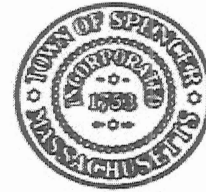
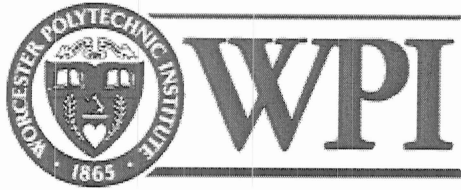


06 C007I  
FC-HT01-44



## Urban Renewal Planning For Downtown Spencer, MA

An Interdisciplinary Qualifying Project  
Submitted to the faculty of  
Worcester Polytechnic Institute  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Degree of Bachelor of Science

**Submitted By:**  
Richard Gentile  
Donald J. Benanti

**Sponsoring Agency:**  
Town of Spencer, Massachusetts Planning Board  
Carter Terenzini - Town Administrator  
Karen M. Cullen, AICP - Director of Development & Inspectional Services

**Submitted To:**  
Project Advisor: Fabio Carrera

This project was completed as part of the "Hometown Initiative" under the auspices of WPI's City Lab.

November 7, 2005

## **Abstract**

This project provides the town of Spencer, MA with the necessary information needed for them to devise a Downtown Revitalization Plan, and eventually apply for a Community Development Block Grant. The primary objectives of our project were to inventory the buildings and structures in the downtown area of Spencer, MA, inventory the Public Infrastructure of the same area, analyze the overall condition of the downtown area to support revitalization efforts and to develop a plan to revitalize downtown.



# Table of Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Table of Figures .....   | 3  |
| List of Tables .....   | 5  |
| 1 Introduction.....  | 6  |
| 2 Background.....  | 8  |
| 3 Methodology.....   | 11 |
| 3.1 Inventorying Buildings and Structures in Downtown Spencer.....                                 | 13 |
| 3.2 Assessing the Conditions of Buildings in Downtown Spencer .....                                | 23 |
| 3.4 Inventorying and assessing the conditions of Public Infrastructure in<br>Downtown Spencer..... | 27 |
| 3.4.1 Assessing the Condition of Sidewalks.....  | 27 |
| 3.4.2 Inventorying Street Lights .....   | 27 |
| 3.4.3 Inventorying Telephone Poles and Power Lines .....   | 27 |
| 3.4.4 Determining the Availability of Parking.....   | 27 |
| 3.5 Identifying Areas to be Targeted by Revitalization.....  | 28 |
| 4 Results & Analysis.....  | 29 |
| 4.1 Inventory of Buildings in Downtown Spencer .....   | 30 |
| 4.1.1 Size of Buildings in Downtown Spencer.....   | 31 |
| 4.1.2 Material of Buildings in Downtown Spencer .....  | 32 |
| 4.2 Current Utilization of Land and Buildings in Downtown Spencer.....                             | 33 |
| 4.2.1 Parcel Occupancy in Downtown Spencer.....  | 33 |
| 4.2.2 Open Space in Downtown Spencer.....  | 35 |
| 4.2.3 Building Use in Downtown Spencer.....  | 36 |
| 4.2.4 Building Occupancy in Downtown Spencer.....  | 37 |
| 4.3 Conditions of Buildings in Downtown Spencer .....  | 38 |
| 4.3.1 Conditions of Buildings According to Building Material.....                                  | 38 |
| 4.3.2 Building Conditions by Use in Downtown Spencer .....   | 41 |
| 4.4 Conditions of Public Infrastructure in Downtown Spencer.....                                   | 45 |
| 4.4.1 Conditions of Sidewalks in Downtown Spencer .....  | 45 |
| 4.4.2 Inventory of Street Lights in Downtown Spencer .....   | 46 |
| 4.4.3 Inventory of Telephone Poles and Power Lines in Downtown Spencer ..                          | 49 |
| 4.4.4 Availability of Parking in Downtown Spencer.....   | 51 |
| 4.5 Areas That Would Benefit From Revitalization .....   | 52 |
| 5 Conclusion & Recommendations .....   | 54 |
| 5.1 Possible Park Locations .....  | 55 |
| 5.2 Extra Light Distribution.....  | 56 |
| 5.3 Repaired Sidewalks.....  | 57 |
| 5.4 Additional Public Parking.....   | 58 |
| 5.5 Burying of Power Lines .....   | 59 |
| 5.6 The Next Steps.....  | 61 |
| 6 Bibliography .....   | 62 |
| Appendix A: Example of CDBG Project Proposal.....  | 63 |

## Table of Figures

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Figure 1. Border of the downtown study area.....   | 11 |
| Figure 2. Buildings that were surveyed.....  | 13 |
| Figure 3. Building Footprints for Downtown Spencer.....  | 14 |
| Figure 4. Close-up view of buildings and their ID numbers.....   | 15 |
| Figure 5. Tax Map Containing Parcel and Lot Numbers.....   | 16 |
| Figure 6. Form View of Created Database.....   | 18 |
| Figure 7. Parcel Footprints for Downtown Spencer.....  | 19 |
| Figure 8. Parcel ownership.....  | 20 |
| Figure 9. Snapshot of assessor's data.....   | 21 |
| Figure 10. Map of total assessed value per parcel.....   | 22 |
| Figure 11. Field form used to survey buildings.....  | 23 |
| Figure 12. Building with a rating of worst.....  | 24 |
| Figure 13. Building with a rating of best.....   | 24 |
| Figure 14. Buildings that were surveyed.....   | 30 |
| Figure 15. Buildings distinguished by number of floors.....  | 31 |
| Figure 16. Building distinguished by primary material.....   | 32 |
| Figure 17. Parcel map of the study area.....   | 33 |
| Figure 18. Parcel map distinguishing between vacant and occupied lots.....                                 | 34 |
| Figure 19. Parcel map distinguishing between existing structure and open space.....                        | 35 |
| Figure 20. Buildings distinguished by primary use.....   | 36 |
| Figure 21. Structure map distinguishing between occupied, partially vacant and abandoned buildings.....    | 37 |
| Figure 22. Aluminum Building Rating Results.....   | 38 |
| Figure 23. Brick Building Rating Results.....  | 39 |
| Figure 24. Cement Building Rating Results.....   | 39 |
| Figure 25. Wood Building Rating Results.....   | 40 |
| Figure 26. Vinyl Building Rating Results.....  | 40 |
| Figure 27. Commercial Building Rating Results.....   | 41 |
| Figure 28. Residential Building Rating Results.....  | 42 |
| Figure 29. Retail Building Rating Results.....   | 42 |
| Figure 30. Industrial Building Rating Results.....   | 43 |
| Figure 31. Mixed-Use Rating Results.....   | 43 |
| Figure 32. Residential and Mixed-Use Combined Rating Results.....  | 44 |
| Figure 33. Sidewalk map distinguishing the portions of sidewalk that rat from absent to above average..... | 45 |
| Figure 34. Map that displays light poles in the study area.....  | 46 |
| Figure 35. Close-up view of light poles along Route 9.....   | 47 |
| Figure 36. Light distribution in the study area.....   | 48 |
| Figure 37. Telephone poles and stringers in the study area.....  | 49 |
| Figure 38. Close-up of stringers along Route 9.....  | 50 |
| Figure 39. Parking lots in the study area.....   | 51 |
| Figure 40. Structure map distinguishing buildings that rat from worst to best.....                         | 52 |
| Figure 41. Recommended park locations (shown in green).....  | 55 |

Figure 42. Light distribution in the study area..... 56  
Figure 43. Sidewalk Results in Downtown Spencer. .... 57  
Figure 44. Available Public Parking in Downtown Spencer..... 58  
Figure 45. Close-up of a typical utility pole in Downtown Spencer..... 59

## List of Tables

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Table 1. Database of basic building attributes..... | 17 |
|---|----|

# 1 Introduction

The deterioration of downtowns across America has resulted in a loss of jobs, and decrease in incomes, and wealth. In the 1960 and 70's, urban renewal was limited to the razing of sometimes, entire street blocks. Today, with the help of some government funding, areas of downtowns are being preserved instead of demolished. The resurgence of downtown areas as centers of economic activity has been a popular trend in many parts of the country in recent years. In 2004, there was just about \$130 billion spent on improving the residential sections of Urban America. This number has steadily increased over the past ten years after the realization that Urban Renewal is not limited to just knocking down buildings. It is credited with revitalizing communities and attracting growth to certain areas. In the U.S., approximately 222,361,000 citizens reside in urban/downtown areas, approximately 79% of the total population<sup>1</sup>. It is necessary to understand the benefits that Urban Renewal could have on a community. After all, it is about stimulating economic growth, as well as restoring the history of downtowns, not demolishing the memories of citizens in small towns.

Many downtowns across Massachusetts need an ally to help them survive and prosper during their economic struggle. With much disinvestment, businesses have been leaving, rental rates are slipping and property owners have less to invest in their buildings, giving districts shabby, decadent appearances and making it almost impossible to attract new businesses. In Massachusetts 5,801,000 people reside in urban/downtown areas, approximately 91.4 percent of the entire MA population<sup>2</sup>. When people from Massachusetts hear the words "Urban Renewal", they quickly get reminded of the "disaster" that took place in Boston's West End. Nearly five decades ago, the city of Boston's power brokers had decided to raze the neighborhood as part of the federally funded urban renewal program. Some 7,000 residents lost their homes in the process<sup>3</sup>. Today, Urban Renewal has transformed many towns in Massachusetts. Although demolition is sometimes necessary, the re-facing and revitalization of towns serves as a

---

<sup>1</sup> Urban and Rural Population pg34: 123 Edition Statistical Abstract of the United States 2003

<sup>2</sup> IDEM

<sup>3</sup> IDEM

reminder of the importance of the humanly created environments, and moreover, increases human interaction and public culture. The way towns often begin the process of revitalization is by taking advantage of federally funded Community Development Block Grants.

The loss of wire making and shoe manufacturing brought devastation to the industrial base in Spencer, Massachusetts. Although new industries came into place shortly after; none of them lived up to the success of its predecessors. With many abandoned buildings and jobs lost in Spencer's Downtown Area, a citizen survey shows that a large number of people answered that Spencer's Downtown is the most undesirable area of the town<sup>4</sup>. Out of approximately 5,000 housing units in the town of Spencer, roughly 1,663 of the structures were built earlier 1939, which include around 34% of the houses. As of 2000, there were almost 360 vacant housing units in town<sup>5</sup>.

To boost Spencer's economy and job industry, a Downtown Revitalization Plan needs to be put in place, but in order to do so; the town needs basic information to put together a proposal for a Community development Block Grant. Our project is intended to fill that need. The results show 86.19% of the total structures that were surveyed were rated average and below. An outstanding 50.42% of the total structures that were surveyed were rated from below average to worst.

The town of Spencer has taken necessary steps thus far by creating a Master Plan; now they need to a CDBG to create a revitalization plan. A plan such as this will include additional employment opportunities, building façade and streetscape improvements, more parking, and public common areas, all of which were called for in the Spencer Citizen Survey. Revitalization of the Downtown area will provide a sense of community and re-embed the small town character in the residents of Spencer.

---

<sup>4</sup> "Spencer, Massachusetts: A Brief History"; Spencer Master Plan

<sup>5</sup> IDEM

## 2 Background

The town of Spencer was settled in 1717 by Nathaniel Wood, and was incorporated as a town in 1753. It has been established as a district from a part of Leicester and was named after Lieutenant Governor Spencer Phipps who had signed the order establishing the district. In 1784, Spencer was a major stopping place on the Old Boston Post Road's stage route between Boston and Hartford, and on to New York. Spencer had its first mill built in 1740 on Seven Mile River, which proved to be the greatest source of water power in the town. Other historical moments include General Henry Knox pushing his cannons through the streets of the town on his way to Boston from Ticonderoga, and George Washington spending the night in Jenk's Tavern<sup>6</sup>.

In the beginning, the main source of livelihood in Spencer was farming, being the home for several large dairy farms, indicating that the town's fertile soil was not only suited for residential use. Spencer's shoe making industry boomed in 1811, when Josiah Green began making shoes, shortly after building a factory of his own; as well did the Prouty family in 1820, and built their factory in 1855. In 1812, Elliot Prouty had begun to "draw" wire in a mill he had built. His business flourished in his family until 1916, when it merged with Wickwire Steel Company. At one time there were 11 factories and 26 buildings for wire drawing.

The Howe family of Spencer did much to make the town famous in the minds of ingenious Americans. William Howe of Spencer developed a wooden truss bridge named after him, as well as his brother Tyler Howe, patented a spring bed. Their nephew, Elias Howe, Jr., may well have eclipsed them when he invented the lockstitch sewing machine<sup>7</sup>.

The loss of wire making and shoe manufacturing was one of devastation to the town's industry. Although new industries came into place shortly after; none of them lived up to the success of its predecessors.

The town of Northampton, Massachusetts experienced the same type of misfortunes as Spencer. The downtown section of Northampton was filled with areas in

---

<sup>6</sup> IDEM

<sup>7</sup> <http://spencer.mass.info/>.

need of economic growth and redevelopment. Due to the city's rapidly declining industrial base, economic strength has shifted to retail and commercial operations that generally paid less than many of the previous industrial sector jobs. As a result, the poverty level rose due to the low-wage jobs predominate the economy<sup>8</sup>.

The main objective of the city was to return three sites in the Historic Mill River Corridor to productive reuse and spark the economy. The downtown area was "rescued" in the 1970's by creative real estate developers and resident pioneers who discovered and reinvented the town's historic infrastructure. They established an animated Main Street with entertainment-oriented businesses, Art theaters. There are apartments above many town shops that stimulate street life at night<sup>9</sup>. They were able to accomplish these goals by using state funds to conduct site assessments, and involving the community in activities and decision making as to how to fully utilize these sites.

