

christiansburg

placemaking plan

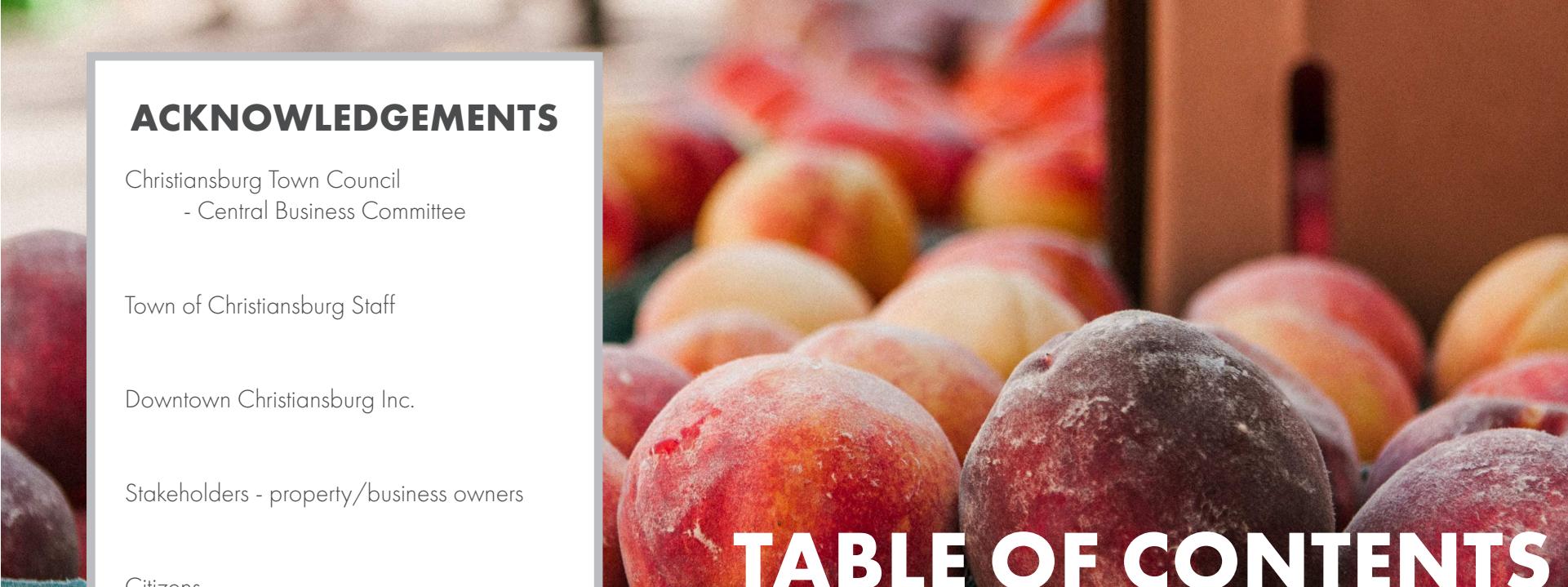
Downtown
Cambria
Midtown



*“Plans are important and necessary, but
real success comes in carrying out plans...
Too many plans eliminate action, and
eliminating action eliminates success.”*

- Doug Griffiths





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Christiansburg Town Council
- Central Business Committee

Town of Christiansburg Staff

Downtown Christiansburg Inc.

Stakeholders - property/business owners

Citizens

Appalachian Regional Commission

Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development
- Joy Rumley
- Tamarah Holmes

Hill Studio

New River Valley Regional Commission

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appendix can be found at
www.christiansburg.org/placemakingappendix

executive summary

The Christiansburg Placemaking Plan is a road map that will guide the Town of Christiansburg toward its goal of becoming a cultural destination for the community.

While the focus of the study is centered on Downtown, the Town also acknowledged the large supporting role the areas of Cambria and Midtown play in the community.

Downtowns across the country are experiencing trends in demographic shifts, consumer behaviors, transportation and housing preferences, and the importance of placemaking. Many of these trends are evident even in small downtowns like Christiansburg, and responding to these trends can ensure the vibrancy of Christiansburg's downtown into the future.

WHAT IS PLACEMAKING?

Placemaking inspires people to collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces as the heart of every community. Strengthening the connection between people and the places they share, placemaking refers to a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to maximize shared value.

Placemaking acknowledges that a successful downtown is not comprised only of tangible elements such as clean streets, well-lit sidewalks, and transit stops, but of cultural and social elements that connect people to a space on a deeper level. Great places foster social interaction, promote health, build and support the local economy, create improved accessibility, nurture and define a sense of community, and promote a sense of comfort.



Diagram courtesy of Project for Public Spaces

THE PROCESS

There were four major phases with this project, beginning in the winter of 2018 and ending in the winter of 2020. The four phases were:

1. Data collection & initial engagement
2. Stakeholder & public engagement
3. Data analysis & strategy creation
4. Plan development

This plan is built on extensive data, as well as the input of many Christiansburg business owners, citizens, stakeholders, and staff. Listening to input from these stakeholders in many different settings across many different platforms gave the Town valuable insight into the collective vision for Downtown. Exploring key demographic and economic data was vital to understanding the trajectory of the Town.

A community survey solicited 971 responses and 697 open-ended comments, and community conversations took place in each of the three action areas. These conversations were attended by property owners, business owners, and non-profit and civic organizations. A total of six community conversations were held, yielding 42 total participants. Members of the project team also attended multiple community events, seeking further input from local citizens about their vision for Downtown. A total of 75 responses were gathered during these community events.

From this input, common themes and priorities began to emerge, resulting in the identification of nine overarching goals and 37 strategies.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Nine priority projects were identified as instrumental to this placemaking work and intended to push the possibilities for Downtown, Cambria, and Midtown toward a more vibrant future. Recommendations for small, but meaningful steps forward, partners to work with, and a means for reflection and evaluation are explored in detail.



PLACEMAKING GOALS

DOWNTOWN GOALS:

- D1. Create vibrant community gathering spaces
- D2. Ensure best alignment of building uses
- D3. Prioritize connectivity and accessibility
- D4. Increase leadership and capacity of Town and Downtown partners

CAMBRIA GOALS:

- C1. Enhance existing community assets to spur vibrancy
- C2. Update facades and increase accessibility

MIDTOWN GOALS:

- M1. Create a welcoming and cohesive commercial corridor
- M2. Seek opportunities for infill and redevelopment
- M3. Prioritize connectivity and accessibility

priority projects

D1.1

Construct a permanent, multi-purpose Farmers Market and community gathering space



D1.2

Enhance Downtown Park to serve both recreational and community events



D2.1

Consider ground-floor zoning ordinance revisions



D2.6

Encourage workforce and market-rate rental housing in Downtown



D4.2

Collaborate with Downtown Christiansburg Inc. and other Downtown partners on Downtown related-initiatives



C1.1

Create a Cambria Streetscape Plan



C2.1

Provide incentives for new businesses in Cambria



M1.1

Invest in commercial entryway signage and landscaping options



M2.3

Encourage the development of a hotel and conference center



introduction

The Christiansburg Placemaking Plan explores all the elements that make a great place. While there are foundational elements critical for success, such as the presence of quality roads, sidewalks, lighting, and safe pedestrian access, there are other, more intangible elements that play an equally important role. This plan is about small, but meaningful steps toward transformative change.

The Town of Christiansburg, located in Montgomery County in southwest Virginia, has a population of over 22,500 and serves as the county seat. Centered within the New River Valley, Christiansburg sits at the crossroads of three major highways: Interstate 81, U.S. Route 11, and U.S. Route 460. The Town has experienced consistent economic growth in recent years, including a steady rise in population, average annual wages, and median home prices.

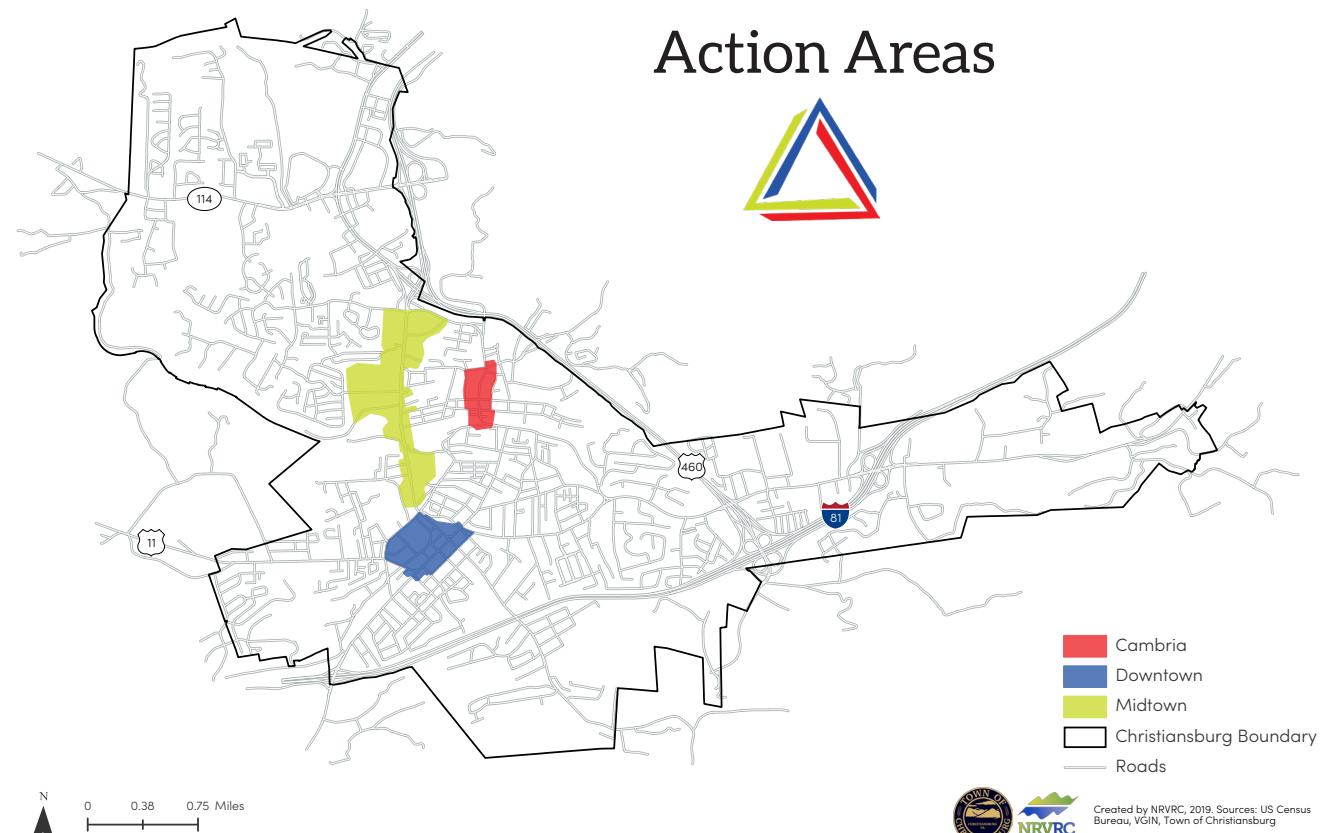
The Town of Christiansburg has long been a retail and residential destination for residents of Montgomery County. As a major employment center within the region, Christiansburg has a daily net in-migration of 8,400 people. Now the Town is considering how to fully activate its Downtown as a vibrant cultural destination for its citizens.

ACTION AREAS

Three areas were evaluated within the Town: Downtown, Cambria, and Midtown. While the focus of this study is centered on Downtown, the Town acknowledged the large supporting roles that the Cambria and Midtown areas play. Understanding the historical context

and demographic trends of these three areas provides helpful insight into the potential of their future. Existing building usage and economic indicators point to strengths and challenges for these areas. The planning team also assessed the connectivity of these areas via car, transit, pedestrian access, or bicycle access.

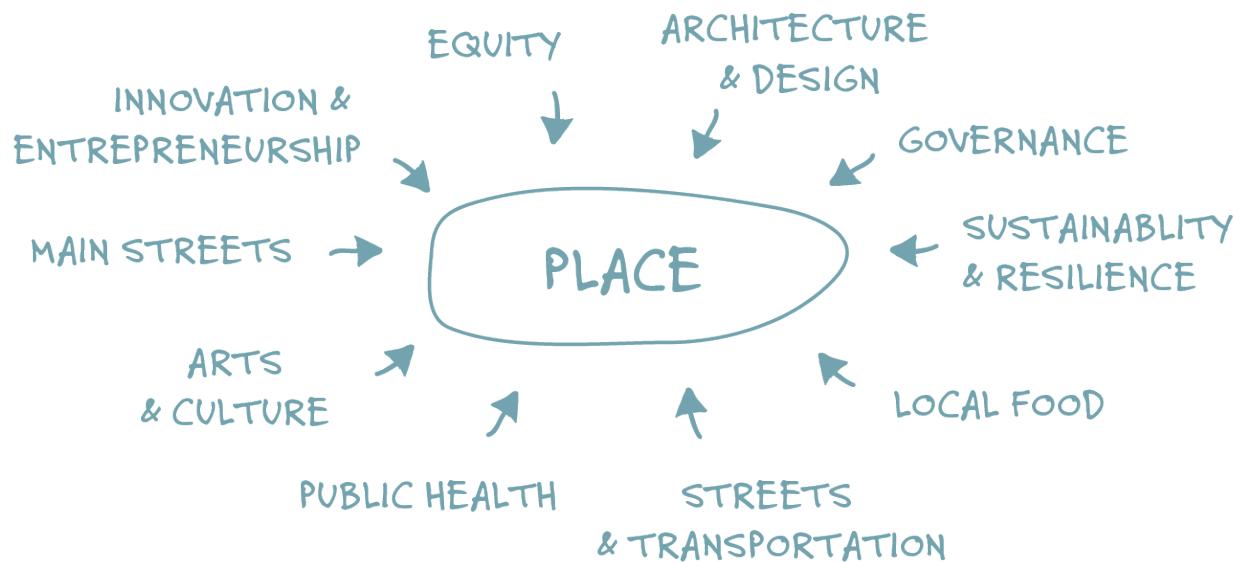
Action Areas



Created by NRVRC, 2019. Sources: US Census Bureau, VGIN, Town of Christiansburg

WHAT IS PLACEMAKING?

According to the Project for Public Spaces, placemaking inspires people to collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces as the heart of every community. Placemaking acknowledges that a successful Downtown is not comprised only of tangible elements, such as clean streets, well-lit sidewalks, and transit stops, but of cultural and social elements that connect people to a space on a deeper level.



HOW TO USE THIS PLAN

Placemaking happens when many and diverse voices are brought to the table. This planning process started the conversation with residents, business owners, and property owners. The resulting plan encourages the Town to listen carefully to its citizens and stakeholders, create meaningful partnerships, and take small action steps – right now – to move forward in progress.

Christiansburg's Placemaking Plan is divided into four chapters, covering economic and demographic data from each of the three action areas, an overview of the public engagement process including major themes and findings, recommended goals and strategies for implementation, and a more detailed look at nine priority projects identified during the planning process. The priority projects are designed with recommendations for how to take quick first steps, partners that should be invited to join the conversation, and opportunities for reflection on progress.

Diagram courtesy of Project for Public Spaces

PLACEMAKING GOALS

Through extensive data collection, one-on-one conversations, and public engagement, the following nine goals were identified for Christiansburg.

DOWNTOWN GOALS:

- D1. Create vibrant community gathering spaces
- D2. Ensure best alignment of building uses
- D3. Prioritize connectivity and accessibility
- D4. Increase leadership and capacity of Town and Downtown partners

CAMBRIA GOALS:

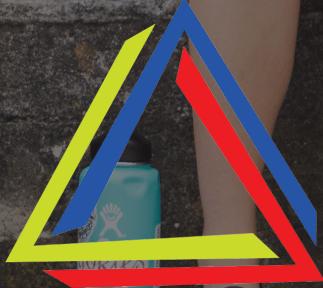
- C1. Enhance existing community assets to spur vibrancy
- C2. Update facades and increase accessibility

MIDTOWN GOALS:

- M1. Create a welcoming and cohesive commercial corridor
- M2. Seek opportunities for infill and redevelopment
- M3. Prioritize connectivity and accessibility



action areas



“Everyone has the right to live in a great place. More importantly, everyone has the right to contribute to making the place where they already live great.” - Fred Kent



action areas

The Town of Christiansburg has many assets that make it a desirable place to live, work, and play. With more than 22,500 residents who call Christiansburg home and an economy that offers 13,108 jobs, the Town is one of the region's largest employment and amenity centers.

The Town has consistently invested in the infrastructure and streetscape needs within Town, addressing infrastructure improvements, sidewalk repair and extensions, pedestrian crosswalks, downtown beautification, trail extensions, and street improvements. Now the Town is taking the next step toward becoming a cultural destination for its residents.

Despite there being more goals and priority projects identified for Downtown, the Town understands how important the Cambria and Midtown areas are in the community. Understanding the history and context of each of these areas in addition to their current demographics and spending trends, is vital in planning for their future.

REGIONAL CONTEXT

Christiansburg is located at the crossroads of corridors, Interstate 81, US Route 460 and US Route 11. Christiansburg is the governmental service hub, serving as the county seat for Montgomery County and is one of two incorporated towns within the County. The Town has long been an important agricultural center for the county as well. The Town of Blacksburg - where Virginia Tech is

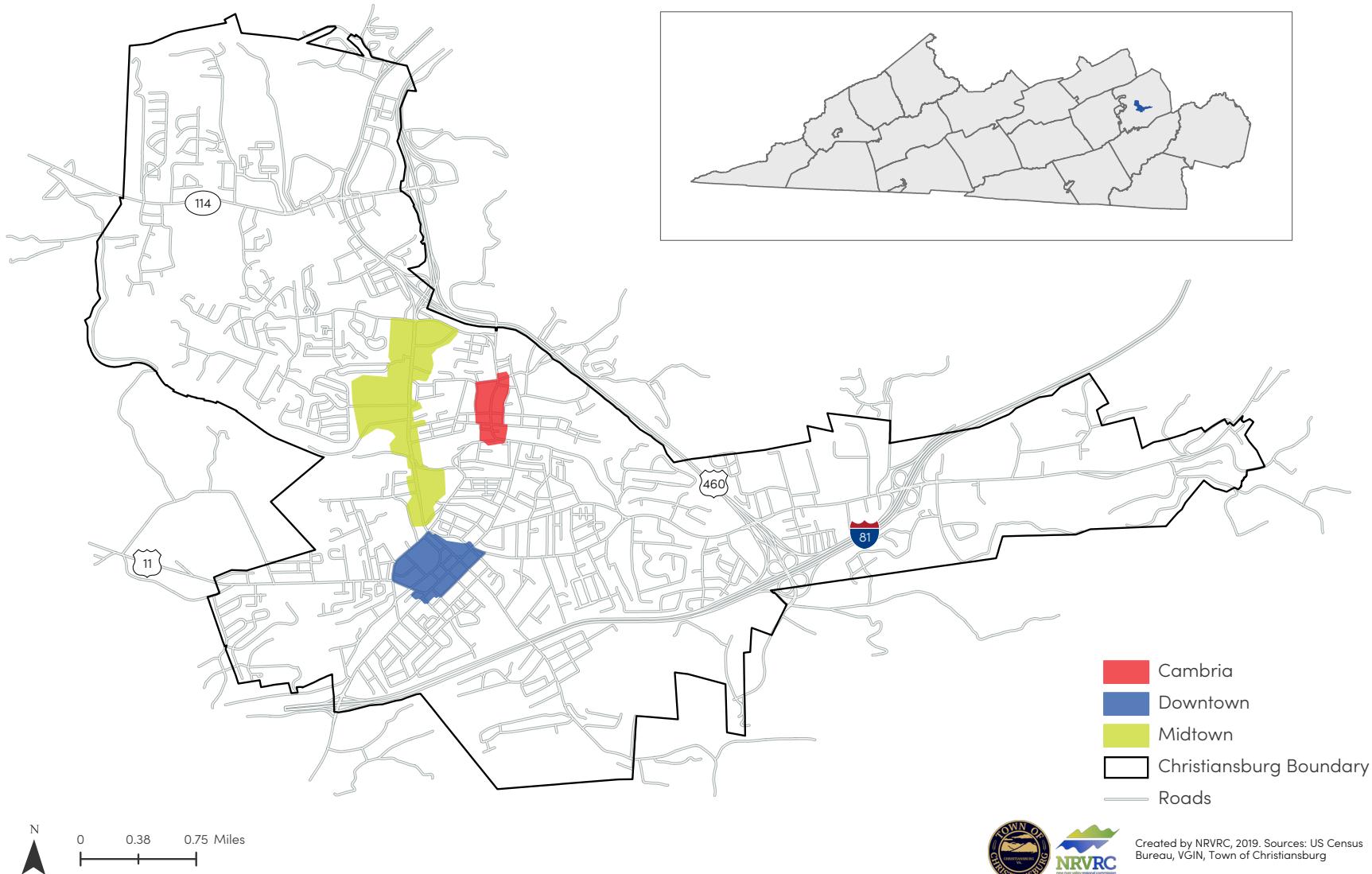
located - is approximately 10 minutes away. Christiansburg is located in the New River Valley, a region which includes the counties of Floyd, Giles, Montgomery, and Pulaski and the City of Radford, and has a population of just over 184,000. Growth in the region has increased by 3.4% since the last decennial Census and has grown 5.3% in Montgomery County specifically.

