VIRGINIA BUSINESS REPORT
An Extension Division Service of the College of Business

A LOOK AT THE COMMERCIAL SECTOR OF BLACKSBURG, VIRGINIA

1972

*A Study Of Merchants' Attitudes Toward
The Prevailing Conditions In The Business Sector*

A. COSKUN SAMLI

AND

JAMES B. WILCOX

September 1972 **Report 3**

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
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PREFACE

This report represents the second attempt to investigate the strengths and weaknesses of the Blacksburg commercial sector. The consumer provided the focal point for the first study while attention was turned to the local merchant, his attitudes and environment, for the second.

As this study is being completed a number of changes have already taken place on the local business scene. Thus, while the results reported here are likely to provide some guidelines for action, similar efforts are needed in the future to maintain current information concerning a dynamic community

Many people contributed to the design and execution of this study. First of all, students in our marketing research classes spent countless hours conducting personal interviews with the local merchants. The Computer Center at Virginia Tech was, as always, very cooperative and efficient during the data processing phase of the study. Our special thanks are due to Dr. Samli's research assistant R. Rajaji who played a key role in coordinating data processing and analysis efforts. Dr. Robert L. King, Head of the Department of Business Administration was very helpful in providing the support the authors needed. Encouragement for the completion of the manuscript was provided by Dr. Edward M. Mazze, Director of Business Extension and by many local merchants, either personally or by mail. Finally, our thanks go to those businessmen, who took time from their busy schedules to participate in the interviews. Without their cooperation, this report would not have been possible.

Needless to say, all errors, omissions and commissions rest solely with the authors.

A. Coskun Samli, Ph.D.
Professor of Business Administration

James B. Wilcox, D.B.A.
Assistant Professor of Business
Administration

Needless to say, all [illegible] the authors.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

Table | Page

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The major findings of this inquiry include:

1. Downtown merchants have less selling space available to them than do other businesses in the area.

2. Sales per square foot is highest in the downtown stores.

3. Downtown merchants employ fewer workers than other area businesses.

4. Fifty-six percent of the total sample reported physical additions or remodeling in recent years.

5. Almost half of the respondents reported an increase in sales over the previous year, while 13% reported a sales decline.

6. Virginia Tech students form a small part of the sales force for downtown businesses.

7. Merchants reported liking Blacksburg because:
   a) It is a friendly area
   b) It is a good business area
   c) It has a university atmosphere.

8. Dislikes of the merchants concerning Blacksburg included:
   a) It has inadequate parking facilities (downtown)
   b) It has a small economic base.

9. Forty-four of the respondents felt that the Blacksburg area has an excellent future.

10. Parking, traffic flows and inadequate space were mentioned as the most pressing problems in Blacksburg.

11. Merchants indicated very light membership in civic organizations and other groups.

12. Corrective measures suggested by the merchants included:
    a) better communication among merchants
    b) having more friendly personnel
    c) creating more competition
    d) planning for growth
    e) creating a parking authority
    f) construction of a downtown shopping mall.

SUMMARY [illegible]

Major findings [illegible]

1. Downtown merchants [illegible] than do other [illegible]

2. Sales [illegible]

3. Downtown [illegible] nesses.

4. [illegible] tions or regul[illegible]

5. Almost [illegible] the previous [illegible]

6. Virginia [illegible] downtown businesses.

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   b) It has a small [illegible]

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11. Merchants indicated very [illegible] other groups.

12. Corrective measures suggested by the [illegible]
   a) better communication among [illegible]
   b) having more friendly [illegible]
   c) creating more competition
   d) planning for growth
   e) creating a parking authority
   f) construction of a downtown [illegible]

Based upon the results of this study, the authors recommend the following actions:

1. Downtown merchants should consider employing more students.

2. Electronics, Clothing, Hobby, Appliance, and Automotive retailers should review their marketing strategies.

3. Methods to facilitate more and better communication and coordination among merchants should be devised.

4. Alternative methods to alleviate the downtown parking and space problem should be considered.

5. Periodic efforts to gain similar information should be exerted.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the most important asset of a small community is its size; an asset that plays different roles in the daily life of the community. The close physical proximity as well as the small number of merchants and consumers facilitate better communication between buyer and seller and between the businessmen themselves.

This study is an attempt to evaluate the future of the business sector of such a community. The local merchants of Blacksburg provided the inputs for the study since the economic future of the town is largely dependent upon their outlook. No matter how good the economic conditions are or how bright the future looks, if the merchants themselves do not recognize the potential, conditions are not likely to improve. Pessimism on the part of the business sector results in unrealized opportunities.

