



DOWNTOWN
CRANFORD

STRATEGIC PLAN



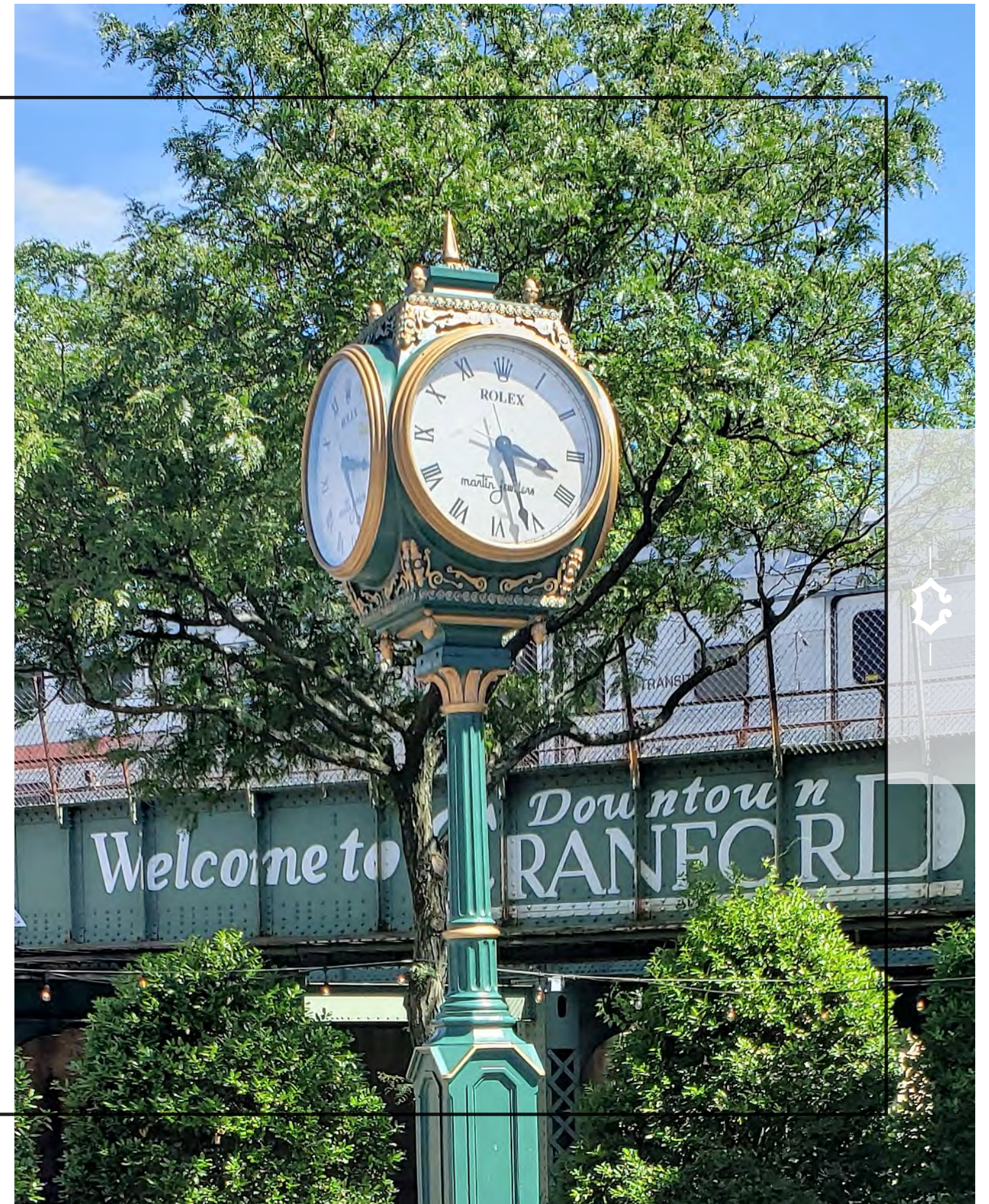
MAY 2018

INTRODUCTION

DOWNTOWN CRANFORD serves as both our central business district and the very heart of our community with benefits that extend to every resident in town. Our downtown provides amenity, serves as a local and regional destination, is home to our municipal government and various services, and is the place where a growing residential population calls home. Much of Downtown also reflects Cranford's architectural heritage, with buildings dating to our early commercial development and bearing the names of some of Cranford's historical figures such as Sperry, Jahn, and Shapiro. Indeed, Downtown Cranford displays a true and unique sense of "place" that helps to define our town. Its success is inextricably related to Cranford's overall economic well-being.

Downtown Cranford is home to New Jersey's oldest Special Improvement District (SID). According to the state's Department of Community Affairs, SIDs are defined areas typically located within a central business district and authorized by state law and local ordinance to collect a special assessment on the commercial properties, businesses, and residents of the area. The assessment is managed by a District Management Corporation (DMC) which is a non-profit organization governed by a Board.

Cranford's DMC is committed to maximizing the potential of our downtown and building on its competitive advantages, including convenient access to New York City, transportation assets, mixed uses, historic character, and community interest and engagement from surrounding residents. To that end, the 11-member DMC Board felt it was necessary to create a new strategic plan for Downtown Cranford to create a vision for our community – businesses, property owners and residents – and set direction for the next five years. The plan was produced through the dedicated and volunteer efforts of DMC Board members and concerned citizens, with support from the DMC professional staff, between November 2016 and November 2017.



{ OUR VISION }

Foster an Active, Self-Sustaining & Compact Downtown Community of Residents & Businesses

VISION

Crafting a vision for Downtown Cranford is critical in communicating the kind of community we want to be and the type of environment we want to cultivate.

