

DISCUSSION PAPER

LOSS OF RETAIL BUSINESSES

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September 2023

The loss of retail businesses in the Salisbury and Lakeville Main Street corridors is spiraling, and hurtful to the future of our small towns. Their character and attractiveness are under assault in a way that should be alarming but has not yet spurred any attempts to prevent or ameliorate the damage. Yet as there becomes less and less reason to set foot in these still-presumably commercial Main Street areas, they will spiral further downward; the diminishing of foot-traffic exacerbates the loss of retail entities, since new ones will see less reason to locate in such a village. Moreover, walk-in entities that are still central to the towns, such as banks and post offices, will be more vulnerable to attempts at shutting them down if foot-traffic further diminishes.

How to reverse and redress this downward spiral is a complex matter, but several elements could be better controlled than they are at present.

First, the town government itself, and the P&Z, should encourage retail businesses in the Main Street corridors, and actively discourage non-retail businesses there or ask the latter to consider locating in buildings that do not front on Main Street. We should be very strict in considering an application to take a property out of the retail category and transform it into office space.

Second, our governmental entities should actively reject applications by non-retail businesses for dedicated parking in areas where retail stores need such spots for their customers.

Third, the town government should consider enticements for new and possibly even existing retail entities in the form of tax abatements. These might even be offered to existing landlords if they will lower the rental price to preferred establishments. Some prospective retail businesses cannot locate to our Main Streets because of too-high monthly rental fees. Experiments with artificially-lowered first-several-years rents along Main Streets have been successfully tried elsewhere, enabling fledgling businesses to become established before paying market-rate rents.