Lexington Downtown Enhancement Project: Phase One Information Gathering Report
To: Lexington Downtown Enhancement Plan Steering Committee
From: Cooper Planning in coordination with EPR and Sympoetica
October 8, 2012

Primary Project Goal
The primary goal as defined by the Project Steering Committee for the Lexington Downtown Enhancement Plan is as follows:
"Creating a more attractive, vibrant, walkable, bikeable Downtown to which local residents, students, visitors, shopkeepers and business people are attracted."

The City of Lexington has incorporated their numerous goals for the downtown area into the singular statement listed above. As a starting point in the process, we can break the goal statement down into its various components to gain a better understanding of the desired outcomes for this planning process.

Creating—Improvements to the downtown area should be a continual and ongoing effort. In the planning process, we will create milestones for implementation, but truly the needs of the community are constantly evolving so the process of planning is never over or complete. There is always room for improvement.

Attractive—The City of Lexington is home to a wonderful combination of historic architecture and natural resources. Within the Downtown Enhancement Plan, we will work to find ways to reduce the visual clutter within the study area and to provide improvements that are harmonious with the architectural and natural legacy of the area. It is important that solutions are unique and customized to Lexington.

Vibrant—We must seek ways to increase the vibrancy and synergy of activity downtown. Physical enhancements can provide more usable gathering and lingering space that can be utilized on a daily basis and also during special events. Programming and Performances in the downtown area can bring more residents and visitors to the downtown area.

Walkable—While sidewalks area available on most streets throughout the study area, the condition of many of the sidewalks is problematic to the pedestrian experience. To create a truly walkable downtown, pedestrians must feel safe and comfortable. To focus of the pedestrian experience, we can think about what is needed to create these conditions. For starters, sidewalks must provide minimum accessibility standards. Adding shade trees creates a more comfortable climate. Places to stop and sit, water fountains, public restrooms and safe street crossings can all contribute to a more walkable environment. This planning effort can also look at how the pedestrian connects with the rest of the City to bring more people downtown on foot.

Bikeable—Bikes offer a great alternative method of transportation that can reduce traffic congestion and the need for excessive parking in the downtown area. To encourage biking within the City of Lexington, resources can be added to improve the biking experience such as: sharrows, signage, bike racks and traffic signals that aren't just geared towards cars.

By improving and enhancing all of the areas above, a variety of user-groups will be attracted to the downtown area as a destination to linger and enjoy.

Project Approach

Cooper Planning, in collaboration with EPR and Sympoetica, will approach this planning and design process for Downtown Enhancements in four distinct phases. The four primary phases of the project are as follows:

Phase One: Information Gathering
Phase Two: Development and Evaluation of Preliminary Sketch Plans
Phase Three: Selection of Preferred Downtown Enhancement Plan
Phase Four: Preparation & Presentation of the Downtown Enhancement Plan

Phase One Work: Complete

Phase One of the Downtown Enhancement planning process has been wholeheartedly focused on gathering information from a variety of sources. Before delving into any design work, our team has spent several months working with the community, gathering necessary data and reviewing pertinent documentation to understand the historical context, the existing conditions, and the community needs as they relate to the downtown study area. We have documented conditions during various site visits and gathered up-to-date data for all of our traffic analysis. The community has been actively contributing ideas through our first public forum, stakeholder group meetings, individual interviews and email solicitation. Specific feedback can be found later in this document in the public feedback section.

Phase Two Work: Underway

Using the information and feedback from Phase One, the team has created three schematic design alternatives for evaluation by the Steering Committee in meeting #2 and the community in the Public Forum #2. In reviewing the public feedback during our team design session, we decided that it is important to have a baseline of improvements to be incorporated into each design. We also provide alternative designs that take the baseline features and incorporate additional improvements to the Downtown area. The Sketch Plans and Design Matrix will be presented at the 10/17/12 Steering Committee Meeting.

Phases Three & Four: Upcoming

Existing Conditions Evaluation Framework

The study team employed a systems approach to the evaluation of the street segments under review. For analysis purposes this approach organizes the broad streetscape environment, which is quite often a complicated mix of activities, physical conditions and elements, into four key environmental systems:

- Vehicular Environment
- Pedestrian Environment
- Visual Environment
- Activity Environment

Since these environments overlap, interrelate and at times complement and/or conflict with each other, the systems approach allows clarity of focus by evaluating the key conditions of each of the environmental systems separately, but within an overarching study area framework.

Vehicular Environment: This environment includes the domain of motorized vehicles, bicycles and parking elements. Here we identify relevant functional, connectivity, and safety aspects of the public rights-or-way, as well as off-street linkages and parking.

Pedestrian Environment: Here we focus on the multi-function zones between the curb and building frontages, where both pedestrians and wheelchair-users should be comfortably accommodated. Key areas of focus include the function, mobility and safety aspects of the environment, particularly dealing with improved pedestrian crossings and the removal of obstacles within the pedestrian domain. The vehicular and pedestrian environments are in close proximity, and overlap at intersections and other street crossings.

Visual Environment: Important aspects of the visual environment include strong visual assets such as beautiful historic architecture, attractive storefronts, flower baskets and brick sidewalks. Another focus is the identification of needed enhancements in the visual environment, such as improved wayfinding systems, more street trees, and a reduction of signs within the downtown visual domain.

Activity Environment: Here we focus on elements that make the City an attractive visitor environment, including existing assets such as historic buildings, museums, walking tours, carriage rides, outdoor dining, and green space. However, key areas for improvement include the need for more event space, more shaded seating areas, and better visitor conveniences.

Please reference the PDF document, Lexington Downtown Development Plan - Existing Conditions, for an Existing Conditions Map and Visual Analysis of each of the four environments described above.

Community Feedback Themes

- Pedestrian Improvements
- Create People Spaces
- 'Greening' the Downtown
- Activities & Programming
- Improve Wayfinding
- Street Improvements
- Parking
- Increase Housing Downtown
- Historic Preservation
- Marketing the Local Economy
- Code Enforcement

Project Resources
- City Council 2026 Vision (Revised 4/19/11)
- City of Lexington Comprehensive Plan
- 2010 Desman Parking Study & Addendum
  http://www.lexingtonva.gov/pdfs/Parking%20Final%20Mgnt%202010.pdf
  http://www.lexingtonva.gov/pdfs/Parking%20Final%20Mgnt%20Addendum.pdf
- City of Lexington Zoning Ordinance
- SIR Report
- Wayfinding Package
- Central Shenandoah Bicycle Plan
- 2012 Traffic Data Count
- Representative Road Geometry
- Public Forum #1 Public Input
- Mobility Stakeholder Bike Plan & Priorities
- Preservation Stakeholder Feedback
- Downtown Business and Property Owner Stakeholder Feedback

City Council 2026 Vision
(Revised 4/19/11)
The City Council 2026 Vision provides a snapshot of the long term goals and vision as expressed by Lexington's City Council. While the Comprehensive Plan provides a more extensive analysis of long terms trends and goals, this document provides the essence of what makes Lexington so distinctive and the many qualities that City Council would like to promote. The vision states, "Lexington is a city for living, loving, learning, lingering, growing, remembering, and adapting." For each category, there is a description and specific goals to enhance each particular quality.

