

MONROE DOWNTOWN PLAN

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

These 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 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.

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.

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.

Existing Uses

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.

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

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

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.

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.

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.

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.

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 Development Incentive Grants (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.

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.

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

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

Civic & 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.

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.

TRANSPORTATION

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.

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

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

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.

Recommendation 1: Evaluate traffic patterns and examine alternatives.

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.

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.

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.

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 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.

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.

OPEN SPACE & 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.

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.

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

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

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

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.

URBAN DESIGN

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.

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

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

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

Strategy 1: Windows and openings on 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.

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.

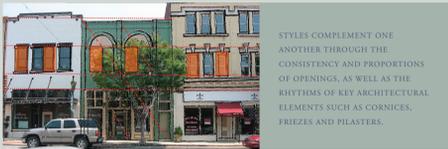
Recommendation 13: Promote outdoor dining opportunities in downtown.

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. (Refer to the City of Monroe's Tree Ordinance.)

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 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.

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.

CHARACTER & 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.

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 gateway 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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 units/dwelling 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.

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

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 a 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.

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

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 complement tenants in the malls of the region and lure them to co-locate along one block of downtown.

Recommendation 3: Increase office occupancy and employment.

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

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).

