

## Asheville Downtown Master Plan

- Asheland Avenue
  - Coxe Avenue
  - Hilliard Avenue
  - South Charlotte Street/Valley Street
  - Southside Avenue
2. Add shared lane markings to these streets in or adjacent to downtown:
    - Charlotte Street (north of I-240)
    - Chestnut Street
    - Montford Avenue
    - South French Broad Avenue
  3. Install sturdy bike racks throughout downtown for a minimum of two racks per street block. Also install bike racks in covered areas of parking structures.
  4. Encourage biking to work, to school, and in combination with transit use.
- C. **Improve the downtown walking network** identified in Strategy 3. Start with near-term opportunities that provide the best improvements to the larger network. Also begin work on long-lead-time elements, such as coordination with NCDOT near Eagle/Market, East End and South Charlotte/Valley Street. Require new development projects to improve sidewalks along their frontage to meet defined standards. Also require new development projects to maintain convenient walking access to current properties in the area during construction.
- D. In all cases, **minimize number of curb cuts**. For significant projects, place curb cuts on the adjacent street lowest in hierarchy (see Street Hierarchy Diagram in the Strategy 3 appendix).
- E. **Coordinate access improvements with established wayfinding and transit services.**
1. Improve wayfinding to parking
    - Integrate parking facilities into the TDA’s wayfinding system, including directions from parking decks to restaurants, workplaces, medical facilities, galleries, historic and cultural facilities, and other key downtown points.
    - Electronically guide drivers to the most appropriate parking areas through signage (coordinated with the wayfinding system). Show real-time parking capacities on line.
  2. Work with Asheville Transit and Mountain Mobility to ensure than new access services and infrastructure enhance existing ones and avoid redundancy.
- F. **Improve parking coordination, capacity, efficiency and convenience:**
1. Create a management partnership to coordinate access, hours of operation, pricing, security and lighting among all available parking facilities—City-owned, County-owned and privately-owned. Create a parking coordinator to oversee existing and proposed parking facilities. Give this coordinator a voice in public transportation decisions.

2. Plan for construction of new parking in the Grove Arcade/Civic Center/Battery Hill vicinity. This should address the 700- to 800-space deficit identified in the City's Comprehensive Parking Study. Investigate a) the AT&T site, b) land between Rankin and North Lexington, c) joint ventures for additional parking in planned developments between Page and Haywood, and d) joint ventures with the Basilica. In all cases, design new parking garages incorporating façades consistent with the urban design framework in Strategy 3.
3. Update parking rates and fee collection.
  - Extend the hours when fees are charged for parking in all City-managed off-street facilities (the City is upgrading the revenue control system in its parking garages, allowing the current \$1 exit charge after 6:00 pm to be replaced with continued hourly charges). Extend on-street parking fee hours until 8:00 pm.
  - Maintain the current hourly fee structure for on-street and off-street parking, but continue to increase rates periodically as recommended in the Comprehensive Parking Study. In July 2009, increase the daily maximum charged in parking garages by \$1 per day (this maximum was increased in July 2008 from \$4 and \$6 to \$5 and \$7). Evaluate the impact of nighttime parking demand in garages as the fee for on-street parking is increased. If on-street demand stays near 100 percent and evening demand increases in garages, consider decreasing the night and weekend rates for garage parking to free up on-street spaces.
  - Consider charging lower fees in off-street garages for small, energy-efficient vehicles—motorcycles, hybrid and electric cars.
  - Make payment for parking more convenient and user-friendly. Investigate systems that allow credit and debit card use, advance online reservations, etc. Consider free or reduced-rate parking through a merchant parking-validation program.
4. Improve lighting and security at all public parking areas.
- G. **Plan shuttle routes and stops to link parking resources** with employment centers, neighborhood retail districts and other key downtown destinations.
- H. **Dedicate some public parking spaces for use by shared-car services** (such as Zipcar) to expand mobility choices and reduce need for downtown households to own cars.
- I. **Locate and design any new or renovated off-street parking to prevent detrimental impacts to street character and promote higher-value uses.** Wherever possible, locate structured parking below-ground or screen it with active uses (housing, stores, offices). Add on-street parking where possible to augment supply, provide convenience, and promote walkability.
- J. **Negotiate off-peak use of private parking areas** near the edges of downtown as suitable places for park-and-ride lots, shuttle stops, construction-worker parking, etc. This approach could reduce capital costs for public parking, increase private and public parking revenue, and conserve core downtown land for high-value uses.

## ACTION STEPS: LONG-TERM

- Implement remaining elements of Asheville’s 2008 Comprehensive Bicycle Plan. Add bike lanes to the following streets.
  - Biltmore Avenue (US 25)
  - College Street
  - Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive
  - McDowell Street
  - Patton Avenue
  - Southside Avenue
- Implement remaining pedestrian improvements.
- As feasible, implement bikeway, pedestrian and shuttle links to enhance downtown access to points including West Asheville, Hillcrest, UNCA, WeCan, Montford, River Arts District, A-B Tech, Tunnel Road, Mission Health Systems, Biltmore Village.
- Consider possible redevelopment of public parking structures—particularly the Rankin Street and Wall Street structures—for higher-value uses. Displaced parking could be accommodated through new below-grade parking, shared parking with the new uses, satellite parking, and/or enhanced transit services that reduce parking demand.

## FUNDING SOURCES

- City funding has been designated for the shuttle feasibility study. As currently planned, this study will determine appropriate sources (including potential revenues from City parking operations and potential employer contributions) to avoid costs of additional parking structures or private-sector employee shuttles. Additional revenue may be generated by recommended changes in the on-street parking program. Increased parking revenues, federal support, and private-sector contributions would likely meet at least 75 percent of the annual operating costs, assumed to be about \$1 million.
- A few of these visitor-oriented items may be eligible for funding consideration by the TDA.
- The City’s Parking Authority produces excess revenue that could be applied toward the shuttle system, enhancements in existing garages or the TDA’s wayfinding system, or other needs.
- Improved pricing and fare collection could increase revenue.
- Private developers may opt to contribute toward public parking in lieu of constructing their own on-site parking.

## IN THE APPENDIX

Enlarged diagrams of potential shuttle service coverage and current parking ownership and usage patterns.

## PRECEDENTS

- Chattanooga's downtown shuttle operates on five-minute headways. Daily ridership reaches about 4,000 in electric vehicles. ([carta-bus.org/routes/elec\\_shuttle.asp](http://carta-bus.org/routes/elec_shuttle.asp))
- Norfolk operates a free downtown shuttle with electric vehicles. The service is funded by the city and operated by the local transit agency. Service is oriented to commuters on weekdays and tourists on weekends. Weekday peak headways are six- minutes; weekday off-peak headways range from 9 to 18 minutes. Weekend headways are 15 minutes. ([hrtransit.org/services/netbus.html](http://hrtransit.org/services/netbus.html))
- Other successful shuttles in comparably-sized downtowns include Alexandria VA and Hartford CT.
- Santa Monica CA is a leader in providing real-time online information on parking availability.
- Many airport parking garages—Knoxville, Tampa, Jacksonville, among them—use ceiling-mounted lights to indicate the precise location of open parking spaces.

## SHAPING DOWNTOWN

# Strategy 3

## Inaugurate an urban design framework to extend downtown's sense of place and community

### OVERVIEW AND GOALS

Downtown Asheville's distinctly urban character—its treasure of historic buildings, unforgettable views to landmarks and mountains, lively parks, sidewalks and storefronts, a scale that invites and rewards walking—is one of our most celebrated assets. Investments made during the 1920s boom yielded a remarkable series of streetscapes. Careful rehabilitation and the resulting economic activity provide today's resilient and rich urban setting.

Anew era of real estate development investment, however, could threaten this character with anonymous, scale-less buildings.

The correct urban design framework can reinforce downtown Asheville's character over the next 20 years. This framework could strengthen downtown's intrinsic qualities and increase values for public and private owners—welcome contributions to street life, the skyline, and overall vibrancy.

The urban design framework proposed in this Downtown Master Plan will help guide private-sector decision makers, the City and a downtown management entity—perhaps the Asheville Downtown District—to intensify a sense of place and community. In addition,

the framework should help push the core's cherished qualities outward to other emerging areas.

Many say that downtown lies within the northern bounds of I-240, South Charlotte/Valley on the east, Hilliard on the south and French Broad on the west. But major areas well beyond these limits hold great potential. Some of these are:

- Broadway toward UNCA;
- The Martin Luther King and Stevens-Lee neighborhoods;
- Along Asheland and Coxe to Mission Health System's campus;
- WeCan;
- The River Arts District.

The urban design framework in Strategy 3 addresses the large and small roles each of these areas plays in defining "downtown." It started with input from the several thousand participants in this Downtown Master Plan process.

- Identify and safeguard the most valued places in downtown Asheville.
- Research and honor downtown's hidden histories; use interpretive elements to help define each of the five emerging districts to make them the next series of most valued places:

important people; public spaces; events; timelines; buildings, etc.

- Establish “gateways” into downtown:
  - the Broadway Corridor;
  - Tunnel Road;
  - the I-240/Beaucatcher cut;
  - Patton Avenue from West Asheville and the River Arts District;
  - Biltmore/Asheland/Coxe from Mission , etc.
- Specify areas for change and growth.
- Create transition zones among these areas.
- Establish and link a hierarchy of public open spaces for civic events, neighborhood gatherings and recreation.
- Locate, name and formalize important view corridors to, from and within downtown.
- Officially recognize the network of primary walking streets; add transit and shuttle nodes to make all of downtown accessible without the need to rely on cars and parking.
- Incorporate the official bikeway network.
- Target specific areas for community retail services, arts-related activities, research and office space, housing, civic, institutional and emerging uses.

## IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH

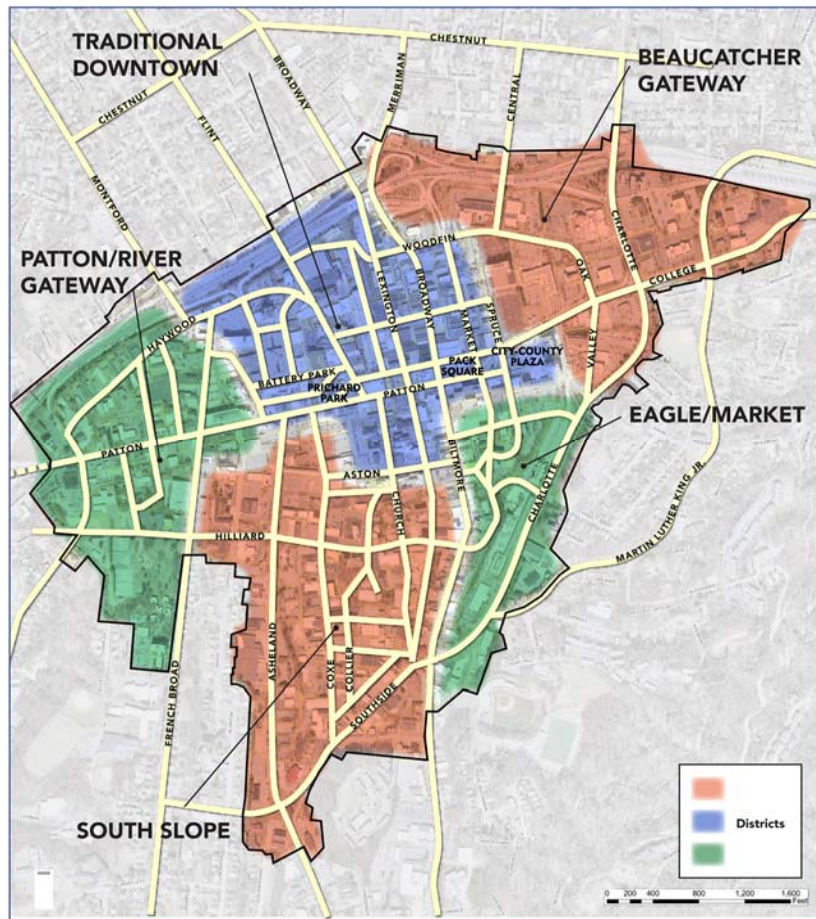
In order to “nourish the goose that laid the golden egg,” a working partnership must be formed among property owners, businesses, residents, advocates, and users. This partnership takes the form of the Asheville Downtown District. ADD’s task is to transform the whole into a series of welcoming, safe, clean, green and walkable, mixed-use urban neighborhoods. Each neighborhood must echo the success of the traditional downtown core and add unique enhancements that contribute to a strong sense—and presence—of community.

