MAIN STREET’S CHANGING ROLE AS A CENTRAL PLACE, AN ECONOMIC CENTER, AND A NEIGHBORHOOD: REGIONALIZATION, RETAIL TRADE, AND APPLYING THE NEW URBANISM

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This thesis entitled

MAIN STREET’S CHANGING ROLE AS A CENTRAL PLACE, AN ECONOMIC CENTER, AND A NEIGHBORHOOD: REGIONALIZATION, RETAIL TRADE, AND APPLYING THE NEW URBANISM

BY

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This thesis asks what Main Street’s role as a central place is today, and what economic forces keep it from becoming an economic center, a central place, and a neighborhood. In the past, Main Streets and small town downtowns filled these roles. This thesis finds that today Main Streets are central places for only specific uses, like niche markets, historic preservation, tourism, and community identity centers. They are no longer true living/working neighborhoods. Sprawl, decentralization, regionalization, and changes retail structure are causes for Main Street’s diminished role in today’s built environment. It proposes returning Main Streets to traditional neighborhoods, similar to a New Urbanist TND (traditional neighborhood design), and similar to the neighborhoods they were in the past. It uses a case study of Exeter, New Hampshire to illustrate findings in the literature.

Approved:

Nancy Bain
Professor of Geography
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Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 Views on Main Street and Living, Working Downtowns

In his book “The Geography of Nowhere” (1993) James Howard Kunstler describes an experience as a child in Lebanon, New Hampshire where he first discovers the charm of a small town. He explains how there is a two acre common in the center of town with elm trees and a bandstand for open space, shops and businesses downtown fronting the common with apartments above them, neighborhoods with housing at one side of town, and a small industrial area down a hill near the river. Every need for daily life was within walking distance in this now historic downtown.

Today development patterns have little resemblance to Lebanon of Kunstler’s childhood, and downtowns that were once like this are something entirely different today. This research investigates what is happening on Main Street, and whether this forgotten arrangement of our needs of daily life could be restored on Main Streets today. It asks what Main Street’s role as a central place is today, and what economic forces keep it from becoming an economic center, a central place, and a neighborhood. Main Streets and small downtowns once fulfilled both of these roles, but today Main Streets are usually either abandoned, filled with specialty shops and “niche” markets, or are tourist attractions. They still are usually cultural centers recognized by local citizens. Main Streets are central places only for these specific uses. Current development patterns, a changing economy, changing retail structure, and changing needs for central places are
causes of this. People still often have a personal connection to these places, and Main Streets often still have a strong sense of place.

It may be possible to restore Main Streets and small downtowns with a combination of mixed uses and living/working neighborhoods. Lebanon at the time of Kunstler’s childhood fit my model of living working neighborhood, and towns similar to Lebanon were the inspiration for New Urbanism. The New Urbanism is an alternative form of development and can be applied to help reach this goal. Despite the fact that many Main Streets are having a difficult time coping with decentralization and sprawl, the New Urbanism has not been used to help Main Streets today. The possibility of making Main Street a stronger central place and neighborhood by applying the New Urbanism needs to be explored.

Today, many downtowns like Lebanon are dealing with the effects of suburbanization and sprawl, and these threaten the physical and cultural landscape of downtown and its history. Even worse, zoning laws often prohibit development like Lebanon’s downtown. In many places in the United States, it is essentially illegal to build another Main Street, or to develop nearby in a form that is consistent with what is already there. Main Streets developed with a mix of land uses. They had retail, workplaces, housing and other uses all on one street. Today’s zoning often separates these uses by forcing them to locate in designated parts of town. It seems obvious that a method to preserve these areas would be to use them in a way that more closely resembles what they were intended for and designed for; as a living/working neighborhood. Development focused on and around Main Street in a form compatible with its history, architecture, and layout is an alternative that is very reasonable.
There is another town that Kunstler visited later in his life; Woodstock, Vermont. This seems to be a charming small town, but in truth it has no real neighborhood, no true community, and is not really a small New England village at all. In Woodstock, few people live downtown. The stores are not grocery stores, hardware stores, or small businesses that would serve nearby residents. Instead, it is full of expensive restaurants, gift shops, specialty shops and tourist activities. It is a charming place, and visitors adore it, yet nobody suggests they make a place like it a part of their everyday life. This is a case of a Main Street being viewed as a commodity to be used for leisure or profit rather than a place to live and be part of their everyday life. It is not the center of economic activity, or even part of daily life like the Woodstock of old was. It merely appears to be the town it once was. This may be acceptable, but the possibility of providing a better place to live and work may be more desirable.

New Urbanism has been evolving over the past decade or two and offers some strategies that can help Main Street become a neighborhood like Lebanon, and make home more closely resemble beloved Woodstock. The Kentlands in Maryland is an example of a New Urbanist development where developers essentially built a new town with all the ingredients of daily life. New Urbanist principles have also been used to improve neighborhoods in already developed areas, such as revitalizing downtown West Palm Beach and building low cost housing in central Cleveland (Duany, 2000). In theory these methods can be applied to small downtowns and Main Streets. It could turn Woodstock into a place to live and work. It can work as a method to rejuvenate
struggling Main Streets, and can also weaken the forces that made downtown struggle to begin with.

New Urbanism has its own set of problems, but many of these could possibly be solved by focusing New Urbanism on and around Main Street. Several critiques, as noted by Ellis (2002) include a lack of jobs located in the core area. Jobs located in the development are often not well paying enough to support most people who live there. There is a mismatch in housing and job types. A Main Street that is an economic center would have a wide range of job types.

Ellis and others also criticized New Urbanism for taking up green space. It is better to have urban infill than to develop green space or open space. Focusing development around the center of small towns will provide infill and not take up as much open space. Why create a new Main Street if plenty of Main Streets already exist and need investment? New Urbanism has been criticized for not fitting in with existing development. A New Urbanist community cannot effectively meet its goals if it is an island surrounded by big box retail and subdivisions. It will fit in well in areas that already have a pedestrian oriented environment and higher densities. It will reinforce conditions that will help a neighborhood function the way it was intended.

It is also said that New Urbanism attempts to “create history.” If done properly, history will not need to be created; history will be preserved and integrated into new communities with enough integrity be valued in the future. These arguments suggest New Urbanism and Main Street preservation are compatible, yet they have not been combined to create living, working downtowns. Conversely, downtowns have not been adequately used to provide alternative places to live and work.
In Richard Francaviglia’s book Main Street Revisited (1996) he lists 16 “axioms” regarding Main Street. The tenth, is an interesting one: Main Street “is more than economic: Main Street is both functional and aesthetic in that design is related to deeply held values about the way space should be arranged and how people should relate to it and to each other.” This research investigates the results of present trends that are driven by economics that may be harmful to neighborhood life on Main Street. Our values on the way space should be arranged and how people relate to it are evident in our efforts to maintain historic and charming Main Streets. This thesis takes us a step closer to bringing economics and a desire for a more dignified landscape into one picture.
Chapter 2

Methodology and Study Area

2.1 Study Area, Choosing Exeter, NH

To get an understanding of how Main Streets work, and to have an example to use, I decided to choose one main street and get to know it intimately. I chose the town of Exeter, New Hampshire and I will refer to it frequently throughout the paper, and will treat it as a case study in my results.

New England has been known for its small towns, Main Streets, and central places. The image of a white church steeple on a town common in a New England village is a strong place making image of New England, and is almost an archetypal image today. They have been recognized as being exceptionally charming, and having a rich heritage and history. These factors make small New England downtowns the most attractive to study. Small New England towns have been the center of numerous movies, books and stories, and the image of life in these small towns can be captivating and often nostalgic. New England is a good place for this research because of the history, culture, and imagery connected to these places.

Exeter fits this image of a small New England town, and its physical layout resembles what Kunstler described at Lebanon (see figure 2). The town is easily accessible to me, it has a historical society, a large library, and best of all, a fairly lively Main Street. It does not have a common or town green at the center, but it does have an
identifiable center with a gazebo at an intersection of two significant roads. It is a small town with rural/suburban development on its fringes, with a total population of 14,058 people in 2000, many of which live in the suburban area outside of town. The town also had a reputation for its “historic” downtown, which centers around Water Street, the town’s main street. Water Street has brick Victorian buildings fronting the sidewalk, and it is the center of a compact downtown area. This downtown is surrounded by neighborhoods with various types of housing, churches, green spaces, and other small
businesses. There are several former industrial sites which are now converted into office space, condominiums, or warehouses. In the past and seemingly still today, the town had places to work, shop, and live in one mixed use area.

Map 1: Topographical Map of Downtown Exeter
The older town is clearly visible amidst what has been a suburban or rural/suburban region since the 1950s. The immediate northern edge of the historic area is developed by industrial parks, automobile dealers and big box retail. These land uses are on major roads that head to the four lane East-West highway connecting the Seacoast to the cities in the Merrimack River Valley inland. Although the town is within the Boston-Worcester-Manchester MSA, on most of the country roads outside of town there is no evidence of nearby urban areas. Much of the area surrounding Exeter is heavily forested, with a few small farms which sell products mostly to suburban residents. Suburban

Figure 2: Downtown Exeter
development has been taking up the forest and farms in a haphazard manner at a steady rate. Some of the rural outskirts have been developed enough to lose their rural feel, while other parts still appear far from any MSA. Most people likely consider Exeter and the towns surrounding it small towns or rural towns, and few have a direct connection to Boston or other major cities in the area. Exeter is in the Portsmouth-Rochester PSMA of the metropolitan region, and Exeter could be considered in Portsmouth’s hinterland.

