

## **HISTORIC DALLAS TOWN CENTER PLAN ACCOMPANING REPORT**

This report accompanies the Historic Dallas Town Center Plan Map, provides explanatory details for the Plan Map and sets forth a set of recommended strategies for revitalizing the Town Center. In terms of public physical improvements, the primary focus of this phase of revitalization is the 100 Block of West Trade Street, the intersections at both ends, and the Historic Courthouse and grounds. Future phases will address other street segments that surround the Historic Courthouse Square. There are also overall strategies proposed for immediate implementation that apply to the entire Town Center involving public-private-community cooperative efforts to reenergize the plan area.

### **Historical Background**

In 2013, the Town of Dallas celebrated its Sesquicentennial. It is therefore fitting that upon 150 years of the Town's incorporation the initiation of a comprehensive program of projects and strategies directed toward the Town Center be adopted and carried out. As the Town Center cannot be separated from its distinctive history, no discussion of or plan for Dallas Town Center can be undertaken outside its historical context. The foundation of this plan rests upon this most basic premise: The existing historic character of Dallas Town Center is its most important asset—past, present and future. Any plan of revitalization must use this distinctive asset as the foundation for building a new future, both physically and economically.

Dallas as a settlement began well before its 1863 incorporation because its beginning goes to 1846 when the southern portion of Lincoln County was split by the General Assembly to form Gaston County. This act provided that the county seat, to be located in the center of the new county would be named for United States Vice-President George Miffin Dallas. Seventy-five acres of land was acquired by the County from Jesse Holland to establish a county seat settlement. The iconic Greek Revival courthouse was constructed in 1847, and remains today on a lovely square in the center of Dallas. Gutted by fire in 1874, the edifice was rebuilt within the original three-foot thick walls and remains today as the centerpiece of Dallas Town Center. The historic courthouse is owned by the Town of Dallas and is currently undergoing renovation and adaptive reuse. The County Jail was also constructed in 1847 on a separate parcel across Trade and Gaston Streets from the square. The jail remains structurally stabilized, yet needing rehab for public use, in the stewardship of Gaston County Museum. Following the construction of the courthouse and jail, the town began to grow with establishments supporting the functions of county seat as well as businesses and institutions for the community and area farm families. Dallas remained the county seat until 1911. But after two earlier failed attempts to move the seat to Gastonia, a third 1909 referendum passed and a new courthouse began construction in Gastonia. But while this and other factors probably stymied mid-Twentieth Century growth in Dallas Town Center, the result has been the remaining of a unique cluster of Nineteenth Century and Turn-of-the-Twentieth Century

buildings that may be unmatched in the Charlotte Region. These buildings in Dallas Town Center exist as a remarkable example of Southwestern Piedmont North Carolina small town/county seat living in the latter half of the Nineteenth Century. Since 1973, the Courthouse Square and buildings fronting opposite sides of bordering streets have been listed as a National Register District on the National Register of Historic Places, US Department of the Interior.

In addition to the former Gaston County Courthouse and Jail structures, significant early buildings remaining in the Dallas Town Center include:

- The 44-room Hoffman Hotel, 131 W. Main Street (now the Gaston County Museum), built in 1852.
- Rhyne Store, 1850, 130-132 N. Gaston Street.
- Sandifer-Friday House, 115 W Main c.1902, built by NC Senator Rbt. Sandifer
- Smyre-Pasour House, 113-115 N. Holland St. 1850, oldest residence on Square
- Holland-Friday House, 128 N. Gaston, mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century, boyhood home of William C. Friday.
- Roberts-Lewis House, 109 N. Holland, 1852.
- C&NW Railway Depot, built 1901, and relocated to 215 W. Main in 1976, renovated and adaptively reused by the Gaston Museum for educational purposes.
- Matthews Hotel/White House Hotel, 116 N. Gaston, c.1870.
- Setzer General Store Building, 124-130 W. Trade, early 1870's.
- Bank of Dallas Building, 146 W. Trade, c.1904.
- Lewis Mill Office, 117 N. Holland, 1904.
- Robert Rhyne House, 103 E. Main, 1901.
- Numerous other structures within several blocks of the Courthouse Square, such as Pinkney Summey House (1903); C.C. Cornwell House (c.1907); Dallas Baptist Church (1914); Holland-Jarell House, c.1848; Oscar Mason Sr. House, early 1900's; Moore-Wilkins-Houser House, c.1900; and, John Puett House, c.1880.

