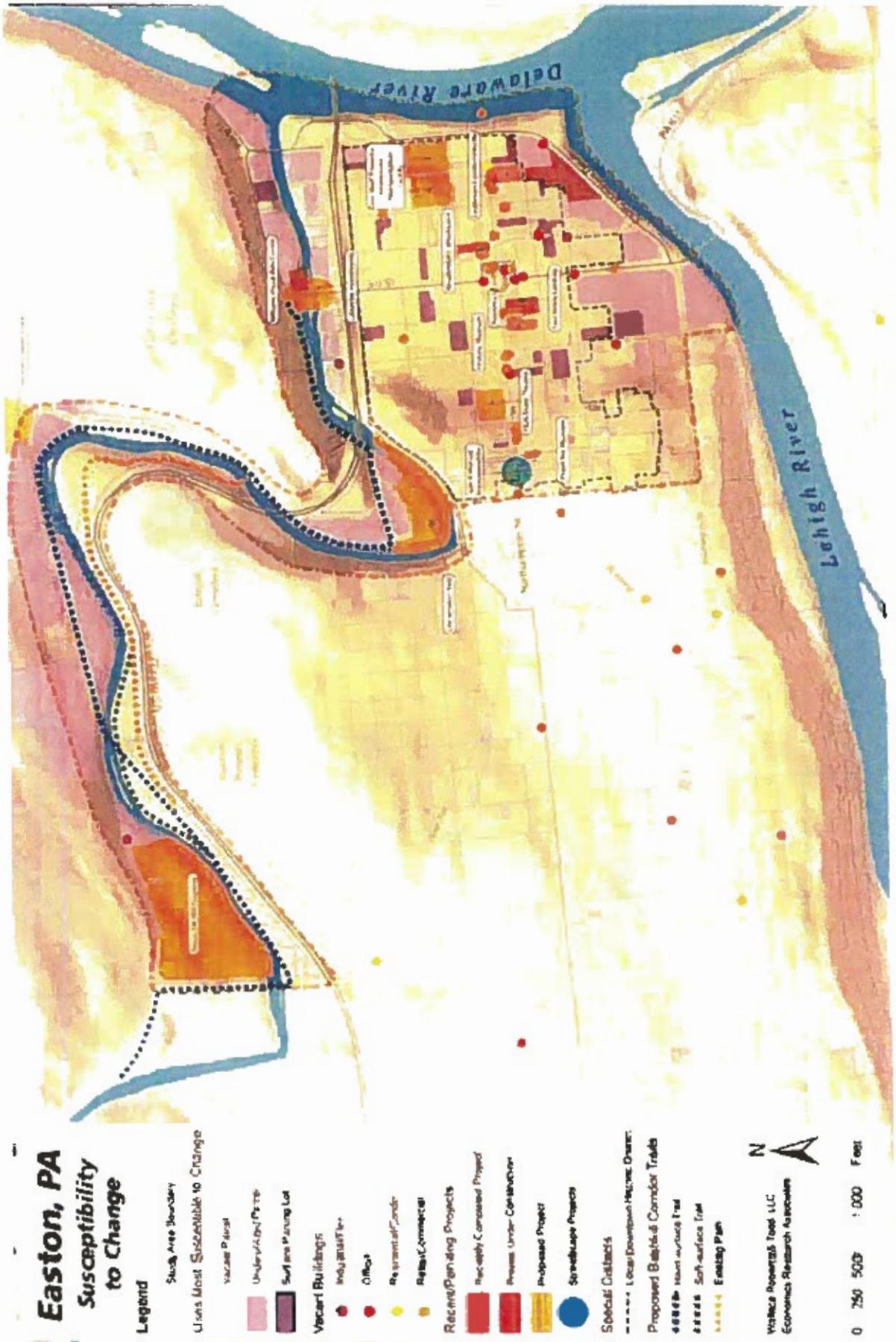


### 3. Natural Resources

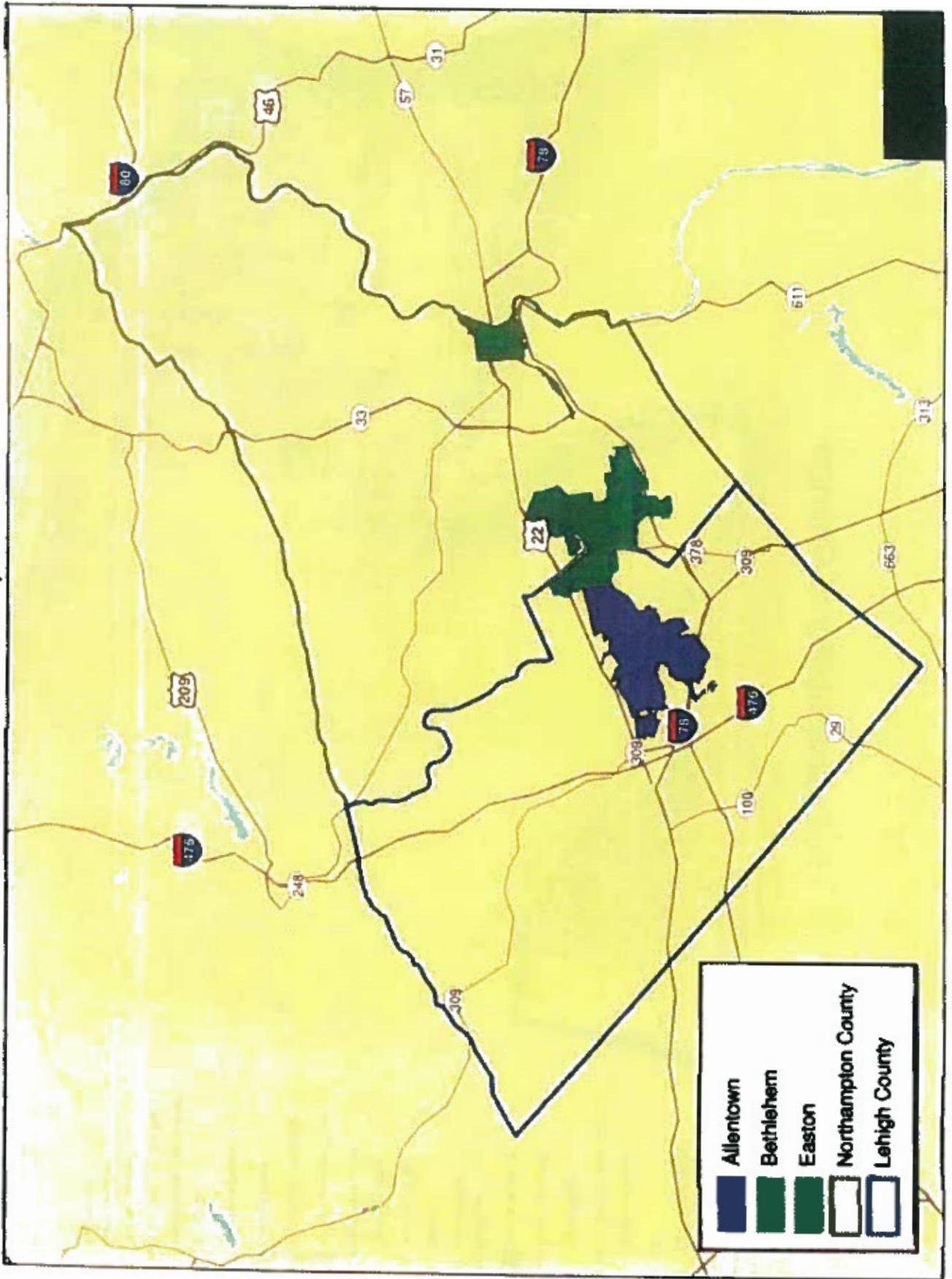




## 5. Susceptibility to Change



# 6. Area Map



**Table 1: Population, 2005-2010**

Year	City of Easton		City of Bethlehem		City of Allentown		Northampton County		Lehigh County	
	2005	2010	2005	2010	2005	2010	2005	2010	2005	2010
Population Projections	27,268	28,725	74,234	78,348	109,688	114,959	283,945	303,429	327,609	345,921
Absolute Change 05-'10	1,457		4,114		5,271		19,484		18,312	
Percent Change 05-'10	5.3%		5.5%		4.8%		6.9%		5.6%	
CAGR 05-'10	1.0%		1.1%		0.9%		1.3%		1.1%	

Source: ESRI Business Information Solutions, Economics Research Associates, 2005.

**Table 2: Households, 2005-2010**

Year	City of Easton		City of Bethlehem		City of Allentown		Northampton County		Lehigh County	
	2005	2010	2005	2010	2005	2010	2005	2010	2005	2010
Household Projections	10,060	10,734	29,697	31,701	43,027	45,157	109,986	118,806	127,877	135,348
Absolute Change 05-'10	674		2,004		2,130		8,820		7,471	
Percent Change 05-'10	6.7%		6.7%		5.0%		8.0%		5.8%	
CAGR 05-'10	1.3%		1.3%		1.0%		1.6%		1.1%	

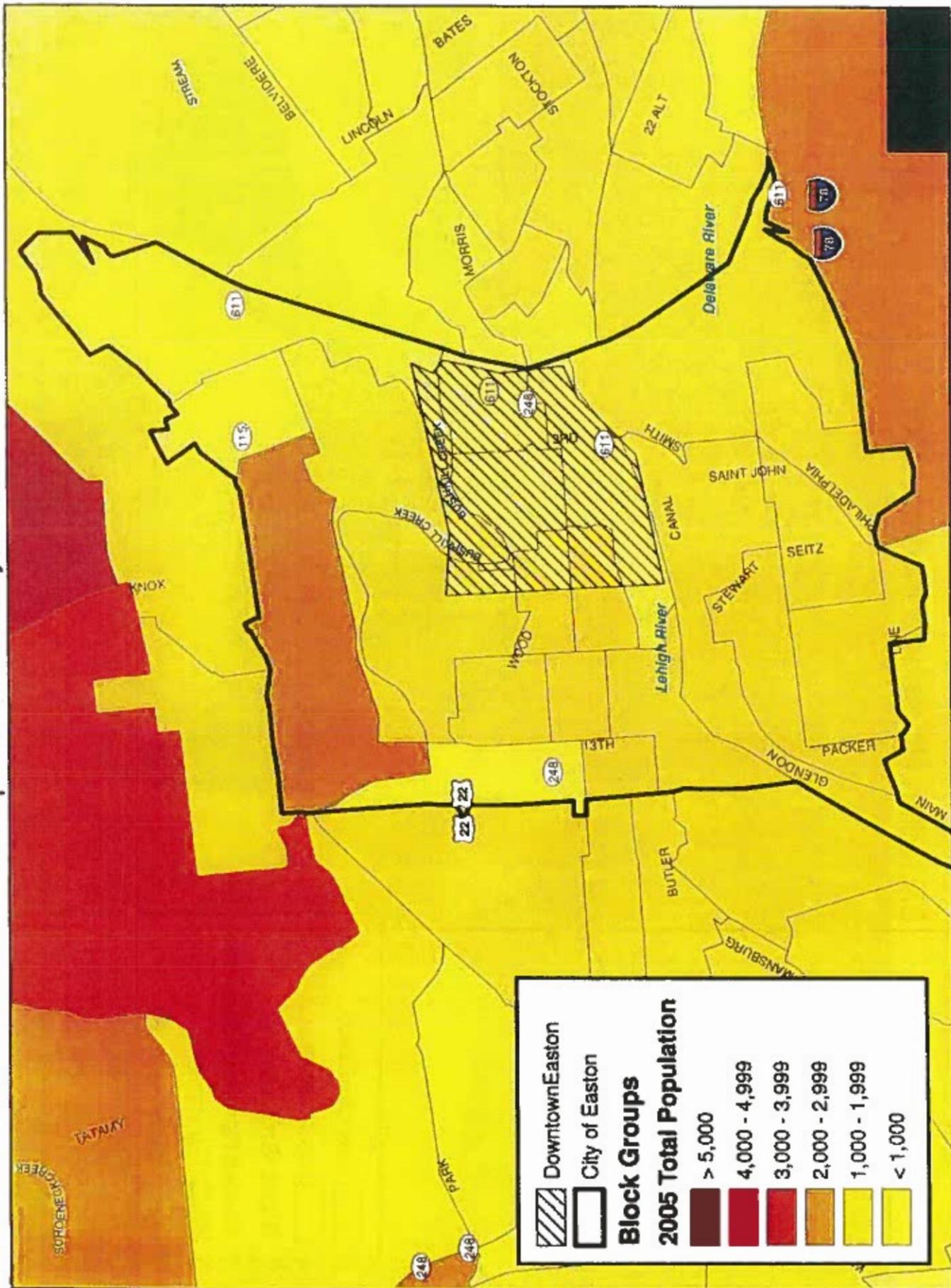
Source: ESRI Business Information Solutions, Economics Research Associates, 2005.

Table 3: Population by Age, City of Easton, 2005-2010

Year	Median Age	< 15	15-29	30-44	45-59	60-74	75+	Total
2005	32.2	4,962	7,837	5,643	4,861	2,316	1,649	27,268
2010	32.4	4,901	8,645	5,246	5,516	2,713	1,704	28,725
<b>Absolute Change</b>								
05-'10	0.1	-61	808	-397	655	397	55	1,457
<b>Percent Change</b>								
05-'10	0.4%	-1.2%	10.3%	-7.0%	13.5%	17.1%	3.3%	5.3%
<b>CAGR</b>								
05-'10	0.1%	-0.2%	2.0%	-1.4%	2.6%	3.2%	0.7%	1.0%

Source: ESRI Business Information Solutions, Economics Research Associates, 2005.

