

Downtown Shopability Analysis

New Port Richey, Florida



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City of New Port Richey

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INTRODUCTION



Aerial view of downtown New Port Richey

Executive Summary

Downtown New Port Richey is an emerging commercial district about to experience an expansion with the opening of a grocery store, restaurants, an apartment complex, and the re-opening of the historic Hacienda hotel. The downtown also has a strong market; according to a 2016 Gibbs Planning Group (GPG) retail market study, its trade area can support up to an additional 169,000 sf of retail and restaurant development. However, several shortcomings inhibit the downtown from realizing its full potential: it lacks the historic character desired by retailers, developers, and tourists; many downtown buildings are tired and generally unattractive; the lack of shade restricts shopping and; the downtown's storefronts, signage, streets, sidewalks, and parking do not meet modern standards. Addressing these issues by adopting the recommendations in this report will go a long way toward creating a more vibrant and successful downtown.

Background

Gibbs Planning Group, Inc. (GPG) has been retained by the City of New Port Richey to conduct an independent third-party analysis of its downtown. This analysis is intended to examine potential modifications to the downtown's physical elements as well as existing policies as they relate to its commerce. The field analysis was completed in August 2018.

It is intended that the implementation of these recommendations will improve pedestrian traffic, increase sales of existing businesses and encourage additional retailers and restaurants to deploy new stores in the downtown. These observations and recommendations are based on GPG's 30 years of urban retail experience and proven industry best practices and have been calibrated to reflect the region's unique characteristics and culture.

EXISTING CONDITIONS DISCUSSION

Storefronts

Observation: Many downtown storefronts are covered with large lettering or signs with large lettering.

Recommendation: Research has shown that there is an inverse relationship between the size of lettering on a storefront and the perceived value of the goods inside. Smaller font leads customers to believe that they are going to receive excellent service, unique products and a good value. Also, large lettering limits views of the interior, and shoppers are more likely to walk into a store or restaurant if they can see the goods or people eating inside. Owners should be encouraged to change their storefronts accordingly.



Observation: Many storefronts have dark-tinted or mirrored windows which prevent would-be customers from seeing the interior of the business. Also, some storefronts have glass block windows that have the same effect.

Recommendation: Shoppers feel unsafe entering a business that they cannot see inside. Dark-tinted, mirrored, and glass block windows limit the opportunity for window shopping and pedestrians are known to walk faster along storefronts where these are installed. As a result, businesses are compelled to use tacky signage or other gimmicks to alert shoppers that there is an operable business inside. While glare from the sun is a valid concern, modern glass can avoid these adverse conditions while maintaining a clear appearance. Furthermore, awnings, shades, blinds, and working shutters are a few design solutions which can increase architectural variety and still allow natural sunlight into the store.



Observation: Many of the downtown's existing storefronts are dated and uninspired, not reflecting the character of their businesses. Overall, the downtown's storefronts lack the design character necessary for a competitive shopping district.

Recommendation: Worn and tattered storefronts detract from the shopping experience. Such storefronts should be identified once per quarter and promptly fixed. To help accomplish this, the existing façade grants program should be expanded, and the city should hire a qualified town architect to prepare conceptual improvements and review grant applications.



Observation: Some storefronts have signbands that are blank.

Recommendation: Signbands are an integral component of a desirable storefront and a blank signband suggests a business is temporary while detracting from the streetscape. Existing signbands should be populated with handcrafted signage or removed in favor of another sign type.



Observation: Several awnings in the downtown are worn and/or made of outdated materials.

Recommendation: Replace outdated awnings with new ones made of either cloth, steel, timber or glass. Awnings should project no more than 6 feet and be at least 8 feet above the walk. Also, to allow for more light, awnings should be a single plane rather than a curve and should not have side panels.



Observation: Several downtown building frontages contain long, blank walls.

Recommendation: Long walls lacking in architectural variety are imposing to walk along and are uncharacteristic in an urban setting. There are a variety of treatments for long walls including changes in height, recesses and projections along the façade, ornamentation, architectural details, murals and landscaping such as vines or planters.



Observation: The historic storefronts of various downtown buildings have been altered.

Recommendation: To the extent possible, storefronts should be returned to their original designs. Paint and stucco should be removed to expose the original brick. Transparent glass should cover at least 70 percent of retail storefronts, and all glass block windows should be replaced (as they have no place in a successful downtown).

Signage & Wayfinding



Observation: Monument signs are out of scale in a walkable downtown.

