

TOGETHER  
**NORTH  
JERSEY.**

CONNECTING  
PEOPLE, PLACES,  
AND  
POTENTIAL.

# PERTH AMBOY BAY CITY TRANSIT DISTRICT STRATEGY

**A LOCAL DEMONSTRATION PROJECT**

**DECEMBER 2013**



## PROJECT PARTNERS



City of Perth Amboy



Middlesex County



Jewish Renaissance Foundation



NJ TRANSIT

## PROJECT TEAM



EE&K a Perkins Eastman Company



Fitzgerald & Halliday



HR&A Advisors

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## ABOUT TOGETHER NORTH JERSEY

In November 2011, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) awarded TOGETHER NORTH JERSEY (aka, North Jersey Sustainable Communities Consortium) a \$5 million Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant. The grant is matched with an additional \$5 million in leveraged funds from project partners. Grant funds have been used to implement the Local Demonstration Project (LDP) Program, develop a Regional Plan for Sustainable Development (RPSD) for the 13-county planning region (pictured to the right), and provide technical assistance and offer education opportunities that build the capacity of jurisdictions, organizations and the public to advance sustainability projects and initiatives.

The plan is both “place-based” and “issue-based” and uses sustainability, transit system connectivity and Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) as the central framework for integrating plans, regulations, investments, and incentive programs at all levels of government to improve economic and environmental conditions, while promoting regional equity and resource efficiency. For more information, please visit [togethernorthjersey.com](http://togethernorthjersey.com)

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 13 County Governments in the NJTPA Region
- Edward J. Bloustein School for Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers University
- North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA)
- NJ TRANSIT
- NJ Office of Planning Advocacy (NJOPA)
- Housing and Community Development Network of New Jersey (HCDN-NJ)
- Sustainability Institute/Sustainable Jersey at The College of New Jersey
- NJ Future
- Building One New Jersey
- PlanSmart NJ
- Regional Plan Association (RPA)

The work that provided the basis for this report was supported by funding under an award from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The substance and findings of the work are dedicated to the public. The authors of the report are solely responsible for the accuracy of the data, statements and interpretations



contained in this document. Such statements and interpretations do not necessarily reflect the views the Together North Jersey Steering Committee or its individual members or any other agency or instrumentality of Government.



## ABOUT THE LOCAL DEMONSTRATION PROJECT PROGRAM

The Local Demonstration Project (LDP) Program seeks to advance specific projects, initiatives, and other investments for local communities to achieve short-term, implementable projects which are consistent with the RPSD goals and program outcomes.

The LDP Program provides technical assistance for strategic planning studies focused on designated areas or corridors associated with established or anticipated transit services and/or facilities. Eligible LDP projects will be sponsored by municipalities, counties, non-governmental organizations, community development corporations, and other interested organizations.

These demonstration projects help to identify partnering opportunities, milestones, and potential funding sources and serve as a model for future initiatives.

Please visit [togethernorthjersey.com](http://togethernorthjersey.com) to learn more

### 12 KEY ISSUES

The range of issues faced by the communities within the Region in positioning themselves for a more sustainable future is broad. The Local Demonstration Project program as a whole will attempt to engage all of the the major policy issues that have been identified in

recent years, as seen in the adjacent diagram. Each project of the LDP program will address Land Use and Transportation at its core and will identify several primary issues as the project's focus.



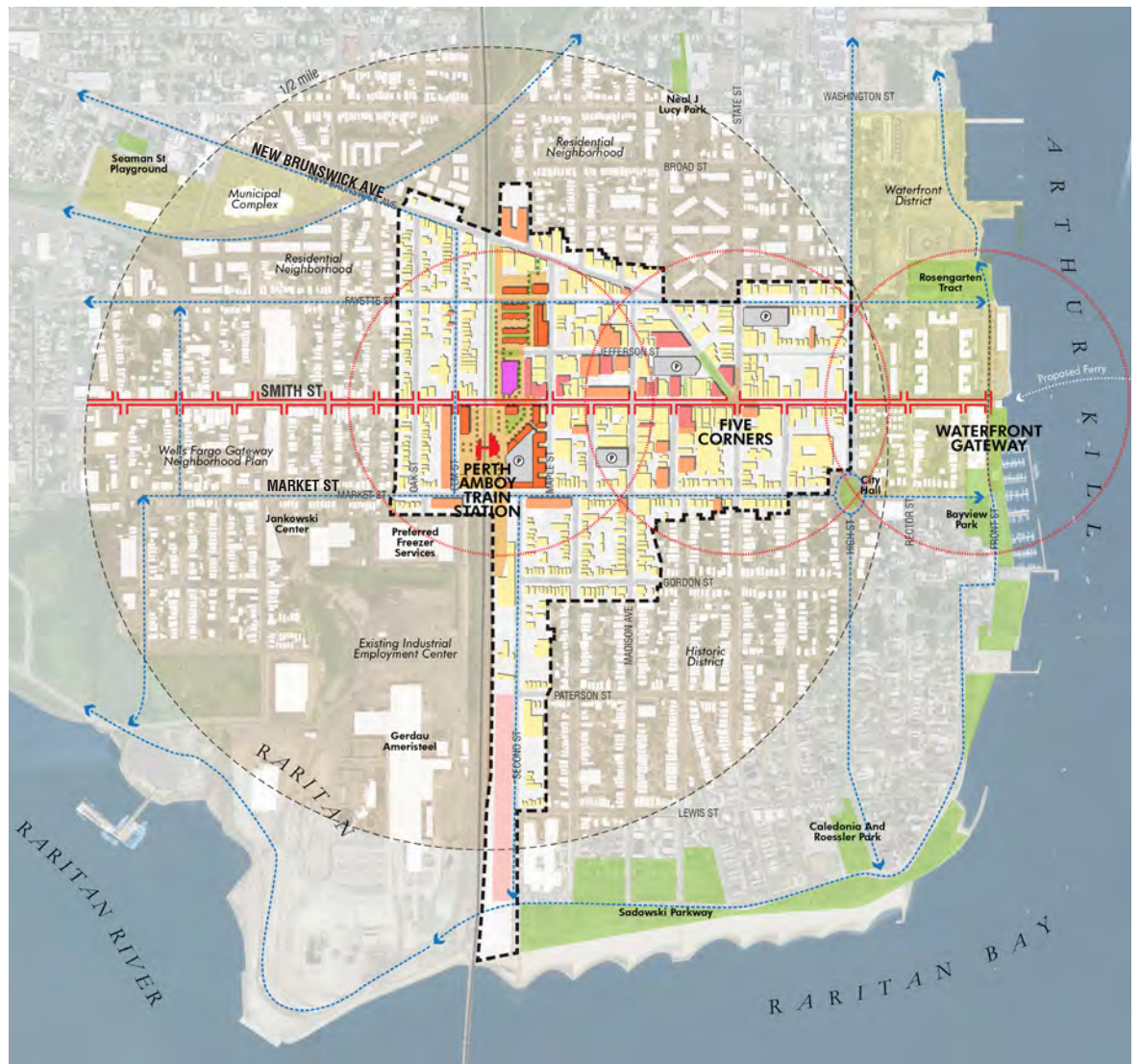
## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Fall 2013, NJ TRANSIT, as part of the “Together North Jersey” USHUD-funded regional planning effort for the 13-county northern NJ region, launched a Local Demonstration Project with the City of Perth Amboy. The goal of the project, which built on the Perth Amboy Economic Growth Strategy completed in 2012, was to develop a Station Area Plan for the area included within the half-mile radius of the Perth Amboy Train Station. The focus of the project was to determine ways to provide existing residents with housing choice and community assets while attracting new residents, businesses and prioritizing investment.

### Redevelop Train Station Area

The blocks between Market Street and New Brunswick Avenue and between the NJ TRANSIT tracks and Maple Street represent a rare opportunity downtown: many vacant and city-owned parcels, and relatively few owners among the other parcels. The Station Area can be improved with the following recommendations:

- **Bring the “front door” of the Train Station onto Smith Street.** Currently, the Station is hidden from Smith Street behind a parking lot. A new Station Green (see opposite page) will create



The Strategy for Perth Amboy revolves around the asset of the Train Station



a more welcoming and direct view to the station from the City's most active pedestrian street.

- **Expand the City-owned site to Maple Street.** In order to accommodate sufficient development to change the character of the Station Area, it would be beneficial to expand the Station Area site to Maple Street. This will be a logical next step after the recent investment (C-Town) along Maple Street.

- **Re-examine parking priorities for site and locations for commuters, residents, and Smith Street shopping customers.**

In order to accommodate sufficient parking for the new development, existing retail and NJ TRANSIT customers, a parking garage may be needed. Costs can be minimized, however, if existing on- and off-street parking resources are better utilized and creative parking solutions are implemented.

- **Create a new Civic Arrival (Station Green) at Smith Street.** Just as Smith Street and the Gateway neighborhood serves to welcome automobiles into Perth Amboy, the Station Green should do so for visitors that arrive via train.
- **Create the maximum appropriate density on the four blocks between Market and New Brunswick Avenue.** The traditional scale of Perth Amboy is low-rise, and any new development



Creating a new Civic Arrival and Station Green



should not disrupt this pattern. In order for a new development to be large enough to serve as a catalyst for the city, a development of only four-to-five stories will likely be necessary.

- ***Establish new north-south pedestrian connections to the Train Station.*** Residents of the neighborhoods north of New Brunswick Avenue may be more likely to walk to the Train Station Area if the walk traversed a pleasant, tree-lined, pedestrian-scale route.

- ***Introduce entertainment and culture into the downtown mix.*** In order to maintain a vibrant outdoor environment well into the evening hours, an entertainment/cultural venue should be incorporated into the Plan.



*Introducing entertainment into the Downtown Mix*





Reorienting Downtown Around the Train Station



### **Adaptively reuse upper levels of older commercial buildings**

Due to the relative scarcity of vacant lots in downtown Perth Amboy and high rates of vacancy among upper floor office space, upper floors could be reimagined to accommodate other uses such as residential.

### **Proactively capitalize on the existing ethnic niche market and food offerings**

Perth Amboy has an impressive variety of food options, making it a potential food tourism destination for the region.

### **Rezone Downtown**

In order to accommodate the types of development necessary to catalyze downtown, and to achieve Transit Village status, zoning will have to be reconfigured.

### **Modernize Parking Regulations and management**

Shared parking strategies are already being utilized in developments such as Amboy Towers and Hobart Plaza. The underutilized Jefferson Street Parking Deck and other lots in the city can be reoriented to serve new development and save on new parking deck costs, if needed.



*Amboy Towers marks the historic center of Downtown*

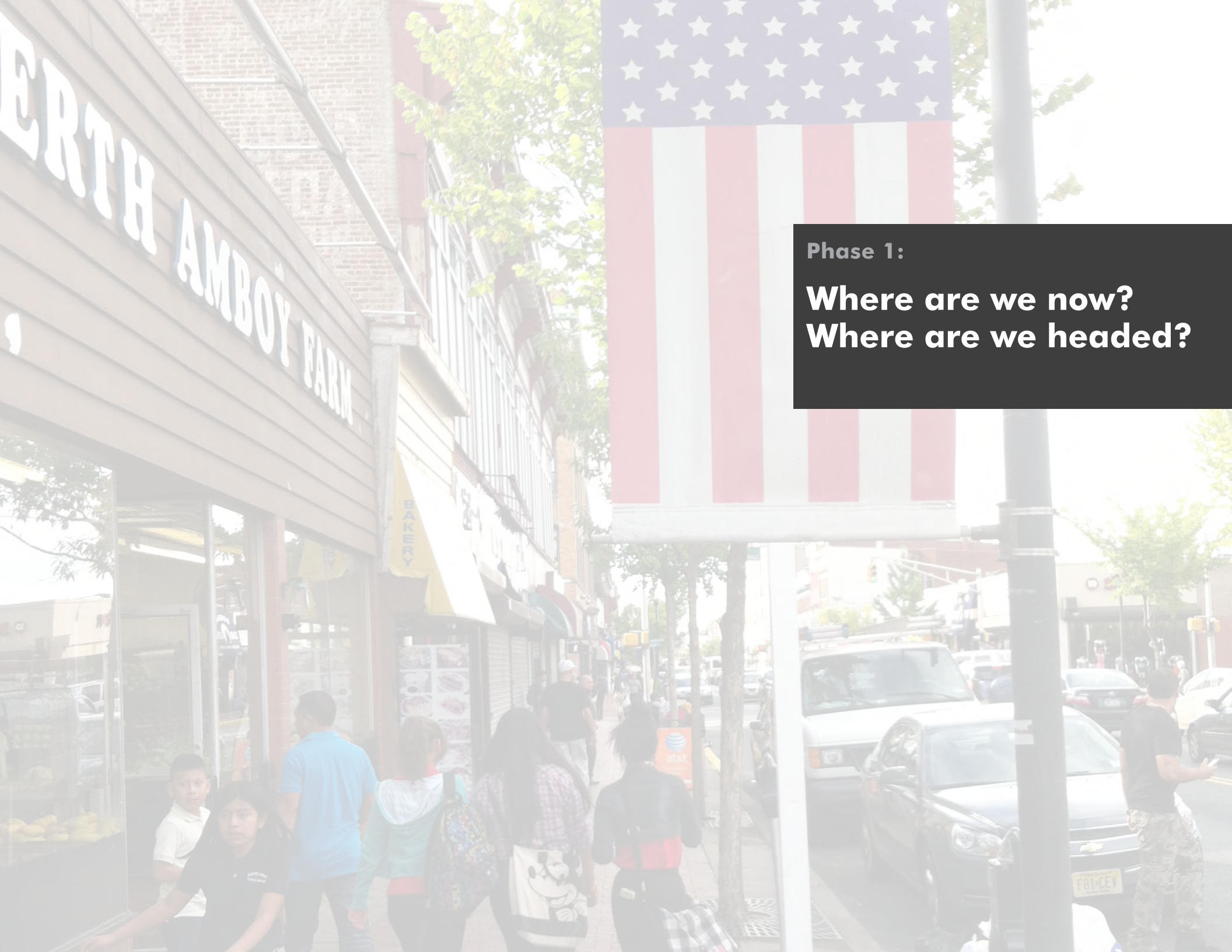


*Underutilized upper floors along Smith Street*



*The annual Dominican Festival draws regional tourists*





Phase 1:

