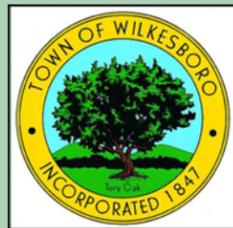


# HISTORIC DOWNTOWN WILKESBORO MASTER PLAN

WILKESBORO,  
NORTH  
CAROLINA

PREPARED FOR THE:  
TOWN OF WILKESBORO

FINAL:  
JULY 22, 2011



## Contents

	<u>Page</u>		
<b>PLAN SUMMARY</b> . . . . .	i	Buildings: Adaptive Reuse . . . . .	32
<b>I. BACKGROUND</b>		Housing . . . . .	33
INTRODUCTION		Rendering: New Infill Housing Along South Street . . . . .	34
Plan Purpose . . . . .	1	Buildings: New Infill Development . . . . .	35
Planning Methodology . . . . .	2	Transportation . . . . .	36
<b>CONTEXT &amp; EXISTING CONDITIONS</b>		Parking . . . . .	40
Downtown's Historic Development . . . . .	4	Gateways . . . . .	42
Physical Conditions: Overview . . . . .	7	Greenways . . . . .	43
Topography . . . . .	8	Proposed New Park/Market . . . . .	44
Floodplains . . . . .	9	Other Public Spaces . . . . .	45
Existing Land Uses & Buildings . . . . .	10	Streetscapes . . . . .	46
Transportation & Parking . . . . .	12	Public Art & Wayfinding . . . . .	51
Streetscapes & Public Spaces . . . . .	14	<b>IV. NON-DESIGN ISSUES</b>	
Economic Context . . . . .	15	Organization . . . . .	52
Plans & Studies . . . . .	17	Economic Restructuring . . . . .	52
Regulations . . . . .	19	Marketing & Promotion . . . . .	53
Programs . . . . .	21	<b>V. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY</b>	
<b>II. PUBLIC INPUT &amp; CONCEPT PLAN</b>		Zoning, Historic Zoning & CLG Status . . . . .	55
PUBLIC INPUT		Building Codes for Historic Buildings . . . . .	56
2010 Consumer Survey . . . . .	22	Strategy for Farmers/Craft Market . . . . .	57
Steering Committee Meetings . . . . .	22	Funding Sources . . . . .	58
Stakeholder Meetings . . . . .	22	Implementation Matrix . . . . .	63
Public Kick-Off Meeting . . . . .	25		
Key Planning Principles . . . . .	25		
Charrette Workshop . . . . .	26		
<b>CONCEPT PLAN</b>			
Concept Plan . . . . .	27		
<b>III. THE PHYSICAL PLAN</b>			
Proposed Land Use & Character . . . . .	28		
Urban Design Plan . . . . .	29		
Axonometric Rendering: Core Area of Downtown . . . . .	30		
Buildings: Historic Rehabilitation . . . . .	31		

## Acknowledgements

### Historic Downtown Wilkesboro Master Plan Steering Committee

- Mike Inscore - Mayor and STMS member
- Sam Stroud - Town Council and STMS member
- Ken Noland - Town Manager
- Andrew Carlton - Director of Planning and STMS Chair
- Jodi Frichner - Wilkesboro Tourism Development Authority (TDA) Director and STMS Promotions Chair
- Pamela Holder - STMS Economic Restructuring Chair, Historic Preservation member, and Real Estate Professional
- Russ Ferree - STMS Design Chair and Land Attorney
- Marilyn Payne - Downtown Resident and Wilkes Heritage Museum board member
- Kelly Royall - Downtown Business Owner, STMS member, and Historic Preservation member
- Dean Ledbetter - NCDOT Division Engineer and STMS member
- Jennifer Furr - Wilkes Heritage Museum Director, Historic Preservation member, and STMS member

### Consultant Team

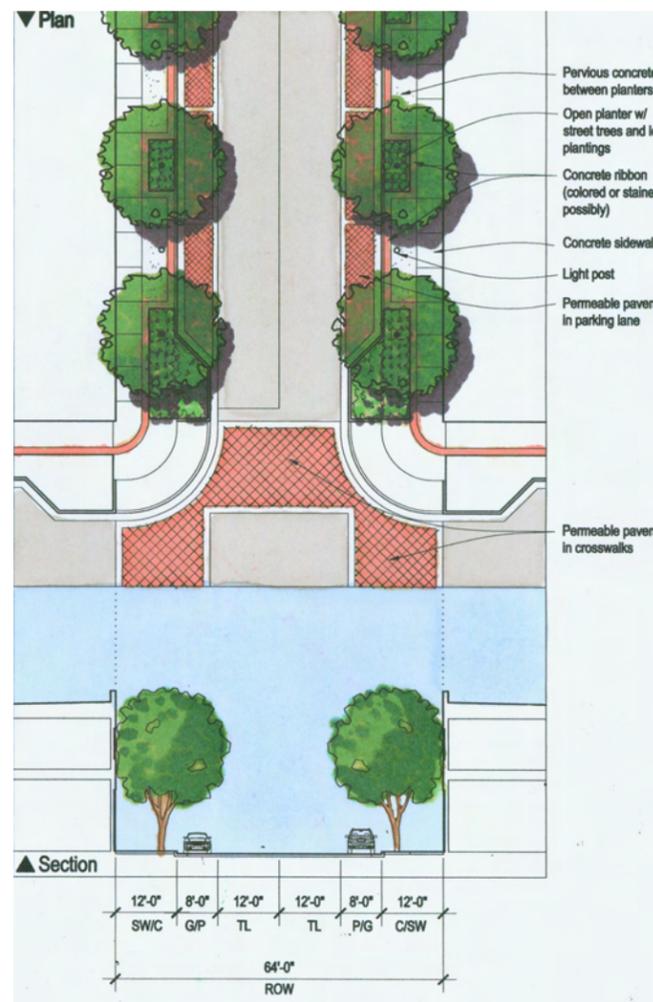
Philip Walker, AICP - The Walker Collaborative (lead firm)  
 Keith Covington, AIA - Third Coast Design Studio  
 Lee Jones - Third Coast Design Studio  
 Roger Henderson, AICP - Martin / Alexiou / Bryson

# PLAN SUMMARY

## PLAN OVERVIEW

The Downtown Wilkesboro Master Plan was prepared in 2011 by the Town of Wilkesboro under the supervision of the Small Town Main Street Committee. The planning process featured an extensive public input process, including a hands-on charrette in which citizens crafted their own visions for the downtown's future; many of their ideas are reflected in the master plan illustrated on the following pages. In addition to non-design issues and implementation strategies, also summarized on the following page, key concepts from the Physical Plan include:

- Streetscape redevelopment
- Additional on-street parking
- Park and farmers/craft market
- Enhanced existing public spaces
- Improved parking lots
- Upper floor housing
- Infill housing south of Main
- Rehabilitated Smithey Hotel
- Preserved Winkler-Perkins House
- New greenway trailhead
- Extended greenway
- Reuse of historic school for housing
- Reuse of WFD Bldg. for public restrooms



## STREETSCAPE & PARK PLANS

Above are plan details for a redeveloped Main Street, and similar improvements are proposed for Bridge Street. At left is a rendering of the future downtown core, including the following features for a new park:

- Plaza with fountain and trailhead fronting Main
- Step up to formal garden north of plaza
- Open lawn anchored by stage/pavilion at north end
- Market area/parking on east with special pavers



**MAIN STREET BETWEEN BRIDGE & WEST STREETS LOOKING WEST**  
This rendering illustrates a redeveloped streetscape with wider sidewalks, street trees within landscaped planters, and parallel parking lanes with impervious pavers. On the left is the former Esso station adapted into a restaurant with outdoor dining.



**INTERSECTION OF BRIDGE AND SOUTH STREETS LOOKING WEST**  
At right is the existing Winkler-Perkins House on the northeast corner. Rehabilitated as a bed and breakfast, events facility, or some other active use it will anchor South Bridge Street. On the northwest corner is new attached infill housing. Architecturally inspired by the Winkler-Perkins House, it extends west down South Street.

# PLAN SUMMARY

## Urban Design Plan

Key landmarks of the plan are listed below and numbered on the map.

- 1) Wilkes Heritage Museum
- 2) Proposed Park / Market
- 3) Winkler-Perkins House
- 4) Smithey Hotel
- 5) Proposed Attached Housing
- 6) Federal Building
- 7) Town Hall
- 8) Police Station

## NON-DESIGN ISSUES

In addition to design, this plan includes recommendations for the other three facets of the Main Street "Four Point Approach," including:

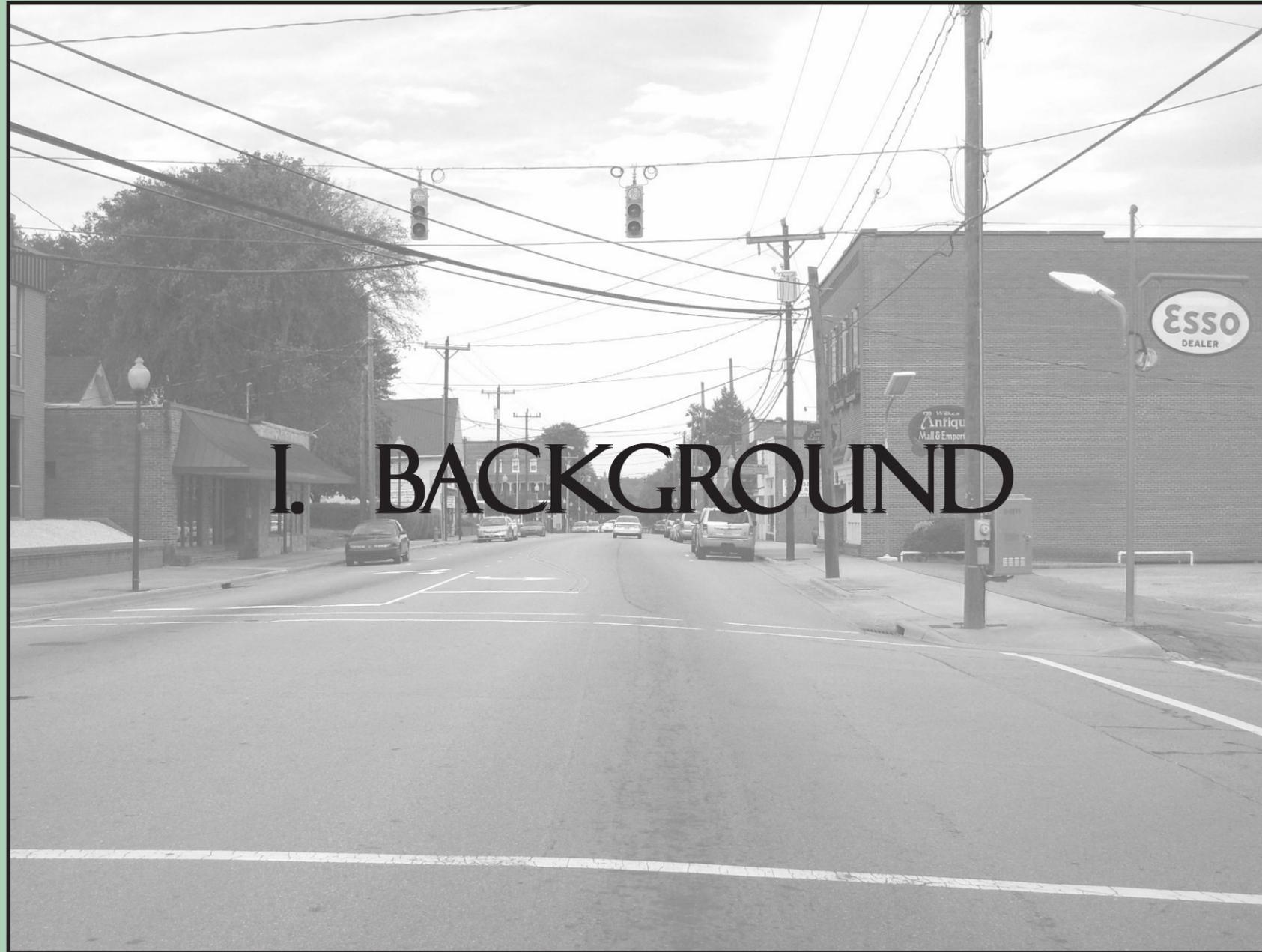
- Organization
- Economic Restructuring
- Marketing & Promotion

## IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

Key recommendations include:

- Make minor adjustments to the existing zoning and historic zoning to implement this plan.
- Leverage the North Carolina Rehab Code to resolve building code issues for upper floor space.
- Establish an entity to manage the new farmers/craft market.





# I. BACKGROUND

## SECTION CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION  
PLAN PURPOSE  
PLANNING METHODOLOGY

**CONTEXT & EXISTING CONDITIONS**  
DOWNTOWN'S HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT  
PHYSICAL CONDITIONS: OVERVIEW  
TOPOGRAPHY  
FLOODPLAINS  
EXISTING LAND USES & BUILDINGS  
TRANSPORTATION & PARKING  
STREETSCAPES & PUBLIC SPACES  
ECONOMIC CONTEXT  
PLANS & STUDIES  
REGULATIONS  
PROGRAMS

HISTORIC DOWNTOWN WILKESBORO MASTER PLAN  
WILKESBORO, NORTH CAROLINA

Note: To skip over the background information and get to the "plan" portion of this document, go directly to page 28 to the Physical Plan.

# I. BACKGROUND

## INTRODUCTION

### Plan Purpose

Wilkesboro, a community of approximately 3,400 people, is located at the foothills of both the Blue Ridge and Brushy Mountains. Serving as the county seat of Wilkes County, Wilkesboro is approximately 55 miles from Winston-Salem, 33 miles from Boone, and 85 miles from Charlotte. Relative to other communities in the area, Wilkesboro's 12-block Historic Downtown District is geographically small. Furthermore, its limited number of businesses and other uses that might achieve a "critical mass" pose a challenge to the downtown becoming a significant destination within the region.

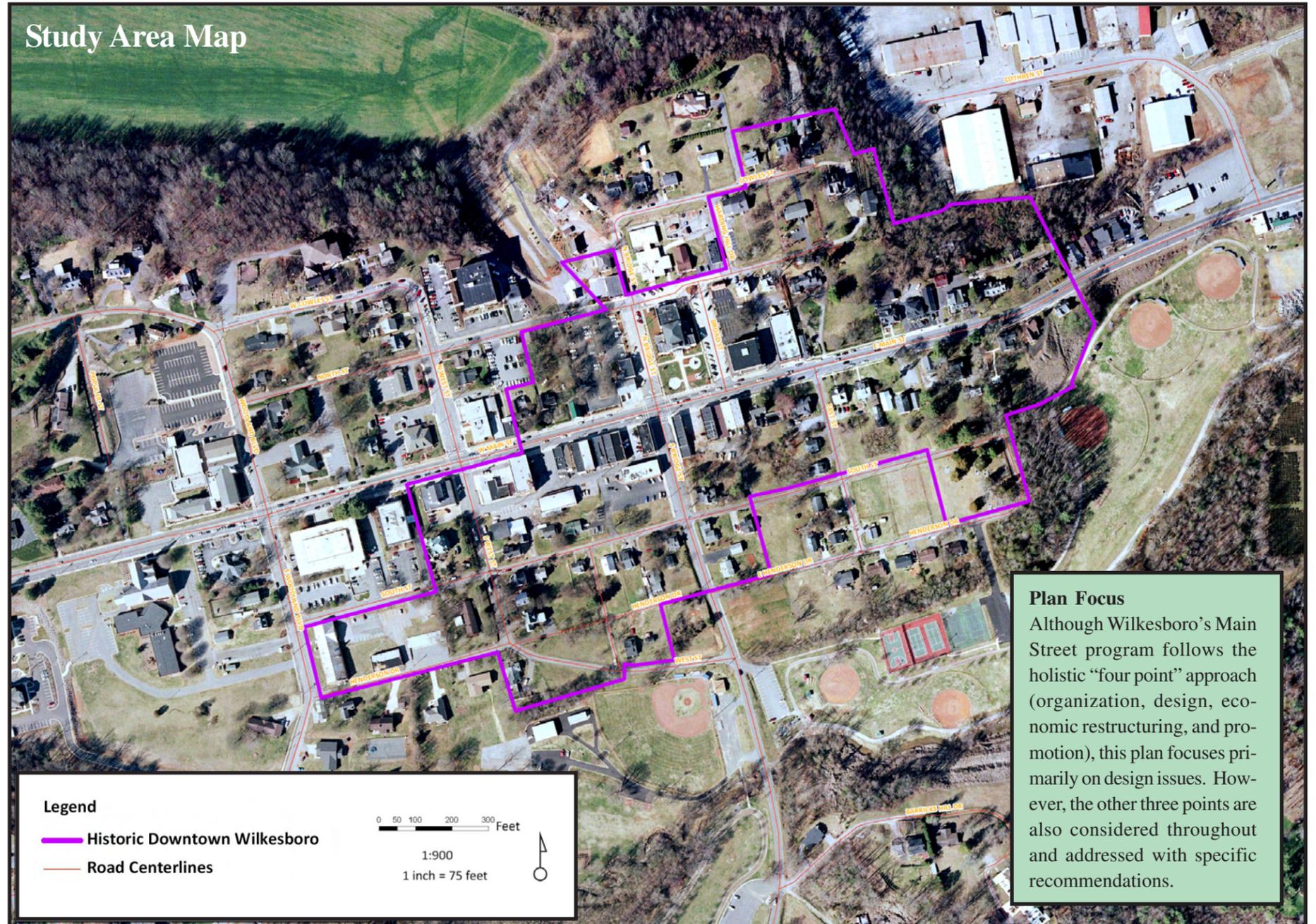
As stated in the Town's request for proposals (RFP) document for this plan's development, the primary purpose of the plan is "to explain to citizens, potential developers, property and business owners, and Town Officials 'what is envisioned for the Historic Downtown...'. The Master Plan will guide and support downtown revitalization and redevelopment efforts, providing a foundation and direction for years to come. The primary objective of the Master Plan will be to build upon predetermined goals and objectives, and develop those goals and objectives into a 'living' concept and strategic implementation plan. This plan will serve as the basis for annual budgetary requests and serve as a tool to evaluate new development projects to ensure that Historic Downtown Wilkesboro is the community that the citizens desire it to be."



The study area covers approximately a quarter mile radius featuring a variety of land uses, including peripheral residential areas. The commercial core, pictured here, is concentrated along a couple of blocks of Main Street.

*"Historic Downtown Wilkesboro is a diversified mixed-use marketplace with a uniquely walkable, visually appealing, and charmingly simple small town atmosphere."* - Excerpt from the Small Town Main Street Vision Statement

### Study Area Map



**Plan Focus**  
Although Wilkesboro's Main Street program follows the holistic "four point" approach (organization, design, economic restructuring, and promotion), this plan focuses primarily on design issues. However, the other three points are also considered throughout and addressed with specific recommendations.

# I. BACKGROUND

## Planning Methodology

Below is a description of the four-step process employed to create this plan document:

### Task 1.0: Background Research & Analysis

This initial task served as the research and diagnostic phase on which the balance of the work relied.

#### *Task 1.1 Review of Background Information*

The Project Team gathered and reviewed key information to gain insights into the project's context. Such information included existing land uses, zoning and development regulations, previous plans and studies, economic and demographic data, real estate market information, base map data, aerial photo maps, historic resources (historic sites inventory, photographs, etc.), and information related to the Small Town Main Street (STMS) Program. This information included the STMS "Plan of Work," which features a detailed Vision Statement and a set of specific preliminary ideas for the downtown's future (farmers/merchants market, traffic calming, etc.).

#### *Task 1.2 Kick-Off Meeting & Study Area Tour*

This meeting with the Project Steering Committee fine-tuned project details and allowed the Project Team to gain additional insights from the Town and STMS representatives. The study area tour was led by the Town Planner, with additional follow-up work by the Project Team as part of Task 1.3.

#### *Task 1.3 Physical Analysis*

As part of the initial fieldwork for this project, the Project Team documented and evaluated the study area's general physical characteristics through mapping, measurements, field notes, and photography. Based upon that field research and existing data, the Project Team conducted an evaluation of Downtown Wilkesboro's existing conditions, with an emphasis on:

- Existing land uses
- Buildings/sites with potential for enhancement
- Buildings/sites with potential for redevelopment
- Streetscapes

- Streets and parking
- Existing/potential public spaces
- Pedestrian circulation
- Potential physical linkages beyond the downtown core (Yadkin River Greenway, Cub Creek Park, adjacent neighborhood, etc.)

#### *Task 1.4 Stakeholder Focus Group Meetings*

The Town and Steering Committee identified key stakeholders who could provide useful information and perspectives on the various issues affecting the study area. Five meetings with various stakeholder groups were conducted by key members of the Project Team, with each meeting including up to ten individuals who have a common interest in Downtown Wilkesboro. Each meeting lasted approximately one hour, and stakeholder groups included the following:

- Residents
- Property owners and real estate professionals
- Business owners/operators and economic development representatives
- Institutional representatives (churches, schools, etc.)
- Public officials (including elected officials and relevant Town department heads)

#### *Task 1.5 Public "Kick-Off" Meeting*

This interactive evening forum featured the following components:

- Introduction of Committee / Town representatives and the Project Team
- Explanation of the project process and objectives
- Identification of the study area's challenges and opportunities
- Identification of other model downtowns

### Task 2.0: Charrette & Concept Plan Development

The goal of the charrette process was to provide a forum for the public and to achieve a consensus about the future of Downtown Wilkesboro. The most tangible outcome of the charrette was the creation of the Concept Plan for the study area. This three-day task required strong teamwork between the Project Team and the Town, as the Town recruited and scheduled all public participants with the guidance of the Project Team. The following sub-tasks occurred:

#### *Task 2.1 Follow-Up Field Work (Day 1 - morning & afternoon)*

This task gave Project Team members another opportunity, prior to the evening Public Workshop, to build on previous impressions of the study area gained during Task 1.0. In particular, examples of land uses, development, and urban design features in Downtown Wilkesboro that "work" and "don't work" were identified. Also, field information not previously obtained, but later recognized as necessary, was gathered as part of this task.

#### *Task 2.2 Public Workshop (Day 1 - evening)*

Prior to Task 2.0, the Town recruited participants to be involved in the Public Workshop. Participants were key stakeholders representing a variety of interests in the study area. The Project Team and Public Workshop participants gathered at Town Hall and achieved the following steps over a roughly three hour period:

##### Workshop Orientation

The Project Team presented the following items:

- Workshop Purpose & Overview
- Background Research Findings
- Results of the Public Input to Date
- Workshop "Ground Rules"

##### Planning Session

Participants were split into teams of approximately ten members each and each team created a concept plan for the study area. The concept plans were created on "existing conditions" base maps with the help of colored markers coded to particular land uses and/or design issues.

##### Workshop Team Presentations & Wrap-Up

Following the completion of the Planning Session, the Workshop Teams reassembled into a single group and one or more members of each team briefly presented their ideas for Downtown Wilkesboro. After each presentation, there were questions and comments. Following the Workshop Team presentations, the Project Team consultants concluded the evening by identifying common elements between the various ideas and suggesting how those ideas might be combined to form the basis for the Concept Plan that the Project

# I. BACKGROUND

Team consultants produced as a prelude to the ultimate master plan.

## *Task 2.3 Concept Plan Development (Day 2 through Day 3)*

Based upon the Task 1.0 background research and findings, and the results of the Day 1 Public Workshop, the Project Team developed the Concept Plan. Including an illustrated plan map, the Concept Plan addressed the following key issues:

- Historic resources
- Land uses
- Transportation and parking
- Buildings and urban design
- Public spaces
- Linkages between downtown and the surrounding context

## *Task 2.4 Concept Plan Presentation (Day 3 - evening)*

Similar to the Task 1.5 public “kick-off” meeting, this evening meeting was widely-publicized to encourage a strong turn-out and included the following components:

- Opening Comments & Project Methodology
- Overview of Existing Conditions
- Explanation of the Public Input Results
- Presentation of the Concept Plan

## Task 3.0 Draft Master Plan Preparation

Based upon the public’s and Steering Committee’s response to the Concept Plan presented during Task 2.0, a detailed draft plan was prepared. Components of the plan included the following:

### Task 3.1 Illustrated Physical Master Plan

### Task 3.2 Buildings

### Task 3.3 Transportation & Parking

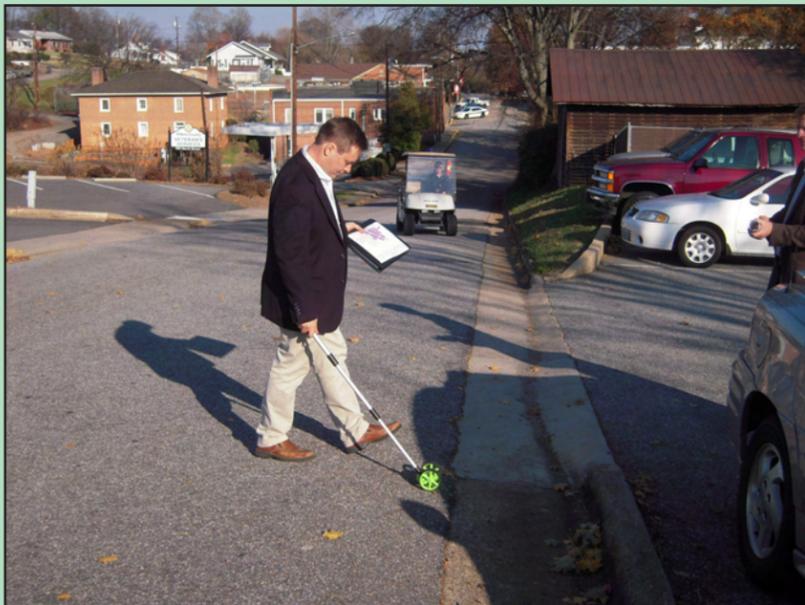
### Task 3.4 Streetscape, Public Spaces, Art & Wayfinding

### Task 3.5 Overhead Utilities

### Task 3.6 Implementation Strategy

## Task 4.0: Master Plan Presentation & Revisions

Following sufficient time for the Town’s and Steering Committee’s review, key members of the Project Team presented the draft plan in a public forum. Based upon a review of the draft plan by the Steering Committee, input from the public presentation, and the Committee’s submission of a single “red-lined” copy (serving as a composite of all comments) back to the Project Team for revisions, the draft plan was revised and submitted as a final document.



*The Task 1.3 Physical Analysis included measuring existing street cross-sections as a basis for subsequent recommendations for street improvements.*

# I. BACKGROUND

## CONTEXT & EXISTING CONDITIONS

### Downtown's Historic Development

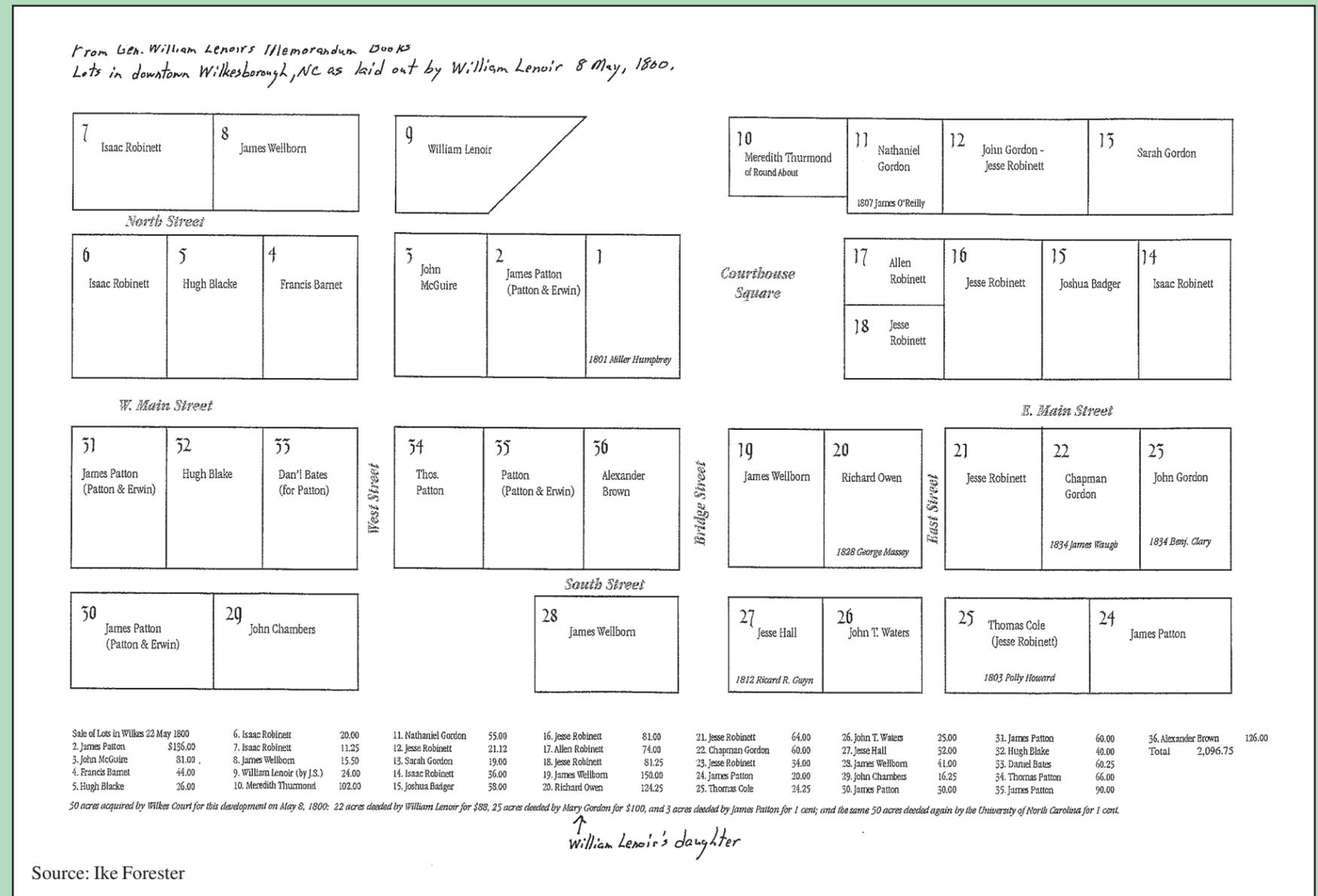
#### Eighteenth-Century Wilkesboro

Wilkesboro can trace its written history to 1752, when a Moravian surveying party passed through the area and documented the existence of a Cherokee Indian village. In 1754, the Moravians purchased land that now includes Downtown Wilkesboro from Earl Granville. By the 1760s, settlers of European origin were living in the region and the area that now comprises Downtown Wilkesboro was referred to as Mulberry Fields. Some of the earliest settlers in the area included Christopher Gist, who came around 1750 and had a home on the northern side of the river, a man named Owen, who lived at Owen's Knob, and Daniel Boone, whose family lived roughly 15 miles up the river until they moved to Kentucky in the early-1770s. The act that established Wilkes County stated that the first court would be held at the home of John Brown, located at the bend of the Yadkin River, on March 2, 1778. Commissioners were then charged with selecting a place centrally located for the erection of a courthouse, prison and stocks. On June 2, 1778, the existing Mulberry Fields Meeting House, a wooden structure built by early Baptists, was chosen to serve as the courthouse. During the Revolutionary War, Mulberry Fields was a mustering site for the Wilkes County Militia and the Mulberry Fields Meeting House was a common gathering place to discuss local government issues of the day. In 1793, a post office was opened at Mulberry Fields. An act was passed two years later naming new Commissioners and directing them to purchase fifty acres of land on which to lay out a formal town and erect public buildings. Mulberry Fields became "Wilkesborough" in 1800 when the town was laid out by General William Lenoir, a hero of the Battle of Kings Mountain during the Revolution. Lenoir refused to allow the town to be named after him. Later, following his death, the next town up the road was named for Lenoir.

#### Nineteenth-Century Wilkesboro

Lenoir's 1800 plan has been translated in the map at right. Key characteristics of the plan include a grid design with three north-south streets and three east-west

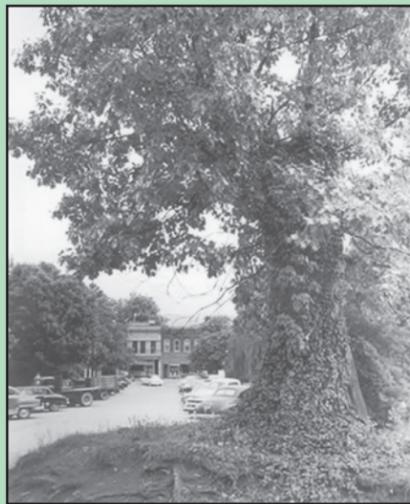
### Downtown Wilkesboro in 1800



This map is a recreation of the plan that General William Lenoir laid out for the town in 1800. Notice the three areas not privatized as lots to be sold off. One area was reserved for the Courthouse, while the other two on the north and south ends were reserved for public springs for water.

# I. BACKGROUND

streets. The primary north-south street is Bridge Street, while the primary east-west street is Main Street. The other four streets are named after compass point directions (North, South, East, West). In addition to the courthouse square property, 36 lots were delineated. A peculiarity of the plan was the lack of designated lots at two locations. One was immediately northwest of the courthouse square and the other was on the southwest edge of the town. The answer to this mystery was found in the town's 1896 map, which labeled both lots as "Public Spring (now dry)." The fact that the lot northwest of the courthouse was originally reserved for public use, as well as its proximity to the courthouse, explains why it would be reserved for other public uses (the Old County Jail would later be constructed here in 1859).