The City of Radford and Montgomery County have high percentages of student populations from Radford University and Virginia Tech, with a total student population of approximately 40,000 between the two universities. The universities produce nearly 10,000 new graduates within the region each year. New River Community College also operates a satellite site at the New River Valley Mall.



Christiansburg

Action Areas



Created by NRVRC, 2019. Sources: US Census Bureau, VGIN, Town of Christiansburg

Downtown

YESTERDAY

After being incorporated as a town in 1833, the current downtown area became a hub for Montgomery County and the region. By the early 1900s, Christiansburg had taken on many of the functions of a regional center, with a bank, newspaper, Temperance Hall and photographer. Agriculture played an important role in the local and regional economy, and livestock were regularly driven to market down Main Street or taken to the Christiansburg Depot.

The completion of U.S. Route 11 – the first interstate highway in America – was celebrated in Christiansburg when the last link passing through downtown was hard surfaced in 1926. By 1929, Virginia Polytechnic Institute (current-day Virginia Tech) was providing employment for many of the area's citizens. Christiansburg also served a critical role in the region's coal mining operations.

Following World War II, Christiansburg rapidly industrialized. Virginia Tech continued to expand, and by the mid-1950s, the university owned 2,000 acres in Montgomery County and employed more than 1,400 individuals. Downtown Christiansburg has long been a destination for services, whether for medical or legal needs, and this remains true today. Christiansburg serves as the county seat for Montgomery County, therefore more downtown buildings are occupied by municipal, civic, and professional services than most small towns.



TODAY

According to the Weldon Cooper Center, Christiansburg has grown 7% between 2000 and 2018, with continued growth projected for the future. Over the last decade, the Town has invested consistently and intentionally in the community, addressing infrastructure improvements, sidewalk repair and extensions, pedestrian crosswalks, downtown beautification, trail extensions, and street improvements. Now the Town is taking the next step towards becoming a cultural destination for its residents.

Christiansburg holds several popular community events throughout the year. These events have become an integral part of downtown. The Food Truck Rodeo, hosted by non-profit organization, Downtown Christiansburg Inc., draws an average of 8,000-10,000 people downtown. Other popular events include Heritage Days, the 4th of July Festival, Christmas Parade, Wilderness Trail Festival, and wine festival. The Town has also invested in its Farmers Market in recent years, including hiring a full-time Events Coordinator to support market operations and other activities in town.

TOMORROW

Major shifts have occurred throughout the country and are important considerations for Christiansburg. Shifts in demographics, consumer behaviors, transportation, and the importance of downtowns are all causing communities to rethink initiatives for their own downtowns.

The American Planning Association recently published an article on the rise of autonomous vehicles (AV) titled, Preparing Our Communities for Autonomous Vehicles, and their impact on local planning. Although

full adoption of AV is still many years away, smaller effects will be felt much sooner. For downtowns and large commercial centers, they are expected to free up considerable amounts of land currently used for parking, opening up possibilities for new design standards, traffic flow, and infill of current surface parking lots.

Navigating these trends will be incredibly important for how the Town of Christiansburg thinks about bringing people to its downtown. This plan evaluates these trends and the placemaking opportunities the Town has, and presents strategies with the goal of creating long-lasting vibrancy for the Town.

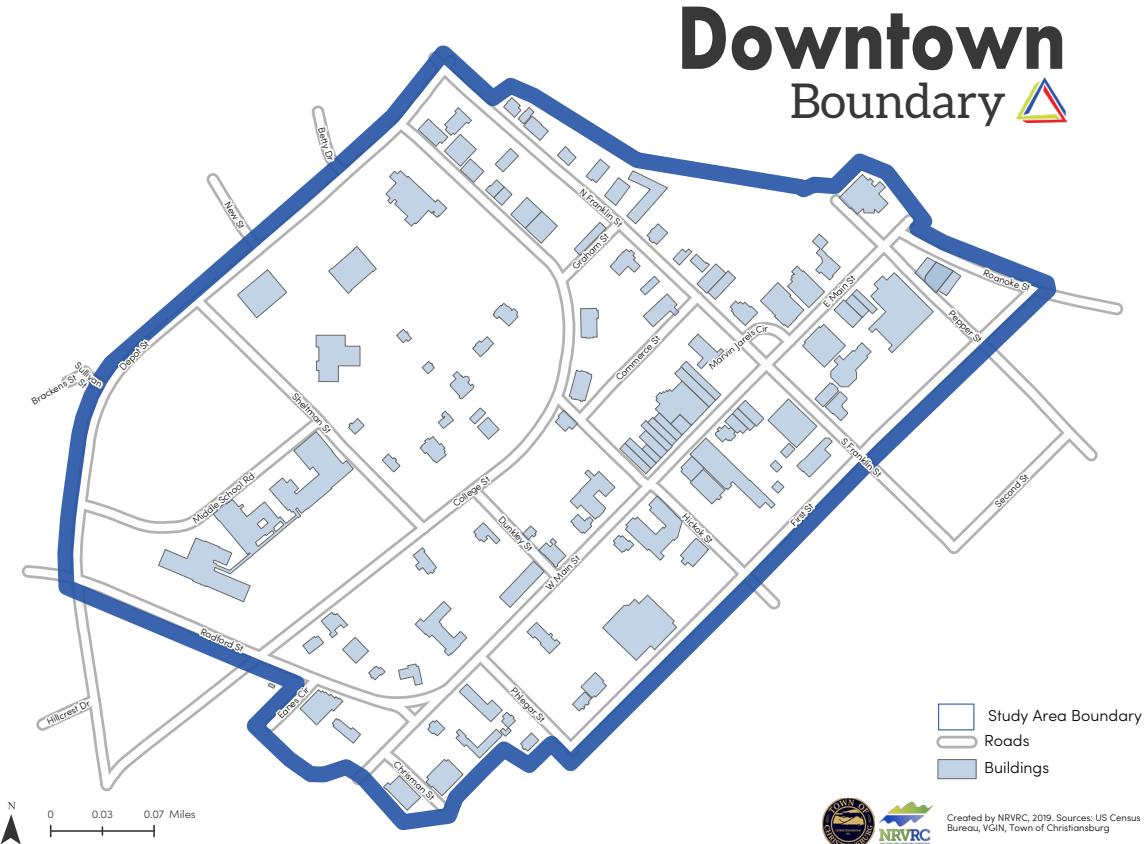


BUILDING USAGE

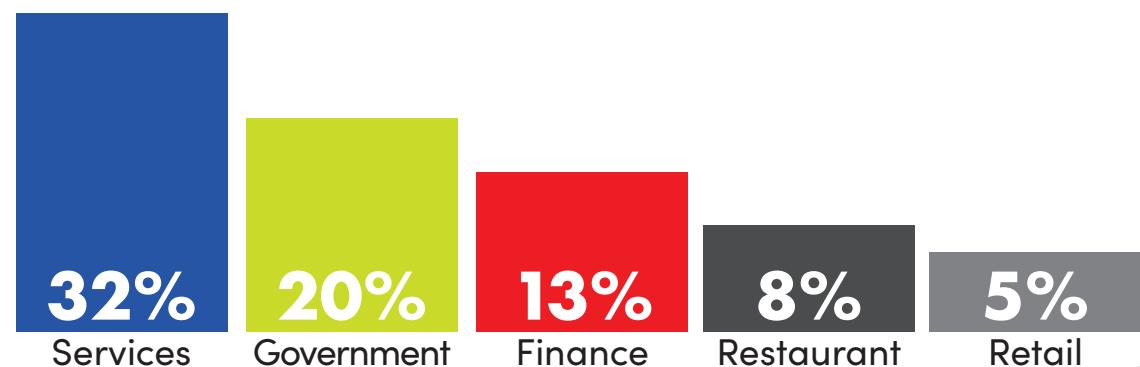
At the time of this study, there are a total of 136 businesses located within the Downtown boundary. Many stakeholders and survey respondents identified that a vacancy problem did not exist; however, there appears to be an issue with alignment of building uses in Downtown. Many service-oriented businesses support the county seat functions, although many do not serve a retail, dining or leisure experience need after 5 p.m.

Since Christiansburg is the county seat for Montgomery County, the Downtown area has an understandably high percentage of government-use buildings. The County Courthouse, Christiansburg Town Hall, the Christiansburg Police Department, and the Montgomery County Public Safety Building are all located in the Downtown project area. Beyond government use, however, Downtown has a large percentage of professional service uses (mainly law offices and insurance agencies) and other office-based uses. Dining establishments comprise only 8% of Downtown businesses, and there are no coffee shops, breweries, or ice cream shops currently open in the Downtown study area.

Upper story building usage is more limited and contains a higher vacancy rate than ground floor usage, however, these upper story buildings are predominantly residential or business uses. This plan will encourage a concentrated effort to ensure all upper floors of Downtown buildings are fully utilized.

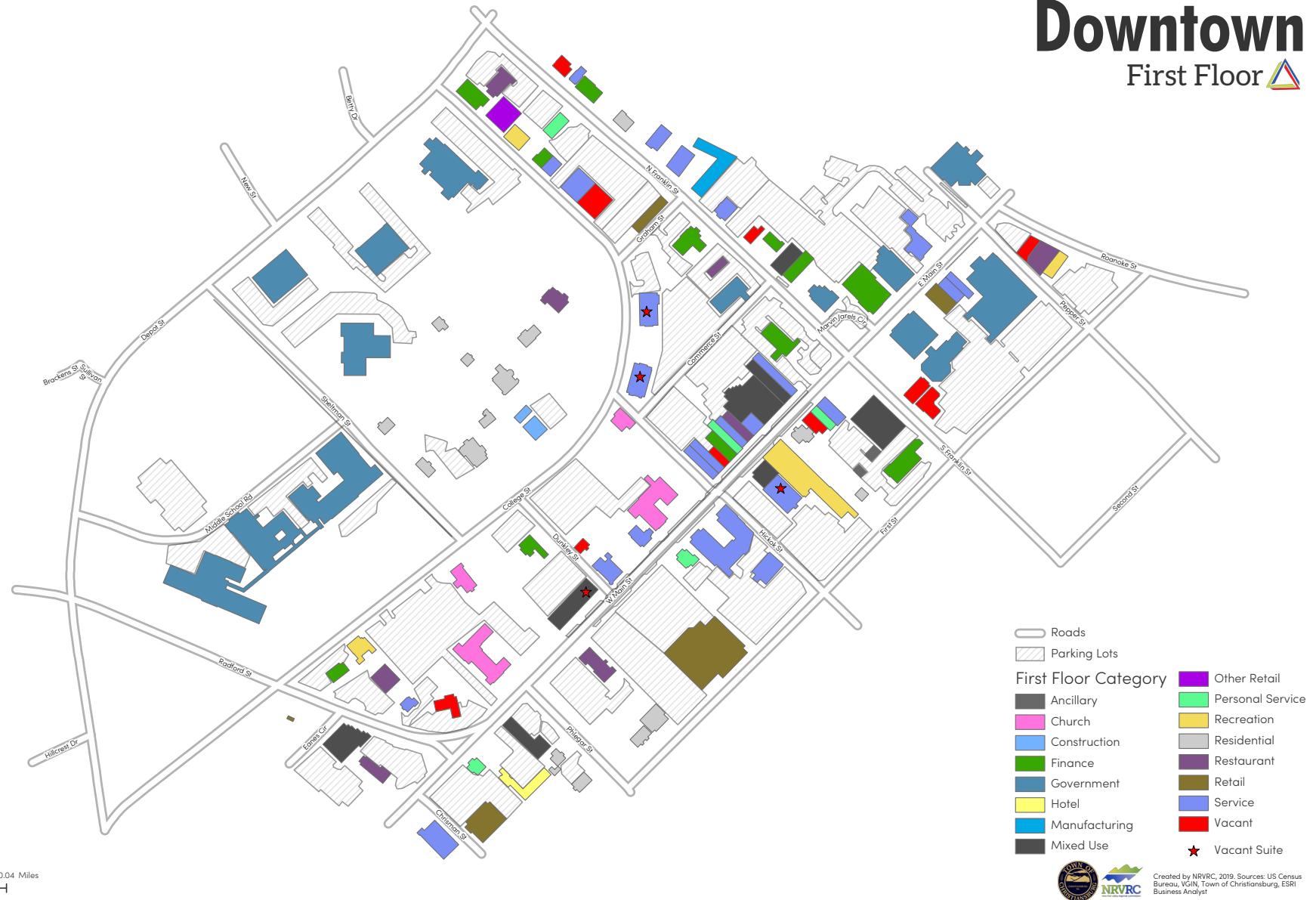


Top 5 Business Categories in Downtown (Includes all floors in buildings)



Downtown

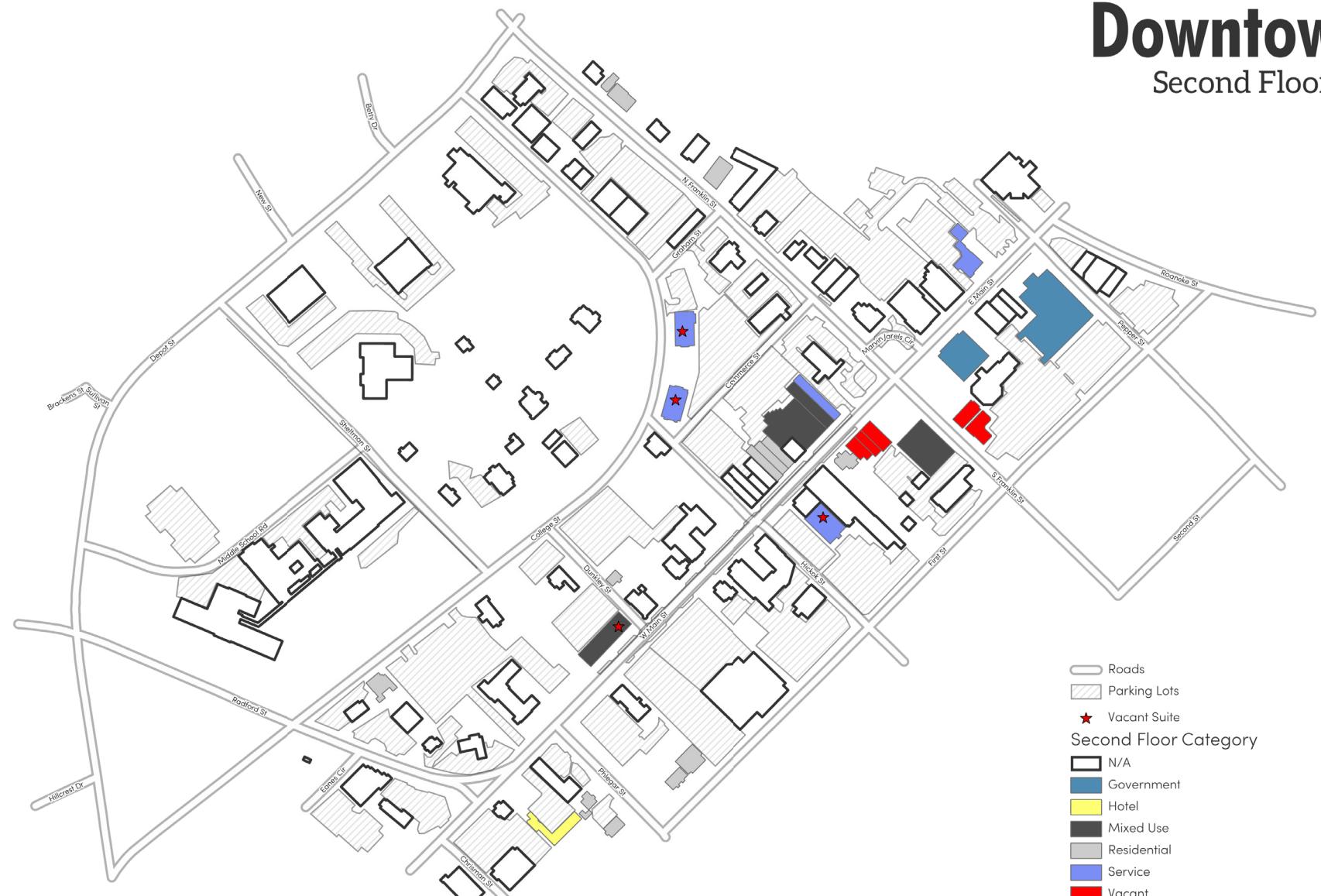
First Floor 



Created by NRVRC, 2019. Sources: US Census Bureau, VGIN, Town of Christiansburg, ESRI Business Analyst

Downtown

Second Floor



N
0 0.02 0.04 Miles



Created by NRVRC, 2019. Sources: US Census Bureau, VGIN, Town of Christiansburg, ESRI Business Analyst

DEMOGRAPHICS AND BUSINESS ANALYSIS

The project team analyzed a series of existing conditions to better understand the Downtown study area. Using ArcGIS Business Analyst, several key demographic and market segment reports were created. For this study, all data was collected based on three drive-time intervals from the center of Downtown: five-minute, 10-minute, and 20-minute.

A **Community Profile** report shows key demographics in and around Downtown, all using 2019 data. While the total population within 10 minutes of Downtown is 22,052, the daytime population jumps to 30,452. According to the US Census, daytime population refers to the number of people who are present in an area during normal business hours, including workers, meaning 8,400 workers travel to within a 10-minute drive of the center of the Downtown project area everyday.

Median household income within a five-minute drive of Downtown is \$60,512, just under the national median household income of \$61,937. This number increases to \$64,892 at a 10-minute drive radius, well above the national median. Median age for both the five- and 10-minute drive times are just below 40 years old, while the 20-minute median age decreases to 26.4 years. This sharp decrease is a result of the proximity of the student populations from Virginia Tech and Radford University. Lastly, within a five-minute drive, 53.6% of the population is between 25-64 years old, considered to be prime working age.

