

July 2019

Downtown Robbinsville Economic Revitalization Strategy



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Downtown Robbinsville Economic Revitalization Strategy

Prepared for Downtown Robbinsville and REVVED UP:
Robbinsville Envisioning Vital, Vibrant Economic Development and Urban Prosperity

Main Street in Robbinsville - Revitalization Strategy Planning in Context

This strategic planning process was undertaken to provide some additional direction and tools to the REVVED UP team working diligently on projects to improve Main Street in Robbinsville and give it a new lease on life. There are aspirations to one day become a NC Main Street community. Until that happens local leaders can continue to use ideas from several successful downtown revitalization efforts and establish a structure for eventual program application.

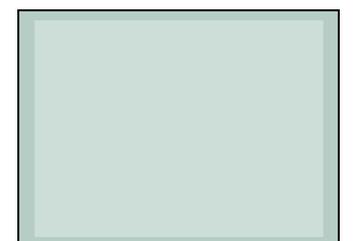
Main Street America™ approaches revitalization with a Four-Point Approach™:

- A Structure to lead, assemble, coordinate and develop cooperation amongst the many interested parties in a downtown—property owners, business owners, town government, citizens of the surrounding community and visitors. (Organization)
- Marketing/Events includes marketing a downtown district’s defining assets, communicating unique features through storytelling and supporting a “buy local” experience. (Promotion)
- Attractive and functional place— includes creating an inviting, inclusive atmosphere, celebrating historic character and fostering accessible, people-centered public spaces--for pedestrians, shoppers, visitors, cars and residents seeking a pleasant place to sit, stroll, window shop, run errands, unwind, hang out.. (Design)
- Economic viability, business climate and sustainability of the downtown as a place of commerce including building a diverse commercial base, catalyzing smart new investment and cultivating a strong entrepreneurship system. (Economic Vitality)

This strategy looks most closely at the tools and processes for economic viability as can be applied and measured by a local committee undertaking downtown revitalization work. This planning process did not seek to address the other aspects of a full Main Street America™ revitalization effort.

That said--REVVED UP is already providing the structure and leadership under the coordination of Michelle Shilet from the Church Mouse, now GREAT, and local builder/designer John Colwell. This active group is in process of incorporation and application as a 501 (c)3 charitable non-profit organization.

Prepared with assistance from:



REVVED UP has also already identified the need for many clean-up, spruce up projects. General beautification and repair of the rock wall was identified as a critical project during the Governor’s Downtown Strong program visit. Plans are being developed for new public spaces (stone façade plaza and the proposed pavilion) and features like the otter fountain. New Welcome signage is in process of implementation with assistance from the Garden Club providing unique plantings of significant local plants.

History and authenticity are expressed in several additional projects already in the works. A survey of historical resources has just been completed by State Historic Preservation staff and REVVED UP is working with Town leadership to create a historic district using the boundaries identified. The mural funded for the back of the VFW building that faces the busy by-pass below will honor the Beloved Women from the local Cherokee community. Programming for that same building and the newly created garden is proposed as training in food preservation traditions including food fermentation, cider making and vinegar. A group working in concert with REVVED UP on the preservation of the old Snider rock building is planning a local history museum in part of the redeveloped structure. The Downtown Strong program has made about \$7,000 available to Robbinsville for façade improvements to four properties along the Main Street. Plans for the new Junaluska Museum are being shared and coordinated with REVVED UP by members from the Eastern Band Office of Cultural Affairs.

- Role of the Economic Revitalization Committee of REVVED-UP
- Develop the long-term economic strategies for downtown’s evolution
 - Reposition downtown in the marketplace and promote it
 - Stabilize and improve the value of downtown real estate
 - Study local market conditions, identify opportunities, develop strategies
 - Find new or better uses for underutilized/vacant buildings
 - Help existing merchants to find ways to better meet customer needs and expand into market opportunities
 - Recruit new businesses to complement/build downtown activity
 - Develop incentive programs to encourage investment

Participants

During the process many local people participated in the various exercises including:

- Michelle Shiplet – Graham Church Mouse Ministries and REVVED UP
- Colby Lovin and Rachel Kline - Robbinsville High School Student Council
- Brian Johnson – Town Council, Travel and Tourism for Robbinsville
- John and Mila Colwell – Main Street property owners and developer
- Daniel Allison – Graham County Travel and Tourism
- Nick and Bonnie Nichols with Graham County Historical Association
- Anne Hager – Graham Church Mouse Board and REVVED UP
- TJ Holland – EBCI Ministry of Culture
- Mary Griffin – Graham County Library
- Sophia Paulos – Graham County Economic Development
- Steve Hooper – Robbinsville Mayor
- Rick Davis – GREAT community organization
- Bill Young – Phillips Motel
- Mark Ware - entrepreneur

Strategic Planning Process

The Department of Commerce Rural Development/Main Street and Rural Planning process for working with rural communities is based on using the unique local assets as the sustainable foundation for a local economy. The process used for this project started with what assets the community and county has, review of existing studies and implementation progress made, what conditions are at present and then moved toward identifying an appropriate role for the community as it serves the local residents and a greater region. At the end work was started on a three to five-year work plan for development of the economic position identified.

The group of volunteers met for two hours for four monthly meetings between January and June 2019 to explore aspects of Robbinsville's downtown viability. Notes from the meetings are in the appendix. The exercises included:

- Establishing boundaries for initial work
- Asset Mapping – defining all the many assets (natural, cultural, built, human, social, government...)
- Current activity on Main Street
- Economic drivers for downtown
- SWOT
- Vision/Economic Positioning
- Market Analysis for retail opportunities
- Work Planning

The April meeting was postponed for the Governor's Downtown Strong planning exercise with many of the same people plus County Manager, Becky Garland and County Commissioner Connie Orr. Prior to that meeting the Governor visited Robbinsville and Michelle Shiplet shared some of REVVED UP's plans.



Notes from the meetings with the results of the exercises are attached as appendices at the end of this report. It is suggested that the group revisit the asset list, SWOT analysis and other results as they develop and implement additional projects. These can be a source of ideas for future work.

