

**Beyond the Market:  
A Case Study of the Downtown Revitalization Paradox in Framingham, Massachusetts**

by

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B.A. in History  
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Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning  
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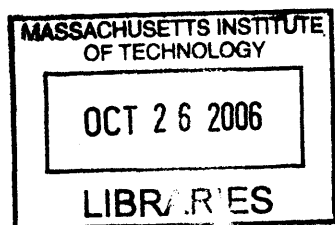
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**ABSTRACT**

U.S. communities have a long history of implementing redevelopment projects based on the displacement of vulnerable minority groups, who have been blamed for physical blight, depression of property values, and stripping neighborhoods of life. In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, with recent immigrants to the U.S. largely bypassing major urban areas for suburbs and small cities, these new destinations now face “urban” pressures in devising redevelopment strategies and plans. The town of Framingham, Massachusetts is a suburb in the Boston metropolitan area that is confronting this challenge as it seeks to revitalize a downtown dominated by a substantial immigrant commercial presence. The town’s revitalization process highlights a new variation on a common historical theme of the oftentimes damaging impact of redevelopment projects.

This thesis examines the ongoing revitalization process in downtown Framingham in order to understand the paradox that the Brazilian immigrant businesses largely responsible for occupying storefronts, returning street life and vitality, and attracting investment to a once depressed district are now being displaced in the very name of revitalization. Framingham is pursuing a gentrification model for redevelopment based on a large-scale construction and rehabilitation project that will remake downtown’s identity and significantly displace the immigrant business community, rather than an incremental approach under a long-term vision that would preserve and build on the downtown immigrant economy. Given that these are two economically viable models, this thesis argues that the revitalization paradox in Framingham cannot be adequately explained by the market dynamics commonly cited. Rather, social, political, and organizational factors have been equally, and perhaps more, significant in determining the revitalization model being implemented. Specifically, these determinants are 1) exclusive social values that have discriminated against minority groups and resulted in a limited vision for downtown; 2) political institutions and regulatory processes that lack leadership, accountability, and efficiency; and 3) fragmented downtown organizations and relationships that have hindered the promotion of an alternative revitalization model. In the course of this argument, I challenge contemporary planning theory by demonstrating that the application of the profession’s ideals of mixed-use, high density, historic preservation, affordable housing, and transit-oriented development can actually be quite damaging for local communities and thus require constant attention by planners concerned with equitable development principles in the local context.

Thesis Supervisor: J. Phillip Thompson  
Title: Associate Professor of Urban Politics



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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As an outsider conducting research on a town over a brief period of time, I have relied upon numerous people in Framingham for information, contacts, and guidance. I am extremely grateful to those I interviewed as well as other Framingham residents who I met (both in-person and virtually) throughout this process. Their generosity of time and candor made my research possible. Although some in town may find this thesis either too narrow in scope or off-the-mark, I hope that people will consider its findings in light of the town's future direction. I have found Framingham to be an incredibly interesting and important place, full of interesting and important people, and I hope that this thesis will contribute to the town developing as a welcoming home for people of all backgrounds.

I would like to thank my thesis advisor, J. Phillip Thompson, and reader, Diane E. Davis, for all of their guidance throughout the conceptualization and writing process. Their invaluable knowledge and insights always came at just the right time to support and challenge my understanding of both the details and the big picture. I feel very fortunate to have worked with both of them on this thesis.

I would also like to thank my friends and family for their ongoing support. In particular, I am very grateful to my father, who is still the best editor I know.

Throughout the writing of this thesis, many people have asked me why I care about Framingham. I have given many academic responses to this question, all of which are very true and valid. In the end, though, perhaps the main reason I care about this town is because of Ilma Paixao, a Brazilian-born community activist, businesswoman, and wearer of many other hats, who I met through a course in spring 2005. Her dedication to making Framingham a better place, despite too many reasons to give up, is inspirational. Anyone questioning the place of immigrants in the U.S. should really get to know Ilma.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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<b>CHAPTER I: THE DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION PARADOX</b> .....	9
A. An Immigrant Story.....	9
B. Research Focus.....	10
C. Methodology.....	13
D. Significance of Research.....	15
<b>CHAPTER II: DOWNTOWN GROWTH, DECLINE &amp; REVITALIZATION</b> .....	19
A. Downtown Ascendance: Pre-1945.....	19
B. Suburbanization & the Malls: 1945-1950s.....	22
C. Downtown Decline: 1960s-1990s.....	26
D. Revitalization & the Arcade Project: 1990s-Present.....	31
<b>CHAPTER III: ECONOMIC MODELS OF DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION</b> .....	39
A. Gentrification Model.....	39
B. Immigrant Economy Model.....	43
C. Framingham Stakeholders' Economic Rationales.....	48
D. A Market-Based Decision?.....	53
<b>CHAPTER IV: EXCLUSIVE SOCIAL VALUES</b> .....	57
A. Race, Class & the Social Aspects of Gentrification.....	57
B. Latent & Explicit Discrimination in Framingham.....	59
C. The Vision for Downtown.....	66
D. The Arcade Project & Social Exclusion.....	70
<b>CHAPTER V: POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS &amp; REGULATORY PROCESS</b> .....	73
A. Suburban Development.....	73
B. Political Institutions.....	77
C. Regulatory Process.....	79
D. Politics & Exclusion.....	83
<b>CHAPTER VI: FRAGMENTED DOWNTOWN COMMUNITIES</b> .....	85
A. Immigrants & Social Networks.....	85
B. Relations Among Downtown Communities.....	87
C. Relations Among Town, Developer & Immigrant Community.....	91
D. Displacement vs. Relocation .....	94

<b>CHAPTER VII: THE DANGERS OF MIXED-USE</b> .....	97
A. Competing Models.....	97
B. Theory vs. Practice.....	104
C. Reframing Framingham.....	106
<b>APPENDICES</b>	
• Map of Downtown Framingham & Route 9 Commercial Districts.....	111
• Arcade Project Plan.....	113
• Photographs of Downtown Framingham.....	115
• List of Interviews.....	123
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	125

## CHAPTER I. THE DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION PARADOX

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### A. AN IMMIGRANT STORY

Like so many immigrants before him, Marco<sup>1</sup> came to the U.S. from Brazil four years ago in search of a steady income and better life for his family. Having settled in Framingham, Massachusetts with approximately 10,000 compatriots in town, he translated his technological skills into a home-based business that produces videos for the local Brazilian population. After several years of honing his trade and building a reputation, he eventually saved enough money to rent a second-floor office space in February 2006 in the historic Arcade building in Framingham's Brazilian-dominated downtown area. The rather run-down office of no more than 200 square feet required significant aesthetic improvements, and so he invested several hundred dollars to improve the space. One month later, with the help of his artist-wife, Marco's office of pale yellow walls and hand-painted floral detail stands out as one of the most inviting and professional in the long-corridor of offices and shops that stretch the length of the Arcade's bazaar-like commercial space. During a March 2006 conversation, Marco speaks in good English with great pride about his business and notes how sales have been growing since he moved into the new office.

What Marco says he does not know, despite having signed a rental contract for his office so recently, is that the Arcade building is the site of a \$60 million new construction and rehabilitation mixed-use project that will replace his office with residential units. In fact, the Arcade Project is the key piece to the revitalization of downtown Framingham and will displace all of the approximately 40 existing upper-floor businesses, as well as potentially some of the 12 ground-floor retail and office units. The project, which has finally emerged from several years of local and state approval and permitting processes, is slated to begin in spring 2006 pending final financial commitments from private lenders. Marco's story is not unique—of 25 Arcade business owners interviewed for this thesis, only one was well-informed about the project and had plans for relocation. Marco's story is also not unique to a specific time or place. Indeed, U.S. history is full of redevelopment projects that have displaced existing residential and commercial tenants under policies of removing blight, raising property values, and restoring life to depressed areas.

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<sup>1</sup> A fictitious name. All individuals cited by name throughout this thesis have granted express permission to be included and/or quoted.

What is different about this story is that there is widespread recognition in town that immigrant business owners like Marco have been largely responsible for revitalizing the same downtown area, which experienced significant vacancies and disinvestment from the 1950s through 1990s, from which they will now be displaced. According to nearly all decision makers in Framingham, the Brazilian businesses have brought street life and vitality back to downtown over the past ten years by populating vacant storefronts, the result of which has been a renewed interest in development and an infusion of investment. Although there is certainly a precedent for such a displacement process—local artists and gay populations have also become victims of gentrification processes that they helped precipitate (Smith 1996)—this revitalization model should raise significant concerns for planners and local government officials due to the vulnerability of immigrant businesses, potential economic loss from their displacement, and the social and ethical implications of uprooting an immigrant community. Furthermore, unlike earlier urban renewal programs, this story takes place in the context of a suburban downtown, a locale with opportunities and challenges quite distinct from urban counterparts.

Understanding this downtown revitalization paradox—that Marco and the same Brazilian business community responsible for reviving downtown Framingham now face massive displacement in the very name of revitalization—is the focus of this thesis, and highlights the general problem of why the reality of redevelopment processes is often so damaging for local communities.

## **B. RESEARCH FOCUS**

Framingham, Massachusetts is a town approximately 20 miles west of Boston with a population of 67,000<sup>2</sup>. Characterized as a suburb or “edge city,”<sup>3</sup> the town is the hub of Massachusetts’ MetroWest region and includes an urban core bordered by residential neighborhoods with small commercial areas. Route 9 essentially divides the town into two parts. Generally speaking, the north-side has a suburban feel with single-family homes, low density,

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<sup>2</sup> This figure is from the 2000 U.S. Census. However, given the significant numbers of undocumented Brazilian and other immigrants, which have been estimated at 5,000-7,500 and who are not included in the official count, the actual population figure is likely much higher.

<sup>3</sup> Term popularized by the journalist Joel Garreau’s 1991 book of the same name, an “edge city” refers to the quasi-urban, quasi-suburban areas immediately surrounding traditional North American cities. These cities are within the metropolitan area and are defined quite precisely, with five million square feet of office space and 600,000 square feet of retail space, among other requirements.

and relative affluence, while the south-side has more urban characteristics with higher density, low- to middle-income residents, social services, and is home to the majority of the town's minority and immigrant populations. The downtown area, located in the south-side, has historically served as the commercial center of town,<sup>4</sup> but with the massive suburbanization of the mid-twentieth century, large-scale shopping malls and office space developed on Route 9 as a competing commercial area that significantly contributed to the decline of downtown. At present, the so-called "Golden Mile" on Route 9 is second only to Boston's Downtown Crossing as New England's major retail destination (it actually lies within both Framingham and Natick town borders). Framingham's downtown is relatively small, with approximately 500 total businesses, and is characterized by the diverse commercial presence of longtime Anglo businesses and the more recent Brazilian, Russian, Indian, and other ethnic retail and services. Concord Street is downtown's main thoroughfare, reaching the district's center at the Memorial Building (Town Hall) and then splitting with Union Avenue. Although downtown is challenged by traffic problems created by the railroad tracks that carry commuter and freight trains directly through the district nearly every hour, it has excellent architectural and cultural assets, including the Danforth Museum and Civic League.

Largely as a result of the Route 9 commercial development and demographic changes, storefronts gradually showed significant vacancies in the second half of the twentieth century, and by the late 1980s, downtown was largely a blighted area. Also at this time, however, a large number of Brazilian and other immigrants came to Framingham and by the early 2000s had built a significant commercial presence that repopulated storefronts and brought street life and vitality back to downtown. Currently, 10,000 to 15,000 Brazilian immigrants reside in Framingham and have established approximately 225 businesses, representing nearly 50% of the total in the downtown area.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, a private developer, with the support of town officials, is currently

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<sup>4</sup> As many in town are quick to point out, however, downtown is not the geographic center of Framingham. These people believe that this has hindered its development.

<sup>5</sup> Local estimates suggest that anywhere from 20-50% of this population are undocumented. According to the U.S. Internal Revenue Service (see [www.irs.gov/businesses/small/international/article/0,,id=129236,00.html](http://www.irs.gov/businesses/small/international/article/0,,id=129236,00.html)) an immigrant is "an alien who has been granted the right by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to reside permanently in the U.S. and to work without restrictions in the U.S...Also known as a Lawful Permanent Resident." An illegal alien is "any person who is not a U.S. citizen or national who has entered the U.S. illegally and is deportable if apprehended, or who entered the U.S. legally but who has fallen "out of status" and is deportable." Meanwhile, an undocumented immigrant is someone living in a country without an official residence permit (Staring 2000). The difference between undocumented immigrant and illegal alien is largely in connotation:

implementing the Arcade Project, a \$60 million, mixed-use new construction and rehabilitation development that is scheduled to begin in spring 2006 and is positioned as the impetus for major downtown revitalization and identity change.

Utilizing the paradox of Framingham's downtown revitalization as an initial insight, this thesis explores and seeks to answer three interrelated questions:

- What are the factors that have determined the downtown revitalization model followed by Framingham stakeholders?
- Is it correct to privilege the market in understanding Framingham's revitalization model, as many suggest, or does this perception obscure other factors that have been equally significant in determining the model that the town has followed?
- Are planning concepts currently in high currency—mixed-use, high density, historic preservation, affordable housing, and transit-oriented development—being applied in a manner that is damaging for local communities? Is there a disconnect between theory and practice about which planners need to be especially vigilant?

This research focus thus seeks to identify the key determinants of the revitalization process in order to challenge the prevailing wisdom that privileges the market explanation at the expense of other factors. Framingham decision makers, knowingly or not, had the option to follow a gentrification model for revitalization based on a large-scale project that will largely displace the immigrant business community, or to pursue a model of incremental improvements implemented through a long-term vision that would preserve and build on the immigrant economy downtown. Why did the town decide to follow the former rather than the latter model? Can their decision be explained by market factors? Downtown revitalization in general is most commonly defined in economic terms, as a process through which to raise property values, upgrade infrastructure, increase investment, attract new businesses, and improve signage and the streetscape. How, then, does one explain the case of downtown Framingham, in which the presence of immigrant businesses have contributed to these improvements, yet now are being displaced by a new project in the very name of revitalization?

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typically, those supportive of this population use the former, while those opposed, the latter. Throughout this thesis, I will utilize undocumented immigrant.

This thesis argues that the downtown revitalization paradox in Framingham cannot be adequately explained by market dynamics. In fact, Framingham decision makers had two economically viable revitalization models from which to choose, based on either gentrification or the immigrant economy. Rather, social, political, and organizational factors have been equally, and perhaps more, significant in determining the downtown revitalization model in Framingham. Specifically, these determinants are 1) exclusive social values that have discriminated against minority groups and resulted in a limited vision for downtown; 2) political institutions and regulatory processes that lack leadership, accountability, and efficiency; and 3) fragmented downtown organizations and relationships that have hindered the promotion of an alternative revitalization model. This thesis challenges conventional wisdom by arguing that these other factors have guided the town's decision making process as much as any economic considerations. In addition, although I recognize that the Arcade Project is a "model" development according to contemporary planning theory—with mixed-use, high density, historic preservation, affordable housing, and transit-oriented development—I believe that this is not necessarily the *right* project for downtown Framingham. The project is financially costly and risky, and is based on identity change and attracting a new population downtown. Instead, the town could have pursued a lower risk, incremental approach to revitalization that builds upon the existing population and immigrant economy. Prior to the Arcade Project, in fact, the town had been employing small-scale changes, but these improvements largely focused on aesthetics rather than support for the immigrant economy. Thus, this thesis also challenges prevailing planning theory by suggesting that concepts promoted as universal ideals can be, in application, quite damaging for local communities. As a result, planners need to pay special attention to the use of prevailing theoretical concepts to ensure that equitable development principles grounded in the local context remain paramount in the design of any strategy or development project. Finally, this analysis suggests planners' continued preoccupation with the built environment, which can come at the expense of the social fabric of a locale.

### **C. METHODOLOGY**

I was first introduced to the town of Framingham during a spring 2005 course entitled, "Race, Immigration & Planning" offered by the Department of Urban Studies and Planning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Through this course, a group of students worked with

the Brazilian American Association (BRAMAS) in Framingham to inform and organize business owners in the Arcade building about the upcoming redevelopment project. As a result of this six-week project, the student group interviewed approximately 15 business owners and town officials and prepared a strategy plan for BRAMAS that focused on mobilizing the immigrant community in response to the pending commercial displacement. This project provided me with initial insights and contacts in town, but given limited time and resources, it stopped short of an analysis of the revitalization paradox occurring with the Arcade Project. This thesis builds on that early work through in-depth examination and a more rigorous approach to stakeholder and issue analysis.

The thesis is organized around the main points of my argument for explaining Framingham's downtown revitalization paradox. The following chapter provides historical context for market and non-economic factors in downtown's life cycle and emphasizes a sense of place by exploring the growth, decline, and ongoing redevelopment of downtown. Chapter III outlines the two economically viable revitalization models under consideration, based on either gentrification or the ethnic economy. Chapters IV through VI then discuss the social, political, and organizational factors of the revitalization process that informed the economic model followed in Framingham. The final chapter focuses on the broad implications of the case study, including a comparison of competing revitalization models and the disconnect between theory and application for planners.

The information presented in this thesis comes from a range of sources. Over a three-month period in 2006 while conducting the majority of my research, I visited Framingham an average of two-three days each week to conduct interviews, attend meetings, and observe the town's dynamics first-hand. My interviews included approximately 30 one- to two-hour discussions with members of the Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, Department of Planning & Economic Development, Town Meeting, Finance Committee, and quasi-governmental agencies; the Arcade Project developer and consultants; longtime Anglo and ethnic downtown business owners; local real estate professionals; nonprofit, religious, and other civic leaders; social service providers; a police officer; a local newspaper reporter; and an anti-immigrant advocate. I conducted nearly all of these interviews in-person, with approximately five done via telephone. In addition, I conducted brief, in-person interviews with 25 Arcade immigrant business owners, which focused on their history in the building and knowledge of the Arcade

Project.<sup>6</sup> I attempted to interview people with a range of politics and divergent perspectives on town issues. Although a few requests to members of local government boards were not returned, targeted interviewees were generally very accommodating and willing to share their views. I have also utilized local sources, including the *MetroWest Daily News*; the *Boston Globe*; *Frambors* postings (a daily listserv open to the public that functions as a discussion platform for Framingham residents on a range of town issues); town master and economic development plans; zoning and other planning documents relevant to the Arcade Project; and meetings of the Planning Board, Board of Selectmen, and Framingham Downtown Revitalization group. In addition, I have conducted a review of literature relevant to the thesis, focusing on scholarship from the fields of downtown revitalization, gentrification, suburbanization, and economic sociology. Optimally, this thesis would include an examination of different communities as points of comparison, but given limited time I decided to focus in-depth on Framingham in an effort to rigorously understand the situation and immerse myself in the town's affairs. I believe that studying the nuances of planning processes are best served by a bottom-up approach that explores real places before positing general theories. In lieu of in-depth comparisons, I have provided brief descriptions of numerous case studies throughout the thesis.

#### **D. SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH**

The target audience for this thesis is intended to be broad. First, I hope that it will serve as a useful document for local officials, planners, advocates for local businesses and immigrants, and other interested people in Framingham and similar suburbs. Although I know that some may consider the thesis' scope too narrow for their needs, I believe that the issues discussed are central to all development in town and so I hope that it can be informative for envisioning an alternative for Framingham. Second, given the relative lack of literature on the causes and impact of commercial gentrification processes, especially in the suburban context, I hope that this thesis can be a useful case study for academics interested in revitalization processes. Although suburban locales are receiving increasing attention, there remains little academic work on development processes in old suburbs trying to revitalize commercial areas. In addition, by challenging the application of prevailing planning concepts, I believe that this research provides

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<sup>6</sup> I conducted these interviews with Ilma Paixao, Director of the Brazilian American Association (BRAMAS), who provided English-Portuguese and Portuguese-English translation.

an important counter-argument for planners that emphasizes the local context above any universal principles. Of course, this becomes a question of perspective, and I argue for the importance of interpreting local context through the lens of equitable development. Finally, I hope that this study will be of interest to a general readership. With the national debate on U.S. immigration policy currently at such a heightened level, inflammatory rhetoric from all political perspectives has predominated the discourse. I believe that an in-depth case study on Framingham, a very typical suburban locale experiencing all of the benefits and challenges of a significant undocumented immigrant population, can serve to inform, even if in a specific context, the debate in a constructive manner. Perhaps refocusing the immigration discourse to concentrate on the nuances of local communities can help inform policy choices in an effective manner.

I believe that there are several reasons to pay careful attention to the ongoing revitalization process in downtown Framingham in particular. First, Framingham is an extremely diverse socio-economic town. Although its median income of \$54,000<sup>7</sup> suggests affluence, different economic levels are well represented, from low-income to middle class to the wealthy. As a result, Framingham can be seen as a very representative place and as such can provide significant insights for other local communities. Second, unlike a neighborhood within an urban context, which is often the subject of similar analyses, Framingham is a political entity unto itself and thus does not rely on external actors for decision making. The local actors who informed the findings of this thesis have real authority to make and implement policy. Gentrification studies in particular have focused almost exclusively on urban neighborhoods; with increasing numbers of vulnerable populations living in suburbs, these areas need to receive greater attention from scholars. Furthermore, suburban downtowns are usually quite different than those in cities. Suburban buildings are at a more human scale and often have historic value, and these downtowns typically are contained within a contiguous district, are linked to residential areas, lack large signature projects and a corporate center focus, and focus on local retailers (Robertson 2001). Third, the Brazilian minority in Framingham is an interesting population for study and is unlike other minority groups that are often the focus of analysis. As a Portuguese-speaking population, Brazilians do not fall under the “Hispanic” label attached to other Latin American groups. In addition, Brazil is a diverse country and immigrants to Framingham come from

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<sup>7</sup> Figure from the 2000 U.S. Census.

different socio-economic backgrounds. Many Brazilians are light-skinned, others dark-skinned, and others “mixed,” and because of this, discrimination against Brazilians cannot only be considered within traditional American conceptions of racial prejudice.<sup>8</sup>

Most importantly, this thesis is a study of a locale that has followed a revitalization model based on gentrification and displacement rather than build upon its existing ethnic economy. Although a significant amount of research has been completed on the causes and effects of gentrification on low-income residents, there is surprisingly little literature on the impact of gentrification processes on small businesses and commercial space in general. Indeed, gentrification is largely seen as a process driven by changes in housing markets, and so Framingham and the Arcade Project offer an important case of gentrification being influenced by changes in both the residential and commercial markets, in addition to social, political, and organizational factors in the community. These additional influences contribute to the importance attached to identity change, and thus displacement, in the town’s revitalization efforts. Furthermore, the gentrification literature has largely focused on the motives of “the gentrifiers,” or those moving into a new neighborhood and causing the displacement of existing tenants. This is largely due to the difficulty in identifying and tracking down the scattered group that has been displaced. As a result, significant research has not been conducted on those who are forced out (see Slater 2003 for research on displaced working class residents in Brooklyn, New York and Toronto). By reaching the displaced before the process has taken effect, this thesis hopes to offer a new perspective on those most adversely affected by gentrification processes.

Finally, recent immigrants to the U.S. are increasingly bypassing traditional urban destinations to settle in suburban communities, which are being radically transformed by a new diversity over the past decade (Logan 2003). Immigrants are not only day laborers in search of construction, homecare, or healthcare jobs; they are also immigrants with high educational levels in search of a permanent home. Because their academic qualifications are often not recognized by U.S. employers, many of these immigrants turn to opening new businesses, as is the case in Framingham, and thus build a strong presence in communities. This enhanced visibility is not always welcomed, especially given the U.S.’ “war on terror” and ambiguous national immigration policies. Local debates abound on immigrants’ legal status, contribution to and use of social services, and perceived threat to national security. This debate is especially interesting

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<sup>8</sup> Traditionally, dark-skinned Brazilians have been of lower socio-economic status than those who are light-skinned.

in suburban locations, which historically have not been as diverse as urban areas and so often lack the mechanisms through which such debate can be made channeled. It is thus important to study the effect of the increased immigrant presence on commercial space and suburban downtowns. Will suburban downtown revitalization processes simply be an updated variation on the common theme of urban renewal uprooting minority groups? As this thesis highlights, the case of Framingham already suggests a new wrinkle: here, the displaced are recognized as revitalizers themselves.

## CHAPTER II. DOWNTOWN GROWTH, DECLINE & REVITALIZATION

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**SUMMARY:** This chapter first recounts the economic, social, political, and organizational factors that have influenced downtown Framingham's historical development in order to provide context for the present revitalization process. It then describes the Arcade Project in-depth and provides details on its impact on downtown and existing immigrant businesses, setting the stage for discussion in the following chapters of the determinants of the downtown revitalization process. The chapter concludes that the strong immigrant presence downtown is not compatible with the goal of the Arcade Project, which is to create a new identity for downtown. This results in the paradox that the immigrant business community largely responsible for revitalizing downtown now faces widespread displacement in the very name of revitalization.

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The history of a place is critical to understanding its identity and symbolic value to the local population. Traditionally, downtown has connoted the central business district and was named as such because it was situated in a geographically lower district in the city, usually near a harbor or river (Ford 2003). Although the historical role of downtown as the center of a locale's commercial activity has passed, there remains a definite mythology about these districts. The character of Framingham's downtown remains a contentious debate in part because of its historical and symbolic significance, despite the fact that many Framingham residents never travel to this district. In fact, the vehemence of the debate seems to have as much to do with how downtown's revitalization represents the future of the entire town as with the district itself. Will downtown, and perhaps Framingham by extension, be won over by the immigrant population? This chapter provides context on Framingham and its downtown historical cycle by tracing the area's growth, decline, and ongoing revitalization since the mid-nineteenth century. In keeping with the focus of the thesis, emphasis will be given to the ways in which social, political, and organizational influences factors coincided and conflicted with economic considerations throughout this history.

