

Volume 2: Background Analysis

DRAFT



TABLE OF CONTENTS

VOLUME 1 : MASTER PLAN

INTRODUCTION.....	6
MASTER PLAN.....	14
IMPLEMENTATION	56

VOLUME 2 : BACKGROUND ANALYSIS

BACKGROUND ANALYSIS.....	92
VISION & GOALS	122
STRATEGIES & CONSIDERATIONS.....	140



Background Analysis

DRAFT



DRAFT

PREVIOUS PLANNING EFFORTS

Previous local and regional planning efforts should be considered when developing a downtown area plan to ensure coordinated recommendations for the study area. This section provides an overview of relevant plans and their applicability to this Downtown Area Plan.

CARRBORO CONNECTS COMPREHENSIVE PLAN (2022)

The Carrboro Connects Comprehensive Plan was the first official comprehensive planning process undertaken by the Town. Significant community input was obtained throughout the engagement process, even as the plan was developed through the COVID-19 pandemic. The plan was developed with a specific foundational focus on addressing climate change and advancing racial equity and included the following key takeaways which have a direct connection to the downtown area:

- Support affordable housing through a variety of efforts, including increased density, reduced parking and commercial property redevelopment for mixed-use projects.
- Encourage environmentally sustainable design practices to conserve and restore watersheds, ecosystems and native plant communities.
- Utilize green stormwater infrastructure (GSI) to support Low Impact Development (LID) practices and ecosystem recovery efforts.

- Support a multi-modal community by improving walkability, increasing pedestrian safety, reducing vehicular speeds, increasing bicycle facilities and improving transit infrastructure.
- Increase downtown street trees and tree canopy coverage through a variety of efforts, including the planting of canopy trees in public spaces.
- Inspire well-designed, mixed-use developments in downtown that incorporate higher densities and support other plan goals by providing small business spaces and affordable housing.
- Incorporate public artwork throughout downtown to enhance the built environment and create a more beautiful, vibrant community.
- Enhance civic spaces and directional signage in downtown to support business opportunities for local businesses and encourage tourism.
- Host numerous community events and festivals in downtown to continue the tradition of community celebration.
- Encourage commercial investment in public amenities, such as sidewalks,



landscaping and tree canopy coverage.

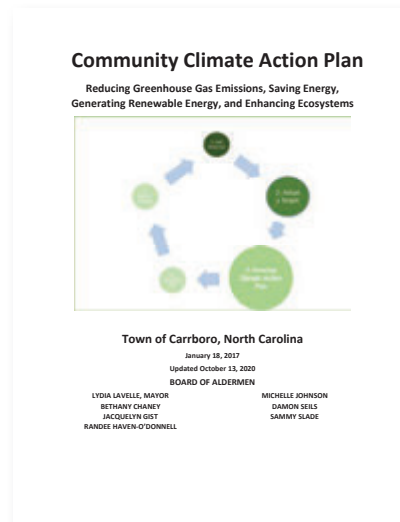
- Facilitate new growth with higher densities along active transit routes and near identified development nodes to reduce car dependency.

COMMUNITY CLIMATE ACTION PLAN (2020 UPDATE)

The Community Climate Action Plan Update was a continuation of the Town's commitment to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases that are causing global climate change. The purpose of the plan was to provide community-scale recommendations to meet the Town's emissions reduction goal.

The plan provided recommendations based on six main topics: community integration, building energy efficiency, transportation, renewable energy, ecosystem protection and enhancement and food choice. Several of the plan recommendations include elements that directly involve or impact the downtown area:

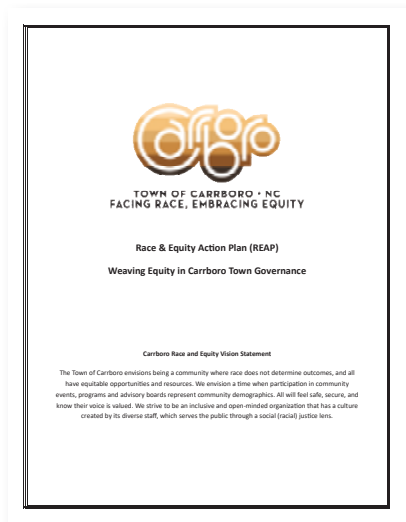
- Reduce community-wide emissions by 80% by 2030 by encouraging more efficient buildings and bringing older buildings up to code.
- Enhance existing transit service to ensure a more comprehensive system and provide better access to downtown from all parts of Carrboro.
- Establish GoTriangle carpool/vanpool parking areas located in downtown to improve access for commuters.
- Research and implement a bike-sharing system downtown.
- Pursue efforts to implement land use and development policies that help ensure destinations for daily needs, such as school, work and shopping, are within convenient bicycling distance from home.
- Pursue geothermal heating and cooling in downtown and explore the creation of a geothermal district.



RACE & EQUITY ACTION PLAN (2023)

The Race & Equity Action Plan is a framework for advancing the Town's race and equity efforts to ensure a culture of equity and inclusivity for all residents of Carrboro. The plan aims to normalize the conversation around racial equity to recognize the bias that exists and review Town initiatives through a racial equity lens. As the Downtown Area Plan is developed, the Town should work to provide an equitable environment that aligns with the Town goals:

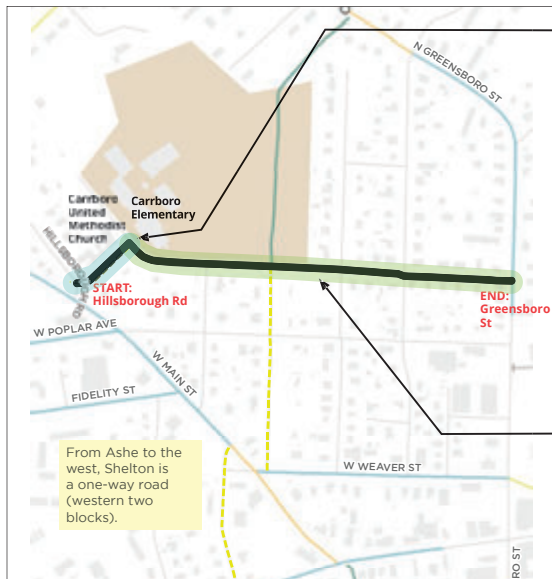
- Continue leading using the GARE Model of Change Approach – visualize, normalize, organize and operationalize.
- Educate Carrboro Town employees and residents about the importance of advancing racial equity.
- Serve as a change agent and a resource to identifying and removing structural bias and inequities in Town policies, practices, procedures, programs and services.
- Reduce racial disparities within Town government.
- Work to ensure Carrboro is a model employer and service provider by embedding racial equity in daily and long-term operations.
- Work with community and partners to ensure safety, sense of belonging and that everyone is valued.
- Help all residents live in a more just and equitable community.
- Update the Town Council agenda template to provide additional background information centering on race and equity.
- Work to ensure that the intentions of all departments connect with equitable impacts.



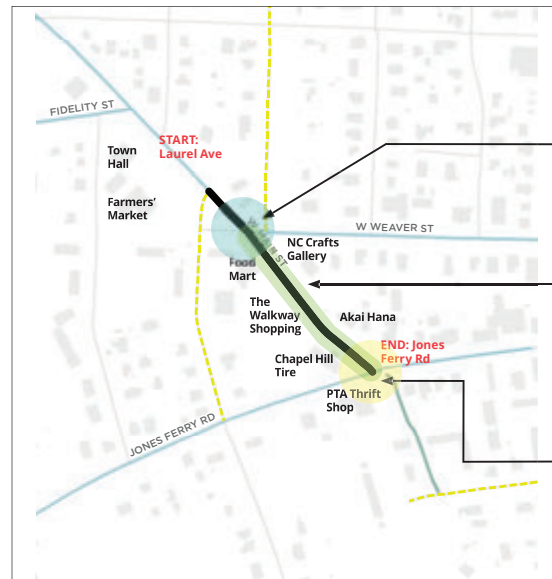
BIKE PLAN (2020 UPDATE)

The 2020 Updated Bike Plan built upon the 2009 Bicycle Plan and established a new vision for bike infrastructure in the future, focusing on ensuring equity, increasing ridership and serving riders of all ages. The plan engaged the community and a steering committee to identify key strategic priorities to support infrastructure projects. The plan resulted in strategic priorities for recommended infrastructure improvements throughout Carrboro. Five of the recommendations were selected as key recommendations with techniques for implementation. Three of the key recommendations located in or directly supporting the downtown area are listed below, including diagrams from the Updated Bike Plan. Additional key projects not detailed in the plan include the Elm Street/Laurel Avenue Neighborway and West Braxton Foushee Street Neighborway.

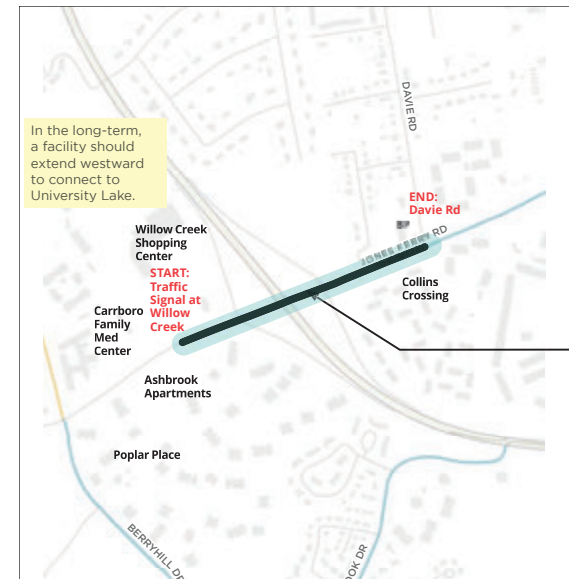
- **Shelton Street Contraflow Lane** – The introduction of a contraflow bike lane on Shelton Street between Hillsborough Road and Greensboro Street. The design of this project has now been funded by the Regional Flexible Fund.
- **West Main Street Bike Lane and Intersection Improvements** – This includes intersection improvements and bike lanes on both sides of the street along West Main Street between Laurel Avenue and Jones Ferry Road.
- **Jones Ferry Road Separated Bike Lanes** – Provide separated bike lanes along Jones Ferry Road on both sides of the heavy commuter corridor from the signal at Willow Creek to Davie Road. The Town completed this work in line with NCDOT resurfacing in summer 2024.



Shelton Street contraflow lane locations



West Main Street bike lane and intersection improvement locations



Jones Ferry Road separated bike lanes location

COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT

DEMOGRAPHICS

The demographic analysis in this section draws on data from various sources, including the U.S. Census, American Community Survey (ACS), Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD), Carrboro Economic Development Department, and Esri, to present information at the most detailed level and using the most recent data available for the data type, at the time of the drafting of this report. Where applicable, this data uses U.S. Census Bureau decennial Census data for 2010 and 2020, ACS 5-Year Estimates by block group or Town-wide, Esri forecasts for 2024, and LEHD data for 2021. Where ACS data is used, the applicable year is identified.

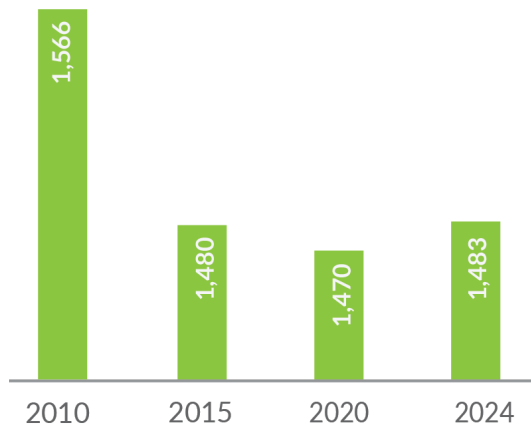
The boundaries of the study area do not align with standard geographies such as town limits, census tracts, or block groups established by the U.S. Census. Due to this difference, some of the analyses presented in this section rely on data by the block groups that are fully or partially located within the study area boundaries. Additionally, using Esri's Business Analyst tool, the data has undergone further apportionment to provide greater detail specific to the study area. Data apportionment involves the summarization or aggregation of data, which enables this analysis to utilize available census data by block group to more accurately calculate information for the defined study area.



POPULATION

Since 2010, Carrboro has grown by 11%, adding over 2,000 new residents. Over that same period, the downtown area population experienced a change of -5.3% representing a reduction of approximately 83 residents. In 2024, approximately 1,483 residents lived in downtown and the immediate surrounding area, representing approximately 7% of the population of Carrboro.

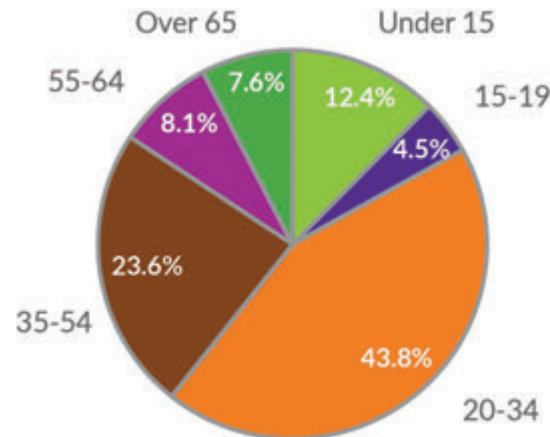
Figure 11. Downtown Population Change



AGE

In 2024, more than half the population in the downtown area was between 20 and 54 years of age, and approximately 251 people are under 20, making up 16.9% of the residents in the downtown area. The median age in downtown is 30.3 years of age which is similar to that of Carrboro at 33.1 years.

Figure 12. Downtown Age Distribution



HOUSEHOLD INCOME

In 2024, the median household income for the downtown area was \$54,664, lower than the median income for the Town of Carrboro, which was \$85,927. The Downtown Household Income Chart below shows the distribution of the downtown population by income level. The household income statistics can impact the types of business options that will be attracted to this area of Carrboro.

Figure 13. Downtown Household Income



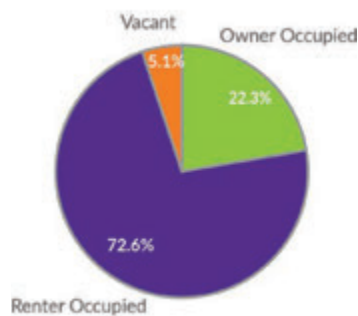
Housing

In 2024, there were approximately 727 housing units in the downtown study area. Of these units, around 22.3% were owner-occupied, while 72.6% were renter-occupied.

The Map 2 illustrates housing costs as a percentage of household income based on 2023 ACS data. While much of the cost burden falls within the range of 21%–40%, there is a noticeable increase in the cost burden of 41%–60% in the eastern and northern portions of the area. These regions are historically home to BIPOC communities, which may have faced systemic barriers to homeownership and equitable economic opportunities.

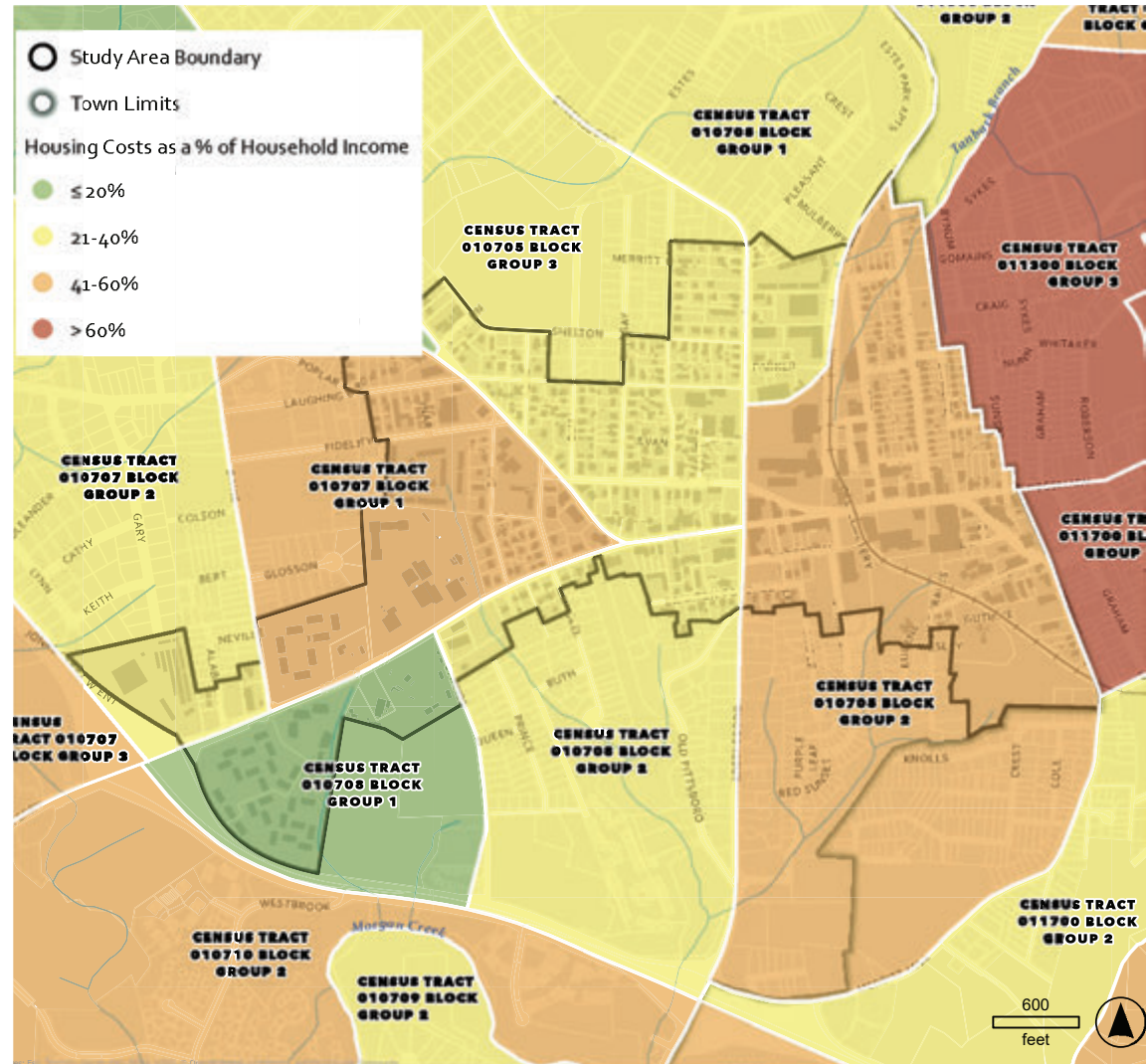
Considering the median household income of \$54,664 and the significant portion of the area that is renter-occupied, the increased cost burden presents a notable challenge for residents. This can disproportionately impact residents in historically underserved neighborhoods and may signal a need for expanded affordable housing options in the downtown area.

Figure 14. Owner/Renter Occupied Units



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Esri forecasts for 2024 and 2029. U.S. Census Bureau 2020 decennial Census in 2020 geographies.

Map 4. Housing Cost as Percentage of Household Income



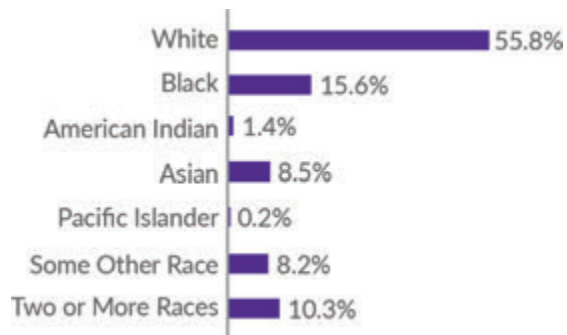
Source: 2019-2023 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

RACE AND ETHNICITY

In the downtown area, the largest percentage of residents is White, comprising 55.8% of the population. The remaining 44.2% includes residents of diverse racial backgrounds, with 15.6% identifying as Black. The Map 3 provides an overview of racial demographics within the downtown area by identifying the predominant race by block group. Most of the area is shown as White, however, one block group highlights Black residents or other people of color as the primary population.

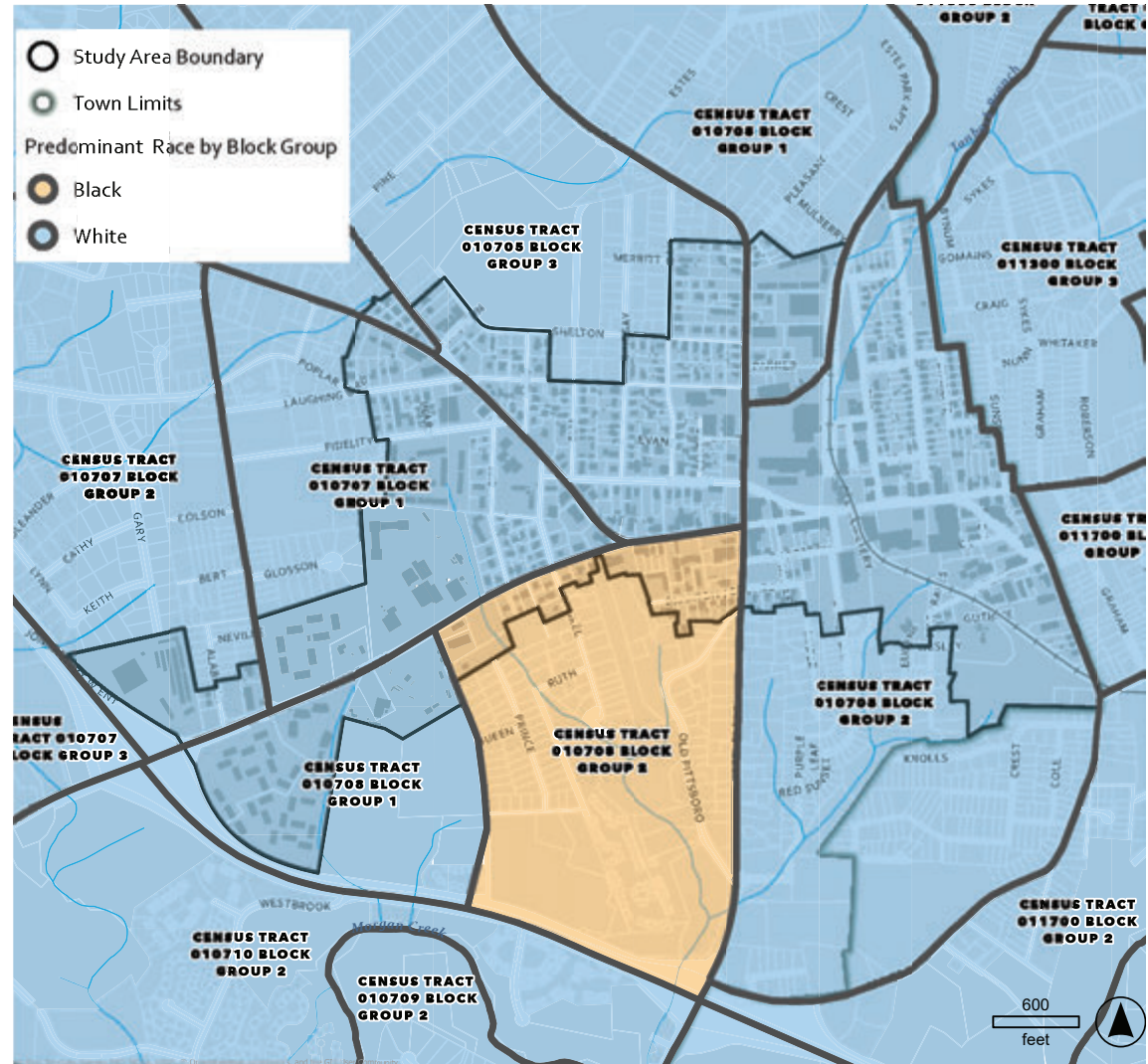
It is important to acknowledge that historically Black neighborhoods, such as the Lloyd-Broad Neighborhood, are not indicated as Black on the map. This discrepancy may stem from the aggregation of populations in larger demographic areas beyond the downtown boundaries. As this Plan is developed, efforts will be made to address and mitigate any potential disproportionate impact on BIPOC communities. The focus will remain on fostering equity, inclusion and representation to create a downtown area that serves all residents, prioritizing historically marginalized groups.

Figure 15. Downtown Race Distribution



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Esri forecasts for 2024 and 2029. U.S. Census Bureau 2020 decennial Census in 2020 geographies.

Map 6. Predominant Race by Block Group



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2019-2023 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Esri forecasts for 2024 and 2029. U.S. Census Bureau 2020 decennial Census in 2020 geographies.

COMMUTING

According to the Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD), in 2021, for the population over the age of 16 that are employed, the majority (nearly 99%) of people employed in the downtown area lived outside the area and commuted in for work. Conversely, 95% of those living in the downtown area work outside the area. This means very few people both live and work in the downtown area. Over 42% of downtown workers commute less than 10 miles to work, but many live or work nearby, while only 16.9% commute more than 50 miles. According to 2018- 2022 ACS 5-Year estimates, approximately 15.8% of the downtown area employed population age 16 and over commuted by public transit, 12.9% by walking, 8.9 % by biking, and 6.7% carpooled.

Figure 16. Distance Traveled to Work

Distance Traveled to work	Percent
Less than 10 miles	42.2%
10 to 24 miles	28.1%
25 to 50 miles	12.8%
Greater than 50 miles	16.9%
Total All Jobs	100.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap Application and LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (Beginning of Quarter Employment, 2nd Quarter of 2002-2021).

Figure 18. Origin-Destination Employment Statistics

Inflow/Outflow Analysis	Percent
Employed in the Study Area	100.0%
Employed and Living in the Selection Area	1.3%
Employed in the Selection Area but Living Outside	98.7%
Living in the Study Area	100.0%
Living and Employed in the Selection Area	4.7%
Living in the Selection Area but Employed Outside	95.3%



Map Source: U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap Application and LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (Beginning of Quarter Employment, 2nd Quarter of 2002-2021).

Figure 17. Commute to Work by Mode



Source: 2018-2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

BUSINESS COMMUNITY

According to the Carrboro Economic Development Department, more than 190 businesses are in the study area. The most prevalent business types are restaurants, food and beverage establishments, miscellaneous retail, and consumer services. A highly diverse business community helps to support a thriving downtown, and Carrboro is already experiencing some of what this success means.