Drive Time Demographics

KEY DEMOGRAPHICS	5 MINS	10 MINS	20 MINS
Population	9,394	22,052	108,568
Daytime Population	8,709	30,452	119,348
Households	4,103	9,631	40,878
Families	2,455	5,832	19,783
Median Household Income	\$60,512	\$64,892	\$53,014
Median Age	37.9	37.8	26.4
Prime Working Age % (Ages 25-64)	53.6%	44.8%	40.0%
Marital Status	52.0%	52.6%	35.6%

Note: Drive times are measured from center of Downtown boundary

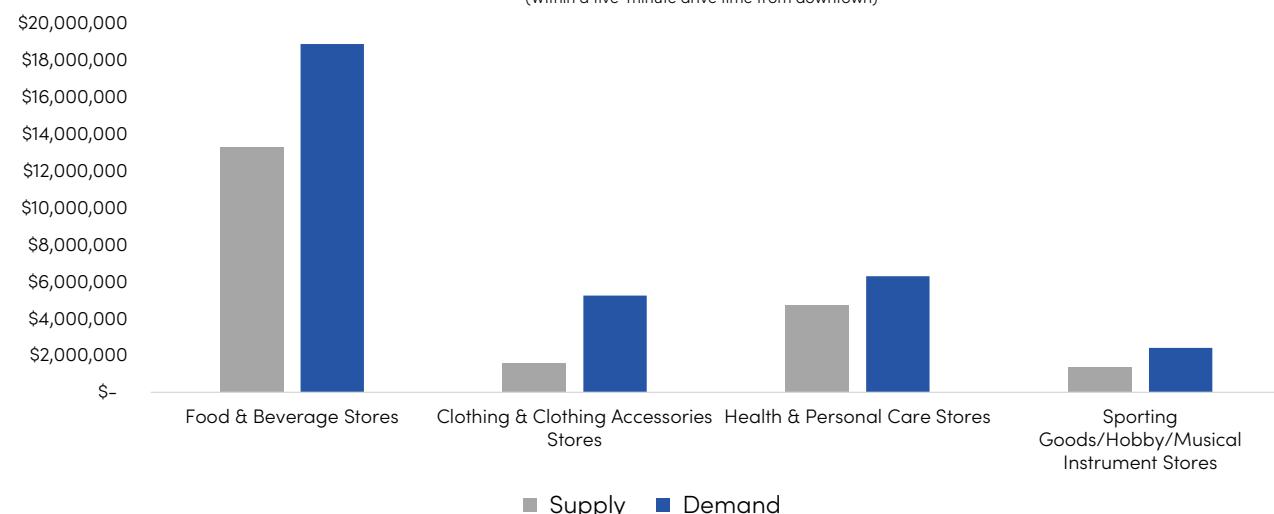
Retail MarketPlace Profile reports, showing retail market potential and retail gap analysis, were analyzed to examine the business environment in and around Downtown. These reports itemize both supply and demand for various industry groups, such as food and beverage, clothing and accessories, sporting goods and hobby stores, and more.

The Industry Group Retail Gap report depicts a gap in multiple key industries within a five-minute drive time of Downtown. This gap indicates a demand based on spending patterns associated within the given industry. In this case, the demand far exceeds the current supply for the following industries: food and beverage, clothing and clothing accessories, health and personal care, and sporting goods/hobby/musical instruments.

The 10- and 20-minute drive time reports show substantial surpluses for the “food services” and “drinking places” industry group. Upon closer examination, it became clear that the majority of total sales volume and the overall makeup of restaurants in Christiansburg was primarily chain restaurants and fast food establishments. Approximately 70% of restaurants within the Town are chain/fast food restaurants, according to the ESRI Business Locator report. This supports the feedback heard during the community outreach process about the need for locally-owned, unique dining options (see Chapter 2). The full data reports can be found in the appendix.

2017 INDUSTRY GROUP SUPPLY & DEMAND

(Within a five-minute drive time from downtown)



2017 INDUSTRY GROUP RETAIL GAP

(Within a 5 minute drive-time from center of Downtown)

Food & Beverage Stores
\$5,581,857

Health and Personal Care Stores
\$1,568,939

Clothing & Clothing Accessories Stores
\$3,663,163

Sporting Goods/Hobby/Music Stores
\$1,040,487

CONNECTIVITY

The ability to access Downtown by car, bike, walking trail, or transit is a critical element to successful placemaking. Great public spaces are easy to get to, easy to navigate, and always connect you to other great spaces.

Downtown has a clear sidewalk and crosswalk network that connects the entire Downtown study area. A paved walking trail connects Downtown Park to the Library just off Depot Street, but no other trail system exists currently in Downtown. Planning is underway to extend the connections to the Huckleberry Trail into Downtown in the next several years.

Blacksburg Transit serves the Town of Christiansburg with both a fixed-route and on-demand service. Radford Transit also has a stop in the Downtown project area. In total there are two transit stops within the project area.

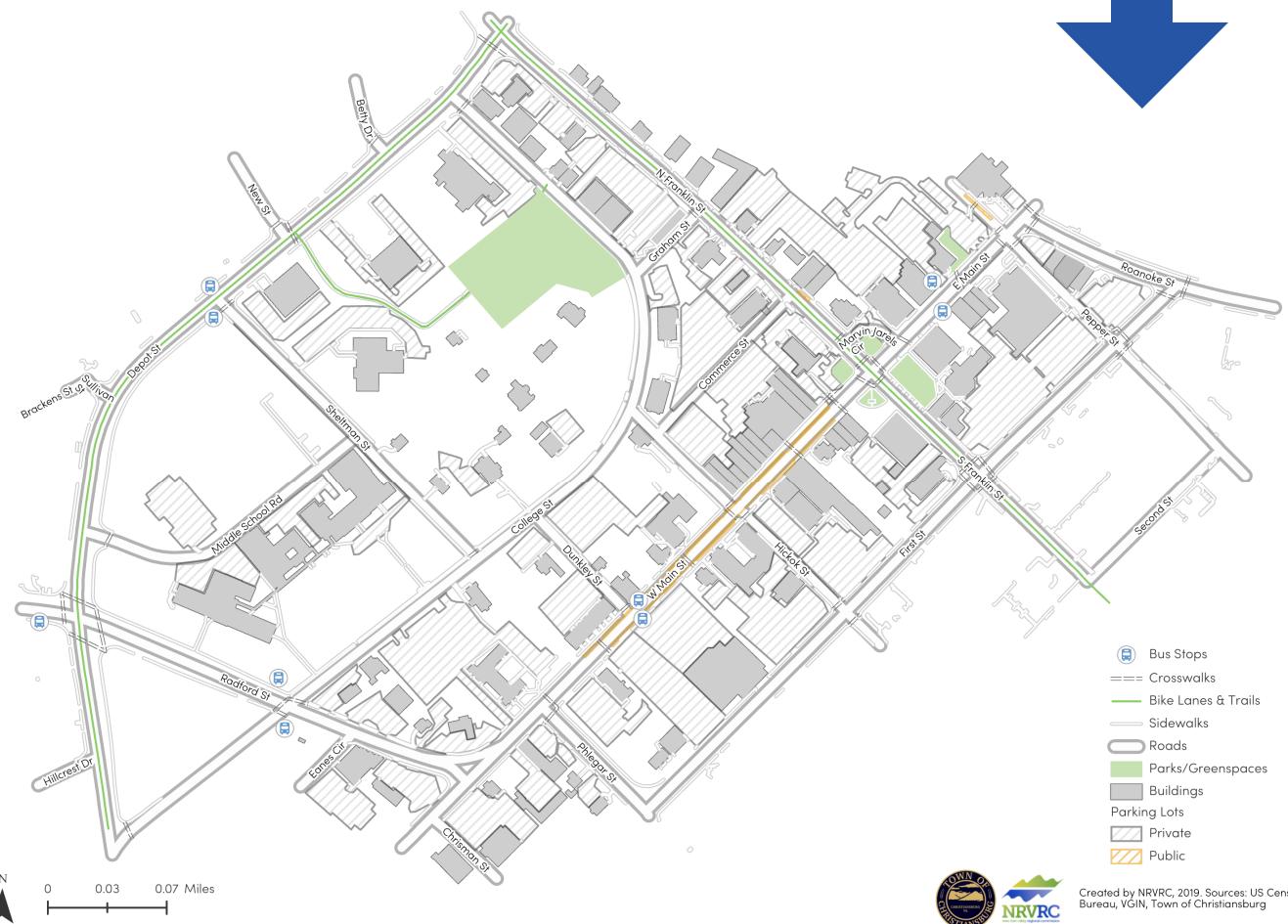
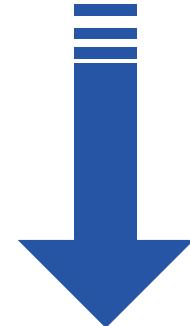
The perception of parking concerns came up throughout the community engagement process. Currently, all parking is free in Downtown, and both eastbound and westbound Main Street has public on-street parallel parking. The remaining parking is privately owned, some of which is restricted from public use (or is customer-only); however, it is unclear if private lots can be used for public parking.

Parking in Downtown

Public Parking Spots = 59

Private Parking Spots = 2,235

Downtown Connectivity



Created by NRVRC, 2019. Sources: US Census Bureau, VGIN, Town of Christiansburg

ORGANIZATIONAL PARTNER

Unique to the Downtown study area is non-profit partner, Downtown Christiansburg Inc. (DCI), which was founded in 2012 and incorporated as a 501(c)(3) in 2018. DCI's mission is to support the revitalization and promotion of downtown Christiansburg as a destination for visitors, an inviting place for residents, and a vibrant economic center for businesses.

DCI hosts several events throughout the year, including the Food Truck Rodeo, Movies Off Main, and Wine & Artisans. In 2018, DCI hosted a quarterly "Talk of the Town" series, helped Great Road On Main host two concerts, and sponsored the Town's "Feet on the Street" event.

In 2017, DCI commissioned a study with the Virginia Tech Office of Economic Development (VT OED) to conduct an analysis of the downtown and review the strengths and weaknesses of DCI with respect to opportunities presented in downtown Christiansburg. Many of the recommendations of this report will complement the recommendations provided by VT OED.



Downtown Christiansburg,
Incorporated is a 501c3 non-profit
organization whose mission is to make
Downtown Christiansburg a great

Cambria

YESTERDAY

The town of Cambria, originally known as Bangs, grew up around the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad depot, first built in 1856 about a mile away from the Christiansburg town square. Union forces burned the original depot in 1864, and in 1868 a new depot was constructed. Today, the Christiansburg Depot is one of only two railroad depots in Virginia built during the Reconstruction period that is still standing.

In 1906, Cambria incorporated as a town and a new passenger station was built east of the old depot, which was converted to a freight station. For much of the early 20th century, Cambria was a robust, thriving community with a mercantile, general stores, grocery stores, banks, and hotels. The old depot was the hub for all goods shipped by rail into Montgomery and Floyd Counties for nearly 100 years, until service was discontinued in 1960. The 1868 building was restored in the 1980s, and Cambria became part of Christiansburg in 1964.

TODAY

Even today the train depot has a dedicated following and is considered one of the cultural anchors of Cambria. Many visitors and residents visit the train depot in order to take photographs of passing trains. One business owner recently built a small viewing platform that looks out toward the railroad. Cambria is not the bustling industrial town it once was; however, it still has much of its historic charm. According to the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), the average daily traffic volume through Cambria was 6,900 in 2018. Results from the community survey revealed that most people coming to Cambria were driving through on their way to another destination.

There are a handful of anchor businesses in Cambria, several of which have taken advantage of the Town's recent facade improvement program to update their storefronts. Property and business owners were eligible for up to \$4,500 in matching grant monies, with access to a local artist who helped draft conceptual design renderings of the improvements. New signage, awnings, and fresh paint have already had a positive effect on this historic area.

TOMORROW

Cambria's unique history and aesthetic charm will play a pivotal role in future placemaking improvements. More than just promoting better urban design, placemaking facilitates creative patterns of use, paying particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution. Cambria is a special place for many residents. Valuing a place's history, culture, and existing population are key to making sure that a community is simply not replicating the latest trend, but instead pursuing its authentic identity.

BUILDING USAGE

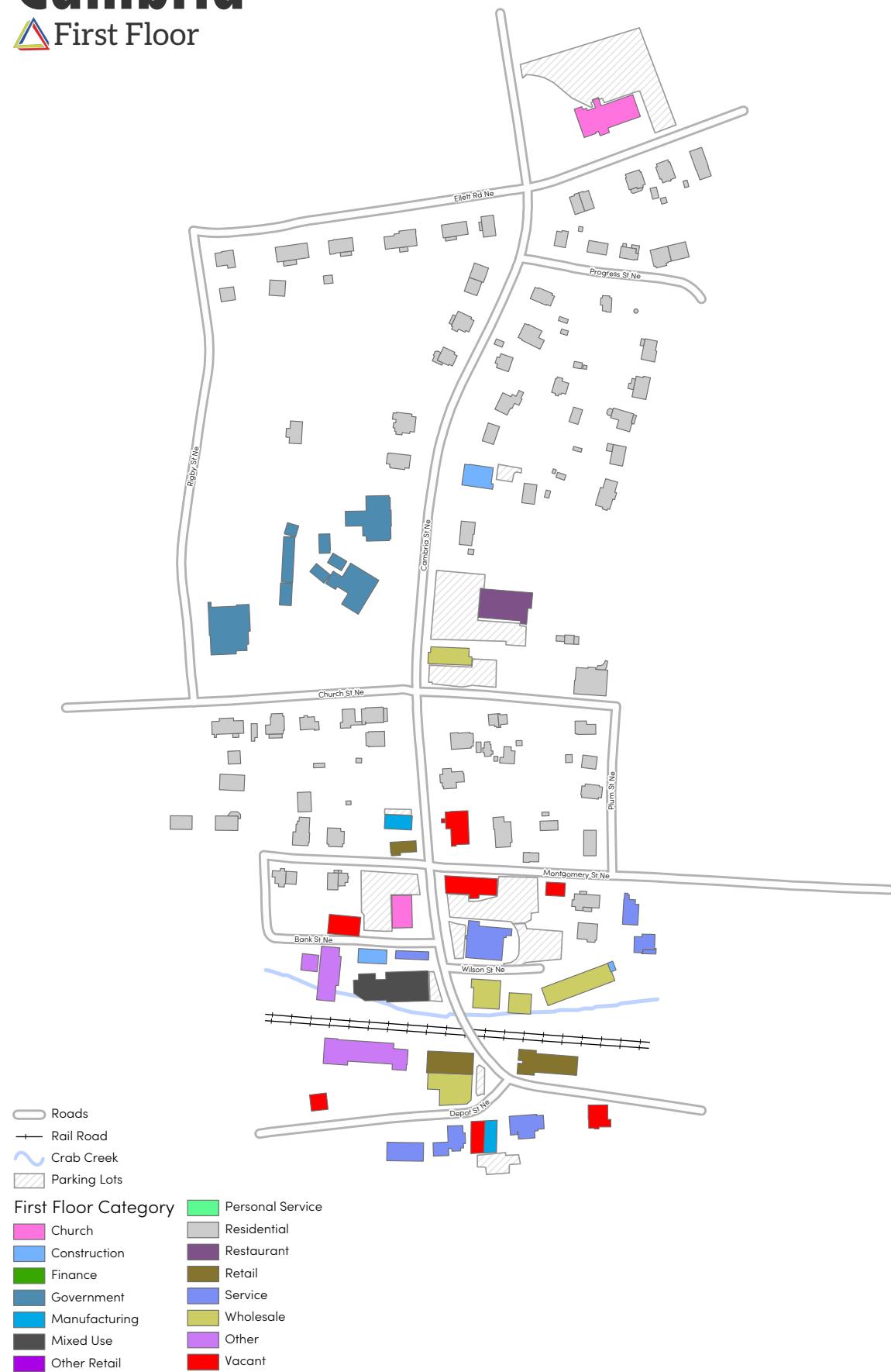
At the time of this study, there were a total of 36 businesses located within the Cambria boundary. In terms of businesses that promote placemaking, only a few Cambria businesses offer food or casual window-shopping opportunities. The remaining business are private offices or service-based uses, such as automotive repair, propane, oil, or electrical supplies.

Cambria Boundary



Cambria

First Floor



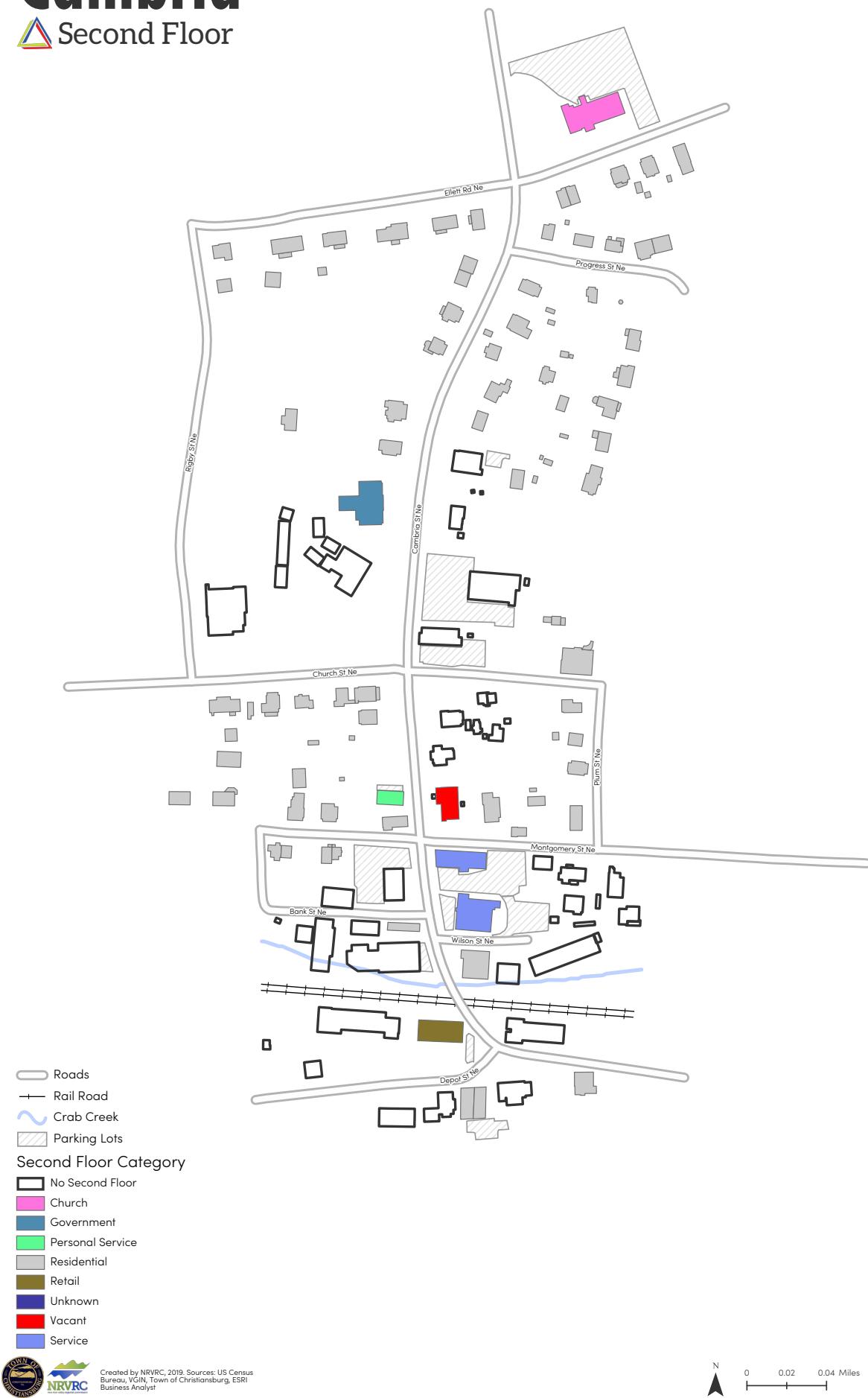
Created by NRVRC, 2019. Sources: US Census Bureau, VGIN, Town of Christiansburg, ESRI Business Analyst



0 0.02 0.04 Miles

Cambria

Second Floor



DEMOGRAPHICS AND BUSINESS ANALYSIS

The project team analyzed a series of existing conditions to better understand Cambria. Using ArcGIS Business Analyst, several key demographic and market segment reports were created. For this study, all data was collected based on three drive-time intervals from the center of the Cambria project boundary: five-minute, 10-minute, and 20-minute.

A **Community Profile** report calculates a population of 9,440 within a five-minute drive time of the Cambria project area, which increases to 24,205 at the 10-minute drive, then to 104,920 at the 20-minute drive time range. The population of Montgomery County is nearing 100,000, indicating that within a 20-minute drive from Cambria, one can access most of the county, as well as bordering jurisdictions, such as the City of Radford, Floyd County, and Roanoke County.

