

Commercial Revitalization in Union Square:  
An Analysis of Main Street Applied to a Multi-ethnic Business District

by

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B.A. in Communication  
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Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master in City Planning

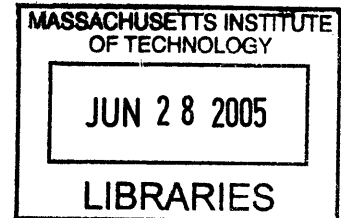
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June 2005

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ABSTRACT

Urban neighborhoods in the United States have a rich composition of ethnicities within their population and their business community. Understanding that ethnic business owners need to be integrated in commercial revitalization efforts is not only important but is also necessary. Immigrant and ethnic groups are growing at a fast rate in the United States, and entrepreneurship continues to be one of the most viable options for their economic mobility.

This thesis explores how diversity can be utilized as an asset within the organizational and promotional efforts of commercial revitalization initiatives. Specifically, it addresses how to broaden participation and how to integrate ethnic business owners in the development and implementation of revitalization efforts. It also discusses how to utilize ethnic diversity as a promotional tool to strengthen the image of a district and broaden the appeal of an area. This thesis draws on lessons and effective practices from a literature review and from the analysis of two case studies, Hyde Jackson Square Main Street and Sunset Park 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue BID. It concludes by providing specific recommendations to Union Square Main Street on how to best integrate the district's rich diversity in its revitalization efforts.

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## Acknowledgements

I first want to thank the Union Square Main Street association for supporting me and allowing me to attend several of their meetings. I especially want to thank Mimi Graney for always being so kind to share information. I also want to thank the rest of the USMS Board for taking the time to talk to me and sharing information on Union Square. I hope this thesis is helpful to you.

I also want to thank all the business owners in Union Square who allowed me to interview them. Their insights and ideas have been invaluable throughout the entire process. I want to give a special thanks to the owner of *Ricky's Flower Market* for giving me a 'good luck thesis plant' that made my work space much livelier.

My most sincere thanks to all the people I interviewed for the case studies in Hyde Jackson Square and Sunset Park for being so open with me in sharing the challenges and opportunities they face.

I want to thank my thesis advisor, Karl Seidman, for always providing me with timely and constructive feedback, and for guiding me throughout the entire process. Thanks to my reader, Susan Silberberg, for giving me great suggestions on how to improve my thesis after the first draft.

Great thanks to my awesome PENN crew, the OLN chicas, SCCers, salsa DUSPers, mis boricuas queridos and all my lovely friends from all parts of life who have made me take study breaks when I needed them the most, and give me a million reasons to smile everyday.

Most of all, I want to thank my family for being the absolute best support network I could ever wish for and always being my biggest cheerleaders. Mami, Papi, Panchi y Moni-¡son lo mejor del mundo!

Finalmente, quiero darle gracias a Ita por ser mi ángel guardián. No sabes lo mucho que me hubiese gustado que me vieras graduarme de MIT, pero se que estás conmigo y que siempre me cuidas desde allá.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

“The commercial district is the living room of a neighborhood. If it’s not healthy and safe no one will want to hang out there, ultimately impacting the community”.

*Founding Member of Hyde Jackson Square Main Street*

Healthy commercial districts play a vital role in the attractiveness and livability of urban neighborhoods. They help maintain and attract investment and jobs, directly contributing to the bottom line revenues of an area. A healthy district also contributes to the quality of life of nearby community members by providing them with more options for goods and services. More importantly, these districts fulfill an important civic function by providing a ‘living room’ space where community members can congregate and connect. As with any house, if the living room is not appealing or safe the neighborhood will not be seen as desirable.

It is no surprise that commercial revitalization has emerged as a community and economic development priority in the last decades. Various revitalization models have been implemented in cities and neighborhoods across the United States, most notably Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and the Main Street model. BIDs function within a legally constituted district where property owners pay a special tax or assessment to cover the costs of services or facilities for which the district has particular needs. The BID model provides an organizational and funding structure, but does not provide a framework for revitalization strategies. The Main Street model, on the other hand, is a public-private partnership that takes a comprehensive and incremental approach to revitalization. It provides a flexible framework to address local needs under four broad areas: (1) organization; (2) promotion; (3) design; and (4) economic restructuring.

Although both models present different challenges and opportunities, one important shared characteristic is their lack of attention towards ethnic communities. Immigrant and ethnic groups continue to grow at a fast rate in the United States, and entrepreneurship continues to be one of the most viable options for their economic mobility. It is therefore

crucial that commercial revitalization models take into account how these groups differ from non-ethnic business communities and how strategies can be modified to address the needs of a multi-ethnic business district. From an organizational standpoint, it is important to address how to broaden participation and integrate ethnic business community members into the development and implementation of revitalization efforts. Similarly, it is important to understand how to utilize ethnic diversity as a promotional asset to strengthen the image of a district and broaden the appeal of an area.

Many urban neighborhoods are grappling with this issue. Union Square in Somerville, MA is one of them. In February 2005, the Union Square Main Street organization was created with the goal of increasing the vibrancy of the neighborhood by enhancing the business district. As Somerville's oldest commercial district, Union Square has a rich history of being an entry portal for immigrant groups and continues to play that role. The presence of immigrants is noticeable through the lively streetscapes that reflect ethnic-specific services and products and the organizations that serve the diverse population of the area. Today the languages spoken by business owners and customers include Portuguese, Haitian-Creole, Spanish, Hindi and several Asian languages, among others. This thesis looks at how commercial revitalization models can be successfully applied to such a multi-ethnic community with the hopes that it will be useful to Union Square Main Street and other districts confronting similar issues.

Organizing business owners across different ethnicities is not an easy task. Traditional outreach and communication strategies might not necessarily work due to language and cultural barriers. In addition, practitioners working in multi-ethnic neighborhoods have to deal with mistrust and other contextual influences that might be present in the district. This thesis seeks to provide ideas on how to integrate ethnic business owners in the organization leading the revitalization efforts. It also provides recommendations on how to communicate the program benefits to engage the ethnic business communities and get them to buy into the project. Diversity in a commercial district can also be used as an effective promotional tool. This thesis highlights several examples where tying the



identity of a district to the ethnic character of the area has proven to be successful in attracting a wider customer base and gaining a competitive advantage.

A fundamental starting point in this thesis is that diversity, if treated properly, can be a great asset to a business community in the context of commercial revitalization efforts. This thesis will further explore how this asset can be leveraged.

### Guiding Research Questions

Because commercial revitalization is inherently a place-based strategy, this thesis focuses primarily on investigating case studies of areas that have dealt with this issue in the past. It also focuses on analyzing Union Square, a district that is in the process of defining its revitalization efforts. The main findings from the case studies and the literature review are captured in a list of effective practices or recommendations, and are tied to two guiding research questions:

How can a multi-ethnic business district:

- (1) ensure inclusion and representation of different ethnic business groups in the leadership organization overseeing the revitalization efforts?
- (2) utilize diversity to form an identity or image that will appeal to a larger customer base and will help spur incremental economic activity?

### Audience

There are two main audiences for this thesis. The first is the Union Square Main Street organization. Through an analysis of their commercial district and other case studies, this thesis seeks to provide specific recommendations on how to utilize the great diversity of their district as an asset. The second audience is composed of practitioners who work on revitalizing multi-ethnic commercial districts. This thesis is aimed at helping them recognize issues that might come up in their practice, and give them ideas on what strategies they could pursue to be more effective.

## Research Areas and Methodology

There are three main research areas outlined in this thesis. The first is a compilation of secondary sources reviewing relevant academic and practitioner literature. The second records information collected through mostly primary research on two case studies of commercial districts that are similar to Union Square, and are organized under the Main Street model or a BID. The third is an analysis of Union Square utilizing data from primary and secondary sources.

### *Literature Review*

The literature review was conducted by utilizing secondary sources in academic and practitioner books and journals dealing with the following four topics:

1. Commercial district revitalization including the Main Street model and Business Improvement Districts.
2. The emergence of ethnic entrepreneurship and characteristics that define ethnic business owners.
3. Frameworks in organizational design literature that address issues of representation and mistrust.
4. Two case studies recorded by practitioners: Fruitvale in Oakland, CA and District del Sol in St. Paul, MN.

### *Case Studies of Districts Similar to Union Square*

I conducted primary research on two commercial districts: Sunset Park in Brooklyn, NY and Hyde Jackson Square in Boston, MA. Case studies were selected based on their demographic profile and their experience with revitalization initiatives. Sunset Park is organized under a BID while Hyde Jackson Square is organized under the Main Street model. Most of the information in this section was obtained through interviews with current and past program directors and key founders of the revitalization programs in place. I conducted five interviews in total, three for Hyde Jackson Square and two for Sunset Park. The names and titles of all the interviewees are included in Appendix A. I also utilized secondary sources such as census data, newspaper articles, promotional

materials, websites, annual reports and surveys conducted and managed by the respective organizations.

### *Union Square*

The research on Union Square is divided into three categories:

#### 1. Demographics and Business Inventory

In order to get a better understanding of the demographics and commercial characteristics of Union Square, I collected data from the U.S. Census, City of Somerville and Urban Land Institute, among others. I also drew information from data recorded in the Union Square Master Plan and the Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Area Plan (NRSA), completed in 2002 and 2003 respectively.

The business inventory was created using a combination of primary and secondary data. It is based on the boundaries set by Union Square Main Streets for the Central Business District or CBD. I first utilized assessors data from the City of Somerville to determine the square footage of the buildings located in the CBD. I then determined the square footage, industry type and the profile (ethnic or non-ethnic) of each business based on field observations. The completed business inventory together with a more detailed explanation of the methodology utilized is included as Appendix B.

#### 2. Union Square Main Street

Most of the information on the Union Square Main Street organization was gathered through formal interviews and informal conversations with the Executive Director and several Board Members. During the months of February and March 2005, I was able to attend several committee meetings to learn more about the goals and objectives of the organization. In addition, I interviewed two individuals who work or had worked at the Planning Department in the City of Somerville to gain their perspective on Union Square and the Main Street program. Finally, I gathered information from several secondary sources including promotional materials and meeting handouts.

### 3. Business Owners

All of the information on Union Square business owners was obtained through primary research. Throughout the month of March 2005, I was able to interview fifteen business owners. All interviews were conducted in the business owners' stores and were face-to-face. The interviewees were mostly chosen at random, and represent the wide-array of ethnicities found along the district. Most interviews were conducted in English except for four that were either fully conducted in Spanish or a mix of Portuguese and Spanish.

#### Thesis Outline

This chapter, **Chapter 1**, provides the framework and guiding research questions that direct the rest of the thesis. **Chapter 2** reviews relevant literature on commercial revitalization, ethnic entrepreneurship and organizational design, and draws important lessons from each. In addition, it reviews two case studies recorded by practitioners on districts that have directly addressed and integrated ethnicity into their revitalization efforts. **Chapter 3** takes the list of lessons and effective practices started in Chapter 2 and builds on them through a case study review of Hyde Jackson Square Main Street and Sunset Park BID, both commercial districts with a multi-ethnic character. **Chapter 4** introduces Union Square and provides a snapshot of the district's demographics and business composition together with a list of the main challenges and opportunities the neighborhood faces. It also includes a summary of the main findings from interviews conducted with business owners in Union Square. **Chapter 5** first discusses the efforts being undertaken by Union Square Main Street in the context of the lessons from all the previous chapters. It then finishes by giving the Union Square Main Street organization specific recommendations on how to leverage the ethnic diversity of the district in revitalization efforts, and provides some brief concluding remarks.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Urban neighborhoods in the United States have a rich composition of ethnicities within their population and their business community. Understanding that ethnic business owners need to be integrated in commercial revitalization efforts is not only important but is also necessary. Immigrant and ethnic groups continue to grow at a fast rate, and entrepreneurship continues to be one of the most viable options for their economic mobility. In addition, diversity in neighborhoods has proven to be an attractive draw to a larger customer base beyond the residential population surrounding the district. Understanding that diversity can be an asset rather than a barrier to revitalization is, therefore, crucial when deciding on strategies and tactics to follow.

The larger question is *how* can ethnicity be integrated and utilized. Practitioners have long recognized that actively involving merchants in the planning and implementation of revitalization efforts is an essential component for success. They have also recognized that marketing a district is a challenge in the face of growing competition from other districts and larger commercial centers. There are two case studies I was able to identify that document how ethnicity has been tied to revitalization strategies, but there is a need to continue building a 'best practices' list. The academic literature has mostly been focused on understanding the conditions and opportunities that drive ethnic groups to establish small businesses. It provides a good foundation for practitioners to understand the challenges faced by the groups to whom they are trying to reach out. The literature on organizational design, although not directly tied to revitalization models, provides an important framework for practitioners to understand the challenges and opportunities that arise when integrating multi-ethnic constituents into a planning process.

This chapter provides a literature review of the following topics:

- Commercial revitalization and the Main Street model.
- Ethnic entrepreneurship.
- Organizational design.
- Two case studies that integrate diversity in the revitalization efforts.

### Commercial District Revitalization

Commercial district revitalization fundamentally follows a place-based approach to economic development (Seidman, unpublished). It focuses on improving neighborhood conditions as a means of improving the well-being of its residents. The strategies of revitalization include improving the physical aspects of an area together with increasing the organizational capacity of the stakeholders involved. Ultimately, the focus is on improving the district. Critics of the place-based approach state that economic development strategies should be more people-based, and should directly focus on improving the well-being of the individuals by increasing their access to work opportunities and capital. Other critics argue that neighborhoods do not constitute economic entities around which economic development strategies should be tied because they are too vulnerable to regional forces (Teitz, 1989).

Despite the debate, commercial revitalization strategies have proven to work in many neighborhoods across the United States. One of the most successful is Main Street, a district management model within commercial revitalization strategies that is widely used. Besides providing background on the Main Street model, I will provide a brief overview of another district management model, Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), as one of my case studies follows a BID structure.

#### *Main Street Model*<sup>1</sup>

Introduced by the National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP) in 1980, the Main Street model is funded as a public-private partnership and provides a clear framework for commercial district revitalization. There are currently over 1,600 Main Street districts across the United States, 19 of which are in the Boston area. The philosophy behind the Main Street model rests on the idea that successful programs need to approach revitalization in a comprehensive and incremental manner. In other words, improving a district involves a series of projects that should build on each other over time.

Main Street focuses on addressing local needs under four broad areas, also called the Four Point Approach:

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<sup>1</sup> From [www.mainstreet.org](http://www.mainstreet.org).

- Organization: Creating the necessary organizational structures that allow for communication and consensus building amongst the stakeholders that have a role in the revitalization process including merchants, residents and government and civic leaders.
- Promotion: Developing marketing strategies and tactics to attract customers, potential investors, new businesses and local citizens to the area.
- Design: Enhancing the physical appearance of the commercial district by rehabilitating historic buildings, promoting new developments where appropriate and developing design guidelines.
- Economic Restructuring: Strengthening existing businesses and attracting new economic uses to fulfill unmet consumer demands.

Each of these areas is addressed, typically, by a separate committee formed by volunteers. Because Main Street relies mostly on volunteers, it requires less staff and financial capacity to be implemented than other district revitalization models do. The committees work with the Main Street Board of Directors and the Program Director.

The Main Street model is a strategic framework that can be tailored to meet the needs and conditions of an area. Its focus on promotional activities and physical improvements ensures revitalization efforts leverage some of the assets found in urban neighborhoods. It can certainly be adapted to leverage the ethnic character of neighborhoods and opportunities created by ethnic entrepreneurs. Yet, the model itself does not provide any guidance on how to do so. In addition, although the Main Street model approaches business revitalization from a broader perspective through the four point framework, it does not take a comprehensive approach at the neighborhood level. The model does not address housing, social or employment issues. It also does not take into account issues of public safety, a major concern in declining urban neighborhoods (Seidman, 2004).

### *Business Improvement Districts<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> From Lawrence O. Houston, *BIDs: Business Improvement Districts*.

Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) started in the 1970s as a way of strengthening the competitive positioning of traditional commercial cores in the face of declining customer demand. BIDs function within a legally constituted district where property owners pay a special tax or assessment to cover costs for services or facilities for which the district has particular needs. Assessments are based on property values and are meant to provide proportional benefits to the stakeholders involved. Once the BID is approved, participation is mandatory for all the individuals owning property within the designated district.

BIDs benefit from having a stable funding base that can be used to plan long-term projects. In addition, the constant funding stream allows BIDs to hire high quality staff whose job is to move along revitalization initiatives instead of relying on volunteers. The activities of the BID are usually defined locally as a result of a planning process. For example, the model provides an organizational and funding structure, but does not provide a framework for revitalization strategies presenting both an opportunity and a challenge. As would be expected, the BID model also does not provide any guidance on how to best integrate ethnicity into revitalization efforts.

Both the Main Street model and the Business Improvement Districts rely on the support of their business community to succeed, the former to recruit volunteers and the latter to gain enough support to approve the assessment. Therefore, the need to engage a diverse business community that characterizes many of the urban commercial areas found in the United States becomes essential. Both models are flexible enough to be tailored to utilize the assets and to meet the needs of a diverse business districts. Yet, what assets and needs do the ethnic business owners have that can form the basis for revitalization efforts in multi-ethnic commercial districts? The academic literature on ethnic entrepreneurship provides some insights into this question.

### Ethnic Entrepreneurship

In order to understand how to effectively integrate ethnic entrepreneurs in the revitalization efforts, it is fundamental to first understand some of the attributes that



define them. Academics have long been studying the reasons immigrants and members of ethnic groups pursue entrepreneurship. In addition, research studies point to several key characteristics shared by successful ethnic entrepreneurs that should be acknowledged, including the role co-ethnics play as customers and employees.

### *Defining Ethnic Entrepreneurship*

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language defines entrepreneur as “a person who organizes, operates, and assumes the risk for a business venture.” Given this definition, we could conclude that an ethnic entrepreneur is anyone who is involved in a business venture and claims an ethnic background or “a set of connections and regular patterns of interaction among people sharing a common national background or migration experience.” (Waldinger, Aldrich, Ward, 1990) This definition assumes that individuals will self-identify with an ethnic background. In addition, it concludes that immigrants can be defined under one ethnicity, an assumption that in many cases does not hold true. A Cuban person of Chinese descent provides an example that highlights the difficulties in reaching an agreement on what ethnic entrepreneurs or ethnic economies mean.

The complexities of identifying individuals and groups under an ethnic economy have been debated in the academic literature for several decades. Bonacich and Modell defined an ethnic economy as one in which the owners and employees are co-ethnics (1980). Wilson and Portes conceived the “enclave labor market” model characterized by the spatial clustering of numerous ethnic businesses and the employment of co-ethnics in these businesses (1980). Chaganti and Green presented a model in which ethnic entrepreneurship is defined by the levels of personal involvement of the entrepreneurs in their ethnic community instead of by their reported ethnicity (2002).

For the purpose of this thesis, I will refer to ethnic entrepreneurs as business owners who self-identify with an ethnic background. In most cases, these entrepreneurs employ co-ethnics although some do not employ other individuals. They also do not necessarily serve a co-ethnic market or provide goods and services connected to their ethnicity. I will

also use the term ethnic entrepreneurs instead of immigrant entrepreneurs as the former encompasses more groups and is more widely used in the academic literature.

#### *Entrepreneurship as Entry into Labor Market*

Most academics agree that self-employment patterns among different ethnic groups only make sense in the context of the constraints and opportunities these groups face. It is generally accepted that immigrants have demonstrated higher rates of entrepreneurship when compared to U.S. born individuals as an alternative to low-wage employment (Light 1984). In many cases, self-employment has proven to be an effective avenue for economic mobility for immigrant and ethnic groups after finding themselves in marginal economic positions. This is mostly true in the case of immigrants who are skilled but cannot enter the mainstream labor market due to language barriers or employers' hesitation to recognize foreign credentials. In many cases, the same skills will give immigrants a better return through self-employment than through the wage labor market. As Waldinger, Aldrich and Ward state "blocked mobility is a powerful spur to business activity." (1990, p.32)

#### *Characteristics of Successful Ethnic Businesses*

As with any business, human and financial resources are two important indicators of how successful an ethnic business will be. Human resources refer to the owner's education, work experience, skills and training. Financial resources include the owner's personal wealth and access to other funds from family, friends and, in some cases, from organizations, governments, banks and formal capital markets. In their study of the Cuban ethnic enclave in Miami, Portes and Bach found that the informal ties to other co-ethnics in the area helped many individuals find capital for their start-up businesses (1985). Furthermore, these connections helped the newcomers obtain reliable information about permits, suppliers and important practices to follow when setting up a business in the context of the area. The unusual combination of human, financial and social capital seemed to have spurred the strong Cuban enclave economy in Miami.

The industries in which small businesses operate also need to be taken into account. Industries in which economies of scale are low provide an opportunity for ethnic entrepreneurs to enter because natives, in general, stay away from them. These are characterized by long hours, year-round operations, readily available credit to customers and small volume sales (Waldinger, Aldrich, Ward, 1990). In addition, the technical barriers are low and provide a larger window of opportunity for immigrants to enter. Yet, as expected, these industries do not provide high financial returns. A study conducted about Latino entrepreneurs in Boston concluded that Latino businesses generate very modest profits and a limited number of jobs due to the nature of the industries they are in. It concludes that Latino businesses constitute “economic survival strategies rather than springboards to economic advancement.” (Levitt in Halter, 1995)

#### *Co-ethnics as Customers and Employees*

Immigrant communities have a special set of needs and preferences that are unique in the context of their new area. In most cases and particularly when the groups are still small, native firms do not want to incur the cost of learning how to cater to the specific needs of these communities. Therefore, it is no surprise that the initial market for ethnic businesses arises from the ethnic community they belong to. Ethnic entrepreneurs are presented with an opportunity to fulfill an unmet demand. These needs and preferences then create a social resource that can be exploited by co-ethnic entrepreneurs or a “protected market position.” (Aldrich, 1984)

Most small ethnic businesses that cater to co-ethnics involve some sort of connection with the communities’ homeland. Generally, the businesses that develop first are tied to food and culinary products. Businesses that provide cultural products such as newspapers, books and clothing are also quick to find a niche within their respective communities. Services specializing on helping immigrants adapt to their new area such as wire transfer stores, travel agencies, and legal and real estate services are also common (Waldinger, Aldrich, Ward 1990). Besides filling an unmet demand in the market place, the success of some of these businesses is also attributed to the desire of fellow co-ethnics to conduct business in their own language. In many cases, this is important

because they are still in the process of learning English, but in other cases it simply provides a way to stay connected to their country of origin. In addition, many immigrants would prefer to interact with someone that understands the issues they face and has the necessary knowledge to address them. For all these reasons, ethnic businesses that cater to the tastes and preferences of particular ethnic groups tend to generate a loyal customer base early on (Bates 1997).