### A. DOWNTOWN ASCENDANCE: PRE-1945

Framingham was incorporated as a township in 1700 and named after the English hometown of its first property developer, Thomas Danforth.<sup>1</sup> Since early in its history, the town has capitalized on its so-called natural advantages resulting from major transportation initiatives.

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<sup>1</sup> The town's original name was Framlingham, which the local historian says meant "meeting place of strangers" (Herring 2000).

First, Framingham's original governmental and civic hub—the Town Center, located in the north-side of town—quickly expanded into a commercial hub with the development of the Boston-Worcester Turnpike (present-day Route 9) in the early 1800s. The new turnpike also allowed Framingham to become the transport center for goods between the two cities, and commercial and industrial growth quickly followed. The second major transportation initiative, the introduction of the railroad in 1834, sparked the development of the downtown district in the south-side of town. The original proposal for the railroad actually ran through the Town Center, but Turnpike owners forced the rail line to the south out of fears of competition. Turnpike fears were confirmed, irrespective of the railroad's location, and the Turnpike company dissolved in 1843. Meanwhile, the great power of the railroad as a high-speed transporter of goods facilitated the rapid growth of downtown into Framingham's major commercial center by the 1850s, while the Town Center quickly declined in commercial significance. By the 1890s, governmental functions had moved to downtown offices, and its position as Framingham's commercial and political center was confirmed. The Memorial Building, the new (and present-day) town hall, was constructed in 1926 in the downtown district, fully completing the geographic shift. Interestingly, the railroad has played a contradictory role throughout downtown's history, initially serving as a great catalyst but later as a partial inhibitor of growth due to grade crossing problems and traffic congestion that later resulted from mass automobile usage. Because of this impact, the railroad has remained at the center of town development debates for more than 150 years. Furthermore, from this early example can be seen the struggle between economic considerations for growth and the social norms of the time that determined the crafting of distinct identities for different areas of town.

By the late 1800s and early 1900s, downtown Framingham was bustling with locally owned commercial ventures. Concord Street, the main thoroughfare through the district, included such retailers as Rice's Drugstore, Bates & Holdsworth Company (a news company), a fish market, the Red Front grocery store, Casella's Shoe Store, a dry goods store, and ladies hat store. Major company offices also settled on Concord Street, including the prominent Framingham Coal Company. To accommodate this growth, downtown's boundaries began to expand, with a blacksmith shop, Chinese restaurant, bakery, ice cream parlor, music store, and cigar and tobacco store situated on adjacent streets.

Property developers quickly seized the new opportunities downtown with a major period of construction in the 1920s. John J. Prindiville was Framingham's most significant early developer, building structures that have defined downtown ever since: the Arcade, Amsden, Prindiville, and Mullaney buildings. The Arcade was a particularly interesting innovation, creating an indoor bazaar space through enclosed walkways lined by small shops. The Arcade thus represented an early form of the indoor mall, providing shelter from harsh New England winters for year-round shopping and, theoretically at least, preparing downtown for the future. Meanwhile, though the Town Center remained well maintained, it had clearly been supplanted by downtown as the center of Framingham's growth.

With this onset of massive development, the Town Meeting responded to new state legislation by creating a local Planning Board in 1914. This new body lacked any real power, and members were untrained, but it did serve to advise the Board of Selectmen and set a foundation for future land use and development control. Zoning in Framingham was first officially debated in 1926, initiated by the Planning Board to "secure an orderly development of a community which will promote health, safety, prosperity, and social welfare of the people" (*Framingham Evening News* 1926). This document explicitly intended to separate residential and commercial uses under the idea that "nature and history" determined that agricultural activities were to happen in the northern portion of the town, while business and industrial activities should occur in the southern area near the railroad. More than a decade later, in 1939, the town adopted zoning bylaws, with subdivision regulations to follow in 1946.

With a growing population of 24,000, Framingham, and its downtown in particular, had thus experienced more than 75 years of significant growth. A 1936 story in the *Boston Herald*, titled "Framingham is Busy Center," summed up the town's strong standing: "Few cities have the natural industrial advantages of Framingham, with its land, transportation, labor market, living conditions, banking facilities..." (*Boston Herald* 1936). In reality, however, the town's assets had been developed by a strong private sector, laissez faire government, and local boosters<sup>2</sup> that attracted diverse transportation routes. Although economic factors were seemingly predominant in this alignment, the town's creation of new political functions clearly facilitated growth, while prevailing social values influenced the focus of commercial development

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<sup>2</sup> These are the groups promoting redevelopment and include local government agencies, newspapers, real estate brokers, financial institutions, property developers, and certain middle-class homeowners (Beauregard 1986).

downtown. As a town attractive to both residents and businesses, Framingham was well situated to absorb the residential flight from cities and massive suburbanization that followed World War II. However, downtown would soon also bear the consequences of this early period of unchecked growth.

## **B. SUBURBANIZATION & THE MALLS: 1945 – 1950s**

The immediate post-war period truly witnessed changes in Framingham that set the stage for decades to come. Throughout the U.S., the end of the war brought about national policies that dramatically altered towns and cities across the country, and Framingham was no different. With massive federal investment in the highway system and homeownership for targeted demographic groups, Framingham capitalized by offering an attractive alternative for urban residents, with easy access to the city, low density housing opportunities, open spaces, and a good school system. With a burgeoning residential base, town boosters recognized that expanded commercial and industrial development could follow. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, however, developers and local government focused on expanding Framingham's manufacturing, rather than commercial, core in an effort to diversify its industrial base. More than 40 industrial companies operated in the town, and in keeping with prevailing social norms that separated land uses, nearly all located in the south-side near downtown and away from the residential areas to the north. Since 1824, when the Roxbury Carpet Company established itself as the town's first manufacturing plant, Framingham maintained a strong industrial tradition. And with the recruiting support of the Chamber of Commerce, the Dennison Company had located in town and produced paper since the early 1900s. "New small factories and laboratories continuing Framingham's traditional diversification will offer better insurance to continuing prosperity than large plants whose policies are decided outside the town" noted the *Framingham News* (1948). This diversity seemingly allowed town boosters to balance competing interests and avoid becoming a company town beholden to one dominant actor. Central to this strategy was the selling of new industrial development to residents in terms of creating local wealth that would protect home rule and participatory decision making. In this way, local officials sought to balance the perception that market interests controlled development, and it appears that the political establishment and private sector actors generally worked together towards shared growth objectives.

Certain town boosters, however, did seek to bring a dominant company to Framingham, and a partnership with the Planning Board brought a strategic zoning change in 1948 that allowed the founding of a General Motors plant. General Motors quickly employed one quarter of the town's wage earners (*Framingham News* 1948), shifting the town's major employment base away from the Dennison Company. Furthermore, decreasing dependence on the railroad and increasing reliance on trucks to move goods allowed plants to scatter from their traditional base on the south-side near downtown. Zoning restrictions did largely contain industrial uses to the south-side of town, the traditional home of the working class characterized as "near-slum dwellings, marginal shops, and objectionable uses such as junkyards" (Ibid). Of note, this tradition of the south-side continues to this day, as the majority of low-income and ethnic groups still live in this area. With its traditional emphasis on home rule, Framingham residents and local government were keenly aware of the vital importance of controlling local decision making; thus, the introduction of General Motors suggests competing visions for the town's future.

Not only had boosters focused their energies on industrial rather than commercial development, but within their commercial interests, they shifted from the downtown district in other, more damaging, ways. With 42% of disposable income spent outside Framingham (Harvard Department of Regional Planning 1948), there was clearly an opportunity to expand downtown retail shops to meet local demand. Property values in downtown were higher than elsewhere in town, and indeed commercial uses had spread up Concord Street and Union Avenue. Rather than promote this district expansion, however, developers and town officials believed that the commercial strip was too long, inconvenient for shoppers, lacking adequate parking, and burdened by heavy congestion from the railroad grade crossing. Meanwhile, residents in town largely believed that their political institutions were losing control over development to private sector interests (Ibid). Despite this belief that economic factors were driving development, however, the strong property market downtown suggests that it was actually social norms of the day that were refocusing interest and investment away from downtown towards new commercial opportunities on the periphery of town.

The major challenge to the survival of downtown Framingham arrived with the establishment of one of the country's first shopping malls: Shopper's World on Route 9. Founded in 1951, the mammoth retail center introduced approximately 40 new stores. The impact of Shopper's World on Framingham was monumental. The town's total retail sales in

1952 totaled \$39.8 million, whereas in 1953, with the mall at near full operation, sales reached \$64.3 million (Framingham Industrial Development Commission 1958). With the establishment of the Natick Mall and other strip retail nearby, boosters soon came to promote this new shopping mecca as the “Golden Mile.”

The Shopper’s World project was realized only after a tense fight over required zoning changes, which the Chamber of Commerce pushed through against the opposition of downtown business owners. Boosters made a case that the mall would bring competition by locating in either Framingham or Natick, so it might as well be in Framingham in order for the town to benefit from the additional tax revenues (Ayer 1955). Downtown business owners, meanwhile, prepared for the increased competition with cooperative sales days and improved parking options (Ibid). Interestingly, five companies (two national and three local) actually opened up new units in Shopper’s World while maintaining a downtown storefront (Ibid). And although downtown businesses competed with the mall retailers for the first few years, the long-term effort required to keep pace could not be maintained.

Downtown also continued to struggle on another front. Numerous failed attempts to eliminate the grade crossing, created by the railroad running through the district, became a major problem with increased automobile usage and resulted in severe traffic congestion. Increasingly, downtown was split into north and south sides by the railroad in a manner that mirrored the town’s spatial and social division as a whole. North of the railroad, downtown and Framingham as a whole was characterized by white collar residences and high-end shopping (including apparel and department stores), whereas south of the railroad was dominated by working class housing, secondary retail, and some blighted areas. Property values reflect this split as well: the highest value in downtown’s north-side was \$17 per square foot, compared to \$8 per square foot in the south-side, and north-side buildings were in far superior condition.

Town officials came to realize that changes were required to meet these new challenges. First, after decades of debate, Framingham residents voted to change the Town Meeting government to a representative Town Meeting in 1951. The town’s tremendous growth and increasing managerial needs to coordinate governmental committees and boards required an oversight function that the general Town Meeting could not offer, and this shift seemed to promise an eventual move to a city form of government. The *Framingham News* in 1955 predicted that the town would soon become a “metropolitan area on a par with a city like

Worcester” based on local development and expansion, and the town formed a committee to investigate transitioning to a city.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the Planning Board did not support a motion to collaborate with Natick in a Greater Boston regional planning organization, under the general authority of a state agency. Clearly, home rule still carried real weight, especially as local political institutions struggled against private interests to maintain some control over development.

Second, in an effort to control growth, the town drafted a general land use plan in 1957 that established five types of commercial districts and provides a good window into the Planning Board’s thinking: Central Business District (downtown), Community Business Districts (Town Center), Local Business Districts (convenience goods only), Highway Business District (Route 9), Commercial Service District (local neighborhood). This document reestablished zoning requirements and the borders of commercial districts in an effort to limit new development. Framingham’s assessed valuation of total land had grown from \$50.6 million in 1952 to \$71.7 million in 1957 (unadjusted for inflation), signaling a strong opportunity for property development (Framingham Industrial Development Commission 1958), which clearly concerned some anti-growth stakeholders in town. The land use plan addressed the ongoing question of the railroad grade crossing and acknowledged the real and psychological impact of this problem on shoppers and downtown business potential (Ellsworth 1957).

The change to representative Town Meeting and land use plan represent efforts by the town to assert its control over market influences. It is important to emphasize, however, that these changes came quite late in the town’s land use development, and that the ineffectiveness of its political institutions had already allowed private developers to build without restriction and set the course for the town’s growth. Furthermore, important social determinations that valued the automobile and suburban retail projects, in conjunction with boosters such as the Chamber of Commerce, pushed developed away from downtown to Route 9. Of course, this is the story of suburban development across the U.S., and thus carries important implications for present redevelopment efforts in other locales.

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<sup>3</sup> Framingham has charged committees with investigating changing its governmental structure on numerous occasions, including an ongoing commission at present. See Chapter V for a discussion of the impact of governmental structure on town development.

### C. DOWNTOWN DECLINE: 1960S – 1990S

By the 1960s, the growing perception of Framingham’s unchecked growth resulted in heightened calls for greater local and regional planning. A 1960 conference sponsored by the Framingham Area Association of Planning Boards convened key planning officials from the area to discuss growth. Not surprisingly, the need for greater planning was couched in language that appealed to residents’ traditional sense of home rule and governmental structure. The conference recommended that towns establish professional, paid staff positions in planning departments that can coordinate infrastructure, adjacent land uses, and consistent zoning regulations. The major goal focused on closing existing loopholes that allowed developers to move from one town to another in order to find less stringent zoning requirements (Ayer 1960). Despite professed enthusiasm for the conference’s message, Framingham did not hire a trained city planner until 1973.

Simultaneously, calls for reorganizing the town governmental structure intensified. Representative Town Meeting included a three-person Board of Selectmen and 200 Town Meeting members, elected by popular vote. One of the main outspoken proponents of governmental restructuring was the Chamber of Commerce Executive Director, saying “The town is getting too large...Our form of government has failed to provide the necessary leadership. We should become a city and have a fulltime mayor” (Sullivan 1961). One of the Selectmen agreed, stating that a new governmental system was needed that could better respond to industrial firms or developers looking at Framingham—potential firms were passed around to different town boards due to lack of coordination, which clearly was not good for business (Ibid). Here is clear evidence, from both local government and business interests, that ineffective political institutions conspired with market factors to determine growth in town. Both the business interests, represented by the Chamber of Commerce, and local government were concerned about the prospects for continued growth in a political environment with questionable leadership and hoped to present an image that encouraged new development. Local referendums on converting the Town Meeting to a city government were frustrated on several occasions in the early 1960s, however (*Christian Science Monitor* 1963). Those in favor of change brought the issue to the state Legislature, but the courts rejected the local referendum.

The ongoing issue of governmental reform also illustrates an important social cleavage in Framingham between long-time residents and newcomers to town.<sup>4</sup> Generally speaking, longtime residents were conservative, working class, largely living in the south-side of town, and opponents of governmental change, whereas newcomers to town were liberal, white collar workers, living in the north-side, and supporters of the city form of government. Newcomers were portrayed as wanting to maintain the low density, homogenous, suburban life that they had sought in leaving urban life, and thus opposed new industry and growth—a stronger municipal government would provide the mechanism by which Framingham’s identity could be controlled. Certainly, the old-timer versus newcomer cleavage was not so straightforward, as both groups called for additional planning and control at times; significantly, however, the governmental mechanism through which each group sought to achieve this goal—empowered Town Meeting versus governmental overhaul—reflects disparate interests tied to different visions for Framingham. The fate of downtown lay at the center of this debate, with frustrations growing that downtown development had stalled for fifty years due to the inability to make a decision on the railroad grade crossing and urban renewal projects on the south-side of town. When a fire in 1966 burned down a major downtown building, the structure remained untouched and was not rebuilt for years. This explicit symbol of decline was entirely emblematic of downtown as a whole.

By the 1970s, Framingham was a changed community. Its population in 1970 had skyrocketed to 64,000, and predictions forecasted that it could reach 110,000 within a decade (Sanders 1974). With this population growth came demographic changes, including ethnic minorities (29% of the population), immigrants (7%), and a significant low-income population (nearly 15%) (Ibid). Even before this period, Framingham had a strong immigrant tradition, beginning with the Irish in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and then Italians in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and these two groups had formed a strong political coalition within the longtime resident camp. Beginning in the 1950s and increasing in the 1960s-1970s, a sizeable number of Puerto Rican and Central and South American populations immigrated to the town, initially as migrant workers. A sociological study on Framingham explored townspeople’s views on their new neighbors and found a number of prejudicial views believing that these groups were a liability to the town, characterizing the newcomers as uncommitted to Framingham’s future and as school drop-outs

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<sup>4</sup> This issue will be revisited in Chapter V.

and substance abusers (Ibid). Nearly all of these immigrant groups resided in the poorest sections in the south-side of town, thereby enforcing a spatial segregation. The town further reinforced segregation through the provision of certain community facilities that resembled “separate but equal” treatment and by placing a moratorium on constructing apartment buildings in town, which would be affordable to low-income groups. The Town Meeting established a Human Relations Committee to address discrimination in housing and social relations, but the impact of this committee is difficult to determine.<sup>5</sup> Clearly, these social issues influenced Framingham’s development in a manner that transcended market factors.

Years of disinvestment had noticeably deteriorated downtown, and the town tried to fill the void left by the disinterested private sector. From 1966-75, downtown property values declined by 7.8%, while the overall town valuation increased 78% (Herring 2000). Downtown land values hovered at \$5 per square foot, with some rents in the south side as low as \$0.50 per square foot, in comparison to the \$10 per square foot that commercial space demanded on Route 9 (Ibid). A large number of retail and residential uses had left downtown, which became dominated by government, financial, and institutional uses. Furthermore, the large amount of tax-exempt property in downtown significantly decreased revenue available for improvements. In response, the town formulated Operation 275, so named to commemorate Framingham’s 275<sup>th</sup> anniversary, as a downtown urban renewal plan to be implemented by the Framingham Redevelopment Authority. It sought to rehabilitate commercial buildings, remove blighted conditions, improve pedestrian movement, increase parking, and reduce the property occupied by railroad facilities. Initially, state and federal agencies promised financial support of the initiative, but it failed to gain momentum, at least in part because of fears by downtown business owners of decreased property values and shoppers bypassing downtown (Sanders 1974). This lack of support is telling, given that the project’s explicit beneficiaries failed to rally behind it. It seems that downtown stakeholders no longer trusted local political institutions to represent their interests (Ibid), and in the end, the Town Meeting defeated Operation 275 in 1975.

Two important studies conducted for the town presented alternatives to Operation 275. First, in its 1975 “Framework for Framingham’s Future,” students from the Harvard Graduate School of Design explored how downtown’s historic building stock could be used as the foundation for revitalization, in contrast to the massive deconstruction envisioned by urban

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<sup>5</sup> This committee still exists, though its effectiveness was questioned by several interviewees.

renewal. The plan clearly states how downtown had suffered from Route 9's commercial development, with shoppers remaining on Framingham's periphery and avoiding the interior. It recommends that downtown capitalize on its unique history and character, cater to pedestrians rather than automobiles, and provide shops for businesses that cannot afford mall rents or large space configurations. Second, a thesis by a student at the Department of City & Regional Planning at M.I.T. in 1979 responds to the urban renewal initiative with a plan to rehabilitate downtown's long-neglected south-side through incentives for property owners and subsidies for existing tenants to remain downtown and promote specialty shops for regional shoppers and convenience goods for workers and local residents. This plan apparently had the support of Framingham's Planning Department and downtown business community, and avoided the use of eminent domain or tenant relocation (Radler 1979). Most significantly, the plan highlights the need to "modernize and better the character of the neighborhood and show people that the town is interested in investing in the future of the Downtown" (Ibid). Though neither of these plans was implemented, they represent real alternatives behind which downtown businesses could rally support. In a sign of further disillusionment with their representation, a group of downtown business owners split from the Chamber of Commerce to found Downtown Associates in 1982 (Herring 2000). Though short-lived, this new organization demonstrates a tangible desire for change. It seems that downtown stakeholders recognized that the area's decline was linked to more than economic factors—Framingham's ineffective political institutions and downtown communities also contributed to a prolonged period of disinvestment and disinterest.

The 1980s continued the slow pace of development, reflecting national economic trends, and saw two important regulatory changes. First, the town instituted a new policy that exacted impact fees from developers to contribute to needed improvements on public roads that alleviated traffic problems created by new construction. In pushing this measure through, however, the Planning Board delayed publishing it in the newspaper by one month, fueling speculation that its delay was intentional in order to allow developers to quickly submit new construction applications before the measure took effect (Richey 1985). Indeed, 14 applications for new construction were received during that month, as well as a project to double the size of Shopper's World, and these developers did not have to pay impact mitigation fees (Ibid). This incident again suggests the influence that developers exerted on local government, often to the detriment of town needs. Second, Framingham amended its zoning bylaws to include site plan

review and a special permit approval process, thereby granting the town more leverage in dealing with developers to control traffic, environmental, and community impacts. These changes represented a milestone for the town, which “during the past 20 years of steady construction, [Framingham] has gained a reputation as being an easy place to build and develop. Planning and zoning bylaws have been vague or nonexistent” (Ibid).

These regulatory amendments, however, did not help downtown recover from years of disinvestment. By this time, Framingham had easily ascended to New England’s second largest retail center behind Boston, but clearly this was through the construction of massive shopping malls, not investment in the downtown business district. Indeed, the major commercial competition was now among the regional malls themselves, as downtown became essentially obsolete for all but local residents and workers (Weinberg 1989). Furthermore, the closure of the General Motors and Dennison plants in the mid-1980s were traumatic events for downtown, which suffered from the diminishment of workers downtown. Several stakeholders interviewed for this thesis noted the missed opportunity to have a proactive response to these economic changes, but instead there has never been a plan to deal with the exodus of manufacturing and its impact on downtown. Again, ineffective political institutions and downtown organizations, coupled with social values turned against downtown growth, inhibited redevelopment efforts.

In response to these ongoing debates, the Framingham Department of Planning issued its first master plan in 1988 to articulate its vision for the town. The plan attributes downtown’s decline to competition from Route 9 and insufficient parking, and thus calls for a new downtown identity that reflects a “specialized role” and does not try to compete with Shopper’s World (Framingham Master Plan 1988). The plan’s major recommendation is to transform downtown into a mixed-use neighborhood center that is home to specialty shops such as “fish and meat markets, a bakery, fruit and vegetable stores, flower shops, general convenience stores, restaurants, hardware stores and hobby/art supply stores” (Ibid). Civic and cultural uses are also recommended, and in order to build a customer base for this retail and entertainment, additional single-family housing would be constructed (Ibid). Interestingly, despite its recommendation not to compete with auto-oriented shopping, a major component of the plan is to improve parking for

downtown shoppers. Several local government interviewees described the 1988 plan as quite weak and another missed opportunity to articulate a coherent vision or implementation actions.<sup>6</sup>

#### **D. REVITALIZATION AND THE ARCADE PROJECT: 1990S – PRESENT**

By the 1990s, economic disinterest, incompatible social values, and ineffectual political institutions and downtown organizations had combined to leave downtown Framingham in a precarious position. The area faced extremely high vacancy rates and a tremendous need for financial investment, business development, aesthetic improvements, and improved infrastructure. Population growth in the town had leveled around 67,000 and growing immigrant and low-income populations created some tensions with other residents. Despite the concerns of some regarding the growing presence of these new groups, focusing on their legal status and purported drain on schools and local services, downtown soon benefited from the entrepreneurial activity of many immigrants. In particular, Framingham had become a major destination for Brazilians, mostly from Governador Valadares in Brazil, beginning in the late 1980s and growing to a present population of 10,000 to 15,000. For several years there has also been a sizeable Puerto Rican population. More recently, Guatemalans have come to Framingham in a new wave of immigration over the past five years, joining Salvadorans, Russians, Indians, and other nationalities. The Brazilians, however, have been the major group to take advantage of downtown's affordable commercial rents and small unit configurations, and by 2006, had established approximately 225 businesses, representing nearly 50% of the total downtown. The majority of these businesses are located in the four interconnected, historic buildings on Concord Street that date from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century: the Arcade, Amsden, Prindiville, and Mullaney.

Accompanying these new businesses has been a revival of street life and a renewed vitality for downtown workers and residents. Of the stakeholders interviewed for this thesis, nearly all recognized that the Brazilian businesses have played a large role in revitalizing downtown by populating storefronts and reviving interest and investment in downtown. Jay Grande, the town's longtime Planning Board Director, emphasized the significant contribution made by immigrant businesses in that they have filled storefronts, are paying rent, and have brought diversity to downtown: "without the Brazilian businesses, downtown would be a ghost

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<sup>6</sup> The 1988 master plan is still in effect today. However, the Planning Board has recently retained a consultant to update the plan.

town.” Michael Perry, who acquired the four historic downtown buildings in 1997 and is the developer of the Arcade Project, bluntly stated that “Framingham would be dead without the Brazilians.” Indeed, according to Mr. Perry, in 1997 there were two vacancies on the ground floor, while the upper floor commercial units were only 30% occupied. Less than ten years later, the upper floor exhibits a 95% occupancy rate and only one ground floor unit is vacant (an old Woolworth’s store, which is being held unoccupied in preparation for the Arcade Project).

It is important to note that some residents still see downtown as blighted with large numbers of vacancies. Although anecdotal evidence indicates that these people rarely, if ever, go downtown, and so their facts are outdated—a walk through downtown quickly demonstrates that there are very few vacancies—their perspective is critical. In the words of one interviewee, “downtown is just vacant to them,” suggesting that these people believe the area fails to serve their needs. For many people, then, downtown has only been revitalized for immigrant populations, and additional redevelopment—indeed, a real identity change—is still required. In this view, immigrant businesses represent blight rather than economic opportunity. Jeff Buck, who is the co-founder of Concerned Citizens and Friends of Illegal Immigration Law Enforcement (CCFILE), a Framingham-based organization that advocates against undocumented immigrants, described the downtown economy as insular and only serving Brazilians, and so “it is not fair to say that they have revitalized downtown.” This viewpoint is definitely in the minority, however, and even these people do not deny that immigrant businesses have filled downtown storefronts.<sup>7</sup>

The renewed interest and investment in downtown generated by the immigrant businesses has been a double-edged sword. A favorable economic environment coupled with unfavorable social, political, and organizational factors has placed these businesses in a vulnerable position.