# 7. Population Density, 2005



	Downtown Easton
	City of Easton
<b>Block Groups</b>	
<b>2005 Total Population</b>	
	> 5,000
	4,000 - 4,999
	3,000 - 3,999
	2,000 - 2,999
	1,000 - 1,999
	< 1,000

# 8. Median Household Income, 2005

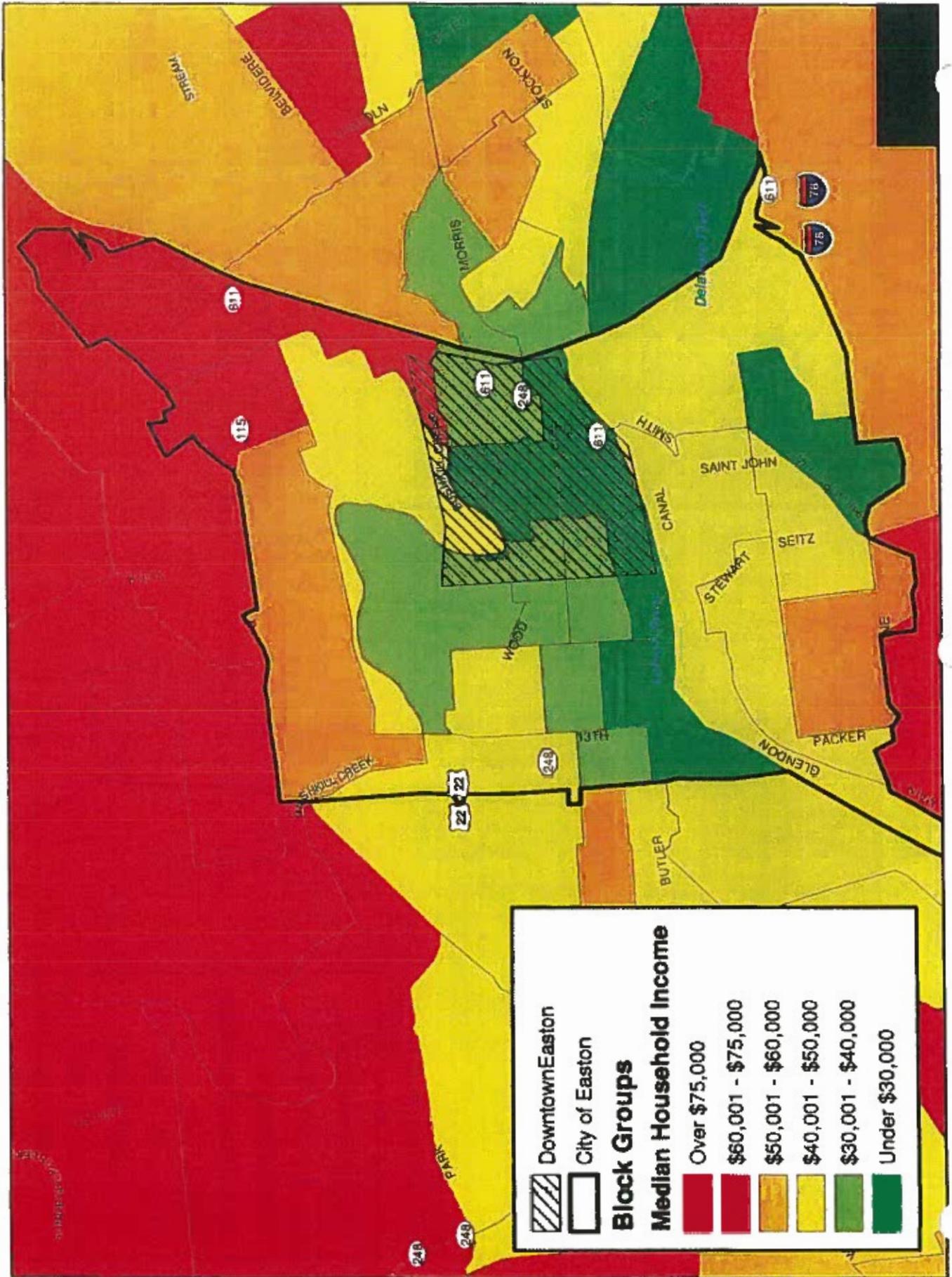


Table 4: Population by Age, City of Bethlehem, 2005-2010

Year	Median Age	< 15	15-29	30-44	45-59	60-74	75+	Total
2005	37.2	12,184	18,262	14,318	13,723	7,960	7,787	74,234
2010	38.7	12,214	19,354	14,022	15,780	9,171	7,807	78,348
<b>Absolute Change</b>								
05-'10	1.4	30	1,092	-296	2,057	1,211	20	4,114
<b>Percent Change</b>								
05-'10	3.9%	0.2%	6.0%	-2.1%	15.0%	15.2%	0.3%	5.5%
<b>CAGR</b>								
05-'10	0.8%	0.0%	1.2%	-0.4%	2.8%	2.9%	0.1%	1.1%

Source: ESRI Business Information Solutions, Economics Research Associates, 2005.

Table 5: Population by Age, City of Allentown, 2005-2010

Year	Median Age	< 15	15-29	30-44	45-59	60-74	75+	Total
2005	35.2	22,782	24,143	23,246	19,524	10,554	9,439	109,688
2010	36.0	22,812	26,236	22,004	22,212	12,042	9,653	114,959
<b>Absolute Change</b>								
05-'10	0.8	30	2,093	-1,242	2,688	1,488	214	5,271
<b>Percent Change</b>								
05-'10	2.3%	0.1%	8.7%	-5.3%	13.8%	14.1%	2.3%	4.8%
<b>CAGR</b>								
05-'10	0.5%	0.0%	1.7%	-1.1%	2.6%	2.7%	0.4%	0.9%

Source: ESRI Business Information Solutions, Economics Research Associates, 2005.

**Table 6: Population by Age, Northampton County, 2005-2010**

Year	Median Age	< 15	15-29	30-44	45-59	60-74	75+	Total
2005	40.3	50,771	54,873	58,106	62,479	33,273	24,443	283,945
2010	41.8	50,931	60,528	54,746	72,221	39,572	25,431	303,429
<b>Absolute Change</b>								
05-'10	1.5	160	5,655	-3,360	9,742	6,299	988	19,484
<b>Percent Change</b>								
05-'10	3.7%	0.3%	10.3%	-5.8%	15.6%	18.9%	4.0%	6.9%
<b>CAGR</b>								
05-'10	0.7%	0.1%	2.0%	-1.2%	2.9%	3.5%	0.8%	1.3%

Source: ESRI Business Information Solutions, Economics Research Associates, 2005.

**Table 7: Population by Age, Lehigh County, 2005-2010**

Year	Median Age	< 15	15-29	30-44	45-59	60-74	75+	Total
2005	40.1	61,942	59,492	68,758	70,365	37,856	29,196	327,609
2010	41.4	61,633	65,669	64,190	80,339	43,557	30,533	345,921
<b>Absolute Change</b>								
05-'10	1.3	-309	6,177	-4,568	9,974	5,701	1,337	18,312
<b>Percent Change</b>								
05-'10	3.2%	-0.5%	10.4%	-6.6%	14.2%	15.1%	4.6%	5.6%
<b>CAGR</b>								
05-'10	0.6%	-0.1%	2.0%	-1.4%	2.7%	2.8%	0.9%	1.1%

Source: ESRI Business Information Solutions, Economics Research Associates, 2005.

Table 8: City of Easton Population Projections by Race and Ethnicity, 2005-2010

	White	Black	American Indian, Eskimo, Aleut	Asian or Pacific Islander	Other	Two or More Races
<b>Population Projections</b>						
2005	20,651	3,816	72	616	1,189	924
2010	20,979	4,360	85	810	1,451	1,040
<b>Absolute Change</b>						
05-'10	328	544	13	194	262	116
<b>Percent Change</b>						
05-'10	1.6%	14.3%	18.1%	31.5%	22.0%	12.6%
<b>CAGR</b>						
05-'10	0.3%	2.7%	3.4%	5.6%	4.1%	2.4%

Source: ESRI Business Information Solutions, Economics Research Associates, 2005.

Table 9: City of Bethlehem Population Projections by Race and Ethnicity, 2005-2010

	American					Two or More Races
	White	Black	American Indian, Eskimo, Aleut	Asian or Pacific Islander	Other	
<b>Population Projections</b>						
2005	59,075	2,865	207	2,143	7,892	2,052
2010	60,570	3,184	228	2,821	9,238	2,307
<b>Absolute Change 05-'10</b>	1,495	319	21	678	1,346	255
<b>Percent Change 05-'10</b>	2.5%	11.1%	10.1%	31.6%	17.1%	12.4%
<b>CAGR 05-'10</b>	0.5%	2.1%	2.0%	5.7%	3.2%	2.4%

Source: ESRI Business Information Solutions, Economics Research Associates, 2005.

Table 10: City of Allentown Population Projections by Race and Ethnicity, 2005-2010

	White	Black	American Indian, Eskimo, Aleut	Asian or Pacific Islander	Other	Two or More Races
<b>Population Projections</b>						
2005	76,058	9,185	404	3,232	16,624	4,185
2010	76,286	10,120	456	4,151	19,302	4,644
<b>Absolute Change 05-'10</b>	228	935	52	919	2678	459
<b>Percent Change 05-'10</b>	0.3%	10.2%	12.9%	28.4%	16.1%	11.0%
<b>CAGR 05-'10</b>	0.1%	2.0%	2.5%	5.1%	3.0%	2.1%

Source: ESRI Business Information Solutions, Economics Research Associates, 2005.

Table 11: Northampton County Population Projections by Race and Ethnicity, 2005-2010

	American					Two or More Races
	White	Black	American Indian, Eskimo, Aleut	Asian or Pacific Islander	Other	
<b>Population Projections</b>						
2005	255,626	8,554	493	5,183	9,804	4,285
2010	269,280	9,870	592	7,052	11,693	4,942
<b>Absolute Change</b>						
05-'10	13654	1316	99	1869	1889	657
<b>Percent Change</b>						
05-'10	5.3%	15.4%	20.1%	36.1%	19.3%	15.3%
<b>CAGR</b>						
05-'10	1.0%	2.9%	3.7%	6.4%	3.6%	2.9%

Source: ESRI Business Information Solutions, Economics Research Associates, 2005.

Table 12: Lehigh County Population Projections by Race and Ethnicity, 2005-2010

	American					Two or More Races
	White	Black	Indian, Eskimo, Aleut	Asian or Pacific Islander	Other	
<b>Population Projections</b>						
2005	279,549	12,481	656	9,068	19,375	6,480
2010	288,980	14,035	773	12,117	22,675	7,341
<b>Absolute Change</b>						
05-'10	9431	1554	117	3049	3300	861
<b>Percent Change</b>						
05-'10	3.4%	12.5%	17.8%	33.6%	17.0%	13.3%
<b>CAGR</b>						
05-'10	0.7%	2.4%	3.3%	6.0%	3.2%	2.5%

Source: ESRI Business Information Solutions, Economics Research Associates, 2005.

Table 13: Educational Attainment of Population 25+ Years of Age, 2000

Year	City of Easton		City of Bethlehem		City of Allentown		Northampton County		Lehigh County	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Less than High School	4,482	28.3%	9,946	21.6%	18,748	27.3%	34,730	19.3%	40,104	18.9%
High School Graduate	5,757	36.4%	15,307	33.2%	25,091	36.5%	65,750	36.5%	74,386	35.0%
Some College, No Degree	2,417	15.3%	7,129	15.5%	10,640	15.5%	29,286	16.3%	33,599	15.8%
Associates	807	5.1%	2,712	5.9%	3,682	5.4%	12,154	6.8%	14,964	7.0%
Bachelors	1,380	8.7%	6,547	14.2%	6,944	10.1%	24,398	13.6%	31,063	14.6%
Graduate/Professional & Above	970	6.1%	4,430	9.6%	3,613	5.3%	13,700	7.6%	18,549	8.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>15,813</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>46,071</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>68,718</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>180,018</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>212,665</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: ESRI Business Information Solutions, Economics Research Associates, 2005.

Table 14: Average Household Expenditures, 2005.

