

GROWING THE FARMINGTON AVENUE CORRIDOR

A REPORT PREPARED BY STUDENTS IN ECONOMICS 331, SPRING 2017: MAX BOHALL, MICHAEL COOKE, CHRISTIAN
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GOALS SET OUT BY COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN*

1

Turning the corridor into a safe, walkable, and vibrant destination

2

Creating a strong and cohesive sense of community

FARMINGTON AVENUE ACCORDING TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD REPORT

Advantages

- ▶ Strategic location
- ▶ Ethnic diversity
- ▶ Access and Scale

Needs

- ▶ Identity
- ▶ Community voice
- ▶ On-site owners

LAST YEAR'S RESEARCH*

Questions

- ▶ What do the identified emerging issues from the fieldwork suggest about the report's goals, and about how the report sees the needs and advantages of the neighborhood?
- ▶ What might be needed to make the report's goals realizable?

Findings

- ▶ Problems within the neighborhood differ from the perspective of whom you ask, i.e. business owners, property owners, and consumers/outsideers.
- ▶ The community action plan identifies the ethnic diversity as a positive, but it may also contribute to lack of interaction between business owners.
- ▶ Institutions or organizations encouraging cooperation amongst business owners could be extremely beneficial.

OUR RESEARCH FOCUS

Our research centers around 3 primary questions:

- 1) *When does cooperation amongst businesses work and for what reasons?*
- 2) *What factors explain successful revitalization in ethnically diverse neighborhoods characterized by small (immigrant) businesses and economic challenges?*
- 3) *What institutions play a critical role in those efforts?*

RESEARCH PLAN



RESEARCH PLAN

Review Literature



Case Studies focused

- Neighborhood Revitalization
- Immigrant Entrepreneurship
- Community Institutions
 - Ethnic
 - Resident-Based
 - Commercial

Examples:

- *Getting Their Share: Irish and Italian Immigrants in Hartford*
- *Immigrant Entrepreneurs and Neighborhood Revitalization*
 - *Boston Case Studies*
 - *Brooklyn, New York Study*
- *The Contributions of New Americans in Connecticut*

RESEARCH PLAN

Meet with Community Partners



- Topics Discussed:**
- Current Community Initiatives
 - Challenges in the Neighborhood
 - Our Research Plan

With whom:

- *Asylum Hill Neighborhood Association & Hartford Preservation Alliance*
 - *Jennifer Cassidy*
 - *Frank Hagaman*
- *Small Business Administration*
 - *Jessica Rivera*
- *International Hartford*
 - *Sharif Soussi*
 - *Art Feltman*

RESEARCH PLAN

Interview and Collect Information



- Hartford Business Improvement District (B.I.D.)
- Hartford Preservation Alliance
- Spanish American Merchants Association (SAMA)
- Asylum Hill Neighborhood Association (AHNA)
- Farmington Avenue Property Owners
- Farmington Avenue Business Owners

RESEARCH PLAN

Analysis of Materials: Putting it All Together



After reviewing the case studies and our principal research questions, the interview transcripts were analyzed and summarized.

From this, we built upon last year's research to formulate our preliminary findings and reflections.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR
UNDERSTANDING THE
FARMINGTON AVENUE BUSINESS
DISTRICT:
SHIFTING FOCUS FROM ETHNIC
ENCLAVE TO ETHNIC *ECONOMY*

FARMINGTON AVENUE CORRIDOR: AN ETHNIC ECONOMY COMPOSED OF ETHNIC ENCLAVES



- ▶ No single group is a majority in the neighborhood
- ▶ Groups are not necessarily cohesive amongst each other
- ▶ Multiple ethnicities form a larger economy that is not centered around ethnic identity

ETHNIC BUSINESSES: TWO MODELS

Ethnic Economy

- Based on **Demand**
- No need for social capital or solidarity, but rather collaboration on practical issues.
- The reason why ethnic businesses achieve success is the **identification of a niche** and the **presence of demand** for that niche due to the density of a particular ethnicity in the area that fills that demand

Ethnic Enclave

- Based on **solidarity**
- **Cohesion** of ethnic groups and social capital as the **key of ethnic businesses success**
- These businesses are successful because they receive **formal and informal help** from their ethnic communities in different ways
 - Funding to start the business
 - Informal credit systems
 - Dedicated customer base
 - Network of support

