

New Jersey Economic Development Authority  
**21<sup>st</sup> Century Redevelopment**

Research Findings



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## Introduction



The goal of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Redevelopment Grant is to design a concise plan to address vacant buildings that connect to planning work already in development. The City of Millville contracted with Holly City Development Corporation (HCDC) to collect data from business owners and community members. HCDC engaged in activity planning with local stakeholders that identified goals and associated activities to decrease the number of vacant buildings in the Glasstown Arts District, which is bound by Main Street on the south; the Maurice River on the west; Broad Street to the north; and Sixth Street on the east. Data from respondents in this report generally refer to this area as Center City, Millville or the Center City area. As a result, we will refer to this area as Center City throughout this report.

Data were collected through focus groups, surveys, interviews, and a building aesthetic inventory to understand the business owners' and community members' perspectives on ways to increase the number of people who shop, eat in, and enjoy Center City, Millville. Themes from this data were then presented to an Activity Planning Committee that consisted of business owners, community members, nonprofit leaders, government representatives, and county officials. They identified goals and activities designed to reduce the number of vacant buildings in Center City like attracting new businesses, retaining current businesses, removing barriers to engagement with businesses, and increasing economic activity in Center City. The results of this plan described below include actionable, fundable solutions that will be implemented collaboratively by public and private stakeholders across Millville.





## Background

The Glasstown Arts District is located in the Center City Millville neighborhood — which is one of the City’s oldest neighborhoods. It is the urban core of the city that encompasses the original grid pattern of streets adjacent to the Maurice River. The heart of the City’s establishment and growth occurred in this neighborhood that is bound by Main Street on the south; the Maurice River on the west; Broad Street to the north; and Sixth Street on the east.

The Glasstown Arts District was established in 2000 with the City of Millville’s support. In 2008, the vacancy rate for businesses in this area was 7%. As of December 2022, the vacancy rate is 35%. In addition, there are also notable trends in demographic shifts in Center City: a declining population, lower educational attainment, high poverty rates, a decline in homeownership, poor property conditions, and high vacancy rates.

According to the 2020 United States census the City of Millville has a population of 27,638. Eighty-three percent (83%) of residents have a high school education or above, while the state of New Jersey has a 90% high school completion rate. Eighteen percent (18.1%) of Millville residents have a bachelor’s degree or higher compared to 41% for the state of New Jersey. Median household income in Millville is \$62,111 while the median rate for residents in the state is \$89,703.

These economic and demographic challenges have resulted in the district being designated a Neighborhood Revitalization Tax Credit community and a Neighborhood

Preservation Program community through the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs. In addition, the Center City area encompassing the Glasstown Arts District has been identified by the State as a neighborhood/district in need of revitalization and designated an Opportunity Zone. It is also part of the City's Urban Enterprise Zone and a designated center by the State Plan.

Despite shifting demographics and high building vacancy, partners across Millville, including HCDC, have developed multiple assets in the Center City area that increase its attractiveness to residents and business owners. A large library expansion, development of pocket parks and trails, and ongoing and active community programming are transforming the community. Millville's location along the Maurice River as well as its central location between Philadelphia and the Jersey Shore uniquely situate it as an easy-to-access destination for customers from nearby travel routes and towns, and a desirable location for residents.

The 21st Century Redevelopment Grant provides an opportunity to focus on economic development by expanding plans to fill vacant Center City properties and build on activities in concert with the 10-year Center City Neighborhood Plan.

The Neighborhood plan was funded through the Regional Foundation (formerly Wells Fargo Regional Foundation) and was organized by HCDC in collaboration with the community and government partners in 2019. The plan identified six key areas of focus for neighborhood revitalization:

1. Building a fun and healthy community.
2. Leveraging arts and economic development.
3. Creating a market for home ownership and investment.
4. Improving our public spaces.
5. Increasing access to jobs and education.
6. Increasing opportunities for civic leadership.

Goals and activities developed through the 21st Century Redevelopment grant enhance and expand on concepts identified in the Neighborhood Plan. This report includes a section with information on ways the 21st Century Redevelopment plan intersects with prior relevant plans in Millville.

## Methods

The goal of the 21st Century Redevelopment Grant is to design a plan to address vacancies. Reducing the number of vacant buildings is contingent upon attracting businesses and residents to the Center City area. Attracting businesses and residents to Center City is contingent



on employing the city’s strengths, and addressing challenges and needs expressed by residents.

HCDC took a multifaceted, participatory approach to identifying strengths, challenges, and needs in the Center City area. HCDC worked with Dogwood Consulting to develop an inclusive, participatory data collection and activity planning process. Ross Whiting, PhD, President of Dogwood Consulting and a social scientist with extensive experience in evaluation and organizational development, lead evaluation design and activity planning. Stakeholders across Center City were included in developing the plan.

First, HCDC conducted three focus groups using the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) tool to assess Center City Millville. Dogwood Consulting then analyzed SWOT data and used that information to design surveys for community members and business owners. They interviewed business owners and conducted an aesthetic inventory to understand the aesthetic strengths and challenges of Center City. Surveys, interviews, and aesthetic inventory design included members of HCDC staff. Tools were also translated into Spanish to include Millville’s Hispanic community members.

Dr. Whiting analyzed data from all sources, identifying common themes across all data sources. The data were presented to the Activity Planning Committee to identify 21st Century Redevelopment Plan activities. Finally, HCDC refined and revised the plan, comparing the plan and findings within existing plans created by HCDC for the City of Millville. Details on data collection and findings are included below.

## Data Collection Methodology

Four methods of primary data collection and analysis were used to inform the development of activities for the 21st Century Redevelopment Program Grant. First, three different Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threat (SWOT) focus groups were conducted in Summer 2022. Data from SWOT analyses were then used to inform the development of two surveys for community members and business owners focused on assets, strengths, and challenges to economic development in Center City Millville, NJ which was administered in Fall 2022. An interview protocol was created for Center City Millville business owners. Data from SWOT analyses, business member and community member surveys, and business owner interviews was then used in conjunction with prior contextual information from a 2018 property survey report, the 2019 Center City Neighborhood Plan, and the 2006 Glasstown River Renaissance Maurice Riverfront Redevelopment Plan. This was used to facilitate an activity development session with Millville stakeholders including community members, business owners, and local and county government officials. Finally, staff at Holly City Development Corporation finalized and described goal areas and associated activities.

SWOT data collection and analyses were chosen as a foundation for survey and interview tool development as it is clear and accessible for participants, promotes group discussion and idea generation, and provides general perspective and solutions (Gurl, 2017; Helms & Nixon, 2010). Data from focus groups was collected via notetaking within sessions and identifying characteristics were removed for analysis. Data from notes were analyzed using grounded theory, a qualitative analysis technique that involves openly coding data for themes without presumptions about what the researcher will find (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). Grounded theory is useful in this analysis as it allows researchers to identify themes which might not otherwise be identified using theoretically driven coding. Data were coded using ATLAS.ti qualitative analysis software by Dr. Ross Whiting who has extensive experience in qualitative research.



## SWOT Results

Analysis revealed three major themes within the data: strengths and assets, priorities, and barriers to economic engagement. Regarding strengths and assets, both community members and business members generally identified the Arts District as an asset, listing specific places as strengths including the Levoy Theater, Clay College and Arts Center, and local galleries. In addition, while there are few sit-down restaurants in Millville, existing restaurants were often considered an asset to the community. Aesthetically, participants highlighted attractive cobblestone sidewalks and ample street lighting as strengths. Location was also listed as a central asset as participants discussed Millville’s proximity to both the New Jersey Shore and Philadelphia. Finally, the library was listed as a strength and asset as community members sought educational opportunities and development, while City Hall was mentioned as a frequent destination for business owners seeking to navigate local regulations.

Priorities in economic development differed between community members and business owners and staff. Community members wanted more local events like car shows, local parades, or large well-organized community events, more frequent shows at the Levoy Theater, and a greater emphasis on Third Friday, an Art Walk that includes art exhibitions, music, theater, dining, and shopping every Third Friday of the month. Community members also wanted an increased emphasis on community policing, including more resources to support people with mental health and addiction challenges in the community and more visible policing in the Center City area.





Business owners and staff priorities included improved signage and city business guides for businesses in the Center City area, expanded marketing of their goods and services, and increased marketing of Millville as a destination for entertainment, shopping, and dining. Business owners also wanted more collaboration and coordination between businesses, including cooperative advertising among businesses. Finally, business owners wanted more youth engagement to encourage young people to live and stay in Millville.

Both community members and business owners and staff identified consistent barriers to economic engagement. Participants reported a lack of community spirit and widespread engagement in the development of the Center City area, a need for more youth development and engagement, and more communication between business owners and the public. While the Arts District was cited as a strength, restaurants were often not open before and after shows which participants felt discouraged show attendees from staying and shopping in Millville.