	City of				Lehigh County
	Easton	Bethlehem	Allentown	Northampton	
<b>Other Spending</b>					
Investments & Loans	\$ 9,962	\$ 11,431	\$ 9,806	\$ 13,631	\$ 14,170
Housing <sup>1</sup>	22,152	25,509	21,790	31,155	31,648
Transportation	6,026	6,635	5,868	8,185	8,222
Household Operations <sup>2</sup>	1,313	1,499	1,288	1,833	1,849
Travel	1,316	1,528	1,293	1,841	1,868
Health	1,261	1,507	1,273	1,812	1,808
Insurance	2,830	3,351	2,838	4,069	4,053
<b>Subtotal:</b>	<b>\$ 44,859</b>	<b>\$ 51,460</b>	<b>\$ 44,156</b>	<b>\$ 62,525</b>	<b>\$ 63,617</b>
<b>Retail/Consumer Spending</b>					
Food at Home	\$ 3,517	\$ 3,887	\$ 3,459	\$ 4,650	\$ 4,739
Food away from Home	2,407	2,619	2,332	3,129	3,201
Apparel & Services	2,103	2,288	2,037	2,743	2,810
Entertainment & Recreation	2,255	2,530	2,192	3,101	3,129
Household Furnishings & Equipment	1,521	1,720	1,484	2,103	2,137
Miscellaneous <sup>3</sup>	409	430	391	507	522
Computers	210	227	201	273	281
<b>Subtotal:</b>	<b>\$ 12,422</b>	<b>\$ 13,701</b>	<b>\$ 12,095</b>	<b>\$ 16,507</b>	<b>\$ 16,819</b>
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>\$ 54,241</b>	<b>\$ 61,583</b>	<b>\$ 53,212</b>	<b>\$ 74,690</b>	<b>\$ 76,103</b>

<sup>1</sup> Housing includes mortgage, utilities, remodeling, utilities and insurance.

<sup>2</sup> Household Operations includes information systems service, child care, lawn/garden, storage, housekeeping and supplies.

<sup>3</sup> Miscellaneous includes smoking products, personal care and school books/supplies.

Source: ESRI Business Information Solutions, Economics Research Associates, 2005.

Table 15 Housing Unit Building Permits Easton, PA	2000					2001					2002					2003					2004					TOTAL No.	Ann'l Avg.
Units in Single-Family Structures	1					32					19					27					-					79	16
Units in All Multi-Family Structures	4					-					-					2					-					6	1
Units in 2-unit Multi-Family Structures	-					-					-					2					-					2	0
Units in 3- and 4-unit Multi-Family Structures	4					-					-					-					-					4	1
Units in 5+ Unit Multi-Family Structures	-					-					-					-					-					-	-
<b>Total Units</b>	<b>5</b>					<b>32</b>					<b>19</b>					<b>29</b>										<b>85</b>	<b>17.1</b>
<b>As % of Northampton County</b>	<b>0.4%</b>					<b>1.9%</b>					<b>1.0%</b>					<b>1.5%</b>											
<b>Bethlehem, PA</b>																											
Units in Single-Family Structures	12					27					141					21					19					220	44
Units in All Multi-Family Structures	91					298					152					-					16					557	111
Units in 2-unit Multi-Family Structures	-					-					-					-					6					6	1
Units in 3- and 4-unit Multi-Family Structures	3					40					-					-					-					43	9
Units in 5+ Unit Multi-Family Structures	88					258					152					-					10					508	102
<b>Total Units</b>	<b>103</b>					<b>325</b>					<b>293</b>					<b>21</b>					<b>35</b>					<b>777</b>	<b>155.1</b>
<b>Allentown, PA</b>																											
Units in Single-Family Structures	76					74					68					51					97					366	73
Units in All Multi-Family Structures	-					-					-					-					-					-	-
Units in 2-unit Multi-Family Structures	-					-					-					-					-					-	-
Units in 3- and 4-unit Multi-Family Structures	-					-					-					-					-					-	-
Units in 5+ Unit Multi-Family Structures	-					-					-					-					-					-	-
<b>Total Units</b>	<b>76</b>					<b>74</b>					<b>68</b>					<b>51</b>					<b>97</b>					<b>366</b>	<b>73.1</b>
<b>Northampton County, PA</b>																											
Units in Single-Family Structures	1,091					1,335					1,678					1,620					1,761					7,485	1,497
Units in All Multi-Family Structures	221					325					231					327					60					1,164	233
Units in 2-unit Multi-Family Structures	2					-					2					6					8					18	4
Units in 3- and 4-unit Multi-Family Structures	81					67					72					101					36					357	71
Units in 5+ Unit Multi-Family Structures	138					258					157					220					16					789	158
<b>Total Units</b>	<b>1,312</b>					<b>1,660</b>					<b>1,909</b>					<b>1,947</b>					<b>1,821</b>					<b>8,649</b>	<b>1,730.3</b>
<b>Lehigh County, PA</b>																											
Units in Single-Family Structures	1,208					1,214					1,350					1,383					1,634					6,789	1,358
Units in All Multi-Family Structures	136					238					84					41					16					515	103
Units in 2-unit Multi-Family Structures	-					4					8					-					6					18	4
Units in 3- and 4-unit Multi-Family Structures	12					10					-					4					4					30	6
Units in 5+ Unit Multi-Family Structures	124					224					76					37					6					467	93
<b>Total Units</b>	<b>1,344</b>					<b>1,452</b>					<b>1,434</b>					<b>1,424</b>					<b>1,650</b>					<b>7,304</b>	<b>1,451.3</b>

Source: U.S. Dept. of Housing & Urban Development, Economics Research Associates, December 2005.

Table 16: Employment by Industry (In Thousands), Northampton County, 1990-2015

											C.A.G.R.	
	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	No.	'95-'05	No.	'05-'15	C.A.G.R.	
Farm Employment	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.6	(0.0)	-0.3%	(0.0)	(0.0)	-0.5%	
Agricultural Services	0.8	1.0	1.1	1.2	1.4	1.5	0.2	2.3%	0.3	0.3	2.0%	
Mining	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	(0.0)	-2.9%	0.0	0.0	0.9%	
Construction	6.5	6.4	7.2	7.5	7.8	8.0	1.1	1.6%	0.5	0.5	0.7%	
Manufacturing	26.3	23.1	18.7	16.7	16.1	15.5	(6.4)	-3.2%	(1.2)	(1.2)	-0.8%	
Transport, Comm & Public Utilities	4.6	4.5	6.0	6.3	7.0	7.7	1.9	3.5%	1.4	1.4	2.0%	
Wholesale Trade	3.5	3.8	3.8	3.8	4.0	4.2	0.0	0.1%	0.4	0.4	0.9%	
Retail Trade	17.9	18.4	20.7	22.6	23.6	24.7	4.2	2.1%	2.1	2.1	0.9%	
Finance, Ins & Real Estate	7.6	7.2	6.9	8.0	8.0	8.0	0.8	1.1%	(0.1)	(0.1)	-0.1%	
Services	28.3	32.2	35.2	39.6	42.7	45.9	7.4	2.1%	6.3	6.3	1.5%	
Government	11.7	12.6	13.8	15.0	16.4	17.8	2.4	1.8%	2.8	2.8	1.7%	
<b>Total:</b>	<b>107.9</b>	<b>110.0</b>	<b>114.3</b>	<b>121.5</b>	<b>127.8</b>	<b>134.0</b>	<b>11.6</b>	<b>10.1%</b>	<b>12.5</b>	<b>12.5</b>	<b>0.98%</b>	

Source: Woods &amp; Poole and Economics Research Associates, 2005.

Table 17: Employment by Industry (In Thousands), Lehigh County, 1990-2015

											C.A.G.R.	
	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	No.	'95-'05	No.	'05-'15	C.A.G.R.	
Farm Employment	0.9	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.7	(0.0)	-0.2%	(0.0)	(0.0)	-0.5%	
Agricultural Services, Other	1.2	1.4	1.8	2.4	2.6	2.8	0.9	5.1%	0.5	0.5	1.9%	
Mining	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.1	2.2%	0.0	0.0	0.8%	
Construction	9.5	8.4	9.9	10.3	10.7	11.2	1.9	2.1%	0.9	0.9	0.9%	
Manufacturing	35.3	33.3	34.6	28.8	28.7	28.6	(4.5)	-1.5%	(0.1)	(0.1)	0.0%	
Transport, Comm & Public Utilities	9.6	10.4	12.6	15.2	15.8	16.4	4.8	3.9%	1.2	1.2	0.8%	
Wholesale Trade	8.4	8.0	10.0	10.4	11.2	11.9	2.4	2.7%	1.5	1.5	1.4%	
Retail Trade	30.9	30.2	34.0	36.2	37.6	39.0	6.0	1.8%	2.8	2.8	0.7%	
Finance, Ins & Real Estate	13.7	14.7	15.9	17.4	18.0	18.5	2.7	1.7%	1.2	1.2	0.7%	
Services	56.1	60.1	72.8	75.6	84.0	92.4	15.5	2.3%	16.8	16.8	2.0%	
Government	15.1	15.9	17.1	18.2	19.3	20.4	2.3	1.4%	2.2	2.2	1.2%	
<b>Total:</b>	<b>181.0</b>	<b>183.5</b>	<b>210.0</b>	<b>215.6</b>	<b>229.1</b>	<b>242.6</b>	<b>32.1</b>	<b>1.65%</b>	<b>27.0</b>	<b>27.0</b>	<b>1.19%</b>	

Source: Woods &amp; Poole and Economics Research Associates, 2005.

Table 18: City of Easton Business Listings, 2005.

NAICS Category	Annual Sales Volume	Number of Employees
Wholesale Trade	\$328,013,000	379
Retail Trade	\$210,752,000	1,150
Manufacturing	\$129,005,000	564
Construction	\$83,169,000	257
Information	\$72,689,000	528
Professional, Scientific & Technical Service	\$71,574,000	379
Health Care & Social Service	\$53,355,000	752
Other Services	\$52,605,000	898
Finance & Insurance	\$50,964,000	232
Accommodation & Food Service	\$25,882,000	449
Real Estate	\$18,005,000	68
Administrative, Support, Waste Mgmt, Remediation	\$13,292,000	90
Arts, Entertainment & Recreation	\$9,849,000	83
Transportation/Warehousing	\$5,045,000	34
Educational Services	\$1,038,000	867
Utilities	\$639,000	3
Public Administration	\$0	1,522
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,125,876,000</b>	<b>8,255</b>

Source: ESRI Business Information Systems, InfoUSA and Economics Research Associates, 2005.

Table 19: City of Easton Business Listings, 2005.

NAICS Category	Annual Sales Volume	Number of Employees
Wholesale Trade	29%	5%
Retail Trade	19%	14%
Manufacturing	11%	7%
Construction	7%	3%
Information	6%	6%
Professional, Scientific & Technical Service	6%	5%
Health Care & Social Service	5%	9%
Other Services	5%	11%
Finance & Insurance	5%	3%
Accommodation & Food Service	2%	5%
Real Estate	2%	1%
Administrative, Support, Waste Mgmt, Remediation	1%	1%
Arts, Entertainment & Recreation	1%	1%
Transportation/Warehousing	0%	0%
Educational Services	0%	11%
Utilities	0%	0%
Public Administration	0%	18%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: ESRI Business Information Systems, InfoUSA and Economics Research Associates, 2005.

Table 20: Downtown Easton Business Listings, 2005.

NAICS Category	Annual Sales Volume	Number of Employees
Wholesale Trade	\$121,813,000	167
Retail Trade	\$110,874,000	694
Manufacturing	\$11,002,000	51
Construction	\$30,516,000	117
Information	\$65,035,000	513
Professional, Scientific & Technical Service	\$36,010,000	217
Health Care & Social Service	\$30,233,000	498
Other Services	\$9,959,000	268
Finance & Insurance	\$31,056,000	180
Accommodation & Food Service	\$16,890,000	314
Real Estate	\$9,008,000	49
Administrative, Support, Waste Mgmt, Remediation	\$2,488,000	36
Arts, Entertainment & Recreation	\$6,669,000	80
Transportation/Warehousing	\$954,000	7
Educational Services	\$610,000	8
Utilities	\$639,000	3
Public Administration	\$536,000	1,494
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$484,292,000</b>	<b>4,696</b>