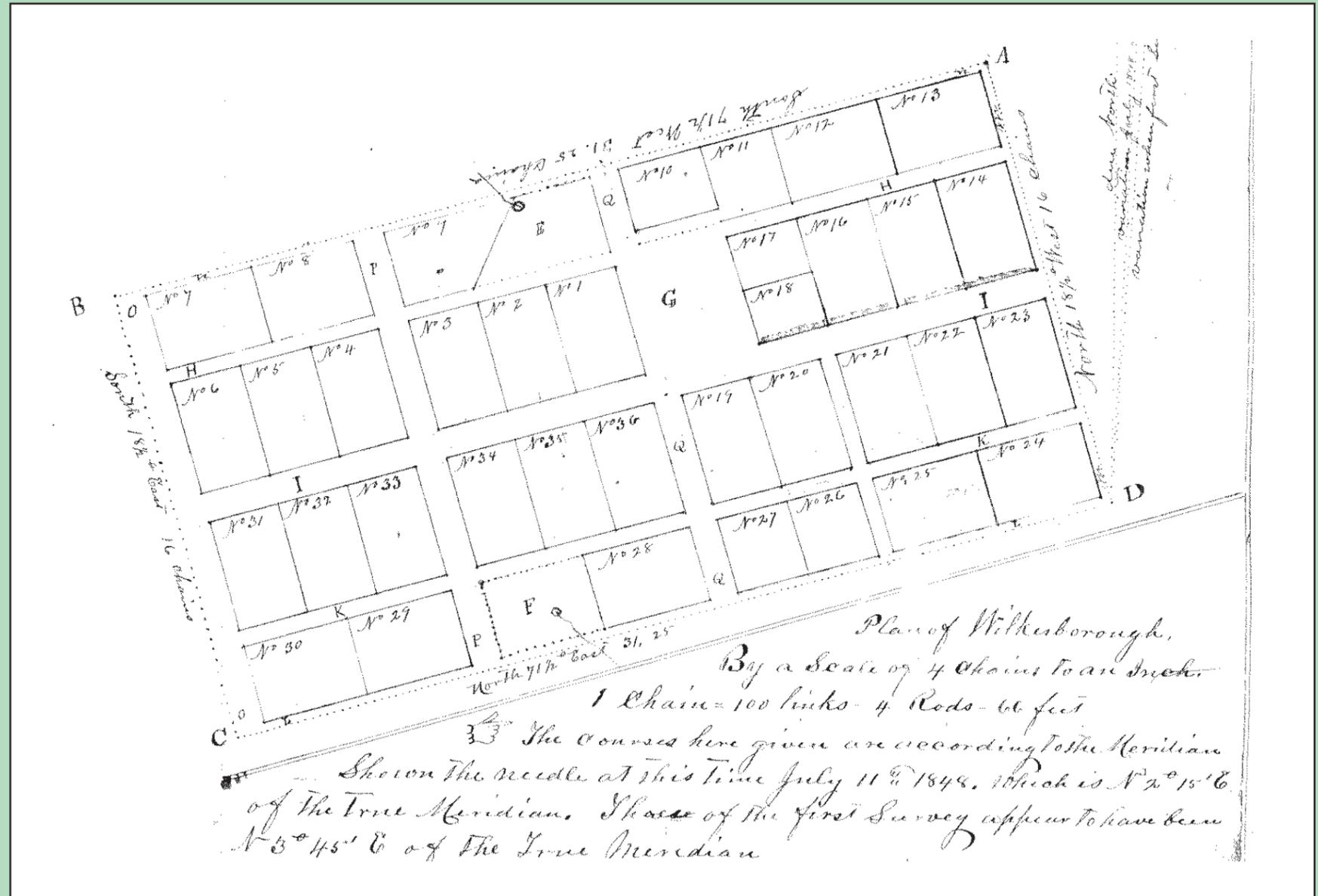


Although this photograph of the Tory Oak was taken during the 1940s, the tree's fame has 18th-century origins. The tree was used by Colonel Benjamin Cleveland as a gallows for hanging British Tories during the American Revolution. Cleveland was one of the American patriot leaders at the Battle of Kings Mountain. While the original tree no longer remains, a replacement that was grafted from the original now grows in its place.

Photo courtesy of Wilkes Heritage Museum

In 1847, the North Carolina General Assembly chartered the Town of Wilkesborough, which likely prompted the 1848 map's creation. That map, at right, is an actual map and not a modern interpretation, as was the case with the 1800 map discussed previously. Although this map does not indicate street names, it is identical to the 1800 map with only one apparent exception - the two areas noted previously that were not designated as lots have now been designated as lots "E" and "F."

## Downtown Wilkesboro in 1848



This 1848 map of Wilkesboro reflects that the two areas originally left as public areas because of the water springs have now been privatized as lots.

# I. BACKGROUND

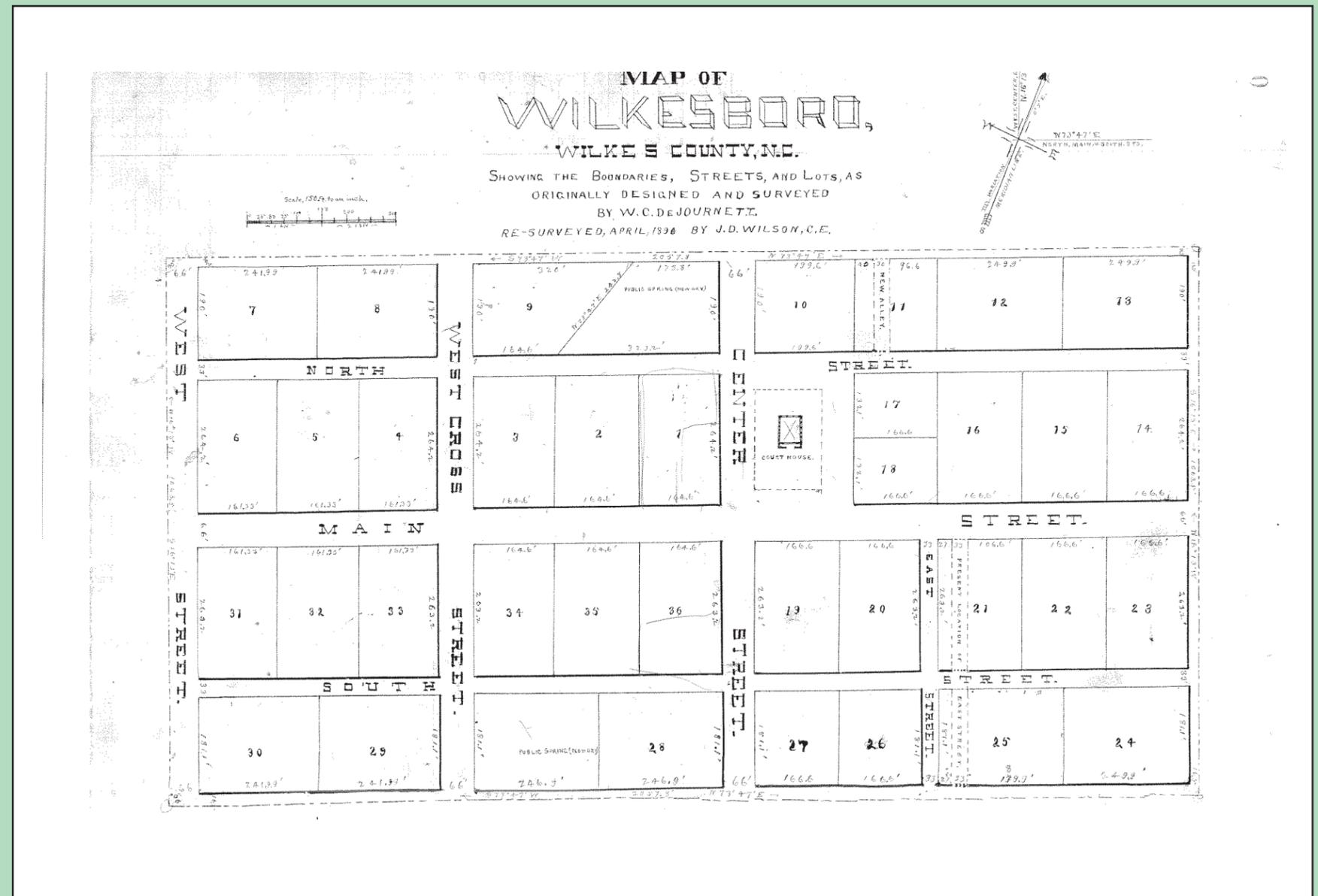
The 1896 map, illustrated at right, was the first to shorten the Town's name to "Wilkesboro." The only significant deviations of this map from its predecessors were the following: 1) "West Street" was renamed "West Cross Street" and a new "West Street" was designated as the western edge of the town (today's Woodland Blvd.); 2) Bridge Street was renamed "Center Street;" 3) the building footprint of the courthouse was illustrated, although it would be replaced by a new building a few years later; 4) a one-block long north-south alley was created just northeast of the courthouse; and 5) East Street was relocated slightly to the west, but along the same alignment.



Photo courtesy of Wilkes Heritage Museum

*This photograph of the Ferguson Building on Main Street was taken in approximately 1900, shortly after it was built. Note that the two-story commercial building currently located immediately west had not yet been built.*

## Downtown Wilkesboro in 1896



*This map of Downtown Wilkesboro, just prior to 1900, illustrates the same basic layout of lots and streets as the earlier maps, but the street names are different. Oddly, the current street names are more consistent with the 1800 map than with this one.*

### Post-1900 Wilkesboro

When comparing today's map of Downtown Wilkesboro with the 1896 map, the overall layout is relatively consistent, but there are some changes. For example, the original street names reflected in the 1800 map have returned, so that Center

# I. BACKGROUND

Street is once again Bridge Street, and West Cross Street is once again West Street. Also, many of the lots have been subdivided and random segments of alleys have evolved; although the downtown still lacks a comprehensive and cohesive alley system. Other key changes included the erection of a new courthouse in 1902 on the site of the former courthouse and the addition of wings to the courthouse during the 1950s. In general, the downtown did not grow much after roughly 1900 because the coming of the North Western North Carolina Railroad in 1890 diverted future growth toward North Wilkesboro. According to the National Register nomination report, *“the biggest change was that as the earlier frame stores aged and were eventually demolished, only a few were replaced by brick buildings. This was probably because there was less perceived need for new stores with North Wilkesboro’s expanding commercial district just across the river. On the other hand, houses continued to be built within the district, filling vacant lots and, in some cases, replacing earlier houses.”* Of the seventy-nine primary buildings currently standing in the historic district, only seventeen (eighteen percent) were erected in the nineteenth century.

Photo courtesy of Wilkes Heritage Museum



The photograph at left features a parade in Downtown Wilkesboro in 1909. Even at this point in its history, Main Street appears to have only a dirt surface.

\* This history has been adapted from the “History of Wilkes County, North Carolina” provided on the “Go Wilkes” website, as well as the “History of Wilkesboro” by Dick Underwood found on the Town of Wilkesboro’s website.

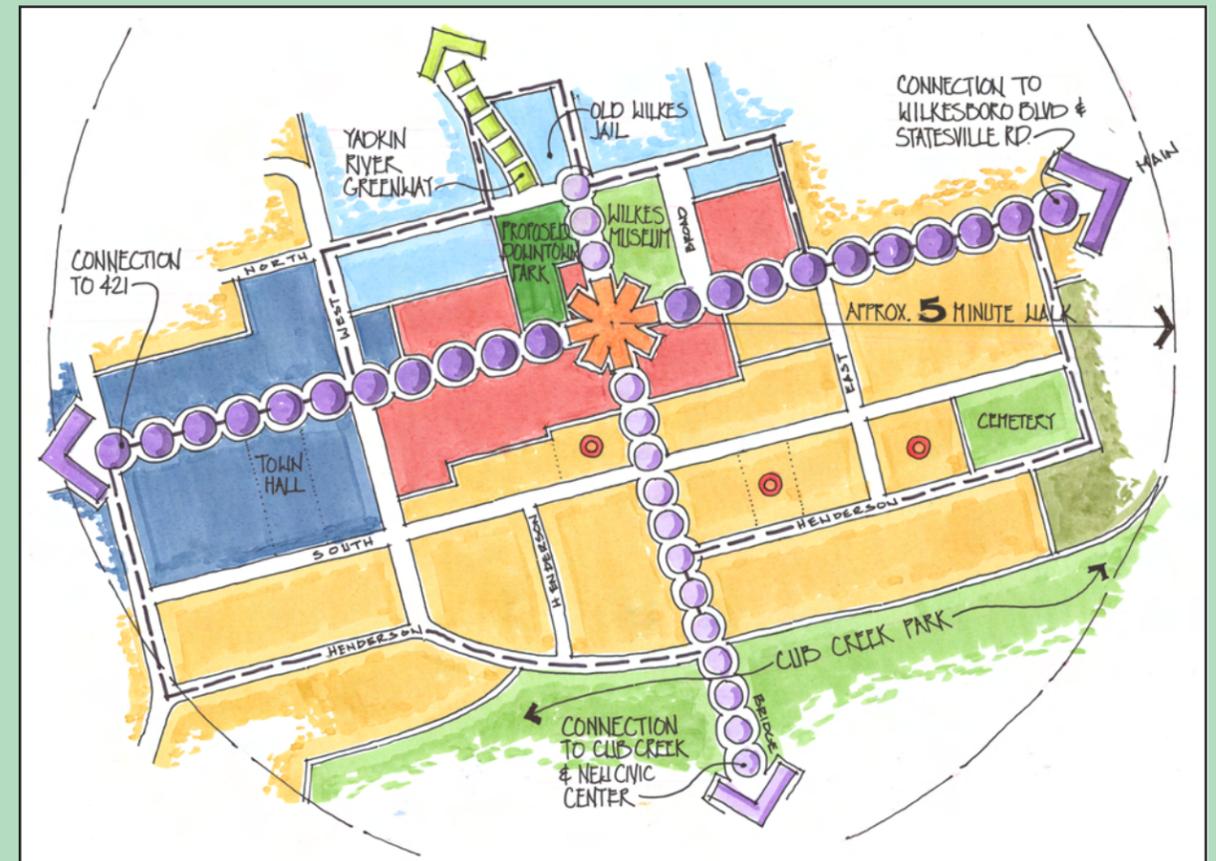
## Physical Conditions

### Overview

This diagram of existing conditions reveals the “big picture” view of Downtown Wilkesboro. The key components of the downtown are as follows:

- Primary Corridors – The key east-west street is Main Street, while the key north-south street is Bridge Street.
- Center – The center of downtown is located at the intersection of Main and Bridge.
- Commercial Core – It flanks either side of Main between West and East Streets.
- Institutional District – Governmental uses along Main between Woodland Blvd. and West Street.
- Mixed Institutional & Office Uses – This area is on the north side of downtown.
- Residential Areas – These are peripheral to the downtown core.
- Civic / Open Spaces – Such areas include the Wilkes Heritage Museum lawn, Cub Creek Park, the cemetery, and the greenway.

## Downtown’s Existing Conditions





# I. BACKGROUND

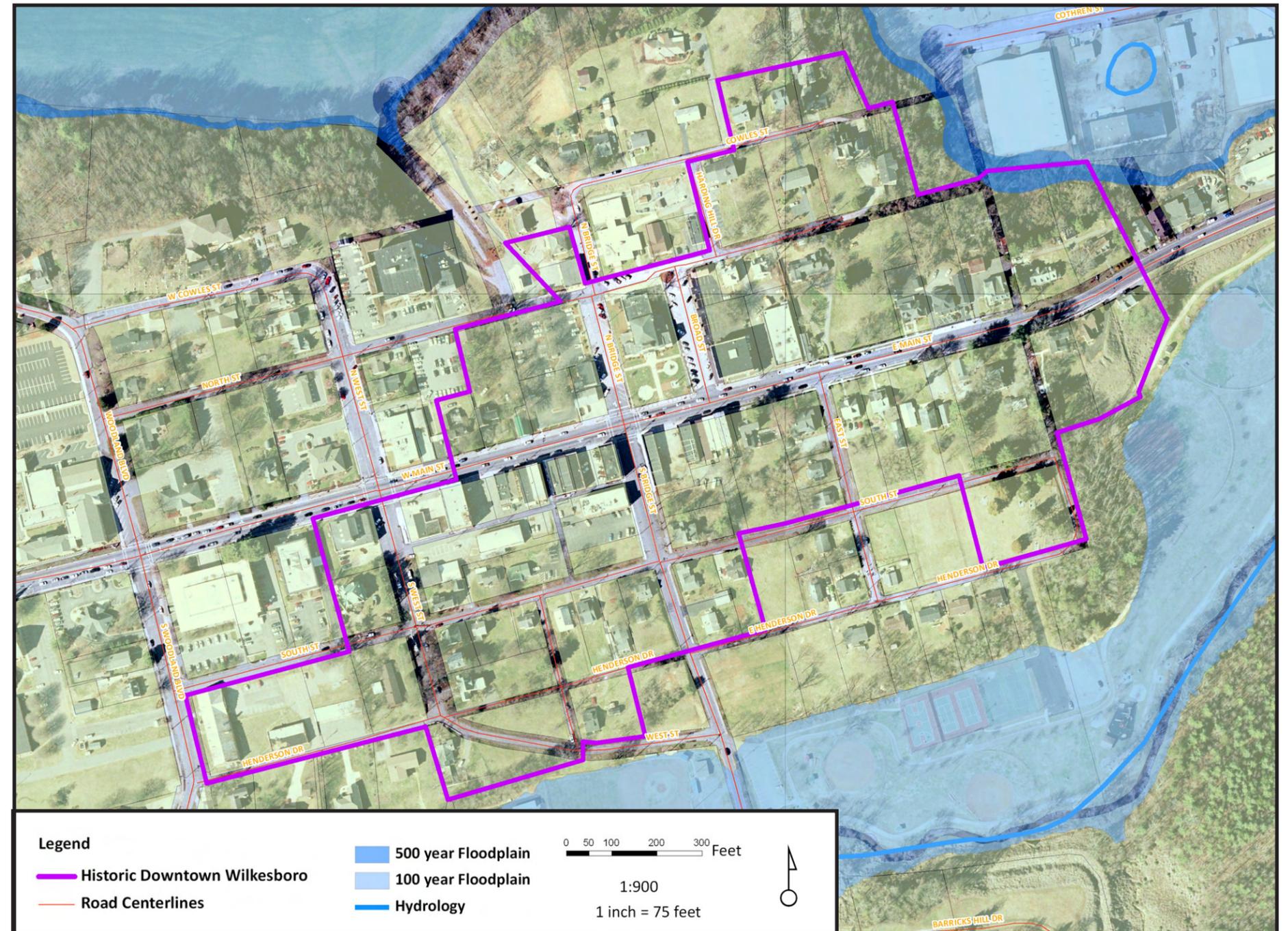
## Floodplains

The issues of topography and floodplains are intertwined, as floodplains tend to be located where low ground elevations and surface water are geographically adjoined. As the floodplain map to the right reveals, the most extensive floodplain areas are located immediately south of downtown as part of the Cub Creek floodplain, with another floodplain being north of downtown and associated with the Yadkin River. The two floodplains nearly join at the east end of the downtown, but a segment of Main leading east out of downtown, as well as the adjacent lands, manages to stay just above the floodplain area.



*Cub Creek's floodplain forms a definitive boundary along the south edge of Downtown Wilkesboro.*

### Floodplains Map



# I. BACKGROUND

## Existing Land Uses & Buildings

### Existing Land Uses

As with all downtowns, the study area has an inherently mixed-use land use pattern. Most of the downtown's existing parcels have a single use. However, it should be a goal for downtown that more buildings, especially multi-story buildings, be used for multiple purposes. In particular, there are some multi-story buildings with ground floor retail and service uses that could be adapted for residential and office uses on upper floors. A good example of an underutilized property is the historic Smithey's Hotel on the northeast corner of Main and Broad Streets.

### Existing Buildings

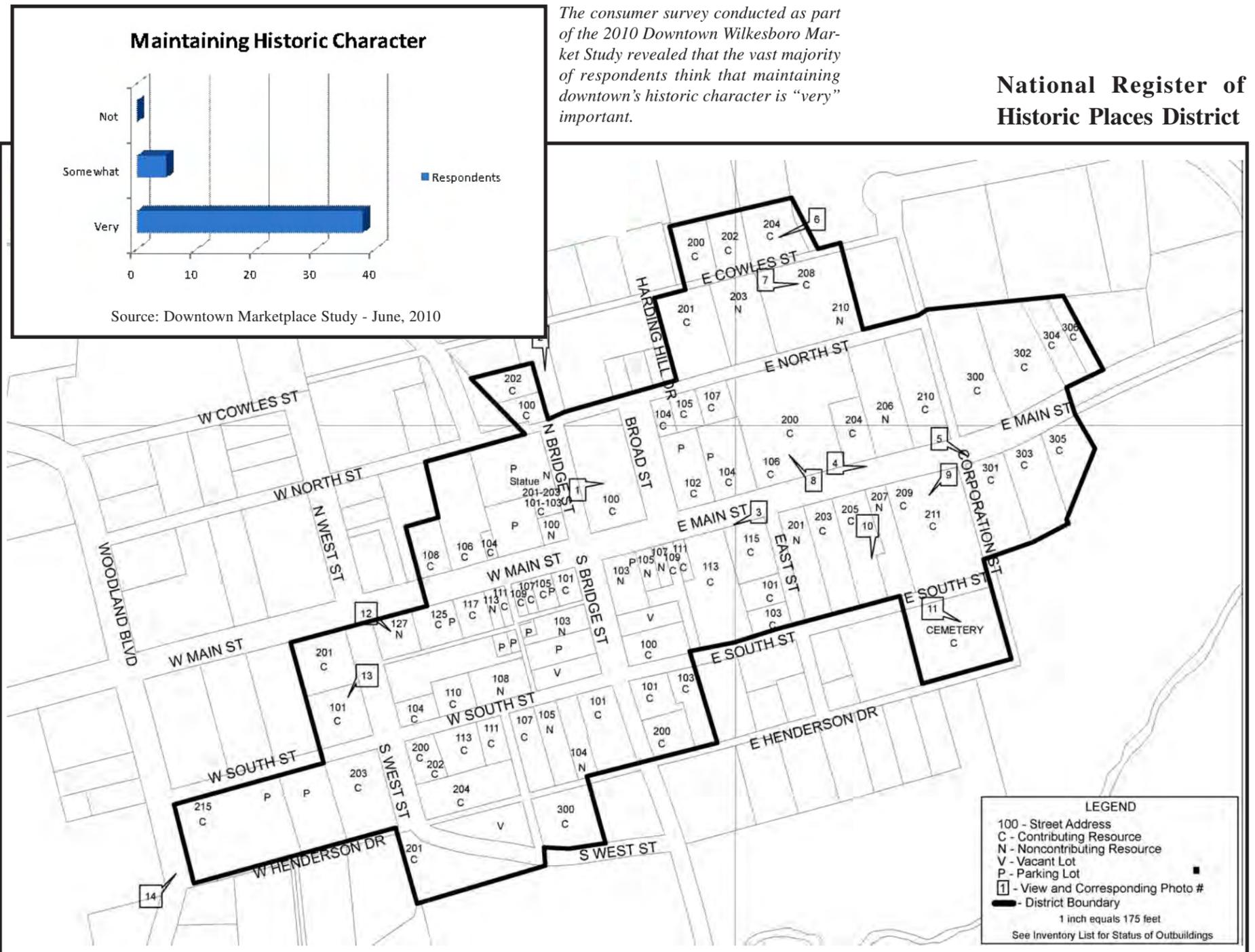
Downtown Wilkesboro has a broad range of buildings, both age and type. In fact, they are collectively of such significance, along with the original town plan, that they have been designated to the National Register of Historic Places. The map, at right, indicates the district boundaries and street addresses and it distinguishes between buildings that are architecturally "contributing" to the character of the district and those that are not.

### Commercial Buildings

Examples of the many commercial buildings include the Wilkesboro-Smithey Hotel (1891) at 102 East Main Street, the J.T. Ferguson Store (1890s) at 111 East Main Street, and the Morrison Hardware Store (1890s) at 111 West Main Street. Several commercial buildings on Main Street were built during the first half of the twentieth century, including the 1950s and 1960s.

### Institutional Buildings

Notable institutional buildings include the Greek Revival style Wilkesboro Presbyterian Church (1850) at 205 East Main Street, the Old Wilkes County Jail (1859) at 202 North Bridge Street, the former Wilkes County Courthouse (1902) at 100 East Main Street, the former Federal Building (1915) at 201 West Main Street, the former Wilkesboro Municipal Building (1930s) at 100 North Bridge Street, and the former Wilkesboro Elementary School (1937) at 215 West South Street. Although it is located beyond the downtown study area for this plan (West Cowles Street), St. Paul's Episcopal Church – one of the earliest



# I. BACKGROUND

consecrated churches in the Episcopal Diocese of Western North Carolina, was completed in 1849 and it features a historic cemetery.

## *Residences*

The oldest house in Downtown Wilkesboro is the Robert Cleveland House. Built in the 1770s in the western portion of Wilkes County by Robert Cleveland, brother of Revolutionary War hero Colonel Benjamin Cleveland, this two-story log structure was relocated and rebuilt next to the Old Wilkes County Jail during the late-1980s. The two oldest residential buildings in the downtown that are original to their sites are the Brown-Cowles House at 200 East Main and the Wallace House at 101 East South Street. They both date from the 1830s. The Johnson-Hubbard House at 113 East Main Street dates from the 1850s and represents the vernacular Greek Revival style, while the Lassiter-Greene House (1850s) at 101 South West Street was originally a one-story Greek Revival, but a Stick Style addition occurred in 1875. Examples of later nineteenth century houses include the Calloway-Hubbard House (1873) at 211 East Main Street, the Jesse T. Ferguson House (1877) at 108 West Main Street, the Davis-Crysel House (1888) at 301 East Main Street, the Winkler-Perkins House (1890s) at 100 South Bridge Street, and the John Cranor House (1890s) at 208 East Cowles Street. There are also several bungalow style houses dating from the 1920s and 1930s throughout the area, as well as later houses from the 1950s and 1960s. Some houses evolved over time, such as the Somers-Bumgarner House at 206 East Main Street. The original one-story section was built in the 1860s, while the two-story addition was built during the 1910s.

\* Information above on the buildings was provided by the National Register nomination report.

## Sample Buildings



*The Ferguson Building on Main Street, featuring an ornate cast iron storefront, was built during the 1890s.*



*The Wilkesboro Police Department building, on Main Street, represents a contemporary form of architecture that adds to the downtown's diversity.*



*The Wilkes County Courthouse, built in 1902, is perhaps the single most significant structure in Downtown Wilkesboro. It is now the Wilkes Heritage Museum.*



*There are several historic houses that have been well-preserved, although their use has transformed to offices.*

# I. BACKGROUND

## Transportation & Parking

### Transportation

The primary street through Downtown Wilkesboro is Main Street, which has an east-west orientation. Also known as State Route 18/268, it is a state-designated road. At Cherry Street it turns into River Street and connects to Route 421/16, while its east end becomes Old US Highway 421. NCDOT traffic counts taken in 2009 for Main (at a point west of the intersection of Woodland Blvd.) indicated 14,000 vehicle trips per day. Recordings taken on Cherry Street indicated 6,200 vehicle trips per day, while Oakwood Road recorded 8,500 vehicle trips per day, respectively.

### Key Downtown Streets

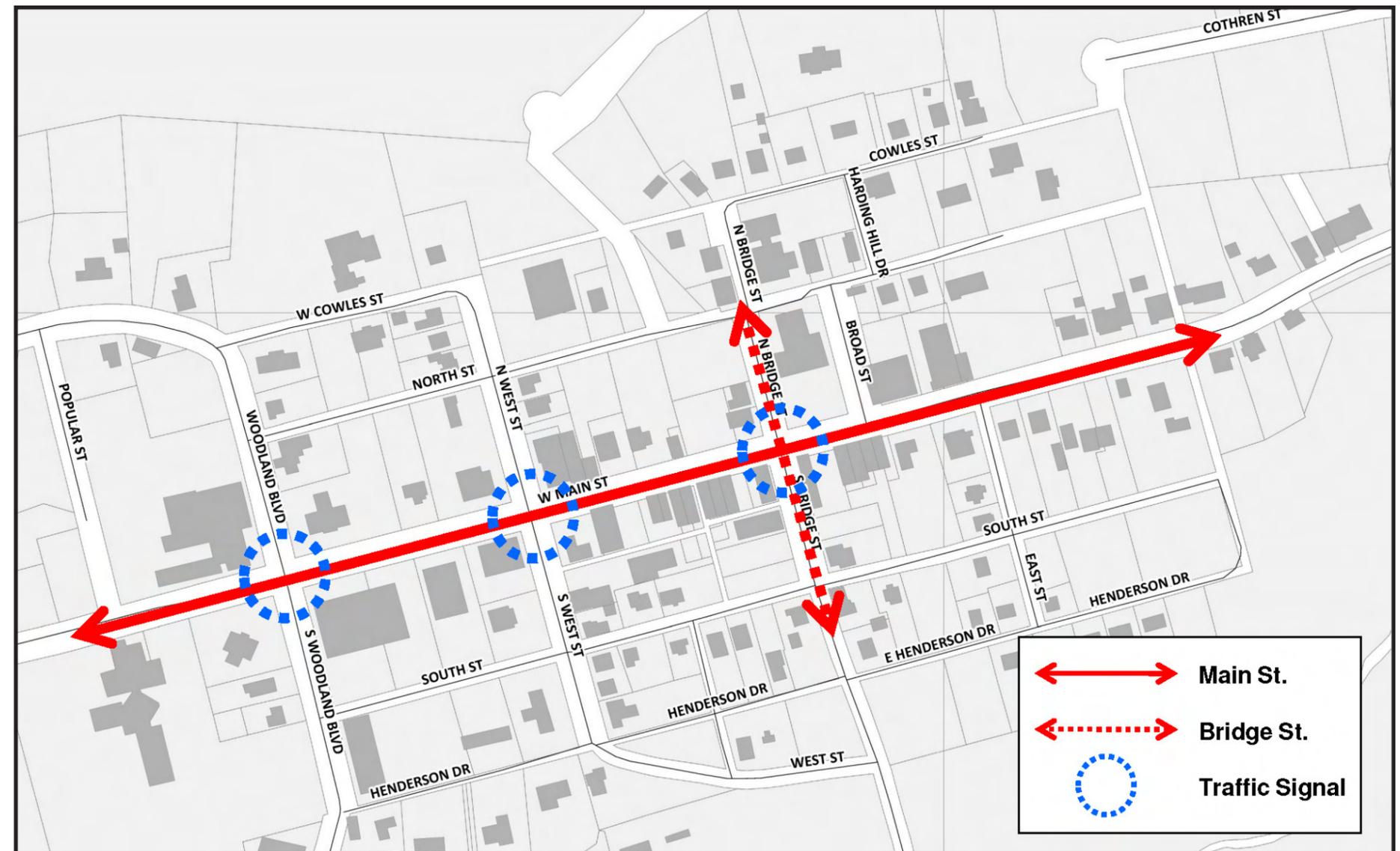
The segment of Main traversing the core of downtown features one driving lane in either direction, on-street parallel parking on both sides, and a turn lane at some intersections. The width of the street narrows at its west end, as there is currently no on-street parking on the north side of Main beginning at West Street. The second most significant street within the downtown is Bridge Street, which has a north-south orientation. Its significance is limited with respect to connecting with other key roads. However, south of downtown it accesses the Cub Creek Park and the new County complex, which are both important to the community. On Bridge and West Streets, there is sufficient curb-to-curb space to convert some parallel parking to angled parking, which would yield more parking spaces.

### Travel Beyond Conventional Vehicles

While downtown's key streets have sidewalks and accommodate pedestrians, other modes of travel are limited. There are no designated bike lanes since the posted speed limit is 20 mph. However, some vehicle speeds intimidate some cyclists. A key complaint of many downtown patrons is 18-wheel truck traffic traversing Main Street, so rerouting such traffic to avoid downtown should be a future goal. The Wilkes Transportation Authority (WTA) provides and promotes public transit by means of the Wilkes Express Bus Shuttle. The shuttle runs on a fixed-route and schedule. It connects Downtown Wilkesboro with other areas of Wilkesboro, including Tysons Foods, Wilkes Community College, Lowes Home

Improvement, Wal-Mart, Lowes Foods, and other retailers. It also travels to North Wilkesboro. Shuttles operate in vans that travel westbound on Main Street at the Smithy Hotel. Stops are located on Main Street at the Smithy Hotel, behind

Town Hall (on South Street), and at the Department of Social Services. Service runs from 7 am to 6:30 pm weekdays on one-hour frequencies. At Town Hall, the shuttle currently departs on the half-hour.



# I. BACKGROUND

## Parking

According to a consumer survey conducted during the Main Street program's 2010 market study, parking in Downtown Wilkesboro is not a great challenge; approximately 62% percent of respondents ranked downtown parking as "good" or "excellent." When asked how important various issues were to improving downtown, parking ranked the least important out of 12 factors.

## *On-Street Parking*

As noted previously, downtown's streets feature on-street parallel parking in most segments, and the key north-south streets could accommodate even more parking spaces by converting parallel spaces to angled spaces. Parking time limits are not regulated. There are no parking meters in the study area. At peak business times, the parking spaces closest to some businesses fill-up. Crossing Main Street has been mentioned by citizens as a chore that could be improved if motorists traveled the posted 20 mph speed limit.

## *Off-Street Parking*

Fortunately for the function and appearance of the streetscape, most off-street parking lots are located behind the buildings fronting Main Street. There are some exceptions to this rule, scattered throughout the downtown, in which parking lots front directly onto their associated street. Examples include two private parking lots located on the south side of Main between West and Bridge Streets. There is also existing off-street parking on the north side of Main between West and Bridge Streets on the site where a future park and market are proposed. Ownership of various off-street parking lots includes several private property owners that allow use by their customers or tenants. Some parking lots are signed for restricted use. The large shaded parking lot on the north side of Main Street is owned by the Town. There are clearly opportunities to better connect the system of rear parking lots and to redesign them for greater aesthetics and higher space yields.

*"We have downtown employees who park on-street when that should be reserved for shoppers and diners. Employees should be required to park in lots."*

- Stakeholder Meeting Participant

Approximately 62% percent of surveyed respondents ranked downtown parking as "good" or "excellent." When asked how important various issues were to improving downtown, parking ranked 12th out of 12 total factors.