Northampton is widely considered a "boomtown" and became a thriving cultural center in the 1980s. Young entrepreneurs saw the city's unspoiled historic downtown, vacant commercial space and unusual mix of residents and students as opportunities for economic growth. Many people are attracted to the town's amenity-rich and garden city style and because of its newcomers Northampton has become a big, little place. "Without argument, when a town begins to go dead, you've got to find a way to let lots of different kinds of people in, and keep them there"<sup>10</sup>.

Spencer's Downtown has never experienced the rewards of receiving a Community Development Block Grant. "The Community Development Block Grant Program provides an opportunity for eligible municipalities to compete for funds to improve local housing, streets, utilities, and public facilities"<sup>11</sup>. The Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development, administers these federal funds and offers several programs designed to address a range of community and economic needs. Characterizing Spencer's Downtown Area as "Blighted", is a crucial part of our project. Blighted areas are defined as being detrimental to the safety, health, morals,

---

<sup>8</sup> "Brownfield's Assessment Pilots": <http://www.epa.gov/docs/swerosps/bf/pdf/anortham.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> "Northampton, MA-A Revitalized City": [http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?r106:3:./temp/~r106O3sY94:.](http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?r106:3:./temp/~r106O3sY94:)

<sup>10</sup> IDEM

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.communitydevelopment.org/cdbg/index.cfm>



welfare or sound growth of a community because it is unduly costly to develop it soundly through the ordinary operations of private enterprise by reason of the existence of ledge, rock, unsuitable soil, or other physical conditions<sup>12</sup>. Towns in Massachusetts such as Adams, and Ludlow have both successfully received CDBGs implemented in their downtowns. Adams, MA requested and was granted \$75,000 for their CDBG, complemented by an extra \$10,000 that went towards the Downtown Development Plan. For a Downtown Infrastructure Improvement project in Ludlow, MA, the city requested and was granted \$686,300 in 2003. Towns around Spencer are making changes and improvements. It's time for this town of 12,000 residents to make improvements as well.

The ultimate goal of this project was to provide the town of Spencer, MA with the necessary information needed for them to devise a Downtown Revitalization Plan, and eventually apply for a Community Development Block Grant. The team conducted an inventory of the entire "Proposed Study Area" and estimated the level of blight therein. Each building in Spencer's Downtown was surveyed to see if it met blight standards. Our project provides the foundation for the Town of Spencer to obtain a Community Development Block Grant sometime in the near future. Making Spencer eligible for a project under the (CDBG) program will forge the "small town" atmosphere throughout, as well as potentially commence a new era for Spencer's economic development.

---

<sup>12</sup> "Administration of The Government, Title XVII: Public Welfare": General Laws of Massachusetts

### 3 Methodology

The ultimate goal of this project is to provide the town of Spencer, MA with the necessary information needed for them to devise a Downtown Revitalization Plan, and eventually apply for a Community Development Block Grant.

The primary objectives of our project were:

- 1) To inventory the buildings and structures in the downtown area of Spencer, MA
- 2) To assess the conditions of all buildings within the study area
- 3) To assess the current utilization of all the parcels and buildings within the study area
- 4) To inventory and assess the conditions of the Public Infrastructure of the same area
- 5) To identify situations in the downtown area that would benefit from revitalization efforts

The study period of our project was from October 2004 to May 2005. The projects study area included the downtown district as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Border of the downtown study area.

By using this map our group was able to identify exact buildings that were necessary to survey, as well as their exact locations.

The following sections of this chapter provide the details about the necessary steps that were taken to fulfill the above objectives.

- **3.1 Inventory:** discusses the precise boundary that was set around the study area, necessary to recognize what buildings/structures were located in Downtown Spencer as well as describes the overall process that was taken in order to abstract all the necessary information from the study area.
- **3.2 Public Infrastructure:** explains what types of Public Infrastructure our group surveyed and how these structures relate to our ultimate mission.
- **3.3 Overall Condition:** describes the definitions and importance of all the information we were able to gather from the study area.

### **3.1 Inventorying Buildings and Structures in Downtown Spencer**

The map below identifies all buildings and structures that were surveyed within the bounds of the study area (see Figure 2).

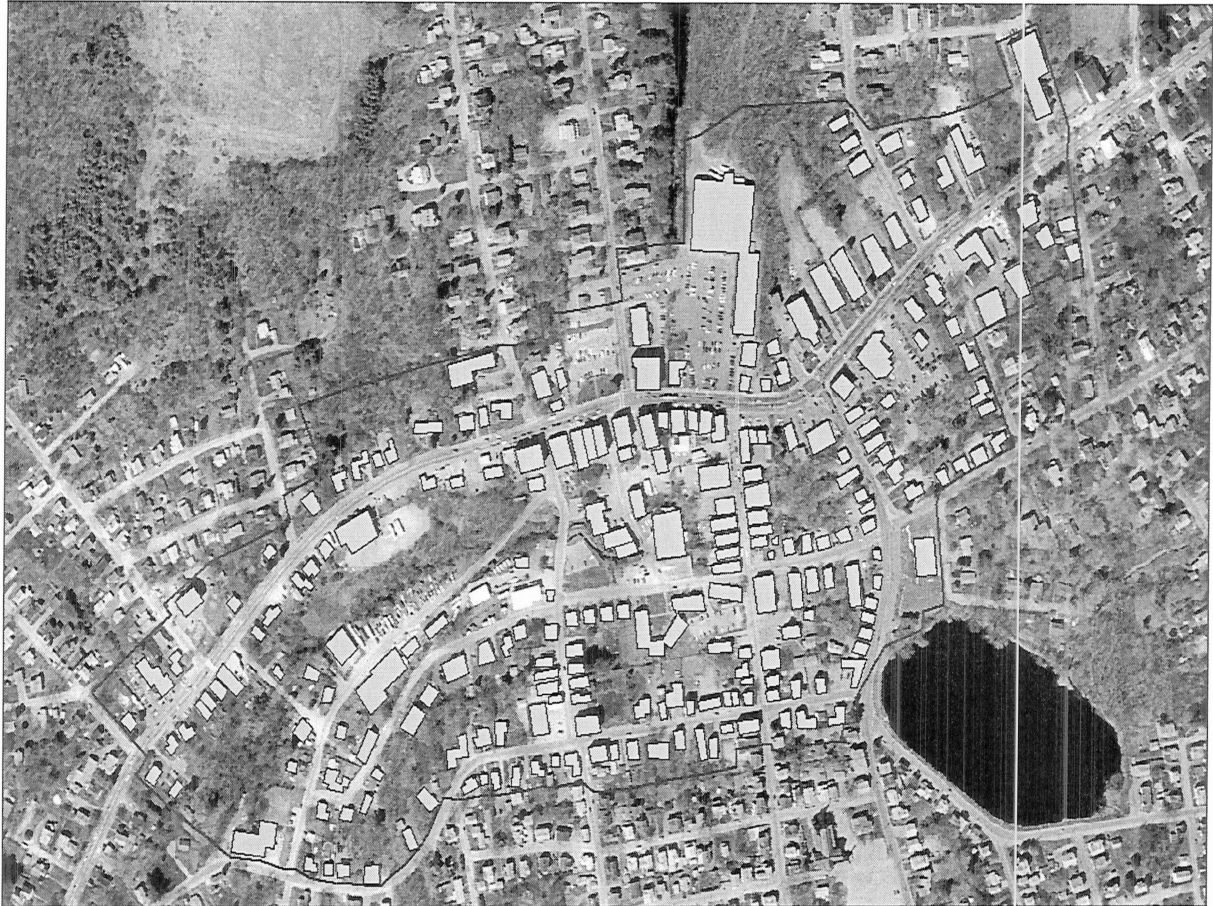


Figure 2. Buildings that were surveyed.

We surveyed structures that had specific uses. Garages, sheds, and the like were not included in our study. Overall, there were 232 buildings surveyed.

In order to view these buildings so we can attach data to them, we needed to first draw a shape that resembled the building. To do this, we traced each building that fell inside the downtown study area (see Figure 3. **Building Footprints for Downtown Spencer.**). Next, we set these to become a region and we were able to attach all the information we needed onto it.



Figure 3. Building Footprints for Downtown Spencer.

To create these maps which contained parcels and buildings, we first started out using MapInfo. This was able to give us color satellite images of the town. We were able to zoom in on a region to further magnify our intended study area. Next, we obtained current tax maps from the town of Spencer so we could overlay them and be able to find the extent of each individual piece of property. In order to get them into the MapInfo database, we scanned the images and joined them to our GIS images. We then traced the outline to create the parcel boundaries on the map. To select the study area, we chose a general group of buildings we felt made up the downtown area. The boundary was formed by tracing the outer edges of these building's parcels.

Buildings that were surveyed were given a unique and individual identification number (see Figure 4). This number was derived from the tax map (see Figure 5) where the buildings appeared on and the lot number it was given. The final suffix in these identification codes is a number assigned separately to each building in the same lot. An



example of this is shown in the top right corner in the following picture. Parcel U-7-59 has two buildings, thus being labeled U-7-59-1 and U-7-59-2.



Figure 4. Close-up view of buildings and their ID numbers.

For example, a building with an identification number of U-7-64-2 appears on town map number U-7, in Lot 64, and is listed buildings #2.



| Building_ID | ID | Building_N | Parcel_ID | Footprint_sq_ft | Floors | Total_Floor_Space_sq_ft | Overall_Rating | Building_Use |
|-------------|----|------------|-----------|-----------------|--------|-------------------------|----------------|--------------|
| U-7-64-2    | 0  | 2          | U-7-64    | 1,114           | 3      | 3,342                   | 3              | T            |
| U-7-64-3    | 0  | 3          | U-7-64    | 1,237           | 3      | 3,711                   | 3              | C            |
| U-7-65-1    | 0  | 1          | U-7-65    | 1,829           | 3      | 5,487                   | 2              | T            |
| U-7-66-1    | 0  | 1          | U-7-66    | 2,267           | 3      | 6,801                   | 3              | R            |
| U-7-67-1    | 0  | 1          | U-7-67    | 2,354           | 3      | 7,062                   | 3              | R            |
| U-7-67-2    | 0  | 2          | U-7-67    | 1,955           | 4      | 7,860                   | 2              | R            |
| U-7-68-1    | 0  | 1          | U-7-68    | 2,534           | 2      | 5,068                   | 3              | R            |
| U-7-69-1    | 0  | 1          | U-7-69    | 2,272           | 3      | 6,816                   | 1              | R            |
| U-7-7-1     | 0  | 1          | U-7-7     | 2,023           | 3      | 6,069                   | 3              | R            |
| U-7-70-1    | 0  | 1          | U-7-70    | 1,490           | 3      | 4,470                   | 4              | R            |
| U-7-71-1    | 0  | 1          | U-7-71    | 1,747           | 3      | 5,241                   | 3              | R            |
| U-7-72-1    | 0  | 1          | U-7-72    | 2,292           | 3      | 6,876                   | 2              | R            |
| U-7-73-1    | 0  | 1          | U-7-73    | 1,922           | 3      | 5,766                   | 3              | R            |
| U-7-74-1    | 0  | 1          | U-7-74    | 1,752           | 2      | 3,504                   | 1              | R            |
| U-7-75-1    | 0  | 1          | U-7-75    | 2,693           | 3      | 8,079                   | 3              | R            |
| U-7-76-1    | 0  | 1          | U-7-76    | 2,803           | 1      | 2,803                   | 4              | R            |
| U-7-77-1    | 0  | 1          | U-7-77    | 3,613           | 3      | 10,839                  | 4              | C            |
| U-7-77A-1   | 0  | 1          | U-7-77A   | 2,054           | 2      | 4,108                   | 2              | R            |
| U-7-78-1    | 0  | 1          | U-7-78    | 1,553           | 3      | 4,659                   | 4              | T            |
| U-7-78-2    | 0  | 2          | U-7-78    | 2,654           | 3      | 7,962                   | 3              | T            |
| U-7-79-1    | 0  | 1          | U-7-79    | 10,022          | 2      | 20,044                  | 4              | C            |
| U-7-79-2    | 0  | 2          | U-7-79    | 1,434           | 2      | 2,868                   | 3              | T            |
| U-7-8-1     | 0  | 1          | U-7-8     | 1,658           | 3      | 4,974                   | 2              | R            |
| U-7-81-1    | 0  | 1          | U-7-81    | 3,358           | 4      | 13,432                  | 2              | C            |
| U-7-82-1    | 0  | 1          | U-7-82    | 7,158           | 3      | 21,474                  | 2              | I            |
| U-7-82-2    | 0  | 2          | U-7-82    | 5,021           | 4      | 20,084                  | 1              | I            |
| U-7-9-1     | 0  | 1          | U-7-9     | 2,047           | 3      | 6,141                   | 1              | R            |
| U-7-92-1    | 0  | 1          | U-7-92    | 2,136           | 3      | 6,408                   | 3              | R            |
| U-7-93-1    | 0  | 1          | U-7-93    | 2,208           | 2      | 4,416                   | 3              | R            |
| U-7-94-1    | 0  | 1          | U-7-94    | 3,746           | 3      | 11,238                  | 3              | R            |
| U-7-94-2    | 0  | 2          | U-7-94    | 2,849           | 3      | 8,547                   | 2              | R            |
| U-7-95-1    | 0  | 1          | U-7-95    | 5,917           | 4      | 23,668                  | 2              | C            |
| U-8-1-1     | 0  | 1          | U-8-1     | 2,009           | 2      | 4,018                   | 2              | C            |
| U-8-1-2     | 0  | 2          | U-8-1     | 6,015           | 4      | 24,060                  | 1              | C            |
| U-8-10-1    | 0  | 1          | U-8-10    | 1,991           | 2      | 3,982                   | 2              | R            |
| U-8-11-1    | 0  | 1          | U-8-11    | 1,987           | 2      | 3,974                   | 2              | R            |
| U-8-117-1   | 0  | 1          | U-8-117   | 10,335          | 2      | 20,670                  | 2              | I            |
| U-8-118-1   | 0  | 1          | U-8-118   | 1,098           | 2      | 2,196                   | 3              | R            |
| U-8-119-1   | 0  | 1          | U-8-119   | 2,509           | 3      | 7,527                   | 2              | R            |
| U-8-12-1    | 0  | 1          | U-8-12    | 1,249           | 2      | 2,498                   | 3              | R            |

Table 1. Database of basic building attributes.