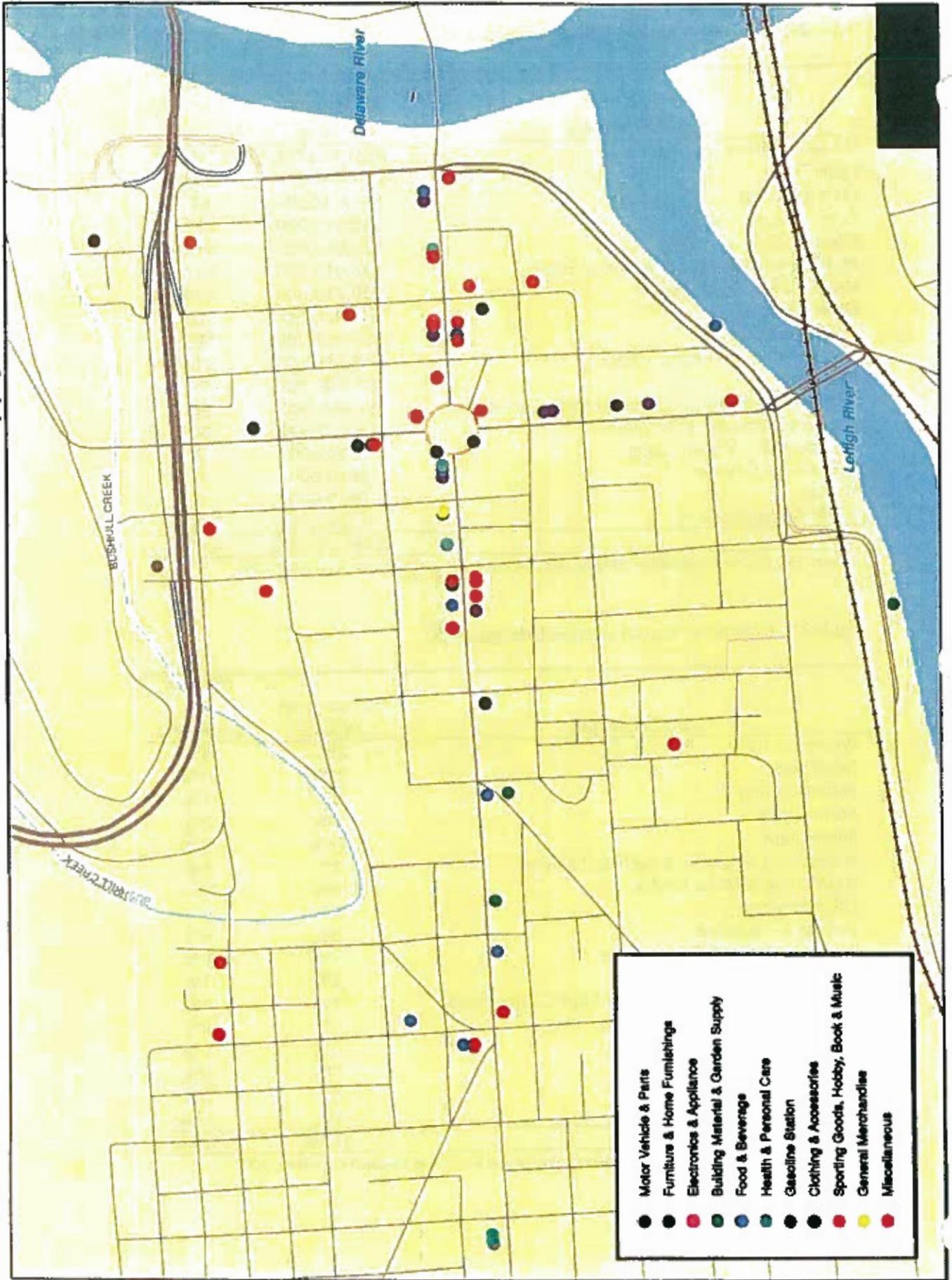
Source: ESRI Business Information Systems, InfoUSA and Economics Research Associates, 2005.

Table 21: Downtown Easton Business Listings, 2005.

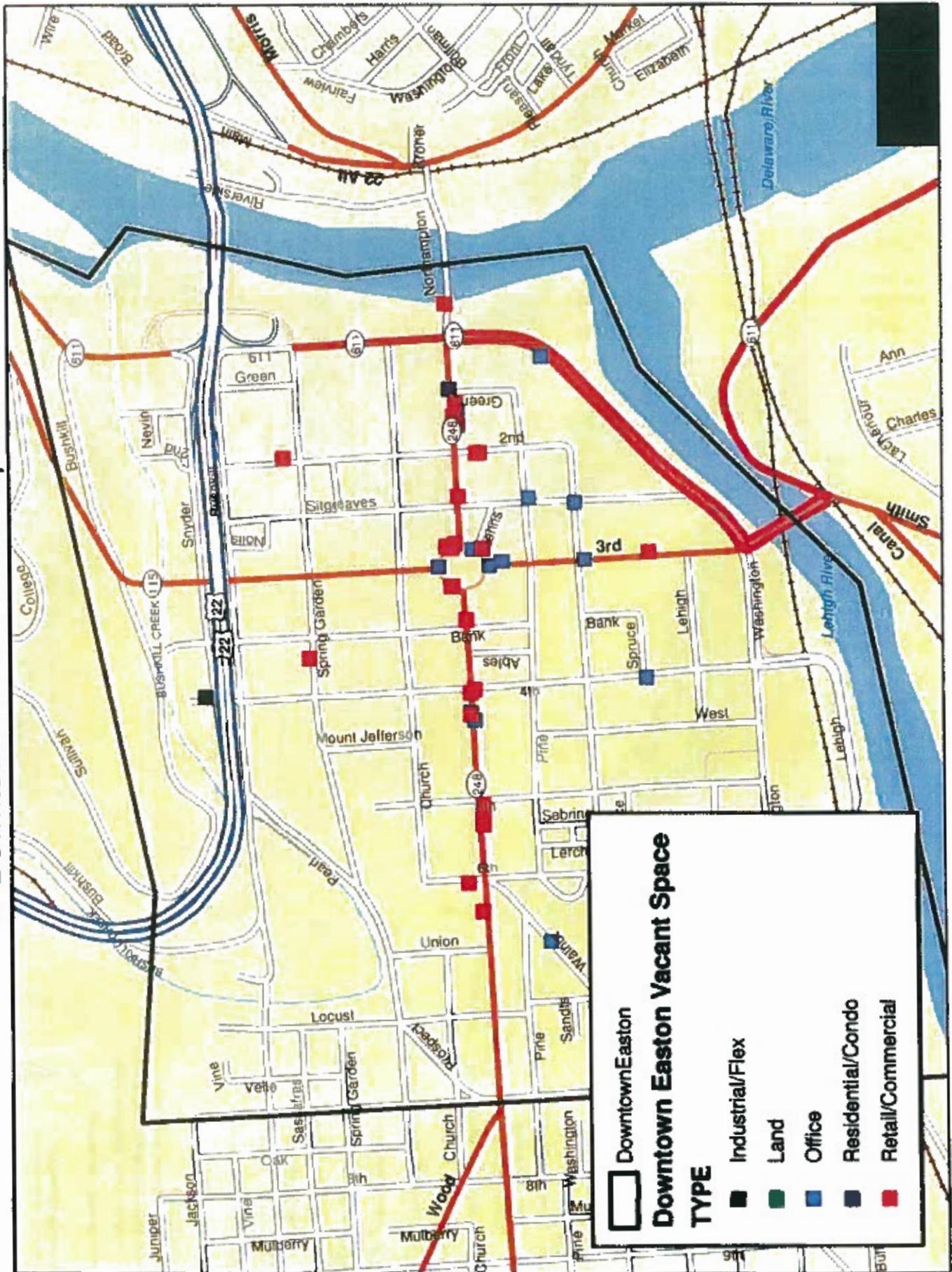
NAICS Category	Annual Sales Volume	Number of Employees
Wholesale Trade	25%	4%
Retail Trade	23%	15%
Manufacturing	2%	1%
Construction	6%	2%
Information	13%	11%
Professional, Scientific & Technical Service	7%	5%
Health Care & Social Service	6%	11%
Other Services	2%	6%
Finance & Insurance	6%	4%
Accommodation & Food Service	3%	7%
Real Estate	2%	1%
Administrative, Support, Waste Mgmt, Remediation	1%	1%
Arts, Entertainment & Recreation	1%	2%
Transportation/Warehousing	0%	0%
Educational Services	0%	0%
Utilities	0%	0%
Public Administration	0%	32%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: ESRI Business Information Systems, InfoUSA and Economics Research Associates, 2005.

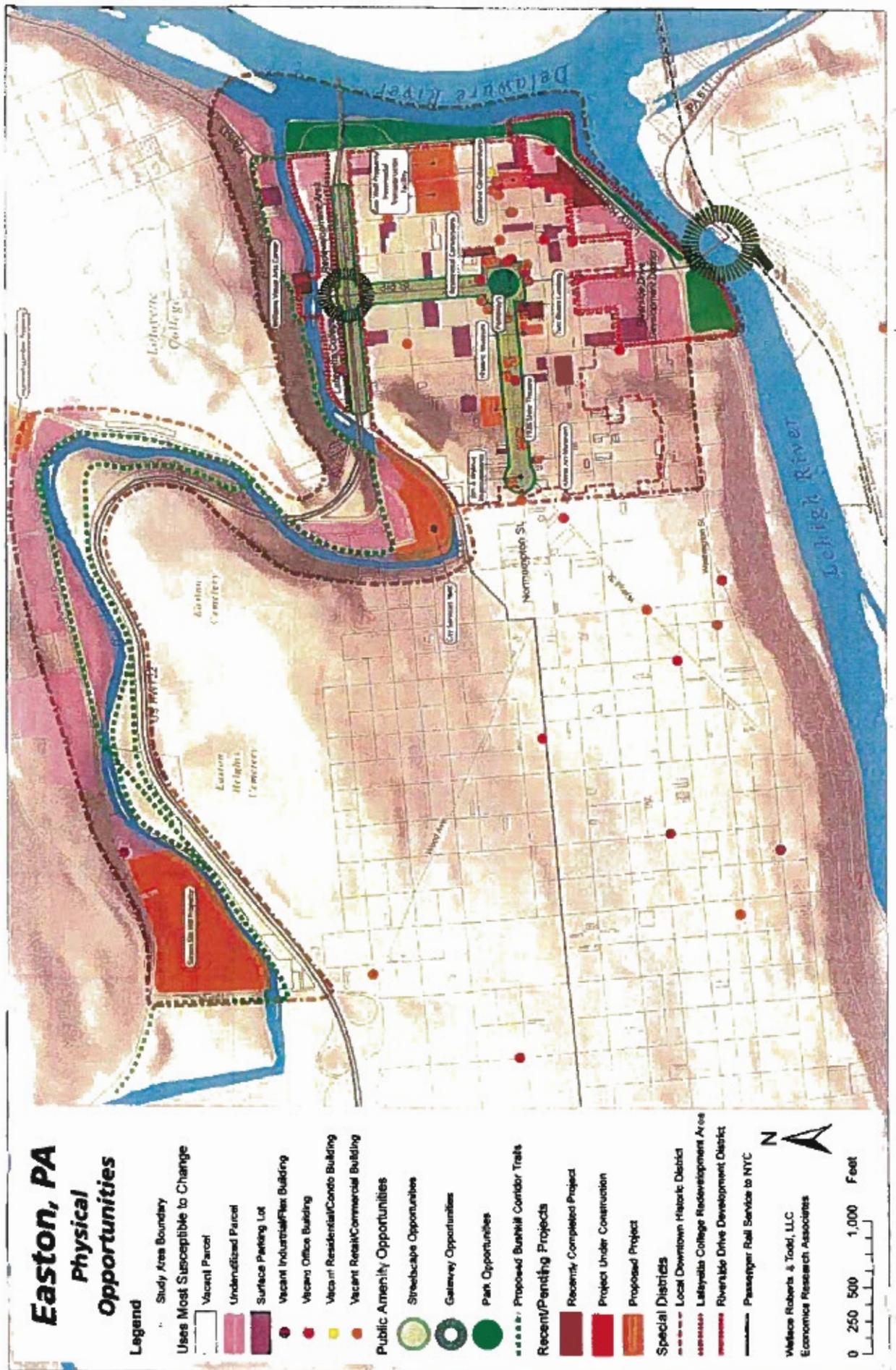
# 9. Downtown Easton Retail Store Supply



# 10. Downtown Easton Vacant Space



# 11. Physical Opportunities



## 3.0 CBD VISION AND STRATEGY

### 3.1 Background

As described in Chapter 2.0, the City of Easton and its CBD have considerable assets on which to build a revitalization strategy: a strategic location at a major gateway to Pennsylvania with easy access to the New York City/northern New Jersey market; a magnificent natural setting at the confluence of the Delaware and Lehigh Rivers; established visitor attractions such as the State Theatre, Crayola Factory, and National Canal Museum; Lafayette College; a dedicated city administration, professional staff, and citizens working to make Easton a better place; and a rich heritage, including an historic downtown with a strong sense of place. Moreover, a number of current private and public development initiatives are generating momentum for positive change. Counterbalancing these assets are several issues that have hindered ongoing revitalization, including crime and poverty, visual blight and disinvestment in key locations such as gateways to the downtown, a poor regional image, an unclear sense of direction regarding economic development, and a lack of institutional capacity to promote and fund significant revitalization activities.

The January 2006 *Economic Development Review of the City of Easton* by Keystone Municipal Services, Inc. asserts that the city lacks a clear statement of where it is headed and what its vision is of the future. A primary purpose of the CBD Economic Development Plan is to establish such a vision for the downtown, one that integrates current assets, stakeholders' expectations for the future, and a realistic assessment of what is possible given real estate market conditions and trends. This vision establishes the "mandate" for the future of the CBD (i.e., what does Easton want its downtown to be?) and provides direction for action to achieve the desired future (i.e., how do we get there?). It can be used as part of a "story" of a revitalizing city that can be conveyed to prospective developers, visitors, residents, and others to attract additional investment to Easton.

Previous planning efforts have proposed a vision and supporting strategies to promote revitalization of Easton's downtown. *A Strategy to Make Downtown Easton a Destination*, prepared by Abeles Phillips Preiss & Shapiro, Inc. in 1993, identified the following Vision Elements:

- A Quality Setting (Historic District, Centre Square, Waterfront, Hills, Park);
- Attractions (Crayola Kids Center, State Theatre, Canal Heritage Corridor); and
- Diversity (Lafayette College, Artist Live/Work, County Offices) result in
- A major tourist-oriented, specialty-shopping district (specialty stores, restaurants, hotels, and restored local and regional patronage).

The *Center City Revitalization and Corridor Linkage Strategy*, prepared by LDR International, Inc. in 1995, reaffirmed the elements of the 1993 plan vision while introducing the following ideas:

- Increase the CBD's residential base through the conversion of existing buildings to residential uses, new infill development, and incorporation of opportunities for new lodging facilities.

