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Field Survey of 23 Long Island Downtowns

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FIELD SURVEY OF 23 LONG ISLAND DOWNTOWNS

Introduction

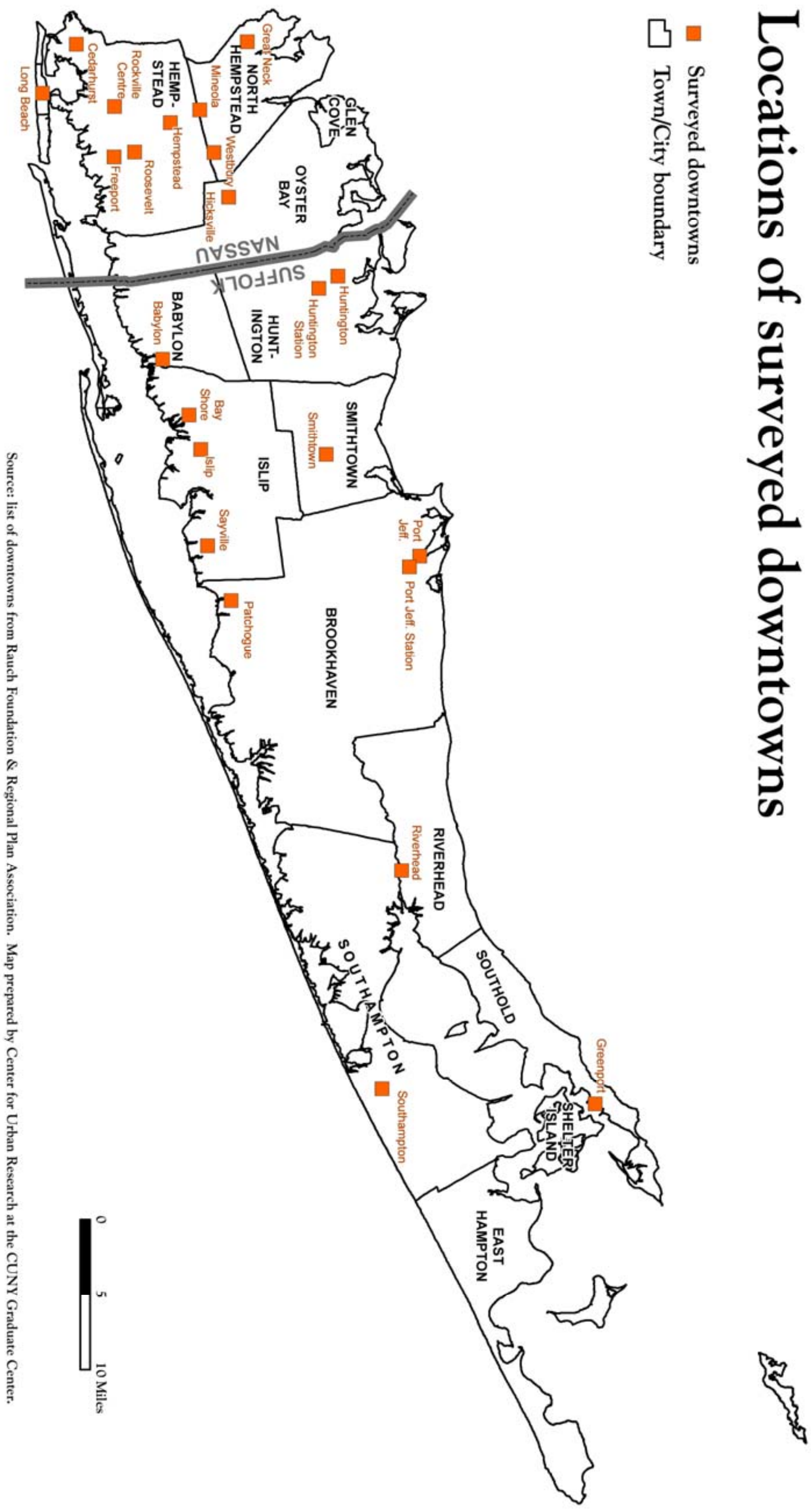
Long Island's downtowns hold great potential to serve as the centers of growth and affordability across the Island. Not only is there the most capacity to add new housing stock in downtowns, many of the Island's downtowns already serve as dense centers of economic activity, culture and access to transportation. Such characteristics create a rare opportunity to develop livable, affordable places that are attractive to diverse populations of young and old, different races and varied income levels. In order to get a sense of where these opportunities exist, 23 of Long Island's downtowns were field-surveyed along various parameters to assess what kind of downtowns we have and how different places are making or could make themselves into livable, affordable places.

Description of Methodology

2000 Census data were gathered for each of the places (Village, City, Census-Designated Place) containing the 105 downtowns (41 in Nassau; 64 in Suffolk) analyzed in the 2007 Long Island Index study of retail/service and vacancy rates, plus an additional 6 downtowns. Census Tract data was used for the area that encompasses downtown Great Neck. Using the Census data, the places were segregated by population into small (less than 5,000), medium (5,000-20,000) and large (greater than 20,000). The places were then ranked according to their share of 18-34 year-old residents, their income distribution, their ethnic diversity and the size of their daytime population. A list of places that combined these characteristics was developed and refined to ensure the representation of the north and south shore as well as the middle of the island. Preference was also given to those downtowns with LIRR stations. Finally, a couple of downtowns that did not meet all of these criteria but were considered important prototypes were added to the list. The final list included 23 downtowns featured in Figure 1.

23 Downtowns were surveyed through field visits in an effort to characterize the vitality of those downtowns and identify their trends, including housing options. Data collected included the number and height of residential and office buildings, type of parking, nearby open spaces, uses of downtown buildings including retail/service rates, vacancy rates, and an in-depth record of types of eateries, coffee shops, culture and entertainment uses, and service and institutional uses. Some information – including building type and height and open space- was collected for the areas immediately surrounding the downtown. Qualitative descriptions of each downtown were also produced by field researchers along with photos. Upon completion of the surveys, 2000 Census population data were gathered for each of the 23 downtowns by Census Block Group in an effort to obtain a more accurate portrayal of downtown population. These numbers are used in the figures below.

