

## **Adjusting our view of downtown storefronts**

By Jamestown Renaissance Corporation Staff

It's been over 40 years since the Chautauqua Mall opened, accelerating a process—then well-underway—of retail migration from downtown to the edges and outskirts of Jamestown. Adjusting to this inexorable shift in the region's retail center of gravity has now been a project for generations of Jamestowners.

Much has happened in recent years to turn this adjustment from a reaction—trying to compete with the mall—to establishing downtown as an urban experience that effectively targets specific audiences. New investment in historic buildings, public spaces, and brand new storefronts have all improved the appearance of downtown and the range of spaces available to interested businesses.

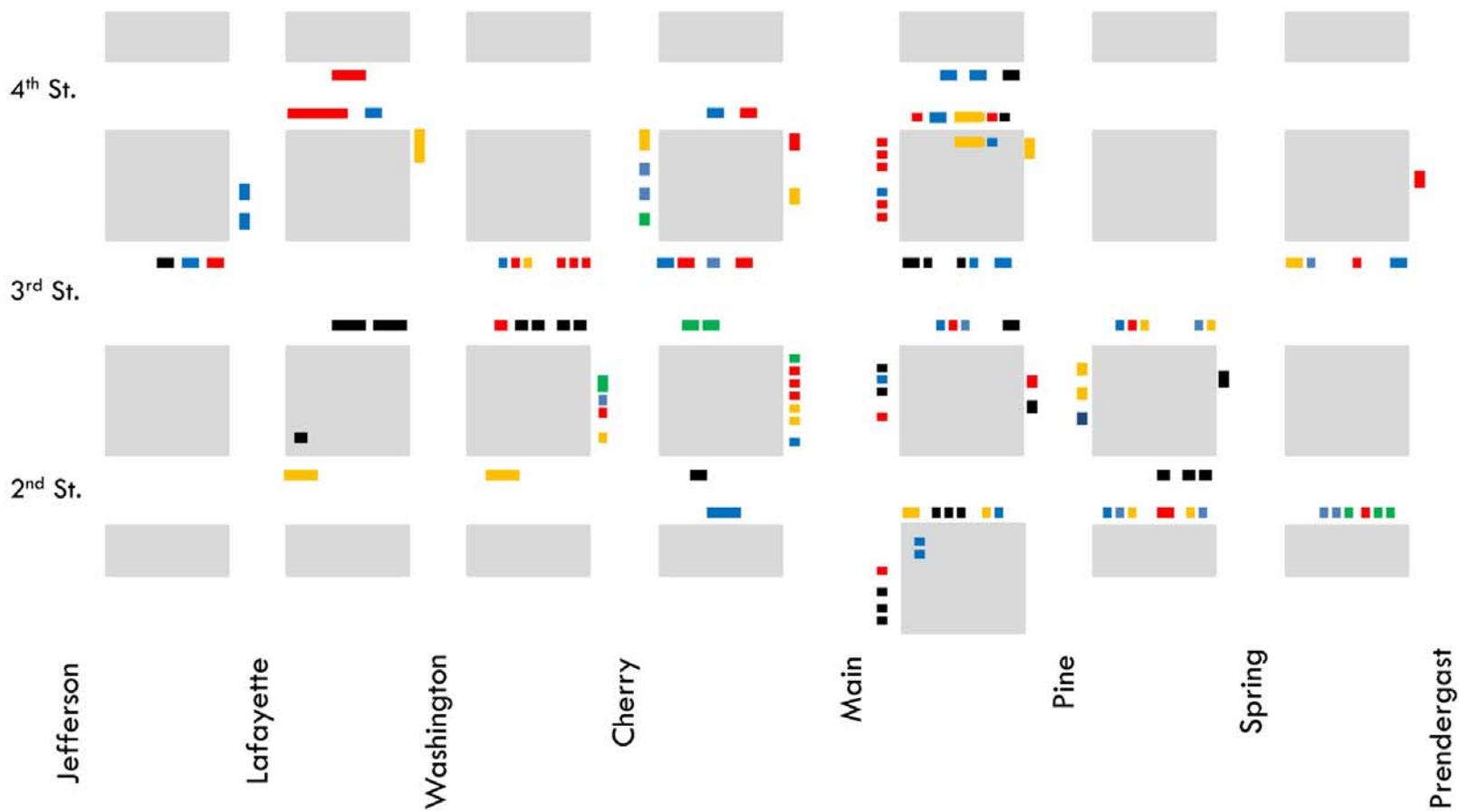
But have improvements to the supply of downtown retail spaces—and the surrounding environment—been enough to spur demand for space?

This month, Jamestown Renaissance Corporation staff mapped a rough inventory of storefronts in the downtown core to see where we have storefronts and what's in them. We counted all ground floor spaces with direct access to the street that are currently serving—or could readily serve—as active storefronts. This roster focused on 9 to 5 activity and does not include banks and museums that lack a traditional storefront appearance, or evening entertainment venues.

