

Proposed Promotion Strategy

General - Definition and Purpose

The word *promote* is defined in the dictionary as a verb which means: “to move forward,” “to further the growth or establishment of something,” “to work actively and stir up interest for the accomplishment of something.” These definitions are precisely the aim of the concept of promoting the downtown, the revitalization effort and the businesses and people within the Marshall community. The promotional component of the revitalization program is intended to:

- Move the process forward,
- To further the growth of appropriate types of development in the downtown and
- To actively work to create enthusiasm for revitalization in the community.

The concept of promotion, as it relates to downtown revitalization, includes an internal and an external component. The concept of *external promotion*, marketing or selling the downtown community and its component businesses and services to the local, regional and tourist market, is the more obvious aspect of promotion. *Internal promotion* involves convincing the local community of the worth of the downtown. Internal promotion also includes communication within the revitalization organization itself. Energy and enthusiasm – both internal and external – is needed to stimulate and sustain the other components of the Main Street process.

The purpose of promotion is to market the offerings and services of the downtown to existing and potential markets and to sell the downtown to those who are or should be involved in the revitalization process. Marshall has historically served as the governmental and service center for Madison County. During the Resource Team visit, many residents relayed their recollections of the vitality and diversity of the business and social activity that once took place on the streets of Marshall. The erosion of activity and the loss of many businesses in the downtown have generated the desire in many citizens to recapture some of the vitality the downtown once had when it was the physical, cultural and social heart of the community. Citizens throughout the community voiced their fondness for the Courthouse, the buildings, and businesses on Main Street, the

Island, river and railroad that have brought people, business and social activity to the citizens of Marshall and Madison County. Downtown Marshall still possesses and evokes a unique sense of place in the region. Polishing, protecting, and promoting the river, rail, road, and ridge will preserve this sense of place and the roots and riches of the buildings and people of Marshall.

Recommendations

Recommendation: Develop an Education Program about the downtown.

One of the important elements of promoting a community is to develop an appreciation for the Town's history and the perspective that the existing built environment and the memories and stories of its citizens provide an identity for the community. This activity will educate and coagulate people around the mission. A vital part of the promotional program should include elements of education and celebration of the role downtown Marshall has played in the history and development of the town and Madison County. Marshall is a culturally and physically unique community that has maintained much of its distinct identity over time. Revitalization of its physical, economic and cultural health will depend upon the community learning to be itself and preserving its place in the future rooted in the past. This history and education need to incorporate the land, river, and natural features; the roads and railroad and buildings, and most importantly, the people who have labored and invested in this place for as many reasons as there are street addresses and tombstones in the town. When the new library is built, it will be a place where this collection can be cultivated. A partnership with the library and the revitalization organization should be forged.

As part of the process, the revitalization organization needs to involve citizens in the process of collecting photographs and stories of the people, places, and events that comprise the history of Marshall. Knowing who you are and why you are in this place, will cultivate and nurture self-respect and an appreciation for the people, places, and events that have made the community what it is today. A broad-based appreciation for the history of the community and the role of the natural and built environment is a necessary foundation for implementing a successful design program that will preserve and maintain local architecture and natural features.

With an appreciation for its past, Marshall can design a better plan for its future. It is much easier to promote and market a product that many people understand and care about. Many citizens expressed their affection for and their desire to stay in Marshall. It is important for the revitalization organization to understand, document, and nurture this love of the community, first to itself, then to others.

Recommendation: Develop and promote an image of the downtown.

Development or redevelopment of Marshall's downtown image is the foundation for revitalization. Prior to the suburbanization of our towns that began in the 1950s, downtowns served as the only retail shopping area and the focal point of the town and County. The construction of the Marshall bypass in the late 1950s began an exodus of businesses and services from the downtown that continues to the present. During the time period from 1957 through 1962, downtown Marshall experienced the loss of several grocery stores, restaurants, boarding houses, a theater, and an auto dealership. During the 1960s, downtown Marshall continued to experience losses as the Belk's store, dry cleaners, most of the restaurants, gas stations and several drug stores closed their doors or moved to the bypass. The downtown no longer captured a majority of the retail sales and services. The mobile population of the post-war era, facilitated by the region's improved road systems and the availability of automobiles, led to expanded shopping and entertainment patterns. Marshall's changing role and image, similar to small towns throughout the region and the nation, has suffered a loss of identity and a subsequent deterioration of its buildings and infrastructure.