Figure 1


Locations of surveyed downtowns
Surveyed downtowns
Town/City boundary
GLEN COVE
NORTH HEMPSTEAD
HEMP-STEAD
OYSTER BAY
NASSAU
SUFFOLK
HUNT-INGTON
BABYLON
SMITHTOWN
ISLIP
BROOKHAVEN
RIVERHEAD
SOUTHOLD
SOUTHAMPTON
SHELTER ISLAND
EAST HAMPTON
Great Neck
Mineola
Westbury
Hicksville
Cedarhurst
Long Beach
Rockville Centre
Hempstead
Roosevelt
Freeport
Huntington
Huntington Station
Babylon
Bay Shore
Islip
Sayville
Smithtown
Port Jeff.
Port Jeff. Station
Patchogue
Riverhead
Southampton
Greenport
0
5
10 Miles
Source: list of downtowns from Rauch Foundation & Regional Plan Association. Map prepared by Center for Urban Research at the CUNY Graduate Center.

Descriptive statistics

Income Distribution surrounding the downtowns covered a broad range. The income distribution of residents in and around Long Island's downtowns is one way to get a sense of affordability. Some of Long Island's communities have considerable variations in income that create distinct areas of exclusivity and distinct areas of poverty. Analyzing the 2000 Census data for places on Long Island (Table 1), we see how income is distributed among residents of the places where our 23 field-studied downtowns are located. Both Greenport and Riverhead have over half of their residents with income levels below $40,000; possibly indicating higher levels of poverty in these areas, though also greater levels of affordability. Huntington, Rockville Centre and Great Neck all have around 40% of their residents in the greater than $100,000 bracket, possibly indicating less affordable places with exclusive nodes. Places with the most evenly distributed income included Port Jefferson, which despite its larger percentage of high-income residents, still has fairly even distribution of wealth in the area analyzed.

TABLE 1		
Long Island Downtown Area	Income	
	% Earning <39,999	% Earning >100,000
Smithtown	20	37
Huntington	21	41
Westbury	24	31
Sayville	24	32
Hicksville	24	28
Babylon	25	29
Rockville Centre	25	40
Great Neck*	27	39
Mineola	28	22
Islip	28	24
Port Jefferson	28	30
Huntington Station	31	22
Port Jefferson Station	32	21
Long Beach	32	22
Freeport	35	19
Roosevelt	35	19
Cedarhurst	35	26
Southampton	40	26
Bay Shore	40	17
Patchogue	43	14
Hempstead Village	45	14
Riverhead	55	9
Greenport	63	7

* Great Neck data is by Census Tract

Levels of downtown population and population density are varied. According to the 2000 Census Block Group data, our 23 field-surveyed downtowns and the areas surrounding them ("downtown areas") are diverse in terms of population and population density (Figures 1-3). The overall average population of the 23 field-surveyed downtown areas was close to 7,100 people per downtown area. Long Beach, Great Neck and Hempstead had the most populated downtown areas with over 15,000 people and along with Freeport, represent the largest of Long Island's downtown areas (over 10,000 people) The majority (13) of the downtown areas field-surveyed were medium-sized with populations between four and ten thousand. The least populated downtown areas field-surveyed were those with populations under 4,000; Sayville, Southampton and Greenport were amongst the smallest overall.

Population density varied widely across the areas. While both Long Beach and Great Neck had populations over 15,000, their densities were quite different;

population density in Long Beach approached 20,000 people/sq mi, while Great Neck's population is spread out over the area (around 8,000 people/sq mi). Hempstead Village had the highest population density of all areas - nearly 22,000 people/square mi, exceeding the average population density of Queens. Roosevelt and Mineola – while medium sized areas - had population densities over 10,000 people/square mile. The least dense downtown areas were Riverhead and Southampton with fewer than 1,000 people/square mile. Overall, population density for the 23 downtown areas field-surveyed was around 6,300 people/sq mi.

Figure 1: Population and Population Density of Large Downtowns (by Census Block Group)

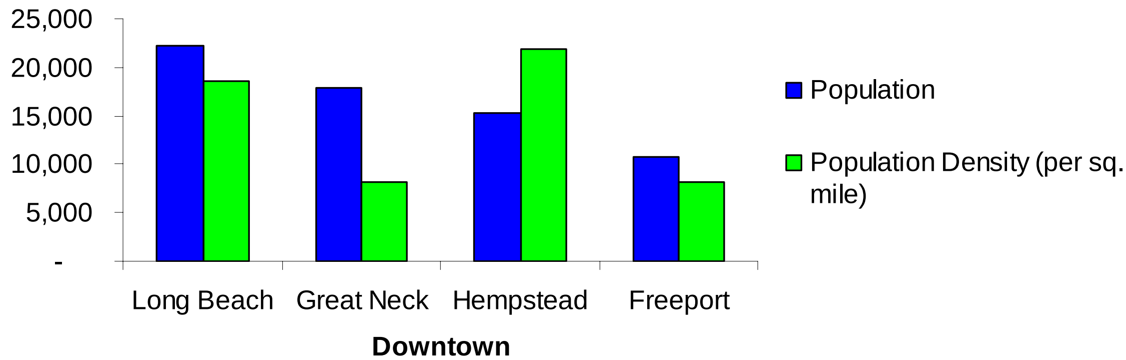


Figure 2: Population and Population Density of Medium Downtowns (by Census Block Group)

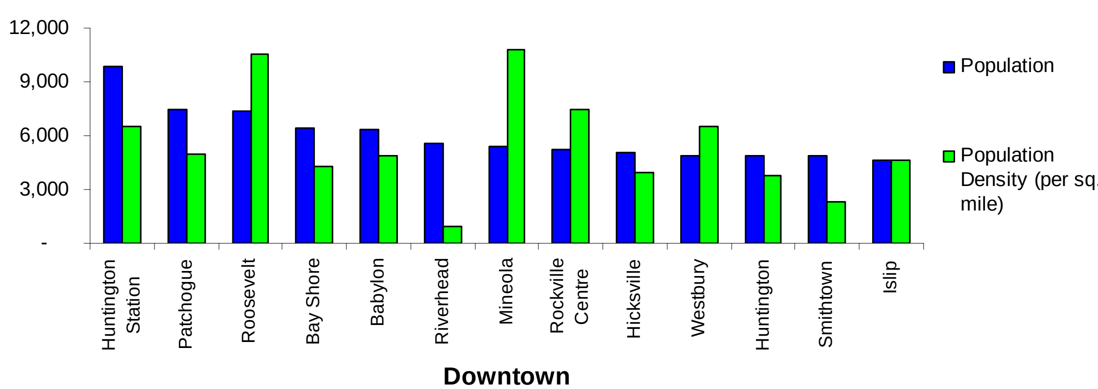
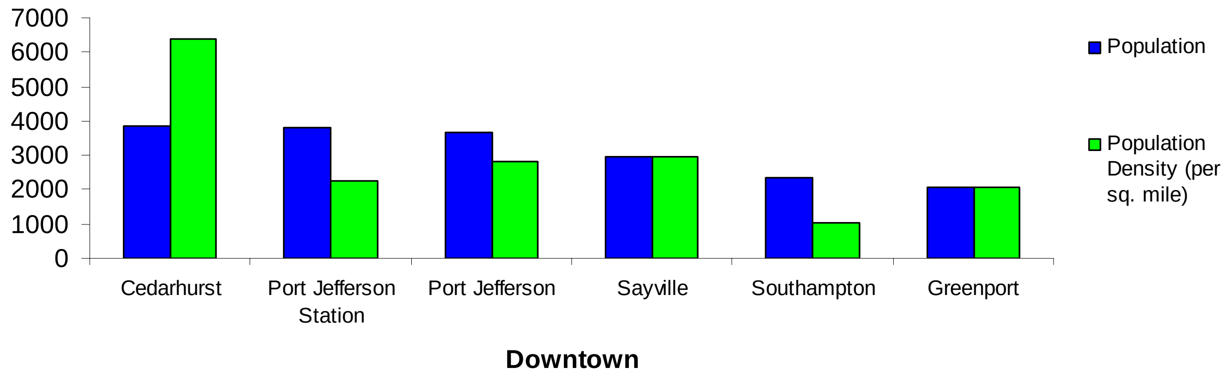


