

asheville downtown **master plan**



Draft Downtown Master Plan

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Asheville Downtown Master Plan

Executive Summary

planning context

Downtown's remarkable rebirth over the past 30 years was made possible by local residents' love for it. Now, Ashevilleans' hard work has made downtown a place loved by people near and far alike. This appeal brings challenges that threaten the very qualities that make Asheville Asheville, and it puts downtown at a crossroads.

Increased demand for downtown retail and living space has driven costs to levels that have started to exclude some of the people and creative enterprises that help generate downtown's enviable ambiance. Development proposals for upscale housing and hotels proliferated in recent years, reaching a number and scale unheard of since the 1920s boom. Some recent building proposals exceed 20 stories, suggesting the most significant changes to downtown's skyline in a generation.

These market demands and growth challenges occur at a time of economic uncertainty. Even in the course of the Downtown Master Plan process, some development proposals have retreated. Memories of the long recovery from the Great Depression loom as large as do growth concerns. If proposals are approved, can they be financed and completed? Should



markets settle and carefully consider these questions in light of a long view on downtown Asheville.

While near-term development may slow, downtown has demonstrated enduring appeal at a national and even international level; it will attract investment again. Today's economic uncertainty reflects a credit crisis more than a market-demand crisis. Long-term demographic and economic trends clearly show resurgent interest in places like downtown that attract and cultivate the "creative class," to borrow Richard Florida's memorable phrase. And even while investment slows, Asheville's high standards for quality of life and place should remain paramount: witness its wisdom in rejecting the 1980s mall proposal that would have removed much of today's vibrant Lexington Park.

The challenges of managing growth and change, then, remain this plan's central focus. They strain the financial, techni-

cal, time, and communications resources of the stakeholders—artists, developers, preservationists, entrepreneurs, residents—who make downtown so desirable. Graffiti, trash and weeds turn up in too many places too often. Historic landmarks remain vulnerable if their market value stagnates. Some community members feel disenfranchised from downtown enterprise and decision-making. Downtown's economy lacks a strategic guiding vision. City and County staff, elected officials, downtown interests, and individual citizens all call for clearer, simpler, faster, and more informed procedures for addressing these challenges—with better results.

all proposals be accepted in the name of more jobs and a broader tax base? The current moment offers a valuable chance to pause while the mar-

The 2002 *Center City Plan*, and previous plans back to John Nolan's excellent 1922–1925 blueprint, lay an enduring foundation for downtown. This Downtown Master Plan builds on these to address the unprecedented challenges at this crossroads.

- First, this plan aims to help the community shape growth in a way that preserves Asheville's character.
- Second, it creates a shared vision for downtown over the next 20 years.
- Finally, it enables the community to understand choices, take advantage of opportunities, and develop tools to achieve the shared vision through changing economic and political cycles.

The following pages summarize the community vision for downtown and set out a series of strategies for attaining the vision.

community vision

The planning process deliberately included all of downtown's stakeholders to better understand and integrate diverse perspectives. Engagement forums included large, interactive public



meetings, one-on-one interviews, affinity group sessions, facilitated summits, and gatherings with targeted citizen orga-

nizations, residents, and members of the downtown business communities. Asked to dream, think, cooperate, and fine-tune their aspirations for downtown, participants painted a variety of portraits for the future from which seven recurring principles emerged.

I Sustain Downtown's dynamic and diverse culture and economy.

- Maintain an eclectic mix of creative, innovative businesses and the employment opportunities they provide.
- Build on the strong and diverse arts community.
- Encourage mixed-use development.
- Balance the needs of tourists and residents.

II Enhance Downtown's role as the larger community's "front porch."

- Increase diversity of races, ethnicities, ages and income levels.

- Seek opportunities for new community gathering spaces.
- Continue to provide programming and activities with regional appeal.
- Coordinate these programs so there is always something to do downtown.

III Strengthen Downtown's identity as a series of residential neighborhoods.

- Create neighborhood centers within a network of parks, services and transportation options.
- Build housing that suits a variety of household incomes, sizes, ages, and lifestyles.
- Use housing and amenities to attract the growing variety of workers needed for current and emerging downtown jobs.
- Invest underutilized land to build greater density and increase the tax base.

IV Preserve and enhance Downtown's diverse architecture, historic resources, walkable streets and view corridors.

- Continue to protect landmark buildings and views to and from our mountain setting.
- Update the downtown National Register of Historic Places Historic District nomination.
- Support adaptive reuse.
- Encourage high-quality, compatible design for all new buildings.
- Create attractive gateways for downtown and its emerging neighborhoods.

V Provide good, interconnected transportation choices for better access and better health.

- Provide downtown with continuous bicycle

and pedestrian routes tied to regional bicycle and pedestrian systems.

- Improve transit service to and within downtown.
- Investigate an auto-free zone on periodic weekends.
- Add parking spaces sparingly and develop new unified parking management strategies.
- Highlight the public health benefits of walkability, fitness and safety.

VI Make Downtown a national model of sustainable planning, development and operations.

- Provide incentives to spur green development and energy-efficient retrofitting.
- Promote resource efficiency in all City operations.
- Set standards for and support regional smart growth.

VII Establish creative strategies for managing this special place.

- Create a downtown management framework that provides a clear structure for predictable decision-making.
- Encourage innovative initiatives and give them time and resources to prove themselves.
- Ensure opportunities for ongoing public engagement at every level.
- Develop a series of financing strategies linked to managing growth and change.



strategies

Seven primary strategies set an action framework for carrying out the vision principles under the Downtown Master Plan. The lettered strategy elements on the next pages highlight major recommendations; see the full Downtown Master Plan for more detail on each. The strategies fall into three groupings.

- **Experiencing Downtown:** the sense and convenience of being downtown
- **Shaping Downtown:** urban design, building form, development review
- **Managing Downtown:** operations and economics

Experiencing Downtown

1 Cultivate essential cultural and historic resources.

Downtown's leadership must marshal new

resources and coordinate actions that support and empower the constituents—such as arts, preservation, and small businesses—best positioned to preserve and enhance unique cultural and historic qualities and, by extension, downtown's vibrancy. Focus on two defining elements: a lively and creative arts scene and the fabric of historic buildings that provides the backdrop for shopping, working, dining, living and enjoyment.

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| A. Ally artists and arts organizations. | F. Maintain the Civic Center/Wolfe Auditorium. | K. Enable sensitive air-rights development on historic properties. |
| B. Designate a Pack Square Cultural District. | G. Support the proposed performing arts center. | L. Teach and celebrate downtown's heritage. |
| C. Organize an "artist's resource center." | H. Update downtown's historic district. | M. Diversify the Historic Resources Commission with downtown stakeholders and professionals. |
| D. Extend the reach of cultural events/ programs to more diverse populations. | I. Use the National Trust's "destination of distinction" award to attract tourists. | |
| E. Strategically support arts-related businesses. | J. Target tax-credit rehabilitation opportunities. | |

2 Expand convenient choices for access and mobility.

Manage access, mobility, circulation and parking as one

interconnected system, coordinated through a collaborative partnership of the City, the County, and private interests.

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| A. Study the feasibility of a downtown shuttle. | E. Coordinate access improvements with wayfinding information and Asheville Transit. | H. Dedicate public parking for shared-car services. |
| B. Implement the 2008 Comprehensive Bicycle Plan downtown. | F. Update rates, fee collection, lighting and security in public parking areas. Build operating partnerships among City, County, and private sector. | I. Screen off-street parking; add on-street parking. |
| C. Improve the downtown walking network. Maintain constant walking access to businesses adjoining construction areas. | G. Use the proposed shuttle to link parking with major downtown destinations. | J. Operate satellite park-and-ride lots in partnership with private land owners |
| D. Minimize curb cuts across prime sidewalks. | | |



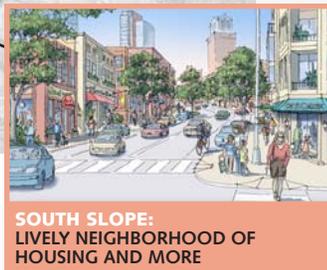
Shaping Downtown

3 Inaugurate an urban design framework to extend downtown's sense of place and community.

Downtown's traditional core already reflects the new paradigm for American downtowns:

walkable streets, public gathering places, mixed uses, and mixed demographics. Consciously extend these qualities throughout the study area to promote a strong sense of community—and attract new residents, merchants, entrepreneurs, and investors.

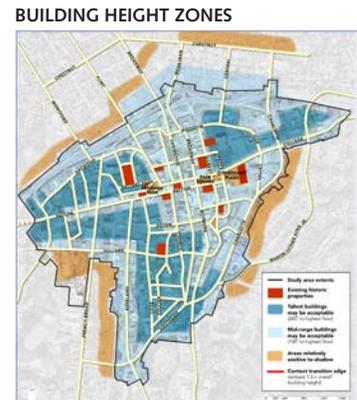
- A. Shape the character of existing and emerging neighborhoods in five main districts and focusing on identity, land use, scale, access, views and parks.
- B. Safeguard the National Register district while encouraging sensitive, high-value development there and elsewhere.
- C. Coordinate plans for downtown and its adjacent neighborhoods.



