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Downtown rejuvenation in hands of the merchants

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Photo Caption: Elizabeth Scrivener: work to do

DOWNTOWN BURLINGTON is a "wonderful place" that will only get better if businesses in the core work together, says Elaine Scrivener.

The new chairwoman of Burlington's Business Improvement Area said there is a lot of interest in "rejuvenating" downtown. About 50 people attended the annual meeting of the downtown merchants' association Monday to discuss ways of bringing business back to the core.

Mrs. Scrivener, of Scrivener's clothing on Pearl Street, told the group that one of her goals is to attract new business downtown and hang on to the businesses which are already there.

She also said the decision last year to provide three free hours of parking at some parking lots is already paying dividends.

"There have been several new businesses locate here and the free parking has been one of the reasons," she said. "I don't think it's ever been terribly expensive but it does make a difference."

While she admitted there is "a lot of work to do" as merchants compete against Burlington Mall and Mapleview Centre, Mrs. Scrivener said she remains upbeat about the future of downtown. A planned seniors' residence at Brant and Pine streets is another step to create more pedestrian and vehicle traffic in the area, she said.

Mrs. Scrivener said merchants hope to capitalize on the growing popularity of the waterfront and Spencer Smith Park. Long-term plans to locate a marina in the area would be a major boost.

Mayor Walter Mulkewich told association members they and the city are now "fighting back" after a devastating recession.

"Revitalization (of the downtown) is a personal goal of mine," said Mr. Mulkewich.

"What you have here is a jewel that needs to be polished."

Guest speaker **Kevin Graff** told the merchants that service is vital to their survival because they don't receive the same amount of traffic as stores in malls.

"You throw around the words customer service, but what does that mean?" he asked. "You absolutely have to get them to come back into your store again."