

The City of Bridgeton Master Plan Overview²⁰⁰⁹

Bridgeton Chamber of Commerce

February 17, 2009



Strengths, Weaknesses, and Opportunities

After a careful review of the empirical data, existing studies and plans, and discussions with civic and business leaders in the City, the consulting team identified a number of assets, challenges and opportunities. The following pages outline those items, based upon them makes a number of recommendations to take advantage of strengths and opportunities and to address those challenges.



ASSETS / STRENGTHS

- A large pool of labor – unemployed persons and those not in the labor force
- A younger population – trainable and flexible
- Cultural diversity – Mexican, African-American and Native American cultures
- Available sites for industrial and commercial development – Florida Street, Route 49 and Buckshutem area, former Owens site, Ferrecute site
- Active rail freight service – reaches several points in the City



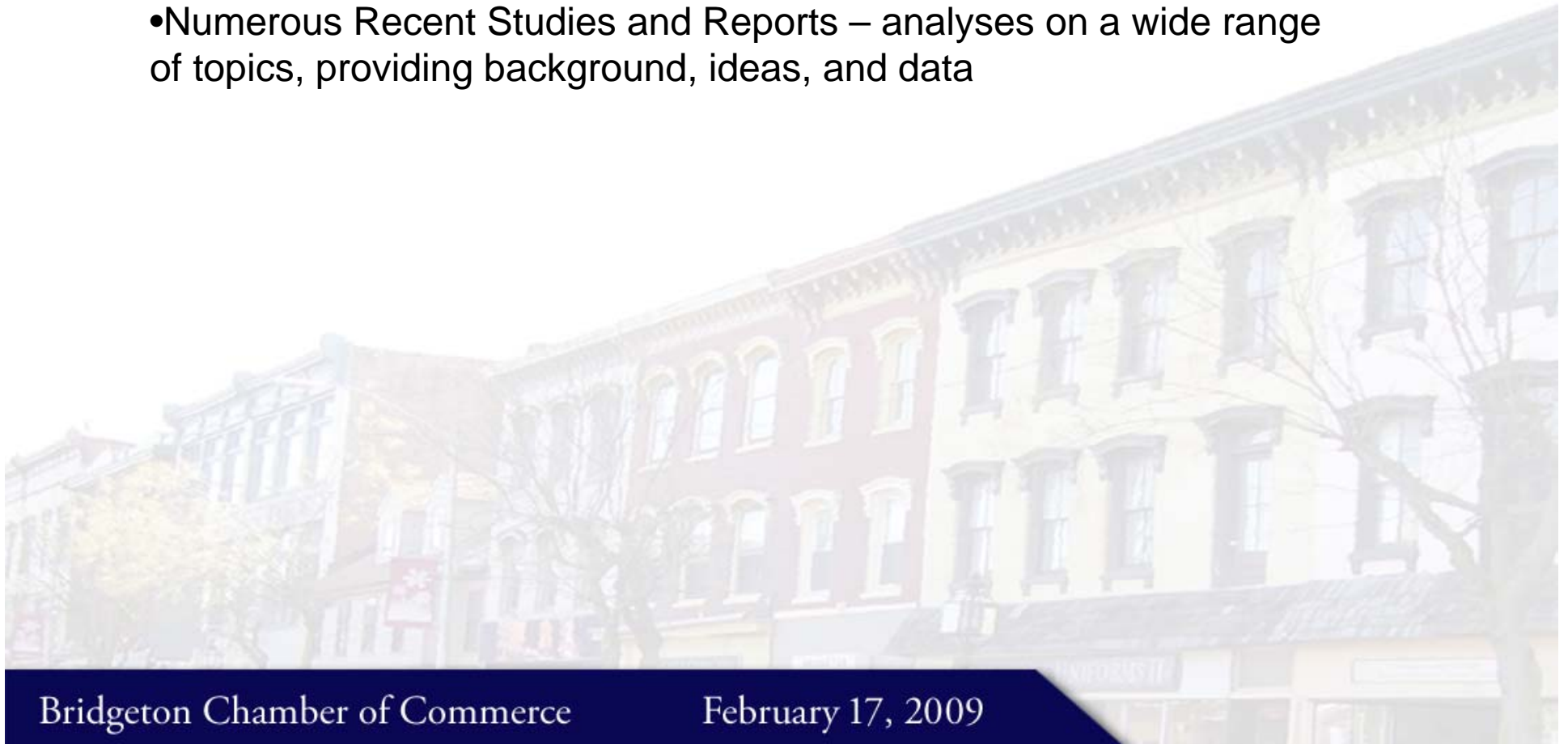
ASSETS / STRENGTHS

- Route 49 traffic to shore points and Millville raceway – modest traffic counts now, but possible larger counts in the future
- The River and City parks and Zoo – unique regional assets
- Historic structures and neighborhoods – a potential tourist asset
- The Urban Enterprise Zone – source of business generation
Seat of County Government – source of employment and potential customers as well as source of some visitor traffic



ASSETS / STRENGTHS

- Numerous Recent Studies and Reports – analyses on a wide range of topics, providing background, ideas, and data





LIABLITIES / CHALLENGES

- Safety concerns – not perceived as a safe location
- Low educational level of the workforce – limits types of firms that can be recruited
- Need for more, new, and better-paying jobs to support economic revitalization
- Parking – a moderate concern at present, which will be exacerbated with development of new businesses in the CBD
- Historic structures – preservation is perceived to add to business costs; is a factor in neighborhood redevelopment



LIABLITIES / CHALLENGES

- Absentee landlords – typically have less interest in their properties than resident landlords or owners, contributing to deteriorated appearance.
