

**asheville**



downtown **master plan**

# Downtown Master Plan

March 27, 2009

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# acknowledgements



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# **executive summary**





# executive summary



## PLANNING CONTEXT

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 1920's 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 all proposals be accepted in the name of more jobs and a broader tax base? The current

*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.*

moment offers a valuable chance to pause while the 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 1980’s 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, technical, 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.

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 organizations, 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, and development review

**MANAGING DOWNTOWN:** operations and economics

# Experiencing Downtown

## 1 Enhance the Downtown Asheville experience by cultivating its creative, cultural, and historic character.

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. Create a strong, supportive alliance among all arts presenters.                                    | F. Extend the reach of Asheville's cultural events and programs.                         | K. Promote opportunities for National Register-qualified properties eligible for 40 percent tax credits. |
| B. Support designation and expansion of Pack Square Cultural District.                                | G. Maintain and upgrade existing Civic Center and Thomas Wolfe Auditorium.               | L. Enable owners of historic properties to sell air-rights.  |
| C. Ensure timely completion of expanded Asheville Art Museum and rehabilitated Diana Wortham Theater. | H. Support the proposed Asheville Area Performing Arts Center (PAC).                     | M. Continue and expand interpretive programs in the Downtown.  |
| D. Support Asheville's Public Art Master Plan and work of the Public Art Board.                       | I. Update and re-nominate the Downtown Asheville National Register Historic District.    | N. Integrate Asheville's preservation expertise more fully into Downtown decision-making.                |
| E. Expand strategic support for the arts and related businesses.                                      | J. Leverage National Trust for Historic Preservation "destination of distinction" award. |  |

## 2 Expand convenient choices for Downtown 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 investments.

- |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| A. Study the feasibility of a Downtown shuttle. Use the proposed shuttle to link parking with major Downtown destinations. | D. Coordinate access improvements with wayfinding information and Asheville Transit.   | F. Minimize impacts of parking on Downtown streetscape and development capacity. |
| B. Implement the 2008 <i>Comprehensive Bicycle Plan</i> .  | E. Update rates, fee collection, lighting and security in public parking areas. Build operating partnerships among City, County, and private sector. | G. Operate satellite park-and-ride lots in partnership with private land owners. |
| C. Improve the Downtown walking network. Maintain constant walking access to businesses adjoining construction areas.      |  |  |



# 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 America's 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 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.
- D. Implement and update streetscape improvement goals of the *Asheville Pedestrian Thoroughfare Plan* and *Downtown Streetscape Plan*.

TRADITIONAL DOWNTOWN:  
SENSITIVE INFILL / "REFILL"



BEAUCATCHER GATEWAY:  
URBAN-STYLE COMMERCIAL GROWTH



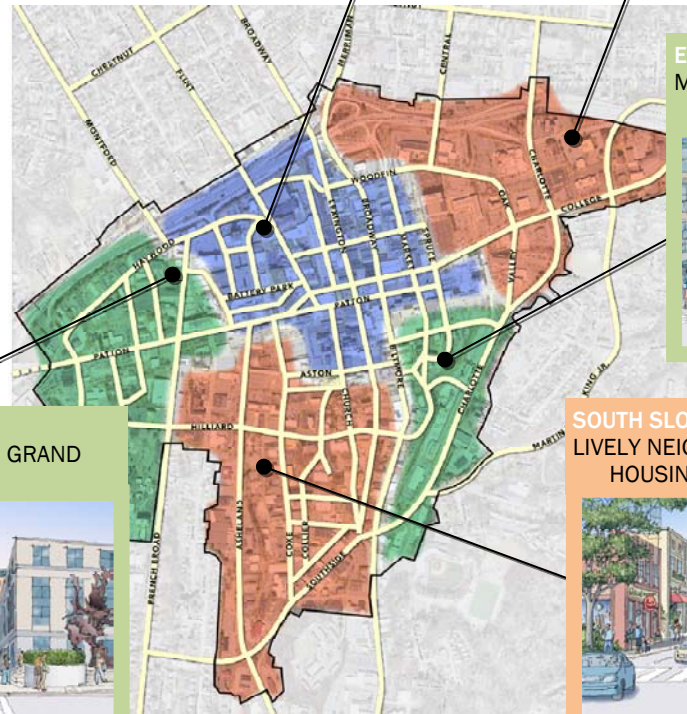
EAGLE/MARKET:  
MAKING SOUTH CHARLOTTE A  
NEIGHBORHOOD STREET



PATTON/RIVER GATEWAY:  
NEW JOBS AND HOUSING FRAMING GRAND  
AVENUE



SOUTH SLOPE:  
LIVELY NEIGHBORHOOD OF  
HOUSING AND MORE





# Shaping Downtown

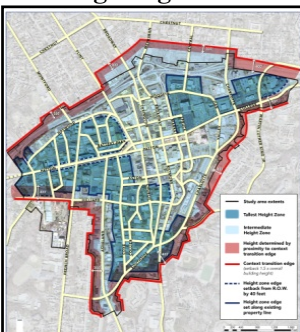
4

## Shape building form to promote quality of place.

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. 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. Encourage gradual scale transitions between Downtown and adjacent neighborhoods.
- B. Establish maximum height zones across Downtown.

### Building Height Zones



- C. Limit shadow impacts on public parks, plaza spaces, and locally-designated landmark buildings with sun-dependant features.

- D. Step upper floors back above a defined streetwall for daylight and pedestrian scale.
- E. Keep taller buildings slender to preserve view corridors and daylight between them.

Downtown’s traditional core already reflects the new paradigm for American downtowns: walkable streets, public gathering places, mixed

> Avoid “slabs” by limiting horizontal dimensions of taller buildings.

> Require a portion of side facades to be glazed.

- F. Require developers to demonstrate how buildings will enhance the Downtown skyline.

> Test proposed buildings in the City’s computer model.

5

## Update Downtown design guidelines to be current, to be 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.

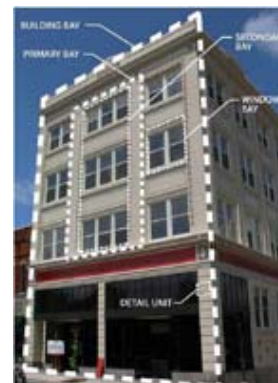
- B. Add new standards:

- > 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.



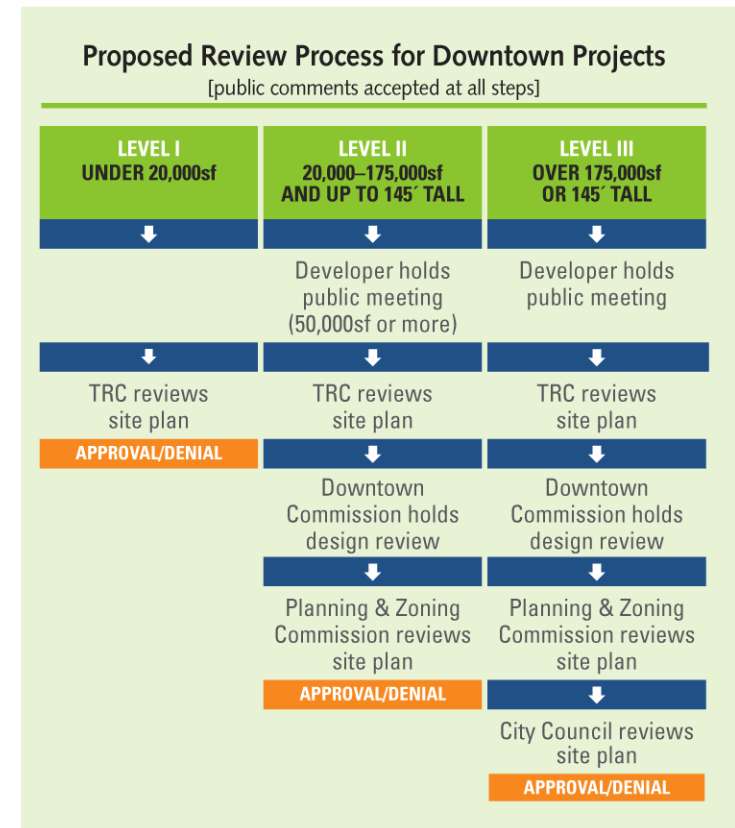
# Shaping Downtown

6

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

- 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 Technical Review Committee (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.

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



# Managing Downtown

## 7 Nurture a sustainable and resilient economy through active management of Downtown.

Downtown deserves its own professional management entity that can serve as housekeeper and champion. In fact, much of Downtown's renaissance resulted from the "Downtown Development Office" that existed in the 1980's through the mid-1990's. This Plan calls for re-establishment of a DDO in the form of a Community Improvement District or "CID," an independent partner for the City and County as well as nonprofit Downtown support and advocacy groups that would grow out of the initiative of downtown's own stakeholders. Similar organizations in 45 North Carolina communities and across the United States help thousands of downtowns flourish. The CID should focus on: 1) reinforcing and extending the character of the traditional core to enhance economic value across Downtown; and, 2) reinvesting this increased value Downtown over time in ways that continue to expand economic opportunity and cultural life.



- A. Support creation of a CID conceived and led by Downtown merchants, property owners, employers and residents to serve mutual interests efficiently and effectively. Structure the CID as a steady, supportive entity that transcends election cycles, goes above and beyond core city services in its scope, and helps Downtown's many stakeholder groups work together toward common purpose. It should serve Downtown businesses, residents, and visitors responsively with professional staffing and storefront visibility.
- B. Within the CID, 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. The CID 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

## IMPETUS FOR THE PLAN

Downtown Asheville is at a crossroads. While the 2002 *Center City Plan* provided a very appropriate basis for ongoing Downtown development—and many of its recommendations remain valid today—four new realities demand a fresh new look at Downtown's future. This Master Plan and the process of accomplishing it respond to these four issues.

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



The approved  
Ellington development



Are historic gems safe  
from redevelopment?

MARCH 2007

Second, this development interest (and the market forces behind it) could threaten some of Downtown's most celebrated assets: the treasure of historic buildings; reasonably affordable places for the local entrepreneurs and artists; locally

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

owned retail; a range of housing options; entertainment venues and restaurants; and, views to our spectacular mountain setting. Ironically, these threatened assets drive market appeal in the first place.



Graffiti and overall  
cleanliness need  
more attention.

Third, there are increasing problems with implementing the recommendations of the 2002 *Center City Plan*: managing Downtown's appearance; securing development approval; maintaining the elements that create Downtown's appeal;

seeking consensus on choices in land use; and, maintaining both the public and private realms. There must be better ways to plan, review, and manage a downtown as robust as Asheville's.

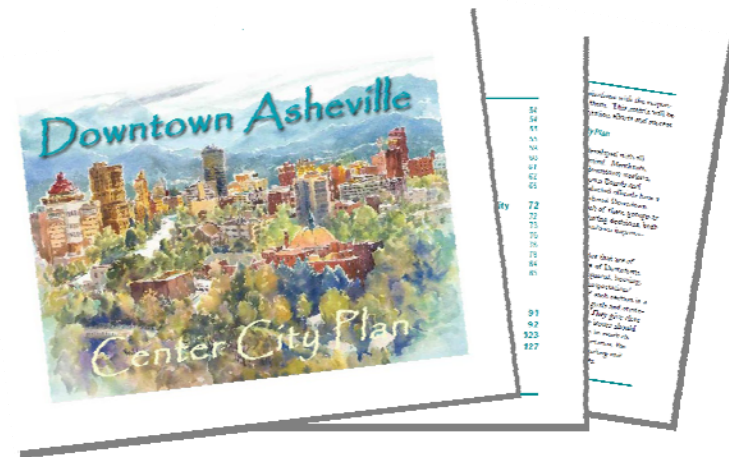
Fourth, economic uncertainty has intensified in the course of the Downtown Master Plan process. Too little growth is as much a concern as unchecked



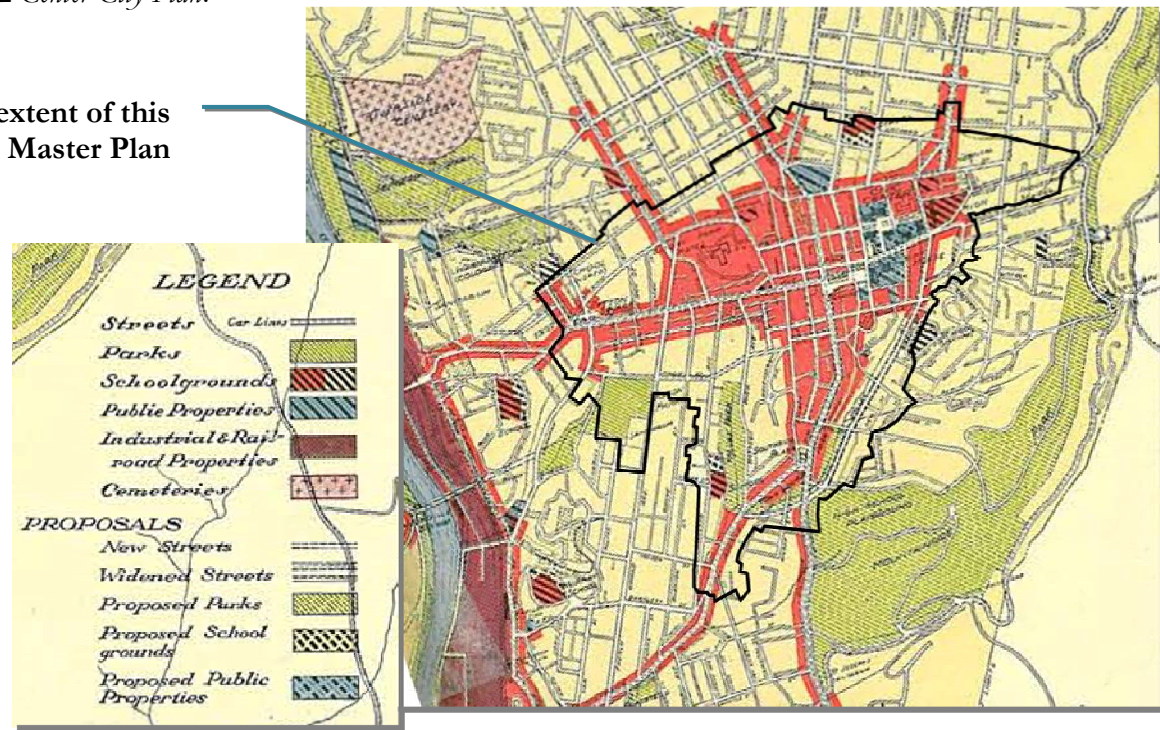
What steps can keep storefronts  
occupied? downtown master plan | 15

growth, underscoring the need for this Plan to apply with equal validity in a downward economy as well as upward cycles over its 20-year perspective.

This chapter reviews these four new realities, provides economic analysis, and identifies principal issues of choice for Downtown Asheville's stakeholders. The 2002 *Center City Plan* provides an excellent basis for understanding Downtown's history and contemporary planning context. There is no need to repeat its content here. Instead, this chapter seeks to highlight on-going and new issues that have come to the fore, and to note the several areas in which the current planning context and this Downtown Master Plan depart from the 2002 *Center City Plan*.



Study-area extent of this  
Downtown Master Plan



The Downtown Master Plan builds on the 2002 *Center City Plan* (top) and preceding plans, including the 1925 *Nolan Plan* (above).

## CENTRAL THEMES

Several broad themes pervaded stakeholder input into the Downtown Master Plan process.

- **It is essential that Asheville retain the special attributes central to its soul**—creative, artsy, walkable, funky, fun, full of great restaurants, locally-owned, and offering an outstanding quality of life. What additional elements are needed to sustain these attributes in face of forces that could erode them? How can Downtown, the City, and the entire region benefit from these attributes without compromising them?
- Moreover, how might we control the 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.”**



Street performers and festivals contribute to the unique character of Downtown.

- **How can we tap, in a more productive way, the very high levels of energy and entrepreneurship intrinsic in Downtown Asheville?** We must find ways to help individuals and organizations work together for bigger, better results. We must address stakeholder fatigue from years of planning and volunteering for Downtown by creating a plan that engages stakeholders efficiently and produces lasting, successful results.
- **We have the opportunity to establish Asheville as a national and international model for sustainability<sup>i</sup>**—drawing on local interest and expertise in practical living—as well as the opportunity to serve as an international center for monitoring and addressing global climate change.
- **All of us must recognize that planning for Downtown Asheville—as for any successful downtown—requires attention to a complex range of interconnected issues.** No single issue should be seen in a vacuum. The planning process must help stakeholders attain the multiple perspectives they need to inform good judgment on trade-

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<sup>i</sup> 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 into 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."



offs and choices that are inevitable in the course of continuing to nurture Downtown.

## CORE ASSETS

Downtown Asheville benefits from assets that should continue to shape its character and prosperity while also safeguarding them from any negative impacts of growth and change. These core assets include:

- A nationally-significant collection of **historic buildings**—and the legacy of careful renovation and stewardship. This is the result of hard work and initiative by many Ashevilleans, spurred by tax credits for certified historic rehabilitation.
- **Stunning views** from Downtown to the surrounding mountain landscapes, and from surrounding ridges to Downtown’s distinctive skyline. There are also terrific view corridors within Downtown to landmark buildings and public spaces.
- An extraordinary range of **locally-owned retail, food and beverage establishments, and arts venues** in pedestrian-friendly storefronts.



The rehabilitated Kress building.



A view of Downtown Asheville and the mountains beyond from Beaucatcher Mountain.

- **A strong sense of walkability**—sometimes compromised by steep topography, development gaps, and highway barriers—but still substantial enough to be a widely appreciated asset. The intimate, human scale of buildings and streets, pedestrian-oriented shops, interesting ground floor uses, and Downtown view corridors are major contributors to walkability.



Downtown’s walkability is upheld by its human-scaled buildings and streets as well as interesting storefronts and cultural events.

- **Prominent and active public spaces.** Pritchard Park, Pack Square, and tree-lined streets with active storefronts create a series of public outdoor rooms throughout Downtown.



Pritchard Park builds community by bringing diverse people together

## DEVELOPMENT FACTORS

Recent market and development trends have ushered in a new era: Downtown is no longer desperate for investment (as it was for much of the period from the Great Depression through the early 1990's); instead Downtown may be challenged by development. The new opportunity is to manage growth for community benefit. The economic downturn reduces urgency, but national trends and renewed interest in urban living point to the ongoing desirability of Downtown Asheville as a place to live, work, and visit. This is an occasion to consider new methods in managing growth, reviewing projects and land uses, and logically protecting key assets before large-scale investment resumes. Downtown deserves more robust development controls to protect its essential qualities while it also assures that project sponsor investment risks and burdens remain reasonable.

### These key development factors are evident:

- **New market and development demand did not happen spontaneously.** Rather, they are the legacy of more than 30 years of courageous, determined investment by preservationists, developers, business owners, residents, and community entrepreneurs. Moreover, the City had an important role in Downtown's long-term revival through the Downtown Development Office in the 1980's. Planning for the future must honor these contributions and learn from them.

*Downtown deserves more robust development controls that protect its essential qualities while also ensuring that developer investment risks and burdens remain reasonable.*

- **There are few remaining significant historic buildings to rehabilitate.** Hence, the focus should be on protecting what has been successfully renovated and seeking ways to encourage high-quality, well-designed new buildings. Defining, facilitating, and demanding excellent compatible infill projects within the historic fabric must be a high priority. While the 2002 *Center City Plan*, the Downtown Design Guidelines, and other plans focus on infill development, there is need for a new focus on larger, more complex projects targeted to sites in the traditional Downtown, its periphery, and especially the South Slope. Greater heights, bulk, and square footage of new proposals requires careful evaluation under more comprehensive criteria.
- **Asheville should be willing to wait for the “right” development projects to come along,** even in an economic downturn. The City's wisdom in rejecting the 1980's mall is evident in today's lively and historic Lexington Park

neighborhood. When strong demand resumes, selectivity becomes all the more important.