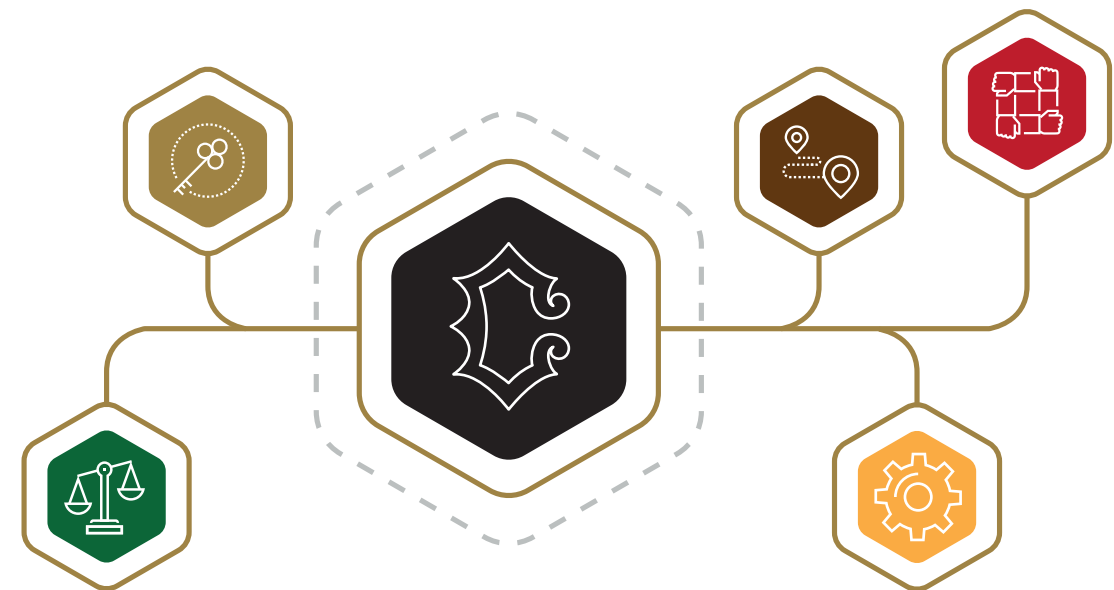
ACTIVE implies a walkable place with engaged and invested residents, recurring visitors, a healthy and bustling business environment, and inviting public spaces.

SELF-SUSTAINING implies having a balanced mix of residents and businesses that can support and service each other to insulate our Downtown from economic downturns and reduce business reliance on out-of-town customers.

COMPACT implies a mix of traditional downtown land uses and compatible development patterns that are walkable, with a critical density of businesses that support each other due to proximity.

COMMUNITY implies a true neighborhood where people support each other.

RESIDENTS & BUSINESSES are the lifeblood of thriving communities. The DMC recognizes that you can't have one without the other.



POLICIES

Polices represent basic, overarching principles intended to guide decision making and advance the realization of our vision. This set of policies is foundational and akin to a mindset that can help to promote alignment among municipal stakeholders and aid in plan implementation.

GOVERNANCE

Develop proactive approaches rather than reactive responses.

Foster and maintain open lines of communication among all municipal departments, boards and organizations.

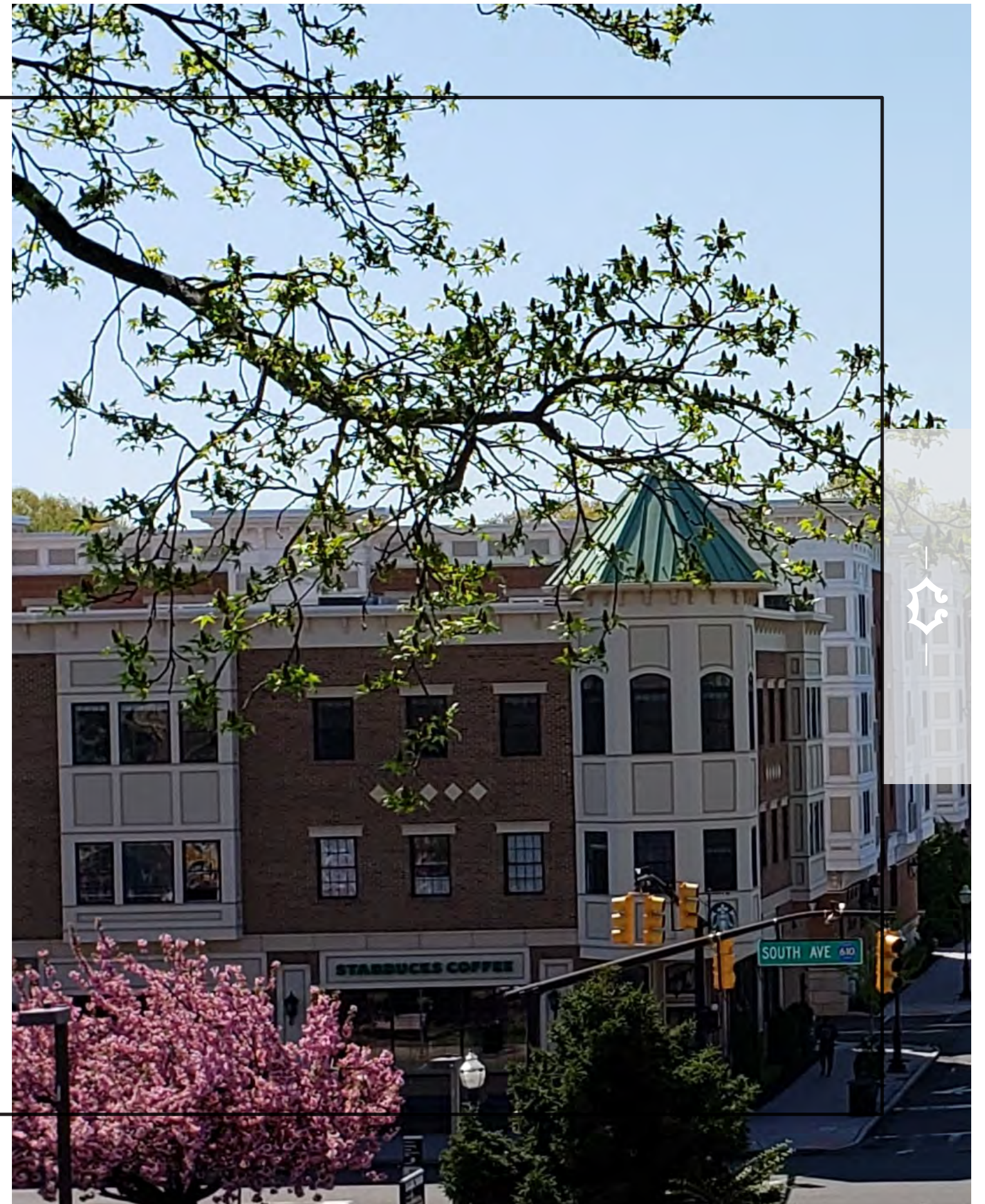
Prioritize public safety, property maintenance, and adherence to ordinances.

