**Purpose of Thesis**

This thesis provides an overview of the opinions of different individuals concerned with the decline of downtown Muncie. It can also be viewed as a method of identifying commonalities in problem definition among these individuals. Through the recognition of these commonalities, a future direction in policy making can be identified. The study involves a compilation of 13 interviews with people from the many sectors involved in downtown Muncie.

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INTRODUCTION

Downtown Muncie has experienced noticeable abandonment and decline since the 1960’s. This is a phenomenon that has occurred in most downtowns across the country. It is the consequence of the “flight to the suburbs” or “urban sprawl.” The development of malls and superstores on the periphery of cities occurred. No longer is the downtown the center.

This decline presented many problems, for downtown Muncie. They include the abandonment and subsequent degradation of buildings, the decay of retail activity, and the overall absence of people in the downtown. In addition to this, new problems have developed through time either due to the neglect of earlier problems, or the advent of modern challenges. The specific problems and solutions discussed in this paper include, parking, “The Plaza,” traffic, self-image, crime, and code enforcement.

This research focuses not on the textbook definitions of the problems in downtown Muncie, nor does it attempt to offer solutions. Rather, the true purpose of this thesis is to provide a basis for discussion. In the beginning the intent of this work was to provide a vehicle to inform the surrounding Muncie community about the problems in downtown. However, it evolved
into a means of communication among the participants in the downtown -- not the outsiders. Through the compilation of these quotations, commonalties can be identified. A commonalty is an automatic starting point for progress. Also, this work deliberately avoids the use of statistical information. I would like to instead focus on the human aspects of the situation. Statistics may be helpful to some individuals who can understand their context. However, I believe this thesis goes beyond the facts and figures. It looks at the emotions, feelings and viewpoints of those involved in the downtown area. To properly convey the messages of this study, I avoid using my voice to transfer the opinions of others. It is their voice that tells the story of downtown.

I interviewed a total of 13 people from different sectors of downtown Muncie. These sectors included the merchants, the city government, and private organizations concerned with downtown development. The list of those interviewed is as follows:

Dan Allen (President of the Chamber of Commerce)
Bruce Baldwin (Redevelopment Commission)
John Bowles (President of Heart of the City Development Corporation and President of Star Financial Bank)
Dan Canan (Mayor)
Jim Carey (Urban Enterprise Association)
Tony Costello (Ball State Professor of Architecture)
Andrew Dale (Community Development)
Steve Eggleston (Home Center)
Jenny Gordy (Uptown Action Council)
Ken Hughes (Manager of Hotel Roberts)
Terry Murphy (Chamber of Commerce)
Mike Powell (Owner of Jack's Cameras)
Lynn Thornburg (East Central Reinvestment Corporation - ECRC).

In retrospect, I feel the manner of my interviews is debatable. On one hand, I wish I had strictly followed a set list of questions. This would have supplied me with everyone's viewpoint on specific topics. However, I allowed each interview to take on a life of its own. My list of questions was merely a flexible guide. Although this method may have produced unbalanced responses, I feel it gave a truer representation of the perceptions of each individual.

In the discussion of solutions or ways to promote downtown development I will review those that are actually in the works, and those that are simply the ideas of these individuals. In this arena there is some common-ground, however, debate is noticeable as well.
BACKGROUND

When asked to describe the deterioration of the downtown, most of those I interviewed had the same basic story. It is the age old text book description of the disease that has plagued downtowns across the country -- suburbanization. One of my goals in asking the subjects to describe the deterioration was to determine whether or not everyone began with the same mind set. The fact that everyone did was a sign of hope. Dan Allen, President of the Chamber of Commerce, described the beginning of Muncie's problems in the following quote: "One common thread is that most of the deterioration began back in the early sixties as you saw the mall concept really gain in favor with the retail buyers." Mayor Dan Canan had this memory:

Oh certainly, I can remember as a child, that was the hub of shopping back then, my mother would take my brother and I shopping, I'm talking when I was probably five to 10 years old—so we're talking 30 years ago. That was the area, and everybody did all of their shopping downtown, and today there are very few places to shop downtown. I think a lot of it has to do with the shoppers in general. You've had the malls come in. I think the mall is now 25 years old. I would assume the start of the decline was the opening of the Muncie mall.
Mike Powell, owner of Jack’s Cameras brings forth a similar, yet different point of view, “People blame it on the lopsided development that was allowed on the West - just uncontrolled growth. It's something that happened everywhere, so Muncie’s not unique.” Lynn Thornburg, director of the East Central Reinvestment Corporation (ECRC) mentioned the same effect the mall had on the downtown. However she also believed the problems began much earlier than that:

There were problems in the sixties before the mall came in, and again, we go to the moneyed people. The financial people, I won’t say their name, but it’s a four letter word and there’s a university and a hospital named after them, that also owned a large department store downtown that locked out other department stores. That was one of their unwritten restrictions -- that the city fathers followed.

Thornburg also went on to describe the exodus from downtown: “One by one the little drugstores and dime stores and things left. The jewelry stores stayed and the government stayed.” Jim Carey of the Urban Enterprise Area sums up why he thinks people no longer come to the downtown:

Its like you or I, if I shop at a supermarket, if I just need a loaf of bread or a gallon of milk, all I do then -- I just go to the Pantry or something. Go where I don’t have to walk. Just go in and get it. Pay more for it, but that’s the way it is, you know. They just won’t come downtown for no more than they’ve got to offer.
The result of the abandonment has produced some horrifying effects in downtown Muncie. Ball State Professor of Architecture, Tony Costello states:

In the course of the 29 years I’ve been here, probably almost half of the buildings in the downtown have been demolished. An aerial photograph of the downtown from 1966 and one taken in 1996 would be startling. It would look like a city that had gone through a bombing. I mean, if you look at pictures of Europe after the war, that very much is what Muncie looks like.

Director of Community Development, Andrew Dale added to this description by saying, “The downtown area is designated as an area of slum and blight, and that means that it’s not a place where you probably want to live.”

According to Dan Allen, the downtown area is “really a black eye on our community. It doesn’t represent the dynamic quality of people in leadership of the Muncie community.”

All agree about the history and sequence of the downtown’s decline. Most mentioned the role the mall played in the deterioration of the area. One also brought up the idea of allowing “corporate interests” to restrain competition. Keeping all of these things in mind, the future may look bleak for Muncie. However, as they say, the first and hardest step is admitting you have a problem.
PRIORITIES, POLITICS AND PLANNING

One of the first things I noticed while conducting my research was the vast number of groups with interests in the downtown (see Appendix A). Community Development, the Redevelopment Commission, Heart of the City Development Corporation, Uptown Action Council, Chamber of Commerce, and Delaware Advancement Corporation are among the many. Along with this, I found that the members of all these groups intertwine. The director of one organization was almost always on the boards of all of the other organizations. At a first glimpse, this may seem ideal. In essence, it appears that everyone is all on one big group. However, the problem is that each of these members still must hold to the priorities of their own group to look after when doing business with a another group. As Tony Costello stated, “In most cases private agendas will supersede the public agendas. In other words - private gain will always in Muncie, win out over the public welfare or public good...”