The Need for the Study

Blacksburg is facing a booming consumer demand. Whether or not this demand is satisfied depends in part upon the attitudes and outlook of local merchants. While an expanding economy cannot maintain its momentum with an adverse attitude, the momentum can be accelerated with a positive outlook. This study was conducted in order to analyze the merchants' behavior, attitude and outlook. It was an attempt to evaluate the current and future business climate of Blacksburg. It is hoped that the results of the study can provide insight concerning current attitudes and future potential.

Study Objectives

More specifically, the main objective was to investigate the retailing climate as perceived by Blacksburg merchants by exploring the following issues:

1. What is the prevailing merchant mix?
   a. Is this mix adequate to satisfy consumer needs?
   b. Are the individual components of the mix functioning effectively?

2. What are the merchants' attitudes towards the future of the Blacksburg area?
   a. What are the attitudes of merchants located in the Gables Shopping Center?
   b. What are the attitudes of merchants located in downtown Blacksburg?
   c. What are the attitudes of merchants located on the periphery of the central business district?

3. What are the merchants' attitudes towards downtown Blacksburg's future?
   a. What are the attitudes of merchants located in the Gables Shopping Center?
   b. What are the attitudes of merchants located in downtown Blacksburg?
   c. What are the attitudes of merchants located on the periphery of the central business district?

4. What specific recommendations can be formulated into action by local merchants, civic organizations, or by the local government?

It is hoped that the study findings and specific recommendations can provide direction for future decision making. Since the economy of Blacksburg is dynamic, a number of changes have taken place between the time this study was initiated and the completion of this report. We are of the opinion, however, that the general findings of this study are applicable and that specific recommendations contained in this report deserve attention.

Objectives

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[illegible] mate a [illegible]

[illegible] issues [illegible]

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What are [illegible]

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What are the [illegible]
future? [illegible]

1. What are [illegible]
Shopping [illegible]

2. What are the [illegible]
Black burn [illegible]

3. What are the [illegible]
of the [illegible]

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CHAPTER II

THE STUDY DESIGN AND THE SAMPLE

Data was obtained from 100 businesses in the Blacksburg area. Initially, attempts were made to contact every merchant with the exception of those involved with service stations, real estate offices, banks, and manufacturing establishments. Out of 120 attempts, 100 useful questionnaires were obtained. Since most of the refusals came from barber shops, beauty parlors and small grocery stores, it was felt that virtually all of the key businesses were included in the sample.

The data was collected by means of a 45-60 minute personal interview conducted with either an owner-manager or co-owner at his place of business. Interviewers were carefully trained for the task and made appointments to meet with the respondents at their convenience. Nonetheless, interruptions during the interview were inevitable as respondents were called away by business responsibilities.

For analysis purposes, responses to the questionnaires were categorized into three groups:

1. Downtown - those businesses located in the central business district.
2. Gables: those businesses located in the shopping center south of town.
3. Other: those businesses located on the periphery of the Blacksburg area.

Respondents' Characteristics

As shown in Table 1, restaurants were by far the largest sub-category of respondents (17%), a fact which can be attributed to

the existence of a university in Blacksburg. Other studies have found considerably smaller proportions of eating establishments when dealing with non-university towns.[1] The second largest sub-category contained beauty shops (8%), followed closely by grocery stores (7%). An overall view of Table 1 could lead to speculation that the Blacksburg merchant mix in general and the Downtown mix in particular have less than adequate service and entertainment components.

Table 2 indicates that Downtown respondents have less selling space available than do their counterparts in the Gables and other categories. Both Gables and Other businesses are located at sites where space is relatively plentiful as opposed to downtown where there appears to be a shortage of space. The same pattern is evident for non-selling space, presented in Table 3.

One of the most important characteristics of merchants is the years of business experience they have had. It may be claimed that the number of years in business correlates positively with the probability of success. From this point of view Gables respondents were ahead with an average of 15.6 years followed closely by downtown merchants (13.9 years). Table 4 displays the two extreme groups that prevail in Downtown; those who have had the least experience (17 of 60) and those who had the most (13 of 60).

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[1]See for ex. A. Coskun Samli and A. E. Prell Central Business District, Granite City Illinois, Business Research Bureau, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, 1966, pp. 220; and A.E. Prell and A. Coskun Samli, The Challenge of Regionalism: Central Business District Study Herrin Illinois, Business Research Bureau, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, 1966, pp. 150.