- In urban areas across the country that yield significant development value, **developers recognize the practicality of contributing toward community benefits** that come back to benefit their own efforts: workforce housing; clean, walkable, and safe streets; access to transit; easily marketable space, etc. This is especially true when project sponsors have a say in how community benefit funds are used.
- At the same time, **relatively high construction and land costs in Downtown Asheville impact development feasibility.** This may limit the potential for contributions to a community benefits package. Developable land in Asheville is limited by topography and large public land holdings (over 40 percent of land in Downtown Asheville is tax exempt), further increasing the value of available land. That being said, there are numerous, easily-accessible redevelopment opportunities ringing the traditional Downtown core.
- **Local and national developers each have a role.** The presence of non-local developers has sparked some concern over whether Downtown will “lose its soul,” often seen as so tied to local initiative. Others point to a long tradition of outsiders making beneficial Downtown (and City-wide) investments.
- **The project review and permitting process is said to be “broken” by just about all parties.** Project sponsors 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 are overburdened. City Council members are concerned that project review demands increasing attention and that review standards are outdated. A principal factor in the “broken” system is extensive reliance on the Conditional Use Permit (CUP) process, which forces City Council review at a late stage with limited public input. Other factors include insufficient public and City input at the very 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 in Downtown Asheville could yield important benefits,** such as integrated parking services, better transit access for their workforce, creation of sites for redevelopment (including whole new neighborhoods), and new 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.

### Approximate Number of Housing Units Completed or Under Construction (pre-1980 to present)

Period	Housing units for rent	Housing units for sale	Period total
Pre-1980	155	-	155
1980-1999	185	35	220
2000-present	115	360	475
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>455</b>	<b>395</b>	<b>850</b>

As of mid-2008, more than 400 additional for-sale housing units were planned in Downtown Asheville. 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 are planned.

There is concern with the number of seasonally-occupied residential units. City tax records suggest that about one-third of for-sale units may be occupied only part-time.

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

## ECONOMIC FACTORS

### Existing Conditions

Downtown Asheville's reality differs from its popular perception. People living Downtown are not exclusively bankers or second-homeowners. There is also a significant cluster of low-income residents. Other data suggest that many Downtown residents have a significant education gap. Similarly, housing Downtown is not wholly comprised of new condominiums. More detailed information is needed to paint an informed picture and adjust (or create) policies accordingly. However, it appears that many units are renter-occupied, densely-populated, and vary widely in value.

Downtown business activity has concentrations in finance, government, and retail trade, but extends to a variety of other sectors and niches. Data indicates that Downtown Asheville's 1,800 businesses support 22,000 jobs, mostly in small enterprise—a noteworthy contribution to the metropolitan area total. More than 50 Downtown businesses (most with fewer than 20 employees) look to expand (and may require some kinds of assistance).

The recession that began in late 2007 appears to be slowing (but not halting) economic activity in the Asheville metropolitan statistical area (or MSA, which includes Buncombe, Haywood, Henderson, and Madison counties). September 2008 saw surprising job growth in comparison to September 2007 across several employment sectors: information; professional and business services; health services; private education; and, leisure

and hospitality. The Asheville MSA has enjoyed 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—preservation, arts, “green,” locally-owned, funky, etc.—for short-term economic gain. For a location like Downtown Asheville, understanding how contemporary land use economics compare with available opportunities (within the context of the character demanded by stakeholders) is fundamental to smart 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 are 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; 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. Indeed, not all approved and proposed 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 and

prices—creates an opportunity for another’s investment. For example, amidst the sharp downturns of the 1980’s, reinvestment in Downtown Asheville 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 on 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. **Businesses that are naturally attracted to Downtown, with 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 services 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 the "creative class."

2. **Uses that will never choose to locate Downtown because the benefits will never outweigh the costs.** Many such uses—manufacturing or distribution—require site or building configurations that are inconsistent with Downtown's character.
3. **Business activities that share characteristics with both the resistant and the attracted business sectors.** This category is the natural priority for recruitment efforts; it 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](http://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 (CCEI, 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 (NOAA), the National Environmental Modeling and Analysis Center (NEMAC) and other governmental, educational, 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, difficulty linking climatologists to business-oriented partners, etc.) would lay a foundation that could pay huge dividends for Downtown's future. Thus, the Downtown Master Plan process studied opportunity for development of Downtown research and office buildings meeting the potential 400,000 square feet demand in this area.

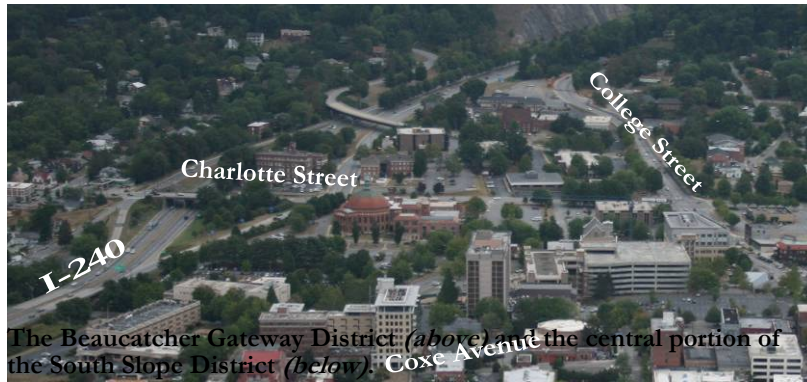
NOAA



The Patton Avenue corridor in the Patton/River Gateway District with the Interstate-240 ramps in the foreground.  
downtown master plan | 23

The Patton/River Gateway district, where NOAA is currently located, offers prime opportunity for such development along and on 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.



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 supporting 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 easy highway access. 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. This would help Downtown's economy and increase 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, government, 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's new and growing businesses need.



South Charlotte Street in the Eagle/Market District (East End neighborhood in foreground)

## ISSUES OF CONCERN

Discussions with key stakeholders and 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 include the following, grouped in seven categories.

### Management and Leadership

- Downtown benefits from many initiatives in 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.
- Hence, this Downtown Master Plan and its ongoing implementation must address many starkly different opinions about Downtown.
- Linking and coordinating these opinions and attitudes can begin with stronger, aggressive leadership from the City's elected leaders and staff.
- 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 (not to mention its impact on business recruitment).

- The City Development Office tasked with implementation of much of the 2002 *Center City Plan* evolved into the Office of Economic Development, with a somewhat different mission. Implementation of this Downtown Master Plan needs to be tied to a more permanent body responsible for implementation. Further, this Plan must be designed to overcome significant challenges that have limited full implementation of past plans.
- Bele Chere has become a headache for many Downtown property and business owners. Its purpose should be rethought; it and other events need improved management.
- Downtown needs the presence of beat cops with mobile communications.

## Economy

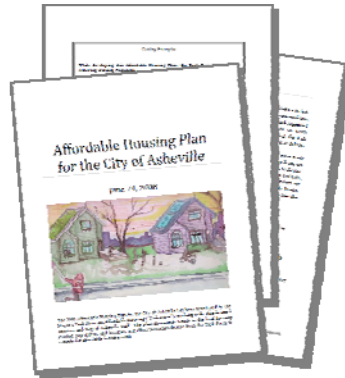
- Downtown is an important economic engine for the entire region—it is the region’s “front porch”—yet this value to the City and County is not sufficiently returned to help sustain and enhance Downtown.
- At the same time, many feel that Downtown’s tax contributions are not evident in basic services—trash collection, security, cleanliness, etc.
- In fact, the dollar value of Downtown’s property tax payments is not as large as commonly assumed (less than five-million dollars in City taxes and less than ten-million dollars in combined City and County taxes), due in part to the presence of many tax exempt properties throughout 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.
- Retail rents are increasing faster than revenues. This threatens local entrepreneurs and artists as high-end shops open, catering to visitors and part-time 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 called for. Business and artist incubator space is needed.
- Artist and start-up entrepreneurs need supportive businesses services such as accounting, marketing, legal, etc.



## Social Issues

### Housing

- Affordable housing is an almost universally agreed upon priority in Downtown (although it should not dominate Downtown housing options). While the supply of Section 8 units is decreasing, more affordable housing Downtown would help satisfy workforce needs of Downtown employers such as government, finance, education, and Mission Health Systems. It would also leverage Downtown's good access to retail services and transportation. Asheville's *Affordable Housing Plan* (June 2008) provides more background information and recommendations on affordable housing.
- Homelessness is a persistent and complex challenge. It tarnishes Downtown's image to visitors and locals. However, Downtown provides important regional services for the homeless such as Western Carolina Rescue Ministries, the Salvation Army, and Homeward Bound. This Master Plan should be coordinated 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



Asheville's Affordable Housing Plan

prime areas like Pritchard Park) may be one appropriate response.

### *The Eagle/Market neighborhood and the larger African-American community with ties to Downtown*

- The Eagle/Market neighborhood is the traditional center of Asheville's African-American community. As the area is redeveloped and expanded, it should embrace the opportunity to open itself to all Ashevilleans; likewise, all of Downtown should welcome the African-American community and its entrepreneurs. Physical, social, and economic isolation must be mended. Full economic opportunities are needed throughout Downtown for all African-Americans.



Eagle Street at South Market Street

- Urban renewal's legacy continues to impact Asheville's African-American community. The well-established African-American community on Valley Street (rebuilt and renamed South Charlotte Street) was relocated, in part to the East End, with insufficient resident input. This Master Plan seeks to re-knit Eagle/Market, the East End, and all of Downtown.

- There has been a struggle to realize long-planned investments in Eagle/Market. The release of CBDG funds in mid-2008 will help. Eagle/Market has several strong organizations promoting community programs and redevelopment, particularly the YMI, Mt. Zion, and EMSDC. Investments focus on “asset-building” rather than “affordability”, priming Eagle/Market for more equal footing with the rest of Downtown.
- The proposed performing arts center, Asheville Art Museum expansion, and completion of Pack Square will have significant impact on Eagle/Market. These projects must be coordinated with the neighborhood to realize mutual benefits.
- Major opportunities exist for Eagle/Market to serve as a physical and social keystone linking the Pack Square Cultural District, the South Charlotte/Valley Street corridor, the East End, Biltmore Avenue, and the South Slope.

## The Arts and Culture

- There is need for much improved organization among individual artists and their supporting groups. Ongoing and more robust initiatives of the Asheville Area Arts Council should help.

- An artist resource center (ARC) will help address many needs expressed by established and emerging artists.
- Too few “second” job opportunities exist to adequately support most artists—emerging, post-career, and established.
- Completion of Pack Square, renovations and additions at the Asheville Art Museum and Diana Wortham Theater, and keen attention to defining a “world-class” cultural district will help raise the profile of all of arts-related institutions, activities, and galleries in the area.

## Sustainability

- Opportunities and incentives are needed to make existing buildings more energy-efficient. A more aggressive City-wide energy code would help—starting with pilot projects in the Downtown.
- It is realistic to hold developers to higher standards in sustainable design. This has been proven in Portland, Santa Monica, and Boulder. Why not Asheville? New buildings should be planned and built for a hundred-year lifespan.
- As taller buildings are proposed, solar access rights to adjacent properties need to be maintained. This would enhance Downtown’s solar power generation potential.

- Sustainability advocates differ on whether taller buildings offer benefits. Increased heights allow increased densities that reduce overall environmental impacts; however, they may also compromise solar access and Downtown character.
- Promote building preservation and adaptive reuse wherever possible—in historic and non-historic buildings alike. This can reduce the energy and material losses occurring through demolition.
- Sustainability-related jobs are already evident throughout Downtown. This should become a major economic development theme.

## Transportation

- Better access to Downtown means more than the single-passenger car. A transit/shuttle service is needed to provide connectivity within Downtown districts, including service to peripheral parking sites.
- The major parking challenge is addressing growing parking demand while reducing land area devoted to storing automobiles. The perceived severity of Downtown's parking deficit varies: some see a major deficit; others "always find what they need."
- The comprehensive *Downtown Asheville Parking Study* was completed in mid-2008. This Master Plan and the *Parking Study* must be totally consistent.

- Public parking garages are too daunting for pedestrians at night. Lighting and surveillance should be improved.



**Improved lighting and surveillance should be provided to make public parking garages safer for pedestrians.**

## Urban Design

- Currently unregulated, building height has become a major issue. Recent development proposals exceed 20-stories. Approaches are needed to prevent the 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.



**Improved walking conditions and infill development across the Interstate-240 corridor could provide a better connection to the north.**

- Downtown needs better connections to surrounding conditions and transitions to adjacent neighborhoods and corridors, especially on the north (I-240) and the east (South Charlotte Street). As redevelopment proceeds on sites at Downtown's edge, land uses and building forms should create better
- There is a significant opportunity to create new neighborhoods outside of the traditional Downtown core. Predicted residential development would benefit from designation of small residentially-themed, intimately-scaled neighborhoods throughout Downtown. The 2002 *Center City Plan* identified a few sub-districts; it is time to expand and formalize these districts and sub-districts.

- There are several funky little spaces, narrow alleys, and almost-hidden courtyards. These should be saved—and used as models within new Downtown neighborhoods.
- More residential uses Downtown requires more public and open spaces. The South Slope district is especially in need of parks. This Master Plan recommends locating parks at 2½-minute walking intervals, as recommended by the 1920's-era *Nolan Plan*.
- Many Downtown condominiums are used as second homes, even though buyers have long-term intentions to retire in Asheville. In the interim, locals cite concerns about “dark windows” and the lost potential for vitality and retail demand.
- Downtown's relatively compact retail floor footprints may minimize their attractiveness to very large chain stores.
- Significant views from Downtown to surrounding landscapes and to local landmarks must be maintained.



**Views to the surrounding mountains should be preserved.**



- Walkability must be enhanced throughout Downtown: at blank or vacant storefronts; along parking lots; near heavy traffic; and in areas with steep topography. The TDA's wayfinding system is a great first step in increasing Downtown Asheville's walkability.



**Long corridors of inactive facades decrease walkability.**

- Efforts should be made to reserve land to facilitate Hub Initiative-related research facilities—as much as 400,000 square feet. Small area plans within Downtown should accommodate this and also provide for housing, retail, and other high value uses.

- The Asheville Design Center has brought a remarkable level of visibility and action to some of these issues, most notably through the I-26/I-240/Patton initiative, “Crossing the French Broad.”
- 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). This issue needs resolution.

## RELATED CURRENT INITIATIVES

Downtown Asheville is a dynamic place. Ongoing work of the City, developers, community organizations, and others—even during this Downtown Master Plan process—has helped shape the issues at hand and has suggested appropriate strategies for addressing them. Some of the most significant Downtown initiatives setting the context for discussion and contributing to ideas include the following:

### Planning Initiatives

- The Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Arts Master Plan
- The Public Art Master Plan
- Report from the Mayor's Affordable Housing Task Force
- Report from the Social Issues Task Force

- The Hub Initiative
- City-sponsored small area plans for Aston Park and the French Broad corridor
- Mission Health System's long-term master plan
- The Tourism Development Authority's way-finding system
- The 2008 Comprehensive Bicycle Plan

### Development Initiatives

- Asheville Art Museum expansion and renovation of the Diana Wortham Theatre in Pack Place on Pack Square
- The proposed Ellington (housing) on Biltmore
- The proposed Aloft Hotel on Biltmore
- Eagle/Market Streets Community Development Corporation's mixed-use development proposal
- Mt. Zion Community Development Corporation's mixed-use development proposal

- The Indigo Hotel at Haywood and Montford
- The proposed Zona Lofts and the master plan for Zona Village in the South Slope
- Five Points Village on the Broadway Corridor
- The proposed Haywood Park mixed-use hotel, housing, and retail proposal on Haywood, Page, and Battery Park
- The proposed hotel development for RFP Parcel A at the Civic Center and the Basilica
- The proposed Parkside development for RFP Parcel B on Pack Square
- The proposed Asheville Area Performing Arts Center (PAC) on Pack Square
- Pack Square reconstruction

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

# public process



# public process

An effective master plan needs to gather the ideas and earn the support of everyone it will touch. For this reason, this planning process deliberately included all of Downtown's stakeholders to better understand and integrate diverse perspectives.

Ashevilleans responded, continuing their tradition of active civic engagement with strong and consistent attendance throughout the master plan process. Engagement forums included large, interactive public meetings, one-on-one interviews, affinity group sessions, facilitated summits, and gatherings with targeted citizen organizations, residents, and members of the Downtown business communities. These events occurred over the span of nearly one year between spring 2008 and spring 2009. The forums asked people to dream, think, cooperate, and fine-tune their aspirations for Downtown. As a result, the Downtown community has built this Plan around ideas that earn remarkably consistent support among people of many different perspectives.

The following events were central to public involvement:

## Kickoff Meeting

May 8, 2008



More than 300 people attended the kickoff meeting at the Asheville Civic Center. In small groups, people discussed their hopes and concerns for Downtown.

## Survey

A public survey hosted online by the Asheville Citizen-Times gathered input on why Downtown matters to people.

### 1. Where is your residence?

Downtown Asheville (Central Business District)	68	9%
City of Asheville, outside of Downtown	388	51%
Buncombe County (Non-Asheville)	209	28%
Western North Carolina	54	7%
Outside of Western North Carolina	39	5%

### 2. Why do you come to downtown Asheville? If you are a Downtown Asheville resident, what attracted you there? (Check all that apply.)

Work	298	39%
Entertainment / Arts / Dining	650	86%
Shopping	464	61%
Worship	116	15%
Community meetings / Events	360	48%
Sense of place / Character	444	59%
Good housing options	20	3%
Government / Social Services	150	20%
I don't come Downtown	27	4%
Other, please specify:	95	13%

### 3. How often do you come Downtown?

Every weekday	165	22%
Every weekend	40	5%
Several times a week	235	31%
Several times a month	152	20%
Several times a year	54	7%
I don't Downtown	26	3%
Other, please specify:	77	10%

## Education Workshop

May 30, 2008

Two hundred people gathered at the Asheville Community Theatre to hear presentations by planning experts and Asheville panelists providing background information on specific issues including the Downtown economy, transit and parking, urban design, and how to put a master plan to work.





## Vision Workshop

May 31, 2008

This all-day Saturday event drew several hundred people to the Randolph Learning Center, fresh from the previous evening's Education Workshop. In the morning, breakout groups worked to identify five priority principles to guide Downtown. In the afternoon, the breakout groups annotated Downtown maps with cherished landmarks, sites to improve, and neighborhoods and districts of distinct character. A visual preference survey identified Downtown characteristics that people appreciate or aspire to.



MARCH 2009

## Vision Drop-in Session

June 1, 2008

An informal public drop-in session at the Office of Economic Development allowed more opportunity to observe the products of the previous day's Vision Workshop and speak one-on-one with planning team members.

## Draft Community Vision Presentation

June 12, 2008

Ideas emerging from the Vision Workshop were refined into seven central principles and a series of urban design diagrams, and presented for public discussion at the Civic Center.



## Strategy Workshop Series

July 28-29, 2009

These sessions, conducted during two days, enabled community review and discussion of specific strategies proposed to address key goals for Downtown. The results of these workshops laid the groundwork for the seven strategies now outlined in the Downtown Master Plan.

- Experiencing Downtown
- Shaping Downtown
- Managing Downtown
- Workshop with Downtown's Business Community
- Workshop with Black Business Alliance
- Workshop with African-American Community
- Workshop Summary Session





## Draft Master Plan Presentation

January 15, 2009

The Draft Master Plan document was presented at the Civic Center, and then made available online and on poster boards at three Downtown locations during a three-week public comment period.



## Other Forums

In addition, the Downtown Master Plan Advisory Committee, subgroups of the Advisory Committee, the Downtown Commission, Planning & Zoning Commission, Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce, and other Downtown groups met on a number of occasions specifically to address goals and strategies of the Downtown Master Plan. Many of these meetings were attended by the local press.

The planning team also met with more than fifty different individual and group stakeholders.