- Large number of immigrants lacking proper documentation – inhibits the ability of workers to find better jobs, start businesses, or to receive training to prepare for better job so Lack of integration of Hispanic community – distrust because of lack of proper documentation and cultural differences cause a social divide as well as missed opportunities for the City and the Hispanic community
- Lack of consistent business practices in the CBD, such as common store hours



LIABLITIES / CHALLENGES

- Lack of coordination with or participation in County, regional, and state economic development efforts
- Need to make the downtown more attractive
- Lack of highway access – Route 49 does not carry the same high volumes of traffic as Route 55 and Route 55 is perceived as distant



OPPORTUNITIES

- Growth in neighboring Townships – Hopewell and Upper Deerfield in particular have seen an influx of wealthier residents for whom Bridgeton is well positioned geographically to provide select goods and services
- Growth in Millville and Vineland; the development of the Motorsports complex – Bridgeton is well positioned to gain from the race track, and should explore ways to capitalize upon the successes of the two neighboring communities
- The Rutgers Food Innovation Center – a solid commitment to the economic development effort and a possible source for the creation of new businesses and the generation of visitor



OPPORTUNITIES

- The Rutgers Marine Center – renovation of the David Sheppard House will provide an additional source of business and visitors
- Bayshore Scenic & Heritage Byway Designation - offers opportunities and incentives to take advantage of traveler needs
- Existence of defined Redevelopment Areas and Area in Need of Rehabilitation designation can both facilitate revitalization efforts
- Available City-owned sites



THREATS

- Indecision and hesitation about adopting a strategy and staying with it
- Reluctance or resistance to recognizing market trends and opportunities





DEVELOPMENT CONCEPTS

After a review of the City's assets, weaknesses and opportunities, several development concepts emerged. Many of them are related, directly or indirectly, and for the most part support one another.





1.CONCEPT- Augment & Capitalize on Millville/Vineland Successes.

The growth and success of Vineland and Millville (especially the Motorsports facility) offer opportunities for Bridgeton businesses to provide goods and services to augment and capitalize upon those successes.