Figure 3: Population and Population Density of Small Downtowns (by Census Block Group)



Long Island's downtowns have generally low building heights. Using the 23 field-surveyed downtowns as a sample, we can get a general sense of the height of Long Island's downtowns by looking at the highest level of buildings recorded (Figures 4 and 5). The majority of field-surveyed downtowns (16 out of 23) ranged in the 1-5 story range of maximum height, with many not stretching above 3 stories. But 7 of the field-surveyed downtowns (Hempstead, Long Beach, Great Neck, Mineola, Cedarhurst, Westbury and Rockville Centre) had buildings with at least 6 stories in the downtown or surrounding area. The highest buildings in or around our field-surveyed downtowns were 9 stories high and were found in Hempstead, Long Beach and Westbury.

Figure 4: Maximum Number of Stories in Long Island Downtowns and Surrounding Areas

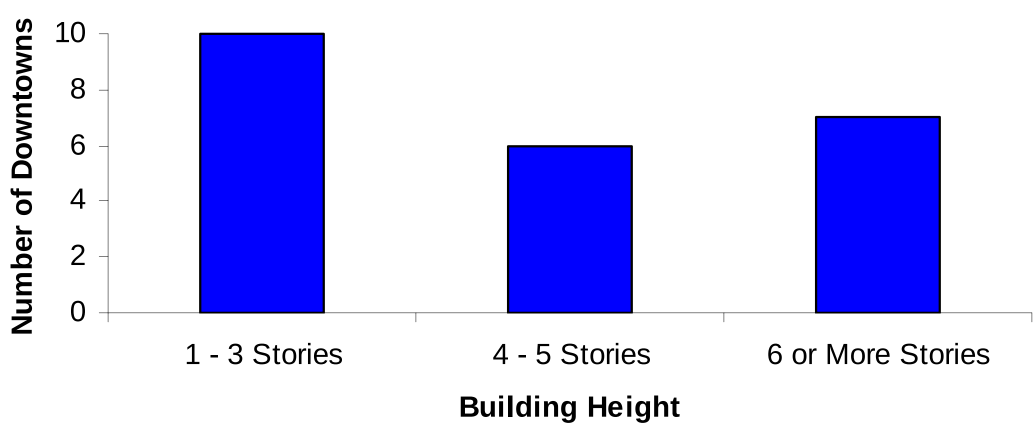
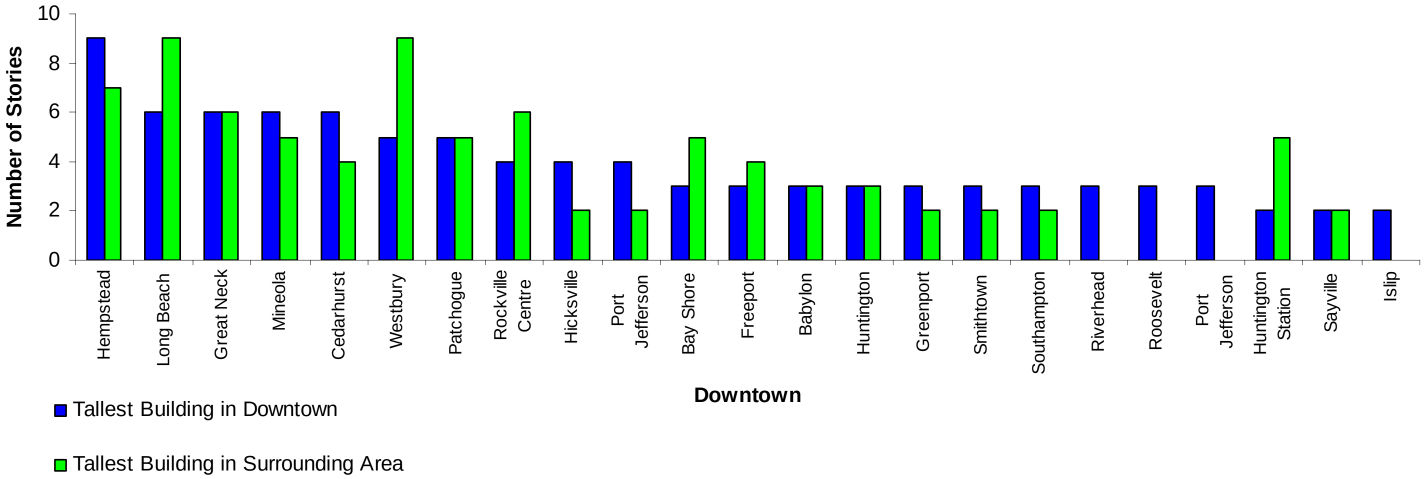
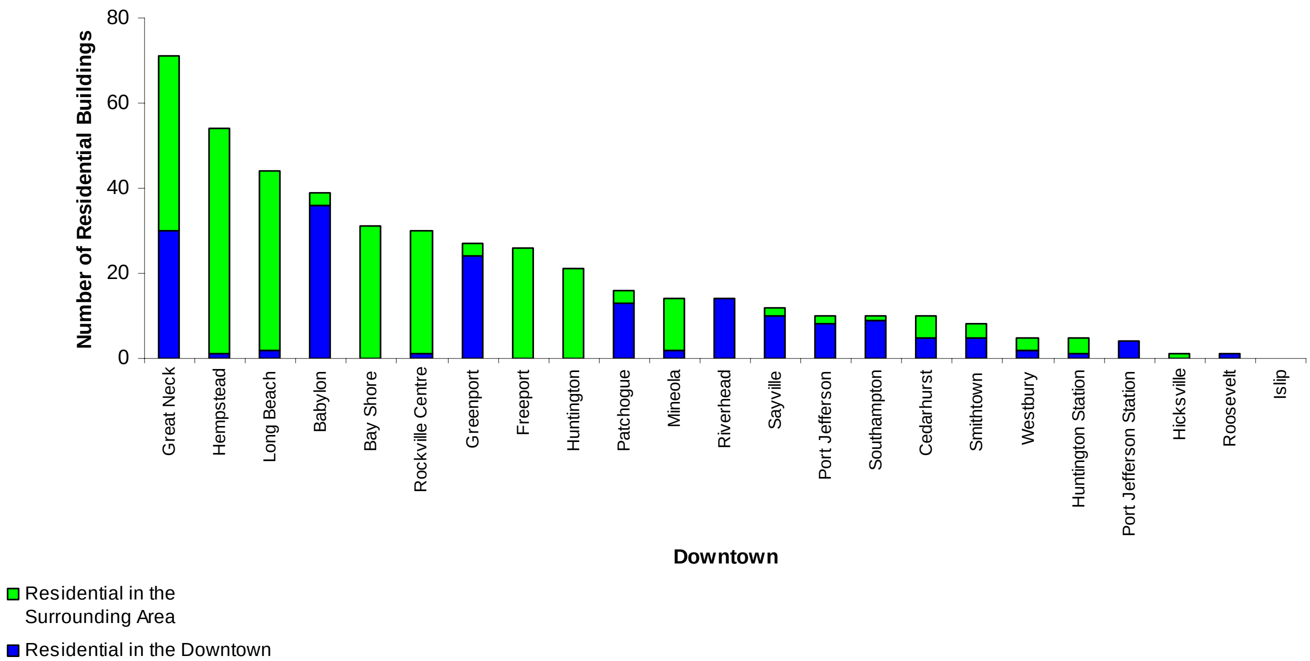


