



BRYSON CITY

NORTH CAROLINA

HANDMADE
in AMERICA
SMALL TOWN

Community Assessment Report
March 2011



Acknowledgements



HANDMADE
in **AMERICA**



North Carolina
Department of
Commerce
**Community
Planning
Division**



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1 INTRODUCTION

WHAT WE DID

Bryson City has an abundance of assets in and around the city that make it a unique spot in the Western North Carolina Mountains. It has a deep culture with strong ties to the region and the land. The flat and compact downtown area makes it very walkable and easy to get around on bicycles. The downtown's rich character comes from its historical main street buildings, building enhancements, industrial heritage and prime location on the Tuckasegee River. On top of these are great natural assets within the city itself - mountain vistas, flowing water, and an extensive habitat for a range of plants and animals. Together these assets support a range of amenities for both locals and tourists.

Bryson City is the cultural, financial, governmental and service center of a Swain County. As the only incorporated place in the county, Bryson City's downtown plays an especially critical role in the economic prosperity of the entire area. Investing in downtown through public/private partnerships can provide the entire community with potentially large returns on investment (ROI). The ROI for the city and county may be realized in the form of increased tax revenues. For entrepreneurs, both existing businesses and new ones, the ROI is increased customers, profits and prosperity. And good returns for non-profits and volunteer/civic groups the ROI is often an increase in community connections and services.



Resource team members took a tour of the city with local storyteller Tim Hall.



Economic Vitality. The Swain County Chamber and Tourist Development Council have a well-funded, attractive and successful advertising program in place. Their website – greatsmokies.com – offers an extensive list of businesses and events in the region appealing to both recreational and cultural tourists. Although there is business turnover, there are also attractive renovations underway. The Chamber is working on creating a pedestrian map as well as an information kiosk to be located at the Caboose (naturally, in partnership with the Train) on Everett Street.

Natural Environmental Attractions. The natural resources and attractions that make Bryson City so unique, that entice visitors from across the globe and help to create the quality of life for those who call it home include:

- Great Smoky Mountains National Park – the most visited national park in the nation.
- Tsali Recreation Area – an extremely popular destination for mountain bikers.
- Nantahala Outdoor Center – a world-class outfitter catering to thousands of whitewater adventurers.
- Fontana Lake - offering flat-water sports.
- Fishing – hundreds of miles of pristine streams and reservoirs are readily accessible to anglers.
- Island Park – currently being refurbished, will be the site of some of the 2013 World Freestyle Kayaking Championships being held in the Gorge.

Built Environment Attractions. Historic buildings include the Swain County Courthouse, the Great Smoky Mountain Railroad, Charleston Station, the Calhoun House, the First Citizens Bank building, the Black Bank building, Madison's on Main and many others.

Social Environment. Bryson City has an established reputation as a unique, authentic and desirable tourist destination and should continue to promote these strengths. Authenticity comes from both its historic buildings and its natural and cultural attributes. This authentic place offers visitors and residents unique and original experiences they cannot have elsewhere. Healthcare, education and other professional services provide hundreds of Swain County residents with gainful employment and manufacturing remains a viable occupation for hundreds more.

As with any downtown, Bryson City faces challenges. Economically, the downtown is bustling during half of the year when the weather is good and colors are vibrant. Yet, it is almost empty during other parts of the year. As a result, merchants and businesses have trouble staying open year round. Due to this lack of activity, the downtown area becomes an unattractive place to spend time during a good a part of the year.

Many challenges relate to getting around the downtown. Parking is a challenge during the peak summer and fall months. Many visitors tend to focus and remain in areas immediately around the train depot without exploring the rest of the downtown area on foot, partly because they are not aware of everything that exists in the downtown area. Adding to this, many buildings on Main Street and to the east of Everett Street are abandoned or in severe disrepair. Finally, much of the downtown treats the Tuckasegee as a back alley instead of a main street. While these challenges can make living in and visiting downtown an unpleasant experience, Bryson City has everything it needs to be a more thriving, unique, economically robust, and inclusive downtown. It just needs to think about what it already has a little differently and then find a better way to get the story out.

3 INTRODUCTION

The HandMade in America Resource Team approach to Small Town revitalization has been used successfully since 1996. The program assembles teams of experienced professionals who spend several days researching, visiting and interviewing key stakeholders in the community. At the request of the Town of Bryson City, HandMade assembled a Resource Team to update the original assessment made in 1998, and specifically focus on the Town of Bryson City. The recommendations generally follow the original guidelines of addressing the four basic areas of the “Main Street” approach to revitalization: organization, design, promotion and economic restructuring. The Bryson City Team was a collaboration between Hand Made in America and the Division of Community Assistance, the Department of Cultural Affairs, the Conservation Fund and Asheville Design Center. HandMade worked with the Town Planning Board to assemble a Steering Committee that could reflect the aspirations and needs of that community.

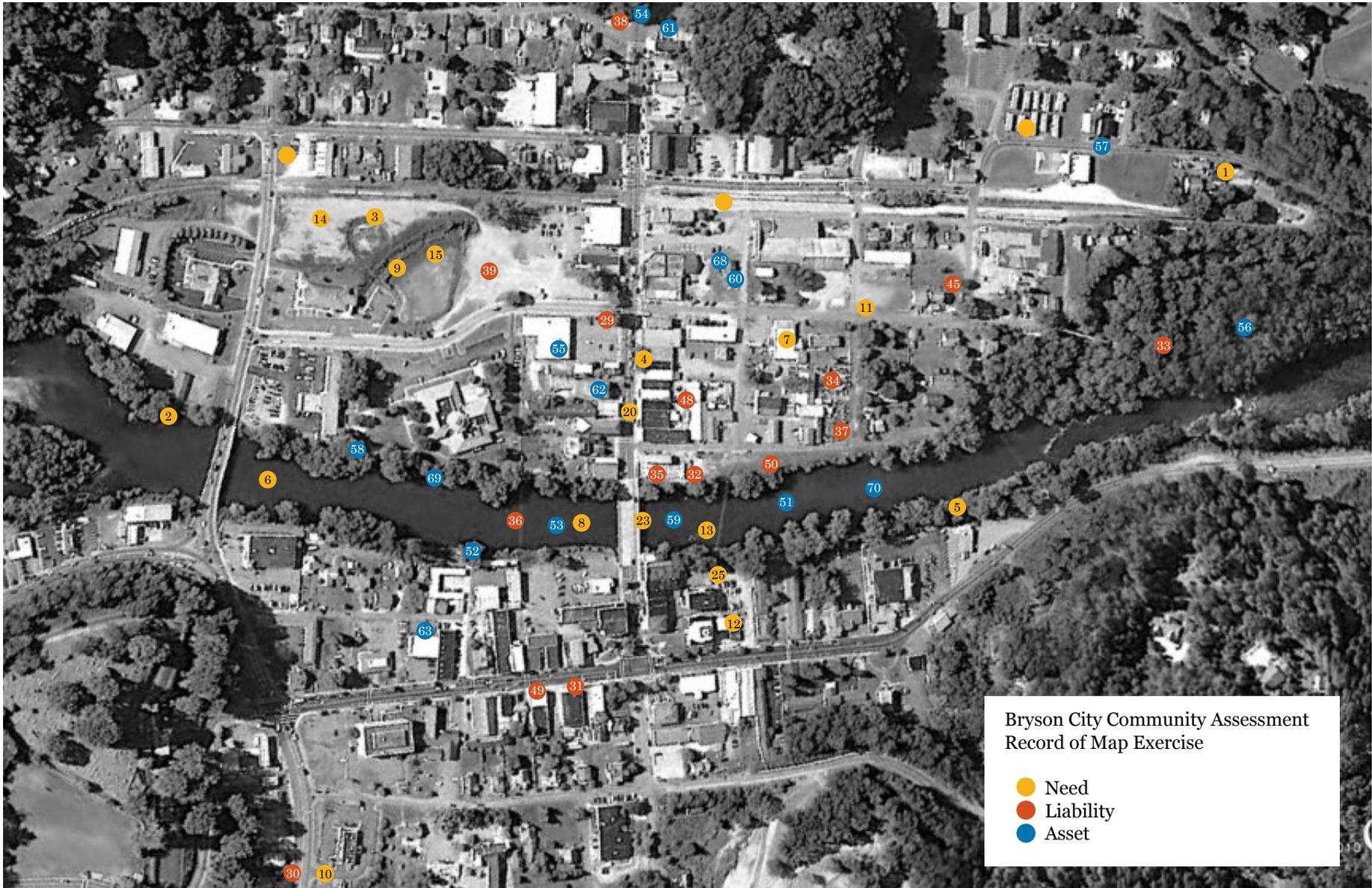


Resource team members interviewing members of the community.

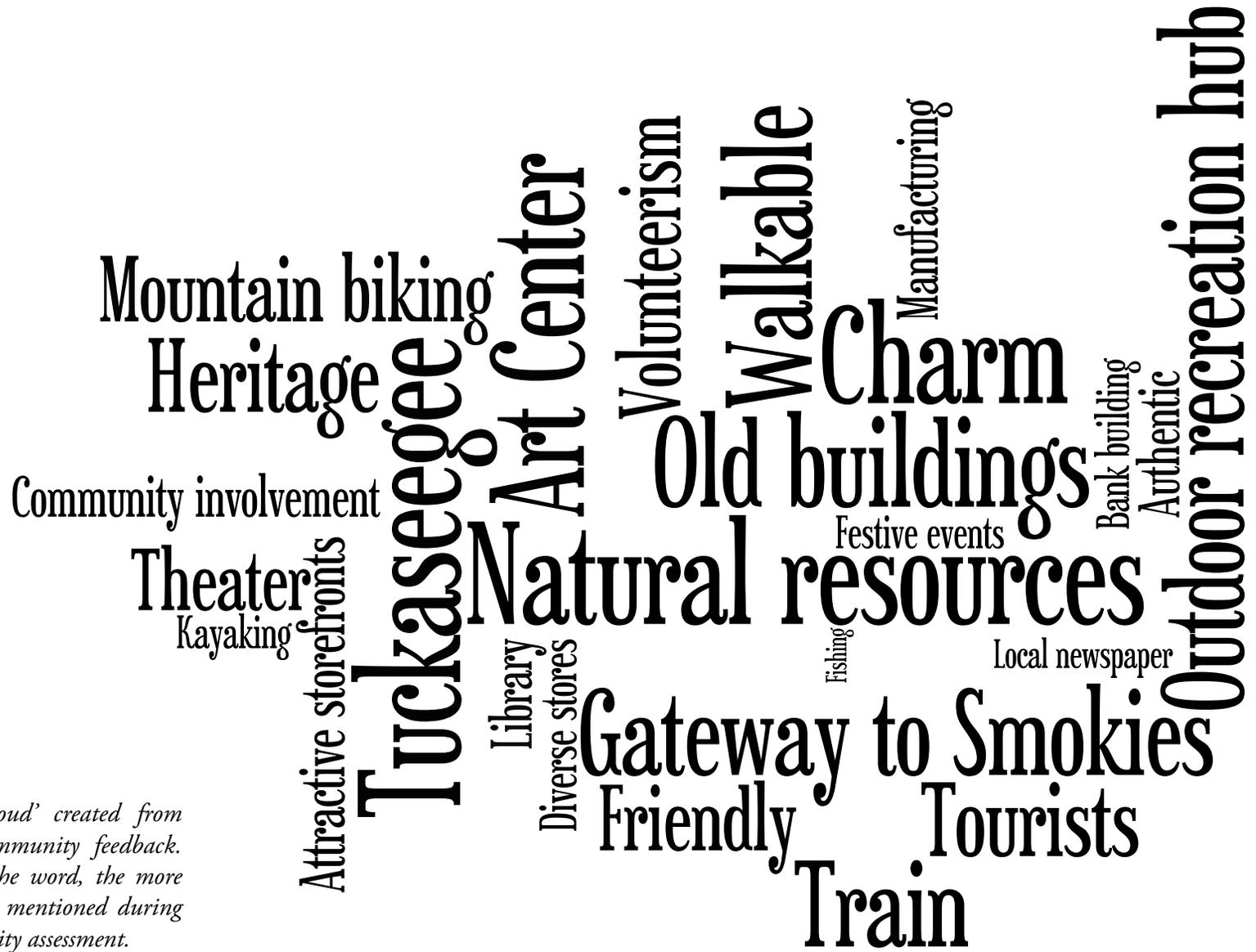
The Team spent three days in discussions with citizen groups, community leaders, staff and organizations identified by the community as having insight into local assets, issues and opportunities. They took driving and walking tours, conducted interviews, took photos, visited specific sites under consideration, reviewed local ordinances, and developed schematic design solutions and sketches.

At the end of their visit, the team held a meeting and each team member offered observations, advice and project ideas. After getting feedback, team members prepared this written report and implementation strategy, which will be presented for further discussion and feedback from the Steering Committee before it is finalized and published.





Community members were asked to identify needs, liabilities and assets within downtown Bryson City. Comments relating to each site were recorded.



A 'word cloud' created from recorded community feedback. The larger the word, the more often it was mentioned during the community assessment.



WHAT WE HEARD

Suggested Guidelines for Implementing these Recommendations:

Changes in the organization, business, promotion and built environment of Bryson City need to balance resources with potential impact. Some will take place before others based on interest, funds and when opportunities present themselves. As a guide, specific projects in the downtown area should be:

DOABLE. Projects should be undertaken with a clear understanding of the resources and capacity to complete them. Focus limited resources on small-scale projects with big impact. Choose some projects that allow community members to contribute their skills and expertise. How does Design impact this? For example, building owners could collaborate with artists to display artwork in empty storefronts.

VISIBLE. Projects should be visible and in prominent locations, where it is evident that things are happening. It is especially important that this happens sometime soon after recommendations are made. For example, projects along Everett or Main Street would immediately be noticeable.

AFFORDABLE. Projects should respect the limited resources of a small town. The selection and design of projects should balance the costs with the potential impacts. For example, a gateway to Island Park could be built for less than \$500.

