

# DOWNTOWN MARKET ANALYSIS & MARKETING PLAN

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THE CITY OF SEBRING, FLORIDA



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## Executive Summary

In October 2008, the City of Sebring Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) initiated the process of developing a Downtown Sebring Marketing Plan. The planning process was focused on developing a marketing strategy that would help promote downtown as a *regional cultural and entertainment destination* and identify key objectives to help the business community leverage their resources and efforts. Swan Advisors engaged in a 13-month process and the delivery of a plan that is based on analysis of the physical and regulatory environments and the market and investment conditions and activities of Downtown Sebring and its current and (anticipated) future customers. It is important to understand that the future success of Downtown Sebring lies in its customers, and that the business mix, business quality, customer service, appearance and attractiveness, safety, accessibility, activities and other components present in Downtown Sebring affect its future.

The scope of work included a kick-off event, secondary and primary market research, a series of one-on-one and focus group interviews, over 200 shopper surveys, a series of meetings with the community, CRA and numerous staff and team meetings. During one community meeting Swan administered exercises with the participants to capture data on topics to inform the final marketing plan. These exercises were administered utilizing proven techniques that enable all participants to engage equally in the process and all input is weighed equally. This limits the influence of the 'vocal minority' and respects that each participant has valuable information to provide. The exercises included:

- ❑ The 4Cs – an examination of Customers, Competitors, Channel Partners and Community Assets
- ❑ Community Visions – participants described their 10 year vision for what it would be like to visit, live, or shop in downtown Sebring
- ❑ Community Positives and Negatives – participants described what they perceived to be positive and negative attributes of downtown Sebring

From the feedback, the Plan was developed in a manner to enable implementation. The eight strategic goals and guiding objectives, as well as specific examples for

creating enhanced economic activity in the downtown and creating positive energy. The plan is designed to allow for flexibility and creativity but also provide accountability. A draft of the Marketing Plan and several revisions of visual marketing collateral concepts were presented to the City for comment and feedback. After several revisions, the final Marketing Plan and Collateral Designs were presented to the CRA for final approval. For the purpose of the Executive Summary, below is a recap of the goals outlined in the final Marketing Plan:

### **GOAL 1: Organize Your Troops**

### **GOAL 2: Create (Reinforce) a Brand for Sebring “Who is Sebring?”**

### **GOAL 3: Increase Awareness of Downtown as a Visitor’s Destination**

### **GOAL 4: Improve Downtown’s Image and Visibility**

### **GOAL 5: Increase Residential Density and Income Base**

### **GOAL 6: Strengthen Existing Businesses**

### **GOAL 7: Cultivate New and Independently Owned Businesses**

### **GOAL 8: Promote Downtown**

## Introduction

Historic downtown Sebring is a traditional Central Florida downtown that is rich in history and character. It is known as the "The City on the Circle", in reference to Circle Drive, the center of the Sebring downtown. Named a "Florida Main Street Community" in 1996, downtown has since both benefitted and suffered as economic conditions change with business cycles.

Buffering the downtown Sebring economy is Sebring's history as the home of a variety of long standing community events, the foremost being the world-renowned auto race "12 Hours of Sebring." Throughout the years, downtown Sebring has been a destination for locals and tourists alike.

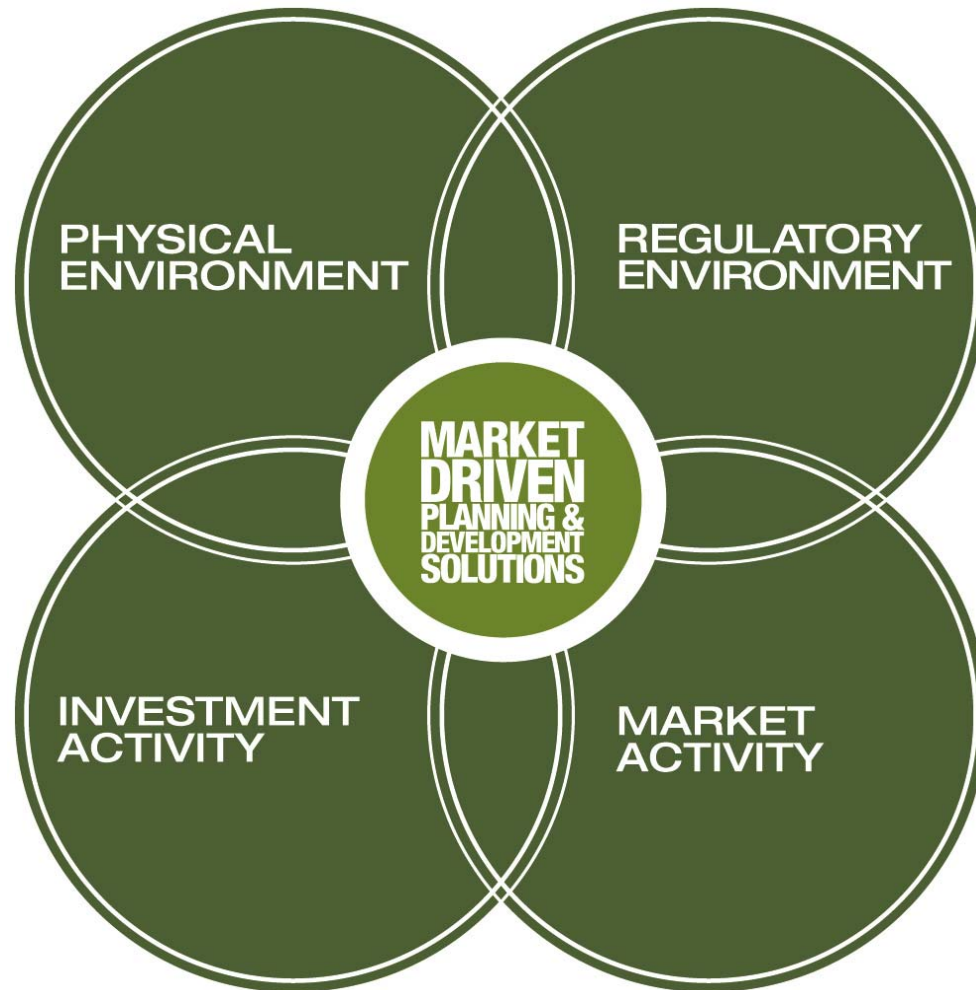
During the global recession that has so far spanned late-2007, 2008 and the first half of 2009 the area has suffered a slump in retail activity, private investment, and customer growth. Changing retail patterns over the past decades have drawn more and more businesses and customers out of the downtown area. What was once a thriving commercial core for the community has struggled to compete with nearby malls and shopping districts along US-27. The development of these larger regional and commercial chain-operated centers has drawn retail uses away from downtown Sebring, making it harder for the local business community to compete and survive. Downtown Sebring has yet to establish a resilient core of businesses that can effectively withstand changing economic cycles.

In October of 2008, the City of Sebring Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) retained Swan Advisors to develop a Downtown Marketing Plan. The process to develop this plan is built on years of experience working on downtown and commercial corridor redevelopment activities. Swan's approach to marketing planning always focuses on the customer, with the understanding that buildings, businesses, regulations and other externalities are important components to examine and understand. Ultimately however, only customers can make a downtown great. This downtown Sebring marketing plan includes the creation of some visual concepts that will help to "brand" downtown as a *local and regional destination*.

This marketing plan was developed to support downtown growth and development at two levels: 1) as a downtown, 2) for the retailers - both of which are equally important. The plan includes goals, objectives and recommendations to promote downtown Sebring and also to promote businesses and business clusters. Independent of specific businesses, buildings, and other assets, the downtown can be marketed and promoted as a unit. Recommendations are included to enhance/improve brand, image, and marketing activities focused towards shoppers, project and investment opportunities for investors and business owners.

Additionally, the plan includes recommendations that businesses can use to promote themselves and improve customer satisfaction. These two levels of marketing planning are complementary and the more activities that are undertaken, the better the result.





## Plan Summary

The four basic tenets of this marketing plan are based on analysis of the physical and regulatory environments and how they interact with, and may influence, investment and market activity in downtown Sebring. Understanding the individual strengths and weaknesses of these elements and how they coalesce enables the development of a marketing plan that capitalizes on opportunities, addresses challenges and provides direction for those responsible for implementation.

The marketing plan includes research, analysis, recommendations and graphic design concepts. The research was presented as Task One Summary and will be included as part of the Appendix. The goals, objectives and recommendations are presented below in Section Two of this report. The goals, objectives and recommendations are based on proven successful downtown marketing techniques, and were chosen and customized to address the opportunities present in Sebring. The graphic recommendations and marketing materials are based on ongoing participation in the project by the designer, and were selected by the Client.

## Purpose

The purpose of this market analysis and plan is to:

- Provide a comprehensive assessment of potential market support for retail uses in downtown Sebring.
- Create an accurate picture of Sebring's retail industry including the location and characterization of the existing supply of businesses; consumer preferences, needs and buying patterns; and opportunities and challenges for growth and development in the downtown.
- Provide the Sebring CRA with a factual base for developing strategies to strengthen and diversify the downtown retail base and capture consumer dollars currently flowing out of downtown.
- Recommend business development and marketing strategies to strengthen the retail base downtown and train a team of stakeholders to carry out the strategies to ensure long-term success.

## Philosophy

Swan believes that community analysis requires an iterative process of research, interviews, community activities involving stakeholders (especially customers), truthing/testing and refinement.

The planning must be cooperative so that all stakeholders have responsibility and reward. Our goal is to help communities know their markets, own their future, implement their plans and cooperatively reap the rewards.



## Methodology

As downtown Sebring's commercial redevelopment program will be phased over time, the retail market analysis considers a ten-year time period from 2009-2019, which is a realistic projection period for retail development. However, as part of this process both immediate and long-term goals and strategies have been provided. The research (both primary and secondary) includes a statistical estimate of potential retail sales and supportable space, the results of a community-wide resident survey of shopping preferences, a survey of the Sebring business community, personal interviews with local leaders, focus groups with key downtown stakeholders, in-store visits to downtown businesses and a workshop on "Understanding Downtown Sebring's Marketplace." To carry out a number of these tasks, Swan made multiple site visits to Sebring (2008-2009). The process was guided with assistance from the City, CRA, local businesses and the community.

The market analysis process presented in this report compartmentalizes the work so that a community can focus on the short- and long-term opportunities and strategies most applicable to their needs at a given point in time as well as for extended periods. Section Two is designed to provide the community with techniques that can be put to work immediately and in the long-term. The process requires input and cooperation from residents, local businesses and property owners so that the recommendations reflect both market conditions as well as the preferences of the community.

## Primary Research

In October 2008, surveys were conducted to reach target audiences key to strengthening the retail base of downtown: area residents/employees and business owners/operators. Area residents, employees and businesses were urged via newspaper feature stories, mailed postcards, posters and organizational newsletters to help shape the future of downtown Sebring by completing an on-line survey. In addition, survey interviews were conducted during the downtown Sebring Heartland Idol event. The primary objective of this research is to gain an understanding of the

perceptions, needs and motivations of local shoppers and businesses. In all, 194 persons participated in the survey activity.

In addition to the surveys, four focus groups and one public meeting was held to gain insight on downtown Sebring's business model and stakeholders' aspirations for downtown, one-on-one interviews with business owners were conducted and more than ten stores and five restaurants were shopped and dined at as if we were traditional customers in order to gain an understanding of the overall customer experience. Detailed results of the surveys are provided as part of the Appendix. A summary of participant's comments about downtown Sebring's customers, competitors, channel partners and community assets are included along with ideas for a new vision for downtown Sebring.

## Secondary Research

Swan collected demographic and consumer spending information from ESRI. This information includes current and projected demographics for a 1, 3 and 5-mile radii from the center of downtown Sebring are included in part and in full in Section One and in the Appendix, respectively. It also estimates the difference between aggregated consumer spending (demand) and the supply of existing goods and services of businesses in the area (supply). What we found is that the difference between demand and supply is positive; therefore there are market opportunities for new stores.

