



West End Revitalization Strategies Plan

Thursday, August 22



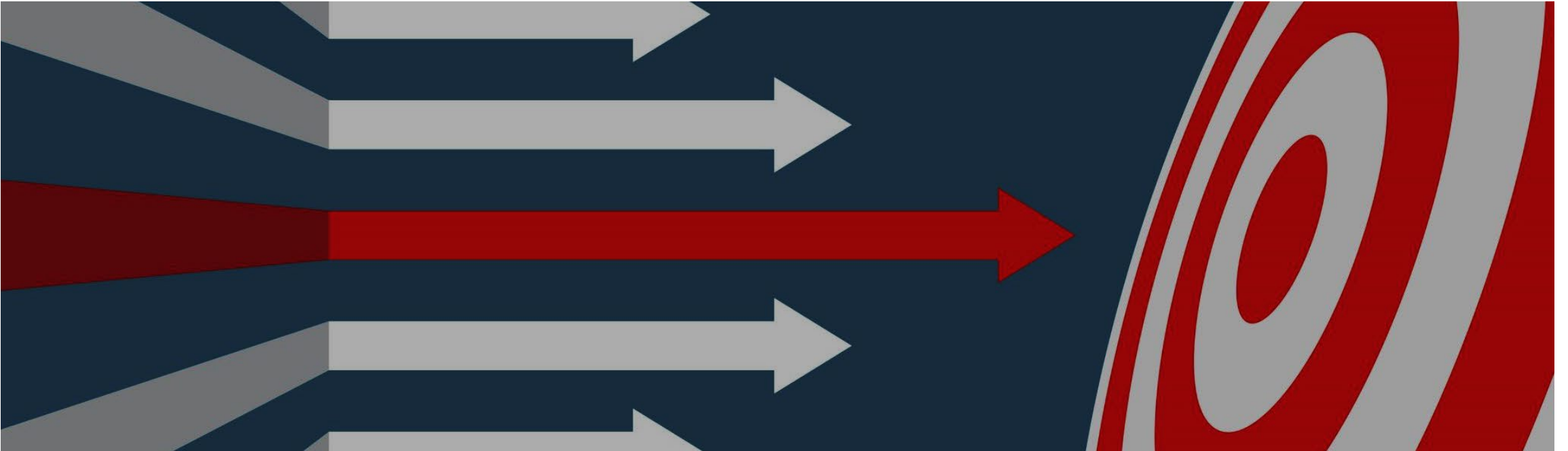
Background: 2020

- Members of the Staunton City Council attended a West End Community meeting and gathered comments on community needs.
- The “Staunton Plan” identified the West End as a strategic focus area and committed to providing resources "to promote this community as a vibrant area that has diverse business opportunities, cultural offerings, and great potential for economic growth and stability."
- The City secures the EPA Brownfield Grant to identify sites for redevelopment. The process includes community engagement.