Rather than view Millville and Vineland as competitors, **Bridgeton businesses should look for goods and services that they can offer to fill gaps or supplement the offerings in those cities.** *For example, the Motorsports facility will require more hotel rooms than Millville currently has, and the City is well positioned to offer accommodations. In addition, the City can create and fill the role of the area's entertainment and dining center by developing an entertainment venue for tourists and travelers in general and race fans in particular.*



1.CONCEPT- Augment & Capitalize on Millville/Vineland Successes.

As noted earlier, Bridgeton can offer the Zoo, its parks, the river, and tours of its historic districts as compliments to attractions and events in the other two communities. **The creation of an entertainment district, emphasizing movies, restaurants, and concerts, would have an appeal for a wide range of visitors to the south Jersey area, as well as residents of the City, its environs, and the region. To the extent that Bridgeton can and wants to differentiate itself, the presence of a large Hispanic population, and significant Black, and Native American populations, offers the chance to provide a range of cultural dining, goods, and experiences not available in the other places.**



1.CONCEPT- Augment & Capitalize on Millville/Vineland Successes.

REQUIREMENTS

- Close examination of Millville/Vineland offerings and identification of niches or different products
- Prompt action to develop hotels and restaurants to ensure market position; create entertainment district to differentiate Bridgeton
- Participation of the Hispanic, Black and Native American communities in this effort to capitalize upon cultural heritage in particular
- Publicity about City attractions and venues; coordination with Millville, Vineland, County, and regional tourism efforts
- Address public safety issues and perceptions, especially in the downtown



2. CONCEPT - Capitalize on Downtown, History, Diversity, Market Location

The revitalization of the downtown affords the City an opportunity to attract outside spending to the community while capitalizing upon the historic nature of the area, the City's cultural diversity, and proximity to the more affluent "suburban" market.



2. CONCEPT - Capitalize on Downtown, History, Diversity, Market Location

The downtown offers an attractive venue to offer a mix of services (financial, travel, professional, language schools, cooking schools), specialty shopping (antiques, crafts, ethnic goods, specialty foods) and dining (coffee shops, ethnic restaurants) in a pleasant and safe environment.

The City can offer the river, its parks and the Zoo, as well as tours of its historic districts as added amenities. In addition to the nearby residents, the City could attract some portion of the beach traffic, Byway traffic, and, integrating its efforts with and building from the success of Millville and Vineland, create an opportunity for visitors to extend their stay in the area by offering a variety of dining and entertainment venues.



2. CONCEPT - Capitalize on Downtown, History, Diversity, Market Location

REQUIREMENTS

- Address public safety issues and perceptions
- Develop programs to address the higher cost of historic preservation for downtown structures
- Decide upon the upstairs living issue
- Recruit desired businesses; capitalize upon presence of Hispanic/Mexican population for stores and eating establishments
- Continue efforts to develop the riverfront; create attractions (e.g., a small marina) and events to draw visitors



3. CONCEPT-Review Existing Redevelopment Plans and Update as Necessary

As the City is deciding upon development programs and priorities, it should undertake a careful review of the existing Redevelopment Plans, updating and amending them to fit the current situation. Resources should be identified to implement the key redevelopment plans.



3. CONCEPT-Review Existing Redevelopment Plans and Update as Necessary

Over the past thirty years the City has identified a number of areas as those in need of redevelopment or rehabilitation, and so designated those areas. **Little or no action has taken place in many of these areas for a wide range of reasons, and some of these plans are now dated.**

The City, through a coordinated effort of the Planning Board, the Economic Development Office, the UEZ, and other entities such as the Main Street program and the Historic Commission, should assess these plans, identify those that can be used to implement the City's immediate priorities, and amend them as necessary to ensure a coordinated development effort.

At the same time the City should seek the means to gain control of these sites so that Requests for Proposals for developers can be issued, and development activity initiated.