This vision statement contains numerous goals and priorities that relate to the Lexington Downtown Enhancement Plan. For example, each of the subject areas mentioned above could tie into any improvements

for the downtown area. Within the 'living' component, there is mention of strengthening the retail base downtown as well as more promotion of the local food culture. The 'loving' component specifically prioritizes creating bike lane along Main Street and /or Nelson Street within City limits. Installing bike racks and bike signage are also a priority.

Within the Downtown Enhancement Plan, a major goal is to promote lingering and people places. While the Vision 2026 has lingering as one of its primary categories, this section focuses more on healthcare and other community services. The 'growing' section of the document elaborates on recreational opportunities throughout the City. Within the enhancement plan, we strive to promote more opportunities for recreation within the City while also capitalizing on connections to parks and trails within the larger natural context of Lexington.

Lexington has done an excellent job in protecting and preserving its heritage and architectural resources. Within the 'remembering' section, there are specific priorities to create a grant program for enhancement and preservation of downtown buildings. This section also references the desire to bury utility lines on Randolph Street. In the final section on 'adapting', Lexington is looking to the future. One priority is to open the R.E. Lee hotel, a property within the heart of downtown. This property is currently under renovation and is slated to be reopened as a hotel. This type of development activity has a positive impact on downtown while providing a variety of accommodations for tourists and visitors. There is also reference to assessing narrow streets to ensure safe passage of Fire and Rescue. Any enhancements to the downtown area will not only be safe and functional, but they will also consider the aesthetic qualities and historic context within the core of Lexington.

City of Lexington Comprehensive Plan
The City of Lexington Comprehensive Plan is the primary long range planning tool and guide to decision making for City staff, the Planning Commission and City Council. The information below is excerpts from the Comprehensive Plan that relate to the goals and feedback thus far for the Downtown Enhancement Plan. Some statements have been underlined by our team for emphasis. As we move forward with design recommendations, more synergy is created when the conceptual plans for downtown are aligned with the overlapping goals and recommendations of other planning documents.

Transportation
Encourage street and pathway design that moves persons, goods, and services safely and efficiently, with minimal traffic congestion. Exploit or enhance the City's distinctive walkable character and ready access to natural resources. Support energy-efficient alternatives to the single-occupancy vehicle, such as public transportation, walking, and bicycling. Acknowledge present limitations in state and local funding while allowing for future opportunities and new funding mechanisms.

GOAL: Increased commercial activity and tourism in Lexington.
GOAL: Easier, more obvious, and attractive access to downtown, parking, Washington & Lee, VMI, and special destinations for those unfamiliar with Lexington.

Walkability and Wayfinding Recommendation: Public restrooms available for use by cyclists and walkers—such as those planned for Jordan's Point Park—will be clearly indicated within this system.

GOAL: A more walkable City seen as a destination for non-vehicular tourism.

A comprehensive wayfinding system offers an opportunity to create a connected system of sidewalks, paths, and trails and to make the City streets safer and more welcoming for non-vehicular transport. Lexington's planning has traditionally emphasized convenient parking, as critical to downtown's economic health; however, since the City's last Comprehensive Plan, studies have established that walking matters as much, or more. They have shown that:

1) The most successful shopping districts are those which provide the most comfort and pleasure for walkers.
2) Improving walking conditions in a community significantly increases retail sales.
3) Such improvements raise property values.

Better walking conditions also strengthen tourism, since many tourists select destinations precisely because they offer opportunities for walking, rather than driving. With gas prices soaring, communities that allow visitors to avoid driving can only grow in popularity. Though the automobile is the principal means of travel in Lexington, almost everyone does some walking and/or cycling daily. Walking serves as a basic means of transportation for those who do not drive or own cars, especially school-aged children, seniors and persons with disabilities.

Within the City, walking and cycling are often the fastest and most efficient ways to perform short trips. Many residents who live within walking distance of downtown or their work places choose to walk or bike rather than drive. Some simply enjoy healthy exercise and the casual opportunities for people to meet and interact that attractive streets with safe walking and cycling provide. Studies have shown that walking is up to three times more common in a community with pedestrian-friendly streets. As a result, communities that improve walking conditions can significantly reduce vehicular travel, which, in turn, reduces traffic congestion, demand for parking, and the need to locate parking on the commercial district's valuable land. Improving walking conditions thus is the cheapest way to bring more shoppers into downtown without the infrastructure costs associated with automobile use. Many of Lexington's narrow streets already feel pedestrian-friendly. Wide roads, fast vehicular traffic, and high traffic volume discourage walking.

Ideally, all City roadways should be made safe for cycling and walking. The absence of sidewalks along busy streets discourages foot traffic and puts pedestrians at higher risk. In the past, walking within Lexington was hindered by the lack of sidewalks in some parts of the City. To address this deficiency, the City has made sidewalks an integral part of its Capital Improvement Program for the past decade.

Simply having sidewalks is not enough to encourage foot or wheelchair traffic. Some sidewalks feel too exposed to traffic, though they are actually safe. Landscaping and amenities that create a feeling of separation from the roadway may be needed, to encourage walkers. In built-up areas of the City, especially downtown, light and utility poles, signs, fire hydrants and other infrastructure interrupt sidewalks, limiting their use. In many places, inadequate width bars wheelchairs. The City is presently exploring the engineering and economic feasibility of placing the utilities underground along Randolph Street between Nelson and Washington Streets. Burying utilities would both enhance the appearance of this important block and make its narrow sidewalks more usable.

Recommendation: In addition to reviewing intersections, to identify vehicular problems, the Planning, Public Works, and Police departments should work together to identify ways to improve pedestrian mobility and safety.

Recommendation: Examine the neighborhoods within ½ mile of commercial areas to determine where improvements to pedestrian linkages are needed.

Hazards include potholes, sewer grates, missing curb cuts, missing route links and uneven or cracked sidewalks. Utilities such as light poles and fire hydrants, as well as mail boxes, should be kept out of new sidewalks and, where feasible, removed from existing ones.

Recommendation: Public Works should develop a "spot improvement program" to reduce hazards along major pedestrian and bicycle routes through small-scale, low cost improvements. Larger projects may be funded by grants, property-owner participation and other non-general fund revenues.

Recommendation: When study shows that existing sidewalks are underused, the Planning Department should consider additional design features to make walkers feel more secure.

Work to improve walkability should engage the community in identifying specific problems and possible solutions. Individual user surveys can allow those using specific walking routes on a regular basis to identify specific problems and barriers to pedestrian travel. The City can then develop small, focused projects to address these problems and prioritize projects for possible funding and implementation.

A potential model for this work is already in place. The Lexington City Public Schools have received a Safe Routes to Schools grant from the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT).

This grant will engage a consultant to inventory and evaluate the existing infrastructure for walking and biking within a 3/4 mile radius of both Waddell and Downing schools. The evaluation will include sidewalks, pathways, traffic directions on streets, crosswalks, stop and yield signs, other significant signage, approximate sight distances and another other physical structures which affect walking and biking. Based on this evaluation, priority improvement projects to enhance walking and biking will be developed, including schematic designs and preliminary cost estimates to enable future funding and implementation. This project could serve as the basis for expanding similar analysis throughout the City.

