



downtown strategies

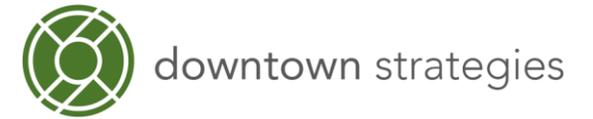
BLACKSBURG, VIRGINIA

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# Downtown 5-Year Action Plan

DECEMBER 2024

# About Us



## Who We Are

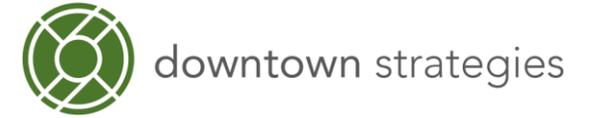
Downtown Strategies, a division of Retail Strategies, exists to provide realistic, implementable strategies to communities for revitalizing their downtowns. Led by a team of downtown revitalization practitioners and real estate experts, our combination of real-world experience, plus expertise in real estate and retail uniquely qualify us to assist communities with backfilling vacancies, increasing tourism, and enhancing the sense of place in their downtowns. Serving rural communities in 25 states, Downtown Strategies is the leading national firm for downtown revitalization planning with an emphasis on real estate and retail.

## 5-Year Plan

At Downtown Strategies, we believe that action and implementation are more important than a flashy 20-year vision. Our process is based on our team's experience as practitioners. Our team members have been in your shoes as community leaders and know what it is like to manage downtown revitalization efforts.

Most communities do not suffer from a lack of ideas, they struggle with knowing where to start when it comes to implementing their ideas. Rather than brainstorming everything that you could ever potentially do in your downtown, we focus on a five-year timeframe. This plan is designed to help you identify where your community should focus its energy and effort in the near-term. Implementing these short-term, doable strategies will incrementally shift the trajectory of your downtown and create the spark that you desire.

# Our Team



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Key Focus Areas: Team Management;  
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Key Focus Areas: Design; Tourism &  
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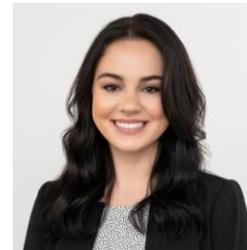


**Laura Marinos**

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Key Focus Areas: Organization;  
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# Our Partnership

Downtown Strategies appreciates partnering with the Town of Blacksburg, VA, and the Blacksburg Partnership on an action-focused 5-Year strategic planning process for Downtown Blacksburg.

In Blacksburg, Downtown Strategies conducted an in-market Strategic Visioning Workshop and provides strategies within this 5-year action plan that are implementable, practical, asset-based, and market-driven.

This action-oriented plan was informed by an extensive Market Analysis, electronic community survey, and input from a Stakeholder Input Session. Below is an overview of the partnership schedule:

Partnership Began	January 2024
Kick-Off Call	February 2024
Strategic Visioning Workshop	August 2024
Strategic Plan Presentation	December 2024



# Focus Areas

In this 5-Year Action Plan created for Blacksburg, Downtown Strategies identified 4 Focus Areas for initiatives to support, strengthen, and enhance downtown. Each focus area was identified based on feedback received during the in-market Strategic Visioning Workshop, as well as the consultant team's expertise and analysis. The 4 Focus Areas for this 5-Year Action Plan include:



## **Policy & Administration**

Policy & Administration involves creating a strong foundation for a sustainable revitalization effort, including cultivating partnerships, community involvement, and resources for downtown.



## **Design**

Thoughtful design supports a community's transformation by enhancing the physical and visual assets that create a vibrant and inviting place for people.



## **Tourism & Promotion**

Smart promotion initiatives position downtown as the center of the community and hub of economic activity, while creating a positive image that showcases the community's unique characteristics.



## **Economic Vitality**

Economic Vitality involves analyzing the retail and real estate as the foundation of downtown's redevelopment opportunities and creating a supportive environment for entrepreneurs and innovators.



downtown strategies

FOCUS AREA 1

# Policy & Administration

Policy & Administration involves creating a strong foundation for a sustainable revitalization effort, including cultivating partnerships, community involvement, and resources for the district.

# 1.1 Action Teams

## Focus Area 1: Policy & Administration

How many times has your community been through strategic planning? Are they jaded that not enough was accomplished afterwards? Implementation is a key focus of our process at Downtown Strategies. In our combined decades of practical experience, creating Action Teams is the most proven method to successful implementation. As the accompanying Project Mapping Workbook details, the Core Team should eventually assemble an Action Team for each Focus Area in this Action Plan. These teams may be represented by existing committees or boards, or they may be newly created groups of volunteers and staff. At the core, following the process of working through the workbook within each team will set your community up for maximum success.

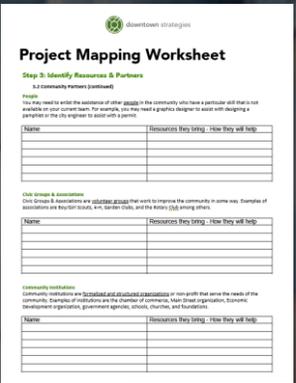
### In Blacksburg

In Blacksburg, Action Teams should be formed with the mission to rejuvenate the downtown, thereby creating a vibrant atmosphere for business and social activities. Action Teams should work in conjunction with the Town of Blacksburg, Blacksburg Partnership, DBI, and other entities and asset owners in the community to identify areas of need and steps to take to move forward. Action Team structure should eventually follow the focus areas of this plan; thus, the following teams should be established over time:

- Policy & Administration
- Design
- Tourism & Promotion
- Economic Vitality

The teams should rely on recommendations and strategies within this plan as their work plans, meet regularly, encourage collaboration and diversity, and keep themselves accountable for realistic timing of implementation of their various work plans. Communication with stakeholders is key, and notes and minutes should be kept for accountability and transparency.

The consultant team has developed a Project Mapping Workbook, which will be provided as an attachment and demonstrates how Action Team members can use this plan to spark action and guide revitalization efforts in the focus area of Downtown Blacksburg. The next phase of our partnership will provide support in getting Action Teams launched beginning with the formation of one team.



# 1.2 Defining Roles

## Focus Area 1: Policy & Administration

Defining roles among different organizations in a community is essential for successful downtown revitalization, as it fosters collaboration, reduces duplication of efforts, and ensures accountability. By clearly outlining responsibilities—whether for local government, economic development organizations, merchant organizations, or private sector partners—each group can focus on their strengths, align their resources, and work toward shared goals. For instance, local governments might address infrastructure improvements and policy incentives, while merchant organizations focus on community engagement and programming. This clarity not only builds trust among stakeholders but also creates a unified vision, streamlining efforts to drive investment, attract visitors, and ultimately revitalize the downtown into a thriving economic and cultural hub.

### In Blacksburg

To effectively revitalize Downtown Blacksburg, it's essential to delineate the roles of key organizations based on their missions and strengths:

**Town of Blacksburg, VA:** As the municipal authority, the Town should focus on infrastructure development, urban planning, and policy implementation. This includes upgrading public spaces, offering development incentives, and enacting supportive regulations to create a conducive environment for revitalization.

**Blacksburg Partnership:** This non-profit, independent economic development organization, formed by the Town, Virginia Tech, and business community, should spearhead initiatives to attract new businesses and investments to Blacksburg, including the downtown area. By promoting Blacksburg as a prime location for economic opportunities, the Partnership can drive growth and diversification in the downtown economy.

**Downtown Blacksburg, Inc. (DBI):** As a non-profit association of merchants, property owners, and downtown advocates, DBI's mission is to sustain a dynamic, vital, and diverse community through marketing, events, economic development, and leadership. DBI should lead efforts in organizing community events, marketing campaigns, and fostering collaboration among local businesses to enhance the downtown area's vibrancy and appeal.



# 1.3 Community Roundtable

## Focus Area 1: Policy & Administration

Communication in community development focuses on enhancing the interaction between the people promoting change that will impact positively on improving the living conditions of members of the participating communities and the people with whom they work to actualize their ideal quality of life. With multiple organizations and entities focused on community and economic development, there is an opportunity for enhanced communication and strategic visioning through a Community Roundtable program. Each month, leaders of key community organizations should gather, with no formal agenda, to discuss current projects, opportunities for partnerships, shared resources, and visioning and planning. Each quarter, additional members of these organizations should gather in a public setting for benchmark updates, providing an opportunity for the press to report on positive happenings within the community.

### In Blacksburg

A Community Roundtable should be formed shortly after adoption of this plan including a representative from the following potential partners: **Town of Blacksburg, Blacksburg Partnership, Virginia Tech, Montgomery County, Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce, Montgomery County Regional Tourism Office, Montgomery County EDA, and Downtown Blacksburg, Inc.** The meeting should be a standing meeting, once monthly, that partners commit to attending. The meeting should begin with a round-robin of updates from each partner, as it relates to the downtown and all community development efforts. Through discussion, new opportunities for collaboration, grant opportunities, and better communication will emerge. Quarterly sessions should take place at a larger venue with the entire executive board from each partner group. The local media should be invited as each partner gives a quarterly update regarding their successes, new projects, and communication wins through this effort. By including these organizations, the Community Roundtable will provide a platform for comprehensive discussions, promote partnerships, and create a unified strategic vision for the revitalization of Downtown Blacksburg.

### Case Study

In Starkville, MS, the Community Roundtable was a key catalyst to successful implementation of strategic projects, communication, and streamlined funding. Partners included the City of Starkville, Oktibbeha County, the Greater Starkville Development Partnership (which included Economic Development, Chamber, Main Street, and Tourism), and Mississippi State University.

### Mission

To create a collaborative platform at the top executive level that unites key community stakeholders in advancing Blacksburg's revitalization through coordinated communication, strategic partnerships, and shared vision development.

### Goals

- Develop a unified strategic vision for downtown Blacksburg revitalization and align organizational goals with broader community development objectives
- Establish regular communication channels between stakeholders and create transparency in project updates, opportunities, and challenges
- Build and strengthen collaborative relationships between public, private, and nonprofit sectors while identifying new resource-sharing opportunities
- Streamline project coordination, reduce administrative barriers, and leverage collective resources for maximum impact
- Increase community awareness of downtown development progress and generate positive media coverage and public support
- Establish mechanisms for monitoring progress, tracking outcomes, and ensuring organizational commitment to collaborative efforts
- Create institutional knowledge sharing and develop best practices that can benefit ongoing efforts and other communities
- Build a self-sustaining model for long-term partnership that ensures continuity across partner organizations

### How It's Different?

Unlike existing community stakeholder meetings where organizations typically send liaisons or representatives, the Community Roundtable requires the direct participation of executive leadership from each partner organization, ensuring decision-makers are engaging directly with their peers to facilitate real-time problem-solving and strategic alignment.

# 1.4

# Consolidate Web Presence

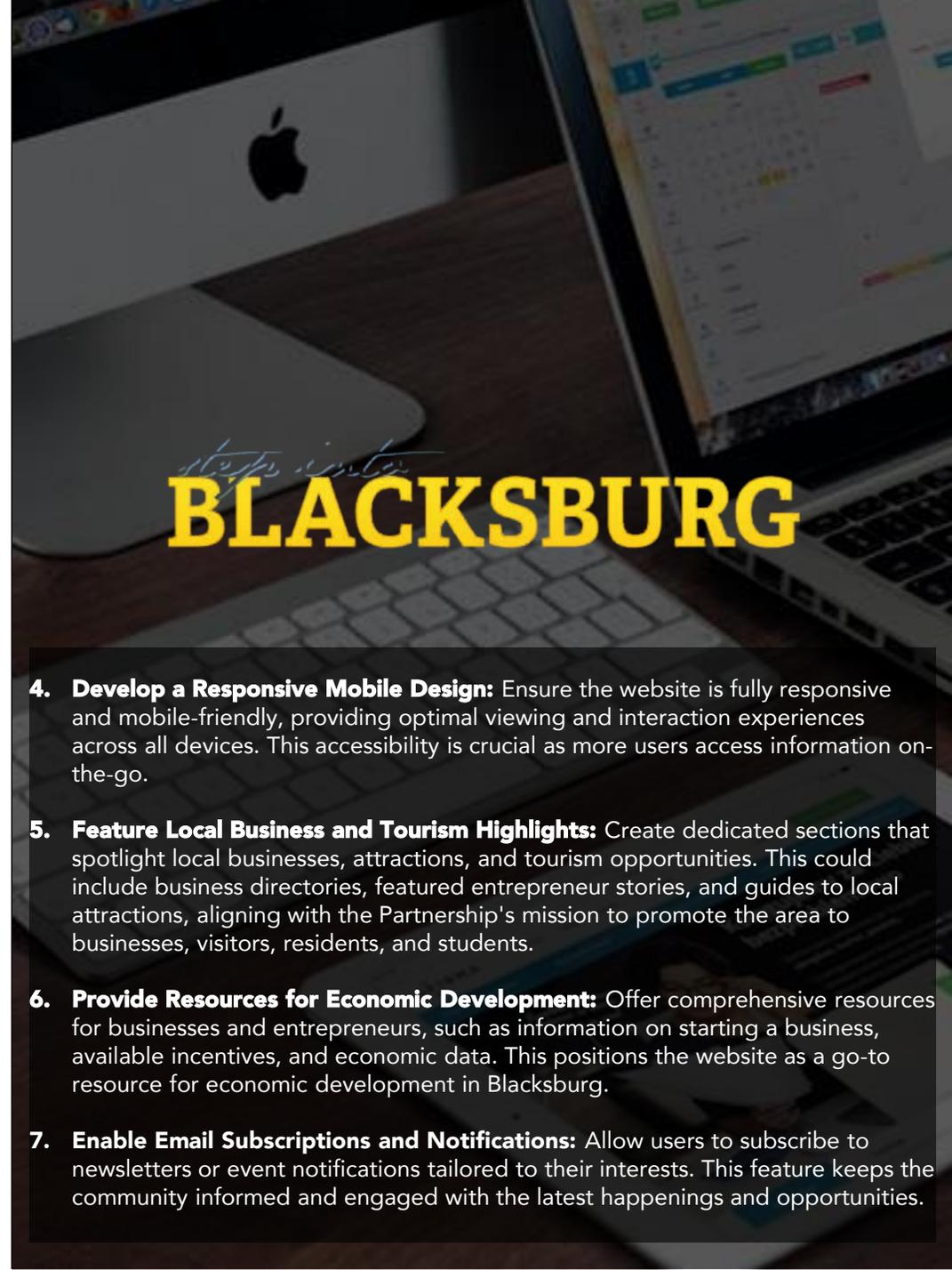
## Focus Area 1: Policy & Administration

Having a web presence is essential for downtown districts as it significantly enhances visibility and accessibility, allowing residents, visitors, and potential investors to easily find information about the district's events, businesses, services, and ongoing projects. This online visibility helps attract more foot traffic and engagement, which is crucial for economic vitality. Effective marketing and promotion through websites and social media channels showcase the district's unique attractions, historic sites, and local businesses, drawing tourists and new customers to boost local economic activity. Additionally, online platforms facilitate communication between the district's management and the community, providing a space for updates, announcements, and feedback, which fosters a sense of community and keeps stakeholders informed and involved in the district's development.

### In Blacksburg

In Blacksburg, there is some confusion about where to find information about community happenings as there are multiple partners offering this type of information. It makes sense for the Blacksburg Partnership to position itself as the authority and central hub for community information. This strategic move can streamline access to events, tourism, and economic development resources. Below and to the right are several recommendations and modifications to the Blacksburg Partnership website to achieve this goal:

- 1. Implement a Centralized Community Calendar:** Utilize the Step into Blacksburg website's interactive, user-friendly calendar tool that aggregates events from various community organizations. This feature should allow organizations to submit events for approval, ensuring the calendar remains comprehensive and up-to-date. Such a centralized platform can boost event participation and community engagement.
- 2. Enhance Navigation and User Experience:** Revise the website's layout to include clear, intuitive navigation menus that categorize information into sections like "Events," "Tourism," "Business Opportunities," and "Community Resources." This structure will enable users to quickly find relevant information, improving overall user satisfaction.
- 3. Integrate Social Media and Sharing Features:** Incorporate social media integration to allow users to share events and information seamlessly across platforms. This functionality can increase the reach of community events and initiatives, fostering greater participation.



- 4. Develop a Responsive Mobile Design:** Ensure the website is fully responsive and mobile-friendly, providing optimal viewing and interaction experiences across all devices. This accessibility is crucial as more users access information on-the-go.
- 5. Feature Local Business and Tourism Highlights:** Create dedicated sections that spotlight local businesses, attractions, and tourism opportunities. This could include business directories, featured entrepreneur stories, and guides to local attractions, aligning with the Partnership's mission to promote the area to businesses, visitors, residents, and students.
- 6. Provide Resources for Economic Development:** Offer comprehensive resources for businesses and entrepreneurs, such as information on starting a business, available incentives, and economic data. This positions the website as a go-to resource for economic development in Blacksburg.
- 7. Enable Email Subscriptions and Notifications:** Allow users to subscribe to newsletters or event notifications tailored to their interests. This feature keeps the community informed and engaged with the latest happenings and opportunities.

# 1.5 Entertainment District

## Focus Area 1: Policy & Administration

Virginia Code §4.1-128.1 permits the establishment of a Designated Outdoor Refreshment Area (DORA,) which allows localities to establish defined zones where individuals can legally consume alcoholic beverages purchased from participating businesses. These areas are designed to boost foot traffic, support local businesses, and enhance downtown vibrancy by creating a lively and engaging atmosphere for residents and visitors. Establishing a DORA requires the locality to adopt an ordinance designating the area, outlining boundaries, permitted hours, and rules for alcohol consumption. Participating businesses must comply with Virginia ABC regulations, including the use of specific cups for DORA beverages.