There are no townships in New England. New England towns are the smallest civil division, and counties are the next smallest. All rural areas around a town center are included in the town, and there are no “corporation limits” to towns. Basically, a city or town’s periphery is politically one and the same. There is no space between town centers that is not included in a town (except in the most sparsely populated areas in far northern New England). Even the most rural areas are part of a town, which may be several miles from any town center. The US census has created a boundary to divide towns that have a compact center into a Census Designated Place, or CDP, and the rural periphery. The compact center would probably be the equivalent of a “corporation limit” in a Midwestern town. In the census, the town can be seen as a whole, or as just the center CDP. Most towns do not have a CDP, and as a result a CDP like downtown Exeter may serve as a central place for several smaller adjacent towns.

In 2000, of Exeter’s 14,058 people, 9759 people live in the CDP. The population of the rural area has been growing fairly rapidly, while the CDP has stayed fairly constant. Despite growth, the area of the CDP has not been expanded in decades.

Exeter is near the bottom of the hierarchy of central places in southern New Hampshire, and in the Boston-Worcester-Manchester (formerly Boston-Worcester-
Lawrence) MSA. The census bureau divided the MSA into PSMAs, which are centered by one or two significant cities in the area. Exeter is in the Portsmouth-Rochester PSMA,

Map 2
and Portsmouth would be Exeter’s nearest higher ranking city. The maps 2-4 show Exeter’s location in the northern part of the MSA. Other central places of comparable size to Exeter, some smaller some larger, are also plotted on this map.

Map 3

Exeter is somewhat unique in that it is one of only a few central places in the area. Portsmouth is the only sizeable central place nearby, and to the west of Exeter, the central places are relatively small compared to Exeter. Exeter is generally in competition with
several much larger, distant central places. The pull factor from these large central places that are not nearby may help contribute to regionalization. Smaller central places nearby are also competing. The next figure is a map of central places and their peripheries, and is one of several possible interpretations. The smaller central places of Epping and Raymond were not included. Hampton was also not included, which is only marginally smaller than Exeter as a central place.

Map 4

Central Places and their Periphery
This interpretation puts Exeter on the map as a central place in competition with much larger cities. Seven cities in the region have a population ranging from about 20,000 to over 100,000 people, much larger than Exeter’s 14,000, of which 9,000 actually live in the central area. To the east of Exeter are what I call the seacoast fall line cities. This is a cluster of small cities of around 10,000 to 25,000 people of which none are dominant. This further complicates any attempt to create central places and peripheries. The geography of this area is much more complex than the Midwestern countryside in Iowa Christaller used to develop his theories, and may lead one to believe it is a complex regional system rather than a network of hierarchical central places.

Towns in the map may be divided between two central places. Most towns that are not designated as central places are mostly rural residential, and any central places within them would be very low on the hierarchy, and mainly consist of a corner grocery store, gas station, and few other activities. It is likely that residents on one side of town will be more likely to use one central place than residents at the other side of town. Sandown, northeast of Derry, is an example of this. Sandown is a neighboring town to my hometown, and students there went to the same high school as I did. I noticed that people living in the southeastern (and most densely populated) side of town were more acquainted with Haverhill, Massachusetts, and parents worked there, and often grew up there. Residents on the northern and western side of town had more connections to Derry and Manchester. Parents of my friends often worked there and were less likely to have connections in Massachusetts. In creating the map, I tried to estimate which town was more associated with which central place. When I later tried to find a more specific periphery of Exeter, I divided towns into quarters (see Figure 3). A town could be a
quarter, a half, three quarters, or entirely part of Exeter’s periphery. The division can be visualized as geographical, or based on the numbers of users. Either way, it was an adjustment that should more accurately distinguish the periphery for Exeter. This estimate is very crude, but it works to create a framework for describing Exeter and its periphery.

In 1950, Exeter’s central place, the CDP was about 36% of the total population of the area. In 2000, it was less than 23%, and all evidence suggests it continues to drop. The town of Exeter itself went from 88% of its population in the CDP, to only 69% today. The region as a whole has grown considerably over this time period. If it were not for this rapid growth, central places may have seen depopulation similar to what happened in many major cities starting in the 1950s. The population of the defined area went from under 14,000 in 1950, and nearly tripled to over 43,000 in 2000. It is clear that rural areas are growing much faster than central places. If retail trade and workplaces have a similar trend, this could signify a significant change in any central place theory that was created to fit a town like Exeter in the 1950s.
## Figure 3:

### Exeter and Its Periphery, 1950

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<th>Towns</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Adjusted Population</th>
<th>Adjusted Area (sqmi)</th>
<th>Population Density</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Exeter (w/CDP)</td>
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<td>5664</td>
<td>19.64</td>
<td>288.4</td>
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<td>Brentwood</td>
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<tr>
<td>Danville</td>
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<td>127</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>43.3</td>
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<td>East Kingston</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>336.75</td>
<td>7.49</td>
<td>45</td>
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<tr>
<td>Epping</td>
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<td>1796</td>
<td>26.03</td>
<td>69</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fremont</td>
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<td>523.5</td>
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<td>40.7</td>
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<tr>
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<td>9.17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Newfields</td>
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<td>7.02</td>
<td>66.8</td>
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The Percent column indicates the estimated percentage of the town that is part of Exeter’s periphery (x100). The adjusted values and Population Density are adjusted for this.

### Exeter and Its Periphery, 2004

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<th>Towns</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Adjusted Population</th>
<th>Adjusted Area (sqmi)</th>
<th>Population Density</th>
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2.2 Methods, Field Work, Sources of Information, Description and Use

I chose to gain an understanding of how small towns and Main Streets used to work, and how they work today. I will discuss Main Street’s and Exeter’s role as a central place, changes in manufacturing and job locations, and changes in retail trade. I also got an understanding of what Exeter was like at three distinct periods of time.

In order to find out what Exeter was like in the past I went to the Historical Society. Besides books on local history, two major sources were Sanborn Maps and Reverse Directories. The historical society had one large book with a Sanborn Map of the entire CDP. This Sanborn map was updated every several years, and was done so by pasting paper over the old copy. It was possible to hold the map up to the light and see what was located where at different periods in history from the early 1900s to the mid 1930s. During this time period it was clear that Exeter had an active main street (Water Street) that contained retail and services for town and rural areas around it. There were several manufacturing areas in town, located adjacent to several neighborhoods on the River, or by the railroad tracks. Near these industrial areas and the commercial area of Water Street were neighborhoods that had various types of housing, small places to work, shops for food and other daily needs. These neighborhoods and all areas of the CDP had housing, workplaces, and lower order retail. There were also churches and other public buildings at prominent intersections, highly visible locations, or central areas in town. Exeter’s CDP was a series of living/working neighborhoods like Lebanon described earlier with Water Street having more higher order goods and services and the greatest variety and diversity of goods and services.
Another valuable source was a volume of reverse directories ranging from the 1800s to the 1970s. I used these to get a sample of what businesses were located on Water Street and other important roads at different periods of time.

Present day patterns were recorded by direct observation. Significant amounts of time were spent driving and mostly walking through different parts of town. Lists of the types of goods and services located on Water Street and other important streets were compiled and compared to lists from the past. I also took note of details like architecture types, and the number and age of people out and about. There was a constant automobile traffic through the Water Street area and other main roads through town, while there was very little bike or pedestrian activity. There were hardly any people out in any neighborhoods on summer weekdays or weekends. The only part of town with a fairly steady number of pedestrians was a quarter mile stretch of Water Street.

I took this sample of the types of activities that took place in Exeter’s CDP from the 1930s to present and compared it to the present situation. I checked to see if there was a notable shift in the type of businesses, goods, or services that were located in town, and got an understanding of the land uses in the periphery.

My most important source for information was combining several inter-related fields that are not often studied as one. Retail location, retail hierarchies, central place theories, urban-rural relationships, Smart Growth, New Urbanism, Sprawl, and Main Street preservation all have their own sets of literature with surprisingly little mixing. The literature review was nearly one and the same with methodology since different topics in the literature review had not been studied as a whole. It was necessary to find
parallels, differences, and gaps between these inter-related ideas in order to have a whole picture of the forces that affect Main Street.
Chapter 3
Literature Review

3.1 New Urbanism and Smart Growth vs. Sprawl

Recent development in the US has generally taken the form of low-density sprawl, which is what New Urbanism or Smart Growth is critical of. Some characteristics of sprawl are a separation of uses, poor interconnectivity, and an automobile scale. Each daily need, like housing, retail, and workplaces are strictly segregated in suburban and urban sprawl. There are subdivisions that contain nothing but housing, and often one specific type of housing per development. Separated from housing is the retail, which is often in a mall or strip mall. Separate from these are the workplaces. Workplaces are often office or industrial “parks” or other industrial areas. These shopping centers and work places are usually surrounded by acres of parking lots, too far from people’s homes to get there by walking, and densities are too low for transit. The automobile scale, and overall auto oriented environment are incompatible with neighborhood and community life. This environment generally creates a dependence on the automobile and is punishing on the natural environment in terms of land use and fossil fuel consumption. Federal, state, and local funding often subsidizes sprawl and new development, which encourages this form of growth and reduces incentives to restore existing neighborhoods and older development (Hayden, 2003).

In comparison to the reference to Lebanon, New Hampshire or a TND (Traditional Neighborhood Design) where everything is located in town, a suburbanite would live a very different life. He or she would drive to work, sometimes great distances, drive to shop, and any children would be bussed to school. Somebody who
was Kunstler’s age at the time he discovered Lebanon would be totally immobile and dependent on an adult with a driver’s license. Elderly residents without a driver’s license would have the same isolation. The auto dependency and reduction in human interaction is said to have a significant and often negative impact on society (Duany, 2000; Kunstler, 1993).