The Arcade Project is a \$60 million mixed-use new construction and rehabilitation project scheduled to begin in spring 2006 that will rehabilitate the four historic downtown buildings on Concord Street and construct a new residential structure and six-story parking garage.<sup>8</sup> The project will result in 50,000 square feet of commercial space, which is roughly equivalent to the present amount. However, the 12 ground floor units will be reconfigured, while the 40 upper floor offices and stores will be converted to residential units. Commercial units are

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<sup>7</sup> I will explore these issues in greater depth in Chapter IV.

<sup>8</sup> The actual sites of the Arcade Project are 101-175 Concord Street, 80 Kendall Street, and 29-47 Frederick Street.

expected to attract rents of \$20 per square foot (current levels range from \$12 to \$18 per square foot, according to Mr. Perry), which compares favorably with other downtown rent levels.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, the Arcade Project will create 290 residential units,<sup>10</sup> which have been targeted at young unmarried professionals, young families, and empty nesters. Per local and state guidelines, 20% of the residential units will be designated as affordable, with the likely mix of 10% to remain affordable in perpetuity and 10% for 40 years. Mr. Perry hopes to attract purchases of \$400 per square foot for the market rate units. In addition, the project will contribute approximately \$1.5 million for off-site improvements in the downtown area, including improved sewage systems and streetscape.

Significant financing for the project will come from a tax increment financing (TIF) package secured at the local and state level. In order to make the Arcade Project and other similar developments possible downtown, Town Meeting passed legislation in May 2005 to create an Urban Center District downtown, which grants tax increment financing to the developer, and following state approvals as well, the district received the TIF for both the commercial and residential components.<sup>11</sup> A TIF is a property tax exemption on all or a portion of the increased value of a project, and for the Arcade Project, the duration is 20 years for the commercial component and 10 years for residential portion. The incremental increases in property tax revenues are collected over the length of the project and reinvested in the district for infrastructure and other improvements. TIFs are a common economic development tool used to address market failures by attracting investment to areas that might not otherwise be of interest to private developers. The case of the Arcade Project highlights the costs and benefits of TIF-funded development for existing versus new populations (see Man 2001 for discussion of TIF inefficiencies and tradeoffs, and see Reingold 2001 for discussion of misuse of TIFs and their association with gentrification and residential displacement). Besides the TIF, the project's financing mix has changed numerous times among public sources and banks, and it is now expected to be completely funded by private lenders.<sup>12</sup> Mr. Perry has already invested \$3 million to \$4 million of his own equity into the project.

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<sup>9</sup> The Fitts Insurance building, which is directly across Concord Street, rents commercial units for approximately \$15 per square foot on the ground floor and \$12 per square foot on upper floors.

<sup>10</sup> The residential units are likely to be condominiums, but are as yet undetermined.

<sup>11</sup> This project is the first time that Massachusetts has granted a residential TIF.

<sup>12</sup> The project will apply for historic preservation tax credits to help finance the rehabilitation work on the existing buildings.

The exact timing of the Arcade Project remains unclear, largely due to uncertainties about the financing package. The rehabilitation component will require access to utilities, and thus is likely to significantly disrupt commercial activity in the building. Currently, it is expected that the new garage construction and historic rehabilitation will come first, to be followed by construction of the new residential building.<sup>13</sup> Mr. Perry has indicated that he needs the revenue from commercial tenants during construction, and so plans to keep the ground floor commercial space usable throughout the development process.

Although this thesis focuses on the Arcade Project as Framingham's major downtown revitalization project, in fact there are two other projects occurring downtown that are of lesser significance, though still important for achieving the town's goal of building downtown's residential base. The Kendall Hotel, located on Concord Street in the center of downtown, is being converted into 25 condominiums, currently advertised at sales prices of approximately \$200,000, with a small amount of commercial space on the ground floor. Meanwhile, several buildings of the former Dennison Manufacturing plant, located on the periphery of downtown, are being converted into condominiums: 187 total units over different phases (the first 80 are presently on the market), that are selling at approximately \$375 per square foot.

The Arcade Project has been positioned by the town and developer as the impetus for a major identity change for downtown Framingham, thereby dramatically altering the character of downtown. The town's Community Development Plan from 2004, produced in cooperation with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, convened resident groups for visioning sessions around broad town goals, including economic development. The top priority that clearly emerged under this goal was the revitalization of downtown, specifically the "strengthening of downtown businesses -- whether retail, entertainment/cultural, or office -- will create economic opportunities for town residents of low-moderate income, who are concentrated in the adjacent residential neighborhoods" (Framingham Community Development Plan 2004). Despite this charge, the Arcade Project will not likely create opportunities attainable by low- and middle-income groups. In the words of Katie Murphy, who was the chair of the Board of Selectmen throughout the project's approval and permitting process, "the Arcade Project will be a jumpstart and impetus to draw in more development...a stimulus to economic development and increased

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<sup>13</sup> The residential structure will be situated behind the four existing historic buildings to be rehabilitated, on the site of an existing parking lot and three single-family homes, which will be demolished.

residential development.” The project’s site plan review and special permit documentation states that it will stimulate “the local economy through the influx of revitalized commercial and retail stores” (Section 3: 9) and will “restore vibrancy” and bolster “the social atmosphere” of downtown (Section 3: 4). The documentation in support of the TIF says that

Most buildings located within the Central Business District are considered to be blighted, underutilized and/or substandard. Upper stories in the existing buildings are vacant or underutilized, and first floor space while primarily occupied does not attract a strong customer base. Even though there is minimal vacancy along the first floors of these buildings, the present conditions give a negative image about the viability of the whole downtown (2005:1).

Such language is entirely emblematic of the manner in which the project is being promoted. Not only is it partly inaccurate (the upper floors are not vacant), it represents only the negative perspective of blight and underutilization. Clearly major identity change is inconsistent with the idea that downtown is already experiencing a revitalization, and instead coincides with the perspective that downtown’s identity cannot be tied to its immigrant businesses.

In order to achieve this identity change, the existing upper floor commercial space will be redesigned and reconfigured, which will result in the displacement of 40 existing businesses (nearly all of which are immigrant-owned). Though a very low priority throughout the approval process, the issue of displacement of the immigrant businesses is not completely lost on key stakeholders when asked. The Director of the Department of Planning and Economic Development, Kathy Bartolini, who has been the town’s point person for working with Mr. Perry throughout the development process, emphasized that she “does not want to lose the Brazilian businesses.” Ms. Murphy said that displacement is “an unfortunate side effect....As a community evolves, that’s what happens. They’ll have to find space someplace or they’ll leave. I feel very bad that people will lose their livelihood, but I don’t know that it’s a government concern.” On the other hand, Ms. Murphy continued that she hopes the Brazilian businesses fill in existing vacancies throughout downtown because “it would be horrible if they all left and there was only a CVS next to a Starbucks next to a Borders.” Such inconsistent beliefs are prevalent in town and suggest that local government and other stakeholders have been unable to represent the economic

and social interests of downtown effectively. Indeed, one has to wonder how the displacement of at least 40 local businesses is not the government's concern.

Meanwhile, longtime Planning Board member Sue Bernstein, who has been an outspoken opponent of the project—mostly on the grounds of its high density and aesthetic, rather than its impact on existing businesses—is concerned that

These people who have kept up downtown so long are going to get pushed out. [During the approval hearings for the project with the Planning Board] there was no discussion of trying to keep the Brazilians' space. It is the goal of some in town to get rid of all Brazilian presence in town. There was virtually no thought given to keeping the original [upper-floor commercial] space...They debated the swimming pool location and parking garage, but there was no concern for the existing tenants.

And Laura Medrano, a Framingham resident and staff member at the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), was quite blunt in saying that “the Brazilians are not realizing this is the first step in downtown getting rid of them.”

The irony of the Arcade Project is that according to contemporary planning theory, it is a model development and represents some of the profession's highest ideals: mixed-use, high density, historic preservation, transit-oriented development, with a significant affordable housing component. This thesis does not dispute the value of these characteristics per se. Rather, I argue that when applied, the Arcade Project illustrates that the reality of these concepts can be quite damaging for local communities. In this case, the project will uproot a large portion of a key economic and social group downtown. Instead of ideals, local context is critical in determining approaches to revitalization, and decision makers need to account for under-represented groups in their understanding of local context.

Furthermore, the Arcade Project is a large-scale, high-risk project rather than one based on incremental steps towards change. Over the past several years, in fact, the town has achieved some small-scale improvements downtown, including renovating a green space, redesigning the entrance to Town Hall, implementing traffic calming measures, and making storefront improvements. Though these efforts have focused on aesthetics and mostly benefited the ground floor businesses (rather than the more numerous upper floor immigrant tenants), they have been

important, necessary steps. The Arcade Project thus represents something of a departure from this approach. In short, Framingham's revitalization process represents what I have termed the "downtown revitalization paradox." Despite widespread acknowledgment by government officials, planners, the project developer, civic leaders, residents, and others that the Brazilian immigrant business community is largely responsible for bringing vitality back to the downtown area—indeed, that they have revitalized downtown—these businesses now face widespread displacement by the Arcade Project in the very name of revitalization.

As the historical narrative presented in this chapter has sought to demonstrate, downtown Framingham is far from a blank slate. Like downtowns across the country, it suffered not only from general economic decentralization but also from the proliferation of the automobile, the formation of new periphery commercial districts offering chain retail, changing social preferences, and the inability of downtown interests to mobilize in the face of strong opposition (Fogelson 2001). In Framingham, these conditions first created a favorable environment for a downtown dominated by immigrant businesses, but now are conspiring against this community through a new vision and redevelopment model that is largely incompatible with the strong immigrant presence. The following chapters will examine in-depth two economically viable models of revitalization, and then will discuss the social, political, and organizational factors that have influenced the decision making process and resulted in the downtown paradox.



## CHAPTER III. ECONOMIC MODELS OF DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

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**SUMMARY:** This chapter discusses competing economic models for downtown revitalization. First, I examine the gentrification model based on the free flow of capital and unchecked property markets. Second, I describe an alternative model based on promoting ethnic economies and entrepreneurship. Third, the chapter presents the most frequent economic reasons for Framingham's downtown's revitalization model provided by key stakeholders. Lastly, I argue that because both models are economically viable and town decision makers could have pursued either, market factors cannot adequately explain the revitalization model that has been implemented. In support of this argument, the last section includes a discussion of case studies of successful revitalization through ethnic economies in the Boston area and throughout the U.S.

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The ability of a locale to revitalize is clearly dependent on the economics of different development models. One model available to Framingham decision makers is based on allowing relatively unencumbered property markets and capital flows to gentrify downtown and attract new populations. An alternative model builds on the existing ethnic economy of the downtown immigrant businesses by nurturing this nascent community and supporting its maturation and incorporation into the general town economy. The literatures on gentrification and ethnic entrepreneurship have both focused on economic and social determinants of community change, often as the subject of much debate, and this chapter will focus on economic arguments as relevant for understanding the case of Framingham's downtown revitalization. The social determinants identified by both sets of literature will be discussed in Chapters IV and VI.

### A. GENTRIFICATION MODEL

The term gentrification is derived from the "gentry" and first coined by sociologist Ruth Glass in 1964 in reference to changes in London neighborhoods through which working class people were displaced by the middle class and the entire social character of neighborhoods was changed (Smith 1996). Although Glass' coinage was intended to be critical, early on gentrification was conceived of as the reversal of urban decay and thus welcomed by city magazines and newspapers touting the renaissance of formerly dilapidated neighborhoods such as the Lower East Side and Cobble Hill in New York City; the South End in Boston; and Capital Hill and Adams-Morgan in Washington (Beauregard 1989). Meanwhile, gentrification's effect of displacing disadvantaged groups was minimized as a minor byproduct (Smith 1986). Presently, the term has both positive and negative connotations depending on one's perspective, but there is

general consensus that it describes the movement of relatively affluent groups into a lower socio-economic neighborhood, resulting in the displacement of longtime residents (Beauregard 1989). Perhaps most importantly, Kennedy and Leonard (2001) include in their definition that, because of its displacement effect, gentrification changes “the essential character and flavor of that neighborhood” (6). Beauregard (1986 and 1989) and Williams (1986) also emphasize that gentrification must be understood as a chaotic group of processes linked to global forces of economic restructuring and shifts in social and economic relations—which can involve townhouse redevelopment, displacement of multi-family structures, warehouse conversions, etc.—that involve different groups of individuals with different causes and consequences. Indeed, gentrification is much more than a process occurring in the residential housing market, but includes the widespread redevelopment of neighborhood commercial and industrial space as well. In addition, gentrification literature has long debated the roles of social structure versus individual agency in influencing such processes, and some authors have reconciled the issues by characterizing gentrification as a complex process with varied individual responses to structural economic and social changes (Beauregard 1989a).

Essentially, gentrification is a process in which property markets operate relatively freely and without prohibitive intervention by local government. Central to the debate on the causes of gentrification have been both production- and consumption-side explanations. Consumption factors focus on the preferences and lifestyle changes of demographics, namely gentrifying groups often identified as “yuppies” or other upper-middle class persons.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, production-side factors emphasize that gentrification occurs from the investment of capital in property, its deterioration through use and disinvestment, and the resultant opportunity for new investment that is highly profitable. Although there is more of a synthesis now among the literature, with both capital and consumption arguments acknowledged, scholars continue to debate (see Smith 1996 for further discussion).

On the production-side of the discourse, the rent gap theory has been articulated to explain the gentrification of city neighborhoods, utilizing the urban-suburban economic dynamic to show how scarce capital is reallocated to competing land markets. Although the case of Framingham does not neatly fit this traditional characterization, the theory offers an

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<sup>1</sup> This side of the debate will be discussed in Chapter IV on the role of social values.

interpretation of property markets that is useful for understanding the downtown's revitalization process in economic terms.

Smith (1986 and 1996) has completed significant research on the rent gap theory. The concept is that as suburbanization proliferates, capital is allocated to this development and consequently disinvested in inner-city property. As a result, a rent gap occurs in inner-city land between the actual market rent attainable from the existing land use and the potential rent that would be achievable from its highest and best use. This spread creates the opportunity for the blighted land to be redeveloped by attracting those who will pay significantly less than potential prices for land. In other words, the rent gap is the difference between the capitalized and potential ground rents in an area. For example, during Manhattan's Lower East Side gentrification process in the 1980s-90s, a noted landlord increased the rent on a long-term ethnic restaurant of 700 square feet from \$950 to \$5,000 (Smith 1996). The rent gap leads to gentrification when it is sufficiently wide as to attract developers to purchase buildings cheaply, absorb the costs of rehabilitating or reconstructing the site, pay off their interest on loans, and then sell the property at a sufficiently high price to provide an acceptable profit (Ibid).

Though the rent gap theory is certainly a useful model, several scholars have noted its limitations in providing a full explanation of neighborhood change (see Slater 2003 for discussion of ongoing debate and international context). Beauregard has stated that the "rent gap argument provides only one of the necessary conditions for gentrification and none of the sufficient ones" (1986: 39). He argues that theorists have reversed the conceptual framework; rather than using gentrification and the rent gap as attributes of uneven development, uneven development is utilized, incorrectly, as a determinant of the two (Ibid). Furthermore, specific desirable sites are required for gentrification, often characterized as architecturally interesting buildings with "potential," which means proximity to the central business district and transportation routes, and commercial areas that can be transformed to the types of retail, services, and restaurants that meet the preferences of the new populations (Ibid). Smith (1986) has supported these arguments, noting that the rent gap is only a partial explanation, given that cheap land is available in many areas, especially rural locales.

The goal of an expanded local tax base is a related economic argument made for explaining gentrification processes. Indeed, gentrification is often held as the model through which localities can rebound from desperate fiscal difficulties by encouraging private sector

reinvestment, higher income residents, and upscale businesses (Williams 1986). An upgraded built environment means a greater tax base, and households with more disposable income will typically boost local economies. An interesting corollary to this model is a strategy utilized by some landlords: the nonpayment of property taxes. Tax delinquency provides capital to landlords that would otherwise be lost to the government, and represents a common form of disinvestment that paves the way for gentrification (Smith 1996). In the case of Framingham, initial estimates for additional tax revenues from the new residential and commercial space totaled \$1.7 million through FY 2008<sup>2</sup> and \$11.7 million over a 20-year period (Beals and Thomas 2003, Section 6: 6).

A further explanation of capital flows is that supply follows demand, and more specifically, responds to latent demand. Developers of retail space are (or should be) keenly aware of this principle, and thus only develop commercial space in districts in which there is a shortage of space. In theory, this system is self-correcting and retail property markets stabilize, but in reality, retail space is often overbuilt (McClure 2001). Reasons for this include long development timelines (i.e. the market changes from conceptual design to the operations phase), and that retail space, unlike single-family residential units, is built in bulk (Ibid). It is thus dangerous for local municipalities to allow the market to self-regulate. Rather, proactive efforts through true partnerships with developers are critical, otherwise towns are at the mercy of private developers and an imperfect market. The availability of retail space and spending thus needs to be monitored by economic development practitioners in order to inform a strategy for attracting new development or limiting new construction.

While these theories, particularly the rent gap, have largely been utilized to explain suburban-urban economic restructuring, they can also be applied to describe the renewed investment in one locale, such as Framingham. Beauregard (1989b) notes that reinvestment in the 1980s was not confined to the central cities. A second wave of suburbanization was driven by affordable land prices and the need for office space, resulting in large office parks, often at the intersection of major transportation routes. This resulted in the need for other commercial uses, and soon thereafter residential construction followed to house all of the new workers, and property values typically increased dramatically (Ibid). The problems associated with these

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<sup>2</sup> This figure is based on the increase from a “no-build” to a “build” scenario. It assumes initial occupancies in 2005, and so is no longer valid.

developments were lost amidst the euphoria of economic rejuvenation. As investment in commercial property went to Route 9—representative of the suburbs, in Framingham’s case—beginning in the 1950s, the “urban” commercial property market in downtown Framingham experienced the related disinvestment. Culminating over several decades in the late 1990s, a rent gap developed in downtown property markets, and thus eventually attracted new investment. Indeed, Framingham represents an interesting case of gentrification. First, it is driven by a major mixed-use project rather than a more gradual encroaching by new residents, and second, there is no identifiable group of gentrifiers (gay population, artists, yuppies) as yet to lead the process. Rather, it is project-driven with the hope that gentrifying groups will follow, and in this way, is reminiscent of the urban renewal programs throughout modern U.S. urban history.

This gentrification model of revitalization, based on allowing private developers to capitalize on significant rent gaps, comes at the expense of vulnerable local populations who cannot survive in a market dominated environment. Indeed, the immigrant business community in downtown Framingham now faces widespread displacement from the Arcade Project.

## **B. IMMIGRANT ECONOMY MODEL**

An alternative revitalization model to gentrification is represented by the ethnic economies that exist in cities and towns across the country. The literature on ethnic and immigrant entrepreneurship has successfully demonstrated the economic benefits created by immigrant entrepreneurs for local communities, and the important work done by both academics and practitioners over the past decade has been largely successful in attributing recognition to these entrepreneurs. Although the literature has focused on dense immigrant and ethnic neighborhoods within large urban areas, such as New York, Miami, San Francisco, and Boston, it is very useful for understanding the contribution made by Framingham’s immigrants to the downtown commercial landscape. The impetus to the research has been to explain the high rates of entrepreneurship among immigrants, understand the financial success attained by these groups, and establish their overall contribution to local economies. Significantly, the literature demonstrates that immigrants are not simply passive recipients of social welfare, as many claim, but can be engines of economic development.

As early as 1953, a President’s Commission on Immigration and Naturalization noted the correlation between the country’s richest regions and concentrations of immigrants, stating that

“their industry, their skills and their enterprise were major factors in the economic development that made these regions prosperous” (qtd. in Butler and Kozmetsky 2004). More recently, the Immigrant Learning Center, based in Massachusetts, released a report documenting the significant contribution made by immigrant entrepreneurs to neighborhood revitalization. The authors’ research of three Boston neighborhoods found that immigrant entrepreneurs substantially contribute to quality of life and local economies through reviving commerce and investment in depressed areas, providing needed products and services, incubating new businesses, attracting new customers, providing employment opportunities, improving the physical appearance of districts, and enhancing public safety (Borges-Mendez et al 2005). Research has also not been limited to the U.S. Major studies, especially on Canadian and Dutch neighborhoods, have emphasized immigrant populations as economic drivers, rather than the traditional conception as societal burdens (Kloosterman 1999). Despite the common fears of burdening social services, requiring welfare and additional housing, spreading disease, and even breeding terrorism, generations of immigrants have proven that they revitalize urban areas and contribute to economic growth.

Every U.S. Census since 1880 has demonstrated that immigrants are more likely to be self-employed than the native born population (Borges-Mendez 2005). Originally, high rates of immigrant entrepreneurship were attributed to low barriers to entry and these groups’ discriminatory exclusion from other types of work. Subsequent research, however, has shown a more nuanced situation (Portes 1995). Waldinger, Aldrich, and Ward (1990) noted that in four of the major immigrant-receiving metropolitan areas—New York, Los Angeles, Miami, and San Francisco—self-employment rates among male immigrants approached 10%. Specifically, over a 30-year period, Cuban immigrants to Miami “transformed a decaying, stagnant city into a booming economy” (Ibid: 19). Indeed, in Framingham, low rents downtown and high vacancy rates allowed for a clustering of Brazilian businesses, while the significant undocumented population has had difficulty accessing existing employment opportunities, save for day laboring.

As the literature demonstrates, immigrant businesses possess several economic advantages that accompany their membership in the ethnic group. First, common backgrounds and worldviews can have definite economic benefits, such as Mexican immigrants knowing how to cook the highly marketable Mexican food (Light and Gold 2000). Second, ethnic groups establish boundaries, and thus cooperation and solidarity, among fellow ethnic group members

(Ibid). This is based in common national origin, language, and cultural assumptions, and can create economic benefits in reaction to challenges by sharing resources and developing cooperative responses. Furthermore, social and cultural capital is critical to explaining how ethnic groups promote their economies: “Groups’ collective resources, including trust and cooperation, help them overcome the disadvantages of outsider status and maximize the value of their human and financial capital in order to achieve economic stability or betterment” (Ibid: 110). Significantly, this shared ethnic economy can also translate into political action.<sup>3</sup>

Conversely, the ethnic economy also comes with certain disadvantages. These include potential swindling of compatriots, indebtedness through favors and communal obligations, and some evidence that employment means lower wages and lack of promotions (see two studies of Vietnamese ethnic entrepreneurs by Phyllis J. Johnson and Jacqueline Desbarats). Furthermore, fierce competition among co-ethnics can result in detrimental economic results, namely multiple businesses selling the same products and targeting the same customers, thereby driving down one another’s prices and profits. This competition can clearly be seen in the upper floor of the Arcade building in Framingham with duplicative businesses vying with one another.

It is important to note that there are different types of immigrant entrepreneurs identified by the literature. First, middlemen minorities, a term adopted by Bonacich, refers to those operating in ethnic enclaves and focusing on providing services to immigrant populations—they are often of a different nationality than those they serve, and function as a buffer between mainstream business and their customers (Bonacich 1993; Portes 1995). Second are entrepreneurs serving co-ethnics with goods and services. Third, other entrepreneurs solely work within ethnic occupational niches that focus on employing co-ethnics (Staring 2000). In addition, legal and undocumented immigrants can also play different roles. The undocumented serve as participants, promoters, and producers of immigrant businesses in a manner that sets them apart from legal immigrants (Ibid). Their marginalized position leaves them largely at the mercy of their ethnic community, without social services or rights on which to rely, and vulnerable to exploitation.

Given these characteristics, several theoretical frameworks offer useful models for understanding immigrant entrepreneurship. Waldinger, Aldrich, and Ward (1990) have espoused an approach grounded in market niches that characterizes immigrant entrepreneurs’ success as

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<sup>3</sup> See Chapter VI for discussion.

determined by unmet demands in the host country. This is based on three determinants: opportunity structures (market conditions), characteristics of the ethnic groups (ability to mobilize social resources), and ethnic strategies (how groups utilize their resources towards market goals) (Ibid). Opportunity structures are based on the idea that market conditions will determine viable opportunities for ethnic business owners, i.e. market demand for goods and services offered by ethnic businesses. Typically, ethnic businesses first develop products and services with a niche market among their compatriots, for the obvious reasons that business owners are most familiar with their tastes and preferences. Except in special circumstances, the local ethnic population is not large enough to allow these businesses to prosper beyond a certain level. Interestingly, many Brazilian immigrants in Framingham are not targeting Anglo customers because their sizeable population means they can prosper financially without capturing other demographic groups. Waldinger et al (1990) also note that markets with demand for “exotic” ethnic goods among non-ethnic populations offer a potential niche market for immigrant entrepreneurs. This can be seen to some extent in Framingham with the example of the Padaria Brazil bakery on Concord Street, which sells ethnic pastries and other food and represents one of the few Brazilian businesses with some crossover appeal to the Anglo population. In the Brazilians’ case, the product offered makes all the difference—clothing shops selling ethnic apparel have hardly any non-Brazilian customers. In addition, the typically strong social ties and networks within an ethnic group result in a competitive advantage for ethnic business owners in establishing a niche market. By predominantly serving their own ethnic group, there are minimal possibilities for outsider competition and loyalty and convenience play key roles in creating a monopolistic position in the market (Jones et al 2000).