FARMINGTON AVENUE: APPLICATION OF THE TWO MODELS

Ethnic Economy

- With this model the corridor would set its aims at the **city level**
- It would try to target the **different ethnic communities** located in Hartford
- Need for business cooperation on practical problems that affect the neighborhood, rather than concentrating on solidarity

Ethnic Enclave

- Corridor would target mostly the **neighborhood** around it (tract level)
- It would need significant work on **community identity** to improve cohesion and social capital
- One might want to improve community initiatives like a recreation center, or places for the community to get together according to wishes and needs

IMPLICATIONS OF THE ETHNIC ECONOMY MODEL: FOCUS ON DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS

For Customers:

- Creation of businesses that respond to those niches that haven't been filled
- E.g., when thinking about demand for ethnic goods, the neighborhood could respond to demand not met by Park Street

For Businesses:

- No need to worry about the creation of a neighborhood identity
- Demand driven model still requires business collaboration on practical problems, such as security, trash removal, and/or networking opportunities

For Residents:

- With this model fewer resources given to the local community, in favor of a more demand driven economic solution
- Possibility of negative impact on neighborhood, its community, and its residents, diminishing solidarity and social capital

LEARNING FROM CASE STUDIES ON NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION

CASE STUDY #1: THREE NEIGHBORHOODS IN BOSTON, MA*

ALLSTON VILLAGE, FIELDS CORNER & EAST BOSTON

*Ramón Borges-Méndez, Michael Liu, and Paul Watanabe, *Immigrant Entrepreneurs and Neighborhood Revitalization: Studies of the Allston Village, East Boston and Fields Corner Neighborhoods in Boston*. Prepared for The Immigrant Learning Center, Inc., December 2005.

INSIGHT FROM BOSTON NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION EFFORTS: THE IMPORTANCE OF PERSPECTIVES

	<u>Entrepreneur's Perspective</u>	<u>Community Informant's Perspective</u>
<u>Challenges</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time constraints (long work hours) • Lack of familiarity with support offered to small businesses • High fees/taxes for local businesses • Complex documentation process • Poor aesthetics in surrounding area • Need for safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independence, self-reliance limits cooperation • Poor dissemination of information and outreach effort from 3rd parties/government agencies • Immigrant entrepreneurs unaware of opportunities for business support: paperwork & language are barriers • Lack of effort on part of business to interact
<u>Opportunities</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis on self-reliance • Large student presses (dense demand) and possibility of broadening demand overtime • In some cases, business mentors provided support for businesses start-up or expansion • Active corridor with pedestrians and lots of human activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transient population • Lots of human activity on the street • Businesses provide needed goods and services (consumer demand)



THEY DON'T ALWAYS
AGREE

Where do they align?

- There's a breakdown of communication between businesses and outside resources
- It's difficult to solidify a consumer base
- Paperwork and documentation limit growth
- Importance of human activity to keep down crime

Where do they differ?

- Informant believe business owners “lack” effort to interact
- Entrepreneurs prioritize fees, aesthetics and safety
- Self-reliance as an opportunity (strength) vs. challenge (constraint) for revitalization



NEED TO BRIDGE PERSPECTIVES WHEN THINKING OF PLAN TO
BUILD COOPERATION

Main Lessons for Neighborhood Revitalization:

- ✓ Overall appearance/cleanliness of the area matters

Needs a face life and cleaner surroundings - Anonymous AHNA member

- ✓ Perception of safety is important

Crime is down, but panhandling complaints are up - Statistics on Asylum Hill

- ✓ Complex paperwork, at advanced reading levels, constrains access to support services

S.B.A. does its best to make the paperwork process as simple as possible and translate it into as many languages as possible - Jessica Rivera, S.B.A.