Alternative methods for development and different ways to “physically arrange our lives” have been considered by cities, communities, and planners. New Urbanism and Smart growth are now viable alternatives to sprawl. Master plans calling for a “human scale,” developing “a sense of place,” and creating a pedestrian environment have become increasingly common, and are present in Exeter’s Master Plan (2004). Instead of collector roads, parking lots, and separation of uses, needs of daily life are mixed in a network of roads at a higher density. Distances between places are far shorter due to this density and better connectivity. Both the automobile and walking are options but neither are necessary. Development is built at a human scale that allows people to walk from place to place in comfort and in an environment that is comfortable to them outside of their automobiles.

The New Urbanism has been evolving over the past decade or two and provides an alternative form of development from suburban and urban sprawl. The concept has come about by the work of numerous scholars and planners (Calthorpe, 1993; cnu.org, 2005; Duany, 2000). The goals, objectives, and forms of New Urbanism are compatible with many Main Streets today. New Urbanism has its own vision for places at a metropolitan scale right down to a street and building scale. The most applicable scale of New Urbanism to Main streets are at a neighborhood level. Two types of New Urbanist
developments, a Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND), and Transit Oriented Design (TOD) are particularly applicable to Main Street.

A TND was conceived and is based on traditional neighborhoods like Exeter. The founders of New Urbanism were inspired by historic neighborhoods like Beacon Hill in Boston, Charleston, South Carolina, and numerous small towns and Main Streets. Before WWII, most development took the form of towns like these. New Urbanism proposes that new development should take the form of compact real towns and neighborhoods like these instead of as sprawl, separated uses, and an automobile scale. TNDs provide housing, workplaces, retail, and public space all in one compact, walkable development. Downtown Exeter has a physical form similar to a TND, but the reality of the land uses located there do not allow it to function as a TND is intended.

A typical TND has a central public space in the form of a square or open space. There is a commercial core around this open space, which contains retail, workplaces, and attached housing. Mixed use buildings are common, where apartments, office space, and retail can share the same building, usually on different floors. The TND extends a five or ten minute walk from this central square. The surrounding blocks are housing, with the highest density closer to the center, and detached homes with lower densities further from the center. Densities are intended to be fairly high.

This form of development, and all New Urbanist developments, promote multiple modes of transportation. Walking is the primary mode of transportation within the TND, automobile use is an option, and public transit is often available. Architecture is also an important factor in New Urbanism. Styles that respect history, culture, and climate are encouraged, and monotony is discouraged.
A TOD is similar to a TND in that only the central area of the neighborhood has a transit stop. Exeter does have a transit station about a five minute walk from the center of town, but it should not be considered a TOD since the transit stop is not a defining factor in the town, and stops are also fairly infrequent.

Instead of a monotonous landscape, Smart Growth and New Urbanism promote human scale neighborhoods and cities are built to be unique and have character. Development practices have come full circle, from a mixed use neighborhood, to decentralization and sprawl, and more recently a trend back towards mixed uses and central places. All of these “new” goals are characteristics that our Historic Downtowns, including Exeter, once had.

### 3.2 Commerce in New Urbanism and Main Street

Main Street was once a part of a neighborhood, and the center of economic activity. Today, it is often either run-down or vacant, or prettied-up into a series of specialty shops promoting an image of an idealized history (Francaviglia, 1996). Instead of making Main Street look authentic, or creating a more nostalgic version of authenticity, it may be possible to morph Main Street into a true neighborhood similar to what once existed. It would have a healthy mix of residences, businesses and retail that people use on a daily basis.

Over the past few decades there has been a movement toward preserving historic Main Streets and the character of small rural downtowns (National Main Street Center, 2004). These downtowns are often threatened by the processes of decentralization, the
effects of sprawl, and a changing economy among other things (Jackson, 1987; Kunstler, 1993). These Main Streets are valued by the public, and efforts to preserve the local history and character have had varying degrees of success. Organizations created by citizens, politicians, and planners have sprung up to help save the historic structures and maintain the sense of history, sense of place, and small town life they offer. The National Main Street center and similar state level organizations provide guidelines, support and awareness in helping to keep these places part of our cultural landscape (National Main Street Center, 2004; New Hampshire Main Street Center, 2004).

These organizations focus on retail, business partnerships, “community” involvement, and tourism to preserve these areas, but do not consider using Main Street as part of a living working downtown. Historical societies have been fairly successful in saving structures of historical value, but do little to save or encourage a community or neighborhood to support it. Methods for downtown revitalization often focus on turning Main Street into a shopping mall, or making it a tourist attraction (Russell, 2002). These downtowns rarely become true neighborhoods with practical neighborhood businesses, and cannot meet most needs of daily life. Why not preserve downtowns by helping them resemble the real neighborhoods they once were?

The results of current policies have either failed to revive Main Street to its former glory, or created aesthetic downtowns that are no more than a mockery of the community they once were. The structures remain intact and are often embellished, but in truth it is no longer a traditional downtown. The most troubling part about this outcome is that this solution does nothing to combat the forces that made the downtown fail in the first place.
In my research I combine these two ideas of Smart Growth/New Urbanism with Main Street preservation. They have generally been viewed as separate entities, but the potential exists for a symbiotic relationship. It seems obvious that a method to revive “Downtown New England Character” would be to develop them into living working neighborhoods similar to what they once were. The current practice saves the material downtown by turning it into a shopping mall or tourist attraction. The neighborhood solution would solve several inter-related problems by saving the historic structures, creating a desired neighborhood, and arranging the needs of people’s daily lives in a way that combats decentralization and sprawl.

3.3 Past Views on Commercial Geography and Central Place Theory

In the past, the economics of Main Streets and small downtowns functioned far differently than they do today, and their role as a central place was also different. Main Street was successful through a rural-urban relationship that does not exist in the same way today. In the past, the periphery of my case study, Exeter, NH, was mainly agricultural and provided limited central goods and services to the people who lived there. Only the most basic needs (in terms of retail or services) were met in the rural periphery, and its population was considerably less than the towns and central places. The smaller centers and small towns in Exeter’s periphery were lower order centers that may have had small convenience stores, gas stations later in history, and small rural manufacturing plants. The periphery depended on the central place for goods and services, and the central place depended on its periphery for business and resources. The
periphery provided downtown Exeter with food products, wood products, leather, and other resources. Today, the needs of the periphery can be met in the periphery, and the activities that take place in the periphery have become very similar to the activities that occur in the central place.

Retail conforms to the spatial patterns of consumers. This “consumer orientation” is when the retail center conforms to the location of its market, and the accessibility to the market. According to Berry, only retail located centrally can attract trade from consumers who need to satisfy needs and also economize travel (Berry, 1988). Competing centers can succeed or fail depending on how competitive they are, and how well they can meet their customer’s needs. The ease of access or better or wider services can help a center work. During the settlement of the Midwest, trade centers emerged centrally around where the settlement was occurring. Later, those that were also county seats and grist mills were the most competitive because they provided the most services, and were the most convenient centers for the consumers. After that, those which provided the railroads became more dominant. As populations increased, the number of centers also increased, filling in the gaps between railroad stops. Automobiles later decreased the number of centers as farmers could bypass smaller centers on the way to the better-serving larger ones. This in concert with chain stores locating in larger centers weakened all but the largest centers. These centers were able to combine local centrality, political activity (county seats), railroads, the greatest variety and largest scale services and retail. These changing factors in technology and needs (like roads, grist mills, railroads, and automobiles) change the market economy, and influence the locations that
best serve the market. Maximum accessibility was the key to retail survival, and was the driving force for change.

A survey from 1934 asked farmers where they got specific goods (Berry, 1988). Lower order goods were obtained at the nearest center, usually a small one. They traveled further, to larger centers for higher order goods. People were willing to travel further to get to larger centers than smaller ones, and travel further for higher order goods and services. A similar study was done by Berry in the 1960s with similar results, only the hierarchy had changed slightly.

It is clear that numerous factors like technology, number and location of residents, and other benefits and boosters places have will determine the best place for retail to locate. While the changes that occurred at Exeter are not the same as the ones that occurred in the Midwest, the Midwest case illustrates how retail centers can be affected by different forces. Exeter has had its share of changes in accessibility and suitability for consumers, which has changed the types and locations of retail in Exeter and its periphery.

Exeter initially had a periphery that was served by the downtown. The periphery would provide Main Street with resources like wood products, leather products, and food. The residents of the periphery would travel to Exeter to conduct business, purchase items they needed, do banking, or many other activities. The activities that went on in town were not agricultural. This is a rural-urban relationship that is similar to the situation in the early Midwest.

This relationship and system began to break down through a series of changes beginning mainly in the 1950s. The advent of the automobile and post-war settlement
patterns have changed accessibility to retail. The once agricultural periphery became residential. Retail, according to the consumer orientation model, will follow its base to maximize access. By 2000, 4977 people lived in town, and I estimate Exeter’s periphery contained 8855 people and is growing much faster than the town. I suspect the number of services and employment places have the same pattern as the population figures. Retail followed its consumers to the periphery to obtain maximum accessibility. The former or apparent central place of downtown Exeter is not the center of activity; it is a center of a certain type of activity that will become clearer later.

The suburban periphery began to develop its own retail centers independent of the multi-purpose Main Street and downtown centers like Exeter. Retail first moved from Main Street to the edge of town, then moved further out into major road intersections, highway exits, and other places with good access to the growing suburban population. The periphery now has its sub-centers, which may or may not be called central places. It may be viewed as a series of separate uses spread across a region of rural residents. This periphery, with all its land uses can supply its own needs with sub-centers scattered across the countryside.