*The area behind the buildings fronting the south side of Main Street features a significant amount of parking. It will be important in the future that this parking resource be well-marked with directional signage.*



*The existing parking lots in Downtown Wilkesboro could be greatly enhanced through improvements such as dumpster screening, lighting, and landscaping. Paint stripping to delineate parking spaces could increase the number of spaces.*

# I. BACKGROUND

## Streetscapes & Public Spaces

### Streetscapes

Downtown Wilkesboro's existing streetscapes are functional, but could be aesthetically enhanced. The sidewalks are predominately concrete, although the sidewalks along the perimeter of the Wilkes Heritage Museum area include brick bands oriented perpendicular to the length of the sidewalk, as well as peripheral brick bands running the length of the segment along Main. The downtown streetscape features two types of lighting. The conventional tall "cobra head" lights found on most streets exist throughout the downtown. There is also a series of human-scale lights with historic-looking acorn globes, but the black poles they are mounted on are narrow and void of any detailing. Historic lights or accurate reproductions would be thicker and include detailing, such as vertical fluting and ornamentation at the wider flared base and at the base of the globe. Based upon public comments desiring to keep night skies free of artificial light, globes that do not cast light up should be considered, especially as parts are replaced over time. The downtown's streetscapes have very few street trees, although that is not surprising given the relative narrowness of the sidewalks. The most detracting visual aspect of downtown's existing streetscapes is the many utility poles and overhead wiring. Eliminating the poles and placing the wiring underground would tremendously improve the aesthetics of Downtown Wilkesboro.

### Public Spaces

For a geographically small downtown, Downtown Wilkesboro has a varied mixture of existing and potential public spaces.

#### *Old Courthouse Lawn (Wilkes Heritage Museum)*

The most prominent public space is the lawn fronting the Old County Courthouse. This space has a high degree of significance because of its historic association with the courthouse and its location at the key intersection of the downtown. Features of this space include some small trees and shrubs, three different paved areas (concrete and brick) that serve as stages for a cannon, a monument and a time capsule. There are several other smaller features, such as a sign for the courthouse museum and an interpretive wayside for the town's Civil War history.

#### *Future Park/Market*

The Town's Main Street Committee had already engaged in their own preliminary planning for the downtown prior to this plan's creation, and a high priority concept was to develop a new park on the north side of Main between Bridge and West Streets. The goal is for the park to also accommodate special events, including a venue where produce, arts, crafts, and similar items might be sold at regularly scheduled markets. Parking will also be needed for the site. In fact, substantial parking already exists on the site.

#### *Federal Building & Town Hall Plazas*

The existing Johnson J. Hayes Federal Building, located on the south side of Main at the corner of Woodland, features a hardscaped plaza in the front. While this space has a peripheral low wall that can be used as informal seating, it is otherwise void of pedestrian amenities and landscaping. The Town Hall to the immediate east also features a small plaza and it too lacks seating or other amenities. These two spaces have strong potential for enhancements that could make them more user-friendly as public spaces.

#### *Cemetery*

The historic Presbyterian Cemetery, located in the southeast corner of the study area, has 175 headstones. The oldest dates to 1811, and more than half of them date to before 1910. While this space is obviously not a park, it is noteworthy that nineteenth-century Americans frequently used cemeteries as passive recreational space for picnicking and similar activities. While today's citizens are not known for using cemeteries in such a manner, it still constitutes a formal green space in the downtown area. It would be more attractive with a traditional-looking metal fence rather than the existing chain-link fencing that surrounds it.

#### *Peripheral Public Spaces*

There are two important public spaces located on the edges of the downtown study area that are especially noteworthy: the Yadkin River Greenway and Cub Creek Park. The greenway has an existing trailhead on the northern edge of downtown near the intersection of North Street and North Bridge Street. There is strong potential for extending this greenway through the downtown core and south to connect with Cub Creek Park. The park features a trail system throughout,

as well as various recreational facilities and parking lots. It is a resource for the entire community, and it especially an amenity to residents in the downtown area.



*This segment of Main Street, located on the south side and just east of Bridge, has many features shared by other segments of the streetscape. Features include concrete sidewalks, a driveway accessing a parking lot, human scaled streetlights, utility poles and overhead wires, and buildings that frame the streetscape.*

*The Federal Building and adjacent Town Hall both feature small plazas between Main Street and their front entrances. However, because of their current design, neither is used very frequently by people. Amenities such as seating could make them more appealing to potential users.*



# I. BACKGROUND

## Economic Context

While the focus of this plan is the physical aspects of Downtown Wilkesboro, an understanding of its economic dimensions is critical to the crafting of an effective plan. That topic is discussed below.

### Overview

It is extremely fortunate for this planning process that a market study for the downtown was completed in June of 2010. Entitled “Downtown Marketplace Study” and prepared by the State’s Small Town Main Street (STMS) staff, it provides information regarding the downtown’s economic context that can help to inform this plan. Much of the information for the study was based upon the 2009 ESRI data report. That report indicated that, within the downtown area as defined by a 0.23 mile radius from the intersection of Main Street and Bridge Street, there are a total of 63 businesses, 611 employees and 203 residents. That .23 mile radius corresponds almost exactly with the “5 minute walk” (.25 mile radius) depicted in the existing conditions diagram on page 7. That radius encompasses the entire downtown. Another area of focus for the STMS study was a five mile radius, which has a residential population of 24,530 and 18,496 employees.



*Although this master plan has a primary focus on physical planning issues, the 2010 market study has assisted in making complimentary recommendations for economic restructuring and promotional issues.*

**DOWNTOWN MARKETPLACE STUDY**  
HISTORIC DOWNTOWN WILKESBORO, NORTH CAROLINA  
JUNE 2010

### Existing Business Mix

In addition to professional services (law, bail bonds, insurance, financial, realty, etc.), existing retail, restaurant and personal service businesses in Downtown Wilkesboro include the following:

#### Retail

- Waggles - pet supply and services
- Antique Emporium
- English Cottage Antiques
- Pipedreams
- Mother Earth Foods - health food and wine store
- Royall’s Art gallery

#### Dining

- Havana Dreams Café
- Betty’s Bread & Pastries
- 50s Diner
- Nana San – Japanese restaurant

#### Non-Professional Services

- Foothills Kung Fu – martial arts
- Parker Electric & Plumbing
- Great State Land & Auction Company
- Wilkesboro Chiropractic Clinic
- Hud’s Barber Shop
- Emmalynes on Main – hair salon

According to the market study, there is approximately 262,432 square feet of retail space in Downtown Wilkesboro. Of that amount, approximately 240,700 square feet was listed at the time as occupied, leaving 21,732 square feet as unoccupied. These figures result in a vacancy rate of just over 8%, although the

study emphasized that occupied space can include space that is greatly underutilized (storage, business with extremely limited hours of operation, etc.). Based on the market study’s merchants survey, in which six out of eight of the downtown retailers participated, the average retail sales per square foot (psf) is around \$93. However, accounting for “outliers” this figure drops to \$83 psf (an outlier is a survey input that appears to deviate markedly from other members of the sample in which it occurs, thereby skewing the statistics). As a general rule used by the Main Street staff, to be viable retail sales psf should be around \$100 psf.

The average rent in Downtown Wilkesboro, according to merchants survey, is \$6 psf, with the range falling between \$3 to \$11 psf. While each property differs with respect to the condition of the building and the services provided by the property manager (utilities, trash removal, building maintenance, etc.), this rental range for Downtown Wilkesboro was considered to be reasonable. Using the sales-to-rent ratio, which is rent psf divided by sales psf, the average ratio at the time of the market study was 10.96%. This average ratio is higher than the goal range of 2%-8.5%, but subtracting the outliers from this total, the average ratio drops to a more realistic level of 6.16%.

### Office & Housing Market

Any successful downtown must have a mixture of land uses that go beyond retail and restaurant businesses to achieve the sort of dynamic environment that yields economic success. In addition to upper floors above retail that have – or could have – housing and offices, much of Downtown Wilkesboro lying beyond Main Street is residential. Within the core of the downtown (as defined by the 0.23 mile radius ring in the ESRI Report), 43 office uses were identified, which translates to 422 downtown employees. While there are few downtown residents living above commercial space, the ESRI report indicated a population of 203 individuals within the 0.23 mile radius of the downtown core. Most or all of these individuals live in single-family detached or attached housing (duplexes, triplexes).

### Consumer Survey Results

The STMS study also included a consumer survey intended to further their understanding of current and potential downtown shoppers. Over 68 surveys

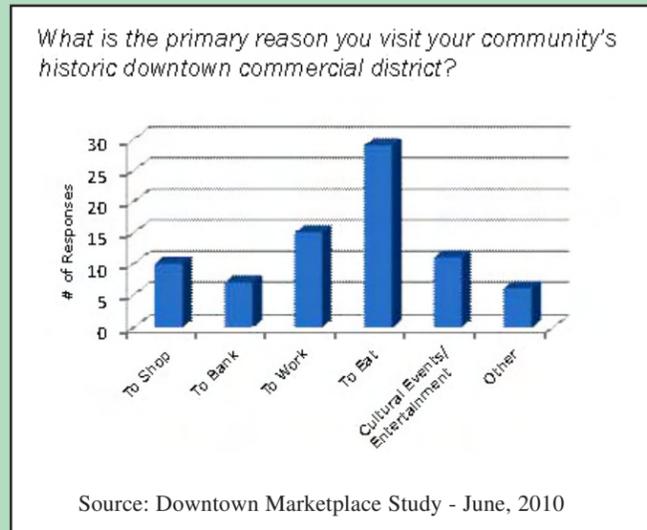
# I. BACKGROUND

taken, of which 40 provided a response to every question. Of the 40 fully completed surveys, 45% were female, 51% were over 50, 30% were between 36 and 50, 94% were full-time residents of Wilkesboro, and 50% had a household size of two. Below are some of the key findings:

When asked “*What is the primary reason you visit your community’s historic downtown commercial district?*” the vast majority indicated that dining was their primary reason. That response was followed by work, cultural events/entertainment, and shopping, in that order. When asked “*What would you like to see downtown?*” popular answers included restaurants, outdoor activity store (bike shop, sporting goods), emporium style store (handcrafted jewelry, pottery, art), followed by a book store, an internet coffee shop, and a clothing store. When asked to rate existing characteristics of downtown, the following responses were provided:

- 5%, 57%, and 38% indicated the *parking* is excellent, good, and poor, respectively;
- 71% of respondents indicated the *variety of goods* offered in downtown is poor;
- 78% indicated the *quality of products* offered downtown is good;
- 2%, 88% and 10% indicated the *price of merchandise* is excellent, good, and poor, respectively;
- 10%, 57%, 33% indicated the *attractiveness of area* is excellent, good, and poor, respectively;
- 54% indicated that the *business hours* are good, while 44% indicated they are poor;
- 26%, 64%, and 10% indicated that *safety* is excellent, good, and poor, respectively;

When asked to rate the importance of a variety of potential improvements for downtown, cleanliness and maintenance ranked number one, with 100% of respondents indicating this characteristic was “very important.” “Maintaining historic character,” “public improvements,” “customer service,” “focus on customer’s needs,” “supporting local businesses,” and “job creation,” followed closely, with over 86% of respondents ranking these characteristics as very important. Also, 79% of respondents indicated that “regular business hours” were very important.



*The 2010 market study's consumer survey revealed that dining is the most common reason for people to visit Downtown Wilkesboro.*

# I. BACKGROUND

## Plans & Studies

A number of plans and studies have been prepared during the past few years that are relevant to Downtown Wilkesboro and this master plan.

### *Comprehensive Plan*

The Town of Wilkesboro adopted its Wilkesboro Tomorrow Comprehensive Plan in March 2008. It was prepared by the North Carolina Department of Commerce's Division of Community Assistance. Many aspects of the plan are relevant to the downtown, including the Future Land Use Plan's description of the "Town Center" (downtown), which is paraphrased as follows:

The Town Center shall balance the needs of pedestrians, motorists, businesses, property owners, residents, tourists, and citizens alike; the needs of each of these groups are different and create a need for a more detailed study and plan.

The following policies that are directly related to this downtown planning effort were identified as "priority policies" in the plan:

#### Policy 1.8:

The Town will pursue the development of specific plans for each of the special planning areas designated on the Future Land Use Map.

#### Policy 3.2:

Sign policies and standards will be periodically updated to enhance community identity and create a high-quality business image.

#### Policy 3.8:

The Town will support efforts to improve the appearance and functionality of the Town Center by funding streetscape plans, including the feasibility of placing utilities underground, researching and applying for grant opportunities, gathering information and coordinating volunteer efforts.

#### Policy 5.5:

The Town will advocate for the revitalization and the adaptive reuse of currently

unused or underutilized structures and sites in appropriately located commercial, institutional, office and industrial areas.

### *Pedestrian Plan*

The Town's Comprehensive Pedestrian Plan was prepared in 2007 and it identifies the downtown's Main Street as one of the top five "areas of concern" for future pedestrian enhancements. Page 6 of Section 2 states: "Main Street in the downtown district is considered to be the 'center' of the Town for many residents. The general public expressed the need for enhancing this area with more pedestrian-friendly sidewalks, improving the parking facilities, and slowing vehicular traffic. Given the current and future opportunities in the downtown area, an enhancement of the Main Street corridor would greatly improve pedestrian conditions." Page 16 of the same section states: "The downtown area has a mixture of sidewalks varying from good to poor condition. Main Street has the majority of poor sidewalks, while streets such as College and Bridge are in good condition. In many areas, the sidewalks may be adequate, but issues such as power poles, lack of accessible ramps, and unmarked crosswalks create unsafe conditions for pedestrians." Another important aspect of pedestrian-friendliness for downtown that is underscored in the plan is the recently-completed spur of the Yadkin River Greenway that connects to Downtown Wilkesboro. Specific recommendations most relevant to downtown include the following:

- Improve the pedestrian access between the new senior housing development on West Main and the downtown core (Note: this same principle could apply to the adaptive reuse of the historic school building, which had not been initiated at the time of the pedestrian plan).
- Sidewalk widths within the downtown should be wider than the minimum width of 5 feet applied elsewhere in town.
- Curb extensions ("pedestrian bulbs") should be provided at each corner of key downtown intersections.

- The design of all sidewalks must conform with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), including curb ramps not exceeding an 11 percent slope.
- Install pedestrian signals at all major intersections, and consider using the "countdown" type within the downtown.
- Implement streetscape improvements in the downtown that include design elements such as decorative paving, street trees, and furniture.
- Create a Downtown Wilkesboro walking guide brochure pointing out historic sites and other places of interest as a means of promoting more pedestrian activity.

With regard to downtown, the Implementation section of the plan states the following:

"The high priority projects are primarily located in the downtown district of Wilkesboro, since the largest number of pedestrians live in this area and traverse existing, damaged sidewalks. Also, the Town of Wilkesboro has established (as a priority) – the enhancement of its downtown streetscape, Main Street. The probable construction costs for these projects are approximately \$2,729,510. Although this is quite a significant figure, the multi-purpose trail projects are included in this amount and have received funding from NCDOT (from a previous segment of the Yadkin River Greenway). The cost estimate for the multi-purpose trails is over \$1,983,300, while the cost estimate for sidewalk improvements is approximately \$746,210."

# I. BACKGROUND

## Market Study

As previously noted in this plan’s Economic Context section, a market study entitled “Downtown Marketplace Study” was completed in June of 2010 by the State’s Small Town Main Street (STMS) staff. It provides invaluable information regarding the downtown’s economic context that can help to inform this plan, and some of the most useful information has been highlighted above. Some of the key recommendations of the study include the following:

- Establish Downtown Brand Identity
- Establish a Cohesive Downtown Marketing Campaign
- Establish a Downtown Wilkesboro Real Estate Task Force
- Establish a Business Recruitment Task Force
- Encourage Retail Self Assessment
- Establish a Historic Building Task Force
- Establish a Pedestrian Experience & Streetscape Task Force
- Establish Concrete Ties with Other Wilkesboro Organizations Interested in Downtown Design Issues
- Establish a Financial and Business Development Task Force
- Establish A Downtown Tax Exempt Organization
- Establish a Municipal Service District (MSD)/Business Improvement District (BID)

## Other Studies & Plans

In addition to the key studies and plans described above, other such documents that were reviewed as part of this planning process for Downtown Wilkesboro include the following:

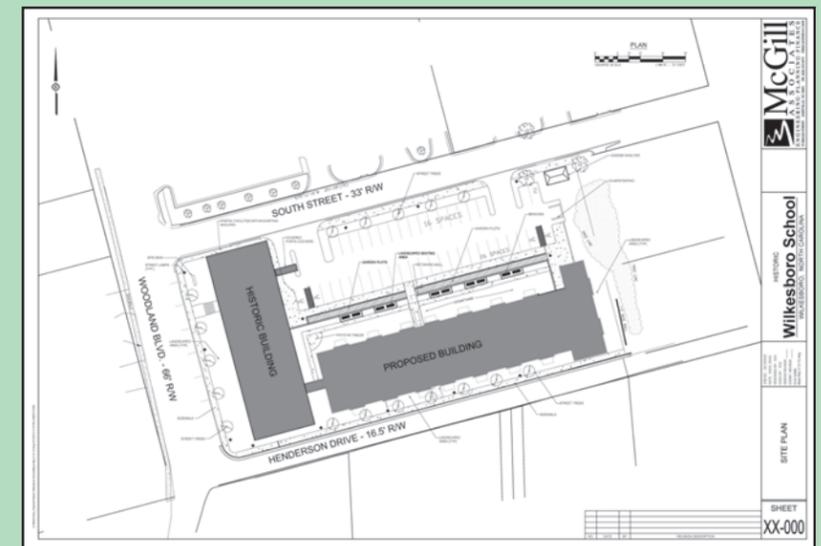
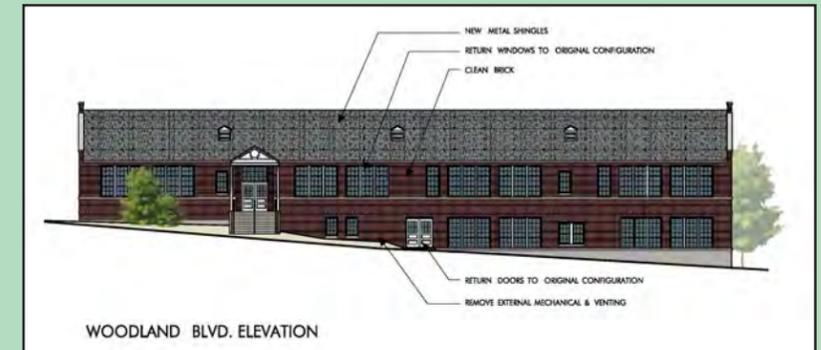
- Yadkin River Greenway Master Plan  
The idea of a greenway along the Yadkin River began informally in 1994 among a group of interested area residents. Subsequently, the group incorporated and raised funds from local governments and fundraising activities to fund a Master Plan for a limited portion of the Greenway, which was referred to as “Phase One.” Greenways Incorporated, a Cary, North Carolina, consulting firm,

completed the plan. The group incorporated and has since continued its planning efforts. Greenway development completed to date was described earlier in this plan.

- Cub Creek Watershed Study  
This plan was prepared by AECOM in 2009 to evaluate the geomorphic stability of a portion of the Cub Creek Watershed and to identify potential sites for stormwater best management practices (BMPs) and BMP retrofits. The study area consisted of the portion of the Cub Creek watershed that falls within the municipal limits and extra-territorial jurisdiction of Wilkesboro. The goal of this study was to aid the Town in the identification, prioritization and evaluation of individual BMP projects that could help improve the water quality of Cub Creek.
- Historic School Restoration Project  
This adaptive reuse project is to utilize the existing historic elementary school that fronts onto Woodland Blvd. for 10 one and two-bedroom apartments and to build a new structure perpendicular and fronting onto Henderson Drive. The new structure will be built to emulate the historic building and it will contain 31 one and two-bedroom apartments. Associated parking will front onto South Street. This project is currently underway, and the targeted residents will be seniors and disabled people in need of affordable housing.
- National Register Nomination  
The Downtown Wilkesboro Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2009. It features the core of Downtown Wilkesboro and has nearly identical boundaries to those of the Town’s locally-designated historic district. This report provides tremendous information on the history of the downtown and its physical development, including information on specific buildings.

## Elementary School Adaptive Reuse

This school was built in 1937. It is being redeveloped into 41 affordable housing units by Northwestern Housing Enterprise, Inc. at a total cost of approximately \$7.1 million. The project engineers are McGill Associates and the architects are Tise-Kiester Architects.



# I. BACKGROUND

## Regulations

While there are numerous regulations impacting Downtown Wilkesboro, the three most significant are zoning, historic zoning, and building codes. Each is summarized below:

### Zoning

As the map at right illustrates, there are three zoning districts within the downtown study area.

*B-1: Central Business District* - This designation occupies the majority of the downtown and is bound roughly by Cowles Street on the north, South Street on the south, East Street on the east, and Woodland Boulevard on the west. The intent of this district is “to accommodate a wide range of uses including retail, office, service, and institutional, as well as residential uses on floors above street level.” There are no minimum “bulk standards” (lot sizes, setbacks, etc.), although there is a maximum permitted building height requirement of 40 feet. This district does not require off-street parking, which is a progressive approach that many communities regrettably fail to follow.

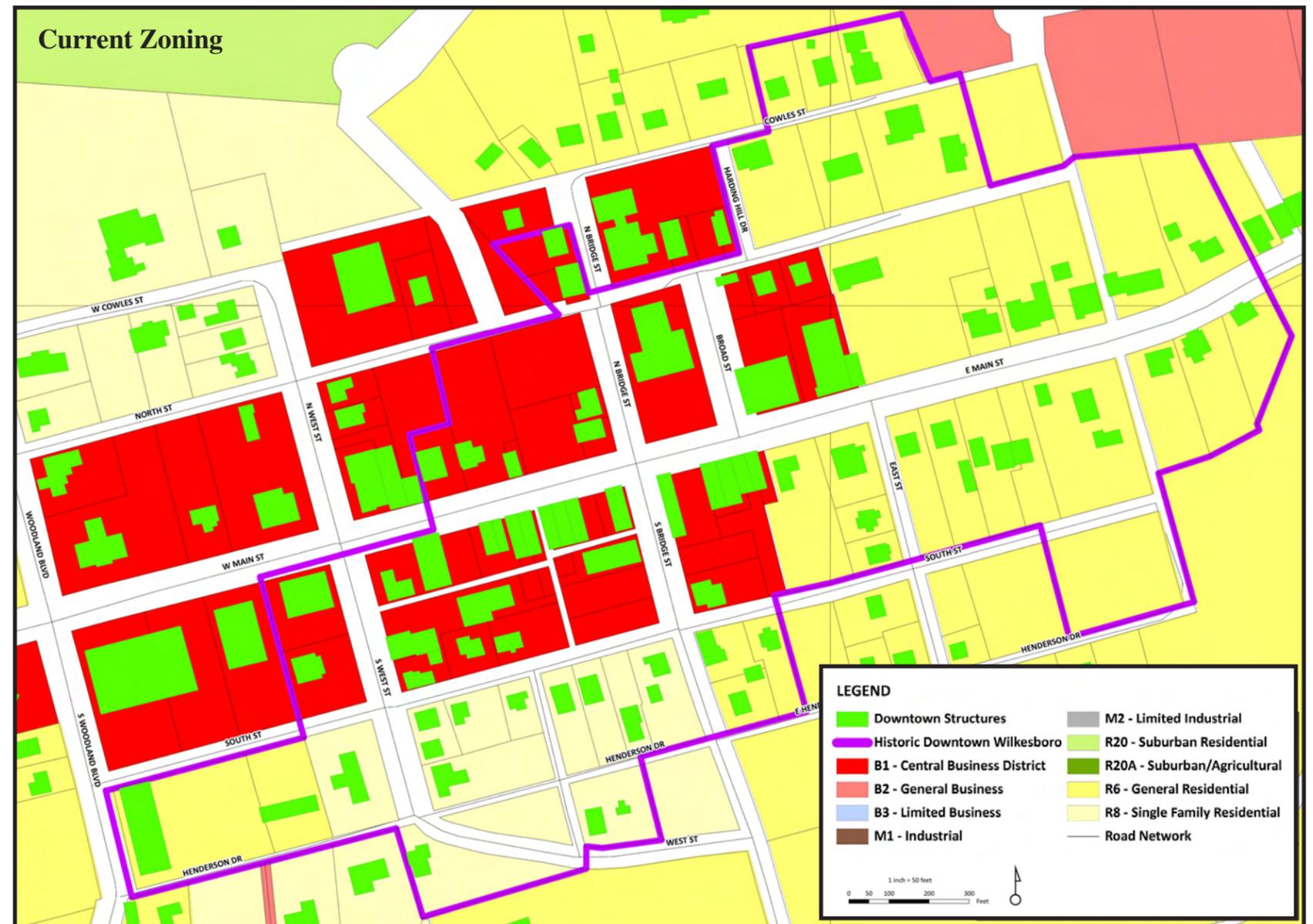
*R-6: General Residential* - With the exception of most of one block in the southwest corner of the study area, this designation is limited to the eastern third of downtown. The district’s intent is “to provide areas for higher-density single-family residential, two-family residential, multi-family residential, and other compatible uses that are designed, constructed, and maintained to avoid detracting from a healthy and aesthetically-pleasing residential environment.” For single-family houses, minimum lot sizes are 6,000 square feet, and minimum front setbacks are 25 feet.

*R-8: Single Family Residential* - Within the study area boundaries, this zone is applied to only a few blocks bound by South Street on the north, Bridge Street on the east, and just south and west of West Street. The district’s intent is “to provide areas suitable for moderate-density residential development and supporting public, institutional, and other compatible uses that are designed, constructed, and maintained to avoid detracting from a healthy and aesthetically-pleasing residential

environment.” Minimum permitted lot sizes are 8,000 square feet, and minimum front setbacks are 35 feet.

It is noteworthy that some of the standards of the current zoning ordinance are

incompatible with historic development patterns and best practices in downtown planning. For example, the B-1 district prohibits multi-family buildings and townhouses, despite the fact that such housing – properly designed – could be compatible with the historic downtown.



# I. BACKGROUND

## Historic Zoning

The Town's historic zoning provisions are contained in Article VIII of the Town's ordinances entitled "Historic Overlay Districts/Historic Landmarks." As stated in the Purpose section of the ordinance, "The purpose of establishing local historic districts and landmarks is to encourage the restoration, preservation, rehabilitation, and conservation of historically, architecturally, and archaeologically significant areas, structures, buildings, sites, objects, and their surroundings; and to review new construction design to ensure compatibility with the character of the district; and to safeguard against any potentially adverse influences which may cause the decline, decay, or total destruction of these important assets."

A careful review of the ordinance revealed that it is a generally well-written preservation ordinance and consistent with "best practices" in the field. While one shortcoming is that applications for the demolition or relocation of a historic resource can only be denied for a one-year period, as opposed to being denied indefinitely as with most preservation ordinances, that limitation is caused by state laws. There are also provisions that allow economic hardships to be considered so that an applicant would not have to wait a full year to take the desired action if a substantial economic hardship can be proven. The inclusion of economic hardship considerations is a positive feature of the ordinance, although it would be helpful to have detailed information pertaining to how an economic hardship is determined (required financial information for submission, criteria for decision making, etc.). Another shortcoming of the ordinance is the lack of "demolition by neglect" provisions, which would prohibit an owners from allowing a historic resource to become so deteriorated as to, in effect, become demolished by neglect. It is acknowledged that the few missing components of the ordinance pointed out here may well have been left out intentionally to achieve the sufficient level of public support for successful Town adoption. Nevertheless, a goal for strengthening the preservation ordinance in the future might be to meet the standards of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. Communities that meet such standards can achieve "certified local government" (CLG) status from their State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), thereby making them eligible for certain grants and technical support from the SHPO. The five broad standards that must be met by a local government seeking certification or maintaining certified

status are:

- Enforce appropriate state or local legislation for the designation and protection of historic properties
- Establish by state or local legislation an adequate and qualified historic preservation review commission
- Maintain a system for the survey and inventory of properties that furthers the purposes of the Act
- Provide for adequate public participation in the local historic preservation program, including the process of reviewing nominations to the National Register of Historic Places
- Satisfactorily perform the responsibilities delegated to it under the Act

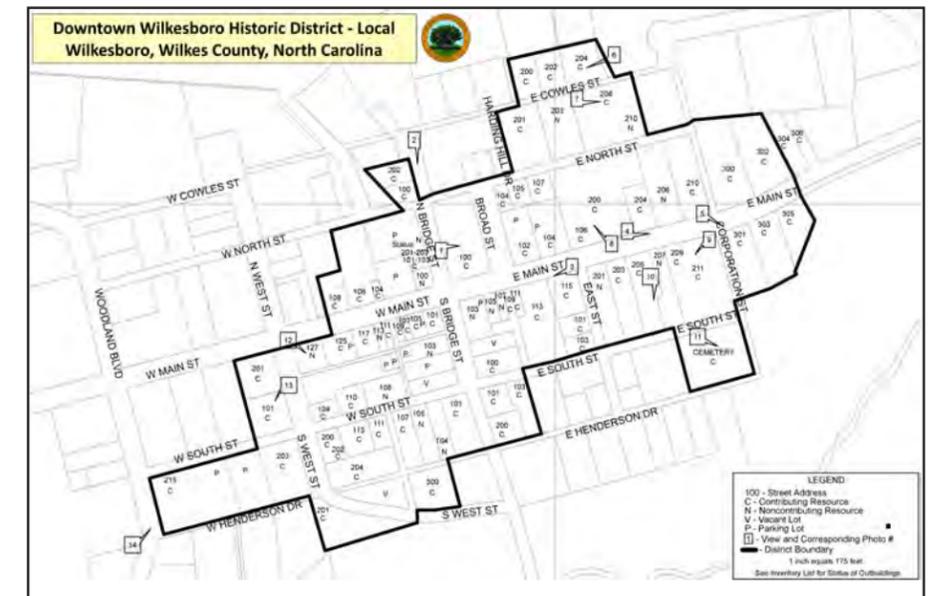
It is important to remember that a local preservation zoning program is only as effective as the design guidelines that govern the districts. A review of Wilkesboro's existing guidelines reveals that they are likely sufficient to work well for Wilkesboro's historic district. They are wisely consistent with the federal preservation standards (Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Rehabilitation) and cover most of the key issues necessary. While they could be improved by addressing the district's predominant architectural forms/styles and by offering more specific and quantifiable dimensional standards, they do provide a positive degree of flexibility in the hands of an effective preservation commission.

## Building Codes

The Building Code is contained within Section 150 under Title XV: Land Usage. As stated in Section 152.02, Wilkesboro's Building Code is "adopted by the North Carolina Building Code Council and as amended, is hereby adopted by reference as fully as though set forth herein as the Building Code of the town, to the extent that the code is applicable for safe and stable design, methods of construction, minimum standards and use of materials in building of structures hereafter erected, enlarged, altered, repaired, or otherwise constructed or reconstructed." The Wilkes

County Inspections Department enforces the Building Code throughout the county, including within the Town of Wilkesboro. The Town of Wilkesboro employs a Fire Inspector to enforce the fire code.

Based upon discussions with downtown property owners and other stakeholders, the implementation of the Building Code by the County has resulted in significant challenges to using upper floor space in older buildings. As an example, efforts to utilize the upper floors of the Smithey Hotel have been hindered, at least in part, by the code's implementation. Because this same issue has been prevalent in many of the state's historic communities, the North Carolina Rehabilitation Code was prepared to help property owners, designers and builders work through code issues for historic buildings. In fact, a website at [www.ncrehabcode.com](http://www.ncrehabcode.com) provides excellent information on how to address code issues for the state's historic buildings. Resolving this issue should be a top priority for revitalizing Downtown Wilkesboro.



For a larger scale version of a nearly identical map, please see the [page 10](#) map of the National Register district. That district and the local historic district depicted above are identical, with the exception of two additional lots included in the local district at the very east end of the district on the north side of Main.

# I. BACKGROUND

## Programs

There are several public and private programs relevant to Downtown Wilkesboro. The most significant program, in light of future revitalization efforts, is the Small Town Main Street Program summarized below.

### Small Town Main Street

The Town of Wilkesboro was recently selected to participate in the North Carolina Small Town Main Street Program (STMS), and the Wilkesboro STMS Program kick-off meeting was held in October of 2009. The North Carolina STMS is under the umbrella of the North Carolina Main Street Program within the Office of Urban Development in the North Carolina Division of Community Assistance. The STMS program follows the National Trust for Historic Preservation's National Main Street Center's Four-Point Approach methodology. The Four-Point Approach is based upon Organization, Design, Economic Restructuring, and Promotion. Wilkesboro's STMS Committee is serving as the project steering committee for this downtown master plan. Preliminary ideas already generated by the committee for this master planning process include the following:

- *Farmer/Merchant's Market:* Research successful market case studies and develop a site design concept, implementation plan, and associated policies for a permanent Farmer/Merchant's Market.
- *Traffic Calming:* Develop traffic calming strategies for Main Street in order to reduce speeding, facilitate parking, and create a better and safer environment for pedestrians and motorists.
- *Connectivity and Streetscape Improvements:* Improve connectivity between the Main Street Corridor, Tyson Greenway Trailhead, Historic Downtown Wilkesboro, Cub Creek Park, and surrounding neighborhoods via streetscapes improvements.
- *Downtown Park/Pedestrian Mall:* Move forward with a centralized park/pedestrian mall concept adjacent to the Wilkes Heritage Museum. Planning and conceptual design elements already completed should be utilized and built upon.

- *Parking Lot Rehab and Improvements:* Increase existing parking efficiency and attractiveness. Convert existing, yet vacant, Town property into well designed and landscaped public parking facilities.
- *Develop Workforce Housing:* Utilizing Town owned properties, identify and develop housing opportunities for Wilkes County workforce.
- *Develop Façade and Capital Improvement Grants:* Develop policies and seek funding for downtown grants to incentivize redevelopment and revitalization.