- ✓ Look beyond the standard consumer base

The chief problem is there are no cafes' or restaurants. There's just no place to go out for a cup of coffee. - Frank Hagaman, HPA

From Lessons to Action Points:

- ✓ Reevaluate traditional communications between agencies and businesses
“[Hartford.com] is informational but it’s really meant to entice people.” - Jordan Polon, B.I.D.
- ✓ Create a well-defined task that brings businesses together and focuses on economic benefit from cooperation
It would be worth my time to work with other businesses - Business Owner
- ✓ Be mindful of the time constraints business owners face
“Create school programs, summer programs, something for the kids. Any investment in the community. We’re willing to put our name on an initiative.” - Business Manager
- ✓ Establish different usages of street to maintain human activity

CASE STUDY #2:
LOCAL BUSINESSES AS UNIQUE
INSTITUTIONS FOR
REVITALIZATION*

FORT GREEN, BROOKLYN

*Stacey A. Sutton, *Merchant effects: Neighborhood entrepreneurs, agents of revitalization. The case of a merchant association*, Prepared for the National Conference of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning, Kansas City, MO, October 29, 2005. Revised: March 2007. Unpublished Manuscript.

“INTERMEDIARY ROLE” PLAYED BY LOCAL BUSINESSES

- Neighborhood merchants and businesses can develop institutions that create both social and economic capital for the area
- Policies that were directed to benefit large businesses and create “good jobs” did not trickle down to help the neighborhood as the benefits from small business expansion did
- Neighborhood small businesses have a greater capacity to facilitate revitalization of the neighborhood than local government due to their greater understanding of the local area

LESSON FROM FORT GREENE, BROOKLYN: LOCAL BUSINESSES CREATE “MERCHANT EFFECTS”

- **Definition:** Merchant Effects are the outcomes shaped and critically influenced by the business community. They can change the perceptions and neighborhood identity of the neighborhood. And they can operate on **five** different aspects of the neighborhood environment:
- **Physical:** Business owners directly help the aesthetics of the area
- **Social:** Businesses provide neighborhood identity and cohesion
- **Commercial:** Provide services to an area to attract patrons
- **Communicative:** Targeting new entrepreneurs and can attract media attention
- **Institutional:** Institutional mechanism establishes rules, and gives businesses political clout & collective voice

HARTFORD EXAMPLE: *THE SPANISH AMERICAN MERCHANTS ASSOCIATION (SAMA)*

Aspects of Neighborhood Environment	SAMA Accomplishments
Physical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project to repaint the facades of buildings, redoing the roads and sidewalks, and cleaning the streets.
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host banquets with food from the community for business owners and donors • Organize a parade with business owner participation
Commercial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use local food at banquets to act as ad for local businesses. • Recommend and use each other's businesses for various services. • Give businesses advice to help remain operational or even expand
Institutional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold meetings to settle disputes and discuss future plans • In elections years act as a voting bloc and meet with politicians to emphasize community & discussions issues • Have meetings with police officers monthly to discuss issues showing their community influence
Communicative:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop project with mayor to convert parking lot into site for different businesses (stalled). • Work in other areas to promote and expand each other's businesses • Implemented camera system to increase perception of safety for local members & visitors from outside the area

ASYLUM HILL “SAMA-LESS”

- Asylum Hill has the Business Improvement District (BID) but lacks the equivalent of SAMA
- What are the key differences between the two institutions, and in what ways are those differences significant for neighborhood revitalization?

SAMA

vs.

BID

- Funding comes from the City of Hartford and from public events such as a fundraiser golf tournament and banquet. ****SAMA also has an annual fee: \$225 for individuals or small businesses and \$1000 for corporations.** – From SAMA website
- Provides **some cleaning services** for Park Street but on a much **smaller scale than BID** – From Angel Sierra Interview
- Primarily focuses on **advice: taxes, paperwork and regulations, and English translations**– From Angel Sierra Interview
- **Owens and operates two loan funds: the Neighborhood Economic Development Revolving Loan Fund and the Merchants Revolving Loan Fund.** - From SAMA website

- Funding comes from both the City of Hartford and a **BID tax** that all property owners in BID catchment area must pay – From Jordan Polon Interview
- **Provides street level services** that are otherwise not done by the city such as sidewalk snow clearance; employs their own safety and cleanliness ambassadors – From Jordan Polon Interview
- Leads **beautification projects** including Hartford banners, Snowflakes, and flower boxes – From Jordan Polon Interview
- **Does not provide any loans**, but has relationships with outside lenders if BID businesses are seeking additional funding – From Jordan Polon Interview