3. CONCEPT-Review Existing Redevelopment Plans and Update as Necessary

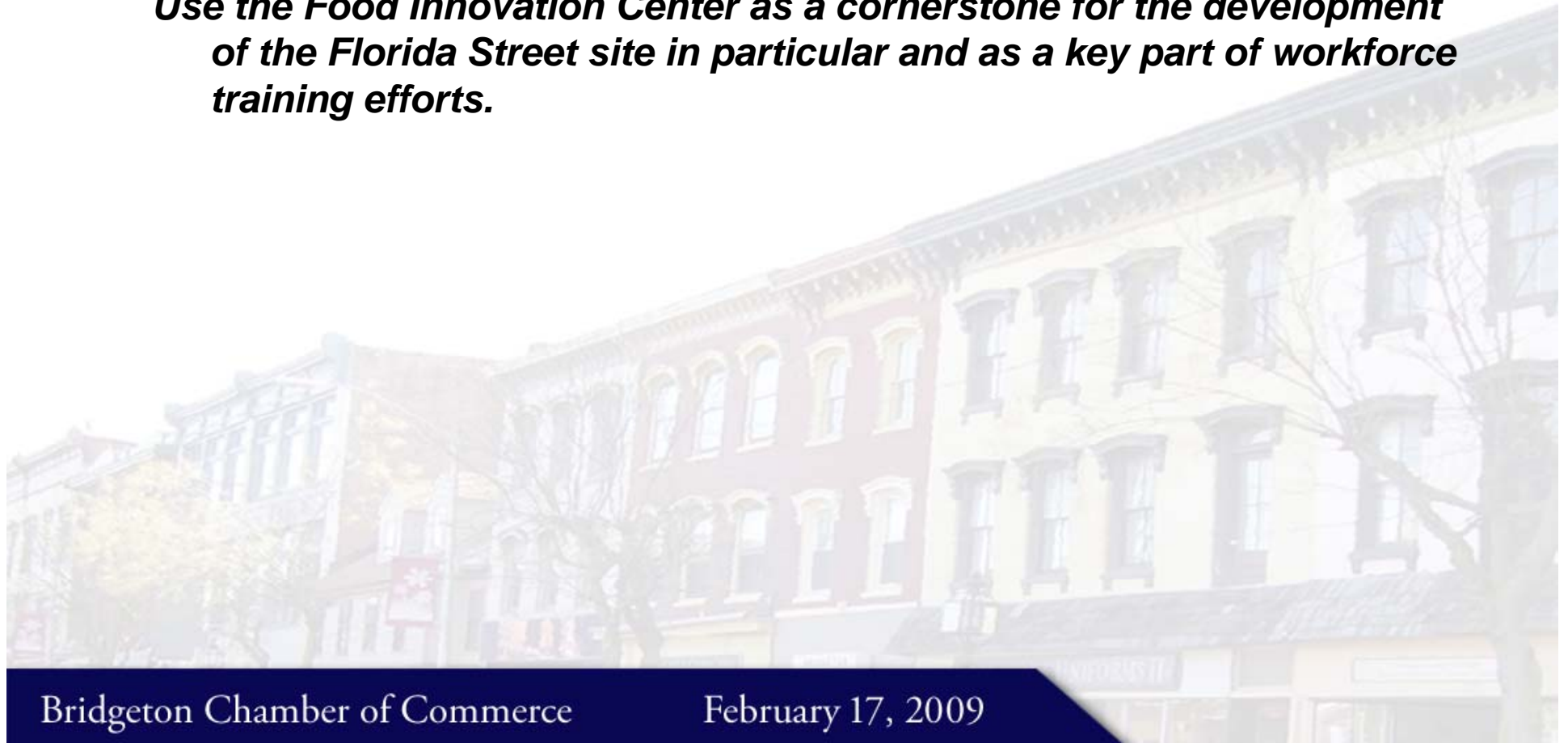
REQUIREMENTS

- Coordinated review and assessment of existing Redevelopment Plans
- Identification of high priority areas and sites in consonance with City development objectives
- Acquisition and assembly of sites



4. CONCEPT-Food Innovation Center as Cornerstone

Use the Food Innovation Center as a cornerstone for the development of the Florida Street site in particular and as a key part of workforce training efforts.