Recommendation: Monument signs should be used sparingly in a downtown and only if the sign does not exceed eye level. Elevated monument signs are characteristic of a highway location and

are scaled to the car. Out of scale or character signage should be removed in favor of signage reflective of a historic, pedestrian-scaled downtown.



Observation: There is confusing signage around several public parking lots.

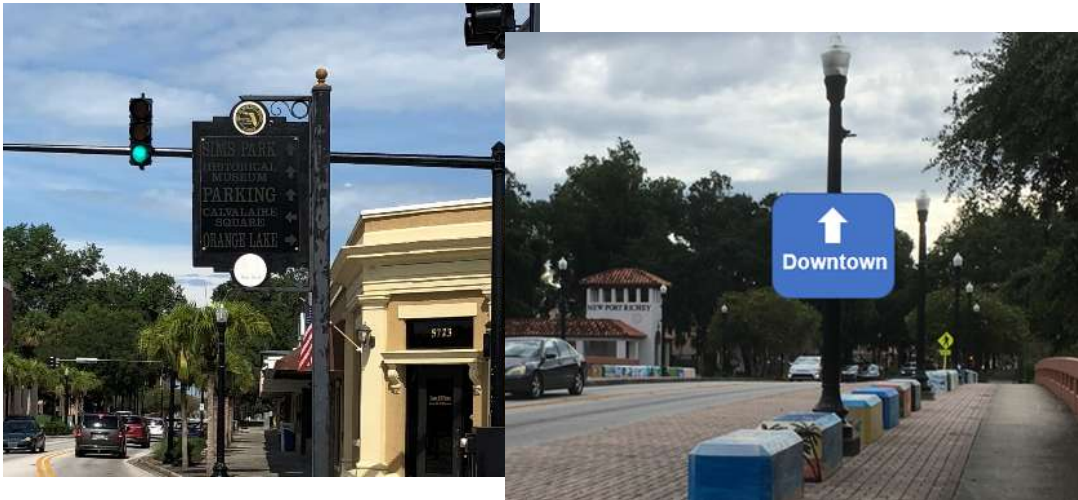
Recommendation: Finding parking is one of the first experiences a customer has downtown, so it should be reasonably convenient and conflict free. Therefore, it is imperative to remove confusing signage around the downtown's public parking lots. In particular, the sign on the left is intended to deter trespassers from entering the Frontier Communications building, but it actually deters visitors from parking in the adjacent public parking lot.



Observation: Master Mechanics Auto Repair and Cotee River Brewing Company (pictured above) are two of the only establishments downtown that have effective signage.

Recommendation: Well-designed and properly scaled signage contributes to strong retail sales and an attractive downtown. Therefore, the city should adopt a signage program and encourage restaurants and retailers to use signs that emphasize the identity of the business and the

downtown's historic character. Using hand-crafted signs designed by local artists and neon signs without plexiglass shields are two of the best strategies to achieve these objectives.



Observation: Wayfinding signs downtown are sparse and difficult to read due to faded lettering (as shown on the left). Additionally, on nearby local roads, there are very few wayfinding signs pointing towards the downtown.

Recommendation: The downtown needs an entirely new and comprehensive wayfinding system in which all signs match. The few faded signs presently in the downtown should be replaced with brighter signs with conspicuous lettering and placed at strategic busy intersections. In addition to directing visitors towards Sims Park and the library, it is important that they show the direction of parking, shops, and restaurants. Additionally, surrounding local roads should have matching signage that directs visitors towards the downtown (Note: graphics shown are representational only and a qualified signage and/or graphics firm should be engaged to design and plan a robust downtown wayfinding system).



Observation: The downtown lacks any formal entrance or wayfinding from the major business routes.

Recommendation: Install wayfinding signage at major business intersections surrounding the downtown, as shown above. Such intersections include Rowan Road at Main (pictured on the left), US-19 at Main Street (pictured on the right), and Route 54 at both Madison Street and Grand

Boulevard. The style of these signs should be consistent with the downtown's other wayfinding signage, with a bright background and large lettering.



Observation: There is insufficient wayfinding signage directing visitors to the downtown public parking lots. In fact, there is no wayfinding signage for several of the parking lots.

Recommendation: Install directional wayfinding signs in every public parking lot, as shown above. Similarly, the city's public parking map available on the government website should be altered into a reader friendly format that names each of the parking lots and details the number of spaces and any specific regulations associated with the lots. The map should be formatted with mobile-enabled viewing, prominently placed on the city's website without requiring a download and paper copies should be given to local businesses and organizations.

