NORTH MAIN STREET SMALL AREA PLAN

SUPPORT DOCUMENT – ADOPTED FEBRUARY 17, 2015

Prepared by:

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PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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PART I - INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND & SUMMARY

The City of Lenoir recognizes that North Main Street is an important "first impression" for visitors traveling to Lenoir's historic downtown from the north, as well as a street used daily by Lenoir residents. Over the past decade, the City invested in beautification projects, streetscape improvements, and other public projects in the downtown to increase the business vitality. While the City continues to pursue opportunities for Downtown growth, improving the appearance of major corridors leading to the Downtown is also a top priority. Past efforts have led to streetscape improvements on Harper Avenue and Mulberry Street.

North Main Street has many assets that make it an ideal place to target investment. Several pioneers have begun to restore the stately historic homes that once stood as an impressive gateway to the Downtown. A rail line, now abandoned, is slated for transition into a greenway through a "rails to trails" project. An 8-acre park, existing sidewalks, traditional development pattern and block layouts, and preserved vernacular architecture all contribute to the unique sense of place in the neighborhood.

However, the area suffers from disinvestment. Many properties on the corridor stand vacant and dilapidated and infill uses over the years have not respected or contributed to the historic character of the area. This Small Area Plan, developed with considerable community input, aims to offer a balance between the preservation of the quality historic character of the area and the advancement of new beautification efforts and infill projects. Area residents, property owners, and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were invited to participate in a steering committee to evaluate and make recommendations about a context-appropriate approach to topics like streetscape, land use mix, design standards, historic preservation, code enforcement, recreation, branding, and public art.

The study area, shown on the following page, was defined in order to capture the residential side streets that would most benefit from improvements to the main corridor. However, the majority of the plan's focus is on North Main Street.

NORTH MAIN STREET SMALL AREA PLAN STUDY AREA
Legend
0.25 mile walking radius
0.50 mile walking radius
N. Main Study Area (proposed)
N
ADVENT CIR
WARREN PL
OLD NORTH RD
WILD CHERRY PL
ARLINGTON CIR
MULUNGU PL
HARRINGTON ST
FINLEY AV
PIEDMONT DR
CALDWELL PL
REGAL PL
MERRIMAN ST
MEADOWLANE DR
WAKEFIELD DR
PERKINS PL
MONTCLAIR CIR
BROWNLEN PL
PINE TREE PL
EACEHAVEN PL
GRAY PL
CONLEY PL
FOLK ST
RANKIN ST
COLLETT PL
PATTERSON ST
HEALAN PL
HARTLEY PL
RIDGE ST
MAIN ST
FINLEY AV
LINK PL
CENTER ST
PROSPECT ST
BINS AV
STAGE ST
BEALL ST
GERMAN ST
WENTWORTH PL
CHARLES PL
SIMS PL
HILLCREST ST
CORPETING PL
WILLOW ST
KIRKWOOD ST
ASHE AV
SCROGGS ST
FOREST PL
GLENDALE ST
HILLSIDE ST
WILDER ST
SHERRYDELL PL
HUNTER PL
ABERNATHY ST
STONEWALL ST
RESACA ST
FOSTER PL
HIGH CIR
PROSPECT ST
DEPOT PL
DOWNUM ST
BOUNDARY ST
CHURCH ST
MULBERRY ST
HARPER AV
NORWOOD ST
BERNHARDT CT
WESTMAN ST
GREENHAVEN DR
EASTVIEW PL
PENLEY

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

One goal of the North Main Small Area Plan effort was to ensure that citizens, property owners, and interested parties had an opportunity to participate and provide input throughout the process. In addition to the monthly meetings of the steering committee, which were open to the public, several community events and meetings were held to provide additional forums for community participation.

A community meeting was held to kick-off the planning process, where stakeholders began to set the scope of the plan, define a study area, and establish initial goals for the corridor. Then, a community walkabout event was held where community members were invited to join elected officials and city staff in four groups on various walking tours throughout the study area. The observations of each group were documented in notes and photos. The final walkabout report can be found in Appendix A.

COMMUNITY EVENTS AND PUBLIC MEETINGS

- January 14, 2014 — Kick-off meeting held at New Passion Church, 602 Main Street NW.
- February 20, 2014 — Steering committee meeting held at City Hall, 801 West Avenue NW.
- March 20, 2014 — Steering committee meeting held at City Hall, 801 West Avenue NW.
- April 17, 2014 — Steering committee meeting held at City Hall, 801 West Avenue NW.
- May 3, 2014 — Community Walkabout Event, starting at J.E. Broyhill Park, 509 Ridge Street NW.
- June 19, 2014 — Steering committee meeting held at City Hall, 801 West Avenue NW.
- July 17, 2014 — Steering committee meeting held at City Hall, 801 West Avenue NW.
- August 21, 2014 — Steering committee meeting held at City Hall, 801 West Avenue NW.
- December 4, 2014 – Community Meeting held at New Passion Church, 602 Main Street NW, to present the steering committee recommendations.
- January 26, 2015 – Lenoir Planning Board considers the recommendations.
- February 17, 2015 – Lenoir City Council considers the recommendations for adoption.

North Main Street Walkabout

PART II: GOALS AND INTENTIONS

The overall goals and intentions guiding the small area plan process were established by talking with stakeholders and elected officials at the beginning of the process. Four related goals were established:

1. Enhance the appearance of N. Main Street as an attractive gateway to Historic Downtown Lenoir.
2. Encourage appropriate non-residential, neighborhood-serving uses to locate along N. Main Street, but limit more intense commercial and industrial uses to protect the area as predominately residential.
3. Protect existing residents from displacement while improving the quality of housing available, especially through increased opportunities for home ownership.
4. Enhance opportunities for active transportation and recreation, both through streetscape improvements and increased connectivity to Lenoir's Greenway and J.E. Broyhill Park.

In order to make recommendations to accomplish the four goals of the small area plan, the steering committee made detailed recommendations in seven main topic areas:

Streetscape. Streetscape concepts are proposed that take into consideration existing right-of-way constraints and beautification goals.

Land Use Mix. Desirable land uses are identified, along with appropriate zoning changes to achieve the regulatory framework to allow the desired uses and prohibit undesirable uses.

Design Standards. Design standards that are appropriate for infill development, both on the main corridors and the side streets, are recommended. Design standards respect the historic character while allowing for new construction techniques and materials.

Historic Preservation. Boundaries for a National Register Historic District are proposed, along with resources and ideas to further preservation of key historic properties.

Code Enforcement. Enforcement of existing ordinances is a powerful tool for improving the appearance of the area, especially with community awareness of enforcement within the bigger picture of neighborhood improvement.

Recreation. An improvement plan for J.E. Broyhill Park is proposed along with strategic connections to future rails-to-trails projects and walking trails.

Branding and Public Art. The "love notes" of the plan, opportunities to brand the district and insert public art are identified.

PART III: DETAILED RECOMMENDATIONS

STREETSCAPE

Streetscape recommendations for North Main Street and Finley Avenue:

- Increase the width of the sidewalk through the elimination of the grass strip between the existing sidewalk and the street. Install pavers or colored and stamped concrete in this area. Treatment may match the Downtown streetscape or be unique to the study area, depending on budget and feasibility.
- Integrate sidewalks into the Rails-to-Trails crossing near Old North Road, to provide a logical terminus for sidewalks (no sidewalks proposed north of the crossing).
- Re-surface roads, repair curb and gutter areas, and repair sidewalks.
- Install crosswalks at the intersection of N. Main Street and Finley Avenue, and explore the feasibility of pavers or stamped concrete at the four corners of the intersection to mimic the downtown square at a scale appropriate to the neighborhood.
- Extend the curbing and sidewalks adjacent to J.E. Broyhill Park at the intersection of Ridge Street and Finley Avenue, to reduce the turning radius of the intersection, calm traffic, and extend recreation area.
- Install a landscaped median within the City-maintained portion of N. Main Street at the intersection of Creekway Drive, to narrow the right-of-way and add visual enhancement.
- Install curb extensions ("bulb outs") around on-street parking on N. Main Street north of Ashe Avenue.
- Underground utilities or relocate to be on only one side of the street.
- Install pedestrian-scaled lighting appropriate to the historic character (extend Downtown lighting)
- Install light-pole banners to brand the area or welcome travelers to Downtown.

Streetscape recommendations for side streets and private property:

- Repair curb and gutter areas and repair sidewalks.
- Encourage knee-walls, low fencing, canopy trees, and attractive landscaping on private properties.
- In existing parking areas with no buffer between sidewalk and parking surface, install knee-walls and planters or planting areas to help provide a buffer for pedestrians and define the street edge.

Examples of paving materials for contrasting hardscape in existing park strip areas. Street trees are recommended wherever overhead utilities allow.

Proposed curb extension and sidewalk connection at Finley Avenue and Ridge Street

(conceptual)

Benefits:

- Traffic calming for turning movements by increased turning radius.
- Additional space for park uses.
- Connection of Finley Ave. sidewalk to Ridge St. sidewalk.

Estimated cost: $ 6,000

Proposed re-alignment of Old North Road, new sidewalks, and rails-to-trails greenway crossing

Benefits:

- Traffic calming for turning movements by increased turning radius.
- Buffering of greenway with new landscaped area.
- Safer pedestrian connections from Old North Road to North Main Street.