### In Blacksburg

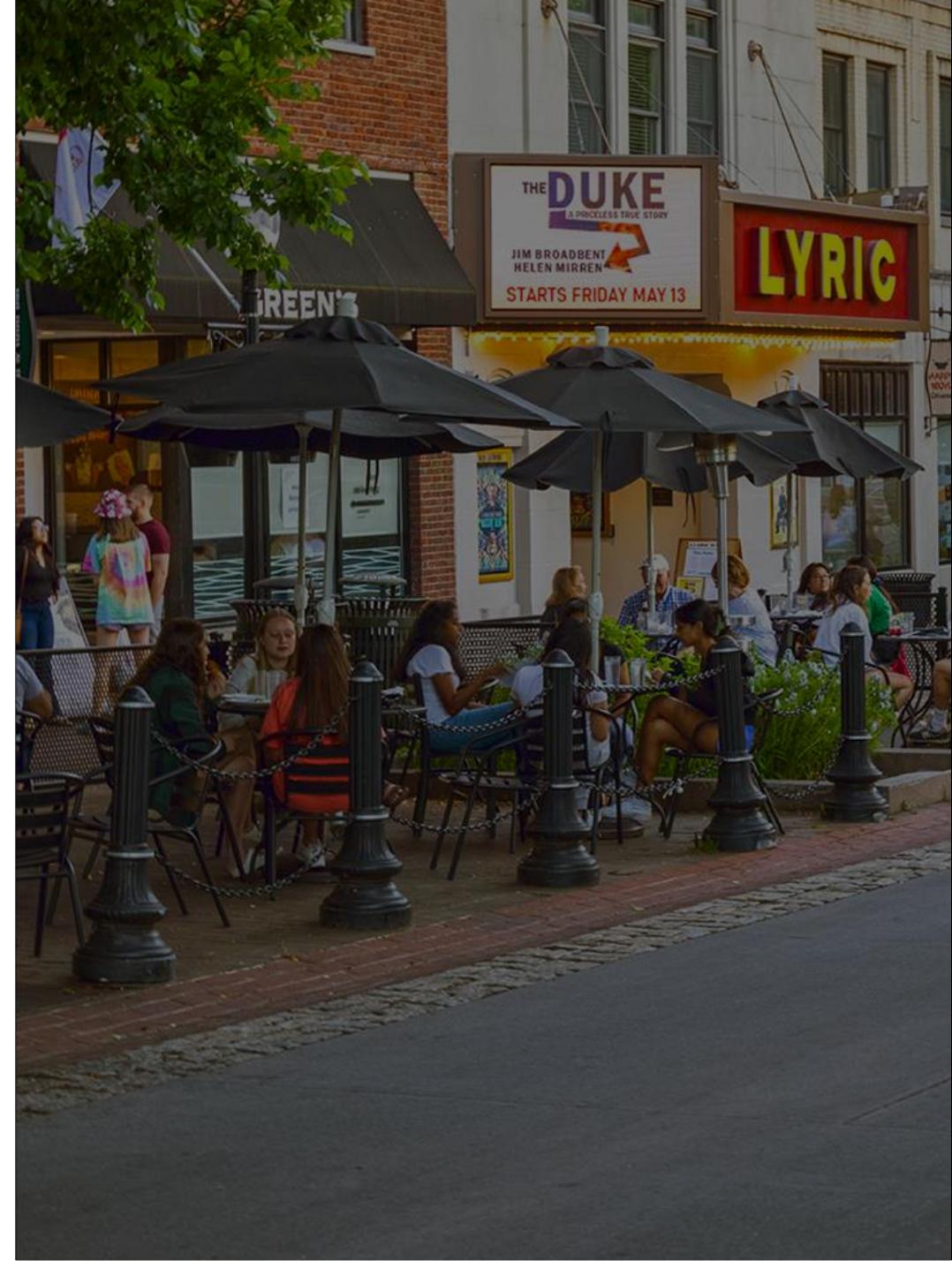
The Town of Blacksburg should pursue the creation of a DORA, following these steps:

1. **Engage stakeholders such as businesses, law enforcement, and community groups to gather input.**
2. **Define the boundaries and operational details of the DORA.**
3. **Draft and pass a local ordinance establishing the DORA.**
4. **Coordinate with DBI to assist participating businesses with compliance and licensing with Virginia ABC .**
5. **Develop and implement clear signage, rules, and communication strategies for enforcement and public awareness.**

While there is sometimes fear of implementing an open container district in a college town or in an area with high numbers of young consumers, anecdotal information and case studies indicate that the creation of these districts can significantly boost vibrancy and vitality by engaging people and encouraging them to spend more time and money in the given area.

### Case Study

Abingdon, VA implemented a DORA, enabling visitors to enjoy alcoholic beverages in designated outdoor spaces within the town. This initiative enhances the town's appeal as a destination for dining and entertainment. Danville, Norton, Fredericksburg, and Leesburg are other Commonwealth examples of successful implementation of this economic tool.



# 1.5 Entertainment District

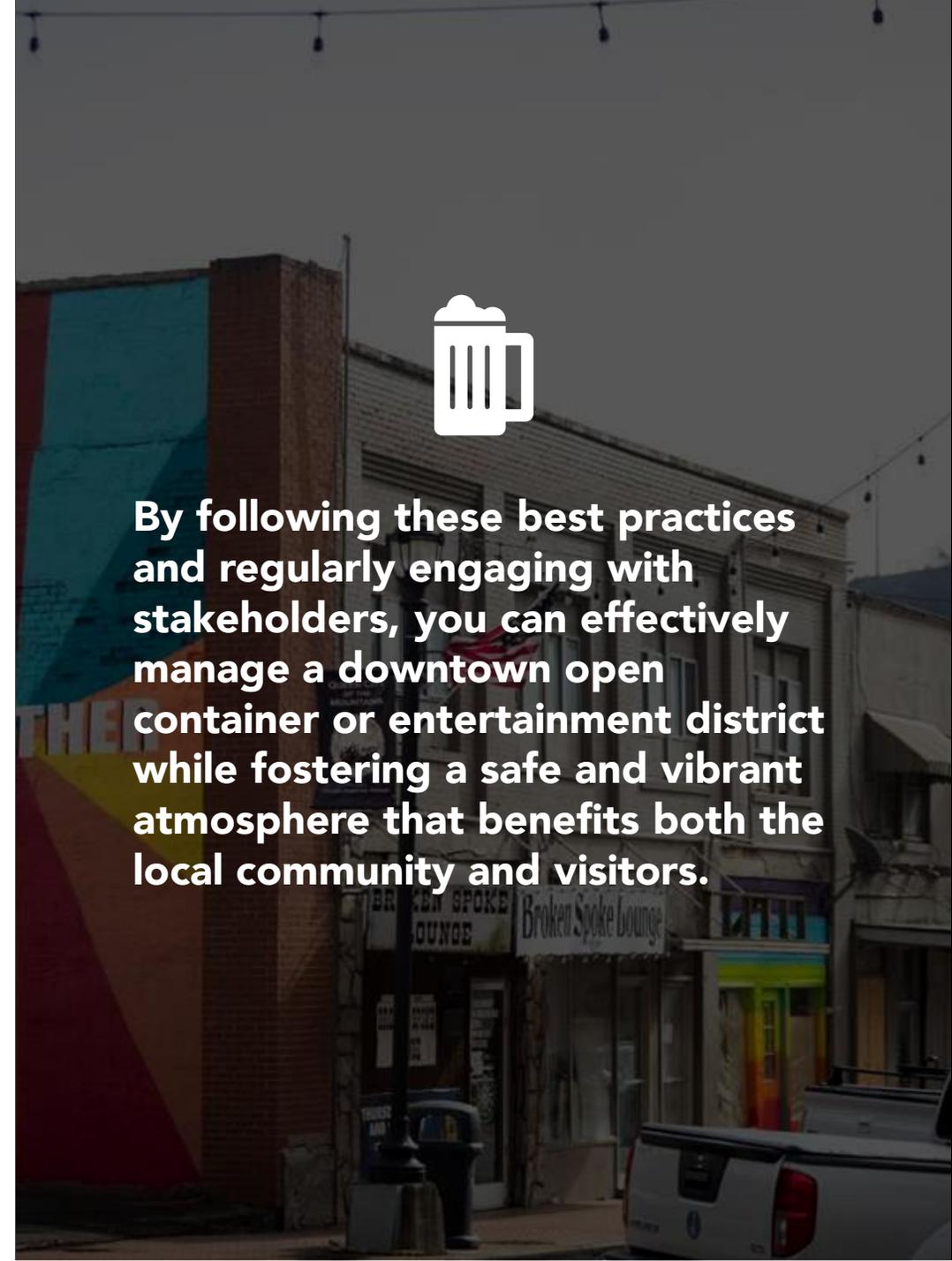
## Focus Area 1: Policy & Administration

To mitigate concern or controversy in passing a DORA, below are **best-practices** for managing entertainment districts:

- **Clear Regulation & Ordinances** – Establish clear and comprehensive regulations and ordinances governing the open container or entertainment district. Ensure these rules are easily accessible to the public.
- **Designated Boundaries** – Clearly define the district's boundaries, so visitors know where they can and cannot consume alcohol. Use signage and physical markers like bollards or planters to demarcate the area.
- **Licensed Establishments** – Limit alcohol consumption to licensed establishments within the district. Ensure that all participating businesses are properly licensed and follow responsible beverage service practices.
- **Designated Hours** – Set specific hours during which the open container policy is in effect. This may be during certain days of the week or for special events.
- **Security & Enforcement** – Increase law enforcement and security presence in the district to maintain order and ensure compliance with regulations. Establish clear consequences for violations.
- **Trash & Clean-up** – Implement a robust cleanup plan to ensure the district remains clean and attractive. Place trash receptacles throughout the area and schedule regular cleanups.
- **Safety Measures** – Install adequate lighting, security cameras, and emergency call boxes to enhance safety in the district.
- **Special Events & Programming** – Organize special events, live music performances, and cultural activities within the district to attract visitors and create a lively atmosphere.
- **Monitoring & Evaluation** – Continuously monitor the district's operations and collect data on its impact on safety, business revenue, and community satisfaction. Use this data to make informed decisions and adjustments.
- **Marketing & Promotions** – Promote the district through effective marketing and communication strategies. Use social media, signage, and local media outlets to inform the public about events and updates.
- **Flexibility & Adaptability** - Be open to adjustments in regulations and policies based on feedback and changing circumstances. Flexibility can help maintain a dynamic and successful district.
- **Education & Responsibility** – Educate patrons about responsible drinking and the importance of adhering to district rules. Encourage businesses to promote responsible alcohol consumption.



**By following these best practices and regularly engaging with stakeholders, you can effectively manage a downtown open container or entertainment district while fostering a safe and vibrant atmosphere that benefits both the local community and visitors.**



# 1.6

# Improve Permitting Experience

## Focus Area 1: Policy & Administration

Streamlined permitting processes are essential for improving commercial development in a downtown by reducing delays, uncertainty, and administrative burdens for businesses. When permitting is clear, efficient, and predictable, it accelerates project timelines, encourages investment, and enhances developer confidence. This improved experience helps attract new businesses, supports local entrepreneurs, and fosters a thriving downtown environment, driving economic growth and community vitality.

### In Blacksburg

Within the development community in Blacksburg, there is a perception that it's difficult to do business with the Town. While this perception may be exaggeration, "perception is reality," and it negatively affects willingness of the private sector to take risk on commercial development properties downtown. While this is not an uncommon challenge for local governments, it's also not entirely easy to solve and it takes a multi-faceted approach including actual strategies for streamlining the process and aggressive messaging and external relations to tell the story of improvements. The Town of Blacksburg has recently invested in OpenGov, which is a cloud-based software platform that helps governments streamline processes, improve transparency, and enhance efficiency in areas like permitting, budgeting, reporting, and citizen services; however, OpenGov's vast features can be overwhelming. Below are the top ten features recommended to implement to improve the permitting process for commercial applicants:

- 1. Online Permit Applications:** Transition to fully digital, user-friendly permit applications to allow commercial applicants to submit forms, documents, and fees online. Streamlined workflows reduce manual data entry, errors, and delays.
- 2. Application Status Tracking:** Enable applicants to track their permit status in real time. A centralized portal showing updates, approvals, or requests for additional information improves transparency and reduces the need for follow-up calls or emails.
- 3. Automated Notifications and Reminders:** Utilize automated email or SMS notifications to keep applicants informed about required actions, deadlines, and approval milestones. This reduces back-and-forth communication and ensures timely submissions.
- 4. Pre-Application Checklists and Document Templates:** Provide standardized checklists and document templates tailored to common commercial permits (e.g., site plans, inspections). This helps applicants understand what's required before they begin, reducing incomplete submissions.

- 5. Workflow Automation:** Leverage OpenGov's automated workflows to route applications to the correct departments or reviewers based on permit type or project details. This minimizes bottlenecks and accelerates review timelines.
- 6. Integration with GIS Mapping Tools:** Use OpenGov's GIS integration to allow commercial applicants to verify zoning, property lines, flood zones, and other spatial data directly within the system. This feature ensures applicants can identify potential conflicts early in the process.
- 7. Fee Calculation and Online Payments:** Automate permit fee calculations based on project details and enable secure online payments. This reduces errors and makes the process faster for both applicants and staff.
- 8. Performance Dashboards and Reporting:** Implement OpenGov's reporting and analytics tools to monitor the average processing times, approval rates, and areas for improvement. Transparent data tracking enhances accountability and builds trust with stakeholders.
- 9. Collaborative Review Tools:** Enable multiple reviewers across departments (e.g., zoning, fire, and public works) to collaborate within the platform. Shared comments and approvals help streamline communication for complex commercial projects.
- 10. Mobile Accessibility:** Ensure inspectors and field staff can access permits, submit inspection results, and upload documents via mobile devices. This reduces paperwork and expedites on-site approval processes.

# Underperforming Properties

Downtown areas are often seen as the economic and cultural heart of a town. Underperforming properties can have a negative impact on the overall economic health of the area. They may contribute to lower local tax revenue and economic activity, as well as the perception of blight, potentially affecting nearby businesses and property values.

There are a variety of strategies that can be used to elevate underperforming properties, and many times, a “carrot and stick” approach is most holistic and effective:



“Carrots” refer to positive incentives, such as financial incentives, recognition and awards, and support for redevelopment.



“Sticks” refer to negative consequences, such as code enforcement, taxes and assessments, and eventual loss of property.

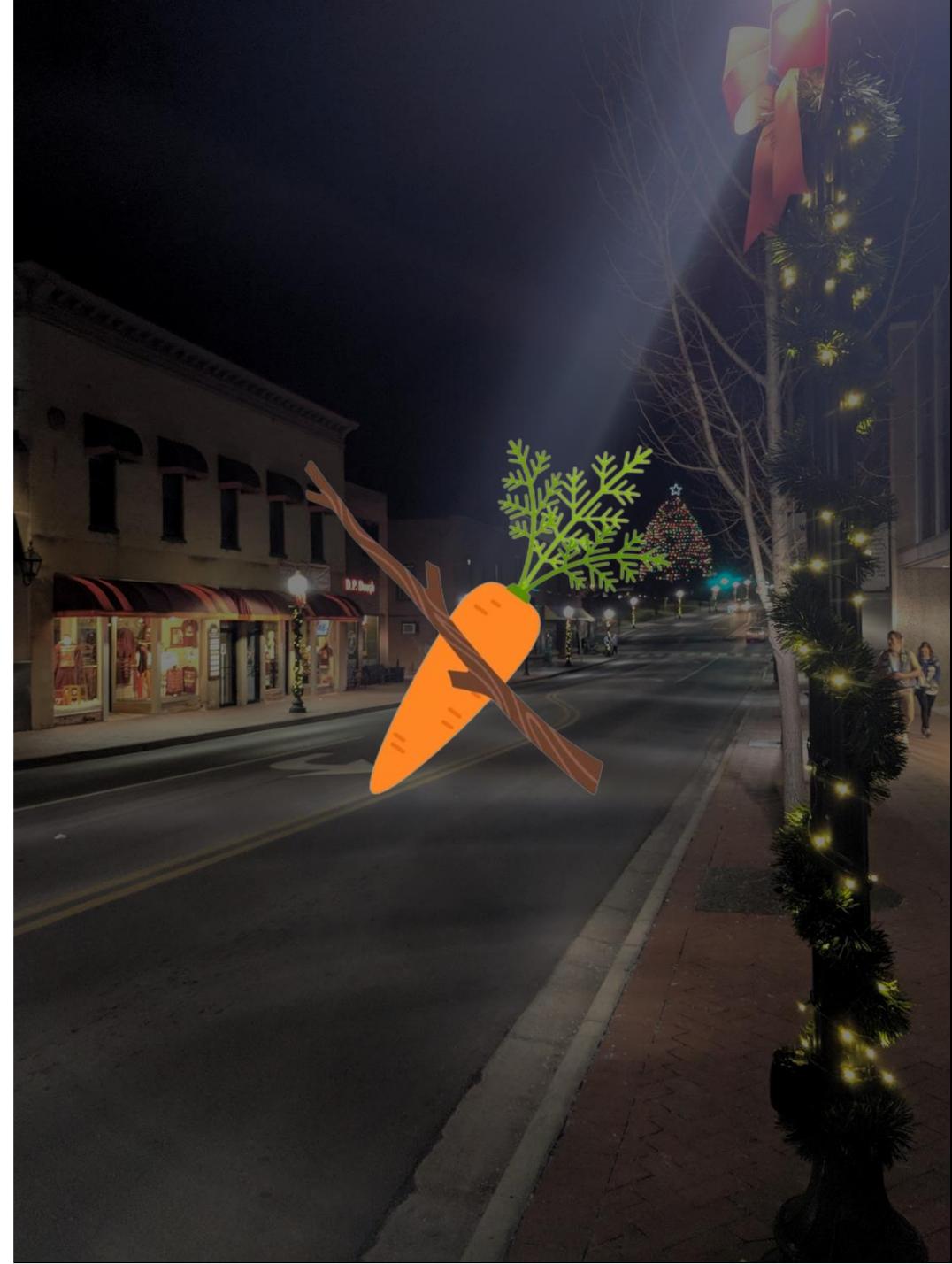
## In Blacksburg

In Blacksburg, the consultant team recommends a “carrot and stick” approach to elevating and improving underperforming properties. The mix recommended is:

**Carrots:** Implement a comprehensive Incentive Package for property owners and developers

**Sticks:** Improve the enforcement of existing maintenance standard codes

Blacksburg’s code includes a comprehensive list of minimum maintenance requirements for buildings within the Town, and there are penalties and enforcement parameters given to Code Enforcement officials that provide the “stick” they may need to be more proactive rather than reactive in their role.



# 1.7 Strategic Incentives

## Focus Area 1: Policy & Administration

Strategic incentives are essential for bridging the gap in investment proformas for downtown redevelopment projects because they help offset higher costs associated with rehabilitating older buildings, addressing infrastructure challenges, and meeting regulatory requirements. By reducing financial risk and improving project feasibility, these incentives attract private investment, stimulate economic activity, and catalyze the revitalization of underutilized downtown areas.

### In Blacksburg

While there are a multitude of potential incentives the Town of Blacksburg could pursue, the following are the most strategic for addressing primary barriers to downtown redevelopment in Blacksburg. An appendix report to this Action Plan provides greater detail on each of the following recommended incentives with accompanying case studies of successful implementation of each. Some recommended incentives currently exist but are not being actively utilized or promoted.

- **Tax Abatement:** Tax abatement in Virginia is a downtown incentive that temporarily reduces or eliminates property taxes on qualifying real estate improvements, encouraging redevelopment and investment in underutilized properties.
  - Town Code Section 22-231 currently provides for partial tax abatement in the Historic District; although it's not being readily utilized or promoted. The Town should reignite the opportunity and promote it to property owners and prospects.
- **Business Fee Rebates:** Business fee rebates are incentives that refund or waive certain local fees, such as permit or licensing costs, to reduce upfront expenses and encourage businesses to invest in downtown redevelopment projects.
  - These incentives exist through Town Code Section 2-600 (Arts & Culture District and Downtown Tourism Zone District;) although they are not being readily utilized or promoted, as well as reimbursement for building code fees, and water and sewer connection fees for qualifying projects. The Town should reignite the opportunity and promote it to property owners and prospects.
- **Revolving Loan Fund:** A revolving loan fund provides low-interest loans to businesses or property owners, creating a sustainable financing tool to support downtown redevelopment projects and stimulate ongoing investment.
  - Funding for this should be run through the Montgomery EDA with financial participation from Montgomery County.



**The Town should consider making these incentives available only to uses that are strategically significant to the future of Downtown Blacksburg, such as for uses like full-service restaurants (fine dining,) boutiques and other specialty retail, hospitality (boutique hotels, and key residential projects.**

**Gap Financing:** Gap financing is a funding mechanism that bridges the shortfall between a project's total cost and the capital secured by the developer, enabling downtown redevelopment projects to move forward when private financing alone is insufficient. Gap financing could be provided through the following mechanisms:

- **Grants:** In some cases, municipalities provide grants to cover a portion of the project costs. These grants are typically awarded for specific purposes, such as historic preservation, environmental cleanup, or infrastructure improvements. Unlike loans, grants do not need to be repaid, which can be a significant incentive for developers.
- **Land Grants or Subsidies:** Some cities offer land at a reduced cost or provide land subsidies to encourage development in key downtown areas. By reducing the cost of land acquisition, gap financing can help developers save money upfront and make redevelopment more economically viable. This can also apply to the acquisition of improved property.
- **Equity Participation:** In some cases, a city may become a partial equity partner in a redevelopment project. This means the city may provide funding in exchange for a share of the project's profits once it's completed. This is often seen in public-private partnerships (PPPs) where both parties share the risks and rewards of the project.

Funding for Gap Financing should be also be run through the Montgomery EDA with financial participation from Montgomery County.