Key Takeaway 1

- The Hartford BID is great for improving business aesthetics across its entire member area, but does not cater specifically to the needs of the neighborhood.
 - “[Asylum Hill] sometimes gets the short end of the stick because they are not a major tax-paying entity . . . [Asylum Hill and downtown are] like two separate worlds really”-Jordan Polon

Key Takeaway 2

- Property owners do not enforce compliance with city ordinance to make storefronts as welcoming as possible
 - “I know that some of those businesses are in violation [of city ordinances] because their windows are completely covered in signage”-
Jordan Polon

→ BID IS WEAKER INSTITUTION ON ITS OWN FOR BUILDING COOPERATION AND TRANSFORMING THE NEIGHBORHOOD

CHANGING OUR FOCUS

Commercial
1
Stakeholder
s

Community
y
Stakeholder
s

CASE STUDY #3:
ENTREPRENEURIAL
NEIGHBORHOOD INITIATIVES:
COMMUNITY-BASED
ORGANIZATIONS AS STRATEGIC
INSTITUTIONS FOR
REVITALIZATION

WEST PALM BEACH, FLORIDA

CONTEXT OF FLORIDA CASE STUDY

Two Community Organizations

One successful in
improving the
community

One failed to
complete their
project

WHAT EXPLAINS THE DIFFERENCE IN BETWEEN THE TWO OUTCOMES?

- ▶ Having **one clear voice** representing the organization earned & maintained power for the organization
 - ▶ The unsuccessful community organization failed due to varying goals among members that undermined their ability to focus on completing a project.
- ▶ Creating **opportunities for building relationships** in the neighborhood
 - ▶ The successful organization created a community center to foster relationships within the neighborhood
- ▶ Adopting an **entrepreneurial model** for the organization: it becomes a broker for the neighborhood's economic development
 - ▶ This model makes new opportunities for investment the primary goal of neighborhood participation in revitalization efforts (aligning incentives between businesses and local residents – ethnic economy model)
- ▶ **Capacity-building** allows the organization to: organize people; create leadership to plan & implement successful strategies; ensure a socially stable environment to attract investment; communicate the community interests to outsiders; & develop political capital.
 - ▶ Relying on local government to implement projects or provide funding means projects match governmental interests & not necessarily those of the community. Professionalism of community group gains local gov't support.

“You need somebody who's willing to make the commitments to get everybody to start doing things.” – Frank Hagaman

HOW CAN AHNA BUILD ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY?

- ▶ Focus primarily on organizing individuals in the Asylum Hill neighborhood who have a stake in the continued economic renewal of the area (local property & business owners, long-term residents).
- ▶ Identify a list of needs/projects that benefit all participants and prioritize actions towards those which can be accomplished swiftly and with the least amount of resources.
- ▶ Maintain a professional code of conduct: agendas for meetings, clear mission statement. Develop plan for continued organizational development.

- ▶ Ensure members understand why the organization is taking the action that it is to prevent dissidence & keep members working together towards a common goal.
- ▶ When working with the municipality, AHNA should present as professional as possible & committed to its projects.
- ▶ When working with the municipality, know who you are presenting your proposal to: understand their incentives are slanted towards governmental goals and not necessarily towards the neighborhood- Make these incentives align wherever possible.

Outcome:

Development of social and economic capital
Foundation for political capital

THE VIEW FROM THE GROUND:
INTERVIEWS WITH NINE
BUSINESSES ALONG THE
FARMINGTON AVENUE
CORRIDOR

Objective

- Identify the possibilities for business cooperation along the corridor
- Uncover business perspective on opportunities & challenges in the neighborhood