Meeting the unique demands of an ethnic community can act as an initial business engine. Yet, in most cases, the growth potential for these businesses depends on expanding their customer base. An early study conducted in 1976 by Aldrich and Reiss of white, black and Puerto Rican businesses found that if businesses only stay bounded to their ethnic community their potential for growth is significantly limited. Ethnic enclaves or very high concentrations of ethnics in an area could be an exception. Practitioners need to understand that ethnic entrepreneurs may lack the knowledge, skills and access to capital needed to expand beyond their co-ethnic market, particularly if their employees are also co-ethnics. The challenge for practitioners then is to devise strategies that will help these businesses position themselves beyond their niche while still catering to the needs of the ethnic community they serve.

The success of a business also depends on the quality of workers employed. Securing hard-working, low-cost and loyal workers directly contributes to the health of a business. While it is common for native employers to face a shortage of native workers, immigrant employers seem to more easily find co-ethnics to employ. This is because immigrants tend to look towards the resources inside their own communities when denied access to the mainstream labor market. In addition, recent immigrants may simply favor employment in businesses ran by co-ethnics. It provides them with access to the labor market and with a familiar space to be in while they get acclimated to their new environment. Legal immigration status may also be a factor. A study of the Haitian community concluded that employees were attracted to Haitian businesses because of the 'family-type' of management and the flexibility given by their employers to arrange schedules and distribute duties (Halter, 1995). In addition, it provides an opportunity for

workers to acquire skills that might later lead them to establish their own businesses. Practitioners need to understand the important role ethnic businesses play in the economic advancement of the communities they operate in, and how it relates to a larger economy at the neighborhood or regional level.

Through entrepreneurship, members of different ethnic groups have found an effective avenue for economic mobility. Many immigrants turn to self-employment as a response to blocked opportunities in the mainstream wage market. The businesses they establish not only tend to serve an ethnic market niche that is not being addressed by the general market, but they also serve an employer function to other co-ethnics in the community. This heavy reliance on their co-ethnics as customers and employees may pose a barrier to getting them involved in commercial revitalization initiatives as their interactions with individuals outside of their ethnic community is limited. In addition, they might be reluctant to work within a multi-ethnic organization that includes groups with whom they have never worked with before and might not necessarily trust. These characteristics, among others, need to be acknowledged and considered when thinking about how to best integrate ethnic business owners in the organization overseeing the revitalization efforts.

### Organizational Design

Studies in social identity theory have consistently proven that human beings have a disposition to identify as part of an in-group and to see differentiations between their group and out-groups. Furthermore, studies have shown that during a process of evaluation in-group members are considered to be more trustworthy, cooperative and loyal than out-group members are (Brewer, 1999). In the context of commercial revitalization, it is then imperative to understand the boundaries that define the stakeholder groups involved in order to understand the organizational challenges and opportunities that will arise. For the purpose of this thesis, I will define groups based on ethnicity on the assumption that a shared history and language tends to have people identify with each other. In some cases, such as with Latino business owners, there are important divisions (Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, etc.) within what I will define as in-group (Latinos) that need to be taken into account.

Although there is no literature written on how to best integrate ethnicity from an organizational standpoint within the context of commercial revitalization strategies, several academics have address this issue in a broader context. Gray identified three factors that influence the success of having different groups work together that provide a good framework for discussion<sup>3</sup>:

- (1) The extent to which there is clear communication that the benefits of inter-organizational relations outweigh the costs.
- (2) The degree to which the appropriate stakeholders are selected to participate.
- (3) The impact of contextual influences such as community, history and racial dynamics.

### *Communicating the Benefits*

People will only get involved in revitalization efforts if the benefits of having them involved are clearly communicated. Furthermore, they have to realize that the benefits they derive (e.g. higher property values, more customers) outweigh their costs (e.g. time, resources). Although this is a simple concept, it is an easy one to forget in the midst of implementation.

Communication clearly plays a large role. There are several layers of complexity that arise when dealing with ethnic communities. Most importantly, language differences and cultural associations can act as barriers to communication. It is obvious why language might be a problem for non English-speaking business owners. Cultural associations, on the other hand, are much more complex. Ethnic business owners might view revitalization initiatives with skepticism, particularly when the government is involved, based on personal experiences in their country of origin or in the United States that are not shared with non-ethnic business owners. These issues should be identified and directly addressed when communicating the goals and objectives of revitalization efforts.

### *Selection of Participants*

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<sup>3</sup> Barbara Gray, *Collaborating: Finding Common Ground for Multiparty Problems*, 1989.

Selection of the “right” participants is a critical factor in determining the future success of an organization. Within the selection process two important dimensions need to be taken into account. First, participants should represent a diversity of interests (i.e. stakeholder groups) and should be diverse in terms of race and socioeconomic characteristics. Secondly, these participants should have the ability to act as representatives for the groups for which they speak.

Having a diverse group of participants should no longer be seen as a ‘politically-correct’ move. Diverse groups have been shown to be more effective at problem-solving and at increasing organizational effectiveness. Groups representing different opinions and ways of looking at challenges have proven to positively impact productivity and creativity in the private sector (Thomas and Ely, 1996). Teams composed of people with heterogeneous perspectives have been found to be more effective than people with homogeneous perspectives because they can access more resources and bring a broader range of skills to the table (Nemeth and Staw, 1989). Therefore, having a diverse organization becomes an indicator of future success.

Yet it is not enough to simply select people from diverse groups. The participants selected also need to be able to represent their respective groups’ interests and needs. To be effective, participants need to have sufficient levels of legitimacy and authority within both the group they represent and the organizational structure they participate in. They need to be an effective ‘bridge’ between the groups involved, a concept I will further explore in the case studies. Investing in finding and recruiting these individuals is worthwhile. Individuals with strong constituency ties know where to find resources, whom to recruit and what tactics to use in order to be successful (Morris, 1984).

### *Contextual Influences*

Contextual influences are probably the hardest to overcome in organizational design due to their complexity and, frequently, unspoken nature. These include racial and political

dynamics and the historical context of relationships among the groups involved. The most important issue that comes up in this context is trust.

The absence of trust is a precondition to conflict (Brewer, 1999). In addition, it can be an indicator of failure in the context of organizational design. Therefore, building trust amongst the groups involved is essential. Moore defines trust as “a person’s capacity to depend on or place confidence in the truthfulness or accuracy of another’s statements or behavior.”<sup>4</sup> Since trust issues are typically based on past experiences, the first step towards addressing the issue is to acknowledge it. From there, trust is usually built incrementally over time. Some tactics recorded by practitioners that have proven to work are as simple as: (1) making consistent congruent statements that are clear and do not contradict previous statements (Creighton, 1972); (2) exhibiting genuine concern to help other participants reach their objectives (Zartman and Berman, 1982); and (3) placing oneself in a subservient position in relation to another party so that they incur a minor risk (Pruitt, 1981).<sup>5</sup> In the context of commercial revitalization efforts, it is crucial that the organization leading the efforts be seen as genuinely interested in incorporating ethnic constituents and acknowledge the need to build trust and engage in trust building behaviors.

The literature on organizational design highlights the importance of representation and provides some answers on how to overcome issues of mistrust and communication amongst groups. Yet, there is a need to know how some of these strategies and others have played out in commercial revitalization efforts. Although there is limited literature on this specific topic, some practitioners have documented case studies that start to shed some light into the questions raised.

### Insights from Case Studies

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<sup>4</sup> Christopher W. Moore, *The Mediation Process: Practical Strategies for Resolving Conflict*, 1996, pp. 177.

<sup>5</sup> All the ones mentioned and a longer list of techniques for building trust can be found in Moore’s book cited above, Chapter 7.



Fruitvale in Oakland, CA and District del Sol in St. Paul, MN are two case studies that document how the ethnic diversity of a commercial district was used as an asset in revitalization efforts. Although neither case goes into great depth, both provide valuable insights on how to broaden participation and leadership to include the ethnic communities of these districts. In addition, they demonstrate that creating an image around ethnicity, in both cases a Latino image, can be a powerful way of attracting a larger customer base and positioning the neighborhood in a positive light.

#### *Fruitvale Main Street<sup>6</sup>: Oakland, CA*

Fruitvale is a low-income, multi-ethnic neighborhood in Oakland, CA that is predominantly Latino. The surrounding residential neighborhoods are densely populated, with more than 47,000 residents within a one-mile radius from the district.

The Main Street program in Fruitvale was born out of a four-year demonstration program launched in 1996 by the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) in conjunction with the Main Street Center. LISC was seeking to apply the Main Street model to beleaguered urban neighborhoods and chose Fruitvale as one of five focus areas around the country. The Unity Council, a non-profit community development organization, took the lead in organizing the revitalization efforts at a local level, and worked together with LISC on devising the strategies that would be implemented.

The representation of ethnic business owners in the revitalization efforts was addressed early on. LISC and The Unity Council were interested in building trust and forming coalitions among people with disparate interests, directly acknowledging the issues that come up in multi-ethnic neighborhoods where people might not be used to working together. To this end, the Main Street program conducted extensive one-on-one outreach to business owners and other stakeholder groups, and was able to attract more than 140 volunteers over the course of four years. The Main Street program also reached out to ethnic constituents by conducting training sessions in different languages and translating all materials. The involvement of LISC, a national and well regarded community

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<sup>6</sup> In LISC's *A Road Map to Revitalizing Urban Neighborhood Business Districts*, 2003.

organization, was incredibly helpful. The Main Street program was able to leverage the networks LISC had already established in the neighborhood to get a larger and more representative group of stakeholders involved in the revitalization efforts.

The Main Street program envisioned “ethnically and culturally diverse groups of people working together, responding to a regional Latino-oriented market.” To this end, they focused on events that leverage the “Latinoness” of the area such as the *Day of the Dead*. The annual Mexican holiday is the biggest event in Fruitvale and draws more than 75,000 people from all over the Bay Area. It features altars created by local artists and live performances by Latin musicians. Merchants record the day the event takes place as the busiest in the year. The *Day of the Dead* event is advertised through local radio stations and newspapers, and has become one of the main ways that people outside of Fruitvale learn about the area. It has been successful in reinforcing the Latino image of the district and in drawing new customers to the area.

Fruitvale’s effective practices include:

- Conducting one-on-one outreach to the business owners, and leveraging the networks already established by LISC.
- Offering materials and training sessions that were translated into Spanish.
- Recognizing the Latino draw the area had as an asset and leveraging it through its promotional efforts, specifically the *Day of the Dead* event.

#### *District del Sol Main Street*<sup>7</sup>

District del Sol (District of the Sun) is located in the West Side neighborhood of St. Paul, an ethnically diverse area that in 2000 was approximately half white, one third Latino and the rest a mix of Asians and blacks. Of the 45 businesses in the district, a significant number are owned by Latino business owners and specialize in Mexican food and retail products. Before the Main Street program was implemented, the district was already a destination for Latino shoppers and others seeking specialized Latino foods and products.

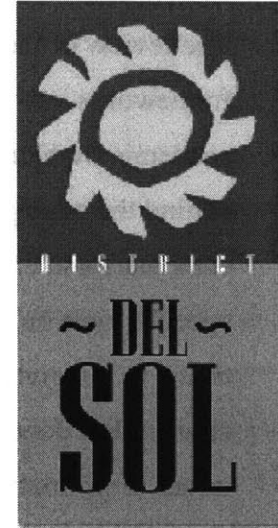
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<sup>7</sup> In Karl Seidman’s *Revitalizing Commerce for American Cities*, p. 59-64, 2004.

The Main Street program was established in 1998 as a response to an RFP submitted by the Twin Cities Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) to fund community development corporations to run commercial revitalization programs in their area. The Riverview Economic Development Corporation (REDA) was one of the organizations selected and became responsible for implementing the Main Street program in what would later become District del Sol.

From an organizational standpoint, REDA focused on consistent one-to-one outreach to the business owners in the area to get them involved in the revitalization initiatives and to build a strong volunteer base. In addition, REDA organized several monthly events including luncheons with speakers, networking breakfasts and after-hours social gatherings. They utilized these events to reach out to ethnic merchants and to overcome the cultural barriers that might get in the way of having all the stakeholders work together. In addition, the events served as an opportunity to get the merchants together and decide on a common vision for the district.

The Main Street program also focused on changing the image of the district to reflect a more positive and vibrant area. In early 1999, REDA launched a public awareness campaign meant to generate interest in the revitalization efforts. The campaign was created around asking “The West Side of What” question in an effort to start defining the district in a different way. In 2000 the Main Street program, with the help of a marketing consulting firm, renamed the district ‘District del Sol’. The new name clearly leveraged the Hispanic character of the area and solidified its position as a destination for people interested in Latino goods and services. The Main Street program also worked at creating a more positive and attractive image of the district through designing a new logo and installing banners along the commercial area with bright colors typically associated with Latin culture.



District del Sol's marketing efforts are also strongly connected with Latino-related events, specifically the *Cinco de Mayo* festival. The event, promoted as "Minnesota's Spiciest Celebration", features a series of activities that celebrate Mexican culture including a lowrider car show and a salsa eating contest. Over 100,000 people attended in 2004 from all over the city. The success and visibility of the event has helped strengthen the image of the district and gain the attention of the public and the private sector.

District del Sol's effective practices include:

- Conducting one-on-one outreach and organizing monthly events around topics of interests and networking opportunities to get the business owners involved.
- Renaming the district to present it in a more positive light and reinforcing its image as a Latino destination.
- Leveraging the Latino presence in the promotional efforts and particularly in the *Cinco de Mayo* festival.

### Conclusion

The review of the literature discussed in this chapter provides valuable insights and frameworks into the role ethnic diversity should play in the revitalization efforts. The academic literature on ethnic entrepreneurship helps practitioners understand the reasons behind the emergence of small businesses and the important role co-ethnics play as customers and employees. The organizational design literature starts to provide some specific tools on how to overcome issues of mistrust and communication barriers when trying to integrate ethnic business owners into the revitalization process. Finally, the two case studies documented by practitioners provide valuable effective lessons around the issues of promotion and identity formation. Still, there is a need to look at the issue more in depth. In the next chapters, I will attempt to build on the list of effective practices and tools by analyzing the Main Street program in Union Square Somerville and documenting two more case studies.

The case studies focus on highlighting how the organizations in charge of the revitalization efforts: (1) ensured diverse representation within the leadership group; (2)

communicated the benefits of the revitalization initiatives to engage ethnic business owners, fostering trust on the organization and the groups involved; and (3) utilized the ethnic character of their district to form an image and market it to a wider customer base.



## Chapter 3: Case Studies

The challenges Union Square faces on how to best utilize its rich diversity have been addressed by other districts beyond District del Sol and Fruitvale. This chapter focuses on two other cases. The first, Hyde Jackson Square, is a Main Street program in a Latino neighborhood in Boston. The second, Sunset Park, is a Business Improvement District in a Brooklyn neighborhood with a large immigrant community. Both cases highlight some of the challenges Union Square is facing and, in many cases, provide paths Union Square Main Street could undertake.

The information for the case studies was obtained through interviews with current and past program Directors and with some of the key founders. The questions were primarily tied to two research questions:

1. What challenges and opportunities they faced in getting the business owners organized in the context of their multi-ethnic districts, and what were the strategies they pursued to broaden participation?
2. How have they successfully leveraged their ethnic diversity to strengthen the identity of the district and to attract a wider customer base?

Each case study is organized by sections:

- **Business District Background** gives an overview of the demographics of the area and the retail mix of the district.
- **Main Street Program/BID** discusses the context in which each program was formed and the main challenges faced.
- **Organization** examines the composition of the Program Board and the strategies pursued to communicate the benefits of the program and to include ethnic business owners in the revitalization initiatives.

- **Promotion** focuses on understanding the process that was followed to decide on the identity for the district, and how successful they have been in leveraging ethnicity in their advertising and promotional efforts.

## ***Case Study 1: Hyde Jackson Square Main Street in Boston, MA***

### Business District Background

Hyde Jackson Square is a linear business district that runs along Centre Street from Columbus Avenue to the intersection with Boylston Street and with South Huntington Avenue. Of its 444,000 square feet of commercial space, about 50% is used by retail and services businesses while the remaining is mostly used for institutional purposes.<sup>8</sup> The vacancy rate is currently 2%. Most businesses in the retail and services industries are small independent merchants with an average number of employees per business of five. There are several large retailers including two grocery stores, Stop & Shop and Hi-Low Foods, which serve as anchors for the district. The district is rich in ethnic grocery stores and food markets with about half being Latino operated and owned.

The neighborhood has a rich history of being a diverse neighborhood. In the 1940s, the area was home to a large immigrant population including Irish, Italian, Jewish, Armenian and Greek residents together with a native black population. Like in many other neighborhoods, the 1960s sent Hyde Jackson Square into decline as many white families moved out to the suburbs. This, in turn, provided an opportunity for new immigrant families to establish in the neighborhood and change its demographic composition. In 2000, the population within a quarter of a mile of the district was 38% Latino, 35% non-Latino white and 21% black.<sup>9</sup> Although the neighborhood still exudes a strong Latino presence, particularly in Jackson Square, there are some tangible signs that gentrification is already taking place.

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<sup>8</sup> Hyde Jackson Square Business Survey Results. Completed in 2003.

<sup>9</sup> 2000 Census Data.



The district draws customers from the immediate neighborhoods and the Greater Boston area. A customer survey completed in 2004 concluded that 60% of the customers come from the residential neighborhoods surrounding the district while the remaining 40% come from other Boston neighborhoods. In terms of the ethnicity of the customers, 80% of the businesses reported having a customer base that is greater than 40% Latino. Approximately one-third of the employees in the district speak primarily Spanish, one-third primarily speak English and one-third are bi-lingual. Location is an important factor in the ethnic targeting of businesses. The businesses with a greater than 40% white clientele are all located within 1 block of the Hyde Square rotary while the businesses with a higher percentage of black clientele are all located in Jackson Square. The survey also found that most customers who come from areas outside of the neighborhood go to the district to shop at its wide variety of ethnic food shops and restaurants.<sup>10</sup>

### Main Street Program

Hyde Jackson Square Main Street (HJSMS) was started from the ground up. The area had been known to have a historically high level of activism, and the case of commercial revitalization did not prove to be an exception. Prior to the launch of the Main Street program in 1998, a group of business owners and residents had been working with the Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Development Association, a strong CDC in the area, for years in improving the district. They initially got together around the issue of safety. The idea to organize under a formal program grew out of feeling they needed to improve the infrastructure of the area and garner more support from the City in order to achieve their objectives. In their eyes, Main Street was the next logical step. They were familiar with the program and believed the incremental and comprehensive approach was the right one for their district.

One of HJSMS first key steps was to define the area of focus. Hyde Jackson was already on its way up and had a stable and more affluent residential base. On the other hand, Jackson Square still faced issues related to economic vitality, trash and safety. This led the leaders in the area to make a conscious decision to unify the squares along Centre

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<sup>10</sup> Hyde Jackson Square Customer Survey Results. Completed 2004.

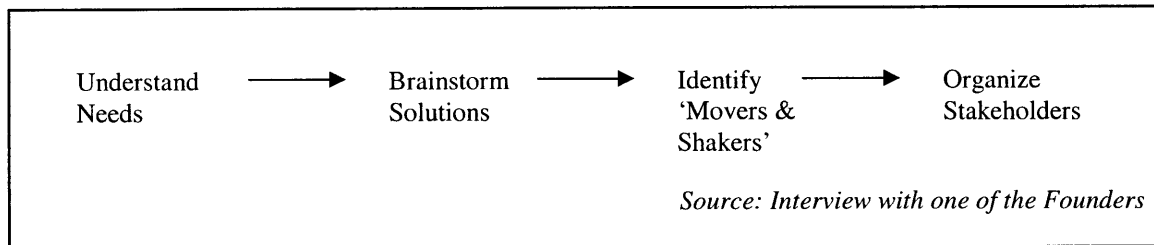
Street in order to have a larger impact. Since its implementation, the program has embarked on major projects including storefront renovation, trash control and heavy promotion among others. A key leader attributed the program's successes to its orientation towards keeping the stakeholders involved.

### Organization

Prior to the creation of HJSMS, key leaders in the area made sure they understood the needs and priorities of all the groups that had a stake in the district. They decided to create focus groups around several issues affecting the neighborhood including trash removal, safety, noise and parking. The focus groups were promoted through flyers, direct mailings and phone calls. The organizers kept the groups small in size, and created a space where the sectors that needed to be represented could participate. The focus groups were open to everyone and were not divided by ethnicity. In fact, the organizers felt strongly about not creating any differentiation between groups so early in the process. Anyone interested in the specific issue to be discussed was encouraged to attend.

The focus groups served a variety of purposes. Besides providing a space to assess needs, they were used to brainstorm ideas of possible solutions and interventions. In addition, they were used to identify the 'movers and shakers' of the area who, in the future, would serve an important role in the revitalization efforts. The uniqueness of this approach is that they identified the leaders in the process of identifying the needs and not the other way around as it is commonly done. This approach ensured inclusiveness and a wider representation of stakeholder interests from the start. Although the focus groups were not organized around ethnicity, they served the purpose of allowing members of different groups to express pride in their heritage and to feel their needs were being legitimized. Lastly and most importantly, the groups started building trust amongst the stakeholders involved by helping them see they were all working towards a common goal. At the end of the multiple focus groups they ran, the organizers were much better equipped to form an action-oriented board, create a strong organizational committee and begin the revitalization of Hyde Jackson Square.

Exhibit 1: *Focus groups process that preceded the formation of HJSMS*



### *Ensuring Diverse Representation on Board*

The HJSMS Board is representative of the area. It has a mix of Latino and non-Latino business owners, and a strong presence of individuals that both own a business and live in the neighborhood. Six out of ten Board Members are Latino, and four are business owners. Since Hyde Jackson Square has a strong Merchant Association, it became clear from the start that the HJSMS’s Board should include members of the association that were considered leaders in the community.

The recruitment of new members is usually based on personal connections, and interested individuals are designated to the Board by other members. One strategy that has proven to be highly successful for HJSMS is to involve a business owner in the Board that can act as a ‘bridge’ between the ethnic and non-ethnic communities. In their case, the organization was able to recruit the owner of a Latino restaurant that is well known in the neighborhood and serves both Latino and non-Latino customers. The restaurant owner was able to voice a wider array of interests based on first-hand knowledge, and enjoyed the credibility and support of the different stakeholder groups involved.