Unfortunately, several structures in Dallas Town Center have been lost over the recent decades. These include:

- Wilson-Spargo House, 109 W. Main, built late 1890's and featured an ornamental second story cantilevered porch, was demolished in the 1980's.
- Lewis House, 202 W. Trade, a massive ornate Victorian home.
- House at 113 North Holland.
- George Detter House, 216 W. Trade, built 1892, demolished 2013.

The Town of Dallas and its citizens are proud of this heritage and the unique position that the Town plays in the history of Gaston County and the Southwestern Piedmont of North Carolina. This is evidenced in a number of ways: The Town is devoting significant resources to the renovation and adaptive reuse of the Historic Courthouse for an events center; a new digital sign welcomes visitors to "Historic Dallas;" and, the notation of the Town's heritage, either pictorially or textually with most assets, operations and

communications. Dallas clearly understands the importance of the Town Center not only for the intrinsic value of its historic resources and the “sense of place” it provides, but also for how these resources can be used to forge a new path for its economic vitality. This report and its recommendations rests upon one primary premise:

*The historic assets of Dallas Town Center exist as its most important strength upon which to rebuild business in the Town Center; provide physical heritage as a framework for enhancing Town Center design; promote Dallas Town Center for enhanced human activity, visitation, events and attractions; and, to garner community support for Town Center physical and economic development.*



Aerial view of  
Dallas Town Center

### **Approach to Downtown Revitalization**

This report recommends that Dallas take generally the same Main Street Four Point Approach® to revitalization of Dallas Town Center as established by the National Main Street Center, Inc. (NMSC). NMSC is a subsidiary nonprofit corporation of The National Trust for Historic Preservation®. Although originally intended and used for downtowns larger than Dallas Town Center, the basic principles are quite applicable to Dallas, by just applying them on a smaller scale. In the 1960's and 1970's, various approaches to downtown revitalization in the USA often failed. Typically these focused on physical “improvements” that did more harm than good. And, they often failed to build upon (or even destroyed) the strongest physical asset of Main Streets—the historic character of their built environment. Community leaders failed to realize that this asset was unique to downtowns as well as enduring in the hearts of much of the public. Around 1980, the National Trust for Historic Preservation initiated the NMSC and its Main Street Four Point Approach® has become a proven success and *the* national model for downtown

revitalization in towns and small cities across the USA. For 33 years, this approach has been used *officially* in 2,000 American communities, resulting in \$54 billion in reinvestment, 450,000 jobs, and the rehabilitation of over 229,000 buildings. The affiliate North Carolina Main Street Center has directly assisted 61 designated Main Street Cities and Towns since 1980. In 2003, the NC affiliate initiated a Small Town Main Street program to assist communities under 7,500 population, such as Dallas, which are unlikely to pursue NC Main Street designation. While the Town of Dallas will likely not become an official Main Street community (or call itself one), it can certainly adapt and apply the proven, common sense Main Street Four Point Approach®. The four points are as follows:

- **Organization-** This means building partnerships with diverse organizations that have an interest in revitalization of Historic Dallas Town Center. This certainly includes the Town of Dallas and should also include town center businesses, property owners, interested citizens and community leaders, civic organizations, financial institutions, and community institutions such as the Gaston County Museum. It may also involve working with organizations that serve a broader area such as NCDOT, Gaston County Historic Properties Commission, Visit Gaston County, and the NC Main Street Center.
- **Promotion-** This involves creating greater interest and ownership by the community in the value of Dallas Town Center and ways to advance it as a center and focus for all aspects of community life- residential, business, institutional, social interaction, leisure, and celebration. For Dallas, promotion should also include measures to attract visitors to its historic assets to spend money and to promote greater appreciation of those assets by all of Gaston County.
- **Design-** This includes projects (both public and private) and policies that enhance the visual qualities and historic assets of Dallas Town Center. It also involves measures to enhance the town center as an enjoyable people-friendly place. This report will propose various Town initiatives designed to enhance visual quality and promote the town center as an enjoyable place for people to come.
- **Economic Restructuring-** This could generally be described as “economic development,” but with small and medium-sized downtowns it particularly means measures to successfully rebuild a *new* diverse economic base. Since the movement of major retail to large chain stores and shopping centers, downtowns must build new economies that take advantage of their most important assets of (1) being a historic and authentic place, and (2) the focal point for community identity and gathering. Realistic strategies should be based on small businesses that can take advantage of the unique appeal of the town center.

