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## LONG ISLAND INDEX 2008

Five Case Studies of Downtown Development

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## FIVE CASE STUDIES OF DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT

### 1. Transit-Oriented Development in a Dense Downtown: Davis Square, Somerville, Massachusetts

**Description:** With 76,000 people, the city of Somerville, Massachusetts, is the most densely populated suburb in New England. Davis Square is one of the city's most vibrant central squares. Located just three miles from downtown Boston, and within walking distance to both Tufts and Harvard Universities, Davis Square is home to a diverse mix of restaurants, coffee shops and stores that cater to students and young professionals who coexist with the area's working class residential base. The Davis Square stop on Boston's subway system connects it with the greater-Boston region, furthering increasing the square's attractiveness to residents, workers and business owners alike.

**Transit connection ushers in downtown vibrancy:** When Boston's transit authority began planning an extension of its Red Line in 1970, local stakeholders recognized that a station at Davis Square would catalyze revitalization and they campaigned for the stop. Time proved them correct: today, Davis Square is a regional dining and entertainment destination with some of the area's finest restaurants, an independent movie theater and live entertainment venue, coffee shops, bars, and a healthy mix of retail. The downtown's amenities and its connection to universities and other downtowns have also attracted the "creative class;" a number of software, architectural, marketing, and design firms have their offices in and around Davis Square.

Diverse housing options in the downtown and surrounding area invite an eclectic mix of working-class families, young professionals, college students and recent immigrants from countries as diverse as El Salvador, Haiti and Brazil. According to the 2000 census, around 1/3 of Somerville residents are foreign-born. Further, the downtown's revitalization has ushered in dramatic increases in property values for the residential neighborhood surrounding Davis Square, which, according to the City, has resulted in considerable new investment in the area.

### 2. High-density, mixed-used downtown with affordable housing and successful single-family neighborhoods: Stamford, Connecticut

**Description:** Located 25 miles to the northeast of New York City, Stamford is the fourth largest city in Connecticut with about 117,000 residents. Surrounded by 5 distinct neighborhoods, Stamford's downtown occupies less than 1% of the total area and is a vibrant center of culture, eateries and active retail and service establishments. Stamford is a major employment center, with 84,000 employees working in the city. Connecticut's most prosperous urban center, Stamford serves as the national headquarters for some of the world's most respected financial institutions, occupying many of the numerous office towers in and around the downtown.

**History:** Like many East Coast cities around the New York City metropolitan area, Stamford, was directly shaped by the rise, and then the fall, of industrialization. By the 1960's, post-war Stamford had severely declined and a massive urban renewal operation was undertaken to

revitalize the downtown. By the 1980's, Stamford had become a center for employment with a number of large office towers, a hotel and a regional shopping center. Having attracted employers and a thriving daytime population, the City expanded its focus to include housing in a 1984 update to its 1977 Master Plan. The new millennium found Stamford as the second largest financial industry center in the US with a rapidly revitalizing downtown scene, but still facing serious housing shortages and development pressures in the surrounding city's neighborhoods. The city underwent a 2 year process to develop its 2002 comprehensive Master Plan that focused development within the downtown to maintain the quality of life in the neighborhoods.

**2002 Master Plan – Downtown Density for Neighborhood Stability:** By the year 2000, City leaders recognized the need for a new Master Plan that built off of the success of those prior, but also factored in the changes not anticipated by them – most notably shortages of affordable housing and significant traffic congestion. The Master Planning process was guided by input from local residents, businesses and civic groups who recognized the importance of growing, but did not want to sacrifice the quality of life of their neighborhoods. The final recommendations of the plan were innovative and included: 1) Directing 80% of new housing and 70% of new office development to the already dense downtown and nearby South End neighborhoods to relieve traffic, positively impact economic development and maintain the identity of surrounding neighborhoods; 2) Reinforcing surrounding neighborhood centers through urban design improvements; and 3) Meeting affordable housing needs for 9,000 units through maintaining publicly supported homes, using tools such as zoning, a Housing Trust Fund, a pre-development loan pool and partnerships with non-profit organizations.