# 1.7 Strategic Incentives

## Focus Area 1: Policy & Administration

In addition to establishing a suite of creative and strategic incentives to support downtown redevelopment projects, the Town and its partners should aggressively promote these opportunities to existing property owners and prospects. Promoting new incentives is crucial for ensuring that potential investors, developers, and business owners are aware of the opportunities available to support downtown redevelopment, as these tools can directly influence project feasibility and attract private capital. The following are recommended ways to promote incentive opportunities consistently in Blacksburg:

1. **Dedicated Webpage or Portal:** Create a centralized online hub with detailed information about incentives, eligibility criteria, application processes, and deadlines. This should live both on the Blacksburg Partnership's website and the Town of Blacksburg's.
2. **Informational Sessions or Workshops:** Host events with the Blacksburg Partnership and DBI to educate stakeholders about the incentives and how they can be utilized for downtown projects.
3. **Targeted Email Campaigns:** Blacksburg Partnership should utilize email marketing to share updates, success stories, and program highlights with developers, business owners, and community stakeholders.
4. **Social Media Outreach:** Leverage social media platforms to share posts, graphics, and videos highlighting the benefits of the incentives.
5. **Incentive Package Digital Document:** Develop a professionally designed digital document that outlines all available incentives, eligibility criteria, and step-by-step guidance for applying. This document can be distributed electronically or shared via the Town's website and partner organizations.
6. **Collaboration with the Blacksburg Partnership and DBI:** Partner with these organizations to amplify promotional efforts and reach their networks of businesses and stakeholders.
7. **Case Studies and Testimonials:** Showcase successful projects that have benefited from these incentives to inspire confidence and interest among potential applicants.



Since developers must navigate both Town and County tax structures, establishing a partnership with Montgomery County officials to offer coordinated incentives would provide more meaningful financial benefits to developers. This strategic collaboration would strengthen Blacksburg's competitive position while creating a replicable framework for other municipalities throughout Montgomery County.

## Focus Area 1: Policy & Administration

Local business engagement is essential for creating effective incentive programs and policies that truly support downtown economic development. Without direct input from business owners who understand operational challenges and market realities, even well-intentioned incentives may miss their mark or remain underutilized. A structured approach to business engagement ensures that Town policies are informed by real-world experience and that the business community is aware of available resources and opportunities.

### In Blacksburg

A two-tiered Business Advisory structure should be established to create comprehensive engagement between Town leadership and the local business community. This approach combines broad-based information sharing with focused problem-solving to ensure incentives are both effective and accessible.

- 1. Business Advisory Forum:** Host biannual or quarterly gatherings that bring together all downtown businesses (with potential expansion Town-wide) to share information about available incentives, gather feedback on existing programs, and identify emerging needs or challenges. These sessions should feature presentations on current and proposed incentive programs, open discussion periods for feedback, and structured opportunities for businesses to share their experiences and suggestions. The format should encourage broad participation while providing actionable insights for Town leadership.
- 2. Business Advisory Council:** Form a select group of 8-12 representative business owners who meet monthly or bi-monthly with Town leadership to workshop specific issues, review proposed policies, and provide detailed feedback on incentive program design and implementation. This council should include diverse representation across business types, sizes, and downtown locations to ensure comprehensive perspectives. Members would serve rotating terms and act as liaisons to the broader business community.

The dual structure ensures that all businesses have regular opportunities for input while providing Town leadership with a dedicated group of advisors who can dive deeper into policy development and problem-solving. This approach creates a feedback loop that makes incentive programs more responsive to actual business needs and increases awareness and utilization of available resources.



# 1.9 Code Enforcement

## Focus Area 1: Policy & Administration

Effective code compliance is fundamental to creating and maintaining a vibrant downtown environment, serving as the foundation for economic vitality and community pride. When properties are well-maintained and meet established standards, they create a positive cycle of investment and care that signals to businesses, residents, and visitors that the area is thriving and worthy of their time and money. Consistent enforcement of property maintenance codes ensures that building facades remain attractive, sidewalks stay clean and accessible, and commercial spaces maintain their functionality and appeal. This baseline of maintenance standards prevents the "broken window" effect where small signs of neglect can cascade into broader deterioration, potentially triggering district decline and decreased property values.

### In Blacksburg

The Town of Blacksburg has adequate codes in place to maintain a standard of care, maintenance, and appearance of downtown properties. However, there is the perception of inconsistent enforcement of these codes, which leads to a culture of carelessness and neglect in the care of some downtown buildings. While the Town does have an electronic method for reporting code violations, it's recommended that the Town implement the following steps to encourage a more proactive response to code concerns:

- 1. Conduct a Staffing and Resource Assessment:** Evaluate authority Town of Blacksburg has to address issues with downtown commercial properties and develop clearer standards/criteria to address them. Evaluate current staffing levels, workloads, and resource allocation to ensure the code enforcement division can adequately address downtown commercial properties. Identify areas where additional resources may improve responsiveness and proactive enforcement.
- 2. Enhance Community Education and Awareness:** Expand outreach initiatives to downtown businesses and property owners, providing clear guidance on code requirements, reporting processes, and the importance of compliance. Promote the existing electronic reporting platform to ensure broader awareness and usage. Partner with Downtown Blacksburg, Inc. (DBI) on this initiative.
- 3. Proactive Inspections Program:** Develop a proactive inspection schedule focused on downtown commercial buildings to identify and address recurring code issues before they escalate. This approach balances complaint-based enforcement with a more equitable and consistent strategy.

- 4. Leverage Technology for Transparency:** Use digital tools to share real-time updates on reported violations, timelines for resolution, and enforcement actions. The following features on OpenGov can assist with this recommendation:

- **Public Facing Dashboards:** OpenGov allows the creation of interactive dashboards to display real-time data on reported violations, case statuses, and resolution timelines. This can provide the public with transparency into how the Town of Blacksburg handles code enforcement.
- **Centralized Reporting & Analytics:** OpenGov's reporting tools can compile and visualize data on code enforcement trends, common violations, and resolution rates. This information can be shared with the public and used internally to identify areas needing improvement.
- **Case Management & Communication:** OpenGov's permitting and licensing suite includes case management features that track code violation reports, inspections, and outcomes. It can also send automated notifications to stakeholders about updates on their reports or ongoing cases.
- **Integration with Existing Systems:** OpenGov can integrate with the town's current electronic reporting platform to consolidate data and streamline workflows. This ensures all information flows into a single system for better tracking and transparency.

- 5. Establish a Business Advisory Group:** Form a local business advisory group to meet quarterly with code enforcement staff. This group can provide feedback, discuss common challenges, and help foster a collaborative approach to maintaining property standards. The eventual Policy & Administration Action Team could serve in this capacity.



Focus Area	Identifier	Strategy	Timeline	Level of Investment	Responsible Party
Policy & Administration	1.1	Create a series of 4 action teams (Policy & Administration; Design; Tourism & Promotion; and Economic Vitality,) and provide each with the Project Mapping Workbook. Each team should complete the workbook to assist with implementing at least 1 strategy from this plan each year. Begin with one team at a time.	NOW	-	Town/Partnership/DBI
Policy & Administration	1.2	Adopt clearly defined roles for Town, Partnership, and DBI as it relates to downtown revitalization and this plan. Work together through systems like the Community Roundtable to collaborate and share resources.	NOW	-	Town/Partnership/DBI
Policy & Administration	1.3	Form a Community Roundtable including a representative from the following potential partners: <b>Town of Blacksburg, Blacksburg Partnership, Virginia Tech, Montgomery County, Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce, Montgomery County Regional Tourism Office, Montgomery County EDA, and Downtown Blacksburg, Inc.</b> The meeting should be a standing meeting, once monthly, that partners commit to attending. The meeting should begin with a round-robin of updates from each partner, as it relates to the downtown and all community development efforts.	Years 1-3	\$	Town
Policy & Administration	1.4	Implement strategic enhancements to the Blacksburg Partnership website to position it (Partnership) as the authority and central hub for community information. This strategic move can streamline access to events, tourism, and economic development resources, including a consolidated community calendar.	Years 1-3	\$\$	Partnership
Policy & Administration	1.5	Pursue the formation of a Designated Outdoor Refreshment Area (DORA) for Downtown Blacksburg. Incorporate best-practices detailed to encourage community confidence and successful roll-out.	Years 3-5	\$	Town



Focus Area	Identifier	Strategy	Timeline	Level of Investment	Responsible Party
Policy & Administration	1.6	Incorporate recommended features of OpenGov to incrementally improve and streamline the permitting process for commercial development projects in Blacksburg.	Years 1-3	\$	Town
Policy & Administration	1.7	Implement Revolving Loan Fund and Gap Financing strategic incentives for addressing primary barriers to downtown redevelopment in Blacksburg.	Years 3-5	\$\$\$	Town
Policy & Administration	1.7	Assemble an Incentive Package digital document and aggressively promote existing incentives (such as Tax Abatement and Rebates) and newly implemented ones. This can be a living document with progressive edits and evolutions.	Years 1-3	\$	Partnership
Policy & Administration	1.8	Host biannual or quarterly gatherings that bring together all downtown businesses (with potential expansion Town-wide) to share information about available incentives, gather feedback on existing programs, and identify emerging needs or challenges.	Years 1-3	\$	Town
Policy & Administration	1.8	Form a select group of 8-12 representative business owners who meet monthly or bi-monthly with Town leadership to workshop specific issues, review proposed policies, and provide detailed feedback on incentive program design and implementation.	Years 1-3	\$	Town



Focus Area	Identifier	Strategy	Timeline	Level of Investment	Responsible Party
Policy & Administration	1.9	Adopt a more proactive response to Code Enforcement by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conducting an in-house Staffing &amp; Resource Assessment</li> <li>• Partner with DBI to expand outreach initiatives</li> <li>• Develop a proactive inspection schedule for downtown buildings</li> </ul>	Years 3-5	\$	Town
Policy & Administration	1.9	Leverage technology for code enforcement transparency by activating recommended OpenGov features for reporting and case management.	Years 1-3	\$	Town



downtown strategies

FOCUS AREA 2

# Design

Thoughtful design supports a community's transformation by enhancing the physical and visual assets that set the downtown district apart.

# 2.1 Create Engagement Features

## Focus Area 2: Design

Creating opportunities for people to interact and explore the downtown district is a key component in creating a vibrant downtown. Public art and design installations can be used to engage visitors and encourage them to explore the downtown district.

Installations that create opportunities for engagement are a great way to attract visitors into the downtown core and create organic promotion through social media. This can be especially impactful in our current culture as people seek out “Instagramable” locations. These installations can be temporary, semi-permanent, or long-term.

Utilizing a temporary selfie station is a creative, low-cost strategy to engage visitors and encourage social media posts creating the perception of activity and vibrancy. A selfie station is a small display or backdrop designed to encourage visitors to pose and take photographs and selfies. These photographs will likely be posted on social media, which generates web traffic and serves as organic advertising for the downtown area. Incorporating a hashtag slogan can direct social media traffic toward a specific message allowing organizers to monitor traffic, engagement, and visitors. QR codes can also be added to direct visitors to the downtown website, tourism page, or events calendar. Sponsorships could also be accepted to offset the cost of the station.

Semi-permanent installations can include fiberglass or metal features that could showcase a logo, oversized letters, abstract art, or a mascot. These installations could potentially be movable so the location can change throughout the year. Businesses could request or pay a small fee to host the installation which would be mutually beneficial to the business and lead organization.

Permanent or long-term installations could include oversized letters, sculptures, or other features that also serve as a landmark or focal point for the downtown core.



# 2.1 Create Engagement Features

## Focus Area 2: Design

### In Blacksburg

Downtown Blacksburg hosts a variety of public art installations. Large Hokie sculptures pay homage to Virginia Tech and add to the college town atmosphere. The Hokie sculptures are a great example of a semi-permanent installation. Murals have been installed throughout the downtown core which add to the vibrancy and creative personality of the district. One of the most creative installations is also the smallest. Blacksburg is home to the “16 Frogs” installation. This is a collection of life-sized bronze bullfrog sculptures placed throughout the community in an effort to call attention to the freshwater under and around the streets of Downtown Blacksburg. Information about the 16 Frogs is organized on a custom website that includes a listing of each installation as well as a map.

It is evident that Blacksburg understands the importance of public art and should continue exploring opportunities for incorporating art throughout the downtown core. **In the short-term, the town should prioritize installations that create opportunities for visitor engagement.**

### Temporary Installations

Temporary “selfie stations” should be installed during key high-traffic weekends throughout the year. These could include Virginia Tech related events such as athletics, orientation, graduation, homecoming, or other activities. They could also include seasonal themes such as Christmas/holidays, Valentine’s Day, 4<sup>th</sup> of July, Halloween, etc. The installations could also focus on the local audience during important community events such as the school district’s homecoming, back-to-school, or other time periods. The stations can be installed for a day, weekend, or week depending on the need and materials used. Balloon arches, oversized lit letters, wooden backdrops, seasonal photo op displays, or other installations will create interest and attract people into downtown core.



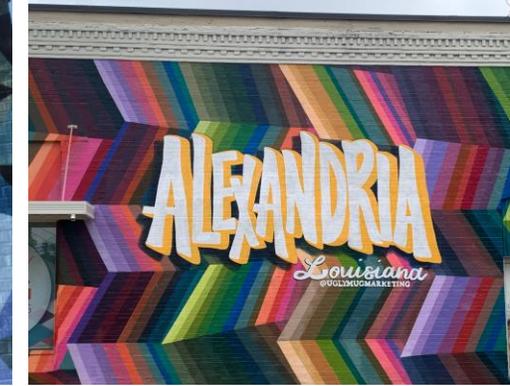
# 2.1 Create Engagement Features

## Focus Area 2: Design

### Selfie Wall Installation

Downtown Blacksburg has created a unique collection of murals that highlight topics from community history, regional tourism, and the local community. The styles range from traditional to whimsical and add vibrancy throughout the downtown. The next mural installation should focus on creating a new Blacksburg tradition. A simple, Virginia Tech themed mural should be installed in a key location in downtown to create a photo op for students, alumni, and visitors. The mural should utilize simple and bold graphics and include a special logo or slogan related to the university. The goal is for the mural to become a long-standing destination for Virginia Tech fans to document their visit to Downtown Blacksburg. The social media posts will create organic marketing traffic and create interest for the district. Following the Virginia Tech themed mural, a simple and bold "Blacksburg" or "Downtown Blacksburg" selfie wall mural should be installed in a key downtown location. These types of murals will become "Instagram Worthy" and popular photo op destinations.

Downtown Auburn, Alabama features a "War Eagle" mural at the corner of College Street and Magnolia Street. The simple mural has been a long-standing photo op and tradition for Tiger fans. The simple white background and battle cry message that utilizes the school colors creates a popular backdrop for photos and social media posts.



# 2.1 Create Engagement Features

## Focus Area 2: Design

### Main Street and College Avenue Feature

The close proximity of the campus and downtown should be highlighted. Virginia Tech has created a gateway entrance at the intersection of Main Street and Alumni Mall, and the Town of Blacksburg has invested in various infrastructure enhancements that strengthen the physical connections between campus and the downtown core. However, it is not immediately evident to first-time visitors that the north side of College Avenue is a part of the Virginia Tech campus. A semi-permanent three-dimensional engagement feature should be placed at the corner of Main Street and College Avenue to highlight the presence of Virginia Tech's campus in Downtown Blacksburg. A large fiberglass or metal version of the VT logo would encourage visitor interaction, create a downtown photo op, and serve as a landmark to identify the edge of campus.



# 2.1 Create Engagement Features

## Focus Area 2: Design

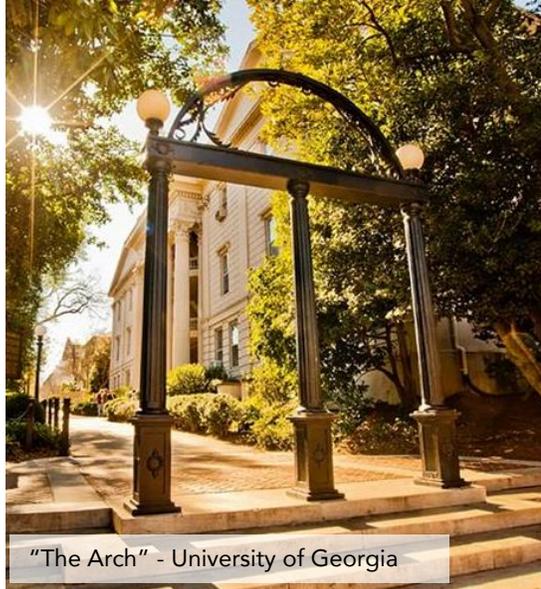
### College Avenue Gateway

The streetscape enhancements along College Avenue have created an incredible pedestrian-friendly, walkable environment. The small plaza entry area across from the Lyric Theatre creates a grand transition between downtown and campus. The Lyric serves as a focal point and landmark for views looking from campus to downtown. The plaza sets a firm foundation, but a vertical gateway focal point features should be added to the small plaza entry area across from the Lyric to serve as a landmark from downtown to campus. Hokie Stone columns or archway would be an appropriate addition and extension of the existing streetscape. This "gateway" will become a popular destination for visitors and serve as a visual and physical connection between the downtown and campus.

The University of Georgia (UGA) campus is directly adjacent to Downtown Athens in a layout that is similar to Blacksburg. An iron arch stands as the gateway entry onto campus at the intersection of Broad Street and College Avenue. "The Arch" dates back to the 1800s and has various legends, superstitions, and traditions associated with its significance. The landmark serves as a transition between campus and downtown and has evolved into an important tradition and landmark for UGA and Athens. The arch is even the focus of the university seal and is featured in various university logos.



"The Arch" - University of Georgia



"The Arch" - University of Georgia



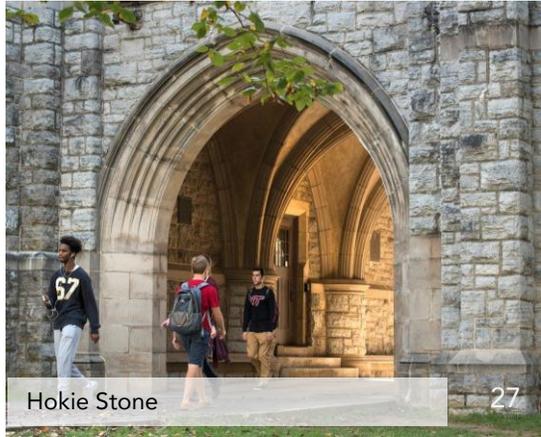
"The Stone Gateways" - Tarleton State University



"The Stone Gateways" - Tarleton State University



Entry Feature - Old Town Camarillo, California



Hokie Stone

# 2.1 Create Engagement Features

## Focus Area 2: Design

### Main Street and Alumni Mall

Alumni Mall is a major corridor that connects the Drill Field with the campus entrance at Main Street. The western end of the mall is terminated by the War Memorial and the landmark bridge, and the eastern end terminates at Main Street in Downtown Blacksburg. While the memorial and bridge create a strong terminus to the west, there is not a prominent building or landmark to anchor the eastern terminus of the mall. The town redesigned the area along the east side of Main Street to create a pedestrian plaza atmosphere with brick pavers, seat wall, landscaping, outdoor dining, and other features. The plaza area is an excellent space and can serve as an anchor, but there needs to be a stronger visual connection between the mall and the plaza.

The plaza area should be enhanced to include visual features that will create a stronger visual connection from the Alumni Mall to downtown, serve as a gateway entry feature for downtown, and increase the vibrancy of the Main Street streetscape.