Aesthetically, participants cited vacant buildings as a barrier to people coming to Center City, vandalism of property, and general trash and litter. Participants also reported a large and visible population of people who are unhoused and cited an acute lack of mental health and addiction services to support this population. Participants felt that this visible unhoused population contributed to the perception of crime in the Center City and surrounding areas, including the riverfront. Regarding public safety, participants discussed a lack of cameras that might deter some of the vandalism and loitering that is prevalent in the Center City area.



## **Introduction: Community Member and Business Owner Surveys**

Community member and business owner surveys were developed to get a wider view on assets and barriers to economic engagement in Center City Millville. For community members, the survey focused on their perceptions of the Center City area, what would encourage them to visit more often, and what stops them from visiting the area. For business owners, the survey focused on their perceptions of the Center City area, what they feel would increase patronage in their business, and barriers to more people visiting their business. Survey questions initially drafted were based on the themes found in the SWOT analysis. They were reviewed and refined by HCDC staff, and community and business stakeholders, and finalized by Dr. Ross Whiting who led survey development and analysis. Surveys included questions and open-ended responses within theme areas to identify potential new themes within the data (Groves, Fowler, Couper, Lepkowski, Singer & Tourangeau, 2011). Final versions were translated into Spanish for distribution to Hispanic community members. Participants were given a choice to complete the survey in Spanish or English. Surveys were hosted on Qualtrics, a digital survey platform, and were administered in-person via iPads, or digitally via link and QR code distribution through social media. Respondents typically took between 6-10 minutes to complete the survey.

## **Community Member Survey: Methods and Results**

Community member surveys included demographic questions including the city in which they live, gender, age, number of people in their household and frequency traveling to Center City. Community members were also asked to rate their agreement with statements on a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree). Statement areas included community events, business hours and information, aesthetics, public safety, restaurant and shopping options, and parking. Data from Likert-scale statements are reported in combination with business owner data below these results. Three questions focused on preferences and barriers when visiting Center City Millville with pre-populated responses based on SWOT results, and open-ended questions on preferences, barriers, and additional information they would like to provide.

Community member participants were recruited through multiple means: in-person events, door-to-door in the Center City community, and digitally via social media and local government websites. Two hundred and forty-three (243) community members

completed the survey from October through November 2022. One-hundred fifty-three (153) reported being residents of Millville, about half reported living within walking distance of High Street and half within driving distance of High Street. Of those not from Millville, most respondents (n=28) were from the large neighboring communities of Vineland and Bridgeton; nearly all the remainder (54 of 55) were within an hour's driving distance to Millville. Respondents were overwhelmingly female (71% female, 27% male, 1% nonbinary or other gender), and overwhelmingly older (34% of respondents were 60+ years old, 23% 50-59, 18% 40-49, 13% 30-39, 7% 21-29, 2% 18-20, and 3% 17 or younger). Average household size for respondents was 3.2; two was the most commonly occurring household size. Respondents visited downtown Millville frequently (54% reported visiting more than twice a week, 12% reported twice a week, 10% reported twice a month, 6% reported visiting once a month, and 17% reported visiting less than once a month).

Community members (n=199) checked multiple responses indicating their reasons for visiting Millville. The top nine reasons include arts and entertainment (60%), restaurants (59%), post office, library, or city hall (54%), events (40%), bookstore (30%), bakeries (26%), bars, or liquor store (25%), employment (23%), and brewery, distillery, or winery (22%).

When asked what businesses or activities they would like to see more of in Center City, the top eight community members (n=198) responses were: restaurants (79%), bakeries (52%), ice cream shop (49%), food trucks (46%), arts and entertainment (44%), events (39%), antique or thrift Store (34%), bookstore (31%).

When asked the major barriers to visiting businesses in Center City, Community Members (n=193) responded: vacant buildings (54%), neighborhood safety concerns (48%), businesses do not meet my needs (40%), cleanliness (39%), parking (34%), business hours (30%), vandalism (26%), accessibility (4%), and transportation (4%).

When asked what businesses participants would like to see more of in Center City, respondents overwhelmingly and strongly indicated food options including more restaurants (including fast-casual and fine-dining options), ice cream shops, bakeries, food trucks, and specialty food shops including coffee or delis. One participant said:

*“Center City needs to focus on one mission...provide a variety of eateries. With the Levoy as the center of attention, surround that attraction with sit down restaurants that offer a variety of pallets(sic). You need something that appeals to everyone...and that is everyone eats!!”*

When asked if they had anything to add about Center City, responses focused mainly on public safety. Participant quotes included:

*“You need to invest more into public safety [Police] to make the area safe, clean up the vacant buildings, homeless and trash on the ground, then maybe someone would want to have a business in Center City. Once that’s done and businesses start to open more people would come out to the events.”*

*“Last night we watched drug deals and known drug users hang at the Millville Library. The homeless population seems to be making High Street their home. Who wants to walk the High Street sidewalk with homeless people and their shopping carts piled high. There is not enough police presence or police enforcing the laws.”*

*“A town that has a lot of potential but needs more improvement in safety, aesthetic, curb appeal, cleanliness, and overall quality. We need those vacant buildings to become nice shops and businesses.”*

Community participants also expressed a desire for fewer pieces of data collection in the future, and more action towards addressing the challenges and marketing Millville’s assets. One participant said “stop sending surveys such as these and just do something!” The desire for action was clear from participants in the data.



## Business Owner Survey: Methods and Results

Business owner surveys included questions about the type of business they own and the number of years they have been in business. Business owners were also asked to rate their agreement with statements on a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree). Statement areas included community events, business hours and information, aesthetics, public safety, restaurant and shopping options, and parking. Data from Likert-scale statements are reported in combination with community member data below these results. Based on themes from the SWOT analysis, four questions included what is needed to attract more patrons to both their business and Center City, and barriers to customers patronizing their business and coming to Center City. Open-ended questions asked business owners to describe what they need to attract customers, types of businesses that would attract more people to Center City, and to include additional information about the Center City area.

Business owners were recruited for the survey by Holly City Development staff who went door-to-door to local businesses and/or called business owners throughout the Center City area. Forty-two (42) business owners completed the survey. All questions were optional. The number of respondents to each questionnaire are indicated in results below. Business types responding from most to least prevalent include arts and entertainment, salons and barbershops, insurance, restaurants, bars and liquor stores, breweries, distilleries or wineries, flower shops, fitness studios and gyms, nail salons and spas, nonprofits, automotive sales, medical services, real estate, professional services, and Legal Services. The average number of years in business was 22.89 years, with most businesses reporting being in business 3 years.

When asked what they needed (n=32) to attract more customers, 75% of business owners reported more advertising and awareness, 59% reported neighborhood improvements like trees, sidewalks, litter, and maintenance, 25% reported renovation or upgrades, 13% reported more transportation, 10% reported community safety, 3% reported city cooperation, 3% indicated longer hours, and 3% reported cultural tourist destination not in Center City.

When asked what barriers existed to customers visiting their (n=31) business, 71% reported safety concerns, 54% reported cleanliness, 45% reported parking, 10% reported transportation, 6% reported no walk-in business, 3% reported access for people with disabilities, and 3% reported limited business hours.

When asked what businesses would attract more people to Center City, the top eight answers were restaurants (81%), bakeries (50%), ice cream shops (50%), breweries, distilleries, and wineries (44%), antique or thrift stores (38%), arts and entertainment (34%), clothing stores (34%), and food trucks (34%). The three least reported were sporting goods stores (6%), nail salons and spas (3%), and salons and barbershops (3%).

When asked what barriers existed to customers visiting Center City, 84% of respondents (n=31) reported vacant buildings, 81% reported neighborhood safety concerns, 77% reported cleanliness, 58% reported parking, 45% reported vandalism, 32% reported that there are not enough businesses that meet customer needs, 29% reported business hours, 16% reported accessibility for people with disabilities, and 16% reported transportation.