Establish an organizational structure in which the Township Administrator can manage this plan's implementation.

Leverage the existing Vision Plan which is well-established and embraced on all levels of municipal government.

Maximize public-private partnerships when possible.

Include DMC professional staff and Board in all application reviews for large commercial and residential projects that may impact the SID.



MANAGING OUR BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Promote traditional downtown development patterns with compact, street-facing buildings and limited curb cuts on side streets only.

Maintain a balance of mixed uses: retail, restaurants, offices, services, and residential.

Encourage new development in the SID to target investment in our downtown and limit impacts to residential neighborhoods throughout the Township.

Prioritize residential development downtown, including opportunities to age in place, while ensuring that COAH requirements are met. Downtown residences will help to stabilize our tax base while increasing the local customer base for our businesses.

Mitigate flooding where necessary through infrastructure upgrades implemented through new development projects and/or public improvements.

Decrease or, at the very least, maintain the net amount of impervious surfaces in our downtown to mitigate flooding concerns.

Utilize rehabilitation and/or redevelopment designations, particularly at vacant or underutilized properties, to

proactively plan for and encourage downtown development.

Differentiate Downtown Cranford from other downtowns by revitalizing historic building facades.

Ensure that all public spaces downtown – sidewalks, plazas, planters, landscaping, etc. – are well maintained.

Incorporate public art into new/improved public spaces.

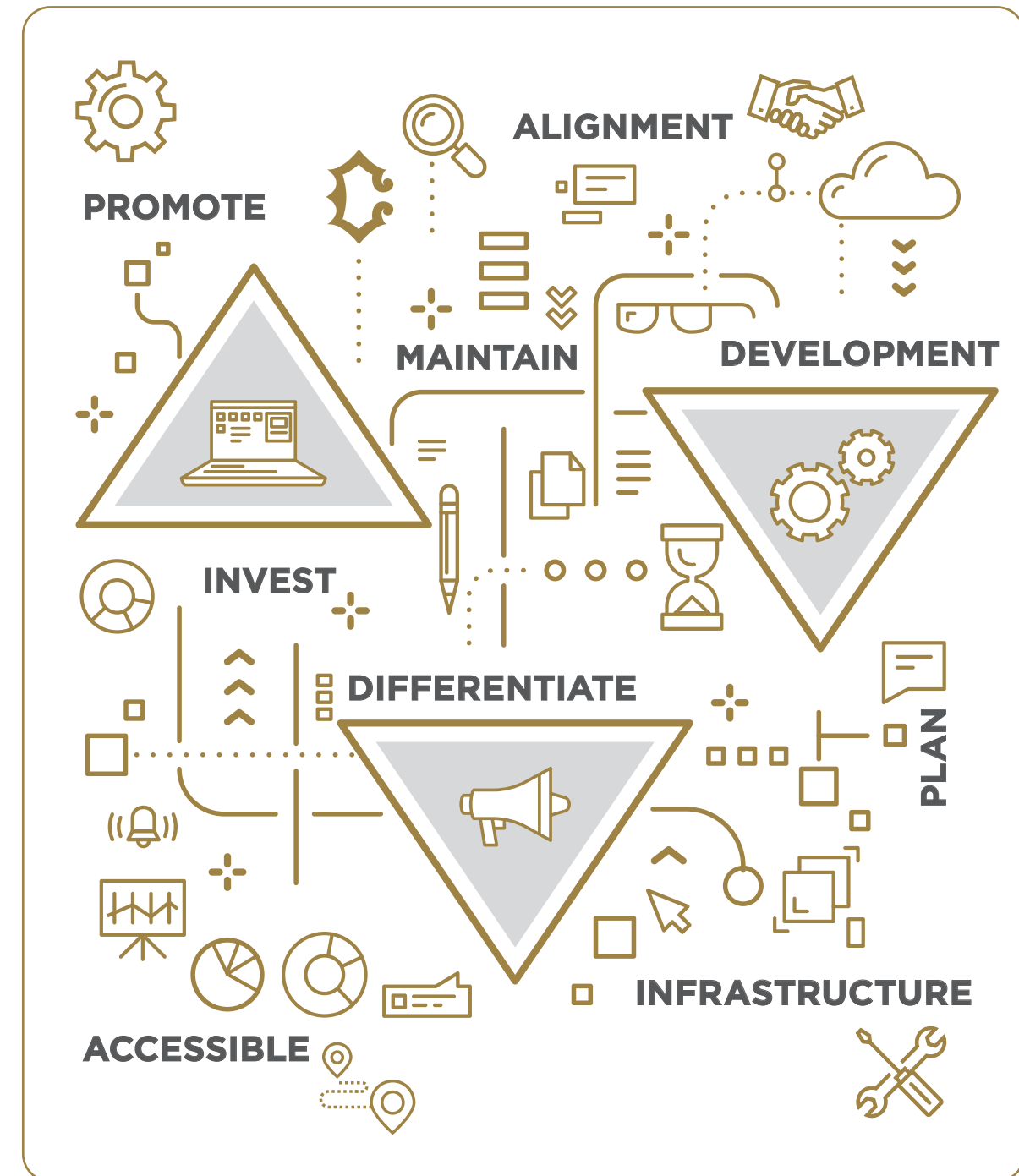
Invest in regular sidewalk maintenance and upgrades to public circulation spaces to create a more walkable and accessible downtown for all ages and abilities.

Maintain sidewalk and streetlight consistency and continuity throughout the SID.

Enhance the ability to travel to/from downtown on bike.

Manage parking supply to respond to current and future trends and ensure that new development projects provide adequate parking for the land uses being built.

Ensure compatibility and alignment with Cranford's Master Plan.