In addition, the Board has strong representation of the organizations and institutions that have historically been active in the area such as JPNDC and the Urban Edge Housing Corporation, presenting both an opportunity and a challenge. While the HJSMS Board is able to draw great lessons from the past civic experience of its members, it sometimes suffers from having a significant amount of individuals wearing “different hats”. Goals have not necessarily always been aligned creating some tension within the organization. For example, there was a situation where, due to the involvement of the CDCs in HJSMS

Board, the organization was getting pulled into affordable housing projects that were clearly outside of its scope and mission.

Still HJSMS's biggest challenge so far has been the retention of board members. As a result of intense work days and financial limitations to hire more employees, small business owners tend to be pressed for time. In Hyde Jackson Square, as in most other districts, the Main Street organization has had a hard time keeping these individuals actively involved. One way it is currently addressing this problem is by being upfront about the roles and responsibilities HJSMS Board Members have. It is planning on sending out a list of key tasks and a short evaluation to future prospective board members based on what other Main Street programs across the country have done (see Appendix C).

#### *Communicating Benefits and Engaging Business Owners*

One of the roles of any Main Street program is to engage business owners, among other stakeholder groups, in the implementation of the revitalization plans. Because there was a strong Merchant Association that was already active in the district, HJSMS was able to draw from their membership base of mostly Latino business owners.

The challenge was then to reach out to the non-Latino merchants. Many meetings in the past had been conducted only in Spanish due to the low participation of English speaking merchants, alienating the few that were interested in volunteering their time. HJSMS realized the English-speaking merchants had created informal and formal relationships with other organizations in the area, and decided to tap these networks. The message was clear: they had to work together to survive and turn around the area. Besides putting up flyers in English and Spanish and sending out mailings to all the businesses in the district, they focused on cultivating one-on-one relationships. The head of the Organization Committee walked up and down the district talking to business owners and encouraging them to join on a regular basis.

To this day, HJSMS believes one-on-one communication is without a doubt the most effective tool for recruitment and for building trust. It shows that HJSMS cares enough about the business owners to take the time and talk to them individually. Even when they send out mailings, a HJSMS representative follows-up by stopping by the businesses and asking what they thought about the materials received. Through these outreach initiatives, HJSMS established itself as the connector between the Latino and the non-Latino merchants, paving the way for the creation of a common vision.

Still, HJSMS is facing some challenges that have been harder to surpass in terms of engaging the stakeholders. Not all business owners see the district as a unified corridor, and cannot see how improving the area would benefit them. For example, when HJSMS approached restaurant owners about running a joint newspaper advertisement on all the different dining options in the district, many resisted. Although eventually they agreed to the joint campaign, the restaurant owners initially saw each other as competitors and could not envision the long-term benefits of promoting the area as a destination. It has also been harder to get the merchants that are in a more precarious financial situation to participate in the program. Although they are the ones that need the most help, it has been particularly difficult to get them to justify taking time out of their schedule to participate in HJSMS.

Retention of committee members has also been a problem. One of the current priorities for HJSMS is to better promote the accomplishments of the organization. They believe this is crucial in keeping people interested and excited about the organization. The storefront improvement initiative seems to have filled this role in the past by giving a tangible and visible sense that things were happening. In the future, the organization hopes to increase its brand recognition through decals in storefront windows and sponsorships in community events. HJSMS also runs annual meetings open to all business owners where the main accomplishments of the organization are presented. Finally, it is important to note that, unlike many other Main Street programs, HJSMS members do not pay an annual fee to participate. Although this allows for a low barrier to entry, it could also lead to lack of ownership and buy-in.

## Promotion

HJSMS is proud of the neighborhood's Latino heritage. Its signage shows palm trees and is painted in bright, tropical colors. Most of the events the organization sponsors have live salsa and merengue bands as the main attractions. The district's most successful advertisement was a story in *GQ Magazine* about how Pedro Martinez, pitcher of the Boston Red Sox at the time, frequented restaurants in the district for home-style Dominican food. HJSMS's mission statement even states that one of its goals is to preserve the Latino heritage in the area. Undoubtedly, the identity of the district is tied to Latin culture.

### *District Identity and Target Audience*

Leveraging the Latino identity in promoting the district was obvious to key players in HJSMS. After all, close to 40% of the residents in the surrounding neighborhood were of Hispanic descent and already represented a significant part of the customer base for the district. In addition, the Latin boom in early 2000 triggered by stars like Ricky Martin and Jennifer Lopez made all-things-Latin hip and trendy to mainstream America. HJSMS decided to pursue a dual marketing strategy catering to two target audiences based on ethnicity:

This bustling neighborhood offers great music shops, bodegas and a variety of locally owned restaurants. Walk around Hyde/Jackson Square and enjoy the many colorful storefronts. Relax on comfortable new benches, listen to Irish music at one of Boston's best pubs, try a Cuban sub or sip a cup of coffee while picking out a book by a local author at a local bookstore cafe.

*From HJSMS's website:  
<http://www.cityofboston.gov/mainstreets/hj.asp>*

- For Latinos, Hyde Jackson Square would be positioned as “el corazón de la vida Latina en Boston” (the heart of Latin life in Boston).
- For non-Latinos, Hyde Jackson Square would be positioned as a thriving multi-cultural district.

HJSMS's strategy has been successful in utilizing a distinct asset, ethnicity, to better position the district with its current customer base and with potential customers vis-à-vis competing commercial areas. It presents Hyde Jackson Square as a unique destination

because it has a great mix of Latino and non-Latino businesses. The strategy also inherently recognizes that what each target audience is looking for in the commercial district might not be exactly the same yet is compatible. To this end, HJSMS has worked with some merchants in helping them attract different target audiences. In the case of a Latino restaurant owner, HJSMS helped him understand how blocking the glass storefront with a refrigerator might be perceived as uninviting to non-Latino customers. Since then, the restaurant has created a menu in Spanish and English which includes descriptions of the Central American specialties they produce for those not familiar with the terms. These small changes have proven to be very successful. The restaurant is now one of the top destinations for both Latinos and non-Latinos in the area.

#### *Advertising and Events tied to Ethnic Identity*

Hyde Jackson Square has received great coverage in magazines with a wide reach such as *GQ* and *Boston Magazine*. The articles in both magazines highlighted the Latino flavor of the area by following the star pitcher of the Boston Red Sox, Pedro Martinez, to his favorite spots. The Program Director at the time was very proactive in following up with media sources that expressed interest in the neighborhood such as in the case of the *Boston Magazine* article. She also submitted two press releases to *The Boston Globe* that resulted in articles: one on the Caribbean fever for the Red Sox and the other on Hi-Low Supermarket's role as a destination for the Caribbean community.

As mentioned earlier, HJSMS has also worked to get the restaurants to do joint marketing in selling the district and running advertisements in local English and Spanish newspapers. In addition, it has utilized several communication vehicles created by Boston Main Street. The program Director was recently interviewed in the Main Street show in public access television. HJSMS also works with the businesses in the district to get special promotions that are highlighted in the *Shopping on Main Streets* business directory.

HJSMS has been very active in planning and sponsoring events. One of its most successful involvements is to sponsor together with other organizations in the area the

*Jamaica Plains World Fair/Feria Mundial* (see Appendix D). The large-scale street fair takes place in September, and in its 16<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2004 attracted up to 20,000 attendees from the surrounding neighborhoods and the Greater Boston area. It features three live music stages representing a wide range of styles including gospel, jazz, mariachi, funk, salsa, merengue and reggae. The event is promoted city-wide through radio and print advertising as “the city’s most diverse community event.” Artisans from all over the city display their crafts and restaurants sell ethnic foods. Local merchants get an opportunity to set up a table and display their products. The *World Fair/Feria Mundial* has been extremely successful in attracting people from outside the neighborhood to see what the district has to offer. In addition, it brings people from the neighborhood out to the street, fostering a sense of community within Hyde Jackson Square.

HJSMS also sponsors events that help foster relationships within the business community. For the last three years they have taken an active role in planning the *Don Juan Networking Gala*, an event started by a local business owner commemorating her father. The fundraiser event presents an opportunity for business owners to network with each other in a nice and relaxing setting. Each year a distinguished merchant is selected and awarded an honor. HJSMS works with the event planners to ensure both Latino and non-Latino merchants are awarded honors every year.

One important difference between HJSMS and other Main Street programs is that the promotional efforts have been folded under the Economic Restructuring Committee. Most of the advertising is managed by the Program Director while the events are managed by special task forces created for the specific projects.

#### Lessons and Effective Practices

The HJSMS case points to the following lessons and effective practices:

- A needs assessment exercise can be incredibly helpful in obtaining buy-in and building trust among the different stakeholder groups. In the case of HJSMS, the exercise proved to be successful strategy in identifying leaders across different



communities. In addition, it helped ethnic business owners feel more vested in the process as their needs were being legitimized.

- Establishing partnerships with existing networks and associations, including chambers of commerce, CDCs, merchant associations among others, can help legitimize the revitalization initiatives and reach out to potential members through different avenues. HJSMS was able to engage Latino business owners by its affiliation with the Merchant Association. It was also able to reach out the non-Latino business owners by tapping informal and formal networks they had established with local CDCs in the area.
- Ethnic diversity can be an effective way to promote a district and give it a competitive advantage. Not only was HJSMS able to attract a lot of media attention due to the Latino character of the district, but it was also able to form an image that distinguished it from its competitors.

### Conclusion

HJSMS has embraced the Latino presence in the district. The organization has been able to integrate leaders of the Latino and non-Latino community in the revitalization efforts by giving everyone a voice. The focus groups process proved to be integral in this regard. In addition, HJSMS has successfully leveraged the Latino presence in the district from a promotional standpoint. Most of the events and advertising done carries an ethnic message. Although it has proven to be the right strategy for now, this might change as the Hyde Jackson Square area becomes increasingly more gentrified.

## ***Case Study 2: Sunset Park 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue BID in Brooklyn, NY***

### Business District Background

The Sunset Park Business Improvement District (BID) extends from 38<sup>th</sup> Street to 64<sup>th</sup> Street along 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The long corridor is home to 385 properties and over 500 businesses. Over half of the stores in the district are allocated towards retail uses with

convenience stores and apparel stores being the most prominent.<sup>11</sup> Most of the stores are small and have a handful of employees although there are also many larger discount variety stores. Latino businesses are commonly found along the district representing about one-third of the total businesses and over 50% of the restaurants. There is also a marked presence of Asian businesses, particularly Chinese, representing 20% of the restaurants and food markets. The vacancy rate of 3% is at the lowest level it has been in years, and is significantly down from the 20-25% level it was at before the BID was established.

The neighborhood of Sunset Park exemplifies many of the demographic changes that have taken place in New York City. It was a vibrant neighborhood of working class white immigrants that radically changed in the 1960s when most of the residents moved to the outer suburbs or other areas in the City. Sunset Park was left behind as an impoverished and disinvested neighborhood. The 1965 Immigration Act triggered a new wave of immigrants from Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean in New York. Many Latinos, especially Puerto Ricans, and Chinese established themselves in Sunset Park and created a strong business community. In 2000, 50% of the total population of Sunset Park was considered foreign born, with 50% of those coming from Asia and 40% coming from Latin America.<sup>12</sup> Sunset Park's 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue is considered to this day to be the "third Chinatown" of New York City while 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue is known to be a thriving multi-ethnic business district. Today as you walk down the BID you hear business owners speak English, Spanish, Korean, Arabic and Chinese among other languages.

The district mostly draws customers from the dense neighborhoods around it with over 40,000 residents living on blocks adjacent to 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue.<sup>13</sup> Most of the customers walk to the area although some drive and park their cars in the one-hour metered parking found along 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The BID is also at close proximity to four subways stops on the R line. Latinos are the largest ethnic group in the surrounding neighborhoods, although Puerto Ricans are now joined by Mexicans, Central Americans and Dominicans. Asians account

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<sup>11</sup> 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue Business Guide to Shoppers. 2003.

<sup>12</sup> From 2000 Census based on zip code data (11220).

<sup>13</sup> Sunset Park BID Annual Report.

for approximately one-fifth of the Sunset Park population with Chinese being the largest group. The South Asian population is quickly growing. In addition, there is a small yet emerging population from Palestine and Yemen, and new Polish and Russian immigrants. Sunset Park is truly a diverse neighborhood with an evolving immigrant population.

### Business Improvement District

The Sunset Park BID was created in 1995 after several failed attempts to get the merchants to participate and provide voluntary funding for revitalization initiatives. Ten years ago the area was facing serious challenges. Crime was quickly rising and city services were diminishing due to a smaller tax base. A group of white residents and business leaders joined forces with the Fifth Avenue Merchant Association, which was led by a Latino business owner, to seek a long-term solution to address the decline of the neighborhood. They decided to propose a BID structure where an official tax assessment is placed on all property owners. The assessment is collected by New York City's Department of Finance, and is fully allocated towards business improvement initiatives. After several months of meetings and outreach efforts, a majority of property owners voted to approve the proposal. Today, the Sunset Park BID is considered a smaller BID for New York City operating at an annual fixed budget of \$200,000.

It was clear that 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue should be the area of focus as it already was the commercial spine of the neighborhood. The decision to have the BID run for 26 blocks along the avenue was based on wanting to include as many businesses as possible in order to have a larger impact. Their strategy proved to be successful. Small Business Services (SBS) has renewed the BID's contract twice since its inception citing a noticeable positive impact in the neighborhood.

The BID provides a wide array of services including trash removal, advocacy for small businesses, holiday lighting and advertising, but its most successful efforts have been around safety. Besides hiring additional security services to look after the district, the BID launched the *Safe Heaven Program*. Participating businesses placed a small decal on their storefront indicating they were a safe place for people feeling in danger, and were

instructed on procedures to follow in the event of a criminal activity. The BID has also been successful in raising additional funding from elected officials for streetscape improvements. It launched the ROSE program (Revitalize our Shopping Environment) where the BID reimburses qualifying merchants 20% or up to \$2,000 per streetscape improvement project. Some of their main challenges continue to be graffiti removal and illegal vending on the streets.

Organization

In the planning stages that led to the formation of the organization, the group proposing the BID set out to understand the needs of the stakeholder groups in the area. In 1994, they distributed surveys to all the business owners, property owners and residents in the district, and received a 10% response rate. The results of the surveys were used to

Table 1:  
*Key Findings Needs Assessment Survey*

<b>Needs and Focus Areas</b>	<b>% of respondents</b>
Police Officers	87%
Crime against businesses	75%
High taxes	62%
Lack of parking	56%
Insufficient street lighting	56%

compose a needs assessments exercise which played an important role in passing the BID under an act of law and in garnering interest in the future structure of the organization.

Most importantly, it demonstrated there was a strong reason stakeholders needed

to organize and get behind the revitalization initiatives: crime. As highlighted in Table 1, out of the top six focus areas identified, three were related to crime prevention. Just like Hyde Jackson Square Main Street, the creation of the Sunset Park BID was originally positioned around the issue of safety.

Getting the stakeholders in the area involved was not an easy task. Since in order to start the BID a majority of property owners had to approve the plan, the organizing team had to conduct constant outreach to garner support for the initiative. Getting support from the ethnic business owners proved to be difficult, particularly with the Chinese.

Communicating what the program entailed and wanted to accomplish was hard due to language barriers and skepticism towards institutionalized organizations. The organizers set out to talk to as many people as they could one-on-one, and although they were not

able to get a high percentage of ethnic stakeholders to participate on the final voting decision, the BID was still approved.

*Ensuring Diverse Representation on the Board*

The BID’s Board of Directors is headed by an Executive Board composed of seven volunteer members. They are all property owners, with half being residents and the other half being business owners. There is no formal recruitment or election process for the Board Members. In addition, the BID’s Board of Directors is composed of volunteers and key civic and government officials divided by stakeholder group. The organizational structure, mandated by law, ensures representation across interest groups by grouping each stakeholder group in the different classes outlined below.

Table 2: *Sunset Park BID Board of Directors as of 2004 Annual Report*

<b>Board</b>	<b>Stakeholder Group</b>	<b>Num. Members</b>
Executive Board	Property and Business Owners, Residents	7
Class A	Property Owners	10
Class B	Commercial Tenants	2
Class C	Residents	1
Class D	Government Officials	4
Class E	Non-voting Members <i>(Senators, Police Officials, Congressmen/women)</i>	8

There are currently three Latino members within the Executive Committee, but no representation of other ethnic groups. Due in great part to the early efforts of the planning group, the BID has been successful in recruiting Latino members to the Board. Latinos were represented in the process from the start, as one of the main organizers in the planning group was a Latino business owner and held a leadership position in the Merchant Association. When the planning group went door to door to build interest in the BID initiative, he helped legitimize the proposal to the Latino community and cross any language barriers that might have impeded communication. Together with the rest of the planning group, he was successful in recruiting both Latino and non-Latino members to the Board and helped set a precedent for the involvement of future Latino stakeholders,

ensuring the Sunset Park BID Board was more representative of the demographics in the area.

Nevertheless, Sunset Park has not been as successful in getting individuals from other ethnic groups to take leadership positions. Currently there is one person of Indian or Pakistani descent on the Board. In the past, there have been several Asian members but at the present there are none. Language barriers seem to be the biggest problem. One strategy the organization has pursued is reaching out to other formal organizations in the area that represent certain ethnic communities in order to gain better insights into the needs and concerns of the groups. For example, the BID works closely with the Brooklyn Chinese American Association which, in turn, is working on starting a BID on 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Sunset Park. The BIDs communicate on a regular basis and have participated in events together. Still, it is unclear what impact this has had on getting more Chinese business owners involved in the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue BID.

#### *Communicating Benefits and Engaging Business Owners*

Before the BID was started, the Sunset Park business community was organized under an association that had few active members. Business owners did not participate because they simply did not want to pay the membership fees. The BID structure directly addressed this issue. As a direct tax assessment on property values mandated by the City of New York, all individuals owning property within the designated district have to pay a certain percentage of money that goes towards the improvement of the area. This helps ensure diverse and fair financial representation. Merchants owning property in the district have demonstrated an interest in the revitalization initiatives because they want to ensure their money is being well spent. Still, the BID has encountered some barriers in getting the businesses at the ends of the district to be actively involved in shaping the agenda and implementing plans. Their current challenge is also geographically focused.

The BID has had to apply basic communication and outreach strategies to get the businesses to take an active role in the revitalization process and understand the importance of the initiatives. In addition, it had to overcome the reluctance to pay for

additional services. The BID's approach was simple yet incredibly effective. It focused on a message that cut across all groups and that was simple for all to understand: economics. The business owners would be presented the following scenario: "Would you trade \$.05 for \$20? For every \$.05, we can provide you with \$20 worth of advertisement, street and sidewalk cleaning, private security and many other services." This message was communicated through flyers, newsletters and one-on-one meetings. Quantifying the value in services the businesses would get in return for their investment proved to be successful in obtaining their buy-in.

To directly address the ethnic business owners, the BID translated all its materials in Spanish for the first few years. Latinos, at that point, were by far the largest ethnic group in the district. Besides aiding communication, this effort showed the Latino business owners that the BID cared enough about them to address them in their native tongue. Unfortunately, once the district became more diverse the materials we solely distributed in English. The decision was made due to budget constraints and was based on the feeling that if the BID translated the materials in one or a couple of languages but not all the ones represented in the district, it would alienate certain pockets within the community.

Currently, the BID is focused on getting merchants excited about the initiatives being implemented. It runs yearly surveys where business owners get an opportunity to rate the job being done and to express their needs. The BID's goals for the year are, to a great extent, determined by the results of the surveys. The surveys are distributed by mail and are only in English. The last one was conducted in 2004 and had a 10% response rate (see Appendix E). From the questions asked, it is not possible to determine if ethnic business owners participated and which groups had more representation. Although language barriers should be taken into account, the surveys at least give the business owners a space to express their opinions and concerns if they wish to do so. They also show a good faith effort from the BID to address the issues of the business community as a whole.

The BID also helps businesses by running seminars and keeping them informed. Recognizing the high number of new businesses in the area, in 2000 the BID created a

guide for new merchants that provides important phone numbers and useful information on the many initiatives taking place in the district. The organization has tried to act as a resource center for merchants, particularly immigrant business owners, to help them understand the regulations they must follow and the resources available to them. For example, the BID partnered with ACCION U.S. to run credit seminars and provide information on loan opportunities to the businesses in the area. Although only three businesses were able to take full advantage of the opportunity resulting in a loan, the seminars were relatively well attended. The BID also publishes *5<sup>th</sup> Avenue Business News*, a newsletter providing important information about the district and highlighting the accomplishments of the organization. The newsletters are hand delivered to all the businesses and mailed to the property owners. In addition, the BID changed its annual accomplishments meeting to a breakfast meeting and successfully increased attendance.

All these initiatives have helped the BID get merchants involved and vested in the revitalization initiatives. But as with other business districts, the most effective strategy to get the business owners involved has proven to be one-to-one outreach. Lack of time is the number one reason merchants give when asked why they are not more actively involved. The Director, therefore, allocates significant amount of time to walk the district and to promote the BID's efforts by talking directly to the merchants.

### Promotion

The BID has not had a problem attracting media attention. Its initiatives have been regularly covered in the *New York Times*, *Crains New York*, *The Daily News* and *Brooklyn Eagle* among others. The amount of coverage received is due, to a great extent, to the BID's proactive efforts to put out press releases about its accomplishments. In addition, the BID negotiated a deal to have a weekly column in the local newspaper, *Sunset News*. It primarily uses this space to provide news of importance to the business and residential communities. Through the press coverage received and the events it puts together, the BID has been successful in redefining the image of the district in a more positive light.



*District Identity and Target Audience*

The identity of the Sunset Park district was born out of a concern from residents and business owners that if they did not define themselves the media would. At that point in time and before the BID, Sunset Park was fraught with crime. The media had widely covered the frequent crimes that were taking place in the area, and people started associating Sunset Park with gang related activities. The BID worked with stakeholders to come together and leverage the assets of the community to paint a more positive picture. The media coverage turned around. Headlines such as ‘Immigrants Again Renew

A neighborhood where people of diverse backgrounds not only live together, but enjoy each other!  
*BID Guide to New Businesses*

Sunset Park’ and ‘Sunset Park Bidding on a Renaissance’ started to appear in local newspapers.

