

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Students in the Spring 2022 Economic Development Studio developed a retail market analysis in coordination with Blacksburg Partnership to inform retail market strategies to attract and improve businesses. The key findings are as follows:

Retail Districts and Supply

- *Blacksburg has six main retail districts:* Downtown, Turner and Main, North Main, South Main, University City Boulevard, and Prices Fork. Each district has various levels of pedestrian accessibility to the Virginia Tech campus.
- *Some retail districts could benefit from building and infrastructure improvements.* Older commercial buildings need improvements to modernize their appearance. Some districts need better parking design, signage, and pedestrian walkways.
- *There is an abundance of available retail space.* The Downtown and South Main retail districts have the highest total number of vacant properties.
- *Blacksburg lacks major retail.* This includes department stores that offer basic retail needs like clothing, furniture, and housewares.

Market Segmentation

- *There are six main market segments for Blacksburg:* on-campus students, off-campus students, visitors, families with children, retirees and empty nesters, and the working population. Each segment has unique characteristics and retail needs.
- *Students are the largest permanent market segment* (on and off-campus students, combined). Other large market segments that access Blacksburg's retail include several thousand employees who travel to Blacksburg for work and several thousand visitors who travel to Blacksburg throughout the year.

Retail Leakage, Demand, and Strategy

- *The project team perceives a need for general merchandise stores (Dollar Stores, General Goods Stores) in Blacksburg.* These categories represent the largest retail demand in Blacksburg.
- The population of Blacksburg is not projected to increase or decrease significantly in the next five years, so emphasis should be placed on attracting more people to Blacksburg, improving current retail, and attracting a variety of new retail.

Recommendations & Promising Practices

In light of the analysis conducted and based on promising practices from similarly situated college towns in other parts of the United States, the project team formulated a series of recommendations for enhancing the retail climate of Blacksburg. Some of these recommendations are applicable to

specific retail districts and/or market segments, while others are broadly applicable to the entire town. The recommendations are listed below.

- Organize new business development workshops and resources
- Create incentive programs for student customers
- Organize holiday and special retail-centered events
- Promote greater family inclusivity in existing events
- Use grants to rehabilitate aging facades
- Adopt programs to enhance both online and offline presence of businesses
- Create more pedestrian-friendly spaces around retail stores
- Provide EV charging stations and better wayfinding signage for automobile travelers
- Create amenities to attract social media enthusiasts
- Expand marketing partnerships with tourism related businesses
- Open a Visitors' Center in Blacksburg
- Leverage customer goodwill, loyalty, and word of mouth
- Increase awareness of the Blacksburg Partnership and its mission

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to sincerely thank Ann Cassell, President of Blacksburg Partnership Inc., our client, representatives from Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce and Downtown Blacksburg Inc., and the other guest speakers who informed our project with their valuable experiences and comments. We would also like to thank the business owners who participated in our intercept as well as online survey with utmost enthusiasm. Finally, we thank Dr. John Provo, Director, and Dr. Sarah Lyon-Hill, Associate Director of Research at the Center for Economic and Community Engagement, Virginia Tech, for assigning us with this project and guiding us through it. We hope that the findings of this report will prove beneficial for future decision making with regards to enhancing the retail climate of Blacksburg.

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1 Introduction

The Spring 2022 Virginia Tech Economic Development Studio, in coordination with the Blacksburg Partnership, developed a retail market analysis to learn about the retail market needs of Blacksburg, Virginia. The report examines the study area and consumer characteristics, retail leakage, and retail demand potential. The report also provides promising practices from case studies, key findings from research, and recommendations for local strategies.

2 Study Area

2.1 Geography

Blacksburg is a 19.77 square mile town in Montgomery County, Virginia. Blacksburg has a population of 44,826 (2020 Census) out of which 24,665 people are aged 15 to 24 (2020 ACS 5-Year). A majority of the people in this age demographic are full-time Virginia Tech students living in town for at least nine months of the year. The stated Blacksburg population is nearly double that of its neighboring town, Christiansburg, which has a population of 22,482 (2020 Census) with a total 2,243 people aged 15 to 24 (2020 5-Year ACS). Blacksburg has road connectivity to other states through highways US 460 and I-81. Blacksburg Transit provides fix route public bus service, while the nearest intercity passenger rail station and regional airport is a little over 40 miles away in Roanoke, Virginia. The New River Valley Passenger Rail will [extend service](#) to Montgomery County in 2026 (NRV, 2022). Blacksburg is home to Virginia Tech, a public land grant research university established in 1872. Major retail shopping centers in town include Downtown Blacksburg, University City Boulevard, University Crossing, Patrick Henry Centre, North End Center, First & Main, North Main Street, Blacksburg Square Shopping Center, Gables Shopping Center, Kent Square, and Hethwood Square Shopping Center. These centers exist within six main commercial corridors as identified by Map 1. Blacksburg Commercial Districts & Retail Nodes.

2.2 Demographics

2.2.1 *Population:*

Per the 2020 Census, Blacksburg has a population of 44,826. The population skews slightly male with only 46.1% of the population identifying as female. The Blacksburg population is also heavily young and college-aged with 59.2% of the population being between the ages of 18-24 years of age ([US Census Bureau](#)).

Blacksburg is less racially diverse than Virginia as a whole but is more racially diverse than the rest of Southwest Virginia: Blacksburg is 75.8% White alone, 4.4% Black or African American alone, 12.5% Asian alone, 4.2% Hispanic or Latino, and 2.6% two or more races. These statistics are from the 2020 census and have a greater margin of error due to many Virginia Tech students not living on campus as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Given its status as a highly regarded

R1 research institution, the university draws a diverse range of people from around the world to live in Blacksburg.

2.2.2 Location:

Blacksburg is the second largest town in Virginia, behind Leesburg in Northern Virginia, and is located within Montgomery County in Southwest Virginia. It is located in the Valley & Ridge region of the state at an elevation of 2,080 feet. Blacksburg is part of the Blacksburg-Christiansburg MSA with a population of 166,378 (2020 Census) and is adjacent to the Roanoke MSA with a population of 315,251. Downtown Roanoke is an approximately 42-mile drive from downtown Blacksburg. Downtowns for major population centers such as Charlotte, North Carolina and Washington, D.C. are around a 173- and 269-mile drive, respectively from downtown Blacksburg. US Route 460 runs through Blacksburg and connects Blacksburg to US Interstate 81.

2.3 History of Blacksburg Retail and Look to the Future

The Town of Blacksburg was founded in 1798 and incorporated as a town in 1871, and one year later the institution that would become Virginia Tech followed. The area was mainly rural until the 1960s when greater commercialization began to take place in and around Blacksburg itself as well as Virginia Tech. In the 1990s, Blacksburg's downtown was the major retail center for the community. In recent years, many of these retailers have relocated to commercial corridors and malls in Christiansburg. Due to shifts in retail trends, such as greater consumer personalization, fast and free delivery, and consumer-friendly online shopping methods, retailers face challenges to stay in business. Blacksburg has to forge a consistent identity through either specialized retail, or a unified vision of what retail should look like.

In the past 20 years the town has undertaken two Strategic/Master Plans for Downtown (2001, 2019), one Retail Market Study (2007), and an Economic Development Strategy Update (2013). Across those four different reports and plans, there are some specific trends and themes that informed this report's recommendations, including: a lack of a consistent/unified identity of what Downtown is or what it should be; greater infrastructure for public, pedestrian and/or multimodal traffic; the attraction and retention of more locally based retail stores; and the need to increase efforts to cater more specifically to the young working professional demographic, with the median age projected to be 23.3 years old in 2026, up from 23.2 years old in 2021, according to the ESRI data that was analyzed.

Parking issues were mentioned in each of the plans/reports, but there was no single issue related to parking that carried over from one report to the next. For example, in the 2000 Master Plan for Downtown there was not enough parking for merchants to cater to the needs of their customers, but in 2013 and 2019, the issue was a relative lack of parking for consumers. Parking will be an ongoing issue that the Town of Blacksburg, consumers, and retailers will have to contend with over the long-term.

Sustainability is an important theme reflected in more recent town reports and plans. In recent years, sustainability went from a semi-niche topic area in urban planning circles to a movement on an international scale. More consumers are expressing their desire to purchase items and goods from retailers that engage in sustainable practices compared to those that do not. This relates to the parking issue, because in the younger demographics, fewer people are buying cars and, in many cases, not even obtaining driver's licenses. People that do not own a car are more reliant on public transportation and alternative modes of transit such as walking and cycling. This is reflected on Virginia Tech's campus and shown in data drawn from the *Virginia Tech Biennial 2016 and 2018 Parking Surveys*. In 2016, a total of 67.2% of student respondents reported using a Single Occupant Vehicle (no other passengers) as their primary means of commuting to campus. That number dropped to 29% in 2018. In the coming years, the shift away from cars as well as the growing importance of sustainability will play a major role in shaping retail districts.

3 Methodology

This report focuses on the challenges to the retail climate of the town, identifying potentially underserved market segments and their needs and understanding the current state and future needs for specific retail corridors. The project team undertook a three-pronged approach to address this task.

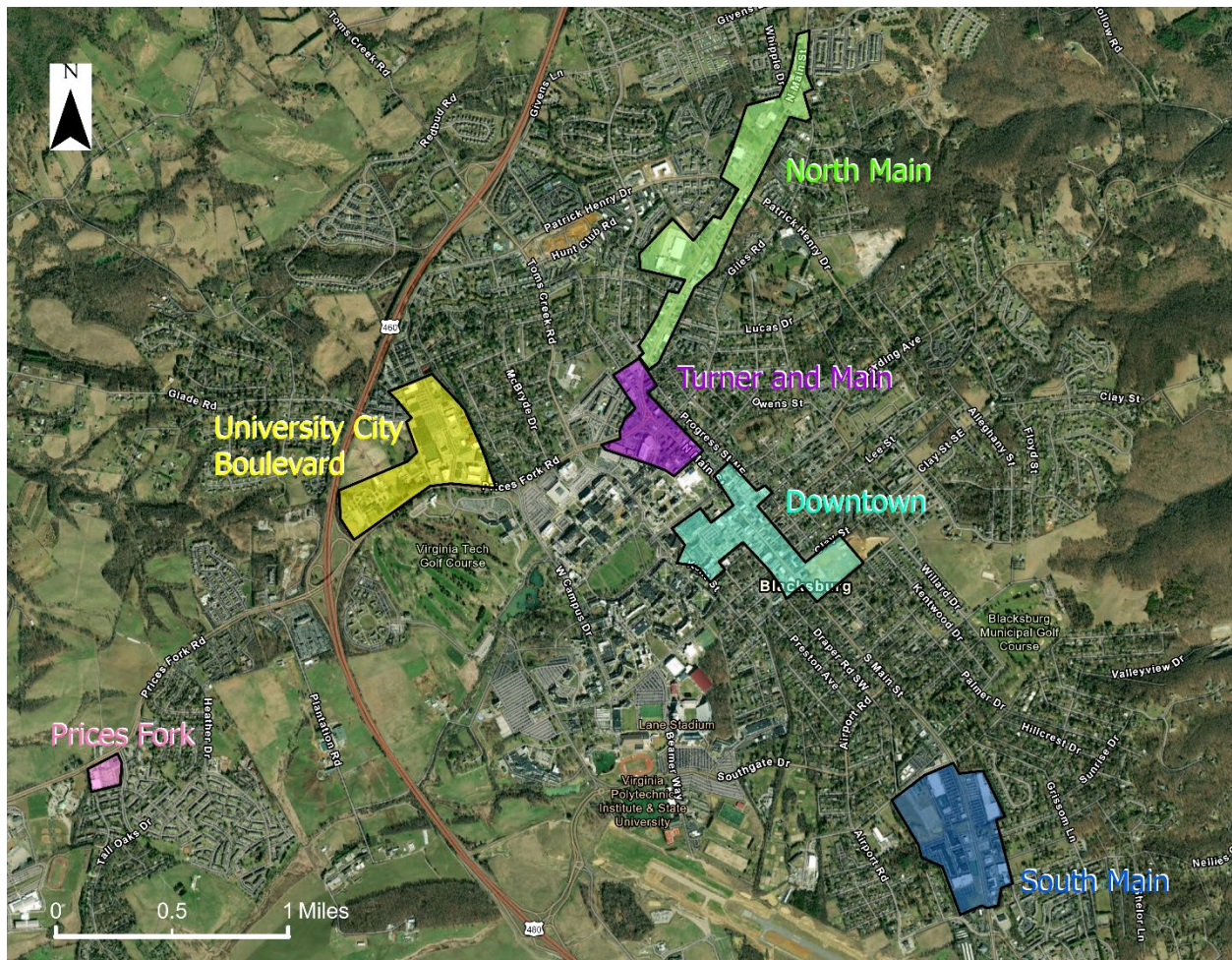
3.1 Business Owner Survey

(i) Online Survey: Virginia Tech Graduate Students conducted a survey of the business owners to obtain first-hand information on the challenges facing business owners as well as the retail district they are located in. For this purpose, the students created a draft survey using Google Forms, asking questions relating to challenges the businesses are facing and what they believe would be beneficial for their flourishing. After the course instructors and Ann Cassell, President of Blacksburg Partnership Inc. (the client), reviewed and approved the draft survey, the students sent the approved survey to the Blacksburg Partnership to distribute to business/property owners in Blacksburg via email. The survey was live from March 22 - April 10, 2022, and received responses from 29 business owners and managers with assistance from the Blacksburg Partnership, the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce, and Downtown Blacksburg, Inc.

(ii) Observations and Intercept Survey: The project team also wanted to get a firsthand experience of the retail scenario of Blacksburg and realize the perceived needs for specific retail corridors. For that reason, the students conducted intercept surveys in the form of interviews with 10 retail business owners located in various business districts of Blacksburg. These interviews not only gave face-to-face interaction with the business owners regarding their requirements, but also helped gain important insight through observation about the overall physical characteristics of each retail district from an economic and spatial planning perspective.

3.2 Retail Leakage Analysis:

The students conducted a retail leakage analysis for the town of Blacksburg, in order to identify retail sectors that are losing customers to neighboring retail markets and also those that have a relatively strong presence in the town. The industry standard tool in market research, Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI) ArcGIS Business Analyst Software was used for this purpose. ESRI uses publicly available data, such as those from the U.S. Census Bureau and proprietary statistical models in order to prepare estimates for a base year, in this case, of 2017, and a projection from 2021 to 2026.



Map 1: Blacksburg Commercial Districts & Retail Nodes

3.3 Secondary Research

To obtain a holistic understanding of the retail environment of Blacksburg, the project team reviewed past research and official reports pertaining to the town. The team searched for and summarized documents relevant to the economic development strategies of the town, historical

development of retail in the region, as well as reports targeting spending patterns of specific market segments, such as students and visitors.