**Where are we now?  
Where are we headed?**



## BACKGROUND

Downtown Perth Amboy has many assets, and the Plan recommends capitalizing on all these assets to bring people and attract new investment into the Downtown. These assets include:

- **High quality streetscape.** This lends order to the spaces between buildings, and is why Perth Amboy has well-defined streets, an intact street-wall and a very pleasant human scale.
- **Compact Downtown.** Almost all of downtown is within a ten minute walk of the train station.
- **Large Hispanic population base.** This demographic profile is unique for the region, and should be included in the strategy for reviving downtown.
- **An attractive waterfront close to Downtown.** Perth Amboy's waterfront has seen substantial public investment in the past several years, is now the largest recreational asset in the city, and is only a 10-15 minute walk from downtown. The marina has been expanded and the waterfront is now the site for numerous festivals throughout the year.
- **Rich history.** Many buildings downtown have historic character, lending



Perth Amboy (1714) is the oldest continuously-used City Hall in the United States



Perth Amboy's waterfront is one of its strongest assets



Pedestrians enjoying Smith Street



Almost all of Perth Amboy is within a 10-minute walk of the train station





One of Perth Amboy's assets is a pedestrian-scaled street grid

Downtown Perth Amboy a unique character and connection to its historical and cultural past. These buildings include the Perth Amboy City Hall, built in 1714, which is the oldest continuously-used City Hall in the US.

- **Robust train service.** The Perth Amboy Train Station boasts a one-seat ride to Penn Station New York in about 50 minutes, and 64 trains per day stop at the station. The Plan recommends reorienting development around the Station Area, which could double the existing ridership of 874 riders per day to 1,739 riders per day.\*
- **Walkable street grid.** A typical block size downtown is about 300' by 600'. These dimensions are comparable to the street grids of walkable cities: New York City (200' by 800'), Chicago (330' by 660'), and Philadelphia (400' by 500'). An appropriately scaled street grid makes the urban environment easier to navigate for pedestrians, and decreases the potential for traffic congestion due to the redundancy of available routes. in the region such as New York City, Newark, New Brunswick, and points along the Jersey Shore like Red Bank and Asbury Park.

\*See study entitled "Transit-Oriented Development and Impact on Transit Ridership" in the appendix

- *Multimodal transportation options.* Perth Amboy is served by a regional bus network that connects to Manhattan several other regional destinations including New Brunswick, Newark and Woodbridge. Downtown Perth Amboy is within a 10-minute drive of a number of major highways such as the NJ Turnpike, Garden State Parkway and Route 440, which provide still further options for moving people and goods to areas
- *Large employers.* Raritan Bay Medical Center, US Food Services, Tropical Cheese, Preferred Freezer Services, and VOPAK are all located in Perth Amboy, many within walking distance of the Train Station. In addition, the city has a strong base of local merchants including electronics stores and restaurants and a base of small and mid-sized entrepreneurial businesses, all organized by the Urban Enterprise Zone.



Raritan Bay Medical Center (above) and Preferred Freezer Services (below) are two of the largest employers in Perth Amboy



## DEMOGRAPHICS

### Population Characteristics

Of the estimated 51,744 residents (per US Census estimation) of Perth Amboy, 82.7% identify themselves as Hispanic or Latino, making Perth Amboy the second-highest concentration of Latino or Hispanic residents in New Jersey. The rest of Perth Amboy is composed of 9.2% White (non-hispanic) and 9.6% Black (non-hispanic) residents, and smaller percentages of Asian and Native American. Almost half (43.3%) of the study area residents are foreign-born, and these residents are almost all from the Caribbean (56.8%), Central America (20.9%), and South America (18.2%). Consequently, the residents within the study area are more likely to speak a language other than English. Over 40% of the residents in the study area speak English "less than very well" (41.4%), which is more than three times the rate of the Together North Jersey 13-county region (13.7%). The languages spoken at home among these populations is overwhelmingly Spanish (95.9%). Perth Amboy is relatively young, as the median age (32.4) is significantly lower than Middlesex County as a whole (37.1) and New Jersey (39). Only 15% of Perth Amboy residents have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with 35% in New Jersey as a whole. In addition, homeownership rate is relatively low: 36.8% compared to 66.6% in New Jersey as a whole.

### Median Household Income and Poverty

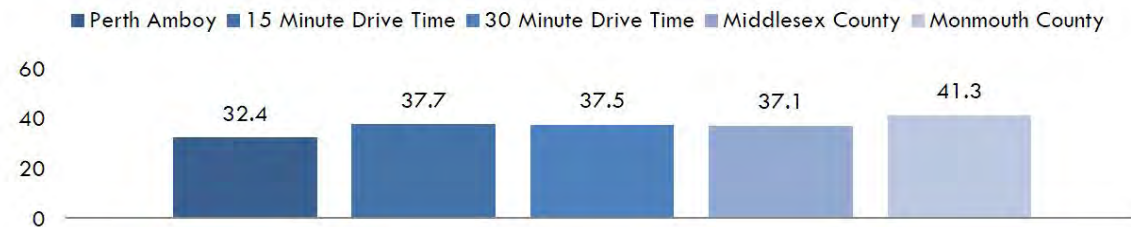
The median household income (per 2010 census) within ½ mile of the Train Station was \$43,342, compared to \$65,333 within a 30-minute drive and \$77,407 for Middlesex County as a whole. In Perth Amboy, 22% of residents live below the poverty line, compared to 8.9% in the North Jersey Region as a whole. Poverty affects families with

children (15.4%) at a rate more than three times that of the region as a whole (5%).

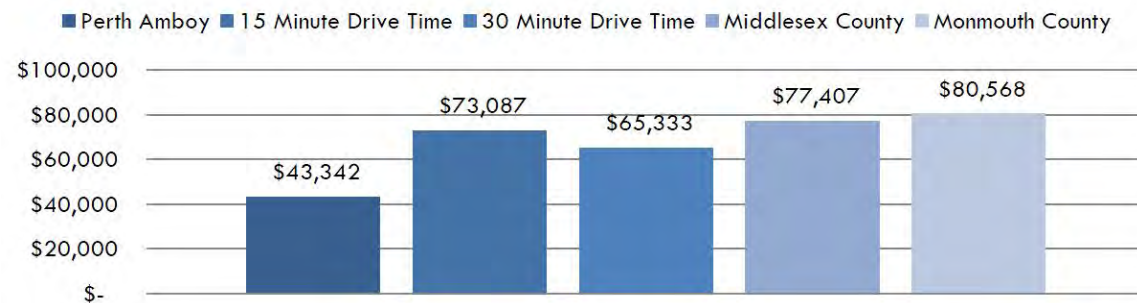
### Access to Transportation

Transit is central to the mobility needs of residents in the study area. The study area has almost three times the level of Carless Households compared with the NJTPA region (32.3% versus 12.5%).

### Median Age



### Median Household Income



The median age and median household income of Perth Amboy are both significantly lower than the region

## PLANNING CONTEXT

The City of Perth Amboy has been very successful in attracting grant funding to undertake needed planning work. The Bay City Transit District Strategic Plan is one among five current planning efforts, including:

- NEA Our Town Grant, which will support cultural district planning for the Gateway Neighborhood of Perth Amboy
- Wells Fargo Regional Foundation Grant, which will be used to create a general plan for the Gateway Neighborhood
- Jewish Renaissance Foundation NGO Micro-grant CPAP Project, intended to learn about the nature of doing business on Smith Street west of the Train Station
- An \$18 million plan to rebuild the waterfront seawall along the southeast border of Perth Amboy

The EE&K Team coordinated closely with these projects to ensure that these efforts would be complementary and to reduce redundancies.



The Bay City Transit District Strategy is one of several current planning efforts, as represented in this map (above). All of these efforts were presented to the public simultaneously during the Open House on September 25th (left)

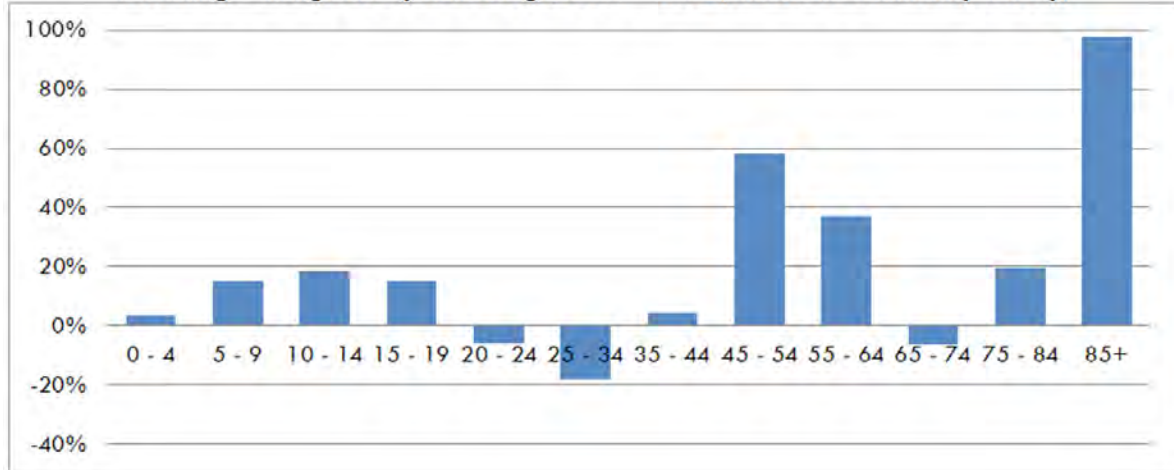


## CURRENT MARKET

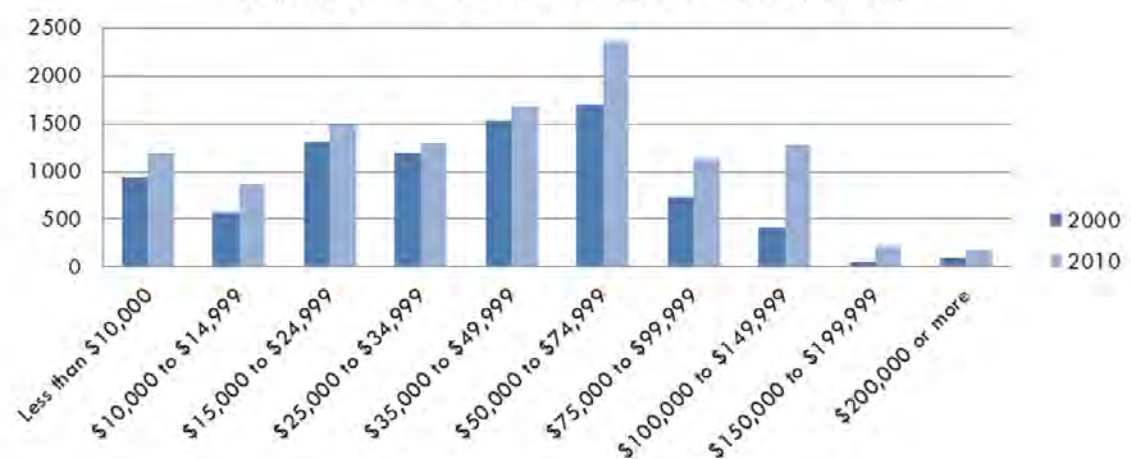
Downtown Perth Amboy needs to build on existing assets, including the connection to its historical and cultural past, in order to reach its potential as a regional destination. The large Hispanic population base creates a demographic profile that is unique for the region. Downtown Perth Amboy is proximate to New York City and has access to multiple modes of transportation for moving people and goods regionally. The current economy is stable, driven by a base of small and mid-sized entrepreneurial businesses. Large business assets including the Raritan Bay Medical Center, US Food Services, Tropical Cheese, Vopak and Preferred Freezer Services serve as major employment centers for the city. However, several factors have held downtown back from realizing its potential, including:

- A negative perception of the city and a view that it is unsafe.
- A lack of awareness (by residents and visitors) of the waterfront and downtown
- Resident education and income levels that lag behind those in other local communities
- A high debt burden due to past financial management decisions
- A lack of a compelling and coherent vision for Downtown

Percentage Change in Population Age, 1990 – 2010 (American Community Survey)



Hispanic Household Income (American Community Survey)



## PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Public Outreach was led by EE&K and supported by the Project Team of FHI and HR&A. The main outreach event occurred in the Alexander F. Jankowski Community Center on September 25, and was a collaboration between several ongoing projects in Perth Amboy. Along with understanding how the Perth Amboy Bay City Transit District Project overlapped with other ongoing projects, residents were invited to vote on which opportunities they felt were most important to their city. Two other events were held in the Perth Amboy City Hall, on September 25 and October 30, in which local stakeholders were invited to offer feedback and voice any issues that they felt were related to the project effort. On November 13, the Project Team made a presentation to the City Council of Perth Amboy, which was

televised on local access channels. The City of Perth Amboy advertised the events through their network and local channels, flyers were posted in public buildings prior to the events, and the events were publicized in the Together North Jersey newsletter, on the website and through social media. The event locations were chosen based on centrality and presence in the community, and all materials for open houses were prepared in both English and Spanish.

