



## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. BACKGROUND

Downtown Staunton is the spiritual and physical center of Staunton. It has a rich history and continues to play a vital part in community life. The central business district is home to local government offices, various courts, the library, a post office, numerous churches and banks, many nonprofit organizations, cultural facilities, social services, offices, shops, and many restaurants. It also has a number of residents living in upper-floor apartments throughout the area.

With the establishment of the two downtown historic districts (Beverley and Wharf) and the subsequent renovation of many older structures, the area has been experiencing a physical and economic renewal since the late 1970s. Tourism continues to increase throughout the downtown district and in surrounding neighborhoods.

As the private sector continues to reinvest in the downtown, Staunton's city government recognizes the important role it plays in the revitalization process. In the early 1980s, the comprehensive plan for the city was updated to reflect a concern for renewing the central business district. A streetscape plan was created with partial assistance from a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. Since then, many individual public improvements have been completed throughout the downtown district.

Major projects have included the Wharf parking lot improvements in the early 1980s, new sidewalks and historic lighting in the Upper Wharf, and the development of a small park space along Lewis Creek near the White Star Mill in the mid-1980s. Additional individual projects have also included replacing old concrete sidewalks with brick and replacing street and directional signs with new custom designs relating to the historic character of the district.

In the mid 1990s the Staunton Downtown Development Association's Design Committee; with the assistance of Frazier Associates, Architects and

Planners, through the Virginia Main Street Program; along with various city officials, completed a comprehensive streetscape plan for the entire downtown area.

The purpose of this streetscape plan was to identify projects that could offer the opportunity for gifts from the private sector and provide guidance to the city on appropriate and needed public improvements. This conceptual plan provided the framework for improving the way the downtown looks and functions.

Developed as a vision for consideration by city leaders and by all citizens of Staunton, this plan was approved by Staunton City Council, the Staunton Planning Commission, and the Staunton Downtown Development Association in 1996. Subsequently, three major streetscape projects and several smaller projects were carried out, all based on the plan. In addition, a new city landscape plan was completed based on recommendations in the original streetscape plan.

Four blocks of Beverley Street from Market to Lewis streets were improved with new underground utilities, brick sidewalks and crosswalks, granite curbs, new historically based streetlights, new traffic signals and coordinated public signs. Similar improvements were completed on Augusta Street from Johnson to Frederick streets as were improvements made to the block of Market Street between Beverley and Kalorama streets.

Additional upgrades included improving several downtown parking lots, adding new plantings to numerous landscaped beds throughout the downtown, installing new street identification signs and new colorful banners downtown. Also specially designed kiosks and trash receptacles were added as new street furniture elements.

Several other projects were undertaken that were not envisioned in the streetscape plan but have contributed to the revitalization process. They include a new downtown trolley system with designated stops and benches. A new entry project included over-



## I. INTRODUCTION

scaled flowerpots and a giant watering can sculpture as welcoming public art features at the intersection of U.S. Routes 250 and 11. In addition, a new 277 space parking garage was constructed at the corner of Greenville Avenue and New Street to blend in with the historic downtown.

The cumulative impact of all of these projects has been the opening of many new businesses and shops, the construction of a new Shenandoah Shakespeare Theatre; the current renovation of the R. R. Smith Center into a future history and arts center; and the The Stonewall Jackson Hotel's renovation and conference center addition. Moreover, several new projects are in the planning phase and these include the Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library and a second Shakespeare Theatre, a recreation of the historic Globe. Also, in the early stages of planning is the renovation of The Dixie Theater into The Staunton Performing Arts Center.

### B. UPDATING THE PLAN

In the spring of 2003, the Design Committee of the Staunton Downtown Development Association decided that the Downtown Staunton Streetscape Plan needed to be updated since it was seven years old and many new projects had been completed or were being planned that would affect the plan priorities. The following sections are from the original plan and have been updated as needed.