Swan also collected property and business information and uploaded it to a VillageManager.net account. Property data for the entire Sebring Community Redevelopment Agency (Sebring CRA) area was provided by the Highlands County property appraiser's office. Business information was obtained from InfoUSA, a list aggregator. Once fully uploaded, VillageManager.net produced reports with baseline metrics about property mix, occupancy and vacancy, business mix and more. All research and reports are housed at the VillageManager.net account.

This report is organized into Two Sections and an Appendix:

### **Section I: Understanding Market Conditions**

This section provides an overview of the purpose, methodology and process and includes a summary of the local demographics, current business mix, economic and consumer data and consumer attitudes.

### **Section II: Identifying Sebring's Immediate Opportunities and Long-Term Goals, Objectives and Strategies**

Based on the findings detailed in this section, strategies to best immediately capitalize on existing economic opportunities are discussed. As well as, a series of ten strategic goals create the framework for the Marketing Plan in response to the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and constraints of downtown Sebring. The strategies necessary to develop a competitive environment are provided as part of the Marketing Plan. These goals and strategies capitalize on current opportunities that have the potential to create both immediate and long-term impact for downtown Sebring and several specific business types. These are important and should be implemented immediately and on an on-going basis.

### **Appendix: The Research**

This section or Appendix contains the detailed data that was collected and analyzed in order to identify the community's needs, opportunities and constraints and develop goals and strategies identified in this report and marketing plan.

# Section One | Market Analysis

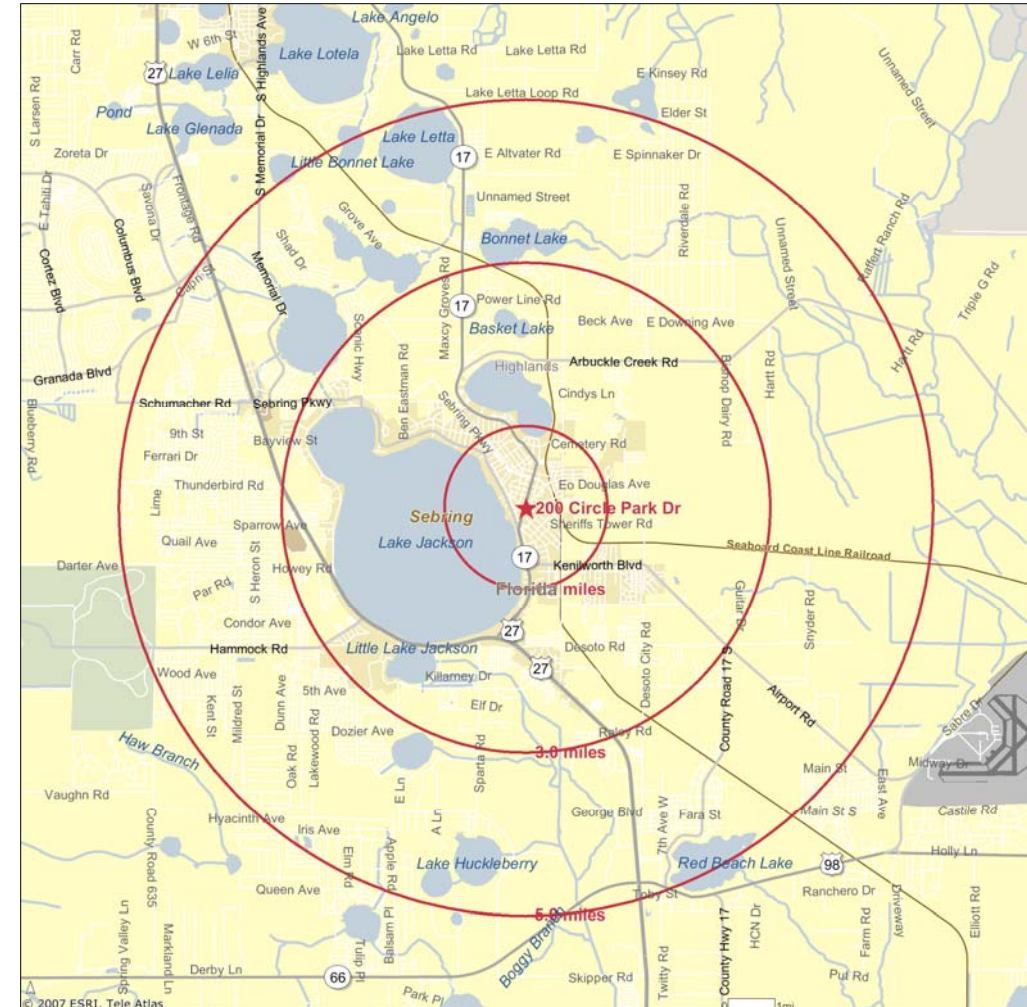
## Target Market Analysis

Downtown Sebring's primary target customer markets for retail and services include: local resident shoppers, area employees and visitors. This section characterizes the size and features of each market, with an in-depth look at the local resident market, which provides the shopping district with the greatest opportunity for a dependable source of year-round sales.

The socioeconomic characteristics of Sebring's local shopper retail trade area are provided in this section. The map on the following page illustrates the boundary of the local retail market area (market area). The market area is the geographic area from which the majority of Sebring's local customers will originate. They are based upon drive-time estimates, the knowledge and experience of Sebring business owners and the location of existing retail competition.

The market area is delineated by a 3 mile radius or 5 minute drive from downtown Sebring will look to downtown for convenience related goods and services, dining, entertainment and some specialty shopping.

When thinking about what *your vision* is for your downtown, it is critical to remember that your *Local Resident Shoppers* = *Sebring's Demographic Profile*.



Sebring, Florida  
Retail Market Area

## Population

Population within the Sebring market area, at a median age of 50.8 years, is estimated at 19,907. Since 2000, the average annual rate of population and household growth within the Market Area has fallen behind State and County averages.

POPULATION & HOUSEHOLD GROWTH City of Sebring, Sebring Market Area, Highlands County and Florida 2000 - 2013							
Geographic Area	Average Annual Change 2000 - 2009				Average Annual Change 2009 - 2014		
	2000	2009 (Estimate)	Number	Percent	2014 (Projection)	Number	Percent
<b>Sebring Market Area<sup>1</sup></b>							
Population	17,756	19,907	2,152	12.1%	21,063	1,156	5.8%
Households	7,802	8,663	861	11.0%	9,177	514	5.9%
Avg. Household Size	2.19	2.22	0.03	1.37%	2.22	0.00	0.0%
<b>Highlands County</b>							
Population	87,366	102,353	14,987	17.2%	110,228	7,875	7.7%
Households	37,471	43,345	5,874	15.7%	46,608	3,263	7.5%
Avg. Household Size	2.3	2.33	0.03	1.3%	2.34	0.01	0.4%
<b>Florida</b>							
Population	15,982,378	19,021,613	3,039,253	19.0%	20,472,562	1,450,949	7.6%
Households	6,337,929	7,543,036	1,205,107	19.0%	8,134,518	591,482	7.8%
Avg. Household Size	2.46	2.47	0.01	0.4%	2.47	0.0	0.0%

<sup>1</sup> Market Area delineated by 3-mile radius from downtown.

## Age

The median age of market area residents is 50.8, older than the State population average of 41.1.

POPULATION BY AGE City of Sebring, Sebring Market Area, Highlands County and Florida 2009			
Age Category	Sebring Market Area <sup>1</sup>	Highlands County	Florida
Under 5	5.2%	4.8%	6.0%
5 - 9	5.1%	4.8%	5.9%
9 - 14	4.7%	4.7%	5.9%
15 - 19	5.2%	5.1%	6.3%
20 - 24	5.0%	4.4%	6.2%
25 - 34	9.3%	8.6%	12.1%
35 - 44	9.2%	9.1%	12.9%
45 - 54	11.0%	11.8%	14.4%
55 - 64	13.1%	14.7%	12.4%
65 - 74	13.5%	15.0%	8.9%
75 - 84	12.4%	12.2%	6.4%
85 and Older	6.3%	4.7%	2.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>19,907</b>	<b>102,353</b>	<b>19,021,613</b>
<b>Median Age</b>	<b>50.8</b>	<b>52.3</b>	<b>41.1</b>

<sup>1</sup> Market Area delineated by 3-mile radius from downtown.

### Median Household Income

The distribution of household income for the Sebring market area is shown below with a median income of \$31,717.00.

HOUSEHOLD INCOME City of Sebring, Sebring Market Area, Highlands County and Florida 2009			
Income	Sebring Market Area <sup>1</sup>	Highlands County	Florida
Less than \$15,000	19.6%	14.9%	11.6%
\$15,000 - \$24,999	19.0%	15.0%	10.3%
\$25,000 - \$34,999	16.2%	17.1%	11.8%
\$35,000 - \$49,999	16.5%	18.2%	15.8%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	17.5%	20.9%	22.2%
\$75,000 - \$99,999	4.6%	6.0%	11.6%
\$100,000 - \$149,999	4.3%	5.2%	9.8%
\$150,000 - \$199,999	1.2%	1.3%	3.3%
\$200,000 and more	1.1%	1.4%	3.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>19,907</b>	<b>43,345</b>	<b>7,543,002</b>
<b>Median Household Income</b>	<b>\$31,717</b>	<b>\$37,729</b>	<b>\$50,413</b>

<sup>1</sup> Market Area delineated by 3-mile radius from downtown.

### Racial Composition

The Sebring market area population is predominantly white. Hispanic residents comprise 14.5% of the market area population. The market area diversity index – the probability that two people from the same area will be from different race/ethnic group – is 57.4.

RACIAL COMPOSITION City of Sebring, Sebring Market Area, Highlands County and Florida 2009			
Race	Sebring Market Area <sup>1</sup>	Highlands County	Florida
White Alone	73.6%	78.9%	74.7%
Black Alone	15.6%	10.9%	15.8%
American Indian Alone	0.6%	0.5%	0.4%
Asian/Pacific Islander	1.1%	1.5%	2.3%
Some Other Race Alone	6.9%	6.2%	4.2%
Two or More Races	2.1%	2.0%	2.8%
Hispanic Origin (any race)	14.5%	18.1%	21.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>19,907</b>	<b>102,353</b>	<b>19,021,613</b>
<b>Diversity Index</b>	<b>57.4</b>	<b>55.4</b>	<b>61.4</b>

<sup>1</sup> Market Area delineated by 3-mile radius from downtown.

Area Employees

The number of employees working within a one-, three- and five-mile radius of downtown Sebring is displayed below. Approximately 1,701 workers are employed within a one-mile radius and approximately 8 times that number (13,899) are employed in total within a five-mile, and 6,717 within three miles, which we have indicated as the “Sebring market Area”, which encompasses a significant market within easy reach of downtown retail and service businesses. Service jobs account for the largest employment sector within the entire three-mile radius, comprising 3,123 or 46.5% of all jobs. Retail trade is the second largest employment sector, with 980 employees in the three-mile area or 14.6% of the total.

SEBRING TARGET AREA BUSINESS MARKET 2009			
Industry	1-Mile Radius	3-Mile Radius	5-Mile Radius
	Employees	Employees	Employees
	%	%	%
Agriculture/Mining	9.1%	7.5%	5.0%
Construction	7.8%	8.9%	8.8%
Manufacturing	3.8%	3.1%	2.8%
Wholesale Trade	0.8%	2.6%	2.3%
Retail Trade	11.5%	14.6%	14.8%
Transportation/Utilities	1.8%	2.5%	2.9%
Information	1.1%	2.2%	2.0%
Finance/Insurance/Real Estate	3.4%	5.7%	6.7%
Services	55.1%	46.5%	47.4%
Public Administration	5.8%	6.4%	7.2%
Total Employment	1,701	6,717	13,899



### Demographic Snapshot

The following tables summarize the major housing and demographic indicators within each of the four geographic areas.