The issue of “politics” came up quite frequently in all of my interviews. However, this is a hard commonalty to define, due to the many different
meanings that can be applied to the word. One interpretation was given by Ken Hughes (Hotel Roberts):

Politics. Nobody can agree. Politics, itself is a system of disagreement. There are a lot of problems in this community. The community is basically bankrupt, can’t drive on half of the streets, the downtown is blighted. Yet, the interesting article in today’s newspaper will be how the prosecuting attorney is ticked off at some judge for taking a piece of paper off of a desk. I mean, it just doesn’t make any sense at all. So that’s the biggest problem -- it’s just political. Somebody needs to, like Harry Truman said, the buck needs to stop somewhere. Someone needs to say, enough of this, this is what we’re going to do, and this is how we’re going to proceed with it...We as people who have put our money up in downtown Muncie, would like to see it move faster, and while the stumbling block there is bureaucracy. Nobody can agree on anything.

Andrew Dale’s (Community Development) sentiments are somewhat similar, “It’s cooperation from so many different groups, that frankly I have a hard time seeing it ever being done, because history will tell you that nobody can get together in this town and get it done. Everything is so lethargic and there are no connections that are made that cement groups together and foster cooperation.” Lynn Thornburg (ECRC) was more specific in her definition of politics, “Muncie’s a very political area. I’m not talking Democrat or Republican, I’m talking politics, which is the same and different. It’s a four year mentality.”

Tony Costello holds high hopes for the downtown if things change:
I think if we can get the damn political stuff taken care of, I think this
city is -- and again its going to take a change of perception -- because
most people would right now say this guy better be committed to a
mental institution, but I really believe this city can do whatever it
wants to do. That's not a commonly held attitude.

Even before a group is formed, politics is a problem. John Bowles,
President of Heart of the City describes the problems involved in the 1992
creation of the group:

We understood that to be successful, the first thing that had to happen
was it wasn't perceived to be a political group, and in Muncie that's
kind of hard to do. So, we, you know, the Mayor was obviously a
part of that group. At that time, we had a Democratic majority on the
city council. We told the mayor we needed somebody from the city
council involved. His immediate response was that there was a
Republican on the city council and that's who it ought to be. In the
end, we said we really thought it probably needed to be more
politically balanced. So, we did end up having one of the Democratic
members of the City Council.

The role of politics seems to be a strong one in this area. The problem with
this issue is that it is so vague. I could never really tell what the real
problem was.

Following right along with politics, is the problem of planning. The
word "plan" came up in almost all of my interviews. The realization of the
need for a plan is quite strong. Lynn Thornburg (ECRC) states her opinion
of the problem:

There is no plan. There are 10 plans -- and there is no plan. There is
no strong driving force. There are probably five agendas driving
that...I think its just no plan. Lots of plans, but no plan, or no implementation of a plan -- or nobody in charge. Administrators that bent to the moneyed people and the money.

Andrew Dale (Community Development) notes that not just any plan will work. "I think a basic plan, that would really help. A plan that’s adjustable, that we could get RFP’s (Request for Proposals) out. I think that those are things we could actively be doing now.” He also described why he thinks people have stayed away from plans:

I think people think that plans are going to hold processes, but really a plan expedites, and to me, instead of putting so much focus on individual projects right now that probably won’t go -- I think we really should sit down and say, well lets dream a little about what we want.

Mayor Canan also mentioned the need for a plan. “I think what’s missing is an overall plan that everybody agrees is where Muncie’s downtown should be 10 or 15 years from now, so we’d all be going in the right direction, or same direction.”

An interesting thing about this call for a “plan” is that there actually was a plan developed in 1989. It was done through the office of Community Development and cost around $95,000 (Dale). However, the “Central City Plan” was never implemented. Andrew Dale (Community Development) explains why:
The plan is very colorful and it's very visual about what could be done, but the plan never says how it could be done. I don't care to see what the thing looks like when I'm planning anything. I mean I do when we get to that point. It's important but it's hard to get to that point if you don't know what vehicle you're going to drive in to make it happen. So that plan, from what I've seen isn't real good at explaining how it could happen. If you paid $95,000 for a plan, wouldn't you want them to tell you maybe what avenues to go to make it happen. I think it's somebody who is sitting down who can doodle pretty fancy and get it done. It's nice that they did that, and it's important to the plan. But the other half, and the most important is how are you going to make it happen. It's called money, and it's called certain people and certain agencies. It's not explained in that, and if it is explained in that, if I recall correctly it's explained simplisticly in a way that doesn't foster reality.

In discussing the different entities that comprise the downtown in conjunction with priorities, politics, and planning, I found some differences. Although, as the above individuals recognize the need for a plan, these next quotations are from those who believe that an organization has finally stepped up to take control. That organization is the Heart of the City. President of the organization, John Bowles, describes its purpose:

The Heart of the City Development Corporation is currently what we've been attempting to put together to try and be a catalyst for some significant events to happen downtown. The background of the Heart of the City goes back about four years...the mayor...brought a lot of people together...he called it the Mayor's Summit on Downtown...I went to the mayor and suggested to him that a group that large...was never going to be able to come up with a consensus in the ability to make a real positive impact, plus there were players missing...that were able to mold public opinion...or had the ability to either control or enhance the ability to come up with the financial capability to make some of the things happen that needed to happen.
The Heart of the City is the final hope for some of the individuals. Mike Powell (Jack’s Cameras) stated, “I think this one has the most potential. If it doesn’t work, I probably won’t get involved with anymore.” Recently the Heart of the City has become more closely aligned with the Chamber of Commerce. Dan Allen (Chamber of Commerce) explains the process:

We got together with our economic development staff and we said we have to take this on. It can’t be a separate entity because there isn’t the additional funding. We just have to look how we can be more efficient with our manpower and we have take this on. So, we did. We went to the Heart of the City, volunteered to take on the task, and in essence encompassing the downtown area as part of our total economic efforts. That’s been in existence now for about four months and I’m just amazed at how effectively we’re already being.

Others don’t share this enthusiasm. When I asked Andrew Dale what projects the Heart of the City had done he stated:

I don’t think they’re doing much, and other people would tell you that they are, but the way they’re doing it is, to me, is all wrong. What they’ll do is they’ll key on a specific project, or they’ll find out someone’s interested in a building. It might be someone who’s really going to do it, and they’ll hone in on that. They’ll say, well, this is what we should do. It’s like the tail’s wagging the dog. There’s no methodology to their madness. It just like, well, if someone’s interested, lets put all of our eggs over there and help them with that. Well, then over here, you know, maybe we should be looking somewhere else at that time, but you don’t know that if you don’t have a plan.
Steve Eggleston (Home Center) also mentioned skepticism about the group, “to date they haven’t done any concrete projects.” However, Dan Allen (Chamber of Commerce) states, “It’s not readily apparent because you haven’t seen the ground breaking, but we have three projects right now that are very significant that are reaching the final stages of conclusion.”