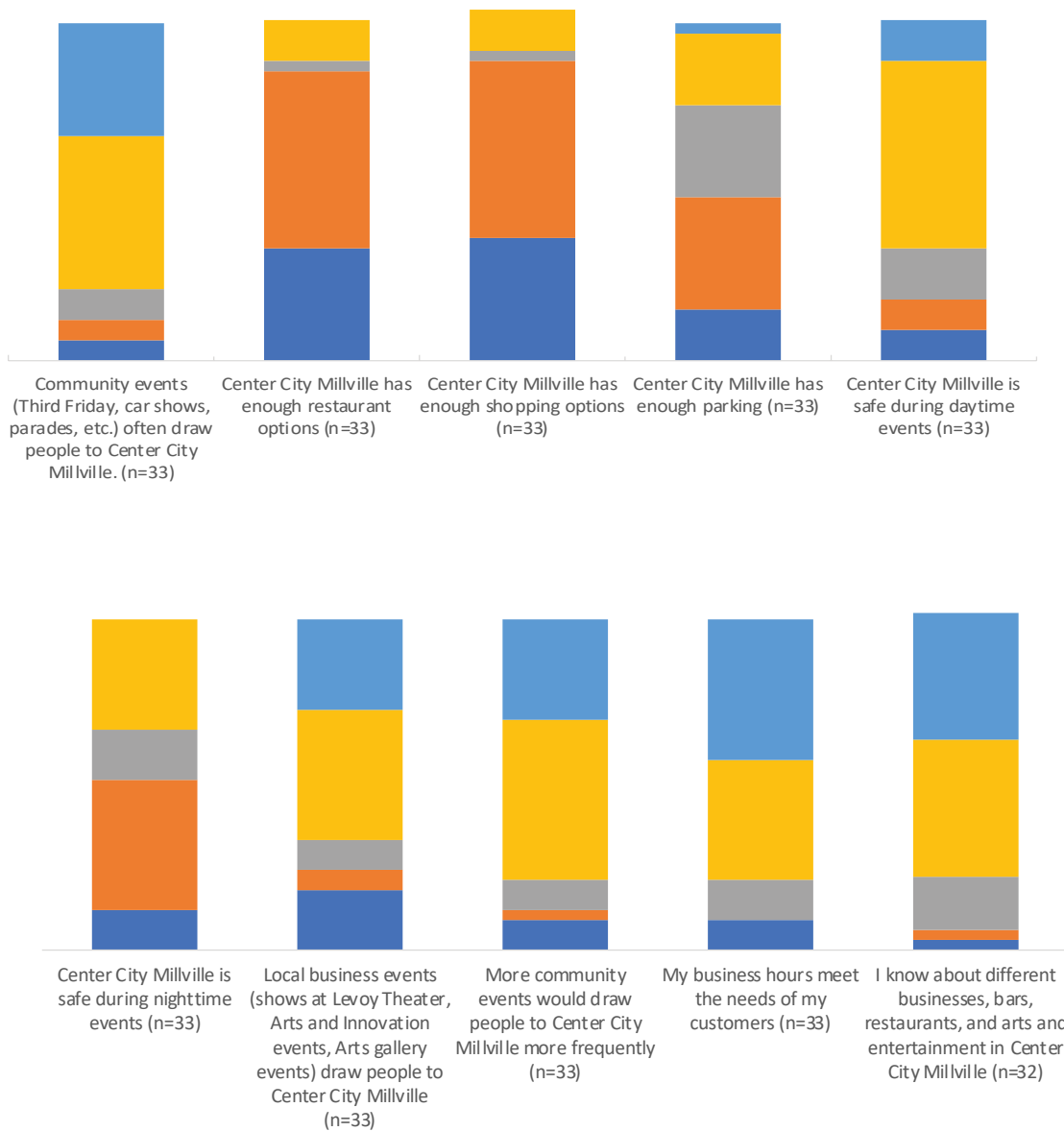
When asked in a text entry what they needed to attract more customers, business owners reported advertising, promotion, and public relations as most important and improving public safety overwhelmingly. When asked in a text entry what they would like to see to draw more people to Center City Millville 19 of 21 respondents said restaurants, bars, food trucks, or bakeries.

## Business Owner Likert Question Results

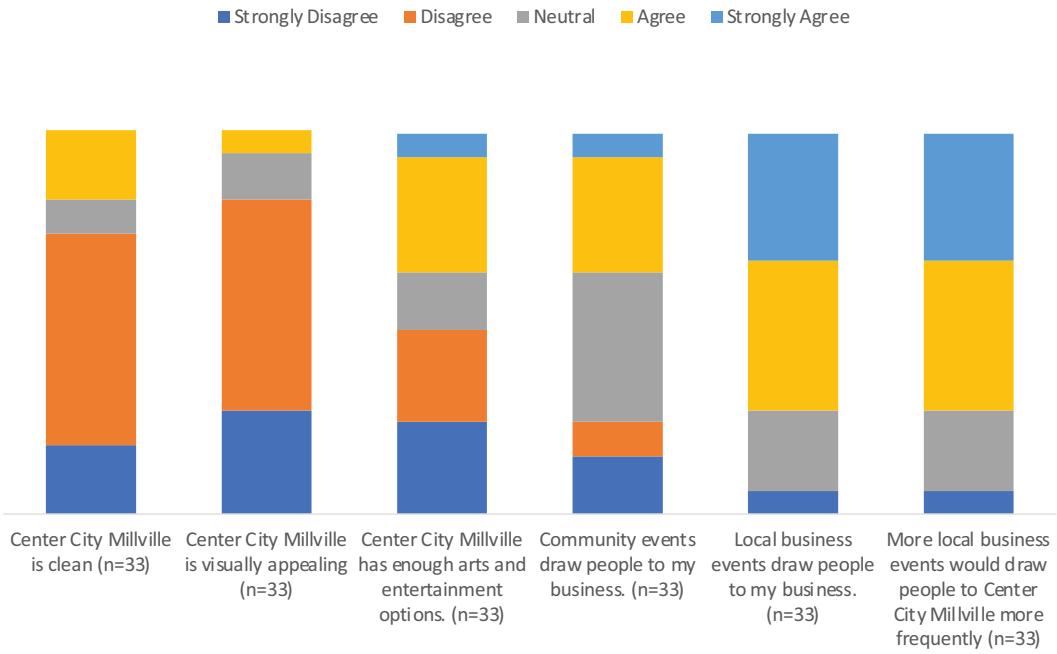
Supplemental statements for business owners are included at the bottom of the tables.