Enhancements could include:

- Adding overhead string lights to the pedestrian plaza area from Wilson Avenue to Faculty Street
- Adding overhead string lighting to the outdoor dining area at Main Street and College Avenue Ext. to create a visual connection to College Avenue on the south side of Main Street
- Adding orange and maroon umbrellas or shade sails to outdoor dining areas
- Installing oversized “Blacksburg” (or variation) letters to create a landmark photo op feature
- Up lighting or wrapping string lights around existing trees along Main Street from College Avenue Ext. to Faculty Street.
- A long-term strategy could include the construction of a unique, vertical landmark focal point feature



# 2.2 Streetscape Vibrancy

## Focus Area 2: Design

Downtowns should be a comfortable and inviting environment for people. The downtown streetscapes and sidewalks play a critical role in the function, perception, and vibrancy of a downtown district. Creating street-level vibrancy along the sidewalks involves adding **layers** of streetscape elements that attract pedestrian activity. Public investment in streetscape elements such as pedestrian infrastructure, streetlights, street trees, benches, and other fixtures set a firm foundation. Additional layers from the private sector such as potted plants, creative signage, outdoor dining, merchandise displays, and lighting bring the sidewalks to life. The combination of public investment and private sector engagement creates a unique sense of place and an active downtown district.

### In Blacksburg

The Town of Blacksburg has historically invested a tremendous amount of resources into downtown streetscape enhancements and more projects are planned for the future. The streetscape along Main Street and College Avenue have been upgraded to include brick paver sidewalks, street trees, decorative lighting, furniture, and other pedestrian infrastructure. College Avenue Ext. along Main Street at Wilson Avenue was redesigned, to create a pedestrian plaza with outdoor dining, landscaping, seat wall, and furniture. Draper Road was converted into a pedestrian focused corridor as a Covid-19 pandemic activation strategy and plans for permanent enhancements are underway. The town is dedicated to enhancing Downtown Blacksburg through investments in streetscape and infrastructure projects.

The downtown streetscapes are extremely high quality, and the town continues to enhance the walkability of the district. Many short-term initiatives, some of which were Covid-19 response strategies, are being converted into permanent installations. While these **large-scale infrastructure enhancements will continue to improve Downtown Blacksburg over the coming years, short-term strategies can be implemented to enhance the vibrancy of the district in the meantime.**



# 2.2 Streetscape Vibrancy

## Focus Area 2: Design

### Shade Structures

Temporary tent shade structures were added along the College Avenue and Draper Road corridors to create outdoor seating and dining areas. The installations were an excellent example of how the town can test concepts prior to investing in permanent or long-term enhancements. The structures have been well received and heavily used which serves as a proof of concept for the strategy. **The tents should incrementally be replaced with more permanent and attractive structures.** The farmers' market pavilion should be used as design inspiration, and the Virginia Tech College of Architecture, Arts, and Design could be a potential partner as a student learning opportunity.

Granville Island Public Market is a major attraction in **Downtown Vancouver**, British Columbia. The market has grown into an entire pedestrian-oriented district. Various streetscape elements and enhancements have been added to the district, including small shade structures. The simple wooden structures provide shaded seating areas and frame spaces within the streetscape for other activities.



Shade structures – Vancouver, BC



Existing shade structures



Farmers' market pavilion



Shade structures – Vancouver, BC

# 2.2 Streetscape Vibrancy

## Focus Area 2: Design

### Draper Road String Lights

The temporary pedestrian enhancements to Draper Road are being upgraded to interim, semi-permanent features soon and construction of permanent streetscape enhancements are planned for 2028. The social gathering space has become a welcomed addition to downtown. Private property owners along Draper Road have also added other social spaces and outdoor dining areas between College Avenue and Market Square. Planters, seating, shade structures, and other details have added to the vibrancy of the corridor, but these areas would be further enhanced with the addition of string lights.

String lights add instant vibrancy to an area and become a destination for activities. **Overhead string lights should be added to the Draper Road corridor between College Avenue and Jackson Street.** Additionally, private property owners should be encouraged to add lighting installations to their outdoor seating areas to create a vibrant and welcoming nighttime environment. The lighting installations will create visual interest and serve as “breadcrumbs” to link other areas of downtown and encourage visitors to explore the entire district.

**Starkville, Mississippi**, converted a sleepy downtown side street into a destination through a string light installation branded “Lights on Lafayette.” The one-block installation created instant vibrancy to the downtown street which had immediate results. In the beginning, the street became a popular destination for small events and photoshoots. Mississippi State University used the street as a location for a baseball promotional video shoot and it was even the site of a wedding proposal. The increased attention on the street has led to tremendous economic impacts and investments. Since the installation in 2020, 5 buildings have been renovated and 4 new businesses have located on the street.



# 2.2 Streetscape Vibrancy

## Focus Area 2: Design

### “Sidewalk Spark” Sidewalk Vibrancy Initiative

The public infrastructure and streetscapes in Downtown Blacksburg create an attractive, inviting, and safe walking environment for pedestrians. Despite the town’s investment in infrastructure enhancements, the downtown sidewalks lack the “signs of life” that bring activity to the downtown. The private sector must take an active role in bringing life to the downtown sidewalks through details that add vibrancy to the downtown core.

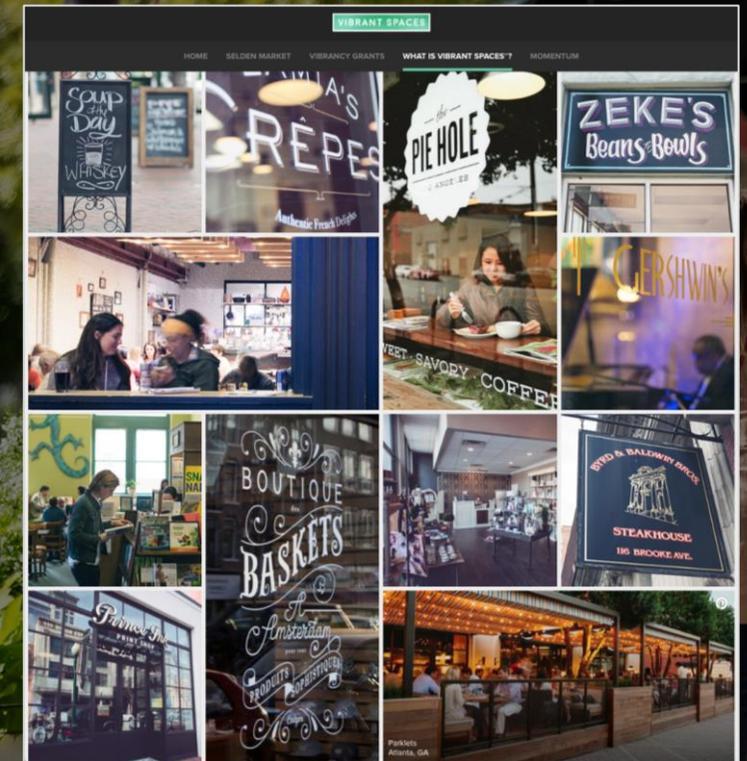
Launch a “Sidewalk Spark” program/initiative to encourage business owners to spruce up their storefronts with attractive window displays, potted plants, sandwich board signs, outdoor seating/dining, and other elements that will make Downtown Blacksburg vibrant and exciting. This program should focus on helping business owners enhance curb appeal, showcase their business, activate downtown sidewalks, and encourage them to add a spark to downtown.

The program could include:

- **Inspiration:** Training sessions or lunch & learn events designed to explain the intent of the program and provide inspirational imagery, mood boards, and ideas. The website for Norfolk, Virginia’s “[Vibrant Spaces](#)” program includes a mood board of inspirational images from Pinterest to showcase examples of what the program is attempting to accomplish (scroll to the bottom of the page).
- **Mini-Grants:** Financial incentives for materials like paint, planters, or signage. These could be mini grants focused on specific elements like signage or a more encompassing Vibrancy Grant program.
- **Friendly Competition:** Awards for categories such as “Most Creative Display” or “Best Street Activation” will be awarded regularly and promoted heavily on social media.
- **Promotional Support:** Featuring participants on social media regularly will highlight good examples and inspire others to engage in the program.

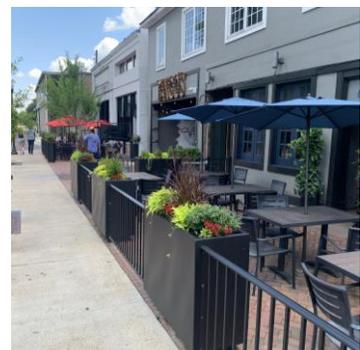


Tuscaloosa, Alabama branded their Façade Grant program “Facelift” to inspire downtown property owners to improve and enhance their buildings and storefronts. Branding a program or initiatives can help create engagement and inspire participation.



The “Vibrant Spaces” website includes a mood board of inspirational photographs to provide examples of what the program is designed to accomplish.

# 2.2 Sidewalk Vibrancy



# 2.3

# Convert Draper Road Parking Lot Into a Social Yard

## Focus Area 2: Design

Downtown pocket parks, plazas, and public spaces play an important role in the vibrancy of the district. These spaces are typically home to the community events and festivals that make each community unique and special. While the role of public spaces has not changed, the design and layout of the spaces must evolve to meet the needs of current day users.

With the rise of the “Third Place” theory (1<sup>st</sup>: Home, 2<sup>nd</sup>: Work, 3<sup>rd</sup>: Social gathering space), many vacant lots and pocket parks have been converted into “social yards” to provide a social space for residents. Yard spaces have seating, oversized games, space for food trucks or food vendors, a stage, and other amenities. “Beer Gardens” and shared social gathering spaces often referred to as “Yards” can be used as an inspiration for practical, low-cost activation strategies and design inspiration. Yard spaces are not refined, “perfect” park spaces. Rather, they have a certain grit and guerilla feel that makes them inviting and comfortable. Many restaurants are incorporating these types of spaces to attract a wide audience from college students and young professionals to families and retirees. Children can run and play while parents enjoy food, beverage, and entertainment.

### In Blacksburg

Blacksburg understands the importance of providing high quality public space. The downtown streetscapes have been enhanced dramatically to include pedestrian-focused vibrancy elements such as paver sidewalks, street trees, decorative streetlights, and other details. Semi-permanent shade structures and outdoor dining areas have been added to provide space for socializing and gathering. As a Covid-19 pandemic response, Draper Road was converted into a pedestrian mall with outdoor seating public art, and other elements. In 2024, the temporary elements added along Draper Road transitioned from temporary to semi-permanent installations. The roadway will be permanently upgraded and transformed starting in 2028 to include expanded paver sidewalks, outdoor dining spaces, lighting upgrades, and other enhancements. These activation strategies are excellent examples of incrementally enhancing the experience and environment for people in the downtown core.

Although these enhancements have created high-quality streetscapes, local residents continue to request additional activities and spaces for children, youth, and families. The needs of these target audiences as well as college student and young adult populations are all related to the “Third Place” theory.



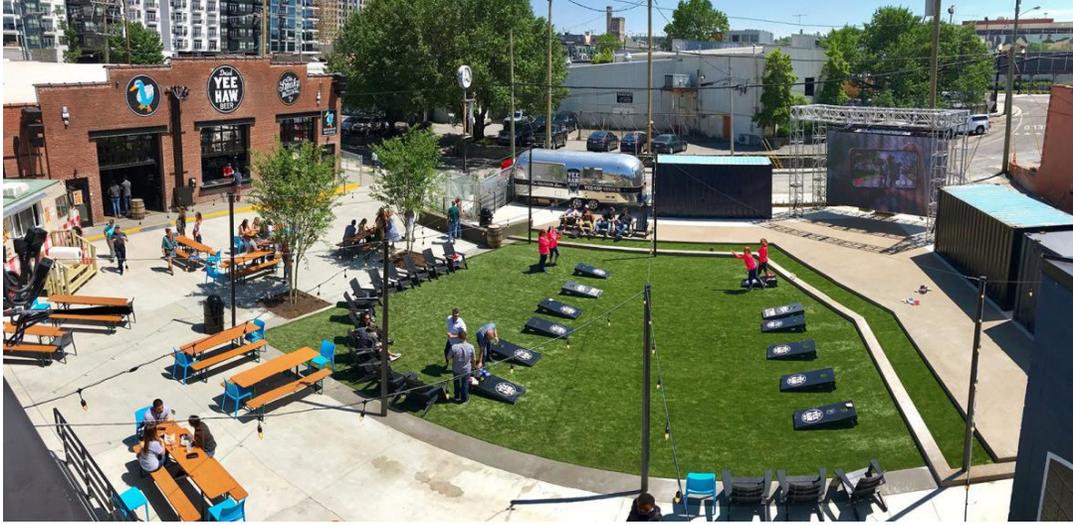
Existing parking lot

# 2.3 Convert Draper Road Parking Lot Into a Social Yard

## Focus Area 2: Design

The permanent enhancements to the Draper Road streetscape will greatly enhance the environment for pedestrians, but spaces for outdoor games, social events, and other activities will be limited. Downtown Blacksburg can potentially use the public parking lot along Draper Road as a future Third Place for the district. *Once the streetscape enhancements are complete, the parking lot could be converted into a social yard activity space that could be used by all generations.*

As opposed to a traditional playground, elements such as turf areas, informal stage, screens, outdoor seating, string lights, shade structures, landscaping, etc. could be used to transform the property into a social gathering space. The proximity to coffeeshops, restaurants, and retailers make it an ideal location to attract young families so the adults can socialize while children play. Additionally, the proximity to campus provides excellent opportunities for students and faculty to enjoy the space alongside local residents. In the short-term, social yard amenities can be added to Draper Road to further enhance the environment and create opportunities for children and youth.



# 2

## DESIGN Action Team



downtown strategies

Focus Area	Identifier	Strategy	Timeline	Level of Investment	Responsible Party
Design	2.1	Install temporary “selfie stations” during key high-traffic weekends throughout the year.	NOW	\$	Tourism, DBI, Blacksburg Partnership
Design	2.1	Install a Virginia Tech themed selfie wall mural in a key location in downtown to create a photo op for students, alumni, and visitors.	Years 1-3	\$\$	Blacksburg Partnership & VT
Design	2.1	Install a simple and bold “Blacksburg” or “Downtown Blacksburg” selfie wall mural in a key downtown location.	Years 3-5	\$\$	DBI
Design	2.1	Install a semi-permanent three-dimensional art installation at the corner of Main Street and College Avenue to highlight the presence of Virginia Tech’s campus in Downtown Blacksburg.	Years 3-5	\$\$	VT
Design	2.1	Install a vertical gateway focal point feature in the small plaza entry area across from the Lyric to serve as a landmark from downtown to campus.	Years 3-5	\$\$\$	VT
Design	2.1	<p>Enhance the plaza area at Main Street and Alumni Mall to include features that will create a stronger visual connection from campus to downtown.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Add overhead string lights to the pedestrian plaza area from Wilson Avenue to Faculty Street</li> <li>• Add overhead string lighting to the outdoor dining area at Main Street and College Avenue Ext. to create a visual connection to College Avenue on the south side of Main Street</li> <li>• Add orange and maroon umbrellas or shade sails to outdoor dining areas</li> <li>• Install oversized “Blacksburg” (or variation) letters to create a landmark photo op feature</li> <li>• Add up lighting or wrapping string lights around existing trees along Main Street from College Avenue Ext. to Faculty Street.</li> <li>• A long-term strategy could include the construction of a unique, vertical landmark focal point feature</li> </ul>	Various	\$ - \$\$	Town & Blacksburg Partnership

# 2

## DESIGN Action Team



downtown strategies

Focus Area	Identifier	Strategy	Timeline	Level of Investment	Responsible Party
Design	2.2	Incrementally replace the downtown tent shade structures with more long-term and attractive structures. Explore partnership with Virginia Tech’s College of Architecture, Arts, and Design.	Years 1-3	\$\$	Town & VT
Design	2.2	Add overhead string lights to the Draper Road corridor between College Avenue and Jackson Street.	Years 1-3	\$\$	Town
Design	2.2	Launch a “Sidewalk Spark” program/initiative to encourage business owners to spruce up their storefronts with attractive window displays, potted plants, sandwich board signs, outdoor seating/dining, and other elements that will make Downtown Blacksburg vibrant and exciting.	NOW	\$-\$\$	DBI & Town
Design	2.3	Incrementally convert the Draper Road parking lot into a social yard activity space once permanent streetscape enhancements are completed.	Years 3-5	\$\$-\$\$\$	Town



downtown strategies

FOCUS AREA 3

# Tourism & Promotion

Smart promotion initiatives position your Downtown or commercial district as the center of the community and hub of economic activity, while creating a positive image that showcases a community's unique characteristics.

# 3.1

## Promote Enhancement Projects

### Focus Area 3: Tourism & Promotion

#### In Blacksburg

The Town of Blacksburg has led a number of infrastructure enhancement projects throughout the downtown core. Although the enhancements have been well received for the most part, many residents expressed that they do not know about upcoming projects and expressed minor frustrations with the constant construction in the downtown core due to altered parking, access, and traffic flow. Most of the town's public infrastructure investments are guided by the 2019 Downtown Blacksburg Strategic Plan, but residents do not understand how each enhancement project is a step toward a long-term vision for downtown.

The town launched the "Let's Talk Blacksburg" website as an outreach tool to disseminate information and promote local projects. The site has a playful, tourism-style tone rather than a technical governmental site, which is a great outreach strategy. The town has also invested in a number of other outreach services designed to "Connect, Engage, and Inform" the general public. In addition to Let's Talk Blacksburg, the town also shares information through a campaign called "TOB Connects," which includes outlets such as Citizens Alert, At Your Request, YouTube, and traditional social media outlets. These are excellent tools and resources for residents and the town should continue to promote TOB Connects outlets.

In addition to the web-based information outlets, the town should also share information through visual promotional materials. While the web-based tools are great, many visitors and tourists will not likely be aware of local projects and news outlets. Disruptions due to construction can create a negative experience for visitors so it is important to promote the positive changes. **Signage, banners, window posters, mesh fence banners, sidewalk stickers, and other visual material should be installed to promote upcoming, in-progress, and recently completed projects. The information should be packaged into a broad campaign designed to promote downtown enhancement projects to highlight that each project, large or small, is part of a larger downtown initiative.** Additionally, current efforts to minimize the impact of the construction projects on local businesses by using signage (example to the right) for navigating around construction and promoting downtown businesses should continue.



# 3.1 Promote Enhancement Projects

## Focus Area 3: Tourism & Promotion

### Case Studies

The **City of Vancouver**, British Columbia is investing in various public infrastructure enhancements in the historic Gastown District. These projects are very similar to Downtown Blacksburg as they include investments in utility maintenance/upgrades, creation of public spaces, and streetscape enhancements. Signs have been installed throughout the district that promote the projects and provide information about timelines and any changes to traffic flow, access, parking, etc. Some signs use engaging, tourism-style language such as “We’re Cobbling Together Some Fun,” which is a reference to the historic cobblestone streets and sidewalks within the district. Other signs include maps or renderings to showcase the exciting plans and imagery. QR codes direct viewers to a website that provides more detailed information about the projects.

**Lake Wales, Florida** recently completed a major streetscape project along Park Avenue and Market Plaza. The project included the complete demolition and rebuild of Park Avenue, which essentially serves as “Main Street,” and the central downtown plaza area. The city and Main Street Association installed various forms of signage throughout the district long-before construction began and throughout the construction process to inform residents and visitors of the project. Signs included large temporary signs installed in highly visible locations, posters in downtown storefront windows, and custom mesh banners along construction fences. They included renderings of the proposed redesigns, a reference to the “Lake Wales Connected Plan” master plan document, a custom branded logo for the initiative, and a QR code that linked to a construction schedule and other detailed information. The “Building the Future” message creates a positive impression of the project despite short-term disruptions and inconveniences during the construction process.



Gastown Neighborhood, Vancouver, BC



Gastown Neighborhood, Vancouver, BC



Downtown Lake Wales, FL



Downtown Lake Wales, FL



Gastown Neighborhood, Vancouver, BC

# 3.2 Develop a Unified "Voice"

## Focus Area 3: Tourism & Promotion

Creating a strong brand is a crucial component of any organization or business. Although it is often overlooked, it is also important for communities to have a strong brand that captures the unique qualities and character of the place. Oftentimes cities and towns overlook the important role those logos and graphics play in promoting the overall community.