The median household income is highest at the five-minute drive time, at \$65,322, which is projected to climb to \$76,391 by 2024. According to the community profile, an estimated 56.4% of the total population falls between the ages of 25 and 64, and the unemployment rate is 2.6%. This highlights that the area in and around Cambria is predominantly working-age people who are employed with earnings higher than the national median of \$61,937.

The **Retail MarketPlace Profile** identifies where there were retail gaps or surpluses in multiple industry groups. There are more industries with retail gaps within the five-minute drive time, particularly food & beverage stores, clothing & clothing accessories stores, and sporting goods stores. There are fewer gaps for the 10- and 20-minute drive times, but the gaps present were considerably greater. This is due to the increased population the larger drive times include. Although the reports do not indicate substantial retail gaps for some of the drive times, it's worth noting that the report is capturing Christiansburg's Uptown area, which includes a range of chain retail and dining establishments found in and around the New River Valley Mall, including Wal-Mart, Target, T.J. Maxx, Olive Garden, Red Robin, and others.

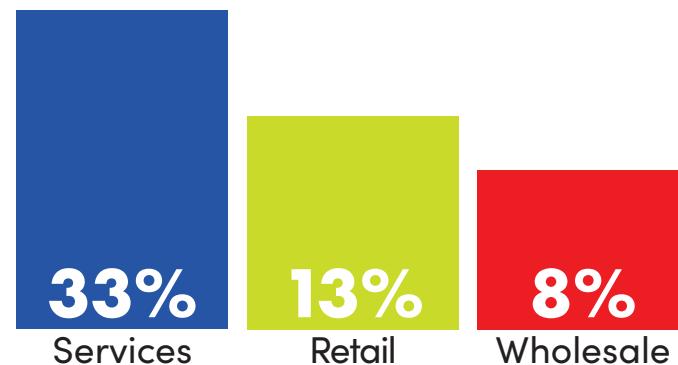
Drive Time Demographics

KEY DEMOGRAPHICS	5 MINS	10 MINS	20 MINS
Population	9,440	24,205	104,920
Daytime Population	9,247	29,442	115,071
Households	4,135	10,390	39,308
Families	2,472	6,096	18,786
Median Household Income	\$65,322	\$63,279	\$52,943
Median Age	36.2	36.0	25.9
Prime Working Age % (Ages 25-64)	55.2%	53.8%	39.6%
Marital Status	55.0%	51.1%	35.0%

Note: Drive times are measured from center of Cambria boundary

Top 3 Business Categories in Cambria

(Includes all floors in buildings)



CONNECTIVITY

Although Cambria has a smaller commercial footprint than either Downtown or Midtown, sporadic availability of sidewalks still presents a walkability challenge to customers, and it is not common to see pedestrians in Cambria. While a draw for many spectators, the railroad tracks bisect the Cambria core and present a challenge for pedestrians.

Although there are no designated bike lanes in Cambria, cyclists are frequent, as the US Bicycle Route 76 (TransAmerica Trail) runs directly through Cambria. Stakeholders regularly mentioned the need for safe bike and pedestrian access throughout Cambria. An extension of the Huckleberry Trail into Cambria is in the planning phase.

Parking is very limited throughout the entire Cambria study area. Commercial parking is typically limited to a few spaces in front of each business, with only a handful of businesses offering substantive parking lots.



Created by NRVRC, 2019. Sources: US Census Bureau, VGIN, Town of Christiansburg



0 0.03 0.05 Miles

Midtown

YESTERDAY

Before the construction of the new US 460 highway, North Franklin Street was the main connector between Christiansburg and Blacksburg. Because of this connectivity, the Midtown area became a strong commercial corridor for the Town, featuring a wide array of shopping and dining options. The area has several anchors, including Christiansburg High School, built in 1974, the Christiansburg Recreation Center, which opened in 1997, and the Christiansburg Aquatic Center, which opened in 2010.

The historic Christiansburg Institute, founded in 1866 after the Civil War, was a school for formerly enslaved people. With ties to Booker T. Washington, the school went on to teach a curriculum similar to that of the Tuskegee Institute. The school grew and expanded to its current site on Scattergood Drive before shutting down in 1966 when local public schools integrated. The building still stands and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Today the Christiansburg Institute Alumni Association is a very active non-profit committed to being involved within the community and restoring the former school.

TODAY

Midtown today is still a strong commercial corridor bordered by residential single-family homes and townhomes. There are many recreation opportunities in this area, including the Christiansburg Aquatic Center, Christiansburg Recreation Center, Christiansburg High School, and connectivity to the Huckleberry Trail. Multiple grocery stores were recently renovated and generate a lot of traffic. The community survey indicated that grocery shopping was one of the primary reasons people come to Midtown, and

respondents indicated they traveled to and through Midtown almost daily. VDOT data shows an average daily traffic count of 25,000 for the North Franklin Street corridor.

The North Franklin Corridor Improvement project is currently underway. The North Franklin Corridor Improvement Project is designed to improve traffic flow and safety along North Franklin Street, while also increasing accessibility for pedestrians. The project includes ramp modifications to Route 460-Business, traffic signal modifications, access management and pedestrian enhancements, new turn lanes, sidewalks, bike lanes, street lighting and signalized crosswalks.

TOMORROW

Planning is underway for the construction of a passenger rail station in Midtown, located on Mill Lane adjacent to the Christiansburg Aquatic Center. Passenger rail was extended to Roanoke in the fall of 2017 with great success, and this project will be a continuation of that service into the New River Valley. Projected ridership estimates are upwards of 40,000 for this station and will significantly increase interest to this area both locally and out of region.

Since opening in 2010, the Aquatic Center has become an anchor to the Town and serves as the official site for all men's and women's swimming events at Virginia Tech. Hosting more than 30,000 swimmers and spectators between 2018 and 2019, the economic impact of the Aquatic Center to the area is projected at over \$4.5 million. As the Aquatic Center continues to grow, it will continue to increase demand for amenities, such as dining, lodging, and retail.



Economic Impact

Competitive Swim Meets FY18-19

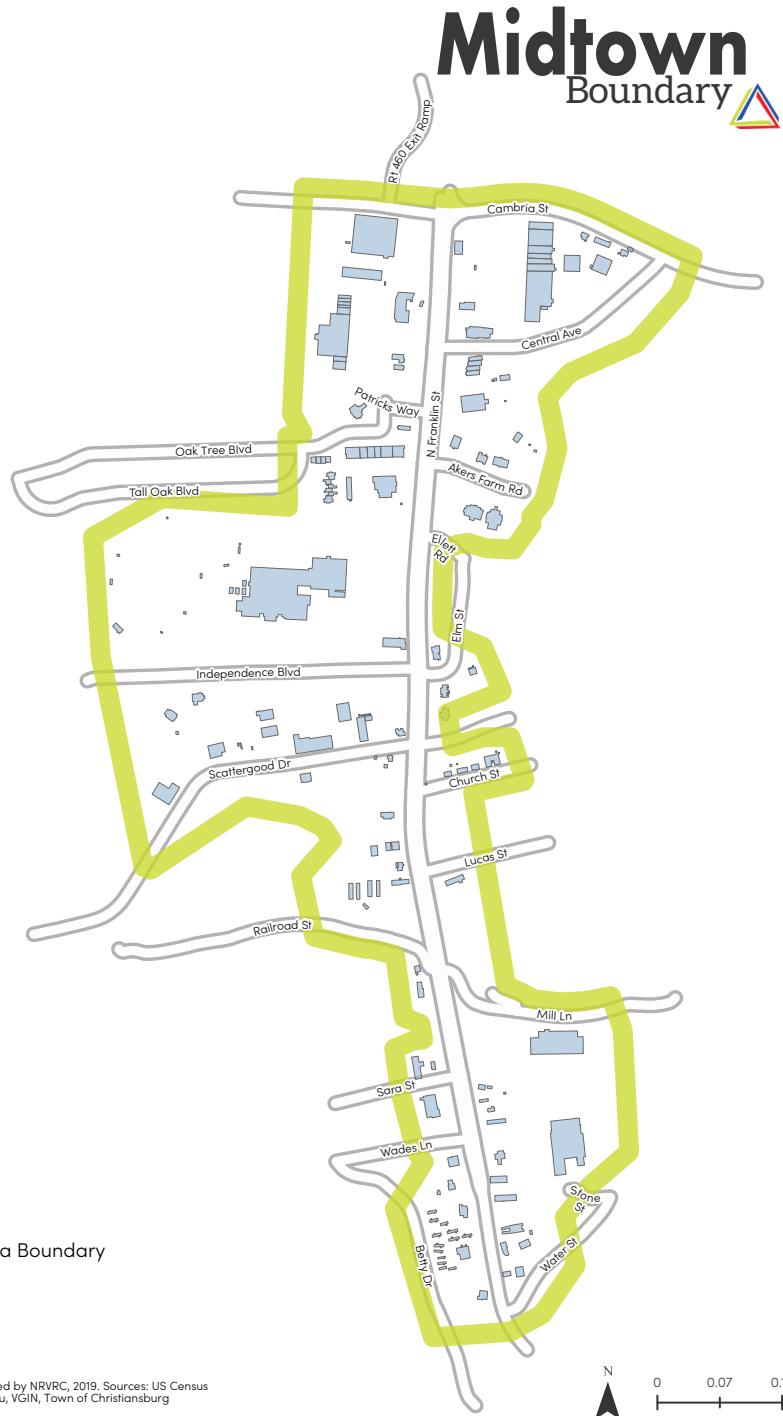
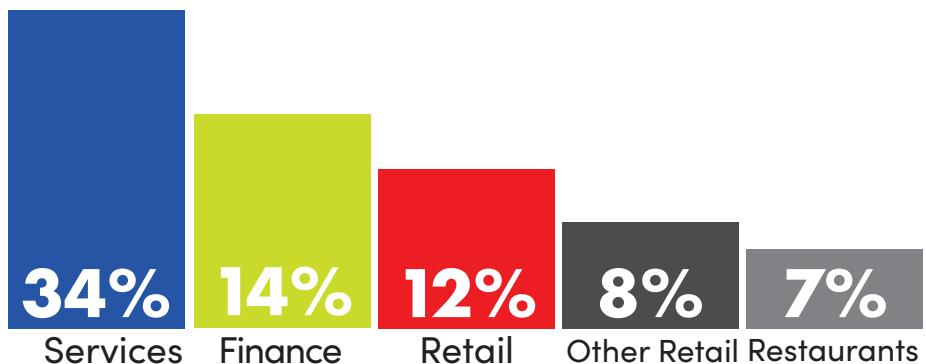
\$4,575,993

BUILDING USAGE

The Midtown area offers a diverse mix of businesses, including retail, recreation, dining, and service. Despite a broad range of offerings, density is still fairly low throughout the corridor, and some underutilization of buildings and parking lots exists. At the time of this study, there were a total of 130 businesses located within the boundary. Nearly all buildings along the corridor are single-story.

Top 5 Business Categories in Midtown

(Includes all floors in buildings)



DEMOGRAPHICS AND BUSINESS ANALYSIS

The project team analyzed a series of existing conditions to better understand Midtown. Using ArcGIS Business Analyst, several key demographic and market segment reports were created. For this study, all data was collected based on three drive-time intervals from the center of the Midtown project boundary: five-minute, 10-minute, and 20-minute.

The data shows that Midtown is the only planning area where the daytime population is higher than the total population for each of the drive-time ranges. In the other areas, the daytime population was lower than the total population for the five-minute drive time. Midtown also had the highest median household income compared to all the other planning areas. At \$70,751, this median household income level is nearly \$10,000 more than the national median. Midtown also boasted the highest per capita income at \$37,042.

The **Retail MarketPlace Profile** painted an unsurprising picture. There are no substantial retail gaps because the corridor is predominantly commercial and is positioned in such a way that it easily serves both the Town of Christiansburg as well as significant portions of the region. The five-minute drive radius revealed only a handful of retail gaps and identified even fewer for the 10-minute drive radius. However, the 20-minute drive time showed far more retail gaps, namely, for home furnishing stores, other general merchandise stores, and clothing & clothing accessories stores. General merchandise stores indicated a retail gap of \$32,302,658. General merchandise stores include dollar stores, home and auto supply stores, variety stores, and trading posts.

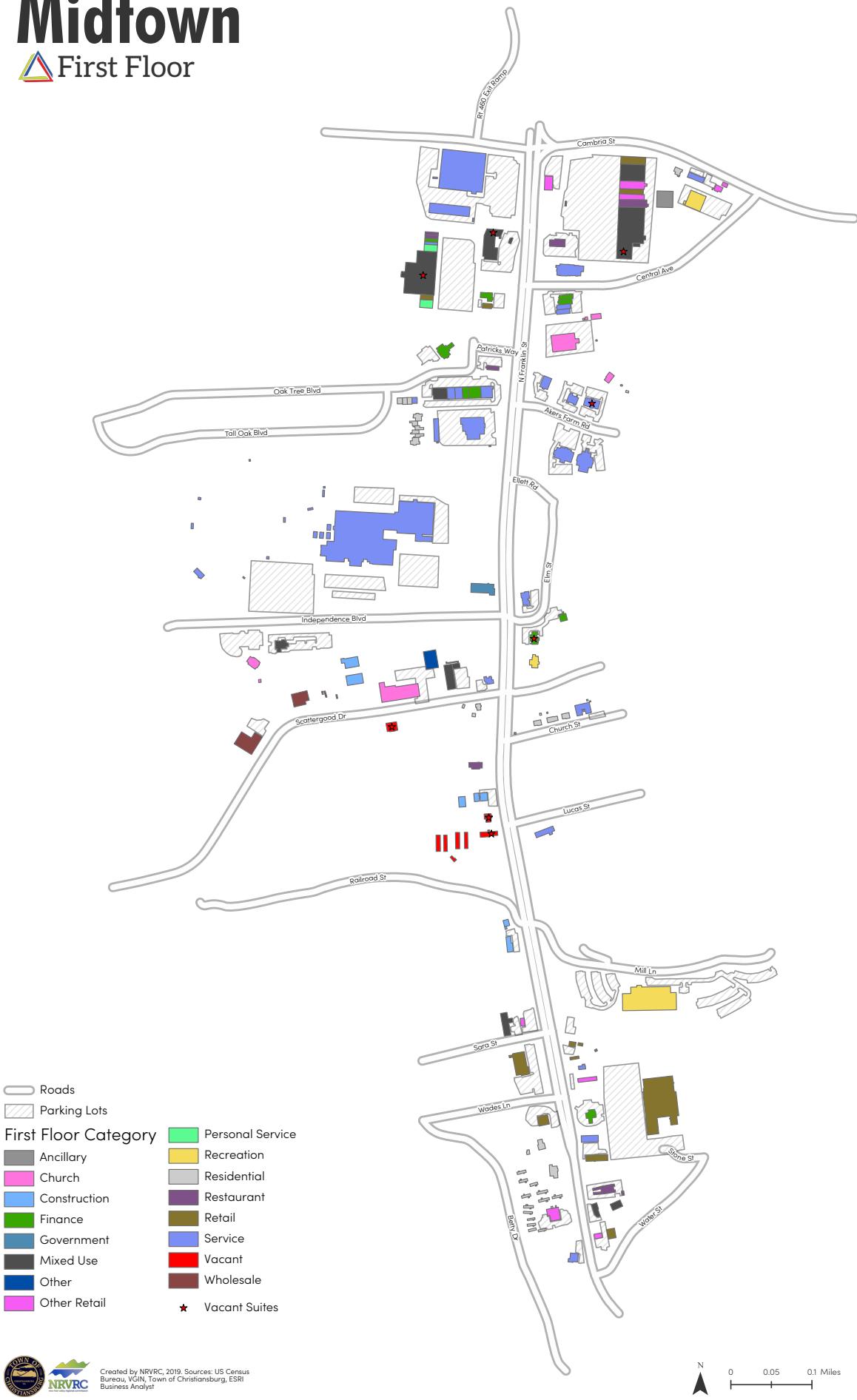
Drive Time Demographics

KEY DEMOGRAPHICS	5 MINS	10 MINS	20 MINS
Population	9,527	28,039	108,284
Daytime Population	9,985	34,164	118,233
Households	4,103	12,068	40,735
Families	2,516	6,853	19,670
Median Household Income	\$70,751	\$61,946	\$53,084
Median Age	36.0	35.3	26.3
Prime Working Age % (Ages 25-64)	55.4%	52.8%	39.9%
Marital Status	57.2%	49.4%	35.5%

Note: Drive times are measured from center of Midtown boundary

Midtown

First Floor



Midtown

Connectivity

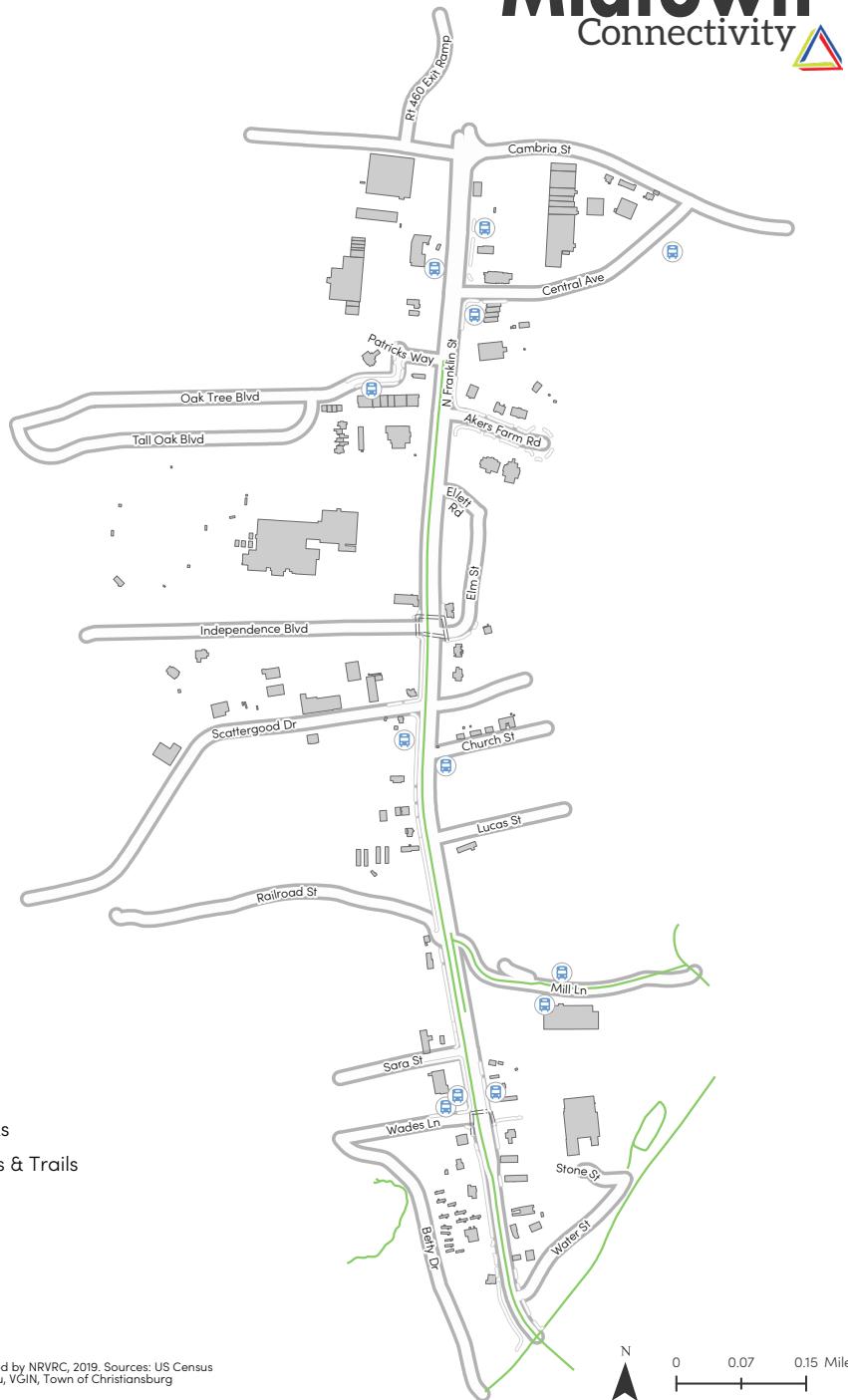


CONNECTIVITY

Despite its use as a main arterial for through traffic, Midtown has a strong sidewalk and crosswalk network for pedestrian connectivity, especially once improvements to the North Franklin corridor are complete. A recent change from the Town has reduced the speed limit within Midtown from 45mph to 35mph.