An alternative theory to the ethnic market niche is the enclave economy framework. This envisions the enclave as a distinct labor market from the general population as well as an “integrated cultural entity” with boundaries protected by solidarity and “enforceable trust” (Butler et al 2004). Promoted by leading theorists such as Portes and Zhou, it focuses on the social capital generated by close-knit immigrant communities and emphasizes the co-ethnicity of spatially concentrated entrepreneurs, providing economic benefits such as funding sources and job access. Zhou’s documentation of Chinatowns is of particular interest here (2000). In this research, Chinese immigrants are increasingly coming to the U.S. with higher educational qualifications, eagerness to assimilate and plans to remain in the U.S., and reception from a more

open society. Despite these favorable conditions, however, they are still flocking to Chinatowns and creating new enclaves, perhaps because of language barriers, fears of racism, or social networks (Ibid). Entrepreneurship is an opportunity through which to avoid menial, low-wage labor; empowers them with dignity and pride against racial discrimination and disempowered immigrant status; and is generally a mechanism for upward social mobility. Most importantly, Chinese immigrants are so successful because of high levels of financial, human, and social capital that supports their efforts (Ibid). Data also indicate that the self-employed of all racial/ethnic groups surpass salaried co-ethnics in absolute earnings (Ibid).

A third framework for ethnic entrepreneurship is the interactionism model. Light and Gold define an ethnic economy as consisting of “coethnic self-employed and employers and their coethnic employees” (2000: 4) and existing “whenever any immigrant or ethnic group maintains a private economic sector in which it has a controlling ownership stake” (Ibid: 9). Starting with the definition of the ethnic enclave economy as a conspicuous economy that comes with the economic advantages of clustering, interactionism developed in response to the over-emphasis on the supply-side of ethnic economies. The fate of ethnic businesses also depends, of course, on demand-side factors in the market, and the interactionism model seeks to integrate the supply- and demand-side components. The viability of an ethnic economy is judged on several wealth production factors, including job creation. Light and Gold (2000) identify three challenges for job creation: generating a high rate of self-employment, maximizing the number of employer firms (not just self-employed firms), and creating jobs within employing firms (adding jobs to existing firms). Jan Rath (2000), among others (Bonacich 1993), has been critical of interactionism for its failure to live up to empirical tests, though notes that a renewed emphasis on social networks and ethnic succession in the job market is more on target—in other words, the closed ethnic networks provide preferential treatment to group members, such that as certain members move up the social ladder, more recent immigrants take their place at the bottom.

A broader point is critical here. The opportunities and strategies employed by ethnic entrepreneurs are strongly related to their “embeddedness in the economic, politico-institutional and social environments” (Rath 2000: 10). In other words, the varied particulars of the local market will in large part determine success and sustainability. The embedded transaction concept originated with the Hungarian anthropologist Karl Polanyi, and was then adapted by Mark Granovetter, who researched how social expectations undermined market transactions (Portes

1995). Granovetter has since articulated the difference between relational embeddedness, which is the personal relationships among economic actors, and structural embeddedness, or the broader social networks in which the actors participate (Ibid). In general, these theories seek to explain behavior that is not “resource maximizing” in the economic sense, and thus strive to understand the market in a new way. Networks are central to social, rather than economic, understandings of the market, containing the social and cultural capital that influence economic transactions (Ibid).

Finally, there are important spatial and temporal dimensions to ethnic entrepreneurship, which can be easily observed in Framingham. The clustering of businesses has numerous economic benefits, including the facilitation of new business formation (Chinatowns, for example), cultural dominance of a commercial area (Little Havana in Miami, for example), and a critical mass of customers (Waldinger et al 1990; Kloosterman 1999). In addition, Waldinger et al describe different stages of ethnic group development: 1) the replacement labor phase, when immigrants are dependent on majority population and take jobs that non-ethnics do not want to do; 2) the ethnic niche phase, when immigrant population grows and families begin to settle and so there is sufficient demand to sustain business development; 3) and a final stage in which experience, networks, and skills allow businesses to branch out to serve non-ethnic populations (1990).

In short, immigrant entrepreneurs leverage significant economic, social, human, and cultural resources to make major contributions to viable local economies. In the case of Framingham, Brazilian businesses certainly have played a major role in reviving the downtown economy. How, then, to reconcile these ethnic economy arguments with those made in favor of a revitalization model based on gentrification and the marginalization of this local economy? Why does downtown Framingham not build on the immigrant economy for continued revitalization?

### **C. FRAMINGHAM STAKEHOLDERS’ ECONOMIC RATIONALES**

The prevailing idea in Framingham is that downtown revitalization and the displacement of the immigration business population are primarily driven by economic considerations rather than other factors. Interviews with Framingham stakeholders revealed several economic arguments to help explain the downtown revitalization paradox. In general, local government and private sector interviewees were more likely than civic leaders to privilege the economic role of

the town's revitalization process. It is important to emphasize, however, that every interviewee held unique opinions and thus resists easy categorization. I will attempt to reflect this diversity of opinion within the categories set out below, which represent a range of market-focused responses.

**1) The immigrants are only here for a short time and so do not invest in downtown.**

Numerous interviewees expressed the belief that downtown revitalization in Framingham can, and according to some should, happen without a major immigrant role because they are not committed residents for the long-term. Clearly this assertion is value-laden and thus goes beyond a pure economic consideration, however, an important aspect is economic in nature. The idea is that the immigrant businesses have not invested financially in downtown or their particular units, and so are not long-term partners in revitalization and are therefore expendable. For example, Ms. Bartolini, the Director of the Department of Planning and Economic Development, noted that the cosmopolitan nature of downtown business mix is an asset, but because these immigrants, unlike the Irish and Italians before them, do not plan on remaining here, they do not try to learn English, serve non-ethnics, or invest financially in the downtown. Indeed, immigration has a definite temporal as well as spatial component, and aspirations and expectations for their future are key to immigrants' economic behavior (Roberts 1995). Clearly, immigrants who are not planning to remain in the U.S. for an extended amount of time are less likely to make substantial financial investments than those intending to stay permanently. This decision is based on norms, as much as realistic considerations, that are constantly changing—that is, not how long will someone stay, but how long *should* they stay (Ibid). These norms are influenced by communities in countries of origin and in the U.S., and are shaped by a host of considerations, including economic opportunities, family realities, and immigration policy.

Although anecdotal evidence suggests that many of the Brazilian immigrants in Framingham do hope to return to Brazil, the interviews I conducted with the business community indicate that this segment of the population intends to remain in the U.S., and in Framingham in particular, for the foreseeable future. When asked about their future plans when the Arcade Project uproots their business, only one of 25 business owners interviewed expressed a desire to return to Brazil rather than reestablish their business, and the vast majority said that they would like to remain downtown in particular.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, many of those interviewed have made

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<sup>4</sup> Note that several answered that they did not know what they will do.

financial investments to improve their units. It thus seems that stakeholders interviewed have relied on assumptions about the immigrant population, rather than substantive information, to formulate their ideas.

Interviewees also pointed to downtown Anglo businesses, such as Fitts Insurance, as models. Headed by Arthur Fitts, the business has been in downtown Framingham for nearly 100 years, and recently invested approximately \$1 million in façade improvements to their properties on Concord Street. Clearly, however, the Fitts business has revenue far beyond that of the Brazilian businesses and so can afford such investments, and as a property owner, the business will reap the profits of the investment. Given the nascent status of the immigrant businesses, they cannot be held to the same financial standards as longtime institutions downtown. Mr. Fitts himself acknowledged as much, recognizing that his family has built its business over decades, whereas the Brazilian businesses have had very short existences.

Another issue that is seemingly lost on some stakeholders is that there is little motivation for the immigrant businesses to invest in downtown when they are facing imminent displacement from their space and have never had any security in their units. Mr. Grande, the Planning Board Director, was the only interviewee who noted this dilemma, highlighting that the Arcade building has been in a state of flux for several years now and most tenants have not had long-term leases. This has created a definite tension and likely dissuaded businesses from thinking about their future. The interviewed business owners largely confirmed this idea, though as noted, several had made financial investments in their own units, including within the past several months, due to lack of information about the upcoming project. The size of their investments ranged from a few hundred to a couple thousand dollars within the past year. When asked, these interviewees all responded that they would not have made their financial investment had they known they would be displaced from their units so soon in the future. Indeed, the owner of one of the more successful ground floor Brazilian restaurants sold his interest in the business last year because of the building's uncertain future.

## **2) Immigrant businesses can stay if they can afford higher rents.**

This argument, made primarily by Mr. Perry, the Arcade Project developer, is based on several misleading ideas. First, in one respect, the statement is factually untrue: the 40 businesses located on the upper floors—the most financially vulnerable businesses—will necessarily be

displaced, irrespective of how much rent they can or cannot afford. And while this might be a valid argument for the ground floor businesses, Mr. Perry has issued contradictory statements, such as “the baker, a couple of the dress shops, Vera’s Jewelers, they’ll all stay, as long as they can pay the rent. The Russian grocery store, I don’t know how to deal with them, whether we’ll keep them or not. We’ll see what happens.” Second, interviewees noted that the Brazilian businesses have been paying artificially low rents over the past several years, and so a rent hike is justified. While this certainly may be the case, presumably if demand for their units had allowed for higher rents, this would have occurred. More likely, the market would not have yielded higher rents, considering the units are in the upper floor of a building with poor infrastructure that is dominated by the Brazilian business cluster.<sup>5</sup> Third, there are only a handful of existing immigrant businesses that can, in fact, afford higher rents. Of those interviewed in this situation, nearly all stated that they would be willing to pay higher rents in a refurbished Arcade building. In short, the argument that the vast majority of the immigrant businesses can weather a major gentrification process by simply paying higher rents does not hold water.

### **3) The financial feasibility of the Arcade Project requires a different business mix that is not an insular economy.**

This argument rests on the concept that downtown is a marginal market for development, and with skeptical lenders, the Arcade Project has limited financial flexibility and so cannot support either the retention of upper floor commercial space or the same Brazilian businesses as presently constituted. Numerous interviewees commented that other developers and local real estate agents believe the project is not financially feasible, and so only by Mr. Perry “doing what he wants” can it be implemented. One consultant stated that it was not financially feasible to have upper floor commercial space because the project requires a certain number of residential units and the existing space is thus needed for conversion. Furthermore, several interviewees placed high value on changing the character and business mix downtown to recreate the local economy to be less insular. Ms. Bartolini, the Planning Department Director, said that because the immigrant community is so large, the businesses can be successful without reaching out to customers from other demographics by displaying English-language menus or hiring staff who

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<sup>5</sup> Note that there are, in fact, a handful of non-Brazilian businesses on the upper floor of the Arcade building. These businesses are service-oriented, including lawyers’ offices.

speak English. This insularity has lessened interest among non-Brazilians—especially the north-side Anglo population, among others—to venture downtown. Although this argument is mostly accurate, in that the immigrant businesses do largely serve co-ethnics at this point, it is hardly a justification for displacement. The Brazilians are a nascent business community and thus require time and support to mature and eventually reach a non-ethnic customer base.<sup>6</sup> Nearly all businesses interviewed, except for the two to three on the ground floor that are quite successful, noted that their customers are nearly all Brazilian. Simultaneously, however, the majority also noted steady or increasing sales over the past several years, and believe in their potential to grow and expand.

#### **4) Downtown Framingham needs the disposable income of new residents.**

Nearly all stakeholders emphasized the benefits of attracting a new residential population to downtown Framingham. As noted, the Arcade Project is a mixed-use development, which brings the promise of new shoppers downtown. Higher density housing means less of a strain on infrastructure, transportation, and the environment, and having a larger community downtown will improve street life and vitality, and presumably attract greater financial investment. Ms. Bartolini noted the need for new residents with disposable incomes to spend downtown—this requires different businesses to meet goods and services needs of new residents. Meanwhile, Rebecca Justice, Director of Framingham’s Civic League, believes that the intent of the Arcade Project is not to marginalize any groups, rather it is to upscale downtown to bring in more money and make additional groups feel more comfortable. In general, this argument makes clear economic sense. By having a greater base of disposable income situated directly downtown, local businesses can capitalize on the larger market. The problem, however, is that the goods and services presently offered by downtown merchants do not match the likely needs of the mostly Anglo population that will reside in the new Arcade building. Thus, there is a need to make commercial space available and to attract new businesses that can serve a mainstream population. And in such a gentrified downtown, there is only minimal room for the existing immigrant businesses.

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<sup>6</sup> The typical characteristics of nascent immigrant business communities will be described in Chapter VI.

#### **D. A MARKET-BASED DECISION?**

Knowingly or not, Framingham local government stakeholders faced different options for downtown revitalization economic models. First, they could have allowed property markets to operate relatively freely, leading to gentrification processes largely controlled by private developers. Second, they could have built upon the substantial ethnic economy downtown, supporting these businesses beyond their nascent and insular characteristics to a new level of maturity.

While some observers might overlook the economic potential of the immigrant business community in Framingham, planners and economic practitioners know that ethnic businesses go through stages of development, and such a nascent economy as that of the Brazilians in Framingham certainly requires time and financial and technical support to develop and eventually serve non-ethnics. The community's social, human, and cultural capital that exist in their ethnic economy are unmistakable assets upon which a larger economy can grow. In addition, because downtown Framingham possesses such a sizeable immigrant business population with an established and growing customer base, a revitalization model that builds upon what already exists represents a relatively low-risk approach. Though not the norm, other communities have pursued and successfully implemented such a model.

Beyond the well-known case studies of Chinatowns across the country, Little Havana in Miami, Korea town in New York City, and others, more typical examples exist for the potential success of ethnic economies. Numerous Framingham stakeholders, in fact, cite the city of Waltham, Massachusetts<sup>7</sup> as a model for downtown revitalization that partially gentrified, yet retained commercial diversity through ethnic restaurants. Waltham utilized a major project, Cronin's Landing, as an impetus to revitalization in 1999. This project however is quite different from the Arcade in that it capitalized on a waterfront location to develop an upscale residential property on the periphery of downtown and did not significantly displace existing populations. Meanwhile, in the immediate downtown area, Waltham has utilized an incremental approach to revitalization by allowing its significant number of ethnic businesses, which are primarily restaurants, to develop relatively unencumbered. Interestingly, according to Alison Steinfeld, the Assistant Director in the city's Planning Department, revitalization in Waltham has occurred largely without a vision, other than to fill storefronts. However, the city did undertake several

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<sup>7</sup> Waltham is a suburb located approximately midway between Boston and Framingham.

efforts that suggest the existence of a plan. First, the city developed a revitalization strategy in 1991 with specific recommendations on zoning, infrastructure, parking, marketing, and business attraction. Second, the city implemented an extensive streetscape plan. Third, the city developed strong nighttime activities with a movie theater to complement the ethnic restaurants, which the Anglo population frequents (restaurants attract customers from the region). Lastly, the Planning Department, City Council, and private developers have collaborated well, and developers and city planners have experience with major downtown projects. Waltham has certainly benefited from strong mayoral leadership and significant federal funding (nearly double the amount received by Framingham). Although the Waltham model is not completely prescriptive, it does demonstrate that a major redevelopment project requires complementary efforts in order to build upon, rather than replace, an ethnic economy. It also suggests that perhaps the two revitalization models are not mutually exclusive.

The Immigrant Learning Center's research on Boston neighborhoods provides additional local examples of the potential for cultivating ethnic economies. First, the Allston Village area of Boston is home to a large number of East Asian and Latino immigrant groups that have opened restaurants and service businesses catering to ethnic, student, and general populations. The area has a significant number of business support programs, and although many businesses reported not utilizing these services, several have received grants from the Allston Village Main Streets program and participated in the annual "Taste of Allston" and other neighborhood festivals (Borges-Mendez et al 2005). Second, Fields Corner in the Dorchester section of Boston has a large Vietnamese immigrant population that has established personal and professional service businesses and restaurants. Though initially serving co-ethnics, some of these businesses have diversified their customer base as the general population grew familiar with these establishments (Ibid). Third, the East Boston neighborhood includes a strong Latino business presence that has helped make the area a destination for shoppers seeking ethnic offerings. Significantly, many of these businesses have acquired equity through property ownership, which has translated into investments in physical improvements (Ibid). Many businesses have also begun to attract Latino customers from beyond the East Boston area (Ibid). In all three of these cases, the immigrant economies have helped to revitalize vacant and disinvested areas, and whether through explicit or tacit support, local actors have allowed these populations to develop.

Successful ethnic-based revitalization case studies also exist from across the U.S. El Mercado is a Latino marketplace in downtown Hartford, Connecticut, organized by the Spanish American Merchants Association (SAMA), which has promoted the predominantly Latino business district as an ethnic destination that is inclusive of all populations. SAMA has cultivated strong relationships with the city and Chamber of Commerce for financial and technical support, and has coordinated a revolving loan fund, business development workshops, and streetscape improvements.<sup>8</sup> A group of Latino merchants in St. Paul, Minnesota, formed the Riverview Economic Development Association (REDA) in 1983 to protect their businesses from disinvestment, and in 2001 founded “District del Sol” to promote the area. In collaboration with the city, REDA collects information, provides business technical assistance, and coordinates cultural events. District del Sol has now become a destination that attracts diverse residents from throughout the city.<sup>9</sup> Fruitvale Village, near downtown Oakland, California, is a collaboration of nonprofit and city groups that promotes Latino, Asian, and African American businesses. Cooperative marketing, cultural events, and streetscape improvements have worked to attract customers from around the Bay Area and have resulted in dramatic increases in sales and tax revenues.<sup>10</sup> In addition, a recent study of successful downtown revitalization strategies in small metropolitan areas—including Asheville, North Carolina; Athens, Georgia; and Burlington, Vermont—documented lessons learned that emphasized small-scale improvements over large projects and the cultivation of niche markets to distinguish downtown areas from suburban mall retail (Filion et al 2004). Although all of these cases certainly faced different opportunities and challenges than does Framingham, they do indicate that revitalization built upon ethnic economies has happened in different contexts and, given time to develop and reach non-ethnic populations, can be successful.

In contrast to these examples, the Arcade Project will largely displace, rather than build upon, the downtown immigrant population and economy. In this way, it is incompatible with the local context and represents a significant financial risk. The project hinges on attracting affluent residents to downtown who are willing to pay relatively high prices for condominium units. Although consistently rising prices in the Boston housing market certainly make Framingham a potentially attractive alternative, Framingham and Massachusetts as a whole have witnessed slow

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<sup>8</sup> See [www.samact.org](http://www.samact.org) for more information.

<sup>9</sup> See [www.districtdelsol.com](http://www.districtdelsol.com) for more information.

<sup>10</sup> See [www.fruitvalevillage.net](http://www.fruitvalevillage.net) for more information.

population growth, in contrast to the immigrant population, which is rapidly increasing throughout the state (Sum et al 2005). Among interviewees, the belief was divided between those with confidence that the 290 residential units will be filled and those who are skeptical. Mr. Perry himself expressed concern about the market for these units. John Zucchi, a member of Town Meeting's Finance Committee, said that the Committee definitely raised concerns about the project's financial feasibility during the review process. Although development financing often takes several years to materialize, the difficulty that the Arcade Project has had securing funds should raise some questions about its viability. In addition, the market study conducted for the project determined that the property's highest and best use is multi-family rental housing, not condominiums (Kaye 2004).

The important point is that both the gentrification and immigrant economy model are economically viable for downtown revitalization. Although new development pro formas might dictate the need for high-rental commercial tenants, a long-term, coordinated economic development plan can certainly accomplish multiple needs. And although the ethnic economy model may not be the common choice, numerous examples exist of locales supporting the viability of ethnic economies and building upon the economics of diversity. In short, Framingham decision makers had different economic paths to follow, each of which has proven successful in different contexts. Given this, factors other than economics must have entered the decision making process, pushing the town to support a project for downtown revitalization that moves the area away from its ethnic economy base. These decisive, non-economic factors are the subject of the following three chapters.

## CHAPTER IV. EXCLUSIVE SOCIAL VALUES

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**SUMMARY:** This chapter examines the manner in which exclusive social values have resulted in a limited vision for downtown. First, I describe the race and class undertones identified in the gentrification literature as inherent to such redevelopment processes. Then, I explore the different types of discrimination that exist in Framingham, and I argue that the presence, albeit minor, of explicit bigotry has created space for latent discrimination to proliferate. The chapter concludes that exclusive social values have resulted in a limited vision for downtown's future and the need for a new downtown identity, despite the fact that significant revitalization has already been accomplished. A large-scale gentrification project such as the Arcade Project facilitates this vision, and so has been the centerpiece of downtown revitalization.

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This chapter begins to answer the question, if economic considerations cannot adequately explain the downtown revitalization paradox, then what can? Social values represent a key influence on local dynamics in any place, and in a town such as Framingham, the role is even more pronounced because of the presence of diverse groups with different worldviews, religious beliefs, social expectations, and cultural norms. The interaction of competing social values in Framingham does not play out simply in conflicting ideas for cultural events or school curriculum, but can be of much greater intensity and consequence.

### A. RACE, CLASS & THE SOCIAL ASPECTS OF GENTRIFICATION

In addition to economic explanations of redevelopment processes, gentrification literature also focuses on changes in demographics and preferences as key factors for understanding neighborhood change. These consumption-side explanations, introduced in Chapter III, balance and sometimes compete with economic considerations in the literature.

A central concept is that young professionals play the role of "urban pioneers" and enter new neighborhoods that are currently occupied by low-income populations in a "back to the city" movement. This process reflects a change in tastes and desired lifestyles by the upper-middle class, who see the excitement and newfound safety of urban areas attractive as places of residence (Hackworth and Rekers 2005; Smith 1996), as well as a change in preferences for "the fashion" of the times (Redfern 2003). Furthermore, the analysis harkens to centuries-old U.S. mythologies, with these new urban pioneers bringing "civility" and culture to lower classes as spurred on by real estate industry boosters, who create new attractive names for neighborhoods to welcome new populations (Smith 1996). Ironically, of course, the gentrified neighborhoods

become sanitized and less culturally diverse, as a result stripping cities of vital working class neighborhoods. The frontier ideology is also based on the new promise of economic opportunity and profitability in the inner city. This social preference-focused rational is necessarily tied to economic considerations, as new consumption patterns are only possible with changed economic realities (Ibid). In addition to these new populations driving up property values and making residential and commercial rents prohibitive for many groups, they also require different goods and services, and thus commercial displacement logically follows.

Although gentrification studies have largely focused on the gentrifiers rather than the displaced, Beauregard and Smith have discussed the process's impact on vulnerable groups (see also Slater 2003; LeGates and Hartman 1986). The role of the gentrified, or displaced, is often overlooked by academics because information on these scattered people can be difficult to obtain. The most likely to be gentrified are marginal groups living in inexpensive but often architecturally desirable housing, are underemployed, minorities, elderly, working class or low-income (Beauregard 1986). Not only is the housing occupied by these people desirable to others, but their marginal status means they are often "economically and politically powerless relative to the gentrifiers" (Ibid: 50). They are unlikely to mobilize or can easily be bought out by developers. Of course, there are also numerous instances of groups threatened with gentrification that have mobilized politically (see below).

Gentrification is unmistakably about class and race, and social, as much as economic, restructuring is inherent to the process (Kennedy and Leonard 2001). Interestingly, gentrification was originally welcomed in certain progressive circles as a means for balancing the spatial segregation in U.S. metropolitan areas based on race (Williams 1986). With the "white flight" of the post-war period from the city, regions and cities have struggled with policies seeking to integrate racial and ethnic groups. Gentrification was seen as a means through which to reintroduce the white middle-class population into the urban core. Of course, with the displacement of minority groups that necessarily ensued, very little integration has occurred, and in fact racial and class conflict have resulted in some neighborhoods (Williams 1986; LeGates and Hartman 1986). LeGates and Hartman (1986) analyzed early research on the displaced and found that the majority of "outmovers" end up clustering in new locations either within the same neighborhood or on its periphery. This relocation pattern has also resulted in multiple displacements—as gentrification spreads, there is the increasing likelihood that displaced groups

will have to relocate more than once if they resettle nearby (Ibid). Furthermore, early studies demonstrated that the costs bore by displaced persons increase, sometimes significantly, in their new residences (Ibid). Notably, I have not been able to identify studies on the costs associated with business displacement.

Closely related to these race and class issues is the theory that gentrification is, at its core, a process driven by the “revanchist city.” Taken from a late-nineteenth century French movement, it signifies the city’s revenge against progressive liberal policies of the New Deal, the economic crises of the latter twentieth century, and the visible presence of minority groups based on race, class, gender, nationality, and sexual preference (Smith 1996). The revanchist city is born out of the fear of the white majority that it is losing control of cities to dangerous underclass groups, and thus seeks to reclaim its property (Ibid). Local and national media certainly promote the culture of fear of “the other” and sensationalize crime in urban areas. Rather than emphasizing capital flows, the revanchist concept focuses on the targeting of specific “undesirables,” whether minorities, the homeless, panhandlers, prostitutes, or others (Slater 2003). A prime example often cited to illustrate the revanchist city at work is the battle over Tompkins Square Park in Manhattan’s Lower East Side during the late-1980s and early-1990s. A 1988 riot by activists, residents, the homeless, and others occurred in response to the city’s attempt to impose a 1:00 a.m. curfew on the park, ostensibly to prevent the homeless from sleeping there. The protestors’ issues involved more than the rights of the homeless; this was a fight against the gentrification of the neighborhood. Three years later, the city did in fact close down the park as part of the administration’s policy against squatters and the homeless, and over the next decade, the Lower East Side/East Village was indeed transformed through gentrification processes (see Smith 1996 for full description of the conflict, and see Blomley 2004 for additional discussion). Indeed, one can see in this theory a mirror of the feelings of the anti-immigrant rhetoric in Framingham and quasi-vigilante border patrol groups across the U.S., which come at least in part from a fear of the other and disillusionment with official mechanisms’ ability to manage change.

