Food Markets and Revitalization: [Social and Economic Opportunities in Downtown Muncie]

Josh Heinz

Professor Jack Wyman
thesis studio instructor

Professor Olon Dotson
thesis advisor

Jeff Culp
thesis consultant
INTRODUCTION:

Muncie, Indiana’s downtown and surrounding neighborhoods would benefit socially and economically from a hybrid indoor/outdoor public/private food market. This market would contribute to the revitalization of the inner city by encouraging more people, businesses and industries to locate downtown. It would also provide a benefit to those that are already located downtown by strengthening the economy of the Central Business District.

Muncie’s downtown is an especially interesting site for this kind of architectural planning project. Due to urban sprawl, tax bases, and counter-progressive revitalization attempts, the inner city is left relatively empty and open to redesign.
Much of the density that was seen in the early twentieth century is now absent from downtown. There is an abundance of parking and unoccupied space that screams for attention, growth, and action. Opportunities are infinite.

Central markets are an ancient tradition still alive in cities everywhere: along the sides of rural roads, in crowded urban districts, and in town centers. Acting as social and economic nodes, markets benefit regional farmers, local businesses, and residents of the city. This thesis is fueled by the anticipation of results when placing a market in the heart of Muncie.
MARKETS:

Throughout history, central public markets, or farmers’ markets, have contributed to the economy and culture of all types of cities, villages, and neighborhoods. Like vital organs of the city, they have provided dwellers with the basic human essentials: food and social interaction.

Some of the earliest known markets occurred in ancient Egypt, facilitated by temporary structures erected in a central city location by the merchants themselves.

Ancient Greece saw the market in the form of the Agora, a permanent structure built in many large cities, which acted as a center for social, political and philosophical exchange as well as commercial activity (Wycherley, 50). These buildings grew and changed form, according to the needs of the growing cities.

Trajan, the Emperor of Rome in 98 – 117 AD, commissioned the design and construction of markets near his forums – both acting as social and economic nodes. Markets continued to be important in the Middle Ages under the control of the Merchants’ Guild. Paris established the first public provisioning system in 1811 under Louis XII. This idea spread throughout Europe and England and eventually found its way to the New World during its colonization. (Goodwin, 19)
Examples of public markets or farmers’ markets can be found in almost every major city in the United States. These come in all shapes and sizes and can be changed according to the needs of a community, or to reflect the culture of the area.

“Public markets in the open air, including many farmers’ markets and crafts markets, have sprung up in cities across the country, attracting people back to the public spaces of their downtowns and neighborhoods” (Spitzer, Baum, 1).

Quincy’s Market in Boston, MA is one of the first examples of an American public market, established in 1658. Modeled after the English market system, it became an important staple in the city’s economy, while encouraging social interaction at all levels. Faneuil Hall, the central market building, has served as an essential marketplace, drinking and meeting hall for the Sons of Liberty, trial house for British troops involved in the Boston Massacre, and venue for discussions, debates, and rallies leading to the American Revolution (Quincy, 21).

“The rich, the middle class, and the poor meet in these markets on an even footing, and thus is provided the spirit of democracy, which is essential to the perpetuity of our institutions” (Marks, Report on Market System...).
The very first American public market, the French Market, was located in the French Quarter of New Orleans, LA. Reading Terminal Market in Philadelphia, PA, serves as both a public market and train station.

Pike Place Market in downtown Seattle, WA has existed since 1907. “The market bustles with life: products spill out in all directions, and people, cars, and delivery vans teem into the streets” (Spitzer; Baum, 19). Pike Place is an excellent example of a hybrid public/private market district with positive impact on downtown Seattle.

Findlay Market, in the historic Over the Rhine district of Cincinnati, consists of both indoor and outdoor, public and private services, run by local businesses and farmers from around the region.
Both enclosed and open-air shops and stalls are available for lease. Some farmers are allowed to park their trucks under a permanent pavilion at the market entrance in order to sell their fresh goods directly to the pedestrian from the back of their vehicles.

Because they provide a retail space for local farmers and small businesses, as well as facilitating public interaction, markets fit well into the modern American downtown, which is a center for social and economic activity. In cities like Muncie, IN, whose downtown districts are suffering from metropolitan expansion, a new market could revitalize the Central Business District and bring activity back to the core. This would require a thorough analysis of the downtown area and its surrounding neighborhoods, as well as consideration for the history and culture of Muncie.
MUNCIE:

Muncie, IN (pop. 67,166) is located in east-central Indiana, northwest of Indianapolis. Previously known as Munsee or Munseetown, it began as a meeting ground for representatives of the many native tribes of Indiana, and was occupied by the Delaware tribe. This began at the highest point of Munsee, located on the north bank of the White River, the current site of the Minnetrista Cultural Center. Statues and paintings throughout town represent Chief Munsee and his followers.