The following are the most important issues and opportunities identified during the September 25th Outreach event:

- Increase artistic community facilities near the station (i.e. performing arts center, theater, art galleries, museums, or public art installations)

- Hold more community events near the Train Station (i.e. farmer's market, street fair, memorial event, parade or similar)
- Maintain or enhance the historic character of the Station Area
- Bicycle lanes connecting the Station Area to the surrounding area
- Make transportation connections easier and better integrate modes of transportation.
- High School students that attended the stakeholder meetings feel that homeownership is too burdensome.

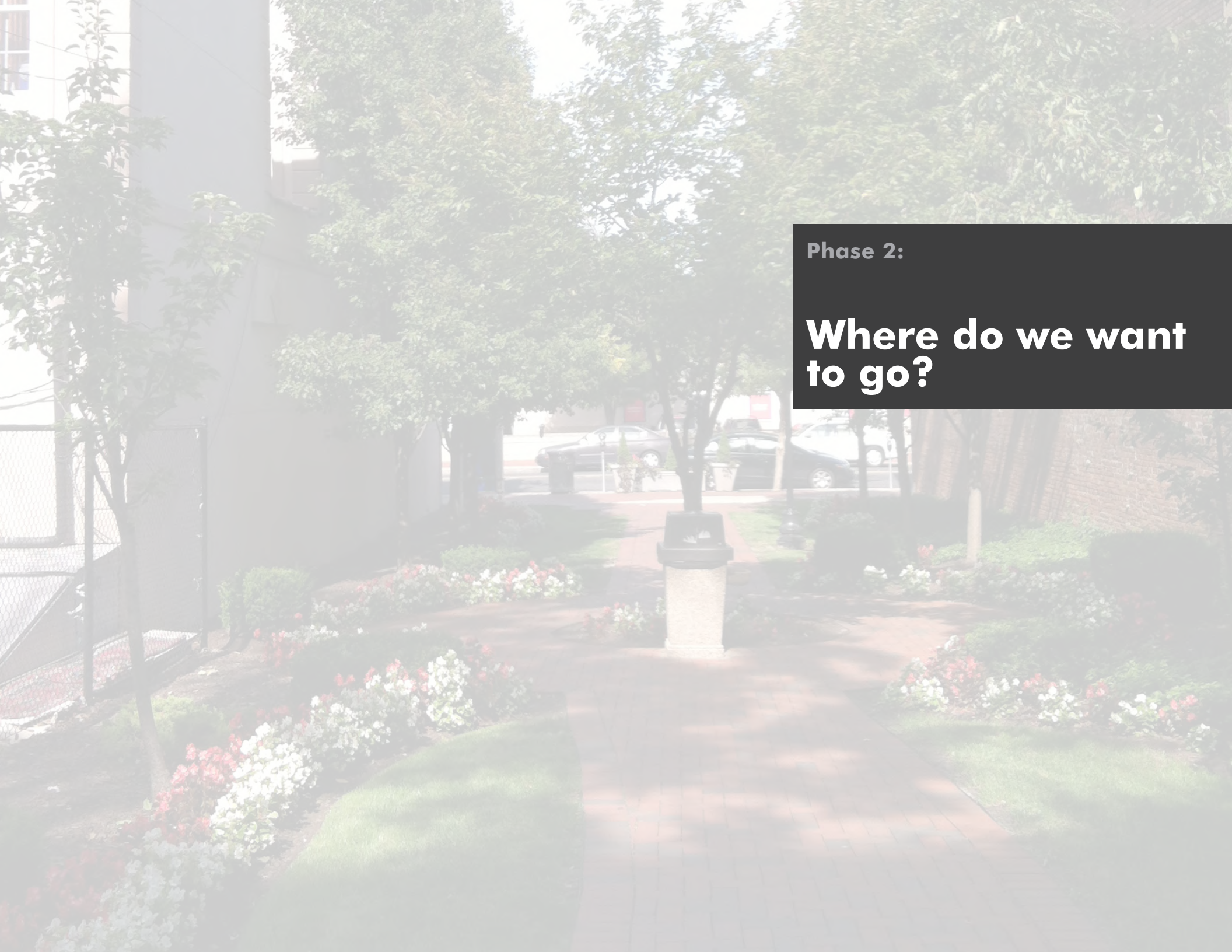
## PARTICIPATING SERVICE ORGANIZATION

Jewish Renaissance Foundation (JRF) is a Perth Amboy-based non-profit organization that assists low-income households in achieving self-sufficiency. They provide emergency services to meet immediate needs of residents, and foster individual growth and transition to household stability through job training, child care, transportation assistance, and other programs. Throughout the study, JRF was instrumental in providing their community-based perspective to the Steering Committee on a range of issues and making sure the right stakeholders were present at meetings.



Mayor Diaz leading a discussion of priorities at City Hall during a stakeholder meeting





Phase 2:

**Where do we want  
to go?**



## KEY PLACES

Re-envisioning a Downtown oriented around transit should begin with creating a framework of places (that is, buildings in combination with open space), rather than

projects (that is, standalone buildings that tend to focus inward). The larger goal driving this approach is to catalyze development and attract new investment into downtown.

The Downtown Transit District is focused on a renewed Smith Street, bracketed by a new “Station Green” and a revitalized “Five Corners” acting as anchors.



Automobile-oriented  
Retail and Office



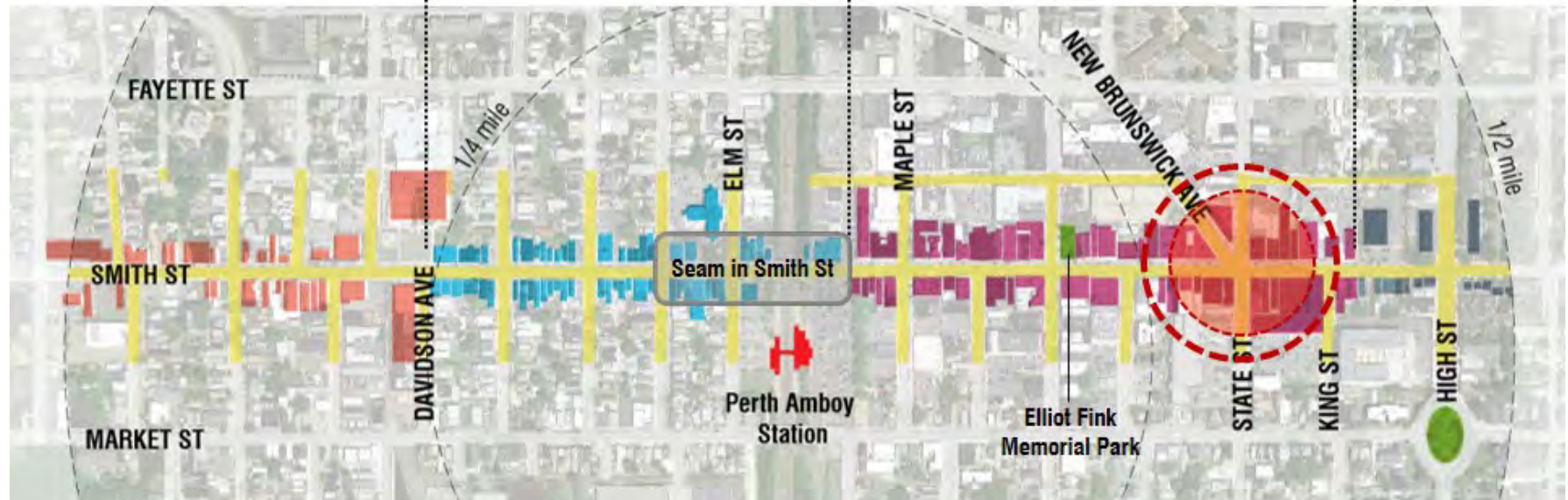
Pedestrian-oriented  
Retail and Office



Pedestrian-oriented Retail and  
Commercial Downtown



Low-density  
Retail and  
Residential









## FIVE CORNERS

“Five Corners”, where New Brunswick Avenue terminates at the intersection of Smith Street and State Street, was historically considered the center of town. The tallest building in the city, Amboy Towers, is located prominently on the “flat iron” point of the intersection, representing an important node along Smith Street, and its status as a Downtown landmark is documented in historic postcards and photos of Downtown. However, the Five Corners intersection does not currently function as a focal point or a place for gathering. The plaza in front of Amboy Towers is undersized, sits between two busy streets in New Brunswick Avenue and State Street, and does not provide any shade for pedestrians or those that might want to sit down. Additionally, the congestion and confusion created by five automobile access points makes the intersection dangerous for pedestrians and frustrating for drivers.



Historic postcard showing Five Corners as a center of activity

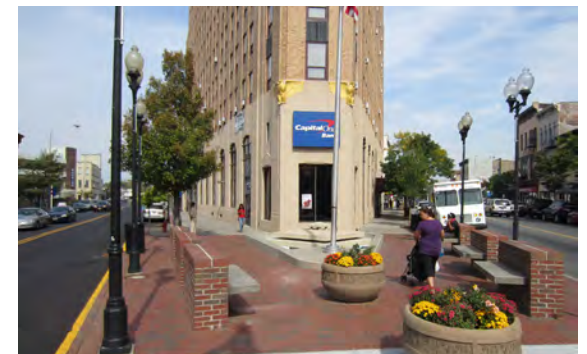
The plan addresses these issues by proposing the closure of New Brunswick Avenue between Jefferson Street and Smith Street to automobile traffic. This will help alleviate traffic congestion on Smith Street by eliminating the awkward angle at which New Brunswick arrives at the intersection. Traffic could be streamlined along Smith by reconfiguring the timing of the street lights. Five Corners could be reestablished as a major gathering place and social anchor along Smith Street. By closing the street to automobiles, the right-of-way could instead