Figure 5: Building Height in Downtown and Surrounding Area



Long Island downtowns offer a range of housing options. Living in or around downtowns requires a variety of choices beyond single-family homes. Apartments and town-houses built in or around downtown centers typically offer more affordable and diverse options for people just starting out or those looking to scale down. Out of the 23 downtowns surveyed, 13 had more than 10 residential (apartments or townhouses) buildings in the downtown area (Figure 6). Five downtowns – Great Neck, Hempstead, Long Beach and Babylon – had more than 30 residential buildings in or around the downtown, offering greater options for living in a downtown.

Figure 6: Number of Residential Buildings in Downtown and Surrounding Area



Retail and service options. Active storefronts in downtowns offers residents the opportunity to fulfill their retail and service needs, whether it be shopping for clothing, taking money out of the bank or picking up a missing recipe ingredient. Having these options close to home in the downtown can help to make living more affordable – reducing dependence on the car and saving valuable fuel dollars. The 23 field-surveyed downtowns not only differed in the number of storefronts, they also differed in the ratio of retail storefronts (grocery stores, restaurants, drug stores, clothes stores, etc) to service storefronts (doctor's offices, banks, car repair shops, nail salons, etc).

Because many of Long Island's downtowns were established as thriving centers of retail and commerce for then nearby residents, the downtowns of today still have many storefronts used for retail and service (Figures 7 and 8). The vast majority of our field-surveyed downtowns (16 out of 23) serve as home to over 100 storefronts and Great Neck, Hempstead, Huntington and Rockville Centre have over 300 storefronts. Only Roosevelt, Islip and Port Jefferson Station have 100 stores or less.

Figure 7: Number of Downtown Storefronts

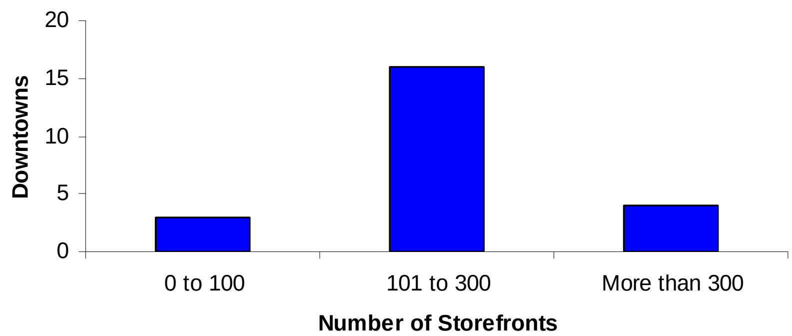
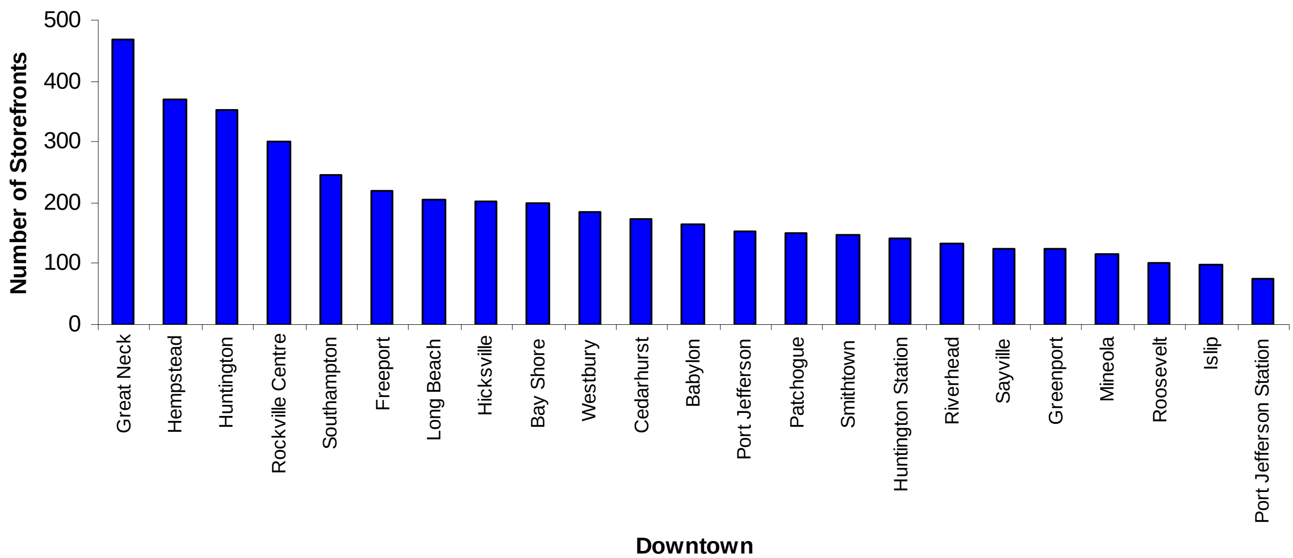
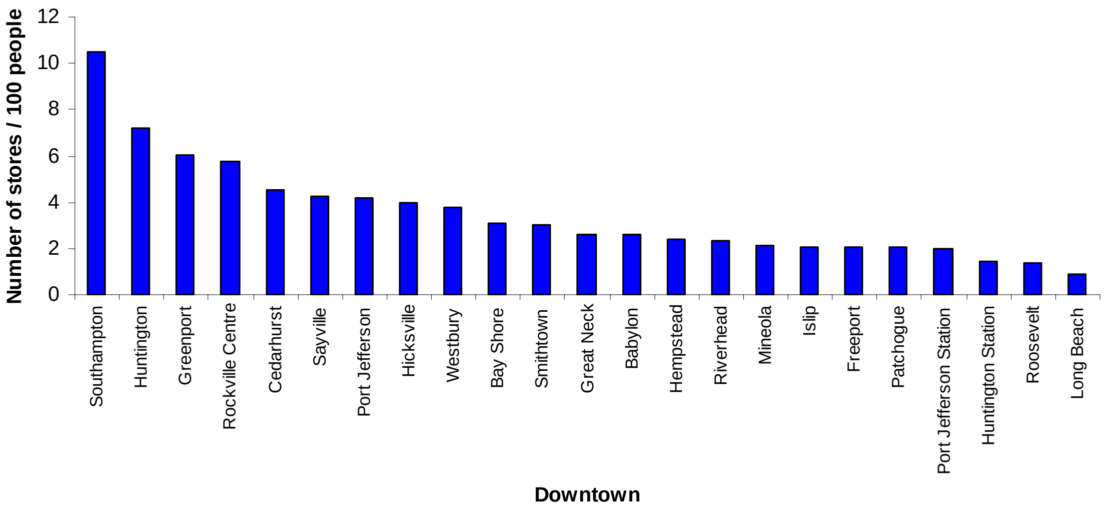