All told, this wealth of input enabled the Downtown Master Plan incorporating great ideas from the spectrum of Downtown's stakeholder perspectives to target a series of shared community interests.



# master plan strategies

\*Numbered superscripts on the following pages refer to additional detail in the strategy appendices

## DOWNTOWN MASTER PLAN VISION PRINCIPLES

## DOWNTOWN MASTER PLAN STRATEGIES

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

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

# Experiencing Downtown

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-19<sup>th</sup>- and Early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Urban Architecture in NC—National Park Service
- Second-Best Collection of Art Deco Architecture in the Southeast—*Smithsonian Magazine*

The list underscoring Asheville's—and, almost inarguably, Downtown's—charm and popularity is extensive. 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 United States 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.
- Asheville has the highest per-capita number of 501(c)3 nonprofits in the United States, many of them dedicated to the arts and related fields including the performing and visual arts, the creative economy, high-quality historic preservation and architecture, sustainability, etc.
- 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 United States and Canada.

As John Ellis—managing director of the Diana Wortham Theatre at Pack Place—put it, “it’s almost impossible to not ‘bump into the arts’ anywhere in Downtown Asheville.” Charlie Flynn-McIver—president of the North Carolina Theatre Conference—posits that “Downtown Asheville is a 24-hour festival.” To maintain and heighten Asheville’s position as an arts destination, this Master Plan seeks to address the lack of financial resources supporting the arts, which display no lack of ideas or talent.

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. These (and other) reasons make it essential to consider new approaches to sustaining existing artists, funding

public art, and cleverly leveraging Downtown Asheville’s reputation.

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? How can we keep established artists and promote more local outlets for their work? How can we support the “art” that has given Asheville destination status and raise the bar for art and architecture to make Downtown truly “world class”?



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.

### Arts goals for Strategy 1 include:

- Encourage all individual artists and arts organizations to collaborate in framing a national model for cultural sustainability and ongoing creativity.
- Ensure a constant supply of suitable studio space, performance space, and exhibition venues (at all rent scales and sizes) to allow Asheville's artists and arts associations to continue their work—from the Asheville Art Museum's expansion into a new architectural landmark to the proposed Asheville Area Performing Arts Center (PAC), and from commercial galleries and art-filled public spaces to individual artists' studios and live-work spaces.
- Build a strong administrative, marketing, and managerial organization to offer coordinated art and cultural experiences. Create partnerships with and among the Chamber of Commerce, Convention and Visitors Bureau, Tourism Development Authority, HandMade in America, Preservation Society of Asheville and Buncombe County, and the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area (among many others). Jointly brand and market Downtown Asheville.
- Provide a very strong umbrella entity linking all arts organizations and artists. Establish an arts resource center for established artists, independent entrepreneurial artists, creative businesses, and entrepreneurs. Make this place an inviting and exciting welcome center that introduces visitors and residents to the local "art" scene.

- Support creation of new architectural landmarks that complement and reinforce Downtown's tradition of beautiful and innovative design.
- Leverage the region's creativity, arts, and cultural offerings to promote Downtown Asheville.

### Historic Preservation

Downtown Asheville has endured decades of disinvestment and neglect. But beginning in the 1980's, 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 eighty-nine-million dollars 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.
- The dramatic impact of historic preservation is well-demonstrated by Pack Place—a public/private partnership begun in mid-1980’s and opened in 1992. Rehabilitation of this 1926 structure into an arts, performance, and education destination has focused regional attention on the arts in Downtown Asheville (and helped increase property values along the Biltmore corridor by 900 percent. Pack Place includes, among other institutions, the Asheville Art Museum and Diana Wortham Theatre, two important anchors of Asheville’s arts community. 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.

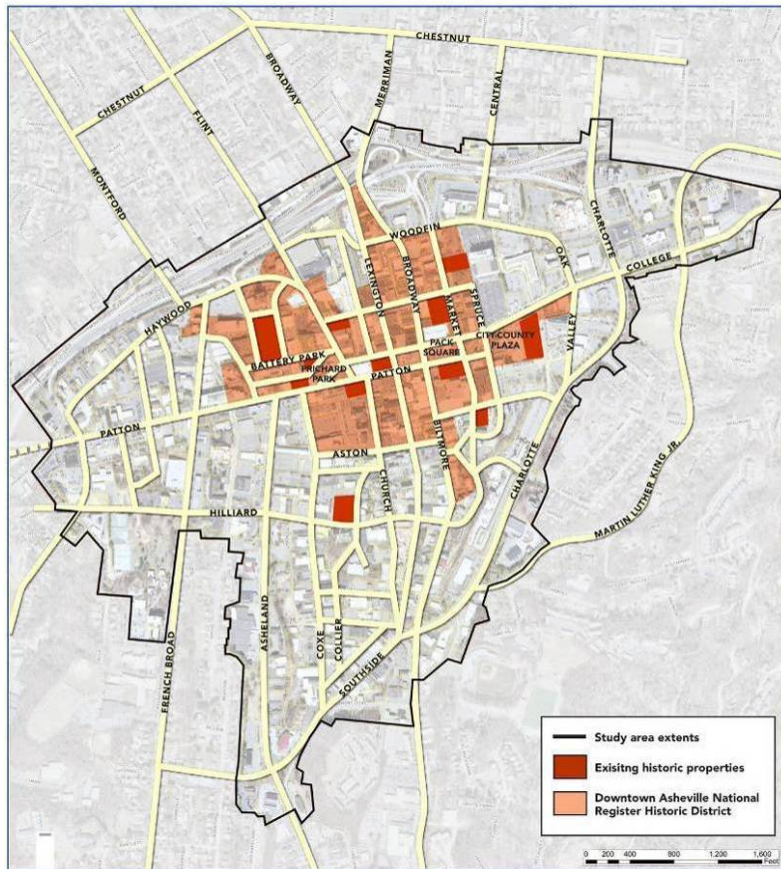
What tools could be used to realize more—and more sympathetic—historic preservation in Downtown Asheville’s traditional core? Are there compelling reasons to adopt (or avoid) a regulatory approach—including, but not limited to, a locally-designated historic district—rather than (or in addition to) expanding 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?

#### **Historic Preservation 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;
- Develop new incentive programs;
- Focus preservation attention on smaller buildings and strategic infill projects within the National Register Historic District; and
- 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.

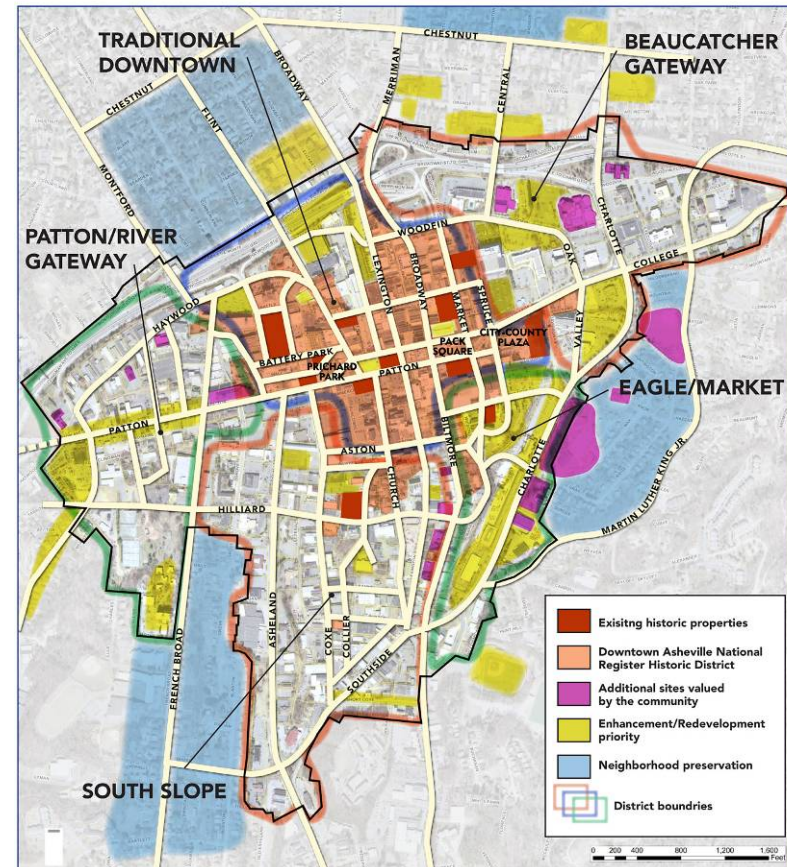


## HISTORIC DESIGNATION



Downtown's current National Register Historic District (peach) and specific protected historic properties (red).

## 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 opportunity for redevelopment supporting the community vision for Downtown—taking some development pressure off places deserving preservation.

## IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH

Use coordinated action—especially through a strengthened alliance among arts organizations, expanded alliances with preservation organizations, and a new overall Downtown management entity or CID (see strategy 7)—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, creative, and art-based businesses;
- Project economic impacts derived from for-profit and nonprofit organizations;

- Assess Asheville’s per capita public support for the arts in relation to programs in other cities;
- Establish metrics, goals, and benchmarks for awareness, sustainability, and growth; and,
- Seek national models and case studies.

#### 2. Once the audit is complete, **stage the first annual cultural “summit”** at a major Downtown arts venue in cooperation with the Tourism Development Authority (TDA), Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB), MountainBiz Works, A-B Tech, the Hub Initiative, UNCA, Pack Square Conservancy, and other major players. The summit should:

- Create cohesiveness within the arts community;
- Develop common advocacy points;
- Plan national marketing;
- Identify strategies to avoid cannibalizing funding sources; and,
- 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 and 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. **Make the Pack Place Cultural District Asheville’s “visitor center for the arts”** by working with existing anchors such as the Pack Square Conservancy, Asheville Community Theatre, Asheville Art Museum, NC Stage



Company, Diana Wortham Theatre, YMI Cultural Center, and other key Downtown players such as Handmade in America, Fine Arts Theater, Asheville GreenWorks, Asheville Design Center and private galleries, plus the proposed PAC, CID, and others.

2. **Cultivate strong links between the cultural district and the Eagle/Market Street District** to coordinate programming.
  3. **Investigate mutually beneficial advocacy, financial, and planning efforts** among PAC, the Asheville Art Museum, Diana Wortham Theatre, Eagle/Market and other cultural district constituents.
  4. **Consider joint-ventures in public/private partnerships, fundraising, and construction.**
- C. **Support the timely completion of an expanded Asheville Art Museum and a rehabilitated Diana Wortham Theatre** in 2010 to create Asheville's first 21<sup>st</sup>-century architectural landmark—an important anchor for the cultural district and Pack Square.
- D. **Support Asheville's Public Art Master Plan and the work of the Public Art Board.** Secure predictable funding for high-quality, community-wide installation, maintenance, and marketing of public art and performances. Engage regional and national artists as providers of public art. Benchmark Asheville's funding levels against other communities.
- E. **Expand strategic support for the arts and arts-related businesses**, addressing working artists, arts institutions, related creative industries and public art. The Community Benefits Program advocated in Strategy 7 as a long-term step could become an important new funding source in this area.

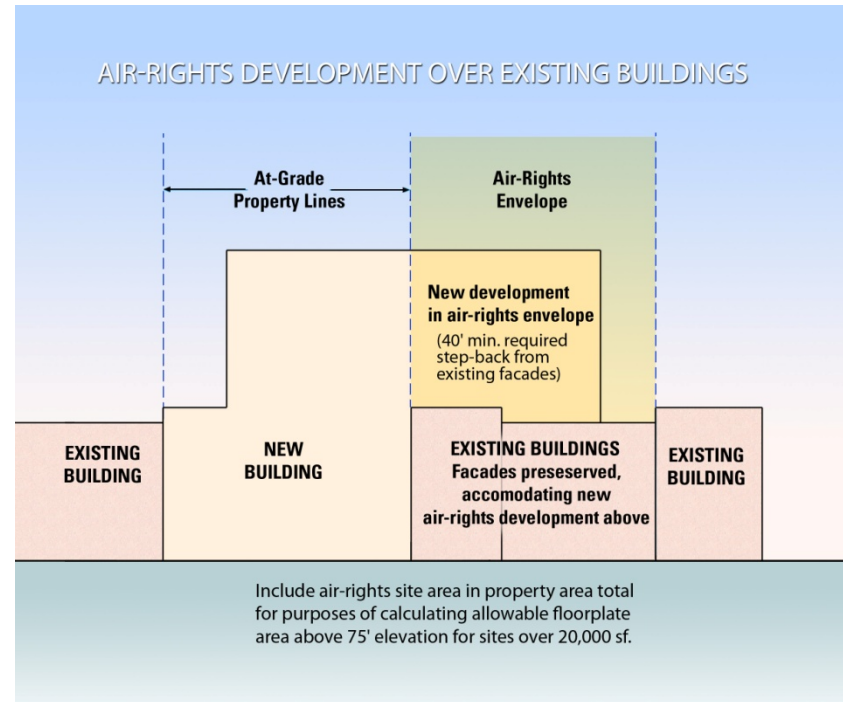
1. **Plan an "Artist's Resource Center" (ARC)** as a vital place for established artists, entrepreneurial artists and creative industries that provides resources, tools, programs and services for an efficient approach to business start-up, maintenance and growth. Locate suitable Downtown startup space for ARC. Investigate possible planning and construction joint-ventures for housing ARC at AAM, PAC, National Climatic Data Center, etc. This might speed ARC's realization.<sup>1</sup>
2. **Advertise and expand opportunities for peer and mentor networking** and access to services provided by other area organizations, such as the 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. **Jointly apply for funding through applicable North Carolina Arts Council grant program(s) such as:** 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; and Statewide Service Organizations, etc. Plan joint applications to other public agencies and private philanthropies.
4. **Expand regular Downtown gallery crawls** and seek cooperation with the River Arts District, using strategies such as extended days and hours and free transit between Downtown and RAD to draw participants.

5. **Encourage creation of high-quality new architecture** that is consistent with the urban design intent of the Downtown Design Guidelines (see Strategies 4 and 5).

F. **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 City-wide events** (such as Bele Chere, Fiesta Latina, 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.

G. **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 for Downtown and an important regional destination. Its replacement should not be a near-term goal as efforts are better directed to other priorities.<sup>2</sup>



Owners of existing buildings should be permitted to sell air-rights easements to owners of adjacent parcels (see Strategy 4).

- H. **Support the proposed Asheville Area Performing Arts Center (PAC)**, accommodating it on the City-owned site south of City/County Plaza. 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).
- I. 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 1959. In addition,

explore the pros and 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.)

- J. **Further leverage the National Trust for Historic Preservation “destination of distinction” award and “Preserve America Community” status** to attract cultural and heritage tourists to Downtown Asheville. As a matter of everyday thinking, partner with the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area.
  - K. **Target National Register-qualified properties eligible for 40-percent tax credits** and aggressively promote these opportunities.
  - L. **Enable owners of historic properties to sell air-rights easements above their buildings** to preserve view and daylight corridors, to enable development on small adjacent parcels, and to leverage value of their property. (See diagram at left and Strategy 4 for further information.) 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 floors built on historic buildings must be stepped-back at least 40-feet from the existing historic façade edge.
  - M. **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.
- N. **Integrate Asheville’s preservation expertise more fully into Downtown decision-making**.
  - 1. **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.
  - 2. **Include representation of the preservation community on the Downtown Commission**, supporting its enhanced role in Downtown design review (see Strategy 6, near-term action step G).

## ACTION STEPS: LONG-TERM

### The Arts, the Artists, and Their Organizations

- Annually celebrate expansion and rehabilitation of Pack Square with “arts” offerings throughout Downtown Asheville. Consider this cultural festival as a re-positioning of Bele Chere. Include events at all nonprofit venues (e.g., Asheville Art Museum, Diana Wortham Theater, ACT, NC Stage, Pritchard Park, Thomas Wolfe, etc.) and for-profit sites (e.g., Bebe, Orange Peel, Fine Arts, galleries, restaurants, bars, etc.)
- Consider longer-term options for the Civic Center. In all cases, keep its functions Downtown.

### Historic Preservation

- Research new precedents 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. These would address the next cycle of renovation/repairs approaching for many buildings originally restored and renovated in the 1980’s and 1990’s.

## 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

- Downtown Places for Arts and Entertainment diagram

### Historic Preservation

- Designated Historic Properties diagram
- Targeting Preservation and Change diagram
- Air-Rights Development diagram

## PRECEDENTS

### The Arts, the Artists, and their Organizations

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

- Alexandria, Virginia
- Bethlehem, Pennsylvania
- Durham, North Carolina
- Harrisburg, Pennsylvania
- Los Angeles, California (SPARC)
- Minneapolis, Minnesota (The Loft; CIA; Sase)
- Paducah, Kentucky
- Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (The Scribe; Painted Bride)
- Reading, Pennsylvania

### Historic Preservation

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

- Annapolis, Maryland
- Charleston, South Carolina
- Nantucket, Massachusetts
- San Antonio, Texas
- Savannah, Georgia

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





# Experiencing Downtown

## 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 Community Improvement District or “CID”—this collaboration should be able to manage both public and private parking. In this “systems” approach, the “CID” 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 (CID) to coordinate planning, policy, and operations.



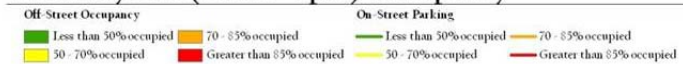
City of Asheville Comprehensive Parking Study  
Existing Parking Facilities



Downtown Asheville parking ownership. (See the Strategy 2 appendix for enlarged diagram.)



City of Asheville Comprehensive Parking Study  
Weekday PM (Noon - 7pm) Occupancy



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. (See the Strategy 2 appendix for enlarged diagram.)



City of Asheville Comprehensive Parking Study  
Weekend PM (5pm - 11pm) Occupancy

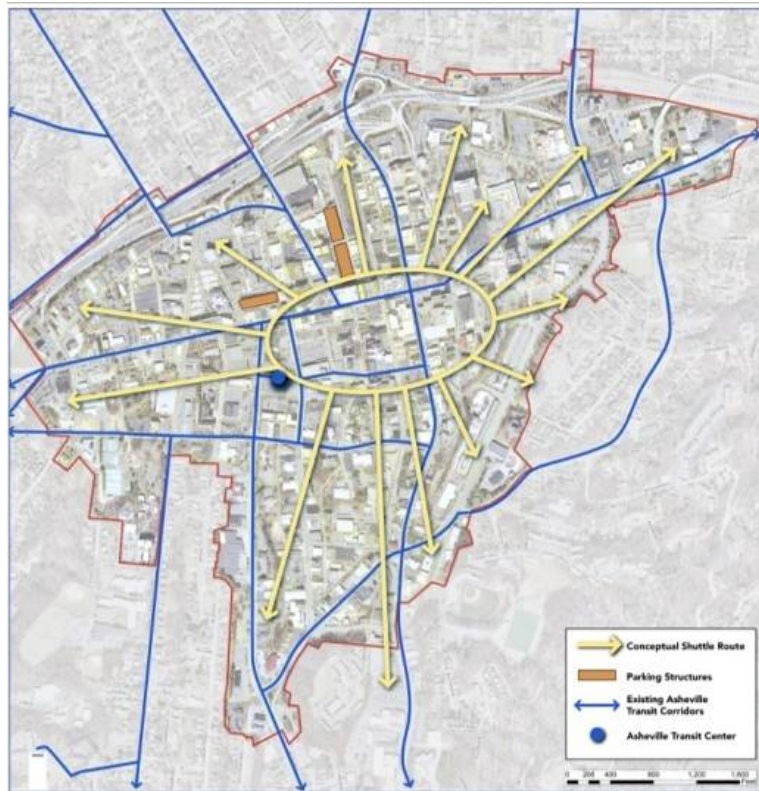


Downtown Asheville parking demand: weekend peak. Negotiated use of lightly-used private satellite lots (green) could expand capacity. (See the Strategy 2 appendix for enlarged diagram.)



