

DESTINATION

# McDOWELL

TOURISM MASTER PLAN

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS  
SEPTEMBER 28, 2021

DESTINATION  
 BY DESIGN

PLANNING | ENGINEERING | COMMUNICATIONS

Eric Woolridge, AICP  
*President*

# PRESENTATION OVERVIEW

1. Destination McDowell: Process
2. Resident Survey Results
3. Recommendations: Total Summary Matrix
4. Recommendations: Highlights
  - a. Marion
  - b. Old Fort
  - c. Little Switzerland
  - d. County-wide Connections



DESTINATION

# McDOWELL

TOURISM MASTER PLAN

A 15-Year Tourism Infrastructure Master Plan  
for McDowell County, NC

FALL 2021



DESTINATION

# McDOWELL

## TOURISM MASTER PLAN

*Project Goals*

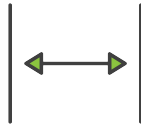
**ASSETS**



**PARTNERS**



**GAPS**



**UNITY**



**VISUAL**



**STRATEGY**



## 2.4 ASSET INVENTORY

This section provides an overview of tourism assets found throughout McDowell County and organizes them into four (4) major asset types including: 1) Natural Resources; 2) Outdoor Recreation and Managed Areas; 3) Main Street Communities; and 4) Historic and Cultural Resources. Each asset is located on an inventory map and listed within the asset types. Exhibits highlight signature tourism assets within the County.

### MCDOWELL COUNTY BY THE NUMBERS

TOTAL LAND AREA OF MCDOWELL COUNTY	<b>281,600 ACRES</b>
TOTAL ACRES OF CONSERVED LAND	<b>98,368 OR 35%</b>
ACRES OF PISGAH NATIONAL FOREST	<b>73,728</b>
ELEVATION RANGE	<b>4,695 FEET (970-5,665 FEET)</b>
MILES OF CATAWBA RIVER	<b>28</b>
MILES OF TROUT STREAMS	<b>268</b>
SQUARE MILES OF LAKE JAMES	<b>4 (2,560 ACRES)</b>
# OF MAJOR WATERFALLS	<b>4</b>
MILES OF BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY	<b>34</b>
# OF BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY ACCESS POINTS	<b>3</b>
MILES OF USFS GRAVEL ROADS	<b>53</b>
MILES OF PLANNED STATE TRAILS	<b>86</b>
MILES OF EXISTING TRAILS	<b>140</b>



## ASSET TYPES

### Natural Resources



McDowell County is fortunate to have abundant natural resources which provide vast potential for the enhancement and development of outdoor recreation opportunities. The topography of the area's mountains, deep valleys, and unspoiled foothills, in concert with their associated watersheds, forests, and streams, bestow the County with extensive natural assets attractive to outdoor enthusiasts.

### Outdoor Recreation and Managed Areas



The County contains a significant number of conserved lands and managed areas, which provide outdoor recreation facilities and opportunities for residents and visitors. Parks, public lands, multiple-use trails, and paddle accesses offer a variety of recreational activities for people of all ages and abilities.

### Main Street Communities

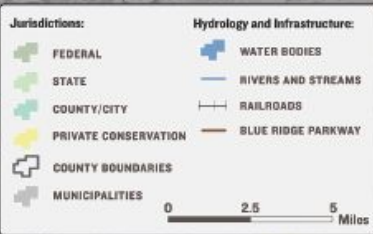


The Downtown Main Street Communities in the City of Marion, Town of Old Fort, and Little Switzerland provide dining, shopping, and public spaces that serve both community needs and tourist interests.

### Historic and Cultural Resources



The County is steeped in Southern Appalachian culture and has a deeply rooted history that includes a strong Native American heritage. The past is remembered at a number of area museums and historical sites while the essence of local culture is proudly displayed, often in the form of mountain food, music, arts and crafts, and many other diverse community pastimes and traditions.



ASSET INVENTORY KEY



NATURAL RESOURCES

- 1 Kitsuma Peak
- 2 Catawba Falls
- 3 Young's Ridge
- 4 Mill Creek
- 5 Heartbreak Ridge
- 6 Newberry Creek
- 7 Curtis Creek
- 8 Hickory Branch Falls
- 9 Buck Creek
- 10 Crabtree Falls
- 11 Pisgah National Forest
- 12 Woods Mountain
- 13 Armstrong Creek
- 14 Tom's Creek Falls
- 15 North Fork Catawba River
- 16 Linville Falls
- 17 Linville Gorge
- 18 Catawba River
- 19 Lake James
- 20 Box Creek Wilderness
- 21 Boba Creek State Natural Area



OUTDOOR RECREATION & MANAGED AREAS

- 22 Andrew's Geyser
- 23 Camp Grier
- 24 Old Fort Ride House
- 25 Crabtree Falls Campground
- 26 Emerald Village
- 27 Armstrong Fish Hatchery
- 28 Blue Ridge Parkway
- 29 Mountains to Sea Trail
- 30 Pisgah Gamelands
- 31 Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail
- 32 Black Bear Rock Access
- 33 Pleasant Garden Paddle Access/Greenlee Park
- 34 Flora Flora State Trail
- 35 Catawba River Joseph McDowell Greenway
- 36 Phillips Landing Paddle Access
- 37 Peavine Trail
- 38 Lake James State Park - Catawba River Section
- 39 Hidden Cove Access
- 40 Wilderness Gateway State Trail
- 41 Linville Caverns



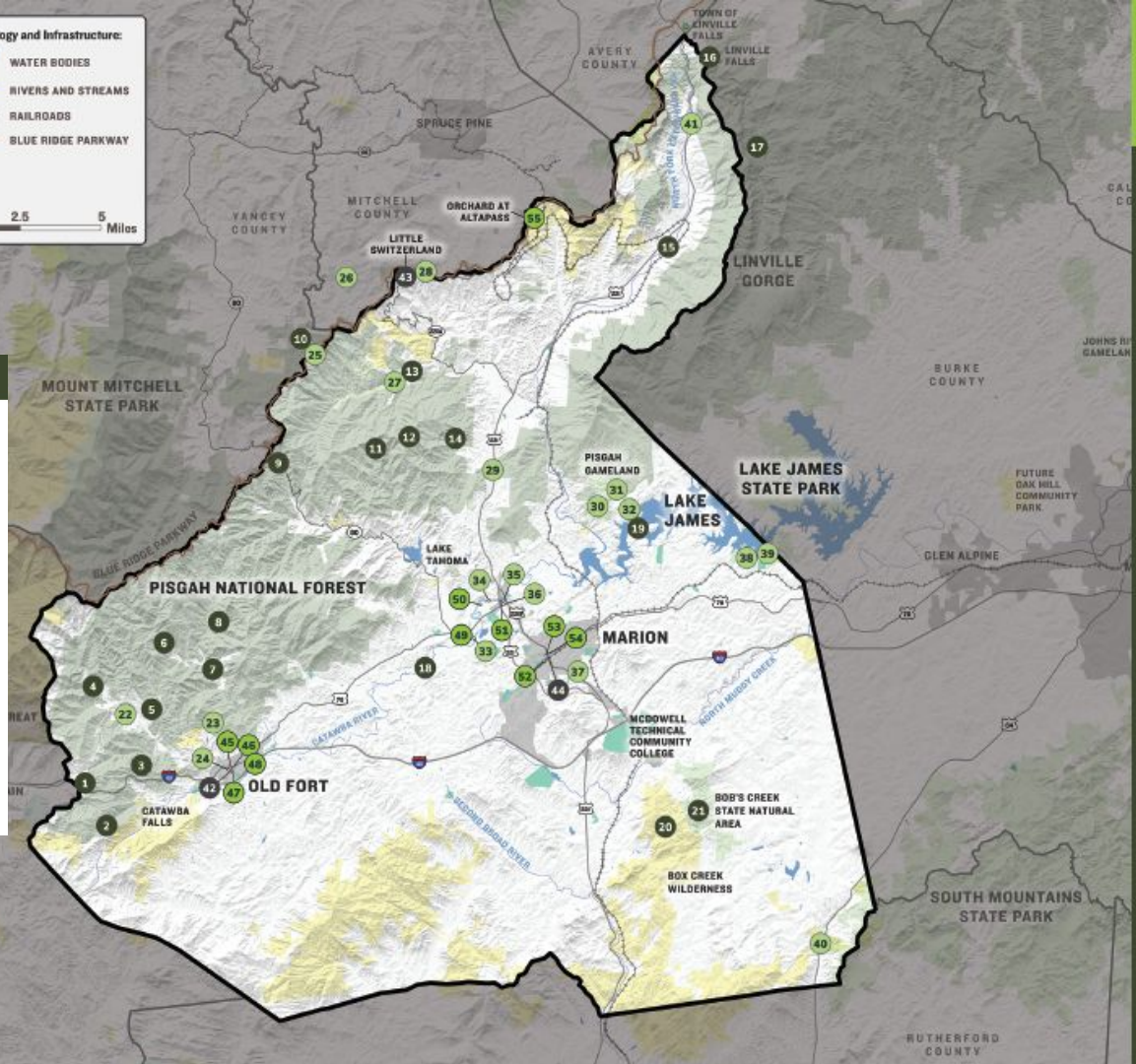
MAIN STREET COMMUNITIES

- 42 Old Fort
- 43 Little Switzerland
- 44 Marion



HISTORIC & CULTURAL RESOURCES

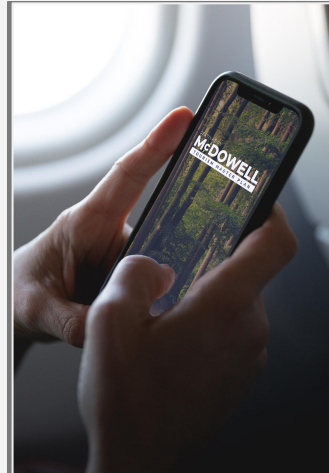
- 45 Old Fort Train Depot
- 46 Old Fort Arrowhead Monument
- 47 Mountain Gateway Museum
- 48 Davidson's Fort Historic Park
- 49 Historic Carson House & Arbor
- 50 Round Hill Cemetery
- 51 Joseph McDowell House
- 52 Marion Depot
- 53 Marion Municipal Event Center
- 54 McDowell County Arts Council
- 55 Orchard at Altapass



# TOOLS OF ENGAGEMENT



- Public Engagement Video (Facebook advertising)
- Website Portal
- Online Survey for ALL Citizens





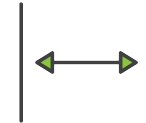


## Focus Groups & Interviews

1. McDowell County Reps
2. Marion Reps
3. Downtown Marion Walking Tour
4. G5 Trail Collective/ USFS
5. Old Fort Business Community
6. Community Forum/ People on the Move
7. Little Switzerland Business Community
8. Orchard at Altapass
9. NC Division of Parks & Recreation
10. Friends of Fonta Flora State Trail



GAPS

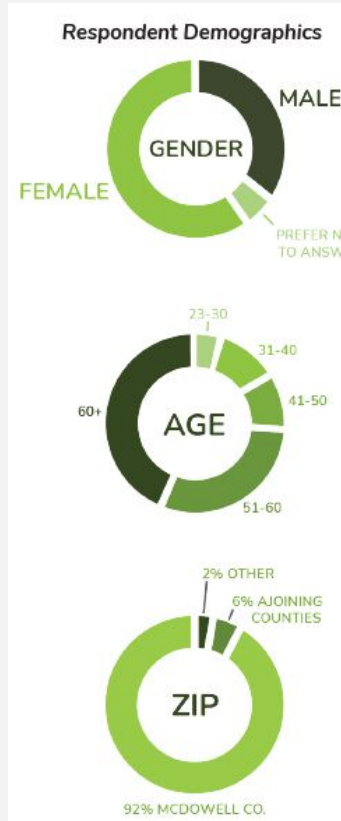


UNITY



# RESIDENT SURVEY RESULTS

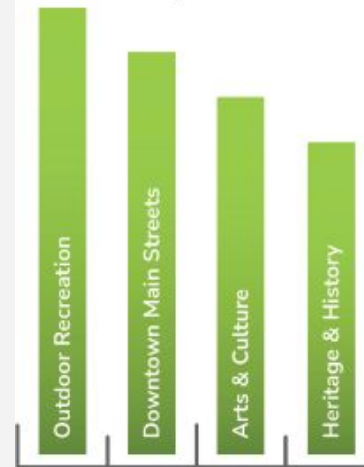
- Assets residents feel are important
- Distributed by MCTDA, Town, City, and County officials and stakeholder groups via web, email, and social media.
- **210 respondents** between April 20 and June 3, 2021.



How important is tourism?