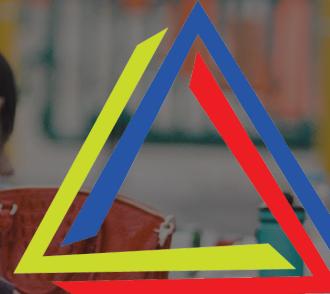
Parking was not a concern mentioned during stakeholder meetings or the community survey, and most businesses are served by parking lots with ample spaces available.

The Huckleberry Trail connects to the northernmost boundary of the Midtown project area, with active plans to expand the trail south to Christiansburg High School and eventually provide pedestrian connection to downtown. Several Blacksburg Transit stops are present on the Franklin corridor, and the Christiansburg Rec Center is an NRV roam bike hub.





community engagement



“There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about.” - Margaret J. Wheatley



community engagement

Community engagement was a critical component of this planning process. With the goal of transforming Downtown into a cultural destination, listening to citizens, business owners, and property owners in many different settings across many different platforms gave the Town valuable insight into the collective vision for Downtown.

The Town heard many recurring themes from survey responses, community event input, and stakeholder engagement, confirming the vision that Christiansburg residents have for their town. Town residents were very clear: they desire a vibrant downtown with unique, casual dining experiences, breweries, and specialty food item shops. Family-friendly places for gathering to listen to music or grabbing coffee are highly desired. Historic Cambria is an area many people feel connected to, both for its history and inherent charm. Finally, Midtown is considered a strong commercial corridor that provides access to dining, groceries, and recreational amenities.

COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

In May and June of 2019, the Town hosted six stakeholder meetings with business and property owners from each of the three planning areas. A total of 42 people participated in the casual, open dialogue meetings.

During the input sessions, stakeholders were asked about community assets they wanted to see developed, what attracted them to their location, and what they like about the planning area they represent and Christiansburg as a whole. Unique themes emerged from each of these sessions, which are highlighted in this chapter. Comprehensive meeting notes from each session can be found in the appendix.



6

Stakeholder Meetings

971 Community Survey Responses

4

Community Outreach Events

1

Community Input Meeting



themes from community conversations

Downtown

2 meetings 21 attendees

DIVERSE DINING & RETAIL OPTIONS

- » Downtown workers and visitors need more options for dining and retail, especially after 5 p.m.
- » Desire for more restaurants with outdoor seating and live music
- » Prioritize retail on the bottom floor with main street frontage, with residential units or service-based businesses above
- » Food truck opportunities within Downtown
- » The ability for residents and visitors to walk downtown and window shop is important
- » Downtown currently has a lot of services and offices, not as much retail or dining

NETWORKING AMONG BUSINESS OWNERS

- » Business owners want to be more connected with one another; increased communication, cross-promotion, quarterly business owner events

FARMERS MARKET

- » Need for a permanent farmers market structure, support for the growth of the market
- » Expansion of hours and/or dates the Farmers Market is open
- » Some have struggled to adapt to Hickok Street closure as a result of the Farmers Market

RESPONDING TO DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES

- » Increase of young professionals and young families buying homes in Christiansburg
- » Opportunity for Christiansburg to serve the needs of young professionals and families

Cambria

2 meetings 7 attendees

INFRASTRUCTURE & ACCESSIBILITY

- » Walkability is an issue
- » Sidewalks need repair
- » Parking is problematic for retail businesses
- » Need better signage for bus stop and route schedule
- » Heavy traffic and concern of pedestrian safety
- » Acts as a throughway, not a destination

HISTORY & CHARACTER

- » Lots of rich history
- » Captive train audience
- » Appreciate the small-town feel
- » Historic train depot an anchor
- » Quaint charm
- » Need trees and greenery along street, attractive sidewalks, landscaping, outdoor seating
- » Lack of identity; need to find "its thing"

VIBRANCY

- » Develop ways of attracting millennials, young professionals
- » Need better mix of businesses – restaurants, coffee shop/tearoom, organic store, etc.



EXERCISE RESULTS



1. Permanent Farmers Market structure (**9 votes**)
2. Artist Incubator Space (**9 votes**)
3. Trail extension (**8 votes**)
4. Downtown-wide public use internet (**7 votes**)
5. Traffic infrastructure improvements (**7 votes**)
6. More art: (sculptures, art installations, murals) (**6 votes**)
7. Public restrooms (**2 votes**)
8. More landscaping (**1 vote**)
9. Ice skating rink (**1 vote**)

1. Public parking (**5 votes**)
2. Trail extension (**4 votes**)
3. Improved sidewalks (**4 votes**)
4. More landscaping (**3 votes**)
5. More art: art installations, murals, sculptures (**2 votes**)
6. Fast internet (**2 votes**)
7. Pocket park (**1 votes**)
8. Streetlights (**0 votes**)

Midtown

2 meetings

14 attendees

INFRASTRUCTURE & ACCESSIBILITY

- » Improve landscaping and streetscapes to soften the area
- » Huckleberry Trail is an important asset for connectivity and attractive to residents
- » Concern over accessibility, walkability, bike-ability
- » Consider adding more bus stops and bus shelters
- » Pedestrian safety is a concern

NETWORKING AMONG BUSINESS OWNERS

- » Desire for more connectivity among Midtown business owners
- » Area is well-connected and has several anchors, including the Recreation Center, Christiansburg High School, Kroger, Food Lion, Town and Country Veterinarian clinic, and the Aquatic Center

DIVERSE DINING & RETAIL OPTIONS

- » Need for more dining options
- » More restaurants with outdoor seating
- » More mixed-use development needed
- » Experience-based businesses (escape rooms, wine by design); businesses where people come and stay for awhile
- » Existing businesses need building façade improvements



1. Sidewalk expansion (**8 votes**)
2. More landscaping (**7 votes**)
3. Trail extension (**6 votes**)
4. Midtown Business Association (**5 votes**)
5. Streetlights (**4 votes**)
6. Bike lanes (**3 votes**)

“Thriving businesses make other businesses thrive.”

- Midtown Business Owner



“The Farmers Market needs to be prioritized and could become a catalyst for Downtown.”

- Downtown Business Owner

“The Train Depot is central to the whole image of Cambria.”

- Cambria Business Owner

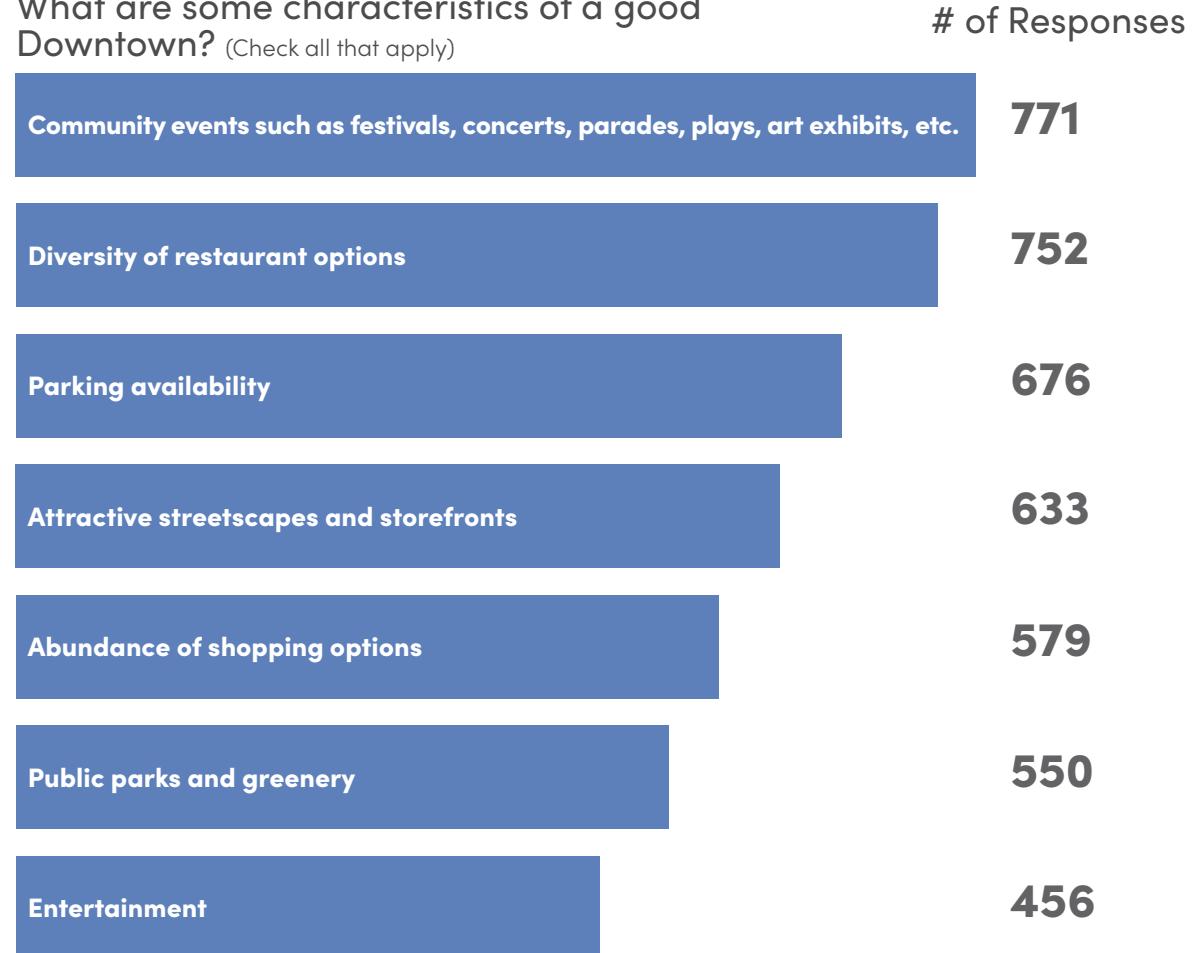
community survey

A 27-question online survey was created to solicit feedback from citizens about Downtown, Cambria, and Midtown. The community survey was open from late May until early September of 2019. The Town received 971 responses to the survey and some common themes and findings are shown on the following pages. A complete copy of the survey instrument and all responses can be found in the appendix.

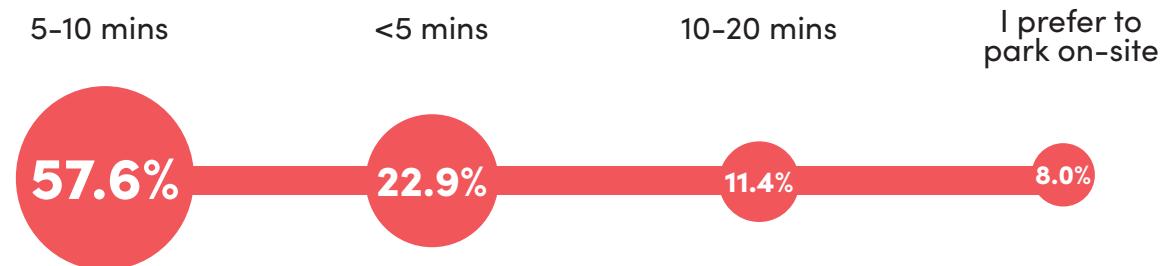
The Town advertised the survey widely across its social media platforms and its website. The survey was also promoted at each of the four community events the project team attended.



What are some characteristics of a good Downtown? (Check all that apply)



What is a reasonable amount of time to walk to Downtown services?

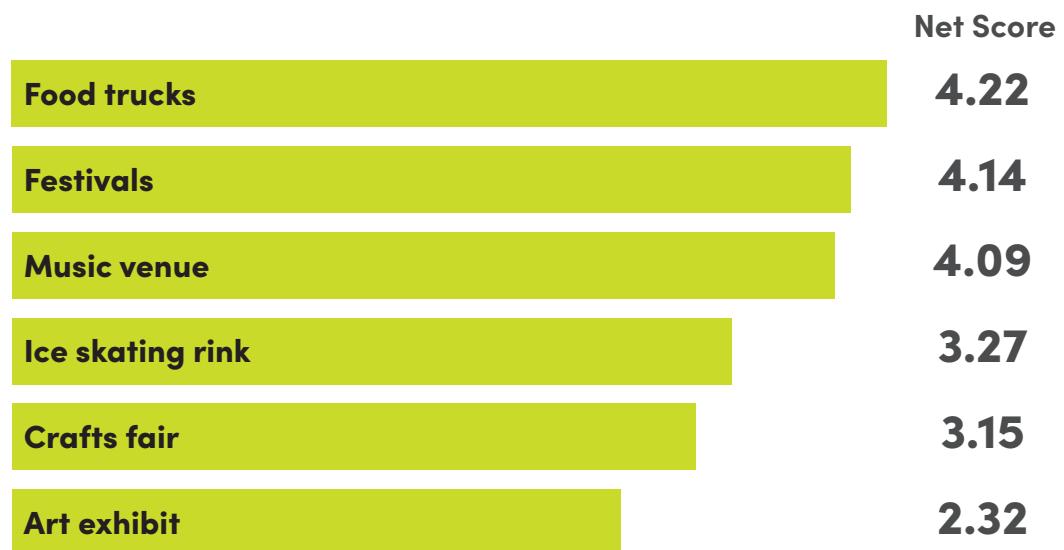


Which Downtown amenities are most important to you?

(Top 10 based on total number of responses)

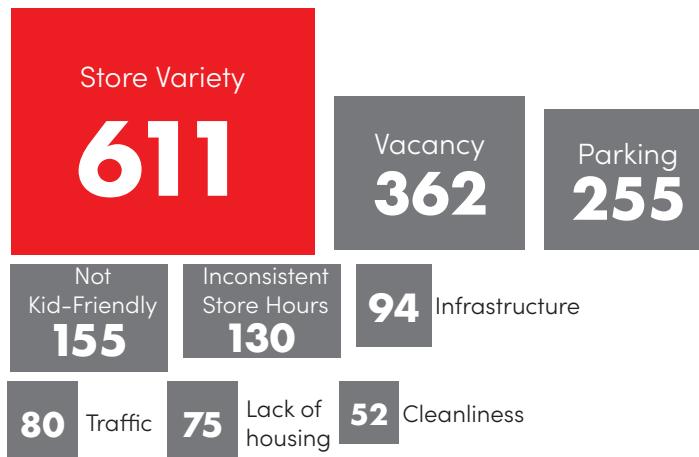


If the Farmers Market space was used for a different purpose during the off-season (November through April), what other uses would interest you? Respondents ranked their preferences, with the higher ranking having a higher overall score. The results show the highest ranked choices by highest overall score.



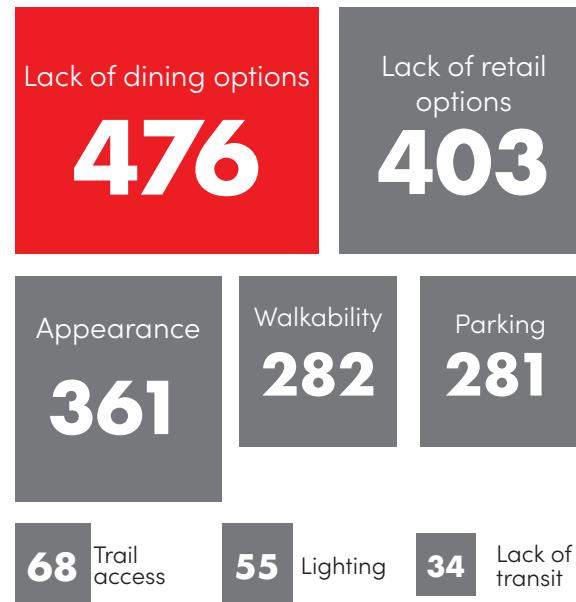
Identify the top 3 issues facing Downtown.

(Top 5 based on total number of responses)



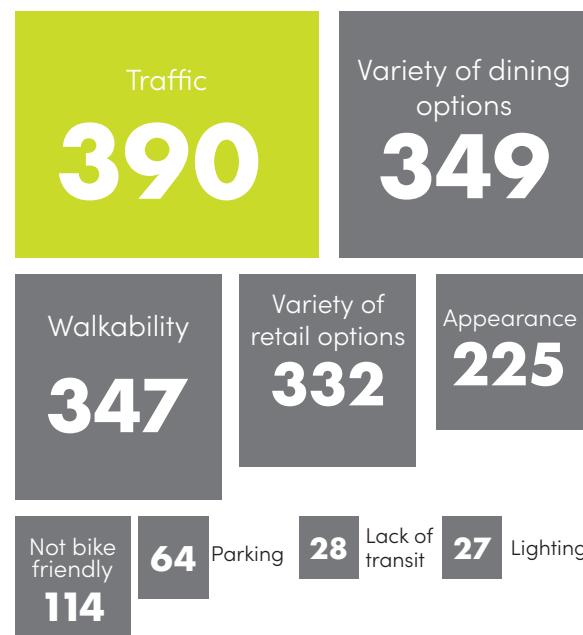
What are the top 3 issues facing Cambria?

(Total number of responses)

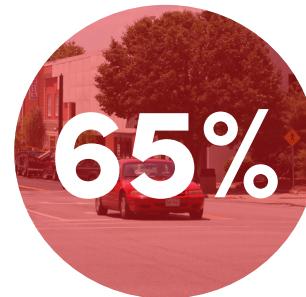


What are the top 3 issues facing Midtown?

(Total number of responses)



What brings you to Cambria most often?

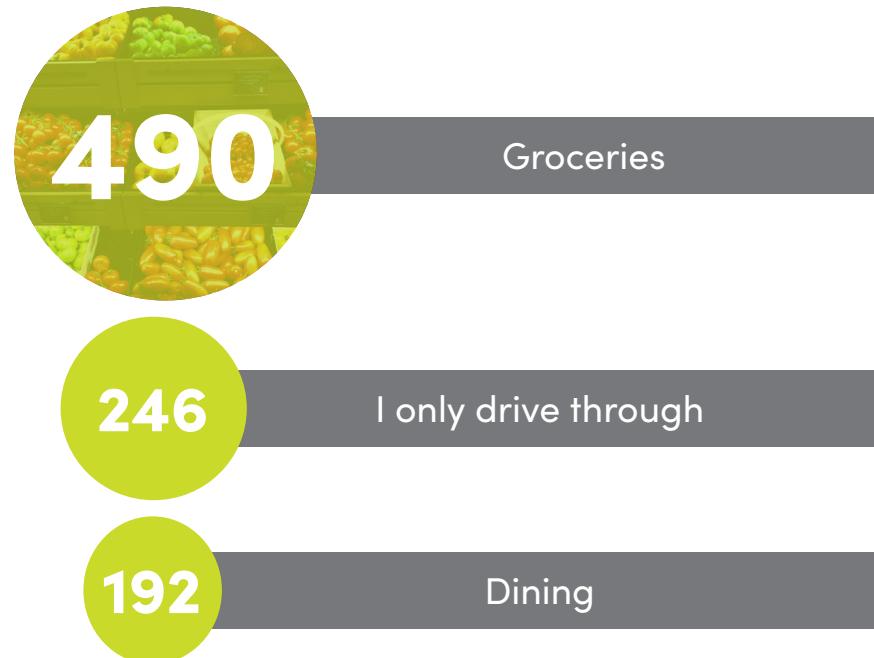


I only drive through



What brings you to Midtown most often?