After surveying the downtown study area, we able to add to these databases the information we gathered (see Table 1). According to building identification numbers (Building\_ID), we were able to add a building number (Building\_N) and parcel identification number (Parcel\_ID). In addition, we added the number of floors (Floors), ground floor area (Footprint\_sq\_ft), total floor area (Total\_Floor\_Space\_sq\_ft), and building use (Building\_Use).



After all measures were considered and overall ratings were assessed, we were able to add the overall rating (Overall\_Rating) into the database. All relevant parameters are included in a Microsoft Access database called Spencer\_Building\_Survey\_2005.mdb (see Figure 6), which also includes appropriate pictures of each of the buildings.

**Spencer Downtown Inventory**

Parcel ID: U-14-4-1

**Overall Condition - General Information**

|                 |                                     |                   |                       |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|
| Building ID     | 001                                 | Building Name     | UNITED METHODIST CHUR |
| # of Floors     | 1                                   | Main Address      |                       |
| Handicap Access | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Primary Materials | VINYL                 |
| Roof Condition  | 0                                   | Overall Condition | 3                     |

**Building Use**

|                     |     |                    |     |
|---------------------|-----|--------------------|-----|
| Building ID         | 001 | Percent Retail     | 0   |
| Floor #             | 1   | Retail Type        |     |
| Residential Units   | 0   | Percent Commercial | 100 |
| Percent Residential | 0   | Commercial Type    | C   |
| Percent Industrial  | 0   | Percent Other      | 0   |
| Industrial Type     |     | Other Type         |     |

**Detailed Conditions**

|             |     |               |             |
|-------------|-----|---------------|-------------|
| Building ID | 001 | Worst Rating  | 2           |
| Side        | F   | Percent Worst | 10          |
| Floor #     | 1   | Rest Rating   | 4           |
| Material    | V   | Notes         | RUST AROUND |

Record: 1 of 10

**Building Components**

|             |     |               |     |
|-------------|-----|---------------|-----|
| Building ID | 001 | Worst Rating  | 3   |
| Floor #     | 1   | Percent Worst | 100 |
| Side        | F   | Rest Rating   | 0   |
| Element     | S   | Notes         |     |

Record: 1 of 8

**Windows**

|             |     |              |   |
|-------------|-----|--------------|---|
| Building ID | 001 | Worst Rating | 4 |
| Side        | F   | # Worst      | 1 |
| Floor       | 1   | Rest Rating  | 0 |
| # Windows   | 1   | Notes        |   |

Record: 1 of 7

WPI

**Building Photos**

MATERIAL SIDE RANKINGS COMPONENTS

Figure 6. Form View of Created Database.

Ultimately, we were able to link assessor's data to the parcels regions that we created (see Figure 7).

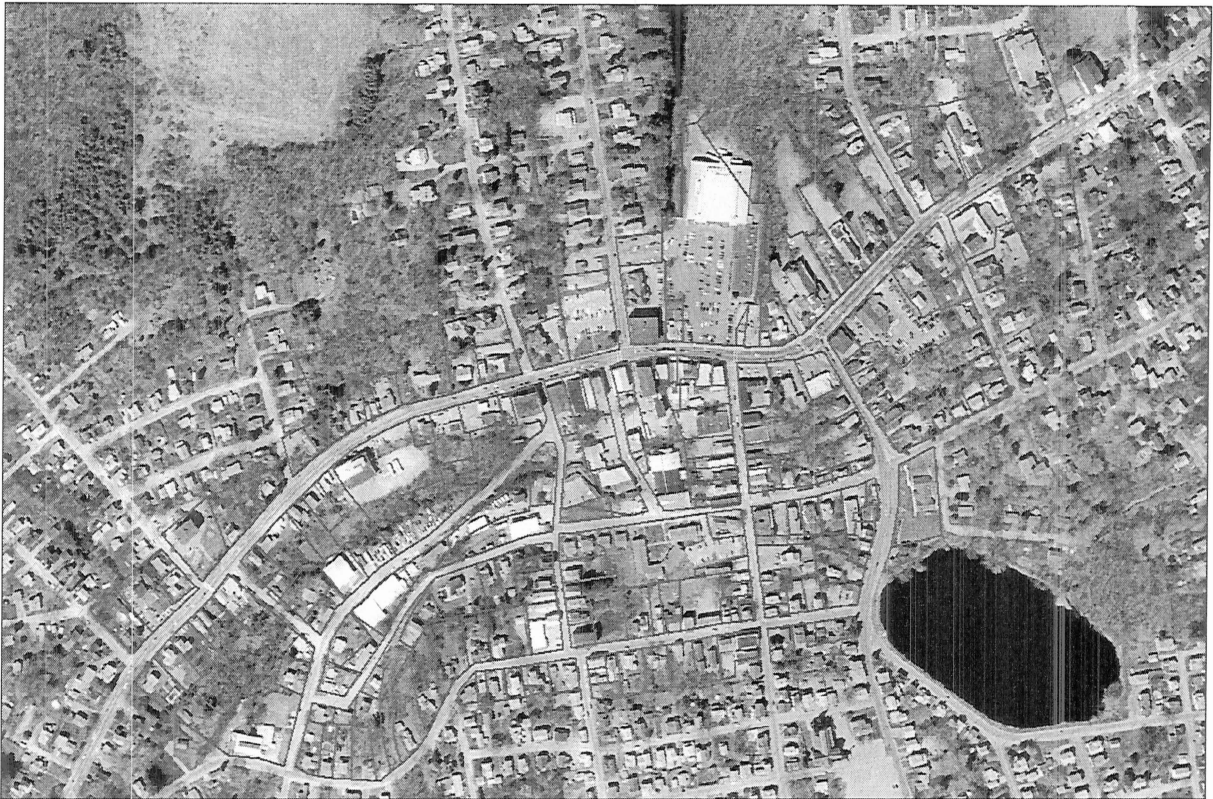


Figure 7. Parcel Footprints for Downtown Spencer.

A good example of what this data can give us is showing the names of ownership (see Figure 8). This gives us an idea if there are any owners which own more than one piece of property and whether the land is private or public. This is extremely useful to get information about a piece of property quickly and easily.



Figure 8. Parcel ownership.

By selecting the Info tab and then the piece of land, you can attain information about the piece of property or the owner (see Figure 9).

| MFL ID  | Year Built | Last Modified | Owner                          | Address                   | Map | Block | Lot | Unit | Tot Assessed | Book-F  |
|---------|------------|---------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|-----|-------|-----|------|--------------|---------|
| U-10-1  | 1995       | 1996          | DAVED LLC                      | 21 DEWEY ST               | U10 | 1     | 14  |      | 145300       | 34242/C |
| U-10-1  | 1900       | 1972          | BERCUME CLAIRE M LE            | 159 SO SPENCER RD         | R10 | 1     |     |      | 154400       | 26346/C |
| U-10-10 | 1972       | 1988          | BOUTILLETTE DAVID P            | 60 CRANBERRY MEADOW RD    | R10 | 10    |     |      | 68000        | 26274/C |
| U-10-11 | 1976       | 1986          | TALBOT CAROL JEAN              | 58 CRANBERRY MEADOW RD    | R10 | 11    |     |      | 61900        | 11040/C |
| U-10-13 | 1970       | 1984          | GADBOIS PAUL E                 | 3 HEBERT RD               | R10 | 13    |     |      | 61900        | 06481/C |
| U-10-14 | 1972       | 1984          | PRIZIO RAYMOND P               | 5 HEBERT RD               | R10 | 14    |     |      | 61900        | 06788/C |
| U-10-15 | 1973       | 1984          | FUTTERLIEB ERIC D              | 7 HEBERT RD               | R10 | 15    |     |      | 60600        | 33848/C |
| U-10-16 | 1975       | 1986          | COURTNEY ROBERT D III          | 9 HEBERT RD               | R10 | 16    |     |      | 59300        | 29552/C |
| U-10-17 | 1972       | 1984          | KOBEL DANIEL J                 | 11 HEBERT RD              | R10 | 17    |     |      | 61200        | 32291/C |
| U-10-18 | 0          | 0             | THOMAS ROGER O                 | 6 LEONARD RD              | R10 | 18    | 61A |      | 100          | 04324/C |
| U-10-18 | 1810       | 1964          | THOMAS ROGER O                 | 6 LEONARD RD              | R10 | 18    |     |      | 74700        | 04624/C |
| U-10-18 | 1987       | 1998          | SANDY ALBERT C                 | 20 WM CASEY RD            | R10 | 18    | 1   |      | 75800        | 09619/C |
| U-10-18 | 1987       | 1998          | SKOV RICHARD T                 | 18 WM CASEY RD            | R10 | 18    | 2   |      | 76600        | 15641/C |
| U-10-18 | 2001       | 2002          | REHABILITATIVE RESOURCES INC   | 14 WM CASEY RD            | R10 | 18    | 4   |      | 78400        | 23065/C |
| U-10-18 | 1987       | 1994          | STODDARD CARL                  | 16 WM CASEY RD            | R10 | 18    | 3   |      | 77000        | 09533/C |
| U-10-19 | 1905       | 1972          | MCCOMAS WILLIAM W              | 12 JOLICOEUR RD           | R10 | 19    |     |      | 64200        | 06641/C |
| U-10-2  | 1971       | 1984          | DIENES CORPORATION             | 27 DEWEY ST               | U10 | 2     |     |      | 268400       | 06817/C |
| U-10-20 | 1988       | 1994          | BERTHIAUME FAMILY REALTY TRUST | 4 JOLICOEUR RD            | R10 | 20    | 1   |      | 79800        | 16952/C |
| U-10-20 | 1985       | 1992          | LEMIEUX PETER                  | 13 HEBERT RD              | R10 | 20    | 3   |      | 67400        | 09844/C |
| U-10-20 | 1985       | 1992          | JOHNS RONALD A                 | 15 HEBERT RD              | R10 | 20    | 4   |      | 67300        | 13976/C |
| U-10-20 | 1985       | 1996          | CYR DEBORAH L                  | 17 HEBERT RD              | R10 | 20    | 5   |      | 68600        | 20980/C |
| U-10-21 | 0          | 0             | BARBATO JOHN L                 | 167 SO SPENCER RD         | R10 | 21    |     |      | 74600        | 05131/C |
| U-10-22 | 1979       | 1988          | BERCUME DAVID A                | 169 SO SPENCER RD         | R10 | 22    |     |      | 65500        | 06464/C |
| U-10-24 | 1740       | 1972          | BARBATO JOHN L                 | 166 SO SPENCER RD         | R10 | 24    |     |      | 268500       | 05131/C |
| U-10-25 | 2002       | 2003          | BULAK DAVID E                  | 3 TOM CASEY RD            | R10 | 25    |     |      | 112600       | 26109/C |
| U-10-29 | 2005       | 2005          | NEIL F RIVERS                  | 13 TOM CASEY RD           | R10 | 29    |     |      | 65000        | 28013/C |
| U-10-3  | 1968       | 1982          | BATTY FRANCIS A                | 5 JOLICOEUR RD            | R10 | 3     |     |      | 63300        | 08981/C |
| U-10-30 | 2004       | 2004          | NEIL F RIVERS                  | 15 TOM CASEY RD           | R10 | 30    |     |      | 64400        | 28013/C |
| U-10-4  | 1968       | 1982          | ADAMS DENISE J                 | 7 JOLICOEUR RD            | R10 | 4     |     |      | 63000        | 13148/C |
| U-10-5  | 1968       | 1982          | DONOHUE JAMES F                | 9 JOLICOEUR RD            | R10 | 5     |     |      | 62600        | 10760/C |
| U-10-6  | 1974       | 1986          | CUMMINGS DONALD E              | 11 JOLICOEUR RD           | R10 | 6     |     |      | 62600        | 19215/C |
| U-10-6  | 1987       | 1992          | J M N REALTY ASSOCIATES        | 1 FLEXCON INDUSTRIAL PARK | U10 | 6     |     |      | 86900        | 08952/C |
| U-10-7  | 1970       | 1981          | J M N REALTY ASSOCIATES        | 5&11 SO SPENCER RD        | U10 | 7     |     |      | 100          | 05571/C |
| U-10-7  | 1979       | 1988          | PARSNEAU DAVID V               | 13 JOLICOEUR RD           | R10 | 7     |     |      | 62300        | 09031/C |
| U-10-8  | 1962       | 1980          | GORDON JOHN J                  | 70 CRANBERRY MEADOW RD    | R10 | 8     |     |      | 55600        | 05264/C |
| U-10-9  | 1980       | 1984          | BILICIVINCENT A JP             | 68 CRANBERRY MEADOW RD    | R10 | 9     |     |      | 65300        | 27789/C |

Figure 9. Snapshot of assessor's data

From this table, there are several maps that we created.

One map that was very important to understand was the assessed value of the piece of property (see Figure 10). It is important to notice that land in the southern part of the downtown study area has a lot less value than generally the buildings along Route 9.



Figure 10. Map of total assessed value per parcel





**4 = Above Average:** This category covers buildings that are now showing first signs of deterioration. Siding may need spot painting or little repair.