Figure 19. Downtown Carrboro Businesses

Industry	Number	Percent
Automotive	5	3%
Banking	3	2%
Broadcast Media	1	1%
Civic & Social Organization	7	4%
Construction Services	6	3%
Consumer Services	19	10%
Creative Professional Services	8	4%
Entertainment	6	3%
Health, Wellness and Fitness	11	6%
Hospital & Health Care	8	4%
Leisure, Travel & Tourism	5	3%
Misc. Retail	38	20%
Professional Services	16	8%
Real Estate	8	4%
Restaurants, Food & Beverages	45	23%
Technology	5	3%
Veterinary	1	1%
Total	192	100%

Source: Carrboro Economic Development Department



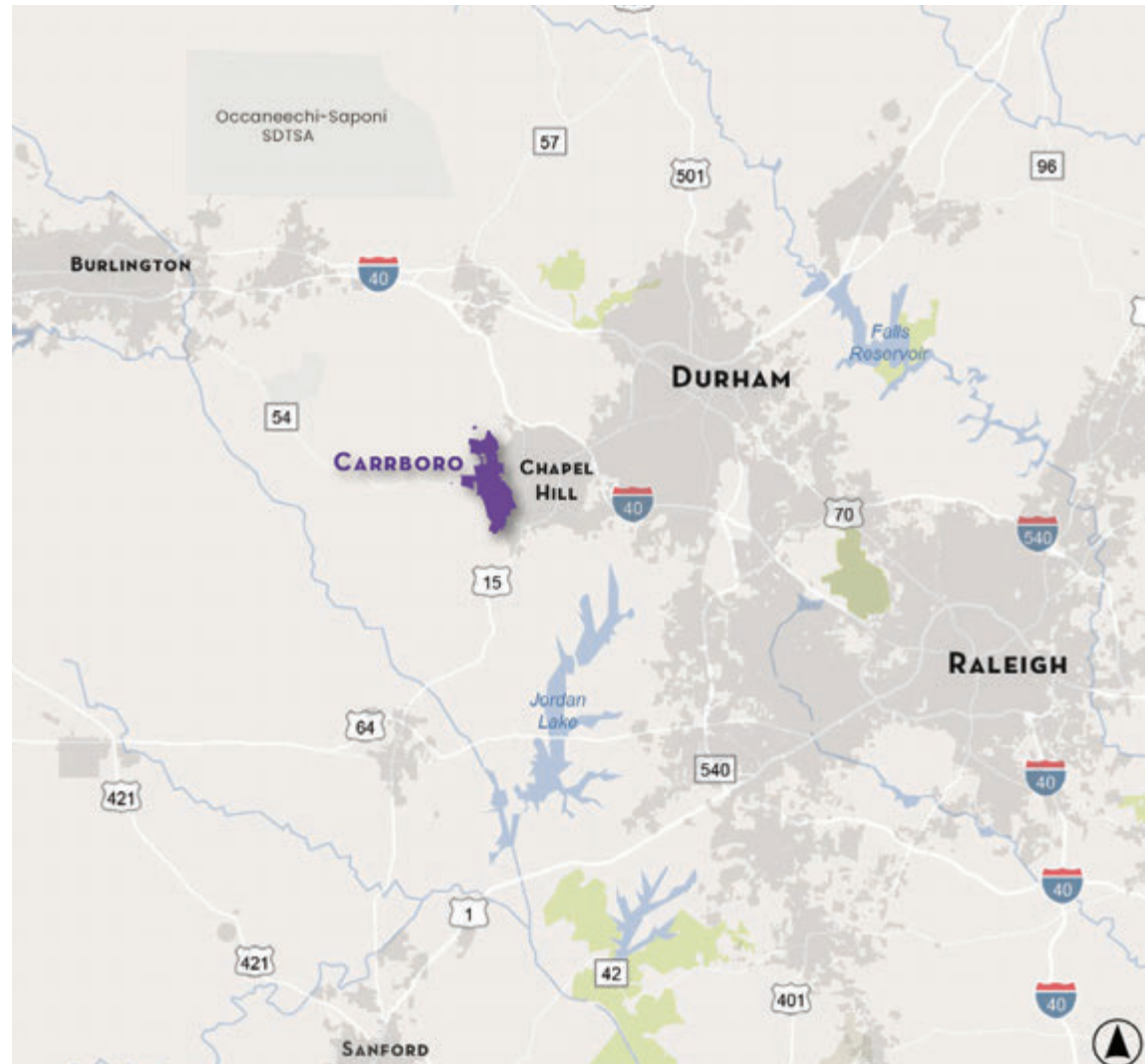
EXISTING CONDITIONS

REGIONAL CONTEXT

Carrboro is in Orange County, North Carolina. It is located west of Chapel Hill and approximately 30 miles from Raleigh and 18 miles from Durham. Carrboro has evolved from its historic roots as a mill town into a cultural and economic hub. The Town is well known for its diverse population and culture. The Town's close proximity (approximately 1.5 miles) to the University of North Carolina (UNC) at Chapel Hill and Durham, and their varying associated attractions (e.g., cultural, educational, medical, sports), influences Carrboro's economy and culture. The Town has a vibrant, youthful energy with small-town charm.

Downtown Carrboro is located south of the Town's geographic center and just east of its population centroid. It offers a walkable/bikeable environment with many destinations that serve as focal points for community life, such as Carrboro Farmers' Market, Carrboro Century Center, ArtsCenter, Weaver Street Market, Cat's Cradle, the Town's only hotel, multiple religious centers, restaurants, local service businesses and extensive music venues and support activities. The area will grow in regional significance with the upcoming opening of the Orange County Southern Branch Library at the Drakeford Library Complex.

Map 7. Regional Context Map



POLICY & REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

When examining a place, it is important to look at it through a variety of frameworks to ensure that recommendations will be contextually appropriate. The Town has approved a number of plans, policies, ordinances and other regulatory documents over the past 40 years. In particular, two have profound impacts on the downtown area and Jones Ferry Road corridor, as follows:

LAND USE ORDINANCE

The Carrboro Land Use Ordinance (LUO) was originally adopted in 1980 and includes numerous updates through 2024. The LUO regulates land use, development patterns and building forms throughout the Town of Carrboro. This ordinance includes requirements for all development in the Town, including the downtown area and Jones Ferry Road corridor, and is the basis for how the built environment looks and functions. The allowable location of uses, buffering/separation of different uses, sign sizes and appearances, building architecture, tree planting requirements, and many other provisions contained in the LUO are what drive the feeling of the built environment. In the very near future, the Town will begin a major rewrite of the LUO to modernize the standards and achieve the goals identified in the Carrboro Connects Comprehensive Plan.

DOWNTOWN DESIGN GUIDELINES

The Carrboro Downtown Design Guidelines were adopted as policy in 1992. These guidelines are intended to encourage a high-quality built environment in Carrboro's Downtown Business District. The guidelines split downtown into four subdistricts: East Main Street, Historic/Commercial, West Main/ Weaver Street and Old Industrial/Commercial. Each subdistrict includes specific guidance on

what should be encouraged, considered and discouraged to integrate new development into the existing community. Several identified overarching goals in the guidelines include the following:

- Promote the development of an identifiable downtown center that is filled with lively, economically viable activity.
- Improve the quality of the physical environment in the downtown by creating a high level of expectation in the quality of downtown development at all scales.
- Create a distinctive and continuously landscaped street and open space character.
- Strengthen the pedestrian character of the downtown and create new pedestrian linkages.
- Improve maintenance and encourage small scale improvements to existing buildings and sites.

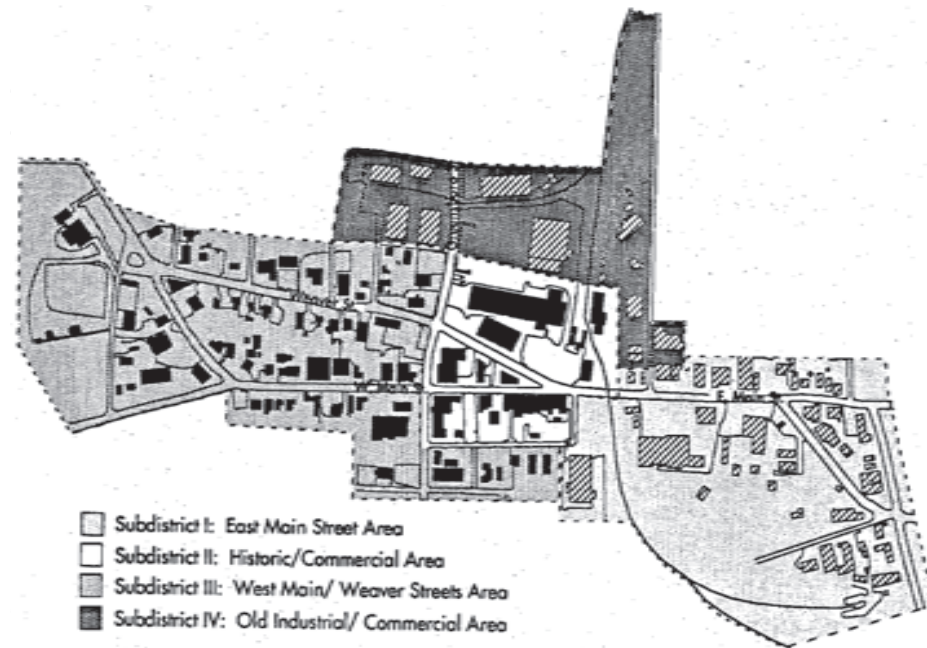


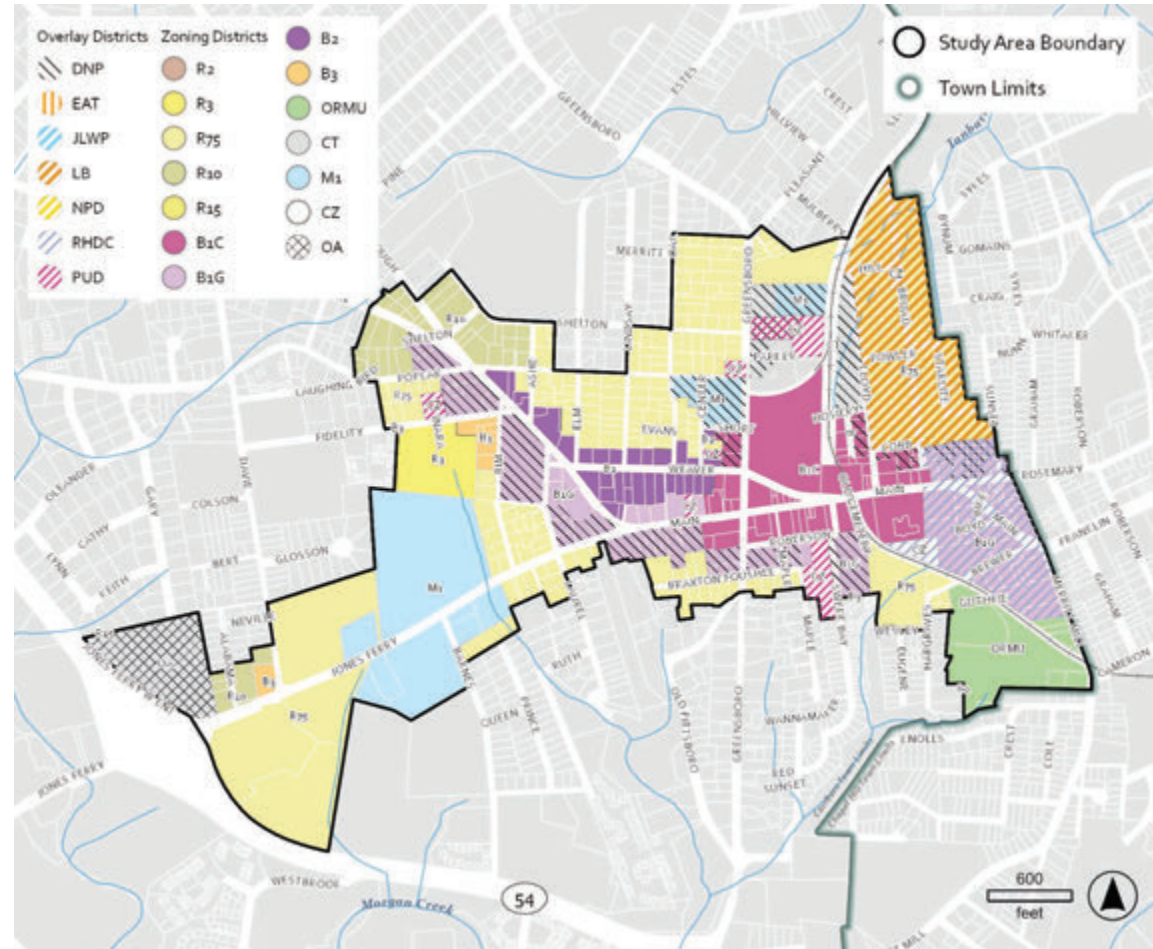
Figure 20. Downtown Design Guidelines Subdistricts

ZONING

Zoning in the study area includes a number of different base districts and overlay districts. The following districts are included in the downtown area and the Jones Ferry Road corridor:

- Lloyd-Broad Overlay district that protects and preserves the character of the Lloyd-Broad neighborhood.
- General Business district that accommodates a broad range of business uses.
- Light Manufacturing district that accommodates limited industrial uses and provides primary job opportunities.
- Office/Assembly district that provides for office, administrative and other professional industries close to arterial streets.
- Fringe Commercial district that provides a transitional area for commercial uses in a more residential form to support a mix of residential and commercial uses.
- Town Center Business district that encourages a unified, compact, contiguous and pedestrian-friendly shopping and entertainment area.
- Downtown Neighborhood Protection Overlay district that guides compatible transition between downtown Carrboro and adjacent residential uses.

Map 8. Zoning Map



Zoning Districts

R2 - Residential
 R3 - Residential
 R10 - Residential
 R15 - Residential
 R75 - Residential
 B1C - Town Center Business
 B1G - General Business

B2 - Fringe Commercial
 B3 - Neighborhood Business
 CT - Corporate Town
 CZ - Conditional Zoning
 M1 - Light Manufacturing
 OA - Office/Assembly
 ORMU - Office-Residential Mixed Use

Overlay Districts

DNP - Downtown Neighborhood Protection
 EAT - Restaurant District
 JLWP - Jordan Lake Watershed Protection
 LB - Lloyd/Broad
 NPD - Neighborhood Preservation
 RHDC - Residential High Density and Commercial
 PUD - Planned Unit Development

PHYSICAL FRAMEWORK

The physical framework looks at circulation patterns, points of interest, buildings and utility infrastructure in the study area. This helps to determine the characteristics that create the physical experience of the downtown area. While much of Carrboro has a robust urban forest, portions of the study area are lacking in tree canopy. Increasing tree canopy in this area will help to advance climate action goals and increase pedestrian comfort.

MOBILITY NETWORK

A mobility network is a system of transportation options available in an area. This includes roads, bike lanes, sidewalks and public transit. The purpose of a mobility network is to make transportation easy, safe and accessible for everyone, whether driving, biking, walking or taking public transit. When different transportation methods are well-connected, it can help reduce traffic, improve air quality and improve people's lives through mobility choice.

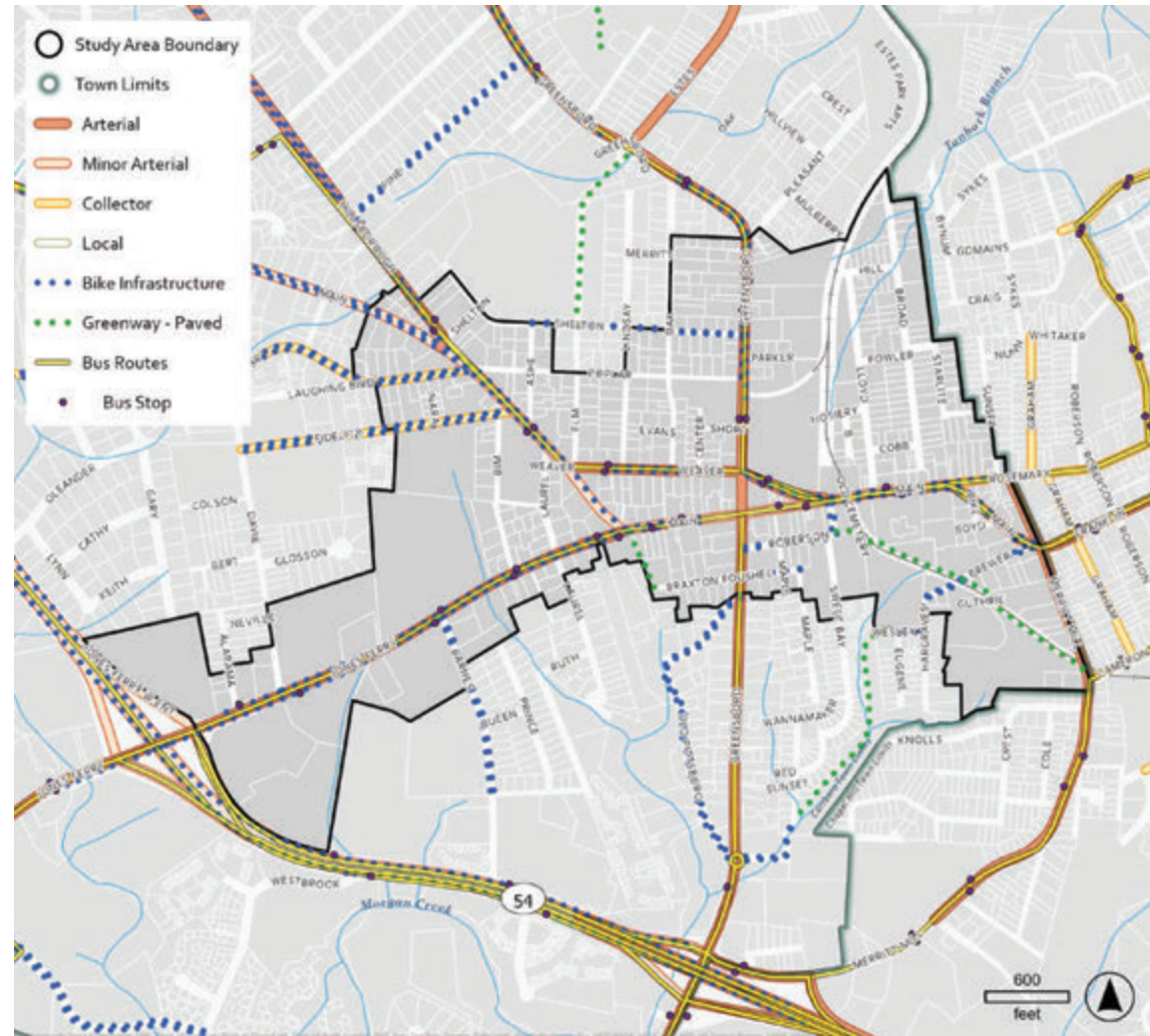
The mobility network in the study area includes arterial, minor arterial, collector and local streets. Notably, most arterial and minor arterial roads are owned by the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT), and changes to these street cross-sections require a higher level of jurisdictional coordination.

A notable amount of bicycle infrastructure provides access to and through the study area. These facilities are further detailed on the next page.

Chapel Hill Transit provides bus service within the study area, with three primary routes: the F, CW and J routes. Bus stops and routes are depicted on the adjacent map.

The existing mobility network contains a wide range of landscaping enhancements and street tree coverage, providing a mixed experience for users throughout the study area.

Map 9. Mobility Network

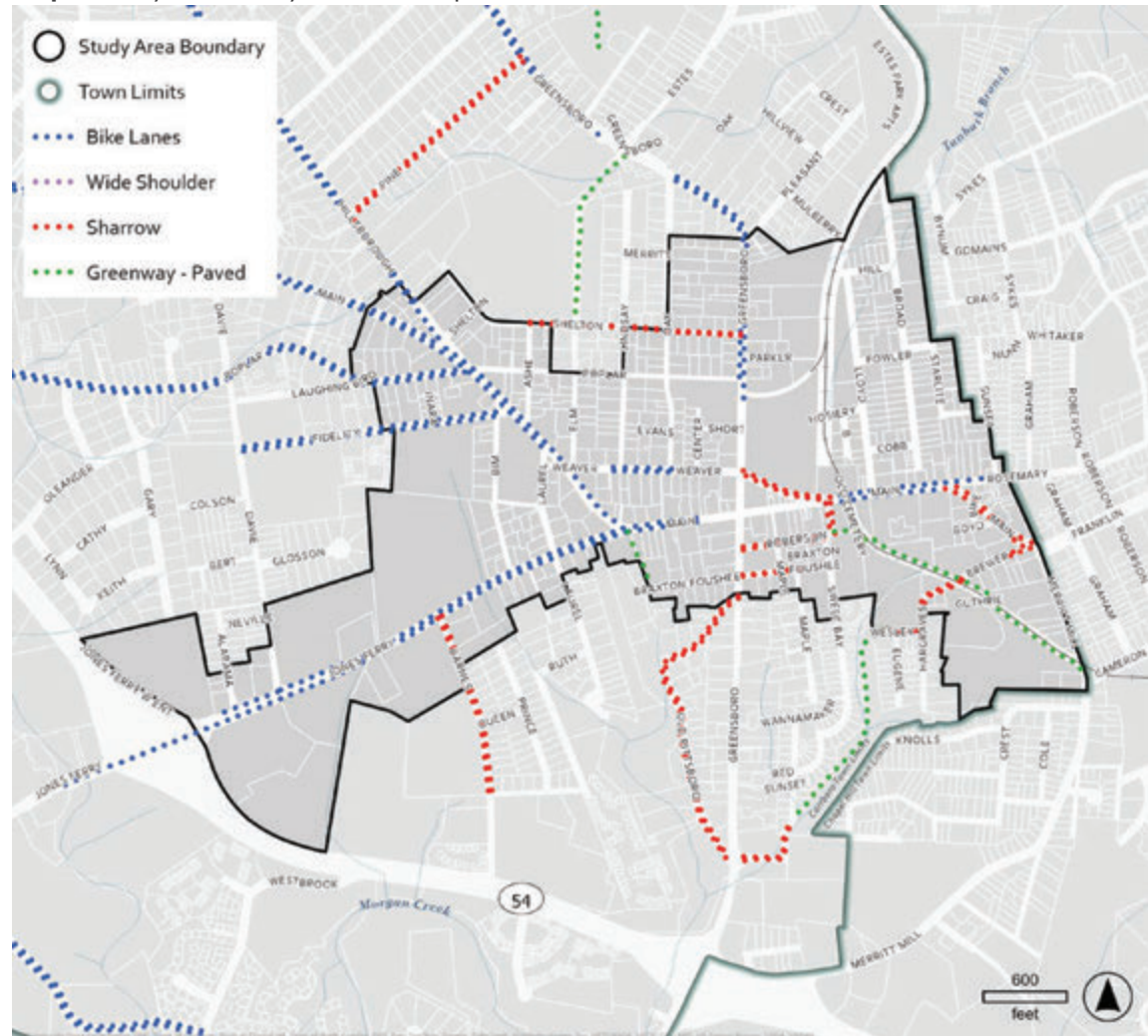


BICYCLE MOBILITY NETWORK

Bicycle infrastructure aims to provide safe, convenient and accessible routes for cyclists, thus allowing more people to choose biking over driving. Providing a complete, comfortable network of bicycle infrastructure creates a real option for people to get around the community and satisfy their daily needs without the use of a vehicle. By integrating bike infrastructure into the broader transportation network, the Town can reduce traffic congestion, lower carbon emissions and promote healthier lifestyles among residents.

The bicycle mobility network in the downtown area includes on-street facilities such as bike lanes, wide shoulders and sharrows, as well as off-street paved greenways shared with pedestrians. There are two primary greenways in the study area: the Libba Cotten Bike Path, which largely runs parallel to the Southern Railroad, and the Roberson Place Bike Path, which runs along a creek corridor between Wesley Street and Purple Leaf Place.

