Downtown Barre Market Study Phase 1 Report: Customer and Business Profiles

Prepared for

City of Barre
and
Barre Partnership

by

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with

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Introduction

The City of Barre and the Barre Partnership commissioned a market study to better understand current market conditions and guide formulation of strategies to strengthen and expand the marker for Barre' downtown commercial district. The study builds on long standing efforts by city government, the Barre Partnership, local economic development agencies, many arts and cultural organizations and others to maintain and improve the downtown as a vibrant commercial and community center. In this report, data and findings from the project's first phase—a profile of existing customers, businesses and tourist attractions—are presented. These findings integrate information from several sources:

- Economic and demographic analysis
- A telephone survey of households conducted in June 2004
- A survey of downtown business conducted in June 2004
- Interviews with tourist attractions and arts and cultural organizations;
- A review of prior studies.

Through deliberation with the Market Study Committee, the Phase One Report will support the formulation of options for downtown Barre's future market directions, marketing goals and branding. The report is organized in six sections:

- Section 1 details the primary and secondary trade area boundaries.
- Section 2 summarizes the residential consumer market for these trade areas—its key demographic characteristics and spending patterns—and estimates retail spending by the second home and tourist markets.
- Section 3 presents a more detailed profile of consumer shopping patterns and perceptions of downtown Barre from the telephone survey. It also reports on their response to improvements proposals and potential marketing themes.
- Section 4 profiles the downtown business base, evaluates its business mix and summarizes survey data on recent trends, business plans and support for improvement options.
- Section 5 reviews profiles tourist, arts and cultural attractions in and around downtown Barre.
- Section 6 summarizes the key implications for future downtown marketing strategies.

1.0 Trade Area Definition

Trade areas were defined through an analysis of Barre City's geography and interviews with several downtown merchants. The **primary trade area** was defined to capture households that shop in downtown Barre City on a weekly or near-weekly basis. This primary trade area includes Barre City, eleven additional communities in Washington County (Barre Town, Berlin, Cabot, Calais, East Montpelier, Marshfield, Middlesex, Montpelier, Moretown, Northfield, and Plainfield) and four towns in Orange County (Brookfield, Orange, Williamstown, and Washington). The **secondary trade area** was defined to include households that shop occasionally in downtown Barre, but on a recurring basis. It contains communities within 20 to 30 miles of Barre City where several retailers reported having a customer base. This larger area includes the balance of Washington County, four towns in Lamoille County to the north (Elmore, Morristown, Stowe, and Wolcott), nine Caledonia County communities to the east (Barnet, Danville, Groton, Hardwick Peacham, Ryegate, St. Johnsbury, Walden, and Waterford), Bolton and Richmond in Chittendon County, and eight towns extend south into Orange County (Bradford, Braintree, Chelsea, Corinth, Newbury, Randolph, Topsham, and Vershire).

2.0 Trade Area Demographic Profile and Spending Patterns

This section uses several secondary data sources to profile regional consumers and provide a full estimate of consumer picture by year-round residents, second home owners and tourists. The profile of year-round residents is based on data from the 2000 Census of Population and Housing and the Consumer Expenditure Survey. Data on the number of seasonal homes is from the 2000 Census and figures on tourist visitors and spending is based on a 2002 report by the University of Vermont's School of Business Administration and the Vermont Tourism Data Center.

2.10 Demographics of Year-Round Residents[1]

Downtown Barre's primary trade area includes 20,755 households with a total population of 51,538. Out of these 51,538 residents, 18% live in Barre City, 87.5% live within Washington County and 12.5% live in Orange County. Moreover, Barre City, Barre Town and Montpelier have 24,946 combined residents and represent 48% of the primary trade area population. The secondary trade area is larger with 25,630 households and a total population of 64,127.

The primary and secondary area populations are quite similar with fairly minor differences. The secondary area has more children, slightly larger households and higher income than the primary area. Both areas are overwhelmingly white—97% for the primary area population and 97.6% for the secondary area. Black, Native Americans, and Asians are each less than .5% of the primary and secondary area populations. Hispanic residents constitute 1.1% of the primary area and .6% for the secondary trade area population.

The age distribution for the two areas is quite similar with the primary area having a larger young adult population and more children living in the secondary area. Both areas have 22.5% of their population above 55, close to one-third in the 35 to 54 age group and 44% to 45% under 35 years old. However, young adults account for over 9% of primary area residents compared to 6% in the secondary trade area. On the other hand, children account for 26.4 of secondary trade area resident compared to 23.7% for the primary area (See Figures 1 and 2). Consequently, primary area has slightly smaller average household size (2.48 versus 2.50) and a larger share of one-person households while the secondary area has a higher percentage of two, three and five person households (see Figure 3). For both areas, married couples without children are the largest household type (close to 30% of all households) followed by single people. Married families with children are less than one-quarter of all households in both trade areas.

Educational attainment in the primary and secondary trade areas closely parallels that for Vermont but there are some differences in the percentage of highly educated and less well educated groups. The secondary area has a higher share of adults with bachelor

[1] All data is this section is from the 2000 Census of Population and Housing unless otherwise noted.

Figure 1. Primary Trade Area Population by Age

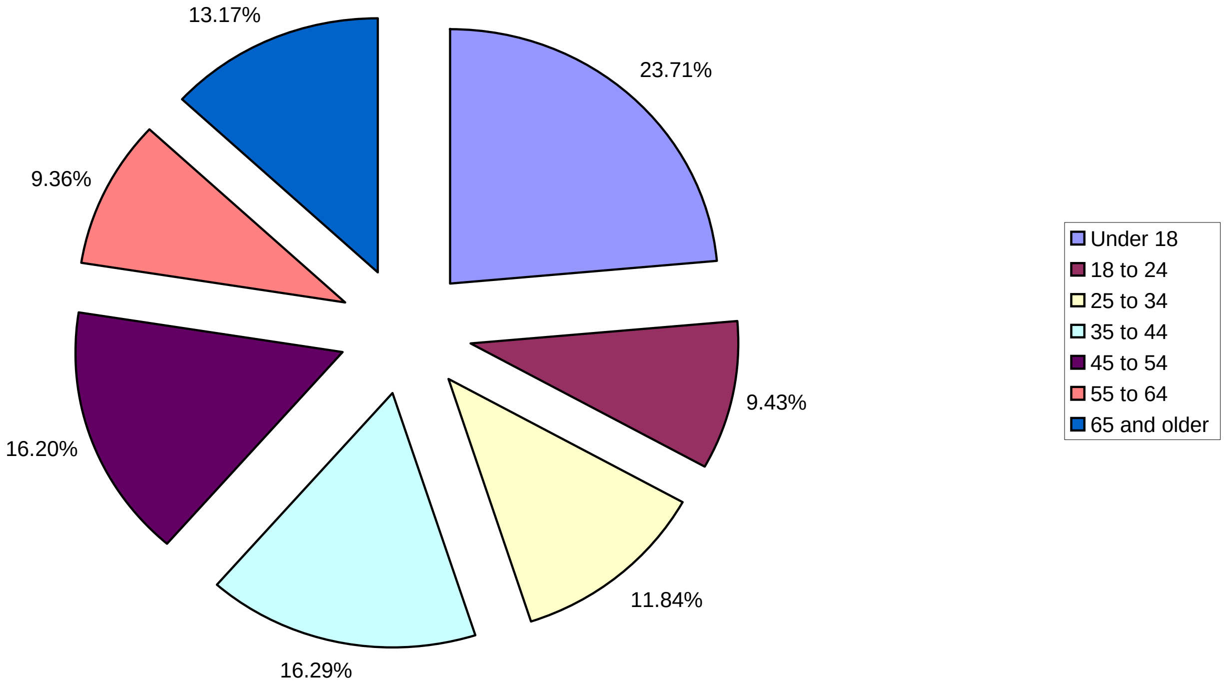


Figure 2. Secondary Trade Area Population by Age

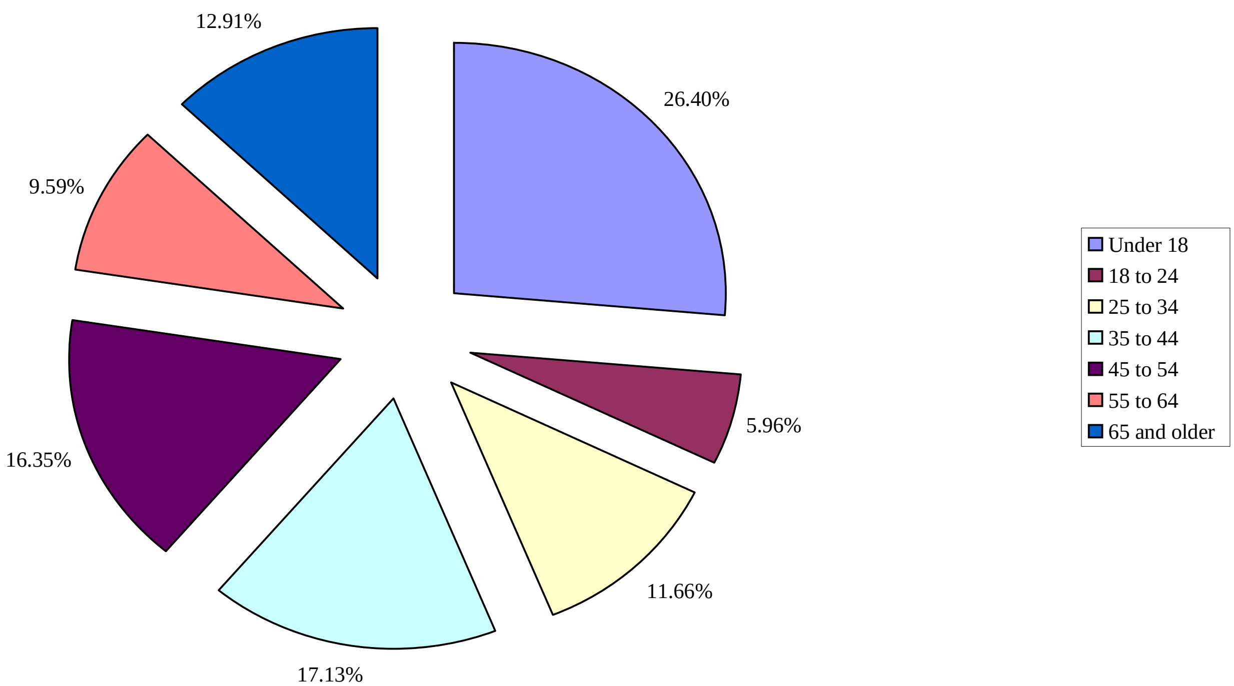
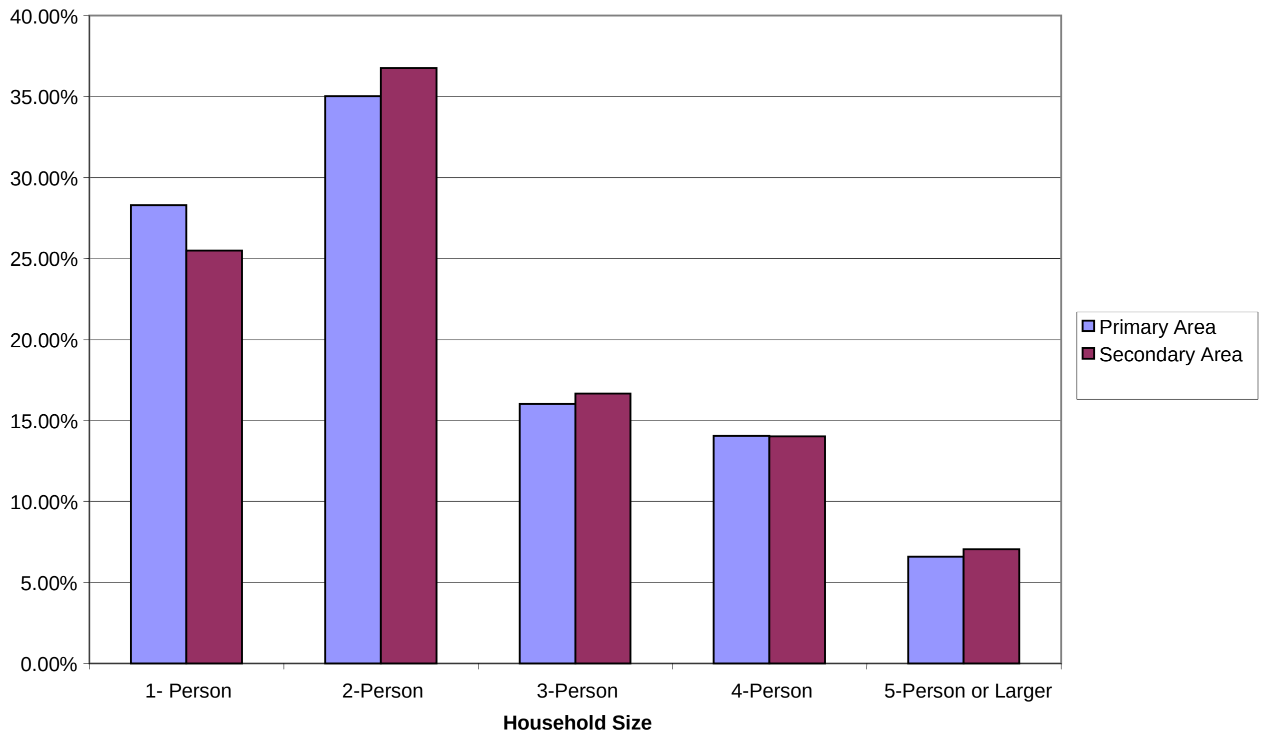
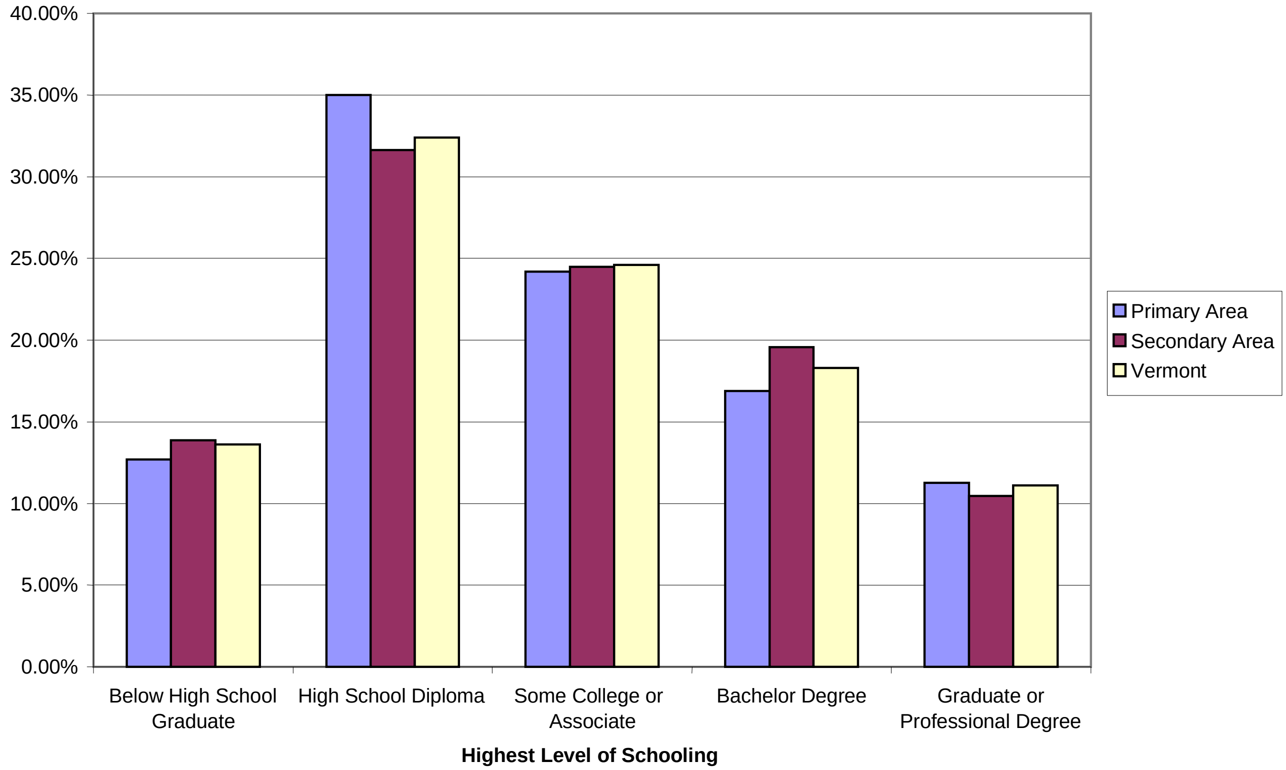


Figure 3. Distribution of Households by Size



degrees and who did not complete high school. However, the primary trade area has a larger concentration of people with both high school diplomas and graduate-level degrees (See Figure 4). For both areas, over 55% of the adult population has either a high school diploma or a college education below a bachelor's degree. `

Figure 4. Percent of Adults 25 or Older By Education Level: Vermont and Primary and Secondary Trade Areas



Median incomes in the primary and secondary trade areas are slightly below those for the US and Vermont. The 1999 median household income was $41,494 and $40,856 for the US and Vermont, respectively compared to $40,040 for the primary trade area and $40,280 for secondary trade areas.[2] Thus, the primary area's median household had 1999 income that 95% of the median US household and 98% of that for Vermont. However, differences in per capital income (PCI) are greater; the primary trade area 1999 PCI was 19,408—10% below the US amount and 6% under the state and secondary area levels. Among primary trade area communities, Barre City has the lowest median household income at $30,393, although its per capita income is above that of several towns. However, median income figures can be misleading as they show neither the distribution of income nor the aggregate income within an area. For example, 22% of primary area households had 1999 incomes below $20,000, but over one-third (38%) had incomes above 50,000 with one in six households above $75,000 (See Figure 5). The income distribution for the secondary trade area was very similar with an almost identical share of households with incomes below $20,000 and above $50,000.

Income is concentrated geographically and demographically in both trade areas. Four towns (Barre City, Barre Town, Montpelier and Northfield) account for 60% of primary trade area income (See Figure 6). Income is less concentrated in the secondary trade area, where the six largest towns represent 52% of total household income. The 41% of households headed by people 35 and 54 years had over half of primary and secondary trade area income in 1999.

[2] Median household income figures for the primary and secondary trades areas are the weighted average for the communities within the respective area.

Figure 5. Primary Trade Area Income Distribution

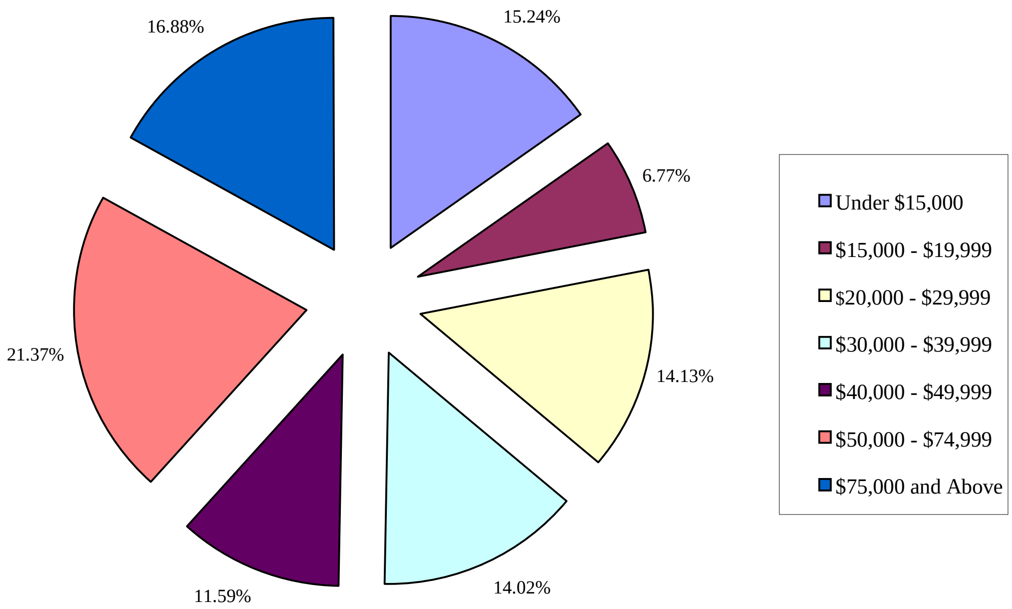
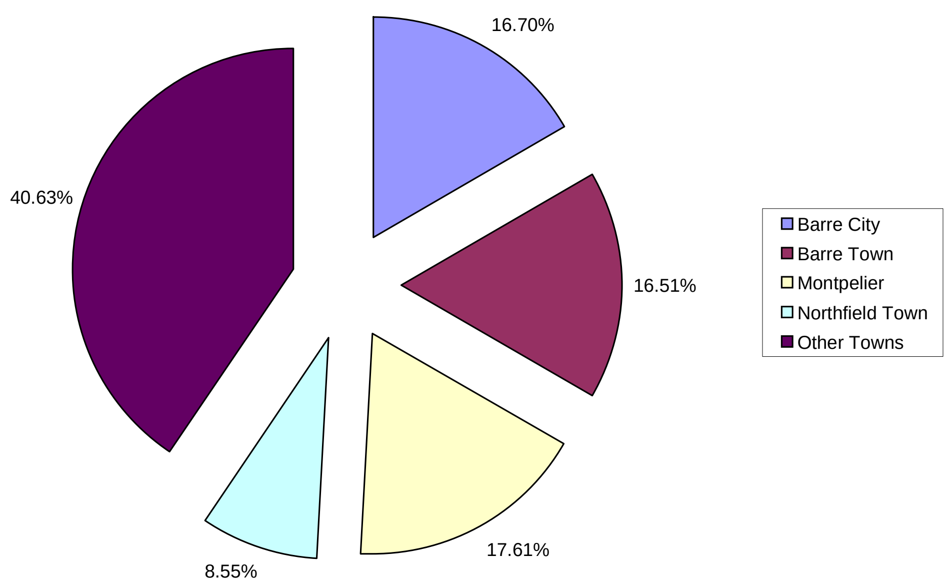


Figure 6. 1999 Distribution of Primary Trade Area Income by Community



2.20 Consumer Spending Patterns

Primary area households had total estimated annual income of $1.2 billion dollars[3] and non-shelter consumer expenditures of $486 million in 2002. Table 1 shows the estimated distribution of this spending by product type for primary and secondary trade area consumers. After transportation ($169 million), **the largest spending categories are food at home ($80 million), food away from home ($57 million), and apparel and footwear ($49 million).** Together, these three categories accounted for 58% of primary area expenditures other than for housing and transportation. Entertainment is the fourth largest category at $47.9 million.