The development of a positive image will serve to bolster the self-image of local residents; attract new residents, professionals, tourists and retirees; serve as a catalyst to encourage investment in new and expanded local businesses; and assist in the recruitment of new industry to the area. People and businesses want to be in a place where new investment and healthy development are occurring, where people through their leaders are facilitating improvements and useful change, and in communities where the citizens have a positive plan for their future.

All of the above mentioned interest groups that Marshall would hope to attract have specific development or resource criteria they desire. For example, tourists want authentic things to see and experience and interesting places in which to eat and shop. New residents and retirees seek housing and quality health care. Families desire good schools for their children. New businesses want markets for their products or services. Industries look for available and dependable labor. Regardless of their perspective, all of these interest groups appreciate and are

attracted to a community that places an emphasis on quality; is clean and orderly; possesses a sense of place; and evokes an image of a community that cares about itself and its people.

Marshall is an authentic mountain town, a point of reference appreciated and desired by both residents with deep roots and those who are recent transplants. This acceptance and appreciation for authenticity is the image Marshall needs to cultivate and preserve. It is a *real* place with interesting, unique, and different people, culture, natural and physical surroundings.

Principal elements for defining and building the image of Marshall should include promoting:

- An authentic small town quality of life; quiet, hospitable, slow pace, low crime
- The availability of outdoor recreational resources, including the French Broad River; the National Forest with camping and hiking trails; a scenic highway; and other nearby recreational resources including the Appalachian Trail and the whitewater rafting
- A rich, cultural heritage and history which exists in the lives, stories, crafts and musical traditions of Madison County

Marshall needs to build on the unique and plentiful recreational opportunities and the craft and music traditions that abound within the County. As the trains' whistle reminds you: Stop! Look! And Listen! To who you are; where you are; what is around you.

Recommendation: Develop a community logo.

Utilizing the artistic and creative talents within the community, the revitalization committee should develop a logo and stance line or theme for Marshall. The courthouse remains an icon for the town and is a prime candidate for use in the logo. Just as the cameras in the movie *My Fellow Americans* focused on the courthouse in the opening shots filmed in Marshall, the courthouse serves as the focal point for the history and people of Madison County. The logo and theme can be used to educate local citizens and to promote the community's vision to its markets. Once adopted, it is the community's responsibility to manifest the logo and stance line in all promotions, signs, and literature.

Then, there's the biggie: the community must deliver on the atmosphere and offerings it is promoting. Will the Marshall experience match the pictures and copy in the brochures and promotional material? If not, most visitors will feel cheated, tell at least 10 people, and not return.

Recommendation: Pursue National Register Historic District status.

Marshall possesses a wonderful collection of intact historic structures and contributing older buildings in the downtown community. One way to be authentic and promote a real identity is to preserve and build upon the unique historic resources that remain in Marshall. The designation of a National Register Historic District for eligible structures and properties would establish the basis and support for further preservation and rehabilitation within the community. National Register designation of historic structures also would provide existing and new owners of these properties the opportunity to potentially take advantage of State and Federal tax credits for rehabilitation.

Recommendation: Implement the design recommendations.

In addition to the designation of downtown Marshall as a National Historic District, the revitalization committee should work with the town and private property owners to implement the design recommendations in this report. The exceptional asset of Marshall's intact building stock can also be a detriment if it is not respected and honored. Design recommendations will address many physical improvements to the buildings and public spaces in the downtown, including actions such as clean-ups, landscaping and the screening of problem areas in the community. Clean it! Green it! Screen it! A clean and orderly community will complement the wonderful architecture in the town and potentially attract new visitors, residents, and investors to the downtown. The town will become more appealing to local residents as well as tourists and visitors.

Communities that seek to attract heritage tourists, the tourists who stay longer and spend more money, must present themselves as interesting, unique, and different. These characteristics are fostered by preserving the community's architecture, enhancing the natural and built resources unique to Marshall, improving the public sector facilities, and maintaining a clean and orderly community. Marshall is fortunate to have a scenic highway, and a river running into and through the town. The revitalization process needs to focus on the visual quality of these resource corridors within the community. Attractive entrance signs and landscaping promoting the historic downtown are needed at all of the major entranceways into the town.

