Business and Economic Development

Why this issue? Description of Issue and Sub-issues

Municipal Interviews
Community Leader Interviews
Resident Survey
Focus Groups

When given the opportunity to voice their top priority for the Borough, residents stated Business and economic development as their #1 overall priority, with 250, or 34%, of residents stating so. When asked to pick their top 3 priorities from a list of commonly identified topics within the Borough, residents selected the Business district as the second-highest priority, with 394, or 54%, residents listing the option. With this, it is evident that the residents of Dormont wish to see their Business District take the steps necessary to become a vibrant and booming center of Borough activity and life.

Ideas for New Businesses
Although the Borough cannot control directly the businesses that make their home in Dormont, clear trends have arisen through Municipal Interviews, Community Leader Interviews, Resident Surveys, and Focus Groups as to which businesses residents would like to see in Dormont. The Borough, in conjunction with the Dormont Community Development Corporation, can use this feedback to identify places of need amongst the businesses in Dormont.

Enforcement
Though the Borough cannot enforce a business' stylistic preferences for its storefront, it can enforce the upkeep of these storefronts, and of the business' property, as a whole. Community Leader Interviews and Resident Surveys expressed the need for Dormont's business owners to maintain their property and storefront to a greater extent, and for the Borough to step in more quickly if these expectations are not met.

Promotion and New Development
Dormont has several features - proximity to the City of Pittsburgh, public transportation, ability to travel from place-to-place with ease, and the lack of a mercantile tax - that make it a prime location for businesses to operate. The Borough can capitalize on these advantages to bring new businesses and new development into Dormont, and promote the Borough as a desirable place for business owners and new residents alike. Municipal and Community interviewees, Resident Surveys, and Focus groups all referred to Dormont's ability to capitalize on these assets. Community Leader Interviews highlighted the too-expensive rent some businesses must pay to maintain their presence in the Business District, which may also be a cause for some of the visible lingering vacancies.

Government Assistance to Businesses
The Borough and Dormont Community Development Corporation can provide assistance to businesses in different ways for different purposes. Businesses struggling to pay their property taxes and/or rent could come to the Borough for resources to help them. Businesses may want financial assistance for small fixes, or to become more accessible and code-compliant. In addition, businesses have expressed a need for more understandable code pertaining to processes for which they may need a permit, so they comply with Borough code when making changes to their property or operating within the Borough.

Parking
Every method of input in this process has reflected the need for ample parking in a viable business district. This is especially important for those with physical disabilities or limited mobility who wish to shop, but cannot travel from their home to the business district without a vehicle. Parking in the Borough, on the whole, is difficult, but the availability of parking in the business district is of the utmost importance. The Focus Groups spoke at-length about this, and the Community Leader Interviews and Resident Surveys addressed it, as well. Historically, there have been conversations about a parking garage on Potomac Avenue, but there seems to be confusion as to what has happened with that plan.

Recommendations/Resources and Potential Partners

Ideas for new businesses
- Restaurants (fast-casual, breweries)
- Unique shops/boutiques
- “Destination” businesses - attract outside customers
- Grocery store

- Potential partnerships and resources:
    - EcoDistricts Protocol (see flash drive)
    - Building Vibrant Communities (see flash drive)

Enforcement
- Design standards for storefronts/façades
- Property upkeep/code adherence

- Potential partnerships and resources:
    - Allegheny Together
    - Business Incentives and Finance Program (see flash drive)

Promotion and New Development
- Filling vacancies/cleaning up vacant storefronts
- Advertising for Dormont/Business District as a destination
- New apartment/business development

- Leverage public transit access to Borough

- Potential partnerships and resources:
    - Uptown Mt. Lebanon Strategic Plan (see flash drive)

Government Assistance to Businesses

- Tax/Rent assistance
- Mini-grants/interest-free loans for small improvements/accessibility upgrades
- Understanding Zoning Code

- Potential partnerships and resources:
    - Business Incentives and Finance Program (see flash drive)

Parking

- Necessity of parking near Business District to entice shoppers
- Access to Business District for older adults/individuals with physical disabilities
- Assess feasibility of parking garage in Business District
- Update public on plan for parking garage in Business District

- Potential partnerships and resources:
    - CMU Parking Study (see Parking Memo)