Table 1. Primary and Secondary Trade Area Expenditures by Product Category

	Primary Area Expenditures ($000)	Annual per Household	Secondary Area Expenditures ($000)	Annual per Household
Transportation	$169,036	$8,144	$224,707	$8,767
Food at home	$79,929	$3,851	$105,987	$4,135
Food away from home	$57,124	$2,752	$76,200	$2,973
Home furnishings and equipment	$34,440	$1,659	$46,281	$1,806
Furniture	$8,650	$417	$11,685	$456
Textiles	$3,294	$159	$4,436	$173
Appliances & misc. house wares	$6,129	$295	$8,267	$323
Misc. household equipment	$15,277	$736	$20,416	$797
Housekeeping supplies	$13,629	$657	$17,938	$700
Apparel and related services	$48,615	$2,342	$65,168	$2,543
Drugs & medical supplies	$12,450	$600	$16,481	$643
Entertainment	$47,904	$2,308	$63,999	$2,497
Fees & admissions.	$13,367	$644	$18,074	$705
Television, radios, & sound equip.	$16,378	$789	$21,737	$848
Pets, toys, & playground equip.	$8,513	$410	$11,385	$444
Personal care products & services	$11,950	$576	$15,829	$618
Reading	$3,948	$190	$5,235	$204
Tobacco and smoking supplies	$7,489	$361	$9,798	$382
Total	$486,513	$23,441	$647,622	$25,268

Source: Karl F. Seidman Consulting Services from 2000 Census of Population and Housing and 2002 Consumer Expenditure Survey

The secondary market area, with $647.6 million in 2002 non-shelter spending is one-third larger than the primary area and provides an important potential source of market expansion for Barre. With similar demographics, the estimated spending patterns in the secondary and primary areas are very similar. However, the slightly higher income levels and larger households in the secondary trade area result in a higher spending level per household. On average, secondary area households spend $1,827 more annually on non-housing items than

[3] Income estimates are for 2002, which in the most recent year for which county level income estimates exist. County income growth rates from 1999 to 2002 were applied to 2000 Census data to prepare these estimates.

those in the primary market. After transportation, the largest differentials are for food at home ($284), food away from home ($221), apparel ($201) and entertainment ($189).

2.30 Spending by Second Home Residents

Due to limited data on second home residents, it was necessary to make several assumptions to estimate their spending patterns. First, the US Census count of homes used for seasonal, recreational or occasional purposes was used to estimate the number of second homes in the primary and secondary trade areas. Since some of these homes are likely owned and used by area residents, the Census count was discounted by 25% to avoid double counting spending by area households. Based on the 2000 census, there are 957 seasonal homes in the primary trade area and 5,972 in the secondary trade area. After adjusting for assumed local owners, **the estimated numbers of second home owners that provide additional spending to the region are 718 and 4,479 in the primary and secondary areas, respectively, or 3.4% and 17.4% of year round households.** Second, U.S. Consumer Expenditure Survey spending levels for the wealthiest group of northeastern households[4] were used to estimate annual spending by product category. Third, annual spending estimates were adjusted to reflect the part-time residency of second-home owners. For furniture and home furnishings products and appliances, one-third of household spending is assumed to occur in the second home market area. For other products, 15% of household expenditures are assumed to take place in this market area[5].

Table 2. Estimated Annual Spending in Barre Market Area by Second-Home Owners

Product Spending Category	Estimated Annual Spending: Homes in Primary Trade Area	Estimated Annual Spending: Homes in Secondary Trade Area	Total Annual Spending for Both Areas
Food at Home	$526,219	$328,264	$854,483
Food Away from Home	$487,715	$304,245	$791,960
Alcoholic Beverages	$89,842	$56,045	$145,887
Housekeeping Supplies	$89,842	$56,045	$145,887
Furniture and Home Furnishings	$734,140	$457,968	$1,192,108
Appliances	$84,708	$52,842	$137,551
Misc. Household Equipment	$310,598	$197,756	$504,353
Apparel and Services	$423,542	$264,212	$687,754
Drugs	$51,338	$32,026	$83,364
Medical Supplies	$12,835	$8,006	$20,841
Entertainment	$449,211	$280,225	$729,437
Fees & Admission	$154,015	$96,077	$250,093
Television, Radio, Sound Equipment	$115,511	$72,058	$187,569
Pets, Toys, Playground equipment	$77,008	$48,039	$125,046
Personal Care Products & Services	$89,842	$56,045	$145,887
Reading	$25,669	$16,013	$41,682
Tobacco & Smoking Supplies	$38,504	$24,019	$62,523
Total for Above Products & Services	$3,760,540	$2,345,886	$6,106,426

Source: Consultant Calculations from 2002 US Consumer Expenditure Survey

4 These are households with over $70,000 in income and an average household income of over $119,170 in 2002.
5 This percentage assume that vacation home residents spend 55 days a year, or 15% of their time, at their second home, which includes four weeks of vacation, one weekend per month for the 11 other months and one week during the winter holiday season.

Finally, the market potential for downtown Barre from the local spending by these consumers is I calculated as 100% of local spending by second home owners in the primary trade area spending and 10% for those in the secondary area due to the greater the distance from downtown Barre and closer shopping options.

Table 2 presents the estimated local spending for second home residents, based on the above data and assumptions. **At $5.8 million, vacation homeowners represent a small market for downtown Barre, less than 2% of the annual expenditures by year-round primary trade area households and 1.5% of the total spending from all three segments.** They have the greatest impact on the furniture and home furnishings market, where they spend an estimated $1.2 million, which is 3.5% of primary trade area spending. Moreover, the fact that most second homes are in the secondary market area makes them a less promising source for retail sales growth for downtown Barre.

2.40 Tourist Spending

Vermont tourists represent a significant consumer market for central Vermont and downtown Barre. According to University of Vermont studies, tourists made 4.69 million trips to Vermont during 2001 with 5.5% (257,950) of these trips to the Central Vermont region and 2.2% (103,180) to Montpelier. Since no data was collected for trips to Barre City, visits to Montpelier are used as the best proxy for the tourist market to shop, dine and attend events in downtown Barre.

A survey of Vermont visitors during 2001 found that the average person spends $210.64 during a trip to Vermont with lodging, restaurants and retail purchases representing the largest spending categories (See Table 3).

Table 3. 2001 Average Expenditure per Person per Trip by Category

Spending Category	Average Expenditure
Lodging	$55.25
Recreation/Entertainment	$26.09
Transportation	$18.73
Shopping	$39.19
Restaurant	$69.09
Grocery Store	$41.04
Other	$13.98
Total	$210.64

Source: *A National Survey of the Vermont Visitor*, William Baker, UVM School of Business

Annual visitor expenditures were estimated by multiplying spending per person by the number of annual person visits to Montpelier. Since shopping is too general category for market analysis, these purchases were assumed to be distributed among four major store groups as follows:

Clothing	30%
Sporting goods, hobby, books, music	25%
General Merchandise	25%
Home furnishings	20%

While these assumptions may not precisely reflect actual visitor spending, they provide an order of magnitude estimate of the impact of visitor spending for specific products and stores.

As Table 4 shows, visitor spending is a sizable consumer market, especially for restaurants and entertainment/recreation. **Visitors to Montpelier spend an estimated $64 million annually while visitors to Central Vermont represent a $160 million market. Three key downtown sectors, restaurants, retail purchases, and entertainment/recreation, account for 50% of visitor spending. The $12.5 million in restaurant spending by Montpelier visitors equals 24% of primary trade area spending at eating and drinking places and represents 19% of the combined spending among all three market segments.** Moreover, tourists who visit destinations throughout Central Vermont spend 60% as much as year-round primary area residents on eating out. Similarly, Montpelier visitors' entertainment/recreation spending represents 17% of the primary trade area market and this spending by all Central Vermont visitors equals 41% of primary trade area demand. However, a significant portion of this spending is for outdoor recreation that does not benefit downtown Barre.

Table 4. Total Annual Spending By Category for Montpelier and Central Vermont Visitors

Product Spending Category	Annual Spending for Montpelier Visitors	Annual Spending for Central Vermont Visitors
Lodging	$18,406,405	$46,015,112
Recreation	$7,961,103	$19,902,757
Movies & Theater	$506,532	$1,266,331
Other recreation	$3,893,586	$9,733,966
Shopping	$11,958,437	$29,896,092
Clothing	$3,587,530.98	$8,968,827
Sporting goods, hobby, books, music	$2,989,609	$7,474,023
General Merchandise	$2,989,609	$7,474,023
Home furnishings	$2,391,687	$5,979,218
Restaurants	$12,522,946	$31,307,364
Groceries	$4,265,857	$10,664,643
Other	$3,448,082	$8,620,205
Total Spending	$64,274,690	$160,686,724

Source: Consultant's calculations from *The Impact of the Tourism Sector on the Vermont Economy*, Department of Community Development and Applied Economics, University of Vermont, September 2002

Visitors to Vermont represent an older, better-educated, and higher-income market than the year-round resident population. During 2002, 36% of visitors were 55 years of age or older compared to 22% and 23% for primary and secondary trade area residents, respectively. Among 2002 visitors, 43% held at least a college degree versus 28% for primary trade area residents and 30% for the secondary trade area. In terms of income, almost half of 2001 visitors had annual household incomes of $50,000 or higher with 27% having incomes of at least $75,000. In contrast, 38% of primary and secondary market households have annual incomes of $50,000 or above, and less than 19% have incomes that equal or exceed $75,000.

Downtown Barre businesses do not gain a large share of visitor spending since they report that tourist are 3 % of their customers, on average. However, visitors to Montpelier and the region are a large market worth targeting to expand downtown activity and sales**.** They have the potential to counter increasing competition from big box stores since tourists have a strong preference for Vermont made goods[6] and probably seek a different type of shopping experience than while on vacation.

2.50 Combining and Comparing the Three Market Segments

Year-round primary trade area residents are, by far, the largest consumer market across all products, accounting for 81.9% of the total estimated purchasing power. The other two segments, however, provide significant additional spending that increases total demand by 22%. Tourists are the major driver of this additional demand since estimated spending by second homeowners close to or less than 1% of total spending in every category except furniture and home furnishings. Tourists are most important for restaurants and entertainment and recreation businesses, where they represent 18% of total spending. At 6% to 8% of demand for home furnishing, apparel and reading, they can also be a valuable customer base for downtown stores that sell these products.

Table 5. Product Demand by Three Customer Segments

Product Spending Category	Primary Trade Area Residents	Second Home Owners	Tourists	Total
Food at home	$79,929,000	$854,483	4,265,857	$85,049,340
Food away from home	$57,124,000	$791,960	12,522,946	$70,438,906
Home furnishings & equipment	$34,440,000	$1,192,108	$2,989,609	$38,621,717
Housekeeping supplies	$13,629,000	$145,887		$13,774,887
Apparel & related services	$48,615,000	$687,754	3,587,531	$52,890,285
Drugs & medical supplies	$12,450,000	$104,205		$12,554,205
Entertainment & Recreation	$47,904,000	$729,437	10,651,751	$59,285,188
Personal care products & services	$11,950,000	$145,887		$12,095,887
Reading	$3,948,000	$41,682	298,961	$4,288,643
Tobacco & smoking supplies	$7,489,000	$62,523		$7,551,523
Total spending by segment	$317,477,000	$6,106,426	$64,274,690	$387,858,116

Source: Karl F. Seidman Consulting

Note: Columns do not sum to totals since some product categories are omitted.

3.0 Consumer Shopping Patterns and Attitudes

A random telephone survey of 469 regional consumers provides a richer picture of customer shopping patterns, their use and perceptions of downtown Barre, and their likely consumer response to different marketing and improvement efforts. This section summarizes the major survey results. Appendix A is the full Institute for Regional Development report.

3.10 Downtown Visits and Shopping Patterns

Regional consumers come to Barre fairly often and primarily to shop—often at a specific business:

[6] Vermont made products were 41% of shopping and grocery purchases made per trip in 2001.

- A large majority (73.4%) had been to Barre within a month before the survey date and 56.8% had visited within the past week.
- Only 11.5 had never been to Barre citing that it is "too far to travel" as the main reason they do not come to Barre.
- Two-thirds of respondents (65.2%) reported shopping as the usual reason for coming to Barre followed by dining (20.7%).
- Most customers (65.2%) regularly visit a specific store or businesses when they come to Barre; the most common destinations are Lenny's (18.9%), either Nelson's or Aubuchon's hardware stores (15.2%), and convenience store/fast foods (10%).
- Almost one-third of residents that visit downtown (30.8%) shop there several times a week while 33.6% shop several timed per month and the balance less than monthly.

Saturday and mornings are the most common shopping times while customers are divided on the impact of evening store hours:

- Almost half of respondents (44%) shop most often on Saturdays. Friday was the next most popular shopping day when 15.7% shop most often.
- Forty-two percent of surveyed customers shop most often in the morning while 37.2% primarily shop in the afternoon.
- Just under half (49.2%) of respondents said that they would shop more often in downtown Barre if stores were open from 5 PM to 8 PM.

The telephone survey provided a good picture of where regional consumers shop for different goods and services and which areas are downtown Barre's major competitors. Key findings from this part of the survey are:

- The largest share of respondents reported that downtown Barre is their primary shopping destination in five categories: hardware and building supplies (42.7%), dining and meals (41.2%), banking and financial services (34.1%), gifts and crafts (28.5%) and books (23.8%).
- Downtown Barre is the second ranked primary destination in two areas: appliances (30%) and personal services (27.9%).
- Downtown Barre ranks lowest (4^{th}) as the primary place to shop in three categories: groceries (8.1%), music, tapes and CDs (15.9%) and clothing (17.6%).
- Shopping in several categories is closely divided among 3 or more destination with no one area dominating. This is true for books, clothing, home furnishing, and music, tapes and CDs.
- Berlin is the leading primary destination for groceries (43%) and clothing (25.3%) and an important competing shopping area for gifts and crafts, health services and music.
- Montpelier does not rank first as a primary destination for any category, but is an important source of competition for dining, books, and music.
- The Burlington area, surprisingly, is not the first ranked primary shopping area in any category, but is an important source of competition, ranking second or third, for appliances, clothing and home furnishings.
- Mail order/internet sites is the primary shopping source for less than 10% of respondents in every category except music, for which it is 12.4%.

<u>**3.20 Evaluation of Downtown Conditions and Improvement Options**</u>

Regional consumers rate most downtown Barre characteristic positively, especially customer service and the quality of goods and services (See Table 5)**:**

- 10 of 15 characteristics were rated good or excellent by at least 60% of respondents.
- Customer service and the quality of goods and services were rated highest—over 80% of respondents rated them good or excellent
- Traffic and selection of restaurants received the lowest ratings, with less than 50% rating them good or excellent.
- A bare majority of surveyed customers rated sales, promotions and special events as good or excellent;
- Crime safety was not a major concern—it ranked in the middle of the 15 items with 62.7% rating it as good and excellent.

Table 5. Customer Ratings of Downtown Barre Characteristics

Characteristic	Percentage Rating It Excellent or Good
Customer service	86.7%
Quality of goods and services	81.3%
Quality of restaurants	70.1%
Attractiveness of store interiors	69.5%
Location of parking	65.9%
Cost of goods and services	64.2%
Store hours	62.8%
Crime and safety	62.7%
Amount of parking	60.5%
Selection of goods and services	60.3%
Attractiveness of public spaces	59.5%
Attractiveness of store fronts	54.3%
Sales, Promotions & Special Events	50.8%
Selection of restaurants	49.6%
Traffic	33.3%

For 10 of 13 proposed improvements, a majority of customers stated that the improvement was likely to encourage them to shop downtown. However, **improved traffic flow/safety and more store sales and promotions received the best response:**

- Over three quarter of respondents (76%) stated that better traffic flow/safety likely to increase their patronage of downtown stores.
- 70.9% reported that more store sales and promotions were likely to attract them downtown.
- Public restrooms and special events/festivals are ranked highly, with 65.3% and 64%, respectively, indicating these changes were likely to get them to shop downtown.

For arts, culture and entertainment options, live music and street festivals have the greatest potential to attract people downtown:

- 70.2% of respondents said that new live music would attract them to downtown
- Two-thirds reported that street festivals would also draw them downtown
- Galleries/visual arts (48.1%) and lectures/readings (32.5%) have the least appeal.

To gauge which branding and marketing messages have the strongest appeal to regional consumers, the survey asked residents to evaluate value propositions about downtown Barre. Two statements generated agreement among a large majority of respondents, indicating that they have good potential as downtown marketing themes: "Shopping in downtown Barre is better for the local economy" (90.4%) and "Downtown Barre's historic building and environment make it a special place". On the other hand, downtown restaurants and entertainment and cultural activities do not distinguish Barre among regional consumers.

Table 6. Customers' Response to Downtown Barre Value Propositions

Value Proposition	Percent That Agree or Strongly Agree
Downtown Barre offers unique stores and shopping opportunities	60.40%
Merchants in downtown Barre are more helpful and friendly than in other stores	54.50%
Downtown Barre's historic building and environment make it a special place	73.20%
Shopping or doing business in downtown Barre is convenient	58.80%
Downtown Barre offers better dining options than other towns	28.30%
Downtown Barre is a family oriented place to shop or visit	60.80%
Shopping in downtown Barre is better for the local economy	90.40%
Downtown Barre has more entertainment & cultural activities than other places	28.80%

4.0 Downtown Barre Retail and Service Base

An effective downtown marketing strategy requires understanding of the composition and trends within Barre's existing business base and it comparative position with competing destinations. This section draws upon the recently completed business inventory and secondary data from the Vermont Department of Employment ES-202 data series to profile downtown Brattleboro's key economic sectors, business agglomerations, and retail specialties and compares Barre City to competing areas to asses its competitive position. A downtown business survey conducted in June 2004 helps characterize businesses, their recent trends and future plans.

4.10 Downtown Business Inventory and Profile

Downtown Barre has a diverse economic base with large retail, financial, service and government sectors, and no one sector dominating the downtown economy. This diverse set of activities is an asset, enhancing the downtown area's convenience and ability to

Table 7. Downtown Businesses and Occupied Square Feet by Industry

Industry Category	Number of Occupants	Estimated Occupied Square Feet*	Percent of Total Occupants	Percent of Total Occupied Square Feet*
Retail	43	136,299	23.8%	34.0%
Information	3	21,732	1.7%	5.4%
Finance and Insurance	17	64,001	9.4%	16.0%
Real Estate	3	4,100	1.7%	1.0%
Prof, Technical & Scientific Services	22	36,717	12.2%	9.2%
Admin, Support & Waste Services	4	7,750	2.2%	1.9%
Educational Services	3	Not included	1.7%	Not included
Health Care & Social Assistance	14	Not included	7.7%	Not included
Private Health Care Providers	8	14,033	4.2%	3.5%
Arts, Entertainment. & Recreation	7	21,766	3.9%	5.4%
Accommodations & Food Service	16	34,869	8.8%	8.7%
Restaurants	15	27,783	8.3%	6.9%
Other Services	24	Not included	13.3%	Not included
Repair, Maintenance, Personal & Laundry	8	8,780	4.4%	2.2%
Public Administration	12	Not included	6.6%	Not included
Other	1	12,757	0.6%	3.2%
Unclassified	2	10,230	1.1%	2.6%
Total	181	400,817	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Karl F. Seidman Consulting Services from business inventory and assessor parcel database.
Table Notes: *Excludes occupied square feet for government, religious and non-profit social service agencies as figures for these uses were not included in the assessor database.

attract residents. Several findings emerge from an analysis of the downtown business inventory:

- Retail is the downtown's largest economic sector with 43 businesses (24% of the total) and accounting for 21% of the estimated occupied space for private businesses. Retailers are also among the largest establishments, occupying, on average, an estimated 3,170 square feet.
- Financial service firms are major downtown users, accounting for 9.4% of firms and 16% of occupied business space. This sector includes banks, insurance agencies, and investment firms, and its size suggests it is an important downtown anchor.
- Health and social services and professional, technical and scientific services together constitute the second largest sector with 36 establishments. Close to two-thirds of the professional service firms are law offices.
- Arts, entertainment and recreation is a secondary downtown sector in terms of number of organizations (7), but includes several large buildings and important evening destinations with the movie theater and opera house.
- Restaurants and accommodations are the fifth largest sector in terms of number of firms (16) and account for almost 9% of occupied downtown business space.