Specific Goal/Purpose of the planning exercise

There are two pieces to this exercise that should help Robbinsville in its efforts to not only revitalize but also possibly become a NC Main Street community:

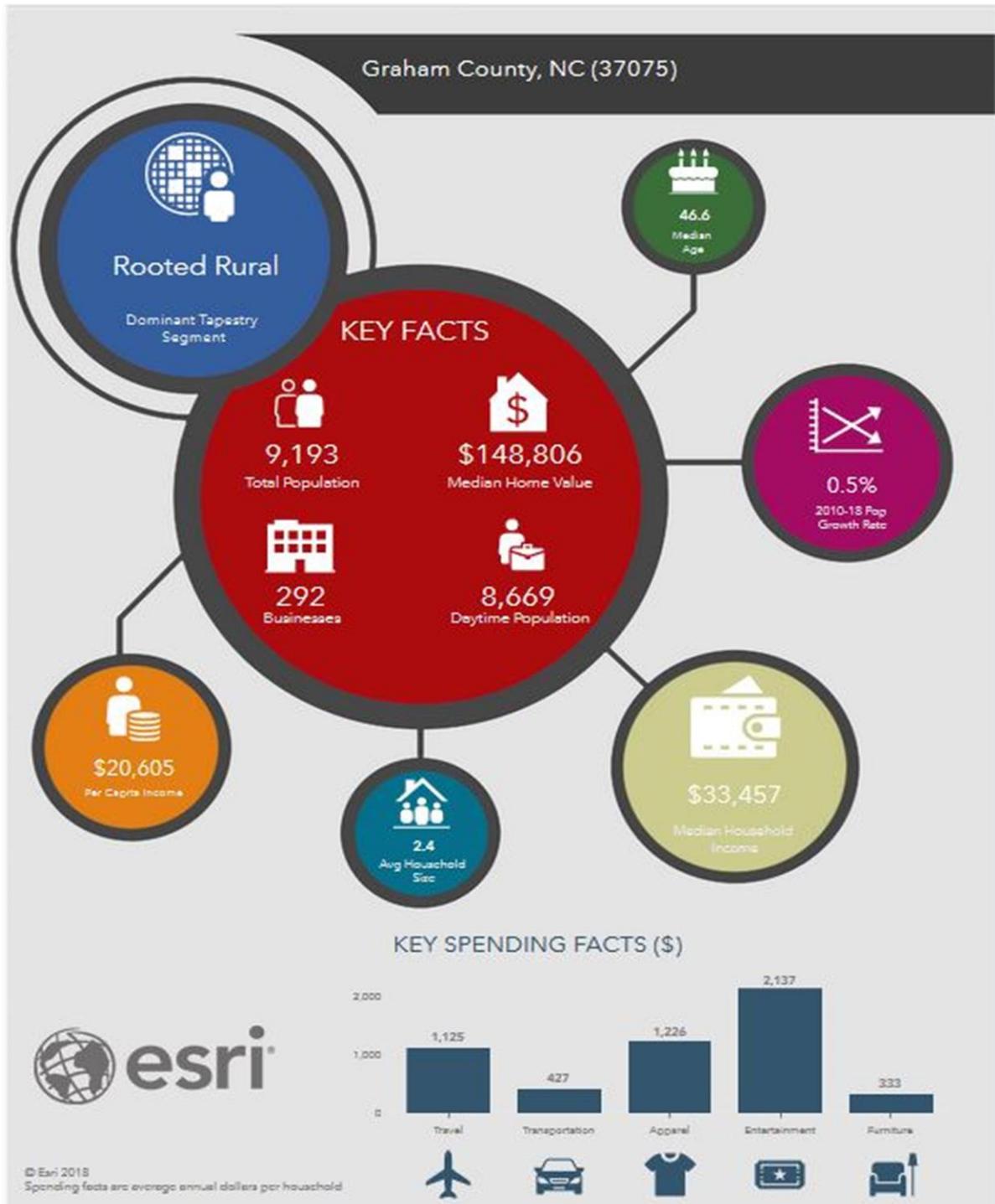
- 1) Identify a unique economic niche for downtown Robbinsville in the region that will help all people working to improve downtown to move toward a shared and understood vision.
- 2) Create, understand and utilize an accounting of what downtown Robbinsville has and what it will become. This can be a critical tool for justifying investment into revitalization as well as demonstrating progress even when it may not feel like progress is being made. Such tools help to focus efforts to recruit investment and understand the local conditions for such investment.

Understanding the setting: Graham County Economic Conditions

In 2012 GREAT (Graham Revitalization Economic Action Team) completed the *Reimagining Robbinsville* study. This has been the guiding vision for the last seven years. As an initial exercise, the team reviewed the recommendations and noted whether they had been completed, were in process, not started or no longer relevant. The priorities included:

Promote Tourism; Develop an interconnected System of Parks & Green Spaces; Revitalize Downtown; Improve the Appearance and Design of the Bypass; Promote Local Economic Development and; Initiate Community Dialogue on sensitive Issues (Corridor K, Alcohol, Zoning, etc.) Several of the priorities have made it back into the work plan developed during this process.

For a bit of context, here is a look at Graham County by the numbers:



ESRI 2018/19	Per Capita Income	Median household Income	Median Home Value	Median Age	Average Household Size	Popula tion Growth	Key Spending				
							Travel	Transport ation	Apparel	Entertain ment	Furniture
Graham County	\$ 20,605	\$ 33,457	\$ 148,806	46.6	2.4	0.50%	\$ 1,125	\$ 427	\$ 1,226	\$ 2,137	\$ 333
North Carolina	\$ 30,207	\$ 54,138	\$ 188,612	38.9	2.5	1.20%	\$ 1,910	\$ 733	\$ 1,902	\$ 2,936	\$ 539

Robbinsville

Downtown Robbinsville is not a very big place in either area or population. For the purposes of this strategy we must look beyond the immediate Main Street boundaries drawn by the team to more generally consider the physical conditions, collection of buildings and assets. In the chart below Robbinsville residents present some very stark differences with Graham County at large. Robbinsville housing is primarily rental, poverty rate is 150% higher, residents are younger with less education and fewer subscribe to broadband.

