



Downtown Strong



Thomasville

Population: 27,055
Davidson County



What is Downtown Strong?



Downtown Strong is a new initiative of the North Carolina Department of Commerce, NC Main Street and Rural Planning Center. The focus of the Downtown Strong Initiative is to provide downtown revitalization expertise to rural communities located in Tier 1 and Tier 2 counties, seeking to prepare for the Downtown Associate Community program, or to prosper on their own. Downtown Strong is a result of feedback from rural leaders during Hometown Strong community meetings.

Downtown Strong helps communities create economic development strategies that will transform downtown and organize their downtown revitalization initiatives around the Main Street America Four Point Approach™.

The Main Street America Four Point Approach™
for downtown revitalization includes:
Economic Vitality, Design, Promotion and Organization

Economic Vitality consists of strengthening the existing economic assets; expanding and diversifying the economic base.

Design focuses on improving the physical aspects of downtown.

Promotion focuses on selling a positive image of downtown based on authentic, creative assets of the community.

Organization involves creating a strong foundation for a sustainable revitalization effort, including cultivating partnerships, community involvement, and resources for the district.

Description of Opportunity Assessment and Priority Setting Retreat

The Opportunity Assessment consisted of a review of previous economic reports and documents that were made available. There was also a tour of the community with Assistant City Manager Michael Brandt and NC Dept. of Commerce Downtown Economic Development Specialist Diane Young. This tour was followed by a Priority Setting Retreat attended by elected officials, business owners, property owners, members of the Historic Preservation Commission, representatives of the Thomasville Tourism Commission, the local Small Business Center, and area residents.

Prior to the Priority Setting Retreat the City of Thomasville hosted a Community Interest Meeting focused on Downtown Thomasville, with sixty-six members of the community attending.

Key Findings from Opportunity Assessment



Key Findings

- Thomasville's elected officials and City management strongly support the revitalization of Downtown Thomasville.
- The TBC (Thomasville Beautification Commission) and PACE (People Achieving Community Enhancement), a local non profit formed in 1991, have completed numerous beautification projects in Downtown Thomasville and throughout the City. TBC and PACE are very well respected and appreciated.

Key Findings from Opportunity Assessment

Key Findings



- Thomasville has suffered from the loss of the furniture industry, leaving large, vacant office buildings and mills on the edges of the downtown district. With that said, the Thomasville Furniture Plant L has recently been converted to Big Chair Lofts, filled with one and two bedroom apartments (92% occupancy as of 6/3/19).
- There is a strong desire for the formation of an organizational structure that is inclusive of broad representation of stakeholders to guide future downtown revitalization initiatives.

Key Findings from Opportunity Assessment



Key Findings

- Thomasville has suffered from the loss of the furniture industry, leaving large, vacant office buildings and mills on the edges of the downtown district. With that said, the Thomasville Furniture Plant L has recently been converted to Big Chair Lofts, filled with one and two bedroom apartments (92% occupancy as of 6/3/19).
- There is currently a sense of optimism being fueled by a significant number of new businesses opening in Downtown Thomasville.
- Business owners are coming together and supporting one another, evidenced by the group Downtown Thomasville Brick and Mortars.

Key Findings from Opportunity Assessment

Key Findings



- Over time a large segment of the downtown building stock has suffered from lack of maintenance. The City and PACE have responded with financial tools and incentives for the renovation of properties located in the City of Thomasville Municipal Service District.
- An existing calendar of events brings large numbers of residents and visitors to Downtown Thomasville. The award-winning Everybody's Day Festival, an event of the Thomasville Chamber of Commerce, has taken place for more than 100 years.

Key Findings from Opportunity Assessment

Key Findings



- A significant number of trains pass through the heart of Downtown Thomasville daily. Some view the trains as an obstacle, creating congestion at crossings and noise as they pass by. Others applaud the visitor traffic the trains bring to downtown, as the straight stretch of tracks provides optimum viewing and vistas for photographs and videos. “Rail fanning” is recognized by the Thomasville Tourism Commission as a driver for visitor activity in the downtown.

Key Findings from Opportunity Assessment

Key Findings



- Downtown Thomasville is seen by many locals as the picture of Americana, the small-town feel and pace is viewed by many as an asset.

Opportunities, Obstacles, Liabilities and Assets (OOLA) Analysis

Downtown Thomasville

OPPORTUNITIES

Recruit additional businesses to add to the current offerings in Downtown Thomasville.

(49 responses)

Improve the physical condition of private property and public spaces, while adding physical amenities to the streetscape for visual interest.

(48 responses)

Increase promotional activities, along with taking advantage of rail fanning as a way to attract more visitors to Downtown Thomasville.

(33 responses)

Organize a committee/task force to coordinate downtown revitalization efforts and improve overall communication of downtown initiatives.

(19 responses)

OBSTACLES

Business recruitment held back by absentee property owners and difficulty in obtaining financing for renovation and business startups.

(22 responses)

Negativity, resistance to change, no one organization leading the downtown revitalization effort.