The team also conducted a series of 12 case studies on college towns like Blacksburg in order to understand challenges to retail development and identify best practices to vitalize their retail climate. The case study areas used for this retail market analysis have a similar population profile to Blacksburg and Virginia Tech. The research from these case studies is shown most in promising practice and recommendations.

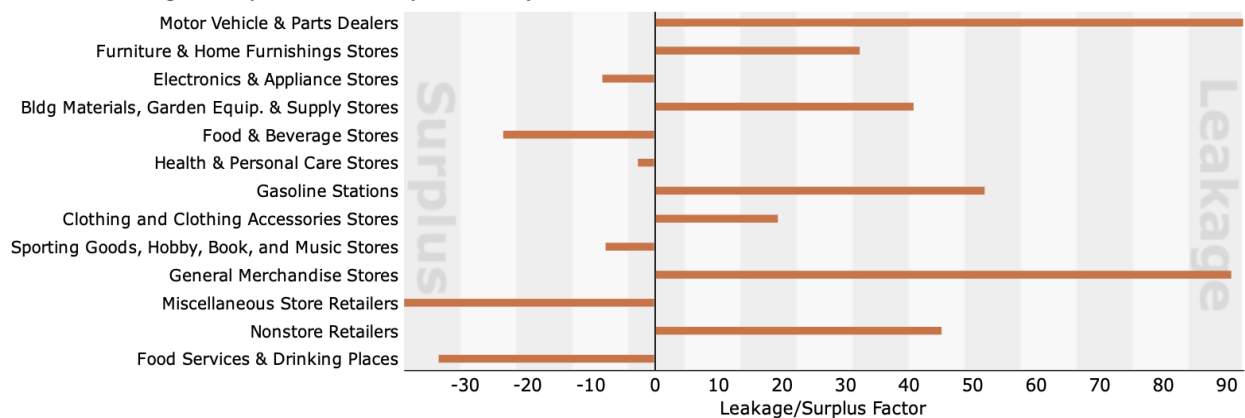
The data from the leakage analysis and secondary research helped to gain a general overview of the retail climate of the town and confirmed the findings from the primary sources (surveys). Finally, the project team formulated a series of recommendations targeted both at specific market segments as well as business districts, based on the analysis of the primary and secondary data obtained.

4 Retail Leakage and Outlook Demand

4.1 Retail Leakage and Surplus Analysis

The ESRI Retail Market Profile for Blacksburg included both a Leakage/Surplus Analysis as well as a Retail Demand Outlook projection, which is forecast five years from when the data was collected in 2021. This leakage/surplus data serves as a starting point for analyzing the town’s retail market. Below is a summary table of the 2017 Retail Market Leakage/Surplus data. A gap or leakage in a specific retail sector indicates that customers are leaving Blacksburg to purchase that good or service from other adjacent regional retails, in this case, the likes of Christiansburg, Radford, or Roanoke. Conversely, a surplus would mean that that specific retail sector can meet the local demand and is also serving customers outside the town.

2017 Leakage/Surplus Factor by Industry Subsector



(Source: ESRI Business Analyst, 2022)

As illustrated in the chart above, there are 13 Retail Industry Sub Sectors ranging from Motor Vehicle & Parts Dealers to Non-Store Retailers. Out of the 13 sub sectors listed, six experienced a surplus while the remaining seven suffered from leakage more severe than the surplus. In other words, more customers in Blacksburg are going out of the regional market to purchase retail goods, while some retailers (those with surpluses) are actually capturing customers from outside the Blacksburg market. The sub sector with the lowest leakage factor is Clothing and Clothing Accessory Stores with a factor of slightly less than 20, while the Motor Vehicle & Parts Dealers as well as the General Merchandise Retailers are experiencing the greatest amount of leakage at 90. Specifically, for Blacksburg retail, it is the General Merchandise Retailer segment that is cause for the most concern as in 2019 50% of town survey respondents indicated they wanted more general retail in Blacksburg. To prevent a greater degree of leakage in this area, a more concerted effort should be made to retain the general/local retail stores, as well as to attract new ones to ensure that this subsector doesn't disappear entirely.

4.2 Retail Outlook Demand

While surplus/leakage is an important aspect of determining the past and current state of Blacksburg retail, it is also important to look to the future to determine what trends will either continue or become more critical to Blacksburg. ESRI provides 2021 consumer spending estimates as well as a 5-year projection of retail demand in 2026.

Table 1: Retail Demand Outlook: 2021-2026

	2021 Consumer Spending	2026 Forecasted Demand	Projected Spending Growth
Apparel and Services	\$53,763,787	\$61,161,611	\$7,379,824
<i>Men's</i>	<i>\$5,545,688</i>	<i>\$6,305,273</i>	<i>\$759,585</i>
<i>Women's</i>	<i>\$9,242,271</i>	<i>\$10,509,615</i>	<i>\$1,267,344</i>
<i>Children's</i>	<i>\$3,621,864</i>	<i>\$4,120,669</i>	<i>\$498,805</i>
<i>Footwear</i>	<i>\$6,389,882</i>	<i>\$7,267,075</i>	<i>\$877,193</i>
<i>Watches and Jewelry</i>	<i>\$1,600,866</i>	<i>\$1,820,433</i>	<i>\$219,567</i>
<i>Apparel Products and Services</i>	<i>\$594,727</i>	<i>\$676,448</i>	<i>\$81,721</i>
Computers	\$2,693,890	\$3,062,673	\$368,783
<i>Computers and Hardware for Home Use</i>	<i>\$2,245,121</i>	<i>\$2,552,407</i>	<i>\$307,286</i>
<i>Portable Memory</i>	<i>\$52,698</i>	<i>\$59,945</i>	<i>\$7,247</i>
<i>Computer Software</i>	<i>\$154,178</i>	<i>\$175,177</i>	<i>\$20,999</i>
<i>Computer Accessories</i>	<i>\$241,893</i>	<i>\$275,144</i>	<i>\$33,251</i>
Entertainment and Recreation	\$102,042,759	\$109,963,554	\$13,308,575

<i>Fees and Admissions</i>	\$8,092,239	\$9,205,027	\$1,112,788
<i>Membership Fees for Clubs</i>	\$2,880,892	\$3,276,637	\$395,745
<i>Fees for Participant Sports</i>	\$1,157,356	\$1,317,229	\$159,873
<i>Tickets to Theater/Opera/Concerts</i>	\$952,748	\$1,083,560	\$130,812
<i>Tickets to Movies</i>	\$750,634	\$853,499	\$102,865
<i>Tickets to Parks or Museums</i>	\$378,447	\$430,488	\$52,041
<i>Admission to Sporting Events</i>	\$662,106	\$753,266	\$91,160
<i>Fees for Recreational Lessons</i>	\$1,293,380	\$1,471,388	\$178,008
<i>Dating Services</i>	\$16,676	\$18,960	\$2,284
<i>TV/Audio/Video</i>	\$14,216,230	\$16,173,123	\$1,956,893
<i>Cable and Satellite Television Services</i>	\$8,869,210	\$10,093,455	\$1,224,245
<i>Televisions</i>	\$1,566,778	\$1,781,642	\$214,864
<i>Satellite Dishes</i>	\$25,743	\$29,275	\$3,532
<i>VCR's, Video Cameras and DVD Players</i>	\$67,098	\$76,329	\$9,231
<i>Misc. Video Equipment</i>	\$163,308	\$185,735	\$22,427
<i>Video Cassettes/DVDs</i>	\$113,853	\$129,483	\$15,630
<i>Video Game Hardware/Accessories</i>	\$511,092	\$580,789	\$69,697
<i>Video Game Software</i>	\$305,511	\$347,220	\$41,709
<i>Rental/Streaming/Downloaded Video</i>	\$1,094,135	\$1,244,012	\$149,877
<i>Installation of Televisions</i>	\$7,119	\$8,096	\$977
<i>Audio</i>	\$1,430,321	\$1,626,540	\$196,219
<i>Rental and Repair of TV/Radio/Sound Equipment</i>	\$62,061	\$70,547	\$8,486
<i>Pets</i>	\$8,122,681	\$9,242,631	\$1,119,950
<i>Toys/Games/Crafts/Hobbies</i>	\$1,476,147	\$1,679,205	\$203,058
<i>Recreational Vehicles and Fees</i>	\$914,109	\$1,040,853	\$126,744
<i>Sports/Recreation/Exercise Equipment</i>	\$2,103,877	\$2,395,191	\$291,314
<i>Photo Equipment and Supplies</i>	\$660,481	\$750,928	\$90,447
<i>Reading</i>	\$1,226,041	\$1,394,907	\$168,866
<i>Catered Affairs</i>	\$365,224	\$415,119	\$49,895
Food	\$111,811,756	\$127,171,048	\$15,359,292
<i>Food at Home</i>	\$63,314,702	\$72,025,242	\$8,710,540

<i>Bakery and Cereal Products</i>	\$8,005,998	\$9,107,793	\$1,101,795
<i>Meats, Poultry, Fish and Eggs</i>	\$13,482,242	\$15,337,573	\$1,855,331
<i>Dairy Products</i>	\$6,246,638	\$7,105,965	\$859,327
<i>Fruits and Vegetables</i>	\$12,144,675	\$13,815,028	\$1,670,353
<i>Snacks and Other Foods at Home</i>	\$23,435,151	\$26,658,882	\$3,223,731
<i>Food away from Home</i>	\$48,497,054	\$55,145,807	\$6,648,753
<i>Alcoholic Beverages</i>	\$7,396,210	\$8,410,614	\$1,014,404

(Source: ESRI Business Analyst, 2022)

Table 2: Demographic Projections, 2021-2026

Demographic Summary	2021	2026
Population	44,594	45,633
Households	15,006	15,428
Families	4,760	4,844
Median Age	23.2	23.3
Median Household Income	\$41,413	\$45,309

(Source: ESRI Business Analyst, 2022)

Table 2 above shows that there is no major demographic or population change in the next 5 years. The population will increase by around 1,000 people, and the number of households will also grow by roughly 400. The number of families will experience a similar increase, albeit to a lesser extent from 4,760 to 4,844.

The median household income will also improve from \$41,413 to \$45,309, however compared to the same projections for the United States, rising from \$64,730 to \$72,932 (per ESRI), it is not as significant of an increase. It should be cautioned that these numbers will likely change due to possible inflation increases as well as fiscal and monetary related decisions at both the state and federal levels.

Overall, the retail sector is projected for growth in the coming 5 years. In 2021, the total consumer spending for the Apparel and Services, Entertainment and Recreation, and the Food Retail sectors was \$175,767,727, while in 2026 it is projected to be \$199,921,566 for a total increase of 13.74% over 5 years.

When compared to the retail growth projections of 6-8% for 2022 alone as determined by the National Retail Foundation, the retail growth projections for Blacksburg are slower than the national projections. Of those three subsectors, the Food subsector is expected to increase the most with an increase of \$15,359,292. It is possible that the projected growth for this subsector is driven

by recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that has decimated both businesses and restaurants alike over the past few years, with some of those businesses and restaurants shuttering their doors for good. However, these projections indicate that recovery is indeed possible and could already be occurring. This will only be to the benefit of Blacksburg, as long as the projected demand is able to be met with the appropriate supply and infrastructure. As the main amount of growth will be from Apparel and Services as well as Food Retail subsectors, the retail and food related businesses that are operating now or will be operating in the near future are poised to be the main beneficiaries of this projected growth. However, while these numbers are indeed promising and provide some optimism for the area, it should be noted that they are just projections and may not be wholly accurate, and some caution should be exercised going forward to not oversaturate the area with those businesses.

5 Retail Districts and Business Inventory

5.1 Downtown Retail District

5.1.1 Characteristics:

Downtown, for many, is the defining space of Blacksburg. This area is traditionally the busiest on weekends, game days, and at night as the town comes alive. There is a diverse spread of local vendors who provide clothing (Fringe Benefit, 310 Rosemont) and specialty goods including books (Blacksburg Books), cooking tools (Gourmet Pantry), Ice Cream and Paper Products (Sugar Magnolia), and jewelry (Caponis Jewelers, Kent Jewelers), as well as several pubs and restaurants (Hokie House, Sharkey's, Top of the Stairs, Maroon Door).

This area serves all market segments. The downtown area attracts both off-campus and on-campus students as well as visitors on football gameday weekends in the Fall. The new Midtown development being constructed in the south end of downtown will bring in more young professionals and empty nesters/retired members of the community. The Midtown development will also add some retail to the downtown area, which can bring in the working population. Families with children also frequent downtown during the day, specifically on football gamedays.

The tenants here are all happy with their location and have no plans to move their business elsewhere. The only complaints tenants expressed was a lack of accessible parking and a lack of wayfinding and signage as well as aging infrastructure that needs to be fixed.



Map 2: Downtown Corridor

5.1.2 Strengths:

The downtown area is adjacent to the Virginia Tech campus, which makes it convenient for on-campus students and visitors to locate. Main Street is the primary road through the Town of Blacksburg and provides businesses with maximum exposure for their goods and services. The downtown area is home to many locally owned or small chain retailers as well as many locally owned restaurants and pubs. Specifically on College Avenue, there is an abundance of outdoor seating with wide sidewalks that can accommodate extra seating. The abundance of available commercial spaces provides a unique opportunity for potential businesses to break into the market, with the caveat of renovating what are mostly Class B and Class C spaces in a desirable location. The high foot traffic volume makes this corridor the best area for niche vendors to get maximum exposure.

5.1.3 Challenges:

There is limited access to convenient on-site parking as well as poor signage to designated parking. While there is a parking lot behind Sharkey's and The Cellar, parking fills up quickly. The new Midtown parking garage may relieve some of these issues with parking. Facades are aging, and the lack of investment in business appearance is apparent with rotting and fading fascia and dirty, outdated buildings. Much of the available spaces are of a lower quality and would require

significant renovation to be usable and would increase the strain on existing parking issues. Some sidewalks along Main Street are also narrow and uneven which can lead to pedestrian accidents such as falling.

5.1.4 Aesthetic Appearance:

Downtown Blacksburg is interspersed with unique and colorful storefronts that are inviting to customers. Many of the storefronts, however, are aging and are not being maintained properly. There is also an abundance of aging infrastructure, specifically with the sidewalks on Main Street. Many portions of the sidewalks are cracked and raised, which presents a safety hazard. In other areas, the sidewalks are far too narrow and obstructed by roadway signage.

5.1.5 Vacant Retail Spaces Include:

- 201 S. Main Street
- 401 S. Main Street
- 125 N Main St. (The Town Centre)
- Midtown Development Parcel(s) DC- 4, DC- 2 (Under Construction) - S. Main Street
- 111 E. Roanoke Street/ 107 Church Street SE
- 420 N. Main Street
- 403, 405, & 411 Draper Road
- 202 S. Main Street (Kent Square)

5.1.6 What is Missing:

Due to its abutment to the Virginia Tech campus and high traffic volume, Downtown is a prime location for any provider of basic goods that on-campus students need for their daily lives. Other opportunities include vendors of clothing that cater to a younger demographic as well as basic household items that are currently purchased online or at Christiansburg locations.