Recommendation: The Planning, Police, and Public Works Departments should use the Safe Routes to Schools project as the basis for expanding similar analysis throughout the City. A focused community-wide evaluation of the quality of walking conditions--including safety, comfort, and convenience--should also address problems of access for people with special needs, including those using wheelchairs, walkers and strollers.

Pathways and Trails
City residents and visitors enjoy access to a number of walking trails both in the City and extending into the county. These include:

• The Woods Creek trail - a 2.4 mile walking trail along Woods Creek through the heart of
Lexington, extends from Waddell Elementary School, through the campuses of Washington
and Lee University and the Virginia Military Institute to Jordan's Point Park on the banks of

the Maury River. A detailed map of this trail and its context are shown on Figure 8.3, page 8-18.

• The Brushy Hills Preserve walking trails - a network of hiking trails through the preserve located approximately 3 miles west of Lexington.

• The Chessie Trail - a 6 mile walking trail along the Maury River extends from the north side of the Maury River opposite Jordan's Point Park to Buena Vista. This trail, presently owned by VMI was constructed on the abandoned C&O railroad corridor. There have previously been bridges across the Maury River at Jordan's Point which utilized the abandoned piers for the railroad bridge and trestle which spanned the river and the Point to connect the Woods Creek and Chessie Trails. These bridges have all been lost to floods. Efforts continue to construct a new bridge or develop another means of access.

The City should continue to support and encourage efforts to link these extensive, significant and beautiful trail systems. In addition to a connection across the Maury River, there may be possible additional extensions to current trails which have not yet been considered. The City should continue to be alert to opportunities to expand its trail network. Extending the trail network has immediate benefits for residents of the Rockbridge area.

Existing and Proposed Trail Projects
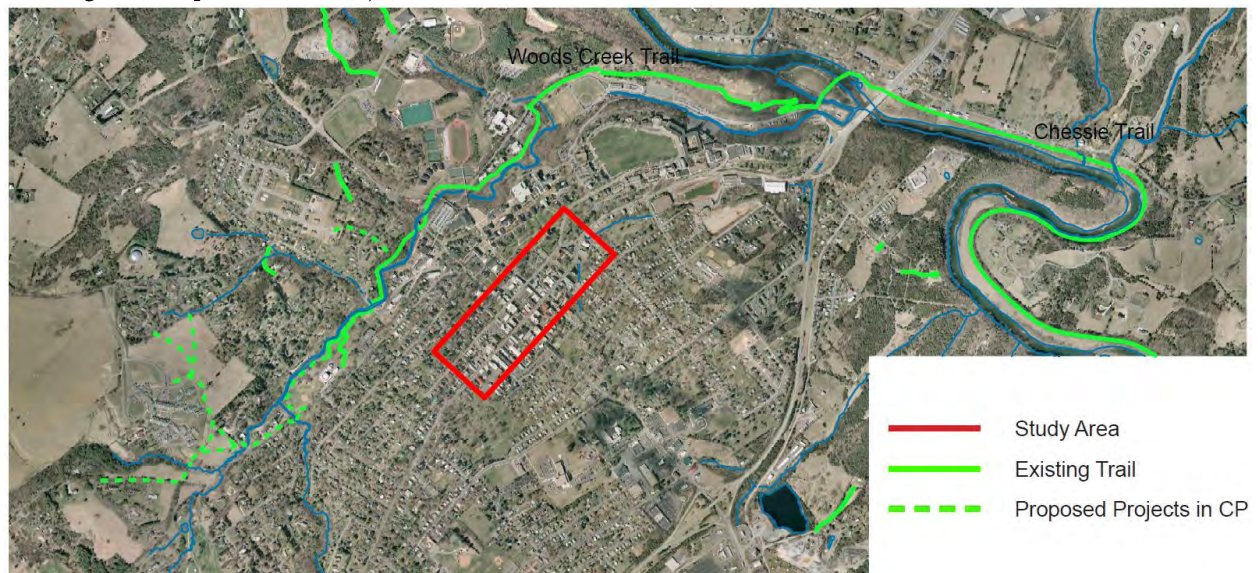
Bicycles
GOAL: A network of safe and convenient bikeways within Lexington that allows residents to substitute bicycles for cars and attracts bicycle tourism.

Another way to move more people without additional automobiles is to provide a network of safe, convenient bikeways. Many people already ride bicycles in and around Lexington. Some adults and many young people use their bikes as a basic means of mobility, riding them to and from schools or jobs. Many recreational riders

cycle for fun as well as a way to exercise. Lexington already hosts many bicyclists who participate in organized recreational rides through the Valley.

At present, thanks to the age of the City, its many narrow streets and limited rights of way, and extensive use of streets for automobile parking, <u>Lexington lacks safe routes for bicycles within the City and especially within the downtown. The very limitations that make Lexington dangerous for bicyclists make improving routes within the City very challenging.</u>

Nevertheless, new policies urge such improvements. In 2004, the Commonwealth Transportation Board adopted a new state policy for integrating bicycle and pedestrian accommodations into roadway projects. This policy essentially reversed previous VDOT policies which required substantial public and political support for bikeways and sidewalks to be *considered* for inclusion in transportation projects. The new policy states that

"VDOT will initiate all highway construction projects with the presumption that the projects shall accommodate bicycling and walking."

It essentially requires bikeways and sidewalks whenever a roadway project occurs in an urban or suburban area. For the past 10 years, Federal transportation policies have provided a consistent source of funding. Thanks to the VDOT policy's lead and increasing interest in cycling, Lexington has an opportunity to build a reputation as a destination for people seeking an active vacation. The Central Shenandoah Valley is positioning itself as a bicycle touring destination. Bicycle touring is a low impact tourist activity that brings dollars to small town businesses, museums, and other cultural institutions, but does not add to automobile traffic and pollution. A *Central Shenandoah Valley Bicycle Plan* (*Plan*) was prepared by the Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission in 2006 with input from representatives from each political jurisdiction within the Planning District, including Lexington and Rockbridge County.