Map 10. Bicycle Mobility Network Map



PARKING

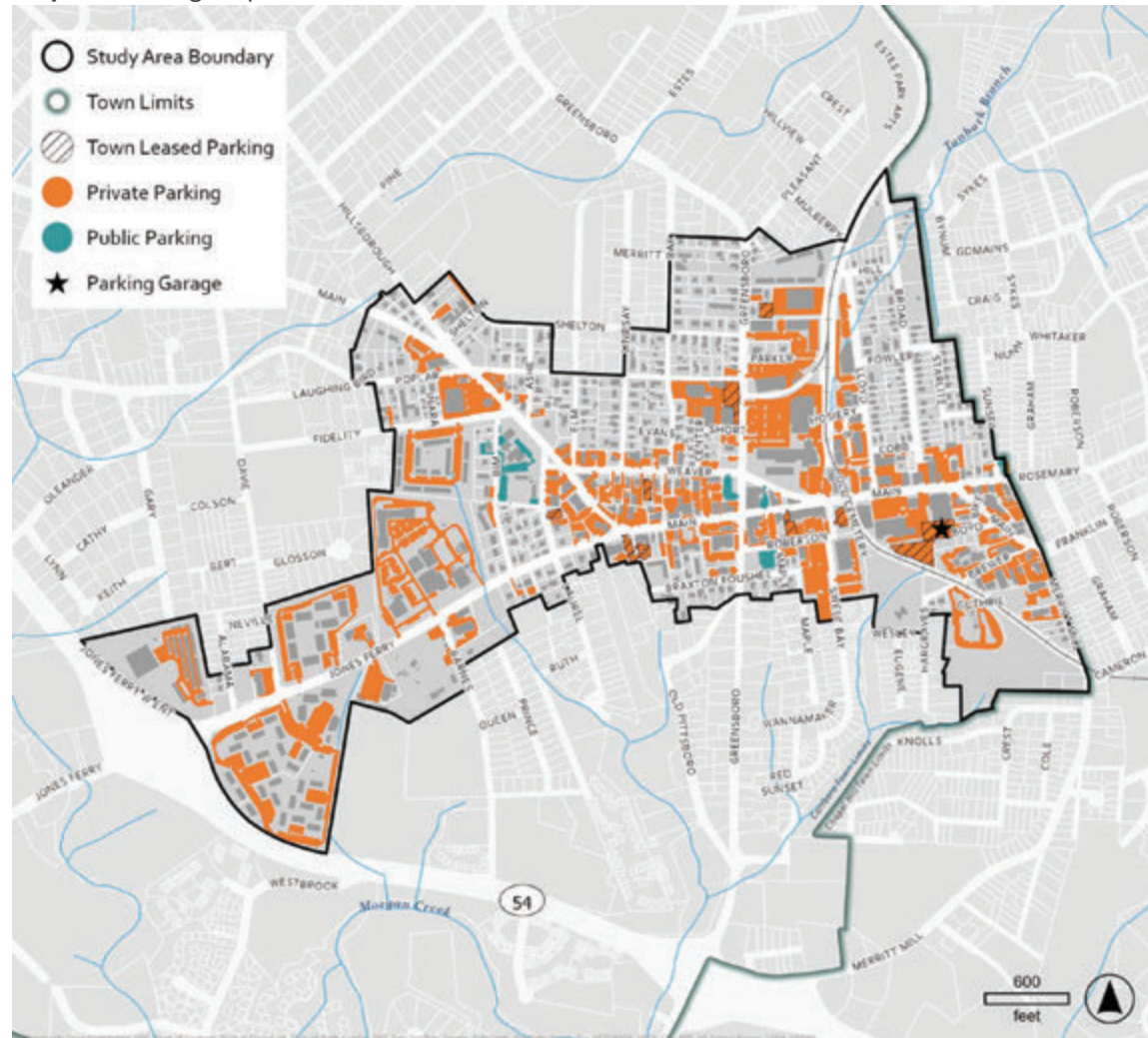
Parking is a critical component of a downtown area. In many downtowns, there is a perception of insufficient parking, even when sufficient parking is available within a short walking distance of most destinations. This can often be addressed by enhancing pedestrian corridors that connect parking areas and destinations to be more safe, comfortable and welcoming.

The parking map illustrates the distribution of public and private parking, as well as lots leased by the Town within Carrboro's downtown area. Due to narrow rights-of-way, most parking is located off-street. Notably, off-street, surface parking areas comprise approximately 20% of the study area. Of that acreage, the majority of parking areas are private or reserved parking.

As the downtown area continues to develop, additional parking areas may be needed. If that is the case, the location and quantity of new parking will need to be carefully considered. Depending on the density and intensity of the surrounding area, structured parking may be a more efficient use of land and is sometimes a better option than surface parking areas. When structured parking is used, the location of accessible parking spaces and accessible routes from the garage to points of interest needs to be considered.

Improved parking wayfinding systems would also help maximize the efficiency of parking resources, ensuring convenient access to businesses and attractions. The Town developed a Wayfinding Program in 2020 and is working on implementation.

Map 11. Parking Map



Note: The Town completed a Downtown Parking Plan in 2017. The boundaries of that planning effort were different from the study area boundary of this Downtown Area Plan, so calculations in the description on this page will differ from those in the 2017 Downtown Parking Plan.

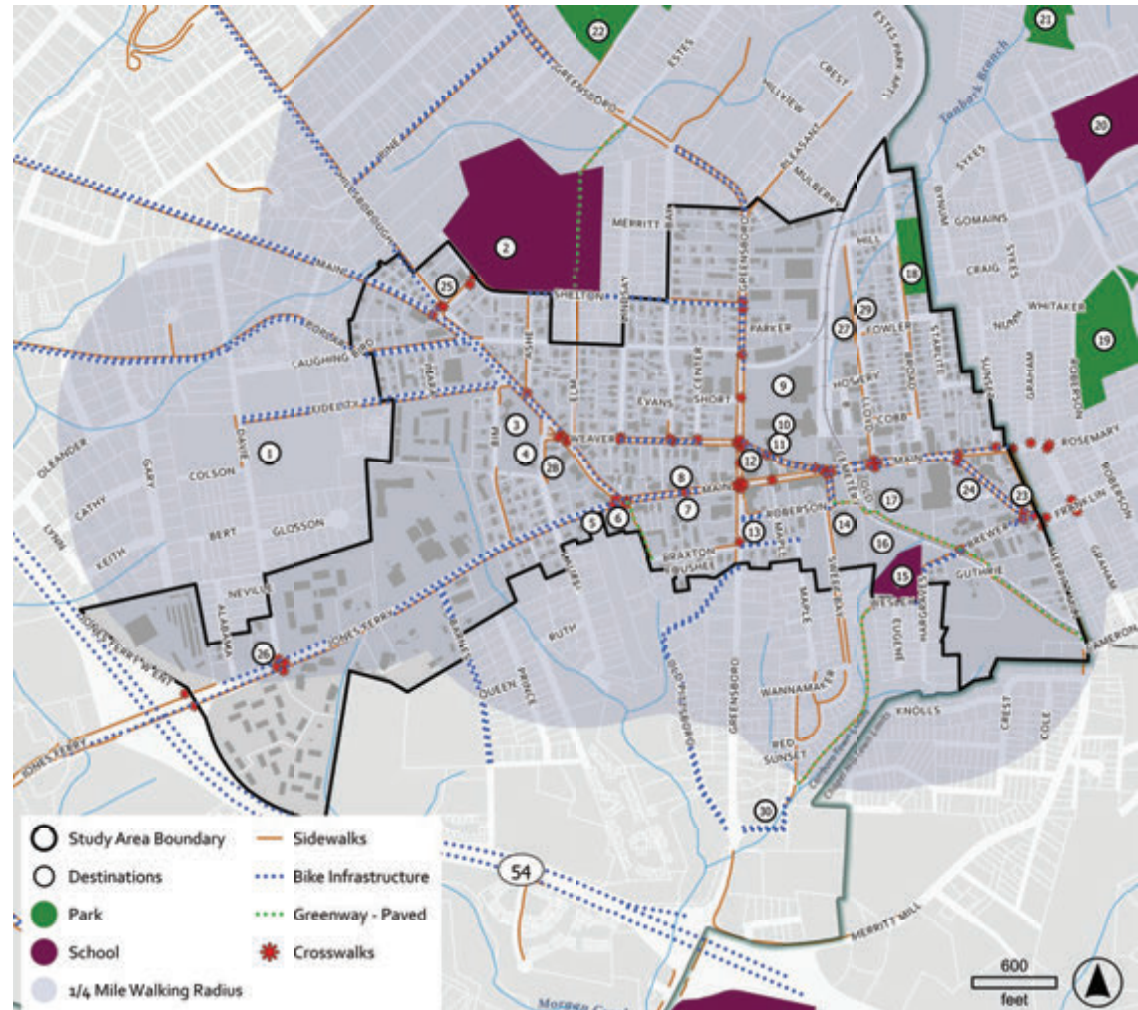
DESTINATIONS & WALKABILITY

This map highlights some of the destinations that draw residents and visitors to the downtown area. These destinations include, but are not limited to, parks, schools, cultural institutions, community service locations, destination businesses and Town Hall. Many of the destinations are close together and within walking/biking distance of one another. The map also shows the pedestrian and bicycle network, including sidewalks, bicycle infrastructure and greenways, as well as a quarter-mile buffer from the center of each destination. The quarter-mile buffer represents approximately a five-minute walk.

The sidewalk network in the core of the study area is nearly complete, contributing to a walkable downtown. Sidewalk connectivity varies in the surrounding area, with some streets having complete connectivity and others having gaps. The quality, design and width of sidewalks vary, as does the level of pedestrian comfort and perceived safety. In some areas, narrow sidewalks associated with narrow rights-of-way constrict the pedestrian flow.

Accessibility for populations with physical disabilities also varies, creating unique challenges for experiencing downtown. Special consideration should be made for accessible parking and routes, including clear wayfinding so everyone feels comfortable and welcome to visit downtown.

Map 12. Destinations & Walkability Map



1	Westwood Cemetery	7	Mill Superintendent's House/ Club Nova	13	Drakeford Library Complex	19	Hargraves Community Center	25	Carrboro United Methodist Church
2	Carrboro Elementary School	8	Inter-Faith Ministries	14	The ArtsCenter	20	Northside Elementary School	26	The Pantry
3	Town Hall Complex	9	Harris Teeter	15	Community School for People Under Six & Adjacent Mini Park	21	Umstead Park	27	Piedmont Health
4	Town Commons/Carrboro Farmers Market	10	Carr Mill Mall	16	Old Cemetery	22	Wilson Park	28	Montessori Academy
5	Strayhorn Houses	11	Weaver Street Market	17	Cat's Cradle	23	St. Paul AME Church	29	Clay Centre
6	CommunityWorx	12	Century Center	18	Baldwin Park	24	Church of God	30	South Green

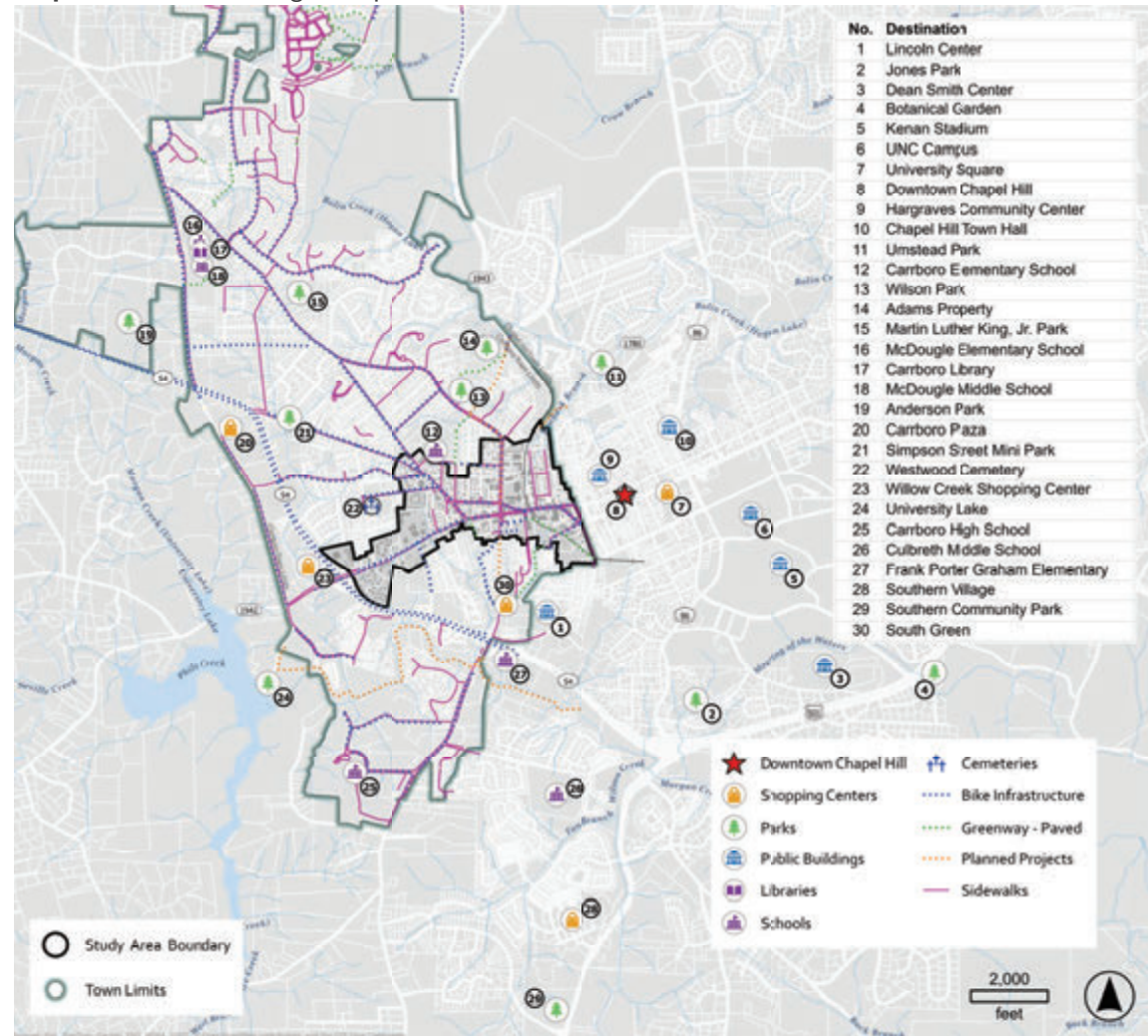
POTENTIAL LINKAGES

There may be opportunities to connect to various points of interest outside the study area. These include shopping centers, parks, public buildings, libraries and schools. Downtown Chapel Hill is directly east of the study area, and the UNC at Chapel Hill is a seven-minute drive or short bike ride from downtown Carrboro. In addition to the Chapel Hill Transit routes previously noted in the Mobility Network section, Go Triangle route 405 provides regional bus connectivity to Chapel Hill and Durham.

As seen on the adjacent map, the Town already has substantial pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure connecting the surrounding areas, some of the identified points of interest and the study area. While not within the study area (or depicted on the map), the Fan Branch Greenway is located southeast of the study area and provides connectivity to Southern Village and Southern Community Park.

Further expanding convenient bicycle, pedestrian and transit access to the study area will help draw people downtown, encourage frequent visits, and support a vision of creating a car-optional downtown.

Map 13. Potential Linkages Map



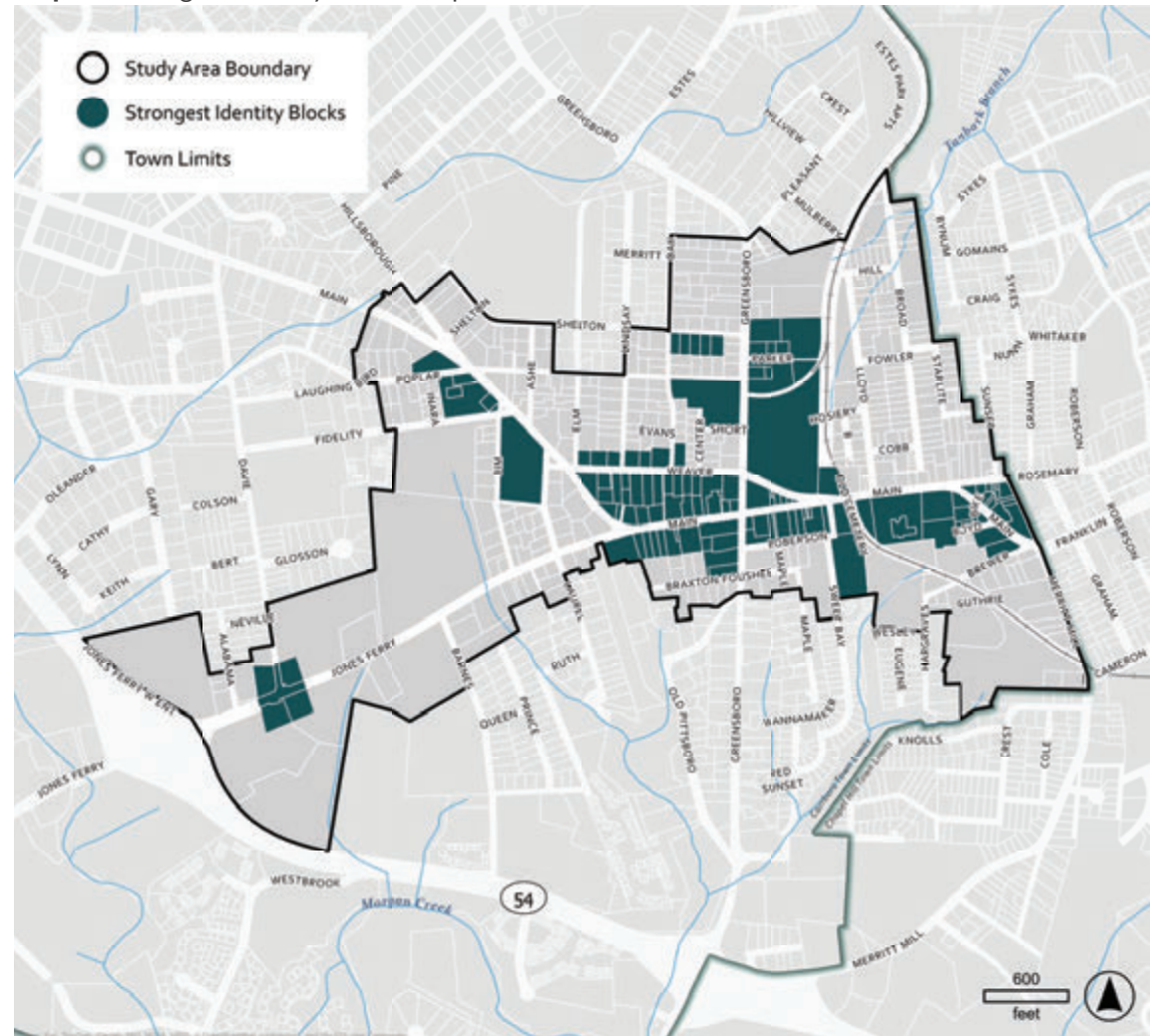
STRONGEST IDENTITY BLOCKS

This map illustrates blocks with the strongest existing identity and investment based on an observational survey of current conditions. Identity relates to an area's character, look, feel and general level of foot traffic. The destinations in these blocks typically draw many people to the study area.

While the strongest identity blocks are spread throughout the study area, the most dense concentrations are located along Main, Greensboro and Weaver streets.

Having complete pedestrian and bicycle connectivity to these areas, as well as sufficient bicycle parking, can help to diversify how people choose to travel in the downtown area. In addition, these areas are already successfully attracting people to downtown. Building on the successes in these area, with potential development or redevelopment in the vicinity is one way to organically expand the areas of interest within the study area, thus attracting more investment and interest into the downtown area.

Map 14. Strongest Identity Blocks Map



UTILITY INFRASTRUCTURE

Carrboro's water and sewer infrastructure is provided by Orange Water and Sewer Authority (OWASA), a regional public utility that provides water and sewer service to Orange County, Carrboro, Chapel Hill and UNC at Chapel Hill. The OWASA water treatment plant is located within the Plan's study area along Jones Ferry Road.

Ample water and sewer are available throughout the downtown area and Jones Ferry Road corridor to support existing and future growth opportunities. OWASA also supplies reclaimed water to portions of the service area, and there are opportunities to expand the use of this resource to support more sustainable water usage. While ample water and sewer supply are available in the study area, the efficient use of these resources should still be considered and carefully planned to support long-term sustainable practices.

The Town's electrical service is provided by Duke Energy, a private electrical supplier for many portions of North Carolina. Electrical power transmission and distribution lines are located overhead on poles, generally along road corridors. Due to numerous challenges and physical constraints on relocating these lines underground, it is unlikely that the Town will see existing overhead lines buried. Being mindful that the existing poles and wires will likely remain is an important consideration for the built environment.



Overhead utility lines along Jones Ferry Road



OWASA Jones Ferry Road Water Treatment Plant

PLANNING & OWNERSHIP FRAMEWORK

The planning framework looks at the study area's existing land use, public/institutional owned land and vacant land. The ownership framework also examines the land values and ease of assembly. This analysis highlights areas that may be available for development or redevelopment and could build on the success of existing activity.

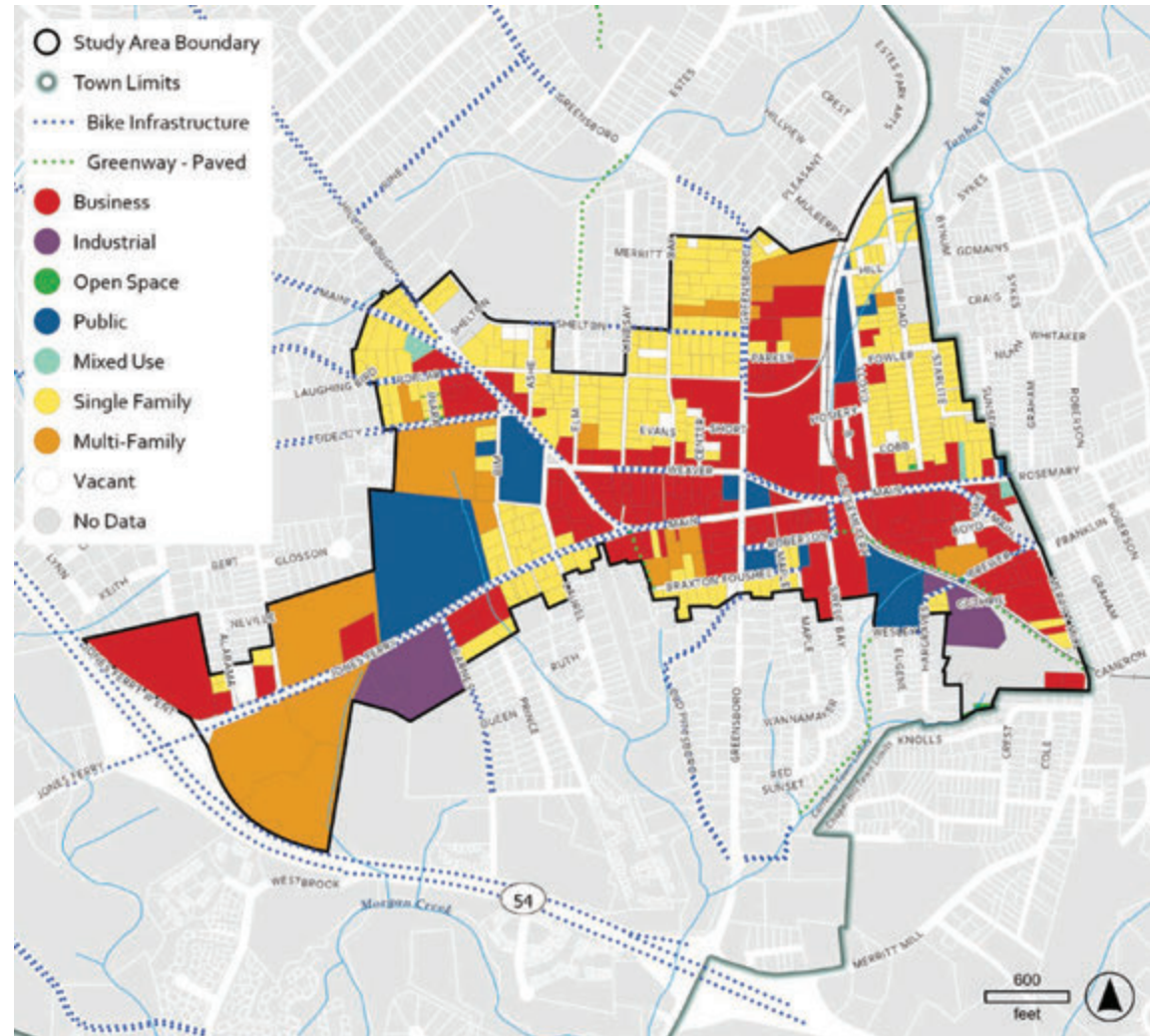
EXISTING LAND USE

This map depicts the existing land uses in the study area. Land use is a critical ingredient in determining the way people live and work. Two factors to consider when designating land use are how land is currently being used and how it could potentially be used in the future. In many cases, the existing active land use on a property remains unchanged. For undeveloped property, there are opportunities to shape the way land can be developed in the future to better meet Town goals.

The study area's two most prevalent land uses are commercial and residential. While these uses complement each other, the interface between them must be thoughtfully considered.

Of note is the limited parks/open space land use in the downtown area and few vacant parcels that could easily be converted to public open space.

Map 15. Existing Land Use



PUBLIC AND INSTITUTIONAL OWNED LAND

Public facilities in downtowns are often activity generators. People visit Town Hall to seek support from their local government, take care of permits and attend various meetings, among other things. Town Commons is home to the successful Carrboro Farmers' Market and many local festivals. Other Town-owned parks provide daily recreational opportunities.

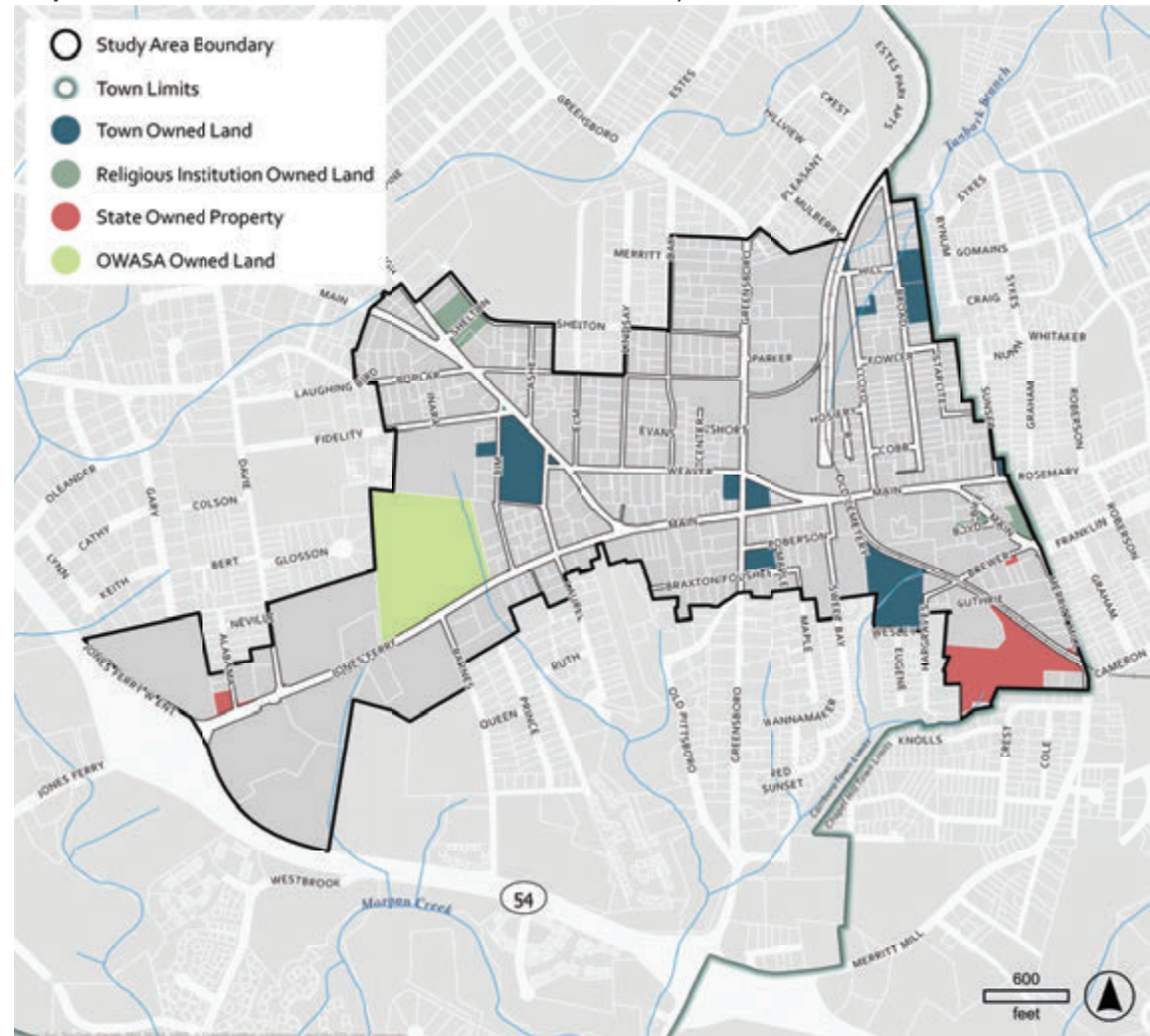
Religious institutions are often filled at certain hours but empty at other times. If a partnership was created between the Town and religious institutions, the parking lots at these facilities could provide overflow parking locations during non-peak times.