FLEXIBLE. Instead of projects focusing or supporting one type of activity, they should be designed to be flexible enough to support a range of activities, which are both planned and unplanned. For example, a new deck (River Porch) at the corner of Everett St. and the river can support a variety of uses including dancing, music, sitting, watching movies, fishing, food carts and kayak spectators.

INCLUSIVE. Projects should be designed in a way that will be children-friendly. Additionally, the design, planning and construction of projects should actively engage members of the community as well as visitors to build ownership into the process. For example, volunteer workdays should be organized as frequently as possible.

TRAINING. Efforts can be made to build and enhance the skill set of community members in the process. For example, high school students could help build the new River Porch. One great example of this is Studio H in Bertie County, where high school students have designed and are now building the local farmer's market.

APPROPRIATE. Projects should respond to the feedback received from community members, stakeholders and the planning + design professionals that worked together to generate this report. Additionally, new projects should be implemented under the guise of the development standards.

SUSTAINABLE. Projects should respond to the natural environment. Local materials and contractors should be used wherever possible.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

GOALS AND STRATEGIES

TIMEFRAME

POTENTIAL PARTNERS

<i>Organization</i>		
Create an independent asset-development organization		
Develop and adopt a simple mission statement and 2-5 year program of work		
Consider incorporating for nonprofit, tax-exempt status		
Create a Economic Restructuring Committee		
Create a Promotions/Marketing Committee		
Organize for Historic Preservation		
Consider applying to join the North Carolina Main Street Program		
Implementing your Plan for Renewal		
Mobilize your Assets by Recruiting Volunteers		
Connect with peers by attending Small Towns meetings		
Clarify the roles of key players and build partnerships with quarterly meetings		
Invest in leadership capacity building		
Measure results and celebrate success		
Identify potential funders and resources		
<i>Economic Restructuring</i>		
Downtown Business Environment		
Assess economic conditions and opportunities for growth		
Strengthen existing businesses and recruit new ones		
Consider ways to attract new businesses		
Explore new uses for existing buildings		
Develop financial incentives and capital for building rehabilitation.		
Monitor the economic performance of the downtown district		
Economic Diversification		
Capitalize on the natural resources of the area/ Reduce dependence upon seasonal economies		
Promote and support entrepreneurs and small businesses less dependent on tourism		
Develop a business marketing and recruitment plan		
Develop downtown farmers' market		
Tourism		
Revisit the Heritage Development Initiative		
Promote Bryson City as an eco-tourism destination.		



GOALS AND STRATEGIES	TIMEFRAME	POTENTIAL PARTNERS
Develop Bryson City's Creative Economy		
Offer paid opportunities for local artists to work on future public improvement projects		
Create a stronger arts presence downtown with strategies for increasing profits in arts related businesses		
Conduct studio tours (perhaps in partnership with Graham County) to increase visibility of local artisans		
Offer regular, live music in public spaces throughout the downtown		
Create more connections among artists, and between artists and schools		
Promotion		
Enhancing Downtown's Appearance		
Clean, screen, green		
Develop a unified signage system		
Improve the memorial benches		
Branding Bryson City		
Create awareness of the current branding campaign		
Develop a calendar listing all local events		
Develop a web page for Bryson City		
Take advantage of the Great Smoky Mountains Railroad headquarters location		
Take advantage of the Go Blue Ridge regional pass		
Using the Past to Promote the Present		
Collect and display photographs of the town's past		
Celebrate the lives of Horace Kephart & George Masa		
Exhibit Swain County life before electricity		
Have "roving ambassadors" in period dress		
Exhibit Cherokee and early European interaction		
Festivals and Special Events		
Evaluate existing events		
Expand activities at existing festivals		
Design activities to include children, wherever possible		
Have live music at all events		
Start an oral history project in the schools		
Start a "quilt trails" project		
Capitalize on the 2013 World Freestyle Kayaking Championships		

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

GOALS AND STRATEGIES

TIMEFRAME

POTENTIAL PARTNERS

<i>Design and Historic Preservation</i>		
Prioritize the River		
Control erosion with new plantings		
Create a River Porch with new opportunities to interact with the water		
Encourage business owners to address the waterfront, making connections from Main Street to the river		
Build a pedestrian bridge connecting Island Park with Main Street		
Improve Connectivity		
Develop a city-wide wayfinding system		
Promote Bryson Street as a connection to Island Park		
Create a Greenway along the river's north bank		
Make sidewalk improvements to link places throughout City		
Improve Main Street with streetscape, plantings and infill		
Activate Gathering Spaces		
Landscape Courthouse parking lot		
Activate Everett Street Bridge with a pedestrian park		
Island Park Gateway and parking lot		
Make public space improvements surrounding the Train Depot (Frye Street)		
Program more events at the County Administration outdoor pavilion		
Build a year-round recreation center		
Continue existing plans for expansion of library		
Develop and Revitalize Structures		
Implement Development Standards		
Activate empty/underutilized storefronts		
Implement Historic Preservation		
Pursue a Downtown Commercial National Register Historic District		
Pursue a Motor Hotel National Register Historic District		
Pursue Individual Listing of Properties on the National Register		
Continue Existing Façade Program With Some Modifications		
Continue County Courthouse Renovations		
Pursue Additional Architectural Survey of the Town		





A gorgeous fall view of the Tuckasee River just north of downtown Bryson City. Prioritizing the river is a key recommendation throughout this report.

11 ORGANIZATION

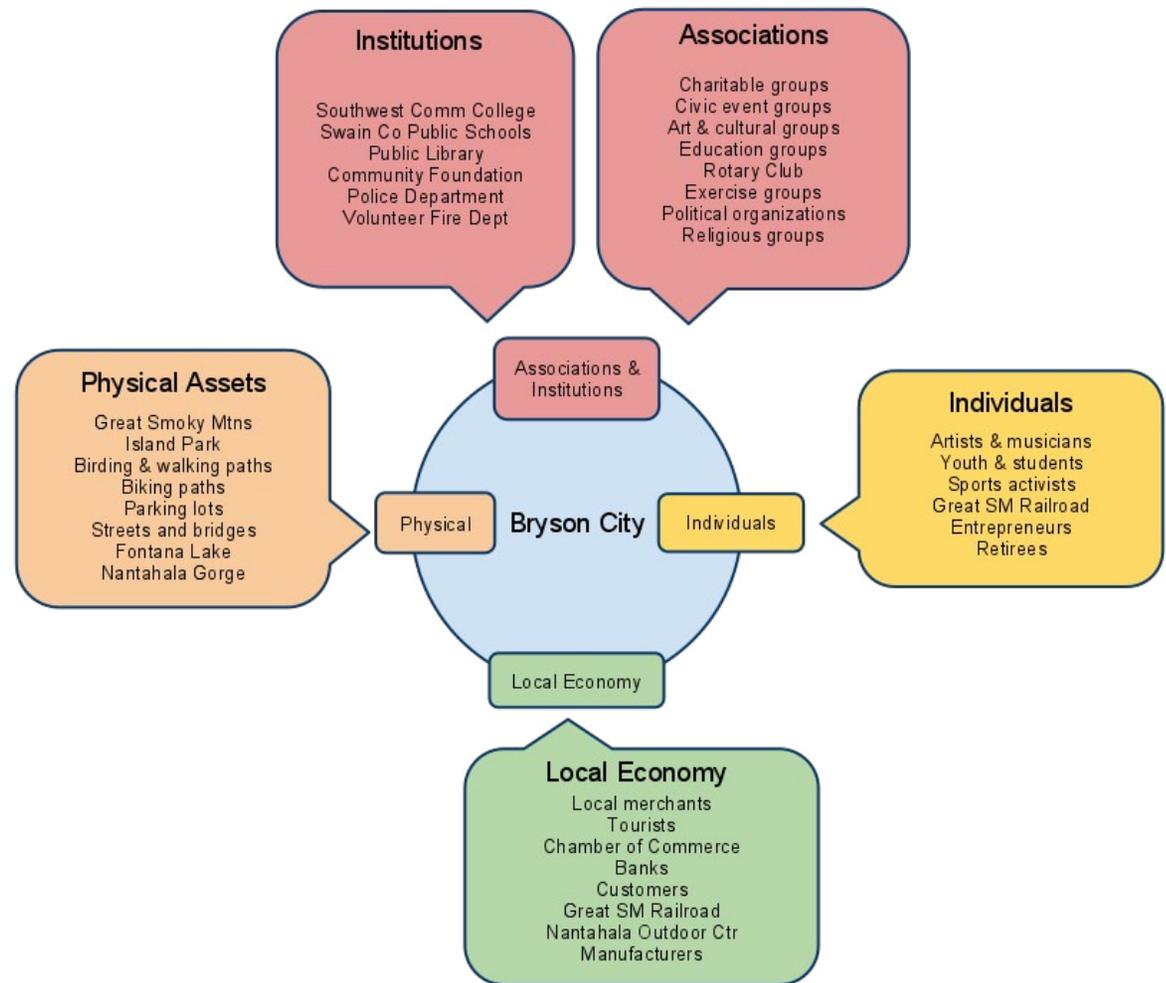
Organization is a process that builds consensus and cooperation by creating partnerships among the various groups that have a stake in Bryson City's downtown district. When all of the stakeholders work toward the same goals and share responsibility for their accomplishment, there is more effective management and advocacy for the downtown business district. Active volunteers, working in collaboration with business, nonprofit and public sector partners representing a broad cross section of the community will ensure the inclusion of a wide range of perspectives in these efforts.

ASSETS

A preliminary community asset mapping for Bryson City, right, lists some of the assets identified during the Community Assessment. It is incomplete, but we recommend considering it a starting point for recruiting

STRATEGIES

The organization element of a downtown revitalization initiative is often less visible than things like streetscape improvements, special events and new businesses, but it is critical to the program's overall success. Organization is what keeps things moving and gets the stakeholders involved, and if not solidly established, can lead to disappointment for the overall process.



Assets in and around Bryson City



RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations were made in HandMade's 1999 Community Assessment for an independent nonprofit organization and several committees to be formed. Other planning documents contain similar suggestions, but the 2011 Resource Team observed that only a small number of public officials and the Chamber are doing most of the heavy lifting. Many goals and plans have been written by consultants and volunteers, but implementation is limited due to the lack of a broad-based organization.

This section of the Community Assessment Report contains recommendations for action that will help all community leaders – businesses, non-profits, institutions, individuals and activists – plan and manage growth and change.

Create an independent asset-development organization

Consider inviting the Steering Committee for this Community Assessment Report to grow into the volunteer-driven asset-development organization necessary to move these recommendations to implementation. Consider the right size and type of organization best suited for Bryson City, looking at ways to include the following groups:

- Establish an Executive Committee composed of City, County and Chamber volunteer leaders and Standing Committee Chairs. The Chamber could serve as the organizational home for the group during its first year or two.
- Establish Standing Committees to oversee and implement the projects identified in this report. Standing Committees make up the fundamental organizational structure of the HandMade Small Towns model, which successfully implement dozens of volunteer-driven revitalization projects around the Western North Carolina region. North Carolina's Main Street Program uses a more standardized organizational structure that corresponds to the sections of this Community Assessment Report. Those Standing Committees would include Economic Restructuring, Promotion and Design.

Economic Restructuring Committee

To coordinate the restructuring of Bryson City's economy, a committee of the Chamber, residents, property owners, businesses, government and nonprofit stakeholders would:

- Track current economic conditions and identify opportunities for market growth.
- Help strengthen existing businesses and take leadership in recruiting new ones.
- Identify new uses for traditional Main Street buildings.
- Work with the City and County to promote the use of financial incentives and capital for building rehabilitation and business development.
- Monitor the economic performance of the downtown district.

In Hayesville, NC the nonprofit organization that leads small town revitalization efforts is CCCRA. Established in 1998, it has six Committees where people volunteer to help with: Events, Courthouse Restoration, Trails & Greenways, Membership, Communications and Appearance. Since its beginning, CCCRA has raised more than \$500,000 in grants to enhance the county's physical beauty as well as enriching its cultural life, and membership has grown to almost 200.

13 ORGANIZATION

RECOMMENDATIONS, *continued*

Promotions/Marketing Committee

This committee could include residents, representatives from groups that currently offer special events (including churches and non-profits), the Chamber of Commerce, downtown retailers and restaurants, lodging industry representatives, local government, outdoor recreation outfitters, and the craft community. It would oversee identity, marketing, promotions and special event improvements for the downtown Bryson City area.

Organize for Historic Preservation

Consider forming a historic preservation commission as part of Bryson City's Planning Board, bringing ongoing efforts towards stewardship of the downtown's historic character. Or a private, membership organization might be the first step. Once a commission is formed and has been operational for a full year, the Town is eligible for funding from the State through its Certified Local Government program. Funds can be used for additional survey work, designation of local historic landmarks or districts, or to pursue additional National Register nominations.

Define a Mission Statement and Program of Work

Develop and adopt a simple mission statement and a 2-3 year program of work for the group in order to stay focused and give volunteers a sense of accomplishment. There will be pressure, as the group's leadership is recognized, to take on other projects. Getting involved with a wide range of projects may be fine for individuals, but in order for revitalization of Bryson City to succeed, the group needs to focus on implementing this plan. As an interim measure, it is important to clarify what the town government, Chamber, County and others will do to help. Explore the possibility of assistance with short-term projects by interns or class projects from Swain County High School, Western Carolina University and Southwestern Community College.

Create a list of "low hanging fruit" projects which can be done with relative ease and will make an impression in the community. Some of those might be:

- A "Parklet" on the Everett Street bridge. Holly Krake can provide the labor, Ron Larocque can provide the lumber, and Freda Livingston can help organize the merchants. Diane Cutler can recruit a team to maintain the plantings.
- Clean up and beautify Bryson Street, and help visitors and residents find Island Park.
- Organize a volunteer recruitment drive, summarizing projects and asking scout troops, church groups, high school student groups, and civic organizations to adopt a project. Recruit a team of "talkers" to make the rounds among the region's organizations.