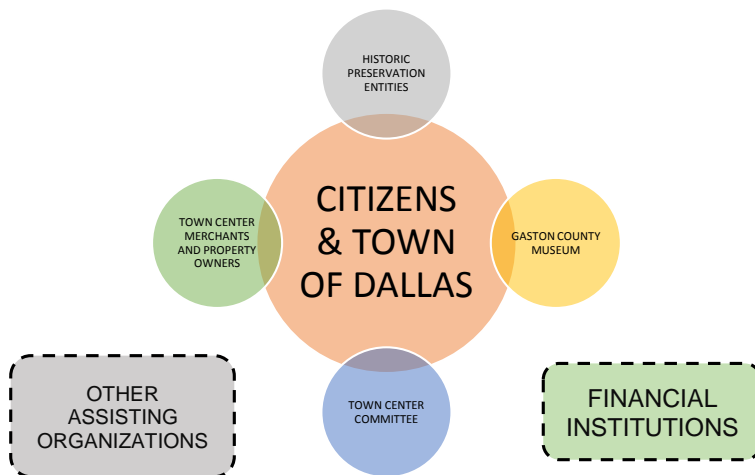
***The strategies in this report are organized according to the Four Points described above; however, some strategies will further more than one of the Four Points.***

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## **1. ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIES**

- 1.1. Define a Town Center Organization.** This is multiple organizations working together in formal and informal relationships. The organizational “hub” should be the Town of Dallas, but a number of other interests and organizations will be necessary to make revitalization happen. Who are all the parties and interests in Dallas Town Center revitalization? What roles do they play? What resources will be needed, such as funding, financing, existing town personnel, volunteers, the museum, etc.?
- 1.2. Form a Town Center Committee or similar body.** Downtown organizations take various forms and legal status. Being a small town, it is not necessary for Dallas to form a nonprofit downtown corporation. Instead, a simple committee formed by the Board of Aldermen and supported by Town staff would likely provide the appropriate level of involvement by diverse interests. This committee should include representation from the Town Board of Aldermen, Town Center businesses and property owners, citizens who are deeply interested in the Town Center, Planning Board, and historic preservation bodies.
- 1.3. Strengthen ties to organizations to jointly promote Historic Dallas Town Center.** These organizations certainly include Gaston County Museum, Dallas Area Chamber of Commerce, Gaston County Historic Properties Commission, and Visit Gaston. Other potential organizations include Gaston Regional Chamber, Gaston Together, and regional/state tourism organizations. This is further discussed in the promotion section.
- 1.4. Create a Historic District Commission to promote and preserve the Town Center’s important historic assets.** This is further described in the Design section.
- 1.5. Partner with nearby owners of attractions to create an “attraction cluster.”**  
This is further discussed in the Promotion section.
- 1.6. The Town Center organization should embrace and inform the community on Four Point Approach® and the Eight Guiding Principles of the National Main Street Center®:**
- 1.6.1. Comprehensive:** Town Center revitalization is not contingent on one “big thing” or a single focus. Efforts must be across-the-board of the Four Points®. It is not massive public projects such as railroad trenches, malling of Main Street, or recruiting some big chain store.
- 1.6.2. Incremental:** Change that is incremental, beginning with first demonstrative steps, and each success building upon previous ones will make for longer-lasting success. Public confidence will grow as successes continue.

- 1.6.3. Self-help-** Local leaders mobilizing local resources and talent will be key to success.
- 1.6.4. Partnerships-** Both the public and private sectors must partner to achieve common goals. Both sectors have a vital interest in revitalization success.
- 1.6.5. Identifying and capitalizing on existing assets-** Dallas Town Center must capitalize on its existing assets. Obviously, with Dallas it must capitalize upon the unique historic assets of its Town Center.
- 1.6.6. Quality-** From public improvements and street fixtures, to design, to business storefronts, to promotional campaigns, quality must be emphasized. Emphasize quality over quantity. Quality actions generate a quality image.
- 1.6.7. Change-** Seeing physical change for the better will turn skeptics into believers. Many people are unable to envision “what might be” but when they see improvements happening, they will lend their support. Improving business and institutional practices, altering ways of thinking about the Town Center, and improving physical appearance can work to shift public perceptions.
- 1.6.8. Implementation-** Plans must result in completed projects. Ongoing visible changes, public and private, are a reminder that efforts are underway and successes are being made. This will garner more support.