- Implement comprehensive urban design improvements (access and circulation, signage, streetscapes, parks, etc.) to promote revitalization.

Most recently, the *Economic Development Review of the City of Easton* posited that the City's strategic location and a strong housing market in the Northeast Corridor mean "...that Easton's future may lie in regenerating its building stock and land for residential purposes."

### **3.2 Economic Development Vision**

The proposed economic development vision for the future of the CBD builds on, rather than reinvents, these previous planning efforts. Its basic premise is that the key to economic success is to repopulate the downtown across several complementary markets that provide patronage for local businesses. Simply stated, the Vision is:

*A Central Business District that capitalizes on its assets – a strategic location, magnificent natural setting, visitor attractions such as State Theatre and Two Rivers Landing, and rich history and heritage – to reinforce its role as a regional destination that attracts new residents, visitors from inside and outside the Lehigh Valley, and workers.*

Following a trend common to revitalizing downtowns across the country, the intent is to encourage a diverse mix of uses that strengthen customer activity and associated demand for retail and services day and night, seven days a week. Based on the study's market analysis, housing investment appears to have the strongest potential to "jump-start" downtown revitalization, with the Eastonian Hotel condominium conversion an important barometer of the depth of potential market support for additional new housing and momentum for further private sector development. Promoting visitation – the second market targeted by the Vision Statement – is an ongoing strategy that has been in large part oriented towards heritage tourists attracted to the Delaware and Lehigh Canal National Heritage Corridor; the Vision suggests that this effort be targeted not only to attract tourists from outside the region, but also to leverage critical assets such as the Crayola Factory and State Theatre with an emerging (but fledgling) restaurant scene to position downtown Easton as a preferred destination for Lehigh Valley residents. Employment (the third target market) is intended to strengthen Easton's traditional function as a regional center of commerce and Northampton County government seat. This strategy seeks to capitalize on a viable commercial building stock by marketing the city's attributes including, for example, business costs (such as commercial rents) that are lower in Easton than elsewhere in the region.

### 3.3 Strategic Initiatives

Three strategic initiatives targeted towards specific markets are proposed to increase the downtown population so as to strengthen opportunities for existing retailers and generate demand for additional quality retailers, destination restaurants, and other supporting services:

1. Promote new market-rate housing;
2. Increase visitation to existing attractions; and
3. Reinforce Easton as a regional employment center.

The Action Plan presented in Chapter 4.0 is structured around these three strategic initiatives.

## 4.0 ACTION PLAN

### 4.1 Overview

This chapter lays out a framework for coordinated action by the GEDP, the City of Easton, and other public and private partners to achieve the economic development vision described in Chapter 3.0. The proposed actions are organized into three general timeframes: short-term (year one), mid-term (years two to four), and long-term (year five and beyond).

**Short-term actions** focus on four critical areas that need to be addressed to lay the groundwork for implementation of a coordinated economic development strategy in subsequent years. These include attention to quality-of-life issues that are significant threats to the downtown's overall revitalization, building institutional capacity for implementation, marketing Easton and its CBD to both existing and potential users/markets, and initiating "catalytic" development projects.

**Mid-term actions** are organized around strategic initiatives designed to increase the downtown's population across three target markets:

1. Market-rate housing;
2. Increased visitation; and
3. Increased CBD employment.

Key capital investments (e.g., priority gateway and streetscape improvements) in support of the three target markets are included in the mid-term actions.

**Long-term actions** are considered important to the long-range future of the CBD, but are likely to be deferred until the mid-term strategic initiatives have been successfully implemented. These strategies include waterfront development (including the provision of additional public parkland and creating opportunities for private development) and establishment of passenger rail service to New York City/northern New Jersey.

The action plan incorporates a recommended phasing strategy for addressing the three geographic focus areas of the CBD Economic Development Plan, as follows:

1. First and foremost, address the Northampton Street corridor and quality-of-life issues in particular to support existing investment being made in the downtown core, such as the Eastonian condominium project, and to reinforce key anchors such as the State Theatre and Two Rivers Landing/Crayola Factory.
2. Second, address the Bushkill Creek corridor to leverage ongoing and pending investments being made by Lafayette College and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and link them to the Northampton Street corridor and downtown core.
3. Address the Delaware and Lehigh riverfronts, which are underutilized assets, over the longer term.

It should be noted that the action plan is not intended as a rigid framework, but rather as a flexible guide for decision-making that can be adjusted to respond to changing circumstances, market and economic conditions, and development opportunities as they arise. For example, the recommended phasing strategy does not preclude pursuing riverfront development opportunities that could arise in the short to mid terms, provided they are consistent with the direction set by this plan. Section 4.6 provides guidance for tracking implementation progress and making periodic adjustments to the action schedule.

## 4.2 Short-Term Actions (Year One)

### A.1 Quality of Life

*Take immediate steps to address quality-of-life issues.* A theme heard consistently throughout the planning process is that crime, poverty, and the perception that the CBD is unsafe are threats to the successful revitalization of downtown Easton. While these issues are beyond the purview of the Economic Development Plan, it is imperative that they be addressed if the momentum generated by current development projects and revitalization initiatives is to be sustained. As noted, these efforts should target those blocks surrounding existing and new investment, such as the State Theatre and Eastonian condominium project. Recommended components of this strategy include:

- Increased presence and focus on crime/security by the City of Easton Police Department (e.g., specially designated foot patrols);
- Enhanced code enforcement and maintenance by the City, to comprehensively address nuisance uses, deteriorated properties, street cleanliness, public health, etc.;
- Development of a more attractive physical environment along Northampton Street and in the downtown in general through the GEDP's Main Street Program; and
- Involvement of other partners, including the business community, Easton Area School District, and the faith-based community (to address social issues in the CBD).

As part of the strategy, the GEDP (initially through its Main Street program) could establish a downtown "ambassador" program modeled after Center City Philadelphia's successful community service representatives program. Under this program, uniformed personnel patrol Center City streets, operate specialized cleaning machinery and manually sweep sidewalks, act as additional eyes and ears for the police, and serve as goodwill ambassadors to the public. It is important to note that a sustainable source of funding will be needed to support this program (the Center City District in Philadelphia is a Business Improvement District [BID] supported by a special services tax on property owners). Over time, expansion of the downtown tax base due to commercial redevelopment should enhance opportunities to evolve from the existing Main Street program toward creation of a BID, providing a dedicated revenue stream to fund such "clean and green" programs as well as other critical initiatives such as marketing and business/tenant recruitment.

## A.2 Capacity Building

Capacity building refers to ensuring that sufficient organizational, financial, and human resources are in place to implement the CBD Economic Development Plan. An array of economic development organizations and entities exists across the Lehigh Valley, offering a range of economic development programs and incentives. They include municipal community development and/or redevelopment departments; special interest groups such as the Easton Area Industrial Land Development Company; regional entities such as the Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation (LVEDC) and Greater Lehigh Valley Chamber of Commerce; governmental agencies such as Northampton County and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania; and others. Given the limited staff resources available to the GEDP, partnerships involving these entities will be a necessary part of implementation.

Perhaps the greatest challenge facing GEDP as it leads efforts to revitalize Easton's CBD is the need to secure funding and other resources for implementation in an environment across the Lehigh Valley that is at once extremely competitive and limited. This challenge is further complicated by the difficult fiscal position of the City of Easton at this time. Therefore, the work required to secure incentive packages (such as gap financing, revolving loan funds, etc.) that are both adequate in size and self-sustaining will be crucial to the overall success of revitalization efforts. Another critical link in these capacity building initiatives is the successful creation of public-private partnerships for specific catalyst projects.

In addition, GEDP, as the lead economic development entity for the Easton area, must work with the city to ensure that the redevelopment and revitalization process in Easton is as streamlined and efficient a process as possible. This should include providing "one stop shopping" for developers and investors committed to Easton.

Capacity building should begin in the first year of plan implementation by addressing four core elements:

- Organization and partnerships
- Development regulations and procedures
- Data collection and monitoring
- Incentives

These efforts will help lay the foundation for the three strategic initiatives to be pursued in the mid term, each of which has a capacity-building component as described in Section B below.

**A.2.1 Organization and Partnerships – define roles and responsibilities in carrying out the plan, including partnership opportunities for specific projects.** GEDP's stated mission is "to be the catalyst for vibrant, successful economic development throughout the Greater Easton Area." As such, it will be responsible for leading implementation of the CBD Economic Development Plan. Numerous other agencies and organizations will need to be involved as partners with GEDP and in leading specific actions if the plan is to be successfully implemented. Section 4.5 provides an initial identification of potential organizational partners for the actions identified in this chapter. Ongoing follow-up with these organizations

will be necessary to enlist their support in moving forward with plan implementation. To begin this process, it is recommended that GEDP convene an economic development summit with all potential partners to present the plan and discuss roles and responsibilities in implementation. This summit will also provide an opportunity to coordinate the CBD Economic Development Plan with other economic development initiatives across the city, such as Lafayette College's Bushkill Creek Corridor project.

As an example of a potential partnership arrangement, the catalyst housing opportunity identified as a mid-term action could be "jump-started" through formation of a public-private partnership with a qualified developer, with the Easton Redevelopment Authority acquiring candidate parcels and GEDP and its partners providing gap financing, or state and local tax abatements used to ensure overall project feasibility if the project is located in a Keystone Opportunity Zone (KOZ). The direction for such a partnership would be set in the short term by Action A.4 below (Catalytic Projects).

**A.2.2 *Development Regulations and Procedures – revise land development regulations and streamline the development process to facilitate economic development in the CBD.*** The city's Zoning Ordinance and land development regulations should be revised as appropriate to accommodate mixed-use redevelopment, including provisions with a degree of flexibility to accommodate conversion of upper-floor commercial space to residential uses as well as other tools that enhance overall project feasibility (e.g., parking waivers, density bonuses, etc.). In addition, regulatory requirements that present obstacles for conversion to artists' lofts or live-work studios should be modified (see Action B.2.3 below). The city's pending update of its Zoning Ordinance is timely to address these issues. As part of the update, development review procedures should be examined for opportunities to streamline approvals and remove obstacles to desired types of development. Establishment of the GEDP office in partnership with the city and other economic development agencies to serve as a "one-stop shop" in Easton for economic development would further expedite this process. Currently, GEDP's office is located next to the Easton office of the Greater Lehigh Valley Chamber of Commerce.

**A.2.3 *Data Collection and Monitoring – establish a commercial property database and an ongoing process to obtain critical market data.*** An initial effort in this regard has been completed by Lafayette College, working in partnership with the city's Planning Department (see Section 2.1). This preliminary inventory should be expanded into a comprehensive database, including customer surveys of commercial activity in the CBD, and updated on a regular basis (one to two times a year). At a minimum, the database should track the following (as available): retail sales performance/productivity; spending patterns of downtown employees, shoppers and visitors; and market conditions such as commercial building vacancies, absorption/leasing activity, changes in rental rates, etc. The process should include annual or semi-annual updates and monitoring to keep the database current. The surveys should be compiled by a lead agency, such as the Chamber of Commerce or Lafayette College, and used as a marketing tool and as an integral part of a larger economic development strategy to inform

business recruitment opportunities and to provide current market information to prospective tenants or businesses. Moreover, understanding sales performance and the degree of capitalization of Easton's downtown retailers are two measures considered critical in identifying future market potentials for retail development.

Based on experience in smaller communities across the United States, annual or semi-annual market surveys of downtown office and retail activity are typically undertaken as a joint effort between commercial brokers, the Chamber of Commerce, a local economic development entity (like GEDP), and/or a downtown business organization. These efforts should be viewed as a marketing tool and as a key component of a larger economic development strategy for the City of Easton.

*A.2.4 Incentives – identify financial and other incentives to be used to “jump-start” revitalization projects.* There are numerous economic development and incentive programs available in Northeast Pennsylvania, such as the Lehigh and Northampton Counties Revolving Loan Fund, the Lehigh Valley Small Business Loan Pool, the SBA 504 Loan Program, the Enterprise Zones and Keystone Opportunity Zones, and the Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance (LERTA) tax abatement program, among others. Section 4.7 provides a summary of available funding mechanisms.

Notably, the consultant team heard during the stakeholder interviews that the city has limited financial wherewithal to promote economic development. As the lead economic development agency, GEDP must work with its partner organizations, including the city, to identify and secure adequate streams of incentives funding – probably significantly beyond the city's existing Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) allotment and zero-interest loan pool – to jump-start the revitalization initiatives outlined in this plan (based on detailed project and plan review). Working in partnership with appropriate economic development entities across the Lehigh Valley, GEDP and the city should identify existing incentive programs (grants, low-interest loans, etc.) and commit a guaranteed level of funding and/or other incentives for qualified projects that promote revitalization in the CBD as a means of reducing investment and developer risk, particularly for the short- and mid-term projects identified by this plan. Over the longer-term horizon, of course, as momentum is generated by successful revitalization initiatives, it could be expected that the size and depth of potential incentives could be reduced.