Another dispute involves the need for a developer. Originally, the Heart of the City saw the need for one. John Bowles (Heart of the City) explains:

No group of volunteers was going to be able to make a significant impact. It’s going to have to be a paid person, or a paid staff. A couple of us in the group had been involved in the Chamber of Commerce economic development efforts over the years. Two of us had served as chairmen of the Board of Directors of the Chamber of Commerce, and we had another person in the steering committee that had also been on the board. We all recognized that an awful lot of what needed to be done was economic development, or very similar to economic development issues. We already had a very successful economic development staff in place in Muncie. So early on we made those contacts to see if there would be an interest, and at that time there was not . . . So we spent the next couple of years trying to figure out a way to fund having a paid staff . . . We probably figured out ways to raise about half of the money . . . How would you ever get a really top notch qualified person to come in and work for a group like that?

Although, eventually the Heart of the City did team up with the Chamber’s economic development efforts, the idea of an outside developer still holds merit. Andrew Dale (Community Development) states his point of view:

If they would have come to us, we would have helped with that most likely. . . I think that person is neutral and that person isn’t tainted. I
mean, when you get these groups together, I participate in the Heart of the City, I'm not a voting member, but I'm a representative of the Mayor, you know you're going to get people who are partial and such. But there is no question about it. Somebody who leads; that has experience that could tell everybody, 'No! You're crazy,' or tell everybody, 'Hey, that's a good idea, let's run with it. Let me see what I can do in a month or two weeks or two months. I'll get back with you and let you know.' But you see, one side of it is that people get caught up in the money. Instead of saying, 'Let's find out,' they say, 'We can't do it.'

All agree that lack of a plan, or an organized system of decision making is a primary problem in the downtown. Conflict that is caused by the confusion of priorities is also mentioned. Some individuals feel that the Heart of the City is the new planning organization. However, others feel the same conflicts have not been resolved.

As opposed to the positive boost of a common definition of the background, this tangle of disagreements is a frightening negative. Even when there is a plan, such as the Central City Plan, the organizations must come together to enforce it. Without support or implementation, a plan means nothing.
PROBLEMS

The problems presented are those brought up by the individuals I interviewed. I did not discuss each problem with each individual. Rather, I permitted problems to emerge in the course of each interview.

PARKING

Although many people may automatically point to parking as one of the major problems downtown, my interviews did not reveal this. Rather, the individuals I interviewed recognize the common perception that parking is the biggest problem in the downtown. However, most of those I spoke with stated that it is only a perception, not a reality. Bruce Baldwin (Redevelopment Commission):

Certainly a big factor with the downtown, that would be considered a problem, even though I feel that it's a perceived problem, is the lack of parking. You can’t, like the Muncie Mall, you can’t park...out in the middle of a parking lot...and go into Ayres or go into Sears or go into Penny’s or go into Lazarus, or what have you -- without walking a great distance. But, because you see that sign, or you see that Osco sign, you see Sears -- you don’t perceive it to be that big of a walk. You can come downtown and go to Murray’s Jewelers, or Standt’s Jewelry or the county building and park around a corner, and even though you’re parking, or you’re walking less distance to your destination, you have the perception that its inconvenient to park downtown because you can’t see that destination once you get out of
your car. That is a real perceived problem. There is a good amount of parking downtown. It's just not as convenient as it would be in an outskirts mall development or a retail shopping center.

Jim Carey (Urban Enterprise Association): discussed the limited amount of parking on the street that is available. "You can only get eight cars in block. In four blocks that's 32 cars, and that's not much parking. The parking lots, sometimes they're overloaded down around the courthouse..." Mayor Canan described yet another aspect of the parking situation. "Parking is a real problem downtown -- convenience parking. There's plenty of lots but some of them get used by the businesses for all of their employees." Mike Powell (Jack's Cameras) adds another dimension:

Not so much as perceived parking. It's poorly marked. People don't know what's available. I think if it were controlled, and the signage were right, I really don't think it's a problem. I think it's a seriously perceived problem. There are several more streets -- there's a parking study underway now...to put a lot more parking on the streets, several hundred spaces. Most of them run on Mulberry. You have to leave bus stop points on each block. I think parking is relatively easy to solve. It's the first thing you hear, isn't it?

Jenny Gordy (Uptown Action Council) also agrees that it is a perception:

Of course, the big -- the big, big, big issue that everybody talks about is parking. Parking problems...when studies actually count the parking spaces, there are tons of parking spaces. But so many of them are privately rented and they're not convenient, and convenience is an illusion...People have changed their whole attitude about what convenient means. So they want to be able to park very close. Even if you go to the mall at Christmas time, you may have to park quite a distance to get out and walk in the mall, and walk down
the mall, to get to the actual store that you’re interested in going to. If you counted steps, I’m sure you’d never have to walk any further, but you’re inside in the mall. You’re outside here, and it’s the illusion that I had to walk half a block...Think about students. Students park and walk all over campus. Nobody ever expects to be able to park right in front of their building and walk in. Right? But that's a big issue. So it's the illusion that it's so inconvenient, even though the parking spaces supposedly exist.

Dan Allen (Chamber of Commerce) states that the Heart of the City may be working towards a solution:

Reality is that there is quite a lot of parking, but the perception is there is not adequate parking. So that causes people to not want to come downtown. So yeah, I think -- we do have a committee within Heart of the City that is just formulating a study on the whole traffic flow and parking for the downtown area. It’ll be doing some public open forums, to where everyone involved will have an opportunity to agree or disagree. Hopefully out of that will come some level of consensus. A hundred percent of the people are never going to agree, but you try to at least draw a majority that feel that we need to do certain things.

This “perceived” problem can lead to some very real consequences. Tony Costello (Professor of Architecture) points out, “The basic core...its basically been demolished for two reasons. First and foremost, because people absolutely believe that you need so much parking that you couldn’t possibly do without all of these lots, most of which are not filled anywhere near to capacity.”
Among those things which are not agreed upon is the issue of a parking garage. Steve Eggleston (Home Center) stated, "I think trend wise we've got to get away from the flat asphalt driveways or parking lots and start looking at a parking garage.” When I asked if he thought it would ever happen, he replied, “Yeah, I do. In my lifetime? I don't know.” Dan Allen’s (Chamber of Commerce) disagreement lies in the economic aspect of a garage:

That would not be my recommendation. I know there are a lot of people that believe that that’s what’s needed. If you look at the sheer cost, a parking garage is 10 times the cost of surface parking...If we would build a parking garage, we could not make it cash flow. People have said, well the city should do that. Well, to me the city should be run like a business. If I wouldn’t do it as a private investment, then I couldn’t support the city doing it. Well, what’s the alternative. Well, obviously we have a lot of blighted areas in our downtown area. Now I’m not an advocate of bulldozing every building, because we have some absolutely gorgeous buildings that are historically significant, but at the same time, we have some buildings that are really beyond salvageable state. They’re not historically significant. Those buildings probably need to be leveled and turned into parking areas. But also, just not a slab of asphalt. A parking area that is well landscaped, well lit, that can be attractive and that whole combination will be a whole package that will benefit revitalization of the downtown area.