TABLE 1

BUSINESS CLASSIFICATION OF RESPONDENTS

Business Type	Downtown	Gables	Other	Total
Dept. Stores	1	3	-	4
Men's Clothing	4	-	-	4
Women's Clothing	2	1	-	3
Restaurant	7	3	7	17
Beauty Shop	5	1	2	8
Hardware/Lumber	3	-	-	3
Jewelry Store	2	-	-	2
Gift Shop	2	-	1	3
Appliances	2	1	-	3
Furniture/Home Furnishings	3	2	1	6
Records-home electronics	3	-	1	4
Shoe Stores	2	1	-	3
Car Dealers	-	-	2	2
Service Stores (repair shops, etc.)	1	-	3	4
Florists/Nurserys	-	-	1	1
Drug Stores	4	1	-	5
Fabrics	1	-	1	2
Grocery	3	2	2	7
Book Store	2	-	-	2
Other	6	1	-	7
Mobile Homes	-	-	1	1
Theatres	1	-	-	1
Hobby Shop	1	-	-	1
Antique Shop	2	-	-	2
Automobile Supply	2	-	-	2
Pet Shop	-	-	1	1
Service Stations	1	-	1	2
Total	60	16	24	100

TABLE 2

SELLING SPACE

Sq. Ft. of Selling Space	Downtown	Gables	Other	Total
0-1000	28	2	5	35
1001-2000	14	3	4	21
2001-3000	7	1	5	13
3001-10,000	3	4	1	8
10,001-20,000	4	4	3	11
20,001-50,000	2	2	3	7
over 50,000	2	-	3	5
Total	60	16	24	100
Average	(5,033)	(10,250)	(13,646)	(7,935)

TABLE 3

NON-SELLING SPACE

Sq. Ft. of Non-Selling Space	Downtown	Gables	Other	Total
0-500	38	6	12	56
501-1,000	11	2	1	14
1,001-2,000	3	1	4	8
over 2,000	8	7	7	22
Total	60	16	24	100

TABLE 4

BUSINESS EXPERIENCE

Years	Downtown	Gables	Other	Total
0-5	17	2	8	27
6-10	8	3	4	15
11-15	7	2	1	10
16-20	7	4	5	16
21-25	8	3	3	14
more than 25	13	2	3	18
Total	60	16	24	100
Average	(13.9)	(15.6)	(12.5)	(13.8)

Business experience in one area perhaps is not as good as experience in different localities. In fact, some businessmen who have been in one area for a long time may become somewhat stagnant and tradition bound. Such a development does not indicate health in a trading area. As opposed to the other two areas, almost 25% of the downtown merchants have had 20 or more years of business experience in Blacksburg(Table 5).

TABLE 5

BUSINESS EXPERIENCE IN BLACKSBURG

Years	Downtown	Gables	Other	Total
0-5	30	11	12	53
6-10	6	4	8	18
11-15	7	-	1	8
16-20	3	1	2	6
21-25	8	-	-	8
more than 25	6	-	1	7
Total	60	16	24	100
Average	(10.0)	(4.8)	(7.0)	(8.5)

CHAPTER III

OPERATIONS OF THE RESPONDENTS

Relatively speaking, Downtown merchants appear to be smaller than their shopping center or Other counterparts based upon sales volume (Table 6). However, if sales per square foot is considered, Downtown merchants appear to make more efficient use of their limited space. On the average, Downtown businesses generate $26 for each square foot of selling space, while Gables is second with $23 sales per square foot and Others are last with only $14.50 per square foot.

Consistent with their spatial limitations, Downtown merchants claimed relatively fewer employees (Table 7) than shopping center merchants who on the average indicated the largest number of employees. Others fell between the two extremes.

Some 11% of the total survey respondents reported an increase in number of employees in the last year (Table 8) with Downtown accounting for the greatest proportion. None of the merchants responding indicated a reduction in the size of their work force.

If we look at the employment change since the late 60's it becomes obvious that respondents located in the Gables shopping center experienced the most rapid growth (Table 9). This was expected however, since the shopping center was fairly new and had not yet reached its peak size in employment.