The state of North Carolina owns a few properties downtown, most notably the study area's largest vacant lot located at the southeast corner of the study area. Converting this property to a taxable use could provide additional tax revenue for the Town and a sizable development opportunity.

The OWASA water treatment plant is prominently located along Jones Ferry Road. The property's frontage is well maintained and the plant is not anticipated to relocate.

Some of these public and institutionally owned parcels help to draw people to the study area and most are unlikely to change uses or ownership in the near future.

Map 16. Public and Institutional Owned Land in the Study Area

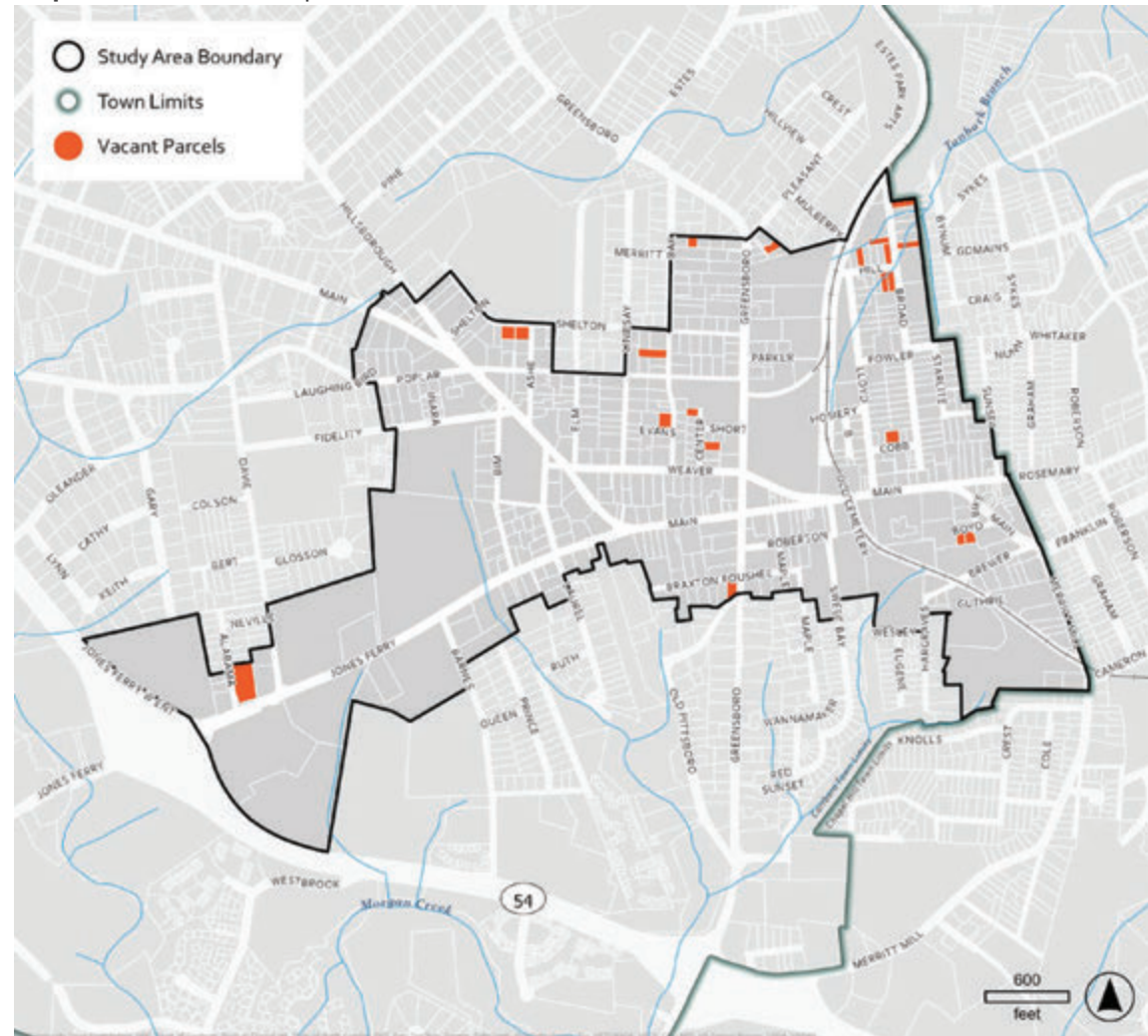


VACANT LAND

Examining vacant land in the downtown area serves two important purposes. First, it reveals gaps in the urban fabric and points to potential areas for future development. Second, smaller scattered vacant parcels offer opportunities for infill development, which can gradually add to the vibrancy and character of the area over time.

There is limited vacant land in the study area and all vacant parcels are relatively small. While larger scale redevelopment would require consolidation of land, small parcels can provide opportunities to support small businesses or pocket park development in the downtown area.

Map 17. Vacant Land Map



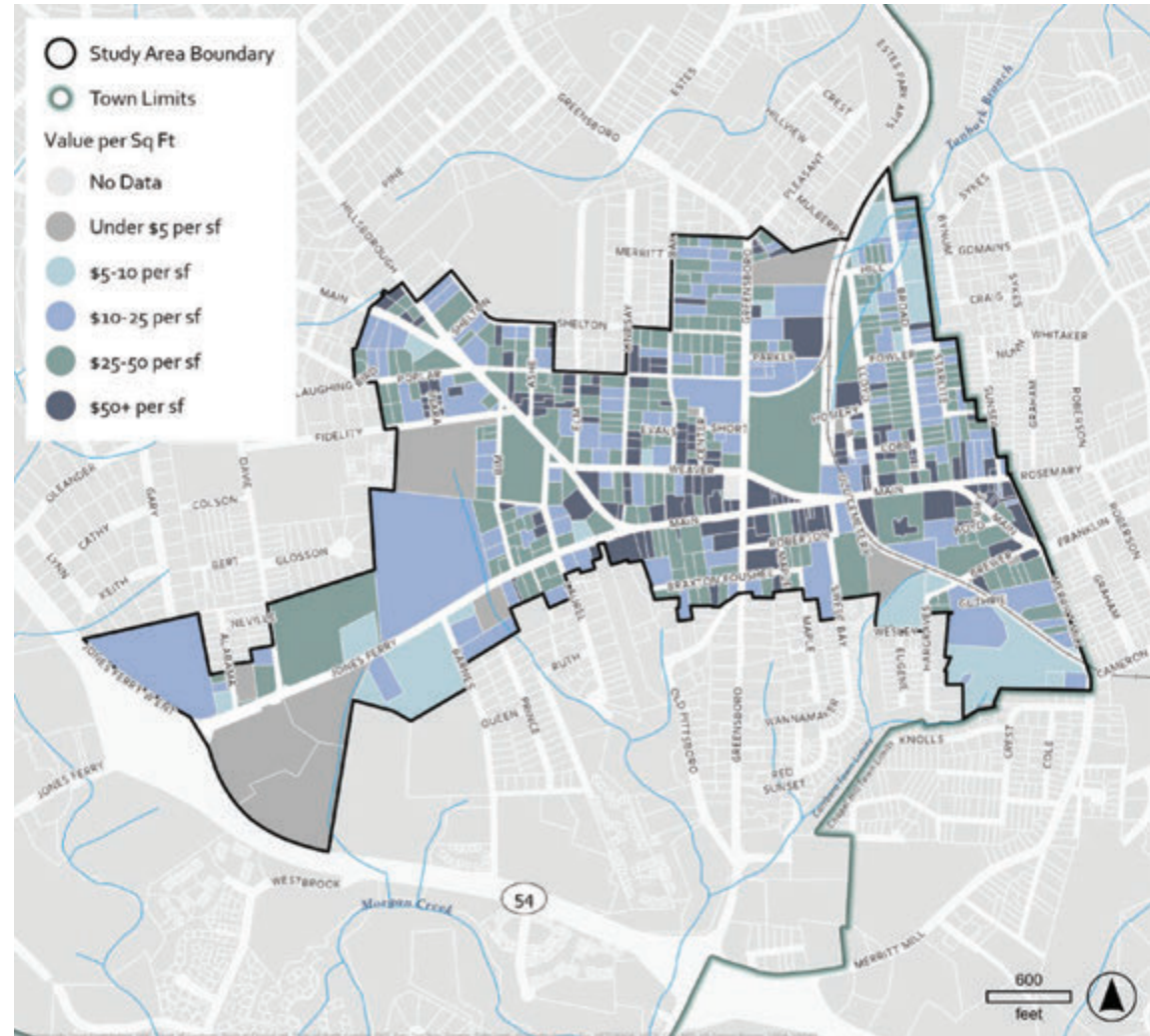
LAND VALUES

Examining the land values within the study area provides baseline data that can set the stage for future development. It identifies locations where redevelopment is unlikely to occur based on high values while simultaneously identifying nearby areas that don't currently have a high land value but can build off the momentum generated by the high land value parcels. The land values in Map 18 are based on price per square foot (excluding building value) and do not represent market values, the owners' expectations or taxable values.

It is important to consider that certain property types, such as those owned by government or religious institutions, are exempt from property tax.

The study area includes all land value increments. However, a high concentration of land values of more than \$25 per square foot is situated along Main Street. This is expected since this is the primary thoroughfare through the heart of downtown Carrboro. Parcels valued at under \$10 per square foot tend to be on the periphery of the study area. Having a wide range of land values helps maintain a diverse local economy and housing options. Naturally occurring affordable housing and affordable business spaces are retained through having lower land values.

Map 18. Land Values Map



Land values were determined by dividing the parcel valuation (from parcel data) by the parcel area.

EASE OF ASSEMBLY

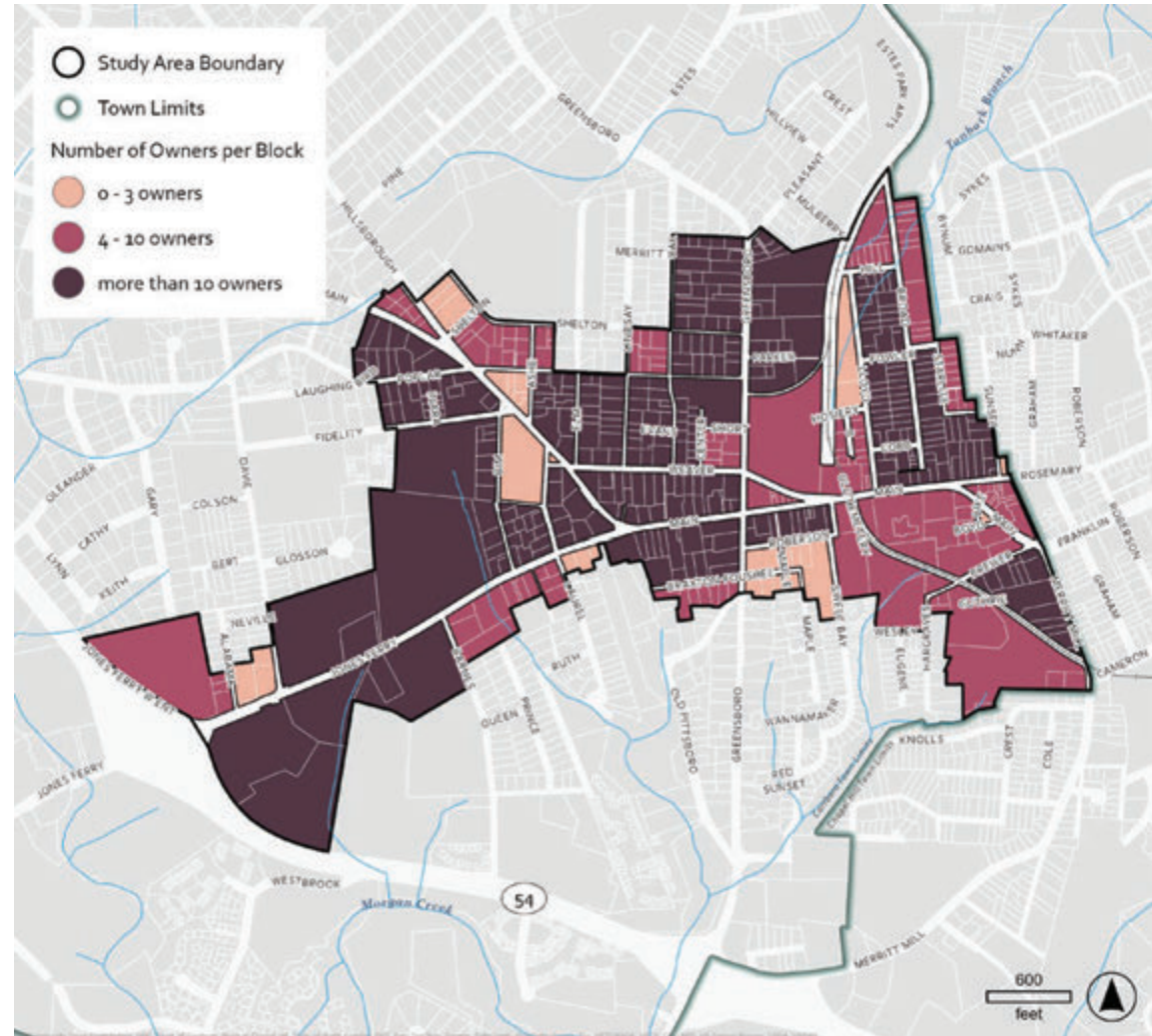
The ease of assembly assessment examines how many property owners are in a specific area. For this study, a “block” refers to a piece of land usually separated from other blocks by streets, alleys or railroad tracks. (Some blocks extend beyond the study area boundary, but only the portion within the study area is identified on Map 19.)

Blocks with fewer than three owners and/or large parcels have the greatest potential for future development or redevelopment because they may not require as much effort to combine properties into a bigger site. Blocks with four to 10 smaller landowners can still be developed, but it may be more complicated as some owners might not be interested in selling or developing their land. These blocks, however, can be ideal for infill development projects which can attract smaller or more creative developers. Blocks with more than 10 small landowners often pose the most significant challenge for consolidation.

While having some larger parcels available for redevelopment allows for needed larger-scale projects, Carrboro has seen incredible success with smaller spaces supporting local businesses, so maintaining numerous small parcels in the downtown area also provides opportunities for more incremental growth.

Most blocks in the study area have four or more owners, which may limit the viability of and/or add extra challenges for larger-scale development. However, due to the street layouts within the study area, some of the blocks include an extensive area (e.g., the

Map 19. Ease of Assembly Map



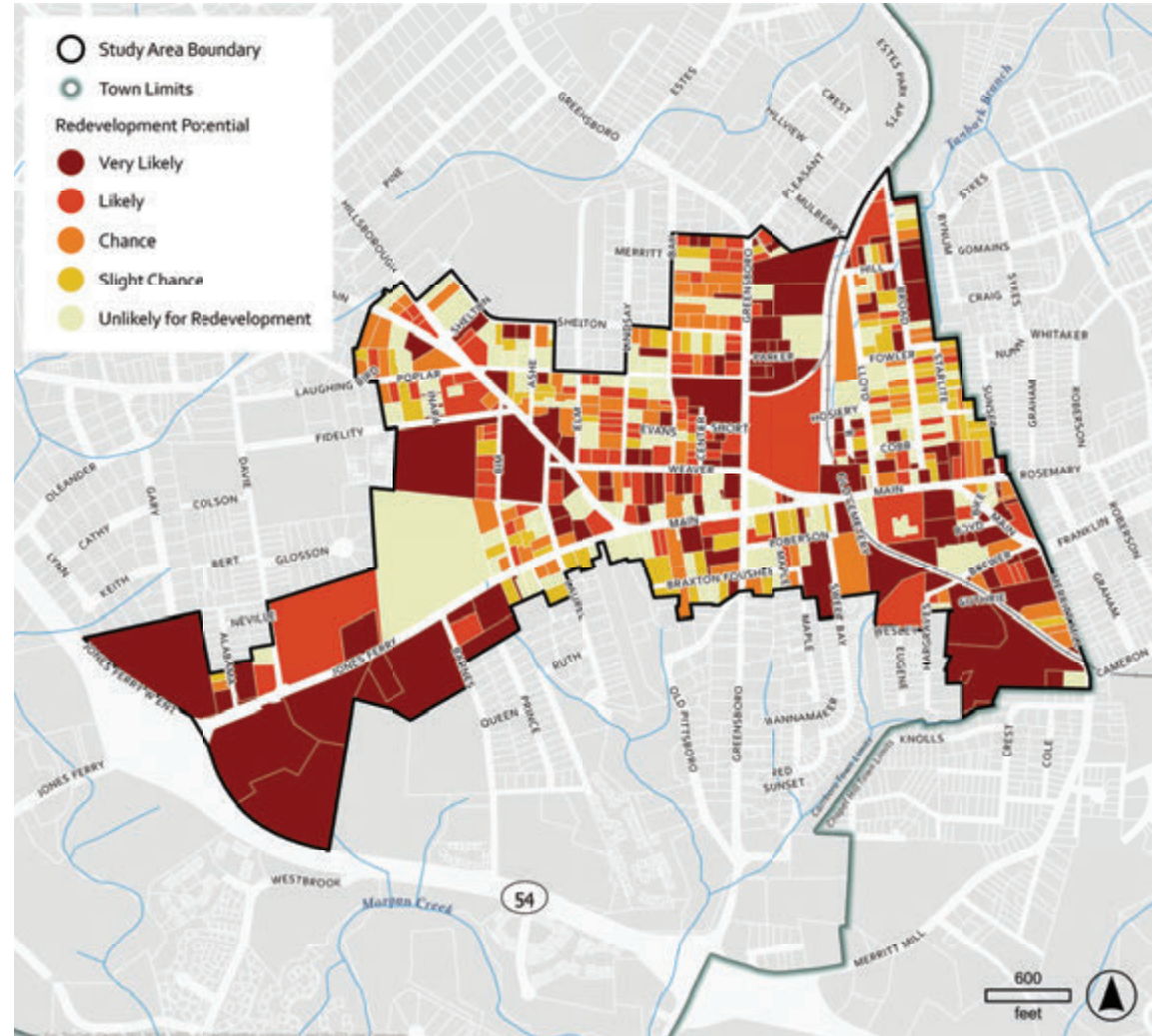
Jones Ferry area). So while there may be more than 10 owners, some of those owners have a very large property that would not require additional land assembly.

IMPROVEMENT AND PRODUCTIVITY ANALYSES

These analyses provide a snapshot of development opportunities on a larger, district-wide basis and are each one factor of many in determining the outcome and potential of redevelopment on a specific parcel. These maps do not indicate any one parcel will be redeveloped but are helpful in identifying clusters for further analysis of opportunities before additional steps are taken.

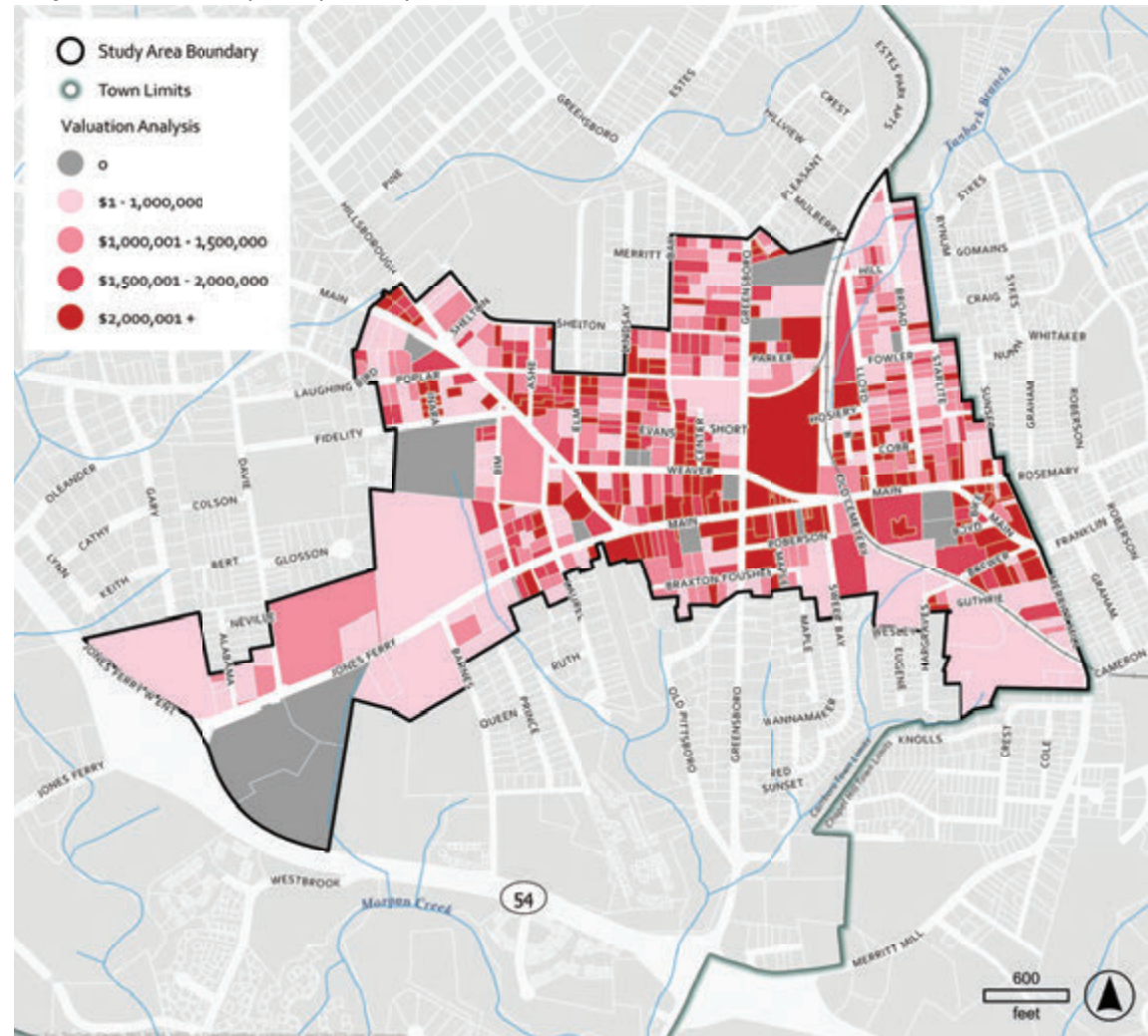
The Improvement Analysis helps identify parcels that may be opportunities for redevelopment. The analysis produces a ratio from the improved value and land value of a property. Essentially, a parcel where the land is a greater portion of the property value than the improvements on the property present a lower ratio indicating the availability for more or higher value improvements. Any property with a value less than one meets this criterion and the lower the ratio, the more likely it would be an opportunity for redevelopment.

Map 20. Improvement Analysis Map



The Productivity Analysis identifies how productive or fully utilized a parcel may be within the district. This analysis is produced by analyzing the total property value to the size or acreage of the parcel. Higher values are the goal. In the context of a commercial district, this often means that a parcel is more fully utilizing all portions of the parcel for productive purposes for its size. For example, a large lot that is half parking lot with a few smaller buildings on it would produce a lower value indicating that has low productivity and, therefore, may be an opportunity for redevelopment.

Map 21. Productivity Analysis Map



DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES

Through analysis of existing conditions, including the frameworks described in the previous pages, a variety of development opportunities and challenges have been identified. These elements and the specific data discussed in this chapter will help to inform the recommendations for the study area.

As future improvements and projects are considered in the study area, existing conditions will present various opportunities and challenges to development and redevelopment. Some of the key opportunities and challenges are illustrated on Map 22 on the next page. While the map does not present every development consideration, the illustrated elements are some of the most important to consider in greater detail while creating this Plan's recommendations. It is important that any improvements ultimately made be contextually appropriate when considering the existing site and surrounding uses.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES:

- While the study area has a relatively small amount of vacant land, those areas provide the greatest opportunity for infill development or additional open spaces.
- Land owned by the Town will be the most accessible area for the Town to improve.
- There are a variety of successful, diverse destinations in the study area, with a concentration along Main and Greensboro Streets. Many of these destinations are already within comfortable walking distance of each other, and future development should continue to expand the offerings within walking distance of other destinations.

