

CITY OF MONROE Downtown Master Plan

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PREPARED FOR
CITY OF MONROE
PO BOX 69
MONROE, NC 28111

PREPARED BY
LANDDESIGN, INC
WARREN AND ASSOCIATES
GLATTING JACKSON KERCHER ANGLIN

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 CONTEXT

1.2 HISTORY

1.3 STUDY AREA

I.0 INTRODUCTION

The City of Monroe's Downtown Master Plan details information gathered during the initial portion of the planning process, including research, analysis and feedback from stakeholders, the Advisory Committee and the community. It includes supporting illustrations. The latter portion of this report is devoted to recommendations and implementation strategies. Finally, at the conclusion of this report are appendices of supporting information, such as the lists of Advisory Committee members and stakeholders, as well as references. Appendix I in this document is the Implementation Matrix and details how implementation recommendations and strategies should be prioritized.

I.1 CONTEXT

The City of Monroe is located approximately 25 miles east of Charlotte, NC, as shown on the Context Map (Figure 1). It is the county seat of Union County, one of North Carolina's fastest growing counties. In 2006, according to the Charlotte Regional Partnership, Union County was the 21st fastest growing county in the United States.

Easily accessible via major roadways traversing the region, most of the rapid growth affecting Monroe and Union County is occurring in the western areas of the county adjacent to the Mecklenburg County border within and near the burgeoning suburban towns of Weddington, Indian Trail, Stallings, Waxhaw and Mineral Springs. Much of this growth is due to the fact that the area enjoys good suburban connectivity between these rapidly growing communities and job centers in Mecklenburg County, especially on state roads NC 75 and NC 84. Most prominent among the major roadways that pass through the region is US 74. The road is among the state's busiest east-west thoroughfares and is a popular route between the Charlotte area and the beaches of southeastern North Carolina and northeastern South Carolina. US 601 is a major connector between Monroe and Concord.

I.2 HISTORY

Prior to Christmas Eve, 1842, the day the state chartered the City of Monroe, the approximately 10,000 people living a mostly agrarian existence in what is today known as Union County coped with long routes of travel to Charlotte or Wadesboro for the needs of the farm, family, and even legal matters of the day. Barely a year later, a log courthouse was erected near the center of a 75-acre parcel that the new county purchased for \$1 an acre. Although there were structures that had previously been constructed in what we now know as downtown Monroe, it was the small, humble log courthouse that made the new city a destination point for citizens in the new Union County. In 1849 the community replaced the log courthouse with new brick construction. It served as both court and jail until the city purchased the building in 1892. For almost the next 80 years, the building served as Monroe's City Hall.¹

¹ Virginia A.S.K. Bjorlin, *Looking Back at Monroe's History*, Walsworth Publishing Company, Marceline, MO, 1995, pp. 5-6.

Like every community in the American South, Monroe's fortune declined during the war years of 1861 to 1865. The cotton economy was forever changed by the Civil War, when large-scale production possible due to slave labor ended, and the post-war years gave way to tenant farming on much smaller parcels of land. Several tanneries, buggy factories and a shoe factory were among the commercial operations that served customers from establishments in downtown Monroe.² For the overwhelming majority of the citizens in Monroe and Union County, farming was the only real option to feed and clothe their families.

That began to change in 1874 when the railroad came to Monroe. Instantly, the city gained access to new markets for agricultural and other commercial products. So too, did outside sales and marketing concerns have access to Monroe. A new era of prosperity began, and during the decade between 1870 and 1880, the population of Monroe nearly tripled to 1,300 people.³ The first bank in town, the People's Bank of Monroe, was founded the same year as the railroad arrived. In 1887, construction of the Georgia, Carolina & Northern Railway was underway. Completed five years later in 1892, it connected Atlanta with important markets up and down the eastern seaboard of the United States. The railroad's course was the second rail connection through Monroe, and significantly increased the number of salesmen and visitors who passed through Union County.

The city's growing population and increasing number of visitors gave rise to other commercial ventures, the two most important began within months of each other- Heath Hardware and the New York Racquet. This pair of retailers has had lasting effect and influence in Monroe.

The Heath mercantile endeavor began in 1887. In 1901, upstart competitor Monroe Hardware started. They merged in 1906.⁴ Taking the name Monroe Hardware, the company has long served both retail and wholesale customers in Monroe and communities across the region, especially those along the railroad and US 74 corridors, from Atlanta to Wilmington.

Only months following B. D. and A. W. Heath's successful hardware start-up, William Henry Belk used his savings, goods on consignment and a \$4,000 loan from a local widow to open New York Racquet on North Main Street.⁵ Belk's store was profitable in only seven months.

Three years later in 1891, brother John joined as a partner, and Belk Brothers Company was formed. Chester, SC was the site of the company's second store in 1893, followed by a third in Union, SC in 1894. And in 1895, William Belk moved to Charlotte to open the firm's fourth store. Today, Belk is the nation's largest privately-held chain of department stores.

² Virginia A.S.K. Bjorlin, *Looking Back at Monroe's History*, Walsworth Publishing Company, Marceline, MO, 1995, p. 19.

³ *Ibid*, p. 25.

⁴ City of Monroe

⁵ Covington, Howard E. Jr., *Belk, Inc.: The Company and the Family That Built It*, Belk, Inc., 2002



Monroe Hardware has had a presence in downtown Monroe since 1901.

I. 3 STUDY AREA

Although the downtown study area comprises only a portion of the overall city, it continues to be recognized as the heart of Monroe. The study area for the Monroe Downtown Master Plan includes the commercial core of the city and portions of surrounding residential neighborhoods. The study area is generally bounded by Meadow and Allen streets to the north, McCauley and Maurice streets to the east, Hudson Street to the south and Washington and Crawford streets to the west. The core area, the heart of downtown that warranted a closer look, is generally bounded by the CSX railroad tracks to the north, the Five Points area and region west of the Union County Public Library on the east, the First Baptist Church and area around it to the south and Charlotte Avenue on the west. The study area and the smaller core area are each delineated on the Study Area Map (Figure 2).

I. 4 PURPOSE OF THE DOWNTOWN MASTER PLAN

To counteract the impact of lost retail, as well as to make downtown Monroe an exciting destination, the City of Monroe has undertaken an effort to revitalize its historic core by creating this new Downtown Master Plan. Monroe has declined from its peak when it was the region's, and certainly the county's, main center of commerce and culture. Today, the goal is to return Monroe to its position as the focal point of commerce, arts and employment in Union County, and as a destination point within the region as it once was before the era following World War II when America embraced the automobile and raced to the suburbs. Exacerbating Monroe's decline was the retail community's flight to the US 74 bypass over the last four decades. This Downtown Master Plan for Monroe is a step in reversing those trends and is a part of a newfound enthusiasm by elected officials, city staff and proponents of downtown for its rebirth. Equal excitement exists among many of those who live in residential neighborhoods, some designated as historic, adjacent to downtown that view downtown as their neighborhood center. The resulting plan addresses trends, opportunities and limitations facing the city; the preservation of historic areas; infill development; enhancements to the downtown street network; and the environment and open space.

2.0

CHAPTER 2: PROCESS TO DEVELOP THE PLAN

2.1 RESEARCH

2.2 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

2.0 PROCESS TO DEVELOP THE PLAN

The process to develop the Monroe Downtown Master Plan took approximately eight months. The steps involved included the inventory, analysis and synthesis of information pertaining to a variety of planning elements; meeting with City of Monroe representatives and others involved in the planning process; the facilitation of a series of public meetings; and, based on this collective information and input, preparing and finalizing the Downtown Master Plan. Research and public participation were the keys to the success of the planning process.

2.1 RESEARCH

In the preparation of this report and others, information was gathered from a variety of sources. The following reports and maps were vital during the process to understand and document the existing conditions in Monroe:

- City of Monroe's Unified Development Ordinance
- City of Monroe's Zoning Map and Ordinance
- Downtown Monroe Inc.'s Strategic Plan
- City of Monroe's Greenway / Bikeway Master Plan
- City of Monroe's Parks, Recreation, Greenways and Open Space Master Plan
- North Carolina Department of Transportation's Traffic Flow and Safety Optimization Study



Members of the Advisory Committee took a walking tour of the downtowns of Morganton and Shelby.

Early in the process to create the Monroe Downtown Master Plan, members of the Advisory Committee, city staff and the consultant team took an educational bus tour of the cities of Morganton and Shelby. Both of these North Carolina cities were selected for comparison to Monroe for their relative sizes in terms of population and geographic areas, as well as comparable residential densities and for their recent measures to reinvigorate their own downtown cores. In addition, both Morganton and Shelby are similar to Monroe relative to their locations in the Charlotte metro area, as well as in their locations along significant east-west roadways US 74 and I-40, respectively. From photos taken during this tour, information from the leadership of both cities and research, a precedent study was prepared. The report compared the physical, functional and economic conditions of Morganton, Shelby and Monroe, and is included as Appendix D at the conclusion of the plan.

Within a few weeks of the bus tour of Morganton and Shelby, members of the Advisory Committee took a walking tour of the downtown Monroe study area. With cameras in hand, the Advisory Committee and consultant team photo documented many of the issues and opportunities visible in downtown Monroe. This photo exercise was important in the initial determination of issues and needs facing downtown Monroe. A summary of this photo tour was documented on two posters, detailing

both opportunities and constraints. These posters are included in this document as Appendix E and Appendix F, respectively.

Simultaneously, research was undertaken to complete a market analysis of downtown Monroe. This analysis included an evaluation of demographic trends and the existing land use pattern.

2.2 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Public participation is crucial to the successful implementation of any plan. In the case of Monroe, the public contributed through regular meetings of the Advisory Committee, stakeholder interviews, a two-day charrette and community meetings attended by the public.

Prior to the project's initiation, an Advisory Committee was formed to guide the planning process and provide valuable input at critical points. Members of the Advisory Committee are listed in Appendix A at the conclusion of the plan. Selected from a cross-section of the community, these citizens were chosen for their unique and valuable perspectives on the issues facing downtown Monroe.

Approximately one week following the Advisory Committee's walking tour of downtown Monroe, 50 stakeholders selected for their involvement in downtown Monroe on a day-to-day basis were interviewed over a three-day period. Their insight into downtown's strengths and weaknesses, both perceived and evident, was instrumental to the consultant team as valuable supplemental information not readily available in documents and reports. The stakeholders are identified in Appendix B in this document.

At a critical point in the process, a two-day charrette, or design workshop, was held so that city staff, the Advisory Committee and key stakeholders could participate in exercises to draw and design the future of downtown, reflecting potential change and improvement. The plans were later refined for presentation to the public.

The community continued to be involved in the process to create the plan throughout the planning process. A total of four community meetings were held: one early in the process to review the purpose and schedule to complete the plan, two meetings on successive evenings following both days of the charrette, and a last meeting to present a draft of the final plan document to the public prior to plan's adoption by the city. These community meetings were opportunities to gather additional input from the public, and for the consultant team to confirm the direction of the plan and that it is a reflection of the community's vision for downtown Monroe.



Stakeholders, individuals who have day-to-day knowledge of downtown Monroe, were interviewed over a three-day period early in the planning process.



Community involvement was crucial in the creation of the Monroe Downtown Master Plan.

3.0

CHAPTER 3: KEY TERMINOLOGY

3.0 KEY TERMINOLOGY

To better understand this report, it is necessary to understand the terminology by which it is written. Although the following terms have been expanded upon further in the entirety of this report, each has been briefly summarized for the reader’s comprehension:

- *Advisory Committee:* The Advisory Committee was comprised of the city manager, assistant city manager, two council members and two members of the board of Downtown Monroe, Inc. (DMI). This committee guided the process to create the Downtown Master Plan.
- *Stakeholders:* A variety of land owners, developers, agency representatives, and others from Monroe who were able to enhance the research by providing an additional layer of information regarding local issues and opportunities.
- *Implementation Matrix:* The Implementation Matrix summarizes the policies set forth in the plan and the related action items. It reflects priorities determined during the process. More importantly, it serves as a worksheet for those involved in initializing, monitoring and measuring progress on implementation activities. It indicates items that should be the focus of first-year activities, and facilitates the prioritization of future implementation activities.
- *Development Scenarios:* A method used to communicate the spirit of the downtown plan by illustrating the result of putting the policies into action.
- *Goals:* Value-based statements that are not necessarily measurable. For the purposes of this plan, they express an ideal future condition.
- *Recommendations:* More specific, measurable statements of desired outcomes rather than goals.
- *Strategies:* Rules or courses of action that indicate how the goals and objectives of the plan should be realized.
- *Level of Service (LOS):* A user’s quality of service through or over a specific facility (highway, intersection, crosswalk, etc.) is classified by level of service (LOS). Level of service is designated “A” through “F.” LOS A represents uninterrupted flow. LOS F represents a highly congested, packed condition. LOS evaluations focus on the peak 15 minutes of flow. LOS

F represents more than 45 passenger cars per mile per lane (pc/mi/ln) as defined in the Highway Capacity Manual by the Transportation Research Board of the National Research Council.

- *Green Streets:* Urban greenways where roads are retrofitted with pedestrian amenities such as continuous sidewalks, trees, benches and crosswalks to give pedestrians priority over vehicular traffic.
- *Primary Trade Area:* An area within a 10-minute drive time from downtown. For the purposes of this Downtown Master Plan, the Primary Trade Area generally extends north to Roanoke Church Road, east to the Town of Wingate, south to Macedonia Church Road, and west to Rocky River Road.
- *Secondary Trade Area:* An area within a 10 to 15-minute drive time from downtown. For the purposes of the Downtown Master Plan, the Secondary Trade Area generally extends north to Unionville-Indian Trail Road, west to the Town of Marshville, south to Belk Mill Road, and west to Wesley Chapel Stouts Road.

4.0

CHAPTER 4: EXISTING CONDITIONS, OPPORTUNITIES & CONSTRAINTS

4.1 LAND USE

4.2 TRANSPORTATION

4.3 OPEN SPACE AND GREENWAYS

4.4 URBAN DESIGN

4.5 CHARACTER AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

4.6 MARKET

4.0 EXISTING CONDITIONS, OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

Through a detailed investigation into the factors affecting downtown Monroe, including land uses, the road network and the efficiency of its circulation, open space and green spaces, urban design, character and cultural resources, and the market analysis, an Opportunities and Constraints Report was generated. This report became the basis for the creation of the Downtown Master Plan. Due to its considerable length, this initial report is not repeated in its entirety, but the following is a summary of the opportunities and constraints of downtown Monroe as listed in that report.

4.1 LAND USE

Monroe's downtown contains a mix of land uses and structures that reflect its past as the center of commerce and government, as shown on the Existing Land Use Map. Most of downtown Monroe is zoned Central Business District (CBD), allowing for a variety of uses, such as office, civic, institutional and multi-family residential on second and third floors above ground level retail, hotels and bed & breakfast operations, and retail and wholesale commercial uses, including banks with drive-through windows. Libraries, schools, convenience stores and entertainment facilities such as bowling alleys and theaters are also allowed in the CBD. Without a master plan, there is no blueprint as to which uses are appropriate in what areas. Nearly 24% of the 260 acres in the study area are currently being used for industrial purposes, with another 21% and 18.9% for residential and commercial / retail uses, respectively. Only 12 acres, or 4.5% of the total acreage in the study area, is in use as parks and open space, all of which is located at the Belk-Tonawanda Park north of the CSX railroad.



Main Street Plaza, near the Union County Courthouse, is among downtown Monroe's successful public areas where as many as 1,000 people may gather for public events and celebrations.



Downtown Monroe has an interesting mix of historic buildings that reflect the city's history as a center for commerce in Union County.



Among several sites in downtown Monroe likely to offer redevelopment opportunities is the former Monroe Hardware Warehouse (Allen Overall Building).

Summary of Land Use Opportunities & Constraints

- A number of the current uses such as for offices, government-related activities and surrounding neighborhoods are excellent assets on which downtown can build. These land uses place a large number of people in close proximity to downtown.
- There are numerous redevelopment opportunities, particularly where the city is willing to facilitate it by providing incentives and/or utilizing property it already owns.
- There is a lack of land uses that will attract residents and visitors downtown on a regular basis and for extended periods.
- The downtown area currently fails to meet the daily service needs of nearby residents and any future residents.



The offices and resources of the Union County Courthouse bring more than 1,000 workers and other people downtown on a daily basis.