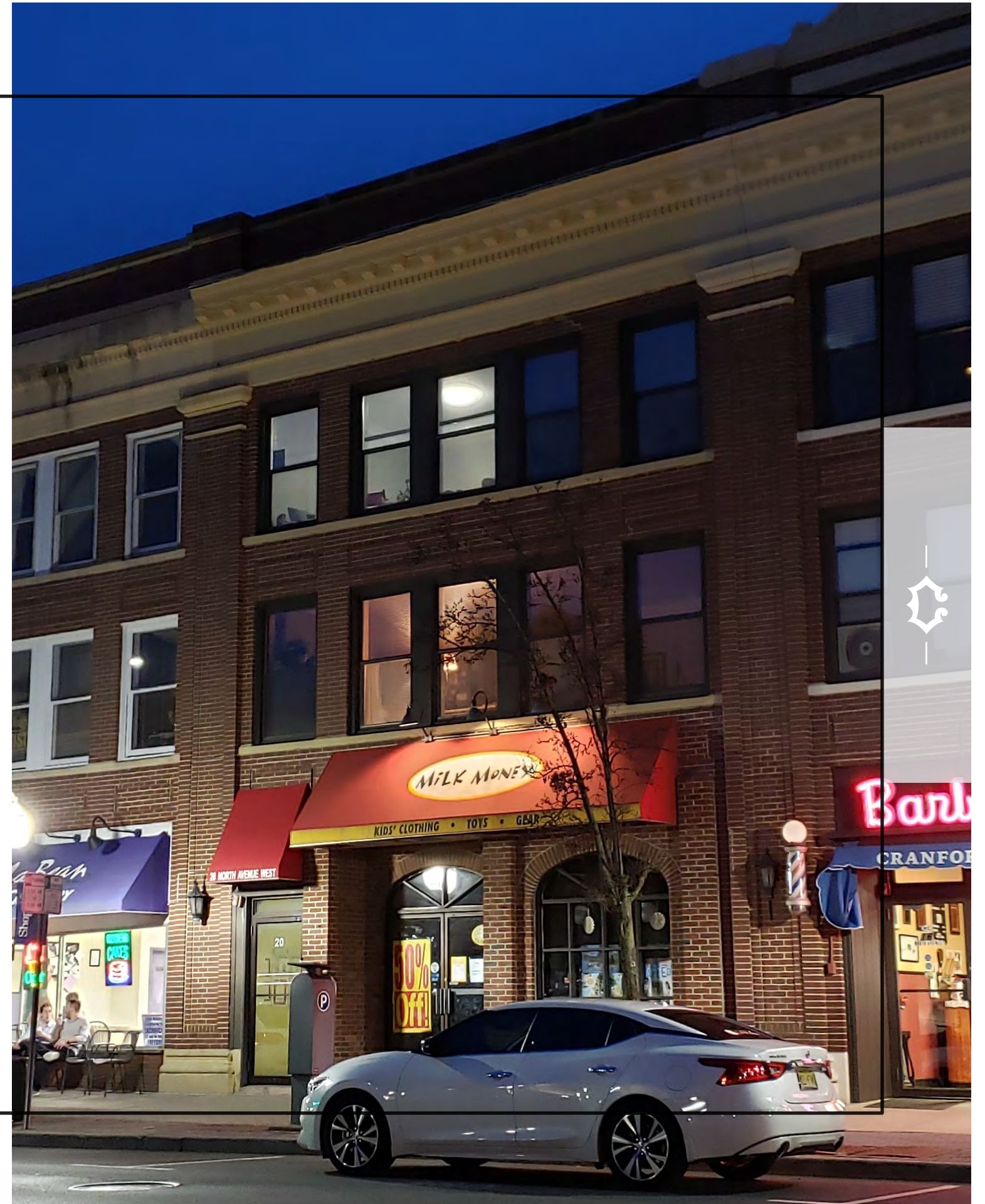
CREATING A BUSINESS-
FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT

Encourage Business Diversity.

Establish Competitive
Fee Structures.

Promote & Support
Small Businesses.

Commit to Efficient &
Streamlined Review
& Approval Processes.



CHALLENGES

Very early in the planning process, members of the DMC's Strategic Planning committee candidly discussed and identified a number of challenges as they relate to Downtown Cranford. These challenges, while not exhaustive, represent defensible areas of concern articulated through previous planning efforts and/or by DMC Board members and local stakeholders. The challenges have been organized into categories.

GOVERNANCE

Code adherence can be erratic due in part to unclear ordinances and inconsistent code enforcement.

A lack of clear, defined design standards for buildings and signs can create unnecessary confusion among developers, architects, businesses and Township officials.

Cranford lacks professional planning services to proactively guide long-term thinking and planning and advocate for Downtown interests.

The Township lacks a parking management entity to continually evaluate supply and demand and proactively plan for future needs and maintenance.

The Township lacks mechanisms to attract funding for planning and/or physical improvements.

Regular, open communication among government departments could be improved.

The annual DMC budget is far less than comparable downtowns in the state, and the budget has been in gradual decline due, in part, to property reevaluations which have lowered assessed property values.

DEVELOPMENT

Downtown features a number of underutilized properties/parcels, such as one-story buildings, vacant properties, detached buildings, surface parking lots, and environmentally contaminated properties.

Certain development patterns and land uses – e.g., strip malls, gas stations, auto body shops, etc. – don't align with Downtown's traditional nature.

Cranford faces increased competition from towns in our region.

Redevelopment/rehabilitation designations are not used to their full potential. In fact, the formal rehabilitation designation that had been applied in 2006 to North Ave (from Centennial Avenue to Alden Street) was rescinded in 2008.

Increasing the number of downtown businesses without increasing the downtown residential population puts businesses at risk of saturation.

E-commerce and chain retailers continue to put some brick-and-mortar businesses at risk.

There appears to be a lack of cohesive development vision for Downtown among Cranford stakeholders and little alignment with the vision established in Cranford's Master Plan.

Meeting the Council on Affordable Housing (COAH) requirements presents a challenge that the Township must proactively navigate to avoid builders' remedies or other legal disputes that otherwise compromise our ability to plan for the future.



MOBILITY

Extremely long crossings make streets intimidating to cross at many intersections.

Suburban drivers are generally unaccustomed to sharing the road with other users, particularly pedestrians.

Street and intersection designs allow and invite speeding.

Sidewalks in many locations are too narrow for sidewalk activities such as al fresco dining or basic two-way pedestrian flows.

Downtown has limited bike parking and no on-street bicycle facilities/markings.

No alternative means of transportation, such as shuttles, exist connecting key activity generators such as Union County College with Downtown.

No gateway experience exists at the edges of our Downtown to literally and emblematically welcome people and announce arrival into our central business district.

Lack of a one-seat ride negatively impacts Cranford's desirability to New York commuters and limits increases in property value.

PARKING

Parking supply is fragmented.

The Township lacks centralized/organized parking management systems.

Parking wayfinding is extremely limited which can increase the amount of time drivers spend in their cars searching for parking.