A strong logo is only the beginning. A "brand" is an entire messaging package that captures the unique personality of the community through logos, graphics, events, promotions, color palettes, messaging, and other material. Every community is different, so every brand package is different. Some communities have a single brand that serves as an umbrella for all external messaging. Others have a family of brands that work in unison to promote the various assets of the community. It is important to engage a qualified professional to determine the appropriate strategy.

**Stephenville, Texas**, home to Tarleton State University, struggled with creating a narrative that captured all of their unique assets. Stephenville has a beautiful courthouse square, is a college town, is home to the Cowboy Walk of Fame, and is known as the Cowboy Capital of the World. They also have multiple entities (city, Main Street Stephenville, tourism, chamber, etc.) who are working to promote the community, which can create a disconnected approach. Downtown Strategies connected Stephenville with a trusted partner, Arnett Muldrow & Associates, to develop a brand package that captured the personality of the community and showcased their various assets. The package, which included logos for the city, downtown, and various organizations, as well as brand extensions for events and promotional materials, gave community leaders the resources they needed to develop a cohesive and unified "voice" for Stephenville.



Example components from the Stephenville, Texas brand package developed by Arnett Muldrow & Associates through a partnership with Downtown Strategies.



# 3.2 Develop a Unified "Voice"

## Focus Area 3: Tourism & Promotion

### In Blacksburg

The Town of Blacksburg has an attractive wordmark that has been utilized in a variety of ways for several years. Promoting an active college town like Blacksburg is challenging. Creating a cohesive narrative to showcase the various strengths and assets to the multiple target audience groups is complex, especially when multiple organizations are involved in promoting the community. Often the brand is diluted because the branding for each individual community organization and event is showcased rather than the community itself. This creates a chaotic environment for messaging and promotions.

Currently Blacksburg, especially Downtown Blacksburg, lacks a cohesive and unified "voice" when promoting the district. Each organization (town, Blacksburg Partnership, DBI, tourism, Main Street Connect, etc.) has its own logo, brand, and approach for promoting Blacksburg. Additionally, the university has its own brand and approach to promotions and marketing. While the presence of various organizations leading downtown initiatives is a strength, it creates a disjointed approach to promotions, marketing, and advertising efforts. In addition to each event being hosted by different organizations, the promotional material and branding for each event lacks a cohesive and unified style and brand. This can make it incredibly difficult for the consumer to understand the various opportunities that are available.

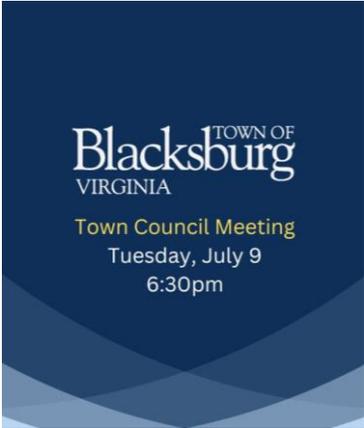
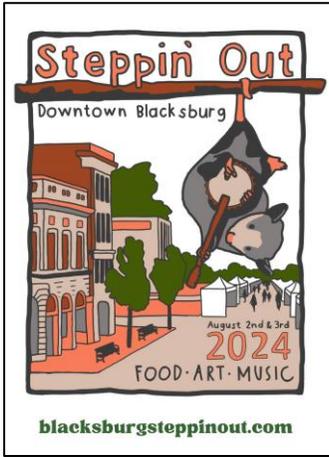


# 3.2 Develop a Unified "Voice"

## Focus Area 3: Tourism & Promotion

**Blacksburg needs a unified voice for tourism and promotional efforts.** This does not imply that all tourism efforts should be led by a single organization. However, there should be a standardized brand package for Blacksburg and Downtown Blacksburg that can be used by the various organizations leading downtown and tourism activities. Standardizing fonts and color palettes for downtown promotions across the various organizations can set the foundation for a unified voice, but a professional brand package would create a firm foundation for promotional efforts. A qualified graphics designer who specializes in community marketing and branding should be enlisted to develop an updated brand package for Blacksburg. The brand package should include a logo and color palette as well as brand extensions for the various events, districts, organizations, and other ancillary efforts. The goal is to create a brand that can properly capture the personality of Blacksburg, create a brand strategy for internal and external audiences, and present a unified "voice" for the community. The brand should be used by all key organizations involved in promoting downtown and events. Each organization can continue to lead various events and activities; however, the promotion of the events should follow the brand package guidelines in order to create a cohesive message for the consumer.

The updated brand will also inform design decisions related to the need to update the existing wayfinding signage system throughout downtown and the community.



# 3.2 Develop a Unified "Voice"

Examples of promotional material from the Starkville Partnership, which includes the tourism association, chamber of commerce, and Main Street Association.

**HISTORIC STARKVILLE**  
MISSISSIPPI'S COLLEGE TOWN

**BLACK FRIDAY BONANZA**  
NOV 29 | DOWNTOWN AND AROUND STARKVILLE

**PUMPKIN palooza**  
OCTOBER 24TH  
DOWNTOWN STARKVILLE  
5-7 P.M.

**UNWINE DOWNTOWN**  
Wine tasting & 20% off everything at participating shops!  
FRIDAY 6:00 PM | 19 | JULY 2024  
GET YOUR TICKETS NOW  
UNWINE DOWNTOWN.COM

**UNWINE DOWNTOWN**  
Wine tasting & 20% off everything at participating shops!  
FRIDAY 6:00 PM | 19 | JULY 2024  
GET YOUR TICKETS NOW  
UNWINE DOWNTOWN.COM

**Spring OPEN HOUSE**  
SATURDAY, MARCH 23  
DOWNTOWN AND AROUND TOWN  
BEGINNING AT 11 AM

**KING COTTON CRAWFISH BOIL**  
FRIDAY, APRIL 21ST 6-9 PM  
GET YOUR TICKETS! \$25 ADVANCED | \$35 AT THE DOOR  
FIRE STATION PARK  
UNLIMITED CRAWFISH TASTING

**CELEBRATE 4th OF JULY**  
CORNERSTONE PARK  
222 BATTERS BLVD  
STARKVILLE, MS 39759

**Open Late TILL 8**  
Tuesday, August 20  
LATE NIGHT SHOPPING, GIVEAWAYS, FOOD TRUCKS, LIVE MUSIC AND MORE!  
5-8 P.M. | THE HUB PLAZA | DOWNTOWN STARKVILLE | DAWG DAYS 2024

**DOWNTOWN@SUNDOWN**  
THURSDAY JULY 11 7-9 P.M. | JENNIFER JEFFRIES | FIRE STATION PARK

**MUSIC =on= MAIN DOWNTOWN**

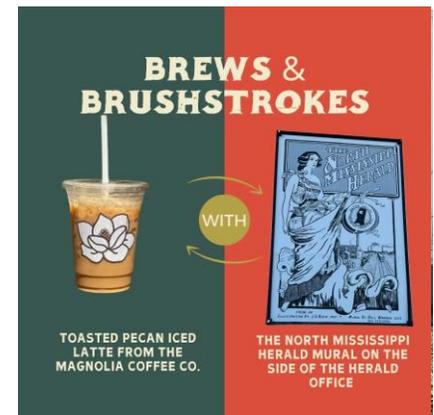
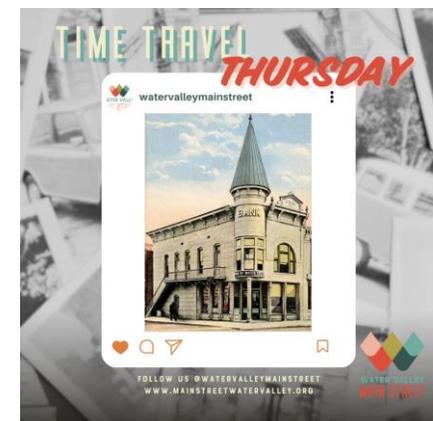
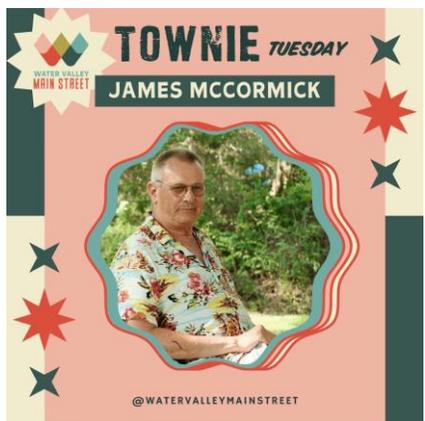
**STARKVILLE CHRISTMAS PARADE**  
DEC 2 6 P.M. | DOWNTOWN STARKVILLE  
PRESENTED BY **Reed's** Est. 1905

**unTapped DOWNTOWN**  
FRI. JUNE 23 5:30-8:30 PM  
CRAFT BEER TASTING & 20% OFF EVERYTHING AT PARTICIPATING SHOPS!  
ADVANCED TICKETS \$20  
WWW.STARKVILLE.ORG

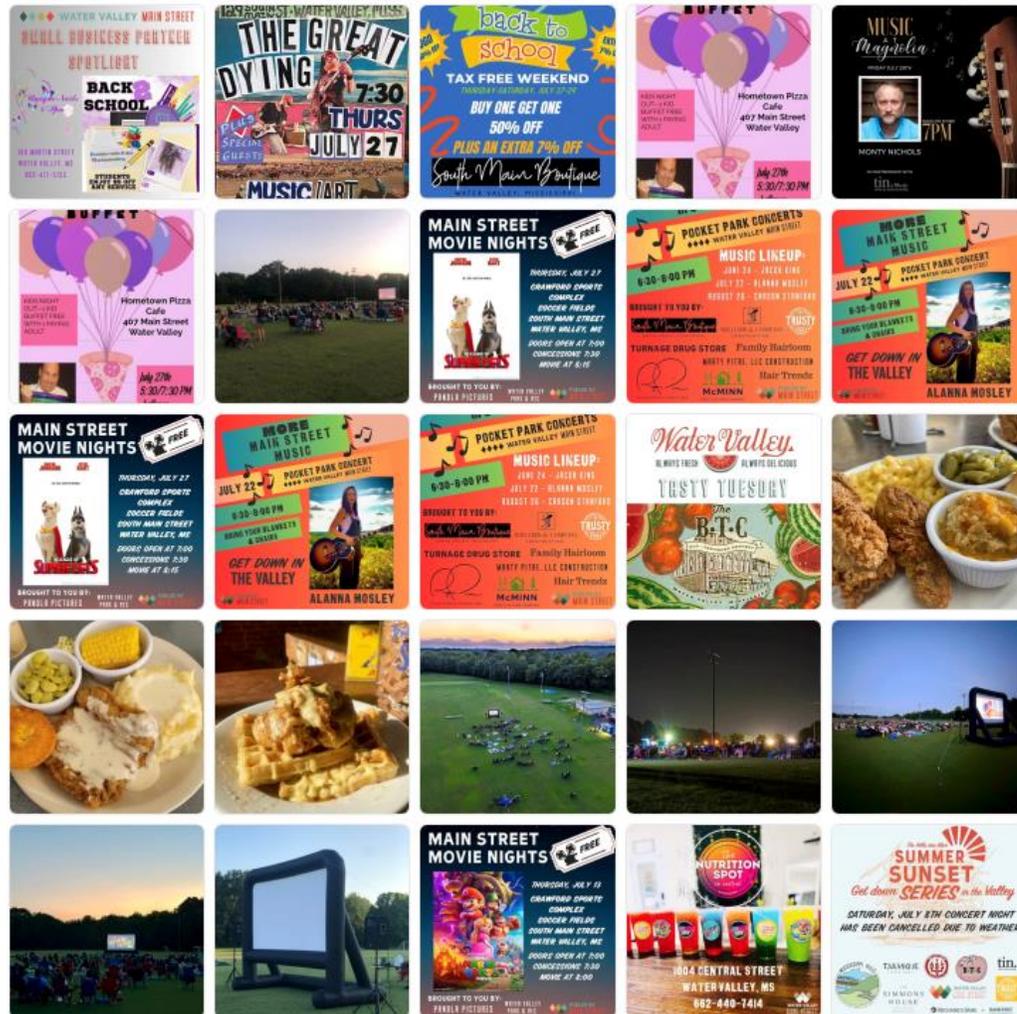
**UNTAPPED DOWNTOWN**  
FRIDAY 5:30 PM | 22 | MARCH 2024  
PRESENTED BY **Bank of Commerce**  
GET YOUR TICKETS NOW  
UNTAPPEDDOWNTOWN.COM  
Craft Beer tasting and 20% off everything at participating shops!

# 3.2 Develop a Unified "Voice"

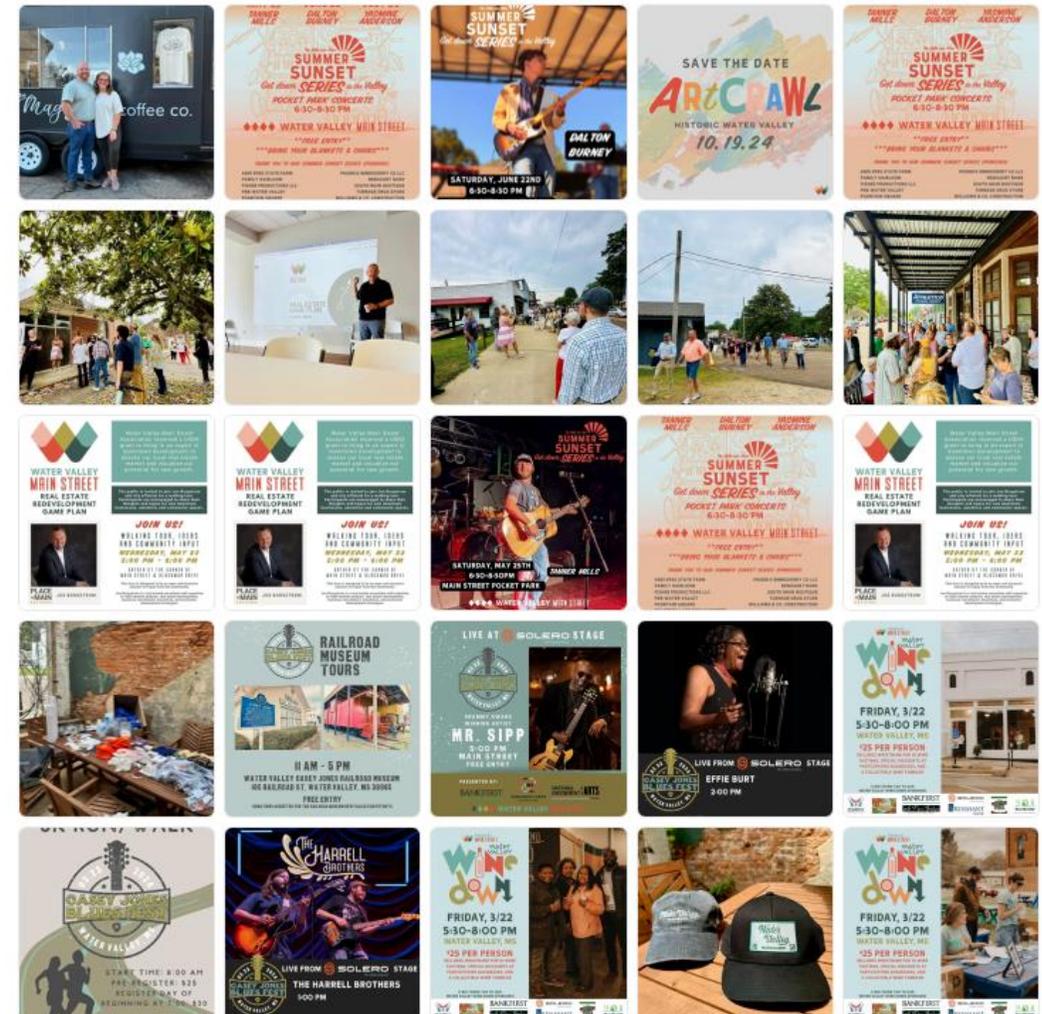
Examples of promotional material from the Water Valley Main Street Association. Although these promotions are from a single organization, the use of a consistent color palette and standardized family of fonts creates a cohesive brand and unified voice for Downtown Water Valley, Mississippi.



# 3.2 Develop a Unified "Voice"



Water Valley Main Street's Facebook feed **before** a consistent brand package was implemented. The lack of a unified style created a chaotic and unrefined presentation.



Water Valley Main Street's Facebook feed **after** a consistent brand package was implemented. Promotions now use a standardized family of fonts and color palette, which present a cohesive, consistent, unified, and recognizable brand.

# 3.3 Be Intentional with Events

## Focus Area 3: Tourism & Promotion

Events and promotions play a key role in tourism efforts. Communities should have a full slate of events throughout the year that include a mixture of large-scale festivals as well as small-scale promotions (or micro-events). The key is to constantly invite visitors into downtown and strategically connect them with downtown businesses. Most communities have two or three major festivals that dominate tourism efforts. While these festivals are important, their impact is limited. Oftentimes businesses, especially retailers, do not experience a large economic impact from large-scale events because the large crowds and disrupted schedules impede casual retail shopping. Retailers often see a much bigger impact from targeted promotions that specifically connect customers to the stores. Examples of these types of promotions are sip-and-shops, seasonal open houses, and themed shopping events. Retailers will often have higher sales for a 100–200-person sip-and-shop event than a 3,000+ person festival crowd. It is important to include a diverse mixture of event types in the calendar of events.

### In Blacksburg

Blacksburg hosts a variety of events and promotions throughout the year, which include a mixture of large festivals, reoccurring events, and small-scale promotions. The events are led by various organizations including the Town of Blacksburg, Downtown Blacksburg Inc., Main Street Connect, and the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce, among others. They are promoted through social media as well as traditional advertising mediums. Every organization has limited staff and resources, so it is critical that efforts are efficient, coordinated, and encourage collaboration among key partner organizations.

Events, promotions, and tourism activities should be seen as an economic development tool. Almost every event should be viewed as an opportunity to connect customers with downtown businesses to create some type of impact and return on investment. Connecting the dots between customers and downtown merchants requires strategic and intentional decisions by the event planners and business owners.



# 3.3 Be Intentional with Events

## Focus Area 3: Tourism & Promotion

### (Honestly) Assess Existing Events

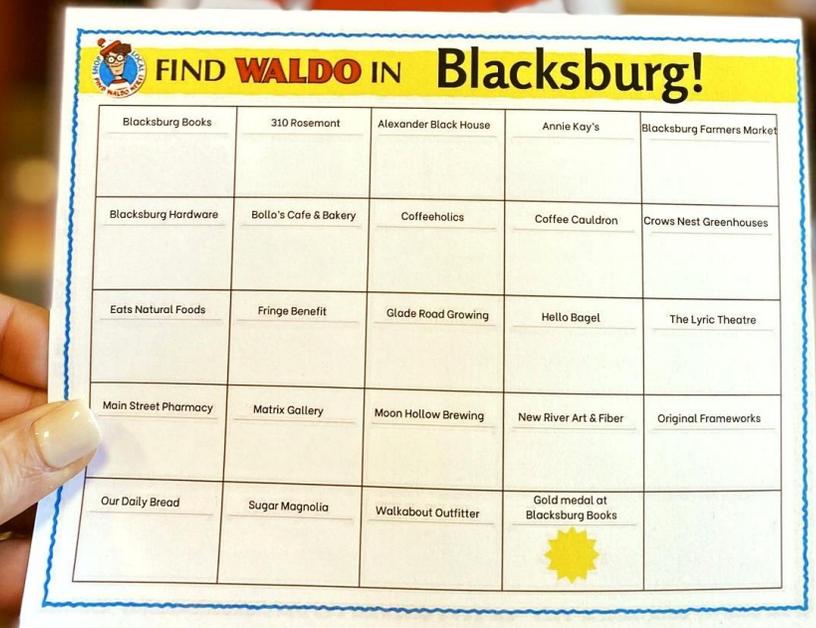
Many communities host events annually without assessing the true impact and return on investment of the activities. Staff members' (and volunteers') time is valuable and limited. Planning events typically dominate the time and resources of community leaders and organizations so, it is critical that any event, large or small, that is included in the scope of work is impactful and generating a return on investment (time, resources, financial, etc.). As a first step, downtown officials should list all existing events on a monthly calendar. This should include all notable community events regardless of the host organization. **Assess each existing event and honestly evaluate the return on investment (time, effort, and resources) to ensure that they are generating a significant impact in some way.** Impact can include economic impacts on retailers and/or restaurants (sip-and-shop, seasonal open house, etc.), but sometimes the impact of tourism efforts is community pride or sense of community (Christmas parade, July 4<sup>th</sup> Celebration, etc.). Ultimately tourism should be viewed as an economic development tool so feel free to discontinue events that do not produce a quality return on investment for staff time and resources.