5.2 South Main Retail District



Map 3: South Main Corridor

5.2.1 Characteristics:

South Main is the most diverse shopping district and provides customers with a wide selection of goods in one convenient location. This area contains three major shopping centers: Blacksburg Square Shopping Center, Gables Shopping Center, and First & Main. In the Blacksburg Square Shopping Center there is the Oasis World Market, Dollar Tree, Campus Emporium, and Our Daily Bread Bistro. In the Gables Shopping Center there is a commercial grocery store (Kroger), Vintage Cellars, and a Virginia ABC store among several other different types of businesses. First & Main contains Walkabout Outfitters, Ashley Furniture, LOFT, and McClain's at First and Main.

The Gables Shopping Center and Blacksburg Square Shopping Center are both strip-mall style while First & Main is designed in a community style. Off-campus students mostly utilize the two

strip-malls for grocery shopping and dining. Retired community/empty nesters, families with children, and the working population also frequent these two strip-malls as well. An important note is that a large number of international students visit Blacksburg Square Shopping center as it contains the only international food market (Oasis World Market).

First & Main does not experience high foot traffic due to its location and lack of visibility from South Main Street. The main customers who visit this area are the retired community/empty nesters. College students will frequent the movie theater especially for sorority/fraternity functions that occur at the bowling alley in the theater. Walkabout Outfitters was surveyed and were not satisfied with the location of their business as they felt hidden. Due to the high attrition rate of tenants, it can be assumed that most leave as a result of low customer visibility.

5.2.2 Strengths:

Some of the strengths of the South Main region is that there is ample parking, and all of the retail centers have convenient, storefront parking. The location of South Main is close to the U.S. 460 interchange. Some important characteristics are that Blacksburg Square Shopping Center has the only international food market in Blacksburg (Oasis Market). Also, First & Main is recently constructed, and tenant spaces are of high quality. There is a wide assortment of retail for all demographics, and this is a central shopping location for most residents of Blacksburg who are shopping for groceries and other essential items. South Main is also the location of many restaurants that are not in the downtown area.

5.2.3 Challenges:

The distance of South Main to the Virginia Tech campus is a distant walk, which excludes on-campus students who would have to resort to public transportation if they do not have a car. In the Blacksburg Square Shopping Center, the entrance to the parking lot has an unprotected left turn and steep entry point, and there is a lack of line direction for the Cook Out drive-thru which often blocks the main roadway. First & Main has its own set of challenges, specifically that there is a lack of visibility of businesses within the retail strip.

In addition to its distance from the Virginia Tech campus, South Main region is not very hospitable for pedestrians and bicyclists. Main Street around the South Main shopping centers becomes a five-lane highway with increased speeds of 35 mph and multiple turn-ins for parking lots along the sidewalk. Trying to walk along or across this section of Main Street is not pleasant and often requires avoiding aggressive or distracted drivers. Additionally, besides the First & Main shopping center, reaching the stores on foot requires walking across large swaths of parking lots. The South Main region also lacks proper bike infrastructure, which makes trips by bike difficult: there's not enough bike parking, and the bike lanes on Main Street (when they exist) are situated in the gutter and are unprotected against fast-moving traffic. Bicyclists can access the shops on the West side of Main Street if they are coming from the North through a connector trail to the Huckleberry Trail, but the previously mentioned challenges make trips by bicycle still very difficult.

5.2.4 Aesthetic Appearance:

All three areas in the South Main region have different aesthetic appearances, resulting in a somewhat disorganized aesthetic for the district. The Blacksburg Shopping Center looks rundown and unkempt. The entrance to this center is difficult with an unprotected left turn and a steep entrance ramp. While there is only one vacancy in this center, the shopping center looks barren from the outside and could benefit from facade improvements. The First & Main retail center is new and is of high quality; this retail strip is more modern, especially in comparison to other retail strips in Blacksburg. Gables Shopping Center is the busiest of the three and has a well-maintained appearance.

The shopping centers on South Main are close to I-81 and are the first thing most visitors see when entering Blacksburg. The aesthetic appearance and upkeep of the South Main shopping centers are not only important for attracting local residents, but also serve an important role in shaping people's perception of Blacksburg.

5.2.5 Vacant Retail Spaces Include:

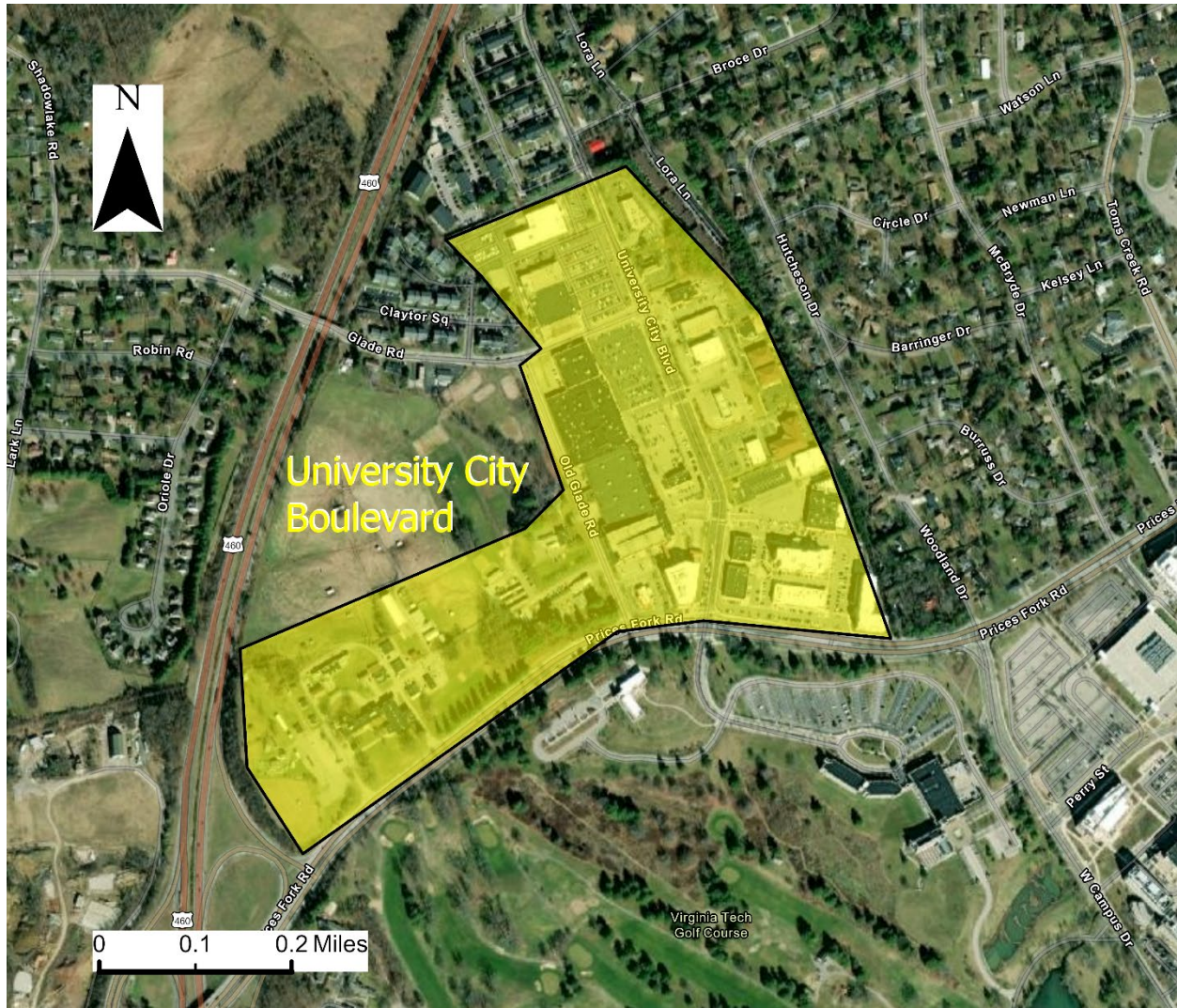
- 2206 S. Main Street (Commercial Lot)
- 2205 S. Main Street (Commercial Lot)
- 2206 S. Main Street
- 1701 S. Main Street
- Several Suites within First and Main Shopping Center
- 1353 S. Main Street (Blacksburg Square Shopping Center)
- 1490 S. Main Street (Gables Shopping Center)

5.2.6 What is Missing:

Each shopping center has unique challenges, but overall First and Main has the greatest negative reception from tenants compared to other districts. Walkabout Outfitters, when surveyed, expressed how they felt hidden and wished to move locations. Despite the high quality of available space, low visibility will require management to increase advertising efforts for tenants within the center. After speaking with the owner of Oasis, more options for international students as well as greater transit access would greatly benefit a currently underserved market demographic.

The retail space in South Main is also underutilized. South Main, specifically Blacksburg Square, is one of the few places in Blacksburg with large retail space that could fit a department store, a retail need in Blacksburg. That space in Blacksburg Square is currently occupied by a Dollar General and a second-hand furniture and goods store owned by the university.

5.3 University City Boulevard Retail District



Map 3: University City Boulevard Corridor

5.3.1 Characteristics:

This area captures most on-campus students who can ride the Blacksburg Transit UCB route to the University Mall and commercial grocer Kroger. There is not a lot of retail in this area and restaurants are mainly chain restaurants (Mezeh, Chipotle, and McAlister's Deli). University City Mall also contains restaurants, a gym, and the Virginia Tech Bookstore.

This area is frequented mostly by students both on and off campus as well as families with children visiting Kroger, Starbucks, and Kindercare Daycare; however, business picks up considerably on football gameday weekend with Blacksburg visitors. Speaking more to attracting visitors, there are two hotels located in this district, Hyatt House and Residence Inn by Marriott. These hotels are sold out on weekends for most home football, bringing a large number of people to this district.

With the abundance of chain restaurants, all market segments come to this area, which includes the retired community/empty nesters, families with children, and the working population. This area also contains a lot of businesses that provide personal services (haircuts, nails, and a formal gown store).

Businesses in this district were not surveyed as there is not an abundance of retail here and most of the restaurants are predominantly chains. Based on personal observation, this district is busy at all times of the day, and tenants would not be inclined to move their business elsewhere. Parking at University Crossroads does become congested at times and during peak hours it can become difficult to find a parking spot.

5.3.2 Strengths:

The entire area is easily accessible by Blacksburg Transit with several covered bus stops and crosswalks. The area is busy most times of the day due to its proximity to the Virginia Tech campus and surrounding residential zones, and Glade Road attracts customers from the Northwestern quadrant of Blacksburg. Being the second entrance to the Northwestern portion of Virginia Tech off of U.S. Route 460 lends easy access to all portions of this corridor. Parking is sufficient in this area, where most of the parking is in front of the storefronts.

5.3.3 Challenges:

One challenge facing the University City Boulevard district is that retail centers are divided by traffic lanes, which is not pedestrian-friendly. While there are crosswalks at stop lights, pedestrians must cross multiple lanes of traffic. There is also a lack of traditional retail in this area; the area is mostly chain restaurants and office space.

University City Boulevard also suffers from the age and perceived quality of some of its retail. For example, the Kroger in University City Boulevard is older and lacks some of the amenities of the newer Kroger in South Main. The UCB Kroger has a lower quality perception compared to the South Main Kroger, especially among students. This leads to less people shopping at the UCB Kroger and University City Boulevard in general as more people will choose to shop at the Kroger at South Main, which makes that part of town even more congested.

Virginia Tech also owns/leases out much of the space in UCB for non-retail purposes such as their Math Emporium, computer support services, and their language and culture institute. While this draws students and some Virginia Tech staff to the shopping center, there is less retail space for businesses, especially ones which target market segments other than university students.

5.3.4 Aesthetic Appearance:

The retail strip directly off Prices Fork Road that has the Chipotle and McAllister's Deli is a new development and has modern curb appeal. The University Mall looks rundown and unkempt and

could benefit from facade improvements. The office space in this area is owned or leased by Virginia Tech, and those buildings look to be in good condition.

5.3.5 Vacant Retail Spaces Include:

- 702 University City Boulevard
- 833 University City Boulevard (University Mall)

5.3.6 What is Missing:

This is Blacksburg's most chain-heavy area and lacks local vendors of goods. Similar to the challenges of South Main, the retail space in University City Boulevard is also underutilized. Along with South Main, University City Boulevard is one of the few places in Blacksburg with a large retail space that could fit a department store, a retail need in Blacksburg. Currently, the large retail space in UCB is being occupied by the Virginia Tech Math Emporium (an institution overwhelmingly derided by both students and faculty alike) and a Hokie Shop bookstore, with services and goods that can be commonly found at other stores around Blacksburg and on the Virginia Tech campus.

5.4 Turner and Main Retail District

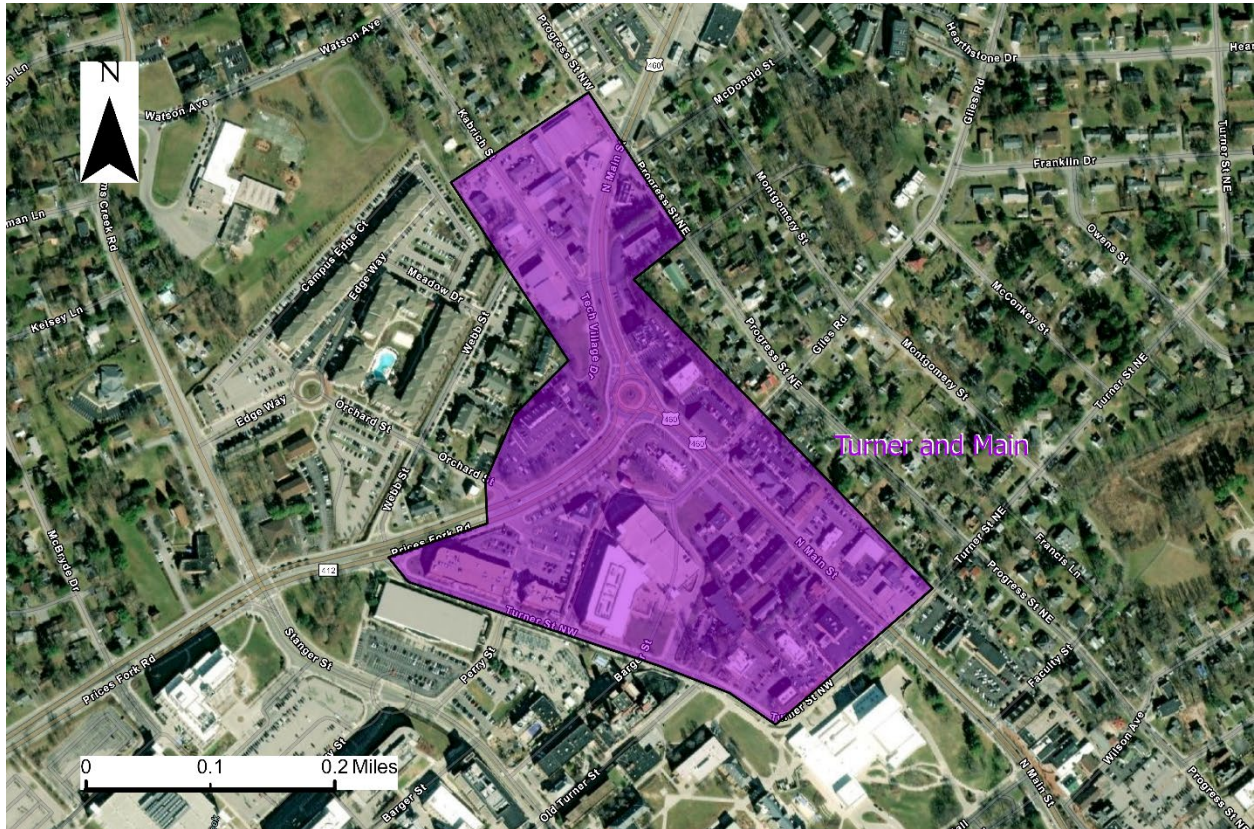
5.4.1 Characteristics:

The intermediary between North Main and Downtown, Turner and Main, is located at the intersection of Main Street and Price's Fork Road. Customers are likely to pass through this area frequently to access the roundabout interchange. There is not a significant number of traditional retailers here. Stores include a few chain fast food restaurants (Wendy's, McDonalds and Zaxby's), locally owned coffee shops (Halwa Cafe and Mill Mountain Coffee and Tea), a local grocery and health food store (Eats Natural Foods), and local restaurants like the only Indian food restaurant in town. The North End Center is a newer area with some chain restaurants and a Virginia Tech computer and electronic store. The Gilbert Street development, currently under construction, will increase the available space for potential businesses and parking within the garage and also increase traffic.