In Berry’s model (1988) he divides people into two categories, urban residents, and farmers. All retail occurred in urban areas. This study would not work today, because there is no fine line between urban and rural. Both rural and urban residents can shop in rural areas, which would not work in Berry’s model. The rural-suburban countryside has many land uses arranged in a complex manner that prohibit this simple categorization. Berry was able to create a hierarchy of centers by noting that higher order centers provided higher order goods. Urban residents looking for very high order goods
like furniture would need to leave their urban area for a larger one higher up the
hierarchy. Having a “category killer” retailer in a suburban area near a highway would
seriously affect Berry’s neat system of a hierarchy of central places. A suburban town
that is not really a central place could have a large chain furniture store at a highway
intersection, and make the town appear to be a higher order town when in fact it is a
suburban town with a grocery store and a large furniture chain. If people will drive a half
an hour to buy furniture, it does not necessarily need to be in a city anymore. A city’s
retail market area is now much more difficult to define. Conversely, retail centers for
residents are more difficult to define.

3.4 A Brief History of Retail, 1950s to Present

Before World War II, most retail was located downtown and on Main Street. This
arrangement fits Berry’s central place theory well. Larger towns have more and a wider
range of services and retail. By the 1950s, stores moved from Main Street to shopping
centers, following residential patterns. Real estate was less expensive in the suburban
areas, and as a result stores grew in size. A typical 10,000 square foot grocery store
downtown would translate to a 25,000 square foot store in a shopping center outside of
town. These 6-8 acre shopping centers were the retail standard from 1955-75, and they
were termed neighborhood shopping centers by retailers (White, 1996).

The next step was to larger shopping centers that were termed Community
centers. These areas served an entire town, and had about 20-30 acres of a wider variety
of stores, and larger stores. Over the years, local “Mom and Pop” stores from Main
Street followed in. These were small stores that were a little more specialized than the larger retail stores. These small shops paid more rent than the anchors, and comprised most of the profit for the community centers (White, 1996).

Over time, the small stores began to disappear, and were replaced by large specialty stores. These were called category killers, like Circuit City and Best Buy selling electronics, Home Depot or Lowe’s selling hardware and home products, and Barnes and Noble selling books. These stores sold products similar to those in the smaller shops, only were often able to do so at a lower price and larger volume.

Once the category killers came into play, the next largest center, the “power center” was created. It consisted of several different big box stores, and a variety of other retail, large and small. These were generally located at highway interchanges. These places had a wide variety of goods, and are able to draw people from far away. They were not located in any central place with an intent to serve any defined or specific market. Instead of central location, it thrived on accessibility to a large number of people, and a size large enough to draw people from a great distance. Large shopping malls and now these power centers became more economical and investments in them became more profitable in the 1950s when congress changed tax rules that “accelerated” their depreciation values (Gladwell, 2004). This gave large retail complexes an advantage over Main Street by making investment in them more profitable.

These power centers are a problem when Berry’s central place theory for retail is applied. These power centers are not cities, but instead are massive agglomerations of retail located on a highway, not in any particular city (White, 1996). These massive centers are 300,000 square feet or more, and serve 100,000 people or more. It is ironic
that retail that was once in a neighborhood on Main Street can now be combined into a massive complex that serves an entire region.

White goes on to explain that today shopping centers cannot be defined by neighborhood, community, and regional shopping centers. Community centers and Power centers are the only terms used to describe most retail today. Community centers serve a few towns, possibly the size of Exeter, and a Power Center would serve nearly the entire county. Small neighborhood shopping centers that are central to a local and specific market are increasingly rare today.

Main Street has adapted (or failed to adapt) to this by providing increasingly specialized retail on Main Street. Stores attempt to distinguish themselves as unique from the larger retail centers outside of town, and this is also seen as a development strategy (Morris, 1999; Robertson, 1999; Stone, 1995).

What forces drove these changes in shopping centers? They initially left Main Street to be closer to their consumers and maximize access. Retailers have a specific set of rules that allow them to locate their retail in a profitable location. They are not serving farmers who will make a trip to the most practical town, nor are they serving urban residents who live in a compact community or neighborhood. They are serving consumers who race across the region going about their daily business. Their locations reinforce the regionalization of the area by fitting themselves into this mobile lifestyle.

In order to attract the most customers, shopping centers actually create their own central places. They need to have an “appropriate critical mass” where the center will be big enough to “draw the traffic necessary to make it successful” (White, 1996). They are not central to any specific market, but draw a share of people from a wider market. The
retail centers are creating their own demand by providing a collection of retail. They are looking for opportunities to make new central places for retail, even though they are central to no specific market. This may put a competing retail center that is less adaptable or disadvantaged out of business. They attempt to improve access to people who are traveling across the region conducting daily business. In Berry (1988), and Borchert and Adams’ model (1963), retail locates at a central gathering place (a city or town) where people gather for all of their needs. Accessibility is maximized because the land use has only rural farmers on the outskirts, and neighborhoods in a compact town. Since this is clearly no longer the case, retail has followed and conformed to current land use trends.

Retail will not do well on Main Street if it no longer maximizes accessibility, even if it is a central location. In order to return retail to Main Street, it may be better to change other land uses so that Main Street is the most accessible place. The New Urbanism can be applicable here. Big box retail cannot be blamed for suburban sprawl, our residential and workplace patterns nearly dictate it. Retail will return to Main Street when everything else goes with it, and development that fits a New Urbanism or Smart Growth model may take it a step closer.

3.5 Downtown Core Commercial areas, Retail Location and Land Use Theories

If a model of Main Street as a living/working neighborhood is similar to the vision of the New Urbanism, the inner workings of New Urbanist developments, like TNDs (traditional neighborhood developments) are a good place to look. One of the
main characteristics of the New Urbanism is how their centers are the center for commercial and retail activity. In Exeter and towns like it, Main Street is the center of commercial activity and retail trade, in theory at least. Two models of the New Urbanism, TNDs and TODs (transit oriented design) can be analyzed to see how well their concept fits existing models of land use theory, central place theory, and retail trade theory.

Banai (1997) did a study on TNDs and TODs to see how well these developments fit existing theories, models, and conventional wisdom with “special attention to the downtown core.” Are the core areas of TNDs and TODs functioning as planned? Do their assumptions of how their developments will work hold true? Or does it go against the current wisdom? He concluded that old theories of land use and retail trade (which he refers to as “old” urbanism) do support “certain location, land use and space-economic features of new urbanism.” For the most part, New Urbanism does not cast away conventional wisdom, but there are retail location theories and practices that cannot be applied.

At a small scale, TODs and TNDs fit a concentric zone theory for cities. There is a CBD of sorts in the center, and land use gets less intensive and less dense as you move away from the center. The center serves the entire market surrounding it. Housing is more prominent at the outer rings. The bid-rent theory also fits. The land is the most valuable at the center, but generally decreases as you move away from the center. Since these New Urbanist developments are modeled after towns like Exeter which originally fit this model fairly well, it is not surprising that they hold true.
The concentric zone model was modified to account for transportation axis and multiple centers with the sectoral and multinucleated theory. Ironically, the existence of multiple centers and regional transportation have posed a challenge to New Urbanism. Automobile dependency, job-housing imbalance, and commuting to work beyond the community boundaries are problems that promoters of the New Urbanism must face. This reality of a regional system in a metropolitan region causes problems for an ideal TND or TOD. Each center is not independent of the others, even in a network of TODs and TNDs.

As a region the central places in these TND and TOD developments can be hierarchical, depending on size and main function. This model fits the idea of a “retail hierarchy.” It can be argued that the hierarchy resembles Christaller’s example in rural Iowa. The old models for central places may apply to TNDs and TODs better than they do for present day sprawl and decentralization. TNDs and TODs more closely resemble pre-sprawl development.

A significant problem with the ideals of New Urbanism is how the retail centers will work. New urbanism dictates a new type of retail theory, which has some similarities, but also some major differences to current retail location theory, and from pre sprawl retail theory. The current theory is known as the principle of minimum differentiation, or PMD (figure 4).

One problem is that New Urbanism forces a social optimum, instead of the more typical market optimum location. Brown (1992) explains these two phenomena with an example of two ice cream vendors at a beach. If the two vendors locate next to each other at the center of the beach, it is a market optimum. Each vendor shares half of the
entire market. This is what is typically expected according to the literature, since it creates less risk and stability in competition. If the vendors were to locate at the quartiles of the beach, each vendor would serve everybody in half of the market. The beach would be divided in half, and people at each half would go to their vendor. This would be a social optimum. By forcing retail to locate at certain centers, TNDs dictate what the market should be, and is thus a social optimum. Retail at the center of a TND would serve everybody in that TND, but not other TNDs.

Figure 4

![THE PRINCIPLE OF MINIMUM DIFFERENTIATION](image)

Figure from Brown (1992)
According to the PMD theory, and the typical system, retail is more stable, and risk for the retailer is reduced in a market optimum situation (see Figure 4). A market optimum situation results in clustering of retail. Dictating retail markets through New Urbanist zoning creates a new environment for retailers. If this is not done effectively retailing will not adapt to the New Urbanist model, and will locate in places that increase their market size and undermine central commercial centers.

Accessibility has a lot to do with market and social optimum locations, but it gets complicated because of changes in scale (TND or regional scale). Part of the principle of minimum differentiation (PMD) theory says that there is “special accessibility to complementary economic activities, rather than general accessibility to the entire market.” This statement may appear to contradict the statement of the market and social optimum, but the key is the scale of the area involved. Typically, retail will cluster complementary retail markets which require special access. It is not directly accessible to any specific group, so it does not survive through accessibility to a specific market. It survives and has reduced risk because of the agglomeration and concentration of compatible goods that are being sold to no specific market. It has special access to the entire market of the region, but locally, it is not the place to shop in the TND. This theory can be seen in the large “power centers” described earlier, where a destination is created and will take a chunk of an entire region-wide market.