Recommendation: Form an events committee.

Marshall has maintained a number of community events and activities that remain well attended and are an attraction for both locals and visitors. The use of the Island for the Island Festival (River Fair), the VFD Rodeo and 4th of July events provides a good foundation for promotional activities in the community. Events also provide a venue for local people to enjoy their community and gather in its "living room." The music at the Depot and the VFD street dances typify the kind of event that reinforces the image of a genuine small mountain town. Although these events and activities, in addition to the Christmas parade and pageant have an established tradition, there is need for broader support and coordination.

It is recommended that an events committee be created from the revitalization organization to evaluate, organize, and coordinate events in the community. The events committee should incorporate representatives from the Chamber, the volunteer fire department, the depot committee, Madison County High School students, community and church members who have worked on events and merchants. The events committee should lead support and coordinate events. Periodically, the festivals and events need to be evaluated to consider the costs, benefits and how effective these activities are in fostering the goals of the revitalization process. The community must focus on and utilize those activities that produce the greatest benefits, either financial or social, for the time and money expended.

The events need to be spread throughout the year to maximize the impact. The events committee should consider obtaining private sponsorships to offset the costs of the events. An annual events calendar should be developed and incorporated in all promotional materials.

Recommendation: Develop a downtown farmers market.

Develop a self-supporting farmers market and crafts market at an appropriate downtown location or on the island. The market might be initiated on one Saturday each month of the summer and early fall, increasing the frequency if there is adequate support and demand. The market will potentially stimulate activity in the downtown, provide additional tourist interest, and provide an outlet for craft and agricultural products generated in the county. As with any event, the addition of food and music will heighten the interest and attraction of the activity.

Recommendation: Develop joint promotions.

Utilize the resources within the county and region to showcase craft and recreational opportunities. Work closely with groups sharing similar interests. The National Forest, whitewater rafting and scenic highways are resources that can entice visitors to stay longer. Providing maps and lists of events and activities for visitors will present tourists with a variety of opportunities to bike and hike; fish, float and boat; raft, ride and drive through Madison County. Promote the resources within the county and region that showcase the art, craft, music, and recreational opportunities. Creating and promoting more local entertainment activities in the evening will provide tourists, visitors, and local residents a reason to stay in Marshall. The establishment and creation of attractions and activities will help attract and support more hospitality-based businesses in and adjacent to downtown Marshall. Accommodations and eating establishments are a requisite to revitalization.

Community businesses should meet and develop promotional and advertising packages. Market discounts could be offered for targeted market segments. These efforts need to focus on the off-peak periods of the tourist season. The initiation of these targeted campaigns may serve as a catalyst for future cooperative marketing ventures. Explore the most effective means of distributing the information to potential markets in the region. By working together, groups of merchants may be able to produce effective joint marketing while cost sharing.

Celebrate Your Successes

A key component of promotion is to generate and sustain enthusiasm and excitement. Use every success and positive action as a cause for celebration (a new business opening, facade improvement, major clean-up, a successful new event). Use the media and a periodic newsletter to inform the business community, elected leaders and citizens that positive progress is occurring and occurring often. Celebrations need not be elaborate, but should provide an opportunity to give credit to those who need it and to those who deserve to receive it.

Conclusion

Promotion is an elixir and catalyst of a successful revitalization process. It is a means to build internal support and enthusiasm, to creatively market the goods and services of the community to appropriate markets, to build local appreciation for the downtown and to foster cooperation between the public and

private sectors of the community. Promotion is the glue that holds the internal and external components of the revitalization effort together. Promotion, in concert with all components of the Main Street process, is an integral part of a long-term, successful comprehensive revitalization process.

 **Action Steps for the *Proposed Promotion Strategy***

1. Do research on historic downtown Marshall and sponsor an exhibit that could travel around the community.
2. Write down an image or vision of Marshall that you would like for others to find when they come to Marshall in the future.
3. Make historic preservation part of that image.
4. Decide on a name for the revitalization organization/committee.
5. Secure an artist who will create a logo that matches the image you want to portray.
6. Organize a downtown farmer's market.
7. Convene a meeting of groups who promote Marshall and Madison County. Work to synchronize and unify the images and message being portrayed. (If this has not been done previously.) Decide on complementary messages and collaborate on promotions.
8. Expand festivals currently being conducted.