Jenny Gordy (Uptown Action Council) agrees, “The problem is, it’s like the chicken and the egg. Like, right now there aren’t enough viable businesses, I believe to warrant the city ever taking it seriously that we need a parking
Bruce Baldwin (Redevelopment Commission) describes his views and the efforts that have gone into getting such a structure for downtown:

I think it would help. Whether it happens, I'm not certain. I don't know quite the numbers...it's a very costly thing. We implemented, the Muncie Redevelopment Commission, implemented a tax increment finance district in the downtown area. The purpose of which was to generate dollars to pay for public benefit projects that happened in the downtown. The primary focus was the construction of a parking garage facility. The dollars that we generated through that TIF district have not met our expectations. We thought we would get more, and we haven't. We can't really construct a facility with what we've been able to generate. Maybe a public-private partnership with a local corporation and government funding, and private nonprofit groups -- maybe through all those, a combination of entities involved -- maybe we could get a parking garage built. But at this point, it's a very costly proposition, and I don't see it happening too soon.

Agreement is basically found in that parking spaces are plentiful.

However, the restrictions and poor management of these spaces are pointed out as the real problems. Also, the idea that it is simply a perception is mentioned by most. There seems to be a split on the parking garage issue. It doesn't appear that it will happen. Even supporters of the idea don't have much confidence that it will be constructed any time soon.

The parking issue is a problem. Whether it is perceived or real, it still has an effect on the environment of the downtown. In today's society, more often than not, we are guided by our perceptions and not reality.
THE PLAZA

"The Plaza" refers to a strip along Walnut Avenue, which was turned into a pedestrian mall in the late sixties, early seventies (see Appendix C). This type of mall occurred in many downtowns throughout America. These failed in most of these downtowns. Muncie was no exception. Eventually the area was opened up to one-way traffic. Jim Carey, who was Mayor at the time the plaza opened up, describes the process:

When we came into office there was a pedestrian plaza, so you didn’t have traffic, see what I’m saying? So we opened it up in 1984, April first of ’84, we opened the plaza up. Without a doubt, that helped all the business people, but still not enough to bring people downtown.

Andrew Dale (Community Development) explains his opinion on why it failed:

The Walnut Plaza...is a problem. It keeps people out, and for the people who have businesses in, it keeps them in. I’m sure the intention of the pedestrian mall was, ‘once people get in there, they’ll stay.’ One, it reduced the parking, parallel parking along the street and it is just a nightmare to get through there. I always think someone’s going to kill me getting through there. I’ve almost been killed a few times! So that needs to be taken out, and there’s talk of that actually right now, for once. They’re probably going to get on the ball and do that.
Even the Mayor puts removal of the plaza at the top of the downtown’s priorities. “The first one, of course everything is contingent upon money, if you had unlimited money, the first thing I would do is go completely tear out the mall downtown.” This same sentiment is found in Ken Hughes’ (Hotel Roberts) statement, “If we were the sole developer, the first thing that would happen is Walnut Street, all of that Plaza would come out and open that back up to two-way traffic. Mike Powell (Jack’s Cameras), as a merchant, discusses his relationship with the plaza:

Downtown was stagnating about the time they started the downtown plaza. But just the construction of the plaza forced several businesses out, and nothing ever came back. It just continued from there. We were at 308 (Mulberry) when they put the plaza in. That was only a block away. We still didn’t really feel it. Then we moved here in July of ‘78. We wanted, I guess to distance ourselves a little bit from the Plaza, because of its condition. But I still had a loyalty to downtown.

When asked what improvement he would make in the downtown, if he could do anything he wanted to, Powell replied, “Rip the plaza completely out, and get traffic and people back on it.” He then went on to say:

But that’s a tough one. Because there are a lot of merchants down there that love the trees and love the planters. I don’t think any of them are not disturbed by the starlings and the mess and the pigeons and the health hazards. But we’ve spent hours traveling and researching, talking to downtowns that have been successful, and they say, ‘First priority -- get the plaza out.’
Although the majority of the individuals placed partial blame on the plaza for the downtown’s decline, Tony Costello (Professor of Architecture) stated:

I think it’s any easy target. It think it’s an easy victim that you can blame. I don’t see it that way. I think it may be considered too little, too late. If you look at the Victor Gruen plan from ‘68 that developed that Plaza, you’ll find out that the parking garages that he recommended on either side of that -- one on High Street, one on Mulberry -- were never built. To this day we still don’t have a parking structure in downtown Muncie...So, I think that’s an easy scape goat.

Some individuals I spoke with didn’t have any question at all about whether or not the plaza would remain. “This year we’re going to be tearing out all the plaza and try to fix it up and decorate it better, make it more enhancing...”(Carey). It sounds pretty definite to me.

Those I spoke with agree that the plaza should be completely opened up. The photographs in Appendix C illustrate some of these problems cited by the interviewees. Some individuals relayed a different opinion of others that I didn’t speak with. However, those who would like to see the plaza remain represent a very small voice. This voice most likely will not be heard. There is a very strong indication that as long as the money is available, the area will be torn out.
TRAFFIC

One of the major arguments about traffic downtown involves "the Loop" (see Appendix B). Jim Carey (Urban Enterprise Association) describes its early origins:

I think the loop, I was Chief of Police when that happened, and the Loop is the best thing we’ve got. We had just 2-way streets all the time, it was a big shock when we got the Loop, but it moves traffic. The Loop was built in 1972. It circles you and takes you from the new City Hall...then you come right around the city and go clear out to the south end of town. The rest of the time we had 2-way streets going every way with the traffic population coming up we had to do something, so that’s the best thing that ever happened to this city.

Dan Allen (Chamber of Commerce) does not see it as positively:

Again, these are just strictly my opinions, but I think what we’ve created is in essence an autobahn through the downtown area. I mean If you hit the lights right, you can be hitting 50 miles per hour by the time you get down to this end of High Street. Certainly that’s not conducive to window-shopping. The one-way streets again are good for moving traffic quickly through an area, but they’re not conducive for shopping. I mean if I want to try to find a place to park right in front of my destination, and I risk that drive-by, if it's not there, it's not just a matter of circling around the block and parking somewhere else. I’m going to end up going 6 blocks out of my way, because of the one-way streets, to get back to any close proximity to where I wanted to go to start with.

Jenny Gordy (Uptown Action Council) expresses the same concern:
What we have in Muncie is this big loop. The traffic on that’s very fast, to get people around, you know. ‘Get ‘em out of here!’ Which may not be such a good idea when you have retail businesses. But, they have the outside loop and then they have this slowed down, as you go through Walnut Plaza, it’s very treacherous! Cars backing out, those pier like things, those cement things and those cement planters -- so you go very slow there and the lights aren’t together, so you have to stop at every block. That’s very, very slow. Then you have all these one-way streets. So, if you forget to turn right at the last chance, you have to go like to Anderson to turn around and come back! Because they’ve blocked off that street for the Radisson, and the Children’s Museum, and all that has taken up one of the streets that used to be a right turn. So you’re just -- you just off into oblivion somewhere if you forget to turn right!

Bruce Baldwin (Redevelopment Commission) also mentions the problem of the Loop:

One of the things, interestingly enough, one of the things that was seen as a very positive development was the development of the Loop around the downtown...A lot of people have indicated that it's hard to get on and off that Loop. I don’t share that. I mean if you want to get off, you can get off. But a lot of people say that because, it’s roughly a mile circle, and because of that, the ease in which you can get on there and you can easily bypass the downtown. Some people say that’s been one of the reasons, one of the things that has been a big problem area, also in the downtown. I don’t share that, but I bring that up because people point that out.