In the case of a TND and in central place theory, the market does not rely on complementary economic activities or concentration, but instead survives because of its general accessibility to its specific and entire market. Berry (1988) stated that it
economizes travel. In this case, the market is the entire TND. This is the case with the social optimum, where beachgoers on one side of the beach go to their vendor. All residents of that TND will go to their center for their retail needs. If there is a “power center” shopping center outside of the TND, it will compete with retail at the center of the TND. Retail at the center of the TND will lose its ability to be the center of a specific market. The two different types of retail locations and the forces that make them work are not compatible.

Retailers will compete with one another for locations that will give them a larger market share. The PMD says the outcome of this dynamic search for a larger market share will result in clustering of retail outlets, again, visible in Figure 4. In the case of the ice cream vendors, they will naturally come together at the center as is the case with the market optimum. In the real world, they will likely produce “power centers.” These power centers do not economize travel. The principles of the New Urbanism turn this theory upside down by dictating retail location. The old method for retail location does not work with New Urbanism.

One of the outcomes of the PMD is clustering. The PMD can help explain why politics, religion and other aspects of life cluster, or become more similar (Brown, 1992). The linear figure above (Figure 4) could be conceptualized in space, or in an idea like left or right bias in a political election. In the case of town planning, it can be applied to all types of activities that take place in the landscape, and may be a reinforcing factor for separation of uses. Medical parks, office parks, retail location could all have origins from this concept. If Main Street develops a niche, it will serve this niche instead of having a general central place function for all types of needs. Similar activities and business types
may locate on Main Street, and naturally cluster there. People traveling to Main Street or doing business there are likely there to fulfill these specific clustered activities. This “natural” force for clustering of similar uses might be the most economical for present day settlement and transportation patterns, but is not conducive for neighborhood life. Different settlement and transportation patterns could allow, encourage, or dictate a different system or theory to take hold besides the PMD. That model would more closely resemble Berry’s model. It would function and economize travel only if all land uses (or daily needs), including retail, are located in a central place.

There are certain conditions of what Banai calls the “old” urbanism that make the PMD hold true. In the case of New Urbanism, the rules have changed and it is unclear whether it is only a matter of time, and not just space, that a new system develops. Change will be even more difficult if practices of “old” urbanism continue to exist and be in competition with different ideas. Banai did not find any specific evidence suggesting a fatal flaw in the New Urbanism. It appears that current theories and practices of retail and central places need to be adapted to the new situation. In the case of areas that have a New Urbanist landscape, one could consider the possibility that our development theories have changed, but our practices and conventional wisdom on retail location and clustering have not kept pace.

The same market forces that keep retail from centralizing in TNDs and TODs are the same forces which inhibit Main Street. As long as these practices of retail location continue to exist as the norm, Exeter will probably not be able to function as a neighborhood similar to that of a TND. These same forces that are holding TND and TOD centers back are also keeping Main Streets and downtowns from being true
commercial and retail centers. A compact town like Exeter surrounded by sprawl will likely feel these forces even stronger than a TND or TOD surrounded by similar settlements and with a less automobile dependent environment.

Also, PMD theory stating that similar or complementary retail will cluster is also having an effect on Main Street. It contributes to homogeneity in retail location or location of anything, instead of the diversity needed for a living/working neighborhood. It also helps dictate suburban retail types serving the region (like a power center) instead of having general retail serving a specific area of town. In many cases, as is the case with Exeter, Main Street has conformed to this system by creating its own cluster of similar or complementary retail. They are niche markets, tourism, and specialty goods on Main Street.

Models of central place theory, just like those Berry discusses, state that only retail located centrally can attract trade from consumers who need to satisfy needs and also economize travel (Berry, 1988). This suggests a social optimum, where retail is located centrally around a specific market. Examples like Brush’s (1955) rural service centers and service areas in Wisconsin and England do not exist in such simple form in today’s landscape. PMD theory and current clustering of similar activities suggest otherwise. The conglomeration of complementary retail activities is what draws people, reduces risk, and determines location for activities. Main Street is not an all encompassing service center. Retail does not have a specific market, but instead shares a region wide market for a specific use.

Conventional wisdom about retail location works against goals for New Urbanism, and works against Main Streets as central commercial areas. Conventional
retail location works through the clustering of similar or complementary markets to a general market, not locating general retail to a specific local market. This is a major barrier in providing a diverse mix of land uses on Main Street.

3.6 Statement of problem and questions

When I say “living working” neighborhoods or downtowns I am referring to places (real neighborhoods) where people can live, work, shop and carry out most aspects of their daily lives. Kunstler’s description of Lebanon, New Hampshire would be an example of a “living working” Main Street. Current methods for preserving downtowns and the economics of retail location and other location do not promote mixed uses needed for success. This mix of land uses and population center near downtown are key points to my definition of “living working” neighborhoods and downtowns. In a “living working” neighborhood, most needs of daily life can be met on and around Main Street, or in neighborhoods in small towns. Main Streets in the past were centers of economic activity, and provided all types of needs, and were a place to live for a large percentage of non-farmers. This cannot be said of most Main Streets today, where you are just as likely to be able to buy a $40 ornamental candle as a gallon of milk. You will probably find a classy restaurant to eat at, but it is unlikely your workplace will consider locating there. You may also be able to find a small expensive condominium or “artist loft,” but forget trying to find housing suitable for a family.

Changes in retail structure and changes in the local economy cause Main Street to have a reduced role in present day society. Main Street is no longer the center of
economic activity that serves needs for people living in town and in the region. After understanding the forces that created and then weakened Main Street, it is possible to look into what Main Street is today, and to search for a possibility of living/working neighborhoods to exist today and in the future.

The New Urbanism and Main Street/Downtown preservation methods are very similar and can benefit each other. New Urbanism is a method for development and planning that incorporates mixed uses, compact/dense settlement, a human scale, a sense of community, and a respect for history, culture and geography (Congress for the New Urbanism, 2004). Each of these principles exist in and are important to neighborhoods in and around Main Street and the small downtowns associated with them. They are also typical characteristics our downtowns once had. Both Main Street preservation and New Urbanism strive to stop monotonous sprawl and be places of value and dignity. New Urbanism can bring neighborhoods with actual people and families living in them. These residents will supplement the customer base for nearby retail (practical retail) and businesses (workplaces and practical services) downtown. Ironically, Main Street programs have a goal to promote a “sense of community,” but do not have any goal to bring more residents downtown. They also have no goal to provide daily needs, services and land uses. How can there be a community if nobody lives there and daily activities cannot be carried out there? You may end up with an aesthetic skeleton instead of a community.

Forces that have worked against these neighborhoods and Main Street’s role as an economic center were identified in the Literature Review. The Rural-Urban relationship, suburban sprawl, forces for competing central places, and retail location strategies have
all changed since Main Streets were neighborhoods and economic centers. These changes have had an effect on Main Street and have shaped Main Street’s present state.
Chapter 4

Results

Decentralization and changes in retail in Exeter was documented from the 1910s to the present. These changes that took place in Exeter are outlined here, then the theory from the literature review is used to help explain, clarify, and verify the processes that took place in Exeter. Inferences drawn from the literature can be verified on the ground in Exeter. Exeter of the past fit old central place theories, and now does not. Retail structure has changed, and this process can be documented in Exeter. The niche markets and niche units that exist on Main Street today help confirm and explain Exeter’s role as a central place and as a living working neighborhood. Causes of the niche markets and downtown Exeter’s relative prosperity are also explained. Understanding the processes of change in downtown Exeter today is the first step in altering the course of Water Street’s, or any Main Street’s future as a neighborhood and economic center.

4.1 Exeter, New Hampshire 1910s-present: decentralization and changes from functioning neighborhoods to regionalization

1910s-30s

From the 1910s through the 1930s Exeter was made up of a series of neighborhoods containing housing, manufacturing, and lower order services. The Sanborn maps dating from this time clearly show distinct neighborhoods around green spaces and adjacent to one or more large manufacturing plants. There were small businesses and small retail mixed in these neighborhoods. There were neighborhoods near the Park Street Common, near the railroad on Lincoln Street, and by the factories on
Front Street. There was also a neighborhood across the Swampscott and Exeter Rivers behind the Exeter Manufacturing plant. There was a central business district on Water Street containing retail, services, businesses, and housing. There was also Philip’s Exeter Academy, a center of activity in the town. These Sanborn maps show small manufacturing plants located around the railroad tracks in the Lincoln Street area, the Front Street area, and by the plant across from the Swampscott River from downtown, and are all adjacent to or between identifiable neighborhoods. These manufacturing plants are likely where most of the town’s residents worked. The raw materials and resources needed for these manufacturing plants were generally provided by the rural periphery that the town served.

There were lower order services located around these plants, including corner grocery stores, shoe stores, and other shops and workplaces. These can be noted on the Sanborn maps from the era. Also included in the mix were churches and other public and civic institutions. Surrounding and among these activities were housing and residential areas. These three land uses were located in close proximity or in the same neighborhood, and are three key ingredients in order to have a localized neighborhood. Each neighborhood has housing for a population base, manufacturing and shops for employment, and shops and stores for a retail base. These are three key ingredients that are used on a regular basis and are required for a living/working neighborhood. They were all present in small areas throughout the town.

The periphery had some agriculture, but it was fairly limited. Rural manufacturing was taking place, and there was already a significant amount of commuting in this area (Hypes, 1936). Population densities in the rural areas outside of
town were very low. Agriculture had been on the decline for the past few decades, but the land use was still mainly agricultural at this time.