## **B. LATENT & EXPLICIT DISCRIMINATION IN FRAMINGHAM**

This section will present issues raised by Framingham stakeholders that address both latent and explicit discrimination in town. My approach in exploring discriminatory beliefs was

to discuss contentious topics related to race and class issues downtown, thereby trying to elicit underlying values through exploration of the concrete.<sup>1</sup> The topics outlined below often function as proxies for race and class issues, and so offer good starting points.

## **1) Density**

In the common conception, high density residential areas suggest the presence of low-income and minority populations. Of the interviewees who expressed dissatisfaction with the Arcade Project, nearly all emphasized the residential density that it promises. Interestingly, save for the 20% affordable units, the new residents of the Arcade will not likely be low-income or minority groups. Yet the linkage of density and “undesirability” remains. In addition, interviewees expressed that high density downtown is incompatible with the remainder of town, which is suburban and low density. Implicit in these remarks is the idea that many residents are uncomfortable with the town’s urban core. For example, Helen Lemoine, a former Planning Board member and Director of Leadership MetroWest, an organization that provides local leadership training, commented that many residents in low density areas are uncomfortable living in a town that has “an urban feel.” Although this is partly due to (unfounded) fears about declining property values, it also suggests that some residents are uncomfortable with the demographic diversity of the downtown area. Mr. Buck, the anti-immigrant advocate, was quoted recently saying, “People say, ‘Celebrate diversity.’ We say, ‘Celebrate assimilation’” (Kocian 2005). Conversely, Ms. Murphy and John Stacik, two admittedly liberal members of the Board of Selectmen, both emphasized that density is a positive for downtown and Framingham in general.

## **2) Social services**

An ongoing debate in Framingham over the past year has been the location of a new social service run by the South Middlesex Opportunity Council (SMOC), which highlights important social values among stakeholders. The Planning Board did not approve its permit to occupy an additional downtown site, and SMOC is now bringing the issue to litigation. A key

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<sup>1</sup> Discrimination is an admittedly difficult subject to discuss with interviewees. The “politically correct” environment, especially in the northeastern U.S., can make interviewees uncomfortable with being honest about their beliefs. Although I felt this to be the case in some interviews, I was impressed with the candor with which most interviewees discussed race and class issues in town. In fact, I would suggest that interviewees might have welcomed the opportunity to speak candidly about these issues.

reason for the health center’s defeat was the vociferous opposition waged by some residents, who believe that Framingham already has its “fair share” of the region’s social services. Most interviewees said that the health center debate has been about class, not race. According to Ms. Medrano of LULAC, however, the debate on the health center has definite racist overtones, but “people don’t want to admit it” and instead focus on issues of traffic and parking. The idea, which many in town do admit, is not to attract “undesirables” into Framingham, which can mean the homeless, substance abusers, low-income, or ethnic groups. Interestingly, SMOC’s statistics demonstrate that the majority (70%) of their clients are Framingham residents, and not “the other” feared by opponents of the new facility. Although the stereotypes of social service users in town are ethnic and racial minorities, statistics from the Civic League’s meals program indicate that only 20% of its recipients are Hispanic/Latino, and that non-Hispanic white recipients constitute 40% of users. In fact, the majority of Framingham’s social service users are not immigrants at all—this is due, in part, to their legal status, which prohibits undocumented immigrants from using certain services. A new group in town, Stop Tax Exempt Private Property Sprawl (STEPPS), has rallied significant support behind preventing additional social services from locating downtown.<sup>2</sup> A central tenet of this group is that social services and downtown revitalization are not compatible.

### **3) Perception and reality of safety**

The perception of safety in the downtown area is a key indicator of stakeholders’ views of different demographic groups. In general, interviewees believe that downtown is a relatively safe area for an urban district. The stakeholders seemingly most concerned with safety issues downtown are the Brazilian business owners, who clearly have a vested interest in keeping the area clean and safe to attract customers. This is an interesting counterpoint to the perception that it is the ethnic groups who make downtown unsafe. In a recent downtown survey conducted by the Framingham Police Department, it was the Brazilian business owners who requested an increased police presence downtown. Indeed, Jane Jacobs, in her classic work, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, stressed the importance of “eyes on the street,” a role that is played by local businesses in a community. Local shops, cafes, and restaurants are also common meeting places for the ethnic community and so provide a needed service. For example, Padaria

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<sup>2</sup> See [www.steps.info](http://www.steps.info) for additional information.

Brazil, a Brazilian-owned bakery on Concord Street across from Town Hall, is the hub for day laborers to find work in the morning. Mr. Fitts, who owns several properties downtown, believes that downtown is quite safe, although greater nighttime activity would definitely improve 24-hour security. Most of his office tenants, in fact, do not have alarms, and though there have been occasional break-ins, they are not cause for concern.

Meanwhile, the Anglo population living in Framingham's north-side seems to rarely venture downtown, and though they may have a general sense that downtown is unsafe, the larger issue is simply unfamiliarity with downtown. In this conception, downtown is less familiar than its suburban counterpart, and its built environment is less well maintained. The stereotype in town is that north-side residents are scared of downtown, though I did not find that fear played as much of a role, according to interviewees, as economic reasons—namely, that downtown does not offer any stores to attract these residents—and general unfamiliarity with downtown. Certainly, of course, this unfamiliarity is tied to diverse populations. Many interviewees also noted that the lack of sufficient lighting downtown creates unsafe areas. In response, however, Kimbra Wellock, a planner in the Department of Planning and Economic Development, said, “People blame it on the lighting, which is definitely a problem, but it’s also that people downtown are different.” Mr. Stacik, of the Board of Selectmen, confirmed this belief, saying that “downtown is safe, though very dark at night—there is a race and class element to all of this to some extent.” In recent years, police efforts to address safety issues have increased, according to Officer Chris Murtagh. A recent police study of downtown safety found that Framingham's crime rates are quite low and comparable to neighboring areas. Furthermore, Officer Murtagh emphasized that, historically, crime is tied to a place rather than any particular group. In other words, when Puerto Ricans and other minorities have left downtown, crime does not follow them to new areas.

#### **4) Shopping preferences**

According to nearly all interviewees, downtown is a good place to shop for the Brazilian population but not for other groups. The reasons for this include the products and services offered, which are seen as targeted for the insular market, as well as the inability of many business owners and staff to communicate in English. The START Partnership, a group leading downtown's cultural initiatives, conducted a recent survey as part of its work to promote

downtown restaurants with nearby night-time cultural events. This survey found that language is a major problem for the Anglo population, noting that some people enter Brazilian-owned stores but cannot communicate with workers and so leave. As Rebecca Justice, Director of the Civic League, noted, “Now it’s a good place to shop for Brazilians, but it’s not as inviting for most people as it could be and doesn’t offer goods for non-Brazilians.” Several non-Brazilian interviewees said that they have had experiences in Brazilian stores and restaurants in which they could not communicate with workers, and said this discouraged them from frequenting the stores. Immigrant businesses’ inability to meet the shopping needs of non-ethnic groups furthers the idea that downtown has only revitalized for certain residents.

### **5) Language abilities**

In many ways, the language ability of staff in key town positions indicates the value attributed to diversity and ability to communicate with different populations. Ms. Justice, in her role as a leading ESL and social service provider for low-income groups, speaks Spanish fluently. According to Ms. Murphy of the Board of Selectmen, however, language skills were not made a priority in hiring three new planners—two in the Department of Planning and Economic Development and one with the Planning Board—in the past year, and the new staff do not have significant language abilities. Interviewees in local government mostly did not believe that language skills were an important consideration for the positions. Others noted that it would be difficult to identify candidates with both the planning expertise and Portuguese and/or Spanish speaking ability. According to Ms. Medrano of LULAC, resident services at Town Hall maintains a listing of employees who speak Spanish and Portuguese, and so will refer residents to these employees when necessary. However, this system requires an accounting employee, for example, assisting a non-English speaker with a zoning issue, which is likely beyond his/her expertise. Ms. Medrano continued that the town needs a more concerted effort to attract minorities into leadership roles, rather than simply low-level positions.<sup>3</sup>

For several years, the discourse in Framingham has also included explicit discrimination against undocumented immigrants by a small group in town. Open discrimination against ethnic communities can have different effects. First, it can result in increased solidarity within the

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<sup>3</sup> I will discuss this issue in greater depth in Chapter V.

ethnic group in an effort to combat attacks (Light and Gold 2000). On the other hand, discrimination can strongly discourage civic participation and open displays of ethnic pride, and in extreme cases, even dismantle ethnic communities (Ibid).

The open anti-immigrant rhetoric in Framingham can largely be attributed to the organization called CCFILE (Concerned Citizens and Friends of Illegal Immigration Law Enforcement) formed in 2003 by Jeff Buck and Jim and Joseph Rizoli.<sup>4</sup> The group has organized anti-immigrant protests with signs stating “Illegals steal American jobs,” “Stop the invasion,” and “Illegal Aliens Bring Diseases” (Bradley 2006). Mr. Buck noted that the charges of racism against the group distract people in town from dealing with the real issue of how to manage undocumented immigrants. According to Mr. Buck, the main issue is not “jobs, disease, or terrorism—though these are important. It’s about sovereignty and determining who lives in your town.” However, the issue for these people is not simply about legal status of immigrants. When asked how the issue would change if all of the immigrants in town were legally documented, Mr. Buck said that they would still be taking jobs from Americans, not assimilating to American culture, and not learning English. “Legal status aside, having 20,000 Brazilians isn’t a good thing for Framingham.” In reality, it seems that the discrimination against immigrants is really about disillusionment with national and local government, particularly its perceived corruption and inability to respond to their concerns. The CCFILE group tries to intimidate minorities at events—they videotape and wear hats that say “Border Patrol,” asking minorities for documentation. Ilma Paixao, Director of the Brazilian American Association (BRAMAS), had a brick thrown through her car window, which was parked in her home driveway, in 2005, and during local elections in 2006 had a sign on her property vandalized.<sup>5</sup> Though no group claimed responsibility for these incidents, and CCFILE members themselves may not be responsible, there is a clear message being sent to immigrants in Framingham. Ms. Lemoine, the former Planning Board chairwoman, commented on CCFILE’s impact:

[It] has been a trauma on the town’s psyche because of the vitriolic discussion, and has made the downtown revitalization process much more difficult. These people don’t come downtown but spread angry rhetoric, blaming illegal immigrants for every problem. There’s an underlying, pervasive negativity that they’ve created. Some of my friends refer

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<sup>4</sup> Mr. Buck has since left the organization and is now a member of the New England Minuteman Association, which focuses on civilian border patrol. Jim Rizoli is a member of Framingham’s Town Meeting.

<sup>5</sup> As far as I know, this is the only reported case of such vandalism during the elections.

to anti-immigrant ideas favorably, raising concerns about property values that really stem from the rhetoric of CCFILE. People read rhetoric in the papers and it riles them up, creating a bandwagon mentality. It allows space for more moderate positions not to seem anti-immigrant.

This last point is particularly important. Discussions about social services or other contentious topics appear quite moderate in comparison to the strong anti-immigrant rhetoric. Although open support for CCFILE and the Rizoli brothers is minimal, numerous interviewees noted that many more residents actually agree with their platform. Sue Bernstein, a Planning Board member, notes that although Mr. Rizoli received a relatively small number of votes in a recent election for Town Meeting, more people likely agree with the anti-immigrant stance but do not want to say anything because it is not politically correct. During my research, I read and heard many people say that their only problem with the Brazilian immigrants is that so many are undocumented, but several interviewees suggested that this covers up a feeling that there are simply too many Brazilians in Framingham. In other words, the issue is not only about legal status, but also about their substantial presence in town. Mr. Stacik, of the Board of Selectmen, noted that there are Town Meeting members besides Jim Rizoli who support the anti-immigrant position. Also, the discrimination is not limited to CCFILE—the Taxpayer’s Association and FIMBY (Framingham Is My Back Yard) espouse some latently discriminatory rhetoric along class and racial lines. Ms. Medrano from LULAC commented that “a lot of their supporters are ‘in the closet.’” Reverend J. Anthony Lloyd of the Greater Framingham Community Church believes that people have different levels of support for CCFILE issues, and that the group “plays on people’s fears and nostalgia.” On the other hand, some interviewees downplayed the racism issue in town. Glen Weisbrod, chair of the Framingham Downtown Revitalization group and Economic Development Industrial Corporation, said that residents are not racist, just uncomfortable because there are so many Brazilians downtown: “there isn’t an anti-Brazilian sentiment—almost no one thinks it’s bad, just some people think ‘it’s not us.’”

According to Ms. Murphy, the town’s de facto position on undocumented immigrants is a “don’t ask, don’t tell policy,” which is quite reasonable given the unclear mandate from the federal government. Furthermore, social service agencies in town are federally funded, and so undocumented immigrants cannot and do not use them; in fact, Ms. Murphy noted that this population is usually paying taxes and getting very little back from the system. Furthermore, in

an effort in 2005 led by Ms. Murphy as chairwoman of the Board of Selectmen at the time, the Board approved a measure to prohibit opponents of undocumented immigrants to voice their concerns on the issue during the public participation portion of Board meetings. In the end, although only some in power in town are blatantly anti-immigrant, there is clearly a prevalent idea that Brazilians control downtown and that this is not necessarily a good thing. The anti-immigrant rhetoric takes the focus away from discussion of other downtown issues and allows less blatant discrimination to meet little resistance.

### **C. THE VISION FOR DOWNTOWN**

The social values outlined above have manifested in a limited vision for downtown and significantly informed the idea that downtown requires a new identity. The framing of a neighborhood's identity is laden with social values and preferences (Hackworth 2005), and in Framingham there is an ongoing struggle for the identity of downtown. As noted throughout this thesis, the Arcade Project is a major development with the stated goal of changing the identity of downtown. When asked "What's the best thing about downtown?" in a 1997 survey of downtown shoppers, only 20% of respondents out of 233 surveyed liked the diversity and ethnic businesses (1997 Survey on Downtown Framingham). Most stakeholders do agree that it is important for downtown to distinguish itself from Route 9 by offering "something unique" that will attract people, but it is unclear what this means. It is also unclear who downtown is supposed to serve: new middle to upper-middle class residents living in the Arcade, Kendall, and Dennison projects, or the existing downtown community, which is largely working class and home to immigrants and other minorities.

First, a key issue is whether a vision for downtown even exists, and if so, what this vision means for downtown. According to Ms. Murphy, the Board of Selectmen is responsible for establishing a vision. In her words, the town's vision for downtown is "nonexistent," and she accepted the responsibility for that failure. Ms. Bernstein of the Planning Board agreed that Framingham does not have a vision for downtown. Mr. Grande, Planning Board Director, believes that the town "has not defined the goal for downtown very well, it doesn't know what the ultimate mix and character will be." On the other hand, Mr. Weisbrod, as chair of Framingham Downtown Renaissance, believes that there is a detailed vision for downtown, as articulated by his group and the Department of Planning and Economic Development. Ms.

Bartolini of the Planning Department has also stated publicly that she believes there is a strong vision for downtown (McLaughlin 2006).

My research indicates that although there may not be a vision for downtown around which consensus has been built, one in fact does exist. The Downtown Framingham Economic Development Strategic Plan, completed by consultants in 1998, describes the vision for downtown as clean, safe, pedestrian-friendly, with adequate parking, and an area that “celebrates the diverse character of the neighborhood,” and “preserves the variety and uniqueness of small businesses” (ii). The FDR group, which includes members of several Framingham organizations from government and private sector, has written a vision statement for downtown: “To establish Downtown Framingham as a center of business and cultural activity that is functionally vibrant and active, and perceived to be an attractive destination visited by residents throughout Framingham and surrounding communities.”<sup>6</sup> The predominant vision for downtown Framingham, with the Arcade Project as the centerpiece, among key decision makers can be characterized as follows:

- **Upscale retail and services.** There is little disagreement among decision makers that the intent of the Arcade Project is to “upscale” downtown by attracting mainstream businesses that appeal to the non-ethnic population. This has an aesthetic aspect as well, in that people believe upscale businesses will upgrade storefronts and signage. The national drugstore chain, CVS, which already has a store downtown, is the only tenant signed to the new Arcade commercial space; it plans to expand into a larger unit. Numerous interviewees also noted the need for a “white cloth” restaurant downtown (the project’s special permit allows for a liquor license and up to a 400-seat restaurant).
- **International flavor with sanitized immigrant presence.** Most interviewees also agreed that downtown needs to have an “international flavor” that retains some existing businesses and attracts new ethnic groups that live in town but do not have a commercial presence as yet. Mr. Weisbrod noted that downtown “needs to build on different groups within multiculturalism, not just the Brazilian presence.” For example, Ms. Medrano noted that she knows people interested in opening a Mexican restaurant downtown but have had trouble securing a location because the Brazilians “monopolize downtown

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<sup>6</sup> See [www.framinghamma.org/web/pages/FDR.htm](http://www.framinghamma.org/web/pages/FDR.htm)

commercial space.” It is important to note that this desire for ethnic businesses represents a sanitized version of what currently exists, with ethnic businesses serving non-ethnics. In particular, this portion of the vision seeks to develop ethnic restaurants rather than retail and services. Researchers have described this type of ethnic commercial identity through the idea of “ethnic packaging” and have linked this cultural marketing to gentrification processes (see Davila 2004; Hackworth and Rekers 2005; and Prince 2005 for important discussion of the benefits and dangers of ethnic packaging for minority groups).

- **Cultural destination.** The mission of the START Framingham Partnership, a quasi-governmental group, is to broaden, deepen, and diversify participation in the arts. Its goal is to build on Framingham’s strong cultural assets downtown as an economic development engine, increasing nighttime activity and bringing in diverse demographics. The hope is that downtown businesses, especially some of the Brazilian eateries, will respond to this opportunity and capitalize on potential new customers. START produced and distributed a flyer to advertise cultural events that also includes a map of downtown food options, but it has been largely unsuccessful in convincing businesses to offer discounts to cultural event customers or to create English language menus. The long-term goal is to promote Framingham as the cultural center of MetroWest and draw people from Boston to Worcester.
- **Improved infrastructure, streetscape, lighting, and signage.** Nearly everyone agrees that downtown’s infrastructure requires significant improvements. A related goal is a more attractive streetscape and English-language signage that is more consistent and less cluttered. In addition, increased street lighting to promote nighttime activity is a major objective.
- **Decreased traffic and increased parking.** Clearly, the railroad crossing has plagued downtown for nearly 150 years, and studies to improve the situation have been completed on several occasions (another is ongoing at present). Traffic comes to a complete standstill nearly once per hour to allow passenger and freight trains to pass, and this image contributes to some residents’ unwillingness to come downtown. And,

despite studies on downtowns across the U.S. that parking is rarely the important issue that locals make it to be (Ford 2003), this continues to be a debate for stakeholders.<sup>7</sup>

Along with this vision, however, are numerous inconsistencies and mixed messages being promoted by stakeholders. Ms. Bartolini of the Planning Department said that “hopefully a Starbucks will come. I’m not really looking for major name retailers, more of a small-scale grocery store” and simultaneously that “I don’t want to lose the Brazilian businesses downtown.” Mr. Perry would like to see a nice restaurant but also thinks diversity is a good thing for downtown, under the reasoning that Waltham, Lowell, and Lawrence have proved that you can make money with diverse populations. Ms. Wellock of the Planning Department stated that there is a way to do both—have Brazilian businesses and also a coffee shop, bookstore, movie theater, and nice restaurant. Mr. Stacik of the Board of Selectmen noted that the Brazilian businesses have contributed to an impression that “downtown is only for them because they are not very welcoming to others, including other minorities.” Indeed, this idea that the immigrant businesses are uninviting is key here. Diversity is simultaneously a positive for downtown because it is distinctive from Route 9 shopping options, yet it has to be a limited or sanitized diversity to be perceived as successful and inviting for non-ethnics. There is an implicit message that the existing immigrant economy cannot develop beyond its insularity to attract the Anglo population as customers. A passage from a recent grant application by the START Framingham Partnership sums up the inconsistencies: “[the proposed program] seeks to build on the town’s existing resources by helping our multiethnic Downtown develop into a thriving business district with a highly visible cultural and civic life accessible across the demographic spectrum. This work will supplement and complement [the Arcade Project]” (Framingham Cultural Triangle Partnership Proposal 2005). Unfortunately, as presently constituted, promoting the Arcade Project and building on the town’s existing ethnic businesses are seemingly incompatible objectives.

Also of note, there is certainly a group of citizens who would prefer to rid downtown, and Framingham in general, of its immigrant and ethnic groups entirely. For the most part, these people do not hold enough authority, or are sufficiently balanced by the opposing perspective, such that a blatant, outright plan for the removal of downtown’s diversity is unlikely to gain

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<sup>7</sup> Of note, in my scores of trips to downtown Framingham, I never had any difficulty finding a parking space within a five-minute walk of my destination.

traction. As described throughout this thesis, however, this unlikelihood does not mean that the immigrant business community is protected, and of course a major byproduct of the Arcade Project is the displacement of a large number of immigrant businesses.

#### **D. THE ARCADE PROJECT & SOCIAL EXCLUSION**

In many ways, these exclusive social values, as implemented through a limited vision for downtown Framingham, come at the expense of the Brazilian business community. Although it is likely that several of these businesses currently on the ground floor of the Arcade building will take units in the rehabilitated space, all of the upper floor businesses will be displaced by the project. Unfortunately, there is a significant community that depends on these small shops and services. One way to look at this transition is through a purely economic lens, i.e. that the larger, more successful businesses will survive, whereas smaller, less successful ones will not. Indeed, perhaps Framingham's revitalization model is really about the displacement of small, rather than immigrant, businesses? Although an ahistorical exercise, I explored this question with some interviewees. Opinions varied greatly and it is difficult to measure discrimination and its attribution to ethnicity in comparison to business size. However, it does seem that non-ethnic small businesses would likely have greater institutional support to protect their interests. The retention and development of small businesses is a cornerstone of economic development practice, and Framingham has a strong core of these establishments, yet most stakeholders in town do not seek to build upon them. Several interviewees actually noted the town's desire for locally owned businesses, and, in unrelated statements, very few believed the town supported the small businesses that currently exist, that is, the immigrant businesses. Although not conclusive, this suggests a strong possibility that ethnicity and business size are distinct categories here. In addition, the fact that some of the larger, ground floor immigrant businesses will initially relocate within the Arcade building says as much about the reality that other tenants have not presented themselves as about efforts to proactively maintain their presence. Finally, the ideas presented throughout this chapter have sought to demonstrate that the social values at work in town certainly rival economic considerations.

It follows that the Arcade Project, and the revitalization process in general, is not simply about bringing in more successful businesses. Rather, it is about bringing in the *right* kinds of businesses to serve different demographics. Coupled with the new residential population, this is

the mechanism through which downtown's identity change will be accomplished. Several comments by interviewees shed light on the connection between social values and identity change downtown. Ms. Justice of the Civic League noted that with nearly 300 new residential units and new commercial space, the effect will be "to change the face of downtown." Ms. Bernstein of the Planning Board described the Arcade Project's impact as changing "the whole feel of downtown...It could look more refined and yuppified, which would look more attractive than the hodge podge of today." Meanwhile, Reverend Lloyd said that the Arcade Project "clashes" with the existing character of downtown, and that the town's vision of a bedroom community with upscale retail and restaurants "does not leave room for Brazilians." Indeed, a strategy that continues with incremental improvements downtown will not achieve the desired identity—only a gentrification model will facilitate this change.

A final point requires discussion here. Several stakeholders and residents are skeptical that downtown, no matter the changes, will ever attract sufficient numbers to create a strong economy. However, according to Ron Isaacson, who is a Managing Director of the regional chain, The Fabric Place, customers come from all over MetroWest to this location in the center of downtown Framingham. This suggests that the point is not that people will not come downtown, it is that they may not come downtown for certain—Brazilian, or immigrant in general—businesses.

In short, exclusive social values have resulted in a limited vision for downtown's future and the need for a new downtown identity, despite the fact that significant revitalization has already been accomplished. A large-scale, drastic development such as the Arcade Project facilitates this vision, and so has been the centerpiece of downtown revitalization. Given the presence of blatant prejudice against immigrants in Framingham, it seems that a safe space has been created that has allowed for latent discrimination to play a significant role in the downtown revitalization debate. In the words of Ms. Bernstein, "I don't really think that downtown revitalization and maintaining the Brazilian businesses are compatible."



## CHAPTER V. POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS & REGULATORY PROCESS

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**SUMMARY:** This chapter examines how Framingham’s political institutions and regulatory process have facilitated the promotion of an exclusive revitalization model for downtown. Framingham town government is based on broad representation, but this ideal is not realized in practice, and instead results in government inefficiencies and lack of accountability and leadership that have allowed development decisions to be determined as much by personal preferences as considerations of economic and social benefit for diverse constituents in town. I also discuss how the town’s land use regulatory control represents significant leverage with private developers that should not be underestimated, but that the town exercises this power inconsistently. The chapter concludes that as a result of these dynamics, key populations—namely the immigrant community—have not been included in the dialogue to influence the revitalization process.