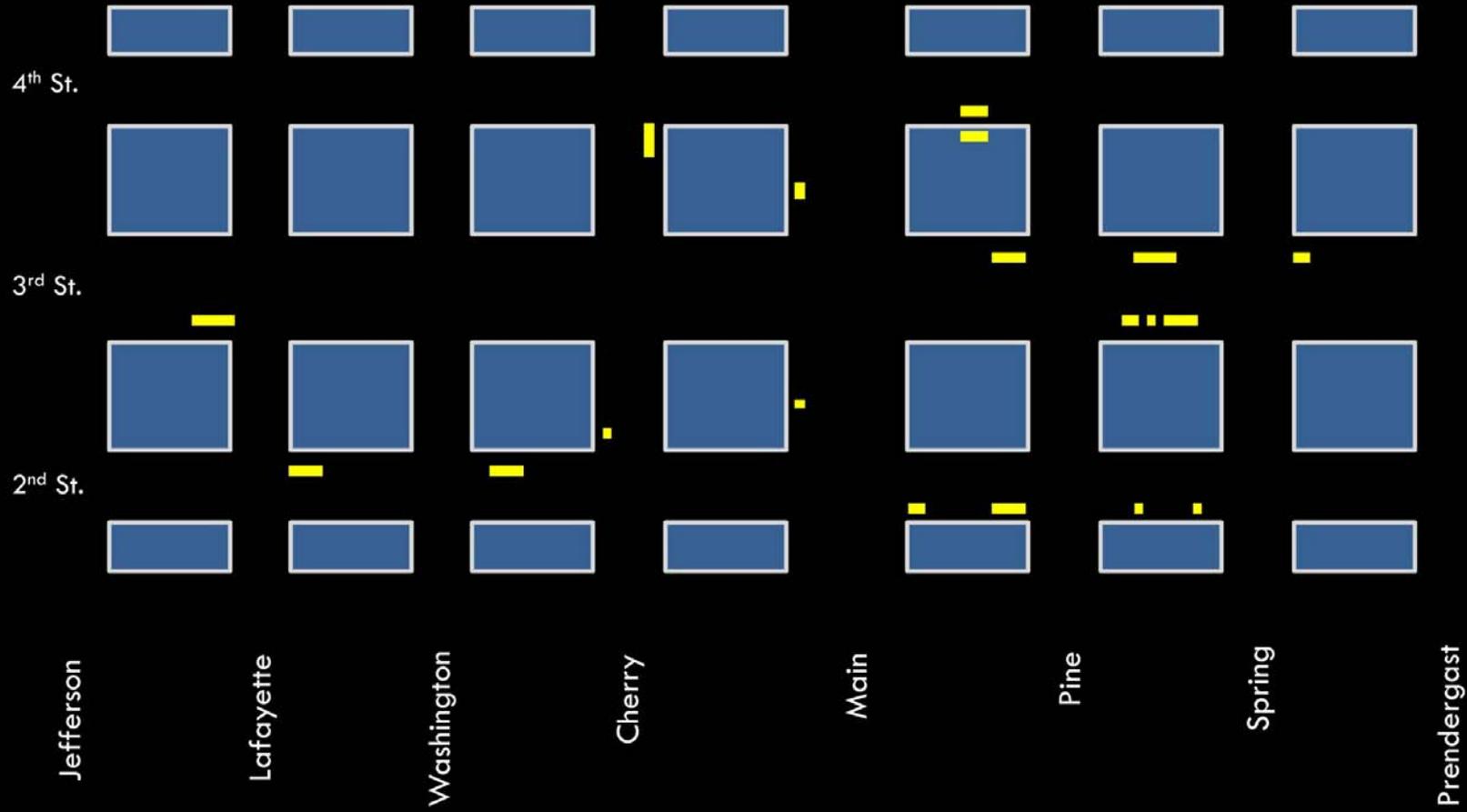
After completing the inventory of storefronts, we put together a second map that highlights downtown spaces that are active after dark. These spaces include bars, restaurants, theatres and other performance and entertainment venues (e.g., the Jamestown Savings Bank Arena and the Infinity Visual and Performing Arts Center).

# Downtown Storefront Activity

- Vacant
- Retail
- Service
- Bar/Restaurant
- Institutional



# Downtown after Dark



Three patterns on the “Downtown Storefront Activity” map immediately jumped out at JRC staff. First, it’s clear that North Main Street is still downtown’s most active retail street and a strength to build on. Second, there are multiple gaps on Third Street—strings of several vacant spaces that hinder potential connectivity between the West End and the Reg Lenna Civic Center. This is especially apparent on the “Downtown after Dark” map. And third, there are large stretches of no storefront activity. Many ground floors have been converted and are no longer welcoming to pedestrians, adding dead spots on the downtown streetscape.

Addressing these problems and seizing opportunities will require a continued commitment to partnerships between public agencies, property owners and businesses. Cleaner and greener streetscapes should be a major focus of these efforts, especially on North Main Street where contiguous period-style streetlamps, more trees, more flowers, and a heightened commitment to building maintenance can spur demand by making the street even more appealing to potential businesses and their customers.

Partnerships will also be crucial in developing a strong link along Third Street between the Jamestown Savings Bank Arena and the Reg Lenna Civic Center, an area that’s now mostly dormant after dark, hindering pedestrian movement between downtown’s two busiest centers of evening activity. Several new but empty storefronts, like those in the BWB Center and the Wellman Building, provide an opportunity to fill this gap, especially between the arena and North Main Street.

Filling those storefronts with activity that adds value to the rest of downtown requires a strategy. Fortunately, that process is underway with a business mix study (now being finalized at City Hall) and its anticipated call for a more appropriate sectioning of downtown into functional districts where businesses can thrive through synergies with surrounding businesses and assets. The plan will help guide the process of identifying and recruiting the right activities for the right market niches and putting them in the right storefronts.

It’s clear that there is not a storefront supply problem in downtown Jamestown. What we have is a demand problem. But this can be addressed through more coordinated efforts to make downtown a great urban experience for customers, an attractive place to do business, an interesting and lively place to live, and a place that generates demand simply by acting as a place to convene and connect numerous community assets.