Parking demand can be difficult to manage during defined peak periods.

MAINTENANCE

There is a general lack of public gathering spaces or areas of engagement downtown.

The downtown streetscape is outdated and falling into disrepair.

Public spaces are not regularly maintained.

Many buildings and facades are in disrepair or in need of basic maintenance.

Understaffing at the Department of Public Works (DPW) can divert resources from Downtown, particularly during the busy fall and winter seasons when leaf collection and snow removal are priorities.



GOALS & OBJECTIVES

A clear set of goals and objectives is required that responds to the challenges listed above.

Goals are overarching, aspirational statements that guide the planning process and subsequent decision making. The four goals that have been developed for this plan are positive, forward-thinking statements that our community can get behind.

Objectives are the specific, measurable steps that are taken to meet an associated goal. The objectives articulated in this plan were developed based on input from the DMC Board, professional staff, and elected officials and are grounded in best practice.

UNDER EACH GOAL, THE OBJECTIVES HAVE BEEN ORGANIZED INTO 3 IMPLEMENTATION TIMEFRAMES:



SHORT - Within 2 years. These objectives comprise more turnkey efforts or “low-hanging fruit” that are either currently underway or readily implementable within 12 months of plan adoption.

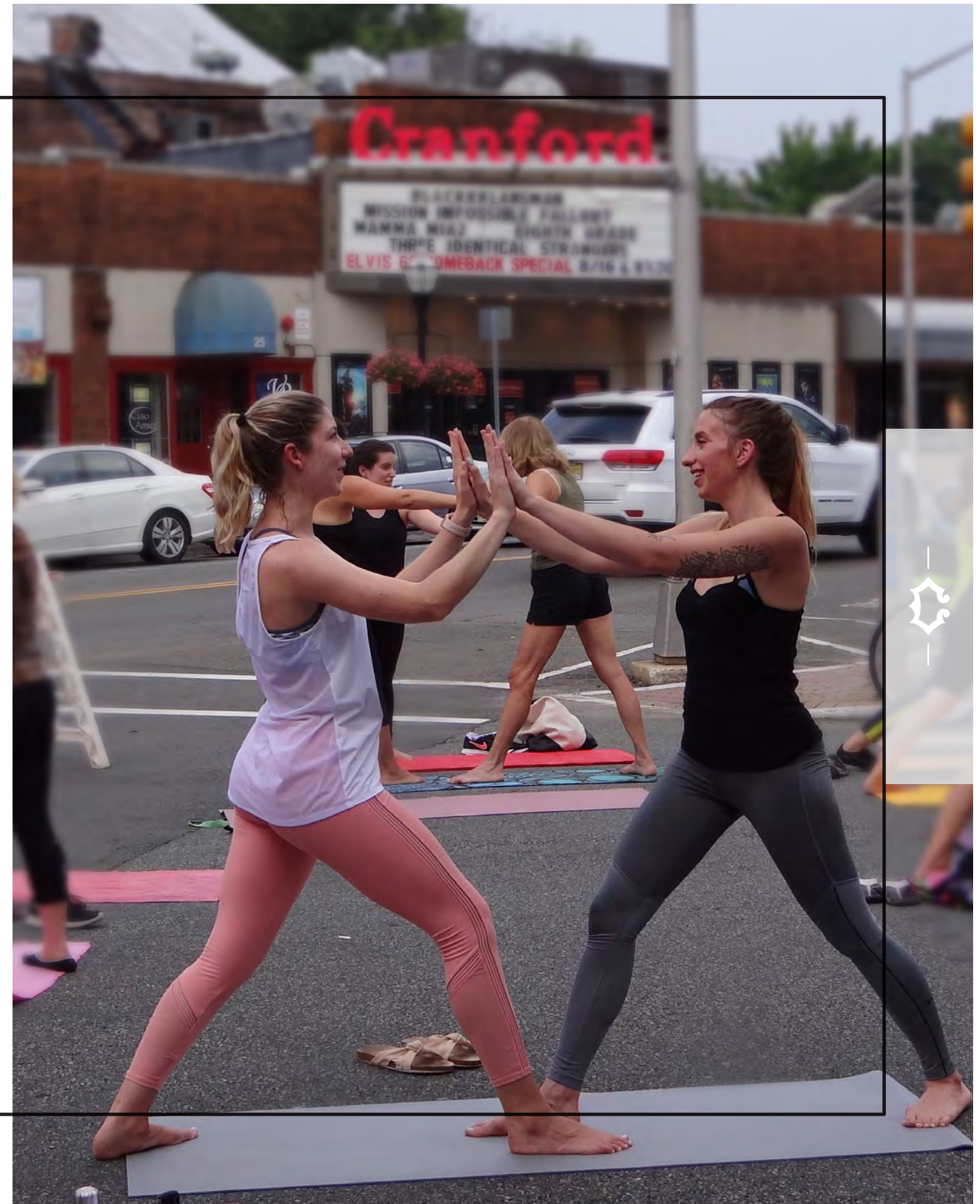


MID - 3-5 years. These efforts are more complex but reasonably implementable within this plan’s 5-year time horizon.



LONG - Beyond 5 years. These objectives have an implementation timeframe that may extend beyond the time horizon of this plan; however, actions necessary to advance implementation should be taken within the next 5 years.

For all strategies, the Township Committee and Township Administrator must play key roles. The intention is for the former to lead and make critical decisions to facilitate strategy implementation while empowering the latter to manage the execution of each strategy by working with specific municipal departments, boards, and entities. Those playing key roles in implementation have been associated with each objective in the following tables.