Potential issues:

- Significant grade change between Old North Road and North Main Street could add expense.

Proposed "Road Diet" at North Main Street and Creekway/North Main Street extension – Add median and landscaping and eliminate one of the left turn lanes *(conceptual)*

Benefits:

- Reduces overly-wide pavement width
- Provides attractive entranceway/gateway to the Downtown
- Enhances redevelopment potential of abandoned grocery store, while removing pavement within the flood zone areas on the property.

Potential issues:

- NCDOT approval will be needed for work in/near the DOT maintained portions.

LAND USE MIX

A handful of zoning changes are recommended to better position North Main Street to accommodate appropriate redevelopment and legalize existing residential uses of industrial-zoned property. Additionally, specific use-related changes are recommended to allow for creative development at scales appropriate to this historic neighborhood. The design standards recommended in the following section support the recommendations for additional permitted and conditional uses within the study area, because they offer "quality control" for the design and form of the building.

RECOMMENDED ZONING CHANGES

Re-zone the commercial and residential property between Finley Avenue and the railroad crossing to Neighborhood Mixed Use (B-5), a zoning category that allows for residential and neighborhood-serving office and retail uses at scales appropriate to the historic character of the area.

- Re-zone the Lenoir Housing Authority property and surrounding residential properties from Heavy Industrial to R-9 Residential zoning, consistent with the current uses of the property.
- Re-zone the vacant Broyhill property from Heavy Industrial to Light Industrial, to help limit incompatible uses next to residential areas.
- Adopt a "Special Use District" over the entire study area to implement the standards for uses and design called for in this plan.

The Special Use District should address the following modifications to permitted/conditional uses:

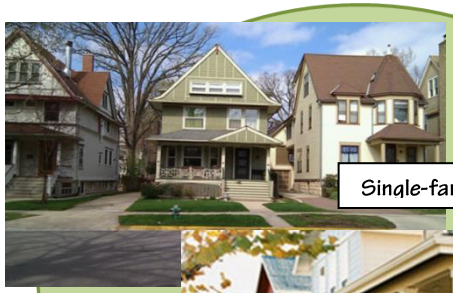
- Attached Dwelling Development (townhomes) permitted "by right" when design standards and exterior setbacks are met.
- Higher density single-family infill development allowed "by right" when re-platting property into three or more lots, including zero-lot-line and bungalow courts.
- Mobile Homes prohibited throughout the study area.

Additionally, the following modifications to the definitions and rules for land uses in the City are recommended, because these issues are not unique to the study area:

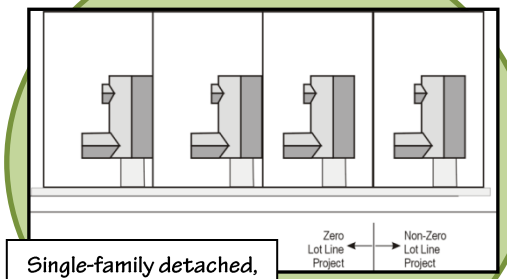
- Establish distance separation requirements for group homes and residential social service and care facilities, as permitted by state statutes.
- Prohibit package sales (ABC permits for off-premise consumption) in neighborhood businesses (small convenience stores allowed in some residential and business districts).

A final note on land use mix – vertical mixed-use (mixing more than one use within an existing building) is already allowed in all zoning districts, as long as each use is allowed in the zoning district. Fire and building code standards may require additional improvements for these types of buildings. Ground floor commercial uses or residential spaces that could "flex" to be non-residential in the future are seen as desirable for N. Main Street. The recommended extension of B-5 zoning should further support and promote this type of development.