### **3. Transit-oriented downtown attracts young and diverse population: Mountain View, California.**

**Description:** Situated between the Santa Cruz Mountains and the San Francisco Bay, just 10 miles north of San Jose and 35 miles south of San Francisco, Mountain View, California is in the heart of the Silicon Valley and home to some of the country's most notable high-tech companies. The city of 72,000 has an active and vibrant downtown with a diverse and young population of around 11,000 residents that enjoy the downtown's thriving restaurant scene, nightlife and reasonably affordable housing. The downtown is well connected to the region via rail, light rail and bus service conveniently and it continues to become revitalized as the city intensifies land use around its transit systems.

**A Diverse Population Experiences Downtown Successes:** Mountain View's resident population is both young and diverse. According to census data, more than half of the population is between the ages of 20 and 54, with nearly 25% in the 25 to 34 year age bracket. 45% of this population is non-white. About 15% of Mountain View's population - or 11,000 people – resides in the city's downtown. Drawn by the employment opportunities and convenient transit connections, this young and diverse population enjoys the opportunities offered by downtown living that include dense, affordable housing, an active nightlife and a walkable and bikeable community with connections to parks. As a major regional employment center, the population of Mountain View swells 40% with a daytime population increase of nearly 30,000 people. The seven-block Castro Street downtown accommodates this population with an internationally diverse selection of restaurants and unique downtown shopping experiences. Mountain View is exceptionally well-served by transit and its downtown is home to Centennial Plaza, the city's

transit plaza which offers access to light rail, bus and regional rail that connects to both San Francisco and San Jose.

#### **4. Downtown undergoing dynamic revitalization process: Patchogue, Long Island**

**Description:** Patchogue is an incorporated village in the Town of Brookhaven, located about 55 miles east of Manhattan on the Great South Bay. The village is connected to New York City and other Long Island municipalities via the Long Island Railroad which has a station in the downtown. With an area just over 2 square miles, the village is home to nearly 12,000 residents, 28% of which were between the ages of 18-34 as of the 2000 Census. Nearly two-thirds of the population live within close proximity to the downtown area (according to 2000 Census block area data). Patchogue's downtown has been undergoing a dynamic revitalization process resulting in an increasingly livable center for culture, shopping and entertainment along Long Island's South Shore.

**History:** From as early as 1750, inhabitants of Patchogue took advantage of its streams and natural harbor transforming it into an important mill town, fishing village and shipping center. Following the installation of the Long Island Railroad in 1869, Patchogue became a significant tourist destination and incorporated as a village in 1893. As industries shifted, Patchogue's downtown slowly became the business center and engine of commerce, exemplified by Swezey's family-owned department store which attracted patrons throughout the region from the time it opened in 1894 until its closing in 2003. Like many downtowns on the Island, Patchogue began to decline in the wake of increased usage of the automobile and the development of large shopping malls and retail outlets in surrounding areas. Decline continued through the 1990's even as village leaders began to focus efforts on downtown improvements. Storefront vacancy rates remained high through the late 1990's when a turnaround began to take shape. Fresh cultural life was breathed into the area in 1998 when the Patchogue Theatre for the Performing Arts was reopened. The 1923 theatre, purchased by the Village Board in 1997, was given a \$5-7 million facelift and today offers residents and visitors opportunities to enjoy recitals, plays and other performances in the heart of the downtown. The success of the Theatre has spawned a new downtown restaurant industry – including a brewery - and affordable housing for artists and waterfront revitalization along the Village's river are likely soon to come.