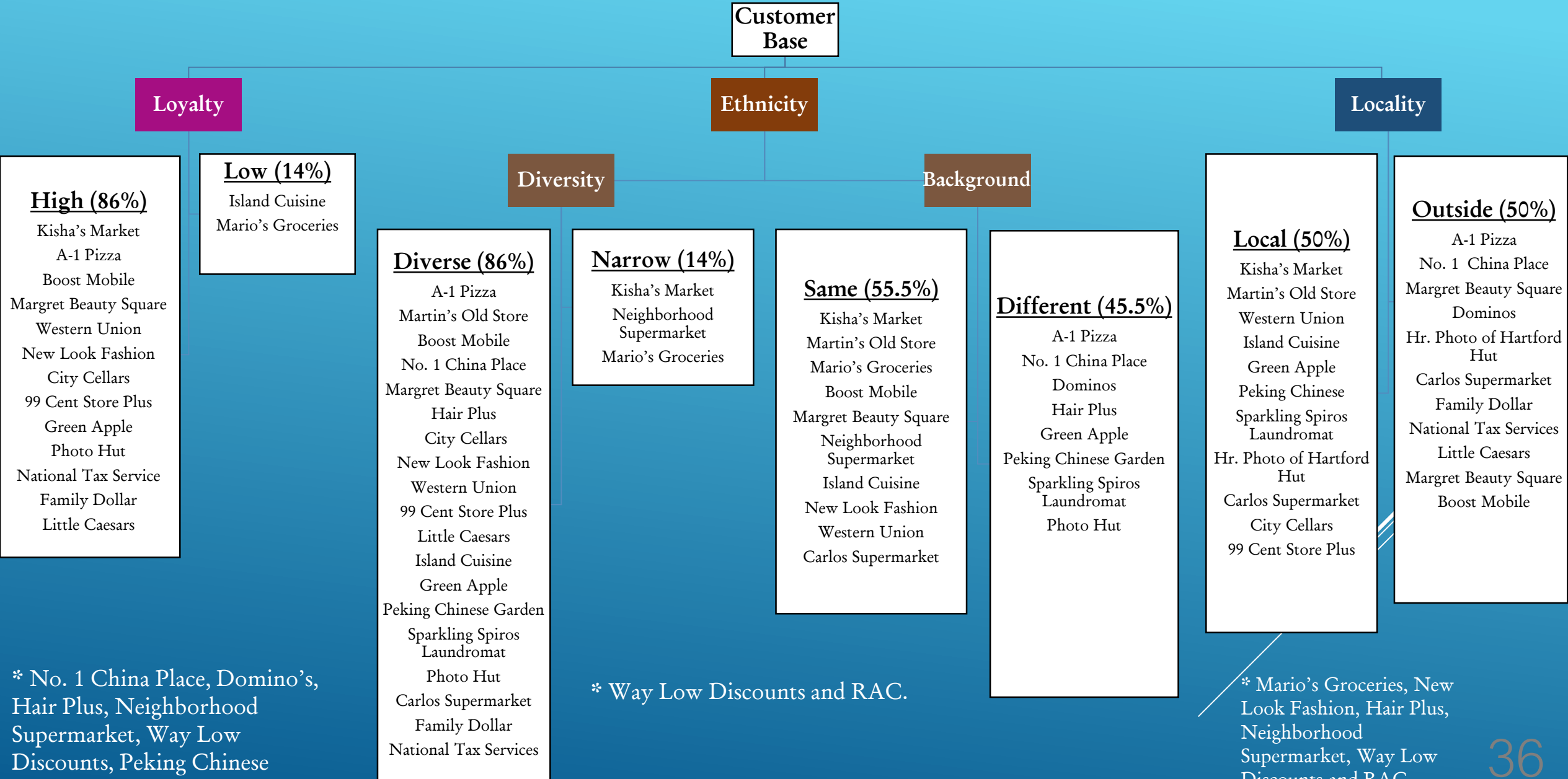
Sample Interview Questions

- What are your top concerns as a business owner on Farmington Avenue?
- What type of project or task would encourage you to work with other business owners to solve?
- What opportunities do you currently have to grow as a business?

Framework for Analysis

- Two criteria on which analysis focused:
 - a) Customer base & key characteristics of business;
 - b) Business's main concerns & perceptions of opportunities.

Spring 2016 Customer Base Analysis Applied to the Nine Businesses Interviewed



* No. 1 China Place, Domino's, Hair Plus, Neighborhood Supermarket, Way Low Discounts, Peking Chinese Garden and RAC.

* Way Low Discounts and RAC.

* Mario's Groceries, New Look Fashion, Hair Plus, Neighborhood Supermarket, Way Low Discounts and RAC.