The Preservation Society of Asheville and Buncombe County is a strong advocate of comprehensive preservation techniques to protect and revitalize local historic resources. A nonprofit membership organization, it provides education, advocacy, preservation assistance and property "rescues." Formed in the mid-1970s, the Society's early efforts focused on documenting the historic resources of the community through surveys and National Register nominations, an important first step in promoting a broader awareness of the community's assets and engendering local preservation action.



Consider incorporating for nonprofit, tax-exempt status

Once the Bryson City Revitalization group is formed and operating, there are several advantages to incorporating the group as a nonprofit organization. This would clearly establish the organization's mission as one of community service (as opposed to private profit or governing), and offer the opportunity to receive tax-advantaged donations and grants from charitable foundations. Information and assistance on forming a 501(c)(3) organization can be obtained from the NC Center for Nonprofits as well as from an attorney.

In Chimney Rock, NC the Community Development Association was created in 2000 to promote the revitalization of the area. Working in partnership with the Hickory Nut Gorge Chamber and the Town, its membership consists of local residents and business owners who pay annual dues and organize events and clean-ups. Chimney Rock Village was one of the first HandMade in America Small Towns.

Consider applying to join the North Carolina Main Street Program

The NC Department of Commerce's Main Street Program promotes downtown revitalization based on economic development within the context of historic preservation, a concept developed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation that has proven successful in more than a thousand smaller communities across the country. The Main Street Program helps small towns to recognize and preserve their historic fabric. Using local resources, these towns build on their unique characteristics to create vibrant central business districts that meet the needs of today's communities. Providing two years of technical assistance in downtown revitalization at a modest cost (travel and lodging of the staff) the Main Street Program provides professional guidance to local committees in communities under 7,500. There is an annual competitive application process to be one of three towns selected.



An organization meeting with leaders of the Clay County Communities Revitalization Association.

The Todd Community Preservation Organization was established in 2000 and is active in the HandMade Small Towns Program. Its original mission was to support the Todd Ruritan Club in securing funding and support for various community projects. Since those early days, TCPO has grown to sponsor events, such as the free summer concert series held each June and July in Cook Park, and obtain grants and donations for community and park improvements. TCPO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation with a 12-member Board of Directors and relies on volunteers to maintain its viability. TCPO's mission is to create a sustainable community while preserving Todd's rich history, natural beauty and culture.

15 ORGANIZATION

IMPLEMENTING YOUR PLAN FOR RENEWAL

This plan captures the hopes and dreams of residents, and harnesses the power to move Bryson City from acting reactively to moving forward positively with a common purpose. A shared vision for the community, like spring water, rises to the surface. Projects must be prioritized and a Workplan put in place with both short-term and long-term needs and goals.

Mobilize your assets by recruiting volunteers

Building community capacity is at the heart of the HandMade Small Towns approach. According to John McKnight, the founder of the Asset Based Community Development Institute and a mentor for the HandMade approach, “significant community development only takes place when local community people are committed to investing themselves and their resources in the effort. This is why you can’t develop communities from the top down, or from the outside in.” A volunteer-led, asset-based approach assures that community residents and groups are at the heart of each project undertaken, doing the planning, implementing, evaluating and celebrating.

Prioritize Volunteer Recruitment

All nonprofits we talked with need help building capacity to meet current demands. In the current economic environment, grants are hard to come by but human resources are available in abundance. Particularly as baby-boomers begin to retire, more talent will come to reside in the Bryson City area. A community-wide effort should begin to identify the needs of all nonprofits in the area and recruit and place volunteers to help. Bryson City used to have a Volunteer Opportunity Day – consider restarting that event. While City, County and Chamber staff can provide guidance, the day-to-day work needs to be done by community members. Volunteers should be identified, recruited and invited to join the new organization and its standing committees. Be sure to include local youth clubs, residents, business and property owners, local area asset managers (e.g., Railroad, National Park, NOC), nonprofits, educators, students and volunteers.

Connect with peers by attending HandMade Small Towns meetings

Send members of your Planning Board, Steering Committee and other interested volunteers to the Annual HandMade Small Towns gathering, Cluster Meetings, the Conservation Fund’s Semi-annual Leadership Training programs, North Carolina’s annual Main Street conference, Rural Partners Forum and other places where small town volunteers gather to swap stories and share secrets. No small town group can go it alone, and your volunteers need to build bridges to mentors and resource groups that are ready, willing and able to help. Be part of the regional partnership.



Community volunteers proudly at work.



Clarify the roles of key players and build partnerships with quarterly meetings

In order for Bryson City's plans to be realized, it is vital for the Town, the Chamber and the County to work in partnership. Bryson City is the county seat, and all agencies and individuals have a stake in what happens with City and County-owned property, as well as what needs to be done to protect the special character of the community. We recommend quarterly meetings between the governing boards of these three major stakeholders, with a goal to increase communication and information sharing, and jointly take on one or more projects recommended in this report.

Invest in leadership capacity building

The organization you are forming needs to be nurtured, and the most effective capacity building happens when there are opportunities for peer-to-peer networking, mentoring and information-sharing. Organize visits to other communities that are doing projects similar to those Bryson City wants to accomplish – take a tour to see historic courthouses, for example. Invest in leadership training, project planning and management training, and start with small projects until the group has the experience and confidence to tackle larger ones.

As the organization progresses, send members to training sessions to build increasingly sophisticated skills in grant writing and fundraising, financial management, and burnout prevention. The completion of challenging but doable projects in a timely manner will build credibility and attract new volunteers to the group. The committee structure not only divides the workload and clearly delineates responsibilities, but also builds consensus and cooperation among the various stakeholders. A compatible organizational home for this group for the next several years, such as the Swain-Bryson Chamber of Commerce, will incubate and help it with by-laws, incorporation, work plans and other start-up activities.

Measure results and celebrate success

Building by building, tree by tree, business by business, job by job, festival by festival are the ways large projects get accomplished by volunteers in small towns. Keeping track of the number of volunteer hours, as well as jobs created and buildings renovated, will help the entire community and region see what is going on. Hold an annual meeting each spring to celebrate accomplishments and recruit volunteers for the next round of projects.

Identify potential funders and resources with similar interests and ask for their advice

Funders and other outside resources should be invited to be part of the organization's discussions from the beginning. The Conservation Fund, Blue Ridge National Heritage Area, Smoky Mountain HOST, Southwest Regional Commission and Appalachian Regional Commission are just a few of the quasi-governmental groups that share the goals of sustainable economic vitality for Bryson City.

In West Jefferson, another HandMade Small Town which is also a county seat, the West Jefferson Community Partnership is a voluntary association of seven groups committed to protecting the Town's resources and preserving and enriching the spirit, cultural, community and family life of the town. The members meet monthly to share new initiatives and concerns, work on identifying funds for new projects and take turns hosting a summer concert series. Current members of the group include: Ashe County Arts Council, Ashe County Library, Chamber of Commerce, Christmas in July Festival, Farmer's Market, Town of West Jefferson, West Jefferson Business Association, and the West Jefferson TDA.

ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING

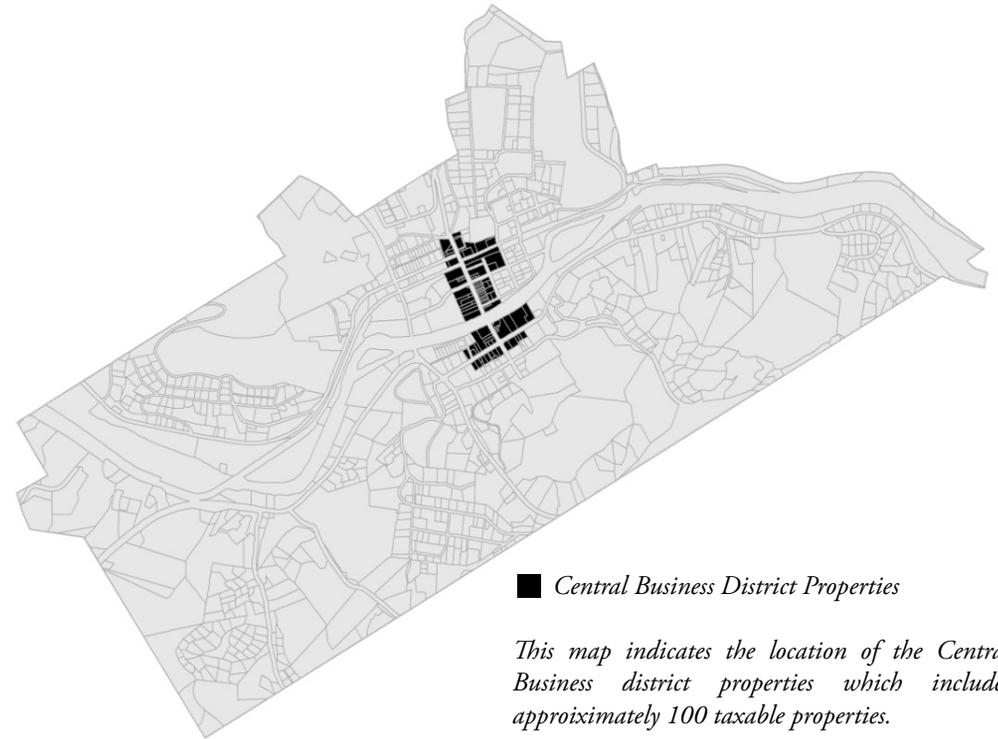
Economic restructuring is recommended to strengthen Bryson City's economic assets, while expanding and diversifying the economic base. This will add value to the community through a collaboration of all sectors of the economy – public, private, nonprofit and voluntary. Economic restructuring is a holistic approach to Bryson City's revitalization and addresses the “triple bottom line” of economy, environment, and equity. With its natural beauty, its location as the Gateway to the Smokies and surrounding outdoor attractions, Bryson City's economic future depends the health of all environmental types – natural, built and social.

The Town of Bryson City has approximately 1000 taxable properties, with a total tax value of roughly \$124,452,000. The buildings located on these properties are valued at \$87,545,700.

In the central business district of downtown Bryson City there are approximately 100 taxable properties, with a total value of \$16,367,400. The buildings in this area have a tax value of \$12,747,600.

Bryson City's population has remained relatively stable from 2000-2010, rising slightly from 1411 to 1424 residents. The number of residents over 18 years of age declined during that same period, dropping from 82% of the total population in 2000 to around 79% by 2010.

During this timeframe there was a 17% increase in the number of housing units in town, from 713 to 833. There was also an increase from 17.5% to 26.1% in the town's residential vacancy rate. Revenue from sales taxes in 2010 was down. These taxes were \$249,135 in 2010. By comparison, in 2005 the town received \$276,827 in sales tax and \$347,583 in 2008.



■ *Central Business District Properties*

This map indicates the location of the Central Business district properties which includes approximately 100 taxable properties.



DOWNTOWN BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

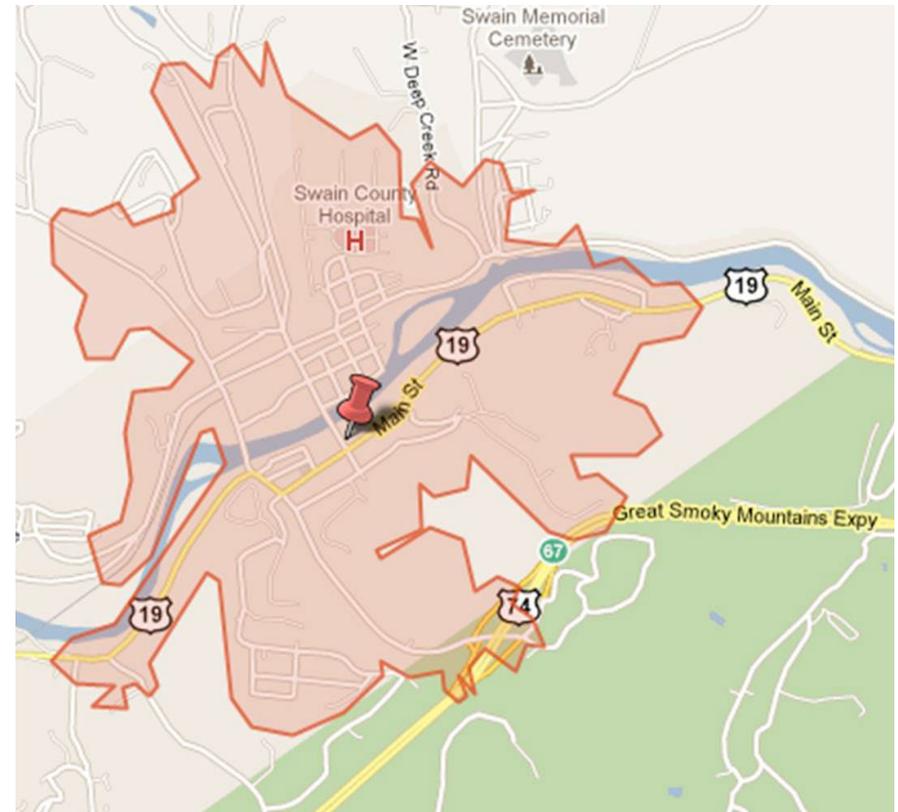
Within one mile of the intersection of Main and Everett Streets there are approximately 492 households. On average each of these households has annual expenditures of about \$46,070. The total amount spent on food, general goods, furniture, appliances, apparel, recreation and entertainment each year is nearly \$14,000,000, or more than half of all household expenses. These household expenditures are not all made in Bryson City. Purchases made by Bryson City residents outside of the town's retail market are considered retail gaps or "leakage." A goal of economic restructuring is to stop these leaks.

In 2009 there were 57 businesses within this one mile range, representing eleven industry classifications (see Table, page 19). These businesses had total retail sales of more than \$52,000,000. A similar analysis shows that there were 75 businesses within a five mile range of downtown. These businesses had sales of more than \$60,000,000 in 2009. The core downtown area made up approximately 87% of that total. Although statistics show that most classes are very robust and demonstrate healthy surpluses, several business opportunities appear viable in the downtown area, notably in the clothing/accessories market.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Bryson City will improve its economy through an organized effort to:

- Collect data about current economic conditions and opportunities for market growth.
- Help strengthen existing businesses and recruit new ones.
- Explore ways to attract new businesses.
- Find new uses for traditional Main Street buildings.
- Develop financial incentives and capital for building rehabilitation.
- Monitor the economic performance of the downtown district.