Besides tying diversity to its image, the BID recognized the significance of the district’s ethnic customers. The 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue district is located in a highly dense area with over 40,000 residents within walking distance. The BID understood that their retail mix would not set them apart from other similar commercial districts. What was unique about Sunset Park was that that within the district you can shop at *Rong Hua Gift Shop*, *Vamos Pa’ Tabasco* and *Ike’s Party Store*. Similarly, the BID recognized that they already had a strong customer base that reflected the diversity of the businesses. Since then, it has focused on the existing customer base within the neighborhood, and has launched many promotions and events to get them to shop more at the district.

*Advertising and Events tied to Ethnicity*

Events and positive press coverage are two ways in which the BID successfully promotes itself as a diverse commercial district. An article published in the *New York Times* Metro Section in 1996 titled ‘A Main Street Fights to Keep Local Flavor’ introduces the neighborhood as “Fuzzy arches of red, white and green garlands graced Fifth Avenue, a street whose name evokes images of packed sidewalks and stores. Tony? You bet. He’s

probably in there somewhere. Or Sean, Juan or Chan.”<sup>14</sup> The play on names clearly signifies the incredible diversity of the area, an aspect of the district the community overall considers to be an asset.

The BID also runs several events, but one of their largest is the *Parade of Flags*. This event started before the BID as an effort to create a better image for the district. All the flags represented within the district are paraded by local children. Last year approximately fifty flags were walked down 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The festival has proven to be a great event to foster a sense of community and to show pride in the diversity of the area. In addition, it attracts a larger audience with people coming from several New York City boroughs. For the last seven years, the BID has also put together a street festival in September that closes off fifteen blocks along 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue for vendors and entertainment. The festival also acts as a fundraiser. Outside vendors are invited to participate after paying a flat fee while all BID members only get charge 50% of the fee. The BID calculates that last year over 75,000 people attended.

Finally, other promotional efforts that are not necessarily tied to ethnicity yet are important include the *5<sup>th</sup> Avenue Shopping Guide*. It is distributed to customers in the area and to anyone interested in Sunset Park by the Brooklyn Tourism Office. Over 5,000 copies were distributed in its last version. The BID also works with businesses in providing special promotions such as customer discounts on special items or during a designated period of time. Lastly, the organization created nine self guided tours that focus on special aspects of Sunset Park’s history and present.

### Lessons and Effective Practices

The Sunset Park BID case points to the following lessons and effective practices:

- Organizing around a common cause is a powerful tool to get stakeholders involved and excited about the revitalization efforts. In Sunset Park, crime and

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<sup>14</sup> David Gonzalez. Metro Section, New York Times. December 14, 1996.

safety issues proved to be important causes for people to work together, and helped the BID garner support in the planning stages.

- Individuals that act as ‘bridges’ between communities can help break ground when dealing with multi-ethnic communities. The Sunset Park BID greatly benefited from having a Latino business owner take an active role during the planning stages. Besides being able to provide legitimacy to the newly formed organization among the Latino community, he was able to communicate with business owners in Spanish and surpass language barriers in one-to-one meetings.
- Regular outreach and two-way communication fosters buy-in and support from the business community. Besides trying to reach out to business owners one-on-one, the BID has created a two-way communication process through surveys that helps determine the goals for the year and gives the stakeholders a neutral space to voice their concerns and needs.
- Ethnic diversity can attract media attention if used effectively. The BID benefited from free promotion through a substantial amount of articles on the district and on how stakeholders were working together across ethnic lines to improve the area. The Director played an important role in ensuring the press was constantly aware of the BID’s activities through releases and other public relations efforts.

### Conclusion

The Sunset Park BID has the difficult task of representing an area with a wide-array of ethnicities and languages. Although it benefits from having all the merchants participate by law, the BID still needs to garner more support for the revitalization initiatives from the ethnic business owners. The organization has been able to integrate Latinos into leadership positions, but needs to have representation of the other ethnicities found along the district. Surveys assessing the needs and priorities together with direct contact with business owners in their stores are some of the outreach efforts that have worked best. From a promotional standpoint, the BID has been able to obtain a lot of attention by

positioning itself as an immigrant business community and having events that celebrate the ethnic diversity of the area. Moving forward, the BID will have to continue to implement the strategies that have worked so far and devise new ones to deal with the demographic changes that are constantly taking place in the neighborhood.

## Chapter 4: Union Square Snapshot

The challenges faced by commercial districts such as Sunset Park and Hyde Jackson Square are not uncommon. Commercial districts embarking on revitalization efforts constantly encounter similar issues that arise when dealing with ethnically diverse areas. Union Square is one of those districts.

Union Square in Somerville, MA has a long history of being an immigrant entry portal. Since the nineteenth century, waves of people from Europe, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean have settled in the area looking for better housing and work opportunities. Today Union Square has a strong multi-ethnic and multi-lingual community. The languages spoken by business owners and residents include English, Portuguese, Haitian-Creole, Spanish, Hindi and several Asian languages. In February 2005, Union Square Main Street officially launched with the goal of improving the livability and vitality of the commercial district. The organization is currently in the process of finalizing their vision and gaining support from the different stakeholder groups. Before providing recommendations on how to best utilize the district's rich ethnic composition, it is fundamental to get a better sense of Union Square as a place.

This chapter provides a snapshot of Union Square, including:

- History of the neighborhood.
- Demographics of the area.
- Retail mix and ethnic composition of the commercial district.
- Results from interviews with business owners.
- Competitive environment.
- Main challenges and opportunities.

### History

Union Square is Somerville's oldest commercial district, and a historic crossroads where major city arterials connect. It is home to the hill where General George Washington and his Continental Army troops raised the Great Union flag in 1776. Union Square gained additional importance in the 1800s when it became a gateway to deliver goods into

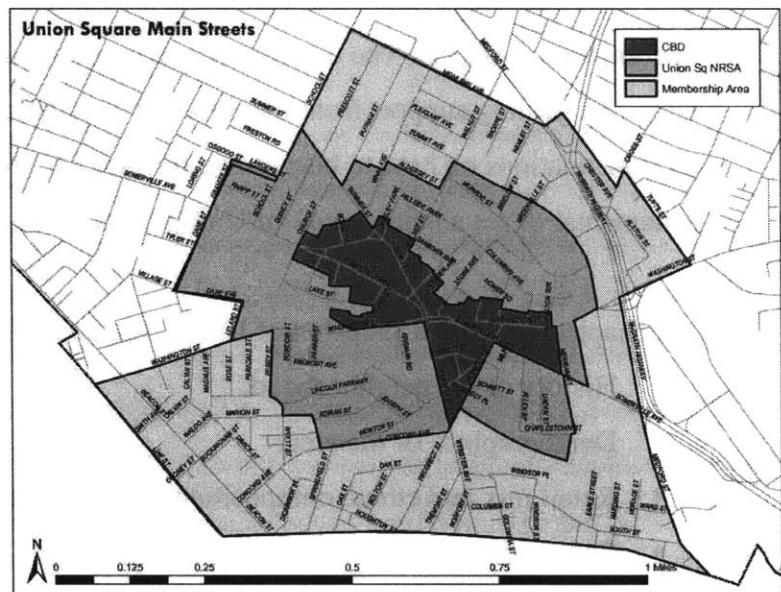
Boston via bridges and ferries. At the turn of the century and due in part to the construction of the railroad at close proximity, it gained status as a vibrant commercial area. Masonic Hall, its first commercial block constructed in 1869, inspired an era of high-style architecture in Somerville and surrounding towns.

At its peak in the early to mid twentieth century, the Square was filled with commercial activity and was serviced by electric streetcars and trolleys. Yet with the adoption of the car as the main mode of transport, Union Square began to decline as consumers shifted their shopping activities to other competing locations. The decline was later augmented by the lack of rapid transit service connectivity and the strong competition it faced from similar neighborhood commercial centers such as Porter Square, Central Square, Davis Square and Harvard Square.

Map 1: *Union Square Main Street Boundaries*

### Area of Study

For the purpose of this thesis, I will focus on Union Square's Central Business District (CBD). The CBD runs along Somerville Avenue and Washington Street between Prospect Street and Webster Avenue as defined by the Union Square Main Streets program (see Map 1).

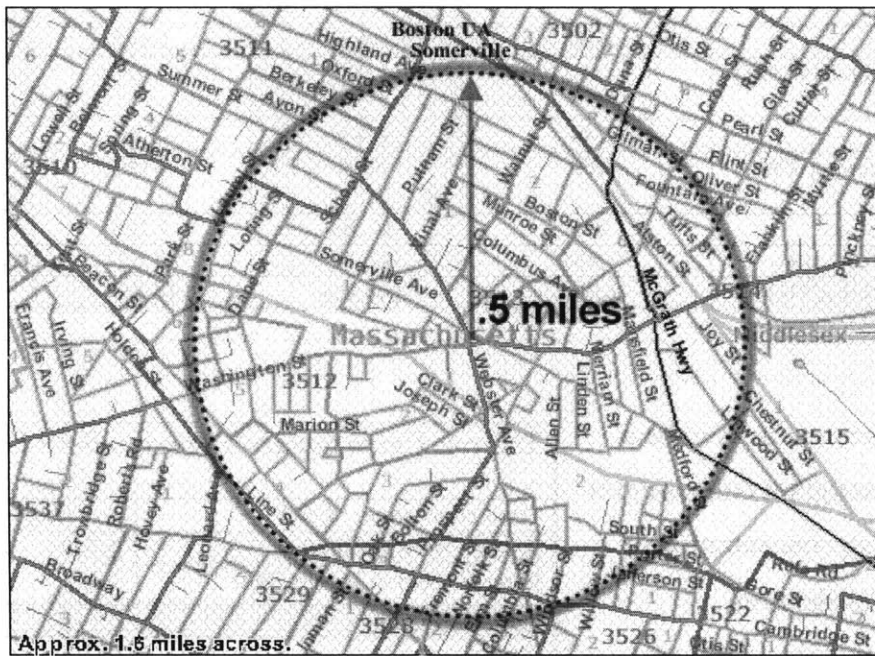


### Demographics

The commercial core of Union Square is bounded by dense residential neighborhoods. This is a great asset to any commercial district as it provides a nearby customer base within walking distance for convenience shopping. For the purposes of this analysis, I have divided the customer market in two:

- The immediate Union Square area<sup>15</sup> found along the Central Business District.
- The Primary Market area<sup>16</sup> designated by drawing a circle of 0.5 miles radii from the center of Union Square at the intersection of Webster Avenue, Washington Street and Somerville Avenue.

Map 2: Union Square's Primary Market Area



The population of the Union Square area (8,894) is ethnically and racially diverse, although at a lower percentage than the communities of Hyde Jackson Square and Sunset Park. As highlighted in Table 3, in Union Square 10.8% of the residents identify as Latino, 6.9% as black, 6.6% as Asian and 8.4% as other. The neighborhoods found along the Central Business District are slightly more diverse than the other ones included in the Primary Market Area, where almost 80% of the residents identify as white as opposed to 72.5% in the Union Square area.

<sup>15</sup> The following six block groups intersect at the Union Square area (25017) 3512 001; 3212 002; 3513 001; 3513 002; 3513 003; and 3515 002.

<sup>16</sup> The Primary Market area includes the Union Square area mentioned above and encompasses three census tracts: 3512; 3513; and 3515.

Table 3: *Racial and Latino Composition of Union Square and Primary Market area*

	Union Square Area		Primary Market Area	
	# of people	% of total	# of people	% of total
Population claiming ONE race	8,425	94.7%	14,135	95.2%
White	6,447	72.5%	11,201	79.2%
Black or African American	615	6.9%	847	6.0%
American Indian or Alaska Native	25	.3%	38	2.7%
Asian	590	6.6%	1,175	8.3%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	4	<.1%	16	0.1%
Other	744	8.4%	876	6.2%
Population claiming TWO or MORE races	469	5.3%	700	4.7%
Hispanic or Latino	959	10.8%	1,286	8.7%
Non-Hispanic or Latino	7,935	89.2%	13,567	93.1%
<b>TOTAL POPULATION</b>	<b>8,894</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>14,853</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: 2000 US Census

Union Square continues to be a portal for immigrant communities and has a high concentration of non-native residents as highlighted in Table 4. Of the total population in Union Square, 32.5% claim they are foreign born. Furthermore, 16% are recent immigrants to the U.S.

	# of people	% of total
Total population: 8,415		
Foreign Born Population	2,749	32.5%
Entered 1990 to March 2000	1,351	16.0%
Region of Birth		
Europe	935	34.0%
Asia	863	31.4%
Africa	101	3.7%
Latin America	779	28.3%
Northern America	42	1.5%

Source: 2000 US Census

having only entered the country in the last decade. Most of these immigrants come from Ireland, Brazil, Portugal and several Asian countries. The presence of the recently arrived and more established immigrant groups is directly tied to the neighborhood's economy as it helps fuel many of the ethnic and non-ethnic businesses found along the district.

The median household income in the Union Square area is below \$40,000, notably lower than in the City of Somerville (\$46,315) and than in the City of Cambridge (\$47,979).

<sup>17</sup> I had to exclude two block groups from this data due to problems reporting this type of detail by block group in census.gov. Therefore, there are 479 people unaccounted for in this set of data.



Within the Primary Market area, the median household income and the percentage of families living under the poverty level fluctuates by census tract. In the census tract with the largest population (#3512), the median household income is \$48,452 and the percentage of people living under poverty is 5.6%. On the other hand, the adjoining census tract (#3513) has a median household income of \$43,393 and a 17.9% percent of people living under the poverty level. While the latter tract has overall a higher population of people claiming white as their race, it also has a higher percentage of people claiming 'other race' and Latino under their identity, mostly highlighting the presence of the Brazilian community.

### Business District Composition

As with the demographics analysis, it is essential to understand the retail mix and ethnic composition of the businesses in Union Square to determine appropriate commercial revitalization strategies for the area. All the information included in this section is from a business inventory analysis I prepared based on field observations, data from the Somerville Assessors Office and several interviews with business owners (see Appendix B).<sup>18</sup>

### *Retail and Services Mix*

The CBD of Union Square has over 400,000 square feet of office and retail space that are currently being utilized by 125 establishments. A great majority of the commercial buildings are one to two stories high, and most of the 30,000 square feet identified as vacant space are located on upper floors. Overall, Union Square has a healthy mix of businesses and a sizable retail component. The key findings from the business inventory are summarized in Table 5 and are highlighted below.

The public administration buildings occupy the highest amount of square feet in the area although they only represent 2.4% of the total businesses accounted for. Not surprisingly,

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<sup>18</sup> Square footage for the business inventory was determined by the following two-step process: first obtaining assessors data on the building's square footage, and secondly walking each storefront to decide what percentage of the total building's square footage went to each business. The complete business inventory and more information on the methodology is detailed in Appendix B.

the City of Somerville is the Square's largest employer.<sup>19</sup> Professional services are both high in terms of number of establishments (16.8% of total) and square footage (15.3% of total). Medical and dental offices occupy almost half of the total square footage allocated towards professional services. Personal services, on the other hand, represent 18.4% of the total businesses yet only 6.6% of the total square footage. This is mostly due to the nature of the most commonly found personal service, hair and nail salons, as small establishments. It is important to note that while these types of services meet the needs of the district's customer base, particularly the immigrant population, hair and nail salons are much more common in Union Square than in other similar neighborhood commercial districts.

Food based services or retail stores are prominent in the district. Combined they represent 30% of the total establishments and the total square footage in the district. The presence of restaurants is particularly strong, representing over 60% in the food service and entertainment category. Apparel stores are the most prevalent within the other retail category, representing 33.3% of the total businesses and 23.8% of the total square footage. Auto related establishments are also common and take up 9.6% of the total square footage.<sup>20</sup> Most of these businesses occupy a single story building and utilize a large portion of the lot for outdoor displays, negatively impacting the visual appeal of the Square. Finally, financial services establishments represent 8% of the total businesses in the area, with insurance companies occupying half of the total square footage within the category.

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<sup>19</sup> As noted in the Union Square Master Plan.

<sup>20</sup> The percentage of auto related services is only half of that reported in the Union Square NRSA due to a difference in the boundaries used for the business inventory. I focused on the Central Business District area where auto related uses represent 9.6% of the total square footage.

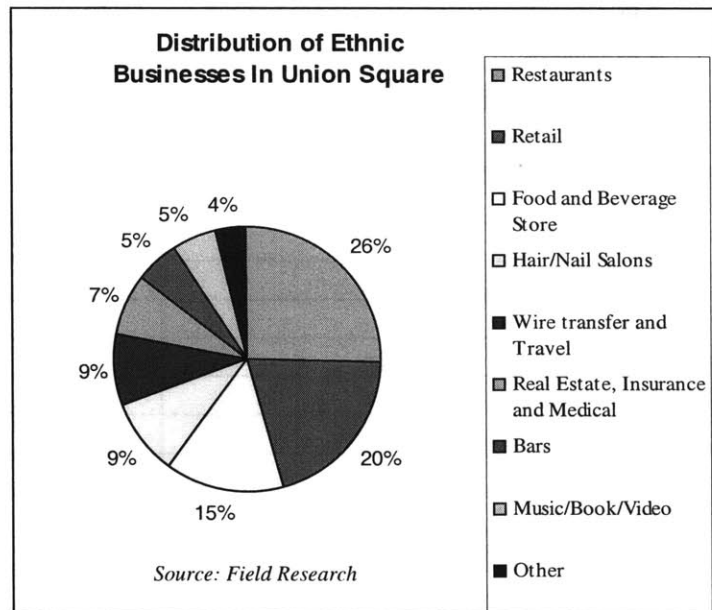
Type	# Est.	% Total	Sq Feet	% Total
<b>FINANCIAL SERVICES</b>	8	8.0%	27,446	6.7%
Bank	2	20.0%	5,829	21.2%
Insurance	4	40.0%	13,725	50.0%
Wire Transfer, Lottery	4	40.0%	7,892	28.8%
<b>FOOD AND BEVERAGES</b>	15	12.0%	76,586	18.8%
Convenience Store	7	46.7%	15,517	20.3%
Specialty/Wholesale/Bakery	6	40.0%	10,739	14.0%
Supermarket	1	6.7%	46,278	60.4%
Liquor Store	1	6.7%	4,052	5.3%
<b>FOOD SERVICE/ ENTERTAINMENT</b>	23	18.4%	48,215	11.8%
Restaurant	14	60.9%	31,519	65.4%
Pizza, Fast Food	4	17.4%	6,164	12.8%
Bar, Lounge	5	21.7%	10,532	21.8%
<b>OTHER RETAIL</b>	21	16.8%	34,649	8.5%
Apparel	7	33.3%	8,232	23.8%
Other	2	9.5%	1,582	4.6%
Electrical and Appliances	2	9.5%	1,894	5.5%
Home	3	14.3%	8,842	25.5%
Books, Music and Videos	3	14.3%	3,188	9.2%
Flowers and Plants	1	4.8%	8,200	23.7%
Hobby/Special Interest	2	9.5%	1,889	5.5%
Jewelry	1	4.8%	822	2.4%
Drugs, Health and Beauty	0	0.0%	-	0.0%
<b>PERSONAL SERVICES</b>	23	18.4%	27,023	6.6%
Hair, Nail Salons	13	48.1%	14,480	41.5%
Cleaners, Laundry	2	7.4%	2,050	5.9%
Travel Agent	2	7.4%	2,140	6.1%
Tailor, Shoe Repair	1	3.7%	600	1.7%
Instruction (martial arts, languages)	3	11.1%	5,568	15.9%
Printing, Publishing	2	7.4%	2,185	6.3%
<b>PROFESSIONAL SERVICES</b>	21	16.8%	62,240	15.3%
Medical, Dental	7	25.9%	30,118	36.8%
Accounting, Legal	3	11.1%	5,524	6.8%
Design, Artist	4	14.8%	13,514	16.5%
Social Service Provider	3	11.1%	1,062	1.3%
Other Professional Services	4	14.8%	12,022	14.7%
<b>AUTO RELATED</b>	9	7.2%	39,220	9.6%
Vehicle Sales	2	22.2%	16,004	40.8%
Gas, Motor Oil	1	11.1%	6,388	16.3%
Vehicle Maintenance, Repair	6	66.7%	16,828	42.9%
<b>PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION</b>	3	2.4%	92,534	22.7%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>407,913</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Although the Square is rich in ethnic restaurants that add to the flavor of the area, it does not have several food store types that are typically found in similar neighborhood districts such as ice cream shops. The district is also lacking a pharmacy and more apparel and general merchandise stores, a clear disadvantage relative to competing neighborhood commercial districts. Union Square is close to Target and T.J. Wright but these two stores are considered to be outside of the district's boundaries. In addition, besides Market Basket, the Square lacks other strong anchors found in nearby squares such as Porter, Harvard and Kendall.

Exhibit 2: *Ethnic Businesses in Union Square*

*Ethnic Businesses*<sup>21</sup>

There are 55 ethnic businesses in Union Square composing 44% of the total businesses in the area. Together they represent over 100,000 square feet or 25% of the district's total square feet. As is evident through the data, ethnic businesses are smaller in size than non-ethnic businesses.



Ethnicity	# Est.	% Total	Sq Ft	% Total
Asian	8	14.5%	25,161	24.9%
Brazilian	26	47.3%	36,003	35.6%
Haitian	2	3.6%	1,763	1.7%
Indian	3	5.5%	2,801	2.8%
Irish	4	7.3%	7,900	7.8%
Italian	2	3.6%	10,201	10.1%
Latino	5	9.1%	6,907	6.8%
Multiple	1	1.8%	1,879	1.9%
Portuguese	4	7.3%	8,485	8.4%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>101,100</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Field Research

Exhibit 2 highlights that most are clustered around retail stores, food stores and restaurants. In fact, all fourteen restaurants in the district are affiliated with a specific ethnicity. Hair and nail salons, wire transfer service shops and apparel stores catering to an ethnic population are also very common.

<sup>21</sup> Ethnic businesses were defined based on the customer markets they serve through field research and/or the ethnicity of the business owner(s) as self-identified during one-on-one interviews.

As highlighted in Table 6, there are over eight ethnicities in Union Square, with Latinos and Asians representing a wide array of ethnic groups. Of the total 55 ethnic businesses accounted for in the inventory, 26 or 47% are Brazilian. Most of these businesses either have a Brazilian name (in either Portuguese or English) or display a Brazilian flag on their storefronts. Asians are the second most represented ethnic group within the business district. Due to the nature of their businesses- food stores and restaurants- they also represent a large percentage of square feet.