Figure 8: Downtown Storefronts



The number of storefronts in each downtown does not necessarily reflect the size of the downtown. When adjusted for population, Southampton has the greatest number of storefronts per 100 residents (Figure 9), while places like Great Neck – which has a high number of storefronts - offers significantly less storefront resources for its larger downtown area population.

Figure 9: Number of Downtown Storefronts per 100 People



The type of storefront available to residents and visitors helps to determine how a downtown is used and can affect its affordability. Figure 10 illustrates how some downtowns, such as Greenport, had a great majority (over 70%) of retail storefronts. Downtowns with this kind of ratio tend to offer abundant shopping opportunities but fewer services like banks and doctor's offices. Some of these "retail-oriented" downtowns are geared more toward tourists and other day-trippers than residents. Table 2 – which arranges the 23 field-surveyed downtowns according to their retail or service orientation – indicates that Greenport, Southampton and Huntington are amongst those considered to be "retail-oriented." At the other end of the spectrum, downtowns that offer a majority of services ("service-oriented") can have fewer retail opportunities; they are more of a service destination. For example, a resident of Bay Shore, which has over 60% of its storefronts dedicated to services, may have less problem finding a doctor's office nearby than a clothing shop or restaurant. Ten of the 23 downtowns had a more even distribution of retail and service storefronts, including Port Jefferson, Freeport and Patchogue.

Figure 10: Retail vs. Service Stores in the Downtown

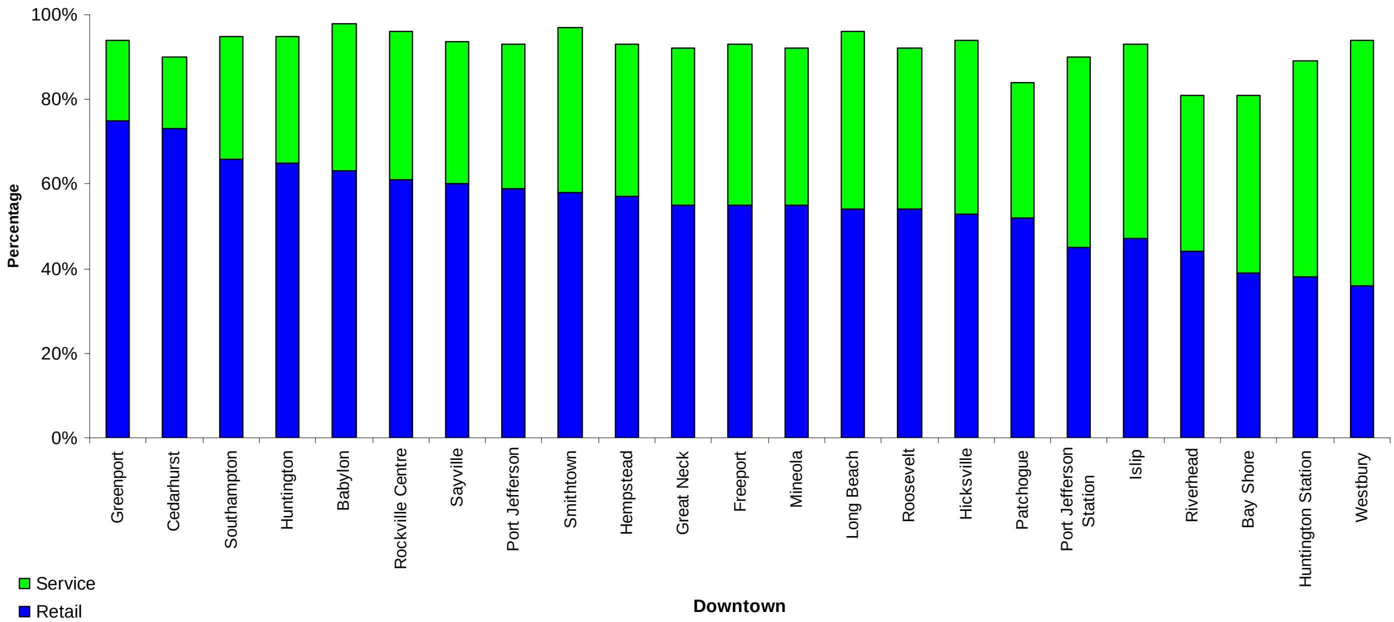
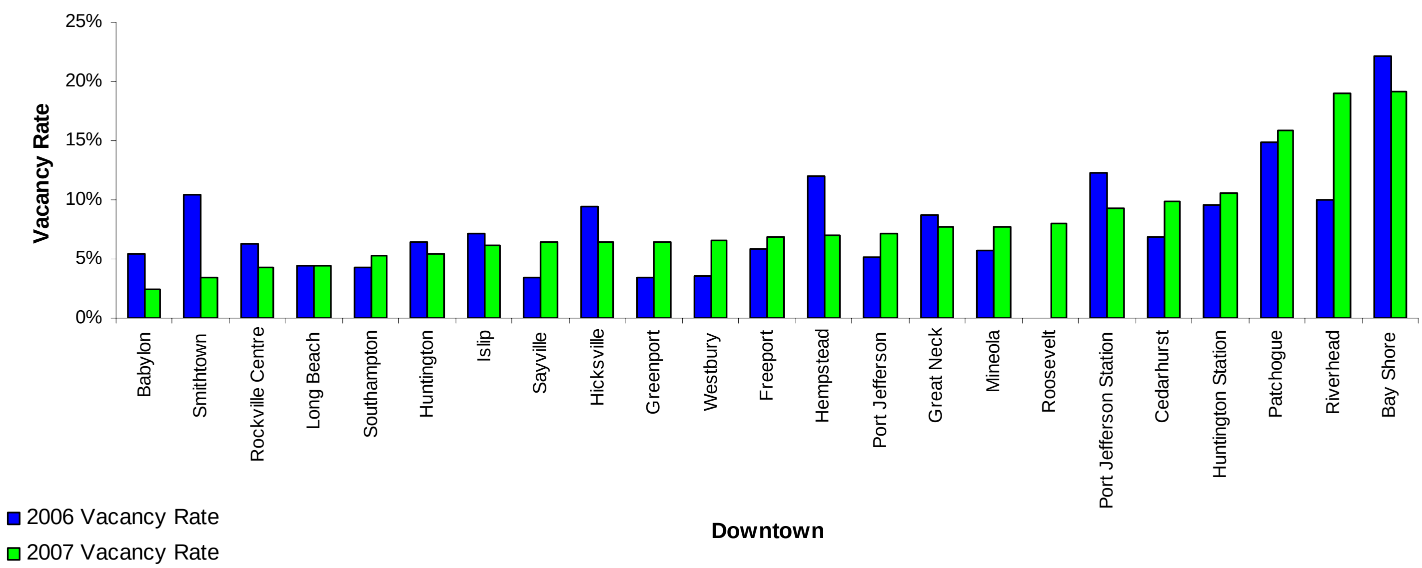