Tourism Categories in Order of Importance



# RESIDENT SURVEY RESULTS

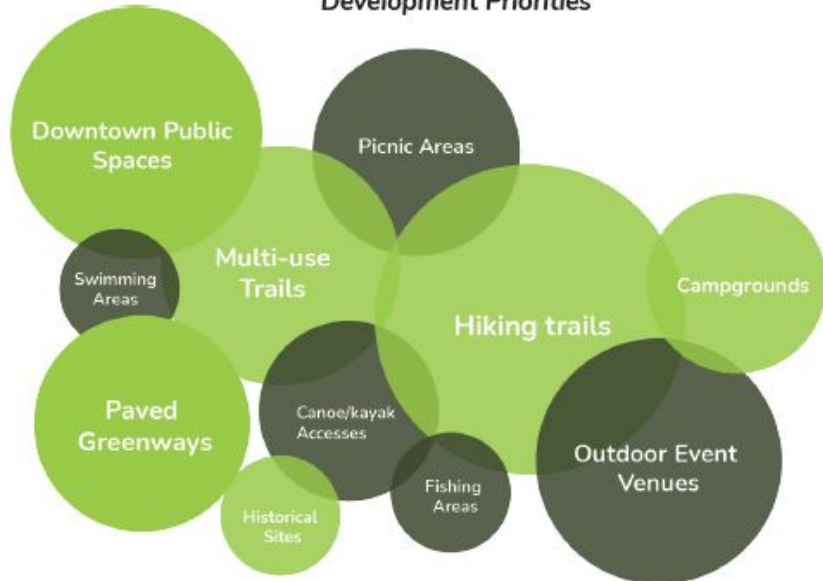
## Barriers to Access



## Top Four Downtown Priorities



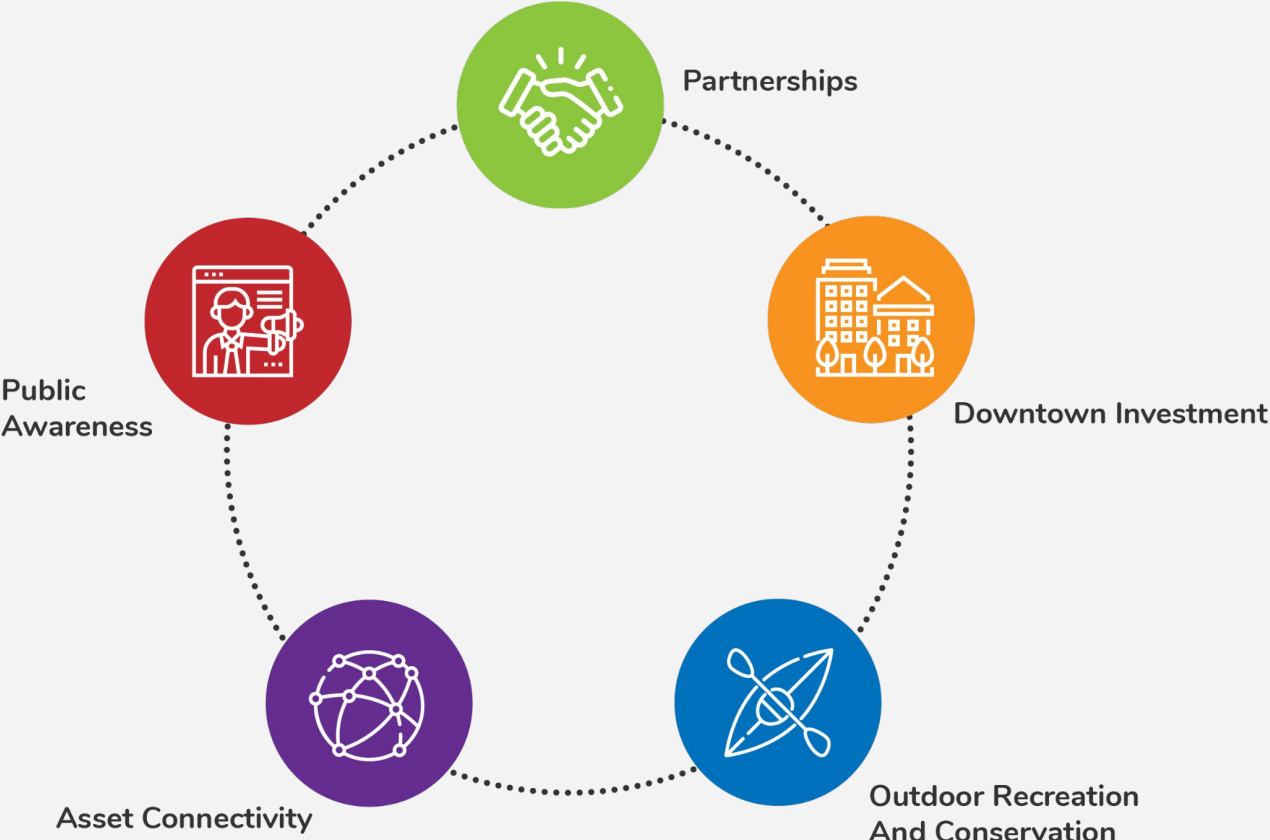
## Development Priorities



## Top Three Natural Assets



# EMERGING THEMES



# RECOMMENDATION HIGHLIGHTS

## 1. Marion

- a. Streetscape Master Plan (W. Henderson + Logan)
- b. Peavine Trail
- c. McDowell House (in progress)

## 2. Old Fort

- a. Curtis Creek Trailhead
- b. Fonta Flora Trailhead
- c. Streetscape Master Plan

## 3. Little Switzerland

- a. Streetscape Plan & Signage
- b. Altapass Orchard

## 4. County-wide Connections

- a. Upper Catawba River Paddle Trail
- b. State-designated Trails and Connectors

## 5. Total Matrix Review



# MARION



## Recommendation Highlights



# MARION STUDY AREA



**LEGEND**

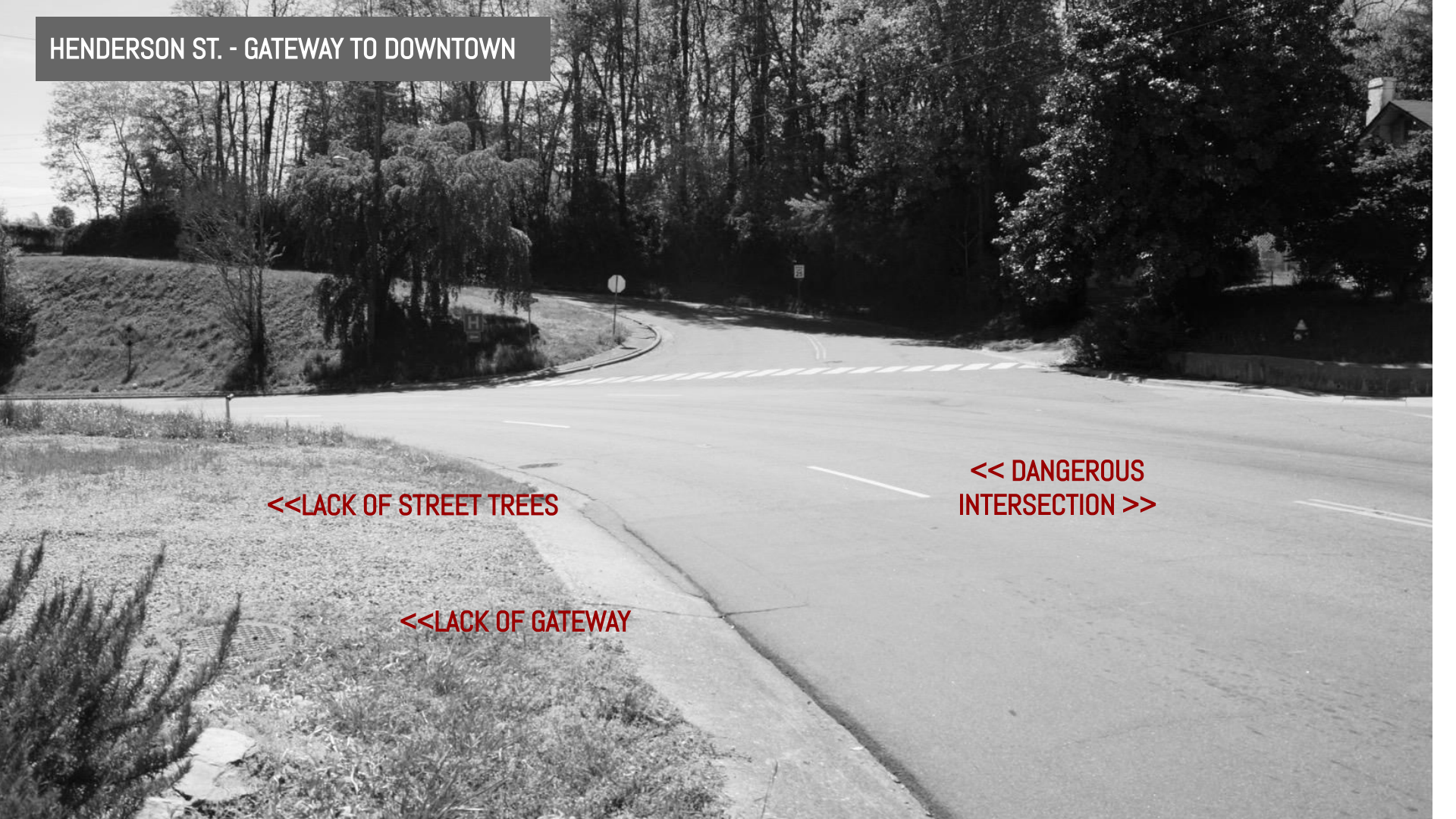
-  STREETScape STUDY AREA
-  STATE-OWNED PROPERTY

HENDERSON ST. - GATEWAY TO DOWNTOWN

<<LACK OF STREET TREES

<<LACK OF GATEWAY

<< DANGEROUS  
INTERSECTION >>





HENDERSON ST. - GATEWAY TO DOWNTOWN

<< POWERLINE CLUTTER >>

<< LARGE PARKING LOT >>

LACK OF STREET TREES >>

<< NARROW SIDEWALK >>

<< WIDE LANES >>



LACK OF PEDESTRIAN  
CONNECTIVITY TO ENTRANCE

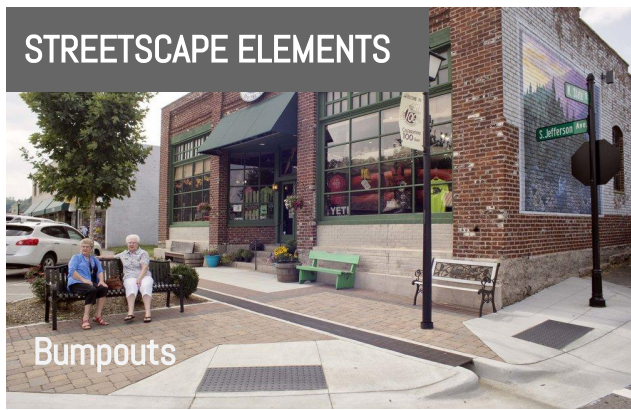


LACK OF STREET TREES/  
LANDSCAPE BUFFER >>>

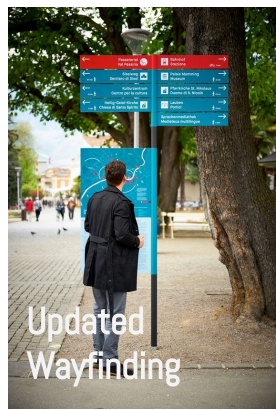
<< SIGNAGE  
DIFFICULT TO READ



# STREETSCAPE ELEMENTS



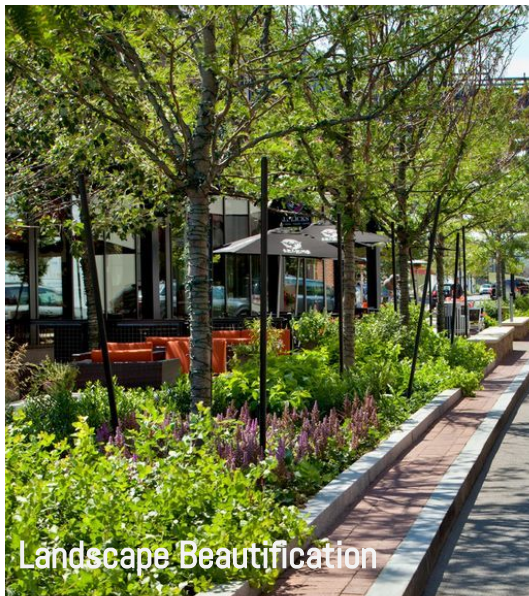
Bumpouts



Updated Wayfinding



Bumpouts + Crossings



Landscape Beautification



Street Trees



Lighting



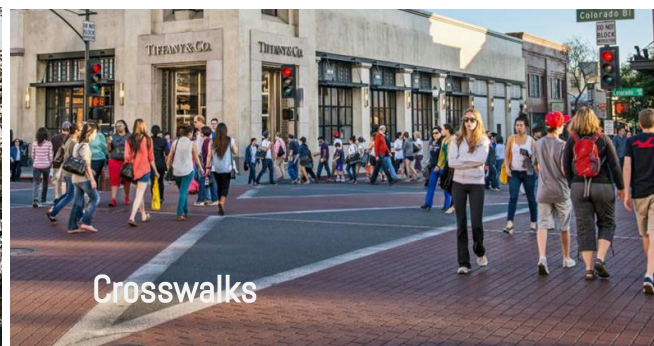
Bike Parking



Bike Parking



Seasonal Banners



Crosswalks

# STREETSCAPE PLAN



# STREETSCAPE PLAN



HENDERSON AND LOGAN

W COURT ST.