## 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.



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.

1. Design the shuttle service (and the shuttle itself) to **offer Downtown employees a compelling alternative to all-day parking**. Use the service to enhance mobility for residents and tourists. Create seamless transfers between the Downtown circulator, Asheville Transit, and Mountain Mobility services, and avoid service duplication. Consider service to West Asheville and Biltmore Village.
  2. **Plan shuttle routes and stops** to link parking resources with employment centers, neighborhood retail districts, and other key Downtown destinations.
  3. **Operate the shuttle frequently in peak periods.**<sup>3</sup> Provide safe and comfortable waiting areas at all Downtown stops and periphery parking lots.
  4. Review technologies such as Next Bus ([www.nextbus.com](http://www.nextbus.com)) to **provide information on waiting times**.
  5. **Encourage use of “green” vehicles** such as hybrid, electric, and biodiesel.
  6. **Establish a pilot service phase** and progress to longer-term service.
  7. **Develop shuttle signage** consistent with TDA’s wayfinding system.
- 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 Downtown streets.<sup>4</sup>
  2. **Add shared lane markings** to streets in or adjacent to Downtown.<sup>5</sup>
  3. **Install sturdy bike racks** throughout Downtown<sup>6</sup>. Also install bike racks in covered areas of parking structures.
  4. **Encourage biking** to work, to school, and in combination with transit use.
- C. **Improve the Downtown walking network** identified in Strategy 3. The transit improvements recommended above will depend on improved walking conditions. Start with near-term opportunities that provide the best improvements to the larger network. Also begin work on long-lead-time elements, such as coordination with NCDOT near Eagle/Market, East End, and South Charlotte/Valley Street.
1. **Require new development projects to improve sidewalks along their frontage to meet defined standards.** Also require new development projects to maintain convenient walking access to current properties in the area during construction. (Refer also to Action Step D under Strategy 3.)
  2. In all cases, **minimize the number of curb cuts.** For significant projects, place curb cuts on the adjacent street lowest in hierarchy. (See the *Street Hierarchy* diagram in the Strategy 3 appendix for more information).
- D. **Coordinate access improvements with established wayfinding and transit services.**
1. **Improve wayfinding to parking.**<sup>7</sup>
  2. Work with Asheville Transit and Mountain Mobility to **ensure that new access services and infrastructure enhance existing ones** and avoid redundancy.
  3. Wayfinding signage should **reference businesses as well as major public destinations.**
- E. **Improve parking coordination, capacity, efficiency, and convenience:**
1. Create a management partnership to **coordinate access, hours of operation, pricing, security, and lighting** among City-owned and County-owned parking facilities. Private owners of parking facilities could also participate in this partnership on a voluntary basis.
  2. **Create a parking coordinator to oversee existing and proposed parking facilities.** Give this coordinator a voice in public transportation decisions.
  3. **Plan for construction of new parking** in the Grove Arcade/Civic Center/Battery Hill vicinity. This should address the 700- to 800-space deficit identified in the City's *Comprehensive Parking Study*.<sup>8</sup>
  4. In all cases, **design new parking garages incorporating façades consistent with the urban design framework** in Strategy 3.
  5. **Update parking rates and fee collection.**
    - Extend the hours when fees are charged for parking in all City-managed off-street facilities. (The City is upgrading the revenue control system in its parking garages, allowing the current one dollar exit charge

after 6:00 pm to be replaced with continued hourly charges.)<sup>9</sup>

- Maintain the current hourly fee structure for on-street and off-street parking, but continue to increase rates periodically as recommended in the Comprehensive Parking Study.<sup>10</sup> Evaluate the impact of night-time parking demand in garages as the fee for on-street parking is increased.<sup>11</sup>
- Consider charging lower fees in off-street garages for small, energy-efficient vehicles—motorcycles, hybrid, and electric cars.
- Make payment for parking more convenient and user-friendly. Investigate systems that allow credit and debit card use, advance online reservations, etc. Consider free or reduced-rate parking through a merchant parking-validation program.

6. **Improve lighting and security** at all public parking areas.
7. **Dedicate some public parking spaces for use by shared-car services** (such as Zipcar) to expand mobility choices and reduce need for Downtown households to own cars.

F. **Minimize impacts of parking on Downtown streetscape and development capacity.**

1. Encourage Downtown developers to partner on pass programs with the Asheville Transit program to **reduce parking demand and development costs.**

2. Locate and design any new or renovated off-street parking to **prevent detrimental impacts to street character and promote higher-value uses.** Wherever possible, locate structured parking below-ground or screen it with active uses (housing, stores, offices). Add on-street parking where possible to augment supply, provide convenience, and promote walkability. Encourage parking structures to be masked by a habitable liner building and the decks above screened from views by a designed façade consistent with the overall building design. Where surface parking lots are built, encourage them to be masked from the street by a habitable building. Ensure that any new on-street parking accommodates transit and bicycle access.

- G. **Negotiate off-peak use of private parking areas** near the edges of Downtown as suitable places for park-and-ride lots, shuttle stops, construction-worker parking, etc. This approach could reduce capital costs for public parking, increase private and public parking revenue, and conserve core Downtown land for high-value uses.

## ACTION STEPS: LONG-TERM

- Implement remaining elements of Asheville's 2008 *Comprehensive Bicycle Plan* and add bike lanes to remaining Downtown streets.<sup>12</sup>
- Implement remaining pedestrian improvements.
- As feasible, implement bikeway, pedestrian, and shuttle links to enhance Downtown access to points including West Asheville, Hillcrest, UNCA, WeCan, Montford, River Arts District, A-B Tech, Tunnel Road, Mission Health Systems, and Biltmore Village.
- Consider possible redevelopment of public parking structures—particularly the Rankin Street and Wall Street structures—for higher-value uses. Displaced parking could be accommodated through new below-grade parking, shared parking with the new uses, satellite parking, and/or enhanced transit services that reduce parking demand.

## FUNDING SOURCES

- City funding has been designated for the shuttle feasibility study. As currently planned, this study will determine appropriate sources (including potential revenues from City parking operations and potential employer contributions) to avoid costs of additional parking structures or private-sector employee shuttles. Additional revenue may be generated by recommended changes in the on-street parking program. Increased parking revenues, federal support, and private-sector contributions would likely meet at least 75 percent of the annual operating costs, assumed to be about one-million dollars.
- A few of these visitor-oriented items may be eligible for funding consideration by the TDA.
- The City's Parking Authority produces excess revenue that could be applied toward the shuttle system, enhancements in existing garages, the TDA's wayfinding system, or other needs.
- Improved pricing and fare collection could increase revenue.
- Private developers may opt to contribute toward public parking in lieu of constructing their own on-site parking.

## PRECEDENTS

- Chattanooga's downtown shuttle operates on five-minute headways. Daily ridership reaches about 4,000 in electric vehicles. ([http://www.carta-bus.org/routes/elec\\_shuttle.asp](http://www.carta-bus.org/routes/elec_shuttle.asp))
- Norfolk, Virginia operates a free downtown shuttle with electric vehicles. The service is funded by the City and operated by the local transit agency. Service is oriented to commuters on weekdays and tourists on weekends. Weekday peak headways are six-minutes; weekday off-peak headways range from 9 to 18 minutes. Weekend headways are 15 minutes. ([www.hrtransit.org/services/netbus.html](http://www.hrtransit.org/services/netbus.html))
- Other successful shuttles in comparably-sized downtowns include Alexandria, Virginia, and Hartford, Connecticut.
- Santa Monica, California, is a leader in providing real-time online information on parking availability.
- Many airport parking garages—Knoxville, Tampa, and Jacksonville, among them—use ceiling-mounted lights to indicate the precise location of open parking spaces.

## IN THE APPENDIX

- Parking Ownership diagram
- Weekday Peak Parking Demand diagram
- Weekend Peak Parking Demand diagram
- Potential Shuttle Route diagram





# Shaping Downtown

3

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

## OVERVIEW AND GOALS

Downtown Asheville's distinctly urban character—its treasure of historic buildings, unforgettable views to landmarks and mountains, lively parks, sidewalks and storefronts, and a scale that invites and rewards walking—is one of our most celebrated assets. Investments made during the 1920's boom yielded a remarkable series of streetscapes. Careful rehabilitation and the resulting economic activity provide today's resilient and rich urban setting.

A new era of real estate development investment, however, could threaten this character with anonymous, scale-less buildings.

The correct urban design framework can reinforce Downtown Asheville's character over the next 20 years. This framework could strengthen Downtown's intrinsic qualities and increase values for public and private owners—welcome contributions to street life, the skyline, and overall vibrancy.

The urban design framework proposed in this Downtown Master Plan will help guide private-sector decision makers, the City and a Downtown management entity—perhaps a Community

Improvement District as outlined under Strategy 7—to intensify sense of place and community. In addition, the framework should help push the core's cherished qualities outward to other emerging areas.

Many say that Downtown lies within the northern bounds of I-240, South Charlotte/Valley on the east, Hilliard on the south, and French Broad on the west. But major areas well beyond these limits hold great potential. Some of these areas include:

- Broadway toward UNCA;
- The Martin Luther King and Stevens-Lee neighborhoods;
- Along Asheland and Coxe to Mission Health System's campus;
- WeCan; and,
- The River Arts District.

The urban design framework in Strategy 3 addresses the large and small roles each of these areas plays in defining "Downtown." It started with input from the several thousand participants in this

Downtown Master Plan process. Goals for Strategy 3 include the following elements:

- Identify and safeguard the most valued places in Downtown Asheville.
- Research and honor Downtown’s hidden histories. Use interpretive elements to help define each of the five emerging districts to make them the next series of most valued places.
- Establish “gateways” into Downtown at:
  - the Broadway Corridor;
  - Tunnel Road;
  - the I-240/Beaucatcher cut;
  - Patton Avenue from West Asheville and the River Arts District; and,
  - Biltmore/Asheland/Coxe from Mission.
- Specify areas for change and growth.
- Create transition zones among these areas.
- Establish and link a hierarchy of public open spaces for civic events, neighborhood gatherings, and recreation.
- Locate, name, and formalize important view corridors to, from, and within Downtown.
- Officially recognize the network of primary walking streets. Add transit and shuttle nodes to make all of Downtown accessible without the need to rely on cars and parking.
- Incorporate the official bikeway network.
- Target specific areas for community retail services, arts-related activities, research and office space, housing, civic, institutional, and emerging uses.

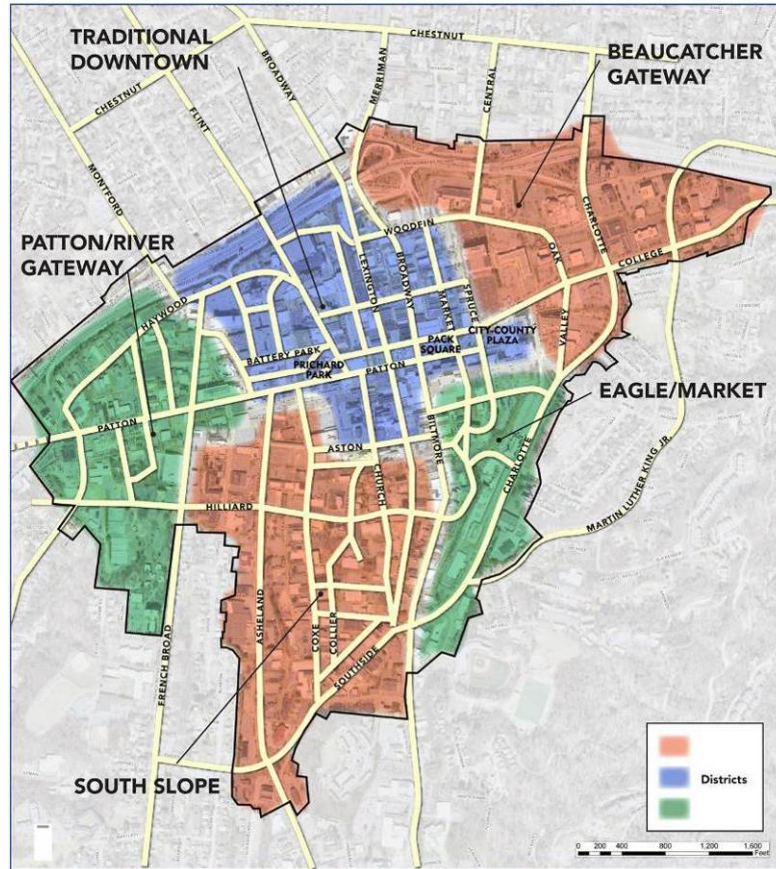
## IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH

In order to “nourish the goose that laid the golden egg,” a working partnership must be formed among property owners, businesses, residents, advocates, and users. This partnership takes the form of the Community Improvement District. CID’s task is to transform the whole into a series of welcoming, safe, clean, green, and walkable, mixed-use urban neighborhoods. Each neighborhood must echo the success of the traditional Downtown core and add unique enhancements that contribute to a strong sense—and presence—of community.

## ACTION STEPS: NEAR-TERM

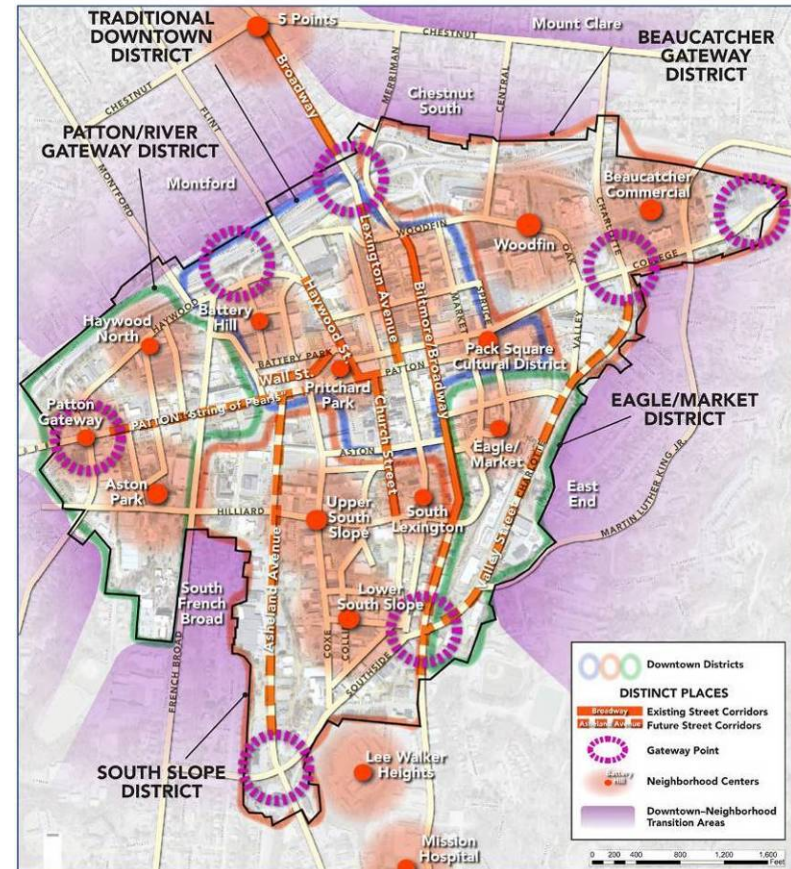
- A. **Adopt the recommendations of this Strategy as the urban design framework to guide and shape existing and emerging neighborhoods.** This framework should cultivate the character of distinct places by distinguishing areas for preservation and areas for change; defining target land uses; facilitating mobility choices; providing civic places for parks, recreation, and culture; and preserving view corridors
  1. **Cultivate the character of distinct Downtown places.** Recognize the five distinct districts within Downtown as unique in their history, location, and opportunities. Identify smaller neighborhoods, corridors, and nodes within them. The *Downtown Districts* and *Downtown Places* diagrams on the next page, and further descriptions of the five Downtown districts and other areas on subsequent pages, describe these further.

## DOWNTOWN DISTRICTS



In addition to the traditional core—basically the National Register Historic District—Downtown includes the Eagle/Market, Beaucatcher Gateway, South Slope and Patton/River Gateway districts. (See the appendix for enlargements of this and other diagrams.)

## DOWNTOWN PLACES

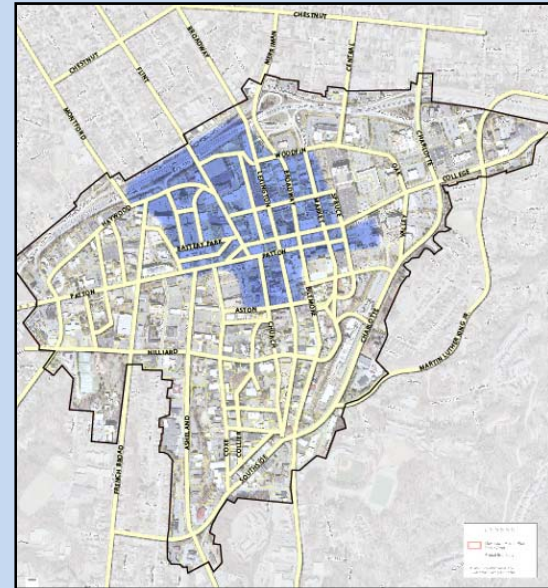


At a smaller scale, many distinct streets and smaller neighborhoods within Downtown further contribute—or could contribute—to its sense of place.



## Traditional Downtown District

The traditional Downtown core exemplifies what most people think of as the “downtown.” It largely coincides with the Downtown Asheville National Register of Historic Places Historic District. This area is most amenable to walking, with significant historic architecture, an eclectic mix of uses, and high-profile arts activities. Thoughtfully designed new buildings are appropriate in this district on vacant sites, replacing non-historic structures, or on top of historic structures. Continued investment in existing and new buildings is necessary for the traditional Downtown district to continue to thrive. The success of this district—and the fact that it is a “15-minute neighborhood” (almost everything is within a 15-minute walk)—provides a model for all other Downtown neighborhoods.



Pedestrian-oriented parking lot infill development along Patton—and façade improvements to existing buildings—would bring more spatial quality and vitality to Downtown.



Adding appropriate new development on Haywood can help existing properties—historic or not—gain value.

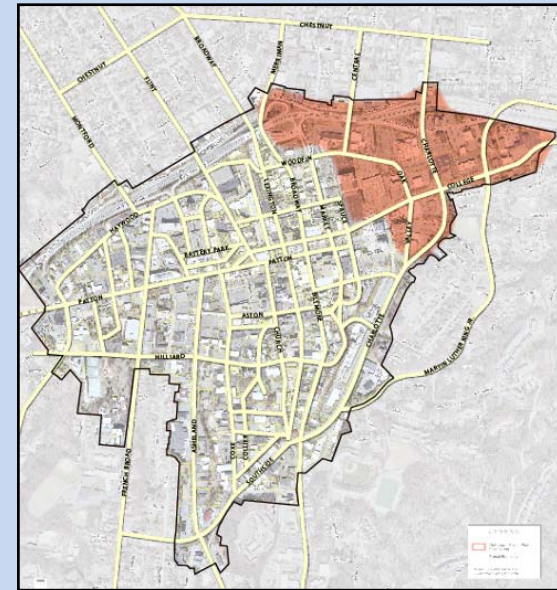


## Beaucatcher Gateway District

This district contains a number of significant commercial sites important to Downtown's economy and employment base. At the same time, its urban renewal-era redevelopment left it in need of a truly urban fabric that could connect it to the traditional Downtown district and make it another "15-minute neighborhood." Commercial uses should be emphasized. Greater density—and some market-supported mixed-uses—should include above- or below-grade parking served by expanded transit and the shuttle. Renovations and new construction should enhance pedestrian-oriented street activity and help create a memorable gateway to the traditional Downtown district.