Since retail is the largest and most diverse downtown sector and the key customer destination, its breakdown by store type is presented in Table 8. The largest clusters of stores are in two categories: (1) clothing and clothing accessories; (2) home supply stores. Downtown Barre has 11 clothing and accessory stores that occupy 39,000 square feet. According to the consumer survey, Lenny's is a key destination and anchor for this cluster. Homer Fitz is the

Table 8. Downtown Retail Businesses and Occupied Square Feet by Category

Retail Category	Number of Occupants	Estimated Occupied Square Feet	Percent of Total Occupants	Percent of Total Occupied Square Feet
Motor Vehicle Parts & Dealers	1	3,870	2.3%	2.8%
Furniture & Home Furnishings	4	11,515	9.3%	8.4%
Electronics & Appliance Stores	5	21,423	11.6%	15.7%
Building Materials & Garden Equipment	5	19,626	11.6%	14.4%
Food & Beverage Stores	2	3,064	4.7%	2.2%
Health & Personal Care Stores	3	10,500	7.0%	7.7%
Gasoline Stations	2	4,700	4.7%	3.4%
Clothing & Accessory Stores	11	38,888	25.6%	28.5%
Sporting Good, Hobby & Music Stores	6	10,313	14.0%	7.6%
General Merchandise Stores	1	8,000	2.3%	5.9%
Miscellaneous Store	3	4,400	7.0%	3.2%
Total	43	136,299	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Karl F. Seidman Consulting Services from business inventory and assessor parcel database.

largest clothing store. Home supply comprise 14 shops in three groups—furniture and home furnishing, electronics and appliances, and building materials and garden equipment—with an estimated 52,000 square feet of space. The two hardware stores are important destinations for the home supply cluster. The telephone survey also indicates that Barre occupies a strong completive position in the home supply category since it is the 1st and 2nd ranked shopping destination for hardware and appliances, respectively.

Downtown's retail and arts and entertainment composition has several implications for its downtown strategy:

- Downtown Barre has a mix of convenience and comparison-shopping stores[7]. Clothing stores are the downtown's key comparison goods category. The home supply cluster includes both a convenience goods (hardware stores) and comparison items (furniture and appliances), but has few stores that supply soft goods and smaller home furnishing comparison goods. Comparison good stores help attract customers from a larger area; convenience stores are important to attract regular local shoppers.
- Most retailers are fairly small independent stores either located only in Barre or one or two additional stores in the region. Only a handful of brand name chains are located in downtown Barre, which are convenience-oriented drug, hardware, discount stores.
- Several downtown retail categories are small, in both number of stores and occupied space, and lack a significant anchor. In most cases, the combined space for all stores in one product category is less than the size of a single big box store. Creating a group of stores for key product groups is important to strengthen their appeal as comparison-shopping destinations.
- Barre has gaps in some important retail categories. It lacks a supermarket, large grocery store or specialty food niche. This is a weakness given the large market size

[7] Comparison-shopping goods are higher priced and/or less frequently purchased goods where shoppers seek destinations with multiple stores to comparison shop.

and customer traffic generated by grocery shopping. It also lacks specialty stores in the sporting goods & hobby and gift & other miscellaneous store groups—two store types that help create local character to differentiate downtowns from shopping malls and big box stores.

- Downtown Barre's diverse retail and economic base means that its identity and marketing appeal is not tied to a specific retail niche or activity, although it has good potential to serve as a "one-stop" destination for many items.

4.20 Comparative Analysis of Barre

Tables 9 and 10 present comparative 2002 data on the number of establishments and employment across business types for Barre and its main competing areas of Berlin, Montpelier and the Burlington region[8]. **This data show that the Burlington region is the dominant retail and business center with eight times the number of retail stores than Barre, and over ten times as many store in some categories.** Within the local area, Barre has more retail stores than Berlin and a comparable number to Montpelier. Consequently, downtown Barre is better positioned to compete with these local retail destinations. Consistent with the business inventory and customer survey, Barre's largest and most competitive retail group is in the home supply category, especially building materials and appliances. Other observations on Barre's position within this local competition include:

- Barre has the largest concentration of establishments and employment relative to its local competitors in clothing and accessory stores with both more and larger stores and in building materials and garden equipment in which Montpelier has the same number of stores but those in Barre are larger.
- Barre appears to have a larger presence in both furniture & home furnishing and electronic and appliance stores but suppressed data for Montpelier and Berlin make this comparison incomplete.
- Telephone survey results reinforce that Barre is a major shopping destination of regional customers for both building materials/garden equipments and appliances.
- Barre has more and larger miscellaneous stores which suggests greater retail diversity than Berlin and Montpelier
- Barre is weakest in food and beverage stores with mostly small stores
- Berlin houses the area's largest stores for groceries and mass merchandise, and is the primary shopping destination among surveyed customers for groceries and clothing.
- Montpelier is a larger financial and professional service center than Barre while Berlin has a larger health care sector. Montpelier's financial sector may emphasize non-consumer services since twice as many residents indicate that Barre, rather than Montpelier, is their primary destination for banking and financial service.
- Barre has a comparable number of restaurants as Berlin and Montpelier, but they appear smaller since they employ fewer people. Yet, downtown Barre is the primary dining destination for over 40% of regional customers.

[8] There are discrepancies between the number of establishments in the business inventory and the state ES-220 data, most notably when the number of businesses in the downtown inventory exceeds the citywide figure from state data. This may result from new businesses formed since 2002, differences in how businesses are classified and the presence of sole proprietorships without employees that are not counted in the ES-202 data.

Table 9. Number of Establishments by Business Type for Barre and Competing Business Centers in 2002

Business Type	Barre City	Berlin	Montpelier	Burlington Region*
Retail	**79**	**52**	**81**	**636**
Furniture & Home Furnishings	3	3	s	41
Electronics & Appliances	3	s	0	32
Building Materials & Garden Supplies	9	5	9	40
Food and Beverage	9	7	10	65
Health & Personal Care	5	3	4	36
Clothing & Accessories	9	6	7	104
Sporting Goods, Hobby, Book & Music	s	6	7	56
General Merchandise	s	6	s	10
Miscellaneous Stores	11	3	16	94
Financial Service	33	s	53	356
Professional Services	55	s	122	718
Education	4	s	13	38
Health Care & Social Services	33	43	51	297
Arts, Entertainment & Recreation	6	4	4	62
Restaurants	25	12	26	194
Repair & Maintenance	10	5	13	112
Personal & Laundry	10	s	9	253
Total All Private Sector	397	206	531	3,650

Source: Source: Vermont Department of Employment and Training, Year
Table Notes: *Include Burlington, Essex Junction, South Burlington and Williston

Table 10. Employment by Business Type for Barre City and Competing Business Centers

Business Type	Barre City	Berlin	Montpelier	Burlington Region*
Retail	700	1,101	832	9,909
Furniture & Home Furnishings	24	17	s	370
Electronics & Appliances	18	s	0	407
Building Materials & Garden Supplies	81	23	58	714
Food and Beverage	84	354	244	1,989
Health & Personal Care	46	44	31	476
Clothing & Accessories	72	35	38	1,437
Sporting Goods, Hobby, Book & Music	s	64	65	730
General Merchandise	s	298	s	532
Miscellaneous Stores	156	45	78	738
Financial Services	213	s	1,591	3,944
Professional Services	255	s	772	7,378
Education	61	s	368	1,047
Health Care & Social Services	802	1,031	473	9,112
Arts, Entertainment & Recreation	10	113	46	1,158
Restaurants	279	342	452	3,775
Repair & Maintenance	79	23	65	749
Personal & Laundry	43	s	35	696
Total All Private Sector	1,801	4,797	5,794	62,951

Source: Source: Vermont Department of Employment and Training, Year
Table Notes: *Include Burlington, Essex Junction, South Burlington and Williston

4.30 Survey Results on Business Trends and Characteristics

A business survey conducted in June 2004 provides additional detail on recent trends and future plans among downtown Barre firms. Surveys were personally distributed to 125 enterprises and 39 were returned for a 31% response rate. Respondents were representative of the overall business mix with 33% retailers, 36% financial and professional service firms, 10% restaurants, and 8% arts and cultural organizations.

Based on the survey responses, downtown business are largely small independent firms that rent a moderate amount of space and experienced sales growth in recent years. Most firms expect increase sales in the near future and many plan to expand or improve their business. Key survey results include:

- Most downtown businesses are well-established with a median age of 18 years, although 26% were founded since 2000.
- Downtown Barre continues to attract new businesses with one-third of respondent locating in Barre since 2000.
- Most firms are local single establishments, as 72% have a singe location in Barre. Another 10% have two stores with the second location in Montpelier.
- Almost two-thirds of respondents (62%) rent their space and pay an average annual rent of $10 per square foot.
- Downtown businesses vary in size with most using a moderate amount of space. The median business space was 2,600 square feet with one-third occupying less than 2,000 square feet and 13% using 10,000 or more square feet.
- **Among firms located downtown for at least three years, 60% reported sales growth over the last three years and 24% had increase of 25% or greater. Over one-quarter (28%) reported a sales decline and 12% had stable sales.**
- **Survey respondents report that, on average, almost 62% of their customers are from Barre City and Barre Towne.**
- Businesses are attracting more customers from outside Barre City but not tourists. Compared to 3 years ago, 42% reported more customers from Barre Town, Berlin and Montpelier and 50% had more customers from other Vermont towns. Only 27% reported increased tourist customers and 62% had no change in them.
- **Downtown businesses report that only 10% of their customers are 35 or younger, which suggest that firms are either overlooking or uncompetitive** for an important market segment that is 33% of the primary trade area population.
- **Downtown merchants are optimistic about the future with 64% expecting their sales to grow in the next three year. Moreover, 46% plan to expand their business and 33% plan other business or building improvements—half of which are for exterior upgrades to signs, façade, or landscaping.**
- Most firms plan to remain in downtown Barre but some are considering closure or relocation. The vast majority of tenants (70%) expect to renew their leases while the other 30% are undecided. Eight businesses, however, are either considering relocating from downtown or plan to retire within 5 years. Among these firms, half are retail stores.
- Over half of business (59%) have created a web site, but restaurants seem the least likely to do so, as only 1 of 4 restaurants respondents have a web site.

Businesses rate most downtown characteristics between good and adequate, suggesting that they see room for improvement in many areas. Using a scale in which 1 = excellent, 2 = good, 3 = adequate, and 4 = poor, the best and worst rated items were:

Highest Rating	Lowest Rating
➢ Customer Service (2.22)	➢ Store Hours (3.04)
➢ Quality of Goods and Services (2.25)	➢ Traffic (2.97)
➢ Amount of Parking (2.26)	➢ Sales/Promotions/Special Events (2.82)
➢ Location of Parking (2.28)	➢ Selection of Goods and Services (2.78)

Consistent with their evaluation of downtown, firms cited new types of stores, evening store hours, and expanded downtown events as the most important downtown improvements. However, businesses were most interested in participated in marketing-related activities, particularly special events:

- Over half of respondents (56%) cited new types of stores as one of the three most important downtown improvements and 28% were willing to participate in activities to recruit new stores.
- 36% cited evening store hours at a top improvement, but only 15% were willing to participate in such an effort
- 23% ranked more downtown events as one of the top three improvements, but a higher share (38%) were interested in participating in these events—the highest participation level of any item;
- Special sales/promotions, cooperative advertising, and a downtown shopping guide or web site also elicited fairly strong interest with 31%, 28% and 26% of respondents, respectively, willing to participate in these activities.

4.40 Sales Gap Analysis

The sales gap analysis seeks to identify retail stores with strong expansion potential based on a low share of total spending currently captured by primary trade area businesses. The following figures approximate the sales gap due to data limitations and the geographic complexity of shopping patterns. Since the data used in the analysis comes from different sources with varied categories and definitions, it is difficult to precisely determine spending by store type for primary trade area residents, second home owners, and tourists.[9] Both consumer spending data and store sales data in the gap analysis are for the primary trade area, since this is the market area that principally supports downtown Barre. The entire primary trade area is used because many stores exist outside downtown Barre and their role in addressing customer demand needs to be factored into the sales gap analysis. However, stores in other locations, especially near the primary trade area boundaries, are likely to attract customers from outside the Barre trade area. Thus, their sales partly reflect demand from a different market area, which may result

[9] Year-round resident spending is estimated by Claritas by retail store type, second home resident spending is based on product categories from the Consumer Expenditure Survey rather than store type and tourist spending data is reported by broader spending categories, i.e., lodging, transportation, shopping, etc..

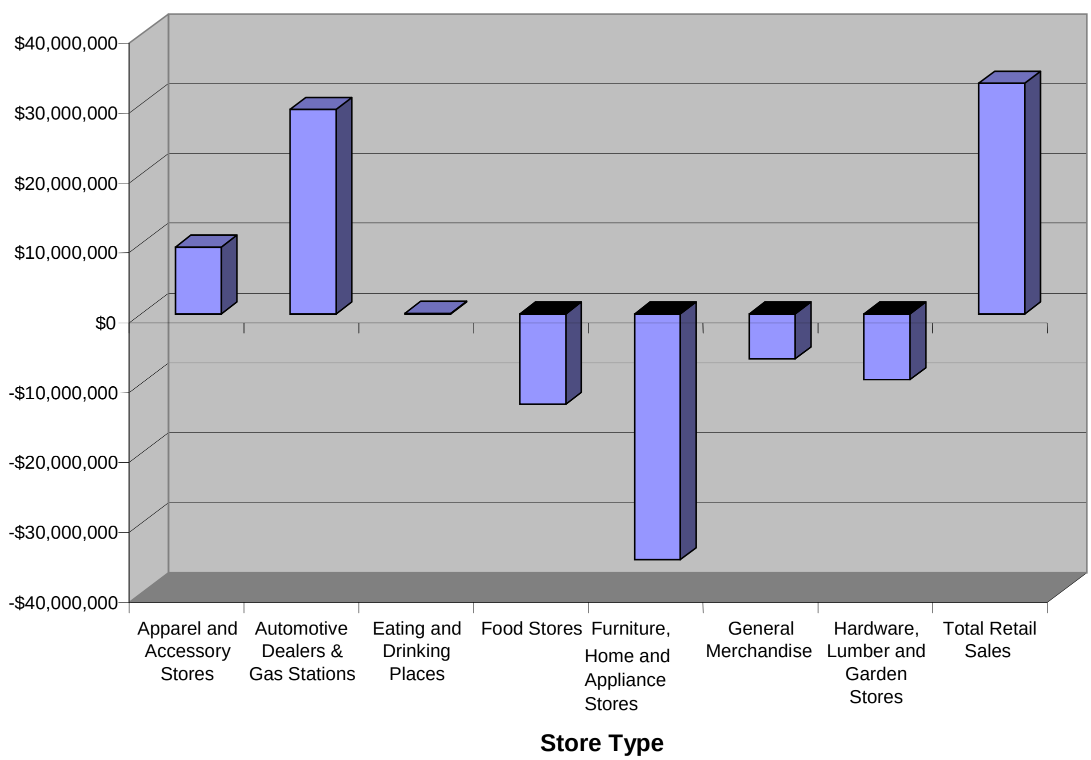
in an underestimation of the sales gap. Nonetheless, the analysis can still be useful in identifying target retail stores with growth potential.

The results from the sales gap analysis are presented in Table 11 and Figure 7. Estimated total annual spending for each store type is the combined spending for year-round residents in the primary market area, second-home owners shopping in the primary trade area and tourists for whom Montpelier is the primary destination[10]. It is important to note that the Claritas estimate of primary trade area household spending is $200 million above that presented in Table 1. The largest differences exist for auto-related goods and groceries, but this difference stems from a large estimate of households in the primary trade area. Annual sales are the total sales for all stores in the primary trade area, as estimated by Claritas. The sales gap is the difference between total customer spending and stores sales. The spending capture rate is the percentage of total customer spending that is being spent at stores within the primary trade area.

The sales gap analysis indicates that stores sales exceed customer demand for most store types with a large absolute sales gap in two store groups:

- **Clothing and accessory stores where the estimated gap is $9.5 million and the capture rate is 60.4%.**
- **Automotive dealer and gas stations where the estimated gap is $29.3 million and the capture rate is 88.5%.**

Figure 7. Primary Trade Sales Gap by Store Type



[10] Secondary trade area residents and tourists visiting all of Central Vermont are not included because downtown Barre draws a relatively small portion of its sales from customers and including customer demand from this much larger market area would yield misleading estimates of the sales gap affecting downtown Barre.

The negative sales gap for food stores, general merchandise stores, and home supply related businesses indicates that these stores draw a significant share of their customers from the secondary trade area. These stores appear to play a large role in making the Barre-Berlin-Montpelier area an important regional shopping destination and expanding its market area. However, the very large negative sales gap for furniture, home and appliance stores probably also indicates problems with the sales data estimates.

The sale gap results do identify any retail stores that are underrepresented in the primary trade area. While a sizeable the sales gap was estimated for clothing stores, a 60% capture rate is fairly high given the competition from the Burlington region and internet and mail order retailers. The second store group with a large sales gap, auto dealers and gas stations, are not a good fit for downtown Barre given their large and auto-oriented site requirements.

Table 11. Primary Trade Area Sales Gap Analysis

Store Type	Total Customer Spending	Annual Sales	Estimated Sales Gap	Capture Rate
Apparel and Accessory Stores	$24,182,251	$14,600,000	$9,582,251	60.4%
Automotive Dealers & Gas Stations	$253,861,919	$224,600,000	$29,261,919	88.5%
Eating and Drinking Places	$66,218,070	$66,100,000	$118,070	99.8%
Food Stores	$142,083,490	$155,000,000	-$12,916,510	109.1%
Furniture, Home and Appliance Stores	$24,415,971	$59,600,000	-$35,184,029	244.1%
General Merchandise	$50,055,332	$56,500,000	-$6,444,668	112.9%
Hardware, Lumber and Garden Stores	$51,063,361	$60,500,000	-$9,436,639	118.5%
Total Retail Sales	$765,837,671	$732,800,000	$33,037,671	95.7%

Source: Consultant calculations from Claritas, 2002 Census of Population and Housing, 2002 US Consumer Expenditure Survey, and 2001 University of Vermont tourist spending data.

5.0 Barre City Tourism, Arts and Cultural Attractions

Barre City has multiple attractions that are an important asset for downtown Barre since they draw both regional customers and tourists. Key attractions include:

- Rock of Ages Quarries and Manufacturing
- Vermont Granite Museum
- Vermont History Center
- Studio Place Arts
- Thunder Road Speedbowl
- Barre Opera House
- Hope Cemetery

This section briefly summarizes the customer base and downtown impact of these attractions and highlights key issues to expand their impact. A longer profile of each attraction and more detailed findings from interviews are provided in Appendix B.

Several destinations draw 40,000 to 50,000 visitors each year, with a large portion from outside the region. Rock of Ages had 54,000 visitors in 2003 and is working toward a goal of 100,000 visitors. Visitors are largely tourists from New England, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio and Quebec. Hope Cemetery attracts approximately 45,000 visitors annually, with many bus tours bringing visitors from across the United States, particularly in the fall. When completed, the Vermont Granite Museum anticipates having as many as 90,000 visitors, of which 20,000 to 30,000 would be from outside Central Vermont. Events at Thunder Road Speedbowl have the largest annual attendance, at over 100,000, but it draws heavily from Central Vermont.

Other attractions have fewer visitors and primarily serve regional customers, although they draw from an area beyond Barre's primary and secondary trade areas. The largest of these is the Barre Opera House, with 23,000 annual attendees.