### *Customer Markets Served*

Union Square serves for the most part residents of the surrounding neighborhoods.<sup>22</sup> The district also serves local day-time workers that are mostly concentrated in government and not-for-profit office space. As noted in the Union Square Master Plan, these worker segments tend to generate less economic activity than market-rate office workers do.

The ethnic businesses mostly serve local co-ethnics with a few, such as Solacao de Carnes and Reliable Market, attracting an ethnic clientele from the Greater Boston area. Both these businesses together with the few other ones that have a regional draw, including Riverside Kawaski and Elegant Furniture, have customers come into the district to shop at their specific store and leave.<sup>23</sup> One of the main challenges facing the revitalization efforts will be to understand how to leverage the traffic coming to the businesses that currently attract a larger customer base. In addition, Union Square might also expand its market by capturing some of the pass-through traffic the area currently gets and give these potential consumers a reason to stop and shop at the district. A traffic study conducted by the City of Somerville concludes that a heavy flow of traffic passes by Union Square on a daily basis, representing a potential customer market that is virtually untapped.

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<sup>22</sup> Finding included in the Union Square Master Plan and confirmed through interviews with fifteen business owners conducted in Union Square.

<sup>23</sup> As noted in the Union Square Master Plan Appendix.

### Interviews with Business Owners

In order to understand the challenges and opportunities USMS faces within the business community, I conducted interviews with fifteen (12% of total) merchants in the commercial district. The interviewees were mostly chosen at random by walking into different businesses and asking the owners if they could offer their time to be interviewed. I tried to cover most of the ethnic business groups represented in Union Square and all the geographic areas found along the CBD. Five of the business owners interviewed are considered non-ethnic while the remaining ten self-identified with one or more of the ethnic groups found along the district. Exhibit 3 provides the distribution of the interviewees by ethnicity while Exhibit 4 provides the distribution by business type.

Exhibit 3

Source: Field Research

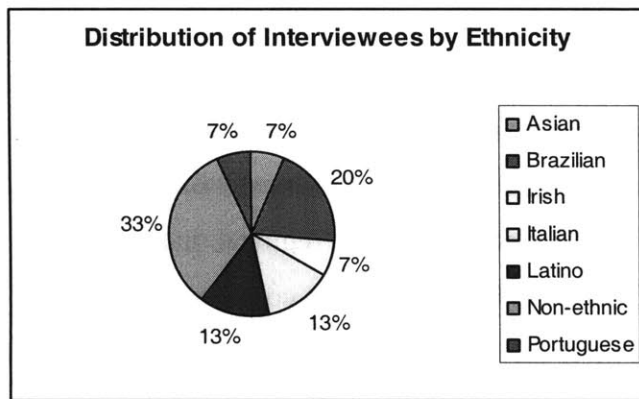
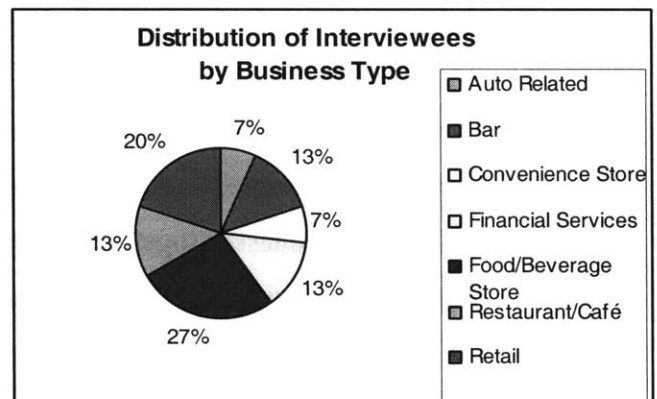


Exhibit 4

Source: Field Research



All the interviews were conducted in person, and the questions were related to the following topics:

- Interviewees' business and customers.
- Opportunities and challenges in Union Square.
- Promoting their business and the district.
- Organizational networks they belong to.
- Union Square Main Street.

The entire questionnaire is included as Appendix F. Following is a summary of the main findings.

### *Business and Customers*

The businesses interviewed tend to be small, having two to five employees. Many of the ethnic businesses primarily employ family members or co-ethnics. The tenure of time they have had a business in Union Square ranges from 32 years to four months with most having been there for more than five years. Of the sample, seven rent their commercial space and the remaining eight own theirs. The ones who own their commercial space tend to be more tenured and, with the exception of three, fall into the non-ethnic category. Besides being business owners, 25% also reside in the immediate Union Square area.

Ten of the business owners interviewed indicated that they primarily serve a local clientele. Walking is the number one mode of transportation their customers use to reach their establishments. A few notable exceptions include a Brazilian meat market that gets 1,3000 customers weekly, of which 50% come from outside of the neighborhood. The owners of the bars and restaurants interviewed also noted they get a sizable number of clients from nearby areas such as Boston and Cambridge. An auto-related business gets an even larger draw from areas as much as 20 miles away from the Square.

Twelve mentioned the ethnic composition of their clients is diverse. As would be expected, the ethnic businesses have a much larger ethnic clientele than the non-ethnic businesses and seem to be specialized within their communities. Yet there are some ethnic businesses that cross-over to other ethnicities beyond their own. For example, besides selling products from Spanish-speaking Latin American countries, the owner of a Latino food market ensures the shop has a wide array of products from Brazil and Haiti to also serve those communities.

### *Union Square Challenges and Opportunities*

Overall, the more tenured business owners interviewed felt Union Square has improved in the last five years. Five mentioned the area is cleaner and safer now than it used to be. Approximately half mentioned that the area has become more diverse and that Brazilians are now the largest immigrant group in the Square. Three also noted the socio-economic composition of the neighborhood is moving away from its working-class roots to a more

gentrified and affluent residential base. Five business owners mentioned that rents have gone up although none provided specific information to quantify the increase.

When asked about the opportunities they saw in the area, 14 of the 15 interviewed mentioned the potential to extend the Green Line to Union Square as the most important. The topic of increased public transit accessibility to the area cut across any differences based on tenure, geography or ethnicity. Other opportunities mentioned included the closeness of the area to downtown Boston and the heavy flow of traffic that is already passing by the Square. Nine mentioned parking was their number one challenge. Parking was mostly mentioned by the businesses along Somerville Avenue and Bow Street, and seems to be more of a geographic issue than an ethnic issue. Pedestrian safety was also mentioned by three businesses, all on Somerville Avenue.

#### *Promotional Efforts*

All except two of the business owners interviewed currently do some sort of promotion for their business. Three actively place advertisements in mainstream newspapers, magazines and radio stations. The rest tend to utilize local print vehicles such as *The Phoenix* and *The Improper Bostonian* or ethnic newspapers such as *O Globo* and *A Semana*. The larger ethnic businesses also utilize Brazilian or Latino television to promote their businesses to a wider audience. Overall, ethnic businesses seem to market solely to ethnic customers and, not surprisingly, prefer to reach to them in their language of origin. Several restaurant owners also mentioned that the free coverage their establishment has received in the food sections of different print vehicles has helped them tremendously. At the moment none run joint promotions with other businesses in the area.

When asked if they had any suggestions on how to promote Union Square to attract a larger clientele, there were three main ideas mentioned. One is to market the Square through large-scale events such as the *Spice of Life*. Another is to position it as a destination for great ethnic restaurants and lively entertainment. Interestingly two of the owners who mentioned this idea are non-ethnic. One noted that Union Square's biggest



asset is that “it’s got a little bit of spice and flavor.” Lastly, several business owners mentioned the area needs to get larger stores or anchors that would make people want to come specifically to the district.

### *Organizational Networks*

Only four of the businesses interviewed currently belong to the Somerville Chamber of Commerce. As highlighted in Table 7, two are ethnic: one is Irish and the other is Italian. One Brazilian business owner was not only a member of the Chamber several years ago but also served as a Director for a short period of time. He decided to step down from the organization after feeling that the Chamber was more focused on larger businesses and that the conversations taking place did not apply to his situation. The business owners who are not members of the Chamber of Commerce attributed their lack of involvement to lack of time and high membership fees. One Latino business owner also openly noted that the Chamber of Commerce is for “Americans” and not people like her. Overall though, the most prominent reason was skepticism about the organization’s intentions and about its capacity to get things done. One business owner summed it up as “lots of talk, but no action.” No other organization was mentioned when owners were asked about formal groups to which they belong.

When asked about their relationship with other business owners in the area, all interviewees pointed to very informal interactions. If they talk to others, the interactions are mostly described as “stopping by on my way to the bank,” “shaking hands on the street” and “going next door to check up on each other.” For the most part, business owners seem to only talk to the owners of businesses they patronize or to the owners that shop at their establishment. Their communication about what is taking place in the area seems to be over sales counters or at street corners. The only merchants who seem to have a stronger network are the Irish bar and restaurant owners. They seem to communicate more frequently with each other and stay in touch with what is happening in the area through mostly social interactions.

### *Union Square Main Street Participation*

As highlighted in Table 7, 12 or 80% of the owners interviewed recognized the name of Union Square Main Street and several mentioned they had seen the flyers. Still many do not really know what Main Street is all about. Four think it is solely a storefront improvement program. The three who did not recognize the name were all ethnic business owners and were located further out from the Square on Somerville Avenue or Bow Street.

Table 7: <i>Findings about Organizations and USMS</i> <i>Source: Field Research</i>	Ethnic		Non-Ethnic		Total	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Member Chamber of Commerce	2	8	2	3	4	11
Heard of USMS	7	3	5	0	12	3
Has or plans to participate in USMS meetings	4	6	2	3	5	10

Only two of the business owners interviewed have attended a Main Street meeting. One is actively involved as a member of the Transportation Committee and the other sent a representative as the only bank in the area. Three other merchants said they plan to participate. When the remaining owners were asked why they were not planning to be involved, the two most mentioned reasons were lack of time and wariness about the organization. Many of the business owners associate Main Street with City Hall and, therefore, their feelings towards the organization range from skepticism to apathy. When asked if they thought USMS would represent their needs, seven mentioned they did not know enough to comment. When asked what USMS could do to get them involved in the organization, the answers were as simple as “come and talk to me” and “show results.”

#### Competing Neighborhood Centers

Union Square is surrounded by six important and active neighborhood commercial districts in Cambridge and Somerville that act as direct competitors. These include Central Square, Davis Square, Inman Square, Porter Square, Kendall Square and Harvard Square. Union Square is at a competitive disadvantage when compared with these squares particularly in terms of accessibility. As demonstrated in Table 8, most of the competing neighborhood centers are located within 1.5 miles of Union Square, and have better public transportation access and parking supply. All except Inman Square are

connected to the Red Line providing easier access to customers beyond the immediate neighborhood. With the exception of Harvard Square and Central Square, all the other districts have less traffic congestion. In addition, they all have significantly better crosswalks, making the pedestrian shopping along the respective districts more pleasant than at Union Square. More importantly, they all have a number of destination restaurants, bars and shops that expand their customer base beyond their immediate neighborhood, with Harvard Square acting as a true regional center.

Table 8: *Access to Competing Neighborhood Commercial Centers*

Squares	Transit	Parking	Traffic Flow	Pedestrian Safety
Central	Bus, Red line	Metered public lots, limited on street	Heavy	Good
Davis	Bus, Red line	On street, limited public lots	Moderate	Good
Harvard	Bus, Red line	On street, Metered public and private lots	Heavy	Good
Inman	Bus only	On street, Private lots	Moderate	Good
Kendall	Bus, Red line	Private garages with public parking	Moderate/Heavy	Good
Porter	Bus, Red line	Shopping center lot	Moderate/Heavy	Fair
Union	Bus only	On street, metered public lots, some private lots	Heavy	Poor

*Source: Union Square Master Plan*

Union Square also faces competition from other larger commercial areas. The Cambridge Side Galleria is only 1.5 miles away from Union Square and contains 850,000 square feet of retail including a Sears, Best Buy and Filene’s Basement. Assembly Square is also located at near proximity of Union Square and has several anchor stores such as Stop & Shop and Home Depot. In addition, the recent opening of A.J. Wright and Target in the perimeter of the Square gives current and potential Union Square customers a broad range of shopping options that directly compete with many of the businesses in the district.

Conclusion: Challenges and Opportunities

Although Union Square faces considerable issues, the area has the potential to become once again a thriving commercial district. It has key assets that can be leveraged to attract new customers and increase loyalty among current customers. The Square also has some

important challenges that need to be addressed. Following is an analysis of the key strengths and challenges in the area.

### *Strengths*

- **High density in surrounding neighborhoods**  
Union Square is bounded by dense, mid-income neighborhoods that provide an immediate customer base for convenience shopping.
  
- **Multi-ethnic character**  
The population in Union Square is incredibly diverse. As an immigrant portal since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the area has pockets of a wide array of ethnicities including Irish, Portuguese, Brazilian, Mexican, Haitian, Italian and Chinese. This multi-ethnic character helps distinguish it from other competing districts.
  
- **Regional draw to restaurants and international food markets**  
The Square is known by the diversity and quality of its restaurants and food markets, and draws customers from nearby neighborhoods, cities and towns.
  
- **Marketing Experience**  
A high percentage of business owners currently engage in marketing their business, and have valuable experience that could be leveraged.
  
- **Lower Rents**  
Rents are lower than in any other competing neighborhood square in the area (Davis, Porter, Central, Harvard). Rents start at \$7 per square foot for industrial spaces and \$11-\$24 per square foot for retail and office space.
  
- **Proximity to McGrath and O'Brian highways**  
Union Square lies at a strategic crossroad location near two important highways that pass through the region, and is closer to these highways than its competing

neighborhood retail districts. Currently, thousands of people pass by the area on a daily basis.

- Significant buildings and landmarks

Union Square's rich history is exemplified by some of its attractive buildings. Although the area lacks a cohesive visual identity, the architecture of the buildings around the main square is worth preserving.

- Attractive possibilities for new development

The City of Somerville owns several properties at key locations that could be used for new development if the uses are repositioned. These include the Kiley Barrel site, the Bow Street Police Station and the Public Safety Building site among others.

### *Challenges*

- Lack of trust and participation from the business community

The business community overall is skeptical about planning initiatives and City Hall's ability to deliver on plans. In addition, very few belong to formal organizations in the area, most notably the Chamber of Commerce.

- Not connected to MBTA Subway

Currently Union Square is not connected to the MBTA T line although there are long-term plans to possibly expand the Green Line to service the area.

- Unclear image and identity

Although Union Square's diversity in commercial uses and population demographics is considered a strength, it can also create a confusing image for customers and residents alike. The area does not currently have a clear identity or image that can be leveraged in promotional campaigns and other outreach efforts.

- Gaps in the traditional commercial core retail mix

Union Square does not have the variety of retail stores that are found in other competing neighborhood commercial districts. Some of the missing retail uses include a bookstore, a pharmacy or drug store, a health club and more retail shops selling apparel and general merchandise.

- Strong competition from nearby squares

Union Square competes with six nearby neighborhood centers in Somerville and Cambridge. The competing squares include: Inman, Davis, Central, Harvard, Kendall and Porter. All except one are connected to the Red Line, giving them an immediate competitive advantage.

- Poor pedestrian experience and heavy traffic congestion

Union Square's heavy traffic flow creates a confusing and dangerous space for pedestrians, a situation that is exacerbated by the complicated and infrequent crosswalks.

- Lack of daytime foot traffic

Business owners complain about the lack of daytime foot traffic in the area. This has led to inconsistent business closing times.

Union Square Main Street needs to take these opportunities and challenges into consideration when coming up with initiatives that will help revitalize the commercial district. In addition, it needs to understand how it can integrate the high number of ethnic business owners found in the district into the organization and foster leadership within the different communities. It also needs to determine if the identity of Union Square should be tied to multi-cultural reality of the district. These topics will be addressed in the recommendations for Union Square Main Street in the following chapter.

## **Chapter 5: Recommendations for Union Square Main Street**

Union Square Main Street (USMS) was created with the purpose of revitalizing the commercial district of Union Square. The City of Somerville took the first step in creating the organization and was able to find individuals in the business and residential communities to take leadership roles. Yet the ethnic composition of USMS members does not reflect the demographics of the neighborhood or of the business community.

In this chapter, I first provide background information on USMS including the organization's current organizational and promotional efforts. All background information was obtained through interviews with Board Members, interviews with City of Somerville officials and by participating in meetings. I then highlight the challenges and opportunities the organization faces in the context of the main lessons from the literature review and case studies covered in Chapters 2 and 3. I conclude with recommendations to USMS on how to integrate the multi-ethnic character of the area in the revitalization efforts and by providing final remarks.

### Union Square Main Street (USMS)

In the summer of 2004, the city of Somerville started to actively pursue the idea of establishing a Main Street program in Union Square. Several studies led the City to this next step. After the Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Area Plan (NRSA) completed in 2002 and the Master Plan completed in 2003, the city decided it was time to take action. City officials, business owners and residents had long been talking about strengthening the economic vitality of the commercial district, and Main Street seemed to be a step on the right direction. The City committed Community Development Block Grant money towards partially funding the initiative with the expectation that the Main Street program would be self-sufficient after a certain period of time. By early 2005, USMS' Board was in place and an Executive Director was hired to develop and coordinate the initiatives. The program officially launched on February 23, 2005 in an open reception that was attended by the Mayor and other important political and civic figures.

### *Current Organization and Goals*

USMS is governed by a Board of Directors, and is organized around five committees that are focused on the following goals and objectives<sup>24</sup>:

- **Organization Committee and Board:**  
Foster local leadership and consensus based on cooperation of residents, businesses, landlords and city government.
  
- **Promotion Committee**  
Strengthen and market Union Square's image so that residents and people from other areas can enjoy its vibrant retail, arts and entertainment offerings.
  
- **Design Committee**  
Pursue urban design and improvement projects that create a unified square, that define the area as a commercial center and that are aesthetically pleasing.
  
- **Economic Restructuring Committee**  
Support and help grow Union Square as a thriving business district providing diverse cultural offerings and a variety of independent businesses to both serve and employ residents.
  
- **Transportation Committee**  
Advocate and facilitate for an efficient and thorough system of transportation that balances the needs of all modalities and pedestrian users.

Transportation is an additional committee added to the Main Street model to address the significant transportation issues in the area. I will focus on analyzing USMS's organizational and promotional efforts to date as a way of providing a context for the recommendations presented at the end of this chapter.

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<sup>24</sup> From document titled Union Square Main Street Goals and Objectives, March 2005.



### Organizational Efforts

USMS has very limited representation of ethnic business owners on both its Board and its committees. This is partly due to the top-down process followed to create the organization. In addition, the different ethnic business communities in Union Square are not formally organized, adding a significant layer of complexity to the outreach efforts to gain their participation.

### *Ensuring Diverse Representation on the Board*

In order to establish the Main Street program in Union Square, city officials started meeting with stakeholders from the area to see what kind of support the program would get and to identify future leaders for the organization. The City needed to establish credibility quickly and demonstrate to the community that this was not just another planning exercise. In addition, it had to start implementation of the program before the Mayoral elections which take place every two years. For these reasons, the City approached individuals who had been involved in other organizations, such as the Business Improvement Group (BIG), to encourage them to take an active role. Although not left out on purpose, the ethnic business owners have not typically been active in the past and thus not part of the City's recruitment efforts.

The USMS Board of Directors is composed of seven voting members, two city officials who act as non-voting members and the program's Executive Director. Two of the seven voting members are business owners in the area while the remaining five are residents. Of the two business owners, one owns a restaurant and the other owns a café in the CBD. Only one self-identifies as ethnic (Irish). Although the City was interested in having a more diverse board, both in terms of ethnicity and in terms of stakeholder groups, it still relied primarily on engaging individuals that had been active in the past, ultimately limiting representation. Committees are chaired by one of the Board Members and have open membership. Although the committee meetings have been advertised through brochures, there has practically been no participation of ethnic business owners to this date.

### *Communicating Benefits and Engaging Business Owners*

As mentioned earlier, the Organization Committee is in charge of building stakeholders' interest and consensus on the revitalization efforts. In addition, it oversees all fundraising activities for the Main Street program and the administration and financial functions of USMS. It appears that the committee is primarily focused on coming up with a plan for the latter goal, and attracting members who will help raise money for the organization.

From informal conversations with members, it appears that the committee is not putting much weight on addressing the ethnic representation gap within USMS. Yet the gap is noticeable. There is not a single Brazilian business owner who is active in the organization although they represent 20% of all businesses identified in the inventory. There are also no Portuguese, Asians, Latinos or Haitians actively participating in the committees. It is important to note that several USMS Board Members including the Executive Director recognize this is a problem. Still, there appears to be no ideas or plans on how to gain support and increase involvement of ethnic business owners.

Most of the outreach efforts have been conducted by the Executive Director, and have been through one-on-one conversations and distribution of promotional materials including a program brochure written in English (see Appendix G). Copies were given directly to merchants for their use and to be handed out to their customers. Besides announcing the launch event, the brochure had information on the committees' kick-off meetings. Unfortunately, the first meeting for the Organization Committee announced in the brochure was cancelled at the last minute, limiting the impact of the outreach that had been done to that point.

### Promotional Efforts

USMS is currently in the process of redefining the district's image by leveraging its bohemian and multi-ethnic character and developing events and activities to support it. The organization is also working with the City of Somerville to bring a farmers market to the area.

### *Leveraging Ethnicity with the Identity of the District*

The identity of Union Square has been mostly tied to the history of the area. Signs proclaiming the area as a “lively historic crossroads” are commonly seen around the district. Even USMS’s current logo is a visual representation of the fort on Prospect Hill



where the first Union Flag was raised. Still, the Promotions Committee is open to change. It held a brainstorming session in early March where people threw out ideas on how to position the district. The multi-ethnic character was one of them. Some of the preliminary positioning statements that came out of the session included "union of all nations", "you don't need a plane to travel the world" and "where the world eats/meets."<sup>25</sup> Overall, the Committee understands that the multi-ethnic character of the area is an asset that can be leveraged to give Union Square a competitive advantage, and is working on integrating it into the marketing plan.

### *Advertising and Events*

USMS is still determining its marketing plan and, therefore, is not currently engaged in advertising efforts although it plans to do so in the near future. On the other hand, the organization is already actively working on events and activities that will bring people to the area. The main focus right now is on the farmers market that is scheduled to launch in the summer of 2005 and run during the weekends.