Having student employees is important for Blacksburg retailers. Since a large proportion of their markets are composed of students, it stands to reason that student salesmen can communicate better with student

TABLE 6

SALES VOLUME

Sales	Downtown	Gables	Other	Total
Less than $10,000	6	-	4	10
10,000 to 19,999	7	-	-	7
20,000 to 39,999	4	1	2	7
40,000 to 59,999	2	1	1	4
60,000 to 99,999	13	4	2	19
100,000 to 199,999	11	1	3	15
200,000 to 399,999	7	3	5	15
400,000 to 599,999	1	2	1	4
600,000 and over	1	1	2	4
No Answer	8	3	4	15
Total	60	16	24	100
Average	(120,000)	(235,000)	(197,000)	(132,000)

TABLE 7

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES

Number of Employees	Downtown	Gables	Other	Total
0-5	34	1	10	45
6-10	15	5	6	26
11-15	6	6	3	15
16-20	2	-	1	3
21-25	1	1	2	4
26 and up	2	3	2	7
Total	60	16	24	100
Average	(6.6)	(13.8)	(9.5)	(8.5)

TABLE 8

EMPLOYMENT CHANGE SINCE LAST YEAR

Change	Downtown	Gables	Other	Total
Increase	8	1	2	11
Decrease	-	-	-	-
No Change	52	15	22	89
Total	60	16	24	100

TABLE 9

EMPLOYMENT CHANGE SINCE LATE 1960's

Change	Downtown	Gables	Other	Total
Increase	10	7	2	19
Decrease	-	-	-	-
No Change	50	9	22	81
Total	60	16	24	100

buyers. More than 50 percent of the Downtown respondents employed no students at all. Only four of the Gables respondents reported not having student employees (Table 10). At the same time 1/6 of the Downtown and Other respondents employ between 51-100% student employees.

TABLE 10

PERCENT STUDENT EMPLOYEES

Percent	Downtown	Gables	Other	Total
0	32	4	12	48
1-50	18	11	8	37
51-100	10	1	4	15
Total	60	16	24	100

Since Virginia Tech plays a special role in Blacksburg's economy it is important to determine the relative emphasis put on Tech-related employees (e.g. relatives of students and/or faculty). Very small proportions of Tech-related employees were reported by the three groups of respondents. All in all, 63% of the respondents did not employ Tech related employees (Table 11). Table 12 illustrates the opposite of Table 11. The largest proportion of the respondents who have more than 50% non-tech related employees are located in Gables Shopping center.

TABLE 11

PERCENT TECH-RELATED EMPLOYEES

Percent	Downtown	Gables	Other	Total
0	40	7	16	63
1-50	17	6	5	28
51-100	3	3	3	9
Total	60	16	24	100

TABLE 12

PERCENT NON-TECH RELATED EMPLOYEES

Percent	Downtown	Gables	Other	Total
0	10	1	3	14
1-50	15	5	6	26
51-100	35	10	15	60
Total	60	16	24	100

Remodeling and Expansion:

An analysis of activities of the responding merchants as to whether they have done any remodeling or adding new departments could indicate the health of the local economic base. A large majority (55%) of the Downtown respondents reported additions or remodeling during the recent years (Table 13). Fifty-six percent of the total sample reported some remodeling or physical additions which is indicative of the dynamic economy of Blacksburg.

TABLE 13

REMODELING OR PHYSICAL ADDITIONS

Additions/ Remodeling	Downtown	Gables	Other	Total
Yes	35	8	13	56
No	25	8	11	44
Total	60	16	24	100

Although not as widely practiced as physical additions or remodeling, departmental additions also have been quite popular among the survey participants. Table 14 indicates that especially in the Gables group, a large proportion of the respondents have added new departments in recent years. This is somewhat expected since this group of businesses is relatively new and still growing.

By looking at the ownership of the place of business and/or the length of lease individual businesses have it is possible to draw inferences relating to the health of local business climate. As a whole, the study participants showed a small proportion of ownership of the building which they presently occupy. Only some 23 percent reported ownership (Table 15). If the merchants don't own the building they may not feel a strong commitment to the area and hence the economic base may be somewhat shaky. Only the respondents who function at the periphery of the Blacksburg market indicated a large proportion of ownership (47%).

An analysis of the length of lease indicates that some 11 percent of the total survey respondents presently have leases which are less than 6 months (Table 16). While these results might partially be explained by a correlation between length of lease and years of experience, such a short term lease is not likely to improve stability of the business climate. As can be seen, these leases are primarily in the Downtown area which may indicate a deep seated problem in this group. Perhaps closely related are the respondent's plans to continue at the present place of business. More than 10% of the Downtown respondents indicated that they will not continue in that location as [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] may be [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] relatively new [illegible].

[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] these [illegible] [illegible] have [illegible] [illegible] relating to the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] participants [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] the [illegible] [illegible] Only [illegible] [illegible] (Table 15). If the [illegible] [illegible] strong [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] shaky. Only [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] strong market [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible].

