

## Summation and Call to Action

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This report on the Community Assessment is filled with 50 recommendations and could easily be overwhelming. Clearly, revitalizing a business district and building sustainable community is a complex, formidable undertaking. At the same time it is exhilarating, creative, worthwhile and a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Involvement in a civic project that has strong support is gratifying. Revitalization is an opportunity to return the community's heart and soul to itself and direct its destiny. It is the opportunity to contribute to resurrection and protection of home. It is a chance to give *community* and *place* back to Marshall.

Managing the evolutionary process of revitalization is messy and organic, not predictable and linear. The best conceived plans change daily and reinvent themselves. That is part of the fun and the intrigue. Since the process is participatory and fosters ownership, it takes time. . . lots of it. Understand from the outset that revitalizing a community is a long-term process and never really ends. It simply is passed to the next generation of caretakers and civic entrepreneurs.

In the Executive Summary, a call for the involvement of civic entrepreneurs was issued. Civic entrepreneurs, who are catalysts, take risks and help the community manage processes of change, are absolutely essential to a successful community development effort. Civic entrepreneurs are not afraid of failure. They consider thoroughly all the options, pick the best one, go for it, and then modify along the way. They are courageous, visionary and faith-full, all stemming from deep convictions.

[They] forge the ties that bind economy and community for mutual benefit. They are passionate and energetic. They bring out the best in other people and know how to encourage them along. . . Civic entrepreneurs are doing nothing less than redefining a new type of business – government relationship, a new type of community. . . Civic entrepreneurs have five common traits. They:

1. See opportunity in the new economy.
2. Possess an entrepreneurial personality.
3. Provide collaborative leadership to connect the economy and the community.
4. Are motivated by broad, enlightened, long-term interests.
5. Work in teams, playing complementary roles.

(*Grassroots Leaders for a New Economy*, Henton, Melville and Welsh, 1997)

Doesn't that profile sound familiar? It's you! It's whom the Marshall revitalization effort must have to ignite and sustain the effort.

To make the tasks ahead seem a little less formidable, consider these helpful hints:

- ✓ Celebrate successes – large and small.
- ✓ Build a strong organization to prevent burnout and to focus on outcomes. Keep bring in new helpers to spread the work and the credit.
- ✓ Use meeting time wisely so volunteers feel their contribution of time is respected and appreciated.
- ✓ Build incrementally on success.
- ✓ Start with simple, basic projects that are visible and achievable.
- ✓ Develop a common vision and mission statement so all participants hold a mutual mental image of the ultimate objectives.
- ✓ Add to the recommendations in this report and then create a strategic plan to organize for action. Prioritize the recommendations and projects. Organize around the priorities.
- ✓ Build on the assets and strengths of Marshall. Use only those approaches that have integrity for the community.
- ✓ Work hard to build trust and a common will across community divisions.
- ✓ Be comprehensive in your approach. Work on several fronts at once, long-term and short-term projects. Think holistically.
- ✓ Be patient in the process and impatient in the doing.
- ✓ Demand excellence – from volunteers, to franchisees, to building owners, to new industries.
- ✓ Communicate. Keep the media informed. Be open about your successes *and* bumps along the way.
- ✓ Realize that it will not be possible to get full consensus on every action.
- ✓ Be inclusive. Talk to one another. But remember that eventually the group has to make decisions and move on and then modify those actions, if necessary.
- ✓ Take the time to evaluate your progress.
- ✓ Be accountable – for your actions, for progress, for the management of other peoples' money.
- ✓ Think boldly.
- ✓ Go with the flow.
- ✓ Don't let the naysayers get you down.

As a way of organizing the work ahead, it may be helpful to think in terms of projects that need to be addressed. The following are some of the projects suggested in this report.

## Sample Projects

The list below shows the shorter-term projects first, followed by those that most likely will take longer. The list does not take into consideration how many people will need to be involved, and what chance they have of succeeding. People in the community mentioned some projects and others were suggested by the Assessment Team.

### Near Term

- Fix the clock on the Courthouse.
- Pursue the National Register study list, which will lead to official designation as a National Register Historic District and make buildings that meet the established criteria eligible for tax credits.
- Plant trees on town property.
- Landscape the gravel area next to the Depot, and plant trees there as well.
- Pave and landscape parking lots the town owns.
- Do an inventory of downtown buildings including size of each floor, loading facilities, condition, and other features and enter it into a database to have ready for clients who want to rent or buy space.
- Have a meeting of business owners and invite the area staff person of the North Carolina Division of Emergency Management to discuss the regulations of the flood ordinance and how it affects existing buildings and undeveloped properties.
- Sponsor a contest for the new board/organization name. Secure a logo. Afterwards have one or more items for sale such as T-shirts, mugs, and canvas tote bags with the new logo printed on them for sale throughout the town to raise funds and awareness.
- Partner with county officials to determine how the former First Union bank building can best and most expeditiously be purchased by the county for additional office space.
- Have a work day on a building downtown that is need of sprucing up.
- Re-paint the "ghost sign" on the side of the old Roberts Pharmacy building across from the courthouse.
- As an aid to getting buildings fixed up, establish a contract between building owners and renters where rent is reduced in return for work being done by the renters.
- Begin work with North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) on the bridge replacement project to ensure that it meets the needs of pedestrians and bicyclists and is an attractive link to the island.

