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City of Frederick

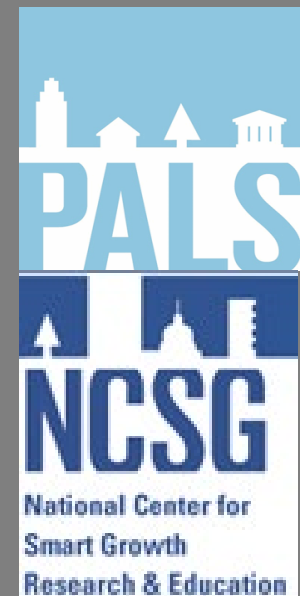
The Golden Mile

Outreach and Engagement to Immigrant and
Minority-Owned Businesses

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PALS- Partnership for
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Executive Summary

As a part of Partnership for Action Learning in Sustainability (PALS) project, our team focused on examining issues and problems faced by the Small and Immigrant Owned Businesses along The Golden Mile corridor. During a four month period, we opted a planning process which includes researching relevant literatures, previous reports, and as well as door to door business survey and interview with community leaders.

We also provided some basic information about city's redevelopment process so that residents, business communities and other stakeholders learned about issues and opportunities related to The Golden Mile so that they could themselves take initiatives to discuss about a shared vision of The Golden Mile and contribute in developing strategies for its long term sustainability vitality.

In our opinion, The Golden Mile corridor has a good mix of social and economic challenges, and great opportunities. One of the great characteristic of this place that set this area apart from many other US communities is its ethnic diversity, which we believe is one of the greatest strengths of The City of Frederick. However, we learned that there is a reasonable amount of fear and confusion within the community in viewing immigrants and about the future of The Golden Mile corridor. Despite all these issues, businesses we reached out to expressed their desire to one, learn more about the redevelopment plan and two, a desire for The Golden Mile corridor to be revamped into a vibrant commercial and cultural destination.

There are some disconnections between business communities and The City of Frederick. Many business communities are not aware about City's planning process nor is it visible to these businesses that the City established a meaningful path to reach out them. We identified this viewpoint as a major challenge which both the City and the immigrant and minority business community on The Golden Mile have resolve together.

The key findings of our research, study and outreach processes are as follows:

1. There are disconnections and communication gap between the business communities and The City of Frederick.
2. Many of the immigrant and minority owned business owners we spoke with felt underrepresented in The Golden Mile Alliance.
3. There is a clear need for the involvement of local community based organizations which can play an intermediary role between the City and local business communities.
4. There is a need of an entity that specifically delves on the issues and problems related to immigrant owned small businesses for their retention and expansion outside of The Golden Mile.
5. There must be a great commitment and will on the part of all key stakeholders – the government and business owners to redevelop The

- Golden Mile Corridor so that economic development efforts benefit all business owners, immigrants and minority owners included,
6. There is a need for a humanized urban design plan for the area so that businesses are interconnected to each other, pedestrians are safe crossing, and cars can easily navigate the roadway.

Therefore the successes of a plan will largely depend on how above listed issues are addressed.

Summary of our recommendations are as follows:

Communication:

- To build strong communication, The City of Frederick should make full use of in house, readily available tools to reach out to the business communities. Website, Social Media, e-newsletter and periodic brochures could be used to start with.
- The City of Frederick can create in-house team or department to reach out the business communities.

Incentivize:

- Make sure small businesses, especially immigrant communities are aware of various low interest loans and tax incentives programs.
- City should establish a department that can handle various issues related to immigrant owned small Business.
- City should organize functions so that immigrant owned business can take pride of being part of the community, for example, prizes, recognition for best businesses during various festivals and holiday season.

Cultural Planning

- City should also be more sensitive towards immigrant's arts, culture, foods and planned according to their cultural needs so that it helps in creating more "Just City."

I. Introduction

A. Purpose of the Project:

The purpose of this project was to gain an understanding of the needs minority and immigrant-owned businesses along The Golden Mile and to prepare and inform them of the coming changes due to the City's plans for redevelopment. The project was completed in partnership with PALS as part of a graduate-level Urban Planning course at the University of Maryland, College Park. Students in Planning for a Multicultural Metropolis engaged in the research under the guidance of Professor Willow Lung-Amam.