The *Plan* details a comprehensive network of cycling facilities connecting neighborhoods, communities, and key destination points. The *Plan*'s study concludes that bicycling has the potential to be very convenient in established urban areas such as Lexington, Staunton and Waynesboro because these jurisdictions have higher building densities, streets with lower motor vehicle speeds and a concentrated mix of offices, stores, parks and residences. The downtown streets and narrow neighborhood streets of these communities are most often two-lane roads with parking on both sides and speed limits set at 25mph. Nevertheless, proper planning can create safe bicycle routes. <u>Painted sharrows—symbols combining a bike icon and a chevron that indicates the direction of travel—mark a lane shared by cars and bicycles, where there is not enough space to create separate bike lanes. Sharrows alert motorists to expect and accept cyclists as users of the roadway. This treatment would suit many Lexington streets.</u>

Parking
<u>Studies suggest, however, that while parking matters, it should be viewed as subservient to the needs and functions which draw people downtown. People come downtown not for parking, but for the wide variety of functions conveniently clustered there, including stores, restaurants, entertainment, tourist attractions, services, housing, government functions and offices.</u>

Concentrating activities, buildings and services and cultural activities in a small area increases efficiency and maximizes economic health by attracting large numbers of people and minimizing the distances they must travel. These concentrated downtown entities succeed in part because of the synergistic benefits that

downtown proximity to other nearby activities provides. Many small businesses depend on walk-in traffic which is highest in the downtown. <u>Providing downtown parking requires balancing the increasing demands of those needing a place to park, while sustaining and enhancing the qualities of a healthy downtown, including a higher density, a pedestrian-friendly environment, and a strong sense of place.</u> Providing parking should not detract from the unique features that make the downtown a lively place to visit, work, shop and live.

<u>2010 Desman Parking Study & Addendum</u>
http://www.lexingtonva.gov/pdfs/Parking%20Final%20Mgnt%202010.pdf
http://www.lexingtonva.gov/pdfs/Parking%20Final%20Mgnt%20Addendum.pdf

The Desman traffic study was reviewed. Particularly salient information from this document includes the following information.

- current estimated surplus of 214 parking spaces (574 of 876 were utilized in the peak hour)
- under a "what if" scenario – sufficient parking is available if all commercial space downtown were utilized
- Some core city blocks are at or near practical capacity levels (i.e. over 85% utilized)
- Majority of the surplus is in the Roy Smith Lot (County Courthouse Garage)
- Suggested some operational changes – many have been implemented (parking times, signage, layout of various lots, enforcement, permit parking, parking zone ordinance, pay for parking scenarios)

<u>City of Lexington Zoning Ordinance</u>

Much of the study area is encompassed by the C-1, Central Business, zoning district. Within this district, a variety of uses are allowed and setbacks area generally not required. The maximum by-right height permitted is 45 feet and residential uses are allowed on upper floors with the ground floor frontage being reserved for more commercial uses to activate the street.

The purposes of this district are to enhance the utility, safety and attractiveness of the historic downtown business area for residents and visitors alike; to encourage the continuation of a compact, efficient and attractive retail facade and arrangement of buildings in the downtown area; and to minimize traffic congestion and its effects in the downtown area, all of which purposes are served by encouraging a compact and convenient arrangement of retail stores, offices, compatible service uses and the use of community parking areas and by discouraging those uses which are incompatible with permitted uses or which would tend to be disruptive of traffic and pedestrian flow and historic building patterns.

Also, a majority of the properties within the study area of the Downtown Enhancement Plan are also part of the Downtown Historic Preservation District; the local historic district for the City of Lexington. These properties fall under the historic area regulations of the Zoning Ordinance that are provided as a means of protecting this important element of the City's historic and architectural heritage. Changes within the Downtown Historic Preservation District require a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Architectural Review Board.

The purposes and objectives of this article are to:

A. Bring attention to the architectural excellence and historic importance of certain buildings, structures, places and areas in the City.
B. Improve the land values, business climate, environmental quality, facilities and services of the City, while keeping the unique and distinctive character of certain sections.
C. Foster a more favorable climate in the City, especially in the Central Business District, for the development of tourism as a basic and vital industry in the community.
D. Encourage the development of off-street parking in the Central Business District for the convenience of shoppers, City and county employees and tourists.
E. To assist private organizations within the City in furthering a deeper appreciation of the rich cultural heritage of the community.
F. To promote a broad program, within the scope of this article, for preserving, rehabilitating and maintaining architecturally fine structures, monuments, walkways, places and areas within the entire City.

The Architectural Board shall prescribe the character, type, color and materials used in the erection, posting, display or maintenance of signs permitted in the Historic Downtown Preservation District, and, in so doing, the Board shall give due consideration to the purposes of such signs and require that they be in harmony with the exterior general design, arrangement, textures, materials, color and use of the building or structure on or at which they are erected, posted, displayed or maintained and congruous with the purposes and objectives declared in § 420-151, without defeating the purpose for which such signs are intended.

Downtown Historic Preservation District
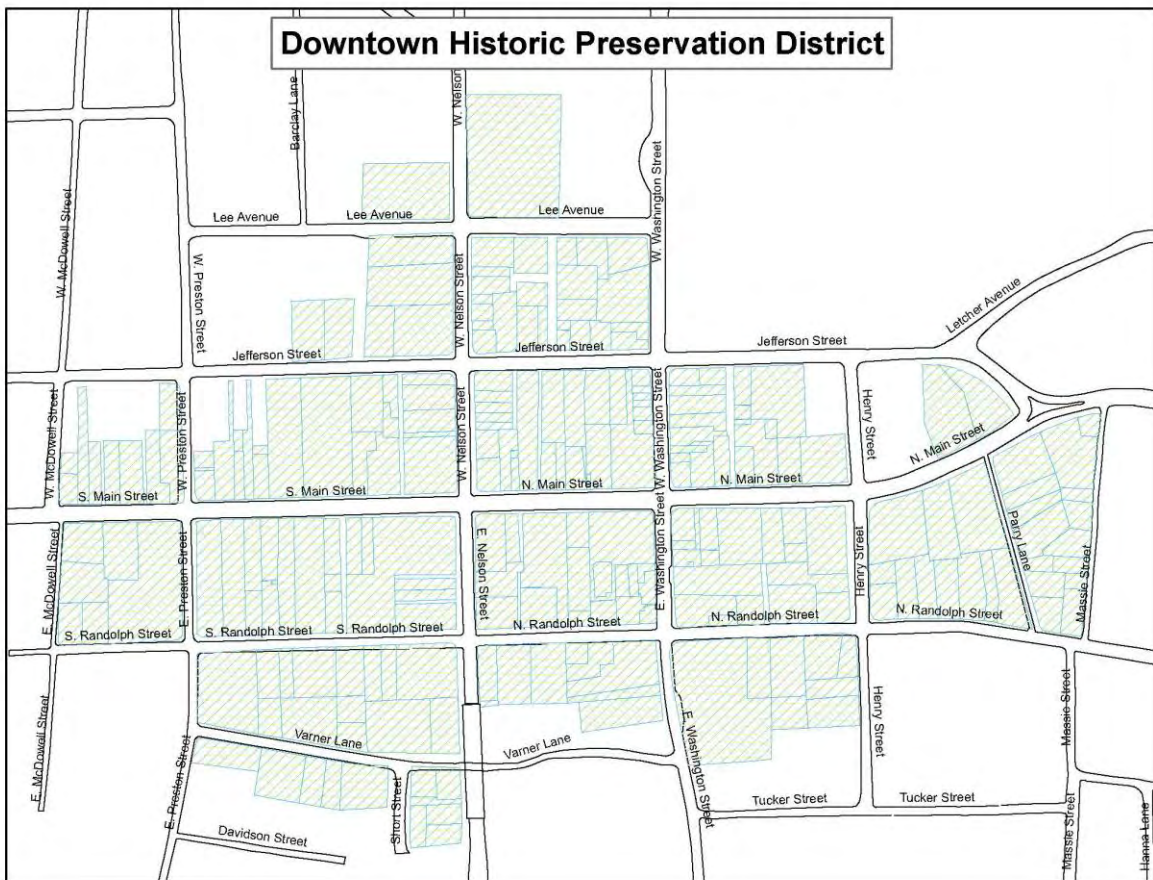
Signage and wayfinding have been a part of every public conversation about the Downtown Enhancement Plan. The streetscape is cluttered with signage that is problematic to the pedestrian and the motorist. Signage obstructs the sidewalks and confuses the driver. On the other hand, businesses feel that private signage regulations are too restrictive, especially in regards to the regulation of signage content.

