



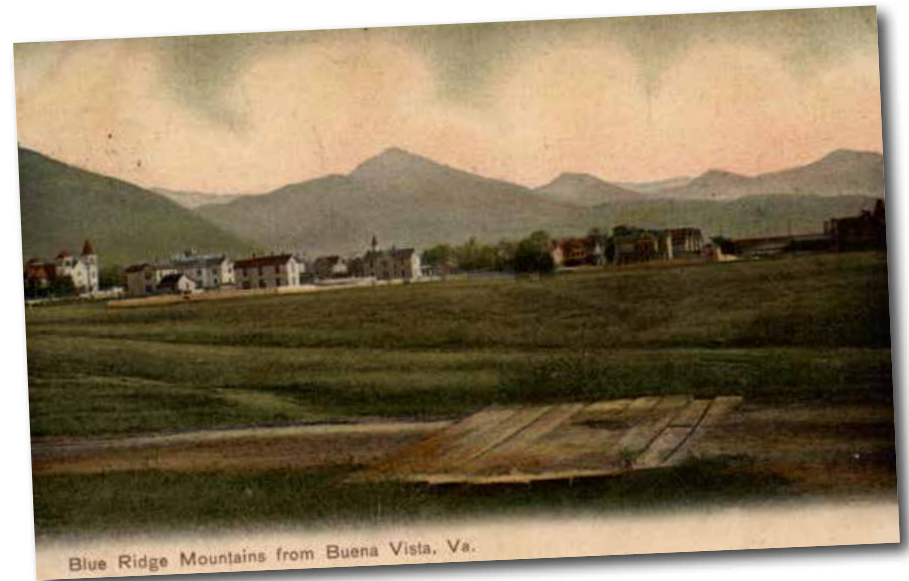
BUENA VISTA Downtown Revitalization Strategy

Prepared by StudioAmmons Inc.
with Chuck D'Aprix, LPDA
and Landmark Preservation Associates

10 December 2020

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✿ INTRODUCTION

StudioAmmons and our design team were engaged by the City of Buena Vista to work with the City and its residents to create a forward looking plan for the City's Downtown Business District, identifying revitalization needs and priorities, while developing a community vision and revitalization strategy that will include 1) a Plan for Promoting Local Identity and Opportunity, 2) an Economic Restructuring Plan, and 3) a Physical Improvements Plan for the downtown area.

Funding for this work was provided through the Community Development Block Grant program (CDBG) sponsored by the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) as part of their Business District Revitalization Grant program. The project initiatives and recommendations presented in this report will provide the necessary preparatory design work to allow the City to pursue CDBG implementation grants for these projects.

Community engagement is a key component of developing and implementing a successful revitalization plan. Gathering community input is particularly challenging these days with the social distancing and public safety measures we are all trying to follow as the COVID19 pandemic is ongoing. Consequently, our team worked closely with City staff to provide a range of safe ways for residents, business owners, and stakeholders to provide their input on the process, convey their thoughts and desires for the future of Buena Vista and express what they want to see in a revitalized downtown.

Buena Vista's setting is stunning and its assets are numerous. Mountains, rivers, an established manufacturing base, a growing university, low crime, low housing costs, easy access to I-81, tens of thousands of people coming each year for local music and cultural festivals, and an abundance of outdoor recreational choices...

So...what's the challenge?

Why are developers walking away from Buena Vista instead of investing there?

Why is Buena Vista such an unseen gem nestled at the foot of the Blue Ridge?

Why is Downtown dead?

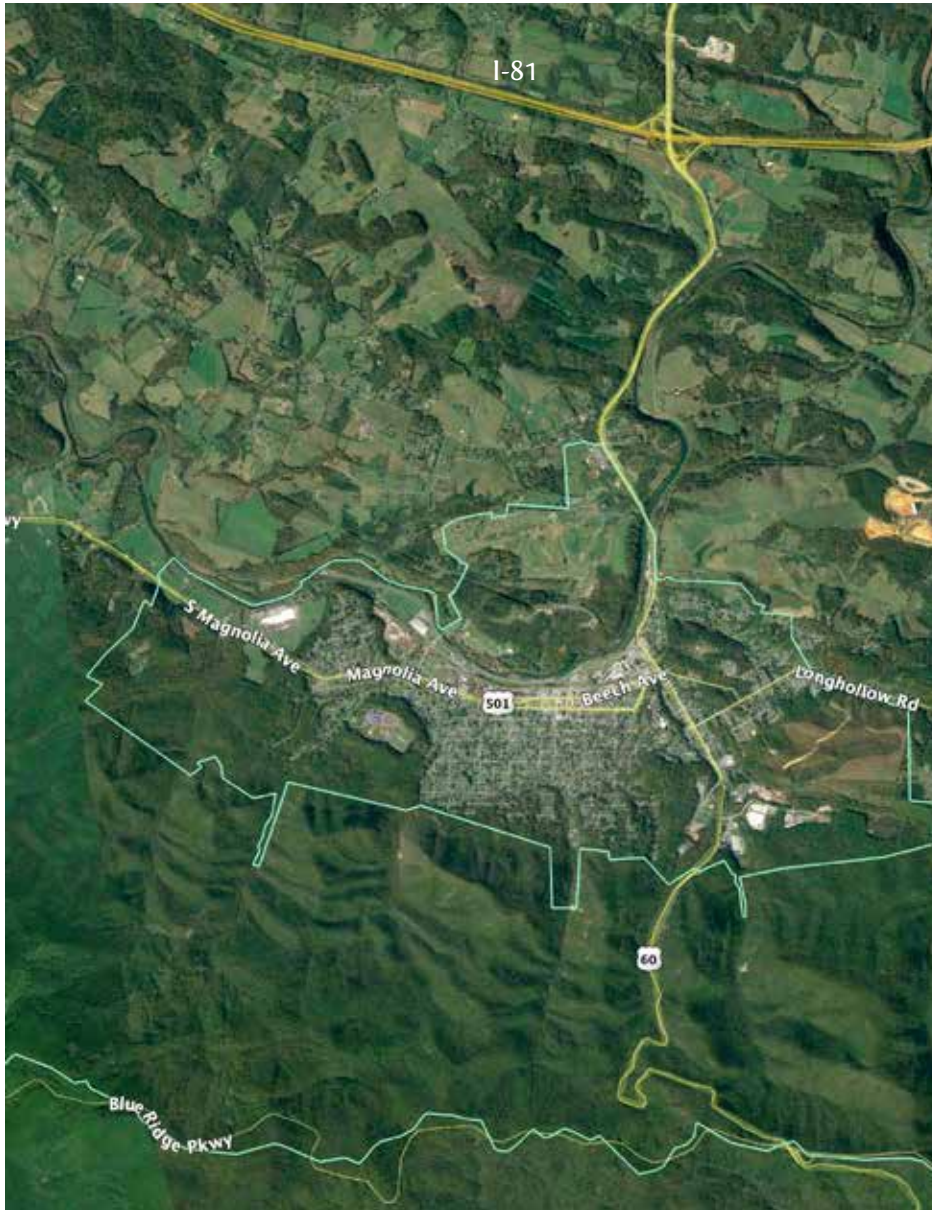
What is to be done about it!?

1

UNDERSTANDING BUENA VISTA

1 - UNDERSTANDING BUENA VISTA

ITS PLACE



Location & Setting

Buena Vista, a designated Appalachian Trail community, is situated at the foot of the Blue Ridge Mountains, just 10 minutes away from access to the Blue Ridge Parkway. Although named after the nearby antebellum Buena Vista furnace, the city's location along the Maury River certainly lives up to its name. The mountains are a beautiful backdrop to the city's historic neighborhoods, river walk trail, and downtown business district. Its manufacturing history is evident in landmark industrial structures that add character and context to the city's over 130-year history as a river and railroad town.

Buena Vista is about a 10 minute drive from the city of Lexington and only about 6 miles from access to I-81, western Virginia's primary north/south corridor, and I-64 connecting east/west to central Virginia, the Richmond metropolitan area, and I-95. Its central location in the Valley allows its residents to get to the cities of Staunton in about 30 minutes and Charlottesville and Roanoke in about an hour.



1 - UNDERSTANDING BUENA VISTA ITS PLACE



View along the Buena Vista River Walk which runs on top of the US Army Corps of Engineers levees



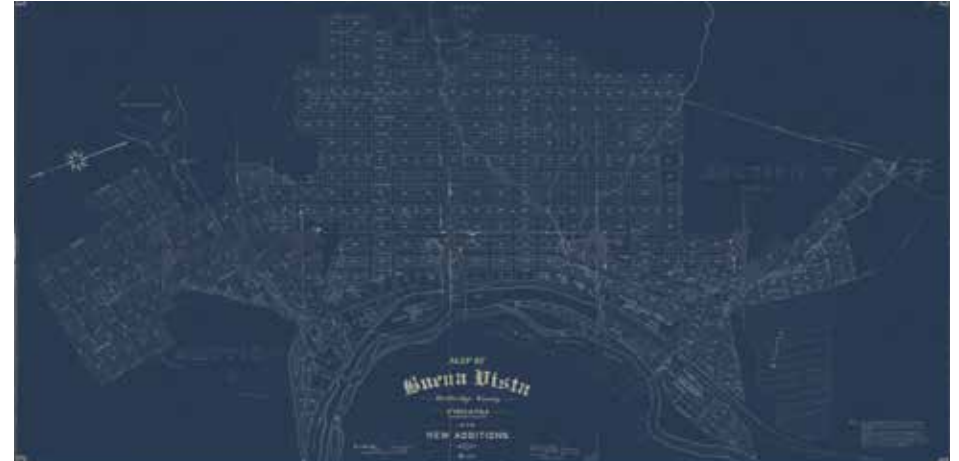
View looking towards Downtown from Vista Links with the Blue Ridge in the background



Aerial view of Glen Maury Park along the Maury River with Downtown Buena Vista beyond



View from the Vista Links, the City-owned golf course across the Maury River from Downtown



View along the Maury River as you enter Buena Vista across the Route 60 bridge

1 - UNDERSTANDING BUENA VISTA ITS PLACE

History - Downtown Character

Buena Vista was established in 1889 as an industrial town located at the juncture of two rail lines and convenient to nearby mineral and timber reserves. Buena Vista quickly became one of the region's boom towns experiencing rapid growth in its first year, reportedly growing from 50 people to 1,000, followed by steadier growth through the early and mid-20th century.

Buena Vista persevered through the economic downturns of the 1890's and the early 20th century, seeing its downtown transition from 'boomtown' era late 19th c. buildings to a downtown with smaller scale early and mid-century commercial buildings supporting the local market (including Rockbridge County and Lexington) and its population of industry workers. Development of new buildings in the downtown continued through the 1960's presenting a mix of traditional earlier commercial structures with mid to late-mid century modern storefronts.



Illustrated aerial view of Buena Vista from 1891



Early postcard view of Buena Vista



Buena Vista's mid-century commercial buildings and shopfronts

1 - UNDERSTANDING BUENA VISTA ITS PLACE

History cont'd

In 1969, Buena Vista's vibrant downtown business district was hit with severe flooding in Hurricane Camille. The entire downtown district was under water and every building was damaged as the Maury River rose out of its banks. After several subsequent major floods and the departure of many downtown businesses and industries, the Army Corps of Engineers constructed a levee system along the Maury River to mitigate future river flooding. Although now protected from the Maury River, Downtown is still subject to small area flooding from the many streams that flow through the city towards the Maury River swelling as they collect runoff from the mountains to the east.



Magnolia Street in Buena Vista after Hurricane Camille



Views along the river walk atop the Army Corps of Engineers levees



City Hall can be seen on the right



Shops submerged from the flooded Maury River

1 - UNDERSTANDING BUENA VISTA

ITS PEOPLE Demographic Overview

The residents of Buena Vista are the foundation on which this Downtown Master Plan is constructed. In addition to its over 6,400 residents, the city is home to Southern Virginia University (SVU) whose recent growth is bringing over 1,100 students into the Buena Vista community each year. Below is a brief demographic overview of the City of Buena Vista. Later in this report, we will establish the Trade Area(s) for Buena Vista. The data below is for the 24416 zip code, which includes some adjacent portions of Rockbridge County. The vintage of the data is 2020.



Historic postcard view of Southern Virginia University

Key Facts

- 8,466** Population
- 41.2%** Median Age
- 2.4%** Average Household Size
- \$34,282** Median Household Income



Historic Population Trend

Education

- 16%** No High School Diploma
- 38%** High School Graduate
- 27%** Some College
- 19%** Bachelor's/Grad/Prof. Degree

Employment

- 45%** White Collar
- 38%** Blue Collar
- 17%** Services
- 9.4%** Unemployment Rate

Income

- \$34,282** Median Household Income
- \$21,026** Per Capita Income
- \$49,877** Median Net Worth

Households By Income
The largest group: \$50,000 - \$74,999 (18.6%)
The smallest group: \$150,000 - \$199,999 (2.8%)

Indicator	Value	Difference
< \$15,000	15.4%	+5.2%
\$15,000 - \$24,999	18.3%	+6.7%
\$25,000 - \$34,999	17.2%	+6.2%
\$35,000 - \$49,999	10.1%	-3.5%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	18.5%	-2.4%
\$75,000 - \$99,999	8.5%	-4.6%
\$100,000 - \$149,999	7.9%	-2.9%
\$150,000 - \$199,999	1.7%	-2.1%
\$200,000+	2.4%	-2.6%

Population

- 9.0%** Greatest Gen Born 1945/Earlier
- 24.0%** Baby Boomer Born 1946 to 1964
- 18.4%** Generation X Born 1965 to 1980
- 22.4%** Millennial Born 1981 to 1998
- 21.9%** Generation Z Born 1999 to 2016
- 4.4%** Generation Alpha Born 2017 to Present

Source: This infographic contains data provided by Esri, Infogroup and Downtown Economics. The vintage of the data is 2020.

1 - UNDERSTANDING BUENA VISTA ITS PEOPLE

Community Engagement

In order to craft a meaningful Downtown Master Plan, it is important that we listen to the experts, namely the residents of Buena Vista and those who use Downtown regularly. Here is what we did in order to maximize public input:

- + Established a website (www.buonavistaforward.com) in order to elicit community information
- + Established a Facebook page (BV Forward) with a link to an online survey
- + Distributed over 2,000 door hangers to Buena Vista households with a survey and website information attached
- + Constructed Downtown drop boxes for the door hanger surveys
- + Established a telephone voicemail line for resident suggestions
- + Held small group sessions with residents to gauge their opinions on Downtown
- + Conducted online focus groups with Southern Virginia University students
- + Talked to Downtown business owners in their respective stores
- + Conducted a content analysis from local media reaching back two years
- + Engaged the local and regional media in order to publicize the surveys
- + Conducted intercept surveys in Downtown Buena Vista on a Saturday afternoon

The results of our extensive resident research are contained later in this report. We thank all of the residents who participated in this process.

Recent Public Initiatives

City leaders from both the public and private sectors have exhibited significant commitment to the revitalization of Downtown Buena Vista. There are some recent initiatives that bring this commitment into focus.

A private real estate development firm launched a public/private partnership to market targeted properties in Downtown Buena Vista. This brought focus to the need for a day-to-day Manager for Downtown Buena Vista, something we will discuss throughout this plan.

The City retained a firm to market the federal Opportunity Zone Program, a tax incentive program designed to jumpstart economic development in the City. In fact, the entire City of Buena Vista is an Opportunity Zone. City leaders rightly felt it was imperative to not only market the availability of this program, but to target certain Downtown properties for the Opportunity Zone. The document produced as part of that effort is in the Appendix to this report.

We will discuss the Opportunity Zone and additional marketing avenues when we offer economic development recommendations later in this report

City incentive programs include a Technology Zone, a Tourism Zone, a Facade Improvement Grant Program, and a Revolving Loan Fund. The City's zoning text has had some updates over the last ten years to allow a mix of uses and some development flexibility. Additionally, the City is a Federally-designated HUB Zone. In combination, these underscore the City's commitment to downtown revitalization.

Buena Vista Forward drop boxes were placed along Magnolia Street to give residents an opportunity to safely drop off their door-hanger surveys while engaging with Downtown



1 - UNDERSTANDING BUENA VISTA

THE PROJECT SITE

The Downtown Business District

The focus of this planning study will be centered on Buena Vista's Downtown Business District, an approximately twelve block area that includes what residents consider to be the "main street" corridor as well as the primary government and retail services. This is the "historic" downtown and overlays closely with the city's Downtown Historic District.



1 - UNDERSTANDING BUENA VISTA THE PROJECT SITE

The Project Site Within the City of Buena Vista



Buena Vista

Downtown Revitalization Strategy

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Aerial Views of Downtown



LOOKING SOUTH



LOOKING EAST

1 - UNDERSTANDING BUENA VISTA THE PROJECT SITE



Examples of vacant mid-century commercial buildings along Magnolia Avenue



Vacant mid-century commercial buildings along Magnolia Avenue



Empty lots where buildings used to be

General Assessment - Current Conditions

Never fully recovering from Camille and subsequent floods, over the last 40 years, the city's business district has deteriorated through neglect, vacancy, and a lack of viable economic development strategies and organizational support. Many buildings have been lost and more remain empty or with struggling local businesses hoping to, one day, see customers return and shops re-open. This steady, decades-long decline has taken its toll on the spirits of the Buena Vista residents and business owners who have little hope left that their city can return to the vibrant days they remember.

Despite the vacant buildings and empty lots, Downtown is kept quite clean and trim. Recent streetscape and sidewalk improvements have helped to unify some of the downtown streetscapes and break up the large expanses of concrete sidewalks but with so few businesses there is little foot traffic on its gracious sidewalks and other areas are showing signs of deterioration and neglect. New street trees have also been installed but the species chosen is an ornamental that will not grow to provide shade and if not properly pruned, will stay shrubby and may impede movement along the sidewalks.



Sidewalk improvements including new corner bumpouts, brick paved areas and street trees have helped to unify the streetscapes Downtown

1 - UNDERSTANDING BUENA VISTA PRELIMINARY ENGINEERING REPORT

Prepared by EPRpc and LPDA

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Introduction

The City of Buena Vista and Studio Ammons have requested a Preliminary Engineering Report to support a CDBG planning study for the downtown business district of Buena Vista. The area under consideration includes Sycamore Avenue, Magnolia Avenue (Bus 501) and Forest Avenue between 19th and 23rd Streets. The study area is shown in figure 1. The assessment contained in this report will be used to develop streetscape plans and cost estimates in the next phase of the project. Numerous opportunities exist to revitalize the downtown area with enhanced streetscape conditions that will improve safety, functionality and overall aesthetic quality.

Figure 1: Study Area



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Existing Streetscape Conditions

To conduct site inventory and analysis for the City of Buena Vista CDBG planning study, LPDA staff walked the streets and alleys within the project area to observe and photograph general and specific site conditions and issues to be used to provide recommendations for streetscape improvements. It was generally observed that walkways are mostly in poor condition, with many places containing damaged concrete with holes, cracks and grass growing through, and several places where uneven concrete segments, heaving from tree roots, a utility pole cable, and an old utility pedestal present trip hazards. There are a number of street corners without curb ramps, ADA domes, and/or crosswalks, two mid-block crossings without curb ramps, and several of the crosswalks present have striping that is faded. Additional issues include utility poles blocking curb ramps, drive entrances that disrupt the walkway, grass or adjacent shrubs encroaching on the walkway making it too narrow, and a stretch of walkway that is being used for business parking. Several curb ramps and drive entrances are not built to ADA standards. There are portions of walkway that are missing or stop short of connecting to other walkways or street corners, and a place on Sycamore Avenue where the walkway stops mid-block. Most of the side streets do not have walkways and the walkways present are discontinuous.

Figure 2: Damaged / deteriorated walkways



Hole in concrete walkway



Cracks and grass in walkway



Walkway heaving and damaged from tree roots



Gap around utility pole, busted concrete



Busted concrete curb



Busted concrete curb

Figure 3: Absent or substandard curb ramps and crosswalks



No curb ramps or crosswalks at intersections



No curb ramps or crosswalk at street crossing



No curb ramps at mid-block crossing



Steep sloping walkway down to curb not ADA accessible



No ADA domes at curb ramp



Curb ramp obstructs walkway, not ADA accessible

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Curb ramp obstructs walkway, not ADA accessible



Faded crosswalk striping

Figure 4: Deteriorated and non-accessible drive entrances



Deteriorated concrete entrance



Drive entrance across walkway is not ADA accessible



Asphalt from adjacent parking displaces concrete walkway



Concrete segments create non-level walkway surface that is a tripping hazard

Figure 5: Walkway obstructions and hazards



Utility pole cable in walkway



Traffic light pole in front of curb ramp



Utility pole in the middle of ADA ramp



Old utility pedestal in walkway



Grass covering sides of sidewalk



Shrubs blocking walkway



Fire hydrant in middle of walkway



Parking lanes and parked cars block walkway

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Figure 6: Discontinued walkways



Concrete section missing in walkway



Walkway ends before connecting to street



Walkway terminates mid-block



Walkway terminates at side street



Portion of side street has no walkway



Pathway for residents does not connect to walkway

New concrete and brick have been installed along Magnolia Avenue, but these alternate with old deteriorated sections of concrete walkway, creating an inconsistent pattern of old and new material, eventually giving way to old material. There exist some unsightly utilities along the walkway and several vacant tree pits with bare dirt that are unsightly and create a potential trip hazard. The intersection bumpouts are entirely concrete or brick paving and could benefit from plants being added into this unused space.

Figure 7: Inconsistent walkway materials/character and aesthetic issues



Alternating new and old paving materials in walkway



New paving materials end at old material



Random mix of old and new paving material



Unsightly utilities in walkway



Vacant tree pit and heaving walkway



Bumpout entirely concrete, opportunity for plants

The alley roads are a combination of gravel and asphalt, both containing large potholes in places. Several of the entrances into the alleys are in poor condition with uneven, busted concrete or gravel with holes that fill with water. There is minimal lighting in the alleys and one location with a utility pole located in the middle of a curb ramp. There are two long buildings right alongside the road that are unsightly with old materials, graffiti, and no doors, windows or structural elements to provide interest.

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Figure 8: Deteriorated alley entrances



Alley entrances in poor condition with busted concrete, loose gravel and holes with standing water

Figure 9: Deteriorated alley roads



Holes, uneven areas and loose gravel in road, inconsistency in paving material with asphalt turning to gravel



Large pothole in asphalt road

Figure 10: Unsightly buildings in alleys



Unattractive CMU and concrete walls, graffiti



Unattractive building wall and chain link fence

Small sections of new concrete and brick have been installed along Magnolia Avenue. In addition to the more specific issues noted above, some general observations were noticed that provide opportunity for future improvements and should be addressed as well. There is minimal outdoor seating and lounging areas throughout the project area and no outdoor dining. Maintained landscaped areas were minimal as well. There are pedestrian scale light posts in the inner downtown area along Sycamore and Magnolia, but they do not continue to the limits of the project area, which has typical cobra head street lighting. On Forest Avenue there is minimal street lighting and no pedestrian scale lighting. Finally, there appeared to be a substantial number of vacant buildings along the streets.

Recommended Streetscape Improvements

The downtown Buena Vista streetscape would be greatly improved by building new walkways along the streets that have proper width and clearances, new curb ramps and drive entrances that meet ADA standards, and constructed with attractive and consistent paving materials. Gaps within the walkways and places where the walkway stops short of street corners should be extended to create continuous pedestrian access. Walkways should be constructed along the 19th – 23rd side streets for continuous access between Sycamore, Magnolia and Forest. Faded crosswalks should be repainted, and crosswalks closer to the inner downtown area could become brick or colored stamped asphalt for a more aesthetic look. All intersection corners should have landscaped bumpouts installed with proper ADA ramps, and the existing bumpouts on Magnolia Avenue could have plants added into them. Along sections where the sidewalk is wider, a planted verge could be added between the curb and walkway to bring additional planted material into the streetscape. Consideration could be given to possibly narrowing the street travel lanes and shifting the curbs toward the street center to create additional space along the sidewalks for plantings and seating or potentially bike lanes. Extending the pedestrian scale light posts to the edges of the project area and onto Forest Street would help to expand the downtown aesthetic and would increase pedestrian comfort and safety.

Alleys should be resurfaced with gravel or asphalt with potholes filled, alley entrances in poor condition should be repaired or replaced, and the utility pole blocking the ADA ramp should be moved. Lighting should be added to the alleys to improve safety and usability as well. Some alleys may hold opportunity for revitalization and incorporation into the downtown environment with pedestrian activities such as outdoor dining. Places chosen for this should have unattractive building facades improved to make the alley more attractive and inviting.

These recommended improvements would enhance the overall aesthetic of the downtown environment while improving safety and accessibility for pedestrians.

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Existing Utilities Conditions

Stormwater

The stormwater collection system received an update in the 80's and appears to have adequate stormwater drainage infrastructure. It was noted by Corey Henson that there is a section of pipe under Sycamore Ave that may be undersized. The pipe is a 24" elliptical pipe that is very shallow. In most areas, drainage is collected along the streets using curb and gutter and is discharged through the system outside of the study area. The section of road between E 20th Street and E 21st Street on Forest Ave does not have any curbing or gutter. It appears runoff in this area could potentially push to the existing building. The intersection of Magnolia Avenue and E 23rd Street has the highest elevation within the study area and the lowest elevation is located near Magnolia Avenue and E 19th where curb and drop inlets are present on all four corners of the street.

The stormwater inlets appear to be in reasonable condition, with the exception of a couple that should be replaced due to damage. Many of the inlets are DI-1/grate inlets located next to the curbing. Several of these grates have debris that has collected in the area and will require street cleaning to prevent the buildup of debris. Ponding was apparent in a few locations; however, this did not appear to be critical and Buena Vista staff did not express concerns with ponding in the study area.

Overhead Utilities

Power is provided to the study area by Dominion Power via overhead lines. At the western end of the corridor the poles are located on the east side of Sycamore Avenue. At E 20th Street the Poles run along the south side of the street. Most of the poles are located within and adjacent to the sidewalk. See picture to the right.



Lighting

The lighting provided within the corridor varies from the cobra head style mounted on utility poles to the decorative street fixtures. See pictures at right.



1 - UNDERSTANDING BUENA VISTA PRELIMINARY ENGINEERING REPORT

Water

Water service is provided to the study area by the City of Buena Vista Public Service Authority. The existing water lines are cast iron and very shallow. The City has concerns regarding the material and depth of the lines. The study area is served by an 8-inch line down the main street with a 2-inch line that runs down the alleys. While it was noted that the City of Buena Vista would like to replace the water lines that serves the study area, no projects are currently planned. The graphic below shows the water lines (in blue) per the City GIS. Per city staff, the existing GIS needs to be evaluated and updated.



1 - UNDERSTANDING BUENA VISTA PRELIMINARY ENGINEERING REPORT

Sanitary Sewer

Sewer service is also provided to the study area by the City of Buena Vista Public Service Authority. The figure below illustrates the sewer distribution layout in the study area. The study area is located in three (3) sewer sheds. The sewer system main was updated in the 80's. The city has capacity concerns at the intersection of E 22nd Street and 1 block east of Magnolia Avenue where the existing system feeds a 12-inch line that runs to a 6-inch line and back to a 16-inch line. This bottle neck creates a backup all the way to the middle school. Other than a few repairs due to tree roots the system appears to be functioning without major problems. No future projects were noted.



1 - UNDERSTANDING BUENA VISTA PRELIMINARY ENGINEERING REPORT

Gas

The gas mains were replaced in 2018 and 2019, with no future projects at this time.

Fiber

The City of Buena Vista is well outfitted with fiber, with multiple providers. Comcast, Century Link, and BARC Connects have fiber lines within the study area, but Rockbridge Area Network Authority put in the main fiber infrastructure that runs through the study area. See below figures that show the plans from the 2011 installation. There is also another branch line of fiber that runs in the alleyway of the blocks between Sycamore Avenue and Magnolia Avenue.



1 - UNDERSTANDING BUENA VISTA PRELIMINARY ENGINEERING REPORT

Recommended Utility Improvements

The following improvements are recommended for Buena Vista study area.

Crosswalks – Crosswalks have become faded and should be repainted. Consideration should be given to improving the visibility and/or aesthetics for the crosswalks closer to the inner downtown area.

Sidewalks – The sidewalks throughout the study area as previously mentioned are mostly in poor condition and should be replaced to address the damaged concrete and bring up to ADA standards. Improving the intersections with bulbouts to reduce pedestrian travel distance should also be considered. Expanding the sidewalk grid for better connectivity would provide safer travels for the neighborhood and children who walk to school.

Sidewalk obstructions – Sidewalk obstructions in the study area include utility poles, lighting, vegetation, and staircases. Where these obstructions limit clearance to less than 48 inches consideration should be given to expanding the sidewalk and vegetation should be regularly trimmed.

Driveways – Commercial entrances and driveways that do not currently meet the VDOT standards should be improved to provide safe pedestrian and ADA access.

Stormwater – The existing 24-inch elliptical pipe that runs under Sycamore should be upgraded/replaced. The existing curb inlets that are damaged should be replaced. Consideration should also be giving to replacing the grate inlets in the bike path areas with curb inlets.

Utility Poles/Lighting – Many of the existing utility and lighting poles are located in the sidewalk and should be relocated to allow ADA compliant passage. The utility cables that are located in the sidewalk/walkways should also be relocated.

Water – The existing water lines should be upgraded to replace the existing cast iron very shallow distribution system.

Sanitary Sewer – The existing system at E 22nd Street and Magnolia Avenue should be upgraded to eliminate the bottle neck that exists where the system runs from a 12-inch line to a 6-inch line and back to a 16-inch line.



2

WHAT IS BUENA VISTA ?



*A Plan for Promoting Local
Identity and Opportunity*

WHAT IS BUENA VISTA? IDENTITY & PROMOTION

Rethinking the Idea of “Marketing and Branding”

Many local economic development initiatives will use the phrase “Marketing and Branding” to describe its method for presenting the community and its assets to the public in a way that will bring business to the locality and elevate its image as a place where people will want to visit, shop, and live. Many downtown revitalization leaders around the country often confuse marketing and branding with the development of a logo and a tagline that, somehow, provides a single overarching concept intended to represent the entire community — the “brand.” As most of us have seen, communities often change their brands, not because it reflects changes in community identity or assets, but rather, just because community leadership wants to sell something new.

As one corporate CEO said, “We can have the most creative marketing branding program in the world, but if the product falls short and we over-promise, we are doomed.” These failures are often caused by the “brand” being disconnected from the actual product through a planning process that comes to see promoting and managing the “brand” as more important than promoting **the place, its people, and its assets and opportunities.**

Today, in a world where most consumers and businesses are part of a diverse digital marketplace, the concept of a single overarching “brand” may not be as useful to a community as it once was. Competition for consumers’ attention has changed the way we are presented with, search, and store information about our preferences and allows for a community to use a more nuanced, varied, and targeted promotional strategy that is easier to manage locally than the investment in, and adherence to, the traditional notion of a “brand strategy.” When a community has a strong sense of local identity, reinforced by its community social life and leadership, then branding can be used as a tool, at the product level, to reinforce community values as well as promoting its assets and opportunities.

With all that said, we feel that your current logo would be fine to continue using and that the best overall tag line for you to use is just your name: BUENA VISTA. It really says it all. Most communities don’t have a name like this. Nothing you could come up with would be better than what is already implied by the name BUENA VISTA. We recommend the use of tag lines for special promotions and campaigns but not for the city’s overall branding.