## ACTION STEPS: NEAR-TERM

- A. While adopting the Downtown Master Plan, **authorize an urban design framework to guide and shape existing and emerging neighborhoods.** This framework should cultivate the character of distinct places: distinguishing areas for preservation and areas for change; defining target land uses; facilitating mobility choices; providing civic places for parks, recreation and culture; preserving view corridors.
  1. **Cultivate the character of distinct downtown places.** Recognize the five distinct districts within downtown as unique in their history, location and opportunities. Identify smaller neighborhoods, corridors and nodes within them. Diagrams on the next page, and further descriptions of the five downtown districts and other areas on subsequent pages, describe these further.

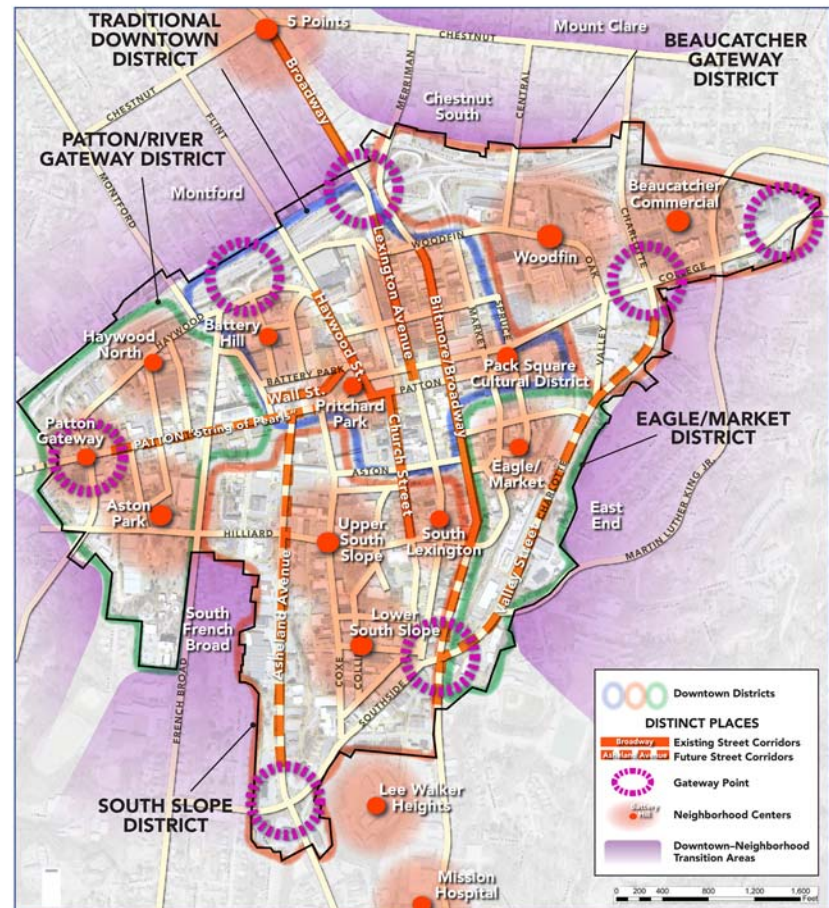
# Asheville Downtown Master Plan

DOWNTOWN DISTRICTS



In addition to the traditional core—basically the National Register Historic District-- downtown includes the Eagle/Market, Beaucatcher Gateway, South Slope and Patton/River Gateway districts. (See the appendix for enlargements of this and other diagrams)

DOWNTOWN PLACES



At a smaller scale, many distinct streets and smaller neighborhoods within downtown further contribute – or could contribute – to its sense of place.

**Traditional Downtown District:** The traditional downtown core exemplifies what most people think of as downtown. It largely coincides with the downtown Asheville National Register of Historic Places Historic District. This area is most amenable to walking, with significant historic architecture, an eclectic mix of uses and high-profile arts activities. Thoughtfully designed new buildings are appropriate in this district on vacant sites, replacing non-historic structures, or on top of historic structures. Continued investment in existing and new buildings is necessary for the Traditional Downtown District to continue to thrive. The success of this district—and the fact that it is a “15-minute neighborhood” (almost everything is within a 15-minute walk)—provides a model for all other downtown neighborhoods.



**Pedestrian-oriented parking lot infill development along Patton, and façade improvements to existing buildings, would bring more spatial quality and vitality to downtown.**



**Adding appropriate new development on Haywood can help existing properties – historic or not – gain value.**



## Asheville Downtown Master Plan

**Beaucatcher Gateway District:** This district contains a number of significant commercial sites important to downtown’s economy and employment base. At the same time, its urban renewal-era redevelopment left it in need of a truly urban fabric, connecting it to the Traditional Downtown District and making it another 15-minute neighborhood. Commercial uses should be emphasized. Greater density—and some market-supported mixed-uses—should include above- or below-grade parking served by expanded transit and the shuttle. Renovations and new construction should enhance pedestrian-oriented street activity and help create a memorable gateway to the Traditional Downtown District.



**Beaucatcher Gateway is an important commercial area. It could become more important with gradual addition of higher-value commercial development that links to the Traditional Downtown District.**

**Eagle/Market District:** Eagle/Market holds a special place in downtown due to its role as the historic center of Asheville’s African-American community. While businesses, housing and institutions operated by African-Americans are no longer confined to Eagle/Market, the district remains an important symbolic place. Eagle/Market needs to be a place that belongs to, welcomes and is an integral part of the entire downtown community. Both community development corporations in Eagle/Market have invested in solid redevelopment proposals. Both should proceed quickly. The CDCs should play roles in “filling the gaps” to link this 15-minute neighborhood to the rest of downtown. Potential development of the Asheville Area Performing Arts Center and redevelopment of City-owned property along South Charlotte Street/Valley Street should contribute to the identity and vitality of the district.



**Asheville has the opportunity to redevelop portions of the DPW site with housing and neighborhood uses that reconnect downtown with the East End. This should transform South Charlotte/Valley into an authentic urban street.**

**South Slope District:** This area contains the most significant opportunities for downtown redevelopment and growth. Topographic variations—most evident along Hilliard as it crosses a series of ridges and valleys—breaks this large area into at least three corridors. Housing development is already underway as part of a mini-neighborhood within close walking distance of downtown jobs and services. While there are ample opportunities for smaller fill-the-gap developments, much of the South Slope is also appropriate for relatively tall new buildings. Office and commercial uses are also suitable here, especially if they reinforce the Mission Health Services campus and provide neighborhood retail. The South Slope should become the major southern gateway to downtown.



The intersection of Biltmore and Southside is an important gateway to downtown from Biltmore Village and the south. It should become a high-value area that includes housing, stores, other commercial uses, and medical offices.



**Coxe should become the heart of a new residential neighborhood with a comfortable walking scale, direct links to downtown, new housing and neighborhood retail—the model of a 15-minute neighborhood.**

**Patton/River Gateway District:** Patton should become the primary link between the Traditional Downtown District and the River Arts District. In the middle of this link is a tremendous opportunity for redevelopment supporting the Asheville Hub’s Centers for Climatic and Environmental Interaction and supporting industries, stemming from presence of the NOAA and underutilized sites. Research and development activities will be within walking distance of downtown—and a short distance from UNCA along the Broadway Corridor. The Patton/River Gateway should also accommodate significant residential and extended-stay hotel development—some in taller buildings. In addition, this link will provide a walkable environment far to the west of Pritchard Park toward the River Arts District. This district also has very high potential if the City is able to reclaim and reuse public rights-of-way along a rationalized I-240 interchange with I-26.



**Patton should become a walkable downtown street lined with buildings that contain storefronts serving new jobs in new industries as well as a range of housing opportunities.**

### 2. Recognize adjacent neighborhoods and corridors

having strong—and mutually-beneficial—relationships with downtown:

**Broadway-Five Points Corridor:** This under-used stretch of Broadway offers significant promise to extend downtown’s mix of uses and walkability across I-240 and into the Montford and Hillside/Mt. Clare neighborhoods. Area property owners and developers of several independent projects, planned or underway, are already working with a notable degree of collaboration on a series of possible initiatives: extending the Reed Creek greenway closer to downtown; exploring a business improvement district (similar to the proposed ADD); thinking about a TIF district; and coordinating public realm improvements.

**Montford Neighborhood Edge:** Montford is a prime national example of the economic powers of historic rehabilitation and preservation. This strong residential neighborhood already has significant ties to downtown through sheer proximity as well as the presence of stores, schools, and the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce on the Montford side of I-240 and new development under way on the downtown side. These ties could be significantly strengthened if the I-240 “cut” were to be mended. Creation of a “Ponte Vecchio” deck with parks built over the highway is not economically viable in the near future. (A deck over I-240 at Flint Street might eventually become viable for expansion of the Civic Center) But less-expensive models for bridge improvement exist. These could take the form of a modest widening to include a small retail space, plantings and trees, and a bike lane.

**Chestnut South Edge:** These blocks north of I-240 contain a mix of office and institutional uses, some in converted residences. To the north, the more solidly residential neighborhoods of the Chestnut Historic District, Central Avenue, and Mount Clare need a more deliberate transition to Chestnut South and downtown. Chestnut South deserves attention for continued preservation, some infill and streetscapes to link to downtown.

**East End Neighborhood Edge:** Urban “renewal” rebuilt portions of the traditional Valley Street as South Charlotte Street and created parcels now occupied by commercial and government uses. This yielded two lasting effects: forcing many African Americans to lose their homes and businesses and severing East End from downtown. Significant new development and streetscape improvements along South Charlotte/Valley should be pursued to re-connect downtown and East End. This is a signal opportunity for participation by

the African American community on both sides of South Charlotte/Valley through the two CDCs in Eagle/Market. The proposed Performing Arts Center on Eagle holds significant potential to improve downtown-East End connections through both architecture and programming.

**Mission Health Services Corridor:** Mission, immediately south of downtown, is Asheville’s largest employer. Continued movement of retirees to Asheville (and success of the Hub Initiative’s “rejuvenation” cluster) will reinforce Mission’s role as Western North Carolina’s premier medical center. Mission’s predicted growth poses challenges: recruiting staff; providing nearby and affordable housing; improving parking and transit access; and strengthening wayfinding systems. Initiatives in this Downtown Master Plan offer opportunities to address all of these challenges, particularly within the South Slope District.