B. Community Partnerships:

PALS is administered by the National Center for Smart Growth and a campus-wide initiative that aims to combine UMD faculty's professional skills with the ingenuity of UMD students to improve Maryland's communities social, physical and economic conditions in a sustainable way.

Further important partnerships consisted of the Asian American Center of Frederick (AACF) and Centro Hispano de Frederick (Centro), who were integral parts of this process. For the last ten years, the AACF has worked to improve the lives of Asians and other minority groups living in and around Frederick County. The center offers a range of services and events, including interpretation services, assistance in obtaining citizenship, language and culture education programs, health advocacy and outreach programs, and much more. Likewise, Centro Hispano de Frederick is dedicated to assisting the Latino/Hispanic population in Frederick, offering English language classes and legal assistance.

C. Background of The Golden Mile:

The Route 40 West corridor, known as The Golden Mile was once a vital gateway of The City of Frederick. The history can be traced back several centuries. Early in the history of the U.S. the State of Maryland established a network of turnpikes for long-distance travel. Three of these would later serve as part of Route 40. What was once a sleepy two lane state highway, Route 40 proved to be an important economic engine and a major commuter route within The City of Frederick.

The city experienced an economic boom during the early 1970s. In October 1976, The City of Frederick and Frederick County suffered a great flood. The downtown area began to languish behind. The city was able to foresee a much brighter future for Downtown Frederick. With the redevelopment plans of the downtown area, many businesses began to relocate from The Golden Mile or go out of business altogether. The area suffered the loss of key retailers due corporate bankruptcy, and the perception of decline in this area made it difficult to attract new retailers to the area. As a result, The City of Frederick formed a task force in 2001 to address these concerns. Though many businesses continued to thrive, further decline was on the horizon without a proactive approach to this issue. The task force looked at the root

causes, and searched for ways to promote, reinvestment and revitalization along The Golden Mile corridor.

According to the 2010 U.S. census, there were 65,239 people residing in The City of Frederick. The city's population grew by 23.6 percent in the ten years since the 2000 census, making it the fastest growing incorporated area in the state of Maryland with a population of over 50,000 for 2010.

Part of this growth is related to the minority group growth. The 2010 census data shows the city's Hispanic population is 9,402, a 271 percent increase compared with 2,533 in 2000. This makes Hispanics/Latinos the fastest growing race group in The City and Frederick county. The City of Frederick had 3,800 Asian residents in 2010, a 128 percent increase from the city's 1,664 Asian residents in 2000. The city's black of African-American population increased 56 percent from 7,777 in 2000 to 12,144 in 2010.

II. Process

A. Initial Phase

This project relies on the gathering of primary information from business owners and community leaders along The Golden Mile. Students used business surveys and scripted interviews to gather information for this project. Prior to starting our community outreach and research, we began familiarizing ourselves with some of the planning initiatives in Frederick and some of the challenges that have already been identified in this community.

Familiarizing Ourselves with Frederick and The Golden Mile:

In order to begin learning about the planning challenges facing The Golden Mile, we reviewed existing city plans including The Golden Mile Retail Report (2009) and The Golden Mile Small Area Report (2013). We also reviewed the results from city surveys the General, Business Owner, and Property Owner survey results. Finally, we took part in a tour organized through PALS to orient us with The City of Frederick. City planners gave us a tour and a brief overview of the city, its infrastructure, The Golden Mile, and some of the development initiatives in the surrounding communities outside of the city center. Stops on the tour included the Frederick Airport, a walk through the historic downtown and Frederick Town Mall. The mall is located along The Golden Mile, was an economic engine for the area. Since it's closing, the community has been eagerly awaiting for something to replace it. In addition to the readings and site visits, we met with a representative from the Asian American Center of Frederick who gave us insight into the immigrant community and immigrant owned businesses along The Golden Mile.

Draft surveys and interview scripts were developed by Dr. Willow Lung-Amam. These were approved by the Internal Review Board at the University of Maryland. Once these were approved, students were given the opportunity to critique and

discuss how these questions could be improved upon for this particular community and for this particular exercise.