Buena Vista — Identity & Promotion

The promotion of a solid community revitalization program is multi-layered and very much rooted in a downtown that serves businesses, residents AND visitors – the entire community. In this section, we will arrive at an identity strategy and then demonstrate how it can be employed to access several vertical markets. Before taking an objective look at the attributes of Downtown, we will address how Buena Vista residents and business owners see their community and look at how to develop the Mission, Vision and Positioning Statements.

What We Heard

In our public engagement process we heard plenty of comments, good and bad, about how the community sees itself and its downtown. As we look to develop ideas for promoting Buena Vista and its downtown we listened closely to what the residents, business owners, and leaders told us about how they see Buena Vista today and their aspirations for a better Buena Vista in the future. Here’s a bit of what we heard.

- You want to see stores, shops, and restaurants re-open downtown
- You want to create more foot traffic Downtown
- You want to fill and renovate empty buildings
- You want better public spaces Downtown
- You want stronger connections to the River Walk and other outdoor activities
- You want more activities for families and kids
- You value the Library as a very important part of Downtown Buena Vista
- You want to see more gathering spaces in Downtown
- You want to see more events Downtown
- You want to see more incentives for locating Downtown
- You want better marketing and promotion of BV
- You want to see a stronger connection with the University

WHAT IS BUENA VISTA ? IDENTITY & PROMOTION

Mission Statement

A revitalized Downtown Buena Vista

Vision Statement

A robust walkable and aesthetically pleasing, mixed-use Downtown that provides opportunities for shopping, employment, the arts, manufacturing, essential services and public gatherings.

Positioning Statement - what's it for

There will, of course, be several target markets for Downtown Buena Vista. A positioning statement serves as a guide on how to engage individual stakeholder groups (e.g., a positioning statement to attract a retail shopper will differ from a positioning statement for a potential entrepreneur or a tourist). The mission and vision statements for all stakeholder groups are the same, the positioning statement will change based on the target stakeholder.

Prior to developing a list of target markets and accompanying position statements, it is necessary to take a clear-eyed, unvarnished look at the strengths and challenges of Downtown Buena Vista.



Rockbridge Regional Library branch is currently in the historic City Hall building on Magnolia Street

STRENGTHS — Downtown Buena Vista

- Several historic buildings within a historic district
- Part of a robust 8-mile market extending to Lexington
- Downtown businesses with a loyal following
- Plentiful Downtown building space for start-ups or business expansion
- A library with a far-reaching user base
- Proximity to the Maury River
- Near Chessie Nature Trail, the Blue Ridge Parkway and the Appalachian Trail
- Proximity to Southern Virginia University
- Dabney S. Lancaster Community College is investing in the Downtown
- Several successful manufacturing firms nearby
- Easy access to I-81
- Walkable
- Plentiful parking
- Opportunity Zone and Other Incentives
- JJ's Meat Shack, Buena Vista Hardware, and the Habitat for Humanity Restore have loyal followings.
- Competitive rents

CHALLENGES — Downtown Buena Vista

- Numerous empty storefronts and shuttered businesses
- Some buildings in need of rehabilitation
- Lack of connectivity to Glen Maury Park and Vista Links Golf Course
- Residual bad publicity from Downtown real estate deals that fell short
- No Main Street Manager to focus solely on the Downtown
- Public and green space are not regularly programmed
- Wayfinding signage requires significant improvement
- Downtown suffers from a poor image among locals
- Overlapping taglines and marketing efforts developed over the years created brand confusion
- Few programmed events in the Downtown

Branding — Positioning Statements

Economic Development Positioning Statement

Buena Vista offers a downtown marketplace with reasonable rents, historic buildings, a cooperative City government, close proximity to a wide variety of outdoor and recreational experiences, four colleges and universities, and some flourishing business with a strong regional following.

See Appendix 1 for a list of Economic Development Resources.

Community Market Positioning Statement

Downtown Buena Vista's revitalization programming is dependent upon a wide cross section of residents and going forward they are welcomed into the fold.

The most overlooked market for many downtown revitalization programs is the community itself. It is helpful to begin thinking of the Buena Vista community as an incubator of ideas. This study is linked to the survey research we conducted. We recommend approaching the community as a whole and then in submarkets. We have established a Facebook page and a website, and we have email addresses from many of the participants. This can be a valuable resource going forward. We recommend changing website content for Downtown on a regular basis and posting to the Facebook page often. The Tapestry segmentation we will discuss later in this report will be helpful in defining groups to engage in the process. However, it is important to engage people beyond that narrow group. In the survey research, it became evident that local residents saw the Downtown revitalization planning as City Hall and community leaders, and not as a program in which they can become involved.

See Appendix 1 for internal community resources that can be helpful.

* Note: We will discuss how to reach these vertical markets in the economic restructuring part of this report. However, once again, it is necessary to understand that there are several markets with whom communication is fundamental.

Tourism Marketing Positioning Statement

Downtown Buena Vista is in close proximity to a host of outdoor recreational opportunities.

See Appendix 1 for tourism marketing resources.

Marketing for tourism is a specialized activity. It is recommended that the City Economic Development and Marketing staff align with regional tourism activities. It is vital to make these regional entities aware of what Buena Vista has to offer and how it is repositioning itself in the marketplace. As we will note later, there is a need for additional lodging in Downtown Buena Vista, and that discussion at City Hall should be ongoing.

We mentioned there will be several markets for Downtown Buena Vista, including: potential business owners, tourists, and, of course, local residents. Of course, many more markets will emerge over time. It will be important to craft a positioning statement for each market utilizing the approach offered here.

WHAT IS BUENA VISTA ? IDENTITY & PROMOTION

Branding — Tag Lines for Buena Vista

As we noted earlier, a tagline or slogan is not a branding effort. 95% of branding takes place in product quality and delivery while positioning correctly for individual markets. Buena Vista has had a number of taglines or slogans over the years. This has led to some confusion, especially since many of the taglines employ the abbreviation BV. The BV abbreviation may work for locals, but for many external markets it may appear parochial or confusing. So we offer a couple of choices which show how tag lines can represent large overarching ideas or be more specifically directed towards a targeted audience for promoting Buena Vista's assets and opportunities.

Tag lines and associated logos/graphics always work best when used consistently while working to reduce possible confusion that may be created by previous or other promotional messages.

*Buena Vista
Forward*



Or...

Dip Your Toes in the Blue Ridge



Buena Vista


Downtown Revitalization Strategy

WHAT IS BUENA VISTA ? IDENTITY & PROMOTION

Branding — Buena Vista Promotional Color Palette

This proposed color palette was taken from the environment in and around Buena Vista and was used to create the logo options on the previous page. Using a consistent color palette (through the use of a Graphic Standards and Guidelines document) across varied print and digital promotional campaigns is a good way to allow a variety of messages and looks to be used across different marketing products while maintaining an acceptable level of visual consistency for related Buena Vista products.

BUENA VISTA
Preliminary Color Palette



BLUES

- R=0 G=115 B=130
- R=43 G=97 B=114
- R=28 G=78 B=106
- R=48 G=62 B=79

GREENS

- R=137 G=164 B=77
- R=87 G=131 B=40
- R=89 G=107 B=14
- R=36 G=51 B=49

CORALS & BRICK

- R=243 G=231 B=215
- R=251 G=141 B=134
- R=251 G=96 B=88
- R=94 G=55 B=44

(existing website reference)

3

BUILDING BACK BUSINESS ...Better!



An Economic Restructuring Plan

3-BUILDING BACK BUSINESS...BETTER! SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Analysis of the Market

In order to develop a comprehensive downtown revitalization plan for Downtown Buena Vista, we determined the Primary Trade Area for Downtown Buena Vista. However, as you will see, Downtown Buena Vista has a potential trade area that is far-reaching and, with the correct marketing, easily attainable.

Primary Trade Area

What is a Trade Area and What Does it Mean to Buena Vista?

Defining a downtown or business district's trade area is an important first step in any downtown's economic vitality plan. This is especially true for Buena Vista. The trade area is crucial because it defines the boundaries that will serve as the basis for further study. It also helps individual businesses identify opportunities to expand their own trade area. We used several accepted methods to determine Buena Vista's trade area.

In downtown revitalization, a trade area is the geographic area from which a community generates most of its customers. This often is the geographic area that represents 60 percent of current customers. Sometimes a community may have more than one trade area (such as a convenience and a destination trade area and a food and dining trade area). Knowing the size and shape of each trade area is extremely important because its boundaries allow for measurement of the number of potential customers, their demographics, and their spending potential. This information provides valuable insight into Downtown Buena Vista's customer base and allows us to calculate demand for stores, products, and services. Interstate 81 also opens the market to a wider population than most communities of this size.

Here is a map of the current Trade Area for Downtown Buena Vista. From the center of Downtown, we highlight the Trade Area for one, four and eight mile intervals. This would, of course, include Lexington (and I-81). These three concentric circles are the Primary Trade Area determined using a unique approach developed by Downtown Economics. Readily available demographic data is analyzed and placed against the research conducted by Downtown Economics to produce a realistic trade area. This is where people will go most often to buy daily items, such as food and health and beauty aids.

This Primary Trade Area does not, however, tell the whole story. One business may draw regionally as another draws for just a mile or two. This should be used as a general guide only.

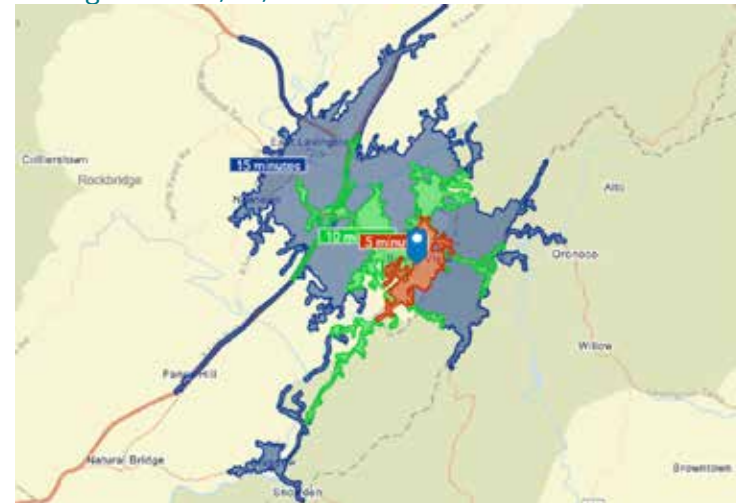
Primary Trade Area Map 1, 4, and 8 Mile Radius from Downtown BV



Source: Downtown Economics, 2020.

Here is the same Trade Area Map with driving time added. An analysis of automobile use in Buena Vista indicates that once in the car, people are willing to travel to secure day-to-day items, such as groceries and health and beauty aids, for up to 12-15 miles.

Primary Trade Area Map Driving Time of 5, 10, and 15 Minutes



Source: Downtown Economics, 2020.

3-BUILDING BACK BUSINESS...BETTER! SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Realistic Extended Trade Area Map

Including Lynchburg, Roanoke, Charlottesville, and Staunton

The Trade Area Map shown on the previous page is limiting. Our original research indicates that people from Buena Vista will also travel to large regional communities for big box stores and to buy electronics, specialty clothing, and other non-convenience items. Below is what we are calling the REALISTIC EXTENDED TRADE AREA MAP. This underscores that people from Buena Vista will travel to Lynchburg, Roanoke, Charlottesville, and Staunton for a larger purchase or for a full day of shopping.

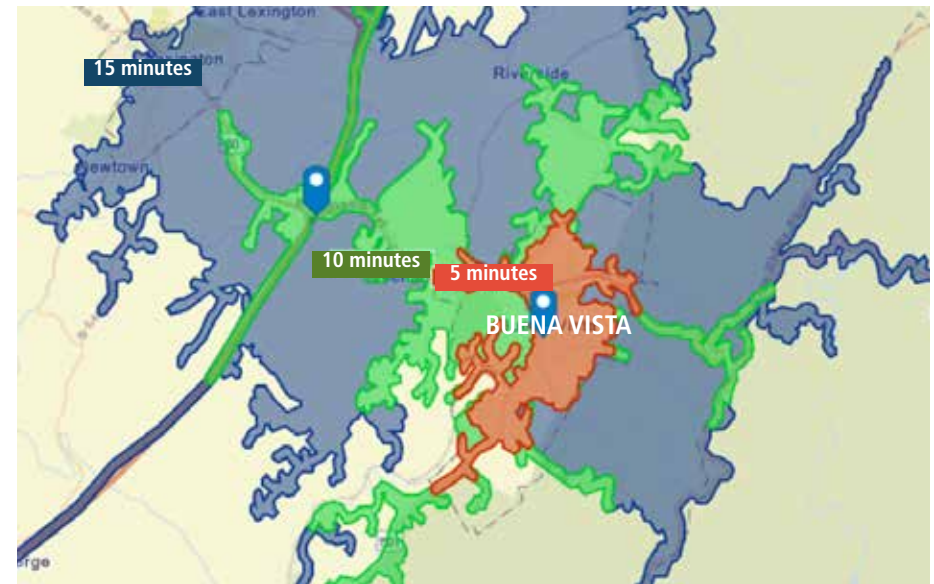


Source: Downtown Economics, 2020.

Interstate I-81 Exit

3.5 Miles from Downtown BV

There is also a highway that opens Downtown Buena Vista to a multi-state regional market. Interstate I-81, only 3.5 miles from Downtown, provides the opportunity to expand the market substantially. Here is a map showing drive time from the I-81 Buena Vista exit to the heart of Downtown. This becomes especially important when marketing for tourism. Rather than thinking of I-81 as a means of departing the area, it can be seen as a way to invite visitors and tourists.



Source: Downtown Economics, 2020.

Access to I-81 is, of course, helpful with respect to distribution; however, as the tourism market begins to expand, it will become even more important. Downtown Buena Vista's proximity to I-81 is essential to future downtown revitalization plans.

Earlier in the report we highlighted the demographics of the City of Buena Vista. We now turn to the demographics, including historical population trends, from one mile from the heart of Downtown and then eight miles from Downtown.

3-BUILDING BACK BUSINESS...BETTER! SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

1 Mile Radius from Downtown Buena Vista

Key Facts

- Population: 4,625
- Median Age: 38.5
- Average Household Size: 2.4
- Median Household Size: \$32,365

Historic Population Trend

Year	Population
2010	4,600
2011	4,550
2012	4,500
2013	4,500
2014	4,600
2015	4,700
2016	4,650
2017	4,600
2018	4,550
2019	4,500
2020	4,625

Education

- 17% No High School Diploma
- 37% High School Graduate
- 28% Some College
- 18% Bachelor's/Grad/Prof. Degree

Employment

- 44% White Collar
- 38% Blue Collar
- 17% Services
- 9.9% Unemployment Rate

Income

- Median Household Income: \$32,365
- Per Capita Income: \$18,446
- Median Net Worth: \$34,914

Households By Income
The largest group: \$15,000 - \$24,999 (20.9%)
The smallest group: \$150,000 - \$199,000 (1%)

Indicator	Value	Difference
< \$15,000	16.4%	-0.6%
\$15,000 - \$24,999	20.9%	-0.6%
\$25,000 - \$34,999	16.0%	-1.6%
\$35,000 - \$49,999	10.2%	+0.7%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	19.2%	+1.7%
\$75,000 - \$99,999	8.0%	+0.3%
\$100,000 - \$149,999	7.1%	+0.4%
\$150,000 - \$199,999	1.0%	-0.2%
\$200,000+	1.2%	+0.1%

Population

- 9.4% Greatest Gen Born 1945/Earlier
- 21.4% Baby Boomer Born 1946 to 1964
- 17.6% Generation X Born 1965 to 1980
- 23.1% Millennial Born 1981 to 1998
- 23.7% Generation Z Born 1999 to 2016
- 4.8% Generation Alpha Born 2017 to Present

Source: This infographic contains data provided by Esri, Infogroup and Downtown Economics. The vintage of the data is 2020.

8 Mile Radius from Downtown Buena Vista

Key Facts

- Population: 23,633
- Median Age: 38.1
- Average Household Size: 2.3
- Median Household Size: \$43,858

Historic Population Trend

Year	Population
2010	22,200
2011	22,100
2012	22,300
2013	22,800
2014	23,800
2015	24,000
2016	23,900
2017	23,900
2018	23,500
2019	23,600
2020	23,633

Education

- 12% No High School Diploma
- 32% High School Graduate
- 26% Some College
- 30% Bachelor's/Grad/Prof. Degree

Employment

- 58% White Collar
- 27% Blue Collar
- 15% Services
- 9.4% Unemployment Rate

Income

- Median Household Income: \$43,858
- Per Capita Income: \$25,447
- Median Net Worth: \$70,606

Households By Income
The largest group: \$50,000 - \$74,000 (18.6%)
The smallest group: \$150,000 - \$199,000 (2.8%)

Indicator	Value	Difference
< \$15,000	15.4%	-1.6%
\$15,000 - \$24,999	13.1%	-3.6%
\$25,000 - \$34,999	12.7%	-4.9%
\$35,000 - \$49,999	13.4%	+3.9%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	18.6%	+1.1%
\$75,000 - \$99,999	10.9%	+3.2%
\$100,000 - \$149,999	9.4%	+2.7%
\$150,000 - \$199,999	2.8%	+1.6%
\$200,000+	3.3%	+2.7%

Population

- 10.0% Greatest Gen Born 1945/Earlier
- 22.8% Baby Boomer Born 1946 to 1964
- 15.4% Generation X Born 1965 to 1980
- 21.7% Millennial Born 1981 to 1998
- 26.8% Generation Z Born 1999 to 2016
- 3.3% Generation Alpha Born 2017 to Present

Source: This infographic contains data provided by Esri, Infogroup and Downtown Economics. The vintage of the data is 2020.

3-BUILDING BACK BUSINESS...BETTER! SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Traffic Counts

1, 4, and 8 Mile Radius from Downtown

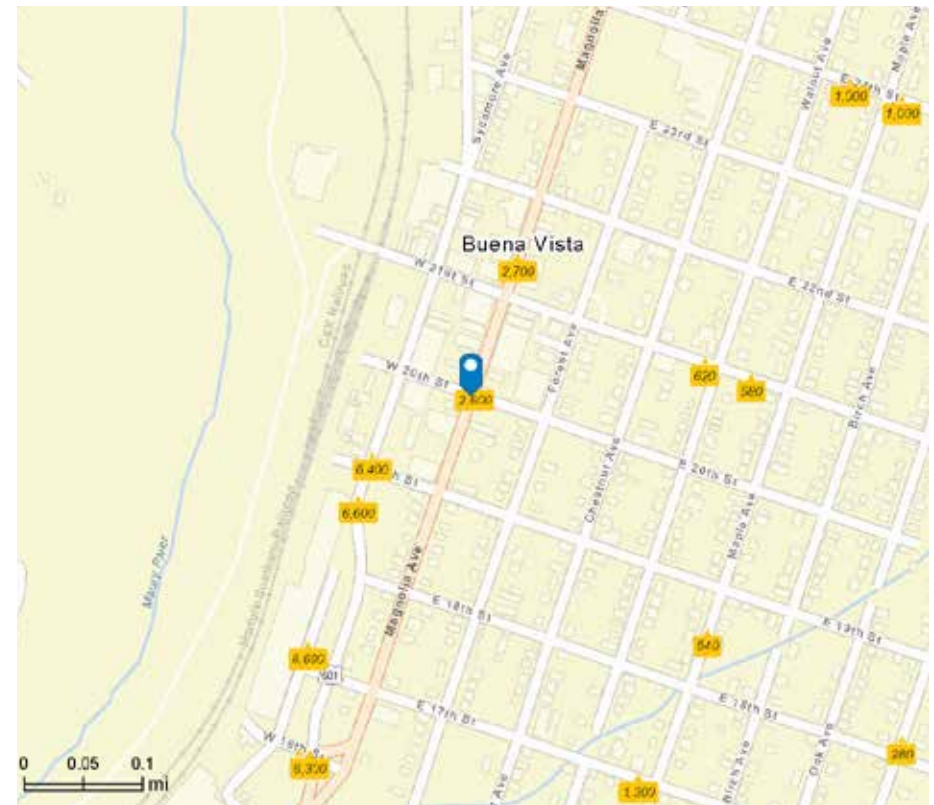
Traffic counts on Sycamore and Magnolia Avenues are about 12% above the national average for a community of Buena Vista's size. This is a positive sign for a number of reasons, including: business attraction, developer attraction, and outdoor event programming.



Traffic Counts

Key Intersections of Downtown BV

Traffic counts in Downtown Buena Vista range from 280 to 6,600 cars per day at key intersections as depicted in yellow on this map.



3-BUILDING BACK BUSINESS...BETTER! SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

2020 Consumer Spending

Within 8 Miles of Buena Vista

In order to develop a robust downtown revitalization program, it is helpful to examine consumer spending patterns. This chart outlines consumer spending from one mile, four miles and eight miles from Downtown. Prior to embarking on an economic restructuring program (business development), it is helpful to analyze consumer sales figures for the Trade Area identified to ensure there are enough customers and buying power to support new businesses in Downtown Buena Vista. Buying power increases the closer one gets to Lexington at the eight mile limit. Lexington is in the trade area and, of course, I-81 opens additional economic opportunities. Those buttress and strengthen the current consumer sales. In short, there is enough consumer purchasing power to support additional businesses in Downtown Buena Vista.

	1 mile	4 miles	8 miles
Apparel & Services: Total \$	\$1,970,772 ²	\$4,243,538	\$13,170,560
Average Spent	\$1,122.95	\$1,253.63	\$1,494.62
Educations: Total \$	\$1,500,914 ⁴	\$3,194,457	\$10,291,758
Average Spent	\$855.22	\$943.71	\$1,167.93
Entertainment / Recreation: Total \$	\$3,313,123 ³	\$7,202,905	\$21,481,260
Average Spent	\$1,887.82	\$2,127.89	\$2,437.73
Food at Home: Total \$	\$5,324,203 ³	\$11,649,777	\$35,245,009
Average Spent	\$3,033.73	\$3,441.56	\$3,999.55
Food away from Home: Total \$	\$3,501,418 ⁸	\$7,646,026	\$23,638,525
Average Spent	\$1,995.11	\$2,258.80	\$2,682.54
Health Care: Total \$	\$6,134,262 ²	\$13,348,760	\$39,411,367
Average Spent	\$3,495.31	\$3,943.50	\$4,472.47
HH Furnishings and Equipment: Total \$	\$2,086,369 ⁹	\$4,540,589	\$13,807,745
Average Spent	\$1,188.81	\$1,341.47	\$1,566.93
Personal Care Products and Services: Total \$	\$868,764 ⁴	\$1,852,222	\$5,739,472
Average Spent	\$495.02	\$547.19	\$651.32
Shelter: Total \$	\$17,274,559 ⁹	\$36,471,937 ⁷	\$116,818,441
Average Spent	\$9,843.05	\$10,774.58	\$13,256.75
Support Payments / Cash Contributions / Gifts: Total \$	\$2,378,021 ¹	\$5,283,549	\$16,199,374
Average Spent	\$1,355.00	\$1,560.87	\$1,838.33
Travel: Total \$	\$2,200,845 ⁵	\$4,691,178	\$14,797,292
Average Spent	\$1,254.04	\$1,385.87	\$1,679.22
Vehicle Maintenance and Repairs: Total \$	\$1,193,555 ⁵	\$2,603,300	\$7,940,509
Average Spent	\$680.09	\$769.07	\$901.10

Source: Downtown Economics, 2020.

Leakage (Sales Void) Within the Trade Area

Using data from ESRI, we compiled sales void analyses (gap analysis) for the Trade Area from the heart of downtown out one mile and then to the eight mile range. Sales void analyses compare the sales volume that businesses within a given area are capturing (the "supply" column in the following tables) with the amount of money that households living within that area are likely spending, somewhere, based on their income levels and other demographic characteristics.

If there is a surplus of one type of business, then it is unlikely that Buena Vista would want to attract or grow that type of business. If there is a sales void, it would indicate that people in the trade area are spending money elsewhere on the product or service, and that might be the type of business or service to grow and nurture. For example, in the tables below, there is a slight void of restaurants in the one-mile area around Downtown Buena Vista (meaning there could be more to support the population of that area), while there is a slight surplus of them in the eight-mile area, which includes Lexington (meaning that there may be enough to support the population of that area).

Buena Vista offers plenty of room to creatively attract or locally grow businesses, so it is important to look at this sales gap (void) analysis as a general guide. Numerous factors enter into the business development equation, and sales gap is just one tool. The data here indicates that when one reaches the eight-mile point, the income level rises as do other demographic indicators that clearly demonstrate that marketing to Lexington will, in the long-term, be vital to Downtown Buena Vista's regeneration.

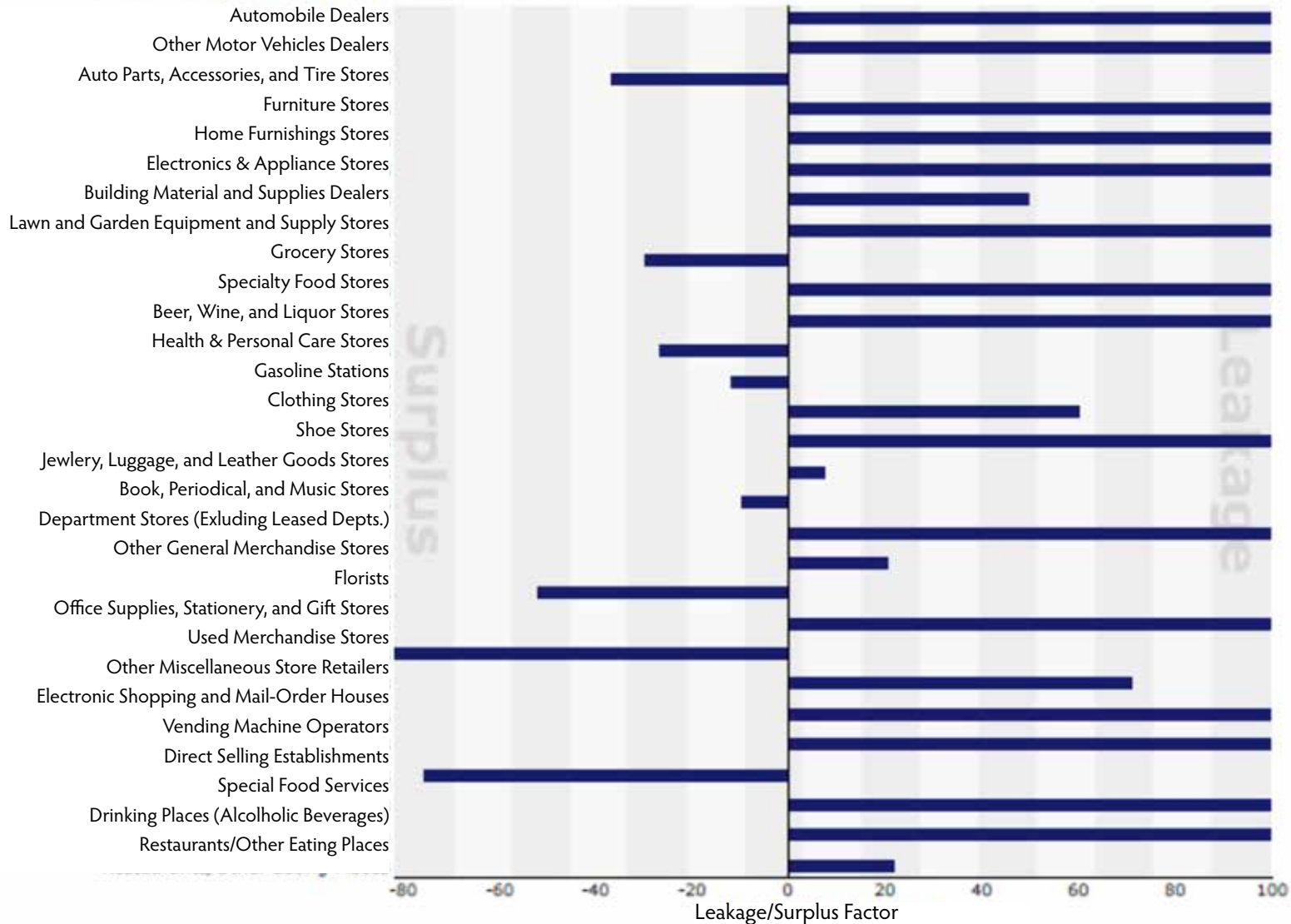
3-BUILDING BACK BUSINESS...BETTER!

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Leakage (Sales Void)

1 Mile Radius of Downtown

2017 Leakage/Surplus Factor by Industry Group

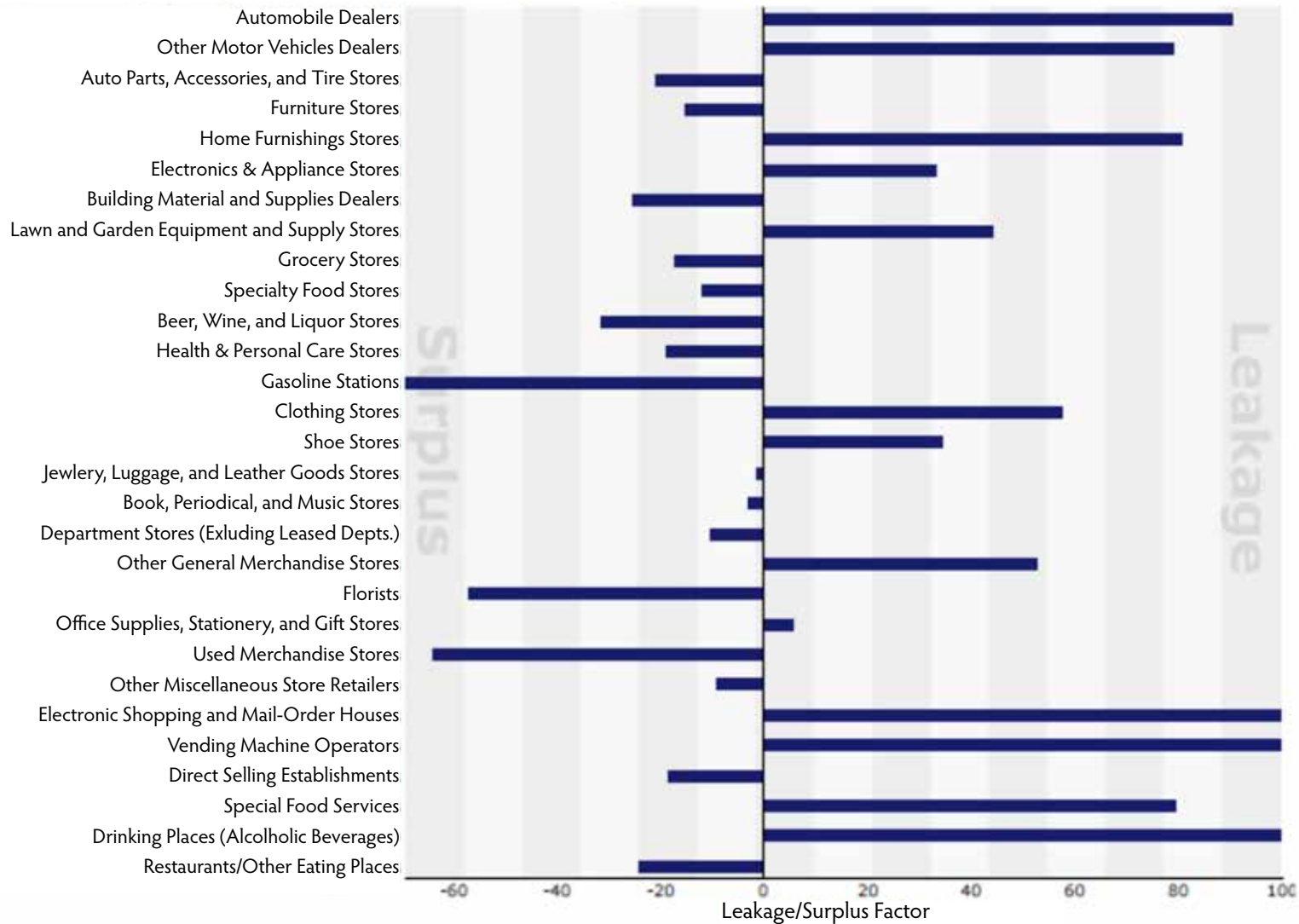


Source: Downtown Economics, 2020.