LOGAN ST.

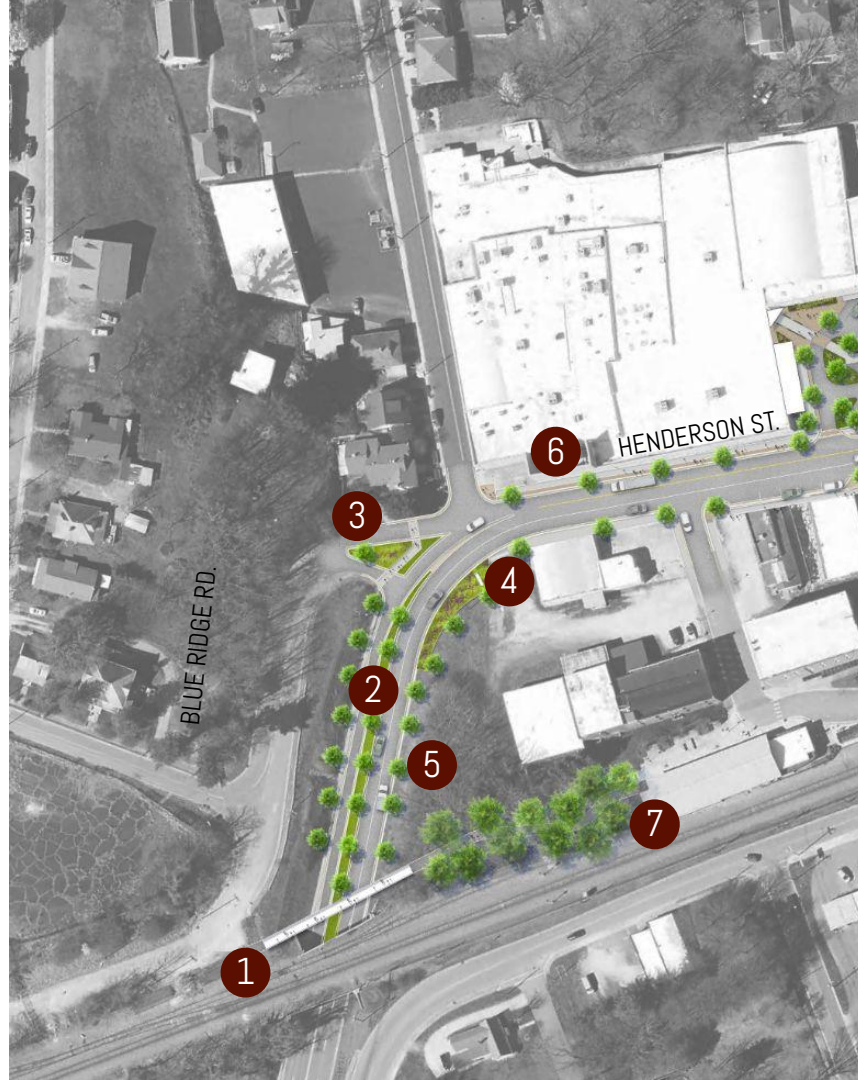
HENDERSON GATEWAY

HENDERSON ST.

MAIN ST.

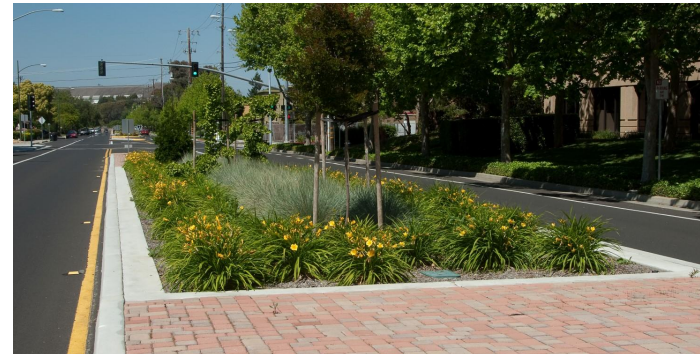
## STREETSCAPE PLAN

1. Pedestrian Bridge
2. Traffic Calming Median
3. Left-Turn Restriction and Safe Crossing
4. Downtown Gateway
5. Tree Planting
6. Streetscape Enhancement
7. Pedestrian Access at the Depot



Median/Boulevard

Precedent Images



# Pedestrian Bridge

# Precedent Images





# GATEWAY

## Precedent Images



## STREETSCAPE PLAN

1. Henderson and Logan Intersection Improvement
2. Entrance Plaza/Gateway
3. Improved Parking Lot Circulation and Connectivity
4. Logan St. Streetscape - Some Reduced On-Street Parking
5. Court and Logan Intersection Improvement
6. Streetscape Enhancement



HENDERSON ST. NORTH-  
EXISTING



HENDERSON ST. NORTH -  
PROPOSED



LOGAN ST. - EXISTING



# LOGAN ST. - PROPOSED



HENDERSON ST. SOUTH-  
EXISTING



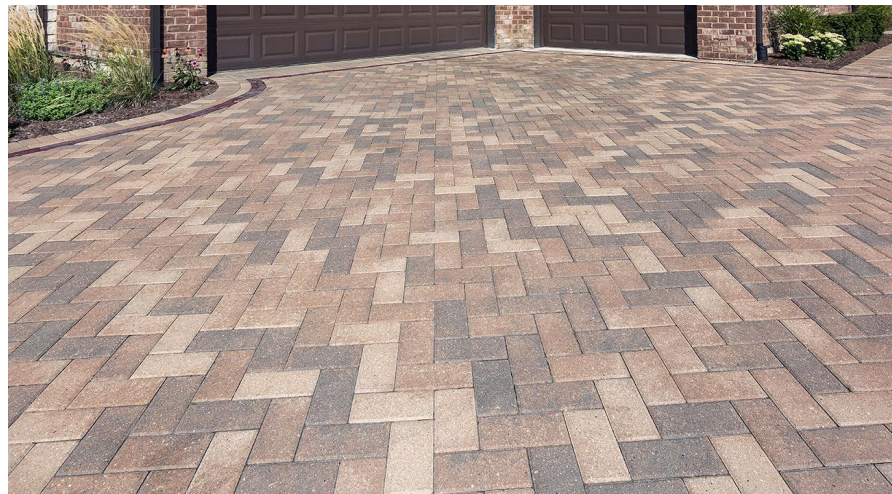
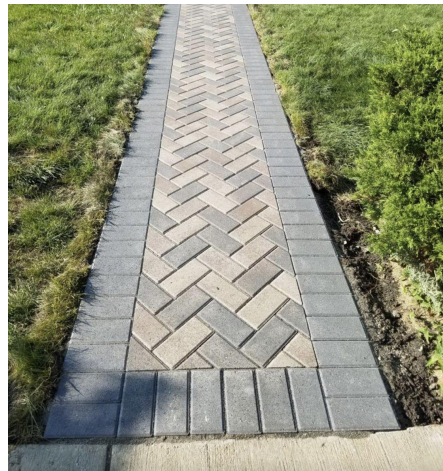
HENDERSON ST. SOUTH -  
PROPOSED