Organizing for Town Center Development

## 2. PROMOTIONAL STRATEGIES

**2.1. Partner with Gaston County Museum in jointly promoting and marketing Historic Dallas Town Center.** This effort can take on various forms, but at a minimum, it should include preparation and distribution of tourism brochures that cover both attractions. The idea is to create a “synergy of attraction” – more visitors can be captured by multiple smaller attractions than by single ones.

**2.1.1. Partner with Gaston County Museum in creating a second Town Center major festival type event.** Currently the Museum and the Town partner with Family Fun Day during Memorial Day Weekend. A second family event could bookend the summer season around Labor Day.

**2.1.2. Support Gaston County Museum in Marketing its special events and special exhibits.** Performing arts events, special exhibits, and other events can be promoted with the digital sign, utility billings and similar means.

**2.1.3. Explore the feasibility of smaller events and/or an informal music venue on the historic courthouse grounds such as traditional music performances.** These could be done in conjunction with the Museum or with other sponsors. The Town could also provide a place on the court square grounds for traditional musicians to gather together informally and periodically to play simply for the love of music. This would need to be done in a manner not to conflict with booked events at the courthouse.

**2.1.4. Partner with Gaston County Museum in exploring ways to secure funding for restoration of the old jail.** A restored jail could play an important role in attracting visitors to the historic Town Center.

**2.2. Persuade NCDOT to change the I-85 and US-321 attraction signs for the Gaston County Museum to list both the museum and Historic Dallas.** Key will be in convincing NCDOT that Historic Dallas is itself, an attraction, unlike other small downtowns. Make sure all off-ramps show direction to Dallas Town Center.

**2.3. Create a brand for Dallas Town Center.** Whether it is “Historic Dallas Town Center,” “Historic Dallas,” “Historic Dallas Square” or something else, it should be both pictorial and text, and used consistently in all efforts.

**2.4. Install a modest sized, “historic looking” sign on West Trade for eastbound traffic that welcomes visitors to “Historic Dallas Town Center.”** Consider installing this sign at a safe location in the south right-of way margin a few feet east if Ingle’s entry drive (opposite Walnut Street) to capture more traffic.

- 2.5. Town Center businesses should be jointly marketed, particularly as business development grows.** This can be accomplished through Dallas Area Chamber, a separate specially formed Town Center merchants association or subgroup of the chamber.
- 2.6. Encourage Visit Gaston and local/regional media to promote “staycations” that encourage day trips within the Charlotte region.** The attraction cluster around Dallas can be enjoyed by several million people on a simple day trip. At least two million people live within a 90 minute drive from Dallas. While day trip tourists do not put “heads in beds” they do spend money when traveling.
- 2.6.1. Partner with other public entities that own/control other nearby attractions (in central Gaston County) to create an attraction cluster of heritage tourism.** Such a cluster could include Historic Dallas Town Center, Gaston County Museum, 1890’s Village at Gaston Park- Dallas, and potentially the Hoyle Historic Homestead (during special open events). Also near the I-85/US-321 is Rankin Lake Park, which offers a unique and exceptional outdoor experience with picnicking, trails and lake activities.
- 2.6.2. Work with Visit Gaston to increase marketing of Dallas Town Center as an attraction in itself.** Also explore with Visit Gaston the feasibility and potential outcomes of creating a Dallas area attraction cluster for heritage tourism.
- 2.7. Aggressively market and promote the renovated Courthouse to a broad area as a small events venue. These events include weddings, family events, heritage cultural events, business events, civic events and other appropriate events.**
- 2.8. Where sidewalks exist or can be easily installed, create and promote an exercise walking route that covers the Town Center and surrounding area.** Not only will this promote healthy living, it will hopefully result in more pedestrians on the streets of the Town Center. The route could connect to Town parks.
- 2.9. Promotional strategies should be regularly reviewed and revised.** Promotion is an activity that is evolutionary and incremental. Enhance what works, discontinue or revise what doesn’t, and allow strategies to change with the changing needs of the Town Center.

#### **The Economic Importance of Heritage Tourism**

Tourism represents over \$1.7 trillion of the US Economy. Market research indicates that Americans increasingly seek meaningful and distinctive experiences in travel. Heritage tourism is one of the top five principle reasons for travel. At least 81% of tourism trips greater than 50 miles are cultural related (includes historic sites). Studies show that cultural tourists spend more, travel further and stay longer.



**3. DESIGN AND PUBLIC IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES**

**3.1. *The historic former Gaston County Courthouse is being restored and renovated as the Historic Dallas Courthouse Center, an events venue.*** The 1847 courthouse and square are property of the Town and served as Dallas Town Hall for many decades. This \$850,000 project will be completed in the latter half of 2014.