3-BUILDING BACK BUSINESS...BETTER! SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Leakage (Sales Void) 8 Mile Radius of Downtown

2017 Leakage/Surplus Factor by Industry Group



Source: Downtown Economics, 2020.

3-BUILDING BACK BUSINESS...BETTER! SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

PSYCHOGRAPHIC PROFILES & LIFESTYLE ANALYSIS

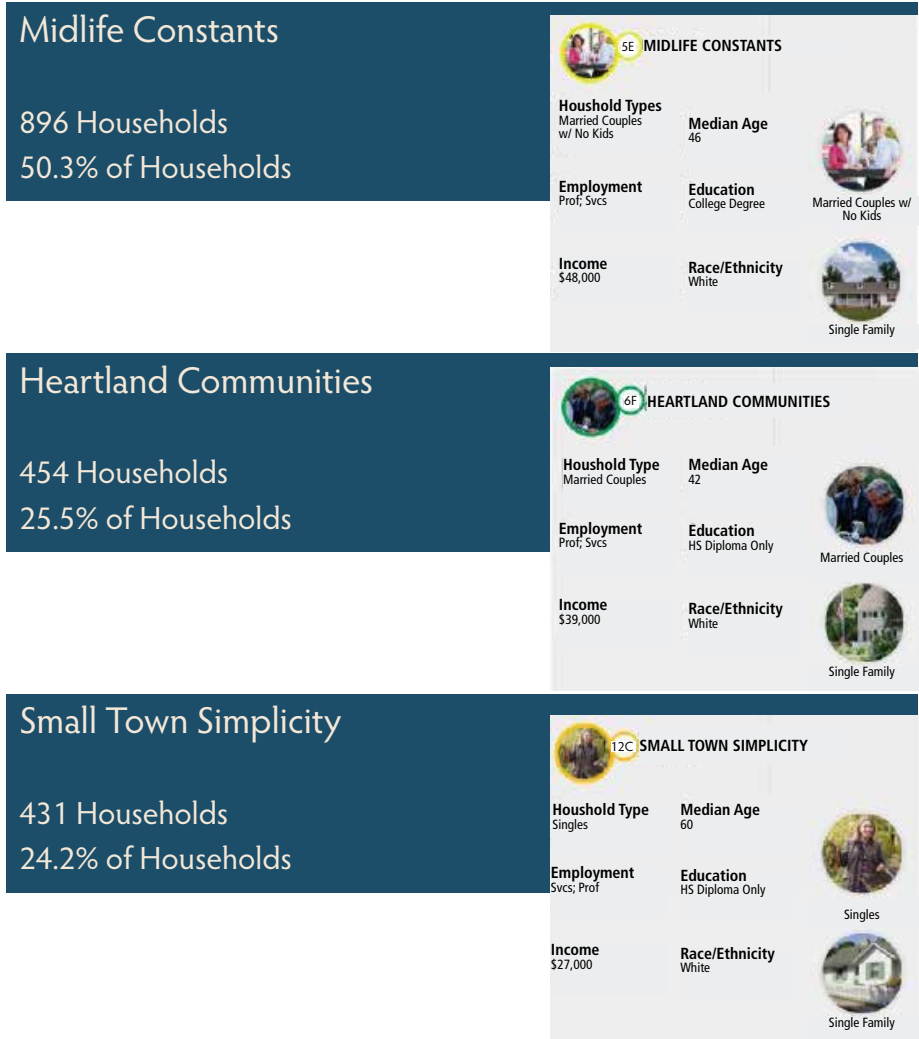
Demographics describe quantifiable characteristics of individuals and groups of people. Psychographics build on demographic characteristics, helping identify preferences for certain types of products or activities based on a person's values, attitudes, lifestyle, and other factors. Two people might be demographically identical – the same age, household size, profession, income, etc. – but one might prefer bottled domestic beer, for example, while the other prefers craft brews. To better understand some of the general lifestyle characteristics and consumer preferences of Buena Vista (and surrounding communities), we used ESRI, a private-sector geospatial information provider. ESRI has developed a proprietary classification system called Tapestry to classify residential neighborhoods in the US into 14 major "LifeMode" groups, then into 67 more detailed segments based on demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. The Tapestry database has been used by the National Weather Service to predict the locations of potentially vulnerable neighborhoods before hurricanes strike, by political candidates to select locations for campaign events – and, of course, by countless product marketers to design products, create advertising campaigns, and choose store locations. For the purposes of downtown revitalization, Tapestry data can be particularly useful in helping retail business owners make decisions about the types and price points of merchandise to carry and in helping design marketing and promotional events for the district.

We examined Tapestry data using our previously established trade area for one, four and eight miles and provided the top three Tapestry segments for each portion of the trade area. Further details regarding each Tapestry segment listed below can be found in the Appendix to this report, which we strongly urge the reader to review.

The psychographic profiles/lifestyle analysis tends to put a human face on the raw data. It helps to create a complete profile. In the Appendix to this report, the lifestyle modes are detailed, and will provide a depth to the understanding of the markets at the one, four and eight mile markers. It is also helpful in determining what types of businesses will do best in Downtown Buena Vista. Also, please note that, while there are additional Tapestry segments for the four mile and eight mile areas that represent smaller percentages of the population, we have only included the top three segments for each of the one, four and eight mile areas.

Top 3 Tapestry Segments 1 Mile Radius of Downtown

The three primary Tapestry segments in the one mile radius of Downtown Buena Vista clearly indicate stability and a settled community. This group will most likely be inclined to purchase day-to-day products and not splurge on large items.



3-BUILDING BACK BUSINESS...BETTER! SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

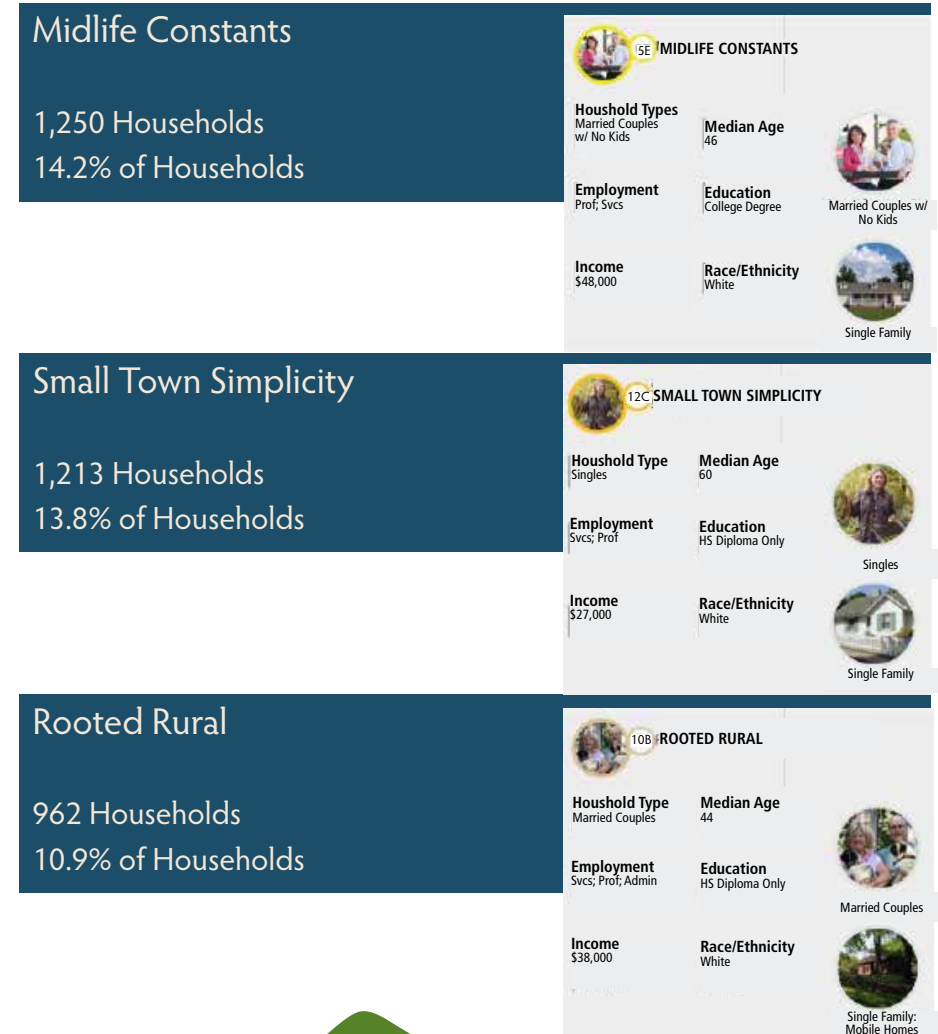
Top 3 Tapestry Segments 4 Mile Radius of Downtown

In the four mile radius of Downtown Buena Vista, we still see the stability of a settled community—similar to the one mile area.



Top 3 Tapestry Segments 8 Mile Radius of Downtown

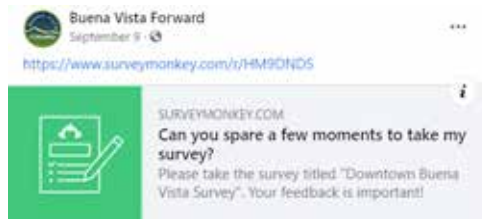
In the eight mile radius of Downtown Buena Vista, we see that stability is still a factor. Additionally, there is more disposable income for shopping and retail items beyond day-to-day household expenditures. That it is why it is recommended to visit the Appendix to this report and look in depth at the lifestyles segmentations for the one, four and eight mile areas around Downtown Buena Vista.



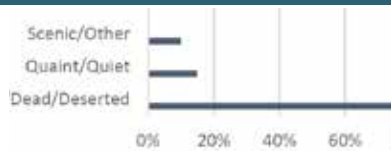
3-BUILDING BACK BUSINESS...BETTER! SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Consumer Research

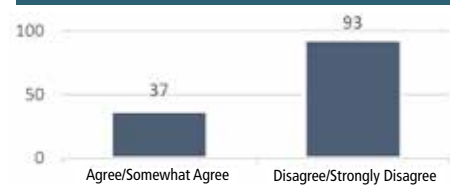
As we noted earlier, we conducted in-depth survey and focus group research to determine what Buena Vista residents and visitors thought about Downtown.



What is the first word that comes to mind when you think of Downtown Buena Vista?



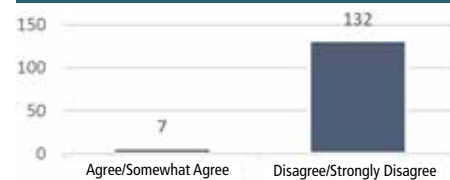
I shop in Downtown Buena Vista regularly



What stores and services do you currently use in Downtown Buena Vista?

- Most frequently mentioned:
- Vinyl Cuts
 - Library
 - Becky's
 - Coiner Country Store
 - Dental Office
 - Original Italian Restaurant
 - Hardware

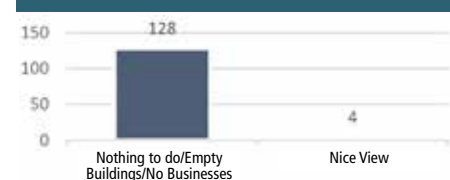
I am happy with the current condition of Downtown Buena Vista



What would you like to see in Downtown Buena Vista that is not currently there?

- Most frequently mentioned:
- Restaurants
 - Coffee Shop
 - Community Theater and Community Space
 - Movie Theater and Art Space
 - Grocery Store
 - Bar

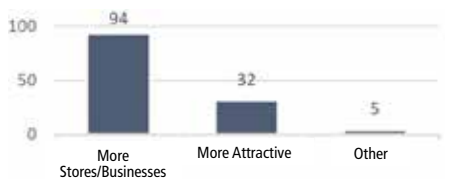
I am happy with the current condition of Downtown Buena Vista



What stores or services do you travel outside of BV for that you would use if they were there?

- Most frequently mentioned:
- Department Store/Target
 - Big Box Stores
 - Restaurants
 - Movies/Entertainment
 - Clothing
 - Manicure
 - Bar/Brew Pub

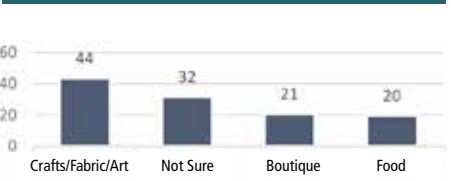
If you could wave a magic wand and make just one change in Downtown BV, what would it be?



What do you like most about Downtown Buena Vista?

- Most frequently mentioned:
- Small Town/Safe/Homey
 - Views
 - History/Historic Buildings
 - Quiet/Walkable
 - Library
 - Wide Street
 - Friendly People

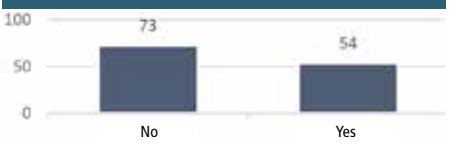
If you would like "pop up stores," what types would you like to see?



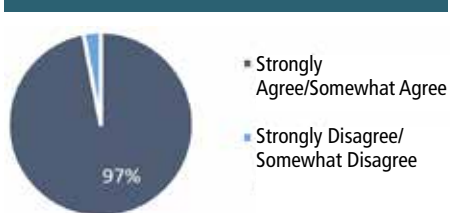
What do you like least about Downtown Buena Vista?

- Most frequently mentioned:
- Not enough to do
 - Not enough Shopping Empty Storefronts
 - Unattractive Buildings

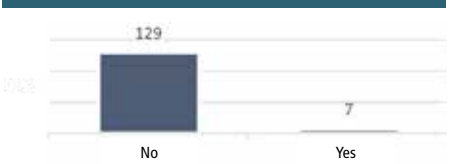
Have you or a family member ever considered opening a store or service in Downtown BV?
Note: 18 of the "NO" respondents said "YES" if they had assistance.



Downtown Buena Vista is safe.

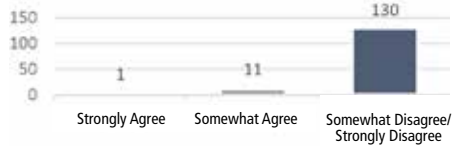


Do you think Downtown Buena Vista is vibrant?



3-BUILDING BACK BUSINESS...BETTER! SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

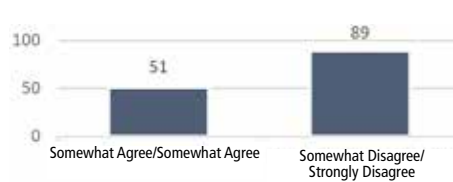
Downtown Buena Vista offers a wide array of services and stores?



What do you think would create more foot traffic in Downtown Buena Vista?



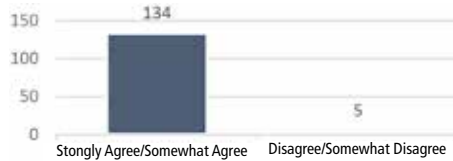
Downtown Buena Vista is attractive.



Can you name a non-chain store or business that could be attracted to Downtown Buena Vista?



Downtown Buena Vista is walkable



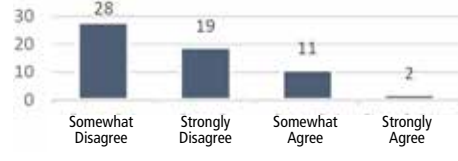
Drop Box / Door Hanger Responses — (68 respondents)



What is the first word that comes to mind when you think of Downtown Buena Vista?



I shop in Downtown Buena Vista regularly.



What stores and services do you currently use in Downtown BV?

Most frequently mentioned:

- Coiner Country Store
- Vinyl Cuts
- Library
- Becky's

What stores or services do you travel outside of BV for that you would use if they were there?

Most frequently mentioned:

- Restaurants
- Clothing
- Bank
- Grocery Store

3-BUILDING BACK BUSINESS...BETTER!

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

What would you like to see in Downtown Buena Vista that is not currently there?

Most frequently mentioned:

- Coffee Shop
- Restaurants
- Antique/Arts
- Live Music
- Things for Teens

What do you like most about Downtown Buena Vista?

Most frequently mentioned:

- Safe
- Close to Home
- Friendly
- Potential

Downtown Buena Vista is safe.

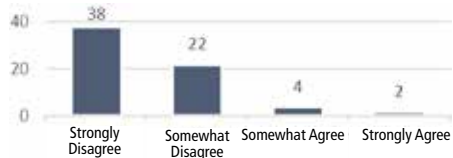


What do you like least about Downtown Buena Vista?

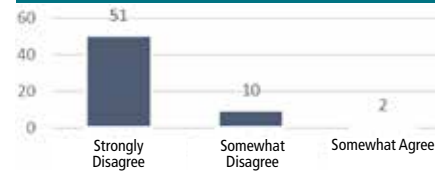
Most frequently mentioned:

- Empty
- Dead
- Lack of Vitality
- No Stores

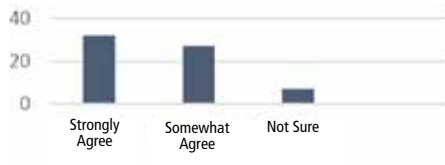
Downtown Buena Vista is attractive.



Downtown BV offers a wide array of services and stores.



Downtown Buena Vista is walkable.



Focus Group Research

Students from Southern Virginia University (3 groups)

- Nothing to Do
- Want More Stores
- Don't Go A Lot
- Feels Safe

Intercept Surveys on Saturday Afternoon in September

- Need More Stores
- Nothing Open
- Easy to Walk
- Feels Dead
- Nothing for Families

Focus Groups Held over Two Days in Downtown Storefront (Community Leaders, Store Owners and Interested Residents)

- Lack of Vision for Downtown
- Lot to Do in Area, but not connected to Downtown
- Housing Prices are Attractive
- Merchants Feel Lack of Support
- COVID-19 Greatly Affected Business
- Lack of Connection to SVU
- Primary Competition in Lexington
- Need More Things for Kids
- Move the Library and Reuse the Current Building
- Too Few Places to Stay
- Taxes are Too High
- City Hall Doesn't Have a Vision for Downtown
- Need More Businesses

3-BUILDING BACK BUSINESS...BETTER!

SO WHAT DOES ALL THIS DATA MEAN FOR DOWNTOWN BUENA VISTA?

Looking at all this data can be overwhelming and can read like “consultant speak.” The research we have gathered tells us there is a path forward to an improved Downtown business climate.

It is noticeably clear from our research that residents of Buena Vista do not believe that Downtown Buena Vista is a vital business center. We heard people describe Downtown as “dead,” or “a place with nothing to do,” or as a “ghost town.” On the other hand, residents patronize many establishments that are currently in Downtown. Becky’s Vinyl Cuts, The Original Italian Restaurant, JJs, the Coiner Country Store and others draw customers from Buena Vista and beyond.

Therefore, we need to give residents some additional businesses to visit. The research is clear – the eight-mile trade area can support additional businesses. The question is how do we provide more businesses? We think the answer lies in attracting and nurturing new business owners – something we call Economic Gardening. Downtown Buena Vista needs to grow its own businesses.



Image from the Buena Vista Forward Facebook page urging residents to call in with comments



3-BUILDING BACK BUSINESS...BETTER! ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING PLAN

Entrepreneurship and Micro-Enterprise in Support of Economic Gardening

The National Main Street Center referred to economic development as Economic Restructuring for years. Within the last few years, they changed the name of the function to Economic Vitality. Both terms refer to economic development. We will use Economic Restructuring here.

Downtown Buena Vista is not going to attract national retail or restaurant chains. In fact, most smaller communities around the United States are not going to attract those types of businesses to their downtown. What is the answer for expanding the downtown business base? **Economic Gardening.**

That leads to the logical question: What is Economic Gardening? Economic Gardening is an approach to economic development that gives precedence to growing smaller businesses, creating an entrepreneurial ecosystem that is functional, while helping existing businesses to stay or expand. In short, it is an approach to home-growing businesses for the downtown.

The reader may be thinking that there are already support mechanisms in place to help entrepreneurs. There are such programs as the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) that do a superb job of assisting with entrepreneurship. Economic Gardening goes beyond this approach. The key is to create an entrepreneurship ecosystem that is part of the culture of Buena Vista. This means the secondary brand of Downtown Buena Vista needs to be CENTER OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP OR CENTER OF ECONOMIC GARDENING.

This means that all sectors of the community need to be aware of the new entrepreneurship ecosystem – the new culture of Downtown Buena Vista. While we will provide a step by step approach to creating this ecosystem, the work of crafting falls to the leadership of Downtown. This underscores our ongoing point that Downtown Buena Vista requires a fulltime Main Street Manager with offices apart from City Hall.

1. Create an Ecosystem Network.

All supporters of entrepreneurship in the region need to be made aware that there is a cultural shift underway in Downtown Buena Vista. A copy of this plan should be provided to leadership regionally. In fact, we recommend the production of a marketing piece entitled DOWNTOWN BUENA VISTA: A CENTER OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP (or Economic Gardening). Organizations such as the Shenandoah Valley Small Business Development Center, the Staunton Creative Community Fund, The Shenandoah Valley Partnership and the Chamber of Commerce should be brought into the fold. Additionally, the business program at Southern Virginia University and the Connolly Center of Entrepreneurship at Washington and Lee University should be sought for ongoing support. Of course, the Dabney S. Lancaster Community College already has working plans for a workforce development/entrepreneurship program right in the heart of Downtown Buena Vista and can play an important role. A briefing session for each group individually or collectively should be provided and the economic restructuring shift made clear.

2. A Complete Cultural Shift.

When we speak of a complete cultural shift, this means from the leadership at City Hall to the residents, college students in the area, college professors, Downtown business owners and as many Downtown building owners as possible. This needs to be seen not as a marketing ploy, but as a change in the ethos of the community. It will be important to bring the media into the mix at some point.

3. Mentors are Needed.

One major component in the creation of the new culture will be the introduction of a handful of mentors from various fields who can serve to provide leadership to potential entrepreneurs. A call should go out regionally for mentors. These need not be experts in entrepreneurship, but rather people who can keep the entrepreneurs engaged. The Small Business Development Center can provide technical expertise, for example, but it is also helpful to have a mentor to make sure the business plan development is on track.

4. Incentives Need to be Revisited.

There are some incentives in place in the form of a 3% revolving loan fund and a façade improvement program, both of which are laudable programs. It would be helpful, however, for the funds to be increased by approximately 50%. The Economic Development Authority (EDA) should develop a micro-enterprise grant program. Entrepreneurs with a workable business plan could be eligible for grants from \$1,000 to \$5,000. A loan/grant review committee could easily be established with representatives from banks, local businesses and the Chamber of Commerce.

3-BUILDING BACK BUSINESS...BETTER! ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING PLAN

5. Renters Need to Have Incentives.

Leasehold improvements, especially in historic structures, can be onerous for renters and discourage potential renters. We are proposing a matching leasehold improvement grant up to \$5,000. Again, the local committee can administer it with City/bank oversight. There have been a number of studies across the country that indicate leasehold incentives reduce vacancy rates in the downtown.

6. The Community Reinvestment Act Needs to Play A Role.

The Federal Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) requires that all financial institutions reinvest in communities they serve. The Community Development representative for each regional bank should be contacted and asked for an investment in: entrepreneurship development, loan/grant processing, and capacity building for the programming generally.

7. An Annual Business Plan Competition Just for Downtown.

We understand the Gauntlet is a well-received program generating significant interest locally. This business plan competition has become part of the business culture regionally. We propose a smaller program held once yearly just for Downtown Buena Vista. The benefit, beyond generating publicity for Downtown, is that people will develop business plans that could be implemented even if they do not win. Business plan competitions have been successful throughout the United States in jump starting downtown revitalization programs.

8. Market Nationally and Statewide.

We have provided economic development contacts in Appendix 1 of this report. Those contacts should be notified of the change in culture. This dramatic change in the creation of an entrepreneurship ecosystem will benefit the program significantly.

9. A Business Retention Program.

There are several businesses in Downtown Buena Vista who have committed to the community. All the incentives should be available to existing businesses in order to secure their longevity in Downtown. Moreover, some of the existing business owners may serve as mentors.

10. Where Do We Find the Entrepreneurs?

We have discussed marketing to a degree. We propose targeted marketing programs to the community generally. There are a significant number of home-based businesses in the area that may be willing to open in a storefront provided the right guidance is offered. Entrepreneurs come from all quarters, young and old. The more time spreading the word in the region, the bigger the pool of participants. Recent college graduates can team up as peers, for example, to open a business. It is not unusual for recently retired professionals to team up to start a business.

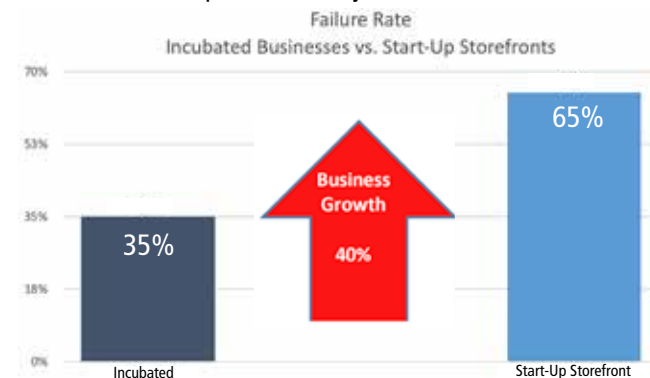
11. Consider Retail Incubation.

If three or more potential entrepreneurs with differing services team up, they can share space and incubate businesses. This simply means they agree to share expenses and space. If one or more of the businesses does well they can move to larger space in Downtown and a new business can be brought in to fill the space. This is a wonderful way to launch new businesses.

12. Introduce New Products in Existing Businesses.

It is not unusual for someone to have a single product they wish to test market. Existing Downtown stores are a wonderful way to introduce that product to consumers. Often the existing store owners will provide space free of charge or in some instances a commission can be paid.

All of the above approaches to entrepreneurship can begin to cement the new Center of Entrepreneurship or Economic Gardening brand. The key is to have a Main Street Manager who can work this as part of her/his job.



This approach to creating Downtown Buena Vista as a Center of Entrepreneurship can easily be accomplished in a matter of months, although proper staffing is necessary. As you will see from the chart, a downtown of less than 10,000 people develops new business 40% faster with an entrepreneurial ecosystem than ones who rely on attracting business from outside.

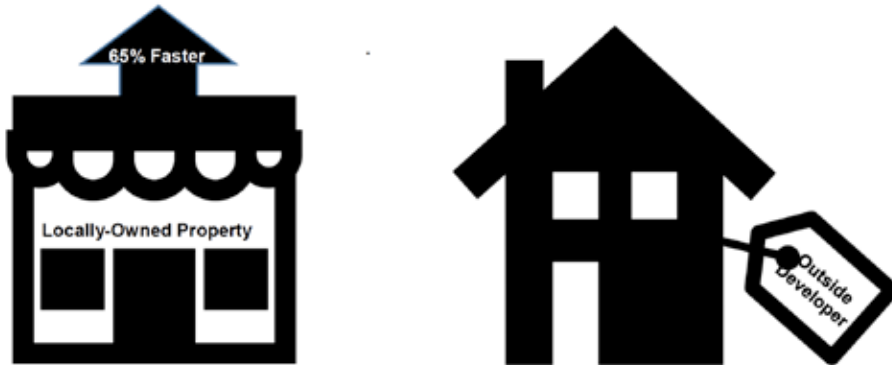
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Real Estate as Business Engine

Real Estate Developers and Building Owners are also entrepreneurs. Obviously, there has been some negative publicity as of late relative to one developer attempting to divest himself from several properties, but that was clearly a business decision that went beyond Downtown Buena Vista. In fact, this developer speaks highly of Downtown. This provides the opportunity for creative and innovative developers to enter the scene to develop properties.

There are some immediate steps that can be taken to attract entrepreneurial developers.

In a downtown comparison of cities with <12,000 population, locally owned properties redeveloped at a 65% faster rate than properties owned by outside developers.



1. Reach out to the Incremental Development Alliance – this is an association of creative developers who take on small-to-midsized projects. The historic nature of Downtown Buena Vista, coupled with reasonable real estate prices, could make real estate deals in Downtown Buena Vista quite attractive. Their contact information has been provided in Appendix 1. They will gladly put you in touch with developers.
2. Assemble a list of all Downtown buildings along with owner/broker information. Get it on the downtown website and Facebook pages.
3. The Urban Land Institute represents developers in urban areas, but they also have developers in small downtowns. It would be worth it to join. Contact information for the Urban Land Institute is included in Appendix 1.

4. Reach out to Commonwealth agencies, including public and private. Virginia Community Capital interacts with developers quite frequently.
5. Utilize the promotional sheet prepared by the Opportunity Zone consultants. If for no other reason it will provide an “elevator speech” on how the program works.
6. Contact building owners using public databases in nearby communities. This may generate interest in Downtown buildings.
7. Subscribe to Site Selection and Area Development publications. Attempt to get a story placed about attractive real estate deals in Buena Vista. This may require advertisement but may be worth it.
8. Contact all the economic development partners on your list and encourage them to list Downtown as an available site.
9. Make sure Rehabilitation Tax Credits and the Opportunity Zone are mentioned in all promotional materials.

Attracting developers is time consuming absent staff. Again, we recommend a Main Street Manager (or some other management entity) be brought into the fold as soon as possible.

Other Approaches to Economic Restructuring

Carts, Pop-ups, Food Trucks

Some potential business owners have an idea and do not want to commit a significant amount of money; therefore, they sell their product in public space to gauge reaction and test the market for success. It is a wonderful way to activate underutilized spaces and create a sense of place. With three or more carts, they are often more successful than a single cart owner. Three or more seems to be the magic number.

Pop-Up stores are becoming increasingly popular especially around holidays. Someone secures short-term space in a storefront and sells products. It has the advantage of filling an empty storefront while also creating activity in the downtown. It allows the pop-up store owner to test market the product, as well.

Food Trucks are now a national phenomenon. The industry has boomed in the last ten years. Despite worries of downtown restaurant owners, food trucks actually increase restaurant sales. Having a Food Truck Friday once a month in Downtown Buena Vista makes a great opportunity for exploration.

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What type of Businesses Should Downtown BV Seek?

There is great interest in what type of businesses are best suited for Downtown Buena Vista. Given the current social and economic climate it would be irresponsible for any consultant to produce a list of businesses that will absolutely do well in Downtown.

The reason we are recommending creating Downtown Buena Vista as a Center of Entrepreneurship is that entrepreneurs working with support systems will find what works best in the marketplace. As the COVID-19 pandemic ebbs and flows and as economic conditions change, entrepreneurs will develop business ideas that are appropriate for the moment.