**Beaucatcher Gateway is an important commercial area. It could become more important with gradual addition of higher-value commercial development that links to the traditional Downtown district.**



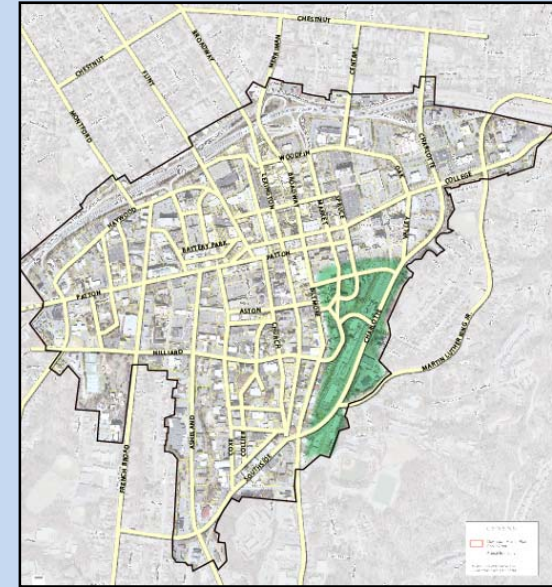
## Eagle/Market District

Eagle/Market holds a special place in Downtown due to its role as the historic center of Asheville's African-American community. While businesses, housing and institutions operated by African-Americans are no longer confined to Eagle/Market, the district remains an important symbolic place. Eagle/Market needs to be a place that belongs to, welcomes, and is an integral part of the entire Downtown community. Both community development corporations in Eagle/Market have invested in solid redevelopment proposals; both should proceed quickly. The community development corporations should play roles in "filling the gaps" to link this "15-minute neighborhood" to the rest of Downtown. Potential development of the Asheville Area

Performing Arts Center and redevelopment of City-owned property along South Charlotte Street/Valley Street should contribute to the identity and vitality of the district.



Asheville has the opportunity to redevelop portions of the DPW site with housing and neighborhood uses that reconnect Downtown with the East End. This should transform South Charlotte/Valley into an authentic urban street.



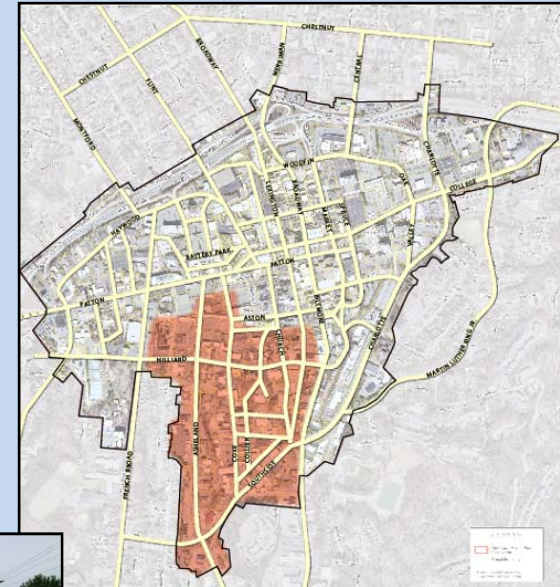


## South Slope District

This area contains the most significant opportunities for Downtown redevelopment and growth. Topographic variation—most evident along Hilliard as it crosses a series of ridges and valleys—breaks this large area into at least three corridors. Housing development is already underway as part of a mini-neighborhood within close walking distance of Downtown jobs and services. While there are ample opportunities for smaller fill-the-gap developments, much of the South Slope is also appropriate for relatively tall new buildings. Office and commercial uses are also suitable here, especially if they reinforce the Mission Health Services campus and provide neighborhood retail. The South Slope should become the major southern gateway to Downtown.



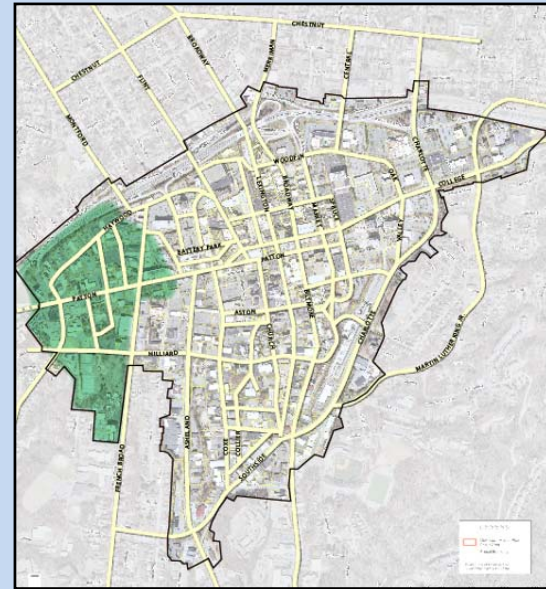
Coxe should become the heart of a new residential neighborhood with a comfortable walking scale, direct links to Downtown, new housing, and neighborhood retail—the model of a “15-minute neighborhood.”



The intersection of Biltmore and Southside is an important gateway to Downtown from Biltmore Village and the south. It should become a high-value area that includes housing, stores, other commercial uses, and medical offices.

## Patton/River Gateway District

Patton should become the primary link between the Traditional Downtown District and the River Arts District. In the middle of this link is a tremendous opportunity for redevelopment supporting the Asheville Hub's Centers for Climatic and Environmental Interaction and supporting industries, stemming from presence of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and underutilized sites. Research and development activities will be within walking distance of Downtown—and a short distance from UNCA along the Broadway Corridor. The Patton/River Gateway should also accommodate significant residential and extended-stay hotel development—some in taller buildings. In addition, this link will provide a walkable environment far to the west of Pritchard Park toward the River Arts District. This district also has very high potential if the City is able to reclaim and reuse public rights-of-way along a rationalized I-240 interchange with I-26.



Patton should become a walkable Downtown street lined with buildings that contain storefronts serving new jobs in new industries as well as a range of housing opportunities.



2. **Recognize adjacent neighborhoods and corridors** having strong—and mutually-beneficial—relationships with Downtown:

- **Broadway-Five Points Corridor.** This under-used stretch of Broadway offers significant promise to extend Downtown’s mix of uses and walkability across I-240 and into the Montford and Hillside/Mt. Clare neighborhoods. Area property owners and developers of several independent projects—planned or underway—are already working with a notable degree of collaboration on a series of possible initiatives such as: extending the Reed Creek greenway closer to Downtown, exploring a business improvement district (similar to the proposed CID), thinking about a TIF district, and coordinating public realm improvements.
- **Montford Neighborhood Edge.** Montford is a prime national example of the economic powers of historic rehabilitation and preservation. This strong residential neighborhood already has significant ties to Downtown through sheer proximity as well as the presence of stores, schools, the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce on the Montford side of I-240, and new development under way on the Downtown side of I-240. These ties could be significantly strengthened if the I-240 “cut” were to be mended. Creation of a “Ponte Vecchio” deck with parks built over the highway is not economically viable in the near future. A deck over I-240 at Flint

Street might eventually become viable for expansion of the Civic Center, but less-expensive models for bridge improvement exist. These could take the form of a modest widening to include a small retail space, plantings and trees, and a bike lane.

- **Chestnut South Edge.** These blocks north of I-240 contain a mix of office and institutional uses— some in converted residences. To the north, the more solidly residential neighborhoods of the Chestnut Historic District, Central Avenue, and Mount Clare need a more deliberate transition to Chestnut South and Downtown. Chestnut South deserves attention for continued preservation, some infill, and streetscapes to link to Downtown.
- **East End Neighborhood Edge.** Urban “renewal” rebuilt portions of the traditional Valley Street as South Charlotte Street and created parcels now occupied by commercial and government uses. This yielded two lasting effects: forcing many African Americans to lose their homes and businesses and severing East End from Downtown. Significant new development and streetscape improvements along South Charlotte/Valley should be pursued to re-connect Downtown and East End. This is a signal opportunity for participation by the African American community on both sides of South Charlotte/Valley through the two community development corporations in Eagle/Market. The proposed



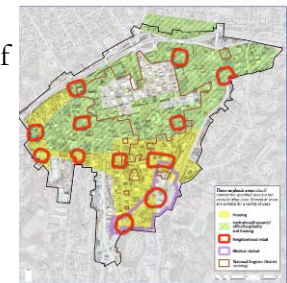
Performing Arts Center on Eagle holds significant potential to improve Downtown-East End connections through both architecture and programming.

- **Mission Health Services Corridor.** Mission—immediately south of Downtown—is Asheville’s largest employer. Continued movement of retirees to Asheville (and success of the Hub Initiative’s “rejuvenation” cluster) will reinforce Mission’s role as Western North Carolina’s premier medical center. Mission’s predicted growth poses challenges: recruiting staff, providing nearby and affordable housing, improving parking and transit access, and strengthening wayfinding systems. Initiatives in this Downtown Master Plan offer opportunities to address all of these challenges, particularly within the South Slope District.
- **South French Broad Neighborhood Edge.** This residential neighborhood comes close to the Traditional Downtown District, but abrupt land- use changes along French Broad and Asheland limit connectivity. Redevelopment within the South Slope District and the Patton/River Gateway offer terrific opportunities to rebuild relationships between Downtown and South French Broad. Early planning for this neighborhood should coordinate with the *Aston Gateway Plan* and this Downtown Master Plan.

- **Clingman Corridor.** New residential development and creation of the Clingman Greenway promise to reinforce Clingman’s function as an important node and connection to the River Arts District and West Asheville. Redevelopment in the Patton/River Gateway District should have important synergies with the Clingman Corridor and help spur additional redevelopment.

### 3. Define target land uses.

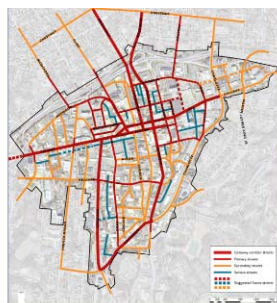
Downtown Asheville’s eclectic mix of land uses is one key to its richness and vibrancy. At the same time, emerging districts and new Downtown neighborhoods should benefit from land use consistency—that is, a use like housing or office space should predominate—even while other land uses remain welcome and desirable. The *Land Use Emphasis Areas* diagram in the appendix for Strategy 3 identifies areas where particular land uses are desirable.



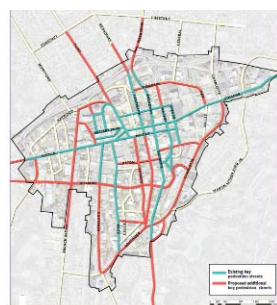
**Land Use Emphasis Areas**

4. **Facilitate access choices.**

The *Street Hierarchy*, *Bicycle Network*, and *Priority Pedestrian Streets* diagrams in the appendix for Strategy 3 outline networks that provide options for getting around Downtown. *Street Hierarchy* classifies Downtown streets so that “Gateway Corridor” and “Primary” streets may be enhanced with the most pedestrian- and visitor-friendly furniture. By the same token, “Service” streets are meant to accommodate heavier traffic, pulling such traffic from pedestrian-oriented streets. *Bicycle Network* illustrates the City’s 2008 *Bicycle Plan* recommendations for Downtown, introducing improved biking conditions on major Downtown routes. *Priority Pedestrian Streets* expands the existing network to link emerging neighborhoods within Downtown.



**Street Hierarchy**



**Priority Pedestrian Streets**



**Bicycle Network**

5. **Provide places for public parks, recreation, and culture.**

“Priority Pedestrian” streets should be placed within a larger network of parks. Existing parks serve as important (and heavily used) centers of community activity and identity that are enjoyed by residents and visitors alike. New open spaces and parks will be needed to serve a growing residential population Downtown. Securing, improving, and maintaining new parkland is a challenge, but key opportunities for establishing them include existing City-owned parcels, land purchases, land reclaimed from NC DOT ownership, and public park space incorporated by agreement into large new developments. (See the *Parks & Greenways* and *Priority Pedestrian Streets* diagrams in the appendix for Strategy 3 for further detail.)

6. **Preserve signature view corridors.** “Vista parks” in existing and new locations are needed to provide permanent public views of Downtown’s stunning mountain setting. See Strategy 4, Action step B, for more detailed requirements. Encourage the creation of private rooftop restaurants, public observation decks, and similar private facilities allowing public access to views from tops of taller buildings.

B. **Steer growth to areas appropriate for change and away from areas needing protection.** The Planning and Development Department and the Downtown management entity (CID) should actively pursue several goals:

1. **Distinguish distinct focus areas for preservation and focus areas for change.** The *Targeting Preservation and Change* diagram in the appendix for Strategy 3 identifies places where change should be avoided and others where it should be most welcome.



**Targeting Preservation and Change**

2. Encourage developers and landowners to **develop strategic sites in ways that benefit whole neighborhoods and districts.** Promote joint-ventures and “broker” deals. Shape development proposals to match intended characteristics in the different districts and neighborhoods in and adjacent to Downtown. Discuss urban design and community goals for Downtown with developers at the conceptual design stage. Help shape projects to meet goals of both their sponsors and the larger community.
3. Define RFQ and RFP criteria on public land to **support urban design framework goals.** Seize these near-term opportunities to foster positive change.<sup>13</sup>

- C. **Coordinate plans for adjacent and overlapping areas** (such as the South French Broad and Aston Gateway plans) with the Downtown urban design framework.

1. The City should **establish plans for all neighborhoods and corridor areas adjacent to Downtown.**

- D. **Implement and update the streetscape improvement goals of the *Asheville Pedestrian Thoroughfare Plan* and *Downtown Streetscape Plan*.** (Also refer to Action Step C under Strategy 2.)

1. **Expand the network of priority pedestrian streets** according to the *Pedestrian Priority Streets* diagram in the appendix for Strategy 3.
2. Require new development projects to **improve overall streetscape conditions along their frontage** to meet defined standards.

## ACTION STEPS: LONG-TERM

- Use City redevelopment powers to strategically buy and “bank” land. Issue RFQs and RFPs for development to achieve Downtown Master Plan goals. Coordinate these processes with the CID.
- Implement longer-term elements of the urban design framework.

## FUNDING SOURCES

- Earmark at least 50 percent of the proceeds from any City land sales to help fund Downtown initiatives.
- Float bonds for redevelopment and repay the bonds from land sale proceeds.

## IN THE APPENDIX

- Downtown Districts diagram
- Downtown Places diagram
- Renderings and other images related to the five Downtown Districts (Traditional Downtown District, Beaucatcher Gateway District, Eagle/Market District, South Slope District, and Patton/River Gateway District)
- Targeting Preservation and Change diagram
- Land Use Emphasis Areas diagram
- Street Hierarchy diagram
- Bicycle Network diagram
- Priority Pedestrian Streets diagram
- Parks and Greenways diagram

## PRECEDENTS

- The Clifton community and Emory University in metropolitan Atlanta have begun to successfully manage strong growth pressure by creating a series of corridor design districts. Guidelines promote different approaches as appropriate in different districts: an emphasis on preservation around traditional residential neighborhoods and natural areas, and an emphasis on significant pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use development in areas in need of transformation from auto-dominated landscapes and uses.
- In Virginia, Alexandria's *Braddock Neighborhood Plan* balances demand for transit-oriented housing with strong community interest in preserving historic buildings. This is a longtime African American community that needs affordable housing. The plan identifies places for higher-density development, lower density development, and transitions. Part of development proceeds pay for community needs.





# Shaping Downtown

## 4

## Shape building form to promote quality of place.

### OVERVIEW AND GOALS

It is true that the built environment effects how we think about a place: we may wish to avoid certain areas but be may be attracted to a lively street scene just a few blocks away. This Downtown Master Plan proposes a zoning policy that defines appropriate massing and height allowances—all coordinated within the urban design framework in Strategy 3—to build distinct character in each neighborhood and gateway. Encourage building forms that create public *and* private value and respond to the community’s vision principles.

Goals for Strategy 4 contain the following elements:

- Employ form-based code mechanisms to provide the fine level of building massing and height control needed to ensure design compatibility with Downtown’s celebrated urban form and architecture. Use favorite historic buildings as models to set height and massing controls.
- Consider taller buildings that cast limited shadows and do not disrupt established neighborhood scale. The South Slope District, South Charlotte, Patton/River Gateway District, and the Beaucatcher Gateway are good candidates for taller buildings. Greater height may also be appropriate for infill or air-rights projects in the traditional Downtown district. Pairs of taller buildings can help frame designated view corridors.

- Respect Downtown’s skyline as a part of our mountain landscape. Design enjoyable building caps; pay attention to building proportions.
- Add to Downtown’s pedestrian scale (and limit shadows) by using step-backs on higher floors.
- Reduce horizontal façade lengths and avoid “slab” buildings.
- Maximize view corridors between taller buildings by limiting floorplate size to a percentage of site area.
- Control shadow impacts on adjacent public open space.
- Investigate roof tops as public spaces and “vista” parks.

### IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH

This Downtown Master Plan seeks to enrich Downtown and surrounding districts with additional residents, activities, and investments. This is accomplished by revisions and integration of existing zoning, Downtown Asheville Design Guidelines, and project review criteria. A variety of heights, massing, and character will respect the treasured context, animate the skyline, and preserve valued buildings and views.

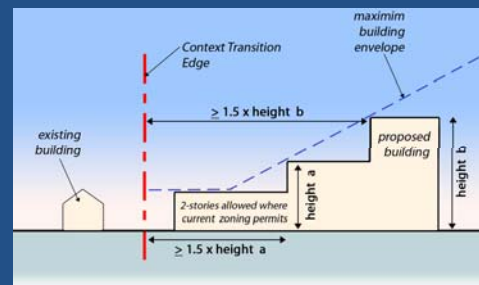
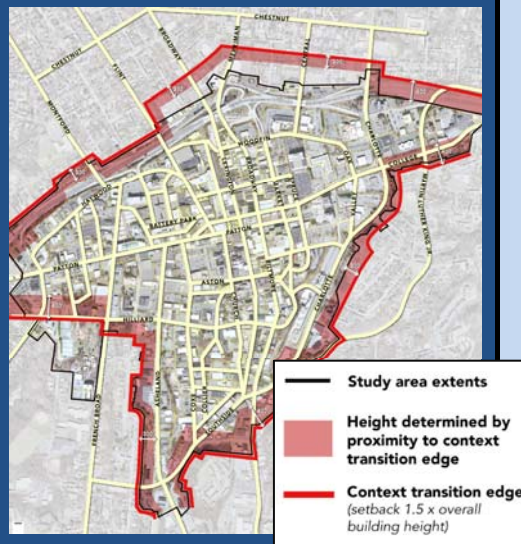
## Height and massing control mechanisms and their order of precedence

Allowable height and massing should be determined through a series of six steps, summarized under *A* through *F* on this and the next page. These form-based control mechanisms are explained in more detail under *Actions Steps: Near-Term* on the subsequent pages. See the appendix for Strategy 4 for enlarged diagrams.