This area is frequented most by on and off-campus students and occasionally by locals visiting Eats, coffee shops, and local restaurants. With its proximity to the campus, on-campus students can easily walk over for coffee or grab a bite to eat. Off-campus students will frequent this area as there are multiple chain restaurants with drive-thru windows for convenience. Similar to the other districts, this area also becomes busier with Blacksburg visitors when there is a home football game. The presence of several vehicle repair garages at the northern portion of this district are beneficial for Advance Auto Parts as they are the only nearby supplier of auto parts.

The only survey conducted here was at the Eats Natural Food store that is adjacent to the roundabout on North Main Street. Eats Natural Food is satisfied with their location and feels their

largest asset is their customer loyalty. We can assume that the rest of the tenants in this area are satisfied with their current location as there has been little movement in and out of this district.



Map 4: Turner and Main Corridor

5.4.2 Strengths:

The Turner and Main area of Blacksburg benefits from easy vehicle and pedestrian access to retail further downtown and from surrounding residential areas. This area is also adjacent to Virginia Tech, making this an easily accessible area by on-campus students and from the surrounding residential areas. This corridor is also easily accessible by Blacksburg Transit with multiple stops in this region.

5.4.3 Challenges:

There is a lack of traditional retail in this area as it is defined by a majority concentration of restaurants serving nearby residential areas. There is currently a lack of parking at the North End Center due to ongoing construction on the adjacent corner on Prices Fork Road. Accessing restaurants in the North End Center area is very difficult as parking has been drastically reduced during the construction phase. In other areas of Turner and Main, there is also a general lack of parking for some of the restaurants on Main Street. Turner and Main is also hard to traverse as a pedestrian due to lack of crosswalks or signaled crossings.

5.4.4 Aesthetic Appearance:

The North End Center, which is owned by the Virginia Tech Foundation, was built in 2012-2013 and looks modern and sleek. The new construction that is happening on Prices Fork Road will be Blacksburg's newest development and will attract visitors as well as current residents. The other shopping options are well maintained and do not need immediate improvement.

5.4.5 Vacant Retail Spaces Include:

- 220 Gilbert Street (Under Construction)
- 712 N. Main Street

5.4.6 What is Missing:

As the connection between two vital retail districts, Turner and Main would benefit from an increase in retail in the North End Center area; retail could be incorporated into the building that holds the Buffalo Wild Wings and Wine Lab. This would give more retail options for on-campus students as well considering that this is walking distance from the dormitories on campus. Many students already frequent this due to the Starbucks in the area so an increase of relevant retail should thrive here.

5.5 North Main Retail District

5.5.1 Characteristics:

North Main exists at the heart of one of Blacksburg's main residential districts. There is one shopping center, which contains a Food Lion, Blacksburg Pharmacy, a Goodwill, and two restaurants. Also in this area is Moog Inc., a manufacturer of advanced motion control products for aerospace, defense, industrial, and medical applications. There is a YMCA Thrift Store as well as some local and chain restaurants in this area.

North Main Street, being a main road in the Town of Blacksburg, is accessed by almost every market segment except for on-campus students at some point. Many students live in this area as well as families with children and empty nesters (with single family homes). There is also a prevalence of lower-end retail along North Main, which is occupied by businesses more tailored towards permanent residents and off-campus students. There are numerous auto repair and autobody shops, a couple of doctor offices and insurance agencies, and home-based retail: a garden store, a hardware store, a furniture store, and a pet store.



Map 5: North Main Corridor

5.5.2 Strengths:

This area is easily accessible by Blacksburg Transit with multiple stops in this area that all go to the Virginia Tech campus as well as through various residential areas. There is ample storefront parking in the shopping center that contains the Food Lion and a few restaurants. The immediate

area around the shopping center is walkable with wide sidewalks; however this only applies to the surrounding few apartment complexes.

5.5.3 Challenges:

This area lacks traditional retail since it is mostly residential along with a grocery store and a manufacturing corporation. This area is a considerable distance away from the Virginia Tech campus and although it is accessible by Blacksburg Transit, on-campus students would have to travel quite the distance, which could be time consuming. This area could benefit from a lot more traditional retail given the surrounding residential area.

5.5.4 Aesthetic Appearance:

The shopping center façade is dated and could use some improvements and remodeling. Some of the sidewalks on North Main are narrow and in disrepair and present safety issues for pedestrians.

5.5.5 Vacant Retail Spaces Include:

- 1108 N. Main Street
- (2) Commercial Lots located adjacent to Patrick Henry Centre - N. Main Street

5.5.6 What is Missing:

The absence of gas stations and other retail means customers must travel to one of the other retail districts for goods other than groceries. Lack of public transportation to Patrick Henry Shopping Centre means customers need to either drive or walk a burdensome distance to access the shops in the center.

5.6 Price's Fork Retail District

5.6.1 Characteristics:

This small retail district bridges the gap between rural Price's Fork and the main core of Blacksburg. There is almost no retail in this district; the only retail type establishment is the Hethwood Market and Food Lion within Hethwood Square Shopping Center. There is one elementary school and an apartment complex in the area. Most of the buildings in this area are occupied by medical offices and other service industries.

5.6.2 Strengths:

This region is supported by the Hethwood Market, which is a small vendor that offers locally-sourced produce and provides space for farmers to sell their products. With the proximity to Foxridge Apartments, which is one of the largest apartment complexes in Blacksburg, these residents frequent the Hethwood Market. Lastly, Kipps Elementary School is in this area and parents picking up their children could easily stop at this center for food/snacks to take home. This district is an opportunity zone to provide desired and necessary services and reach potential customers that currently travel elsewhere to satisfy their needs.

5.6.3 Challenges:

There is no high frequency public transportation and, most noticeable, is the lack of retail options as there are almost none beyond the Food Lion. With the high number of residents living in this area, this district could benefit from an increase in retail options. This area is far away from other complementary businesses; most consider this district to be the outskirts of Blacksburg.



Map 6: Price's Fork Corridor

5.6.4 Aesthetic Appearance

This area is the least developed compared to the other districts, with an elementary school, a large apartment complex, and a small market. This is an older area; however, the buildings are maintained in a good condition.

5.6.5 Vacant Retail Spaces Include:

- None

5.6.6 What is Missing:

This retail district lacks any defining characteristics and any diversity of shopping. The proximity to a highly populated residential area as well as several schools means this area could benefit highly from any traditional retail including restaurants, convenience stores, and other basic shopping staples that are available in any of the other corridors.

5.7 Retail Supply Summary

The Blacksburg retail supply provides the basic needs of those who live in the town. There are several grocery stores, a few hardware stores, several gas stations, and automobile repair shops. It lacks family clothing stores, general stores, and department stores that sell a variety of household goods. Residents, visitors, and commuting employees must travel to Christiansburg or another town for a better selection of retail.

Blacksburg offers several dining options. However, many options are fast food establishments or pubs. Most of the dining options cater to Virginia Tech students or people who want a quick meal and are not looking for a dining experience. The town can benefit from additional family-friendly, specialty, and fine-dining options.

With the exception of a few shops downtown, there are not many places to purchase artisanal or locally produced goods. Such stores resonate with the people in the town as well as visitors and others who travel through the town by supporting a sense of community and sharing the culture of Blacksburg and its region. Additionally, some retail districts near the residential areas, like North Main and Prices Fork, can benefit from new retail that meets the needs of the market segments residing in those areas.

There is commercial space available in multiple retail districts around Blacksburg. Some retail locations need facade and signage improvements to make the locations look more modern. There is also a need to make the areas outside existing retail more inviting. With the exception of the Downtown retail district, customers to the retail establishments travel by car. There is a need for better parking and pedestrian improvements in all of the districts.

6 Consumer Characteristics

There are six market segments that represent consumers in Blacksburg: On-campus students, off-campus students, visitors, retirees and empty nesters, families with children, and the working population. Each segment has different characteristics and retail needs as outlined below.

6.1 On-Campus Students

6.1.1 Population:

Per Virginia Tech 2022 statistics, there are 9,300 students living on campus. 6,758 of these students are freshmen with 2,982 female students and 3,763 male students (Virginia Tech, 2022).

6.1.2 Location:

This group is located entirely within the residential portion of Virginia Tech's campus. Dormitories are located almost exclusively within the southwest quadrant of campus nearest to Kent and Washington Streets.

6.1.3 Characteristics:

This market segment consists of college aged students (18-22) with high dependence on walkability/public transit. Due to the lack of reliable personal transportation, many students require access to basic necessities and other retail options within a short walking distance. Growing up in the age of technology makes this group technologically adept. Limited space in dormitories defines how many items can be stored at any given time.

6.1.4 Spending Pattern:

This group follows current technological and fashion trends promoted through social platforms and influencers and values affordability. They prefer to order items online that cannot be purchased within a 30-minute walk from campus. As many students attend classes full or part-time, they lack the disposable income to purchase multiple high-ticket items, meaning affordability and promotional deals are preferred. A spending study by Deloitte analyzed data from the 2020-2021 fiscal year to predict a national average of parent spending on their college-aged children for the 2022 school year. Average overall spending is up 8%. Their model shows predicted nationwide sales in the middle-income market segment of up to \$1.3B with an average of \$1,459 spent per child (an increase of 5% from 2020). The 3 major categories of spending are technology such as computers, electrical gadgets, and digital subscriptions, and dorm furniture (Deloitte Insights, 2022.). Post-pandemic online shopping is expected to occupy 35% of all back-to-school purchases. Main online purchase factors include competitive pricing, sales or discounts, and availability of free shipping.

6.1.5 Strategies to Attract Specific Market Segment:

- Advertising through online venues will reach a greater number of potential customers than physical advertisements.
- Promotional deals are a strong method to attract and create a strong customer base.
- Ease of use will attract those customers who are too busy to purchase items in person.
- Providing delivery services and a quick and user-friendly experience will incentivize students to purchase items they want or need (DoorDash, GoPuff)

- Creating an “experience” for students to post on social media is both a powerful advertising tool and a good way to differentiate businesses from those in other localities. (Picture opportunities, location tags, brand ambassadors)

6.2 Off- Campus Students

6.2.1 Population:

The total number of students living off-campus is approximately 25,356 students ([Factbook: About the University | Virginia Tech](#)).

6.2.2 Location:

Off-campus students live in various locations in Blacksburg and Christiansburg; they typically live in apartment complexes such as Terrace View, The Hub, The Edge and in houses that are rented out each year. Typically, most students live within 2 miles of the Virginia Tech campus; however, some students opt to live further away towards Christiansburg as rent is cheaper.

6.2.3 Characteristics:

Students living off campus are college-aged adults. Many of these students who are pursuing a master's degree or PhD are under the age of 35, but there are older students. Students living off campus typically have access to a car and have easy access to various grocery stores around Blacksburg. However, students still must go to Christiansburg to purchase everyday necessities. This creates barriers for off-campus students who do not have a car or access to a car, particularly international students. There is a bus route that goes to Christiansburg (specifically to the Walmart/Mall); however, the process does take a lot of time.

6.2.4 Spending Patterns:

Undergraduate students have a higher spending limit than personal income would suggest, as some have financial support from their parent/guardian. Graduate/PhD students living off campus tend to spend less as most do not receive support from parents/guardians. Many graduate/PhD students are on assistantships with the university, which covers part of tuition and offers a monthly stipend. Overall, many off-campus students will still order items online if those items cannot be purchased directly in Blacksburg, and most value affordable priced goods. As of 2021, average spending per student has increased, rebounding from a decrease as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Average spending per student is up to \$1,459, and most are splurging on computers, hardware, and other supplies for college. Online purchasing is projected to remain almost the same as 2020, with 35% of shopping expected to occur online.

6.2.5 Strategies to Attract Specific Market Segment:

- Online advertising is a good way for retailers to advertise their business and products, and this could reach many students at a time.

- Retailers should offer promotions and sales/deals to attract the student population as they do value affordability.
- Overall, there needs to be more retail options available in Blacksburg that follow the current fashion trends. Students will continue to purchase goods online if they are not available in Blacksburg.

6.3 Blacksburg Visitors

6.3.1 *Population:*

The total number of Blacksburg visitors is over 50,000 annually. People travel to Blacksburg to attend events at Virginia Tech. This includes alumni and parents. Other visitors include people traveling to visit family and friends in Blacksburg and people vacationing in Montgomery County and the surrounding region.

6.3.2 *Location:*

A total of 38% of the visitors come from outside the Southwest Virginia Region, including Blacksburg, from other locations in Virginia. Smaller percentages of travelers visit from North Carolina, Maryland, and Pennsylvania. The majority of visitors come to Blacksburg for Virginia Tech events and to visit family and friends. Other visitors come for outdoor recreation, entertainment, or sightseeing ([Virginia Tourism Corporation Travel Data & Profile: Southwest Virginia](#), 2019).

6.3.3 *Characteristics:*

The average travel party size is 2.8, and 29% of visitors are traveling with children. The average age of travelers is 44 years old. The average household income of travelers is \$84,570. Over 80% of visitors travel by automobile. These visitors desire retail that is not geared toward university students. They desire a variety of lodging options, non-fast food dining options, more recreational activities, and specialty shops and restaurants that offer locally made items and cuisine ([Virginia Tourism Corporation Travel Data & Profile: Southwest Virginia](#), 2019).