Looking at the extensive research, including lifestyle analysis, the following businesses may do well:

- Women's Consignment Store
- A Neighborhood Bar (small)
- A Prepared Meals Takeout Store
- A Women's Shoe Store
- Ice Cream Shop
- A Coffee Shop (small)
- An Antique Store
- A Shared Work Environment

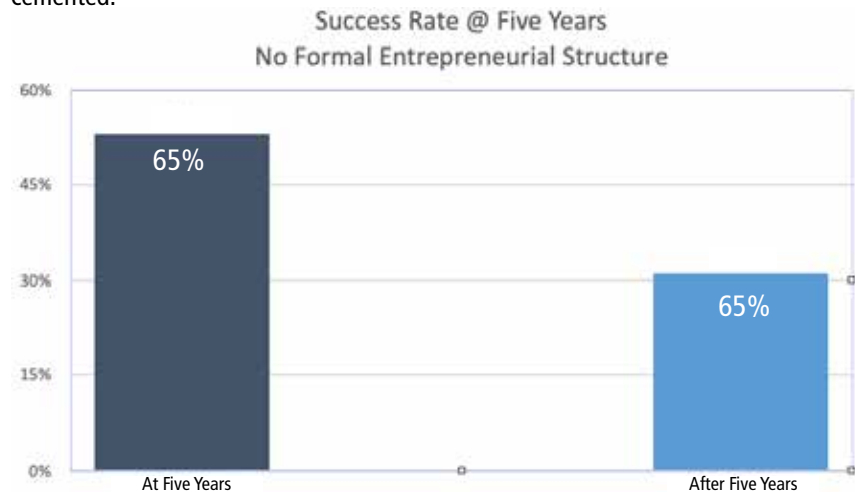
The community would, however, be best served by the entrepreneurial energy brought to bear by potential business owners. It is in that to-be-developed Economic Gardening ecosystem that the best ideas will emerge.

As noted, entrepreneurs can, through passion and good business instincts, often develop a business that, frankly, no one would have thought about. That is why it is so important to create that environment and support system for people in which to test their ideas and concepts and get advice in the development of a business plan. That is why we reiterate here that an entrepreneurial ecosystem should be job one with respect to Economic Restructuring.

Frankly, all the research in the world will not tell us some types of businesses that will go on to be successful. Much of the success of a business is tied not just to the business acumen of a store owner, but to her/his passion and commitment. That is why it is important to make Downtown Buena Vista a Center of Entrepreneurship.

Potential business owners know they are welcomed and that all ideas are welcomed. Downtowns are a wonderful place to try new ideas, products and services.

There are numerous college students within the Trade Area. We encourage marketing to these college students to let them know there is support for creative young entrepreneurs in Downtown Buena Vista. Some may partner up to launch an idea. We are not naïve – some students in youthful exuberance will develop ideas that fail. However, in nurturing the creative class, the brand of Downtown as a Center of Entrepreneurship will be cemented.



Some Old School Marketing for New Business

When the national Main Street Program first began, they encouraged Main Street Managers to develop promotional materials on the downtown and then visit nearby communities. They would drop off materials at stores in neighboring communities in order to entice them to open a second location. While, for many businesses today, that second location is the internet, the personal sales pitch has been paying off again for many communities. Maybe the store doesn't want to relocate or open a second location, but they know folks in the field who might want to relocate or open a new location. Many downtown managers are assembling the packets and visiting other communities. We recommend doing that once a quarter in order to raise the profile of the Downtown.

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Activating Downtown Streets and Greenspace — an Economic Restructuring Perspective

The extensive research conducted as part of this study indicates that many people thought there was little activity Downtown. Although it will take time to expand the retail and service base in Downtown, public (some privately held) space can be used for a variety of purposes. The overarching idea is to activate the open space and the streets, particularly Magnolia Avenue, to provide a sense of activity for Downtown. This again will require staff, and we return to our recommendation that a Main Street Manager be engaged.

Music

Music is a wonderful way to create a sense of place downtown and counter the perception that Downtown, is as some people phrased it – IS DEAD. There are many ways to provide music Downtown. Many communities have had wonderful luck hiring college students on Friday or Saturday night to play music in a Town Square or empty building. Studies indicate that people feel a part of the downtown experience when music is added to a downtown landscape. These do not have to be professional musicians, but rather enthusiastic music buffs who will play for a modest fee.

Southern Virginia University has a music program, as does Washington and Lee University. This would be a wonderful way to engage college students while providing a sense of place Downtown.



Photo Sources: Southern Virginia University (www.svu.edu) and Washington and Lee University

If one wanted to enhance a music program, then musicians can be urged to play on sidewalks throughout Downtown. There are also a significant number of musicians in the area who may be willing to provide music at a nominal cost. In fact, this could initially be a monthly promotion, such as First Friday or Second Thursday. The key is consistency.



Photo Sources: The Dallas Morning News and Google Maps.

Carts and Other Downtown Vendors

At Mountain Day 2020, there were a number of carts and vendor spaces. It is recommended that five or six of those vendors be invited back for a monthly event on a rotating basis. Some may sell food, and some may sell arts and crafts. The key is to activate the public space and create a lively town square and an engaging streetscape. This begins to layer activities to create a sense of place. Some of the vendors may find Downtown an attractive place for a fulltime business location. Music and vendors one evening a month will begin to cement the idea that Downtown can be a lively place. Keep in mind that Downtown Buena Vista is battling the image as a place with little activity. The more activity on a regular basis, the more that perception will be changed.



Photo Source: Buena Vista Arts Council, Instagram.

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Food Trucks

Food Trucks now populate towns and cities across the world. There is a reason – people like them, and they instill excitement in downtown. In fact, they increase business for existing restaurants. A monthly event, with only one or two food trucks in the beginning, will create an additional sense of activity either on the street or in the Town Square. Food truck operators sometimes end up in a brick and mortar location – so this is a way to introduce food purveyors to Downtown. Note that Downtown restaurants should be given the opportunity for a cart and to bring a truck if they have one. It is a matter of inclusion for those who have invested in Downtown.



Special Events Calendar

In addition to a monthly event, it is recommended that a calendar of special events be created. This would, of course, include Mountain Days and the well-known Labor Day activities. We recommend a holiday event at Christmas, either in the Town Square or scattered through Downtown open spaces. The possibility of a Winter Fest is something to consider – these work well in many downtowns. There is no lack of creativity in Buena Vista.



Photo Source: Buena Vista Arts Council, Instagram.

Art

It is always helpful to have artists selling their artwork in downtown. Having artists in a Town Square or sidewalk may help an artisan decide to take space in the downtown. There are already several artists in the area that can be brought into Downtown programming.

The purpose of creating all this activity is two-fold. First, it will counteract the perception of “death” that was articulated in the survey responses. Second, it will introduce potential tenants to Downtown. Regular special events and promotions, in partnership with the Buena Vista Arts Council, can activate Downtown, and we highly recommend starting as soon as reasonably possible.



Weekly Farmers Market

At various times, Downtown space has been utilized for farmers’ markets. Although these markets were small in scale, we recommend reviving this practice using the spaces located on Magnolia Avenue as pictured below. We recommend working with the Virginia Department of Agriculture and the Department of Housing and Community Development to bring yet another activity to Downtown.



City parking lot next to Coiners Store



Lot across Magnolia from Coiners Store

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MAIN STREET PROGRAM: A NECESSITY FOR BUENA VISTA

The national Main Street Program has been a success nationally and across the Commonwealth of Virginia. The Main Street Program encourages a community to establish a 501(c)(3) non-profit to focus on downtown revitalization. There have now been dozens of studies that indicate that a downtown, even in a smaller community, can have a significant economic impact on the community, often surpassing the economic impact of big box stores.

There are well over a thousand Main Street Programs across the country and, thankfully, Virginia is lauded for its professionalism and effectiveness. As noted throughout this report, we feel strongly that a Main Street Program is absolutely critical to the long term success of Downtown Buena Vista.

A Downtown Master Plan absent the staff to implement it becomes just one more study. We believe that a full-time Main Street Manager should be hired to address this Master Plan and other downtown revitalization programming.

Business development, special events, helping business and building owners all require daily management. A volunteer Board of Directors can serve to buttress the work of the Main Street Manager.

The resources brought to bear by the National Main Street Center and the Virginia Main Street Program can advance a downtown revitalization program. Frankly, from what we have seen, existing City staff do not have the time to manage the downtown revitalization program daily.

The Main Street Program addresses four primary areas – all areas of concern in Buena Vista – Economic Restructuring/Vitality, Design, Promotion/Special Events and Organization. We understand that Buena Vista is allied with the Virginia Main Street Program, and we recommend that every effort be made to become an official program.

In the meantime, we are recommending that a fulltime Downtown Manager be hired and provided a modest budget in order to ensure that Downtown receives daily attention. We are fully cognizant of the financial constraints faced by Buena Vista; however, this is an investment that pays dividends. Many economists have come to the conclusion that the property in a revitalized downtown is more valuable than an office or industrial park.

We have provided a path forward for revitalization for Downtown. We believe full-time implementation is necessary for the long-term rebirth of Downtown Buena Vista.

INCENTIVE ANALYSIS

Opportunity Zone Recommendations

The federal Opportunity Zone program is designed to attract investment to areas in need of economic stimulation. Buena Vista recently engaged a firm to produce a promotional brochure on the Opportunity Zone while highlighting certain Downtown properties (that promotional piece is in the Appendix to this report) For the first few years that the Opportunity Zone program was in place, it benefitted larger development firms. The capital gains tax benefits of the program naturally became attractive to larger firms seeking to lower their capital gain taxes. Through creative programming, such as Opportunity Virginia, a division of Virginia Community Capital, the program can also be used by smaller developers and can be employed to lure investors into the community.

We provided information earlier on this report about the Urban Land Institute and the Incremental Developers Alliance – both groups represent developers of various sizes. We highly recommend providing their membership with the brochure on the Buena Vista Opportunity Zone. It is highly unusual for a single developer to come into a community and acquire a large portion of the downtown, so it will require patience as developers get to know Buena Vista.

Technology Zone - Hub Zone - Tourism Zone

The Technology Zone is an interesting one to use potentially for a small scale manufacturing downtown. It would be helpful to use the Technology Zone incentives to align with the national trend toward small scale downtown manufacturing. Small scale downtown manufacturing is being encouraged statewide.

The Hub Zone will not have a significant impact on downtown revitalization. However, manufacturers within the community may still find it useful in federal contracting.

The Tourism Zone could have significant applicability to Downtown Buena Vista. This can be used to attract tourism and lodging related businesses, provide tax waivers and a host of other benefits. This has applicability across the tourism spectrum, and we highly recommend a promotional piece be developed explaining the benefits.

3-BUILDING BACK BUSINESS...BETTER! ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING PLAN

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEW INCENTIVES

As mentioned earlier in this plan, there are two incentives that are targeted just for Downtown - the Façade Improvement Grant Program and the Revolving Loan Fund (3% interest). Frankly, if Downtown is going to be a Center of Entrepreneurship as recommended, these programs are woefully underfunded.

The Revolving Loan Fund which currently has \$65,000 available should be increased by \$40,000. The Façade Improvement Grant Program which has \$14,500 should be increased by \$35,000. We are recommending a leasehold (renter's fund) for matching grants be available for up to \$5,000, for a total of \$30,000 in the fund. It is important to keep in mind that these are investments in the future revitalization of Downtown.

Small Scale Manufacturing Downtown

Small-scale manufacturing is becoming increasingly important in downtown revitalization programs across the United States. In fact, in a sense, it has become a movement supported by downtown revitalization programs. A soon-to-be-released book will highlight how small scale manufacturing can create a sense of vitality within a downtown.

This movement for Buena Vista is well-timed. A 15,000 square foot former Ford dealership was donated by a local philanthropist for the creation of a workforce development center by the Dabney S. Lancaster Community College. This provides the opportunity for Downtown Buena Vista to marry itself to a potential small manufacturing program.



Examples of small scale urban manufacturing operations in the U.S.

There is substantial square footage in Downtown, and an entrée into the world of small-scale manufacturing would be the creation of a storefront maker's center. Downtown Economics has determined there are 60-plus home-based craftsmen in Buena Vista. This provides the opportunity for some of these craftsmen to rent storefront space and share expenses – an incubator of sorts. Local publicity through service clubs should easily generate interest in becoming a tenant in the Maker's Storefront.

Maker's stores have done well throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia, and the shared expenses lessen the risk for each tenant. This could easily be run as a co-op where the craftspeople are the owners. This will require the assistance of a staff person on the front end – hopefully, a Main Street Manager.

As the workforce development center matures, it is highly feasible that more advanced items, such as 3-D printed products, can be brought into the mix. The incentive package currently in place (and the one proposed in this report) could lessen the risk substantially. Dabney S. Lancaster Community College and Downtown leadership should begin meeting and crafting plans for a Maker's Market and Downtown manufacturing.



Examples of maker's markets around the U.S.

Housing Potential Downtown

Developers and other business leaders have looked at housing on upper stories in Downtown Buena Vista. In fact, some very attractive units were developed, while some sat on the drawing boards. There is still a market for downtown housing, and it tends to be lifestyle-based.

There are some people, usually young professionals or midlife career changers who like the idea of living in downtown housing—especially lofts. Upper stories in Downtown can easily accommodate additional apartments or condos and empty spaces on Magnolia Avenue can certainly accommodate housing.

A look at the housing market in Buena Vista does not call for standard housing units; again, downtown housing appeals to a vertical market who enjoy the amenities of downtown. It is our evaluation that 40 housing units Downtown can easily be absorbed.

Studies clearly indicate that multi-use downtowns have the greatest long-term chance to revitalize and have a mix of service, retail, professional office and housing.

3-BUILDING BACK BUSINESS...BETTER! HISTORIC DISTRICT EXPANSION

Historic Designation Opportunities

Buena Vista's current historic district was created in 2009. Today, the passage of eleven years has created opportunities to expand the district, both in acreage and period of significance.

The Buena Vista Downtown Historic District was listed in the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places in 2009 as a means to encourage rehabilitation activity in the downtown (the district boundaries are shown on the map at the end of this section). The district embraces Buena Vista's commercial and civic core, an area of approximately ten acres centered on Magnolia Avenue between 19th and 22nd streets and containing fifty-three buildings and other resources. The oldest building was built in 1889, the year the city was established, and the district's period of significance, defined as the period during which buildings contribute to the district's historic character, extends to 1959, which in 2009 was the fifty-year "cutoff" for standard designation. The 2009 designations were facilitated by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR).

Buildings and other resources in the district that date to the period of significance (1889-1959) and retain their basic historic character (that is, possess "integrity") are classified as "contributing," which confers certain benefits. Resources constructed or substantially altered after 1959 are "non-contributing," though they are still located in the district (the state and national registers do not accept "Swiss cheese districts" that omit resources within the boundaries). The district is primarily commercial in character, and though it adjoins historic residential areas with high integrity, these were not included in 2009 owing to their non-commercial character.



Period of Significance Opportunities

Were the 2009 designation to be updated, it would be possible to extend the period of significance (POS). This would make it possible to reclassify as contributing buildings currently classified as non-contributing on account of age. Fifty years is not an automatic POS cutoff; the end date, like the beginning date, needs to be justified based on the district's resources and history. However, since the district's significance relies in part on its status as the historic business center of the city, and that status continued to and beyond the fifty-year mark, it should be possible to extend the POS to the fifty-year cutoff, which is currently 1971. The district was also listed for its governmental significance. Inclusion of the 1969-70 Buena Vista Municipal Building at 2039 Sycamore Avenue would bolster that area of significance and also justify extension of the POS to 1971.

Two buildings currently classified as non-contributing could probably be reclassified as contributing if the POS were extended to 1971. They are:

- 2040 Magnolia Avenue. The former Peebles Department Store, built-in 1969. It retains its basic original appearance and would therefore be considered to possess sufficient integrity.
- 2062 Magnolia Avenue. Built-in the 1960s, the building was occupied by Scottie Discount Stores in 1974. It retains its basic original appearance and would therefore be considered to possess sufficient integrity.

Currently these buildings would not qualify for rehabilitation tax credits because of their non-contributing classification. It should be noted that were the historic district designation updated to extend the POS, the update would necessitate the reevaluation of all resources in the district. The update would note the demolition of 2161-2163 Magnolia and might reclassify contributing buildings that have lost integrity as non-contributing, though the sense is few if any such buildings would warrant such reclassification. In other words, most and possibly all buildings classified as contributing in 2009 (other than the demolished building) appear to remain contributing.

3-BUILDING BACK BUSINESS...BETTER! HISTORIC DISTRICT EXPANSION

Boundary Increase Opportunities

An expanded POS would also create opportunities to enlarge the historic district, a procedure known as a boundary increase. Several commercial buildings dating to the 1960-70 period adjoin the district and may potentially be included in it as contributing resources. These are:

- 1) 2175 Magnolia Avenue. Value Mart Building. 1968 (VamaNet date). The Modernist one-story cinder-block commercial building has brick veneer, a parapet flat roof, and an aluminum and plate-glass storefront window/entry wall. The parapet has a ceramic coping with tiles manufactured by the Pomona Tile Company (also known as the Pomona Terra Cotta Manufacturing Company) of Pomona, North Carolina, now part of Greensboro. A past tenant of the building was Value Mart. (DHR Site No. 103-5075)
- 2) 120 East 22nd Street. John S. McCown Dental Office. Ca. 1965 (VamaNet date 1957). The story-and-a-half Colonial Revival brick building was inspired by the architecture of Colonial Williamsburg. Research into Buena Vista phone directories by Washington & Lee University Leyburn Library Special Collections Librarian Lisa McCown shows John S. McCown's dental office first appearing at the current address in 1965 (Lisa McCown happens to be John McCown's niece). Currently Wilhelm & Company Real Estate.
- 3) 2202 Magnolia Avenue. Telephone Building. Ca. 1971. Back part is 131 East 22nd Street.
- 4) 2172 Sycamore Avenue. Virginia Employment Commission, Buena Vista Office. 1963 (VamaNet date). Currently Canton Restaurant. (DHR Site No. 103-5079)
- 5) 2039 Sycamore Avenue. Buena Vista Municipal Building. 1969-70.

Other commercial areas with resources that appear to date to 1971 or before adjoin the existing district but lack sufficient integrity for inclusion. Reevaluation of the existing historic district boundaries detected the existence of a large adjacent historic residential area portions of which may qualify as a state and national register historic district. Because this area is residential in character rather than commercial, the best approach to its designation would be to propose it as a standalone district. The area to the north of the existing historic district and the contiguous group of 1960s-1970s buildings listed above is mixed in character, with weak and strong block faces in terms of integrity. More detailed analysis and discussion with DHR may determine whether the area, which overlaps the north part of the project area, has historic district potential. If so it would likely be considered part of the potential residential historic district noted above rather than an extension of the existing historic district.

In addition to the probable residential historic district adjacent to the current Buena Vista Downtown Historic District are other buildings and areas that may have national and state register potential. The ca. 1950s-60s industrial building at 245 West 21st Street (The Mundet Factory) possesses good exterior integrity from the historic period, and depending on its interior integrity, historical significance, and significance relative to other mid-twentieth-century industrial buildings in Buena Vista may be eligible for listing. Also of note is the group of boom-period commercial buildings on Beech Avenue near US 60. The group includes the ca. 1890 Arcade Building at 2574 Beech with its ornate cornice and parapet and original storefronts with stained-glass transom borders, as well as the buildings at 2535 Beech Avenue, all two-story frame buildings. Such a concentration of frame commercial buildings associated with western Virginia's late-nineteenth-century urbanization boom is a rare survival, and despite the smallness of the group (three buildings) and uncertain interior integrity, may be eligible for listing as a historic district.

The northern parts of the project area, the blocks from 22nd Street to 23rd Street along Sycamore and Magnolia streets, have concentrations of historic buildings and portions may qualify for inclusion in a potential (primarily) residential historic district, although such a possibility would need to be tested in consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office.

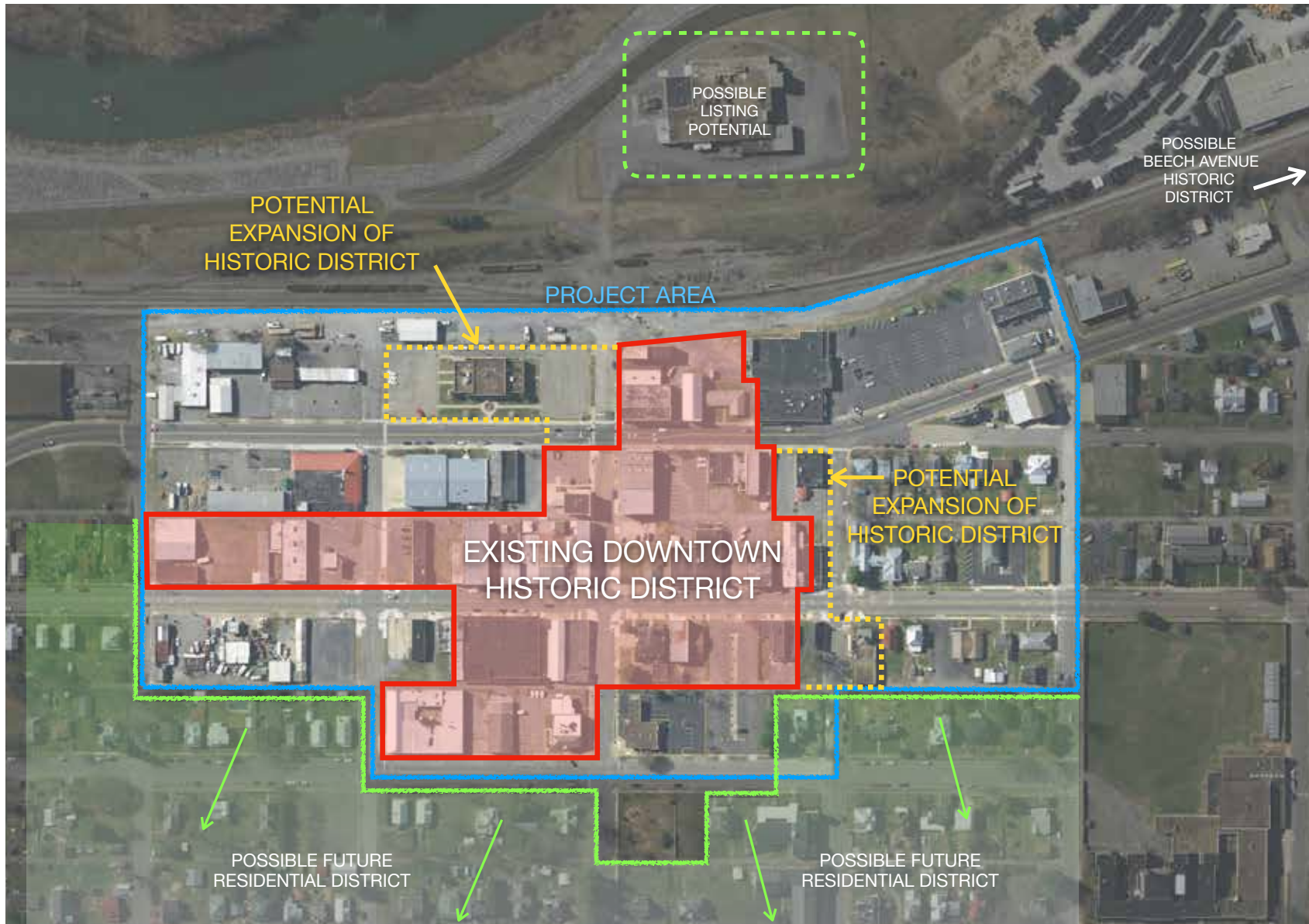
Discussion...

State and national historic district designation was a cost-effective way to extend the potential benefits of designation to Buena Vista's downtown property owners in 2009. Would expanding the district's period of significance and/or boundaries benefit the City and property owners in 2020? The answer depends. Were the owners of any of the seven buildings listed above to seek rehabilitation tax credits for work on the buildings, POS and/or boundary expansion would make participation in the rehab tax credit program possible. The City might consider the expense of expansion a worthwhile investment to facilitate a rehab project or encourage potential projects.

The analysis has identified part of the boundary of a large potential residential historic district lying to the east of the downtown. This neighborhood possesses many architecturally notable residences constructed from Buena Vista's boom period to the mid-twentieth century. A large portion of the area would almost certainly qualify for listing in the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places.

* Special Assistance from Lisa McCown and Doug Moran

3-BUILDING BACK BUSINESS...BETTER!
HISTORIC DISTRICT EXPANSION
HISTORIC DISTRICT EXPANSION OPTIONS



3-BUILDING BACK BUSINESS...BETTER! SMALL SCALE MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT LIBRARY RELOCATION:

The current library is housed in a key historic building in the heart of Downtown. We believe that, from an economic development perspective, the library should be relocated to a different site on Magnolia Avenue, and that the City should develop a highest and best use analysis for the historic structure. It has been mentioned by some that the existing library could serve as a boutique hotel. There are few lodging opportunities throughout the City, so a hotel may be a viable option. What is clear is that a library in its current location is not the highest or best economic use. There are locations within Downtown that would serve as an ideal library site, thus creating the opportunity to develop a key historic structure in Downtown.



View of the historic 19th c. City Hall building, currently the home of the Rockbridge Regional Library and proposed new downtown B&B The Nestle Inn.

Redevelopment Concept - A New Library Location

As we all prepare for Covid19 vaccinations and hope that our economy gets back to some predictable level soon we understand that communities will be feeling the effects of market anxiety for quite some time. For this reason we feel that the small-scale mixed use development pairs well with the idea of incremental growth. The Library project is a perfect example of how this concept can be used to help share risk, costs, and construction impacts across a varied user program while offering the Buena Vista community amenities that might not be possible otherwise in such a stressed market.

We understand that the current Rockbridge Regional Library branch that is located in the City-owned historic City Hall building is not a good fit and they would like to have more flexibility with their interior program. The historic City Hall is one of the City's most important landmarks and plays an important role anchoring the corner of Magnolia and

21st Street across from the proposed new City Center Park. Its continued public use and access is important to maintain and the proposed use as a historic inn would be a good fit for its size and layout.

Project Structure:

- + Library is relocated to what was the Arts Council Building at 2037 Magnolia
- + The City funds the planning for the conversion of the historic City Hall into a historic Inn. Let's call it The Nestle Inn, keeping things friendly and comfortable. With professionally prepared plans and project budget, the City would advertise for a developer who would take on the renovations and operations with a long term lease. An LLC would be set up for the work in order to transfer historic tax credits to the developer.
- + The program for the new Library — which might be called the "Librarium," Latin for "bookshelf," — is a mixed-use project including:
 - The Rockbridge Regional Library
 - The University's bookstore
 - A coffee shop or cafe
 - A small interpretive center to tell the Buena Vista Story
- + With the library as the primary tenant, there is a built-in customer base for the coffee shop. The University bookstore brings the University's presence into the heart of Downtown and the Interpretive exhibits on the Buena Vista Story provide an educational opportunity for both visitors and locals. The Cafe walls can become gallery space and there can be public meeting rooms and offices or apartments upstairs.
- + Both properties become fully income-producing for the City and continue to strengthen the core area of Downtown that is the focus of the revitalization plan. A very quick look at the numbers would go as follows:

Old City Hall — +/- 8,322 s.f. renovated at \$145/s.f. would = \$1,040,250
Construction costs with tax credit reductions of 45% = \$572,137
Monthly debt service, taxes and ins., @ today's rates, would be +/- \$4,000/mo

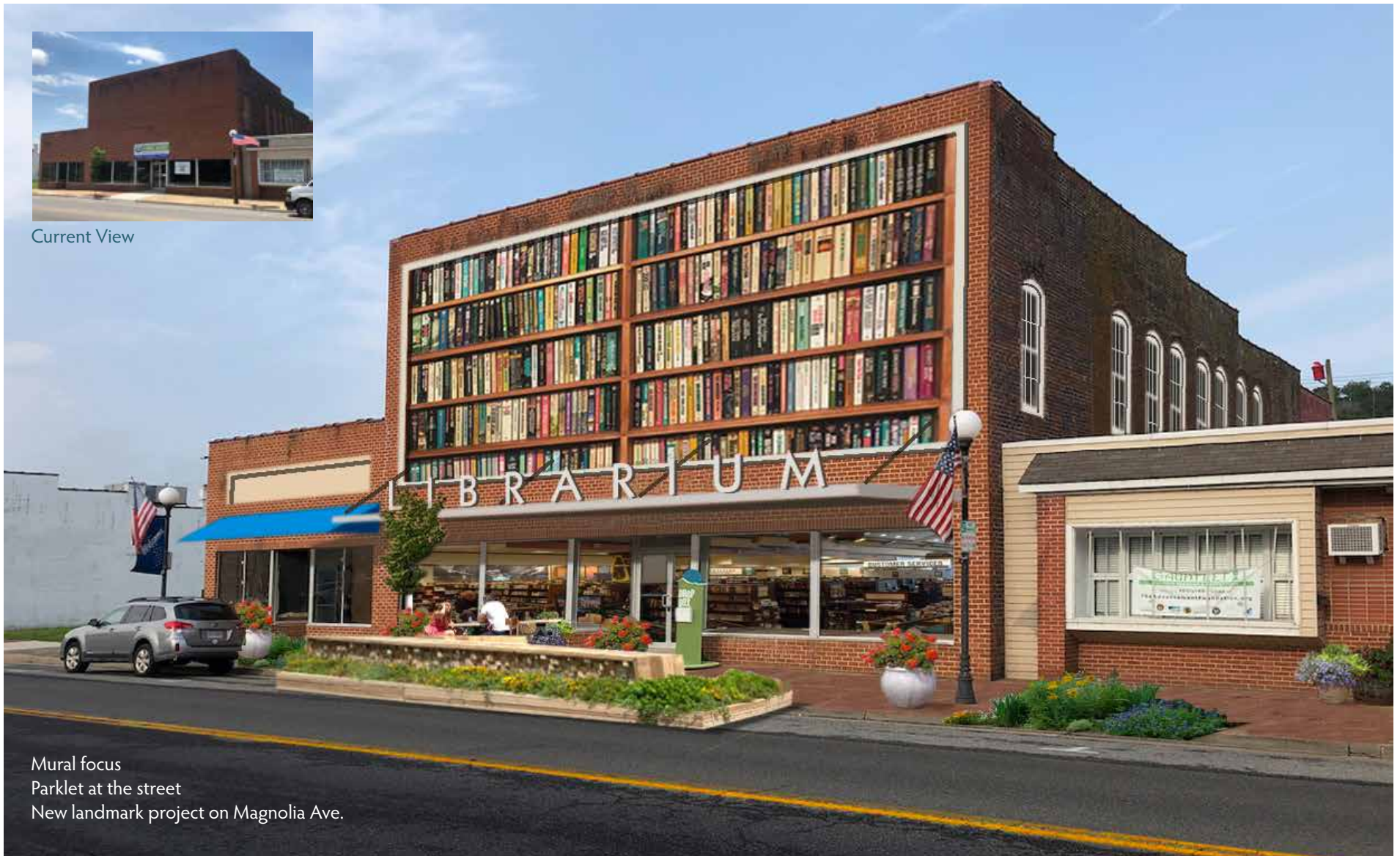
2037 Magnolia — +/- 11,000 s.f. renovated at \$125/s.f. would = \$1,375,000
Construction costs with tax credit reductions of 45% = \$756,250
Monthly debt service, taxes and ins., @ today's rates, would be +/- \$5,000/mo
Leasing at \$10/s.f. would bring in +/- \$7,800/mo

3-BUILDING BACK BUSINESS...BETTER! SMALL SCALE MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT

A New Library Location — “The Librarium”



Current View



Mural focus
Parklet at the street
New landmark project on Magnolia Ave.

