In 2006, following a number of short-term improvements made in the district, the BRA launched a cross-disciplinary long-term planning effort to examine the future direction of the area. The goal was indeed bold: to make Boston’s urban core a model for downtowns around the world. An international team of consultants was assembled to develop a comprehensive planning strategy to re-establish the neighborhood as “Boston’s Meeting Place.”

“A Crossroads for a Crossing.” Downtown Crossing boasts a strategic central-city location, with over 1.8 million square feet of retail space and convenient access to the city’s subway lines. Anchored by a four-block pedestrian zone developed in the late 1970s, over 230,000 people pass through daily. The district continues to be a dynamic urban neighborhood located at the intersection of commercial, business and leisure activities. However, like many urban shopping districts across the country, the area has struggled to adapt to profound shifts in the retail industry, such as the consolidation of anchor department stores and dominance of internet retailing.

In late 2004, Mayor Thomas M. Menino, the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA), local prominent business owners and other stakeholders joined together to develop a vision for the beloved but tired district. This public/private partnership represented an important turning point for the area. Although still a work in progress, during the past six years the DCEII has witnessed significant achievements. Highlights of these accomplishments include:

Identity and Branding Strategy
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The document features bold but achievable ideas represented through compelling graphics, illustrations, and photography. Direct outcomes of the Identity & Branding Strategy include the formation of Boston’s first Business Improvement District; more than $350 million in new investment in the district; new zoning regulations and illustrative design review requirements for all signs and storefront modifications; aesthetic and operational upgrades to the pushcart vending program; a renewed pedestrian zone including new pedestrian zone regulations and signage; and a comprehensive interim public art program promoting the brand. Excerpts from the executive summary brochure are featured in the attached graphics.

Development Projects: Restoration and Reinvestment
The district is home to several of Boston’s most significant historic sites. In 2010, three buildings were returned to their former splendor after lying empty for more than 15 years. The historic Ames building, a vacant shell since 1995, was converted into a boutique hotel. It is operated by the Morgan’s Hotel Group and features 120 rooms and the award-winning Woodward restaurant with outdoor café. The Paramount Theatre reopened its doors in January 2010 as part of a larger Paramount Center redevelopment completed by Emerson College. The jewel of the $95 million complex is a 550-seat Art Deco theater, including the eye-popping reconstruction of much original décor. The Modern Theater, renovated by Suffolk University, opened in November 2010, displays a painstakingly reconstructed historic façade behind which lies a new 185-seat performance space on the ground floor and a 200-bed dormitory facility above. Combined with the adjacent Opera House, which underwent a $54 million restoration in 2004, the three theaters now anchor the southern end of the Downtown Crossing neighborhood. Once dubbed the “Combat Zone” as a result of the adult-oriented businesses located there, the redevelopment of the theaters has resulted in the opening of seven new restaurants nearby, with more planned. At the opposite end of Washington Street, the Ames Hotel has led to the opening of three new sit down restaurants in proximity.

Arts, Events and Programming
A comprehensive approach to activating the pedestrian zone year-round with events has been developed in close cooperation with the Downtown Crossing Partnership. The introduction of Art Fridays, a seasonal craft market, and a month-long Holiday Market featuring over 75 unique artisans and specialty food producers during the winter season have become new Downtown Crossing highlights.
traditions, drawing tens of thousands of people to the district. A regularly programmed Thursday night “Block Party” began as a series of pub and wine crawls.

**Downtown Boston BID**

Following two prior failed attempts in 1998 and 2000 to establish a BID in the neighborhood, the Downtown Boston Business Improvement District (BID) was formed in 2010 after a two-year campaign led by the private sector and supported by the City. The BID includes 4.2 million square feet, 34 blocks, and 528 members. Beginning operations in May 2011, it has a budget of $2.9 million. The formation of the BID will undoubtedly prove pivotal in the continued success and development of the area. It is tasked with continuing the progress that has been made by the DCEII in events and programming, while focusing on clean and safe supplemental services for the Downtown.