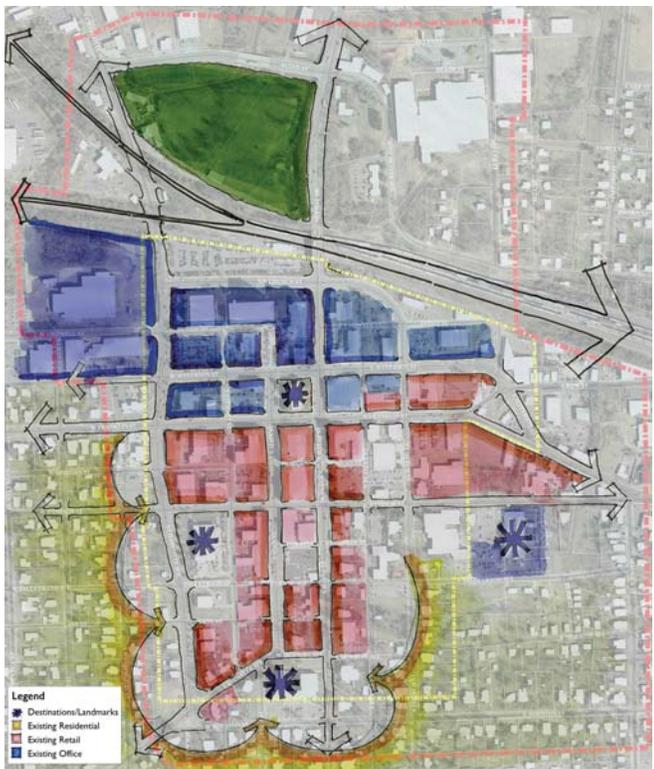
Despite the popularity of the coffee shop at Lancaster and Charlotte Avenues, Downtown Monroe currently lacks many of the service uses to meet the daily needs of residents in nearby communities.



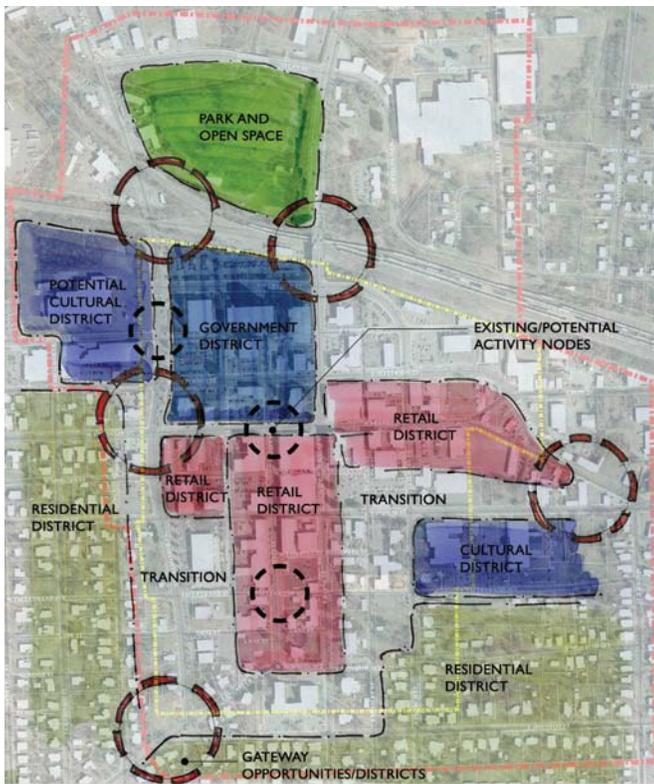
Downtown Monroe lacks a variety of land uses that would attract visitors on a regular basis. The Renn's Nest, for example, is one of the few retail establishments located in downtown Monroe.



The city has a major opportunity to redevelop the site of the former Joffre Hotel at the center of downtown, opposite the historic Union County Courthouse.

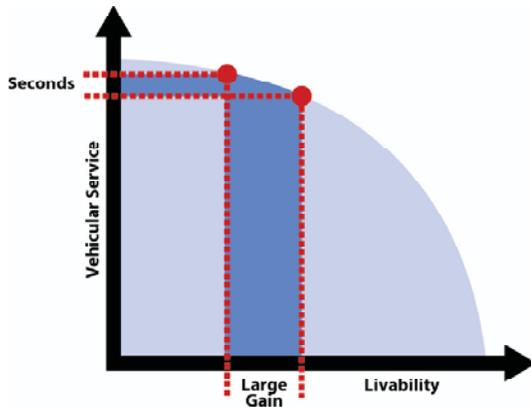


The Land Use Analysis shows the residential, retail and office Land Use categories as they exist today.



The District Analysis figure identifies gateway opportunities, as well as potential activity nodes, areas that could become centers of intense activity.

4.2 TRANSPORTATION



The transportation system plays a critical role in defining the character of Downtown Monroe. Transportation issues span the study area boundaries and should be discussed both at the local and regional levels.

The local street network is configured as a well defined “grid” of streets that provide good connectivity into the neighborhoods to the east, south and west. The primary transportation challenge of this study is to balance the success and livability of Downtown Monroe with Franklin/Jefferson Streets’ and Charlotte Avenue’s requirement to accommodate regional transportation. Livability is focused on balancing vehicular service requirements with business, neighborhood and pedestrian needs.

Since the focus of both the Franklin/Jefferson pair and Charlotte Avenue are currently skewed toward vehicular service, large gains in livability for the downtown can be made with rather minor impacts on vehicular service. Improvements to the Franklin / Jefferson one-way pair and Charlotte Avenue, in particular, are important for the redevelopment of Downtown Monroe.

The regional street network is supported by three primary routes: Franklin Street, Charlotte Avenue/Lancaster Avenue, Skyway Drive/Hayne Street. The primary traffic flow in downtown Monroe in the morning peak hour is from the west and south to the north. The pattern is reversed in the afternoon from the north to the west and the south.

It is important to note that traffic flow into and out of Downtown Monroe is accommodated by numerous connections to the east, south and west. However, the CSX rail line is a major barrier, limiting access to and from the north. Only two streets in downtown cross the CSX line Charlotte Avenue (underpass) and Skyway Drive (overpass).

Franklin Street (SR 75) is one of the Union County’s primary east-west corridors. According to the NCDOT, the average daily traffic volume is 14,000 vehicles a day. In Downtown Monroe, Franklin Street’s east-west responsibility is shared in a one-way couplet with Jefferson Street. Franklin Street provides the movement for the eastbound traffic and Jefferson Street provides movement for the westbound traffic.

It is important to note that the western connection between Jefferson Street and Franklin Street is awkward with two 90 degree turns that share Charlotte Avenue for one block. This “confluence” of east-west and north-south traffic flows is one of the primary culprits in the congestion at the intersection of Franklin Street and Charlotte Avenue.

Also, a large volume of traffic on Franklin does not continue east of Downtown Monroe. The traffic volume on Franklin shifts from 14,000 vehicles a day west of Charlotte Avenue to 10,000 vehicles east of Hayne on both Franklin and Jefferson Streets combined.

Charlotte Avenue, which connects to Lancaster Avenue, is one of two primary north-south corridors in Downtown Monroe. Currently,

Charlotte Avenue serves areas north and west of the Downtown, while Lancaster Avenue serves traffic south and west of the Downtown. Traffic volumes in the two corridors combined have four distinct areas. Charlotte Avenue north of Jefferson Street carries around 18,000 vehicles a day. Charlotte Avenue between Jefferson and Franklin Street carries between 20-24,000 vehicles a day. Charlotte Avenue south of Franklin Street and Lancaster Avenue carries approximately 13,000 vehicles a day. Lancaster Avenue south of Charlotte Avenue carries approximately 9,000 vehicles a day.

The combination of Skyway Drive and Hayne Street provide the second primary north-south route in Downtown Monroe. Skyway Drive provides an important connection to US 74, while Hayne Street provides access to the less populated southern parts of Union County via Wolf Pond Road. Like the combined Charlotte/Lancaster corridor, the Skyway/Hayne corridor has distinct traffic volume breaks along the corridor. Skyway Drive (north of Church Street) carries 14,000 vehicles a day, while Hayne (south of Church Street) carries less than 7,000 vehicles a day.

A comprehensive evaluation of traffic operation in downtown Monroe was prepared, with the results of the analysis included as Appendix G in this report. Traffic performance in Downtown Monroe by standard engineering assessments is excellent. No intersection is operating at a level of service below LOS B (See Figure 4). However, due to roadway geometries, signal spacing, and traffic operations, the congestion at the Franklin Street and Charlotte Avenue intersection regularly impacts the operation of Charlotte Avenue.

The regional street network is programmed to be modified by the Mecklenburg Union Metropolitan Planning Organization (MUMPO). MUMPO's plan calls for the extension of Martin Luther King Boulevard to Lancaster Avenue, which will significantly alter regional traffic in Downtown Monroe (See Figure 5). Currently both local and regional vehicle traffic from the west and south must pass through Downtown Monroe.



FIGURE 5
Levels of Service Map

Source: Glatting Jackson Kercher Anglin

The programmed extension of MLK will provide a viable higher speed connection between Lancaster Avenue and Franklin Avenue to US 74 (Roosevelt Boulevard). This addition to the regional road network should allow the City of Monroe, Union County, and the NCDOT to reassign regional truck traffic around, rather than through Downtown Monroe. This new roadway will also allow the City, County, and State the confidence to develop policies and design recommendation that slow in downtown Monroe and encourage a more walkable downtown and in turn encourage regional private vehicle connections around rather than through downtown.



The one-way roadway Jefferson Street is too vehicular-oriented, making it difficult for pedestrians to safely cross.



Speeding is an issue on one-way streets through downtown Monroe, such as along Franklin Street, shown here at its intersection with Church Street.

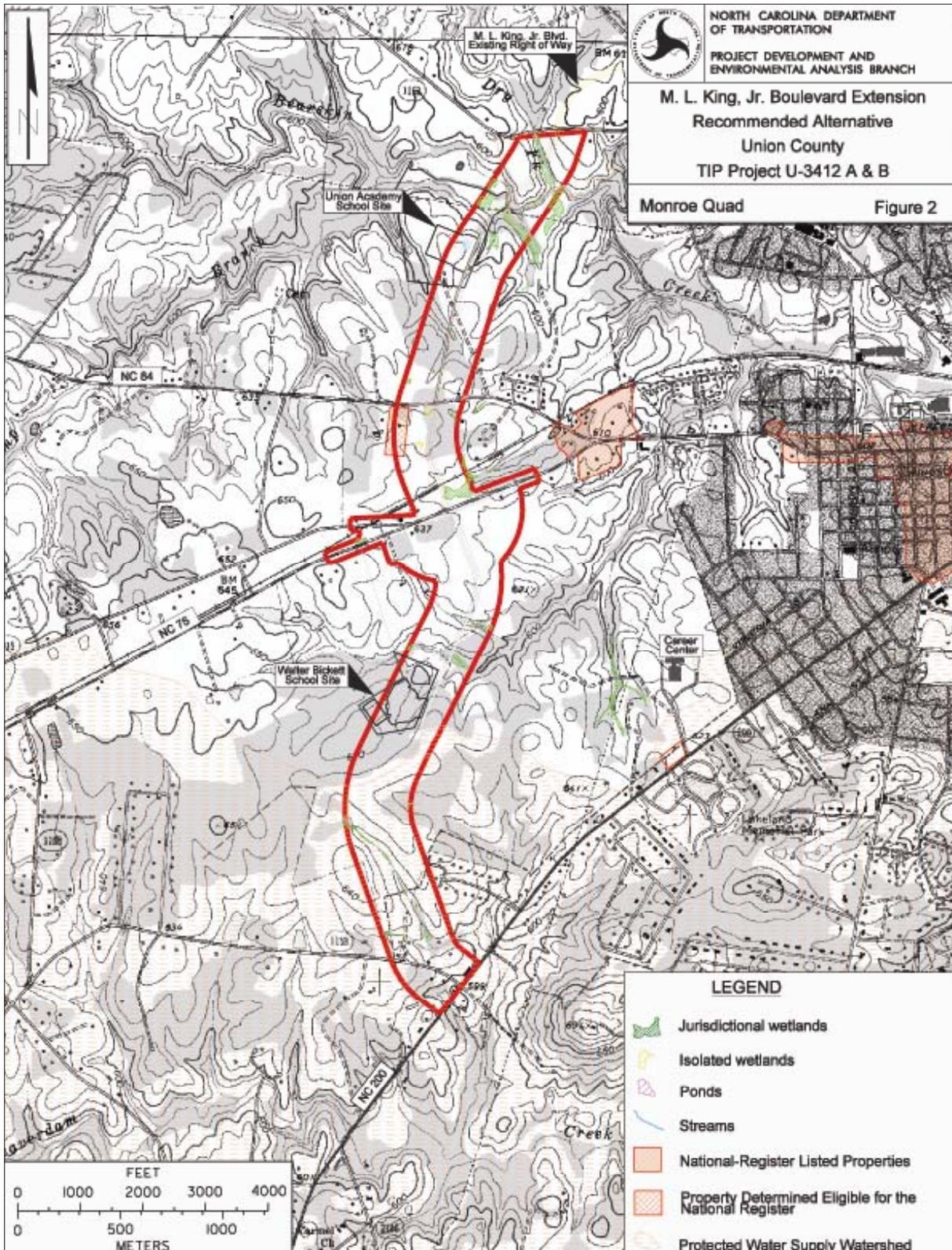


FIGURE 6
 Martin Luther King Boulevard Extension

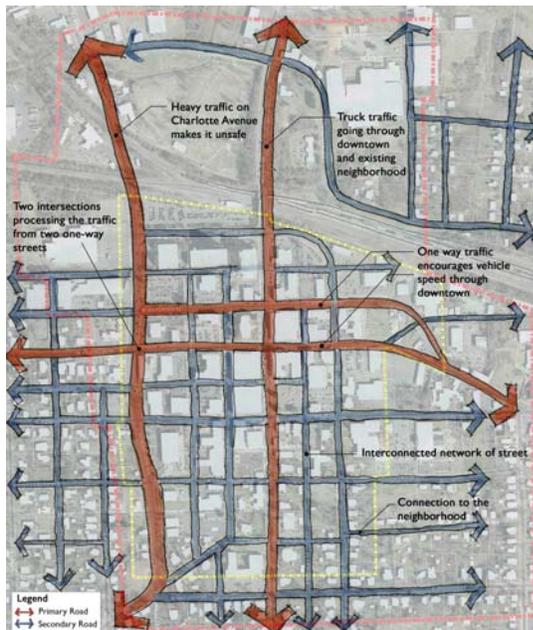
Source: Mecklenburg Union County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MUMPO).

Summary of Transportation Opportunities & Constraints

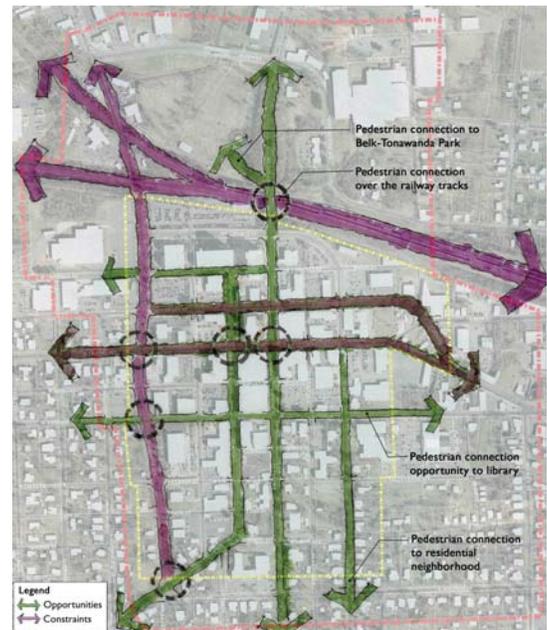
- Downtown Monroe has good regional connectivity, which provides opportunity to bring people and goods into downtown efficiently.
- Barriers, such as the railroad corridor between downtown and Belk-Tonawanda Park, prevent the optimization of connectivity.
- One-way streets, such as Franklin Street and Jefferson Street, are too vehicle-oriented, which creates congestion and safety issues.
- There is an opportunity to convert the one-way pair of roads to a two-way pair, thereby improving overall circulation.
- Certain key intersections, such as Jefferson and Charlotte and Franklin and Charlotte, have traffic congestion issues.
- The width of Charlotte Avenue, along with the lack of any pedestrian refuge, makes it difficult to cross.
- Truck traffic on some major roads is an issue for some residential neighborhoods.
- Signal prioritization is the reason for congestion at some intersections.
- There is a perception of a lack of and/or inconvenient locations of available parking in downtown.
- In general, there is a lack of bike and pedestrian connections within and to downtown.



In the core area there are 1,675 parking spaces, including 330 on-street parking spaces. This amount of parking is adequate for downtown but people still perceive there are not enough parking spaces.



The Road Network Analysis Map shows the primary and secondary roads into downtown Monroe, one-way streets and significant areas where conflicts exist.



The Bike and Pedestrian Movement Analysis details the locations of opportunities and constraints, as well as areas where there may be potential conflicts (shown within the dotted circles).

4.3 OPEN SPACE AND GREENWAYS

There is a variety of open spaces in downtown Monroe, including parks, plazas and gardens as shown on the Assets Map (Figure 6). Some of these facilities are more heavily used than others, with connectivity being the primary deterrent. Some greenways exist as part of the existing sidewalk system, but opportunities exist for more and for improvements to make them more pedestrian-friendly.

Summary of Open Space and Greenway Opportunities & Constraints

- Belk-Tonawanda Park is a significant downtown feature, but suffers from access issues, both visual and physical.
- Main Street Plaza is highly recognized and widely utilized for a variety of events and activities.
- Downtown's plazas, gardens and open spaces soften and enhance the urban setting, though not all are of a size or design that would support regular use.
- Downtown does not have a well-defined pedestrian trail system, as delineated in the city's greenway master plan, to provide interconnectivity internally and with adjacent neighborhoods.
- The planned MLK extension, when completed, will markedly improve connectivity throughout the center portion of the city and reduce congestion in downtown now created by through traffic.