(Total Number of Responses)



community outreach events

During the spring and summer of 2019, project team members attended several local events to talk with residents about their vision for Downtown. Respondents had the option to answer up to three open-ended questions:

1. In what ways do you feel connected to Downtown?

2. What is one business you would visit regularly if it was in Downtown?

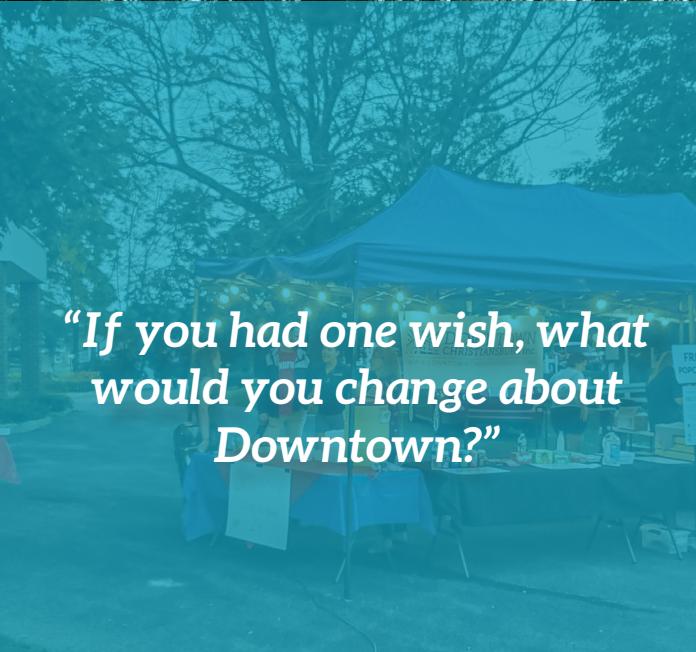
3. If you had one wish, what would you change about Downtown?

The Town received a total of seventy-five responses across the four community events. Several consistent themes emerged for each of the three questions. A list of all the responses can be found in the appendix. Overall, the wishes from the response cards were consistent with many of the themes identified from both the community conversations and the community survey.

75

Community Input
Card Responses





"If you had one wish, what would you change about Downtown?"

Food & Beverage

Offer more restaurants

More restaurant variety

Desire for restaurants with outdoor seating

More local restaurant options

Downtown brewery

Business Culture

More business open after 5:00pm.

Amenities

More benches and seating

Shaded seating areas

More parking options

Dog park

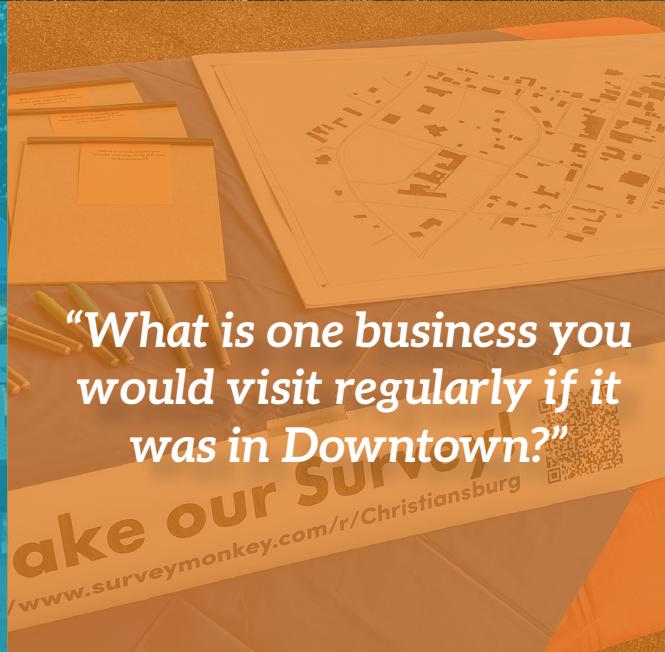
Dog waste stations

Increased pedestrian and bike accessibility

History & Culture

More murals and art

Honor historical aspects of Downtown with plaques and markers



"What is one business you would visit regularly if it was in Downtown?"

Food & Beverage

More dining options

Need for restaurants with outdoor seating

Breweries

Coffee shops

Ice cream parlors

Restaurants that serve brunch

Local and/or unique dining

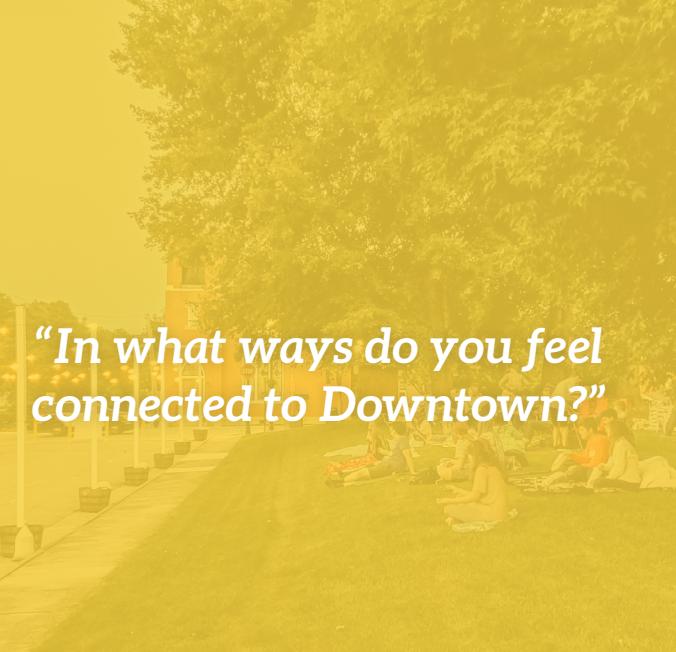
Several suggestions for a few chain restaurants/stores

Retail

Boutique retail

Bookstores

Outdoor equipment store



"In what ways do you feel connected to Downtown?"

Events

Social Gatherings

Downtown Events

Wine / Beer Festival

Accessibility

Destination for daily walks

Easy to access

History & Culture

Quaint Character

Rich History



strategies



“A goal without a plan is just a wish.”

- Antoine de Saint-Exupery



strategies

With the goal of a vibrant, diverse, and inviting Downtown, and in conjunction with the supporting roles played by Historic Cambria and Midtown, the following are key placemaking goals and strategies for the town. The success of these strategies will be made possible through collaborative ownership among local government staff, citizens, business owners, and other key stakeholders.

STRATEGY EVALUATION STAKEHOLDER EXERCISE
A team of diverse stakeholders and town staff gathered in October of 2019 to review the draft strategies created through data collection and numerous public engagement activities.

Before starting the evaluation exercise, the group was given an overview of the project timeline, key findings from community engagement, the online survey, and demographic and economic data for each study area.

PLAN YOUR DAY OFF EXERCISE: To jumpstart the day, the group was given the following instructions: "You were just given an unexpected day off. Plan out your day using only businesses or amenities located in Downtown, Cambria, or Midtown." Each participant then shared their "day off" with the rest of the group, discovering that lots of people had similar plans for their day! Two additional questions were then posed as a segue into the next activity: "Were you surprised by how many options there were, and was there anything you wanted to include that wasn't available?"

EVALUATION MATRIX IN GROUPS: Participants were divided into three groups, representing Downtown, Cambria, and Midtown and provided strategies for their assigned area. They were asked to discuss each strategy and evaluate them based on low to high **level of difficulty** to accomplish and low to high **level of community impact** once accomplished. Participants were also encouraged to add any strategies that might have been missing.

REPORT OUT AND DISCUSSION: Each group reported out an overview of their discussion and shared their assessment of each strategy, assigning them a place on the matrix.

VOTING: At the end of the meeting, each participant was given three stickers to vote on strategies they believed were the highest priority. The results of the voting were utilized by the project team in prioritizing strategies for the final plan.

Within the 37 recommended strategies in this chapter, nine transformative projects are highlighted as priority projects. These priority projects will be designated by a triangle logo (right) and will be featured in detail in Chapter 4.



1

Goal: Create vibrant community gathering spaces

The results of the Town's public survey were highly consistent: residents are looking for interesting places to gather for food, music, drinks, and entertainment. The Town has been actively investing in Downtown through improvements such as sidewalks, pedestrian crosswalks, landscaping, and lighting, much of which was completed within the last decade. Now the Town is beginning to think about how to fully activate Downtown to be a vibrant destination for its citizens.

In pursuit of a vibrant and inviting Downtown, Christiansburg should brainstorm at least 10 attractions that would draw people to the area and focus on pursuing those activities. If that list includes amenities the Town couldn't provide on its own, even better! It means there are partnerships and collaborations to pursue, volunteers and non-profits to engage with, and both public and private investment to leverage.

Several spaces within Downtown make excellent candidates for investment. Emphasis should be placed on multi-use spaces within the Downtown core, with a mixture of green space and hardscapes.

DOWNTOWN STRATEGIES

D1.1

Construct a permanent, multi-purpose Farmers Market structure and gathering space.



The Christiansburg Farmers Market began in 2015 and is open, May through October, on Thursdays 3-7 p.m.

D1.2

Enhance Downtown Park for both recreational use and community events.

D1.3

Identify underutilized spaces suitable for a pocket park.

D1.4

Purchase underutilized and/or undeveloped Downtown property for green space.

Support from Previous Plans:

Destination 2022:

Goal 1.2 & 2.3 Increase promotions of the Farmers Market/Downtown

Goal 1.4 Evaluate hiring a full-time special events planner/coordinator to increase programming activity in Downtown and Cambria.

Local Foods Local Places Final Report:

Goal 1: Design a future market that meets the needs of customers, vendors, and Downtown businesses.



Downtown Park is located on College Street near the Armory. It is conveniently located a block or two away from the Farmers Market.

2

Goal: Ensure Best Alignment of Building Uses

We know consumer behavior is constantly changing. However, according to PUMA's 2020 Global Trends Report, despite growing online sales, Downtowns still have a very active role to play. Many customers still value brick and mortar stores, prioritizing those who make an effort to personalize the consumer experience.

Downtown already has a strong foundation of wide sidewalks, street lighting, benches, and landscaping. Beyond these elements, Downtown lacks a diverse mix of desirable retail and restaurant businesses and community experiences. Overwhelming feedback points to the need for more local dining options, family-friendly entertainment, outdoor seating, breweries, and specialty shops. Developing lodging Downtown is another option that could create a regular flow of customers and foot traffic. To become a cultural destination for residents and visitors, working to align business uses with those of customer interests will be transformative for the town.

DOWNTOWN STRATEGIES

D2.1

Consider zoning ordinance revisions to encourage vibrant dining/experiential businesses on ground-floor of designated area of Downtown core.

D2.2

Encourage micro-retail opportunities for ground floor businesses to allow for the development of smaller or start-up businesses.

D2.3

Offer tax abatement incentives to Downtown property owners to encourage façade, landscaping, or streetscape improvements.

D2.4

Encourage the development of infill buildings.

D2.5

Continue Façade Grant program for Downtown and encourage redevelopment of existing historically significant buildings.

D2.6

Encourage workforce and market-rate rental housing in upper-story buildings Downtown.

D2.7

Encourage use of second story space in Downtown Main Street corridor for the purpose of housing, artist incubator space, co-working space, and professional service businesses.

D2.8

Encourage the development of a boutique hotel in Downtown.

Micro-Retail Example

Instead of only utilizing the ground floor for one retail space, divide the space into multiple smaller retail spaces.



CoLab in Roanoke is a shared, co-working space. This is a good example of mixed-use that is suitable for Downtowns.

3

Goal: Prioritize Connectivity & Accessibility

There are more than 22,000 people within a 10-minute drive of Downtown and a net in-migration of 8,400 workers each day. That represents over 30,000 people the Town could serve through Downtown businesses and amenities. This goal considers every definition of connectivity and accessibility: a greater connection between destinations, accessibility to businesses through nearby parking, and internet connectivity.

4

Goal: Increase leadership and capacity of Town and Downtown partners

Successful Downtowns have strong identities and strong advocates tending to the needs of business owners and citizens. The Town and Downtown Christiansburg Inc. (DCI) worked together during this planning process, and this plan encourages that relationship to continue to grow. DCI's role as an advocate and liaison for Downtown is a key component of the success of the Downtown strategies.

DOWNTOWN STRATEGIES

D3.1

Provide free, public wi-fi in downtown core.

D3.2

Facilitate daytime permit parking in private lots to create additional parking opportunities and generate an additional source of revenue for property owners.

D3.3

Create a trail system connecting Downtown to Downtown Park.



"You can easily judge the accessibility of a place by noting its connections to the surroundings, including the visual links. A great public space is easy to get to, easy to enter, and easy to navigate."
- Project for Public Spaces
PlaceMaking Guide

D4.1

Develop a strong brand for Downtown Christiansburg.

D4.2

Collaborate with Downtown Christiansburg Inc. to establish a culturally and economically vibrant Downtown through promotion, exploring creative solutions, and active relationships with business owners.

D4.3

Foster dialogue/relationships with property owners to better understand needs, communicate customer interests, and broker future partnerships.

D4.4

Invite Downtown Christiansburg Inc. to serve and collaborate with town staff on committees concerning Downtown.

D4.5

Encourage representation of Downtown business owners

Support from Previous Plans:

Destination 2022:

- » Goal 2.9: Develop joint public/private parking and cross access program for urban (Downtown, Cambria) settings

Downtown Christiansburg Inc. Final Report 2018

- » Recommendation 4: Collaborate with local government
- » Recommendation 5: Increase communication between DCI and business owners
- » Recommendation 6: Increase public outreach, marketing, and branding efforts

Local Foods Local Places Final Report:

- » Goal 2: Promote Downtown and the market

1

Goal: Enhance Existing Community Assets to Spur Vibrancy

The people who live and work in Cambria have a fierce affinity for the community. Architecturally and historically, Cambria has a quaint charm that attracts both visitors and residents. Enhancing the already existing character in Cambria will honor its history in a new and modern way. The presence of the railroad and the historic train depot are anchor points that are intentionally incorporated as part of these strategies. The existing assets in the Cambria core provide a strong foundation to bring about vibrancy and revitalization.

2

Goal: Update Facades & Increase Accessibility

Cambria has already seen improvement from the Town's Façade Grant program, and with continued joint investment in the area, the impacts can be significant. As revitalization efforts increase, the Town should ensure zoning ordinances are supportive of these efforts.

CAMBRIA STRATEGIES

C1.1

Create a Cambria Streetscape Plan that incorporates thoughtful design elements for parking, sidewalks, and landscaping.

C1.2

Foster dialogue/relationships with property owners to better understand needs, communicate customer interests, and broker future partnerships.

C1.3

Develop a brand for Cambria honoring its rail history.

C1.4

Identify underutilized or available land suitable for a public park.

C1.5

Build a train viewing platform.

C1.6

Partner with Train Depot property owner to safely secure and preserve the building.

C1.7

Provide incentives for new businesses to occupy empty storefronts.



Christiansburg Train Depot located in Cambria.

Support from Previous Plans:

Destination 2022:

- » *Goal 1.9: Promote the adaptive reuse and renovation of existing commercial building stock through promotion and use of the commercial building Rehabilitation Code.*
- » *Goal 2.2: Develop, adopt, and fund programs and policies that are supportive or promoting of new and/or leveraged private investment in businesses and buildings in the Downtown and Cambria areas*
- » *Goal 2.9: Develop joint public/private parking and cross access program for urban (Downtown, Cambria) settings*
- » *Goal 5.6: Develop programs and policies that would tend to encourage or facilitate residential use of upper floors and dense residential infill development or redevelopment on the periphery of Downtown and the Cambria business core area.*

C2.1

Continue Façade Grant program for Cambria.

C2.2

Promote and encourage entrepreneurial opportunities by eliminating any zoning conflicts that may restrict adaptive reuse of buildings.

C2.3

Connect Cambria to the Aquatic Center, future passenger rail site, Roanoke Street, and the Huckleberry Trail.

1

Goal: Create a welcoming and cohesive commercial corridor

The Midtown area is a strong commercial corridor that serves residents of Christiansburg as well as those of Montgomery County and the neighboring town of Blacksburg. Placemaking efforts for this area focus on unifying the corridor and strengthening its role as a gateway to Downtown. The Town could update this corridor with cohesive elements, such as consistent business signage and landscaping and incentivize property owners to invest in façade improvements to their buildings.

2

Goal: Seek Opportunities for Infill and Redevelopment

As an existing commercial corridor, the Town should consider capitalizing on the opportunity for greater density along North Franklin Street. Several undeveloped and underutilized parcels exist in Midtown, creating the potential for new businesses. Strategies identified in the Town's Comprehensive Plan highlight a corridor-wide strategy for redevelopment and infill as priorities.

MIDTOWN STRATEGIES

M1.1

Invest in commercial entryway signage and landscaping options along the North Franklin corridor to be funded by both local and private resources.



Example of cohesive commercial entryway signage.

M1.2

Offer tax abatement incentives to property owners to encourage façade improvements.

M2.1

Incentivize infill development in designated underutilized areas.

M2.2

Promote two to three-story developments along North Franklin corridor.

M2.3

Encourage the development of a hotel and conference center along the North Franklin corridor.



Mixed-use development is characterized as a pedestrian-friendly development that blends two or more residential, commercial, cultural, institutional, and/or industrial uses. (Source: University of Delaware)

3

Goal: Prioritize Connectivity & Accessibility

The Town is currently working on the Franklin Corridor Improvement Project, which is designed to improve traffic flow and safety along North Franklin Street, while also increasing accessibility for pedestrians. The project includes ramp modifications to Route 460-Business, traffic signal modifications, access management and pedestrian enhancements, new turn lanes, sidewalks, bike lanes, street lighting and signalized crosswalks.

The Midtown stakeholders group also discussed a different type of connectivity, referring to the business owners' relational connectivity. They were excited to have a means of communicating, cross-promoting, and staying up to date on neighboring businesses.

Support from Previous Plans: Christiansburg Comprehensive Plan

- » CED 9.3: Develop a Master Plan for the Institute UDA that implements the principles of TND through an urban design framework that includes a strategy for redevelopment of existing commercial strip malls, design guidelines for new development, development that complements the current institutional uses and future passenger rail train station, and connectivity to the Huckleberry Trail, identifying potential zoning recommendations and incentives.
- » CED 9.3B: In order to implement the principles of traditional neighborhood design, the Institute UDA should have its own Streetscape and Pedestrian Plan, based on an urban design framework that includes (1) "Complete Streets" approach that promotes street designs that enable safe access for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities, and (2) a Pedestrian Plan that safely links the major residential developments to the west with Christiansburg High School, the Recreation Center and the commercial areas located along North Franklin Street.
- » CED 9.3C: Improve public safety, alleviate traffic congestion, and potentially provide economic development enhancements through improvements at the intersection of North Franklin and Cambria streets that include the proposed elimination of the fifth leg, planned entrance consolidation, and provision of pedestrian signalization that should address safety concerns.
- » LUP 2.12: Promote new infill development and redevelopment utilizing existing infrastructure.

MIDTOWN STRATEGIES

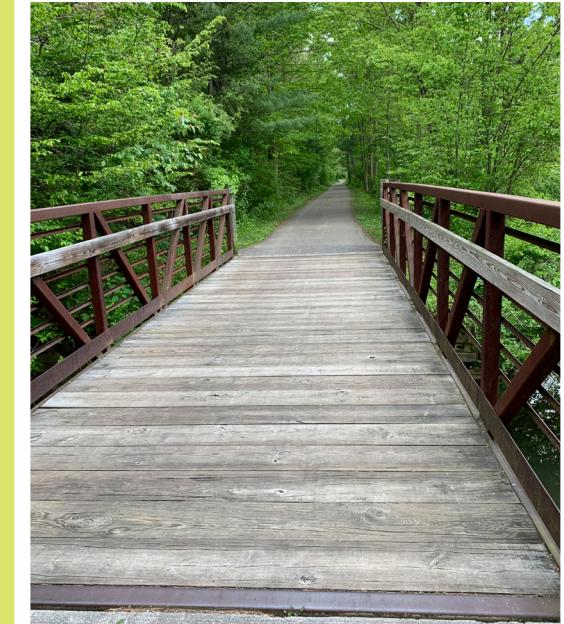
M3.1

Create a Midtown Business Association that meets at least twice each year.