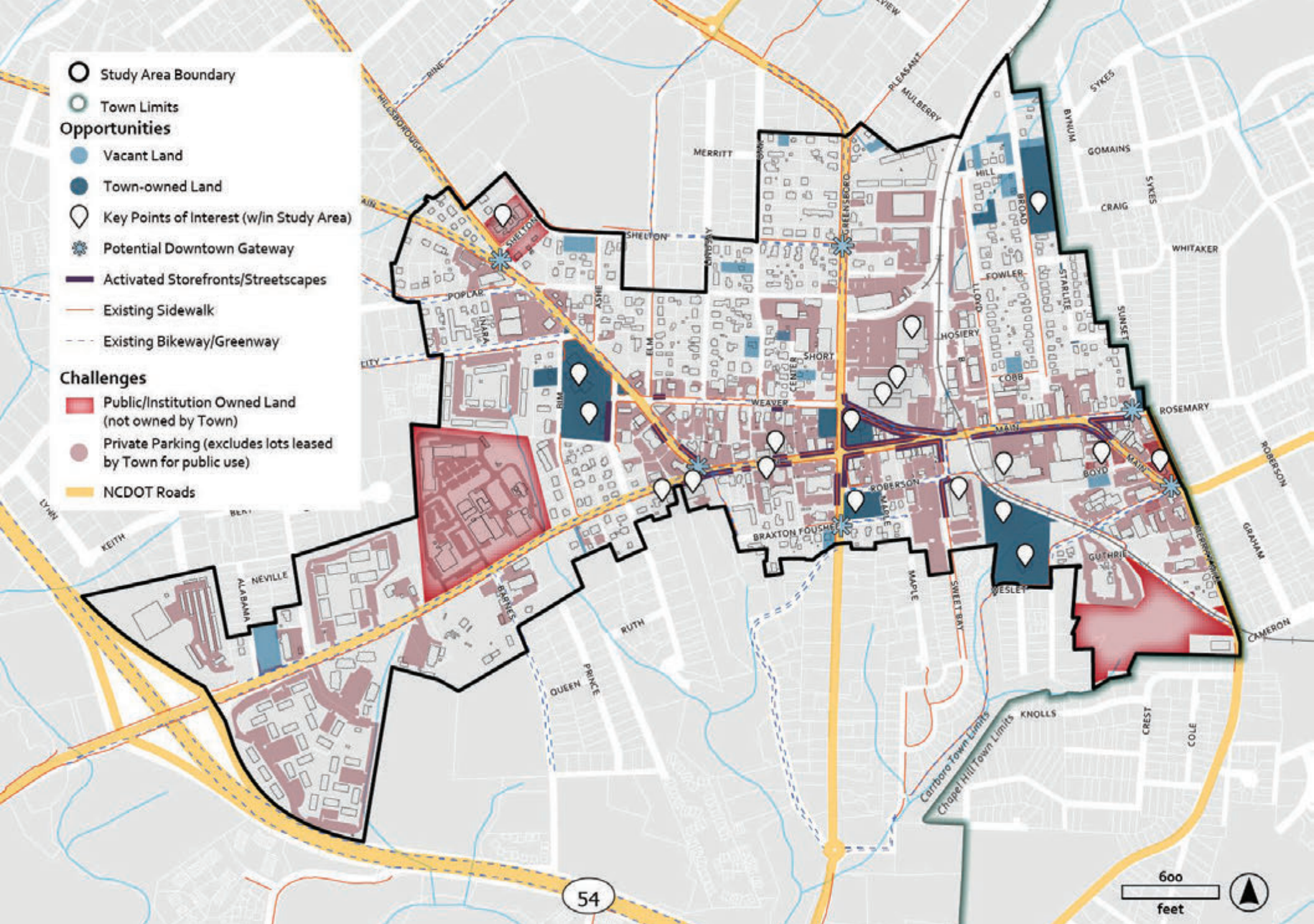
- Existing primary access points into the downtown area have the potential to be enhanced to create strong visual cues (i.e., gateways) and a sense of place as people enter the area.
- Activated storefronts and streetscapes easily engage passersby. Sometimes, this includes elements such as outdoor gathering areas, visibility into buildings and uses that attract people throughout the day. Numerous areas, primarily along Main Street and Weaver Street, are already well-activated. The addition of further enhanced streetscapes and activated building uses can help expand this existing success in the downtown area.
- With the desire to be a multi-modal community, having a substantial network of sidewalks and bikeways/greenways is crucial. The study area already has a strong bicycle and pedestrian network that can be expanded to further the Town's goal of multi-modal transportation.

KEY CHALLENGES:

- The study area is home to various public and institutional entities (e.g., OWASA, religious institutions, and the state). While Town-owned land is easier to consider for redevelopment, other public and institutional entities may have various challenges to resolve that may prevent reuse or redevelopment potential. For

this reason, these areas are highlighted as potential challenges.

- Narrow rights-of-way inhibit the addition of on-street parking throughout the downtown area. This, in turn, leads to an extensive amount of private off-street parking throughout the study area, most of which is reserved for a single or small number of establishments. Easily accessed and well-dispersed public parking is a strong factor in the level of visitation a downtown receives. The quantity of private or reserved parking areas in the study area limits public parking opportunities.
- Most of the primary and minor arterials in the study area are owned by NCDOT. In many instances, these are the roads most appropriate for enhanced streetscapes. Close coordination with NCDOT will be required for enhancements to be realized. Narrow rights-of-way along all roads will also limit the streetscape elements that can be successfully integrated into the downtown area.
- While not depicted on the map, the study area has a relatively small number of outdoor gathering areas. Welcoming and inclusive spaces where people can enjoy the area without needing to visit a specific establishment are an important part of a lively environment. Finding areas for such new spaces may be a challenge.



Map 22. Development Opportunities and Challenges



Vision & Goals

DRAFT



DRAFT

ENGAGEMENT APPROACH

As with the Carrboro Connects Comprehensive Plan, the engagement process for this project was guided by the Town's commitment to advancing race and equity and incorporating values of inclusivity and representation. A broad range of engagement and outreach tools were used throughout the process, improving on what was successful during the creation of Carrboro Connects, as well as what the Town has learned since then through its growing toolbox of race and equity tools. The Downtown Area Plan aims to build on and reinforce the community's trust that their voices are being heard and that the Town is dedicated to implementing a community-based vision for the future of the downtown area. The planning process officially began in the summer of 2024. Three key principles were observed while developing this Plan's engagement strategy and approach.

1. Coordinate with Other Projects and Efforts

- Build on the vision of Carrboro Connects.
- Strengthen the connection of this project to other implementation projects of Carrboro Connects.
- Incorporate previous work, such as parking and circulation analyses, the Bike Plan, the Community Climate Action Plan, and the 2001 Downtown Carrboro New Vision.

2. Use Inclusive Carrboro Engagement Principles

- Listen to gain understanding.
- Represent and report comments, input and feedback transparently.
- Be open, timely and responsive, and follow through on commitments.
- Recognize not all community members will engage with digital tools, nor be able to come to a one-time public meeting and provide multiple opportunities and means for engagement and outreach.

3. Advance Race and Equity and Prioritize Climate Action

- Collect demographic information at every event to understand who has not been heard from and adjust outreach as needed to address gaps in representation.
- Provide all engagement materials in English and Spanish and provide translation services at events.

- Coordinate with local community organizations to understand how to best include the voices of community members they serve, including Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), Hispanic/Latino and low-income residents.
- Limit single-purpose vehicle trips: plan events in places that are accessible by transit, walking and/or biking as well as by car. Host events at times when community members are already downtown and provide virtual alternatives where possible.



HEARING FROM RESIDENTS

Promotion of the Plan and getting the word out to community members included the launch of Carrboro's new outreach platform Engage Carrboro—where the project website was housed. Banners and flyers were placed strategically throughout the downtown area. The team brought opportunities to engage with the community to a variety of events including large Town events like the Fiestas en la Calle (Latin American Festival) and Open Streets, as well as small pop-ups at local businesses and the Farmers' Market. Town staff sent postcards and hand-delivered invites and information to residents' doorsteps in the Lloyd-Broad, Tin Top, Lincoln Park, Alabama Avenue and Glosson Circle neighborhoods, as well as mailing postcards and letters to every resident and property owner in the downtown area. The team conducted small group listening sessions with council members and stakeholders, several dedicated workshops, and other community and neighborhood events.

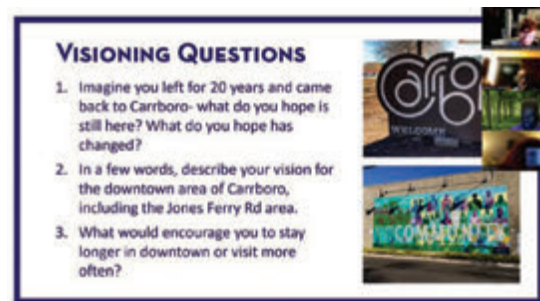
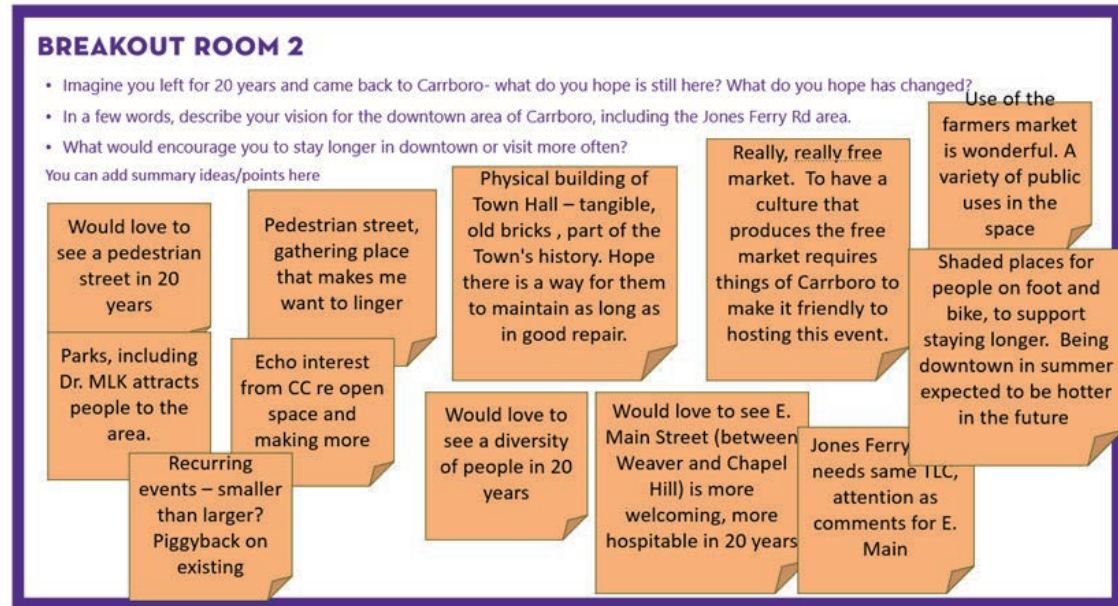
These ongoing efforts, in tandem with the visioning survey administered both digitally and physically in multiple languages, and word of mouth, sought to facilitate having Carrboro residents lead the planning process, as well as creating opportunities for the team to hear as much as possible from those who face barriers to participating in planning conducted solely through public Town Council meetings.



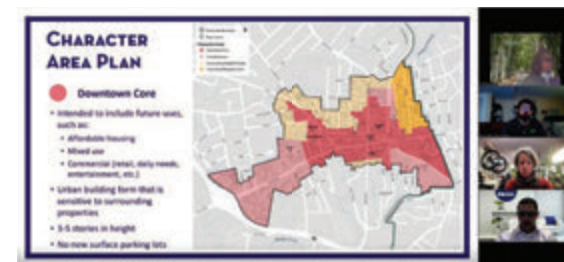
COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDER & ADVISORY BOARD MEETINGS

A series of small group meetings and discussions were held during the project, including business owners, developers, residents, elected officials and non-profit community organizations. By offering both in-person and virtual options for these meetings, the team was able to speak with over 30 community members throughout the project who offered a diverse array of expertise and lived experience at each step of the Plan's drafting. Participants discussed the things they loved about Carrboro, the places for opportunity and potential change, and helped lay the foundation of the vision for downtown Carrboro for the next 20 years.

In addition to small community member and stakeholder meetings, the project team met with advisory boards and commissions several times throughout the process to pull from their expertise and experiences, gather feedback on iterations of the draft, and verify that the Plan was accurately reflecting the vision of the community and Town.



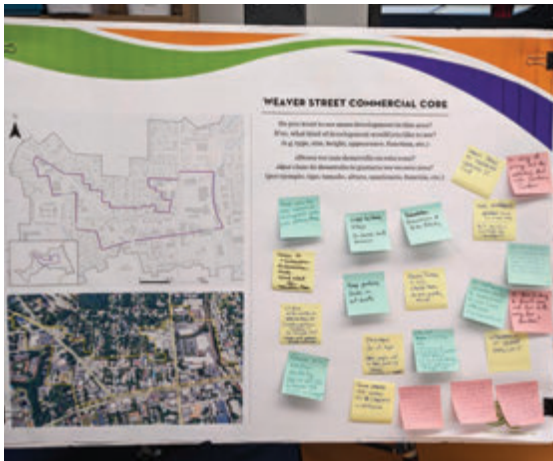
Virtual Advisory Board meeting



Virtual stakeholder presentation

POP-UP EVENTS & OPEN HOUSES

Over the course of the project, the team partnered with community organizations like El Centro Hispano, Marian Cheek Jackson Center, ArtsCenter, Orange County Public Library, CHICLE and Carrboro Farmers' Market to host pop-up events at longstanding Town signature events, and standalone open houses and workshops. Additionally, in the summer/fall of 2025, the draft Plan was released in full for a period of public comment before adoption.



PROJECT WEBSITE & VISIONING SURVEY

ENGAGE CARRBORO WEBSITE

Engage Carrboro was launched in parallel with this project and served as a hub for early open discussion and visioning, and the survey. With the ability to translate the site into the six most spoken languages locally, as learned from engagement while creating Carrboro Connects, the website provided a virtual space where community members could read about the Plan, participate in a variety of ways, stay up to date on progress, watch videos of meetings and share their ideas.

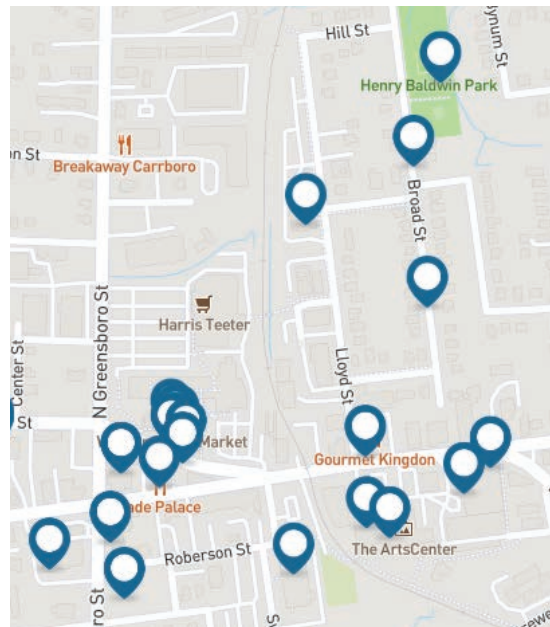


**2,000+
SITE VISITS**

**800+ MAP
RESPONSES**

SURVEY OVERVIEW

An online public survey was launched to gather input from the community regarding downtown priorities, existing conditions in the area and opportunities for the future of downtown Carrboro. The survey was open from September 1 to November 8, 2024 and received 286 responses. The survey was promoted through community events, the Town's website, email blasts and social media. Partners at the Refugee Community Partnership, El Centro Hispano and the Marian Cheek Jackson Center also helped distribute and administer paper surveys to residents and/or administer the questions in Spanish. Highlights of survey results are described on the following pages, with complete, detailed results included in the Appendix.



VISIONING SURVEY SUMMARY

RACE, EQUITY & REPRESENTATION

As part of the team's commitment to race and equity, as responses were being collected, staff and the consultant identified a difference between respondents' self-identified race as Black or African American (4%) and Carrboro's population (14%, 2022 ACS 5-Year Estimates). The survey period was extended and Town staff attended neighborhood meetings and reinforced relationships with Lloyd-Broad and Alabama Avenue residents. This was done in an effort to include Black and African American residents' voices in the visioning process and keep them involved through the remainder of the project.

Survey demographics are provided on this page and represent part of a larger spread of voices heard throughout the project. For in-person events where self-identified demographics were collected, please see the Appendix.

Figure 23. Survey Demographics - Age

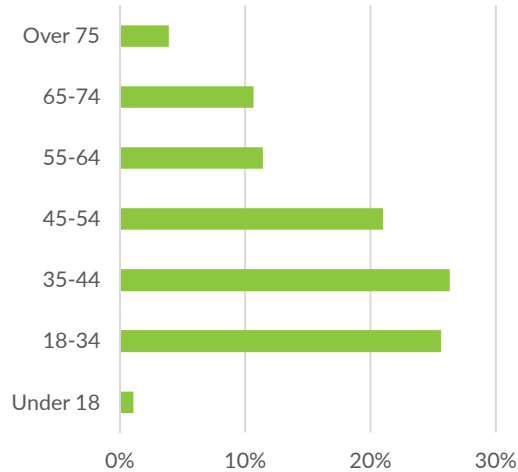


Figure 24. Survey Demographics - Home Ownership

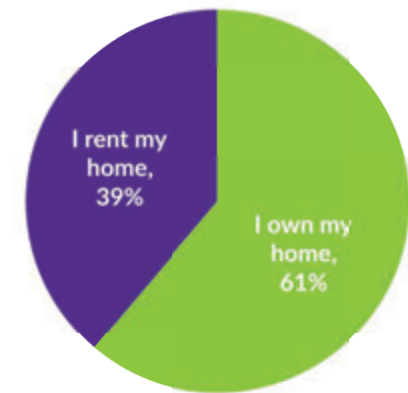
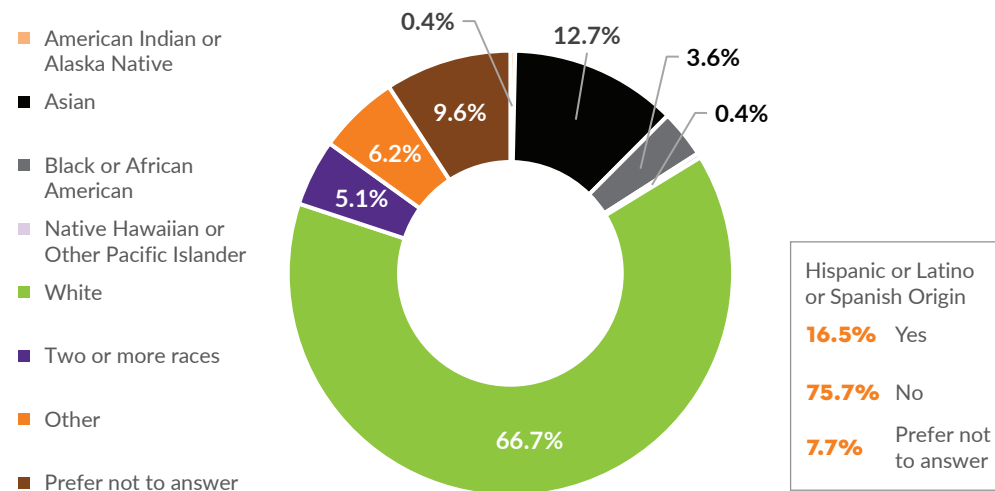


Figure 25. Survey Demographics - Race and Ethnicity



WHAT DO YOU HOPE IS STILL HERE IN 20 YEARS?

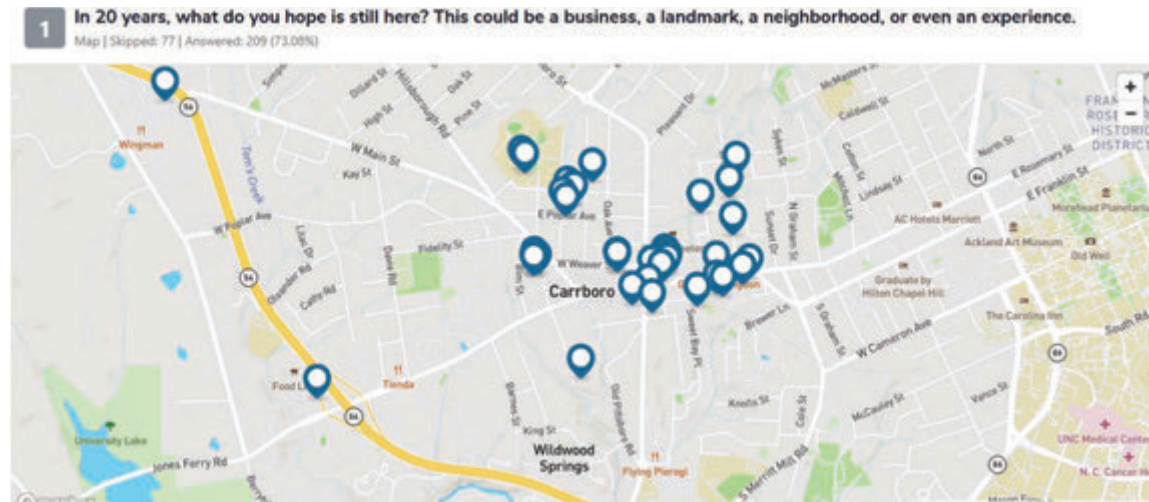
Survey respondents expressed a deep appreciation for the vibrant community spirit embodied by downtown Carrboro. Weaver Street Market emerged as a focal point, celebrated for its central role in community gatherings. Similarly, the Carrboro Farmers' Market is cherished for its local produce and social atmosphere. Cat's Cradle, a cornerstone of the local music scene, is beloved for its cultural contributions.

Residents praised the variety of parks and green spaces like the Town Commons, which offers recreational opportunities and hosts community events. The presence of small, local businesses adds a unique charm to downtown, with many enjoying the diverse range of dining and shopping options. The Town's walkability and bikeability were also highlighted, with respondents valuing the ease of navigation and dedicated paths.

The historic and unique buildings of Carrboro were mentioned fondly, with a call to preserve the architectural character that sets the Town apart.

Community events and activities, such as festivals and markets, contribute to a lively and engaging downtown atmosphere. Additionally, venues like The ArtsCenter play a crucial role in supporting local arts and culture.

Overall, the map responses reflect a strong sense of community pride and a desire to maintain the welcoming, inclusive and vibrant nature of downtown Carrboro.



Map from online survey showing a sampling of comments

As our town grows I'd love for Carrboro to build more community spaces downtown. Parks, gathering spaces, recreational use, picnic spaces, art spaces, splash pad.

A vibrant downtown area with businesses that appeal to all sorts of people and more 'third spaces' where we can gather, people-watch, share experiences

General walk and bikeability.

Add places for small businesses that are affordable by allowing for more space, maybe going up in height of existing commercial space.

Respect the historic district and protect it.

How People Spend Time in Downtown

84% of respondents visit the study area at least a few times a week.

When asked about how they spend time in the downtown area (with respondents selecting all that apply), respondents indicated a variety of activities, ranging from meeting daily needs, to socializing, education and entertainment activities. The team asked for more details about the types of places visitors go, to also understand about the kinds of uses are successful and most sought in the study area to date.

These existing activities help illustrate what draws people to the downtown area today, showcasing the wide range of activities and services available that create a lively, active downtown area that supports live, play and work experiences.