As a part of our coursework, students read several articles about the process and approach to conducting one on one interviews and surveys when working with communities. Our class spent several sessions discussing the strengths and weaknesses of these different approaches and reviewing the survey and interview questions that had been developed. Students had the opportunity to make suggestions for how to tailor the questions in ways that would create more opportunities for sharing. Given that we are working with a largely immigrant community, students worked to ensure that the surveys and interview scripts were designed in ways to avoid alienating or making business owners unnecessarily anxious about or threatened by revealing information about their stores, their personal biographies or their experience doing business along The Golden Mile.

Working together with representatives from our community partners (AACF and Centro), we identified over 100 businesses along The Golden Mile as being minority owned or immigrant owned businesses. These businesses tended to be small store fronts like restaurants, grocery stores, convenience stores, etc... catering to the local immigrant community. In addition, 24 community leaders were initially identified for the one-on-one interviews. This process became somewhat iterative as the project got underway – in some cases additional community leaders were added to the initial list when students had difficulty getting in contact with the leaders due to lack of response or out-of-date contact information.

Working in teams of two, students were assigned a list of 15 to 18 businesses to visit with the business survey. In addition, each member of the class was assigned two community leaders to interview one –on-one. Students picked their own groups (two students per group); these choices were largely based on pairing students who had a car and those who didn't to ensure that all groups could travel to Frederick to complete the outreach. Each pair coordinated with a staff person from either Centro Hispano de Frederick or Asian American Center of Frederick. These staff members served as ambassadors within the community – to help students connect with community leaders and to help students during the survey process.

B. Conducting Research

1. Surveys:

Each pair of students arranged a time to travel to Frederick and visit each business door to door. These visits were unannounced and informal. Most of the groups were able to coordinate with a volunteer staff member from either Centro Hispano de Frederick or Asian American Center of Frederick. These volunteers served, in some

cases, as a familiar face when walking into businesses. In some cases they also offered translation assistance.

Due to the distance for most students, a majority of the groups conducted this research in one day visit. Students visited each business and asked to speak with the owner. If an owner was unavailable, students asked if a manager or staff person was willing to speak with them. Students introduced themselves and offered a brief explanation of the project and our efforts to reach small business owners along The Golden Mile. After this introduction, students asked if the individual would be willing to spend a few minutes talking and answering questions. Students took notes and filled out the survey while talking to each individual.

Each pair of students took it upon themselves to figure out how they were most comfortable asking the questions – some stuck to the exact script, while other rearranged the order of questions. For example, on the printed survey, one of the first questions was about the respondent's ethnicity and/or country of origin. For many groups, they felt that this put the respondent on edge in the very beginning of the interview. Instead, students felt that they received a better response and better interview in which everyone felt more comfortable, if they asked this question towards the end, after a rapport had been established.

In cases that staff or owners expressed that they were unwilling or uncomfortable being interviewed; students left the PALS bag which held all of the information and resources. Students also left a copy of the survey and asked owners to get in touch if they wanted to follow up later. In situations where the owners or staff members were willing to answer questions, students spent about 10 to 15 minutes talking with the individual and taking notes. Students also share the PALS bag with each respondent with a blank survey. No businesses followed up on their own to ask questions or to return a filled out survey.

2. Interviews with Community Leaders:

Centro Hispano de Frederick and Asian American Center of Frederick representatives helped to identify community leaders for our interviews. These interviews were intended to provide a more in depth perspective on the development along The Golden Mile and throughout Frederick. Leaders were identified within the immigrant and business community, faith-based community, community providers, government officials, and also included local politicians and nonprofit leaders.

Students coordinated these interviews on an individual basis – each reaching out to two assigned community leaders. Students approached this in different ways; some contacted their leader by email and some by telephone. When it was possible, students met face to face with their community leader, but in some cases had to rely on telephone interviews. Students recorded these interviews and then took notes to summarize the themes discussed in the interview. For some students, the community leader interviews offered a more detailed assessment of the business

climate along The Golden Mile.