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This chapter continues the discussion of non-economic factors influencing the revitalization model for downtown Framingham with an examination of the town’s political institutions and regulatory processes. Framingham is the largest township, by population, in the state of Massachusetts. This is no insignificant piece of trivia—it highlights the fact that other locales with such large populations have transitioned to mayoral or city council forms of government. Framingham, in contrast, is governed by a representative Town Meeting structure (the legislative branch) with 216 members who meet annually, and a Board of Selectmen and Town Manager (the executive branch). Meanwhile, the town’s Planning Board, which also has three full-time professionals to administer its work, controls the regulatory process as well as the town’s long-range planning functions, including the master plan. The Department of Planning and Economic Development, which includes approximately eight full-time employees, administers the town’s Community Development Block Grant funds, housing rehabilitation loans, economic development in conjunction with the Economic Development Industrial Corporation (EDIC), the LIFT bus transportation service, and the community development action plan. This chapter explores how these institutions have influenced the revitalization process, in particular how political decision making has been capricious and how the land use regulatory process can be a critical leverage point to control private development, yet is utilized inconsistently.

### A. SUBURBAN DEVELOPMENT

A key long-standing issue in suburban locales is their ability to determine and control development. Unlike major cities, suburban governments typically lack the financial resources to

undertake major development projects, and so rely on the private sector more heavily than do well-funded urban areas.

At first glance, suburban governments have much to gain from gentrification processes. A town like Framingham has a significant number of non-tax paying social services for low-income and minority groups, whereas gentrified property brings revenue and new populations bring greater disposable income to spend in the community. This issue has been at the heart of the debate on SMOC's new health center<sup>1</sup> as many residents believe that downtown already has enough tenants that do not pay property taxes. From this economic point of view, it is understandable that local government would support gentrifying projects through tax abatement programs and rezoning (Beauregard 1986). Moreover, the impact fees gained from private sector development are allocated to fund important public works projects, such as sewage systems, schools, and parks. For example, Framingham's Planning Board spent approximately \$500,000 to renovate the Downtown Common green space, money exacted from impact fees from other development projects. In general, the Planning Board receives a minimum of 3% of the project value for discretionary planning funds. So, projects drive mitigation fees, and in the case of the Arcade Project, approximately \$1.5 million will be allocated towards critical sewer and streetscape improvements. Furthermore, since most commercial development in Framingham occurs on Route 9, the majority of funds must be spent on infrastructure there, and it is unusual for such a significant amount of funds to be available for downtown improvements. Indeed, one interviewee with Framingham development experience commented that "towns typically extort mitigation fees from the developer, but Framingham is extreme." From this economic perspective, downtown Framingham clearly has a strong interest in seeing the Arcade Project implemented.

Simultaneously, suburban governments must work within certain constraints. Gottdiener (1977) argued that disempowered local politicians are beholden to developers and without support from political parties, which is a major cause for unplanned, sprawled suburbs. In contrast, developers and business interests are connected to regional, national, and international economies and networks, and are therefore able to exert control over locally focused politicians and residents, who cannot form coalitions due to ever-changing loyalties for local issues (Ibid). Furthermore, the tradition of local home rule, planners' focus on physical rather than social

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter IV.

issues, and homogenous populations all exacerbate this suburban reality, resulting in politicians controlled by private sector revenue and left with land use control as their only source of power (Ibid). Planners, meanwhile, play the peripheral role of advisor to the ineffectual, and are truly disabled to influence local development (Ibid). The lack of conflict allows unchecked growth (see also Molotch 1976 for discussion of how political and economic actors collaborate through “growth machines” to promote growth). Gottdiener’s portrayal, while still largely accurate in the Framingham context, requires additional clarification. In fact, the main power that local government retains, that of land use control, should not be underestimated. It is a source of leverage and power that, in a town like Framingham, works to balance the playing field between private developers and local government. Instead of the image of private developers controlling local government, or vice versa, the case of Framingham suggests that they are really partners that bring different required assets to the table and must collaborate for any development to happen. In short, the idea that local governments are powerless and at the mercy of private developers is only half of the story—simultaneously, private developers are equally at the mercy of the approval and permitting process controlled by the town. In this symbiotic relationship, the town needs financial resources, which the private sector provides, while the private developer requires approval, which can only be granted by local government. According to Mr. Grande, who has served as Planning Board Director since 1996, funding can always be obtained; instead, he pointed to the town’s “lack of leadership, organization, and vision” to explain why more has not been accomplished downtown.

Given this, it is not accurate to state, as some stakeholders have, that downtown Framingham is simply fortunate to have anyone to develop a project such as the Arcade, and is at the whim of Mr. Perry, the developer. Planning Board member Ms. Bernstein noted that “there’s no reason that Framingham shouldn’t expect to have projects that we like.”<sup>2</sup> Several other stakeholders emphasized that Framingham has a strong location, public transportation, educated workforce, services, and infrastructure, and thus has much to offer private developers. On the other hand, during the Planning Board hearings for the project’s special permit in 2004-5, Board member Tom Mahoney commented that a lot of work had been put into the project and the town “got the best that it could come away with.” Several Town Meeting members spoke at the

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<sup>2</sup> Ms. Bernstein was first elected to the Planning Board in 1991 and takes credit for pushing developers to conform to good development standards.

hearings and stated their fear that if the Arcade Project is not implemented, “nothing will come of downtown.”

The more relevant issue with the Arcade Project is that it has been worked on for more than four years and has been promoted publicly as the key to downtown revitalization. As a result, there is a definite belief that it is “too late” for it to fail. Many residents and others do not believe the town can pull off a project the size and complexity of the Arcade, and so its completion has indeed become important for downtown’s psyche in many people’s minds. According to Ms. Bartolini, the Planning Department Director, the Arcade Project is “instrumental, it’ll be a huge psychological impact and an overnight success....if the Arcade does not happen, developers won’t care why, they’ll just go elsewhere.” Similarly, Mr. Weisbrod of the FDR group said that the town definitely “needs a success...[the Arcade] is critical to demonstrating that the town can get things done.” And planner Kimbra Wellock said that “if the Arcade fails, it would really set back downtown revitalization because this would exacerbate the perception that the town can’t get projects done.” Clearly, much rides on the Arcade Project’s successful implementation, and strong momentum has been in its favor.

This belief may be due, in part, to the idea that incremental steps towards revitalization have gone publicly unnoticed thus far. According to Ms. Bartolini, the town has accomplished a lot without any attention, including investing \$130,000 of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds for storefront improvements in addition to \$1 million in improvements completed by Fitts Insurance on Concord Street. Clearly, the problem with incremental improvements is that they require financing, but private and public sector funding for such initiatives can be difficult to secure. Given these considerations, several stakeholders expressed the belief that downtown requires a major, drastic project rather than continued incremental improvements. There can certainly be value from a major infusion of residents and income into downtown, and this strong catalyst approach certainly has its supporters. On the other hand, several stakeholders actually contested the idea that Framingham is a cash-strapped suburb, and that this lack of funds prohibits downtown revitalization. Rather, they acknowledged that although incremental growth is the more challenging path, it can be successful within a long-term vision.

## **B. POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS**

Several aspects of Framingham's political institutions have directly impacted the revitalization model for downtown. The political culture in Framingham is often characterized by geography. Stereotypically, north-side residents prefer their suburban environment, shop at the Route 9 malls, are middle or upper-middle class, politically centrist to conservative, largely anti-growth, unsupportive of additional affordable housing and social services, and concerned about the large immigrant population downtown. These residents are both longtime and new to Framingham. Meanwhile, south-side residents have an "urban sensibility," are low or middle income, and are either politically progressive or conservative "townies." The majority of Framingham's minority groups live in the south-side. Certainly, there are numerous exceptions to this characterization, but interviewees expressed it as the norm.

Many in town also perceive political divisions as largely falling along growth and anti-growth lines. According to some, this cleavage is quite strong, and there is an idea that a portion of the affluent population on the north-side has found common ground with working class south-side residents on the basis of an anti-growth political stance. Of note, however, not everyone sees this socio-political cleavage. Although NIMBYism (Not In My Back Yard) has always existed everywhere, the strong anti-development camp in Framingham largely began in the 1970s in response to the malls and major projects going up on Route 9. According to Mr. Fitts, who was born and raised in Framingham, there is "a dreadful NIMBY attitude in this town." Other stakeholders have characterized the division more simply as the "north-side rich and powerful against the south-side poor and voiceless."

How do these divisions play out in local politics and affect downtown's revitalization model? Although representative Town Meeting is based on the principles of citizen participation and representation of diverse interests, all too frequently, Town Meeting plays out pro-growth vs. NIMBY conflicts rather than considerations of the social and economic well-being for the town's diverse populations. According to most interviewees, Town Meeting is largely conservative in regards to development. In an interesting reversal, Town Meeting, with the support of the Planning Board, passed a mixed-use bylaw in 1998 that paved the way for the Arcade Project and was seen as a key to attracting new investment to downtown. The bylaw, in fact, represented a rare occasion in which Town Meeting, the Board of Selectmen, and Planning Board all supported a single piece of pro-growth legislation. According to Ms. Lemoine, who was an

instrumental member of the Planning Board at the time and pushed through the legislation, strong elements in Town Meeting were opposed to the bylaw, however, because mixed-use represents the “unnatural” combination of land uses. An illustrative anecdote told by an interviewee is that a resident recently openly stated that he campaigned for Town Meeting simply to vote “no” on everything, and in fact he won a seat.

For at least 50 years, Framingham has debated whether to transition into a city form of government and has periodically commissioned committees to investigate the issue. Ms. Justice, the Civic League Director, noted that “there’s a sense that people don’t want to grow or become something more than a town—there’s a lot of resistance to new things.” She continued that the town meeting has not fully transitioned into utilizing the Town Manager position, that the standing committees create numerous delays, and that all the different town boards want to be “in charge.” Similarly, Ms. Bartolini of the Planning Department stated that she does not believe “the government in Framingham is structured in a manner that allows the town to achieve what it needs to do.”

The main argument made in defense of the Town Meeting and Board of Selectmen/Town Manager structure is that it protects home rule and encourages citizen participation and the representation of diverse interests. Ms. Bernstein of the Planning Board noted that although it is admittedly less efficient, this structure affords a variety of political choices—“if your mayoral candidate loses, then your interests are not represented at all”—and is less subject to lobbying and having campaigns bought with financial contributions. However, evidence suggests that the principles to which the government aspires are far from recognized in practice. First, several Town Meeting districts have difficulty filling their seats, not to mention that the voluntary committees that members staff are often unopposed. Second, voter turnout for local elections is quite low, usually in the single digits or teens.<sup>3</sup> Although voter apathy is clearly a national problem, Framingham’s governmental structure does not seemingly inspire residents anymore than others.

Most importantly, minorities are not well-represented in Town Meeting or the Board of Selectmen. Although there are a few minority group members in Town Meeting, their numbers do not approach the proportion of the population that they represent. Without adequate political representation, it is extremely difficult for these groups to have their interests protected, and most

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<sup>3</sup> At the most recent election in April 2006, turnout was 16%, which was considered quite high.

often, their voice is absent. Several interviewees suggested that perhaps, for all of the talk about representation and democracy by proponents of Town Meeting, it is actually quite deceptive because minorities have not been able to penetrate Town Hall. Interestingly, a related argument made by the anti-immigrant group is that the town does not respond to all residents' needs and curbs dialogue on the full range of issues. According to Mr. Buck, town government is very partisan towards the needs of undocumented immigrants because they fail "to stand up for the law or uphold the constitution." The issue is not that a mayoral structure would guarantee greater representation or participation, but that the ideal benefits of Framingham's structure do not translate into practice, and that the tradeoffs with its disadvantages must be considered (see Allor and Spence 2000 for discussion of incorporating multiculturalism into local planning bodies).

In the end, the drawbacks result in a governmental structure that is inefficient and lacks leadership and accountability. Town Meeting convenes annually, barring special circumstances, and so legislation can take a considerable amount of time to be considered. A consultant with extensive experience in Framingham described a situation in which there is "no leadership in town because of the representative town meeting structure—there's no one to whom developers can go to champion a project, like a mayor." Ms. Murphy, formerly of the Board of Selectmen, said that the governmental structure confuses people, both residents and those within government, and partially as a result, there is not a coherent vision for downtown. The manner in which local government is currently set up, "one or two standing committees of town meeting can stop a project," whereas a city structure would help to streamline development.

### **C. REGULATORY PROCESS**

For several decades, Framingham has had a reputation as a difficult place to develop. This perception largely stems from the anti-growth backlash in the 1970s that followed the extensive retail and office development on Route 9. The reputation is also largely attributed to the Planning Board, which, as the regulatory function, is set up to check growth in town and balance the development-oriented Department of Planning and Economic Development. Beyond this natural tension based on function, the dynamic between the two entities is often strained. In the words of one interviewee, "the Planning Department has never seen a project it didn't like, whereas the Planning Board works to be thorough in its review process. There are both institutional and personality tensions." Meanwhile, according to others, the Planning Board

“shoots down” too many ideas for economic development put forward by the Planning Department. Numerous government stakeholders expressed frustration with this interrelationship, especially the stalemates that often result on key development issues, and noted that the entities do not support one another and that this hurts development downtown.

The Planning Board’s regulatory review of the Arcade Project’s special permit sheds light on the nature in which the process has influenced the revitalization model for downtown. The process was relatively expedited, which has been attributed to Mr. Perry’s insistence that his financing would be jeopardized by a lengthy process. The Planning Board responded by speeding up its review, including a marathon session in March 2004 that lasted until 3:00 a.m. in order to confirm approvals before a new Board election.<sup>4</sup> The relatively streamlined process can be partly attributed to the Board of Selectmen, in particular the former chairwoman, Ms. Murphy, who instructed the Town Manager to make the project happen and work around the Planning Board’s demands. In this case, a Selectman was able to play a leadership role, which might otherwise be assumed by a mayor, to champion a project. The downside to this, according to then-Planning Board member Helen Lemoine, was that “everything happened at the eleventh hour so things [e.g. the relocation plan] fell through the cracks, with only minimal requirement on the developer.”

The contentious issues of the relevant Planning Board meetings in 2004-5 highlight further particulars of the process.<sup>5</sup> Several Board members emphasized that they would vote in favor of the Arcade Project because they did not want to counter the wishes of Town Meeting, which had supported the TIF for the project. Ms. Bernstein commented to the development team at the March 14, 2005 meeting that she favored downtown revitalization, “just not at any cost.” A consultant for the development team brought before the Board stated that his experience showed that downtown revitalization “starts with a project of this stature.” Interestingly, Mr. Perry stated that he originally sought to retain the upper floor commercial space in the Arcade, but after he was prohibited from having ground floor residential space by the zoning bylaw, financial considerations dictated the upper floor’s conversion to residential units. Major delays for the project then came at the state level from the Department of Housing and Community

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<sup>4</sup> It was feared that the election would bring new members to the Board who were openly opposed to the Arcade Project. Note that two years later Mr. Perry still had not secured his financing.

<sup>5</sup> The following information comes from the Planning Board’s minutes for several meetings, available at [www.framinghamma.gov/web/pages/PB\\_Agenda.htm](http://www.framinghamma.gov/web/pages/PB_Agenda.htm).

Development (DHCD) review process. The local approval process required four out of five votes from the Planning Board, and Town Meeting was even more challenging because of its numerous committees: Planning and Zoning, Ways and Means, Public Works, Utilities, Community Services, Finance, and Capital Budgeting all reviewed the project before the TIF could be approved.

The Planning Board did mandate additional review processes and requirements on the project during the special permitting process, including a substantial mitigation package. However, the Board's constraints reflect priorities that did not include the existing immigrant business tenants. Ms. Lemoine noted that the Board was necessarily preoccupied with project feasibility and so an emphasis on a tenant relocation plan went under the radar. The Board did require a plan as part of the special permit approval, but "if I had to do it all over again, the relocation piece would play a greater role—it hasn't because it wasn't carefully spelled out in the requirement." Moreover, "no one on the Planning Board had experience with such a large downtown project so also had no experience with a relocation plan." In fact, the Board's meeting minutes do show that during the January and March 2004 hearings, a Planning Board member raised the issue of the relocation of existing businesses and requested a plan from Mr. Perry. A representative for the development team responded that the businesses will have the option for remaining in the building at a higher rent. It is important to note that the discussion of business relocation is limited to two to three comments amidst hundreds in the hearing minutes.

In the end, the Planning Board did grant the special permit approval for the project with a requirement for a relocation plan for existing commercial tenants prior to commencement of any construction. Of course, this was just one of several requirements, and seemingly fell through the cracks during the subsequent two-year pre-development process. It seems as though neither Mr. Perry nor the Planning Board took the requirement as a high priority. A formal plan was supposed to be presented at the February 2006 Board meeting, but no plan was actually put forth. Rather, Ms. Bernstein raised the issue and requested that the developer provide letters to tenants (approved beforehand by the Planning Board—and, in fact, the initial version was amended for being overly cursory and lacking any specific information) and hold a meeting to inform them of the upcoming changes in the building. A brief discussion occurred, but in all only a few minutes were spent on the displacement of at least 40 businesses—at this point, only a few months away—in comparison to other concerns such as window design and hours of construction. A

tenant meeting is now scheduled for late April 2006. Indeed, Mr. Grande, the Planning Board Director, thought it odd that relocation of existing tenants was first being discussed at such a late date. Meanwhile, Mr. Stacik of the Board of Selectmen was emphatic with his frustration that relocation plans have not been better articulated, calling it an oversight and blaming negligence.

It thus seems that the town, having controlled the project review process, has not given sufficient guidance or clarity to Mr. Perry on specific requirements for tenant relocation. For example, the site plan approval included language that the developer “shall prepare a relocation plan prior to building occupancy.” This was an ambiguous ruling, and as a result, there is a last-minute scramble to first meet the requirement now. If business displacement and relocation were truly of concern to town government, at least on par with other issues, greater clarity and consistency were required from the beginning. In the words of a planning consultant, “the town’s requests on relocation are not unreasonable, they were just too vague and disorganized from the outset.”

A related concern is the perception that individual agendas of the Planning Board members are weighted more heavily than benefits afforded the town. One knowledgeable consultant expressed this frustration as “Framingham is particularly difficult because the Board asks for things that are above and beyond its purview. The political dynamic in Framingham is less than ideal for a project of this complexity at the moment.” Many believe that the Planning Board changes its mind all too frequently, constantly making additional demands on developers rather than articulating a clear process and requirements from the beginning. However, Ms. Bernstein believes that “the Planning Board wouldn’t push [Mr. Perry] too hard. There was such a groundswell of opinion that the Arcade is the only way to revitalize downtown. If you made too many waves and pushed too hard, then he would go away and the Board would be blamed for halting revitalization efforts.” This idea ties the review process into the earlier discussion of regulatory control as a poorly utilized point of leverage. It is reasonable to assume that the Arcade Project would not have “gone away” under a requirement for a tenant relocation plan, and the priorities for which the Board decided to push the project are telling.

In addition, the issue of local competence was raised numerous times by interviewees. With the Arcade Project, the situation is of an inexperienced town and developer navigating a large and complex development project. Although the Planning Board and Planning Department have full-time professional staff, the actual decision makers—Town Meeting, Board of

Selectmen, and Planning Board members—are not professionals, just interested and involved residents who have many competing demands on their time. When asked whether she had read a February 2006 document presented by the Arcade development team to the Planning Board two weeks prior to a key meeting, Ms. Bernstein replied that she did not have time to read the document. This is understandable and not unexpected given numerous responsibilities, but it is not an effective method for downtown revitalization. The Planning Board does utilize numerous consultants during review processes, including traffic, landscape and architectural professionals for the Arcade Project. In the end, however, there are serious questions about how well informed the actual decision makers have been at key points in the process. On the other side, several interviewees expressed the viewpoint that Mr. Perry lacks the experience to complete the project in a satisfactory manner, and that the town would be better off with a different developer. Others commented that the development plan was overly rigid and could not accommodate changes, though this may be due to tight financial returns. In general, there has been concern over handing the development of downtown’s major revitalization project to a relatively inexperienced developer. And, fairly or not, the Arcade Project is several years off target from its originally estimated fall 2006 completion date.

#### **D. POLITICS & EXCLUSION**

What roles have political institutions and regulatory processes played in influencing downtown revitalization? This chapter argues that, in contrast to the popular idea that suburbs have little power in the development process, local government in Framingham actually had significant leverage throughout the regulatory process. This control affords the town the ability to influence private development such that it does not have to accept the first project that comes its way. However, Framingham’s political institutions and regulatory process are uncoordinated and not representative of the full diversity of constituents’ interests. Indeed, the political institutions and regulatory process often are the vehicles through which the exclusive social values discussed earlier manifest. According to Mr. Stacik of the Board of Selectmen, “there is too much emphasis on personal preference and not the regulatory process” in development decisions. From the other perspective, Mr. Perry stated that “the project only works when the town wants it to happen.”

Of utmost importance during the regulatory process is that the arguments made to promote the project parallel those related to the exclusive social values discussed in the previous chapter. Indeed, crime, traffic, and commercial preferences were all highlighted by the development team during its meetings; in contrast, economic and social diversity received scant, if any, attention. This situation can continue because the political representation of a key demographic group in town—the immigrant population—is poor at best. Before newcomers to any locale can feel comfortable participating in civic life, they must feel welcomed by their new home. As discussed in the previous chapter, immigrants to Framingham have entered an oftentimes hostile environment. It is not surprising, then, that their political representation and participation are so weak. Meanwhile many residents clamor for integration, saying that they would feel more comfortable with the large immigrant presence if these groups were better integrated. It is quite difficult to assimilate without any political representation, and it is the responsibility of the town to work towards this goal. Simultaneously, the immigrant population must mobilize itself, which is the subject of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER VI. FRAGMENTED DOWNTOWN COMMUNITIES

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**SUMMARY:** This chapter examines how the disorganization within the immigrant community and ineffective communication between town government and the business community have enabled the gentrification-based revitalization model to be implemented without significant opposition. In particular, the chapter explores the key role played by rumors, miscommunication, and misinformation in facilitating the implementation of the Arcade Project. The chapter concludes that the inability of downtown communities to organize and communicate has prevented them from influencing the revitalization discourse with an alternative model based on retention of the immigrant economy.

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This chapter concludes the discussion of the non-economic factors that have influenced Framingham's downtown revitalization model with an examination of organizational and communication issues among downtown groups. First, the chapter discusses the importance of ethnic social networks for immigrant groups, and then addresses the issue of why the immigrant business community has not mobilized in opposition to the Arcade Project or promoted an alternative model for revitalization based on the retention and maturation of its local economy. Finally, taking the other perspective, I explore why the town and project developer have not connected to downtown communities.

### A. IMMIGRANTS & SOCIAL NETWORKS

The role of social networks for immigrant entrepreneurs is paramount in the literature on ethnic economies. Waldinger, Bonacich, Light, Rath, Portes, Sensenbrenner, and others have all emphasized how ethnics' embeddedness in social networks is the key for building solidarity and trust through common experience (Rath 2000). The relationship between ethnic economy and ethnic community can be characterized as symbiotic—ethnic entrepreneurs often have strong ties to community and feel a sense of responsibility to give back to their community (Light and Gold 2000). In fact, the political, economic, and social fates of the group are intertwined, as solidarity is critical to success (Ibid). Benefits accrued by the ethnic community extend well beyond job creation and profit generation to include social benefits as well. Indeed, in her social service work in Framingham with diverse populations, Ms. Justice of the Civic League has noted that low-income ethnic groups in town have an advantage over the Anglo low-income population because of their strong communities that tend to take care of one another.

Furthermore, the shared entrepreneurial experience often results in formal and informal associations, thereby affording ethnics a business advantage over others (Waldinger et al 1990). Similarly, ethnic economies have typically also translated into political mobilization (Light and Gold 200). Self-help organizations are often established by the early ethnic business elite, largely because of the high visibility and economic success these people have attained, which allows some position of influence and thus activism in the community at-large. Ethnic economies support political leadership, as much through formal office holding as by providing financial contributions to support efforts to influence political decision making (Light and Bonacich 1988). In addition to large-scale public policy successes, such as affirmative action, small-scale victories can be achieved through entrepreneur-funded activism, including funding for ethnic media (Ibid). Churches and religious institutions also play a key organizing role for activism and building common agendas (Ibid). On the other hand, the case of Chinese entrepreneurship demonstrates the potential for the perception that immigrant businesses are unconcerned with civic and political duties in their new country, opting instead to remain invested in affairs back home (Zhou 2000). This political isolation reinforces the negative stereotype that they are unwilling to integrate into the majority economy and social landscape (Ibid).

Meanwhile, case studies from a range of Boston neighborhoods targeting ethnic business owners showed that immigrant entrepreneurs did not report involvement in any local neighborhood association (Borges-Mendez et al 2005). These business owners were also not well connected to government assistance programs (Ibid). This lack of formal organization and connection to government has been attributed to a sense of pride and individualism among immigrant entrepreneurs (Ibid). Unfortunately, this population typically requires financial and technical assistance beyond what their ethnic networks can provide, and so often miss an important opportunity.

It is also important to distinguish between varying dependencies on social networks. Immigrants to the U.S. are no longer just poor or rural workers coming to the U.S. without proper documentation. Rather, as is the case with many Brazilian immigrants, educated middle-income classes are increasingly migrating to the U.S. Studies show that a large number of these immigrants enter the country legally and overstay tourist or temporary visas (Staring 2000). Social capital is the glue for all immigrant entrepreneurs, and especially so for undocumented immigrants, who are significantly dependent on family members, friends, contacts, and others for

survival (Ibid). Furthermore, undocumented immigrants cannot turn to public institutions for support as readily as legal immigrants, and so are even more reliant on personal networks. Staring (2000) emphasizes that a romanticized view of these relationships, however, should be avoided—recent research has emphasized that undocumented immigrants can display extreme disloyalty and betrayal. This does not have to be as dramatic as the so-called Mexican and Mexican-American “coyotes” who transport people across the border. In a place like Framingham, disloyalty can manifest in a more subtle manner, including through disorganization and leadership vacuums.