Figure 26. How People Spend Time in Downtown

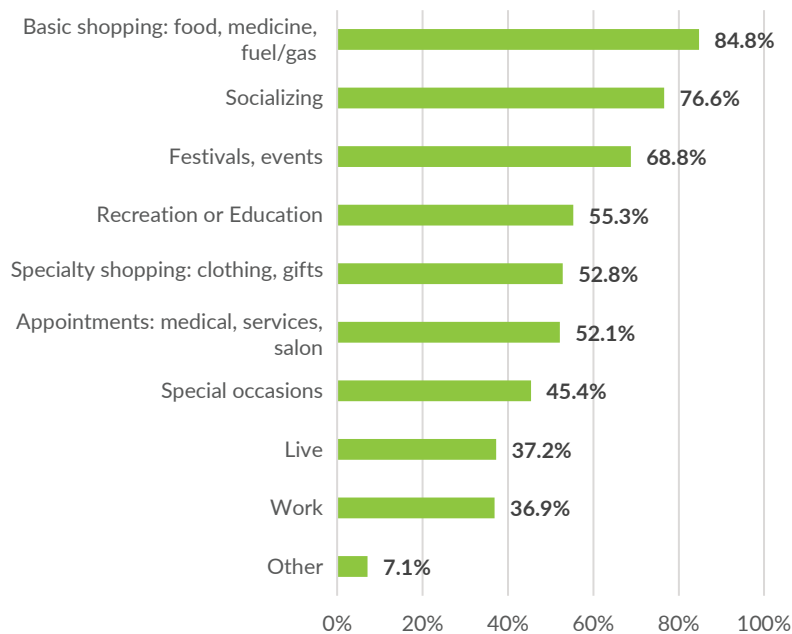


Figure 27. What Activities People Do or Places They Visit

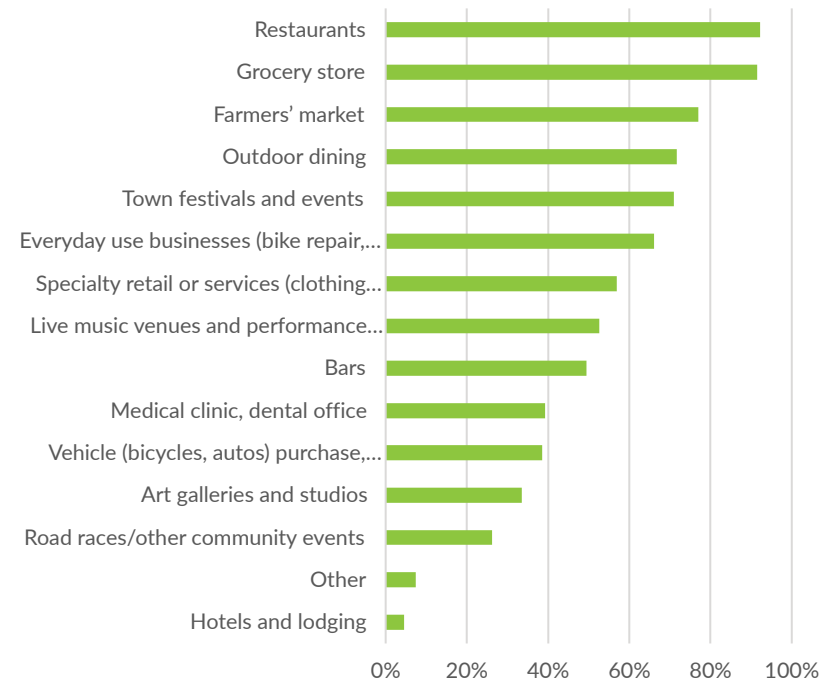
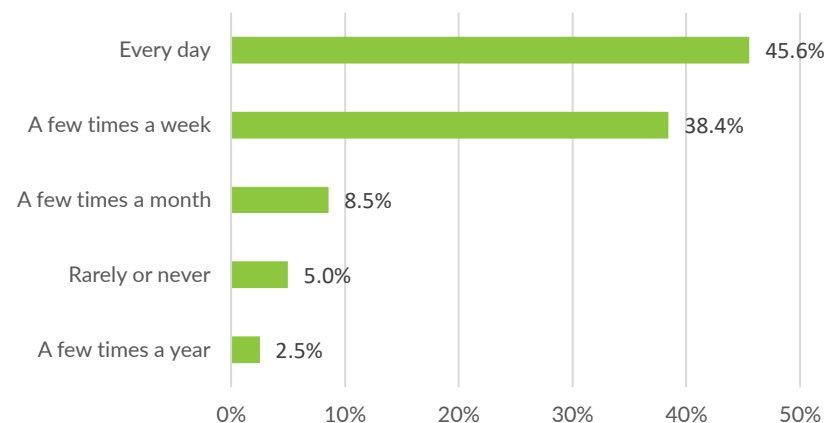


Figure 28. How Frequently People Visit the Study Area



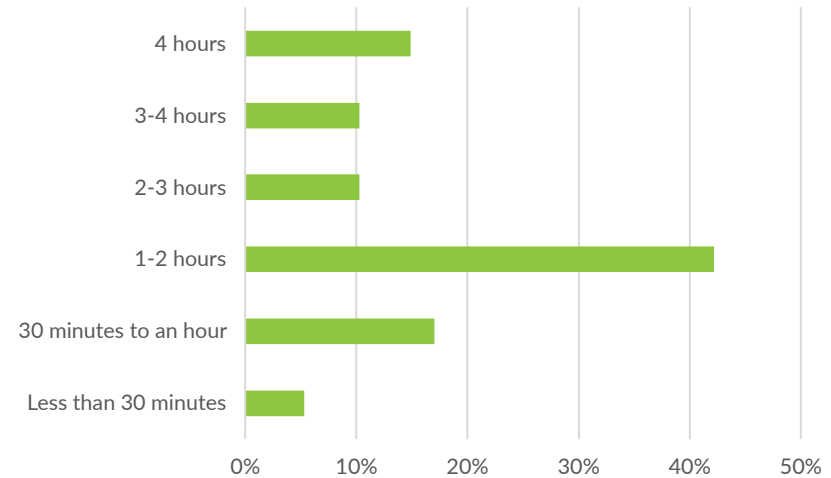
GETTING TO AND STAYING IN THE DOWNTOWN

ENCOURAGING PEOPLE TO STAY LONGER

Over 40% of survey respondents indicated that they stay in the study area for 1-2 hours when they visit. 67% responded with ideas for what would encourage them to stay longer. The most common themes were:

- More public seating, shaded areas and outdoor spaces to spend time in and with the community without needing to spend money. Suggestions include parks, benches, plazas and other small public spaces, particularly beyond Weaver Street Market to create more opportunities for visitors to walk and stop at places throughout downtown.
- Improved circulation, access and safety for all modes of travel – exploring ways to mitigate pedestrians, cyclists and cars on the road, bus service later into the evening, more public parking and friendlier parking policies on private lots.
- Extended business hours and a greater diversity of dining and shopping options, noting a desire for more global cuisine that represents and caters to a variety of community members, helping them to feel welcome.
- More frequent community and cultural events and additional public amenities (e.g., public restrooms, robust Wi-Fi network).
- Spaces and festivals that provide things to do for all ages. Some respondents commented that many businesses seem to cater to students and younger crowds.

Figure 29. How Long People Typically Stay in the Study Area

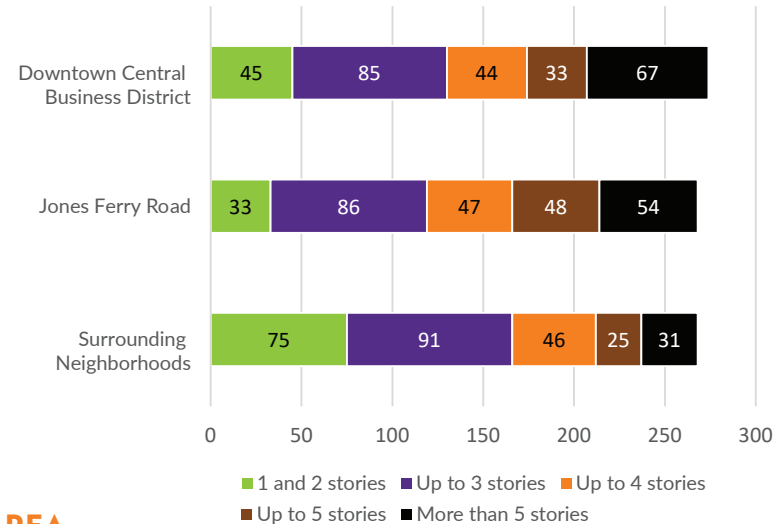


IMAGINING THE FUTURE OF DOWNTOWN CARRBORO

MAXIMUM BUILDING HEIGHTS IN THE STUDY AREA

Respondents were asked what they think the maximum building heights should be in the Downtown Central Business District, Jones Ferry Road area and the surrounding neighborhoods. Most respondents indicated that up to three stories was the most appropriate for all locations. The second largest ranking for the Downtown Central Business District and Jones Ferry Road was more than five stories, while the surrounding neighborhoods were one and two stories.

Figure 30. Maximum Building Heights



WHAT PEOPLE WANT TO SEE MORE OF IN THE STUDY AREA

Survey respondents were asked what types of things they would like to see more of in the study area and were able to choose five priorities. The most popular priorities were:

- Trees and shade.
- Safe bicycle and pedestrian spaces.
- Public gathering spaces, parks, plazas and/or pavilions.
- Affordable housing.
- Vehicular and traffic flow improvements.

The least common specified priority was buildings or places where people exclusively work (rather than mixed-use where people can live and work), with 10% of total responses.

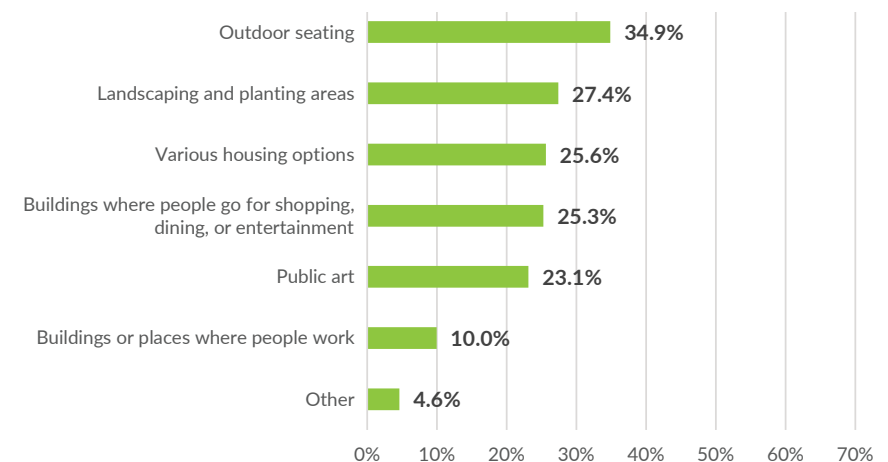
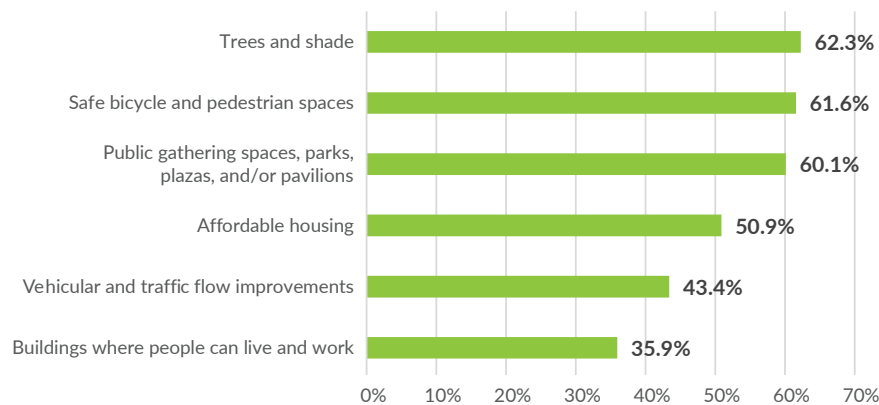


Figure 31. What People Want to See More of in the Study Area

WHAT DO YOU HOPE HAS CHANGED IN 20 YEARS?

Residents and visitors envision a downtown transformed into a safer, more representative, more accessible and community-centric space.

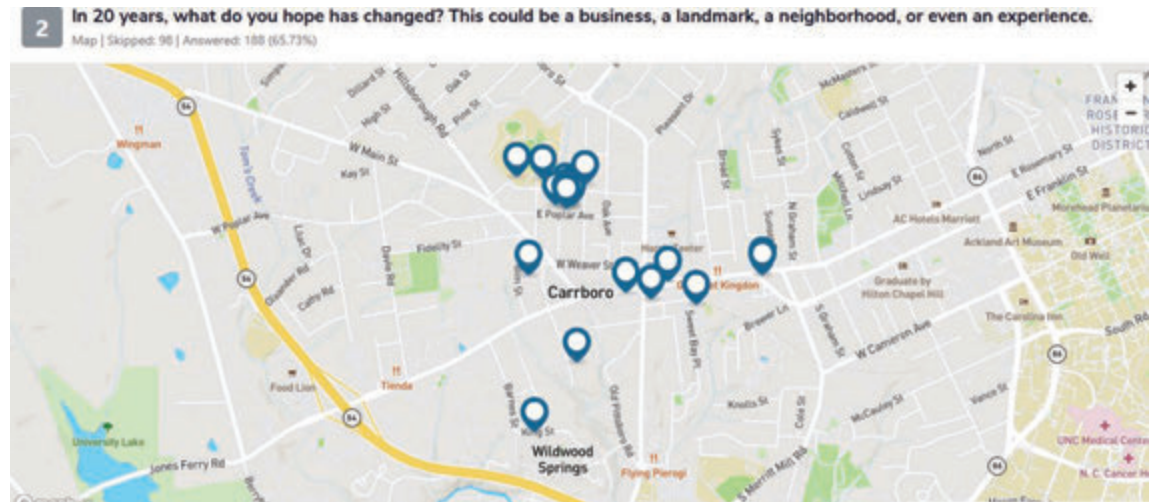
Desired changes include improvements in traffic circulation and transportation options, with an emphasis on safer streets, more available public transportation and enhanced walkability and bikeability. Safety and connectivity are key parts of this vision, notably continued build-out of the bike and pedestrian network to help people easily and safely navigate the area.

Affordable housing is a major concern, with many expressing a need for increased availability of housing options that cater to all levels of low-income households (30%, 60%, and 80% Area Median Income).

Respondents call for stronger support for the local arts, music and culture scene(s); encouragement of small business growth; and more diverse dining establishments to enhance the unique character of Carrboro.

People desire a climate-resilient future calling for sustainable and eco-friendly improvements and interventions, such as green building and environmental conservation efforts.

Finally, there is a strong emphasis on community-centric development, with suggestions for youth centers and spaces that enhance the well-being of residents. People desire more parks, green areas, recreation facilities and general spaces to foster a sense of community and provide places for the community to gather.



Map from online survey showing a sampling of comments

As we build more density we add to the heat dome affect in town. We need more water feature parks for kids and dogs to cool off in.

Affordable, dense, housing on Jones Ferry toward OWASA.

I hope we will continue to prioritize making the town as bike- and pedestrian-friendly as possible.

Add flashing lights to these and other crosswalks across Greensboro.

I hope E Weaver is closed to motor vehicle traffic either full time, or from 7 am to 10 pm.

Work with property owners and stakeholders to redevelop for greenway oriented high density and mixed use.

RECURRING THEMES

This Plan embodies comments received from residents and visitors across 286 survey responses and hundreds of attendees across public events (community members could both fill out the survey and come to events). The collective vision and goals of this Plan—for an equitable, climate-conscious and economically sustainable downtown—reflect the outcome of concerted discussions about growth and change in the downtown area. A detailed summary of events and survey responses can be read in the Appendix of this Plan.

Through the varying engagement methods, the Carrboro community shared their priorities and vision for the downtown area. When considered holistically, a series of recurring themes become clear.



PUBLIC SPACES

The community envisions inclusive gathering spaces that provide engaging activities at no cost, creating opportunities for everyone to enjoy.



MOBILITY, ACCESS AND TRANSPORTATION

The community prioritizes access and safety, through continued improvements and resources for walking and biking, complete streets that manage traffic effectively and safely, and space for visitors who must drive to come to the downtown area.



AFFORDABILITY

The community desires affordable housing and businesses, with a particular focus on retaining places that meet daily needs and providing more budget-friendly dining options and grocery stores.



PLANTS AND GREEN SPACE

The community values trees, green spaces, native plants and green infrastructure for shade, aesthetics and ecological and environmental services that address climate change, like air quality and stormwater mitigation.



ART, MUSIC AND ENTERTAINMENT

The community desires to continue to foster vibrant spaces like murals, interactive art, color, music and live entertainment to create an engaging atmosphere. Creative expression is a defining feature of Carrboro.



ORGANIC GROWTH AND HISTORIC IDENTITY

The community emphasizes that new development should be thoughtful and blend with the existing spirit of Carrboro, including a strong interest in maintaining historic buildings, small businesses and local landmarks.





VISION

The following vision statement comes from community members' thoughts and ideas and from input from Advisory Boards, Town Council, community partners and residents.*

It embodies the collective aspiration heard from the community and serves as the foundation for moving forward and is built directly on Carrboro Connects and its commitments to advancing racial equity and addressing climate change.

This statement guides the formation of goals and implementation strategies that make up the Strategies and Considerations, Master Plan, and Implementation chapters.

**All data, comments and other inputs can be seen in the Appendix.*



Carrboro's downtown area is a vibrant, walkable and community-oriented space that balances preserving historic charm with thoughtful growth. The downtown area serves every Carrboro resident, with particular attention to BIPOC and marginalized community members; as a place for daily needs, a place to gather with community and a place to live. The downtown area fosters economic diversity, celebrates arts and culture, and ensures accessibility for all.

GOALS

The following goals provide overall direction for the downtown area of Carrboro to achieve the community's direction, vision and aspirations. The goals serve as the ultimate basis for the Plan's recommendations and implementation. They also provide a framework to evaluate changes, challenges, opportunities and issues that were not anticipated by this Plan, allowing it to function as a living document responsive to future needs.

1

Build for climate resilience; protect and plant trees, install and incentivize green stormwater features, enhance and establish public green spaces.

2

Ensure a range of housing choices, including affordable and workforce housing, to support economic diversity and prevent displacement, allowing all current and future residents to thrive in Carrboro's downtown.

3

Improve pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, reduce traffic congestion, and expand public transit options to create safe and equitable mobility opportunities for all residents.

4

Support small businesses, entrepreneurs and minority-owned enterprises by creating affordable commercial spaces, fostering a dynamic local economy, and encouraging inclusive economic opportunities.

5

Maintain the architectural integrity of historic buildings while encouraging sustainable and compatible development that aligns with Carrboro's unique identity.



Strategies & Considerations

DRAFT



DRAFT

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to identify pertinent elements of the built environment in the downtown area, including considerations, best practices and overarching strategies that can help the Town achieve this Plan's vision and goals. This chapter touches on elements related to the following:

- Property development
- Downtown transportation and infrastructure
- Branding and urban design
- Buildings and frontages

Incorporating best practices for the elements in the downtown area will help support the goals of this Plan and the Town's racial equity and climate action goals. Each new project proposed for the downtown area should be evaluated against the considerations in this chapter to determine how well the project fits with the desired character and future vision of the community.

There are many other considerations when developing in Carrboro; however, the items in this chapter are tailored to be most applicable to the downtown area. Creating a unique, interesting, pedestrian- and bicycle-focused, affordable, and welcoming downtown area takes careful planning and implementation.

The strategies contained in this Plan are overall ideas of how to achieve the Plan's goals. As each strategy could be achieved through a variety of policies, further discussion and decisions are necessary to create policy initiatives. These discussions should include funding and other practical considerations.



PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT

DEVELOPMENT AND REDEVELOPMENT IN THE PRIVATE MARKETPLACE

Carrboro is able to focus on a market-driven approach for the downtown area due to its prime development location. This approach allows the Town to work with developers and business owners to focus on efforts that will have positive impacts on the downtown area and continue enhancing racial equity. Opportunities for redevelopment will be most likely to occur, as the study area is already mostly built-out. As such, supporting high-quality redevelopment is necessary to achieve the goals of this Plan. Key strategies to consider include the following:

- Provide clear guidance on desired redevelopment elements to help developers understand what is expected of them when undertaking projects in the downtown area.
- Support redevelopments in prioritizing building reuse and expansions rather than replacement, where appropriate.
- Find ways to reduce impervious surface coverage through redevelopment to help with overall stormwater management.
- Encourage diverse businesses such as music and performing arts, restaurants, and those meeting daily needs of residents as well as mixed-use development.



CONSIDERATIONS AND STRATEGIES

LOT SIZES

A factor contributing to Carrboro's strong small business environment is the numerous small lots that are in the downtown area. Small lot sizes allow for a variety of local business opportunities to remain in the downtown area and provide room for startup businesses. Smaller buildings can help keep monthly business ownership expenses lower; however, not all businesses can thrive in small spaces, so there is also a need for larger buildings and leasable spaces. Larger spaces also allow startup businesses a place to grow into, while remaining in the downtown area. Creating an atmosphere that allows for a variety of lot sizes and building spaces helps maintain a diverse residential and commercial mix. Encouraging a diversity of spaces can help the Town continue its racial equity efforts by creating opportunities and spaces for all. Key strategies to consider include the following:

- Allow more intensive development to occur on smaller lots to maximize the usability of small sites.
- Encourage a variety of spaces or flexible spaces inside buildings when redevelopment projects are proposed.
- Support residential infill and increased densities, particularly on smaller lots, through expansions of ADUs, duplexes, quadplexes and other similar housing types.
- Support property recombination to create larger parcels for new development opportunities.
- Create a land banking program to acquire, consolidate, hold and sell property for targeted development.
- Consider creating guidelines for the best strategy to retain larger parcels to encourage diverse development, as there are a large number of existing smaller parcels in the downtown area.
- Work with property owners to find the appropriate balance of small and large lots to maintain a variety of spaces in the downtown area.



Small lot development in Carrboro



Large lot development in Carrboro

GENTRIFICATION

Gentrification is the loss of historic, typically disadvantaged businesses and residents. This loss is regularly due to increased rent, increased ownership costs or shifts in local demographics that result in a loss of business revenue. Retaining rich cultural heritage and diversity in the local community means combating gentrification is an important element of having a livable and comfortable downtown area. Key strategies to consider include the following:

- Consider opportunities to expand the Town's economic base without increasing property taxes and balance property revaluation increases at the county level with local tax cuts.
- Expand affordable housing efforts to support the retention of an economically diverse community.
- Support minority-owned businesses to preserve the community's diverse cultural heritage and provide opportunities for historically disadvantaged populations.
- Assist businesses with temporary relocation during construction.
- Create a Town-managed flex space to support local businesses. This could include incubator space to help small businesses launch and/or swing space for businesses to move to while their existing location is being renovated.
- Encourage business owners and homeowners to join existing or organize new business owners or neighborhood associations to provide a stronger voice for the community.
- Establish criteria for balancing economic growth with community preservation efforts.

CASE STUDY: FLEET FEET LOCATION CONSOLIDATION

At the time of this event, Fleet Feet's corporate headquarters were split between two buildings in downtown Carrboro. To consolidate operations into a single location, the company considered relocating to another community.

To support both Fleet Feet's consolidation and the expansion of Kalisher—an art production and curation company also based in downtown Carrboro—the Town took two key actions:

- **Parking Support:** The Town agreed to lease and sublease parking spaces, enabling Kalisher to meet the minimum parking requirements needed to move into one of the buildings that Fleet Feet was occupying.
- **Property Purchase:** The Town committed to purchasing a condominium unit owned by Fleet Feet.

These creative financing and supportive efforts from the Town provided Fleet Feet with the necessary cash flow to relocate into a new building and remain in Carrboro. As a result of the Town's creative incentive, Fleet Feet retained 40 jobs and kept its corporate headquarters in the community.

Today, Fleet Feet employs approximately 130 corporate staff and hosts hundreds of vendor visits annually at its downtown Carrboro headquarters. Although Kalisher has since relocated elsewhere, the Town's support allowed them to expand and remain in Carrboro for a time. Fleet Feet continues to grow in its current location. The Town still leases parking, but eventually sold the condominium unit at a small profit.





REGULATORY PROCESS

The Town is currently undergoing the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) project and will be updating the regulatory process that has been in place for years. Local zoning and land development regulations are major drivers for the built environment, so it is critical that the Town's UDO rewrite supports the goals of this Plan. The recommendations for regulatory process changes in the Carrboro Connects Plan also apply to the downtown area; however, additional specifics are included in this Plan. Key strategies to consider include the following:

- Streamline the approval process for development that meets certain requirements by allowing these developments to move forward with by-right approvals.
- Ease regulations for developments that incorporate affordable housing and affordable commercial spaces.
- Include optional development incentives in the UDO that encourage environmentally sustainable development, affordable housing and commercial spaces, and specifically help achieve the vision and goals of this Plan.
- Create outreach materials to assist applicants in understanding applicable Town processes and expectations.
- Consider the different character areas when developing new standards to help achieve the desired vision for each area.

INCENTIVES

To encourage desired development and redevelopment in the downtown area, the Town can incentivize desired options through a variety of means. The Town should focus on incentivizing development that includes environmentally sustainable practices, incorporates the Town's history, retains existing businesses, provides affordable rent or ownership opportunities, and creates a variety of spaces that can help the Town achieve goals set forth in this Plan. Key strategies to consider include the following:

- As affordability is one of the most important elements in maintaining an inclusive downtown area, allowing buildings with affordable units to exceed height maximums will help support this goal.
- Evaluate the creation of a Municipal Services District to support downtown and create a recurring revenue source.
- Support business owners with public parking arrangements to reduce on-site parking needs.
- While updating the UDO, consider additional optional incentives to achieve the desired development outcomes (e.g., affordable housing, environmentally sustainable development) through increased density and height, reduced parking minimums, a faster approval process, and staff-level approvals.
- Create public-private partnerships (P3s) for the Town to jointly develop property with a developer to create affordable housing and commercial space.

DOWNTOWN TRANSPORTATION & INFRASTRUCTURE

Streetscape typologies were discussed in the **Volume 1, Master Plan** chapter. This section introduces other transportation and utility considerations to keep in mind as the downtown area continues to grow and redevelop. With the limited space in the public ROWs, the Town will need to work closely with NCDOT and private property owners during development and redevelopment to help support innovative and Carrboro-specific transportation and infrastructure goals.

This section includes information about:

- Downtown mobility
- Intersection and pedestrian safety strategies
- Opportunities for transportation infrastructure improvements associated with potential future redevelopment/development
- Utility considerations



DOWNTOWN MOBILITY

Streets are an integral part of the public realm and often make up a large portion of public lands, and, as such, they should be designed to accommodate a range of users, including pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles. Streets should also be designed and used to achieve Town goals by using strategic elements, such as stormwater management techniques, public art, habitat creation, and pilot projects that demonstrate the Town's commitment to its goals and values. Complete Streets are designed to provide equitable access for all travelers and all modes of transportation.

SIDEWALKS

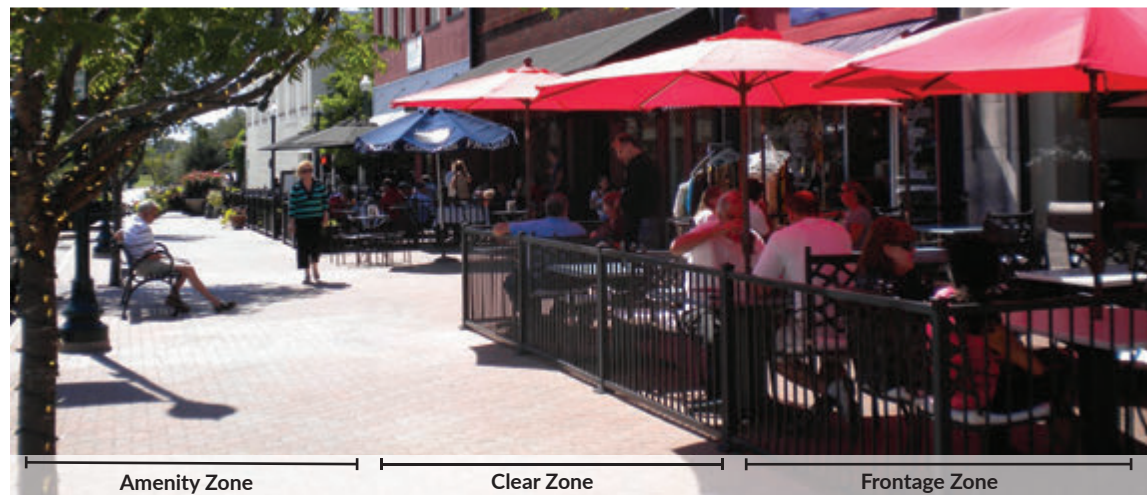
Sidewalks play a vital role in communities, are a critical element of a complete street and have been found to enhance public health and maximize social capital. They facilitate pedestrian safety, movement and access and promote overall community connectivity and welfare. Safe, accessible and well-maintained sidewalks are a fundamental and necessary investment for the Town. It is critical that sidewalks provide enough width to accommodate the expected amount of pedestrian traffic, or else people might need to step off the sidewalk into potentially dangerous situations.