4 Shape building form to promote quality of place.

Enhance zoning, design guidelines, and similar urban planning tools to shape buildings in ways that increase—and balance—civic and private value. These must enrich downtown's character, attract new investment and carefully blend past preservation and new development. Encourage variety in heights, massing, and character to respect context, animate the skyline, preserve valued views, and offer development options.

- A. Establish maximum height zones across downtown and assure careful height transitions toward neighborhoods.
- B. Evaluate the architecture and view impacts of proposed buildings with photomontages.
- C. Step upper floors back from streets for daylight and pedestrian scale.
- D. Keep taller buildings slender, with space for views and daylight between them.
- E. Limit shadow impacts on public parks/plazas.
- F. Test proposed buildings in the city's computer model.



Shaping Downtown

5 Update design guidelines to be current and clear and to promote sustainable development.

Undertake a coordinated revision of all applicable regulations to reflect updated criteria, and to promote broad practical understanding of their values and provisions:

- A. Review projects using a concise official checklist that consolidates the UDO, Downtown Asheville Design Guidelines, and new design criteria. Clearly distinguish between required and recommended elements. Make projects that don't meet recommendations subject to City Council review.
- B. Add new standards:
 - > Building height and massing measures (Strategy 4).
 - > Require more attention to proportion and detail.
 - > Address residential buildings.
- C. Initiate incentives for "green" building construction and renovation.



6 Make project review transparent, predictable, and inclusive of community input.

Mending the review process requires selective additions, deletions and changes to the existing UDO to ensure that review and approval of development proposals respects fair, objective criteria and community goals.

- A. Require developer-sponsored public meetings early in the review of large proposals.
- B. Summarize process and standards in a pamphlet available at all public review sessions.
- C. Revise categories of project review and ultimate regulatory authority:
 - > **Level I:** Small projects; regulated by Technical Review Committee.
 - > **Level II:** Expanded to larger projects; regulated by Planning and Zoning Commission.
 - > **Level III:** Reserved for largest projects; regulated by City Council.
- D. Strictly limit application of the Conditional Use Permit process to questions of land use.
- E. Require phased proposals to submit a master plan and each phase for individual approval.
- F. Conduct TRC approval prior to design review (project levels II and III).
- G. Affirm and strengthen the Downtown Commission as the principal design review body.
- H. Establish a core Downtown Development Team to expedite City design review.
- I. Limit review duration to 90 days at each step.
- J. Enable proposals failing design review, or delayed past 90 days, to appeal to the City Council.
- K. After a pilot period (perhaps four years), evaluate these process changes; amend as needed.



Managing Downtown

7 Nurture a sustainable and resilient economy to help manage and redevelop downtown.

champion. In fact, much of downtown’s renaissance resulted from the “Downtown Development Office” that existed in the 1980s through the mid-1990s. This plan calls for re-establishment of a DDO—perhaps the Asheville Development District or “ADD”—



as an independent partner for the City and County as well as nonprofit downtown support and advocacy groups. It should focus on 1) reinforcing and extending the character of the traditional core as a model for enhancing economic value across downtown, and 2) translating this increased value into community benefits such as workforce housing; support for the arts, historic preservation, and small businesses; workforce development, public spaces, and other priorities.

Downtown deserves its own professional management entity that can serve as housekeeper and

as an independent partner for the City and County as well as nonprofit downtown support and advocacy groups. It should focus on 1) reinforcing and extending the character of the traditional core as a model for enhancing



A. Structure the ADD as a steady, supportive entity that transcends election cycles and coordinates with city services. It should serve downtown businesses, residents, and visitors responsively with professional staffing and storefront visibility. Beginning modestly, it should evolve to be locally funded and independent, drawing its leadership from merchants, employers and residents.

B. Within ADD, develop the regulatory framework to implement project development financing.

C. Within ADD, offer and manage a community benefits program (CBP) that safeguards Asheville’s intrinsic character. Fund it

from complementary sources that have a vested interest in this character:

- > an annual fee from all downtown properties based on assessed value (may be dedicated from current property tax revenues);
- > a fee based on permitted construction value of new Level II and III buildings; and
- > a property-title transfer fee based on a portion of sales price.

The CBP should contribute to projects (chosen annually by ADD and City Council) that offer common benefits and reflect community values including: green space, affordable housing,

public art, workforce training, minority business programs, historic preservation, and other capital improvements, including landscape, streetscape, and the like.

D. Within ADD, establish an economic development arm to recruit and support character- and value-enhancing economic activity. Much of downtown’s vibrancy and charm derives from great storefronts—characteristically local, diverse, unique and pedestrian-oriented. ADD should professionally monitor and manage downtown’s mix of uses, nurturing, training and helping place the right retailers in the right locations.



Planning Context

Planning Context

The Downtown Master Plan responds to an unprecedented set of opportunities and challenges

IMPETUS FOR THE PLAN

The Downtown Master Plan process and its product reflect the fact that downtown Asheville is at a critical crossroads. While the 2002 Center City Plan provided a very appropriate basis for ongoing management and development of downtown, and most of its recommendations remain valid today, four critical new realities revealed the need for a renewed perspective on downtown's future.

First, after struggling for seven decades to attract investment, **downtown become a strong focus of development interest** in the past five years, at a national level, particularly for housing, hotels and retail – a condition that can be expected to persist beyond the current economic downturn.

Second, this **development interest, and the market forces behind it, appears to threaten some of downtown's most celebrated assets**, including its numerous local entrepreneurs and artists, its treasure of historic buildings, and spectacular views. These, of course, are some of the key assets driving market appeal in the first place.

Third, **growing difficulties with implementing recommendations of the Center City Plan** and otherwise managing downtown's appearance and development review process have suggested the need for more robust implementation methods.

Fourth, the period of economic uncertainty that has intensified in the course of the Downtown Master Plan process mean **the prospect of too little growth is perhaps as much a concern as unchecked growth**. It underscores the need for the plan to apply with equal validity to downward economic cycles as well as upward ones over its 20-year perspective.

This chapter reviews these four new realities further, provides economic analysis, and identifies principal issues of concern of downtown stakeholders during this planning process.

The 2002 Center City Plan provides an excellent basis for understanding downtown's history and contemporary planning context issues. There is no need to repeat its content here. Instead, this chapter seeks primarily to highlight those ongoing or new issues that have come to the fore, and to note the several areas in which the current planning context and Downtown Master Plan recommendations depart from the Center City Plan.

CENTRAL THEMES

These broad themes have pervaded stakeholder input into the Downtown Master Plan process:

- **It is essential that Asheville retain the special attributes central to its soul** – local, creative, artsy, walkable, funky, fun, full of great restaurants, and having an outstanding quality of life. What additional ingredients are needed to sustain these attributes in face of forces eroding them? How can downtown, the city and region draw benefit from these attributes without compromising them?
 - Following on this, control forces of growth and change so they contribute to downtown’s soul instead of sapping it. In other words, **“don’t kill the goose that laid the golden egg.”**
 - **Tap, in a more productive way, the very high levels of energy and entrepreneurship intrinsic to downtown.** Find ways to help individuals and organizations to work together for bigger, better results – as the city’s numerous business owners, non-profits and engaged residents have less influence by themselves. Address stakeholder fatigue of years of planning and volunteering for downtown by creating a plan that engages stakeholders efficiently to produce lasting, successful results.
- **Establish Asheville as a national and international model for sustainability**¹ – drawing on local interest and expertise in sustainable living as well as the opportunity to serve as an international center monitoring and addressing climate change.
 - **Recognize that planning for downtown Asheville – as for any successful downtown – must address a complex range of interconnected issues.** No single issue should be seen in a vacuum. The planning process should help stakeholders attain the multiple perspectives they need to inform good judgment on the trade-offs and other choices that will be inevitable in the course of continuing to nurture downtown.

CORE ASSETS

Downtown Asheville has the benefit of broadly recognized assets that should continue to shape its character and prosperity while also being safeguarded from any negative impacts of growth and change.

¹ The plan understands a “sustainable” downtown to mean one having the qualities and resources to endure economically, socially and environmentally for the long term – a century and more in the future. As defined in the 1987 report *Our Common Future* by the UN’s Brundtland Commission, "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

- A nationally-significant collection of **historic buildings** – and the attached legacy of its renovation and stewardship through the hard work and initiative of many Ashevilleans, with major help from tax credits.
- **Stunning views** from a variety of perspectives: from downtown to the surrounding mountain landscape, from surrounding areas to downtown’s prominent perch on a ridge, and within downtown to landmark buildings and public spaces.
- An extensive series of **locally-based retail and arts establishments** in pedestrian-oriented storefronts.
- **A strong sense of walkability** – compromised in places due to steep topography, gaps in development or sidewalks, and highway and street barriers, but still substantial enough to be a widely recognized asset. The intimate, human scale of buildings and streets, great extent of pedestrian-oriented shops and other ground floor uses, and downtown view corridors are major contributors to this quality.
- **Prominent and active public spaces:** mainly Pritchard Park, Pack Square, and City-County Plaza which create a series of public outdoor rooms at the heart of downtown.