In addition, USMS was recently awarded an arts grant in partnership with the Somerville Arts Council to create a program they are naming the *ArtsUnion*. According to the grant proposal, the program “seeks to utilize assets in Union Square- namely the vibrant ethnic mix of the area and the burgeoning artist population- to propel an entirely new cultural rejuvenation project.” The *ArtsUnion* program has five key components: (1) outdoor performance series; (2) arts and crafts market; (3) walking tours on different topics

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<sup>25</sup> From Promotions Committee meeting minutes: April 20, 2005.

including history and culinary diversity; (4) new street architecture such as benches and tree gates; and (5) designation of Union Square as an arts district.

#### Other Organizations in Union Square

Besides USMS, there are several organizations in Union Square that are active in the area and are important to note. The Business Interest Group (BIG) acts as the merchant association arm of the Somerville Chamber of Commerce. The group worked on the current signage found throughout the district, and has taken an active role in the efforts to bring the Green Line to Union Square. The Somerville Community Corporation (SCC) is a local CDC focused on affordable housing. The Community Action Agency of Somerville (CAAS) is a not-for-profit organization focused on issues of poverty and advocacy for lower-income populations. The Massachusetts Alliance for Portuguese Speakers (MAPS) provides a range of health and social services for Portuguese-speakers in the area. Although it caters to an ethnic population, it is not well connected with Union Square's Brazilian or Portuguese business communities. Lastly and although not a formal group, the grassroots organization behind the *Spice of Life*<sup>26</sup> festival has played an important role in the community, and has been successful in reaching out to a wide array of stakeholders in the area.

None of the organizations listed seems to have strong affiliations with the ethnic business groups in Union Square. In addition, although some of these organizations may lend their support in the revitalization efforts, none are currently actively working with USMS. This is highlighted by the fact that there is no representation of any of these organizations in the USMS Board of Directors.

#### USMS's Challenges and Opportunities in Context of Main Lessons

In this section, I look at the main challenges and opportunities USMS faces in the context of the lessons from the literature review and the case studies. I will focus on analyzing

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<sup>26</sup> The *Spice of Life* festival started in October 2000 and ran for three years. It showcased the great diversity of Union Square through music performances, food stands and artists' displays.

which aspects of Union Square need to be taken into account when adapting the key lessons presented in Chapters 2 and 3.

### *Main Lessons from Literature Review*

The literature review on ethnic entrepreneurship and organizational design and the review of two case studies documented by practitioners- Fruitvale and District del Sol- uncovered important findings that should be considered in the context of USMS's efforts.

- **Co-ethnics play an important role as customers and employees for ethnic businesses.**

Based on the information obtained through the business owners interviews discussed in Chapter 4, the ethnic businesses in Union Square seem to share the characteristics uncovered in the ethnic entrepreneurship literature review: co-ethnics compose, for the most part, the main customer and employee base. This is important to note because the dependence on co-ethnics initially acts as an engine for growth but can eventually act as a barrier. For example, the marketing knowledge Union Square ethnic businesses have seems to be limited to ethnic media. In addition, by employing mostly co-ethnics, these businesses might not have the internal resources and knowledge necessary to be able to successfully expand to a wider customer base.

- **The absence of trust is a precondition to conflict.**

The absence of trust towards planning initiatives and, in particular, City Hall extends beyond the ethnic business owners in Union Square. As highlighted in Chapter 4, business owners across ethnic lines are skeptical about the Main Street program being another example of "lots of talk, but no action." In a memo written by a City of Somerville official in the summer of 2004, the "serious lack of trust between the various stakeholders in Union Square" was one of the top obstacles mentioned for the implementation of the Main Street program.<sup>27</sup> The lack of representation of different groups in USMS's Board is likely to exacerbate the mistrust. USMS needs to

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<sup>27</sup> *Union Square Main Street Memorandum* written by Shoma Haque, Rappaport Fellow in the Department of Planning and Development, in August, 14 2004.

understand the significant challenge this poses to get buy-in and support from the entire business community and the repercussions it will have in the future if not addressed properly.

- **The selection of participants is a critical factor in determining the future success of an organization.**

The creation of the Union Square Main Street Board was not designed to be representative from the start, mostly due to the top-down process it followed. USMS was presented as a mandate from the City, and leaders were identified by City of Somerville officials. The City drew resources from formal organizations in the area, including the Somerville Chamber of Commerce which has very limited reach within both the ethnic and the non-ethnic business communities in Union Square. Although individuals that do not see representation as a problem claim that the organizing stage has been successful, the reality is that there are major stakeholder groups that were left out in the process. Without integrating ethnic business owners, USMS' ability to develop strategic capacity is compromised. At the moment, the leadership appears to be very concentrated within some stakeholder groups, potentially creating a feeling of "us" vs. "them."

- **Events tied to the ethnicity of a district can be an effective promotional tool.**

Both case studies covered in the practitioner literature review have been able to successfully leverage the ethnicity of their districts by tying it to large-scale events. The *Cinco de Mayo* and the *Day of the Dead* festivals are promotional assets to District del Sol and Fruitvale respectively, and attract over 75,000 attendees from various areas of the city. Union Square has the opportunity to leverage its rich multi-ethnic character in events that have a general draw and celebrate the district's diversity like it did in the past with the *Spice of Life* festival.

### *Main Lessons from Case Studies*

The case studies covered in Chapter 3 provide valuable insights into strategies that could be implemented in Union Square to leverage the multi-ethnic character of the district. It

is important to note that neither Hyde Jackson Square nor Sunset Park is a mirror of Union Square. The districts have important demographic and organizational differences within their business communities that need to be taken into account. I will highlight some of the most significant differences in the context of the main lessons learned from the case studies.

- **Leveraging the existing organizations and networks of an area increases resources and helps reach out to potential members through different avenues.**

Hyde Jackson Square Main Street and the Sunset Park BID were able to leverage a strong merchant association to generate interest in the revitalization initiatives and reach out to potential members. Both organizations benefited from the high level of civic experience and networks within their district. Furthermore, HJSMS integrated two local CDCs into the Board of Directors, increasing capacity and widening the organization's reach.

Union Square's situation is more challenging. Although several established organizations in the area focus on the business community, most notably the Chamber of Commerce, the level of participation is very low. Out of the fifteen business owners interviewed, only four belong to the Chamber. Not unlike the trust issues mentioned earlier, the lack of interest in participating in formal organizations is also a larger issue within the business community in Union Square, and is not confined to the ethnic community.

- **Individuals that act as 'bridges' between different communities play a key role in reaching out to ethnic business owners and engaging them in the revitalization efforts.**

'Bridges' are individuals who connect two communities that otherwise might not be connected. Their role is incredibly important as they are able to build support within groups that sometimes seem unattainable, and act as agents for building trust. In the Sunset Park BID, a Latino business owner who was also part of the merchant association ensured the participation of the Latino community in the revitalization

efforts by conducting the outreach in Spanish. Still, it is important to note that the BID has not been as successful in including the other ethnic groups found in Sunset Park.

Union Square might face a similar challenge. Since there are over eight ethnicities represented in the district, the amount of ‘bridging’ that needs to take place is significantly multiplied. To make the situation more complicated, some of the ethnic communities found in Union Square are fragmented. Even the Brazilian community, which is by far the largest in the district, does not have a person in a leadership position at the moment that can fulfill a ‘bridging’ function. The relationship between the business owners seems to be more informal and based on customer-to-client interactions.

- **Regular one-to-one communication is the most effective outreach strategy.**

All four cases covered in Chapters 2 and 3 point to one-on-one communication as the most effective avenue for getting business owners involved and excited about the revitalization programs. Key leaders of both HJSMS and the BID allocate a substantial part of their time to walking the district and talking to business owners directly.

USMS’s Executive Director has been able to make direct contact with many of the business owners in the area. Out of the fifteen interviewed, only three business owners claimed they had not heard of USMS. Yet, even some the ones that have heard of it are not clear on the organization’s mission and goals. Language barriers might have played a role. To this end, USMS needs to increase its direct outreach efforts to the entire business community. Furthermore and tied to the prior point about ‘bridges’, USMS needs to find leaders who are fluent in languages represented in the district to reach out to ethnic business owners and get them to understand what the organization is about. As mentioned earlier, USMS’s current leadership has limited foreign language capacity.



- **Conducting a needs assessment exercise is a powerful tool to get stakeholders involved and excited about the revitalization efforts.**

HJSMS was successful in understanding the business community's main concerns by conducting focus groups around issues affecting the neighborhood. Similarly, the BID is able to formulate an agenda every year based on the results from an annual needs assessment survey. In both cases, the exercises have proven to be effective avenues to get support and buy-in from the business community.

To date, Union Square business owners have not been formally asked about their needs and concerns. The only voices being heard are of those merchants who participate in formal organizations or who are proactive and attend meetings. Ethnic business owners do not seem to fall into this category, although they represent 44% of the total businesses in the CBD.

### Recommendations for USMS

In this section, I propose specific recommendations to Union Square Main Street on how to integrate the Square's rich diversity in its organizational structure and promotional efforts. The recommendations take into account the challenges and opportunities listed above together with other important findings that emerged from the analysis of Union Square. They are divided in two themes: organization and promotion.




#### *Organization*

USMS faces significant challenges in getting ethnic business owners interested in taking leadership positions and excited about the revitalization initiatives. First, there is widespread skepticism in the neighborhood about efforts that involve City Hall. This skepticism is shared by both ethnic and non-ethnic business owners. Second, the ethnic communities are not formally organized and their informal networks are not particularly strong. There seems to be a lack of communication, even within specific ethnic communities, such as with the Brazilian business owners. Third, there is no on-going history of the different communities working together to improve the area. Lastly, there

are serious language barriers playing out in the district, with a significant number of ethnic business owners not speaking English fluently.<sup>28</sup>

Following is a table summarizing the main recommendations USMS could undertake to address the organizational challenges

*Table 9: Summary of Recommendations for USMS to Address Organizational Challenges*

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES		ACTIONABLE RECOMMENDATIONS	
Step 1	Recognize issue and agree on addressing it.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Have current Board understand lack of representation is an issue that will impact future success.</li> <li>➤ Obtain current Board’s buy-in for Step 2 and Steps 3.</li> </ul>
Step 2	Increase organizational capacity.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Grow Board of Directors:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Add more businesses and non-profits to balance stakeholder groups.</li> <li>○ Include non-English language capacity.</li> <li>○ Integrate key organizations operating in Union Square.</li> </ul> </li> <li>➤ Identify and recruit leaders that can act as ‘bridges’ for different ethnic communities.</li> </ul>
Step 3	Build trust and ownership.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Assess needs through focus groups and surveys.</li> <li>➤ Organize around a common cause or need.</li> <li>➤ Conduct constant one-to-one outreach.</li> <li>➤ Translate promotional materials.</li> <li>➤ Run networking events and provide technical assistance.</li> <li>➤ Show results.</li> </ul>

<sup>28</sup> While conducting interviews with business owners, I either interviewed or talked to several that were not fluent in English. Although I do not have any specific data to support this observation, it is important to note.

➤ **STEP 1: Recognize lack of representation in USMS is an issue and agree on addressing it.**

Before USMS can increase its capacity and address the lack of trust and ownership the business community feels towards the revitalization efforts, the Board has to accept the challenge it is facing: USMS is not representative of the area. This reality impacts USMS's organizational capacity and, in the future, will impact the success of the revitalization initiatives. As highlighted in the organizational design literature review, having a diverse group increases productivity and resources. Some of the potential benefits to USMS include more widespread physical improvement and better coordinated marketing among others. The case studies reviewed support this idea. In Hyde Jackson Square the integration of non-Latino merchants into the revitalization efforts was crucial in the success of the organization. In the case of Sunset Park, although the BID has not been as effective in integrating ethnic business owners besides Latinos, the organization is working on reaching out to the Asian community because it recognizes that the lack of representation is a problem.

Once the Board recognizes the issue, it has to buy-into a plan to make the necessary changes to have a more inclusive and representative organization. Step 2 provides recommendations on how this could be accomplished.

➤ **STEP 2: Increase Organizational Capacity.**

An essential step towards ensuring a more representative and inclusive organization is to enhance USMS's organizational capacity. Increasing the number of Board Members is one way to achieve this goal. Another is to identify and recruit individuals who can act as 'bridges' and leaders for the different ethnic communities.

### **Grow the Board of Directors.**

USMS's Board of Directors is relatively small when compared to other Main Street Boards. In addition, the Board is more resident-focused. Out of the total seven members, only two own a business in Union Square. As found in the interviews with the merchants, the Union Square business community is already skeptical about any "planning" initiative taking place in the district. Business owners across ethnic lines expressed frustration with the lack of action in the area. Having such limited representation of the business community could also contribute to the merchants' perception that their needs and concerns are not being properly addressed. This will, most likely, add to the feelings of mistrust already present. In addition, USMS is not leveraging the organizations in the area. Although not nearly as strong as in Hyde Jackson Square, Union Square has several organizations that have been active in the past and that have resources that could be utilized.

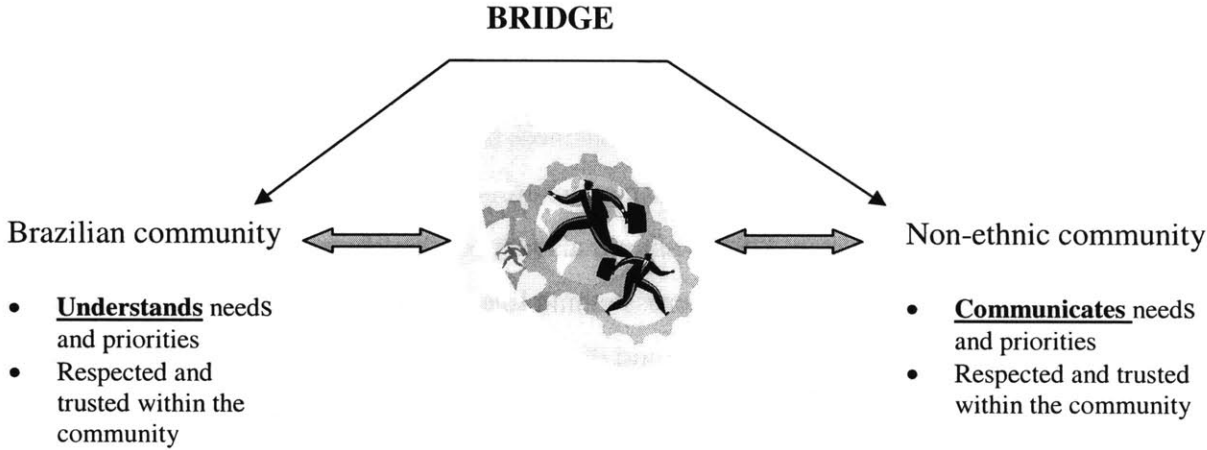
USMS should therefore consider increasing its Board by three to five new members that represent the business community and organizations in the area. In addition, it should recruit new Board Members that represent different ethnic communities. If the organization wants to be successful in reaching out to ethnic business owners, it needs to grow its foreign language capacity. As was highlighted in both the case of HJSMS and the BID, addressing the Latino business owners in Spanish proved to be a very efficient strategy to get them involved. At a minimum, USMS should recruit new members that speak Portuguese to address the very prominent Brazilian and Portuguese business communities found in the district.

### **Identify and Recruit Leaders that can Act as 'Bridges'.**

USMS needs to identify individuals that can act as 'bridges' between Union Square's ethnic and non-ethnic communities. Besides providing leadership, 'bridges' give legitimacy to the specific needs of the ethnic community they belong to and serve. They can also effectively identify and allocate other resources needed to implement ideas. Most importantly, they can help transform what is seen as "their vision" into "our vision"

by representing a different voice while owning a piece of the process. I will use the Brazilian community as an example since it is the largest business group in the district.

*Exhibit 5: Example to illustrate the role a Brazilian business owner acting as a 'bridge' could fill by connecting the Brazilian business community and the non-ethnic business community in Union Square. The Brazilian community is used for illustrative purposes.*



Currently, the Brazilian community feels no sense of ownership over USMS' plan because they have not been part of shaping it. A bridge that has the respect of both the Brazilian community and the USMS Board can help by bringing and legitimizing a new voice in the process. One person who could be a good 'bridge' with the Brazilian community is the owner of Amazonia Insurance. Due to the nature of his business, he has client-to-customer relationships with a large number of Brazilian business owners in the area. In addition, he participated as a Director in the Chamber of Commerce and is well respected by non-ethnic business owners. He can play a crucial role in communicating the benefits of getting involved in USMS to the Brazilian business owners and in representing their needs within the organization.

While I have used the Brazilian community as a way of highlighting this recommendation, it is important to recognize that USMS needs to bridge with other groups as well, most notably the Asian and Latino communities. The owners of Reliable Market and El Internacional represent potential 'bridges' to these communities respectively.

Once USMS increases its organizational capacity and is ready to engage ethnic business owners, it will have to work on building trust in the organization and having the community feel a sense of ownership over the revitalization initiatives.

➤ **STEP 3: Build Trust and Sense of Ownership within Business Community.**

USMS will need to spend a significant amount of time addressing the issues of mistrust and lack of ownership felt within the business community. Several tactics should be pursued. Conducting a needs assessment exercise through focus groups or surveys could be an effective first step. USMS should also try to identify a common issue or need that will mobilize business owners across ethnic lines. Constant outreach through one-on-one conversations, networking events and distribution of promotional materials will also play a crucial role towards achieving this strategic goal. Finally, throughout the entire process, it is fundamental that USMS promotes its achievements to the business community on a continuous basis and shows that things are happening.

**Assess needs through focus groups and surveys.**

USMS has to go back several steps to build the constituency it needs to support the revitalization plans in the area within both the ethnic and the non-ethnic business communities. One way of generating interest and a sense of ownership within the business community is by running small focus groups. In Hyde Jackson Square the focus groups played an important role in getting the business community's support to start the Main Street program.

Since USMS is already in place, the purpose of the focus groups in Union Square should be to determine the main needs and priorities for the business owners, both ethnic and non-ethnic. Most importantly, the focus groups should be used to build ownership over the revitalization process and identify other leaders in the community who will help move the Main Street initiative along. It is imperative that the current USMS Board understands the cost faced if the unrepresented stakeholder groups, most notably the ethnic business owners, are not included early in the process. Besides the focus groups, USMS could also

assess the needs of the business owners in the district by distributing a survey. As demonstrated in the case of HJSMS and the BID, a needs assessment exercise not only informed future strategies but also helped the organizations build trust and interest in the revitalization efforts.

To date, Union Square’s business owners have not been formally asked what their needs and concerns are. The only voices being heard are of those merchants who participate in formal organizations or who are proactive and attend meetings. Based on the findings from the interviews, ethnic business owners do not tend to fall in this category. Yet that does not change the reality that these owners represent 44% of the total businesses in the CBD. It is therefore essential that USMS provides a forum, both through focus groups and surveys, for ethnic business owners to voice their concerns while feeling their needs are being recognized and acted upon. USMS should also consider translating the survey into different languages to facilitate communication and to demonstrate interest in obtaining their opinion.

**Organize around a common cause or need.**

Once USMS understands the main needs of the business community, it should try to find a common and concrete cause to get people mobilized and organized around.

Commercial revitalization and all the catchy phrases that come with it (e.g. “improve livability,” “enhance the business district”) are vague and might not mean anything to business owners. In addition, these phrases do not provide the sense of immediacy that will motivate a large number of stakeholders to organize. As highlighted in Chapter 3, in both Hyde Jackson Square and Sunset Park the issue of crime and safety provided a good reason for people to come together. In Union Square, the extension of the Green Line might be that issue. Fourteen out of fifteen business owners interviewed mentioned it as the number one opportunity in the area. Flyers for the public meeting to discuss the topic could be seen in storefronts all around the CBD. Although the project brings up other issues due to its long-term nature, the support at the moment cuts across any ethnic lines and represents a common goal for the business community overall.

**Conduct constant one-to-one outreach.**

Throughout the entire process, USMS should focus on directly reaching as many business owners as possible. All four case studies covered in this thesis point to one-on-one communication as the most effective outreach tool to engage business owners and get them excited about the revitalization efforts. USMS should dedicate a significant amount of time to talking directly to the business owners and keeping them informed about the organization's activities. When interviewed, one Brazilian merchant put it simply by saying that all USMS had to do to get her involved was to "come and talk to me."

In this capacity and in conjunction with the Executive Director, USMS leaders and 'bridges' that speak a language represented in the district will play a crucial role in reaching out to ethnic business owners. As noted earlier, many merchants do not seem to be fluent in English. Having someone address ethnic business owners in their native language will significantly enhance communication. Personality also plays an important role in one-to-one communication. Besides having foreign language ability, individuals that are charismatic and well-liked within the community should take the lead in reaching ethnic business owners.

**Translate promotional materials.**

Translating materials into the languages spoken by business owners in the district could also be an effective way of integrating ethnic business owners. Besides aiding communication, it will show that USMS cares about including them. The Sunset Park BID translated all of its materials in Spanish during the first years, and had several messages in Chinese in their newsletter. Although it decided to cut back on translations due to costs and not wanting to exclude any ethnic group, the current Director says the translations helped get a wider group of constituents behind the revitalization initiatives. In Union Square, materials should be translated at least into Portuguese to address the Brazilian and Portuguese communities, which represent almost 25% of the businesses in the CBD. USMS should explore getting the materials translated for free or at a low-cost by partnering with organizations such as the Massachusetts Alliance for Portuguese Speakers (MAPS), by asking community members for help or by hiring a student. The



latter avenues could also be used to translate materials into the other languages spoken in the district.

**Run networking events and provide technical assistance.**

Other possible avenues for building trust and reaching out to the business community include networking events and technical assistance support. Networking events proved to be highly successful for District del Sol where Main Street organized after business hours social events for merchants to come and meet each other. In addition, it held monthly events with outside speakers that addressed topics of interest to the business community. Running these types of events in Union Square could prove to be successful in strengthening the relationships between both ethnic and non-ethnic merchants. At the moment, the business owners are not well organized either formally or informally, and their interactions seem to be more based on a client-to-customer level rather than on a business owner-to-business owner level. The networking events could help, to a certain extent, structure these relationships and cultivate a sense of community.

USMS could also assist ethnic businesses in growing their markets beyond co-ethnics. In Hyde Jackson Square, the Main Street organization helped one Latino restaurant owner promote his business to a wider, non-Spanish speaking market. Due in part to HJSMS's efforts, the restaurant is currently one of the top destinations for Latinos and non-Latinos alike. USMS should look into technical assistance programs that address the needs of the ethnic business community. Demonstrating genuine interest will be powerful in establishing trust with the ethnic business owners. USMS leaders acting as 'bridges' should play a primary role in getting the business owners interested in both the networking events and the technical assistance programs.