2017 Am Comm Survey	Robbinsville	Graham County	North Carolina
Population (2018 est.)	650	8,484	10,383,620
Median Household Income	21,250	36,030	50,320
% Owner-occupied housing	37.8	81.8	65
% Persons in Poverty	26.5	18.1	14.7
Median Age	40.6	45	38.4
% High School Diploma or higher	70.7	81.8	86.9
% Households w broadband	46.8	49	75.8

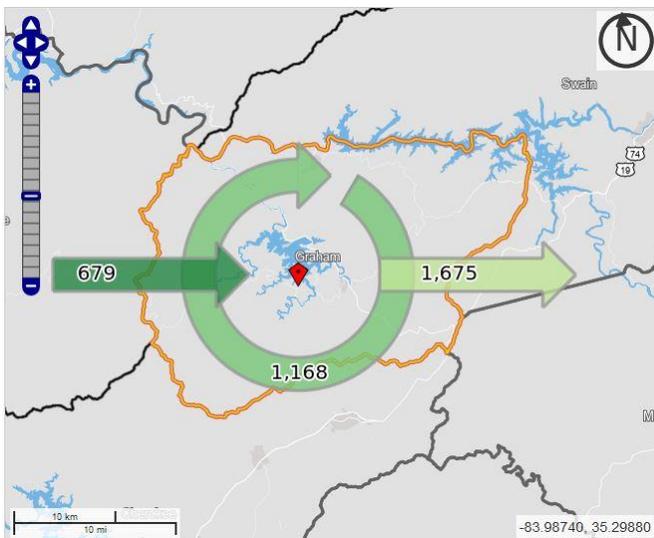
A population of only about 650 people does not represent the buying power needed to support the stores and services desired or necessary for a convenient lifestyle. While some may lament that part-time residents distort the cost of a home in Graham County, their investments and expenditures are critical to the property tax base and creation of an economy-of-scale to keep and expand the businesses that provide those critical goods and services in Robbinsville. Downtown remains the primary location for goods and services in Graham County.

From whence the Local Incomes?

These charts and diagrams show where local people are working and where their income is coming from. Of the list of largest employers, the Graham County government and Ingles Markets are within walking distance of Main Street. The Graham County Schools are not far away and connected by greenway. Hosting such employers in downtown provides the opportunity for convenient spending by workers—especially shopping and dining activity as well as putting pedestrians on the street for vitality and safety.

Graham County Top Employers 2018

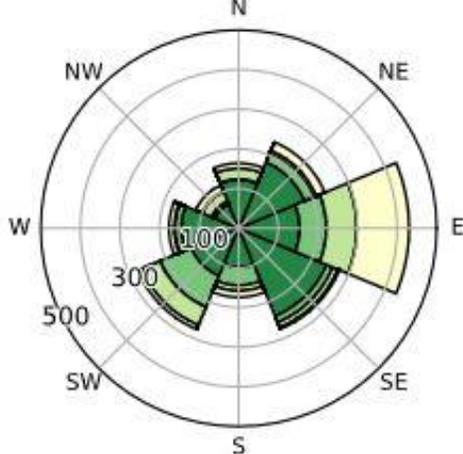
Company	Industry	Employment Range
Graham County Schools	Education & Health Services	250 - 499
Graham County	Public Administration	100 - 249
Graham County Land Company LLC	Construction	100 - 249
Fontana Village Inc.	Leisure & Hospitality	100 - 249
Crisp and Crisp Inc.	Construction	50 - 99
Ingles Markets, Inc.	Trade, Transportation & Utilities	50 - 99
Principle Long Term Care, Inc.	Education & Health Services	50 - 99
Lovin Equipment and Sales, Inc.	Trade, Transportation & Utilities	50 - 99
Sawyers Home Care	Education & Health Services	50 - 99



The employer listing above reminds us that many people—especially those working in the offices downtown—are engaged in white-collar work. They may have slightly higher incomes and education levels. They are a target market for new downtown businesses.

The diagrams to the left and below illustrate commuting patterns into and out of the County. There are 679 people who earn income in Graham County but may take that money home--out of the county—to spend it. However, 1,675 people are generating their income elsewhere and bringing it home, at least partially, to spend in Graham County.

Job Counts by Distance/Direction in 2015
All Workers



The chart below suggests by distance and direction in which other communities residents' incomes may be spent.

Jobs by Distance - Work Census Block to Home
Census Block

	2015	
	Count	Share
Total All Jobs	1,847	100.0%
Less than 10 miles	1,136	61.5%
10 to 24 miles	264	14.3%
25 to 50 miles	218	11.8%
Greater than 50 miles	229	12.4%