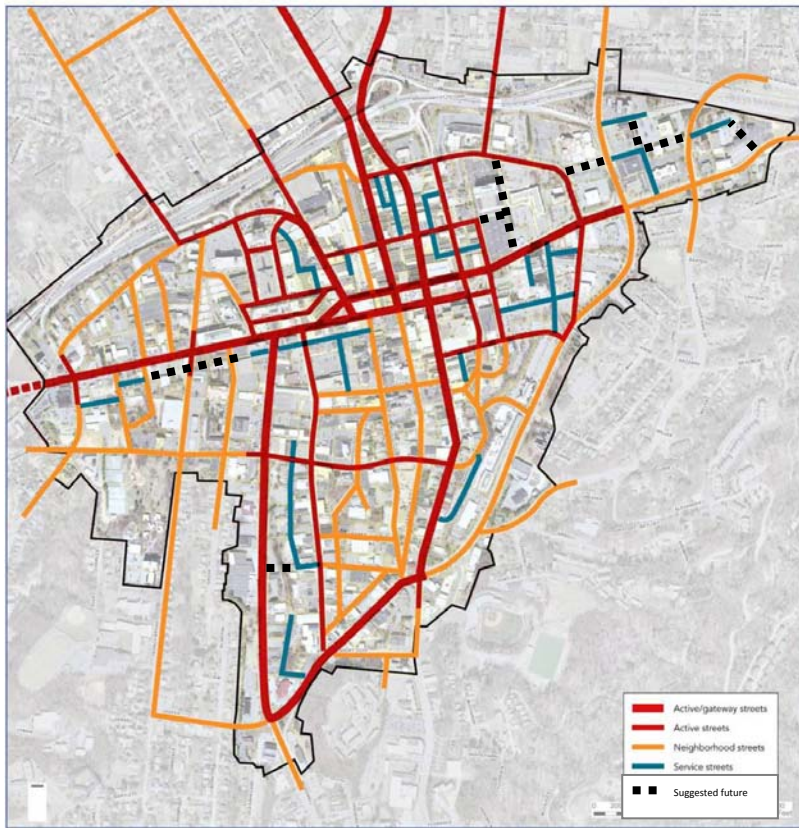
**South French Broad Neighborhood Edge:** This residential neighborhood comes close to the Traditional Downtown District, but abrupt land- use changes along French Broad and Asheland limit connectivity. Redevelopment within the South Slope District and the Patton/River Gateway offer terrific opportunities to rebuild relationships between downtown and South French Broad. Early planning for this neighborhood should coordinate with the Aston Gateway Plan and this Downtown Master Plan.

**Clingman Corridor:** New residential development and creation of the Clingman Greenway promise to reinforce Clingman’s function as an important node and connection to the River Arts District and West Asheville. Redevelopment in the Patton/River Gateway District should have important

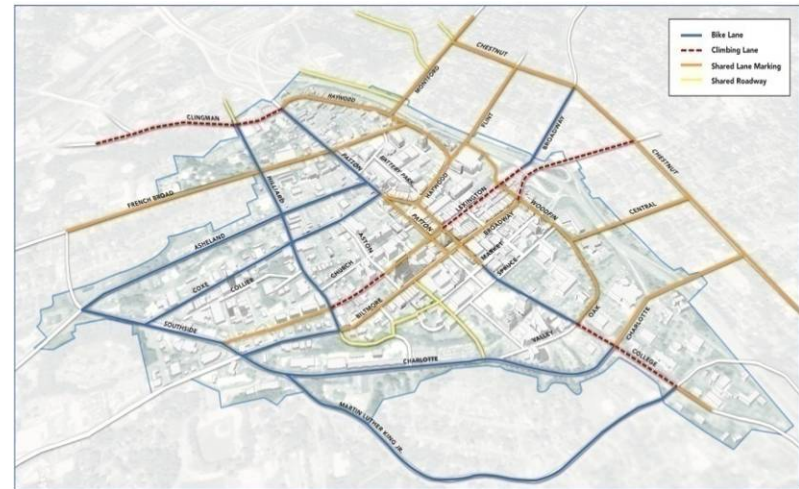
synergies with the Clingman Corridor and help spur additional redevelopment.

3. **Distinguish distinct focus areas for preservation and focus areas for change.** The *Focusing Preservation and Change* diagram on the next page identifies places where change is to be avoided, and others where it is most welcome.
4. **Define target land uses.** Downtown Asheville’s eclectic mix of land uses is one key to its richness and vibrancy. At the same time, emerging districts and new downtown neighborhoods should benefit from land use consistency—that is, a use like housing or office space should predominate—even while other land uses remain welcome and desirable. The *Target Land Uses* diagram in the appendix for Strategy 3 identifies areas where particular land uses are desirable.
5. **Facilitate access choices.** The *Street Hierarchy*, *Bicycle Network*, and *Walkable Streets* diagrams on the following page outline networks that provide options for getting around downtown. *Street Hierarchy* classifies downtown streets so that “Active” and “Active/Gateway” streets may be enhanced with the most pedestrian- and visitor-friendly furniture. By the same token, service streets are meant to accommodate heavier traffic, pulling such traffic from pedestrian streets. *Bicycle Network* illustrates the City’s 2008 Bicycle Plan recommendations for downtown, introducing improved biking conditions on major downtown routes. *Walkable Streets* expands the existing network to link emerging neighborhoods within downtown.

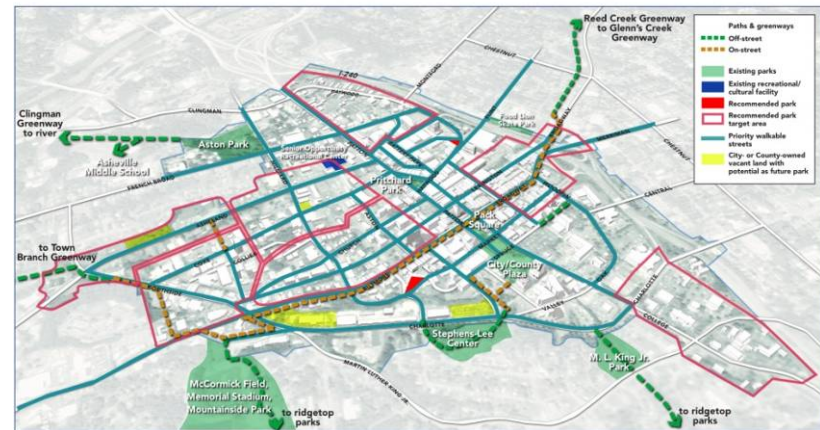
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This *Street Hierarchy* diagram classifies streets according to pedestrian appeal, appearance, and character, distinguishing them from service access routes.

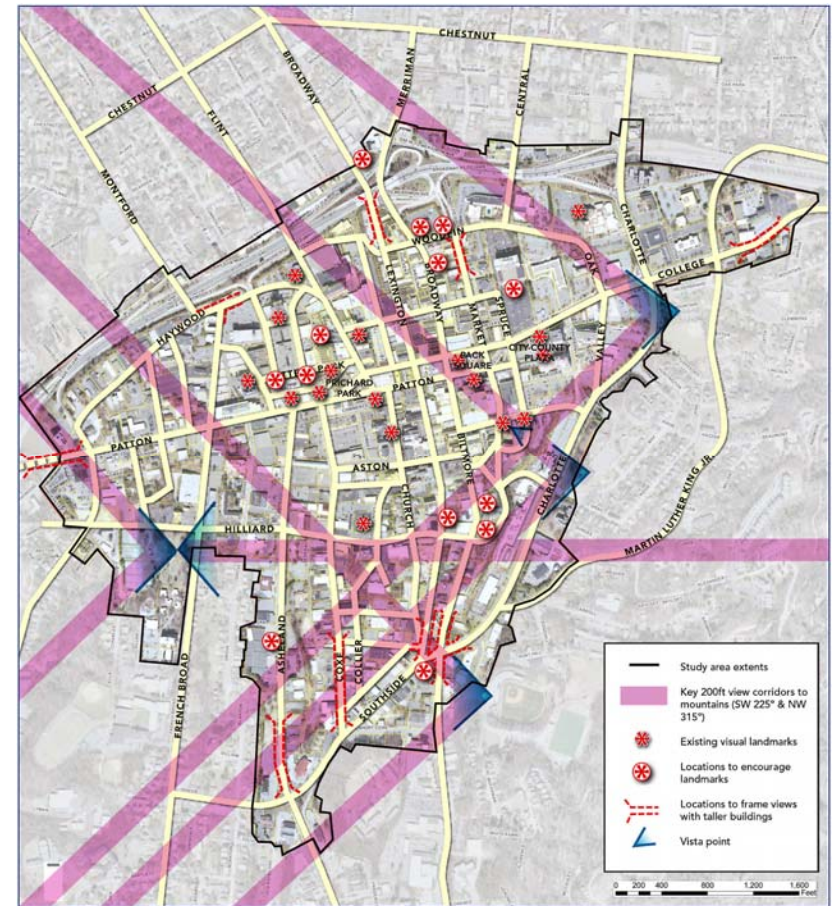


*Bicycle Network (bird's eye view looking northwest; to be replaced with plan view)*



*Parks, Greenways and Walkable Streets (bird's eye view looking northwest; to be replaced with plan view)*

6. **Provide places for public parks, recreation and culture.** The *Parks, Greenways & Walkable Streets* diagram on the previous page places walkable street within a larger network of parks. Existing parks serve as important (and heavily used) centers of community activity and identity that are enjoyed by residents and visitors alike. New open spaces and parks will be needed to serve a growing residential population downtown. Red outlines on the diagram show target areas where a new park will likely serve a neighborhood center. Securing, improving and maintaining new parkland is a challenge, but key opportunities for establishing them include existing City-owned parcels, land purchases, land reclaimed from NC DOT ownership, and public park space incorporated by agreement into large new developments.
  
7. **Preserve signature view corridors.** “Vista parks” in existing and new locations (and on roofs of tall buildings) are needed to provide permanent public views of downtown’s stunning mountain setting. See Strategy 4, Action step B, for more detailed requirements.



**View Corridors and Landmarks**

- B. **Steer growth to areas appropriate for change and away from areas needing protection.** The Planning and Development department and the downtown management entity (ADD) should actively pursue several goals.
  1. Encourage developers and landowners to develop strategic sites in ways that benefit whole neighborhoods

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and districts. Promote joint-ventures and “broker” deals. Shape development proposals to match intended characteristics in the different districts and neighborhoods in and adjacent to downtown. Discuss urban design and community goals for downtown with developers at the conceptual design stage. Help shape projects to meet goals of both their sponsors and the larger community.

2. Define RFQ and RFP criteria on public land to support urban design framework goals. Seize these near-term opportunities to foster positive change.
  - Redevelop City-owned land along South Charlotte/Valley (including the DPW service areas). Conduct a community-based planning process emphasizing involvement of the African-American community to determine priority uses, scale and other characteristics. Encourage participation by the two community Development corporations in the Eagle/Market district.

- Encourage joint-ventures for park or plaza space in the redevelopment of City-owned land at Haywood and Page Streets
- Include civic or retail uses on the ground level of all City-owned RFP sites.

- C. **Coordinate plans for adjacent and overlapping areas** (such as the South French Broad and Aston Gateway plans) with the downtown urban design framework.

## ACTION STEPS: LONG-TERM

- Use City redevelopment powers to strategically buy and “bank” land. Issue RFQs and RFPs for development to achieve Downtown Master Plan goals. Coordinate these processes with the ADD.
- Implement longer-term elements of the urban design framework

## **FUNDING SOURCES**

- Earmark at least 50 percent of the proceeds from any City land sales to help fund downtown initiatives.
- Float bonds for redevelopment and repay the bonds from land sale proceeds.

## **IN THE APPENDIX**

See the appendix for larger urban design framework diagrams of most of the illustrations in this Strategy. There are also enlarged renderings illustrating opportunities in all five of the 15-minute downtown neighborhoods.

## **PRECEDENTS**

- The Clifton Community and Emory University in metropolitan Atlanta have begun to successfully manage strong growth pressure by creating a series of corridor design districts. Guidelines promote different attitudes as appropriate in different districts: an emphasis on preservation around traditional residential neighborhoods and natural areas; an emphasis on significant pedestrian-oriented mixed-use development in areas needing transformation away from auto-dominated landscapes and uses.
- In Virginia, Alexandria’s Braddock neighborhood plan balances demand for transit-oriented housing with strong community interest in preserving historic buildings. This is a longtime African American community needing affordable housing. The plan identifies places for higher-density development, lower density development and transitions. Part of development proceeds pay for community needs.