4. CONCEPT-Food Innovation Center as Cornerstone

The Center offers the opportunity to capitalize upon the City and region's strength in agriculture. Though it appears that many of the businesses assisted by the Center will be relatively small-scale operations, these firms will create jobs and require a variety of support services (equipment repair, packaging, package design and printing, as well as accounting, legal services and financing). These could be housed in part by the development of office and perhaps retail space at the Florida Street site.

Perhaps generating more employment is the fact that the Center is a high profile project which has already drawn national and international attention. The Center will likely require hotel, exposition and meeting space and the City can use this as a selling point for development of such projects. Such development would also capitalize upon the anticipated demand for hotel space created by the racetrack.



4. CONCEPT-Food Innovation Center as Cornerstone

The Center also may serve as an important workforce training venue, preparing workers for higher skilled and better paying jobs in the food processing and food service industries. Trained and skilled workers could obtain employment as chefs, kitchen assistants and the like in the larger vacation/recreation centers such as Atlantic City and the Cape May area. This idea also integrates with the development of specialty food stores and cooking schools, whether downtown or elsewhere in the City.



4. **CONCEPT-Food Innovation Center as Cornerstone**

REQUIREMENTS

- Implementation of the Center's programs
- Identification and recruitment of support industries and services
- Developing appropriate training and certification programs
- Recruitment of persons for these training programs



5. CONCEPT - Capitalize on Freight Rail Service

The City should capitalize upon the existing freight rail service and seek to establish itself as a regional distribution center.

A range of non-perishable goods and commodities, such as building materials, aggregates and the like, could be delivered to sites in Bridgeton for distribution to firms across the southern portion of the state. Rail service was an important consideration in the decision to locate the ethanol plant in Bridgeton and is an important consideration for other types of operations. Efforts to identify and recruit such firms should be continued. One regional development objective is the creation of a transloading facility, and Bridgeton should participate in any effort to locate such a facility, as well as monitoring the development of port facilities in Paulsboro and Salem.



5. CONCEPT - Capitalize on Freight Rail Service

The City should capitalize upon the existing freight rail service and seek to establish itself as a regional distribution center.

REQUIREMENTS

- Maintain contact with regional rail operators
- Monitor port related developments and transloading facility planning



Based upon the preceding analysis of economic conditions, demographics, strengths and weaknesses, and development concepts, the consulting team identified the following set of five key Development Objectives. Based upon our review of comments, suggestions and expressed needs, the team then developed a set of priorities, strategies and plans to achieve these objectives.

The basic objectives and a brief commentary on each follow:
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- 1. Create more, new, and better paying jobs for City residents to reduce poverty and increase the City's tax base.***
- 2. Promote education and job training programs to meet the current and future needs of the 21st century economy.***
- 3. Capitalize upon local and regional, opportunities and assets.***
- 4. Create a better focused, more responsive, and coordinated Economic Development and Redevelopment program.***
- 5. Define City objectives and image and build a marketing and implementation program to obtain those objectives and that image.***



1. Create more, new, and better paying jobs for City residents to reduce poverty and increase the City's tax base.

One comment heard several times was that the City needed jobs, any kind of jobs, to get out of the current economic doldrums. While the creation of a range of job types is crucial, a focus on better paying career oriented jobs offers the best opportunity to achieve sustainable growth.