OBJECTIVE	RESPONSIBLE PARTIES
<div><div>S</div><div>SHORT-TERM</div></div>	
Implement temporary seasonal public “parklet” with support/sponsorship form at least one downtown business.	DMC, Local businesses
Gauge interest in converting the land in front of Municipal Building into a public plaza with seating, a water feature, monuments, tables & chairs, and/or other activating elements that can encourage use	DMC, Public Works
Revisit the Heritage Corridor Master Plan to gauge feasibility and applicability to making improvements to the Rahway River walkway.	DMC, Union County, Historic Preservation Advisory Board
Create a Downtown Cultural Arts Committee to champion public art installation and cultural events programming in Downtown Cranford.	DMC, Local businesses
Amend the Land Development Ordinance to prohibit auto-oriented land uses including those with drive-through uses.	DMC, Planning Board, Zoning Board, Zoning Office
Permit temporary “pop-up” businesses in vacant spaces and actively promote their availability.	DMC, Planning Board, Zoning Board, Zoning Office
Organize more events that bring people of all ages downtown. Events could focus on music, visual arts, food, craft beer, holiday window decorating, or 5k races.	DMC
Plant street trees where trees have been removed, and replace damaged trees as necessary.	DMC, Public Works

OBJECTIVE	RESPONSIBLE PARTIES
<div><div>M</div><div>MID-TERM</div></div>	
Upgrade the landscaping of at least one downtown public space or at municipal properties.	DMC, Public Works, Environmental Commission
Prepare a design to re-envision Post Office Plaza and/or Eastman Plaza, and identify and dedicate funds to renovate the space.	DMC, Engineering, Public Works
Identify land to create new open space including a small playground and/or a dog run.	DMC, Planning Board, Zoning Board
Allocate additional Public Works resources to support Downtown maintenance.	Public Works, DMC
Install public Wi-Fi in Eastman Plaza.	DMC
Lobby County and municipal governments to make enhancements to MacConnell Park and /or Sperry Park which are both located within 1.5 blocks from downtown. (Note: MacConnell Park is within the Rahway River Parkway Historic District, so any enhancements should be sensitive to preserving this historic resource.)	DMC, Environmental Commission, Historic Preservation Advisory Board, Union County
Create a business attraction plan that could be used to actively solicit new downtown businesses.	DMC
Create a ‘development handbook’ that clearly outlines the steps to proposing a new development or increased density of buildings and sites in the downtown.	DMC, Planning Board, Zoning Board, Zoning Office





GOAL: PRIORITIZE SAFE & ACCESSIBLE ACTIVE MOBILITY		GOAL: PRIORITIZE SAFE & ACCESSIBLE ACTIVE MOBILITY	
OBJECTIVE	RESPONSIBLE PARTIES	OBJECTIVE	RESPONSIBLE PARTIES
<div>L</div> <div>LONG-TERM</div>		<div>S</div> <div>SHORT-TERM</div>	
Enhance and emphasize gateways to downtown through a combination of gateway treatments, including but not limited to welcome signage, sculptural elements, landscaping, pedestrian safety interventions (i.e., curb extensions), lighting, or sidewalk materiality change.	Engineering, DMC, Public Works, CPD	Establish a campaign to educate all road users about the rules of the road and safe behaviors.	DMC, CPD
Create a list of desired improvements at the NJ Transit station, particularly at street level, and Lobby NJ Transit for future station improvements.	DMC, Public Works	Engage Cranford residents and municipal entities about the importance and benefits of pedestrian safety and access.	DMC, CPD, Pedestrian Safety Committee
Pursue development of a small downtown hotel that could accommodate visiting family and friends, bring additional visitors downtown and further diversify our tax base.	DMC, Union County, Historic Preservation Advisory Board	Identify locations for new bike racks and have them purchased and installed.	DMC, Public Works, Local businesses
		Investigate locations where it may be feasible to expand sidewalk space, including on a temporary/seasonal basis.	DMC, Engineering, Pedestrian Safety Committee, Local businesses
		Amend Land Development Ordinance to require minimum of 15' sidewalks at all new development projects to allow more space for sidewalk seating, stroller and wheelchair access, landscaping, etc.	Zoning Office, Zoning Board, Planning Board, DMC
		Work with Union County to evaluate conditions and investigate pedestrian safety pilot projects at two or more downtown intersections.	Union County, DMC, Pedestrian Safety Committee, CFD, First Aid Squad
		Upgrade all street light fixtures in the SID and at railroad underpasses to energy-efficient LEDs.	Public Works, DMC

OBJECTIVE	RESPONSIBLE PARTIES
<div>  MID-TERM </div>	
<p>Hire a planning consultant to conduct a comprehensive, multimodal transportation study with a particular focus on incorporating and improving conditions for walking and cycling.</p>	<p>DMC, Zoning Office, Engineering, CPD</p>
<p>Ensure all crosswalks are clearly and consistently marked in a “ladder” pattern with reflective thermoplastic.</p>	<p>Public Works, Engineering, CPD, DMC, NJDOT</p>
<p>Implement at least two local pedestrian safety pilot projects that reconfigure an intersection, shorten a crosswalk, or otherwise highlight the potential of permanent safety interventions.</p>	<p>Union Country, DMC, Pedestrian Safety Committee, CFD, First Aid Squad</p>



GOAL: PROVIDE PARKING THAT MEETS THE NEEDS OF EXISTING & FUTURE USES

OBJECTIVE	RESPONSIBLE PARTIES
<div><div>S</div><div>SHORT-TERM</div></div>	
Initiate discussions with NJ Transit on potentially purchasing Lot 4 on the south side of the train station.	NJ Transit, DMC, Zoning Office
Evaluate trends in parking demand and alternate parking options.	DMC, Parking Committee
<div><div>M</div><div>MID-TERM</div></div>	
Hire a planning firm with parking experience to conduct a parking study to a) assess parking supply versus demand and utilization, b) evaluate the merits of constructing a new municipal parking garage, and c) reexamine parking requirements for infill residential development.	DMC, Zoning Office, Parking Committee
Reevaluate pricing strategies for both on-street and permit parking to manage demand. For the former, investigate feasibility of variable parking meter rates to manage demand during peak periods (e.g., lunch, Friday evening).	DMC, Parking Committee
Examine pros/cons of creating a dedicated municipal parking utility.	DMC, Parking Committee

OBJECTIVE	RESPONSIBLE PARTIES
<div><div>L</div><div>LONG-TERM</div></div>	
Better manage existing parking supply through wayfinding, technology, and/or digital parking guidance signs with real-time information on the number of available parking spaces.	DMC, Parking Committee
Investigate the creation of a Parking Benefit District or Payment in Lieu of Parking strategies where some/all parking revenue collected downtown is reinvested back into the SID for parking and/or other strategic improvements.	DMC, Parking Committee



GOAL: EMPOWER GOVERNMENT TO PROACTIVELY PLAN FOR THE FUTURE, MAKE INVESTMENT DECISIONS, PURSUE FUNDING, AND IMPLEMENT PROJECTS