## SHAPING DOWNTOWN

# Strategy 4

## Shape building form to promote quality of place

### OVERVIEW AND GOALS

It is true that the built environment effects how we think about a place: we may avoid certain areas but we may be attracted to a lively street scene just a few blocks away. This Downtown Master Plan proposes a zoning policy that defines appropriate massing, height and density allowances—all coordinated within the urban design framework in Strategy 3—to build distinct character in each neighborhood and gateway. Building forms focus on creating public and private value and guide development potential to organize mass, height and density responding to the community’s vision principles. Goals for Strategy 4 contain the following elements.

- Consider taller buildings that cast limited shadows and do not disrupt established neighborhood scale. The South Slope District, South Charlotte, Patton/River Gateway District and the Beaucatcher Gateway are good candidates for taller buildings. Greater height may also be appropriate for infill or air rights projects in the Traditional Downtown District. Pairs of taller buildings can help frame designated view corridors.
- Respect downtown’s skyline as a part of our mountain landscape. Design enjoyable building caps; pay attention to building proportions.

- Add to downtown’s pedestrian scale (and limit shadows) by using step-backs on higher floors.
- Reduce horizontal façade lengths and avoid “slabs.”
- Maximize view corridors between taller buildings by limiting floorplate size to a percentage of site area.
- Control shadow impacts on adjacent public open space.
- Investigate roof tops as public spaces and “vista” parks.

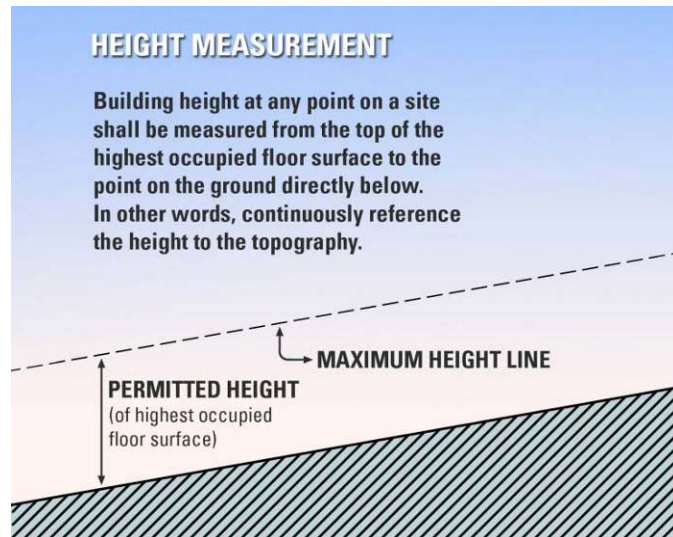
### IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH

This Downtown Master Plan seeks to enrich downtown and surrounding districts with additional residents, activities and investments. This is accomplished by revisions and integration of existing zoning, Downtown Asheville Design Guidelines and project review criteria. A variety of heights, massing and character will respect the treasured context, animate the skyline and preserve valued buildings and views.

## ACTION STEPS: NEAR-TERM

Undertake a coordinated revision of the Uniform Development Ordinance (UDO) and the Downtown Asheville Design Guidelines to safeguard downtown’s character through building form and height.

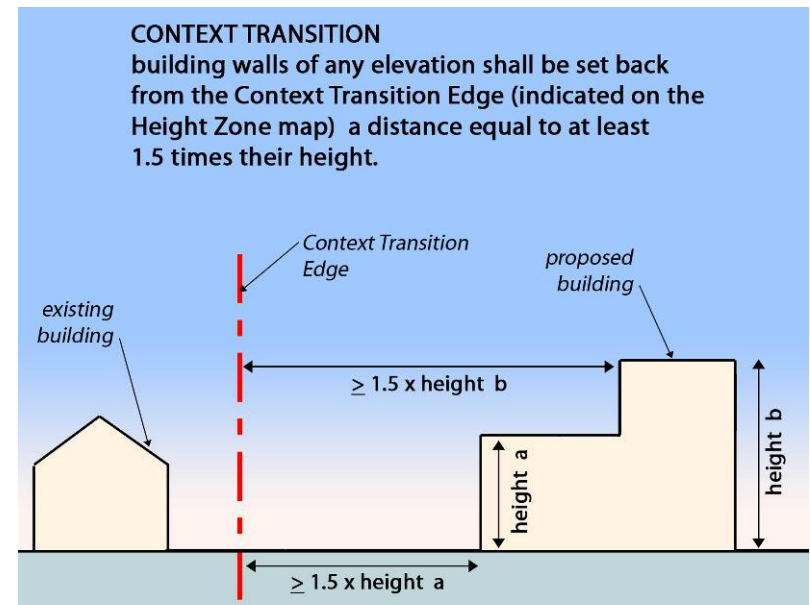
- A. **Establish maximum height zones in downtown.** Measure building height from existing grade level to the highest occupied floor surface; the remainder of the top floor, roof top mechanical areas and appropriate building caps are not included in overall heights.



### Determination of building height

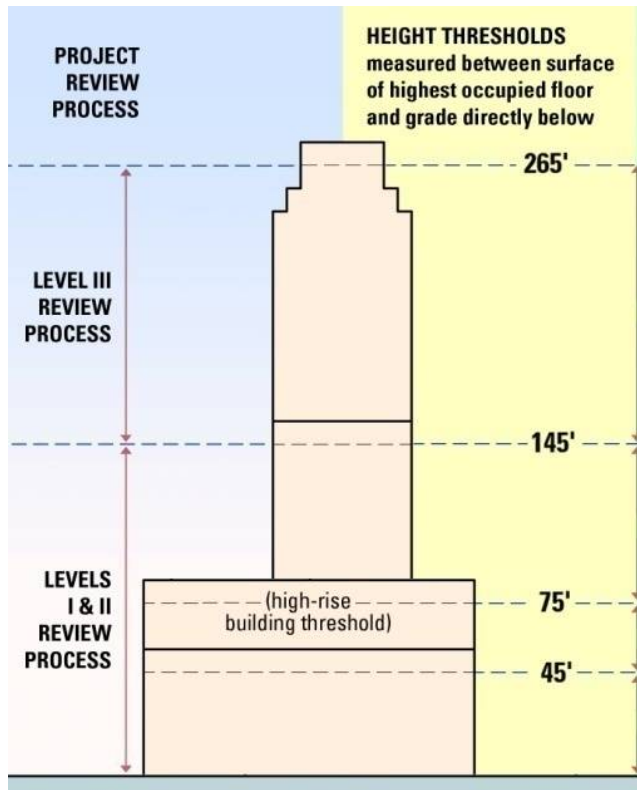
1. 45 feet (five stories) is permitted and encouraged as-of-right throughout downtown—especially on infill sites between buildings.

2. 75 feet (eight stories per North Carolina building code) is permitted throughout downtown.
3. 145 feet (15 stories) is the intermediate height threshold defined by the community’s favorite 1920s structures: the Jackson, Battery Park Hotel, County building and City Hall.
4. 265 feet (27 stories) is the maximum allowable height (similar to the Ellington and Battery Park proposals).
5. Encourage gradual scale transitions between downtown and adjacent neighborhoods. Set back all building elements from the Context Transition Edge a distance at least one-and-one-half times their height (see diagram below, and building height zone diagram next page).



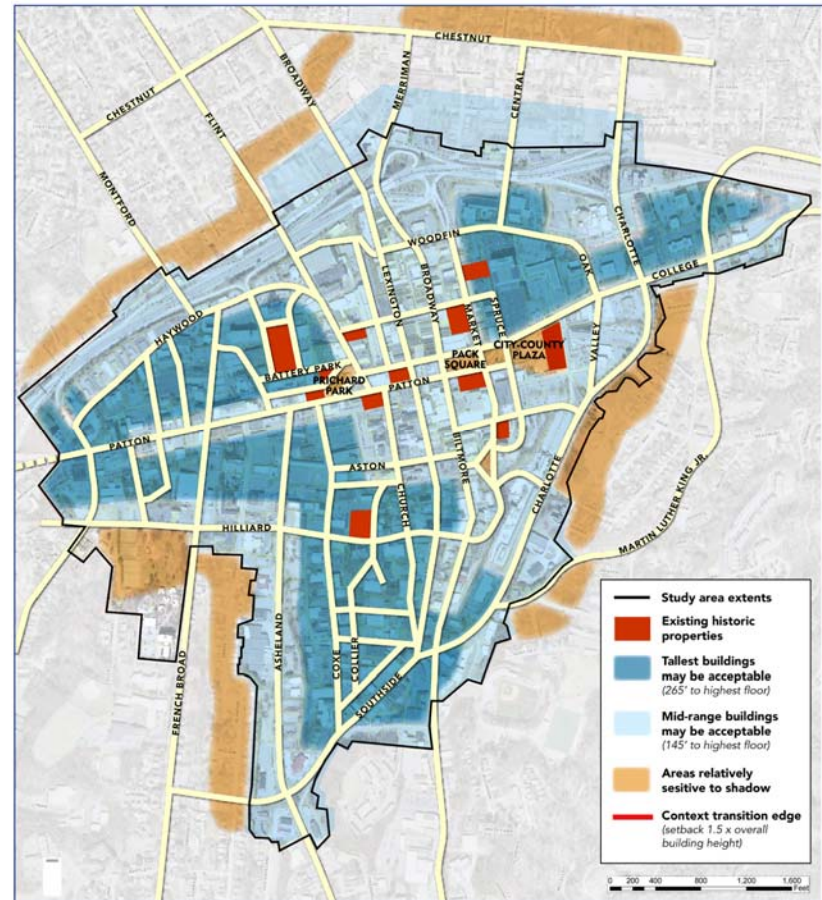
**Proposed buildings should be set back from the Context Transition Edge a distance proportional to their height.**

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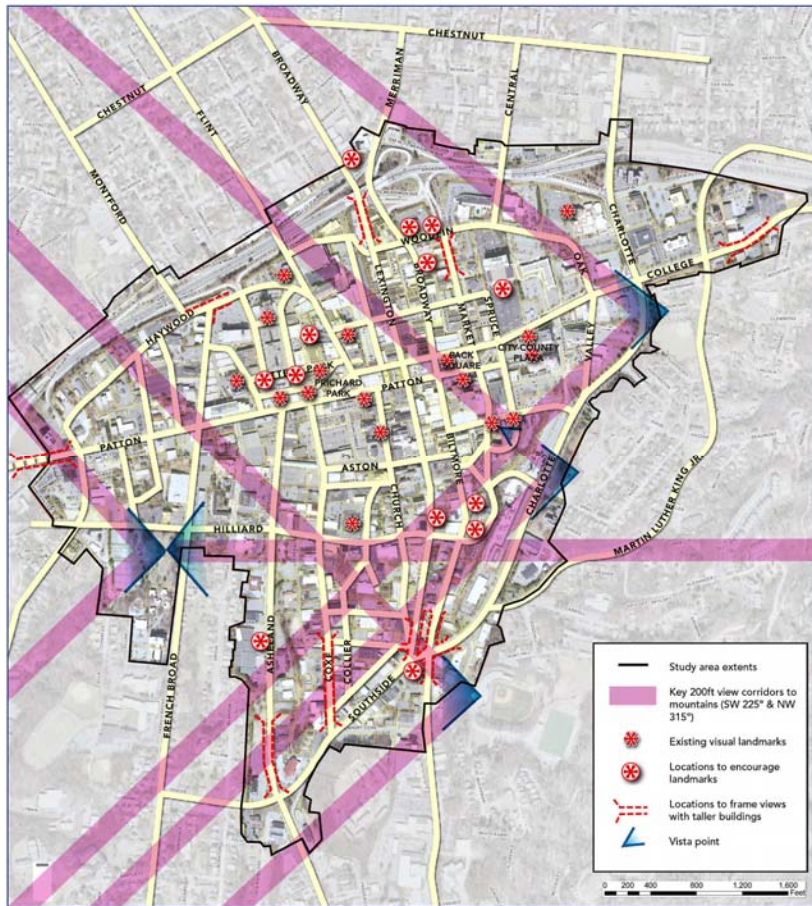


