

# DESTINATION: DOWNTOWN

## A look at the four points of revitalization

*Editor's note: This series focuses on the plans for development and growth of downtown Kings Mountain through the possible help of the North Carolina Main Street Program. MPI applied for participation in this program today. This series is a collaborative effort between the Mountaineer Partnership and The Herald. MPI Dir. Adam Hines contributed to this report.*

Part 2 of a 7 part series

By EMILY WEAVER, ADAM HINES

Mountaineer Partnership, Inc., Kings Mountain's downtown revitalization committee, is applying for participation in the North Carolina Main Street Program.

If accepted, the plan will help MPI breathe new life into downtown through technical assistance, training, program guidance, networking, advocacy and leadership. Crafted by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the program has helped revitalize over 1,200 downtowns across the country.

The plan is for communities to "recognize and preserve their historic fabric, and, using local resources, build on their unique characteristics to create vibrant central business districts that meet the needs of today's (downtowns)," according to the North Carolina Main Street Center, which oversees the program.

The NCMSPP operates under a "Four-Point Approach," focusing on the areas of organization, design, promotion and economic restructuring. MPI oversees and directs the efforts of all four of these committees of professionals and volunteers from the community.

### Organization

Under organization, the plan incorporates "building human and financial resources, through public

and private partnerships, to achieve a common vision" for downtown.

Diverse groups, consisting of merchants, bankers, public officials, the chamber of commerce and civic groups, "must work together to improve downtown," according to the program.

Mountaineer Partnership, Inc., has already demonstrated strengths for this part of the approach. The board consists of professionals, government officials and citizens, both public and private, who work together for the downtown initiative.

Mauney Library Dir. Sharon Stack has chaired the Organization Committee for three years.

"This committee provides the backbone of organization for Mountaineer Partnership and the four point approach," she said. "It helps the organization to function effectively. Under the Main Street program the Organization Committee is responsible for budgeting, planning, and membership."

The need of a shared vision for downtown branches off into available human resources and available financial resources to enact that vision.

### Promotion

In the promotion approach, the main goal is to sell a "positive image of downtown based on the authentic, creative assets of the community."

The three basic areas of focus fall under image building campaigns, retail promotion, and special event development.

The North Carolina Main Street Program suggests that communities create a brand (logo or slogan) to help "sell" the downtown, using signage, websites, newsletters and social media networks to reach the public. MPI currently has a website (mtnpartnership.com), produces newsletters and has a logo. At the request of and with the input from the Chamber of Commerce, City of Kings Mountain, and MPI, NCDOT recently put up street signs leading to downtown at the main gateways to Kings Mountain.

The goal of retail promotion is to get customers into downtown shops and to encourage those cash

registers to ring. This goal can be achieved through avenues such as joint advertising campaigns, sidewalk sales, public art programs or art fairs, farmers markets, antique car shows, and marketing and education about the goods and services available.

Special events, which attract crowds to downtown, are already held in Kings Mountain. Christmas and Halloween parades, the independent film festival, Beach Blast, the Gateway Festival, Mountaineer Christmas and many other events continue to bring crowds into downtown each year.

Look for the promotion committee of MPI as it hosts its first Beer Garden Event this Saturday July 18th as part of the annual Beach Blast event held in Patriots Park.

### Design

The design approach operates simply under the principle of attraction, "improving the physical aspects of downtown."

This approach focuses on storefronts, streetscape design, signage and public spaces. The goal is to recreate the look of downtown to be both pleasing to the eye and spirit by creating an environment where people will want to work, shop, relax and play.

"The Design Committee is very interested in restoring the bollard monuments and chains in front of the parking area on Battleground," said Chairwoman Shirley Brutko, who has served on the committee almost a year.

She added that they are also interested in working on sidewalks, cross walks, railroad crossings, bike lanes, signage and other beautification efforts through the Main Street Program.

Facade grants for renovating shop fronts are already offered through the city, a joint effort between MPI and city council.

Streetscapes and all of their elements, including types of trees, lighting, furnishings and parking, are studied under this approach. Sometimes even the simplest improvements can make the scene, as noticed in the ground-illuminating lights, which currently shine on trees downtown.