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TABLE 14

DEPARTMENTAL ADDITIONS

Departmental Additions	Downtown	Gables	Other	Total
Yes	23	7	6	36
No	37	9	18	64
Total	60	16	24	100

TABLE 15

OWNERSHIP OF BUILDING

Own	Downtown	Gables	Other	Total
Yes	10	2	11	23
No	47	14	12	73
Total	57	16	23	96

TABLE 16

LENGTH OF LEASE

Length (Months)	Downtown	Gables	Other	Total
1	5	1	1	7
2-6	4	0	-	4
7-12	10	-	2	12
13-18	-	-	1	1
19-24	1	1	1	3
more than 24	19	8	5	32
Total	39	10	10	59

illustrated in Table 17. The fact that a number of merchants do not plan to continue at their present location can be traced to the fact that 15% of the respondents in the Downtown area reported a decline in their sales over the previous year (Table 18). Even though adverse national and economic conditions may be partially responsible for this situation, it is possible that some merchants are blaming their location for this outcome. However, almost half of the respondents reported a growth over the previous year. This performance appeared to be better than that experienced by respondents during the late 60's. Only 22% of the total sample reported an increase in their sales since the late 60's (Table 19), as opposed to 43 percent of the respondents reporting a growth in their sales during the past year.

Earlier it was stated that only 10% of the downtown merchants employ students who amount to more than 50% of their total work force. This figure appears to be quite inadequate if we consider the fact that 33 percent of the Downtown respondents reported more than 50% of their sales directly to students (Table 20).

TABLE 17

PLANS TO CONTINUE AT PRESENT LOCATION

Plans	Downtown	Gables	Other	Total
Yes	54	15	21	90
No	6	1	3	10
Total	60	16	24	100

[illegible] The fact that a number of respondents do not [illegible] at the present time [illegible] in regard to the fact [illegible] has resulted in a decline [illegible] over [illegible] outcome [illegible] however, [illegible] accounts for [illegible] by reason [illegible] late 60's [illegible] 22% [illegible] in their sales [illegible] of the respondents [illegible] growth in their [illegible] past year.

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[illegible]

[illegible]	[illegible]	Downt[illegible]	[illegible]
[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]

TABLE 18

SALES CHANGE SINCE LAST YEAR

Change	Downtown	Gables	Other	Total
Increase	27	7	9	43
Decrease	9	2	2	13
No Change	24	7	13	44
Total	60	16	24	100

TABLE 19

SALES CHANGE SINCE LATE 60's

Change	Downtown	Gables	Other	Total
Increase	16	1	5	22
Decrease	6	1	1	8
No Change	38	14	18	70
Total	60	16	24	100

TABLE 20

PERCENT SALES TO STUDENTS

Percent	Downtown	Gables	Other	Total
0-25	20	8	10	38
26-50	20	6	9	35
51-75	11	2	4	17
76-100	9	-	1	10
Total	60	16	24	100

CHAPTER IV

THE LIKES AND DISLIKES OF THE RESPONDENTS

The attitude of merchants towards the area can be partially assessed by determining what they like and dislike about Blacksburg. Having a friendly area appeared to be very important to the merchants (42% of the response). Merchants also indicated that this is a good business area (Table 21) and university atmosphere contributed heavily to the well being of the area (29% of the response). Future potential and student business also were appreciated by the respondents.

There were also a number of dislikes. In a summary form these were related to financial, economic, people and physical aspects (Table 22). More specifically,Table 23 indicates that the most serious dislike stems from the conditions of parking facilities. Previous reports have also emphasized this point.[1] Some merchants also disliked the fact that the total economic base is relatively small (7%). Disposition of the towns people and taxes were also mentioned.

Along with the likes and dislikes an attitude scale was developed in order to determine the respondents' attitude to Blacksburg proper and Downtown in particular. As shown in Table 24, 44 percent of all of the respondents indicated that in their view, the Blacksburg area has an excellent future. Relatively speaking, Downtown respondents had only 36 percent sharing this view as opposed to 68% of the respondents in the Gables shopping center.

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[1]See for example: A. Coskun Samli, A Look At Consumption Patterns in Blacksburg, Virginia, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University Extension Division, 1971.