M3.2

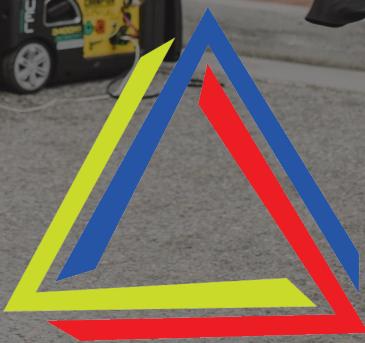
Actively promote bike, pedestrian, and transit accessibility, including the Huckleberry Trail and local bikeshare program.



The Huckleberry Trail is a 14-mile trail system that connects Christiansburg to Blacksburg and the Jefferson National Forest. Both the Town of Christiansburg and Blacksburg, along with the Friends of the Huckleberry, have made significant investments in improving and extending the trail.



moving forward



“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.” - Helen Keller

We listened to input from business owners, property owners, citizens, and staff to create an actionable list of strategies that will bring more life and vibrancy to the areas of Downtown, Cambria, and Midtown. Now what?

The following strategies were identified as priority projects by stakeholders and the project planning team, meaning they were identified as excellent first steps to beginning the work outlined in Chapter 3.

JUST START

Sometimes even great ideas never get implemented because the task seems too daunting and no one knows where to start.

The “Just Start” section provides some easy initial steps to help prevent “analysis paralysis.” Sometimes that’s all you need to put an idea into action.



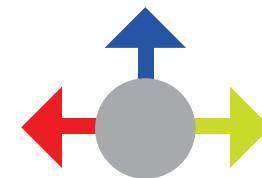
THE BUDDY SYSTEM

There's always safety in numbers, and that applies to plan implementation too. This section suggests key partners whose skills and opinions may be needed to successfully implement a strategy. It is not meant to be an exhaustive list, but a priming of the pump to always be thinking of implementation with a collaborative approach. It is essential for the Town to reach out to a wide range of voices in order to succeed with any of these projects. Placemaking happens when many and diverse voices are brought to the table!



NAVIGATING THIS CHAPTER

The nine priority projects in this chapter are introduced with the following format:



SIGNS OF SUCCESS

Evaluating the success of placemaking is a bit more challenging than other projects a locality may implement, but this section provides prompts for reflection and metrics to track progress.



D1.1

Priority Project:

Construct a permanent, multi-purpose Farmers Market and gathering space.

The Christiansburg Farmers Market was originally established in 2015. In 2018, the Town hired a full-time Special Events Coordinator to oversee the Market, manage all town-sponsored events, and create new community programming and projects. The conceptual design shows a 180-foot linear covered structure to house farmers market vendors.

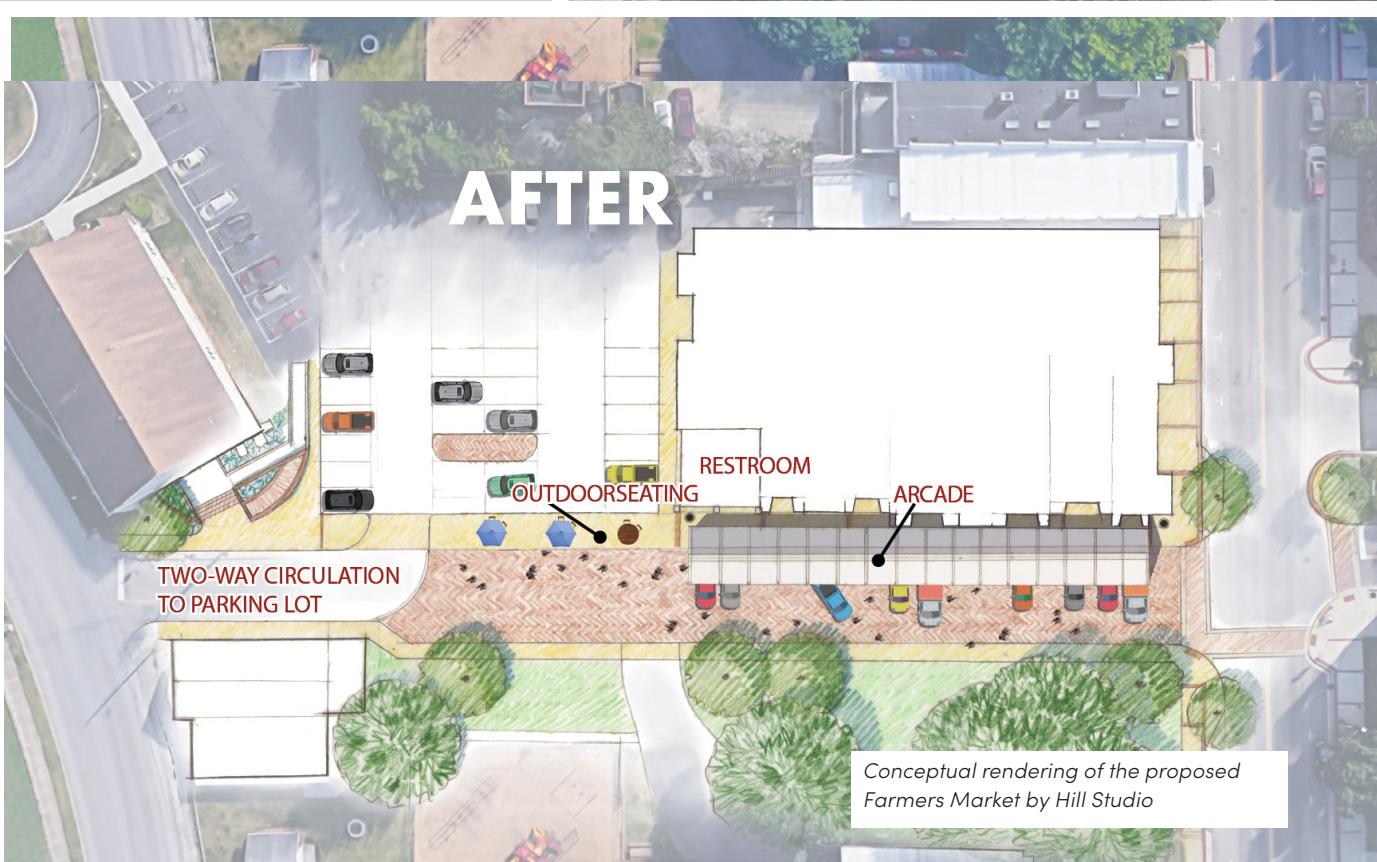
Six “parklets” are proposed for the northern end of Hickok Street. These areas consist of wooden decks with tables, large market umbrellas, and planters that are intended to be a counterpoint to the hardness of the paved street and provide seating areas for busy customers or community event attendees. The parklets will also feature wi-fi connections and charging stations, and be lit from below to glow at night.

The planning process identified that while many people support the growth of the farmers market, they would also enjoy the opportunity to use the community gathering space in multiple ways. Below are some possibilities to consider.

- » Parklets for smaller gatherings
- » Lunch gatherings
- » Festival
- » Craft fair
- » Intimate music concert
- » Art exhibit
- » Community movie night
- » Patio tables + umbrellas for gathering or eating
- » Food truck venue
- » Children's play area
- » Free little library site
- » Outdoor dance space with live band



The proposed design currently allows for the ability to keep Hickok Street open to one-way traffic on non-market days. For this space to truly have placemaking impact and act as a cultural anchor for Downtown, the Town may consider permanently closing Hickok from Main Street to Commerce Street.





- » The Town closed a portion of Hickok Street in 2018 and strung cafe lights around the space. Farmers Markets and summer movie events were held in the space. This was a great first step to test how the space could function as an exclusive market and gathering space.
- » Use the next Farmers Market season to conduct in-person surveys at the market. Show the conceptual design options to customers and Market vendors and collect feedback to assist in final design.
- » The Town is currently pursuing funding for this project through a competitive grant application to the Appalachian Regional Commission. If funded, this project could be completed as early as 2023.

THE BUDDY SYSTEM

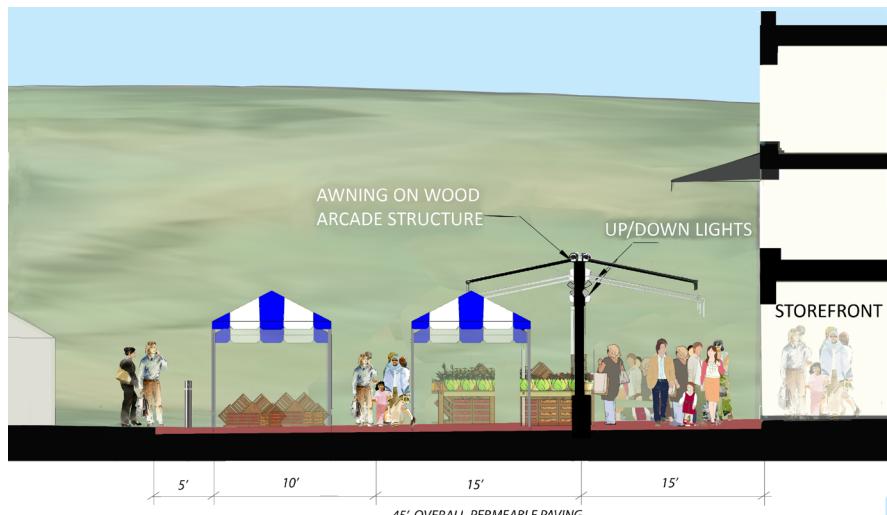
- » Downtown Christiansburg Inc.
- » Farmers Market vendors
- » Downtown business owners
- » Citizens of all kinds: young people, empty nesters, families, and young professionals
- » Adjoining property owners
- » Local Art Council or groups of local artists
- » Virginia Cooperative Extension
- » Montgomery Tourism

SIGNS OF SUCCESS

- » Ability to expand Farmers Market to Saturday
- » Increase in visitors
- » Increase in market vendor sales
- » Increase in Downtown business sales
- » Increase in events (big and small!) hosted Downtown
- » Overall vibrancy



Existing site of the Christiansburg Farmers Market located on Hickok Street



SECTION THROUGH FARMERS MARKET - OPTIMIZED WITH TENTS

Conceptual rendering of the proposed Farmers Market by Hill Studio

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- » Incorporate lighting, landscaping, and permanent seating
- » Allow for further personalization through local art
- » Incorporate areas for music
- » Allow for pedestrian travel separate from vendor setup
- » Incorporate public restrooms
- » Emphasize connectivity to pocket park at Great Road On Main, as well as Downtown Park.
- » Currently the Market is open once a week on Thursday evenings. Once construction is complete, consider expanding Market hours to include Saturday as well



Other Great Gatherings:

In 2019, through a joint application between the Town and Downtown Christiansburg Inc., Opportunity SWVA awarded the Town a \$3,000 RALLY grant to pursue a project that advances the community vision and supports business development. The project will be a pocket park located in downtown on the Great Road on Main, just across the street from the Farmers Market.



Case Study - Pulaski Park - Northampton, MA

Pulaski Park is a small section of a larger, existing urban greenspace that had fallen into disrepair. The town of Northampton reactivated the space, incorporating green space and hardscape design elements for a modern urban design.

D1.2

Priority Project:

Enhance Downtown Park for both recreational use and community events

Located on 1.4 acres on College Street next to the armory, Downtown Park offers ample playground space, green space, and a recently constructed pavilion. The Town has invested in this space regularly over the last decade, replacing and expanding the playground equipment, adding signage, and incorporating a StoryWalk connecting to the library.

The location and topography of Downtown Park is perfectly suited for an amphitheater. The proposed design offers the opportunity to host multiple outdoor evening events which will also encourage people to explore Downtown. A bandshell structure is located along College Street with stone terraces that can seat up to 300, and significantly more could sit on the open lawn. A half-mile walking trail winds through the property, connects to the library and loops back to Downtown Park. Trail connectivity across College Avenue to Downtown will also be important to consider in order to link these two spaces.

A **StoryWalk** is a series of signs featuring sequential spreads from a children's picture book. Those signs or pages are spread through indoor or outdoor spaces in all seasons, allowing a reader to follow along with a story by walking

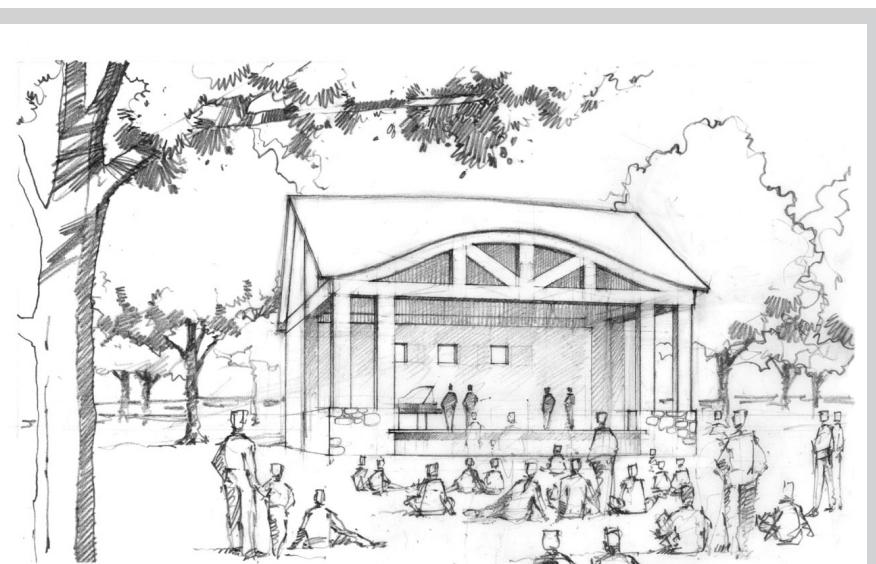


Conceptual rendering of
Downtown Park by Hill Studio

JUST START



- » String cafe lights across temporary poles to create a small gathering space. Host a mini-concert series on a Saturday evening with three to four local bands. Other ideas for activities in the space include poetry slams, talent shows, small plays and open mic nights.
- » Reach out to adjacent property owners to cost share a trail connecting Hickok street to Downtown Park.
- » Incorporate helpful amenities that will begin to attract more people, such as bike racks and pet waste stations.
- » Collaborate with Master Gardeners or the Native Plant Society to design and install landscaping throughout the park. Start small, and work in manageable phases.
- » Reach out to local community groups to co-sponsor an event.
- » Host a design day at the park and set up multiple stations for citizens to share their ideas for the park while a designer sketches the ideas in real time. Display the finished products in Town Hall and on social media.



Conceptual rendering of community amphitheater located in Downtown Park by Hill Studio

THE BUDDY SYSTEM

- » Downtown Christiansburg Inc.
- » Adjacent property owners: Armory, Christiansburg Library, Christiansburg Fire, Summit restaurant
- » Master Gardeners
- » New River Chapter - VA Native Plant Society
- » Civic groups
- » Citizens of every type



SIGNS OF SUCCESS

- » Physical improvement to the park
- » Increased number of events held in the space
- » Set up trail counters to track the number of users on the walking paths

CASE STUDY - Pulaski Park - Northampton, MA

Pulaski Park utilizes natural elements for children to play on, incorporates native landscaping, and has a seating + stage platform.

D2.1

Priority Project:

Consider zoning ordinance revisions to encourage vibrant dining and experiential businesses on ground-floor of designated area of Downtown

Consistent feedback from the public during this planning process made it clear that everyone who envisioned a vibrant, bustling Downtown hoped for businesses that fostered a community experience: local dining establishments with outdoor seating, coffeehouses, breweries with live music, ice cream shops, and unique retail.

Many localities have played an active role in shaping their Downtowns by creating usage guidelines for ground level businesses. The case study referenced below highlights some helpful considerations used by the town of Apex, NC when implementing usage guidelines within their Small Town Character Overlay District.

If the Town pursues the creation of a ground floor usage ordinance, it is suggested the ordinance focus on the Downtown core of Christiansburg, encompassing Main Street fronting businesses from the intersection of Main Street and South Franklin Street, to the intersection of Main Street and Dunkley Street.



Conceptual rendering of Downtown Christiansburg by Hill Studio

JUST START



- » Start with communication! Host a gathering inviting all business and property owners that may be affected by an ordinance revision to share an overview of the process and what to expect. Offer one-on-one meetings with any owner who has additional questions or concerns.
- » Seek out an existing owner who would be willing to test the benefits of micro-retail.
- » Host a Pop-Up Fair in a current vacant storefront and/or on Hickok Street to highlight the types of businesses the town would like to attract.

THE BUDDY SYSTEM



- » Downtown Christiansburg Inc. - Partner with DCI to share a consistent message about the usage ordinance and encourage questions and feedback from business owners.
- » Strong relationships with existing Downtown **business and property owners** are essential for influencing change in Downtown.
- » Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce

SIGNS OF SUCCESS



- » Increase in number of businesses open after 5 p.m.
- » Increased meals and lodging tax revenue
- » Increase in number of existing office businesses incorporating micro-retail
- » Agenda item on Central Business Committee meeting

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- » Review existing ordinances for any barriers to Downtown dining establishments providing outdoor seating or for any restrictive parking regulations

CASE STUDIES

- » **Apex, NC** – At the encouragement of its Downtown Business Association, the town of Apex, North Carolina passed an update to its Unified Development Ordinance to define the allowable uses of ground floor commercial buildings in Downtown. Many of the existing restaurant and retail businesses were advocating for this change as well. Implementation of this new ordinance will occur incrementally, as the ordinance is only enforced when a building changes uses.
- » The founders of SaveYour.Town are all about practical steps that can be implemented right-away. They suggest holding pop-up fairs as a great way for a property owner to activate an empty storefront and to test the potential success of a business. Popular themes include artisans, crafters, or food entrepreneurs.



D2.6

Priority Project:

Encourage workforce and market-rate rental housing in upper-story buildings downtown.

People want to live in vibrant towns, and they want to live in quality housing. With the increasing housing pressures experienced in Montgomery County over the last five years, Christiansburg is responding by approving over 900 units of housing, comprised of single-family detached, townhomes, and multi-family units.

Workforce housing supports successful economic development, as businesses may have trouble attracting or retaining workers without nearby affordable housing options and/or convenient and affordable transportation. Downtowns that offer mixed-income rental housing provide for a wide variety of housing needs, as well as a customer base for existing and expanding Downtown commercial amenities.

As many other communities have experienced, once significant investment begins in Downtown, more investment and vibrancy follows. Many communities found that initial investment in infrastructure and amenities of their Downtown began to attract residential investment as well. While some of this growth occurs organically, the Town could take a more active role in encouraging these uses. Funding sources such as Virginia Housing Development Authority and the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit program provide viable funding options for implementation.





- » Take an initial inventory of the current number of Downtown residential units and basic information such as occupancy vs. vacancy and number of bedrooms and bathrooms. This will help establish a baseline for tracking growth.
- » Work closely with an existing property owner who is interested in redeveloping their space for more intentional mixed-use. Be clear about desirable business types and cohesive design aesthetics. Create a toolkit from the experience that could help guide other interested owners (or developers) through the same process.
- » Reach out to local developers who may be interested in investing in mixed-use residential development Downtown.
- » Explore the "Workforce Housing Toolkit" offered by Housing Virginia <https://www.housingvirginia.org/toolkits/workforce-housing-toolkit/>

THE BUDDY SYSTEM



- » The region has several high-capacity developers who have successfully accomplished mixed-use developments. Their expertise will be critical to project success.
- » Due to the low vacancy rate Downtown, engagement with existing property owners who may have vacant upper-story building space will be critical.