## **B. RELATIONS AMONG DOWNTOWN COMMUNITIES**

Although the Brazilian immigrant community in Framingham has strong social relationships, as evidenced by a walk through the halls of the Arcade building, this solidarity has not translated into mobilized action. In many neighborhoods, vulnerable communities have organized in opposition to gentrification projects. For example, the Fifth Avenue Committee in Brooklyn’s gentrifying Lower Park Slope neighborhood worked with low-income residents to establish a Displacement Free Zone to prevent widespread upheaval and preserve ethnic and class diversity (Slater 2003). Although my interviews with business owners in the Arcade building indicated that nearly all respondents would be interested in participating in some form of mobilization, efforts by the Brazilian American Association (BRAMAS) to organize meetings have been largely unsuccessful, as have been technical assistance sessions and meetings conducted by the town. Business owners note their limited time and multiple responsibilities as reasons for missing such opportunities, but the reality is that business owners everywhere are extremely busy, yet many manage to attend meetings before and/or after work and still attend to their families. Organizations have been formed at different times, such as the Brazilian Business and Cultural Council, founded in 1997 by a business owner, but these have been entirely short-lived. What explains the lack of mobilization within the Brazilian community?

It seems that there are several reasons. First, the Brazilians’ perception of government and the reality of their legal status are critical. Brazilians in Framingham have a palpable distrust of local government, stemming both from experiences in their native country and in the U.S. In the minds of most Brazilians, government is neither partner nor friend, and thus not an institution to which one can turn for assistance. For those who are undocumented, this belief is exacerbated

by the fear that participation in town events might expose them to deportation. Town-organized meetings targeted at the business community, and conducted in Portuguese and advertised in the local Brazilian newspapers, have not been well attended. For example, a series of business development training sessions on accounting, business plan development, and marketing had very low levels of participation. Although Planning Department Director Ms. Bartolini noted that it is always difficult to get significant business owner participation, ethnic or otherwise, she also emphasized that in her years of experience working with diverse populations, she has never had difficulties developing rapport with business community. Over seven years in Framingham, though, she has been unable to do so. In addition, businesses need to understand how local government can help them realize tangible benefits and incentives from such programs (see Walzer and Kline 2001 for discussion). Mr. Grande, the Planning Board Director, noted that Brazilian businesses were excited about basic planters in the sidewalk because they represented a real improvement.

Second, the vehemence of the anti-immigrant rhetoric in Framingham likely intimidates many immigrants from participation in town events. Conflict with non-ethnics can often hasten group and identity formation (Light and Gold 2000), but this does not seem to be the case with the Brazilian population in Framingham, at least on a sustained basis. Although the community has organized cultural celebrations in town and certainly has a highly visible presence downtown, several of the business owners interviewed commented that they would be intimidated by open involvement with official institutions.

Third, the community has not had a leader emerge from the business community who consistently connects to Town Hall. Ilma Paixao, Director of BRAMAS,<sup>1</sup> has been involved in several town efforts on downtown revitalization and is the person to whom town officials often turn for access to the Brazilian community. BRAMAS has an office in the Arcade building and has tried to organize business owners in response to the project, but Ms. Paixao is overburdened by community and town requests and has only a fledgling organization that cannot afford compensation for her work. Vera Dias-Freitas owns Vera Jewelers, one of the more successful Brazilian-owned businesses on Concord Street, and is a member of the Chamber of Commerce and Rotary Club. According to interviewees, however, and despite many people's hopes, she has

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<sup>1</sup> The Brazilian American Association (BRAMAS) is an organization that works to provide services to the local community and organize constituents around relevant issues. It has been hampered over the past several years by funding shortages, internal challenges, and Board turnover.

not been a strong advocate or voice for the community. Fernando Castro owns Income Tax Plus, another successful Brazilian business that has been on Concord Street for more than a decade and has six offices throughout the region. Mr. Castro has gotten involved with promoting the community, but he also has not emerged as a consistent leader. Other possibilities for leadership positions come from some of the other established businesses downtown, such as Elias Fernandes of Padaria Brazil bakery, but so far, no one has taken on this role in a sustained manner.

Lastly, the Brazilian business community may simply be too nascent to have reached a stage that is conducive to organizing. Mr. Castro emphasized that the Brazilian business community in Framingham is only about ten years old, and especially with people coming from various areas of Brazil, it takes time to build a strong community. Reverend Lloyd believes that the Brazilian population still has a guest mentality and is first learning to be comfortable being vocal. In contrast, established immigrant communities are more likely to initiate a formalized organization. For example, the Vietnamese business community in Boston's Fields Corner neighborhood founded a Vietnamese Merchants Association that specifically filled the void of mainstream business organizations (Borges-Mendez et al 2005). The cases of El Mercado in Hartford, District del Sol in St. Paul, and Fruitvale Village in Oakland also illustrate the critical importance of an organized ethnic business community (see Chapter III for details). Furthermore, Mr. Grande also noted that with the Arcade Project pending, it would be reasonable for the Brazilian businesses to feel unsettled and unsure of their future status.

Without its own association, however, there are established, non-ethnic downtown organizations through which the immigrant business community could find representation:

- **Chamber of Commerce.** The MetroWest Chamber of Commerce has the majority of its membership on Route 9 and so represents major clients such as Staples, Bose, and TJ Maxx. The organization focuses on regional issues such as workforce training and transportation. Yet, the Chamber's President, Ted Welte, is a strong advocate for downtown, and participates in numerous local government downtown efforts. Though some longtime Anglo business owners expressed dissatisfaction with the Chamber's activity downtown, as a membership organization, it has a mandate to respond to the

needs of its base, which is not downtown. Though Vera Jewelers is a member, downtown immigrant businesses do not have a strong presence in the Chamber.

- **Economic Development Industrial Corporation (EDIC).** EDIC is a quasi-public agency that seeks to implement the town's economic development goals. It shares staff with the Planning Department and is a strong advocate for downtown, but currently does not have any funds to implement programs. The organization meets regularly, and though it has conducted outreach to downtown immigrant businesses, none are involved in the agency's work.
- **Framingham Downtown Renaissance (FDR).** FDR is a coalition of government and civic leaders dedicated to promoting the economic development of downtown. The group has attempted to raise funds but has been unsuccessful thus far, and so depends on its volunteers entirely for implementing activities. It is a strong advocate for downtown with good professional networks and the capacity to mobilize stakeholders. The organization has struggled to involve both downtown property and business owners. Although Ms. Paixao is a regular participant, the group has been frustrated that Brazilian business owners have not been more involved (MacCormack 2006a). Of note, this group has discussed the value of the downtown ethnic economy at its meetings.

In addition, for a few years Framingham had a Downtown Manager position in the Planning Department that focused exclusively on promoting downtown business interests. Funding for the position ended several years ago, but numerous stakeholders—including both local government and business owners—emphasized the role's value and success. It is significant to note that the position was originally filled by a bilingual woman who communicated well with the downtown community. Members of FDR have particularly advocated for the return of this position (MacCormack 2006b).

In sum, existing downtown organizations have been unsuccessful in incorporating or empowering the immigrant business community. For decades, downtown had a specific merchant association, but the prevailing sentiment among longtime business owners is that they are tired of all the different committees and plans that have not materialized, and so are less inclined to participate. Coupled with the new immigrant populations downtown, which are unfamiliar to Anglo business owners, there is seemingly little momentum for initiating a

downtown merchant association. As a result, not only does the immigrant business population lack representation in political institutions, it also lacks a voice in downtown civic groups.

### **C. RELATIONS AMONG TOWN, DEVELOPER & IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY**

If organization and participation have not come from the Brazilian population itself or existing entities, at least at the moment, why not from the town or project developer? Local government certainly has a vested interest in having a structured mechanism through which it can communicate with the downtown business community. Indeed, local government interviewees expressed frustration at not knowing to whom in the Brazilian community they should turn for outreach or implementation issues. Public-private partnerships are very much in vogue in development projects and planning theory, but the concept can be quite empty without real weight behind it. In the case of downtown Framingham, the collaboration developed between the town and developer has lacked a key additional partnership: one with the downtown business community.

It seems the answer is that Mr. Perry has had a strong economic incentive to keep the current Arcade tenants unorganized and uninformed, while the town has not stepped in until the last moment to insist on greater communication and information sharing.

There has been a clear economic benefit for Mr. Perry as landlord and developer of the Arcade to maintain tenants over the past several years as the planning and permitting processes have dragged on, and thus a strong impetus to perpetuate confusion and uncertainty among tenants. There were likely few other tenants interested in renting the Arcade's commercial units except for other Brazilian or ethnic businesses. Though the rent levels per unit have been modest—Mr. Perry has emphasized that he has not raised rents since 1999—when aggregated over 40-50 tenants, the cumulative revenue is not insignificant and he has needed to maintain this income stream. Clearly, it is better to have some revenue than none. The alternative was a return to a downtown of major vacancies, which would have resulted in lost income and certainly would have contradicted the required image of a thriving downtown and a good place for further investment.

Indeed, the lack of communication and purported intentional miscommunication is not without precedent in gentrifying areas. Building owners have become increasingly exploitative during periods of disinvestment immediately before redevelopment occurs, resorting to tactics

such as cutting off utilities and refusing to maintain the building while receiving the final months of rent (Smith 1996). Although Mr. Perry cannot be charged with such extreme tactics, there have been some questionable incidents.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, over the several years of the pre-development process, the local business community has been very poorly informed, and has never been consulted. Except for the M.I.T. student group, in fact, no one has ever asked the business owners what their plans would be for the future—either relocation, a new livelihood, return to Brazil, etc. Given this, it seems difficult for the town and Mr. Perry to devise a relocation plan when they do not know who or what will be relocated. Certainly, local government stakeholders have been (rightfully) frustrated by the seeming lack of interest among the business community, but prior experience does not necessarily indicate future behavior, especially when there are such important financial issues at stake.

When asked, Mr. Perry stated the following regarding what tenants do and do not know about the Arcade Project:

[The tenants] know that I'm going to start building. They ask when it's going to start and I say sometime in the spring—I don't know when exactly, I have to wait on my financing. I have to come up with a plan of what I'm going to do with them, and I don't know....Upstairs, all of them have to move....I don't know where I'm going to put all these people. I'm going to have to come up with a plan. The town knows this, what do they think I'm going to do with all these people?

Mr. Perry continued that he believes the displaced tenants will find other spaces throughout downtown, though likely at higher rents.

Clearly, relocation is not Mr. Perry's top priority, which is to be expected given that he is driven by an economic bottom line. However, where are the local government officials, who are charged with both protecting the economic and social welfare of their constituents? The Planning Department convened a meeting in summer 2004 and invited business owners to hear presentations by staff and Mr. Perry on the Arcade Project plans (Torrens 2004a). Attendance at

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<sup>2</sup> First, during the Christmas 2005 season, the Arcade building went without heat for one week and the town subsequently locked out tenants for nearly 24 hours, two days before the holiday, thereby costing significant potential sales. Second, some business owners in the Arcade reported that a building janitor, who is Brazilian, told business owners to disregard information disseminated by the M.I.T. student group on the project in spring 2005. This is completely unsubstantiated, though has contributed to the rumors that abound among tenants.

this meeting was mostly limited to ground floor businesses, rather than those who are most vulnerable on the upper floor, and it seems that it served as much as a platform to promote the project as to inform the business community about its impact on their future. Since this time, the project has undergone numerous iterations, yet communication with the business community has been minimal and upper floor business owners remain in the dark. At the tenant meeting in April 2006, which was required by the Planning Board, many business owners were caught very unaware.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, save for a few brief discussions of the Planning Board, the displacement issue has seemingly not been discussed among key decision makers themselves.

Of the 25 business owners interviewed for this thesis, only one was fully informed about the Arcade Project.<sup>4</sup> Nine had no knowledge of the project, and most others had various degrees of misinformation. The most common belief among business owners is that the project will have a temporary construction period, during which they will have to vacate their units, but that following this period they will be able to move back into their upgraded spaces at a higher rent. Though this may be the case for ground floor businesses, it is certainly not so for those on the upper floor, who will necessarily be displaced. Furthermore, these tenants have little if any recourse, given a clause in their standard rental contract that states:

Lessee acknowledges that lessor may decide to develop the building in which leased premises are located, including but not limited to I) substantially renovate II) demolition of the building in which premises are located (the “Development”). In the event lessor decides to proceed with the Development, the lessor may terminate this lease by giving written notice to lessee that the lessor intends to develop the premises and that the lease shall be terminated, said termination to be effective *one month (30 days)* from the date of the written notice to lessee. This provision shall take precedence over any other provision in this lease (emphasis added).

One month’s notice is certainly insufficient time for any business owner—let alone the immigrant business owners in downtown Framingham—to make alternate plans for their livelihoods.

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<sup>3</sup> This meeting will be discussed in-depth in Chapter VII.

<sup>4</sup> This is Ilma Paixao, BRAMAS’ Director, who is well informed about the project due to her individual activism, participation in town affairs, and partnership with M.I.T.

In contrast, there are specific examples of community-developer partnerships formed to protect existing tenants during times of dramatic neighborhood change. In Boston's Jamaica Plain neighborhood, a private developer and community development corporation collaborated on developing a new Stop and Shop supermarket (Hernandez 2001). A critical component of the project was the establishment of a \$500,000 fund to support community initiatives, specifically local ethnic business owners threatened by the new competition. Although some existing businesses experienced decreased sales levels, others were able to maintain their operations through the community support (Ibid). In a similar situation, the New Community Corporation in Newark, New Jersey, partnered with a Pathmark supermarket to secure the allocation of one-third of store income, which was reinvested to support small business development and job opportunities for local residents (Proulx and Nelms). The quasi-public Pike Place Market Preservation and Development Authority in Seattle, Washington utilized historic preservation, cooperative management, and below-market rental opportunities to mitigate tenant displacement in the highly successful Pike Place Market (Ibid). The Authority targeted both middle- and low-income populations through diverse shopping options, including numerous units leased to economy retailers and funds supporting the establishment of businesses by minorities and women (Ibid). In Washington, D.C., the Development Corporation Columbia Heights (DCCH), a local community organization, negotiated with a commercial developer to receive a portion of project profits for reinvestment in support of initiatives to benefit vulnerable populations (Kennedy and Leonard 2001). Lastly, in East Palo Alto, California, nonprofit agencies received several hundred thousand dollars from a developer to assist with their resettlement costs (Ibid).

#### **D. DISPLACEMENT VS. RELOCATION**

Decision makers in Framingham rightfully distinguish between displacement and relocation, and focus on the latter when discussing the Arcade Project. Existing immigrant social networks will support their efforts to relocate, and indeed interviewees expressed a strong desire to see these businesses fill in vacant storefronts throughout downtown. Meanwhile, as noted previously, it is likely that some of the successful ground floor immigrant businesses will relocate within the new Arcade building. If there is a good possibility that many businesses will resettle elsewhere, then is the displacement so bad? In other words, if the town or developer were

able to devise a relocation program—which is a big “if”—why could not downtown be strengthened by the Arcade Project while maintaining a resettled immigrant economy?

While this is a possibility, indications suggest that the detrimental impact of dislocation on downtown’s immigrant businesses will be significant. First, as discussed above, neither the town nor Mr. Perry have devised a relocation plan of any substance. Without financial and/or technical assistance, the immigrant businesses are in an extremely vulnerable position. Second, the majority of the businesses do not have sufficient savings to finance the costs associated with identifying and moving to a new location. Several of those interviewed had invested significant amounts of money in their units, money that will now be lost. Town officials and Mr. Perry initially indicated that he will contribute financial support to assist with relocation, such as paying broker fees, but since the project will no longer receive public financing (which would require relocation assistance), funding is no longer available.<sup>5</sup> Third, given the lack of information they have received, business owners have not insufficient time to plan for their future. For example, some suggested that they would have already moved in order to complete the relocation during the slow winter months and reopen in time for the spring. Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, displacement will break up the established Brazilian economic cluster in the Arcade building on which these businesses depend. It is quite likely that with relocation these businesses will be scattered throughout downtown, and thus will lose the economic benefits of their proximity, including shared equipment, common customers, and business support. In addition, the customer base downtown will potentially be quite different with the introduction of new residential populations, and the existing businesses may not adequately adapt to this change.

Furthermore, these impacts only represent economic considerations. There is also a critical social perspective on displacement that cannot be overlooked. The Arcade Project will remove the physical units belonging to a key downtown community that thrives in part because of its existing upper floor commercial space. As Dr. Fullilove has documented, such “root shock” to a community can have devastating consequences, and is not easily recreated elsewhere (2004). Though businesses may reestablish, the drastic social upheaval can permanently damage social networks and the emotional health of the downtown immigrant community, which is clearly tied to its physical space, not to mention breeding further mistrust for local government. In addition, a normative critique of displacement emphasizes the fundamental rights of people to

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<sup>5</sup> Chapter VII discusses this issue in greater depth.

their community. The Uniform Relocation Act is a U.S. federal program that provides financial assistance to tenants displaced by publicly-funded projects. The United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has issued guidelines for communities regarding the just eviction from housing units, including consultation with affected groups, adequate and reasonable notice prior to eviction, information on the proposed project, provision (where possible) of legal aid to the affected, and assistance with resettlement (Beauregard 2005). Although these regulations are targeted at displaced residents of federal programs, there is no reason not to expect comparable rights for vulnerable commercial tenants of all redevelopment projects. In short, relocation in the Framingham case is merely a euphemism for displacement, and will certainly be damaging to the immigrant business community.

This situation fully illuminates the downtown revitalization paradox. Under the town's stated objectives in its tax increment financing plan, it states: "The first floor space while primarily occupied does not attract a strong customer base. Even though there is minimal vacancy along the first floors of these buildings, the present conditions give a negative image about the viability of the whole downtown" (Tax Increment Financing Report 2005). Yet, as discussed in Chapter II, simultaneously the Brazilian immigrants have been lauded as revivers of downtown. State representative Karen Spilka (D-Ashland) said that "I think more people should be reaching out and working with Brazilians. They are a very important part of the area's life. You just have to look at downtown Framingham to realize how much they have helped revive" (Torrens 2004b). The lack of organization of the immigrant business community, coupled with minimal efforts by the town or developer, has significantly contributed to allowing this paradox to continue. Furthermore, these conditions have prevented the emergence and advancement of a logical alternative to the gentrification-based model—building upon and supporting the growth of the downtown immigrant economy through complementary development efforts.

## CHAPTER VII. THE DANGERS OF MIXED-USE

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**SUMMARY:** This chapter concludes the thesis by weighing the benefits and detriments of the competing revitalization models and suggests that Framingham’s approach may represent the emergence of a new model for downtown revitalization in the suburban context. I argue instead for a revitalization model based on equitable development principles that builds on the existing assets of local populations. In the case of Framingham, this means the nascent ethnic economy that can be supported and expanded into the town’s overall economy. In addition, I discuss the implications of a disconnect between planning theory and its application through projects that are damaging to local communities.

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Downtown revitalization strategies are typically tied to physical and economic improvements, such as historic preservation, streetscape improvements, waterfront development, and business development (Burayidi 2001). Though these efforts certainly have their value, they can also be “band-aid” approaches that fail to address underlying social, political, and structural issues that threaten the success of any initiative. These often overlooked issues are especially important in suburbs and small cities, such as Framingham, with growing minority populations that lack the tradition or mechanisms for representing diverse interests. This thesis has attempted to challenge the predominant thinking by illustrating the social, political, and organizational factors that rival market influences in determining a revitalization model. Although it may be less difficult, from the funding and political perspective, to address the built environment and economic issues than social questions, local governments cannot be excused from having a meaningful dialogue. This concluding chapter examines the physical/economic versus social tension by comparing the two revitalization models discussed throughout the thesis and exploring the implications of a disconnect between planning theory and application.

### A. COMPETING MODELS

The gentrification-based revitalization model described throughout this thesis, and applied in Framingham, can be understood as a bifurcated process. The first phase, which follows a period of significant disinvestment, is characterized by immigrant or ethnic businesses moving into vacant, low-rent downtown areas, and subsequently revitalizing these commercial districts with populated storefronts and renewed street life. The neighborhood eventually reaches a “turning point” at which time reinvestment kicks in (Smith 1996). In the second phase, private developers capitalize on an improved market, exclusive social values, ineffective political

institutions, and local disorganization to remake downtown identity through gentrification processes that threaten to displace the very businesses responsible for revitalizing downtowns initially. There are clear benefits and detriments to this revitalization model:

**Benefits of gentrification model:**

- Large and immediate infusion of investment
- Impact fees result in infrastructure, streetscape, and other improvements
- Greater residential disposable income
- Improved perceptions of safety through physical improvements
- Additional stable jobs through larger businesses

**Detriments of gentrification model:**

- Residential and commercial displacement
- Escalated inter-group tensions and social disunity
- Loss of commercial diversity and scattering of clustered economies
- Potentially damaging political repercussions
- Inauthentic identity and place-making
- Difficulty attracting complete financing packages
- Economic control by private sector

Conversely, an incremental approach grounded in equitable development principles builds on the local context to balance the economic and social needs of diverse populations. Equitable development can be defined as “the creation and maintenance of economically and socially diverse communities that are stable over the long term, through means that generate a minimum of transition costs that fall unfairly on lower income residents” (Kennedy and Leonard 2001: 4). In the case of Framingham, it means supporting and growing the established immigrant economy to create a downtown that is unique and commercially distinct from Route 9. Other revitalization efforts, such as streetscape and storefront improvements, infrastructure upgrading, technical assistance provision, and business creation programs work to complement the existing economy. Such an incremental approach requires a significant investment in time and

coordination; committed governmental, civic, and private sector leadership; and dedication to sustained fundraising. There are also clear benefits and detriments to this revitalization model:

**Benefits of equitable development model:**

- Organic change can be gradually absorbed by community
- Residential and commercial displacement not required
- Commercial diversity and character of place preserved
- Potential for expanding customer base to non-ethnics and regional ethnics
- Opportunities for building social cohesion
- Varied rent levels and physical spaces to accommodate diverse businesses
- Distinctive commercial identity distinguished from other shopping areas
- Driven by both local government and private sector

**Detriments of equitable development model:**

- Public attention span is short but incremental change requires time
- Requires multiple, relatively small financing sources
- No major visible success to promote
- Non-ethnic population may not frequent businesses
- Sustained political will required
- Debatable ability to stimulate additional physical improvements

It is critical to emphasize that both of these approaches are viable as revitalization models. There is much debate on whether gentrification is a “dirty” word, and different perspectives have taken different sides on the issue (see Kennedy and Leonard 2001 for discussion). Although gentrification case studies have largely focused on urban neighborhoods, there are examples of large-scale projects in other contexts. For example, Cronin’s Landing in Waltham, Massachusetts has been identified as a successful, large-scale project that stimulated revitalization efforts.<sup>1</sup> Significantly, however, this project did not result in major displacement. On the other hand, numerous studies have suggested that “big fix” solutions rarely work in small cities and suburbs (Robertson 2001). Rather a “continuous series of small-scale organizational,

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<sup>1</sup> See discussion in Chapter III.

aesthetic/design, and economic improvements that makes downtown distinctive from other settings—a strong sense of place—is the foundation for successful downtown development in small cities” (Ibid: 20). Studies have also emphasized that revitalization needs to be a bottom-up approach, or at minimum include local business communities in the planning and implementation process (Hardt 2001). In a study of revitalization efforts in five small Wisconsin communities, which were of similar population sizes if not social and political dynamics to Framingham, Burayidi (2001) found several keys to success: 1) forming a strong downtown organization (CDC or other non-profit group); 2) utilizing a TIF for infrastructure; 3) appointing a downtown manager responsible for business recruitment and retention, technical assistance to businesses, marketing downtown, and streetscape improvements; and 4) conducting special events. Significantly, tailoring approaches to individual places, based on a sense of place, was critical to these communities’ success (Ibid). In a place like Framingham, of course, the critical question becomes whose place is it?

As discussed throughout the thesis, this identity issue is central to the revitalization model pursued. The Planning Department and Planning Board have previously followed an incremental model for revitalization, and with the repopulation of downtown by immigrant businesses, had experienced real success. Members of the Planning Department and the FDR group, in particular, have pressed for incremental change, while simultaneously promoting the Arcade Project. In order to effect the identity change sought by many in town, a major gentrification project was required. From this perspective, “real” downtown revitalization will only happen with identity change. With exclusive social values, lack of political representation, and community disorganization working against them, the immigrant businesses have been in no position to promote an alternative revitalization model. Indeed, “the power to define a place can often mean the power to decide the destiny of that place” (Blomley 2004: 147). And more specifically, the gentrification model is promoted by value-laden narratives: “Dominant property narratives engage in a complex set of moral moves, including the erasure of an existent population....At an extreme, the effect is to render displacement natural, inevitable, and beneficial” (Ibid: 101-2). In Framingham, such narratives are certainly at work.

In the end, when deciding between approaches, or some variation on either, planners and local government have a responsibility to view their local context through equitable development principles. This means understanding how local property markets, changing demographics,

employment base, social dynamics, the political culture, and institutional relationships affect a range of constituents. Framingham's own Economic Development Strategic Plan states "Don't put all your eggs in one basket. No single project or program is going to make all the difference" and that "retention comes before recruitment" (1998: 4). Although this plan recommends an improved identity for downtown, it also emphasizes marketing approaches that build on the immigrant businesses, not the displacement of these economic assets. Indeed, improved marketing of an identity is quite different from changing an identity.