Belk-Tonawanda Park is downtown Monroe's most significant existing recreational space but it is difficult to access due to its location across the railroad tracks from downtown



Main Street Plaza is widely utilized for programmed events in Monroe.



Downtown Monroe's plazas, gardens and open spaces soften the urban setting, although they could be used more efficiently throughout the downtown.

4.4 URBAN DESIGN

Like many other small towns, Monroe evolved from its early days as a trading center rooted in agriculture into the county's center of commerce and government. With the advent of the automobile and arrival of the railroad, Monroe began to radiate out from the core area that had first grown around Union County's original log courthouse. This original urban center now forms the downtown area that needs to be revitalized and transformed back into an activity center. Built on the traditional principles of an urban center, Monroe's downtown possesses a number of positive elements that make it a strong candidate for improvement and redevelopment.

BLOCK PATTERN & STREETScape

Downtown Monroe's block pattern immediately suggests a walkable core. An average block size of 340 feet promotes walkability by allowing people to choose multiple directions, as shown on the Block Pattern Map (Figure 8).

The downtown block pattern is interesting and intuitive, which is conducive to a good streetscape. The current streetscape design varies from street to street, with some streets more friendly to pedestrians:

- Main Street features sidewalks, trees and street furniture that make it more supportive of pedestrian traffic.
- In contrast, Franklin Street, Jefferson Street, Charlotte Avenue and portions of Hayne Street lack the same features that make Main Street more pedestrian-friendly in form and function.
- Some streets that are not major vehicular routes—Stewart Street, for example—lack the pedestrian amenities that encourage walking.
- In general, there is a lack of pedestrian amenities, such as sidewalks, street trees, interesting storefronts, etc., that could otherwise promote connectivity between downtown and the adjacent residential neighborhoods.

The widths of the sidewalks throughout most of downtown, including Main Street, are not adequate for the combination of comfortable movement of pedestrians, merchandise display and areas in which to congregate. In some instances, this is partially due to trees that have begun to overwhelm the spaces around them. The growth of these trees also is causing maintenance issues due to their contact with building facades. Fortunately, the width of Main Street is adequate to support the addition of wider sidewalks.

Many downtowns have a well-defined center through the disposition of buildings, streetscapes and prominent intersections. This is presently lacking in downtown Monroe. There are, however, opportunities for the city to create such center; the intersections of Main and Franklin streets and Hayne and Franklin streets, are examples.



The present Union County Courthouse, built during the 1970s, has little in common architecturally with other buildings in downtown.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The architectural style and built environment of downtown Monroe is the signature element that gives the area an unique sense of place that is supported by a number of elements. Key among these is the scale, style and setback found within downtown.

The scale of the built environment is relatively consistent throughout the downtown area, with building heights averaging three to four stories. One significant exception is the Union County Courthouse, which is in stark architectural contrast to the buildings around it.

Other than this case, the variety of architectural styles that exist throughout downtown range from Federal to Greek Revival to Art Deco. For the most part, the styles complement one another through the consistency and proportions of openings, as well as the rhythms of key architectural elements such as cornices, friezes and pilasters. This complementary diversity adds greatly to the uniqueness of downtown and creates visual interest that appeals to both residents and visitors. As shown in the façade illustration below, many attributes of the built environment, as discussed above, are visible in downtown Monroe. The proportions of individual buildings, shown as diagonal dotted red lines in the photo illustration, are repeated in the openings of doors and windows.

The setback of buildings from the street also contributes to Monroe’s positive urban character. Although the downtown core has buildings set on the sidewalks, some major thoroughfares, such as Charlotte Avenue, feature buildings set back from the sidewalk and offering a more expansive feel.

Styles complement one another through the consistency and proportions of openings, as well as the rhythms of key architectural elements such as cornices, friezes and pilasters.



Monroe's architectural style and built environment are elements that make downtown interesting. Key features include the consistency of scale, style and setbacks found within downtown.

Summary of Urban Design Opportunities & Constraints

- Downtown's block pattern is pedestrian-friendly and offers opportunities for better connectivity.
- Streetscapes vary, making some streets more conducive to pedestrian traffic than others.
- The downtown area lacks a focal point that actually functions as a hub of activity.
- Sidewalks are generally not wide enough to fully support intended uses, and trees have encroached into sidewalk space as well.
- Monroe's built environment possesses architectural diversity and scale that gives it a special feel. The varying architectural styles, for the most part, complement one another and give downtown a traditional look and feel.
- The institutional style and scale of the government office complex is a stark contrast to the more traditional architectural styles of the buildings around it.



The sidewalks in downtown Monroe are of inconsistent widths, many not wide enough to support varying uses.



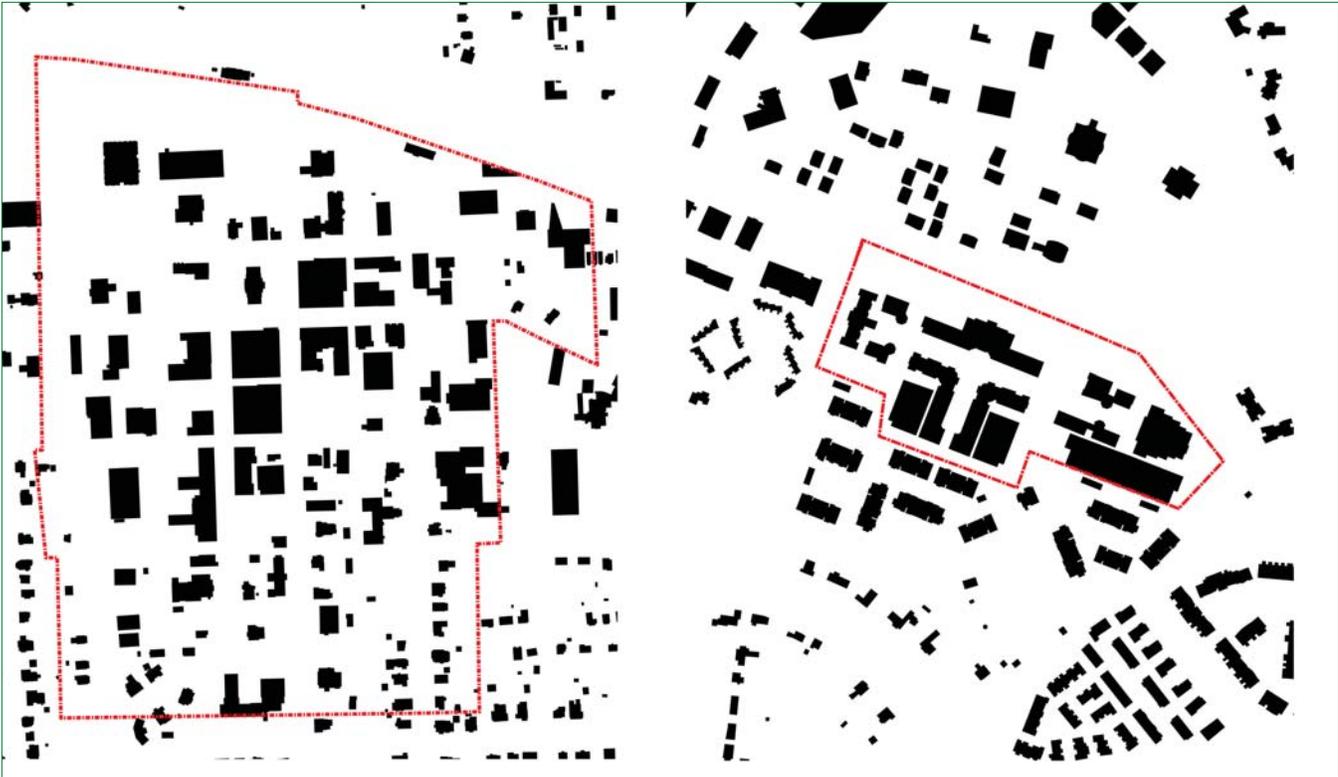
Streetscape design varies significantly in downtown Monroe, making some streets more pedestrian-friendly than others.



The sidewalks in downtown Monroe are of inconsistent widths, many not wide enough to support certain uses while trees have encroached into sidewalk space.



Downtown Monroe has varying, but mostly complementary, architectural diversity and scale that gives the town a special feel.



Philips Place provides a good example of building placement, which could serve as an example of downtown Monroe.

4.5 CHARACTER AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

Among the factors that make any downtown special, Monroe included, are various elements that contribute to its character, particularly cultural elements that are a reflection of a community’s people and heritage. They include the city’s preserved historic structures, the identifiable cultural entities and unique places that define a community’s identity; the residential communities and neighborhoods near downtown; the city’s civic structures, institutions, churches and other places of worship; organizations which support and promote downtown Monroe; gateways, signage and wayfinding.

HISTORIC BUILDINGS

Downtown Monroe has many significant and historic buildings, as shown on the Assets Map (Figure 7). Among them are the Historic Union County Courthouse, Old City Hall, Monroe Hardware, the Belk Building and others. A complete listing of historic buildings is found in Table 4.1. These structures provide the unifying character that is the signature of downtown, as is detailed in the Urban Design section of this report.



The Secret Building, which along with Monroe Hardware dominates nearly a block of Franklin Street, dates to 1927.

Table 4.1: Downtown Monroe's Historic Buildings

Site No.	Historic Building	Year Built	Location	History/Significance
1	(Former) Union County Courthouse	1886	Center of downtown	Architecturally and historically the most significant building in Monroe.
2	People's Bank Building	Circa 1875	313 N. Main Street	People's Bank of Monroe was the city's first financial institution.
3	(Former) U.S. Post Office	1913	407 N. Main Street	Built in the Neo-Classical federal style, this substantially sized government facility indicated the growing importance of Monroe as a center for business, especially railway commerce.
4	The Depot	1906	100 Smith Street	Intricate design and construction demonstrated the importance of Monroe as a stop along the railway.
5	Old City Hall	1847	100 W. Jefferson Street	Built as a county jail, the oldest building in Union County served as Monroe's City Hall for 80 years (1892-1972).
6	The Jackson Club (United Way Building)	1905	102 E. Franklin Street	Housed the Bank of Union, a grocery store and the Jackson Club.
7	Monroe Hardware Warehouse	1924	101 N. Hayne Street	A massive, three-story brick and concrete structure that housed the warehouse operations of Monroe Hardware between 1924 and 1962.
8	St. Paul's Episcopal Church	1911	116 S. Church Street	Gable-roofed, red brick church was constructed in 1911, renovated in 1922, and expanded twice, in 1945 and again in 1978.
9	Belk House	1903	401 S. Hayne Street	Impressive Neo-Classical Revival residence was built by Dr. John Belk, a partner with brother William Henry Belk in Belk Brothers Company.
10	First Baptist Church	1878-1957	Lancaster Avenue at the end of Main Street	From humble origins within the confines of the Monroe City Cemetery, First Baptist Church built the first brick building in town in 1878. The present sanctuary was built in 1957.
11	Center Theater	1940	120 S. Main Street	Art Deco style theater opened February 1940 and served Monroe for 51 years.
12	Stewart House	1875	100-108 N. Main Street	Also known as the Central Hotel, the Stewart House served a vital function of housing visitors who came to Monroe on the new railway.
13	Monroe Bank & Trust Building	1919	120 N. Main Street	Distinctive façade with graceful columns is now the home of Downtown Monroe, Inc. and the Union County Arts Council.
14	Belk-Bundy Building	1911	200-204 N. Main Street	In 1911, the building's Italian Renaissance Revival style of yellow bricks demonstrated Monroe's prosperity in the early days of the century. It housed ground floor retail with office space above.
15	Belk Building	1888-1901	201 N. Main Street	The beginnings of the Belk retail empire began at 201 N. Main Street in Monroe. Belk is the largest privately-held retail department chain in the U.S.
16	English Drug Building	1876	Franklin Street	Built by developer John D. Stewart, the building occupied by the English Drug Company housed retail and wholesale pharmaceutical operations through the 1920s.
17	Monroe Hardware (Secrest Block)	1927	101-111 W. Franklin Street	Both Monroe Hardware and Secrest Drug Store dominated this block, which was destroyed by fire in 1927 and rebuilt.

DOWNTOWN'S IDENTITY

Monroe's identity is tied to its history, culture, commerce, architecture and the many events and programs which have traditionally been held in the core of the community. For example, many activities have taken place on the grounds of the Historic Union County Courthouse. In addition, generations of families from Monroe have enjoyed parades at Christmas. Traditionally, downtown has always been the place where the community gathers for significant events and celebrations. During events such as these, celebrated annually with family members and neighbors, Monroe still feels like a small town, despite being the county seat of a the fastest growing county in the state.

What makes downtowns unique? Memorable downtowns are special due to various reasons. Among them are the local economic conditions; is the community growing in terms of office space and employment, for example. Also contributing to the vibrancy of downtowns are historic context, accessibility, density, diversity and the harder to define characteristics such as enthusiasm and community support. Through the renovation of existing structures, especially historic buildings; streetscape improvements for better access; vehicular circulation, bicycle and pedestrian amenities; the recruitment and retention of restaurant and entertainment facilities; Monroe is seeking to recapture the excitement, vitality and identity that downtown once enjoyed.

Neighborhoods

Since its 19th century founding, people have always called downtown Monroe home. Residential areas, especially those which are designated as historic, contribute to the identity of downtown Monroe. While there are not a lot of residents or residential structures, many individuals who have sought out housing opportunities near downtown are among those committed to downtown's success as a destination. Many consider downtown to be their "front porch," and they look to the core not only as the place people come during the day to work, but as a place where there are services provided and there are dining and entertainment options. For the people who live in downtown and nearby it, the core must service the needs of daily life with supporting retail and commercial ventures. An exciting and vibrant downtown has eateries and social gathering spots, churches and vital civic institutions. It should also be safe.

The people who live in the surrounding neighborhoods of downtown Monroe are among the individuals most committed to its success. Relative to the region, people have been able to purchase homes inexpensively. This was confirmed during stakeholder interviews. Many of these individuals are natives of Monroe or the region who have moved back home. Certain streets, not all, offer significant curb appeal presently, such as Washington Street and Church Street. Residents near downtown currently lack certain services nearby, such as a grocery store or pharmacy. Recently, an increased interest in downtown living for the small town charm Monroe enjoys has stimulated discussion to create more residential opportunities in the form of second floor condominiums above ground level retail establishments.



Downtown Monroe's identity consists of its small town feel and historic architecture. With its shops and restaurants, Main Street is among the most active areas of downtown.



The neighborhoods adjacent to downtown have seen many structures lovingly restored and preserved.



First Baptist Church is a visual anchor at the far end of Main Street.

Civic / Institutional

Various civic and institutional uses add to the character and identity of downtown Monroe. Assets that are located downtown include office buildings owned by Union County and the City of Monroe, the Union County Courthouse and other institutions which perform the tasks of justice and law enforcement, the Union County Library, administrative offices of the Union County Schools and the U.S. Post Office. These civic institutions are shown on the Assets Map (Figure 7). There are also churches and organizations that perform tasks for the community, such as county social service offices, the United Way and Downtown Monroe, Inc. (DMI). Combined, these institutions make downtown a destination. That said, downtown Monroe presently lacks other institutions which would contribute to its identity, including museums and facilities for the arts and entertainment.

Programming & Events

All downtowns need entities and organizations that create signature programs and events special to the community. Community gatherings for holidays, parades and music events contribute significantly to the character and identity of the place. Events sponsored and/or organized by DMI include the annual Main Street Mile and 5K race, home tours and walking tours, Friday night classic car cruisers, Halloween costume contests and trick-or-treating, the well-attended Christmas tree lighting ceremony and Christmas parade and other events.



In addition to programming and scheduling events that bring people downtown, a function performed by DMI is the installation and maintenance of the fountains downtown.

Organized in 1992 and incorporated the following year, DMI is a public – private partnership that shoulders the responsibility of promotion, improvement and advancement of downtown Monroe. It is the primary entity that programs events in downtown. Such events, as detailed above, help create a collection of memories for people who associate them with downtown Monroe. DMI operates under a system recommended by the North Carolina Main Street Program, and has been a member of that entity since 1998. A board of directors provides direction for the organization and various committees focus on specific areas of concern, such as promotion, transportation, design, economic restructuring and the nomination of future members of the board of directors. The board and staff of DMI were instrumental in the gathering of information for this report, the organization of stakeholder interviews and the promotion of the public meeting held at the downtown master plan’s inception. DMI is funded through a special tax levied on properties within the Municipal Service District. For more information on the functions, purpose and activities undertaken by DMI, visit the organization’s Web Site at www.downtownmonroenc.org.

Gateways

Various areas of downtown lend themselves as natural gateways, as defining or reinforcing features that create a sense of arrival and contribute to character and identity. These points of transition are important because they immediately create a visual footprint of character since they are usually the first experience for the visitor when entering downtown.

Although some areas do a better job of transition and character definition, all of them could be improved to emphasize one's arrival or departure to or from downtown. Five areas which fall into this classification in downtown Monroe are:

- Franklin Street at Charlotte Avenue
- Charlotte Avenue at the railroad tracks
- Skyway Drive at the railroad tracks
- Lancaster Avenue at Charlotte Avenue
- Five Points area

Signage & Wayfinding

Signage and wayfinding makes it easier for visitors to experience any destination and helps reinforce the character of the place. And while signage and wayfinding does not necessarily add to character, it helps uncover it. Although downtown Monroe has many features worth showcasing, it has yet to capitalize on promoting them.