The Five Corners intersection today

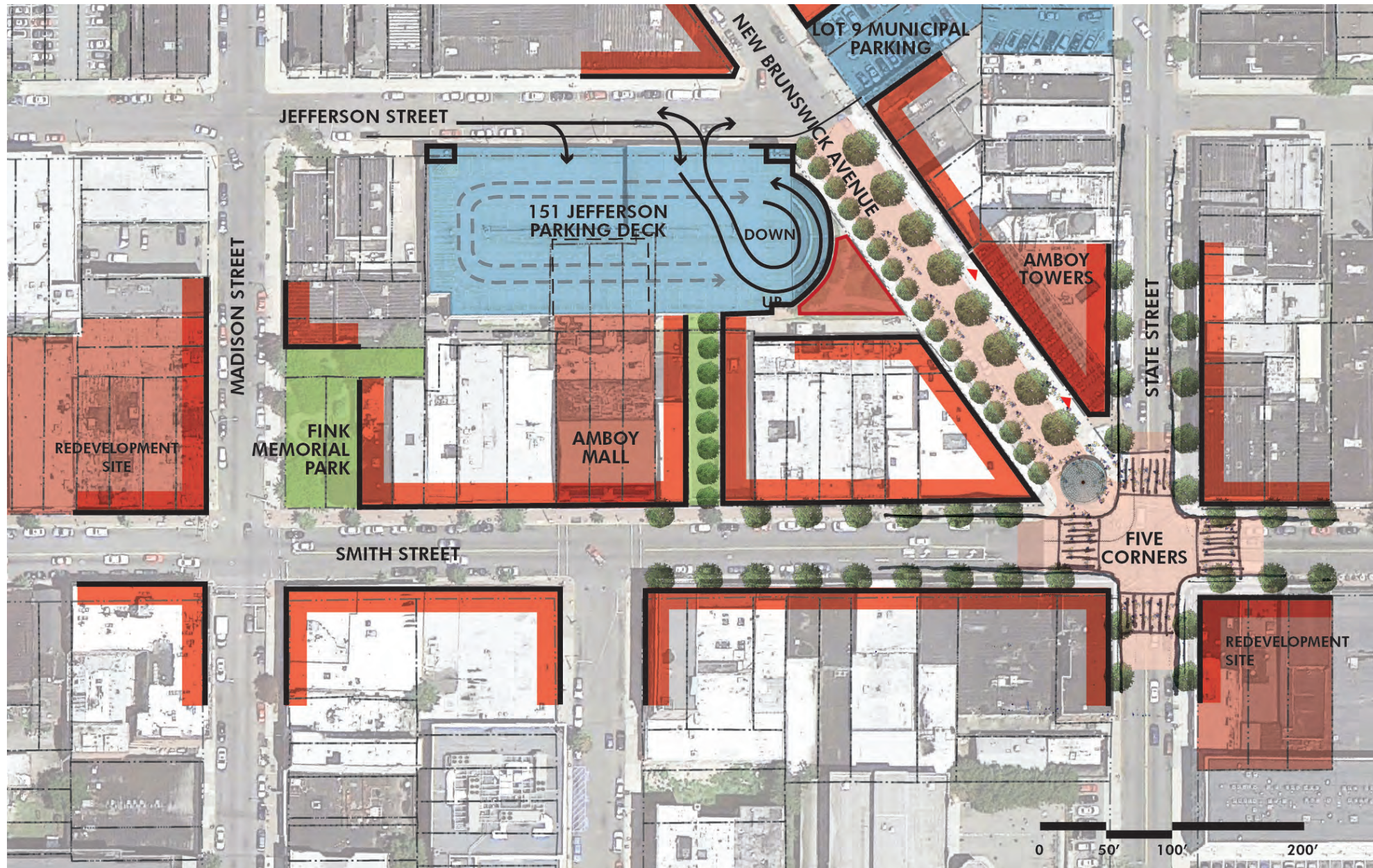
be converted to a plaza large enough for festivals and events. This will add new open space downtown which will be important with the anticipated loss of Barton Fink Memorial Park. The underutilized privately-owned existing Barton Fink Park, in turn, could be a new development site.

The redesign of New Brunswick Avenue should work in tandem with the redevelopment of Amboy Towers, ensuring the two projects work harmoniously and the redeveloped building has a suitable drop off.



View to the Jefferson Parking Deck (above) and the existing plaza in front of Amboy Tower (below)





The Five Corners intersection reimagined with a pedestrian-dedicated section of New Brunswick Avenue and a direct link to the Jefferson Parking Deck from Smith Street





Existing View (left) and proposed view (below) from the Train Station toward Smith Street

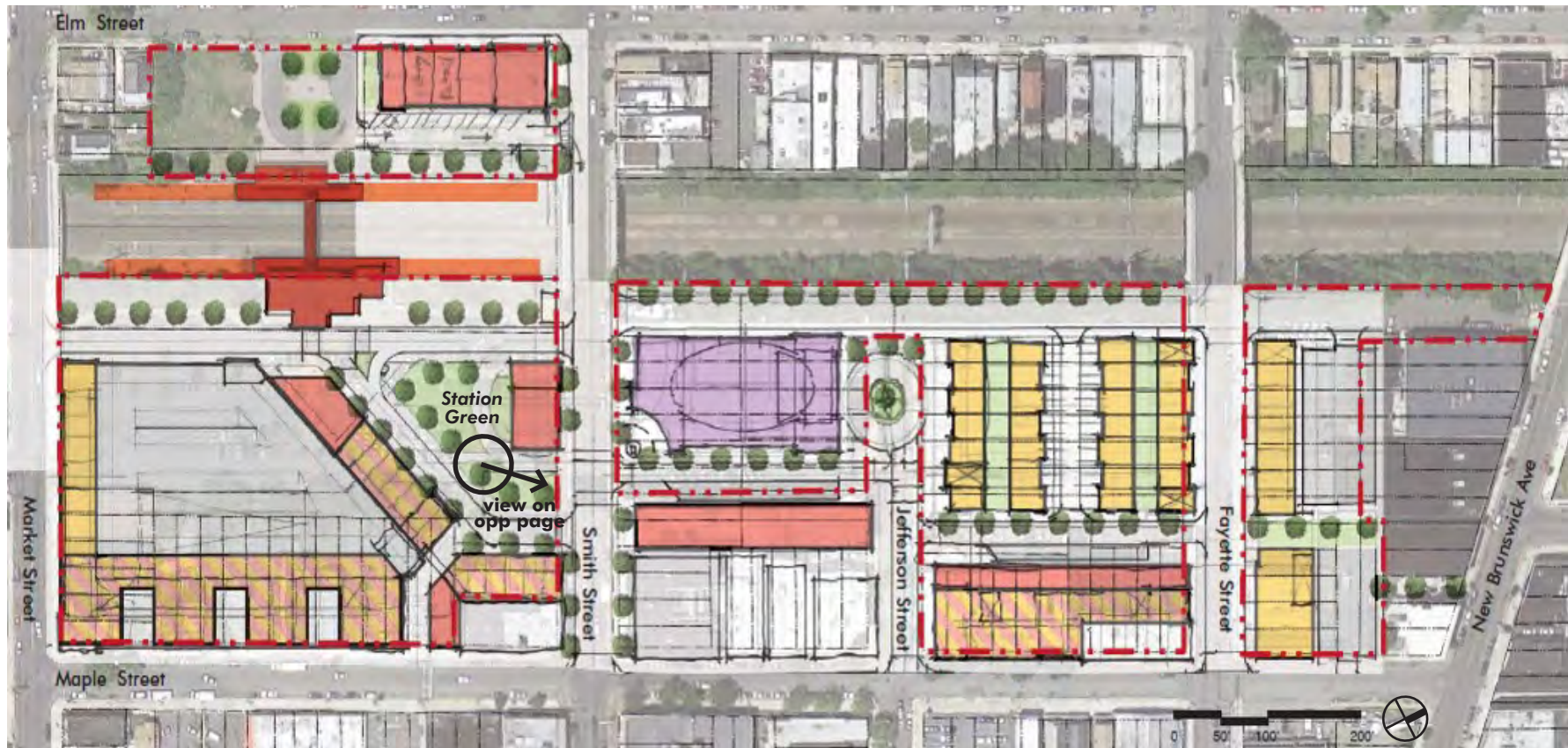




## STATION GREEN

The new Station Green will provide Downtown with valuable open space and will be configured to complement both the Train Station and Smith Street. It will be:

- a new place of arrival or gateway into Downtown.
- appropriately sized, so it will fit well into the existing streetscape
- a new amenity for existing and future downtown residents
- lined with active ground level uses.
- a new place that can establish the train station as an anchor for Smith Street.



Proposed Plan for the four blocks adjacent to the Station



## TRAIN STATION AREA REDEVELOPMENT

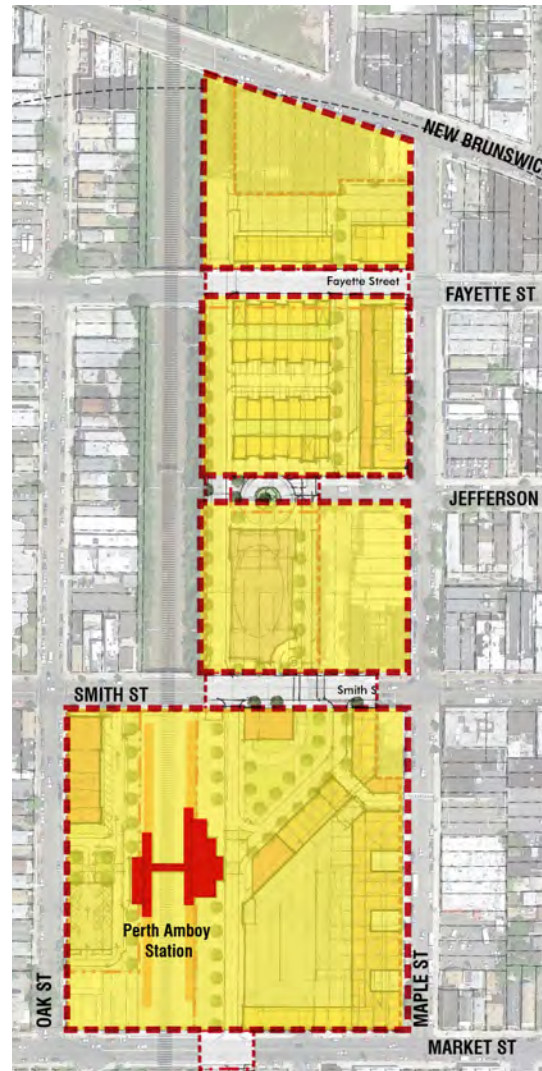
Redeveloping the Train Station Area is the most critical step in unlocking the potential value of the train station for Downtown, and Perth Amboy as a whole. There exists a large quantity of vacant land in close proximity to the train station on the four blocks between Market Street and New Brunswick Ave. This is rare opportunity in any downtown, and is next to a station that offers a fifty-minute one-seat ride into Midtown Manhattan. The Plan should be guided by these five development principles that should guide the Station Area Redevelopment:

### ASSEMBLE DEVELOPMENT SITES

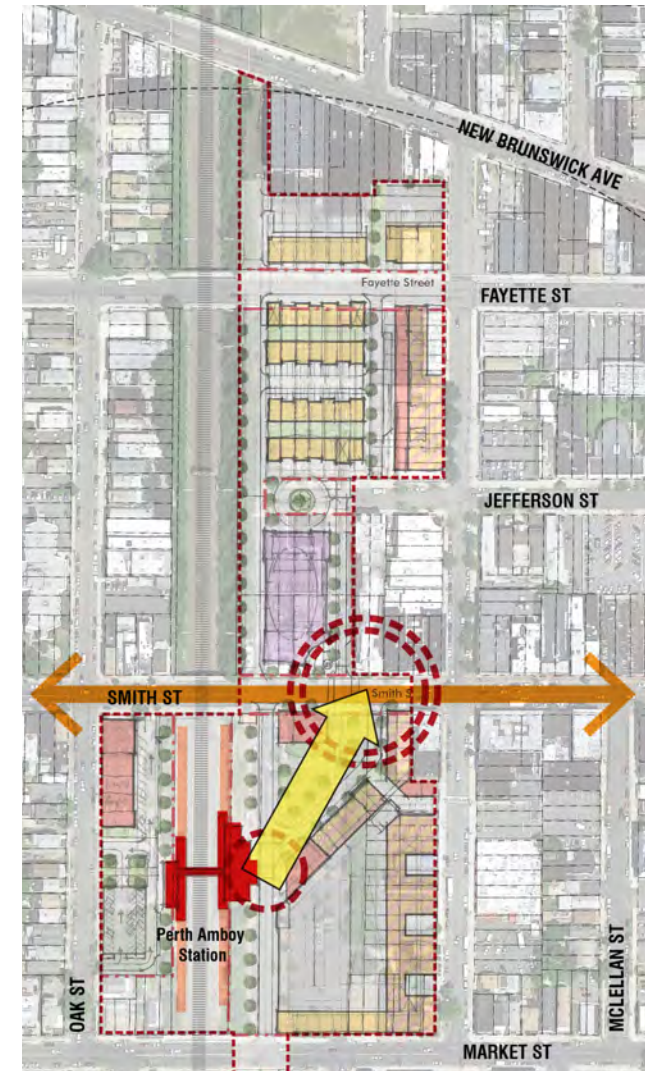
The key parcel is the City-owned property adjacent to the train station (which currently is a surface parking lot), which has the substantial advantages of being adjacent to the train station and on Smith Street. However, the parcel itself is not large enough to catalyze development. As such, the Plan recommends that a number of adjacent properties (most of which are currently surface parking lots) be incorporated into the redevelopment of the City-owned property. This will allow the redevelopment to incorporate a parking garage to support both the commuter parking and downtown parking needs.

### DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES

*Assemble development sites to make a larger impact*

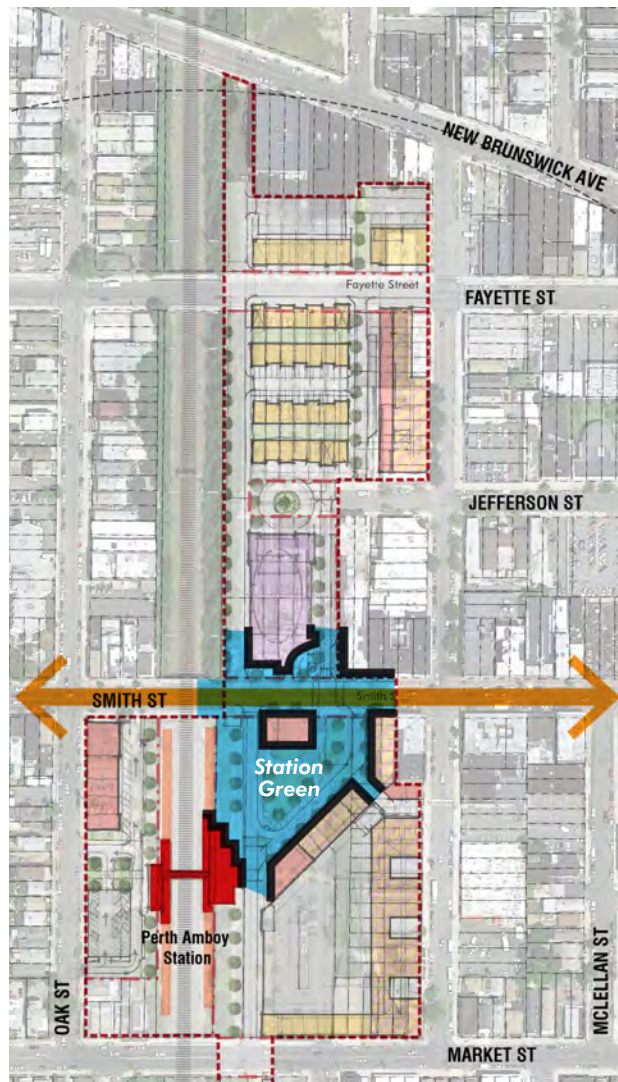


*Project the Station's presence to Smith Street*

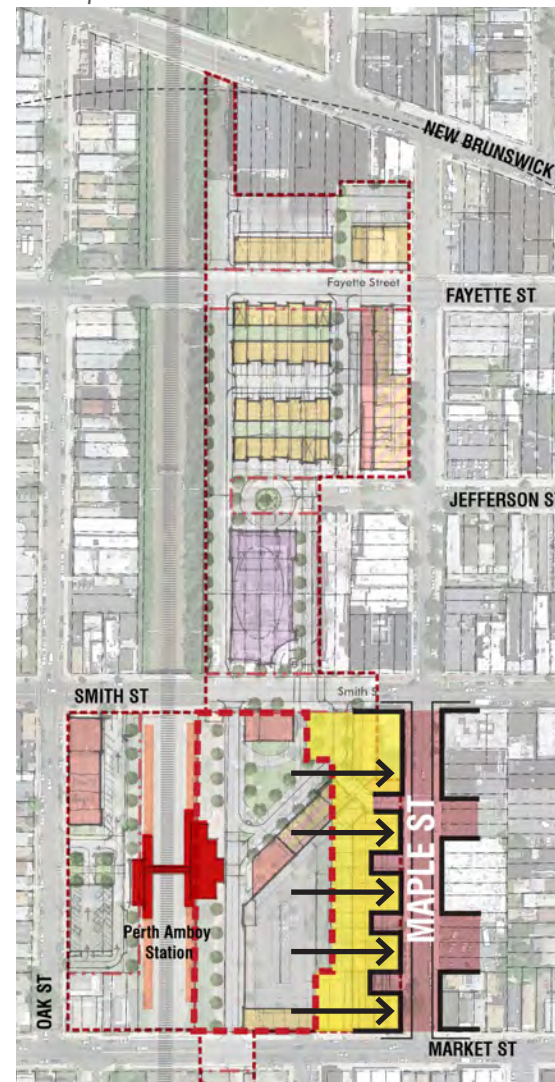




Create a civic place of arrival



Project the Station's presence to Maple Street



## IMPROVE THE TRAIN STATION PRESENCE ALONG SMITH STREET

While the train station is visible from Smith Street, it is set back over two hundred feet from the Smith Street and set within a surface parking lot. As such, it does not have a significant physical presence on Smith Street. The challenge is to project the presence of the station out to Smith Street and create a higher quality environment in the immediate area around the station to encourage ridership.

## BRING THE STATION AREA TO MAPLE STREET

The Station Area will enjoy a direct connection to the Station via Maple Street. Pedestrians can also be linked more directly to the train station through a system of new midblock passages, which can be lined with active ground level storefronts and cafes, landscaped, and privately managed.

*“Redeveloping the Train Station Area is the most critical step in unlocking the potential value of the train station”*



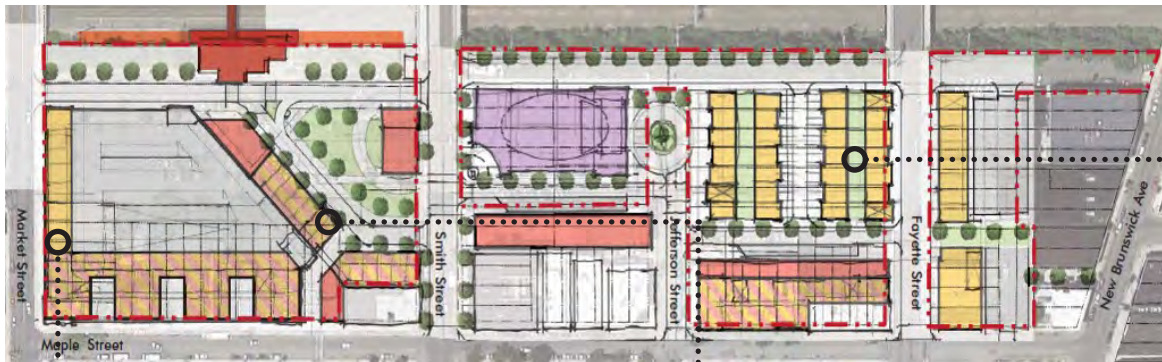
## INTRODUCE A VARIETY OF HOUSING OPTIONS

The redevelopment area includes a variety of different product types, including two-family homes and multifamily apartments. During the stakeholder meetings, local high school students commented that “owning a home is too much of a burden.” This should be taken into consideration when determining the mix of rentals and owner-occupied units.

## MAINTAIN THE SCALE OF DOWNTOWN.

The vision proposes new development that is appropriate for Downtown Perth Amboy in size and scale – all buildings are relatively low in scale, with a maximum of five stories. The proposed buildings can be developed as stick frame buildings, but built to a justifiable density in this central downtown location adjacent to the train station.

*“The redevelopment area includes a variety of different product types, including two-family homes and multifamily apartments.”*



The Plan presents a variety of housing types: Parking garage liner (left), multifamily apartments (center), and two-family homes (right)



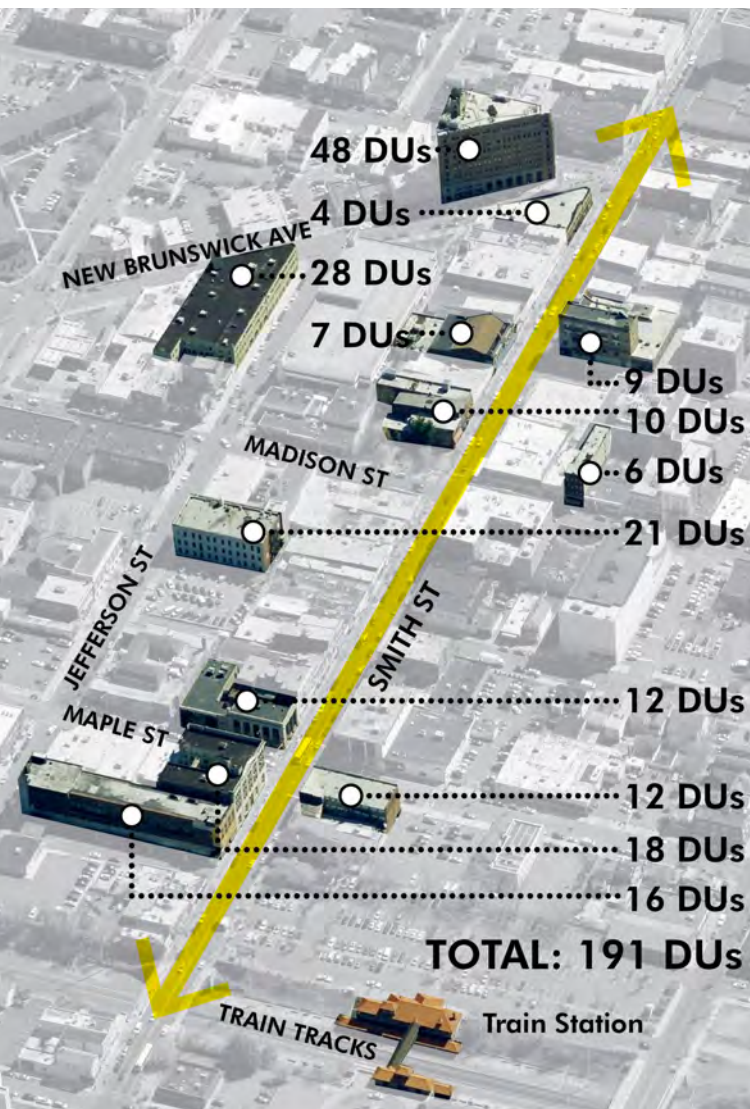


*The existing view (left), and the proposed view (below) from Smith Street to the train station*





## ADAPTIVELY REUSE UPPER LEVELS OF OLDER COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS



Due to its history as a commercial center, Downtown Perth Amboy has a relatively large inventory of space on the upper levels of several downtown buildings. The relatively small floorplates of these buildings, coupled with the loss of Perth Amboy's status as a regional commercial center, have rendered these buildings less competitive in attracting commercial tenants. However, the high ceilings and large windows of these buildings, along with their historic character, make them highly suitable for residential and live-work lofts. Other cities in the region, such as Red Bank and Asbury Park, have been able to take advantage of an inventory of similar buildings to help attract people back downtown into high-quality market-rate residential units. The Plan estimates that the Downtown core area has the potential for almost 200 new residential units within 12 buildings downtown. A certain amount of upper level conversions have already taken place and are occurring currently, including the Raritan Building at the corner of Smith Street and Madison Avenue and the planned rehabilitation of Hobart Plaza on Hobart Street. These have been developed through zoning variances on a case by case basis. Formalizing the zoning in the Downtown area to allow these types of conversions would help send a signal to the market and attract quality developers with a track record of

delivering high quality product in this market. It is important that the new zoning is inclusive enough to allow "as of right" affordable residential units in Downtown to preserve a healthy mix of housing options.



Asbury Park (above) and Red Bank, NJ (below) have successfully reused historic buildings to transform their downtowns



## PROACTIVELY CAPITALIZE ON THE EXISTING ETHNIC NICHE MARKET AND FOOD OFFERINGS



Dominican Republic Festival, Perth Amboy

One of Perth Amboy's greatest strengths is its status as a destination and ethnic niche market for the region. Perth Amboy's relatively large Latino population, 78% as of the 2010 census, is a unique characteristic that has the potential to be a valuable asset and driver for future growth. Over 50 restaurants are located along Smith Street within a short walk of the Train Station, offering a wide variety of ethnic cuisine. It is already an established regional destination for visitors on the weekends as well, hosting several events throughout the year such as the Puerto Rican, Dominican Republic, Greek and Ukranian Cultural Festivals. This status as a destination could be leveraged to attract more people to spend more money, as well as start to attract more people to live downtown.

There are many examples of other towns and small cities throughout the region that have

been able to leverage similar assets to attract new investment:

- **Flushing in Queens, New York**  
An area that has leveraged its status as an ethnic destination to attract significant new investment from overseas investors.
- **Ironbound in Newark, New Jersey**  
A neighborhood with a substantial Portuguese community, which is one of the most vibrant areas in downtown Newark
- **Port Chester in Westchester, New York**  
A town that has a concentration of Latino restaurants and has established an identity within Westchester County as an ethnic food destination. This includes a mix of local ethnic restaurants and larger establishments like the Tarry Lodge and Market operated by the renowned restaurateurs Mario Battali and Lydia Bastianich.



Tarry Market in Portchester, NY

*“Perth Amboy is already an established regional destination for visitors, hosting several events throughout the year such as the Puerto Rican, Dominican Republic, Greek, and Ukranian Cultural Festivals.”*

## BRINGING CULTURE AND ENTERTAINMENT DOWNTOWN

Cultural and entertainment venues have proven to be an effective way of attracting new vitality and expanding employer bases in Downtowns. This is a strategy that has been employed in places like South Orange and Red Bank. Given the City of Perth Amboy's recent award of an NEA grant after this project was completed, the next step is to

identify and characterize the existing range of cultural and arts activities in anticipation of a possible future plan for an arts center Downtown. During the stakeholder meetings, representatives from local high schools were in favor of bringing a theater downtown. An entertainment venue could help downtown in several ways:

- Complement the established Downtown restaurant scene, bringing more visitors downtown during all hours of the day.
- Provide the kind of amenity that will help attract more people to live downtown.
- Help to establish Downtown Perth Amboy as a destination, and build on the ethnic and recreational resources already present.