6.3.4 *Spending Pattern:*

Visitors' spending patterns revolve around lodging, accommodations, and food and beverage. The direct impact of visitor spending before and during the COVID-19 pandemic was approximately \$145 million in 2020 and approximately \$222 million in 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic. The biggest areas of impact spending were in food and beverage and lodging ([The Virginia Tourism Corporation Direct Visitor Impacts Report](#), 2020).

6.3.5 *Strategies to Attract Specific Market Segment:*

- Create a Blacksburg Visitors Center to help tourists and Virginia Tech visitors with recommendations for lodging, food & beverage, and things to do.
- Increase marketing and promotional support by:

- Creating or expanding marketing partnerships with tourism-related businesses.
- Making brochures, parking maps, and other travel-related resources available and easier to find online; and
- Producing seasonal guides and offering advertising opportunities and promotional support.
- Improve parking and walkways by providing additional parking locations, widening sidewalks, and adding additional crosswalks.

6.4 Retired Community & Empty Nesters

6.4.1 Population:

This market segment consists mostly of people nearing or beyond their retirement age (65+ years). There are 2,890 people of this age group living in Blacksburg, 56% of whom are female ([US Census 2020 ACS 5-Year Survey \(Table S0101\)](#)) and 95% of whom live in family and non-family households (i.e. with younger family members, spouse, other relatives etc.) ([Esri BA Population Summary](#)).

6.4.2 Location:

The retired community/empty nesters mainly live in the residential neighborhoods primarily consisting of single-family homes within 2 miles from the campus. They prefer a small town or suburban feel when choosing a place to live. There are also some assisted living homes in Blacksburg for the older population; for example, Warm Heath, English Meadows Senior Living, and Fieldstone Senior Apartments, etc.

6.4.3 Characteristics:

Retirement packages and social security benefits are the primary sources of income for this market segment. People aged between 65 and 74 years have higher disposable median (\$57,309) and average income (\$78,390) compared to those above the age of 75 years (Median = \$42,561; Average = \$62,004) ([Esri BA Population Summary](#)). Most people in this segment own single-family homes and 1 or 2 vehicles, but they have limited mobility due to existing medical conditions. However, they still prefer to be physically active and are usually engaged in gardening, home maintenance etc. Although 2,437 people live in households with access to a computer ([Esri BA Population Summary](#)), most of them prefer print over electronic media. Nevertheless, they are likely to be connected to the internet, but that is primarily for basic uses, like keeping track of investments, contacting family and friends living away, or staying up to date with the news.

6.4.4 Spending Pattern:

This market segment consists of budget aware shoppers who are more inclined to buy American products and services. Brand loyalty is the highlight of this segment, and many in the segment use coupons from their preferred retailers to shop. They focus more on the quality of products and only spend within their means, meaning they do not carry as much balance on credit cards as the

younger generations. However, medical and health care facilities constitute a significant part of their spending. And while they would occasionally spend on recreation in the form of theaters, art, and movies etc., they are more likely to prefer a meal at home rather than in a restaurant.

6.4.5 Strategies to Attract Specific Market Segment:

- Reward customer loyalty through coupons, special offers, and other perks
- Advertise through traditional media
- Promote online/over the phone orders and home delivery among their preferred brands
- Make retail stores more accessible - assistance with identifying and picking up products, more legible labels on products, better lit facilities, etc.
- Introduce home-call service at an additional cost for services like therapies, hair-cut etc.

6.5 Families With Children

6.5.1 Population:

There are 2,383 households considered to be family households with at least one child under the age of 18. This comprises 17.8% of all households in Blacksburg ([ESRI BA Population Summary](#)).

6.5.2 Location:

Families with children need extra space to raise their children; thus they mainly live in the residential neighborhoods primarily consisting of single-family homes or in apartments and townhomes that aren't heavily occupied by students.

6.5.3 Characteristics:

This market segment consists of either one or two parents roughly between 30 and 55 years of age and at least one child 18 years of age or younger.

6.5.4 Spending Pattern:

While smaller in size, families in Blacksburg have a high level of disposable income. The median disposable income for people between the ages of 25 and 34, 35 and 44, and 45 and 54 (common ages for people with kids) was \$36,242, \$59,955, and \$78,882, respectively ([ESRI Disposable Income Profile](#)). In addition to the higher disposable incomes, people with children spend more money monthly than people of the same age and income without children. However, to adapt to the increased financial demands that come with children, families with children try to spend less per person. This means families tend to buy and shop in bulk and at discounted stores. Large and expensive purchases and events are curtailed and/or substituted for cheaper alternatives; families, when going out to eat, will eat at "family-style" restaurants in place of fancier restaurants and, for entertainment, go to the movies over more expensive and lavish options (i.e., plays).

6.5.5 Strategies to Attract Specific Market Segment:

- Selling family essentials at affordable prices. (i.e., groceries, children’s clothing, children’s shows, school supplies, etc.)
- Events or deals which allow for family-based discounts or bulk deals
- Stores providing/having infrastructure to support families that are shopping with kids.
 - Parking for families traveling by car
 - Safe biking and walking infrastructure for families traveling by walking or bicycle
 - The store’s interior should be safe and suitable for children; if the average shopping trip time for a store is long, providing daycare/childcare facilities would be an effective draw.
- Finally, stores that market to families and supply family-friendly goods (i.e., healthy foods)

6.6 Working Population

6.6.1 Population:

Blacksburg has a daytime working population of 16,000. Of that total population, 5,350 people work and live in town. A total of 4,700 people commute out of town ([Strategic Plan for Downtown Blacksburg, 2019](#)). This segment is scattered throughout Blacksburg in both single-family housing and apartment complexes.

6.6.2 Location:

This segment of the market is scattered throughout the town, not only in the areas that cater to young professionals, but also in the near and outlying suburbs with the possibility for movement between Downtown and the outskirts of town.

6.6.3 Spending Patterns

The spending pattern for this segment varies greatly depending on what stage of life the individual or family is in. For example, a young and single professional will have different spending habits and priorities than someone who is older with an established family. As a result, retail in Blacksburg must be more varied to cater to the needs of this subgroup as there is more variation in it compared to other market segments.

6.6.4 Strategies to Attract Specific Market Segment:

- Pricing that is competitive with online retailers
- Diversity in offerings
- Parking for those with cars and accessibility via public transportation and walking (skewed more towards public transit and walking)

- Discounts by industry potentially (for example an “Engineering Event” where engineers can show that they work in that sector and receive a certain percentage off their purchase)
- Make the experience fast and relatively easy because their time is limited (either on their way to or from work)
- Easy carryout/pick up or curbside service that can reduce the amount of time spent waiting for the products they buy
- Make retail an experience that will cause them to want to come back vs wanting to shop online by offering a personalized shopping experience
- Cater to young professionals that have families and make the retail experience one that interests them
 - For example, having a retail event that is specifically designed for children in terms of what goods/services are available
 - A retailer could team up with a local restaurant/bar to create a social event for single young professionals to serve as a mixer while also showing their products/services
- Honor the pedestrian by making sidewalks safer, more visually appealing, vibrant, and inviting
- Encourage micro-retail spaces in mixed use infill structures that can attract new small businesses

7 Market Analysis from Primary Sources - Business Owner Survey

The project team conducted an intercept questionnaire of 10 retail establishments located in the key business districts of Blacksburg including the Downtown area, North and South Main, and University City Boulevard. They also disseminated a similar questionnaire via email to the business owners of the town with the help of Blacksburg Partnership and heard back from 29 of them. The results of these surveys give a holistic view of the retail environment of the town and the needs and opportunities for its improvement. Some of the key findings are summarized below.

7.1 Long Term Retailers:

More than half of the businesses surveyed have been in operation between 10 years and more than 20 years. This indicates that many businesses have a strong tie with the town, which can be leveraged to foster positive changes in the retail climate. For instance, during our field survey, the owner of Eats recalled getting help from their customers to relocate their store after a fire incident. Loyal, longtime customers offered manual labor and also lent their trucks to transport their goods to the new location.

7.2 Seasonality:

Since Blacksburg is a college town, seasonality has an impact on the sales of most businesses. The

majority of the retail stores make their highest sales during holiday seasons like Christmas or winter holidays, followed by the football season and graduation ceremonies. On the other hand, sales usually take a dip during the longer holidays like the summer break. Seasonality, therefore, is an important factor to consider when examining retail demand and supply as well as planning any initiatives to promote retail in Blacksburg.

7.3 Role of Events:

Businesses participate in a number of events taking place throughout the year in Blacksburg, like Steppin' Out, Brew Do, Fork and Cork, Up on the Roof, and other seasonal holiday related events. About a quarter of the retailers surveyed mentioned events and holidays, such as Steppin' Out, Valentine's Day, Halloween, and St. Patrick's Day, drive a significant amount of business to their stores. However, when asked about the revenue that they potentially generate from participating in these events, more than half of the respondents situated the share within the 0-10% category. They explained that they participate in these events primarily with the intention to market and connect to the community, and not necessarily to gain revenue.

7.4 Services Required:

In terms of the services required to improve their sales/revenue, the majority of businesses stressed providing adequate parking spaces for their customers. Some of them also mentioned walkability and handicap accessibility measures as an essential need considering some of their key customer demographics: for instance, the retired community. They also described the need for more advertisement and promotion of their businesses and additional support for local businesses to compete with the big names. In this context, many have also underscored the importance of local and regional trade organizations helping them out with their resources and expertise.

7.5 COVID-19 Fund:

Federal, state and local governments have been giving out financial assistance to nearly all categories of businesses throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Most businesses across the country used these funds to stay operational during these challenging times. In Blacksburg as well, most businesses received some sort of funding either from federal or state governments or both for COVID-19 related hardships. They have used these funds mostly to stay afloat, by paying rent and continuing payroll of their employees.

7.6 Online Business:

Almost all of the businesses surveyed have an online presence, through tailored websites or social media pages like Instagram, Facebook, etc. With declining COVID-19 cases, most of these stores have returned to primarily in-person business. Nearly half of the businesses have mentioned their intention of doing more business online in the future.

8 Summary of Promising Practices for Retail Development

The project team reviewed case studies from 12 similarly situated college towns in the U.S. to identify best practices in the promotion and retention of the retail climate. These practices are incorporated in this report because they are relevant to Blacksburg in terms of attempting similar activities and deriving similar results. Details about each of the case studies conducted for this project are listed in Appendix B.

8.1 New Business Development Workshops and Resources

Business development workshops can help emerging businesses during the opening and maintenance process. Currently, the American Institute of Architects and the Mayor’s Innovation Project are sponsoring a retail incubator in Blacksburg. This project will help revitalize the defunct retail space in the heart of Downtown Blacksburg, next to the Maroon Door, when it is completed. This project provides business owners with expert knowledge and other resources needed to break into the Blacksburg market. This opportunity should be promoted to more prospective retail businesses.

8.2 Incentive Programs for Student Consumers

Incentive programs aimed toward student spending can draw more student consumers to local businesses. Laramie, Wyoming offered an incentive program called “Cowboy Cash” to students at the University of Wyoming. Students who were enrolled in a meal plan at the university received five \$10 gift certificates to use at local businesses. The program was funded by the federal CARES Act, and businesses were reimbursed the full amount of the gift certificates after redemption ([‘Cowboy Cash’ Program Benefits UW Students, Local Businesses | News | University of Wyoming](#)).

8.3 Holiday and Special Retail-Centered Events

Special retail-centered events allow each retail district in Blacksburg to attract consumers at different times throughout the year. Some holidays and seasons are perfect opportunities to host special shopping events in different retail districts. The Annual Holiday Parade in December and Halloween trick-or-treating are opportunities for businesses to offer extended hours for increased foot traffic in certain shopping areas like the Downtown District. Themed events, like Restaurant Week, should include businesses in all retail districts to encourage consumers to shop and dine in the different centers in Blacksburg ([Ten Principles for Downtown Retail](#)).

8.4 Use Grants to Rehabilitate Aging Facades

The City of Morgantown partnered with the Small Business Administration to develop a Small Business Assistance Grant that will make use of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to assist small businesses in the downtown as well as other commercial districts of the city in coping with the impact of COVID-19. One important aspect of this program is the allocation of \$200,000

from the ARPA funds to continue the Façade Improvement Program in the downtown area. Another \$200,000 has been allocated for the Morgantown City Ambassador Pilot Program, which will assist in providing services like patrolling the Downtown and riverfront districts, litter removal, safety escorts, and greeting and assisting visitors to the downtown area.

The Town of Blacksburg was recently awarded a \$13 million grant from the ARPA fund. We recommend using a portion of the grant to fund a similar project that will enhance the outlook of the retail stores in the town, especially those located on aged properties.

8.5 Bricks and Clicks and Technical Assistance Program

This interesting venture of Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance, named the “Bricks & Clicks Grant and Technical Assistance Program,” is aiming to close the digital divide among the small businesses by providing them with technical and financial assistance to strengthen both their offline and online presence ([Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance, 2022](#)). This assistance would range from supporting renovation expenditure, infrastructure improvement, etc. (bricks) to developing and publishing websites, helping to create proprietary software and database management systems for retails, etc. (clicks). Since many retailers in Blacksburg expressed their interest in doing more businesses online, such initiatives might prove helpful for them.

9 Recommendations

9.1 Honor the Pedestrian

Retail business owners should make changes to the entrances of their stores to be more appealing to customers. They can find ways to make the sidewalk and window displays more attractive and inviting. Several restaurants have utilized outdoor space and created designated seating areas in creative and useful ways. Exemplary downtown businesses include: The Cellar, Sharkey’s Wing and Rib Joint, Green’s Grill and Sushi Bar, Maroon Door, and Top of the Stairs. Only a select few restaurants in the remaining retail districts utilize outdoor seating, and some of these businesses include: El Rodeo Mexican Restaurant(s), Our Daily Bread, and Cabo Fish Taco. We have identified several local restaurants that could also benefit from an outdoor seating option including Hokie House Restaurant and Vintage Cellar. Businesses that could benefit from physical appearance improvements include Greenhouse Skate Shop, Benny Marzano’s, the Patrick Henry Centre Shopping Center Mall, and a majority of businesses within the Blacksburg Square Shopping Center.

The South Main and North Main Districts need to be more pedestrian friendly. It was reflected in the survey that sidewalk infrastructure was in poor condition, specifically in areas on Main Street. There needs to be an increase in safety as well as aesthetics in these districts in general. The

Blacksburg Square parking lot would greatly benefit from a potential redesign to enhance pedestrian safety and improve connectivity to other stores in the district.