1. Create more, new, and better paying jobs for City residents to reduce poverty and increase the City's tax base.

Strategy: Revitalize downtown businesses:

- Conduct clean-up and beautification programs, using UEZ and Main Street resources and programs
- Develop consistent business practices (common hours and days of operation, e.g.) and shared marketing efforts and programs
- Develop and reinforce public safety image for downtown
- Recruit desired businesses (e.g., restaurants, financial services, stores with ethnic/cultural focus)



1. Create more, new, and better paying jobs for City residents to reduce poverty and increase the City's tax base.

Strategy: Seize the opportunity to become the hospitality/entertainment center of the region

- Focus on hospitality/entertainment as cornerstone of development, including hotel development, boutique retail and weekend recreation
- Identify key areas and assemble sites where possible
- Inform/recruit appropriate developers
- Recruit appropriate shops and businesses
- Seek participation of local Hispanic, Black, and Native American communities



1. Create more, new, and better paying jobs for City residents to reduce poverty and increase the City's tax base.

Strategy: Expand and diversify economic base

- Use the Rutgers Food Innovation Center to leverage new food related businesses as well as the hospitality industry

Strategy: Maintain and expand existing business base

- Expand business retention and UEZ programs
- Create and promote financial and other incentives for redevelopment



2. Promote education and job training programs to meet the current and future needs of the 21st century economy.

The creation of new and better paying jobs will require a better trained workforce. A range of efforts to improve worker skills and better prepare current students should be undertaken. Take advantage of multi-lingual population. Develop programs to encourage higher levels of educational attainment.



2. Promote education and job training programs to meet the current and future needs of the 21st century economy.

Strategy: Work for local training programs and support

- Seek local Workforce Investment Board office
- Develop training programs through Food Innovation Center and other Rutgers programs
- Continue and expand bilingual education and English as second Language programs



3. Capitalize upon local and regional, opportunities and assets.

As noted, the City has a wide variety of assets and emerging opportunities upon which to capitalize. Identifying, ranking, and developing them will require careful planning, concerted effort, a long-term commitment, and, most important and perhaps most difficult, funding



3. Capitalize upon local and regional, opportunities and assets.

Strategy: Position neighborhoods and Victorian homes as attractions

- Begin walking tours of neighborhoods again
- Evaluate historic preservation guidelines; focus on key neighborhoods and structures
- Evaluate impact of using housing as an economic development tool

Strategy: Encourage businesses and organizations that demonstrate the cultural diversity of Bridgeton