South Orange Performing Arts Center



A cultural or entertainment venue could complement the mix of uses in Downtown

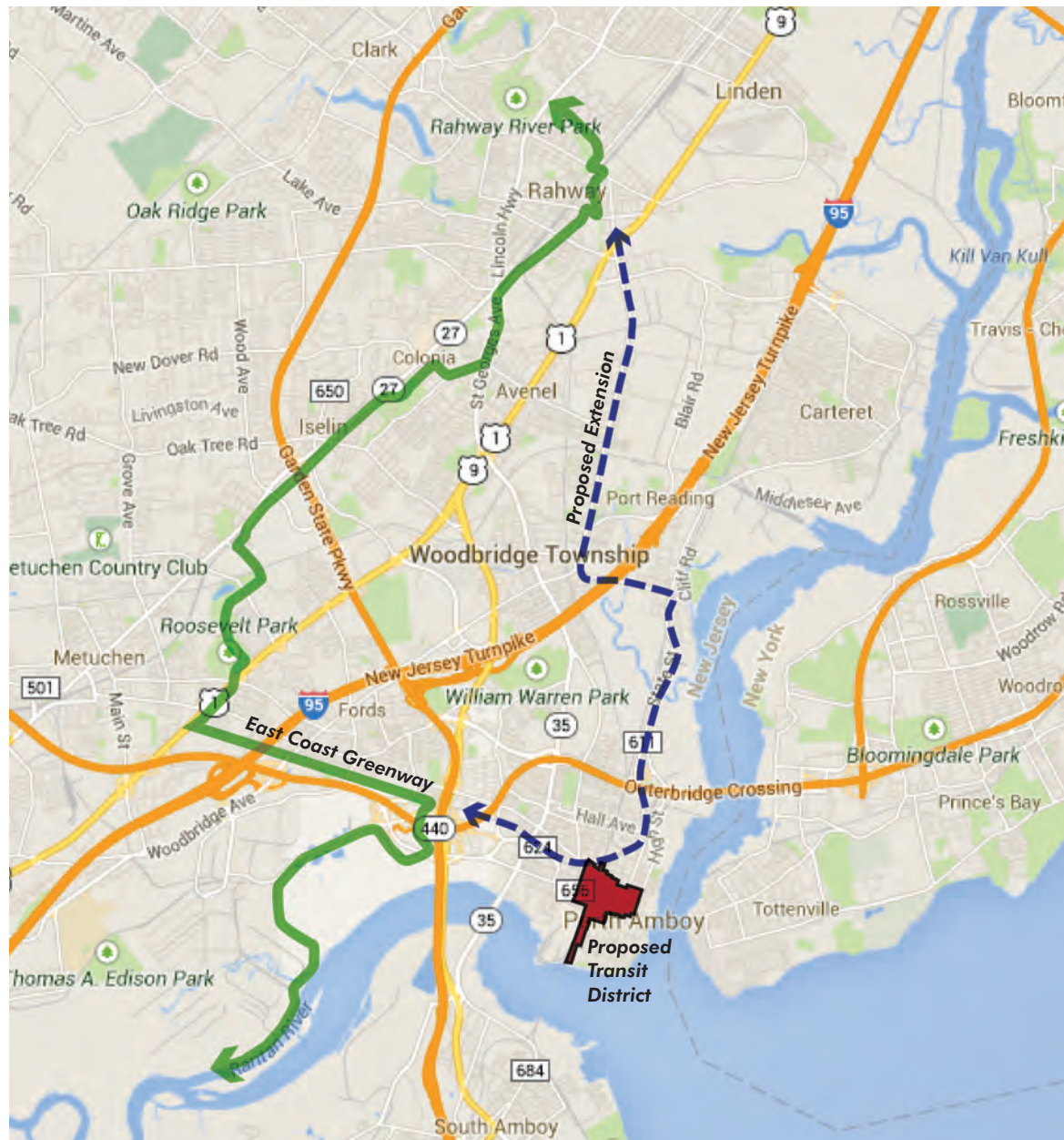


## BRINGING BICYCLES DOWNTOWN

The East Coast Greenway stretches from Florida to Maine along the Eastern Seaboard, and yet does not run through Perth Amboy, a city surrounded on three sides by waterfront. The Plan proposes that cyclists be given an opportunity to take a side trip from the East Coast Greenway to Perth Amboy's waterfront, riding through downtown along the way.



The East Coast Greenway (above) could be extended to include areas of Perth Amboy like the Waterfront (top)



The existing route of the East Coast Greenway (which comprises the Middlesex Greenway) currently circumvents Perth Amboy



In addition to connecting to the regional trail system, Perth Amboy should institute a new system of shared and dedicated bicycle lanes to offer a wider range of ways to get around downtown and to recognize and appeal to the needs and lifestyles of the younger demographic. The key destinations to be integrated in the bike network include:

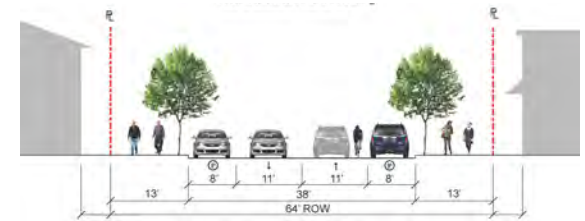
- Perth Amboy Train Station
- Public Library
- City Hall
- Five Corners
- Marina
- Waterfront

Because of the relatively narrow typical 38' foot curb-to-curb dimension of Downtown's streets, the Plan recommends introducing shared bike and automobile lanes, called



Perth Amboy could become a friendlier environment for bicycles like this area in the DUMBO section of New York City

"sharrows," rather than dedicated bike lanes which would require the elimination of existing parallel parking. The only exception to this is High Street, which has a 60' curb-to-curb dimension and as such can accommodate a dedicated bike lane.



A proposed bike network (below) connecting the Train Station to the waterfront and other districts in Downtown, and a street section (above) depicting the location of a sharrow along a typical Perth Amboy street right-of-way





## CONNECTING THE STATION AREA TO THE WATERFRONT

Perth Amboy's waterfront is a valuable asset located within a 10-15 minute walk of the Train Station. The proposed Transit District extends down Second Street from the Train Station in order to strengthen the connection to this resource. The Waterfront is already the site of many festivals throughout the year, and in order to lessen the need for parking and attract more visitors to the area for these events, visitors should be encouraged to take a train to Perth Amboy and then walk or bike to the waterfront.

On axis with the Train Station, Second Street is an important link to the Waterfront. Currently, many of the sites on the west side of the street near the water are vacant, and may contain residual contamination from past industrial uses. Through a grant provided by the US Environmental Protection Agency Brownfields Assessment Coalition, the Middlesex County Improvement Authority has begun developing concepts for the potential of this area.

*The waterfront is the site for the annual Dominican Festival (near right). The easiest way to access the waterfront from the Train Station is via Second Street, the southern portion of which is currently being studied with a grant from the EPA (far right)*



## DOWNTOWN TRANSIT SERVICES

### Bus Service

Perth Amboy has robust bus connections to many regional destinations, including New York City Port Authority (via route 116), Woodbridge and points north (via routes 48 and 815), and New Brunswick and points south and east (via routes 813 and 817). However, while these routes connect very well

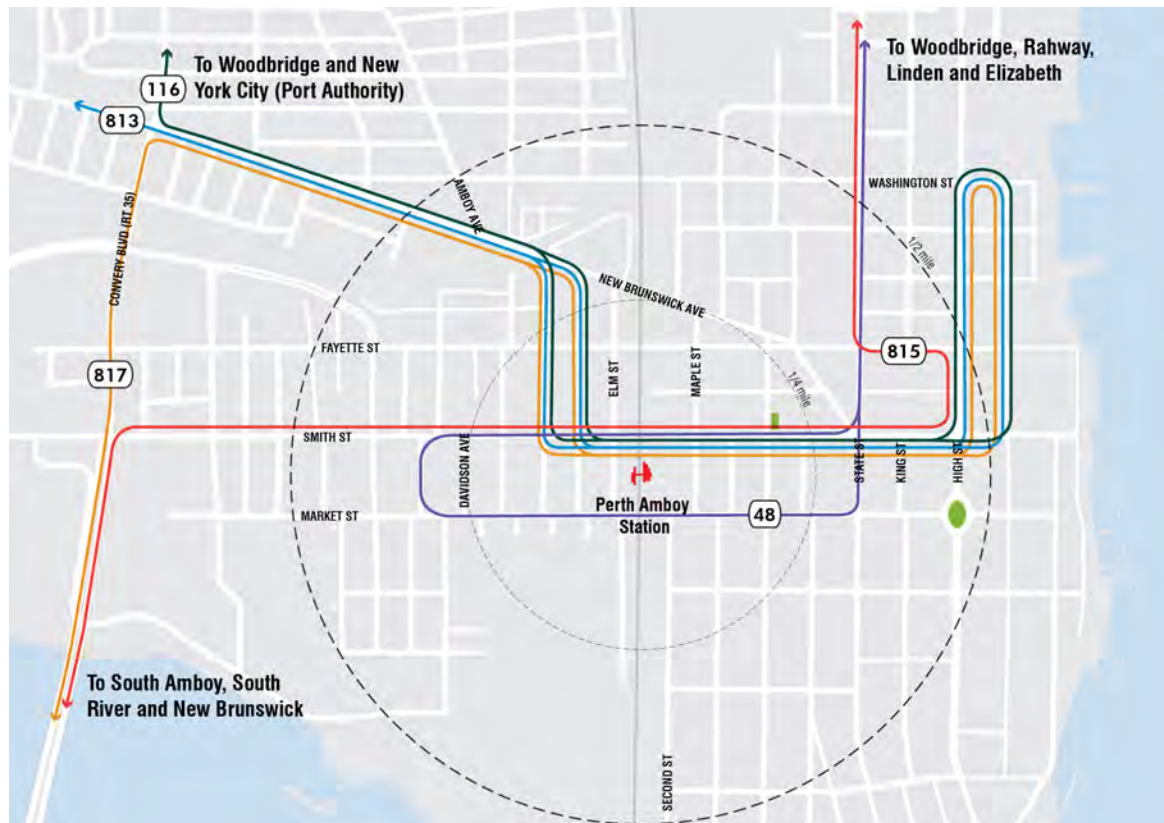
to points outside of Perth Amboy, existing bus stops should be better advertised and how the routes serve Perth Amboy and beyond should be made clear.

### Downtown Circulator

During stakeholder outreach, many residents highlighted the need to strengthen and

improve connections between Downtown and Perth Amboy's surrounding residential neighborhoods. This issue is especially critical to those residents without access to an automobile, such as high school students that need to access the public library and other amenities downtown after school. From 2003 to 2005, Cathedral International ran a circulator that traveled from Smith Street to the waterfront, until the funding from DOT and the UEZ ran out. However, Keep Middlesex Moving (the Transportation Management Association, or TMA, of project partner Middlesex County) represents an important resource that could reintroduce a Downtown Circulator to Perth Amboy. This would have important benefits to Downtown and its residents, including:

- Helping to alleviate downtown traffic congestion
- Providing those with limited access to cars, such as school-age children and elderly, with a convenient way to get to and around downtown.
- Serving as a draw for tourists and a good way to learn about what the city has to offer, especially during festivals and special events



NJ TRANSIT offers a robust bus service that connects to regional destinations such as New York City, Newark and New Brunswick





Phase 3:

**How do we get there?**

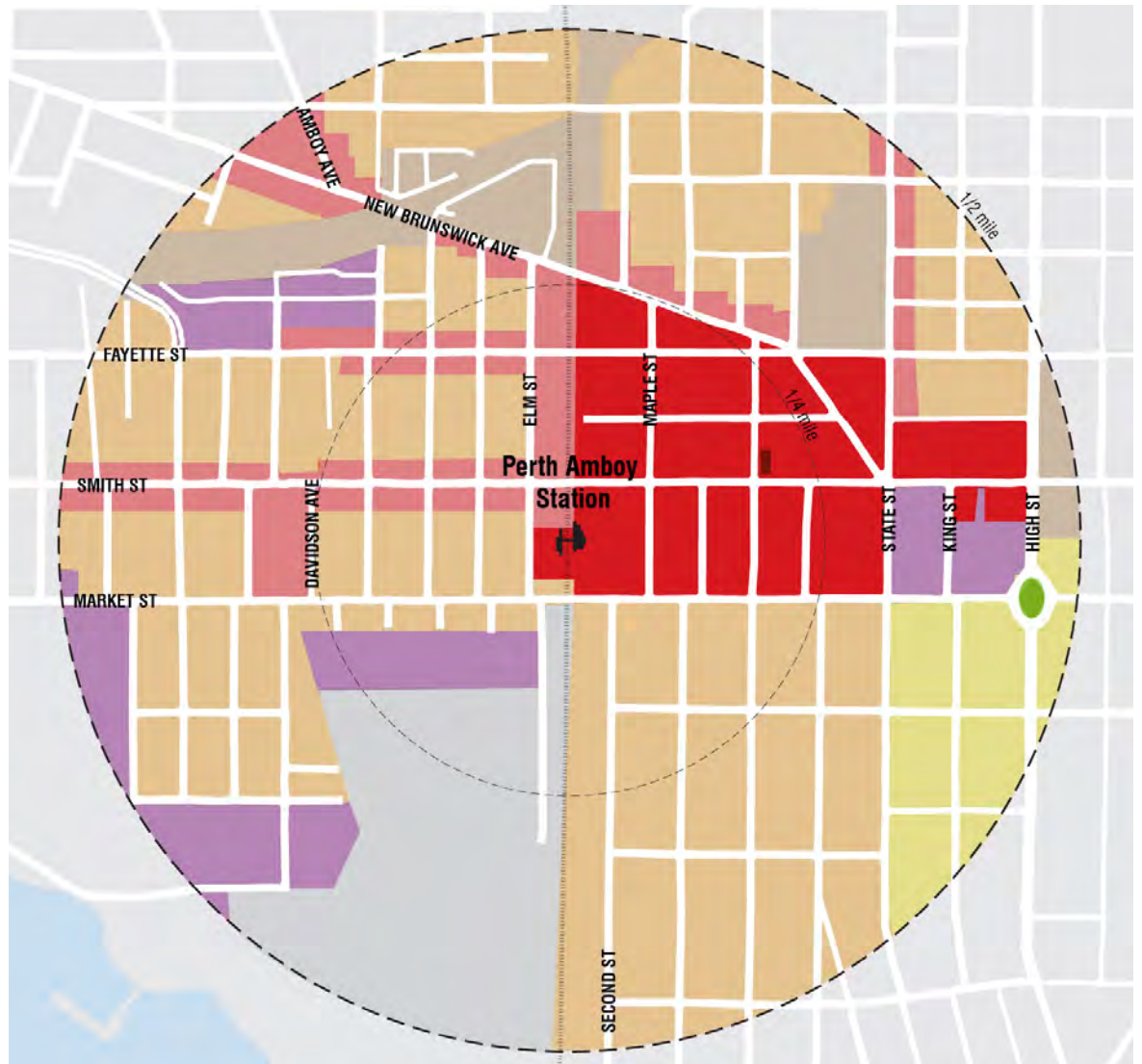
## ZONING

Downtown Perth Amboy currently has several zoning constraints that are impeding the highest and best use of the area around the station. For example, residential uses are currently prohibited in the Station Area per the existing C-2 zoning. The Plan recommends three areas of focus:

### REZONE FOR TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT.

This has several advantages:

- Consistency/clarity of requirements at the Station Area
- Allows consistent mix of uses
- Facilitates and encourages desired form
- Serves as a consistent guide for developers
- Avoids potential conflicts among adjacent uses and zones



*The existing zoning above (the legend for which is to the left) within a half-mile of the Train Station is not currently conducive to transit-oriented development*



## TAILOR ZONING REQUIREMENTS FOR TRANSIT VILLAGE

Designation to achieve the following:

- Define boundaries and purposes of zone
- Allow a mix of uses as-of-right
- Create a density of at least 8 dwelling units per acre
- Establish setback and lot coverage guidelines to bring buildings to street
- Modify parking – low or no number requirements near the Station Area

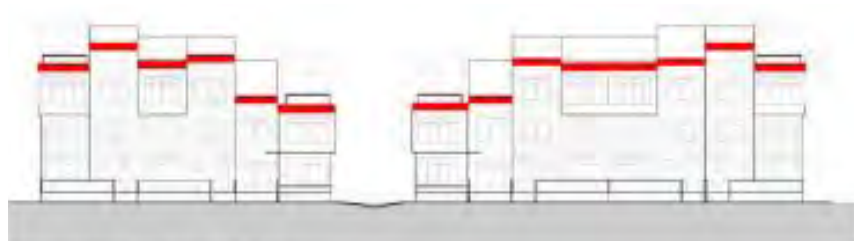
- Consider NJ Residential Site Improvement Standards (RSIS) as a context for parking

## CONSIDER FORM BASED CODE

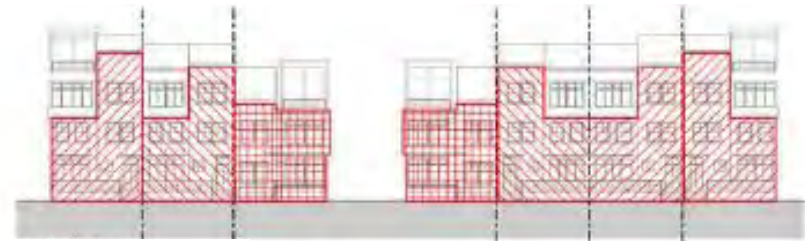
Form-Based Code provides some regulating concepts without limiting uses:

- Vision centered; place-based; architectural

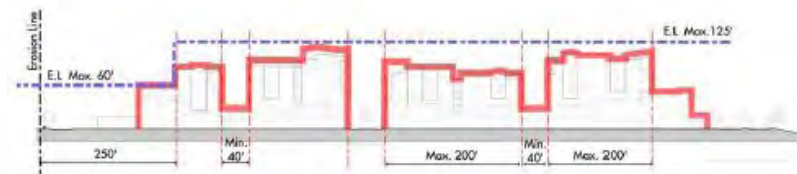
- Categorizes neighborhoods based on typology
- Organizes elements by building type; entitle uses
- Regulating plan with standards for spatial arrangement of structures; blocks
- Public space, building type, architectural standards (includes Green Buildings)
- Some examples of where this has been implemented in New Jersey include Somerville, Dunellen, and Summit



*Encouraged - irregular eaveline*



*Discouraged - repetitive eaveline*



Design Guidelines like that employed in Arverne-by-the-Sea in the Queens, NY employ standards for rooflines and form.

## TRANSIT VILLAGE DESIGNATION

The New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) and NJ TRANSIT spearhead a multi-agency Smart Growth partnership known as the Transit Village Initiative. The Transit Village Initiative create incentives for municipalities to redevelop or revitalize the areas around transit stations using design standards of transit-oriented development (TOD). Transit Village designation for Perth Amboy will be an important step in implementing the Transit District Strategy and in establishing the identity of Downtown Perth Amboy as a transit-oriented development.

### Benefits of TV designation

- Grants for redevelopment and visioning studies
- Assistance with:
  - Bike/pedestrian studies
  - Pedestrian safety improvements
  - Circulation studies
  - Station rehab
  - Bike path construction
  - Streetscape improvements
- Assistance for business expansion
- Brownfield clean-up money
- Low-interest mortgages and financing assistance
- Market studies

The suggested Transit Village boundary for Perth Amboy is defined to the west by the railroad tracks and Oak Street, to the north by New Brunswick Avenue and Fayette Street, to the east by High Street and Second Street, and to the south by Market Street and Gordon Street. In most cases, the boundary is extended to the properties on the other side of the street in order to preserve the integrity of both sides of the street. Here are other factors that determine where the boundary is placed (opposite page):

- *Distance from the transit platform.* The

### Next Steps

- 1) Adopt a transit-oriented development (TOD) redevelopment plan and/or a TOD zoning ordinance
- 2) Map of the TOD/redevelopment area(s) Transit-supportive architectural design guidelines.
- 3) Transit-supportive site design guidelines. Parking management system and/or transit-supportive parking requirements.

maximum distance is typically ½ mile, or about a ten minute walk.

- *Types of neighborhoods.* The residential neighborhoods to the north and the Historic District to the southeast of the Station Area are excluded because of the desire to maintain their current character.
- *Other plans.* The JRF Wells Fargo Gateway Neighborhood Plan is focusing on Smith Street west of the Station Area, and it has its own plan for the neighborhood. The Waterfront District to the east, likewise, should be governed by a different set of regulations than the Transit District.
- *Employment centers.* The Municipal Complex and Existing Industrial Employment Center are excluded because they represent existing assets that supplement the Transit District.
- *Proximity to the Station Core.* The triangle defined by New Brunswick Avenue, Market Street, and the railroad tracks represents the heart of the Transit District, but the District extends west past Oak Street, East to High Street, and down the Second Street Corridor in order to capture the redevelopment potential in these surrounding areas.

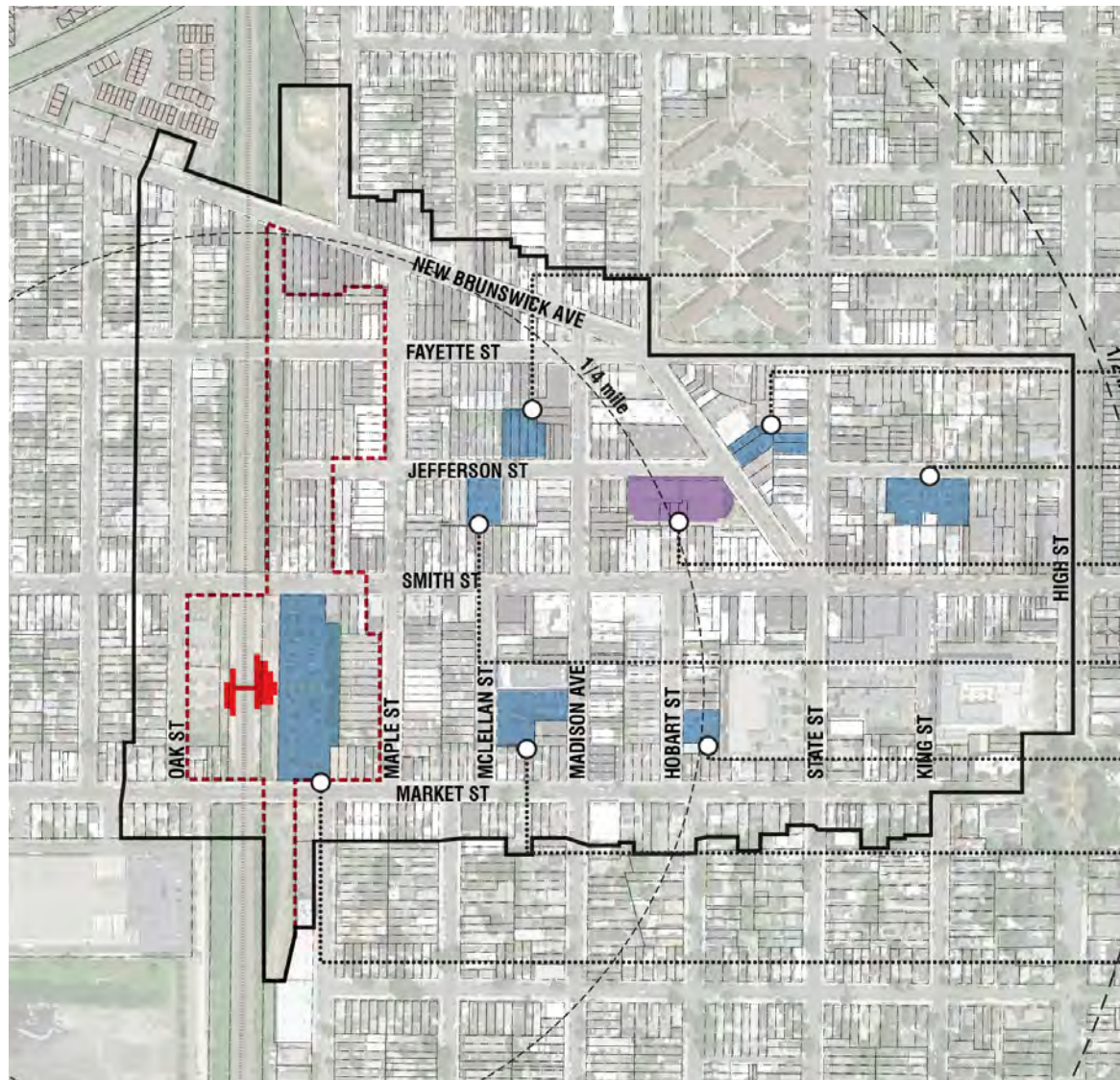






## MODERNIZE PARKING REGULATIONS AND MANAGEMENT

Parking is a critical component for the success of any downtown. Because of the significant costs associated with the construction of new structured parking, the Plan recommends focusing on more efficient and strategic management of Downtown's existing inventory before the