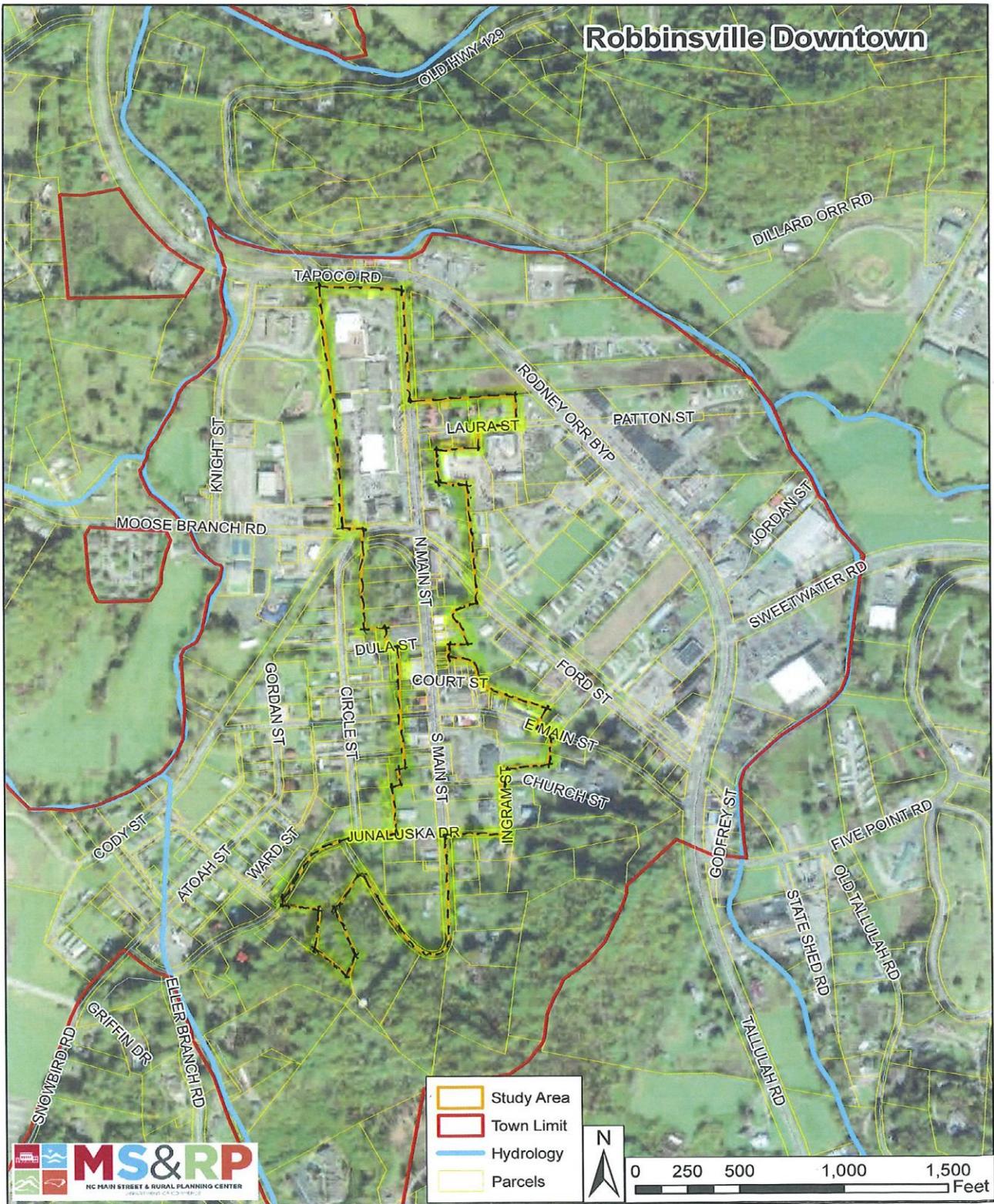
Defining Main Street within Downtown

Discussion started with possible boundaries for the planning work. It was noted that outsiders consider the Rodney Orr Bypass to be the main street and downtown. It requires some familiarity to find the actual Main Street on the top of the ridge. There was a decision to focus the initial work to a core area and thus consensus included Main Street from the Phillips Motel to the S Main Street loop beyond Ghormley Street/Junaluska Drive. After much discussion the area was set at one lot wide on either side of Main Street but with some additional allowance at intersections with Laura, Court, East Main Street, Church, a bit down Ford, and Ghormley Streets to include the Junaluska museum site.

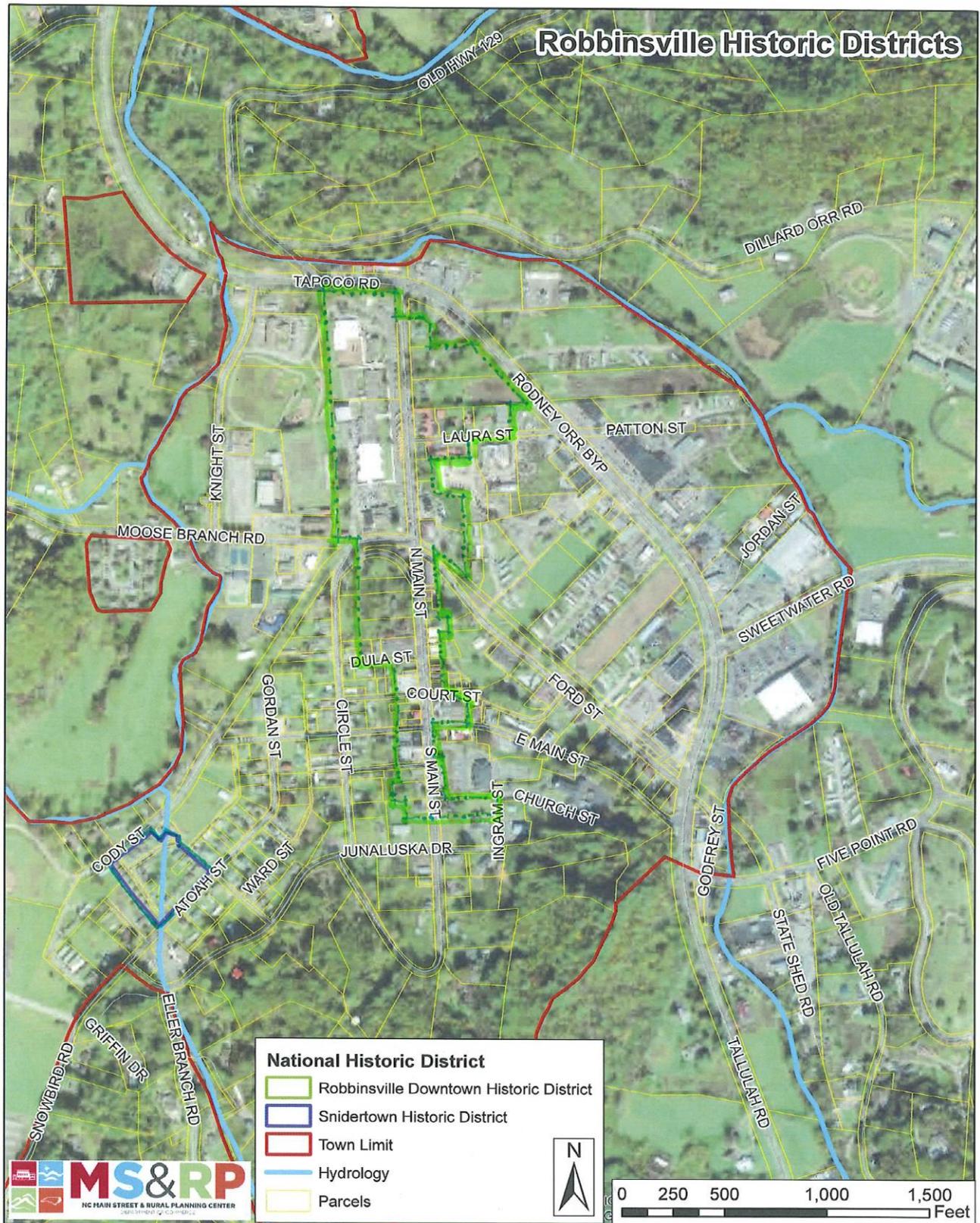
The two maps that follow show first the primary Main Street study and focus area for this work. The second map is the result of a historic inventory that took place during this planning process. The State Historic Preservation Office identified two potential areas for listing as Historic districts. If adopted by the Robbinsville Board of Aldermen, the Downtown Historic District could be nominated for listing. If the listing is successful, property owners would become eligible for tax credits on major renovations to their structures. This is important in communities that cannot afford to otherwise incent redevelopment and builds pride in the buildings that were so lovingly constructed earlier in Robbinsville's history.