The importance of design to a thriving main street was emphasized by national revitalization expert Dan Burden when he said, "Fix the streets, and the people and businesses will follow". Dan Burden, selected in 2001 by Time Magazine as one of six of the world's most important civic innovators, owns and operates Florida Based Walkable Communities Inc. traveling to downtowns around the country using pictures from around the world he has taken of building and streetscape design elements that can be beneficial to their particular community.

### Economic restructuring

In the economic restructuring approach, the goal is to strengthen a downtown's existing "economic assets of the business district while diversifying its economic base. Activities include conducting market analysis to understand the changing market place, adapting vacant buildings that have outlived their original purposes for use as entertainment or cultural facilities, creating interest in completing the streetscape through infill or redevelopment projects, and sharpening the competitiveness of Main Street's traditional merchants," according to the program.

This approach focuses on increasing the community's tax base, increasing loan demand and deposits in local financial institutions, enhancing property values, generating additional sales of goods and services and creating jobs.

These goals are tackled through market analysis surveys, studying a community's economic positioning; database development; business retention, expansion and recruitment strategies; specific development opportunities; and having a mixed-use center of activity: retail, service, professional, governmental, institutional and residential, according to the North Carolina Main Street Program.

*In next week's Herald, read more about how the city can grow through the promotion approach of the Main Street Program.*

## MILL

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businesses came to town and cotton was no longer King in this area, Gilbert's father, H. Lawrence Patrick (for whom the Kings Mountain Senior Center is named) bought used textile equipment in the 1960s and started Patrick Yarns, spinning industrial mop yarn.

Fifty years ago there were 10 family owned spinning plants in Kings Mountain and hundreds of textile plant across the two Carolinas employing thousands of people. Today, Patrick Yarn Mills is the only family owned spinning plant in what used to be one of the busiest textile sites in the Piedmont.

In the Time news feature article, Patrick credited environmentally friendly business practices, above average pay to workers, and good employee benefits for making the company more competitive. He lays most of the blame on the decimated manufacturing industry on an uneven playing field in China.

Patrick was also quoted in the Global business feature that he is not looking for government intervention to save his business. His company spins a wide range of products for a diverse group of customers including yarn for military applications, fiber optic cables, and antimicrobial yarn for water filtration, to name a few of the dozen or more different products supplied to many different markets.

Gilbert Patrick became president and chief operating officer in 1993 when Patrick Yarn employed 50 at a single plant across the railroad tracks on S. Battleground Avenue. Today, there are 170 employees and two state-of-the-art mills, the most recent location in the former big former Cleveland Mills plant on York Road. The plants operate three shifts, six days a week.

Unlike any recession that most of us have experienced in our lifetime, the local company is lessening the impact by creating new avenues for business and "thinking outside the box."

On a recent holiday Patrick was modest about company successes, busy grilling burgers for his employees a company picnic.

## RECORDS

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everyone, this new feature will save time and money.

### Information overload

Environmental Health Dir. Marty Allen said that the department's filing cabinets were getting full. They were backed up with records they had to keep; public documents that state law requires them to hold on to for a period of time and information they couldn't afford to toss out.

Each onsite inspection of a property includes extensive field investigations. From testing water quality and taking soil samples to looking at old sewer systems, wells or foundations, the fieldwork is a thorough process. Sometimes investigators have to navigate around land rights, fussy property owners, animals or Mother Nature's influence to collect the information the government requires.

"Once we get the information we need and nobody gets killed in the process, we're gone," Allen joked. "So if we lose that information and we have to go back and get that again, it would be like who's going to get the short straw?"

Some of the information like that of underground sewer systems dating back to the 70s or beyond is irreplaceable, he said.

There may be old systems or wells dating back to the '40s or '50s that were repaired and left on the property or that had broken down underneath the soil over time.

But knowing what lies beneath without being an archaeologist or having a crystal ball to gaze into, Allen said, can be an impossible feat.

If landowners want to build an additional wing onto their home or an extra cottage out front, these property questions come to surface. Instead of digging up a costly "roadblock" in construction, the Environmental Health Department helps developers navigate this "mine field" of old foundation structures, sewer systems and wells.

But all of the field notes, site drawings, plot descriptions, tests and other important information leads to a lot of paper work.

"We were growing four-drawer filing cabinets," he said about the department's archive room. "I've got 23 in there that you can't get your fingers in (between the files)."

But even in those crammed cabinets packed with pertinent facts and figures, another threat, besides running out of room, was closing in on the department.