TABLE 2	
Retail/Service Orientation	**Downtown**
Retail-centered Downtowns	Greenport Cedarhurst Southampton Huntington Babylon Rockville Centre Sayville
Mixed retail/service Downtown	Port Jefferson Smithtown Hempstead Great Neck Freeport Mineola Long Beach Roosevelt Hicksville Patchogue
Service-oriented Downtowns	Port Jefferson Station Islip Riverhead Bay Shore Huntington Station Westbury

Storefront vacancy rates. Storefront vacancy rates refer to the percentage of downtown business center storefronts that are vacant at the time of surveying. Lower vacancy rates indicate that a downtown has a healthier economy while a high vacancy rate is a sign that businesses have left or are not attracted to a downtown. The lower the vacancy rate, the more likely that a resident or visitor will find the retail or service opportunity they are looking for in their downtown without using a car to fulfill their needs. The average storefront vacancy rate of our 23 field-surveyed downtowns was 8.1%. Four of the downtowns had vacancy rates under 5% including Babylon, Smithtown, Rockville Centre and Long Beach, which all experienced improvements or stayed the same from last year (Figure 11). Patchogue, Riverhead and Bay Shore each had vacancy rates over 15%, but only Riverhead experienced a dramatic increase in vacancies, while Patchogue had a slight increase and Bay Shore improved by 3% over last year.

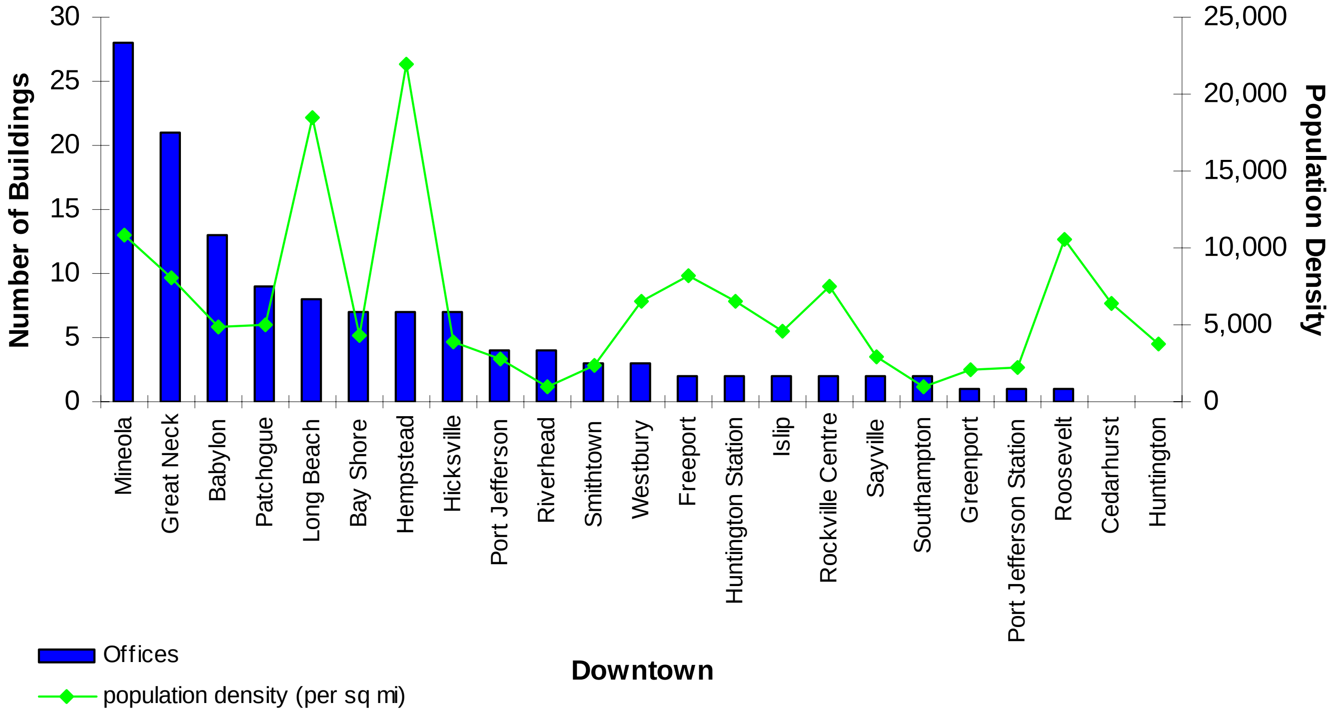
Figure 11: Comparison of 2006 and 2007 Storefront Vacancy Rates