**Survey Results: Business Owners** (n=number of respondents)

■ Strongly Disagree 
 ■ Disagree 
 ■ Neutral 
 ■ Agree 
 ■ Strongly Agree

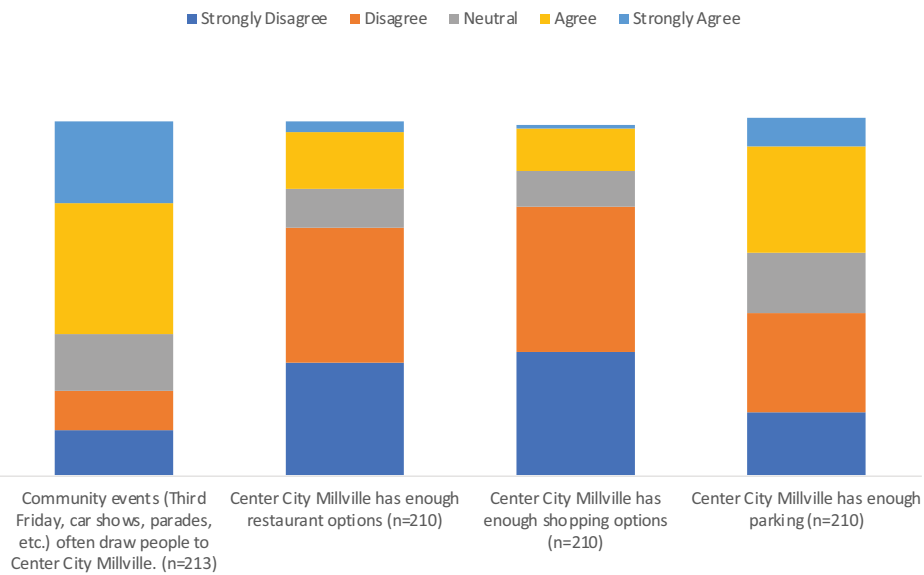


**Survey Results: Business Owners** (n=number of respondents)



**Community Member Likert Question Results**

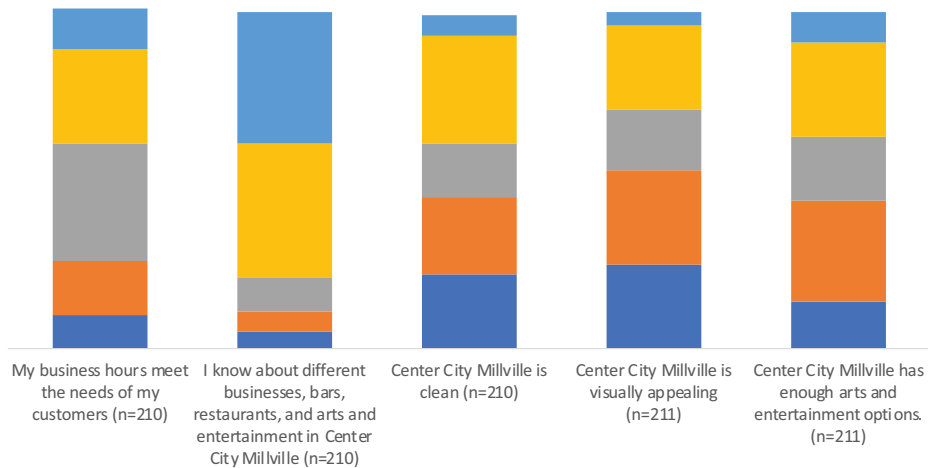
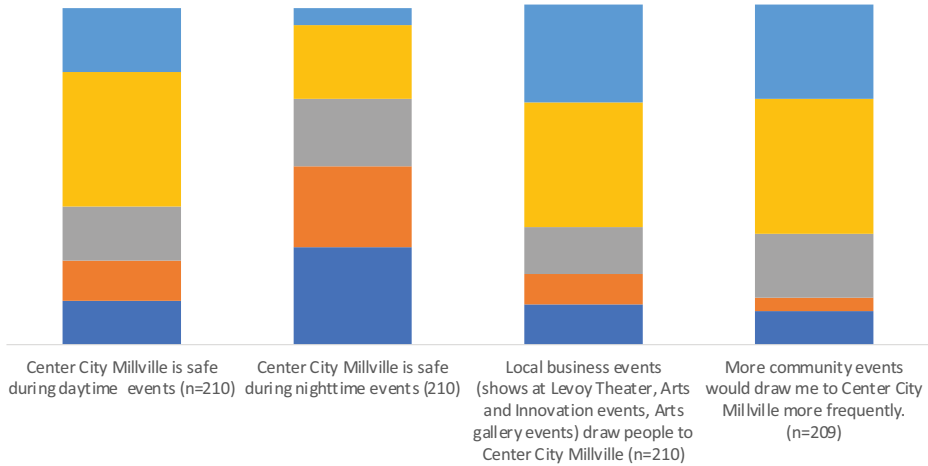
**Survey Results: Community Members** (n=number of respondents)





**Survey Results: Community Members** (n=number of respondents)

■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neutral ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree



## Business Owner Interviews: Methods and Results

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 business owners in Center City Millville in October 2022. Business owner professions included bars and restaurants, real estate, insurance, salons and barbershops, home goods, nonprofits, and arts and entertainment. Dogwood Consulting developed interview protocols that build on the questions in the business owner survey while allowing space for business owners to share new information through follow-up questions. A semi-structured interview protocol was designed to guide the conversation towards specific topic areas while allowing space for the interviewer to elicit more information from the participant (Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson & Kangasniemi, 2016). Data from interviews was recorded via notetaking on a laptop during face-to-face interviews and reviewed immediately after the interview by the researcher to expand on information from the meeting while the memory was still fresh. This technique resulted in several direct quotes from participants used to illustrate the themes found below. Data from notes were analyzed using grounded theory, a qualitative analysis technique that involves open-coding data for themes without presumptions about what the researcher will find (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). Grounded theory is useful in this analysis as it allows researchers to identify themes which might not otherwise be identified using theoretically driven coding. Data were analyzed using ATLAS.ti qualitative analysis software. As a result, several new themes were identified in the interview data that were not present in survey and SWOT analyses.

Themes from interviews were in two overarching categories: central themes were identified from data across participants, professions, and topic areas; focused themes were identified when among specific participants and professions, or there were strong and consistent feelings within a specific topic area. Topic areas in those categories included:

### Central Themes

Arts and Entertainment  
 Events  
 Government  
 Human Services  
 Marketing  
 Public Safety  
 Vacant Buildings

### Focused Themes

Community Engagement  
 Economic Challenges  
 Location  
 Renovation/Update of Businesses  
 Restaurants  
 River  
 Staffing

Within those topic areas, data were also coded for how participants framed their conversation in topic areas. Themes used to frame conversation of specific topics included: strengths and assets, needs, challenges and barriers.

## Central Themes

Business owners overwhelmingly framed arts and entertainment in Millville as a strength. The Levoy Theater, Rowan College of South Jersey in the Center City Area, film festivals, and art galleries were all repeatedly mentioned as specific strengths in Center City. One participant said “[Art] is what resonates with young people: it’s made here, it’s made sustainably, you need people with passions and ideas.” Other customers described the Millville Arts scene as a “field of dreams,” indicating that the arts are a primary reason people travel to Center City. Occasionally participants framed the arts as a draw to the downtown area, but strongly associated their statements with the need for more diverse food and drink options before and after shows and gallery events: “You should be able to go have a nice meal and a nice drink.” Other participants expressed a desire for more “studios, painters, and sculptors” in the downtown area as prices for real estate might be more accessible for emerging artists.

Events were also a central theme within the data. All business owners mentioned events as a need in Center City. Many expressed a desire for a limited number of well-run events each year, describing well-organized events as “...a foundational revenue generating moment.” Participants wanted to limit the number of larger events to ensure they are well-organized and well-advertised to draw people to Millville. Multiple business owners also described Third Friday as an asset, a recurring monthly event on the third Friday of the month in which galleries and businesses hold recurring open houses to welcome people to their spaces and encourage shopping in the Center City area. When asked what draws people to their business, one participant said “Third Friday. They [businesses and the city] invite businesses to be open later so more people shop and hang out on High Street.” Though some business owners note a decline in in-person shoppers on Third Friday, many attribute this change to a lack of advertising and decline in participation by some businesses in Center City.

The need for human services was also a prominent theme within the data. There is a visible and consistent population of unhoused people residing in the Center City region which were mentioned by every business owner interviewed. Business owners largely described the unhoused population as “a major deterrent [for] people coming to Center City,” but also said that unhoused groups were more often tied to the perception of crime

than to actual incidents that affected potential patrons in the Center City area. While the unhoused population and the need for services for this group were most often cited as a concern and challenge to business in Millville, other participants described the need for more supports and services in this area directly, asking “How do we fix this in the long run?” and a desire to see the unhoused population supported. Though the unhoused population in Millville was not often directly tied to crime, they were occasionally tied directly to vandalism and loitering in the Center City area.

Public safety and the perception of crime in Center City were also consistent themes. Public safety was often cited as a challenge and barrier to patrons shopping in Center City. Business owners reported that people who live in Millville but do not frequent the downtown might perceive it as dangerous: “Perception of crime is a problem. There is a real economic and information divide between the people who live and work in the downtown and everywhere else. They’re missing the opportunities [to shop in the downtown].” Another participant said “Crime is an issue in other parts of town, not necessarily downtown. Drug and homeless population downtown are an issue. Crime is targeted.” To address public safety, all business owners expressed a desire for more community policing in the Center City area and expressed a desire for more police officers regularly patrolling on foot. When asked what they need to address public safety in the Center City area one participant said:

*“More street police. Bike cops. All the time, not just sporadically for events. During the early 2000’s there were beat cops around. [We] knew how to get ahold of them in emergencies. The police are people you would see every day - they were present. There is no enforcement of violations in the Center City area.”*

The local government was also often cited as a challenge and barrier to developing businesses in the downtown area. Business owners expressed a desire for more clear guidelines when setting up their business, and less stringent and more clear code enforcement when developing new properties. Other participants expressed a desire to better maintain public spaces. There is also a perception of inaction within the government:

*“No one in the city is moving things. They’re losing opportunities. Vineland has industrial parks - if they snooze the business goes to Vineland.”*

The need for improved spaces was also communicated by business owners, and a desire for more strict code enforcement, particularly for building exteriors in Center City.



Businesses want more collaboration with the government. When asked what would draw more businesses to Center City, one participant said “we need a more cooperative local government. Support [for economic development] from the state exists.” Though most participants framed the government as a challenge and barrier or a need to improve, one area stood out as a strength. The library was often cited by participants as a strength in local government and access to educational resources, meeting spaces, and technology in the Center City area.

When asked what they needed to improve their business, all business owners discussed improved marketing as a need. The need for marketing fell into two categories: the need for marketing for specific businesses, and the need to market Millville as a whole. Individual businesses reported a need to engage in local marketing, but also said they did not know where to begin the process. When asked what training they needed, one participant said, “Social media, website development, online sales. [I’m] missing out on customers.” They often wanted their products and services advertised but were unaware of how and where to place their products and services. Business owners also wanted a more comprehensive and clearer plan for marketing Millville as a whole.

*“Once the streets are clean, promote more of the city as a destination, have a drink and come to a restaurant.”*

Other business owners suggested telling people about the successes business owners and businesses have that customers will be attracted to shop and eat in Center City. Business owners largely acknowledged that the responsibility for marketing their own goods and services was their responsibility, they also felt the local government had responsibility in marketing and advancing Millville as a destination.

Vacant buildings were also a central theme across participants’ responses. This was framed as challenges and barriers, needs, and strengths and assets depending on the context of the conversation. Most participants felt the presence of vacant buildings was a barrier to improved business: “There’s a perception they’re going to fail because the buildings fail.” Others said, “Vacant lots are a problem. Maybe make the rent lower and more affordable to open more businesses. More businesses would create more traffic.”