**1950s-70s**

By the 1950s this system began to break down. There were fewer manufacturing centers in the town, the railroad did not operate as often as it once did, and the beginnings of suburban sprawl have begun to have an effect (Reverse Directories, Bell, 1990). Most of the businesses on Water Street remained, but the retail and housing began to shift. Grocery stores began to move to the outskirts of town, mainly on Portsmouth Ave. Neighborhood stores were no longer as important to local residents. People had the option of getting goods in “combined trips” as they traveled around town and around the region. These larger stores outside of town were often able to have lower prices than the smaller local ones. Also, new housing has begun to appear in what was once farmland or forest on the rural periphery. All three of these ingredients for daily life (workplaces, retail and services, and housing) have been compromised, and distances between them have increased. With the availability of the automobile, neighborhood life (living, working, and shopping in one neighborhood) was no longer a requirement, and sprawl is a new and competing alternative. While some basic ingredients for a neighborhood appear to still be intact at this time, alternatives to neighborhood life and other pull factors are breaking down functioning neighborhoods of twenty or more years ago.

Later in the 1970s, most of the small manufacturing plants have gone, but were replaced with fewer, larger plants in the outskirts (Bell, 1990). The Sylvania plant is a perfect example of this. It is a massive complex well outside the CDP with large parking
lots. This complex is isolated from any neighborhood, and the only reasonable way to get there is by car. Workers are forced to not only leave their neighborhood, but to drive completely outside of town. Manufacturing as a whole is in decline during this time, and more jobs are in the service sector.

Pease Air Force Base was also built around this time, and it employed many of Exeter’s residents (Bell, 1990). Because it was located in an adjacent town, this required a commute by car. Shopping malls in the Portsmouth area (a nearby small city and higher order center) also opened up. This marks a change to a regional economy. Where once most needs could be met in a single neighborhood or at least in the CDP, now people travel from town to town, from center to center, and throughout the periphery. A neighborhood at this time may only be a social or perceived entity, and not serve a function of providing the needs for daily life as it had a few decades ago.

If people are living in Exeter and working in a neighboring town, a central retail location is not necessary if employees are regularly traveling across a region. Retailers begin to realize that a central location is not as important, but accessibility and being able to draw travelers is more important.

Another key difference from decades past is the development in the periphery. The rural areas around town provided materials needed for manufacturing. Leather, wood products, and some food products were among them, and it seems they are no longer as important at this time as they were in previous decades. Now, urban and neighborhood activities are occurring in the periphery. This shows the change in the rural-urban relationship mentioned earlier.
Present

In recent years, big box retail and grocery stores have appeared on Portsmouth Ave, and in adjacent towns. Industrial parks continue to appear on the fringes of town by the highway, as zoning places them. Rural roads become developed with homes, and cul-de-sacs and housing developments spread across the rural surroundings. The shift from functioning neighborhoods to regional networks of life is complete.

Amid all of this travel and regional scaled lifestyle are the remnants of the neighborhoods of the past. The small CBD of Water Street is still intact. The neighborhoods adjacent to it are there, but provide a much smaller percentage of the region’s population, provide few jobs, and little retail.

A quick glance at the Water Street area suggests all the ingredients for a neighborhood exist, and they do to an extent. There are residences, but a very small number of them in proportion to the rural suburbs. There are workplaces, but few compared to the industrial and office parks on the outside of town. There is retail, but it is generally not practical for everyday needs. The changes in retail structure make the small shops and stores downtown higher order goods than they once were. People who live in this area do not use these stores for their needs; they go to the supermarket just like everybody else. The people who use the stores in this neighborhood-like area are the same people who are racing across the region for all of their needs. The ingredients for daily life are arranged in the form of a neighborhood, but it is being used as a part of a regional system of workplaces, residential areas, and specialized retail places. The changes in retail trade have made the retail in town different from the practical retail of the past.
The residents in the neighborhoods on and adjacent to Water Street are only a small proportion of the people living in the region. Their numbers are not enough to make a significant difference in the location of retail. Retail will conform to the spatial pattern of its consumers, and this proportionately small group of people will not have a large influence on where retail will locate.

Workplaces do exist on Water Street, but they too are only a small proportion compared to the industrial parks and other workplaces scattered throughout the countryside and at the edge of town. Since the employees are also usually far-flung across the region, in most cases people cannot walk or ride a bike to these workplaces. Workers also may not be able to do their business in town since a proportionately small number of other businesses are located there.

Along with the remnant Water Street area are the remnant neighborhoods. Many still have a clear center defined by road intersections, schools, or green spaces. There are still corner stores, residences and small work places. The people who live in these neighborhoods are not served by their neighborhood, but instead use the region-wide array of workplaces and retail that people in the rural periphery use. People who live outside this area may use the retail or workplaces in the neighborhood just as they use many others region-wide. The neighborhood is part of the regional society even though it takes the shape of the functioning neighborhood it was developed for. In terms of being able to live an urban, community life in Exeter (or small town life) the area is no longer self-sufficient. Any residents or workplaces depend on outside forces, and regional forces much more than they have in the past.
4.2 Retail Central Place Theory Then and Now

In the literature review it was determined that Main Street is no longer a retail center because it no longer maximizes accessibility. As a result, Exeter, once the central place for nearly all needs, simply becomes another niche in a region-wide network of goods and services. The centers are no longer needed as a practical central place because the periphery can take care of itself. Instead of agriculture in the periphery and most other needs in the center, the periphery contains similar land uses in a drastically different form. Although Main Street is no longer needed as a practical central place for most needs, it has a separate function and a different type of central place. The center serves everybody, from the people who live there to the rural periphery, but it is only a center for specific types of activities. It is another stop in a whirlwind of activities spread across the region. In addition to its practical function, it is still a cultural center that people recognize, and a remnant from the past.

The idea of the periphery “taking care of itself” is explained by the PMD (principle of minimum differentiation.) The current practice of retail (and possibly other activities) do not survive by being central to a specific population. They are not at the center of a specific market as is the case with retail (or jobs) centrally located on Main Street. PMD and current practices work by clustering similar goods and providing a share of access to the entire market. Their advantage is not central location, but is in its ability to “draw” people in. Locations outside of any specific central place draw people from all areas across the region, or from combined trips.
Another way to view the relationship is by analyzing the changes in the economy in the past decades. Brush discusses “urban activities unrelated to the surrounding rural villages” when talking about small towns in the 1920s (Brush, 1955). Without agriculture being the primary activity in the periphery, nearly all activities today are what Brush called “urban activities.” Instead of an inter-dependent relationship between two entirely different systems, former central places are now just one small part of a region-wide system of goods and services. Main Street is a central place only for certain specific activities that are used by people across the region. The type of services served will be discussed later.

Besides retail and business services, the urban-rural periphery has changed because of the resources they provide. There were several lumber yards, shingle plants, and shoe factories in Exeter that were supplied by forests and farms from the periphery. Food was also supplied by nearby farms, and this trade occurred in the central place. There was a farmers market on a regular basis on Front Street at the edge of town where goods were traded. This type of trade is only minimal today as the leather, wood, and food products have been replaced by rural residents. In this way too the center has become less important.

Exeter was also a trade area along the railroad. Products being shipped came through town on their way to somewhere else. This provided more activity and more jobs. Today, the interstate highway system is on the outskirts of town, and Exeter is no longer important in that regard. Many of the manufacturing plants that once used the railroad moved to the periphery where they had better access to the highway, and better truck access. The railroad has a new purpose today. It is a commuter rail from Portland.
Maine to Boston Massachusetts. This might be a force that helps reverse the current
decentralization trend, but the railroad stop is by no means a defining characteristic of the
town. Most users of the train drive in and park in the large parking lot. These people
could be coming from anywhere, not necessarily from downtown. Given the small
number of stops on the route to Portland or Boston and their distance, and price of a
ticket, it is unlikely that Exeter will ever resemble a TOD, or transit oriented design. The
nature of the transit station among other things would need to change.

4.3 Changes in Retail Structure, Niche Markets, and Retail on Main Street

The type of center that Main Street and small towns are today can be explained by
changes in retail structure. Past articles about retail trade and central places found that
smaller centers contained a certain level of services and higher order towns had a wider
variety of services that become more specialized, but also include the lowest level
services (Berry, 1988; Borchert and Adams, 1963). A small central place will have a gas
station, and a grocery/convenience store. Higher up the ladder will have a bank, drug
store and restaurants. Above that will be camera shops, sporting goods and a florist, with
furniture near the top. The higher order the good or service, the further people are willing
to travel for them, and the more people are needed to support it. The higher order the
center, the larger the service area is. Lower order goods can usually be found more
locally. Each market had a defined, central marketplace. I find that today, these bottom
level services/basic needs/daily needs like groceries, drug stores, and laundry mats do not
exist on Main Street to the extent they did in the past. Main Street mostly consists of
higher order services, specialty shops, and I would even call them niche units. Today, the rural periphery contains big box retail and grocery stores which is where most of the lower and middle order services are found.

A major reason for the niche markets downtown and lack of daily needs and lower order goods is the “Wal-Mart effect.” Wal-Mart (and large retail centers) sell basically everything, and cover a wide range of retail types that used to be divided up into different types of stores. A supermarket can have a meat shop and a bakery in it. This is where people go for baked goods and meat. Therefore, any real bakery or meat store (on Main Street) becomes a higher order service than it was in the past. The meats or baked goods they provide have to be different from what a supermarket provides, and serve a different market than simply people who want baked goods or meat. It became a niche unit either by adaptation, or became a niche unit because people began to perceive it to be a niche unit instead of a place to get baked goods or meat.

In some cases, shops need to become extremely specialized. Big-box sporting goods stores like Sports Authority have all but eliminated “mom and pop” sporting goods stores. Any sporting goods store on Main Street is usually as narrow as a bicycle shop (there are two on or near Main Street in Exeter) rock climbing shops, golf stores, or fly-fishing shops. The bicycle shops are narrowed even further, as different shops sell family oriented bicycles or various types of high end bicycles for avid cyclists. These stores are so specialized that they do not directly compete with the big box retail stores. The irony is that people are willing to travel further for higher order goods, and these high order goods are not conducive to neighborhood life. Niche markets can survive without the best accessibility because they are destination markets, and Main Street is no longer the
most accessible location for consumers. The users of these highly specialized stores are usually not in the neighborhood, but often drive in from great distances or are tourists. Niche units are nearly the opposite of daily needs units that would serve a neighborhood.