DEMOGRAPHIC SNAPSHOT City of Sebring, Sebring Market Area, Highlands County and Florida 2009			
Demographic Indicator	Sebring Market Area <sup>1</sup>	Highlands County	Florida
Average Annual Population Growth			
2000	17,756	87,366	15,982,378
2009	19,907	102,353	19,021,613
2014	21,063	110,228	20,472,562
Average Household Size	2.22	2.33	2.47
Median Age (Years)	50.8	52.3	41.1
Median Household Income	\$31,717	\$37,729	\$50,413
Race			
Percent White Alone	73.6%	78.9%	74.7%
Percent African-American Alone	15.6%	10.9%	15.8%
Percent Hispanic Origin	14.5%	18.1%	21.5%

<sup>1</sup> Market Area delineated by 3-mile radius from downtown.

HOUSING SNAPSHOT City of Sebring, Sebring Market Area, Highlands County and Florida 2009			
Demographic Indicator	Sebring Market Area <sup>1</sup>	Highlands County	Florida
Housing Units			
Owner	52.3%	59.8%	58.9%
Renter	21.0%	15.7%	25.2%
Vacant	26.7%	24.5%	15.9%
Owner-Occupied Unit Value			
Median	\$94,608	\$121,288	\$144,752
Contract Rent <sup>2</sup>			
Median	\$354	\$372	\$551
Units in Structure <sup>2</sup>			
Single Family Detached	45.6%	54.8%	52.3%
Single Family Attached	3.5%	5.1%	5.9%
2-4 Units	5.4%	3.3%	2.7%
3-4 Units	3.6%	2.4%	4.3%
5-9 Units	2.0%	1.6%	5.0%
10-19 Units	1.5%	1.6%	5.0%
20+ Units	5.0%	2.3%	12.9%
Mobile Homes	32.1%	27.6%	11.6%
Other	1.1%	1.3%	0.4%
Median Yr Structure Built <sup>2</sup>	1976	1982	1980

<sup>1</sup> Market Area delineated by 3-mile radius from downtown.

<sup>2</sup> Calculations for these indicated categories are for the year 2000.



## Visitor Market

Sebring's natural and recreational amenities make the area a significant visitor destination. Downtown Sebring has an opportunity to take advantage of the direct linkage of the visitor hospitality and visitor market occurring just outside of the downtown Sebring market area specifically through restaurants. Based on the preliminary research on one existing 110-room hotel within a 5-mile radius of downtown, there was a dining market opportunity for almost two million dollars. As indicated in the visitor market section of this report, there are approximately 10 hotels of similar size to the 110-room hotel indicated above, within a 5-mile radius of the downtown trade area. Based on this data alone, it can be anticipated that there is an additional dining market opportunity of over \$ 15,000,000 currently not being captured by downtown.

In the immediate Sebring area there are several significant visitor attractions and/or events, which provide the opportunity for capturing additional retail, restaurant and entertainment spending by this market. As downtown Sebring progresses with its physical improvements and related business development and promotional activities, it should be able to draw an increasing number of visitors from downtown's outlying areas and throughout the region.

## Community Tapestry Segments

Recognizing that people who share the same demographic characteristics may have widely divergent interests and shopping preferences, Community Tapestry data (developed by ESRI Business Information Solutions) categorizes neighborhoods throughout the nation into 65 consumer groups or market segments. Neighborhoods are geographically defined by census blocks, which are analyzed and sorted by a variety of demographic and socioeconomic characteristics as well as other determinants of consumer behavior.

Local trade area households have been grouped into Tapestry market segments. The Sebring market area is chiefly represented by the “Senior Sun Seekers” market segment, which represents 55.7% of the market. This group is comprised of married couples with a median age of 51.9 and an average income of \$38,062.

Although numerous segments are identified within the Sebring market, Swan selected the 5 most prevalent markets within the 5 mile radius, which consisted of the highest percentage of occurrence for further analysis of market understanding and strategic policy recommendations. The segments are described with a general character statement for a better understanding of the particular segment, the demographic tenets, general lifestyle behaviors and purchase preferences.

## Senior Sun Seekers, 55.7% of Greater Market Area Households

The Senior Sun Seekers market is one of the faster growing markets. With a median age of 51.9 years, this segment boasts the third oldest population of all the Community Tapestry segments. Approximately 62 percent of householders are aged 55 years or older. Married couples without children and singles comprise 70 percent of all households. The median household income is \$38,062 with many retired anticipating retirement. These neighborhoods are located mainly in the South and West with more than 43 located in Florida alone. Senior Sun Seekers residents have permanently relocated from colder climate states to warmer areas; others are “snowbirds” that move south for the winter. Single-family houses built in the late 1960’s make up almost half of the housing and mobile homes comprise nearly 40 percent. Senior Sun Seekers frequently take car trips and prefer to stay in reasonably priced motels or hotels such as Motel 6, Super 8, and Comfort Inn. They eat out frequently at family restaurants, steakhouses, and fast-food establishments. They invest heavily in all types of insurance and often consult with a financial advisor about their finances. Homeowners invest time and limited funds in minor home improvement projects, many hiring lawn and property maintenance services; however, some enjoy gardening and caring for the lawn themselves. Many residents are members of veterans’ clubs or fraternal orders and do volunteer work through them. Residents watch a wide variety of T.V. programs including game shows, dramas, news programs, home improvement shows, sitcoms, and golf tournaments. The Golf Channel is their cable station of choice. With plenty of leisure time, Senior Sun Seekers residents enjoy reading, especially boating magazines, romance novels, mysteries, and religious books. Leisure activities include playing backgammon and bingo, working crosswords, gambling at casinos, attending professional football games, visiting theme parks, and fishing.

### **The Elders, 10.8% of Target Market Area Households**

The Elders represents the oldest market of Community Tapestry, with a median age of 73.6 years. Approximately 80 percent of these householders are aged 65 years or older; however, 53 percent are aged 75 years or older. Married couples with no children living at home and singles make up 9 in 10 households. Because most of The Elders residents are retired, understandably, 80 percent of these households receive Social Security benefits, more than three times the national level. While the median household income of \$40,987 is lower than the national median, the median net worth of \$186,156 is much higher than the U.S. value. This market represents the highest concentration of retirees who favor communities designed for senior living, primarily in warm climates. Half of these households being located in Florida, and 30 percent are found in Arizona and California. Housing types are varied with half single-family dwellings, one-third is multiunit buildings, and 17 percent are mobile homes. This market is informed, independent, and involved. They are members of veterans' clubs and fraternal orders. Many of The Elders residents pay attention to their diets; visit their doctors regularly; and take prescription drugs to manage various health conditions. They have diverse investment portfolios and hold long-term care and travel insurance policies. They play golf, buy golf clothing, listen to golf programs on the radio, and watch tournaments on the Golf Channel. Other leisure activities include doing crossword puzzles, fishing, attending local casino nights and going to the theater. Residents especially prefer eating out for breakfast and often eat at family restaurants over fast-food places. Reading two or more newspapers, listening to jazz music on the radio and watching television is part of the daily routine. The Elders prefer domestic vehicles, generally owning a Buick or Mercury. This market shop from catalogs such as from Lands' End, L.L. Bean, QVC, and HSN and favor the department stores such as Dillard's when going out to shop.

### **Social Security Set, 7.6% of Target Market Area Households**

Four out of 10 Social Security Set householders are aged 65 years or older with a median age of 45 years. Most of these residents live alone. Somewhat ethnically diverse, Social Security Set neighborhoods are a blend of different racial groups. Social Security Set individuals live on very low fixed incomes from which they have accumulated over their life in order to support them now that they are retired. The median household income for this market is \$16,632; the median net worth is \$35,073. Approximately 8 percent of households rely on public assistance; 16 percent receive Supplemental Security Income. Located in large cities scattered across the United States, these communities are dispersed among business districts and around city parks. Most Social Security Set residents rent apartments in low-rent, high-rise buildings; a few elderly residents opt to live in congregate housing. More than half of these households do not own a vehicle; many residents rely on easily accessible public transportation. With a somewhat restricted income the activities and purchases of residents in the Social Security Set markets often include shopping at discount stores but prefer grocery stores close to home. This market ranks high for dependence on Medicare or Medicaid to cover health care costs. They bank in person and pay cash when they shop. Residents watch both daytime and primetime TV, particularly game shows, sports, and entertainment news shows.

### **Rural Bypasses, 5.7% of Greater Market Area Households**

The Rural Bypasses median age is 37 years and the market is very similar to U.S. distributions with half of the households consisting of married-couple families, 15 percent being single-parent families, 7 percent representing other family types with one fourth of the households consisting of a single person. The median household income for this market at \$28,087 is below the national average and is derived primarily from wages and salaries, but dependence on Social Security benefits, Supplemental Security Income, and public assistance income is above average. These neighborhoods or market concentrations consist often of large open space, undeveloped land, and farmland. Most homes were built after 1969 and are either single-family houses or mobile homes. Rural Bypasses residents shop at big box chains such as Lowe's and fill their prescriptions at the Wal-Mart Pharmacy instead of using regular pharmacies. For leisure, they watch sports on TV, in particular, NASCAR racing, football, and fishing programs and read similar topic magazines.

### **Heartland Communities, 3.6% of Target Market Area Households**

Heartland Communities is a well settled and close-knit group of residents whose median age of 41 is slightly older compared to U.S. residents. Approximately half of the residents have already retired, many in the same towns where they have lived and worked their whole lives. Nearly one-third of householders are aged 65 years or older. Married couple families comprise nearly half of the household types and almost one-third are singles who live alone, other family types and shared housing are also represented. Children are found in 30 percent of the households. The median household income for this segment is \$35,006 with some 39 percent receiving Social Security benefits. Their neighborhoods are primarily found in small towns scattered across the Midwest and South. They are low-density neighborhoods with older homes mostly single-family houses built before 1960, located in urban clusters and rural, nonfarm areas. Heartland Communities residents have a distinctly country lifestyle. They play bingo, do woodworking, and enjoy outdoor activities such as hunting and freshwater fishing and read magazines of similar interests. Reading two or more Sunday newspapers is important to them. They also listen to country music and auto racing on the radio. Heartland Communities residents have a personal time and money investment in their homes and communities. Many grow their own vegetables, mow their own lawns and do their own home improvement projects. Many residents shop from catalogs, QVC, and Avon sales representatives. Outside the home, they spend their money in family friendly stores such as Wal-Mart and restaurants include such as Ponderosa and Lone Star Steakhouse.

## The 4 C's of Opportunity

This section discusses how Swan utilized our 4 C's process to involve the entire community in order to achieve an understanding of the community's needs. Swan needed to understand the existing business model for the community, that is, the opportunities it pursues. To do so, we needed to learn more about the neighborhood's current Community Residents, Competitors, Channel Partners, and Community Assets. To understand the 4Cs of opportunity, specific questions were asked; the answers help describe the downtown business model that the community both actively pursues and passively let's happen. Key questions include but were not limited to the following:

### **Customers**

Who are they? How do they behave?

### **Competing Corridors**

Where else do customers shop?

### **Channel Partners**

What companies or organizations have relationships with key customer groups?

How can they be used to promote your community?

### **Corridor Assets**

What stores and public venues are keys assets to the corridor?

In the following sections a summary of findings and recommendations based on the research and surveys conducted for each of the 4 C's categories are provided.

## Customers

When conducting a study of any market, it is essential to start with the customers. Swan conducted research in order to find out who the customers are (from demographics), how they behave (how, when and where they shop plus what they buy) and what their preferences or wishes are (what they would like to see downtown.)