DEVELOPMENT FACTORS

Market and development trends ushered in a new era in which downtown is no longer desperate for investment, as it was for much of the period from the Great Depression through the 1990’s, but to some degree challenged by development. The new need, at once a challenge and an opportunity, is to manage growth for community benefit. The current economic downturn reduces currency of this issue, but national demographic trends and renewed interest in urban living point toward the ongoing desirability of downtown as a place to live, visit and work. The current moment offers valuable opportunity to set in place new methods of managing growth and change before large-scale investment resumes. Downtown deserves more robust development controls that protect its essential qualities while also ensuring that developer’ investment risks and burdens remain reasonable.

These key development factors are present:

- **The new market and development demand did not come about spontaneously.** Rather, they are the legacy of a generation (more than 30 years) of courageous and generous investments of dollars, sweat and time by developers, business owners and other community members. Further, the city has had an important role in downtown’s long term revival, especially through the work of the former Downtown Development Office in the 1980’s and subsequent planning efforts. Planning for the future must honor these contributions and learn from their lessons.

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- **There are few remaining significant historic buildings to rehabilitate.** Hence, the focus forward should be on protecting what has been renovated, and any other significant resources, but also embracing appropriate new buildings. Facilitating and defining compatible infill development among historic buildings remains a priority. However, while the Center City Plan, Downtown Design Guidelines and other past planning efforts focused primarily on infill development, there is a need for a new focus on the larger, more complex development projects recently targeted to larger sites both in the traditional downtown core and its periphery, such as in the South Slope. The greater heights, lengths and gross areas of these projects mean that their impacts should be evaluated carefully under more comprehensive new criteria.
- **Asheville should be willing to wait for the right development projects to come along,** even in an economic downturn. Its wisdom in rejecting the 1980's mall proposal that would have replaced much of today's lively Lexington Park neighborhood amply demonstrates this. When demand resumes, selectivity becomes all the more important.
- In similar urban contexts across the country that yield significant development value, **developers recognize the practicality of contributing toward community benefits** that come back to benefit them – such as workforce housing and clean, walkable streets—particularly when they have a say in how funds are directed.
- At the same time, **relatively high construction and land costs downtown impact development feasibility** and may limit the amount of community benefit contributions possible. Developable land area in the Asheville region is very much limited by topography and large public and private land holdings, increasing its value. Still, the numerous redevelopment opportunities ringing the traditional downtown are highly attractive owing to the recognized existing value of downtown and generally good access. Ongoing parcel aggregation in these areas by a variety of demonstrates this.
- **Local and national developers each have a role.** The trend toward more non-local developers sponsoring larger projects has sparked concern over whether downtown will “lose its soul” so tied to local initiative. Others have pointed out a long tradition of outsiders coming to make beneficial investments in downtown.
- **The project review and permitting process is considered broken by just about all parties.** Developers and property owners bear inconsistent review comments, unclear development standards, protracted review periods, and related costs. Community members feel unheard. City staff and community volunteers performing review functions feel overburdened. City Council members are concerned that project review demands increasing amounts of their attention and that review standards are outdated. A principal problematic factor is extensive reliance on the conditional use permit process, which forces city council review to occur at a late stage with limited, late public input. Others include insufficient public and city input at early stages of proposals, limited

technical review expertise, and unclear project review standards.

- Expanded efforts by the city and county to strategically coordinate use of their significant land holdings downtown could yield important benefits**, including integrated parking services, and creation of sites for redevelopment and parks.
- Downtown’s emergence as a major residential neighborhood is still in progress, but demonstrates clear momentum.** The following *approximate* figures on housing units (completed or under construction) demonstrate this trend:

Period	Housing units for rent	Housing units for sale	Period total
Pre-1980	155	-	155
1980-2000	185	35	220
2000-present	115	360	475
Total	455	395	850

As of mid-2008, more than 400 additional for-sale housing units were planned downtown. Downtown has also helped spur significant development interest in

adjoining neighborhoods, where more than 65 for-sale units were completed since 2000, and over 550 more have been planned.

Concern has been raised over a perceived preponderance of seasonally-occupied ownership units. City tax records suggest that about 1/3 of for-sale units may be seasonally occupied, and the balance permanently occupied.

The Asheville Office of Economic Development and Public Interest Projects, Inc., contributed to these figures.

ECONOMIC FACTORS

Existing conditions

The reality of downtown differs from its popular perception. People living downtown are not exclusively elite bankers or secondary homeowners; there is also a significant cluster of low-income residents and data suggest many downtown residents face a significant education gap. Similarly, housing downtown is not wholly comprised of new condominiums. Many units are renter-occupied, densely occupied, and divergent in value; more than one third have subsidized rent.

Downtown business activity has concentrations in finance and retail trade, but extends to a rich variety of other sectors and niches. Data indicate Downtown Asheville's 1,800 establishments support 22,000 jobs, mostly at small businesses – a noteworthy contribution to the metropolitan area total. The more than 50 establishments in Downtown with fewer than 20 employees may require help to expand over the coming decade.

The recession beginning in December 2007 appears to be slowing, but not halting, economic activity in the Asheville Metropolitan Statistical Area (or MSA; includes Buncombe, Haywood, Henderson and Madison counties). September 2008 saw surprising job growth in comparison to September 2007 across many sectors within the MSA: information, professional and business services, health services and private education, and leisure and hospitality. The Asheville MSA has undergone steady net job growth every month since June 2003.

Managing economic ups and downs

In contrast to residents of communities desperate for growth, Ashevilleans are unlikely to abandon their principles about how downtown should evolve for the sake of short-term economic development. For a location like downtown Asheville, understanding how contemporary land use economics compare with available opportunities, within the context of the character desired by stakeholders, is the key to economic development. In turn, that means thinking through how broader economic forces affect the nature of enterprises attracted to downtown's infrastructure—its character and amenities—and able to afford it.

As real estate developers and property owners' fortunes rise and fall, they too will make this calculus. During flush times, downtown's custodians—from landlords to the community improvement district—can require special considerations for the privilege of access and, conversely, during lean times, they can accommodate those who might usually be priced out of the market, including artists and others that contribute character.

During challenging economic times, some downtown Asheville prospective and built projects face diminished cash flows; not all approved new construction will occur. Such times are opportunities to pursue thoughtful economic strategies because public sector intervention takes on added potency; one entity's disinvestment—often sparked by declining values/prices—creates an opportunity for another's investment. Amidst the sharp downturns of the 1980s, reinvestment began anew while values were decreasing.

Retaining and growing existing businesses will require reaching out to business leaders (beyond those with free time or economic interest to attend public meetings) to assess their specific labor, infrastructure, material, financing, real estate, and energy needs.

Constant contact with business leaders can prevent abrupt closures. Developing a database of business needs across the gamut could help sort out industries that may be in trouble and allow for assistance before bankruptcy becomes necessary.

Targeting the right new businesses for downtown

Downtown's future hinges upon sound strategic interventions that complement existing talent, investment, and tolerance for risk and leverages. Thinking about what makes downtown an attractive location for desirable business activities may yield policies that can be pursued despite economic shrinkage. Sorting businesses into three categories can help prioritize recruitment efforts and resources:

1. **Some businesses are naturally attracted to downtown,** little or no incentive to locate there. Downtown's infrastructure—its character, its role as the center of cultural and civic life, and the lifestyle it accommodates—will always make it the most attractive location for certain beneficial land uses. Its role as city and county government center will always support attorneys and title companies in addition to municipal employees. Similarly, accounting firms, banks, consulting enterprises and other business service enterprises cluster where networking opportunities are easy to nurture. Companies in creative endeavors such as design and advertising also naturally gravitate toward downtown's enclaves that attract creative people.
2. **Other uses will never choose to locate downtown because the benefits will never outweigh the costs.** Many such uses – such as manufacturing or distribution –

require site or building configurations that are inconsistent with downtown's character.

3. **A third category of business activities shares characteristics with the resistant and the attracted business sectors.** This category is the natural priority for recruitment efforts, and requires the most strategic thinking about who to recruit and how. These operations are indifferent, or even mildly averse, to the idea of locating downtown. They require a nudge, especially when a move downtown equates to real or perceived risk. Accommodating these uses means thinking about how downtown's less dense precincts should evolve.