*The Small Town Main Street Committee identified several desired projects prior to the initiation of this downtown master planning project. Among them was the idea of converting this Town-owned property fronting Main Street into a park and market place. Regardless of the scenario ultimately achieved, it will be important that a substantial amount of parking be retained on this site for the benefit of nearby businesses.*



## II. PUBLIC INPUT & CONCEPT PLAN

### SECTION CONTENTS

#### PUBLIC INPUT

2010 CONSUMER SURVEY  
STEERING COMMITTEE MEETINGS  
STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS  
PUBLIC KICK-OFF MEETING  
KEY PLANNING PRINCIPLES  
CHARRETTE WORKSHOP

#### CONCEPT PLAN

CONCEPT PLAN

HISTORIC DOWNTOWN WILKESBORO MASTER PLAN  
WILKESBORO, NORTH CAROLINA

# II. PUBLIC INPUT & CONCEPT PLAN

## PUBLIC INPUT

Any successful downtown master plan must be grounded in a clear understanding of stakeholder perspectives and preferences. Public input will not only provide critical information needed to formulate a solid strategy, but the public's support can be politically vital to making plan implementation occur.

### 2010 Consumer Survey

As noted previously, a consumer survey was conducted as part of the market study performed for Downtown Wilkesboro in 2010 by the Main Street program. Some of the key findings included the following:

- Frequency that respondents shopped in downtown: 2-6 times per week (18%), 3-6 times per month (24%), 3-6 times per year (16%), almost never (31%).
- The primary reason for respondents to visit downtown: dining (37%), work (19%), cultural events/entertainment (14%), shopping (13%), banking (9%), other (8%).
- Other reasons the respondents visit downtown (beyond the primary reason addressed above): dining (33%), shopping (22%), cultural events/entertainment (20%), banking (13%), other (12%).
- How respondents learn about businesses, sales events, and promotions in downtown: local newspaper (34%), word of mouth (30%), direct mail (13%), internet (11%), radio (10%), television (2%).

At right is an excerpt from the survey results that address the respondents opinions regarding shopping in Downtown Wilkesboro and the actions needed to improve the downtown.

### Steering Committee Meetings

Wilkesboro's Small Town Main Street (STMS) Committee is serving as the project Steering Committee for this downtown master plan. That committee includes a

*As this survey indicates, respondents feel that the variety of goods available in Downtown Wilkesboro is poor. Among the most important features of downtown are its cleanliness and maintenance, its historic character, public improvements-streescapes/landscaping, and customer service.*

#### How would you rate the following in regards to the shopping experience in your community's historic downtown commercial district?

Answers	Excellent	Good	Poor	Total
Parking	2 4.76%	24 57.14%	16 38.10%	42
Price of Merchandise	1 2.44%	36 87.80%	4 9.76%	41
Variety of Goods	1 2.44%	11 26.83%	29 70.73%	41
Quality of Goods	4 10.00%	31 77.50%	5 12.50%	40
Attractiveness of Area	4 9.52%	24 57.14%	14 33.33%	42
Attractiveness of Buildings	4 9.52%	21 50.00%	17 40.48%	42
Business Hours	1 2.44%	22 53.66%	18 43.90%	41
Safety	11 26.19%	27 64.29%	4 9.52%	42

#### How important are the following to improving your community's historic downtown commercial district?

Answers	Very	Somewhat	Not	Total
Maintain Historic Character	38 88.37%	5 11.63%	0 0.00%	43
Cleanliness and Maintenance	42 100.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	42
Public Improvements-Streescapes/Landscaping	37 86.05%	6 13.95%	0 0.00%	43
Focusing on Needs of Local Customers	36 83.72%	6 13.95%	1 2.33%	43
Customer Service	37 86.05%	6 13.95%	0 0.00%	43
Providing Regular Business Hours	34 79.07%	8 18.60%	1 2.33%	43
Supporting Local Businesses	36 83.72%	7 16.28%	0 0.00%	43
Creating More Jobs for Locals	35 81.40%	8 18.60%	0 0.00%	43
Advertising	23 57.50%	15 37.50%	2 5.00%	40
Improving Tourism	25 59.52%	14 33.33%	3 7.14%	42
Hosting More Special Events	26 63.41%	14 34.15%	1 2.44%	41

diverse spectrum of individuals who have a variety of interests in Downtown Wilkesboro, including public officials, business owners, property owners, and downtown employees. Throughout the life of this project, the committee has met numerous times to discuss and provide input on the plan's development. Key meetings have included the initial project kick-off meeting held on the morning of November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2010, the February 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting to discuss the planning ideas as they developed during the charrette, and various meetings to review and discuss drafts of the plan. Committee members have also been involved with many other meetings, such as the public kick-off meeting on November 18<sup>th</sup>, and the charrette

workshop on February 1<sup>st</sup>.

### Stakeholder Meetings

A series of five stakeholder focus group meetings were held by this project's Planning Team on November 18 and 19, 2010. Each group represented a different perspective and interest in Downtown Wilkesboro, and each meeting allowed for an in-depth discussion of the group's relevant issues. On the following page is a summary of each meeting:

## II. PUBLIC INPUT & CONCEPT PLAN

### Meeting #1: Public Officials

Key ideas from this meeting included the following:

#### *General*

- The downtown's small geographic scale provides an opportunity to accomplish many improvements.

#### *Streets, Transportation & Parking*

- The concept of replacing existing traffic signals with 4-way stop signs should be considered.
- It should be relatively easy to reroute truck traffic around downtown.
- Henderson Street should be converted back to two-way traffic flow if possible.
- Most of the traffic on Main is "through traffic" having no intention of stopping downtown, such as Tyson employees.
- The downtown church parking is exceeded on Sunday mornings, but overflow parking occurs on adjacent streets.

#### *Streetscapes & Green Space*

- Downtown's green spaces need to be physically linked with Cub Creek Park.
- Many people would like to see utility poles eliminated and overhead lines buried.
- More greenery would improve downtown (the holly street trees were removed roughly 20 years ago when Tyson bought out the Holly Farms plant).
- Street crosswalks should be improved with user-controlled signal lights. They might be the type that count down the amount of time left to cross.

#### *Land Uses & Buildings*

- Much upper floor space is vacant because of the difficulty of applying building codes. The North Carolina Rehab Code needs to be applied here by the County codes officials.
- There is a possibility that the existing County jail will be relocated near the new Court House whenever funding becomes available. It is said that the foundation is sinking and many believe the building should be demolished.
- It is hopeful that the Winkler-Perkins House at the corner of Bridge and South

can be preserved and put to some public and/or private sector use.

- Attorney offices and public entity offices exist in downtown because Wilkesboro is the county seat.
- A local success story for adaptive reuse is North Wilkesboro's Key City development, which adapted a textile building into residential condominiums. A vacant high school in Wilkesboro on the East end of Main could be similarly adapted, but it is owned by a religious college.
- The Federal Building is rumored to be going on the market soon because a new facility is being built in Statesville. It is believed that the post office could remain in the building or relocated elsewhere downtown.

#### *Marketing & Promotion*

- An economic challenge is for downtown to become a regional destination. Perhaps billboards on the highway should be considered.
- The existing welcome center on the highway outside of downtown should help to market downtown.
- Downtown should capitalize on the future residents who will occupy the adaptively-reused historic elementary school.

### Meeting #2: Property Owners & Real Estate Professionals

Key ideas from this meeting included the following:

#### *Streets, Transportation & Parking*

- Henderson Street should be converted back to two-way traffic flow, if possible.
- The Town needs to invest more in downtown infrastructure and streets.
- Truck traffic downtown is a problem, and the 40 mph speed limit adds to the impacts.
- It is believed that the police need to issue more speeding tickets on Main.
- Downtown has a problem of downtown employees parking on-street rather than in lots.
- The existing bus route needs to be improved to get people to and from downtown.
- North Bridge Street should be converted to two-way traffic, if possible, and the same idea should be considered for Broad Street.

#### *Streetscapes & Green Space*

- Above ground utilities should be buried, if possible.
- Better designed street lighting is needed.
- It is reported that Duke Power has a 50-year "pole rights" that would impact any changes (this issue needs researching).

#### *Land Uses & Buildings*

- More businesses are needed, particularly restaurants.
- The former Esso gas station property has great potential, including for restaurant use.
- Upper floor housing is needed.
- Wilkesboro needs to hire its own building codes official, as North Wilkesboro has done. There is a consensus that the County codes official fails to effectively apply the North Carolina Rehab Code so that upper floor space can be utilized.
- Among desired uses are a drug store and hair salon.
- It is rumored that the County will be buying the Federal Building when the new one in Statesville is completed, and the existing Post Office will remain.
- A franchise such as Subway might be interested in locating in Downtown Wilkesboro.
- Downtown Wilkesboro needs an incentive program for façade rehabilitations.
- Murals should be painted on the blank sides of buildings.

#### *Marketing & Promotion*

- In Davidson, North Carolina, they show movies on the side of a building. Perhaps that idea could be applied to a downtown building in Wilkesboro.
- Downtown needs a better and stronger image. Downtown Mount Airy, North Carolina, is a good model for successful branding.
- We should consider renaming "Downtown Wilkesboro" as "Downtown Wilkesborough" (the historic spelling) to play up its historic qualities.
- Downtown needs to more effectively leverage visitors to the Wilkes Heritage Museum. However, one challenge is that downtown businesses are closed by 4:00 PM on Saturdays and all day Sundays.

## II. PUBLIC INPUT & CONCEPT PLAN

### Meeting #3: Business Owners/Operators & Economic Development Reps.

Key ideas from this meeting included the following:

#### *Streets, Transportation & Parking*

- One business owner reported that she has to pay \$15 per month for a light in her rear parking area.

#### *Streetscapes & Green Space*

- The County's fuel pumps located in front of the greenway trailhead (just northwest of the Wilkes Heritage Museum) should be removed to enhance that area.
- While it was acknowledged that keeping storefront window display lights on in the evening could help light the streetscapes and animate downtown, it was a cost issue for tenants.

#### *Land Uses & Buildings*

- More restaurants are needed downtown. In particular, they should be relatively high quality and feature outdoor dining.
- 50s is only open for breakfast and lunch, but it does very good business.
- More groundfloor retail is needed, as much groundfloor space is currently occupied by other uses.
- One individual in town owns a large percentage of downtown's properties. This situation is a challenge for downtown because the owners can, reportedly, be difficult to work with.
- The antique mall on Main, featuring 28,000 square feet is on the market for \$450,000. New ownership may lead to another use.
- More downtown housing is needed.

### Meeting #4: Institutional Reps. (Econ. Develop. & Business Owners/Operators)

Because of a mix up related to the meeting invitations, several business owners/operators and economic development/tourism representatives participated in this meeting, in addition to the institutional representatives. Key ideas from this meeting included the following:

#### *General*

- Illegal drug sales occur behind the commercial buildings on the south side of Main.
- Downtown needs to have free wi-fi (internet service).

#### *Streets, Transportation & Parking*

- The downtown needs less through traffic that does not stop in downtown.
- Truck traffic is a particular problem for downtown.
- The auction house on the east end of Main consumes a large amount of parking on Saturdays, but it does not appear to be perceived as a significant problem for downtown.

#### *Streetscapes & Green Space*

- The streetscapes would be aesthetically improved if the sidewalks included some brick.

#### *Land Uses & Buildings*

- The Wilkes Heritage Museum gets about 300-400 visitors monthly. The projections prior to its development were 50,000 (annually?).

#### *Marketing & Promotion*

- A Downtown Merchants Association is needed.
- Downtown needs a logo.
- The Wilkes Heritage Museum conducts candlelight ghost tours of Downtown Wilkesboro that are relatively well attended.

### Meeting #5: Residents

Key ideas from this meeting included the following:

#### *General*

- Lowe's hardware stores started in North Wilkesboro.
- There has been a high level of job losses in the area in recent years.
- Similar to Tom Dooley, another local legend from the area was Otto Wood, a 1920s outlaw who was killed by police in Downtown Salisbury in 1930. A play

entitled "Otto Wood: The Bandit" has been written and performed locally.

#### *Streets, Transportation & Parking*

- The utility poles and overhead wiring should be eliminated.

#### *Streetscapes & Green Space*

- The current greenway system needs to be connected with other areas/destinations in the downtown area.
- The proposed new park/market should have public restrooms and an amphitheatre.

#### *Land Uses & Buildings*

- The Saturday auctions attract a lot of people.
- Downtown needs more businesses.
- The idea of establishing a Hall of Fame for Merle Fest should be explored.
- Perhaps Lowe's could help to financially support a façade improvement program for Downtown Wilkesboro.
- The community college should have some sort of a downtown satellite for certain courses and activities. Perhaps their current crafts classes (woodworking, jewelry making, etc.) could occur downtown.

#### *Marketing & Promotion*

- Merle Fest, which occurs annually at the end of April, needs a stronger tie in to Downtown Wilkesboro, such as more events. There is a campsite east of town that is called Sewer Fest because of its location near a sewage treatment facility.
- The community college needs to be leveraged to benefit the downtown.
- Blowing Rock, North Carolina, is a good model for having a strong identity.

# II. PUBLIC INPUT & CONCEPT PLAN

## Public Kick-Off Meeting

This meeting was held at Town Hall on the evening of November 18, 2010. Two public input exercises included the identification of challenges and opportunities to revitalizing Downtown Wilkesboro, as well as the identification of “model” downtowns in which some aspect of the downtown might be applied to Wilkesboro. As indicated, some issues can be viewed as both challenges and opportunities. Below is a summary of the key ideas generated:

### Challenges & Opportunities

#### *Challenges*

- Getting people downtown on weekends
- People think downtown is dead
- Overhead utilities
- Lack of residential downtown
- State highway traversing downtown
- The gateways into and out of downtown are not visually appealing
- Dark areas in downtown
- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance
- Signage to downtown and wayfinding within the downtown
- The number of parking spaces and their location
- The current walking tour is not well-marked
- There is a lack of retail variety

#### *Opportunities*

- Downtown has a lot of good history
- Public bathrooms can be provided

#### *Both Challenges & Opportunities*

- Defining an image for downtown
- Building façade improvements
- Lighting sequences can slow traffic, but side street turns become difficult
- Providing a central location for dropping people off before parking

## Model Downtowns

As part of the public kick-off meeting, other downtowns with some aspect that might be emulated by Wilkesboro included the following:

- Charlottesville, VA – uniform appearance
- Abingdon, VA – historic, high quality, major highway access
- Salisbury, NC – pedestrian friendly
- Lexington, NC – courthouse art center
- Mt. Airy, NC – Andy Griffith theme
- New Bern, NC – beauty, Tyron Palace, places to sit
- Hendersonville, NC – slow traffic, downtown events
- Blowing Rock, NC – arts festival
- Asheville, NC – great downtown
- Beaufort, SC – no specific reason noted
- Charleston, SC – no specific reason noted
- Savannah, GA - no specific reason noted

## Wilkesboro Small Town Main Street Vision Statement

Historic Downtown Wilkesboro - the gateway to the Blue Ridge Mountains - located in scenic Wilkes County and nestled in the Yadkin River Valley, is the commercial, municipal and social heart of a vibrant pedestrian and cycle friendly community. Serving both young and old, residents and visitors, Historic Downtown Wilkesboro is a diversified mixed use marketplace with a uniquely walkable, visually appealing, and charmingly simple small town atmosphere. Historic Downtown Wilkesboro gains from a community of easy going, yet highly motivated and dedicated citizens, whose contributions to the preservation of their past and to the vision of their future is at the heart of the their community’s strength. Embracing Historic Downtown Wilkesboro as a place to dine, shop, have fun, learn, listen and live; the community is not simply a place, but serves as the social, cultural and historic foundation for an engaged, healthy, and happy way of life.

## Key Planning Principles

The following planning principles were created for Downtown Wilkesboro, with input from the public, to serve as a guiding light in creating the plan.

1) Preserve and enhance natural and historic resources. Natural resources include the steep slopes and natural green space, while historic resources include buildings and features, such as the Old Courthouse lawn (Wilkes Heritage Museum), monuments, and the site of the Tory Oak.

2) Land uses should be diverse and physically integrated, both horizontally and vertically. They should be “mixed use” rather than simply “multi-use.”

3) Buildings should have a human scale. Scale shall be reflected in a building’s height, width, façade massing, and detailing.

4) Downtown’s architectural past should be respected. Historic buildings should be preserved and improvements should be consistent with recognized preservation principles, while new infill development should be compatible in design with its context.

5) Provide inter-connected streets that are pedestrian-friendly. Downtown should retain its integrated capillary system of streets that offers multiple routes for vehicular and pedestrian traffic.

6) Streetscapes should be attractive, safe and interesting. Sidewalks should have sufficient width for walking, sitting and even dining in appropriate locations. Streetscapes should be well-lit for safety, and building facades should feature storefronts that animate the street.

7) Accommodate parking for vehicles without degrading the appearance and function of downtown. Most parking should be limited to on-street (parallel or angled) and behind buildings.

8) Provide a generous amount of public space in a variety of forms. Public spaces might include grassy parks, hardscaped plazas, linear parks (greenways), and other forms to accommodate a wide range of passive and active uses, including

## II. PUBLIC INPUT & CONCEPT PLAN

special events.

9) Offer a variety of downtown housing alternatives - by types and cost - for all income levels and stages of life. People have new housing needs with each new stage of life, and they should not have to move to another part of their community (or even another community) at each stage. With the exception of upper floor housing, most should be peripheral to the downtown core.

10) Provide a rich mixture of shopping, dining, entertainment, and other types of goods and services. Such resources should be within a comfortable walk for many people, and a regional destination for others.

11) Offer a variety of civic, cultural, educational and recreational opportunities. Downtowns are the heart and soul of their communities, and they should serve as the area's civic hub. Uses/activities should include governmental offices, post offices, churches, education, and special events.

12) Create an environment that will allow businesses to succeed. In addition to maintaining a safe and attractive physical context with sufficient parking, businesses should be organized to work collaboratively and promote themselves in a unified manner.

### Charrette Workshop

A charrette is an intensive multi-day brainstorming session intended to develop ideas to solve problems. A three-day charrette was held from February 1-3, 2011, to create the key ideas for the Downtown Wilkesboro Master Plan. On February 1st a public workshop was held to solicit planning ideas from the public. Key concepts generated by the public are illustrated on the following page, and below are photographs from the event.



# II. PUBLIC INPUT & CONCEPT PLAN

## Key Concepts from the Charrette Workshop

The following key concepts were developed by the citizen participants who participated in the public charrette workshop held at Town Hall on the evening of February 1, 2011:

- 1) Extend greenway to Cub Creek Park
- 2) New park/market needs parking
- 3) Convert N. Bridge to two-way traffic
- 4) Denser housing on Main & south side
- 5) Need more restaurants and retail
- 6) Bury overhead utilities
- 7) Make South & Henderson real streets
- 8) Consider the ghost tour in light of pedestrian routes
- 9) Develop bed-and-breakfasts
- 10) Develop public restrooms
- 11) Bus stop shelters (at new park, etc.)
- 12) Enhance blank walls with murals
- 13) Reuse Esso for pizzeria/ice cream
- 14) Preserve/rehab historic buildings
- 15) New streetscape for Main & Bridge
- 16) Kiosk for historic interpretation
- 17) Mixed use in Smithey Hotel (resid.)
- 18) Rehab Winkler-Perkins property
- 19) Enhance alleys and rear parking
- 20) Replace traffic lights w/ stop signs
- 21) Eliminate truck traffic on Main
- 22) Pipe in music on streetscape
- 23) Parking for tour buses
- 24) Bring Merle Fest to downtown

## Concept Plan

The subsequent pages of the plan expand upon the following issues:

- Land Use
- Urban Design
- Buildings
- Transportation, Parking & Gateways
- Streetscape, Public Spaces, Art & Wayfinding
- Overhead Utilities
- Non-Design Issues
- Implementation





# III. THE PHYSICAL PLAN

## SECTION CONTENTS

PROPOSED LAND USE & CHARACTER  
URBAN DESIGN PLAN  
AXONOMETRIC RENDERING: CORE AREA  
BUILDINGS: HISTORIC REHABILITATION  
BUILDINGS: ADAPTIVE REUSE  
HOUSING  
RENDERING: NEW INFILL HOUSING  
BUILDINGS: NEW INFILL DEVELOPMENT  
TRANSPORTATION  
PARKING  
GATEWAYS  
GREENWAYS  
PROPOSED NEW PARK/MARKET  
OTHER PUBLIC SPACES  
STREETSCAPES  
RENDERING: MAIN STREET STREETSCAPE  
PUBLIC ART & WAYFINDING

HISTORIC DOWNTOWN WILKESBORO MASTER PLAN  
WILKESBORO, NORTH CAROLINA

# III. PHYSICAL PLAN

## PROPOSED LAND USE & CHARACTER

The map at right illustrates the proposed land use and character areas summarized below:

### Urban Mixed Use

Areas of the downtown with this designation allow a variety of uses, including retail, services, offices, and housing. Offices and housing should occur only on upper floors. Buildings should have a predominantly commercial character with a one to three-story height, masonry facades, and fronting directly onto the associated street.

### Residential Character Mixed Use

This designation allows the same uses as the Urban Mixed Use areas, but in buildings having a residential character and a one or two-story height. Roofs should be pitched, facades should be wood, and buildings may have a shallow to moderate front setback. Parking must be beside or behind buildings.

### Civic / Institutional

These areas allow uses such as houses of worship, educational and governmental uses. Because they are special uses, they can have design features that allow them to visually stand out. However, they should not exceed three stories in height, and their massing should be broken up to achieve a human scale. No parking shall occur within the front setback.

### Cultural

This highly-specialized category applies only to the Wilkes Heritage Museum property, the historic building complex to the west (old jail and relocated log house), and the existing jail behind the museum. While the existing jail use is not presently a cultural use, its future reuse should be cultural in nature and complimentary with the Wilkes Heritage Museum. Historic integrity is critical for this area.

### Multi-Family

This designation has been applied to only one property - the adaptive reuse and infill development at the historic Wilkesboro Elementary School. Its design characteristics have already been determined and respect the historic integrity.

### Attached Housing

This designation has been limited to an area flanking both sides of South Street. Buildings can include duplexes, triplexes, quads, and townhouses, and must feature exterior front entrances. They should be designed to be compatible with the area's existing residential architecture, including facade massing that provides a human scale, pitched roofs, front porches, wood exteriors, and a shallow to moderate front setback void of parking.

### Detached Housing

This area is reserved only for single-family detached houses similar in scale, materials and character to existing houses in the area. All shall have pitched roofs, raised foundations, front porches, and wood exteriors. Driveways should be permitted, but not front parking areas.

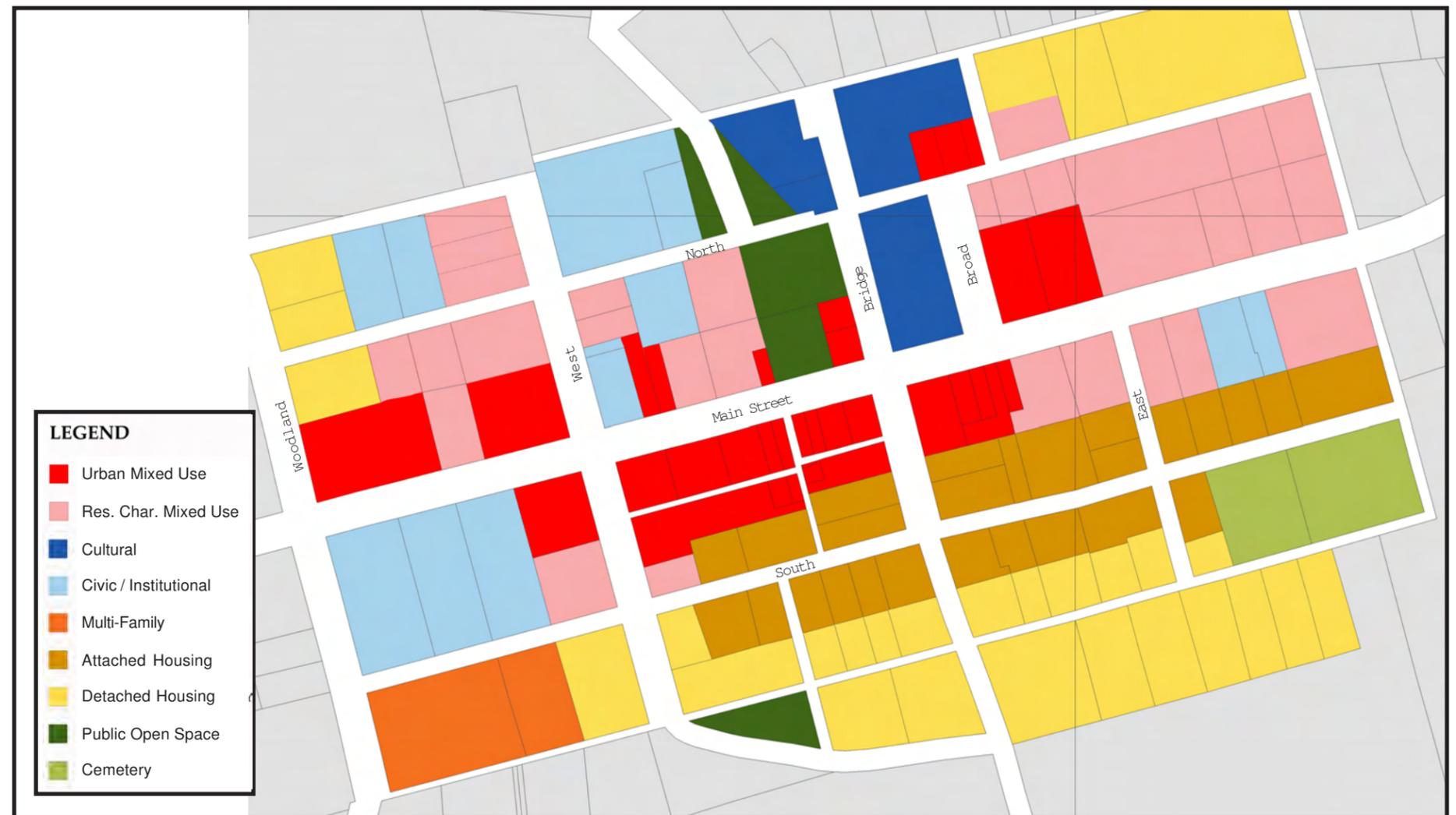
### Public Space

This area is limited to public parks and greenways, such as Cub Creek Park, the existing greenway and the proposed new park/market. The historic cemetery in

the southeast corner of the study area is also included within this general category.

### Cemetery

This area represents the only existing or proposed cemetery within the immediate study area. This current use should continue (see page 45 for specific recommendations).



# III. PHYSICAL PLAN

## URBAN DESIGN PLAN

This plan is explained in detail on the following pages, but key landmarks of the plan are numbered and tied to a legend below. An axonometric (“bird’s eye”) rendering of the core of this area is provided on the following page.

**BUILDING KEY**

	Existing Buildings
	Proposed Buildings

### SITES LEGEND

- 1) Wilkes Heritage Museum
- 2) Proposed Park / Market
- 3) Winkler-Perkins House
- 4) Smithey Hotel
- 5) Proposed Attached Housing
- 6) Federal Building
- 7) Town Hall
- 8) Police Station



# III. PHYSICAL PLAN

## AXONOMETRIC RENDERING: CORE AREA OF DOWNTOWN

This rendering illustrates the physical plan provided on the previous page. Key features include the following:

- Proposed new park anchoring the left half of the rendering, including a fountain near Main and a stage/pavilion and lawn toward the north end
- Farmers/craft market on the east side of the new park
- Existing restaurant to the immediate west of the new park with outdoor dining fronting the park
- Existing buildings to the immediate east of the new park to include outdoor dining fronting the park
- Historic fire department building north of the market adapted for public restrooms and other public uses
- Redeveloped streetscapes with street trees throughout and pedestrian bulbs at intersections
- Rehabilitated and fully utilized Smithey Hotel on the east end of the core area
- Physically enhanced parking lots south of Main, including an enhanced passageway linking rear parking with the new park



# III. PHYSICAL PLAN

## BUILDINGS: HISTORIC REHABILITATION

While this plan recommends new infill development in specific targeted locations, the sensitive rehabilitation of existing historic buildings should be given the highest priority for the following reasons:

- The history and historic character of Downtown Wilkesboro is a key element for “branding” the downtown (see more on this in the “Non-Design Issues” section of this plan).
- Every dollar spent on historic rehabilitation has a greater local economic impact than the same dollar spent on new development. This circumstance is because rehabilitation is more labor-intensive than new construction, while new construction is more material-intensive. Labor tends to be local, while materials are not.
- There are more existing financial incentives for historic rehabilitation, such as the state and federal investment tax credits, than there are for new construction.

It is important that all future building rehabilitations follow federal standards - the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards and Guidelines for Rehabilitation - to insure the highest quality work and to meet the standards necessary for achieving the federal investment tax credit for historic rehabilitation. Fortunately, the Town’s existing design guidelines that implement the historic district’s special zoning are consistent with the federal standards.

### Sample Buildings with Strong Rehabilitation Potential

*Located on the corner of North and Bridge Streets, the historic Wilkesboro Fire Department Building could be taken back to its original integrity with some improvements to the entrance area, including removal of the shingled wall and window, and redesigning and centering the door.*



*This commercial building on the south side of Main could be greatly enhanced by some simple facade improvements. The existing paint scheme appears to extend the adjacent building across the bottom floor. By eliminating the paint on the ground floor (or painting the entire facade consistently), it will regain its cohesiveness.*



### Smithey Hotel

This building should be given particularly high priority for downtown because:

- 1) It is strategically located at the high-visibility location of Broad and Main.
- 2) It has the greatest potential to accommodate several uses that would help downtown, including retail, dining, lodging and housing.

Policy recommendations contained elsewhere in this plan should be targeted to the Smithey Hotel, including the following:

- Applying the North Carolina Rehab Code
- Facade and Capital Improvements Grants
- Proposed payment in lieu of property tax abatement (abatements are prohibited in North Carolina, but this type of program could achieve the same results)



### Winkler-Perkins House

Located on the northeast corner of Bridge and South Streets, this vacant two-story historic house is owned by the Town, which has hopes of seeing it preserved, restored, and put back to productive use. Recommendations include:



#### 1) Preserve the Building:

- “Mothball” the building. Stabilize it for future rehabilitation when funding becomes available.
- Consider applying a conservation easement to the building to provide protection beyond that available through the existing historic zoning, which only stalls demolition for up to one year.

#### 2) Seek Private Sector Ownership:

- This recommendation assumes public funding and uses are not viable.
- Potential uses include a bed-and-breakfast, rentals for receptions, meeting space, and similar uses.



# III. PHYSICAL PLAN

## BUILDINGS: ADAPTIVE REUSE

Adaptive reuse occurs when a building is transformed for a use other than its original intended use. It is an important concept to putting historic buildings back to use when their original use is no longer an option. Fortunately, Downtown Wilkesboro has several older buildings that are strong candidates for adaptive reuse, as explained in detail on this page.

### Esso Service Station

Because of this building's original automobile orientation, it is set back further from Main Street than would ideally be preferred. However, that front setback also poses an opportunity for outdoor dining. Outdoor dining would not only fill the void in the setback, but also help to activate the street more. It is recommended that any improvements to this site still retain the integrity of the buildings architecture, as well as retain the Esso sign. Potential uses that have been suggested by the public for this property include a pizzeria and an ice cream shop. The blank wall of the adjacent building also provides an opportunity for a mural and/or to show outdoor movies on.



### Historic Wilkesboro Elementary School

This project is already underway and will be a positive addition to downtown. The 1937 school building will be restored and adapted for 10 affordable housing units, while another 31 units will be constructed in an adjacent perpendicular building architecturally inspired by the historic school. Northwestern Housing Enterprises is the developer, and the project cost will be \$7.1 million. The targeted residents will be elderly and/or disabled people. The new building will front Henderson Street, while the parking lot will front South Street.



### Current County Jail Site

Although this facility is still in use as a jail, it has become functionally obsolete and reportedly has foundation problems. It is the County's goal to construct a new facility elsewhere if and when funding becomes available. At that time, the property could be reused as additional parking, storage and programming space for the adjacent Wilkes Heritage Museum. Programming might include living history activities, as well as craft-related courses offered by the community college (woodworking, jewelry making, etc.). The Cleveland log house and historic jail could be tied into this complex.



Existing cultural complex



### Future living history programs



# III. PHYSICAL PLAN

## HOUSING

Downtown Wilkesboro is fortunate to be surrounded by housing. Residents not only provide additional market support to downtown businesses, but they also give the area a more “lived in” atmosphere. However, there are several shortcomings of the current housing stock:

- Very little housing exists within downtown’s commercial core
- The housing around downtown is relatively low density
- Much of the housing around downtown is in need of physical improvement
- There is a lack of higher-end housing that will attract more middle to upper income residents with purchasing power to help downtown businesses.

### Upper Floor Housing in the Commercial Core

To achieve an economically healthy downtown, it is important that all existing building space be fully utilized. At present, much of it is vacant or used for storage. To be adapted for housing, the following must occur:

- *Resolve building codes issues:* See [page 56](#) for details on this issue.
- *Target multiple incentives to buildings:* Examples include the existing state and federal investment tax credits for historic rehabilitation, the Main Street programs



*In addition to office space, Downtown Wilkesboro’s upper floor space should be utilized for housing. Residents will not only provide additional market support to downtown businesses, but they will also give the area a more “lived in” atmosphere.*

proposed Capital Improvement and Facade Improvement grant programs, and this plan’s proposed payments in lieu of tax abatements (see [page 59](#) for details).

### New Infill Housing

It is recommended that vacant sites located close to the commercial core, as well as certain similarly located properties with single-family houses that are not designated as “contributing” buildings to the historic district, be developed with higher density housing. Key sites are located on the north side of South Street, including the Town-owned property on the northwest corner of Bridge and South Streets. It is important that such new housing be architecturally compatible with existing housing, and that it front onto the street with parking to the rear. See the following page for additional direction on context-sensitive design. The Town’s existing historic zoning and design guidelines will also help to assure compatibility. While single-family detached housing is appropriate for the study area’s peripheral areas, the recommended higher-density housing will make an excellent transition between the commercial core and existing single-family areas.

