

On Tuesday afternoon, at 1 PM on July 30th, I took the third and last walk of my informal, subjective, non scientifically based “survey of the Historic Downtown Chestertown Business District” survey.

Once again my numbers varied a bit – a few percentage points if you will. Once again this week I discovered 4 new businesses that I had not seen either of the previous two weeks. Three of them are businesses on the second floor of the Alexander Building. The fourth was an attorney’s office on park row. I suspect all of those businesses, being service oriented, have persons coming to them who have appointments or already know where they are located.

One office on “Lawyer’s Row” that appears to have four entrances has only one in actuality so that is why there are 3 fewer lawyers this week than last week.

For the purpose of my survey Washington Tavern is officially closed. I counted them as open when a real estate agent told me that was the case but I looked in the window and from what I could see...I call it closed.

Retail	22 Stores	3 closed
Services	35 Stores	2 closed
Food/Restaur.	7 stores	1 closed
Galleries	4 stores	2 closed
Private Artist Studios	4 studios	could not tell
Public Artist Studios	4 studios	1 closed
Lawyers, Newspapers		
Political Parties	18 Store Fronts	3 closed
Empty Stores	12 Stores	11 closed
Lodging, Theatre,		
Historic Society	4 locations	2 closed
Drug Stores	2 stores	0 closed

A few observations and again please remember that this survey is subjective, unscientific and “seat of the pants.”

1. My primary hope is that the results will get people talking, thinking and problem solving about the needs of our Historic Downtown Business District and it's future. I think it's a mistake to assume that it will take care of itself as it has in the past. Retail business and how people shop is changing and has changed especially since the Financial Crash of 2008. The Chestertown Model is based on the early 20th Century. I wonder if it's adapting as well as it can in the 21st Century.
2. I conducted this survey from my point of view and from the point of view of someone visiting Chestertown i.e., someone who has not been here before and someone who visits from DC/Northern VA. or Philly/NJ. That is why the survey was taken after lunch.
3. What most jumped out at me:
 - a. There are many more "shops/businesses downtown that I would have thought – 112.
 - b. Most are open Tuesday – 78% open
 - c. Saturday is second with – 62% open
 - d. Sunday is third with 26% open
4. Let's combine service with legal services and retail with restaurants. Chestertown has 50 legal/service businesses vs. 28 retail businesses. Yes, I know it's the county seat. Thus, service outnumbers retail by about 2 to 1. Given how people shop and want to shop and the current stock of retail space available in Chestertown, do we have the kind of spaces that we need if the town is to prosper in the future? Do we want a town where the waterfront becomes the place where everything is "happening" because they build handicapped accessible, light filled retail spaces and the historic district (with so many non accessible spaces) becomes primarily a service business district?
5. What role, if any should town government play in planning for the Historic District's future? Perhaps some, perhaps none but has anyone put the question to the Mayor and Council or will anyone put it to the candidates. If the question is asked, will the town government respond?
6. Take your own survey of Chestertown, walk around but with a "different eye." Pretend that you are a visitor. Look in the windows of every shop. What do you see? With services outnumbering retail about 2 to 1, and with empty stores, most of what you will see is not designed to engage the visitor. What's the image that we present? Landlords should be concerned about this, real estate agents should be also. It affects their bottom lines as it affects every business.
7. Lastly, the newspapers are filled almost daily with the news of towns working together to improve their downtowns and their struggling historic districts. Chestertown has done its fair share of this...still, I get

the feeling that if we want to do more than survive, if we want to thrive, we have to plan and I'm not sure that I see us planning "big picture." I think we're planning ad hoc, and "small picture." I believe that we need more people in the conversation. Truth be told, I'm not sure how we do it but I think it needs to be done.