The Asheville Hub initiative (www.ashevillehub.com) has laid significant groundwork in prioritizing and creating opportunities within this latter category. Among the Hub's seven clusters and further sub-clusters, its Centers for Climatic and Environmental Interaction, within the Technology cluster, offer some of the strongest potential synergies and economic benefits for downtown. This opportunity stems primarily from downtown or near-downtown presence of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the National Environmental Modeling and Analysis Center and other government and private sector organizations dealing with both applied and theoretical aspects of weather and its impacts on people. The climate cluster also presents numerous spinoff opportunities into other business activities and requires the services of people likely to be attracted to downtown, not just for its intrinsic qualities but also so they can work near each other. Indeed, research and interdisciplinary work strongly benefits from concentrating numerous skilled employees within walking distance. Overcoming inherent obstacles (e.g., susceptibility to business cycles, resistance to risk by scientists,

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difficulty linking climatologists to business-oriented partners, etc.) would lay a foundation that could pay big dividends in the future.

Thus, the Downtown Master Plan process studied opportunity for development of downtown research and office buildings meeting the potential 400,000sf demand in this area. The Patton/River Gateway district, where NOAA is currently located, offers prime opportunity for such development along and to either side of Patton Avenue (see Strategy 3 for more on downtown districts). The Beaucatcher Gateway and South Slope districts also offer significant development opportunity.

The Hub's Rejuvenation cluster also has relevance to downtown owing to the proximity of the Mission Health Systems campus just to the south. Downtown, especially the South Slope, could provide sites for workforce housing, medical offices and similar supportive land uses.

Among other Hub clusters, Creativity also has clear relevance to downtown's established arts presence, related businesses, and overall character.

Another business category worth considering in specific downtown locations is retail requiring some automobile access and parking. While the traditional downtown core is no place for new auto-oriented uses, the Asheland Avenue corridor and Beaucatcher Gateway (the predominantly commercial area east of Charlotte Street) could tolerate and benefit from destination retail that would benefit from their easy highway access. Such destination uses – such as mid-scale retail and a multiplex movie theater – could attract more people from the larger city and region to come downtown and discover its other amenities, helping downtown's economy and increasing its presence in the

minds of people all over the region. These uses could also have synergies with downtown's health care concentration.

Attracting and opening new businesses will require the city to think more seriously about existing specialties and complementary activities. Further diversification of the overall concentration in education, health, and tourism would help insulate against a weak economy. Policies must work both to prevent target sectors like atmospheric sciences from locating elsewhere and to incentivize them to do business downtown. Working with schools on educational attainment goals (perhaps through quid pro quo funding mechanisms) may help lift current residents and attract young families, enhancing the workforce new and growing businesses need.

ISSUES OF CONCERN

Discussion with key stakeholders and general community members identified a more detailed series of concerns and facts that stem from the central themes, opportunities and challenges summarized above. These feed into the vision principles described in the executive summary, and set the focus for the implementation strategies. They principally include the following, grouped in seven categories:

Management and leadership

- Downtown benefits from the many initiatives of a very activist community, but the flipside is...
- ... too many piecemeal actions suffer from being uncoordinated. Downtown needs a stable approach, not unduly impacted by near-term politics.
- Nobody is taking responsibility for trash, graffiti and general cleanliness – details of critical importance to making downtown a favored destination for locals and visitors alike.
- The plan and its ongoing implementation must address many starkly different opinions about downtown.
- Stronger leadership is desired from city elected officials and staff.
- The City Development Office tasked with implementation of much of the Center City Plan evolved into the Office of Economic Development, with a somewhat different

mission. The Downtown Master Plan needs to be tied to a more permanent body responsible for implementation.

- This plan must be designed to overcome significant challenges that have limited the application of past plans.
- Belle Chere has become a headache for many downtown property and business owners. Its purpose should be rethought, and it and other events need improved management.
- Downtown needs the presence of beat cops with mobile communications.

Economy

- Downtown is an important economic engine for the region, yet this value to the city and county does not sufficiently come back to help sustain and enhance downtown. Many feel that downtown's tax contributions are not sufficiently returned in the form of basic services. In fact, the dollar value of downtown's property tax payments is not as large as commonly assumed (less than \$5 million in city taxes and less than \$10 million in combined city and county taxes), due in part to the presence of many tax exempt properties (public and private non-profit) downtown. But direct property tax payments do not fully represent the larger indirect value that downtown generates through its public- and institutional-sector jobs, its benefits to tourism and hospitality businesses outside of downtown, and other assets.

Asheville Downtown Master Plan

- Retail rents are increasing faster than revenues. This threatens local entrepreneurs and artists as high-end shops come in catering to visitors and partial-year residents. Some longtime business and property owners earn more renting out their retail space to others than running their own businesses. A broader range of rent levels is needed. Business and artist incubator space is desired. Artist entrepreneurs need supportive businesses services such as accounting, marketing etc.

Social issues

Housing

- Affordable Housing is an increasing priority downtown, although it should not necessarily dominate downtown housing options. The supply of Section 8 units is decreasing. Locating more affordable housing downtown would help satisfy workforce needs of downtown employers such as Mission Hospital, and would also leverage downtown's good access to numerous services and transportation options. The affordable housing task force report issued in June 2008 provides more background and recommendations on affordable housing.
- The presence of homeless people is a persistent and complex challenge downtown. It tarnishes downtown's image to visitors and locals, but is also legitimate in that downtown provides important regional services for homeless people (Western Carolina Rescue Ministries and Homeward Bound are two examples of service providers). The plan should coordinate with the city's Ten-Year Plan to end Homelessness, which includes the most

informed set of recommendations. Relocating certain homeless services to parts of downtown that are easily accessible yet away from prime park areas like Pritchard Park may be one appropriate response.

The Eagle/Market neighborhood and the larger African-American community with ties to downtown

- Although the Eagle/Market neighborhood has an important history as a center of the African-American community in Asheville, its future should embrace the city's full diversity of people, even while honoring its heritage. Likewise, the remainder of downtown should be fully accessible to the African-American community and its entrepreneurs. Today, Eagle/Market and the greater African-American community remain somewhat disconnected from the larger downtown from physical, social and economic perspectives.
- Economic opportunities are needed throughout downtown for African-Americans of all ages.
- The legacy of urban renewal continues to have an impact on Asheville's African-American community and the greater downtown. Members of the well-established African-American community around Valley Street (rebuilt and renamed as South Charlotte Street) were relocated, in part to the East End, with insufficient resident input or support.
- There has been a long struggle to realize long-desired and -planned investments and programs in Eagle/Market. The release of CBDG funds for these in summer 2008 will help. Eagle/Market has several strong organizations

promoting community programs and redevelopment, particularly the YMI, Mt. Zion church and EMSDC. Many planned investments focus on “asset-building” rather than “affordability;” priming Eagle/Market and downtown for more investment.

- The performing arts center, art museum expansion and Parcel B proposals would each have significant impact on Eagle/Market and must be coordinated with the neighborhood to realize mutual gain.
- Important opportunities exist for Eagle/Market to serve as a physical and social link among the Pack Square Cultural District, South Charlotte/Valley Street corridor, East End, Biltmore Avenue, and South Slope.

The arts and culture

- There is a need for improved organization among individual artists and supporting groups. Ongoing initiatives of the arts council should help in this regard.
- An initiative to create an artist resource center will help address many needs expressed by artists.
- Too few job opportunities exist to support artists. As a result, the artist community is skewed toward young or post-career individuals; artists in the middle of their careers tend to find insufficient means for support.
- The emerging Pack Square Cultural District can help raise the profile of a variety of arts-related institutions and galleries in the area.

Sustainability

- Opportunities and incentives are needed to make existing buildings more energy –efficient. A more aggressive city or downtown energy code would help.
- It would be realistic to hold developers to higher standards for sustainable design, as is done in other cities (Portland, Santa Monica and Boulder are some examples).
- New buildings should be planned for a hundred-year lifespan.
- Solar access rights to individual properties need to be maintained as taller buildings are being proposed. This would preserve downtown’s solar power generation potential.
- Sustainability advocates differ on whether taller buildings offer benefits or not. Increased heights allow increased densities that reduce overall environmental impacts, but also may compromise solar access and downtown character.
- Promote building preservation and adaptive reuse wherever possible – with historic and non-historic buildings alike – to reduce the energy and material losses that occur through demolition.
- More efficient parking should be planned to reduce land area devoted to parking.

Asheville Downtown Master Plan

- Sustainability-related jobs already have a presence downtown, and could expand to become an important sector.

Transportation

- More access choices are needed beyond the single-passenger car
- A useful transit/shuttle service is needed to provide connectivity within downtown districts, including service to peripheral parking sites.
- The central parking challenge is addressing growing parking demand while reducing land area devoted to parking. A shuttle to remote parking areas should be provided. The perceived severity of downtown's parking deficit varies, with some people seeing a major deficit while others "always find what they need."
- A downtown parking study was recently completed, and this plan should be consistent with its recommendations.
- Public parking garages too daunting for pedestrians at night. Lighting and surveillance should be improved.

Urban design

- Building height, currently unregulated, has become a serious concern as recent development proposals have exceeded 20 stories. An approach is needed to prevent negative impacts of taller and bulkier buildings on shadows, scale and views.