Although it may seem like an unusual concept, the Loop has both good and bad points. Most don’t see it as a big problem. Some see it as a terrific idea. Others see it as a major problem of the downtown. There was no strong common opinion on this topic.
**SELF-IMAGE**

In a lot of the self-help books that are so prevalent in today's society, you can read about the importance of your self-image. Before making any improvements, you have to love yourself. Could the same concept possibly apply to a city as well? Tony Costello (Professor of Architecture) states:

I think in some ways, one of the things that troubles me about Muncie, and it's one of the things that I try to be really careful in my comments about Muncie...that is I think communities develop self-images of themselves and I think that is an image that the typical, if there is such a thing, that the typical citizen has of their community. It is greatly influenced by what's written in the paper. It's greatly influenced by what people say over cocktails at a cocktail party. It's greatly influenced by how people just kind of generally talk about a community. Quite honestly, Muncie is simply not talked about very highly..."

One of the questions I asked during my interview involved the comparison of Muncie to other cities of comparable size. The chart in Appendix C lists the different cities mentioned. However, I wanted to know if Muncie's downtown was average, better or worse. Steve Eggleston (Home Center) stated, "I don't think the ills of Muncie are unique, and I think the best thing Muncie can do is to open their eyes and seek help from
other avenues rather than just pretend like they’re an island - which is what they tend to do.” Terry Murphy (Chamber of Commerce) states:

Muncie is no different than what happened in most downtowns and communities this size. Muncie, in a lot of ways -- people are real critical of the downtown--but it really has had a lot of development in it over the last few years...so things aren’t as bad as maybe a local perception. Somebody coming in from out of town is not going see things as bad as maybe somebody here thinks they are.

In contrast to this, is a story told by Dan Allen (Chamber of Commerce):

We lost a major industrialist, that was virtually ready to sign a contract and bring a new manufacturing facility to this area. The last stage effort was to bring in their top leadership and to make the final O.K., I guess you would call it. Well, their plane was late coming in, that cut short our time with them, and virtually they drove from the Indianapolis airport to downtown Muncie. We had a meeting, and they left. That was the last we heard. So as we were quizzing the consultantist as to what went wrong, what happened, because we thought this was almost a done deal, he was open with us and stated that the group after seeing downtown Muncie, determined that they really didn’t want to put a facility in what they perceived to be a decaying, dying community.

This coincides with the opinion of Ken Hughes (Hotel Roberts), who has only been in the Muncie area for two years. He notes that Muncie is “Way below average...When you drive through, there are more buildings in downtown Muncie that are vacant and boarded up with broken windows than there are buildings that are occupied. Far more.” Mayor Canan ranks Muncie as “probably a little worse, from the standpoint I think it's been
ignored too long.” This is similar to Bruce Baldwin’s (Redevelopment Commission) feelings:

Most communities, our size, I see them doing the same kinds of things we’re doing, or have their eyes on the same kinds of things that we would like to have. I’m not going to indicate that nobody’s already doing it, and I’m not going to say that we’re doing the best job of anybody...I think on the whole we’ve done a good job here...As far as other communities and their successes or lack thereof, I think we are all at about the same stage. Some are progressing more quickly than others, but it’s happening everywhere.

Tony Costello (Professor of Architecture) also sounds positive about the current state of downtown:

I think Muncie is actually better than most people want to tell you, because it’s not real cool to tell you that Muncie’s a neat place to live. Now, I personally love going on record as saying I really enjoy raising a family in Muncie...The frustrating thing for me is Muncie has all the possibilities...Muncie has the money, people will tell you we don’t. There are moneyed people here in town that if they wanted to, could make things happen, much greater than they do happen.

Ken Hughes (Hotel Roberts) also believes something needs to be done about the negative image.

...a feel good campaign, a positive campaign about our community, cause the people that live in Muncie have a very negative opinion of where they live. They really do. I mean, all you’ve got to do is talk to them. Sometimes I think they’re almost embarrassed of their hometown. It’s unfortunate, it’s a nice town. It could be nicer, but you get people started on Muncie, you know, they’re bitching about the streets, the sidewalks, ...no street signs.
Of those that mentioned this in the interviews, all agree that people are hard on Muncie. There is a difference in opinion on whether this harsh judgment is deserved or not.
CRIME

Crime is a factor that may keep people from visiting the area after dark. Then again, it could just be that people do not believe that there is anything to do in downtown after dark. Whatever the situation, some of the individuals that I spoke with stated that the problem is simply a perceived problem. Andrew Dale (Community Development) stated, “One is the perception of crime. I think it’s a perception. If you look at the statistics, I don’t think there is a high crime problem downtown. So that’s a perception.” This was also reflected by Mike Powell (Jack’s Cameras):

A successful downtown can’t be successful if everyone leaves at five. They have to live here. I live downtown. I live next door. We were like one of the first. We’re about the only ones, but I’ve been encouraged not to live there. Downtown gets a bad rap. It’s not dangerous. I’ve lived downtown just over 10 years -- never had a problem. My wife and I have never been approached, never felt threatened. Doors get left unlocked, and no one bothers anything. Newspapers are negative. If something bad happens downtown, they over report it. If something happens at the mall, they don’t report it. It is not in the paper. If something happens outside downtown, the newspaper calls it ‘near downtown.’ They just get that word in there...they’re downtown, and I don’t understand the prejudice.
Mayor Canan lists the perception of crime as one the downtown’s top problems. “I think the safety issue. There’s not a big crime problem downtown. Usually crime gets associated with downtown areas. There needs to be increased lighting, probably police patrols -- just to curb that fear.”

On the other hand, the following statement from Lynn Thornburg (E.C.R.C.) which describes the East Central neighborhood, seems to imply that there may be a crime problem in the downtown area:

I wanted to improve the neighborhood that I grew up in. I mean, I had watched it go from a fairly safe place to a not quite safe place. I mean we used to be able to walk around trick-or-treating and not worry about it. So I had watched it go down. It hadn’t gone all the way down like some of the other inner city neighborhoods.

The fact that this was not a topic brought up by many of those interviewed may be an indication that it isn’t seen as a problem. It does not matter whether the crime problem is real or perceived. Just as it does not matter whether the parking problem is real or perceived. If the majority of the population perceive something, it might as well be true. Something must be actively done to change the perception.
CODE ENFORCEMENT

My first desire was to avoid a subject which is so full of technicalities and legalities. However, this is an important issue that cannot be left out of any summary about the downtown. Jenny Gordy (Uptown Action Council) lists it as one of the major issues of the downtown:

...the need for current laws and zoning ordinances that are on the books -- for people to be held accountable...Somehow to have those laws used instead of just looking the other way, while all kinds of violations take place.

Lynn Thornburg (E.C.R.C.) also states the need for the codes to be more strictly enforced:

We have a downtown that's broken, and now they're trying to fix it -- but it's almost too late. If somebody would have stepped in, and I speak from experience, because when I went up there, I rewrote the unsafe building ordinances to fall in with some of the things that were being used in Indianapolis and South Bend. You can fine the people. They have certain requirements. They can't just let the building sit there and rot, sort of like selective demolition or demolition by neglect. They have responsibility. You can fine them, you can make them post bond. There's receivership, and it's used in other cities. Where if you have a vacant property, whether it be in our neighborhood or downtown, and the owners refuse to do something, then the city steps in and takes ownership...So I feel if they'd have done that once or twice, people would have gotten the message. They wouldn't have just said, 'Nobody cares.' Building
commissioners are selected on the basis of politics. 'Gee they worked real hard on my campaign and they're going to be out of a job from wherever. So I will,' -- I'm not specifically saying this one is I'm just saying that over the years that I've been doing this -- the 20 some -- it's been that way. You know, good old boy stuff.