Paver Type

Precedent Images



Corner Plaza:  
Logan/Henderson Intersection

Precedent Images



# Peavine

## Recommendation Highlights





  
**PEAVINE**  
RAIL TRAIL





# 1. State Street Trailhead

Option 1



Trail to Future  
Multi-Family  
Homes

21 Typical Spaces  
and 2 ADA Spaces

Ramp up to  
Trailhead

Entry Arbor and  
Fencing

Storage

# 1. State Street Trailhead

Option 2



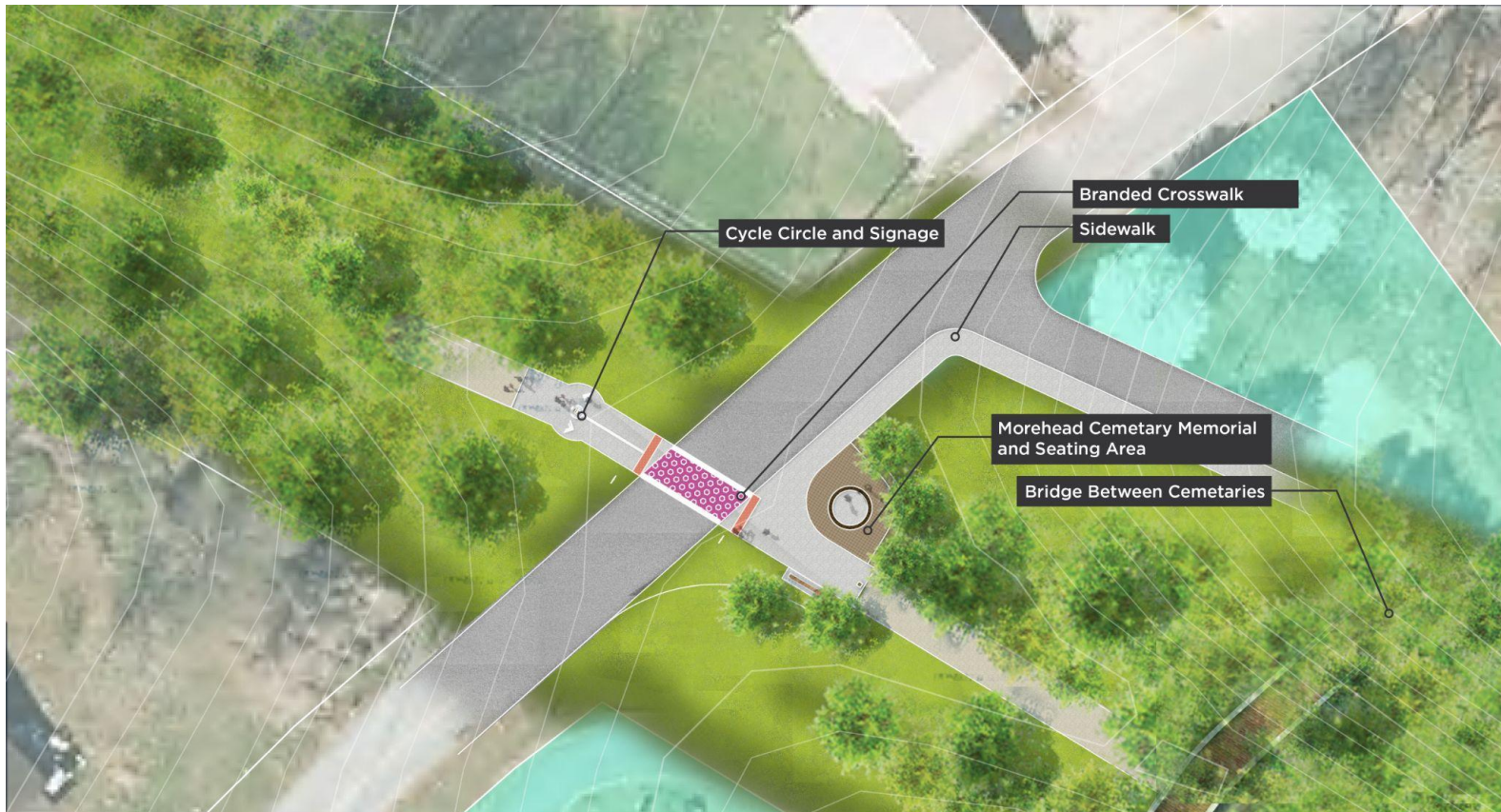






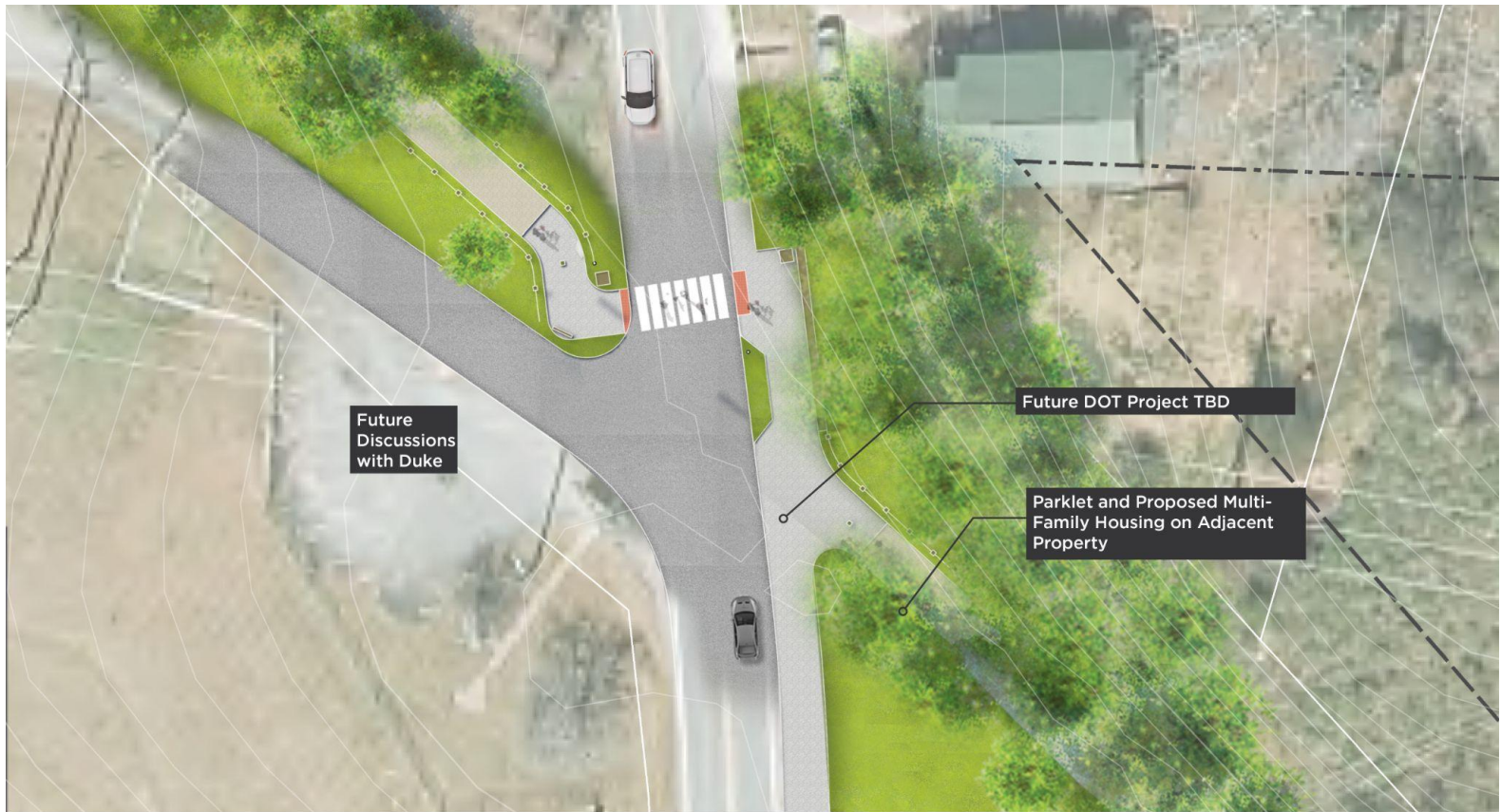
## 2. Alabama Ave and Virginia Ave

Site Plan



### 3. Georgia Ave

Site Plan and Morehead Memorial



## 4. Baldwin Ave

Site Plan



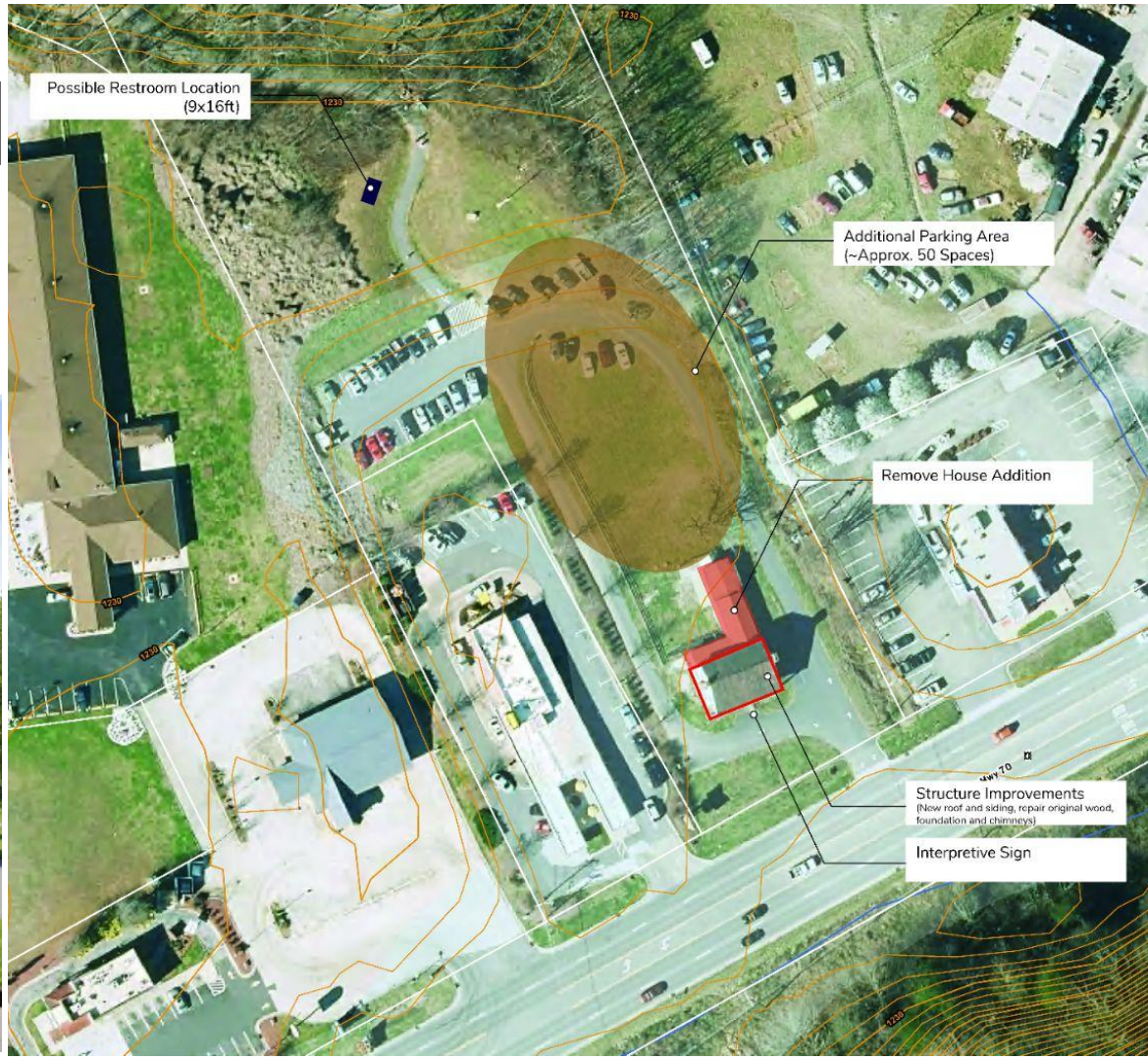


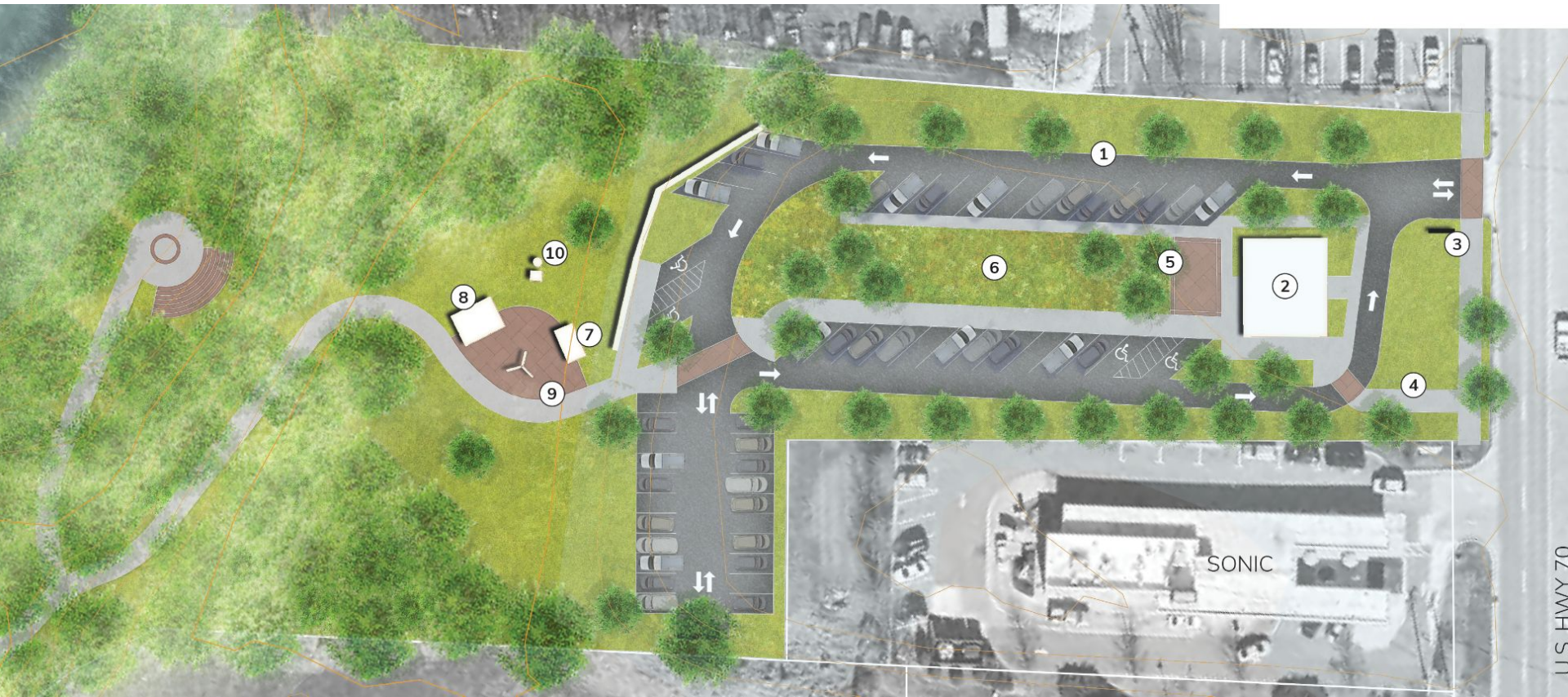


# Marion Street

Site Plan

# McDowell House





U.S. HWY 70

SONIC





**KEY FEATURES**

- 1. Expanded Parking with Enhanced One-way Circulation  
Total- 65  
New-61  
ADA-4
- 2. Renovated McDowell House
- 3. Entrance Sign
- 4. FFST Trail Connection
- 5. Drop-off and Plaza
- 6. Bioswale
- 7. Restroom
- 8. Picnic Shelter
- 9. Trailhead Plaza
- 10. Flag Pole
- 11. Upper Catawba River Trail  
Phillips Landing Access