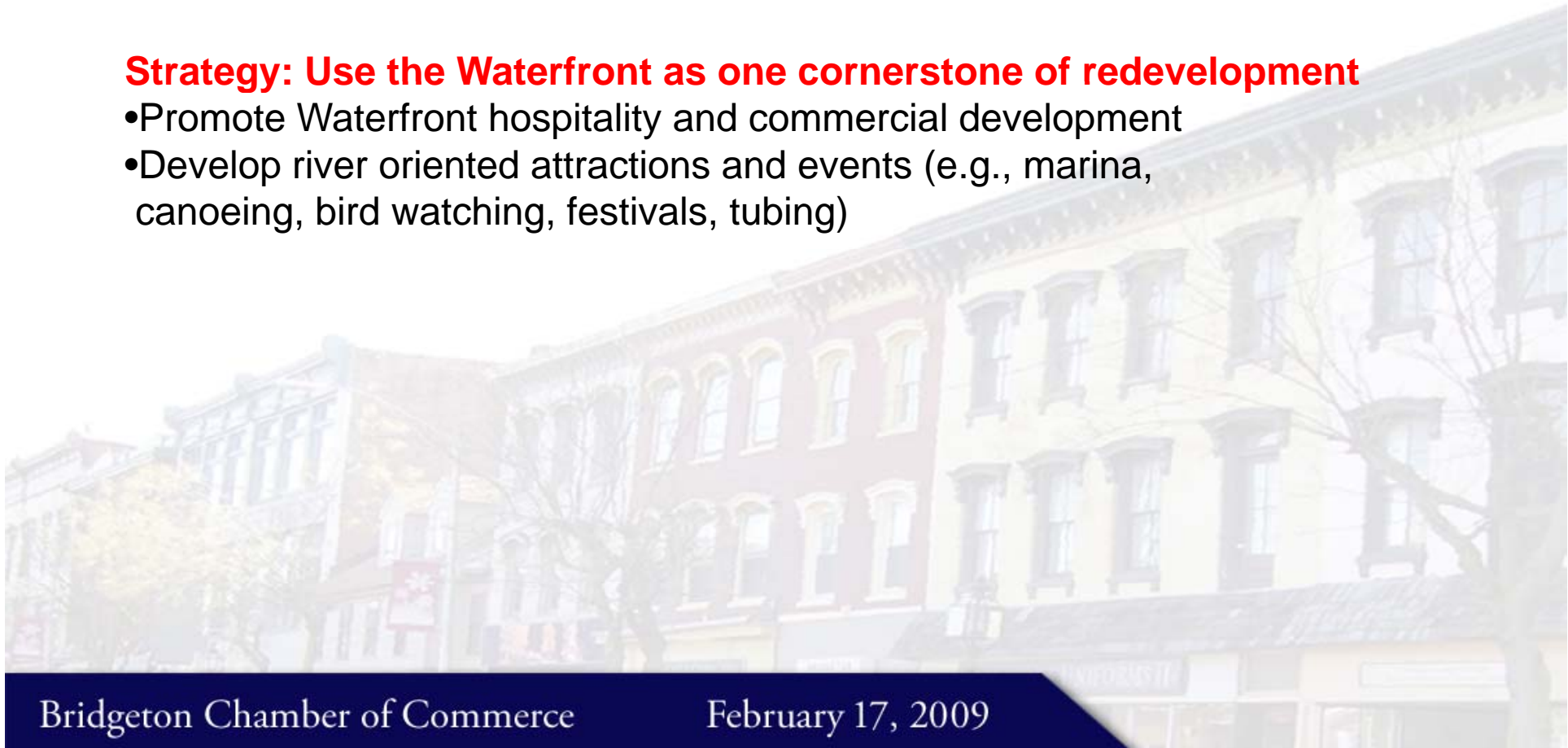
- As noted above, support ethnic restaurants, craft boutiques, and imported goods stores, especially in the entertainment district



3. Capitalize upon local and regional, opportunities and assets.

Strategy: Use the Waterfront as one cornerstone of redevelopment

- Promote Waterfront hospitality and commercial development
- Develop river oriented attractions and events (e.g., marina, canoeing, bird watching, festivals, tubing)





4. Create a better focused, more responsive, and coordinated Economic Development and Redevelopment program.

The City has maintained a solid economic and development program. Moving to the next level and aggressively addressing development issues will require a more concerted and focused effort to support existing businesses and expand the tax base.



4. Create a better focused, more responsive, and coordinated Economic Development and Redevelopment program.

Strategy: Focus Economic Development Efforts

- Enhance coordination with County, regional and county ED efforts
- Harmonize UEZ, Main Street and Zoning to maximize benefits