EXAMPLES OF ENCOURAGED RESIDENTIAL USES



Single-family detached

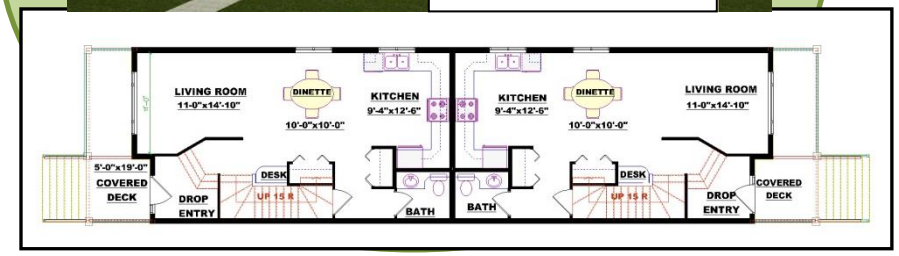


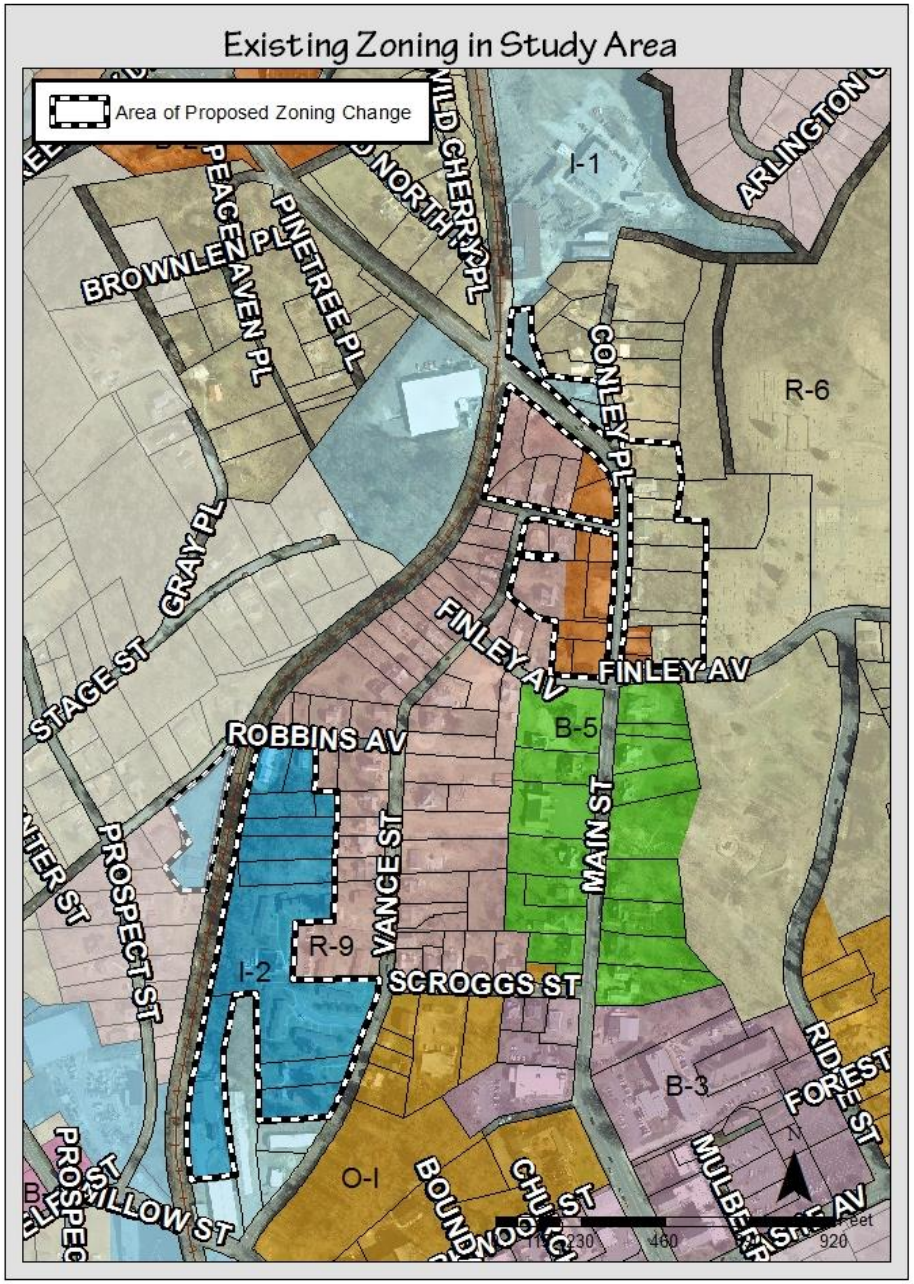
Single-family detached, zero-lot-line

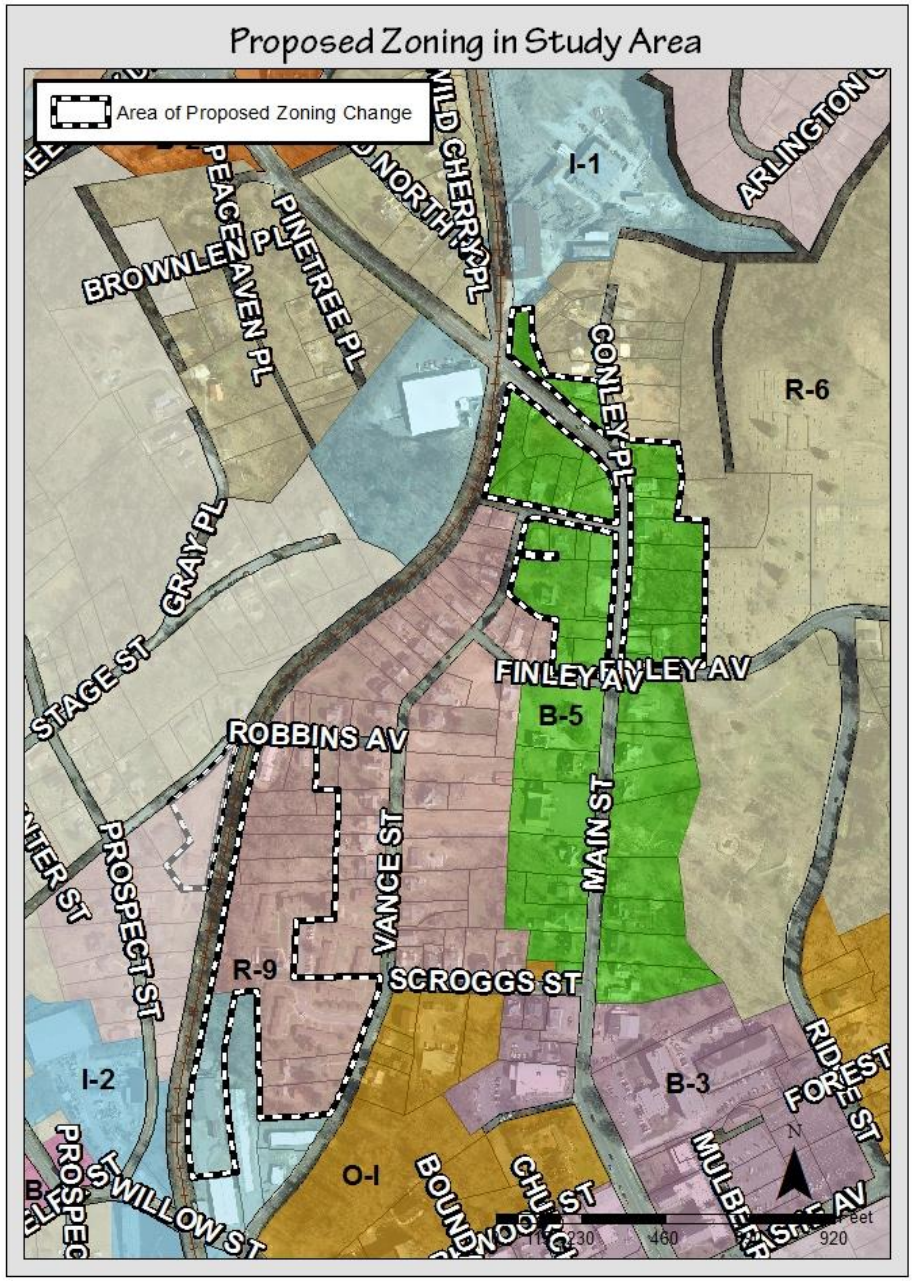
Single-family attached

Single-family bungalow courts

Front-back duplexes




Existing Zoning in Study Area
Area of Proposed Zoning Change
I-1
ARLINGTON
WILD CHERRY PL
NORTH
PEACEN AVEN PL
PINETREE PL
BROWNLEE
CONLEY PL
R-6
GRAY PL
STAGE ST
FINLEY AV
FINLEY AV
B-5
ROBBINS AV
MAIN ST
VANCE ST
PROSPECT ST
R-9
I-2
SCROGGS ST
B-3
RIDGEFOREST
O-I
WILLOW ST
BOUND
CHURCH ST
MULBERRY
N
0 115 230 460 920 Feet


Proposed Zoning in Study Area
Area of Proposed Zoning Change
I-1
ARLINGTON
WILD CHERRY PL
NORTH
PEACEN AVEN PL
PINETREE PL
BROWNLEE
CONLEY PL
R-6
GRAY PL
STAGE ST
FINLEY AV
FINLEY AV
B-5
ROBBINS AV
MAIN ST
VANCE ST
PROSPECT ST
R-9
I-2
SCROGGS ST
B-3
RIDGEFOREST
O-I
WILLOW ST
BOUND
CHURCH ST
MULBERRY
N
0 115 230 460 920 Feet

Proposed N. Main Street Special Use District Overlay

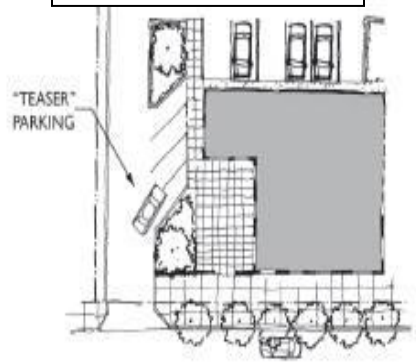
DESIGN STANDARDS

Design standards are recommended in three different categories. Properties facing main corridors have more stringent requirements, while basic design standards appropriate to historic, small-lot development will apply to all properties within the study area. Most of the design standards will be incorporated into the zoning ordinance as changes to the B-5 Neighborhood Mixed Use standards or in a Special Use Overlay District for the entire study area that will be codified within the Zoning Ordinance. Additionally, city-wide recommendations are also made.

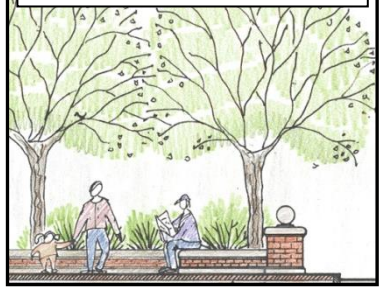
PROPERTIES THAT FACE N. MAIN STREET AND FINLEY AVENUE:

- Windows and doors must be emphasized with trim, shutters, pronounced sills, or other appropriate treatments.
- Parking exclusively in the rear or side yards for new construction and conversion of single family homes into commercial uses. Where existing parking is located between the building and the street, street walls can be installed to help define the street edge.
- Require a minimum number of architectural features per lineal length of façade – architectural features are things like a front porch, change in materials, projections/recesses of the façade, and windows and entryways.
- Predominate building materials should be wood siding, brick, stone, textured CMU, and/or stucco. Vinyl siding, if used, must simulate wood grain and is limited to 30% of the façade for mixed-use and non-residential buildings.

Parking in Side and Rear



Streetwall for existing parking

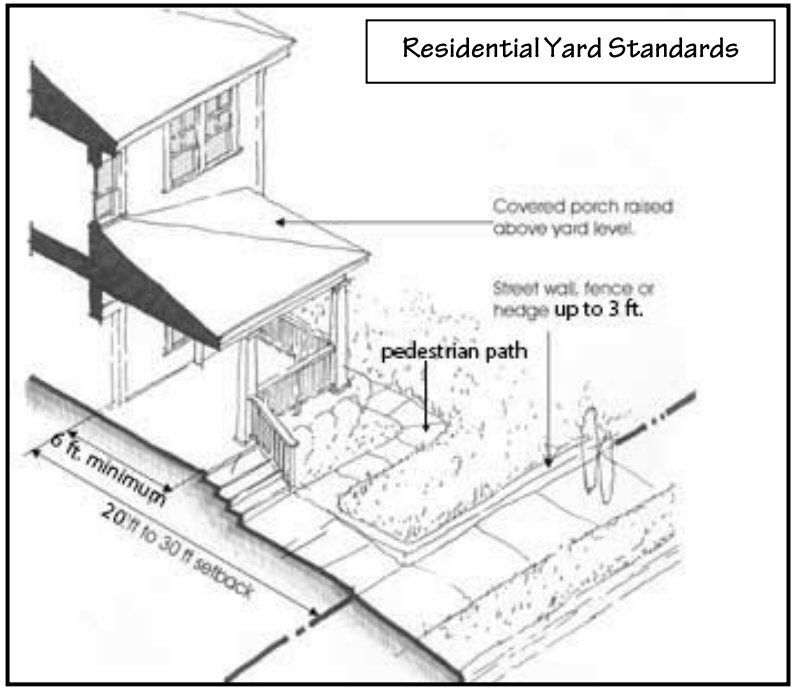


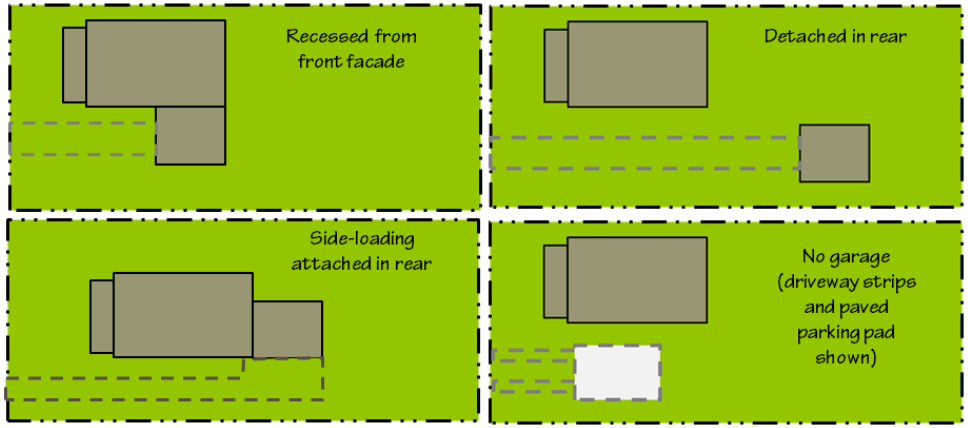
Form remains constant while uses can shift between residential and office.