**5 = Best:** Buildings that require little or no exterior work. Buildings are in excellent condition and demonstrate consistent, planned maintenance and repair.

We first listed the percent of the worst portion of each rated area and then indicated what type of condition the rest of each section was in.

An example of a “Worst” rating can look something like this (see Figure 12):

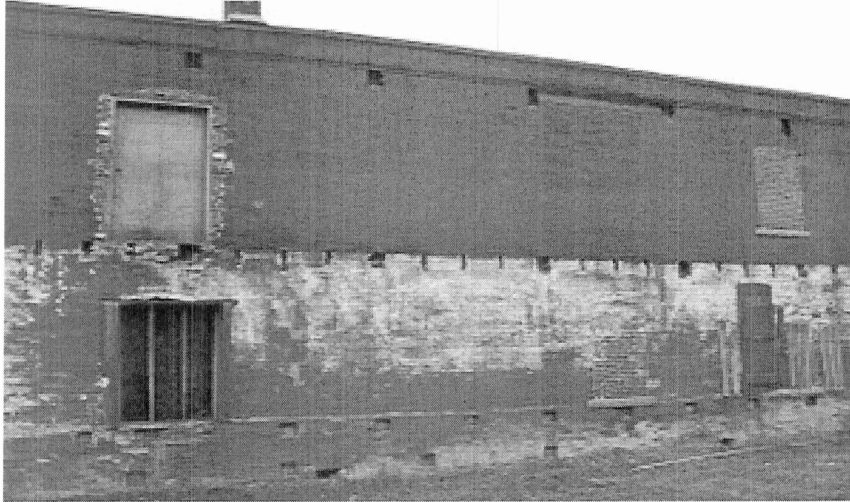


Figure 12. Building with a rating of worst.

An example of a “best” rating is provided in the picture below (see Figure 13).



Figure 13. Building with a rating of best.

Buildings that fell between these two extremes were given an appropriate rating.

Windows and components were rated with the addition of a rating of 0. This rating was used mainly when a window or door was boarded up and therefore absent. Components include doors, steps, railings, chimneys, driveways, and roofs. Similarly to the way the façade's were rated, each window was observed by floor number and side. The total number of windows was listed first followed by the worst rating of the group. We then marked how many out of the total amount were of this rating and then noted the rating of the rest of the windows. Components were rated exactly the same as façade's were. Each component was broken down into percentages if necessary, for example, if there were a total of four steps that were being rated and one of the four steps was clearly a below average, then the steps would be rated 2 for 25% followed by the rating of the rest.



### ***3.3 Determining Current Utilization of Parcels and Buildings in Downtown Spencer***

To determine usage, each building was observed to determine the amount of floors. This was done by looking at how many levels of windows or doors were evident from the outside. In addition, we observed mailboxes, doorbells, curtains on windows and all others aspects that signified a residential unit. Basements and cellars without windows or doors or any other signs of an addition floor were not observed.

While rating the section, we noted the percentages of each type that consumed the structure. The types included residential, retail, commercial and industrial. Residential was the only use type that we specified by units on each floor. All others were based solely on percentages.

Percentages of retail, commercial, and industrial floors were easily discriminated by signs, names on windows and the like.

### ***3.4 Inventorying and assessing the conditions of Public Infrastructure in Downtown Spencer***

The public infrastructures that our group surveyed in the study area were sidewalks, light poles, power lines and parking lots. We felt that these four infrastructures have a unique significance with regards to obtaining a grant.

#### **3.4.1 Assessing the Condition of Sidewalks**

Sidewalks were rated on a 0-5 scale, exactly the same as the windows, with a rating of 0 indicating no sidewalk at all. Sidewalks were very relevant to meet our objective in order for our group to identify certain safety issues when an individual is walking around the downtown area.

#### **3.4.2 Inventorying Street Lights**

Light poles were surveyed by their location. Depending on how many light poles were on each block, our group was able to estimate “dark spots”. These spots indicated the necessary amount of light poles that should be added to each section of the study area, once again to insure the safety of walking patrons.

#### **3.4.3 Inventorying Telephone Poles and Power Lines**

Telephone poles and power lines were surveyed relatively similar to the light poles, as they were marked on a map layer in their exact locations. This part of our study concerns beautification. Since we found a large number of stringers throughout the downtown area, it might be in the Town’s best interest to have these lines buried.

#### **3.4.4 Determining the Availability of Parking**

Parking lots were surveyed a little differently from the previous three studies. These were mapped out to provide a region that the parking lot covered, as opposed to a point or line.

### ***3.5 Identifying Areas to be Targeted by Revitalization***

After all the data was collected from the survey area, we put all the information into a weighted formula to figure out the overall condition of each structure. The windows carried the most weight, followed by the components, and then façade's of each building. The overall condition of each structure is necessary to determine the level of "blight" in the downtown area, described in the introduction. Each structure with an overall rating of 3 and under is very essential to reaching our overall objective. The percentages of buildings with every rating will be located on a separate map layer in MapInfo.

To determine the under-use of each structure our group focused mainly on the total number of windows on each floor of the building. Any floor of a structure that contained 80% or more of its windows with a rating of either 0 or 1 was considered to be vacant. The total percent of under-used or abandoned buildings will be included in our results section.

The overall ratings for the structures in the target area were solved by using a weighted formula. The weights (out of 100) were as follows:

45% = Windows

35% = Components

20% = Façades

The order of the weighting was decided by the member's of our group and Spencer's Town Planner. The total average of all these aspects were taken for each building and then calculated in our weighted formula. After each average was multiplied by their respective weight, they were added together to find their overall rating.

The overall ratings ranged from 1 – 5, with the decimal places .4 and below rounded down to the nearest whole number and decimal places .5 and above rounded up to the nearest whole number.

## **4 Results & Analysis**

There are three main results of our project: inventory of buildings in downtown Spencer, land use in downtown Spencer, public infrastructure rating results. Each one of our results is broken into sub-sections with further detail of each condition. Our overall building rating results section was put together from all the information extracted from our study. This section contains the data that will be the most useful for Spencer to obtain a Community Development Block Grant.

## ***4.1 Inventory of Buildings in Downtown Spencer***

There were 232 total buildings that our group inventoried in Downtown Spencer (see Figure 14). Inventory was taken on the total number of floors in each building, to determine primary use and building vacancy; and primary material of each building, to determine the condition of the exposed building materials. These factors were calculated in our overall conditions formula shown in section 3.5 to determine the total level of blight within the Downtown area. Percentage of disinvestment was tallied when a condition was rated below average and worst.



Figure 14. Buildings that were surveyed.

### 4.1.1 Size of Buildings in Downtown Spencer

It was necessary to note the total number of floors in each building for our group to be able to calculate the primary use of each structure as well as the level of vacancy (see Figure 15).



Figure 15. Buildings distinguished by number of floors.



### 4.1.2 Material of Buildings in Downtown Spencer

The picture below distinguishes the buildings in the study area by their primary material (see Figure 16). The pie chart in the upper left hand corner indicates that the most frequently observed material in Downtown Spencer is vinyl.



Figure 16. Building distinguished by primary material.

## **4.2 Current Utilization of Land and Buildings in Downtown Spencer**

Determining building and land use enabled our group to see which types of structures were experiencing the highest levels of blight within the downtown area. Inventorying each building and parcel in this manner allowed us label the primarily vacant buildings and parcels as abandoned, and therefore blight. Also, partially or fully vacant parcels can possibly provide the town of Spencer with the opportunity to form a type of city owned establishment that they see necessary.

### **4.2.1 Parcel Occupancy in Downtown Spencer**

The downtown study area was divided into smaller areas by their parcel identification number (see Figure 17).



Figure 17. Parcel map of the study area.



This helped us to get a feeling for the extent of each piece of property for each individual owner. This was useful because it showed to whom stray structures belonged. It was also important to know the size of these lots for future recommendations, for example, possible park locations, and to determine vacancy results.

This parcel map can be further analyzed to display vacant and occupied pieces of property. A red shape represents a lot without structures, parking lots, or any other significant formation that would correspond to operation on that piece of land. A green lot symbolizes a currently active area of land (see Figure 18).



Figure 18. Parcel map distinguishing between vacant and occupied lots.

As we walked the entire downtown area we took pictures of each side of each structure, focusing on sections that would strongly support our purpose, such as broken windows, peeling paint etc. We then assessed the conditions of each building according to the field form that we have provided on the following page.

## 4.2.2 Open Space in Downtown Spencer

From the map of buildings surveyed, in addition to other maps including parking lots, etc., we were able to get an idea where a majority of the existing structures were and where there was open land (see Figure 19).



Figure 19. Parcel map distinguishing between existing structure and open space.

The black objects represent existing structures, active or inactive. Green areas represent impervious land. This was beneficial to the project because several things can be taken from this map.

For example, a sense of manufactured congestion can be gathered by noticing an abundance of black objects in certain areas of the map. Another piece of information that we were able to extract from this map was the trend of development along Route 9, the major avenue of transportation through the town. Other information we gathered were

building sizes and block densities. From the maps provided above, we further analyzed each building use in section 4.2.3.

### 4.2.3 Building Use in Downtown Spencer

The use of each building was also done by floors. The map provided below (see Figure 20) distinguishes buildings by their primary use.



Figure 20. Buildings distinguished by primary use.

This map shows that, in our study area, there are 150 residential buildings, 12 retail buildings, 33 commercial buildings, and 14 industrial buildings.

This portion of our study provided us with the necessary information to estimate the level of blight in each building use category presented in section 4.3.2.



#### 4.2.4 Building Occupancy in Downtown Spencer

After analyzing the building use, we were able to develop a map that showed which buildings had floors that were unused (see Figure 21).

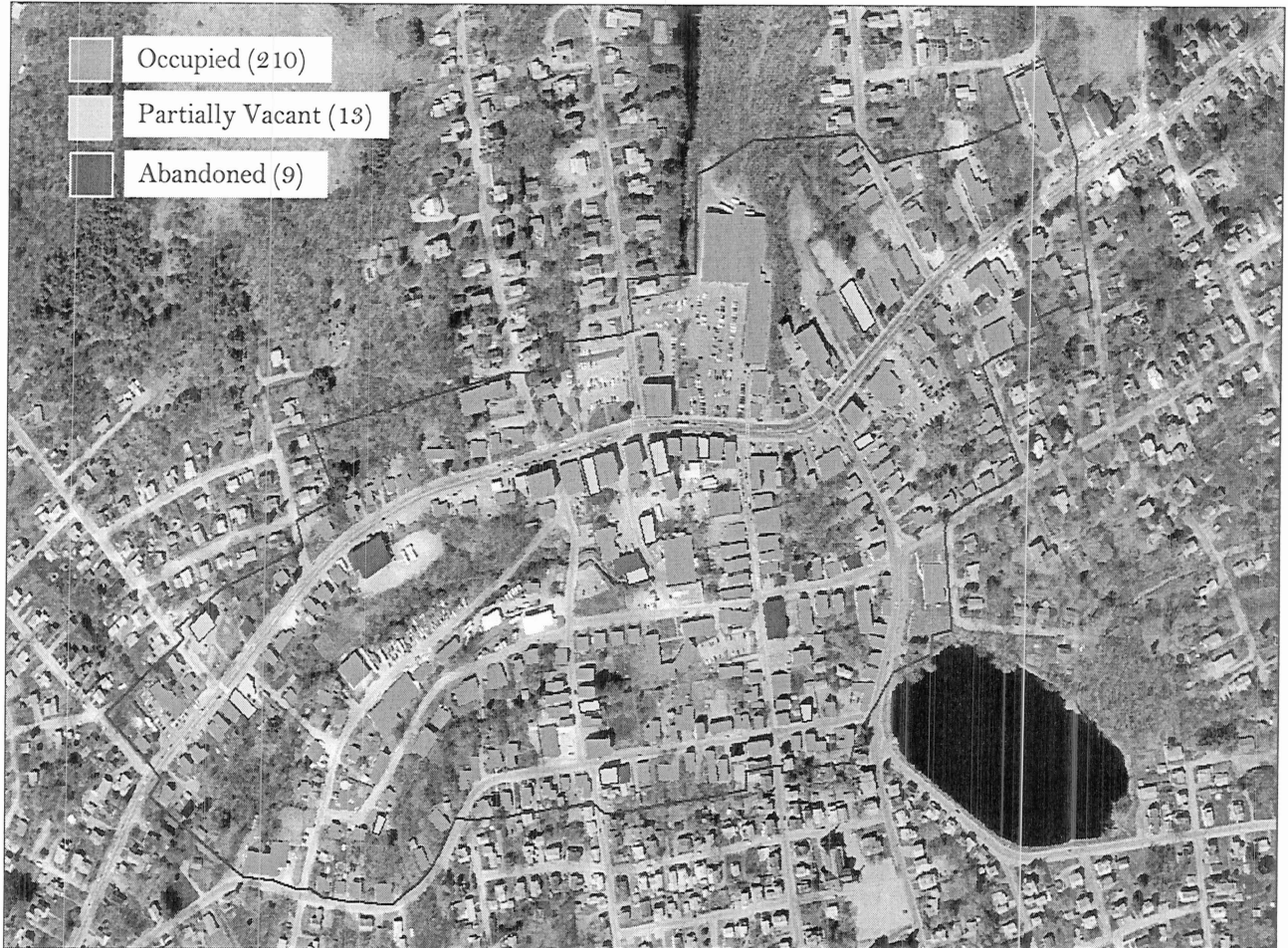


Figure 21. Structure map distinguishing between occupied, partially vacant and abandoned buildings.