In the early 1800’s white settlers came to the area and established a town on the south side of the river. Native tribes were eventually pushed westward by the U.S. government. Agriculture became the primary industry, and with the arrival of the railroad in 1852, the market opened wide. Population increased steadily and Muncie was quickly incorporated as a town. In 1886 natural gas deposits were discovered in nearby Eaton. New industries were drawn to the area by the abundant energy supply, and Muncie’s population doubled to 11,000 in less than five years. This expansion continued well after the end of the gas boom and into the 1960’s (Connolly, 215).

above left: aerial view of central Muncie, IN from the northwest; left: downtown Muncie during the filming of a movie in 1924
Several affluent neighborhoods appeared at the perimeter of downtown in the beginning of the twentieth century, including the Old West End and the East Central district. These neighborhoods, along with the Minnetrista/Mckinley neighborhood, housed the wealthiest citizens. The Industry neighborhood was built south of downtown, opposite the main railroad lines, serving as a large working class neighborhood.

Muncie prospered with the manufacture of metal and glass products, automobiles, and the mining of natural gas until the mid twentieth century. Long after the end of the gas boom, many industries, including the Ball Corporation, relocated. The lack of business caused severe unemployment, leading to poverty and crime. Also, with the construction of Interstate Highway 69 a few miles to the west, and State Road 332, which connected it to the city, Muncie’s downtown began to empty. Businesses that still resided in central Muncie relocated to Highway 332 (McGalliard Road) in order to take advantage of thick automobile traffic.

Attempts at rejuvenating the inner city included cutting off Walnut Street (the main commercial axis) from automobile traffic, thereby making it a pedestrian mall. This strategy was used in many American cities, including Indianapolis and Chicago, but it backfired in all cases, isolating the Central Business District from traffic, and pushing businesses away from downtown.
Currently, Muncie’s downtown is only a shadow of what it used to be. The stretch of Walnut Street between the White River and the railroad tracks is lined with historic commercial buildings (and buildings made to look historical) however this character is mostly gone in all other areas of downtown. Abandoned structures, empty parking lots, and “modern” buildings now occupy most of the land. While the historical character of the East Central and Old West End neighborhoods is physically preserved in the attractive houses, these communities are distressed by poverty, crime, lack of jobs, and lack of commercial services (especially grocery and pharmacy).

*top left: urban analysis of central Muncie; far left: southside of downtown; left: corner of Jackson and Walnut streets in the middle of downtown*
Grocery service is certainly not lacking in Muncie. A total of 350,000 square feet of grocery retail space is scattered throughout the city (ZHA). Unfortunately, there are no stores anywhere near the Central Business District, forcing residents to drive, or use public transportation to the outlying areas just to purchase food and other essentials. Also, a vast majority of the grocery space in Muncie is owned by Marsh Supermarkets, Inc. This corporation began in Muncie and eventually grew to serve most of east-central Indiana. Four Marsh supermarkets, four Lo-Bill supermarkets, and over twenty Village Pantry convenience stores (all Marsh operated) are located in the city. Other grocery stores are run by Wal-Mart, Meijer, and Aldi, however none of these are located in the inner city.

*top right:* existing and proposed grocery services in Muncie; *right:* demographic maps showing growth, average income, and population density
OBJECTIVES:

Muncie, IN is an ideal location for a downtown revitalization project involving the establishment of a public/private food market. Indeed, a conventional modern grocery store with little relation to the site, economy, and culture of Muncie could fall out of the sky, land in downtown, make decent profits, and maybe even contribute to revitalization.

However, a hybrid public/private open/enclosed market facility that responds to the physical, social, and economic conditions of Muncie could spark a revitalization movement that would spread throughout the city.

“The most successful type of retail market that has yet been evolved is the combination of the farmers’ retail open public market with the public or private enclosed market” (Goodwin, 41).
A central market alone would provide a multi-faceted strategy for re-growth: stimulating commerce and attracting new residents and businesses to downtown, acting as a central community landmark, facilitating social and economic exchange, creating blue-collar jobs, contributing to public health, and adding to the cultural identity of Muncie.

In order to accomplish these goals, certain design guidelines must be used, most importantly in the choice of site. Site is primary because of the nature of a food market as a social gathering zone just as well as a commercial entity.

Unlike the standard modern grocery store, this hybrid market must integrate itself into the city and downtown for effect. Proximity to neighborhoods, public transportation, landmarks, commercial and industrial axes, parks, plazas and highways must be considered.

“While a good location does not ensure a profitable operation, it is an indispensable starting point in the life of a supermarket, which must attract people to a fixed point for a 15 to 20-year period” (Kane, Jr., v).
Analysis:

The project site lies at the south end of downtown along Walnut Street, near the railroad tracks. This site was chosen for its central location from which a market could serve the nearby Old West End, East Central and Industry neighborhoods.