Access to public transportation. Long Island is privileged to serve as home to the nation's largest commuter rail service, the Long Island Railroad. With over 100 stations, many Long Island downtowns have an active train station within walking distance of the center of the community. Access to rail and bus service makes a downtown more usable by connecting downtowns to each other and to the region's center, New York City. Importantly, studies have shown that transportation costs are a significant part of the average household budget. These costs are higher for those who rely on cars – particularly as the cost of fuel continues to rise. Living in downtowns with access to public transportation, allows residents a more affordable option for mobility. Of the 23 downtowns field-surveyed, all but Roosevelt, Huntington and Port Jefferson have rail stations in the downtown. These three downtowns are all within 1.5 miles of the nearest rail station and each is served by either MTA Long Island Bus of Suffolk County Transit Bus, which pass through many of Long Island's downtowns.

Downtown employment opportunities. Residents of downtowns that are close to office buildings have the opportunity to reduce transportation costs by walking to their place of work. The greater the number of office buildings in or around a downtown, the better the chance that these opportunities exist. Additionally, downtowns are made more vibrant by the presence of a daytime population that supports the local business district of the downtown. Of our 23 field-surveyed downtowns, three of them (Mineola, Great Neck and Babylon) had more than ten office buildings in or around the downtown (Figure 12). A great majority – 15 – had less than five office buildings in or around the downtown, highlighting an opportunity to attract workers to these downtowns by encouraging the development of office space.

Figure 12: Number of Downtown Office Buildings and Population Density



Downtown culture and nightlife. An area's downtown can often serve as the center of culture, diversity and entertainment for people of all ages. Those downtowns with a variety of culture and nightlife options enable downtown and nearby residents to save money by providing alternatives to more expensive places like New York City for their entertainment needs. Our 23 field-surveyed downtown areas were each found to have at least one element of culture, and all but Hicksville offered late-night opportunities (Figures 13 and 14). Huntington by far offered the most opportunities to experience culture of our 23 field-surveyed downtown areas. With eight coffee shops, three clubs or theatres, a library and bookstore, Long Islanders look to Huntington as a place of culture and it shares the title with Port Jefferson for most popular downtown on Long Island according to the 2008 *Long Island Index* survey.

Figure 13: Downtown Culture

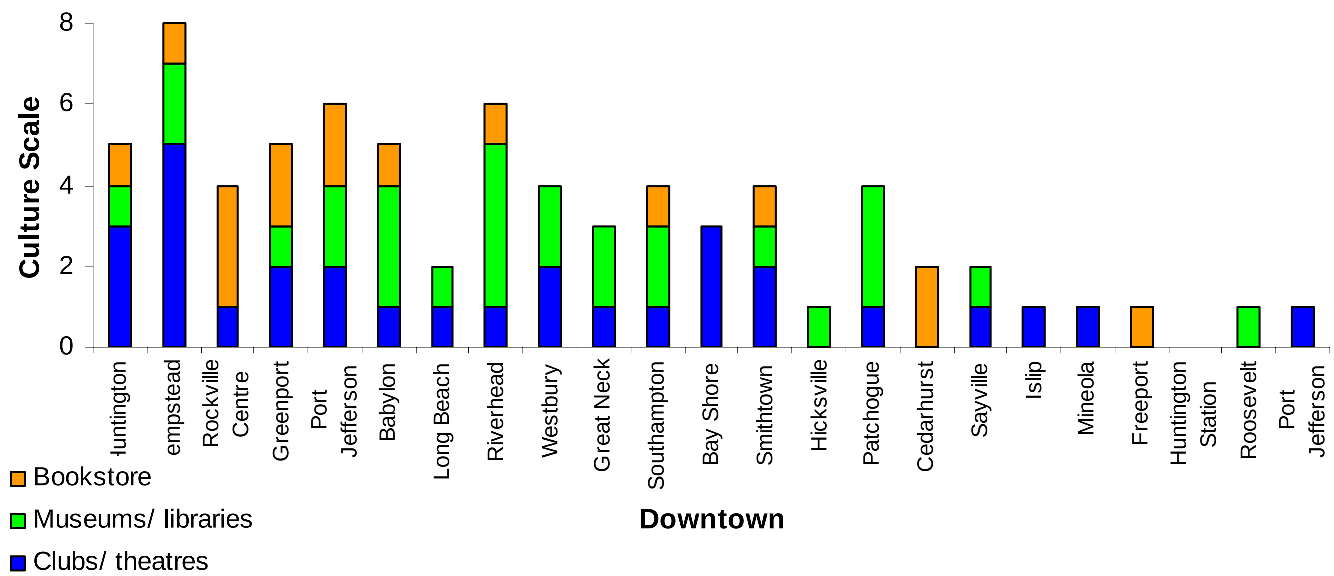
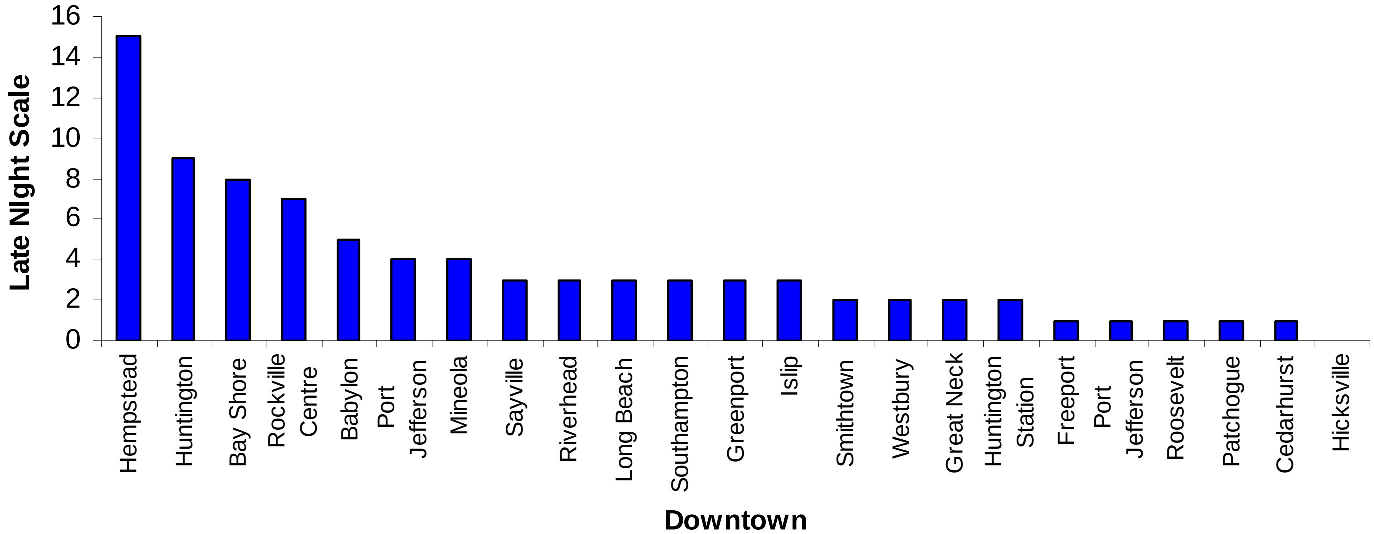