TABLE 21

REASON FOR LIKING AREA

Reason	Downtown	Gables	Other	Total
University Atmosphere	20	1	8	29
Good Business Area	20	8	6	34
Friendly Area	24	6	12	42
Convenient to Customer	2	2	3	7
Future Potential	15	2	6	23
Town Atmosphere	15	2	2	19
Student Business	15	4	5	24
Customer Turnover	3	1	-	4
Other	3	1	1	5
Total	117	27	43	187

TABLE 22

REASONS FOR DISLIKING AREA
(Summary)

Reason	Downtown	Gables	Other	Total
Financial	4	-	3	7
Economic	9	2	3	14
People	12	2	6	20
Physical Facilities	15	-	2	17
Total	40	4	14	58

TABLE 23

DETAILED DISTRIBUTION OF DISLIKES

Reason	Downtown	Gables	Other	Total
Shoplifting	1	1	2	4
Employee Quality	1	-		1
Price Consciousness	2	-		2
Taxes	3	-	3	6
Parking Facilities	8	-	1	9
No Room for Expansion	4	-	-	4
Small Economic Base	5	-	2	7
Uncooperative Merchants	3	-	1	4
Tech vs. Town	3	-	-	3
Rents too High	2	-	1	3
Slow Summers	2	2	-	4
Disposition of Towns People	3	1	3	7
Other[1]	3	-	1	4
Total	40	4	14	58

[1]Includes negative promotion, town council, goods transportation, and strict ABC laws.

TABLE 24

RATING OF BUSINESS FUTURE OF BLACKSBURG AREA

Expectations	Downtown	Gables	Other	Total
Excellent (1)	22	11	11	44
Good (2)	36	5	10	51
Fair (3)	1	-	2	3
Poor (4)	1	-	1	2
Bad (5)	-	-	-	-
Total	60	16	24	100
Average	1.7	1.3	1.7	

When the future of Downtown was discussed, the response does not appear to be as optimistic as it was for Blacksburg proper. Only 18 percent of the respondents considered the business future of Downtown Blacksburg to be "excellent" (Table 25). Respondents from Gables Shopping Center appeared to be slightly more optimistic about Downtown Blacksburg than the Downtown merchants themselves as indicated by average scores of 2.1 versus 2.2 respectively (the smaller the score the better it is).

TABLE 25

BUSINESS FUTURE OF DOWNTOWN BLACKSBURG

Expectations	Downtown	Gables	Other	Total
Excellent (1)	11	5	2	18
Good (2)	29	6	10	45
Fair (3)	14	3	10	27
Poor (4)	6	2	1	9
Bad (5)	-	-	1	1
Total	60	16	24	100
Average	2.2	2.1	2.5	2.3

Reasons Behind the Attitude

Although determining the attitude of merchants is important in itself, by knowing the reasons behind the positive or negative attitude, more insight could be gained and corrective action could be taken.

Table 26 indicates that growth of Tech and growth of the town itself account for most of the optimism towards the business future of Blacksburg.

Shopping centers and parking facilities primarily reflect the relative pessimism towards the business future of Downtown Blacksburg (Table 27). A 6 percent of "no comment," response as to the problems of Downtown by downtown merchants may also indicate a slight problem of not being very interested and/or not analyzing the problems in the way they should be.

In addition to reasons behind their attitude, the respondents were asked to name major problems prevailing in Blacksburg (Table 28). Parking was mentioned most frequently, (25% of the total response). Traffic was considered to be the second most important problem with inadequate space being the third. It may be hypothesized that the respondents primarily had Downtown in mind when they listed these problems. Special emphasis may be put on two special responses: "poor group relations" and "don't know." They may signify perhaps a relative lack of awareness and interest in the community's economic profile.

Finally merchants' membership in different civic and other groups may indicate the strength or weakness of the community. Of the 60 participants from Downtown Blacksburg, only 16 indicated membership in the Downtown Merchants Association. Only 13 reported being a member of the Chamber of Commerce (Table 29). These figures may indicate to some degree an absence of interest. Without the existence of interest and group action, economic opportunities cannot possibly materialize.

TABLE 26

REASONS FOR EXPECTATIONS OF BLACKSBURG AREA

Reasons	Downtown	Gables	Other	Total
Growth of Tech	28	6	7	51
Growth of Town	22	8	11	31
Increased Competition	4	-	3	7
New Industry	3	1	2	6
Other	3	1	1	5
Total	60	16	24	100

TABLE 27

REASONS FOR EXPECTATIONS OF DOWNTOWN AREA

Reasons	Downtown	Gables	Other	Total
Shopping Centers	14	1	6	21
Growth of Area	22	7	10	39
Parking Facilities	12	6	5	23
No Comment	6	-	-	6
Other	6	2	3	11
Total	60	16	24	100