One of the greatest opportunities for improved signage is along US 74 where unknown opportunities to attract visitors downtown are missed simply because travelers are not directed to downtown from the thoroughfare. Still, the same issue of limited signage and directional wayfinding is true to lesser degrees along all the major roadways that lead into downtown. The vast majority of visitors to downtown Monroe arrive via private automobile, most using one of four roadways:

- US 74
- US 601
- NC 75
- NC 84

Once the visitor arrives in downtown, it is equally challenging for him/her to find destinations within the core due to a lack of wayfinding mechanisms.

Summary of Character & Cultural Resources Opportunities & Constraints

- Monroe's history could be capitalized upon and promoted.
- The preservation of older buildings could become an issue as development pressure increases.
- Downtown has historic neighborhoods nearby that have seen an increase in reinvestment as more people choose to live near downtown.



The restored 1884 Historic Union County Courthouse may one day be the site of a museum that displays the history of the City of Monroe and Union County.



As development pressure increases, the preservation of older buildings will continue to remain important.



The historic neighborhoods near downtown Monroe have seen a resurgence in popularity.



Monroe's Center Theater on Main Street is undergoing a complete renovation that will turn the property into a regional music venue that will hold more than 500 people per performance.

- Downtown lacks an array of cultural facilities, key ingredients that make a downtown a special place to be, i.e. arts facilities, museums, performing arts centers, etc.
- The old Center Theater, once restored and reopened, is an opportunity to attract people to the downtown during evenings and weekends.
- Residents have expressed the desire for more activities and events downtown. For example, since the Christmas parade is so well attended, why not schedule a Fourth of July parade?
- Downtown lacks a facility that tells the rich story of its history, tradition and culture.
- Downtown lacks defined gateways that create a sense of arrival.
- Downtown lacks signage to aid wayfinding and reinforce a defined character.

4.6 MARKET

To inform the decisions about the future of downtown as reflected in the Downtown Master Plan, it was necessary to undertake a real estate market and economic development analysis. The following is a summary of the existing conditions and issues/opportunities as they relate to demographics, employment, and residential and commercial development.

DEMOGRAPHICS

There are 641 people currently living in the study area, 12.1% more than the 572 people who called the study area home in 2000. Households total 208, 10.6% more than the 188 households in the study area in 2000. Most of these residents and homes are located in the southeast portion of the study area, in the Monroe Historic District.

Median household incomes in the study area increased by 25.2% from \$26,269 in 2000 to \$32,889 in 2007. Although this income growth rate is similar to those of Monroe and Union County, the current median income is only 63.4% of Monroe's and 51.2% of Union County's.

RESIDENTIAL TRENDS

Between 2002 and 2006, a total of 15,497 single-family houses were sold in Union County, with annual closings averaging 3,099. These sales include both new and resale units. Currently, there are eight active listings in the Monroe Historic District. Prices range from \$219,000 to \$339,900, with an average listing of \$279,124. Half the listing prices are over \$100 per square foot.

Sales of condominiums or townhouses in Union County between 2002 and 2006 totaled 383, over 57% of which took place in 2005 and 2006. The attached for-sale market accelerated during the five-year period, with the 123 closings in 2006 almost four times the 34 closings in 2002. Compared to escalating single-family average closing prices, condominium and townhouse pricing was fairly stagnant between 2002 and 2006 in Union County. In addition, the gap between single-family and condominium / townhouse closing prices is widening.

There were 252 apartments completed in Union County during the same five-year period, equating to an annual average of about 50 units. However, all units were delivered in 2003 and 2004, with no additions to the apartment supply in the county over the last two and a half years.

Currently, there are seven single-family residential projects either proposed or underway in the City of Monroe. Combined, these seven projects represent more than 2,000 lots. No multi-family projects have been approved.

Forecasts

Residential and commercial real estate trends were analyzed and 10-year forecasts were generated.

Residential

Based on land availability, demographic trends, development activity, and potential transportation improvements, the downtown Monroe study area could add between 170 and 225 residential units during the next 10 years. This represents a growth rate of 76% to 101%. Of those additional residential units, approximately 75% would be categorized as multi-family (duplexes/triplexes, condominiums, townhouses, apartments).

Table 4.2: Residential Market Forecast, Downtown Monroe Study Area, 2007-2017

Type	Units		Change, 2007-2017	
	2007	2017	#	%
Single-Family	172	212-222	40-50	23%-29%
Multi-Family*	51	181-226	130-175	255%-343%
Total	223	393-448	170-225	76%-101%

* Includes all residential units except single-family detached

Source: ESRI, Warren & Associates

The 40-50 additional single-family detached units comprise between 22% and 23% of the total residential units forecasted for the study area during the next 10 years (Table 4.2). Almost 75% of the 170-225 new residential units would either be for-sale condominiums/ townhouses or apartments. Another 3%-4% is expected to be in-fill duplexes/triplexes.

Table 4.3: Residential By Type Forecast, Downtown Monroe Study Area, 2007-2017

Type	Additional Units	% of Total
Single-Family Detached	40-50	22%-23%
Duplexes/Triplexes	5-10	3%-4%
Condos/Townhouses	75-95	42%-44%
Apartments	50-70	29%-31%
Total	170-225	100%

Source: Warren & Associates

In a supply-constrained market such as downtown Monroe, the availability of sites should drive the demand for new residential development.

Summary of Residential Opportunities & Constraints

- The residential neighborhoods near downtown lack certain code enforcement from the aesthetic perspective.
- There are no destinations in downtown Monroe that would attract potential residents.
- The demand for housing stock in downtown Monroe is low.
- Too many rental properties in Monroe make it an unattractive and uncertain market in which to invest.
- Most of the housing market focus is in western Union County because of the proximity to Charlotte.

- The high costs of renovations to available second-floor space hampers potential residential uses of that space.
- Stringent building code requirements for the residential upfit of structures make it cost-prohibitive for creating new housing opportunities.
- There is a lack of coordination between property owners, the City of Monroe and potential buyers and investors, and marketing to local and regional residents about the residential potential of downtown Monroe has been ineffective.
- There is a lack of choices to offer a diverse housing stock for both rental and owner-occupied housing.
- There is an opportunity to cater to the growing Hispanic market which has opted to live near downtown.
- There is an opportunity to attract younger people with children who may consider living downtown or near downtown by providing attractions and activities specific to their interests.
- There is an opportunity to convert second-floor space into housing.
- There is an opportunity to take advantage of the emerging trend in the United States that people want to be a part of a mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly environment again.
- The City of Monroe and Union County own land in the downtown area that is suitable for redevelopment; the opportunity to participate with the private sector in that effort is there.
- A renovated former Monroe Hardware Warehouse (Allen Overall Building) would provide a prime opportunity for new, high-density housing in downtown Monroe.
- Downtown's housing potential is currently not marketed to non-local people.
- New transportation projects such as the Monroe Bypass and the MLK Boulevard Extension makes downtown Monroe more accessible.

RETAIL, OFFICE AND EMPLOYMENT TRENDS

Based on Union County tax records and a recently completed field check, the study area currently contains 332,087 square feet of office space, including second floor space. The office space total includes 137,863 square feet of bank space. There are 139,066 square feet of retail and 210,237 square feet of office space in Monroe's Municipal Services District (MSD), which is considered the commercial core of the study area. About 46% of the retail space and 27% of the office space is currently vacant. Much of the vacant office space is located on the second and third floors of buildings.

According to a field check, there are a total of 35 retail businesses occupying 75,386 square feet of space in the MSD. Almost half of the businesses and occupied square footage are in the apparel and beauty salon/spa industries. Of the 47 office-related businesses in the MSD, 13 are law/legal firms, with another nine associated with bank and/or

PRIMARY TRADE AREA

The preliminary basis for the Downtown Monroe Primary Trade Area was a 10-minute drive time. This area generally extends north to Roanoke Church Road, east to the Town of Wingate, south to Macedonia Church Road, and west to Rocky River Road.

SECONDARY TRADE AREA

The preliminary basis for defining the secondary trade area was the distance between a 10- and 15-minute drive time from downtown Monroe. This area generally extends north to Unionville-Indian Trail Road, west to the Town of Marshville, south to Belk Mill Road, and west to Wesley Chapel Stouts Road.

financial services industries. Almost half of the 152,868 square feet of occupied office inventory is either government or law/legal space.

Renovated commercial space in the study area ranges from \$7 to \$10 per square foot (not including utilities). The rent range is generally for shell upfit (wiring, HVAC, plumbing, façade) only. Based on information from local property owners and managers, typical renovation costs for much of the commercial space in the study area range from \$55 to \$70 per square foot.

Four commercial projects totaling over 1 million square feet have been approved in Monroe. These projects range from 117,145 square feet at Shoppes at Rocky River, which could include a Harris Teeter anchor, to 550,000 square feet on a site at US 74 and Secrest-Price Road that is proposed to include Home Depot, Kohl's and a theater.

Forecast

Retail and Office

To determine retail demand by type of service, it was necessary to define a primary and secondary retail trade area for downtown Monroe (Figure 9).

The primary trade area should generate 65%-75% of sales for a retail site within the study area, with the secondary trade area producing another 15%-25%. Another 5%-10% of demand comes from non-household factors such as employment and visitors. Natural and man-made barriers, as well as competitive product and drive-times are taken into consideration to determine the final boundaries of each trade area.

Retail Demand

In order to estimate the demand for retail space in downtown Monroe between 2007 and 2017, a household forecast was conducted (Table 4.4). By the end of 2017, approximately 17,400 households could be added to the combined trade area, which would reach a total of over 44,000 households. Almost 60% of the household growth is forecasted within the Secondary Trade Area.

Table 4.4: Household Forecast, Trade Areas, 2007-2017

Trade Area			2007-2017 Change	
	2007	2017	Number	Percent
Primary	13,560	20,700	7,140	52.7%
Secondary	13,661	23,920	10,259	75.1%
Total	27,221	44,620	17,399	63.9%

Source: ESRI, Warren & Associates

The buying power of trade area households can be determined by applying future average household incomes to the future households. The Primary Trade Area average household income is expected to escalate from \$64,053 in 2007 to \$85,600 in 2017, an increase of 33.6% (Table 4.5). The

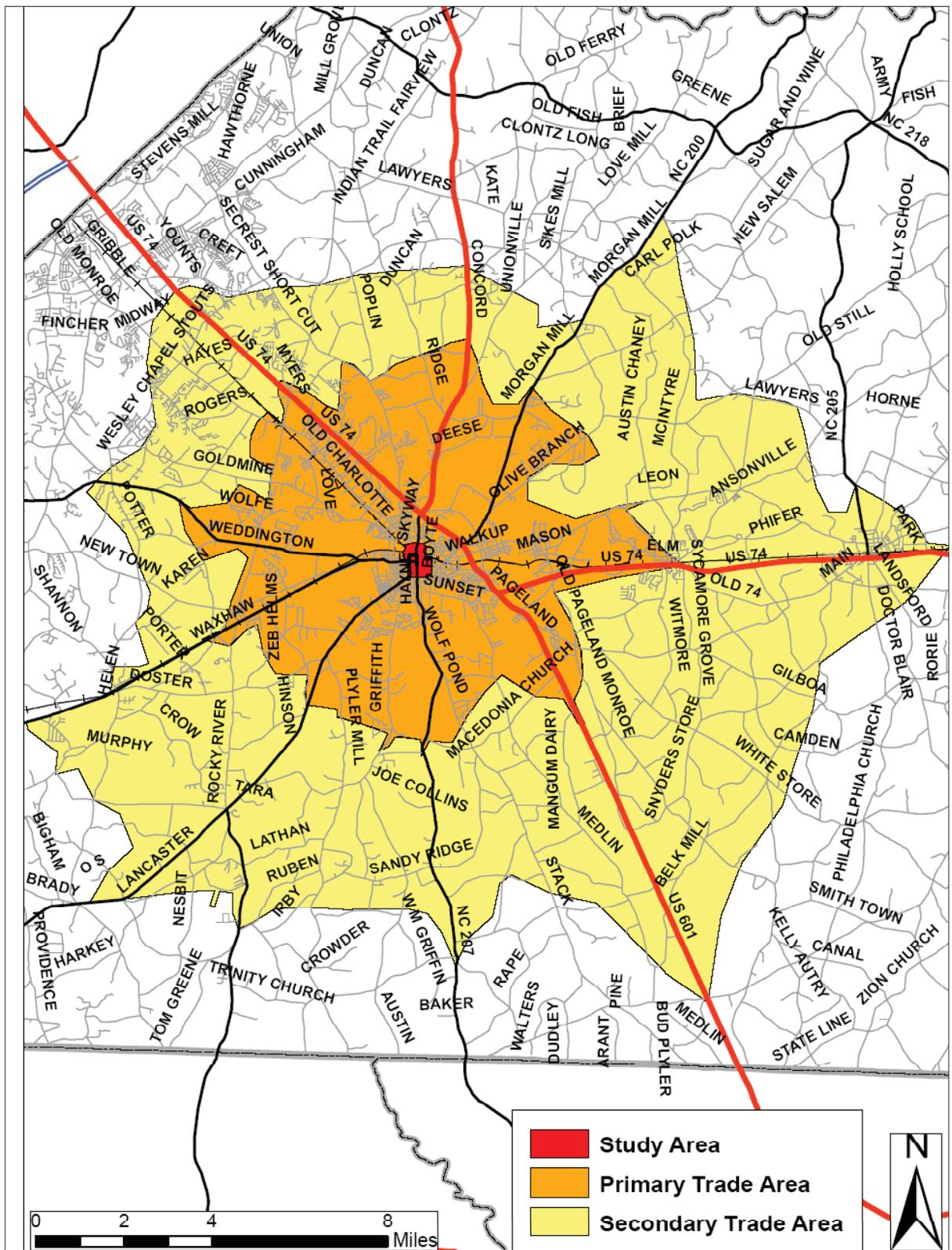


FIGURE 9
Primary and Secondary Retail Trade Areas

Source: Warren & Associates

forecasted average household income for the Secondary Trade Area in 2017 is \$92,300, or 34.6% higher than \$68,574 in 2007.

Table 4.5: Avg. Household Income Forecast, Trade Areas, 2007-2017

Trade Area	2007	2017	2007-2017 Change	
			Number	Percent
Primary	\$64,053	\$85,600	\$21,547	33.6%
Secondary	\$68,574	\$92,300	\$23,726	34.6%

Source: ESRI, Warren & Associates

Based on the household and average household income forecasts, the Primary Trade Area total household income would increase from \$868.5 million in 2007 to \$1.7 billion in 2017 (Table 4.6). Total household income in the Secondary Trade Area is expected to grow by 135.7%, from \$937 million in 2007 to \$2.2 billion in 2017.

Table 4.6: Total Household Income Forecast, Trade Areas, 2007-2017

Trade Area	2007	2017	2007-2017 Change	
			Number	Percent
Primary	\$868,558,680	\$1,771,920,000	\$903,361,320	104.0%
Secondary	\$936,789,414	\$2,207,816,000	\$1,271,026,586	135.7%

Source: ESRI, Warren & Associates

In order to forecast retail demand by type, it was necessary to calculate taxable sales for each retail category and estimate the percent of household income that is spent on each of these categories. This was done for both trade areas.

After estimating the expenditure potential by retail category for each trade area, a study area capture rate was determined. This capture rate varied depending on the type of retail. Taking into account inflow demand from employment and visitors, the total sales potential for the study area was calculated. To determine the amount of retail space needed to support these sales, estimated sales per square foot for each retail category was obtained from the Urban Land Institute's Dollars and Cents of U.S. Shopping Centers 2007 publication.

The results of the retail demand forecast calculations are indicated in Table 4.7. Only those retail categories relevant to the Downtown Monroe Study Area are shown. A total of 56,000-76,000 square feet of new retail space is supportable by 2017. Between 52% and 54% of this space is for supermarkets/pharmacies and restaurants.

The 30,000-40,000 square feet of new office space forecasted for the study area during the next 10 years does not include any publically-owned space for government offices. However, the private-sector-owned space could include both private and public sector tenants. Much of the demand for

Table 4.7: Retail Forecast, Downtown Monroe Study Area, 2007-2017

Retail Type	Square Feet 2007-2017	% of Total
Supermarket/Pharmacy	15,000-20,000	26%-27%
Restaurants	15,000-20,000	26%-27%
Apparel/Shoes	7,500-10,000	13%
Furniture/Home Furnishings	5,000-10,000	9%-13%
Fitness Center	5,000	8%
Gifts/Miscellaneous	2,500-5,000	4%-8%
Beauty Salon/Barber	2,000	3%
Florists	2,000	3%
Laundry/Dry Cleaners	2,000	3%
Total	56,000-76,000	100%

Source: Union County, Warren & Associates

office space in downtown Monroe is a result of it being the Union County seat, which inherently creates demand for legal firms, accountants and real estate professionals. In addition, the close proximity (two miles east) of the Carolinas Medical Center – Union, a 157-bed acute care and 66-bed long-term care hospital, should generate the need for more medical-related office space.