Building height thresholds in the Master Plan

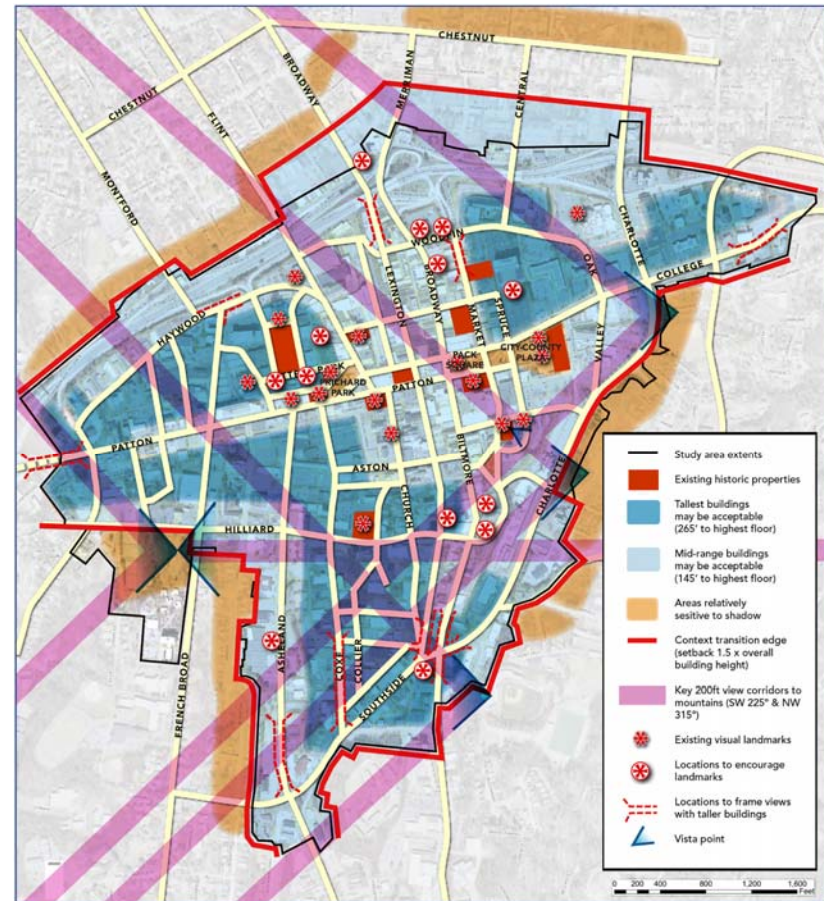
## BUILDING HEIGHT ZONES



Building height zones respond to and shape character in different downtown areas.



Buildings in public vista corridors deserve special architectural attention to ensure they do not compromise celebrated views. Buildings serving as visual landmarks are encouraged in specific prominent locations to enhance the experience of moving through downtown.



Composite diagram of building height zones, public vista corridors and historic properties inappropriate for tall new buildings.

- B. Require building caps, and related approaches to building form and siting, that **acknowledge the prominence of taller buildings on downtown Asheville's skyline**. Encourage caps that help define a building's character and scale from the street and that can function as memorable skyline elements,

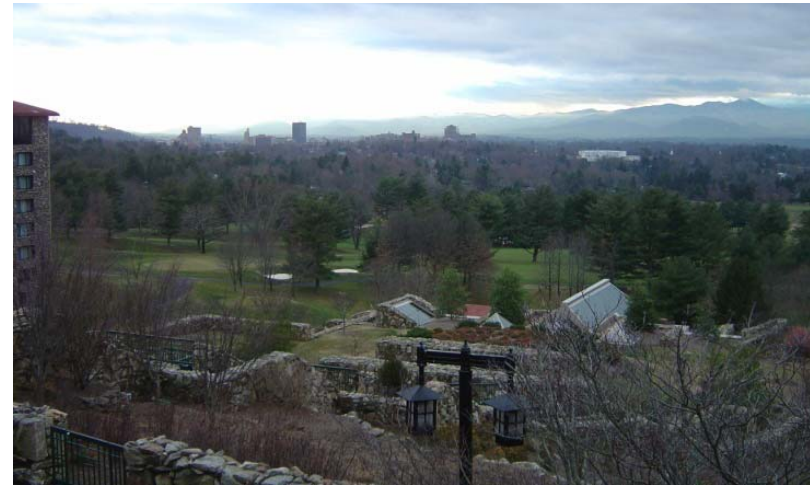
## Asheville Downtown Master Plan

without detracting from important public views. Design caps as attractive landmarks with special forms and materials. Coordinate caps with building form to distinguish a base, middle and top. Express a character uniquely appropriate to the downtown Asheville.

To facilitate evaluation of these qualities, require sponsors of all proposals exceeding the 75 -foot height threshold, and those located in designated 200-foot-wide public view corridors (see view corridor diagram), to submit photomontages illustrating their proposed building's presence in the skyline. For buildings over 75 feet, illustrations should be provided of existing and proposed ground-level views from the following points:

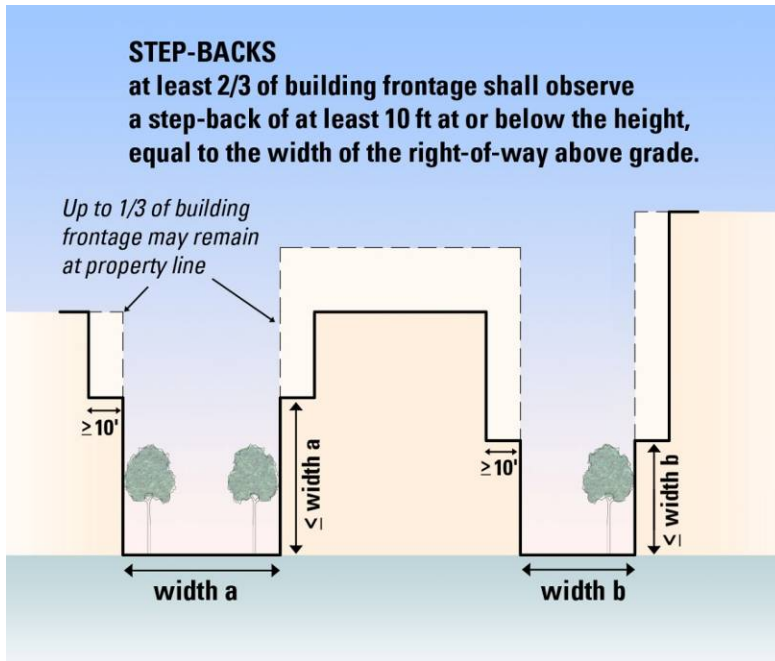
- Patton Avenue at Florida Avenue;
- Biltmore Avenue at Choctaw Street;
- Town Mountain Road from the bridge over I-240;
- Merrimon Avenue at Grayson Street; and
- The main terrace at the Grove Park Inn.

For buildings in public view corridors, illustrations should be provided of existing and proposed ground-level views from the view corridor vista point.



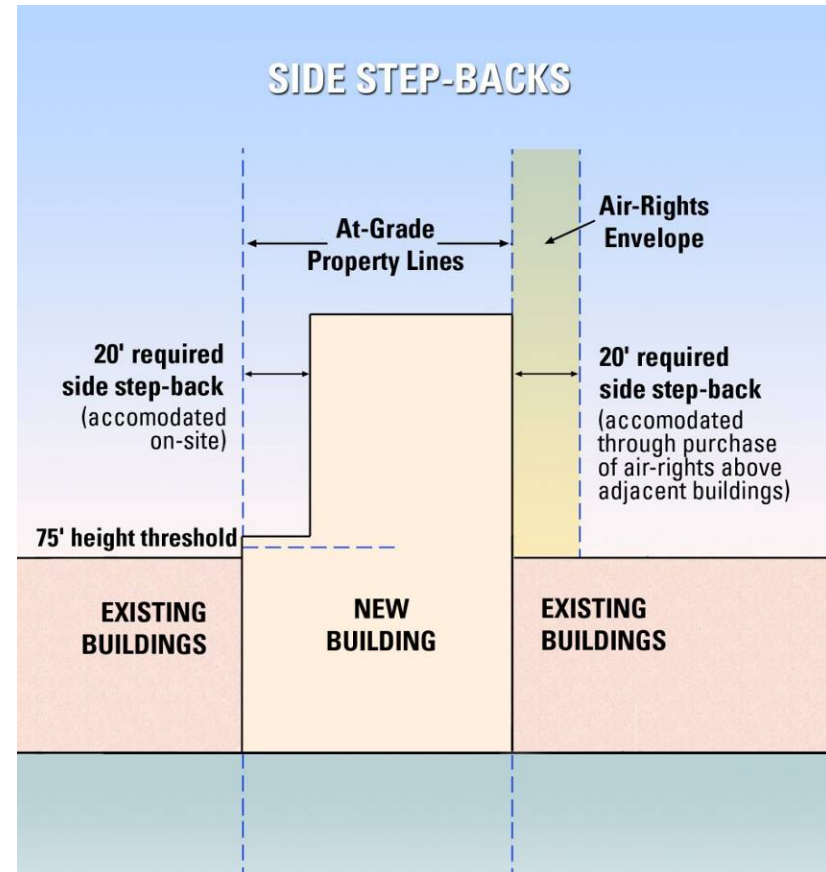
**Downtown skyline and mountain view from the main terrace at the Grove Park Inn**

- C. **Step-back upper floors from street rights-of-way** to preserve downtown's traditional scale and allow daylight to reach street level (see diagram next page).
1. Require a front façade step-back of at least ten feet once a building's height equals the width of the principal street right-of-way along its front.
  2. In new buildings proposed within 200 feet of listed historic buildings, require the front step-back to occur within five feet (vertically) of the average height of the historic building.
  3. For major new proposals and at major downtown intersections, require front step-backs to occur at a height equal to twice the width of the overall street right-of-way.



Front step-backs should be required at heights proportional to street right-of-way width.

- D. **Promote view corridors between buildings;** encourage slender buildings. The following requirements apply *only* to buildings rising above the 75 foot height threshold defined in action step A.2 above.



Side step-backs should be required on-site or may be accommodated by purchase of air rights from adjacent owners.

1. Step-back upper building mass at least 20 feet from adjacent side property lines (developed or undeveloped).
2. Allow purchase of air-rights from adjacent properties to enable building to extend directly to the property line.
3. Require side facades to be at least 25 percent glazing.

## Asheville Downtown Master Plan

4. Limit the gross area of floorplates to 30 percent of the site area on parcels 20,000 square feet or larger.
  5. Limit the gross area of floorplates to 6,000 square feet on parcels smaller than 20,000 square feet.
  6. Avoid “slabs” by limiting maximum overall horizontal floorplate dimensions above the required step-back to 150 feet
  7. Orient building mass to preserve and enhance significant public views, as described under action step B above.
- E. **Require that no point in a public park and plaza space be shaded** by a new building for more than two hours between 10:00 am and 2:00 pm, observed on the equinox.
- F. To facilitate public review, require all sponsors of proposals exceeding the 75 foot height threshold **to submit a three-dimensional computer model** of their project suitable for insertion into the city’s three-dimensional downtown computer model.



**Computer model of a hypothetical new building (in ivory) at the corner of Haywood and College streets, set into model of existing buildings (with brown roofs) for purposes of public comment and review**

## ACTION STEPS: LONG-TERM

Enhance the City’s three-dimensional computer model of downtown with more accurate topography, street trees and new development projects as they are submitted and approved. Use the enhanced model more extensively in public places for review and presentations.

## **FUNDING SOURCES**

City funding should be provided for revision of the UDO, Downtown Asheville Design Guidelines and training for the City's design review staff.

## **IN THE APPENDIX**

See the appendix for larger building-form diagrams, including most of the illustrations in this Strategy.