Andrew Dale (Community Development) also agrees on the importance of code enforcement. "Code enforcement is something very important...I think the city needs to come into compliance with all of that and get on the ball and do what they should have always been doing, and should be doing now." Ken Hughes (Hotel Roberts) describes possibly why there is little reinvestment occurring:

I know there's a great deal of negative comment that you'll hear, that well these property owners don't care, and they don't keep their buildings up. Well, you also have the flip side of that coin. If you couldn't rent it, and you can't make money off of it, you really don't have any money to reinvest in it. If the community doesn't seem to be interested in reinvesting anything in it, why should you?

Perhaps the threat of losing your property would add a little incentive for not letting it deteriorate. This issue is basically agreed upon by all of those who mentioned it. Active enforcement is needed. However, I can't really imagine anyone saying anything to the contrary.
NEW PROJECTS

HOUSING

There seem to be quite a few new projects afoot in downtown Muncie. One of these includes a move toward restoring buildings and putting in apartments. One specific building that may be redeveloped is the Mitchell Building. Dan Allen (Chamber of Commerce) describes one potential developer's future ideas for it:

...he’s entertaining a concept of making that luxury apartments, with a retail facility on the first floor. He should invest probably close to a million and a half to two million dollars in the project, and restore it to its original state...it would be on the historical registry. So just a great, great project for downtown.

There are other movements towards adding housing in the downtown. Allen goes on to describe a similar project:

...on the north end of High Street, that again, a couple of individuals, these are local people, who have purchased a building that was vacant, and its current stage -- it's a pretty architecturally stimulating building. But, what we've found is that in the original pictures of the building, there was some much grander facade some columns and some beautiful stone work that somewhere during the past decade or two has been encased in brick. Their plan is to remove that brick and restore the original facade.
Mayor Canan describes the reasons behind the movement towards housing. "Some of the bigger, older buildings that could be converted into residential apartments -- that should be done. Because, what that will do, is that will put people downtown, and with people is the money again."

Andrew Dale stated that some of the programs in the Community Development Office include Historic Facade Restoration, Clearance and the Home Program. He described the Home Program.

Its about five years old. That program is to provide home ownership opportunities for people. What we’ve done primarily with that program is provide funding to either for profit or nonprofit entities who are providing affordable housing...We’ve got people interested in doing that now, and are bringing proposals to us for downtown apartments and such. I believe that housing is a catalyst for downtown.

This leads directly into a discussion about housing in the downtown area.

Most of those I spoke with agree that it is, overall, a positive thing.

However, the type and the funding for the such apartments in disputed.

Ken Hughes (Hotel Roberts) states his point of view:

The first thing that needs to happen downtown is residential, and I’m not talking about Section 8, low income housing. It needs to be high end housing apartments - very upscale. Nothing is wrong with Section 8 housing, people need that. But if you’re trying to improve an area, you’re not going to improve it by building low income housing. These people don’t have enough money to pay their rent, let alone go buy a suit.
Lynn Thornburg (E.C.R.C.) agrees:

To start dumping low, low income housing money in the downtown is not going to make it. It is just going to turn the downtown into a slum. Because you’re going to have absentee professional private for profit developers whose bottom line is to make a buck, and they’re not going to be managing the property...The people bring their stuffed furniture out on the Walnut Plaza, and I mean, I know I’m stereotyping, but it’s a fact of life. I live in a neighborhood where that happens. Your junk car sits there, it stopped working, so you jack it up...But I look like an opponent of downtown development because I’m outspoken against that use of the money. The city fathers or whomever are not seeing it that way. They’re saying, ‘We’ve got to get people back downtown,” and I’m saying the people in those one bedroom apartments are restricted as to what income they can make.

Tony Costello (Professor of Architecture) has an alternative point of view:

My notion is that the problem with this country is we don’t mix enough housing of different economic groups...this is not just Muncie -- this is nationally. I think there is an ever-widening gap between the have and the have nots...There are a lot of people, and I hate to use this term, that simply don’t want to live or work near ‘those people,’ and as I always say, but for the grace of God we could be ‘those people.’
CONVENTION CENTER, CHILDREN’S MUSEUM,
AND HOTEL ROBERTS

During my interviews, two of the frequently mentioned projects were the expanded Convention Center and the Children’s Museum. Renovation of the Hotel Roberts also was named as a prominent development. Bruce Baldwin (Redevelopment Commission) describes the developments:

Some real recent improvements I’ve seen are yet still to be fully developed. The Convention Center expansion with the addition of a children’s museum. We’re taking a community the size of Muncie and putting a children’s museum in it that is, proportionate to the population, a world class facility. We’re blessed with having a person like Jim Davis in this community, the creator of Garfield. There will be a Garfield exhibit there, that will be rivaled no where else. It will be Garfield’s home basically. Ball Corporation is contributing or participating in this with a space exhibit in the Children’s Museum, and McDonalds corporation, I believe they’ve got their ‘Learn not to burn’ exhibit that will be permanently housed down there as well. It’s really something that this community has, that a good portion of the people don’t realize yet. The Convention Center expansion itself, we are a fall out, I guess for Indianapolis. A lot of times when Indianapolis has a booking or something, but it’s not what they want in the Convention Center or Hoosier Dome, a group can come up here. We’re within easy driving range of Indianapolis. We will be on the same level as, I guess basically three other centers in Indiana. One, is Evansville’s Convention Center, I think it’s the Century Center in South Bend, and the Grand Wayne Center in Ft. Wayne...Our exhibition hall will roughly triple the size
of what we’re able to show now... So those are very positive things. The Hotel Roberts recently signed on again as a Radisson Hotel. It’s unbelievable the amount of business a hotel can generate when it has its own 1-800 link up to a national chain.

Mike Powell (Jack’s Cameras) discusses some secondary business that could be promoted by these new developments:

There are still some things to do in that immediate area. I don’t know that improvements will start in that immediate area. There will be a lot of people in that area. People who are there at night -- there’s not much to do. You can’t buy pretty much anything in the downtown area. There’s no deli. You couldn’t get personal items. If you were the family of somebody at a convention, you’re pretty much stuck in the downtown. There’s a restaurant that just changed hands, Felicities, and its planning evening hours. The Herot does a decent night business. The COC, there’s another restaurant. The building being remodeled right in that area. Students love it downtown.