## Research Findings

Based on the ESRI demographic report, the following trends will affect the downtown Sebring market into the near future:

- Halted population growth – Sebring’s projected household growth is slower than average compared to household growth in Florida and the nation as a whole.
- High average age and large retired population – seniors as a whole do not spend a significant amount of money on retail purchases, with the exception of traveling, dining and gift purchasing. Due to limited incomes and age, they are not considered shoppers.
- Low household income – The overall lower household income is due to the large senior population.
- Less diversity further from downtown – Often in rural areas, homogeneous populations can feel alienated in more diverse communities such as in downtowns.

Many of these trends can act as constraints to creating a vibrant downtown marketplace, however, with the proper market positioning many of these challenges can be overcome. For example, downtown Sebring already attracts a young family

population with the dance studios and children’s museum. Downtown Sebring can build on this so that young families can become a key, and valuable customer group.

### Who are the customers?

Based on the input at the community workshops, the following are the top four customer groups identified as the primary customers of downtown Sebring.

- Snowbirds/retirees
- Event participants
- Tourists
- Government workers

From the list of downtown businesses (summarized in the community assets section below), Swan believes that downtown Sebring also attracts the following customer groups not identified by the community stakeholders.

- Young families
- Bargain hunters
- Antique shoppers

These specific groups are the 'base customers' of downtown Sebring's. Throughout the analysis these groups are examined at depth to identify their specific shopping habits and preferences. The marketing plans for both immediate and long-term strategies have been created to guide and optimize these group's buying behaviors.

### Shopping Habit

With 194 one-on-one customer surveys conducted at Sebring community events and through the survey posted online at [www.downtownsebringsurvey.com](http://www.downtownsebringsurvey.com) the following conclusions can be made regarding the customers "typical" shopping habits and levels of satisfaction.

- Most shoppers come downtown 2-3 times per month. While this is satisfactory and clearly a step in the right direction towards a more viable downtown economy, it should be a goal to have most shoppers coming at least once per week.
- Based on surveys, the restaurants are the biggest draw to downtown, second are special events, and lastly shopping.

Many of the participants also indicated they felt downtown Sebring is easy to reach but not necessarily close to home or work, which requires some level of planning in order to visit downtown.

### Customer Satisfaction

- Based on survey and workshop input, it appears that visitors and non-shoppers are more satisfied with downtown than regular or intentional shoppers. What this says is that unlike many downtowns with poor images, downtown Sebring does not have an image problem to overcome.
- Shoppers are instead dissatisfied with the variety of businesses downtown.
- For the stores that shoppers do tend to visit or want to visit, they indicated they are most dissatisfied with the store hours. They would like stores to stay open longer. This makes sense since 70% of disposable income is spent after 6 PM and on the weekend.

These findings imply again that downtown Sebring does not have an image problem to overcome – which is a relief. But rather the complaints about downtown Sebring were regarding a lack of retail variety, store inventory and a need for longer, more consistent store hours.

### **Spending Leakage**

As indicated in the Retail Marketplace report also referred to as the spending leakage report and located in full in the Appendix, it is obvious there are clear market opportunities (where demand is greater than supply) in downtown Sebring for the following items:

- General merchandise – This would include a variety or multi-purpose store that sells items across spending categories.
- Small restaurants – These would include primarily casual restaurants.
- Specialty food – This market includes a retail type store that offers a variety of prepared foods available for take-out to eat at home.
- Vehicle/Auto parts and repair business – This includes a retail/service business that offers access to both auto and motorcycle parts and repair.

This list is by no means all-inclusive and does not mean that other types of businesses outside these categories cannot compete downtown. “The market” includes all businesses, however primary research often identifies product categories that shoppers want but do not seem to have an obvious market opportunity (i.e. where demand is greater than supply). That’s why it is important to conduct both secondary and primary research to determine both the customer demand and the market capacity. Secondly, it is critical to understand that if downtown Sebring chooses to attract new business(es) in a competitive retail category, the business must be well run and be able to compete with established firms in the area or surrounding areas located on major corridors.



## Competitors

Households moving into the Sebring Area have choices in the areas outlying to downtown Sebring, as identified by the workshop participants and survey respondents. The feedback from these groups identified U.S. 27 shopping centers, big box centers, malls and other towns (especially Lakeland, Tampa, Orlando and Lake Wales) to be the main competitors to downtown Sebring.

When shoppers were asked to identify where they shop for a wide variety of goods and services, U.S. 27 strip malls were overwhelmingly cited as the main source for everything – except for dry cleaning for which people come to downtown Sebring.

Because there is one clear competitor, it will be easy to make contrasts between downtown Sebring and U.S. 27 strip malls. One of the main vehicles for doing so may be the dry cleaners downtown.

## Channel Partners

Channel partners are loosely defined as any person or group who has a relationship with the customer, who plays an important role in disseminating information to the customer and can help to validate the message and enable the strategies to succeed. For instance, they are the suppliers and distributors who can help downtown Sebring get to key customers and provide them great value. A full list of channel partners identified in the public meetings is attached in the 4Cs workshop document. Considering the aforementioned customer groups, the following channel partners (from that list) may be very helpful in reaching key customer groups and providing them great value.

### Identified Customer Groups

- Churches
- Bible study groups
- Schools
- Sports teams
- Government employees
- Local home builders
- American Motorcycle Assn
- Golf cart store
- Farmer's Market
- Garden Center groups – butterfly friends, garden clubs, orchid society
- Event planners
- Gym clubs
- Horticulture and agriculture groups
- Antique car show group
- Community College
- Bingo/card leagues
- Interior decorators
- Race track

## Community Assets

Assets are the things that earn a business (or a downtown) money. Community assets make downtown Sebring valuable to shoppers. A mix of businesses, buildings, public spaces and services encourage shoppers to visit downtown Sebring and spend time – hence, spend money.

## Primary Research

Participants at the two community workshops identified the following community assets as key to promoting downtown:

- Children's Museum of the Highlands
- The Community Theatre
- The Circle
- Library
- Lakes and pier
- Uniqueness of shops and buildings
- Art League
- Government center
- Events

One of the goals for downtown Sebring will be for these community assets to be combined with specific clusters to make unique and valuable experiences that will satisfy the specific customer groups. In the marketing plan that addresses the short-term or more immediate goals and strategies, specific campaigns will grow specific clusters of businesses by attracting specific customer groups, such as with your current cluster of children friendly businesses (Children's Museum of the Highlands, The Happy Owl, children's store and the dance studio).



## Secondary Research

For downtown Sebring the key assets are the downtown's stakeholders, properties and businesses. Swan acquired property and business information and uploaded it to downtown Sebring's VillageManager.net account – plus all of the property and business owner information and connected owners' names to the businesses and properties they own. The full research results are included in the Appendix of this report. From this information, Swan identified the following:

- Business mix
  - Leading categories
  - Prominent clusters
  - Natural connections
- Property mix
  - Types
  - Occupancy and vacancy
- Business and property ownership
  - Key ownership

# Section Two | Marketing Plan

## Capitalizing on Your Immediate Opportunities

The initial steps in creating a revitalized downtown through the successful implementation of a marketing plan must first begin with the focus on your existing opportunities. This section provides an overview of key business opportunities that exist for downtown Sebring and simple ways to get the most out of on them. Think about how to actively reach out to visitors that are already in the area, but are not necessarily spending their time or money downtown. Many visitors to Sebring spend several days in local hotels for both business and leisure purposes but *never* come downtown. Many even commute from US-27 hotels to areas near downtown for sporting events and activities....but then they *leave*.

Yet, Sebring has a direct linkage to the hospitality and visitor market through the local restaurants. This is a great opportunity to immediately increase the number of shoppers and diners simply by marketing to existing Sebring area visitors. To benefit from these visitors, reach out to them directly. For example, arrange to provide marketing materials in their hotel rooms and in the hotel lobbies. Promote the assets of downtown and specifically market your restaurants and destination shops.

- Put table tents and door hangers in hotel rooms.
- Place marketing materials in hotel room desks, under the telephone, etc.
- Set up performance deals with hotel staff for referrals and reward them with coupons.

Be creative in your ideas and approach to implementing this plan in order to change habits.

Most importantly, think about how to implement the short-term strategies so to generate immediate impacts that allow you the time to engage in the long-term planning efforts that will impart sustainable results!



## Plan your work and work your plan!

**Brand Yourself. Looks Count. Strive to be Different.**

**Know What You Have to Offer. Get the Word Out.**

**Brand Yourself.** Downtown Sebring must perceive itself as a product and market itself to compete with other nearby areas. Developing a brand theme or an identity upon which all other initiatives are based – e.g., logo, urban design, signage, advertising, marketing collateral, website, etc. – is a key step in the marketing process. This plan includes a new logo. USE IT! Integrate it to your signage, all marketing materials, website, everything!

**Looks Count.** Downtown Sebring must recreate (re-position) itself as a vibrant, clean and safe downtown in the eyes of prospective businesses and shoppers. CLEAN UP!

- Clean store windows
- Stage vacant windows
- Remove out of date materials from windows
- Minimize materials in windows
- Power wash sidewalks
- Add fresh paint
- Plant new flowers, remove the dead ones

**Strive to be Different.** While national retailers will appeal to a wide market, they also mimic what can be found anywhere in the nation. Downtown Sebring's historic character sets it apart from nearby malls and shopping districts. One-of-a-kind unique specialty stores and restaurants initially should be the focus of business recruitment efforts. This tactic does not preclude encouraging existing successful operations in the region to open additional locations, but rather should embrace such actions. Be your best and it will set you apart from the rest.

**Know What You Have to Offer.** One of the best strategies for recruiting businesses is to be able to provide an inventory of available real estate opportunities and business needs.

**Get the Word Out.** Working with the local media to highlight success stories and monitor new business and construction/redevelopment throughout downtown Sebring will help convince target markets that downtown Sebring is an attractive and unique place to live/work/play/learn. Use your resources to shout out what's new in downtown!

In the immediate future (6-12 months), the CRA's emphasis should be on working with existing businesses to capitalize on the hospitality/visitor market as well as other identified existing market opportunities in the "Best Way" possible. These Primary Business Development Goals and selected Core Strategies focus on successfully promoting and capitalizing on the existing market opportunities and are outlined in the chart that follows. This will allow for downtown Sebring to continue their efforts to successfully carry out the long-term goals, objectives and strategies are also discussed in this section.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT GOALS	
Primary Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Increase local spending by trade area shopper and visitor target markets.</li><li>▪ Retain, strengthen and expand the existing business base in downtown Sebring.</li><li>▪ Recruit or encourage businesses that will complement and improve the existing commercial mix and will enhance downtown's attractiveness to its target markets.</li></ul>
Core Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Develop positive downtown image through branding and marketing.</li><li>▪ Encourage residents, businesses, visitors, and area employees to shop in downtown Sebring.</li><li>▪ Encourage, support, and assist existing businesses.</li><li>▪ Incubate, support, and grow new businesses.</li><li>▪ Target new businesses to add to the business mix and strengthen the overall economic base.</li><li>▪ Create vacant property improvement programs and advertise vacant space as opportunities.</li></ul>

CAPITALIZING ON EXISTING OPPORTUNITIES	
Customer Retention: Work For Your Existing Customers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Offer customer specific promotions by targeting the shoppers' specific needs and wants. The impact is immediate!</li> <li>▪ Never stop paying attention to what is and isn't working. Measure the progress and success of special promotions (sales per square foot, number of new customers, marketing return on investment).</li> <li>▪ Let seniors know they aren't forgotten. Recognize how important your senior customer market is by acknowledging their shopping needs. They shop earlier in the day and spend money on dining, travel, gifts and children's items.</li> <li>▪ Give them choices. Promote and provide young families who are <i>already</i> coming downtown, alternative downtown activities.</li> <li>▪ It's not all child's play. Promote activities for parents who are downtown with their children.</li> <li>▪ Government workers eat out at lunch. Use them to spread the word about downtown and then reward them.</li> <li>▪ Get your visitors moving through downtown. Give them a way and an incentive to stroll, shop and eat downtown.</li> </ul>