*This master plan blow-up illustrates the location and general form of proposed higher-density infill housing south of the commercial core.*



*This form of attached housing would be compatible for the area fronting South Street, as it echoes the Winkler-Perkins House architecturally.*

# III. PHYSICAL PLAN

## RENDERING: NEW INFILL HOUSING ALONG SOUTH STREET

This rendering illustrates the physical plan at the intersection of Bridge and South. Key features include the following:

- A rehabilitated Winkler-Perkins House at far right
- New attached housing on the north side of South and the west side of Bridge (at left)
- An enhanced streetscape for both Bridge and South



# III. PHYSICAL PLAN

## BUILDINGS: NEW INFILL DEVELOPMENT

Assuming that downtown's older buildings continue to be protected through the Town's historic zoning, there are only limited opportunities for new buildings. However, it is important that any new buildings be of a compatible design that reinforces the character of Downtown Wilkesboro instead of diluting it. Fortunately, the Town has a set of design guidelines to implement the historic zoning that will help to insure that new development is compatible with the historic downtown. Below is a summary of infill design objectives for commercial / mixed use buildings, residential buildings, and civic / institutional buildings.

### Commercial / Mixed Use Buildings

The majority of downtown's future commercial / mixed use buildings should be one or two-story buildings with a brick parapet facade, a flat roof, and a high percentage of groundfloor transparency (door and window glass). They should also have little to no front setback. However, given that there are a few residential buildings on Main that have evolved into commercial uses, thereby setting a historic precedent, it is acceptable to have commercial and mixed use buildings with a residential character. Such buildings should have a shallow to moderate front setback, a wood exterior, pitched roof, raised foundation, and front porch.

### Residential Buildings

Residential buildings should have the same general characteristics as the "residential building type" within the commercial / mixed use category (shallow to moderate front setback, wood exterior, pitched roof, raised foundation, and front porch). Although single-family detached houses have historically dominated Downtown Wilkesboro's housing stock, attached housing is acceptable within specific appropriate locations that are geographically transitional between the Main Street corridor and the peripheral single-family areas. However, attached housing should be designed to have a massing that visually breaks up the bulk of the building so as to blend with single-family detached housing.

### Civic / Institutional Buildings

Although excessively large building footprints and expansive unbroken facades should be avoided, civic / institutional buildings can deviate from the norm.

## NO: Inappropriate



*Building heights in downtown should not exceed two stories. The front setback above is too deep, and parking should not be in front of the building.*



*Downtown's residential building types have pitched roofs, but they should feature roof overhangs rather than the roof edge being encased in a cornice.*



*This facade's uninterrupted plane fails to achieve a human-scaled massing. It also has a horizontal orientation rather than a series of vertical bays.*

Height & Setback

## YES: Appropriate



*New buildings in Downtown Wilkesboro should not exceed two stories. Mixed use and commercial buildings should be built up to the sidewalk.*



*Institutional buildings can be set back from the street to front onto a lawn or plaza to emphasize their symbolic significance.*

Roof Forms



*Flat roofs should be screened with a parapet facade on the building's frontage. The parapet should also screen rooftop equipment and penetrations.*



*Varied roof lines are one tool for breaking up the massing of large structures. These roof forms are compatible with downtown's existing housing.*

Massing & Facade Design



*Pilasters (attached pillars), storefront windows, and cornice line variations on this new building break up the facade into vertically oriented bays.*



*This building represents an attached housing type. The projections and recesses are extremely effective in breaking up the facade mass.*

# III. PHYSICAL PLAN

## TRANSPORTATION

Downtown requires a balance of traffic, access, and people. It requires places to park, but not too many and only in the right places. To achieve such balance requires a physical plan that is sensitive to existing uses and attractive to newcomers. There are several shortcomings to address regarding Downtown Wilkesboro’s current transportation context:

- a. Too many motorists exceed the posted 20 mph speed limit
- b. Some truck drivers intimidate pedestrians and cyclists
- c. Motorists traveling through without stopping provide little benefit to downtown
- d. There are too many traffic signals (green lights tell motorists to “Go!”)

### Change Primary State Route Designation from Main Street

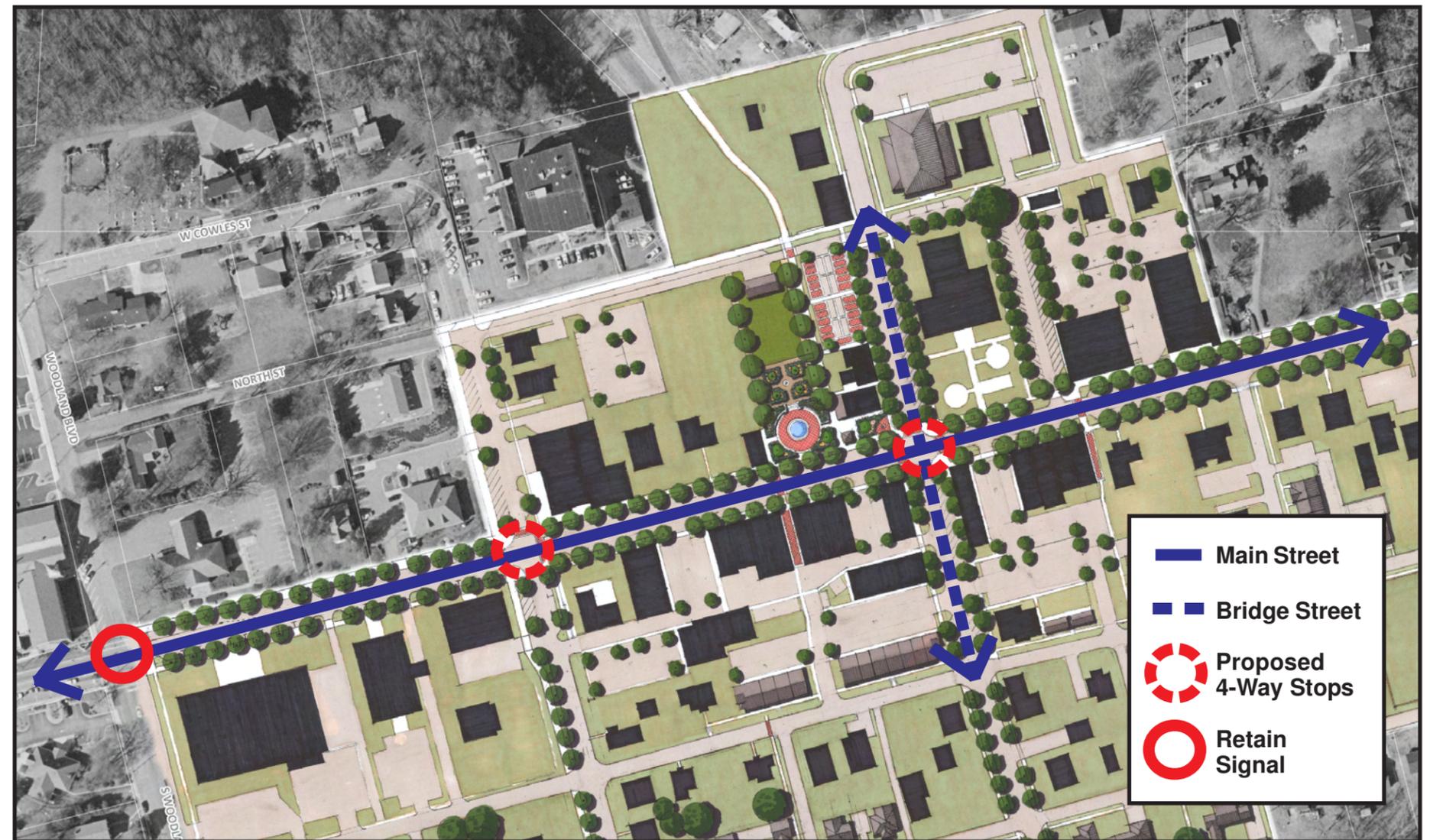
To change the balance in favor of pedestrians, it is recommended that the Town work with NCDOT to de-designate Main Street as a primary state route. Oakwoods Road and NC 115 have been discussed as potential routes to “receive” State Route 18 and 268 designations. An important first step is to request that the Wilkesboro Town Council approve a resolution supporting a four-lane divided curb and gutter section design with a 130-foot wide right-of-way on Oakwoods Road (SR 1001) from US 421 to East Main Street (NC 18/268/2510), including a bridge replacement over Cub Creek that will support large heavy truck loads. Such changes will induce through traffic to use Oakwoods Road unless they have a destination downtown, in which case they will continue to use Main Street.

### Convert Bridge Street Back to Two-Way Traffic

North Bridge Street is currently a one-way street operating southbound. Angled parking spaces line both sides of the street. Given the desire to transform downtown, over time, into more of a tourist destination, a two-way street would be less confusing to first-time visitors. North Bridge Street could be resurfaced to change the angle of on-street parking on the east side. Parallel parking is recommended on the west side as the existing street is not wide enough from curb-to-curb to support angled parking on both sides. No change to the one-way operation on Broad Street is recommended at this time. However, a change to

the intersection of North Street and Broad Street is recommended. This is the intersection where the Tory Oak site exists within a traffic island in the center of the intersection, with traffic circulating on all sides of this landmark. Observations in February 2011 suggest that the health of the current tree may improve if the

street pavement between the tree and the historic courthouse building were to be removed and replaced with mulch. All traffic movements can be accommodated on the north and east sides of the tree. Some on-street parking spaces on the east side of Broad Street near the intersection may need to be removed.



# III. PHYSICAL PLAN

## Replace Two Traffic Signals on Main Street with All-Way Stops

Traffic counts conducted in January and February 2011 indicate that only one traffic signal is needed downtown. Peak hour traffic experiences little delay now, but the sequence of traffic signals promotes some degree of speeding and loses the desired pedestrian-friendly environment. Level of service analyses of the traffic counts indicates that the signal should be retained at the intersection of Woodland Boulevard and Main Street. Observation of peak hour traffic conditions at this intersection reinforce the need for a signal to serve the frequent left turn movements to South Woodland Boulevard, which serves the senior housing and government service buildings immediately adjacent to Woodland Boulevard. All-way STOP signs should be considered to replace signals at two intersections on Main Street: at West Street and at Bridge Street. These signs would require every vehicle to stop prior to entering the intersection. This approach will greatly enhance the pedestrian friendliness of Downtown Wilkesboro.

## Streets Layout & Connections

### Make Street Improvements to Implement this Plan

To support the physical plan recommendations cited in this plan that will bring more residents and customers to Downtown Wilkesboro, street improvements are recommended. Typical cross-sections on the following page illustrate the recommended widths for sidewalks, street pavement and rights-of-way. Most of the recommended changes retain existing curblines if they exist. New construction is recommended on South Street to support the type of development that will attract new residents and consumers to downtown. The one-way restriction can be retained to avoid excessive right-of-way within difficult topography. However, a full traffic lane plus designated on-street parking and a sidewalk are recommended. The north sidewalk could be built on the top of the embankment as new buildings are built with building entrances loading onto the sidewalk. If the south side of South Street redevelops, developers should be required to build a full street, as shown in the illustrations on the following page.



South Street

*Although it is challenged by slope issues, South Street needs to be redesigned to mature into a legitimate urban street. Even retaining its one-way design, it can be enhanced with on-street parking and a sidewalk on the north side.*

### Work with Alley Owners to Make the Following Alley Improvements

- (1) Formalize the vehicle and pedestrian access along the alley connecting West and Bridge Streets that is just behind the Main Street businesses, and
- (2) Prohibit vehicles from using the north-south alley connecting Main Street with the alley behind Main Street businesses. Traffic would shift to West or Bridge Streets and enhance the pedestrian safety and comfort.

### Build Traffic Safety Improvements on the North Side of Main Street

This recommendation is for the east end of downtown, where traffic turns left into a bakery parking lot. Additional sight distance can be created by replacing the earthen embankment with a low retaining wall.

## Cycling

With the de-designation of the primary state route recommended on the previous page, the Town could adapt Main Street to accommodate bike lanes. Although not reflected on the suggested street cross sections on the following two pages, one option the Town could consider would be to restripe Main for two 10 foot wide travel lanes, two 7 feet wide parking stalls, and two 5 feet wide bike lanes. The only concern might be that the bike lanes would only link to the greenway



Model Bus Shelter

*One way to enhance the experience of transit riders is to provide better transit stops for key locations. This image should inspire the design of the shelter proposed for the new Park / Market fronting Main. That shelter might also serve as the proposed new greenway trailhead.*

rather than to a more extensive network of designated bike lanes. If implemented, designated bike lanes should extend far enough on Main to make it worthwhile for cyclists and to avoid surprising motorists when cyclists suddenly appear.

## Transit

Page 12 of this plan's Background section describes in detail the Wilkes Transportation Authority's public transit system provided via the Wilkes Express Bus Shuttle. It is recommended that a stop be provided on Main Street at the proposed new park/market. It might be able to double as the greenway trailhead structure (see image at top right).

# III. PHYSICAL PLAN

## TRANSPORTATION: STREET CROSS-SECTIONS

### Main Street Scenario A: Retain Existing Curbing

This cross section would be applied to Main Street between Woodland Boulevard and just beyond Broad. In this scenario - Scenario A - the design would retain the existing curbing. While the result is a narrower sidewalk width (10 feet) than the ideal scenario (Scenario B), it would be less expensive.

This design reflects the absence of a turn lane, with the exception of a left turn lane from Main to Woodland Boulevard. The cross section for Main applied starting just east of Broad and extending east to the edge of downtown would be different from this cross section through the core of downtown. That cross section would have a more residential character, including replacing the periodic tree grates accommodating street trees with a continuous planting strip.

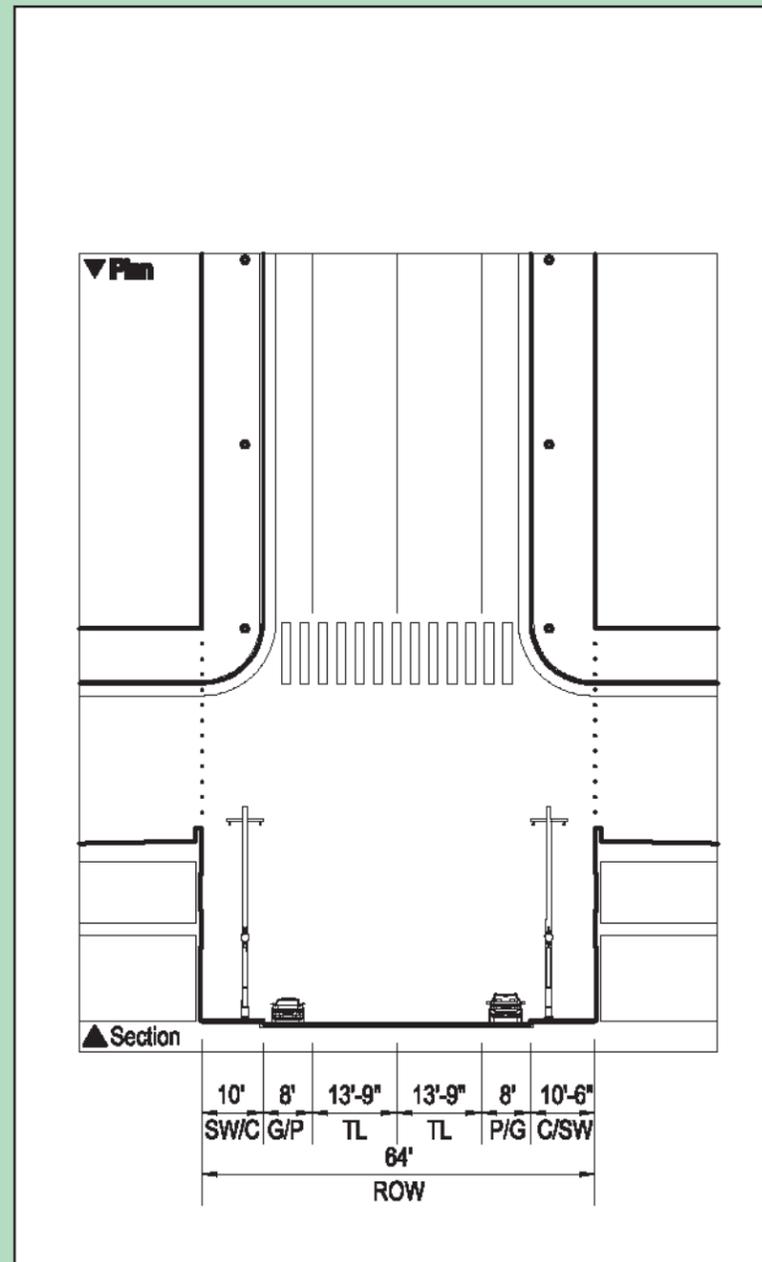
This cross section does not show overhead utilities. It is possible that the utilities could stay in this scenario. However, there would still need to be changes in the current pole configuration to make overhead utilities feasible. Also, modifications to this cross section would have to be made to the sidewalk and furnishing zones to appropriately respond to changes in use and character through downtown. Modifications would also need to be made to accommodate the left turn lane at Woodland.

See [pages 46-50](#) for more detailed information on the proposed streetscape design.

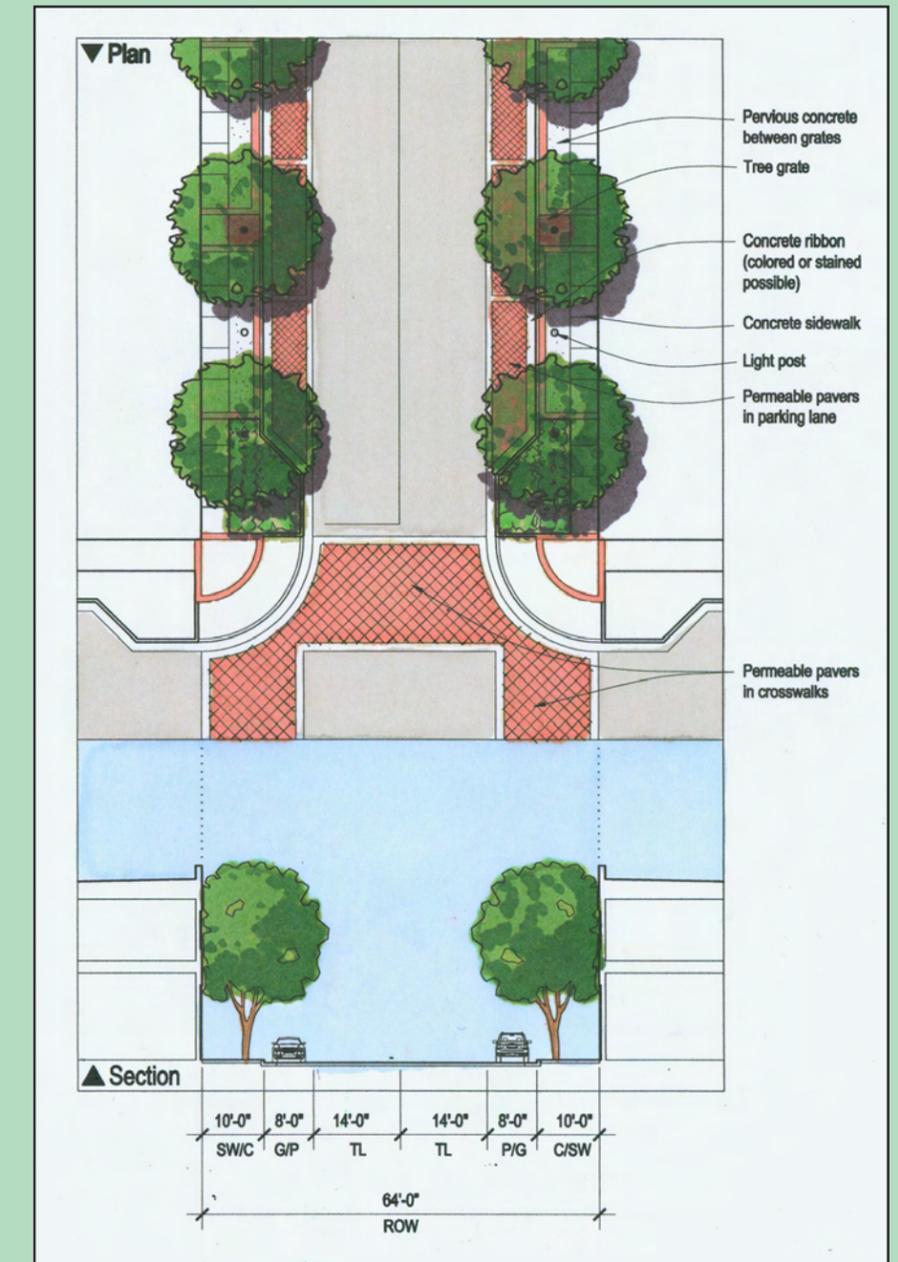
#### Cross-Section Legend

- SW: Sidewalk                      C: Curb                              G: Gutter
- P: Parking                              TL: Travel Lane

Existing: Main Between West & Broad looking east



Proposed Scenario A: Main Between West & Broad looking east



# III. PHYSICAL PLAN

## TRANSPORTATION: STREET CROSS-SECTIONS

### Main Street Scenario B: Relocate Existing Curbing

As with the cross section on the previous page, this cross section would be applied to Main Street between Woodland Boulevard and just beyond Broad. In this scenario - Scenario B - the design would relocate the existing curbing. While the result is a wider sidewalk width (12 feet) than the alternative scenario, it would be more expensive. Building new curb/gutter is at least \$12 per lineal foot, and that does not include the cost to demolish existing curb and gutter or the cost to make any changes to underground drainage and stormwater or utility work.

Because of the greater sidewalk width, this scenario features open planters rather than tree grates. As with the previous scenario, this design reflects the absence of a turn lane, with the exception of a left turn lane from Main to Woodland. The cross section for Main applied starting just east of Broad and extending east to the edge of downtown would be different from this cross section through the core of downtown. That cross section would have a more residential character, including replacing the periodic planters with a continuous planting strip.

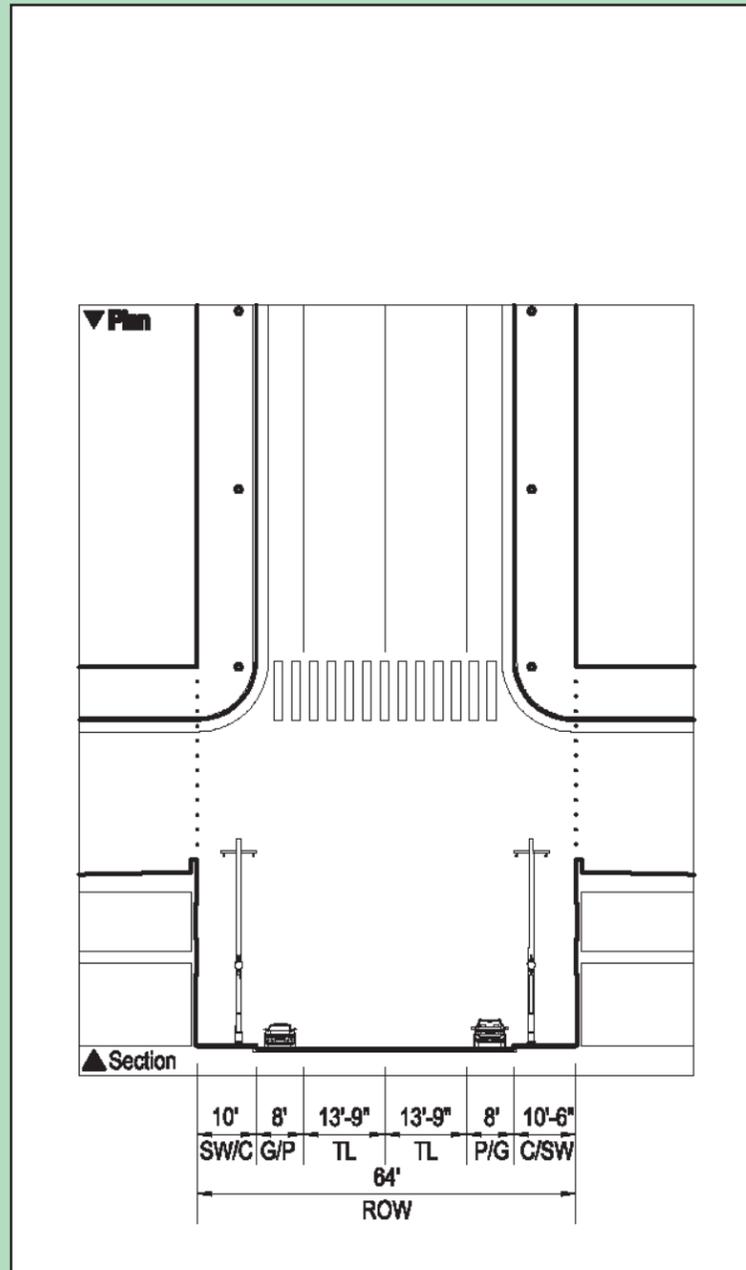
As in the case of Scenario A, this cross section does not show overhead utilities. It is possible that the utilities could stay in this scenario. However, there would still need to be changes in the current pole configuration to make overhead utilities feasible. Also, modifications to this cross section would have to be made to the sidewalk and furnishing zones to appropriately respond to changes in use and character through downtown. Modifications would also need to be made to accommodate the left turn lane at Woodland.

See [pages 46-50](#) for more detailed information on the proposed streetscape design.

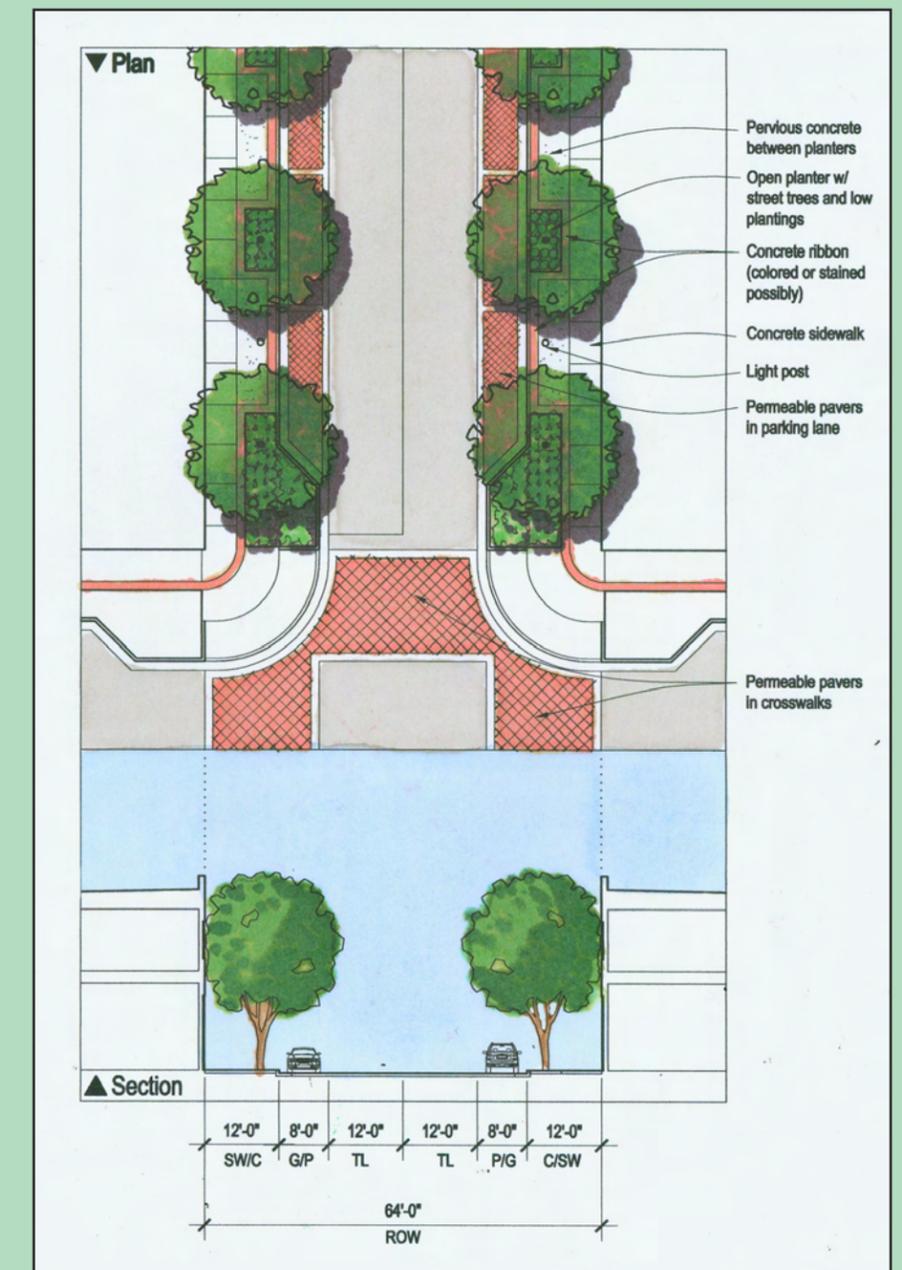
#### Cross-Section Legend

- |              |                 |           |
|--------------|-----------------|-----------|
| SW: Sidewalk | C: Curb         | G: Gutter |
| P: Parking   | TL: Travel Lane |           |

Existing: Main Between West & Broad looking east



Proposed Scenario B: Main Between West & Broad looking east



# III. PHYSICAL PLAN

## PARKING

Whether a true parking undersupply exists or not, the issue of parking is always a key issue for any downtown. For those downtowns lacking a parking problem, getting one is typically an inadvertent goal, as that means the downtown is economically prosperous. While there are mixed opinions regarding Downtown Wilkesboro's parking status, it is a primary goal of this plan to ensure that parking is available to serve the needs of downtown patrons in the optimal locations. *This plan proposes to add approximately 70 more on-street parking spaces than currently exist.*

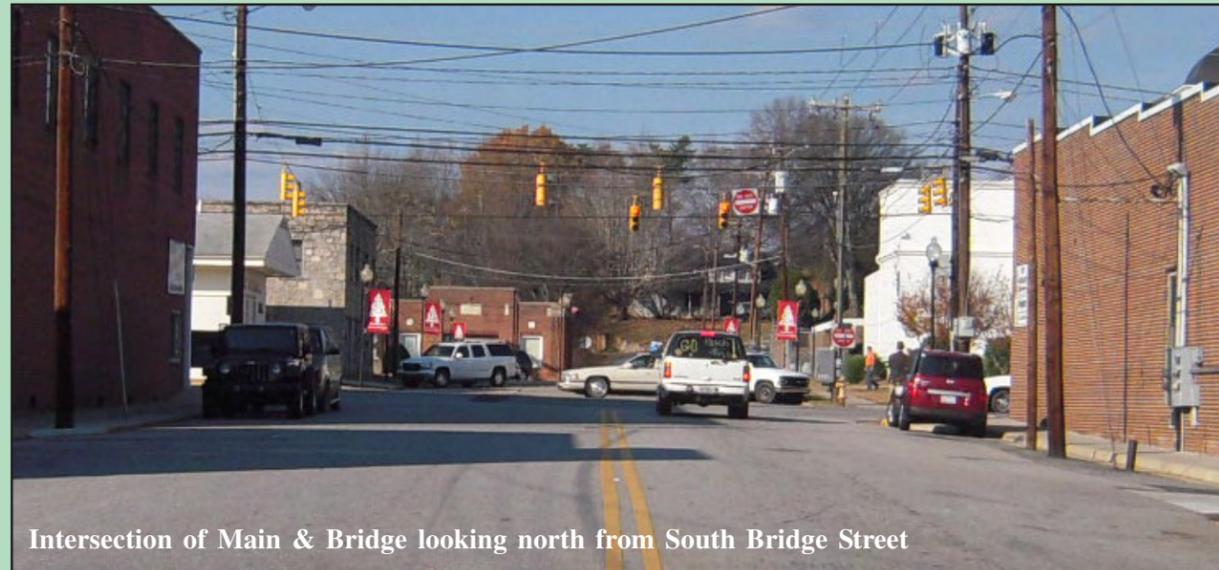
### On-Street Parking

At present, downtown's primary streets have parallel on-street parking, although Broad and North Bridge Streets feature angled parking. An objective is to provide angled parking wherever existing curb-to-curb widths will accommodate it, while accommodating two-way traffic. This objective is both to increase the number of spaces, and to narrow the street widths as a traffic-calming measure.

### Changes to On-street Parking

This plan proposes the following changes to on-street parking:

- a. *Main Street from Woodland to West:* 8 additional spaces by adding on-street spaces on the north side of Main Street once the left-lane at West Street is eliminated.
- b. *Main Street from West to Bridge:* 3 additional spaces by adding to both sides once left lanes at West and at Bridge Streets are eliminated.
- c. *Main Street from Bridge to East:* 5 additional spaces by adding 4 in front of the museum and 1 on the south side once the driveway to the Waggles parking lot is closed (this is a long-term goal not illustrated in the master plan).
- d. *West Street from Main to North:* 11 additional spaces by adding angled parking on the west side of N. West Street and removing the right-turn lane approach to Main Street.
- e. *West Street from Main to South:* 7 additional spaces by adding mostly to the east side, adjacent to the former Esso site and south to South Street.
- f. *Bridge Street from Main to North:* 7 fewer spaces by converting from angled



Intersection of Main & Bridge looking north from South Bridge Street



*The first block of Bridge, south of Main, offers an opportunity to convert some parallel parking on the east side to angled parking. That measure will increase the number of parking spaces and "calm" traffic by tightening the width of driving lanes. The proposed "pedestrian bulbs" at intersections will help to achieve these parking changes.*

to parallel parking on one side of Bridge Street. However, 2 to 6 new spaces could be created here with improvements to diagonal parking on the east side and future parking north of the museum if the county jail is relocated.

- g. *Bridge Street from Main to South:* 3 additional spaces by creating angled parking on both sides of Bridge Street from Main to South Streets.
- h. *Broad Street:* 7 additional on-street spaces might be created through the elimination of multiple curb cuts and improvements to the diagonal head-in parking on both sides of Broad Street.
- i. *North Street from West to Bridge:* 16 additional spaces by converting North Street to one-way westbound operation between the Town parking lot and West Street.
- j. *South Street from West to Bridge:* 17 additional spaces by keeping South Street one-way westbound and adding parallel parking on the north side of the street.

Being conservative, 24 feet parallel parking spaces were calculated, but an additional 6 to 7 parking spaces could be created on Main if the Town's 20 feet standard for parallel spaces were applied.

### Parking Management

At present, no parking management is occurring. This situation may not currently be a problem. However, as revitalization success is achieved and parking demands increase, management will likely be needed. Management does not require parking meters, but it should require that vehicles be limited to two to three hours for on-street parking. In the meantime, the merchants should ensure that they and their employees are not parking on-street so that shoppers have convenient parking.