9.2 Provide EV Charging Stations and Better Wayfinding Signage for Automobile Travelers

Electric vehicle charging stations are limited in Blacksburg. Current EV stations include: First and Main, University City Boulevard Kroger gas station, Kent Square parking garage, Gables Shopping Center (South Main Kroger), and the Virginia Tech Architecture Annex lot. More EV charging stations in retail districts would allow customers to shop while their cars are charging. Potential locations for EV charging stations are Downtown Blacksburg in the existing parking lot behind Sharkey's, North Main in the Patrick Henry Shopping Centre (Food Lion), Hethwood Shopping Center (Food Lion), and another station within the University Crossing Shopping Center (University City Boulevard).

Improvements can be made to parking direction signage, especially downtown. The current signage is confusing and not easy to see. Larger and more universal signage specifically in the Downtown district can help direct traffic to parking areas. Blacksburg visitors that have not frequented Blacksburg may have difficulty finding parking, specifically parking for visitors and not specifically students.

9.3 Attract Social Media Enthusiasts

Retail business owners should create taggable “experiences” to attract social media enthusiasts. This trend is especially popular with younger generations of consumers and travelers. Taggable experiences can include creation and use of hashtags specific to the business and their special events. One example of this is creating murals or backdrops in retail establishments to go along with the hashtags. Some stores create flower or greenery walls where consumers can snap a photo while they are shopping in the store and use a location or store-specific hashtag. Another example of creating a taggable experience is creating a contest like a scavenger hunt for gift certificates to use in store using the name of the contest in the hashtag. Scavenger hunts can be developed by a specific store, retail district, or entire town. This is a free advertising opportunity for businesses.

9.4 Expand Marketing Partnerships with Tourism-Related Businesses

With over 50,000 people traveling to Blacksburg every year, there is a need for more tourism-related activities. Hotels, stores, and restaurants should partner with each other to encourage visitors to buy from local vendors and take advantage of other activities Blacksburg has to offer. For example, visitors who travel to Blacksburg to visit Virginia Tech should also know about the outdoor recreation activities in the area, family-friendly dining restaurants, and stores that sell locally crafted goods. Partners may choose to offer hotel packages that include admission to museums or other attractions, coupons to stores, and a lunch voucher for a local restaurant.

Additionally, all organizations' websites that are accessed by potential Blacksburg visitors should make traveling and tourism information easily accessible. For countywide websites, this information should be able to be sorted by town (Blacksburg, Christiansburg, etc.) so that visitors can more easily plan an itinerary or utilize a pre-planned itinerary with Blacksburg favorites.

9.5 Open a Visitors' Center in Blacksburg

The Montgomery County Visitor's Center is located in Christiansburg. Their services are valuable, but they are not always accessed by Blacksburg visitors. A visitor's center could offer travelers important information about shopping, dining, lodging, and things to do in Blacksburg. Ideal locations include a vacant space downtown or the Alexander Black House. The visitors center could be staffed by volunteers and should be open during the weekends, vacation seasons, and during major Virginia Tech events.

The benefits of having a visitors' center include helping visitors discover experiences in Blacksburg and helping them learn more about the story of Blacksburg. Virginia Tech offers experiences for visitors throughout the year, and there are more experiences for visitors to immerse themselves in beyond the campus. Visitors should know more about the town's parks and trails, festivals, historical sites, arts scene, and retail shops.

9.6 Leverage Customer Goodwill, Loyalty, and Word of Mouth

Some Blacksburg consumers, especially the retired and empty nester market segment, prefer specific brands and American-made products. One way to encourage more purchases from these consumers is to reward their customer loyalty with special offers and coupons. Retail advertisers can reach more customers who read traditional media by promoting their products and services in local newspapers, like *The Burgs*. The Business Owner Survey indicates that some business owners desire more sponsorship opportunities for local events. This, too, can help advertise retail businesses to the market segments who get their news and information from traditional media.

9.7 Promote Greater Family Inclusivity in Existing Events

Blacksburg offers many retail-related events and celebrations throughout the year. Some of them are targeted toward more mature consumers such as Brew Do and Fork and Cork. Others, such as Steppin' Out, the Annual Chocolate Festival, and the International Street Fair, cater to multiple market segments, including those with children. Event sponsors should promote appropriate events as "family fun" to attract families with children from Blacksburg and Blacksburg visitors.

Ways to attract more families from and outside of Blacksburg to these events include more social media marketing. This includes not only adding general information about the event, but it also includes using media like videos and photos that portray families participating in the events. If there are admissions fees for events, sponsoring organizations should include fees on their promotional materials for adults, children, and groups.

9.8 Increase Awareness of the Blacksburg Partnership and its Mission

Conversations and comments from the Business Owner Survey indicated that several business owners wanted to know more about the Blacksburg Partnership, its mission, and programs. Business owners could benefit from more face-to-face interaction with the Blacksburg Partnership, informational pamphlets, and online communication. The Blacksburg Partnership should increase its social media presence to reach more business owners, investors, residents, tourists, and others interested in retail and business opportunities in Blacksburg.

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Appendix A: Business Owner Survey

Question 1: What's your company's name?

Question 2: How long has your business been in operation?

- Less than a year
- 1-2 years
- 3-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 10-20 years
- 20+ years

Question 3: Which demographics do you cater your product/services to? (Check all that apply)

- Undergraduate students
- Graduate Students
- University Visitors
- Tourists
- Families with children
- Working professionals
- Retirees
- Other

Question 4: How much of your sales comes from these groups? (Indicated by "A significant amount", "A fair amount", "A small amount", "Almost no service")

- University students
- Visitors/tourists
- Families with children
- Working professionals
- Retirees
- Other

Question 5: Are you satisfied with your current location (building or business district)?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Question 6: If no, why and where would you like to relocate?

Question 7: During what periods of the year do you make your highest sales?

- Christmas/Winter Holiday Season
- Football Game Weekends
- Graduation
- New Student Orientation
- 3.2 for 32 Run for Remembrance
- None of the Above
- Other

Question 8: Which events, that you currently participate in, drive the most business to your store? (check all that apply)

- Steppin' Out
- Relay for Life
- Fork and Cork
- Up on the Roof
- Blacksburg Farmers Market
- Brew Do
- Seasonal Holiday Related Events (Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's Day, Halloween, etc)
- Other

Question 9: In the event(s) that you participate in, what percentage of your revenue is generated from these events?

- 0-10%
- 10-25%
- >25%
- Unsure

Question 10: What do you feel is preventing your business from flourishing? (check all that apply)

- Your location in Blacksburg
- Your store's location conditions
- Competition from similar businesses in the Blacksburg area
- Competition from online retailers (i.e., Amazon, Wayfair, etc.)
- Lack of adjacent complementary businesses
- Lack of a customer base/right demographics
- Lack of advertising/awareness
- Nothing is wrong. Business is doing great.
- Poor parking availability and location
- Poor pedestrian and bicyclist access and facilities
- Distance from/lack of service from Blacksburg Transit

- Other

Question 11: What factors are helping your business to thrive? (Check all that apply)

- Location in Blacksburg
- Your store's/location's condition
- A lack of competition from competing businesses
- A good/fair amount of adjacent complementary businesses
- A strong online presence
- Strong customer base/the right demographics
- Good advertising/a lot of public awareness
- Good parking availability and location
- Good pedestrian and bicyclist access and infrastructure
- Everything is wrong. Business is doing terrible.
- Near/good service from Blacksburg Transit
- Other

Question 12: What services would help improve your business' sales/revenue?

Question 13: How much has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your business' profits?

- >25% increase
- 10-25% increase
- 0-10% increase
- Minimal change
- 0-10% decrease
- 10-25% decrease
- >25% decrease
- Unsure

Question 14: Have you received any financial benefits from the state/federal government during the COVID-19 pandemic?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Question 15: If yes, how have you used the state or federal funds?

Question 16: Does your business have an online component/presence?

- Yes
- No

Question 17: How much do online sales make up your total revenue?

- 0%
- 0-10%
- 10-25%
- 25-50%
- 50-75%
- >75%
- Unsure

Question 18: Have you considered conducting more business online?

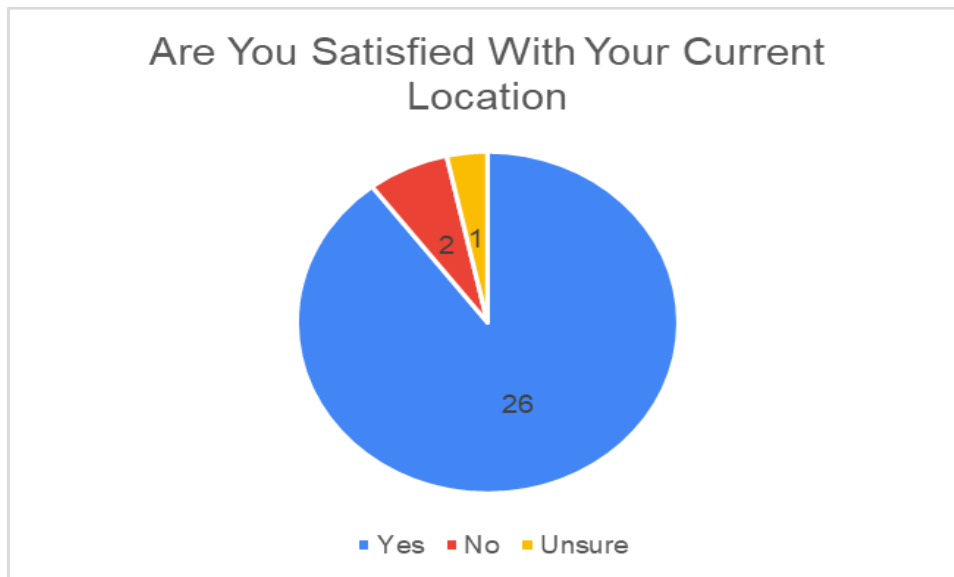
- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Question 19: Do you have any thoughts on how the Blacksburg Partnership and other organizations can help boost and diversify retail in town?

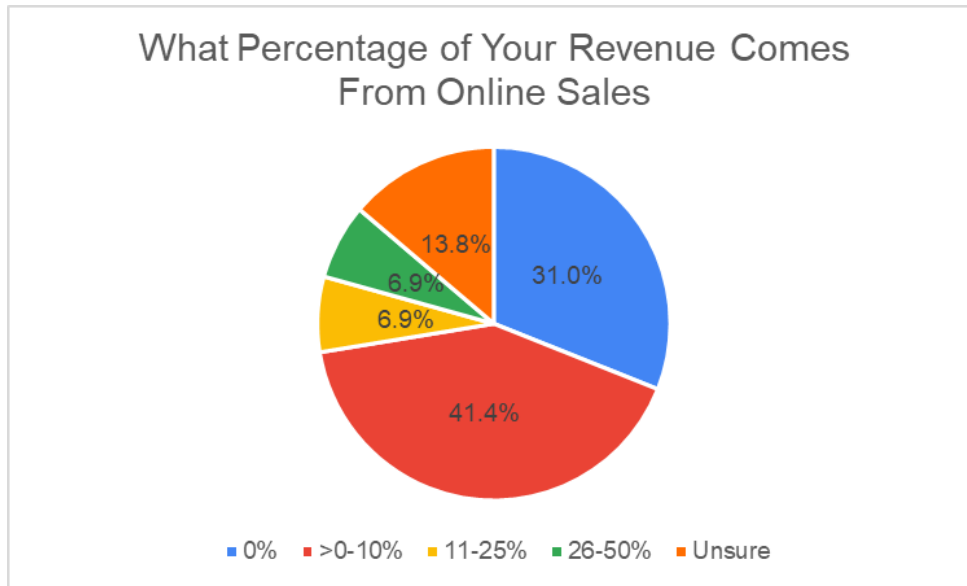
Appendix B: Business Owner Survey Graph Results



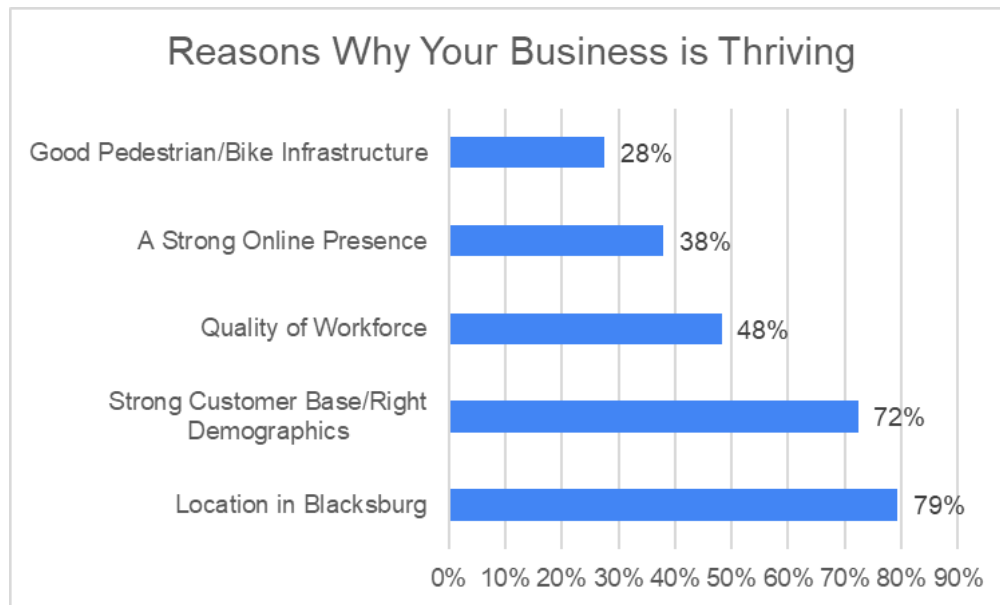
In combination with the email survey and the in-person survey, retailers tend to have a significant/fair number of sales from all of the market segments that were included in the survey.



An overwhelming majority of the survey respondents indicated that they are satisfied with their current location. A common reason for satisfaction with the current location is that the business is in a good location for students. One of the businesses that was surveyed that is not satisfied with their current location stated that their business felt hidden where it was located.