There was also a perception that out-of-state and owners who were not local did not maintain their properties. Business owners were concerned about the maintenance of building facades on High Street, which was often tied to the need for code enforcement from local government. While business owners mainly saw vacant buildings as a barrier to increased customers and business in Center City, others acknowledged that

vacant buildings might also present an opportunity for Millville to reinvent itself moving forward. The perceived availability of property and lower property values were occasionally seen as an opportunity for enterprising new businesses who were in search of a new location. A few participants also talked about vacant properties as a strength, particularly in discussions around the reinvention and revitalization of Millville as a whole, and often related to optimism about the future of Millville as a location with more arts and restaurant options.

## Focused Themes

Themes in this category were identified among specific participants and professions, or when there were strong and consistent feelings within a specific focused topic area. Community engagement was the first focused theme to be identified in the data. Responses related to community engagement were overwhelmingly positive. Participants cited a sense of community, and the desire to build a community of people who support kids and families: “They make things available for the kids. Playstreets, community garden, PTO (parent-teacher organizations), Girl Scouts, [businesses] donate to all the local teams to help them develop a sense of community.” Business owners reported a large volunteer base in Millville that has a desire to see the town improve. Business owners also expressed optimism that all of Millville was headed in a positive direction. Despite descriptions of barriers and challenges related to economic development in Millville, they also expressed optimism about the support of the businesses that exist in Center City.

*“[I’m] positive about the direction [of Millville]. Seeing the people that care, and them being more than the people who don’t care is helpful. There are enough people that care that [my business] does good...The pulse is not dead – there are things happening, people are looking out for and trying for the town of Millville.”*

Economic challenges in the surrounding area were also cited as a barrier to business in Millville. There was concern about people being able to afford rent, bills, and properties in the Center City area. There’s also a “wealth issue” in Millville and the surrounding communities. One participant said,

*“There’s plenty of homes, but there’s not plenty of good homes.”*

Participants reported feeling that the cycle of poverty was repeated among residents, particularly those close to the Center City area.

Location was also cited as an asset by business owners. For business owners who distribute goods, the plentiful distribution space and availability of real estate was cited as an asset as Millville is centrally located to many major markets including Philadelphia, New York, Baltimore and Washington, D.C. Other business owners cited it as an easy drive from Philadelphia and Atlantic City and reported an opportunity to attract customers traveling down the main highway just outside of town.

The need for renovation and updates for businesses was a focused theme within the data. Businesses wanted interior and exterior improvements. Interior improvements to existing businesses were largely cosmetic: new furniture, decorations, paint, or updated equipment. Interior improvements for vacant buildings were generally characterized as infrastructure-related, including building out spaces for use by specialized businesses, and updating plumbing, heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems. Nearly all businesses expressed a need for more exterior updates including minor carpentry and masonry repairs, or paint and signage.

Restaurants were identified as a need for the Center City area. Business owners expressed a desire for more sit-down restaurants in the Center City area, including restaurants that are open before and after shows at the Levoy Theater. Existing restaurants were occasionally discussed as a strength, but business owners generally wanted more diverse options for restaurants to draw people to High Street.

The riverfront area was often discussed as a strength by business owners. One participant said, “The waterfront is underutilized — the park is nice;” another stated, “The river is lovely, there are cruises in the Summer months, people come out.” Business owners expressed a desire to develop the riverfront as a place to draw families to the Center City area, and a potential area for future development.

Staffing was consistently reported as a challenge and need by business owners in Center City. “Good people are hard to find in this economic system. Every upscale, affluent store has ‘help wanted’ outside. The biggest challenge for us is [finding] good employees.” Business owners are concerned that young people are not staying in Millville to find work, especially as many of them view their work as flexible and useful. Business owners also feel that employees who are available to work are requesting pay that is too high for them to afford.

## Aesthetic Inventory: Methods and Results

An aesthetic inventory was developed based on information from the SWOT analysis to identify needs and strengths in the storefronts on High Street, the main street running North to South in Center City Millville. The aesthetic inventory was completed by HCDC staff who viewed properties, listed the addresses of the properties, and recorded the aesthetic strengths and needs associated with the facade of the buildings in a digital survey.

### Categories included:

- Accessibility and Access
- Business Hours
- Carpentry and Hardware
- Design and Neighborhood Fit
- Lighting
- Paint
- Sidewalks
- Signage and Advertisement
- Window Displays
- Windows and Glass
- Vacancy
- Other: Open Ended

Ninety-five (95) addresses were inventoried from 0-500 blocks on Buck and High Streets, and side streets East and West of High Street to Second Street.

### The top eight aesthetic needs included:

Vacancy (n=34, 36%)

- Business Hours (n=33, 35%)
- Paint (n=28, 30%)
- Other: No Address Displayed (n=18, 19%)
- Accessibility and Access (n=17, 18%)
- Windows Displays (n=15, 16%)
- Signage and Advertisement (n=14, 15%)
- Windows and Glass (n=4, 4%).

Carpentry and hardware, design and neighborhood fit, lighting and sidewalks received less than 1% of responses in the aesthetic needs area.

**The top eight aesthetic strengths included:**

- Windows and Glass (n=66, 70%)
- Accessibility and Access (n=39, 41%)
- Signage and Advertisement (n=34, 36%)
- Sidewalks (n=26, 27%)
- Paint (n=23, 24%)
- Window Displays (n=23, 24%)
- Business Hours (n=18, 19%)
- Lighting (n=3, 3%)

Carpentry and hardware, design, and neighborhood fit, and vacancy all received less than 1% of responses in the aesthetic strengths area.

The most consistent aesthetic needs were vacancy and the need to display an address. The most consistent aesthetic strengths were windows, glass, and sidewalks. All other areas appeared on both strengths and needs lists, indicating that there were mixed aesthetic strengths and needs across Center City Millville.

## **Consistent Themes Across Data**

Consistent themes were identified across data using open-coding and categorization of both the category of the theme as a strength and asset, challenge and barrier, or opportunity and preference. Themes that were consistently listed as a strength and asset across data included arts and entertainment, location, and positive local support. Themes that were reported as a challenge and barrier across data included human services, community safety, vacant buildings, aesthetics, and the government. Opportunities and preferences across the data included restaurants and food services, events, marketing and advertising, riverfront development, and renovation and updates for businesses. Consistent themes across the data were organized into an informational sheet for use in the next phase of goal area and activity development to address vacant properties in Center City Millville.

## Activity Planning

The goal of the 21st Century Redevelopment Grant is to reduce vacancies in the Center City area. To decrease vacancies, Center City Millville needs to position itself as a desirable location for business, drawing on its strengths, addressing needs, and using challenges as the context for the development of activities that increase the number of people who eat, shop, and enjoy Center City, Millville. While the primary goal is to reduce vacancies in the Center City region, the primary outcome of the data collection and activity planning process is a set of goals and activities designed to entice prospective business owners and residents to occupy currently vacant properties. A facilitated Community and Economic Activity Planning session was held for two hours on November 30, 2022, with many of Millville’s core stakeholders including business owners, community members, nonprofit leaders, and government representatives, and county leaders. The purpose of the session was to understand common themes across the data and develop goals and activities that increase the number of people who shop, eat in, and enjoy Center City, Millville, and reduce the number of vacancies in businesses and residences.

Community and Economic Activity Planning was facilitated by Ross Whiting, PhD, President of Dogwood Consulting, who has extensive experience in organizational development, facilitation, data-driven activity planning, and creating of goals and action steps. Twelve (12) business owners, community members, nonprofit leaders, government representatives, and county leaders convened to review the data collected. Facilitated activity planning included establishing shared expectations for the group, reviewing data from SWOT analyses, surveys, interviews, and the aesthetic inventory, developing goal areas, and activity planning within goal areas. Notes were taken by participants, HCDC staff, and Dr. Whiting which were then organized into goal and action area categories. The agenda for the activity planning session and associated informational sheet with relevant data can be found in Appendix A. Goal areas and associated activities for future consideration based on activity planning and collected data are presented below and are organized in four major categories: Asset Activation, Public Services, Marketing, and Business Development.



## Activities

### Asset Activation

#### **Vacant Properties**

The primary goal of this grant and of the Activity Planning Committee was to address vacant buildings in the Center City region. Activity Planning Committee members acknowledged that attracting businesses and residents to vacant properties was contingent on a variety of complex factors. The activities below represent a collection of actions designed to increase the number of people who shop, eat, and enjoy Center City Millville, as well as attract businesses and residents to vacant properties through improvements in a variety of areas identified through data collection and the activity planning process.

Addressing vacant properties in the downtown area is the top priority for the activity planning committee, and a theme consistently found throughout the data. Vacant properties were sited most often as a challenge and a barrier. However, they were also less often categorized as an opportunity particularly among business owners, and as a strength among some groups interested in economic development with Center City Millville. However, most participants felt that vacant buildings were a deterrent to improving business and prioritized attracting new businesses and expanding existing businesses to fill vacant spaces.