Another example of changes in the hierarchy is that you can buy a camera at Wal-Mart, or you can go to a camera shop/photo shop. The camera shop on Main Street is a different type of place today. It became a higher order specialty place now that Wal-Mart is a good place for most people to get their cameras and film. A different group of people will need camera shop caliber cameras than Wal-Mart caliber cameras. The camera shop on Water Street in Exeter is more of a photo studio than a camera shop. Looking in the window, you see professional photography equipment, along with professional photographers inside. This is not a place to buy a disposable camera or a cheap pack of film. The camera shop is now more of a specialty item higher up on the hierarchy because Wal-Mart can serve as the camera shop of old for most consumers. Wal-Mart provides cheap, high volume developing, and a variety of cheap cameras, but no expertise. The camera shop on Main Street survives because it has specialized and is no longer in direct competition with large retailers. Wal-Mart differs from older department stores on Main Street in its scope and volume. Wal-Mart has become a standard for shopping, and dominates other forms of retail because of its sheer size and recognition from consumers.

Specialization is often cited as a method in handbooks and guides explaining how to compete with big box retail (Morris, 1999; Robertson, 1999; Stone, 1995). The problem with this is that anybody living in the “neighborhood” on Main Street does not
have access to a lower order photo shop, but would be forced to use a higher order service or good, or would need to travel outside of their neighborhood for their needs.

In comparing the services Exeter provided in the past to those of today, it is necessary to bear this in mind. A bakery then is much different than a bakery now. Even though the category of business hasn’t changed, their purpose may be very different. This helps explain why Main Street isn’t a real neighborhood, or cannot easily be used for practical, daily uses. The ingredients may appear to be there, but it is not the same as it once was. This is especially true when one considers the fact that the users of these niche markets are often in-migrants who have moved into the suburbs, not people who have historically lived in the neighborhood (Vias 2004). The population growth in the area created the demand for these stores on Main Street, and this will be discussed further in the next section. Water Street and other Main Streets, with their historic feel, attractive architecture, and comfortable, aesthetic environment often attract tourists. Tourism likely encourages niche markets and increases their customer base.

4.4 Niche Markets helping Main Street

The changing demographics that go along with suburbanization and growth in the rural periphery of a small Main Street often create the demand for these unique niches (Vias, 2004). This new market created by the new suburbanites is often what keeps some rural downtowns thriving, while others are abandoned. Vias explains how small towns can be put into three categories in terms of retail. The “Loser” category has a declining population and economy, low income levels, is more rural, and as a result all retail
declines. It declines in volume and in number of stores. The second category “Coping,” has marginal population growth, a more diversified economy, moderate income, and “Growth-Retail Switching.” In this case, employment and sales in retail go up, but the number of stores declines. This is a result of big box retail moving in and possibly helping the local economy, but smaller stores often on Main Street suffer. The third category is the “Winner.” These towns have a growing population and economy. The economy is often based on services or recreation (instead of declining agriculture in the first category), with a lot of growth in retail. Employment goes up, the scale of stores goes up, and the number of stores also goes up. These towns are feeling the effects of big box stores challenging downtown, but the new in-migrants and changing economy provides a market for a “niche” marketplace with different types of retail that can often survive on Main Street. Exeter would fit into this category. The big box retail did not put Main Street out of business; it simply forced it to change. The regional growth in the area created the demand for a new purpose on Main Street. That purpose was for a cultural, historic, aesthetic central place, and niche markets that may not have been necessary or desired in the past.

I made this discovery by gathering a list of services that were found on Water Street in the fifties, and did a survey on a summer day in 2004, and compared the lists (Figure 5). The types of services available do change. It appears that some of the larger stores in the fifties like the drug store and retail/hardware stores have been divided into one or more smaller stores. There are more lower order goods and services on Water Street in the 1950s, and the seemingly low order goods on Water Street today are higher than they may appear. The bakery, the deli, the photo studio, and the hat store are very
unique places, and this is clear when you view them from the sidewalk. There is no place like it in Wal-Mart. Even the restaurants and taverns are expensive, and serve cuisine for long sit-down meals, and are not meant for a quick bite to eat. The words “deli” or “tavern” may provoke a sense of nostalgia for a deli or tavern of old, but these places are decidedly different.

Figure 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Water Street 1952-54</th>
<th>Water Street 2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vacant</td>
<td>Real Estate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grocery</td>
<td>Bakery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radios &amp; electric appliance</td>
<td>Attny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacant</td>
<td>ASI Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthodontist</td>
<td>Copy store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacant</td>
<td>Eyesight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's Apparel</td>
<td>Law office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoe Stores</td>
<td>Hair salon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VFW</td>
<td>Photo studio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photoshop</td>
<td>Real Estate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watch shop</td>
<td>Bike Shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td>Law office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dentist</td>
<td>architects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPA</td>
<td>small business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Bank</td>
<td>Clothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atty at Law</td>
<td>Nike outlet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atty at Law</td>
<td>Women's clothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardware, plumbing, heating</td>
<td>Jewelers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dentist</td>
<td>Condos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Am. Red Cross</td>
<td>office space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beauty Salon</td>
<td>Classy deli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>retail/Druggist/Stationary/Stationary/wallpaper/</td>
<td>tavern (restaurant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoe Store</td>
<td>hat store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atty at Law</td>
<td>renovations/improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Town offices</td>
<td>renovations/improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurance Bank</td>
<td>office space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dry goods</td>
<td>Investments</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hair salon</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>fancy gift shop</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>accountant office</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bookstore</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This chart is a list of services located along the same stretch of Water Street in the fifties and 2004. There were residences on the Street in 1952-54, however they are not listed. Today nearly all residents are in condominiums. (Source- Reverse directory 1952-54)
The list of services from the 50s is not drastically different from today. The only
obvious differences are the grocery store, hardware store, retail and druggist, and the dry
goods store in the 1950s. These are lower order retail units that are not present today.
Also, the “radios and electric appliance” and television stores would not be typical things
to find on Main Street today. Televisions and electronics are higher order goods, and
their location in a central place in a fairly high order center is understandable for the
1950s. These higher order goods today are located often in “category killers” like Best
Buy or Circuit City far from the town’s center. A good like a TV does not fit with the
niche units on Main Street today, and would not contribute to an “agglomeration of
similar goods” needed to draw people to downtown.

The presence of a bookstore on Water Street today is unique, since it has survived
the competition of category killer bookstores like Barnes and Noble. This may have
survived because pedestrians walking down the sidewalk often stop in to browse around
and flip through books. It is an activity that is fairly compatible with the other activities
going on, and fits the relaxed touristy atmosphere. Also, this particular bookstore is
divided in two, with one section entirely devoted to children’s books. This factor makes
it unique, and is also a desirable store for an important demographic to the growing
suburbs around Exeter: young couples starting families. If it were not for the growth in
the area, this store would probably not survive.
4.5 A Lasting Sense of Place

While there are plenty of trends that undermine the importance of Main Streets and Water Street as a central place, there are also significant forces that hold them together. The neighborhood may still serve as a social entity for its residences. Churches, schools and civic institutions exist there, and there is likely a sense of community in these places. If these civic institutions like churches and schools are used mainly by the residents of the neighborhood, and not solely by outsiders in the region-wide network of activities, then this is a lasting characteristic of a neighborhood.

The residents that live in the rural periphery will also likely have an attachment to town. The strong support the town gives to maintaining the “historic character” and keeping a “vibrant downtown” is evidence of this. The hundreds of cars parked within a quarter mile of any church in town every Sunday is also evidence of a sense of community. People from outside of town drive to the center to worship and be a member of a community.

In an interview with the owner of a hardware store on Main Street in Plymouth, New Hampshire, the owner explains how he needed to adapt when Wal-Mart came to town (Peirce, 2004). He explained how he needs to have specialized hardware, good service, and a special connection to residents in town. As part of a strategy to stay in business, (and as a concerned citizen) the owner became involved in the community, making sure Main Street and downtown is a cultural center that the community recognizes, and that it remains a center (or destination) separate from the big-box retail destinations outside of town. He helped with the efforts to keep the post office downtown, keep churches active, and town government centered on the common on Main
Street. He also helps organize festivals and events on Main Street and discusses work with Main Street Programs. It is obvious he reached beyond the local neighborhoods and went to people living in the rural areas outside of town and in neighboring small towns. It didn’t seem to matter to him where these people lived, as long as they were part of the community. Despite the fact that Main Street may not be the center for economic activity, or even daily life, it is still a center of community in the minds of nearby residents.

The store owner’s adaptation went beyond economics and needed to reach something deeper. Francaviglia (1996) may have explained it well when he said Main Street “is more than economic: Main Street is both functional and aesthetic in that design is related to deeply held values about the way space should be arranged and how people should relate to it and to each other.” I am sure the owner of this hardware store would agree that these deeply held values about what Main Street should be are part of what keeps him in business, and keeps downtown alive.
Chapter 5
Conclusion

5.1 Summary and Conclusions

What does this mean for Main Street? It means that the services provided there are becoming more and more specialized, and as a result it is difficult for them to function as a neighborhood like they did in the past. They are totally different places because of this change in retail structure and retail location. They do not serve the periphery for daily needs, and few people live there in proportion to the past. If people do live and shop there, they have to meet their daily needs in specialty shops. It is no surprise these Main Streets are not central places as they were in the past. It is also no surprise few people live, work, and shop there. The economics of the place was not meant to serve them for anything but the more specialized needs. You may be more likely to find a professional photographer and a wedding cake than a cheap pack of film and a loaf of bread. You may have fine dining, but may not be able to get a quick bite to eat.