Based on the customer survey, the largest share of trade area residents attend the Barre Opera House and the lowest share visits the Vermont History Center:

- 42.9% of respondents reported visiting the Barre Opera House over the past year;
- Less than one-in-five (18.3%) visited the Vermont History Center
- Thunder Road and Vermont Studio Arts each attracted 21% of regional customers at least once in the past year

It is worth noting that no venue was visited by a majority of residents over the past year, suggesting that there is a significant potential to expand local attendance at key attractions.

Good linkages exist between visitor attractions and downtown businesses, but they are limited in scope without an overall strategy and coordination. Most attractions foster downtown patronage by providing listings of and referrals to local restaurants, lodging, shops, and attractions. Some stronger collaborations exist, such as local advertising at Thunder Road Speedbowl and theater/dining packages between the Opera House and Sean and Nora's. Several organizations also are active in the Barre Partnership's activities to market and improve the downtown district. However, there are few joint marketing and promotional activities between anchor attractions and the businesses community and one destination had a mixed experience co-sponsoring a promotional event with downtown merchants.

During interviews, staff at tourist and cultural attractions identified the following issues and challenges to building the tourist market and expanding its economic impact for downtown Barre:

- A key organizational barrier to strengthening these relationships is the lack of a formal organization representing local arts and tourism attractions. Such an organizational could build on the considerable existing informal interaction to provide a stronger and more coherent voice and agenda for enhancing arts and tourism activities, and building relationships with local retailers such as joint marketing and promotions.

- One interviewee noted that central Vermont lacks a strong promotional package to increase and extend visitation to the region. New attractions, e.g., the Granite Museum and the Historical Society collections, and the strengthening of existing attractions (Rock of Ages) create an opportunity to develop a promotional package with a more appealing mix of attractions. The need for more aggressive joint marketing of the region at state visitor centers and other venues was also noted.

- Granite and granite-related activities, long an engine for attracting tourists to the City and region, have seen a fall-off in visitors since the peak years of the 1960s. Two explanations for this decline were provided: (1) the lack of a strong granite-oriented infrastructure -- information, exhibits, packaged tours, and demonstrations (the new Granite Museum and the newly-opened Rock of Ages Visitors Center help address this issue); and (2) the omission of a critical element within the current infrastructure-the artist. Few opportunities are available where visitors can see first-hand how individual artists work with and shape granite. This human and artistic dimension requires more attention and visibility, which the planned connection between the Granite Museum and the Stone Arts School should partly address.
- Many interviewees raised issues related to the overall image and appeal of downtown Barre that affect its success in becoming a significant tourist destination. These include: (1) the need to create a new positive image the updates its perception as an blue collar industrial community; (2) the high volume of through truck traffic on Main Street that detracts from the retail environment, and discourages amenities such as outdoor cafes; (3) several building vacancies that create eyesores and diminish downtown's visual appeal; (4) updating the retail mix to appeal more strongly to a new generation of shoppers; (5) a sense of inertia among merchants as they await the reconstruction of Main Street; and (6) poor perceptions of public safety downtown.
- Some interviewees felt that Barre's could work to improve its evening entertainment offerings by better marketing existing events, upgrading some venues (e.g., the movie theater), and adding new venues and events.
- The workforce within the tourist industry and downtown businesses is not adequately equipped and trained in customer service protocols to foster tourism. Thus, visitors who come to Barre City and interact with retail employees such as gas station attendants and store clerks are not sufficiently informed by these front-line workers about the tourist attractions and the shops in the downtown. A customer service training program was attempted several years but was not fully developed.
- Many visitors to the region are family members and friends of local residents. This is a potentially lucrative market for tourist attractions and downtown businesses alike, but little is known about this visitor base and how to expand their patronage of downtown stores and the City's arts and tourism attractions.
- Hope Cemetery appears to be a significant tourist anchor, but is extremely under-exploited and under-resourced. With a stronger market orientation and more resources, the Cemetery could generate more economic spin-off activity for the downtown.

6.0 Summary of Key Findings and Implications

Several key findings emerge from the above customer profile, analysis of downtown's economic composition and competition, and review of tourist, arts and cultural attractions. Key findings and implications for downtown Barre's marketing strategy include:

- Primary trade area residents are downtown Barre's largest and most critical consumer market to retain and grow. Barre City and Town, Montpelier and Northfield, with 60% of primary trade area income, are especially important.

- Young adults and married couples without children are important market segments given their size and, in the former case, apparent under-representation among existing business customers.

- The secondary trade area is an important growth market due to its larger size and similar demographics to the primary trade area. Residents in the southern and eastern portions of this region are more promising given their greater distance to the Burlington area.

- Tourists are an important market in Central Vermont, especially for restaurants and entertainment venues, and represent an important longer term opportunity for downtown Barre. To capitalize on this market, significant local and regional efforts are needed to attract more visitors to the regional, develop stronger and better integrated attractions, enhance downtown as a tourist destination, and create better linkages between downtown businesses and key attractions.

- Customers rate downtown Barre positively well with its greatest strengths in the quality of its goods and services and customer service and its major weaknesses in traffic and limited sales, promotions and special events. This latter weakness is directly within the control of downtown Barre businesses and civic organizations.

- Promotions and special events are a promising way to attract more customers and expand downtown patronage and have considerable business support. Incorporating live music and street festivals in special events will make them more attractive to customers.

- Downtown Barre is performing well as retail and service center with a diverse economic base and is a top destination in five store categories. However, it faces important competition from mass merchandisers in Berlin, the size and diversity of chain stores and big box retailers in the Burlington area, entertainment venues in Burlington and restaurants in Montpelier.

- To compete more effectively, Barre needs to emphasize and enhance the convenience of downtown shopping as a diverse one-stop center and work to enhance the downtown shopping experience with special events and activities, amenities and an attractive environment that highlights it historic buildings and cultural assets. Expanded amenities and a more inviting physical environment are also important to growing Barre as a tourist destination.

- The diversity of downtown Barre's business bases, several anchor stores and concentrations of businesses in clothing, home supply, financial services, restaurants and growing cultural attractions are key to its market position. This diversity is strength but also means that the downtown's image is hard to define, as it is not linked to specific types of stores or services.

- Downtown Barre's greatest retail strength is in home supply products, particularly hardware and building materials and appliances. Broadening this retail group to include home furnishing can strengthen its role as a home supply center and provide cross over appeal to tourists and second home owners, especially by featuring Vermont made products and crafts.

- Downtown should also seek to diversity its restaurants to strengthen its role as a dining destination and address an important weakness identified in the customer survey.

- Downtown Barre is unlikely to attract a major grocery store to overcome its weakness as a food shopping destination, but it may be able to establish itself as a niche grocery destination through attracting specialty food stores, such as a food coop, health food store, ethnic food stores and Vermont made food products. These specialty stores will also increase shopping opportunities for tourists

- Stronger collaboration among tourists and cultural organizations and between these organizations and the downtown business community is needed to strengthen the Barre region and downtown as a cultural and visitor destination, better integrate downtown Barre into a regional "granite trail" and regional shopping, dining and entertainment offerings, and to enhance the overall marketing for downtown business and key attractions.

Downtown Barre Customer Survey

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Executive Summary

The purpose of the 2004 Barre Downtown Customer Survey is to develop a better understanding of the markets served by and market opportunities in Barre City. The data was collected through a random sample of the following Barre area town's adult residents from June 14-24, 2004. Sixty-six percent of the target sample population was drawn from the primary market area and the remaining thirty-three percent was drawn from the secondary market area which is outlined below. A total of 469 interviews were conducted with area residents for a margin of error at approximately +/- 4.5 percent.

Primary Area (66%)

Washington County:
- Barre City
- Barre Town
- Berlin
- Cabot
- Calais
- East Montpelier
- Marshfield
- Middlesex
- Montpelier
- Moretown
- Northfield
- Plainfield

Orange County:
- Brookfield
- Orange
- Williamstown
- Washington

Secondary Area (33%)

Washington County:
- Duxbury
- Payston
- Roxbury
- Warren
- Waitsfield
- Waterbury
- Woodbury
- Worcester

Caledonia County:
- Barnet Bradford
- Danville
- Groton
- Hardwick Chelsea
- Peacham
- Ryegate
- St. Johnsbury
- Wadlen
- Waterford

Orange County:
- Bradford
- Braintree
- Chelsea
- Corinth
- Newbury
- Randolph
- Topsham
- Vershire

Chittendon County:
Bolton
Richmond

Lamiolle County:
Elmore
Morristown
Stowe
Wolcott

Some of the highlights of the survey are as follows:

- An overwhelming majority (73.4%) of respondents report that they went to Downtown Barre sometime during the last month.

- A clear majority of respondents report that on their last visit to Downtown Barre they purchased either goods or services at 64.5 percent.

- A strong majority of respondents (65.2%) report that the usual reason for their trips to Downtown Barre is for shopping.

- An obvious majority of respondents report that they the regularly visit a specific store or office when they visit Downtown Barre.

- Almost twenty percent of respondents (18.9 %) state that they most often regularly visit Lenny's.

- An overwhelming majority of respondents (86.4%) rate the customer service in Downtown Barre as excellent or good, in addition the quality of goods and services rate highly as well at 81.3 percent.

- Almost half of all respondents (44.0%) shop most often on Saturday's.

- Forty two percent of respondents generally shop most often in the morning, closely followed by afternoon shoppers at 37.2 percent.

- Respondents are most likely to shop for hardware and building supplies (42.7%), dining and meals (41.2%), banking and financial services (34.1%), gifts and crafts (28.5%) and books (23.8%) in Downtown Barre.

- A significant majority of respondents (70.2%) report that they would be more attracted to Downtown Barre if there were more live music.

- An overwhelming majority of respondents (90.4%) either strongly agree or agree that "shopping in Downtown Barre is better for the local economy".

Project Overview

Bridgewater State College's Institute for Regional Development, subcontracted by Karl Seidman, designed and administered a citizen survey of Barre residents during the month of June 2004. The purpose of this survey is to obtain information and customer perceptions about Barre to assist in planning for the future of Downtown Barre.

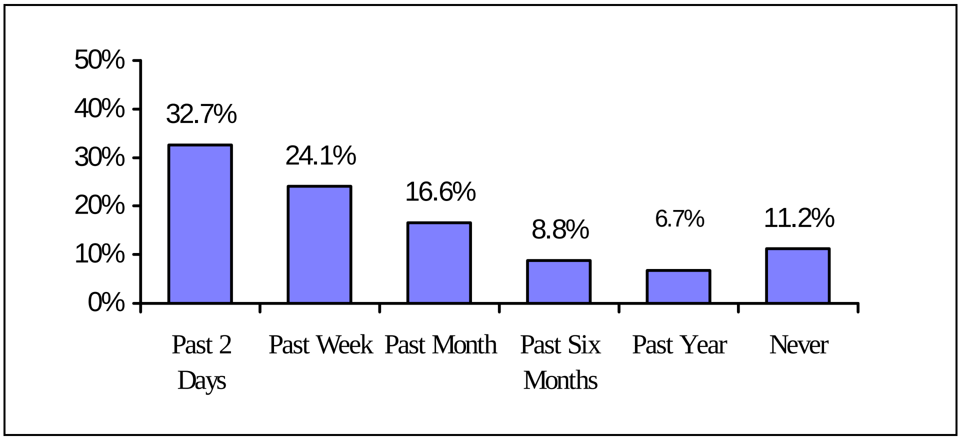
By means of a random sampling process, the survey gathered data from a diverse group of citizens in the greater area. A team of trained interviewers administered the survey during daytime and evening hours. A total of 469 interviews were conducted with Barre and surrounding area residents over the age of 18. The margin of error is approximately +/- 4.8 percent at the 95 percent confidence level.

All interviewing was conducted from the Institute for Regional Development's telephone research center at Bridgewater State College. A project director was present at all times to supervise the administration of the survey, monitor for quality control, and handle any other problems. Shifts of interviewers were used during the evenings (5:30 to 9pm and days 12:30 to 4:30pm) from June 14-24, 2004. Telephone numbers were selected at random and purged of non-working and business numbers. All telephone numbers in the sample were then called up to three times, using a rotating schedule of callbacks to ensure that a telephone number had been tried on different weekday evenings and days.

Upon completion of calls, the survey responses were entered into a computer database. Using the latest state-of-the-art statistical software (SPSS for Windows Version 11.5), the data file was analyzed. Complete protection and confidentiality of the survey database was assured during all phases of data analysis. Access to the database is limited to the project directors.

Downtown Barre

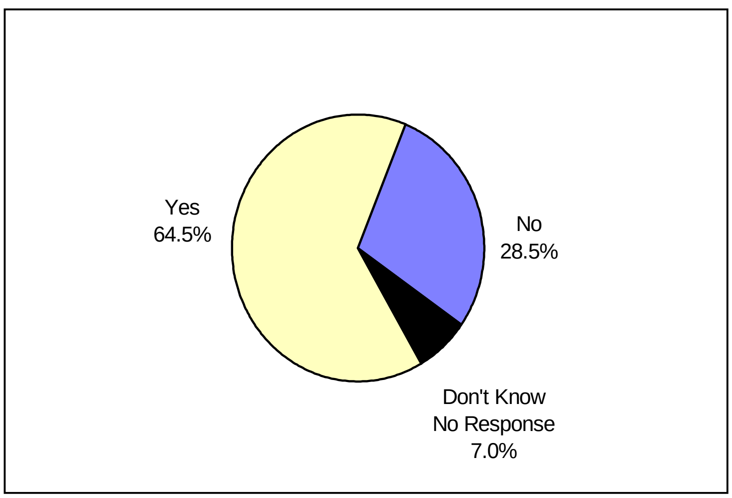
Figure 1
When was the last time you went to Downtown Barre?
N=465



Highlights:

- An overwhelming majority (73.4%) of respondents report that they went to Downtown Barre sometime during the last month.

Figure 2
On your last visit to Downtown Barre, did you purchase any goods or services?
N=417



Highlights:

- A clear majority of respondents report that on their last visit to Downtown Barre they purchased either goods or services at 64.5 percent.

Table 1

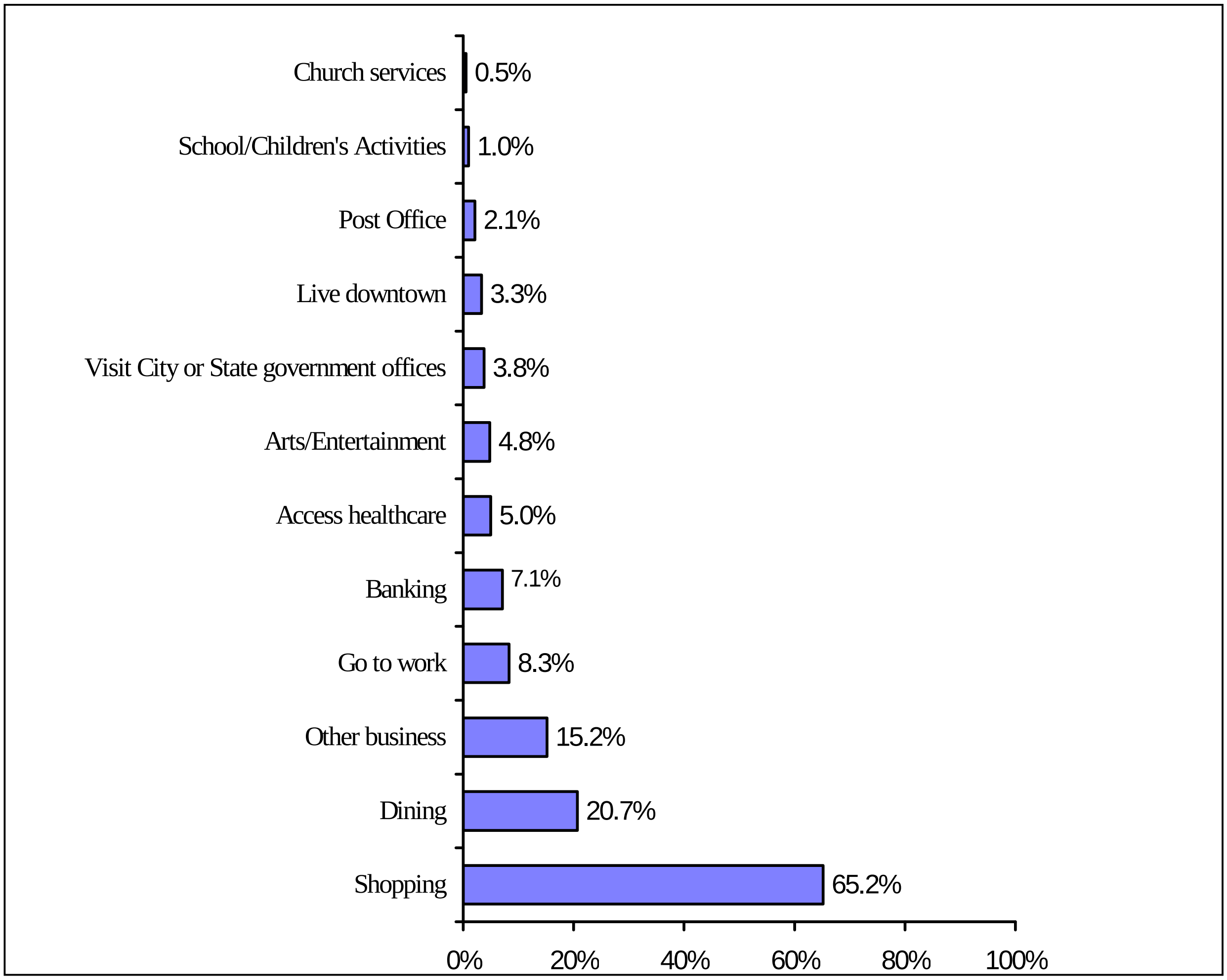
If you have never visited Downtown Barre, why not?

Reason	**N**	**Number of respondents reporting "Yes"**
It is too far too travel	39	26
Parking is not adequate	19	3
It doesn't have the type of stores or services that I need	23	9
Stores are too expensive	19	1
It doesn't offer the type of arts/entertainment that I enjoy	18	1
Downtown area is unsafe	18	1
Downtown area is unattractive	18	0
Stores/business hours are not convenient	18	0
Other	23	12

Highlights:

- Twenty six of thirty nine respondents report that the main reason they have never traveled to Downtown Barre is because it is "too far too travel".

Figure 3
When you come to Downtown Barre, what are the *usual reasons* for your trip? N=420



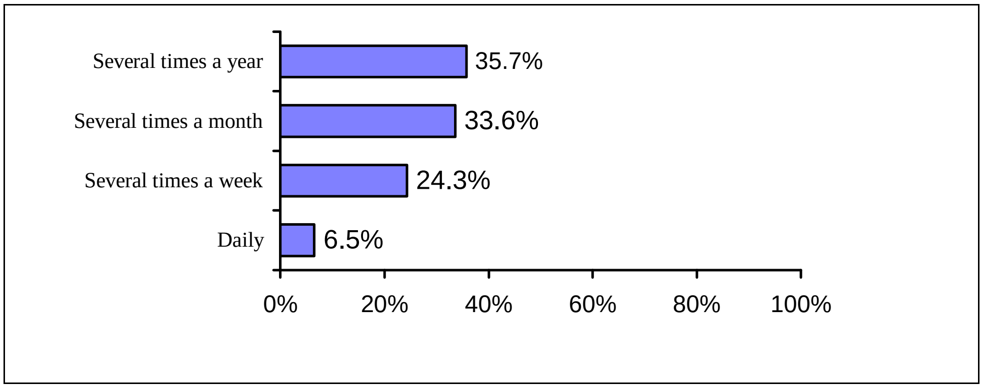
Highlights:

- A strong majority of respondents (65.2%) report that the usual reason for their trips to Downtown Barre is for shopping.

Figure 4

How often do you come to Downtown Barre to purchase goods or services?

N=387



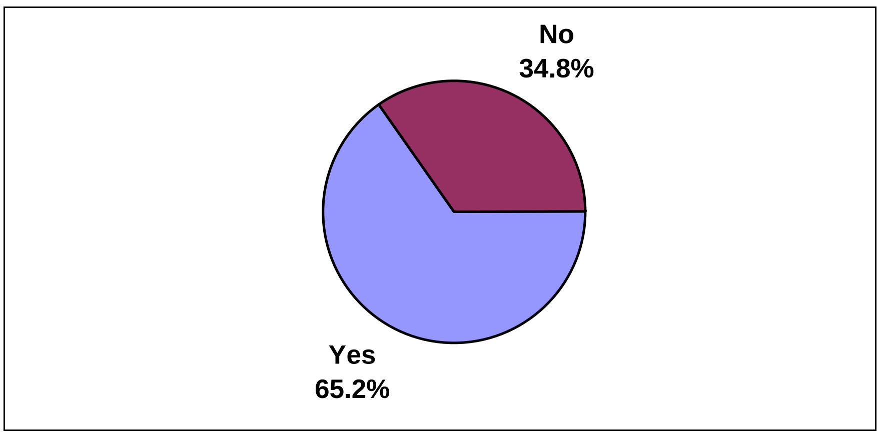
Highlights:

- Over half of all respondents (57.9%) report that they usually visit Downtown Barre either several times a week or several times a month.