Sidewalks in the downtown area are especially valuable as they encourage visitors to spend more time engaging with their local community and businesses.

Urban sidewalks have three zones that are sometimes indistinguishable in looks, but are important to understand from a functional perspective.

1. The “frontage zone” is the portion of the sidewalk up against the building frontage. This area is usually at least 2 feet wide and is where entry doors open out into the sidewalk. This is where the public and private realms merge and can be used for café seating or other activation elements.

2. The “pedestrian clear zone” is the portion of the sidewalk that is clear of obstacles and where pedestrians can walk freely. This area is preferably 6 feet wide, but can be reduced to 4 feet for small portions in urban, more constrained settings. Keeping the clear zone free of obstructions is an important aspect of ADA accessibility for the downtown area.
3. The “amenity zone” is the area along the back of curb where there is space for benches, lighting, trees, etc. This zone varies in width depending on the space available within the ROW and acts as a buffer between vehicles and pedestrians.



Sidewalk activity zones

LANE WIDTH

Lane widths allocated for motorists, transit and bicycles are a crucial aspect of street design. Lane widths should be considered within the overall assemblage of the street. Narrower streets are typically recommended in the downtown area, are proven to naturally reduce vehicle speed, create a more comfortable experience for pedestrians and cyclists, and provide more ROW space for a variety of uses. Reducing travel lane widths using striping allows for visually shrinking the street without the expense and time necessary for demolition and reconstruction.

CURB EXTENSIONS

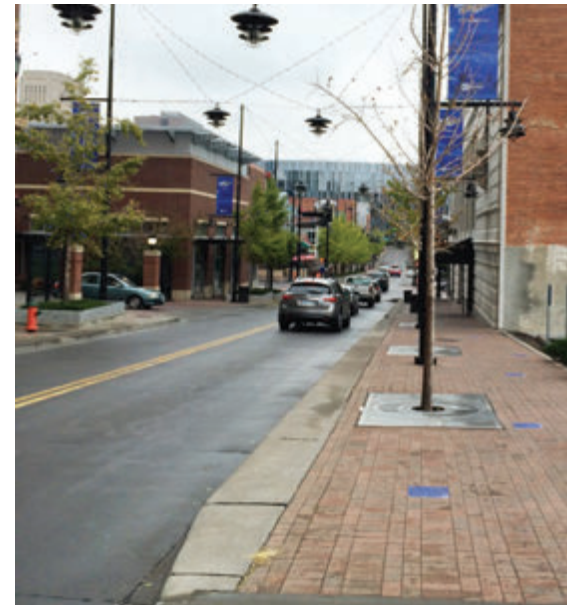
Curb extensions are a traffic calming measure primarily used to visually and physically narrow roadways at crosswalks and extend the sidewalk for pedestrians crossing the street. Shortening the crossing distance improves pedestrian safety and visibility. Curb extensions may also be implemented to help allocate more space for street furniture, landscaping, innovative



Temporary curbside seating



Curb extension



Narrow drive lanes

stormwater treatment or street trees in areas in ROWs. These are also referred to as “bump-outs.”

PARKING

Parking is an inherent functional piece of most places. With downtowns in particular, it is important that the pedestrian experience between parking areas and points of interest is safe, comfortable and interesting. Connecting parking lots to destinations in the downtown area with a connected sidewalk network can help provide a comfortable experience for visitors, residences and business owners. Private parking reduces overall parking efficiency and the financial performance of downtowns. In some instances, creating joint-use parking agreements can allow otherwise restricted parking areas to support downtown functionality beyond the hours of peak use by the owning entity (e.g., allowing public parking at religious institutions outside of their busy hours).

In a downtown, good urban form tends to locate parking on-street or toward the fringe of the core in communal lots or structures, allowing focus to remain on pedestrian



Carrboro parking sign



Consolidated downtown parking area



Existing parking garage in downtown

space and activity. Many communities have eliminated minimum parking requirements in their downtowns.

BICYCLES

With low traffic speeds in the downtown area, investment in bicycle infrastructure is ideal, as slower vehicular speeds help encourage bicycling. As bicycles will be riding on the streets with vehicles, all roadways should be designed with the intention of slowing vehicle speeds and encouraging shared lanes or dedicated bicycle lanes. A public education program for both cyclists and motorists may help people navigate these shared spaces more safely.

On-street bicycle infrastructure, such as dedicated bicycle and buffered bicycle lanes, can help create a comfortable environment for cyclists to travel along the streets. In addition to on-street bicycle infrastructure, the use of greenways or multi-use paths is highly encouraged wherever possible, as spaces dedicated to non-motorized modes of transportation (walking, bicycling and rolling)



Libba Cotten Bike Path

create a more comfortable experience for people who do not want to be on the road with vehicular traffic.

TRANSIT

Bus service to and from the downtown area is provided by Chapel Hill Transit (locally) and GoTriangle (regionally), which creates opportunities for transit to meet daily needs for residents. The existing park and rides near the downtown area help support transit riders and carpooling, thus reducing the need for automobiles and large parking lots. Continuing to have a transit system that provides reliable transit can help reduce the number of vehicles on the street and be used on a daily basis for residents, workers, visitors and business owners to reach destinations for daily needs. As the community continues to grow, regular assessment of the transit routes, infrastructure and ridership demand is important to help maintain transit as a high-quality transportation option in the future.



Bus stop



Buffered bicycle lane

INTERSECTIONS AND PEDESTRIAN SAFETY STRATEGIES

The downtown area should be a highly pedestrianized environment and bicyclist and pedestrian safety and comfort should be balanced with vehicular traffic needs. Strategies to enhance safety that may be appropriate for the downtown area include elements such as:

- Narrow lanes that require motorists to drive slowly and pay attention to their surroundings.
- Shorter block lengths that help maintain slower vehicular speeds.
- Bump-outs or curb extensions at crossings and intersections that make pedestrians more visible to drivers and create pinch-points for cars, thus slowing them down.
- Raised crosswalks that keep the crosswalk at the same elevation as the sidewalk make it more convenient and safer for the pedestrian, as well as act as a speed hump for cars.
- Well-marked and signed crosswalks with proper warning signs and high visibility pavement marking, such as specialty paving or decorative markings at crosswalks, act as a visual signal to drivers to watch for pedestrians.
- Building frontages that address the street, streetscape elements and active sidewalks to generally create an environment that encourages slow speeds.
- Vehicle turning speeds and pedestrian crossing distances are directly impacted by corner radii. Maintaining smaller corner radii is critical to creating compact intersections that encourage safe vehicular turning speeds. While 10-15 feet are considered standard curb radii, in urban settings many communities use corner radii as small as 2 feet.
- Lighting and bollards at crossings and intersections to notify both pedestrians and cars to pay attention. Bollard locations help signify non-vehicular areas and need to comply with ADA accessibility requirements.
- Reduced driveway curb cuts to limit cars crossing the sidewalk and reduce pedestrian conflicts.
- Sight triangles clear from obstructions to allow drivers to see clearly.
- Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons and Pedestrian Hybrid Beacons installed at high-volume crossings to improve pedestrian safety.
- Downtown slow zone that reduces vehicle speeds to increase pedestrian and bicycle safety.
- Leading Pedestrian Intervals to provide pedestrians an advance start on crossing a street before vehicles can go.



Raised crosswalk with bollards



Sidewalk buffered from drive lanes by plantings



Enhanced crosswalk paving

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE ASSOCIATED WITH POTENTIAL FUTURE GROWTH

The downtown area should prioritize transportation options and choices that support a wide variety of travel modes for residents, business owners and visitors. From bus transit to bicycle to vehicular to pedestrian options, all modes of transportation should be accounted for. The following are some specific approaches that can help enhance transportation options for the downtown area:

- Continue working closely with transit providers to identify locations to co-locate bus stops with new development.
- Include bike racks, bike corrals, bike lockers and bike shelters in new development and throughout the downtown area.
- Encourage the continued installation of EV charging infrastructure.
- Create interlocal bike-share program between Carrboro, Chapel Hill and UNC.
- Invest in innovative solar panel usage, such as shade structures for electric bikes or scooter charging.
- Support an expansion of the fixed bus routes to ease daily usage for residents in the downtown area and increase ridership.
- Explore public-private partnership (P3) opportunities for shared parking garage facilities to reduce the need for surface parking.
- Construct more greenway/multi-use pathways that will connect residents, businesses and green spaces.
- Encourage land uses and site designs that promote walking and biking to help reduce future vehicular traffic.
- Designate rideshare pick-up and drop-off zones near high-frequency destinations to support micro transit options.



Bike share program



EV charging infrastructure



Long-term bike storage

Image source: <https://groundcontrolsystems.com/products/long-term-bicycle-parking/>



Existing bus service

UTILITY CONSIDERATIONS

Utility design and implementation decisions have a substantial impact on day-to-day experiences and the environmental footprint of a downtown. As development and/or redevelopment occurs in the downtown area, the Town should consider the following utility strategies.

INNOVATIVE STORMWATER MANAGEMENT AND GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

In natural areas, stormwater is either slowly absorbed into the soil or gradually moves toward the lowest points and channels before reaching ponds, low-lying wetlands or waterways. In urban areas, a significant portion of the land is covered by buildings, pavement and other surfaces that do not allow the water to seep into the ground, known as impervious surfaces. This causes a greater quantity and velocity of water to run off into adjacent areas and waterways. Incorporating innovative stormwater management into the built environment helps restore the natural environmental functions of absorbing and cleaning stormwater.

Stormwater management should remain of critical importance due to the vast impacts it has on local water quality and wildlife. Encouraging the use of innovative stormwater management techniques can help reduce impacts on the natural environment. Properly designing, installing and maintaining stormwater infrastructure can also help reduce flooding and property damage from major rain events.

As part of innovative stormwater management techniques, protecting water quality using green infrastructure is important. Infrastructure should be designed and built

to minimize localized runoff and treat the first inch of stormwater through conservation of natural areas, green infrastructure, use of pervious surfaces and other stormwater control measures (SCMs). These low-impact approaches offer multiple benefits, including improved quality of life, enhanced built environments, and effective stormwater and water quality management.

The use of natural systems and processes to treat and retain stormwater is referred to as green infrastructure. Green infrastructure strategies can be accomplished at the regional, community and site scale. In a downtown environment, implementation of green infrastructure interventions should be done where possible. By working together, a network of small-scale facilities in the downtown area can generate a large benefit.

Some overall approaches for managing stormwater and using green infrastructure in the downtown area include:

- Add rain gardens along streetscapes and on private sites.
- Install bioswales incorporated into larger green spaces.
- Use native and adapted plantings in no-mow zones.
- Install street trees, where space allow, to add tree canopy which helps intercept stormwater before it hits the ground.

- Add green roofs, which can capture and use rain that falls on the roof.
- Use permeable paving in parking or other paved areas.
- Reduce impervious surface through retrofitting existing development and by limiting impervious surface on new development.
- Maintain existing stormwater facilities and infrastructure to get their maximum effectiveness.
- Encourage on-site infiltration and designs that mimic pre-development site conditions for stormwater management.
- Install educational signage and incorporate art informing the public about stormwater.
- Continue to require buffers along streams, ponds and other waterbodies to maintain a vegetated space between development and the water.
- Continue to provide resources on the Town's stormwater website about ways residents can help improve the quality of stormwater runoff entering local waterways.
- Continue to expand the Town's proactive stormwater program with retrofits, enhancements, educational events and enforcement of environmental regulations.

Opportunities that are more specific for each of the Character Areas include:

DOWNTOWN CORE

- Retrofit and redevelop existing parking lots and building lots to include underground stormwater management facilities, bioswales and rain gardens to treat and slow surface runoff. Additionally, use rain barrels or cisterns to capture rainfall before it becomes runoff.

DOWNTOWN EXTENSION

- Incorporate SCMs that enhance new development and redevelopment of sites, which may include rain gardens, designed wetlands, beautified wet ponds or other amenities that are an integral part of the site design.

SURROUNDING NEIGHBORHOODS

- Convert swales into bioswales.
- Consider incorporating several neighborhood stormwater management systems to help manage and clean neighborhood stormwater.
- Encourage installation of rain gardens on private property.

LLOYD-BROAD

- Convert swales into bioswales.
- Utilize open land and park space to help manage and clean neighborhood stormwater.
- Encourage installation of rain gardens on private property and connection with residents.

These strategies are especially important for the downtown area given its proximity to Morgan Creek and Lake Jordan. The use of innovative stormwater management and green infrastructure adjacent to roadways and parking areas can be especially effective at capturing and filtering out pollutants commonly found in runoff before it enters local waterways. These improvements can be implemented in conjunction with visual upgrades to existing surface parking lots and as part of roadway improvements.

Correct design, installation and maintenance of green infrastructure facilities is of utmost importance; this is especially true for innovative stormwater practices where plants serve functional purposes. Vegetated stormwater facilities do not necessarily require more maintenance; in fact, they should generally require less. However, they must be properly designed, installed and maintained to function effectively.

RAINWATER HARVESTING

Using cisterns, rain barrels and other rainwater harvesting techniques can help reduce stormwater runoff, while also providing water for on-site use. Using reclaimed water from Orange Water and Sewer Authority (OWASA) can also help reduce environmental impacts by reducing the use of potable water for non-drinking purposes and flushing needs. In addition to intercepting rainwater through harvesting techniques and utilizing reclaimed water, reducing water consumption through low-flow fixtures and drought-tolerant plantings helps reduce the overall demand for freshwater consumption. These approaches not only help reduce stormwater runoff, but

also help reduce environmental impacts of using treated, potable water for non-potable needs (such as irrigation or flushing toilets).



Bioswale designed into a parking lot



Curbside rain garden

OVERHEAD UTILITY LINES

Overhead power lines and telecommunication lines are part of modern life. Having overhead lines in or adjacent to the ROW creates certain challenges for street tree placement and keeping sidewalks free of obstructions. This Plan does not envision the undergrounding of overhead utility lines due to the expense and practicality of installing utility lines underground in the downtown area. However, if the chance arises, the Town should work with Duke Energy and other utility providers to install as many lines underground as possible.

UTILITY BOX LOCATION

The location of ground-level utility boxes should be carefully planned to avoid conflicts with sight triangles, pedestrians and street trees. Utility boxes offer an opportunity for use as a canvas for public art and can be themed to reinforce the various parts of the Town. For

instance, historic-themed utility boxes could be located in the historic district and nature-themed utility boxes could be located in areas on the edge of the urban fabric.

ALTERNATIVE ENERGY GENERATION

Innovative energy generation techniques can help reduce the reliance on greenhouse-gas generating electricity and make projects more resilient to power outages. The incorporation of solar and geothermal throughout the downtown area can help demonstrate the Town's commitment to climate action. Having solar lighting and solar electric bike charging stations are small-scale examples. Larger projects, such as solar roofs and geothermal heating systems can be incorporated into redevelopment projects based on their infrastructure needs. Sustainable practices in the downtown area should also include energy conservation efforts to reduce the

amount of energy needed. Both small-scale implementation and large-scale projects are needed to help the downtown area be more climate-conscious. As there can be competing goals between strategies, a case-by-case evaluation will be necessary to assess which strategy is most appropriate for a given site. For instance, taller buildings provide higher densities but also create larger shadows, which may impact opportunities for solar collection.

SUSTAINABILITY HIERARCHY

As the Town considers utility strategies, particularly those related to water and energy, it is valuable to consider a sustainability hierarchy. Best practices would included the following priorities for utility strategies:

1. Reduce the need (efficiency first)
2. Rely on alternative sources (e.g., solar or rain cisterns)
3. Recycle, if applicable (e.g., water)



Utility box art



Small scale solar application



Residential scale solar application

BRANDING & URBAN DESIGN

PUBLIC SPACES

The design elements seen and experienced in public spaces such as parks and plazas create a lasting impression on people who visit the area. These are also the spaces where people can gather or spend time in the downtown area without patronizing a business. Parks and open spaces are often where you will see families spending time in urban spaces. Downtown Carrboro already has one great public space at Carrboro Town Commons and a variety of popular quasi-public spaces. There is community desire for more public and quasi-public spaces in the downtown area.

As the Town considers strategies for additional public and quasi-public spaces, it is recommended to include a mixture of space types, scales, amenities and experiences. A large, open grass area like the Town Commons is great for events and general play, but its location is removed from the daily visitors to the commercial core. Paved areas with movable furniture offer flexibility since the user can configure seating as they desire. Water features (e.g., fountains, splash plaza) attract people and can provide cooling opportunities, but the associated safety and maintenance must be considered during design. Smaller, scattered spaces help to create user options as they move through the area. Incorporating shaded seating, a variety of plantings, engaging art installations, universal accessibility for people regardless of their abilities or disabilities, event infrastructure and clear

signage will help create exciting experiences and welcoming spaces for all in downtown. Safety and cleanliness should be prioritized in all public/quasi-public spaces.

Branding and urban design elements outlined on the following pages can be used to unify the Downtown Core and Core Extension character areas described in the **Volume 1, Master Plan** chapter. Similar design elements may be used on a less intensive scale in the Surrounding Neighborhoods and Lloyd-Broad Neighborhood character area. For example, decorative paving patterns that may be used for an entire block in Downtown Core and Core Extension areas could be used only at intersections in the other character areas. Using branded street name signs could be done throughout all character areas to help unify the greater downtown area.



Urban public space featuring water play, multiple seating types and shade trees



Small-scale quasi-public gathering area



Art park space with interactive elements

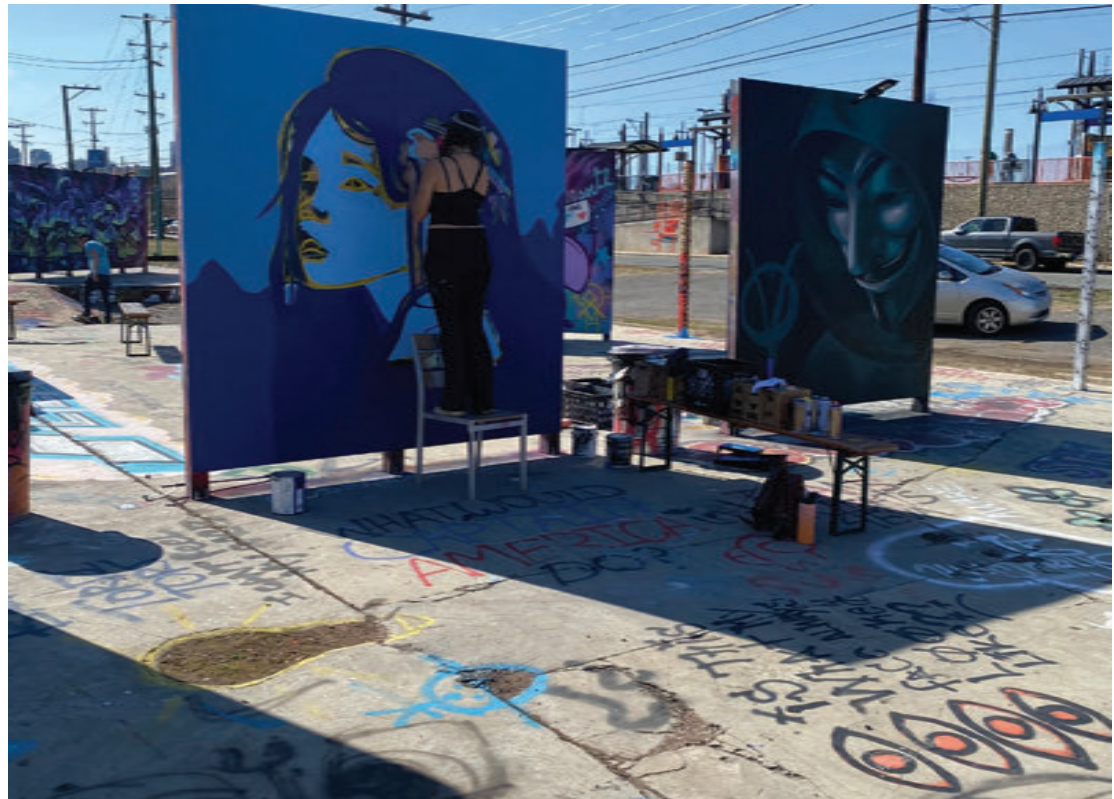
PUBLIC ART

Public art can provide many functions and benefits in a downtown setting. Public art provides opportunities to celebrate local history, culture and artists. It can be used to effectively enliven buildings, parking lots and other spaces lacking visual interest or a sense of place. Public art can be visual, educational and interactive, taking forms such as gateways, signage, murals and sculptures. Even functional elements like paving, benches, trash cans and screening fences can be turned into distinctive art pieces.

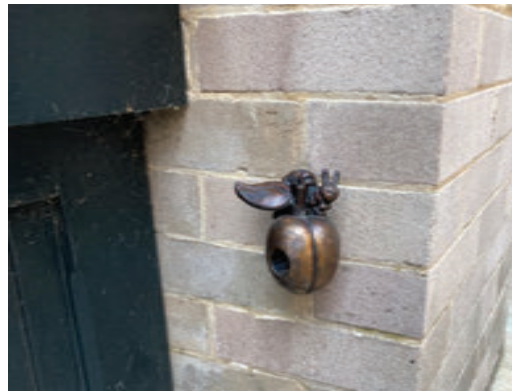
The Town should consider creating a public art plan to identify strategic locations for permanent and/or temporary art installations in both small- and large-scale spaces. Art in public spaces should encourage people to stop and enjoy it with adequate space to allow for this. Interactive art is encouraged as it creates a unique experience while engaging viewers as active participants. Examples include musical or sound elements, light and shadow play, and art with movable components.

The Town could consider various ways to showcase rotating art exhibits around the downtown area, perhaps by creating a dedicated art trail or by setting aside some private space to host rotating art pieces. Temporary art can be used to expand public art without the expense of permanent installations, while also drawing visitors for new experiences. The Town could also consider creating a public art program that dedicates a certain percentage of project budgets to a public art fund.

Vandalism of public art can be an issue. Potential solutions could include temporary art or providing a “graffiti wall” to give people a legitimate outlet for graffiti.



Public graffiti wall



Small-scale art installation



Educational public art

SITE FURNISHINGS

Site furnishings include elements such as seating, waste receptacles, planters, screens, shade structures and tree grates. These elements should be visually appealing, commercial-grade, durable and made of vandal-resistant materials. They offer a chance to reflect the desired character of the downtown area, whether it be historic, contemporary, eclectic or another style. Furnishings can maintain a consistent aesthetic or allow businesses to express their unique identities through varied styles, colors and designs along a block. The heat conductivity of materials should be carefully considered when selecting benches, tables and other surfaces that people will touch during summer months.

The Town should consider both movable and accessible mounted furniture in public spaces, while seating along a streetscape and at bus stops should be mounted to the pavement. Trash and recycling receptacles should be located at regular intervals along the street, at bus stops and in all public spaces to make it easy and convenient for people to clean up after themselves. Bike racks should be placed at regular intervals along the street, at all public facilities, at key points of interest (e.g., grocery store, event venues) and at bus stops.

The Town's 1990 Downtown Design Guidelines included examples of benches, trash cans and bike racks. The Town may consider updating those guidelines with preferred furnishing families including benches, tables, litter receptacles, light poles and luminaries, and planters, as well as clearly determining where the rules may be "broken" to allow for creativity and interest.



Unique wood benches



Existing furniture in downtown



Metal café seating

LIGHTING

Effective lighting sets the mood, enhances safety and adds visual appeal during evening activities. It can help draw attention to art, benches and other elements that help create a quality space. It also serves as an architectural feature that can either highlight the historic charm of a downtown area or contribute to a modern, contemporary look. Lighting should be integrated into the overall urban design guidelines to ensure that its materials and aesthetics align with the downtown branding strategy. Thoughtful implementation is key, addressing different scales and complementing the surrounding context. This includes incorporating lighting for vehicular areas along streets, placing bollards at intersections and introducing pedestrian-focused lighting along key pedestrian pathways.

Lighting can also be used as art itself and for the sole purpose of highlighting special building or landscape elements. Decorative and accent lighting should be used sparingly, on iconic buildings and in major public spaces, to preserve the impact when it is used.

The downtown area primarily has vehicular focused lighting along the streetscape. Due to limited ROW, this may be the only option in many locations. The Town could consider more ornamental, pedestrian-scale lighting in gathering areas. The use of a distinctive light pole or color could be used as a visual cue that people have entered downtown.

All lighting should follow Dark Sky principles to protect the nighttime sky and avoid negative impacts of lighting. Quality lighting is also important to create a safer nighttime environment by illuminating pedestrian crossing areas and reducing dark areas that may feel uncomfortable for people. Providing a well-lit pedestrian experience is key to increasing people's feeling of safety in a downtown environment.



Landscape accent lighting



Pedestrian bollards at an intersection



Decorative street lamp with banner

STREET TREES

During community engagement, the desire for additional shade trees in the study area was frequently voiced. Street trees provide multiple benefits such as shade, heat island effect mitigation, air quality mitigation, traffic calming, aesthetics, stormwater management and habitat, among other things. Providing shade along sidewalks greatly increases pedestrian comfort and, even along primarily vehicular corridors, shade can help reduce the ambient heat caused by paved surfaces. Ideally, shade is provided by street trees of shade-tree species. Ornamental trees can also be used in select locations to provide visual interest but do not have as large of an impact on shading. All tree species used should be native, selected for disease resistance, adapted to the climate, and appropriate for the context or setting in which they are being planted. Ideally, street trees should include multiple different species to create a more sustainable urban forest.