The 1847 Greek Revival courthouse pictured as renovation and restoration work begin.

**3.2.. *The historic courthouse grounds, which serves as a “town commons” will also be receiving a landscaping makeover as part of the courthouse renovation.***

Generalized depiction of renovated historic courthouse grounds. Based on landscaping plan prepared by Site Solutions, PA.



**3.3. Install pedestrian friendly improvements on streets forming the historic courthouse square.** These measures will not only help promote safety and comfort for pedestrians moving about the Town Center, but also constitute a profound aesthetic improvement. These are depicted on the Town Center Plan Map. This stretch of Trade Street is NC Routes 279 and 275 and is thus controlled by NCDOT. All the measures described below will require NCDOT approval.

**3.3.1. *Phase One should concentrate on the intersections that bookend the 100 block of West Trade Street.*** These intersections are Trade and North Gaston, and West Trade and North Holland. Future phase(s) can address Main and Gaston, and West Main and Holland.

**3.3.2. *“Bulb-out” sidewalks at intersection crosswalks- 100 block W. Trade.*** As shown on the map, this involves extending out the curb line and widening the sidewalks at the intersection corners to reduce the length of roadway the pedestrian must cross. This would not decrease either the width of, or number of motor vehicle travel lanes. Nor would it decrease the number of on-street parking spaces. Since the parking spaces do not extend to corners, the space used for the bulb-outs is within the same existing roadway area between the end of the row of parking spaces and the corner. The parking lot plan prepared by Diamond Engineering (between Gaston Street and the old jail), shows the same type of treatment. Curb extensions can also have a traffic calming benefit by creating “visual friction” in the mind of the motorist.

**3.3.3. *Install decorative brick pattern crosswalks at intersections at either end of 100 block of West Trade (Trade/N. Gaston and W. Trade/N. Holland).*** Heated polymer stamped applications to heated asphalt have improved in durability over the last ten years. Recommended higher quality, durable applications cost about \$20.00 per square foot installed. A specialized experienced contractor using StreetPrint (or equal/better) applications is needed. Additionally, a wide white thermoplastic border is applied to both sides of the stamped brick pattern. The actual cost at each intersection will depend on the stamped area of each crosswalk. While extending the curb lines for bulb-outs will require installation of new concrete curbing and sidewalk at intersections (and likely one or more storm drain relocations), the area of stamped asphalt for crosswalks will be reduced by the bulb-outs. Well-defined crosswalks increase their visibility to motorists, and when installed with a brick pattern provide a significant aesthetic improvement that fits well with the historic district.

**3.3.4. *Install new countdown pedestrian signal heads to serve all four crosswalks Trade/N/Gaston and W. Trade/N. Holland intersections.*** If four one-arm new traffic signal poles are used (as per the illustration on the Plan Map), then all pedestrian signals can be attached to signal masts. If two, two-arm poles are installed, then two of the pedestrian signals pairs should be installed on separate



decorative poles of height appropriate for pedestrian signals (at corners not chosen for two-arm signal poles. The cost of new pedestrian signal heads is about \$450 each (plus installation). Each intersection will require two per crosswalk, and with four crosswalks at each intersection, that comes to a total of eight per intersection. If the heads are not mounted to traffic signal masts, then costs of each needed decorative post and ground anchoring should be added.

**3.3.5. Increase motorists' awareness of crosswalks and need to stop for pedestrians by installing in-crosswalk signs.**

Illustrated is a type that is installed near crosswalks at the center line.



**3.4. Upgrade street lighting, traffic signage and signals in the 100 Block of West Trade and the intersections at both ends of this block.** As noted, this is a state maintained road; therefore, all of these improvements will require NCDOT approval. All installed sign supports, signal poles, street light poles/posts and similar vertical street-side features must meet NCDOT/FHWA crash breakaway standards. All installed fixtures should be consistent in color and pattern, and be consistent with the Town Center's historic character. For a historic area such as Dallas Town Center, either black or dark green are recommended. All electric lines to serve signals and lighting should be underground and internal to fixtures.

**3.4.1. Install new signals, poles and mast arms at intersections of Trade and N. Gaston, and W. Trade and N. Holland.** The illustration below shows four one-arm signal poles. Alternatively, the Town could install two, two-arm signal poles at the appropriate caddy-cornered positions. NCDOT may require one configuration or the other. If the two-pole configuration is chosen, decorative pedestrian signal poles (about \$400 apiece) will be required at the two corners without traffic signal masts.