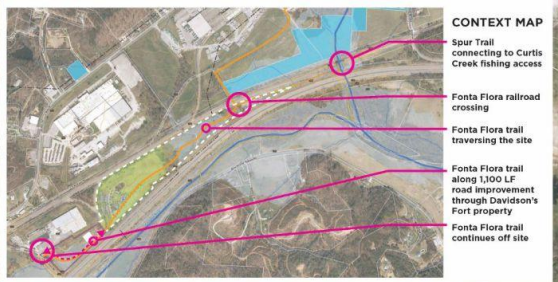


# Old Fort

## Recommendation Highlights



# FFST TRAILHEAD

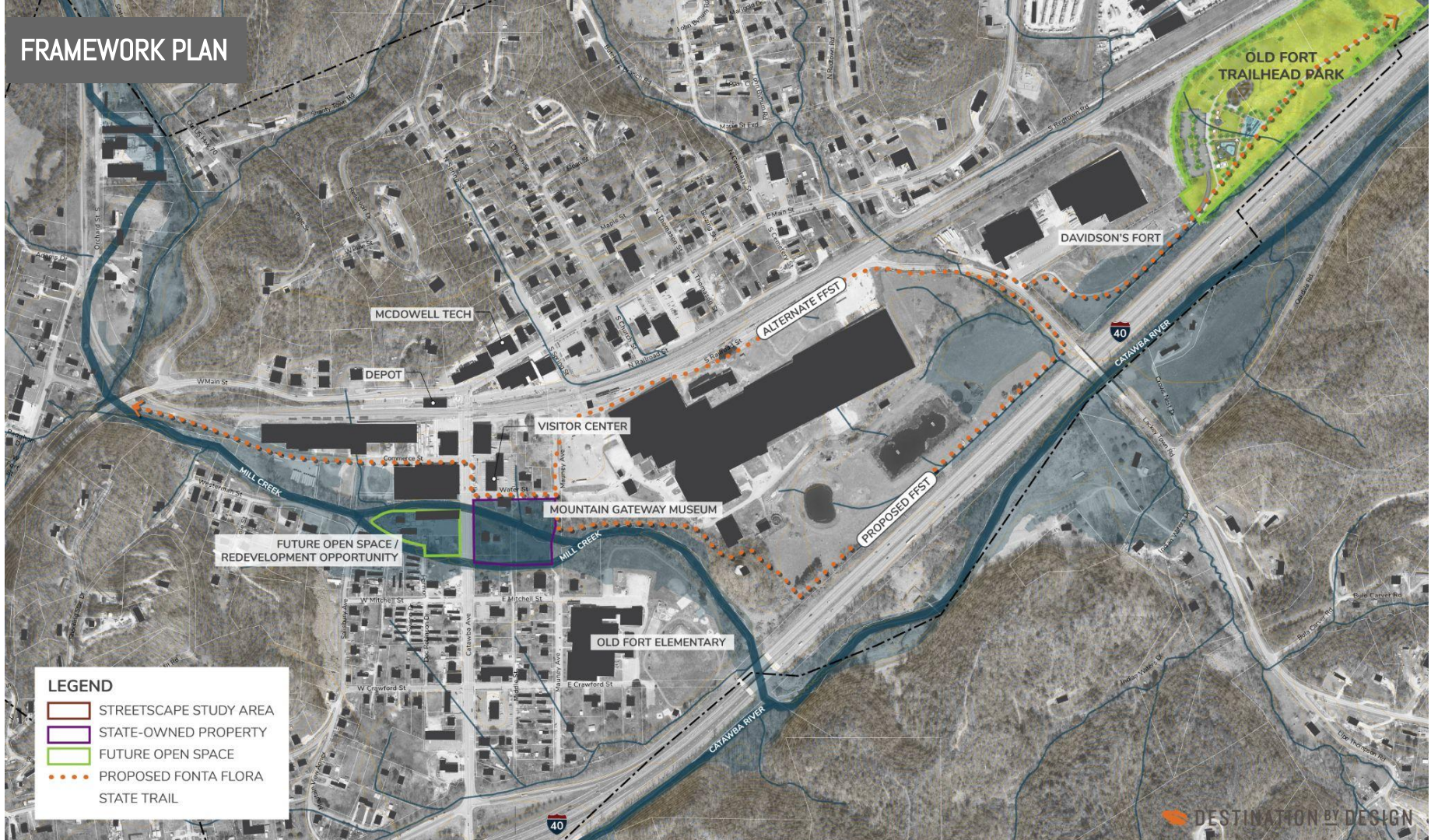


- CONTEXT MAP**
- Spur Trail connecting to Curtis Creek fishing access
  - Fonta Flora railroad crossing
  - Fonta Flora trail traversing the site
  - Fonta Flora trail along 1,000 LF road improvement through Davidson's Fort property
  - Fonta Flora trail continues off site

- KEY**
- BIKE GARDEN AND PLAYGROUND
  - PARKING LOT WITH 100 SPACES
  - SPLASH PAD WITH PICNIC SHELTERS AND SHADE SAIL
  - CENTRAL GREEN EVENT LAWN
  - PUMP TRACK
  - DOG PARK WITH LARGE AND SMALL DOG AREAS
  - POLLINATOR MEADOW
  - MOWED PATH THROUGH MEADOW
  - SHADE TREE ALLEE ALONG THE FONTA FLORA TRAIL
  - SHADED SEATING
  - FITNESS PLAYSCAPE
  - HAMMOCK GROVE
  - TRAILHEAD FACILITIES WITH RESTROOM AND PICNIC SHELTER
  - RAIN GARDEN AND STORMWATER MANAGEMENT



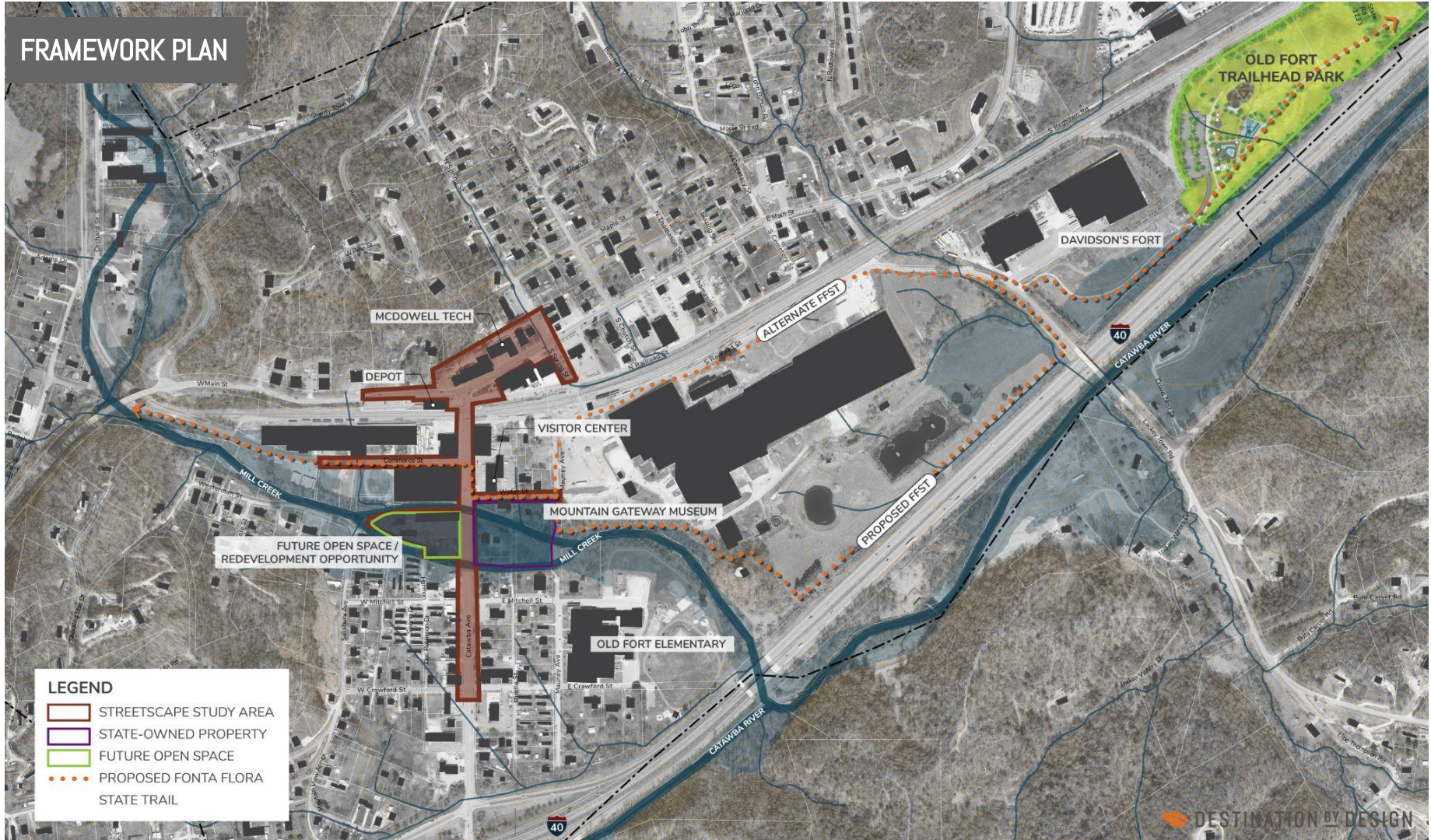
# FRAMEWORK PLAN



## LEGEND

- STREETSCAPE STUDY AREA
- STATE-OWNED PROPERTY
- FUTURE OPEN SPACE
- PROPOSED FONTA FLORA STATE TRAIL

# FRAMEWORK PLAN



## LEGEND

-  STREETScape STUDY AREA
-  STATE-OWNED PROPERTY
-  FUTURE OPEN SPACE
-  PROPOSED FONTA FLORA STATE TRAIL

# FRAMEWORK PLAN

## STREETSCAPE FOCUS AREA

MCDOWELL TECH

DEPOT

VISITOR CENTER

MOUNTAIN GATEWAY MUSEUM

OLD FORT ELEMENTARY

DAVIDSON'S FORT

OLD FORT  
TRAILHEAD PARK

ALTERNATE FPST

PROPOSED FPST

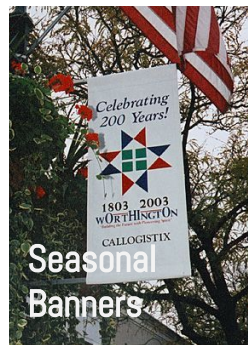
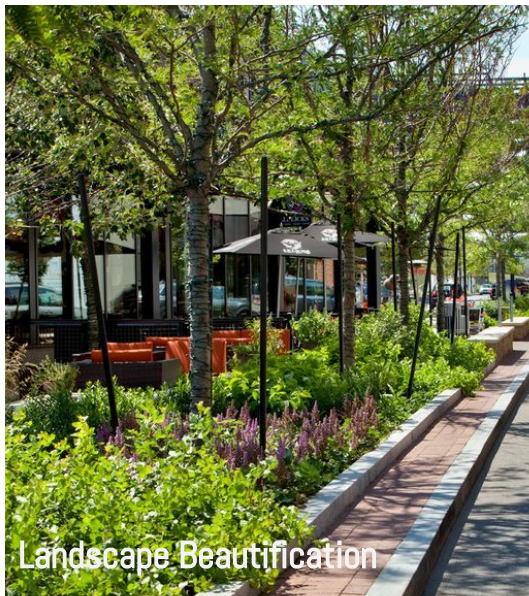
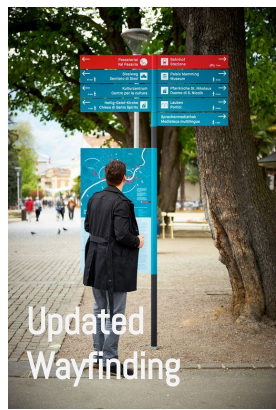
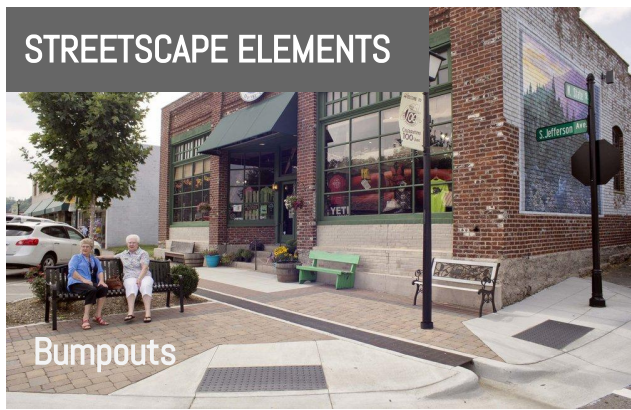
FUTURE OPEN SPACE/  
REDEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY

### LEGEND

-  STREETSCAPE STUDY AREA
-  STATE-OWNED PROPERTY
-  FUTURE OPEN SPACE
-  PROPOSED FONTA FLORA STATE TRAIL



# STREETSCAPE ELEMENTS



# STREETSCAPE PLAN



# STREETSCAPE PLAN



MAIN STREET



NORTH CATAWBA



SOUTH CATAWBA

**Existing Conditions:  
South Catawba**

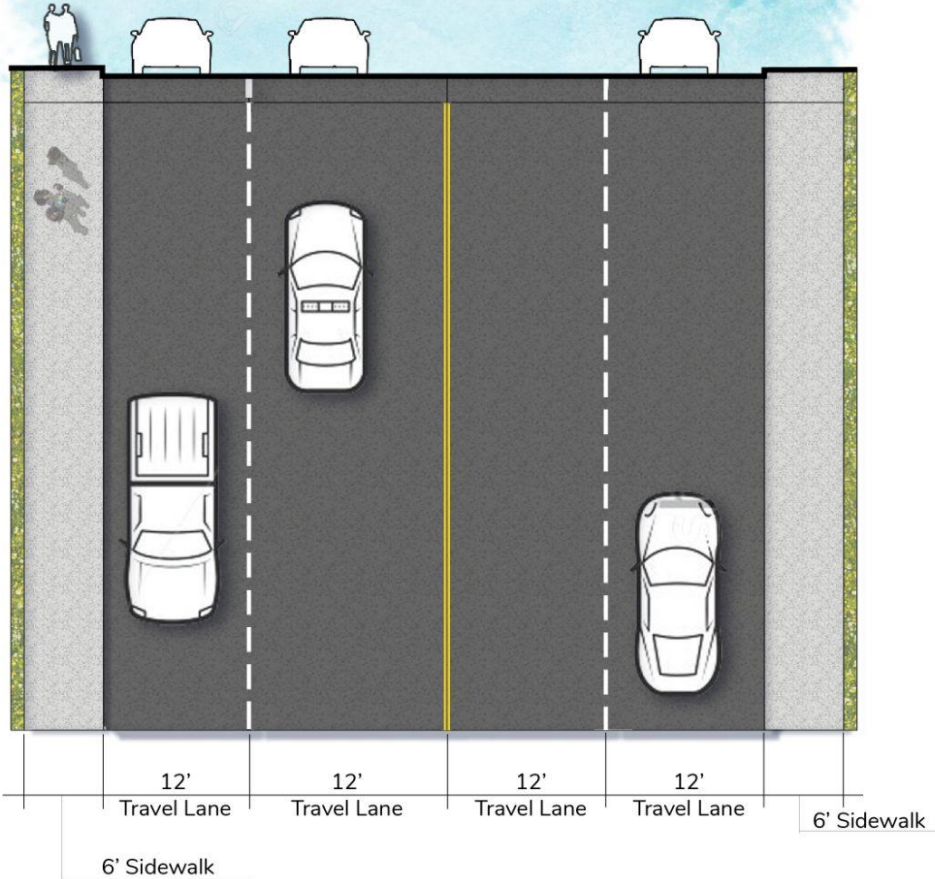


<< NARROW SIDEWALK

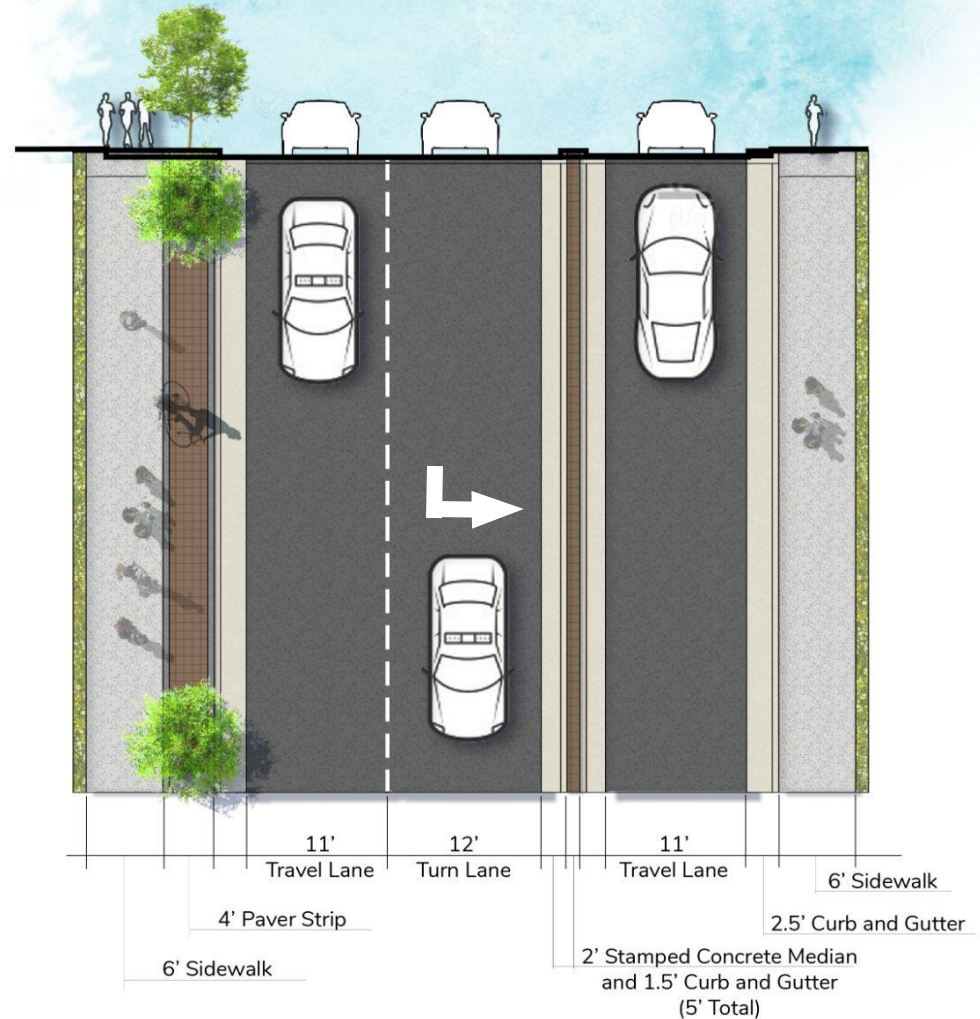
<< WIDE LANES >>

LACK OF STREET TREES >>

# Existing Conditions: South Catawba



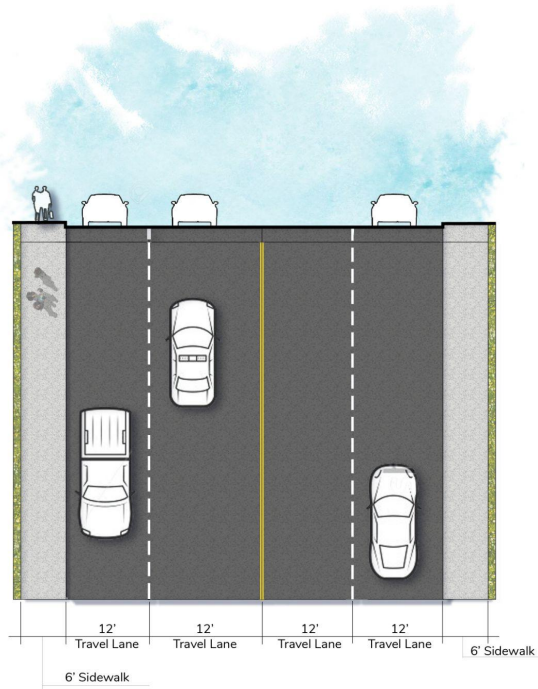
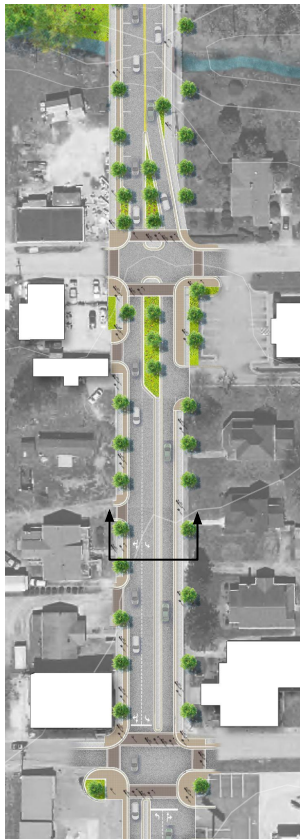
# Proposed Conditions: South Catawba