III. Reflecting on the Process

This report has been completed by the first of two class in a year-long partnership with PALS and the community partners. Moving forward into the second semester of the partnership, there are some key lessons learned.

The accelerated schedule of the research did not allow each working group to interview each of the business owners and community partners on their respective lists. During the second portion of the research effort, it will be important to build on the relationships that have been created. The community partners at both the Centro Hispano de Frederick and the Asian American Center of Frederick will be integral in this effort.

Overall, the working relationship with the Centro Hispano de Frederick and the Asian American Center of Frederick were very helpful in conducting the interviews. The level of trust that the staff of these two community resources has with business owners permitted a level of comfort during the interviews. In some cases, interviews would not have occurred at all without the existing relationships of our partners. By demonstrating that the University of Maryland students were trusted by these community partners, the business owners were more open to sharing their information and thoughts about The Golden Mile.

The large number of interviews necessitated the class to break up into smaller working groups of two students each. This strategy proved to be effective, as it minimized the amount of logistical coordination and increased the flexibility of each team. Pairing the independent group-work with frequent check-ins as an entire class provided a solid foundation of cross-group sharing and learning.

Much of the difficulty in surveying immigrant-owned businesses can be attributed to a lack of trust with the researchers. In terms of community leader interviews, there was difficulty in coordinating times. When the community partners were not available, business owners tended to be less willing to participate in the survey. However, this was not true all of the time, as some business were agreeable and shared their thoughts on The Golden Mile. At times, language barriers posed challenges in completing surveys with business owners. In other instances, the business owners were not present or the staff at the businesses were too busy to participate. For community leaders, the interview process was successful except for instances where it was too difficult to coordinate availability.

Moving forward, the research process could be improved by selecting work-groups with the goal of spreading the class's diverse language skills and backgrounds. Due to different cultural norms, it is recommended to split up genders among the work-groups and to spread cultural backgrounds and language skills. This will improve the overall ability of the work-groups to communicate effectively when interviewing business owners of diverse backgrounds. That said, was also important to ensure that each work-group had access to an automobile. This logistical consideration

should not be compromised when creating diverse working groups.

IV. Outcome

A. Analysis

Our outcome is based on completed surveys from small business owners and recorded audio of the community leader interviews. After our class visited The City of Frederick and completed these surveys and interviews, we have valuable responses from the business owners and community leaders in The Golden Mile corridor.

Several common themes can be found throughout the surveys. The surveys found that many businesses desire facade improvements as well as increased signage on Route 40. Many business owners also voiced concerns of the safety of the area. Business owners would like more direct contact with the City. However, there was a general sentiment of skepticism about planning efforts. Several business owners also expressed a level of discomfort with planning meetings and others felt they were a waste of time.

Most business owners had heard of redevelopment generally but did not know the specifics or whether it would affect them. While there were no questions specifically asking about this aspect, many business owners spoke up about the new Wal-Mart. If the business owners had heard about redevelopment, it was usually limited to the coming construction of the Wal-Mart so it was a common theme that came up. Among the business owners, there were mixed opinions about this development. Some felt that the Wal-Mart could bring more potential customers to the area and others felt that the Wal-Mart would represent competition. The type of business was often related to the sentiments expressed by the owner. Retail businesses felt concern of losing customers to Wal-Mart while many businesses in the service sector felt optimistic that they could benefit.

The responses from the interviews with the community leaders have shown that the City and planners in Frederick have attempted outreach but that there is still a disconnect. Some community leaders felt that this could be due to an inability to focus on engaging with the City while they are just trying to get by. The community leaders also reported that there is a disconnect between the County and the City in terms of their views of immigrants and The Golden Mile. Also, community leaders echoed business owners' fears that they cannot compete with Wal-Mart. They felt that the City needs to provide economic assistance, marketing and mentoring. The City should translate planning documents and information about the redevelopment into the most common foreign languages spoken in The Golden Mile. The community leaders said that the City should also seek to engage minority and immigrant-run small businesses through local community organizations, such as Centro and the AACF. A large number of the responses show that traffic congestion and crime are discouraging people from coming to The Golden Mile. The

community leaders often expressed an appreciation for the diversity present along The Golden Mile but rarely frequented many of the businesses.