### Fill in the Gaps

Once the calendar is built, look for gaps throughout the year or opportunities to build on existing events. For college towns, local businesses typically struggle during the Christmas and summer breaks as well as off weekends when high-traffic events are not occurring. **Explore how small-scale promotions and activities can fill the gaps throughout the calendar year and generate traffic for local businesses without exhausting staff time and resources.**

### Go Small

**Small-scale promotions or "micro-events" should be prioritized because they can have a tremendous economic impact for downtown merchants without overtaxing staff members.** Small-scale promotions generally require coordination among downtown merchants (operating hours, sales, activities, etc.) and promotion (mainly social media) rather than time and resources like a large festival or event. The "Where's Waldo" promotion organized by Blacksburg Books is a prime example of a simple promotional activity that highlighted local businesses through social media without requiring extensive time, funding, or resources. Other examples include scavenger hunts, open houses, late night shopping events, Sip & Shops, Art Crawls, etc. Downtown Blacksburg, Inc. could be the primary organization to coordinate micro-events and small-scale promotions for the downtown core.

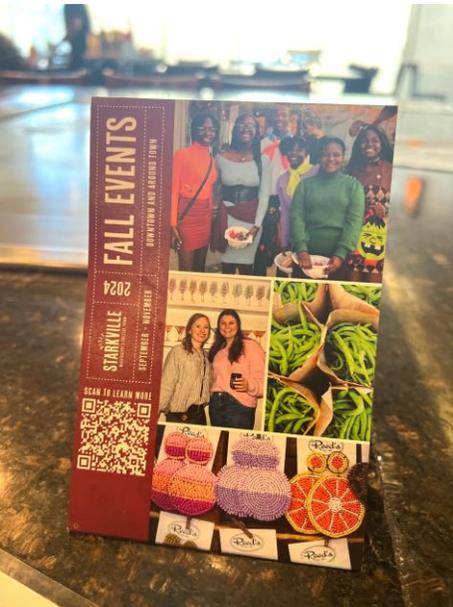


# 3.3 Be Intentional with Events

## Focus Area 3: Tourism & Promotion

### Package Events

Explore how current events can be packaged together to create a more impactful and cohesive promotional package for the community. Remember that visitors and participants do not care who is leading the event. They see every event as a Blacksburg event regardless of if it is led by the town, Blacksburg Partnership, Blacksburg Regional Art Association, or any other organization. Group Downtown Blacksburg events into seasonal promotional packages throughout the year. This will allow Downtown Blacksburg to present an organized and unified message to prospective visitors. Packaging events also makes the community seem more active because events are promoted under the “Downtown Blacksburg” umbrella rather than each stand-alone organization or event. Each season should have a different focus/theme and could have a different target audience.



# 3.3

## Be Intentional with Events

### Focus Area 3: Tourism & Promotion

The following are examples of seasonal campaigns that group existing and new events into unified and structured packages. These are meant to serve as examples and can be modified and renamed to fit the needs of the local community.

#### Fall: "Fall Crawl"

- Theme: Celebrate Hokie pride, football season, gameday, tailgate, harvest and fall festivities.
- Target Audience: Virginia Tech visitors, students, football fans, gameday crowds
- Key Events: Tailgating weekends, downtown football watch parties, harvest markets, seasonal decorations contests.
- Promotions: Gameday guides, "What to Wear" guides, themed retail promotions, fan photo contests, Friday "Wear the Colors" promotion, and Sunday Brunch & Browse promotion.
- Social Media: Highlight Hokie spirit with game-day posts, behind-the-scenes features from participating businesses, gameday fashion advice, and a "Downtown Hokie Highlight" series.

#### Winter: "Holiday Lights & Winter Nights"

- Theme: Capture the warmth of the holiday season with winter events and festive lights.
- Target Audience: Local residents, students, faculty, regional visitors
- Key Events: Holiday markets, tree lighting ceremony, downtown caroling, and a winter art walk.
- Promotions: Shop-local holiday discounts, warm beverage specials, Black Friday promotion, and a "12 Days of Downtown Deals" countdown.
- Social Media: Showcase the lights and decorations, host a "Winter Nights Photo Challenge," downtown storefront display contest, and feature gift ideas from local retailers.

#### Spring: "Blacksburg in Bloom"

- Theme: Embrace renewal with cultural events celebrating local art, music, and cuisine. Strong focus on local businesses.
- Target Audience: Regional visitors, local residents, students, faculty, Virginia Tech visitors
- Key Events: Spring art fairs, International Street Fair, food festivals, live music series, art crawls, and Spring Open House.
- Promotions: Art themed sales, "Blacksburg Beacons" posts featuring local entrepreneurs, and cultural assets.
- Social Media: Focus on local artist features, foodie spotlights, art, and photo tours of vibrant spring blooms and art installations around town.

#### Summer: "Savor Summer" or "Sweet 16"

- Theme: Celebrate local life with family-friendly summer events for residents. Encourage locals to "savor" everything downtown has to offer, especially during the quiet season without students.
- Target Audience: Local residents, regional visitors, visitors for key high traffic Virginia Tech events
- Key Events: Outdoor movie nights, summer concert series, special dinners, and weekly farmers' markets.
- Promotions: Loyalty punch cards for frequent shoppers, summer dining discounts, and a "Discover Downtown" challenge with prizes.
- Social Media: Highlight summer events, engage followers with community stories, and share "Hot Spot of the Week" posts showcasing hidden downtown gems.

# 3.4

## “Brunch & Browse” Experience

### Focus Area 3: Tourism & Promotion

Capitalizing on being a college town is a difficult challenge. Creating experiences for visitors without competing with university events is a delicate balance. The key is to complement the university’s events rather than competing with them. Identifying high-traffic university weekends and developing add-on events or activities that enhance the fan experience is key to creating an exciting college town atmosphere. The main goal of these events is to generate an economic impact for downtown retailers and restaurants. Therefore, it is critical that any add-on event is designed to specifically connect the dots between university visitors and downtown merchants. These add-on events are also designed to create a weekend experience for visitors to encourage shopping, dining, and overnight stays to maximize the economic impact for the community.

#### Case Study

**Starkville, Mississippi** realized that although Mississippi State University football games attracted 60,000 visitors to campus, the downtown area was doing very little to capitalize on that traffic. There were no activities on Friday so visitors would arrive on Saturday, which was dominated by the on-campus gameday activities and left little time for local shopping and dining. On Sundays every downtown retailer and restaurant was closed. Although thousands of visitors were in the city, there were very few opportunities for them to shop, dine, or visit local attractions.

In 2011, the Starkville Main Street Association (SMSA) and Starkville Convention and Visitors Bureau (tourism) launched the “New South Weekends” campaign. This campaign was designed to complement football gameday weekends by offering add-on events. The idea was to create a weekend **experience** in Starkville rather than simply focusing on Saturday as gameday. The campaign began by offering a Friday night event, which enticed visitors to arrive a day early, increasing hotel revenue. The various Friday night events included activities such as an art market, beer tasting event, chili cookoff, live music, Halloween festival, and other similar small-scale events. Saturday was devoted to gameday, but local restaurants were promoted for pre-game and post-game dining. Sunday was focused on encouraging visitors to dine and shop before departing, which, initially, was the biggest challenge.

**BULLDOG**  
**BRUNCH**  
= and =  
**BROWSE**

Previously Downtown Starkville was a ghost town on Sundays so the idea of hosting a dining and shopping event was challenging. SMSA approached downtown retailers and restaurants with a proposal. They explained the intent of New South Weekends and requested that they agree to test a concept. SMSA was not asking them to permanently change their hours to open on Sunday, they simply asked them to commit to opening on the 6 home football game weekends. In return, SMSA would promote the event as “Bulldog Brunch and Browse,” a coordinated shopping and dining event. Social media, web-based, and print media promotions were utilized, and all participating businesses were included. The event was a huge success and led to Sundays, a day they were previously closed, becoming one of the highest revenue-generating days for most downtown merchants.

Fast-forward to present day and Downtown Starkville is an active and vibrant destination on Sundays throughout the year. Almost every restaurant, not only downtown locations, offer brunch specials. Retailers are regularly open on Sundays and have even worked together to plan their own events and promotions.

# 3.4

## “Brunch & Browse” Experience

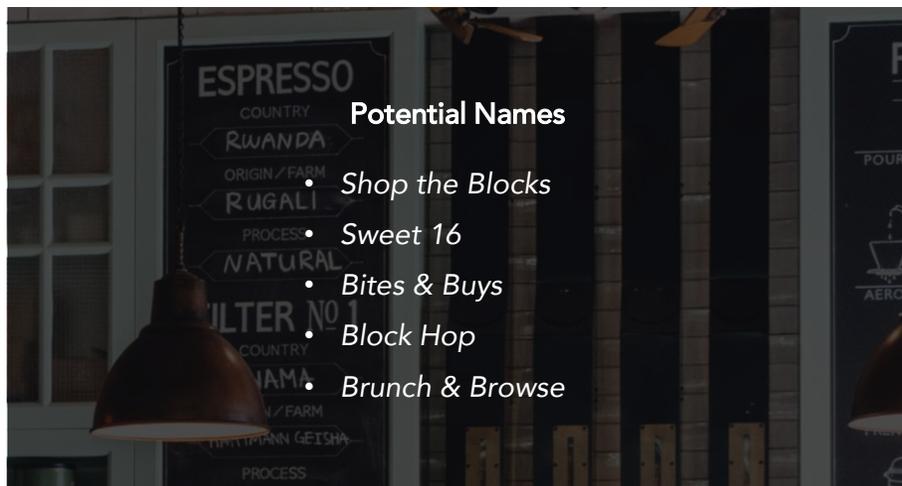
### Focus Area 3: Tourism & Promotion

#### In Blacksburg

Community leaders in Blacksburg have expressed the need to incorporate add-on events and experiences during key times of the year, starting with a Brunch and Browse or Sip and Shop style event into the scope of work for Downtown Blacksburg. This type of promotion will enhance the fan experience, provide a robust customer base for downtown merchants, and create a fun activity for local residents.

Initially the event should be added to the Sundays of home football game weekends then expanded as needed. Once established, these types of events can become an easy add-on to high-traffic weekends at Virginia Tech, holidays, or other occasions.

The following is an outline of how a Brunch and Browse event could be structured for Downtown Blacksburg. These are only examples and can be modified, renamed, and customized for Blacksburg.



#### Potential Names

- Shop the Blocks
- Sweet 16
- Bites & Buys
- Block Hop
- Brunch & Browse

#### Potential Program Details

- **Brunch & Breakfast Deals**  
Local restaurants in Downtown Blacksburg could offer special brunch or breakfast deals on game weekends. Participating locations could create limited-time dishes or drink specials to add interest to the event.
- **Shop & Save with School Pride**  
Retailers could offer small discounts or gifts for anyone wearing school colors. Another idea is a "Game Day Loyalty Card" that guests can get stamped for each shop or restaurant they visit. Completing the card could make them eligible for a raffle or discounts.
- **Pop-Up Vendor Market**  
Occasionally setting up a small market with local artisans or themed pop-up shops could add an exciting element to the experience. Partner with local Virginia Tech student artists or regional entrepreneurs to showcase their unique merchandise and handmade crafts.
- **Social Media Engagement & Giveaways**  
Encourage visitors to post about their brunch and shopping experiences using a campaign hashtag. Using hashtags also allows event organizers to analyze engagement and the experiences of visitors. Social media should also be heavily used to promote participating businesses.
- **Photo Opportunities & Interactive Experiences**  
Install temporary photo stations throughout downtown to make the event more shareable on social media. Participating businesses could also use photo op stations to generate social media traffic from participants.

# 3.5 Something for the Locals

## Focus Area 3: Tourism & Promotion

### In Blacksburg

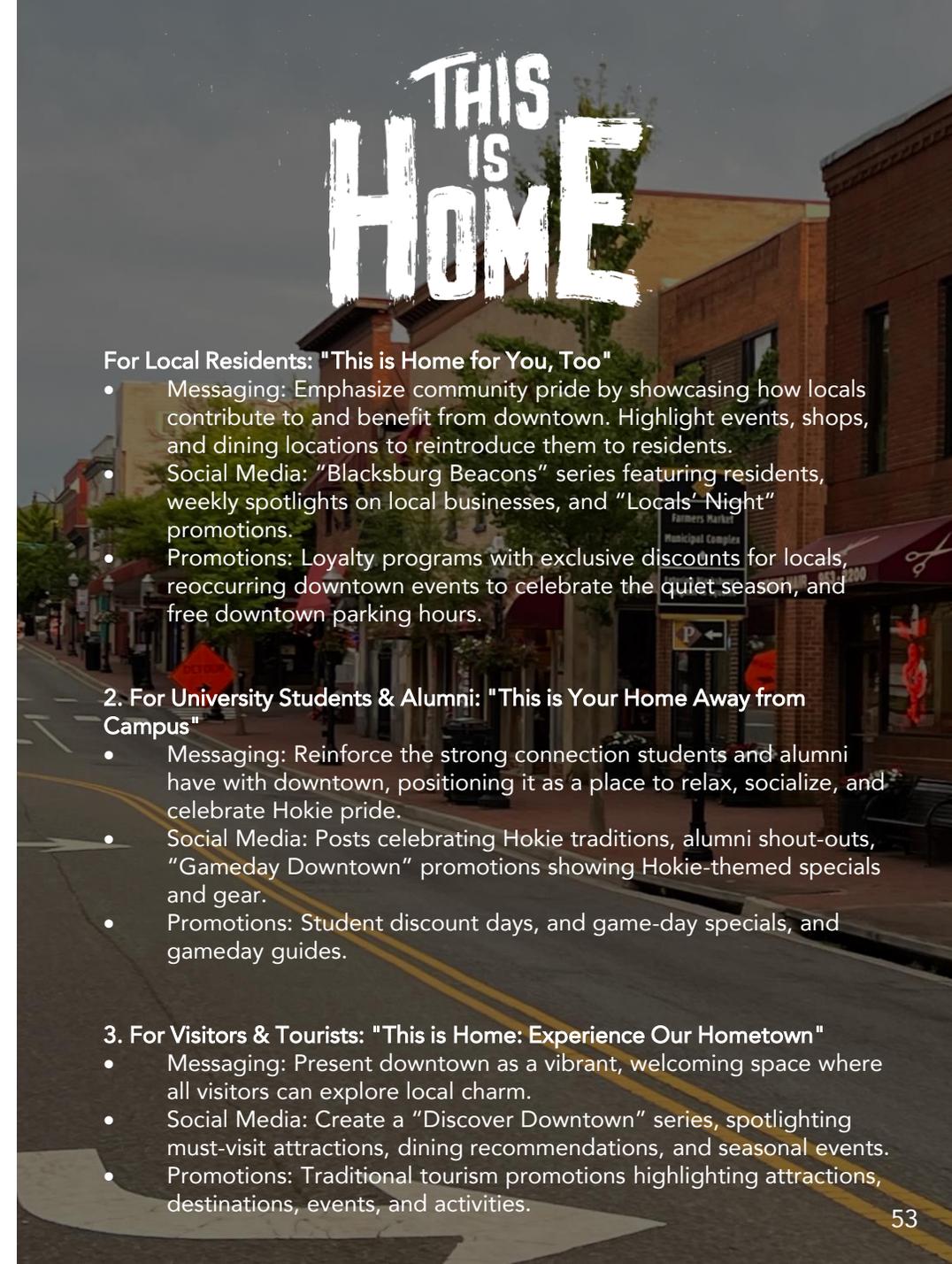
A reoccurring theme throughout the various input sessions hosted by Downtown Strategies is that local residents do not feel connected to Downtown Blacksburg. Common observations were that they felt like downtown was solely focused on students and Virginia Tech visitors, downtown restaurants and retailers were focused on the university customer base not locals, and that there were no activities designed for residents.

There is a tremendous need for a promotional campaign designed to connect local residents with Downtown Blacksburg. This campaign should include messaging as well as events and activities specifically designed to engage locals.

Virginia Tech developed a **"This is Home"** promotional campaign that recognizes that the university serves as "home" to students during their time on campus and showcases the unique sense of community on campus. This slogan has been embraced as a campus pride message for Virginia Tech. This slogan could also be used to encompass what Blacksburg means to students, faculty, and local residents.

Blacksburg is home for students, alumni, and full-time residents. **Explore opportunities for adapting Virginia Tech's "This is Home" slogan into a promotional campaign to showcase the relationship between the university and town to various target audiences. The initial phase of the promotional campaign should be focused on showcasing how Downtown Blacksburg is "Home" for local residents and that they are welcome in the downtown core. The campaign can include events, promotions, and activities specifically designed to connect locals with Downtown Blacksburg, as well as marketing material with a targeted narrative focused on changing the perception that there is nothing for locals in the downtown core.**

The campaign can eventually be expanded to highlight how Blacksburg, and specifically Downtown Blacksburg, is home to other audiences. Downtown Blacksburg could be the central component of the campaign since the district literally serves as the bridge between the town and university as well as residents and visitors.



### For Local Residents: "This is Home for You, Too"

- Messaging: Emphasize community pride by showcasing how locals contribute to and benefit from downtown. Highlight events, shops, and dining locations to reintroduce them to residents.
- Social Media: "Blacksburg Beacons" series featuring residents, weekly spotlights on local businesses, and "Locals' Night" promotions.
- Promotions: Loyalty programs with exclusive discounts for locals, reoccurring downtown events to celebrate the quiet season, and free downtown parking hours.

### 2. For University Students & Alumni: "This is Your Home Away from Campus"

- Messaging: Reinforce the strong connection students and alumni have with downtown, positioning it as a place to relax, socialize, and celebrate Hokie pride.
- Social Media: Posts celebrating Hokie traditions, alumni shout-outs, "Gameday Downtown" promotions showing Hokie-themed specials and gear.
- Promotions: Student discount days, and game-day specials, and gameday guides.

### 3. For Visitors & Tourists: "This is Home: Experience Our Hometown"

- Messaging: Present downtown as a vibrant, welcoming space where all visitors can explore local charm.
- Social Media: Create a "Discover Downtown" series, spotlighting must-visit attractions, dining recommendations, and seasonal events.
- Promotions: Traditional tourism promotions highlighting attractions, destinations, events, and activities.

# 3.5 Something for the Locals

## Focus Area 3: Tourism & Promotion

### Case Study

Downtown **Clemson, South Carolina**, hosts a summer event series called "On the Ave." The series begins immediately after Clemson University's graduation and is designed to connect local residents with the downtown core. College Avenue, which serves as "Main Street," is closed to make way for live music, outdoor dining, and outdoor games. Tables and chairs are set up on the street to allow downtown restaurant customers to dine on the street in a festive environment. "On the Ave" celebrates the students moving away for the summer by encouraging locals to enjoy downtown during the quiet summer months.