Buildings that were totally unused were listed as abandoned, or a represented as a red buildings. A yellow building represents a building that had at least one floor that was vacant, but also at least one floor that was occupied. We used outside appearance, such as windows, as one of the most significant signs or vacancy.

### **4.3 Conditions of Buildings in Downtown Spencer**

In this portion of our study our group assessed the condition of the buildings in Downtown Spencer according to building material, and building use.

#### **4.3.1 Conditions of Buildings According to Building Material**

This portion of our study allowed us to make assessments of the external material that had the most upkeep in the following sections, allowing us to tell which primary material contributed to the most blight in the study area.

##### **4.3.1.1 Conditions of Aluminum Buildings**

There were 20 total aluminum buildings in the study area. Their rating results are shown in Figure 22. This portion of our study shows that 55% of the aluminum structures surveyed in the study area are currently experiencing disinvestment and are in need of rehabilitation.

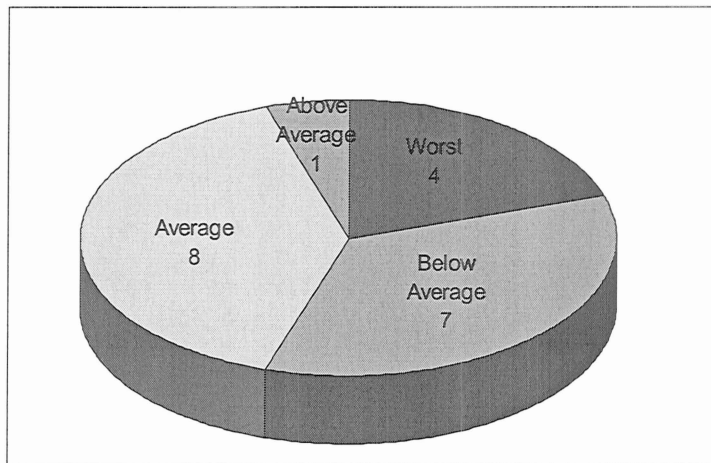


Figure 22. Aluminum Building Rating Results.

### 4.3.1.2 Conditions of Brick Buildings

There were 31 total brick buildings in the study area. Their rating results are shown in Figure 23. This portion of our study shows that 71% of the brick structures surveyed in the study area are currently experiencing disinvestment and are in need of rehabilitation.

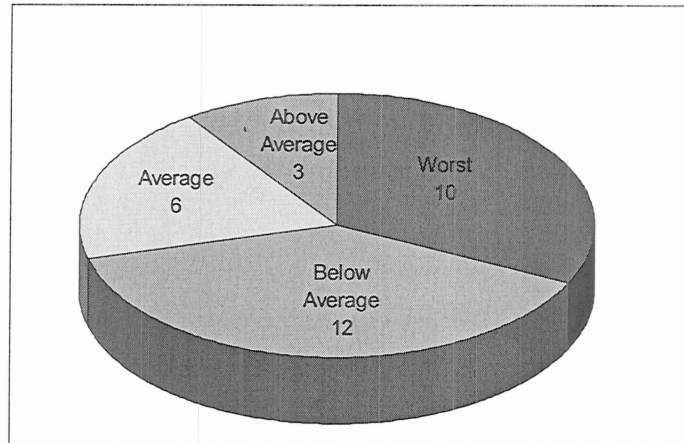


Figure 23. Brick Building Rating Results.

### 4.3.1.3 Conditions of Cement Buildings

There were 8 total cement buildings in the study area. Their rating results are shown in Figure 24. Since there were no cement structures surveyed in the study area that were given a condition of below average, none of the cement structures are currently experiencing disinvestment.

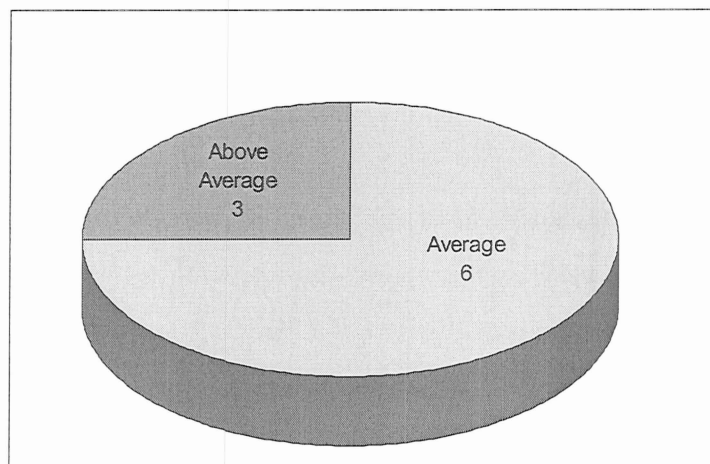


Figure 24. Cement Building Rating Results.

#### 4.3.1.4 Conditions of Wood Buildings

There were 52 total wood buildings in the study area. Their rating results are shown in Figure 25. This portion of our study shows that 83% of the wood structures surveyed in the study area are currently experiencing disinvestment and are in need of rehabilitation.

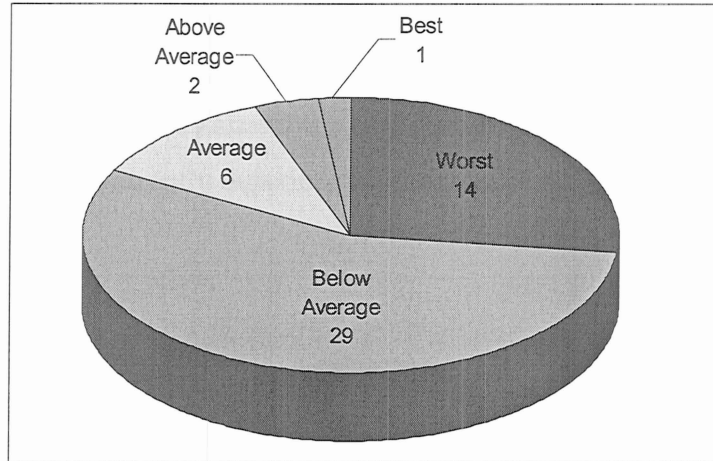


Figure 25. Wood Building Rating Results.

#### 4.3.1.5 Conditions of Vinyl Buildings

There were 123 total vinyl buildings in the study area. Their rating results are shown in Figure 26. This portion of our study shows that 26% of the vinyl structures surveyed in the study area are currently experiencing disinvestment and are in need of rehabilitation.

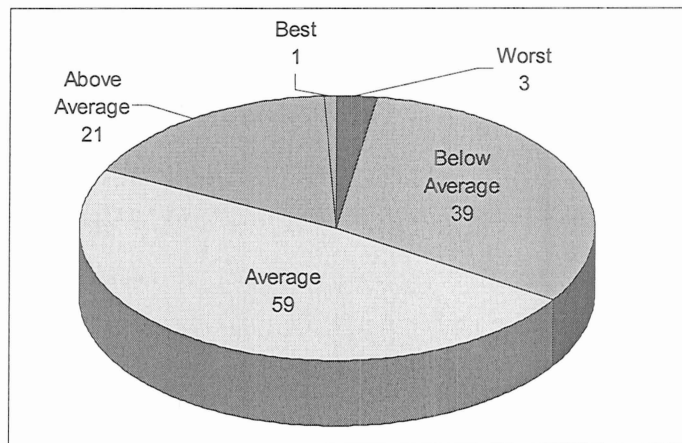


Figure 26. Vinyl Building Rating Results.

### 4.3.2 Building Conditions by Use in Downtown Spencer

This portion of our study allowed us to make assessments of the buildings according to the use of that structure. This allows us to tell which primary building use contributed to the most blight in the study area.

#### 4.3.2.1 Condition of Commercial Buildings

There were 33 total commercial buildings in the study area. Their rating results are shown in Figure 27. This portion of our study shows that 69% of the commercial structures surveyed in the study area are currently experiencing disinvestment and are in need of rehabilitation.

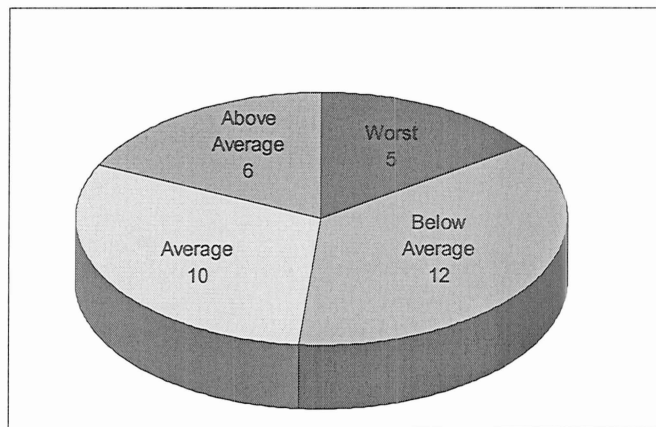


Figure 27. Commercial Building Rating Results.



### 4.3.2.2 Condition of Residential Buildings

There were 150 total residential buildings in the study area. Their rating results are shown in Figure 28. This portion of our study shows that 86% of the residential structures surveyed in the study area are currently experiencing disinvestment and are in need of rehabilitation.

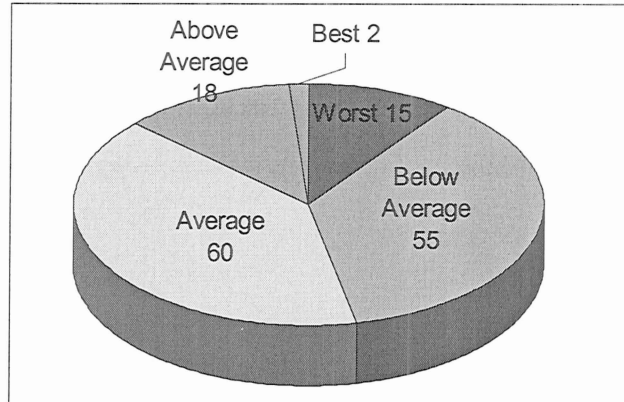


Figure 28. Residential Building Rating Results.

### 4.3.2.3 Condition of Retail Buildings

There were 12 total retail buildings in the study area. Their rating results are shown in Figure 29. This portion of our study shows that 75% of the retail structures surveyed in the study area are currently experiencing disinvestment and are in need of rehabilitation.

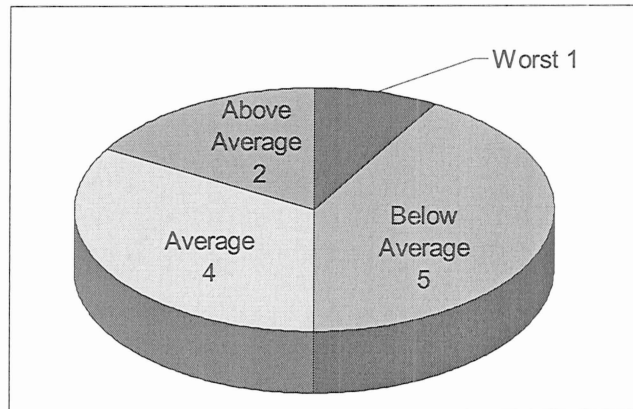


Figure 29. Retail Building Rating Results.

#### 4.3.2.4 Condition of Industrial Buildings

There were 14 total industrial buildings in the study area. Their rating results are shown in Figure 30. This portion of our study shows that 79% of the industrial structures surveyed in the study area are currently experiencing disinvestment and are in need of rehabilitation.

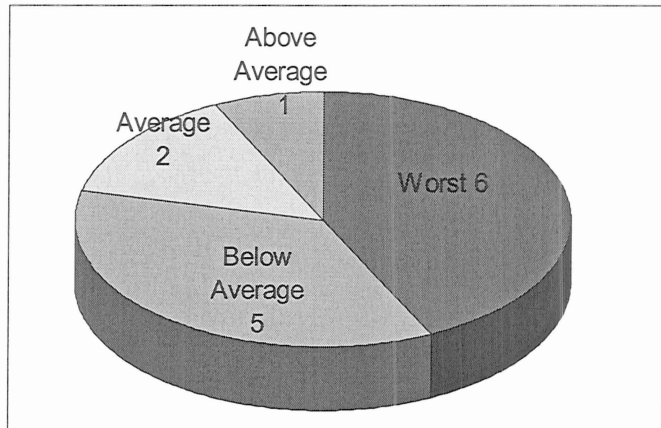


Figure 30. Industrial Building Rating Results.

#### 4.3.2.5 Condition of Mixed-Use Buildings

There were 23 total mixed use buildings in the study area. Their rating results are shown in Figure 31. This portion of our study shows that 87% of the mixed structures surveyed in the study area are currently experiencing disinvestment and are in need of rehabilitation.

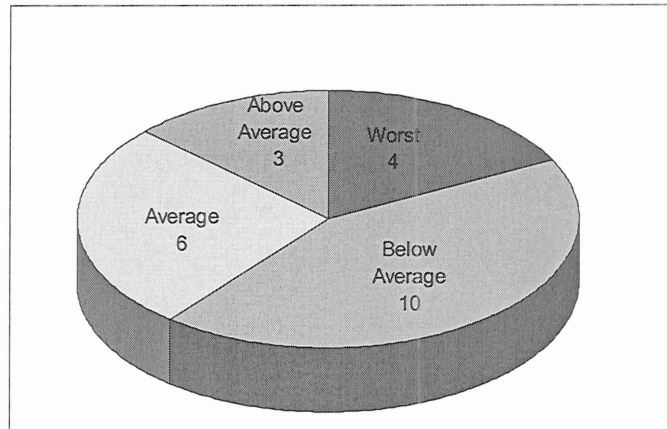
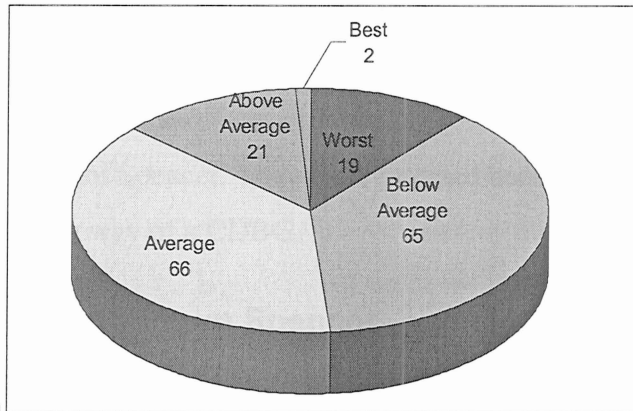


Figure 31. Mixed-Use Rating Results.