Buena Vista

Downtown Revitalization Strategy

3-BUILDING BACK BUSINESS...BETTER! SMALL SCALE MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT

A New Library Location — The Modern Option



Mural focus
Parklet at the street
New landmark project on Magnolia Ave.

Buena Vista

Downtown Revitalization Strategy

3-BUILDING BACK BUSINESS...BETTER!
SMALL SCALE MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT

A New Library Location — The Appalachian Option



Mural focus
Parklet at the street
New landmark project on Magnolia Ave.

Buena Vista

Downtown Revitalization Strategy

3-BUILDING BACK BUSINESS...BETTER!
SMALL SCALE MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT

A New Library Location — The Wild West Option



Mural focus
Parklet at the street
New landmark project on Magnolia Ave.

4

A NEW VISION FOR DOWNTOWN



A Physical Improvements Plan

4-A NEW VISION FOR DOWNTOWN DESIGN APPROACH



Visitors and Residents are Drawn to Many of the Same Things!

- Great places to shop, eat, walk, sit, bike, and run.
- Successful and interesting businesses and shops
- Safe streets and neighborhoods
- Activities for families and outdoors enthusiasts
- An vibrant accessible Downtown
- A good cup of coffee
- A sense of belonging
- Art and Culture
- Beautiful places
- Rich history
- Friendly people

Our design approach for Downtown Buena Vista’s revitalization is built upon what we heard the community say they want, miss, need, and hope for. The overwhelming sentiment we heard is that the community wants to see new life in their flagging Downtown. They recognize the assets they have to work with — the mountains, the river, their industrial heritage — but a rich history and an abundance of natural beauty are not all that is needed to help rescue Buena Vista’s fading Downtown, and its residents and business owners know that.

A new vision for Downtown will give its residents, business owners, and leaders a shared and focused approach to working on a wide range of community planning initiatives with a strategic eye towards finding synergy between projects, strengthening community bonds, and seeing that each new initiative, however small, supports a vibrant and accessible Downtown that can serve its residents and attract new visitors to help enliven the city and create a renewed sense of forward momentum.

“Pride of Place” – Residents and Business owners want it. Visitors want to feel it.

THE NEW VISION FOR DOWNTOWN is built upon a set of core ideas that help prioritize and group recommendations for both community and governmental action. These ideas support an incremental approach to development where every project adds a little something to the pot, building the stability and confidence the community needs to take on more ambitious and challenging initiatives over time. This set of core ideas provides a framework for how the community can take action to rebuild itself and take charge of its own success.

The core ideas are:

- * **CONNECTIVITY** — *communicating (with each other), getting outdoors (with nature), getting healthy (with ourselves)*
- * **GATEWAYS and WAYFINDING** — *arriving, exploring, discovering*
- * **MAIN STREET** — *eating, shopping, playing*
- * **PUBLIC SPACE** — *gathering, sharing, celebrating*
- * **BEAUTIFICATION and PLACEMAKING** — *taking charge, creating, activating*

4-A NEW VISION FOR DOWNTOWN DESIGN APPROACH IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK PLAN — CITY OVERVIEW



KEY

- ① Gateway into City of Buena Vista
- ② Rt. 60/29th Street
- ③ Gateway Intersection into Downtown
- ④ Beech Avenue
- ⑤ Bus. 501/Park Avenue
- ⑥ Bus. 501/Magnolia Avenue
- ⑦ Sycamore Avenue
- ⑧ Forest Avenue
- ⑨ 21st Street
- ⑩ 10th Street bridge
- ⑪ Boat launch and Chessie Trail
- ⑫ Future park with boat launch and picnic area
- ⑬ River gateway
- ⑭ River Park
- ⑮ Future boat launch
- ⑯ River Walk multi-use trail
- ⑰ Multi-use trail connection to River Walk Trail
- ⑱ Pedestrian bridge across river
- ⑲ Southern Virginia University
- ⑳ S.V.U. sports fields
- ㉑ Softball field at Parry McCluer Middle School
- ㉒ Neighborhood park at Forest Ave. and 21st St.
- ㉓ Laurel Park
- ㉔ Power line corridor/potential ridge trail
- ㉕ Concrete canal - possible skate/tube trail
- ㉖ Vacant lot - possible City use
- ㉗ Community gardens - possible future City park
- ㉘ Parry McCluer High School and ball fields
- ㉙ Parry McCluer track and softball field
- ㉚ Glen Maury RV Park & Campground

LEGEND

- Major connector roads
- Downtown streetscape improvements
- Multi-use trail
- Important gateways and intersections
- Parks, athletic fields, green space
- Vacant land with potential future use



4-A NEW VISION FOR DOWNTOWN CONNECTIVITY

- * CONNECTIVE INFORMATION
- * WALKABLE BV INITIATIVE
- * CONNECT TO REGIONAL TRAILS
- * CONNECT TO LOCAL TRAILS
- * CREATE NEW TRAILS AND WALKS
- * 21st STREET GATEWAY PROJECT

Buena Vista has the good fortune of being nestled between the Blue Ridge Mountains and the Maury River, just 10 minutes from the Blue Ridge Parkway and Appalachian Trail. State route 60 passes through town and Interstate I-81 is just a little over 5 minutes away. Despite this seemingly advantageous location, the city currently feels detached and removed from regional traffic and travel. Even within the city, its most important outdoor resources, such as Glen Maury Park, the Vista Links public golf course, and the city's River Walk seem disconnected from each other and certainly from Downtown. Not only is there little visual information to help you understand what is there, but if you try to find information on what to do in Buena Vista, you're more likely to end up in neighboring Lexington due to the way visitor information is directed and the lack of product driven promotion about Buena Vista and its available amenities. Visitor opportunities abound in and around Buena Vista but they are not connected to each other or to information that helps the public understand what's there, how to visit, and what the experience might be like.

Why would I want to visit Buena Vista?

In our conversations with community, residents, business owners, and city leaders, everyone overwhelmingly felt that Buena Vista is a place with wonderful opportunities for outdoor recreation but although many people drive the Blue Ridge Parkway, or hike the Appalachian Trail, they find few reasons to come into the city.

With a little bit of connective work Buena Vista can become a visitor hub, generating enthusiasm within the community while bringing new revenue and economic opportunities to the City.

Getting Connected — recommendations

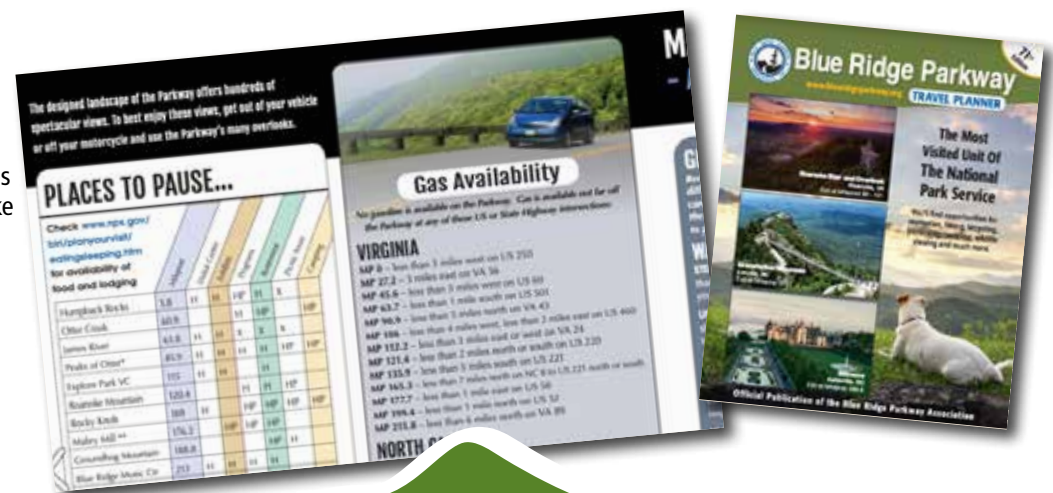
The first part of "Getting Connected" is to Make Buena Vista Visible and Understandable to both its residents and visitors through the development practical and useful information that helps people know:

- What is so unique about Buena Vista?
- How to get there?
- Where to go once you're there?
- What to do there?
- Options for planning a stay?
- Consistency in look and feel - got it together?

1. **Redesign the Buena Vista city website** to reflect the beauty of its setting, the pride the community feels in its history, and its vision for the future. Although it needs to provide the important information all community websites should provide, bring the Visit Buena Vista information forward. The website should present Buena Vista first, then its government.



2. **Make sure that Buena Vista is represented** in regional and state marketing materials.



4-A NEW VISION FOR DOWNTOWN CONNECTIVITY

3. **WALKABLE BV**— Build on the city’s Healthy BV Initiative by creating both a local and visitor culture around walking and focused on access, accommodation, and accessibility.

Market a tag line like...

“Take a Walk With Us” or “Worth the Walk”

- Treat walks as an amenity and actively market them
- Develop special events around walks and walking - Healthy BV follow up
- Partner with AT (Appalachian Trail) and hiking organizations to co-brand something - maybe if you come show an AT photo when you drop down into the town, you can get a discount BBQ or a discount on insoles..
- Get on trails/hiking apps like AllTrails
- Local historical organization should develop a walk through the City using the Cleo App to focus on historic sites.
- Create special programs and accommodations for accessibility using golf carts and a variety of low-impact accessible transport.
- Coordinate walking activities in Downtown as a part of Park festivals and events encourage businesses to provide specials and discounts to event goers showing tickets.
- Prioritize Downtown streetscape improvements for “Walkable BV” - create branded signage



Connecting to Regional Trails — recommendations

4. **Blue Ridge Parkway** — Add signage helping people, coming off of the Parkway, decide to venture into Buena Vista. Partner with Virginia Tourism and the Parkway’s advertising to promote Buena Vista - perhaps with other “parkway cities and towns” throughout Virginia as a way of encouraging folks to take a driving break and support the economies of small cities and towns like Buena Vista.



5. **Appalachian Trail Pit Stop** — Hikers want and sometimes need a break also. Buena Vista could be an AT Pit Stop like Damascus in Washington County with an AT hostel located downtown. You should also provide information in hikers resources about Buena Vista so they can plan ahead knowing that they could venture into town for a bit of city food or some supplies. Work with local businesses like the Coiner Store to understand what supplies hikers run out of most or what they might come into town for during their hike. Buena Vista might not be able to support a full outdoor gear shop, but it might be more reasonable to manage a few essentials initially and find a way to let hikers know where to go to get them.
6. **Chessie Trail/Brushy Blue Trail** — Revisit the planning ideas that were proposed for the Brushy Blue Trail as part of a regional trails system. Develop the necessary infrastructure for connecting the Chessie Trail with the Buena Vista River Walk through Downtown.

4-A NEW VISION FOR DOWNTOWN CONNECTIVITY

Connecting to Local Trails & Walks — recommendations

7. **Buena Vista River Walk** — Improve the Downtown connections to the River Walk including the development of the 21st Street River Gateway. Planning for the 21st Street corridor will help connect the River Walk with the city's Downtown public space and Main Street.



Current view of the 21st Street entrance to the River Walk — not very inviting...

8. **New Downtown/River Walk Loop** — Develop a new walking loop allowing you to walk a portion of the River Walk that would be a manageable short walk looping back through Downtown. Creating more ways to access the River Walk from Downtown will make it feel like its part of the fabric of Downtown and fight the separation that is created by the existing rail lines.



View of possible location for the new Downtown walking loop trail

9. **Interpretive Walks** — Create new urban walking paths that provide themed interpretive information. One could be a “Birding in BV” walk or a Downtown history walk that focuses on and tells the history of Buena Vista.

10. **Glen Maury / Vista Links Trails** — Both Glen Maury Park and the Vista Links are incredible cultural resources to have within the city limits but, although visible from Downtown, there is no easy way to connect with them across the river. Two of the city's most important potential economic drivers are totally disconnected from Downtown. Currently, tens of thousands of visitors come to festivals at Glen Maury Park each year but fewer find their way into Downtown. A pedestrian/golf cart bridge over the river connecting Downtown with Glen Mary and Vista Links would allow the many thousands of visitors that come to golf and enjoy festivals in the park to easily walk or “cart” into Downtown to shop or eat at a Buena Vista restaurant.



Aerial view of Glen Maury Park with Downtown Buena Vista just across the Maury River

4-A NEW VISION FOR DOWNTOWN CONNECTIVITY

CONNECTIVITY — TRAILS



Buena Vista

Downtown Revitalization Strategy

4-A NEW VISION FOR DOWNTOWN CONNECTIVITY

21st Street River Gateway — recommendation

The Sycamore Avenue and 21st Street intersection serves as the visual and physical connection to Buena Vista's riverfront area, the downtown business district, and the Blue Ridge Mountains. The intersection and the edges of 21st Street along with the historic City Hall frame a vista to the riverfront greenway, Glen Maury Park and associated green spaces. This area has the potential to introduce travelers to the downtown area and its amenities through an organized streetscape that incorporates visual cues and wayfinding.

The Western end of 21st Street provides access to the Riverfront Park and trail system which has the potential to include multiple connections through the downtown area, its neighborhoods and ultimately a gateway to Glen Maury park at 20th Street. The linear riverfront park and trail system also could be expanded to provide access to potential water access facilities adjacent to the route 60 Bridge for canoes and kayaks.

The 21st Street Corridor and its Western terminus is proposed to serve as a gateway park with coordinated aesthetics and amenities which enhance the experience of visiting and walking along the riverfront. The design includes improved edge treatments along 21st Street with landscape buffers, street trees, lights, banners, and wayfinding signage. Buffer plantings around the rail property and industrial property will soften the visual impact of these areas while enforcing the vista to the river front park. Curbing or edge treatments along the road will create a clean appearance. A gateway structure over the road, architectural paver terminus and coordinated architectural fencing and gates will create a visually unified and useful space.



Existing River Walk parking lot and signage with the planned Agriculture Center (Mundet Factory) in the background - see enlarged plan for view location

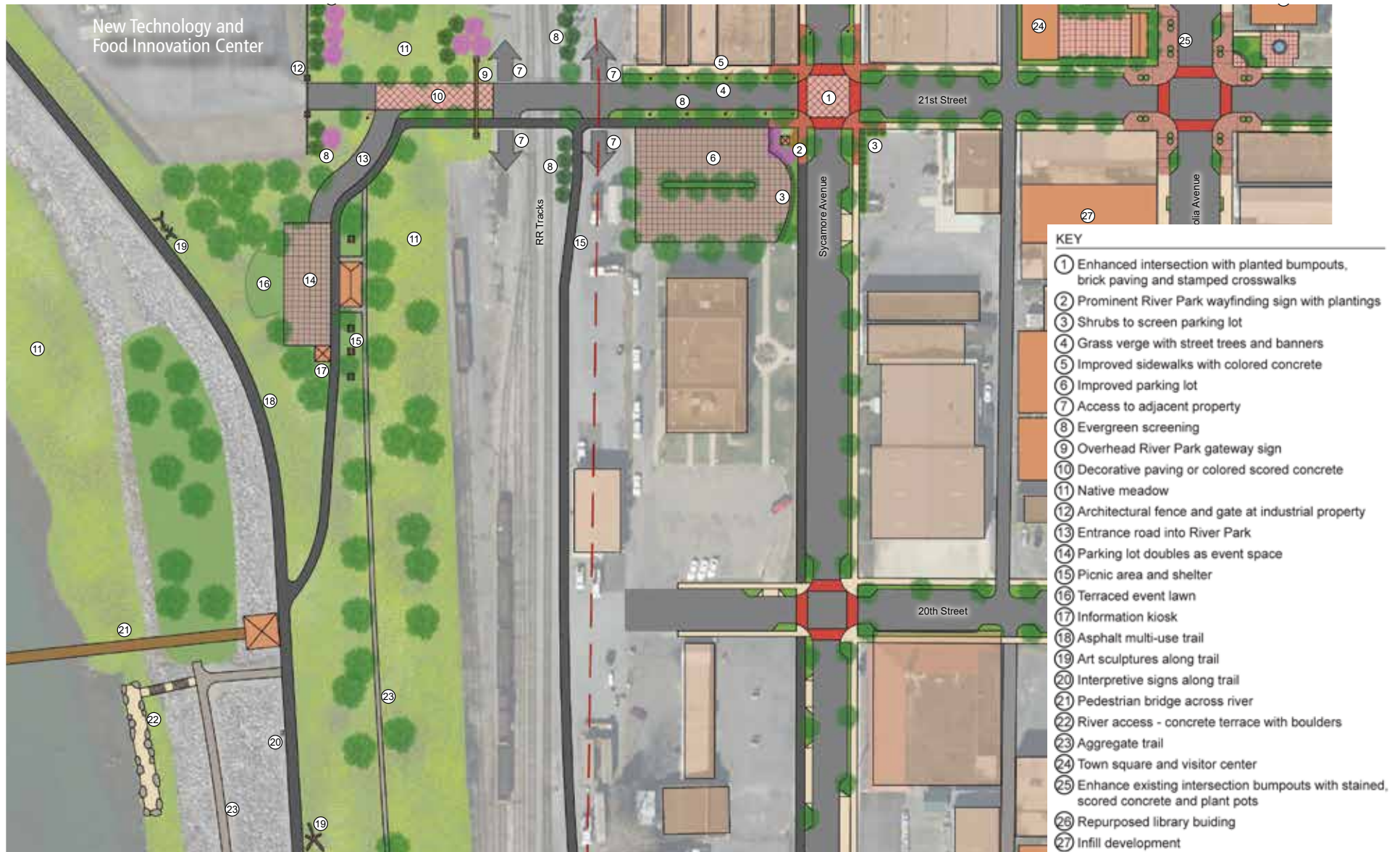


Enlarged 21st Street River Gateway Plan - see full plan on next page

The trail head and park site will be improved to include paved parking, trailhead access points, trail map, pavilion, amenities, site furniture and landscape. The slope of the flood control embankment and adjacent parking lot and pavilion may serve as event space for river park related activities. The parking lot may be paved or marked in a way that doubles as a plaza and Gathering area to serve this function. Access from this point to the trail system may include access to the upper and lower river walks. This expanded trail system will provide access to various short and longer loop walks, providing access to various downtown waypoints, vistas, park spaces and interpretive areas.

4-A NEW VISION FOR DOWNTOWN CONNECTIVITY

21st STREET RIVER GATEWAY PLAN



4-A NEW VISION FOR DOWNTOWN CONNECTIVITY

NEW PEDESTRIAN / GOLF CART BRIDGE OVER THE RIVER TO GLEN MAURY PARK



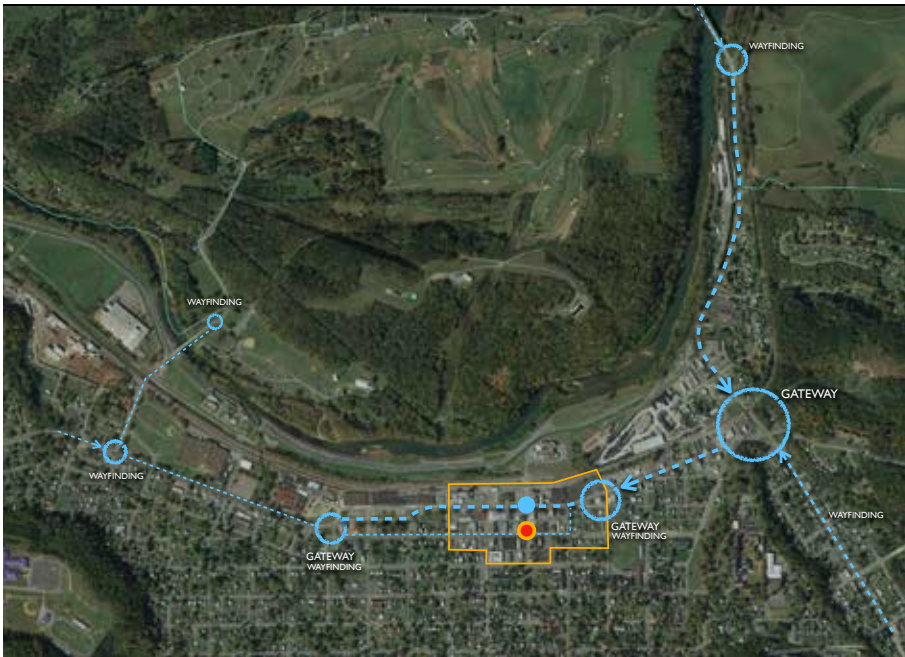
4-A NEW VISION FOR DOWNTOWN

GATEWAYS & WAYFINDING

- * NEW SIGNAGE AND WAYFINDING MASTERPLAN
- * NEW VISITOR KIOSKS
- * NEW CITY ENTRANCE GATEWAY DESIGN

Downtown Buena Vista...where is that?

Currently there is little in the way of clear directional (wayfinding) or identification signage throughout the city and along its entry corridors. Existing directional signage is small and not very readable and is often located where it plays a role in creating visual clutter rather than helping clearly direct you to Buena Vista's amenities. For years, I have driven Route 60 through the northern part of Buena Vista and have never noticed the city's Visitor Center. I had no idea that there was more to Buena Vista than what I saw as I passed through along Route 60 headed west. Nothing I saw encouraged me to turn off of Route 60 and find my way into Buena Vista's lovely historic Downtown. People won't come if they don't know its there.



A New Gateway — Entering Buena Vista

Buena Vista's primary gateway lies at the intersection of Route 60 and Beech Ave. It is approached from the north and from the south along Route 60. In both directions the approach is busy and cluttered and lacks any sense of arrival as you proceed toward the busy intersection with the Hardees, Burger King, gas station, and a myriad of other sign types cluttering up the view. Although you do stop and sit for a moment at the traffic light, the view is less than enticing and does little to encourage you to turn off of 60 in search of Downtown.

On approaching this intersection, amongst the visual clutter, there are a few key elements that can be used to create a new entry sequence enhancing the experience and providing a suitable location for new landscaping and signage to be integrated with a new gateway designed to direct you on into Downtown Buena Vista.

Establishing awareness of Buena Vista's downtown destinations through effective wayfinding will require a coordinated approach. This will involve establishing a visual identity and visual cue points along the Rt. 60 entrance corridor where community identity, branding and wayfinding is integrated into the landscape and infrastructure. The corridor should integrate signage, landscape elements and road edge improvements in a unified design rather than spot improvements of signage and landscape.

The proposed gateway corridor will incorporate key identity zones including introductory gateway identity areas, improved streetscape, and entrance gateways. Establishment of these areas will require a coordinated effort between the City, VDOT, the railroad and property owners. If implemented effectively the improvements will increase safety, visibility and property values while also serving as wayfinding and branding for the City.

The proposed design includes introductory welcome signage at the route 60 bridge, coordinated streetscape buffering, ornamental street lights and banners along the Route 60 corridor, visually impactful landscape massing, bridge improvements and sculpture at the rail over pass and visually coordinated landscape and wayfinding signage at the intersection of Route 60 and Beech Avenue.

4-A NEW VISION FOR DOWNTOWN GATEWAYS AND WAYFINDING

NEW GATEWAY DESIGN — ENTERING BUENA VISTA



4-A NEW VISION FOR DOWNTOWN GATEWAYS AND WAYFINDING

Wayfinding & Signage

As previously discussed in the Economic Restructuring portion of this report, good wayfinding is essential to support the promotion and use of your downtown and its assets. If people can't find your downtown and don't know where things are or what's there, then they will pass you by. Wayfinding is not just about providing directions, but it is a key to making Buena Vista's opportunities and assets visible and tangible to visitors and residents. You have to provide visitors, travelers, and local residents with the information they need to make decisions about what they want and where to go to get it.

A consistent look and feel in a well designed signage system gives the visitor a sense for how "together" you are as a community and how you value promoting your assets and welcoming travelers, business people, and tourists to your community. To support the concept of "WALKABLE BV" there are many opportunities to use interpretive signage in public locations to add to the experience of walking local trails or just strolling around downtown. Signage themes could range from birding and nature subjects along more natural trails, to the city history and important people in more urban settings.



4-A NEW VISION FOR DOWNTOWN GATEWAYS AND WAYFINDING

Wayfinding & Signage — recommendations

1. Develop a Signage Masterplan for a city-wide signage system including wayfinding, place identification, and interpretive signage for vehicles and pedestrians along public roads and trails including Signage Design Guidelines establishing the look and feel, materials, sign types, as budget costs. The Signage Masterplan will lay out plans for a phased implementation identifying associated materials, installation methods and costs for sign types.



Example of a signage system designed for the Randolph Macon campus carrying the college brand

2. Strengthen the Downtown’s visible connection to Glen Maury Park and Vista Links through the use of new wayfinding signage and branding along the connecting route and across Veteran’s Bridge. This will go along way toward making Glen Maury Park feel like it’s more connected to Buena Vista and for visitors coming through town the park will seem closer and the route more familiar if the route is celebrated through marking or branding it all the way out to Veteran’s Bridge



View of approach to Veteran’s Bridge with Glen Maury Park just across the river

3. Replace Visitor Center with new, self-service visitor kiosks. Today, few small localities are operating Visitor Centers that require staff or even volunteers. In the wake of Covid19, travelers will still be wary of personal interactions where they could get similar information without going inside. Instead of the staffed Visitor Center on Route 60, which as previously noted, is not a visually effective solution, we recommend that two new visitor kiosks should be developed strategically located (as determined in the development of the signage masterplan) where visitors will see them and can easily stop and get out to gather information for their visit. These may be designed as roofed gazebo-like structures as they are in some locations or a simpler version might feel more like a well designed trailhead that provides a location for local maps and information and can guide visitors to downtown businesses where they can get additional information about the area.



Warm Springs visitor kiosk, Bath, County, Virginia



Interior view of the kiosk showing map, interpretive panels and brochures

4-A NEW VISION FOR DOWNTOWN

MAIN STREET INITIATIVE

- * BECOME A VIRGINIA MAIN STREET COMMUNITY
- * HIRE A MAIN STREET MANAGER
- * EXPAND HISTORIC DISTRICTS AND INCENTIVES
- * TARGET EMPTY AND BLIGHTED BUILDINGS
- * PROMOTE LOCAL INVESTMENT
- * PROMOTE SCALABLE, CREATIVE BUSINESSES
- * INCREMENTAL DEVELOPMENT
- * FUND CONDITIONS SURVEYS AND DEVELOP STABILIZATION BUDGETS

After meeting with the community and chatting with interested citizens and business owners, it became clear that most of the folks we met felt that Magnolia Avenue is the “Main Street” of Buena Vista. They lament its decline and all say they would get involved if they could do something to help bring life back to Downtown.

Magnolia Street has traditionally been the primary commercial street in the downtown lined with a familiar array of turn of the century and mid-century shops and storefronts. Over the last half century residents have watched as businesses closed and many buildings became empty or underutilized. In our community surveys residents and business owners overwhelmingly used the words “dead” and “empty” to describe their Downtown. Although there are a few long standing businesses still sticking it out in Downtown, these businesses are struggling to remain open and the support they should be getting from being part of a downtown business community is just not there.



View down Magnolia Avenue (Buena Vista's Main Street) with empty buildings on the right.

The Case for Main Street

Empty and undervalued city downtowns, such as Buena Vista's become particularly susceptible to a set of particular problems that are difficult to resolve through a hands-off or laissez faire approach to economic development.

- » Businesses are isolated and have no branding/marketing support from the greater downtown community. Strategies for “hanging-on” become more important than for growth.
- » Local support only goes so far in today's economy where brick and mortar businesses are competing with online sales for everyday and specialty items.
- » The business revenue a healthy downtown brings in to the community dries up creating budget shortfalls for the City that defer or prevent necessary maintenance and improvements to its aging Downtown infrastructure. A potential business owner thinking of opening a new business can see this trend and sees little potential for support in growing their business in a downtown location.
- » Empty buildings deteriorate and eventually fall or are demolished leaving a powerful and visible symbol of mismanagement and business closure to visitors, potential business owners and local residents.
- » Empty and abandoned buildings fall in value until the market is so depressed that undercapitalized or overambitious developers see “opportunity” and make investments that they may not, ultimately, see through or fully capitalize. These investors are often out-of-town developers who do not have a personal stake in the community but are rather looking to catch an investment just before a community is on the upswing. These projects often create short-term raised expectations within the community. But when they stall or fail they are a source of major disappointment with speculators often deciding to abandon their investments or just sit on valuable building assets preventing their acquisition and development by more responsible or better planned local entrepreneurs.

A point is often reached where a well planned, individual project or new business still withers after opening since there is little active support to insure its success, or at least its survival, over the first three or so years of its operation. Existing and new business owners choosing to take their chances in this environment are often dependent on how far their personal funds will take them before they find themselves focusing on just trying to stay afloat rather than planning for future growth.

Becoming a Virginia Main Street Community

Buena Vista is currently a Virginia Main Street Affiliate but is not a full fledged Main Street Community. As an affiliate, technical support from Main Street's managing organization the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) is limited. (see additional information on the Main Street Program in the "Building Back Better" portion of this report)

The most important thing the Main Street program brings to a Main Street City is the creation of a full time Main Street Manager position. It takes time for an affiliate city to become a full Main Street City but in the mean time, Buena Vista can begin to create this position through one of its downtown organizations such as Action BV. The good folks at DHCD can help the city and Action BV create this new position and its job description so that it meets the requirements of a full fledged Main Street City and will be in place and working when full Main Street status is achieved.

The Main Street manger's role includes: economic development and business recruiting, business marketing, cultural and event programming, real estate and development and planning, Downtown advocacy and policy. In a small town or city, the Main Street Manager needs to have a broad range of personal and professional skills and expertise since supportive resources are often lacking. Part of their role can be to help bring local resources to the table in support of the City's vision for Downtown. With the community offering to help with revitalization efforts, residents and business owners just need some organization and management to guide and focus their volunteering efforts. This may be where a Main Street Manager could begin to assist the City most.