Recognizing the value of a community's history, as evidenced by the unique buildings along Main Street, is one of the founding tenets of the National Main Street Program™. It underpins the work of the committee creating an attractive and functional Place. When built over time and one building at a time, the community takes on a character that cannot be duplicated and will not look like somewhere else. This has been the secret of Main Streets surviving the pressures from the mall and strip development practices in earlier decades. They thrive as interesting places where individuals can make a difference with one building and one business. Economically this incremental growth pattern is the most successful to emulate for re-development—one building at a time. No single building or project will make or break a town.

Listing on the National Register of Historic Places does not carry requirements for any property owner unless that property owner decides to take advantage of the tax credits and work through the construction approval process. These credits are recognized as one of the most successful tools for improving downtowns across the country.



Downtown Robbinsville Study and Focus Area



Proposed Robbinsville Downtown National Historic District + Snidertown Historic District

Activity on Main Street

People love to watch other people, and nothing draws people to a downtown better than all kinds of other people to watch and interact with. There was an assumption that because people are not seen strolling along Main street that the buildings are all empty. This is not true! Other than a couple of very obvious vacancies, the buildings house offices and some residences. These are not activities that generate foot traffic and many facades do not reflect the level of activity that is going on behind them. The availability of properties for redevelopment is local knowledge—for sale signs are not posted but instead a potential investor must have an idea, select a location or two and find someone who can tell them about the owners' willingness to sell—in addition to any accompanying local history!

Task: Organize a file with basic information on each potentially available building that will make it easier for investors to know what opportunities await.

Retailers may ask about sidewalk counts before investing in a property. Counts are of the number of people walking past their building during a period of time. They give potential retailers an idea of how much walk-in traffic they may expect. It assumes that once parked the shoppers will move between stores before returning to their cars. A record of people crossing the street shows the level of connectedness between the people, services and goods available, and an ability to accomplish a mission, without moving their vehicle. The more shops visited, the more money left behind...and the more vital the street also appears to be.

Task: Organize a sidewalk count at critical times and days



Current activity on Main Street Robbinsville takes place in limited areas at very specific times or days.

- When the courts are in session the courthouse square is parked full, people sit on the benches and walls as they wait. They move between the lawyers' office, parking lots and courthouse. Some do also walk across the street to eat at Lynn's Place for lunch, warm up in winter or enjoy a coffee break. Note: *no breakfast was being served along Main Street.*
- At the very beginning and end of the school days there are lines of cars snaking from Knight Street to the designated pick-up/drop-off area of the school. The students are the only people on foot and no one really ventures onto Main street—just as far as they need to get into a car.
- Sunday has a rhythm of activity around morning Sunday School and worship services with parking lots full and then a return crowd in the evening either on Sunday or Wednesday, when choirs practice. The pedestrian activity is from vehicle to church door and also does not venture out onto Main Street.
- Other activity is similarly between vehicles and office buildings—insurance, ag services, florist, etc. but workers seldom walk between the offices. The florist and Church Mouse are the only active retail businesses on the street.
- The Town does sponsor music and street fairs in the courthouse square bringing crowds and a social life to downtown. Young people reported hanging out a bit after school—but only infrequently and mostly at Lynn's Place restaurant, until early evening. They otherwise have no reason to come into downtown.

A mapping of activity showed a lack of synergy between the offices, school and shops on Main Street. Visitors to Main Street undertake only one activity per trip as there are not the supplemental activities to encourage people to linger or to make Main Street a destination, much less the social heart of the community. A well-run coffeeshop or other such “Great Good Place” could so easily change the entire experience of Main Street and Robbinsville for visitors and office workers as well as providing a destination for after school or weekend days.

From this exercise the group then discussed the economic drivers in downtown. These ‘drivers’ are what brings people into town and where or how they spend any money. The drivers on Main Street were obvious from the map of activity—Courthouse, Lynn’s Place, Middle School, etc. however the group then thought more broadly about downtown Robbinsville. They discussed who the clientele is that responds to the different drivers—from outdoor recreation activities to the County offices. The greater downtown is mostly a service center for local residents with government—Town, County and Courthouse, schools, attorney, insurance, pharmacies, hardware, groceries...and all mostly within walking distance although, topography can be a challenge.

A listing of what brings people into downtown is included in the February meeting notes attached at the end of this report. During the retail analysis exercise, the team identified the types of services and items that they currently travel outside the community to purchase. Sometimes these were simply not available but sometimes the items offered locally were not of the style, quality or quantity desired by the consumer. Such organized queries can help to guide business recruitment and development efforts by the committee when coupled with data and knowledge of the appropriate, available space.