**Show results!**

Throughout the entire process USMS needs to 'market' itself and all its achievements to the entire business community in Union Square. One of the main sources of mistrust comes from the "lots of talk, but no action" feeling found throughout the district. Demonstrating that USMS is causing change and delivering on plans should significantly

alter this perception. Constant one-to-one communication, newsletters and a website are good vehicles to use. USMS is already utilizing some of these vehicles but needs to expand its reach. Visible and tangible changes are also powerful. In Hyde Jackson Square, the storefront renewal program played an important role in getting business owners excited about the revitalization initiatives. In sum, USMS should not be shy about promoting all the great accomplishments they will achieve.

The challenges USMS faces from an organizational standpoint are significant and complex, yet they are not insurmountable. USMS is in a point in time where it can make changes before the organizational challenges negatively impact the success of the revitalization initiatives. Recognizing there is a representation issue, increasing the organization's capacity and building trust and ownership of the plans within the entire business community are essential first steps. Addressing the main organizational issues will also prove to be critical for the success of the following promotional recommendations.

### *Promotion*

From a promotional standpoint, USMS is on the right track to leverage the multi-ethnic character of the district. The organization is already following some of the effective practices found throughout the case studies. More than addressing challenges, the recommendations tied to promotion are focused on utilizing opportunities that are already present in the district. To this end, USMS would greatly benefit from developing a plan around basic marketing principles that can be applied to its commercial district, or two of the four marketing Ps: Product, and Promotion.<sup>29</sup>

First, USMS needs to define the 'product' it will be promoting or selling. Convenient location, important anchor stores or unique shopping or consumption experiences are some ways commercial districts can be positioned as a product. In the case of Union Square, USMS should leverage its multi-ethnic character in creating a product image and

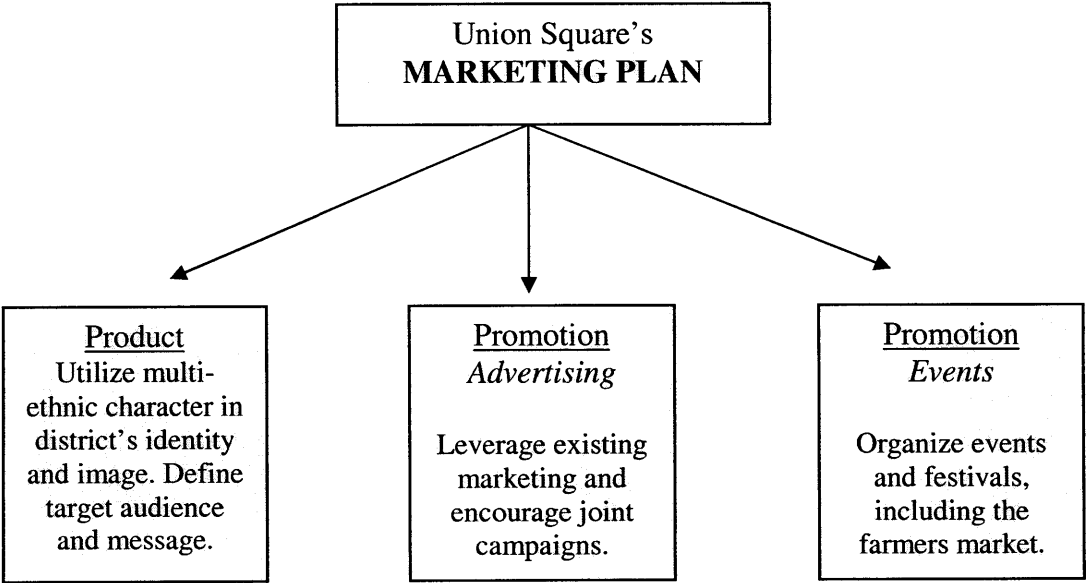
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<sup>29</sup> The four P's of marketing are: Product (the product or service provided); Place (the distribution channels used to get the product to the customer); Promotion (the outreach efforts to get customers interested); and Price (quantity charged for the product or service).

a cohesive message. Second, the organization needs to determine the vehicles that could be used to promote the district to current and potential customers. USMS could utilize the existing marketing knowledge in the district on which vehicles it could use to reach a larger ethnic and non-ethnic customer base. Third, USMS should continue the planning efforts underway to bring events, festivals and activities to the area including the farmers market.

Following is a summary of the recommendations that USMS could undertake to leverage the promotional opportunities of the district:

*Exhibit 6: Summary of Recommendations for USMS to Leverage Promotional Opportunities*



**Create an identity of Union Square as a multi-cultural destination.**

As evidenced in the case studies, ethnicity can be a promotional draw if positioned correctly. The Sunset Park BID was able to successfully leverage its multi-ethnic character to get free coverage in local newspapers. Similarly, Hyde Jackson Square has been able to play on the Latino presence in the district to attract customers from outside of the neighborhood. From a multi-cultural standpoint, Union Square is a model district.

The presence of the Brazilian, Irish, Latino and Asian communities is immediately felt by simply walking down one block and looking at the storefronts. In addition, Union Square already has a reputation for its ethnically diverse restaurants and food markets that can be further capitalized on.

USMS should turn the district's current reputation and multi-ethnic reality into a competitive advantage. By marketing Union Square as an ethnically diverse district with a strong restaurant and entertainment mix, USMS could appeal to a wider customer base and differentiate the district from its competitors. None of the competing squares highlighted in Chapter 4 seem to be utilizing diversity in the positioning message of their districts.<sup>30</sup> The organization's current ideas for positioning the Square as "union of all nations," "you don't need a plane to travel the world" and "where the world eats/meets" are right on target and should be further developed.

#### **Leverage existing marketing in the district.**

Once USMS defines the image and the way the district will be presented, it needs to decide which vehicles will be used. Union Square merchants are already promoting their businesses to ethnic and non-ethnic customers alike. Thirteen out of the fifteen business owners interviewed mentioned they promote their establishment through print advertising, radio or television. Ethnic business owners tend to focus on advertising in ethnic media. *O Globo*, *A Semana* and *Telemundo* were the vehicles most widely mentioned. USMS has the potential to gain advertising dollars from the promotions that are already taking place.

USMS should integrate into its plan the existing marketing knowledge in the district. It should leverage the marketing expertise of both ethnic and non-ethnic business owners,

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<sup>30</sup> Positioning statements posted on competing districts' websites-- HARVARD SQ.: "Harvard Square is a world-renowned shopping, dining, cultural and historical destination."; INMAN SQ.: "Inman Square is one of the last bastions of owner-run businesses in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the US and the Earth."; and CENTRAL SQ.: "Frequented by students and professors, business people, visitors, and residents, Central Square establishments offer a bit of everything, all in one convenient place." Other competing squares do not have a website.

and understand which vehicles have proven to work. In addition, USMS should help ethnic business owners understand how to position their businesses to a larger customer base while preserving their ethnic character. Finally, USMS should help restaurants get exposure in the food sections of print media as this has proven to be an effective draw in the past.

**Encourage businesses to run joint promotional campaigns.**

A joint advertising campaign is an effective way to communicate to current and potential customers that they have many reasons to visit an area. After initial opposition by the restaurant owners, HJSMS ran a joint campaign promoting different establishments in several local newspapers. The business mix in Union Square easily lends itself to cross-promotional opportunities. Just like in Hyde Jackson Square, a joint campaign could be created around restaurants. The Square has fourteen ethnic restaurants that are already a draw to the area and one of the district's greatest assets. USMS could pay for or encourage business owners to run a joint campaign utilizing media vehicles that have worked in the past such as *Boston Magazine* and *The Phoenix*. The tagline "where the world eats/meets" would fit perfectly in this context.

**Organize large-scale events that bring people to the district.**

Large-scale events have proven to be successful promotional vehicles to get people from outside of the neighborhood in a district. The *Cinco de Mayo* festival in District del Sol, *Day of the Dead* in Fruitvale, *World Fair/Feria Mundial* in Hyde Jackson Square and *Parade of Flags* in Sunset Park have all achieved this goal. Furthermore, their appeal is mostly due to the celebration of ethnicity or ethnicities found along the different districts.

A similar event or festival in Union Square could also prove to be successful. USMS should consider creating a new event or reviving the *Spice of Life* festival through the *ArtsUnion* program. The festival attracted 3,000 people the year it launched (2000), and proved to be a great event to bring the community together. Five business owners, almost all ethnic, mentioned it as an idea for promoting the district. Like all the districts mentioned above, USMS could promote the event to a larger audience through print and

radio advertisements and flyers. The farmers market scheduled to launch in the summer of 2005 will also be a great asset to the Union Square community that could be utilized to bring more people into the district. In addition, USMS could expand it into a farmer's and international food market where local stores and restaurants sell food along with the farmers.

Overall, USMS is in a strong position to leverage Union Square's multi-ethnic character in its marketing plan. In addition, USMS can gain current advertising dollars and can utilize the exiting marketing knowledge in the district to reach a wider customer base. Lastly, through the *ArtsUnion* program the organization has the financial resources needed to sponsor a large scale event if it wishes to do so. Yet as mentioned earlier, in order for all these promotional recommendations to be successful, USMS needs to address the organizational challenges it is facing at once. Without the buy-in from the ethnic business owners and their marketing knowledge, USMS promotional efforts will most likely flounder.

#### *Final Remarks on USMS*

Union Square continues to be a portal entry for immigrants. As such, the demographics of the area will most likely continue to change, presenting an ongoing representation challenge for USMS. For this reason, the recommendations highlighted in this thesis will have to be revisited and modified according to the needs of the district. The organizational issues will have to be continually addressed, and new leaders and 'bridges' will have to be recruited on an ongoing basis. In addition, the focus on improving the area led by organizations such as USMS might also change the economic composition of the residential neighborhoods in the area, affecting the demand for products and services currently found along the CBD. Rising rents and gentrification are already issues mentioned by many business owners in the district. These changes will also need to be addressed in the context of the image of the district and the way it is presented through promotional materials.

## Conclusion

This thesis starts with the assumption that diversity in a district, if treated properly, can be an asset for revitalization initiatives. Through a review of academic literature on ethnic entrepreneurship, commercial revitalization and organizational design, a review of the case studies on Fruitvale and District del Sol documented by practitioners and by documenting the cases of Hyde Jackson Square Main Street and Sunset Park BID through primary and secondary sources, I argue that there are three components that can turn ethnicity into an asset rather than a barrier:

1. The extent to which ethnic business owners are selected to participate in the revitalization efforts and integrated into leadership roles.
2. The types of outreach and communication strategies utilized by the organization leading the revitalization efforts to engage ethnic business owners and how the benefits of participating are communicated.
3. The promotional efforts that are tied to the ethnic character of the area to attract a wider customer base and to give it a competitive advantage.

Throughout this thesis, I have provided effective practices on how several commercial districts have integrated these three components. The case studies covered provide a number of lessons that are applicable to Union Square and other urban neighborhoods. In addition, I have analyzed the case of Union Square and provided specific recommendations to the organization leading the revitalization efforts on how to best integrate the district's multi-ethnic character into their revitalization efforts, drawing on the lessons from the case studies and literature reviewed.

I understand there are limitations to my argument. First, if all the businesses position themselves as 'ethnic' then there is no competitive advantage. Second, I only focus on the business community and do not address ethnicity within other stakeholder groups involved in commercial revitalization such as residents and representatives from

community organizations. Third, I do not look at how ethnicity can be incorporated into other aspects of commercial revitalization strategies such as design elements and economic restructuring. Further research could be conducted to study these issues in more depth.

For now, I hope this thesis is helpful to the Union Square Main Street organization and other practitioners working on commercial revitalization in multi-ethnic business districts. Getting a diverse group of constituents to participate in enhancing a commercial district is challenging but worthwhile as it is an indicator of future success.



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## **Appendix A: List of Interviewees**

Tony Barros, Founder, Hyde Jackson Square Main Street.

Kristi Chase, Preservation Planner, City of Somerville.

Aileen Duggen, Director, Hyde Jackson Square.

Ben Dryer, Board Member and Head of Design Committee, Union Square Main Street.

Renee Giordano, Director and Founder, Sunset Park 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue BID.

Valerie Grabiell, Former Director, Hyde Jackson Square Main Street.

Mimi Graney, Executive Director, Union Square Main Street.

Shoma Haque, Rappaport Fellow, Office of Housing and Community Development, City of Somerville.

Kenneth Kelly, Board Member and Head of Promotions Committee, Union Square Main Street.

Bob Rodriguez, Founder Sunset Park 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue BID.

Carrie Sousa, Project Manager, Office of Housing and Community Development, City of Somerville.

The identity of the fifteen business owners interviewed in Union Square cannot be disclosed due to confidentiality reasons.

## Appendix B: Union Square Business Inventory

The business inventory encompasses the businesses located in the Central Business District (CBD) as defined by Union Square Main Street as of March 2005.

- The names of the businesses, addresses, and retail/service category were obtained via field research (observation).
- The ethnicity was determined either by field research (name of business or storefront display) or through the interviews conducted with business owners in the area.
- The square footage was determined based on a two-step process:
  1. Identifying the building in the City of Somerville Assessors Maps and using the database (<http://data.visionappraisal.com/somervillema/>) to obtain the building's square footage.
  2. In the case of multiple businesses in one building, I walked each storefront to determine the percentage of the building's square footage that is allocated to the specific business.

NOTE: Some of the buildings with odd shapes were harder to measure and, therefore the approximated square footage is less accurate.

Name of Business	No.	Street	Floor	Ethnicity	Retail/Service Category	Apprx. Sq feet	1st floor Sq Ft	Map/Lot
Good Year Tires	1	Bow St.	1		Vehicle Sales	8,218	8,218	73-10 C
Commercial Space	11	Bow St.	1,2		-	7,602	3,801	73-11 C
Feel Well Rehab Clinic	19	Bow St.	1		Medical and Dental	2,109	2,109	73-24 A
Law Offices	23	Bow St.	1		Accounting and Legal	1,971	1,971	73-25 A
The Neighborhood Res and Bakery	25	Bow St.	1	Brazilian	Restaurant	1,546	2,310	73-26 A
Ned's Hair Cutting Salon	29	Bow St.	1		Hair/Nail Salons	764		
Stanhope Framers	55	Bow St.	1		Design/Artist	8,250		63-20 C
Mt. Auburn Health Care	33	Bow St.	1		Medical and Dental	6,335	6,335	73-27 A
Auto Repair	65	Bow St.	1		Vehicle Maintenance, Repair	1,176	1,176	63-32 C
Gold Scissors	75	Bow St.	1		Hair/Nail Salons	1,067	3,950	63-33 C
Little India	77	Bow St.	1	Indian	Restaurant	1,501		
Union Square Real Estate	79	Bow St.	1		Real Estate	1,382		
Capone Foods	12-14	Bow St.	1	Italian	Specialty/Wholesale/Bakery	2,415		
Union Square Bistro	16	Bow St.	1,2		-	6,503	6,622	74-13 C
Toque de Anjo	18	Bow St.	1	Brazilian	Apparel	3,311		
Union Square Market Place	22	Bow St.	1		Convenience Store	2,650	2,650	74-12 C
Boyes Watson Architects	30	Bow St.	1		Designs/Artist	1,151	1,151	74-10 C
John Ambark Dentist	36	Bow St.	1		Medical and Dental	1,328	1,328	74-8 C
Solucao Casa de Carnes	38	Bow St.	1	Brazilian	Specialty/Wholesale/Bakery	1,494	3,049	74-7 C
Jerry's Underground	39	Bow St.	1		Hair/Nail Salons	518		
Sunny's Deli	40	Bow St.	1		Convenience Store	1,037		
Fred M. Susan & Sons	271	Somerville Av.			Vehicle Maintenance,	6296	6,296	81-7 D

Name of Business	No.	Street	Floor	Ethnicity	Retail/Service Category	Apprx. Sq feet	1st floor Sq Ft	Map/Lot
					Repair			
Union Square Veterinary Clinic	37	Union Square	1		Veterinary	1742	6,184	74-15 C
Somerville Multiservice	295	Somerville Av.	1	Latino	Electronics and appliances	1,200		
JJ Vaccaro Telecommunications Group	38	Union Square	2		Other professional services	2,022		
Girl from Ipanema	8	Bow St.	1	Brazilian	Hair/Nail Salons	980		
Davidson Laundry	10	Bow St.	1		Cleaners/Laundry	1,440		
Wagner Jewelers	301	Somerville Av.	1	Brazilian	Jewelry	822		
Lino's Restaurant	307	Somerville Av.	1	Portuguese	Restaurant	1,938	1,938	74-16, 17 C
International Optical	311	Somerville Av.	1	Portuguese	Other	929	929	74-18 C
Jerry's Liquors	329	Somerville Av.	1		Liquor Store	4,052	4,052	74-21 C
Sally O'Briens	335	Somerville Av.	1	Irish	Bar	1,564	5,008	74-22,23 C
Union Square Family Health	337-341	Somerville Av.	1		Medical and Dental	3,444		
Commercial Space	335-341	Somerville Av.	2		-	5,008		
P.A.s Lounge	345	Somerville Av.	1		Bar	2,794	2,794	74-24 C
Bombay Market	359	Somerville Av.	1	Indian	Specialty/Wholesale/Bakery	600	1,929	74-27 C
Mistica	361a	Somerville Av.	1	Brazilian	Apparel	634	1,959	74-28 C
Cidinha	361b	Somerville Av.	1	Brazilian	Apparel	702		
AA Cash Register	361c	Somerville Av.	1		Hobby/Special Interest	623		
Shalo Bo	62	Bow St.	1	Brazilian	Hair/Nail Salons	458	12,407	74-1C
Amazonia Insurance	66	Bow St.	1	Brazilian	Insurance	5,648		
International Market	367	Somerville Av.	1	Brazilian	Convenience Store	1,104		
All Seasons Home Remodeling	369	Somerville Av.	1		Design/Artist	509		
Silvia's Boutique	369	Somerville Av.	1	Brazilian	Apparel	637		
Brazilian-American Laungages	371	Somerville Av.	1	Brazilian	Instruction	1,146		
Braz Transfers	377	Somerville Av.	1	Brazilian	Wire transfer, lottery	3,363		
Club Choices	381	Somerville Av.	1		-	2,100	2,100	63-34 C
M/S Caribbean Music and Products	383	Somerville Av.	1	Hatian	Music/Book/Video	1,289	2,578	63-35 C
Hollywood Nails Design	389	Somerville Av.	1		Hair/Nail Salons	1,289		
Wuchon House	290	Somerville Av.	1	Asian	Restaurant	4,458	4,458	82-8 C
Dunkin Donuts	282	Somerville Av.	1		Pizza, Fast Food	2,023	2,023	82-10 C
Walnut Street Center	300	Somerville Av.	1		Medical and Dental	4,238	4,238	74-3 D
Vendas Inmobiliarias	304	Somerville Av.	1	Brazilian	Real Estate	933	2,160	74-2 D
Commercial Space	314	Somerville Av.	1		-	525	1,050	
Digitron	316	Somerville Av.	1		Printing and Publishing	525		
La Internacional Food Corporation	320	Somerville Av.	1	Latino	Convenience Store	2,479	2,479	74-1 D
New Asia Chinese Cuisine	326	Somerville Av.	1	Asian	Restaurant	3,086	3,086	74-16 B
Union Hair Salon	344	Somerville Av.	2	Brazilian	Hair/Nail Salons	3,141	3,141	74-24 B
J.J. Sullivan Plumbing	346	Somerville Av.	1		Home	3,141		
Maranatha Hair Salon	358	Somerville Av.	1	Brazilian	Hair/Nail Salons	1,162	2,108	74-8 B
Bacc Travel	362	Somerville Av.	1	Brazilian	Travel	946		
The Family Center	366	Somerville Av.	1,2		Medical and Dental	10,672	5,336	74-4 B
Tir Na Nog	366a	Somerville Av.	1	Irish	Bar	814	814	74-3 B

Name of Business	No.	Street	Floor	Ethnicity	Retail/Service Category	Apprx. Sq feet	1st floor Sq Ft	Map/Lot
Luzia's Brazilian Restaurant	372	Somerville Av.	1	Brazilian	Restaurant	1,923	2,944	74-1 B
Champagne Glass Company	374	Somerville Av.	1		-	1,021		
Pine Mine Country Antiques	380	Somerville Av.	1		Home	1,952		
Londontowne Galleries	380	Somerville Av.	1		Home	1,952	3,905	74-4 A
Market Basket	400	Somerville Av.	1		Supermarket	46,278		
Mikes Automotive Service	1	Union Square	1		Vehicle Maintenance, Repair	4,698	4,698	82-7 C
Riverside Kawasaki	2	Union Square	1	Italian	Vehicle Sales	7,786	7,786	82-6 C
Mandarin Chinese Restaurant	7	Union Square	1	Asian	Restaurant	2,206	5,122	82-4 C
Angel Nails	9	Union Square	1		Hair/Nail Salons	709		
Union Square Korean Restaurant	9a	Union Square	1	Asian	Restaurant	2,206		
Western Union	12	Union Square	1	All	Wire transfer, lottery	1,879	2,868	82-3 C
Auto Insurance	13	Union Square	1		Vehicle Maintenance, Repair	989		
MA State Lottery	14	Union Square	1		Wire transfer, lottery	2,176	2,176	82-2 C
Amarildos Hair Design	18	Union Square	1	Brazilian	Hair/Nail Salons	2,225	3,754	82-1 C
Mamma Ginas	19	Union Square	1		Pizza, Fast Food	1,529		
Commercial Space	19	Union Square	2		-	3,804		
Walden Cleaners	21	Union Square	1		Cleaners/Laundry	610	7,182	74-5 D
Charles Roberts Hair Cutters	21a	Union Square	1		Hair/Nail Salons	542		
Excel Mortgage	22	Union Square	1		Real Estate	542		
India Palace	23	Union Square	1	Indian	Restaurant	700		
Red House Chinese Restaurant	24	Union Square	1	Asian	Restaurant	700		
Machu Pichu Restaurant	25	Union Square	1	Latino	Restaurant	900		
Verizon Wireless	26	Union Square	1		-	1,151		
Lifetime Transfer	28	Union Square	1	Haitian	Wire transfer, lottery	474		
It's a Girl	29A	Union Square	1		Apparel	474		
Sherman Café	257	Washington St.	1		Specialty/Wholesale/Bakery	1,151		
Elegant Furniture	31	Union Square	1		Home	4,938		
Third Life Studio	33	Union Square	1		Instruction	2,529		
Professional Offices	33.5	Union Square	2			5,753		
G&T Custom Tailoring	36	Union Square	1	Brazilian	Tailor/Shoe Repair	600		
Citizens Bank	41	Union Square	1		Bank	5,718	5,718	73-19 D
Reliable Market	45	Union Square	1	Asian	Convenience Store	5,282	5,282	73-19B D
Reliable Video	52	Union Square	1	Asian	Music/Book/Video	1,164	4,656	73-19A D
Brasil Insurance	53	Union Square	1	Brazilian	Insurance	1,164		
Fred Villaris Studios and Self-Defense	54	Union Square	2		Instruction	1,893	1,893	
Wayne A. Snow CPA	53	Union Square	2		Accounting and Legal			
Union Square Smoke Shop	54	Union Square	1		Convenience Store			
Chez Orize	56B	Union Square	1		Hair/Nail Salons	1,164	6,850	73-29 E
Maria's Market	57	Union Square	1	Portuguese	Specialty/Wholesale/Bakery	3,087		
Quick Color Copy	60	Union Square	1		Printing and Publishing	1,660		
Richard Schifone Law Offices	60	Union Square	2		Accounting and Legal	1,660		
Union Bakery	61	Union Square	1	Brazilian	Specialty/Wholesale/Bakery	1,992		
Centro Comunitario Vida	61	Union Square	2	Brazilian	Medical and Dental	1,992		
Bank of America		Union Square	1		Bank	111		