# 3.5 Something for the Locals

## Focus Area 3: Tourism & Promotion

Below are examples of various activities, events, and promotions that could be developed to connect local residents with Downtown Blacksburg. These examples can be modified and customized as needed.

### Locals' Events

- Advertise resident-focused times or nights with quiet, family-friendly atmospheres, especially tailored for those wanting to avoid the student crowds.
- Social Media: Share a calendar of locals-only events with special activities (e.g., workshops, wine tastings) in a relaxed setting.
- Extended hours events allow residents to shop, dine, and explore downtown after 5:00 p.m. Some communities host "Open Late 'Til 8" promotions or "First Friday" promotions where downtown merchants coordinate extended hours for targeted shopping and dining events.
- Events similar to Clemson's "On the Ave" to celebrate the absence of the college students.

### Discover Downtown Challenges

- Interactive weekly or monthly challenges (e.g., visit three different businesses and post about it on social media) with small rewards for participants.
- Promotions: Offer a "Local Loyalty Card" or passport that residents can complete for a chance to win larger prizes, such as dining vouchers or event tickets.



# 3.5 Something for the Locals

## Focus Area 3: Tourism & Promotion

### Blacksburg Beacons Social Media Series

- Social media series that highlight local residents, community leaders, special businesses, etc. who “light up the community.” These posts celebrating local heroes and those who make special contributions to the community help generate community pride and engage residents. This type of series also creates easy to generate social media content and provides opportunities for spin off content.

### Homegrown Highlights

- Weekly posts spotlighting local businesses with photos, special offers, and short interviews with owners, creating familiarity and community connection.
- Encourage followers to share their own stories with a branded hashtag like #BlacksburgIsHome, making residents feel seen and valued.
- Promotions: Include “locals-only” perks (e.g., 10% discount on certain days) to entice residents downtown and increase foot traffic.

### Seasonal Strolls

- Post photo tours featuring scenic downtown spots during each season. Feature holiday decorations, spring blooms, or fall foliage along with downtown’s businesses.
- Promotions: Encourage residents to visit and take photos, offering incentives for tagging the downtown account.



# 3.5 Something for the Locals

## Focus Area 3: Tourism & Promotion

### Special Dinner

- High-end dinners highlighting local culinary talent and fresh local foods are a great strategy for engaging local residents. Many communities host these dinners on a downtown street with string lights and decorations to create a unique atmosphere for the participants.
- Examples:
  - Blacksburg, Kentucky's "[Dinner in White](#)"
  - Stockton, California's "[Feast at the Fox](#)"

### Restaurant Week

- Restaurant Week is a targeted promotion designed to drive traffic to local restaurants during their slowest time of year. Successful models paired the restaurant competition with a charity fundraiser to drive customer activity. Residents nominate local charities. The top 3 nominees are selected for Restaurant Week. During the event, customers vote for which of 3 local charities should receive the prize at the end of the week. First, second, and third place prizes are awarded to the charities and the restaurants with the most participation also wins a prize.
- This type of event engages the local community and incentivizes the restaurants to promote the event and develop creative engagement strategies.
- *Note: Blacksburg has hosted a Restaurant Week in the past, but it has not returned after COVID.*



# 3.6 "Towns of the ACC" Collaboration

## Focus Area 3: Tourism & Promotion

College towns are unique places that attract visitors and tourists for a variety of reasons. Obviously athletic events are a major driver, but visitors are also attracted for college visits, conferences, performing arts, and general tourism activities. College towns elicit a strong sense of place and identity which coincides with their home university. Universities' affiliations with conferences also contribute to the identity of the institution and college town. Fans are loyal to their school, but they also have allegiance to their conference. Universities within a certain conference collaborate on athletics, research, policy, and other topics. College towns should form similar collaborations to enhance tourism opportunities.

The Southeastern Conference (SEC) is a conference with a longstanding sense of pride and identity with a strong history of tradition. That tradition is strongly showcased through football, but is also seen through various other outlets related to athletics, academics, research, etc. In 2021, a collaboration was formed between the 12 SEC college towns (now 14). This collaboration was led by the Convention and Visitors Bureaus (CVBs) of each city as an organized and targeted tourism initiative. The "[Cities of the SEC](#)" is a tourism initiative that included a website, blog posts, videos, and other content highlighting the unique flavor of each city. The CVBs coordinate promotions throughout the athletics seasons so that fans know what to experience when traveling to away games. They have also partnered with the SEC to promote the initiative as a way to enhance the fan experience within the conference. The CVB directors also host an annual planning meeting during SEC Media Days, which is the major introduction to college football season. "The Cities of the SEC" has created a relationship-based network for the CVB directors to learn from each other and collaborate on regional tourism initiatives.

### In Blacksburg

Blacksburg is a strong college town within the Athletic Coast Conference (ACC). Shifts in the college football landscape and college athletics as a whole has led to major changes in every major conference. Conference realignments have brought new universities, and their respective college towns, together. This creates the need to introduce Blacksburg to a new audience of tourists and visitors. Additionally, the ACC is composed of schools from drastically different regions of the country, which creates more opportunities to introduce visitors to the culture of Blacksburg and the Virginia region.

In the short-term, Blacksburg should target promotions to newly added ACC cities in an effort to introduce the town to the new audience. If possible, this should involve a partnership with the university so that the town and university are highlighted.

A long-term target is to form a collaboration or consortium of the various college towns of the ACC following the model of the "Cities of the SEC." This should include a formal partnership with the ACC, dedicated website, social media content, and collaborative promotions.



Visit the SEC

You know these rewards will mean more to SEC fans! Check in at participating locations in SEC college towns and you can win prizes and earn entries in to the Grand Prize Sweepstakes!

Places To Go (150)

- Aggie Park  
Check-in  
--- mi  
1000 pts
- Aggiewild Wild Animal Safari  
Check-in  
--- mi  
1000 pts

Experiences Explore Rewards My Bag More

go.visitthesecc.com

Meet the Cities



Just 60 miles northeast of Atlanta, the college town of Athens is a cultural hub of creative energy. Our vibe comes from a robust visual and performing arts scene, live music almost every night of the week, amazing food and beverage offerings, innovative creators and more. [Athens, Georgia](#), is a destination that is always open to new experiences.



Scenic drives and historic rail lines meander through live oaks, dogwoods, and azaleas in the spirited destination of Auburn-Opelika. A distinctive place defined by warm hospitality and a surprising churn of activities and people, it's made for those seeking authentic experiences. It's the coolest college town in the South and his hip older sister. [Auburn Opelika](#) it gets into your soul.



What you hear is true. With vibrant entertainment, art and culture, inspiring cuisine and stunning outdoor experiences, [Austin](#) lets you create a soundtrack all your own. So take a look around, and put the Live Music Capital of the World® on your playlist.

# 3

# TOURISM & PROMOTION Action Team



downtown strategies

Focus Area	Identifier	Strategy	Timeline	Level of Investment	Responsible Party
Tourism & Promotion	3.1	Promote, inform, and celebrate downtown construction projects by using signage, banners, window posters, mesh fence banners, sidewalk stickers, and other visual materials. The information should be packaged into a broad campaign designed to promote downtown enhancement projects to highlight that each project, large or small, is part of a larger downtown initiative.	NOW	\$	Town & DBI
Tourism & Promotion	3.2	Enlist the services of a qualified graphics designer who specializes in community marketing and branding to develop an updated brand package for Blacksburg.	NOW	\$\$	Town & Blacksburg Partnership
Tourism & Promotion	3.2	Update the existing wayfinding signage system throughout downtown and the community.	Years 3-5	\$\$\$	Town
Tourism & Promotion	3.3	Assess each existing tourism event and honestly evaluate the return on investment (time, effort, and resources) to ensure that they are generating a significant impact in some way.	NOW	-	DBI
Tourism & Promotion	3.3	Explore how small-scale promotions and activities can fill the gaps throughout the calendar year and generate traffic for local businesses without exhausting staff time and resources.	Years 1-3	-	DBI
Tourism & Promotion	3.3	Small-scale promotions or “micro-events” should be prioritized because they can have a tremendous economic impact for downtown merchants without overtaxing staff members.	Years 1-3	\$	DBI
Tourism & Promotion	3.3	Explore how current events can be packaged together to create a more impactful and cohesive promotional package for the community.	Years 1-3	-	DBI & Blacksburg Partnership
Tourism & Promotion	3.4	Incorporate add-on events and experiences during key times of the year, starting with a Brunch and Browse or Sip and Shop style event into the scope of work for Downtown Blacksburg.	Years 1-3	-	DBI



Focus Area	Identifier	Strategy	Timeline	Level of Investment	Responsible Party
Tourism & Promotion	3.5	Explore opportunities for adapting Virginia Tech's "This is Home" slogan into a promotional campaign to showcase the relationship between the university and town to various target audiences. The initial phase of the promotional campaign should be focused on showcasing how Downtown Blacksburg is "Home" for local residents and that they are welcome in the downtown core.	Years 1-3	\$	Town, Blacksburg Partnership, DBI & VT
Tourism & Promotion	3.6	Form a collaboration or consortium of the various college towns of the ACC following the model of the "Cities of the SEC."	Years 3-5	\$	Tourism & Blacksburg Partnership



downtown strategies

FOCUS AREA 4

# Economic Vitality

Economic Vitality focuses on capital, incentives, and other economic and financial tools to assist new and existing businesses, catalyze property development, and create a supportive environment for entrepreneurs and innovators that drive local economies.

# 4.1 Adaptive Reuse Projects

## Focus Area 4: Economic Vitality

Adaptive reuse projects involve transforming existing structures for new uses while preserving key architectural elements. These projects are vital for downtown revitalization, offering opportunities to preserve historic character, meet modern needs, and enhance economic development. For such projects to succeed, **the pro forma**—a financial document forecasting costs and returns—must balance, ensuring the project is financially viable. In Blacksburg, there is a desire for historic structures to be revitalized into new uses, yet many barriers such as high property costs, large improvement expenses, and perceived regulatory difficulties are preventing this from happening at a higher rate. Below is a primer on The Players, The Process, & The Capital Stack that illustrates at a high-level how these projects come about.

### The Players

**Property Owners:** Typically hold the historic or underutilized property. May be private individuals, developers, or municipalities.

**Developers:** Lead the project by coordinating design, construction, and financing. They often assemble the team, secure permits, and manage the budget.

**Architects and Designers:** Specialize in adapting existing structures to new uses while meeting historic preservation standards. Work closely with preservationists if the building is historically significant.

**Municipal Partners:** Provide zoning and permitting approvals and may offer incentives like tax abatements, grants, or expedited reviews. Local bodies, such as the Blacksburg Historic Design Review Board, ensure compliance with regulations and design guidelines.

**Investors and Lenders:** Banks, equity partners, or other financiers provide the upfront capital. Investors are critical in filling gaps in the capital stack.

**Community Stakeholders:** Organizations like the Blacksburg Partnership can advocate for and support adaptive reuse projects by connecting developers with resources and aligning goals with community priorities.

### The Process

**Initial Feasibility Study:** Developers analyze the property's potential, including structural condition, zoning regulations, and market demand.

**Inclusivity:** Ensure diverse voices are heard by inviting a range of participants, including small developers and minority-owned businesses.

**Financial Modeling:** A detailed pro forma is developed to estimate costs, revenue potential, and required return on investment (ROI).

**Design and Planning:** Architects create plans that align with modern use cases while retaining historical elements. Permits and approvals are secured from local boards and agencies.

**Capital Stack Assembly:** Developers combine funding sources, leveraging grants, loans, equity, and tax incentives.

**Construction and Renovation:** Work is executed while adhering to historic preservation guidelines if applicable.

**Lease-Up or Sale:** The property is leased or sold to end users, generating the anticipated revenue.

# 4.1 Adaptive Reuse Projects

## Focus Area 4: Economic Vitality

### Capital Stack of a Successful Adaptive Reuse Project

**Equity Contributions:** Provided by the developer and private investors. Typically, 20-30% of the total project cost.

**Debt Financing:** Loans from banks or financial institutions make up the bulk of the funding. May include construction loans and permanent financing.

**Grants & Incentives:** Historic tax credits (federal and state in Virginia), façade improvement grants, and other local funding programs. These reduce the cost burden and improve project feasibility.

**Tax Abatements:** Local governments may offer property tax abatements to incentivize redevelopment.

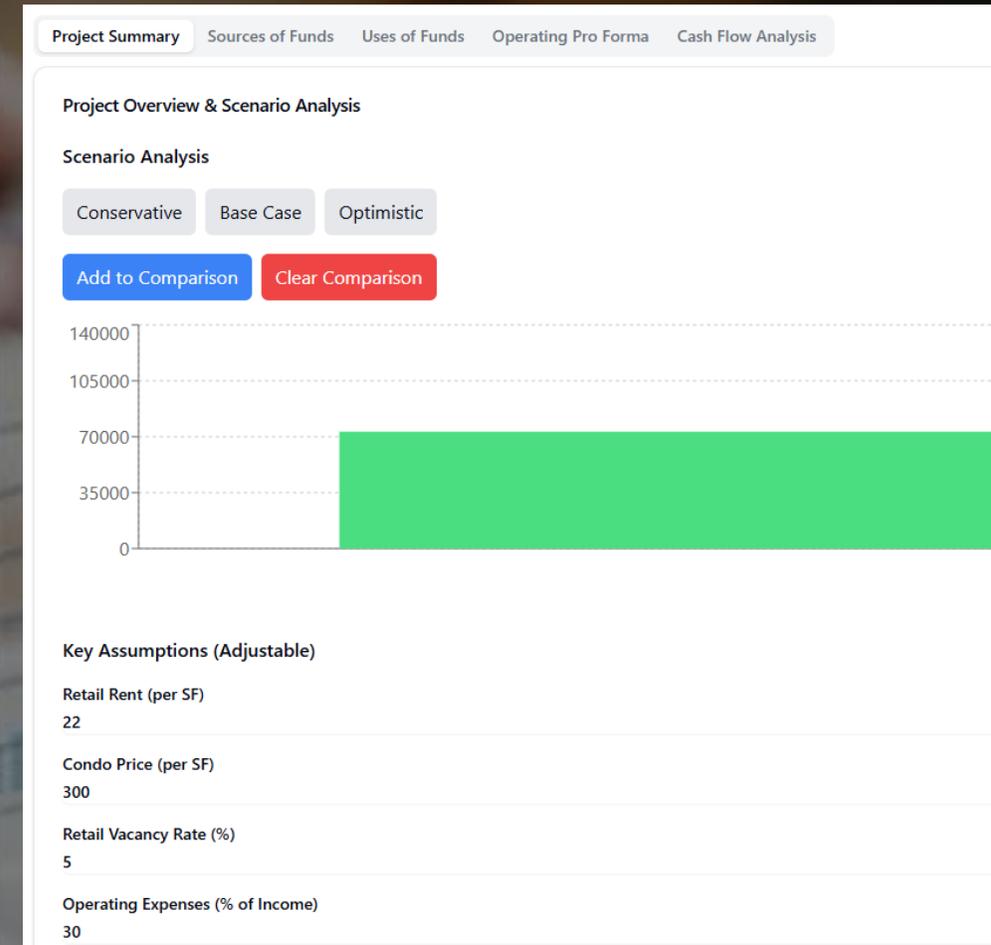
**Revolving Loan Funds:** Low-interest loans from public or nonprofit entities to bridge funding gaps.

**Gap Financing Grants:** Municipalities can offer gap financing grants to close the funding shortfall between total project costs and available capital, making projects financially viable while addressing public interest goals.

For adaptive reuse projects to pencil out, developers must skillfully align the players, processes, and capital stack while ensuring that public-private partnerships are strong, and incentives are fully leveraged. Highlighting these elements in Blacksburg will emphasize the importance of collaborative efforts to bring these transformative projects to fruition.

To assist with the visualization of the financing of adaptive reuse projects, we've created a custom, interactive dashboard that helps the Town, Partnership, developers, and investors analyze historic rehabilitation projects by combining traditional real estate metrics with historic tax credit incentives in this sample pro forma tool. Users can explore various financial scenarios through adjustable inputs for key variables like rental rates, operating expenses, and construction costs, while also fine-tuning their capital stack through three preset templates (Traditional, Maximum Leverage, and Conservative) or custom configurations.

This tool will be provided for use during the Implementation phase of our partnership.



# 4.2 Historic Tax Credits

## Focus Area 4: Economic Vitality

Historic preservation can be a hot topic in communities especially as residents, elected officials, property owners and developers alike grapple with the proper balance of preserving historic character and context with practicality in progress and redevelopment.

### In Blacksburg

The Blacksburg Historic District, roughly the area north of the junction of Main and Jackson Streets, including sections out along Lee and Progress Streets, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and therefore, unlocks significant tax credits for qualifying redevelopment projects of contributing structures in the district. In Virginia, the state tax credit is equal to 25% of the total qualified rehabilitation expenditures. This credit can be combined with the Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentive, which offers an additional 20% credit for eligible rehabilitation expenses, resulting in a potential 45% total tax credit.

Along with designation and publicity, the credits are the primary benefit of the National Register program; however historic tax credit projects can be complex, lengthy, and bureaucratic, though they are generally worth the elongated timeline if the developer is familiar with the process and if the qualified rehab expenses exceed \$1,000,000. Being listed on the National Register of Historic Places does NOT provide any protection to the historic structure or its character.

For protection of historic assets Blacksburg's Historic Design Review Board (HDRB) oversees development affecting contributing structures within the Historic or Design Review Overlay District. The HDRB reviews and advises on proposed changes to ensure they align with the town's historic preservation and design standards. While this layer does provide ultimate historic protections, it can also be a deterrent to local developers or those that are not familiar with the historic rehabilitation process or to those that believe guidelines are unclear, not equally enforced, or are overreaching.

There is no perfect balance of practicality and preservation in downtown historic districts; however, there are key strategies to promote the benefits of historic tax credits and clearly communicate design standards in the district. They are detailed to the right.

### Communication Strategies

#### 1. Host Informational Workshops

- Organize workshops or seminars with preservation experts, architects, and developers who have successfully used the credits.
- Highlight both benefits (financial incentives, increased ROI) and challenges (compliance, time investment) with real-world examples.

#### 2. Create a Comprehensive Guide

- Develop a downloadable guide or brochure explaining the tax credit program, including eligibility, application steps, timelines, and required documentation.
- Include case studies and before-and-after photos to illustrate the impact of the credits

#### 3. Develop Digital Resources

- Create a dedicated webpage on the town's or the Blacksburg Partnership's website to outline the program, link to resources, and feature FAQs.
- Use videos or infographics to simplify complex information for quick comprehension.

#### 4. Engage in Direct Outreach

- Partner with local real estate developers, property management companies, and commercial brokers to educate their networks about the program.
- Provide one-on-one consultations or Q&A sessions for developers considering specific projects.

#### 5. Use Social Media Campaigns

- Share success stories, testimonials, and quick tips on platforms like LinkedIn or Facebook to engage the developer community.
- Highlight how tax credits have made specific projects financially viable in Blacksburg or nearby communities.

#### 6. Address the Challenges Honestly

- Be transparent about potential challenges, such as red tape, compliance, or upfront costs.
- Position the town as a partner in helping developers overcome these challenges by offering guidance and resources.

#### 7. Provide Financial Models

- Offer hypothetical financial proformas or calculators to demonstrate how the credits can close funding gaps in typical redevelopment projects.

# 4.3 Development Roundtable

## Focus Area 4: Economic Vitality

Throughout this plan, we've focused on strategies to improve communication about opportunities, incentives, and policies from the Town and Partnership to the private sector. A Development Roundtable is an essential tool for cities facing the perception that they are not business-friendly or easy to work with or for ones that have progress and news to share. This collaborative forum provides an opportunity for open dialogue between town officials, developers, business owners, and other key stakeholders and partners. It can be instrumental in addressing concerns, building trust, and improving the overall development environment in the town.