Intersection of Everett and Main Street. Approximately 492 households are

In Brevard, NC the town established the "Retiree Resource Network" which provides local entrepreneurs with much needed direct and individualized assistance from a team of retired business experts with a wealth of knowledge. Place-based community development that draws on existing community assets, such as the skills of its retired citizens and enterprises with growth potential, is a tremendous revitalization strategy.

ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING

Assess economic conditions + opportunities for growth.

The first step in revitalization will require considerable data gathering and research about current conditions through the use of building and business inventories, consumer surveys and a retail market analysis. A preliminary survey of downtown businesses identified 95 properties in the district consisting of mostly retail shops and other similar uses. In the downtown district there is a vacancy rate of approximately ten percent. There are several resources available to assist in this effort, including the NC Department of Commerce's Community Development Division and Advantage West. The Chamber of Commerce, with more than 350 members, is a tremendous source of local data.

Strengthen and support existing businesses.

Prior to any efforts to recruit new businesses, consider offering professional development opportunities and training for downtown business owners and operators. Early success is likely to come by building a strong foundation of existing assets and encouraging these entrepreneurs to grow their businesses. As existing businesses flourish, their success will attract new businesses to locate downtown.

The Ashe County Farmers Market in West Jefferson, NC, another HandMade Small Town, was established in a temporary building near the downtown business district about 5 years ago. A partnership with the Extension Service, today it has grown to be an "anchor tenant" on Back Street, offering local crafts, produce, packaged food and locally raised meat, eggs and fish...open March through November.

Business Type	# Businesses	Retail Sales	Retail Demand	Retail Gap
Motor Vehicle and Parts Dealers	11	\$2,158,890	\$2,155,845	(\$3,045)
Furniture/Home Furnishing Stores	3	\$612,589	\$199,481	(\$413,108)
Electronics & Appliance Stores	2	\$348,378	\$266,852	(\$81,526)
Bldg/Garden Equip/Supply Stores	3	\$898,007	\$320,143	(\$577,864)
Food and Beverage Stores	6	\$25,944,437	\$1,736,193	(\$24,208,244)
Health and Personal Care Stores	2	\$3,085,211	\$432,795	(\$2,652,416)
Gasoline Stations	4	\$12,645,349	\$1,840,531	(\$10,804,818)
Clothing/Accessories Stores	2	\$266,307	\$361,672	\$95,365
Sports/Hobby/Book/Music Stores	0	\$0	\$82,646	\$82,646
General Merchandise Stores	2	\$524,049	\$854,814	\$330,765
Miscellaneous Store Retailers	6	\$722,129	\$352,469	(\$369,660)
Food Services & Drinking Places	16	\$4,870,969	\$1,292,889	(\$3,578,080)
Total	57	\$52,076,315	\$9,896,330	(\$42,179,985)

Businesses within one mile of intersection of Main and Everett.

Business Type	# Businesses	Retail Sales	Retail Demand	Retail Gap
Motor Vehicle and Parts Dealers	15	\$7,233,922	\$6,018,034	(\$1,215,888)
Furniture/Home Furnishing Stores	4	\$949,174	\$553,660	(\$395,514)
Electronics & Appliance Stores	4	\$596,130	\$729,698	\$133,568
Bldg/Garden Equip/Supply Stores	3	\$898,007	\$897,520	(\$487)
Food and Beverage Stores	7	\$25,974,076	\$4,714,792	(\$21,259,284)
Health and Personal Care Stores	2	\$3,085,211	\$1,169,288	(\$1,915,923)
Gasoline Stations	4	\$12,645,349	\$5,039,801	(\$7,605,548)
Clothing/Accessories Stores	4	\$522,361	\$984,576	\$462,215
Sports/Hobby/Book/Music Stores	0	\$0	\$222,876	\$222,876
General Merchandise Stores	3	\$2,728,076	\$2,333,772	(\$394,304)
Miscellaneous Store Retailers	10	\$1,124,137	\$971,083	(\$153,054)
Food Services & Drinking Places	19	\$5,375,479	\$3,524,241	(\$1,851,238)
Total	75	\$61,131,922	\$27,159,341	(\$33,972,581)

Businesses within five miles of intersection of Main and Everett.



Consider ways to attract new businesses.

Incentives for business recruitment such as low-interest loans, grants and technical assistance may be necessary in order for new businesses to afford to relocate into existing Everett Street or Main Street buildings, thus strengthening the retail core. Interviews and surveys from the community assessment indicated Bryson City needs of several types of new businesses including clothing and shoe stores, more restaurants, an outfitter and a health food store.

Explore new uses for existing buildings.

The number of vacant buildings in downtown is not excessive, but they are prominent and in some cases unsightly and even uninhabitable. When addressing the ten percent retail vacancy rate on Main & Everett Streets, begin by focusing on high visibility/high impact buildings. Creativity and innovative thinking, as well as substantial capital, will be required to solve some of these issues.

Develop financial incentives and capital for building rehabilitation.

In Bryson City there is already a façade improvement program that can assist property owners with costs associated with building repair and maintenance in the downtown district. In the past, awareness and interest in the program has not met expectations, however this initiative offers the community an opportunity for a high-impact starting point and possible catalyst for additional investment in downtown businesses.

Monitoring economic performance of the downtown area.

Consider setting specific measurable goals to track downtown's economic performance over time. Economic indicators may include numbers of new or closed businesses, total jobs created, sales tax revenues, property tax assessments, amount of private and public funds invested, number of visitors, rent and vacancy rates. These indicators will help measure the collective impact of this assessment's recommendations as they are implemented over the following years.

The Don Gibson Theater in Shelby, NC is a leading example of how an unoccupied eyesore of a building in the downtown district can be revitalized. After much fundraising and redevelopment work was accomplished, the theater reopened in 2009 after more than a decade,

The Yadkin Valley Craft Guild and the Town of Elkin, NC started the "Growing Entrepreneurs" apprenticeship program in 2007. In this program local artists receive education and training and assistance in starting their own heritage craft-based businesses and local art studios.

Beck McCray of smallbizsurvival.com has shown how social networking cannot only help small businesses, but can help build and strengthen rural communities. Her website is a valuable resource for small communities and small businesses that wish to tap the wide range of possibilities the Internet can make available.

The Swain Center for the Arts and local arts-related businesses (e.g., Cottage Craftsmen, Charles Heath, Pincu Pottery, Tartan Lassie and others) should meet to identify ways to create more connections among artists and increase their visibility and profitability as part of the downtown Bryson City community. The recommendations listed above are only a starting point, but reflect strategies that have worked successfully in other small towns and rural

ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING

ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION

Bryson City's economy is highly seasonal and largely dependent on the tourist trade. This means businesses have a difficult time making ends meet in the winter, while residents are forced to go outside the community to meet their work and shopping needs. A transition away from traditional primary and secondary economic activities, including manufacturing and the extraction of natural resources, has greatly impacted the growth of the service industry and knowledge-based services such as information generation, sharing and information technologies. It is unlikely that Bryson City can avoid this "New Economy," but it would be unwise to become completely dependent upon any one activity, such as tourism development, at the expense of other practical alternatives.

Reduce dependence upon seasonal economies.

Accommodations, food services, retail trade and recreation sectors provide the majority of jobs in the area, yet they are also the most susceptible to seasonal fluctuations. To help minimize the seasonal effect on the local economy, Bryson City must develop and promote a highly diverse and functional economy that is resilient to changing seasons. During the off-season, income-generating opportunities must be established for those full-time residents without full employment, so family income can be sustained until the boom times return.

Promote and support entrepreneurs and small businesses less dependent on tourism.

In order to improve off-season options for residents not fully employed, intentional actions must be taken to help offset the impacts of the seasonal economy. Recruitment of large employers is one technique, but supporting local artisans and heritage-oriented businesses can help provide the framework for a strong network of community-based economic opportunities.

Green businesses, including alternative energy and green building techniques, offer some hope for future manufacturing opportunities. Product development and manufacturing for the outdoor industry is another possibility for industrial jobs in the region. AdvantageWest, the regional economic development partnership that serves Swain County and Bryson City, has identified green building and energy efficiency, natural products and the outdoor industry as clusters of potential economic development.

Business marketing and recruitment.

Marketing should target business owners who naturally gravitate to what the general area has to offer. Bryson City can be attractive to young families and the creative class, as well as those interested in the town's rich history and culture. The Internet is an essential tool to attract young entrepreneurs and local business owners have expressed concern about the general lack of high-speed connectivity in the area, and specifically of a short supply of expertise necessary to take full advantage of social networking and web-based marketing. In order to compete in the global economy, Bryson City and Swain County need to actively advocate for better Internet connectivity.



Develop a downtown Farmers' Market.

The continued development and support of a farmers' market downtown is one promotional activity that could have an immediate impact on the economic viability of the area. Downtown farmers' markets have proven to be excellent locally controlled community assets.

TOURISM

Revisit the Heritage Development Initiative.

In 2004, as participating partners with the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area, Swain County and the Town of Bryson City produced a Heritage Development Initiative. This plan proposed \$17 million in investments to support heritage development tourism and identified many projects that would conserve and celebrate the area's unique natural, cultural, historic, recreation and agricultural resources. This plan took an integrated approach to developing infrastructure, programs and community capacity while addressing a wide range of topics including: small businesses, entrepreneurship, leadership, sustainability, downtown revitalization, and greenways. It is recommended that the plan be reviewed to determine which of the specific projects currently remain relevant and viable.

Promote Bryson City as an eco-tourism destination. Many of the visitors who are attracted to the Smoky Mountains, Nantahala Outdoor Center, Fontana Lake and Tsali locations eventually wind up in Bryson City, either by design or chance. The challenge is convincing them to spend more of their time and money in town and to view the town itself as a destination that should not be overlooked. The Swain County Chamber and Bryson City should consider building capacity by adding qualified staff to help with eco-tourism planning, economic development and recruitment.

DEVELOP BRYSON CITY'S CREATIVE ECONOMY

Artists and nonprofit cultural organizations are often overlooked by business development organizations because they tend not to speak the same language. Yet artists contribute to the local economy by renting or buying local retail space, earning revenue through sales, bringing liveliness and personality to the streets of downtowns, and providing both residents and visitors a unique and memorable experience. Bryson City and the surrounding area are home to hundreds of artists, artisans and musicians who can create and enhance community identity, help stimulate tourism attract investment, improve property values and connect people through shared cultural experiences.

Recommendations:

- Offer local artists opportunities to be paid to work on future public improvement projects such as the wayfinding signs, public benches, and the proposed Bryson Street Gateway
- Create a stronger arts presence downtown and develop strategies to help arts-related businesses be more profitable
- Conduct studio tours (perhaps in partnership with Graham County) to increase visibility of local artisans
- Start a Quilt Trails project (see recommendation under Promotion for more details)
- Offer regular, live music in public spaces throughout the downtown
- Create more connections among artists, and between artists and schools

Promotion serves the dual purpose of selling downtown Bryson City to those who are or should be involved in the revitalization process, and to advertise the offerings and services of the downtown to existing and potential markets. Internal promotion encourages downtown merchants, property owners, residents, volunteers, donors, and public bodies to become interested, excited and involved in revitalization efforts. External promotion—marketing the downtown community and its businesses and services to the local, regional, and tourist market—attracts merchants, area residents and tourists to Bryson City. The lead promotion organization for both the City and County is the Swain County Chamber of Commerce.

Recommendations:

The community needs to address four different market segments in its promotion and economic restructuring plans:

- Year-round Residents (both long-time and relocating residents),
- Seasonal Visitors (both long-term renters and people with second homes),
- Intentional Visitors (those choosing the Great Smokies experience), and
- Incidental Visitors (people visiting the nearby large attractions of the Casino in Cherokee and Nantahala Outdoor Center)

ENHANCING DOWNTOWN'S APPEARANCE

One of the primary goals of the revitalization process is to develop an image for the downtown and the community. The development of a positive image will serve to bolster the self-image of local residents; attract new residents, professionals, tourists, and retirees; serve as a catalyst to encourage investment in new and expanded businesses; and assist in the recruitment of new industry to the area.

Mobilize your assets by recruiting volunteers.

Building community capacity is at the heart of the HandMade Small Towns approach. According to John McKnight, the founder of the Asset Based Community Development Institute and a mentor for the HandMade approach, “significant community development only takes place when local community people are committed to investing themselves and their resources in the effort. This is why you can’t develop communities from the top down, or from the outside in.” A volunteer-led, asset-based approach assures that community residents and groups are at the heart of each project undertaken, doing the planning, implementing, evaluating and celebrating.



Clean, screen, green.

Communities that seek to attract new visitors, businesses and residents need to put their best foot forward. A recurring theme during the resource team's visit was cleaning up the town—whether that means picking up litter, painting a building or a sign, repairing something broken, screening something from view, or putting displays of artwork or craft in empty storefronts. The town enjoys a gorgeous setting, yet the built environment at times can detract from the natural surroundings. Bryson City is blessed to have a scenic railroad, highway and river running through the heart of the town. These three features should receive the highest priority for physical improvements during project planning and implementation.

Develop a unified signage system.

There are numerous examples of signs that are missing, difficult to read, incorrectly placed, or incomplete. It is imperative to address these issues as soon as possible, using a consistent design so people know when they see a sign of a certain size, shape, color and lettering that they will associate it with a local place of interest. It would be wonderful to use the talents of local artists to help create the signs.

A well-designed, well-coordinated navigation system is important for enhancing a tourism-based economy and promoting a local sense of place. For more detailed signage recommendations, refer to the Community Design section.

Improve the memorial benches.

A brief survey of the memorial benches around the historic courthouse revealed that few people would be drawn to sit on them because of the deteriorated condition, the rough surfaces and the growth of lichen or algae. It could be worthwhile to enlist the aid of volunteers or youth service projects through school or scouts to give all the benches in town a good scrubbing and sanding, with a fresh coat of varnish or paint.