OBJECTIVE	RESPONSIBLE PARTIES
<div><div><div>S</div></div><div>SHORT-TERM</div></div>	
Pursue Certified Local Government (CLG) status.	DMC, Historic Preservation Advisory Board
Hire or contract with a professional grant writer to proactively pursue funding and financing opportunities for various Township initiatives including studies or capital projects.	DMC
Identify and document underutilized properties - vacant properties, one-story buildings and surface parking lots - which could be developed or improved.	DMC
Actively and regularly enforce all codes pertaining to facade maintenance, signage, snow clearance, and other downtown maintenance matters.	DMC, Zoning Office
<div><div><div>M</div></div><div>MID-TERM</div></div>	
Engage the DMC Board and staff when updating the municipal Master Plan.	Planning Board, Zoning Board, DMC, Historic Preservation Advisory Board
Engage planning professionals for visioning, land use, and parking studies as direct hires or consultants.	Planning Board, Zoning Board, DMC
Establish clear and understandable building design standards incorporating best practices for historic areas/districts.	Planning Board, Zoning Board, DMC, Historic Preservation Advisory Board
Utilize Redevelopment and/or Rehabilitation designations to encourage development on underutilized and/or contaminated properties including but not limited to vacant parcels and surface parking lots.	Planning Board, Zoning Board, DMC

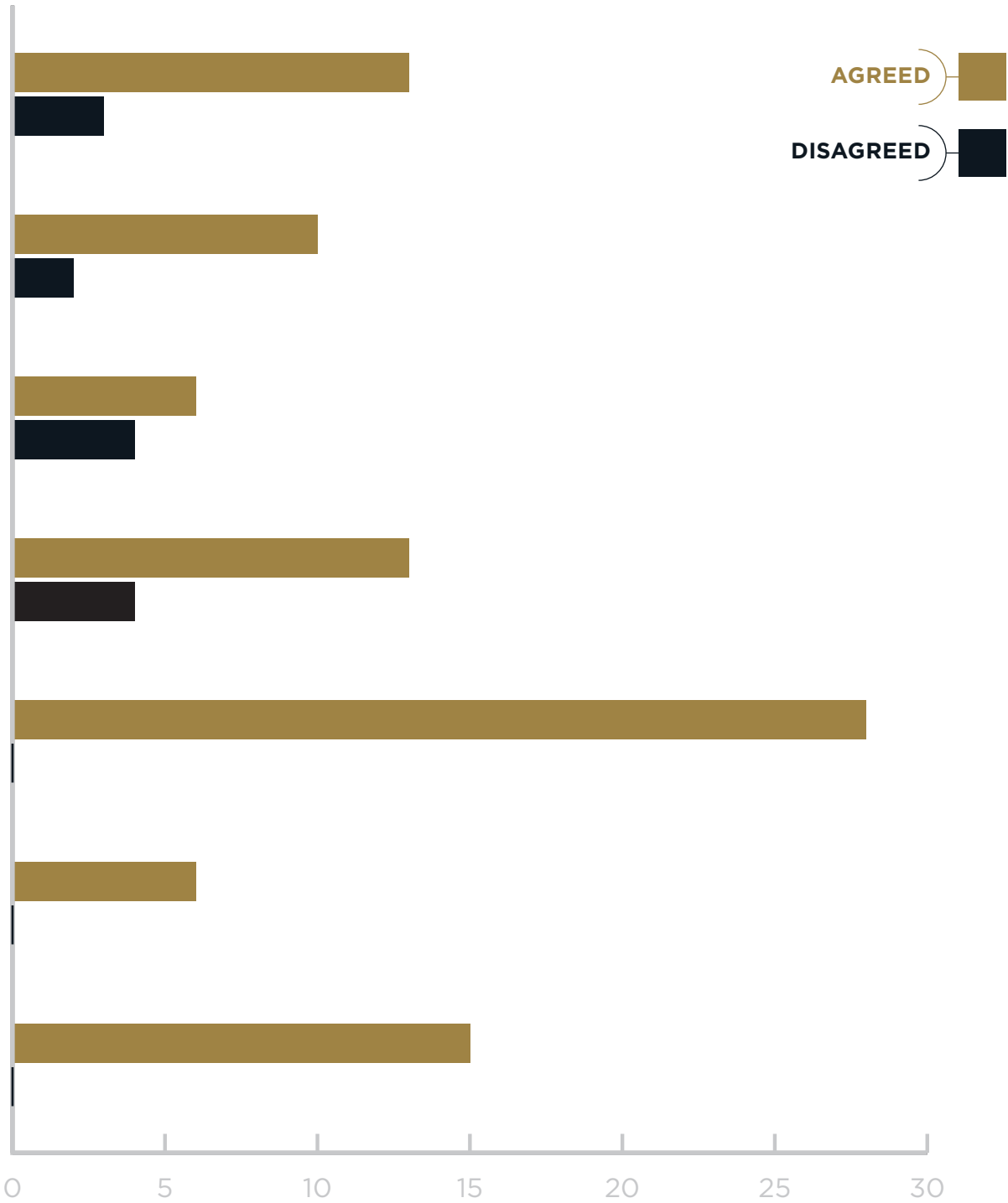
OBJECTIVE	RESPONSIBLE PARTIES
<div><div><div>L</div></div><div>LONG-TERM</div></div>	
Pursue Form-Based Coding as a way to visually and graphically communicate regulatory intent and encourage building forms that fit the historic and traditional character of our downtown.	Planning Board, Zoning Board, DMC, Historic Preservation Advisory Board
Evaluate current permit fee structures to ensure competitive alignment with neighboring municipalities. Rank our current fees to see where they stand in the County. Adjust permit fees as necessary to encourage investment.	DMC

GOAL: PROMOTE A VIBRANT DOWNTOWN ENVIRONMENT



SHORT-TERM OBJECTIVES

Prepare a design to re-envision Post Office Plaza, identify and dedicate funds to renovate the space.	13	3
Gauge interest in creating an open plaza with seating, a water feature, monuments, tables and chairs, and other activating elements on land in front of Municipal Building.	10	2
Install a temporary, seasonal public “Parklet” with support/partnership from at least one downtown business.	6	4
Permit temporary “pop-up” businesses in vacant spaces and actively promote their availability.	13	4
Create a Downtown Cultural Arts Committee to champion public art installations and cultural events programming Downtown Cranford.	28	0
Amend the Land Development Ordinance to prohibit auto-oriented land uses including drive-through uses.	6	0
Create a list of desired improvements at the NJ Transit station, particularly at street level, and lobby NJ Transit for improvements.	15	0