Sidewalks, Streets & Parking



Observation: Throughout much of the downtown, the sidewalks appear neglected. They are dirty, worn and cracked.

Recommendation: All downtown surfaces should be cleaned on a regular basis. The city should power wash sidewalks monthly or require businesses to do so. Further, cracks in the sidewalks should be repaired.



Observation: At virtually all pedestrian crossings, the slope of the sidewalk ramp leads people into the middle of the street and away from the direction of the crosswalk.

Recommendation: Where sidewalk ramps resemble those shown above, the curb should be flush with the gutter and the slopes adequately changed to allow for direct street crossings. Beyond enhancing walkability, this is especially important to accommodate strollers and wheelchairs.



Observation: Curb cuts along Main Street should be minimized and removed where possible.

Recommendation: Although downtowns rely on off-street parking, curb cuts should be limited or entirely removed along core blocks. Frequent curb cuts severely disrupt walkability due to frequent entering and exiting vehicles and changes in the slope of the sidewalk. The curb cut shown above is no longer in use and should be removed immediately as it likely does not comply with ADA (American with Disabilities Act) design standards for public sidewalks.



Observation: The north side of Grand Boulevard (pictured on the left) has on-street parking on both sides of the street. However, the south side of Grand Boulevard between Main and Nebraska (pictured on the right) has three travel lanes but no on-street parking

Recommendation: Grand Boulevard between Main and Nebraska should be put on a road diet. There is sufficient room to restripe this section of the boulevard to allow for two ten-foot travel lanes and two eight-foot parking lanes on both sides of the street. Essentially, the south side of Main Street should mirror its north side. Making this change is important because it will slow down vehicles approaching downtown and expand on-street parking. It is not apparent that each of the three existing lanes are required and the gains in on-street parking near Main Street will provide added convenience to downtown customers close to or in front of their desired locations.



Observation: The intersection of Main Street and Adams Street is difficult to cross.

Recommendation: A pedestrian crossing system (with crosswalk lights) is only on one side of Adams Street and requires pedestrians on the west side of Adams Street to first walk east to cross Main Street. Additionally, use of the crossing signal is no intuitive or familiar to pedestrian and motorists alike. A four-way stop controlled design at this intersection would slow down vehicles entering downtown from the east and would result in a more pedestrian friendly crossing. Similarly, all peripheral intersections should be studied to determine if a four-way stop would improve pedestrian crossing and reduce vehicle speeds entering downtown.



Observation: There are several surface parking lots along Main Street and Grand Boulevard.

Recommendation: Gaps in development due to parking lots (sometimes referred to as “missing teeth”) create an undesirable pedestrian experience and compromise the walkability of the study area with frequent curb cuts. Often, these gaps can be infilled with relatively inexpensive liner-type buildings with the trade-off of only a few parking spaces. Surface parking lots with frontage along primary streets should be studied for infill development, liner-buildings or moveable pop-up shops and at a minimum should be lined with a three-foot screen wall or decorative fence. Surface parking should be located behind buildings and not take up valuable frontage along main streets.



Observation: There are few pedestrian crossings downtown that connect the north and south sides of Main Street.

Recommendation: Add a mid-block crossing where Main Street intersects with Florida Avenue. This is a natural location for a crosswalk because there is no parking on this portion of the south side of Main Street.

Site Furnishings & Trees



Observation: Cheap and generic sandwich boards lack downtown character.

Recommendation: Sandwich boards should appear handmade and reflect the downtown as well as the identity of the business they are advertising.



Observation: The sidewalk appears fairly bland. Very few downtown retailers have flowers or other plantings in front of their stores, and many of the existing planters are empty.

Recommendation: To introduce color, flowerboxes should be put by store windows and should be maintained or supervised by a central authority for cohesiveness. Also, planters, hanging baskets and tree-well plantings should be maintained throughout the downtown.



Observation: Pedestrian crossing buttons are confusing and unnecessary.

Recommendation: Most pedestrian will not take the time to read the instructions to use the existing crossing signals; those that do will likely be confused; and nearly everyone is forced to sit through one cycle without a “walk” signal before they realize when they can cross the street. The button actuated crossing signals are likely more expensive to operate than automatic signals that change with every cycle and should be removed. Existing crossing signals should be replaced with a simple automatic crossing system.