The Activity Planning Committee recommended multiple activities in relationship to this goal:

- Attract new businesses to reduce vacant properties.
- Retain businesses and potential expansion of businesses downtown.
- Target promotion of Center City Millville to industries identified in the data as a need, primarily restaurants and food service options.
- Promote under-utilized industrial properties to developers and business owners in expanding fields in New Jersey.
- Identify funding sources (including Urban Empowerment Zone, New Jersey Economic Development Association, Neighborhood Revitalization Tax Credits, and other sources) to support a person or organization who will develop, recruit, and place business owners in vacant properties in Center City.

- Maintain a vacant properties list to share with potential investor and collaborate with local realtors on marketing tools for vacant properties.
- Employ strengths, meet needs, and address challenges identified by the city by meeting goals (outlined below) designed to increase the appeal of Center City Millville to external partners and business owners.

The final activity area is intentionally broad; activity committee members identified the goals below in support of better positioning and marketing Millville as a thriving arts and entertainment hub with a variety of food, drink, goods, and service options for visitors.

## Public Services

### **Community Policing**

Community policing was supported in a variety of the data as both business owners and community members reported safety concerns as the second highest barrier to business in Center City. Community members and business owners identified increased community policing, including increased visibility of foot- or bike-based law enforcement officers in the Center City area as a deterrent and to increase the feeling of safety for business owners and community members.

Activities identified by the Activity Planning Committee to improve community policing include:

- Partner with the Millville Police Department to identify opportunities to increase visibility and frequency of foot- or bike-based law enforcement officers in the Center City area.
- Increase communication from the police department to business owners and community members in the Center City region through 1-to-1 connections between foot- or bike-based law enforcement officers.
- Communicate the need for increased parking enforcement, including for abandoned and derelict vehicles to reduce the perception of crime in Center City.
- Identify funding sources at the County, State, and Federal levels that support the development of community policing models and initiatives.

### **Human Services**

The visible and consistent presence of the unhoused population in Millville often precipitated conversations about ways to support the identification of ethical supports and

services to work toward consistent housing. The challenges for the unhoused population in Millville were a consistent theme across the data as participants identified a lack of housing, employment, mental health, and addiction services to effectively support working towards housing for this group. People who were unhoused in Millville were never associated with the larger perception of crime in Center City but were sometimes tied to vandalism and loitering. Participants across data sources expressed concern and compassion for the unhoused population in Millville, and wanted to resolve this challenge proactively, compassionately, and collaboratively.

The Activity Planning Committee found addressing this challenge difficult, which was consistent with the complexity of the challenges within the unhoused population found in the data. None of the members present in the Activity Planning Committee had expertise and/or experience working with people who are unhoused, but instead had suggestions to tie into existing resources and groups who frequently work with the unhoused population. Activities suggested by the Activity Planning Committee included:

- Collaborate with the M25 initiative in Cumberland County, a nonprofit created to identify cooperative solutions that alleviate suffering by feeding the hungry, ending poverty, and reducing crime, primarily with Millville’s unhoused population.
- Collaborate with Inspira Health and other large health networks in Millville and Cumberland County to identify ways to support the often-complex needs of the unhoused population.
- Identify funding sources that support the complex services necessary for the unhoused population, and better position groups and people with experience working with this population to meet their needs.

### **Opening a Business**

Data collected via surveys and interviews initially did not directly identify challenges and barriers to opening a business in Millville. However, when discussing consistent themes with the activity planning committee, business owners and directors all identified the lack of a clear process for business development as a barrier to opening a business in Millville. Improving the process around opening a business emerged from the conversation about ways in which challenges and barriers manifest with local government code enforcement and regulation. As a result, Activity Planning Committee members identified multiple activities that could make opening a business in Millville easier and more clear:

- Develop clear, user-friendly guides that describe the steps business owners must complete to open a business in Millville.
- Develop clear, consistent code-enforcement and compliance guides for new and current business owners that communicate how accountability is maintained by local government and the responsibilities of local property owners.
- Identify people responsible for supporting potential and new business owners in Millville as they complete the steps necessary to open a business.
- Identify opportunities to collaborate with existing business groups — like the Chamber of Commerce — to provide mentoring opportunities to new business owners.

### **Aesthetic Improvements**

The need for aesthetic improvements was a consistent challenge and barrier to improved economic engagement in Center City Millville. In addition, business owners identified the need for renovations and improvements across the data. Both business owners (82%) and community members (53%) felt that Millville was not visually appealing, while both business owners (73%) and community members (45%) reported that Millville was not clean. Fifty-nine percent (59%) of business owners reported the need for neighborhood improvements including trees, sidewalks, litter, and maintenance to attract new customers. In qualitative data, business owners acknowledged that improvements to their own property were their responsibility, but also identified opportunities for the local government to maintain and improve public spaces including litter, sidewalk maintenance, and lighting. In addition, 30% of businesses on High Street were identified as needing paint to improve the aesthetics of their properties.

Activity Planning Committee members felt that aesthetic improvements were tied to perceptions of public safety in Center City, and that increasing the appeal of Center City is critical to attracting new and retaining current businesses. Activities identified by the committee included:

- Identifying and communicating public works needs to responsible government parties including the need for tree removal and maintenance, lighting, and sidewalk repair.

- Identifying funding and opportunities to improve the aesthetics of businesses including paint and minor building repairs, posting signage advertising their goods and services, and posting consistent hours.
- Identifying space and funding to improve arts through murals and other arts-centered initiatives to both reinforce Millville’s status as an arts and entertainment hub and occupy currently vacant spaces with art.
- Identifying potential models like Pain the Void in Los Angeles for arts development in the Center City region.

### **Communication and Collaboration**

Communication and collaboration between businesses was a consistent theme within data and was primarily characterized as a need in the areas of marketing and communication. In addition, positive local support was noted as a strength among business owners through interview and survey data. Motivated, forward-thinking, entrepreneurial business owners were identified in sectors across Millville who were interested in collaborating with other like-minded business owners to cross-promote their businesses and drive Millville in a positive direction.

Through the activity planning process, committee members acknowledged the need for improved communication and collaboration between businesses in Millville to support cross-promotion, recommendation, and a shared vision and direction for Millville as a whole. While there are organizations like the Chamber of Commerce that connect and create synergy between businesses in Millville, a shared direction through collaboratively developed plans is currently not part of plans across businesses and organizations in Millville. The Activity Planning Committee recommended the following activities to improve communication and collaboration between businesses in Millville:

- Adopt this plan as an official plan for the City of Millville.
- Share results from this 21st Century Grant plan with business groups, business owners, government stakeholders, nonprofit groups, and Millville residents to garner interest in the collaborative implementation of the activities in the plan.
- Promote connections between business organizations in Millville by including the Chamber of Commerce in discussions related to a shared mission and vision for Center City Millville, while also facilitating a forum

in which innovative, entrepreneurial ideas can develop, grow, and be collaboratively implemented by economic stakeholders across Millville.

- Promote connections between business owners across Millville to encourage cross-promotion of businesses and identify natural areas of strength and support among business owners in Millville.
- Identify preferred methods of communication across business owners and adjust event and location-specific communications to meet business owner needs.
- Develop a business resource guide for business owners, government, economic development stakeholders, and potential consumers so groups understand what is available as they shop, eat, and enjoy Millville.



## Marketing

### Attracting People to Millville

Increasing the number of people who shop, eat, and enjoy Center City was the primary focus of improving existing businesses in Millville and attracting new investment. Two assets were identified in drawing people to Center City: Millville’s status as an Arts and Entertainment hub in the region, and its location in proximity to both Philadelphia and Shore destinations.

The river-front area was also identified as an underutilized and underappreciated asset. Further, marketing and advertising both Millville as a whole and individual businesses was identified as a need across the data. The government was viewed as responsible for marketing Millville to outside investors, while individual businesses wanted more information on how to use and leverage social media. In addition, the aesthetic inventory revealed opportunities to make improvements including paint, minor repairs, consistent signage, and posting hours of operation to make their business more attractive and available to potential customers.



Activity Planning Committee participants identified several opportunities for collaboration between businesses and destinations in the wider area that are currently underutilized as drivers of business to Millville. In addition, Millville was perceived by the group as having an unaligned marketing strategy in relationship to its identity as participants identified multiple overlapping and intersecting identities for the town, but no clear identity. Activities designed to attract people to Millville included:

- Defining and clarifying an identity and brand for Millville separate from the existing brands and identities like Holly City, Glasstown Arts District, or other identities that make Millville’s offerings and attractions clearer to people experiencing it for the first time.
- Creating marketing materials including videos, visuals, billboards, and advertisements.
- Highlighting the riverfront as an asset and destination in Center City.
- Collaboration between Millville businesses and major local destinations including the Army Airfield Museum and the Motorsports Park to cross-promote major places and events in Millville.