**Retail Revitalization: Downtown Dining Destination**

Working closely with local property owners, restaurateurs and entrepreneurs, the DCEII has attracted more than 25 new food-related establishments to Downtown Crossing, anchoring the area as a dining and foodie destination. Support from the city has been in the form of graphic design assistance, signage and website design, business workshops, and low-interest loans. Prior to 2004, the district had no outdoor dining. Today, six restaurants have outdoor cafes with seating for over 300, and four more establishments are planned or under construction. Additionally, many restaurants that have no access to outdoor space have invested in movable partitions to invite patrons to engage in the vibrant street life.

**INNOVATION** When the RFP for the Identity and Branding Strategy was issued in early 2006, few if any cities had attempted to combine urban design, retail planning, branding, place-making, and pedestrian modeling together in one effort. By combining all these elements into one plan, proponents correctly assessed the need for an integrated strategy in the revitalization of such a dynamic district. Other North American cities have looked to Downtown Boston’s cross-disciplinary approach as they grapple with their own urban retail cores’ identities. This approach to redefining Downtown Crossing’s image acknowledges the diverse range of forces acting upon the district and provides a unified road map for future development.

**DIVERSITY** A broad spectrum of stakeholders has been engaged at all stages of the DCEII. Through the leadership of the Mayor and the BRA, the DCEII brought together a diverse range of city departments to have meaningful and non-threatening conversations, allowing for collaboration on solutions to short- and long-term problems. When discussions with local merchants unearthed a tension between them and local youth who frequent the Crossing, a series of meetings with youth leaders, the school department, and service agencies established a regular dialogue leading to improved relationships. Informational forums were also held with Police and Public Works union officials to address their concerns regarding how the BID might change their role. Public officials from other cities with BIDs were invited to speak about their experiences, calming the concerns of union officials.

**REPLICATION** Many central-city shopping districts are going through the same difficulties that Downtown Crossing is currently overcoming. Boston’s incremental process of reinventing its urban core can serve as a model for rethinking the needs of downtowns in other municipalities. Specific recommendations from this plan that are applicable to other cities include the holistic approach to planning for a district, illustrative signage zoning regulations, the restaurant and outdoor dining initiative, event and programming promotions, and the public process lessons drawn from the establishment of the BID.

**REPRESENTATION** While Downtown is primarily thought of as a business and commercial district, in fact over 6,000 residents call the district their home. The DCEII required a great deal of community outreach to all parties – commercial and residential – and demanded strong leadership from both the City and the local business community. An inclusive partnership was formed between elected officials, the City of Boston (including multiple agencies) and the Downtown Crossing Association (which during this process became the Downtown Crossing Partnership (DCP)). The change in the business organization’s name was due to a shift in its leadership and a dramatic restructuring of the organization’s direction and focus. The DCEII process proved to be transformative in the DCP’s relationship with the City and the BRA as all parties worked together to advance a shared vision in a spirit of mutual respect and confidence. Through participatory community workshops, steering committee meetings, and jointly-issued media communications, the BRA and DCP forged a strong and enduring partnership committed to making Downtown Crossing “Boston’s Meeting Place.”

**CONCLUSION** Endorsed and supported by the BRA Board as the official plan for Downtown Crossing, the DCEII emphasizes the critical importance of the area’s future success in the overall development of downtown Boston. Of the myriad “lessons learned” throughout the planning process, perhaps the most significant take-away was the need for this exercise to be based on “truth” – ensuring that the district’s brand is rooted in Downtown Crossing’s inherent authenticity. This “truth” is comprised of the area’s bustling streets; the variety of active and sublime places; the district’s unique, exciting and sometimes confounding experiences; and all of the people who live, work, play and cross paths in Downtown Crossing every day. This is an urban district like no other, and the brand reflects this real, organic place. With a real sense of vigor and vibrancy, a renewed identity, and tangible development and change, Downtown Crossing marches on with one of the country’s greatest urban renaissance stories of the 21st century.