Observation: A bus stop sign on Main Street is posted on a light pole that is in the middle of bushes where people cannot easily congregate and a public bench on Main Street is not in-line with the adjacent street trees.

Recommendation: Move the bus stop to a location where a group of people can easily congregate along the curb (and ideally where there is seating) and move the bench forward to be in-line with the street trees.



Observation: The light poles downtown lack decoration and signage.

Recommendation: Light poles should be utilized to enhance the streetscape and advertise the downtown. As shown on the right (which was taken in downtown Birmingham, Michigan), hanging flower baskets and colorful unique banners can achieve these objectives.



Observation: Some downtown restaurants are gated off from the sidewalk and have only installed plantings within their gates.

Recommendation: To soften the edge of the gate, these restaurants should place planters on both sides of their gates.



Observation: Retailers have implemented creative outdoor dining arrangements to increase pedestrian activity downtown.

Recommendation: Outdoor dining is a critical component of a vibrant and sought-after downtown environment. Many existing restaurateurs have installed outdoor dining behind or to the side of their buildings while others have added tables and chairs to the sidewalk or installed parklets or dining decks in on-street parking spaces. Café seating along Main Street should be encouraged to increase activity, however there should be regulations to ensure a clear walking path is maintained on the sidewalk. Similarly, dining decks and parklets should be regulated and limited to one per block to maintain convenient on-street parking.



Observation: The Main Street streetscape includes beautiful mature deciduous trees that provide shade and a unique pedestrian scale for downtown shoppers. However, most of these have been cut down in favor of palm trees.

Recommendation: Maintain the existing shade trees. These trees offer protection from extreme heat, and also enhance the downtown's uniqueness and authenticity. Furthermore, numerous studies have shown that such tree-lined downtown streets positively affect a shopper's mood and contribute to a perception that stores offer quality goods and services.

Economic Development Opportunities



Observation: The Richey Suncoast Theatre and Railroad Square are great amenities for the downtown but are underutilized.

Recommendation: The Richey Suncoast Theatre hosts community theater and runs a few movies each season, but its offerings should be expanded. In fact, currently there are month-long gaps where nothing is scheduled on the theatre's calendar. Entertainment is an important component of a successful downtown and can drive shopping and dining sales. There are several partnership models with community theaters that should be explored to encourage more frequent activity at the Richey Suncoast Theater.

Railroad square, with its colorful outdoor patios, is another prime place for community events and entertainment, in particular because it does not require closing down Main Street or Grand Boulevard. A programming strategy for Railroad Square should be implemented especially as it pertains to expanding the identity of downtown.



Observation: Railroad Square has hip outdoor dining, but its ambiance is hindered by an unsightly streetscape with little shade.

Recommendation: An overall streetscape strategy needs to be developed for Railroad Square, which should include grounding electrical wires, planting trees that provide shade, and uses complementary to downtown such as pop-up shops, outdoor dining, food trucks and public space. Support streets and alleyways like Railroad Square are successfully being redesigned in many downtowns to expand the urban experience and appeal to a broader audience (as shown to the right).



Observation: The area to the immediate west of downtown is conventionally suburban in nature.

Recommendation: This suburban area is misleading because it does not suggest the existence of a nearby downtown. These blocks and parcels are advantageous for redevelopment (as illustrated by Main Street Landing) and could be leveraged to connect the significant traffic from US-19 to downtown.

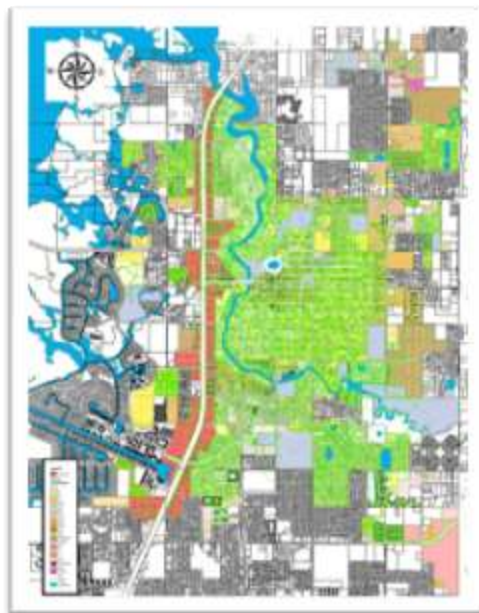
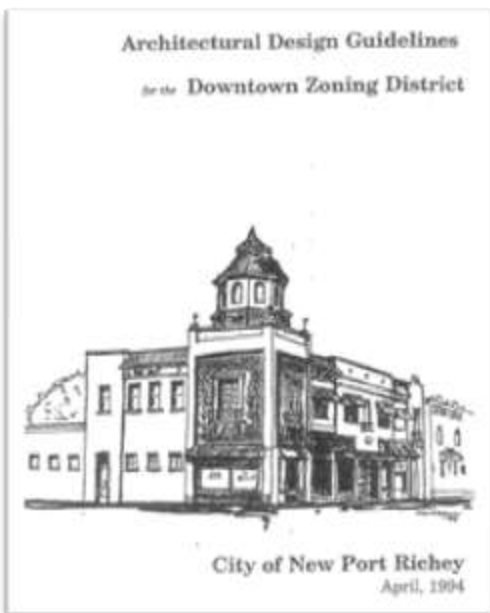
EXISTING CODE REVIEW