- Historic preservation must be a continued priority, as it is a big part of what's made Asheville so special and successful.
- Downtown needs better connections to surrounding neighborhoods on all sides. This means overcoming barriers of highways and auto-dominated streets, particularly I-240 and South Charlotte Street. Further, as redevelopment unfolds on sites at the edge of downtown, land uses and building forms need to create better edge conditions relating to adjacent neighborhoods and corridors.
- The prospect of new development in downtown areas outside of the traditional downtown core brings a need to enhance identification of subsidiary places within downtown. Increased residential development would especially benefit from designation of small residentially-themed neighborhoods at an intimate scale, every few blocks. While the Center City Plan identified certain sub-districts, an expanded structure of districts and sub-districts is needed, recognizing existing and emerging place identity.
- Many people living out of Asheville have purchased downtown condominiums as second homes, and often have long-term intentions to retire in Asheville. The rare use of these second homes has prompted concern about their "dark windows" representing lost potential for vitality and retail demand.

- The relatively compact retail floor footprints in downtown are helpful in minimizing the number of chain stores.
- Significant views must be maintained from downtown to the surrounding landscape, and to local landmarks.
- More public spaces are needed as downtown's residential use expands. The South Slope district is especially in need of park space. Consider locating parks at at 2 ½-minute walking intervals as recommended by the Nolan plan.
- Walkability must be improved where it is compromised or missing. Major needs include addressing blank or vacant storefronts, parking lots, heavy traffic, steep topography, and lack of wayfinding cues.
- Save funky little spaces, such as narrow alleys and courts
- There are mixed opinions on whether downtown should be overtly child-friendly (attracting families to visit and live downtown) versus merely child-tolerant (enhancing tourist appeal to couples and groups traveling without children).
- Land use planning should reserve land to facilitate HUB- related research (400,000 sf). It must also show housing and other high value uses.
- The Asheville Design Center has brought a remarkable level of visibility and action to these issues and, most notably, the I-26/240/Patton initiative.

RELATED CURRENT INITIATIVES

Downtown Asheville is a dynamic place, and the ongoing work of the City, developers, community organizations and others even during the downtown master plan process has helped shape the issues at hand and strategies for addressing them. Some of the most significant downtown initiatives that have helped set the context for discussion of the plan and may possibly contribute to its implementation include:

Planning initiatives

- Parks, Recreation and Cultural Arts master plan
- Affordable Housing Task Force report
- Sustainability Advisory Commission on Energy and the Environment (SACEE) Green Development Initiatives memorandum
- Social issues task force
- Asheville Hub
- Upcoming city-led area plans for Aston Park and the French Broad Street corridor

Development initiatives

- The Ellington (predominantly housing) on Biltmore Avenue
- Eagle/Market Streets Development Corporation mixed residential/retail development proposal
- Zona Lofts and master plan for Zona Village in the South Slope
- Haywood Park (mixed-use hotel, housing and retail) on Battery Hill
- Housing development proposal for city RFP Parcel B (south of City-County Plaza)
- Hotel development proposal for RFP Parcel A (at Civic Center and Basilica)
- Performing Arts Center (PAC) proposal south of City-County Plaza
- Pack Square reconstruction and its delays

Note: these lists are not intended to be all-inclusive.

Master Plan Strategies

DOWNTOWN MASTER PLAN VISION PRINCIPLES

Sustain downtown's dynamic culture and economy.
 Enhance downtown's role as a center of residential neighborhoods.
 Strengthen downtown's identity as a series of public realm, and view corridors that create downtown's unique legacy.
 Preserve and enhance diverse architecture, historic resources, transportation choices for better access and better health.
 Provide good, interconnected of sustainable development and operations at every level.
 Make downtown a national model of sustainable development and operations at every level.
 Establish creative strategies for implementing the master plan.

DOWNTOWN MASTER PLAN STRATEGIES

	Sustain downtown's dynamic culture and economy.	Enhance downtown's role as a center of residential neighborhoods.	Strengthen downtown's identity as a series of public realm, and view corridors that create downtown's unique legacy.	Preserve and enhance diverse architecture, historic resources, transportation choices for better access and better health.	Provide good, interconnected of sustainable development and operations at every level.	Make downtown a national model of sustainable development and operations at every level.	Establish creative strategies for implementing the master plan.
Experiencing Downtown							
STRATEGY 1 Cultivate essential cultural and historic resources.	●	●		●			
STRATEGY 2 Expand choices for access and mobility.	●	●			●	●	
Shaping Downtown							
STRATEGY 3 Inaugurate an urban design framework to extend downtown's sense of place and community.	●	●	●	●		●	
STRATEGY 4 Shape building form to promote quality of place.	●	●	●	●			
STRATEGY 5 Update design guidelines to be current and clear and to promote sustainable development.	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
STRATEGY 6 Make project review transparent, predictable, and inclusive of community input.							●
Managing Downtown							
STRATEGY 7 Nurture a sustainable and resilient economy to help manage and redevelop downtown.	●	●	●		●		●

This chart summarizes how the Downtown Master Plan's seven strategies address its seven vision principles.

EXPERIENCING DOWNTOWN

Strategy 1

Enhance the downtown Asheville experience by cultivating its creative, cultural, and historic character

OVERVIEW AND GOALS

Asheville has garnered a series of distinctions:

- Top 25 Arts Destinations—*American Style*
- Top 10 Healthiest Places to Live—*Kiplinger's*
- Top 10 Great Adventure Towns—*National Geographic*
- Top 10 Literary Destinations—*USA Today*
- Top 12 Travel Destinations in the World—*Frommer's*
- Top 8 Great Walking Towns—*Where to Retire*
- Best Places to Live (ranked #8)—*MSNBC*
- Best Collection of Late-19th and Early 20th-century Urban Architecture in NC—*National Park Service*
- Second-Best Collection of Art Deco Architecture in the Southeast—*Smithsonian Magazine*

This list underscoring Asheville's—and, almost inarguably, downtown's—charm and popularity is not exhaustive. Citizens and elected officials intend to keep it that way. This Asheville Downtown Master Plan suggests a number of innovative measures to cultivate our lively arts scene and reinforce the outstanding historic architectural backdrop that encourages it. Strategy 1 addresses these two keys to the downtown Asheville experience.

The Arts, the Artists and their Organizations

Asheville is now recognized as the number-two arts destination among smaller U.S. cities (following Santa Fe, New Mexico).

- The arts and artists contribute \$65 million annually to Western North Carolina's economy.
- WNC's artists comprise the largest percentage of self-employed workers in the state.

- While not all are devoted to “art,” Asheville has the highest per-capita number of 501c3 non-profits in the US.
- Anecdotally, at least 75 percent of the market for “emerging” artist’s work is local; only 15 percent is out-of-market. The numbers almost reverse for Asheville’s “established” artists: less than 20 percent remains in the local market; more than 70 percent is shipped to points across the US and Canada.

As John Ellis put it, “it’s almost impossible to not ‘bump into the arts’ anywhere in downtown Asheville.” Charley McIver posits that “downtown Asheville is a 24-hour festival.”

However, public financial support for the arts is “flat” and current economic uncertainty does not bode well for increased funding. With no local corporate headquarters, philanthropic decisions are made far from downtown Asheville—in Charlotte, Atlanta, New York and elsewhere.

How can Asheville’s arts community continue to thrive and sustain itself through the current economic downturn—and beyond? How can we build upon and market the success that has been achieved? How can we continue to attract emerging artists?

Downtown Master Plan goals include:

- Encourage all individual artists and arts organizations to collaborate in framing a national model for sustainability and ongoing creativity;
- Ensure a constant supply of suitable studio space (at all rent scales and sizes) to allow Asheville’s artists and arts associations to continue their work—from the proposed Asheville Area Performing Arts Center (PAC) to the

expanded Asheville Museum of Art to individual artists’ studios and live/work space;

- Build a strong administrative, marketing, and managerial organization to offer coordinated art and cultural experiences. Provide a strong umbrella entity for all arts organizations. Establish an arts resource center for independent entrepreneurial artists;
- Leverage the region’s creativity, arts and cultural offerings to promote downtown Asheville.



The concentration, variety and quality of arts-related destinations in downtown— venerable institutions, small businesses as well as impromptu music- and art-filled public spaces—are central to Asheville’s vitality, economy and identity—now and in the future.

Asheville Downtown Master Plan

Historic Preservation

Downtown Asheville endured decades of disinvestment and neglect. But beginning in the 1980s, it began to realize the benefits of market disinterest and an isolated mountain setting. Downtown Asheville escaped the ravages of urban renewal and thus enjoys a relatively intact historic fabric. Artists and other urban pioneers found they could afford downtown real estate and so created an interesting, eclectic environment that's become the envy of communities coast-to-coast.

Now that its older buildings have become economically viable and a key element in experiencing the city, preservation must continue to be an integral strategy for downtown Asheville.