The appendix also contains:

- Building height zone map
- Building height threshold diagram
- Diagrams illustrating sample application of form and height controls
- Diagrams showing implications of public park and plaza shadow restrictions on building form
- Analysis of downtown parcel areas

## **PRECEDENTS**

Beginning in the early 1990s, Vancouver successfully fostered a series of tall, slender buildings throughout its Downtown South area through specific design guidelines. The guidelines achieve pleasing building proportions while retaining views to the mountains and the sea. The guidelines also diminish the impact of tall buildings on streets by controlling floorplate size, dimensions between buildings, building volume and orientation, shadow impacts, and similar measures.

Aspen and Durango, Colorado, measure building height at any point on a parcel to the actual grade below it, rather than to a single average ground elevation. This approach improves building height relationships with significant topographical variation, and thus has been recommended for downtown Asheville.



## SHAPING DOWNTOWN

# Strategy 5

Update downtown design guidelines to be current, to be clear, and to promote sustainable development

### OVERVIEW AND GOALS

Downtown Asheville has recently attracted larger-scale, higher-value projects of unprecedented height and overall scale. The City should also continue to encourage small-scale infill development. Both require more sophisticated tools for review and approval, with flexibility and incentives for inventive approaches to sustainability, economic viability, and character enhancement. Strategy 4 specifically addressed new height and massing requirements; Strategy 5 focuses on recommended design guidelines, and overall documentation of development standards. In all cases, proposal review must be expanded to:

- Respect downtown's topography.
- Consider environmental impacts comprehensively.
- Evaluate impacts on adjoining properties and uses—before, during and after construction.
- Examine building form; articulate scale as sensed from near and far; consider transitions to, from, and among adjacent taller buildings.
- Work toward high-quality residential buildings: encourage ground-level unit entrances, live-work spaces, co-housing, and other quality-enhancing measures.

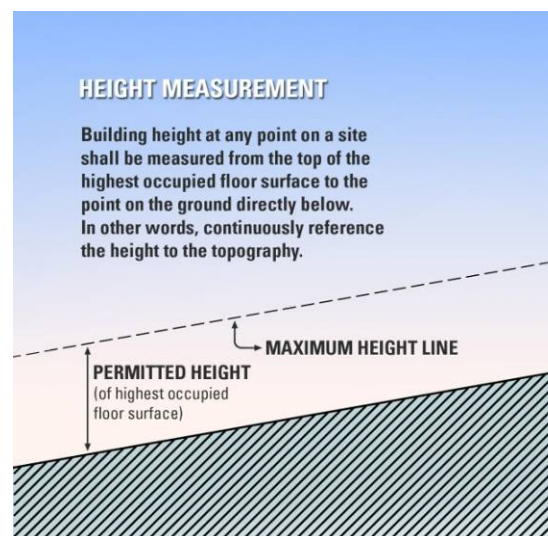
- Study a building's fit in the urban fabric—especially ground floor uses and the face presented to the public.
- Consider a new building's fit with neighboring historic buildings and special places.
- Supplement Asheville's existing green building strategies:
  - add incentives such as expedited plan review, density bonuses, and grants, awards;
  - make all incentives meaningful in time, money;
  - build partnerships with the WNC Green Building Council and other green organizations;
  - provide educational programs for City staff, developers, appraisers, lenders, and other key actors in the development process;
  - provide technical and marketing assistance to green builders.
- Provide clear, objective, readily available review standards to developers, property owners, and the general public as well as review agencies.
- Clearly distinguish between required and recommended (voluntary) development standards, and provide incentives for meeting recommendations.

## IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH

The rallying cry is “don’t kill the goose that laid the golden egg.” This Downtown Master Plan presents an opportunity to use zoning, design guidelines and similar tools to encourage new buildings that preserve and enrich the character, quality, and sustainability of downtown’s streets, public spaces and architecture.

## ACTION STEPS: NEAR-TERM

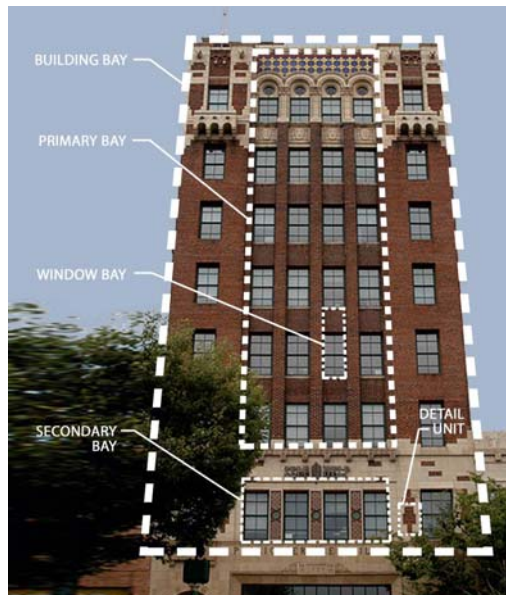
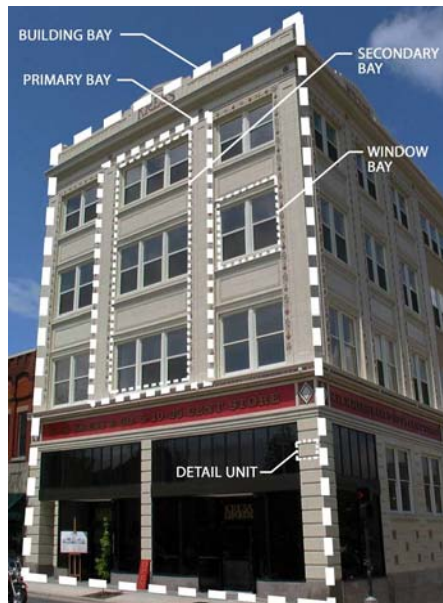
- A. Consolidate, approve and enforce elements of the UDO and updated Downtown Asheville Design Guidelines (see B, below). Clearly distinguish between the required and recommended elements. Create a concise checklist to serve for design review and for formal written findings submitted to the regulatory body making final approval decisions. (An outline for this checklist appears in the appendix.)
- B. Add new standards to the existing Downtown Asheville Design Guidelines.
  1. **Continuously measure building height in relation to topography.** Currently, building height is determined in reference to a single point on a site. If this reference point occurs at the site’s highest elevation, a significant grade change can push the project’s overall height significantly beyond the intended standard. This master plan recommends that building height at any point on a site be measured *continuously* to the point on the ground directly below. Hence, the topography on which a building sits will directly determine its height profile.



**Determination of building height, not including the top floor, mechanical areas, and building cap.**

2. **Articulate building form at a range of scales.** In keeping with the practice of famed Asheville architect Richard Sharp Smith, larger buildings should be articulated in a hierarchy of smaller volumes and masses that better relate to other buildings and the scale of streets. Volume and mass scale intervals should include :
  - *Building Bays:* 42 feet to 64 feet, measured horizontally, is a familiar Asheville scale. Bays should extend vertically for at least three stories. These basic building-block bays relate well to the scale of historic downtown buildings and our street widths.
  - *Primary Bays:* 22 feet to 36 feet, measured horizontally, and at least three stories vertically are common in Asheville.

## Asheville Downtown Master Plan



- *Secondary Bays:* Ten feet to 16 feet, measured horizontally, and at least one-and-one-half stories vertically relate to the scale of individual residential rooms, most offices, building entrances, and sidewalks.
- *Window Bays:* Three feet to six feet, measured horizontally, and extending vertically at least 1.4 times the horizontal dimension. Window bays of this size relate to the scale of typical building windows, doors and projecting bays (as well as the human body).
- *Detail Units:* R.S. Smith used details of variable dimensions, but generally enclosed an area of about one square foot. Detail units relate to the scale of individual building-material units such as bricks, shingles, light fixtures, and vegetation.

Within 200 feet of an historic structure, new building façades should specifically make reference to the historic building(s): Bay windows on a new building, for example, might match those on an historic building; tiles or spandrels on a new building might match the size of window divisions on an historic structure.

**Buildings should express mass and volume at a range of scales to help make downtown fit comfortably together. The analyses of the Kress and Public Service buildings at left show how the recommended range of scales can be articulated on buildings of varied sizes, styles and uses.**

3. **Integrate multifamily and townhouse residential buildings into downtown’s fabric.** Stakeholders across the board agree that more downtown housing should help shape and activate streets. Urban residential buildings have specific privacy and identity needs not addressed in the current, commercially-oriented design guidelines. To that end, the City should adopt these measures:

- Provide exterior entrances for individual ground-floor units (and access to units on upper floors through other entries). Individual entrances provide scale and identity at the same time that they break down the scale of a larger building.
- Provide privacy separations between individual ground-floor units and the sidewalk. Raise the floor level to between 18 and 48 inches above sidewalk grade. On streets where building setbacks are typical, include a compact front yard—at least two feet deep and no more than 15 feet deep, preferably matching context—with fence or plantings defining the yard edge along the sidewalk.
- On active streets, encourage live-work units with ground-floor offices and retail space. Locate these units on the lot line and provide significant retail-style glazing.
- Articulate building façades with bay windows, balconies and materials to distinguish individual dwelling units

C. Initiate incentives for buildings to meet high standards of green design and operation. This will reduce downtown

Asheville’s impact on the environment and provide leadership for other communities. It also reduces operations costs of new and existing buildings, benefiting long-term economic viability. This Downtown Master Plan endorses concepts in the July 2008 memo by Asheville’s Sustainability Advisory Committee on Energy and the Environment (SACEE), and embraces the following initiatives.

1. **Propose property tax incentives.** In other cities nationwide, a green building’s higher assessed value sometimes offsets tax-rate reductions. Explore opportunities to provide grants to untaxed nonprofit organizations for green construction and retrofit.
2. **Offer water fee reductions.** Encourage water conservation through reduced fees for lower usage rates.
3. **Introduce an expedited permit process.** Assure green proposals priority consideration among other permit applications.
4. **Establish a green community benefit program (CBP) bonus.** Consider rewarding use of sustainable building standards with credits toward the CBP (see Strategy 7, action step C). For example, consider qualification for LEED Gold or higher standard as a means of meeting contribution requirements for new projects.
5. **Build on existing conservation incentives offered by utilities.** Familiarize all development proposal sponsors with utility-based grant programs for green projects.
6. **Support partnerships for education and assistance.** Collaborate with the Western North Carolina Green Building Council, Asheville-Buncombe Technical

## Asheville Downtown Master Plan

Community College, and other area sources of green-building expertise. Target education for City staff and project review entities. Expand education opportunities for developers, designers, lending institutions, appraisers and other stakeholders. Develop opportunities for free (or very inexpensive) technical assistance from green design professionals.

7. **Pursue the goal of achieving LEED Gold certification for all City-owned buildings**
8. **Establish an awards program.** Promote local and regional green projects that encourage high performance. Raise the profile of green design as part of the City's profile as a national leader in sustainability.

## ACTION STEPS: LONG-TERM

- Frequently upgrade green building standards to reflect emerging technologies and advantageous changes in the cost/benefit equation.

## FUNDING SOURCES

Foundation grants and local university support (UNCA, A-B Tech, WCU, etc.) may be available for City staff training on green building principles.

Some cities have secured green design and building funding from their respective state, from the US Economic Development Administration, and from the US Environmental Protection Agency.

## IN THE APPENDIX

- The suggested project review checklist mentioned in action step A.
- Text, precedent photos, and diagrams describing suggested new design standards in more detail.

## PRECEDENTS

Among many other cities, Durham has developed a set of very clear design standards. Farther afield, Bellingham, WA, Long Beach and San Jose, CA, New Haven, CT, and Ottawa, ON, have developed very good site-specific design standards and models, as well as model for green building.