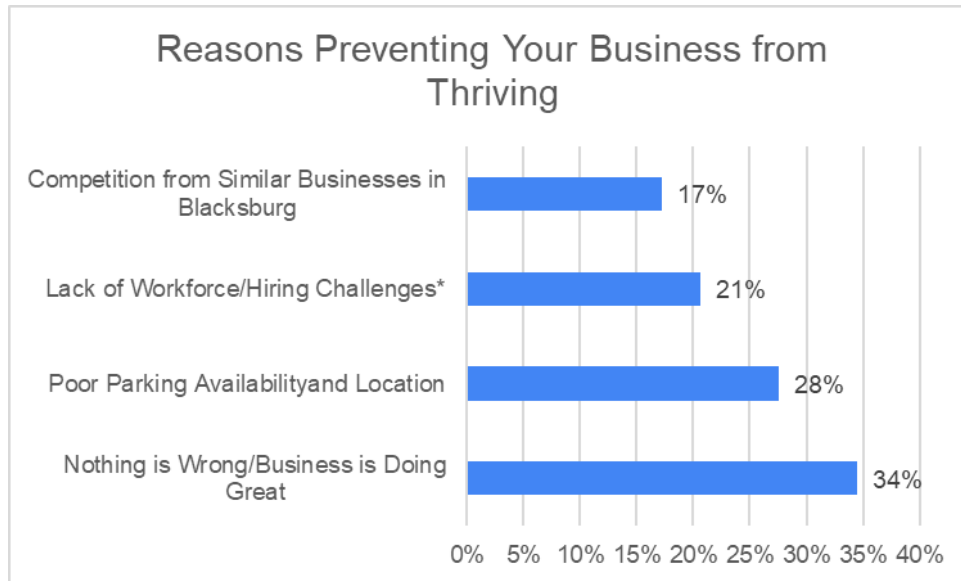


From the businesses survey, most of their revenue comes from purchases made in their physical stores. Almost a third (31.0%) of businesses don't conduct sales online or get no revenue from online sales, and another 41.4% of businesses get between >0-10% of their total revenue from online sales. Only 13.8% of businesses surveyed get more than 10% of their revenue through online sales. Finally, 13.8% of businesses were unsure of how much online sales made of their overall revenue.



When surveying businesses about reasons for their business's success, the most common answer chosen was "Location in Blacksburg," with 79% of businesses selecting it. Another highly selected choice was "Strong Customer Base/Right Demographics," which was selected by 72% of respondents. After these two answers, there was a drop off in agreement. Only 48% of respondents

selected “Quality of Workforce” as a reason why they’re successful; it is important to note that this question was added to the online survey but was not available for the in-person survey. A “strong online presence” was the fourth most selected choice, being selected by 38% of respondents, and “Good Pedestrian/Bike Infrastructure” was the fifth most selected choice with 28% of respondents selecting it.



When surveying businesses about multiple reasons for why their business was facing challenges/preventing them from thriving, the response rate was lower than for reasons why their businesses were doing well. This tells us that most businesses in Blacksburg are doing well, as exemplified by the most common answer chosen, which was “Nothing is Wrong/Business is Doing Great,” with 34% of businesses selecting it. The most selected actual issue was “Poor Parking and Location,” which was selected by 28% of respondents. The next most selected issue was “Lack of Workforce/Hiring Challenges” with 21% of businesses selecting it as a reason for why they’re facing challenges; it is important to note that this question was added to the online survey but was not available for the in-person survey. “Competition from Similar Businesses in Blacksburg” was the fourth most selected choice and was selected by 17% of respondents.

Appendix C: Case Studies of Similar College-Towns

LARAMIE, WY

Description of the Town

Laramie, Wyoming is a small city of 31,407 residents located in Southeast Wyoming (US Census Bureau, 2021). It is the county seat of Albany County and is the location of the University of Wyoming and WyoTech, the state's largest vocational school, which has an enrollment of 12,249 and around 2,500 students, respectively (National Center for Educational Statistics, n.d.; Flobeck, 2007). While the area Laramie is located in has been inhabited and used by Native Americans for over 10,000 years, the town that exists today got its start with the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad by Union Pacific (Viner, 2018). With access to a major rail line and vast amounts of prairie land, ranching and freighting became the town's major industries (Viner, 2018). The town's economy began to diversify when state legislators chose Laramie to be the site of Wyoming's land-grant university in response to the passage of the Morrill Act of 1862. With the decline in freighting jobs and the expansion of the university, the University of Wyoming has become the city's main employer (Viner, 2018).

Laramie's retail market profile shows the duality of Laramie's split identity between being a college town and a more industrial, blue-collar town. Using ArcGIS Business Analysis to run a report of Laramie's market profile, Laramie has a surplus of stores in fields that typically accommodate the preferences of college students: bars, restaurants, and shoe stores. However, Laramie also has a large leakage factor in other retail sectors that are more associated with college students such as bookstores, electronic & appliance stores, and clothing stores. In addition, the large surplus in automobile dealers, direct selling establishments, and office supply stores further detail Laramie's larger blue-collar population and land-use and choices to include big box and industrial commercial stores.

Capital Improvements

Laramie hopes to attract retailers by improving its downtown streetscape, community events, and pedestrian and bike facilities downtown. For the streetscapes, the city has plans to repave dilapidated sidewalks, add sidewalks on streets where there are none, increase tree canopy, increase ornamental lighting, and add decorative landscaping where possible (Arnett Muldrow and Associates, 2011). Most of these improvements would be on the 2nd and 3rd streets, which are the two streets that comprise most of the downtown core and the roads that most residents and visitors use to get downtown (Arnett Muldrow and Associates, 2011). The largest target for bicycle facilities is University Avenue, which is the street that connects the University to downtown (Arnett Muldrow and Associates, 2011). The city plans on putting a bike lane in the median of the avenue to help connect university students to downtown retailers. Finally, LMSP hosts events like farmers' markets and art walks to increase community involvement and engagement (Love &

Powe, 2020). With these improvements, Laramie hopes that the more beautiful, accessible, and engaging downtown will increase commerce and attract retailers.

Promotional Strategies Implemented

The Laramie Main Street Program (LMSP), in conjunction with the state-run Wyoming Main Street program, have launched a pilot program to help small businesses. The program, titled “Made on Main,” helps small business owners move their businesses from their homes/other retail locations into vacant downtown storefronts, helps to coordinate small businesses with each other, and helps these small businesses sell their products at food co-ops and farmer’s markets (Laramie Main Street Alliance, 2019; Love & Power, 2020;). This program helps to promote retail in Laramie by killing two birds with one stone: creating a more vibrant downtown by replacing vacant storefronts with interesting businesses, and helping small businesses take the next step in their growth into more sizable and stable businesses.

The LMSP has another program tasked with promoting retail and commerce called “Cowboy Cash.” LMSP partnered with the University of Wyoming to provide all students living on campus or with a meal plan with five \$10 gift certificates to Laramie businesses that follow proper COVID-19 guidelines (University of Wyoming, 2020). Students show their student IDs and “Cowboy Cash” at checkout, and then the business is reimbursed the amount of “Cowboy Cash” that was used (University of Wyoming, 2020). This program was started to help Laramie businesses that were struggling during the pandemic, as well as subtly implanting a habit in UW students to shop at local stores. This program was funded using a portion of the University of Wyoming’s CARES act funding.

Applicability to Blacksburg

Downtown Blacksburg has a distinct advantage with the center of the university being adjacent to many shops and businesses. Additionally, many of the buildings closest to downtown are undergraduate dorms where thousands of university students are only a few minutes’ walk away. These students could become reliable shoppers at downtown businesses if given the right opportunity or incentives to do so. The implementation of a similar program to the “Cowboy Cash” program in Laramie, Wyoming could be an instigator that changes undergraduate students’ shopping habits to include local downtown businesses in addition to online shopping and traveling to Christiansburg.

Implementing similar capital improvements to the ones proposed in Laramie would help beautify the main shopping areas in Blacksburg, especially downtown, and help with the travel of bicyclists and pedestrians. As stated in the recommendations section, these improvements would improve Blacksburg’s retail environment.

IOWA CITY, IA

Description of the City

Iowa City is a medium sized university town located in Johnson County and is also the county seat. Iowa City is home to the University of Iowa, a public research university founded in 1847 that has a current enrollment of more than 31,00 students as well as a \$3.137 billion endowment fund (University of Iowa, 2022). Iowa City currently has a population of roughly 75,000 people and encompasses 26.19 square miles. According to the 2020 census, 78% of the population is white, with 8.6% identifying as African American and 6.4% identifying as Latino or Hispanic (United States Census Bureau, 2020). Downtown Iowa City is notable for its pedestrian mall, which is known for hosting large gatherings of consumers especially in the summertime, with the Friday Night Concert Series as well as Iowa City Jazz Festival and Iowa City Arts Festivals being main attractions. The pedestrian mall also hosts many restaurants and retailers and is known for its appeal to the artist community.

Promotional Strategies Implemented

In 2016 Iowa City adopted a new Strategic Economic Plan which utilizes two main tools to accomplish these goals: Tax Increment Financing as well as a joint partnership with the University of Iowa for their “City-University Project 1 Urban Renewal Area”. These two projects will complement each other as the urban renewal will enable tax increment financing as well as mandate that 15% of the units be affordable for tenants at or below 60% AMI. Other developments in exchange for increased density in certain parts of the urban renewal zone must include 10% affordable housing. According to the plan, the city will also “continue to seek projects that diversify existing uses in the given urban renewal area including: Class A office, hotel, entertainment, and residential uses provided by market studies and financial analysis that support such investment” (Economic Development Policy, P.1).

MORGANTOWN, VA

Description of the Town

Morgantown is the largest city of North Central West Virginia and the county seat of Monongalia County, West Virginia. The population of the city is 30,712 and it encompasses an area of 10.62 sq. miles (United States Census Bureau, 2020). Morgantown is home to West Virginia University (WVU), a public land-grant research university founded in 1867. WVU received \$203 million in external funding for research and other sponsored programs in the fiscal year of 2021, with the National Institutes of Health and the United States Department of Agriculture being the top two federal funders. The Morgantown campus hosts about 26,269 students, 52% of whom are West Virginia residents (West Virginia University, 2022). A 2015 Downtown Morgantown market

feasibility study showed that although 25% to 50% patrons of these businesses were WVU students and employees, more than 8% of the retail spaces were vacant (Hesner, 2015).

Applicability to Blacksburg

The City authority has come up with a range of innovative ideas to retain and attract retail businesses in the region. Realizing that the commercial sector of the city is responsible for 40% of all the greenhouse gas emissions in the community, the city has put a Sustainable Small Business Certification program to encourage sustainable energy consumption practices and save money in the process. The City of Morgantown partnered with the Small Business Administration to develop a Small Business Assistance Grant that will make use of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to assist small businesses in the downtown as well as other commercial districts of the city, in coping with the impact of COVID-19. One important aspect of this program is the allocation of \$200,000 from the ARPA funds to continue the Façade Improvement Program in the downtown area. Another \$200,000 has been allocated for the Morgantown City Ambassador Pilot Program, which will assist in providing services like patrolling the Downtown and riverfront districts, litter removal, safety escorts, and greeting and assisting visitors to the downtown area.

HARRISONBURG, VA

Description of the Town

Harrisonburg is an independent city and the county seat for Rockingham County, located in the Shenandoah Valley region of the Commonwealth of Virginia. The land area of the city is 17.3 sq. miles, and population according to the 2020 census was 51,814, 23% of whom identify as Hispanic or Latino of any race (United States Census Bureau, 2020). James Madison University (JMU), a public research university with an enrollment of more than 21,000 (James Madison University, 2022) and Eastern Mennonite University, a Mennonite affiliated, private liberal arts university are located within the city. As of the fiscal year 2015, JMU has generated a direct-effect spending of \$338 million in the Harrisonburg MSA and supported 8421 direct and indirect jobs in the region (Rephann, 2016).

The city has a vibrant downtown with historical importance, and the number and variety of dining and beverage options available throughout the city has earned it the designation of the first culinary district of the commonwealth of Virginia. Harrisonburg is also Virginia's first art and cultural district, thanks to its unique array of museums and historical landmarks. The majority of the surplus in the retail market of the city principally comes from motor vehicle sales and auto parts dealerships followed by general merchandise in the forms of big box stores like Home Depot, Walmart, food and beverage stores, and shopping centers.

Applicability to Blacksburg

Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance (HDR) has a number of initiatives in place for local business promotion. HDR provides advocacy support for business retention and restoration, facilitates dissemination of essential information to businesses, arranges for pertinent training sessions, provides façade improvement grants, and maintains a downtown gift card program to incentivize downtown spending. Moreover, HDR also hosts a series of events including the signature Taste of Downtown, celebrating the culinary diversity of the city. Another interesting venture of HDR is the Bricks & Clicks Grant and Technical Assistance Program, which is aiming to close the digital divide among the small businesses by providing them with technical and financial assistance to strengthen both their offline and online presence (Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance, 2022).

The Harrisonburg Economic Development also serves as a liaison between businesses and funding opportunities provided at the local, regional as well as national levels. One such unique initiative is the Harrisonburg Business Loan Program that disburses loans of up to \$25000 from a revolving loan fund to eligible City-based businesses making it easier for small businesses that might not meet traditional requirements for obtaining loans (Harrisonburg Economic Development, 2022).

CORVALLIS, OREGON

Description of the City

Corvallis, Oregon is a city of 59,922 residents in Northwest Oregon and sits on the Willamette River (US Census Bureau, 2021). Corvallis is the county seat of Benton County, the named jurisdiction in the Corvallis Metropolitan Statistical Area, consisting of 92,442 residents and a part of the larger Portland metropolitan area of 2,492,412 people (US Census Bureau, 2021). Corvallis is also the location of Oregon State University, the state's land-grant university, which has an enrollment of 31,719 students (Nealon, 2021). The university is the city's largest employer, followed by Samaritan Health Services and Hewlett Packard. Corvallis, owing to the university and HP, is an innovative city, being in the top five cities in the United States for patents per capita (Rammelsberg, 2018).

As a smaller-sized city with a large number of college-aged consumers and white-collar professionals, the retail in Corvallis reflects the purchasing trends of these consumers. Using ArcGIS Business Analysis to run a retail marketplace profile shows that Corvallis has a high market surplus of electronic & appliance stores, book/periodical/music stores, and florists. Corvallis also has smaller surpluses for personal care stores, restaurants, shoe stores, clothing stores, and grocery stores. Stores and retail that don't fit into the college students/white-collar professional niche tend to have a high leakage factor in Corvallis: Department stores, general merchandise stores (non-department stores), gasoline stations, and furniture stores.

Business Accelerator and Enterprise Zones

A strategy Corvallis has to promote retail is by promoting and leaning into their industry cluster of innovative businesses and start-ups. The first step in this strategy is by having a close working relationship with Oregon State University and helping them with their “Advantage Accelerator” program. This is an OSU-run program that helps OSU students transform their ideas into start-up businesses (Oregon State University, 2015). While the city is not directly involved in this program, OSU students do interact with the surrounding community to help build their businesses. Corvallis also has three “enterprise zones” around the city where companies building/installing new buildings in the zones obtain some level of property tax exemption, which can last up to three years (City of Corvallis, n.d.). These enterprise zones benefits aren’t available for all businesses but are designed more for manufacturing or light-industrial companies (City of Corvallis, n.d.). While not directed at retail specifically, by leaning into Corvallis’ inventive start-up culture and economy and helping those kinds of businesses succeed, the jobs and tax revenue brought by these companies can be used to help and promote Corvallis’ current and future retail.

Applicability to Blacksburg

Blacksburg with its connection to Virginia Tech, similarly to Corvallis and Oregon State University, has a large pool of talented labor living within its borders. With similar programs to Corvallis’ and OSU’s business accelerator and enterprise zones, Blacksburg could potentially retain some Virginia Tech graduates and help them start businesses in the community. These businesses in return would increase Blacksburg’s tax base and could expand Blacksburg’s customer base with the creation of new jobs.