Illustration showing new signal poles and mast arms, and brick-pattern crosswalks. **Note: black signal housings are used.**

**3.4.2. Install new pedestrian-scale historic street lighting along the 100 block of W. Trade, and follow with additional installations along other streets forming the historic courthouse square.** There are several issues with existing lighting: (1) Overall the Town Center appears to be somewhat under lit for a downtown area. (*It is recommended that the Town seek the advice of a street lighting technical consultant to assist in determining appropriate levels of lighting; and types to achieve desired results*). (2) Lighting type and color are mixed in the Town Center (high pressure sodium vapor street luminaires and metal halide luminaires at pedestrian level). (3) Pedestrian level light posts are too low to allow for pedestrian clearance when banners are attached. (The low height may also contribute to low levels of lighting in streets and sidewalks.). (4) Use of a more robust post and base would give a higher quality and more historic compatibility. New poles and globes should be taller (but still at pedestrian level) and more robust than the existing fixtures. The additional height and appropriate fixture selection may also increase the lighting level of the street. Each light post should include GFCI outlets for uses such as holiday lights and special events. Cost \$1,700-\$2,000 each with globe and base, not including installation. Another \$300 should be added if LED luminaires are used. There are 10 pedestrian light posts along the 100 block of West Trade, and 28 posts along both sides of the other three street segments that border the courthouse square.

**3.4.3. Replace the sodium vapor street lighting luminaires on wooden utility poles at Trade/Gaston and Trade/Holland intersections with two high quality, latest technology LED luminaires at each intersection.** Assuming each LED light fixture has lumen levels at least equal to the existing sodium vapor lights, this would result in considerably more light cast upon the intersections. These new lights should be on metal poles with the same color as other fixtures. These can be installed on separate poles or on vertical extensions of signal masts. They should be placed caddy-cornered at each intersection. The LED lighting color should be closer to the metal halide used in the existing pedestrian lights than existing sodium vapor luminaires.

**3.4.4. Consider using LED luminaires for both pedestrian-level and street lighting.** LED street lighting technology has evolved greatly over the last several years so performance will be best when the latest technology, highest quality luminaires are chosen. This measure can provide the advantages of more consistent light color, reduced energy consumption and longer life. The disadvantage is a somewhat higher cost of the luminaire. Examples of installed LED *street* lighting can be seen on Franklin Boulevard in Gastonia in the downtown area.

**3.4.5. All free-standing street signs and traffic signage should be mounted on decorative sign posts.**

**3.5. Establish a local historic district for the Town Center.** This would be a zoning overlay that would allow for design review for renovations, new constructions,

and demolitions within the established boundary. While it cannot stop demolitions, it can delay demolitions for one year in order to allow time for a potential action to save the building through the private sector. Such districts are established pursuant to NCGS 160A-400 and require the establishment of a Historic District Commission to issue certificates of appropriateness for works within the district. Some works are exempt and minor works can typically be staff approved. As noted earlier in this report the historic buildings of Dallas Town Center are its most important asset and unless measures are taken to protect and develop upon these assets, the assets could eventually dwindle to a level where they lose their collective value as an economic and community asset. This measure would require approval of the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) after submitting a site and building inventory of the proposed district.

**3.6. Preserve all existing on-street parking in Dallas Town Center.**

**3.7. Construct two new off-street parking lots for to serve Dallas Town Center and a midblock pedestrian connector to West Trade from the Wilkins Street Parking lot.** These parking lots will add an additional 67 spaces to the Town Center. This will be particularly important for business development; and, for serving events at the restored Historic Courthouse, events at Gaston County Museum, and other Town Center events and festivals.

**3.7.1.** The first parking lot proposed will include 26 spaces and would be located behind the stores fronting along the 100 block of West Trade. Driveway entrance to the lot will be from Wilkins Street. Sidewalks will connect the parking lot to the streets fronting the courthouse square. Below is a generalized depiction of this proposed parking lot as prepared by Diamond Engineering. The cost estimate for construction prepared by the



engineer in March 2013 was \$102,926, not including property acquisition. The property is privately owned. In conjunction with construction of this parking lot, a midblock pedestrian connector should be built to connect the parking lot to the stores on West Trade, as well as to create a more direct route to the Historic Courthouse Square. This connector is shown on the illustration. The connector should be enhanced with a decorative stamped pattern walkway, landscaping, a sitting area, and an ornamental entrance where it connects to the West Trade sidewalk. The connector will require

acquiring an additional strip of property or easement and removing a narrow building (about 10 feet wide) between the Setzer Building and 136 West Trade Street.