CAPITALIZING ON EXISTING OPPORTUNITIES	
Business Retention: Work With Your Existing Merchants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Understand your potential and talk about it---a lot. Promote the findings of the analysis through the media and in networking meetings.</li> <li>▪ Very few existing businesses downtown truly understand their shoppers' needs/desires. Help existing businesses expand and diversify their merchandise mix based upon the opportunities identified. Coach your businesses.</li> <li>▪ Develop friendly competitions for your businesses and then reward them for their exceptional service and new initiatives.</li> <li>▪ Respond to business needs. Offer workshops and one-on-one technical assistance visits ranging from merchandising and window displays to target marketing and retail promotions.</li> <li>▪ Recruit from nearby. Recruit from afar. Investigate possible incentives and technical assistance to help "home-grown or local" businesses and entrepreneurs move to downtown.</li> <li>▪ Organize committees to identify and respond to critical issues in timely manner. Use your locals effectively to listen and find ways to use advice effectively.</li> <li>▪ Restaurants are your most popular attraction. Advertise local retail shops through them – on table tents, placemats, restaurant ticket jackets and restroom doors and windows.</li> <li>▪ Don't lose track of the loyal. Encourage and assist businesses in developing customer databases in order to reach out to existing shoppers.</li> </ul>



STRATEGIES TO GROW DOWNTOWN SEBRING	
Business Attraction: Selling New Businesses on Downtown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Fill your vacant stores with the right businesses. Focus first on filling existing vacancies within the core retail area with using a key business list that can be distributed to real estate agents and brokers.</li> <li>▪ Work for your property owners and they will work for you. For instance, secure lease rate reductions from property owners.</li> <li>▪ Convince them it's just about them. Develop target recruitment campaigns using mailings, one-on-one contact, third-party outreach, and new collateral materials.</li> <li>▪ Keep your calendar buzzing. Develop a schedule of communications and events to keep groups informed about downtown initiatives and opportunities.</li> <li>▪ Show Off downtown Sebring! Offer downtown walking or driving tours to promote the area to potential businesses and investors.</li> <li>▪ Create a comprehensive database of key economic indicators (vacancy rate, jobs, employment, private/public investment, businesses recruited/retained, special event/promotion traffic counts and retail impact, etc.) to track and promote downtown Sebring's vitality and overall progress.</li> </ul>

STRATEGIES TO GROW DOWNTOWN SEBRING	
Customer Attraction: Introducing a New Downtown to New Customers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Access to the hospitality industry has always been available. It is a resource for new downtown visitors. Use it! Reach out to local hotels to develop a cooperative marketing strategy through the use of hotel door hangers and restaurant table tents (as described above).</li> <li>▪ Never stop marketing downtown Sebring.....shoppers will always shop, so your message must be in place or they will forget. Use the new logo and build your brand identity for the downtown Sebring to be incorporated in all marketing and development initiatives (key messages, downtown name, logos, brochures, website, etc.).</li> <li>▪ Share the work, share the benefits! Develop collaborative marketing initiatives and joint/cross promotions with the Sebring Chamber, Economic Development organizations, Highland County Fairgrounds, Sebring International Raceway, Visitor's Association and other key local organizations.</li> <li>▪ Let technology work for you. Invest in a downtown Sebring website that communicates its identity to existing and prospective businesses, residents and customers.</li> <li>▪ Use a variety of promotional tools to reach all customers at all times of the year in order to raise awareness, educate, generate sales and assure customer satisfaction.</li> <li>▪ Be Creative! Promote downtown as a visitor destination. Get visitors out of their hotel rooms, off of US-27 and into your circle! Come join our circle campaign!</li> </ul>



## Introduction

Following an established marketing planning method, Swan with help from the downtown Sebring community and CRA staff created a marketing plan that appeals to different niche customer groups, addresses threats by competitors, employs a variety of channel partners, and appropriately uses the community's public and private assets. Secondary and primary research was conducted to understand the likes, dislikes and wants of current and potential customers and resources in the Sebring community. (Data details are located in the Appendix.) It is important to understand that this marketing plan document is not intended to function as a typical graphic driven planning document but rather as a *business plan* for downtown.

Going forward it is important to consider the top three predictors of whether someone who comes into your store just to browse or becomes a purchasing customer. According to Paco Underhill (retail anthropologist and author of "Why We Buy") the top three predictors are ***Time***, ***Touch*** and ***Talk***.

***Time*** – Research indicates that the retailer's goal should be to find ways to keep the shopper in their store for more than 13 minutes as the likelihood of them making a purchase significantly increases. This is also true for how Sebring should think about keeping customer in downtown. The longer you can keep visitors in your downtown, the more likely they will shop at your stores, eat at your restaurants, and stay in your hotels.

***Touch*** – Customer-Product interaction is key. The ability to touch and feel the products allows the customer to utilize another one of their senses to help them imagine them using the item. Just as important as giving them something to touch is to make sure that the item they are touching is appealing. Is the shirt they are holding feel *soft* and smell *clean* or is it *hard* and *stale* from years in the window storefront. The attention to inventory is what can get the customer through your front door to make a purchase, but it can also be what sends them back out the door without a bag in hand.

***Talk*** – When the customer walks through your door, who do they encounter?

Shoppers who have an opportunity to engage in conversation with knowledgeable, friendly staff helps the shopper develop relationship with the area, the store, and the product that can overcome their own objections about making a purchase and for returning on another day.

The goals indicated as a part of this marketing plan is to encourage key shoppers to visit downtown Sebring at key times of the year and then have a valuable and memorable time doing so.

## Downtown Marketing Opportunities

From the feedback gathered through the focus group interviews, the intercept surveys, and discussions with members of the business community, including business and property owners, community leaders and supporting partners downtown's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and barriers were identified. Below are eight strategic goals developed as the framework for the Marketing Plan:

**Goal 1: Organize Your Troops**

Organize people to achieve the community vision for downtown Sebring.

**Goal 2: Create (Reinforce) a Brand for Sebring "Who is Sebring?"**

Devine your "Message" and obtain the "tools" to deliver.

**Goal 3: Increase Awareness of Downtown as a Visitor's Destination**

Leverage your history and events to attract people downtown.

**Goal 4: Improve Downtown's Image and Visibility**

Place a priority on improving downtown's image and visibility through a holistic downtown enhancement approach.

**Goal 5: Increase Residential Density and Income Base**

Build your residential density to grow your downtown customer base.

**Goal 6: Strengthen Existing Businesses**

Keep an open dialogue between the CRA, downtown business and property owners, and local organizations.

**Goal 7: Cultivate New and Independently Owned Businesses**

Cultivate new businesses to spur additional economic growth.

**Goal 8: Promote Downtown**

Consistently promote downtown to attract the "best" consumers that will enhance economic activity.



## **GOAL 1: Organize Your Troops**

The CRA alone will not be able to accomplish all of the work in this plan. The strategies and projects outlined for implementation in this study are ambitious, and the hiring of a downtown coordinator and creation of an organization committee(s) will be absolutely vital to ensuring the success of Sebring's downtown efforts. Thus, it must seek the help.

### **Objective 1.1 Hire a Downtown Coordinator**

It is critical to the future of downtown Sebring and its vision that a position is created (Downtown Coordinator) and an individual is hired that is solely dedicated to helping manage and oversee the marketing efforts of downtown Sebring. The Downtown Coordinator position could be hired under the jurisdiction of the City and/or CRA or be hired as a consultant. The position could be filled, as either a part time or full time position depending on the level of responsibility the position will share with other CRA staff. The position should oversee all aspects of the objectives and strategies presented in the Marketing Plan.

Downtown Coordinator – The coordinator would manage the execution of all the strategies outlined in this plan. They would manage downtown events, assist with business retention and recruitment, execute promotions and manage the volunteers and/or committees. A hired consultant, paid CRA staff person or a combination of both, could fill this position.

### **Objective 1.2 Organize Committees**

We envision the following committees organized by local groups to accomplish the following:

- Downtown tourism committee – this function could be organized by the chamber of commerce. It would maintain the calendar of regional events, connect downtown businesses to the events and venues and look for new partnerships.
- Downtown business attraction committee – this committee would be managed by a group of local realtors. The group would seek solutions to leasing problems, cooperatively show spaces downtown and market properties.
- Downtown business retention committee – Organized by Michael Jacobson at Habitat for Humanity, this committee could mentor other businesses on buying, accounting, merchandising, marketing and selling.
- Promotions committee – this committee would be organized by the events coordinator at the historic hotel and would manage the execution of promotions.

### **Objective 1.3 Find leadership in your CRA Staff and Board Members**

The businesses, property owners, downtown coordinator, and the committees need a leader. This leadership should start with the CRA Staff and CRA Board.

## **GOAL 2: Create (Reinforce) a Brand for Sebring “Who is Sebring?”**

Promotion occurs when two elements exist. First downtown must have a “Message” and second, downtown must obtain the “Tools” to deliver the message to existing and new customers and even to specific customer groups. This is the process of community branding.

### **Objective 2.1 Branding**

Respondents to the shopper survey and attendees at the public meetings told us that they want downtown Sebring to be known for the following:

- Familiarity – the historic feel reminds us of who we are.
- Great meeting place – close to work and home, a great place to meet.
- Uniqueness – unique place, unique feel – makes you feel unique.

The key to branding for people already familiar with Sebring is knowledge about product and service availability. They think downtown Sebring doesn’t have enough to offer and the store hours are inconsistent and/or inconvenient. Overcoming this involves creating events that invite them back downtown at several key times to change their attitudes about downtown. They should be invited to festivals and invited to return within a month for a special shopping event. This will reinforce their positive impressions of downtown Sebring.

### **Objective 2.2 What is Your Message?**

Downtown Sebring’s message must clearly articulate and describe the type of retail mix, the shopping environment, and the target customer market. The statement distinguishes downtown Sebring from surrounding shopping districts. Focus groups and business interviews emphasized several core values that will form the basis for downtown’s message.

The key general messages are that Sebring...

- Is more than you’d expect
- Serves multiple markets—not just upscale shoppers—friendly hometown appeal
- Is a town of real people - Locally owned and operated businesses
- Always includes something to do and somewhere to dine.

For Seniors, Sebring...

- Has a place and time for you.
- Is a place to share time with each other – and other generations.
- Offers daily specials for special people.

For Young Families, Sebring...

- Has more to do, downtown.
- Offers \_\_\_\_\_, while you wait.
- Is a place to build something special – like bonds with your children.
- Is the perfect place to take a break.

For Government Workers, Sebring...

- Is a place to brag about. Tell visitors to sample all downtown has to offer.
- Is your perfect lunch spot.
- Is something to do right after work.

For the Antiquers, Sebring...

- Is a place to find cool collectibles
- Is old and new – and new to you.
- Is another great Florida downtown to discover.
- Could be your buried treasure.

**Objective 2.3 Utilize All Your Promotional Tools**

Promotional tools should be used to raise awareness of downtown Sebring, what it offers, when the consumer should shop, what should be bought and how to thank the customer for shopping.

Bring Awareness of downtown Sebring	YouTube Video Stock footage cable commercial Radio spot Gas pumps Website Lake trails
Educate the customers about what downtown has to offer "them."	Direct mail to civic groups, homeowners' associations and membership groups. Advertisements in customer specific publications Public relations articles in specialty publications and customer specific newsletters. HTML email Events
Generate Sales through Seasonal Specials	Events at specific times of year. Garden in the early spring. Home fixtures in late winter Liquidation in the summer. 'Create and sell' seminars in the fall and winter. Food preparation in the winter.
Ensure Customer Satisfaction	Child Care Christmas Days Special invitation sales Internet only sales to best customers



### **GOAL 3: Increase Awareness of Downtown as a Visitor's Destination**

It is critical that you don't let people forget about you. If people are coming to Sebring, they should be coming downtown. Make visitors and locals aware of what downtown has to offer. Tell them why you are different than everything else. More importantly, tell them why you are better!