Figure 14: Late Night Downtowns



				DOWNTOWN						
				Cultural & Night Life		Residential	Commerce			
	Long Island Downtown Area	**Downtown Population**	**Downtown Population Density (per sq mi)**	**Cultural Places**	**Night Spots**	**Multi-Unit Options**	**Retail/ Service Orientation**	**Total Storefronts**	**% Eateries**	**Vacancy Rates**
Size	**Note 1**	**Note 2**		**Note 3**		**Note 4**	**Note 5**			
Small	Cedarhurst	3,838	6,397	2	1	10	Retail	173	19%	9.8%
	Greenport	2,048	2,048	5	3	27	Retail	124	23%	6.5%
	Port Jefferson	3,674	2,826	6	4	10	Mixed	154	18%	7.1%
	Port Jefferson Stat.	3,805	2,238	1	1	4	Service	75	9%	9.3%
	Sayville	2,943	2,943	2	3	12	Retail	125	12%	6.4%
	Southampton	2,332	1,014	4	3	10	Retail	245	9%	5.3%
Medium	Babylon	6,362	4,894	5	5	39	Retail	165	20%	2.4%
	Bay Shore	6,421	4,281	3	8	31	Service	199	12%	19.1%
	Hicksville	5,091	3,916	1	0	1	Mixed	203	15%	6.4%
	Huntington	4,901	3,770	5	9	21	Retail	352	24%	5.4%
	Huntington Station	9,820	6,547	0	2	5	Service	141	8%	10.6%
	Islip	4,644	4,644	1	3	0	Service	97	12%	6.2%
	Mineola	5,393	10,786	1	4	14	Mixed	116	23%	7.8%
	Patchogue	7,439	4,959	4	1	16	Mixed	151	17%	15.9%
	Riverhead	5,614	952	6	3	14	Service	132	14%	18.9%
	Rockville Centre	5,239	7,484	4	7	30	Retail	302	23%	4.3%
	Roosevelt	7,382	10,546	1	1	1	Mixed	100	11%	8.0%
	Smithtown	4,864	2,316	4	2	8	Mixed	146	18%	3.4%
	Westbury	4,911	6,548	4	2	5	Service	184	15%	6.5%
Large	Freeport	10,712	8,240	1	1	26	Mixed	221	16%	6.8%
	Great Neck	17,827	8,103	3	2	71	Mixed	469	18%	7.7%
	Hempstead Village	15,323	21,890	8	15	54	Mixed	371	16%	7.0%
	Long Beach	22,201	18,501	2	3	44	Mixed	204	24%	4.4%

Notes:

1 Villages included in 2007 survey completed by Rauch Foundation.

2 Population and population density data derived from 2000 U.S. Census data based on census definitions for "Census Block Group," or a rough equivalent of the downtown area.

3 Cultural places include museums, libraries and others. Late night places include clubs, theatres, bars. Data from Rauch Foundation survey.

4 Includes apartments, townhouses and other multi-family options in the downtown and surrounding area. Data from Rauch Foundation survey.

5 Retail/service orientation indicates if there is a dominance of retail (greater than 60% retail storefronts), service (less than 50% retail storefronts) or a mix of the two (50-59% retail storefronts) the two. Data from Rauch Foundation survey.

DOWNTOWN		MUNICIPALITY					
Heights	Open Space	Affordability		Diversity			
Tallest Building (# Stories)	Yes/No	Income		Race % Non-White	Age %18-34	Long Island Downtown Area	
		% <39,999	% >100,000				
Note 6	Note 7	Note 8		Note 9		Note 1	Size
6	Yes	35	26	14	19	Cedarhurst	Small
3	Yes	63	7	34	19	Greenport	
4	Yes	28	30	11	21	Port Jefferson	
3	No	32	21	16	23	Port Jefferson Stat.	
3	Yes	24	32	6	18	Sayville	
3	Yes	40	26	24	18	Southampton	
3	Yes	25	29	11	19	Babylon	Medium
5	Yes	40	17	41	23	Bay Shore	
4	No	24	28	21	21	Hicksville	
3	Yes	21	41	9	17	Huntington	
5	No	31	22	39	25	Huntington Station	
3	Yes	28	24	19	20	Islip	
6	No	28	22	21	24	Mineola	
5	Yes	43	14	31	28	Patchogue	
3	Yes	55	9	36	20	Riverhead	
6	Yes	25	40	13	16	Rockville Centre	
3	Yes	35	19	97	24	Roosevelt	
3	Yes	20	37	6	17	Smithtown	
9	Yes	24	31	48	24	Westbury	
4	Yes	35	19	68	24	Freeport	Large
7	Yes	27	39	12	17	Great Neck	
9	Yes	45	14	87	33	Hempstead Village	
9	Yes	32	22	23	23	Long Beach	

Notes:

6 Number of stories of the tallest building in the downtown and surrounding area. Data from Rauch Foundation survey.

7 Includes parks, open areas, playgrounds in the downtown and surrounding area. Data from Rauch Foundation survey.

8 Income distribution (from 2000 U.S. Census data) is one way to get a sense of affordability. In general, a livable place offers opportunities for those at all income levels. Data for the "Census Place" and Great Neck uses "Census Tract Data." This data refers to the larger municipality, not just the downtown area.

9 % of population that is non-white and % of population that is between 18-34 based on 2000 U.S. Census data for the "Census Place" while Great Neck uses the "Census Tract Data." This data refers to the larger municipality, not just the downtown area.

Downtown refers to the main commercial area in the village, typically the "Main Street."

Surrounding area refers to the streets surrounding the downtown, approximately 3 blocks in every direction from the downtown commercial area.