Figure 5

When you come to Downtown Barre, do you regularly visit a specific store or office?

N=419



Highlights:

- An obvious majority of respondents report that they regularly visit a specific store or office when they visit Downtown Barre.

Table 2

If you do regularly visit a specific store or office, which one?
N=270

Store or Office	Percent Reporting
Lenny's	18.9%
Convenience Stores/Fast Food	10.0%
Aubuchon's	8.5%
Nelson's	6.7%
Banking	4.8%
Dollar Store/Family Dollar	4.1%
Farmers Diner	3.7%
Brooks	3.7%
Medical/Dental Services	3.7%
Other Hardware/ Appliances	3.3%
Clothing/Jewelry	3.3%
Homer fits	2.2%
Wal-Mart	2.2%
Pharmacies	2.2%
Other	22.6%

Highlights:

- Almost twenty percent of respondents (18.9 %) state that they most often regularly visit Lenny's.
- Ten percent of respondents report that they visit convenience stores and or fast food establishments in Downtown Barre.

With regard to some of Downtown Barre's characteristics, please indicate if you think the characteristic is excellent, good, fair or poor. (See Highlights Page 16)

Figure 6
Selection of Goods and Services N=405

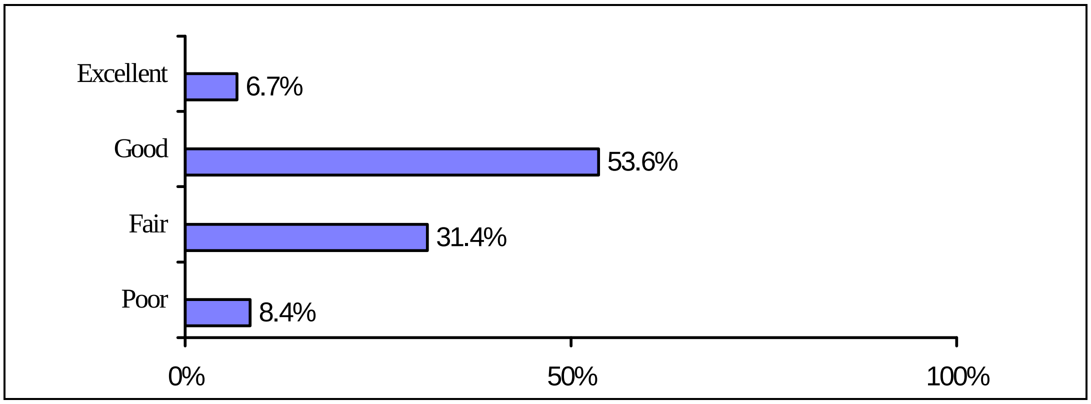


Figure 7
Quality of Goods and Services N=405

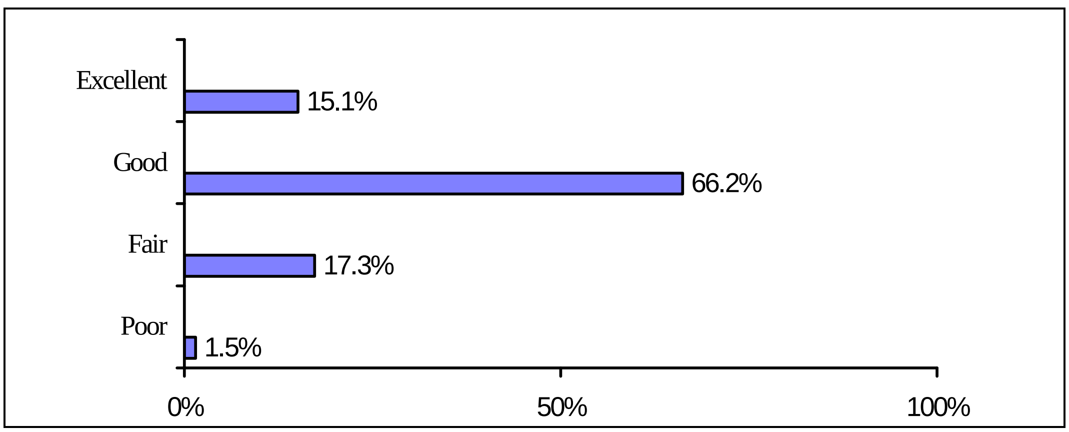


Figure 8
Cost of Goods and Services N=399

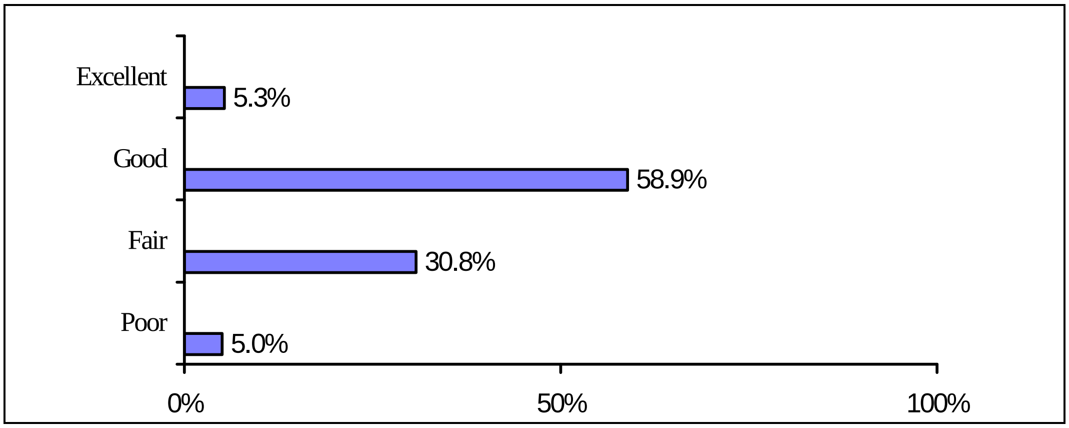


Figure 9
Selection of Restaurants N=377

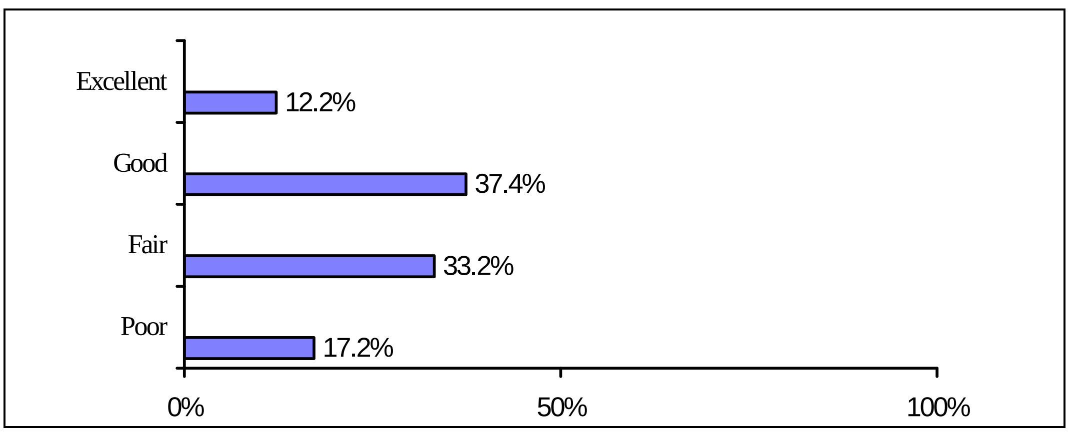


Figure 10
Quality of Restaurants N=375

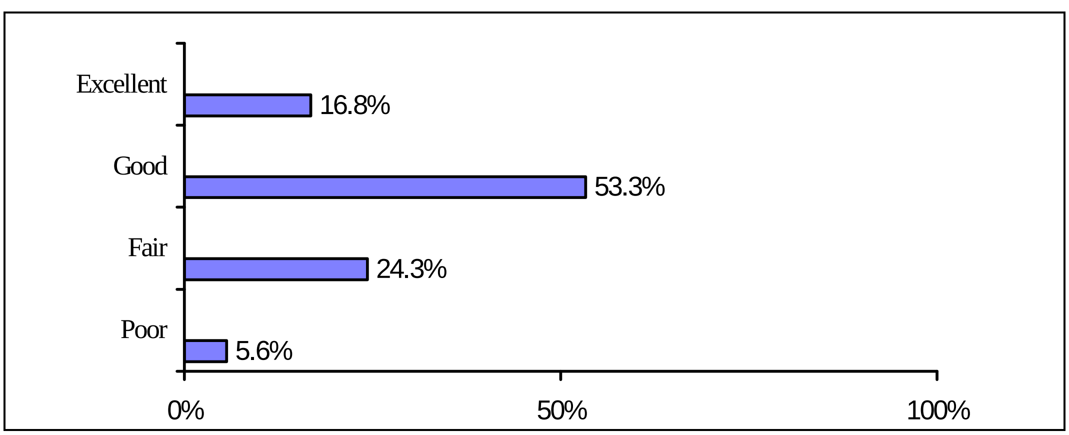


Figure 11
Customer Service N=407

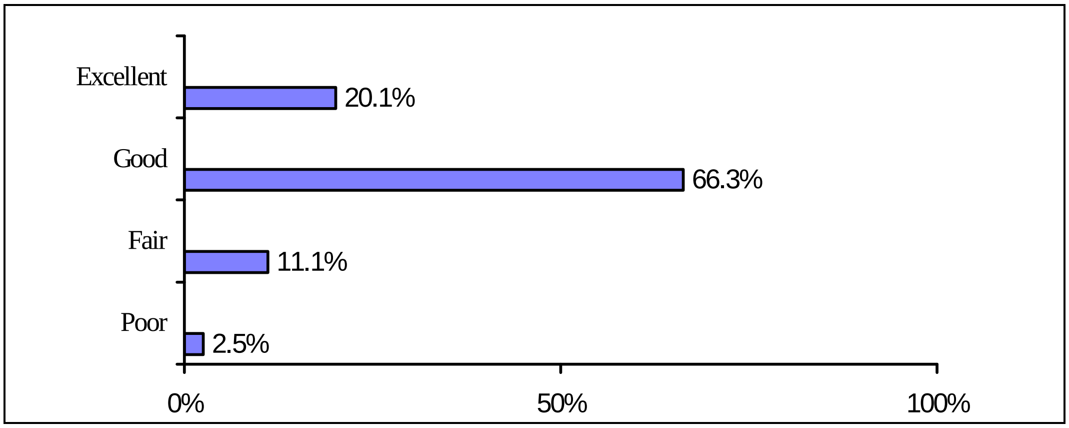


Figure 12
Store Hours N=392

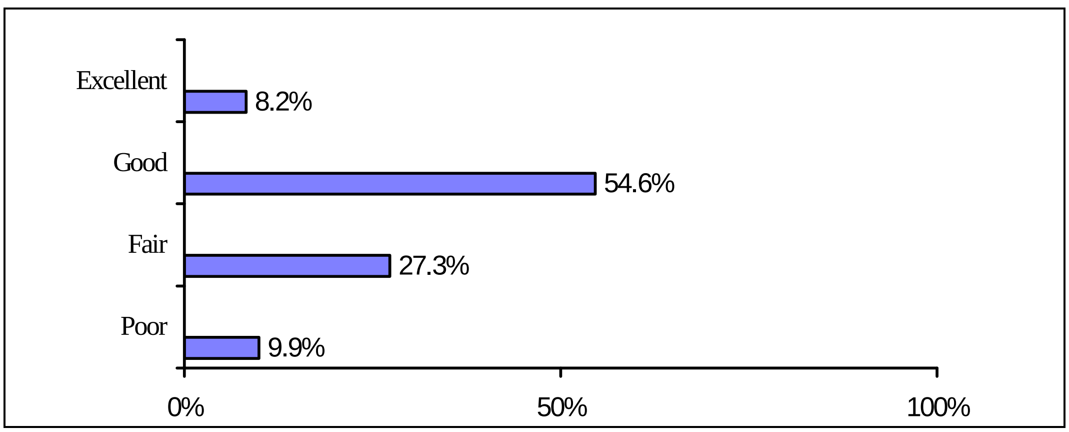


Figure 13
Amount of Parking N=413

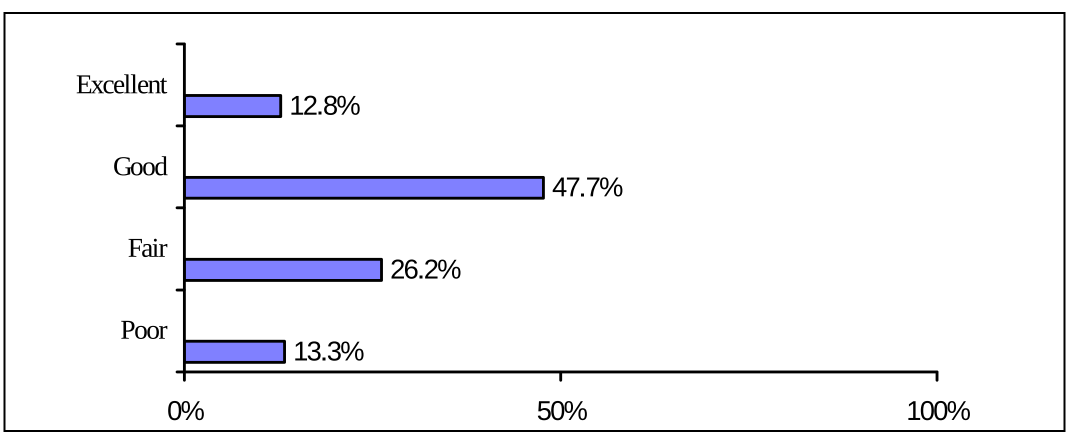


Figure 14
Location of Parking N=411

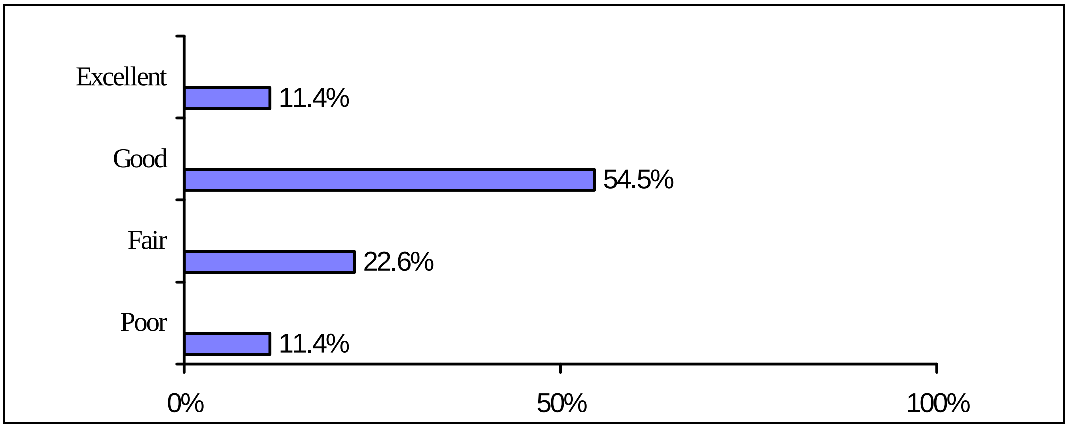


Figure 15
Attractiveness of Store Fronts N=411

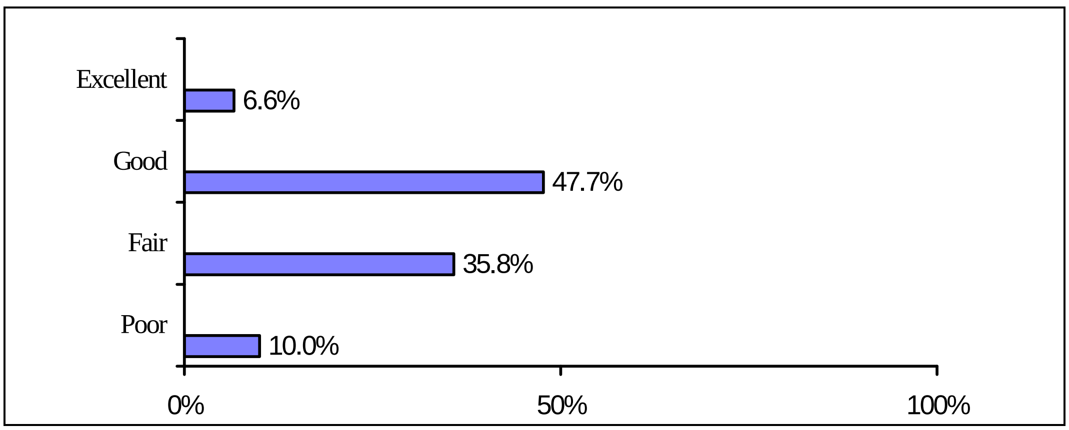


Figure 16
Attractiveness of Store Interiors N=403

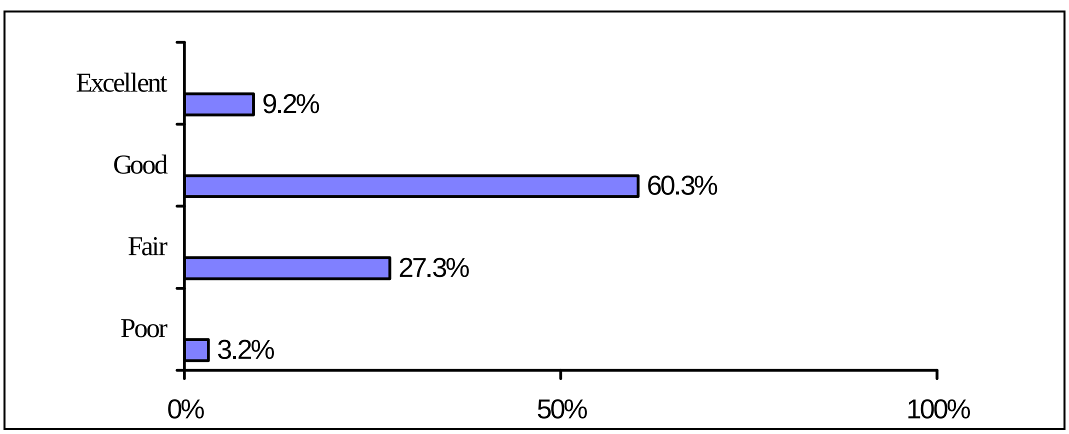


Figure 17
Attractiveness of Public Spaces N=408

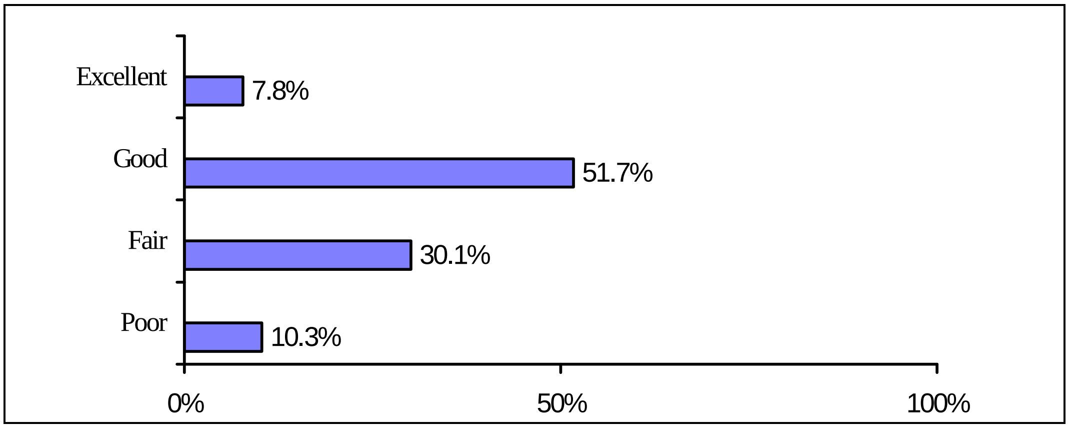


Figure 18
Crime and Safety N=386

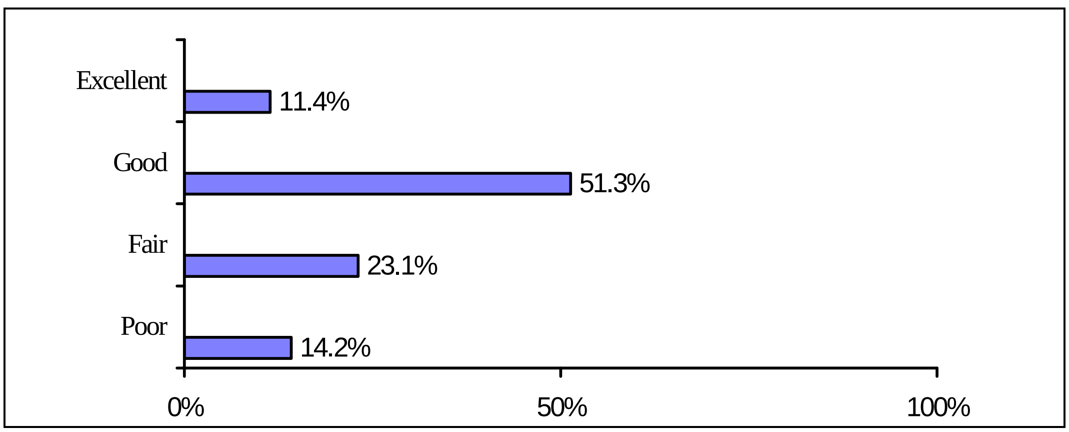


Figure 19
Traffic N=409

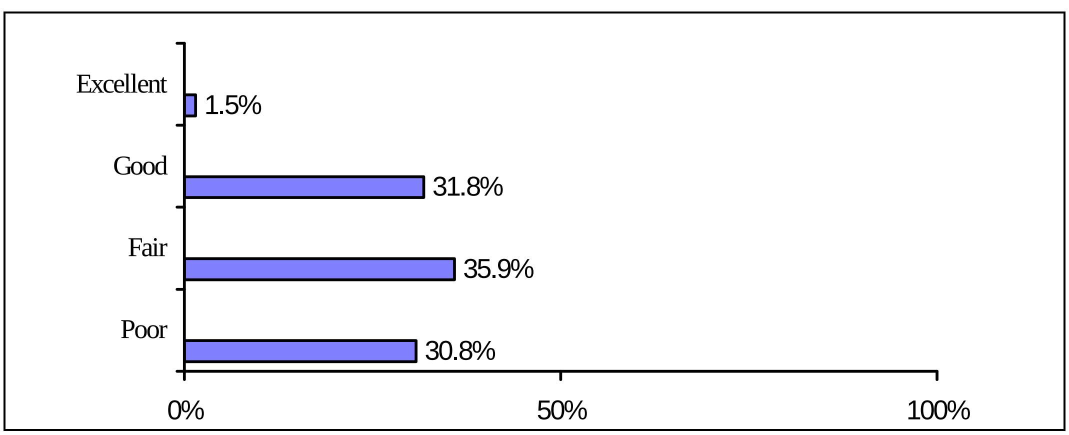
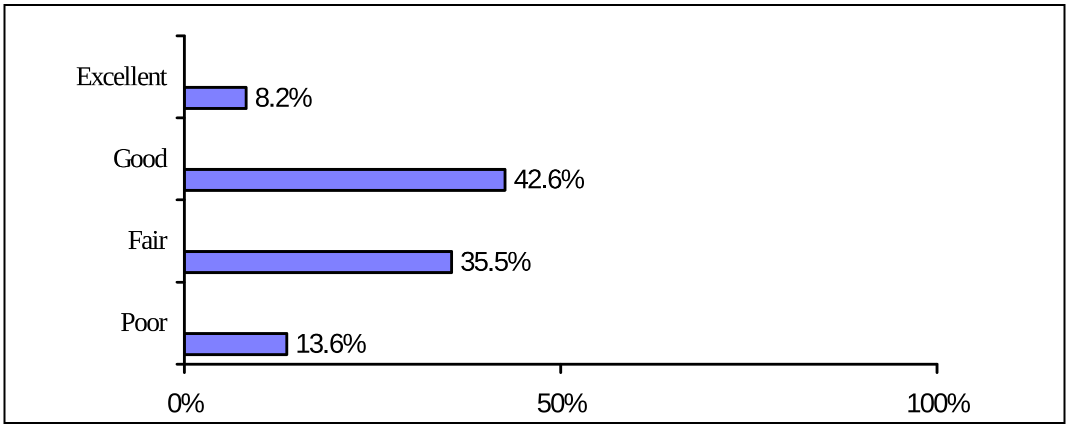


Figure 20
Sales, Promotions and Special Events N=352



Highlights:

- An overwhelming majority of respondents (86.4%) rate the customer service in Downtown Barre as excellent or good, in addition the quality of goods and services rate highly as well at 81.3 percent.

- A slight majority of respondents rate the selection of restaurants in Downtown Barre as fair or poor at 50.4 percent. Selection of goods and services and the amount of parking also rate low at 39.8 percent and 39.5 percent respectively.

Table 3
The following is a list of things that may be done to improve Downtown Barre. Please state if it is likely or not likely to encourage you to visit and shop more often in Downtown Barre.

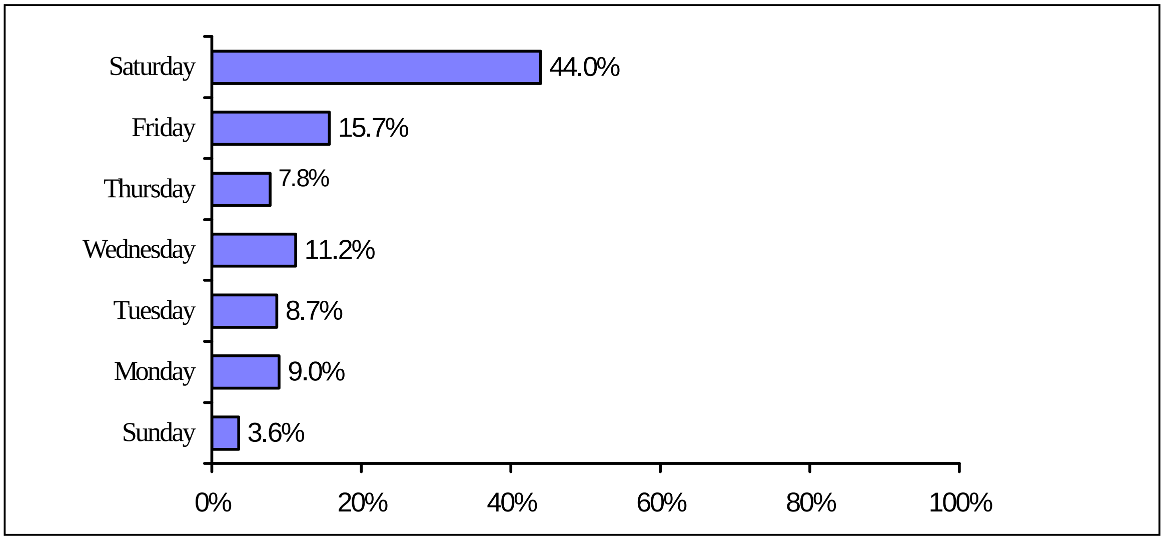
Improvement	Likely
Improved traffic flow/safety	76.0%
More store sales and promotions	70.9%
Provide public rest rooms	65.3%
Special events or festivals	64.0%
More arts or cultural events	59.8%
Cleaner public spaces	58.1%
More conveniently located parking	55.1%
Improved pedestrian safety	53.3%
More parking	52.5%
More attractive storefronts/signs	51.6%
More attractive store displays/interiors	49.4%
Improved handicap accessibility	45.9%
Better outside lighting	42.4%

Highlights:

- The above table illustrates that the respondents are most likely to favor improvements to Downtown Barre's traffic flow and safety (76.0%) and increased store sales and promotions (70.9%). However, respondents are less likely to favor handicap accessibility (45.9 %) and lighting improvements (42.4%) in Downtown Barre.