**A**

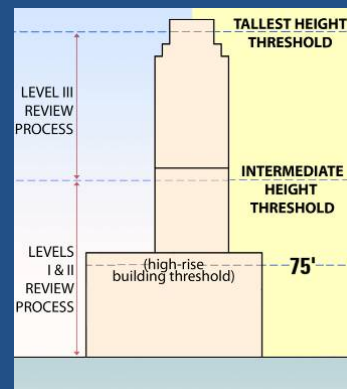
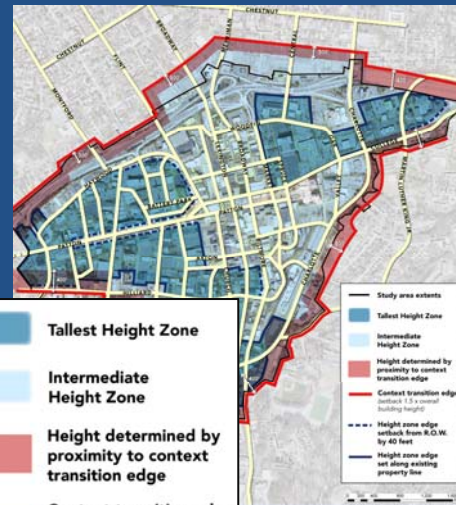
### CREATE GRADUAL SCALE TRANSITIONS TO ADJACENT NEIGHBORHOODS

AS BUILDINGS APPROACH THE CONTEXT TRANSITION EDGE, MAXIMUM ALLOWABLE HEIGHT DECREASES



**B**

### LIMIT HEIGHT AS REQUIRED BY HEIGHT ZONE



**C**

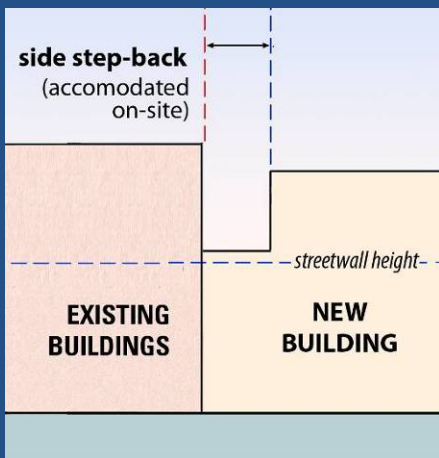
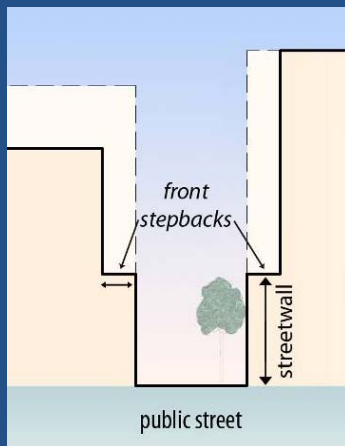
### SHAPE BUILDING MASSING AND HEIGHT TO PREVENT EXCESSIVE SHADING OF PUBLIC PARKS, PLAZAS, OR LANDMARK BUILDINGS



**D**

## **PRESERVE DOWNTOWN'S TRADITIONAL SCALE AND ALLOW DAYLIGHT TO REACH STREET LEVEL**

ABOVE THE ESTABLISHED STREETWALL, STEP BACK UPPER FLOORS FROM FRONT OR SIDE PROPERTY BOUNDARIES

**E**

## **CREATE SLENDER BUILDINGS THAT ALLOW VIEW CORRIDORS AND DAYLIGHT BETWEEN THEM**

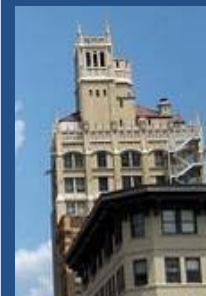
AVOID "SLAB" BUILDINGS BY LIMITING MAXIMUM OVERALL FLOORPLATE LENGTH AND AREA ABOVE THE 75-FOOT HEIGHT THRESHOLD.

**F**

## **CLEARLY ILLUSTRATE HOW THE BUILDING WILL ENHANCE THE DOWNTOWN SKYLINE AND PRESERVE ESTABLISHED PUBLIC VIEW CORRIDORS**

BUILDING SITING AND ARCHITECTURE—PARTICULARLY THAT OF BUILDING CAPS—SHOULD ACKNOWLEDGE THE PROMINENCE OF TALLER BUILDINGS ON DOWNTOWN ASHEVILLE'S SKYLINE.

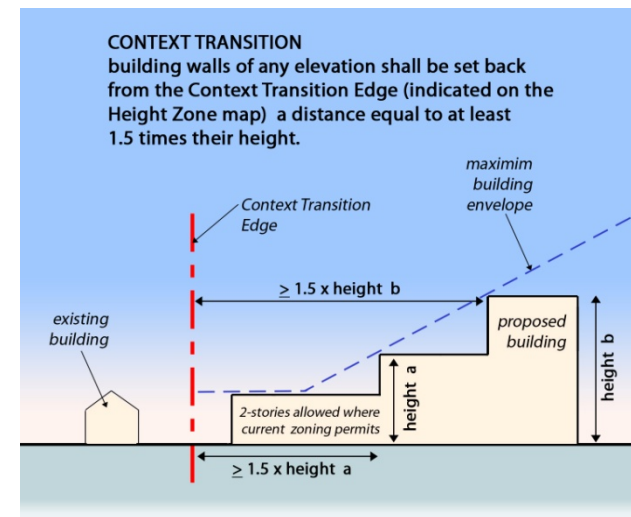
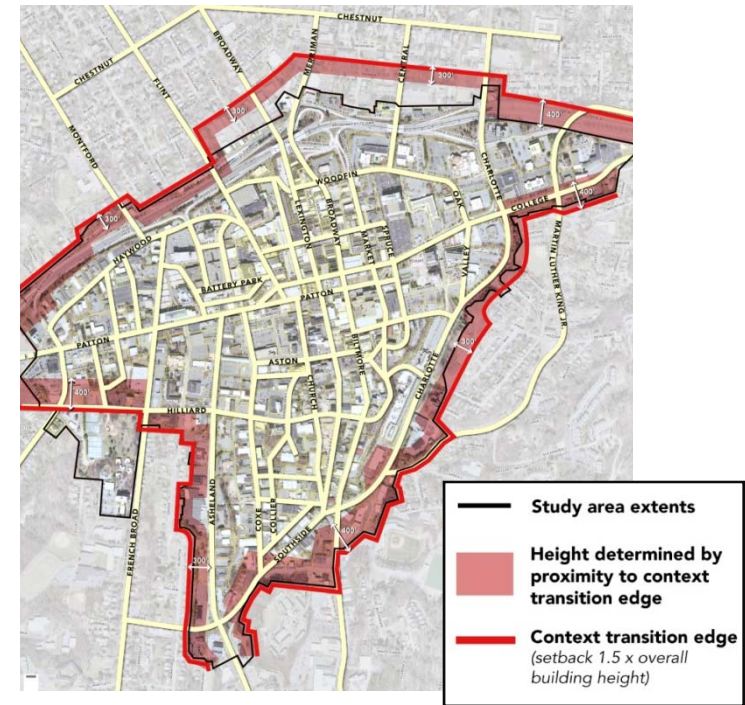
ORIENT BUILDING MASS TO PRESERVE AND FRAME ESTABLISHED PUBLIC VIEW CORRIDORS.

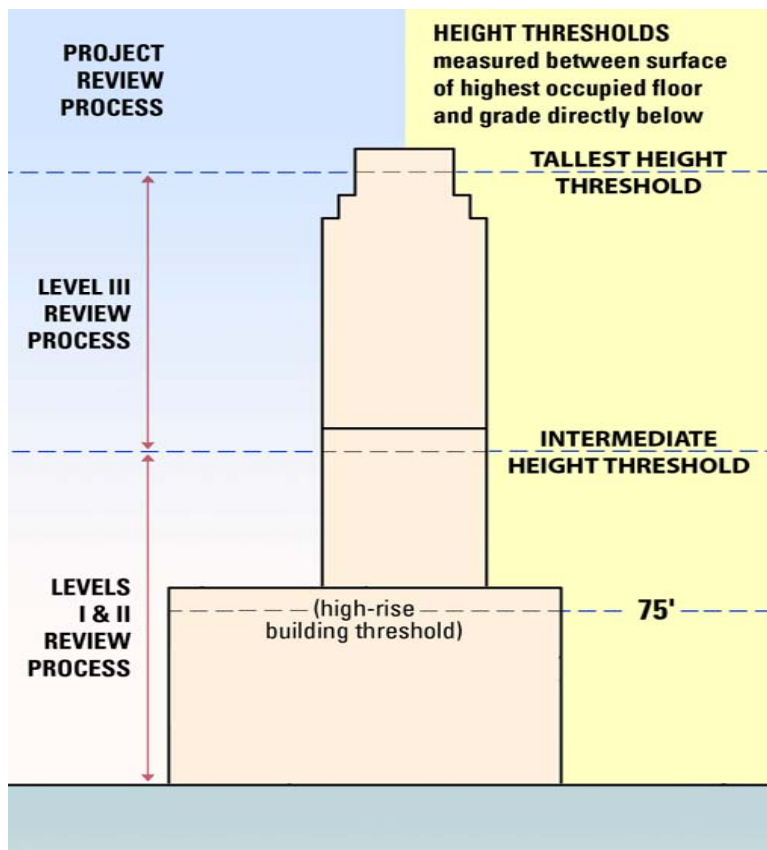




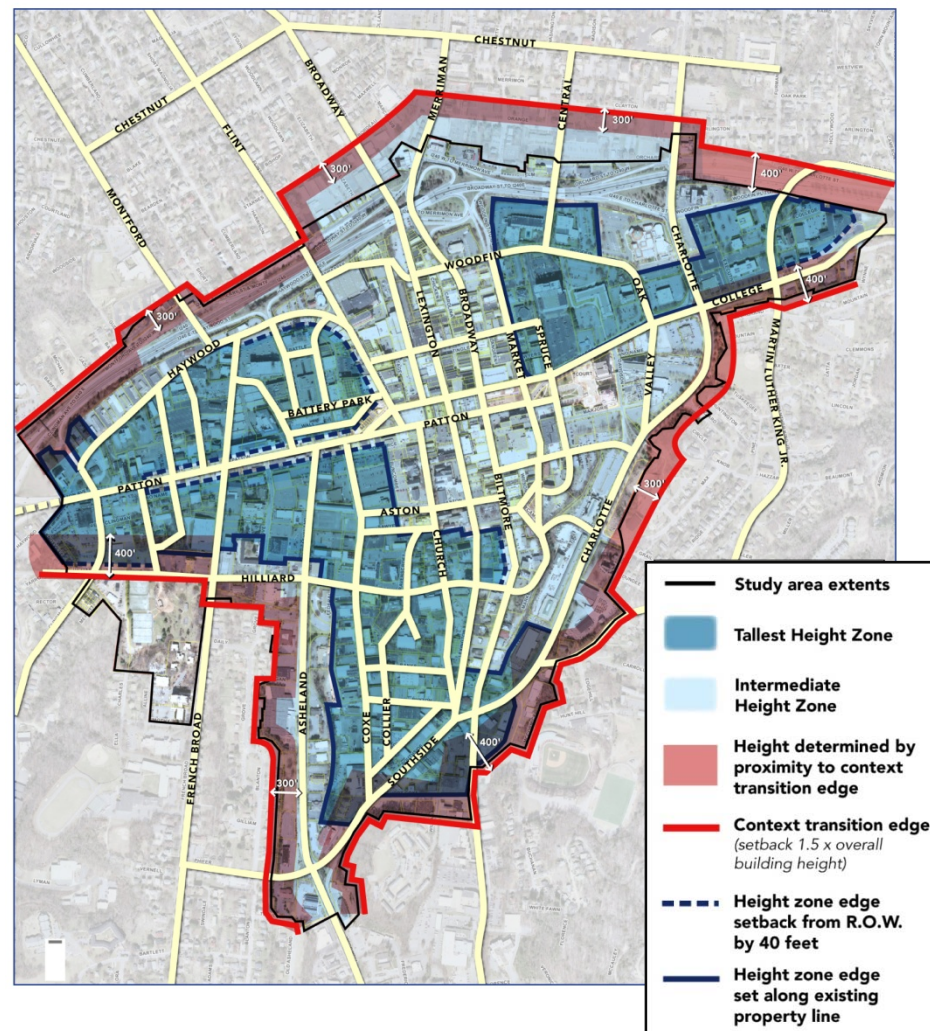
## ACTION STEPS: NEAR-TERM

- A. **Encourage gradual scale transitions between Downtown and adjacent neighborhoods.** As a building site approaches the Context Transition Edge, its maximum allowable height should decrease proportionately.<sup>14</sup> Refer to the *Context Transition*, *Building Height Zone*, and *Height Threshold* diagrams on the next page for further detail. Regardless of Context Transition requirements, two-stories of height should be allowed where permitted by current zoning.
- B. **Establish maximum height zones in Downtown.** Measure building height from existing grade level to the highest occupied floor surface; the remainder of the top floor, roof top mechanical areas, and appropriate building caps are not included in overall heights.
  1. Allow 75-feet (up to 8-stories per North Carolina building code) throughout Downtown.
  2. Establish an **Intermediate Height Zone** threshold defined by the community's favorite 1920's structures: the Jackson, Battery Park Hotel, County building, and City Hall.<sup>15</sup>
  3. Establish a **Tallest Height Zone** threshold as the maximum allowable height (similar to the Ellington and Battery Park proposals).<sup>16</sup>





Building height zones respond to and shape character in different Downtown areas. Refer to the appendix for Strategy 4 and endnotes 12 -14 for specific details regarding building height zone thresholds.

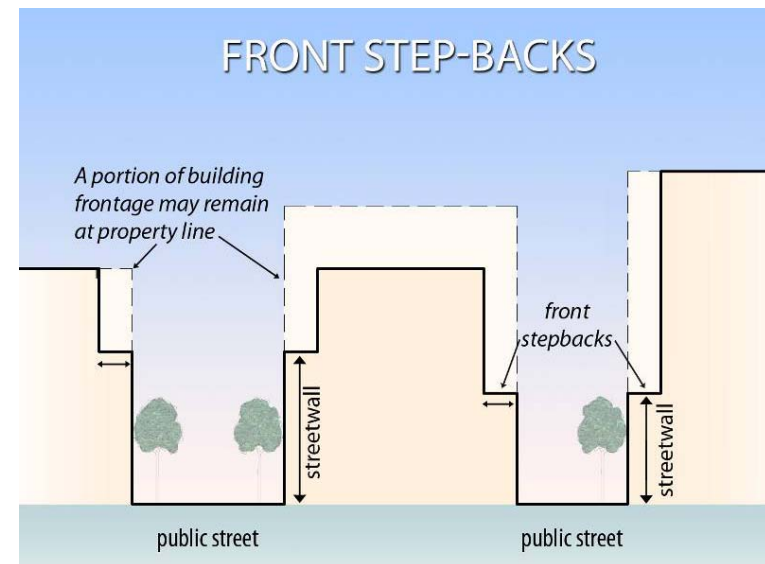




C. **Require that no point in a public park or plaza space, or any locally-designated landmark buildings** with features or details that are sunlight-dependant and make such resources significant (i.e.: fine stained-glass windows or sculptural ornaments), **be shaded by a new building to an extent that diminishes its quality of usability.**<sup>17</sup>

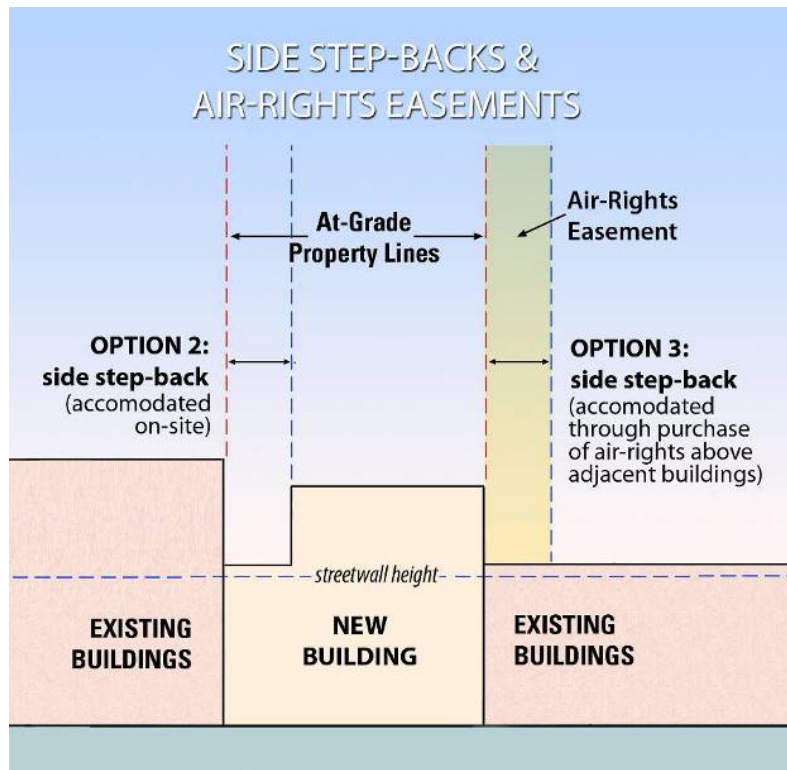
D. Step-back floors above the defined streetwall to **preserve Downtown's traditional scale and allow daylight to reach street level.** (See the *Front Step-back* and *Side Step-back* diagrams on this and the next page and in the appendix for Strategy 4). The builder may choose between using a front façade step-back, a side step-back, or a combination of the two (i.e. if the front step-back option is applied to 40 percent of façade length, the side step-back option should be applied to 60 percent of side frontage). Step-backs are not required on Service streets. Front and side stepbacks should not be required if the provision of that stepback would diminish the buildable floorplate by more than 10 percent.

1. **Streetwall height should be defined in proportion to street width**, except that for new buildings proposed near listed historic buildings, the streetwall height should be similar to the height of the historic building.<sup>18</sup>
2. **The front façade step-back** option requires a step-back of stories that occur above the streetwall.<sup>19</sup> A portion of the façade length may be exempted from the step-back; encourage portions of the façade to exceed step-back height at prominent intersections. (Front stepbacks should only be required for buildings that extend to the



street edge; for buildings that set back beyond the streetwall, a front stepback should not be required.)

3. The side step-back option **requires building mass above the established streetwall to step-back from adjacent side property lines**, whether that land is developed or undeveloped.<sup>20</sup> (See the *Side Stepback* diagram on the next page and the appendix for Strategy 4). As a means of satisfying the side step-back option, **allow the purchase of air-rights from adjacent properties** to enable buildings to extend directly to the property line. In the event that a building fronts multiple streets, allow the side stepback option or its equivalent air-rights option to be accommodated through any combination or distribution amongst the building sides.



- E. **Promote view corridors between buildings; encourage slender buildings.** Limit the amount of floorplate permitted above the 75-foot height threshold.<sup>21</sup> On larger parcels, make this floorplate area proportional to site area. On smaller parcels, allow a reasonable minimum floorplate in all cases.

1. **Avoid “slab” buildings** by limiting maximum overall horizontal floorplate dimensions above the 75-foot height threshold.<sup>22</sup>
  2. **Require a portion of side facades above the 75-foot height threshold to be comprised of glazing.**<sup>23</sup>
- F. **Require building proposals to demonstrate how they will enhance the Downtown skyline and preserve established public view corridors.** Building siting and architecture—particularly design of building caps—should acknowledge the prominence of taller buildings on Downtown Asheville’s skyline.
1. To facilitate evaluation, require sponsors of all proposals exceeding the 75-foot height threshold, and all proposals located in designated public view corridors<sup>24</sup> (see the View Corridor diagram in the appendix for Strategy 4), to **submit photomontages illustrating their proposed building’s presence in the skyline.** For buildings over 75-feet, illustrations should be provided of existing and proposed ground-level views from designated external vista points.<sup>25</sup> For buildings in public view corridors, illustrations should be provided of existing and proposed ground-level views from the corresponding view corridor vista point. (See the *View Corridors* and *External Vista Points* diagrams in the appendix for clarification of view corridor and vista point locations.)

2. Evaluate the photomontages (and model representation, see item 3 below) of proposals according to these criteria:

- Deliberate attention paid to an architecturally attractive cap that is distinctly *of* Asheville. Caps should be designed as attractive landmarks with special forms and materials. Coordinate caps with building form to distinguish a base, middle, and top.
- Slender building proportions—no broad slabs blocking a major portion of the view
- Success in preserving, framing or enhancing significant views
- Contribution to the overall Downtown skyline

3. To facilitate public review, require all sponsors of proposals exceeding the 75-foot height threshold to **submit a three-dimensional computer model** of their project suitable for insertion into the City's three-dimensional Downtown computer model.

## ACTION STEPS: LONG-TERM

- Enhance the City's three-dimensional computer model of Downtown with more accurate topography, street trees, and new development projects as they are submitted and approved. Use the enhanced model more extensively in public places for review and presentations.