Given the currently limited funding levels, the following are examples of incentives that the city could offer to promote specific redevelopment projects:

- Regulatory incentives such as density bonuses, reductions in parking ratios/requirements, and expedited permit approvals
- Property tax abatements (e.g. LERTA), business tax abatements, and/or exemptions such as tax-exempt bonds and tax-exempt bridge bonds to attract (or retain) downtown office and retail tenants
- Donation of publicly-owned lands or tax foreclosed properties
- Land acquisition/assembly and land banking
- Development fee waivers

- Flexible development standards
- “Bricks and mortar” projects such as infrastructure, provision of public amenities (streetscape, landscaping, open space, riverfront improvements, etc.), and/or construction of public parking facilities (can be funded as part of long-term capital improvement projects through General Obligation bonds)

While not tied to a specific project, improved wayfinding and signage programs to help patrons locate downtown parking and cultural attractions will be important to reinforce the downtown’s appeal as a destination and contribute to the success of catalytic projects. Parking supply and demand in the downtown will need to be monitored as economic activity increases and additional parking developed through public initiatives if required.

### A.3 Marketing

*Develop a unified marketing and communications strategy to reach the three target markets: residents, visitors, and businesses.* A potential impediment to downtown revitalization is the poor image of Easton that has developed over the years and which is reinforced by press coverage that tends to focus on negative events. Therefore, a proactive marketing campaign is needed to improve the image of the city as a whole and the CBD in particular. The first step in this campaign is to develop a unified strategy and framework for more detailed efforts tailored towards the three target markets (residents, visitors, and businesses) as described below for the mid-term strategic initiatives. The strategy should:

- Identify a compelling theme or message to convey Easton as a city on the upswing (e.g., “Experience the Renaissance”, “Rediscover Easton” as an exciting place to live, work, and visit, etc.);
- Highlight and connect current projects and initiatives to demonstrate progress and build momentum;
- Publicize the public-private partnerships that have been created to build momentum and highlight the city’s commitment to revitalization; and
- Confirm target markets (e.g., young professionals and empty nesters as segments of the residential population) and media outlets that can be used to reach these markets. Focus group sessions inside and outside of the region can be used to help understand what is needed to attract prospective visitors and residents to Easton.

Current marketing programs are regional in scale, with the Lehigh Valley Convention and Visitors Bureau promoting visitation and the LVEDC promoting business development in the Lehigh Valley as a whole. The challenge is to implement a marketing and communications strategy specifically tailored to Easton and the three target markets (potential new residents as well as visitors and businesses) within the context of these broader initiatives. As part of this strategy, the GEDP and its partners should immediately begin outreach efforts with the regional media to communicate the positive changes that are occurring in downtown Easton. Specific activities could include informational meetings with media representatives; authorship of press releases, articles, and editorials; special events, etc. The city’s monthly newsletter can be used to reach residents regarding the progress that is being made. In addition, a dedicated website should be established to highlight positive developments, attractions, and

events. This site can be hosted on the city's existing website (which already highlights Easton's attractions and events) or set up as new GEDP website and linked to other Lehigh Valley websites.

#### A.4 Catalytic Projects

*Identify and conduct detailed financial feasibility studies for catalytic residential and mixed-use projects.* "Catalytic projects" are those projects that will have the greatest effect in generating momentum for additional private investment. As such, they should meet one or more of the following criteria:

- Occupies a key downtown location (e.g., facing Centre Square)
- Replaces a deteriorated building or building that otherwise significantly impacts the visual character of the downtown
- Replaces a use that negatively affects surrounding properties and the image of the downtown as a whole
- Is of a type, scale, and quality of development that will make a major contribution to downtown revitalization

The following steps should be taken in the short term to initiate the catalytic projects:

- Identify potential sites or specific projects that would meet eligibility requirements for appropriate grants and incentives per Action A.2.4 (Incentives);
- Conduct detailed feasibility studies, including financial and economic impact, to understand the potential costs and benefits to the city; and
- Secure guarantees of appropriate levels of city (or other economic development entity) monies earmarked for specific projects.

In addition, this stage may involve negotiation of Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) on a project-specific basis to enter into a public-private partnership(s) depending upon the degree of owner/developer interest. It is critical that these initiatives convey both commitments on the part of the city and GEDP as the lead economic development entity to specific projects as well as early-on momentum to generate interest in subsequent private investment.

Based on the analysis conducted for this plan, candidate projects include the recently vacated Rite Aid parcel on Centre Square, the Hotel Lafayette and/or Hotel Hampton buildings, or other properties that have similar potential to generate positive momentum for downtown revitalization. GEDP's role on these projects, working in concert with its partner organizations and the selected developers, will be to structure the partnership and magnitude of incentives (as required) based on the findings of the detailed analyses outlined above. Acting through the Easton Redevelopment Authority, the GEDP and the city may choose to acquire a key catalyst site(s) for redevelopment.

### 4.3 Mid-Term Actions (Years Two to Four)

#### B.1 Strategic Initiative: Market-Rate Housing

- B.1.1 *Project Development – initiate catalytic residential/mixed-use projects in the downtown core.* These projects will be based on results of detailed market and financial feasibility studies (Action A.4) with the target of developing 100-150 new housing units focused in key locations such as the 100, 300, and 400 blocks

of Northampton Street. The primary objectives in choosing these locations are to:

- Dovetail with ongoing private revitalization initiatives (e.g., the Eastonian);
- Redevelop key sites, vacant properties, or nuisance uses that are impacting existing or new investment (catalytic project criteria identified above for Action A-4); and
- Expand the downtown population to enhance other business activities, including new retail and restaurants that are needed to support key downtown anchors such as the State Theatre and Two Rivers Landing.

While the primary objective of these projects is to develop market-rate housing, the ground floors should be reserved for retail uses to promote commercial activity in the downtown.

In addition to the proposed catalytic projects in the downtown core, plans are moving forward for redevelopment of the Silk Mill complex in the Bushkill Creek Corridor with probable implementation in the mid-term time frame. While market-rate residential development in this location will benefit the city as a whole, it will have no direct impact on the CBD because of the separation between the site and the downtown core. Thus it is important that this project include physical and programmatic connections to encourage residents to view downtown Easton as an attractive destination.

- B.1.2 Capacity Building – provide incentives for identified catalytic projects.** As noted above for the short-term actions, it is expected that incentives will be necessary to “jump-start” the catalytic projects, particularly for undercapitalized developers and/or “mom & pop” property owners. Incentives may be provided to “write down” the costs of individual projects proposed by the private sector if they meet specific eligibility criteria or, alternatively, the selected site(s) could be publicly acquired and offered to potential developers. In the latter scenario, the GEDP and its partners would need to prepare Request for Qualifications to pre-qualify candidate developer(s), prepare Request for Proposals (RFP) including expectations for development, and select approved development team(s) based upon the RFP response. Based on the results of the feasibility analyses, candidate incentives will be identified as part of a negotiated Development Agreement with the selected development team(s). The Development Agreement should clearly specify incentive terms.
- B.1.3 Marketing – market the catalytic projects.** GEDP and associated partner organizations should be prepared to assist where necessary the selected development team as it initiates its own project-specific marketing. Also, they will need to ensure that key market information (e.g., target market segments, demographic data, etc.) is made available to the development team to support its efforts. The concurrent marketing strategy (Action A.3 above) should have as one of its focus areas this (and other) target markets.

## B.2 Strategic Initiative: Increased Visitation

This strategic initiative should focus on strengthening and supporting existing key visitor attractions (State Theatre, Two Rivers Landing, etc.) and the linkages between them. It has three major components:

- Recruit destination retail stores and restaurants to increase the CBD's appeal to residents of Easton, the Lehigh valley, and beyond, and to entice visitors to stay longer and spend more money;
- Explore establishment of an artist recruitment program to increase Easton's attractiveness as a visitor destination while contributing to quality of life for residents and the local economy; and
- Implement a coordinated marketing program to increase visitation to the CBD.

**B.2.1 Retail Recruitment – initiate a retail recruitment strategy to attract destination retailers and restaurateurs.** This strategy should be designed to create a retail cluster in the 300 and 400 blocks of Northampton Street surrounding the State Theatre, which is a primary demand generator of potential customers.

As noted in Section 2.3 of this report, presumed increases in both the number of households and household incomes in Easton could be expected to generate an additional \$34 million in new buying power over the next five years. It is estimated that this added buying power could support up to 135,000 square feet of retail space, irrespective of location. A successful marketing and tenant recruitment strategy for downtown restaurants should seek to capture a minimum of 20% of this new retail spending. This could be expected to result in an additional \$6.5 to \$7.0 million in new spending downtown, translating into roughly 25,000 to 30,000 sq. ft. of new space. (In addition, successful implementation of the economic development initiatives outlined in this plan could also be expected to result in improved sales among existing retailers).

A minimum target to achieve critical mass is eight to ten restaurant operators across a range of price points and menus, occupying a minimum of 20,000 square feet of street-level space in high visibility/corner locations or storefronts with sufficient width to maximize tenant/retailer exposure. The Easton Redevelopment Authority (or a parking authority as appropriate) should lead, with GEDP assistance as required, efforts to provide proximate, secure, and well-lit parking lot(s) or a parking structure as demand warrants to support the retail recruitment strategy.

In the short term (i.e., over the next one to two years), the consultant team believes that opportunities for new retail and restaurant development in the CBD will be limited, as market conditions do not favor retail expansion until a larger critical mass of residents, visitors, and workers is created. Over time (i.e., two+ years), demand for the retail recruitment strategy could be induced if specific incentives are tailored, as noted below.

The retail/restaurant recruitment strategy should consider a family-style, sit-down restaurant as an appropriate venue for the street-level space in the Alpha Building on Centre Square upon the relocation of the Crayola Store to Two Rivers Landing. As noted, a cluster of high-quality restaurants should be targeted for

the 300 and 400 blocks of Northampton Street surrounding the State Theatre, to include a mix of price points and menu choices designed to support the theatre as well as the proposed renovation of the VFW building into another cultural attraction, reportedly as a museum to house the extensive collection of a private art collector. This would include, at a minimum, a white tablecloth/fine-dining establishment, a Tapas or other themed ethnic restaurant, an espresso/dessert café, and a good-quality, sit-down facility offering American/continental cuisine. The objective is to create "critical mass" with a sufficient number of operators across a range of food and beverage themes and menus to avoid duplication and competition with existing restaurateurs located in the downtown.

**B.2.2 Artists Recruitment – Explore creation of an "artists' relocation program."** Many communities similar to Easton have focused on arts and crafts as a community/economic development strategy. The Banana Factory in Bethlehem, for example, supports two galleries, 28 studio artists, and a variety of community arts programs. Other cities such as Paducah, KY and Cumberland, MD are actively working to attract artists to move to their communities to increase visitation, improve quality of life, and promote local economic activity.

Downtown Easton has a number of attributes that are appealing to potential artist residents, including an attractive setting with urban amenities, available and affordable space, and easy access to the New York metropolitan area. *A Strategy to Make Downtown Easton a Destination*, prepared by Abeles Phillips Preiss & Shapiro, Inc. in 1993, recommended "more artist (and other) live/work space" as one of five key projects. The stated concept was to promote "loft conversions, row house renovation, (and) office building reuse for shared living and work quarters for artists, architects, and like-minded professionals." While less progress has been made in implementing this recommendation than other key projects proposed in the 1993 plan, the opportunity remains to build a thriving arts community in Easton.

A similar, highly successful initiative that could serve as a potential model for Easton is the Lowertown Arts District in Paducah, KY. This program, a public-private partnership, provides low-cost financing for the rehabilitation of significantly deteriorated properties in the district. Since its creation in 2000, approximately 60 or so artists have relocated. While this number is not yet considered to have reached critical mass, it should be noted that accompanying the artists are art galleries that, over time, are enhancing the appeal of downtown Paducah as a destination. A similar program in Easton, given its proximity to New York, should be evaluated. Components of this program could include:

- Identification of vacant or underutilized buildings and spaces within the downtown that lend themselves to conversion to space for artists as part of the property database recommended by Action A.2.3 above, possibly forming an artist's "sub-district" within the downtown;
- An active marketing program targeted towards artists in the New York metropolitan area and elsewhere, including an Easton Artist Relocation Program website (see [www.paducahartts.com](http://www.paducahartts.com) for Paducah's website), special events such as the "Easton Loft Seminar" conducted for artists in 1985, and placement of advertisements in arts/crafts magazines and other media geared towards the artist community;

- Incentives attractive to artists (Paducah's program offers lower-than-market interest rates and other financial incentives through a partnership with a local bank, group health insurance packages, joint marketing and promotional opportunities, technical assistance with business plans, and tax incentives for property improvements); and
- Initiation of a demonstration artists' live/work project as a catalytic project.

As part of this program, the city should evaluate its zoning regulations to remove any barriers to conversion of downtown buildings to artists' lofts or live-work studios (see Action A.2.2 above).

A lead organization (e.g., the Arts Community of Easton) and source of seed funding will need to be identified to initiate an artists' relocation program in Easton. Additional feasibility (e.g., financial) studies will also likely be required in advance of negotiating actual agreements with prospective applicants, including the demonstration artists' live/work project. The Silk Mill complex has been mentioned as a potential location for such a project, offering space available for adaptive reuse in a distinctive setting. However, its physical separation from the CBD may limit its ability to generate additional visitation to downtown attractions and businesses without strong physical and programmatic connections.

