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Title: Enhancing economic development in the central business district of Barre City, Vermont through participatory research

Abstract:

In this time of economic uncertainty, there are concerns for the survival and wellbeing of many small businesses that comprise the majority of storefronts in Vermont's traditional downtown areas. Central Vermont's Barre City is one town that has been struggling but has recently employed two strategies to revitalize its central business district, including active recruitment of new businesses and a large-scale main street reconstruction project.

The purpose of this study is to gather input from Barre residents and business owners on a variety of issues regarding economic revitalization. Resident input was gathered through a survey that was announced and distributed as an insert in a free weekly newspaper and online version of the survey was also announced in the newspaper. Copies were also made available in the Town Clerk's office. Businesses on the Central Vermont Chamber of Commerce and the Barre Partnership email listservs received email invitations to respond to a different survey, targeting concerns faced by businesses.

Frequency reports of data will be produced and statistical analyses will be conducted to determine correlations pertinent to the following research questions.

- How supportive are residents of various development initiatives?
- How do residents rate characteristics of downtown?
- What characteristics of downtown are most important to residents?
- What modes of transportation do residents use?
- How satisfied are businesses with the current business environment and economic development activities?
- What challenges are businesses facing?
- What measures would minimize the impact of reconstruction on business?

Study results will be shared with the public, Barre City officials, the local chamber of commerce, Barre business groups, and other interested parties. This study is intended gather information that will help stimulate public discussion of common values, interests, concerns and challenges regarding the future of downtown Barre and its economic potential.