A neglected stream running through the train company's parking lot.



Empty historic buildings on Everett Street.

BRANDING

A consistent branding campaign offers a great way to position Bryson City in the larger context of Western North Carolina. Yet, it is a concept that can help craft the way new and existing spaces are thought about in the actual town. Ed Burghard of Strengthening Brand America describes place branding as, "...the promise a community makes about the experience someone can expect and the commitment by the community's leaders and its citizens to proactively ensure that the promise and experience is realized each and every time."

Create awareness of the current branding campaign, and capitalize on it.

Creating and sustaining a brand is difficult to achieve, but a good brand is an invaluable commodity. The existing regional brand of Gateway to the Smokies offers an opportunity to piggy-back an effort to distill Bryson City's strongest qualities into a single, recognizable image. The Front Porch of the Smokies is a possible brand for the community to consider, as it conveys a relaxed and inviting image of the town. There also exists a current effort to brand Bryson City as the Base Camp to the Smokies, which capitalizes upon the wide array of outdoor recreation opportunities the region presents. No matter the angle, a branding campaign will want to capture the essence of Bryson City's three strongest attributes:

- A small, walkable town full of charm with historic buildings, relaxed feel, slower pace, and family atmosphere;
- A bonanza of outdoor recreational opportunities including: a National Park as a backyard with hiking, biking, and horse trails; the Tuckasegee River running through the town with opportunities for canoeing, kayaking, tubing, and fishing; a scenic railway line with its headquarters in town; Fontana Lake and associated fishing and boating nearby. Residents and visitors have the unbeatable opportunity to hike and bike; raft, rail, and ride; and fish, float, and boat;
- Rich, multi-cultural heritage and history with the ability to explore Cherokee, European, Appalachian traditions and influences as well as the establishment of the National Park and the building of Fontana Dam, which created the lake and flooded numerous settlements.

Develop a calendar listing all local events.

Year-round residents, seasonal residents, and visitors all have a similar question: "What is there to do this weekend?" While major holiday events are well advertised, there are literally hundreds of smaller activities that need to be publicized more broadly. While the sign at the corner of Everett and Main is a good start, more could be done. A web-based calendar should be created as a central collecting point, and all local non-profits, promoters, businesses, civic groups and churches encouraged to list their events in one place. Newspapers should be encouraged to publish the listings.

Develop a web page.

A web page should be developed to highlight Bryson City's businesses, attractions and events. The page should incorporate the community's logo, have a calendar of events, and a listing and map of the major attractions and resources. The page needs to be linked with the existing Chamber of Commerce web page and also have contact information about the Town and city services. Consider MyBrysonCity.com or BrysonCity.gov or BrysonCityNC.org as the url for the website.



Take advantage of the Great Smoky Mountains Railroad headquarters location.

The GSMR is a major presence downtown, as well as an economic engine. While it is not a good idea to rely too heavily on tourism, it is possible for downtown merchants to work more closely with the themed train events, make sure that merchants' brochures are available at the train kiosks, and expand Railfest to include historic photographic displays, storytelling and the like. It is mutually beneficial to the Railroad and town to have a vibrant, lively, beautiful community that has a wide range of activities so people want to make a return trip.



Take advantage of the opportunity of the Go Blue Ridge regional pass.

The Blue Ridge National Heritage Area has recently introduced the Go Blue Ridge Card offering discounted admission to several regional attractions, including the Great Smokey Mountain Railroad, NOC and Zipline. Local businesses and events should seek ways to promote it.

USING THE PAST TO PROMOTE THE PRESENT

A promotional program should celebrate the unique role downtown Bryson City has played in the history and development of the town, county and region. A broad-based appreciation and respect for the history of the community and the role of the natural and built environment is a necessary foundation for the implementation of a successful promotion program.

Collect and display photographs of the town's past.

As an ongoing part of the revitalization process, the Steering Committee should involve the citizens in the process of collecting photographs of the people, places and things that comprise the history of Bryson City. An appreciation of Bryson City's past will cultivate respect for the people, places and buildings that have made the community what it is. Digital technology makes it much easier to scan photos, quickly return them to the owners, retain the electronic version, and then reproduce them so they can be displayed. Photo displays can be designed for downtown, schools, library and other public venues. Consider creating a traveling display which could be used at schools, fill vacant storefronts, or fill a wooden fence around an empty lot.

Celebrate the lives of Horace Kephart and George Masa.

Pay homage to these historical figures at the Swain County Heritage Festival in May and acknowledge their crucial role in establishing the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Kephart Days, held each spring, is an important celebration that encourages literate discussions as well as period activities.

- Have live music from the time period when the struggle to establish the Park was taking place.
- Exhibit George Masa's photographs, and sponsor hikes or drives to revisit the places he photographed.
- 2012 is the 100th anniversary of the publication of *Our Southern Highlanders*. Consider ways to highlight that in advertising and historical events to attract the cultural tourist.



Celebrate Horace Kephart and George Masa at the Swain County Heritage Festival

Exhibit Cherokee and early European interaction.

Exhibits and demonstrations can educate residents and visitors about the contributions Cherokee and settlers made to this region's unique food, medicine, music, farming and crafts.

Exhibit Swain County life before electricity.

At the Swain County Heritage Festival, Horace Kephart Celebration, Chili Cook-Off and other special events, include demonstrations of one or more of the following: pottery-making with a foot-turning wheel and how to make potters' clay; basket-making; using dried gourds for birdhouses; weaving; making quilts; splitting wood; using a treadle sewing machine, woodstove, washboard and other household implements; milking a cow or goat; plowing with a mule. This will reflect the talents and resourcefulness of mountain people as well as connect people to the past. It is important to design these activities to involve children, such as making a quilt block or painting a gourd for a birdhouse. Some of these activities are already taking place during the Mountain Life Festival at the Oconaluftee Visitors Center in September, but the events could be designed in such a way so they complement each other. Have "roving ambassadors" in period dress present at events to explain the area's history and interact with visitors, especially children.



FESTIVALS AND SPECIAL EVENTS

The Chamber of Commerce website boasts a wide variety of special events and festivals, as well as recurring activities throughout the year. A common theme that emerged from resident interviews was, “we don’t need more events—we just need to liven up the ones we already have.”

Evaluate existing events.

The Steering Committee, Chamber of Commerce and community should evaluate the town’s existing festivals and events. The evaluation needs to consider the costs, benefits, and how effective these activities are in fostering the goals of the revitalization process. The community must focus on activities that produce the greatest benefits, either financial or social, for the time and money expended.

Expand activities at existing festivals.

Consult with the Arts Participation Section of the NC Arts Council for possible festival funding. This section emphasizes the development of new audiences, requiring organizers to consider how to attract primarily locally underserved or under-represented populations. For example, Bryson City may consider ways to attract a larger share of local Cherokee audience. Also consult the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area website for the Traditional Artists’ Directory that lists regional and local storytellers and traditional musicians. Documented by professional folklorists and vetted by a panel of specialists, the individuals and groups in this directory present authentic programs embodying the Folklife of the region (www.blueridgeheritage.com/traditional-artist-directory).

Design activities to include children whenever possible.

Include storytelling at all special events and festivals. Mountaineers are natural storytellers; before the advent of electricity, people talked and told stories for entertainment. This also fits in with the mountain culture of visiting extended families, and can tie in with the town’s branding campaign.

Have live music at all events.

The music jam at the public library, held every other Thursday throughout the year, draws dozens of people. The local charter school emphasizes teaching children to play musical instruments. Consider reviving the fiddling contest sponsored at one time by the Smoky Mountain Music Association. There is also a rich heritage of singing, both secular ballads and hymns, which could be another addition to an existing event.

Start an oral history project in the schools,

and include the stories in exhibits at special events as a traveling exhibition. There are people in the community who have ties to the creation and early days of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, or worked in the logging camps, or helped build Fontana dam. These are important stories and sharing them will bring pride to residents and help visitors appreciate the town, want to learn more, and therefore stay longer as well as make return visits.

29 PROMOTION

Start a “quilt trails” project.

Quilt trails are popular attractions for tourists and can encourage visitors to explore local byways that also offer attractions that lack a strong visitation. Quilt trails can bring people in proximity to working farms with produce stands, artist studios, country stores, B&Bs, recreational facilities and other sites located away from the town and main roads.

Six contiguous counties host quilt blocks, and they have been placed on barns, stores, and other buildings. The project welcomes volunteers to help with painting, story writing, installation, and other tasks that it takes to keep the project running. Each quilt block is connected by its pattern name to the history of the land, the building or the family. Documenting quilting heritage requires little explanation and tends to generate startling enthusiasm. Quilt trails will require some fundraising activities on the part of the volunteer committees or organizations that sponsor them. The WNC Quilt Trails website (www.quilttrailswnc.org) has a wealth of information that describes the history, how to sponsor your own block, driving trails, and items that can be purchased.



A historic barn in downtown Bryson City that may be a good site for a quilt block.



Example of the quilt trail in Ashe County.

Quilts are an effective way to establish the heritage of place. Quilt documentation days encourage residents to bring in family quilts that are then documented as to maker, style, pattern, materials and family stories connected to them. Quilt exhibits can be hung in a variety of settings, are colorful and dynamic and always attract large numbers of visitors. Quilt exhibits of both Bryson City and Cherokee community members could be an effective way to bridge these communities. Quilt documentation, exhibitions and a quilt trail could all be parts of the same project. Such a project would require the curatorial expertise of a folklorist or other quilt scholar. Contact the NC Arts Council for possible funding opportunities.



Capitalize on the 2013 World Freestyle Kayaking Championships. The International Canoe Federation has chosen the Nantahala River Gorge as the site of the 2013 Freestyle World Championships, solidifying the area's status as a paddling destination. The Nantahala Gorge was selected alongside other international metropolitan centers like Moscow, Prague and Toronto for events in eight other paddling disciplines. The World Championships, scheduled for September 2-8, 2013, is expected to draw up to 500 international paddlers and thousands of spectators to Western North Carolina. The Nantahala will also host a Junior World Cup Freestyle event September 8-9, 2012 as a test event for the World Championships in 2013.

The community is already seeking opportunities for tie-ins and cross-promotional events and activities leading up to these events. For example, there is an excellent practice site in the Tuckasegee by Island Park (locally known as "Devil's Dip") that could be marketed as a place to hone kayaking skills. In the past year the owners of a bicycle shop held a "summer solstice" festival and intend to make it an annual event with a band, discount sales tent, and performances by the Bryson City belly dancers. This might be an opportunity for an event that is already outdoor-focused to add a component that would be focused on the river, and at the same time draw attention to the World Championships.

Plan regular clean-up days, as well as a major community clean-up day in the Spring of 2012 to spruce things up. Involve local churches, community groups, scout troops, high school and college students in an effort to clean and plant, and then celebrate with a community picnic at the end of the day.



Spectators gathered along a riverside for the World Freestyle Kayaking Championships in Colorado.

Design plays a central role in the revitalization of Bryson City's downtown. The designs recommended in this section will help shape the aesthetic, functional, economic and social dimensions of the downtown, helping to preserve the Bryson City's past while introducing new elements to the downtown fabric. In this section, design improvements will address five key strategies, each containing a number of recommendations for implementation.

1. Prioritize the River.

The Tuckasegee River might be the greatest untapped asset Bryson City has. A concerted effort should be made to bring people close to the river. This will cultivate a sense of ownership and stewardship that can ensure the health of the river for generations to come.

2. Improve Connectivity.

Routes through the downtown area and between major destinations should be enhanced. New routes need to be established and identified between key locations. Finally, wayfinding and signage should be improved to not only assist movement within the downtown, but also to and from it.

3. Create Lively Gathering Spaces.

Existing gathering spaces should be improved to meet the needs of both locals and tourists. New spaces can help foster a broader range of activities as well as draw people to other parts of downtown and the river.

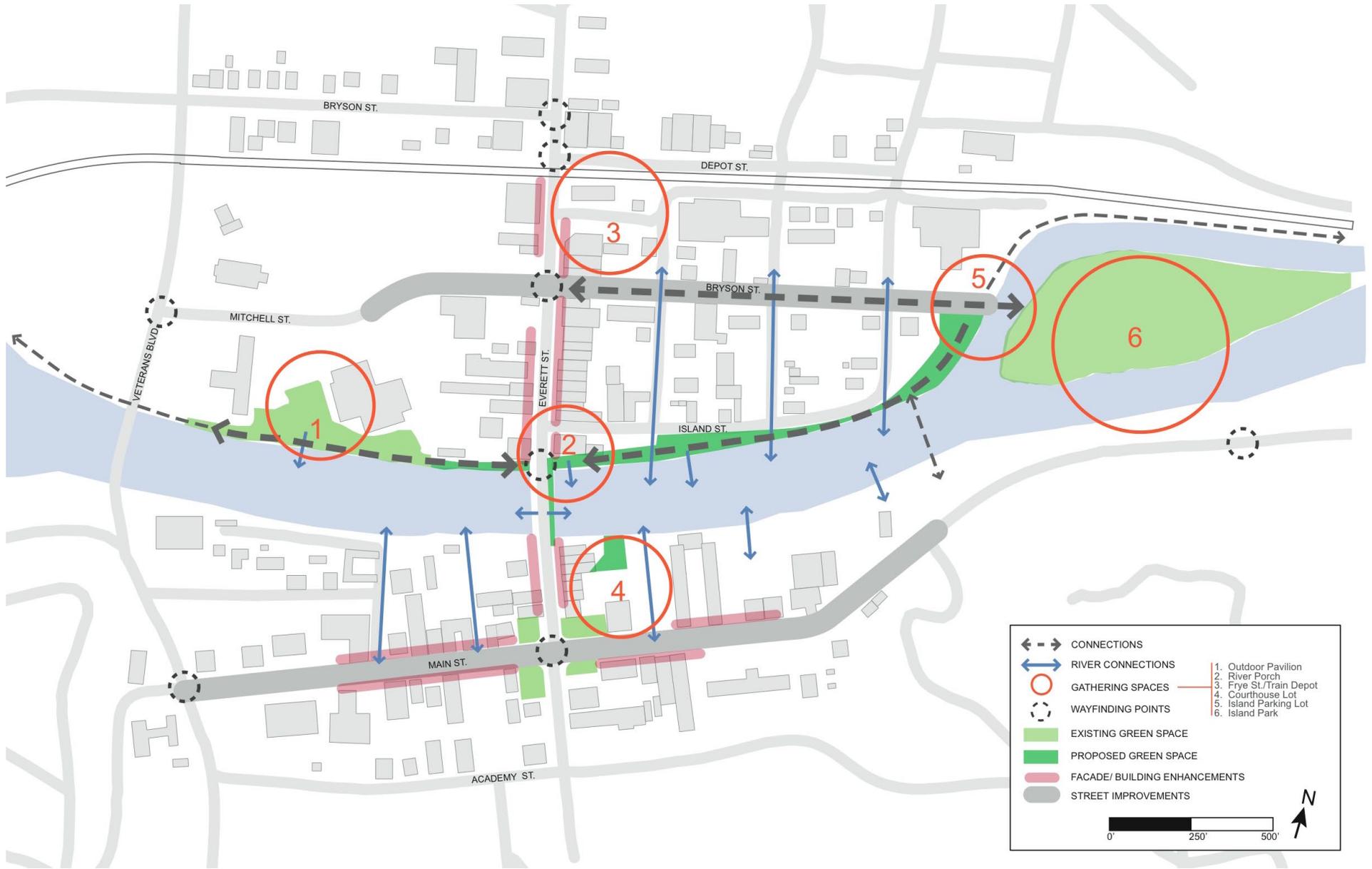
4. Structural Revitalization and Development

It is important that buildings are not left to fall into disrepair or appear abandoned. Unused buildings on Everett and Main Streets can be activated through arts and tourist promotion in window fronts, until new businesses are ready to occupy them. Partnerships with the Performing Arts Center should be expanded to promote art and events in underutilized storefronts.