## SHAPING DOWNTOWN

# Strategy 6

## Make downtown project review transparent, predictable, and inclusive of community input

### OVERVIEW AND GOALS

The current downtown development review process is messy and confusing to all: the public, the development community, elected officials, even City staff. (The appendix contains a critique of the current process.) Why the frustration? This process is based on a regulatory framework that long predates downtown's changing dynamic. Many parts of the process are hold-overs from suburban development patterns; they must be revised to provide clarity and certainty in downtown Asheville; allow ample public input; assure a level playing field for developers; promote confidence among elected officials; and give City staff and volunteer reviewers a firm set of procedures and regulations. The following goals should shorten the time required for project review and reduce overall development costs.

- Clarify design standards and guidelines, with a focus on making them relevant to today's downtown. Ensure that approvals are clearly linked to specific standards.
- Make the Level I approval process as easy as possible to encourage infill development.
- Adjust Level II and Level III project thresholds to guarantee that larger projects undergo public review at earlier stages.
- Require approval bodies to consider whether a proposal meets policy goals in this Downtown Master Plan.
- Limit application of the quasi-judicial conditional use permit (CUP) *only* to those projects whose proposed uses fall outside as-of-right land uses for their site.
- Shorten the downtown development review process by eliminating at least one level of review.
- Place a finite time limit on design review.
- Guarantee multiple opportunities for public input—especially in early stages.
- Provide opportunities for community benefits through development bonuses in a consistent, equitable, and non-political framework.
- Enhance the role of the Downtown Commission in design review.

## IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH

Give planning the force of law by ensuring review and approval of development proposals in ways that respect objective criteria stemming from community goals.

## ACTION STEPS: NEAR-TERM

Amend the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) to include new processes and review elements.

- A. Accommodate opportunities for meaningful public comment.
  1. For large projects, require developer-sponsored community meetings at an early stage, when public comments can be addressed most easily and effectively. Sponsors of Level II projects over 50,000 square feet and all Level III projects should hold a community meeting prior to Technical Review Committee (TRC) and Downtown Commission review. Such meetings are also recommended for Level II projects of less than 50,000 square feet.
  2. All official review meetings, including those of the TRC, Downtown Commission, Planning and Zoning Commission, and City Council, should have advertised opportunity for public attendance and input. Any members of the public making comments should state their resident address and any relevant affiliations. Public comments made at meetings should be included in the written record of each review meeting. Written comments submitted by those not in attendance need not be included in the record.
  3. Publicity for developer- and City-sponsored meetings alike should follow typical current procedures including mailings to neighboring property owners, temporary outdoor signs, and online, except that mailings should

be expanded to owners within 500 feet, up from the current 200 feet.

- B. Create a Downtown Development Handbook that lays out the review process, outlines all applicable regulations, and describes development incentives—including density bonuses, green building incentives, and affordable housing incentives. Distribute the handbook at all predevelopment conferences. Distribute a concise summary of relevant standards at all public meetings for public reference.
- C. Make structural changes to the review and approval process:
  1. Revise project level definitions. Asheville’s division of development proposals in Level I, Level II and Level III categories should be retained, but alter the level thresholds for downtown proposals.
    - The revised “Level I Downtown” category should include all proposals under 20,000 square feet.
    - Expand the “Level II—Downtown” category to include proposals from 20,000 square feet to 175,000 square feet and up to 145 feet (15 stories) in height. (See Strategy 4 for more detail on height definitions.)
    - Limit the “Level III—Downtown” category to proposals above 175,000 square feet and above 145 feet or 15 stories in height.
  2. **Require formal written findings** from TRC and the Downtown Commission (levels II and III) detailing how a project does or does not meet requirements in the UDO and the Downtown Asheville Design Guidelines. Formal written findings should be part of recommendations sent to higher review bodies for review. A member of TRC or Downtown Commission (or both) should present findings to the regulatory body. Reports should include record of public comments in all review stages.
  3. **Review “Level I—Downtown” proposals as a staff function** by the Technical Review Committee (TRC). This administrative review covers all proposals of less than 20,000 square feet. The TRC should be the regulatory



## Asheville Downtown Master Plan

body for Level I—Downtown proposals. At TRC meetings, the oral public comment period may be limited, with opportunity for attendees to submit written comments. Appeals may be made to the Planning and Zoning Commission.

4. **Review “Level II—Downtown” proposals in this order:**
    - First, the TRC should perform site plan review and issue formal written findings, then refer the proposal to the Downtown Commission.
    - Second, the Downtown Commission should perform design review and issue formal written findings, then refer the proposal to the Planning and Zoning Commission. Appeal of design review may be made to City Council.
    - Third, the Planning and Zoning Commission should review the proposal for compliance with all UDO design and development standards and approve it, deny approval, or approve it with conditions, as the ultimate regulatory body. Appeal of Planning and Zoning decisions may be made to City Council.
  5. **Review “Level III—Downtown” proposals in the following order:**
    - First, the TRC should perform site plan review and issue formal written findings, then refer the proposal to the Downtown Commission.
    - Second, the Downtown Commission should perform design review, issue formal written findings, then refer the proposal to the Planning and Zoning Commission.
    - Third, Planning and Zoning should review the proposal for compliance with all UDO design and development standards and approve it, approve it with conditions, or deny approval, based on formal written findings from the TRC and the Downtown Commission. It should then refer the proposal to City Council.
- Fourth, City Council must consider the formal written recommendations from the three lower bodies as well as any new public comment. City Council should issue final approval, denial or approval with conditions as the ultimate regulatory body. Appeal of Council’s decisions may be made to the Superior Court of Buncombe County. Level III—Downtown review should not combine a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) hearing with site plan review (see action item D below). CUPs should be confined only to uses that could prove incompatible with existing downtown uses and character. Projects that cause concern due to size (not use) should become “uses by right with special conditions;” clearly define the term “special conditions” in the UDO.
- D. Apply the Conditional Use Permit process (CUP) only to projects requesting a variance from allowed land uses, and only to consider the specific question of use. Apply the CUP process separately in all of the above review and approval processes and hold a special hearing before City Council. If a proposal requires a CUP, the permit should be obtained before final site plan approval by any regulatory body.
  - E. Large development proposals with phased components should submit a master plan for review and approval, and then each component phase for individual review and approval. Advance approval of the master plan should allow for expedited approval of component phases.
  - F. Require Technical Review Committee (TRC) review of all Level II and Level III projects prior to review by the Downtown Commission: “technical merits” should be established before any form of design review.
  - G. Affirm the Downtown Commission as the principal design review body. Update its membership to include representation by design and development experts (for example, registered architects or landscape architects, urban designers, engineers, real estate professionals, developers, attorneys

practicing land use law, and so on). Development proposals not meeting recommended design standards should be denied by the Downtown Commission but then referred to City Council for design review.

- H. Establish a core group of City staff to serve as a “Downtown Development Team,” handling all downtown proposal applications and attending all predevelopment conferences. This team should include members of the TRC and Downtown Commission’s Design Review Subcommittee to ensure that site planning and design issues receive attention early in the process.
- I. Each project review step involving a review commission should have a specific time limit between submission and written findings, to expedite the process. As in other North Carolina jurisdictions, stipulate that proposals are deemed approved if action is not taken within a specific number of days. A maximum three-month (90 day) design review period is recommended. Review may be extended due to significant design modifications. Approvals may be expedited to reward exemplary response to design guidelines or other favorable proposal qualities.
- J. Project sponsors may choose project review by City Council in these cases:
  - 1. In the event project review by other commissions has extended past the time limit identified above.
  - 2. In the event design review approval has been denied for not meeting recommended design standards (projects shall not be denied a permit for not meeting recommended standards).
  - 3. In lieu of making a contribution to the Community Benefits Fund (see Strategy 7, action step C).
- K. After a pilot period, evaluate the success of these review process changes and amend them as appropriate prior to

permanent adoption. A four-year pilot period is recommended to allow sufficient time for economic recovery and significant project proposals to occur, while keeping the timeframe finite.

Other technical changes associated with these action steps include:

- Expanding the boundaries of the Downtown Asheville Design Guidelines Overlay District to conform to urban design recommendations of this Downtown Master Plan, specifically the five downtown neighborhoods. (Adjacent districts should not be included in the new Overlay District.) Change the name of the new Overlay District to the “Downtown Overlay District.”
- Separate this UDO section from other citywide standards to emphasize the special character of downtown Asheville.
- Revise the UDO to state expressly that review of projects in the Downtown Overlay District must consider whether the proposal is consistent with Downtown Asheville Design Guidelines and the recommendations in this Downtown Master Plan.

## **ACTION STEPS: LONG-TERM**

Review the success of the process after four years. If the process is found viable, make it permanent in the UDO. If not, investigate new and alternative ideas .

## **FUNDING SOURCES**

Approval processes are a function of staff recommendations, determinations by Council-appointed commissions and boards, and Council approvals—sometimes following resident demands. Any changes are within the City’s—and the collective community’s—hands.

## **IN THE APPENDIX**

- An assessment of the existing project review process for downtown Asheville and its real (and perceived) disadvantages.
- A list of the advantages of the proposed revised review process
- A review of development and approval processes in other North Carolina jurisdictions.
- A matrix that details alternate review process options, with text explanations.
- A comparison of design review performed by the Downtown Commission and that carried out by a historic district commission.
- Further discussion of the conditional use permit process.
- A discussion of variances.

## **PRECEDENTS**

Every good city—especially those that depend, in part, on tourism—develops a home-grown process for project review and approval. It is up to Asheville to approve its own unique process. This Downtown Master Plan contains suggestions on where to start.



## MANAGING DOWNTOWN

# Strategy 7

## Nurture a sustainable and resilient economy to help manage and redevelop downtown Asheville

### OVERVIEW AND GOALS

Downtown Asheville’s appeal depends as much on its vibrant mix of economic activity as it does on its diverse cultural flavor and historic architectural character. Retail—while a highly visible aspect of downtown life—is only one manifestation of economic vitality. Desk pilots, shopkeepers, culture vultures, tourists, artists, residents, street folk and other local characters are all attracted to and depend on a wide array of commercial uses that generate downtown’s economic activity.

Some downtown denizens, however—including residents, business operators, and visitors—find the central business district rough around the edges. When graffiti tarnishes a prominent view, a panhandler interrupts a private conversation, or an empty storefront interrupts a row of active ones, the downtown experience suffers. Business operators fear these and other impediments to life downtown diminish their ability to attract and retain employees and customers.

What mix of land uses makes sense for Asheville and how should future demand for them be harnessed to reinforce downtown’s essential sense of place? Hard factors describing supply and demand for retail (resident-driven, tourist-oriented,

regional draws.), office (prime to incubator), hotels (high-end to hostel), and housing (condos, workforce, affordable), are only slightly less difficult to measure than subjective economic yardsticks that reflect character like “vitality;” “authenticity;” “bike-ability;” and—yes—“funkiness.” All contribute to downtown’s vibrancy; all must be cultivated; and, to the extent possible, all require monitoring and some degree of management.

Goals for Strategy 7 include the following elements.

- Maintain the distinctive character and unique attributes that are so much a part of what makes Asheville Asheville.
- Ensure that the downtown is always clean, safe and green.
- Deliver affordable housing units representing at least 15 percent of market-rate unit production, using a variety of tactics consistent with the June 2008 Report of the Task Force on Affordable Housing.

## IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH

Reinforce and extend the character of downtown’s traditional core to enhance economic value and opportunities across all parts of the larger downtown. Translate increased economic value into community benefits—such as workforce housing, support for artists, support for small businesses, workforce development, investment in the arts and other institutions, and investment in public spaces. Target these, in turn, to reinforce downtown’s traditional qualities, economy and other programs that enable everyone to share in the benefits of prosperity. To accomplish this, downtown needs its own professionally-staffed management entity, an independent partner for government that is led by the downtown community and collaborates closely with City departments, non-profit support groups, County agencies and others to function as downtown’s champion.