ENTIRE OVERLAY DISTRICT:

- Garages must be detached, recessed from the front façade, or have doors not visible from the street (rear/side loading or basement garages).
- Front porches are required, with allowances for up to a 6 ft. front yard encroachment for open porches with roofs.
- Every building must have at least 30% transparent materials (windows, doors with windows) facing public streets.
- Every building must have an entrance facing the public street, with a pedestrian connection to the sidewalk.
- Front yard landscaping recommended to be under 3 ft. tall or over 7 ft. tall (shade trees and low shrubs) to allow for visibility into and out of the property. Shrubs, low open fencing (wood picket or wrought-iron style), or street walls are encouraged to define the edge of the yard.
- Appearance review is required for all additions, exterior modifications, and new construction, to ensure that the character of the new construction complements the dominant historic architectural form in the area (similar materials, scale, massing, directional expression, roof shape, etc.).

2-story, 1.5-story, and 1-story infill: appropriate throughout study area.





Examples of permitted garage locations and designs.

CITY-WIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to the recommendations specific to the study area, some recommendations are made that should apply to all properties in the city. These recommendations help ensure that properties in the study area aren't being held to a standard that provides a disincentive to redevelopment, and are basic clarifications to existing ordinances and common practices. City-wide recommendations:

- Substantial improvements and all new residential construction should provide 1 parking space per residential unit with a durable surface (pavers, concrete, stone, etc). Gravel is acceptable paving material if it is located after at least 15 ft. of paved driveway connecting to a city street (unless the city street is gravel, then gravel driveways are permitted.)

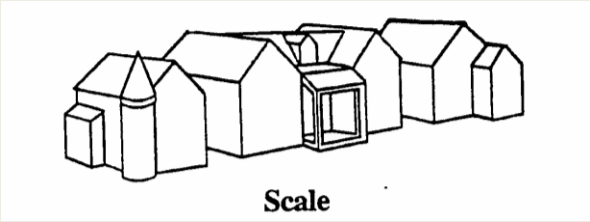
Driveway stripe

Gravel with apron paved

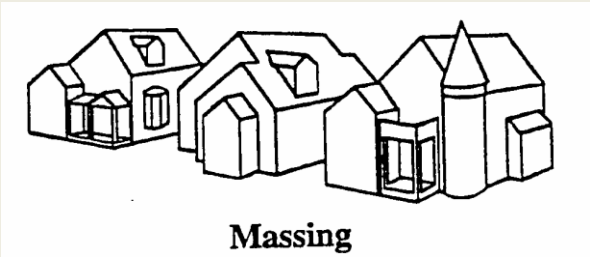
Open weave pavers

Cement parking pad

Appearance Review Principles



Scale is the relationship of the size and proportions of buildings to the scale of nearby buildings. Larger buildings should maintain a similar scale and rhythm.



Massing is the way that uninteresting boxlike forms are broken into smaller, varied masses.

The main entrances of new buildings should match the predominate orientation of nearby buildings.

For the portion of a building visible from the pedestrian level, repetition of the existing roof shapes, pitches, and materials is encouraged.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

The study area was largely platted and developed at the turn of the last century, with many structures dating back to the 1800s and a majority of the lots developed by the 1960s. The design standards proposed in the previous section support and respect the historic character of the neighborhood. This section addresses the preservation of the existing historic structures.

HISTORY OF LENOIR AND NORTH MAIN STREET

Caldwell County was founded in 1841 with Lenoir as the county seat (although Lenoir was not officially incorporated until 10 years later in 1851). The Chester and Lenoir railroad arrived in 1884, and the first furniture company in Lenoir (Hickory Furniture – later reorganized into Lenoir Furniture) established its factory in 1889. With the establishment of the railroad and the furniture industry, Lenoir attracted many immigrants from outlying farms – between 1890 and 1902 Lenoir's population doubled and by 1907 five furniture companies were operating in Lenoir. This industrial era resulted in older homes being cleared to make way for factories, with extensive rebuilding to accommodate the growing population.

The stately homes on North Main Street were all constructed during this period of rapid home building, most by prominent politicians, doctors, lawyers, and furniture families. James Harper, a leading merchant in Lenoir and prominent landowner, owned property on N. Main Street. The Lenoir Family lived on N. Main Street, including Walter J. Lenoir who founded the Lenoir Hardware and Furniture Company and built the building that still stands at 812 West Avenue. The Moore Family (owner of Caldwell Furniture, now Thomasville Furniture) and the Robbins Family (Hibriten Furniture, Community Music Club of Lenoir) and Edgar Allan Poe (early mayor of Lenoir) also called N. Main Street home.

The First Methodist Church of Lenoir, First Presbyterian Church of Lenoir, and the First Baptist Church of Lenoir are all located within the study area and were founded before 1900 (although much of the existing campuses have been built later as additions or renovations). Bellview Cemetery was also established in the late 1800s, built on land previously occupied by the Finley School.

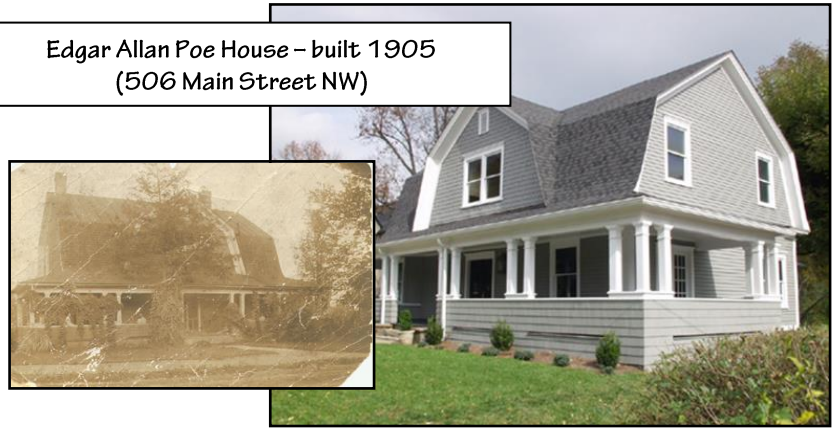
Bellview Cemetery once represented the historic segregation lines between the white neighborhoods of N. Main Street and Vance Street and the African American community of Freedman that was established following the civil war (the Freedman community is located east of the cemetery and includes Finley Avenue, Rankin St., Folk St., and Arlington Circle). The two neighborhoods began to integrate in the 1960s and 1970s as a result of the national civil rights movement and the desegregation of public schools.

HISTORIC DISTRICT CONSIDERATIONS

There are two types of historic designations: National Register of Historic Places designations and local historic designations. Designations can be for a district or for an individual structure.

National Register designations must be at least 50 years old, have integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and be "significant" to historically important events, people, or architectural styles.

National Register designations create an opportunity to fund renovations through federal Historic Tax Credit programs (for eligible, contributing structures). The City of Lenoir has one National Register Historic District (the Lenoir Downtown) and six individual structures listed on the National Register of Historic Places (Caldwell County Courthouse, Lenoir Grammar School, Lenoir High School, Mary's Grove/Rabb House, and the Edgar Allen Poe House). The Edgar Allen Poe House is in the study area. National Register status does not limit what owners can change about their property, except when federal funds are involved.



Edgar Allan Poe House – built 1905
(506 Main Street NW)

Local historic districts can offer a higher level of projection for historic properties by requiring that new construction or exterior renovations go before a Historic Commission for approval prior to any construction work. The City of Lenoir currently does not have a Historic Preservation Commission or any local historic districts.

While all or some of the study area may be appropriately designated as a local historic district, the recommended design standards in the overlay district accomplish much of what a local district would protect – compatible renovations and infill development. Historic neighborhoods can be recognized in other ways, such as signs, plaques, markers, streetscape, and other improvements that contribute to the cohesion and branding of the area (see page 27 for more details on how this could work in the study area). On the following pages, three areas are proposed that warrant additional study in order to appropriately designate and/or celebrate the unique history of the neighborhoods within the study area.

A barrier to historic preservation in the study area is the poor condition of many structures. Thirty-one structures within the study area have been identified as abandoned or dilapidated. This is discussed more thoroughly in the following section, but weighing the historic value of the structures as a part of a cohesive district against the negative impacts of vacant, abandoned, and dilapidated homes on property values and the perception of safety will be an ongoing challenge for the neighborhood.

Three distinct historic areas have been identified to be further studied for National Register District status or for recognition locally as a historic or traditional neighborhood. The map on the following page designates approximate boundaries of the three areas. A full historic survey was outside of the scope of this plan, so year built information is used as an approximate determination of contributing structures.