### 4.3.2.6 Condition of Residential & Mixed-Use Combined

There were 173 total residential and mixed-use buildings combined in the study



area. Their rating results are shown in Figure 32.

This portion of our study shows that 87% of the residential and mixed structures surveyed in the study area are currently experiencing disinvestment and are in need of rehabilitation. Many towns that apply for state funded grants include a section such as this in their studies. For this reason, we have included it in ours.

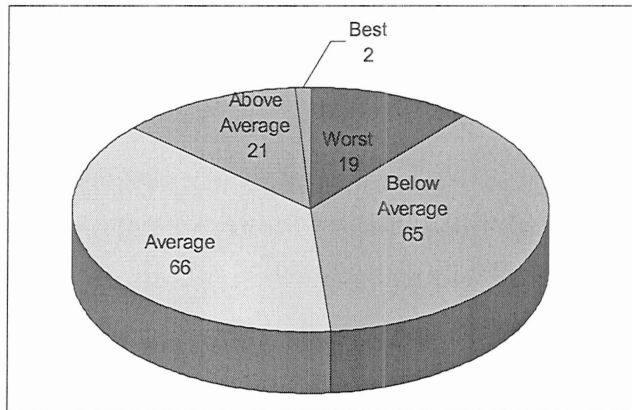


Figure 32. Residential and Mixed-Use Combined Rating Results.

## 4.4 Conditions of Public Infrastructure in Downtown Spencer

The public infrastructure that was surveyed in downtown Spencer was all sidewalks, light poles, telephone and power lines, and parking lots. These infrastructures are observed on a daily basis by the citizens of Spencer. They were targeted because they are all prime candidates for revitalization by way of a CDBG.

### 4.4.1 Conditions of Sidewalks in Downtown Spencer

From this map we were able to spot critical sections where there are no to low grade sidewalks (see Figure 33). This is a significant observation due to the fact that this is a safety issue. Individuals need to walk in the streets or on dangerous paths to move about through the town.

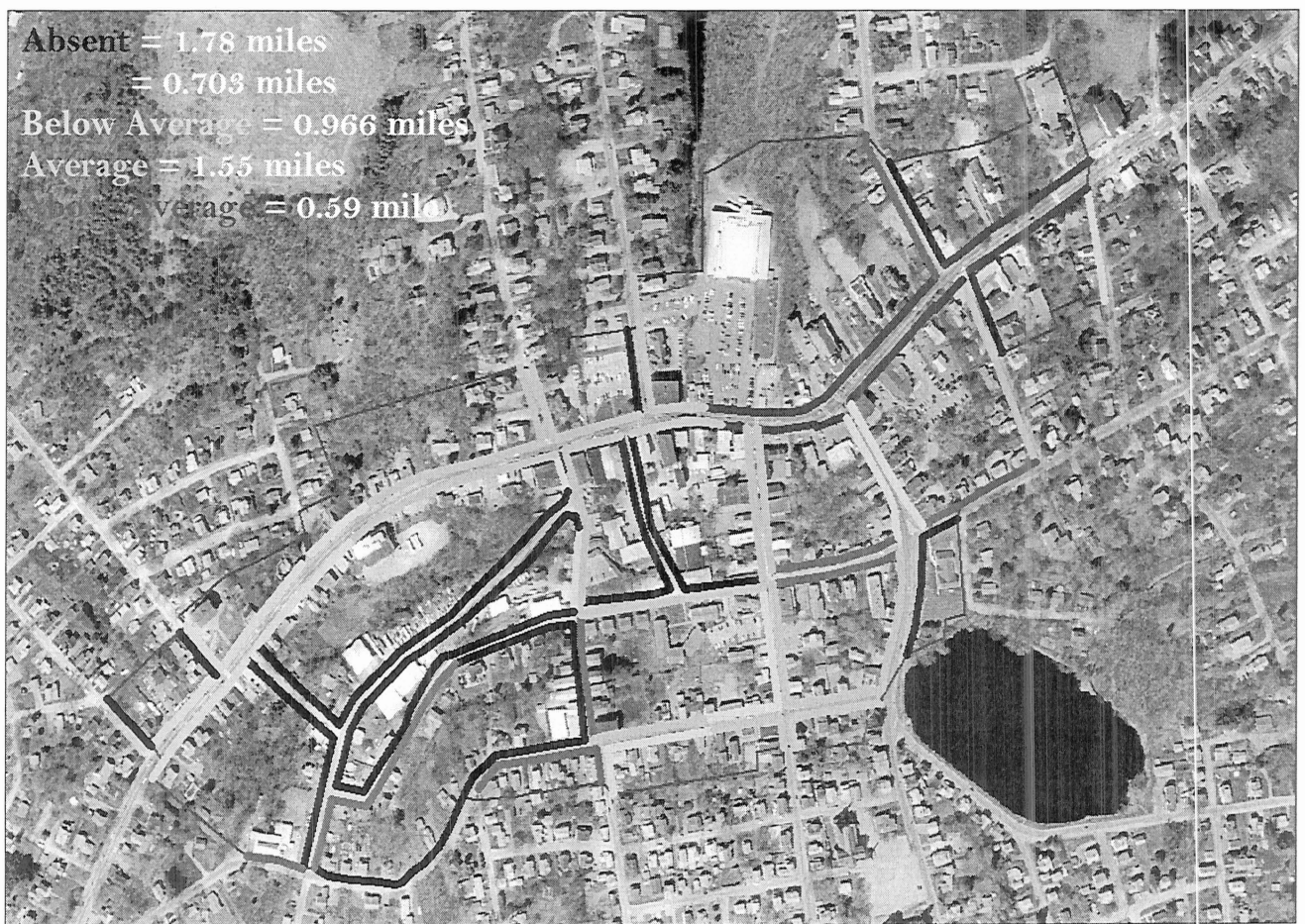


Figure 33. Sidewalk map distinguishing the portions of sidewalk that range from absent to above average.

An interesting trend to notice in our downtown study area is that, starting from the northeast section of the study area and traveling down Route 9, sidewalks greatly deteriorated. This can be compared to the building density. There appears to be more buildings in areas with better sidewalks.

From this map, we measured the total lengths of each condition. The least appearing sidewalks were the ones in above average condition. The most abundant condition for sidewalks was given an absent rating.

#### 4.4.2 Inventory of Street Lights in Downtown Spencer

The yellow dots represent current light poles (see Figure 34). From studying the map, you can see that there are a majority of light poles along Route 9. This may be because that it is a busy street, but every street needs to be lit for safety reasons.



Figure 34. Map that displays light poles in the study area.



Pedestrians can be in danger on dark streets at night. There are a lot of corners where there is a limited sight distance so cars may not be able to spot crossing pedestrians. Especially on streets where there are below average to no sidewalks, as explained in the previous section, well lit streets would be a great improvement to the downtown study area.

#### 4.4.2.1 Inventory of Street Lights

Shown below is a close-up of a segment of light poles (see Figure 35). It shows the ample amount of light poles along Route 9. However, in the lower half of the picture, you can see where the amount of light poles decrease and the number of buildings increase.



Figure 35. Close-up view of light poles along Route 9.

#### 4.4.2.2 Lighting in Downtown Spencer

By adding more street lights in the residential area of the town, this would immensely improve the neighborhood (see Figure 36). Families would feel safer, for example, to walk the streets at night. This, with the combination of improved sidewalks, would make the residential areas a safer and improved environment for families

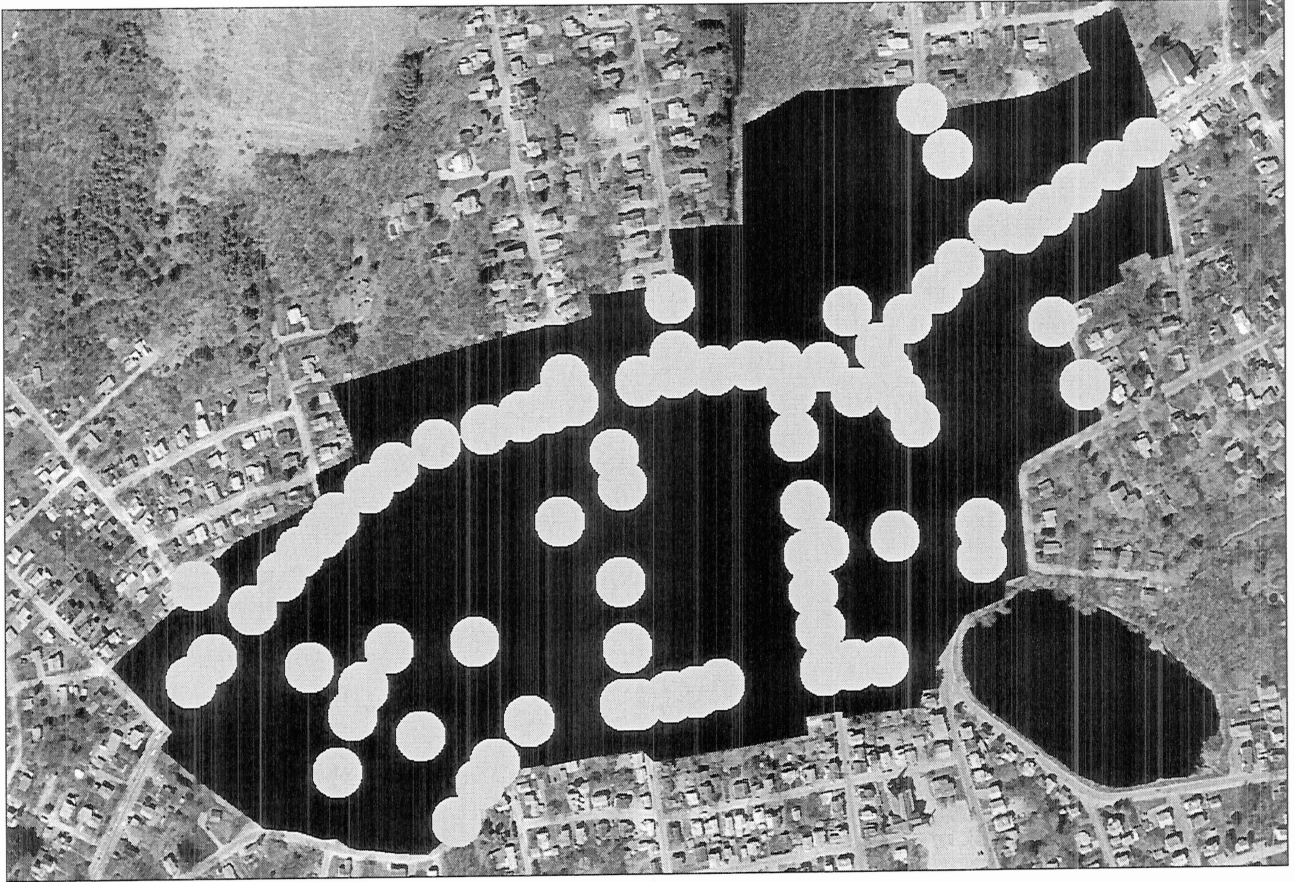


Figure 36. Light distribution in the study area.



#### 4.4.3 Inventory of Telephone Poles and Power Lines in Downtown Spencer

The orange lines drawn on the map represent a power line stringer. The yellow dots show where a telephone pole is located. The map shows how cluttered the streets are, especially on the Route 9 stretch of road (see Figure 37).



Figure 37. Telephone poles and stringers in the study area.

#### 4.4.3.1 Inventory of Power Lines

Pictured below is a close up view of the above telephone and power lines mainly along Route 9 in Downtown Spencer (see Figure 38).



Figure 38. Close-up of stringers along Route 9.

#### 4.4.4 Availability of Parking in Downtown Spencer

It was necessary to survey the placement of the parking lots to estimate the total number of parking spots. These costs would be included in the total amount requested in the grant. A black shaded region represents a current parking lot (see Figure 39).