## Events

Data across sources identified key events as drivers of business, including existing seasonal events and recurring events like Third Friday. Community members and business owners both felt that well-run, seasonal events would attract more people to Center City. Parades, festivals, food-based events, car shows, carriage rides, and motorcycle festivals were cited as potential events to attract people. Data also suggested capitalizing on arts and entertainment as a strength in Millville and identifying events that draw people to the area based on its reputation as an arts and entertainment hub.

The Activity Planning Committee identified several opportunities to develop and create recurring events that would draw people to the Center City area. In addition, participants identified cross promotion of events with local and regional locations to drive people to the region. While participants acknowledged that there are events that draw people to the Center City area, they wanted an increase in the number of well-run, select, warm-weather events to drive people to Millville and create more positive exposure for the town. Activities identified by the committee included:

- Develop 1-2 recurring, well-run, warm-weather events that involve both local businesses, cross-promotion with local and regional destinations, pop-up stores from other towns and regions, and invitations from outside businesspeople to come see, experience, and enjoy Millville.
- Riverfront related event ideas included branding and building an identity with the river as a destination like WaterFire in Providence Rhode Island, utilizing the availability of boating and on-water activities, and waterfront space as a location for bands, pop-up shops, and entertainment.
- Cross-marketing and attracting larger and more prominent participants to local Air Shows at the Army Airfield Museum and local airport.
- Events tied to national organizations that draw people from those organizations and areas of interest including Chess, Checkers, or Chili Cook-offs.
- Identify funding sources — including Urban Empowerment Zone funding — to plan, organize, and implement day-of event management.

## Business Development

### **Professional Development and Training for Business Owners**

Marketing and advertising were identified as a primary need among business owners across data sources. Seventy-five percent (75%) of business owners (the top response in the survey) said they needed advertising and awareness to attract more customers. While discussing the need for marketing and advertising for individual business owners, business owners and nonprofit leaders identified a lack of knowledge around business tasks including marketing and advertising, but also specific gaps in knowledge for processes consistent across business types. Activities related to professional development and training for business owners included:

- Developing courses and/or supporting external organizations to link prospective and current business owners with professional development needs with the content and information needed to succeed and grow within their businesses in topic areas including:
  - » Digital Literacy
  - » Copywriting, Advertising, and Marketing
  - » Social Media
  - » Human Resources
  - » Accounting
  - » Lease Negotiation
  - » Interior and Exterior Design
  - » Insurance Requirements and Navigation
- Identifying funding sources that link prospective and current business owners with professional development resources like Neighborhood Revitalization Tax Credit funding, Urban Empowerment Zone funding, and Neighborhood Preservation Program funding.
- Identifying potential models for implementing professional development opportunities including the Union County Economic Development Coalition.

## **Educational Connection**

Arts and entertainment was repeatedly and strongly described as a strength in Millville. While arts options like the Levoy Theater and art galleries were frequent points of discussion, local K-12 and higher education options were less frequently discussed as options. In addition, businesses sought more ways to engage and retain local workers for future work. Business owners suggested identifying ways to partner with educational groups for internships, professional development, or direct work experience through apprenticeships or as staff.

The Activity Planning Committee identified three ways to engage K-12 and higher education institutions in local economic development. They suggested enhancing the arts and entertainment scene by identifying opportunities for arts collaboration, identifying workforce development opportunities, and developing skills and professional development of local community members by institutions of higher education through coursework and programming. Activities associated with these areas of focus included:

- Developing relationships with arts faculty in K-12 and higher education settings to identify ways to increase public art, showcase student arts development within Millville, and seek out opportunities for collaboration on arts-related projects.
- Developing and establishing workforce development opportunities for K-12 and higher education students through internships, apprenticeships, staffing, or mentoring with local business owners and leaders.
- Identifying workforce development opportunities through professional development for residents to improve their business skills and remove barriers to college completion which could result in improved outcomes of residents.
- Reducing the cost burden for residents to engage in higher education through scholarships and/or free coursework.
- Identifying funding for arts and workforce development projects through funding from the Neighborhood Revitalization Tax Credit program, the Urban Empowerment Zone program, and other relevant sources.



## Restaurant Development

The need for diversified and increased restaurant and food service options in Millville was a consistent theme throughout the data. Though participants discussed some existing food options as positive and high-quality options within Center City, the need for more formal, sit-down dining options that are available before and after arts and entertainment events was a consistent theme.

Activity Planning Committee members acknowledged the acute need for more diverse food options. The committee identified local assets that might be used as training and incubation sites for future restaurateurs and entrepreneurs, identified ways to attract more restaurateurs to the area, and acknowledged the need to develop longer-term goals related to attracting and retaining restaurants and other food service options in Millville. Activities identified by the committee to attract and develop restaurants to the Center City area included:

- Activating local assets like the American Legion’s commercial kitchen and automotive garages to facilitate the development of a food service and restaurateur training space, and a food truck development center to begin a pipeline of diverse food service and restaurant options in Millville.
- Identifying opportunities for certificate and training programs to use spaces in Millville to train food service and restaurant business professionals.
- Identifying funding sources to activate spaces and create certificate pipelines for people in Millville to develop and use food-service skills.

## **Role Clarification and Planning**

The final action area was developed based on discussion at the conclusion of the Activity Planning Committee meeting. The Committee expressed support for implementing the activities identified in this plan. Consistent with prior survey and interview data, they also expressed support for Millville as a whole, calling it a positive, developing, underappreciated place to live and work. Government, nonprofit, business, county, and community partners all expressed a mutual desire for Millville’s improvement, and suggested the following measures to activate and follow-through with the activities identified in this plan:

- Sharing results from this 21st Century Grant plan with business groups, business owners, government stakeholders, nonprofit groups, and Millville residents to garner interest in the collaborative implementation of the activities in the plan (consistent with Communication and Collaboration activity).
- Convening meetings with potential stakeholders identified through the planning and dissemination process to identify a shared vision and mission for partners.
- Refining activities and identifying potential roles for collaborating organizations on project activities.
- Establishing a structure by which partner organizations are accountable for their roles and responsibilities.
- Identifying funding sources for project and activity implementation from sources listed above and new sources.

## **Gaps in Knowledge**

Through the creation of the plan, in coordination with the activity planning committee, several gaps in knowledge were identified among local project partners that will require additional expertise, guidance, and support moving forward: human services, attracting people and businesses, and coordinating roles and responsibilities.

Human services for the unhoused population in Millville was the clearest gap in expertise among Millville stakeholders. In addition, identifying supports for the unhoused population was a top priority across the data, and was seen as a major, acute, visible deterrent to economic development in Millville. The Activity Planning



Committee expressed a desire to identify resources to address this need with a people-first orientation. Project partners universally expressed a desire to identify and use the expertise of more experienced people and organizations to address this challenge in Millville.

Activities to attract people and businesses to Millville centered on creating a uniform marketing and communications strategy that includes brand development and targeted communications. While some partners within the Activity Planning Committee held expertise in these areas, the amount of effort necessary to create partnerships within Millville to define and deliver a consistent brand is beyond their current capacity. To enact this plan, project partners will need to identify funding sources and partners to identify and execute a clear branding and communications strategy.

Notably, establishing roles and responsibilities was a central, strong, and well-aligned conversation at the end of the planning process. Currently, many project stakeholders who would be involved in executing this plan are working on pieces of the plan without major coordination and collaboration between nonprofit, public, and private partners. There was a strong desire to establish this plan and use it as a catalyst for more regular collaboration and action towards the goals within. There was optimism amongst the group about collaboration in early 2023.

### **Synergy with Existing Millville Plans**

The data received from the 21<sup>st</sup> NJEDA planning efforts aligned with several previous planning processes including the following:

A property survey report was conducted in 2018 of both the commercial parcels and the Center City neighborhood as a whole. Data from that report indicated several commercial property structures that were considered fair to poor condition. Alignments from this planning process include:

- Building on Assets
- Organizing and Engaging Residents
- Prioritizing Vacant Properties
- Programming and Reuse of Spaces for Community Programming
- Refreshing District Branding and Marketing to Attract Visitors and Residents
- Working with the City to use and enforce its property maintenance and nuisance abatement ordinances, vacant property registry, and abandoned property list ordinances.

In 2018, HCDC received a Planning Grant through the Regional Foundation (formerly Wells Fargo Regional Foundation) to embark on an 18-month planning process that engaged community residents and stakeholders in identifying priorities for overall quality of life improvement within the Center City neighborhood. The planning process resulted in the Center City Neighborhood Plan of 2019 and encompassed a 36-block radius which includes the Glasstown Arts District. Six priorities of focus were identified through this process and were adopted by residents and stakeholders:

- Building a fun and healthy community – to connect residents to our city and each other.
- Leveraging arts and economic development – to improve our economy and create beautiful, inspiring places together.
- Creating a market for homeownership and investment to foster a neighborhood of well-kept, affordable homes and safe streets.
- Improving our public spaces so that everyone has a great place to meet neighbors, relax and play.
- Increasing access to jobs and education to ensure that no matter your age or economic background, you can gain access to increased economic opportunities.
- Increasing opportunities for civic leadership to foster engaged informed and connected citizens of all ages.