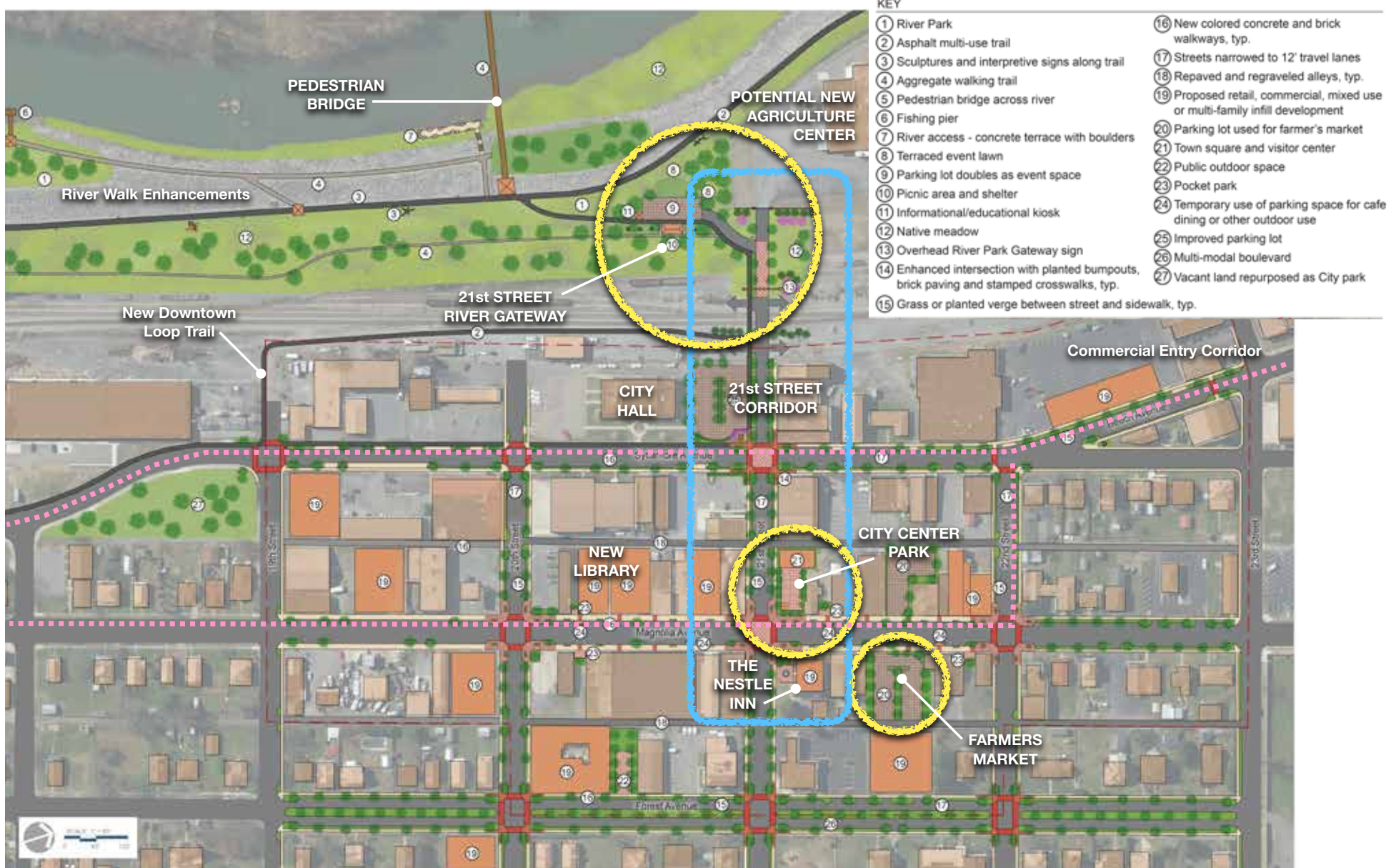
Addressing Empty and Blighted Buildings

The first impression you get as you drive around in Buena Vista is "What a nice little Downtown." Next you notice how many prominently located buildings seem to be empty. And finally, you get a sense for how many vacant lots there are and just how much unused open space there seems to be throughout Downtown. No one wants to lose another building. But just waiting and hoping that some investor comes along and sees how much they can get for their money is not the best way to revitalize your Downtown. You don't want people to think these buildings are cheap, you want people to think they are valuable and will be a great place to locate their business. This is where the Main Street Manager is critical in helping develop a strategy for marketing and promoting Downtown and actively pursuing and supporting businesses or new uses for each building or property. This process requires continuity, consistency, and a good bit of dogged determination on the part of the Main Street Manager, working in partnership with the City and other local and regional organizations that can bring partnering resources to the table and help identify buyers or developers for each property.

- » Develop Main Street Buena Vista logo and signage.
- » Keep the City focused on streetscape improvements along Magnolia as a priority
- » Develop interpretive signage for Downtown to help everyone identify and understand the importance of Buena Vista's historic buildings
- » Take advantage of the wide streets to create pop-up parks and fun interventions that will make the city feel more alive and invite participation from residents and visitors.
- » Encourage quality business signage working with the mid-century vibe.
- » Assess signage and sidewalk ordinances to make it easy for businesses to safely use the sidewalks for signage, merchandise or tables and chairs
- » Work with property owners to create temporary seating areas or pocket parks at empty lots - these can be used as activity centers and expand the functionality of the street during festivals and events
- » See the wide streets as public space and create connections to other key public space opportunities - City Center Park, 21st Street Gateway, the River Walk, etc.
- » Develop a series of small events around downtown and focused on the Magnolia Ave corridor featuring local music and food. Special focus on family events that would also appeal to visitors and event goers as a draw into Downtown.
- » Create an ongoing program to work with shop owners to develop creative shop window displays - create a matching grant for this run through the Main Street program
- » Promote a more informal and fun character in Downtown (quirky and artsy) to contrast with how Lexington is seen as a destination - Promote Buena Vista's own unique character.
- » Promote work/live space opportunities for artisans/artists
- » Move Library to new location and develop Old City Hall into a B&B called The Nestle Inn.
- » Focus on bringing in more artisans.
- » Work with businesses that are still struggling in a post Covid19 economy with new ideas for how to sell both in-store and online as well as restructuring for take-out.
- » Include a focus on commercial entry corridor with key historic commercial buildings
- » Connect new housing locations with local walks and trails
- » Support a real bootstrap campaign of local people just doing things themselves rather than sitting around waiting for someone to give them some money.
- » Tell the City's story and connect with history: horses, Box Car Cafe, BV Furnace, Harts Bottom, etc.

4-A NEW VISION FOR DOWNTOWN MAIN STREET INITIATIVE

INFILL DEVELOPMENT AND STREETScape IMPROVEMENTS



4-A NEW VISION FOR DOWNTOWN MAIN STREET INITIATIVE

Historic Preservation

Historic Preservation is a key ingredient in Buena Vista's future. The City's most recent Comprehensive Plan speaks to its importance this way:

Goal 1: Historic Resources

The City of Buena Vista will be a community that supports the preservation and protection of historic resources. Historic resources are vital assets that support economic development, community revitalization, education and civic pride, while contributing to the character of the community.

To achieve this goal, the following critical success factors must be accomplished:

- » Preserve older and historic structures, landscapes and features in order to provide a sense of identity.
- » Increase awareness of neighborhood and block landmarks that create community character and provide linkages to the past.
- » Increase awareness of the social and economic value of historic preservation.

The Main Street Manager and the technical resources available to the City through the Main Street Program will play a key role in supporting the City's position on the importance of Historic Preservation as a guiding principal in the redevelopment of Downtown buildings and properties. The Main Street Manager can work with businesses and property owners to assist with their understanding of local zoning regulations, building codes and enforcement and the financial incentives available to owners of historic structures looking to rehabilitate their buildings.

Since the Buena Vista Downtown Historic District is fully contained within the Downtown Business District, the Main Street Manager would be able to work with the City's Planning Department on many shared fronts including:

- » Establishing and promoting a District brand and identity
- » Working with property and business owners to implement the District boundary extension
- » Develop incentive packages for business and property owners helping them understand how to use all available incentives, particularly lesser known incentives like the Tourism Zone



View of Buena Vista's original late 19th century City Hall



Typical early 20th century commercial buildings

4-A NEW VISION FOR DOWNTOWN

PUBLIC SPACE

- * NEW CITY CENTER PARK
- * FARMERS AND MAKERS MARKET
- * THE RIVER WALK
- * GLEN MAURY PARK
- * VISTA LINKS
- * STREETScape IMPROVEMENTS

The quality of a city's public space often forms the strongest impression that a visitor will take away with them.

The quality of a city's public space plays an important part of how its citizens see their city and what it stands for.

One of the most important and transformative things you can do to breathe new life back into Downtown is to improve existing, and develop new public space that can be shared by everyone and programmed for a wide variety of public functions.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOOD PUBLIC SPACES:

1. Keep it simple and adaptable
2. Make it accessible for everyone
3. Highlight the City's character
4. Plan for people, not cars
5. Engage all of your senses
6. Parks are more important than you think
7. Trust the users to tell you what works
8. Quality materials matter
9. Find ways to engage the community
10. Work on great public spaces is ongoing



View of the small public park in front of the current Library (the historic City Hall)

4-A NEW VISION FOR DOWNTOWN PUBLIC SPACE

PUBLIC SPACE & KEY PROJECT FOCUS AREAS



4-A NEW VISION FOR DOWNTOWN PUBLIC SPACE

New City Center Park — recommendations

Although Buena Vista is not lacking in green space there is no central public space that helps define its Downtown or its city center. The empty lot on the northwest corner of 21st Street and Magnolia Avenue should be considered as the location of a new City Center Park. This site is in the heart of Downtown, across from Buena Vista's original City Hall, its most historic building, and positioned along the 21st Street Corridor as part of the plan for connecting the River Walk to downtown. The New City Center Park can be used as the central organizing space along Magnolia for Downtown festivals and a wide range of community gathering functions. On a quiet day it might just be the place to grab a calzone at the Original Italian Restaurant and eat a relaxed lunch before heading back to your office, shop, or City Hall just a half a block away.

The park should be designed simply as a flexible gathering space with structures kept to a minimum and landscaping that is not intrusive or high maintenance. Seating and shade are important in Virginia. One of the recommended visitor kiosks should be located here close to the corner where it will be easily spotted by visitors as they travel into town along Magnolia Avenue. City Center Park might also be the location of an important piece of public art — you could even consider moving the Coffee Pot building there as an iconic building/sculpture that would draw people there for coffee and leave visitors definitely remembering Downtown Buena Vista.



View of existing vacant lot at the corner of Magnolia Ave. and 21st Street



Proposed City Center Park



4-A NEW VISION FOR DOWNTOWN PUBLIC SPACE

New City Center Park — The Village Green and Visitor Kiosk



4-A NEW VISION FOR DOWNTOWN PUBLIC SPACE

New City Center Park — How about Getting your Coffee from the Coffee Pot...?



Buena Vista

Downtown Revitalization Strategy

4-A NEW VISION FOR DOWNTOWN
PUBLIC SPACE

New City Center Park — Summer Movies in the Park - “The Reel Buena Vista”



Buena Vista

Downtown Revitalization Strategy

4-A NEW VISION FOR DOWNTOWN PUBLIC SPACE

Farmer's Market — recommendations

Nothing feels more local than a Farmer's Market, even if it starts out small. Healthy food choices are very limited in town and a small market, even if it starts out more like a "farm stand" instead of a full blown market, it can begin to provide a local option for both staples and specialty items as vendor participation in the market grows. Many markets provide a venue for live local acoustic music and local restaurants can test out new foods and take-out options. Today, with the impact of Covid19 affecting most businesses, many farmer's markets have created an online ordering option that allows people to place orders and pay ahead of time and then just pick them up when the market is open. With Lexington's market scheduled mid-week, the weekend market slot may be available for Buena Vista and the market can be promoted as part of a Saturday visit to Buena Vista.

Farmer's Markets are always a combination of planning and organic growth so everyone must be committed to the idea for the long haul. The market can also be used as a venue where local entrepreneurs or pop-up vendors can test out their products and get a bit of visibility before considering a move into a brick and mortar location.

- » Utilizing grants and support from the USDA the City should explore ideas for how to help subsidize vendors to get the market going and sustain it for its first couple of years while its management and operations can be worked out.
- » Consider the construction of a modest Market shelter to provide a place to centralize services and utilities while creating an opportunity for visibility and promotion along Magnolia Avenue
- » Program events and activities during every Market Day
- » Promote "Market Day" as a special time to come Downtown with the family
- » Partner with Coiner's Store and the ice cream shop to be a part of Market Day
- » Remove the old beat-up community bulletin board and replace with a new one.
- » Insure that the lot can still be used on off days for parking or special events - Market pavilion provides sheltered parking when not in use for the Market



View of the City parking lot that used to be used for a Farmer's Market

4-A NEW VISION FOR DOWNTOWN PUBLIC SPACE

River Walk — recommendations

Buena Vista's River Walk runs along the top of the Corps of Engineers flood wall built to protect Downtown from the Maury River's after several historic floods in the last few decades. Despite the fact that the flood wall visually and somewhat physically separates the River from Downtown, the almost 3 mile River Walk is a great asset to have just a block from Downtown and accessed at the end of 21st Street.

- » Make it part of the Virginia DWR (Department of Wildlife Resources) regional birding trail
- » Install seating/interpretive information stations
- » Place trash receptacles and dog waste stations at strategic locations
- » Create a Friends of the River Walk group to help with maintenance and upkeep of seating areas — look for business sponsorship to support purchases and upkeep
- » Integrate River Walk map and signage with new City-wide signage system
- » Design new Downtown loop and future pedestrian bridge connector across the River to Glen Maury Park
- » Interpret the historic floods and the flood wall at the holding pond location



View of Downtown Buena Vista and the Blue Ridge beyond — from the City's Vista Links golf course

Glen Maury Park — recommendations

Glen Maury Park is one of the largest revenue generators in the City but the programming and events held there, that bring tens of thousands of people to Buena Vista, have little impact on Downtown. People come and go, camp and fish, and never find their way into Downtown. It's not easy to find Downtown from the Park and there is little information about Downtown when you're there. Here are a few suggestions that may help connect Downtown with the Park and increase the time people stay in the area while bringing revenue to Downtown businesses when thousands of people are at a festival in the Park.

- » Following previous recommendations, improved signage and wayfinding would help people know how to get to Downtown and what they can do there
- » Integrate festival programming with programming for activities and events Downtown - focus on things that would expand the experience of someone coming for a day or a weekend.
- » Create a stronger connection to the River Walk and bring people into Downtown that way. Ultimately the construction of a new pedestrian/golf cart bridge from the northern portion of the park into the heart of Downtown would be the biggest step toward linking the Park and the Downtown economically.

Vista Links — recommendations

Vista Links, the City's public golf course, sits on the bluffs overlooking Glen Maury Park, the Maury River and all of Buena Vista. The views are absolutely stunning and you'd be hard pressed to find another public course located in such a beautiful setting. Unfortunately, Vista Links, as a public course is a heavy draw on the City budget. The annual loss from maintenance and operations of the course would fund considerable Downtown improvements and infrastructure upgrades. Although the politics of golf courses tend to separate people into groups "for" and "against" spending this money, it would be much better, with such a wonderful resource close at hand, if the City could find a creative way to increase income from such a unique and beautiful course. Becoming a destination BV experience, even when many courses are shutting down and the popularity of golf seems to be diminishing.

- » For this reason, we recommend that the City hire an economic development consultant to study the current condition and potential for The Vista Links and provide the City with recommendations for the best and highest use of the site and all of its amenities with an eye towards how to make the course profitable and how to broaden the use of this beautiful site to best benefit the citizens of Buena Vista. A profitable golf course would free up hundreds of thousands of dollars that could be spent on other City improvements.

4-A NEW VISION FOR DOWNTOWN PUBLIC SPACE

Streetscape Improvements — recommendations

The public space created by Buena Vista's wide streets and sidewalks can be enhanced through a series of pedestrian and vehicular improvements to sidewalks and surfaces, particularly at key intersections that define Downtown. Work can begin by continuing to install brick sidewalk entry areas around Downtown and cleaning up sidewalk edges and green strips, defining key intersections with new crosswalks and repainting parking space and street lines throughout Downtown.

* Note: See Preliminary Engineering Report for recommended upgrades and deferred maintenance issues throughout Downtown.



Seating and planting areas would help here



Striping need refreshing throughout downtown



Opportunities for recessed planting and seating areas



Improve 21st Street River Gateway approach



Restore historic signs and canopies



Promote upkeep of visible alley areas

- » Repainting and restriping streets and parking areas
- » Install banner brackets along Magnolia and install seasonal banners. On other downtown streets (Sycamore, Forest, etc.), install brackets for veterans banner program
- » Develop a plan for adding seating along Magnolia and 21st Street
- » Staining concrete at bump-outs for better vehicular visibility to prevent cutting corners
- » Forest Avenue improvements — coordinated with the College's new Entrepreneurial Center
- » Continue budgeting for sidewalk trees using varieties that will produce shade and will not impede pedestrian circulation
- » Add streetscape trees at project focus areas
- » Restore old signs and work with business owners to develop new, creative signs that will enliven the street
- » Add planting areas at corner bumpouts to reduce the amount of hardscape and soften the feel for pedestrians
- » Assess existing decorative streetscape trees for potential size and shape. Move decorative trees that will not grow to sufficient height and shape for a street tree to the new planted area at the 21st Street River Gateway area
- » Continue adding brick sidewalk sections at entrances throughout Downtown
- » New crosswalks and surfacing at key intersections
- » All Access Trail upgrade for River Walk sections
- » New planted areas — sidewalk plantings and green spaces to use native meadow plantings
- » Consider the installation of bioswales or stormwater planters at new street planting areas
- » Review the City's zoning regulations and make modifications to permit more access and business use of sidewalk areas
- » Coordinate with Main Street Manager and business owners to plan and construct parklets in existing parking spaces — use local resources for all projects where possible

4-A NEW VISION FOR DOWNTOWN PUBLIC SPACE

DOWNTOWN STREETScape PLAN IMPROVEMENTS



Buena Vista

Downtown Revitalization Strategy

4-A NEW VISION FOR DOWNTOWN BEAUTIFICATION & PLACEMAKING

- * PAINTING AND MURALS
- * SPONSORED LANDSCAPING - DEMONSTRATION GARDENS
- * PARKLETS AND STREET INSTALLATIONS
- * NEIGHBORS HELPING NEIGHBORS

You can start immediately to improve the look and feel of the Downtown while you begin to engage residents and business owners, personally, in the process. Although many of the recommendations presented in this report will require planning, time, and money, you can start to tackle beautification projects, right away, using volunteers and donated supplies. The scale of these projects can vary from just keeping a hedge trimmed or cleaning up debris in a vacant lot to the painting of a wall that helps brighten up a blighted or lackluster property. Most importantly, you can start talking to each other about these quick-start initiatives and begin building an ongoing community conversation about the look of Downtown and how everyone can pitch in to help.

Your beautification projects will bring people together for hands-on work as a community and as neighbors on projects that have immediate results. Everyone will feel the power of transformation through small projects that, over time, help to improve the whole Downtown and set an example for responsible stewardship and action for current and future residents, business owners and all who pass through, shop, eat, or just choose to stroll along Magnolia Avenue.

Often, these quick turn-around projects get organized informally and just “happen.” But there are a few recommendations that may help turn what could be seen as isolated improvements into a larger scale initiative for the Downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods.



There's a lot that volunteers can do

Beautification — A Few Principals to Follow

Strengthen the community - Use community meetings to let people know what everyone's thinking. Share ideas. Eat ice cream. Decide to do something together.

Develop a strategy - Just pick a couple initial projects and get started. Begin by keeping it simple and identifying easily achievable goals while you start to think about the bigger picture, prioritizing and planning for the projects that will be the most impactful.

Invite participation - Create a communications tool that will allow as many people as possible to keep up with what's going on and to know how they can volunteer or help with each effort. ie; Facebook, Instagram, newsletters, email blasts, etc. They're free. Use them all.

Continue using community meetings - Identify priority projects and the resources and people power needed. Share information quickly and continue to invite people to participate.

Invite other local stakeholders to the table to help - Reach out to local artists, community leaders, and civic organizations and put them to work.

Don't over organize - Downtown might need its own beautification committee, but don't over organize these small, quick projects. Let them work as catalysts for building interest, support and visibility throughout the community then when you need to organize for something more challenging, you've already got plenty of engaged people to call on.

Schedule projects - Make sure everyone has something to do. Everyone is busy so being able to plan around a project day and feel like they can contribute is important to volunteers.

Talk to the neighbors - Let them know what's happening. No one likes to be left in the dark and it's best to know how the neighbors feel about the work to so that any negative impacts can be mitigated.

And let's not forget to feed people! - A bit of food and refreshments just makes everyone happy and gives them a chance to take a break and get to know each other through their shared experience. A little thank you for a lot of hard work helps keep people volunteering for more and feeling like their work is valued.

4-A NEW VISION FOR DOWNTOWN BEAUTIFICATION & PLACEMAKING

What is Placemaking?

The concept of placemaking is built on honoring and respecting the distinct identity of place. When the values of place are embedded in the design and development philosophy of new projects, they contribute to unique identity, rather than change it. Placemaking takes its inspiration from what exists: context, history, people and culture. It includes architecture and urban design, public art and public space, and people. It is development that leverages the essential qualities of a place to amplify and strengthen them. It is development that not only aspires to achieve performance outcomes economically, environmentally and socially, but more importantly seeks to capture and represent the meaning of place. Placemaking elevates the importance of citizens because they are the place experts of their community. No one understands the experience of place better than the citizens who contribute to it every day – the people who give a community narrative life and meaning.



Private parklet created at the rear of a Downtown building 1/2 block from 21st Street

Buena Vista can use placemaking to leverage the power of arts, culture and creativity to serve the community's interest while driving a broader agenda for change, growth and transformation. By focusing on the City's existing resources, the community can institute successful placemaking initiatives to build better public realms with clear identities (physical, cultural, and social). Buena Vista is blessed with a number of community assets, including its Downtown District with its intact historic architecture, the River Walk along the Maury river front; proximity to the Blue Ridge Parkway and the Appalachian Trail; large festivals at Glen Maury Park; and Vista Links, one of the most beautiful golfing locations in Virginia. These assets can be further highlighted and expanded upon through simple design initiatives such as public art, programming/markets, pop-up parks, and gateway activations. These measures can be quick, cost-effective improvements that bring immediate life to space and community. Because these activations can be low-cost and have a light touch on existing conditions, they are opportunities to test ideas and create a path for permanent future development.

What you can do?...Start Tomorrow!

Buena Vista should organize a placemaking initiative immediately. A leadership committee can be organized from the Action BV group, or Downtown business owners and residents, or the creative community. Regardless of how it is led or organized, it should seek to engage the entire community in the effort. Everything you do should reinforce your community identity, your values and your aspirations for the future of Downtown Buena Vista. Every action should serve as an articulation of identity and vision. There are dozens of people-friendly interventions that Buena Vista can engage in to reinforce its self-expression and promote the animation of its vision for the future.

Engage in "tactical urbanism"

Create small-scale interventions that use inexpensive materials and volunteers to build opportunities for public gathering and a stronger, people-friendly public realm. For examples, many communities are organizing chair bombing events, which involve using donated warehouse pallets to build chairs and then program a public area as a people-friendly gathering space. These kinds of creative ideas are easily scalable. In Christchurch, New Zealand, volunteers came together to build the "Pallet Pavilion" as a public gathering and event space following an earthquake event that left many properties vacant and in need of activation. In Houston's Fifth Ward, local artists gathered lumber from housing demolitions and built the "Fifth Ward Community Jam" amphitheater which quickly became the main civic space in the neighborhood and is programmed for community events throughout the year. Get creative and harness the talents of residents to create community events and spaces that reflect the character of Buena Vista.



Chair Bombing event



Pallet Pavilion

Placemaking content provided by Erin Simmons and the AIAs Communities by Design Program.

4-A NEW VISION FOR DOWNTOWN BEAUTIFICATION & PLACEMAKING

Leveraging Public Art for Placemaking

Public art has played an important role in placemaking initiatives across the country. Public art offers an opportunity to engage the community in continuing self-expression about its collective vision for the future. Participatory art projects can help engage the community by offering an opportunity for the community to put its unique stamp on Downtown culturally as well as the chance to articulate aspirations for the future. For example, one neighborhood in Seattle held a planning process to envision what they would like to see for a vacant block. They had an artist produce a large scale mural of the envisioned uses for the block, and it created so much interest that an investor developed the block accordingly as a result. In the Fremont neighborhood of Seattle, a community planning process reimagined a derelict area under a bridge with a giant Troll. The troll has now become the iconic image for the neighborhood, is the central meeting location for civic life, and draws visitors from around the world. The derelict space has now become a hub and an economic asset.



The Giant Troll

Mural and screen painting



Transforming Your Streets

Placemaking ideas can also extend into strengthening the public realm, particularly streets. For instance, in Portland, Oregon neighbors organized to paint the streets as a traffic calming measure. In Tampa, locals organized street festivals to reclaim the public realm for people and test new ideas regarding street design. Through the Build a Better Block initiative, communities all over the world have engaged in community-driven pop-up street design interventions to reclaim public space and create a more human-friendly neighborhood context. Efforts in this vein can also complement organizing efforts for resident activities like critical mass bike rides or night rides that are often organized to demonstrate demand for bike facilities or experience biking at untraditional times.



Street painting and parklet playgrounds



Placemaking content provided by Erin Simmons and the AIAs Communities by Design Program.

4-A NEW VISION FOR DOWNTOWN BEAUTIFICATION & PLACEMAKING

Painting and Murals — recommendations

One of the quickest and easiest ways to make immediate improvements to properties that look and feel a bit run-down is by painting. Start with the simple painting of walls and entries that face the street or painting fences, railings, or signs at building entries or along the sidewalks. Sometimes a quick touch up is all that is needed to brighten up a building or freshen up a rusty metal fence, but sometimes it takes a little more.

As you drive through Downtown you notice an abundance of very visible blank building walls often facing the street or at corners and open side lots. Think of these walls as blank canvases ready for decoration and murals. Murals can be extensive pieces of local art or can be simply the addition of decorative pattern or color band on the wall. Formalizing a local mural program throughout Downtown would begin to activate some of these blank walls while building excitement in the community as they see Downtown begin to transform and lift itself up. Businesses can participate by offering up their blank walls or working with artists to create murals that showcase aspects of the business's role in Buena Vista's history or how they want to be seen as a part of Buena Vista's future.



Examples of how painting and art projects can transform drab unused walls and spaces



Side wall next to the new City Center Park



Side wall facing the intersection



Some back walls are very visible and would benefit from beautification



Both side walls could be painted with a pocket park in between

- » Formalize a Downtown mural program for blank walls and businesses that would like to participate and encourage local artists to get involved
- » Focus on alleys and side walls for painting or creative installations
- » Freshen up aging signage
- » Paint fences, crosswalks, railings, sign posts, etc.
- » Encourage businesses and property owners to consider large, blank painted walls for murals

4-A NEW VISION FOR DOWNTOWN BEAUTIFICATION & PLACEMAKING

Landscaping/Demonstration Gardens — recommendations

Buena Vista has recently begun to improve the landscaping throughout portions of Downtown with the installation of new street trees and a few business owners manage small flower garden areas at their buildings, but much more can be done using landscaping, fencing and edge treatments, and demonstration gardens to improve Downtown streets. These improvements will soften the feel of Downtown and create a more inviting atmosphere, encouraging people to stay longer and spend more time on-foot than in their cars.

One of the primary characteristics of small city downtowns is a mix of residential, professional, retail, and industrial uses ranging from gas stations and retail stores to single family houses, apartments and professional offices. This mix, along with a scattering of light industrial businesses can mean that, even when some owners are responsibly managing their properties, more attention could be paid to screening some of the necessary, but often unsightly, areas around properties such as loading and trash collection areas, auto repair lots, and mechanical equipment.

Fences can be used both as an opaque screen (as with a loading dock at a grocery store) or as a framework for creating a green wall. In other locations, hedges and plantings can be used to screen mechanical equipment or unsightly parking areas and, even when these areas can't be totally screened out-of-sight, introducing landscaping and planting areas can soften their impact on the streetscape.

Where there are abandoned properties suffering from a lack of maintenance, the City could use a temporary fencing program to help screen unsightly lots from view. Property owners who do not wish to clean up their lots would have to pay for the installation of the fencing, creating an incentive for owners to get responsible and clean up their site before the fencing is installed. A temporary fencing program can be used along with a neighborhood painting/mural program to help liven things up and bring attention to properties that need improvement.



Successful screening, like at a loading dock or electrical transformer location (left, center) help reduce the visual impact of these service areas bringing a pleasant and orderly appearance to the street. Fences and screening can also be used to promote art and mural projects (right)

- » Get local businesses and organizations involved with planting and landscaping throughout Downtown — use signage for sponsorships
- » Develop a strategy and work with property owners to use demonstration gardens to teach about native plants, zeroscaping, and permaculture techniques
- » Assess existing streetscape trees to determine if they will actually grow to a shape that will not interfere with pedestrians on the sidewalks. What's really needed Downtown is shade. Consider the need for shade as well as the ornamental purpose of any new street trees. Consider the overall effect along each block and street.
- » At vacant or abandoned lots, install pocket gardens within the first six feet back from the sidewalk. Install temporary fencing to the rear to screen empty lots from the pedestrian sidewalk areas. Screen mechanical equipment and trash areas where possible.



Small planting area along Magnolia Avenue



Location where a fence and planting bed would improve the experience of walking down the sidewalk



New planting at corner bumpouts can help soften the feel and add color to expansive areas of concrete



Buena Vista has an abundance of parking spaces that could be converted into planting areas or rain gardens

4-A NEW VISION FOR DOWNTOWN BEAUTIFICATION & PLACEMAKING

Parklets and Street Installations — recommendations

Buena Vista’s wide streets and abundant parking create a great situation for developing small parklets or temporary park areas built within the space of your street parking spaces. Parklets expand the public sidewalk and allow for fun and enjoyable gathering, sitting, reading, and eating areas that are fully accessible to pedestrians. They can also be used to create visual interest and to get people excited when they see activity along the street. Today, businesses can use this approach in response to COVID19 concerns to add outdoor seating or tables and chairs for their restaurants and shops. These constructions are not permanent and can move up and down the street or be adopted by a business owner that sees their long term benefits. They are often built by the business owners and volunteers and can range from highly-designed street furniture pieces to simple installs with astroturf, fencing and simple tables and chairs.

- » Develop an approach for working with businesses to build two or three new parklets along Magnolia. Recommended locations would be in front of the new Librarium, near the Farmer’s Market or mid-block where shoppers can pause or sit with a cup of coffee.
- » Look at opportunities to use the area of a parking space, or the first 10’ of an empty lot, to create small pocket parks with seating and landscaping. These areas can also be used during festivals and parades to provide small gathering areas or vendor areas along the street.
- » Engage local artists and artisans in the design and fabrication of parklets and street furniture you want to place around Downtown. People like to feel the casual artsy vibe these create as they encourage folks to sit a spell.
- » Integrate artful bike racks in Downtown and plan to study how the Downtown could become more bicycle friendly.

Examples



A simple benched parklet



Astroturf platform, a board and a couple of supports create this parklet



Maybe a gracious reading area in front of the new Librarium



Sometimes just a simple platform, railing and cafe tables and chairs are all you need



Parklets can be engaging and fun for everyone



Parklets can be tiny but still effective



Extra effort can create more substantial parklets



Parklets can be exhibits or learning environments

4-A NEW VISION FOR DOWNTOWN BEAUTIFICATION & PLACEMAKING

Neighbors Helping Neighbors

Beautification projects build community and strengthen bonds between neighbors and businesses. In such a mixed-use areas with a combination of new and long-term players it's important to create strong bonds between businesses and neighborhood residents so they can all work together to maintain a balanced diversity of business and industry focused on the needs of local residents and the City as a whole. To facilitate neighbor-helping-neighbor projects the City could support partnerships with local businesses. For example they could help create a City Paint Fund — a partnership with local hardware stores, in the neighborhood, to provide paint for beautification projects that are using all volunteer labor. This approach can be used to provide hardware and home improvement materials, food for workers, branded T-shirts and hats for project teams, or plants for landscaping projects. These programs not only build social bonds between neighbors and business owners, they help to activate local businesses by calling on them to invest and play an active role in the improvement of their neighborhood.



Choose a location, get permission, tell them when to show up, bring paint, work together, feed them, watch them become friends, and entice them with the promise of the next project!

5

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS



The Take Away

5-MAKING IT HAPPEN SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Goals Summary

Throughout this report each section has contained a series of recommendations focused on achieving a simple set of goals for the redevelopment of Buena Vista's Downtown. Through this study and analysis it is clear that the issues we have tried to address, although focused primarily on the Downtown Business District, are key issues affecting the entire Buena Vista community and its role in the region.