Over the next 10 years, there is demand for an additional 86,000-116,000 square feet of commercial space in the study area (Table 4.8). The priority should be to absorb existing vacant space with this demand before building new inventory in the study area. Most of the commercial demand should be focused in the MSD. Between 56,000 and 76,000 square feet (65%-66%) is retail and 30,000-40,000 square feet (34%-35%) office.

Table 4.8: Office and Retail Forecast, Downtown Monroe Study Area, 2007-2017

Type	Square Feet 2007-2017	% of Total
Office	30,000-40,000	34%-35%
Retail	56,000-76,000	65%-66%
Total	86,000-116,000	100%

Source: Union County, Warren & Associates

As is the case for residential development, new retail and office development will be somewhat constrained by the availability of marketable sites.

Of the estimated 1,710 jobs in the study area, more than 70% are categorized as either government or service. These two industries, in addition to finance, insurance and real estate (F.I.R.E.), comprise higher shares of total employment than both the City of Monroe and Union County. Government, attorneys and banks comprise the bulk of employment. Retail trade comprises a much lower share, 7.1%, of total

employment than Monroe, 20.3%, and Union County, 17.3%. Study area employment comprises 7% of the 24,114 jobs within the City of Monroe, and the city's employment is almost 50% of the nearly 50,000 jobs located in Union County in 2007.

Summary of Non-Residential Opportunities & Constraints

- Downtown's existing tenant base lacks diversity to attract potential customers.
- Some tax credits are available for rehabilitating historic structures, but they may limit what you can do with the property.
- Much of the vacant commercial space is in need of renovations.
- No commercial anchors remain since Monroe Hardware relocated to US 74.
- There is a lack of retail and restaurant services for downtown employees and residents of the Monroe Historic District and other residents who live near downtown.
- There is a lack of family-oriented activities that attract more people downtown during non-working hours.
- Office space demand is predominantly driven by the public sector and there is a lack of demand from other sectors.
- Ineffective coordination between property owners, the City of Monroe and potential buyers/investors does nothing to encourage current owners, especially long-time property owners, to invest in their sites because they are content to receive the rents their properties currently generate.
- Current development and building rehabilitation incentives the City of Monroe offers need to be reevaluated.
- Many long-time property owners are reluctant to sell or pay for upfit costs of their space; they are content with paying property taxes and receiving low rents from tenants.
- New transportation projects such as the Monroe Bypass and the MLK Boulevard Extension could negatively impact the potential for commercial development in downtown Monroe in that they could create new commercial development opportunities along the new roadways.
- Commercial space is available and rents are low.
- Being the Union County seat of government, downtown Monroe provides a stable employment base with potential for expansion.
- Urban fabric is in place to support sustainable commercial activity; architectural character of the buildings is an asset.
- One or two civic anchors in the study area should attract more people downtown on a weekly basis and help support retailers.
- The City of Monroe and Union County own land in the downtown area that is suitable for redevelopment; the opportunity to participate with the private sector in that effort is there.
- A suburban to urban movement is emerging throughout the United States; people want to be a part of a mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly environment again.
- Redevelopment and expansion of the Monroe Mall could

provide some opportunities to lure smaller retailers to the study area.

5.0

CHAPTER 5: THE MONROE DOWNTOWN MASTER PLAN

5.1 LAND USE

5.2 TRANSPORTATION

5.3 OPEN SPACE AND GREENWAYS

5.4 URBAN DESIGN

5.5 CHARACTER AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

5.6 MARKET AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

5.0 THE MONROE DOWNTOWN MASTER PLAN

GOALS

- Embrace a common vision for growth, development and redevelopment in the downtown of Monroe.
- Improve the transportation/circulation network for greater efficiency in moving people and goods throughout downtown.
- Provide a variety of mobility choices and make downtown a safe place.
- Make downtown a destination, more vibrant on weekends and evenings.
- Market the downtown to the residents and visitors.
- Attract more residential development and a variety of housing choices in downtown.
- Deliver great services in downtown Monroe.
- Make downtown more attractive through physical improvements to the streetscape.
- Diversify retail and employment opportunities in downtown to create a unique commercial destination and experience.

The Monroe Downtown Master Plan was created in response to the opportunities and constraints identified during the initial portion of the project. The plan took shape over several weeks following the intensive two-day charrette by first examining the various elements of the plan independently and then together to develop a cohesive vision for the future of downtown Monroe.

Given the existing conditions in Monroe today, a set of goals for the downtown's future was established through the community involvement process. These goals were used to guide the development of the Downtown Master Plan. Collectively, these goals establish a framework for policy initiatives created to implement the various objectives and initiatives that are found in the Recommendations and Implementation Strategies section of the plan. These goals are not organized in order of priority, as all goals are equally important. However, the implementation strategies outlined in section 6.0 are aimed at achieving these goals. Future prioritization of the strategies will be a reflection of the importance the community places on achieving each goal.

The Downtown Master Plan establishes a vision for the Monroe of tomorrow by building on its strengths, learning from the past and determining the courses of action necessary to reinvigorate downtown. The plan acknowledges downtown as the heart of Monroe, as the most prominent intersection of commerce and culture in Union County. The Downtown Master Plan reflects a vision for a place where people live, work and play; where numerous restaurants, entertainment venues and shops enliven a safe city core.

Consistent with the vision, the plan also offers suggestions for physical improvements to downtown Monroe. It encourages the correct mixture of downtown retail; seeks to bolster residential areas adjacent to the core; respects the character of downtown, especially the architecture of the built environment; and suggests improvements to the transportation network. Furthermore, the Downtown Master Plan determines catalyst areas where redevelopment opportunities exist.

Some of the key highlights of the Downtown Master Plan, shown as Figure 10, is to create a distinct and easily identifiable center at Franklin and Main; create a signature urban park at the southern end of Main Street as an anchor and a destination; convert one-way traffic streets, especially Franklin and Jefferson, to two-way streets for a safer and more pedestrian-oriented network that will support the downtown retail; provide for more housing choices, especially high density mixed in with other uses; and to lure destination-oriented retail uses such as restaurants, hotels and cafés. The following sections describe the plan in more detail.

5.1 LAND USE

The plan calls for the retention of existing uses as well as complementary uses to integrate into downtown and make downtown Monroe a destination for residents and visitors. The mix of uses illustrated includes the existing land uses to keep in the downtown and new uses that will help make it a more vibrant place.

Recent trends in downtown revitalization include the common thread of residential uses in downtown, as many have decided to live close to where they work, or simply choose the experience offered by downtown living. Additional residential uses in the core of downtown could help spur activities to make downtown more vibrant. This is further reinforced by the market analysis completed for downtown.

The plan suggests three ways to address residential development and redevelopment in downtown Monroe and its surrounding areas: reinforce existing neighborhoods, create new opportunities for downtown living in the heart of Monroe and provide opportunities for additional housing as a transitional use between the core and existing neighborhoods. According to the market analysis, most of the residential land uses that will come to downtown will be in the form of higher density housing, such as townhomes, condominiums and apartments.

As shown in the plan, existing residential is primarily single-family. These areas could remain at densities similar to those that presently exist and the existing fabric could be preserved through the promotion of similar scale, form and style of houses. The area of downtown along Main Street and Hayne Street could have residential development in the form of condominiums (including units above first floor commercial space) or townhomes. Higher density housing could be promoted in areas other than Main and Hayne streets as points of transition into the existing neighborhoods. North of the CSX Railroad tracks, higher density housing could take the form of condominiums, townhomes and attached single-family homes. Here and in other places throughout the study area, open space could benefit from the “eyes on the park” by having more residential units organized around and facing such open spaces.

Like many downtowns, Monroe’s commercial center has changed from its traditional retail stronghold where the likes of Belk, J.C. Penney and Monroe Hardware were destinations for shoppers. To revive downtown as a shopping destination a diverse mix of commercial uses could include restaurants, a grocery store, a pharmacy, establishments for apparel and shoes, as well as retail stores for home furnishings. The commercial uses are envisioned for areas throughout downtown, but primarily along the major corridors.

In addition to residential and commercial uses, office and employment uses are expected to be a primary component of the land use mix. The plan calls for these uses to be concentrated in the northern portion of downtown, where most currently exist. The city and county government and administrative offices, school administration offices and related uses

will continue to occupy a significant portion of this area in downtown and would be best complemented by additional office uses.

The plan acknowledges the locations of existing civic and institutional uses, which are expected to remain in downtown. Several sites have been identified on the plan for future civic uses. Intentionally distributed throughout the downtown, these sites lend themselves to a variety of civic uses that could serve as anchors, generating activity in downtown and increasing the downtown's role as a major destination in the city and the region.

Some areas lend themselves to more than one use. Two areas have been identified on the future land use map for mixed-use development: Mixed-Use A and Mixed-Use B. While each area can and should accommodate primarily office, commercial and higher density residential uses, the specific tenants in each area will differ. Mixed-Use A is the area that, for the most part, flanks both sides of Main and Hayne streets. Utilizing existing buildings, this area would accommodate a variety of uses in rehabilitated space. As a place to concentrate retail and restaurant uses, this area is envisioned to be the shopping and entertainment hub of downtown.

Mixed-Use B is an area on the east side of downtown. In contrast to Mixed-Use A, Mixed-Use B would consist of new construction provided through redevelopment efforts of private investors. It is envisioned to have more residential uses. These uses would be organized around a proposed collection of civic uses. Ideas for the civic sites expressed through the process included relocating the Ellen Fitzgerald Senior Center to a site on the north side of Franklin Street and expanding the Monroe Aquatics and Fitness Center to have a location south of Franklin Street.

Transitional uses provide transition from the intense, predominantly mixed-use uses found at the city's core to the less intense uses found in surrounding neighborhoods. Uses in this part of downtown could include higher density residential development and offices for lawyers, accountants and other professionals.

5.2 TRANSPORTATION

The historic approach to transportation planning in the State of North Carolina has been focused solely on moving more cars. As a consequence, transportation planners and engineers have focused on only two transportation solutions: make roads bigger, or make roads more efficient. Due to the context of the study area, this single-minded approach was not used for the Downtown Monroe Master Plan.

A balanced approach to transportation planning recognizes the interrelationship between land use and transportation planning. This approach broadens the definition of transportation planning to include the movement of people - through cars, transit, bicycling and walking. This approach also recognizes the value of improving the quality of the trip as well as utilizing land use solutions to resolve transportation problems. The redevelopment plan for downtown Monroe will employ a balanced approach to transportation issues.

The transportation land use cycle illustrates how land development patterns, in redeveloping areas, are impacted by transportation investment. Typically land development and private investment in redeveloping areas respond positively to transportation improvements that balance mobility with accessibility. Single purpose transportation investments that favor mobility can restrict access and consequently reduce investment within a district. See the Transportation Map (Figure 11).

Basic transportation planning principles suggest that a traditional network of streets has more capacity than the suburban sparse hierarchy. The fundamental reason why a network of small streets outperforms a sparse hierarchy of streets is that streets become less, not more, efficient as their size increases. Instead of an efficiency of scale as the street gets larger we experience a “diseconomy” of scale. A highly connected grid of streets provides numerous, redundant opportunities to make left turns. This contrasts with a sparse network pattern in which left turns are gathered up from multiple locations and focused at a single location.

The long-term redevelopment strategy for increasing vehicular capacity in downtown Monroe is focused on increasing the street network within the study area. The most significant of which is the two-way conversion of Franklin and Jefferson streets, the long-term extension of Church Street to Crowell Street. This action will provide a needed alternative route to the Franklin Street / Charlotte Avenue intersection.

The downtown street network of Monroe has many different users. Its obvious role of providing service to vehicular traffic will be slightly reduced with the extension of MLK Boulevard. However, successful redevelopment of downtown Monroe is dependent on the street network recognizing all of its users and developing design solutions that meet and balance all of its users' needs.

Besides its vehicular transportation role, Monroe's downtown streets need to better meet the transportation needs of pedestrians and bicyclists.

Equally important, transportation planners need to recognize and propose design solutions to facilitate the street network's community responsibilities of supporting commerce (the exchanges of goods and services) and proper functioning as a premiere public space.

5.3 OPEN SPACE AND GREENWAYS



Public sculptures function as landmarks along Asheville's Urban Trail, which is a 1.7-mile walking tour through the streets of downtown Asheville.

According to the American Planning Association's Planning and Urban Design Standards, a critical element of any downtown is the number, location and types of public spaces. The open space framework, as shown on the Proposed Open Space / Green Streets Map (Figure 12), is a series of public and private spaces scattered through all sections of downtown in varying sizes that are linked by "green streets." Green streets are simply urban greenways where the roads are retrofitted with pedestrian amenities such as continuous sidewalks, trees, benches and cross-walks that give pedestrians priority over vehicular traffic. The highlight of the Downtown Master Plan is the variety of open spaces in the form of parks, plazas and gardens that will enhance the experience one feels in downtown Monroe and become the unifying spaces for existing development and new development around them.

PARKS

Downtown Monroe has a significant facility in Belk-Tonawanda Park, despite the park's disconnection from the downtown core due to the railroad tracks. The plan proposes to improve the connectivity between downtown and the park, as well as provide more open space opportunities within the downtown core. One of the key enhancements in the downtown could be the creation of a downtown urban park, possibly along the southern portion of Main Street with access from Hayne Street. The park could serve as an anchor on Main Street on this side of the downtown core, opposite the Main Street Plaza near the courthouse at the other end of the Main Street and Hayne Street corridors. As this park anchors and promotes a more viable Main Street, it creates two nodes of interest- one at the intersection of Main and Franklin streets, and the other near the proposed urban park.

This signature facility will be designed to cater to all demographic groups, from children to senior citizens. It could have interactive water fountains, comfortable seating, trees for shade, beautiful hardscape and softscape and opportunities for public art that could tell the history of Monroe. This park could have a stage for outdoor performances and could be designed to accommodate multiple purposes, such as outdoor movies or a weekend farmers' market. During special events, this park could be extended onto Main Street by utilizing the different textures and surface materials.

Other parks include a neighborhood green at the southeastern portion of the downtown core area and another at the southwestern portion of the study area. Both of these facilities could serve the passive recreation needs of the downtown with internal trails, gardens and gazebos. Small neighborhood pocket parks are also proposed at the northeastern part of the study area where redevelopment of residential spaces is proposed. These proposed parks could provide good public space for current and future residents.

PLAZAS

Plazas are smaller open spaces that are generally extensions of public and private buildings. The Downtown Master Plan proposes three plazas for downtown Monroe. Plazas are proposed in front of the old train depot, near the eastern part of the Jefferson and Franklin split and on Windsor Street north of the public library. Other existing plazas, such as Main Street Plaza or the few on Franklin Street, need to be tied to other open spaces within downtown.

GARDENS

Various small gardens, both existing and in the future, play significant roles in the quality of open space in downtown. Such spaces could be used to display landscaping elements such as planted trees, flowers and shrubs, as well as provide an appropriate background for downtown activities.

5.4 URBAN DESIGN

Great urban design makes for an appealing destination. The Downtown Master Plan seeks to build on the strong history of Monroe's urban core by enhancing its block pattern and streetscape, as well as through the creation of design guidelines. Detailed design guidelines will help developers and potential investors to understand the city's desire for development and redevelopment. This section deals with the built form and the streetscape of downtown Monroe.

BUILT FORM

Building scale, placement, architectural style and materials define the overall character of built form. In order to reinforce existing character, any new development needs to complement the rhythm, proportions and style of the prevalent architecture.

STREETSCAPE

Over 30% of the downtown core is in the public realm – the streets, sidewalks etc. High quality, cohesive and functional development of these areas is critical for private investment to happen in downtown Monroe. Therefore, streetscape improvements add tremendous value to downtown. Two types of streetscape improvements are suggested in the Downtown Master Plan– major streetscape improvements and minor streetscape improvements. Major streetscape improvements are recommended for major thoroughfares such as Hayne Street, Franklin Street, Main Street and Charlotte Avenue, whereas minor streetscape improvement is recommended for all the other streets. Major streetscape improvements will require a continuation of sidewalks with large trees and landscaping, wider planting strip (8 feet to 10 feet), uniform lighting with decorative lamps and other street furniture. Minor streetscape improvements on the other hand will require continuous sidewalks, small trees and uniform lighting.

5.5 CHARACTER AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

To reinforce the urban, historic core of Monroe it is vital to protect and promote the cultural resources in downtown that contribute to the city's character. These cultural resources set downtown Monroe apart from other North Carolina communities and are crucial to the long-term success of the study area. Character and cultural resources are mainly defined by historic buildings, neighborhoods, gateways and the events held in downtown. Historic buildings are identified on the Assets Map (Figure 7) , as well as in Appendix E, the poster summarizing opportunities in downtown Monroe.

HISTORIC BUILDINGS

Downtown Monroe has an important collection of commercial buildings which form the nucleus of the city. The Downtown Master Plan suggests that Monroe can reinforce the character of its downtown by preserving these older, historic buildings by identifying opportunities to adaptively reuse them. The city could take an incentive-based approach where owners receive tax credits and grants for preserving historic buildings.