Robbinsville Retail Market Analysis:

Understanding Business Potential

The Main Street Business Revitalization team reviewed Retail Marketplace Profile numbers generated by ESRI using 2018 Demographics and sales from 27 industry groups. The report shows Demand or Retail Potential for the good or service as an average amount anticipated to be spent by consumers considering the demogrphahics. The corresponding Supply or Retail Sales are actual numbers from businesses reporting in that classification or industry group. A comparison of the two numbers determines a **Retail Gap**. That gap may show sales that exceed expected demand (**surplus**) or sales that do not meet the anticipated demand (**leakage**). Leakage then assumes that the consumers purchase that good or service elsewhere—a missed income and activity opportunity for the local community.

The team looked at retail sales numbers for the Town of Robbinsville as well as Graham County. As the County seat and primary retail location within the county, sales numbers show that Robbinsville serves more population than just those living in Robbinsville in many industry sectors. Robbinsville is a destination for these items.

- There is a Surplus in sales of just over **\$23M** in total Retail Trade/Food & Drink
- People come into Robbinsville to purchase: auto parts/accessories/tires, building materials/supplies, groceries, health/personal care items, gas, items from general merchandise stores, flowers, office supplies/stationery/gifts, and to eat at restaurants.

Graham County Retail Marketplace as a whole

- Retail Trade + Food/Drink Gap is over **\$48M** – this is leakage or unrealized income to the County
 - \$46.6M Retail
 - \$ 1.8M Food & Drink

Basic goods and services for county residents – What the numbers tell us

- Lawn & Garden Equipment & Supply stores are doing 8 times more business than expected! Perhaps county residents spend that much more than other Americans or maybe local big equipment dealers are selling to outsiders.
- Health & Personal Care and Gasoline Stations are serving residents at the expected level—just a bit more perhaps because of residents’ age and distance from other communities
- The Florist is selling almost twice as much as expected! A popular niche or product has been found and reputation made.
- The Used Merchandise stores are doing 150% more business than expected – perhaps for lack of other shopping outlets or elevated poverty rates
- There is 100% leakage in Beer/Wine/Liquor stores, shoe stores, jewelry/luggage/leather goods, book/periodical/music stores, department stores, special food services and drinking places.
- Similarly there appear not to be any “Non-store Retailers” that includes electronic/mail-order houses, vending machine operators and direct selling establishments.

Thoughts by economic activity in County

- Motorcycling falls under Motor Vehicle & Parts Dealers/Other Motor Vehicles (Not Automobile)
 - No Supply is listed – all purchases are made out of county – there no motorcycle sales so the County leaves over \$1.8M for others to collect from locals and does not consider any possible outlay by visitors

- Auto Parts, Accessories & Tire Stores do average business – one might expect more income to be reported from sales to car club and motorcycling visitors
- Sporting Goods, Hobby, Book & Music Stores serve outdoor recreation and leisure activities
 - No Such businesses or supply listed – GC leaves another \$1.8M on the table and that just serves the local population without consideration of the myriad visitors to the County doing Recreation
- Restaurants do not bring in the sales that are expected for service even to the local population. With tourism as a primary industry one would expect there to be sales above those expected from locals. There may be several considerations – not enough restaurants, not the right mix of food offered so people eat at home or in another county instead or perhaps Visitors do not find the food they seek or they prefer to have a drink with a meal and eat instead out-of-county or at one of the resorts/clubs that report sales differently. It appears that about \$1.7M are left on the table by local residents—and we do not know how much Visitors might also be willing to purchase! This represents dozens of jobs. Restaurants would report more sales (usually 30 percent) with alcohol sales possible.

Task: The REVVED UP Main Street group should undertake the next level of retail self assessment. Some effort has already been put into collecting the ownership, tax value, size and current use of each building along Main Street. This information allows evaluation of investment and growth in tax value over the years. The next step might be calculating sales per square foot of retail space and sales per dollar rent. These numbers applied to the leakage allow the group to predict a safe scale for new business development. For example:

Graham County is leaking \$1.8M in Sporting goods/hobby/musical instrument sales. If we assume that a shop can capture even 15 percent of this amount that would be \$270,000. If Robbinsville shops generally support about \$250 sales per square foot then - theoretically - Robbinsville can support 1080 square feet of space selling sporting goods, hobby equipment and musical instruments.

Such analysis may also encourage existing businesses to recognize a product not being provided in the community and add some floor space for it in their existing business. Many analyses will only show 600 – 800 square feet of space needed—a nice expansion for an existing shop but may not be enough for a new one.

ESRI Retail MarketPlace numbers were also generated for 40 – 60 and 120 minute drives from downtown Robbinsville. The retail gaps show that generally, Robbinsville residents must travel about two hours before many of the basic retail needs are met (and then exceeded). Data charts are attached at the end of this report.

***Supporting task:** A complete database of downtown properties, ownership, size, condition and current use can also help make this information more readily available to potential investors as well as committee members engaging in business recruitment or development. A template is available with an excerpt included in the attachments.*

Economic Engagement - Positioning Statement/Vision

The goals of any downtown revitalization effort are to:

- increase the numbers, variety and incomes of local businesses,
- increase the numbers of people on the main street with money to spend
- attract investment to increase the value of main street properties

This results in a stronger sense of place and pride for the downtown, greater provision of desired goods and services and increases of both sales and property tax revenues allowing the community to provide needed and improved services for a better quality of life.

For revitalization efforts with limited time and staff resources, it is critical that there is a shared direction, vision and priority so that each action builds on the other to create the greatest impact.

"If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there." Lewis Carroll

"If you don't know where you are going, you'll end up someplace else." Yogi Berra

This section is organized around the economic engagement part of downtown revitalization, thus the group worked on a statement that, like a vision, would guide the direction and priorities for immediate and longer-term economic project work. The economic positioning statement identifies the role Robbinsville plays in the regional economy, the key industry(ies), quality references and target markets. Projects and priorities will help to build the condition or role that is described in the positioning statement:

Downtown Robbinsville is the [Adventure Portal for Outdoor and Nature-based Recreation](#) in Western NC. Visitors and residents enjoy new adventures and heritage traditions in natural settings woven through the walkable town. New businesses thrive.