The Center City Neighborhood Plan of 2019 has served as the catalyst and guiding document for two additional State designations for the Center City Neighborhood including: the Center City Neighborhood Revitalization Tax Credit (NRTC) Plan of 2020 and the City of Millville’s Neighborhood Preservation Program (NPP) plan of 2019.

The Glasstown River Renaissance Maurice Riverfront Redevelopment Plan was adopted in December of 2006. This plan was adopted following an extensive planning process to create a unified vision for riverfront development. At its core, the primary objective of this effort was to conduct a master planning process to build consensus around a strategic development plan for the Riverfront, downtown core and surrounding neighborhood edges.

Placed on hold for several years due to a halt in economic and housing activity that happened with the market crash of 2008, few of the initiatives in the plan were implemented. However, with the recent surge of economic development and increased

need for housing, the 21st Century planning process revisited this plan to determine relevance and potential correlation of plans. Much of the 2006 feedback directly correlates to the data received from the 21st Century Planning process. Relevant elements include:

- Description of and identifying assets including existing riverfront park, library, art galleries and clay college, downtown restaurants, Levoy Theater, adjacent residential neighborhoods, existing boat docks/ramps/recreational boating, recreational use of river, existing senior housing, High Street activities/shops and baseball fields.
- Further emphasis was placed on the absence of strong connections between the Riverfront and the downtown area. Additional opportunities discussed were increased riverfront recreation, tourism in the downtown, the need for public events, promoting and expanding the Arts District to the Riverfront, etc.

## Conclusion

The 21st Century Redevelopment Grant establishes activities in several major areas designed to reduce vacancies in Center City Millville by attracting and retaining businesses and residents. Areas of focus include activating spaces, public services, marketing, and business development. These areas and activities will be the focus of roles and responsibilities meetings in early 2023 among local public, nonprofit, and private partners.

During the culmination of the 21st Century Redevelopment Grant activity planning session, project partners expressed a clear and acute desire to activate this plan and make it “...more than a plan on a shelf; a living, actionable plan that ties us together and drives us forward.” This plan, in conjunction with the HCDC Center City Neighborhood Plan of 2019, will be used as a catalyst to sustain positive momentum and drive collaboration between partners to activate Millville’s arts and entertainment and riverfront spaces and to fill business and residential locations in Center City.

## Next Steps

Next steps include reconvening the Activity Planning Committee to map out a plan for turning some of the feedback into action. The committee will develop a strategy and timeline for attracting and retaining businesses, increasing visibility through individual business marketing and Center City branding, enforcing vacant property ordinance and increasing community policing. The committee will also recommend ways to establish a regular schedule of family-friendly events designed draw a people to the downtown area from the immediate community as well as the county and the region. Workforce development partnerships, collaboration and a commitment from the City of Millville to provide services and enforcement is also necessary for revitalization to take hold.

**For more information about the plan and actions steps,  
contact Samantha Cruz at (856) 825-7000, ext. 7394.**

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## Appendix A

### 21st Century Redevelopment Grant: Community and Economic Activity Planning Agenda November 30, 2022

1. Welcome
  - a. Ross Whiting, PhD, President, Dogwood Consulting, Evaluation and Organizational Development Consultant
  - b. Goal: Identify goal areas and associated activities that will increase the number of people who shop, eat, drink, and enjoy Center City Millville.
2. Introductions: name, role in Millville
3. Framing the day
  - a. Your role: speak within your experience, take notes, listen, and expand
4. Data review
5. Goal area development
  - a. Goal: Identify broad goal areas based on data and participant experience.
  - b. Brainstorming
    - i. Generate ideas: in small groups, write down anything you believe represents an area of focus. Feasibility not important; large, impossible, strange ideas welcome!
    - ii. Share ideas: no criticism or judgment of others' ideas.
    - iii. Narrow the list: The best solutions meet our stated goal, incorporate the data, and reflect your experiences.
6. Action planning: In small groups, brainstorm activities and actions associated with activity areas.
  - a. Example: Parking improvement
    - i. Activity example: identify the number of parking spaces available during peak times and events.
    - ii. Activity example: identify potential solutions to increase parking availability.
    - iii. Activity example: identify barriers to parking: code, ticketing, meters, etc.



## Data from Focus Groups, Surveys and Interviews July-November 2022

### Strengths and Assets

**Arts and Entertainment:** Levoy Theater, Clay College/Art Center, Arts District. Community members: top reason (60% of respondents) to visit Center City Millville.

*“[Arts] is what resonates here with young people: they want it made here, made sustainably. You need people with passions and ideas to give that information.”*

**Location:** Proximity to cities and the shore. 45 minutes to Philadelphia and Atlantic City. Proximity to available industrial and distribution sites.

**Positive Local Support:** Organizations and people who drive positive change in Millville; community member volunteers, support from residents. Many business owners from here.

*“...They [the community] want to see people succeed here.”*

*“The pulse is not dead; there are things happening, people that are looking and trying for the town of Millville.”*

### Challenges and Barriers

**Human Services:** Unhoused population: lack of housing, employment, mental health, addiction support (acknowledged by participants as complex!). Cited as a barrier by both community members and business owners under “other” barriers to business.

*“They don’t mess with people. They typically don’t have anger in their heart. They fell on hard times.”*

**Community Safety:** Business owners (81%) and community members (48%) reported neighborhood safety concerns as the second highest barrier to business in Center City, Millville. Unhoused population occasionally mentioned in specific incidents; contributed to the “perception of crime.”

*“It’s a great town. It’s sad that the news doesn’t help lately as well. There was a shooting last Saturday; crime and the perceptions of crime are a problem. [I’m] really worried about that...no, we don’t feel safe to come downtown sometimes because it’s not safe.”*

**Vacant Buildings:** Business owners (84%) and community members (54%) reported vacant buildings as their top barrier to business in Center City, Millville.

*“There is a perception [among prospective business owners] that they’re going to fail because the buildings fail.”*

**Aesthetics:** cleanliness, vandalism, broken sidewalks, buildings in disrepair among top concerns.

- Community members (53%) and business owners (82%) felt that Center City was not visually appealing.
- Community members (45%) and business owners (73%) felt that Center City was not clean.
- 59% of Business owners reported they need neighborhood improvements (#2 response) including trees, sidewalks, litter, and maintenance to attract more customers.
- Government: Consistent code enforcement a reported need. A need to maintain and improve public infrastructure: parks, cobblestone sidewalks, the lights in Center City. Often tied to challenges and opportunities: a desire for the government to lead promotion of Millville as a destination, improvement of public spaces, and promoting and coordinating human services and public safety.

## Opportunities and Preferences

**Restaurants/Food Services:** A need for more diverse food options; existing restaurants discussed as strengths. Community members (70%) and business owners (85%) feel Center City does not have enough restaurant options.

- Community members' top four businesses they would like to see more of in Center City: restaurants (79%), bakeries (52%), ice cream shop (49%), and food trucks (46%).
- Business owners' top four businesses to attract more people to Center City: restaurants (81%), bakeries (50%), ice cream shops (50%), breweries, distilleries, and wineries (44%).

*“Millville needs a sit-down restaurant. We need an anchor property. They bring people to the street. They benefit from other anchor businesses...We need destinations.”*

**Events:** Seen as drivers of business; preference for recurring (Third Friday), and a few well-run, seasonal events. Community members (60%) and business owners (78%) felt that community events draw people to Center City, Millville; community members (68%) and business owners (78%) felt more events would draw more people to Center City.

*“Events, parades, Third Friday, they invite the businesses to be open later, more people shop and hang out, Holiday events in the wintertime.”*

Event ideas/existing events: Music festival: chili cook-off, fireworks, Christmas parade, car shows, parades, carriage rides, motorcycle festival.

**Marketing and Advertising:** For Millville and for individual businesses. 75% of business owners said they needed advertising and awareness to attract more customers (top response). Promote the city as a destination.

*“We need more marketing, advertisement, promote more of Millville. Once the streets are clean, promote more of the city as a destination: have a drink and come to the restaurants.”*

**Riverfront:** Include the riverfront in future development and planning; needs cleaning and development as a park property.

*“The river is a big draw...If we can clean more of the river area — not a lot of families walking down the river, but it’s an asset.”*

*“Take advantage of the river, there are a lot of opportunities [for development]”*

**Renovation and Updates of Businesses:** Aesthetic improvements to the interior and exterior of buildings and businesses primarily within business owner data.

*“We want to do basic improvements; furniture changes, decorations, paint - basic renovations.”*