NORTH MAIN STREET: PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE 1841 TO 1914

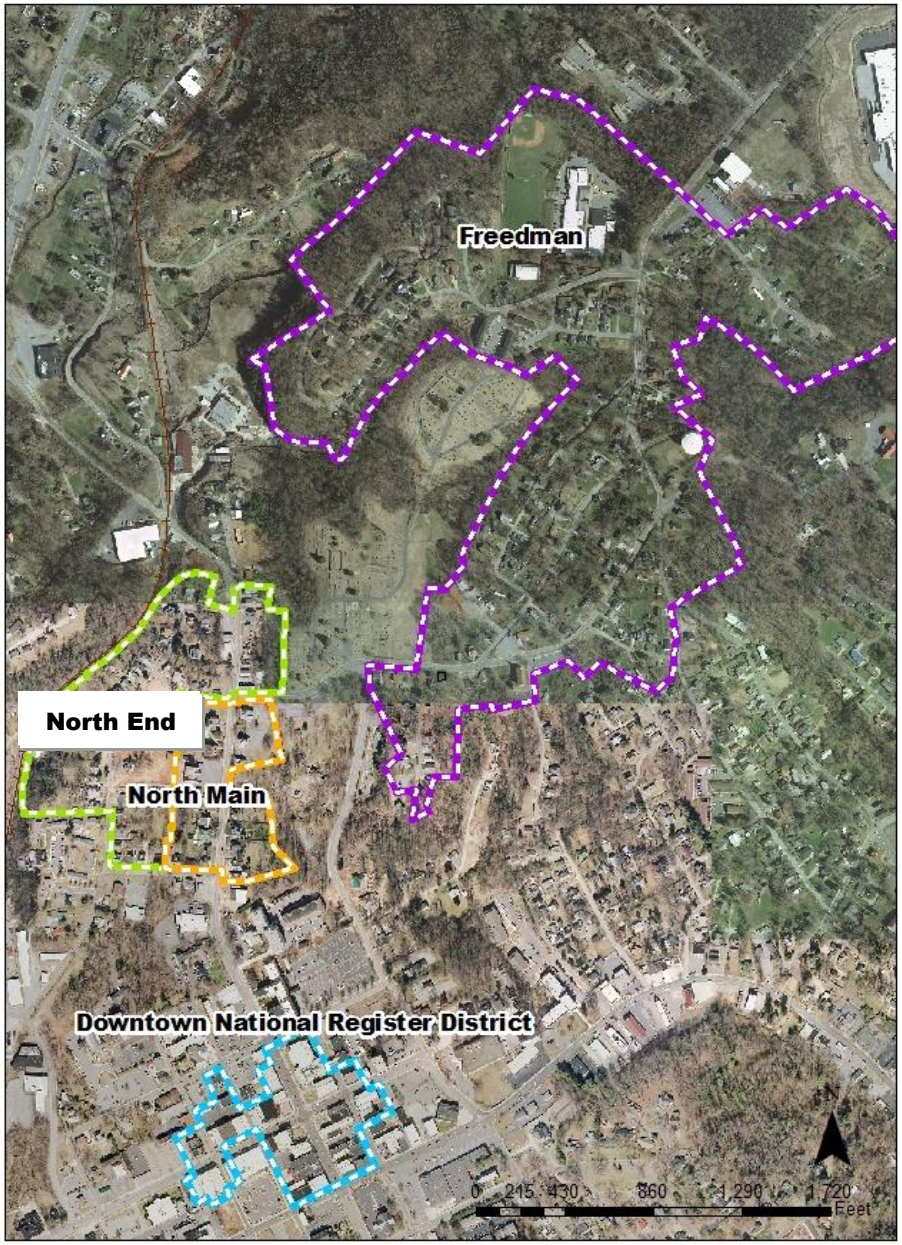
The oldest homes in the study area (pre-1914) are concentrated along the southern end of N. Main Street. This is where the Edgar Allen Poe house is located. The block is relatively intact, although at least two structures are threatened and potentially damaged through neglect beyond financial feasibility for preservation.

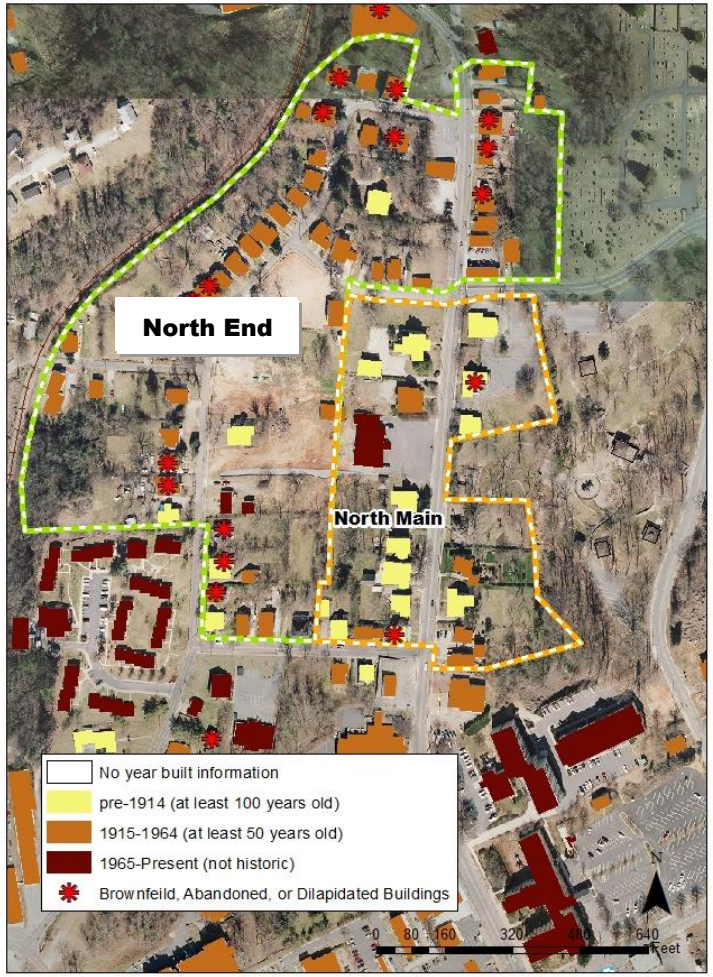
NORTH END – PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE: 1915-1960

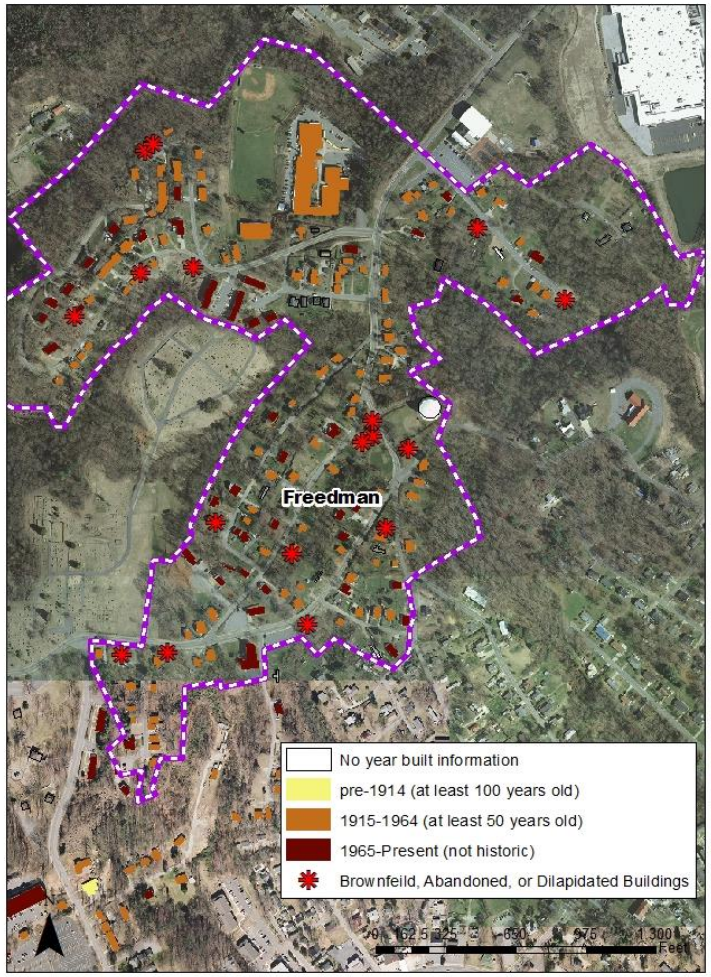
This district includes three homes built in the late 1800s and one more built in 1908; however, the oldest homes are in poor condition and the majority of the homes were built in the middle of the 20th century. Vacant lots are prevalent and erode the traditional fabric of the neighborhood, but sections of this district are well preserved.

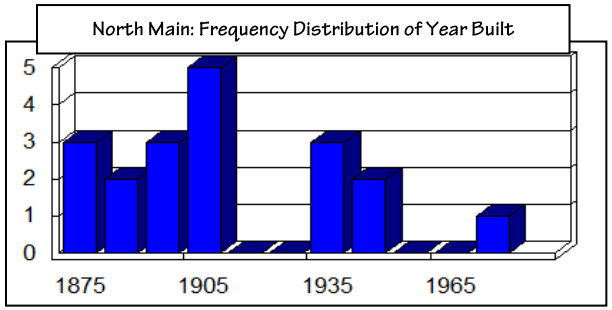
FREEDMAN – PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE: 1870-1945

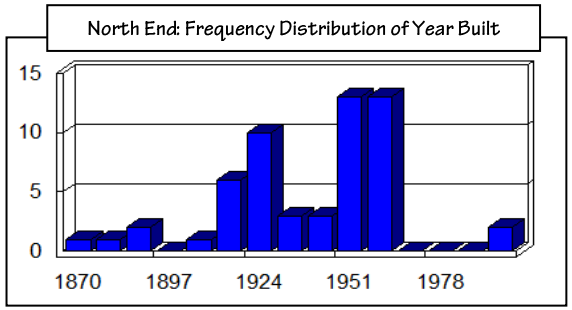
The scope of the study area for this Small Area Plan actually stops at Rankin Street, bisecting the Freedman community. Given the historic significance of the Freedman community to African American history in Lenoir, a more in-depth study of the whole Freedman community is recommended to complement and expand the efforts of this Small Area Plan.