- 3.7.2. The second parking lot proposed will include 41 spaces and would be located between the old jail and North Gaston Street, and would front on East Trade Street. Driveway entrances to the parking lot would be provided

on North Gaston and East Trade. To the right is a generalized depiction of this proposed parking lot as prepared by Diamond



Engineering. The cost estimate for construction prepared by the engineer in March 2013 was \$223,485, plus property acquisition. A small portion of the proposed parking lot site is owned by Gaston County Museum, Inc. The Town should propose that the museum furnish this portion to the Town in exchange for building and maintaining the parking lot since the parking lot would be supportive of the museum. But most of the property is privately owned.

- 3.8. **Install new street furnishings of consistent color and pattern.** For example, new benches should be installed along the 100 block of West Trade. Consider installing benches on sidewalks bordering the courthouse square. A pattern document can be helpful in maintaining consistency.

- 3.9. **Town Center design and historic preservation should not overlook the importance of details (even small ones) and quality appearance, nor should it overlook the diverse and eclectic nature of the Town Center's built environment that evolved over its 167-year history.** Examples of this principle could be:

- 3.9.1. **Preserving the granite bollards that surround the courthouse square.**
- 3.9.2. **Preserving the historic granite horse watering trough in the planting strip along the south margin of 100 block of West Trade.**
- 3.9.3. **Preserving the public clock, currently at the northwest corner of the courthouse square.**
- 3.9.4. **Keep tree limbs from obscuring the NC Historic Highway Marker for "Dallas" located on the northern area of the courthouse square.**
- 3.9.5. **Understanding that some buildings are more historic than they may appear at first look, such as the former filling station (c.1940) that sits at the southwest corner of Trade and Holland.** Buildings such as this can be adaptively reused for businesses that contribute to Town Center vitality.

- 3.9.6. *Trees and landscaping are an important part of the historic district and overall good design.*** There may be opportunities to add trees where appropriate, but they should accent the Town Center and its businesses, not obscure them.
- 3.9.7. *Make the 100 block of West Trade (and intersections at either end) free of wooden utility poles, once new signal masts and mast arms are installed.*** Longer range, the Town should plan to eliminate all wooden utility poles and overhead wiring from streets surrounding the courthouse square. Along Main Street, the heavy AT&T wiring is particularly prominent.
- 3.9.8. *When new mast and mast arms are installed, use signal control cabinets that are the same color as the new signal masts and arms.***
- 3.9.9. *Discourage phony “historical” alterations to historic buildings.*** An example of this would be putting a new Colonial style entrance on a Victorian style building.
- 3.9.10. *New building construction in the Town Center should “honor the street.”*** This means that buildings should be built with minimal setbacks from the pedestrian zone and if parking is provided, it should be to the rear of the building or at least behind the front setback.

#### **4. ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING STRATEGIES**

**4.1. *The Town and Town Center organization should determine business development and recruitment targets based upon the Town Center’s greatest assets.*** Capitalizing upon and further developing existing assets will assure greater success in business development. Resolving existing constraints to development objectives will also be necessary. The following assets of Dallas Town Center are readily apparent:

**4.1.1. *Historic character and historic importance of Dallas Town Center.***

**4.1.2. *As with almost all downtowns, Dallas Town Center serves as center for community identity and provides a “sense of place” to Dallas.*** It is the downtown that creates the personal and collective physical image of most communities, including Dallas. In addition, it has the historic courthouse as the center of the Town Center and the identifying community icon. It is the sense of community identity along with the seeking of historic, authentic experiences that continue to attract people to their community downtowns.

**4.1.3. *The physical character and arrangement of buildings in the Town Center provide a clear, distinct “sense of arrival,” and there is also a sense of when one is leaving the center of town.*** With Dallas there is clearly a “there,” “there.”

**4.1.4. *Traffic counts on Trade Street in the Town Center are remarkably high.*** Many consumer businesses location strategies rely heavily on traffic counts, which are typically reported in “average daily traffic” (ADT) counts. For Trade Street in the Town Center area, in 2012 the count reported by NCDOT was **16,000 ADT**. This is approximately 18% **higher** than reported in the same year for Franklin Boulevard in downtown Gastonia.