### TOTAL: 858 spaces

- Lot A (185 Jefferson Street)  
**51 spaces**
- Lot 9 (Between N. Brunswick and State)  
**41 spaces**
- Lot C (103 Jefferson Street)  
**83 spaces**
- Jefferson Street Lot (151 Jefferson Street)  
**311 spaces (3 story garage)**
- Lot B (196 Jefferson Street)  
**55 spaces**
- Lot 4 (Hobart Street)  
**36 spaces**
- RD Howell Lot (269 Madison Street)  
**94 spaces**
- Train Station Lot (Smith Street)  
**187 spaces**

*Downtown has an abundance of existing parking*



construction of new parking. This includes:

- improving wayfinding to existing parking downtown
- more efficient pricing strategies that make the Jefferson Street Garage more attractive, thereby reducing the need for drivers searching for parking to circulate on downtown streets, creating unnecessary congestion.
- implementing shared parking strategies
- implementing policies like payments-in-lieu of parking (PILOP) for new downtown development
- holding discussions with NJ TRANSIT on utilizing NJ TRANSIT's properties on Oak

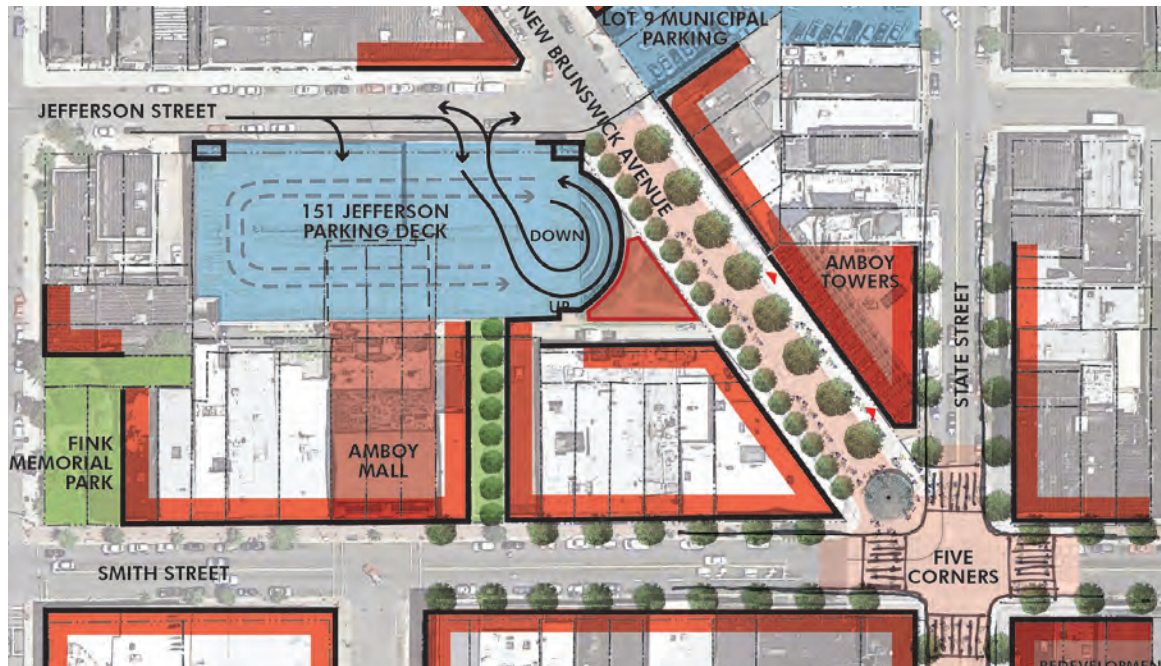
Street and Market Street to expand their commuter parking inventory

Significant new development in the train station area will most likely require a new garage to accommodate the needs of new residents, businesses, and commuters. The Plan accommodates a new garage on the City-owned parcel. A new parking garage up to three levels could accommodate 375 spaces. The Plan demonstrates how the new garage can be configured to allow for buildings to screen it from the new Station Green and the other surrounding streets.

The Jefferson Street Garage represents an important resource downtown, but has

untapped potential. It does not appear to be near full utilization. One factor may be pricing. However, the major issue is that the connection between the garage and Smith Street is unclear and indirect. This connection is important in that it is the de facto point of arrival onto the City's main retail street for those using the garage. The entry through the Amboy Mall, although weather protected and well lit, is somewhat hidden and less than attractive as an experience for downtown visitors.

The Plan recommends developing one of the parcels to the east of Amboy Mall as a new midblock landscaped alley as a new pedestrian link to the garage. This new connection could be landscaped and programmed with active ground level uses such as cafes or restaurants with outdoor seating to create a safe, managed and attractive new arrival experience for those arriving by car. Such a space could make the Jefferson Street Parking Deck a more competitive parking option for those coming by car.



Above: A mid-block alley through an abandoned storefront (center) would make access more direct than the existing connection through Amboy Mall

Left: The Jefferson Parking Deck is currently hidden from Smith Street

## MARKET OPPORTUNITIES

In order for Perth Amboy to reach its potential, it needs to recognize the available opportunities while maintaining a range of affordable housing options Downtown. Its housing stock is relatively old and is primarily composed of rental units. Downtown development will be driven by young

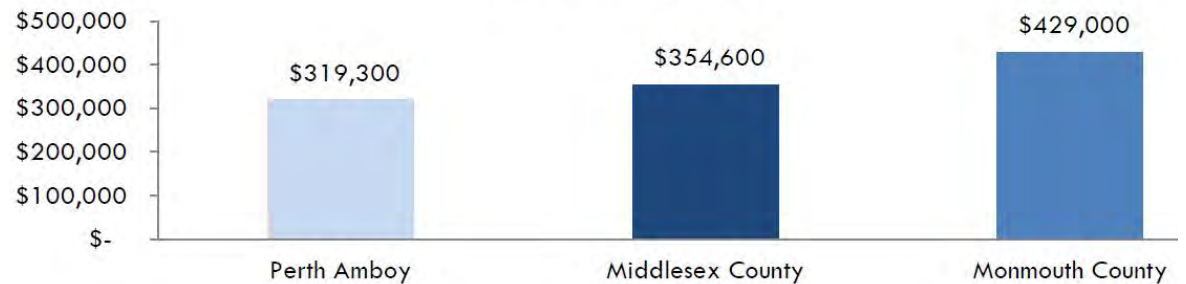
professional, downsizing baby boomers, and “divorced dad” market segments, for whom newer housing products and a greater share of owner-occupied units is more desirable. While there is strong demand regionally for new development, public sector involvement

(typically from cities) is still necessary to stimulate this development. Likewise, structured parking is a critical component of new development that can be challenging to privately finance, and will most likely require public sector involvement.

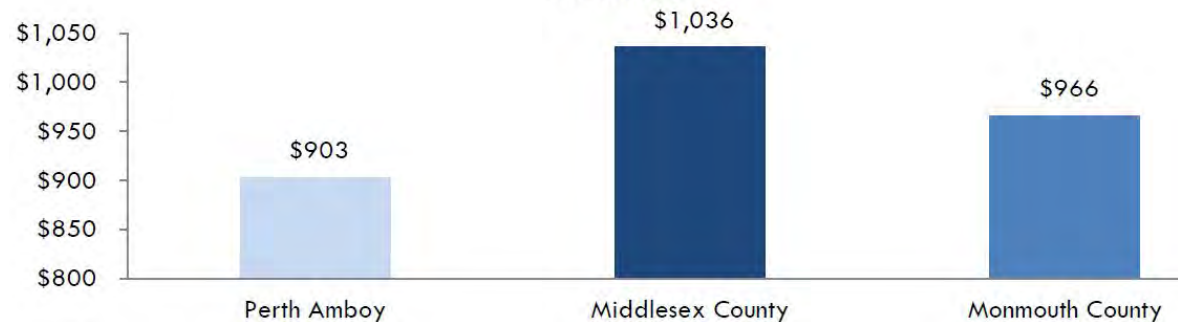
*Perth Amboy is a 30-minute drive to and from many population centers in the region*



**Median Home Value**



**Median Rent**



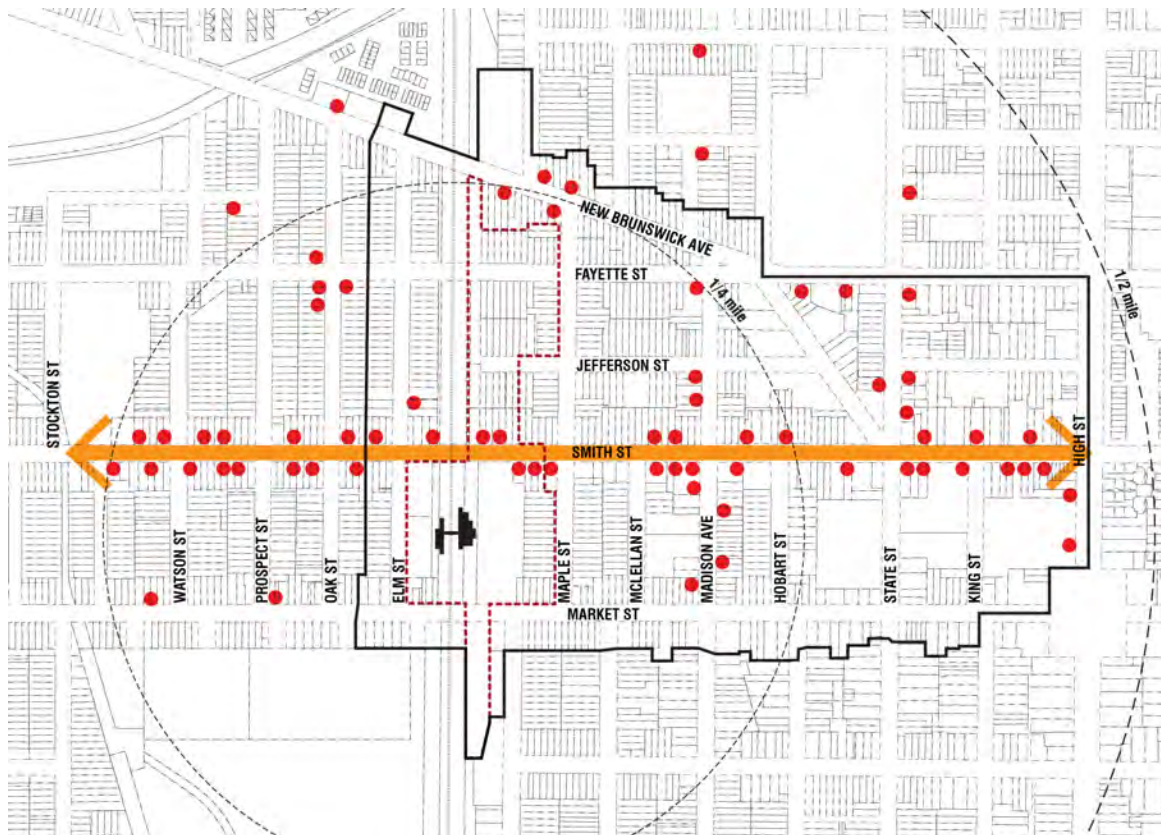


## ON-LINE MARKETING

A necessary part of doing business in this era of social media is connecting with users online. One method for improving business Downtown, especially for cultural resources and food businesses, is to make Perth Amboy a destination for the younger, internet-savvy demographic. Sites such as Yelp,

Facebook, Foursquare, and Twitter enable local businesses to gain exposure on the web, putting Perth Amboy "on the map" especially to those who may be new to the area or are just visiting. Potential visitors will typically access these types of sites for ideas of where to visit while in town. Further, social media

outlets can boost a popular restaurant or business with good reviews. Competition for "followers" and "likes" from visitors can create a healthy rivalry for neighborhood businesses, and increase Perth Amboy's web presence as a whole.



Downtown has a wealth of restaurants that would benefit by social media exposure

Terrazza on High Street already has a web presence

## STATE AGENCY WALK, TALK, AND ACT TOUR

The Project concluded with a Walk, Talk and Act Tour, held on February 28, 2014. The tour presented an opportunity for project partners to share key challenges and recommendations with representatives from key state agencies.

Apart from the Project Team and Steering Committee participants, other notable attendees included Anthony Finocey from NJDEP, Paula Stevens from the NJ Council on the Arts, Paul Ceppi from NJEDA, Alan Miller and Gary Scharfenberger from the NJ Office for Planning Advocacy, Charles Burton from Senator Menendez's office, and Craig Coughlin, assemblyman from NJ District 19.

The Tour focused on the Transit District, but also featured Perth Amboy's waterfront and a walk along Smith Street. Although the tour marked the conclusion of the Local Demonstration Project, it set the stage for the further development of the projection: the Development and Adoption of new Transit District Zoning and applying for Transit Village designation.



*The tour gathers in the Train Station bridge above the tracks to discuss next steps and implementation*







CONNECTING  
PEOPLE, PLACES,  
AND  
POTENTIAL.