#### ORIGINAL PLAN GOALS

- Build on existing plans and studies.
- Improve the pedestrian environment.
- Ensure that public improvements are appropriate to the historic character of area.
- Improve connections within the area and to the Wharf and surrounding neighborhoods.
- Make the downtown user-friendly for visitors.
- Create public art that celebrates the history of

the area.

- Phase improvements to reinforce activity areas/private investment.
- Improve maintenance of existing public spaces and elements.
- Provide opportunities for birthday gifts to the city in a public/private partnership.

#### DISTRICT CHARACTER

This plan covers approximately twenty blocks of downtown and surrounding areas. Made up of two historic districts, this area is surrounded by three residential historic districts. The Beverley Street Historic District is a typical "Main Street." Its four blocks of commercial buildings exhibit unusually ornate architectural styles and date from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century. The Wharf Historic District lies two blocks south and consists of warehouses, a flour mill, and a historic train station complex.

In terms of streetscape elements, Staunton has a wealth of historic examples to follow. Historic cast-iron light poles from the early twentieth century have been saved and new poles have been installed based on their design. In the past, brick paving and limestone curbs were standard throughout the district. Remaining examples are being retained and new brick sidewalks have been installed to replace the modern concrete ones. Particularly distinctive to the Shenandoah Valley are the limestone walls and wrought-iron fences that grace both public and private sites throughout the area.

#### STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

##### UTILITIES

##### Strengths

- Historically styled poles for traffic signals at underpass entrance to downtown.
- Underground utilities have been installed in major parts of downtown.



## I. INTRODUCTION

### Weaknesses

- Unsightly overhead wires remain on several side streets and other routes.
- Rusting old traffic signal poles with hanging light signals remain at several intersections.

### LIGHTING

#### Strengths

- Historically styled and pedestrian-scaled fixtures already installed in the Wharf, and on New and Market streets.
- New, historically styled, more ornate fixtures based on historic photos and existing examples have been fabricated and installed on Beverley Street.

#### Weaknesses

- Unsightly cobra-head lights remain mounted on some existing wooden poles.

### LANDSCAPING

#### Strengths

- Existing city program with committed professional staff and board.
- Landscape ordinance and new plan created.
- Attractive seasonal plantings and flowerbeds have been installed in many areas following the plan.
- Positive response from city residents for landscaping program.

#### Weaknesses

- Weeds and trash remain in some landscaped areas and along sidewalks and curbs.
- Some areas have not yet been upgraded according to plan due to limited resources.
- Limited tree maintenance program for public areas.

- High watering costs associated with seasonal hanging baskets.

### SIDEWALKS/CURBS

#### Strengths

- City upgraded many downtown sidewalks with new brick ones.
- Wharf improvements included brick/concrete sidewalks in both Upper and Lower Wharf.

#### Weaknesses

- Broken/patched sidewalks remain in parts of downtown.
- Lack of a consistent standard for modules and repairs.
- Lack of pedestrian crosswalks at some intersections.

### PARKING LOTS/PUBLIC SPACES

#### Strengths

- Wharf lot has been redesigned and improved.
- Courthouse lawn has been redesigned and improved.
- Landes Park space has been created in VDOT project.
- Hardy Lot has been redesigned and improved.
- Lot at Frederick and Lewis streets has been redesigned and improved.
- Additional improvements have been made along Lewis Creek including new fencing, brick walks, etc.

#### Weaknesses

- Trash maintenance in parking lots is inconsistent.
- Broken/patched walkways, curbs, and walls remain in several locations.



## I. INTRODUCTION

- Lack of many public spaces for activities or for tourists.

### ENTRYWAYS

#### **Strengths** (varies with location)

- Some examples of attractive landscaping.
- Cleaned-up public signs.
- New historically styled traffic signals.

#### **Weaknesses** (varies with location)

- Lack of visual definition of entry.
- Inconsistent maintenance of landscaping.
- Signs need consolidation.
- Unattractive traffic signals hanging from wires.

### ALLEYWAYS

#### **Strengths**

- Existing network for pedestrians.