GATEWAYS & WAYFINDING

To attract visitors on a regular basis, it is essential that Monroe improve signage into and around its downtown core. Gateways are critical signs or landmarks that identify a particular area. The positioning of gateways is also important in that they announce one's arrival into downtown. Finding one's way into downtown from major roads, such as US 74, was identified as one of the major issues at the beginning of the project. It will be necessary to coordinate with the North Carolina Department of Transportation to place signage to guide travelers from this busy highway into downtown.

Gateways within the core area are as important as those directing visitors to the downtown. Making these places memorable is one of the keys to creating a downtown destination. The Downtown Master Plan identifies four key areas as potential gateways:

- Skyway Drive and the railroad
- Franklin Street and Charlotte Avenue
- Lancaster Avenue and Houston Street
- Five Points area

NEIGHBORHOODS

Downtown Monroe is surrounded by residential neighborhoods, especially on its western, southern and eastern peripheries. This places a lot of residents within close proximity to downtown, a significant asset in terms of the study area's revitalization. These neighborhoods, however, will need protection and preservation. In addition, connectivity to and from existing neighborhoods is an issue on the northern side of downtown.

PROGRAMMING & EVENTS

Community gatherings for holidays, parades and music events contribute significantly to the character and identity of downtown Monroe. Events sponsored and/or organized by Downtown Monroe, Inc. (DMI) and/or other organizations include the annual Main Street Mile and 5K race, home tours and walking tours, Friday night classic car cruisers, Halloween costume contests and trick-or-treating, the well-attended Christmas tree lighting ceremony and the Christmas parade.

5.6 MARKET AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

While the plan illustrates the range of uses that the downtown can support now and in the future, it is important to note that the plan also identifies opportunities for catalyst projects to build momentum and stimulate investment that is consistent with the vision described above. These are key locations that require special attention, as the details of development and redevelopment are critical to the successful evolution of downtown toward the vision formulated through the planning process.

CATALYST SITES

Catalyst sites are areas where one would expect to see a specific development or redevelopment project that is intended to spur revitalization. The Downtown Master Plan looked at four sites for their values as catalyst sites: the former site of the now demolished Joffre Hotel, the downtown urban park, the Monroe Hardware Warehouse (Allen Overall Building) and the area that the city owns across the street from the building and civic uses at multiple sites in the downtown. These sites were chosen as focal points in the downtown study area for their locations in the heart of Monroe. Each of these potential sites offers significant opportunities to reinvest in the core area. The Joffre Hotel site is the most significant available parcel of land in the downtown study area. This catalyst spot could serve as the site for a restaurant, hotel or other significant use at the heart of downtown. Another catalyst project in downtown could be the creation of an urban park to serve all demographic groups, from children to senior citizens. The former Monroe Hardware Warehouse (Allen Overall Building) and the city-owned parking facility across Hayne Street could be a strategic location for a mixed-use project.

The additional 170-225 residential units, 56,000-76,000 square feet of retail, and 30,000-40,000 square feet of office forecasted for the study area during the next 10 years need to be strategically located as to foster development opportunities in other areas. Furthermore, the development/redevelopment of these strategic locations needs to be chronologically prioritized. The four following catalyst sites have been identified for future development and are vital to the overall success of downtown Monroe (Figure 12). All of the catalyst sites would be considered new development or redevelopment, and would be in addition to currently vacant retail and office space that could be occupied.

Catalyst Site I

Located in the northwest quadrant of the Franklin and Main streets intersection, Catalyst Site I is very visible and highly accessible by both pedestrians and vehicles. The 0.5-acre, city-owned site is currently being used as a public parking lot. It is the former location of the 100-room Joffre Hotel, built in 1911 and demolished in 1996.

Recommended land uses at this site could include retail, office, and potentially hotel. Franklin Street is recommended to convert into a two-way street with on-street parking, which should benefit potential retailers at the site. Retail tenants could include restaurants, grocery stores, and pharmacies, while office tenants could include legal service firms, banks,



The public parking lot is replaced by a mixed-use building anchored by certain architectural elements. Transparency of front windows connects the public space and private space. Streetscape improvements include street furniture, trees, outdoor dining, plaza, fountain and decorative lamps.



FIGURE 13
Catalyst Sites

Source: Warren & Associates



An urban park is proposed along Main Street. Infill development is recommended along Charlotte Avenue.

real estate, and government services.

Catalyst Site 2

Catalyst Site 2 includes two blocks:

- Main, Correll, and Hayne streets, and Talleyrand Avenue
- Hayne, Correll, and Beasley streets, and Talleyrand Avenue

The 0.8-acre first block would include an urban park which could serve as an anchor for the southern portion of Main Street. The programming of park amenities could focus on the attraction of families, including an open lawn, water features, a small playground, and historic monuments/statues. The park would be able to take advantage of a renovated Center Theater directly across Main Street. It could also serve as a catalyst for surrounding restaurant and residential development. The park, along with a portion of Main Street, could also serve as a potential farmer’s market during the appropriate seasons, providing an additional destination on a regular basis. The city-owned site is currently being used as a public parking lot.

The 0.75-acre second block is recommended for condominiums above retail or two- to three-story townhouses that could front Hayne Street directly across from the proposed park. The site currently includes a dry cleaners and a residential home being used as a business. The adjacent block to the south includes three parcels that could also be assembled and included as part of the same residential development. This block would be more suitable for townhouses than condominiums because it is further removed from the park. Townhouses would also serve as a better transitional use between the single-family residential and churches in the Historic District and the urban core along Main Street.

Catalyst Site 3

Catalyst Site 3 is a combination of two blocks (or portions of blocks) straddling Hayne Street between Windsor and Morgan streets. The portion of the site on the west side of Hayne Street is currently occupied by the 50,000-square-foot former Monroe Hardware Warehouse (Allen Overall Building). This three-story building is recommended for adaptive reuse as ground-floor retail with a combination of office and residential on the second and third floors. Depending on the state of the market and the condition of the building at the time of redevelopment, there are basically three options for reuse:

- Two floors of residential above retail
- Two floors of office above retail
- Second floor for office and third floor for residential

The residential units would more than likely be rental because of the lack of on-site parking. If the building needs to be demolished, the site is still viable for a combination of commercial and residential development that could mirror what is recommended across Hayne Street.

The 0.8-acre block across Hayne Street from the former Monroe Hardware Warehouse (Allen Overall Building) is city-owned, and is currently used for public parking. A new two- to three-story building is recommended for the half of the block that fronts Hayne Street, while the half that fronts Beasley Street should continue to be used for parking. However, the nature of the parking should shift from public to private to accommodate the for-sale residential units above retail that are recommended for the new building.

Catalyst Site 4

The fourth identified catalyst site is the block bounded by Charlotte and Talleyrand avenues and Windsor and Stewart streets. This 2.25-acre site is currently occupied by a U.S. Postal Service distribution facility. The post office has indicated that it would like to relocate this facility to a new location and potentially remove its distribution function which would reduce its acreage and square footage requirements. Because of the uncertainty associated with the potential post office relocation, this site is more of a long-range development/redevelopment opportunity.

Potential land uses at this site include office, residential, and potentially a limited-service hotel. The hotel would be a more feasible option should a civic use eventually relocate to a downtown site. Office uses could either be single- or multi-tenant, depending upon whether the site redevelops as a single- or mixed-use project. Office owners or tenants could include financial, medical and legal businesses. Residential uses would be high-density, attached townhouses or condominiums. As is the case for office, the type and amount of residential units would depend on whether the project is single- or mixed-use. On-site parking is recommended for any for-sale residential component.

6.0

CHAPTER 6: RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

6.1 GENERAL

6.2 LAND USE

6.3 TRANSPORTATION

6.4 OPEN SPACE AND GREENWAYS

6.5 CHARACTER AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

6.7 MARKET POSITION

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

To revitalize the downtown of Monroe and realize the vision expressed in the Downtown Master Plan, this section outlines broad recommendations in six key areas: land use, transportation, open space, urban design, character and cultural resources and market position to put this plan into action. To be successful, these recommendations and strategies cannot remain locked within these pages. Implementation of the plan in accordance with the recommendations and strategies is the key to realizing the vision.

6.1 GENERAL

There are some recommendations that do not fall under specific elements, but affect the implementation of the overall plan.

Recommendation 1: Establish a commission, appointed by the city council, to advise the city and help facilitate the implementation of the Downtown Master Plan by reviewing proposals for development and redevelopment of downtown, and by supporting economic development efforts, and the marketing and promotion of downtown Monroe.

Recommendation 2: Update the Downtown Master Plan on a regular basis and no less than every five years to address the changing needs of downtown Monroe.

Recommendation 3: Hire a downtown director as the key staff person for the commission and monitor / record progress on the implementation of the Downtown Master Plan.

Recommendation 4: Consider “branding” downtown Monroe to position it in the region and the state and to inform decisions that ideally would support and reinforce the city’s identity.

Strategy 1: Develop and implement a strategic branding plan.

Note: The process to develop the plan would include market research, envisioning, a SWOT analysis, and definition of the city’s identity reinforced by branding materials (i.e., logo, collateral) and a clear message. Several stakeholder groups would be involved in this process and later charged with implementation responsibilities, which the plan would also address.

6.2 LAND USE

The plan calls for the retention of existing uses as well as complementary uses to integrate into downtown and make downtown Monroe a destination for residents and visitors. This section indicates the existing land uses to keep in the downtown while accommodating new uses that will help make it a more vibrant place. See Figure 14 for proposed land use allocation throughout downtown.



Downtown Monroe has a strong public and private employment base due to the number of city and county staff who work downtown daily.

6.2.1 EXISTING USES

Being the county seat, and historically a major trade area for Union County, downtown Monroe is fortunate to have some uses that will continue to provide a strong foundation for the future and, therefore, are worth retaining.

Recommendation 1: Support public and private office uses related to both city and county functions that are currently clustered in the northern portion of the core area and around the old courthouse.

Strategy 1: Continue to allow public and private office uses related to the city and county functions by right, especially in the areas shown on the Future Land Use Map (Figure 14).

Recommendation 2: Support service uses such as law offices, hair salons, spas, etc.

Strategy 1: Allow service uses by right per the Future Land Use Map, Figure 14.

Recommendation 3: Support retail uses such as restaurants, coffee shops and antique stores.

Strategy 1: Continue to allow small-scale retail uses such as restaurants, coffee shops and antique stores by right on the ground floor anywhere in the downtown.

Recommendation 4: Support civic and institutional uses such as the Union County Public Library, churches and senior citizen center.

Strategy 1: Attract civic and institution organizations to downtown by helping to identify space within downtown that they can occupy.

Strategy 2: Partner with the civic and institutional organizations to program events that will bring more people to downtown on a regular basis.

Note: For example, the city, along with the downtown organizations, could organize after school programs at the library and churches.

Recommendation 5: Critical for the success of downtown is enhancing safety in the existing neighborhoods in around the study area.

Strategy 1: Increase policing of neighborhoods around downtown to boost the overall safety.

Strategy 2: Assist neighborhoods in establishing and/or strengthening neighborhood watch programs.

Strategy 3: Organize regular clean up days that send the message that the community is closed to thieves, vandals and loiterers.

Recommendation 6: Encourage the rehabilitation and the adaptive reuse of the existing historic buildings with new uses.

Strategy 1: Identify opportunities for key buildings and raise awareness of such opportunities through economic development initiatives.

Note: For example, the old county courthouse could be used for a city/county museum and the Monroe Hardware building could be used for a small grocery store.

Strategy 2: Continue and promote the use of the North Carolina Rehabilitation Code, NCRC, as an alternative to new building codes in order to offer flexibility for rehabilitation needed to encourage investment and revitalization in Monroe's downtown.

Note: The city should consider proactive measures to increase the use of the code.

- Access the code at the following web site: <http://www.ncrehabcode.com/pdf/2006%20NC%20Rehab%20Code.pdf>.
- A number of case studies are available to assess the applicability of the code for variety of projects: <http://www.ncrehabcode.com/learn/casestudies.html>.
- Educate city staff about the code and suitable applications of it.
- Meet with developers, builders, investors and other key stakeholders who may be interested in investing in downtown Monroe to conduct the same educational activities conducted with staff.
- The city could also consider registering some staff and key people for on-line courses to familiarize them with the workings of the code.
- Create a list of key sites where the NCRC could be applied.
- Include the NCRC in a local, regional and statewide marketing package for economic development.



The historic neighborhoods near downtown Monroe have seen a resurgence in popularity.

6.2.2 NEW USES

All great downtowns, regardless of size, have compatible uses that allow people to work and play in close proximity to where they live, creating an exciting and vibrant environment, even during evenings and on weekends. To improve this mix of land uses in Monroe, a variety of new uses are envisioned.

Mixed-Use

Overall, the downtown should contain a rich mixture of uses. Two areas in particular have been identified on the future land use map for improvement: Mixed-Use A and Mixed-Use B. Although both of these areas suggest an integration of the same types of uses, the specific tenants of each area will differ.

Recommendation 1: Modify the zoning ordinance to allow a broader range of uses in areas designated as mixed-use.

Recommendation 2: Create an area that can be a hub of activity for downtown Monroe.

Strategy 1: Accommodate the appropriate mix of uses at or near the intersection of Main Street and Franklin Street.

Note: See the Catalyst projects section of this report for a detailed description about this area.

Recommendation 3: Promote high density residential, office and commercial uses in Mixed-Use A.

Strategy 1: Modify the zoning ordinance to create a mixed-use district that coincides with the boundaries shown on the Future Land Use Map.

Strategy 2: Promote commercial or retail on the ground floor along critical corridors in downtown such as Main Street, Hayne Street and Franklin Street to make these streets more active.

Strategy 3: Require all development proposals with residential on the ground floor to go through the “conditional use” process for approval.

Strategy 4: Continue to allow residential and office above commercial uses in this district by right.

Strategy 5: Provide performance-based incentives, such as low interest loans, tax exemptions for a certain period of time and DIGs to encourage that the upper floors on buildings along Main Street and Hayne Street be converted into residential units.

Recommendation 4: Promote high density residential, office and commercial uses in Mixed-Use B.

Strategy 1: Modify the zoning ordinance to create a mixed-use district that coincides with the boundaries shown on the Future Land Use Map.

Strategy 2: Expand the Monroe Aquatics and Fitness Center in this general location.

Strategy 3: Relocate the Ellen Fitzgerald Senior Center in this general location.

Residential Uses

While the existing fabric of single-family residential will remain, additional housing with additional housing types will add more households to the downtown area, particularly new housing types in the form of townhomes and condominiums.

Recommendation 1: Promote higher density residential in the form of townhomes and condominiums along Charlotte Avenue, Hayne Street and Skyway Drive.

Strategy 1: Modify the zoning ordinance to allow for higher density residential uses by right for the areas shown on the Future Land Use Map.

Recommendation 2: Reinforce existing single-family neighborhoods by allowing similar residential types, density, form and style.

Strategy 1: Allow setbacks, yards, heights and other physical characteristics of surrounding structures establish the standards for new construction in existing neighborhoods.

Recommendation 3: Identify opportunities to creatively integrate more residential units into downtown.

Strategy 1: Work with downtown churches and other institutional landowners to integrate residential units into expanded facilities.

Note: Age-restricted housing units could be accommodated, with minimal parking requirements on such sites. A church, for example, could either sell a portion of its land at a reduced price or provide an affordable ground lease to developers. In exchange, the developer could construct needed facilities for the church, including shared amenities with the new residents.

Commercial Uses

Current commercial uses in downtown Monroe are expected to continue and in the future grow to include entertainment and service uses to cater to downtown's many daily workers, residents of nearby neighborhoods and those who visit Monroe.

Recommendation 1: Attract a wide array of commercial uses to meet the need for “entertainment” and services in downtown and generate more activity in downtown.

Note: See section 6.7 under Market Position for specific strategies aimed at attracting these uses.

Recommendation 2: Attract a prominent retail tenant that could be a downtown anchor to the ground floor of a prominent building.

Note: The United Way Building is an ideal location; however, use of this building for this purpose could only follow United Way’s decision to relocate to other space in downtown.

Recommendation 3: Attract a prominent retail tenant (such as a small grocery store) for the ground floor of the Monroe Hardware building.

Note: According to the downtown market analysis, there is demand for these types of businesses: Grocery stores, pharmacies, restaurants, apparel / shoes, furniture / home furnishings, fitness centers, gift stores, beauty salons and barber shops, florists and dry cleaners.

Civic and Institutional Uses

As expected within a county seat, one of the dominant land uses is for government offices. Offices for city, county, court system and school system staff will continue to be a significant allocation of land use.

Recommendation 1: Recruit civic uses such as community centers, a civic center, theaters and museums in key locations within downtown.

Strategy 1: Identify key locations for some of the key civic uses and take ownership of these locations when the right opportunities present themselves.

Recommendation 2: Facilitate the conversion of the restored Union County Courthouse into a County Museum with a separate section that highlights the history of Monroe.

Strategy 1: Coordinate with Union County to aid in the conversion of the restored Union County Courthouse into a museum.

Strategy 2: Work with the Arts Council to help identify pieces of Monroe’s history and outline the means to collect historical documents and items which could be housed and displayed in the downtown museum.

Strategy 3: Partner with the Belk department store chain or the Belk family to establish an interactive historical site that celebrates the Belk chain’s first store in downtown Monroe.