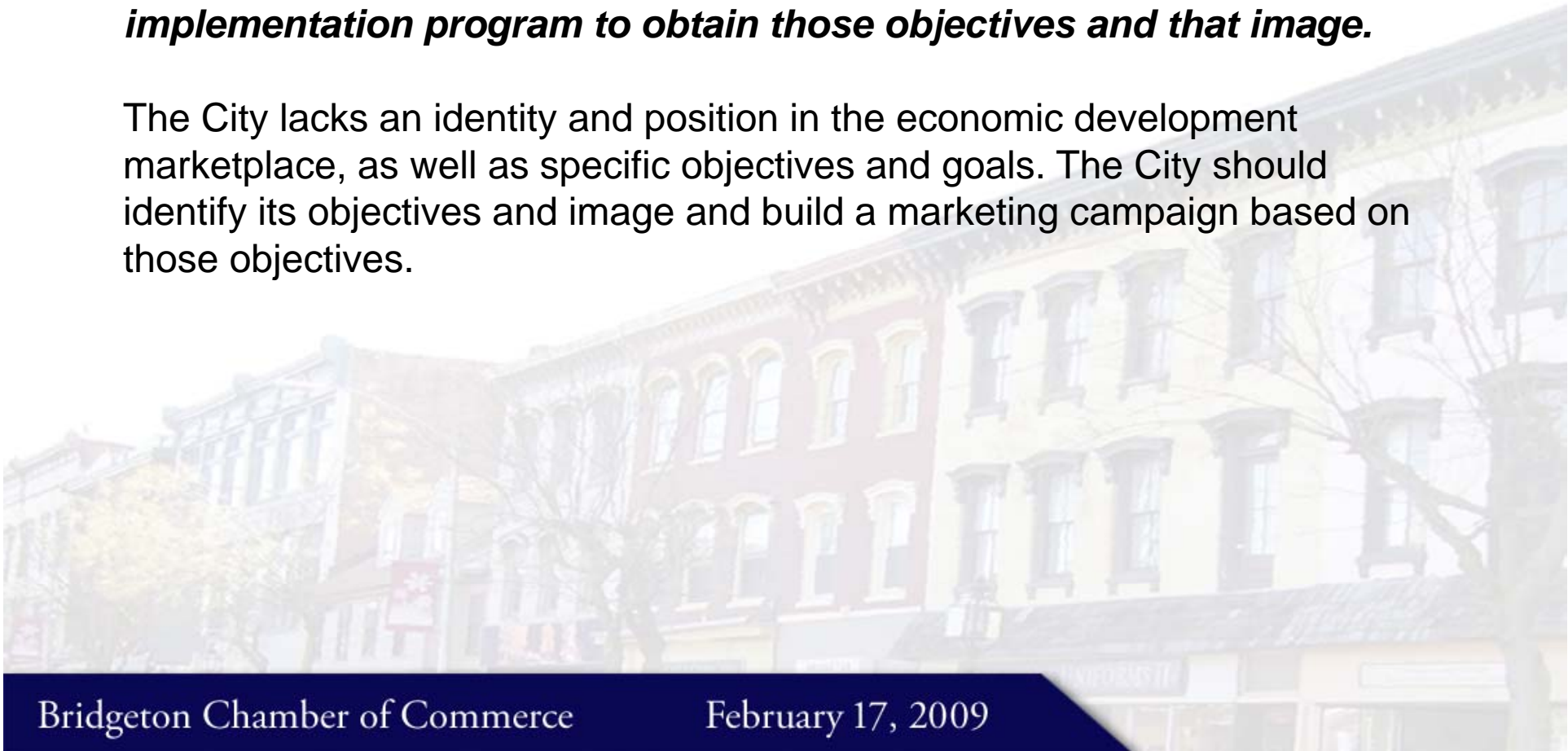
Strategy: Focus redevelopment efforts

- Identify priority sites in accord with City development and economic growth plans – define and focus on “catalyst projects”
- Assemble sites in support of plans and seek developers



5. Define City objectives and image and build a marketing and implementation program to obtain those objectives and that image.

The City lacks an identity and position in the economic development marketplace, as well as specific objectives and goals. The City should identify its objectives and image and build a marketing campaign based on those objectives.





5. Define City objectives and image and build a marketing and implementation program to obtain those objectives and that image.

Strategy: Address public perception of the City

- Focus on public safety concerns, especially in the downtown
- Focus on clean-up and beautification (noted above)
- Address vacant storefronts and vacant lots

Strategy: Implement image or “branding” campaign

- Decide upon an image or “brand” for the City, and develop appropriate logo and marketing materials
- Implement focused or targeted marketing campaign
- Improve signage and wayfinding in neighborhoods and at gateways
- UEZ and Main Street program should develop coordinated business



Questions?