Codes, ordinances, guidelines and programs are a key component of a well-operated, engaging and economically robust downtown. Similarly, adopted codes and ordinances largely reflect to the development community whether a city supports continued economic development and is a key factor in the decision to explore and propose projects in a given jurisdiction. As such, codes and ordinances should not be onerous, but effective in producing development aligned with the community's vision and respectful of the downtown's historic character.

Architectural Design Guidelines for the Downtown Zoning District

The City's Architectural Design Guidelines is an excellent and progressive document with recommendations generally aligned with contemporary industry standards for downtown development. However, the document is voluntarily enforced, nearly 25 years old and incomplete in places. GPG recommends the document be updated in format and graphic content, enforced for all new downtown projects and applied to existing buildings with a sunset clause requiring compliance within five- to ten-years. Additionally, GPG recommends the following changes to the guideline:

- Clearly define which streets are pedestrian-oriented commercial or transitional and include a map of the downtown highlighting street designations.
- Include an overview of the programs, incentives and grants currently available to downtown businesses and property owners for façade and other building improvements.
- Expand architectural styles section to include visual descriptions of each style with illustrated design characteristics.
- Remove currently described new construction height restriction in favor of a number of stories height limit.
- Signs and awnings should have a minimum vertical clearance of eight feet from the sidewalk.



Zoning Ordinance

To encourage development in downtown New Port Richey, the zoning code should be streamlined and improved. One way to achieve this would be through implementation of an

illustrated form-based code which focuses on the scale and design of development as opposed to traditional Euclidean land-use based regulations. Specifically, GPG recommends:

- A guaranteed approval process timeline detailing the steps required to build a project in New Port Richey and the steps the city will take to ensure efficient approval and occupancy.
- Expand the types and densities of residential development allowed in the downtown district and explore how existing regulations may have unintended consequences that are unnecessarily limiting development.
- Remove parking requirements in the downtown district in favor of a payment-in-lieu-of-parking program which is directly invested into existing and future public parking.
- Create a specific downtown sign code which encourage creative signs that reflect the unique businesses and historic character of the downtown.
- Adopt and enforce the architectural design guidelines for the downtown district.

IMPLEMENTATION

As a result of an existing conditions analysis, code and plan review and merchandising recommendations, this study includes numerous strategies for building infill, lighting, open space, parking, storefronts, streetscape, tenant mix, vehicular circulation and walkability. To ensure sustainable commerce, maximum shopper appeal and strong sales, the following chart organizes the recommendations of this study by their short-, medium-, and long-term implementation targets.

Shopability Analysis Implementation Strategies

Short-Term	Medium-Term	Long-Term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Install planters, flowerbeds and hanging baskets. • Install shade trees on Main Street • Implement a comprehensive, multi-scale wayfinding system • Fund façade grant program according to architectural guidelines and hire a town architect • Clean sidewalks and other public surfaces on regular schedule, coordinate façade cleaning • Remove ineffective pedestrian crossing signals, obsolete curb cuts and improve curb cut and slope of crossings • Create map of downtown parking and advertise online 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consolidate study area zoning into comprehensive form-based standards that honor historic character of New Port Richey while incentivizing redevelopment • Eliminate parking requirements • Install four-way stops at key intersections entering downtown • Implement a creative streetscape and programming strategy for Railroad Square 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate or incentivize infill development at key sites along west Main Street • Ensure all downtown facades comply with industry standards