Downtown Barre Shopping Characteristics

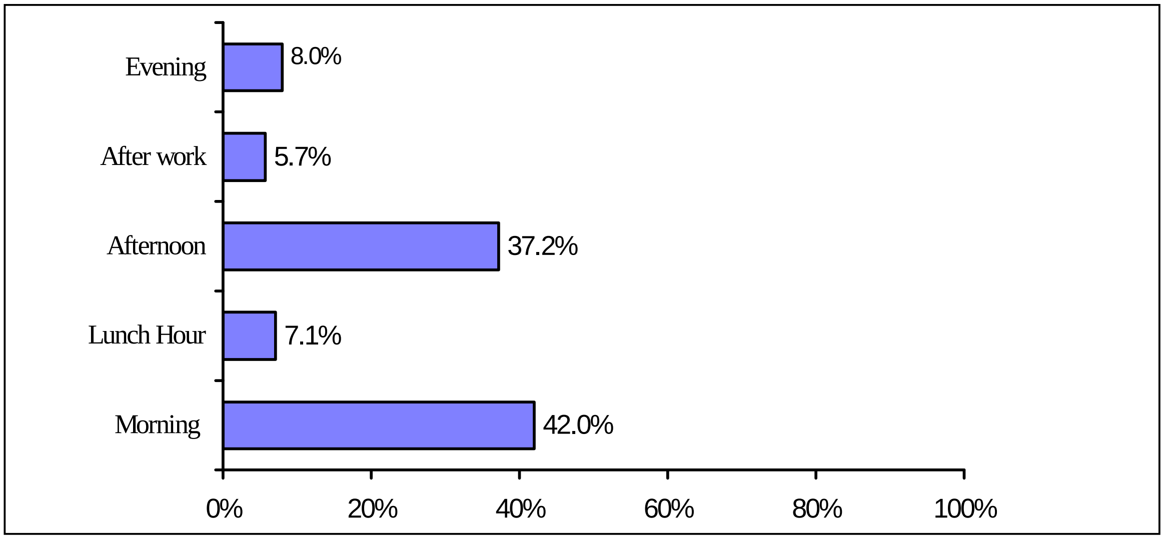
Figure 21
On what day of the week do you generally shop most often? N=357



Highlights:

- Almost half of all respondents (44.0%) shop most often on Saturday's.
- Only 3.6 percent of respondents report that they shop on Sunday's.

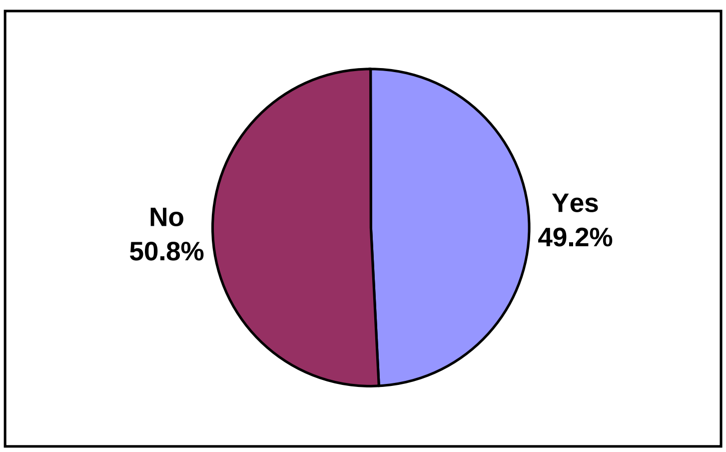
Figure 22
At what time of the day do you generally shop most often? N=436



Highlights:

- Forty two percent of respondents generally shop most often in the morning, closely followed by afternoon shoppers at 37.2 percent.
- Respondents are least likely to shop after work at 5.7 percent.

Figure 23
Would you shop more often in Downtown Barre if stores were open between 5pm and 8pm? N=453



Highlights:

- There is no statistical difference of respondent attitude regarding whether or not they would shop more often in Downtown Barre if stores were open between 5 and 8pm.

Table 4
For the following list of items, please state whether you primarily shop for the item in Downtown Barre, and if not, please state where you do shop for the item.
N=466

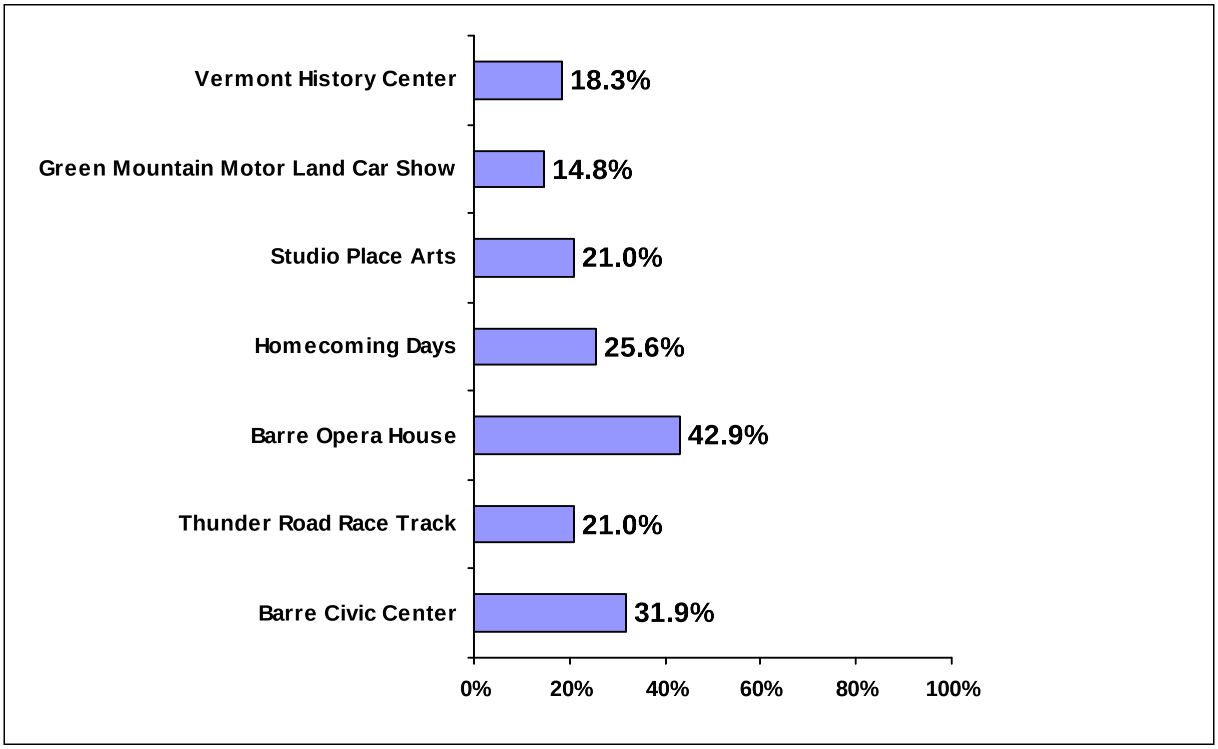
Product/Service	Barre	Other Areas of Barre	Berlin	Montpelier	Williston, Burlington, Essex Junction or S. Burlington	Internet or Mail Order	Other
Hardware/ Building Supplies	42.7%	2.4%	2.8%	15.2%	12.4%	0%	24.5%
Dining & Meals	41.2%	3.4%	7.9%	20.2%	7.3%	.2%	19.7%
Banking & Financial Services	34.1%	4.9%	8.2%	23.0%	2.1%	.6%	27.0%
Appliances	30.0%	33.7%	11.8%	7.9%	19.5%	.9%	26.2%
Gifts & Crafts	28.5%	1.7%	16.3%	12.4%	12.0%	5.2%	23.8%
Personal Services	27.9%	3.2%	9.7%	19.5%	4.5%	.2%	35.0%
Books	23.8%	1.5%	9.2%	20.4%	12.7%	9.9%	22.5%
Home Furnishings	20.6%	3.9%	12.9%	3.9%	20.8%	2.6%	35.4%
Clothing	17.6%	1.5%	25.3%	4.9%	23.4%	9.2%	18.0%
Health Services	16.7%	2.6%	32.0%	10.7%	3.9%	.2%	33.9%
Music, Tapes and CD's	15.9%	1.7%	19.7%	14.2%	10.7%	12.4%	25.3%
Groceries	8.1%	10.7%	43.0%	14.8%	2.1%	.2%	21.0%

Highlights:

- Respondents are most likely to shop for hardware and building supplies (42.7%), dining and meals (41.2%), banking and financial services (34.1%), gifts and crafts (28.5%) and books (23.8%) in Downtown Barre.
- Respondents (33.7%) are most likely to shop in "other areas of Barre" for appliances.
- Respondents report that they shop for their personal (35.0%) and health services (33.9%) and for their music tapes and CD's (25.3%) in "other" areas.
- One fifth of respondents at 20.8 percent report they shop for their home furnishings in the Williston, Burlington, Essex Junction or South Burlington areas.
- One quarter of all respondents (25.3%) report they shop for clothing in Berlin.
- Respondents are most likely to report that they primarily shop for their groceries in Berlin at forty-three percent.

Arts and Entertainment

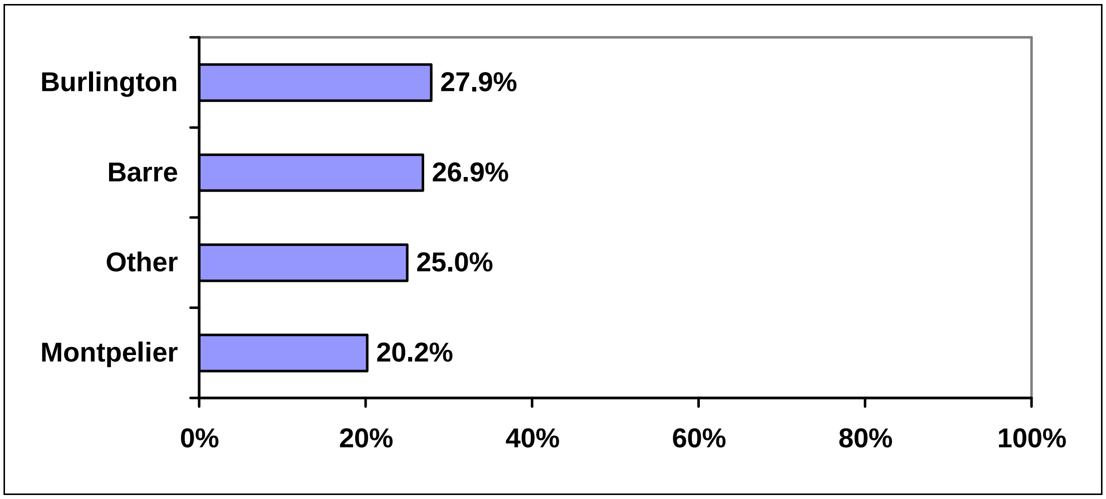
Figure 24
Which of the following offerings in Barre have you visited in the last year? N=462



Highlights:

- 42.9 percent of respondents report that they visited the Barre Opera House in the past year, followed by 31.9 percent of respondents who report that they visited the Barre Civic Center.

Figure 25
When you attend arts or entertainment events, where do you go most often?



Highlights:

- Well over one quarter of respondents (27.9%) report that they most often go to Burlington for their arts and entertainment events.

Table 5
What additional arts or entertainment activities would attract you to Downtown Barre? N=458

Activity	Percent reporting favorably
Live music	70.2%
Street festivals	66.7%
Live theater and dance	53.8%
Family activities	52.6%
Galleries and visual arts	48.1%
Lectures and readings by notable authors	32.5%

Highlights:

- A noteworthy majority of respondents (70.2%) report that they would be more attracted to Downtown Barre if there were more live music.