The project matrix, found on the following pages, helps establish the priority level of each project and gives projected budget costs for most items. Due to the limited scope and extent of this study, these costs are presented for planning purposes and actual project costs may vary once each project's specific parameters are established.

Project Goals

- + To spur economic growth and pride of place by making Buena Vista's assets and opportunities visible and accessible to visitors and locals.
- + To attract new business owners to locate downtown
- + To renovate blighted and unoccupied buildings
- + To turn around public opinion and negative sentiment about Buena Vista through the revitalization of Downtown
- + To improve the quality of Buena Vista's public space
- + To improve and envision the River Walk as a primary destination for local and regional visitors
- + To activate the Buena Vista community to be its own best advocate for progress



5-MAKING IT HAPPEN
SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

PROJECT MATRIX

ACTION	PRIORITY			BRIEF	PARTNERS	COST
	1	2	3			
MARKETING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT						
Establish EDA microenterprise program		✓		Microenterprise loans from \$1,000 to \$5,000 and establish loan committee	City, EDA, Action BV	\$20,000
Prioritize Community Reinvestment Act		✓		Contact all bank CRA reps with copy of this plan	City, Action BV	\$0
Establish incentives for commercial renters	✓			\$5,000 leasehold improvement matching grant	City, Action BV	\$35,000
Create annual business plan competition		✓		Plan mirrors the Gauntlet	City, Action BV	\$10,000
Business retention program established	✓			Incentive marketing packages distributed to existing businesses	City, Action BV	\$0
Marketing for entrepreneurs	✓			Market to recent college graduates, regional residents, business owners in neighboring communities	City, Action BV	\$7,000
Retail incubation plan		✓		Develop a full-scale retail incubation plan using a consultant	City, Action BV	\$5,000
Encourage businesses to introduce new products			✓	Encourage existing businesses to allow new products from local craftspeople	City, Action BV	\$0
Market buildings for incremental development	✓			Market to incremental development alliance	City, Action BV	\$3,000
Marketing available sites to ULI	✓			Contact Urban Land Institute about available downtown buildings	City, Action BV	\$1,000
Market to commercial building owners in region		✓		Create marketing piece for distribution to regional commercial building owners	City, Action BV	\$1,000
Marketing program for developer attraction	✓			Contact state agencies, statewide and regional non-profits about development opportunities downtown	City, Action BV	\$1,000
Food trucks and carts			✓	Establish a monthly program of food cart and pop-up businesses	City, Action BV, Chamber, EDA	\$15,000
Activate streets with music, entertainment and food			✓	Establish a monthly program in conjunction with food trucks/carts for entertainment downtown	City, Action BV, Chamber, EDA	\$8,000
Establish a special events calendar		✓		Develop a list of newly planned and existing special events	City, Action BV	\$2,000

— Note: Action BV is used in the matrix as the new Main Street Organization

— Note: Priority one projects shown in red

5-MAKING IT HAPPEN
SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

PROJECT MATRIX

ACTION	PRIORITY			BRIEF	PARTNERS	COST
	1	2	3			
Develop a cultural plan for downtown		✓		A study to ensure a place for the arts in downtown	City, Chamber, Action BV	\$8,000
Conduct market rate housing study			✓	Conduct full scale study of housing development opportunities in downtown	City, Action BV	\$12,000
Small scale manufacturing plan		✓		Develop plan to identify opportunities for small scale manufacturing in a storefront downtown	City, SBDC, Dabney Lancaster Comm. College, Virginia Community Capitol, DHCD, Action BV	\$14,000
Local makers store downtown		✓		Develop a plan for the creation of a local makers store downtown	City, SBDC, Dabney Lancaster Comm. College, Chamber, regional economic development orgs.	\$8,000
Develop comprehensive economic development marketing collateral	✓			Create marketing collateral with all incentives and advantages of City of Buena Vista, especially the downtown	City, Action BV	\$6,000

CONNECTIVITY						
City Website Redesign	✓			redesign to focus on assets and opportunities	City, Chamber	\$25,000
Walkable BV Initiative		✓		Planning for new City walking trails	City, Chamber, Rockbridge Region, PDC,	\$12,000
Blue Ridge Parkway Signage		✓		Coordinate BV signage on/at Parkway	Blue Ridge Pkwy, City, County PDC	\$5,000
Appalachian Trail Pit Stop		✓		Draw for AT hikers to come into BV	City, Chamber, Action BV	TBD
Appalachian Trail Hostel			✓	Possible lodging focus	Action BV, Chamber	TBD
Develop Hikers Resources		✓		New info on Hiking in and around BV	Action BV, Chamber, PDC	\$3,000
Chessie Trail Connection	✓			Connect existing River Walk with current end of the Chessie Trail	City	\$10,000
New Downtown River Walk Loop		✓		Connects Downtown with the River Walk in a manageable loop trail	City, Action BV	\$15,000
Buena Vista Birding Trail and Guide		✓		Connect with Statewide trail network	City, Virginia DWG, DCR	\$5,000

5-MAKING IT HAPPEN
SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

PROJECT MATRIX

ACTION	PRIORITY			BRIEF	PARTNERS	COST
	1	2	3			
Create an Adopt-a-Trail Program for Local Businesses		✓		To get local and regional businesses involved and make them visible	City, Action BV, Chamber	\$0
RIVER WALK IMPROVEMENTS						
Branding signage (fab/install)	✓			So Buena Vista River Walk can be promoted as a destination	City, Action BV, DHCD	\$6,000
Flood Wall Interpretive Trailhead		✓		New trail head/signage at flood wall equipment location	City, Action BV, NPS-Chesapeake Gateways	\$7,500
All Access Trail Improvements - New Access Points, Fishing Platform, Boat Launch		✓		Design for trail improvements	City, DWR, DCR	\$180,000
21st Street River Gateway Park	✓			Design for new gateway park at the River Trail access and 21st Street	City, DHCD, PDC	\$70,000
Create "Friends of the River Walk" Organization	✓			A new Friends organization to partner with the City to maintain, manage, and enhance the River Walk	residents, business owners	Volunteer
New seating along trail	✓			Replace old benches with more permanent and secure seating	City, Friends of...	\$5,000
21st Street Corridor Improvements	✓			Design for 21st Street improvements as connector to River Walk and AT - drainage improvements, sidewalks, entrances, multiuser path within right of way, street lights, intersection improvements, crosswalks	City, DHCD, VDOT, Action BV, Chamber	\$37,500 - \$150,000
New Pedestrian / Golf Cart Bridge to Glen Maury Park	✓			Design for new bridge across the Maury to connect Glen Maury Park and Vista Links to Downtown - approach trails, end abutments, center pier	City, EDA, Army Corps, Action BV	\$300,000
Community Garden - Future City Park		✓		New visible community garden in vacant gateway lot	City, Residents, Chamber,	\$2,000
Skate Tube Trail			✓	Design study for converting culvert to recreation area	City	\$6,500
Ridge Trail to AT		✓		Design for new trail connection from Downtown to the Appalachian Trail - 2.5 miles, gravel trail, drainage improvements, not ADA	City, AT,	\$75,000

5-MAKING IT HAPPEN SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

PROJECT MATRIX

ACTION	PRIORITY			BRIEF	PARTNERS	COST
	1	2	3			
GATEWAYS & WAYFINDING						
Signage and Wayfinding Masterplan	✓			Masterplan for citywide signage system	City, DHCD, PDC	\$25,000
Signage and Wayfinding (final design-fab/install)	✓			Fabrication and installation of signage	City, DHCD, Action BV, VDOT	\$85,000
New Visitor Kiosks (2) (design-build)	✓			Two new visitor kiosks to replace the Visitor Center on Route 60	City, Chamber, Action BV, DHCD	\$70,000
New City Entrance Gateway	✓			Design for the new City Gateway - 29th Street improvements, street trees, lights, banners, 2 major gateway element areas	City, DHCD	\$112,500

MAIN STREET						
Become full Main Street Community	✓			Work with DHCD to become full member	City, Action BV, DHCD	\$0
Hire Main Street Manager	✓			Work with DHCD to develop job description and hire	City, Action BV, DHCD	\$45,000
Expand Historic Districts	✓			Hire consultant to manage historic district survey and expansion	City, VDHR	\$7,500
New Library Location (The Librarium)	✓			Design-build for new multi-function historic renovation for the new Librarium at 2037 Magnolia	City, University, Chamber, Action BV	\$800,000 net*
New Downtown Inn (The Nestle Inn)		✓		Renovation of historic City Hall as a Downtown inn.	City, developer, Action BV	600000 net*
Develop Incentive Package for Businesses	✓			Tool box that helps businesses know how to access incentives	Action BV, City, Chamber	\$100,000
Target Empty and Blighted Buildings		✓		Develop conditions surveys and rehab cost models to promote targeted properties	Action BV	\$20,000
Pop-up Park		✓		Develop initial pocket park on Magnolia using volunteers	Action BV, Volunteers, City, Chamber	\$500
Ordinance Updates		✓		Update zoning ordinances to allow for more sidewalk usage and compatible signage requirements - explore form-based zoning for Downtown	City, Action BV	\$12,000
Commercial Entry Corridor Upgrades		✓		Small area plan for corridor between new gateway and Downtown	City, Action BV	\$7,500

* Denotes project costs after State and Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits

5-MAKING IT HAPPEN

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

PROJECT MATRIX

ACTION	PRIORITY			BRIEF	PARTNERS	COST
	1	2	3			

PUBLIC SPACE						
New City Center Park	✓			Design for the new village green at the NW corner of Magnolia and 21st Street	City, DHCD, EDA Action BV	\$45,000
Moving Coffee Pot to City Center Park		✓		Saving and moving the historic coffee pot building to the new City Center Park as a branded destination	City, DHCD, EDA	\$250,000
Farmers Market Pavilion	✓			Design for new pavilion in the public parking lot set up for a market or events	City, Action BV, Chamber, EDA, DHCD, USDA	\$25,000
Restripe/repaint Streets	✓			Begin restriping program with Magnolia Ave. and 21st Street	City, VDOT	\$15,000
Banners along Magnolia and 21st Street		✓		Install banner brackets and first round of changeable banners	City, Action BV	\$5,000 + sponsors
Seating along Magnolia		✓		Sidewalk benches	City, Action BV	\$5,000
Forest Ave Improvement Plan			✓	Design for improvements to Forest Avenue in coordination with Community College renovation of the historic Ford Dealership building	City, Dabney Lancaster Community College, Action BV	\$7,500
Downtown/Magnolia Ave. Improvement Plan	✓			Design for Downtown Streetscape improvements (Sycamore, Magnolia & Forest, curb improvements, drainage, cross walks, lighting, street trees, curb and gutter, spot improvements to Magnolia intersections, bump outs, pop up parks)	City, DHCD, Action BV	\$30,000 - \$375,000

BEAUTIFICATION & PLACEMAKING						
Formalize Mural Program	✓			Work with local schools and orgs	WWC, City	\$0
Install Demonstration Gardens		✓			WWC, City, Volunteers	\$0
New Parklets at vacant lots	✓			Design and installation of parklets at vacant lots along Magnolia	City, Action BV, Volunteers	\$6,500
Organize Community Beautification Projects		✓		Painting, Planting, and Cleaning up	City, Action BV, Volunteers	\$2500 + Volunteers

5-MAKING IT HAPPEN
SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

PROJECT MATRIX

ACTION	PRIORITY			BRIEF	PARTNERS	COST
	1	2	3			
Business Sponsorships for landscaping		✓		Sponsorships and adoptions of streets, blocks, gardens, planters, and street furniture	City Action BV	\$500
Uplighting of the Smokestack			✓	National competition for using light to make a night time sculpture out of the smokestack on the river	City, Action BV, EDA	\$15,000
Public Art Plan	✓			Develop a public art plan coordinated with the mural program and Cultural planning initiatives	City, Action BV	\$7,500

6

APPENDICES



Related Things

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES

- » Real Estate Developers through the Urban Land Institute www.virginiauli.org
- » Incremental Smaller Developers through the Incremental Development Alliance www.incrementaldevelopment.org
- » Site Selectors and Area Development publication www.siteselection.com and www.areadevelopment.com
- » Commonwealth Economic Development Agencies
- » International Downtown Association www.downtown.org
- » The Small Business Development Center www.valleysbdc.org
- » Every Downtown building owner
- » State legislative representatives
- » Locavesting www.locavesting.com
- » The National and State Main Street Programs (www.virginiainmainstreet.com and www.mainstreet.org)
- » National Center for Economic Gardening www.economicgardening.org
- » Business Alliance for Local Living economies (www.communitywealth.org)
- » The Identified Economic Development Partners Working List Currently Used
- » Small Businesses In Neighboring Communities
- » Startup Shenandoah Valley

INTERNAL COMMUNITY RESOURCES

- » Young couples
- » Retired business owners
- » College Students from all the area colleges and universities
- » High School Students
- » Professors/Instructors of business at all of the regional colleges/universities
- » Residents who expressed an interest, as part of this study, in becoming involved in downtown revitalization—especially those interested in opening a business
- » Real estate brokers
- » Building Owners
- » All Downtown Business Owners
- » Senior Citizens
- » People with specialized skills such as marketing, architecture, real estate
- » Public school teachers
- » Plant managers at all of the manufacturing plants in Buena Vista
- » Newcomers to the community
- » Service Groups and Community Social Organizations
- » History Buffs

TOURISM MARKETING RESOURCES

- » Sierra Club www.sierraclub.org
- » The Hiking Project www.hikingproject.com
- » Virginia Restaurant, Lodging and Travel Association www.VRLTA.org
- » Blue Ridge Busker Fest www.BlueRidgeBuskerFest.com



LifeMode Group: GenXurban

Midlife Constants

5E

Households: 3,068,400

Average Household Size: 2.31

Median Age: 47.0

Median Household Income: \$53,200

WHO ARE WE?

Midlife Constants residents are seniors, at or approaching retirement, with below average labor force participation and above average net worth. Although located in predominantly metropolitan areas, they live outside the central cities, in smaller communities. Their lifestyle is more country than urban. They are generous, but not spendthrifts.

OUR NEIGHBORHOOD

- Older homes (most built before 1980) found in the suburban periphery of smaller metropolitan markets.
- Primarily married couples, with a growing share of singles.
- Settled neighborhoods with slow rates of change and residents that have lived in the same house for years.
- Single-family homes, less than half still mortgaged, with a median home value of \$154,100 (Index 74).

SOCIOECONOMIC TRAITS

- Education: 63% have a high school diploma or some college.
- Unemployment is lower in this market at 4.7% (Index 86), but so is the labor force participation rate (Index 91).
- Almost 42% of households are receiving Social Security (Index 141); 27% also receive retirement income (Index 149).
- Traditional, not trendy; opt for convenience and comfort, not cutting-edge. Technology has its uses, but the bells and whistles are a bother.
- Attentive to price, but not at the expense of quality, they prefer to buy American and natural products.
- Radio and newspapers are the media of choice (after television).



Note: The index represents the ratio of the segment rate to the US rate multiplied by 100. Consumer preferences are estimated from data by GfK MRI.



LifeMode Group: GenXurban

Midlife Constants



TAPESTRY SEGMENTATION
esri.com/tapestry

AGE BY SEX (Esri data)

Median Age: 47.0 US: 38.2

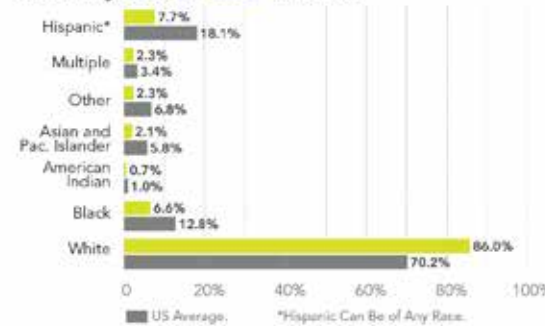
■ Indicates US



RACE AND ETHNICITY (Esri data)

The Diversity Index summarizes racial and ethnic diversity. The index shows the likelihood that two persons, chosen at random from the same area, belong to different race or ethnic groups. The index ranges from 0 (no diversity) to 100 (complete diversity).

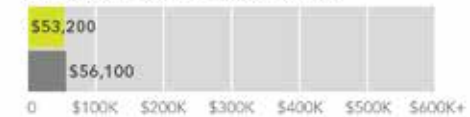
Diversity Index: 36.2 US: 64.0



INCOME AND NET WORTH

Net worth measures total household assets (homes, vehicles, investments, etc.) less any debts, secured (e.g., mortgages) or unsecured (credit cards). Household income and net worth are estimated by Esri.

Median Household Income

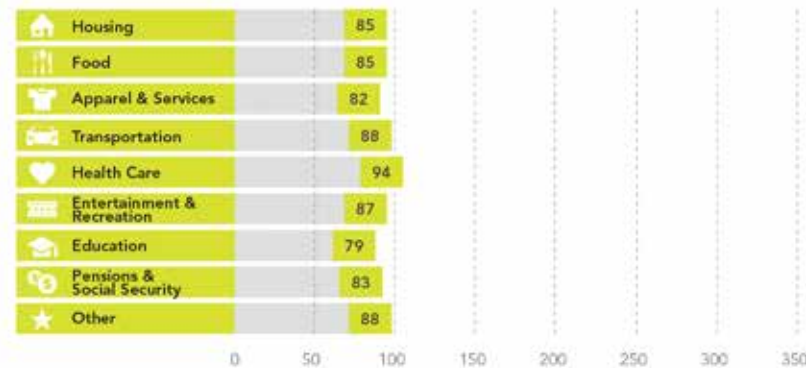


Median Net Worth



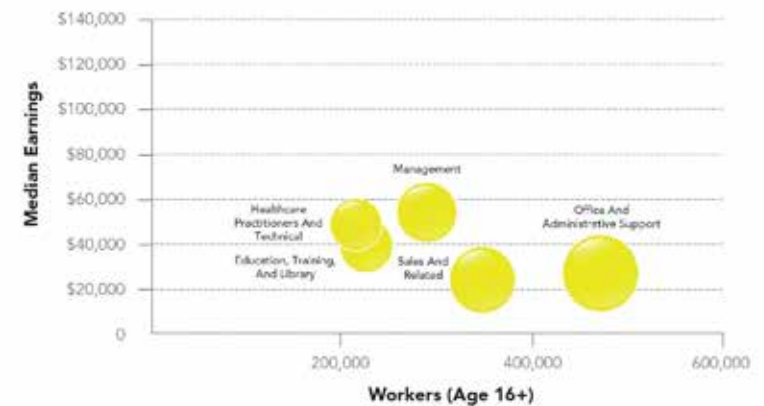
AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD BUDGET INDEX

The index compares the average amount spent in this market's household budgets for housing, food, apparel, etc., to the average amount spent by all US households. An index of 100 is average. An index of 120 shows that average spending by consumers in this market is 20 percent above the national average. Consumer expenditures are estimated by Esri.



OCCUPATION BY EARNINGS

The five occupations with the highest number of workers in the market are displayed by median earnings. Data from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey.





LifeMode Group: GenXurban
Midlife Constants



TAPESTRY SEGMENTATION
esri.com/tapestry

MARKET PROFILE

(Consumer preferences are estimated from data by GfK MRI)

- Prefer practical vehicles like SUVs and trucks (domestic, of course).
- Sociable, church-going residents belonging to fraternal orders, veterans' clubs and charitable organizations and do volunteer work and fund-raising.
- Contribute to arts/cultural, educational, health, and social services organizations.
- DIY homebodies that spend on home improvement and gardening.
- Media preferences: country or movie channels.
- Leisure activities include movies at home, reading, fishing, and golf.

HOUSING

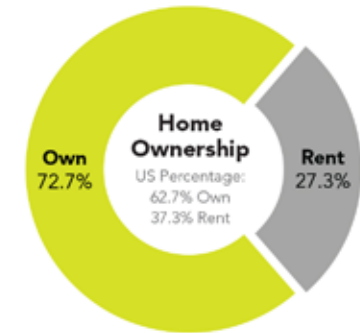
Median home value is displayed for markets that are primarily owner occupied; average rent is shown for renter-occupied markets. Tenure and home value are estimated by Esri. Housing type and average rent are from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey.



Typical Housing:
Single Family

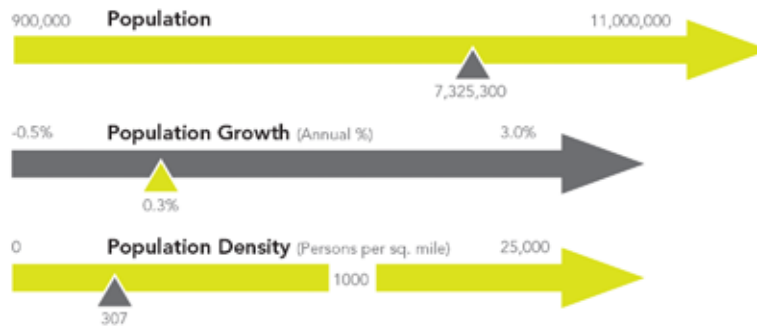
Median Value:
\$154,100

US Median: \$207,300



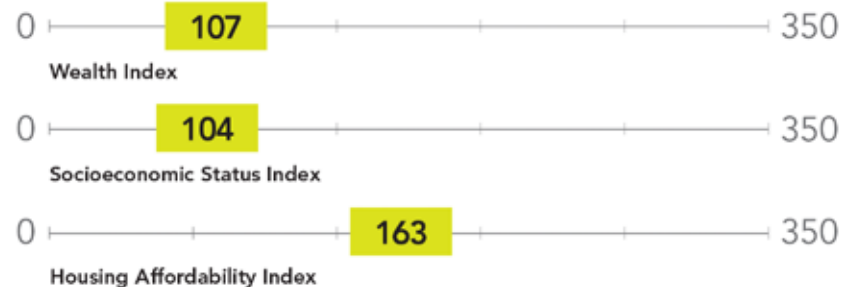
POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

Total population, average annual population change since Census 2010, and average density (population per square mile) are displayed for the market relative to the size and change among all Tapestry markets. Data estimated by Esri.



ESRI INDEXES

Esri developed three indexes to display average household wealth, socioeconomic status, and housing affordability for the market relative to US standards.





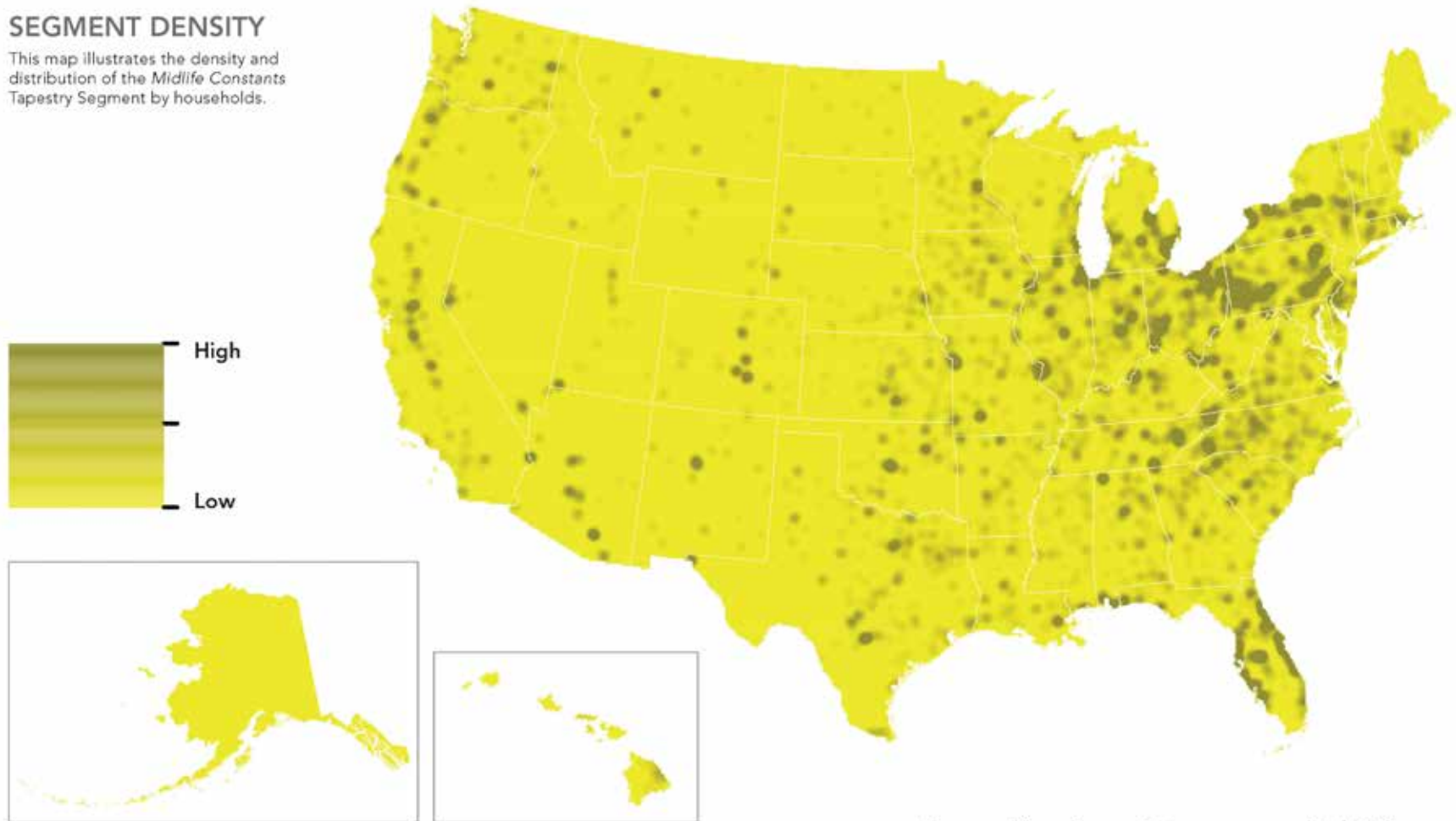
LifeMode Group: GenXurban
Midlife Constants



TAPESTRY
 SEGMENTATION
esri.com/tapestry

SEGMENT DENSITY

This map illustrates the density and distribution of the *Midlife Constants* Tapestry Segment by households.



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 SCIENCE
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 WHERE™



LifeMode Group: Cozy Country Living

Heartland Communities

6F

Households: 2,850,600

Average Household Size: 2.39

Median Age: 42.3

Median Household Income: \$42,400

WHO ARE WE?

Well settled and close-knit, *Heartland Communities* are semirural and semiretired. These older householders are primarily homeowners, and many have paid off their mortgages. Their children have moved away, but they have no plans to leave their homes. Their hearts are with the country; they embrace the slower pace of life here but actively participate in outdoor activities and community events. Traditional and patriotic, these residents support their local businesses, always buy American, and favor domestic driving vacations over foreign plane trips.

OUR NEIGHBORHOOD

- Rural communities or small towns are concentrated in the Midwest, from older Rustbelt cities to the Great Plains.
- Distribution of household types is comparable to the US, primarily (but not the majority) married couples, more with no children, and a slightly higher proportion of singles (Index 112) that reflects the aging of the population.
- Residents own modest, single-family homes built before 1970.
- They own one or two vehicles; commutes are short (Index 82).

SOCIOECONOMIC TRAITS

- Retirees in this market depress the average labor force participation rate to less than 60% (Index 94), but the unemployment rate is comparable to the US.
- More workers are white collar than blue collar; more skilled than unskilled.
- The rural economy of this market provides employment in the manufacturing, construction, utilities, healthcare, and agriculture industries.
- These are budget savvy consumers; they stick to brands they grew up with and know the price of goods they purchase. Buying American is important.
- Daily life is busy, but routine. Working on the weekends is not uncommon.
- Residents trust TV and newspapers more than any other media.
- Skeptical about their financial future, they stick to community banks and low-risk investments.



Note: The index represents the ratio of the segment rate to the US rate multiplied by 100. Consumer preferences are estimated from data by GfK MR.



LifeMode Group: Cozy Country Living

Heartland Communities

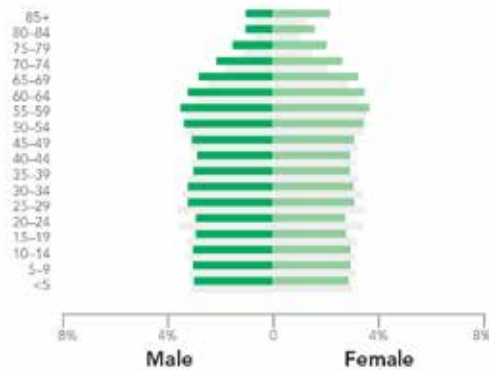


TAPESTRY SEGMENTATION
esri.com/tapestry

AGE BY SEX (Esri data)

Median Age: 42.3 US: 38.2

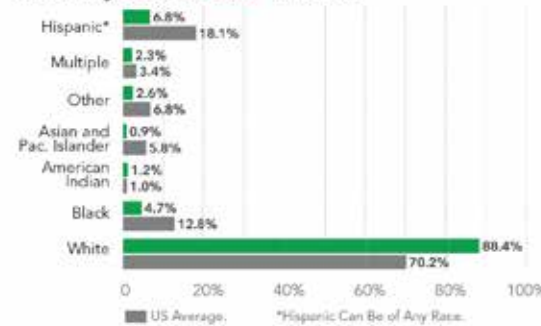
■ Indicates US



RACE AND ETHNICITY (Esri data)

The Diversity Index summarizes racial and ethnic diversity. The index shows the likelihood that two persons, chosen at random from the same area, belong to different race or ethnic groups. The index ranges from 0 (no diversity) to 100 (complete diversity).

Diversity Index: 31.5 US: 64.0



INCOME AND NET WORTH

Net worth measures total household assets (homes, vehicles, investments, etc.) less any debts, secured (e.g., mortgages) or unsecured (credit cards). Household income and net worth are estimated by Esri.

Median Household Income

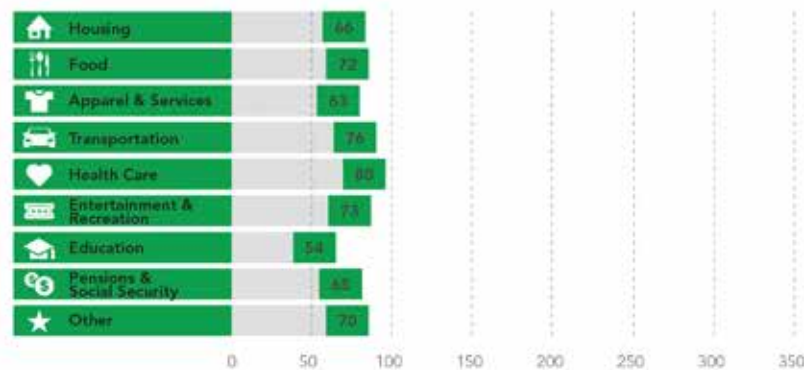


Median Net Worth



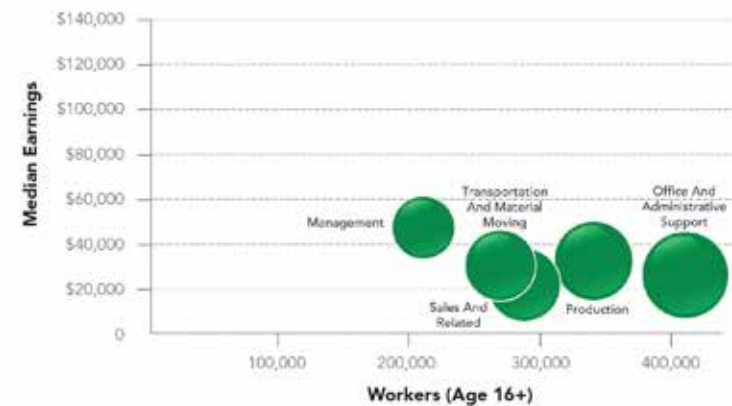
AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD BUDGET INDEX

The index compares the average amount spent in this market's household budgets for housing, food, apparel, etc., to the average amount spent by all US households. An index of 100 is average. An index of 120 shows that average spending by consumers in this market is 20 percent above the national average. Consumer expenditures are estimated by Esri.