**B.2.3 Visitor Marketing – implement a campaign to increase visitation to existing attractions.** Building on the ongoing marketing efforts of local attractions such as the State Theatre and the Crayola Factory at Two Rivers Landing and regional organizations such as the Lehigh Valley Convention and Visitors Bureau and Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor, a working partnership should be established to craft a coordinated strategy specifically designed to attract more visitors to Easton and its CBD. Components of this strategy could include:

- Seek editorial coverage in appropriate travel magazines, and build relationships with regional travel writers in the Pennsylvania/New York/New Jersey marketplace with “full-court” press articles about the numerous activities and attractions in Easton. Aside from expanding press coverage about Easton, a primary goal of this initiative is to build relationships with the travel industry and to enhance the overall reputation of Easton and the organizations and attractions that draw visitors to the city. This initiative should be of high quality and sufficient detail to ensure inclusion in travel and tourism literature prepared by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania; city magazines covering the major cities throughout the Northeast, such as Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., and New York City; and the “weekend” sections of both first- and second-tier daily newspapers such as Hartford Courant, Baltimore Sun, New Jersey editions of the Star-Ledger, Providence Journal, and others.
- Retain a firm that specializes in “rack card analysis” to conduct annual surveys of Zip Codes of visitors to Easton to understand visitor behavior and market dynamics and to inform directions in the marketing strategy. In addition, this firm should oversee a coordinated distribution and management of travel cards on each of the city's key attractions. These rack cards should be distributed in high-traffic locations such as highway

information centers on key interstates and the Pennsylvania Turnpike, and other locations within a 50- to 100-mile driving radius of Easton.

- Conduct familiarity (“fam”) tours with the Lehigh Valley Convention and Visitors Bureau and similar regional organizations within a 50- to 100-mile driving radius to promote existing attractions, lodging properties, and meeting/conference facilities in Easton, thus ensuring that the city “gets on the radar screen” of organizations involved in visitor and tourism development.
- Coordinate this marketing strategy with the existing and extensive marketing efforts of the State Theatre, the Crayola Factory and National Canal Museum at Two Rivers Landing, and the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor. The non-profit organization running the State Theatre, for example, expends significant effort and a large part of its annual advertising budget to “sell” Easton. A coordinated marketing strategy involving both the public and private sectors should be designed to share marketing costs such that the burden is not disproportionately borne by any one organization. This strategy would complement the branding and identity strategies underway at Two Rivers Landing. It is critical that the city play a coordinating role between these marketing initiatives and its own role in downtown revitalization. This could include, for example, ensuring that a wayfinding and signage program adequately conveys specific information on downtown’s cultural anchors, coordinating police presence such as foot patrols on evenings when the State Theatre has an event, or ensuring that the city’s municipal parking garage is fully staffed at appropriate times to cover downtown events.
- Integrate and market recreational trail development along Bushkill Creek as proposed in the 2003 *Bushkill Creek Corridor Enhancement Study* with outdoor recreational opportunities in the larger region, such as the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area and the Jacobsburg Environmental Education Center. The objective is to tap into the regional market for active and passive recreation while enhancing downtown Easton’s attractiveness as a place to live. Depending on the extent of programming, this initiative will increase the number of day visitors to Easton, resulting in likely benefits for the city’s restaurants, retail sector, and existing attractions.
- Sponsor “episodic” events – such as annual ethnic or neighborhood festivals held in downtown Easton – to reinforce with the targeted regional audience/marketplace what Easton is and what it has to offer. Known as “evergreen events,” these events are intended to integrate these multiple attractions with other elements of the city’s economy, such as retailers. In so doing, multiple objectives are met, including collective marketing (particularly beneficial for small retailers or “mom & pop” operations), and linking events sponsored by individual attractions (e.g., coloring contests at the Crayola Factory or seasonal performances at the State Theatre) to community-wide event such as a “Best of Easton” food festival involving the city’s restaurants. Centre Square could serve as a

special event venue if redesigned to improve its function as a community gathering space (Action B.4.3). Over the long term, a redesigned waterfront park could also be used for this purpose (Action C.1).

- Partner with Phillipsburg, NJ to increase the critical mass of visitor attractions/events and distribute program costs.

**B.2.4 Capacity Building – establish the capacity needed to implement the retail recruitment, artist recruitment, and visitor marketing strategies.** The specific capacity-building steps will vary according to strategy:

- The restaurant cluster concept will likely require sizable financial incentives to enhance its chances of early success as the quality-of-life issues identified in this plan are addressed and resolved. Incentives to induce demand may include rent write-downs, tenant fit-out allowances, capital equipment grants or loans, provision of parking, and the like.
- To build capacity for attracting supporting retailers to Easton, any marketing efforts (including tenant recruitment) must be guided by a plan that identifies a specific marketing niche. For example, a “home artisan” concept to identify and attract tenants is a possibility in that it could build upon existing retail anchors such as Dyke’s Lumber. This concept could include specific merchandise categories focused on home renovation and repair and design, similar to what has been created over the past 15 years in the 16:62 Design Zone in the Lawrenceville section of Pittsburgh (see [www.1662designzone.com](http://www.1662designzone.com)). This program is funded by the Pittsburgh Partnership for Neighborhood Development and, in part, through the Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh’s Citywide Main Street Program and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development.
- The artist recruitment strategy will be a multi-pronged approach involving GEDP, the City of Easton, the Easton Redevelopment Authority, appropriate regional economic development agencies, and the cultural/arts agencies of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. With support, the Arts Community of Easton could become the lead agency. Numerous partner organizations may be considered as potential funding sources. As part of the initial evaluation of the feasibility of this program, GEDP should take the lead in evaluating potential deal structures/ funding mechanisms in association with partner organizations and assistance from real estate and arts consultants.
- The visitor marketing strategy should build on and coordinate the existing efforts of regional and local agencies and attractions involved in marketing, with the Lehigh Valley Convention and Visitors Bureau a logical candidate to lead the strategy.

### B.3 Strategic Initiative: Increased CBD Employment

A variety of strategies should be pursued to reinforce Easton's role as a regional employment center. Most notably, these strategies will require that various levels of government – city, county, and state – commit to public policies focused on this outcome. For example, this could include a County Executive Order that key county agencies such as the court system be retained in downtown Easton. The objective is to retain existing (and attract future) key anchor tenants that, in turn, will attract various private sector professional services tenants, such as legal, accounting, insurance, and real estate. As part of this effort, the city and GEDP should work with the county to increase interaction between the county complex and downtown businesses (e.g., by making employees and jurors aware of the dining and retail opportunities available in the CBD).

**B.3.1 *Undertake an industry cluster analysis.*** In order to define what types of office tenants could be attracted to Easton in the future, a joint effort should be launched involving the LVEDC, GEDP, the city, county and state governments, and other economic development partner organizations as appropriate to share in the cost of conducting an industry cluster analysis. The purpose of this analysis is to identify opportunities in specific employment growth sectors as a basis for recruiting office-using business and professional services tenancies designed to strengthen downtown office/commercial building occupancies. Integral to this effort is an understanding of future space needs and programming requirements of existing (and potentially future) government agencies and departments located in downtown Easton, which are the logical near- and mid-term anchors for strengthening the downtown office market. For example, as the county's court system grows, demand for professional office space oriented to professional and business services firms (legal, accounting, etc.) will grow as well. As demand for professional and business services firms grow, spin-off demand will be generated for supporting activities such as printing, off-site document records and storage, and supporting convenience and service retail (banks, dry cleaners, coffee shops, etc).

**B.3.2 *Marketing – develop and implement a business recruitment strategy.*** An outcome of the industry cluster analysis will be a candidate list of potential employment growth sectors (by North American Industrial Classification System [NAICS] codes) that are forecast to grow in two identified time periods (0-5 years and 5-10 years). Working in conjunction with the partner organizations, a business recruitment strategy should be prepared to reach candidate businesses and firms in selected NAICS sectors within specific geographic locations (e.g., Northeast Pennsylvania, north Jersey, metropolitan Philadelphia and New York, etc.). A variety of means can be used to reach prospective businesses and, for prospects where interest is viable, a negotiation process to identify candidate locations/buildings, space requirements, potential financing incentives and other terms should be undertaken. Specific business types will be identified as an outcome of the industry cluster analysis.

Business recruitment efforts should also be directed towards existing downtown businesses to determine their needs with the objective of ensuring that they remain and grow in the CBD. For example, attention to the quality-of-life issues

identified throughout this report will likely play a large part in the decision of existing businesses to remain (and expand) in the downtown.

**B.3.3 Capacity Building – build the organizational capabilities and incentives needed to promote increased downtown employment.** The initiatives identified above will require coordination between multiple public agencies and private players, including the city, county and state governments as well as GEDP, the Lehigh Valley Chamber of Commerce, and relevant economic development organizations such as the Easton Area Industrial Land Development Company. Others not known at this time may also participate. A fundamental element of a business recruitment strategy includes a clearly defined package of incentives “in the tool kit” with a wide degree of flexibility as well as consistent application to ensure their strongest possible effectiveness in attracting prospective businesses and tenants that are considering Easton. It is of critical importance that these incentives and other tools have sufficient “staying power” to enhance their use as a marketing tool as well. The mid-term business recruitment strategy should focus on the establishment of business and professional recruitment incentives such as gap financing, rent writedowns, and tenant fit-out assistance to induce demand, with a target range of 25,000 to 50,000 sq. ft. of office absorption over years two to four. Specific business types will be identified by the industry cluster analysis.

#### **B.4 Supporting Capital Investments**

Public sector capital investments should be targeted to reinforce quality-of-life improvements, improve the attractiveness of the CBD for residents and visitors, and support identified catalytic projects. The following projects are recommended as key investments to be implemented in the mid-term timeframe:

**B.4.1 Northampton Street/3<sup>rd</sup> Street – implement streetscape improvements connecting to Lafayette College’s 3<sup>rd</sup> Street corridor revitalization.** A partnership between the City of Easton, Lafayette College and Northampton County has implemented streetscape improvements to N. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street near Bushkill Creek. These improvements should be extended down 3<sup>rd</sup> Street into Centre Square and along Northampton Street. Elements such as historic light fixtures, brick sidewalks, and hanging flower baskets would encourage pedestrian activity and guide visitors between attractions such as the State Theatre, Two Rivers Landing, and the Williams Visual Arts Center. The GEDP through its Main Street Program is a logical entity to sponsor these improvements with the participation of other partners.

**B.4.2 Bushkill Creek Corridor – Implement recreational improvements connecting to Lafayette College’s 3<sup>rd</sup> Street corridor revitalization initiatives.** The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has committed a \$3 million grant for new trails and recreational improvements that will link the western end of the Bushkill Creek Corridor with the investments being made along N. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street. These trail improvements should connect seamlessly with the existing trails along the Delaware and Lehigh Rivers and eventually with the improved waterfront park proposed by Action C.1 below. As noted above (Action B.2.3), the Bushkill Creek recreational improvements will improve quality of life for downtown

residents and can help attract visitors to the CBD if marketed in conjunction with regional outdoor recreational opportunities. Lafayette College's recent investment in and current development plans for the N. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street/Snyder Street area will function as a lynchpin between the Bushkill Creek Corridor and the CBD, particularly if improvements are extended along 3<sup>rd</sup> Street to Centre Square per Action B.4.1.

- B.4.3 *Centre Square – Redesign as a community gathering/activity space.* Centre Square is a landmark public space situated prominently at the intersection of the main thoroughfares through the CBD. Despite the rich history of the square – the Declaration of Independence was read aloud here in 1776 and it has hosted a farmers' market since 1791 – the square today functions primarily as a traffic circle. The over-engineered system of stoplights and wide traffic lanes creates confusion for drivers and unsafe crossing conditions for pedestrians. Improvements to Centre Square can transform the space into an attractive destination for residents and visitors.

The Soldiers and Sailors monument stands majestically in the center of the square but the rest of the space is not well suited for civic and social gatherings. The interior of the square is cluttered with planters, light poles and electrical boxes. Dense foliage and high-backed brick benches make it difficult to see into the square. Walking paths through the square are set at diagonal angles to Northampton and Third Streets and do not correspond to the crosswalks, making it inconvenient for pedestrians to traverse the square. In order to function as a safe, civic gathering place, elements such as the brick benches and electrical boxes should be removed. By replacing much of the space occupied

#### B.4.5 US 22/N. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street Gateway – Implement gateway improvements and cleanup.

The US 22 gateway on N. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street is characterized by industrial uses, a confining highway embankment, and an uninviting overpass. Similar to the railroad bridge on S. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, this overpass would benefit from cleaning, lighting, and other improvements coordinated with the proposed streetscape improvements to N. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street (Action B.4.1). This is especially important to support increased interaction between the CBD and Lafayette College. Streetscape improvements along Snyder Street/US 22 between Bushkill Creek and the Delaware River would improve the image of this gateway as well.

### 4.4 Long-Term Actions (Year Five and Beyond)

#### C.1 Waterfront Development

*Develop a riverfront park along the Delaware and Lehigh Rivers, connecting to the Bushkill Creek corridor recreational improvements:* The confluence of the Lehigh and Delaware Rivers forms a beautiful scenic vista at the doorstep to the city, but this asset is underutilized. Today, the waterfront is divided from the CBD by a high-speed bypass road with parking lots to the west and a narrow park that is difficult to access along the riverfront to the east. In the short term, signalized crosswalks should be installed on Larry Holmes Drive near the US22 Bridge and at the confluence of the two rivers to provide access to the riverfront. Larry Holmes Drive should continue to serve as a truck route to bypass Centre Square, but travel speeds could be reduced in order to make it a more inviting environment. Low cost speed-reduction (traffic calming) techniques include the legalization of on-street parking and curb bump-outs.