Railroad tracks to the south facilitate an industrial spine that slices Muncie in half, acting as both a physical and psychological barrier. The site location provides an opportunity to reconnect the Walnut Street commercial axis, benefiting both downtown and the south side.

Effective public parks and plazas are absent in the area, suggesting that a portion of the site be dedicated to open recreational activity. This would reinforce the market as a community node and icon for downtown. Open space would also allow the market to expand if necessary. Other activities such as artistic displays and performances, concerts, fairs, carnivals, or tournaments could also be facilitated.
Because 30% of households within a ½ mile radius of downtown do not own cars (ZHA), the site must be designed for maximum pedestrian, bike, and bus accessibility. 3 city blocks to the north is the MITS (Muncie Indiana Transit System) central bus station. MITS is the major public transportation system for the city. Bus routes reach to the outskirts of Muncie and back. Routes adjacent to the site serve the south side of town and run every fifteen minutes.

Between Walnut and Mulberry Streets (E-W) and between Howard and Seymour Streets (N-S) would be the major enclosed portion of the market. An open-air market and recreational space is proposed on the north side of Howard. Howard Street would serve as a secondary pedestrian spine to Walnut, connecting the Horizon Convention Center to the west with the YMCA and new Howard Square senior housing project to the east.
Most of the site for the enclosed market consists of an asphalt parking lot, which is sparsely used at all hours of the day, mostly by those visiting the adjacent YMCA facility. Because of the abundance of parking space in this area of downtown, it is unlikely that construction here will negatively impact automobile accessibility.

On the southwest corner of the site lies an abandoned commercial building from circa 1900. The masonry and wood structure appears sound and sturdy. An altered storefront faces Walnut and another faces what was formerly Seymour Street to the north. Brick paving, concrete parking curbs, and trees lining the street are all intact. The building has served as a restaurant and bar. I propose rehabilitating the structure as a pharmacy or restaurant.
Flanking the site to the south are similar abandoned buildings that could provide additional commercial services. To the southeast stand Uncle Monte’s Soul Food Restaurant, formerly occupied by the Salvation Army, the abandoned Muncie Inn, and a few single-family houses. To the east stand the YMCA facility, and further, Howard Square Apartments. To the north of the site stand several commercial buildings occupied by restaurants and bars, a parking lot and a large open grassy space. To the east stand the historic 6-story Roberts Hotel, several historic commercial buildings, and the Muncie Mission, which provides emergency food and shelter to those in need. Horizon Convention Center and Muncie Children’s Museum stand across High Street, further west.
Program:

“...one can list some of the issues an effective program must consider: the lack of markets in inner city areas; the relative decrease of all types of food stores in inner city areas; the lack of mobility of many (but not all) black and low income shoppers; the particular mix of products...and services desired by inner city area families; and the employment of inner city area residents by food stores” (Sexton, Jr., 119).

In order to be successful, a central market must compete with outlying supermarkets and convenience stores scattered throughout the city. It should be flexible in providing both public and private services to the city and should offer a large quantity and variety of goods.

However, since downtown revitalization is the major goal of this project, the facility could work in attracting people to Walnut Street for essential shopping, and encourage pedestrians to wander into other small stores and restaurants for other goods and services.

The indoor market can sell everything that conventional grocery stores offer, and can transform itself according to the needs of the customer or the merchant. Local vendors, farmers, and large corporations can sell their goods and services inside. This will maximize variety and encourage competition, which is good for any market system.
Indoor services will include a delicatessen, bakery, and café, which can operate as a single or as separate departments. Deli and bakery goods can be prepared in the store, requiring substantial service area. Produce goods are also prepared and sold inside the store by local and regional merchants. Several service areas are necessary to accommodate the many farmers who will display their fresh fruits and vegetables during market season. A meat and seafood market will offer prepared and frozen goods and is also open to both local and regional meat vendors. Dairy products, frozen foods, dry goods, bulk items, beer and wine, floral arrangements, stationery, periodicals, and non-food domestic items, such as paper and cleaning products, can also be sold indoors. Other services include bill payment, banking, and customer assistance.

During spring and summer, an outdoor market pavilion will provide the necessary space and equipment for a community farmers’ market. A simple roof is required for shade and protection from rain, while enclosed portions will provide storage space for coolers, freezers, preparation equipment, and fixtures. Display bins and equipment can be moved outside during the market, and locked indoors in the evening and during the winter. The pavilion can still be used as a community shelter during non-market season.
**DESIGN:**

The enclosed market is divided into three large independent bays that contain the major display spaces of the store.