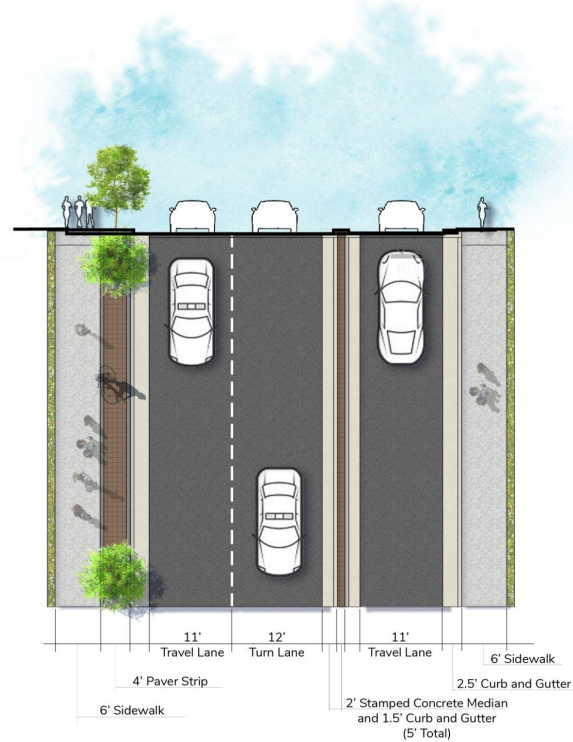
# SOUTH CATAWBA



# SOUTH CATAWBA



EXISTING CONDITIONS



PROPOSED CONDITIONS



Existing  
Conditions:  
North Catawba



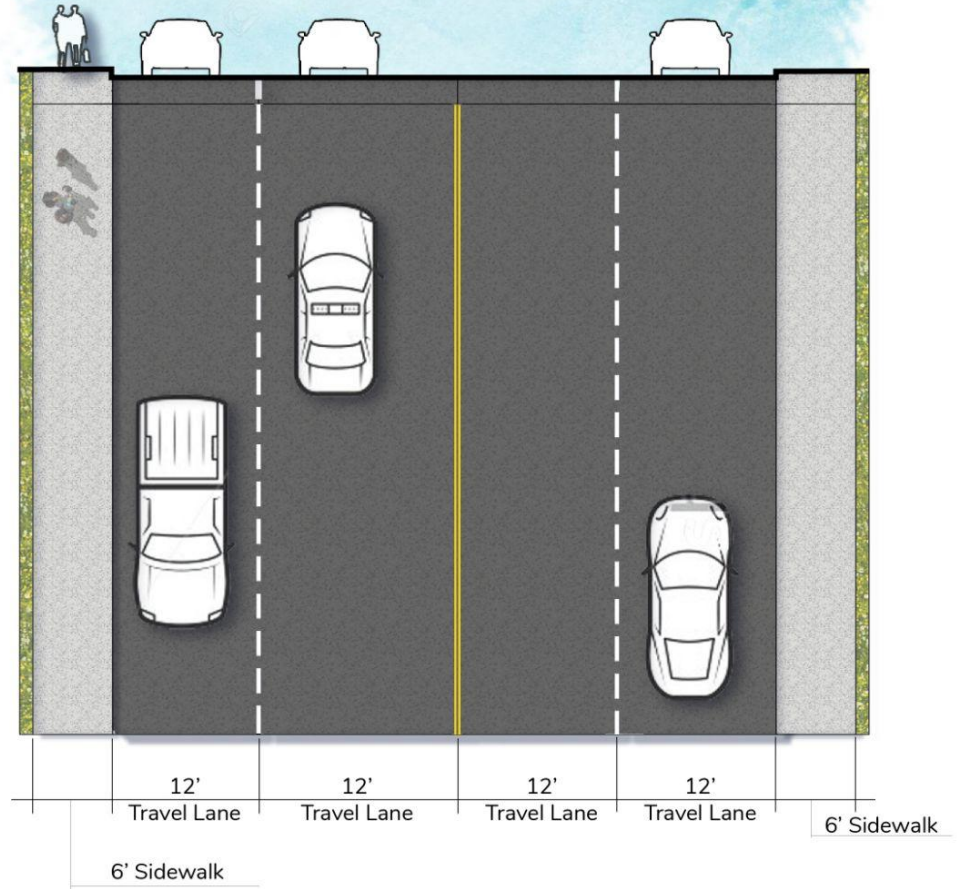




# NORTH CATAWBA



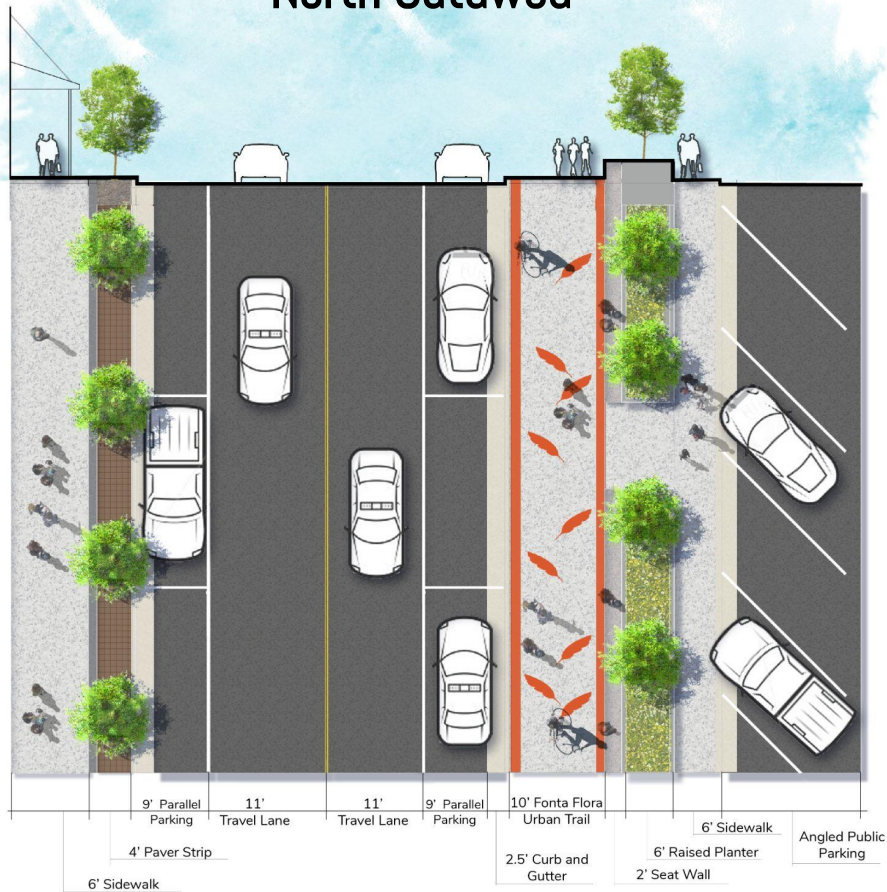
# Existing Conditions: North Catawba



# NORTH CATAWBA



# Proposed Conditions: North Catawba



COMMERCE STREET

OPEN FRONTAGE >>

<< EXPOSED LOADING DOCKS, NO  
FORMAL DELINEATION

LACK OF CONTINUOUS CURB,  
GUTTER, AND SIDEWALKS >>

# NORTH CATAWBA - COMMERCE STREET







# NORTH CATAWBA - COMMERCE STREET



# 118 CATAWBA: Future Mill Creek Park



# Mill Creek Park



**MAIN STREET**



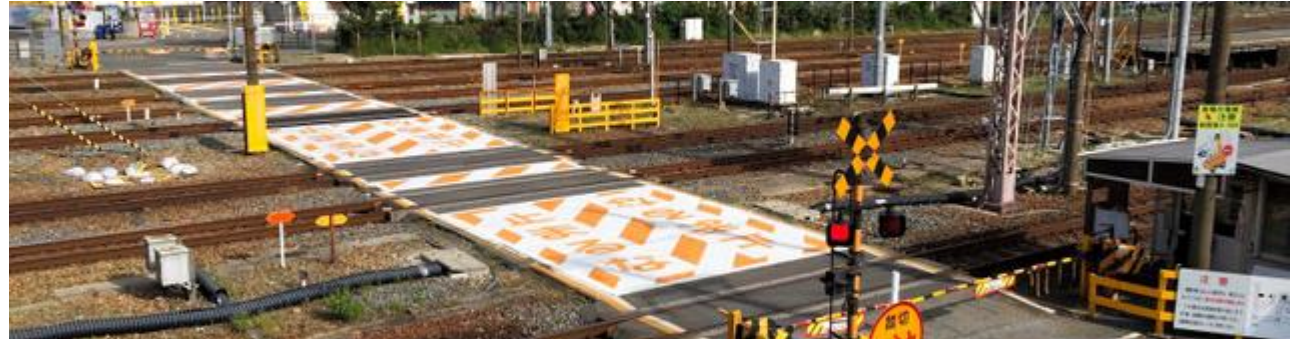
**POWER LINE/POLE CLUTTER >>**

**LACK OF PEDESTRIAN CROSSING >>**

**<< OPEN FRONTAGE TO TOWN HALL**

# MAIN STREET

## Railroad Crossing Thermoplastic Paint Precedents



MAIN STREET



OVERHEAD UTILITIES >>

<< OPEN FRONTAGE / LACK OF SIDEWALK

<< LACK OF ON STREET PARALLEL PARKING

OPEN FRONTAGE >>

NARROW SIDEWALK FOR MAIN ST.>>

MAIN STREET



<< WIDE SPRING ST >>

<< OPPORTUNITY FOR A  
THRESHOLD MOMENT >>

OPEN FRONTAGE >>





MAIN STREET

OPPORTUNITY FOR STRONGER  
CONNECTION TO PARKING LOT

PUBLIC PLAZA ENHANCEMENT  
OPPORTUNITY

<< OPPORTUNITY FOR A  
THRESHOLD MOMENT

OPEN FRONTAGE >>



MAIN STREET



# CURTIS CREEK TRAILHEAD



Existing Parking Repurposed to 4 ADA Parking Spaces

Restroom (10' x 20')

All Use Trail

Biorestation

Picnic Area

87 Typical Parking Spaces

Hike and Bike

Directional Signage Signage

CURTIS CREEK ROAD

Equestrian One Way Only

Restroom (10' x 20')

6 Pull Through (55' x 18') and 6 Parallel Equestrian Spaces (20' x 60')

All Use Trail

Biorestation

Biorestation

Typical Car DO NOT ENTER Sign

92 Typical Parking Spaces  
4 ADA Spaces

Archeological Site Boundary

Hiking Only

Watering Hole



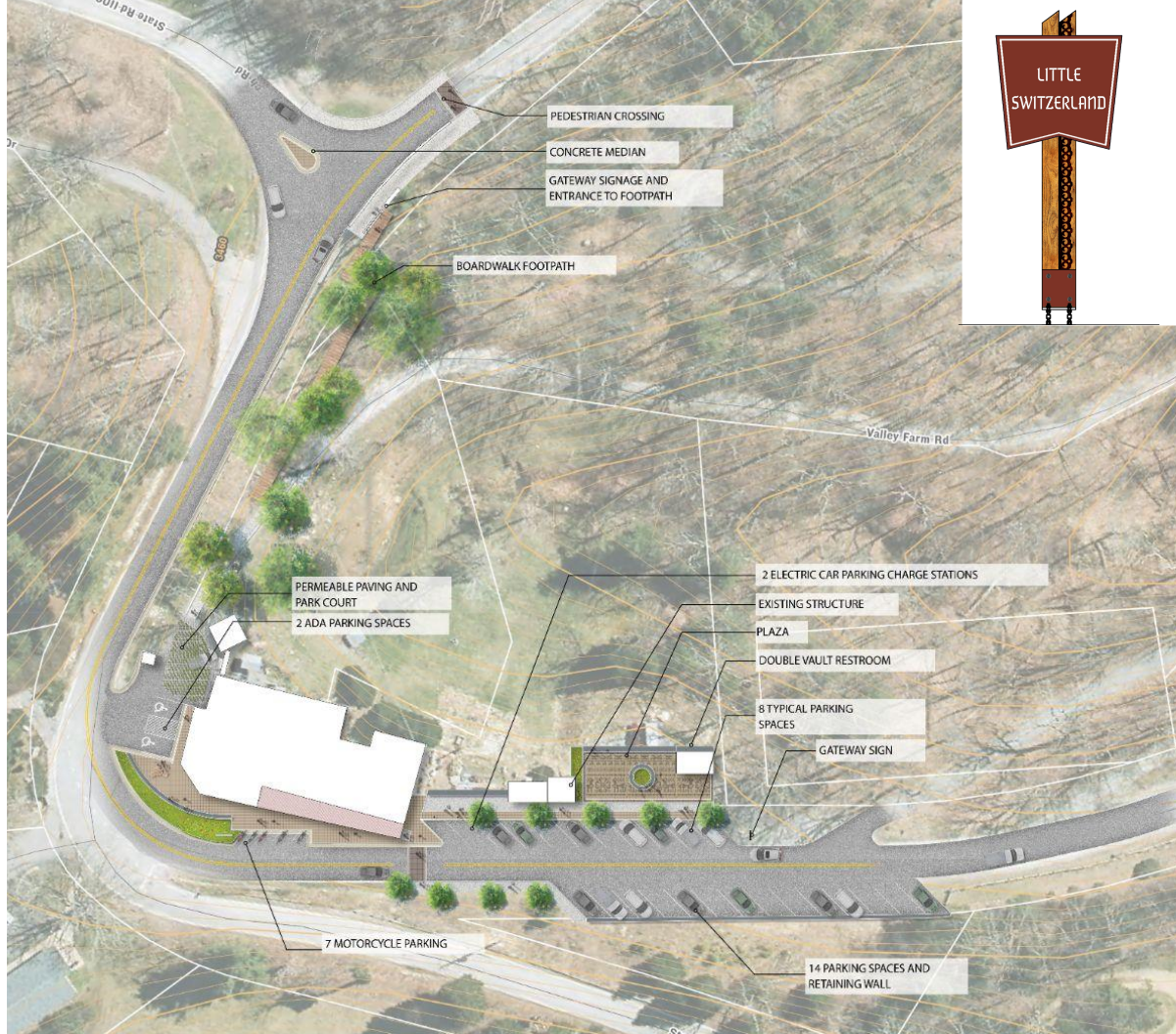
# Little Switzerland

## Recommendation Highlights



# STREETSCAPE PLAN

## PRECEDENT IMAGES



# THE ORCHARD AT ALTAPASS



# THE ORCHARD AT ALTAPASS



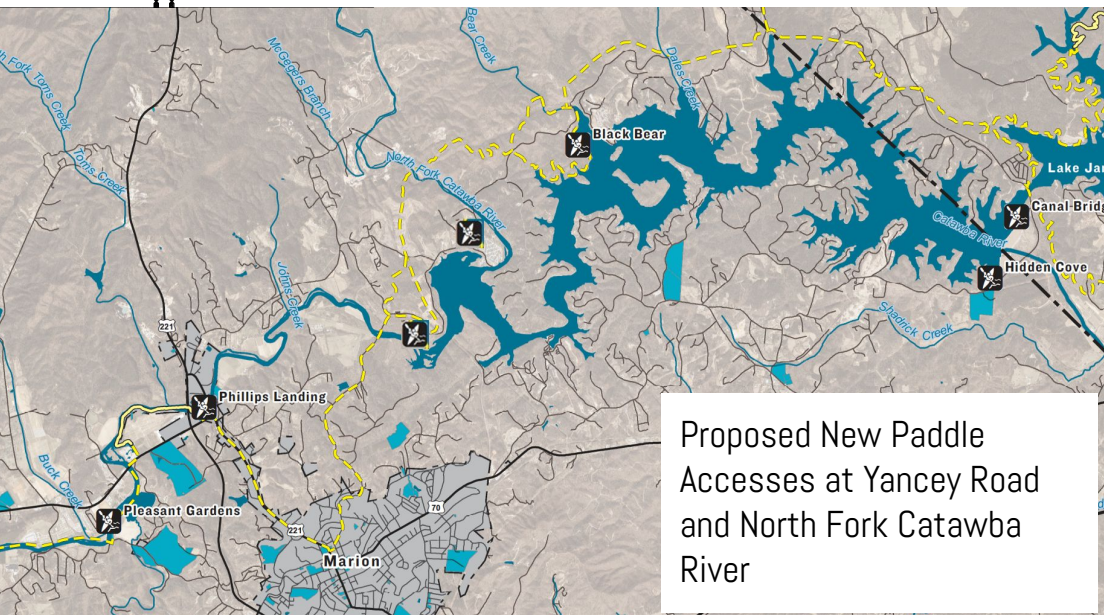
# COUNTY-WIDE CONNECTIONS



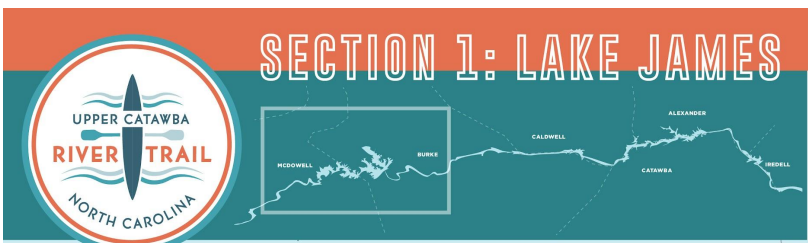




# Upper Catawba River Paddle Trail



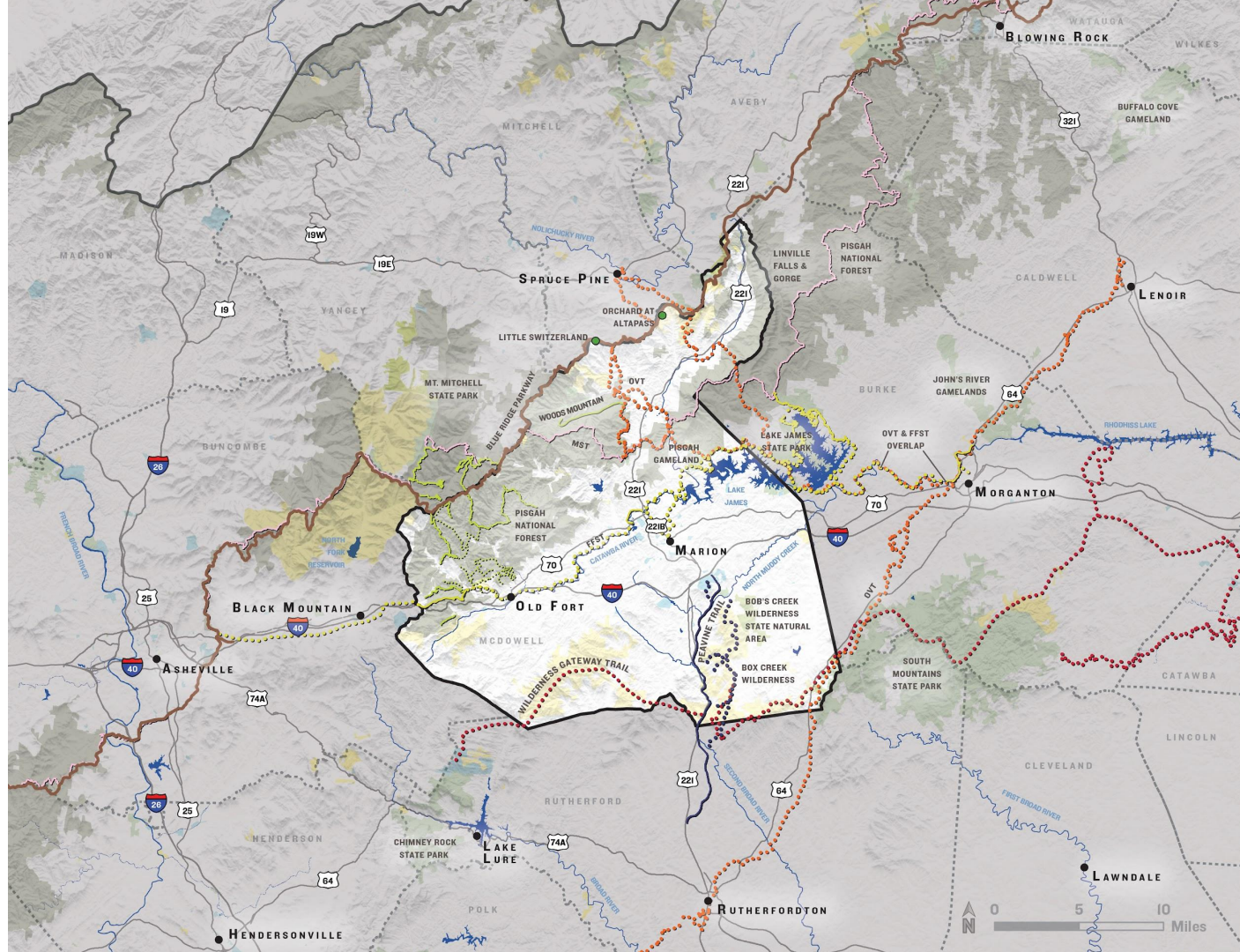
Proposed New Paddle  
Accesses at Yancey Road  
and North Fork Catawba  
River