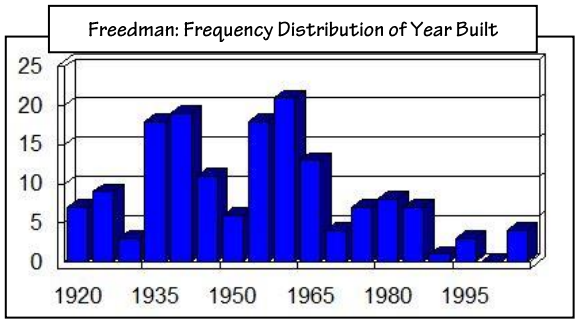



North End
North Main
No year built information
pre-1914 (at least 100 years old)
1915-1964 (at least 50 years old)
1965-Present (not historic)
Brownfeild, Abandoned, or Dilapidated Buildings
0 80 160 320 480 640
Feet


Freedman
No year built information
pre-1914 (at least 100 years old)
1915-1964 (at least 50 years old)
1965-Present (not historic)
Brownfeild, Abandoned, or Dilapidated Buildings
0 162.5 325 650 975 1,300
Feet


North Main: Frequency Distribution of Year Built
5
4
3
2
1
0
1875
1905
1935
1965


North End: Frequency Distribution of Year Built
15
10
5
0
1870
1897
1924
1951
1978


Freedman: Frequency Distribution of Year Built
25
20
15
10
5
0
1920
1935
1950
1965
1980
1995

CODE ENFORCEMENT

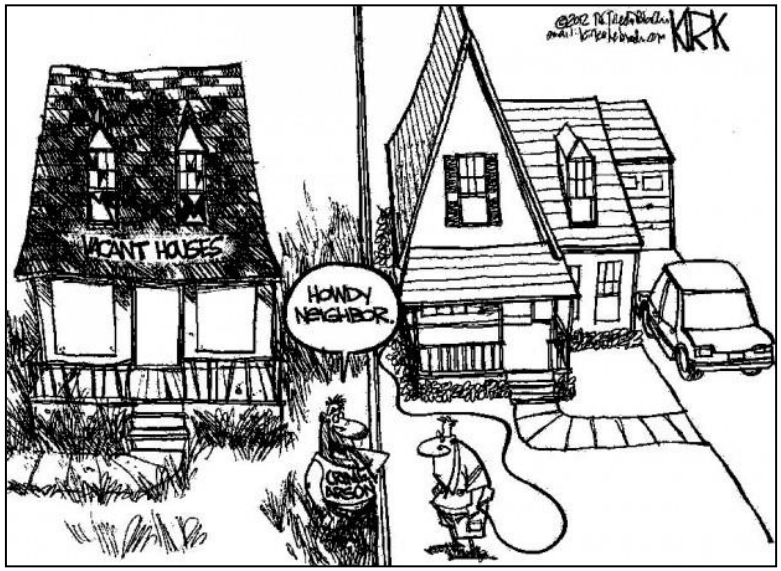
Throughout the community input process, one of the most frequently cited issues was the prevalence of dilapidated properties. While the majority of structures are in good condition, at least 31 properties within the study area are in poor condition – some boarded up, some abandoned and unsecured, and others occupied but severely substandard. These properties frequently have nuisance violations, such as junk vehicles and overgrown vegetation, in addition to housing concerns.

The City's existing ordinances provide an avenue for enforcement against these properties. Ideally, the City can work with owners to provide options and opportunities to achieve compliance. Property owners have several options available to remedy violations. They can choose to make improvements to bring the structures back into compliance with minimum standards. They could sell the property to an investor willing to make the improvements or remove the structure to create an infill lot. Owners can demolish the structure themselves. As a last resort, the City can abate the violations and charge the cost of abatement back to the property in the form of a tax lien.

The goals of intensified enforcement include:

- Reduced opportunity for crime in abandoned structures.
- Enhanced appearance and feeling of community pride.
- Repairs and renovations to existing structures and the elimination of unsafe and substandard housing.
- Reduction of fire risks, mold and mildew, pests, and other side effects of vacant and damaged structures.
- Increased investment due to heightened investor confidence (fewer dilapidated structures creating uncertainty).
- Creation of infill lots and facilitation of high-quality, compatible infill development.

The City recently re-organized code enforcement staff to split enforcement between the Police Department and the Planning Department. As a part of the changes, the Planning Department adopted a priority formula to begin to address the backlog of minimum housing cases throughout the City. The priority formula weighs indicators like number of police calls, number of citizen complaints, location in proximity to other cases, and location on a development corridor or special planning area to prioritize the case load. With the adoption of the small area plan, enforcement action will begin within the study area.



RECREATION

In addition to being located within walking distance of dining, shopping, and year-round festivals and special events in the Downtown, the properties within the study area have excellent access to recreation opportunities. The Small Area Plan focuses on improvements to J.E. Broyhill Park and enhanced connections to walking and biking opportunities.

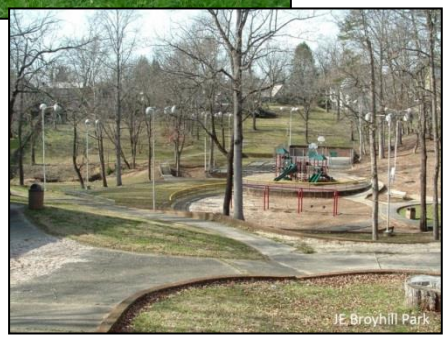
J.E. BROYHILL PARK

This 8-acre park was built in the late 1960s using donated property from the Broyhill family and funds from the Land and Water Fund. The park was intended to function as a Downtown park, to replace the original central Downtown park that once was located where the Walgreens and Head Start strip center sits today. Originally designed with water features and a merry-go-round, the park now has modern playground equipment, a basketball court, three picnic shelters, bathrooms, a small community building, and beautiful mature shade trees.

However, the park has challenges. The original design of the structures has made them susceptible to water damage and the topography of the park leads to erosion and water retention. Because of the original monies for the park, any plans for renovations must maintain the equivalent functions of the existing structures.

One of the main issues identified is that the park is built over a spring that originates in Bellview Cemetery. Known as "the gultch," it once divided Downtown from property to the east. Much of the original "gultch" has been piped and covered up, but it "daylights" for a short distance at the southern end of the park before going back underground and running through the parking lots at Koinonia Apartments and First Baptist Church. The ground over the stream is often inundated with water and stays soggy, leading to erosion of mulch and soil, standing water and mosquitos, maintenance issues, and possible degradation of the community building, which is built on top of the stream.

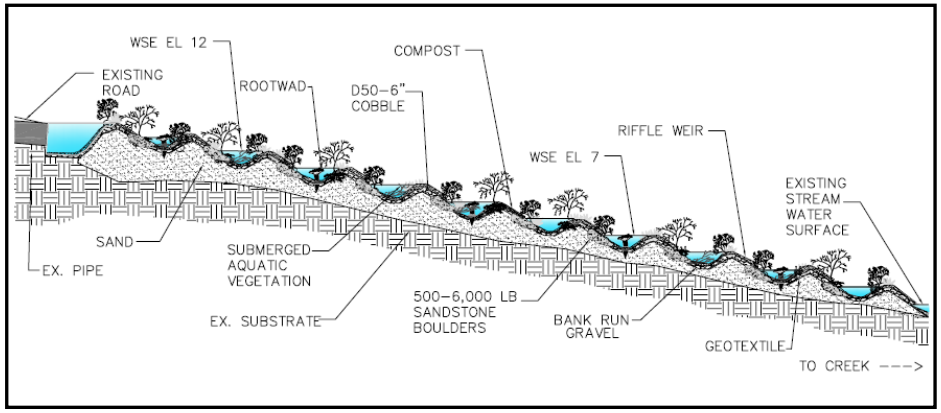
J.E. Broyhill Park

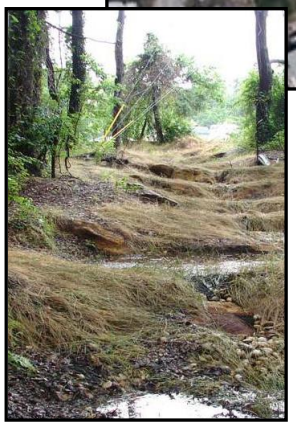


An innovative approach to re-designing the stormwater system within the park is the recommended installation of a Regenerative Stormwater Conveyance system in the natural path of the water through the park.