### In Blacksburg

A Development Roundtable should be established with quarterly meetings. The meetings should feature open dialogue with targeted invitations to past developers and those that are interested. While the most essential part of a Development Roundtable is listening and gathering feedback, light programming should also be offered to provide value to attendees. Quarterly programming could include:

#### Q1: Kick-off and Priority Setting

- Welcome & Introductions
- State of Development
- Identification of Development Priorities
- Open Dialogue

#### Q2: Process Improvement and Innovation

- OpenGov as a Tool for Developers
- Clarifying the Permitting Process
- Training on Utilizing OpenGov
- Open Dialogue

#### Q3: Economic Development and Public-Private Partnerships

- Economic Outlook
- Historic Preservation & National Register District
- Other Town Incentives
- Open Dialogue

#### Q4: Review and Future Planning

- Year in Review
- Development Roundtable Impact
- Future Planning
- Celebrating Successes
- Open Forum



### Purpose

- Establish a collaborative forum for open dialogue between Town officials, developers, business owners, and key stakeholders
- Create an essential tool for addressing the perception that the Town is not business-friendly or easy to work with
- Provide a structured platform for listening to and gathering feedback from the development community
- Improve communication about opportunities, incentives, and policies from the Town and Partnership to the private sector

### Desired Outcomes

- Build trust between the Town and private development sector
- Address concerns and misconceptions about the development process
- Improve the overall development environment in Blacksburg
- Create better understanding of development priorities and processes
- Enhance transparency through tools like OpenGov
- Foster stronger public-private partnerships for economic development
- Generate actionable feedback to improve town policies and procedures
- Establish ongoing communication channels that support economic vitality in Blacksburg

# 4.4 Google Business Profile

## Focus Area 4: Economic Vitality

Having a current Google Business Profile is essential for a local mom-and-pop business because it enhances visibility and credibility in an increasingly digital marketplace. This profile allows businesses to appear in local search results and Google Maps, making it easier for potential customers to find essential information such as operating hours, location, contact details, and services offered. An updated profile can significantly influence customer decisions, as it provides an opportunity to showcase positive reviews and high-quality photos, helping to build trust and attract new clientele. Google Business Profile can differentiate a local business and contribute to sustained growth and customer loyalty in the following ways:

**Increased Visibility:** Businesses with a complete Google Business Profile are 70% more likely to attract local visits compared to those without.

**Customer Engagement:** About 56% of consumers who find a local business through Google search are likely to visit the business within a day.

**Call to Action:** Listings that include a phone number can see up to a 25% increase in call volume, as consumers prefer to connect directly for inquiries.

**Positive Impact of Reviews:** Approximately 84% of consumers trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations. A high number of positive reviews can significantly boost conversion rates.

**Enhanced Local Search Rankings:** Businesses with optimized profiles can rank higher in local search results, driving more traffic. Listings that rank in the top three local search results can account for 30% of click-through rates.

**Click-Through Rate (CTR):** Listings with photos receive 42% more requests for directions and 35% more click-throughs to their websites compared to those without images.

**Conversions from Posts:** Businesses that regularly post updates on their Google Business Profile can see up to a 10% increase in engagement from potential customers.

**User Intent:** Around 78% of mobile local searches result in an offline purchase, indicating that a strong online presence directly influences consumer behavior.

### In Blacksburg

DBI should share the Google Business Profile guide, provided by Downtown Strategies as a supplement to this Action Plan, with downtown business owners at their merchant meetings. Encourage businesses to claim their presence on Google and update their own Google Business Profile to enhance visitor experiences.



 small business support

GOOGLE BUSINESS PROFILE TUTORIAL 

### Small Business Support

Claiming a Google Business Profile (GBP) – formerly Google My Business – is essential (and free) for small businesses to manage their online presence. Here's a step-by-step guide:

- Sign in to Google Account:**
  - Use the Google Account associated with your business. If you don't have one, create a Google Account.
- Go to Google Business:**
  - Visit the Google My Business website: <https://www.google.com/business/>
- Search for Your Business:**
  - Enter your business name and location in the search bar. If your business appears, select it. If not, click on "Add your business to Google."
- Select Business Type:**
  - Choose the appropriate business category that best describes your business.
- Enter Business Information:**
  - Fill out the required fields with accurate and up-to-date information about your business, including name, address, phone number, website, and business hours.
- Verify Your Business:**
  - Google will need to verify that you are the rightful owner of the business. Verification options may include receiving a postcard with a verification code at your business address or receiving a phone call. Follow the provided instructions for the selected verification method.

# 4.5 Business Recruitment Packet

## Focus Area 4: Economic Vitality

Almost every downtown desires to have more retailers, restaurants, and other businesses. Ideally this growth would happen organically as the perception and reputation of the downtown shifts to become a destination. Building a strong sense of place within the downtown is important. The downtown should be clean, inviting, safe, and attractive. The properties and buildings should be well maintained and ready for tenants. The area should be active and frequently used for events. While all of these elements are important pieces of the puzzle, communities can also take an active role in recruiting businesses to the downtown.

Many communities have successfully targeted specific businesses in nearby cities or regions and recruited them. This could be a relocation, convincing the business to open a second location, or convincing them to open another concept in the new community. Successfully pitching the community to this business requires a structured and organized presentation of data and real estate details.

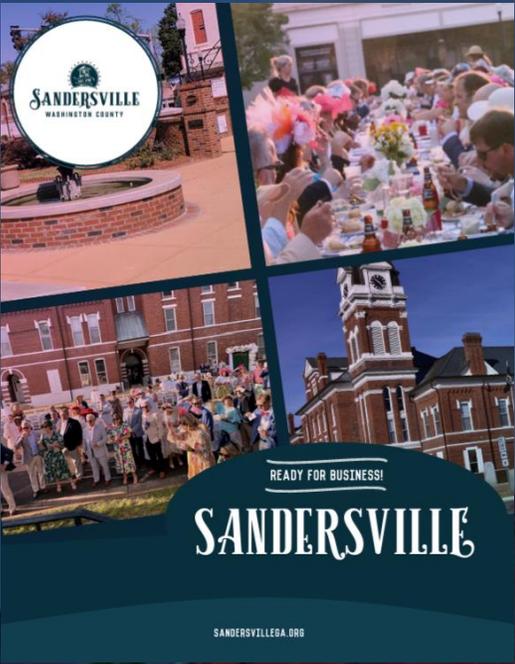
A Business Recruitment Packet contains information relevant to recruiting a potential business in an easy-to-follow format. The packet should include:

- **Market analysis data summary**
- **Map of the downtown district**
- **List of available properties with real estate information**
- **Guide to necessary approval processes**
- **Guide to available incentives and programs**
- **Point of contact information**

### In Blacksburg

In Blacksburg, the Business Recruitment Packet should include any focus properties, the market analysis from this plan, incentives available, and contact information for the Town and Partnership to ensure that no balls are dropped.

If desired, Downtown Strategies can create this Business Improvement Packet for Blacksburg through our Implementation partnership for quick implementation.



**ARE YOU A BUSINESS OWNER OR ENTREPRENEUR LOOKING FOR THE PERFECT OPPORTUNITY TO TAKE THE NEXT STEP?** **LOOK HERE**

Downtown Sandersville is the perfect place for you! Whether you are an existing business looking for a new home, a business looking to expand and add a new location, a start-up looking to take the next step, or an entrepreneur ready for a new adventure, our downtown is the ideal place to start your next chapter!

Our downtown is a network of business owners, organizations, and civic organizations constantly looking for ways to enhance our downtown. We regularly invite visitors to downtown through our festivals, events, social media marketing, and promotions. We also understand the importance of a first impression and regularly improve our curb appeal through design and beautification projects. We strive to create an authentic visitor experience so your business can thrive!

Are you tired of the red tape and constant jumping through hoops? We recognize that most city governments seem to constantly look for reasons to tell you "No." Our goal is to get you to "Yes" as quickly as possible. We recognize how challenging it is to open a business and we want to make sure you feel welcomed and embraced as a part of our community.

We want to make it as easy as possible for you to join our existing business community and get your ideas off the ground soon! Our "Ready for Business" guide provides all the resources you need to get started. Whether you are a first-time business owner or a seasoned professional, our guide will make the process simple and straightforward.

Find tips and details about incentives, policies, processes, and key contacts necessary to successfully open a business. Do not wait another minute – take the first step to launching your dream business in our dynamic downtown today!

**Use this guide as a resource to help you get Ready for Business and join our downtown family.**

- 1 DOING BUSINESS
- 2 ABOUT
- 3 INCENTIVES
- 4 PARTNERS/PROPERTY
- 5 RULES/CONTACTS

# 4.6 Targeted Retail Recruitment

## Focus Area 4: Economic Vitality

The Blacksburg Partnership plays a critical role in actively recruiting retail to the downtown area to ensure it remains a vibrant and thriving hub of activity for residents, students, and visitors. A strong retail presence enhances the downtown experience by offering diverse shopping options, increasing foot traffic, and supporting local businesses, which collectively contribute to the area's economic vitality. Active retail recruitment can help fill vacant storefronts, diversify the tenant mix, and address gaps in goods and services, ensuring downtown meets the needs of its growing and dynamic community. By leveraging its resources, networks, and partnerships, the Blacksburg Partnership can attract unique retailers that complement the town's historic charm, while fostering a thriving local economy that supports long-term downtown revitalization. The Blacksburg Partnership and its partners should take steps to recruit businesses within top retail focus categories to fill vacant or underutilized downtown properties by employing an appropriate combination of these four retail recruitment strategies. Downtown areas can provide the perfect "nest" for new businesses within the focus categories.

- 1 Existing Businesses within or near the business district**  
Encourage local businesses to expand or relocate within the downtown area by highlighting available incentives, increased foot traffic, and opportunities for growth. Strengthening these relationships helps reinforce the downtown as the heart of commerce while retaining local economic contributions.
- 2 Emerging Entrepreneurs**  
Engage with aspiring business owners through incubators, business plan competitions, or networking events, offering mentorship and resources to establish their ventures in the downtown district. Providing support for start-ups fosters innovation, creativity, and a fresh retail mix that attracts diverse customer segments.
- 3 Existing Local or Regional Businesses**  
Attract established regional businesses by showcasing the benefits of downtown presence, such as access to a vibrant customer base, visibility, and community-oriented branding opportunities. These businesses bring regional recognition and loyalty, enhancing downtown's status as a regional destination.
- 4 National Chains (only applies to certain situations)**  
Approach national chains that align with the downtown's character and demographics, emphasizing unique market opportunities, supportive incentives, and the potential for community engagement. Including national brands enhances downtown's retail appeal and increases foot traffic while complementing locally owned businesses. Your Retail Recruitment team at Retail Strategies will take the lead on this once identifying your retail prospects.

The biggest threat facing entrepreneurs in Downtown Blacksburg are the high build-out and improvement costs of available real estate that they often cannot afford. First, focus on low-hanging fruit, such as retail-ready real estate. Through a successful Development Roundtable and external communications regarding incentives and opportunities, there may be more opportunity in the future to pair interested developers with available real estate and emerging entrepreneurs. Additionally, incentives identified in the plan such as Revolving Loan Funds can assist qualified entrepreneurs with build-out costs. Existing incentives already on the books like rebates will break down these barriers as well. Finally, ensure prospective businesses participate in the Small Business Support training and technical support program before they sign a lease or undertake huge costs to increase their chances for profitable and sustainable businesses.

# 4.7 411 North Main Retail Incubator

## Focus Area 4: Economic Vitality

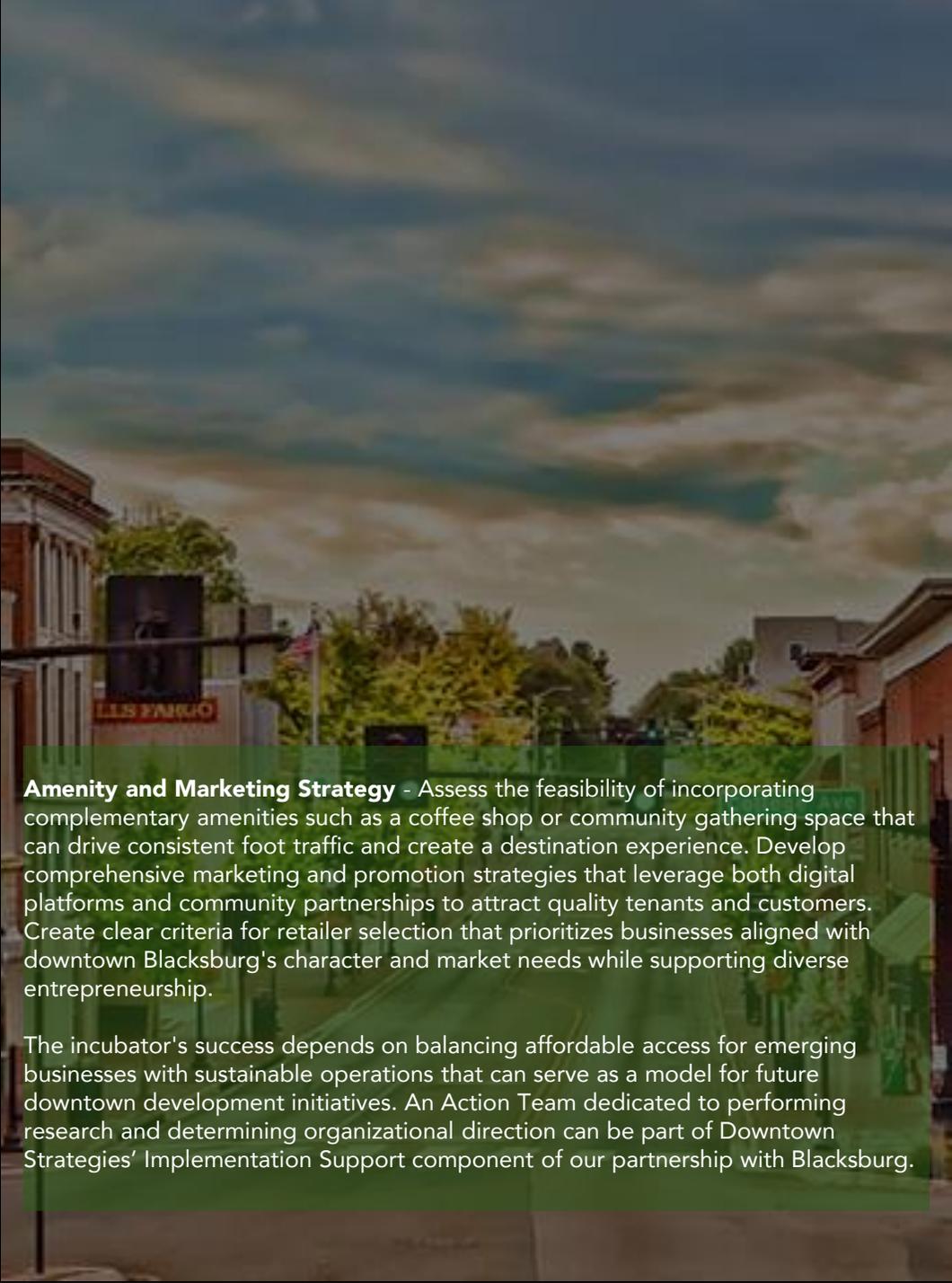
Retail incubators serve as vital catalysts for downtown economic development by providing affordable entry points for emerging businesses while creating unique shopping destinations that attract consumers and foot traffic. The 411 North Main property presents an exceptional opportunity to establish a retail incubator that can nurture local entrepreneurship, fill vacant storefronts, and contribute to the vibrancy of downtown Blacksburg. However, successful implementation requires careful planning, operational best practices, and strategic partnerships to ensure long-term sustainability and positive impact.

### In Blacksburg

The Town and DBI should prioritize establishing operational frameworks and best practices for the 411 North Main Retail Incubator through comprehensive research and strategic planning. This facility will feature individual retail stalls alongside glass vanity cases for smaller item displays, creating flexible spaces that can accommodate diverse business types and scales.

**Best Practice Research and Case Study Development** - Commission a comprehensive study of successful municipally-funded retail incubators to identify proven operational models, pricing structures, and support systems. Focus on facilities with similar mixed-use concepts that combine individual stalls with display cases, paying particular attention to tenant selection criteria, lease structures, shared services, and marketing strategies. Document specific case studies that demonstrate measurable economic impact and sustainability metrics.

**Operational Framework Development** - Establish clear policies and procedures covering tenant selection processes, lease agreements, pricing models, and facility management protocols. Determine the optimal approach for point-of-sale systems, evaluating both shared POS solutions and individual merchant systems based on cost-effectiveness and operational efficiency. Develop staffing models that balance professional management with cost control, potentially incorporating partnerships with Virginia Tech business programs for student internships or graduate projects.



**Amenity and Marketing Strategy** - Assess the feasibility of incorporating complementary amenities such as a coffee shop or community gathering space that can drive consistent foot traffic and create a destination experience. Develop comprehensive marketing and promotion strategies that leverage both digital platforms and community partnerships to attract quality tenants and customers. Create clear criteria for retailer selection that prioritizes businesses aligned with downtown Blacksburg's character and market needs while supporting diverse entrepreneurship.

The incubator's success depends on balancing affordable access for emerging businesses with sustainable operations that can serve as a model for future downtown development initiatives. An Action Team dedicated to performing research and determining organizational direction can be part of Downtown Strategies' Implementation Support component of our partnership with Blacksburg.

# 4

## ECONOMIC VITALITY Action Team



downtown strategies

Focus Area	Identifier	Strategy	Timeline	Level of Investment	Responsible Party
Economic Vitality	4.1	Utilize the adaptive reuse pro forma interactive dashboard to experiment with sample or hypothetical projects and understand the types of financial resources and diversification of finances needed for successful mixed-use projects in the historic district.	NOW	-	Town/Partnership
Economic Vitality	4.2	Promote the benefits of historic tax credits and clearly communicate design standards in the district to prospective developers and investors through the various identified communication strategies.	Years 1-3	\$	Town/Partnership
Economic Vitality	4.3	Establish a Development Roundtable with quarterly meetings. The meetings should feature open dialogue with targeted invitations to past developers and those that are interested. While the most essential part of a Development Roundtable is listening and gathering feedback, light programming should also be offered to provide value to attendees.	Years 3-5	\$	Partnership
Economic Vitality	4.4	DBI should share the Google Business Profile guide, provided by Downtown Strategies as a supplement to this Action Plan, with downtown business owners at their merchant meetings. Encourage businesses to claim their presence on Google and update their own Google Business Profile to enhance visitor experiences.	Years 1-3	\$	DBI
Economic Vitality	4.5	Create a Business Recruitment Packet featuring any focus properties, market analysis, incentives available, and contact information for the Town and Partnership.	Years 1-3	\$	Town/Partnership

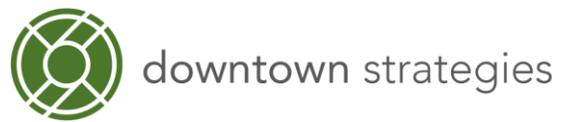
# 4

## ECONOMIC VITALITY Action Team



downtown strategies

Focus Area	Identifier	Strategy	Timeline	Level of Investment	Responsible Party
Economic Vitality	4.6	The Blacksburg Partnership and its partners should take steps to recruit businesses within top retail focus categories to fill vacant or underutilized downtown properties by employing an appropriate combination of these four retail recruitment strategies. Downtown areas can provide the perfect “nest” for new businesses within the focus categories. Utilize the Business Recruitment Packet as a leave-behind.	Years 1-5 (ongoing)	\$	Partnership
Economic Vitality	4.7	The Town and DBI should prioritize establishing operational frameworks and best practices for the 411 North Main Retail Incubator through comprehensive research and strategic planning.	Years 1-3 (ongoing)	\$	Town & DBI



downtown strategies