The signage regulations in the Zoning Ordinance set out these purposes:

A. The purpose of this article is to regulate all exterior signs so as to protect the public health, safety and morals and to promote the public welfare. The principal features are the restriction of advertising to the business of the premises on which a sign is located and the restriction of the total sign area permissible per site.

B. In order to maintain the same level of attention, signs have had to become more aggressive, more numerous and more expensive. In some areas they threaten to go and in others already have gone out of control, thus defeating the very purpose for which they were created. Accordingly, it becomes necessary to reduce destructive competition with regard to signs.

C. Furthermore, lack of control has caused dangerous conflicts between advertising signs on the one hand and traffic control signs and signals on the other, thus destroying the effectiveness of both. The great increase in automobile traffic in the City has greatly aggravated this danger. There should be no dispute over the priority in importance between traffic controls and advertising signs.

D. Furthermore, outdoor signs suspended from or placed on top of structures and otherwise erected above the ground frequently are dangerous to the public, especially during high winds.

E. Furthermore, the uncontrolled use of signs and of their shapes, motion, colors, and illumination and their insistent and distracting demand for attention can be injurious to the mental and physical well-being of the public and can be destructive to adjacent property values and to natural beauty.

F. Accordingly, it has become necessary, in the public interest, to regulate the size, location, character and other pertinent features of all exterior signs in the City.

SIR Report

This year, a marketing plan was completed for the City of Lexington by the Southeastern Institute of Research. This report provides a comparison of visitor survey information from 2005 and 2011 to understand tourism trends and identify strategies to increase tourism and dollars spent within the Lexington area. This report offers 10 strategic recommendations for tourism marketing. Some of the important points from this report include:

- Target Baby Boomers and the Virginia market
- Identify ways to package and promote the region to attract more visitors
- Identify ways to enhance visitor experience
- Identify ways to increase repeat visitation
- Cross-promote attractions and showcase assets
- Visitor Centers are important—continue to invest in this resource
- Increase family activities and consider how to appeal to Gen X and Gen Y
- Look for ways to enhance online and the technology-empowered travel experience

Wayfinding Package

Frazier Associates in September 2010 to develop a regional wayfinding system for the Rockbridge County area including the Lexington and Buena Vista communities. At this time, the fabrication and installation of the signage package has not been funded. This work is important because there is a strong desire for the creation of a simplified and effective local wayfinding system. Any efforts to create a local wayfinding package should coordinate with this regional system.
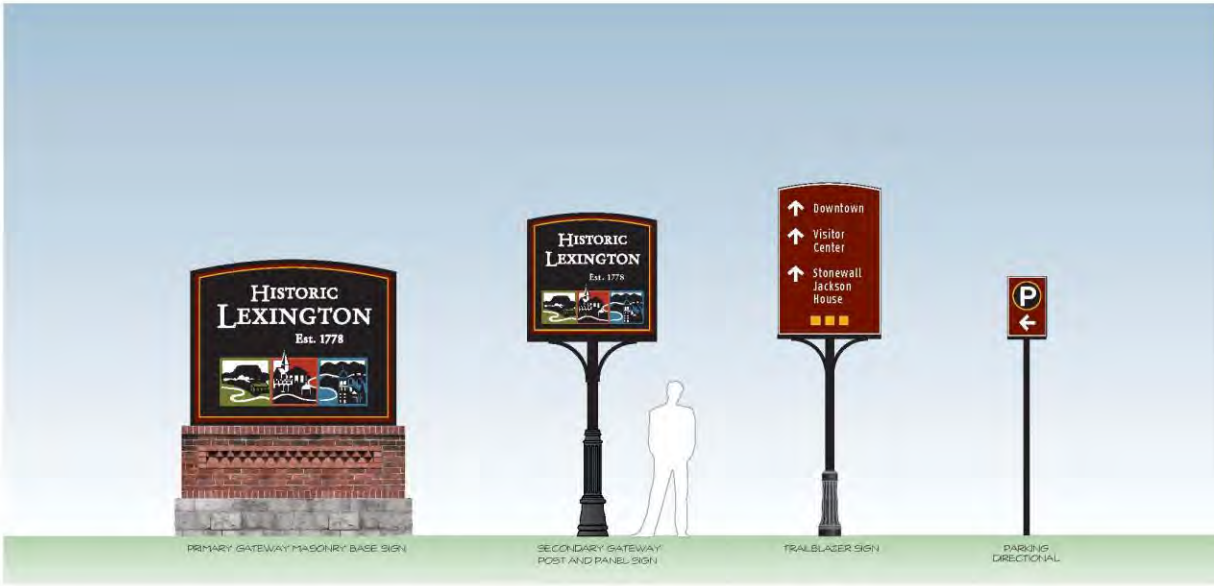
Central Shenandoah Bicycle Plan

A Bicycle Plan (Plan) was prepared by the Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission in 2006. The following issues were identified as being important for the future of bicycling:

- safety
- desire for bike lanes
- connectivity
- places for families and new riders
- sharing the road
- recreation/tourism.

The *Plan* is intended to ensure that bicyclists can use the roadway network in the future. The *Plan* details a comprehensive network of cycling facilities connecting neighborhoods, communities, and key destination points. Creating bike lanes or paths is the number one strategy for accommodating bicycles, but in Lexington, such opportunities are limited by narrow street widths, on-street parking, and limited building setbacks. Nevertheless, painted sharrows, marking a lane shared by cars and bicycles, where there is not enough space to create separate bike lanes, would suit many Lexington streets. This could connect residents with their identified destinations, including Rockbridge County High School, grade schools, public libraries, and shops.

A bicycle route within the city could also connect Lexington with other cities and towns via Route 11. Route 11 is becoming a bicycle corridor and ultimately would require bike lanes and paved shoulders along its entire length; but within Lexington, the route could be created inexpensively by clear marking with sharrows.

Bicycle Network

LEXINGTON

Washington & Lee University

Virginia Military Institute

Main St.
Study Area
Nelson St.