*It is important to the economic health of a downtown that the most convenient parking - on street parking - be reserved for short-term users who will be shopping or dining for only a few hours. The only way to ensure the appropriate turnover is to manage the parking. A particularly harmful practice is when downtown employees parking on street rather than in long-term parking lots.*

# III. PHYSICAL PLAN

## Off-Street Parking

### Parking Lot Design

Efforts to add on-street parking spaces are introduced in this plan. This effort is to enhance customer satisfaction, encourage new customers, and mitigate the loss of off-street parking when the proposed new park/market eliminates some existing parking spaces. Similarly, the enhancement of some privately owned off-street parking lots is recommended, including paint-striping to define driving and parking areas, landscaping, and lighting. Such changes would enhance the overall customer experience and increase the likelihood of repeat visits. By better defining parking stalls, there may also be increased space efficiencies that yield more stalls. Below are examples of measures that can enhance parking lots:

- Relocate and screen dumpsters
- Provide landscaping and shade trees anywhere that vehicles are not intended to drive
- Provide human-scaled lighting to increase safety and perceptions of safety
- Clearly delineate parking stalls with paint-striping to maximize efficiencies and the number of stalls
- Enhance the connections between parking areas and Main Street with lighting and other improvements
- Provide directional signage along Main and other key streets to parking areas

### Parking Lot Screening

In a related recommendation, it is proposed that the front edges of parking lots facing Main Street be visually screened through landscaping, low fencing, and/or low walls. Sufficient space can be maintained so that vehicles can still access the lots, but there would be enough of a screening treatment to lessen the appearance of the void created by parking lots and to extend the street wall of Main.



Existing parking



Model parking design

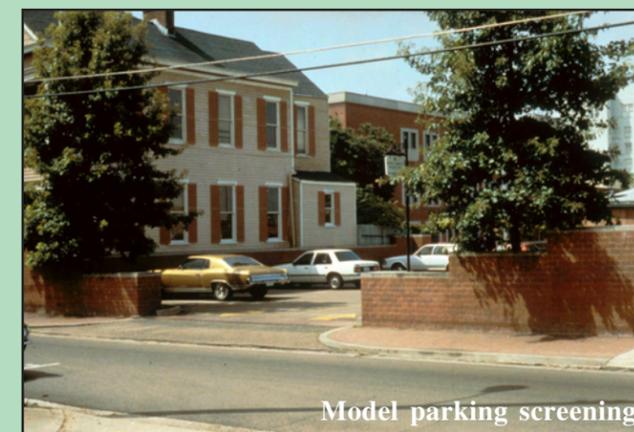
*The existing parking area behind the buildings flanking the south side of Main Street (top left) stands in stark contrast to the model parking lot depicted below. Many of downtown's existing parking lots fail to delineate driving aisles and parking stall and they lack landscaping, screening for dumpsters and lighting.*



*This blow-up of the master plan illustrates rear parking areas on the south side of Main Street between West and Bridge Streets. Recommended improvements include parking lot screening along Main, landscaping islands, and paint-stripe delineation of driving aisles and parking stalls.*



Existing parking lot on Main



Model parking screening

*The few parking lots fronting Main (above left) should remain as parking until additional parking elsewhere can compensate for any spaces lost by infill development. In the meantime, such lots should be screened with walls, fences, and/or landscaping (above right).*



Model parking lot connector

*Connections between Main Street and parking lots should be attractive and well-lit, such as the model above.*

# III. PHYSICAL PLAN

## GATEWAYS

### Purpose

A “gateway” is a point of entry into a community or special area offering a sense of arrival. Because it is a single point, it should not be confused with a “gateway corridor.” There are presently no clear-cut gateways into Downtown Wilkesboro that offer a strong sense of arrival. Gateways are important because they make a first and last impression for a downtown.

### Planning Principles

Gateway treatments are typically applied to locations that:

- Have a discernible change in landscape, land use, development pattern and/or overall character, and/or
- Will not be a “moving target” because of future development trends

Gateway treatments should convey a desired character, theme or message. They can come in a variety of shapes and sizes, including the following examples:

- Landscape elements
- Signs
- Arches
- Architectural elements
- Public art

Gateways should be applied sparingly. Not every entry point into an area warrants a gateway treatment. They should be reserved for key entry points.

### Recommendations

Because this plan recommends that a key part of the downtown’s branding be based upon its history and historic character (see page 54), and because the downtown’s National Register Historic District designation is such a significant and distinguishing facet of the downtown, it is recommended that the gateway treatments be located and focused on the National Register district.

### Locations

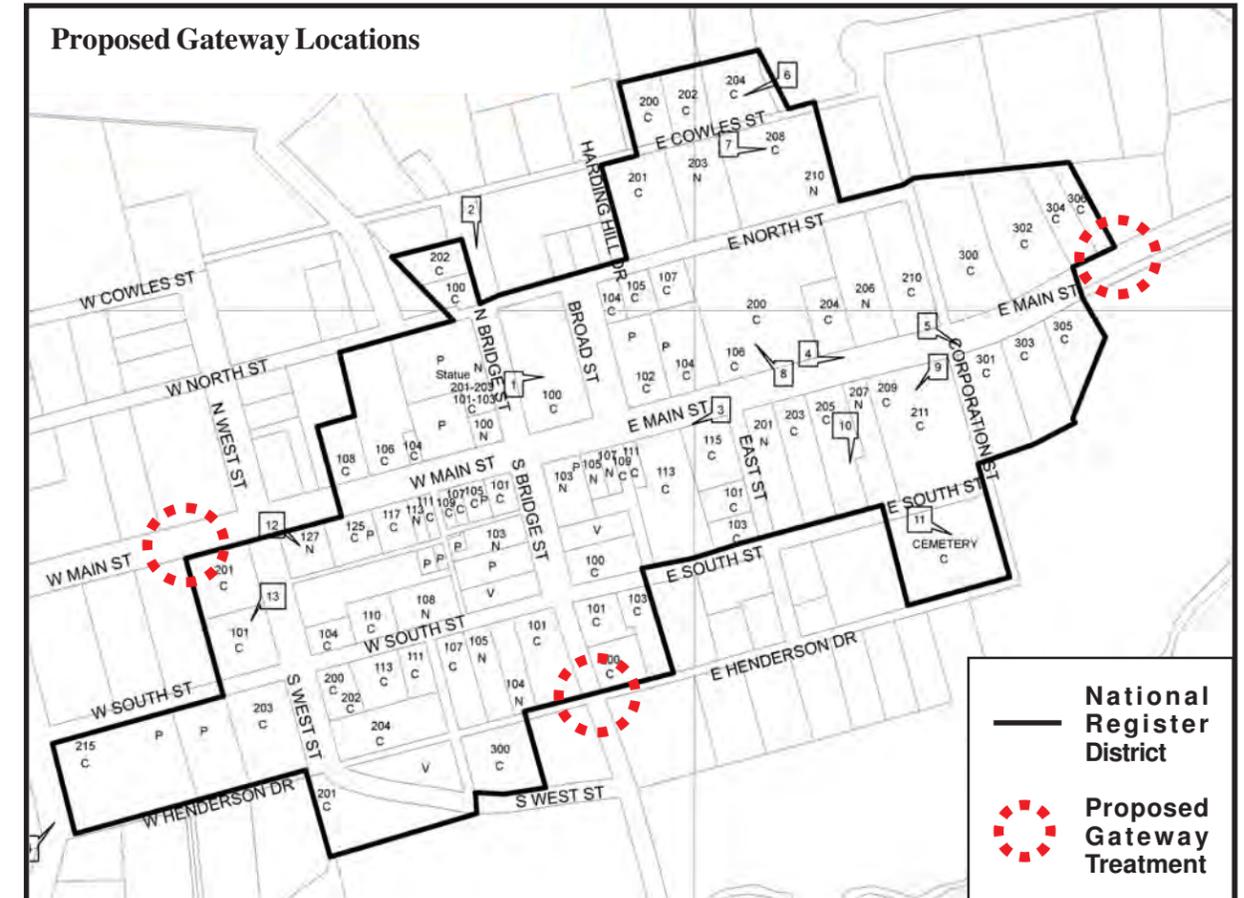
Based upon the key roads that lead in and out of Downtown Wilkesboro, it is recommended that the following three gateways receive a special treatment at the National Register boundaries:

- West: W. Main (between Woodland & West)
- East: E. Main (at N. R. boundary)
- South: Bridge (at Henderson)

Because of the low levels of traffic from the north, it is recommended that no northerly gateway be designated.

### Design Treatments

It is recommended that the gateways to “Historic Downtown Wilkesborough” be marked by only a sign and perhaps some complimentary landscaping. Below are examples of potential designs. Regardless of the exact design, it is recommended that a design that has a high quality (design and materials) and historic character be utilized.



### Sample Historic District Entry Signs



# III. PHYSICAL PLAN

## GREENWAYS: Linking Downtown & Its Context

Greenways are trails or linear parks that provide both a mode of transportation and outdoor recreation opportunities for hikers, cyclists and others. They often follow natural corridors such as stream or man-made corridors such as rail lines. Many greenways are linked to their regional downtowns.

### Current Status of the Greenway

The Yadkin River Greenway Council is a private non-profit organization established in 1995. The Town of Wilkesboro has partnered with the Council and supported the greenway's development through in-kind contributions, the pursuit of easements, and financial contributions, most of which originated with NCDOT funds. In addition to the financial support of the Greenway, including the purchase of signs and literature, the Council oversees master planning. At the bottom of this page is the current master plan depicting planned and completed segments.

### Proposed Greenway Extension

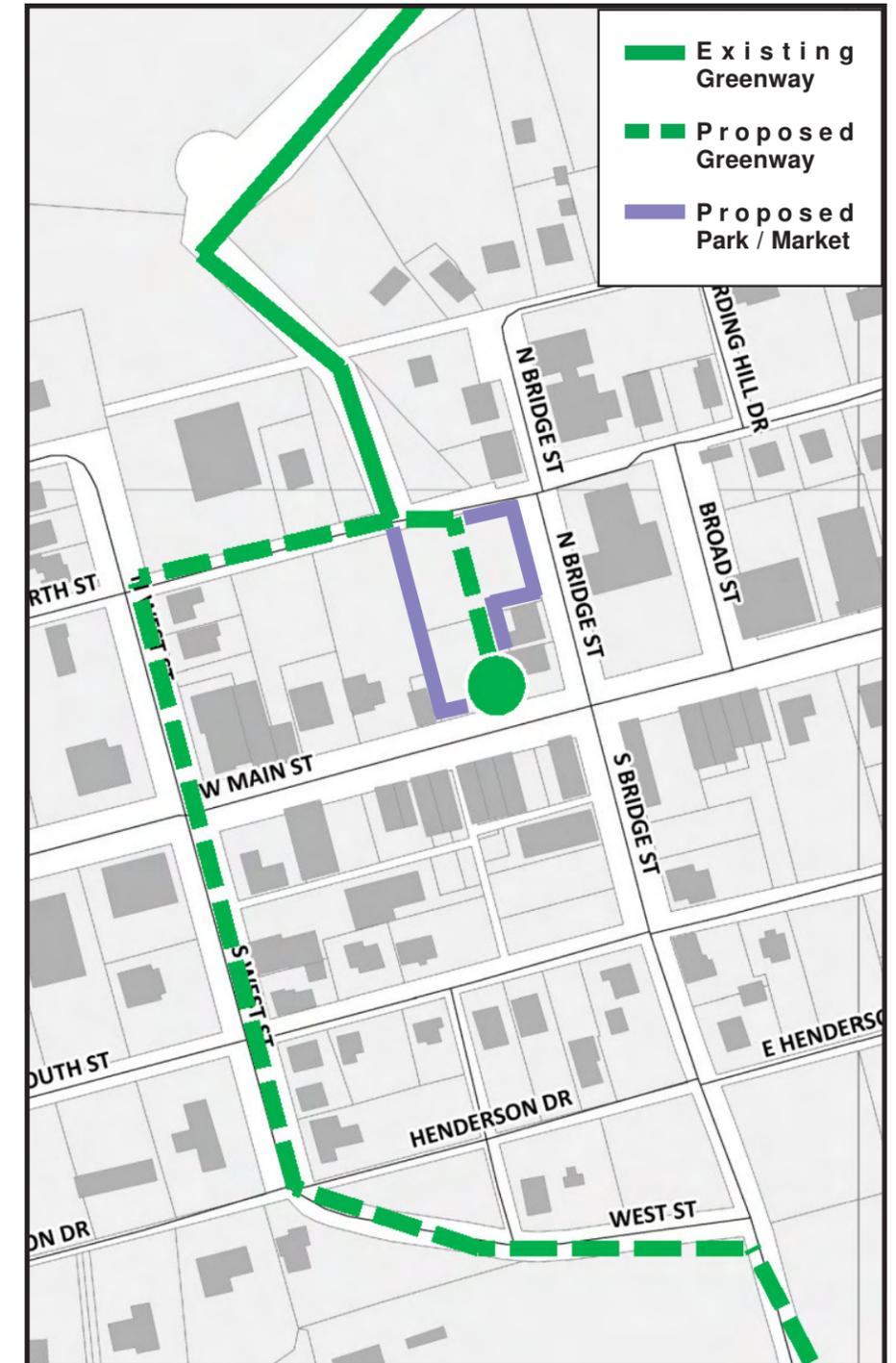
The greatest shortcomings of the current greenway spur into Downtown Wilkesboro are its lack of connectivity and the fact that the trailhead lacks visibility.



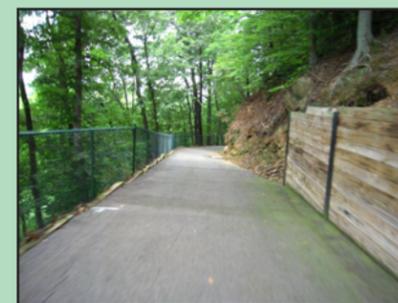
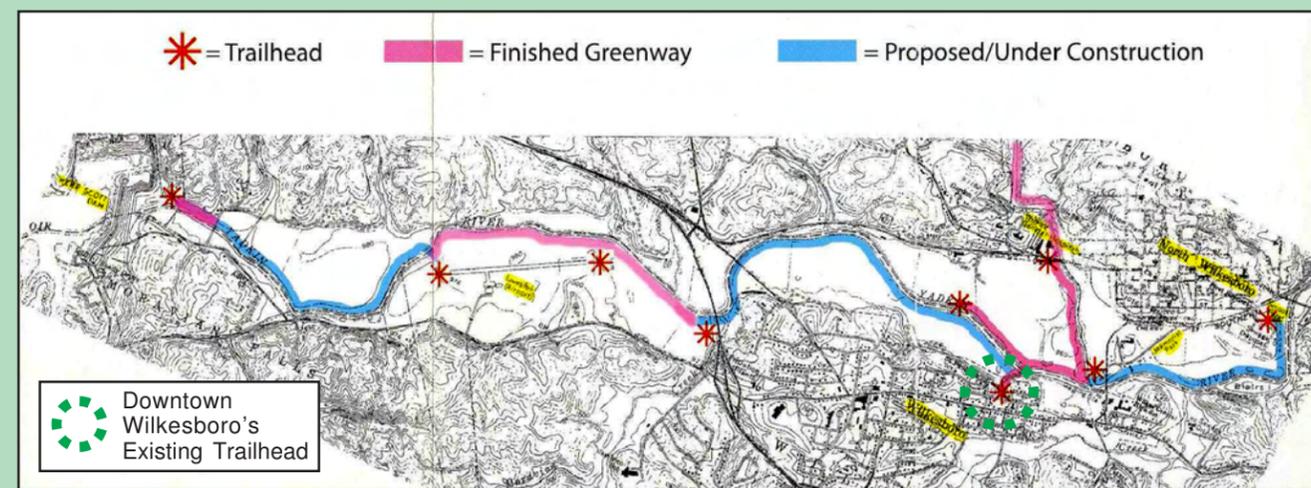
Although the nearby trailhead is recommended for relocation to the proposed park's Main Street frontage, it is still recommended that this canopy and fuel pumps be relocated as well. Owned by the County, they negatively impact the character of the area, including the greenway and nearby historic buildings. The area should eventually be landscaped.

The recommended improvements are as follows:

- 1) *Relocate the Trailhead:* The trailhead should be located on Main Street at the south end of the proposed new Park / Market (see the following page for details).
- 2) *Connect the Greenway to Cub Creek Park:* The map at right illustrates the proposed route. While a connection down Bridge Street to the park would be most direct, West Street is proposed because of less severe slopes.



### Yadkin River Greenway Master Plan



This segment of the greenway extends north toward the river from the current downtown trailhead on North Street. It connects to Downtown North Wilkesboro.

# III. PHYSICAL PLAN

## PROPOSED NEW PARK/MARKET

Based upon the Small Town Main Street Committee’s work on this park prior to this planning process, as well as the public input obtained since, this public space should be designed for the following uses (see page 57 regarding management):

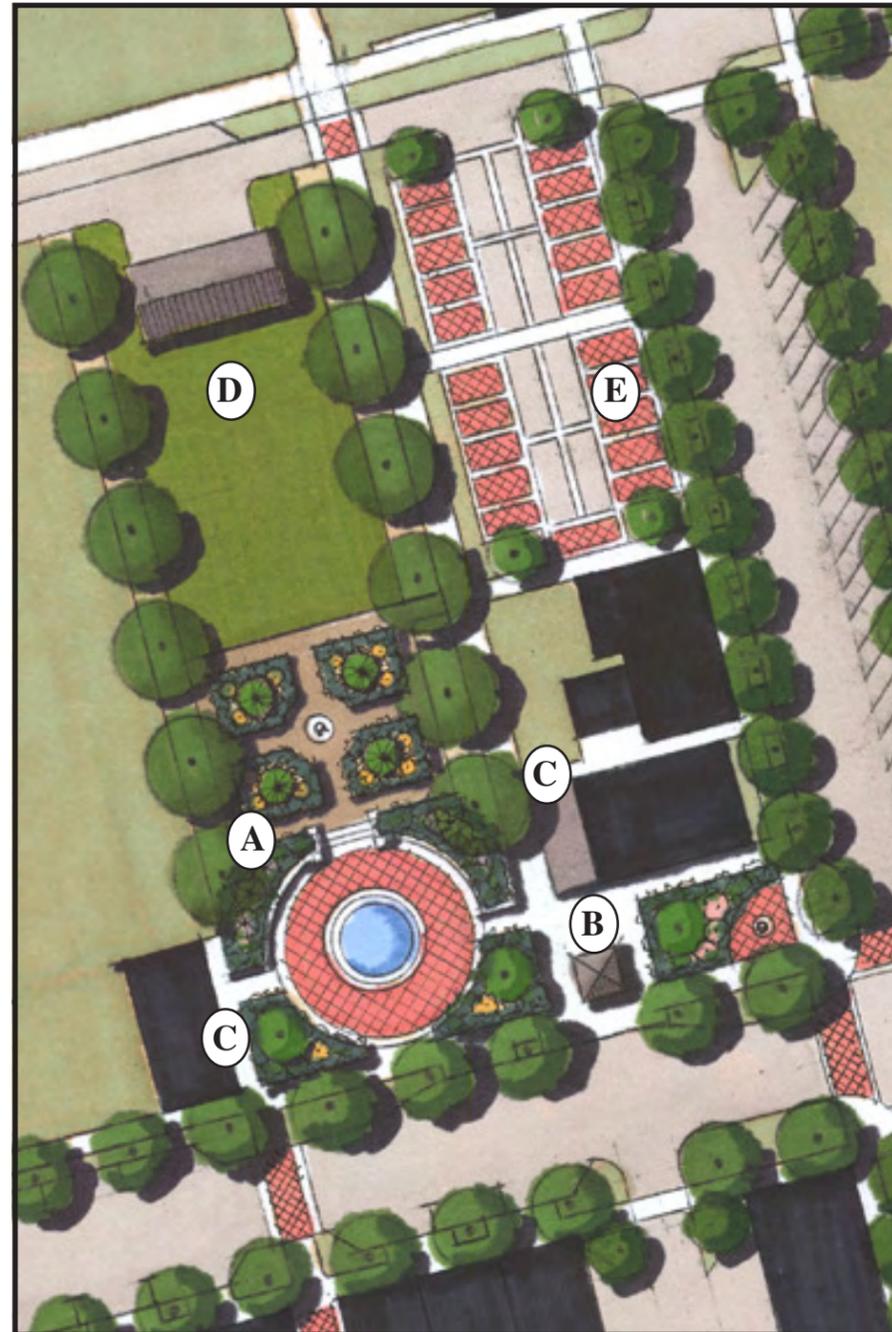
- Passive recreation
- Special events / markets
- Parking during non-event times

To achieve these goals, the following features are proposed (see map at right):

- A) Plaza with Fountain & Garden  
Serving as the most formal portion of the park, this space will be at the same grade level as the Main Street sidewalk and anchored by a fountain. The front portion of the plaza will step up in grade level to a formal garden, which could be anchored by the relocated Cleveland statue.
- B) Relocated Greenway Trailhead & Bus Stop  
The greenway will traverse the east side of the lawn (“D” below) and terminate at Main Street. A small shelter will serve as both a trailhead and a bus stop. An informational and interpretive kiosk can be part of this structure.
- C) Outdoor Dining at Adjacent Restaurants  
This idea will be a private sector venture to help activate the park’s edges.
- D) Lawn & Stage/Pavilion  
An expansive lawn area, anchored at the north end by a stage/pavilion for outdoor performances and framed on each side by a tree row, can serve as seating during events and passive recreation space at other times.
- E) Space for Parking & Market Vendors  
This area will feature attractive permeable pavers on both sides, but scored concrete elsewhere. During market events it will be used by vendors and their vehicles, but it will provide additional parking space at all other times.

Although public restrooms are not proposed as part of the park, it is recommended that the idea of adapting the adjacent former Wilkesboro Fire Department Building for that use, as well as other Town uses (Recreation Department offices, etc.) be explored. Also, it is recommended that this space be named “Cleveland Park” after Revolutionary War hero Colonel Benjamin Cleveland.

Proposed Park/Market Concept Plan



Special pavers can allow stormwater to permeate while providing a rich material when the parking is used for events.

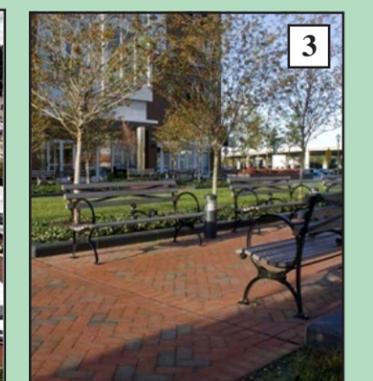
The Colonel Benjamin Cleveland statue should be relocated to become the focal point of the proposed garden..



## Character Images

These images represent the following components of the park:

- 1) Stage/pavilion
- 2) Formal garden area
- 3) Plaza area
- 4) Parking/vending area
- 5) Parking/vending area



# III. PHYSICAL PLAN

## OTHER PUBLIC SPACES

In addition the proposed new public spaces, such as the extended greenway and the new park/market, there are wonderful opportunities to enhance some of Downtown Wilkesboro's existing spaces.

### Wilkes Heritage Museum Lawn

The Old Courthouse (Wilkes Heritage Museum) lawn is perhaps the single most significant public space in Wilkesboro. Consequently, it is critical that the historic integrity of the space be protected by avoiding significant changes. Furthermore, any changes would require the approval of the Wilkes Heritage Museum. Below are recommended minor improvements that are consistent with this approach:

- Eliminate Peripheral Utility Poles & Overhead Lines  
Although this plan has acknowledged the costs of burying utilities and provides a streetscape design alternative that would keep overhead utilities, their removal at this key location could greatly enhance its visual quality.
- Frame the Space with Street Trees  
Adding street trees along Main, Bridge and Broad Streets would better define the space, and such treatment is consistent with this plan's streetscape concept.
- Achieve Symmetry with Lawn Plantings  
By balancing existing trees on the west side with similar new trees on the east side, the symmetry of the Courthouse's design will be reinforced.
- Provide More Seating  
At present, there is very little seating in the lawn. It is recommended that "Savannah" style benches (see page 49) be provided to make the space more user-friendly.



The Courthouse lawn's integrity should be preserved and reinforced.

### Existing Plazas

There are two small plazas existing in the downtown that are both associated with governmental buildings and that are adjacent to one another. The Town Hall's plaza has no seating or other amenities to attract users. While the Federal Building's plaza does have a peripheral wall that can be used as informal seating, there are no other user-friendly features. Consequently, the following improvements are recommended:

- Federal Building Plaza  
As a supplement to the informal seating already provided by the peripheral wall, it is recommended that benches be provided in this space.
- Town Hall Plaza  
Two minor improvements could greatly enhance this space:
  - Provide benches to make the space user-friendly
  - Provide peripheral low hedges to better define the space and make it more comfortable with a sense of physical enclosure

Another element that may be needed in both spaces is trash recepticals, although it is recommended that they not be placed too close to the seating areas.



Federal Building Plaza



Town Hall Plaza

### Cemetery

The historic cemetery is located in the southeast corner of the study area and bound by South, Henderson and Corporation Streets. The earliest headstone dates to 1811, so it has clearly been an important component of the community since its earliest years. The cemetery is significant at multiple levels, including as a final resting place for past Wilkesboro citizens, as a historic site, and as an important stop on the Candlelight Ghost Tours that are sponsored by the Wilkes Heritage Museum. Not only do the ghost tours help to activate the downtown on the occasional evenings that they occur, but they are also tied into an annual paranormal conference held at the museum that brings people to Downtown Wilkesboro.



This logo is courtesy of the Wilkes Heritage Museum

### Recommendations

The following recommendations are provided:

- Replace the existing chain link fence surrounding the cemetery with a more traditional looking fence.
- Provide a high-quality interpretive wayside exhibit to tell the cemetery's story.
- Encourage a local organization (boy/girl scouts, community service organization, etc.) to "adopt" the cemetery for on-going maintenance and improvements.



While not inexpensive, the replacement of the cemetery's existing chain link fence (left) with a higher-quality and more traditional fence (right) would greatly improve the integrity and historic character of the cemetery.

# III. PHYSICAL PLAN

## STREETSCAPES

### Issues & Objectives

#### Issues

Key issues that need addressing for downtown’s existing streetscape include:

- The sidewalks are relatively narrow in some segments and are made of plain concrete.
- There is a general lack of street trees and furnishings (seating, trash receptacles, etc.)
- Utility poles and overhead lines add visual clutter that lessens downtown’s aesthetics.
- Parking lots fronting Main feature driveways that interrupt the streetscape.
- Most of Main is impervious.

### Proposed Design

The ideal streetscape for Main Street includes wider sidewalks, separated from narrowed travel lanes by a generous planting and furnishing zone. The recommended design for Main Street would increase pedestrian comfort and safety, while improving the environment.

#### Increasing Pervious Surfaces

The majority of Main Street is currently totally paved with impervious surfaces. One of the goals of the streetscape design is to increase pervious surface area within the current right-of-way. The design utilizes permeable pavers for on-street parking. The pavers will not only add to the beauty of the street and help visually separate the travel from the parking lanes, but they will also reduce the amount of storm water runoff from carrying contaminants and pollutants to the adjacent natural waterways. Porous concrete is also incorporated within the furnishing zone to allow water infiltration to tree root zones. The porous concrete is ideal for walkways because it does not create a tripping hazard like pavers might.

#### Existing Conditions



North side of Main between West and Bridge

#### Energy-Efficient Lighting

Pedestrian-scale LED (light-emitting diode) lighting should be considered for streetlights. The LED light fixtures will reduce energy consumption and produce a white light that is more attractive than typical street lights. The design for Main Street calls for lights mounted on staggered poles within the furnishing zone that are tall enough to illuminate both the street and the sidewalk.

#### Street Trees

The design utilizes open planters containing understory street trees and low-maintenance plantings. Understory trees must be used in locations currently containing overhead utilities, but they will also be appropriate if overhead utilities are removed given the one to two-story scale of the buildings along Main. Native species should be given priority over non-native trees in the streetscape (see list at bottom right). Trees will have to be pruned just high enough to allow for pedestrian and vehicular traffic. When properly maintained, the understory trees will fill the overhead space between the street and the utility lines.

#### Planters

Plantings beneath the trees in open planters will provide color and texture, and will help soften the hardscape within the public right-of-way. The planters should be surrounded by raised curbs that will help prevent salt and other chemicals from washing into the planter soil. The curbs will also prevent soil and mulch from washing out of the beds and onto the sidewalk and street. The understory plantings should consist of a mixture of low-maintenance plants, including flowering perennials, groundcovers, and ornamental grasses.

#### Other Design Features

On-street parking has been formalized by the use of curb extensions at intersections and access points. See [page 48](#) for more on these “pedestrian bulbs.” The design proposes the removal of utility poles from pedestrian walkways. If kept, they should be located within the new furnishing zone. The furnishing zone requires that the sidewalks be widened a couple of feet. The wider sidewalks allow for the separation of pedestrians from the roadway, and, thus increased comfort and a sense of safety for pedestrians.

#### Character Images

The two images at right are intended to convey the general look and feel of the proposed new streetscape design for Downtown Wilkesboro. While it is not proposed that downtown’s sidewalks be constructed of brick, it is proposed that the on-street parallel parking be paved with bricks. The landscaped areas in the planters on the outside of the sidewalk are similar in character to the proposed design for Downtown Wilkesboro.



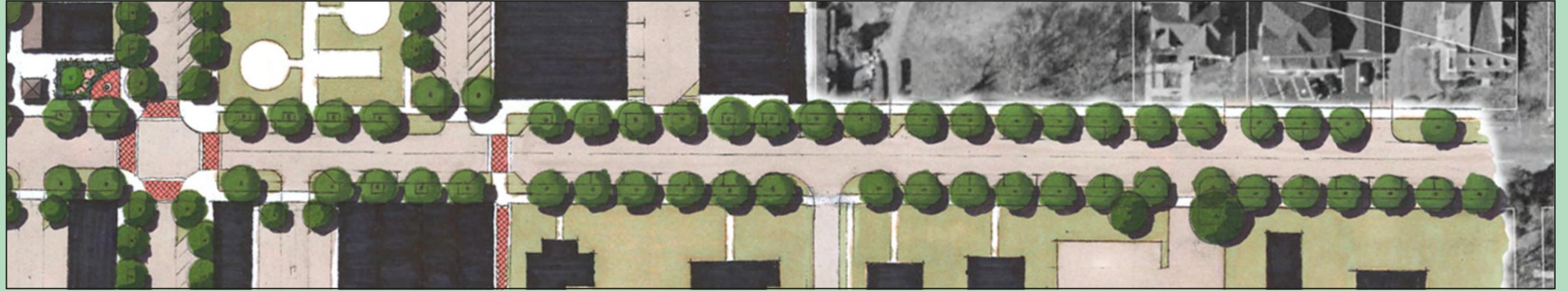
#### Recommended Street Trees List

American Fringe Tree	Serviceberry
Eastern Redbud	Flowering Dogwood
Trident Maple	Amur Maple
American Hornbeam	Crapemyrtle

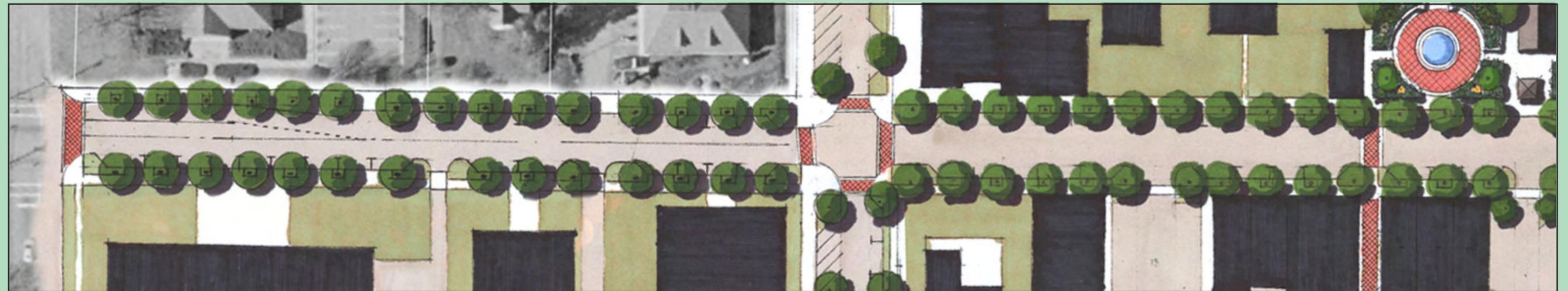
# III. PHYSICAL PLAN

## STREETSCAPES: MAIN STREET

East Segment



West Segment



# III. PHYSICAL PLAN

## RENDERING: REDEVELOPED STREETScape ON MAIN STREET

This rendering illustrates the segment of Main between Bridge and West looking west. Key features include the following:

- An adaptive reuse of the former Esso station as a restaurant with outdoor dining
- An enhanced streetscape with:
  - Broader sidewalks
  - Street trees in landscaped planters
  - New street light poles and festive banners
  - Parallel on-street parking with pervious paving



# III. PHYSICAL PLAN

## STREETSCAPES: Key Features

### Pedestrian Bulbs

“Pedestrian bulbs” are a streetscape treatment at a street intersections whereby the sidewalk system extends out a bit into the street, often in a bulb-shaped pattern. Pedestrian bulbs provide many advantages, including:

- Decreasing the distance that a pedestrian walks to cross the street
- Providing traffic calming by “pinching down” or decreasing the driving width of streets
- Protecting the end vehicles in a row of on-street parking from being hit by moving vehicles
- Providing an opportunity for additional landscaping and streetscape furnishings

Because of the advantages, summarized above, pedestrian bulbs have been incorporated into the design for Downtown Wilkesboro’s streets.



Main Street’s current streetscape (left) lacks pedestrian bulbs. Bulbs (top right) decrease the distance that pedestrians walk to cross the street. Crosswalks (bottom right) often connect bulbs on either side of the street.