Providing adequate soil volume is an important factor in determining the fate of street trees and allowing them room to grow large enough to provide shade. Today's best practices suggest 1,000 cubic feet of soil volume is necessary to support a thriving street tree in an urban environment. Soil volume can be provided in planting areas, tree wells/pits or underneath walking surfaces with the use of suspended pavers. Based on limited ROWs in some areas, the provision of street trees would likely require coordination with and an easement from adjacent private landowners to plant trees on their property. High-quality soil and room for root growth are critical to street tree success and should be prioritized.



Examples of street trees

LANDSCAPING

Similar to street trees, the community expressed a desire for additional plants and landscapes downtown. Landscape plants provide many functions in a downtown. Landscaping along a street and in public spaces helps to improve the micro-climate and the aesthetic of the area. Shade trees provide shelter while shrubs can function as buffers between pedestrians and vehicular traffic. Ornamental trees can be used to highlight pedestrian corridors, public art, monuments or places of respite.

Plant materials should be selected for function, a species' ability to withstand and thrive in an urban context and the local climate, and the maintenance requirements. Plant materials such as shrubs, perennials and ornamental grasses should include native species selected to provide year round interest during all seasons by selecting plants that vary in color, bloom, shape and texture. The use of planters with enhanced annual plantings should be focused in high-traffic pedestrian areas.

In an urban setting, landscaping should allow for unobstructed pedestrian movement and visibility.

Much of the property in the downtown area is privately owned, so having a robust landscape and tree preservation ordinance in place is critical to maintaining existing vegetation. In addition, many communities create programs to support tree planting on private properties to enhance the tree canopy.



Examples of urban landscape design

PARKING LOTS

As previously noted in the Plan, there is very little opportunity for on-street parking within the study area and essentially all parking in the commercial area is concentrated in surface lots and parking garages. Providing space for cars to park is an important part of a downtown's economic success as there will always be some people who cannot conveniently and/or feasibly access the area otherwise. However, parking lots do not need to be simply a large swath of impervious pavement. A traditional parking lot (e.g., lot at Sweet Bay Place and Roberson Street) largely lacks vegetation and shade, contributes to the heat island effect and prevents stormwater absorption. There are multiple ways to improve a parking lot for aesthetics, stormwater functionality, temperature regulation and user comfort.

Increasing vegetation in and around parking lots can improve their aesthetics and help to mitigate the impacts listed above. Shade trees and low-growing ornamental plants along the perimeter, in planting islands and/or between rows of parking, can make an impactful difference. Trees with extensive surface roots, weak wood, or that drop a lot of fruit, branches and/or large leaves should be avoided. Low-growing plants should grow to a max of 30-36 inches to preserve sight lines for drivers.

Using pervious pavement in parking lots can help to manage stormwater and reduce the heat island effect. The lot's location and site context (e.g., drainage patterns, soil type, etc.) will help determine which types of pavement would be most beneficial and where in the lot (e.g., parking stalls) to use the pavement. Combining pervious pavement

with green infrastructure, such as rain gardens or bioswales, can enhance the stormwater management functionality.

Lastly, the exterior treatment of parking garages can enhance their aesthetic and ecological functionality. The addition of murals/artwork, colorful lighting and/or parking garage screen walls can make garages more visually appealing, preserve airflow and provide an opportunity to coordinate with the local art community. Incorporating plants and green walls can similarly add visual appeal while also helping to improve air quality. Solar panels can be placed on the roof and/or on top of shade structures to integrate with rooftop parking.



Parking lot landscaping



Pervious pavement in parking stalls



Decorative parking garage screen wall

GATEWAYS AND SIGNAGE

Gateways and signage play a crucial role in downtowns by enhancing wayfinding, ensuring visitors can easily navigate and discover key attractions and services. They also contribute to the area's identity and aesthetic appeal, creating a welcoming atmosphere that attracts visitors.

Gateways create an enhanced entrance into an area and help people understand that they are entering a special district. Public parking and directional signs are helpful in creating a comfortable space for visitors and can help support local businesses by encouraging tourism.

The Town adopted its Wayfinding Program in 2020 (see Figure 32) which includes recommended locations for signage throughout the downtown area (not mapped here). This Plan recommends the addition of downtown gateways that reflect this aesthetic.

Gateway design elements often include signage, architectural elements, enhanced landscaping, lighting and public art to create robust visual entrances. A series of primary and secondary gateways are proposed to create improved entrances to the downtown area. Secondary gateways will be smaller in scale,

but should use similar branding, plant palette and design aesthetics as primary gateways.

PRIMARY GATEWAY LOCATIONS

- N. Greensboro Street @ Pleasant Drive
- S. Greensboro Street @ Old Pittsboro Road
- W. Main Street @ Hillsborough Road
- E. Main Street @ N. Merritt Mill Road
- Jones Ferry Road @ NC-54 On/Off Ramp

SECONDARY GATEWAY LOCATIONS

- W. Rosemary Street @ N. Merritt Mill Road
- S. Merritt Mill Road @ W. Cameron Avenue

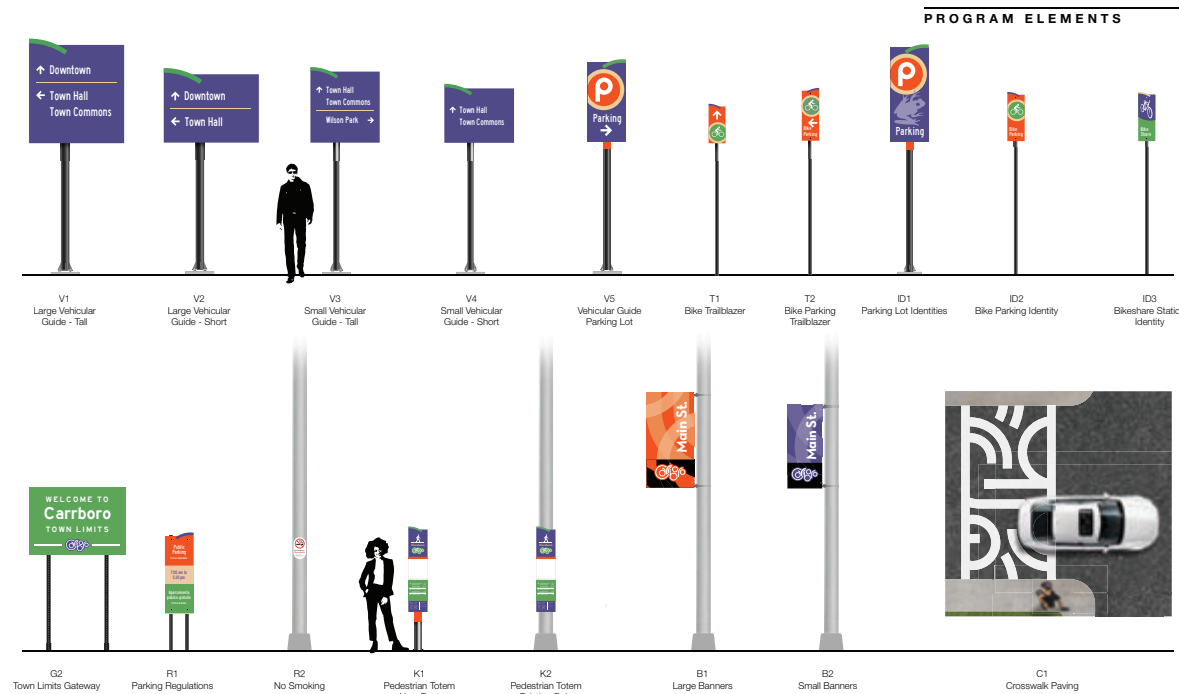
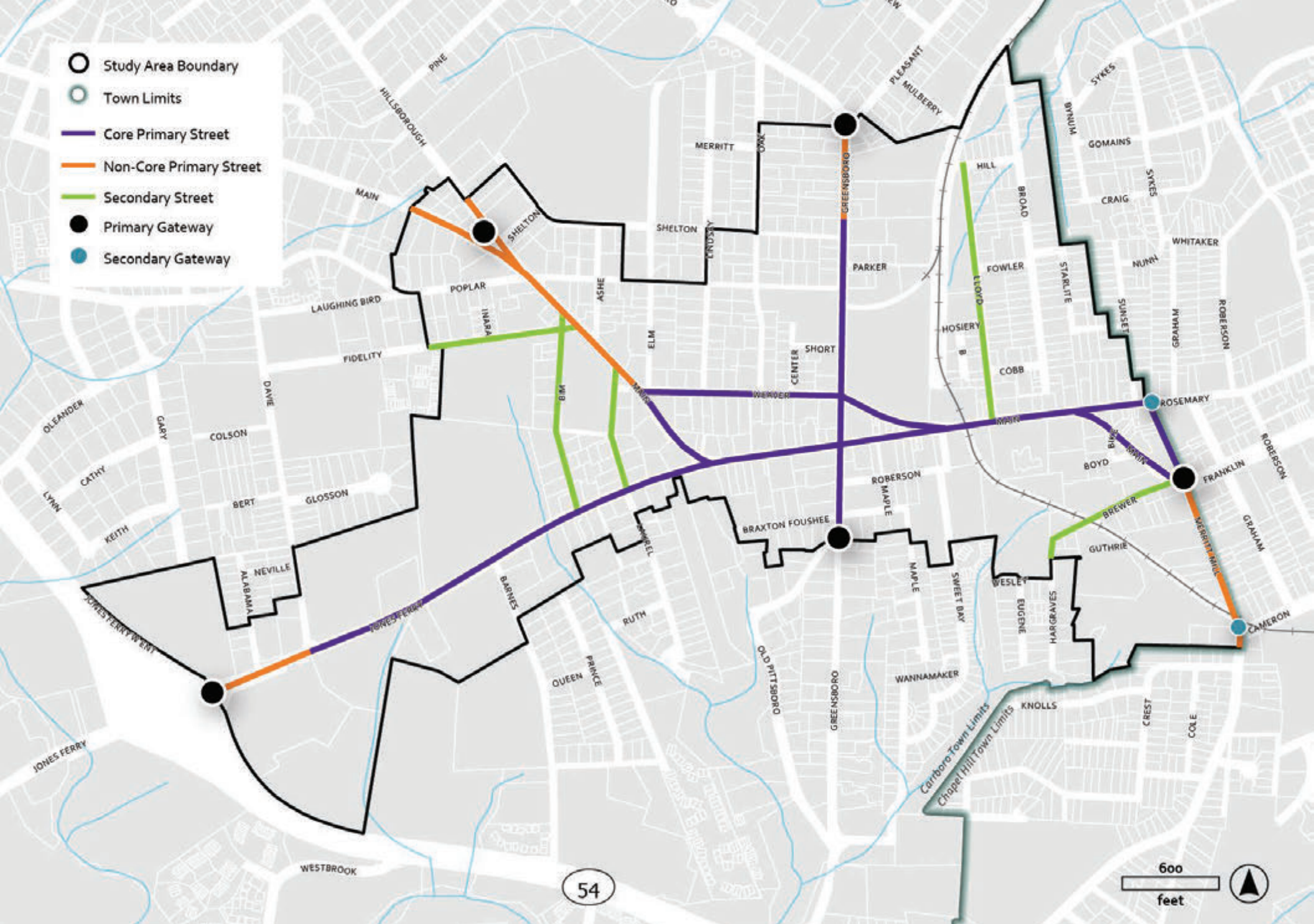


Figure 32. Town of Carrboro Wayfinding Program - Family of Sign Types (Design by Others)



Map 23. Downtown Gateways

BUILDINGS & FRONTAGES

The creation of good public spaces does not end at the boundary of the public ROW. The form of the surrounding buildings and the context they create for the public realm have an immense impact on the character of the space and its success in a community. Building form should also respond to the type of street environment and configuration that exists or is to be created over time. Street design and building form go hand-in-hand and must be aligned to create a harmonious and vibrant public realm. See Figure 33 and Figure 34 on the following pages for illustrations of some of the principles described below.

HEIGHT, MASSING & SCALE

The height, massing and scale of a building should be reasonably proportional to surrounding buildings and the streetscape so that they do not overpower the public realm. Buildings must be designed and sculpted to create a comfortable experience, especially in highly pedestrianized environments. The height, massing and scale of buildings need to be balanced with the size of surrounding or adjacent ROWs and open spaces. Buildings and the elements that contribute to their facades should have a proportion and scale that are welcoming for pedestrians. Considerations in massing include, but are not limited to, creating a sense of enclosure or openness, sunlight and shadows, reinforcing views, and wind patterns. The downtown area has a variety of existing building heights, and it is recommended that any new buildings should be two-to-five stories in height (as identified in the character areas described in the **Volume 1, Master Plan** chapter). This is enough height to create downtown appropriate densities and allow for a variety of uses without overwhelming the existing community fabric.

BUILDING PLACEMENT

Buildings in pedestrianized areas should be located at or near the front property line, in order to reinforce the streetscape and create a quality pedestrian experience.

For residential uses, the building placement will depend on the type of residential building being proposed and the context. Townhomes and multifamily buildings should be located at or near the property line to ensure the proper proportions are created for the public realm. Where single-family dwellings are appropriate, they should be set back 8-15 feet from the property line, close enough to engage the sidewalk but providing some buffer for the home. Encouraging units to be located closer to the street reinforces the streetscape, creates a quality pedestrian environment and opportunities for socialization.

For mixed-use and commercial buildings, the building placement should be setback 0-20 feet from the property line, depending on the street typologies on which the building fronts, and include a wide sidewalk between the building and public sidewalk. Larger setbacks should only be used in order to incorporate additional pedestrian space or enhance the

pedestrian experience, such as the elements noted in the renderings in the **Volume 1, Master Plan** chapter.

BUILDING FACADES

Enhancing building facades with inviting features not only enriches the pedestrian experience, but also enhances the overall scale and appeal of the structures. It is crucial to steer clear of long, monotonous walls devoid of windows or entrance features. Architectural elements like balconies, porches, patios, colonnades, awnings and light fixtures should adorn facades along the street. All buildings, whether residential, mixed-use or commercial, must prioritize prominent entry features that have direct connections to public sidewalks.

ENCROACHMENTS

Encroachments are building elements that protrude across the property line into the public ROW. Given the limited space along the downtown area streets, encroachments in the form of overhangs could be a good strategy to provide sidewalk shade where there is not sufficient space for street trees.

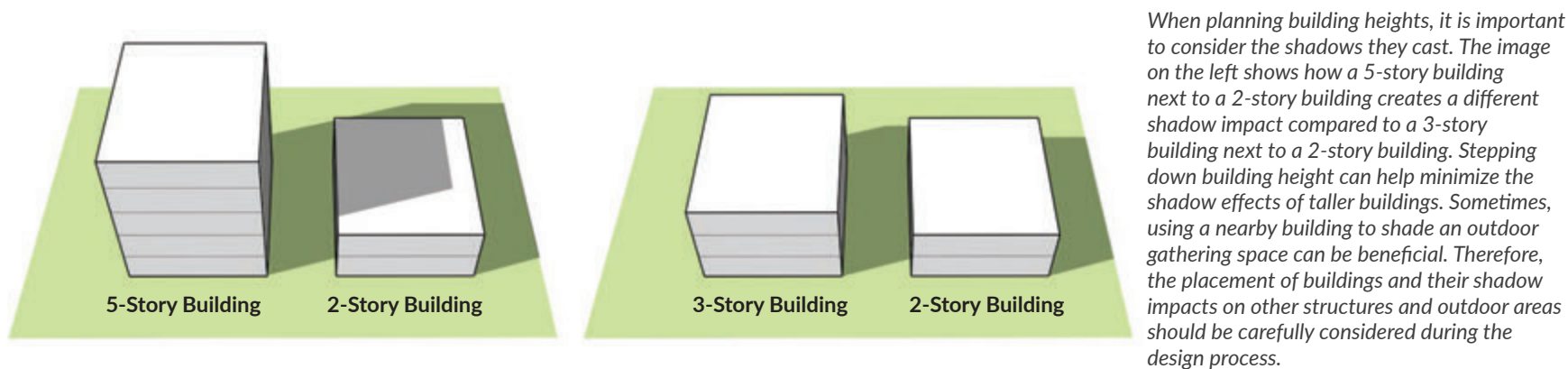
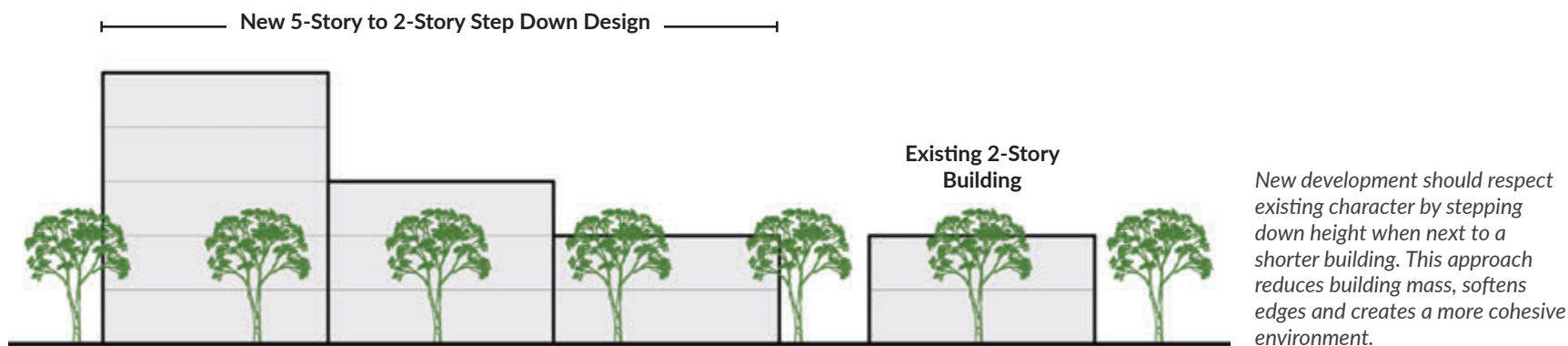


Figure 33. Compatible Building Heights and Shadow Impacts

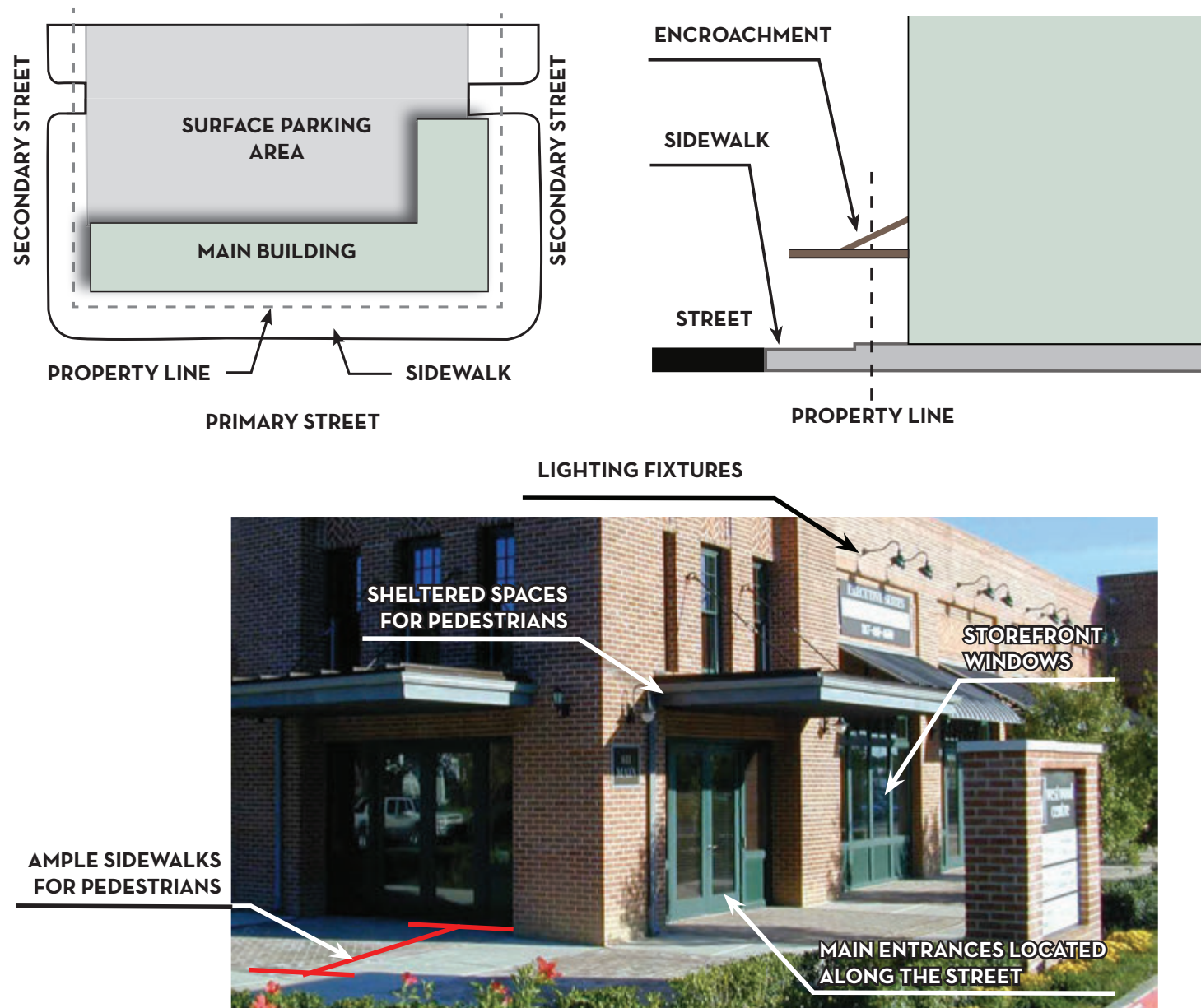


Figure 34. Strategies to Address Urban Design Using Building Form

STOREFRONT AND WINDOW ACTIVATION

To maintain a successful downtown, it is crucial to actively engage pedestrians with their immediate surroundings. Storefronts play a crucial role in serving as the seam between the public and private realms. Appealing, well-lit and lively storefronts play an essential role in supporting a downtown.

While motorists driving through a district will notice if the majority of storefronts are inactive (thus signaling a struggling area), pedestrians are even more sensitive to these types of details. For example, visitors walking in a downtown may turn around and return to their cars if there are several empty storefronts in a row.

Activation strategies to encourage pedestrians include:

- Outdoor café seating
- Pop-up signs and sidewalk sales
- Window displays
- Potted plants and flower boxes
- Seasonal decor and displays

As discussed in the downtown mobility section on page 148, a “frontage zone” of at least 2 feet along building frontages is helpful to allow room for activation elements, door swings, etc.

Empty buildings and frontages are inevitable for any retail area. Activation with a pop-up shop, seasonal use, public/civic use, art installation or even just interesting window

displays can help fill the space temporarily until a more permanent use comes in. These are also strategies that can be used for privately owned buildings that do not currently have an active use on the ground floor.

Activation also means that businesses are actually open when visitors are expecting to patronize them. This includes being open during reasonable hours during most days of the week and into the weekends and evenings.



Plants help to enliven a sidewalk



Outdoor café seating



Art in a vacant storefront

BUILDING AND SITE LIGHTING

Improving storefront lighting encourages exploration on foot, draws attention from passing motorists and encourages business/property owners to improve their displays. Storefronts should be lit from inside and out, where possible, irrespective of whether the building is vacant or open.

It is recommended that the Town work with property owners to maintain a database of buildings to include interior and exterior lighting and assess the costs of making improvements. Outside of keeping properties in good maintenance and curating tenants, this is perhaps the most important step property owners can take to benefit their individual properties and the downtown area as a whole.

All lighting should follow Dark Sky principles to reduce light pollution and be cognizant of lighting's environmental impact. The Town can take two main approaches to help reduce light pollution in the downtown area.

The first is retrofitting existing lighting. This would be a Town-led, proactive approach to replacing existing lighting with full cutoff fixtures, changing out bulb type to adjust the color of light to decrease the amount of blue light being emitted, and modify lights to operate on timers which turn off at some point during the night.

The second approach is to require all new exterior light installations to limit light pollution by including full cutoff fixtures, limit blue spectrum light colors, limit lighting intensity, set maximum fixture heights and have time limits in place for lighting to turn off.



Roofline lighting example



Illuminated channel letter sign example



String lights example

SIGNAGE

Signage is an important element of the urban environment and, if well done, can be a major asset for the community. Businesses rely on clear and visible signs, so the Town should work closely with the business community to balance signage needs and visual distractions. Signage in the downtown area should be pedestrian-scaled and focused with interesting detailing and unique branding.

Using external illumination, temporary A-frame sidewalk signs, neon and other smaller-scale sign options will help support an attractive environment. Signs that are meant for vehicular traffic, use internal illumination and incorporate bright LED lights are incompatible with the environment envisioned for the downtown area and should be avoided.



Pedestrian-scale business signage conveys the business brand in an inviting manner

BLENDING NEW BUILDINGS WITH EXISTING HISTORIC STRUCTURES

The Town has well-maintained historic properties, such as the historically significant Strayhorn House, and three National Register historic districts that should be celebrated and preserved for the future generations to enjoy. Historic properties also help cultivate a unique sense of place and can support a high-quality built environment and aesthetic. Carefully balancing the maintenance of historic buildings (e.g., building upgrades to meet fire code) with new development is an important aspect of allowing the downtown area to continue to grow without losing the existing community fabric.

Blending the scale, mass and architecture of new construction with the existing buildings can help ease the transition from old to new. Careful architectural detailing and roof type and pitch help not only align new construction with older building techniques, but also provide interest for pedestrians.

From mill-era housing to modern architecture, Carrboro has embraced a wide variety of architectural styles, materials, colors and design aesthetic. This variety should be continued in the downtown area, but when building immediately adjacent to a historic property, the design choices should be more reflective of the historic resource for compatibility. Elements more reflective of historic design can include brick facades with frieze banding or smaller-scale residential buildings with porches and simple roof lines.



A new building that reflects the historic building materials in the area