BUEN

Southern College

(623) (39) (60) (672) (251) (60) (11) 8 1 I-81

Big Spring

Proposed bike lane/sharrow
Proposed wide shoulder
Bike route recommended by public
Needed crossing improvement
Existing bike lane or route
Roadway
Destination for bicyclists
Higher Education

Bikeways Current Conditions in Central Shenandoah Valley

On-road bike lanes and bike routes in the Central Shenandoah Valley are currently limited. Off-road facilities for bicyclists (i.e. trails) are even more limited. Several of the universities and colleges offer bicycle parking areas (outdoor racks) on campus.
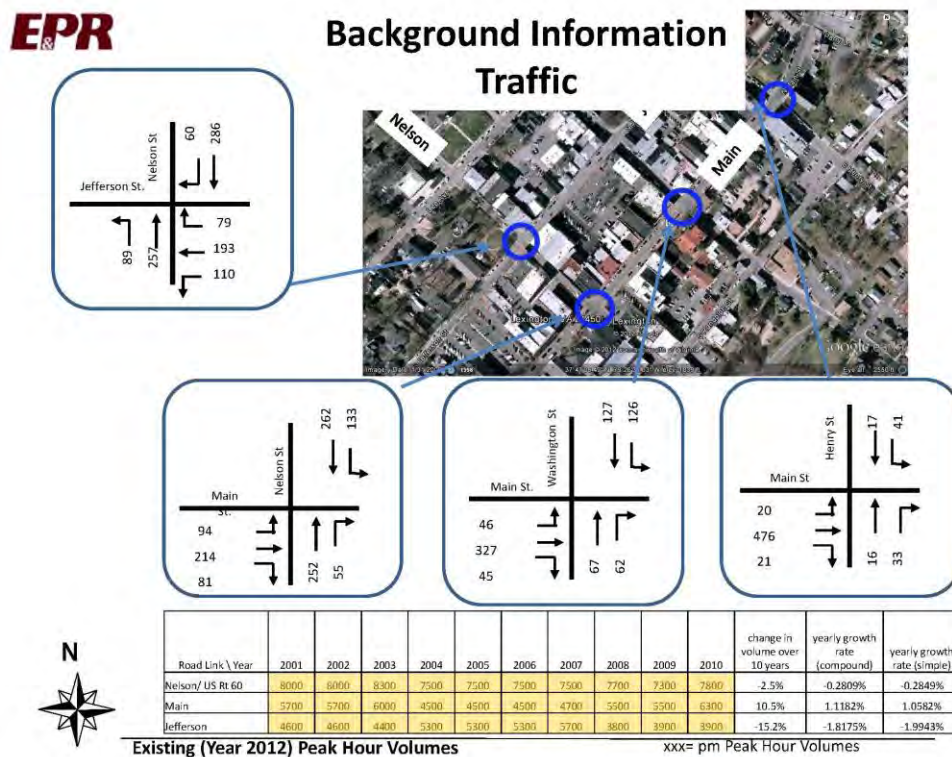
Barriers to Bicycling (general conditions in the region):

- Narrow, rural roadways with high speed traffic and a lack of paved shoulders, conditions which force bicyclists to share the lanes with motor vehicles.
- Hostility from motorists who do not respect bicyclists' legal right to share the road.
- Inadequate shoulder maintenance – debris frequently collects in the shoulder, reducing the space available for bicycling.
- Key arterials that connect cities to rural riding routes with multiple lanes and substantial traffic volumes and no bicycling facilities.
- Large intersections with multiple turning lanes creating long signal phases and wide crossings in all directions. These intersections can put bicyclists in conflict with turning vehicles. Often signal timing is inadequate to enable a bicyclist to clear the intersection, and some signals do not respond to bicyclists (actuation system does not detect the presence of a bicycle).

- Lack of off-road trails for less experienced bicyclists.
- Lack of signage and route maps to provide bicyclists with information on routes.
- The region's highways (namely Interstates 81 and 64) divide communities and create significant barriers to bicycling. Highway interchanges require bicyclists to share the road with high speed traffic merging on and off highway ramps. An example is I-81 at the Frontier Culture Museum.

2012 Traffic Data Count

As part of the initial discovery efforts, manual traffic turning movement counts were conducted at four intersections within the study area. Additionally, historical average daily traffic counts for road links within the study area from the VDOT published historical traffic volume database. This traffic information is shown in Figure 1.

Background Information Traffic

Road Link \ Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	change in volume over 10 years	yearly growth rate (compound)	yearly growth rate (simple)
Nelson/ US Rt 60	8000	6000	8300	7500	7500	7500	7500	7700	7300	7800	-2.5%	-0.2809%	-0.2849%
Main	5700	5700	6000	4500	4500	4500	4700	5500	5500	6300	10.5%	1.1182%	1.0582%
Jefferson	4600	4600	4400	5300	5300	5300	5700	3800	3900	3900	-15.2%	-1.8175%	-1.9943%

Existing (Year 2012) Peak Hour Volumes   xxx= pm Peak Hour Volumes

Field observations were conducted to observe traffic flows and queuing within the study area. These observations are useful for validating the traffic operational model results. The manual turning movement counts, along with the field observations, were used to create a traffic model as needed to examine existing levels of service and queuing at the intersections. Per the modeling effort, it was found that the existing levels of service are in the B range in the weekday afternoon peak hour and there doesn't appear to be any major traffic operational concerns with the existing laneage and signal timings. The Main and Jefferson intersections with Nelson were found to have the greatest queuing. Queuing along Nelson extends nearly the length of the block between Jefferson and Main. However, queuing on the Jefferson and Main approaches was found to be

moderate, with the 95th percentile queue (queue is less than this length 95% of the time) around 5 to 6 vehicles per lane.

Note that level of service is a measure of the quality of traffic flow and congestion at intersections and along corridors. The "grading" goes from level of service A to F. Much like a student's report card, level of service A is good with minimal delays and congestion, and level of service F means that there are movements where the volumes exceed the capacity and excessive congestion is occurring. For small towns and rural areas, level of service C is usually a good target for maximum levels of congestion, whereas in more urban areas such as northern Virginia levels of service in the D and E range might be considered tolerable.