Computer model of a hypothetical new building (in ivory) at the corner of Haywood and College streets, set into a model of existing buildings (with brown roofs) for purposes of public comment and review.

## FUNDING SOURCES

City funding should be provided for revision of the UDO, Downtown Asheville Design Guidelines, and training for the City's design review staff.

## PRECEDENTS

Beginning in the early 1990's, Vancouver successfully fostered a series of tall, slender buildings throughout its Downtown South area through specific design guidelines. The guidelines achieve pleasing building proportions while retaining views to the mountains and the sea. The guidelines also diminish the impact of tall buildings on streets by controlling floorplate size, dimensions between buildings, building volume and orientation, shadow impacts, and similar measures.

Aspen and Durango, Colorado measure building height at any point on a parcel to the actual grade below it, rather than to a single average ground elevation. This approach improves building height relationships with significant topographical variation, and thus has been recommended for Downtown Asheville.

## IN THE APPENDIX

- Height Measurement diagram
- Building Height Zones diagram
- Context Transition Edge diagram
- Project Review Process diagram
- View Corridors diagram
- Front Stepback diagram
- Side Stepback diagram (for buildings at or below the 75-foot height threshold)
- Side Stepback diagram (for buildings above the 75-foot height threshold)
- Analyses of the BB&T and Renaissance Hotel sites
- Analysis of Downtown parcel areas and parcel widths





# Shaping Downtown

5

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

## OVERVIEW AND GOALS

Downtown Asheville has recently attracted larger-scale, higher-value projects of unprecedented height and overall scale. The City should also continue to encourage small-scale infill development. Both require more sophisticated tools for review and approval, with flexibility and incentives for inventive approaches to sustainability, economic viability, and character enhancement. Strategy 4 specifically addressed new height and massing requirements; Strategy 5 focuses on recommended design guidelines, and overall documentation of development standards.

In all cases, proposal review must be expanded to:

- Respect Downtown's topography.
- Consider environmental impacts comprehensively.
- Evaluate impacts on adjoining properties and uses—before, during and after construction.
- Examine building form; articulate scale as sensed from near and far; consider transitions to, from, and among adjacent taller buildings.
- Work toward high-quality residential buildings by encouraging ground-level unit entrances, live-work spaces, co-housing, and other quality-enhancing measures.
- Study a building's fit in the urban fabric—especially ground floor uses and the face presented to the public.
- Consider a new building's fit with neighboring historic buildings and special places.
- Supplement Asheville's existing green building strategies.
  - Add incentives such as expedited plan review, density bonuses, and grants, awards.
  - Make all incentives meaningful in time and money.

- Build partnerships with the WNC Green Building Council and other “green” organizations.
- Provide educational programs for City staff, developers, appraisers, lenders, and other key actors in the development process.
- Provide technical and marketing assistance to green builders.
- Provide clear, objective, readily available review standards to developers, property owners, and the general public as well as review agencies.
- Clearly distinguish between required and recommended (voluntary) development standards, and provide incentives for meeting recommendations.

## IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH

The rallying cry is “don’t kill the goose that laid the golden egg.” This Downtown Master Plan presents an opportunity to use zoning, design guidelines and similar tools to encourage new buildings that preserve and enrich the character, quality, and sustainability of Downtown’s streets, public spaces and architecture.

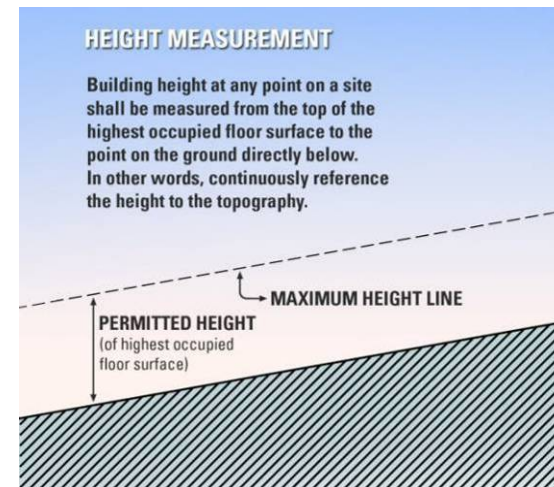
## ACTION STEPS: NEAR-TERM

- A. **Consolidate, approve and enforce elements of the UDO and updated Downtown Asheville Design Guidelines** (see B, below). Clearly distinguish between the required and recommended elements. Create a concise checklist to serve for design review and for formal written findings submitted

to the regulatory body making final approval decisions. (An outline for this checklist appears in the appendix.)

### B. **Add new standards to the existing Downtown Asheville Design Guidelines.**

1. **Continuously measure building height in relation to topography.** Currently, building height is determined in reference to a single point on a site. If this reference point occurs at the site’s highest elevation, a significant grade change can push the project’s overall height significantly beyond the intended standard. This Master Plan recommends that building height at any point on a site be measured *continuously* to the point on the ground directly below. Hence, the topography on which a building sits will directly determine its height profile.



Determination of building height, not including the top floor, mechanical areas, and building cap.

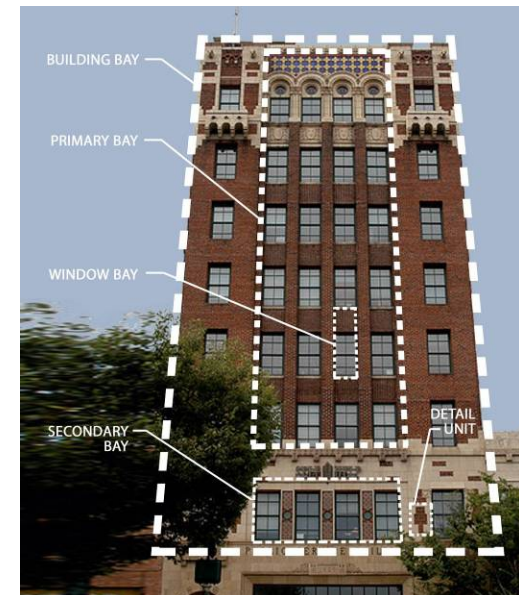
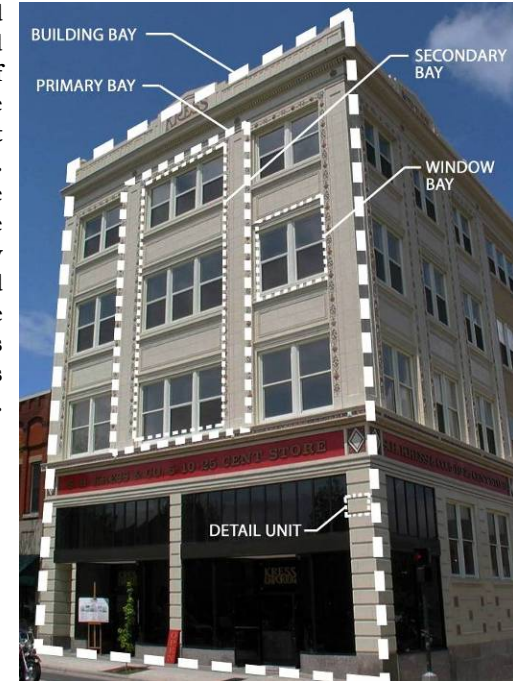
## 2. Articulate building form at a range of scales.

In keeping with the practice of famed Asheville architect Richard Sharp Smith, larger buildings should be articulated in a hierarchy of smaller volumes and masses that better relate to other buildings and the scale of streets. Volume and mass scale intervals should include:<sup>26</sup>

- *Building bays* that relate well to the scale of historic Downtown buildings and street widths;
- *Primary bays* that create the major divisions of the façade composition;
- *Secondary bays* that relate to the scale of individual residential rooms, most offices, building entrances, and sidewalks;
- *Window bays* that relate to the scale of typical building windows, doors, and projecting bays (as well as the human body); and,
- *Detail units* that relate to the scale of individual building-material units such as bricks, shingles, light fixtures, and vegetation.

Encourage new building facades to specifically make reference to any historic building(s) close by. Bay windows on a new building, for example, might match those on an historic building; tiles or spandrels on a new building might match the size of window divisions on an historic structure.<sup>27</sup>

Buildings should express mass and volume at a range of scales to help make Downtown fit comfortably together. The analyses of the Kress and Public Service buildings at right show how the recommended range of scales can be articulated on buildings of varied sizes, styles and uses.





3. **Integrate multifamily and townhouse residential buildings into Downtown’s fabric.** Stakeholders across the board agree that more Downtown housing should help shape and activate streets. Urban residential buildings have specific privacy and identity needs not addressed in the current, commercially-oriented design guidelines. To that end, the City should adopt these measures:

- **Encourage exterior entrances for individual ground-floor units** (and access to units on upper floors through other entries). Individual entrances provide scale and identity while also breaking down the scale of larger buildings.
- **Encourage privacy separations between individual ground-floor units and the sidewalk.**<sup>28</sup>
- Along “Primary” streets, **encourage live-work units with ground-floor offices and retail space.** Locate these units on the lot line and provide significant retail-style glazing.
- **Articulate building façades** with bay windows, balconies and materials to distinguish individual dwelling units.

C. **Initiate incentives for buildings to meet high standards of green design and operation.** This will reduce Downtown Asheville’s impact on the environment and provide leadership for other communities. It also reduces operations costs of new and existing buildings, benefiting long-term

economic viability. This Downtown Master Plan recommends exploring some, or all, of the following initiatives:

1. **Propose property tax incentives.** In other cities nationwide, a green building’s higher assessed value sometimes offsets tax-rate reductions. Explore opportunities to provide grants to untaxed nonprofit organizations for green construction and retrofit.
2. **Offer water fee reductions.** Encourage water conservation through reduced fees for lower usage rates.
3. **Introduce an expedited permit process.** Assure green proposals priority consideration among other permit applications.
4. **Establish a green community benefit program (CBP) bonus.** Consider rewarding use of sustainable building standards with credits toward the CBP (see Strategy 7, action step C). For example, consider qualification for LEED Gold or higher standard as a means of meeting contribution requirements for new projects.
5. **Build on existing conservation incentives offered by utilities.** Familiarize all development proposal sponsors with utility-based grant programs for green projects.
6. **Support partnerships for education and assistance.** Collaborate with the Western North Carolina Green Building Council, Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College, and other area sources of green-building expertise. Target education for City staff and

project review entities. Expand education opportunities for developers, designers, lending institutions, appraisers and other stakeholders. Develop opportunities for free (or very inexpensive) technical assistance from green design professionals.

7. **Pursue the goal of achieving LEED Gold certification for all City-owned buildings.**
8. **Establish an awards program.** Promote local and regional green projects that encourage high performance. Raise the profile of green design as part of the City's profile as a national leader in sustainability.

## **ACTION STEPS: LONG-TERM**

- Frequently upgrade green building standards to reflect emerging technologies and advantageous changes in the cost/benefit equation.

## FUNDING SOURCES

Foundation grants and local university support (UNCA, A-B Tech, WCU, etc.) may be available for City staff training on green building principles.

Some cities have secured green design and building funding from their respective state, from the U.S.

Economic Development Administration, and from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

## IN THE APPENDIX

- The suggested project review checklist mentioned in action step A.
- Text, precedent photos, and diagrams describing suggested new design standards in more detail.

## PRECEDENTS

Among many other cities, Durham has developed a set of very clear design standards. Farther afield, Bellingham, Washington, Long Beach and San Jose, California, New Haven, Connecticut, and Ottawa, Ontario, have developed very good site-specific design standards and models, as well as model for green building.

# Shaping Downtown

6

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

## OVERVIEW AND GOALS

The current Downtown development review process is messy and confusing to all—the public, the development community, elected officials, even City staff. (The appendix for Strategy 6 contains a critique of the current process.) Why the frustration? This process is based on a regulatory framework that long predates Downtown’s changing dynamic. Many parts of the process are holdovers from suburban development patterns; they must be revised to provide clarity and certainty in Downtown Asheville, allow ample public input, assure a level playing field for developers, promote confidence among elected officials, and give City staff and volunteer reviewers a firm set of procedures and regulations. The following goals should shorten the time required for project review and reduce overall development costs.

- Clarify design standards and guidelines, with a focus on making them relevant to today’s Downtown. Ensure that approvals are clearly linked to specific standards.

- Make the Level I approval process as easy as possible to encourage infill development.
- Adjust Level II and Level III project thresholds to guarantee that larger projects undergo public review at earlier stages.
- Require approval bodies to consider whether a proposal meets policy goals in this Downtown Master Plan.
- Limit application of the quasi-judicial Conditional Use Permit (CUP) *only* to those projects whose proposed uses fall outside as-of-right land uses for their site.
- Shorten the Downtown development review process by eliminating at least one level of review.
- Place a finite time limit on design review.
- Guarantee multiple opportunities for public input—especially in early stages.
- Provide opportunities for community benefits through



- development bonuses in a consistent, equitable, and non-political framework.
- Enhance the role of the Downtown Commission in design review.

## IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH

Give planning the force of law by ensuring review and approval of development proposals in ways that respect objective criteria stemming from community goals.

## ACTION STEPS: NEAR-TERM

Amend the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) to include new processes and review elements.

- A. **Accommodate opportunities for meaningful public comment.**
  1. For large projects, **require developer-sponsored community meetings at an early stage**, when public comments can be addressed most easily and effectively. Sponsors of significant Level II projects<sup>29</sup> and all Level III projects should hold a community meeting prior to Technical Review Committee (TRC) and Downtown Commission review. Such meetings are also recommended for Level II projects of less significance.<sup>30</sup> A city planning or review staff member should attend the developer-sponsored meeting to ensure compliance.
  2. For all official review meetings—including those of the TRC, Downtown Commission, Planning and Zoning Commission, and City Council—**require opportunities for public attendance and input to be advertized.** Any

members of the public making comments should state their resident address and any relevant affiliations. Public comments made at meetings should be included in the written record of each review meeting. Written comments submitted by persons not in attendance should not need to be included in the record.

3. **Require publicity for developer- and City-sponsored meetings** to follow typical current procedures including mailings to neighboring property owners, temporary outdoor signs, and online, except with expanded mailings.<sup>31</sup>
- B. **Create a Downtown Development Handbook** that lays out the review process, outlines all applicable regulations, and describes development incentives—including density bonuses, green building incentives, and affordable housing incentives. Distribute the handbook at all predevelopment conferences. Distribute a concise summary of relevant standards at all public meetings for public reference.
- C. **Make structural changes to the review and approval process.**
  1. **Revise project level definitions.** Asheville’s division of development proposals in Level I, Level II, and Level III categories should be retained, but alter the level thresholds for Downtown proposals.
    - Include all proposals less than 20,000 square feet in the revised “Level I—Downtown” category. Expand the “Level II—Downtown” category to include proposals from 20,000 square feet to 175,000 square feet and up to the Intermediate Height Zone

threshold.<sup>32</sup> (See Strategy 4 for more detail on height definitions.)

- Limit the “Level III—Downtown” category to proposals above 175,000 square feet and above the Intermediate Height Zone threshold.
2. **Require formal written findings** from TRC and the Downtown Commission (levels II and III) detailing how a project does or does not meet requirements in the UDO and the Downtown Asheville Design Guidelines. Formal written findings should be part of recommendations sent to higher review bodies for review. A member of TRC or Downtown Commission (or both) should present findings to the regulatory body. Reports should include record of public comments in all review stages.
  3. **Review “Level I—Downtown” proposals as a staff function** by the Technical Review Committee (TRC). This administrative review covers all proposals of less than 20,000 square feet. The TRC should be the regulatory body for Level I—Downtown proposals. At TRC meetings, the oral public comment period may be limited, with opportunity for attendees to submit written comments. Appeals may be made to the Planning and Zoning Commission.
  4. **Review “Level II—Downtown” proposals in this order:**
    - First, the TRC should perform site plan review and issue formal written findings, then refer the proposal to the Downtown Commission.

- Second, the Downtown Commission should perform design review and issue formal written findings, and then refer the proposal to the Planning and Zoning Commission. Appeal of design review may be made to City Council.
- Third, the Planning and Zoning Commission should review the proposal for compliance with all UDO design and development standards and approve it, deny approval, or approve it with conditions, as the ultimate regulatory body. Appeal of Planning and Zoning decisions may be made to City Council.

**5. Review “Level III—Downtown” proposals in the following order:**

- First, the TRC should perform site plan review and issue formal written findings, then refer the proposal to the Downtown Commission.
- Second, the Downtown Commission should perform design review, issue formal written findings, and then refer the proposal to the Planning and Zoning Commission.
- Third, Planning and Zoning should review the proposal for compliance with all UDO design and development standards and approve it, approve it with conditions, or deny approval, based on formal written findings from the TRC and the Downtown Commission. It should then refer the proposal to City Council.
- Fourth, City Council must consider the formal written recommendations from the three lower bodies as well

as any new public comments. City Council should issue final approval, denial, or approval with conditions as the ultimate regulatory body. Appeal of Council's decisions may be made to the Superior Court of Buncombe County. Level III—Downtown review should not combine a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) hearing with site plan review (see action item D below). CUPs should be confined only to uses that could prove incompatible with existing Downtown uses and character. Projects that cause concern due to size (not use) should become “uses by right with special conditions;” clearly define the term “special conditions” in the UDO.

- D. **Apply the Conditional Use Permit process (CUP) only to projects requesting a variance from allowed land uses,** and only to consider the specific question of use. Apply the CUP process separately in all of the above review and approval processes and hold a special hearing before City Council. If a proposal requires a CUP, the permit should be obtained before final site plan approval by any regulatory body.
- E. **Require large development proposals with phased components to submit a master plan for review and approval** and each component phase for individual review and approval. Allow for expedited approval of component phases through advanced approval of the master plan.
- F. **Require Technical Review Committee (TRC) review of all Level II and Level III projects prior to review by the Downtown Commission.** “Technical merits” should be established before any form of design review.

- G. **Affirm the Downtown Commission as the principal design review body.** Update its membership to include representation by design and development experts (for example, registered architects or landscape architects, urban designers, engineers, historic preservation experts, real estate professionals, developers, attorneys practicing land use law, and so on). Development proposals not meeting recommended design standards should be denied by the Downtown Commission but then referred to City Council for design review. Downtown Commission members should recuse themselves from review when potential conflict-of-interest occurs.
- H. **Establish a core group of City staff to serve as a “Downtown Development Team”,** handling all Downtown proposal applications and attending all predevelopment conferences. This team should include members of the TRC and Downtown Commission's Design Review Subcommittee to ensure that site planning and design issues receive attention early in the process.
- I. To expedite the process, **establish a specific time limit between submission and written findings for each project review step** involving a review commission. As in other North Carolina jurisdictions, stipulate that proposals are deemed approved if action is not taken within a specific number of days. A maximum three-month (90 day) design review period is recommended. Review may be extended due to significant design modifications. Approvals may be expedited to reward exemplary response to design guidelines or other favorable proposal qualities.
- J. **Allow project sponsors to choose project review by City Council in these cases:**

1. In the event that project review by other commissions has extended past the time limit identified above; or
2. In the event that design review approval has been denied for not meeting recommended design standards (Projects shall not be denied a permit for not meeting recommended standards.); or
3. In lieu of making a contribution to the Community Benefits Fund. (See Strategy 7, long-term action steps.)

K. After a pilot period, **evaluate the success of these review process changes and amend them as appropriate** prior to permanent adoption. A four-year pilot period is recommended to allow sufficient time for economic recovery and significant project proposals to occur, while keeping the timeframe finite.

Other technical changes associated with these action steps include:

- Expanding the boundaries of the Downtown Asheville Design Guidelines Overlay District to conform to urban design recommendations of this Downtown Master Plan, specifically the five Downtown neighborhoods. (Adjacent districts should not be included in the new Overlay District.) Change the name of the new Overlay District to the “Downtown Overlay District.”
- Separating this UDO section from other citywide standards to emphasize the special character of Downtown Asheville.
- Revising the UDO to state expressly that review of projects in the Downtown Overlay District must consider whether the proposal is consistent with Downtown Asheville Design Guidelines and the recommendations in this Downtown Master Plan.