TABLE 28

MAJOR PROBLEMS IN BLACKSBURG

Problem	Downtown		Gables		Other		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Traffic	10	9	4	16	5	14	19	11
Lack of Space[1]	9	8	1	4	2	6	12	7
Parking	31	28	5	20	6	17	42	25
Taxes	1	1	-	-	2	6	3	2
Prices	3	3	-	-	3	7	6	4
Services Lacking[2]	2	2	1	4	2	6	5	3
Competition[3]	4	4	-	-	1	3	5	3
Poor Group Relations[4]	6	5	1	4	2	6	9	5
Unpleasant Sales People	1	1	-	-	3	7	4	2
Dirty Town	2	2	2	8	-	-	4	2
Poor Planning for Buildings and Growth	26	24	1	4	1	3	28	17
Lack of Federal Support	2	2	-	-	-	-	2	1
Don't Know	6	5	7	28	2	6	15	9
None	4	4	2	8	3	7	9	5
Other[5]	3	3	1	4	3	7	7	4
Total	110		25		35		170	

[1]Includes Real Estate too Expensive
[2]Includes Appearance, Administration, Poor Buildings, etc.
[3]Includes too many small businesses
[4]Includes Static Business Attitude
[5]Includes Dependence on College, Lack of Quality, Needs More Houses, better protection, no customer attraction.

TABLE 29

CIVIC GROUP MEMBERSHIP

Group	Downtown		Gables		Other		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Downtown Merchants Assoc.	16	37			1	8	17	24
Chamber of Commerce	13	30	8	50	6	50	27	38
Jaycees	4	9			-		4	6
Kiwanis	5	12	1	6	1	8	7	10
Gables Association	-		5	31			5	7
Hokie Club	-				1	8	1	1
Rotary	-							
Lions	1	2	2	13			3	4
Other	4	9	-		3	25	7	10
Total	43		16		12		71	

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Given that the problems reported in Chapter IV do exist, what actions should be taken by local groups? This question was asked of the respondents in order to determine the most frequently mentioned suggestions. The most important response was Promotion/Communication (Table 30) with a 24% of the total response. Primarily, this suggests better communication among the merchants as well as the merchants and the community. Secondly, joint efforts in promoting business can be inferred from this response. Having more friendly personnel (12%) and creating more competition (11%) also are positive recommendations.

The Planning Committee, according to respondents, can also take corrective action. Improving parking is the most important recommendation (Table 31). It was also recommended that the Committee should develop plans for growth (13%). Considering a mall for Downtown was also highly recommended. Some 32 percent of the respondents had nothing to say on this issue which again indicates some degree of apathy on the part of the community.

Finally it was suggested that local government create a parking authority and improve business facilities (Table 32). Similarly, better planning (15%) and improvement in services (13%) were recommended.

More specifically, some programs were recommended. These are reported in Table 33. Once again more organization and promotion are recommended as the most important action to be taken (15%). Modernizing downtown was also strongly recommended.

TABLE 30

WHAT CAN MERCHANTS DO

Action	Downtown		Gables		Other		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Promotion/Communication	15	19	8	35	10	30	33	24
Improve Parking	9	11	1	4	4	12	14	10
More Aggressive Merchandising	9	11	1	4	4	12	14	10
Treat People Equally	5	6	1	4	3	9	9	7
Reasonable Prices	6	8	2	9	2	6	10	7
Friendly Personnel	10	13	2	9	4	12	16	12
Active in Local Politics	2	2	-		1	3	3	2
More Competition	9	11	3	13	3	9	15	11
Other	1	1	1	4	1	3	3	2
Don't Know	14	18	4	17	2	6	20	15
Total	80		23		34		137	

TABLE 31

WHAT CAN PLANNING COMMITTEE DO

Action	Downtown	Gables	Other	Total
Modernize	5	1		6
Coordinate Sales w/Roanoke	3	-	-	3
Better Lighting/Streets	5	2	-	7
Consider a Mall	4	1	3	8
Plan for Growth	4	1	8	13
Improve Parking	12	2	4	18
Make it easier to rezone	4	-	2	6
Information	2	2	-	4
Other	2	-	1	3
Don't Know	19	7	6	32
Total	60	16	24	100

...ate Sales w/Roanoke
...ighting/Streets
... Mall
... Growth
...y Parking
...it easier to rezone

TABLE 32

WHAT CAN LOCAL GOV'T DO

Action	Downtown	Gables	Other	Total
Improve Services	5	2	5	12
Parking Authority/ Facilities	25	1	9	35
Fair Taxes	4	2	3	9
Modernize/Beautify	8	2	-	10
Merchant Relations	5	2	2	9
Better Planning	9	1	4	14
Promote Shopping	1	-	-	1
Encourage New Shopping Center	2	-	-	2
Other	1	-	-	1
Total	60	10	23	93