Representative Road Geometry
Per field measurements, it was found that Main Street has a roadway section consisting of 36 feet of pavement between the curb faces. Jefferson Street has a 30 foot typical section between the curb faces. Figure 3 illustrates these measurements.
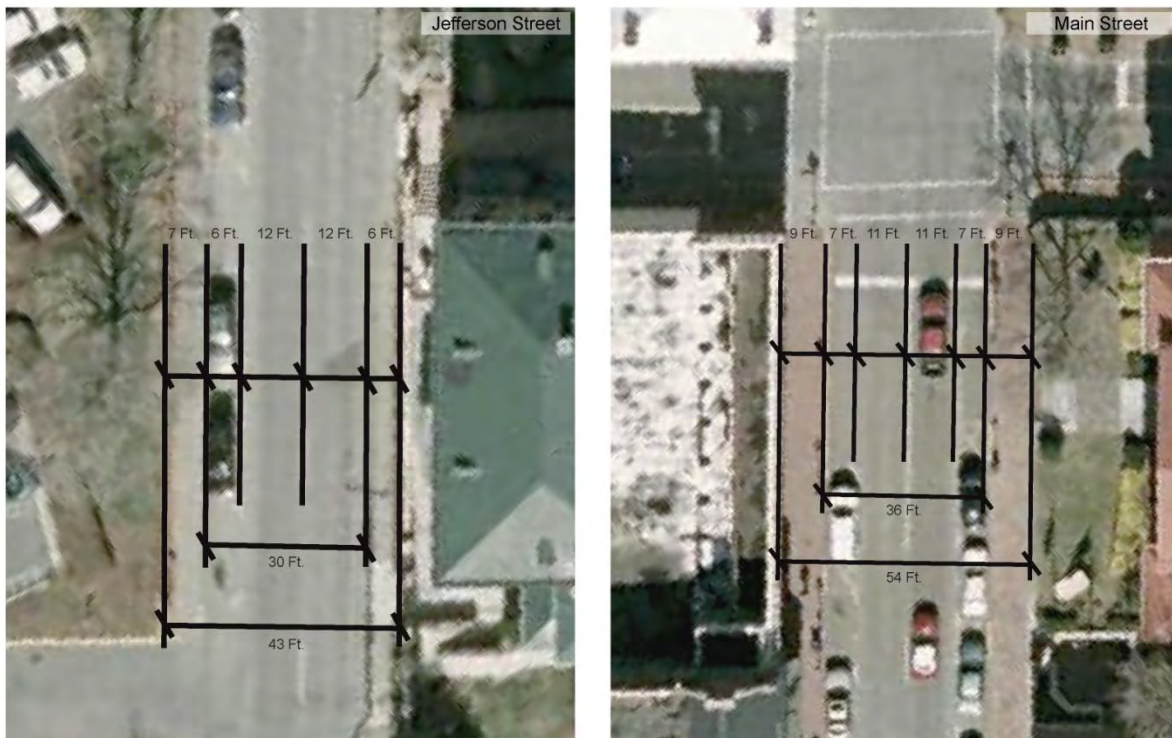
Public Forum #1 Public Input

Lexington Downtown Enhancement Plan
Public Forum #1 on August 28th, 2012
Meeting Notes (** denotes a Top Five Idea)

People Spaces:

**More space and attractions (movie in Hopkins, street performers)
**Abundant seating - everywhere
**Parklets (small, park like spaces)
**Outdoor business environment
**Include Davidson park culture
**Friendlier Environment (daylight and dark) for youth and older lingering
Outside seating
Outdoor dining
More outdoor dining
Inviting atmosphere to linger
Street furniture and dining areas - awnings
Places to sit
Usage of green spaces between old courthouse and old bank
Make attractive and/or informational use of triangle at main and Jefferson
Usage of rooftops - nest

Historic Preservation:

**Promote historical aspect
**Stay true to historical identity (no cookie cutter design) Protect the historical buildings and see that they are treasured
Create entity which helps property owners maintain/improve their facades
Remember that most folks visiting Lexington come because of the history (therefore protect historical footprint)
Expand use of Lexington bricks on selected downtown streets to create an appearance of more historical center

Would like to be more tourist and visitor friendly, keeping historical sense

Landscaping:

**More shade trees and foliage
**Greening and Cleaning spaces
Add more greenery downtown for beauty and protection
More green
More trees (shade) and plants
Street trees - limited
Green spaces with seating
Trees and plants in parking lot
Green spaces
Not enough trees downtown
Trees on main

Pedestrian Improvements:

**Explore pedestrian mall on Washington Street
**Pedestrian friendly, sidewalks / atmosphere, more welcoming, utilities underground
**Wider sidewalks
**Mid-block street crossing
Pedestrian friendly
Pedestrian precinct within study are with exceptions of deliveries
Improve pedestrian crosswalks
Mid-street crosswalk
Create vehicle / pedestrian compatibility
More sidewalk activity
Make sidewalks more pedestrian friendly
Wider sidewalk
Sidewalk wider - middle of main
Put lines underground on Jefferson
Create ways to soften walkways (VMI corridor)
Block main from nelson to henry to create pedestrian way
Encourage walking

Wayfinding:

**Better Signage and Wayfinding
**Connectivity to adjacent attractions (natural and business)
**Improve the north entrance (hook 'em)
**Improved / updated signage
Improve signage
Update signage to reflect current
Eliminate the sign posts and utility poles on the right side of Main Street
Use wayfinding to connect downtown to countryside

Better/cleaner signage
Improved signage
Less sign posts
Signage in keeping with historic city
Improve clarify access to city

Activities/Programming:

**Live music downtown
**Evening hours/nightlife
**Visitor friendly activities events, attractions
Night time activities downtown
Outside entertainment space
Opportunity for the performing arts
Good mix of business activities for visitors / residents

Parking:

**Relieve parking pressure critical commercial parking zones business owners and employees
**Downtown Employee and owner education on parking
**Centralized parking garage
**Plan must include VMI VC SJC Garage
More convenient off street parking
Good/convenient parking
Procure McCrum's lot and convert to multi-story parking deck
Promote and signage for parking
Is diagonal parking infeasible?

Streets:

**Trolley? To bring visitors from hotels or horse center to downtown
**Maintain 2 lanes traffic - Main and Jefferson
**2 lanes of traffic on Main Street
**Bike lanes on Randolph St.
**Improve interior blocks
Improve traffic flow especially delivery trucks
Two way street
One lane of cars
Embellish improve alleyway

Housing:

**More full time residents above stores
More Residential
Increase residential downtown

Economy:

**Define a clear identity and underscore economic impact on downtown business
**More cooperation from businesses to work together for events and evening hours
**College buys in to viability of downtown
**Keeping businesses open, attracting new business and financial entity to help owners maintain and improve facade
**Focus on tourism
Make city a local food destination
Focus on tourists
Visitors board to find more opportunities to advertise Lexington
Why? What compelling issue requires attention at time of economic instability?
Concentrate on saving downtown businesses, other towns around have done this
Create more foot traffic south of Nelson
Bring people from outskirts of town into town (ex. horse center)
A way to bring more small business into town, less vacancies
Address vacancy downtown
More people downtown
Fill empty storefronts
More retail spaces in downtown
Business - availability, access
Fully occupied ground level storefronts
24 hr 7 day vitality
Service service service
Make real estate accessible for small businesses

Enforcement:

**Keep deliveries off Main Street
**Delivery trucks - better access
**Pride of ownership: care of facades
Try to find alternatives to the delivery trucks parking on Main Street and blocking traffic
Ordinance enforcement - noise, trash, weeds
Maintenance of buildings, parks, landscaping
Building facades to be more attractive and well kept
Flags, law enforcement, student housing, private use of public space
Owners of buildings who don't live in Lexington need pressure put on them to lower rent and/or fix up buildings to make more attractive
Trash that is placed out on the sidewalks after usual 9-5 business hours. The city picks up the trash every morning, but can be nuisance for evening visitors.

Other:

Everyone in community a cheerleader
City building is ugly
What is on the table?