Benefits of Regenerative Stormwater Conveyance:

- Aesthetic improvement
- Reduces velocity and erosion
- Handles more stormwater
- Enhances water quality
- Cheaper than conventional stormwater ponds
- Wetland hydrology support
- Amphibian and aquatic habitat support
- Terrestrial wildlife habitat enhancement
- Suppression of invasive plant species
- Training opportunities/tourism/laboratory for new stormwater management techniques



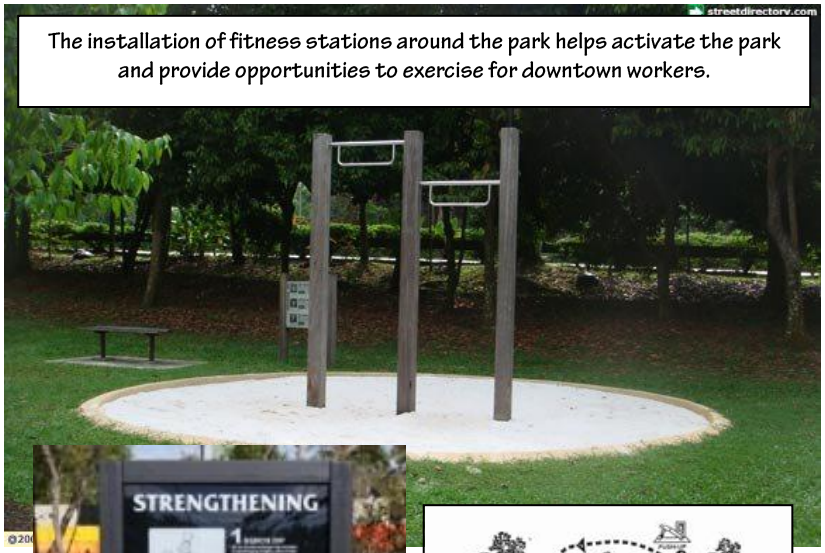


Examples of regenerative stormwater conveyance systems

Other recommendations to improve J.E. Broyhill Park include:

- Repairs to sidewalks and existing picnic shelters.
- Extension of curb and northeast corner at Ridge St. /Finley Ave. intersection (see streetscape section for details).
- Removal of community building with CPTED (crime prevention through environmental design) issues (design provides hiding spots for illegitimate users) and erosion concerns, and replacement with a larger picnic shelter at the north end of the park.
- Enhanced landscaping and the addition of more visible sculptures at the three main pedestrian entrances to the park – Ridge St., N. Main St., and the corner of Finley Ave. and Ridge St., with particular attention paid to "dressing up" the entrance on Main St.
- Explore adding more fitness elements around the park, like a fitness course that incorporates pull up bars, balance beam, sit up station, etc. The park could serve as an outdoor fitness area for area residents as well as people working downtown and at the hospital, creating space for healthy habits like lunchtime exercising and walking meetings.

The installation of fitness stations around the park helps activate the park and provide opportunities to exercise for downtown workers.



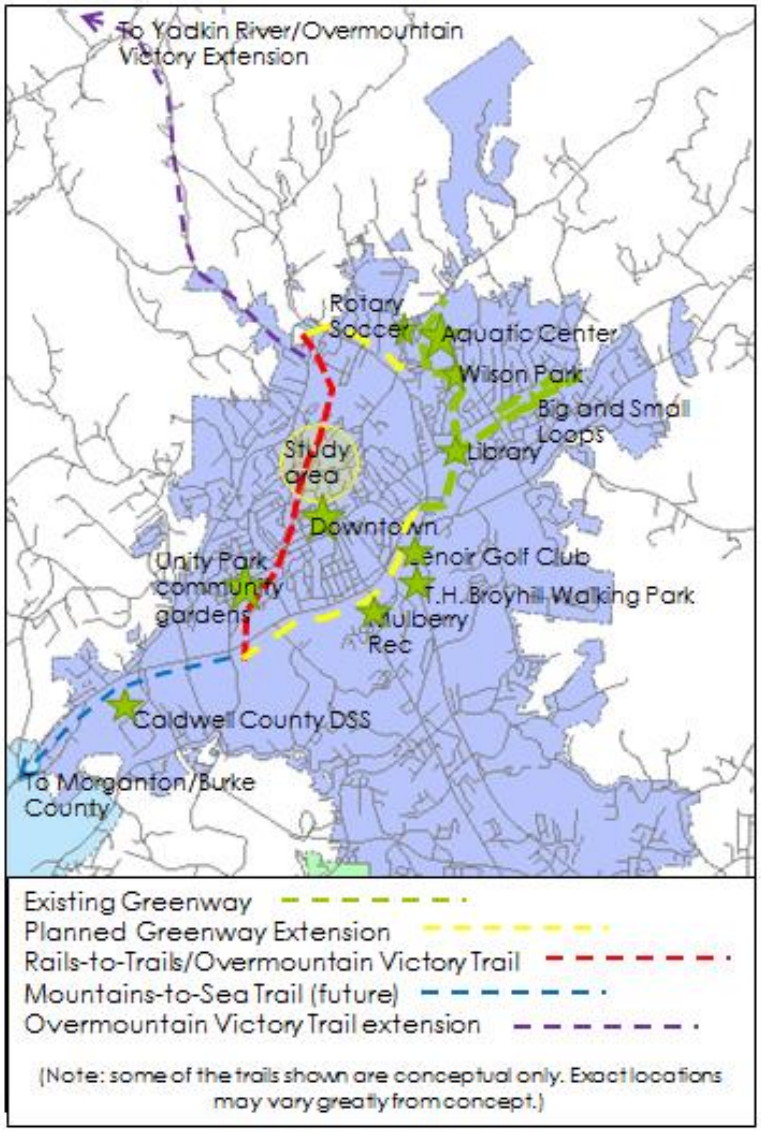
GREENWAYS AND WALKING PATHS

The most significant opportunity to connect the study area to the City's existing and planned greenway trail network is the planned Rails-to-Trail project that will run within the existing C&NW Railroad right-of-way. The abandoned rail line runs from south of Morganton Blvd, up past the Unity Park Community Gardens, through the Downtown, and along the backside of the Vance Street properties until it crosses over Main St.

Improvements to the crossing are proposed in the Streetscape section of this plan. This trail, planned as a part of the Overmountain Victory Trail (the historic path that the Overmountain patriots took on their way to the Battle of Kings Mountain), will connect the study area to:

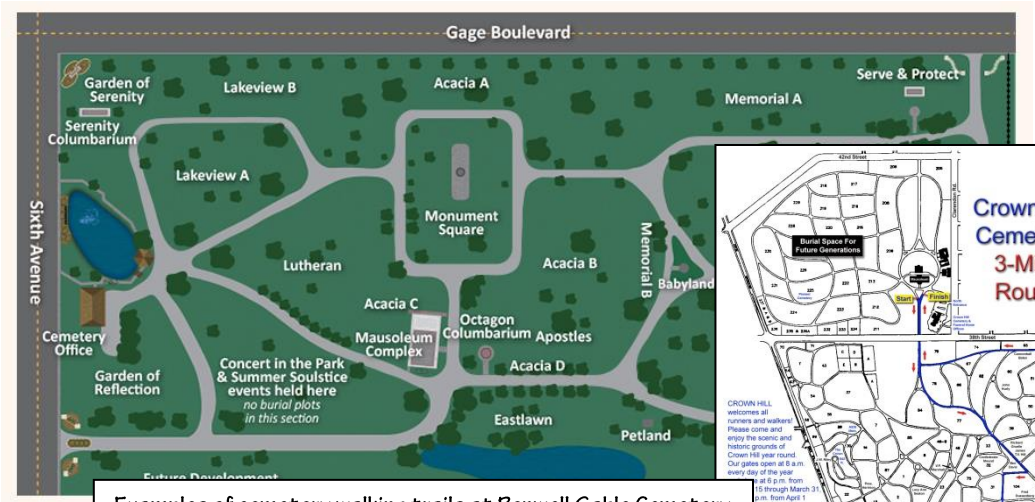
- The Mountains-to-Sea trail which connects Lenoir to Morganton along highway 18.
- The Yadkin River Valley/Happy Valley Trails.
- Existing greenway trails along Zacks Fork Creek and Lower Creek
- Unity Park Community Gardens
- Lenoir Aquatic and Fitness Center
- Rotary Soccer Complex/Mountain Bike Trail
- Wilson Athletic Park
- Caldwell County Public Library (Main Branch)
- Lenoir Golf Club
- Mulberry Recreation Center

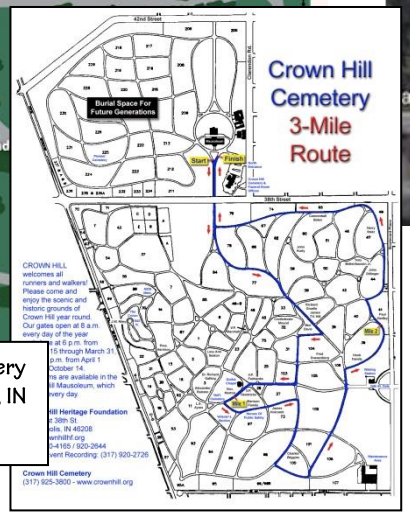
This asset is likely to increase the desirability of property within the study area. Enhanced sidewalks on Main Street and the striping of bike lanes or "sharrows" within the existing width of Main Street will further enhance the connectivity.