## ACTION STEPS: NEAR-TERM

- A. Establish a downtown management entity to actively oversee and maintain downtown’s many moving parts. Steady, consistent, and supportive, this entity must transcend election cycles. It would provide the careful, day-to-day management important for a tourism-oriented downtown. Such management groups already exist in many, if not most, North American tourist-oriented communities (and other downtowns as well), providing services beyond the scope of what is provided in general commercial areas. The professionally-staffed organization—initially, an Asheville Downtown District (ADD)—should begin as a function of the City of Asheville and initially provide a modest set of services. It should have the explicit goal of evolving, through the efforts of an *ad hoc* leadership group, into a locally funded, independent entity that draws increasing leadership from, and provides greater benefits to, downtown merchants,

employers and residents. ADD would coordinate closely with the City, supplementing municipal services and championing downtown.

1. Draft legislation for City Council approval authorizing establishment of the ADD.
2. House ADD in street-level downtown space.
3. Form an *ad hoc* group to brainstorm roles, responsibilities and leadership. Include members of the Downtown Commission, Asheville Downtown Association, DARN, the Preservation Society, CIBO, the Chamber’s Tourism Development Authority, Hub, arts agencies, City staff, and many others, with an eye to establishing responsibilities, levels of service and metrics for ADD. Draw up a memorandum of understanding documenting these between ADD and other organizations concerned with downtown.
4. Prepare an Action Agenda that details how to:
  - Achieve a “first 365 days” calendar of goals, duties and events.
  - Become the “go to” entity or all things downtown Asheville.
  - Establish a Clean and Safe Team and detail its responsibilities (e.g., addressing overall cleanliness, including graffiti, litter and weeds).
  - Coordinate with other government entities (City, County, regional, state, and federal) and private/not-for-profit organizations whose mission includes downtown (for example, the TDA and social services agencies).
  - Increase downtown’s profile with City leadership.
  - Create a “Leadership AVL Forum” specific to downtown.
  - Advance priorities for future downtown planning.

## Asheville Downtown Master Plan

- Facilitate broad community engagement in downtown Asheville.
- 5. Schedule regular information and coordination meetings with other organizations concerned with downtown such as Downtown Commission, DARN, Downtown Association, ADC, Arts2People, AAAC, Quality Forward, and CIBO.
- 6. Work with downtown merchants to agree upon a consistent schedule for retail operating hours. Coordinate these with timing of parking rate policies laid out in Strategy 2.
- 7. Maintain a library of downtown economic analyses and other useful how-to information from other communities.
- 8. Develop positive responses to common arguments that hamper progress in downtown (and across WNC). Asheville has a reputation (only partly deserved) for a bewildering approval process, limited developable land, low income of among the state's major cities, high housing prices among the state's major cities. ADD must actively pursue its promotions and marketing efforts and address detrimental impressions about the city, real or perceived.
- B. Develop the regulatory framework for setting up project development financing (PDF) in downtown Asheville and its gateways (potentially drawing upon alternate "synthetic" or "reverse" PDF strategies as most feasible).
- C. Within ADD, offer and manage a Community Benefits Program (CBP) that safeguards Asheville's intrinsic character.
  1. The CBP should be funded through three combined sources, tapping development value arising from this character:
    - An annual fee from all downtown properties based on assessed value (may be a dedicated portion of existing property tax revenues). This ultimately places cost burden on current residents and businesses.
    - A percentage fee on permitted construction value of Level II and III downtown construction projects. This ultimately places cost burden on future residents and businesses. Project sponsors may opt out of this requirement by undergoing design review by City Council, or by providing in-kind contributions of equivalent value, such as affordable housing units, streetscape improvements or below-market retail rents. In-kind CBP contributions need not occur on the project site, but should be within one mile of the site; make this distance subject to periodic revision by ADD. Also consider rewarding achievement of sustainable building standards (i.e. LEED Gold) with credit toward the CBP contribution. Establish a payment schedule of three equal installments:
      - The first payment accompanies the project sponsor's submission of a plan to mitigate adverse construction impacts.
      - The second occurs on receiving a final certificate of occupancy.
      - The third occurs one year following issuance of a final certificate of occupancy or upon the sale of the final share of interest in the project, whichever comes first.
    - A property title transfer fee based on a portion of sales price. This may be assessed on the buyer, seller, or combination of both. The fee has the benefit of reducing rapid "flips" of property ownership. Special state legislative approval is required for applying a transfer fee.

2. “Bank” and manage CBP contributions by placing them in a dedicated CBP account. Award 75 percent to any of the options listed below according to a priority list created annually by ADD; award 25 percent to any of the following options at the discretion of City Council:

- City of Asheville Affordable Housing Trust Fund.
- Any eligible 501c3 in good standing in North Carolina whose mission addresses downtown Asheville arts, culture, parks and open space, historic preservation, affordable/workforce housing, underserved communities, or specific downtown proposals. To be eligible, each 501c3 must provide evidence of demonstrable results—projects or programs—in downtown Asheville. Designated 501c3s must file an annual report with the City Manager’s office documenting use of awarded CBP funds. The City Manager will provide City Council with an annual report describing the collection, disposition and use of funds.
- Buncombe County’s Tourism Development Authority.

3. Communicate all program requirements, forms and other materials pertaining to CBP and the community development bonus in a single package, remarkable for its clarity and brevity.

D. Establish an economic development arm within ADD to recruit and support character-enhancing economic activity downtown.

Practically all of downtown’s vibrancy and charm derives, first, from pedestrian activities generated by the mix and variety of ground-floor retail offerings, including locally-owned shops; foods; diverse merchandise; one-of-a-kind items; crafts; arts businesses; and independent artists, . Monitoring and managing this mix is a full-time job for a retail manager—not unlike the work performed by professional mall

managers. It is incumbent on ADD to nurture, train and help place the right retailers in the right locations.

1. Coordinate ADD’s economic development arm with existing organizations that work toward compatible goals, including the City’s OED, Black Business Alliance, the Chamber, HandMade, MountainBiz Works, A-B Tech’s Small Business Center, Arts2People, and individual project sponsors. ADD should not duplicate the services that these (or other) organizations offer but should be ready, willing, and able to make beneficial referrals and provide appropriate support.
2. Use ADD’s economic development arm to recruit, finance, and/or offer business-location and -enhancement services to:
  - Specialty retailers with a focus on home-grown enterprises, goods and services.
  - Merchants ready to fill gaps in the existing retail/service offerings. This includes ensuring the presence of basic services that are affordable to the full range of residents in and around downtown. Equally important, this includes offerings that are oriented to the full range of local residents, including the African-American-community and other cultural groups;
  - Retail outlets for local service organizations, especially those offering indigenous products and artwork.
  - Specialty collective space geared toward start-up enterprises, studios, guilds, markets, food product manufacture, push carts and other small or cooperative ventures.
  - Specialty blended space, such as work-sell, live-work, and structures designed for intentional communities.
3. Train downtown’s workforce to ensure that it has the skills to welcome and prosper.



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- Encourage widespread use of existing hospitality-training programs offered by the CVB and others.
  - Help ensure that local youth have access to training and employment services geared to a broad range of downtown workforce needs.
4. Welcome Asheville’s emerging economic sectors that are creating new opportunities and demands for office and research space. These uses should find downtown attractive. ADD can roll out the welcome mat and help attract demand from new knowledge-based enterprises such as:
- climate-related analytics;
  - wellness practice and training;
  - visualization, software and other high-technology ventures;
  - commercial spin-offs from all of the above; and
  - other emerging uses consistent with downtown Asheville’s character.

## ACTION STEPS: LONG-TERM

### Expand ADD’s Role

- A. Spin off ADD into an independent, locally funded organization with a parallel redevelopment authority.
- B. Function as the municipal services liaison:
  - Add to TDA’s wayfinding system.
  - Oversee completion of greenways and bikeways.
  - Revise the city’s signage ordinance, including billboard regulations.
  - Schedule building, safety and environmental inspections.
  - Manage and mitigate impacts of major construction projects.
  - Adopt downtown parks and take charge of their maintenance, programming, and other improvements.
- C. Commission and make publicly available professional, non-proprietary market analyses.
- D. Assemble strategic land parcels on the City’s behalf:
  - Offer them to qualified developers to meet community supported priorities.
  - Coordinate “project development financing” (PDF) with possible extensions 1) along Broadway to UNCA, 2) along Patton and Clingman to the River Arts District and 3) along Asheland/Biltmore to Mission, AB Tech, and Biltmore Village.
  - Issue bonds within these same PDF districts.
  - Buy, sell and manage real estate.
  - Monitor, buy and sell development rights.
  - Broker compatible development of adjacent proposals.
  - Broker land swaps.
  - Participate in joint ventures.

- Help arrange bridge financing (similar to UDAG).
  - By contract, issue RFQs and RFPs for additional development on public and private parcels.
- E. Oversee all things “clean and safe” in the public realm:
- Open downtown Asheville as clean, safe and green every day.
  - Coordinate security patrols; provide Segway and bike patrol equipment for the APD; install pole cameras for APD.
  - Clean and repair streets and sidewalks and monitor these daily.
  - Oversee planting and décor and monitor these daily and seasonally.
  - Manage recycling programs, systems and equipment.
- F. Lead the effort to make downtown Asheville completely powered by clean energy, become a national model in this area, use clean energy to leverage sustainable development, and become a municipal utility.
- G. Investigate infrastructure links to other emerging areas: River Arts District; NCDC; new neighborhoods.
- H. Program, market, and license downtown public realm places and events:
- Begin with Pack Square, Pritchard Park, MLK Park, and the River Arts District.
  - Coordinate and help plan and fund parades, festivals, celebrations.
  - Help find a permanent home for the City Market, now at DPW; coordinate other farmer’s markets and, arts fairs.
  - License street vendors and performers.
- I. Help manage and expand wayfinding with the Chamber’s TDA; expand the Urban Trail.
- J. Coordinate implementation of bikeways/greenways throughout downtown and 1) along Broadway to UNCA, 2) along Patton and Clingman to the River Arts District and 3) along Asheland/Biltmore to Mission, A-B Tech and Biltmore Village.
- K. Manage downtown’s public and private parking facilities (City, County, private lots) as a system; increase revenues to the City, County and private owners.
- L. Investigate a coordinated goods-delivery system to multiple downtown businesses.
- M. Help manage ground-floor retail mixes:
- Broker deals.
  - Ensure adequate neighborhood retail services for residents.
  - Work with appropriate franchises and chains.
  - Promote retail that serves to draw visitors.
- N. Launch an incubator program:
- Focus on locally-owned businesses that produce or sell locally-made and locally-grown items.
  - Encourage entrepreneurs and start-ups.
  - Foster arts-related businesses for both established and start-up artisans.
- O. Initiate a private-sector shop-front/show window “design aid” program.

## **FUNDING SOURCES**

The following may be applicable in downtown Asheville.

- Income from downtown development density bonuses, with suggested contributions for residential and commercial development increasing with development height and scale.
- Leveraged tax revenues from new development (known in Charlotte and elsewhere as “synthetic” or “reverse” tax increment financing (PDF) districts.)
- At least 50 percent of net proceeds from any sale of City-owned parcels in the downtown.
- Matching funds from the City, the County and local foundations.
- Earned income revenues from services, events, licensing, or similar activities.

## **PRECEDENTS**

Successful business improvement districts (BIDs) have been inaugurated, sustained and expanded in Chapel Hill, Charlotte, Durham, Raleigh, and Wilmington, etc. There are hundreds more BIDs throughout the US and Canada.

## **IN THE APPENDIX**

- More detail on PDF and density bonus revenue formulas and current local assumptions.
- Current downtown Asheville economic figures and their anticipated key trends.
- Examples of possible contributions to the community benefits program from sample development projects.
- Potential cost and time savings to developers resulting from the clarified and simplified development-approval process recommended in this plan. See Strategy 6.