5. Historic Preservation.

Preserving historic structures is a recommended economic restructuring strategy for Bryson City. The town and the surrounding area have several historically significant structures that could qualify for the National Register of Historic Places. Historic preservation also provides unique opportunities for Bryson City and Swain County to pursue collaborative projects that can be mutually beneficial.





PRIORITIZE THE RIVER

The Tuckasegee River is one of Bryson City's greatest assets and, as it weaves its way into the heart of the town, it serves as a physical reminder of the natural beauty that surrounds the city. The river makes its presence known with calming whispers of rushing water that wash away the sounds of nearby traffic. Residents and visitors can find unique sporting opportunities including kayaking, fishing, swimming, and canoeing - all within the perimeter of downtown Bryson City. As Bryson City's "original main street," the river should be a high priority to preserve this defining feature of the downtown.

Control erosion with new plantings

The Tuckasegee River is a beautiful component of Bryson City, but the river is in need of maintenance particularly in the form of erosion control. The banks of the river must be fortified to preserve it for current and future generations. Suggested plantings include coconut mat for weed reduction, river thicket for root mass and erosion control, new sycamore, silky dogwood, and willow tree succession plantings.

The Watershed Association of the Tuckasegee River (WATR) is an organization located in downtown Bryson City that focuses on improving the water quality of the river. The organization works hard to monitor the health and safety of the river. Volunteers may consider working with WATR to implement erosion control, establish new plantings and monitor the pollution levels of the river. Volunteers can also care for the river by cleaning litter from the banks and waterway.

Create a River Porch with new opportunities to interact with the water

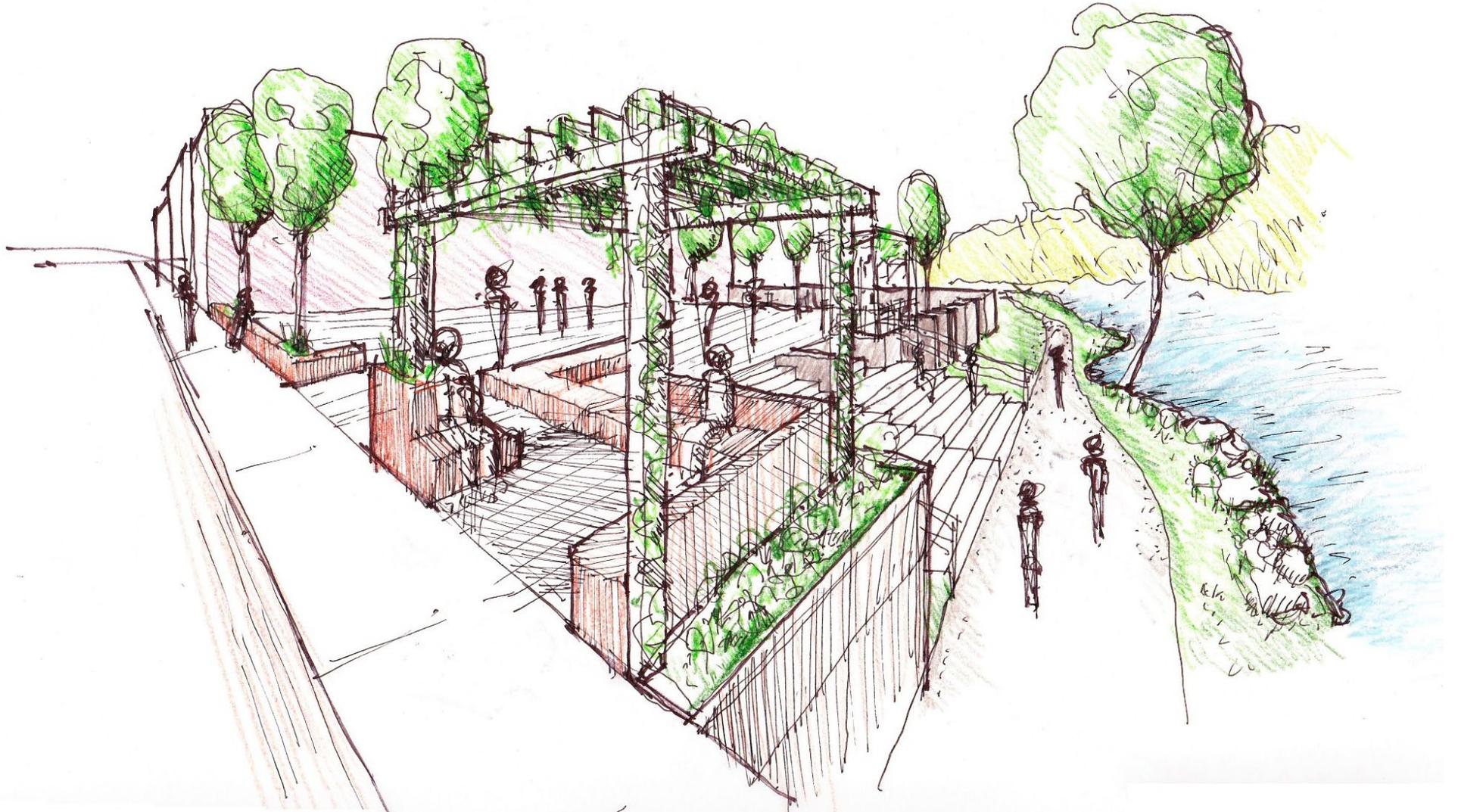
The Tuckasegee River is a prominent natural feature to downtown Bryson City, but it can be made more accessible to locals and visitors. Existing access points may be enhanced with improved signage, inviting new opportunities to experience the river.

The Town Hall parking lot adjacent to the Everett Street Bridge provides a prime opportunity to improve the river's edge and create a River Porch - a unique gathering place, which could draw visitors across the River to the Main Street side of downtown. The vacant lot on the north side of the Bridge is also a possibility, as its existing foundation will support a platform structure that can step down to the river. A River Porch can incorporate a shade structure and benches with plantings, as well as a possible area to project films (on the side of the adjacent building). If large enough, a River Porch could include a small stage or covered area for performances, as well as an interactive area for children.



Suggested river plantings (clockwise from top) buttonbush, pussy willow, redbud, and serviceberry.





The River Porch will serve as a gathering space for pedestrians, and may include a shade structure, benches, performance areas, and interactive games for children.

Encourage business owners to address the waterfront

Although the Tuckasegee River is Bryson City's "original main street," there are few businesses that address the waterfront. The river provides business owners with a unique opportunity to capitalize on the beautiful views and provide seating and access for patrons.

The connection to the River could provide an excellent way to create an identity for the Main Street businesses as the "River District." Currently the river is hidden from Main Street; buildings face away from the river and lots behind these buildings are used for parking. Access opportunities along the southern bank of the river have not been realized.

Consider developing a system of pedestrian pathways running perpendicular to Main Street in strategic locations that are easy to see from Main and terminate at a small riverfront gathering places. These connections may require a mix of public and private property, taking advantage of existing driveways, open areas and parking lots.

Build a pedestrian bridge connecting Island Park with Main Street

The River Walk will encourage people to explore Island Park, but there is only one way to access the park (across the existing bridge from Bryson Street). A connection from Island Park to Main Street would increase the visibility and promote the use of Island Park. The connection can be a pedestrian bridge from the park to the east end of Main Street, near the BBQ Wagon.

IMPROVE CONNECTIVITY

Routes and pathways that people use to move from place to place can be called connections, whether they are traveling by automobile, bicycle, walking or other mode. Connections link together various starting points and destinations, like a home that is connected to the grocery store by a street or sidewalk. In order to make great places, it is essential that connections be designed to balance efficient movement with a certain level of comfort.

Connections are not only for traveling; they can be special places themselves with things to do scattered along them. For example, bike paths provide transportation routes, but this type of connection is also a destination in and of itself. A riverside walkway provides another connection where folks can stroll for enjoyment without a destination in mind. In other words, connections can often serve as linear gathering places.

Identified locations for pedestrian pathways include:

- River Street through Methodist Church parking lot to Academy Street.
- Everett Street to Mickey's Pub (two pathways), from Main Street between the Hurley building and Jimmy Mac's and between the Hurley building and the old Clampitt Hardware store.
- Courthouse parking lot promenade.
- Rosewood Inn's swimming pool area. Create a pathway alongside the pool to open space along river. Potential link to small walkway along the river from the Courthouse to the BBQ Wagon and a future footbridge across river.
- Connection from the BBQ Wagon to the river ending at a pedestrian bridge across the river. This bridge would extend from Ramseur and connect to a future Riverwalk on north bank.



Develop a Citywide Wayfinding System

A well-designed, well-coordinated navigation system is important for enhancing a tourism-based economy and promoting a local sense of place. Current signage in Bryson City can be conflicting and confusing. Intersections appear to be cluttered with ineffective signs and generally impair a visitor's experience resulting in missed opportunities for local economic development. A modest-scaled wayfinding system and sign management plan is recommended for Bryson City. The planning and development of a wayfinding system should employ a thorough community involvement process, with a special effort made to engage local businesses.

Consider a planning process for wayfinding systems:

- Develop a mission statement and a set program goals. Conduct a stakeholder analysis and outreach process (especially NCDOT, GSMRR and local businesses).
- Determine any and all destinations to guide the wayfinding plan (parking, tourist attractions, regional sites).
- Generate a common city map used by all entities for visitor wayfinding purposes (Chamber of Commerce, GSMRR, Town Hall). To aid in visitor navigation, consider signage that divides the city into three to four zones based on geography.
- Develop a signage system plan: create specific designs of sign types based on a clearly defined system hierarchy, design a clear navigation system, and anticipate expansion with future development. Consider secondary functions beyond navigation, like historic walking tours and bike route signage.
- Identify sites for sign placement (based on sign types, navigation system and previously determined destinations).
- Develop a plan for system management and maintenance. Identify obsolete and conflicting signs and create a plan for their removal. Create a plan for preservation or adaptive reuse of “vintage” signs that add to the town's character and visual interest.

Recommended sign types and design characteristics for wayfinding system:

- Combine automobile and pedestrian systems to meet the needs of both users (keep it simple and cheap).
- Use local materials and human resources (rather than expensive and ornate systems found in larger cities).
- Incorporate public art to add color to the streetscape.



An example of conflicting and confusing signs



Old and faded, this sign is not giving visitors to Bryson City a proper welcome.

Phase 1:

- Identify key destinations and sign placements.
- Design and install the following:
 - Common map (distribute to businesses, tourists)
 - Vehicle/pedestrian destination signs
 - Parking area indicators
 - Complete/update the Chamber Caboose information center (identify future informational center location).

Phase 2:

- Design, develop and install informational/historic markers integrated into the wayfinding system (update the common map if needed).
- Update Bryson City welcome signs at all entry points.
- Work with the County to develop a wayfinding system at a larger scale using the established design standards.
- Add more destinations and expand wayfinding system (update the common map if needed).



Sample wayfinding signs. Wayfinding systems should include a mission statement outlining program goals and should outline all major destinations within the city.



Promote Bryson Street as a connection to Island Park

Bryson Street is an important pathway for encouraging movement between Everett Street and Island Park, as well as initiating revitalization in the Redevelopment District.

- Restore the sidewalk on the north edge of the street from Everett to the Island Park Bridge (eventually install sidewalks on both sides of the street).
- Consider continuing a similar streetscape pattern along Mitchell Street to the segment between Everett and Greenlee, then transitioning to a more residential configuration between Greenlee and Island Park.
- Add parallel parking to both sides of Bryson Street. Consider using a low-cost paving surface, perhaps gravel or decomposed granite.
- Add street trees to create a clear, pleasant vegetated corridor to Island Park.
- Limit curb-cuts for driveways, provide access on side streets when possible.
- Consider how adjacent lots can be subdivided and developed to continue the single-family residential housing type along Bryson Street.



A view down Bryson Street towards Island park featuring sidewalks, parking, street trees, and crosswalks.

Phase 1:

- Restore the sidewalk to the north edge of the street, and add low cost parallel parking.
- Plant street trees (first determine location to avoid conflict with future street upgrades).
- Extend Mitchell Street improvements across Everett to Greenlee.