Recommendation 3: Coordinate with the Union County Public Library to better involve the library in the activities of downtown Monroe.

Strategy 1: Expand the hours of operation of the Union County Public Library.

Note: Longer periods on weekday evenings and on weekends, as well as aiding the library in creating programs for students and their parents, will make a stronger destination downtown.

Recommendation 4: Coordinate with churches in the downtown to create after-school programs for students.

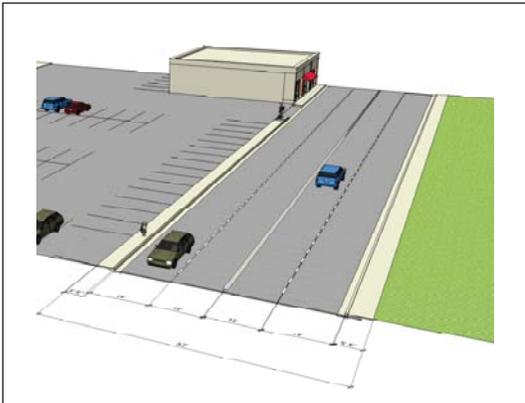
Transitional Uses

These uses provide transition from the intense, predominantly mixed-use uses found at the city's core to the less intense uses found in surrounding neighborhoods. Uses in this part of downtown could include higher density residential development and offices for lawyers, accountants and other professionals.

Recommendation 1: Promote a mix of office and high density residential in these areas.

Strategy 1: Modify existing zoning to create a new district that allows for office and high density residential uses.

6.3 TRANSPORTATION



Charlotte Avenue – Today



Charlotte Avenue - Future



Franklin Street – Today



Franklin Street - Future

Numerous physical transportation improvements are needed for the successful redevelopment of downtown Monroe. Many improvements can and should occur in the short-term (1-5 years), while other improvements are not needed immediately and are proposed more as long-term solutions (1-10 years). The focus of these improvements physically elevates the status of the public realm and allows the transportation system to fully support the redevelopment plan. Traffic operations using today's traffic volumes and the proposed street configurations and network for the downtown Monroe will not significantly change. All but one intersection will operate at an LOS of B, or better. The Charlotte and Franklin intersection will operate at an LOS of C. Complete details of the transportation analysis and Levels of Service details are documented as Appendix G and Appendix H.

Recommendation 1: Evaluate traffic patterns and examine alternatives.

Note: Immediate opportunities exist to reduce the size of Charlotte Avenue south of Franklin Street from a four-lane, undivided roadway to a two-lane street with a center left-turn lane. Current traffic volumes along this portion of Charlotte Avenue can be easily accommodated within a "three-lane" cross-section. The introduction of a center turn-lane enables the creation of future pedestrian refuge islands, significantly improving the connectivity of downtown Monroe to its adjacent neighborhoods.

Recommendation 2: Explore alternatives for better traffic circulation and mobility on Charlotte Avenue, from Church Street to Franklin Street and from Charlotte Avenue to Johnson Street.

Recommendation 3: Convert Jefferson Street and Franklin Street to accommodate two-way traffic.

Note: Arguably the most important transportation improvement in downtown Monroe is the conversion of both Franklin and Jefferson streets back to two-way traffic. The only purpose of one-way streets is to move vehicles as if nothing else matters. Unfortunately, this decision to create one-way streets has hampered the redevelopment of downtown Monroe for years. The Downtown Master Plan suggests that this pair of street conversions are undertaken as soon as possible.

From a land use perspective, one-way streets limit the community's ability to attract any form of retail investment along either of these streets as well as along Main Street. Retailers will always choose to locate on two-way streets over one-ways streets because both directions of traffic can see their building and ultimately their products.

From an economic development perspective, Franklin and Jefferson streets are large, hostile barriers between government jobs and Main Street. One-way streets provide both a physical and psychological barrier to pedestrians. For economic development purposes, it is vital to maximize the impact jobs have on downtown. Any barrier to maximizing the benefit of downtown employment should be

eliminated.

Strategy 1: Conduct a detailed study and coordinate with NCDOT, city engineers and business owners to convert Franklin and Jefferson to two-way streets.

Recommendation 4: Construct a roundabout at E. Jefferson Street and E. Franklin Street.

Note: The current split of Jefferson and Franklin on the eastern portion of downtown creates rather strange remnant parcels of land and an unsightly gateway into historic Monroe. The conversion of both Jefferson and Franklin streets to two-way traffic creates opportunities to significantly improve the development potential of the land and create a stately entrance into downtown Monroe. A roundabout at this intersection will require some land acquisition. However, the value the roundabout will give the area in terms of traffic operation, land development opportunities and aesthetics should far outweigh the costs.

Strategy 1: Coordinate with NCDOT, city engineers and business owners in studying the geometries of a roundabout, the acquisition of land and the construction of the facility.

Recommendation 5: Construct a roundabout at Charlotte Avenue and Lancaster Avenue.

Note: The operational and aesthetic environment around Lancaster Avenue and Charlotte Avenue's intersection with Houston Street could be greatly improved with a roundabout.

Strategy 1: Coordinate with NCDOT, city engineers and business owners in studying the geometries of a roundabout, the acquisition of land and the construction of the facility.

Recommendation 6: Promote the use of on-street parking on Main Street and Hayne Street for visitors, allowing them a three-hour parking limit.

Strategy 1: Meet with downtown business owners to educate them about the needs for customer parking and encourage business owners and their employees to park at the designated areas other than on Main Street and/or Hayne Street.

Strategy 2: Issue parking permits to downtown residents and business owners who could park in designated areas other than on Main Street or Hayne Street, allowing those on-street spaces to be utilized by visitors.

Note: The city could impose heavier penalties than it currently has for parking violators.



Jefferson Street – Today



Jefferson Street - Future

Recommendation 7: Promote the use of shared parking between public and private spaces for both residential and commercial land uses. For example, parking for city and county employees, churches and other public uses such as the Union County Public Library could also be used by retail traffic, residents and visitors.

6.4 OPEN SPACE AND GREENWAYS

Recommendation 1: Preserve existing open spaces such as Belk-Tonawanda Park, Main Street Plaza and other gardens.

Strategy 1: Continue with the maintenance and upkeep of all existing open spaces and provide adequate lighting and police patrol to make these spaces safer.

Recommendation 2: Create opportunities for an urban park along the southern portion of Main Street.

Note: *This park needs to be an entire block that fronts both Main Street and Hayne Street, between Correll and Morrow streets.*

Strategy 1: Acquire, if the city does not currently own, approximately .8-acre for this park.

Strategy 2: Finalize the programming of the park to include all elements to make this park a signature facility and a destination.

Note: *Hire a design firm to refine the design and programming of the park.*

Recommendation 3: Coordinate with St. Paul's Episcopal Church to use its currently vacant open space as a neighborhood green.

Note: *The city could pay for the design of this green and take over its maintenance, while ownership of the parcel remains with the church.*

Recommendation 4: Coordinate with the NCDOT to create parkland in conjunction with the construction of the roundabout at Lancaster Avenue and Houston Street.

Strategy 1: Secure a neighborhood park site on the parcel that lies west of the roundabout, as shown on the Future Land Use Map, Figure 14.

Note: *This could be done when the land for the roundabout is acquired.*

Recommendation 5: Coordinate with CSX to create a plaza in front of the depot and link it via a pedestrian connection to Main Street Plaza and Belk-Tonawanda Park.

Recommendation 6: Create opportunities for urban plazas near the Five Points area and coordinate with public departments (such as the Monroe Aquatic and Fitness Center) to include such spaces in their programming, as and when these uses decide to relocate.

Recommendation 7: Incorporate public art into the design of plazas and roundabouts to tell the history of Monroe.

Recommendation 8: Promote the use of gardens at prominent locations, especially along the way to the entrances to major buildings and public spaces.

6.5 URBAN DESIGN



Many buildings near the core of the study area are consistent in the rhythm, proportions and style of construction.

Recommendation 1: Create detailed design guidelines for the entire downtown to communicate the desire of the city to the development community.

Recommendation 2: Promote three-story buildings close to the center of downtown, especially within the one-block radius of Main Street and Franklin Street.

Note: The height of any proposed building needs to be less than the height of the cupola of the Historic Union County Courthouse.

Recommendation 3: Promote two-story buildings in other parts of downtown beyond the immediate city center (as has been defined).

Note: Three-story buildings in other parts of downtown could be permitted through a “conditional use” process.

Recommendation 4: Require that the heights of buildings be consistent with the heights of neighboring buildings and that the buildings’ façades share the same vertical proportions as neighboring buildings, regardless of lot width.

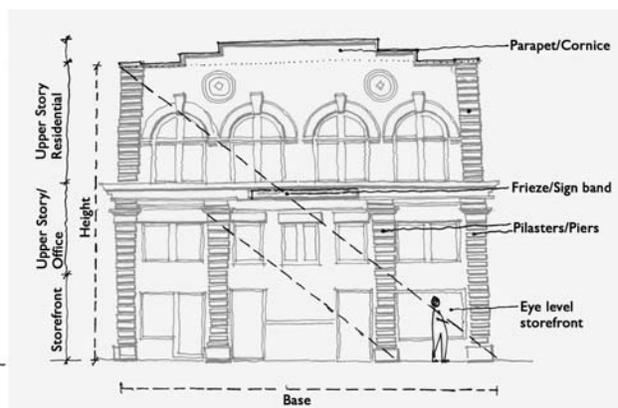
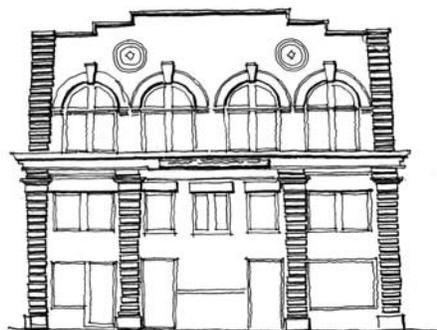
Recommendation 5: Promote the design and proportions of façade elements such as doors, windows, pilasters and cornices that are complementary to the design elements of existing buildings.

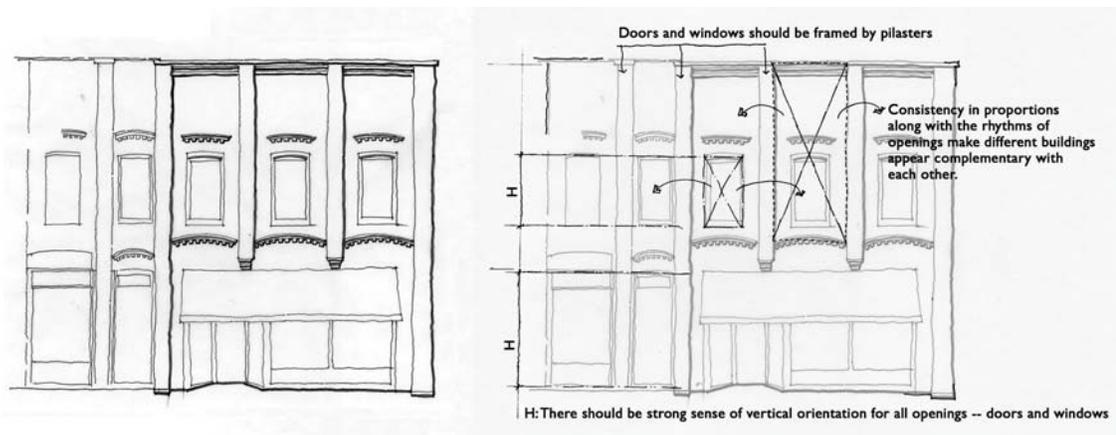
Strategy 1: Windows and openings at the upper story should have a vertical orientation.

Strategy 2: Windows and openings should follow the rhythm and sequence of existing structures.

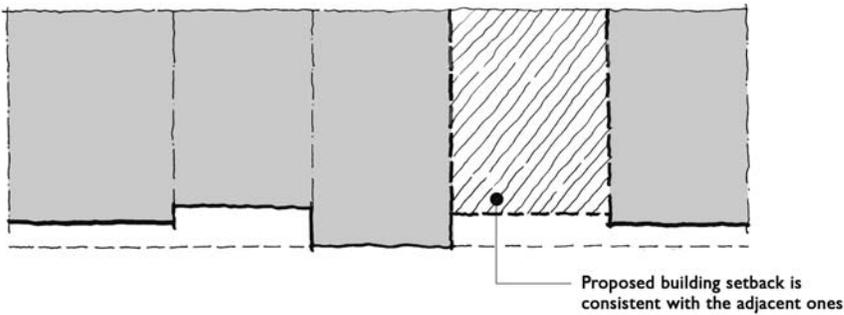
Strategy 3: Horizontal lines such as of cornices, floor lines and awnings should be continued in any new building.

Recommendation 6: Maintain the front building setback consistent with that of adjacent buildings and the streetscape.





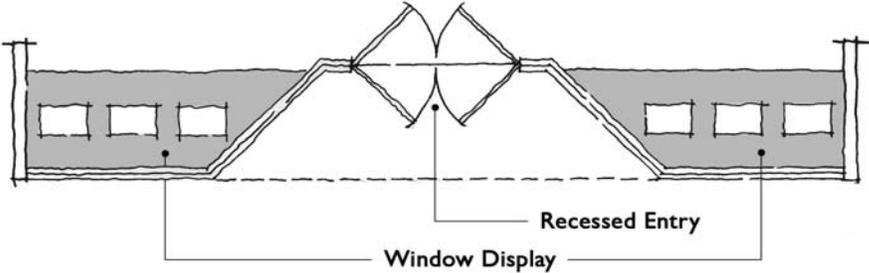
Recommendation 7: Focus development and animate public amenities by orienting buildings towards public spaces, for example, new park blocks.



Strategy 1: Require the main entrance of new development around public amenities such as parks, greens and plazas to orient towards the public open space.

Recommendation 8: Promote buildings up to the sidewalk with minimum setbacks, or the general setback of the block to create urban settings.

Recommendation 9: Promote recessed entries along with the storefront displays to create a consistent ground floor experience.



Recommendation 10: Create more interesting, vibrant commercial storefronts.

Strategy 1: Promote a continuous, uninterrupted commercial storefront on both sides of the street along Main Street, Hayne Street and parts of Franklin and Jefferson streets.



The Center Theater was built in the Art Deco style.

Strategy 2: Require a building edge with retail uses on the ground floor that directly faces the major streets.

Recommendation 11: Promote the display of merchandise in storefronts and allow some merchandise to be displayed outside the store on the sidewalks.

Strategy 1: Establish criteria that allows and regulates how merchandise may be displayed outside stores on sidewalks.

Recommendation 12: Monroe’s downtown has diverse architectural styles, ranging from Federal to Art Deco. Infill development should respect surrounding architecture by taking elements from existing architecture, yet change the material, color, or texture to be distinct.

Recommendation 13: Promote outdoor dining opportunities in downtown.

Recommendation 14: Increase the sidewalk width to 13 feet and planting strip width to six feet on Main Street to promote better pedestrian movement, outdoor dining and merchandise display.

Recommendation 15: Replace existing trees with large canopy trees suitable for street tree use (such as Maples, carpinus betulus ‘fastigiata’, autumn blaze red maple) on Main Street.

Recommendation 16: Create signature intersections as shown on the master plan graphic (such as at the intersection of Main and Franklin, Franklin and Charlotte, and Franklin and Hayne, etc.) with different paving material.

Recommendation 17: Promote the use of decorative lamps with hanging



The “proposed” image displays the improvements of parking, street furniture, street trees, outdoor dining, paving materials and decorative lamps on Main Street.



The comparison of the two images shows the improvements of parking, crosswalks, as well as the conversion into two-way on Franklin Street.

planting baskets as part of major streetscape improvements.

Recommendation 18: Create opportunities to include signage and wayfinding as part of the street furniture.

Strategy 1: Create a template that defines the fonts, color and size of signage to present a consistent look and feel throughout downtown.

Note: These consistent standards should be applied to all directional signage, signage for major destinations, etc.

Recommendation 19: Promote public art as part of the street furniture that commemorates and celebrates Monroe’s history.

Recommendation 20: Identify key locations for garbage receptacles and recycling bins.

Note: Such locations should be along minor streets such as Stewart Street.

6.6 CHARACTER AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

Recommendation 1: Increase the possibility of preserving commercial buildings that are of historical significance to Monroe’s downtown.

Strategy 1: Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of expanding the Monroe Historic District to include the commercial buildings deemed historic.

Note: Downtown Monroe currently has some overlap between the properties listed in the Monroe Historic District and commercial buildings designated as historic in regards to residential structures now used for commercial purposes, for example, McEwen Funeral Home.

Strategy 2: Create a mechanism for educating property owners about the value of historic structures, particularly their value to the city, and raise awareness of the losses, and potential losses and negative impacts of losing historic structures.

Recommendation 2: Establish Neighborhood Watch programs to engage residents and law enforcement officials in discussion to protect the neighborhoods and their residents.

Strategy 1: Meet with neighborhood representatives to identify specific issues facing their communities and create a task force of residents and law enforcement officials to increase awareness about crime and safety.

Recommendation 3: Define as gateways key entranceways into the downtown.