Table 6
Which of the following newspapers do you read regularly?
N=468

Newspaper	Percent reporting
Barre Montpelier Times Argus	63.2%
The World	44.0%
Burlington Free Press	28.2%
The Seven Day Newspaper	15.0%
Saint Johnsbury Caledonian Record	5.8%

Highlights:

- A clear majority of respondents report that they regularly read the Barre Montpelier Times Argus at 63.2 percent

Of the following statements about Downtown Barre, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree. (See highlights Page 26)

Figure 26
Downtown Barre offers unique stores and shopping opportunities

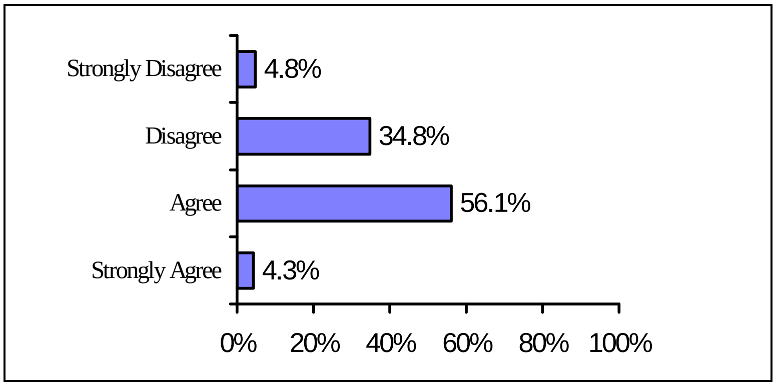


Figure 27
Downtown Barre's historic buildings and environment make it a special place

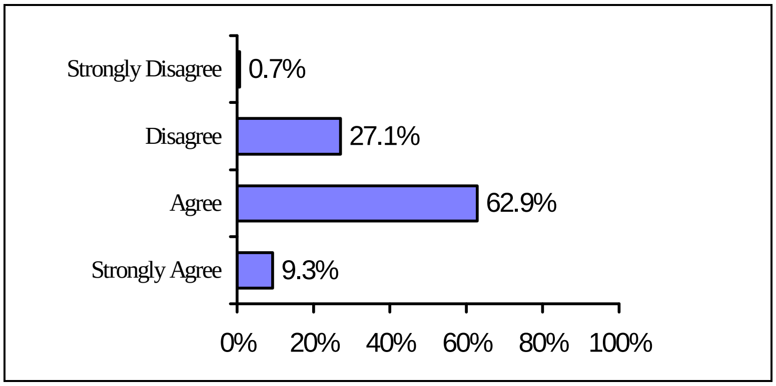


Figure 28

Shopping or doing business in Downtown Barre is convenient

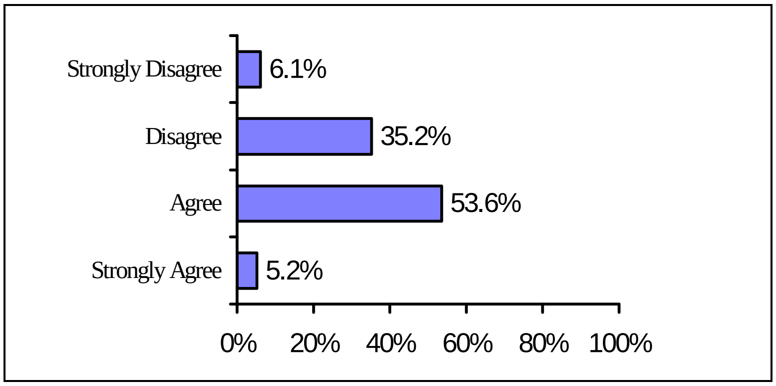


Figure 29

Downtown Barre offers better dining options than other towns

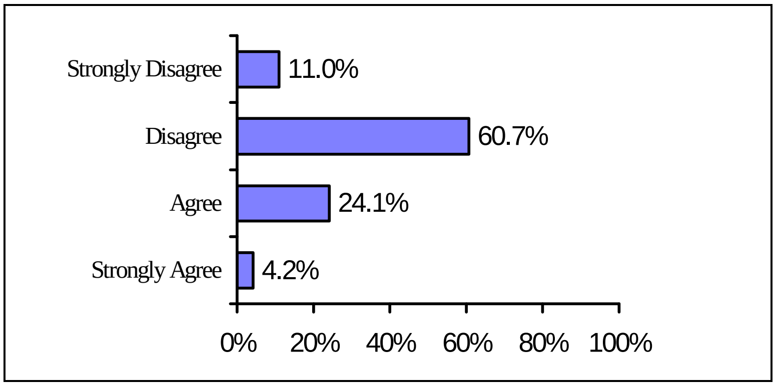


Figure 30

Downtown Barre is a family oriented place to shop or visit

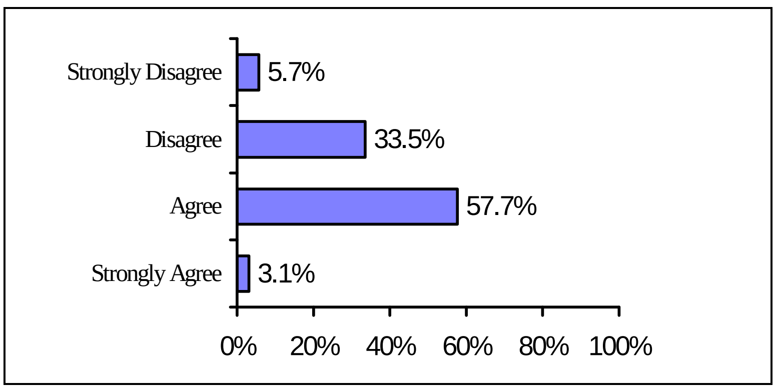


Figure 31

Shopping in Downtown Barre is better for the local economy

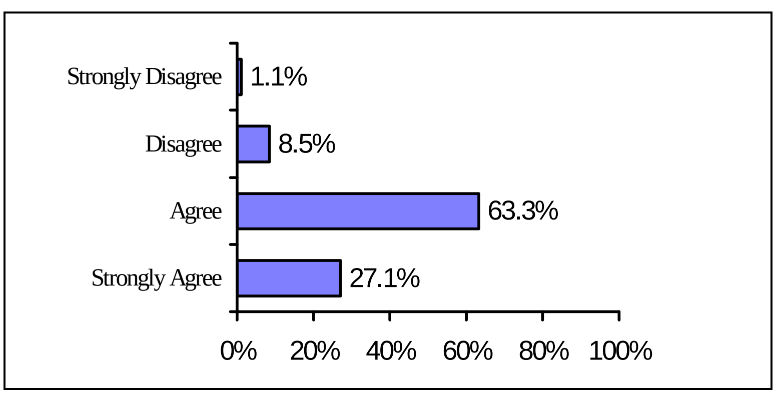


Figure 32
Downtown Barre has more entertainment and cultural activities than other places

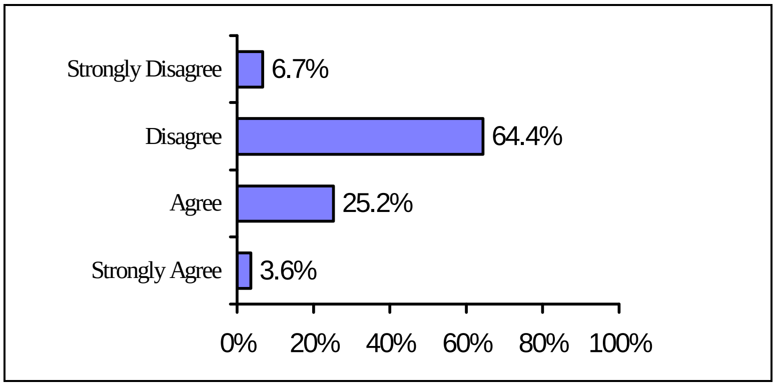
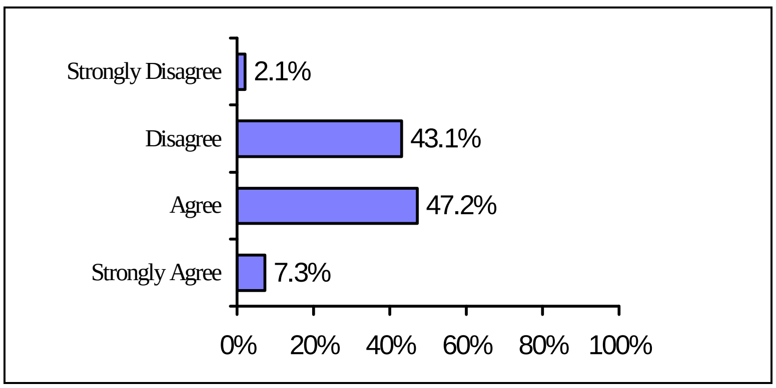


Figure 33
Merchants in Downtown Barre are more helpful and friendly than in other stores

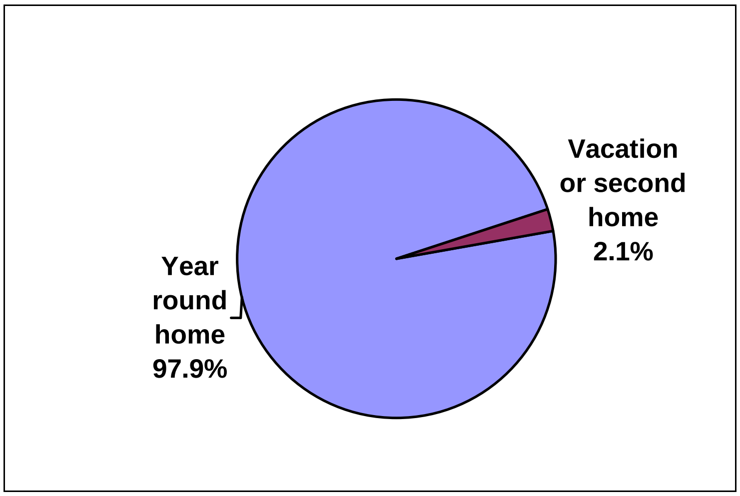


Highlights:

- An overwhelming majority of respondents (90.4%) either strongly agree or agree that "Shopping in Downtown Barre is better for the local economy".
- A strong majority of respondents either strongly agree or agree that "Downtown Barre's historic building and environment make it a special place".
- 58.8 percent of respondents either strongly agree or agree that "Shopping or doing business in Downtown Barre is convenient".
- A strong majority of respondents (71.7%) either disagree or strongly disagree that "Downtown Barre offers better dining options than other towns".
- A strong majority of respondents (71.1%) either disagree or strongly disagree that "Downtown Barre has more entertainment and cultural activities than other places".
- Almost half of all respondents (45.2%) either disagree or strongly disagree that "Merchants in Downtown Barre are more helpful and friendly than in other stores".

Sample Demographic Characteristics

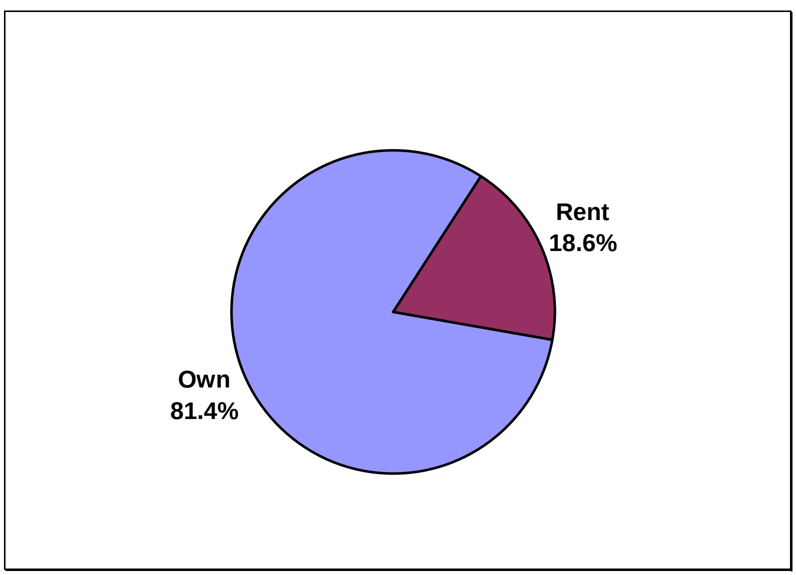
Figure 34
How would you best describe your residence?



Highlights:

- An overwhelming majority of respondents would describe their residence as their "year round home".

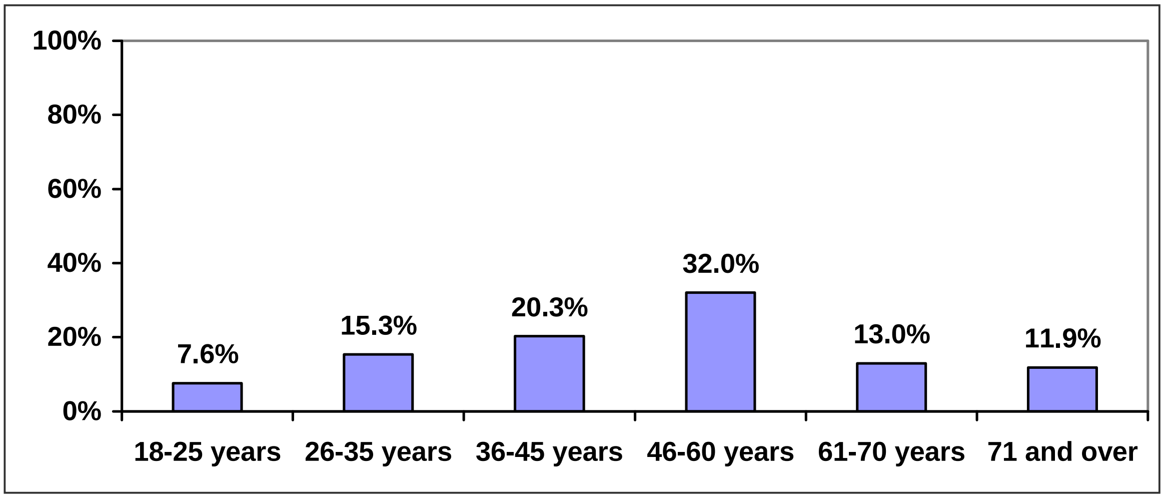
Figure 35
Do you own or rent your home?



Highlights:

- A clear majority (81.4%) of respondents state that they own their own home.

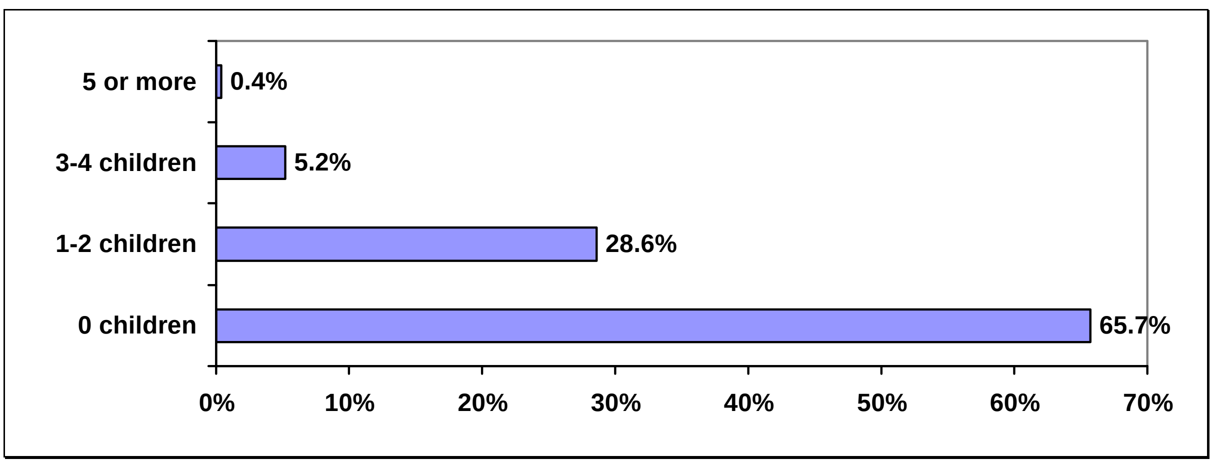
Figure 36
Into which of the following age groups do you fall?



Highlights:

- The largest percentage of respondents (32.0%) is between the ages of 46 and 60.

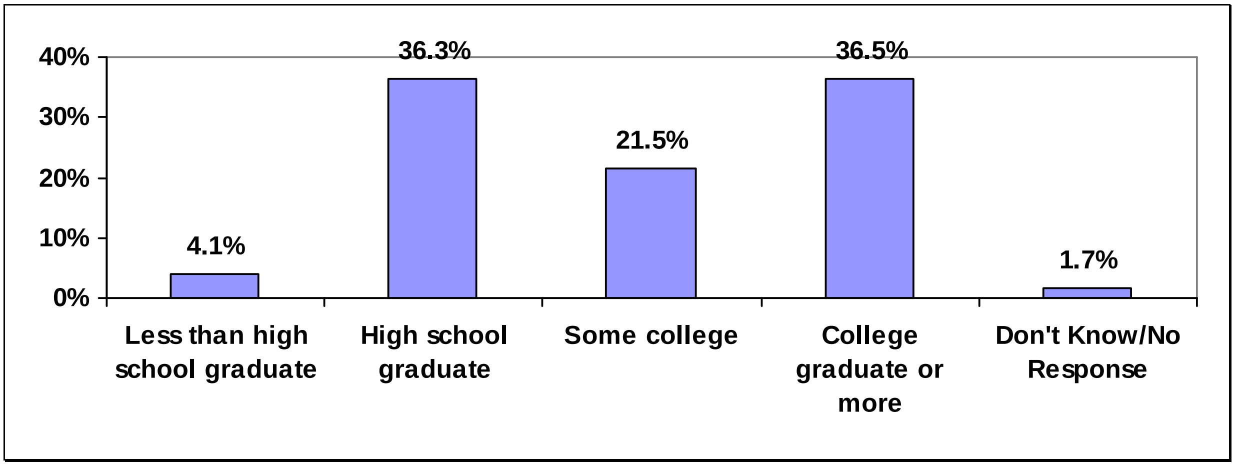
Figure 37
How many children under 18 live in your household?



Highlights:

- The majority of respondents (65.7%) report that they have no children under 18 in their household.

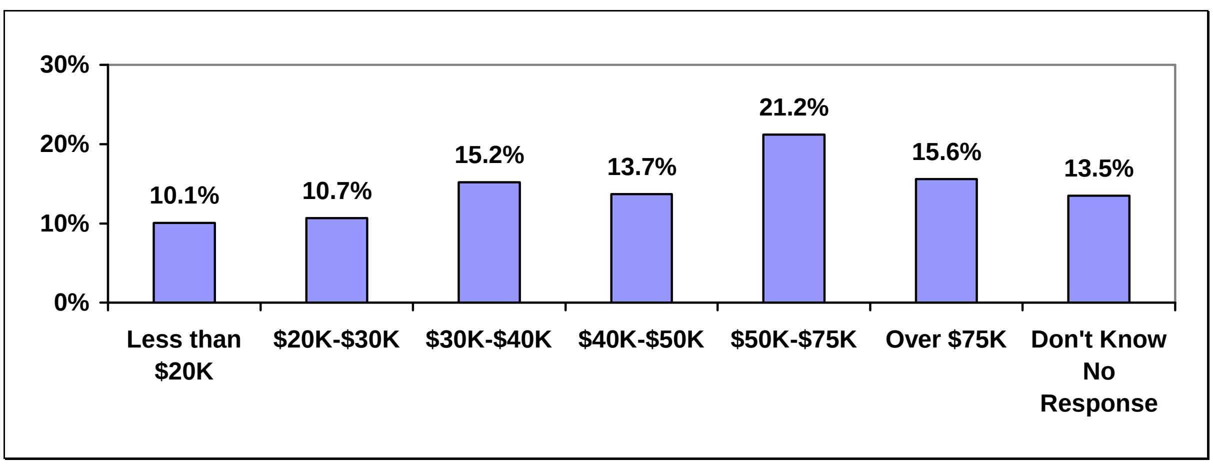
Figure 38
What is the last grade in school you completed?



Highlights:

- The largest percentage of respondents (36.5%) report that they have at least a college degree.

Figure 39
Into which category did your total household income for the past year fall?



Highlights:
- The majority of respondents (50.5%) report that their income is greater than $40,000.

Figure 40
What is your gender?

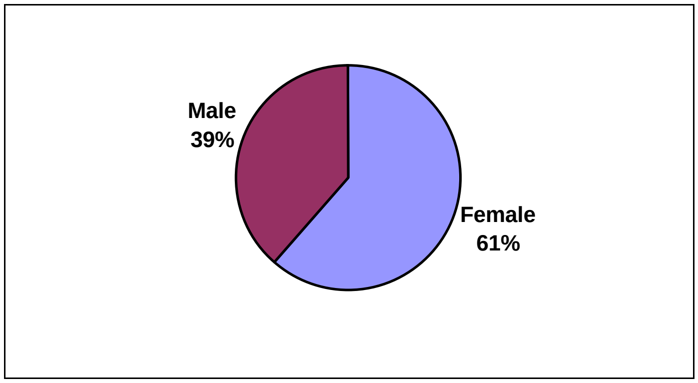
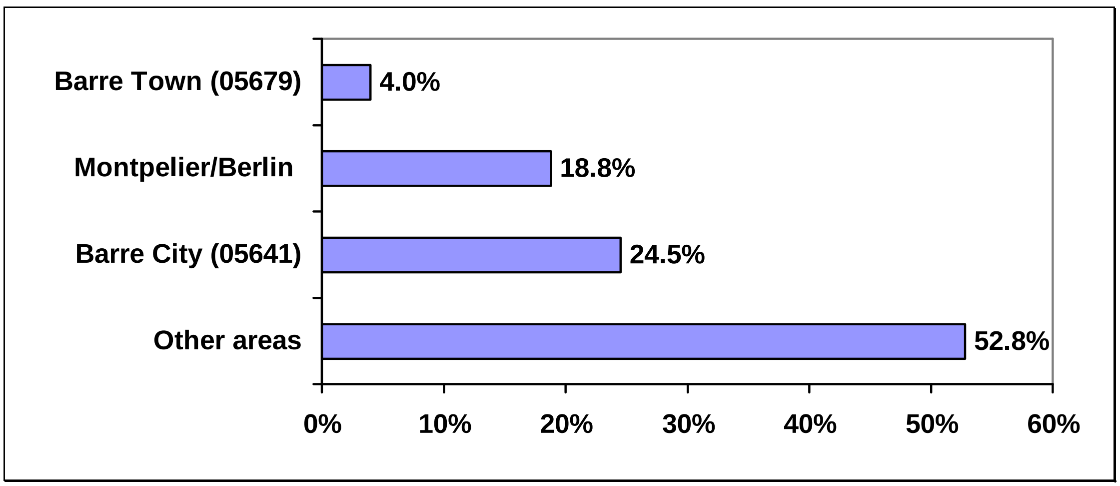


Figure 41
Residential Zip Codes



Institute for Regional Development

One of the missions of Bridgewater State College is to serve the Southeastern Massachusetts region by working to enhance its intellectual, economic, cultural and civic well being. To this end, the College established the Institute for Regional Development on September 1, 1996. The Institute serves as the viable focal point for College initiatives related to enhancing the quality of life in Southeastern Massachusetts. The mission of the Institute is to serve as a resource center for the public, private, and non-profit sectors of Southeastern Massachusetts through applied research, training, and technical assistance programs.