#### **Objective 3.1 Showcase the History to Expand Cultural Tourism**

Cultural and lifestyle tourism is defined as visits by persons from outside the community who are motivated by interest in historical, artistic, or lifestyle offerings of a community. Cultural and Lifestyle Tourism is more than historic buildings; it is the entire history of the community, its events, its people and its "culture." Suggested strategies to attract the cultural and heritage tourist include:

- Create a Self-Guided Walking Tour – In cooperation with the local historical society, the CRA should create a marketing piece on downtown historical buildings, cultural landmarks, history and places to a full-color brochure with map and suggestions on how to walk the self-guided tour. Include on the downtown website, a downloadable PDF of the self-guided walking tour.
- Historical Building – Place historical plaques and brief histories of the various buildings at the corresponding locations such as the fire station.
- Murals – Murals are excellent venues to showcase a community's history and attract visitors. The CRA in cooperation with the local historical society should commission local artists to create additional historically accurate wall murals. Invite local journalist to write an article about the significance of the mural.
- Distribute regular press releases about Downtown's public and private assets, people and buildings.

- Place stories on local blogs.
- Pitch stories on [www.helpareporterout.com](http://www.helpareporterout.com).
- Introduce visitors to your community theater
- Outreach to Community – Arrange to train volunteers to speak on downtown Sebring's history. Consider a monthly article in the local newspaper about downtown history.
- Offer information/tours to travel writers – Make outreach to local travel writers with information on the area downtown Sebring history. Distribute pertinent information to regional tourism groups.



### Objective 3.2 Foster a “Visitor Friendly” Environment

It will be key to the downtown’s success that the local business community and visitor points of interest foster a “visitor friendly” environment. Downtown business owners and their employees are not just cashiers, wait staff and front desk personnel. They are the community’s sales person. In addition to selling merchandise, they should also be able to “sell” events, attractions, the downtown area and the community in general. Downtown Sebring must make visitors feel welcomed and comfortable so that they enjoy their experience, want to spread the news and return again. Strategies to achieve this objective include:

- Educate business owners and staff - Develop a training program to help educate business owners and employees about the various aspects of downtown Sebring including its history, special events and coming attractions.
- Have downtown Sebring business owners “adopt” a local attraction or event. Encourage individual businesses to “adopt” an attraction or event, such as the Community Theater, become very knowledgeable about it and then promote it. As visitors enter various stores, they’ll find that each promotes a different attraction.
- Utilize a “visitor center” location in the downtown to function as an identified location to distribute marketing materials, greet visitors and promote the various venues and events.



## GOAL 4: Improve Downtown's Image and Visibility

A community's overall image and visibility is key to its success in the marketplace and achieving its brand or vision. It is imperative that assistance to business and property owners be given to help improve both empty and occupied storefronts, window displays and the overall general presence of downtown. Parallel to physical improvements, effective signage is needed to help guide people to and through downtown. Capturing potential consumers and directing them to downtown must be a priority to help support the other promotional and marketing activities implemented.

### Objective 4.1 Work with Businesses to Improve Their Overall Physical Presentation and Success

Businesses should be paying attention to how their store presence impacts both the image of downtown and their individual stores. Encourage store owners to be responsible for all aspects of the business, including its physical upkeep.

- Front entrances must be inviting and visually appealing.
- The entire store inside and out should be kept as pristine as possible. Business owners need to sweep, vacuum and mop their businesses on a consistent basis. Awnings, carpets, rugs, blinds, curtains also need to be cleaned on a regular basis.
- Offer Visual Merchandising Assistance. Offer one-on-one visual merchandising assistance to help businesses improve their window displays, in-store displays and overall visual presentation of their business.
- Require or encourage that store owners update their storefronts on a predetermined cycle (i.e. every 4 weeks)
- Signage - Perpendicular overhead signage needs to be encouraged under the awnings to assist with keeping pedestrians moving throughout the downtown.

Not only does the signage assist with identifying the businesses within the storefronts, it helps with creating interest and attention down the sidewalks. The CRA should meet with the City to review current sign regulations and recommend acceptable and consistent designs for signage.





## **Objective 4.2 Work with Businesses on Strategies to Increase Sales and Customer Satisfaction**

Educating business owners on what the customers are saying and the needs they have are critical to making a business grow. Offer the results of the market analysis and customer surveys in order to improve the supply to meet the demand.

Examples of improvements are:

- Encourage storeowners to only show merchandise in their storefronts that is available as part of the inventory.
- Encourage storeowners to expand their inventory to offer more sizes, colors and styles.
- Encourage storeowners to consider specific customer needs when designing their store and merchandise.

## **Objective 4.3 Improve the Presentation of Empty Storefronts**

There are a number of empty storefronts in downtown as well as the surrounding streets. These empty storefronts are often the first impression that a shopper has regarding downtown. In addition, the community is missing an opportunity to market these available storefronts to potential investors. Efforts need to be centered on improving the storefronts as much as possible to improve its image and help “sell” downtown’s economic opportunities. Several recommendations for consideration include:

- Work with willing property owners to encourage them to clean up their storefronts. Meet one-on-one with property owners to encourage them to remove old signs, products and junk from vacant buildings and especially from in front of vacant windows (including second and third floor windows). Take before and after pictures and incorporate them in the CRA newsletter to recognize those who have made the effort.

- Recommend that political posters or similar type brochures not be displayed in storefront windows in order to reduce window clutter and increase store visibility.
- Work with willing property owners to ensure that contact information regarding availability of their buildings is accurate, clearly posted and positive in nature. Many of the vacant buildings in downtown have no information regarding availability and if there is information, it is often hard to see and/or not presented professionally.
- Consider offering some type of generic signage that property owners could place in their windows, which they could fill in the contact information such as “Downtown Sebring. If interested in this site, please contact...” This would ensure a certain appearance.
- Adopt a window program. Each month or quarter, adopt a window and build a display to promote community events, other downtown businesses, redevelopment projects, etc. Although some property owners are not as willing to have their windows cleaned and a display built, work with those who are willing and again recognize them in the CRA newsletter or at a City meeting.
- Conduct quarterly walk around in downtown. On a quarterly basis, have a CRA representative conduct an assessment of the condition of the overall cleanliness of downtown and condition of all public amenities. Create a checklist and forward any issues or concerns to the appropriate agency, property owner or business owners.
- Hold a downtown clean-up event. On a bi-yearly basis, the CRA in partnership with the City should host a downtown clean-up event (April and October). Have downtown business and property owners, local youth, city staff, civic organizations and residents participate in activities such as:
  - Painting or cleaning the public right-of-ways (benches, curbing, etc)
  - Cleaning the exteriors of businesses, including awnings and signs

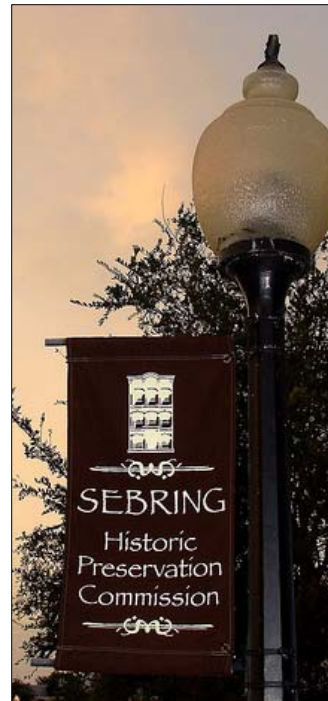
- Sweeping and washing sidewalks
- Washing windows
- Remove graffiti, stickers, pick up trash
- Make minor building repairs

- Adopt a Planter Program. Ask businesses to “adopt” a planter in front of their storefronts and keep them well planted and watered. Once a quarter, the CRA will purchase flowers and have the business owners refresh the planters as needed. Create signs to place in the planter boxes “This planter adopted by Name of Business.”

#### **Objective 4.4 Expand the Banner Program, Outdoor Décor and Public Art**

One of downtown’s major strengths is its unique character and ambiance. Individuals expressed that they liked the pedestrian scale of the area and the buildings. Downtown should expand upon the banner program and other pedestrian amenities and add new outdoor décor and public art to help improve its image.

- Continue to expand upon the existing banner program. Continue to support and expand upon the seasonal banner program in downtown Sebring. Banners not only add interest to the streetscape but they can help promote the area and its unique character. Downtown should have at least four sets of banners that could be easily rotated throughout the year. One set of banners should reflect downtown’s logo and tagline. Other sets should include:
- Banners to promote the cultural and arts aspects of



downtown. Consider having the banners created by local artists, children and high school students that have a common theme but with different designs.

- Create a set of banners to highlight historical events or points of interest.
- One set should promote the winter holiday season.
- Install white lights in downtown trees. A very effective outdoor enhancement is having white lights strung in the trees that line downtown.
- Incorporate matching outdoor café tables and chairs throughout downtown. Having matching outdoor seating and dining tables and chairs helps to create a manicured, uniformed streetscape. The CRA should make the initial purchase and require all businesses that provide existing outdoor seating to switch to the matching sets.
- Incorporate Public Art Installations throughout the downtown.
  - Art in your downtown can include passive, active and functional pieces. For instances, downtown art can include kid friendly water features, community participation themed pieces, such as the turtle or manatee, historical murals or bicycle racks that as a stand alone function as art but also have a functional purpose.





#### Objective 4.5 Improve the Perception Regarding Parking

The perception of parking in most downtowns is that there isn't enough. However, we find that is not usually the case; it is a matter of parking management, education and promotion that is lacking. Address improving the perception of available parking by implementing the following strategies:

- Improve and promote the general condition of the parking lots; promote the lots to downtown businesses – The City should ensure that the public parking spaces are well maintained and properly lit. The CRA should educate downtown workers about the importance of maintaining customer parking in front of their businesses.
- Better directional signage to parking lots – To assist shoppers and visitors with locating available parking directional signs showing parking lots should improved.





#### Objective 4.6 Encourage Improvements to Facades, Storefronts and Buildings

Improving the physical aspects of the buildings, facades and storefronts must be a priority. However, the process must be a public-private partnership with the City and CRA exploring incentives or funding mechanisms to encourage improvements. Several strategies for consideration include:

- Implement/Reintroduce a commercial/business façade improvement program. The City and CRA should implement/reintroduce a façade improvement program for downtown businesses and property owners to access. The program should offer various levels of funding to assist simple paint and fix-it projects to more extensive rehabilitations of the building or storefront. Adjust the program to the current needs.
- Aggressively promote the façade improvement program. Develop a simple brochure or “fact sheet” that outlines the process of accessing the façade improvement program and distribute it to all downtown businesses, property owners.
- To attract new businesses and investors, use various outreach channels such as the new business welcome kit, the CRA’s downtown website, property owner meetings, brown bag lunches, one-on-one visits, etc.
- Implement a program to showcase and celebrate the final improvements or projects. Throughout the process, take before and after pictures of the projects and use them later in showcasing the projects including press releases, updates to the brochure, on the website, public presentations, recruitment mailers, etc.
- Install plaques on the building(s) recognizing the project’s contribution to downtown Sebring.