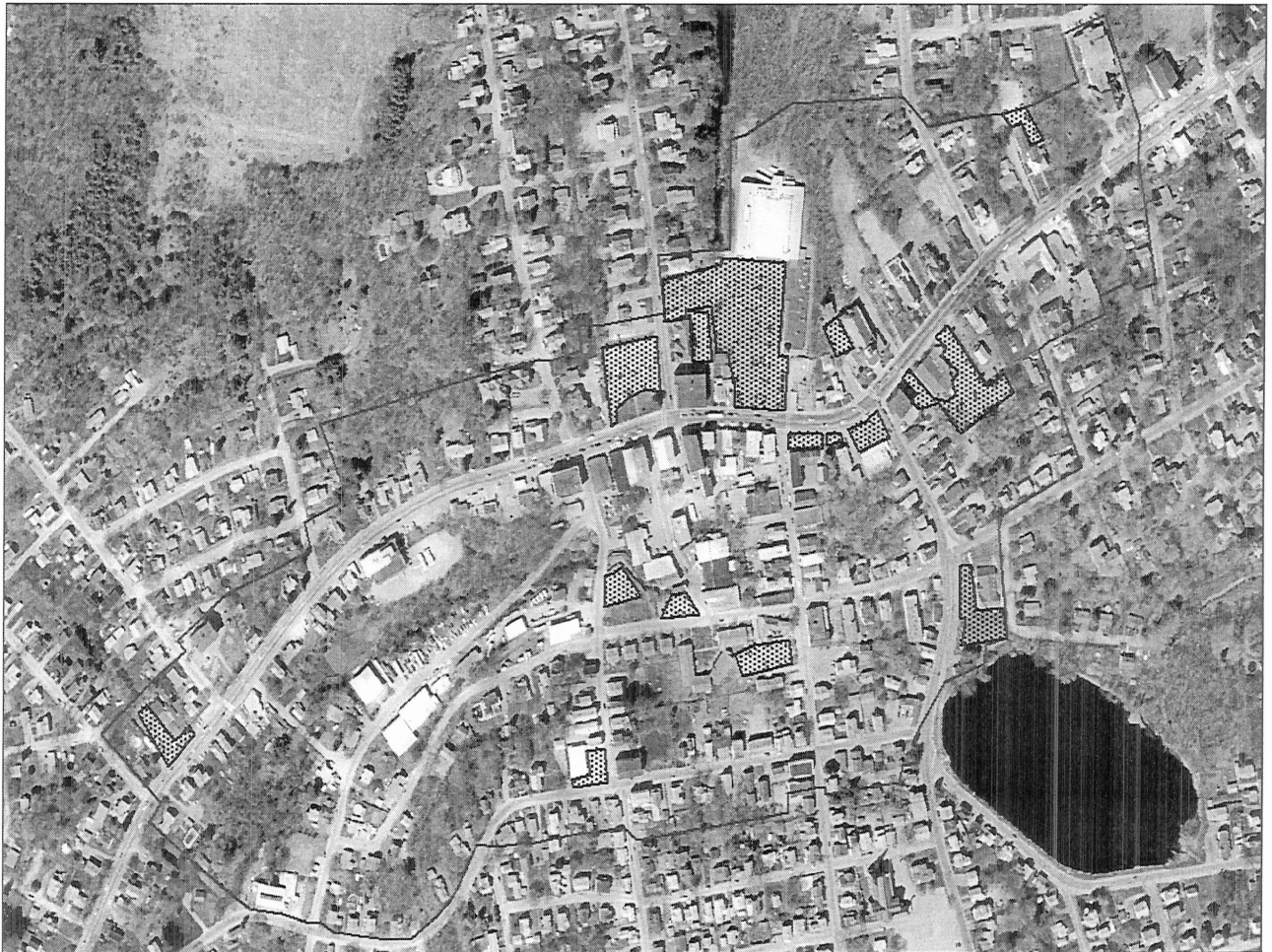


Figure 39. Parking lots in the study area.

From the map, you can see that there are many parking lots in one general area. Not many public parking lots are found throughout the downtown area.



## 4.5 Areas That Would Benefit From Revitalization

The overall ratings for the structures in the target area were solved by using a weighted formula that is described in section 3.5. Our overall building rating results section was put together from all the information extracted from our study. Like mentioned in section 3.5, we took into consideration all components, facades, windows of each structure. The results by total number of buildings in each rating are shown in Figure 40.

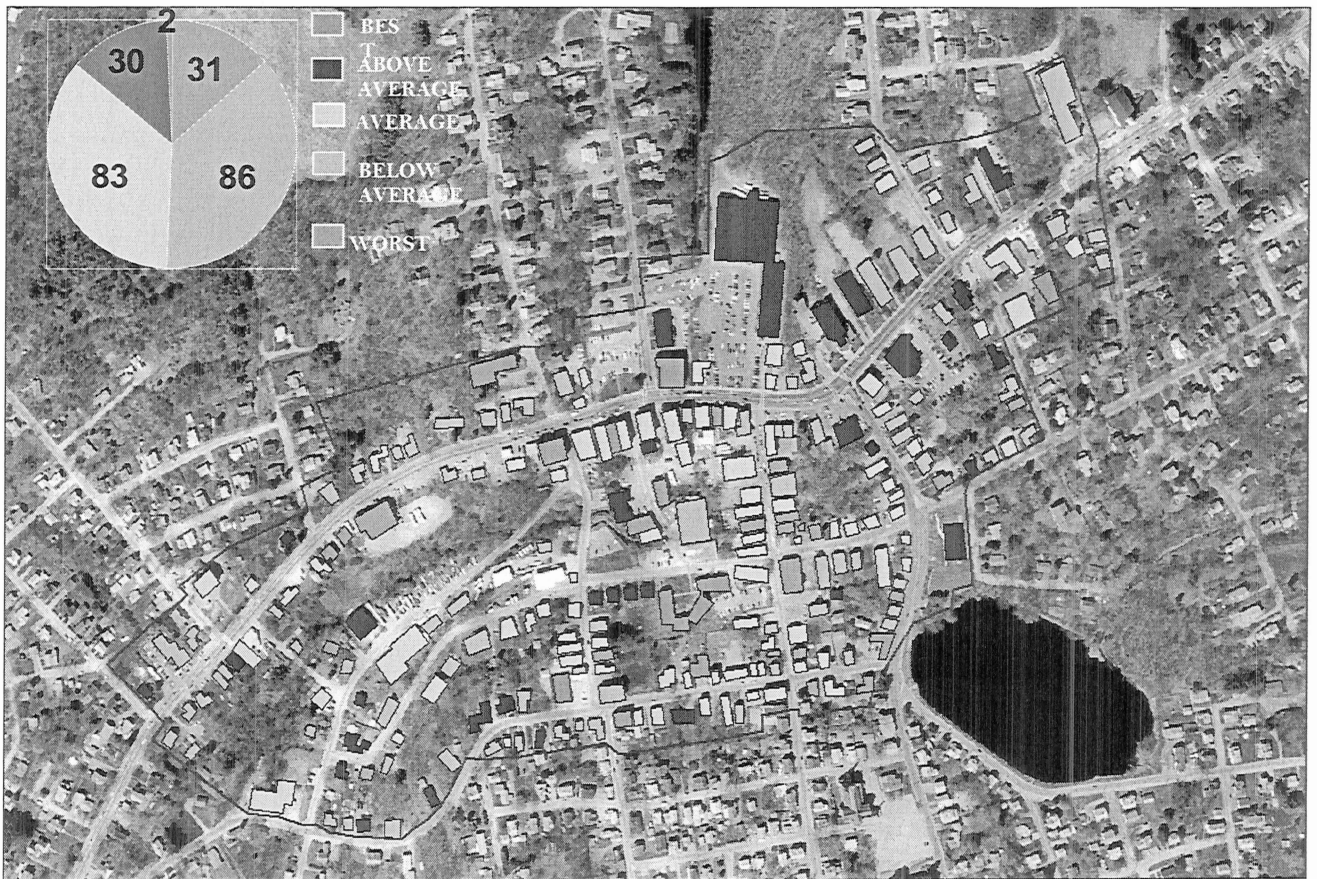


Figure 40. Structure map distinguishing buildings that rat from worst to best.

Out of the 232 total buildings that were surveyed, 200 of them were given a rating of average and below, and 117 were either below average or worst.

These findings were the most important part of our study due to the fact that 86.19% of the total structures that were surveyed were rated average and below. An

outstanding 50.42% of the total structures that were surveyed were rated from below average to worst.

## 5 Conclusion & Recommendations

As stated in the Background chapter of this document, a CDBG grant requires a town to have a significant percentage of blight. Other towns receiving grants that we have studied showed in the range of 70% – 75% disinvestment in their overall downtown building stock.

Spencer is currently experiencing 86.19% of disinvestment in its core downtown area. Residential buildings in the downtown area seemed to be the most problematic as they rated 86% on our blight scale. The other ratings were as follows:

|                       |     |
|-----------------------|-----|
| Industrial Buildings: | 79% |
| Retail:               | 75% |
| Commercial:           | 69% |

Spencer is in dire need of rehabilitation in its core downtown area. We strongly recommend the Town of Spencer take our results into consideration and devise a plan of action to renew its downtown, starting with the public areas containing the highest percentages of blight. Please refer to Appendix B for our complete CDBG proposal.

The following five sections describe our solutions to the town's public infrastructure problems. They include the addition of public parks, extra light distribution, repaired sidewalks, additional public parking, and the burying of power lines.

## 5.1 Possible Park Locations

As we traveled the study area, we noticed that there are few attractions on its side roads. The map provided below shows possible park location within the downtown bounds (see Figure 41).

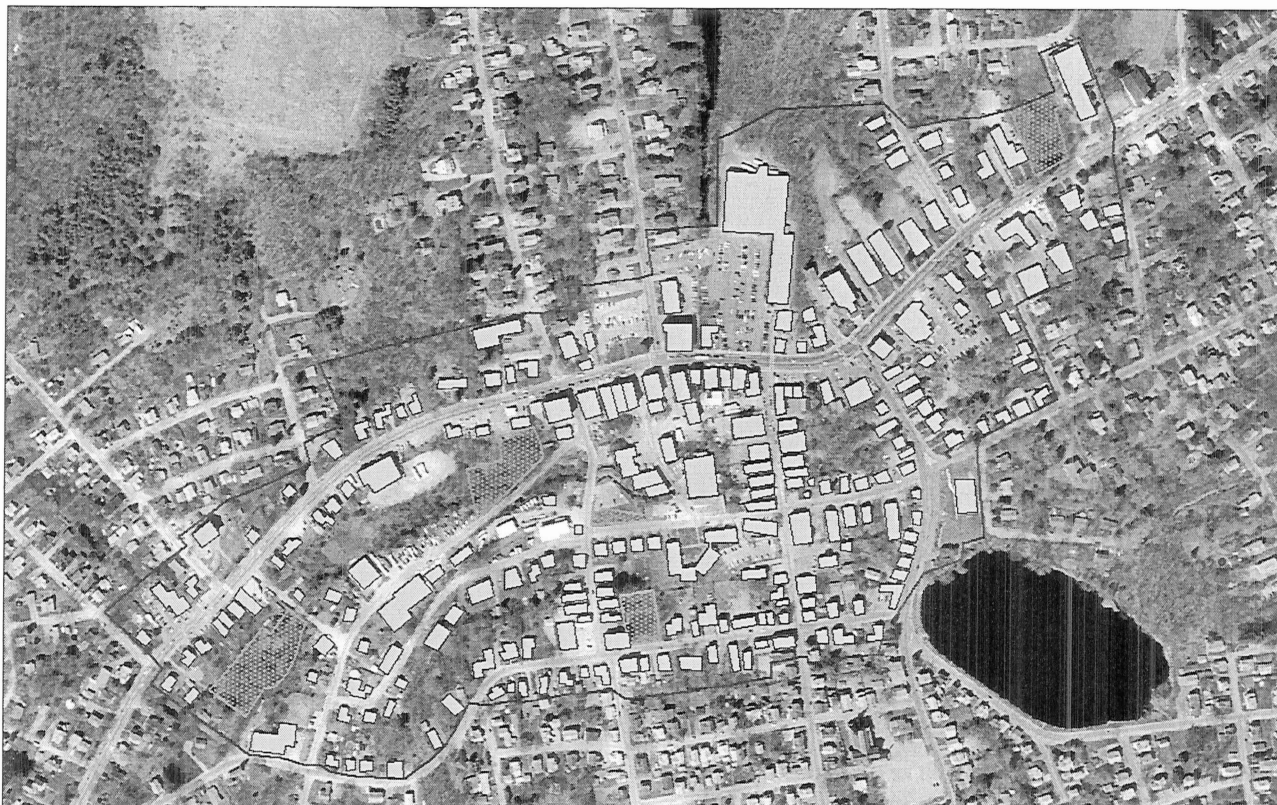


Figure 41. Recommended park locations (shown in green).

Pocket parks within the downtown area will provide the towns people with reason to walk the side streets and take full advantage of their celebrated town. Furthermore, these parks could possibly contain monuments marking famous Spencer events, with plaques next to them providing the park goers with a history lesson. As families walk through Spencer together, a sense of community will be restored, making towns men and women appreciate and enjoy their surroundings.



## 5.2 Extra Light Distribution

In order for the citizens of Spencer to take full advantage of the downtown area, we feel that additional lighting on the side roads off of Route 9 will be necessary. The picture below (see Figure 42) shows the light distribution in Spencer's Downtown.