Over time, Larry Holmes Drive could be redeveloped as a riverfront boulevard with trees, a landscaped median, historic light fixtures, and other streetscape improvements. On the landward side, mixed-use development could replace the marginal uses and surface parking lots as is underway with development of the Intermodal Transportation Facility on the Governor Wolf property and is proposed for the underutilized properties at the Lehigh River Gateway by Action C.2. On the water side, the existing park could be transformed into a pedestrian promenade with multi-use paths to replace the currently hidden trail along the river, with activities such as special events and food service overlooking the water. The objective should be to create a continuous waterfront park from the S. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street gateway along the Lehigh and Delaware Rivers, connecting to the recreational trails along Bushkill Creek (Action B.4.2). This improved riverfront park could become a “showpiece front yard” for the CBD and the City of Easton.

#### C.2 Lehigh River Gateway Redevelopment

*Target underutilized properties in the vicinity of Larry Holmes Drive for residential/mixed-use redevelopment:* The S. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street/Larry Holmes Drive intersection at the southern end of the CBD is framed by a hotel of marginal quality and low-level, automobile-oriented commercial uses. These single-story, single-use buildings do little to project the image of the historic downtown that exists only a block to the north. In the long term, the properties at this major gateway to the CBD could be assembled and redeveloped as an attractive mixed-use neighborhood (e.g., ground floor retail with residential and office uses above). Floodplain issues could be addressed by elevating

residential uses above the 100-year flood elevation with parking and nonresidential uses below. Additionally, the property on the west side of S. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street between Washington Street and the Lehigh River could be redeveloped as a waterfront park that anchors the end of the Larry Holmes Drive “riverfront boulevard” (Action C.1). The elevated rail line that traverses the property could be integrated into the park design to evoke Easton’s industrial heritage. The Lehigh River Gateway Redevelopment could be moved to the mid-term timeframe if significant developer interest emerges.

### C.3 Passenger Rail Service

*Establish passenger rail service from New York City/Northern New Jersey to Easton:*

Easton’s proximity to New York and Northern New Jersey is a valuable asset that should be preserved and enhanced. Easy access to Interstate 78 and frequent bus service between Easton and New York make the city a more desirable location for residential development. In order to maintain and improve this important transportation corridor, which is experiencing increasing congestion due to growth in the region, Easton should work to re-establish passenger rail service between the Lehigh Valley and the New York area.

Passenger rail service in the I-78 corridor will provide many benefits for Easton and the region. Rail will offer fast and reliable journey times that are attractive for commuters and employers. Easton residents will gain reliable access to employment opportunities throughout the region. Likewise, rail service will be an asset that attracts workers and jobs to downtown Easton. Finally, passenger rail service will make Easton a more visible and accessible tourism destination for New Yorkers and others with disposable income seeking a weekend getaway via an alternative means of transportation.

While the actual implementation of rail service is a long-term action, there are immediate opportunities for Easton to get involved in the planning process. The North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority recently commenced the I-78 Corridor Transit Study. The first phase of the study will investigate whether park & ride facilities and improved bus service can mitigate the need to widen the highway. Phase II of the study will determine the feasibility of extending the NJ Transit Raritan Valley rail line to Phillipsburg/Easton. Easton can work with the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission, PennDOT, the Lehigh and Northampton Transportation Authority (LANTA), and the Town of Phillipsburg – all of whom are represented on the project’s steering committee – to promote rail service to Phillipsburg/Easton.

## 4.5 Action Plan Responsibilities

In order for the action plan to be successful, the roles of the various agencies involved in revitalization of Easton’s CBD will need to be clearly defined and partnerships established that leverage the resources and abilities of the agencies to the maximum extent possible. Action A.2.1 recommends that GEDP convene an economic development summit with all potential partners to present the plan and discuss roles and responsibilities in implementation. Table 22 provides a starting point for this discussion by identifying potential lead entities and supporting partners for the action plan items.

Consistent with its mission, the GEDP is envisioned as a catalyst for downtown revitalization by initiating actions such as a unified marketing strategy and development projects that

ultimately may be carried out by others with the appropriate capabilities and resources. Nevertheless, it is evident from the comprehensive scope of the action plan that GEDP will require increased staffing and resources in order to lead and coordinate the overall effort as well as numerous individual actions. This may include consideration of a Business Improvement District as a sustainable source of funding to replace the five-year Main Street Program as revitalization increases economic activity in the downtown. The City of Easton must also provide leadership and (despite fiscal constraints) be prepared to commit resources to 1) aggressively addressing quality of life issues in the CBD and 2) providing incentives to facilitate catalytic development projects. The LVEDC, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and others will also play an important role through funding programs and technical or administrative support. For example, the LVEDC, which has provided financial support for GEDP including funding for this plan, will need to continue its support by targeting economic development resources towards the priorities identified in the action plan. Northampton County, which also contributed funding for this plan, should be prepared to support specific economic development initiatives.

While not specifically noted in the Action Plan Responsibilities table, involvement of the private and non-profit sectors will be essential to successful implementation. Public/private partnerships with developers will be necessary to move forward with the catalytic projects. Downtown businesses, financial institutions, the faith-based community, social service organizations, and others all have roles to play in various actions ranging from addressing quality-of-life issues to supporting physical improvements in the CBD.

#### **4.6 Plan Monitoring**

If the CBD Economic Development Plan is to continue to be valuable and useful over time, it is important to develop methods to monitor its effectiveness and keep it current as implementation moves forward, circumstances change, and new information becomes available. The Action Plan focuses on building capacity for implementation during the first year, coupled with addressing crucial quality-of-life (Action A.1) and marketing/communications (Action A.3) issues. Capacity building includes:

- Securing agreements on the roles and responsibilities of the various organizations and the partnerships to be used in implementation, starting with a downtown economic development summit (Action A.2.1);
- Revising the city's development and land use regulations and procedures to facilitate desired types of development (Action A.2.2);
- Developing a complete property database and an ongoing system to obtain critical market data (Action A.2.3); and
- Identifying financial and other incentives (Action A.2.4) to be used to "jump-start" selected catalytic projects (Action A.4).

At the end of the first year GEDP should review the progress made in implementing the above actions and define a work schedule designed to achieve the three strategic initiatives (market-rate housing, increased visitation, and increased CBD employment) over the subsequent four years, using the mid-term actions outlined in this plan as guidance. The work schedule should define the specific actions to be taken (including the selected catalytic projects), responsible parties, and incentive/funding sources based on the results

of the capacity-building activities during the first year. It will likely include additional or ongoing actions needed to build capacity, as well as continuing programs to address quality-of-life issues and communicate positive developments in the CBD to residents of Easton, the region, and beyond. Subsequent plan monitoring should track progress made in implementing this work schedule as follows:

1. Annually assess progress made on each specific action during the previous year.
2. Measure progress in achieving the strategic initiatives based on defined indicators.
3. Develop a revised work schedule of actions to be carried out over the next five-year period based on the previous two steps.
4. Conduct a more comprehensive assessment of progress made and update the CBD Economic Development Plan every five years, or more frequently as circumstances dictate.

To the extent possible, statistical indicators should be used to measure progress in achieving the strategic initiatives. The plan suggests several mid-term planning targets tied to these initiatives, including 100-150 new housing units, 8-10 restaurant operators (a minimum of 20,000 sq. ft.), and 25,000-50,000 sq. ft. of new office space. These targets will need to be revisited and additional indicators of economic and market performance developed based on the market data tracking system developed during the first year. Visitation, which is typically tracked by organizations such as the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor as well as by individual attractions, can be used to monitor progress in achieving the "Increased Visitation" strategic initiative.

#### **4.7 Funding Sources**

Potential funding sources for revitalization and redevelopment initiatives in Easton's CBD will vary by source, amount, and type of project as well as public policy objectives and authorizing legislation enacted by the City of Easton, County of Northampton, LVEDC, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the federal government in economic development initiatives such as Enterprise Zones. There is a comprehensive array of business financing programs available, ranging from education/training assistance to environmental support services to redevelopment incentives. Many programs are focused on industrial development, but several programs administered through the LVEDC may be used for specific downtown redevelopment projects. Examples of potential funding sources for specific revitalization initiatives in Easton's CBD include:

- Land sale or land lease proceeds from the sale of publicly-owned land
- Municipal/state grants such as those offered by the Pennsylvania Economic Development Financing Authority (PEDFA) taxable bond program
- Special below-market rate second mortgages
- Tax Increment Financing (TIF) approaches
- Special assessment districts
- Revolving loan funds such as HUD's Section 108 loan guarantees
- Other financial initiatives such as pooled loan reserves, tax abatements (e.g., as available through the Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance Act, or LERTA), bank community development corporations, federal New Market Tax Credits, etc.
- Historic preservation tax credits available for renovation of eligible historic buildings

- Grants for heritage development projects available through the Delaware and Lehigh National and State Heritage Corridor
- Other approaches, as determined

For example, the LVEDC administers a regional loan pool for firms looking to locate or expand in Easton, Bethlehem and Allentown for emerging growth companies, commercial real estate, business expansion and retention and entrepreneurial businesses. Funding can be used for land and building acquisition, building renovation, or machinery and equipment. The minimum loan pool amount is \$100,000 with a maximum ceiling of \$2 million. The loan pool may be used to finance up to a maximum of 40% of total project costs.

It may be useful to have the LVEDC, in partnership with GEDP, serve as a clearinghouse for the many financing programs offered through various public agencies in the Lehigh Valley. GEDP's role, in partnership with the city, would be to assist eligible applicants in targeting appropriate financial incentives and to guide the applicant through the process.

Table 22. Action Plan Responsibilities

Action	Potential Lead	Potential Partners
<b>2.2.2 Economic and Regulatory Capacity Building</b>		
A.1 Quality of Life	City	GEDP
A.2.1 Organizational Capacity Building	GEDP	LVEDC, EAILD, ERA, GLVCC, County
A.2.2 Regulatory Capacity Building	City	GEDP, County
A.2.3 Data Collection and Monitoring	LVEDC	GEDP, GLVCC, Lafayette
A.2.4 Financial / Regulatory Incentives	City, GEDP	PA, LVEDC
A.3 Unified Marketing Strategy	GEDP	LVCVB, LVEDC, Crayola Factory, D&LNHC, State Theatre
A.4 Catalytic Project Initiation	GEDP	City, LVEDC, GLVCC, EAILD, ERA
<b>3.2 High Quality Visitor Experience</b>		
B.1.1 Market-Rate Housing: Project Development	GEDP	City, ERA
B.1.2 Market-Rate Housing: Capacity Building	GEDP	City, ERA
B.1.3 Market-Rate Housing: Marketing	GEDP	City, LVEDC, GLVCC, Lafayette
B.2.1 Visitor Enhancement: Retail Recruitment	GEDP	City, ERA, GLVCC
B.2.2 Visitor Enhancement: Artist Recruitment	ACE	GEDP, City, ERA
B.2.3 Visitor Enhancement: Marketing	LVCVB	Crayola Factory, D&LNHC, State Theatre, City, GEDP, LVEDC
B.2.4 Visitor Enhancement: Capacity Building	GEDP	City, ERA, Crayola Factory, D&LNHC, State Theatre, ACE, LVCVB, County
B.3.1 Employment: Industry Cluster Analysis	LEVDC	Chamber of Commerce, EAILDC, GEDP, County, PA
B.3.2 Employment: Marketing	GEDP	GLVCC, EAILDC, LVEDC
B.3.3 Employment: Capacity Building	GEDP	City, GLVCC, EAILDC, LVEDC, PA, County
B.4.1 Northampton St. / N 3 <sup>rd</sup> St Streetscape Improvements	GEDP	City, Lafayette, PA, PennDOT, County
B.4.2 Bushkill Creek Corridor Recreational Improvements	City	Lafayette, PA, D&LNHC, County
B.4.3 Centre Square Redesign	GEDP	City, PennDOT, County
B.4.4 S 3 <sup>rd</sup> St / Lehigh River Bridge Gateway Improvements	GEDP	City, County
B.4.5 US 22 / N 3 <sup>rd</sup> St Gateway Improvements	GEDP	City, County
<b>4.0 Transportation and Park Development</b>		
C.1 Waterfront Development: Riverfront Park	City	PA, County, DRJTBC
C.2 Lehigh River Gateway Development	GEDP	City, EAILDC, ERA
C.3 Passenger Rail Service	NJTPA, LVPC	PennDOT, City, LANTA

Note: See page 85 for a key to acronyms used in the table.

**Table 22 Action Plan Responsibilities (cont.)****Acronyms**

ACE = Arts Community of Easton

City = City of Easton

County = Northampton County

D&LNHC = Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor

DRJTBC = Delaware River Joint Toll Bridge Commission

EAILDC = Easton Area Industrial Land Development Company

ERA = Easton Redevelopment Authority

GEDP = Greater Easton Development Partnership

GLVCC = Greater Lehigh Valley Chamber of Commerce

Lafayette = Lafayette College

LANTA = Lehigh and Northampton Transportation Authority

LVCVB = Lehigh Valley Convention and Visitors Bureau

LVEDC = Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation

LVPC = Lehigh Valley Planning Commission

NJTPA = North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority

PA = Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

PennDOT = Pennsylvania Department of Transportation