#### Objective 4.7 Improve Gateway Signage

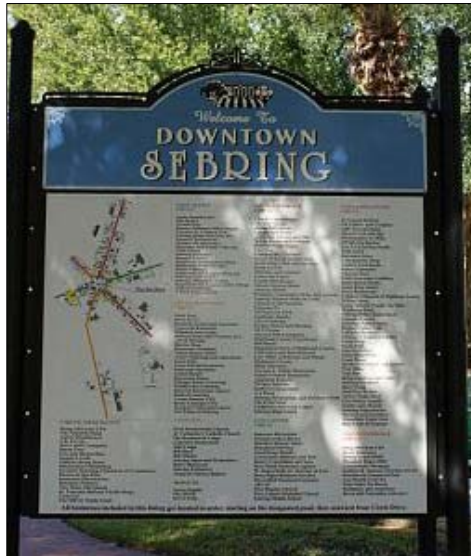
Gateway entrances provide the first hint about the character and quality of the people and businesses within a community. The first impression will ultimately result in either the people stopping or simply driving through on their way to something “better.” In addition to making the first impression, gateway treatments orient the visitor at all key entry locations.



## Objective 4.8 Help Customers Find Their Way

A coordinated way finding system can direct visitors into and around downtown in order to find shopping areas, parking lots, and places of interest.

- Parking lots – Directional signs from major streets showing available parking areas.
- Areas of Interest Signage - (such as Children’s Museum, Community Theater).
- Map Kiosks – The kiosk(s) should be pedestrian-scaled and include the downtown logo to further the area’s branding. These kiosks should have a map of the entire downtown showing points of interest, landmarks, parking lots and a listing of downtown businesses. The kiosk(s) can also function as one of the downtown art installations.



## **GOAL 5: Increase Residential Density and Income Base**

Increasing your density in and around downtown creates instant customers. Residents of downtowns, big and small, like to shop where they live. While the market is not right for acting on this goal immediately, this should be revisited later. Downtown has the potential for higher density residential in existing downtown buildings.

### **Objective 5.1 Mixed Income/Market Rate Housing**

Make available both mixed income and market rate residential space in the downtown. Make available second floor spaces for commercial and/or residential uses.

Utilize available community assets to encourage residential redevelopment projects with developer incentives, such as, grants or expedited permitting.

### **Objective 5.2 Habitat/Non-Profit**

Partner with local housing providers on innovative projects that bring a mix of residential to downtown.

### **Objective 5.3 Renovation Incentives**

Develop incentives to recruit young families and professionals. Create/Adapt renovation incentives to current need:

- Down payment assistance
- Façade/landscaping grants
- Major systems renovation grants or no-low interest loans





## **GOAL 6: Strengthen Existing Businesses**

The first step in successful business development is always strengthening existing businesses. Increasing sales in existing businesses boosts market resilience and often creates opportunities for businesses to expand or establish a new business through a strong product line or simply from their existing business's success. Additionally, recruiting customers is important, but retaining your loyal ones is even more so.

### **Objective 6.1 Develop and Maintain an Active Retention Program**

Communities can offer an array of tools and programs targeted at business retention but only the business owner or manager can integrate the programs and make the necessary changes. Below are several programs that downtown Sebring should implement to strengthen their existing business base:

- Foster an open dialog with downtown businesses. One of the most effective tools for business retention is communication. This enables the CRA to identify businesses that are at risk of closing or leaving the area and to identify potential problems before they are irreversible. Local businesses need to know that there is interest in their problems and in keeping their businesses in the area. Assessing businesses needs or issues can be accomplished through either direct interviews, one-on-one, or in groups.
- Conduct small business assistance and education. The environment for the small business owner is constantly changing and extremely competitive. On-going education is essential for the health of any business, however getting owners or managers to attend workshops or seminars can be difficult, especially if they are not convinced the trainings will meet their needs. Offer smaller scaled and more personal programs, such as:
  - One-on-one in-store consultations
  - Secret Shopper Program
  - A series of educational articles in the CRA newsletter, on the website and other related business communication networks.

- Take advantage of cross-marketing. Downtown businesses can generate customer traffic through cross marketing and cross merchandising. For example, cross-merchandise by selling specialty bookmarks or stationary in the local coffee shop.
- Create new opportunities for existing businesses. Sebring has multiple successful existing businesses that can act as a catalyst for new ventures. For example, the existing thrift business can be linked to other retailers, such as antique stores or home fixture stores.

### **Objective 6.2 Consider the Needs and Desires of Existing Customers**

Retailers should consider the needs and desires of their regular customers when designing their store, choosing their inventory, creating customer appreciation incentives and offering waiting activities for parents and children.

- Seniors - tend to shop earlier in the day and spend most of their disposable shopping income on dining out, travel, gifts and children's items. Opportunities to cater to these customers could be to make sure items they will likely be interested in are easy accessible and have easily read price tags and in-store signs, offer "early bird" specials, or discounts on a meal if they purchase a non food item from another downtown business.
- Families – will come downtown for a variety of activities. By having joint special events such as a local artists showing at a gallery and an arts and crafts session at the children's museum, and if you participate in both, offer a discount at one of the downtown restaurants. Remember, even art installations in the circle or throughout the downtown can act as entertainment for children and adults. (i.e. coffee shop and/or bookstore)

- Government Employees - make up a significant portion of the daily downtown foot traffic during the week. Not only should retailers focus on the importance of those customers as returning patrons, but think about them as an opportunity to pass the word along. Encourage them to return and to bring someone new through discounts or specials, and remember to keep your menu fresh and new. These customers are coming often; give them something new to look forward to.
- Out of Town Visitor - might only come to Sebring once or twice year, with each one representing a potential long-term relationship for downtown businesses. Personal contact strongly influences shoppers' decisions about where to buy things, and the internet has made it easy for business owners to stay in touch with customers.

### Objective 6.3 Maintain Relationships with ALL of Your Customers

Each person who visits a business in downtown Sebring represents a potential long-term customer for that business, even if he or she never visits the business in person again. Businesses – particularly independently owned businesses – can maintain ongoing profitable relationships with one-time visitors through mail, phone calls, websites, and other venues.





## Objective 6.4 Expand Hours that Downtown is Open

It is now commonplace for households to be two income families, this means that the majority of retail purchases are made on weekends and weekday evenings. However, few of downtown Sebring's businesses are open later than 6:00 pm, and a surprising number do not keep regular business hours and are not open on Sundays. To help address this, retailers should have regular operating hours that the customer can count on. Retailers additionally can offer later than usual operating hours on certain days or occasional customer appreciation hours for regular shoppers.

- Open Sunday Campaign – Have business commit to being open on Sundays, even if for limited predetermined, advertised hours.
- Look Open, Be Open! Most important, business hours should be clearly posted. And if the business is open, it should look open. Lack of signage or incorrect store information can send the wrong message to the customer as to how important their business is to you. Be Clear!



## Objective 6.5 Enhance communications between businesses

Communication and outreach efforts directed at the entire downtown business community should be a priority. The BID should continue to support its existing communication networks and launch new venues to help keep all businesses in the loop of what is happening in downtown as well as gather feedback when needed. The BID should focus less on promoting the “Business Improvement District” and more on marketing downtown and the exciting promotions and activities its offered. As mentioned before, “BID” does not necessarily mean much to those outside of the BID membership.

- **Create a consistent image in all communication venues.** Incorporate downtown’s logo, tagline and name and use it consistently in all communications.
- **Compile an accurate database of all Downtown businesses, their contact information, fax numbers and email addresses and keep it up to date.**
- **Publish regular newsletters and make them available via email as well as downloadable from the website.** The newsletter should contain information about current downtown developments, upcoming promotional activities, listing of new businesses, incentives or trainings available, educational articles, listing of all meetings and contact information regarding the CRA and work groups or committees. Contact other downtown organizations to see what their newsletters look like and the type of content included.
- **Utilize e-mail bulletins.** These could supplement the newsletters and include information about matters requiring immediate attention.
- **Hold regular “membership” meetings or community forums.** Consider changing the format to be a community forum versus the typical “membership” meeting. These forums should be held at least quarterly for the first few years and have both a social as well as educational component to them. Word of caution: if not structured correctly, community forums can become platforms for

complaints. Therefore, make sure that there is a method for engaging passionate individuals such as asking them to volunteer on a committee or support an activity.

- **Establish a “block captain or ambassador” program to maximize outreach efforts.** A volunteer or Board member is assigned to a block and is responsible for getting to know the businesses on their block, visiting them regularly, distributing information as needed and gathering feedback and input regarding their concerns, issues or needs.

## Objective 6.6 Educate businesses about the downtown Sebring efforts

The majority of business owners aren’t aware of the efforts of the CRA. Programs need to be expanded to educate downtown business about the CRA, its value to the community and its annual program of work.

- **Prepare a brochure or marketing piece about the CRA and downtown Sebring.** As a separate piece to the Downtown Business and Shopping Directory, prepare a brochure that can be easily inserted into the directory explaining about downtown, its value to the business community, a list of services and programs and contact information. Incorporate downtown’s logo and tagline, make it as professional as possible and make it available at the City’s departments to distribute with all applications for business licenses.
- **Implement a “new business welcome program”.** Utilizing the block captain program, personally visit new businesses to welcome them to the downtown and enlist their involvement in the Association. Leave businesses with a package that includes the Downtown Business and Shopping directory, brochure about the “CRA”, several past newsletters, “goodies” or give-a-always from fellow businesses, information about upcoming events, etc.
- **Produce an annual report.** Present the report at the membership meeting, provide an overview of the report at a CRA meeting, insert it in the newsletter, post it on the Web site and make it available to all property owners and key partnering organizations.

### **Objective 6.7 Improve communications between the CRA and Downtown businesses.**

Continuing to strengthen this relationship and supporting consistent and regular communication between the City and the downtown business community should also be a priority for both entities.

- Make sure that all CRA members and key staff receive the CRA newsletter and have the CRA provide quarterly updates to the CRA.
- Assign City staff to participate on the various Downtown committees.
- Each year, hold a work session between the CRA and the CRA to review accomplishments, discuss priorities and address any issues or needs.



### **Objective 6.8 Strengthen relationships with local and regional organizations**

It is key that the CRA becomes more active with other organizations in Sebring, the county and within the region to further to strengthen and expand relationships and to help keep the community abreast of downtown's progress. Suggestions include:

- Provide articles about what is happening downtown for other organizations' newsletters.
- Invite representatives from other organizations to the quarterly downtown forum.
- Appoint representatives from the CRA to participate on other organizations' committees. These representatives would report back to the CRA and its membership on what other organizations are doing.
- Give presentations on what the CRA is doing and how they are progressing to other organizations' Board and/or Committee meetings.



## GOAL 7: Cultivate New and Independently Owned Businesses

Recruiting new established and/or franchised businesses can be challenging. As part of your marketing plan look to recruit local entrepreneurs and businesses. Innovative owners with strong entrepreneurial skills and vision can often be what drive the success of many downtowns. Establish a vision and profile for downtown that identifies the types of businesses that meets the needs and desires of the community. This gives the proven entrepreneur an opportunity to create unique businesses that fit the specific market opportunities. While Sebring has some strong existing retail and restaurants, the attraction of additional anchors - particularly entertainment type businesses- will help to animate downtown later in the day and early evening hours which is critical its success.

### Objective 7.1 Implement a Recruitment Strategy to Attract New Businesses

It is important to attract businesses that are compatible with the image or “brand” of downtown. To help guide this, the City, CRA, local Chamber, local businesses and property owners and other key revitalization partners should offer tools and incentives to become part of downtown.

- Create a business development brochure specific for marketing downtown business opportunities. Include building inventory of all available and occupied downtown properties including contact information, square footage, amenities, condition and a picture. Identify gaps in the business markets. Periodically review and update if needed any market studies, sales leakage and/or other related trade area reports.
- Develop an incentive program specific for downtown.
  - Incentives to property owners that offer special or reduced lease rates to local business owners, entrepreneurs and artists.
  - Reduced business license fees for downtown businesses.
  - Offer restaurant capital investment funds and/or leasehold

agreements for building improvements such as life safety requirements, grease traps, fire escapes and elevators.

- Develop a new business welcome start up kit. The package should include a “Doing Business in Downtown Sebring” brochure, information on the CRA, business resources and information, Chamber of Commerce application and other related information or data to help businesses start off on the right foot.