CITY CELLARS & 99 CENT STORE PLUS (ONE OWNER)

Business Characteristics

- Loyal and diverse customer base
- Highly ambitious, wants to buy old Dunkin Donut building
- Disheartened by lack of action by City and other business owners

Business Concerns

- Views panhandlers, drugs, crime, and trash as a serious hindrance to his business
- Taxes are too high
- Considering leaving the area if no action is taken
- Thinks other businesses don't care about the community
- *"Nobody Cares"*

Takeaway

Extremely passionate about wanting to clean up the area. This is the only issue he is willing to work on.

NATIONAL TAX SERVICES

Business Characteristics

- Customer base is diverse and significantly come from outside the community
- Business is a part of a franchise, doing very well
- Manager is a community organizer in her spare time

Business Concerns

- Believes communities are too reclusive and disconnected from the community
- Believes Trash is a problem

Takeaway

Willing to work together with other businesses to carry out any investment into the community. Expressed interest in potentially sponsoring an event.

FAMILY DOLLAR

Business Characteristics

- Diverse customer base with business from outside the community
- Part of a franchise with a strong corporate identity

Business Concerns

- Views trash and crime in the surrounding area as an issue
 - Does not believe anything can be done
 - *“Can’t change people”*

Takeaway

Expressed zero interest in working with the community to solve problems. Any time they need to solve a problem, Family Dollar’s corporate institution helps them.

LITTLE CAESARS

Business Characteristics

- Manager is a resident of the Asylum Hill neighborhood
- A community oriented individual
- Part of a franchise

Business Concerns

- Panhandling, trash, crime, and drugs all impair their ability to grow

Takeaway

The manager is extremely community oriented and warm to the idea of working together and getting to know neighbors. Believes that reducing panhandling, trash, crime and drugs in the area is currently the best issue to take on as a community

GREEN APPLE

Business Characteristics

- Highly diverse, loyal, and local customer base
- Extremely self-reliant and competitive

Business Concerns

- Explicitly only willing to work together to increase security in the community.

Takeaways

The owner of Green Apple is significantly self-reliant and competitive, thinking that any community action could give other businesses in an area a competitive advantage over him. Potentially willing to work together on security.

MARGRET'S BEAUTY SQUARE

Business Characteristics

- Highly diverse, loyal, and local customer base
- Highly receptive and open to community organizing

Business Concerns

- Highly concerned with the presence of drugs and panhandling
- Worried that other businesses in the community do not care and are too independent

Takeaways

Owner is very willing to work together as a community to solve problems; however, she is unsure if the neighbors are willing themselves.

A1 PIZZA

Business Characteristics

- Highly loyal and diverse customer base that pulls in business beyond the local community
- Competitive and self-reliant

Business Concerns

- Only expressed concern with competition among the neighboring businesses

Takeaways

Unwilling and uninterested in working as a community to solve any problems or launch any initiatives unless it is guaranteed to bring in more business.

BOOST MOBILE

Business Characteristics

- Highly loyal and diverse customer base
- Business is very successful
- Self-reliant and independent

Business Concerns

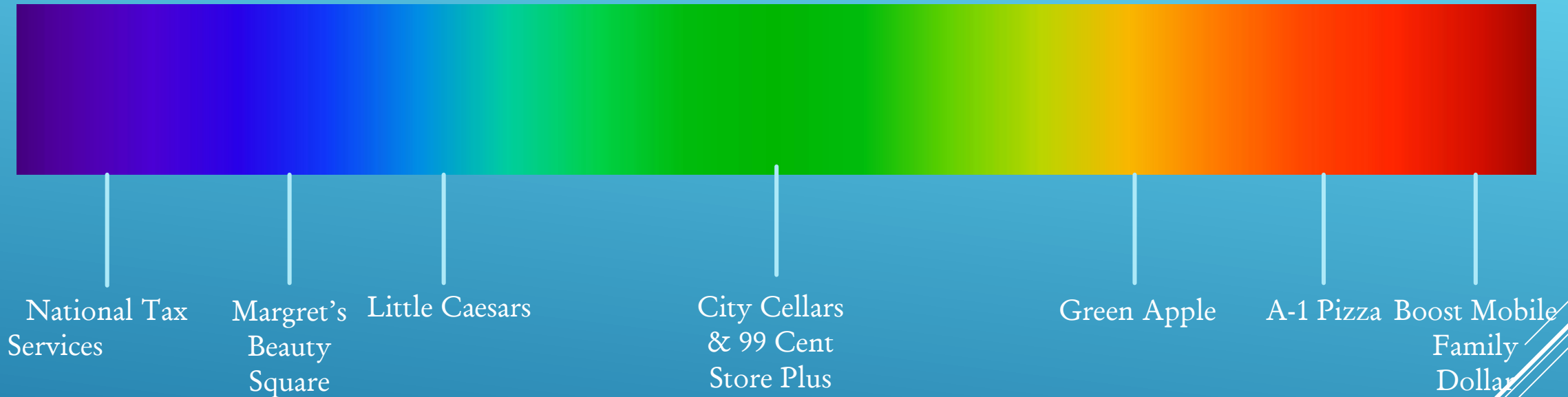
- Somewhat concerned with the drugs in the area.