Role in Region:	Adventure Portal
Key industry:	Outdoor/Nature-based Recreation
Quality:	New adventure, heritage traditions woven through a walkable downtown
Target markets:	Visitors/Recreators and active, entrepreneurial residents



The interpretation, project definition and ultimate implementation of this economic position is an evolutionary process! Each time and each group that considers Robbinsville as an Adventure Portal, will have new ideas. If not, consider these questions:

What is an **Adventure Portal**? This definition and the way it evolves in Robbinsville will be an engaging journey over time with success dependent mostly on the imaginations of local entrepreneurs, marketers and adventurers! REVVED UP already has a working relationship with the Robbinsville High School Student Council. The engagement of youth is encouraging for both the creativity they bring and also any possible interest in developing new businesses as a career in Graham County. Guiding considerations include:

- One moves through a portal on the way in and out of an adventure
- The portal is a constricted space – a person must be ready before passing thru the portal:
 - Information – where to go, what to do
 - Skills training – how to do it safely and have fun doing it
 - Access to proper equipment and tools – retail, repair, outfitting – what do I need?

- Support services – Adventure planning and packaging, health and safety, expert packing, sustenance, counseling (!)
- Education – what am I experiencing? interpretation, appreciation, understanding
- Expert guides – why go it alone?
- Hospitality – care for body, soul and spirit
- More...
- Is the portal virtual or physical? Or both?
- How does one feel on either side of the portal – is life different? Can you ever come back?



Outdoor + Nature-based Recreation – new adventures and heritage traditions

- Robbinsville residents value the unique diversity and natural beauty of their landscape – they steward and share what is authentic to Graham Co.
- Priority is placed on activities that respect “night skies, nature sounds and the earthy smells of the wilderness” that surrounds Robbinsville
- Green and blue spaces and activities connect areas of Robbinsville to destinations beyond
- Understanding and practicing Heritage Traditions leads residents and visitors to greater understanding of sustainability and connection between town and natural systems – gardening, preserving food for winter, herbal remedies, musical traditions...

For **Residents and Visitors**

- Residents are encouraged to participate in the activities that visitors drive for hours to enjoy
- Residents are supported in entrepreneurial endeavors to make Robbinsville an Adventure Portal
- Residents enjoy and help to create an attractive quality of life and outdoor lifestyle that supports a vibrant community and economy
- Visitors find a full range of activities and services whether a first-time adventurer or expert
- Residents and Visitors at all levels of health and ability enjoy the adventure on either side of the portal
- Visitors are expected to understand, appreciate and respect Graham County’s remote natural environments



How does downtown become the Adventure Portal: The Workplan

REVVED UP Partners shared a listing of projects that are already underway but need to be coordinated for maximum impact and recognized as components of the shared economic position and vision.

These included:

- Church Mouse gardens and value-added center for heritage foods – spring 2019
- A new Pavilion for music, training and the renovation of the VFW for office/classroom, restrooms and concession for the Pavilion.
- Snider Building renovation and Graham County Historical Museum
- Visitor Center opening in larger space on the Bypass
- John and Mila Colwell’s plans for a restaurant and lodging – phase one fall of 2019, spring 2020
- Mention of the Otter Plaza behind the stone façade
- Mark Rogers’ meat market with specialty pork from Kentucky (?) – spring 2019
- Junaluska Museum preliminary plans – will be built into the mountainside on two levels. It will be visible from Main Street for maximum tourist draw with the upper level on the same level as the memorial. 2021 or so.
- In-Town wayfinding signage and routing (build on the pedestrian signage already installed and coordinating with the County Tourism plan and branding.



The Work Plan Matrix:

The Economic Positioning statement or Economic Vision for Robbinsville downtown included three main areas of work. The team worked in groups to further define opportunities or objectives and then actions under each area. The resulting work plan is attached. This must be considered a working outline to be revisited annually for definition of successes, challenges and new opportunities or directions.

Robbinsville Main Street Economy Development Plan

Downtown Robbinsville's Economic Position/Economic Vision:

Main Street Robbinsville NC: The Adventure Portal to Outdoor Recreation, Connector of Physical, Social and Cultural Adventures and a Pulsing Center of Entrepreneurship.

Adventure Portal to Outdoor Recreation	Connector: Physical, Social, Cultural	Center of Entrepreneurship
<p>Goal: Prepare residents and visitors for activity in the surrounding wilderness + the facilities to receive them <i>Objective #1.1: Create the Portal as place</i> <i>Objective #1.2: Use partnerships to develop ORec training, education, interpretation experiences and workforce development</i> <i>Objective #1.3: Increase number and variety of OR enthusiasts participating</i></p>	<p>Goal: Define + Develop experiences that share local culture, create social networks and physically connect downtown to nature <i>Objective #2.1: Use walking trails to connect attractions and downtown</i> <i>Objective #2.2: Use existing assets to appeal to different ages, groups</i></p>	<p>Goal: Create conditions to Develop, Promote and Support small businesses providing goods & services to residents and visitors <i>Objective #3.1: Create enticing places, appearances</i> <i>Objective #3.2: Prepare & Promote Business locations</i> <i>Objective #3.3: ID business opportunities, development enticements and nurture business people</i></p>
<p>Action: Visitor Center as the hub Task: Collect, share lists of activities available Task: Develop experience packages esp for nature adventures Task: Develop, launch, market interactive information stations Task: Develop, launch, market virtual reality experiences + interactive technology Task: Develop, launch interactive heritage info stations to encourage exploration of GC</p>	<p>Action: Develop trail from RHS to CC Camp integrated with edible walking trail Task: Follow up with GREAT and T&T regarding progress in developing pedestrian connections to downtown</p>	<p>Action: Plans & Cost Estimates for active, attractive public spaces on Main Street Task: Identify locations most logical and a program of supported activities for each Task: Engage public in creating plans Task: Research ordinances and enforcement of clean up on derelict properties Task: Expand flower plantings & engage Garden Club in maintenance</p>