In the case of Framingham and its gentrification-based model, I have argued that the Arcade Project does not fit the existing local assets of downtown. First, the project displaces downtown's main economic engine, while \$60 million is a huge financial investment for the area, especially considering that the new residential structure cannot be built in phased components. It is thus a high-risk project, and some stakeholders in town fear that the project will run out of funds after construction has begun, leaving behind a major blight in the center of downtown. Second, the project depends entirely on its ability to attract a significant number of new residents through a "back to the 'suburban city'" movement. It is unclear whether the growing interest in urban living applies to suburban locations like downtown Framingham, or just the plethora of recently gentrified neighborhoods in urban areas. In addition, the project needs to attract this new resident base at a time when local and state population growth has been modest. In contrast, the immigrant population in Framingham and Massachusetts as a whole is steadily growing, and nearly one out of five new immigrants to the state is Brazilian (Sum et al 2005, based on 2003 projections). As a result, the economic health of the area is certainly tied to immigrant populations. Third, the Arcade Project, and the gentrification model in general, is likely to result in mainstream businesses, which can afford the required rent levels and more readily meet the retail and service needs of new residents. Such businesses will not distinguish downtown Framingham from Route 9 shopping options, however, and so are less likely to attract customers from beyond the immediate area in the manner that successful ethnic businesses might.

In contrast, several incremental steps would work towards the goal of supporting the downtown immigrant economy and continued revitalization:

- Develop and promote a long-term vision that explicitly includes the immigrant business community
- Upgrade the infrastructure of existing buildings
- Consider subsidies for commercial rents and/or a business incubator space
- Retain flexible unit sizes and configurations for different business needs
- Secure long-term leases and consider percentage leases for immigrant businesses
- Explore nonprofit/CDC property ownership mechanism
- Consolidate professional planning staff currently dispersed in different agencies, and empower the Department of Planning & Economic Development
- Reintroduce Downtown Manager position
- Organize within Brazilian community and among minority groups, and connect businesses to regional ethnic merchant groups
- Continue façade improvement program and assist businesses with signage compliance
- Tailor and expand technical assistance support for immigrant businesses

Clearly, supporting the organization of the immigrant business community and coupling technical assistance with all financing programs are key aspects to any incremental approach. It is important to restate that micro-loan, façade renovation, and signage assistance programs have been attempted by town planners. Unfortunately, these initiatives have met communication challenges, and so it is important to establish improved relations with the business community to restructure the programs in an effective manner. A continued policy of minimizing barriers to entry is also necessary to support business development. Lastly, town stakeholders and the immigrant business community would have to collaboratively navigate cultural differences for an equitable development model to be successful. For example, an active street life is commonly important to immigrant groups, but this idea is almost antithetical to suburban life.

An equitable development model for downtown Framingham that utilizes an incremental approach to build on the local immigrant economy would certainly face financing challenges. Securing funding for required improvements is difficult in the highly competitive environment in

which multiple municipalities are fighting over limited resources. Framingham does have Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds that can be utilized for streetscape improvements. Tax increment financing, although currently used towards the Arcade Project's implementation, can also be applied to support community control of property and infrastructure improvements. Similarly, development impact fees controlled by the Planning Board can be applied to infrastructure and business support initiatives. Local officials also cited Chapter 90 funding for transportation improvements, the state's Community Development Action Grant Program (CDAG) for general economic development, and targeted private financing. In addition, the Main Street Program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation offers a proven model for commercial revitalization that, unlike other federal programs, is based upon incremental change and so requires fewer resources and less capacity from the outset. The program is based on the synergy among local organization and physical and economic improvements, and emphasizes community involvement and business retention.

In addition, Framingham would benefit from new planning approaches and/or institutional structures through which to create and implement projects based on equitable development principles. Planning *with*, as opposed to *for*, diverse groups is critical for balancing the competing interests of constituents (James 2000). Formal structures can take the form of a socially responsible private developer, community development corporation (CDC), government redevelopment authority, or a public-private partnership.

Clearly, widespread acceptance of a revitalization model based on equitable development principles requires a major paradigm change. In the case of Framingham, rather than seeing the immigrant community as a societal burden or passive recipient of welfare, this population needs to be understood in light of its potential as a key economic engine. This is certainly not a problem specific to Framingham, as immigrants in most places are largely undervalued as economic drivers. A paradigmatic shift, however, requires policies that support local ethnic economies. In an article for the national Main Streets Program, Donovan Rypkema makes an important distinction: "*Change and progress...are not necessarily synonyms. Change that is so rapid, change that is so dramatic in scale, change that is so mutating of the physical character of the neighborhood that it creates a widely felt damage to the sense of community is change that, in the composite, does not constitute progress. We need to have change in our neighborhoods, but we also need the time for adaptation and change*" (2003:2, emphasis in original). The point is

not that neighborhood change and business turnover are inherently negative, but that these processes need to be managed properly and with a concern for equity in implementation.

Furthermore, it is important to reemphasize the spatial and temporal dimension of immigrants' success. Critical social networks and economic considerations, such as customer attraction and economies of scale, depend upon the commercial concentration of these businesses. The removal of the existing upper floor Arcade units is thus quite damaging, and the continued availability of such affordable, small, and flexible commercial units is critical to the viability and growth of these businesses. The town must also recognize that an immigrant business community requires time to develop to a point at which it serves non-ethnics. The Brazilian businesses in Framingham are at a relatively early stage in development, and so require technical and financial support to expand beyond their current insular economy.

## **B. THEORY VS. PRACTICE**

A key underlying theme throughout this thesis has been the disconnect between planning theory and application in the case of the Arcade Project. How can a development that includes mixed-use, high density, historic preservation, affordable housing, and transit-oriented development be bad for downtown Framingham? Indeed, according to the project's site plan review documentation, "The Romney Administration [the state government] has focused a great deal on the promotion of 'smart growth' to curb the advance of suburban sprawl and the environmental and economic constraints that can follow. This Project is *the epitome of an ideal smart growth development* as defined in State initiatives in that it reuses a previously developed site, it does not require extensive infrastructure improvements or extensions, it is proximate to existing public transportation, and it has a strong economic and housing connection" (Section 7: 19, emphasis added). It is also important to note that the project's Community Impact Assessment fails to mention anywhere that existing businesses will be displaced by the project.<sup>2</sup>

Following the findings in this thesis, I believe that there is a disconnect here between theory and application, arising from the profession's roots and heavy emphasis on design and the economic bottom-line over the social fabric of a place. From urban renewal to present-day gentrification projects, physical planning and mainstream economic interests—rather than those of local populations, as described herein—have dominated the discourse on community

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<sup>2</sup> This document does briefly describe the required demolition of three homes on site.

revitalization. In this paradigm, the value of social dynamics and networks are often mere after-thoughts.

Recent movements such as smart growth and New Urbanism, which have mobilized to combat suburban sprawl in the name of place-based planning, have employed laudable principles but have not always succeeded in protecting local communities. These groups seek to concentrate housing, infrastructure, transportation, and other development that otherwise contribute to sprawl. Although they look in part to the work of Jane Jacobs and her focus on place-making and the social aspects of planning, her concepts have been partially misinterpreted and misapplied in this context. The idea that development can build a sense of place through the built environment is quite different than Jacobs' argument that neighborhoods are much more than physical structures. Rather, they are social interactions and networks that cannot be easily created but must develop organically over time (Jacobs 1961). Though major projects and drastic change may have their time and place, when a locale such as downtown Framingham has developed economic and social assets organically, why change this so dramatically? It thus seems that the credible principles of smart growth can be appropriated to promote projects that are damaging for local communities.

Another example of this phenomenon is a major redevelopment project in the Assembly Square district of Somerville, a city directly outside Boston. In order to encourage much-needed development in this area, the city passed an amendment to its zoning bylaws that allows an expedited approval process (no public appeal required) for projects that include an "accompanying use" property elsewhere in the city. Meanwhile, identical properties without an accompanying use are subject to a more rigorous, special permitting review. A group of abutters brought the case to the state's land court, which ruled in their favor. The court cited three key reasons for its decision: treating two like properties differently violates state zoning's uniformity clause; there is no rational basis for expediting the approval of one property based on the existence of an accompanying use property; and the invalid distinction circumvents standard public processes.<sup>3</sup> The city, on the other hand, has argued that it has a rational basis for the expedited review because the amendment promotes smart growth principles. In other words, the

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<sup>3</sup> The case—Louana H. Evarts, Eric Spencer and Wendy Vincent vs. the City of Somerville, Mayor of the City of Somerville, Aldermen of the City Of Somerville, et al—is now pending review by the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court.

city is trying to utilize concepts to which most professionals adhere in order to circumvent public review of a major development project. If successful, the amendment would strip the public's right to challenge a project's impact on abutting properties, services, and infrastructure. This case is quite complex and certainly requires additional research, but its ramifications are already apparent: although the redevelopment of Assembly Square and promotion of smart growth principles are laudable, these concepts should not be applied to evade a public process and cannot be used in an unlawful manner.

The case of Assembly Square underscores a major lesson of the Arcade Project, namely, the critical importance for planners to be vigilant about theory versus practice. Many concepts are desirable per se, and oftentimes these same concepts are quite damaging in application. As a result, a rigorous understanding of the local context through the lens of equitable development is paramount—and this understanding needs to account for social and institutional dynamics as well as physical, economic, and political considerations.

### **C. REFRAMING FRAMINGHAM**

With the Arcade Project quickly approaching its construction stage in spring 2006, there have been some promising recent developments. Per the Planning Board's mandate, Mr. Perry met with tenants in April 2006 to formally provide them with information for the first time in several years. At this meeting, tenants expressed frustration with the project and the process. The *MetroWest Daily News* told the story of Sebastiao Oliveira, a 62-year-old Brazilian business owner of a clothing store: “‘They said we have to go, but I have nowhere to go,’ said Oliveira, tears filling his eyes. ‘This is my business, and this is where I live because I can't afford to rent another place. I'm 62, I have cancer and diabetes. I can't start all over again. There are nights that I cry. Where am I going to go?’”(Mineo 2006). Present indications are that the rehabilitation on the existing space will begin in December 2006, meaning that tenants will have to vacate by November 2006 (Ibid). Although meetings such as this one cannot compensate for years of neglect, at least some communication has been initiated. Meanwhile, at the behest of Ms. Paixao and a few business owners, the tenants met beforehand to discuss their interests and explore potential strategies. This group plans to continue to meet over the next several months to explore ideas such as finding shared space for displaced tenants, in order to address their primary concern of recreating the commercial cluster in the Arcade building. Another sign that the

immigrant community may be organizing occurred on May 1, 2006, when downtown businesses did not open as part of the national “A Day Without Immigrants” demonstration in response to the ongoing federal immigration policy debate.

In addition, and perhaps as a result of the interviews conducted for this thesis, members of the Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, and Department of Planning and Economic Development are now paying more attention to the needs of displaced tenants. Unfortunately, because the project will likely be financed entirely by private sources, Mr. Perry has no obligation to provide financial assistance for relocation costs.<sup>4</sup> The town has stated that it does not have funds available to defray any relocation costs. An interesting test for town-immigrant relations will be the expiration, in October 2006, of the grandfathering of nonconforming uses of the town’s signage bylaw. Achieving compliance poses a significant challenge, but simultaneously a real opportunity.

Meanwhile, the gentrification-based model for revitalization is being implemented. It is favored by many stakeholders because it facilitates the identity change for downtown that they seek, whereas continued incremental improvements based on equitable development principles would result in a strengthening of the existing, immigrant identity. Is this a problem specific to Framingham, or do preconditions exist elsewhere that might lead to the revitalization paradox in other urban and suburban locations across the U.S.?

A cursory review of newspaper articles and literature over the past year turns up a range of stories that resemble that of Framingham. In the East Boston neighborhood, some Latino business owners fear that “they might be victims of their own success” because the rapid rise in rent levels and property valuation could displace their businesses and customer base (Borges-Mendez et al 2005: 41). In the Washington Heights neighborhood of New York City, Dominican entrepreneurs have played a key role in reversing the disinvestment in the South Bronx by creating jobs, providing needed goods and services, and improving the physical appearance of storefronts (Guarnizo 1992). However, recent reinvestment and rent speculation have priced out many of these businesses from their commercial space (Ibid). In Freeport, New York, a suburban community on Long Island, a diverse group of immigrants who have revitalized the commercial district through business formation are facing the potential of displacement from a new artists’

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<sup>4</sup> If the Arcade Project had received public funds, it would have been subject to Massachusetts General Law Chapter 79A §3, which mandates the provision of relocation assistance to the displaced, as well as Chapter 79A §4, which mandates the submission of a relocation plan for projects displacing five or more dwelling or business units.

live-work space and residential complex (Lutz 2005).<sup>5</sup> In Danbury, Connecticut, Ecuadorian and Brazilian immigrants, among others, organized a march in June 2005 to draw attention to their contribution to downtown revitalization and recent attacks on their growing presence (Yardley 2005). In Silver Spring, Maryland, local planners have expressed concern about the impact of a planned mixed-use development on Latino businesses, which have filled numerous vacancies in the area (Goodno 2005). In Richmond, Virginia, following more than 20 years of (mostly unsuccessful) city attempts to revitalize downtown through large-scale projects, new residential and commercial development initiatives are threatening to displace ethnic entrepreneurs largely serving a low-income African-American population (Bass 2005). And in Denison, Iowa, Pulitzer Prize-winning writer Dale Maharidge (2005) profiled the city's ongoing struggles to manage community development amidst tensions between a growing Latino population and longtime white residents. A nascent Mexican and other Latino business community, combined with the influx of new shoppers, has contributed to interest in redevelopment of the city's main commercial district. Local government, however, has been more concerned with business attraction than retention, and minority groups lack representation to champion their interests (Ibid). These examples certainly suggest that Framingham is not an isolated case, but rather emblematic of a broad national trend. Thus, the key question is whether "older suburbs [can] accommodate these new ethnic groups, or will outmoded decentralized government structures and prejudice keep them hidden *baja del agua*—underwater? Will these new populations revitalize the dream and energize suburbia to change once again?" (Baxandall 2000: 250).

Downtown Framingham is experienced differently by diverse groups, usually along class and ethnic divisions. While some see the immigrant population as a thriving economic and social community, others see blight and foreignness. In the words of Ms. Bartolini, the Planning Department Director, "There are more Brazilian flags downtown than American, and that doesn't send a good message." Ms. Bernstein of the Planning Board said, "Everyone uses buzzwords of revitalization, which means different things for different people—either physical improvements or getting rid of Brazilians." Clearly, the rhetoric in town demonstrates that the competing meanings of revitalization have yet to be reconciled.

A development such as the Arcade Project can possess all of the ideal characteristics according to prevailing planning doctrine. That does not mean, however, that it is the right

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<sup>5</sup> For a broad discussion of Freeport and similar Long Island suburbs, see Baxandall and Ewen 2000.

project for downtown Framingham. Ultimately, the responsibility of planners, local government officials, and community and economic development practitioners is to consider their local context through the lens of equitable development principles, prior to initiating new projects. Only with this knowledge can an appropriate model for revitalization—based on local realities rather than theories—be identified and pursued.



## MAP OF DOWNTOWN FRAMINGHAM AND ROUTE 9 COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS

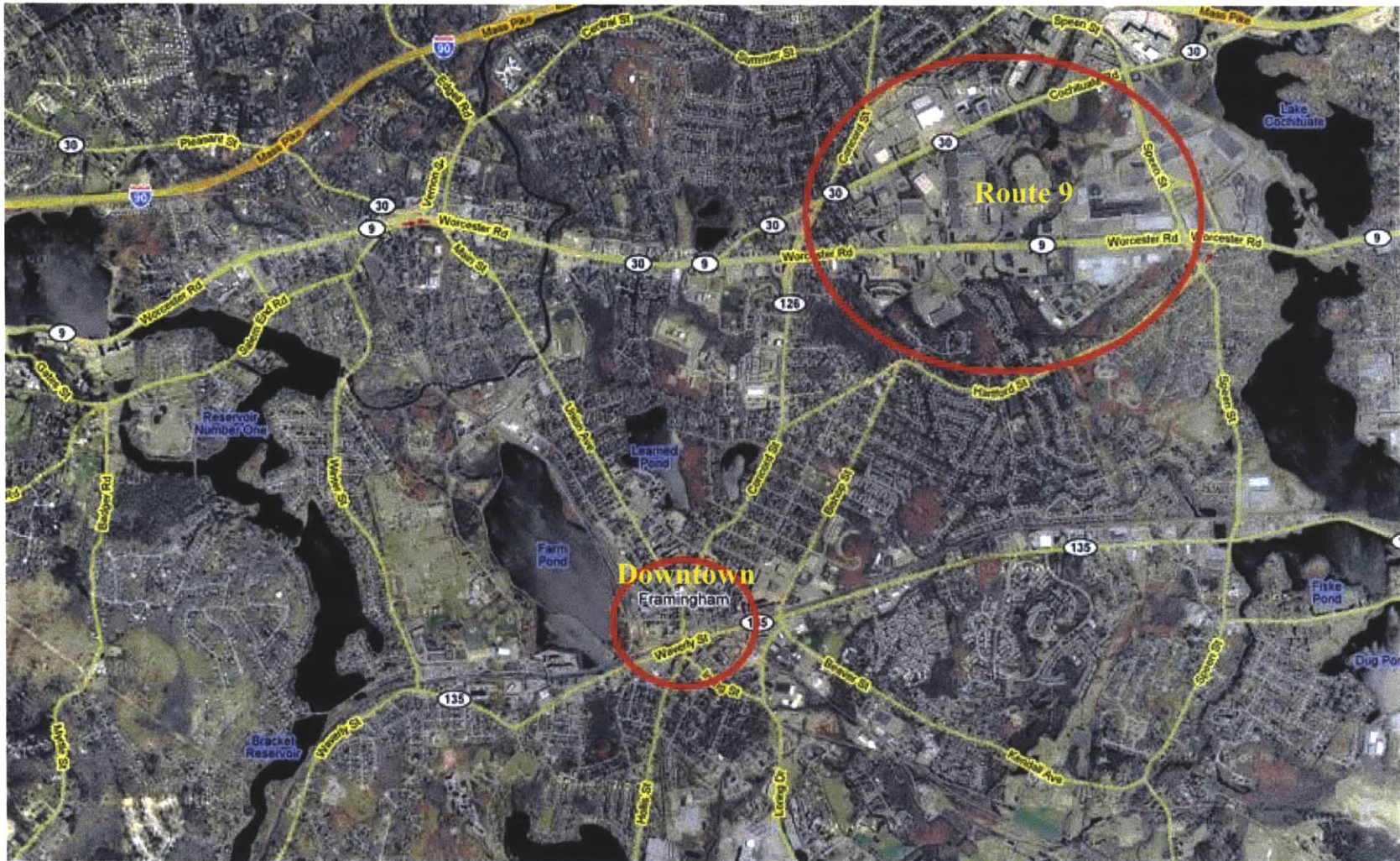
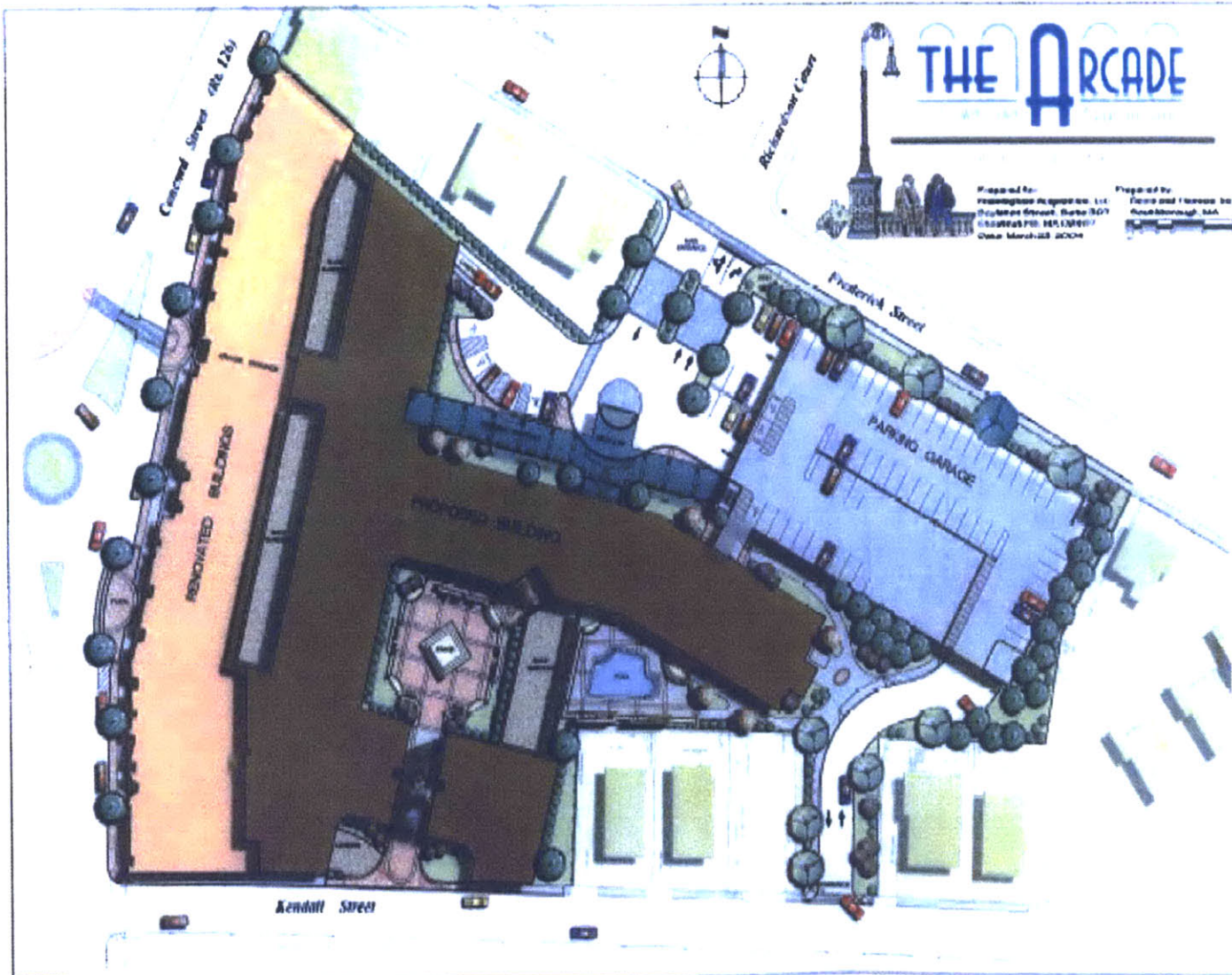


Image courtesy of Google Maps.



# ARCADE PROJECT PLAN





**PHOTOGRAPHS OF DOWNTOWN FRAMINGHAM**

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The Memorial Building (Town Hall) in the center of downtown.



The Arcade building.





The Amsden building.



The Prindiville building.





The ground-floor interior space of the Arcade building.



The upper-floor interior space of the Arcade building.





Example of storefront improvement implemented by longtime business owner.



Example of open space improvement at the Downtown Common.



## **LIST OF INTERVIEWS**

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Kathleen Bartolini, Director, Department of Planning & Economic Development, 1/25/06.

Susan Bernstein, Member, Planning Board, 3/24/06.

Jeff Buck, Founder, Concerned Citizens and Friends of Illegal Immigration Law Enforcement, 3/2/06.

Fernando Castro, Owner, Income Tax Plus owner, 3/10/06.

Carla Fink, Director, START Framingham Partnership, 1/17/06.

Arthur Fitts, President, Fitts Insurance, 3/15/06.

Sharon Gartenberg, former Member, Town Meeting Standing Committee on Planning and Zoning, 3/12/06.

Jay Grande, Director, Planning Board, 2/17/06.

Ron Isaacson, Managing Director, The Fabric Place, 2/6/06.

Holly Johnson, Planner, Beals and Thomas, Inc., 3/28/06.

Rebecca Justice, President, Framingham Civic League, 1/26/06.

Evan Lebson, Vice President, Genzyme Corporation, 1/30/06.

Helen Lemoine, Director, Leadership MetroWest, 3/11/06.

Reverend J. Anthony Lloyd, Greater Framingham Community Church, 3/15/06.

Laura Medrano, League of United Latin American Citizens, 2/21/06.

Liz Mineo, Reporter, MetroWest Daily, 2/13/06.

Katie Murphy, former Chair, Board of Selectmen, 2/21/06.

Officer Chris Murtagh, Framingham Police Department, 3/6/06.

Ilma Paixao, Director, Brazilian American Association, 3/1/06.

Michael Perry, President, Framingham Acquisitions, LLC, 2/1/06.

Lily Pollans, Planner, Department of Planning & Economic Development, 2/10/06.

Mark Rosen, Phoenix Commercial Real Estate, 2/10/06.

John Stasik, Vice Chair, Board of Selectmen, 3/10/06.

Alison Steinfeld, Assistant Director, City of Waltham Planning Department, 4/13/06.

Sam Swisher, Department of Planning & Economic Development, 2/17/06.

Glen Weisbrod, Chair of Framingham Downtown Revitalization and Economic Development Industrial Corporation, 2/10/06.

Kimbra Wellock, Planner, Department of Planning & Economic Development, 2/10/06.

Ted Welte, President, MetroWest Chamber of Commerce, 2/8/06.

John Zucchi, Town Finance Committee, 2/13/06.

25 Brazilian and other immigrant business owners of the Arcade building, 3/3/06 and 3/10/06.

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