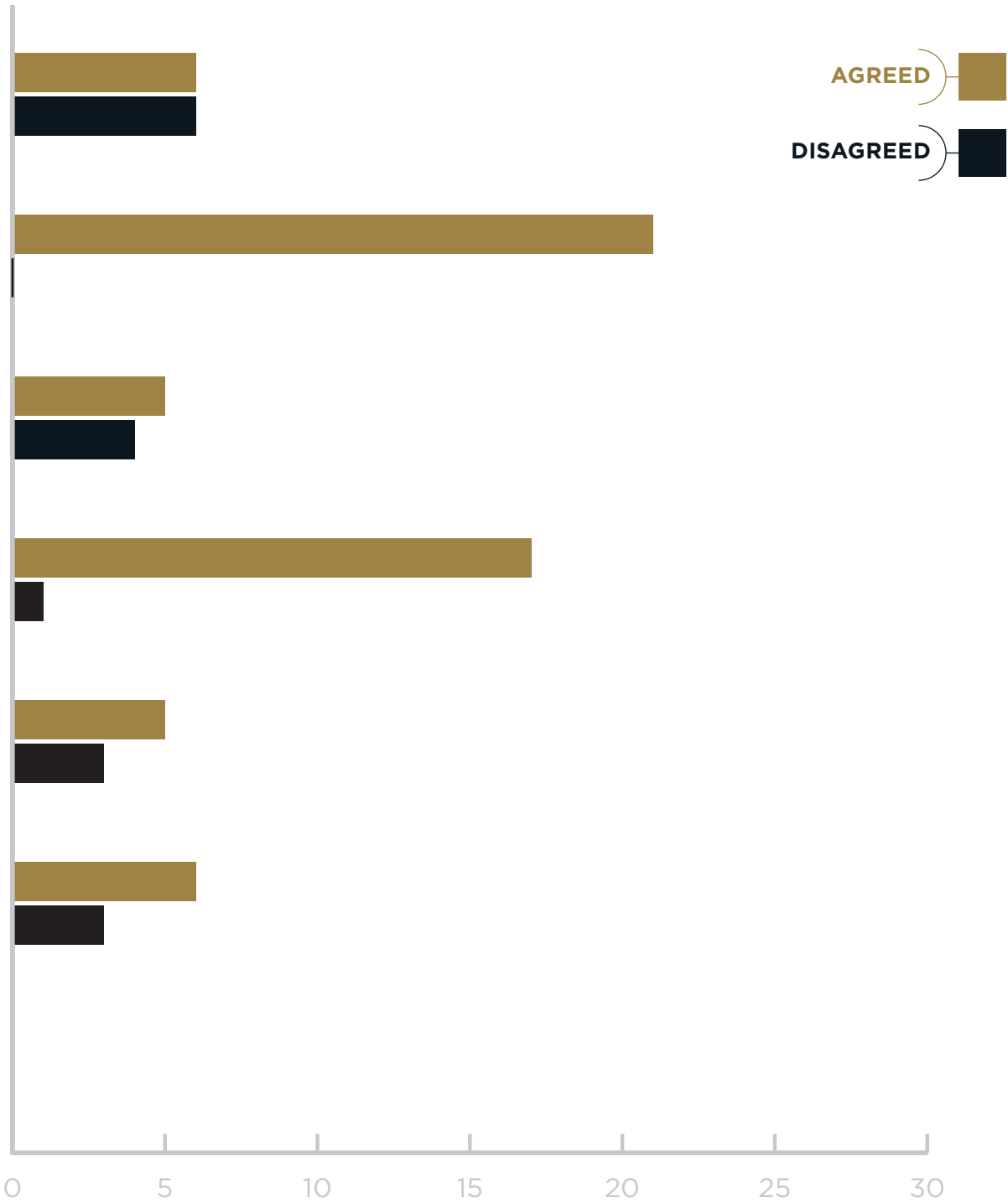


GOAL: PROMOTE A VIBRANT DOWNTOWN ENVIRONMENT



MID-TERM OBJECTIVES

Upgrade the landscaping of at least one downtown public space.	6	6
Identify land downtown to create new open spaces seating, small playground and/or a dog park.	21	0
Lobby the County and Municipality for enhancements to McConnell and Sperry Parks which are located within 1.5 blocks of downtown.	5	4
Create a business attraction plan that can be used to actively solicit new downtown businesses.	17	1
Create a “Development Handbook” that clearly outlines the steps to proposing a new downtown development or increased density of buildings and sites.	5	3
Allocate at least one Public Works employee to support downtown maintenance.	6	3



GOAL: PROMOTE A VIBRANT DOWNTOWN ENVIRONMENT



LONG-TERM OBJECTIVES

Enhance gateways to the business district with a combination of treatments, including but not limited to welcome signage, sculptural elements, landscaping, pedestrian safety interventions (i.e. curb extensions), lighting or sidewalk materiality change.

6

1

Pursue development of a downtown hotel that could bring additional visitors downtown and further diversify our tax base.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The DMC would like to acknowledge and thank the members of the Strategic Planning Committee who voluntarily dedicated their time and insights to spearhead this effort.

Joe Colangelo DMC Board Member

Thomas Connelly DMC Board Member, Downtown business owner

Anthony Durante DMC Chair (2018), Strategic Planning Committee Chair

Jean Maisonneuve Township Commissioner, DMC Board Member,
Township Committee Liaison to the DMC (2018)

Kathleen Miller Prunty Former DMC Executive Director (now retired)

Steve Needle DMC Board Member, Downtown business owner

Barry O'Donovan DMC Chair (2017), Downtown property and business owner

Dick Salway Former Township Mayor and Commissioner

Maureen Tinen Former DMC Board Member, Downtown property and business owner

Mike Venditti Former DMC Board Member

We would also like to extend special thanks to the following individuals, groups and boards who provided critical input and support during this plan's development.

Deputy Mayor Ann Dooley

Commissioner Patrick Giblin Township Committee Liaison to the DMC (2017)

Gabe Bailer DMC Executive Director

Michelle Stavrou

Ellen O'Donnell

Members of the Downtown Cranford business community

Planning Board

Zoning Board of Adjustment

Historic Preservation Advisory Board