Takeaways

Uninterested in working with a community. This business is doing well on its own and they see no need to put in any additional effort to grow.

	Customer Loyalty	Customer Diversity	Customer Location	Franchise?	Top Concern	Secondary Concerns	Attitude towards Community	Willingness to work with other businesses
City Cellars & 99 Cent Store Plus	Loyal	Diverse	Local	No	Panhandling and Drugs	Trash	Skeptical and Disheartened	Somewhat
National Tax Services	Loyal	Diverse	Outside Community	Yes	Businesses too Independent	Trash	Open	Yes
Family Dollar	Loyal	Diverse	Outside Community	Yes	Trash	Crime	Closed	No
Little Caesars	Loyal	Diverse	Outside Community	Yes	Panhandling and Drugs	Crime	Open	Yes
Green Apple	Loyal	Diverse	Local	No	Security	None	Closed	No
Margret's Beauty Square	Loyal	Diverse	Outside Community	No	Panhandling and Drugs	Businesses too Independent	Open	Yes
A-1 Pizza	Loyal	Diverse	Local	No	Competition	None	Closed	No
Boost Mobile	Loyal	Diverse	Outside Community	Yes	Panhandling and Drugs	None	Closed	No

WILLINGNESS TO WORK WITH COMMUNITY



- Despite willingness to work with community, there is consensus among the businesses on the need to solve panhandling, drugs, trash, and the overall perception of crime.
- There is also a major lack of community identity. This involves a significant disconnect between business owners and the rest of the community. For example, even when businesses occupy separate niches there is still a perceived sense of competition.

MOVING FORWARD: PRELIMINARY IDEAS FROM OUR RESEARCH

Need for an active community-based organization that can broker relationships in the neighborhood:
Potential Role for AHNA

Identify well-defined concrete task(s) that focuses on economic benefits from business cooperation

Utilize BID services to further beautify the corridor & resolve the more pressing issues

Target demand for ethnic goods to meet diverse needs, boost human activity throughout the day, & encourage opportunity to interact

**Need for an active community-based organization that can broker relationships in the neighborhood:
Potential Role for AHNA**

- Help to bridge different perspectives and leverage role of BID
- Connect to other institutions, such as *International Hartford*, to reevaluate traditional communication & outreach by non-profit & gov't agencies to area businesses.
- AHNA may need to strengthen organizational-capacity to assume role.

Identify well-defined concrete task(s) that focuses on economic benefits from business cooperation

- Start modestly and prioritize i) businesses that exhibit high cooperation score and ii) actions that can be accomplished quickly and with minimum resources. Informal business cooperation can lay foundation for more formal institutional mechanisms in the longer run.

Utilize BID services to further beautify the corridor & resolve the more pressing issues

- Leverage the position of Aetna and The Hartford on the board of BID to boost commitment to the Asylum Hill neighborhood
- Ask BID to help resolve issue of several businesses not complying with window display ordinance and, in the future, supporting them to improve frontage

Target demand for ethnic goods which meet diverse needs, boost human activity at different times of the day, & encourage opportunity to interact

- E.g., green grocer with broader reach that aligns with residents' interests (organic, fish & meat market, small take-away section)
- Business that centers around opportunity to interact, such as a sit-down restaurant

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Ramón Borges-Méndez, Michael Liu, and Paul Watanabe, *Immigrant Entrepreneurs and Neighborhood Revitalization: Studies of the Allston Village, East Boston and Fields Corner Neighborhoods in Boston*. Prepared for The Immigrant Learning Center, Inc., December 2005.

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