Strategy 1: Identify key gateways such as the bridge over the railroad on Skyway Drive, the intersection of Franklin Street and Charlotte Avenue, the intersection of Lancaster Avenue and Charlotte Avenue and the Five Points areas.

Strategy 2: Use public art at the gateway locations mentioned in Strategy 1 to tie local history with development.

Note: For example, public art could tell the story of Monroe’s artesian wells near the Five Points section of downtown, or, art could tell the rich history of the railroad in downtown.

Note: One place suitable for public art is along the northern gateway into downtown. A vertical visual icon could be placed at the northern end of the bridge, as shown on the Proposed Master Plan, Figure 10, which announces one’s arrival into downtown and the entranceway to Belk-Tonawanda Park. This beacon could incorporate various elements of the history of Monroe.



The Illustrations above show infill development in the Five Point area and certain key elements to define the significance of the gateway area.

Recommendation 4: Coordinate with the NCDOT to install signage on US 74 that gives motorists directions into downtown Monroe.

Strategy 1: Identify Skyway Drive as the major entranceway into downtown from US 74.

Strategy 2: Create a corridor overlay for Skyway Drive.

Note: A corridor overlay on Skyway Drive north of the CSX railroad to US 74 could help enhance the quality of development and offer a better visitor experience along the major entranceway. In addition, a corridor overlay would establish a vision for the future along Skyway Drive, coordinate any necessary improvement actions and provide guidance for property owners and developers.

Recommendation 5: Engage the services of a design firm to address signage and wayfinding issues into and within the downtown.

Strategy 1: Prepare a signage concept plan to identify locations for proposed signage elements.

Note: The signage concept plan should describe the needs for new and/or additional signage elements, including recommendations for removal of unnecessary signage, and legibility, directional and placement issues in current signage that should be corrected.

Strategy 2: Empower the consulting design firm to identify the “look and feel,” or signature appearance, of a downtown wayfinding system.

Strategy 3: Prepare a Downtown Signage and Wayfinding Guideline Manual that will serve as a design and production manual for signage vendors and a working standards manual for any public entity or official who make directional or signage-related decisions.

Note: The Downtown Signage and Wayfinding Guideline Manual should include the following elements: Hierarchy and purpose of the overall wayfinding system; specific locations of each signage element and its identified purpose; color palette, design elements, general materials and typeface



Left: Monroe could implement the use of signs or kiosks along downtown streets that help tell the story of the city’s history and culture. Note the directional information mid-way up the sign.

usage for wayfinding signage; a plan for implementation and proposed methods of installation for each signage element.

Recommendation 6: Continue to organize events intended to attract people to downtown Monroe, such as holiday celebrations and special events.

Recommendation 7: Establish a dialogue with the Union County Public Library to create activities downtown for children and students.

Recommendation 8: Create special events to take place in certain areas of downtown- Main Street Plaza, Belk-Tonawanda Park, the proposed urban park.

Recommendation 9: Consider investing in arts and cultural events and organizations that would attract residents from throughout the Charlotte area. This could include providing below-market spaces for galleries and performance venues.

6.7 MARKET POSITION

Recommendations as they relate to prospective public sector infrastructure investments and financial incentives have been identified that may assist in the development of strategic downtown sites.

The consolidation and redevelopment of underutilized parcels as well as the renovation of existing second-floor space should also be considered to grow the residential base within the study area.

RESIDENTIAL USES

Recommendation 1: Encourage new housing that will activate the sidewalks and public spaces of downtown Monroe, making it more marketable for all uses, and increase retail and restaurant sales.

Strategy 1: Provide entry-level for-sale and rental units for a young, diverse adult market.

Strategy 2: Attract more for-sale residential for higher-income professionals who could work downtown and occupy office space.

Strategy 3: Increase land efficiency and tax revenue by including upper level residential in new commercial buildings.

Strategy 4: Continue to allow residential uses above retail uses on Main Street, and promote higher density residential above retail spaces on Main Street and Hayne Street.

Note: The following strategies could be applicable for one or more of the above recommendations. Therefore, they are listed separately.

Strategy 5: Purchase strategic property within or around the MSD and require as a contingency within a sales contract that residential uses be developed or integrated as part of a (re)development.

Strategy 6: Consider creating a performance-based loan program to facilitate reinvestment and rehabilitation of existing buildings for residential use.

Strategy 7: Continually evaluate the effectiveness of and promote the use of the Development Incentive Grant (DIG) program to encourage new residential uses on vacant parcels of land or where dilapidated buildings cannot be restored and require complete replacement.

Strategy 8: Consider two modifications to the city's Residential Investment Grant program offered to Central Business District (CBD) property owners. This grant assists with the development of residential uses in the upper levels of the buildings within the CBD. It can significantly reduce the costs associated with the rehabilitation of an income producing structure by currently providing \$10 per \$100 (10%) of the assessed tax value. The total rehabilitation expense

must exceed a value two (2) times the amount of the grant and be completed within a 24-month period from the award date of the grant. The two recommended modifications include:

- Increasing the percentage of assessed tax value to at least 20%.
- Providing an additional grant equivalent to a certain percentage of the total rehabilitation expense. This additional grant would provide an incentive for larger rehabilitation projects.

Strategy 9: Determine eligibility for Community Development Block Grant funds offered as part of the federal Priority Redevelopment Grant program. This grant is focused on providing incentives for downtown redevelopment and revitalization. Qualifying activities include preservation and redevelopment, clearance and redevelopment and public improvements to encourage private sector investments.

Strategy 10: Promote the federal tax credit program (Tax Reform of 1986) offered for rehabilitating certified historic buildings. The program provides a 20% federal tax credit, a 20% State of North Carolina tax credit, and a 20% State of North Carolina historic mill tax credit for the substantial rehabilitation of historic buildings for rental residential purposes.

Strategy 11: Provide property owners in the MSD of downtown Monroe with up to 100% of property tax exemptions for a specified period to invest private capital in new or rehabilitated structures for residential purposes.

Note: The City of Fargo, North Dakota provides a 100% property tax exemption for five years if a property owner invests at least \$55 per square foot of capital improvements for new residential structures and at least \$15 per square foot for existing residential structures. The City of Concord, North Carolina credits property owners 40%-60% of property taxes for either three or four years depending on the level of investment. A \$200,000 minimum investment is required, as are a minimum number of residential units.

Strategy 12: Provide property owners with a building rehabilitation property tax exemption.

Note: Fargo, North Dakota offers a three-year exemption for property tax value added to residential structures between 25-39 years old and a five-year exemption for structures 40 or more years old.

COMMERCIAL USES

Like many downtowns, Monroe's commercial center has changed from its traditional retail stronghold where the likes of Belk, J.C. Penney and Monroe Hardware were destinations for shoppers. To revive downtown Monroe as a retail shopping destination, a diverse mix of commercial uses could include restaurants, a grocery store, pharmacy, establishments for apparel and shoes, as well as stores for home furnishings. Demand for such retail establishments was identified in the market analysis.

Recommendation 1: Increase retail occupancy and sales by attracting a major restaurant at a prominent location.

Recommendation 2: Aggressively market downtown retail space to complementary tenants in the malls of the region and lure them to co-locate along one block of downtown.

Note: Co-tenancy is a situation when more than one person or more than one business has an interest in real property at the same time, which may include tenancy in common; joint tenancy; or the possession or occupancy of land, buildings or other property by title, under a lease or through the payment of rent.

Recommendation 3: Increase office occupancy and employment.

Recommendation 4: Increase commercial real property tax base by encouraging new retail and office development.

Note: The following strategies could be applicable for one or more of the above recommendations. Therefore, they are listed separately.

Strategy 1: Provide incentives in the form of tax incentives, rent concessions or utility bill concessions for a certain time period (for example, up to six months) to encourage businesses to locate in downtown.

Strategy 2: Require such businesses to show a proven business plan along with a commitment to remain downtown for a certain time period (for example, at least two years).

Strategy 3: Continually evaluate the effectiveness of and promote the use of the Development Incentive Grant (DIG) program to encourage new commercial uses on vacant parcels of land or where dilapidated buildings cannot be restored and require complete replacement.

Note: Examples of commercial projects eligible for Development Investment Grants include office buildings, hotels, bed & breakfast accommodations, conference centers, parking decks, manufacturing facilities and distribution facilities. DIGs may only be used to finance new construction.

Strategy 4: Continually evaluate the effectiveness of and promote the use of the Façade Improvement Grant (FIG) program to encourage private investment associated with exterior improvements and the renovation of building facades in the Central Business District.

Strategy 5: Expand the current boundaries of the Municipal Services District (MSD) to generate additional revenue for financing public infrastructure improvements, including on- and off-street parking, which enhance the commercial competitiveness of the area.

Strategy 6: Promote the federal tax credit program (Tax Reform of 1986) offered for rehabilitating certified historic buildings. The program provides a 20% federal tax credit, a 20% State of North Carolina tax credit, and a 20% State of North Carolina historic mill tax credit for the substantial rehabilitation of historic buildings for commercial purposes. An additional 10% federal tax credit is offered for the substantial rehabilitation of buildings built before 1936 for nonresidential purposes.

Strategy 7: Determine eligibility for Community Development Block Grant funds offered as part of the federal Priority Redevelopment Grant. This grant is focused on providing incentives for downtown redevelopment and revitalization. Qualifying activities include preservation and redevelopment, clearance and redevelopment and public improvements to encourage private sector investments.

Strategy 8: Determine eligibility for Community Development Block Grant funds offered as part of the Storefront Rehabilitation Matching Grant. This grant is focused on providing incentives for enhancing the physical appearance of buildings (particularly historic buildings) in the downtown area. If the building is under private ownership, applicants are eligible to receive grants of up to 50% of total costs. Non-profit ownership is eligible for up to 100% of total costs. Only improvements made to the building exterior are eligible. The maximum grant is \$75,000.

Strategy 9: Determine eligibility for Community Development Block Grant funds offered as part of the Job Creation Projects. This grant is focused on providing incentives for creating jobs for lower income persons through the renovation or construction of buildings downtown. The maximum grant is \$75,000.

Strategy 10: Provide property owners in the MSD of downtown Monroe with up to 100% of property tax exemptions for a specified period to invest private capital in new or rehabilitated structures for commercial purposes.

***Note:** The City of Fargo, North Dakota provides a 100% property tax exemption for five years if a property owner invests at least \$55 per square foot of capital improvements for new commercial structures*

and at least \$25 per square foot for existing commercial structures. The City of Concord, North Carolina credits property owners 40%-60% of property taxes for either three or four years depending on the level of investment. A \$200,000 minimum investment is required.

Strategy 11: Provide property owners with a building rehabilitation property tax exemption. For example, Fargo, North Dakota offers a three-year exemption for property tax value added to commercial structures less than 25 years old and a five-year exemption for property tax value added to commercial structures 25 or more years old.

Strategy 12: Consider reducing the minimum investment level for the existing Development Incentive Grant (DIG) offered by the City of Monroe from \$1 million to \$500,000. This grant is designed to entice developers and investors to initiate new projects within the CBD of downtown Monroe. It targets investments made on vacant land or where dilapidated buildings cannot be restored and require complete replacement. This grant could also be more actively promoted and marketed throughout the region. Eligible projects include:

- Office buildings
- Hotels
- Residential condominiums
- Bed and breakfasts
- Conference centers
- Parking decks
- Manufacturing facilities
- Distribution facilities

Strategy 13: Research the potential to implement a public-private low-interest loan program similar to one that exists in Winston-Salem, NC. With input from Wachovia and BB&T, a restaurant loan program has been created whereby the City of Winston-Salem provides a loan equal to 37.5% of a project cost, up to \$150,000 per applicant subject to the applicant and participating lender providing 62.5% percent of the project cost. Interest rates are 3-5 percent, with a loan term up to 15 years. Loan repayments are deferred for 2 years. Eligible uses for the funds include property acquisition, rehabilitation, equipment, furnishings, inventory and working capital.

Note: *In order to encourage the concentration of restaurants in a compact, pedestrian-friendly area, 3% loans are available for new restaurants locating along certain street segments. However, for any dinner restaurant interested in locating in the areas of downtown zoned CB, loans are available at 5% interest. To qualify for the loans, restaurants must agree to certain terms, such as remaining open for at least four nights a week, participating in the Downtown Winston-Salem Partnership co-op advertising program and providing*

information about the number of jobs created by income range (to ensure a benefit to low-to-moderate income people).

Strategy 14: Consider low interest loans (3%-5%) for businesses that pay for rehabilitation costs of empty or underutilized commercial space in the MSD. The interest rate offered could be scaled to the amount of the investment; the larger the investment, the lower the interest rate. A maximum loan term of 15 years is recommended. Also, a potential performance clause (i.e. sales tax revenue generation) could be added so that if the terms of that clause are not met, there could be some form of clawback agreement.

Strategy 15: Consider a downtown Monroe development grant that essentially credits a developer with a percentage of the annual real and personal property taxes for a specified period. A minimum investment would be required. The percentage of taxes credited could be scaled to the investment level. In Concord, the program is 40%-60% for three to four years with a \$200,000 minimum investment.

Strategy 16: Offer a negotiable level of sales tax reimbursement for a specified time period to retail developers for an agreed upon percentage of the public infrastructure improvements privately funded by the developer. The reimbursement includes a percentage of infrastructure improvements such as parking decks, streets, drainage, water, sewer and traffic calming. An example is Northport, Alabama.

Strategy 17: Create a new business incentive program that targets new businesses in downtown Monroe. This aid would help reduce the initial monthly lease rates that the business would pay. For example, in downtown Livermore, California, an eligible business may receive up to 50% of the lease rate but no more than \$1.00 per square foot (per month) with a maximum of \$2,000 for the first six months of operation. For the second six months of operation, the incentive is up to \$0.50 per square foot (per month) with a maximum of \$1,000.

***Note:** Starting in year two of operation, the business repays 55% of the total incentive amount back to the city at 0% interest. Payments are monthly and must be completely repaid at the end of the fifth year of operation. The remaining 45% of the total incentive is a low interest loan paid back to the city through monthly payments starting in year two of operation. The interest rate is Prime minus 1%, with a maximum interest rate of 4% for a five-year loan.*

Strategy 18: Continue to fund infrastructure improvements such as streets/streetscapes, parks and public utilities within an expanded MSD. Debt service would be partially covered by property taxes collected within the MSD.

Recommendation 5: Develop a retail retention and recruitment strategy.

Note: *A retail niche strategy for downtown Monroe is one that focuses on the creation of a critical mass of independent retailers that collectively create a vibrant destination. The strategy must respond to the following realities:*

- *Downtown Monroe cannot compete with conventional retail-oriented concepts such as shopping malls or lifestyle centers.*
- *Downtown Monroe must capitalize on its unique sense of place and position retail as supporting a multi-dimensional experience that includes other important activities, including working, living and recreating.*
- *Downtown does not currently have the market fundamentals (population, household incomes, parking supply) to attract significant brand name retail, with the possible exception of restaurants.*
- *Local independent retail should fortify downtown Monroe's uniqueness in the regional market.*

Strategy 1: Maintain a downtown property database, and disseminate the market information in the database to existing and potential new retailers, as well as work with building and land owners to create a credible inventory of available properties and marketing materials.

Note: *Relevant information to track would include downtown sales tax revenues, rents and vacancy rates, and block-by-block employment and residential densities. A downtown retail map should be created and maintained, identifying available sites and space as well as property contact information. Engage the local and regional commercial real estate brokerage community to market the properties. Currently, downtown Monroe has no visibility in the Charlotte region.*

Strategy 2: Surveys should be conducted every year that solicit input from existing retailers regarding issues and opportunities.

Strategy 3: Space referrals to identify specific locations suitable for new business concepts. Actively match prospects to property owners.

Strategy 4: Explore enhancements to the Web sites for the City of Monroe and Downtown Monroe Incorporated. An interactive map and a downtown directory are both recommended.

Strategy 5: Support civic investment and residential development that will help support the growth of the downtown Monroe retail market.

Strategy 6: Create a Downtown Merchant's Association that actively supports all new housing and commercial development, as well as civic and cultural uses that support retail.

Strategy 7: Well-defined gateways and more adequate signage along

feeder routes to downtown Monroe will help the retail market thrive. Emphasis should be placed at US 74.

Strategy 8: Contact operators of existing restaurants, family-oriented businesses and specialty shops in the Charlotte region to investigate relocating or opening an additional store in downtown Monroe. Use planned public investments as leverage to attract new businesses.

Strategy 9: Invest in marketing materials for downtown Monroe. Specify properties (catalyst sites) to supplement information provided by Downtown Monroe Inc. to prospective developers or employers. Describe local incentives such as property tax credits and public investments in amenities to improve quality of life.

Recommendation 6: Identify and promote development and redevelopment of catalyst sites, as shown on Figure 13.

Strategy 1: Create a formal process to solicit interest from the development community regarding the four catalyst sites.

Strategy 2: Create a development program for the catalyst sites where the city already owns the property.

Note: This program would detail the appropriate mix of uses, detail the square footage and both the scale and form the development should take.

Strategy 3: Once the program is established, create a formal RFP process and solicit bids from interested developers.

Strategy 4: Solicit developer(s) that would meet the requirements of the RFP and establish mutually agreed upon terms that match the needs of both the city and the developer(s).