Phase 2:

- Complete both sides of the street (sidewalk and parallel parking).
- Work with adjacent property owners to explore options for subdivision and residential development (expand development standards to determine desired type for the Redevelopment District).
- Extend improvements to “side streets” (Greenlee, Collins, and Ramseur). Use a smaller-scale cross section of sidewalks and parallel parking (where appropriate and feasible) to connect Depot Street to Island Street and the river. Consider special treatment for the segment of Greenlee between Bryson Street and Fry Street due to major pedestrian activity from GSMRR and its surrounding public open space.

Create a Greenway along the river's north bank.

A pathway along the river, called a River Walk, could be a major enhancement for Bryson City. This linear open space could connect Island Park to Everett Street and the existing County River Walk. Long-term streetscape improvements in the Redevelopment District should make safe pedestrian connections from Depot and Bryson Street to the River Walk, perhaps using design features such as textured crosswalks.

The existing walkway by the county building could connect to the proposed River Walk, guiding pedestrians along the water's edge to Island Park. A River Walk would connect key gathering points along the way, including the pavilion at the county building, river access points, the proposed park on the Everett Street bridge, a River Porch, and a bridge to Island Park. Consider a path with a pervious surface that allows for mixed traffic (bike and foot traffic) and presents a minimal intrusion to the existing landscape. The River Walk can include signage to point out important natural and manmade features.

The River Walk would serve as both a downtown park along the river and city-wide multi-use pathway extending from River Road to the 288 Boat Ramp. In the long term, this route has the potential to become an even longer trail from Bryson City to Fontana Lake, providing a safe route for cycling and other outdoor activities.



The River Walk will connect the County Building to Island Park. The path will follow the water's edge, creating opportunities to interact with the river.

Identify targeted sidewalk improvements to link places throughout city.

- Extend a sidewalk to the high school.
- Create a sidewalk from downtown/Mitchell Street to the shopping center.
- Make efforts to identify other opportunities throughout the town, focusing on missing links that enable safe and comfortable movement of pedestrians to and from downtown and surrounding neighborhoods.



Implement Main Street improvements.

Since the arrival of the train to Bryson City, the central civic activity of downtown has shifted from Main Street to Everett (the “new Main Street”). With some minor improvements, Main Street can play a unique role in Bryson City.

- Make streetscape appearance similar to Everett and Mitchell to maintain consistency on downtown’s primary streets. Improvements should extend from the BBQ Wagon to Veteran’s Boulevard.
- Develop and support the Chamber’s Memory Street tree program
- Address vacancies and gaps in development along the street.
- Complete the renovation of the Old Courthouse and its surrounding parking lot/open space.
- Preserve a vegetated corridor coming into downtown from Highway 19. This break in development helps Main Street serve as an effective gateway.
- Install and enhance crosswalks to match strategic perpendicular connections from Main Street to the river.
- Enhance the intersection of Veteran’s Boulevard and Main Street with a gateway feature. This may include reconfiguring the intersection, adding signage, landscaping and streetscaping, or installing a roundabout. Special attention should be given to the area along Main Street surrounding the Federal Building.
- Encourage residential development within and around this part of downtown. Encourage mixed use, specifically apartments above businesses, and more residential development similar to that already existing along Academy Street.
- Consider how development projects along Bennet Hill Street can enhance Main Street.
- Consider the four small plazas at the intersection of Main and Everett.

CREATE LIVELY GATHERING SPACES

Bryson City is blessed with a diverse group of residents and visitors. From locals whose families have lived and prospered in the area for generations, to newly transplanted retirees and entrepreneurs that have discovered the unique quality of life here, to tourists and outdoor enthusiasts who flock to the region's immense beauty and natural attractions. Together, these groups allow the town to flourish. Yet at times these different user groups can be at odds. Tourists cause traffic and parking problems for local residents. Transplants may inflate the real estate market, making housing unaffordable for locals. And local residents have become dependent on tourism, which has created an unbalanced economy in the off-season.

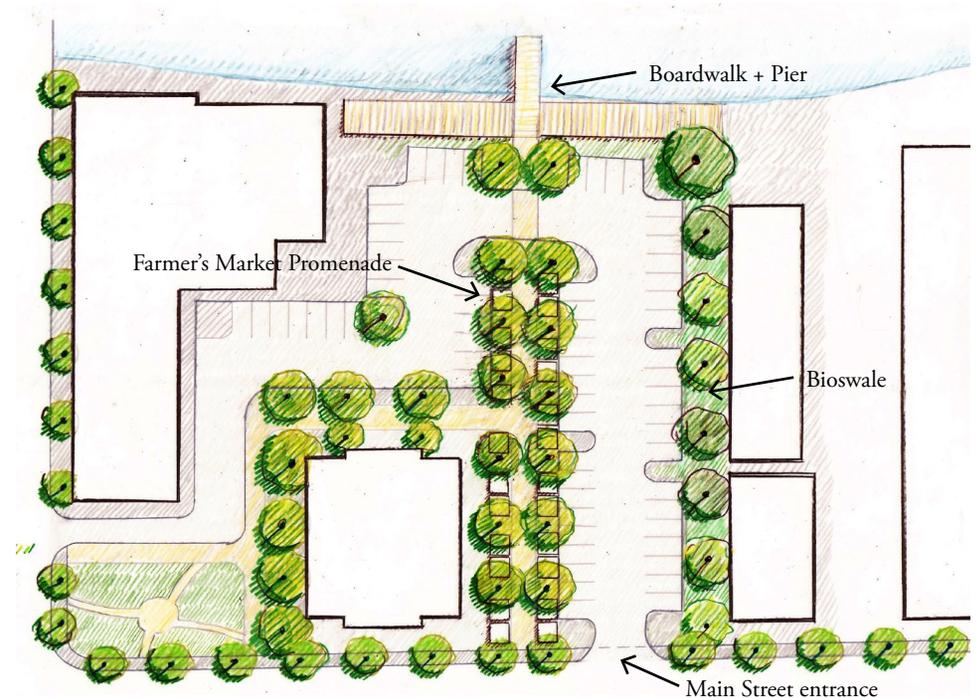
Community gathering spaces that connect and integrate a variety of users can help build relationships and trust, foster collective thought and action, spur economic complexity and growth, and heighten an overall sense of local identity. Bryson City already has gathering spaces that can be enhanced, while at the same time there are some key opportunities to build an even greater sense of community. As previously discussed, it is important to establish clear connectivity between these gathering spaces. They need to be central, walkable and accessible to many user types.

Landscape courthouse parking lot.

The new courthouse parking lot provides an excellent opportunity to create a flexible, multi-use gathering space while still meeting the town's needs for more parking spaces. Parking lots can be designed into pleasant public parks that can host a variety of events, such as festivals or a weekly farmer's market. Include tree plantings, seating, pedestrian pathways, bio-swales to treat runoff, and access to the riverfront with a boardwalk and pier.

Development phases:

1. Level and pave parking lot with gravel to allow for parking.
2. Move the weekly Farmer's Market to the parking lot as soon as possible.
3. Professionally landscape the parking lot with a pedestrian promenade and riverfront boardwalk and pier. As the Courthouse parking lot develops into a permanent home for the Farmer's Market, a boardwalk structure can be built to enhance the market's connection to the river. The boardwalk can be a simple structure level with the parking lot for easy accessibility.
4. Professionally landscape the park on corner of Everett and Main Streets and alleyway along the Cork & Bean.



Courthouse Parking Lot Landscape plan, including riverfront boardwalk.



Enhance Everett Street Bridge with a pedestrian park.

Bryson City is a pleasantly walkable city with attractions spread across the downtown area. Despite the compact size of downtown, visitors can tend to gather near the depot without exploring the rest of the city. Successful businesses have developed along Everett Street, but pedestrians seem hesitant to cross the bridge towards Main Street because it causes a break in the urban fabric. The bridge can serve as an inviting connector rather than a barrier, encouraging pedestrians to cross it and enjoy the amenities on Main Street. In order to promote this pedestrian experience, attention must shift from car traffic to foot traffic.

Some or all of the parking spaces along the bridge can be eliminated in exchange for a pedestrian friendly park area. The park could provide seating, shade and plants to promote the natural beauty and provide an opportunity for people to enjoy the river. The park would encourage pedestrians to visit merchants throughout downtown, creating more foot traffic on Main Street and discouraging more vehicular traffic. Residents who enjoyed the convenience of parking their cars on the bridge will be able to park around the corner in the new lot by the Courthouse.



Everett Street Bridge with pedestrian park providing shade and benches.



Example of an Island Park gateway structure, using local materials.

Island Park Gateway and parking lot

Island Park is a beautiful gathering place, but it is hidden away in the far corner of the city with limited visibility and foot traffic. A gateway should be built at the head of the bridge to Island Park to increase visibility and direct people to the park.

The gateway can be a fairly small-scale endeavor, built with a minimal budget and perhaps using volunteer labor. A rough sketch shows one possible design, but the project could serve as an opportunity for collaboration with local artists (possibly inviting a design competition). The gateway may incorporate an information and display area, which should be visible from Everett Street.

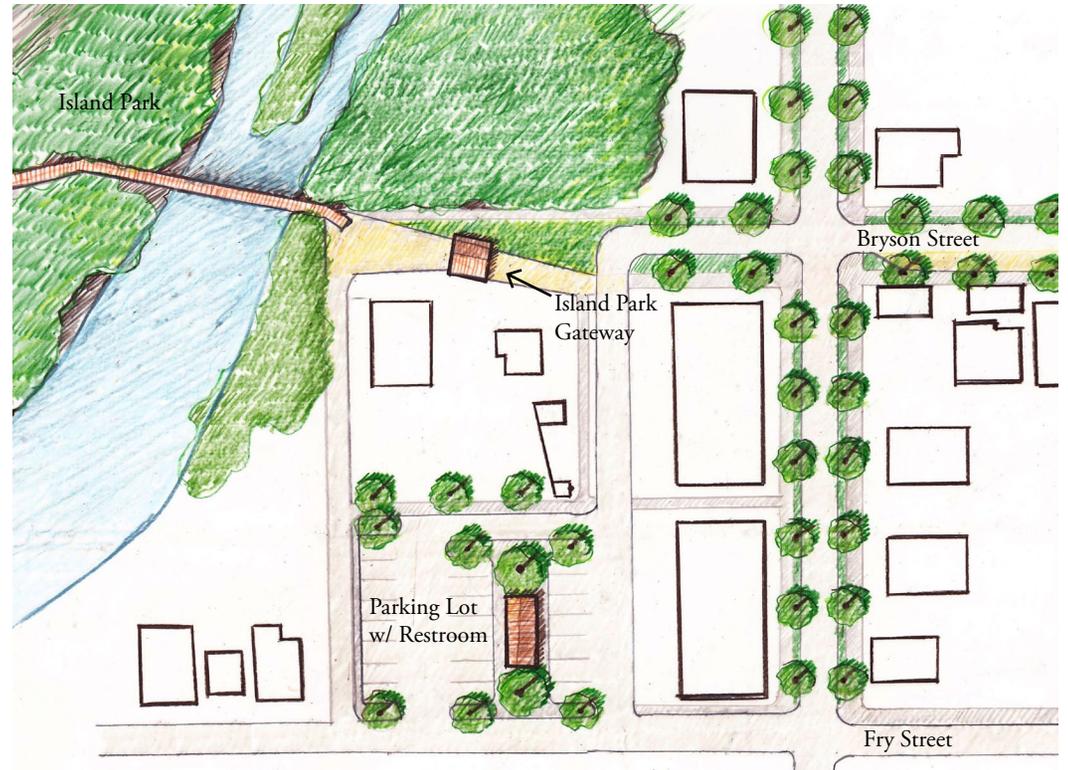
Island Park Parking Lot

Recommendations:

- Provide vehicular and pedestrian access to Island Park bridgehead by creating a small parking lot, formalizing on-street parking and adding a wide sidewalk.
- Town officials may consider negotiating with property owner for redevelopment partnership.
- Any improvement to this area should preserve the integrity of Island Park; attempt to preserve the industrial grain silo as a landscape element; consider surrounding residential land uses when increasing activity; serve to revitalize the surrounding district; and use a gateway feature to attract users from Everett Street.

Various alternatives and development phases:

1. Small parking lot at corner of Ramseur and Bryson Street
 - One entry on Bryson, one on Ramseur
 - Wide sidewalk from parking lot to Island Park Bridge
 - Possible cleanup around bridgehead; create an entry with information, waste receptacle and benches
 - Street segment alternatives: keep open and simple, add on-street parking around the block, close street starting at Bryson (residents to use rear access along RR tracks).
2. Large parking lot (1/2-3/4 block) along full length of Ramseur
 - 2 entries/exits on Ramseur (none on Bryson)
 - Demolish large metal warehouse
 - Add large parking area and/or medium density housing
 - Preserve existing two homes on SE corner
 - Street segment alternatives: same as above.
3. Complete redevelopment of block/lot for parking and housing.



Island Park site plan with parking

Program more events at the County Administration outdoor pavilion

Outdoor pavilions are wonderful assets to the community. The streetscape improvements to Mitchell Street can create an inviting pathway to the park. Bryson City residents expressed the need for more live music and enhanced existing outdoor festivals.

Continue existing plans for expansion of library

The public library is already a strong gathering space in the community. Ensure that the landscape and architectural design of the new library incorporates indoor and outdoor spaces for gathering.