## ACTION STEPS: LONG-TERM

Review the success of the process after four years. If the process is found viable, make it permanent in the UDO. If not, investigate new and alternative ideas.

## FUNDING SOURCES

Approval processes are a function of staff recommendations, determinations by Council-appointed commissions and boards, and Council approvals—sometimes following resident demands. Any changes are within the City’s—and the collective community’s—hands.

## IN THE APPENDIX

- An assessment of the existing project review process for downtown Asheville and its real (and perceived) disadvantages.
- A list of the advantages of the proposed revised review process
- A review of development and approval processes in other North Carolina jurisdictions.
- A matrix that details alternate review process options, with text explanations.
- A comparison of design review performed by the Downtown Commission and that carried out by a historic district commission.
- Further discussion of the Conditional Use Permit process.

## PRECEDENTS

Every good city—especially those that depend, in part, on tourism—develops a home-grown process for project review and approval. It is up to Asheville to approve its own unique process. This Downtown Master Plan contains suggestions on where to start.



# Managing Downtown

7

**Nurture a sustainable and resilient economy through active management of Downtown.**

## OVERVIEW AND GOALS

Downtown Asheville's appeal depends as much on its vibrant mix of economic activity as it does on its diverse cultural flavor and historic architectural character. Retail—while a highly visible aspect of Downtown life—is only one manifestation of economic vitality. Desk pilots, shopkeepers, culture vultures, tourists, artists, residents, street folk, and other local characters are all attracted to and depend on a wide array of commercial uses that generate Downtown's economic activity.

Some Downtown denizens, however—including residents, business operators, and visitors—find the central business district rough around the edges. When graffiti tarnishes a prominent view, a panhandler interrupts a private conversation, or an empty storefront interrupts a row of active ones, the Downtown experience suffers. Business operators fear these and other impediments to life Downtown diminish their ability to attract and retain employees and customers.

What mix of land uses makes sense for Asheville and how should future demand for them be harnessed to reinforce Downtown's

essential sense of place? Hard factors describing supply and demand for retail (resident-driven, tourist-oriented, regional draws), office (prime to incubator), hotels (high-end to hostel), and housing (condos, workforce, affordable), are only slightly less difficult to measure than subjective economic yardsticks that reflect character like “vitality”, “authenticity”, “bike-ability”, and—yes—“funkiness.” All contribute to Downtown's vibrancy, all must be cultivated, and—to the extent possible—all require monitoring and some degree of management.

Goals for Strategy 7 include the following elements:

- Maintain the distinctive character and unique attributes that are so much a part of what makes Asheville Asheville.
- Ensure that the Downtown is always clean, safe, and green.
- Empower Downtown property and business owners, residents, major employers, and other key stakeholders to collaborate in making decisions and investments that support mutual Downtown interests.

- Create a mechanism to help fund benefits that broadly support the Downtown community. As a priority, invest up to half of these funds to help deliver affordable housing units representing at least 10 percent of overall unit production, using a variety of tactics consistent with the June 2008 Report of the Task Force on Affordable Housing.

## IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH

Reinforce and extend the character of Downtown’s traditional core to enhance economic value and opportunities across all parts of the larger Downtown. Translate increased economic value into community benefits—such as workforce housing, support for artists, support for small businesses, workforce development, investment in the arts and other institutions, and investment in public spaces. Target these, in turn, to reinforce Downtown’s traditional qualities, economy, and other programs that enable everyone to share in the benefits of prosperity. To accomplish this, Downtown needs its own independent, professionally-staffed management entity, created of, by and for the Downtown community. This entity should collaborate closely with City departments, nonprofit support groups, County agencies, and others to function as Downtown’s champion.

## ACTION STEPS: NEAR-TERM

- Establish a Downtown management entity — termed here a “CID” or Community Improvement District — to actively oversee and maintain Downtown’s many moving parts.** The CID should be collectively conceived and led by Downtown merchants, property owners, employers,

and residents to serve their unique mutual interests as efficiently as possible. Steady, consistent, and supportive, the CID must transcend election cycles. It would provide the careful, day-to-day management important for a tourism-oriented Downtown. Such management groups already exist in many, if not most, North American tourist-oriented communities (and other downtowns as well, including more than 45 in North Carolina alone), providing services beyond the scope of what is provided in general commercial areas. The professionally-staffed organization should begin with a modest set of services targeting key priorities, such as keeping Downtown clean, safe and green. It should ideally be self-funded to maximize the Downtown community’s discretion in directing their resources. The CID should coordinate closely with the City, supplementing municipal services and championing Downtown.

- Form an *ad hoc* “pursuit group” to brainstorm roles, responsibilities, resources, and leadership of the CID.** Include Downtown’s diverse constituencies, including members of the Downtown Commission, Asheville Downtown Association, Downtown Asheville Residential Neighbors (DARN), the Preservation Society, Council of Independent Business Owners (CIBO), the Asheville Hub, arts agencies, property owners, major employers, and major institutions. It should also have non-voting representation from the Chamber’s Tourism Development Authority, City staff, and/or other government entities. The pursuit group should establish responsibilities, levels of service, and metrics for the CID. The group should also confirm the CID’s geographical extent, as it need only address the portion of Downtown occupied by its primary constituencies; note that some CID’s apply different levels of service and contributions to distinct areas according to land use or other

characteristics. Draw up a memorandum of understanding documenting these between the CID and other organizations concerned with Downtown.

2. **Draft legislation for City Council approval authorizing establishment of the CID as designed by the pursuit group.**
3. **House the CID in street-level Downtown space,** highly visible and accessible to its constituency and visitors.
4. **Prepare an Action Agenda** that details how to:
  - Achieve a “first 365 days” calendar of goals, duties and events;
  - Become the “go to” entity for all things Downtown Asheville;
  - Establish a Clean and Safe Team and detail its responsibilities (e.g., addressing overall cleanliness, including graffiti, litter, and weeds);
  - Coordinate with government entities (City, County, regional, state, and federal) and private/not-for-profit organizations whose mission includes Downtown (for example, the Chamber’s Tourism Development Authority and social services agencies);
  - Increase Downtown’s profile with City leadership;
  - Create a “Leadership AVL Forum” specific to Downtown;
  - Advance priorities for future Downtown planning; and,
  - Facilitate broad community engagement in Downtown Asheville.
5. **Schedule regular information and coordination meetings with other organizations concerned with**

**Downtown** such as the Downtown Association, the Downtown Commission, DARN, ADC, Arts2People, AAAC, Asheville Greenworks, and CIBO.

6. **Develop positive responses to common arguments that hamper progress in Downtown** (and across WNC). Asheville has a reputation (only partly deserved) for a bewildering approval process, limited developable land, low income among the state’s major cities, and high housing prices among the state’s major cities. The CID should actively pursue its promotions and marketing efforts and address detrimental impressions about the City, real or perceived.
- B. **Establish an economic development arm within the CID** to recruit and support character-enhancing economic activity Downtown.

Much of Downtown’s vibrancy and charm derives from pedestrian activities generated by the mix and variety of ground-floor retail offerings, including locally-owned shops, foods, diverse merchandise, one-of-a-kind items, crafts, arts businesses, and independent artists. Monitoring and managing this mix is a full-time job for a retail manager—not unlike the work performed by professional mall managers. It is incumbent on the CID to nurture, train, and help place the right retailers in the right locations.

1. **Coordinate the CID’s economic development arm with existing organizations that work toward compatible goals,** including the City’s Office of Economic Development, Black Business Alliance, the Chamber, HandMade, MountainBiz Works, A-B Tech’s Small Business Center, Arts2People, Buncombe County Economic Development Commission, and individual project sponsors. The CID should not duplicate the

services that these (or other) organizations offer, but should be ready, willing, and able to make beneficial referrals and provide appropriate support.

2. **Use the CID's economic development arm to recruit, finance, broker deals, and/or offer business location and enhancement services to:**

- Specialty retailers with a focus on home-grown enterprises, goods and services;
- Merchants ready to fill gaps in the existing retail/service offerings, including:
  - Basic services that are affordable to the full range of residents in and around Downtown;
  - Offerings oriented to the full range of local residents, including the African-American-community and other cultural groups; and,
  - Auto-oriented destination retail and entertainment in certain locations (such as portions of Asheland Avenue) that do not diminish walkability or other important qualities and that do help attract more visitors Downtown.
- Retail outlets for local service organizations, especially those offering indigenous products and artwork;
- Specialty collective space geared toward start-up enterprises, studios, guilds, markets, food product manufacturers, push carts, and other small or cooperative ventures; and,
- Specialty blended space, such as work-sell, live-work, and structures designed for intentional communities.

3. **Train Downtown's workforce to ensure that it has the skills to welcome and prosper.**

- Encourage widespread use of existing hospitality-training programs offered by the Asheville Area Convention and Visitors Bureau and others.
- Help ensure that local youth have access to training and employment services geared to a broad range of Downtown workforce needs.

4. **Work with Downtown merchants to agree upon a consistent schedule for retail operating hours.**

Coordinate these with timing of parking rate policies laid out in Strategy 2.

5. **Maintain a library of Downtown economic analyses** and other useful how-to information from other communities.

6. **Welcome Asheville's emerging economic sectors** that are creating new opportunities and demands for office and research space. These uses should find Downtown attractive. The CID can roll out the welcome mat and help attract demand from new knowledge-based enterprises such as:

- Climate-related analytics;
- Wellness practice and training;
- Visualization, software, and other high-technology ventures;
- Commercial spin-offs from all of the above; and,
- Other emerging uses consistent with Downtown Asheville's character.

## ACTION STEPS: LONG-TERM

### Consider expansions of the CID's role:

- **Function as the municipal services liaison.**
  - Add to the Tourism Development Authority's (TDA's) wayfinding system.
  - Oversee completion of greenways and bikeways.
  - Revise the City's signage ordinance, including billboard regulations.
  - Schedule building, safety, and environmental inspections.
  - Manage and mitigate impacts of major construction projects.
  - Adopt Downtown parks and take charge of their maintenance, programming, and other improvements.
- **Commission and make publicly available professional, non-proprietary market analyses.**
- In coordination with the City, **establish and manage a Community Benefits Program (CBP)** that safeguards Asheville's intrinsic character.
  - **Fund the CBP through a balance of sources, tapping development value.** <sup>33</sup> Seek sources that stand to see a return on their contribution. Avoid funding strategies that excessively discourage appropriate Downtown development.
  - **"Bank" and manage CBP contributions by placing them in a dedicated CBP account.** Award a defined portion to any of the options listed below according to a priority list created annually by the CID; award the remainder to any of the following options at the discretion of City Council: <sup>34</sup>
    - City of Asheville Affordable Housing Trust Fund.
    - Any eligible 501c3 in good standing in North Carolina whose mission addresses Downtown Asheville arts, culture, parks and open space, historic preservation, affordable/workforce housing, underserved communities, or specific Downtown proposals. To be eligible, each 501c3 must provide evidence of demonstrable results—projects or programs—in Downtown Asheville. Designated 501c3s must file an annual report with the City Manager's office documenting use of awarded CBP funds. The City Manager will provide City Council with an annual report describing the collection, disposition, and use of funds.
    - Buncombe County's Tourism Development Authority.
  - **Communicate all program requirements, forms and other materials** pertaining to CBP and the community development bonus in a single concise package.
- **Work with the City to encourage strategic development that advances community interests.**
  - Purchase strategic development sites and offer them for sale through RFQs and RFPs to qualified developers to meet community supported priorities.
  - Utilize "Project Development Financing" (PDF) tools (potentially drawing upon alternate "synthetic" or "reverse" PDF strategies as most feasible).
  - Buy, sell, and manage real estate.
  - Monitor, buy, and sell development rights.
  - Broker compatible development of adjacent proposals.
  - Broker land swaps.
  - Participate in joint ventures.
  - Help arrange bridge financing (similar to an Urban Development Action Grant).



- **Oversee all things “clean and safe” in the public realm.**
  - Open Downtown Asheville as clean, safe and green every day.
  - Coordinate security patrols, provide Segway and bike patrol equipment for the Asheville Police Department (APD), and install pole cameras for APD.
  - Clean and repair streets and sidewalks and monitor these daily.
  - Oversee planting and décor and monitor these daily and seasonally.
  - Manage recycling programs, systems, and equipment.
- **Lead the effort to make Downtown Asheville completely powered by clean energy**, to become a national model in this area, to use clean energy to leverage sustainable development, and to become a municipal utility.
- **Investigate infrastructure links to other emerging areas** such as the River Arts District, National Climatic Data Center (NCDC), and other new neighborhoods.
- **Expand coverage to corridors and districts adjacent to Downtown**, if desired by stakeholders in these areas. Potential expansions include: 1) along Broadway to UNCA; 2) along Patton and Clingman to the River Arts District; and, 3) along Asheland/Biltmore to Mission, AB Tech, and Biltmore Village.
- **Program, market, and license Downtown public realm places and events.**
  - Begin with Pack Square, Pritchard Park, Martin Luther King Jr. Park, and the River Arts District.
  - Coordinate and help plan and fund parades, festivals, and celebrations.
- Help find a permanent home for the City Market, now at DPW. Coordinate other farmer’s markets and, arts fairs.
- License street vendors and performers.
- **Help manage and expand wayfinding** with the Chamber’s TDA. Expand the Urban Trail.
- **Coordinate implementation of bikeways/greenways throughout Downtown** and: 1) along Broadway to UNCA; 2) along Patton and Clingman to the River Arts District; and, 3) along Asheland/Biltmore to Mission, A-B Tech and Biltmore Village.
- **Partner with the City to help manage Downtown’s public and private parking facilities** (City, County, private lots) as a system. Increase revenues to the City, County, and private owners.
- **Investigate a coordinated goods-delivery system to multiple Downtown businesses.**
- **Launch an incubator program.**
  - Focus on locally-owned businesses that produce or sell locally-made and locally-grown items.
  - Encourage entrepreneurs and start-ups.
  - Foster arts-related businesses for both established and start-up artisans.
- **Initiate a private-sector shop-front/show window “design aid” program.**

## FUNDING SOURCES

The following may be applicable in Downtown Asheville:

- Income from Downtown development projects, proportional to construction value.
- Leveraged tax revenues from new development (known in Charlotte and elsewhere as “synthetic” or “reverse” tax increment financing (PDF) districts.)
- At least 50 percent of net proceeds from any sale of City-owned parcels in the Downtown.
- Matching funds from the City, the County, and local foundations.
- Earned income revenues from services, events, licensing, or similar activities.
- Property transfer tax revenues
- Property owner contributions

## PRECEDENTS

Successful community improvement districts (CIDs) have been inaugurated, sustained, and expanded in Chapel Hill, Charlotte, Durham, Raleigh, and Wilmington. There are hundreds more CIDs (or essentially similar BIDs, Business Improvement Districts) throughout the United States and Canada.

## IN THE APPENDIX

- Current Downtown Asheville economic figures and their anticipated key trends.
- Examples of possible contributions to the community benefits program from sample development projects.



# putting the plan to work





# putting the plan to work

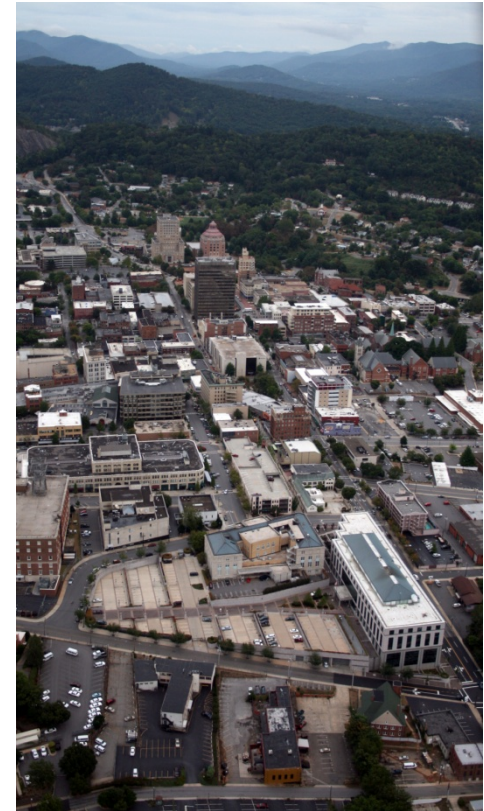
Understanding these points will help Asheville get the most from its Downtown Master Plan:

- **The Plan balances the goals and interests of Downtown's many diverse stakeholders.** While all aspects of the Plan will not appeal to everyone, most of the Plan will appeal to everyone. Grounded in the broad public input received during the planning process, the Plan provides a framework for people of different perspectives to work productively together around common interests.
- **The Plan's strategies are fundamentally interrelated.** Improving the project-review process (Strategy 6) depends upon updating development standards (Strategies 4 and 5). Allowing the arts and businesses to flourish (Strategies 1, 7) depends upon the organizing functions of a Downtown management entity (Strategy 7). Thoughtful allocation of land uses (Strategy 3) is key to improving access and parking (Strategy 2). Thus, application of any strategy should support related strategies.

- At the same time, **implementation of the Plan will need to occur in stages.** Focus first on cost-effective steps that can be achieved in the near term. As initial milestones are reached, and the capacity of the City, Downtown management entity, and Downtown stakeholders grows, more ambitious efforts may follow. Downtown's

stakeholders should be centrally involved in setting priorities on an ongoing basis. All seven strategies, however, should be implemented in parallel at some level.

- **Some elements of the plan merit testing and possible refinement.** Revisions in the project-review process and design standards, in particular, should be applied for a pilot period of



The Downtown Master Plan will help the whole Asheville community gain from opportunities throughout the traditional Downtown and its gateways.

up to four years, evaluated against goals, and improved as appropriate.

- **The Plan is designed for resiliency**—through changing economic times, political leadership, and community priorities.
- **The City should provide primary leadership in putting the Plan to work.** The Downtown management entity, once established, can offer additional leadership in defined areas. At all times, Downtown stakeholders will have an important role to play in advocating for Downtown and defining priorities.

Downtown Asheville is well-known as a place of creative opportunity and high-quality of life, and the Downtown Master Plan aims to continue these traditions. Some of the most important opportunities provided by the Downtown Master Plan include:

- Cleaner, greener, and safer Downtown streets and parks;
- A stronger Downtown economy through increased attention to the unique needs of businesses, institutions, and entrepreneurs;
- Continued preservation and stewardship of Downtown’s incomparable collection of historic buildings;
- More predictable, and better, results from the development review process;
- New buildings that fill gaps in Downtown and continue the architectural traditions of favorite historic buildings;

- An expanded and more memorable set of Downtown neighborhoods and districts defined by walkable streets, beautiful architecture, views to the mountain landscape, and the individual touch of Asheville’s people;
- Improved connections between Downtown and its adjacent neighborhoods and corridors;
- An increased profile of Downtown within the larger city and region as the area’s center of community, culture, and enterprise;
- An enhanced profile of Downtown as a major destination for visitors from across the country and the world;
- New financial resources to reinvest in Downtown’s businesses and creative culture to make them continually stronger; and
- “Smart growth” development that supports the ecology, beauty, and enjoyment of Asheville’s stunning mountain setting.

Together, the Downtown Master Plan strategies offer something for everyone. They will make even more of the incredible energy, creativity, and commitment that the people of Asheville already invest in Downtown businesses and organizations, by creating new channels for individuals and groups to work together *and* individually toward common interests. The Downtown Master Plan Advisory Committee and other stakeholders have already demonstrated a tremendous level of commitment to the Downtown Master Plan, identifying key issues and refining the strategies addressing them through hours of constructive dialogue. This is a very positive sign that the Plan's fundamental concepts have broad and deep support in the community—for the community's support and initiative is as necessary to putting the Plan to work as is City leadership. Working together, the Downtown community will help sustain the wonderful qualities of Downtown that have earned such love and investment from so many people.