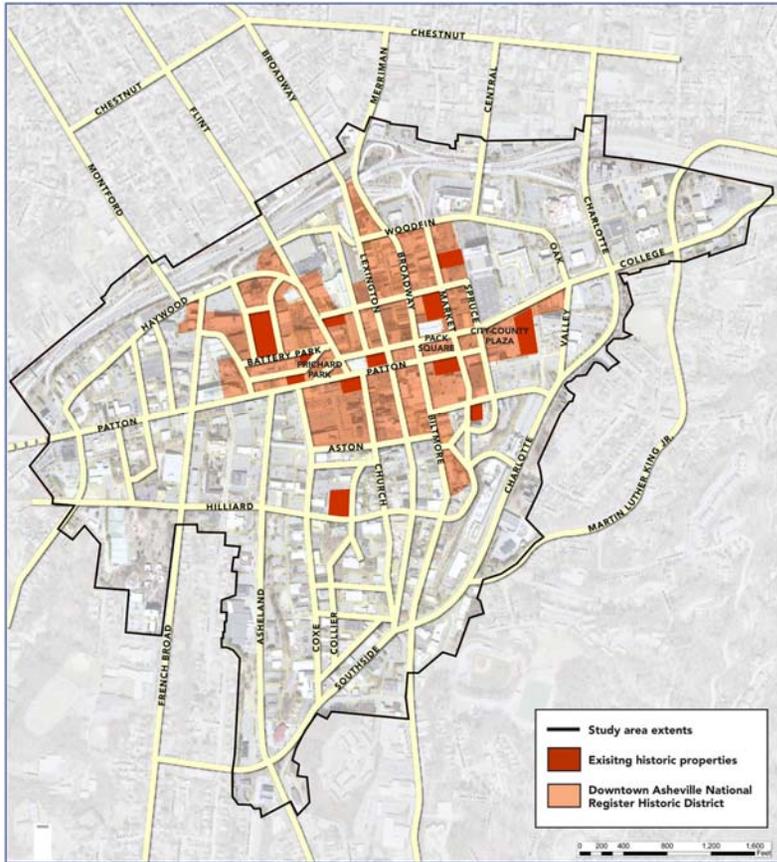
- Since 1976, there have been 82 rehabilitation projects in downtown Asheville's National Register Historic District (NRHD). All of these benefitted from a 20 percent federal rehabilitation tax credit (for income-producing structures). These projects represent over \$89 million in downtown re-investment—beginning at a time when downtown was neglected and deteriorating. In large measure, historic rehabilitation saved downtown Asheville.
- Since 1998, project sponsors and owners have been able to double that tax credit (to 40 percent) by using North Carolina's matching tax credit for certified historic rehabilitation.
- Downtown Asheville and Buncombe County lead the state in the number of completed historic rehabilitation projects that use federal tax credits.
- These incentives for downtown revitalization and growth are keys to continued success.

What tools could be used to realize more—and more sympathetic—historic preservation in downtown Asheville's traditional core? Are there compelling reasons to adopt (or avoid) a regulatory approach—including, but not limited to, a locally-designated historic district—rather than (or in addition to) expanding awareness and implementation of existing incentive-based approaches that build on the 40 percent combined federal and state tax credits for income-producing properties? Can the existing downtown NRHD be revised to recognize Asheville's "essential creative culture" and its post-1929 historic assets?

Downtown Master Plan goals for Strategy 1 include

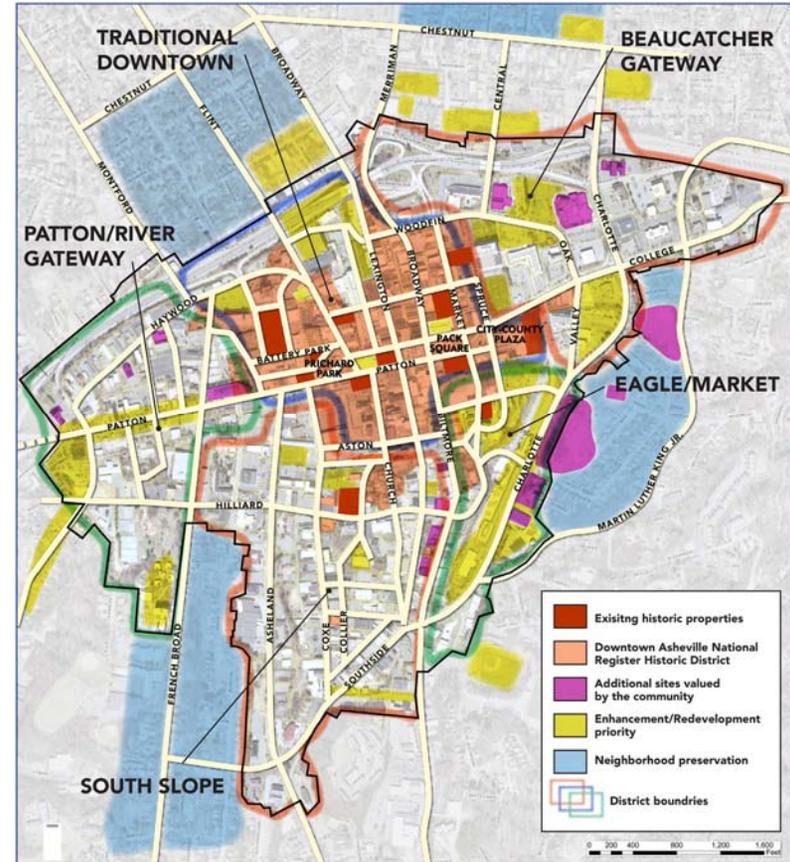
- Update the existing Downtown Asheville National Register Historic District.
- Increase awareness, support and (most importantly) use of existing incentives to spur preservation of more of Asheville's historic fabric.
- Focus preservation attention on smaller buildings and strategic infill projects within the National Register Historic District.
- Develop new incentive programs.
- Enable sensitive renovations and expansions to historic structures so they may maintain competitive economic value and thus evade pressure for demolition and replacement with higher-value uses.

HISTORIC DESIGNATION



Downtown’s current National Register Historic District and specific protected historic properties.

TARGETING PRESERVATION AND CHANGE



The historic district and properties from the diagram at left, plus other priority sites identified by the community for protection (purple) and enhancement or redevelopment (yellow). Uncolored areas generally offer significant additional opportunity for redevelopment supporting the community vision for downtown – taking some development pressure off places deserving preservation.

IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH

Use a new downtown management entity—the Asheville Downtown District (ADD)—to muster existing leadership and resources in support of the essential elements of downtown Asheville’s success—the arts, historic preservation, small and locally-owned businesses and other constituent communities. These are the forces that are best positioned to preserve and enhance the downtown’s unique cultural and historic qualities. These are the people who built—and depend on—its continued vibrancy.

ACTION STEPS: NEAR-TERM

A. Create a strong, supportive alliance among all arts presenters that will collectively:

1. Perform the first annual state-of-the-arts audit to:
 - Identify existing artists and organizations;
 - Compile each agency’s mission and programs;
 - Inventory each agency’s resources, e.g., staff, budget and equipment;
 - Identify existing spaces, uses and needs;
 - Inventory unmet needs;
 - Identify all arts-related and art-based businesses;
 - Project economic impacts;
 - Seek national models and case studies.
2. Once the audit is complete, stage the first annual cultural “summit” in cooperation with the Chamber’s Tourism Development Authority (TDA), MountainBiz Works, the

Hub Initiative and other major players, including higher education providers. The summit should:

- create cohesiveness within the arts community
- develop common advocacy points;
- plan national marketing;
- identify strategies to avoid cannibalizing funding sources;
- encourage partnership grant applications for state, federal and foundation funding.

3. Publish and distribute an arts and events calendar, updated daily, in electronic format, as a handout available at the Convention & Visitors Bureau, and as flyers posted on kiosks added to the TDA’s wayfinding system.

B. Support designation and expansion of the Pack Square Cultural District, in terms of membership and geography.

1. Work with existing constituents such as the Pack Square Conservancy, Asheville Community Theater, Asheville Museum of Art, NC Stage Company, Diana Wortham Theater, YMI Cultural Center, Handmade in America, Fine Arts Theater, Quality Forward, Asheville Design Center, private galleries, the proposed PAC, ADD and others.
2. Cultivate strong links between the cultural district and the Eagle/Market Street District to coordinate programming.
3. Investigate mutually beneficial financial and planning efforts among PAC, the Asheville Museum of Art, Eagle/Market and others. Consider joint-ventures in fundraising and construction.