B. Recommendations

Using the information gathered through the interviews and surveys, several recommendations have been formed to prepare and assist the small businesses along The Golden Mile as plans for redevelopment progress. Creating a safety plan for The Golden Mile would help alleviate concerns expressed by the business owners. Safety and ease-of-access for pedestrians should also be ensured and improved where necessary. Several business owners reported that some of their customers walk to get there. Improved pedestrian infrastructure and more convenient pedestrian access will increase the safety of customers who walk and encourage more pedestrians to visit businesses along The Golden Mile.

In response to concerns about rising rents and the need for marketing and other business improvements, The City of Frederick should seek to provide assistance in these areas. The lack of adequate, visible signs for businesses means the loss of potential customers traveling along The Golden Mile. The City of Frederick should create an easier process to change or add signage to buildings and shopping center marquees. The City of Frederick should also provide a method for providing assistance to qualified businesses along The Golden Mile for funding improvements of this kind.

In order to help these businesses, The City of Frederick must attempt to foster more contact with the owners. The City of Frederick should change their policy on languages to become more inclusive. The City of Frederick should also maintain a complete and up-to-date database of the businesses. Several of the small businesses we attempted to visit were out of business. The organizations that we worked with, AACF and Centro, should act as intermediaries to help the City reach these businesses. This requires that the City work closely with these groups but gains the knowledge and access that these groups have regarding the small, minority-owned businesses along The Golden Mile.

V. Conclusion

In order to develop a strong understanding of the critical issues that would impact The Golden Mile corridor, our community outreach process focused on exploring various issues faced by businesses on a day-to-day basis. In addition, our objective was to learn how they defined their problems so that we can incorporate their local knowledge, their cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and their first-hand experience in framing our strategic recommendations. One specific thing we learned from these planning and outreach strategies is that the person-to-person connection is critical for building up trust, and luckily our diverse student team has been able to establish a good connection with the local businesses and community leaders. The Asian American Center of Frederick and Centro Hispano de Frederick both played a great role in facilitating our outreach process. We firmly believe that organizations that have strong connections with the community can play an instrumental role in building a connection within the diverse communities, as well as with the various departments of The City of Frederick and that many local community leaders we reach out to have a similar opinion.

The City of Frederick is rich in cultural diversity. This diversity could be a great engine for The City of Frederick in overall development. Currently, small and immigrant-owned businesses maintain a very skeptical view of the City's planning programs; however, they are fairly optimistic about the future of The Golden Mile area. Individual community leaders as well as business communities that we reach out to during the process, expressed that the city needs to play a proactive role in their community outreach initiatives and that the city should focus on making such initiatives more inclusive so it could foster trust among various stakeholders. During interviews, community leaders expressed that the City needs to play a more proactive role in its community outreach initiatives. Making such initiatives more inclusive could foster trust among various stakeholders. Moreover, working with community partners, such as the Asian American Center of Frederick, Centro Hispano de Frederick and The Golden Mile Alliance should play an instrumental role in the process, eliminating the fear and skepticism that exists in the community. Despite their lack of communication with the City, the business owners have an opinion about what happens in The Golden Mile.

It is our team's opinion that a broad level of public outreach is imperative for both the plan making and plan implementation processes. Such inclusive processes would provide a guiding framework to the City government, elected representatives, community leaders, residents, business communities and other key stakeholders. Though it is a great challenge in itself, The City of Frederick should focus not only on short term tax base expansion, but also should focus on potential conflicts that might develop because of unequal distribution of city incentives, scale and nature of immigrant owned business versus big box businesses like Wal-Mart. Therefore, the City needs to work together with the small businesses and immigrant-owned business for the City's long term vitality.

Additionally, city planners should focus not only on future plans, but also on how to hear the opinions of those who make their livelihoods along The Golden

Mile. Planners should consider that their planning decisions have implications on the day-to-day realities of business-owners and residents of The Golden Mile.

We believe our work provides a guiding document and sets a stage for future planning initiatives for The Golden Mile corridor and The City of Frederick.