Name of Business	No.	Street	Floor	Ethnicity	Retail/Service Category	Apprx. Sq feet	1st floor Sq Ft	Map/Lot		
Union Square Pizza & Subs	63	Union Square	1		Pizza, Fast Food	827	2,021	73-28 E		
Costamar Travel	64-65	Union Square	1	Latino	Travel	1,194				
Toast Lounge	70	Union Square	1		Bar	3,000	10,037	73-27 E		
Apt. Hub Real Estate	70	Union Square	2		Real Estate	2,000				
Christopher Kokoros Insurance	70	Union Square	2		Insurance	2,000				
CAAS	70	Union Square	1		Social Service Provider	5,000				
The Ruby Rogers Center	71	Union Square	1		-	1,680	1,680	73-26 E		
The Independent	75	Union Square	1	Irish	Restaurant	3,162	3,162	73-25 E		
Somerville Community Access TV	90	Union Square	1		Social Service Provider	2,531	5,061	73-1 F		
MA Alliance for Portuguese Speakers	92	Union Square	1	Portuguese	Social Service Provider	2,531				
Monro Muffler Break	223	Wahington St.	1		Vehicle Maintenance, Repair	2,669	2,668	81-31 A		
Ricky's Flower Market	238	Wahington St.	1		Flowers/Plant Store	8,200	8,200	81-1 D		
Gulf Gas Station	231	Washington St	1		Gas/Motor Oil	6,388	6,388	81-7 E		
Taqueria La Mexicana	247b	Washington St	1	Latino	Restaurant	1,134	3,494	73-23 E		
Irish Eyes Pub	249	Washington St	1	Irish	Bar	2,360				
Vango Convenience	251	Washington St	1		Convenience Store	1,801	13,428	73-24 E		
Metro Design Group	251b	Washington St	1		Design/Artist	3,604				
St. Gerards Thrift Shop	251a	Washington St	1		Apparel	1,965				
Great Thai Chef	255	Washington St	1	Asian	Restaurant	6,059				
Post Office	237	Washington St	1		Post Office	20,000			n/a	81-8 E
Police Station	220	Washington St	1,2		Police	57,534			29,613	81-4 D
Sillari Plumbing	210	Washington St	1		Home	1,249	2,498	81-1 C		
Best Rate Insurance	208	Washington St	1		Insurance	1,249				
Cota Stuzziero Funeral Home	197	Washington St	1		Other professional services	2,941	2,941	81-12 B		
Somerville Boys and Girls PS	181	Washington St	1		School	15,000		81-11 B		
Auto Brokers/Valvoline Oil Change	182	Washington St	1		Vehicle Maintenance, Repair	1,000	3,097	94-1 D		
Marione Studio Photo	179	Washington St	1		Other professional services	1,306	5,879	93-9 F		
Modern Styles Hair	175	Washington St	1		Hair/Nail Salons	1,225				
Adonia Gospel Records	171	Washington St	1	Brazilian	Music/Book/Video	735				
The Dog House	169	Washington St	1		Hobby/Special Interest	1,266				
Ginettes Beauty Supply	165	Washington St	1	Brazilian	Other	653				
Mister Vacuum	163	Washington St	1		Appliances	694				
Esquina Brazil	161	Washington St	1	Brazilian	Apparel	500				
JJ Variety Subs	157	Washington St	1		Pizza, Fast Food	1,785				

**Appendix C: Sample of Roles and Responsibilities Email or Letter used to Recruit Potential Main Street Board Members**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_;

I am the president of the \_\_\_\_\_ Main Street Board of Directors. Each year in February, prior to our annual meeting, new people are sought to fill open positions on our Board. Three Board Members will be retiring from the Board in February.

Your name has been suggested as a possible new Board Member, as we have targeted some business and professional areas that we would like to have represented on our Board. We strive to have well-balanced mix of representatives directing the programs of Main Street.

Our Board meetings are held monthly, on the second Wednesday at 7:45 a.m. They last approximately one hour. We also ask that each member serve on a standing committee, such as Organization, Promotion, Economic Restructuring, or Design. Board members are asked to commit from four to eight hours a month to Main Street. Each member is also needed to play a role in our annual fund raising efforts.

If you are interested in getting involved in what I believe is an exciting and accomplishment drive program, I ask that you please fill out the enclosed form which will help us see how your expertise fits with our current board mix. I would appreciate it if you could return your form by \_\_\_\_\_, if possible. If you have any questions or would like more information about Main Street, please feel free to call me at 555-5555 or call John Smith, Executive Director of \_\_\_\_\_ Main Street.

If you are not interested at this time but would like us to keep your name in consideration for future board openings, please let us know.

Sincerely,  
Bill Gates, President  
Our Town Main Street Board of Directors

The survey sheet had the following on it. From their forms we plotted all their answers out on one sheet, just a big sheet blocked off with these characteristics running down the side and board member's name across the top. By plotting our current Board Members, we could see what our board was lacking and then added the potential new members characteristics, we could tell who would fill the gaps for us.

**MAIN STREET BOARD OF DIRECTORS COMPOSITION ANALYSIS**  
Please check all that apply to you:

**SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE**

- 1. Administrative -- General
- 2. Architecture
- 3. Artist
- 4. Banking
- 5. Budgeting/Finance
- 6. Business Owner
- 7. Charity Organization
- 8. Computer Equipment (Hardware)
- 9. Computer Programs (Software)
- 10. Education
- 11. Fund raising
- 12. Health Care
- 13. Leadership
- 14. Legal
- 15. Marketing
- 16. Media/Public Relations
- 17. Organizing
- 18. Personnel
- 19. Planning/Development
- 20. Politics
- 21. Public Safety
- 22. Public Speaking
- 23. Real Estate
- 24. Service Clubs
- 25. Social Services
- 26. Volunteer Administration
- 27. Writing
- 28. Other Skills \_\_\_\_\_

**PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS**

Age

- 15-20
- 21-35
- 36-50
- 51-65
- Over 65
- Male
- Female

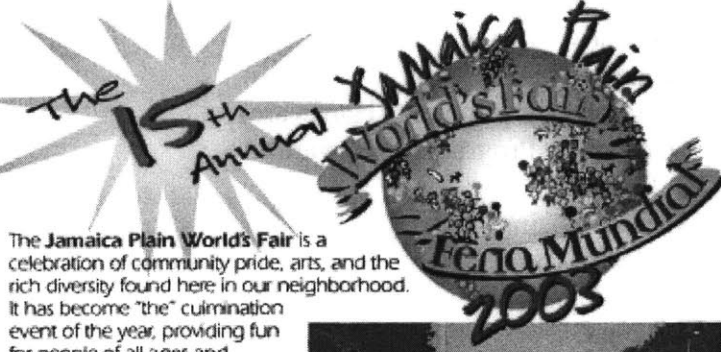
The 4 W's make a strong and healthy board. Which one of the following best describes you?

- Wealth
- Wisdom
- Worker
- Worrier

**Appendix D: Flyer Advertising Hyde Jackson Square's World Fair/Feria Mundial**

**The City's  
Most Diverse  
Community  
Event**

*takes place in  
Jamaica Plain*



The Jamaica Plain World's Fair is a celebration of community pride, arts, and the rich diversity found here in our neighborhood. It has become "the" culmination event of the year, providing fun for people of all ages and cultures!

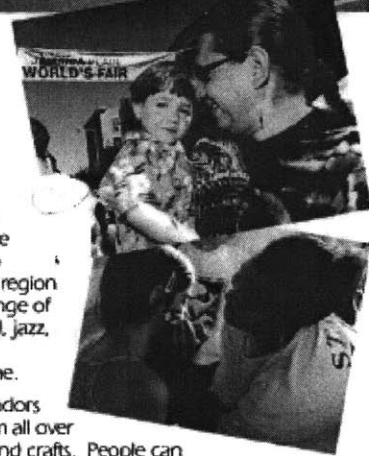


The Fair is hosted by local business and community groups and organized by hundreds of volunteers. From its origins as a sidewalk sale fourteen years ago, the Fair has grown into a "don't-miss" extravaganza attended by more than 20,000 people.



The event kicks off with a parade through the district featuring baton twirlers and bicyclists. Local youth groups perform dance and musical numbers throughout the day on the community stage.

The musical lineup on the main stages features top bands from around the region representing a wide range of styles, including gospel, jazz, mariachi, funk, salsa, merengue, and reggae.



The varied mix of vendors includes artisans from all over the city selling arts and crafts. People can sample the foods of many countries from some of the area's top restaurants and cafés. Exciting children's activities including interactive art, dance, festival rides, and puppets are stationed throughout the festival.



The hosts of this event have worked together for many years to revitalize the neighborhood. They are the Hyde Square Task Force, Hyde/Jackson Square Business Association, Hyde/Jackson Square Main Street Program, and the Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Development Corporation.



**The Jamaica Plain World's Fair symbolizes the spirit of diversity and community pride that make Jamaica Plain one of the best places to live in the city of Boston!**

# Appendix E: Sunset Park BID 2004 Survey Questions and Results



**Sunset Park District Management Association**  
**Sunset Park Business Improvement District**  
 476 51<sup>st</sup> Street, cor. 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor / Brooklyn NY 11220  
 PHONE: (718) 439-7767 / FAX: (718) 439-7794  
 EMAIL: [SunsetParkBID@aol.com](mailto:SunsetParkBID@aol.com) / WEBSITE: [sunsetparkbid.org](http://sunsetparkbid.org)  
**SERVING SUNSET PARK'S 5<sup>th</sup> AVENUE COMMUNITY SINCE 1995**

## SUNSET PARK BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT SURVEY

The Sunset Park Business Improvement District exists thanks to the vision of dedicated business, civic and political leaders in the Sunset Park community, who recognized the necessity for an equal sharing of the burden and responsibility in keeping 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue viable as a business district and as the "heart" of the Sunset Park community.

Now, after almost nine full years of operation, Sunset Park has a "Main Street" which is virtually graffiti-free, cleaner, safer, more welcoming and economically healthier. Your BID has opened reliable lines of communication with all city agencies that have a responsibility for providing local services. It has created linkages with other organizations. Strong positive relationships have developed between your BID and your elected officials from all levels of government. The diverse members of the business and residential communities have come together to work positively for an enhanced quality of life in Sunset Park.

Once again, we need to hear from you, the members, so that we know how your BID is affecting you and what paths it should take in the future. Please take a few minutes to answer the questions below that pertain to you and return this survey to your BID office by March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2004. Thank you.

	<u>Circle One</u>	
	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>
<b><u>ABOUT OUR MEMBERS</u></b>		
1. Have you owned your building, business or lived on 5 <sup>th</sup> Avenue for less than 4 years?	7	41
2. Have you owned your building, business or lived on 5 <sup>th</sup> Avenue for 4-9 years?	13	33
3. Have you owned your building, business or lived on 5 <sup>th</sup> Avenue for more than 9 years?	69	12
<b><u>BID GENERAL INFORMATION</u></b>		
1. Are you aware that you are part of the Sunset Park 5 <sup>th</sup> Avenue BID?	82	3
2. Do you get mail from your BID with information on meetings, projects, plans?	77	8
3. When you get mail from your BID, do you read it and/or respond to it?	81	7
4. Would you like to become more involved in the future of your BID?	55	25
5. Would you like to see your BID continue its work of revitalizing 5 <sup>th</sup> Avenue for you?	85	2
<b><u>BID ADVOCACY &amp; STAFF</u></b>		
1. Has your BID advocated for you personally or solved a problem with a city agency for you?	14	66
2. Are you aware that your BID lobbies to keep city services on 5 <sup>th</sup> Avenue?	62	16
3. Has your BID staff been helpful and pleasant when dealing with you?	54	6
<b><u>BID PROMOTIONS</u></b>		
1. Did you receive your BID window decal for you to display your BID membership?	20	55
2. Have you participated in one or more BID events, or programs - Safe Haven, Parade of Flags, Sidewalk Sales Days, Street Festival, gift certificates, tree planting, free advertising, meetings, tree lighting, surveys, R.O.S.E. mini-grant program?	37	43
3. Have you ever received, through the BID, "no tax week" posters, information on forums, grants, loans, or other programs of importance to you?	21	58
<b><u>RECONSTRUCTION/RENAISSANCE PROJECT</u></b>		
1. Have you seen the decorative lampposts on 5 <sup>th</sup> Avenue purchased with the \$850,000 which your BID asked Assemblyman Ortiz to allocate towards the beautification of 5 <sup>th</sup> Avenue?	68	15
2. Did you know that Congresswoman Velázquez has allocated \$180,000 towards this project?	31	47
3. Did you know that Councilwoman Gonzalez has allocated \$50,000 towards this project?	35	48
4. Did you know that your BID is monitoring and meeting with NYC Department of Transportation to plan for the Reconstruction of Sunset Park's 5 <sup>th</sup> Avenue which may begin in 2008?	43	43

**BANNERS AND HOLIDAY LIGHTS**

**YES - NO**

1. Did you see the holiday lights on every block from 38 <sup>th</sup> to 64 <sup>th</sup> Street?	79	3
2. Did you see the illuminated SUNSET PARK BID arches on 38 <sup>th</sup> & 64 <sup>th</sup> Street?	73	6
3. Did you attend the stage performances at the BID tree lighting ceremonies?	12	68
4. Did the 18' holiday tree placed in front of OLPH on 59 <sup>th</sup> Street and 5 <sup>th</sup> Avenue add to the spirit of cooperation between the community and the merchants?	60	8
5. Have you noticed that the lamp post banners change 5 times during the year, promoting shopping?	47	30

**SECURITY**

1. Did the security force, hired by your BID to monitor 5 <sup>th</sup> Avenue during December, act as a deterrent to crime and give a greater sense of safety to shoppers?	61	9
2. Does the free Safe Haven program foster a special bond between the businesses and the local community by protecting children and senior citizens?	53	12
3. Would you be interested in taking part in the Safe Haven program?	27	32
4. Do you think that having security cameras on 5 <sup>th</sup> Avenue will create a safer avenue and deter crimes such as graffiti and burglaries?	67	12

**SPECIAL EVENTS ON 5<sup>TH</sup> AVENUE**

1. Have you ever participated in the Sunset Park 5 <sup>th</sup> Avenue BID Street Festival?	26	52
2. Did you know that there wasn't a single act of violence or problem even though 75,000 people enjoyed this year's Street Festival?	31	45
3. Did you know that the BID-sponsored 5 <sup>th</sup> Ave. Parade of Flags has been taking place for 10 years?	44	32
4. Do you think that Sidewalk Sales Days for 4 days in July will bring more attention to 5 <sup>th</sup> Avenue businesses?	57	18

**GRAFFITI REMOVAL PROJECT**

1. Does a graffiti-free 5 <sup>th</sup> Avenue create a more pleasant shopping atmosphere for customers?	79	4
2. Did the graffiti removal company, hired by your BID, maintain your property graffiti-free?	53	18

**SANITATION & PAILS**

1. Do you think a clean street and sidewalk will entice more shoppers to come to 5 <sup>th</sup> Avenue?	77	3
2. Have you seen our BID sanitation crew emptying and cleaning underneath the corner pails?	62	15

**VENDOR ISSUES**

1. Do you think that street peddlers hurt business and create an unpleasant shopping area?	65	11
2. Will you help us in our campaign to eliminate illegal vending from 5 <sup>th</sup> Avenue?	72	5
3. Did you know that there are regulations prohibiting most street vending on 5 <sup>th</sup> Avenue?	59	19

Other Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

If you would like to receive more information or be more involved please include the following information:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Business name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION  
AND FOR CARING ABOUT YOUR BID COMMUNITY.

## Appendix F: Union Square Business Owners Interview Questions

*The questions included in this document served as a guide while conducting interviews with business owners in Union Square. The questions were asked in a conversation format rather than a formal interview format.*

### About their business

- How long have they been in area as a business owner? If applicable, as a resident?
- How long has the business been open?
- How many employees does the business have?
- Do you own or rent space in the building? If you rent, who is your landlord?
- Who are your customers?
  - Where do they come from (geography)?
  - Do they belong to specific ethnic group(s)?
- Do you do any marketing for your business? How and where? What has been most effective?

### About themselves

- What is your involvement in the business? How many hours do you spend in the business per day/week?
- Are you US or foreign born? If foreign, how long have you been in the US? If US born, what is your decent?
- If foreign born, did you have a business in the country you were in before coming to the US?
- What is your main language of communication with family/friends? With customers? With other business owners?

### About Union Square

- What main trends have you seen in the area in the last 5 years?
- What are the main challenges and weaknesses you see in the area?
- What are the main opportunities and strengths you see in the area?
- If you think 5 years from now, what is your vision for Union Square? What kinds of stores do you see? What kinds of customers do you see in your store? How do you envision the physical space of the Square?
- What do you think would be a good way to promote Union Square to a wider customer base? What would be the message? Which vehicles would you use?

### About Linkage with other Businesses

- What kinds of networks or groups (formal or informal) do you belong to in Union Square or in Somerville?
- What types of relationships do you have with other business owners in Union Square? How often do you talk to or socialize with other business owners in the area?

- Do you belong to a merchant association? If so, do you believe your needs as a business owner are being addressed? If not, why? Have you ever been involved in one?

#### About Main Streets

- Do you know about the Main Street program that is being implemented in the area? What do you know? What do you think about it?
- Do you think Union Square will benefit from having a Main Street program? Why or why not?
- Have you attended any USMS meetings? Do you plan to? Are you interested in being a member of any of the committees?
- Do you think the program will effectively represent the needs of your business? Why or why not?
- What could USMS do to ensure your needs are being addressed? From an organizational standpoint? From a promotional standpoint?
- What kind of programs or training would you like USMS to make available that would help you with your business?



## Appendix G: Union Square Main Street Brochure

Initiated by Mayor Joseph Curtatone, Union Square Main Streets is a non-profit, public-private partnership between the City of Somerville, the National Main Street Center, Union Square business leaders, residents and community leaders. The city's first community-based economic revitalization program will provide merchants and community residents with the tools for the neighborhood to advance its own redevelopment.

Union Square Main Streets follows a proven national model. Begun in 1977 by the National Trust for Historic Preservation initially to protect historic commercial architecture, the Main Street program has developed as a comprehensive revitalization strategy to stimulate economic development in traditional commercial districts like Union Square. Currently the National Main Street Center administers the program in 40 states and over 1600 communities in the US, most notably with a citywide network of Main Street districts in Boston. The Main Street model is a framework for restoring a community's economic vitality then maintaining these positive changes.

# UNION SQUARE MAIN STREETS

Mayor Joseph Curtatone and Union Square Main Streets invite you to

*Celebrate  
Union Square*

Join in Launching  
Union Square  
Main Streets  
Wednesday, February 23  
6:30pm -8:30pm  
The Independent Restaurant  
in Union Square

Union Square Main Streets, initiated by Mayor Joseph Curtatone, is a non-profit organization to revitalize Union Square. With other business leaders, residents, civic and community leaders learn how all of us can work together to improve the economic life of Union Square. For more information please contact [USMS@unionsquaremain.org](mailto:USMS@unionsquaremain.org) -- 617-623-1392 x119

# Changing Union Square

Union Square Main Streets increases the vibrancy of this Somerville neighborhood by enhancing its business district and surrounding neighborhoods through active community collaboration.

- We are a broad-based group of representatives of Union Square, including business and commercial property owners, residents, non-profit and civic leaders, and Somerville city government.
- We help Union Square grow as a thriving, safe, friendly business district providing diverse cultural offerings and a variety of independent businesses to both serve and employ residents.
- We strive to make Union Square cleaner and more pedestrian-friendly.
- We seek to improve the storefronts of Union Square with better signage and a cleaner appearance.
- We promote Union Square, so that people will want to live in Somerville and shoppers will come from other areas to enjoy its vibrant arts, retail and entertainment offerings.
- We foster local leadership and cooperation of residents, businesses and landlords to build a healthy, economically vital Union Square.
- We recognize that there are no magical, overnight solutions for reviving Union Square, just a gradual process of effective transformation. Revitalization comes both through cooperative planning for the future and creating visible change now.

Union Square Main Streets follows the successful model of the National Main Street Center with volunteer, community-based committees leading focused initiatives.

**Design-** Creates an inviting atmosphere for Union Square through preservation and creative reuse of historic buildings; Develops coordinated building design guidelines; Improves public spaces; Promotes storefront improvements

**Promotion-** Develops a unified Union Square identity and presents the promise of Union Square to shoppers, investors, new businesses, and visitors; Creates and distributes marketing materials; Hosts Union Square events; Implements a media campaign.

**Economic Restructuring-** Improves the retail mix in Union Square; Provides technical assistance; Directs real estate development; Recruits businesses to reduce vacancies.

**Transportation-** Enhances pedestrian accessibility and safety; Increases accessibility and access to public transportation; Improves traffic flow and access to parking.

**Organization-** Builds consensus and cooperation among the Union Square business district stakeholders; Recruits board members; Provides financial oversight; Raises funds.