✿ **Longer Term**

- Undertake a water use survey of each property and help people conserve water through installation of low flow showerheads, flush reduction mechanisms and other means to make more water available for new businesses and residents.
- Provide more opportunities for young people in Marshall. One opportunity is the abandoned recreation area with the pool, tennis, and basketball courts; that could be restored and a skateboard area added.
- Build more sidewalks and places for people to ride bikes.
- Enact a parking lot landscape ordinance that applies to all commercial areas in Marshall.
- Sponsor an annual or bi-annual mural-painting contest. The murals from the previous contest could be painted over after the new winner had been chosen; this would give people a reason to re-visit the town.
- Sponsor a sidewalk chalk art contest for children.
- Establish a railroad excursion trip for passengers between Marshall, Hot Springs, and other scenic spots.
- Work with local banks to establish a low-interest loan pool.
- Organize a loan pool to help local businesses make improvements to their buildings. Offer a program that gives reduced rent in return for sweat equity. Use binding contracts/agreements.

With a clear sense of direction and vision, the necessary ingredients are present for successful community economic development. The Town has taken appropriate, initial steps to move ahead. Keep up the good work!

**Important Steps to Take Following the Community Assessment**

The following are steps that are crucial to building a strong foundation for years of revitalization and community development work. Although some of it is not showy work, it is critically important.

✿ **Build Support**

- Create awareness about the revitalization effort.
- Learn about downtown.
- Inventory local resources/assets – cultural, architectural, natural, social, historic.
- Expand the base of support.
- Gain local government support.

- Work with the media. Tell your story.
- Listen, listen, listen and talk, talk, talk.
- Create a common mental vision about the revitalized downtown among the participants.
- Identify and build on community assets.
- Become thoroughly familiar with the resource booklet.
- Choose a “sister city” and visit them.

✿ *Construct an Organization*

- Define an organizational structure, functions, and purpose.
- Develop a mission statement, goals, and objectives.
- Design an organization that fits the community and the opportunities.
- Develop a budget; set up a bank account.
- Identify sources and secure funding.
- Initiate committees and assign functions/duties.
- Write by-laws and gain legal incorporation.
- Choose board members and leadership.
- Learn from your experiences; process your journey.

✿ *Implement Projects*

- Establish general priorities and set annual goals.
- Weave projects into committee work.
- Find and integrate partners into the ongoing work.
- Build in accountabilities for money, goals, and projects.
- Choose strategic, high leverage projects and do them.
- Celebrate successes!

In the Assessment Report for Chimney Rock, North Carolina, prepared after their March 1996 Team Visit, this message opened the report and is applicable to Marshall:

✿ Value your community's heart  
✿ Plan and organize well  
✿ Participate  
✿ Persevere

✿ Invest  
✿ Be authentic  
✿ ENJOY!

✿ No risk, no gain  
✿ Work the plan  
✿ Tell your story  
✿ Find win-wins

Finally, enjoy the ride. Revitalization is an adventure! Everyone's help is needed to make it work. Celebrate your heritage! Celebrate your unique community! Celebrate your self-sufficiency! Build your image around it. And above all, honor and respect who you are!

A quotation from Ed William Wilson, III, reminds us of a way to exercise honor and respect. Mr. Wilson, a speaker at the *Save Our Mountains Forum and Tour*, spoke about Bakersville, one of the towns participating in HandMade in America's Small Towns Project:

In our nation, and all too often, the ability to exploit our resources for short term gain has outstripped our interest in, or understanding of, the consequences for the future. But we stand in a position today to address this imbalance, to act rather than react; to not simply plan for the future but to shape and mold it into a legacy we can give our children without excuse or regret.

We in Bakersville welcome opportunities that growth offers. . . . But not at the expense of the very things that define this place and our home. Our mountains, the oldest in the world, it is said. Our forests that cloak the hills with life. Our streams and rivers, the fresh waters basic to our life. We must demand that what would be new, accommodate, even embrace, that which is old. That those who come here seeking should also be willing to give in equal measure. And that those who make this home remember that it already is home. . . .

Deepest thanks from the Resource Team to our many hosts in Marshall for the manner in which you welcomed us and shared your special community.