Lynn Thornburg (E.C.R.C.) describes some problems the Convention Center may face:

O.K., we’re going to have a convention center. One thing that’s so neat about Indy is you can go to Indy and you can walk at night, if its warm weather. You can walk and get an ice cream cone or sit on the steps of the Soldiers and Sailors Monument, or go in a couple of shops, couple cute restaurants. Downtown Muncie -- you go to the Convention Center, and you get, you know, an armed guard that takes you back over to the hotel that costs an arm and a leg and that’s it -- unless you get whisked off to the northwest part of town for something. That’s not right. There should be some little shops downtown. I think Cafe Felicity is excellent. It is kind of like what could happen...
Ken Hughes (Hotel Roberts) relates the hopeful success of the Horizon Convention Center to the success of downtown Muncie:

If downtown doesn’t improve, there is a $10 Million hole in the ground sitting over there. It had better improve - or they’re going to eat that, because nobody’s going to come. It has to improve, in spite of itself. It can’t help itself, and I think there are some people in place now that have some very good vision -- that understand what they have gotten themselves into by building that. They basically put their necks on the block. I mean, if that place sits empty 90% of the time, somebody is paying for that building, and it certainly isn’t the people who are using it, because nobody’s going to be using it. So again, it goes back to the residents through tax dollars are going to fund that facility. If they don’t do something with the downtown to make it a more attractive, appealing place to come, conventioneers and people with business meetings aren’t going to want to come there. I feel...this could be a catalyst to make this a very vibrant area, or it could end up being a huge failure -- whichever one they decide for it to be.

Andrew Dale (Community Development) is hopeful that the additions will prove to be positive.

Well, their statistics say that they’ll be booked all the time. So going with their statistic, I would say that it’s going to be all right. I think a lot of people don’t understand the value of those...as they are attractors. I think it’s important. I think when everything is in the...dumps, you need to try and trod forward in some areas. I think they’ve done a good job of doing that. We’ve got to keep our head above water somewhere. I think that’s the one area you couldn’t say that they haven’t done a good job. They do bring in a lot of people, and they’re going to bring in a lot more. The hotel down there has really come about. I think the hotel should be lumped in...I think it helps.
Tony Costello (Professor of Architecture) believes that the additions won’t only draw local people, but that they will be “one of the few reasons that people are going to come specifically to the downtown area of Muncie...from surrounding counties and even surrounding states.” Dan Allen also notes that “the Convention Center is going to inject a new element of life into the downtown area.”

Jenny Gordy (Uptown Action Council) is excited about the projects:

I’ve looked at figures that are amazing, frightening, wonderful. The Children’s Museum -- they were very careful they didn’t put in a restaurant, they didn’t even put in a snackbar. So that all these people that come and go to the museum, I know, I’m a family, you go someplace to take your kids to a museum, first thing you have to do afterwards is find a Coke and a french fry place. So hopefully restaurants that are in place will see a great surge starting in July, when the Children’s Museum opens.
NEW BUILDINGS

These interviews gave the individuals a chance to reflect on the downtown. Through this reflection, some recalled the positive aspects of the past few years. These aspects involve the construction of several new buildings. However, not everyone views these as positive. Also, even more new construction is on the horizon. Dan Allen (Chamber of Commerce) describes the project:

...the federal building that was announced about two months ago. It is a federal building that will be going on the site of the vacated armory. Again, a blighted area that will be renewed with new facilities, new buildings, new people.

John Bowles (Heart of the City) describes the process leading to the decision of the location:

The federal government was looking for space for a new Social Security office. The Social Security had originally said they prefer to be downtown, but they didn’t limit the bidding to the downtown area. As time wen on late last fall, it became evident that the winning big on that project was going to be out in the northwest quadrant somewhere. In a location that was probably in the midst of the worst traffic jam in Delaware County, and probably didn’t make a lot of sense for the Social Security customers. Those of us working on the downtown efforts didn’t think it made sense for the whole community’s standpoint. Particularly since the most recent comprehensive plan of the downtown area establishes the north end
of the downtown area as being the governmental district. So when we found out that it looked like there was going to be a government office moved outside the downtown area, we actually went up to Chicago and dealt with the people from the General Services Administration. With the efforts of our Governor’s office and our local governmental officials -- our Senator Lugar, Senator Coates, and Congressman McIntosh -- we were able to orchestrate enough of a discussion to get that turned around and have the new office built downtown...So that was a major success for us.

This will join the other office buildings that have either been recently constructed or have been maintained throughout the period of decline.

Bruce Baldwin (Redevelopment Commission) describes some of the present activity:

Ball Corporation, Muncie’s only Fortune 500 company is right next door. They bring in a lot of people, a lot of activity, a lot of income to the community -- they’re downtown. Delaware Machinery and Ontario Corporation are two local based companies that have shown great growth. Their corporate headquarters are in the downtown area. We virtually have a brand new City Hall. It opened in 1991. We have a brand new Justice Center-Jail facility that opened in ‘92 or ‘93. So there is a lot of new building downtown that mixes with some of the older buildings.

Along with this, Terry Murphy (Chamber of Commerce) adds that, “The bank buildings are all relatively new.”

Lynn Thornburg (E.C.R.C.) expresses some fear of the new construction trend:

There is the moneyed Chamber of Commerce attitude, which has the funds to do some of the work, but doesn’t see our downtown like some of the other cities see it -- as a restored, wonderful, beautiful,
historic area. They see it as 'tear it down and build new smoke glass-sided.' You know, steel buildings with big stone on it. So that mentality has clashed.
VISIONS AND DREAMS

New ideas in various categories were also brought up during the interviews. These ideas ranged from offhand remarks to detailed explanations. Some of the following include items of hearsay. Basically, this is the section of ideas and excerpts of all kinds.

The first two items are actually things that are already being done with other ideas and statements following:

The Uptown Action Council works towards being very proactive.

Jenny Gordy explains:

We have done things as simple as clean up a vacant building. We spent a workday just sweeping and vacuuming and cleaning windows, and pulling down blinds so that you didn’t see inside the vacant part. We actually put artwork in the windows. We had a project for awhile called “Art in the Window” that was modeled after Cincinnati’s project. They take vacant downtown buildings and let artists put their artwork up, so at least there is, you know, not vacant buildings everywhere.

The idea of elderly apartments was mentioned by a couple of individuals. Lynn Thornburg (E.C.R.C.) stated, “I could see a lot of elderly housing on the second story of the downtown buildings, and maybe even make it like a retirement area. But also, then do the other things that are necessary to make it a safe place.” Terry Murphy (Chamber of Commerce) also mentioned,
“We may have to look at new constructions of senior citizens complexes and things like that.”

A different idea came from Steve Eggleston (Home Center):

I think one of the overriding themes in some of these towns that have stronger downtowns is a centrally located park area, courthouse type of scenario. When you read about the new urbanists, they’re talking about how to redesign neighborhoods and suburbs, they always talk about a ‘community land,’ a central community park or whatever.

The idea of studying the mixture of retail businesses in the downtown was brought up a few times. Steve Eggleston stated:

Something that it seems like, everybody seems to just be ignoring is the mix of businesses that are downtown. I think it’s kind of unique. I’ve had people laugh and giggle about, ‘you’ve got so many jewelry stores.’ But I think that’s a nice niche. But I don’t see anybody doing any serious study of a market mix.

Mayor Canan agrees with the significance of the retail mix:

I don’t think anybody knows what the mix of retail businesses should be downtown, in order to ensure the downtown’s survivability. Right now you have a mix of attorney offices, banks and jewelry stores. Basically that is what comprises the majority of the downtown. That doesn’t tend to have people come in and walk the streets and shop. You have to have a diversity of retail.