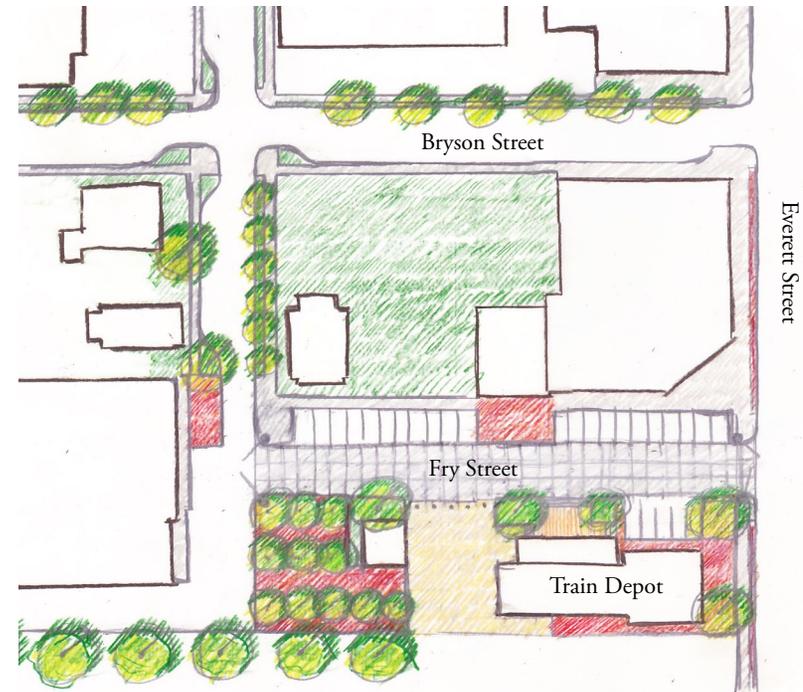
Year-round recreation center

Both youth and adult residents conveyed a strong need for a recreation facility that can be used year-round. Of particular importance are activities for teenagers.

Improve Community Event Space Near the Train Depot

The area surrounding the Depot offers opportunities for public and private investment that could benefit surrounding businesses. In addition, design improvements can encourage visitors to explore other parts of the town, while increasing pedestrian safety, decreasing demand for parking, and enhancing Bryson City's existing amenities.

- Consider opportunities to leverage train revenue to other parts of community in exchange for public space improvements.
- Create a flexible “Festival Street” on the segment Fry Street from Everett to Greenlee that will allow for easy street closure during events.
- Design closure devices to function as street furniture (e.g., swinging gate that doubles as a bench).
- Change existing street texture, which can serve as traffic calming device.
- Preserve existing parking, add more by closing curb cut to grass parking lot.
- Consider a redesign of the Depot open space to address surrounding businesses and improve the train boarding/unloading process. Consider a more “open” form that integrates the surrounding streets into the design. Develop a new landscape plan with large shade trees and seating for train patrons and the general public.
- Create a civic presence within the open area fronting Everett, including the addition of street trees and seating. Expand this area to the Fry Street right-of-way. Foster a direct relationship with this space and areas across and along Everett Street.
- Improve the sidewalk on Everett crossing Fry and the railroad tracks, creating a smooth, comfortable and safe connection to Depot Street.
- Allow for the future expansion of the Depot shelter.
- Treat Greenlee as a gateway to Bryson Street, Island Park and the future River Walk.



Improved Bryson City Event Space concept drawing

Phase 1:

- Change texture of Fry Street and install swinging gates.
- Complete sidewalk along south edge of Fry Street; close curb-cut to grassy lot (add two parking spaces).
- Expand front porch of Depot, add sidewalk across RR tracks.
- Make improvements to Fry Street north of Greenlee.

Phase 2:

- Complete redesign and redevelopment of depot open space to address Fry Street as an urban plaza (Bryson City Square)

STRUCTURAL REVITALIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT

There are a number smaller scale structures that could be designed and built with minimal effort and resources. These immediate projects offer the possibility to create visible and tangible projects, build affordable structures, and involve a range of people in both the design and building phases. Focus on enhancing and improving key buildings and storefronts, as well as building new structures that will support and foster a range of activities.

Implement development standards (currently under consideration)

Bryson City is currently creating a Development Standards document that should be implemented as soon as possible.

Fill empty/underutilized storefronts

There are several opportunities in downtown to bring life to empty storefronts. The Performing Arts Center (as well as local artists) should work with building owners to promote upcoming events and display art related to history, wayfinding, culture, and crafts.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

The goal of historic preservation, or the ongoing preservation of the historic architecture and landscapes of a community, is first and foremost to maintain a unique sense of place for local residents. Visitors will sense this genuine feel and will be drawn to the town's unique character. Numerous studies have shown that one of the main activities of tourists is to see historic places.

Incorporating historic preservation as a main goal of future development plans for the town is good design, helps promote the town, and is good for growing the economy. As buildings are renovated, this creates construction jobs, draws new entrepreneurs and businesses, and creates additional employment for local residents. Upper stories of buildings can be renovated to include offices, artist studios and residences, creating a more stable tax base in the downtown.

In our community conversations, the importance of maintaining downtown, boosting local businesses, and keeping the authenticity of important historic places was expressed over and over. With this in mind, the following are some specific steps that Bryson City, and in some cases in conjunction with Swain County, can take to further the goals of historic preservation.

Building inventories and assessments are needed to inform the community about the condition of the area's building stock and identify structures in need of rehabilitation, which is sometimes a complex and costly endeavor. The community needs to prepare for these big projects and get them underway. Besides base-line data gathering and long term goal-setting, preserving the historic character is important because it will help establish a context for future development and redevelopment.



Pursue a Downtown Commercial National Register Historic District

The National Register of Historic Places is a listing of historic buildings and sites kept by the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, which serves to document the architecture and the history of a building or district within the context of its local history. Listing of a building or district on the National Register places no restrictions on the property as far as renovation is concerned. A listing can convey many benefits to a community, as noted below. However, there are some optional funding sources and financial tools for the renovation of historic properties where specific design guidelines will be specified. When this is the case, the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation must be closely followed (www.hpo.ncdcr.gov/standard.htm). There is no State register, but the first step in listing a property is to apply to have it placed on a study list, which indicates it is eligible for listing. The next step is to prepare a more detailed National Register nomination form.

Preliminary boundaries of a commercial district on Everett and Main Streets are included at the end of this section. Previous planning studies have outlined larger districts, but since that time some modern changes have taken place on some of the buildings and new modern construction has infilled some vacant lots. A historic district must be a contiguous grouping of properties that are at least fifty years old and have undergone minimal architectural changes. National Register listing does not place any restrictions on property owners. It serves to document the history and architecture of the town within its historic context. The advantage, within a commercial district such as Bryson City's, is that owners would be eligible to pursue investment tax credits if they are substantially rehabilitating their buildings, inside and out. If an owner chooses to use this program, there are some design guidelines—The Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation—that are attached to the tax credits and will need to be followed. One of the main benefits of listing on the National Register is that it serves as an honor for the community and is a promotional tool to attract visitors.

Boundaries as shown here are preliminary, developed in conjunction with staff from the Department of Cultural Resources, Archives & History Division. The first step would be to pursue a study list to determine exact boundaries and eligibility since this has changed from the 1999 recommendations, and then, once approved, to proceed with a full National Register designation report.

Pursue a Motor Hotel National Register Historic District

Just to the east of the proposed downtown historic district is a small grouping of ca. 1960s motor courts. These have great significance to the history and development of Bryson City in more modern times, in a different context than the older commercial district noted above, and are good examples of this type of architecture. The boundary of this area is also noted at the end of this section. The first step would be to pursue a study list application to determine eligibility for listing on the National Register.



Historic 1940s photograph of the Miagene Motor Court in downtown Bryson City.

Pursue Individual Listing of Properties on the National Register

There are three properties outside of the above-mentioned districts that could be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

These properties are mapped at the end of this section. These include:

- **The Heritage Quilt/Tuckasegee Mill on Black Hill Road.** This ca. 1946 mill building, with a ca. 1960 addition, is just outside the city limits, but very accessible to the downtown. A study list application should be done for this property, as noted above, with the goal of listing on the National Register. This opens up the possibility for this 117,000 square foot building to be rehabilitated for multiple uses that the community needs and desires such as a vocational education center, a library, artist studios, and additional community space. Investment and mill tax credits could be used for this building, making its rehabilitation more appealing to one or more investors. Local organizations can help to find tenants and work with those businesses, schools, or other entities for ongoing sustainability.
- **The Railroad Depot.** Preliminary study of the depot would indicate that it is eligible for listing on the National Register. The first step here is also preparation of a study list application and close coordination with the Great Smoky Mountains Railroad, noting that it could be a promotional tool for that organization.
- **Island Park Historic Landscape.** More detailed research should be conducted into the history of Island Park, its relation to the Civilian Conservation Corps, and the possibility that it might be eligible for listing on the National Register as a historic landscape.

Continue Existing Façade Program With Some Modifications

To date, only two business owners have taken advantage of the Bryson City's existing façade program. It is currently set up as a low interest loan program, and it is recommended to change this to a grant program or no-interest loan program if it is desired to revolve the money back into the fund. It is also important to attach some design guidelines to the program, so there is some monitoring of the work that takes place. The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation are a good place to start for historic properties.

At present, these are somewhat in conflict with Bryson City's new development standards. If possible, new storefront standards should emphasize retention of original architectural features, rather than replacement with large expanses of glass. Existing massing and setback standards in keeping with a historic district. In particular, it is important to maintain the genuine character of downtown buildings so that the sense of place that is uniquely Bryson City's continues into the future. It is quite often less costly and in keeping with the Secretary's Standards that existing historic materials be retained and renovated rather than replaced. At the end of this section are some sample façade sketches, keeping in mind that often the simplest renovation work is also the least costly for the owner.



Continue County Courthouse Renovations

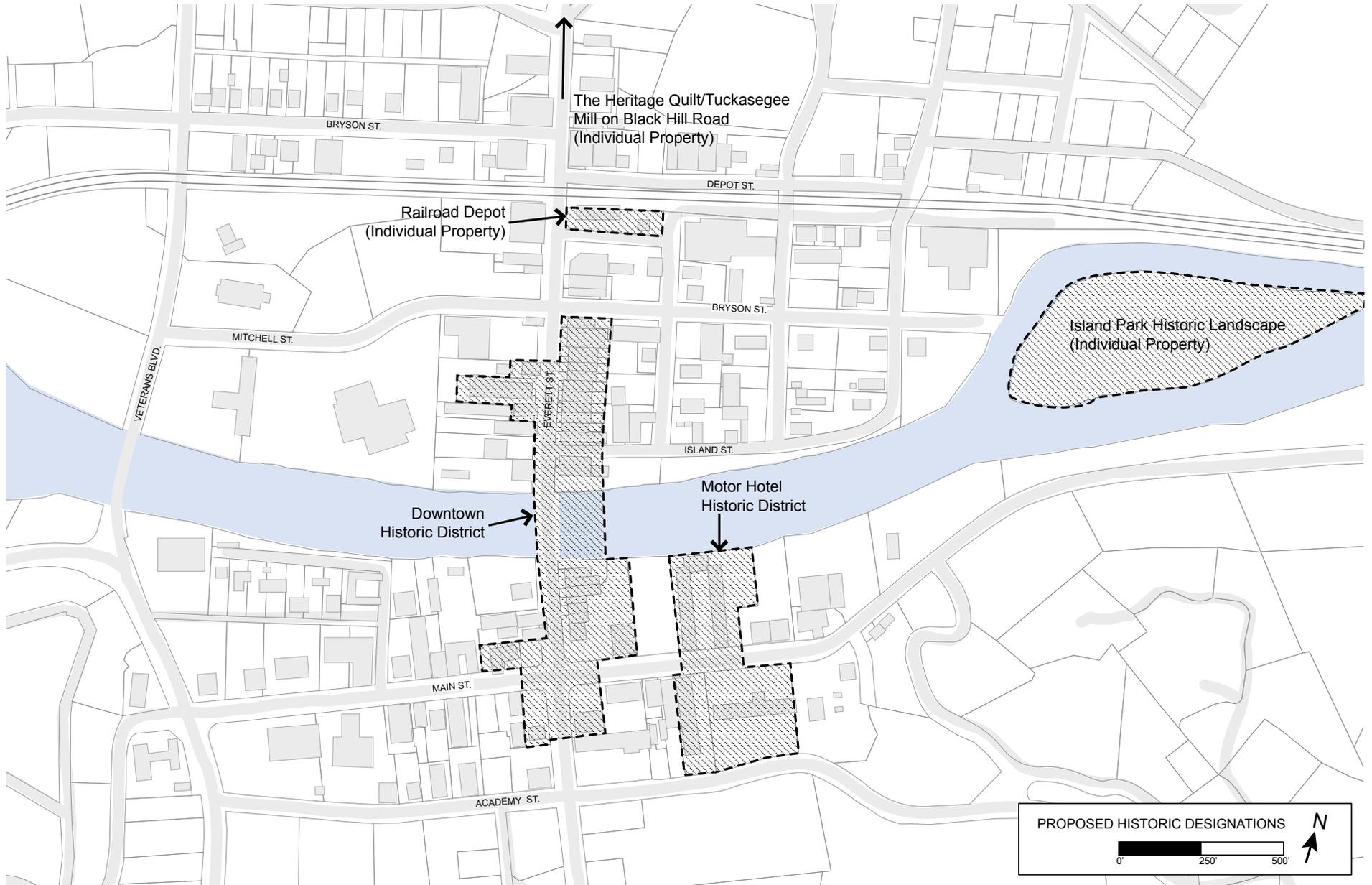
It is important to resolve any structural concerns with the second floor of the courthouse and continue with renovation plans. The first floor could have multiple uses, and the second floor courtroom space could be used as a community gathering space with museum rooms located in the small anterooms surrounding the main space. The first floor proposed use as a welcome center for the Park will draw visitors to this important downtown landmark. It is recommended to work closely with a preservation architect and the technical preservation staff at Archives & History so that historic materials are maintained while new uses are developed.

Pursue Additional Architectural Survey of the Town

Some of the properties noted above have been previously surveyed through the Department of Cultural Resources Archives & History Division. However, there are likely additional properties or potential historic districts that may be eligible for National Register listing and have not been noted here. It is recommended that a full architectural survey of the town be conducted to determine this potential. Certified Local Government grants are often used for this purpose.



Before and after views of The Bartlett Building, showing a few simple facade improvements



Proposed Historic Designations Map



The Bryson City Team was a collaboration between Hand Made in America and the Division of Community Assistance, the Department of Cultural Affairs, the Conservation Fund and Asheville Design Center. The members included:

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HandMade worked with the Town Planning Board to assemble a Steering Committee that could reflect the aspirations and needs of that community. The committee included:

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