**4.2. *Some types of businesses that the Town could pursue for the Town Center and be consistent with overall revitalization goals include:***

**4.2.1. *One or more upscale restaurants.*** The Town Center makes an excellent place to spend an evening of dining and entertainment. An upscale restaurant could also benefit from events at the restored Historic Dallas Courthouse Center and events at the Gaston County Museum. Or, simply the opportunity to stroll around the improved historic square after dinner would be a nice capstone to an evening out. Entertainment provided by the restaurant can also increase attraction. Allowing for the on premise sale of beer, wine and spirits has better positioned Dallas for recruiting an upscale restaurant to the Town Center. This is because alcoholic beverages account for a major profit center for upscale restaurants, are now essential for their business success and will thus drive restaurant locational choices.

**4.2.2. *Small dining and snack shops.*** If the Town Center grows as a visitor attraction, businesses that can capture both local and visitor traffic will have a better chance of success. This could include a small cafe, sandwich shop, deli, ice cream, confectionery store, and similar stores, all of which cater to families.



**4.2.3. *Small independent businesses that cater to local trade seeking customer service.*** Examples of existing businesses that are of this tradition include Dallas Paint and Glass, local hairdressers, and barbers. Other such businesses might include a bakery, health or specialty foods, florist, caterer and other independent retail trades of similar scale.

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**4.2.4. *Finance, Investment, Real Estate and Insurance Businesses.*** These establishments serve the local Dallas community and are attracted to the Town Center by visibility, traffic counts and location convenience to local customers.

**4.2.5. *Antique Stores.*** Antique stores and antique malls may be attracted to historic areas. Some small downtowns have built a substantial sector of their economy on antique and decorative arts stores. They do this by becoming a **destination** for shoppers of antiques and decorative arts. An antiques destination occurs when multiple successful stores locate within walking distance of each other. It is the same principle that attracts crowds to farmers markets. The fact that Dallas Town Center is a unique historic district might be a basis for attracting multiple stores because some of the factors that attract people to historic districts and the Art and History Museum may also be common with attracting people to quality antique stores. The quality of antique stores and antique malls is an important consideration. Some “antique malls” are simply indoor flea markets. The Piccolo Antique Mall in Belmont is an example of a higher quality store. Multiple stores and/or magnitude of shopping choice/opportunity can greatly contribute to antique sales success. Antique malls usually require buildings with relatively large open floor space, such as the former Mary Jo’s Cloth Store.

**4.2.6. *Artist Studios and Picture Framers.*** The Town Center offers low cost rental space, which can be very attractive to artists seeking studio and sales gallery space. This includes painters, ceramicists, sculptors, fiber artists and other visual arts professionals. There may be some synergy of attraction between the artist studios, antique and decorative arts stores, picture framers, and the Gaston County Art and History Museum.

**4.3. *The Town of Dallas TOP TIER program provides an incentive for private sector investment within the overall Town Limits of Dallas.*** This program provides investment grant assistance toward: (1) façade improvements, (2) architectural design, (3) business or property upfits, and (4) infrastructure support. Assuming adequate funding, this program can be a powerful tool for Town Center business development. Assuming economic reinvestment in the Town Center is a priority, and assuming the built historic resources in the Town Center are foundational to such reinvestment, the following recommendations are made:

**4.3.1. *Priority for TOP TIER funding should be given to applications for businesses located/locating within the Town Center when such businesses would clearly contribute to economic restructuring goals.***

**4.3.2. *Funding for projects within the Town Center should not be given to any project that is clearly inconsistent with the overall goal of historic***

**preservation.** This is accomplished by incorporating design review into the application process for Town Center locations. Whether it is new construction or property renovation, any project within the Town Center receiving public assistance should be sensitive to historic character.

**4.4. Economic Restructuring should be done in consort with the three other components of the Four Point Approach®.**

**4.4.1. The overall Town Center organization contributes to formulating business development goals for the Town Center.** Businesses owners should welcome same type businesses. Everyone understands that successful new business development helps the overall business area succeed.

**4.4.2. Marketing and promotions become a joint effort between businesses, the Town and other institutions.**

**4.4.3. Public Improvements and private building reinvestments are all done with design sensitivity to the historic character of the Town Center by understanding that preserving and enhancing this asset is key to economic development.**



Representation of improved buildings and facades consistent with preservation economic development goals.

**4.5. The Town, together with its overall Town Center organization, needs to formulate strategies not only for new business recruitment, but also for retaining and growing existing businesses that contribute to its economic restructuring strategies.** Important in this process is determining what the needs are for existing businesses and what existing resources can be used to address such needs. One source for assisting existing businesses might be the Small Business Center at Gaston College.