Still on the issue of retail, many think that specialty retail and “destination retail” are they keys. Terry Murphy (Chamber of Commerce) asserts:

I think what you’re going to look for is your specialty retail, your destination -- where if you want something, you look in the phone book for where that place is, and you go to it. I don’t think it’s going to be something that people come down and just stroll around, like
you would a mall, but for specific things, or very special things. Yeah, I think that’s where we need to go from.

Andrew Dale (Community Development) agrees:

It would certainly be nice, wouldn’t it? You come to the Convention Center, and you go down and you’re going to go home to your child...you might want to pick something up for them. I think it’d be nice. There’s absolutely no plan right now to market that whole idea. Which once again goes back to that process of specifying what you want in that area, because that’s an excellent area to really move the entertainment.

He also goes on to describe the success of destination retail:

They have such a specific and unique offering, such as Jack’s Cameras. It’s probably one of the best camera shops in the state. The jewelry merchandisers have stayed because there is a demand for that. But would a grocery or a small mom and pop deli stay? No.

Dan Allen (Chamber of Commerce) also mentioned the possibility of a destination restaurant locating in the downtown:

I met with a couple of gentlemen that are interested in a unique destination restaurant. A restaurant that people would drive from say, Indianapolis to Muncie, to dine because of its uniqueness and its quality. These are individuals that have a lot of experience in this type of restaurant, so they do have the expertise to pull it off. They’re interested in putting the facility downtown. A lot of this is coming from the convention center.

Terry Murphy (Chamber of Commerce) adds to this sentiment:

To get downtown really viable again, we’ve got to keep what’s here. We’ve got to keep our government sector down here, but we’ve got to build on the Convention Center expansion. So we’ll have to look at the hospitality industry. So people that come to conventions will have places to eat and places to go.
Other avenues that the downtown can focus on were expressed by Mike Powell (Jack’s Cameras):

I think the downtown needs to work with the university and the river too -- two wonderful assets there that could be tied together. Campus isn’t that far away. There is tremendous student interest in the downtown for recreation and housing. Great things are going to start happening on the river.

Ken Hughes (Hotel Roberts) also believes that focus should go towards the university:

They seem to miss that they have 20,000 tourists here every year for nine months a year. Every student at Ball State, with the exception of probably 10% ...come from somewhere else. So they are all tourists. We have pretty much alienated our tourists in this town. you know, I could envision every 10 to 15 minutes a shuttle bus running from somewhere on campus to the downtown area. In the downtown area you could have everything from ice cream shops to T-shirt shops to bars to restaurants. You could have a number of things in this downtown area that would draw those tourists to the downtown area.

Tony Costello (Professor of Architecture) brought up the need for preservation:

I think the stronger and the more revitalized the historic neighborhoods around the downtown become, the more we can stop erosion. the more we can stop demolition, the more we can stop the deterioration of those -- I think that is also going to tremendously help the downtown to be seen as a good place to live, a good place to start a business, a good place to reopen a grocery store or a pharmacy.
FUTURE

Downtown Muncie is on the brink of a significant time period. Until events such as the opening of the convention center play out, the future direction is unclear. The commonalties that I have drawn from my interviews, show that those involved in the area do recognize their shortcomings. Hopefully they will use this knowledge to come together and lead downtown Muncie to achieve its fullest potential. The future, in the opinion of those I interviewed, sounded a lot like this following quote from Jim Carey: “I’m not negative or anything, but it will just never be like it was.”

Mayor Canan agrees:

Anybody that thinks it is going to become what it was 30 years ago, is kidding themselves. But that doesn’t mean we should give up on it...I think a revitalized downtown is possible, but it will never be the shopping hub of Muncie that it was 30 years ago.

When asked whether or not downtown Muncie would experience growth in the future, Canan answered, “Oh, I think we have to. Yeah, I have to be hopeful that it’s going to get better.” Bruce Baldwin (Redevelopment Commission) had a very similar outlook. “The downtown itself is not and
probably never will be the retail center that it used to be in the ‘50’s and earlier. But it is a service center and a banking center.”

Andrew Dale (Community Development) refers back to the previously discussed political problems in his view of the future:

I think it’s really sad that we cannot see our own piece, and how it fits into the whole. That will be the downfall. If they continue to do it in the next four years, you might as well kiss it good-bye -- because it won’t happen. We have buildings now that are deteriorating and even some of the good ones -- they are going to be gone. They aren’t going to have anything left.

Lynn Thornburg’s (E.C.R.C.) outlook is equally grim:

Until you make that commitment to put whatever it takes to get it going -- you have to have some open dialogue, be open to a variety of ways. Our neighborhood reinvestment corporation has succeeded because we welcome other people involved in our neighborhood. We don’t want to do everything. We can’t do everything. So until there is a real commitment, not just lip service and not just planning; and until there is open communication between all the groups that stand to benefit from this, nothing is going to happen.
CONCLUSION

In any situation, where there is “no methodology to the madness,” it is difficult to draw any solid conclusions. This, compounded with my inability to decipher rhetoric weakens the confidence I have in my own interpretations. However, it would appear to me that the problems in downtown can be solved. The key is to be found in the willingness of each group or individual to place long term collective success above short term individual success. As soon as the realization occurs that these small battles are insignificant in comparison to the power of final victory, then something can be achieved.

It may seem to be a positive reflection that agreement was found on most issues. Parking, the plaza, traffic, self-image, crime and code enforcement were essentially agreed upon by the majority. However, the true problem which halts advancement is found in the “Priorities, Politics, and Planning” section. In that section, everyone even agrees that they disagree!

It doesn’t matter how many cars are parked, how many plazas are ripped out, how many crimes are prevented, or how many codes are enforced.
It doesn't matter how many cars are parked, how many plazas are ripped out, how many crimes are prevented, or how many codes are enforced. Without the inclination to sacrifice a little bit of a personal goal, the successes are worth only small individual gains.

After saying that, I must admit that I didn't come up with it on my own. It is simply a necessity that you learn through speaking with each of these individuals. Whether it is stated directly or indirectly, everyone recognizes the need to look at the long term goals. It is during the effort to fulfill that need that you run into the stumbling blocks. The number of groups that have been formed and reformed make it apparent that no manner of "group" can solve this problem. It will take internal attitude changes among those involved in the present and future of downtown Muncie. Most importantly, I feel that an individual planner should be hired. This individual should have no bias towards any particular group involved in the downtown. Future policies must take into account the feelings and needs of anyone affected by downtown.
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APPENDIX A

PRIVATE

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

HEART OF THE CITY

DELWARE ADVANCEMENT CORPORATION

CITY

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

PUBLIC

REDEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

URBAN ENTERPRISE ASSOCIATION

HOME CENTER

UPTOWN ACTION COUNCIL
DOWNTOWN

THE "LOOP" IS REPRESENTED BY BLACK ARROWS
APPENDIX D

<table>
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This chart displays various cities around Indiana that were mentioned by some of the individuals during the interviews. The columns fit the sentence, "X City is ______ than Muncie." They were either brought up indirectly or in response to the question -- "Compared to other cities is Muncie better, worse, or average?"