The northern bay, or Bay #1, facilitates the display of produce, deli and bakery goods, which are the major products sold at farmers’ markets. This bay also contains a public café, adjacent to the deli and bakery on the northwest corner of the site, encouraging social activity while attracting people to the market. A direct pedestrian route is allowed through the store between the Horizon Convention Center to the west, and the YMCA to the east.

Dry grocery goods (mostly non-perishable food items), dairy, and frozen foods are sold in Bay #2, which also contains checkout lines and a newsstand. The newsstand is configured to serve both indoor customers and pedestrians passing by on Walnut Street.

In Bay #3, non-food items such as cleaning products, paper products, and pet food, are sold. This bay has an additional public entrance on the south façade for easy access to the adjacent pharmacy/restaurant building and the pedestrian alley created by former Seymour Street.

These three bays are serviced by two long, independent cores with loading docks at the eastern ends. The northernmost core contains the service functions for the produce, deli, and bakery departments. Dairy, meat and frozen food departments are incorporated into the second, southern core, along with the beer and wine section, public restrooms, the customer service counter, administrative office, and bill-payment counter. Parts of both cores could be operated by the building owner, or leased by local independent vendors. Arrangement of equipment provides flexibility in this respect. Major public entrances are located at the western end of both cores, however the entire building can be open during warm weather.

The structural system of the market consists of reinforced concrete portals that provide architectural rhythm, and govern the interior layout of displays and equipment. In the typical modern supermarket, the structure’s impact on the ground plane is minimized, allowing unlimited flexibility in the store layout. Instead of using this system, display units and equipment can be integrated into the structure, creating character and identity, which attract customers to the market.

Between the concrete portals, at the building perimeter, operable curtainwall facades are installed. These elements allow the building to be completely open in warm weather conditions, and the entire facility can be utilized as an open public market. During winter months, the facades can be closed, facilitating a private market or grocery store. Interior displays, as well as the public café, are allowed to flood into the street, making the enclosed building into a sort of urban plaza that happens to be protected from the elements.
**Structural Sequence:** [A] reinforced concrete frame, [B] operable curtainwall facades, [C] ribbed slab roof and tensile pavilion roof, [D] sawtooth trusses, [E] bay roofs and finalized design

Concrete portals at the building perimeter have substantial overhang to facilitate outdoor markets, cafes, and pedestrian cover. The market reaches out to pedestrians with open facades and wide overhangs. In the winter it is an enclosed building and in the summer it is an open public plaza with a roof.

Sawtooth trusses span the short dimension of each bay, and are designed to allow both natural light and air to penetrate the building, even when the market is fully enclosed. Stack ventilation is possible in summer months when the operable curtainwalls are open. Natural light and ventilation will reduce the loads on mechanical systems, increase worker productivity, and help sales.
Immediately north of the enclosed market, across from Howard Street, is the open-air public market pavilion. Steel tube or pipe columns, in conjunction with tensile members, support a lightweight roof. Enclosed masonry structures house display units, coolers, and service equipment. During market season, farmers are allowed to park their vehicles under the pavilion, move their goods into the service area, and put them on display facing Howard Street and the central market building to the south. Unlike most open-air markets, this facility provides the merchant with all necessary equipment, storage, and preparation space. During non-market days, all equipment can be locked inside and the facility can still serve as a recreational shelter.
Section perspective looking east

Conceptual physical model
view of central market from northwest
view of cafe seating in Bay #1
southwest view of central market
view of Bay #2 from the east
open market pavilion from the east
view from west
SUMMARY:

This project has shown how an indoor/outdoor public/private market facility would improve conditions in downtown Muncie and its surrounding neighborhoods. By providing grocery service to areas lacking, stimulating economic competition, and by establishing a community interaction zone, the market would begin revitalization in the inner city.

Current plans to rejuvenate downtown, as visualized by Muncie Redevelopment Commission, Muncie Urban Enterprise Association, and Rundell Ernstberger Associates, are expected to begin after the restoration of the White River Greenway and construction of the Wheeling Cantilever Walkway. Plans include the development of a retail entertainment complex, infill housing, a public park and open greenspace. While a temporary open-air farmers’ market could be incorporated into this redevelopment plan, a permanent central market is absent. I strongly suggest to the City of Muncie, that a semi-enclosed market structure that allows flexibility between public and private services be built.

In addition, I suggest that further study be conducted on the development of public markets as revitalization strategies in distressed communities around the country. This study must be a multi-disciplined endeavor, requiring the input of local residents and businesses, public officials, economists, sociologists, architects and planners. Opportunities are infinite in places where space is abundant and city dwellers are willing to cooperate for the common good.

In the end, I hope that this project has proven the importance of public markets as urban centers and regenerators of activity in places like Muncie.
REFLECTION:

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