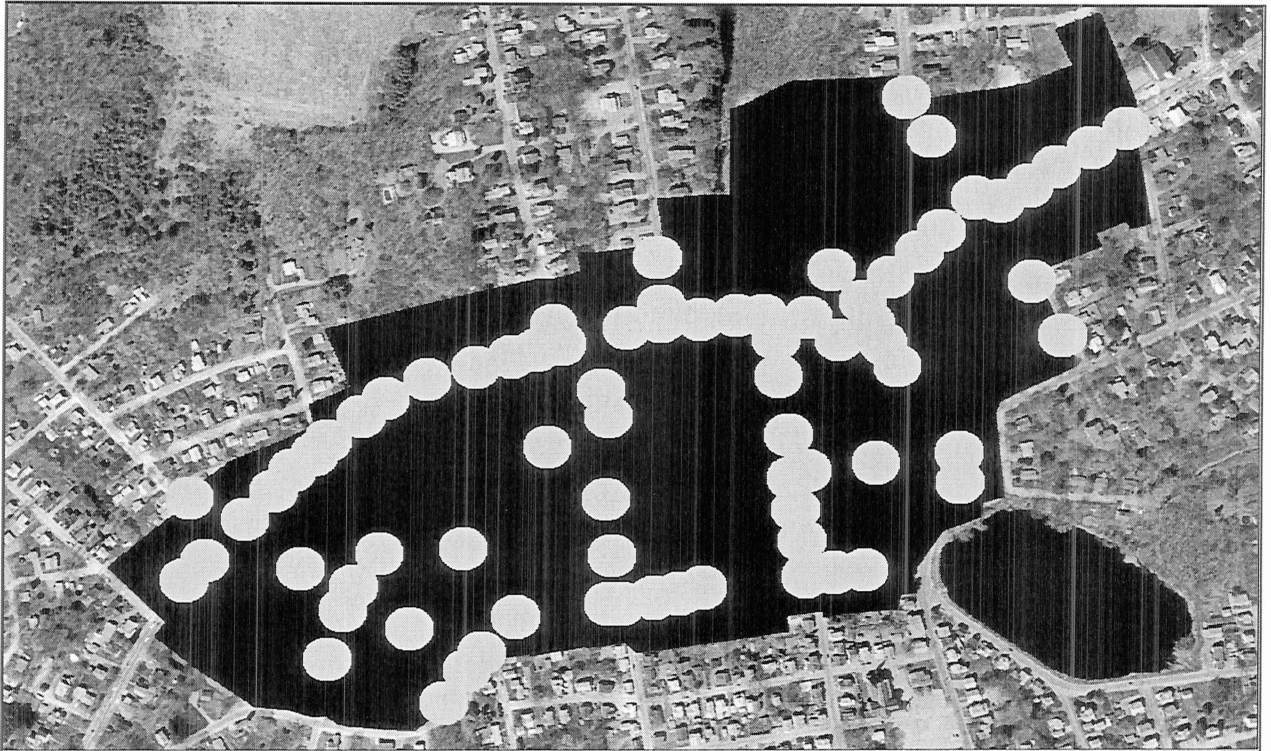


Figure 42. Light distribution in the study area.

The black area shows regions that have poor lighting. As shown, there is an abundance of dark areas south of Route 9. There still remain side streets that do not have adequate street lighting. This is highly a safety issue. Unlit areas can be dangerous to pedestrians if crossing the street at night. In order for people to feel safe in the evening and at night, walking off of the town's primary road, there needs to be sufficient lighting on all side streets. Without this addition, the thought of having attractions pull people off of Route 9, is not a reality.

### 5.3 Repaired Sidewalks

As shown in Figure 43 there are nearly 2 miles of roads that do not contain sidewalks in the study area. The construction and repair of these problematic sidewalks will add to the comfort of town's people walking in the downtown area. Sidewalks are a very important part of the daily safety for individuals. Of the total 5.589 miles of sidewalk in the study area, 3.449 miles of sidewalk remains to be either absent or less than average.

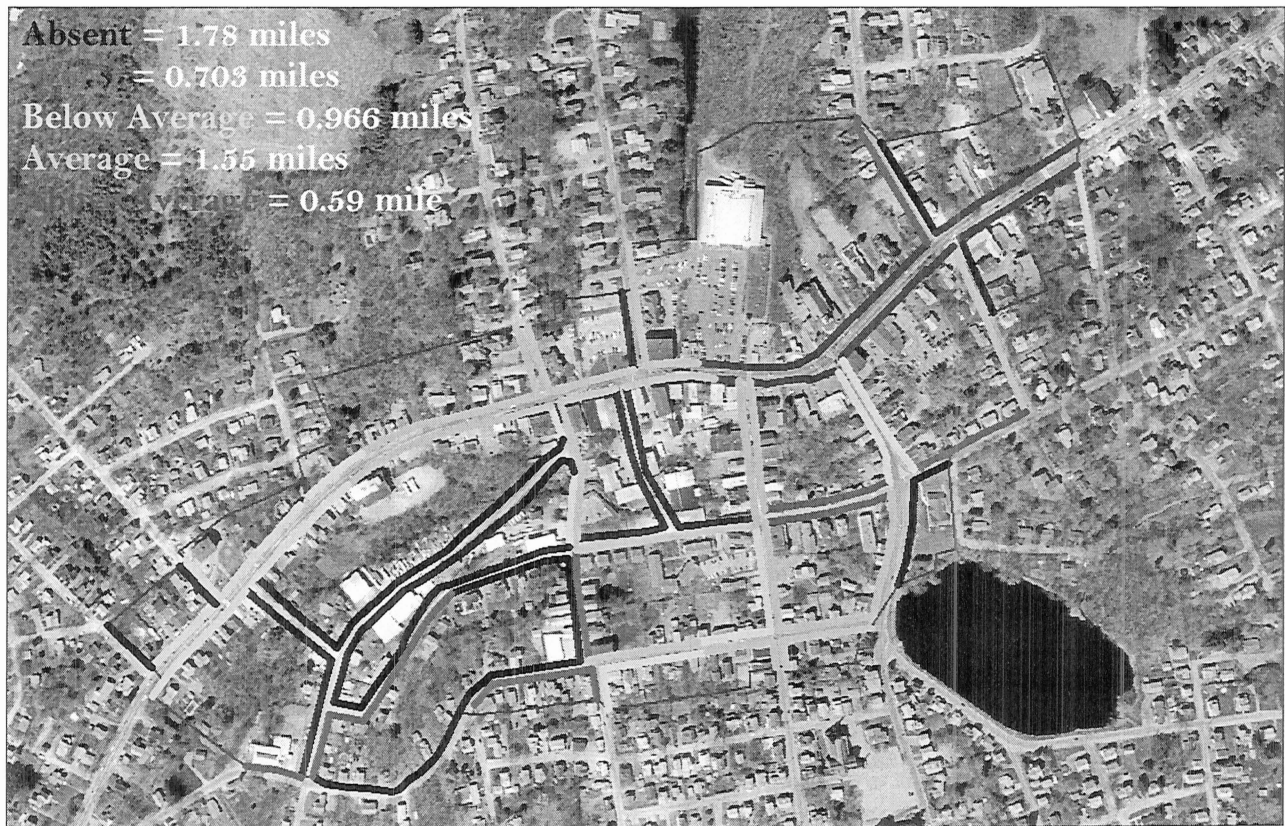


Figure 43. Sidewalk Results in Downtown Spencer.

This number represents almost 62% of the sidewalks. This is a good example of showing how poor the downtown infrastructure really is. The best sidewalks occur along Route 9 with a few above average sidewalks occurring off Route 9. This is, compared with the other infrastructure problems, a reasonably cheap and easy solution to help make Spencer look better. The sidewalks would trim the streets and make everything look more uniform; lessening the amount of times the road just spills onto property.

## 5.4 Additional Public Parking

Figure 44 shows that there are currently 462 public parking spaces in Downtown Spencer. Additional parking lots through a block grant may change the environment of the area completely. In the Massachusetts Zoning Code, it is stated that, for retail buildings, there should be one parking space per 200 square feet of building floor. A quick estimate clearly shows that this is not the case in Spencer. All along Route 9, are retail buildings, and yet only 9 parking lots have any relative access to the stores and shops. If new parking lots are created, a greater amount of people can park and interact with Route 9 stores.



Figure 44. Available Public Parking in Downtown Spencer.

These new parking lots may help attract more customers to smaller shops. A problem might exist where people are not willing to stop and shop around because they are not able to find a spot along an extremely busy road. Another problem may be where they actually do find a parking spot, but it is located too far from where they want to shop. Utilizing the grant to add more parking spaces, in any form, would help build up the smaller, family run shops by attracting more business, boosting the town's economy.

## 5.5 Burying of Power Lines

The following picture is an example of how bad this problem is (see Figure 45). This telephone pole is located on the corner outside Spencer City Hall. It branches off in many directions and causes an extreme eye-sore.

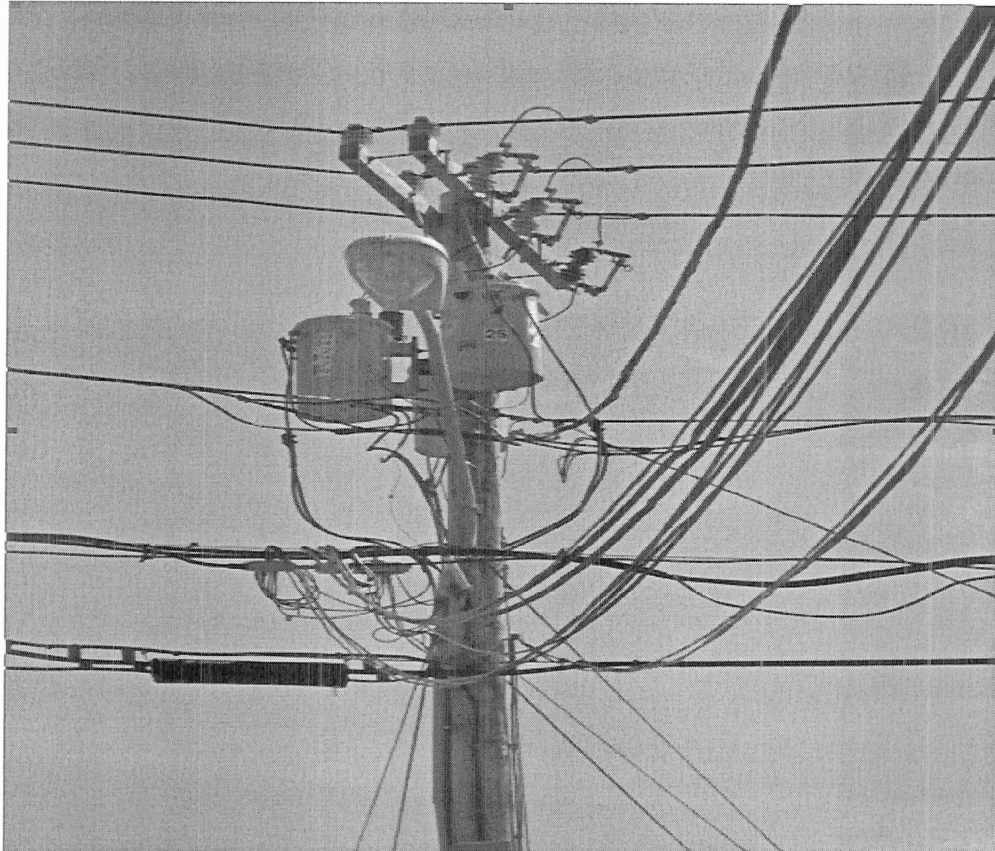


Figure 45. Close-up of a typical utility pole in Downtown Spencer.

A solution to this problem may be to use the acquired grant money to remove these wires and replace them underground, as was recently done in downtown Holden, MA. It is not financially feasible without grant money to accomplish this, as it is very involved. After contacting an Engineer from Massachusetts Electric, he informed us that the company would have to come on site and estimate any costs.

In our opinion, this would greatly improve the atmosphere of the general downtown area. Route 9 in Spencer, with almost all commercial and retail buildings, is the major source of the towns economy. It would certainly appear to be more welcoming

to outsiders if these wires were buried. Simply put, the excess of stringers crossing the roads in the downtown area seem to pollute the neighborhood.

## **5.6 *The Next Steps***

To succeed in renewing Spencer, certain steps must be taken. It will take total cooperation from residents, town officials, and business owners/operators. A good start would be the application for a community development block grant. This will help in raising funds for the restoration of the town. A series of planning must occur and gradual implementation of these ideas. To ensure that all individuals are helping with the restoration, incentives and negotiations with business owners should be provided help move this idea along. Another idea to help get the community involved would be the implementation of a design competition. No one in the town understands what the citizens of Spencer want better than the citizens themselves. If this project was made where everyone was sure to do their part, Spencer can, and will gradually change into a better, safer, and revitalized town.



## 6 Bibliography

“Urban and Rural Population”; pg34: 123 Edition Statistical Abstract of the United States 2003 / Prepared by the chief of the Bureau of Statistics, Treasury Department.

“Community Renewal”: <http://www.communitydevelopment.org/cdbg/index.cfm>

“Administration of The Government, Title XVII: Public Welfare”: General Laws of Massachusetts. Computer File Periodical

“Spencer, Massachusetts: A Brief History”; Spencer Master Plan:  
<http://spencer.mass.info>

“Brownfield’s Assessment Pilots”: United States Environmental Protection Agency.  
<http://www.epa.gov/docs/swerosps/bf/pdf/anortham>

Hamilton, William L.: “Northampton, MA-A Revitalized City”: New York Times Article: April 15, 1999. <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query>



## **Appendix A: Example of CDBG Project Proposal**

### **CDBG Project Description**

**Name of Project:** Spencer Downtown Development Plan

**Type of Project:** Downtown revitalization planning.

**Description:** The proposed project will result in the preparation of a comprehensive development plan for the Downtown Spencer area. The plan will develop a strategy to stabilize and improve the viability of Downtown Spencer so that it will once again serve as the economic, social, and civic center for the community. Implementation of the Downtown Development Plan is expected to provide direct benefits to low and moderate income residents of the Downtown by guiding municipal actions to: eliminate blighted conditions and improve the quality of existing substandard housing without displacing those living there; enhance the economic viability of Downtown, creating new jobs and business opportunities; and improve the physical design of Downtown, making it more accessible and attractive to residents and visitors.

**Need:** Downtown Spencer exhibits high levels of distress. Evidence of this includes deteriorated building conditions, underutilized store fronts, high vacancy levels, and deferred maintenance among building owners. The Spencer Downtown Building Inventory (May 2005) indicates a very high level of building deterioration, with an estimated 87% of housing and mixed use structures and 81.82% of commercial buildings in need of moderate to substantial rehabilitation. Importantly, if improvements of the Downtown Spencer Area are not undertaken within a short-term period, Spencer risks losing much of its historic fabric and sense of community.

**National Objective:** The Spencer Downtown Development Plan project meets the national objective of “elimination of slums and blight on an area basis.”

**Total CDBG Dollars Requested for Project:** \$750,000