Funders

- VHDA
- Low Income Housing Tax Credits
- NRV HOME Consortium
- Historic Tax Credits

SIGNS OF SUCCESS



- » Private investment in renovating existing upper-story housing increases
- » Affordable rental units are increased Downtown via partnerships with funding programs mentioned above
- » Second floor windows have curtains in the windows and lights on in the evening

CASE STUDIES

- » Through its Community Development Block Grant program, the City of Oshkosh, Wisconsin provides financial assistance for repairs to qualified property owners of rental property serving low and moderate income renters in the city. Financial assistance is in the form of a no-interest, deferred payment loan. Loans are payable in one payment in either 10 or 15 years following the completion of the rehabilitation or when the property is sold, whichever happens sooner.



Oshkosh, Wisconsin

D4.2

Priority Project:

Collaborate with Downtown Christiansburg Inc. and other downtown partners to establish a culturally and economically vibrant Downtown through promotion, exploring creative solutions, and building active relationships with business owners.

A placemaking plan for Christiansburg would not be complete without mentioning non-profit partner, Downtown Christiansburg Inc. Many communities have seen the benefits a dedicated Downtown organization can bring, and Christiansburg is poised for the same result.

While a Downtown business association cannot replace local government staff, they do provide a helpful conduit to voicing the needs of Downtown business owners. Vibrant Towns have an intuitive synergy between local government staff, Downtown organizations, and Downtown businesses. To develop this type of relationship, the Town and DCI should identify key roles and boundaries for collaborative opportunities. Long-term, DCI could serve as an economic development driver for Downtown.

Above: Band playing at the 2019 Food Truck Rodeo in Downtown Christiansburg.

Below: Volunteers with D.C.I. at the 2019 Food Truck Rodeo.



JUST START



- » Choose a convenient evening and invite all Downtown business owners to Great Road On Main for a wine and cheese gathering. Let business owners network for the first half of the time and then allow them time to speak on a mutually engaging topic. Keep it positive! Collect their information and brainstorm ways they would prefer to stay in touch (an email list, a private Facebook group, regular gatherings, etc.)
- » Annually schedule a half-day retreat with Downtown Christiansburg Inc. and the Town to discuss common goals and identify roles and responsibilities for best working together to serve and promote Downtown. Don't forget the snacks.

THE BUDDY SYSTEM



- » Downtown Christiansburg Inc.
- » Anchor Downtown business owners
- » Montgomery Regional Tourism
- » Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce
- » Montgomery Museum of Art & History
- » Kiwanis Club of Christiansburg

SIGNS OF SUCCESS



- » A Downtown Business Association is created.
- » Increase of collaborative endeavors between Town and D.C.I., and other partners (events, grant applications, meetings, etc.)
- » Downtown businesses are engaged and providing more frequent communication.



C1.1

Priority Project:

Create a Cambria Streetscape Plan that incorporates inviting design elements for pedestrians, bicyclists, parking, community gathering spaces, and landscaping.

The Cambria streetscape plan takes control of the public areas to provide a planned business environment and pedestrian access. The proposed design combines pedestrian safety, angle parking, landscaping, and inviting wayfinding signage to calm traffic and invite passersby to become customers.



JUST START



- » Develop conceptual street views of different concepts that can be shared with Cambria business owners and solicit feedback on the design. Ask them how it could improve their customers' experience.
- » **Test it now:** Using temporary paint, paint out the proposed improvements: the sidewalks, the medians, the parking spots, the serpentine road shape. Post street signs a few days before, inviting anyone to walk the space and provide feedback about how it may improve accessibility and community vibrancy.

THE BUDDY SYSTEM



- » Cambria business owners
- » Cambria residents
- » Norfolk Southern
- » Town Council – host a field trip to Hendersonville, NC or conference call with planning staff
- » VDOT Residency Office

SIGNS OF SUCCESS



- » Increase in revenue for Cambria business owners
- » Pedestrian activity increases
- » Business/citizen organization started

CASE STUDIES

- » **Hendersonville, NC** – Based on a similar design in Grand Junction, Colorado, Hendersonville first constructed its serpentine Main Street in the 1970's. The design provided for the incorporation of landscaping, parking, traffic-calming road design, and pedestrian access. The result was tremendous growth in the Downtown



Before and after conceptual rendering of entryway into Cambria by Hill Studio

C2.1

Priority Project:

Provide incentives for new businesses to fill empty storefronts in Cambria.

Several of Cambria's storefronts are currently vacant or underutilized. The Town's Façade Grant Program for existing business owners has already had marked success, with four businesses participating to redevelop or freshen up their street-facing facades. This strategy explores options for incentivizing new businesses to locate in Cambria.

Incentive options could include, but are not limited to:

- » Upfit money for any new or expanding retail or dining business
- » Reduced utility rates for any start-up breweries
- » Tax abatement for the first five years of business
- » Façade Improvement matching grant (continue the program already run by the Town)
- » Architectural Assistance Program
- » Historic tax credits

CASE STUDIES

- » Wilson, NC Architectural Assistance Program, Building Improvement Reimbursement Grant
- » SaveYour.Town – Vacant Building Tour

JUST START



- » Have a local artist or elementary class paint empty storefront windows. Add simple string lights from the inside to illuminate it at night.
- » Vacant building tour. Partner with the Chamber of Commerce to reach out to any owners of vacant buildings who may be interested in selling or leasing their building. Publicize an afternoon tour of each of the buildings, creating a simple spec sheet and providing an opportunity for owners to answer questions to potential buyers/lessees.

THE BUDDY SYSTEM



- » Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce
- » Existing business and property owners
- » Cambria residents
- » Small Business Development Center
- » Local banks

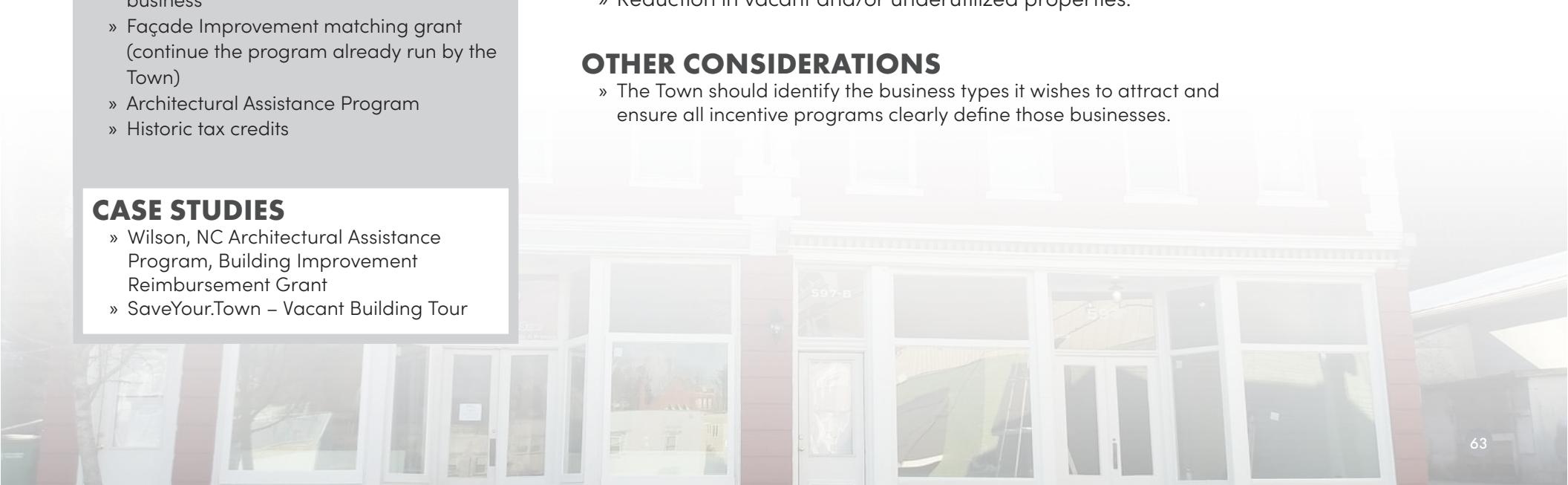
SIGNS OF SUCCESS



- » Reduction in vacant and/or underutilized properties.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- » The Town should identify the business types it wishes to attract and ensure all incentive programs clearly define those businesses.

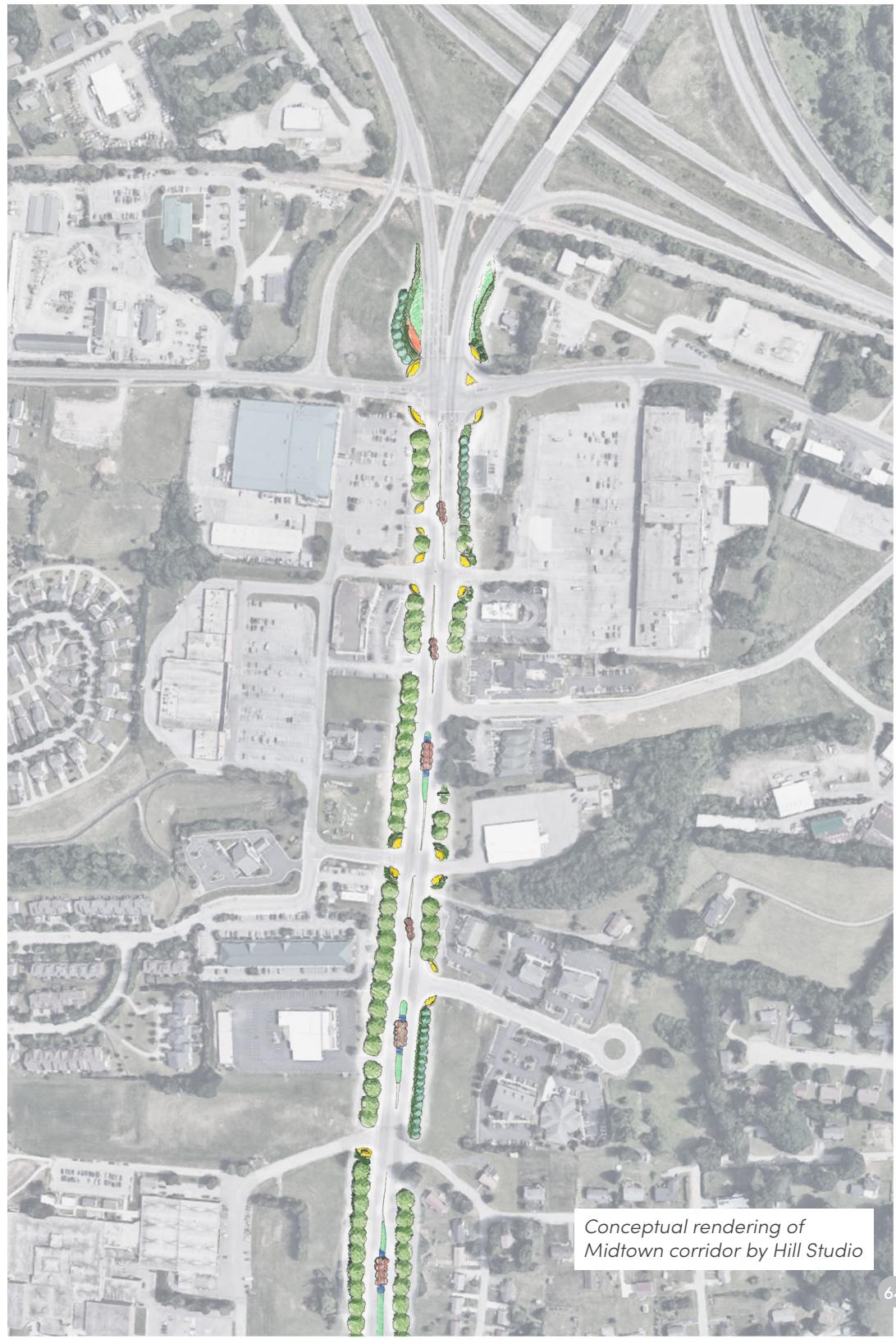


M1.1

Priority Project:

Invest in commercial entryway signage and landscaping options along the North Franklin corridor to be funded by both local and private funds.

Commercial corridors do not often have the intimate feel that many expect from Downtowns and more pedestrian friendly areas. However, adding new locally branded signage to a business district can have a large impact to soften and bring cohesion to heavily trafficked areas.

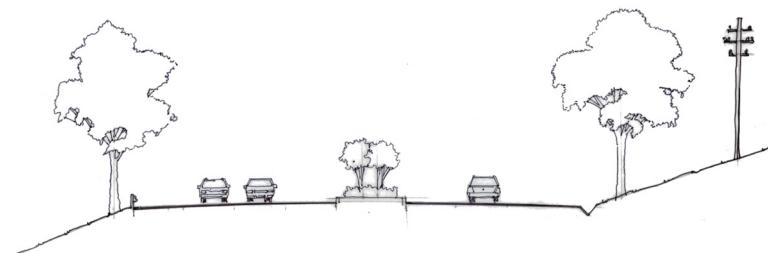


Conceptual rendering of Midtown corridor by Hill Studio

JUST START

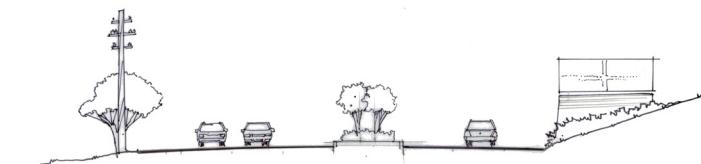


- » Review sign ordinance regulations for any guidance or restrictions.
- » Prepare a streetscape rendering that illustrates proposed designs. Many businesses may be more likely to participate if they can start to visualize how much better the signage and landscaping could look.
- » Create three attractive sign designs and allow citizens to vote on their favorite via a Facebook poll.
- » Revive the median flowerbed program.
- » Begin by incorporating elements the Town can maintain as/if needed, such as roadside and median landscaping and gateway signage.



THE BUDDY SYSTEM

- » Midtown business owners - recruiting a few early adopters will influence others to participate
- » Citizens of all kinds: young people, empty nesters, families, and young professionals
- » Christiansburg-based businesses who may be interested in median adoption program
- » Master Gardeners or Arborist Club



SIGNS OF SUCCESS

- » Increase of participation in the cost-sharing program
- » Increase of participants in median adoption program

M2.3

Priority Project:

Encourage the development of a hotel and conference center along the North Franklin corridor.

The North Franklin corridor is home to the Christiansburg Aquatic Center, which hosted more than 52,000 swimmers and spectators in fiscal year 2019. In addition, the future New River Valley Passenger Rail Station is proposed adjacent to the Aquatic Center and is estimated to attract around 40,000 annual ridership.

A thoughtfully designed hotel and conference center, located within a half-mile of these two amenities, would offer lodging and shuttle accommodations for visitors. While there are several candidate sites near the proposed Amtrak Station and the Aquatic Center, sites with a minimum of two to three acres are recommended.

The conceptual design illustrates a 36,660 square-foot hotel on a 3.75-acre parcel. Restaurants are proposed on each end, where they can serve hotel guests or passersby and buffer the guestrooms. A pool and other amenities are shown over the central lobby area. Guestrooms are designed on either side of a central corridor, at approximately 52 guestrooms per floor. The example drawing shows a total of 208 parking spaces, and the central events lawn is about 25,000 square feet.



JUST START



- » Using the conceptual design, propose the concept to any owners of undeveloped/underutilized parcels within a half-mile radius.

THE BUDDY SYSTEM

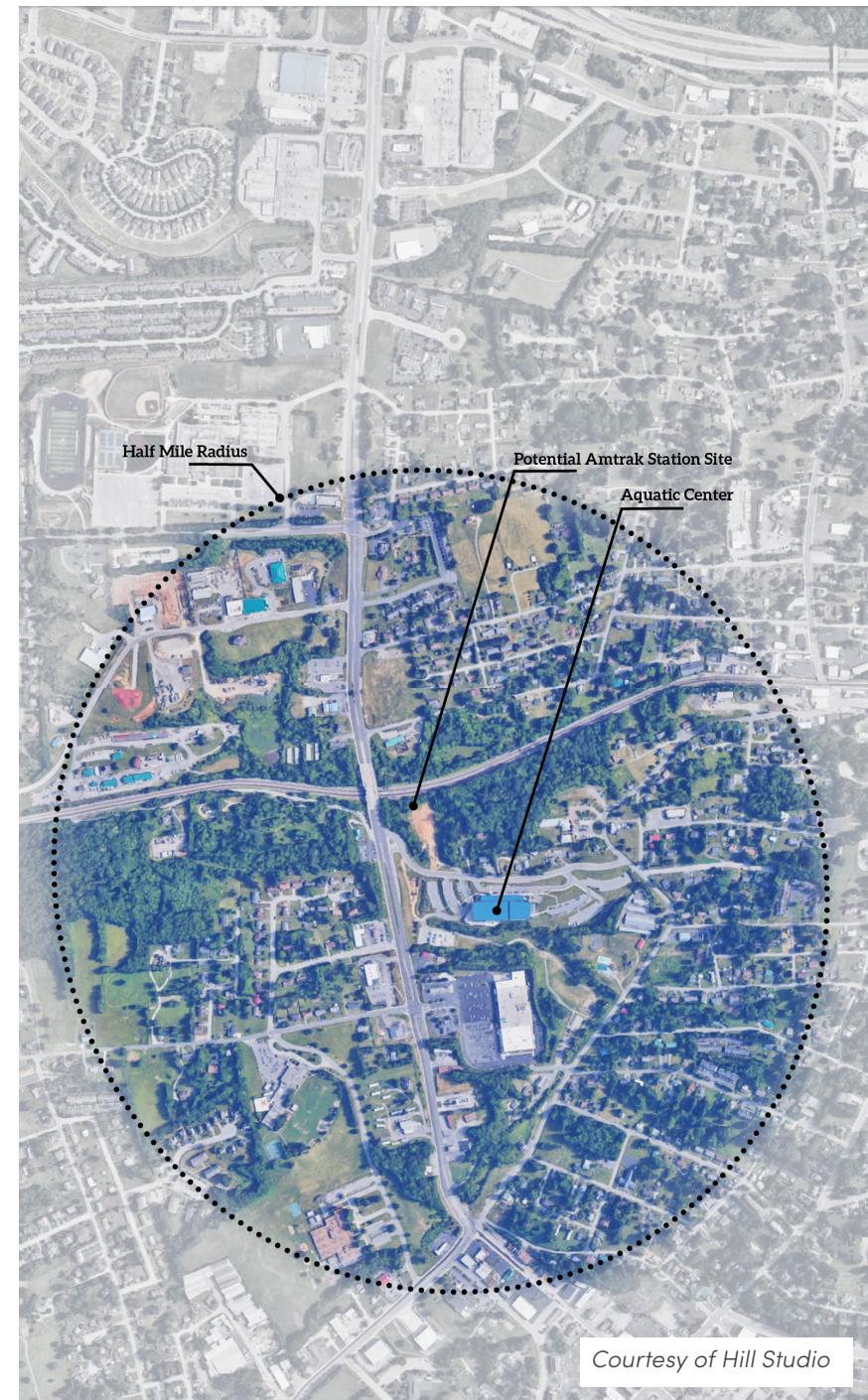


- » Owners of undeveloped parcels in the half-mile radius
- » Aquatic Center (to provide input on recurring needs for lodging, transportation, etc.)
- » NRV Passenger Rail Leadership Team & Stakeholder Group
- » Local businesses who may desire conference/meeting space

SIGNS OF SUCCESS



- » Developer site plan proposal received by Town



where do we go from here?

Creating this placemaking plan would not have been possible without the insight, ideas, and support from Christiansburg citizens, business owners, property owners, Town Council, and local civic organizations. Considerable investment and improvements have already taken place, but this is only the beginning of what will be an ongoing effort. Downtown, Cambria, and Midtown are all well-positioned to see even more improvements, as the Town as a whole works toward becoming a cultural destination.

This plan presents an exciting journey for the Town to embark on, and the momentum created during this planning process will serve as a catalyst for the Town to jump in and begin its transformation. The Town will continue to listen carefully to its citizens and stakeholders, create dynamic partnerships, and take small, but meaningful steps forward.

“Great things are done by a series of small things brought together.”

- Vincent VanGogh