Bellview Cemetery is another opportunity to provide for additional walking trails, fitness opportunities, and tourism potential. The cemetery currently has paved lanes with very low automobile traffic. Combined with a fitness trail within J.E. Broyhill Park, the variable terrain and existing paths make the cemetery a logical place to extend a fitness walk for those wanting more miles.

Additionally, "cemetery tourism" can draw in people to the area, increasing the activity and providing a way to share the rich history. Plaques with historical information, mile markers, and emergency phones near the back of the cemetery (which isn't visible from the main road) would all be relatively low-cost strategies to enhance the cemetery as an amenity while respecting and celebrating the families buried there.





Examples of cemetery walking trails at Penwell Gable Cemetery in Topeka, KS (above) and Crown Hill Cemetery in Indinanpolis, IN (right)

Signs can explain history, including pictures and information on families buried in the cemetery.

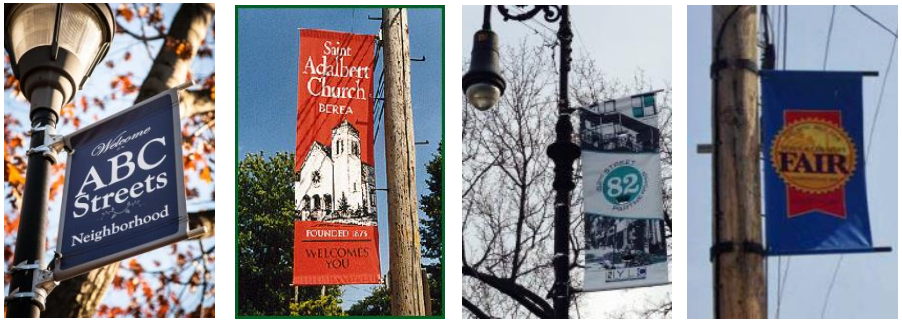
BRANDING AND PUBLIC ART

Branding the corridor and providing opportunities for public art will help N. Main Street stand out as both the unique and special neighborhood that is as well as an appropriate gateway and celebration of historic Downtown Lenoir.

With the implementation of the other recommendations of this plan, the visual appearance of the corridor as well as recreational opportunities should be enhanced. The recommendations in this section will help to further promote the area and support pedestrian activity.

Recommended Options to Brand the Corridor and include more Public Art:

- Hang street banners on new historic light poles or existing utility poles (depending on ultimate streetscape design).
- Install way-finding signage to help pedestrians and drivers to find parks, trails, and Downtown (Note: the concepts presented here could provide a starting point for city-wide signage. City-wide signage should be consistent, so no recommendations are made specific to the study area.)
- Explore re-naming Main Street so that "North" becomes more prominent in the name (for example, it could be written and signed as "North Main Street" instead of Main Street NW). This approach is historically accurate as well.
- Facilitate the placement of sculpture at the entrances to J.E. Broyhill Park, so that it is visible from the surrounding streets, as well as in a prominent location near the rails-to-trail crossing.
- With the installation of the median at the entrance of the corridor, enhanced landscaping, shade trees, way-finding signage, and sculpture should all be explored to provide a beautiful and interesting "first impression" of the corridor.
- Explore historic markers, neighborhood signs, and information kiosks to tell the story of the three historic neighborhoods located in the study area.



Street banners come in a variety of sizes and colors. They can be mounted on metal, cement, and wood poles on the sidewalk-side, street-side, or both sides. They can be mounted on poles that have overhead utility lines. They can be switched out seasonally or advertise special events.

Way-Finding Sign Concept. Well-designed way-finding signage provides for a variety of sign-types with a consistent branding to be readily identifiable by drivers and pedestrians.

Future conceptual Rails-to-Trails crossing and infill development of a bungalow court with access from Vance Street.

Future conceptual North Main Street Gateway, with median, directional signage, landscaping, and light pole banners.

PART IV: IMPLEMENTATION

The vision presented here in this Small Area Plan will be implemented through zoning changes and ordinance amendments, strategic enforcement of existing ordinances, public investment through grants and capital expenditures, and private investment.

ZONING CHANGES AND ORDINANCE AMENDMENTS

As described in Part III, city-initiated zoning changes and a zoning overlay containing the design standards recommended in this plan will be an important first step to legalizing the types of development we want to see in the study area. Having an overlay district in the zoning ordinance helps to provide predictability within the regulatory framework, which takes some of the "guesswork" out of investment decisions. None of the changes will have amortization clauses or compel owners to make changes, but the new regulations will apply to new construction and substantial renovations.

ENFORCEMENT OF EXISTING ORDINANCES

Property maintenance codes and minimum housing standards will be enforced within the study area on a proactive basis. As a result of the community walkabout and the focused study on the corridor, the City code enforcement staff now has a better understanding of the properties that have suspected violations and will be able to pursue them in a logical and unbiased way. The cost of the enforcement will be absorbed by the existing budget and staff allocations for code enforcement in the City.

PUBLIC INVESTMENT

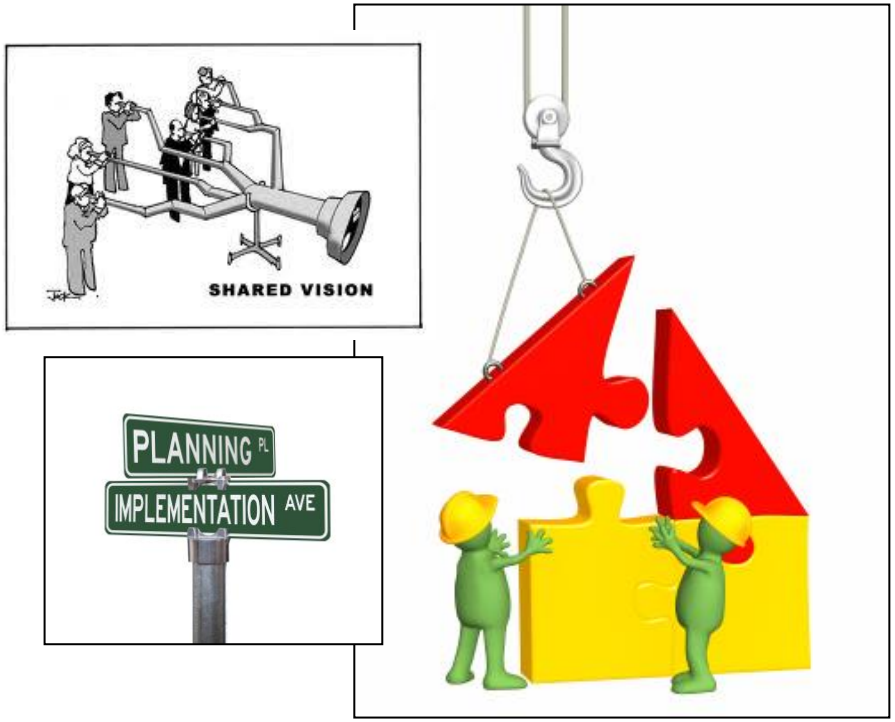
This plan calls for several projects that will need to be refined and vetted through City Council and future capital improvement budgets. The plan serves as the starting point to establish an "ultimate" vision for the area – the exact designs may still go through many rounds of changes until they meet current engineering standards and budget constraints.

Generally, some of the improvements will likely be able to be accommodated within existing operating budgets for standard improvements like sidewalks and resurfacing. Some other options to pay for improvements may include:

- Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), HOME funds, Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC), Choice Neighborhood Grants, and other federal grants available to revitalize low and moderate income areas.
- Capital Improvement Program amendments
- Pedestrian and Bicycle infrastructure grants
- Recreation/Healthy Living grants
- Technical support from boards, commissions, universities, and non-governmental organizations for specific projects, including:
    - J.E. Broyhill park stormwater project – NC State Agriculture Extension Office
    - Sculpture – Caldwell County Arts Council
    - Banners/Way-finding Signs/Entrance Signs – Lenoir Tourism Development Authority, Lenoir Main Street

PRIVATE INVESTMENT

Private investment is crucial to attaining the full vision presented in this document. Public investment and consistent enforcement of ordinances is an important first step in creating a climate conducive to private investment, as well adopting the recommended ordinance changes that expedite creative redevelopment and increased density, which can help make projects work financially.

The City can do the following things to help support private investment:

- Offer pre-development conferences, prompt call-backs, and other excellent customer service techniques to support interested investors and developers to conduct their due diligence and eliminate costly "surprises" in the redevelopment process.
- Work to get appropriate areas designated as National Register Historic Districts to increase private funding sources.
- Explore property tax deferment and other local incentives to development.
- Explore grants to do environmental assessments on any property with suspected contamination.
- Consider executing tax lien foreclosures, eminent domain, or other means of property acquisition for properties where ownership issues (multiple heirs within an estate, other legal ownership issues) prevent easy sale or enforcement of major property issues. City can clean up titles by acquiring properties and then re-sell them for restoration or redevelopment.
- Explore the adoption of the entire study area as a Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Area, to allow for greater flexibility to use HOME, CDBG, and LIHTC for mixed-income projects.
- Foster relationships between the City and providers of low and moderate income housing to stabilize the area with long-term affordable, well-designed, well-managed properties (Lenoir Housing Authority, Caldwell County Habitat for Humanity, etc.)