"In the dark ages of Environmental Health," he said, they used to have to make copies of records accumulated in fieldwork with carbon paper - a medium that seemed to pass the tests of age and time.

But then came the more "environmentally friendly" carbonless paper for copies. These copies began to fade. Without exposure to

light, heat or moisture the words once recorded on these back-up records vanished within the filing cabinets.

"If we have to go back out there and run the gauntlet to get that information back, it's expensive, it's time consuming and we may miss something because in 10 or 15 years, a lot of things can happen," Allen said.

"Trees grow up, people bulldoze, they move things, you just don't know and then it doesn't even resemble what was out there. Then you miss something that you had record of that would have been a help."

### Records check

About 10 years ago, Allen started asking around, looking for any kind of media that may help him save the information they had, shrink their overloaded archive room and help them retrieve the files without an archeological dig through the cabinets.

He knew about microfilm, but asked about any other method. They began to back up their records on compact discs, but even that became a daunting task.

Then, one day, Allen went to the county's Register of Deeds office and saw a light of hope on a computer screen. He noticed people pulling up photocopies of actual deeds records online.

"How did you get that information on that screen?" he asked Bonnie Reece of the deeds' office.

He said that she told him the records were recorded through a process called "digital imaging," through a company they used called Parker-Lowe and Associates.

Through the office he was able to get in touch with Parker-Lowe and Associates. The company began to help them back up their files through high-powered scanners, which take a digital snapshot of each record. The files are then identified, labeled and catalogued in the system and backed up on a DVD, which, Allen said, has a higher storage capacity than a CD.

Should anything happen to the information floating around in cyber space, which is stored in two other memory banks throughout the country, or the office, which holds the records, Allen said that they will be able to get the site back up and running with a computer and the DVDs.

With this new technology they were able to scan all of the documents deemed "public record" for a given property, including department letters, field notes, soil tests, water and/or air quality readings, deeds, any land easements and other facts into a single group of accessible files. Medical records relating to a property and other "sensitive" information will not be available.

A clerk checks to make sure the documents appear clear and legible in each scanned image. Once scanned and set, they send the information to Parker-Lowe and Associates, who backs up their system every afternoon, he said.



EMILY WEAVER/HERALD

### Michelle Lovelace looks up a record online.

About four and a half years ago, their process of record keeping had changed. On off days or slow afternoons at the office, workers sit at the scanner backing up records.

"We're really putting a lot of information on there," said Allen, a 34-year-veteran in environmental sciences and Cleveland County native.

### Laying it online

Then, one day, a representative of Parker-Lowe asked if Allen ever thought about having the records online.

"Tell me more," he said, intrigued.

After more conversations and research, Allen then took the idea to Health Dir. Denise Stallings. They talked to County Manager David Dear and the green light was officially given.

On June 22nd, at the county commissioners' meeting Allen unveiled their newest technological advancement and pride of the county - the first environmental health department in the state to have its records accessible online.

"We don't have all of our records on it yet," he said, adding that the most commonly requested ones are being downloaded first. "Every day there is more and more records available."

Allen added that they hope to have all of the public health records online within the next year.

"I still can't take care of those documents and box them, burn them or shred them yet. The state of North Carolina doesn't recognize a DVD as an archivable

medium yet," he said, adding that the DVDs are still being backed up on microfilm.

But once microfilmed, the documents can be destroyed. The filing cabinets can have a little breathing room.

The county's Environmental Health Department's information is used and needed by a variety of professionals and patrons. Attorneys need to look at records for title searches, real estate agents use it for listings, building inspectors seek notes for cases, contractors look at property information for new construction or repairs, and planning and zoning officials rely on the records for mapping.

What used to take a full day of digging through filing cabinets to fill the requests of nearly 25-30 faxes from people seeking information can now be found in seconds online.

New industries or businesses contemplating moving into the county will be able to access records in a matter of minutes instead of weeks, he said.

"We were walking a tightrope of trying to do the best we could as quick as we could and sometimes as quick as we could do it was not quick enough. I don't know how to get any quicker than this," Allen said. "This is light years ahead of what we did just 10 or 15 years ago."

With a username and password the public can search records by a landowner's name, property address or parcel ID number. The website is accessible at <http://www.clevelandcounty.com/public/health/hd/pages/envhalth.html>