### Objective 7.2 Promote Vacancies and Opportunities

- Websites – Use the New downtown website to advertise the great “opportunities” for new businesses to move to downtown by providing available lease or purchase space.
- Familiarization tour – Invite possible investors and developers to a luncheon with a presentation and walking tour of downtown’s real estate opportunities.
- Provide a monthly list of sale and leasing opportunities – This list can be distributed countywide by mail or e-mail.

### Objective 7.3 Implement an Outreach Program with Property Owners to Help Gain Their Support

It will be critical to the overall success of downtown to gain the support of the downtown property owners and have them buy-in to the overall. Implementing a variety of communication networks and outreach techniques to garner support and involvement from property and business owners.

- Host a downtown property owner lunch. These informal lunches should be held on a quarterly basis and be targeted to gather feedback from property owners regarding needs or issues facing the leasing, improving or selling of their properties.



## GOAL 8: Promote Downtown

It is critical for the downtown to have an aggressive, consistent and on-going calendar of promotions and advertising venues targeted at attracting consumers, both local and visitors. Efforts to attract visitors and existing and new residents will need to be critical.

### Objective 8.1 Develop a Twelve-Month Calendar of Smaller Scaled Events to Create Incentives to Come to Downtown

People need a reason or “incentive” to come downtown. Communities across the nation including Sebring have found that hosting an event is a viable way to attract consumers and visitors to downtown. While it takes time to create a monthly calendar of events, downtown Sebring already hosts successful events. Building on these events, through a series of smaller events need to be added to continue to create that additional “reason” to come to downtown and create additional foot traffic to spur economic activity. While it would be ideal to hold a promotional event each month, the cost to promote and hold monthly events can be unreachable. We recommend starting with a reduced number the first year and increase the number of events each following year.

- Events can be a mix of “closed street” events and smaller events used to draw people downtown (such as Flag Day or downtown Trick or Treat.).
- Service and professional businesses should show their support for the event through approved window displays, advertising and sponsorship. For example, a local bank could fund the materials necessary for a kite-flying day or trick or treat bags.

## Examples of Promotional Events

Kite Flying Day – Hold a downtown event in which merchants provide the basic ingredients of a kite – paper, string and masking tape – and later display photographs of kites made.

Downtown Trick or Treat – Done in many communities, this event offers a safe alternative to residential trick-or-treating. Consider having a costume contest.

Back in History– A festival that focuses on a specific historical era with arts and crafts, music and themed around the history of Sebring.

### Monthly Holidays and Ideas:

**January;** National Hobby Month, Pottery demonstration and workshop

**February;** Victorian/Old-Fashioned Valentine’s Day; President’s Day Sale

**March;** Kite making and flying the park, 12 Hours of Sebring

**April;** Spring Fling Sidewalk Sale, Art, Music and Culinary Extravaganza

**May;** Armed Forces Day (third Saturday in May); Mother’s Day;

**June;** Flag Day;

**July;** Fourth of July; National Ice Cream Month,

**August;** Chili Cook-off, Music in the Park

**September;** National Dog Week;

**October;** Downtown Trick-or-Treat, Customer Appreciation Month

**November;** American Indian Heritage Month; Veterans’ Day

**December;** Old-Fashioned Christmas and Parade



## Objective 8.2 Produce a Comprehensive Brochure with a Unified Message and Aggressively Distribute it to a Variety of Outlets

As downtown Sebring begins to brand itself it will be imperative that any marketing materials that are used to support the brand and attract consumers to downtown must be aligned with the City's vision for downtown. Conveying the brand to the target markets will require multiple paths delivering a consistent message. The following should be considered in the development of the new brochures and mail outs:

- Unified logo and tagline.
- A map of downtown indicating the location of all businesses, parking areas and other key points of interest.
- An accurate, up to date business listing of all businesses and the types of services they provide.
- Highlight cultural and entertainment businesses.
- Listing of annual downtown events.
- Brief background on the history of downtown as well as its exciting future.
- A brief description of things to do while visiting downtown (self-guided walking tour, murals, children's museum, community theater, etc.).
- Format of the brochure should be designed so that is suitable to fit in brochure racks, informational kiosks and as a promotional mailer. It should also be available to download front the downtown website.

### **Objective 8.3 Enhance the Website to be the Central Point of Information**

The Internet has changed the way people shop, obtains information about goods and services, and determines family plans. It is critical that downtown position its Web presence to provide information to the consumer. The following should be considered regarding the downtown website:

- Incorporate downtown's logo and tagline.
- Make your downtown Directory, Calendar of Events, and other literature available for download as a PDF file.
- Invest in quality and keep the website current and up to date.
- Encourage local businesses to link to the site. Link from the City's and CRA's website to downtown businesses' websites.
- Establish mutual links with other key agencies or organizations to ensure that the greatest number of visitors sees your site.
- The website should be identified in all advertising and marketing materials.
- Use lots of photography especially activity shots.
- To stay in front of customers, ask them to sign up for an e-newsletter with upcoming events and special savings.

### **Objective 8.4 Create Promotions to Help Attract or Draw Day Workers into Downtown on a Regular Consistent Basis**

It is very important to continue to recognize the local day worker customers that exist in Sebring. For that, the retailers should find ways to both market to them, through them, and then thank them. Several recommendations for consideration are:

- Distribute downtown business directories to all key employers.
- Let's Do Lunch Poster. Sample menus of participating restaurants are incorporated into one large poster called "Let's Do Lunch in downtown Sebring" and are then distributed to key employers to put in their break rooms.
- Customer Appreciation Month. The concept here is to honor those who work and already patronize downtown businesses. Dedicate one entire month and offer a variety of discounts, incentives, awards and fun promotions to get downtown employees back into downtown.
- Offer discounts or give away "Downtown Appreciation Dollars" to key customers.
- Support the promotion by showcasing "Downtown Employers" in window displays.
- Have staff wear buttons that say "We Love Our Customers" or "We Love our City's Employees."
- Use Table Tents at the restaurants to promote the monthly event and the various discounts being offered.
- Have restaurants create "Bring a fellow employee to lunch and get a free dessert as our way to say thank you."

- Encourage restaurants to offer two for one lunches and market to key employers.
- Help businesses create and support “Bounce back” promotions among themselves. (I.e. Coffee shop can give away a coupon for a free sample of candy from the candy store.)

### **Objective 8.5 Develop Customer Specific Promotions**

Successful promotions allow customers to save and also serve as an effective technique for retailers to attract and retain customers by targeting the shoppers’ specific needs and wants. Successful targeted promotions will attract new customers, raise customer satisfaction levels and strengthen sales.

- Senior sales – often in the late afternoon for restaurants and once a month for other types of businesses.
- School discounts – reward kids who get good grades. Reward the child and the parent at the local children’s museum, ice cream or coffee shop or toy store.
- Membership rewards – give museum members a special discount once a year or more for being an important patron of downtown Sebring.
- Local government (or other business) discounts – show your badge once quarterly to get a significant discount.

### **Objective 8.6 Create Positive Media Stories to Enhance Downtown’s Image**

Efforts need to focus on actively identifying positive news stories and promoting them through a variety of media venues. Several strategies for consideration are:

- Distribute regular press releases about downtown. In addition to promoting the events, create and distribute regular press releases about:
  - New business openings and expansions
  - Unique business practices
  - Profile unique business owners, property owners and accomplishments

### **Objective 8.7 Take Advantages of Social Media Applications and Websites**

Social media applications are one of the fastest forms of communication and marketing. The key is that they are easy accessed by a variety of audiences and they are FREE. Consider how one or all of these applications can work for the City, CRA, downtown consumers and business owners.

- Twitter
- LinkedIn
- Facebook

### **Objective 8.8 Develop a Series of Promotional and Advertising Venues Targeted Directly to Reach the New Residents Moving into the Region.**

Downtown must position itself now to capture both the consumer dollar as well as the interest of the resident to come downtown. A series of direct mail, special promotions, mini events and other creative marketing efforts targeted directly to the new resident will help get the word out that downtown is a place to explore, visit and shop. Several recommendations are:

- Bi-yearly Direct Mail piece to new residents. Create an interesting, professional direct mail piece that acts as an invitation to come to downtown Sebring. Obtain the addresses and zip codes from a mail house service to



target. Consider offering a discount coupon and make sure to list all of the upcoming events. To assist with offsetting the cost of the printing and mailing, consider offering downtown businesses the opportunity to either advertise or sponsor it.

- Host a “Walkabout Downtown” Event. Host an event that is focused at getting new local residents (as well as existing residents that have not been downtown for a while) to come downtown and walk through the various businesses, restaurants and other attractions (i.e. Children’s Museum, Library, Theater). Participants are invited to come downtown and visit the various venues throughout the day. Participating businesses provide visitors with a little gift or freebie and coupon inviting them to come back for future purchases.
- Develop a “move-in” coupon book or welcome package for new residents. Create a downtown Sebring Coupon book that has discounts and incentives from participating businesses, as well as arts, cultural and historical venues. Work with realtors, homebuilders and mortgage and title companies to distribute the coupon book to the new resident.
- Make sure that the downtown Sebring Business Directory and Calendar of Events are included in relocation packets, visitor packets, racks, and other key places.

### **Objective 8.9 Continue to Support and Expand Clustered/Cooperative Advertising Programs**

The downtown businesses that advertise on a regular basis should develop programs with their local advertising mediums (newspaper, radio, weekly/monthly direct mail advertising, etc.) to cluster their advertisements on the same page(s) with a heading promoting “Downtown Sebring – History in the Making”. Examples of this type of advertising include:

- Newspaper – A quarterly insert in the local newspaper (arranged by them) that combines advertising, positive and informational editorial content (including upcoming events), photos and a listing of all downtown businesses. Overruns of this insert can be distributed at the Chamber, City Hall, Visitor Center, etc.
- Radio – Produce a “donut” commercial with a local radio station. The first 20 seconds of the commercial would talk about downtown Sebring and its shopping opportunities, history and/or upcoming special events; the next 30 seconds of the commercial is about a downtown business (the business would pay for this portion of the commercial) and the last 10 seconds would remind the radio listener (a call to action) to come to downtown for a special event or shopping/lunch, etc.
- Cable TV – Same idea as the above-mentioned radio donut commercial, only with positive film images of downtown Sebring, its stores, places to go, historical buildings, etc. and a cable TV commercial of a downtown business.
- Coupon books/magazines – Downtown businesses should cluster their ads together in a section of the coupon/book magazine and have a heading with “Downtown Sebring” in the branded font along with downtown’s logo and tagline.
- Flyers available in downtown businesses – Downtown businesses should cluster advertising about their businesses in high quality, professionally produced flyers to cross-promote each other’s business. These flyers should be placed in the advertised businesses, Chamber of Commerce, visitor centers, etc.
- Movie Theaters – Movie slides could be run in local movie theatres with different downtown businesses appearing on half of each slide; downtown Sebring’s logo, font and website address should appear on the other half of the slide. This should be kept simple as each slide only appears for seven seconds on the movie screen.

## Summary

With the retail market analysis completed, downtown Sebring has a valuable and factual foundation for promoting its significant business opportunities and implementing customized strategies. Whether targeting local or visiting shoppers for increased spending, promoting business opportunities or improving the image of downtown Sebring, the implementation of this marketing plan will help ensure that downtown Sebring can become the downtown you envision. It will take cooperation, focus, and using the information and recommendations developed through this project to move downtown toward a more successful future. It is important to remember that in order for community and commercial revitalization to be truly successful in downtown Sebring, it is critical that partnerships and collaborations be strengthened to tap market opportunities and move the vision forward. While the Sebring CRA is taking the lead on these activities, Sebring's business and community leaders as well as other stakeholders must come to the table. The more the stakeholders and community get involved, the greater the outcomes. This is truly a community project for Sebring.