OCCUPATION BY EARNINGS

The five occupations with the highest number of workers in the market are displayed by median earnings. Data from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey.



6F LifeMode Group: Cozy Country Living
Heartland Communities



MARKET PROFILE

(Consumer preferences are estimated from data by GfK MRI)

- Traditional in their ways, residents of *Heartland Communities* choose to bank and pay their bills in person and purchase insurance from an agent.
- Most have high-speed Internet access at home or on their cell phone but aren't ready to go paperless.
- Many residents have paid off their home mortgages but still hold auto loans and student loans. Interest checking accounts are common.
- To support their local community, residents participate in public activities.
- Home remodeling is not a priority, but homeowners do tackle necessary maintenance work on their cherished homes. They have invested in riding lawn mowers to maintain their larger yards.
- They enjoy country music and watch CMT.
- Motorcycling, hunting, and fishing are popular; walking is the main form of exercise.
- To get around these semirural communities, residents prefer domestic trucks or SUVs.

HOUSING

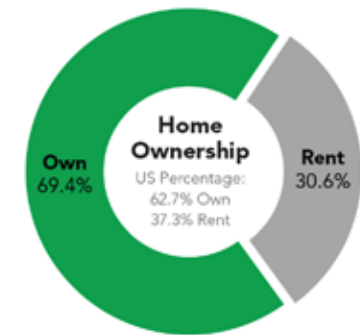
Median home value is displayed for markets that are primarily owner occupied; average rent is shown for renter-occupied markets. Tenure and home value are estimated by Esri. Housing type and average rent are from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey.



Typical Housing:
Single Family

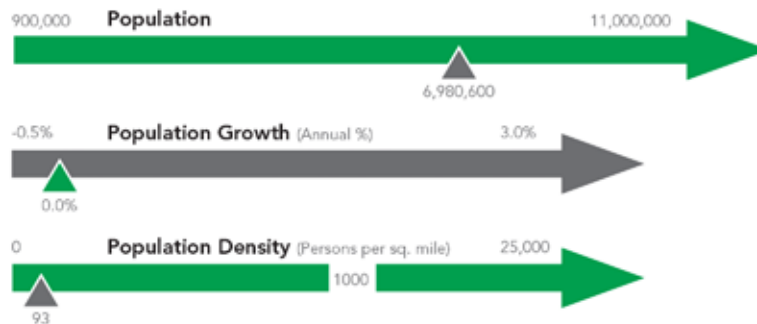
Median Value:
\$95,700

US Median: \$207,300



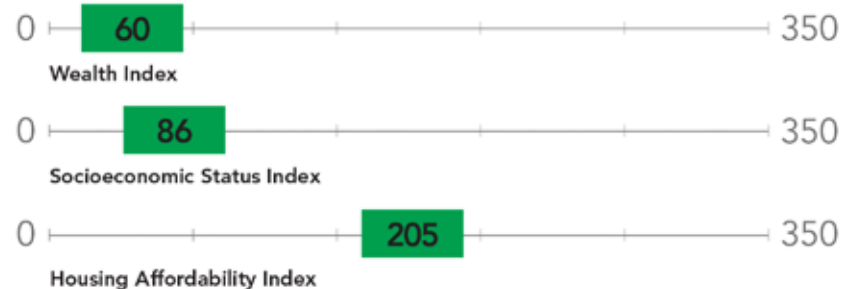
POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

Total population, average annual population change since Census 2010, and average density (population per square mile) are displayed for the market relative to the size and change among all Tapestry markets. Data estimated by Esri.



ESRI INDEXES

Esri developed three indexes to display average household wealth, socioeconomic status, and housing affordability for the market relative to US standards.





LifeMode Group: Cozy Country Living

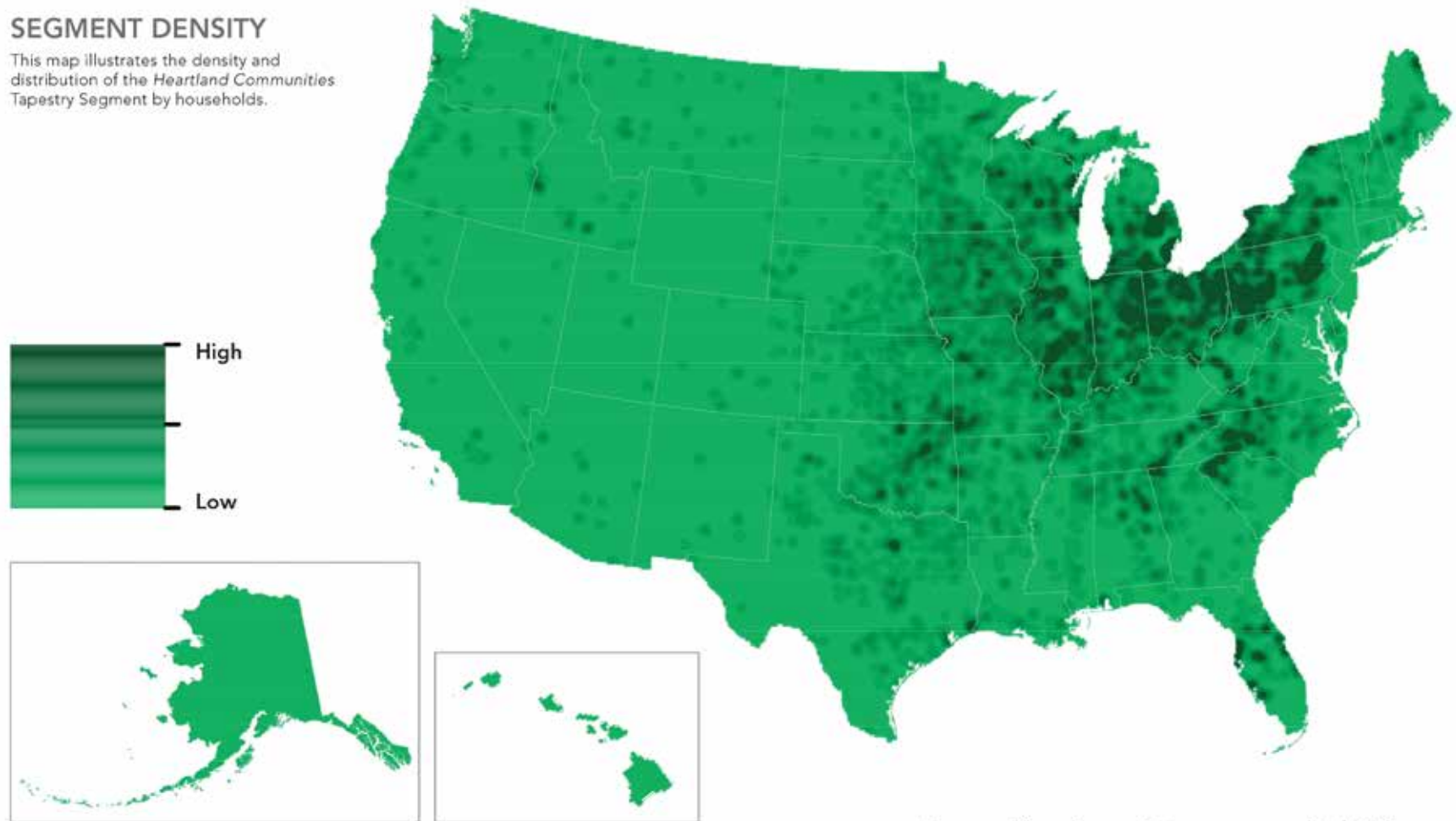
Heartland Communities



TAPESTRY
SEGMENTATION
esri.com/tapestry

SEGMENT DENSITY

This map illustrates the density and distribution of the *Heartland Communities* Tapestry Segment by households.



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LifeMode Group: Hometown

Small Town Simplicity

12C

Households: 2,305,700

Average Household Size: 2.26

Median Age: 40.8

Median Household Income: \$31,500

WHO ARE WE?

Small Town Simplicity includes young families and senior householders that are bound by community ties. The lifestyle is down-to-earth and semirural, with television for entertainment and news, and emphasis on convenience for both young parents and senior citizens. Residents embark on pursuits including online computer games, renting movies, indoor gardening, and rural activities like hunting and fishing. Since 1 in 4 households is below poverty level, residents also keep their finances simple—paying bills in person and avoiding debt.

OUR NEIGHBORHOOD

- They reside in small towns or semirural neighborhoods, mostly outside metropolitan areas.
- Homes are a mix of older single-family houses (61%), apartments, and mobile homes.
- Half of all homes are owner-occupied (Index 79).
- Median home value of \$92,300 is about half the US median.
- Average rent is \$639 (Index 62).
- This is an older market, with half of the householders aged 55 years or older, and predominantly single-person households (Index 139).

SOCIOECONOMIC TRAITS

- Education: 67% with high school diploma or some college.
- Unemployment higher at 7.7% (Index 141).
- Labor force participation lower at 52% (Index 83), which could result from lack of jobs or retirement.
- Income from wages and salaries (Index 83), Social Security (Index 133) or retirement (Index 106), increased by Supplemental Security Income (Index 183).
- Price-conscious consumers that shop accordingly, with coupons at discount centers.
- Connected, but not to the latest or greatest gadgets; keep their landlines.
- Community-orientated residents; more conservative than middle-of-the-road.
- Rely on television or newspapers to stay informed.



Note: The Index represents the ratio of the segment rate to the US rate multiplied by 100. Consumer preferences are estimated from data by GfK MRI.



LifeMode Group: Hometown

Small Town Simplicity

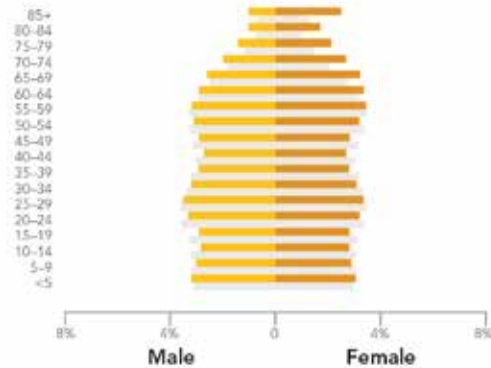


TAPESTRY SEGMENTATION
esri.com/tapestry

AGE BY SEX (Esri data)

Median Age: 40.8 US: 38.2

■ Indicates US



RACE AND ETHNICITY (Esri data)

The Diversity Index summarizes racial and ethnic diversity. The index shows the likelihood that two persons, chosen at random from the same area, belong to different race or ethnic groups. The index ranges from 0 (no diversity) to 100 (complete diversity).

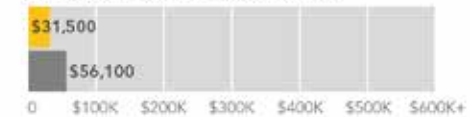
Diversity Index: 51.0 US: 64.0



INCOME AND NET WORTH

Net worth measures total household assets (homes, vehicles, investments, etc.) less any debts, secured (e.g., mortgages) or unsecured (credit cards). Household income and net worth are estimated by Esri.

Median Household Income

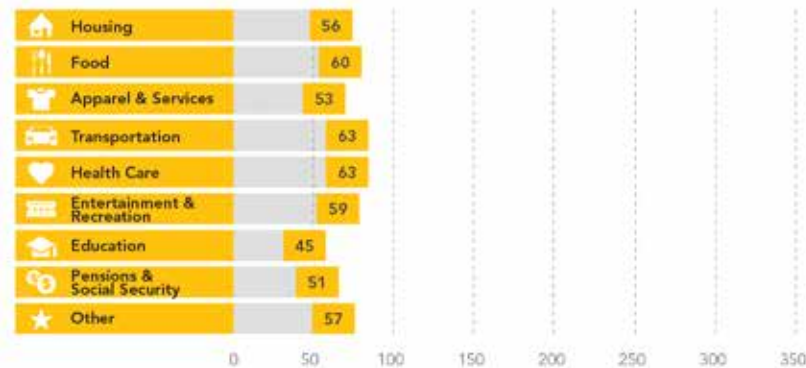


Median Net Worth



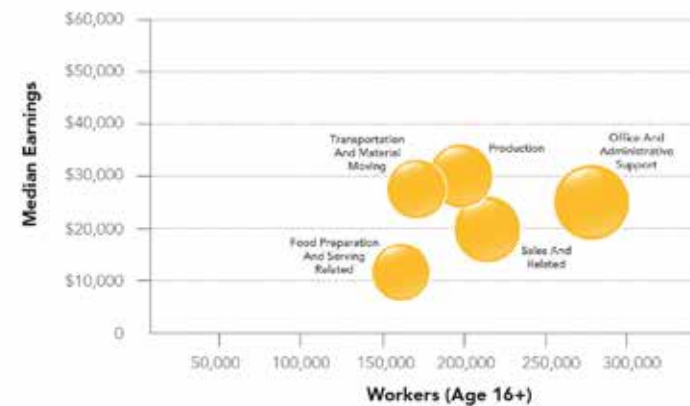
AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD BUDGET INDEX

The index compares the average amount spent in this market's household budgets for housing, food, apparel, etc., to the average amount spent by all US households. An index of 100 is average. An index of 120 shows that average spending by consumers in this market is 20 percent above the national average. Consumer expenditures are estimated by Esri.



OCCUPATION BY EARNINGS

The five occupations with the highest number of workers in the market are displayed by median earnings. Data from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey.





LifeMode Group: Hometown

Small Town Simplicity



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MARKET PROFILE

(Consumer preferences are estimated from data by GfK MRI)

- *Small Town Simplicity* features a semirural lifestyle, complete with trucks and SUVs (domestic, of course), ATVs, and vegetable gardens.
- Residents enjoy outdoor activities like hunting and fishing as well as watching NASCAR and college football and basketball on TV.
- A large senior population visit doctors and health practitioners regularly.
- However, a largely single population favors convenience over cooking—frozen meals and fast food.
- Home improvement is not a priority, but vehicle maintenance is.

HOUSING

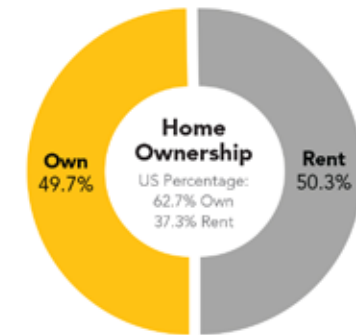
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Typical Housing:
Single Family

Median Value:
\$92,300

US Median: \$207,300



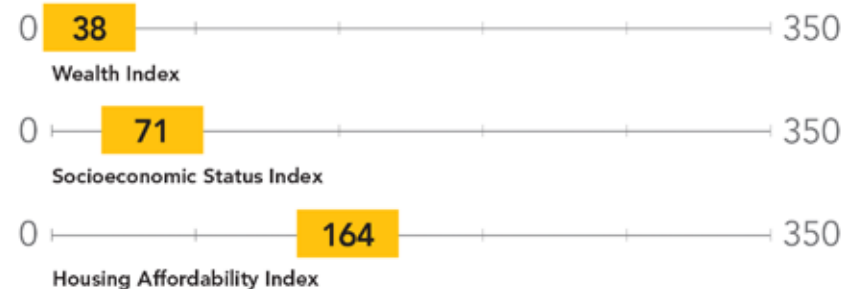
POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

Total population, average annual population change since Census 2010, and average density (population per square mile) are displayed for the market relative to the size and change among all Tapestry markets. Data estimated by Esri.



ESRI INDEXES

Esri developed three indexes to display average household wealth, socioeconomic status, and housing affordability for the market relative to US standards.





LifeMode Group: Hometown

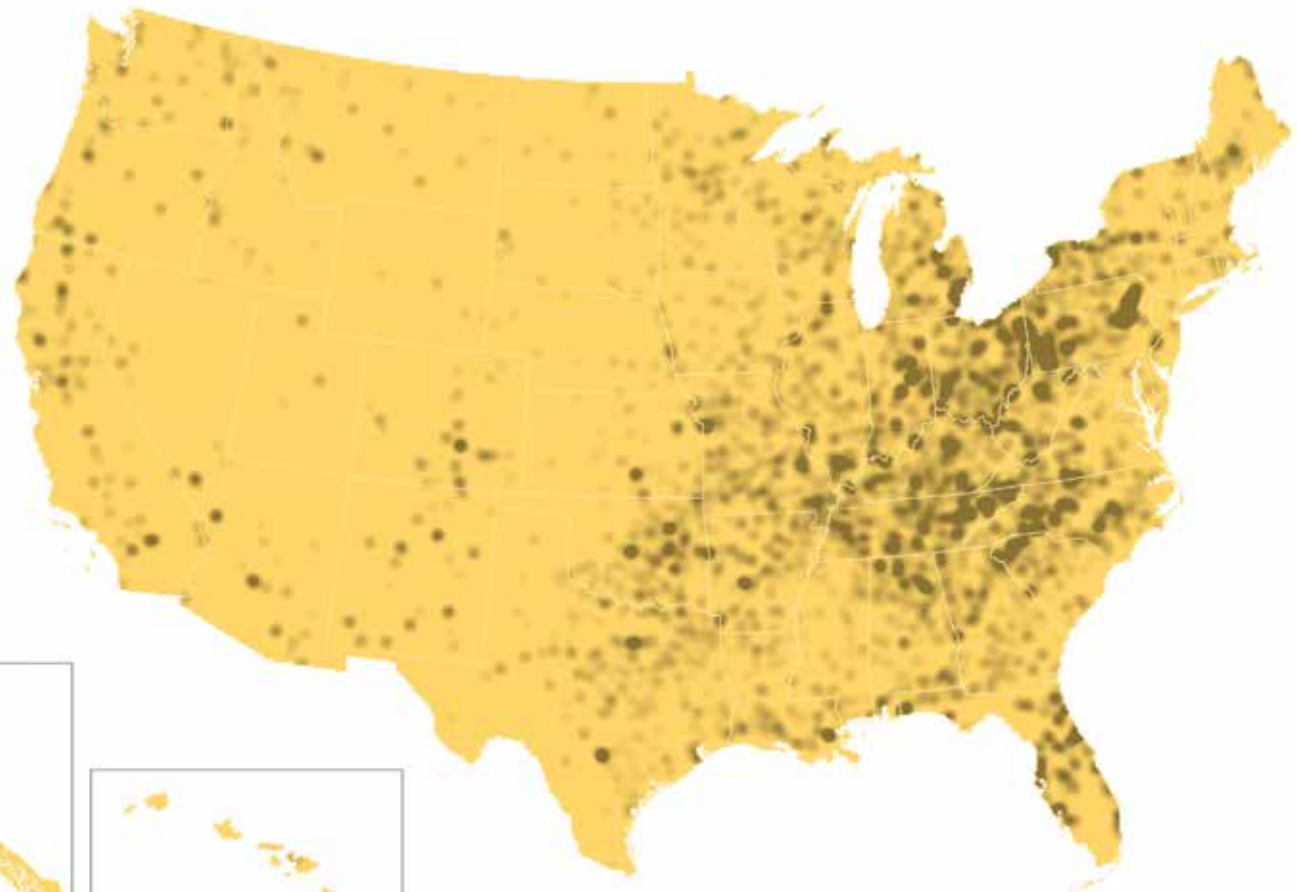
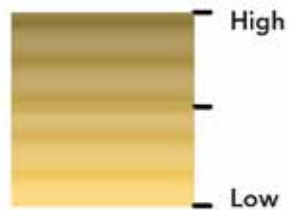
Small Town Simplicity



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SEGMENTATION
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SEGMENT DENSITY

This map illustrates the density and distribution of the *Small Town Simplicity* Tapestry Segment by households.



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LifeMode Group: Rustic Outposts

Rooted Rural

10B

Households: 2,430,900

Average Household Size: 2.48

Median Age: 45.2

Median Household Income: \$42,300

WHO ARE WE?

Rooted Rural is heavily concentrated in the Appalachian mountain range as well as in Texas and Arkansas. Employment in the forestry industry is common, and *Rooted Rural* residents live in many of the heavily forested regions of the country. Nearly 9 of 10 residents are non-Hispanic whites. This group enjoys time spent outdoors, hunting, fishing, or working in their gardens. Indoors, they enjoy watching television with a spouse and spending time with their pets. When shopping, they look for American-made and generic products. These communities are heavily influenced by religious faith, traditional gender roles, and family history.

OUR NEIGHBORHOOD

- This market is dominated by married couples, few with children at home.
- 80% of homes are owner occupied: primarily single family (73%) or mobile homes (24%).
- Nearly one in five housing units are vacant, with a high proportion for seasonal use.
- Home values are very low—almost half of owned homes are valued under \$100,000.

SOCIOECONOMIC TRAITS

- Thrifty shoppers that use coupons frequently and buy generic goods.
- Far-right political values on religion and marriage.
- Do-it-yourself mentality; grow their own produce and work on their cars and ATVs.
- Pay bills in person and avoid using the Internet for financial transactions.
- Often find computers and cell phones too complicated and confusing.
- Clothes a necessity, not a fashion statement; only buy new clothes when old clothes wear out.



Note: The Index represents the ratio of the segment rate to the US rate multiplied by 100. Consumer preferences are estimated from data by GfK MRI.

10B

LifeMode Group: Rustic Outposts
Rooted Rural

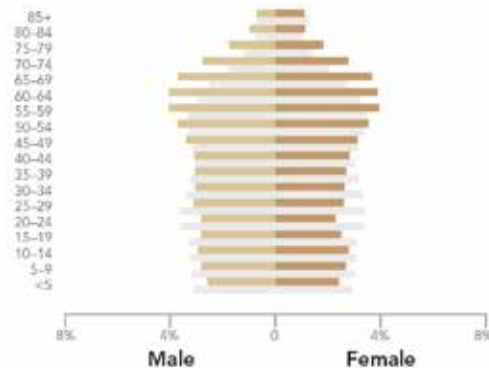


TAPESTRY SEGMENTATION
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AGE BY SEX (Esri data)

Median Age: 45.2 US: 38.2

== Indicates US



RACE AND ETHNICITY (Esri data)

The Diversity Index summarizes racial and ethnic diversity. The index shows the likelihood that two persons, chosen at random from the same area, belong to different race or ethnic groups. The index ranges from 0 (no diversity) to 100 (complete diversity).

Diversity Index: 29.2 US: 64.0



INCOME AND NET WORTH

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Median Household Income

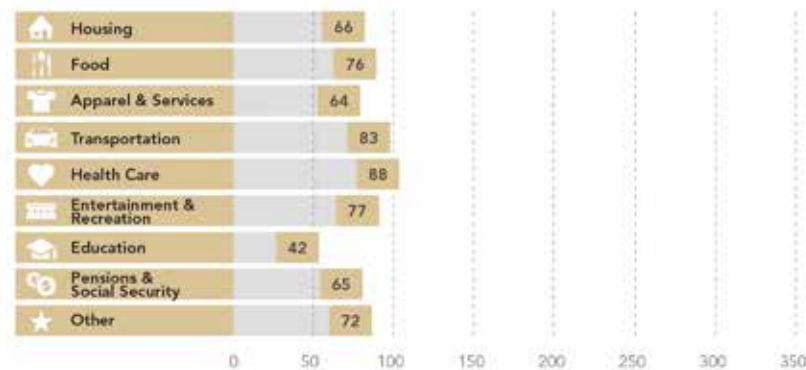


Median Net Worth



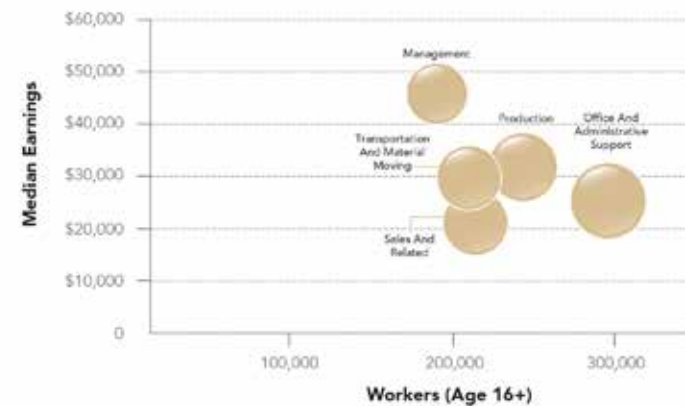
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OCCUPATION BY EARNINGS

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10B

LifeMode Group: Rustic Outposts

Rooted Rural



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MARKET PROFILE

(Consumer preferences are estimated from data by GfK MRI)

- They own a riding lawn mower, as well as a garden tiller, and have vegetable gardens.
- More than half of the households have a high-speed Internet connection.
- They use a satellite dish to watch CMT, the History Channel, and GSN (Game Show Network).
- Pets are popular—dogs, cats, and birds.
- Leisure activities include hunting and fishing.
- They listen to faith-based radio, country, and gospel music.
- Many are on Medicare and frequent the Walgreens pharmacy.

HOUSING

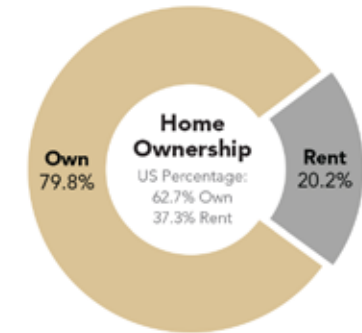
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Typical Housing:
Single Family;
Mobile Homes

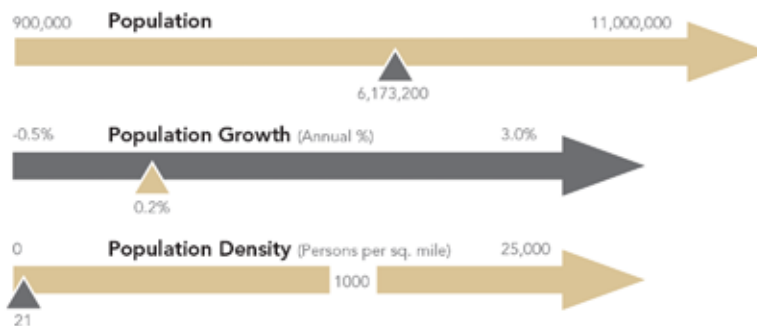
Median Value:
\$112,800

US Median: \$207,300



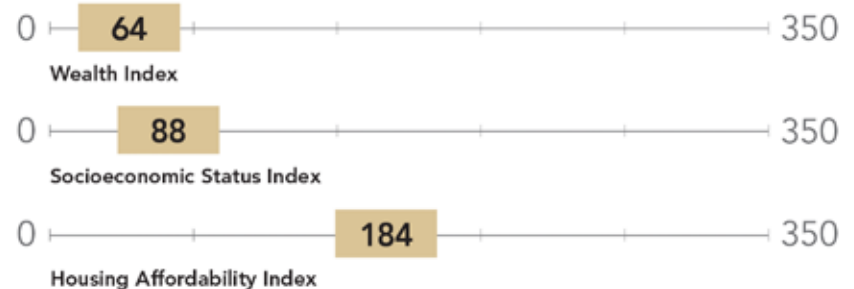
POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

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10B

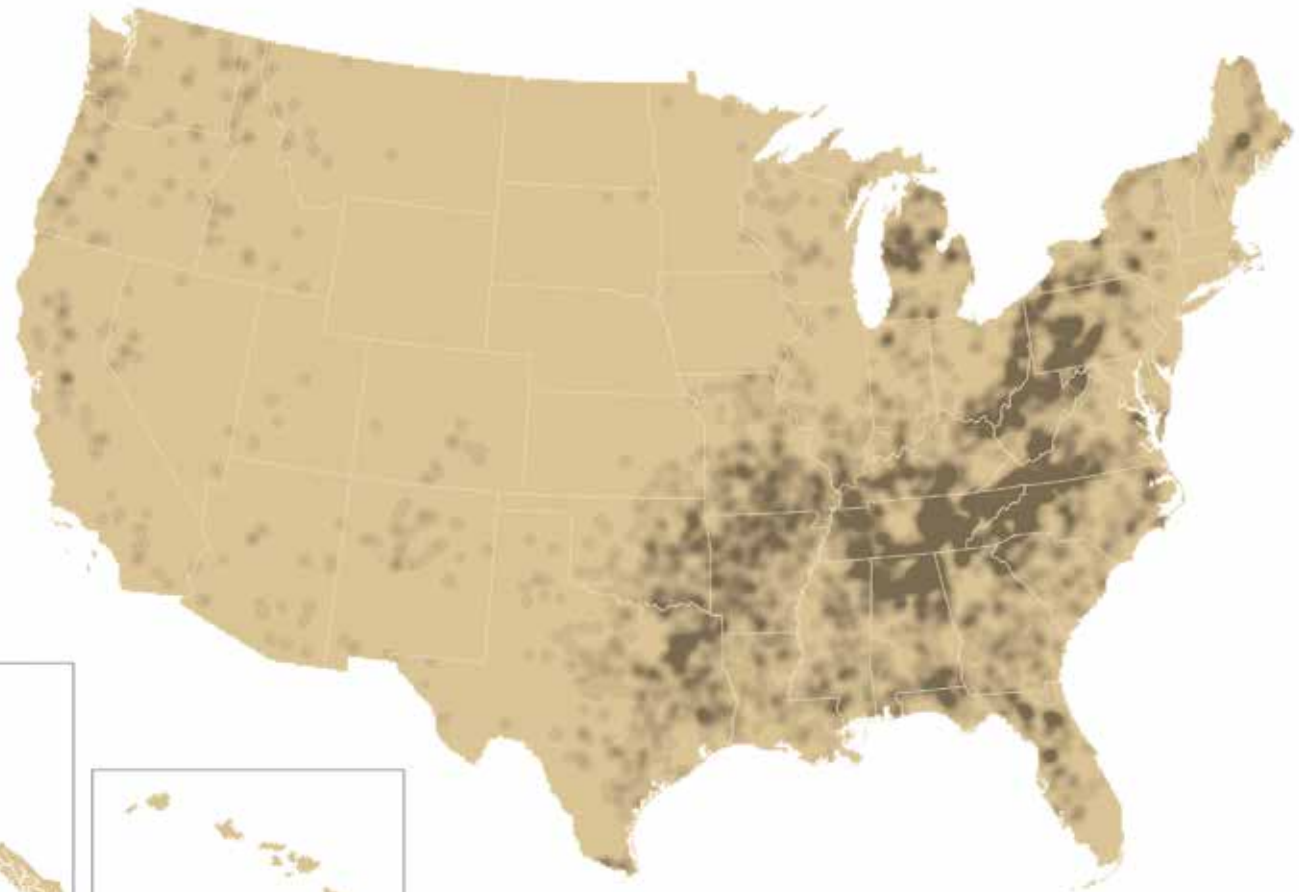
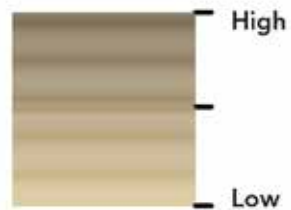
LifeMode Group: Rustic Outposts
Rooted Rural



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 SEGMENTATION
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SEGMENT DENSITY

This map illustrates the density and distribution of the *Rooted Rural* Tapestry Segment by households.



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