C. Plan an “Artist’s Resource Center” (ARC) as a vital place for entrepreneurial artists that provides resources, tools,

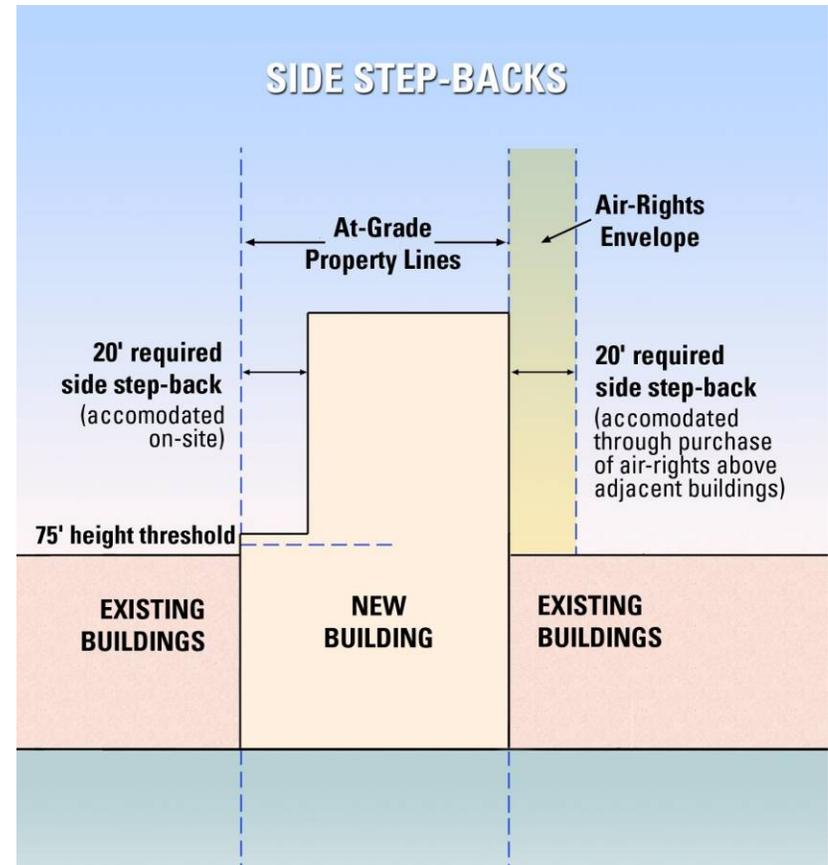
programs and services for an efficient approach to business start-up, maintenance and growth.

1. Launch a downtown start-up facility for ARC.
 2. Provide opportunities for peer and mentor networking and access to services provided by other area organizations, such as Small Business Center at A-B Tech, MountainBiz Works, Mountain Housing Opportunities, Pisgah Legal Services, Eblen Charities, Community Foundation of Western North Carolina, and Asheville Bravo Concerts.
 3. Investigate possible planning and construction joint-ventures for ARC—AMA, PAC, National Climatic Data Center, etc.—that might speed ARC’s realization.
 4. Apply for funding through applicable North Carolina Arts Council grant program(s): Arts and Audiences; Arts in Education; Creating Place: Community Public Art and Design; Folklife; General Support; Grassroots Arts Program; Organizational Development; Outreach Program; Regional Artist Projects; Statewide Service Organizations, etc.
 5. Hold regular downtown gallery crawls in cooperation with the River Arts District, using strategies such as extended days and hours and free transit between downtown and RAD to draw participants.
- D. **Extend the reach of Asheville’s cultural events and programs to the diverse populations** of downtown, the city, and the region. As one excellent example, address past disenfranchisement of the African American community in and around downtown.
1. Collaboratively plan and schedule major Citywide events (such as Bele Chere and Goombay!) to more effectively draw multicultural participation and audiences.
 2. Ensure that the range of concerts, exhibits, festivals and cultural/arts events appeals to all community members.
 3. Of equal importance, seek more sponsors to make these events affordable, welcoming, and accessible to the entire community.
 4. Expand cultural education and training for youth, exposing them to Asheville’s vibrant legacy of arts, people and history. Enable them to sustain it through coming generations.
- E. As necessary, **provide strategic support to arts-related businesses** such as galleries and live performance venues. Be open and honest with each other.
- F. **Maintain and upgrade the existing Civic Center and Thomas Wolfe Auditorium** to serve for at least the next five to ten years. Despite limitations, the facility remains a contributing resource to downtown and an important regional destination. Its replacement should not be a near-term goal as efforts are better directed to other priorities. Near-term upgrades, however, should include a more efficient, zoned HVAC system.
- G. **Support the proposed Asheville Area Performing Arts Center (PAC)**. Leverage it to support revival of Eagle/Market Street and South Charlotte Street (see Strategy 3, action step A.1/Eagle Market District for more on this opportunity).
- H. Organize and obtain a Certified Local Government grant (due January 2009) from the NC Department of Cultural Resources to **update and renominate the Downtown Asheville National Register Historic District**. Adopt the renomination in 2010. Extend the period of significance to include properties built between 1929 and 1958. In addition, explore the pros and

Asheville Downtown Master Plan

cons of designating a local historic district. (Note that local historic district designation could excessively restrict the ongoing investment that downtown needs to thrive by establishing stringent restoration standards without adequate financial support to help meet them.)

- I. **Further leverage the National Trust for Historic Preservation “destination of distinction” award** to attract cultural and heritage tourists to downtown Asheville.
- J. **Target National Register-qualified properties eligible for 40% tax credits** and aggressively promote these opportunities.
- K. **Enable owners of historic properties to sell side step-back air rights** (see Strategy 4). Enable owners of historic properties to build sensitively above their properties. These two approaches allow owners to capitalize on increasing site value without demolishing downtown Asheville’s historic fabric. Additional stories built on historic buildings must be stepped-back at least ten feet from the existing historic façade edge.



Owners of existing historic buildings may sell air rights to owners of adjacent parcels. These air rights would serve as the required side step-backs.

- L. **Continue and expand interpretive programs in the downtown** to enable residents and visitors to understand and celebrate the city’s heritage. Incorporate this interpretation in more TDA way-finding stations.

1. Engage citizen “historians,” scholars from UNCA and neighborhood leaders to develop the story framework and priority programming.
2. Interpret historic preservation success stories, e.g., the avoided downtown mall and other aborted urban renewal schemes via downtown walking tours, plaques, etc.
3. Link possible tours to the established network of downtown Asheville’s excellent “Urban Trail” sculptures.
4. Tap the arts community to create innovative ways to present stories; use multiple media—sculpture, text panels, audio services, printed maps and guides, etc.
5. Relate historical events and people to buildings and public spaces. Make the stories of Asheville’s diverse communities come alive, thus expanding public awareness and appreciation of the city’s historic fabric.
6. Increase the presence of the Eagle/Market Street District on the Urban Trail. Tell the story of urban renewal in the South Charlotte/Valley Street area.

M. **Diversify the Asheville-Buncombe Historic Resources Commission** to include Asheville Downtown Commission members, design professionals (including urban designers), sympathetic developers, construction professionals, and members with similar backgrounds.

ACTION STEPS: LONG-TERM

The Arts, the Artists, and their Organizations

- Locate and establish a permanent downtown home for the Artist Resource Center (ARC). Accommodate live/work space, a retail outlet, working studios open to the public, a hostel for visiting artists, shared equipment for artists-in-residence, a small performance space, a library and archive, offices for shared professional services (such as legal, accounting, photography, and printing), a restaurant, a store that sells recyclable material by the pound, sculpture gardens, an “art lending library,” etc.
- Consider longer-term options for the Civic Center. In all cases, keep its functions downtown.

Historic Preservation

- Develop highly creative preservation measures for continuing historic rehabilitation and adding space on top of existing historic structures. Maintain consistency with the downtown Asheville context and guidelines in Strategies 3, 4 and 5.
- Reinforce the five-district composition of downtown Asheville’s neighborhoods in Strategy 3. Observe the unique architectural histories of each district.
- With other historic district commissions, investigate additional retro-fit tax credits through the state and/or nationally.

RESOURCES

The Arts, the Artists, and their Organizations

UNCA's Undergraduate Research Program (available to perform research on a variety of topics such as arts, culture and history) should be an excellent source of energies and talents.

Web searches reveal a list of existing Artist Resource Center ideas. Good examples are under "precedents" at right.

Thoughtful discussions may yield joint-ventures between art and culture groups and planned downtown developments.

Historic Preservation

Contact the National Trust and the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers for emerging ideas and trends.

Enlist research and thesis help from students enrolled in professional preservation programs at NC State, UNC-Chapel Hill and Clemson.

IN THE APPENDIX

The Arts, the Artists, and their Organizations

Diagram of downtown places for arts and entertainment

Historic Preservation

Diagram of designated historic properties as well as other places community members wish to preserve

PRECEDENTS

The Arts, the Artists, and their Organizations

Examples of some Artists Resource Center (ARC) program elements are found in:

- Alexandria VA
- Bethlehem PA
- Durham NC
- Harrisburg PA
- Los Angeles CA (SPARC)
- Minneapolis MN (The Loft; CIA; Sase)
- Paducah KY
- Philadelphia PA (The Scribe; Painted Bride)
- Reading PA

Historic Preservation

Some of the most inventive historic preservation programs are found in:

- Annapolis MD
- Charleston SC
- Nantucket MA
- San Antonio TX
- Savannah GA

Excellent tours of historic districts and places are operated by the Chicago Architecture Foundation.