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Appendix B: Profile of Leading Tourism and Cultural Attractions

Rock of Ages

Profile

Rock of Ages Quarries and Manufacturing, located 4 ½ miles from downtown Barre, is the largest granite quarrier and memorial retailer in the U.S. and Canada. If addition to manufacturing private memorials, mausoleums and civic memorials, it makes industrial products, including press rolls for the paper industry, surface plates and machine bases, and acid baths. It also sells raw granite blocks to other manufacturers locally and around the world.

Founded in 1885, Rock of Ages has been a formal tourist attraction since it opened its first visitor center and organized tour program in 1924. This year, it opened a new, expanded visitor center featuring a theater presentation, computer-based and interactive-exhibits, and a variety of other exhibits. The adjacent manufacturing facility has an elevated deck overlooking the manufacturing floor, where visitors can see finish artisans at work. Visitors can also go on a 40-minute narrated shuttle tour of its 50-acre, 600-foot-deep active quarry.

The manufacturing facility is open year-round for viewing, and the visitors' center is open daily between May 1st and October 31st. The quarry tours are operated from June to mid-October.

Customer Base

Rock of Ages has hosted between 45,000 and 65,000 visitors during the last few years, about one-third of these from coach tours. There were 54,000 visitors in 2003. About 40% of visitor traffic is during the fall foliage season in September and October. Visitation reached a peak of 110,000 in the late 1960s and then declined through the mid 1990s, when it began picking up save for a temporary downturn after 9/11. Early 2004 traffic points to continued solid growth. With the new visitor center now open, Rock of Ages has set target of 100,000 annual visitors, to be achieved partly through stronger joint marketing with other central Vermont attractions.

The facility's primary visitor markets are the New England states, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio and Quebec. Other visitors are drawn from throughout the 50 states and Canada, and from a number of European countries, notably from the United Kingdom and Italy, which saw significant immigration to Barre, as well as Germany and France. Only a small percentage of visitors – less than 5 percent – are Vermonters.

The facility is marketed aggressively through a variety of organizations and media, and has recently created a full-time PR position. It participates in a number of cooperative marketing programs through the Vermont Attractions Association marketing consortium, The Vermont Tourism Network, which markets to group tours, the state chamber of commerce, the Central Vermont Chamber/Regional Marketing Organization, and a number of local chambers. It participates in joint incentive packages with other regional attractions. It distributes a marketing brochure at all Vermont visitor centers as well as many hotels and restaurants in high-tourism areas of the state. It does selected print and radio advertising, and has been featured on a number of travel-focused television programs, magazines and newspapers.

Connection to Downtown

According to Rock of Ages' marketing director, the strongest connection between the facility and downtown Barre is through generating customers for local restaurants and, to a lesser extent, hotels. Visitor Center personnel are knowledgeable about restaurants and hotels in the area, make frequent referrals, and distribute a downtown map that shows restaurant and hotel locations. They also send thousands of visitors to Hope Cemetery, which brings them into downtown. The marketing director does not believe that Rock of Ages visitors have a significant impact on other downtown retailers.

Vermont Granite Museum

Profile

The Vermont Granite Museum and the Stone Art School are located in the 30,000 square foot former Jones Brothers granite manufacturing shed on Route 302 at the northern gateway to the city. This $12.5 million project is partially completed, with the restoration of the shed's exterior shell and the completion of the school facilities. The museum facilities are scheduled to be open and partially completed in 2005 depending on the pace of fundraising. Approximately $1.4 to $2 million is needed to open the museum and another $3 million to complete it.

The school's primary mission is to train a new generation of artisans and artists in the techniques of memorial art and other stone sculpting. Some educational programming has already begun, and the school hopes to be fully operational as early as this fall with a range of programs in etching, drafting, design, carving, and sandblasting. These will include both longer-term courses and short-term intensive seminars. A number of weekend intensives have already been held, drawing in 6-12 participants per seminar, some of which have stayed on along with spouses to vacation in the area.

The museum's mission is to create stimulating, interactive environments for learning about the geology, technology, history, and art of Vermont's granite heritage. The museum exhibits will present interpretive, interactive, and demonstrative experiences in an authentic, full-immersion learning environment. The museum will be connected to the school by an observation deck where visitors can watch the artisans at work.

Customer Base

A market analysis conducted for the museum estimated that it could attract as many as 90,000 visitors per year, including tourists, school field trips, and local residents. About 20,000-30,000 would be additional to the area's current non-local visitor base. Some small-scale marketing has already been conducted for the school, and marketing will be intensified once the school is running at full-scale and the museum is open.

Connection to the Downtown

Initially, it was hoped that a downtown location could be found for the museum, but there were no downtown sites of the size and dimensions needed to hold the facility. Once the Jones Brothers building was acquired, it was decided to also acquire the depot building downtown to establish a museum visitors' center. It is hoped that a regularly scheduled excursion train and bike path can eventually be initiated to link the museum with the downtown visitors' center as well as Rock of Ages and Montpelier. A train already operates between the visitor center and the museum site during the Granite Festival. The museum's executive director also hopes to establish collaborative events with downtown merchants.

Vermont History Center

Profile

The Vermont History Center is located at 60 Washington Street adjacent to downtown Barre. It is the headquarters of the Vermont Historical Society, a nonprofit membership organization that "exists to collect, preserve, and interpret Vermont's past for the use, education, and enjoyment of present and future generations." The center, which opened in the summer of 2002 in the renovated historic Spaulding School building, houses the society's offices, research library, and historical collections. Visitors currently come to the center primarily to use the research library and to attend periodic lectures and performances (approximately 10 annually).

The society's biggest event of the year is the Vermont History Expo, held during a June weekend at the Tunbridge Fairground 20 miles south of Barre. The society also holds period special exhibitions in its former headquarters building in Montpelier. The current exhibit, *Freedom and Unity: One Ideal, Many Stories*, opened in March.

The society plans to renovate the 1914 wing of the center to contain an auditorium, classrooms, meeting rooms, and exhibition spaces, including 1,500 square feet for changing exhibitions and additional space for visible storage. These additional facilities should significantly increase visitation to the center. The society will also rent some of the new wing space as a conference center.

There is no definite completion date for the new wing, which is dependent on the pace of an ongoing capital campaign. The timing of the renovations has been slowed by the higher-than-expected costs of renovating and operating the new building. It is anticipated that an additional $3.5 to 4 million will be needed to complete the additional work.

Customer Base

Current visitors to the center are primarily scholars, genealogists and students. In addition, visitors from around the country come to research their family roots, especially in summer. Approximately 2,300 researchers used the library during the center's most recent fiscal year. Local residents are the primary audience for lectures and performances. Special learning events are also held for local school classes and professional development activities organized for local teachers. The planned additional facilities, when completed, should increase visitation significantly.

The society engages in limited marketing, including mailings to instate membership, press releases, and calendar listings in local media. It distributes a newsletter with circulation of 3,500. It is a member of the Vermont Attractions Association and part of a consortium of state libraries that are digitizing their collections to provide more online information and encourage greater use.

Connection to Downtown

The society is a member of the Barre Partnership and has been involved in a number of downtown events, including Barre Homecoming, Men Against Granite, and the Learning for Life Festival. A number of Barre business owners also serve on the society's board. There may be increased opportunities to connect center visitors with downtown one the planned addition meeting and exhibit facilities are opened.

Studio Place Arts

Profile

Studio Place Arts (SPA) is a nonprofit community center for the visual arts located in the historic Nichols Block on North Main Street in downtown Barre. The space was renovated at a cost of $850,000 and opened in October 2000.

SPA contains exhibition space, teaching facilities, and studio space for resident artists. It hosts 10 major shows annually in its first floor exhibition space for established Vermont and national artists, each with an opening and other events such as panel discussions. Each show lasts about five weeks. One of its major shows is a stone-carving event exhibiting stone pieces created by regional carvers. It also organizes nearly two dozen lesser shows in other parts of the building for students and new artists. Exhibited art works are offered for sale, with sales in 2003 totaling about $46,000. SPA also holds an annual gala in early February with a theme art exhibit, music, dancing, and refreshments.

SPA offers 40 classes and workshops in the visual arts quarterly for both adults and children. Its studio space is currently fully occupied with 15 resident artists.

SPA participates in the annual statewide open studios and had about 200 visitors in the most recent year.

Customer Base

SPA's largest customer base comes from a radius of 25 miles. However, it also attracts a significant number of customers from as far as a 60-mile radius, including Burlington, Woodstock, and Rutland. About 30% of opening reception attendance is from the Burlington area, but most is from central Vermont.

SPA markets its show aggressively and routinely gets reviews in Burlington print media and other state periodicals focusing on arts and culture.

Connection to Downtown

Regular gallery hours are 11 a.m. – 2 p.m. Tuesday and Wednesday, and noon-6 p.m. Thursday through Saturday. SPA has no concrete information on patronage of downtown businesses by gallery visitors, but SPA's executive director believes it is limited. Her impression is that some daytime visitors "might go to a few stores" and some evening visitors (i.e., to openings and special events) patronize local residents.

Thunder Road Speedbowl

Profile

Thunder Road Speedbowl is a stock car racetrack located on Quarry Hill about three miles from downtown Barre. In operation since the late 1950s, the track has been improved and modernized through close to $1 million in investment since 1980. Thunder Road currently holds 19 racing events annually between early May and early October, most on Sunday and Thursday evenings.

Customer Base

Thunder Road draws heavily from Central Vermont for its customer base, an important market for downtown retailers. It also brings in a significant number of visitors from beyond the region. Its 12 Thursday events attract 4,000-5,000 spectators, primarily from Barre and elsewhere in central Vermont, particularly Lamoille County east of Barre. Its seven weekend events typically draw 6,500-8,000 spectators each, most from central Vermont but many others from as far away as New Hampshire, Maine and Quebec.

Some non-local spectators stay at local lodging establishments, but more travel in RVs and use special parking spaces developed adjacent to the track. The track purchased additional land to accommodate the RVs. Prior to the growing use of RVs, non-local spectators tended to be day trippers.

Connection to Downtown

Many local retailers advertise at the track, and the track operators report that there is a waiting list of local sponsors. This indicates that downtown retailers view the track audience as an existing or potential market.

In spite of the above, the track operators report that they have tried unsuccessfully to work with downtown businesses on collaborative marketing efforts. A few years ago, they organized a large spring car show with 100 race cars on Main Street to kick off the racing season. The Times Argus and three downtown merchants signed on as co-sponsors. Main Street was closed, through traffic diverted, and vendors and food carts brought in. The event had a promising first year, but the track operators felt that downtown merchants weren't aggressive about tying sales promotions to the event. When they requested limited financial support from the Downtown Partnership for the second year, they were turned down. They now hold the event at a nearby shopping mall instead of downtown.

Another concern of the track operators is the limited number of quality hotel and motel rooms in the area. This has limited the number of out-of-town customers, but has become less of an issue with the growth in RVs and camping.

Barre Opera House

Profile

The Barre Opera House (BOH) is the Central Vermont region's principal performing arts facility. It first opened in 1886, was destroyed by fire in 1889, and then re-built in 1899. The 645-seat facility was closed in 1944 because of a decline in its audience and financial difficulties, but opened again in 1974, when a group of volunteers began a long but successful renovation and fundraising campaign. The BOH now rents the facility to outside groups and individuals, and only on occasion produces its own shows. The City of Barre owns the building that houses the BOH, and locates its municipal offices there.

From roughly 1899-1944, the BOH hosted an extraordinarily diverse set of performers, lecturers and performances, including Helen Keller, Eugene Debs, and the John Phillip Sousa Band. And, since Barre was home to a number of different immigrant populations, there were theatrical performances and musical concerts produced by groups of Italians, Scots and French-Canadians.

The facility is currently used for weddings, graduations, corporate meetings, fund-raisers, dance recitals, concerts and plays. Last year, there were 87 events, including a concert by Michelle Shocked, a recital by the Shooting Star Dance Studio, several performances by the Vermont Philharmonic, and local productions of the Magic Flute and Don Giovanni.

Customer Base

Approximately 23,000 people attend events at the BOH each year, but only a very small percentage of the audience is tourists. The audience generally comes from the Barre-Montpelier area, and greater Washington County. The socio-economic composition of the audience is quite varied.

Connection to Downtown

The BOH has a strong relationship with the downtown and with downtown merchants. It has a collaborative relationship with Sean and Nora's restaurant, and makes visitors to the facility aware of other attractions, restaurants and shopping opportunities.

Hope Cemetery

Profile

Hope Cemetery, one of the principal tourist attractions in Barre, was opened in 1985. It covers approximately 80 acres and includes 10,500 gravesites. Edward Adams, a nationally known landscape architect, designed the cemetery. It is one of three that are owned and operated by the City, but Hope clearly has more visibility than the other two. The City's Director of Cemeteries and Parks and his three staff maintain the cemetery.

Italian sculptors did much of the artistic design work and sculpture in the cemetery. Italian sculptors were unusually adept at stone carving, and in the late 1800s and early 1900s a good number of them immigrated to the United States, principally to Quincy, Massachusetts, Westerly, Rhode Island, and Rutland and Barre, Vermont. The Italian immigrants who came to Barre typically worked in one of the scores of granite manufacturing plants in and around Barre, and did sculpting work on the cemetery memorials on a commission basis for local and area families. The City was very supportive of this work and allowed larger memorials than most cemeteries, and it also allowed sculptors "free rein" in their design. Competition among the sculptors often was the basis of the more innovative designs.

In addition to gravestones that are somewhat unusual (e.g. an armchair, a large soccer ball, an airplane, and a race car), there are genuine works of art among the memorials. These include the Elia Corti Memorial, the Calcagni Colonnade, the Bettini Chair, the Bianchi Celtic Cross, and the Dente Angel.

Customer Base

The Cemetery attracts approximately 45,000 visitors a year, the majority of whom arrive during the six weeks of fall foliage season. Many of the visitors are from the Central Vermont region, but bus tours, which have become increasingly popular, bring people from all over the United States. Visitors from Japan, Germany, and other parts of Europe are not uncommon.

Because the City's Cemeteries and Parks Department oversees the cemetery, the primary focus of staff is on maintenance. Consequently, there is no dedicated staff or resources for keeping a database of visitors, or promoting and marketing the site. However, the Director and his staff will occasionally provide a walking tour or guide a bus group, and refer visitors and bus operators to local cemetery historians and sculptors. Also, the Director may provide training to his secretary, and make her more available for tours.

Connection to Downtown

The relationship of the Cemetery to the downtown and downtown merchants is modest. Cemetery staff will direct visitors and bus tour operators to area restaurants and shops in the downtown, but the limitations on their time prevent them from developing a more substantive collaboration or strategic alliance.

Summary of Key Findings

A number of important points emerged from the interviews, some specifically addressing the relationship between the downtown business distract and tourism and cultural attractions, and some more general observations about the downtown environment.

- The relationship between the downtown retail district and arts and tourism anchors is strong but limited in scope. For example, there is no overall strategic plan that unites the two entities, there is no visionary leadership that is spearheading a substantive and effective relationship, and there is no formal organizational structure for ongoing collaboration. More joint marketing and promotional initiatives are needed to encourage increased cross-over between downtown business patronage and attraction visitation.
- One key organizational barrier to strengthening these relationships is the lack of a formal organization representing local arts and tourism attractions. While there is considerable informal interaction among these entities, this could be built upon by establishing a stronger, more coherent voice and a more formal agenda for enhancing arts and tourism activities, and building relationships with local retailers (e.g., through joint marketing and promotions).
- One interviewee noted that central Vermont lacks a strong promotional package to increase and extend visitation to the region. The addition of new attractions such as the Granite Museum and the Historical Society collections and the strengthening of existing attractions such as Rock of Ages create an opportunity to develop a promotional package with a more appealing mix of attractions. The need for more aggressive joint marketing of the region at state visitor centers and other venues was also noted.
- While granite and granite-related activities has been the engine for attracting tourists to the City and region, there has been a fall-off in visitor numbers from the peak years of the 1960s. Some of those who were interviewed for this project attribute it to at lest two factors. One is the lack of a strong granite-oriented infrastructure -- information, exhibits, packaged tours, and demonstrations (this should be addressed, in part, by the new Granite Museum and the newly-opened Rock of Ages Visitors Center). The other is a critical missing element within the infrastructure, and that is the artist. Currently, there are few opportunities available where visitors can actually see first-hand how individual artists work with and shape granite. This more human and artistic dimension requires more attention and visibility. Increased visitation to the Rock of Ages manufacturing facility and the planned connection between the Granite Museum and the Stone Arts School should at least partly address this issue.

- Many of those interviewed pointed to the need to establish a stronger and more positive image and identity for Barre. Barre has suffered from its image as a blue collar, industrial community in a state that plays up its bucolic, rural character. This negative could be turned into a positive by more forcefully highlighting and celebrating Barre's urban, ethnic, and industrial heritage. This could be done through a combination of "branding" and promotional themes, cultural events, historical attractions, property improvements, and retail amenities. Examples include: developing a common brand such as "America's granite capital" or "Barre – the heart of Vermont's history" for use in marketing and image-building efforts; promoting restoration of historical downtown buildings to highlight the city's architectural craftsmanship and create a look that evokes its industrial heyday; and bringing back the city's ethnic festival, which was successful but marred by an unrelated criminal incident.
- According to several people who were interviewed, Barre is "working and living" downtown, very much unlike the museum-like and upscale downtowns of Woodstock and Montpelier. Many people want to see the downtown enhanced, but do not want it transformed to become another "pretty downtown." At the same time, some expressed the view that the retail mix has to be updated somewhat to appeal more strongly to a new generation of shoppers. Overall, it needs a combination of its traditional ambiance, a healthy retail mix, and the cultural and entertainment amenities that give it a unique appeal and distinguish it from competing retail centers.
- Although the downtown appears to be quite vibrant, there are several building vacancies that create eyesores, and they diminish the visual appeal of the downtown. A few of these building owners are viewed as uncooperative, and they show little interest in improving the buildings or making them available for more productive uses. Restoration of these buildings to highlight their architectural craftsmanship and attracting new tenants to enhance and broaden the business mix would make the downtown more appealing to residents and visitors alike.
- While Barre may never by an entertainment center on the scale of Burlington or even Montpelier, some of those interviewed felt that even evening entertainment was important in both bringing residents downtown later in the day and in providing a more complete mix of visitor attractions. It was suggested that existing events be better marketed, that some venues be upgraded (e.g., the movie theater), and that existing offerings be supplemented with additional venues and events.
- The high volume of through truck traffic along Main Street is viewed as detracting from the retail environment, exacerbating pedestrian access issues, and discouraging amenities such as outdoor cafes. Some of those interviewed felt that downtown can never reach its full potential unless a way is found to divert heavy truck traffic around it.
- Public safety issues were cited as another deterrent to increased retail activity. While there was disagreement over whether this was more perception than reality, one area of agreement is that pathways from parking lots to the street could be made brighter, cleaner and generally more attractive.
- The planned reconstruction of Main Street has brought about a sense of complacency at best among many downtown merchants, and at worst has discouraged some merchant's interest in new projects, collaborations, and programs for the downtown. This feeling of

inertia, according to some, is appropriate on one hand, but discouraging, on the other hand, to those who want to find better ways to enhance the downtown now.

- The workforce within the tourist industry, and within downtown businesses, is not adequately equipped or trained in customer service protocols. As a consequence, many visitors who come into the City and interact with retail employees such as gas station attendants and store clerks are not sufficiently informed by these front-line workers about the tourist attractions and the shops in the downtown. A customer service training program was attempted several years but it was not fully developed.
- Anecdotal information suggests that anywhere from 25%-35% of the visitor base to Barre are family members and friends of local residents. This could be a potentially lucrative market for tourist and downtown business alike. However, little is known about this visitor base, and more importantly, no one in either the tourism/cultural communities or the downtown retail community knows if local residents are making an attempt to visit the downtown and the City's arts and tourism attractions.
- Hope Cemetery appears to be a significant tourist anchor, but one that is extremely under-exploited and under-resourced. With a more of a market orientation, and with resources to support it, the Cemetery could generate more economic spin-off activity for the downtown.
- Several interviewees noted that there are no dedicated funding sources for the downtown that could lead to, for example, improved signage, façade enhancements, joint promotions and activities, etc. Without a new source of funds, the downtown will certainly survive, but will not be able to move to a higher level of commercial and economic development.