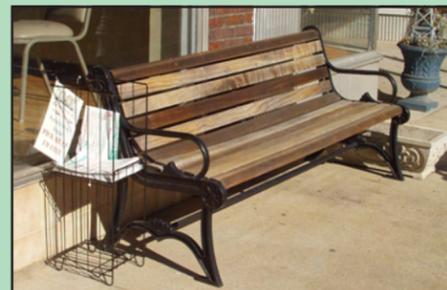
### Lighting & Furnishings

In addition to providing safety and comfort to downtown’s users, lighting and streetscape furnishings can add greatly to the downtown’s human scale and historic character. See [page 46](#) regarding the potential for LED lighting. Below are images and descriptions of recommended streetlights, benches, and trash receptacles that will reinforce a human scale and downtown’s historic character.

*While the globe currently used on downtown’s streetlights (left) has an attractive and historic character, the small diameter and lack of ornamentation are inconsistent with historic precedents for this type of lighting. Assuming it is cost-effective to reuse the existing globes, it is recommended that a thicker and more ornate pole be used (right).*



*To reinforce downtown’s historic character, it is recommended that a Savannah style bench be used, as well as any sort of trash receptacle similar to the one shown here.*



### Animating the Street

Downtowns are often judged by the amount of perceived activity occurring on their streets, and a casual observation reveals that Downtown Wilkesboro is in need of more animation. The following approaches are recommended for making downtown more interesting and appealing (see [page 51](#) regarding public art):

#### Encourage Outdoor Dining

Outdoor dining should be permitted on any street adjacent to a restaurant where sufficient sidewalk exists for pedestrians and wheelchairs to have unobstructed movement. This plan’s proposed streetscape improvements should help to further accommodate outdoor dining, especially where sidewalk widths will be increased. Also, see [page 44](#) regarding potential dining to front the proposed park/market.

#### Pipe Music onto the Streets

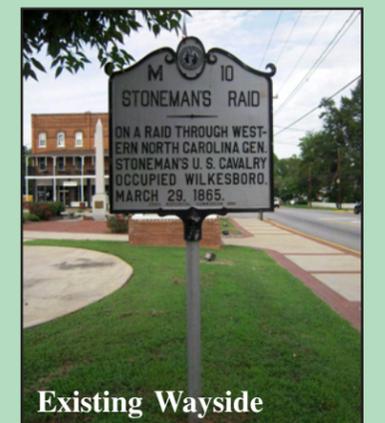
As long as it is not played at volumes that would be bothersome, and the selected music is “safe” with regard to its general appeal, outdoor music can greatly animate a downtown. It is recommended that the selected music be tied to the MerleFest branding of downtown discussed on [page 54](#). Royalty payment issues must be researched before implementing this idea.

#### Create Interpretive Wayside Exhibits

Interpretive wayside exhibits are an effective way to make a downtown more interesting. As noted previously in the Background section of this plan, Wilkesboro’s rich history offers many interesting stories to be told. The community’s military history alone includes stories of: General Lenoir who laid out the town’s plan; Colonel Benjamin Cleveland, a hero of the Battle of Kings Mountain, and the Tory Oak; Union Cavalry General Stoneman’s raid on the town in March of 1865; and the legend of Tom “Dooley” Dula.



*Outdoor dining seems to have reached an all-time high in popularity and it is an effective way to make urban streets more lively.*



**Existing Wayside**

# III. PHYSICAL PLAN

## STREETSCAPES: Key Features

### Interpretive Wayside Exhibits continued...

It is recommended that state-of-the-art interpretive wayside exhibits, similar to those utilized by the National Park Service, be provided throughout the downtown. They should be provided in locations where sufficient pedestrian travel space is available, such as the proposed pedestrian bulbs at intersections. The proposed new park/market is another location. If any are provided at the Wilkes Heritage Museum, they should be minimal in number to avoid the area from appearing too cluttered, given the number of monuments and other objects that already exist.

### Kiosk

It is recommended that a kiosk having three or more sides be provided to feature a downtown map and interpretive panels addressing General William Lenoir (see page 4), the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail, and the greenway. It should be designed with a historic character, and it might be located in the proposed new park or near the Wilkes Heritage Museum, historic jail, and cabin.

When Gettysburg, Pennsylvania's, Main Street program conducted a survey and found that only 25% of battlefield visitors were going downtown, they decided to lure more visitors by telling the story of the battle downtown (bottom left). It is more important that wayside exhibits be in a high-pedestrian area than where the historic event occurred. Murfreesboro, Tennessee, has pursued the same approach (right). General Stoneman's photograph (bottom right) is one of many graphics that could be used to more vividly tell his story.



### Overhead Utilities

At present, Downtown Wilkesboro's streets are lined with wooden utility poles and overhead lines for electricity and telecommunications. This situation has three key drawbacks: 1) potential temporary losses of service after storms caused by lines broken by fallen tree limbs, 2) the year-round negative visual impact of the poles and lines, and 3) the physical disruption to the streetscape caused by the poles, which can be particularly problematic for the access-challenged. Although this plan's streetscape concept design can accommodate either keeping or eliminating the poles and lines, many of downtown's stakeholders have expressed the desire to relocate or bury overhead lines. Below, are some considerations for addressing this issue.

### Current Types & Location of Utilities

The following utilities presently exist in Downtown Wilkesboro:

*Electrical Lines* - Provided by Duke Energy.

*Telecommunications* (telephone, television and internet) - Provided by three carriers: Charter, Embarq/Centurylink, and Wilkes Telecommunications

### Potential Costs to Bury or Relocated Utilities

Per-linear-foot costs of burying overhead utilities are lower when part of a streetscape redevelopment project than doing it as a stand-alone project. It is not possible to pinpoint costs until detailed engineering is conducted, which is beyond the scope of this plan. However, cost estimates for doing similar streetscape redevelopment work in other North Carolina communities are instructive. Using the roughly 1,000 foot distance between West and East Streets as a basis, the following potential streetscape redevelopment costs might apply to the Scenario A design (retaining existing curbing):

- Burying Overhead Wires - \$100/ft. @ 1,000 ft. = \$100,000
- Street Resurfacing - \$11.55/ft./lane @ 1,000 ft. X 2 driving lanes = \$23,100
- Parking Lane Resurfacing - \$12/sq.ft @ 1,000 ft. X 8 ft. X 2 lanes = \$192,000
- Street Marking - \$4/ft. @ 1,000 ft. = \$4,000
- Sidewalk Replacement - \$5.11/sq.ft. @ 20,000 sq.ft. (10 ft. X 1,000 ft. X 2) = \$143,080
- Handicapped Ramps - \$1,300/ramp @ 16 = \$20,800
- Street Trees - \$200/tree @ 50 (36 ft. spacing) = \$10,000
- Street Lights - \$2,500/light @ 20 (100 ft. spacing) = \$50,000

These figures total to \$542,980, and with a 25% contingency for unforeseeable costs, the total is \$678,725 or approximately \$678.73 per linear foot. It is noteworthy that streetlights and street trees do not include installation costs, while other costs

do include labor. Also, the street light costs are based on completely new lights, while a significant cost savings might occur if the existing globes are mounted on new poles, as has been recommended. Assuming a design cost of approximately 10 percent of the "hard costs" of implementing these public improvements (\$67,872.50), the total cost for redeveloped streetscape according to Scenario A between West and East Streets would be approximately \$746,597.50.

### Alternative to Burying Lines

One additional alternative to burying overhead lines or keeping them as they are is to increase the height of the lines. This approach would also require replacing the existing wooden utility poles with taller metal poles, but there are two potential advantages. One benefit is that there might be an opportunity to utilize fewer poles. The other potential benefit is that larger street trees might be provided than could otherwise occur with lower lines, and the trees' visual screening and the increased line height might lessen their overall visual impact.

This view of the Old Courthouse (Wilkes Heritage Museum) and its lawn area, taken from the northwest corner of the intersection of Main and Bridge Streets, illustrates the negative visual impact of the existing utility poles and overhead lines.



This view of the Old Courthouse (Wilkes Heritage Museum) and its lawn area, taken from the west side of the lawn, provides a sense of how this important site could appear without utility poles and overhead lines. Note that poles and lines can be seen at far right in the distance.



# III. PHYSICAL PLAN

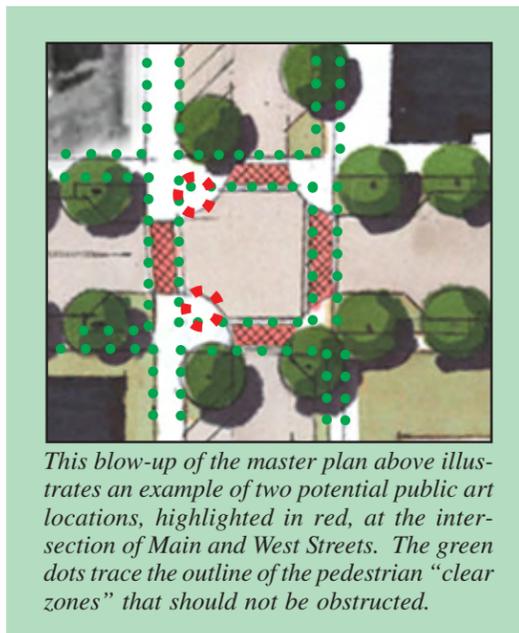
## PUBLIC ART & WAYFINDING

### Public Art

Public art is an excellent way to make a downtown street more interesting. There are three primary issues to consider in establishing a downtown public art program: the location of art, the type of art, and the management of art. Each issue is addressed below:

### Art Locations

It is recommended that art be located within public spaces and at street intersections where space permits. Examples of the types of public spaces that could accommodate public art include the proposed new park/market and the two small plazas in front of the Federal Building and the Town Hall. While the Wilkes Heritage Museum lawn might potentially accommodate public art, the existence of several monuments and similar items may lead to this area becoming cluttered, thereby adversely impacting its historic integrity. Within intersections, art might be placed at pedestrian bulbs at locations where pedestrian flows do not normally occur (see illustration above right)



*This blow-up of the master plan above illustrates an example of two potential public art locations, highlighted in red, at the intersection of Main and West Streets. The green dots trace the outline of the pedestrian “clear zones” that should not be obstructed.*

### Art Types

There will clearly need to be some guidelines and parameters regarding the type of public art that might occur in Downtown Wilkesboro. Because of the subjective nature of art, decisions regarding the type of art that might be allowed are completely up to the Town. There is no “right” or “wrong” answer that can be provided by consultants. However, one approach that should at least be considered would be to tie art to some theme for downtown that is linked to the branding concept for downtown. Two potential themes include the town’s rich history and MerleFest. Either way, a link with some unique aspect of the community would seem to be desirable relative to a theme that any community could adopt.



*These two examples of public art are tied to a unique theme for their respective downtowns. The horse statue at left in Downtown Louisville, Kentucky, fits the area’s thoroughbred theme. Similarly, the human statue at right depicts a historic personality associated with Ybor City, Florida’s, early years.*

### Art Management

The following issues must be addressed by a management entity that would oversee a public art program for Downtown Wilkesboro:

- Establishment and implementation of guidelines to select art
- Decisions on the location of art (in partnership with the Town)
- On-going maintenance of art

Rather than creating a new entity to manage a public art program for Downtown Wilkesboro, it is recommended that a partnership be established between the Small Town Main Street program’s design subcommittee and the Cultural Arts Council of Wilkes.

### Murals

Another form of public art that would require less consideration for locations and on-going management would be murals painted on blank walls. There are multiple buildings on Main in which the side wall faces an open space or parking lot, such as the antique mall that faces the former Esso station parking lot.

### Wayfinding

Wayfinding is the process of providing direction to people so they can find their way around a given area. Wayfinding is particularly important for downtowns that have various attractions and visitors who might be seeking them out. While wayfinding can be provided through various means, including websites, maps, brochures, and higher technology means, the most basic and effective method is through directional signage. The primary issues related to directional signage

include the types of destinations to be signed, the location of the signs, and the design character of the signs.

### Destinations for Wayfinding

Directional signage should be provided for the following destinations: Wilkes Heritage Museum, Old Town Jail, Cleveland Log House, Cub Creek Park, proposed new park/market, proposed new greenway trailway, and parking lots behind buildings on Main Street.

### Location of Directional Signage

Directional signs need to be located along key corridors, such as Main, and positioned with a reasonable lead distance that will give drivers time to react relative to negotiating traffic. They should also occur at any intersection that requires the driver to turn. Furthermore, where possible, directional signs should be added to existing poles/streetscape features so that signage is consolidated to avoid visual clutter. In fact, directional signs can be designed to provide directions to multiple destinations within the same single sign (see image below at left).

### Character of Signage

In general terms, it is recommended that wayfinding signage be either simple and contemporary looking (see below at left) or have a historic character that reinforces the character of downtown (see below at right). Regardless, it should be coordinated with the Yadkin Valley Heritage Corridor’s wayfinding format, which is yet to be determined.



*These two wayfinding signs illustrate two options for design character: a contemporary and simple design (left) that does not visually compete with other streetscape elements, and a historic-themed sign (right).*



## IV. NON-DESIGN ISSUES

### SECTION CONTENTS

ORGANIZATION  
ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING  
MARKETING & PROMOTION

HISTORIC DOWNTOWN WILKESBORO MASTER PLAN  
WILKESBORO, NORTH CAROLINA

# IV. NON-DESIGN ISSUES

## ORGANIZATION

Downtown revitalization does not happen on its own if there is not deliberate intervention; without some sort of organization to spearhead the effort, it is difficult to make progress. Consequently, the following key recommendations for organization are offered:

- *Small Town Main Street Committee should continue as the lead entity for downtown revitalization.* Wilkesboro is fortunate to have earned the designation and should take full advantage of the program, including the technical assistance provided by the North Carolina Main Street program. While it would be ideal to have an independent entity with a paid executive director (either part or full time), such a scenario would be very difficult to achieve for such a small community and small downtown. Thus, the current structure of support by Town staff makes sense, although it will be important to continue to solicit support via private sector participation.
- *Continue use of the subcommittee system for the Main Street program.* The current subcommittee structure mirrors the Main Street “Four Point” approach: organization, design, economic restructuring, and promotion. Because of this master plan’s focus on physical improvements for downtown, the program’s design subcommittee will play a key role in pursuing the plan’s recommendations.
- *Create a merchants association as an arm of the Main Street Program.* Although Downtown Wilkesboro currently has a small number of retail and service businesses, it is important that the owners and operators of those businesses become directly engaged in the downtown revitalization process. Their participation will be particularly important for this plan’s economic restructuring and promotion recommendations on the following pages, such as the implementation of centralized retail management techniques.
- *Establish an entity to operate the market at the proposed new park.* See recommendations on this concept on [page 57](#) of the Implementation Strategy.



The Main Street program’s system of subcommittees to address downtown issues has a track record of success across the country.

## ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING

### Market Based Principles

The following principles form the basis for the market strategy for the study area:

- *The length of stay of downtown visitors will strongly correlate with the amount of money spent.* However, the correlation is much weaker for some specific uses, such as governmental uses (Town Hall, Federal Building, etc.).
- *It is better to serve multiple market segments simultaneously than to have a singular focus on any one segment.* However, it is important to project a single and cohesive image for the downtown when marketing.
- *Rent is a function of sales.* Downtown landlords should have a strong profit motive to be concerned with their tenants’ merchandising and operations, such as business days and hours, marketing approaches, product lines, and window display appearances.
- *More pedestrian street activity is better than less.* “Sidewalk density” can serve as just one indication of economic success in a downtown.
- *Future downtown residents can contribute toward a safe and “lived in” atmosphere that draws many more people to the area for shopping, services and entertainment.* However, the residents will not be a large enough market, on their own, to support downtown’s retail sector.
- *People will walk a maximum of approximately three blocks in downtowns of small communities, such as Wilkesboro, in order to reach a destination before resorting to an automobile.* Rainy or hot weather can reduce that distance, as can real or perceived barriers, as well as too many vacant lots and parking lots.
- *A downtown retailer has approximately 6 seconds to attract a window shopper based upon an average storefront width of 25 feet and pedestrian speeds of 3 miles per hour.*
- *A successful retailer’s goal should be to always exceed consumer expectations.* For a variety of reasons, it is difficult enough for urban businesses to compete with suburban businesses. However, independently-owned smaller businesses also have more flexibility to follow “opening day standards” when conducting business.

### Business Retention, Expansion & Recruitment

It must always be kept in mind that people visit a downtown primarily for the businesses that are located there, as opposed to being drawn by building facades

or shiny new sidewalks. Thus, for truly successful revitalization to occur, an emphasis must be placed on achieving a critical mass of desirable businesses. The first focus should be on the retention and expansion of existing businesses that are considered to contribute to downtown’s success. The Main Street’s economic restructuring subcommittee should take the lead on this front by having a continued dialogue with existing business owners and operators to monitor their success and concerns. For example, if they are facing challenges related to parking, building codes, or landlord relations, the committee should work to find solutions. Although also important, the recruitment of new businesses should be a secondary concern relative to existing desirable businesses. Nevertheless, the national and state Main Street programs have effective steps to suggest in developing and executing a business recruitment strategy.

### Potential New Businesses

The only way to determine with any certainty the types of new businesses that might be able to prosper in Downtown Wilkesboro is through the performance of a market analysis by an experienced professional. However, until such time as a market analysis can be conducted, the following business types are suggested based upon existing voids in downtown’s business selection, the expressed desires of stakeholders, and what has worked in other similarly-situated small downtowns:

- Outfitters Store (outdoor recreation clothing and equipment)
- Wine-Tasting Room & Shop (highlighting local/regional wines)
- Coffee House / Used Book Store
- Varied Restaurants (including fine dining)
- Micro-Brewery and/or Sports Bar
- Day care
- Live Entertainment (potentially music with a MerleFest affiliation)
- Antiques
- Lodging (potentially an inn at the Smithey Hotel)

# IV. NON-DESIGN ISSUES

## MARKETING & PROMOTION

The marketing and promotion of Downtown Wilkesboro will entail a range of strategies, including centralized retail management and other efforts. The Main Street program's promotion subcommittee will need to spearhead these efforts in collaboration with a merchants association, once one is established.

### Centralized Retail Management

Centralized Retail Management (CRM) is the same technique used by thousands of shopping malls across the country in which the retailers are organized to function as a single unit. CRM can include coordinated days and hours of operation, use of a logo, joint advertising, common area maintenance, and a tenant location strategy, although the latter two are not recommended for Downtown Wilkesboro based upon the downtown's small geographic area and challenges to sustaining on-going costs. Below is a description of some key CRM techniques that should be applied to Downtown Wilkesboro:

#### Consistent/Extended Days & Hours of Operation

One competitive advantage enjoyed by suburban shopping malls is that all mall tenants must comply with consistent days and hours of operation, and the community's shoppers are aware of those days and hours of operation because of that consistency. Downtown Wilkesboro needs to use the same strategy. At present, most retail and service businesses in the downtown operate from 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM during weekdays, most are open on Saturday, and none are open on Sunday. Downtown's most popular restaurant - 50s - is not open for dinner. Business operators in small downtowns often explain that the low volume of business cannot justify enduring the costs of staying open later and throughout the weekend. They are correct because, as long as the market believes that downtown is essentially closed on evenings and weekends, few people will venture downtown.

Instead, downtown's retailers must band together and agree on the specific days and hours of extended operations. A good starting point is for all businesses to remain open every Friday and Saturday evening, as well as staying open on weekdays until at least 7:00 PM to give shoppers a window of opportunity to make purchases after work. Many retailers will continue to close on Sundays for religious reasons, and that decision must be respected. With regard to weekday evenings, some downtowns select one or two days per week or month to keep shops open and they make sure to get the word out through advertising. While

the growing pains can be difficult, and it may take up to six months of extended hours before the market catches on, the long-term rewards are usually worth it. For Wilkesboro, it is recommended that any experiments with extended hours during weekdays be tied to any events that might be programmed for the proposed new park/market, as well as events of the Wilkes Heritage Museum, such as the candlelight ghost tours.

#### Logo

A good starting point for any downtown marketing program is the adoption of a logo. In addition to being incorporated into the letterhead of the downtown organization (Small Town Main Street program), it can also be used for joint advertising, decorative banners for street lights, shopping bags of downtown businesses, and similar uses. If a logo is adopted, it should be simple, easily recognized, and convey a high level of quality.

#### Joint Advertising

Joint advertising is an approach in which multiple businesses combine their efforts to advertise as a cohesive unit. By advertising jointly, the public will begin to see Downtown Wilkesboro as a singular destination for dining and buying goods and services, much like a shopping mall. Of course, this objective will be more capable of being achieved when more businesses open in the downtown to create a critical mass. Although this strategy may need to be deferred until business development can occur and there is greater financial "strength in numbers," the optimal times to pursue joint advertising may be during holidays.

## Other Marketing & Promotional Strategies

#### Brochures

Brochures promoting downtowns have been a dependable tool for many years and they are still relevant and effective today. In fact, websites have enabled them to be downloaded, which makes them that much more accessible to the public. A good brochure design balances high-quality graphics with the minimal amount of text needed to convey the most important information. While some downtowns have several different brochures (especially larger ones), each with its own separate theme, two should meet Wilkesboro's current needs. One brochure should address the area's history, both in general terms and on a building-specific basis. It should be coordinated with the Wilkes Heritage Museum's existing walking tour of the downtown. Fortunately, many historic photographs of downtown are available for use. The other brochure should focus on existing businesses and cultural activities, as well as highlighting parking. Because of tenant turnover, this brochure will require periodic updating, but the one on downtown's history will not require such updates for obvious reasons. Attention

paid to content and design will be of little value if the brochures never make it into the hands of the public. Geographically, the area of distribution should be broad. It should include Downtown Wilkesboro itself, the nearby visitors center on the highway, and regional communities such as Boone and Winston-Salem. Brochures should also be provided to area hotels and restaurants. Also, the brochures should be provided to groups that are easily targeted, such as congregations of the downtown area churches, local government employees, and MerleFest visitors.

#### Window Displays

A rule of thumb in the retail industry cited previously is that an impulse shopper decides whether or not to enter a store in approximately 6 seconds. People really do "judge a book by its cover," and nothing reflects more strongly on a shop's merchandise and quality than its window displays. Typical shortcomings of storefront displays for many small businesses in downtown locations include a lack of creativity in their design, too much time between changing displays, and not keeping storefronts lit in the evening. Not only does unlit storefronts represent a missed opportunity for advertising businesses and animating the downtown, but the lack of lighting makes downtown appear to be less safe at night. Merchants have cited cost issues with keeping storefronts lit at night, so energy-efficient bulbs should be explored. In addition to keeping window displays lit all night, it is recommended that a greater level of thought and creativity go into creating window displays. The input of experts should be considered, and window displays should be changed every month at a minimum. Also, "cross marketing" with other Downtown Wilkesboro businesses should be considered in which merchandise from other downtown stores is utilized and credited in a particular display.



*Not only does this model window display stay lit all evening, but it uses fans to blow the apparel, giving it an animated appearance that enlivens the street.*

# IV. NON-DESIGN ISSUES

## Sales Promotions

At present, sales promotions are occasionally organized in Downtown Wilkesboro by a small group of business owners, but they should be held more frequently. As with joint advertising, sales promotions will require a great deal of teamwork among various businesses, so promotions should be coordinated by the Small Town Main Street program and the proposed downtown merchants association. Key holidays often serve as a good opportunity for sales promotions, and joint advertising should be used to market sales events. All sales promotions should focus on quality and avoid a “bargain basement” image for Downtown Wilkesboro. Standards for the outdoor display of goods should be adopted and enforced to include requirements such as attractive skirting for tables.



*Even without a formal organizational structure in place, a handful of downtown merchants have been able to hold occasional sidewalk sales events as a means of increasing downtown's visibility.*

## Wilkes Heritage Museum Programs

Downtown Wilkesboro is quite fortunate to have such a high-quality museum, housed in an architectural gem, as a key anchor of activity. The more this facility can thrive, the more downtown will thrive. While the proposed new park/market will provide an additional venue for programs of the museum, such as living history demonstrations, the current jail property to the immediate north offers even greater potential. As already proposed on page 32 of this plan, it is recommended that - if and when this facility is abandoned for a new location - this site be adapted for additional parking, as well as storage and programming space for the museum. There may also be potential to partner with the community college and conduct classes here that are related to crafts and artisan type activities.

## “Movies on Main Street”

Many downtowns have had success in attracting crowds by holding periodic movie showings outside at night during the warmer months. They can be projected on a large screen/sheet or the side of a building. There are a couple of potential sites in Downtown Wilkesboro where the sides of the building are adjacent to a large open space that could lend itself to this arrangement. In particular, the side of the antique mall building that faces west toward the former Esso station would be an excellent location for such movies. A non-profit group such as the Small Town Main Street Committee or the Wilkes Heritage Museum could organize these events as fund raisers for their mission.

## MerleFest Events

Most of MerleFest's events currently occur at the community college, but it is recommended that at least some performances occur downtown once the park/market is developed, complete with the stage/pavilion. This measure would not only benefit downtown economically, assuming businesses mobilize to capitalize on the event, but it would also reinforce the MerleFest “branding” concept for downtown proposed below.

## Branding Downtown with MerleFest

Given the national and even international recognition that MerleFest receives, its fame has not been leveraged sufficiently to provide year-round benefits to Wilkesboro. It is recommended that the downtown somehow be branded with MerleFest. Two examples of how to give downtown a year-round MerleFest presence would be to pipe relevant music into the streets, as well as to have a dining/entertainment establishment that would feature regularly-scheduled live music that is consistent with the types of music played at MerleFest. Clearly, using the MerleFest name, logo, and other elements would require a formal agreement with the MerleFest entity, and the entity may require that certain quality control standards be enforced. Nevertheless, the potential benefits would be worth exploring such a branding approach.

*MerleFest provides enormous economic benefits to the Wilkesboro economy because of the large number of visitors it attracts. Although the community college serves as the ideal location for the majority of related events, it is recommended that some events be held in Downtown Wilkesboro once the proposed park/market is developed.*



Photographs by Jim Dirden



Photo by Jim Dirden

## Special Events

In addition to their fund-raising potential for the proposed new downtown merchants association, special events are important because they can attract people to Downtown Wilkesboro to have a positive experience. Even if they do not spend money in downtown businesses during the event, the exposure to downtown might prompt them to return for subsequent visits. Once the proposed park/market is developed, there will be a multitude of opportunities for special events. It is recommended that quality be emphasized over quantity, although a regularly held series (Shakespeare in the Park, Thursday Evening Jazz Concert, etc.) can be relatively easy to orchestrate once the initial work is done, and they can be beneficial to the downtown. In addition to the proposed farmers/craft market events that could be held weekly, the following three types of special events are recommended for Downtown Wilkesboro:

## Rename the Downtown Area

Because the downtown's rich history and historic character have been identified as key themes associated with the image that should be conveyed for downtown, the area's name should be consistent with that them. It is recommended that the downtown be referred to as “Historic Downtown Wilkesborough,” thereby using the original spelling of the community.



## V. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

### SECTION CONTENTS

ZONING & DESIGN STANDARDS  
BUILDING CODES FOR HISTORIC BUILDINGS  
STRATEGY FOR FARMERS/CRAFT MARKET  
FUNDING SOURCES  
IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX

HISTORIC DOWNTOWN WILKESBORO MASTER PLAN  
WILKESBORO, NORTH CAROLINA

# V. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

## ZONING, HISTORIC ZONING & CLG STATUS

### Zoning

A review of the downtown's existing zoning is provided on [page 19](#) of this plan's Background section. The recommendations below are based upon that existing zoning, as well as the proposed Land Use Plan contained on [page 28](#) of this plan. In general, it is not recommended that new zoning classifications be created for downtown, as the current categories are consistent enough with this plan as long as some boundary adjustments are made and as long as the historic district overlay zoning continues to serve as a "safety net" on design issues. It is also noteworthy that the proposed Land Use Plan should not be interpreted as being in need of a translation into zoning. For example, while the Land Use Plan illustrates a distinct Civic/Institutional area on the west end of Main, the current Central Business District (B-1) zoning accommodates such uses, so a separate zoning classification for civic/institutional uses is unnecessary.

### Adjust the Central Business District (B-1) Boundaries

The boundaries for this zone should be adjusted to be consistent with this plan's recommended Land Use Plan. In particular, the properties on the north side of South Street that have been proposed attached housing should be changed from B-1 to General Residential (R-6) zoning to accommodate attached housing. As noted previously, areas designated as Civic/Institutional in the Land Use Plan can remain B-1 since that classification allows civic and institutional uses. It is acknowledged that an alternative approach would be to allow attached housing in B-1 zones. However, such housing would be inappropriate for the downtown core along Main Street, so that alternative is not recommended.

### Apply Residential Zoning in Accordance with the Land Use Plan

Much of the area in the southeastern and eastern portion of the study area is currently zoned General Residential (R-6), which permits attached housing, despite these areas being dominated by single-family detached housing. Such areas should be rezoned Single-Family Residential (R-8).

### Defer to the Historic Preservation Commission on Dimensional Issues

Depending upon the specific type of housing, and number of units, there are a variety of front setback and minimum lots size standards. It is recommended that the Town adopt a policy, formally or informally, that these dimensional issues will be determined by the Wilkesboro Historic Preservation Commission based upon compatibility relative to the surrounding context.

### Historic Zoning

To ensure that existing significant buildings are not inappropriately altered, and that new development is compatible with the downtown, well-written design standards are critical. Downtown Wilkesboro is currently protected through local historic zoning in which the Town's historic preservation ordinance and supplemental design standards are implemented by the Wilkesboro Historic Preservation Commission. A review of these policies is provided on [page 20](#) of this plan. In general, the policies and practices of the commission are effective in protecting the historic downtown's integrity. However, there are areas for improvement for both the ordinance and the design standards, as follow:

### Preservation Ordinance

#### *Add a "Demolition by Neglect" provision to the Ordinance*

Demolition by Neglect provisions are contained in many preservation ordinances and would prohibit an owners from allowing a historic resource to become so deteriorated as to, in effect, become demolished by neglect. Such a provision would not allow deliberate demolition to be an alternative.

#### *Expand the Economic Hardship Provisions*

While there are some minimal provisions that take the issue of economic hardship into consideration in the Commission's decisions, the language typically found in economic hardship provisions does not exist. Most such provisions include a lengthy list of the types of legal, financial and structural information that might be asked of the applicant, as well as some sort of criteria for determining if an economic hardship does indeed exist.

#### *If State Enabling Laws Change, Extend the Time Limits for Protection*

At present, the Town can only defer the demolition or relocation of a historic resource for up to one year, as state laws do not allow limits beyond that amount of time. There are a few North Carolina communities that have had special legislation adopted to avoid such limitations, so it may be worthwhile for Wilkesboro to explore such options. Regardless, it is recommended that, if and when enabling legislation changes for this issue, Wilkesboro should revise its ordinance to allow for perpetual denials of demolitions and relocations.

### Design Standards

The Town's existing design standards for the historic district are fundamentally sound. However, if outside funding becomes available in the future, the standards might be enhanced as follows:

#### *Add a Section on the Existing Architecture*

There is currently a lack of information on the district's existing architecture. Most design standard documents include an overview of the predominant architectural types and styles, including their key characteristics. Such information can be helpful in determining the appropriateness of proposed alterations to existing buildings or new infill development.

#### *Provide More Quantitative Standards*

The existing standards provide a thorough set of principles to follow, but could be improved by quantifying them more with specific dimensions for various design considerations, such as a minimum percentage of glazing on ground level facades, maximum widths for uninterrupted facade planes, and roof pitch ranges for residential type buildings.

### **CLG Status**

Communities that achieve Certified Local Government (CLG) status via their State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) are those that meet the federal standards of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. Communities that meet such standards become eligible for certain grants and technical support from the SHPO, such as for creating or enhancing preservation ordinances and design standards. Because Wilkesboro's preservation program appears to meet the general standards for CLG designation, it is recommended that designation be pursued with the SHPO.

# V. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

## BUILDING CODES FOR HISTORIC BUILDINGS

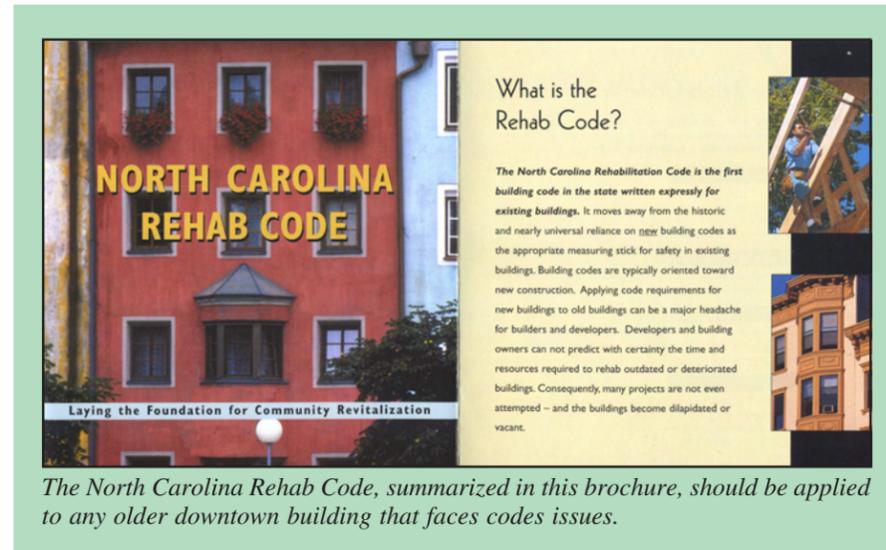
Background information on the Town’s building code is provided on page 20 of this plan’s Background section. As noted there, some of downtown’s older buildings have run into codes issues, particularly when attempts have been made to utilize upper floor space for housing and office uses. This discussion must first be prefaced with the acknowledgement that, where building codes apply to older buildings, there are often “gray” areas. While codes officials are often vilified for not being flexible enough in applying their codes, problems also can stem from property owners who are unwilling to compromise and spend the money necessary to make their buildings safe. The following recommendations are made with this circumstance in mind:

### Hire a Town-Employed Building Official

At present, the Town utilizes the County’s building official to implement building codes in Wilkesboro. Regardless of the abilities of that official, the Town needs to have its own employee performing this function if it wants to exert the ultimate degree of control in applying building codes. This idea has already been discussed informally by Town officials and appears to have merit.