What the concern about bicycles?
Don't change
More activity from colleges to help beautify and upgrade downtown

Mobility Stakeholder Bike Plan & Priorities
Stakeholder Meeting of Rockbridge/Lexington Bike-Ped Advisory Councils
August 22 2012

Top Challenges:
Unfriendly buildings
Narrow streets & sidewalks
Washington St is particularly steep
Pre-Historic feelings about preservation
No place to sit
Victim of old attitudes i.e. No Lounging
No shade
Is it safe for kids to bike downtown?
No bike racks
Cars don't yield to pedestrians or bike riders
Aging population -- stays home due to the challenges of sidewalks & fast cars
Remove many of the signs that fill the sidewalks. They take up too much room

Top Opportunities:
Addable items…
Shade trees
Public Restrooms
Water Fountains
Mid-Block Crosswalk
Public Plazas or Park-lets
Places to sit like Chess Park
Sidewalk Cafes
Washington St (or other) pedestrian Mall
Embellish Old Courthouse Square
Tie in -- Fridays Alive, Community Festival, Friday Art Walks
Improve Wheelchair & Stroller safety
Improve pedestrian Crossings
Improve Crosswalks (curb Ramps et al)
Sharrows & Signage
Safe Routes to Schools
Develop Alleyways throughout town
Change Speed limits
Lane for Wheels - bikes, wheelchairs
Tie into current VDOT Study of Rt 60 Nelson St.
Tie into County Bike Trail planning
Capitalize on Main St = Rt 76 Trail -- funding perhaps

Awareness about bikes & pedestrians & wheelchairs

Preservation Stakeholder Feedback
9/12/12

Focus on Downtown Study Area as 'Layers of History' and provide enhancements that increase continuity among those many layers.
How do we focus on history and bring the experience to life for the downtown visitor?
Main Street as the Great Wagon Road—Can we add this as honorific name of main street to peak curiosity about local/regional history?
Create educational theme about history—comprehensive narrative that is accessible to visitors through places/stories/ exhibits.
Integrate students and the elderly for a richer experience

How does Visitor Center market the history of Lexington—everyone can be a salesperson of downtown Lexington. City is undersold to the casual interstate tourist. HLF: provides walking tours.

Lewis & Clark Eastern Legacy Trail.

Signage: Wayfinding is a big problem. Directory signage would be very helpful.
Regional Wayfinding Signage package is too suburban
Provide Downtown Information Kiosks. Hopkins Green, Courthouse and Cemetery are options for info kiosks.

Visitor Center: Poor location—can it be more central? Old Library building or Tire Shop—Move.

Main Street Program: Lexington Downtown Development Association was disbanded in 2006 (lost Main Street status). Had access to grants and funding for special programs. Now, too many empty storefronts and Lexington is too lax on economic development.

Quality buildings get quality tenants. Not enough staff members to properly enforce maintenance regulations.

Traffic Lights: Not designed for pedestrians or bikes to trip the light; only cars. Problematic for ped/bike usage of downtown.

Main Street: Explore the option to make main street two-way south of Nelson to boost the economic vitality for this part of downtown. This area needs rejuvenation.

Create two downtown parking decks—Behind Southern Inn and Dutch Inn (will require usage of eminent domain because of web of easements and complicated title issues)

Build upon Assets (Thematic Drivers): Create Anchor points to cross sell amenities
Focus on Incubating the Following Themes—

- Local Food Destination
- Real Downtown
- Walkable Environment
- Add more Downtown Residents
- Continuity—Preservation of Downtown as a place
- Tourism/ Education/ Agribusiness
- Farm to Table: More permanent home for the Farmer's market—Lee Street Lot or Visitor's Center lot
- Arts/ Performing Arts: Create downtown venues—MUSIC!!
- Horse Theme: Horse Center and Carriage Tour—how to build on this? Trail connections and horse trails close to downtown.

No cookie cutter solutions—and not every street/area will have the same look in the downtown.

Perception: Hard to do business in Lexington. City government must make it easy to do business.

Population is not growing… we have an aging population and no Gen 'Y' opportunity right now.
Market area as a retirement region rich with cultural experiences.
What particular amenities are needed for an aging population?

Focus of Cultural Amenities downtown
Crooked Road Example—strong marketing for tourism
Barter Theater in Abingdon

Avoid the 'Williamsburg Effect' that was part of the Downtown Renaissance 40 years ago—fake historicism.
1st National Bank covered up 'real' architecture.
Threat of fire is a major issue for historic downtown buildings.

Arthur Bartenstein: Historical Photo PowerPoint of Downtown Lexington
Ed Dooley: 19th Century Lexington Sketchup Model to be unveiled this fall.

<u>Downtown Business and Property Owner Stakeholder Feedback</u>
9/12/12

Signage:
- How do you get to Downtown Lexington? Signage is confusing—not helpful for parking or businesses
- Overly restrictive sign ordinance—Sign content should not be regulated. Must meet modern marketing needs.
- Create Directory signage downtown (similar to what is on C-ville's Downtown Mall) to direct customers to businesses on side streets. Increase the flow of tourism traffic.
- Add downtown info kiosks to keep everyone informed of events and opportunities.

Parking:

There is always a perception of not enough parking available. City should do away with 10 minute spots—not long enough to do business. Remain empty because of fear of ticketing. Look into parking as unlimited in the evenings and weekends.

Even though we want to focus on boosting tourism, 80% of business is locals. Don't sacrifice local needs.

Themes/Nitch Marketing: 'Lexington is a company town'
1. Education
2. Agri-Business—Explore Farm to Table and Arts & Culture Opportunities
3. Tourism—More amenities needed. Create 'stickiness' and this will also benefit locals. Tourism Report by John Martin—baby boomers audience, couples, not many children.

No real industry or Gen Y opportunities currently.

Criticism:
Project boundaries and scope—How come primary sites such as Cemetery, VMI, W & L, Tourism Office, and Parking Garage are not included? Please keep these connections in mind as we proceed.

Regionalism:
Also, Lexington needs to think on a bigger scale—regional opportunities and cross-marketing. In our project, it is good to understand the reasons why people come to town.

500,000 visitors to Natural Bridge
300,000 visitors to the Horse Center
How do we get more of these people into downtown Lexington? Create outposts at key locations. Ensure adequate cross marketing of all top opportunities.

Downtown Lexington should act as a HUB for all regional activities to increase the 'stickiness' factor. How can you drive through the valley and not stop here?

Visitor Center:
Is it working?
Poor location/hard to find and topographic challenges. Should be moved to a core spot at the top of the hill. Trade places with Tire shop on Randolph?

Arts/Culture/Entertainment:
No venues downtown and lack of evening activities. There must be more opportunities for music and performing arts.

Ideas:
- Provide Bicycle Rentals Downtown
- Improve Housing opportunities for Retirees
- Close the streets more often for special events downtown.

13 vacant properties downtown: Lack of upkeep by property owners and high rents. Vacancy equals lack of downtown connectivity.

How can the City of Lexington become more business & development friendly? There seems to be a lack of interest from City Council and City Staff. Business owners would like to have more support.
Change Politics—anti-business. Need to put a positive and supportive spin on the process.

Food & Performing Arts:
Look to Abingdon, VA and the impact of the Barter Theater
Staunton has now surpassed Lexington—what lessons can be learned?
Roanoke—special use tax within the business district to sponsor events and improvements.

Priorities:
Fix Signage & Wayfinding
Provide Amenities Downtown
Create Connections and Cross Marketing