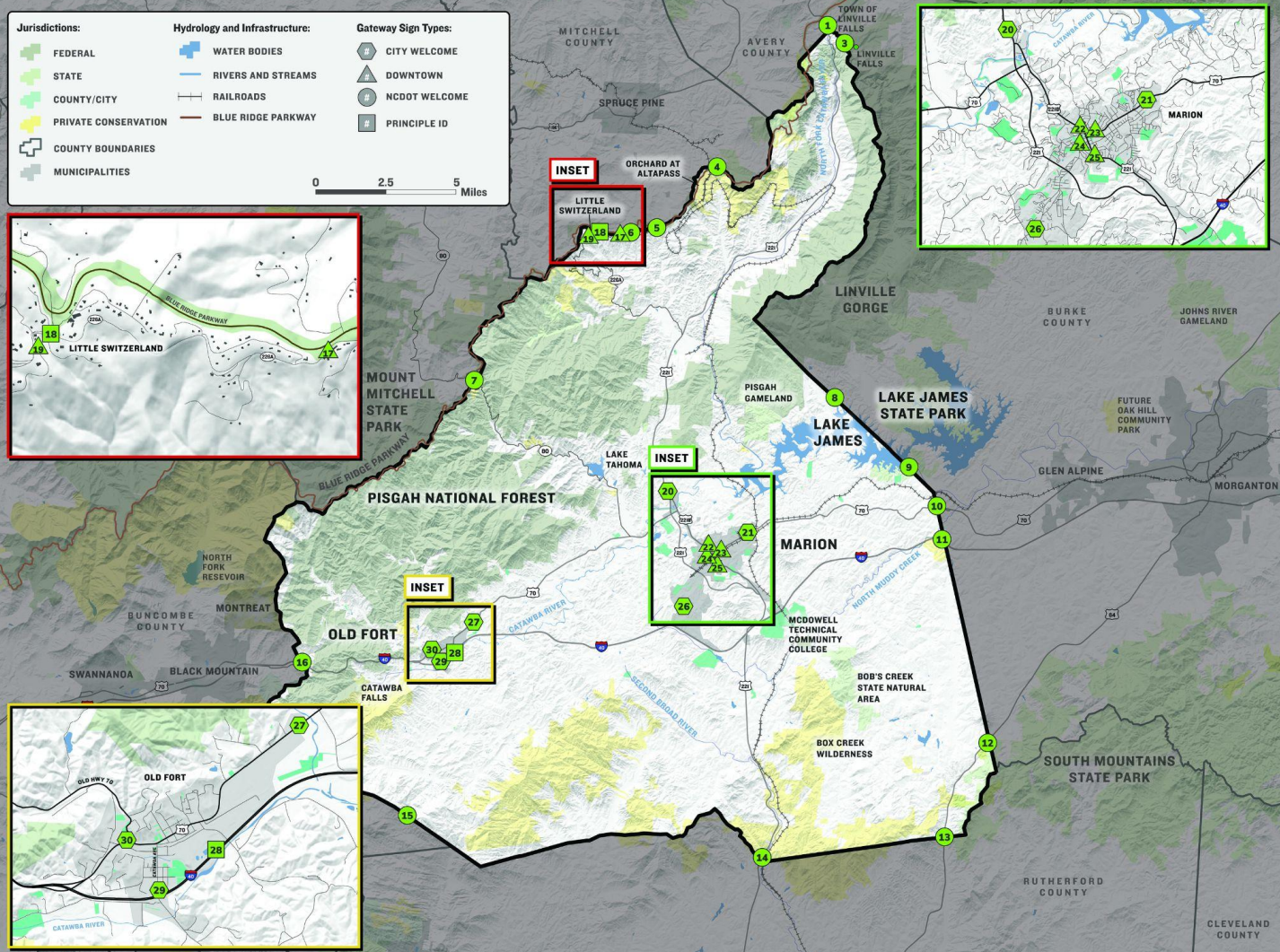
ACCESS POINTS	HISTORY	IMPORTANT NUMBERS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Pleasant Gardens</li> <li>2 Phillips Landing</li> <li>3 Black Bear</li> <li>4 Hidden Cove</li> <li>5 Canal Bridge</li> <li>6 Lake James State Park Paddle Campsites</li> <li>7 Linville</li> <li>8 Bridgewater Portage</li> <li>9 Bridgewater</li> </ul>	<p>Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat. Ut wisi enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exerci tation ullamcorper suscipit lobortis nisl ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat. Duis autem vel eum irure dolor in hendrerit in vulputate velit esse molestie consequat, vel illum dolore eu feugiat nulla facilisis at vero eros et accumsan et iusto odio dignissim qui blandit praesent luptatum zzril delenit augue duis dolore te feugiat nulla facilisis.</p> <p>Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat. Ut wisi enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exerci tation ullamcorper suscipit lobortis nisl ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat.</p> <p>Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat. Ut wisi enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exerci tation ullamcorper suscipit lobortis nisl ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat. Duis autem vel eum irure dolor in hendrerit in vulputate velit esse molestie consequat, vel illum dolore eu feugiat nulla facilisis at vero eros et accumsan et iusto odio dignissim qui blandit praesent luptatum zzril delenit augue duis dolore te feugiat nulla facilisis.</p> <p>Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat. Ut wisi enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exerci tation ullamcorper suscipit lobortis nisl ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat.</p> <p>Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat. Ut wisi enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exerci tation ullamcorper suscipit lobortis nisl ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat.</p>	<p><b>IN CASE OF EMERGENCY CALL 911</b></p> <p><b>County Numbers</b></p> <p>Alexander County (828) 632-4658 Burke County (828) 750-1028 Catawba County (828) 464-4423 City of Hickory (828) 328-5531 City of Morganton (828) 438-5285</p> <p><b>Marinas</b></p> <p>Lake James Marina (828) 584-0665 Castle Bridge Marina (828) 396-9199 Lakeside Marina (828) 495-8881 Bike Camp Marina (828) 630-7907 Taylorsville Beach Marina (828) 652-7649 Bear Creek Marina</p> <p><b>General Information</b></p> <p>Alexander County (828) 632-8140 Burke County (828) 437-3021 Catawba County (828) 750-0496 Hickory County (828) 328-4813 McDowell County (828) 652-4280 Hickory Metro Convention &amp; Visitors Bureau</p> <p><b>Keep Property</b></p> <p>Keep the Upper Catawba River Trail clean. Carry trash with you and dispose of it properly. The trail is a publicly-owned river flowing through private property. River users should not trespass, abuse or litter the waters, banks or shoreline of the trail.</p>
LEGEND		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Limited Access Highway</li> <li> Highway</li> <li> Local Roads</li> <li> County Boundaries</li> <li> Hydrography</li> </ul>		

# State Trails

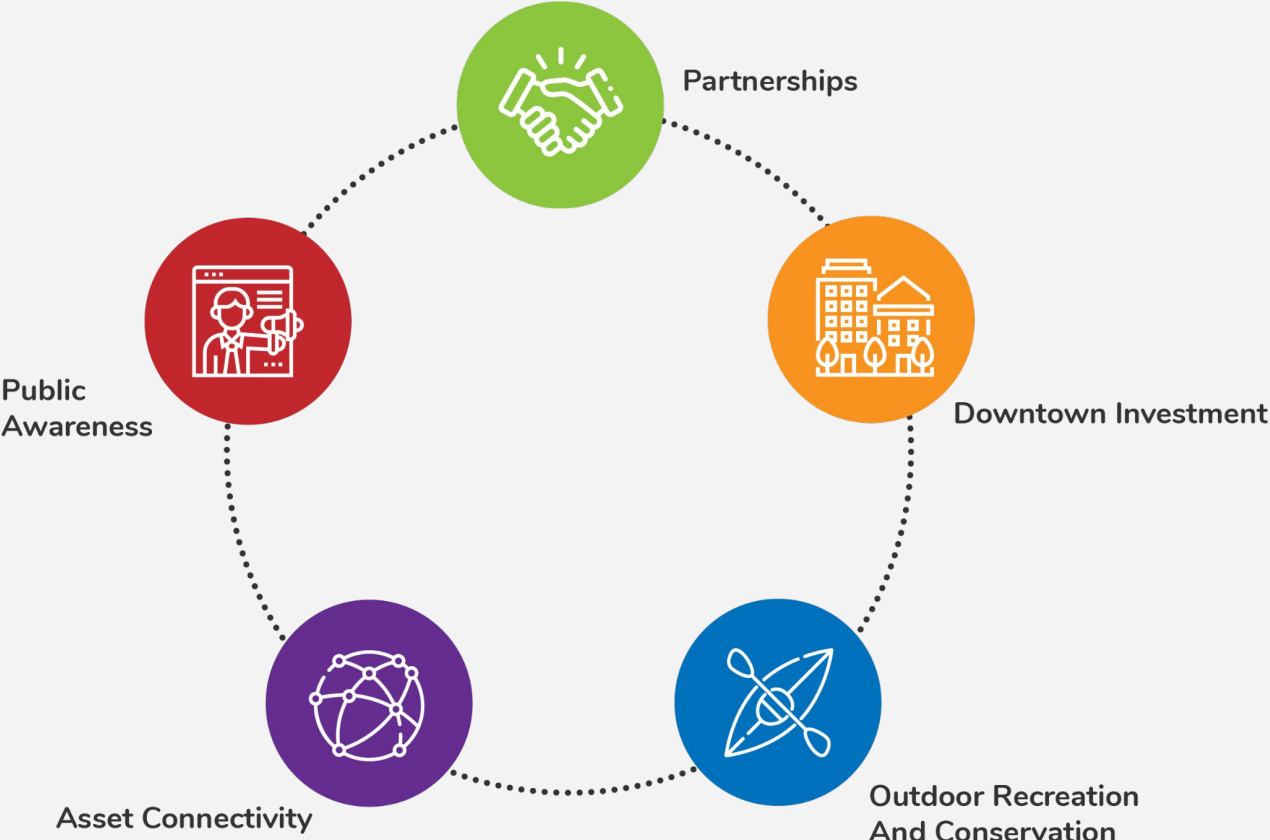
- a. State Trails (x 4)
  - i. Fonta Flora
  - ii. Wilderness Gateway
  - iii. Overmountain Victory
  - iv. Mountains to Sea



# Gateway Signage



# EMERGING THEMES





# PARTNERS

## Government/ Quasi-Government

1. McDowell County
2. City of Marion
3. Town of Old Fort
4. McDowell Chamber of Commerce
5. Marion Economic Development Office/ Marion Business Association

## Non-Profit

1. G5 Trail Collective/ USFS
2. Friends of Fonta Flora State Trail
3. McDowell Trails Association/ Friends of Mountains to Sea Trail
4. Overmountain Victory Trail Association/ Parkway
5. Community Forum/ People on the Move
6. Foothills Conservancy
7. Little Switzerland Business Association/ Artisans League of Little Switzerland
8. Orchard at Altapass/ Parkway
9. McDowell Arts Council/ Arrowhead Artisans League
10. Historic Carson House (interpretive trails)
11. Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation

**YEAR**  
**I-3**  
**FOCUS?**

**Marion**

- Peavine
- Drexel Master Plan
- Logan or W. Henderson St.

**Old Fort**

- Phase 1 Streetscape
- FFST Trailhead and Park
- Mill Creek Park
- G5 Trail Implementation
- Curtis Creek Trailhead

**Little Switzerland**

- Gateway Signage
- Uptown/ Downtown Connector
- Altapass Orchard Improvements

**County-wide Connections**

- County-wide Wayfinding
- Catawba River Paddle Trail (Duke Agreement for new access and improvements throughout)
- State Trail Implementation (Multi-trail impacts and co-alignment)

DESTINATION

# McDOWELL

TOURISM MASTER PLAN

DESTINATION  
 BY DESIGN

PLANNING | ENGINEERING | COMMUNICATIONS

Eric Woolridge, AICP  
*President*