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Summit study ordered to help boost business

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SUMMIT — What is the future for downtown Summit?

In a state where the first thought after the decision to go shopping is which mall, how can downtowns not just survive but thrive?

A \$63,000 study, expected to be completed by June, is an attempt to find those answers for Summit.

"It's part of the total effort to improve the downtown," said Joe Steiner, president of Summit Downtown Inc., which oversees the special improvement district.

"It's going to create a strategic plan to find out what our customers want and a strategic plan on how to get it," Steiner said.

The loss of Root's and McElgunn's, two major anchor stores, and the inability to fill those retail spaces, has been a source of great concern among city leaders.

Three firms were hired to conduct the six-month market analysis and study: Project for Public Spaces and Abeles Phillips Preiss Shapiro Inc., both based in New York, and The

Community Advocates of Caldwell.

The project is the first such comprehensive study and plan for the downtown in Summit's history, said Don Smartt, a principal in The Community Advocates who is coordinating the study.

The goal, he said, is for the downtown to recapture its regional strength.

"Summit is in a far better position than most downtowns in New Jersey," he said, adding it is

among the upper 5 percent strength in terms of potential and stability.

"It has a strategic position in the marketplace that places it among the Princetons and the Ridgewoods.

It is in a unique posi-

tion." Smartt said. "It's upscale and regional, with a strong residential community. It can compete when it fills a niche market."

Summit was a regional center for men's clothing for decades, but over the last 20 years has lost that position. Smartt said. But recognizing that the downtown cannot compete with The Mall at Short Hills in a retail area like this, he said, does not mean there is no future.

"The goal is for the downtown to recapture its regional strength."

Donald R. Smartt
Principal, The Community Advocates



Don Smartt and The Community Advocates