EXPERIENCING DOWNTOWN

Strategy 2

Expand convenient choices for downtown access and mobility.

OVERVIEW AND GOALS

Getting to and around downtown Asheville is not easy. Many of us have to consciously think “How do I get from here to there?” and, once there, “Where do I park?” or “How close is the next bus stop?” or “Where’s a bike rack?” (Imagine what this is like for visitors.) While downtown’s physical size is relatively small—and well-suited for comfortable walking—variations in topography and street alignment can make connections unclear, if not arduous.

There are clear opportunities to offer a rationalized “systems” approach to improve downtown entries, downtown parking and movement around downtown. A “systems” approach could also add to everyone’s enjoyment of downtown.

As an example, peak parking demand—especially during evenings and weekends—may be better addressed by offering alternatives to driving, hence parking. In turn, this would preclude the need to spend public funds on construction of new garages and free scarce land for more profitable mixed-use development.

As another example, over 60 percent of all downtown parking spaces are in privately-owned areas and not available to the general public during peak demand hours. A “systems” approach suggests that these areas be made available to the public after business hours. If carefully managed, after-hours use of private parking should return cash to the owners as well as to the public.

A further example: If a downtown management entity were formed—the Asheville Development District or ADD—this collaboration should be able to manage both public and private parking. In this “systems” approach, ADD is seen as a partnership among private property owners, the City, the County, parking authority, transit authority, Mountain Mobility and perhaps the Chamber of Commerce, among others.

Yet another example of a “systems” approach: Study and implement a downtown shuttle service. The study process is relatively straightforward:

- Investigate origin/destination (to the level of ZIP+Four) for all who drive and park downtown. Do the same for transit riders.
- Identify primary entry points, destinations (parking decks, employment), and lengths of stay.
- Predict potential shuttle ridership based on cost, frequency of service, resistance points, etc.
- Draw up proposed routes, with options for serving close-in neighborhoods and destinations.
- Identify possible locations for fringe parking lots.
- Estimate various operating costs.
- Identify a success plan and service evaluation criteria.

Another idea may deserve consideration. Peak parking demand—on special occasions such as First Night, A Taste of Asheville, and major holidays—could be addressed by declaring an auto-free zone within parts of downtown. Entrepreneurs could rent decorated four- to six-person electric carts to residents and visitors. Transfer points between private automobiles and carts could be at the City-managed Rankin or Civic Center garages and at the County’s new facility on College.

The “systems” approach also extends to pedestrian access, bike access and downtown walkability.

- Implement the recently-approved bike access plan throughout downtown. Coordinate the bike access plan with the Urban Design Framework (Strategy 3).
- Investigate a comprehensive pedestrian access plan—especially over/under I-240, from the River Arts District and along South Charlotte/Valley Street—and integrate it with the shuttle system and transit routes. Also coordinate this with the Urban Design Framework (Strategy 3).

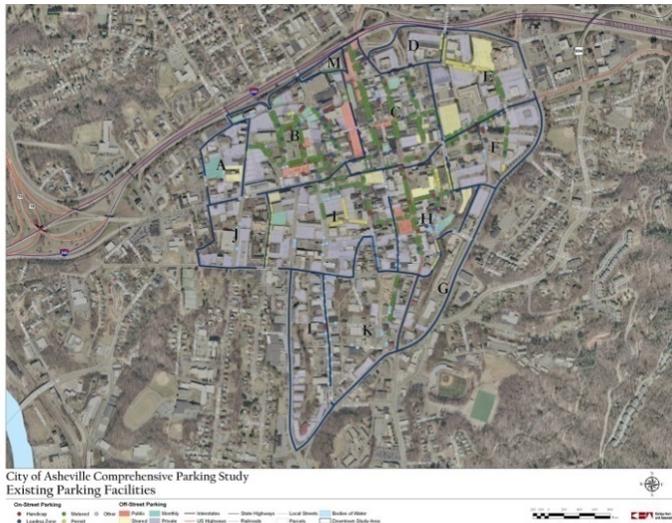
- Examine future bikeway, pedestrian and shuttle links to enhance downtown access. These include West Asheville, Hillcrest, UNCA, WeCan, Montford, River Arts District, A-B Tech, Tunnel Road, Mission Health Systems, Biltmore Village.

Conventional approaches to providing parking can also change to enhance the downtown experience. People in Asheville, like other Americans, are looking to spend less time in their cars and more time enjoying places and people. New parking management tools make it possible to get more function out of existing parking resources by making it easier for users to find and pay for parking and use existing spaces more intensively, thereby, reducing the land and financial resources needed to create parking. Lack of minimum parking quantity requirements in current zoning is beneficial in that property owners can minimize land and funds devoted to parking as the market allows. Where increased parking demand cannot be avoided, good parking design makes a big difference in keeping downtown a place pleasant for walking.

IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH

Manage downtown access, mobility, circulation and parking as a single interconnected transportation “system.” Provide joint leadership through the Asheville Transportation and Engineering Department and the recommended downtown management entity (such as ADD) to coordinate planning, policy and operations.

Asheville Downtown Master Plan



Downtown Asheville parking ownership



Downtown Asheville parking demand: weekday peak. The wide range of demand from lot to lot suggests that coordinated parking management could make more efficient use of existing parking.



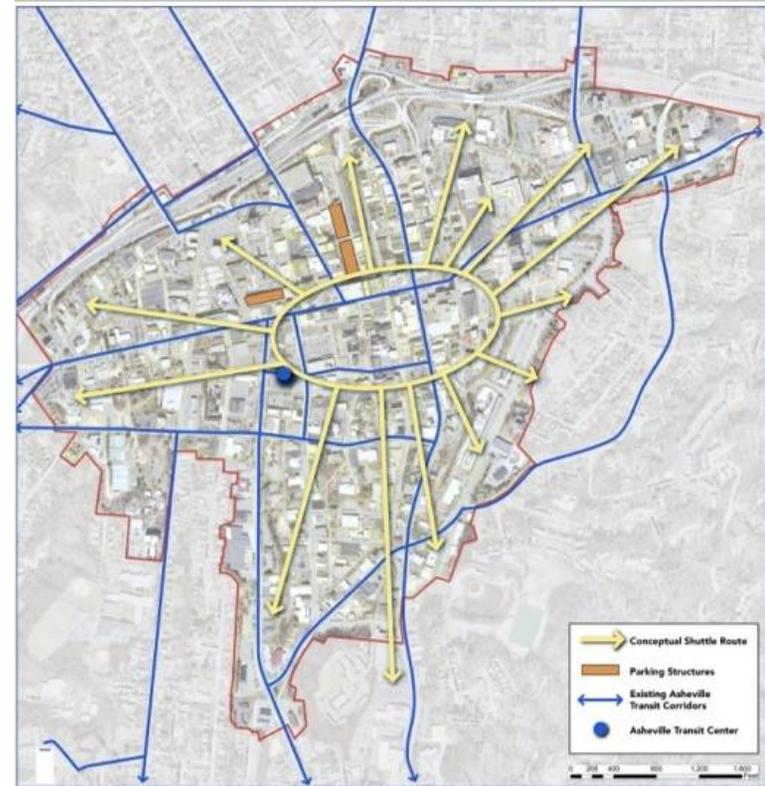
Downtown Asheville parking demand: weekend peak. Negotiated use of lightly-used private satellite lots (green) could expand capacity.

ACTION STEPS: NEAR-TERM

A. Proceed with the downtown shuttle service feasibility study proposed by the City, whose recent Comprehensive Parking Study identified a deficit of 700 to 800 parking spaces in downtown. A shuttle would address both parking and mobility.

1. Design the shuttle service (and the shuttle itself) should offer downtown employees a compelling alternative to all-day parking. Use the service to enhance mobility for residents and tourists. Complement Asheville Transit and Mountain Mobility services; avoid service duplication; facilitate efficient transfers. Consider service to West Asheville and Biltmore Village.
2. Operate the shuttle frequently in peak periods (five- to ten-minute headways); provide 10- to 15-minute off-peak headways.

3. Provide safe and comfortable waiting areas at all downtown stops and periphery parking lots.
4. Review technologies such as Next Bus (nextbus.com) to provide information on waiting time.
5. Encourage use of “green” vehicles: hybrid, electric, biodiesel.
6. Establish a pilot service phase and progress to longer-term service.
7. Develop shuttle signage consistent with TDA’s wayfinding system.



A downtown shuttle service should complement existing Asheville Transit and Mountain Mobility services, providing new connections among downtown destinations, current public parking and additional satellite parking at edges of downtown.

- B. Implement downtown elements of Asheville’s 2008 Comprehensive Bicycle Plan**, starting with opportunities that yield the greatest impact and visibility. Coordinate biking improvements with the Parks & Recreation Master Plan and Greenway Master Plan.

1. Add bike lanes to these downtown streets.