<p>Action: Develop working partnerships</p> <p>Task: Host “how-to” events w ORec experts</p> <p>Task: Connect WCU ORec students with volunteer opportunities in GC</p> <p>Task: Host educational + nature-based events</p> <p>Task: Organize demo days to inspire/expose middle + HS students to equipment & activities</p>	<p>Action: Improved and installed entry signage for Robbinsville</p> <p>Task: Create drawings, receive approval, amass funding as needed</p> <p>Task: Secure materials, recruit laborers, finalize planting plan, schedule work</p>	<p>Action: Create Property Inventory</p> <p>Task: Identify potentially available properties, ownership, size and condition</p> <p>Task: Research methods to encourage/Incent improvements up to vanilla box readiness</p> <p>Task: Promote appropriate development – signs in window, photos, cut sheet, ??</p>
<p>Action: Support equity + Inclusion to grow market share and visitors</p> <p>Task: Create access to equip for all people – gear library, inexp rentals + instruction</p> <p>Task: Consider groups with limited access for programs in GC</p> <p>Task: Market wide range of activities possible</p>	<p>Action: Design, paint and install mural of Beloved Women on VFW/dntn building</p> <p>Task: Secure funding</p> <p>Task: Contract designer, schedule volunteer training sessions</p> <p>Task: Paint, install, celebrate</p>	<p>Action: Open six new businesses on Main Street</p> <p>Task: Research best entrepreneurial support practices and adapt</p> <p>Task: ID types of business appropriate to each available location, create info sheet</p> <p>Task: Marketing/Recruitment campaign</p>

Implementation

Perhaps the greatest challenge to small communities is leadership and staff or volunteer time to implement projects once identified. Robbinsville is a step ahead with good leadership through REVVED-UP but many of the members are already engaged in nearly full-time projects of their own. This means that work may not progress simultaneously on all priorities at once. This process has focused on increasing economic vitality.

The Center for Entrepreneurship is the one goal that is entirely new with no current ‘projects’. The Tri-County Community College’s Small Business Center and other partners with business development interest should be tapped to assist with these objectives and tasks. Perhaps **a couple of entrepreneurial (but retired?) local residents could be recruited to help lead this critical activity.** NC Main Street and the NC Commerce staff will also assist with research and data collection as possible. An entrepreneurship committee might undertake analysis of which buildings are best suited for active retail, any potential services and incentives to support new and growing entrepreneurs, and a mix of downtown uses that build the Adventure Portal and bring a year around mix of visitors to stay in town even when the weather makes the forest and lakes less hospitable. Cut sheets for buildings and desired businesses might be used as marketing materials for committee members to actively recruit key anchor businesses.

As a part of the proposed process the team was to have surveyed the community about wanted and needed goods, services and entertainment in downtown. This occurred instead as part of the Graham County Historic Association (GCHA) market analysis and feasibility study for defining a combination of uses to occur in the historic Snider Department store. Results are to be released soon. It is hoped that the results will also inform any business development and recruitment activities for Main Street and downtown.



Summary Actions:

- ❖ Recruit business-minded residents with an interest in seeing Main Street revitalized to create an economic revitalization committee
- ❖ Approach partners like the Small Business Center and NC Commerce staff for assistance to get started on business development/recruitment materials, incentive programs, ordinances and best practices
- ❖ Continue the project work already underway that is listed in the workplan and those on John Colwell’s 20-year plan
- ❖ Celebrate publicly the completion of any and every task and project to build support and an image of success
- ❖ Recruit/Develop a business (café, brewery, etc.) offering a great, good place to hang out and a gift shop next door

Downtown Strong

The Governor’s program to assist with immediate improvements in rural downtowns visited Robbinsville during this planning process. The focus was defining a couple of immediate actions to help build a sense of pride and accomplishment. On April 22-23, 2019 a facilitator from the NC Main Street program lead a Robbinsville group through a concentrated ten-hour planning process. This exercise precluded the April meeting of this committee.

Priority projects are intended to be immediate with results in up to 18 months:

- Legal Alcohol – alcohol is already in the County but tax benefits are not received because it does not have legal status and is therefore not locally taxable. It was noted that this is a critical effort for many reasons:
 - The lifestyle of the visitors that Robbinsville hopes to attract to spend more time and money in the county, includes craft beer and quality wine, mead, etc. It is an integral part of the experience and social scene.
 - The prohibition is tying up developable land in unused facilities required for resorts to be recognized as “clubs”. The land and expense of construction could have been invested for expansion of services, income and property tax generating purposes.
 - The clubs/resorts, because of the alcohol sales, do not see their guests spending much or any additional time off-premises during which they would support local businesses and enjoy experiences beyond the boundaries of the resort. This limits the visitors’ length of stay as there are perceived to be fewer things to do and makes it difficult for businesses not on resort property to survive.
 - High quality restaurants and grocery stores make at least 30 percent of their income from alcohol sales. This has been the financing model and greatest guarantee (if there is one) of restaurant success possible. And the service of alcohol is efficient income requiring much less preparation, fewer inputs and staff time.

Action Statement: Legalize the Sale of Alcohol in the Town of Robbinsville.

Implementation: A separate group of citizens has formed to work on this issue.

- Beautification – general clean-up and repair, encouraging façade improvements, improving lighting--comes with pride and involvement

Action Statement: Accomplish General Cleanup of Downtown Area & Repair Prominent Rock Wall, as Well as Address the Need for Better Lighting along Main Street

Implementation: The Downtown Strong program made funding available for the creation of façade improvement plans for four Main Street buildings including \$7,000 as matching funds for initial improvements to those façades.

Attachments:

MSRP Main Street Basics: Economic Vitality Committee Role

Meeting Notes and Materials

January 15, 2019

February 19, 2019

March 19, 2019

Work Planning Matrices from June 2019

Retail Market Place Profiles

Town of Robbinsville

Graham County

40, 60, 120-minute drive time radius from Main Street Robbinsville

MSRP Main Street Economic Restructuring: Retail Self-Assessment - information and worksheets

Retail Goods and Services Expenditures – Graham County 2018

NC Main Street Basics Info Sheets

Organization

Promotion

Design

Economic Vitality

Identifying Stakeholders and Partners

Volunteers

Generic Façade Program

Albemarle Downtown Development Corporation Façade Improvement Grant Application