(21 responses)

Physical condition of private property along with property owners unwilling to maintain/renovate older buildings, town is not bicycle friendly, and train tracks create traffic issues

(15 responses)

Large events are not pet-friendly and have become heavily attended by groups with political interests

(3 responses)

Opportunities, Obstacles, Liabilities and Assets (OOLA) Analysis

Downtown Thomasville

LIABILITIES

Much of the private sector building stock is in need of renovation. Lack of maintenance has lead to a high vacancy rate. Overall lighting of streets and sidewalks needs to be improved. Public spaces could be better maintained. Downtown is flanked by vacant large mills and the TFI headquarters building.

(135 responses)

Little entertainment or dining options, lack of a market or grocery store. Businesses close too early, are not open on Sundays.

(31 responses)

Lack of police presence in Downtown. Lack of leadership and/or visionary, potential leaders work out of town.

(21 responses)

ASSETS

Destinations including the Big Chair, fountain, amphitheater, murals, and the Farmers Market. The pedestrian pace and feeling of “authentic Americana”. Beautification efforts by PACE, landscaping and flowers. Recent private sector renovations to buildings. Ample and convenient parking.

(36 responses)

Governmental leadership, volunteerism, potential for foundation funding.

(27 responses)

A well established calendar of events, and the City’s online communication. The attraction of train fans and the potential to grow that audience.

(11 responses)

New businesses on Salem Street, out of town developers investing in Thomasville.

(11 responses)

Implementation Strategy Workshop

Priority

Downtown
Thomasville
Committee



Actions

- Form a committee to guide future Downtown Thomasville revitalization initiatives.
- Adopt a hashtag to be used routinely by all stakeholders to create a unified ongoing promotional campaign.

Implementation Strategy Workshop

Priority

Downtown
Thomasville
Committee



Actions

- Include membership on this committee who will explore adding public art in a variety of forms to Downtown Thomasville.
- Develop a plan for maintaining the recently completed building inventory.

Tasks

	Action	Timeline or Due Date	Responsible Party(ies)	Resources Needed		Org.	Promo.	Design	Eco. Vit.
1	Form a committee inclusive of a wide cross-section of the community to guide future downtown revitalization efforts.	9/1/19	City of Thomasville	City, NC Dept. of Commerce, TBC, PACE, downtown business owners and property owners, non-profits, Chamber, Small Business Center, Thomasville Tourism Commission		X			
2	Develop a hashtag to be used routinely by all Downtown Thomasville stakeholders to create a unified ongoing promotional campaign.	9/30/19	Downtown Thomasville Committee	City, TBC, PACE, downtown business owners and property owners, area non-profits, Chamber, Thomasville Tourism Commission			X		

Tasks

	Action	Timeline or Due Date	Responsible Party(ies)	Resources Needed		Org.	Promo.	Design	Eco. Vit.
3	Include membership on this committee who will explore adding public art in a variety of forms to Downtown Thomasville.	9/1/19	Downtown Thomasville Committee	City, local artists				X	
4	Develop a plan for maintaining the recently completed building inventory to use as a business recruitment tool moving forward.	12/31/19	Downtown Thomasville Committee	City, business owners and property owners					X

Implementation Strategy Workshop

Priority

Downtown
Development Toolkit



Actions

- Hire a designer to develop a Best Design Practices document that addresses façade design.
- Develop a plan to promote the Downtown Development Toolkit once it is completed.

Implementation Strategy Workshop

Priority

Downtown
Development Toolkit



Actions

- Identify a section of Downtown Thomasville to concentrate encouragement of façade improvements utilizing the Downtown Development Toolkit.
- Include information in the Toolkit regarding existing financial development tools and incentives.

Tasks

	Action	Timeline or Due Date	Responsible Party(ies)	Resources Needed		Org.	Promo.	Design	Eco. Vit.
1	Hire a designer to develop a Best Design Practices document (downloadable PDF) that addresses façade design, including awnings, signs, storefronts, and upper story windows.	8/1/19	City of Thomasville	City, Downtown Strong Grant		X			
2	Develop a plan to promote the Downtown Development Toolkit once it is completed.	10/31/19	Downtown Thomasville Committee	City, TBC, PACE, downtown business owners and property owners, media outlets			X		

Tasks

	Action	Timeline or Due Date	Responsible Party(ies)	Resources Needed		Org.	Promo.	Design	Eco. Vit.
3	Identify a section of Downtown Thomasville to concentrate encouragement of façade improvements.	10/31/19	Downtown Thomasville Committee	City, business owners, property owners				X	
4	Add information regarding existing financial tools and incentives to the Best Design Practices information to make a complete development toolkit.	10/1/19	Downtown Thomasville Committee	City, Designer developing the Best Design Practices document					X

Next Steps

- Review workplan.
- Edit responsible parties and completion dates as needed.
- Add tasks that make the workplan more complete.

Utilize the workplan to remain focused and action oriented.

Develop a workplan for all future Downtown Thomasville initiatives, keeping in mind that all four areas of the Main Street approach should be incorporated into each future workplan.

Summary

Downtown Thomasville is experiencing positive momentum, driven in part by the opening of multiple new businesses, a large private sector residential redevelopment project, and the support of downtown revitalization efforts by city leaders.

The poor condition of the downtown building stock is seen by many as the district's largest liability. This will be overcome in time as downtown property becomes viewed as a sound investment due to additional business openings, greater downtown foot traffic, increased private sector investment, and a better understanding of sound design practices in combination with existing financial tools.





For follow up information please contact :

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