TABLE 33

PROPOSED ACTION OR
PROGRAMS THAT SHOULD BE SPONSORED

Programs	Downtown		Gables		Other		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
More Organization/ Promotion	8	16	2	14	1	10	11	15
Parking	3	6	-		1	10	4	5
Community Action	3	6	-		-		3	4
Continue Old Programs	2	3	2	14	1	10	5	7
Modernize Downtown	6	12	-		-		6	8
Work with Tech	1	2	-		1	10	2	3
Other	1	2	-		-		1	1
Don't Know	20	40	8	57	4	40	32	43
None	7	14	2	14	2	20	11	15
Total	51		14		10		75	

In improving the commercial sector the total merchant mix providing different goods and services for the community should be considered. If local merchants feel that there are certain types of businesses that are lacking, this question should be considered very seriously. Table 34 displays the respondents' preferences. Downtown merchants feel strongly about the lack of a department store (17%) as well as lacking service and repair shops. More restaurants, recreation and women's clothing stores were also recommended.

A number of specific bits of information uncovered by this survey were revealed in this report. It seems clear that Downtown is suffering from lack of space and perhaps inadequate merchant mix. Additionally, Downtown is lacking the proper emphasis of employing students who in turn provide better communication with student-buyers. Table 35 reports approximations of total dollars spent on different goods and services. It is especially clear that Electronics, Clothing, Hobby, Appliance and Automative businesses could do better by perhaps revising their general orientation.

More and better communication and coordination among the merchants and more positive programs to improve business conditions are needed. Parking and lack of space in downtown, and some degree of apathy which appeared to be prevalent among the merchants have to be handled carefully and positively. Perhaps one of the most important recommendations is to make periodic efforts to gather similar information to that reported in this study.

TABLE 34

BUSINESS LACKING IN AREA

Business Type	Downtown		Gables		Other		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Department Stores	10	23	0		2	11	12	17
Men's Clothing	1	2	1	13			2	3
Women's Clothing	2	5	1	13	2	11	5	7
Restaurant	4	9	1	13	4	21	9	13
Hardware/Lumber	1	2			1	5	2	3
Appliances	3	7					3	4
Records, Electronics Music Shops	1	2					1	1
Shoe Stores	2	5			1	5	3	4
Car Dealers	1	2	1	13			2	3
Service/Repair Shops	7	16	1	12	4	21	12	17
Drug Stores			1	12			1	1
Fabrics	1	2					1	1
Grocery, Fish & Meat			1	12	1	5	2	3
Book Store	1	2					1	1
Hobby, Sporting Goods Shops	2	5					2	3
Automotive Supply	1	2					1	1
Service Stations	2	5					2	3
Bakeries					2	11	2	3
Recreation/Entertainment	2	5	1	12	2	11	5	7
Liquor Shops	2	5					2	3
Total	43		8		19		70	

TABLE 35

SPENDINGS OF STUDENTS [1,2,3]

Items	Dollars		Percentages	
	In Blacksburg	Outside	In Blacksburg	Outside
Movies	218097	13482	94	6
Billiards	55833	729	99	1
Bowling	48249	573	99	1
Concerts	192738	39465	83	17
Other Entertainment[4]	506283	113310	82	18
Clothing	536868	558783	49	51
Eating[5]	873375	218343	80	20
Grooming[6]	449262	13896	97	3
Laundry[6]	438393	13560	97	3
Electronics[7] Accessories	12000	195000	6	94
Hobby[8] Accessories	34410	58692	37	63
Appliances[9] Accessories	19200	20010	49	51
Car Maintenance[10]	128476	47519	73	27
Car - Gas & Oil[10]	419823	155277	73	27
Total	3,933,007	2,176,910		

Notes:

1. The figures are based on an estimated 7500 students living in the dormitories.

2. The annual figures are based on 9-month totals.

3. Some of the answers had a category entitled "both". These figures were allocated according to the percentages of spending in and outside of Blacksburg.

4. Other entertainment includes dances, special weekends and fraternities.

5. The percentage distribution of eating is based on the percentage distribution of spendings on weekends.

6. The percentage distribution of laundry and grooming is based on the average percentage distribution of others spendings.

7. Electronics includes radio, tape recorder, record player, speaker and components and TV.

TABLE 35 (cont'd)

8. Hobby includes, camera, guns and posters.

9. Appliances includes electronical appliances, typewriters and lamps.

10. The percentage distribution of car maintenance, and gas and oil is based on an average percentage distribution of spendings on all other items.

Source: An unpublished survey directed by A. C. Samli and James Wilcox.