

VILLAGE OF ALFRED  
CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT STUDY

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JUNE 1978

A most striking conclusion one may drive from this report is that the Village of Alfred has a very strong economy, albeit a small one- one that supports not only its own residents, but also twice as many non-residents. The next conclusion that comes to one's mind is why there are so few business establishments limited to just a few categories of goods and services, representd in this market with a daily inflow of over 700 commuter employees and some 6,000 student residents? Keeping in mind the fact that Alfred is the cultural center of the area as well- the locale of plays, concerts, lectures, football and basketball games- that shall attract substantial numbers of visitors, the answer to this question is even more pressing.

Apparently little thought has been given so far to the fact that this situation is a source of strength not weakness, considering that so many people come to Alfred and so few reside does not exclusively imply that funds are taken out of Alfred to benefit other communities in the vicinity. It also implies that the non-residents do not represent additional costs to the Alfred community, like schooling their children, using municipal services, etc.

Consequently, the first and most important economic objective might become the effort to direct some of these significant funds back into the Alfred community.

However, patterns of spending are very difficult to change. The national picture clearly indicates that the practice of working one place and living and spending in another is a well stabilized pattern (viz., the

decline of downtown areas and the prosperity of suburban shopping plazas and malls). People spend their money where they live not where they work. It also happens to be true that students will make most of their purchases in their hometowns before coming to school or during vacation.

This is not to argue that patterns of spending cannot be altered. However, change will require astute and innovative business techniques.

The Village of Alfred will have to undertake a major effort to differentiate itself - i.e. create the image of a distinct, unique and special place in the area. Each and every business establishment which aspires to attract customers from the outside, or gain the patronage of commuters and students (as well as village residents) will have to concentrate on differentiating its physical premises, its products and services.

Even if one or a few businesses succeed in doing it, it still remains questionable whether people will be willing to travel to Alfred because of one or two places of interest. In other words an effective, successful effort at community action that would require community action - community action that would take advantage of all marketing and advertising techniques available.

As cooperation among the various sectors of the community could bring about productive results, it is recommended that an Economic Development Board be organized.

Such a Board should include representatives of all segments of the community who have a stake and interest in the Village's economy, like the village government, the business community and the two schools. Such a body would serve as a permanent forum where coordination of efforts

and mutual cooperation could be arrived at. There is no doubt that a great number of possibilities could be explored. The questionnaires indicate that not that many residents of surrounding communities attend activities of Alfred - wouldn't coordination with some events organized by the business community attract more visitors? Do Alfred's activities have to cease in May? Couldn't the facilities of the schools and the community attract a summer clientele? Wouldn't summer offer some advantages for programs involving sports, the outdoors, summer stock theater, etc.

Alfred has some unique features - two major institutes of higher learning. On one hand, as mentioned above, they have the potential of attracting a number of people to special events, like concerts, and plays, etc., on the other hand they have a pool of talent that can be harnessed to organize and conduct workshops, seminars, clinics of all aspects of small business management, like marketing and advertising and problems of accounting and finance.

The findings of the foregoing study indicate that exploring possibilities in a number of business areas might be useful. However, one must keep in mind that the success or failure of business is not a function of the type of business or product exclusively, but even more so of the person or persons behind the business.

Business management is an intricate and complex function requiring training, skill and a special acumen. The fact that such a large proportion of businesses listed in the study is of a relatively new vintage as can be seen from the statistics in the study and considering that the first five years is the most critical - a period where the incidence of

failure is the highest, and that probably some of the listed businesses might not be around by the time this section is written has probably more to do with this fact than with the lack of opportunity in this community.