*It is critical to the future success of Downtown Wilkesboro that buildings such as the Smithey Hotel be able to meet code requirements for their full utilization.*



*The North Carolina Rehab Code, summarized in this brochure, should be applied to any older downtown building that faces codes issues.*

### Fully Utilize the North Carolina Rehab Code

North Carolina has statewide mandatory building codes that apply to all buildings except one and two-family dwellings. An overview of the Town’s building code is provided on page 20 of this plan’s “Background” section. Because of the hurdles posed for historic buildings by conventional building codes, the North Carolina Rehab Code was created.

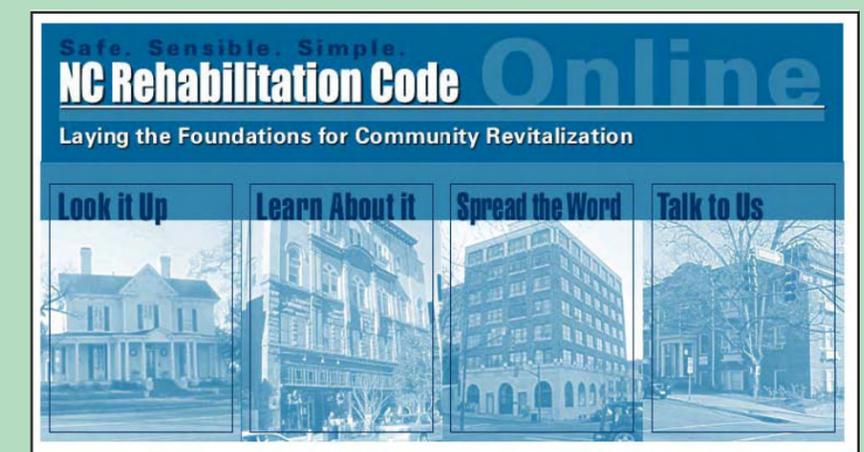
As is stated in section 1.2 under Applicability and Compliance, “Except as otherwise specified and when elected for a specific project, this code shall control all matters concerning the repair, renovation, alteration, reconstruction, change of use, and addition to all buildings and structures and their service equipment as defined herein and shall apply to any existing buildings and structures in the State of North Carolina.” This 206-page document was finalized in mid-2009 and went into effect on January 1, 2010. As stated in the introduction section of the code, “This code takes a new approach. The requirements that apply to a project are based upon the type of work being done rather than on the extent of the work.” The code addresses the following six categories of work:

- Repair - patching and minor replacement
- Renovation - refinish and replacement, but no space reconfiguring
- Alterations - reconfiguring space less than 50% of the area
- Reconstruction - reconfiguring space effecting exits or exit access
- Changes of Occupancy - use change requiring change in application of the code
- Additions - increase in building area

The Rehab Code is based upon the following four principles:

- 1) *Now is not the perfect time:* The point at which a building owner undertakes a project to improve a building is not the perfect time to require additional work.
- 2) *Leave it no less safe:* No building should be less safe after a project is undertaken than it was before the project began.
- 3) *Predictability:* A building owner should be able to predict the scope and cost of a project before the project begins. Requirements should be clear and should be known.
- 4) *Proportionality:* The code requirements for a building project should be in proportion to the planned work. The Rehab Code should not be so stringent as to discourage the incremental improvement of buildings, but, at the same time, should assure life safety.

One of the challenges faced by historic downtowns, such as Wilkesboro, is the code-driven costs associated with converting upper floors to residential or office uses. Under the Rehab Code, requirements can be relaxed when a use is changed to a lower relative use group hazard. In general, residential uses (R-1 through R-4) and offices uses (“Business” or B) are categorized as lower use group hazards than retail (“Mercantile” or M). According to those with experience using the Rehab Code, the most significant deterrent to using it is the lack of familiarity with its application, as it is often misinterpreted by building inspectors.



*The website “NCRehabCode.com” provides extensive additional information.*

# V. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

## STRATEGY FOR THE FARMERS/CRAFT MARKET

Page 44 provides detailed recommendations on the design of the proposed park/market fronting the north side of Main just west of Bridge. The idea of the park/market was initiated by the Small Town Main Street Committee prior to this master planning process, and its fruition would add an important anchor to the downtown. Below are recommendations related specifically to the markets operation.

### Establish a non-profit entity to manage the market

This entity will need to be incorporated and carry insurance, it will need a board of directors, and it will need an executive director or manager, even if that person is a part-time consultant to the market entity. It will be important that the entity keep its costs low, as vendors will not want to pay more than roughly \$15-\$20 daily stall fees. Other successful markets should be used as a model.

### Sell local produce and crafts

To date, this concept has been based upon the market selling local produce and crafts. Many urban markets have found success by including organically grown produce, which is a growth market in most locales.

### Maintain a mid-spring to late-fall schedule

This schedule would not only be consistent with peak agricultural production months, but also favorable weather for market patrons. It is also assumed, at this point, that the market would operate every weekend, but other alternatives should be explored.

### Provide sufficient vendor space and parking

The concept plan for the park designates the northeasterly portion of the site for parking and vendor space. The vendor spaces would receive a special paving treatment and 21 stall areas are shown at this point. However, the stage/pavilion area is also directly accessed by vehicles off of North Street and could function well for additional vendor space.

### Plan for room to expand

A basic principle of successful markets is to have room to expand in the future if necessary. This plan has recommended that the current jail facility, if and when it might relocate, be utilized for parking, storage and programming for the adjacent Wilkes Heritage Museum. Because this site is also located diagonally from the proposed park/market, it might also serve as an area to expand the market if necessary.

### Provide public restrooms

Public restrooms must be available for a successful market. Furthermore, downtowns are increasingly providing public restrooms as an important amenity to visitors, particularly in tourist-oriented places. This plan has already suggested that the former Wilkesboro Fire Department Building, located on the northwest corner of Bridge and Main, be adapted for public restrooms. It could serve other functions as well, including potentially space for the Town's Recreation Department.

### Market Start-Up Check List

- Project Kick-Off & Define Market Goals
- Review Site Issues
- Research Code & Health Department Issues
- Determine Shopper Profile
- Define Desired Vendor Mix
- Contact Agricultural/Craft Partners
- Prepare Operating Budget
- Identify Funding & Sponsorship Opportunities
- Develop Prospective Vendor Database
- Create Marketing Plan
- Prepare Marketing Materials (website, brochure, etc.)
- Recruit Targeted Vendors
- Develop an Operations Plan
- Develop the Market Calendar
- Prepare Vendor Leases & Rules
- Complete Vendor Recruitment
- Finalize the Market Calendar
- Finalize the Operating Budget
- Implement the Marketing Campaign

*“The spectacular resurgence of markets, which have grown more than 80 percent over the last decade in the United States, is truly cause for celebration. Their rise has been fueled not only by greater public awareness of the joys of eating local food, but also the myriad spin-off benefits that markets provide - economic opportunities..., safe and vibrant social gathering spaces, decreased dependence on fossil fuels, and so on.”* - Markets for All: “Celebrating National Farmers Market Week” - Aug. 2010 - Project for Public Spaces



As with special events, farmers markets can draw many people to a downtown to have a positive experience, thereby enhancing the downtown's image.

# V. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

## FUNDING SOURCES

There are two basic types of funding sources that should be explored by the Town to help implement this plan for Downtown Wilkesboro: public sector funding that might be utilized by the Town or other public entities, and private sector funding and financial incentives that might be employed by private sector property owners, developers and business owners. Also, while most of these sources summarized below are existing, there are recommendations here for new funding and incentive mechanisms that should be considered by the Town. They will all require much more research and consideration beyond this plan before being established.

### Funding & Incentives for the Private Sector

There is a need for incentives that make it easier and more desirable for businesses to locate in Downtown Wilkesboro and for investors to improve property and develop small-scale, infill commercial and mixed-use buildings. Various incentives could be included as part of an overall package for businesses. Among the existing and potential incentives are the following:

#### Existing Funding & Incentives for the Private Sector

The following are local, state and federal funding sources and incentives that currently exist for the private sector to utilize for property improvements and businesses.

#### *Facade Improvement Program (FIP)*

This program was recently adopted by the Town for fiscal year 2010-2011. As one of two new grant programs (see below), it is limited to property and business owners within the B-1 Central Business District. The FIP provides 50/50 matching grants for improvement to the exterior of commercial buildings, with a priority given to front facades. Examples of improvements include: removal of false fronts and inappropriate features, cleaning of facades in accordance with approved methods, exterior painting (unless the surface was previously unpainted), historic reconstruction of storefronts and similar features, installation of awnings, structural improvements (except roofs), signs and exterior lighting, and landscaping (given low priority unless part of a broader facade project). The maximum grant amount is \$3,500 per property/business, and a minimum of \$500 must be spent by the applicant on the improvements. Grant payment is made only upon

completion of the project per all agreements. Improvements must be consistent with all zoning and historic zoning regulations, including the historic district design guidelines, and must be approved by the Small Town Main Street (STMS) design subcommittee. They must also adhere to the recommendations of the STMS economic restructuring subcommittee. Work must be completed within six months of approval unless an extension is granted. These grants are available not only to property owners, but to business owners as well with the written consent of the property owners. Private dwellings are not eligible unless they were originally used for commercial purposes and were later converted to residential use. If a building has multiple units/tenants, each tenant must apply for the program separately. Priority is given to improvements having the highest visibility and/or that make the greatest contribution towards the revitalization of downtown.

#### *Capital Improvement Program (CIP)*

This program was adopted concurrently with the FIP described above, and the two programs can be utilized by the same property/business owner at the same time. The CIP is intended to assist with any interior or exterior improvements to a commercial building that will enhance the “functionality” of the building. Examples of eligible improvements include new/improved roofs, electrical and HVAC upgrades, energy efficiency/green initiatives, restroom improvements, plumbing upgrades, flooring, and structural/foundation improvements. As with the FIP, this program is available not only to property owners, but to business owners as well with the written consent of the property owners. In fact, most of the components of this program are identical to the FIP, including the maximum grant amount of \$3,500 and the minimum expenditure by the applicant of \$500. Priority is given to projects that make the most significant impact on the building’s safety, maintenance, energy efficiency, handicapped accessibility, and the historic district’s overall architectural integrity and character.

Since the FIP and CIP are both new and untested, no recommendations are provided here for adjustments. However, as the programs are utilized, needed revisions will likely become apparent. Likewise, if the programs are not utilized, that situation would also convey needed changes. While the funding pool for each program (\$7,000) is quite limited, one potential improvement to the programs may be to increase the award amounts to make them attractive enough to encourage property and business owners to pursue improvements.

#### *North Carolina Capital Access Program (CAP)*

The North Carolina Capital Access Program expands business finance options for businesses across the state. By reducing risk, it encourages banks and other

qualified lenders to consider loans that otherwise fall just outside conventional underwriting standards. The program will enable up to \$800 million in business lending over two years, freeing capital in a tight credit market. “NC-CAP” is made possible by \$46.1 million in federal funding under the federal Small Business Jobs Act of 2010. The state’s Rural Center has been designated to administer the program in all 100 counties. The program matches an up-front fee, typically 2 percent to 7 percent, paid by the lender and borrower. The combined amount is deposited into a pooled reserve fund held by the lender. The pooled fund includes matching fees from all NC-CAP loans made by the institution and covers losses in the event of a default. Any North Carolina business with 500 or fewer employees is eligible for an NC-CAP loan. Loans generally range from \$25,000 up to the maximum of \$5 million, and both term loans and lines of credit are eligible. Loans may be used to finance most business purposes, including real estate, construction, equipment and working capital. Loans may not be used for refinancing of existing debt, paying delinquent taxes, lending activities, passive or investment real estate, gambling or speculative ventures, or any illegal activity. Applicants apply for the loan through their local lender, who will make all loan decisions and determine whether a fee is required. Applicants are expected to meet all the normal borrowing requirements, including credit rating and collateral. The Rural Center’s website maintains a list of all participating lenders, as participation is voluntary. Eligible institutions are federally insured banks and credit unions, and community development financial institutions.

#### *State Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits*

Considered the most comprehensive state preservation tax credit program in the nation, two packages exist:

1. A 30 percent state income tax credit for certified rehabilitations of non-income-producing certified historic structures, including personal residences that do not generate income. Qualified rehabilitation expenses must exceed \$25,000 within a two-year period.
2. A 20 percent state income tax credit for certified rehabilitations of income producing certified historic structures, such as commercial, rental, and retail buildings. This credit can be combined with the 20 percent federal tax credit for the same type of structure. Qualified rehabilitation expenses must exceed the greater of the “adjusted basis” of the building or \$5,000 within a two-year period (or five-year period for phased projects).

The tax credit amounts are derived from percentages of the amount spent on the rehabilitation, and are credited to the owner of the designated historic structure. A “certified rehabilitation” is defined as that which has been approved by the State Historic Preservation Office or the National Park Service. All work must

# V. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

adhere to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation in order to qualify for the credit. Unlike the process of seeking grants through a competitive process, which may or may not be successful, qualified projects are guaranteed to enjoy the benefits of tax credits. Since there is currently no federal tax credit for non-income producing properties, the 30 percent state tax credit for such rehabilitation projects is particularly important.

## *Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit*

This 20 percent income tax credit is available for buildings listed on (or eligible for) the National Register, that are income producing (office, retail, hotel, rental housing, etc.), and that entail building rehabilitations following federal standards. The federal tax credit is worth 20 percent of the eligible rehabilitation costs for qualified buildings and projects. Eligible project costs generally must exceed the value of the building itself (not including the land) at the beginning of the project. Most rehabilitation costs are eligible for the credit, such as structural work, building repairs, electrical, plumbing, heating and air conditioning, roof work and painting. Certain types of project costs are not eligible for the credit, such as acquisition, new additions, furniture and landscaping. The IRS also allows a separate 10 percent tax credit for income-producing buildings constructed prior to 1936, but not listed in the National Register. Since this program is not one that involves limited financial resources that must be carefully targeted to specific areas for the maximum leveraging, it is applicable throughout the downtown area.

## *Small Business Programs*

The federal Small Business Administration (SBA) can provide grants, loans and technical assistance to small businesses. The SBA does not offer grants to start or expand small businesses, but it does offer a wide variety of loan programs. While the SBA does offer some grant programs, these are generally designed to expand and enhance organizations that provide small business management, technical, or financial assistance. These grants generally support non-profit organizations, intermediary lending institutions, and state and local governments. "7(a)" loans are the most basic and most used type loan of SBA's business loan programs. Its name comes from section 7(a) of the Small Business Act, which authorizes the Agency to provide business loans to American small businesses. All 7(a) loans are provided by lenders who are called participants because they participate with SBA in the 7(a) program. Not all lenders choose to participate, but most American banks do. There are also some non-bank lenders who participate with SBA in the 7(a) program, which expands the availability of lenders making loans under SBA guidelines. 7(a) loans are only available on a guaranty basis, which means they are provided by lenders who choose to structure their own loans by SBA's requirements and who apply and receive a guaranty from SBA on a portion of this loan. The SBA does not fully guaranty 7(a) loans. The

lender and SBA share the risk that a borrower will not be able to repay the loan in full. The guaranty is a guaranty against payment default. It does not cover imprudent decisions by the lender or misrepresentation by the borrower. Under the guaranty concept, commercial lenders make and administer the loans. In addition to its loan programs, other SBA programs include small business development centers, small business investment companies, preferred and certified lenders, micro-loan information, and export assistance. Another helpful organization for small businesses is the Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE). SCORE is a resource partner with the SBA. The SCORE Association, headquartered in Washington, D.C., is a non-profit association dedicated to entrepreneurial education and the formation, growth and success of small businesses nationwide. SCORE's extensive, national network of 10,500 retired and working volunteers are experienced entrepreneurs and corporate managers/executives. They provide free business counseling and advice as a public service to all types of businesses, in all stages of development.

## *Community Reinvestment Act (CRA)*

Enacted in 1977, CRA requires banks to be rated on their track record of making loans, investing in community development, and providing financial services to low and moderate income neighborhoods and individuals. Banks that lend to businesses with revenues of \$1 million or less, or make loans through certified development companies of the Small Business Administration, receive automatic CRA credit for the economic development impact of those loans. Other business loans of up to \$1 million, regardless of the size of the business, are eligible for CRA credit if the business is located in a low and moderate-income area. Banks also receive credit for stimulating commercial revitalization through their community development lending. They can receive CRA credit for financing building rehabilitation and business development, as well as operating branches in older commercial districts.

## *Bank of America Historic Tax Credit Fund*

To help implement the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) described above, the National Trust for Historic Preservation formed a joint venture with the Bank of America to stimulate community development investments. The \$25 million Bank of America Historic Tax Credit Fund is managed by the National Trust Community Investment Corporation (NTCIC), the for-profit subsidiary of the National Trust. This program uses federal and state tax credits to provide equity ranging from \$500,000 to \$5 million for historic building rehabilitation projects identified by the National Trust's Heritage Property Services.

## Proposed New Funding & Incentives for the Private Sector

The following funding and incentive concepts are suggested as new tools to ex-

plore further. It must be emphasized that the focus of this plan has intentionally been placed on physical improvements, and the consultant team was correspondingly structured to reflect that focus. Therefore, pursuit of the ideas below will warrant the guidance of financial and economic experts.

## *Landmark Tax Deferral*

An existing program in Guilford County is designed for owners of locally designated landmark properties in which the owners may qualify for up to a 50 percent tax deferral on city and county property taxes. This incentive can make a project economically viable, but it starts with listing (or a determination of eligibility) on the National Register. This deferral, which has no expiration date if guidelines are adhered to, assists property owners in the upkeep and maintenance of their historic properties. Designation is initiated at the request of historic property owners and, if granted, remains active with the deed. The Smithey Hotel is an example of a key property in Downtown Wilkesboro that could benefit from such a program.

## *Payments in Lieu of Tax Abatements*

While property tax abatements are not permitted in North Carolina, cash payments / incentives can be provided that might approximate tax abatements if designed to increase the local tax base, employment levels, and/or economic activity via commercial or industrial development. The Town could offer stepped payments to qualified investors in downtown properties based upon their amount of investment, the objectives met, and other criteria as determined by the Town.

## *Retail Entrepreneur Grants & Subsidies*

Some developers offer temporary rental assistance or direct subsidies to attract small specialty retailers to projects where they are trying to market housing. Local governments can do the same, including in North Carolina. This incentive is increasingly offered by local governments for revitalization and is recommended for approval on an individual basis within targeted areas. Such subsidies could vary widely, from several months of completely free rent to a more modest monthly discounted rate, such as 20 percent.

## *Business Technical Assistance*

The Town's Small Town Main Street Committee could hire a merchandising specialist or other assistance on a one-time or annual contract to work with downtown businesses. While rates charged by a consultant could vary substantially, approximately \$1,000 to \$1,750 per day, plus expenses, should be budgeted. A business incubator might also be created as a way to encourage start-up businesses downtown.

# V. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

## **Funding for the Public Sector**

It is noteworthy that there are multiple governmental programs that help to fund affordable housing, such as the HOME program, state and federal low and moderate income housing tax credit, and the New Market Tax Credits for community development corporations. However, since the downtown area already has a substantial amount of lower and moderate income housing, including the new project to adapt the Wilkesboro Elementary School for affordable housing, it is not recommended that a substantial amount of additional affordable housing be an objective for the downtown. Instead, more moderate to higher-end housing is needed to help the downtown economically.

Another potential financial tool not being recommended here is Municipal Service Districts (MSDs). Referred to in most places outside of North Carolina as business improvement districts (BIDs), MSDs can be established by a municipality to provide, finance, or maintain a variety of services, facilities, or functions within a specific area. They are funded by a special tax applied to the area which it will serve. Although this tool may be worthy of future exploration by the Town, it is not recommended at this time because it is believed that the small size of the downtown area and relatively small number of businesses would fail to generate sufficient revenues to support a revitalization program (staff, office space, etc.).

### *Self Financed Bonds*

Known elsewhere in the country as tax increment financing (TIF) and only recently approved in North Carolina for use by local governments, this mechanism funds the development of public facilities and infrastructure by allowing governments to issue bonds to fund improvements that are subsequently paid off by the increase in nearby property tax revenues caused by the public improvements. Although the state's laws regarding this tool are very loose on how it is used, it is recommended that, in Wilkesboro, they be narrowly limited to revitalization within the downtown area in accordance with strict criteria. It is recommended that a detailed study be conducted first to determine the viability of a self financed bonds district before this concept is pursued.

### *Certified Local Government (CLG) Program*

The CLG program provides funding to enable local communities to develop programs and participate in the state's preservation process. Only cities and counties officially designated as a CLG by the state can apply for these grants. CLG

communities must have a legitimate historic preservation program, such as historic zoning and a preservation commission. Wilkesboro is currently not a designated CLG community, but it appears to meet the basic standards to qualify as one. CLG grants are funded with money appropriated from Congress for preservation efforts through the National Park Service Historic Preservation Fund (HPF). CLG grants require a 50 percent cash or in-kind service match from the community. Because a total of only \$65,000 have been available annually in the state during recent years, securing grants is extremely competitive, and most individual grants range between \$5,000 and \$15,000. Eligible grant projects include, but are not limited to: training for local preservation commissions; completing or updating surveys of historic resources; producing historical walking or driving tour brochures, videos or other educational materials; preparing preservation plans; and preparing National Register of Historic Places nominations. In some cases, funds can be used toward physical restoration projects.

### *Save America's Treasures Programs*

These funds are appropriated by Congress, and grants are limited to the preservation and conservation of nationally significant historic and cultural resources. The program is a partnership of the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Institute of Museum and Library Services. Eligible historic resources include historic districts, sites, buildings, structures and objects. Eligible applicants include nonprofit, tax-exempt 501(c), U.S. organizations, units of state or local government, and federally recognized Indian Tribes. Grants are awarded through a competitive process and require a dollar-for-dollar, non-federal match. The minimum grant request for collections projects is \$25,000 for the federal share, and the minimum grant request for historic property projects is \$125,000 for the federal share.

### *Transportation Enhancement Funds*

The "Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users" (SAFETEA-LU) includes opportunities for funding within its Enhancement Program. The Enhancement Program is a federally funded program that promotes diverse modes of surface transportation, increases benefits to communities, and encourages citizen involvement. In North Carolina, the program is administered by the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT). There are twelve categories from which local governments may apply for reimbursement funding, mostly related to: scenic beautification, historic preservation, and pedestrian and bicycle facilities. All qualified projects must have some relationship to surface transportation. Cost reimbursement for eligible projects can range from \$1,000 to \$1 million. Streetscape projects are a common enhance

ment funds project and might include lighting, historic sidewalk pavers, benches, planting containers, decorative walls and walkways, signs, public art, historical markers, or other similar elements. These funds can also be utilized to upgrade or create bike and pedestrian pathways. Among this plan's projects that may be funding candidates are the streetscape redevelopment and greenway extension.

### *Community Development Block Grants*

CDBG funds are available for specific program categories including: community revitalization, scattered site housing, infrastructure, economic development, housing development, urgent needs, and capacity building. Each program has specific requirements. Non-entitlement cities, such as Wilkesboro, must compete with other non-entitlement communities for CDBG funds. These funds can be used for a wide range of community development activities and must prioritize benefits to low and moderate income persons. Qualified activities include: property acquisition, relocation and demolition, rehabilitation of buildings, construction of infrastructure, limited public services, and assistance to job creating businesses.

### *National Endowment for the Arts - Challenge America Grant*

The National Endowment for the Arts provides national recognition and support to significant projects of artistic excellence in the visual, literary, media, design, and performing arts, thus preserving and enhancing the nation's diverse cultural heritage. Grants are intended to provide the best of the arts in communities throughout the nation, including projects to benefit people in underserved areas or whose access to the arts is limited by factors such as age, disability, ethnicity, educational or economic level. Eligible activities are those that promote the arts, and eligible recipients include local governments, public non-profit institutions/organizations, and federally Recognized Indian Tribal Governments.

### *North Carolina Parks and Recreation Trust Fund*

Among other things, this program provides grants to local governments. Recipients use the grants to acquire land and/or to develop parks and recreational projects that serve the general public. The North Carolina General Assembly established the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF) on July 16, 1994 to fund improvements in the state's park system, to fund grants for local governments, and to increase the public's access to the state's beaches. The Parks and Recreation Authority, an eleven member appointed board, was also created to allocate funds from PARTF to the state parks and to the grants program for local governments. PARTF is the primary source of funding to build and renovate facilities in the state parks, as well as to buy land for new and existing parks. The PARTF program also provides dollar-for-dollar grants to local governments. Recipients use the grants to acquire land and/or to develop parks and recreational projects

# V. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

that serve the general public. The fund is fueled by money from the state's portion of the real estate deed transfer tax for property sold in North Carolina. Although 65 percent of the funds are allocated toward state parks and another 5 percent go toward a coastal program, the remaining 30 percent of the funds are used for dollar-for-dollar matching grants to local governments for park and recreation purposes. Grants for a maximum of \$500,000 are awarded yearly to county governments or incorporated municipalities, and factors considered by the Authority as it selects grant recipients include, but are not limited to:

- The criteria contained in the scoring system
- The geographic distribution of projects across the state
- The presence or absence of other funding sources
- The population of the applicant
- The level of compliance with prior grant agreements

## *State Park & Tree Grants*

The Division of Forest Resources of the State's Department of Environment and Natural Resources provides annual grants ranging from \$1,000 to \$10,000 to promote sustained urban and community forest programs. This grant is awarded to projects that focus on involving community groups and initiating or advancing the development of urban forestry programs. Past grantees have developed pocket parks, tree ordinances, and established urban forestry programs, among other projects. This grant is not simply about planting trees. In fact, grant applications for the sole purpose of tree planting or beautification are discouraged. Tree planting should happen within a larger project which is aimed at promoting and enhancing the tree population already present in the community. Although communities and interest groups may apply for grants annually, when funding is limited, first-time applications are typically selected before repeat applicants. In addition, grant funding is not meant to support on-going programs, such as planting, maintenance or staffing. The initiation of a program, as well as the education, training, or initial hiring of an urban forester for a community, are considered eligible.

## *North Carolina Arts Council Grants*

The North Carolina Arts Council offers a variety of grants in support of local arts development. Over 1,300 grants are awarded each year to ensure that artists and arts organizations continue to produce rich and diverse arts experiences for the state's citizens and visitors. Individual artists, as well as organizations, may apply. There are a wide variety of categories to apply under, including arts education, cultural tourism, performing arts, and community arts advocacy, in addition to others. Awards range from \$2,500 to \$70,000. Depending upon the type of grant, communities can use this funding to support various arts-related initiatives, like architectural design of an arts or cultural facility. Funds can be used to support

non-profit arts programs and organizations, especially those that focus on folk art or cultural art, including performing arts. These funds could also be employed to commission a community mural or other art projects to foster a sense of community, such as public art sculptures.

## **Matching Funding to Projects**

Below is a list of potential funding sources for some of the key recommendations of this plan. Because the focus here is to identify outside or alternative means of funding, the most basic sources - such as the Town's general funds - are considered obvious and not addressed here.

### Restoration of Historic Buildings

Key examples, because of their National Register designation or potential, include the Smithey Hotel, the Winkler-Perkins House, and several of the historic commercial buildings along Main:

- *Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credit* (federal) - building rehabilitation costs
- *Certified Local Government Program* (federal) - stabilization and rehabilitation studies
- *Save America's Treasures Programs* (federal) - rehabilitation costs, etc.
- *Community Development Block Grants* (federal) – acquisition, rehabilitation costs, etc.
- *State Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit* (state) - building rehabilitation costs
- *North Carolina Capital Access Program* (state) - property acquisition and building rehabilitation costs
- *Facade Improvement & Capital Improvement Programs* (town) - building improvement costs
- *Landmark Tax Deferral* (county / note: this incentive doesn't currently exist, but could be adopted) – utilization of historic buildings for any uses
- *Community Reinvestment Act Financing* (private) – acquisition/rehabilitation loans
- *Bank of America Historic Tax Credit Fund* (private) – equity for rehabilitation costs

### Development of New Housing

Key examples include potential infill opportunities on the north side of South Street and upper floor apartments in historic buildings along Main:

- *Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credit* (federal) - upper floor apartments in

historic buildings

- *Community Development Block Grants* (federal) – land acquisition, development costs
- *State Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit* (state) - building rehabilitation costs
- *North Carolina Capital Access Program* (state) - property acquisition and building rehabilitation costs
- *Facade Improvement & Capital Improvement Programs* (town) - building improvement costs
- *Landmark Tax Deferral* (county / note: this incentive doesn't currently exist, but could be adopted) – utilization of historic buildings for any uses
- *Community Reinvestment Act Financing* (private) – acquisition/rehabilitation loans

### Land Acquisition and/or Development of Community Facilities

The primary example is the proposed new park/market, as well as associated parking and public restrooms. The proposed redevelopment of the current jail facility would also fall under this category.

- *Transportation Enhancement Funds* (federal) – new park/market, new greenway trailhead, and the greenway extension
- *Community Development Block Grants* (federal) – land acquisition, development costs
- *State Park & Tree Grants* (state) – park/market development, enhancement of Wilkes Heritage Museum lawn and small civic plazas, street trees, landscaping parking
- *North Carolina Arts Council Grants* (state) – architectural design, murals, public art
- *Community Reinvestment Act Financing* (private) – land acquisition/development loans

### Public Infrastructure

Key examples include sewer, water, electrical, gas and telecommunications lines, as well as drainage facilities and new streetscapes.

- *Transportation Enhancement Funds* (federal) – streetscape redevelopment
- *Community Development Block Grants* (federal) – all forms of public infrastructure

### Cultural Programs

Key examples include music and arts-related festivals, historic interpretation, and educational programs such as those sponsored by the Wilkes Heritage Museum.

# V. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

- *Certified Local Government Program* (federal) - historic interpretation
- *Save America's Treasures Programs* (federal) – historic interpretation
- *Transportation Enhancement Funds* (federal) – historic interpretation
- *National Endowment for the Arts - Challenge America Grant* (federal) - arts and cultural programs
- *North Carolina Arts Council Grants* (state) – arts and cultural programs, cultural festivals

## Business Development

Key examples include consultation, information and business recruitment strategies.

- *Community Development Block Grants* (federal) – all forms of business development
- *Small Business Programs* (federal) – all forms of business development
- *North Carolina Capital Access Program* (state) - property acquisition and improvement costs, inventory purchase, and other business expenses
- *Business Development Center* (local) – limited to consultation and education
- *Community Reinvestment Act Financing* (private) – business loans



*Assistance for start-up and existing businesses exist at the federal, state and local levels.*

# V. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

## IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX

No.	Recommendation	Page #	Responsible Party	Time-Frame
<b>A. Buildings &amp; Facilities</b>				
A-1	Adaptive reuse of Wilkesboro Elementary for affordable housing	32	Developer	Near Term (Yr. 1)
A-2	Rehabilitation and full utilization of the Smithey Hotel	31	Property Owner	Near Term (Yr. 1)
A-3	Preservation, rehabilitation and reuse of the Winkler-Perkins House	31	Town & Private Developer	Near Term (Yr. 1)
A-4	Adaptation of upper floor space in older buildings for housing and offices	33	Property Owners	Mid Term (Yrs. 2-3)
A-5	Attached housing development along South Street	33-34	Town & Private Developers	Mid Term (Yrs. 2-3)
A-6	Adaptive reuse of former Esso Station for dining, etc.	32	Property Owner	Long Term (Yrs. 4-5)
A-7	Redevelopment of jail facility for parking, storage and programs for Wilkes Heritage Museum	32	Town & Museum	Long Term (Yrs. 4-5)
A-8	Mixed use infill development on vacant parcels on Main Street	35	Property Owners & Developers	Long Term (Yrs. 4-5)
<b>B. Transportation &amp; Public Spaces</b>				
B-1	Development of the new park/market fronting Main Street (including public restrooms)	44	Town	Near Term (Yr. 1)
B-2	New greenway trailhead at new park/market and extension to Cub Creek Park	43	Town	Near Term (Yr. 1)
B-3	Enhancements to Old Courthouse lawn	45	Town	Near Term (Yr. 1)
B-4	Enhancements to small plazas at Town Hall and Federal Building	45	Town & Federal Building Owners	Near Term (Yr. 1)
B-5	Discourage truck traffic away from downtown	36	Town & NCDOT	Near Term (Yr. 1)
B-6	Install a wayfinding system of directional signage	51	Town	Near Term (Yr. 1)
B-7	Changes to streets, intersection traffic controls, and on-street parking	36-39	Town	Mid Term (Yrs. 2-3)
B-8	Streetscape redevelopment	38-39, 46-50	Town	Mid Term (Yrs. 2-3)

# V. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

No.	Recommendation	Page #	Responsible Party	Time-Frame
B-9	Improvements to parking lots	41	Property Owners & Town	Mid Term (Yrs. 2-3)
B-10	Develop gateway treatments	42	Town	Long Term (Yrs. 4-5)
B-11	Enhance the historic cemetery	45	Cemetery Owner	Long Term (Yrs. 4-5)
B-12	Provide public art	51	Cultural Arts Council & Private Sector	Long Term (Yrs. 4-5)
<b>C. Non-Design Issues</b>				
C-1	Establish a Downtown Merchants Association	52	Main Street - Organization Com.	Near Term (Yr. 1)
C-2	Establish an entity to manage the new market	52	Main Street - Organization Com.	Near Term (Yr. 1)
C-3	Business retention, expansion and recruitment	52	Main Street - Econ. Restruct. Com.	Near Term (Yr. 1)
C-4	Initiate a centralize retail management strategy	53	Main Street - Econ. Restruct. Com.	Mid Term (Yrs. 2-3)
C-5	Implement marketing and promotion strategies	53-54	Main Street - Promotion Com.	Mid Term (Yrs. 2-3)
<b>D. Implementation Strategy</b>				
D-1	Revise zoning and historic zoning to implement the plan	55	Town	Near Term (Yr. 1)
D-2	Pursue Certified Local Government (CLG) status	55	Town	Near Term (Yr. 1)
D-3	Resolve building code issues for older buildings	56	Town	Near Term (Yr. 1)
D-4	Establish the farmers/craft market	57	Main Street & Market Entity	Near Term (Yr. 1)
D-5	Pursue existing funding sources and establish new programs	58-62	Town	Near Term (Yr. 1)