HATTIESBURG, MS

Description of the City

Rich with timber resources, natural drainage, and located between the Leaf and Bouie rivers, Hattiesburg is located in Forrest and Lamar counties and encompasses a 54.48 sq. mile area with a population of 45,989 and a median income of \$34,735 (Wikimedia Foundation, 2022 January 6). Downtown Hattiesburg was the most desired shopping destination until the 1950s when retail began moving closer to newer residential zones such as Broadway Drive and West Pine Street (Hattiesburg Comprehensive Plan, 2008). Residential growth continued moving towards the southwestern quadrant in the 1970s, leading to the creation of the Cloverleaf Mall, which housed stores such as Sears, JCPenney, and Waldofts. In response, downtown transitioned to banks, offices, restaurants, and other personal service-based businesses. The historic downtown mixed-use building design and grid-based road system directly conflicted with the Euclidean zoning form that was the standard until recently. Zoning changes have helped create numerous walkable mixed-use neighborhoods.

Promotional Strategies Implemented

Hattiesburg economic development initiatives are undertaken by the Area Development Partnership, a private, non-profit organization whose mission is improving the quality of life for citizens of Greater Hattiesburg. ADP merged with the Chamber of Commerce in 2001, taking over economic development services. This entity has implemented policies towards strengthening regionalism to help sell the area as “one” market. Successful programs include the Southeast Mississippi Community Investment Corporation (SEMCIC), which provides financing options for opportunities that expand local small-business and job creation in the area. ADP has also partnered with the USM Accelerator program to provide businesses with technology to scale-up and promote their services and products as well as improve their manufacturing, commercialization, and distribution processes.

Applicability to Blacksburg

The implementation of mixed use and development to densities consistent with the existing character of the area will help promote more complete neighborhoods especially for a range of incomes. Identifying areas that are underserved and provide neighborhood-level services (grocery, pharmacy, general, etc.) will reduce need for automobile travel (and leakage to Christiansburg) and create nuclei that promote smaller community interactions and resident retention. Similar to the USM Accelerator program, the Virginia Tech Apex Center for Entrepreneurs is a valuable resource for potential business owners and inventors in the region who need assistance scaling their businesses to a sustainable level.

VALDOSTA, GA

Description of the City

First created in the 1850s as the Atlantic and Gulf Railroad was being constructed across South Georgia, the City of Valdosta is the seat of Lowndes County, approximately 20 miles from the border of Florida along Interstate 75 (Tomberlin, 2018). With a population of 56,095, and a median household income of \$32,595, the city encompasses an area of 36.43 square miles (Valdosta, GA. Data USA, 2022). The creation of U.S. 41, formerly known as “Dixie Highway” allowed straight travel from Chicago, IL to Miami, FL and subsequently brought a breadth of tourism and associated services such as motels and restaurants. This phenomenon repeated with the construction of Interstate 75 along the western sector of Valdosta. As business districts moved away from the traditional downtown zone, other shopping centers developed, including Brookwood Plaza, which is owned by Valdosta State University.

Promotional Strategies Implemented

In addition to Georgia-based business incentives, Valdosta hosts a range of other local programs including a streamlined permitting process, access to revenue bonds and other loan funds, reduced utility fees, and several other “aggressive” techniques to draw a competitive mix of retailers. Other services include the University of Georgia (UGA) Small Business Development Center at Valdosta State, which provides consultation for local vendors, ranging from creating a business plan to marketing their products for different sectors. The “Military Zone” designation is a job tax credit program that provides benefits for development in areas that are considered less developed or have a higher rate of poverty. Incentives for this program include the maximum job credit allowed under law, the lowest job creation threshold of any job tax credit program, use of Job Tax Credits against 100 percent of Georgia income tax liability and withholding tax, and allowing credit to be claimed by any business of any nature.

Applicability to Blacksburg

Providing new business incentives to potential entrepreneurs would help nervous investors break into a post-COVID market. Utilizing Virginia Tech’s presence as a constant source of customers and enticing tax credit programs available through both the state and federal government would create the opportunity many new businesses need to emerge into the market.

Virginia’s New Company Incentive Program offers “an exemption from corporate income tax, and up to \$2,000 per new job, for companies with no employment or property in the state prior to January 1, 2018 and that meet statutory investment and employment requirements” (Incentives, 2022). Blacksburg could follow in the steps of Illinois University who drafted a bill for a program similar to Start-Up NY, a New York State program, that provides significant tax advantages for new businesses that locate within a close proximity to eligible universities/ college campuses in New York State.

BOWLING GREEN, KY

Description of the City

The city of Bowling Green has a population of 72,294 people as of 2020, according to the U.S. Census. While looking at subsequent Census data, there is a lack of data reported for what percentage of the population falls within a certain age range. This could have been a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic and inaccurate numbers. The city is in Kentucky and is located within one and two hours of Nashville, TN and Louisville, KY. “Proximity to the larger city amenities and those markets has been appealing to entities seeking to locate businesses or corporate headquarters in Bowling Green and Warren County” (Warren County/Bowling Green Focus 2030 Comprehensive Plan, ED-1).

Promotional Strategies Implemented

Looking at the Warren County/Bowling Green Economic Development Plan, their overall economic development goal is to “maintain a strong local economy that provides opportunities and resources to everyone in Warren County/Bowling Green” (Warren County/Bowling Green Focus 2030 Comprehensive Plan, ED-5). There are two relevant objectives highlighted in the economic development plan, including actions outlined to meet these objectives. The first one (ED-1) aims to “pursue actions to strengthen core industries, retain existing businesses and industries in the community and attract new businesses and industries, particularly those that will help to diversify the local economy” (Warren County/Bowling Green Focus 2030 Comprehensive Plan, ED-5). Some of the actions outlined include periodically reviewing the zoning map to keep up to date area for commercial, industrial, and office development. The other action in addressing this objective is to make sure potential business owners/entrepreneurs/current business owners are aware of vacant facilities.

The second objective (ED-3) aims to support local small businesses, entrepreneurial endeavors, and industries. The actions outlined to support this objective include “facilitate the establishment of new small and/or home-based businesses by such activities as reviewing the Zoning Ordinance to ensure that it does not unduly restrict the operation of home-based businesses, particularly in rural areas” (Warren County/Bowling Green Focus 2030 Comprehensive Plan, ED-7). The city aims to coordinate with private sector partners to identify and promote specialty shopping niches (i.e., antique corridors, furniture rows, arts districts, etc.). Lastly, they will encourage and participate in promotional events that benefit local businesses.

Applicability to Blacksburg

This case study is applicable to Blacksburg in a few ways. Bowling Green emphasizes action in addressing the zoning map to make sure that vacant spaces are up to date. This would help potential business owners be aware of potential vacant spaces that they could utilize. Encouraging promotional events that would benefit local business are actions that have been taken by Blacksburg in the past and would continue to be beneficial for small businesses.

OXFORD, OH

Description of the City

According to the U.S. Census Quickfacts page, Oxford had a population of 23,035 people. Just like Bowling Green, KY, the data on the percentage of people of a certain age is inaccurate and

incomplete. Oxford, OH is geographically at the center of three major markets that include Indianapolis, Columbus, and Cincinnati. Oxford, OH is also home to Miami University which has approximately 17,000 students (Miami University). Oxford cherishes the “small town” feel, and supporting local businesses is the core value that bonds the community.

Promotional Strategies Implemented

The economic development section of the comprehensive plan laid out strategies and actions to tackle issues with retail and how it could be developed even more. There are three strategies that the comprehensive plan outlined with various actions to meet their goals. The first objective is to expand and retain current businesses. This can be done by identifying key local business concerns and providing educational workshops/training related to identified business concerns. The second objective is to attract new businesses consistent with the skills of the local community, quality of life, and identified economic needs. This can be done through creating strategies to specifically attract service-based retail to the redevelopment area along Locust Street and the U.S. 27 North corridor and marketing Uptown for expanded shopping.

The third objective is to develop focused economic development and redevelopment incentive policies. This can be done through considering developing incentives such as tax credits, site development and redevelopment assistance, and “One Stop” permitting to promote redevelopment, promoting the utilization of the Façade Improvement Program to merchants and property owners in Uptown.

Applicability to Blacksburg

Oxford, OH economic development strategies can be readily applied to Blacksburg. The Façade Improvement Program is a practice that has been discussed with the Blacksburg Partnership. There is mutual agreement that some businesses in Blacksburg would benefit from this program. Oxford also considered the use of tax credits, site development and redevelopment assistance, which has also been discussed with the Blacksburg Partnership. The idea of hosting workshops and educational seminars for possible entrepreneurs seems like a beneficial practice. Future local business owners can get a sense of what the town needs, who they would be serving, and how many people they would be serving. Regarding educational seminars for entrepreneurs, this was also reflected in one of the responses in the Business Owner Survey that was administered to Blacksburg businesses.

WEST LAFAYETTE, IN

Description of the City

West Lafayette, Indiana is a medium sized city located in Tippecanoe County, Indiana located roughly 113 miles southeast of Chicago, IL. The city currently has a population of 44,595, composed of 60.2% white, 9.8% African American, and 17.3% Asian (United States Census Bureau, 2020). The city encompasses 13.82 square miles and is also the most densely populated city in the state of Indiana. West Lafayette is home to Purdue University, a public flagship land-grant research university founded in 1869 with a total enrollment of 48,639 students. The majority of economic activity is centered in and around Purdue University as it is the largest employer in the city and caters mainly to the student population as well as faculty.

Promotional Strategies Implemented

The City of West Lafayette’s Economic Development Commission uses “tax abatement financing” as compared to Iowa City’s TIF methods. According to the EDC, “tax abatements can be used to encourage new investment and increase and maintain basic employment within the economic revitalization area. Abatements can be given for both investment in real estate and equipment. If an abatement is granted, the applicant’s property taxes are phased in over a period of years” (City of West Lafayette Economic Development Commission”. While this may seem somewhat similar to Tax Increment Financing however, they are different as “TIF allows financing based on the future tax increment but the taxpayer still pays the full tax amount, while tax abatement allows the taxpayer to pay less in taxes and while the tax abatement provides fewer incentives than TIF, the regulations and requirements of abatement are less onerous” (Metropolitan Council Local Planning Handbook, Tax Abatements).

STILLWATER, OK

Description of the Town

Stillwater is a town near Oklahoma City, Oklahoma with a population of 48,394 people. It is home of Oklahoma State University whose student population makes up a little more than half of the total population. The median household income is \$48,394. Stillwater’s top employers include Oklahoma State University (approximately 6,000 employees) and Stillwater Medical Center (approximately 1,000 employees). Stillwater’s retail consists of multiple retail districts with both small and large businesses. Some districts have more locally owned stores, and others have big box stores.

Strategies for Attracting Retail

Stillwater utilizes Tax Investment Finance (TIFs) to finance structural improvements and enhanced infrastructure to promote the viability of existing businesses and attract new businesses. The town currently has 3 TIF districts. Stillwater also attracts retail through Opportunity and Enterprise Zones to spur investment in impoverished and economically distressed areas. Over 54% of

Stillwater is designated as a State Opportunity Zone, and over 28% is a Federal Opportunity Zone. Businesses in these zones sometimes benefit from tax credits and low interest loans.

CONWAY, AK

Description of the Town

Conway is a town near Little Rock, Arkansas with a population of 64,134. It is home to the University of Central Arkansas, Hendrix College, and Central Baptist College. College students make up 18.4% of the population. Conway's median household income is \$46,805. Over 18,000 people commute to Conway from outside towns and counties to work. Its top employers include Acxiom Corporation (approximately 1,500 employees), University of Central Arkansas (approximately 1,500 employees), and Conway Regional Health (approximately 1,300 employees). Conway's downtown retail district is the center for smaller businesses in town. There are over 40 small retail stores and restaurants in the downtown area. Other major retail districts contain larger retail stores like Target, T.J. Maxx, Sam's Club, Kohls, and more.

Strategies for Attracting Retail

Conway used the Central Business Improvement District to plan and develop a retail corridor. The BID included a parking and transportation program, maintenance and beautification program, staff, and property owners and developer incentives. This BID allowed for tax credits and grants for rehabilitation. Conway works with private developers to help recruit retail to Conway.

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Appendix D: Market Analysis from Secondary Sources

Secondary market sources from towns and cities that have a similar population size and retail characteristics to Blacksburg were analyzed to understand what lessons could be learned from their experiences with revitalizing retail in their downtown areas. Other secondary sources such as trade journal articles were also analyzed to incorporate more general lessons/principles that could be applicable to Blacksburg.

Retail, Entertainment, and Culture Cluster Study, Loudoun County, VA 2016

- Retail demand has a limit. Retail demand is a definable commodity that is traded throughout a market. Although this demand can certainly grow with new residential and office development in particular, it is more likely to shift among submarkets. For this reason, it is critical to acknowledge that substantial retail growth in one area will often occur at another area's expense (diminished retail potential).
- Small, incremental amounts of retail demand are created by new development. These increases are often overestimated and can quickly result in a retail market that is oversupplied. Community ties are woven between people who may not otherwise intersect when a larger area of customers are served by fewer retail establishments.
- Retail is more easily supportable with a more balanced ration of retailers to customers.
- Each retailer can impact the culture/dynamic of the neighborhood that it is located in; retailers should be encouraged to take a more active role in the neighborhood.
- Convenience and ease of access are critical to commuters/working professionals who do not want to spend much time searching for what they want.
- Creation of a vision is important for downtown retail; even if it is not a unified one, smaller sub-visions can be reflections of the local neighborhood.

[RETAIL, ENTERTAINMENT & CULTURE CLUSTER STUDY](#)

Downtown Christiansburg Inc

- Define the downtown area, pursue changes that would promote walkability and focus on area with highest density
- Improve streetscapes to attract and retain downtown businesses
- Create unified identity for different streets that retail businesses can play an active role in
- Provide incentives for retailers to either join or stay in downtown
- Increase public outreach, marketing and communication efforts for downtown and the retailers

(Source: [Downtown Christiansburg Inc.](#))

Retail Realities, American Planning Association 2018

- Flexibility is key for brick-and-mortar retailers to stay competitive in the current market conditions
- Increase experiential retail, make the shopping itself an experience
- There is no one size fits all solution for every and all areas, communities have to work with retailers to understand them better and figure out what works for them

(Source: <https://www.planning.org/planning/2018/jul/retailrealities/>)

Montgomery County Retail Strategy 2017

- Growth of e-commerce is reshaping every area of retail for both good or ill
- Stores will need to be physically flexible and adaptable in their planning, development and construction
- Neighborhood goods and services should be emphasized in mixed use developments
- Walkability and placemaking are continuing to be important to retail environments as being able to shape or create an identity for the area

(Source: https://montgomeryplanning.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Retail_Trends_Study_Final10.12.17.pdf)