**Affordable Homes Attract the Next Generation and Revitalize Downtown:** Aware of the importance of maintaining a young, professional population and familiar with the boost that new residents bring to downtowns, the leadership of the Village of Patchogue has spent the last few years cultivating affordable housing opportunities in Patchogue's downtown area. Most recently, the Village collaborated with Suffolk County and the Long Island Housing Partnership to transform 5 acres of underutilized lots - contiguous to the downtown and blocks from the LIRR station - into a mixed-income, 2-bedroom town house development. The Vision LI Smart Growth Award-winning Copper Beech Village offers 80 units of town houses – half at market rate and half at various discounted rates - and creates affordable housing for first-time homebuyers. Providing homes in convenient proximity to the downtown attracts those seeking the lifestyle offered by a newly thriving, cultural center and in turn, creates patrons for the local economy, further fueling Patchogue's revival. The development was the first project supported by the Suffolk County Workforce Housing Commission, which acquired half of the property as part of its effort increase housing options in the County. The Village continues to seek out

affordable housing opportunities and is considering collaborating with Artspace, a nationwide, non-profit developer of artists live and work space, to find affordable living opportunities for artists in the downtown.

## **5. Downtown with great potential: Hempstead, Long Island**

**Description:** Hempstead Village in Nassau County is less than 20 miles from Manhattan and well connected to the region via the Long Island Rail Road and MTA Long Island Bus. It is New York State's largest incorporated village, with more than 56,000 residents who live in several higher-density neighborhoods of townhouses, single-family houses and apartment buildings. Its active Main Street includes a diverse mix of retail and services, including many nightlife venues. The relative affordability of housing in Hempstead attracts a diverse population: the village has amongst the Island's highest non-white (Black, Hispanic and Asian) population (87%) and amongst the highest population of residents between the ages of 18 and 34 (33%) according the 2000 Census. Yet Hempstead continues to struggle with high poverty rates and a small tax base. With its central location, its exceptional access to transit, and the fact that higher densities already exist in the downtown, Hempstead has great potential as a future center for mixed-use and residential development.

**History:** The earliest settlers of what was to become Hempstead Village were religious freedom seekers from Stamford, Connecticut, determined to practice their own brand of Puritanism in 1644. By 1843, Hempstead had become Long Island's central marketplace and location for mercantile and mechanical businesses. This early "hub" became incorporated as a village in 1853 – the county's first. Over the years, the Village increasingly served as home to more residents – including the Vanderbilts and Belmonts – while it remained the center of commercial activity for more than two centuries. Hempstead's retail golden years came to an end in the late 1950's and 1960's when regional shopping malls – like nearby Roosevelt Field – opened with great success and downtowns started losing business. Coupled with the closing of a nearby Air Force base, Hempstead's longstanding residents began to leave the declining Village and by the 1980's, economic recession left it impoverished and blighted. Since then, several Village administrations have tried to wage redevelopment efforts, with little success. The 1990's brought large retail development projects to the Village as well as some new affordable housing, but not enough to trigger downtown revitalization. In the early 2000's, Hempstead built modern facilities for its LIRR train station and adjacent Long Island Bus Transit Center, demonstrating the importance of this transportation gateway to the future downtown revitalization.

**Opportunity Knocks** – Affordable Living at a Mass Transit Hub: Hempstead's position as a transportation gateway – its Transit Center serves more than 25,000 MTA-Long Island Bus riders a day on over 20 routes and the adjacent LIRR Station is the terminus of the electrified Hempstead Branch – holds great potential for the downtown as a thriving residential center. Large undeveloped parcels around the train and bus stations can be redeveloped as mixed-use buildings that attract young, first-time homebuyers and empty nesters looking to scale down. Already, upgrades to aging buildings in the village have made affordable, modern co-ops available to an emerging influx of residents. Access to public transportation makes Hempstead an attractive location for residents seeking easy commutes to the City or opportunities to get around the Island, but who cannot afford to own homes there. Some developers are even working together with the Long Island Housing Partnership to offer lower-income buyers loans of up to \$25,000 for new homes. Further, as one of Long Island's densest and tallest downtown,

Hempstead offers opportunities to build a strong downtown at a scale not typically seen on the Island. While a recent \$2 billion development proposal to redevelop 26 acres and build 2,500 downtown condos failed, the proposal signifies the interest of developers in this village. If community concerns can be addressed, large projects like these would help to create an economic base in the downtown - allowing for the preservation of the quality of life in the surrounding suburbs – while reinvigorating a walkable, vibrant downtown.