#### **Weaknesses**

- Patched paving surfaces.
- Weeds.
- Lack of lighting.
- Poor drainage.

### STREET FURNITURE

#### **Strengths**

- Some new metal benches have been installed at trolley stops.
- New kiosks and custom designed trash containers have been installed in downtown area.
- Historically styled drinking fountain has been installed at Wharf.
- Most elements have been painted uniform dark green color.

#### **Weaknesses**

- Lack of consistent standards for trash containers.
- Lack of maintenance on trash containers.
- Limited number of trash containers and benches.

### PUBLIC SIGNS

#### **Strengths**

- City has purchased new computerized sign-making machine.
- New distinctive street signs have been installed throughout the district.
- New distinctive information signs have been installed throughout the district.
- Some information signs have been consolidated into one location/signboard.

#### **Weaknesses**

- Individual public signs remain scattered along entryways in some locations.
- New wayfinding signs for tourists and visitors have been fabricated but not installed.

## C. STRUCTURE OF THE PLAN

The body of the report presents the plans for each of the fifteen project areas and accompanying subareas. Each description covers project scope, public projects (to be undertaken by the city), private gift projects, and issues, if any, for further public/private coordination. Ample photographs and graphics are used to illustrate the intended effect of plan elements.

Maps at the back of the report show how the many area projects are linked into a cohesive whole. The Project Areas Map provides a key for locating the fifteen project areas. Materials and Lighting Conceptual Plans show locations for improvements in both the central business district and the North Central Avenue corridor.



## I. INTRODUCTION

The Infrastructure Improvements Map lays out a phased conceptual plan for the city when it undertakes major construction activities such as placing utilities underground, installing new street and traffic lights, and replacing existing sidewalks with brick ones. These eleven recommended phases are listed in the next section, Implementation Steps.

In the Appendix are standards and specifications for street furniture and other elements called for in the plan. A bibliography provides a list of previous studies of the project areas along with a sampling of “Main Street” streetscape references.

### D. IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

This plan contains a wide variety of projects including both public and private initiatives. Some can be started immediately; others require design, engineering, and allocated funding. Some projects can occur independently of infrastructure improvements while others need to be implemented along with the city’s construction projects.

Phasing priorities may change due to unforeseen private sector projects and/or public facilities that may be developed and therefore must remain flexible to take these factors into account.

#### **Tasks needed to be completed before elements of the plan can be implemented:**

- Review any existing projects scheduled to be completed in the short term by the City in order to coordinate with this plan.
- Finalize a Maintenance Plan for all public areas and elements.
- Review existing traffic study for any additional changes.
- Confirm priorities for utility and infrastructure improvements so that the city can continue to seek funding for future projects.

#### **Suggested phasing for infrastructure street improvements** (underground utilities, streetlights, traffic signals, brick sidewalks, etc.)

1. Beverley Street from Market to Lewis – where not completed.
2. Augusta Street from Frederick to the Wharf – where not completed.
3. Market Street from Frederick to Kalorama. (First phase from Beverley to Kalorama is complete)
4. Greenville Avenue/Johnson Street from Coalter to New Street. (New to Augusta is complete)
5. New Street from Frederick to the Wharf. (Partially completed in block of parking garage from Beverley to Johnson.)
6. Central Avenue from Frederick to Johnson.
7. Frederick Street from Coalter to Lewis.
8. Coalter Street from the Underpass to Frederick.
9. North Central Avenue from Frederick to Churchville. (Master plan is needed for this area - refer to note in Section C(3)b.)
10. North Augusta Street from Frederick to Churchville Avenue.
11. Lewis Street from Frederick to Middlebrook.
12. Lewis Street from Frederick to Churchville.

#### **Suggested phasing for parking lot improvements:**

1. Augusta Street Lot. (behind old YMCA)
2. Greenville Avenue Lot. (Old RMA Lot - implement with entry corridor improvements)
3. Lewis Street Lot. (next to old Firehouse - implement with improvements to North Central Avenue)