Exeter has gone through a transition from a group of living, working neighborhoods to part of a regional network of activities. Main Street is no longer an all encompassing central place, and is no longer the center of economic activity and retail. It is a central place for only specific goods and services, like niche markets, tourism, and community identity. The people who go to Main Street and use it are not only residents of nearby neighborhoods, but are people who are traveling across the region for all of their needs. Residents of Main Street and adjacent neighborhoods use Main Street in the
same way as those who live further away. They travel across the region just like
everybody else, and they use Main Street for the same reasons and in the same way as
everybody else. Main Street is one specific stop for specific activities in a region-wide
network of our built environment.

This is what happens when a central place is no longer a central place. It becomes
a new type of central place. It serves a specific function instead of an all-encompassing
central function. This function is a place for niche markets, tourism and recreation, and a
culturally recognized community central place. Living/working neighborhoods have a
hard time existing in an environment where daily needs cannot be easily provided, and
the services most accessible are too specific for practical use. These services are part of a
region-wide network of services, even if they are located in what appears to be a local
neighborhood. Also, those that are part of the “community” are usually not residents of
the immediate vicinity either. Despite the narrowing of Main Street’s role in the
landscape, it is apparent that Main Street’s identity as a community center, and its sense
of place is lasting.

The lack of neighborhood life on Water Street in Exeter is notable in the amount
and type of traffic traveling through. The automobile traffic is steady to non-stop, and at
“rush hour” or on Fridays the traffic is nearly gridlock. Cars are coming from well
outside of town, and many are just passing through. There are proportionately few
pedestrians around, and observation shows little evidence of local residents walking to
Water Street to do business. This observation makes sense, since there is little incentive
for locals to walk to Water Street on a regular basis if the services there are not services
they need to use often.
5.2 Future Prospects for Main Street, Central Places, and the New Urbanism

The future of New Urbanism and active downtowns and Main Streets depends heavily on what role they play as central places. Models of central place theory like those Berry (1988) discusses state that “only retail located centrally can attract trade from consumers who need to satisfy needs and also economize travel.” It is concluded in this thesis that this model cannot be applied to Main Streets as central places today. If there is a trend back to this type of system, downtowns and core areas in TNDs would be more likely to become living working neighborhoods. The economizing travel aspect of this is important because it would help planners and community members reach their goals of eliminating sprawl and developing in “smart” ways. It creates central places with mixed uses, unlike the present situation with a separation of uses, decentralization, and region-wide travel. Large “power center” retail centers would no longer be economical. Development could accommodate pedestrians, and higher densities would be more desirable. This thesis does not find any methods to bring about such a change, but understanding the processes involved is the first step.

I learned an important lesson reading Jane Jacobs’s “Life and Death of the Great American City” (1961) when she discussed inner city projects. Planners tried to help the lives of lower income city residents by building high rise apartment complexes and parks, but their vision often failed because they had only a vague understanding of how their neighborhoods and society worked. Their needs and the forces holding their neighborhood together were not understood, so naturally the solutions they provided conflicted with the way their neighborhood functioned. This thesis is an attempt to keep
New Urbanism and downtown development from making this same mistake of reaching for an impossible goal. By getting an understanding of how central places function, and what forces are acting on them, better decisions can be made. I do not want to have a vision and try to create something that cannot work, just as planners created high rise projects with a vision of how their residents would live, and failed to provide a workable solution. No matter how great the vision, something cannot be fixed if there is no underlying understanding of how it works.

A possible way to have central places that attract consumers in an economical way is through strict zoning. If retail and certain activities are only allowed to locate in these central places then the system would work. A network of TNDs and TODs can create this if it is not mixed in with sprawl, and zoning eliminates the nature of PMD theory. This revolutionary zoning change would be very dramatic and it would likely take a long time for the system to adapt to the new development patterns. Old existing development would also pose a serious threat to emerging central places. Imposing such a radical change in zoning is not likely to happen, and may not be supported by public opinion. An extraordinary increase in fuel prices could make this situation more likely to occur.

If planners or citizens want to begin to make a difference today, there are several things that can be done to begin a change from the present situation on Main Street to real neighborhoods. One step would be to encourage a highly diverse mix of uses on and adjacent to Main Street. There presently are mixed uses on Main Street, but the mix is not diverse enough to support a neighborhood. Workplaces are provided on Main Street, but they are all white collar office space jobs or low paying retail jobs. A wider range of
job types and incomes will help. Also the housing needs to be diversified. Most housing on Main Street today are condos or apartments, and are often labeled “artists lofts” for young people. There needs to be a wider variety of housing available, especially for families. Finally, the most obvious lack of diversity is the retail. There needs to be more than specialty stores and niche units. Lower order goods like department stores, drug stores, and grocery stores need to be encouraged. The larger and more diverse population downtown will help provide a market for these lower order goods and services.

Also, large industrial parks and retail centers need to be discouraged in town and in nearby towns. Due to the highly mobile and regional nature of society today, these developments can have a significant negative effect on Main Street even if they are several miles away from downtown. This happened in Exeter, where Wal-Mart and Home Depot were kept out of Exeter, but instead located 10 miles or so up the highway in Epping. These retailers had nearly the same effect here as they would have in Exeter. Without these options for locating businesses or shopping, centrally located office space or retail would be more attractive, and sprawl forces would be less competitive.

The pedestrian environment is usually in good shape on Main Street, but deteriorates rapidly as you walk towards adjacent neighborhoods and away from any “historic” downtown. A better pedestrian environment will encourage walking and make neighborhood life more attractive, safer, and easier.

Centrally located transit stops will also help. This transit will compete with highways that serve the periphery, and will connect various central places and TND type developments. They will strengthen centers, and bypass the rural periphery. It will also help make it possible to live in a rural area without use of an automobile. All of the
central places marked on Map 3 have rails or at least a rail right of way running directly through downtown. These places represent a significant portion of the built environment, and has the potential to contain an even larger population, and more workplaces and retail.

It is important to note that any changes need to be economical, and logical. Changes cannot be forced, but need to be able to survive on their own or occur naturally in order for them to compete with well established sprawl forces. These changes can begin immediately, and it is possible for significant changes in the way society works to take place in as little as a decade.

Future research and trial and error can investigate further on how to take action to make Main Street an economic center and neighborhood. No matter what solution is found, the change would take time. Old (or current) practices would need to be phased out, and in the mean time they would pose a serious threat to emerging centers. Even if the new central place theory were the most economical, there is no way to know how long it will take for people to adapt to the new way of life and new way of thinking. Banai (1998) stated that it might be a matter of time, and not just space, for the changes to occur.

5.3 Further Research

It may be the case that the success of the niche markets makes real estate too expensive for diversity on Main Street. This phenomenon was noticed by Jane Jacobs’s (1961). Institutions that do not turn a high profit, like laundry mats and affordable housing, may not be able to afford the same rents and leases as expensive restaurants, real
estate firms, expensive condominiums and specialty stores. This success makes real
estate too expensive to support the diversity needed for a living/working neighborhood.
This seems very possible and could be investigated further.

It is important to realize that this project focuses on economic and physical
reasons for the fate of Main Street. There is not much in terms of public opinion and
culture included in the outcomes. A sense of place, community, and history is a strong
force acting upon Main Streets that could not be ignored. It provides incentive to keep
these places alive. Further research would need to consider other cultural factors like
housing preferences, lifestyle preferences, and popular automobile culture that has
become the norm since the 1950s. Lifestyle changes may not be desired. Developers
may not have recognized the potential of different forms of development. A suburban
yard may have become the norm to the extent that alternatives seem radical.

Another very important idea is that Main Street may be viewed as nostalgic and in
the same light as Walt Disney’s Main Street USA. Main Street may be expected to
provide an amusement park atmosphere instead of a place to live and work. People may
not see these places as part of the working landscape, but rather as a relict or something
to enjoy or preserve. Francaviglia (1996) and Kunstler (1993) have both hinted at this.

This possibility can be taken a step further in the case of Exeter and its historic
districts. Nearly the entire downtown core of Exeter is zoned as a Historic District, and it
is this zoning and vision of town that keeps it a compact, walkable place resembling a
TND. If it were not viewed as historic, development would not take the form it does
today. Its form is not a result of goals for a desirable place to live or work, its goals are
to preserve its historic and aesthetic character. Hammer (2000) points out that these historic districts are what TNDs may have been based on; not the original town itself. Hammer contends that the founders of the New Urbanism used historic districts as models for proper development patterns. These models were not necessarily organic towns, but historic districts that looked as they did because of their “historic” identities. This further suggests that the “historic” label is the driving force of Main Street’s form, and consequently TND and New Urbanist form.

It is also possible that simply labeling it “historic” can keep it from becoming a part of daily life. On the other hand, the “historic” label could simply be a popular and effective way to recognize and promote good development and planning practices. This cultural aspect of Main Street, as well as people’s views of what Main Street is needs to be investigated further. These “deeply held values about the way space (in Main Street) should be arranged and how people should relate to it and to each other” that Francaviglia discusses need to be considered in terms of how and why Main Street is used.

5.4 Closing Comments

Many people including myself have an attachment to small towns and special places, and hope to see them last through generations. I am one of a growing group of people who are increasingly critical of sprawl, are troubled by energy consumption, and do not want to live a suburban lifestyle. Research on this topic can help change the lives of many citizens. A life in a small town with daily needs at hand is an excellent and often unavailable alternative to suburban or urban living. This thesis and study in this area can
have a positive impact on the natural environment, the human environment, and the overall quality of life for everybody.
WORKS CITED


Sanborn Maps-1910s-1930s.