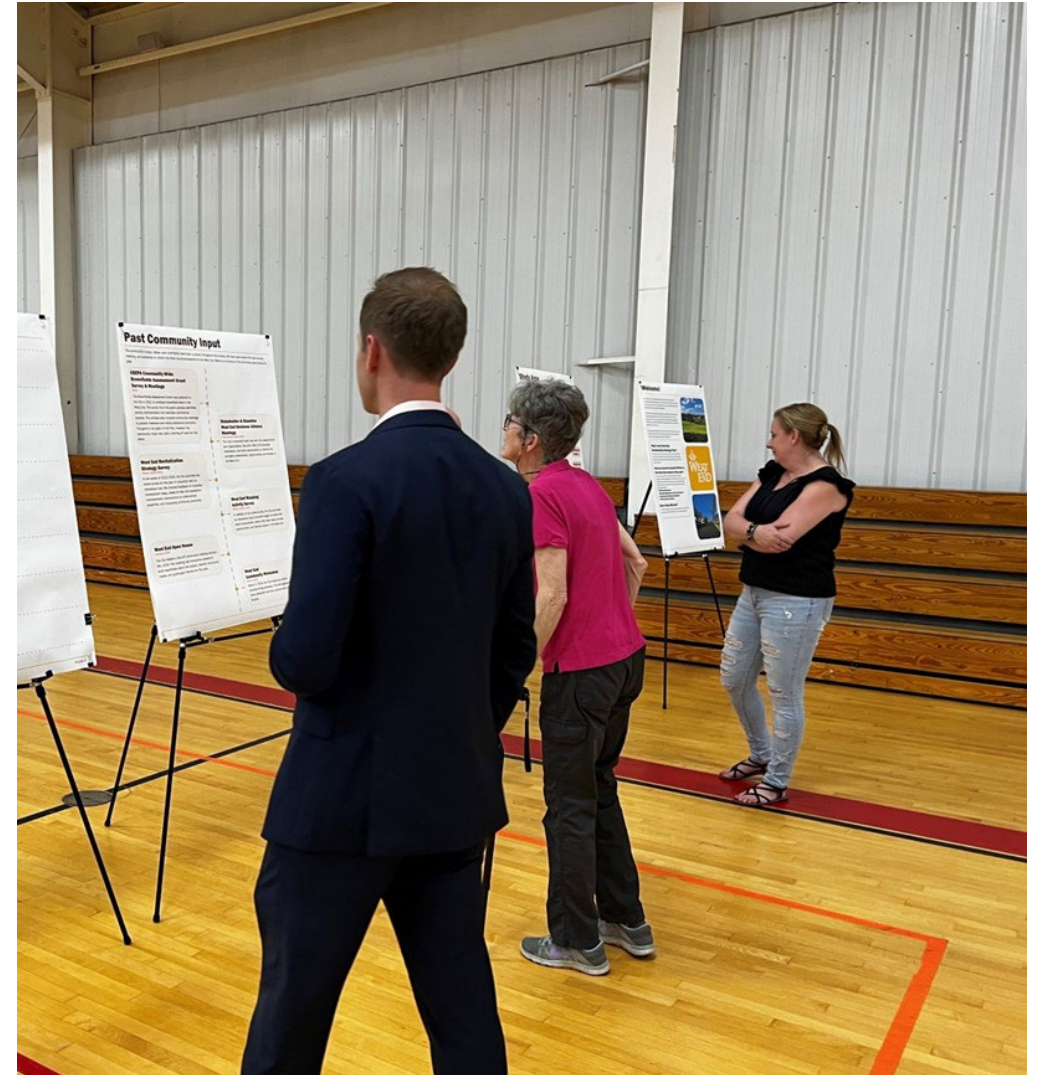
Process Goals

- Develop a **cohesive vision** that bridges livability and economic development.
- Develop **achievable approaches** to revitalize the commercial corridor.
- Improve the **overall quality of life** in the West End.



2023-2024

- **Summer 2023:** The West End RSP process begins.
- **Fall 2023:** Staunton and its consultants begin stakeholder discussions.
- **Winter 2024:** The broader public engagement process begins with an Open House Event and community survey.
- **Spring 2024:** Staunton and its consultants continue to build visioning statements, recommendations, and plan elements. This season also includes two community meetings.
 - **March** – Community workshop
 - **May** – Community Open House
 - **June** – Video and a second survey
- **Summer 2024:** The process yielded significant data and public insights, which go into the draft plan for review by the local Planning Commission and Council.



Engagement



About **290** people participated throughout the RSP process

4% of the Primary Study Area population

213 took online survey in the Winter of 2023/2024



1,290
unique comments received

79 from the January Open House

1,011 from online survey and map survey

84 from May Workshop

56 from Open House (60 Virtual follow up)



Document Overview

- Vision Statement with four supporting goals
- Ten objectives/strategies that support the goals
- 29 recommended actions
 - 15 higher-priority, detailed actions
 - 14 other actions
- Seven chapters (124 pages)
- Six appendices

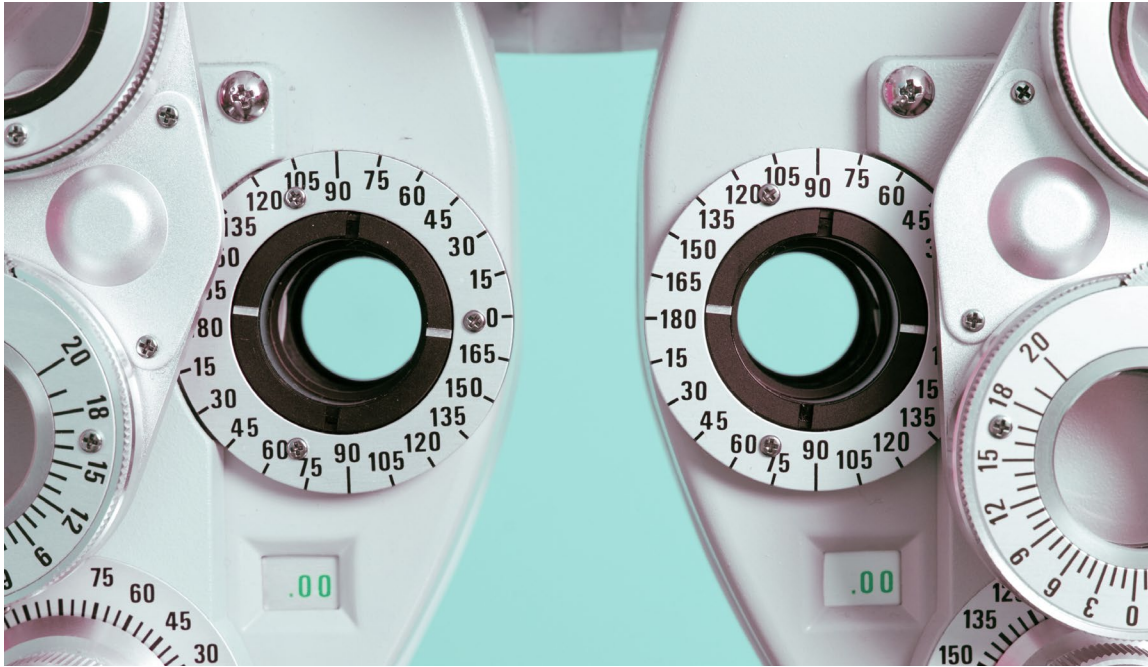


Document Overview

- Executive Summary
- Introduction
- Background
- Defining West End's Future
- Vibrant Commercial Corridors
- Healthy & Safe Connections
- Green Neighborhoods
- Reinvestment & Affordability



Visioning



The West End will be a vibrant, diverse, and multimodal community, where residents can safely and conveniently access their thriving commercial corridor, consisting of local shops and services that function as a proud gateway to Staunton's western neighborhoods.

- Vibrant Commercial Corridor
- Healthy and Safe Connections
- Green Neighborhoods
- Reinvestment and Affordability

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- **Strategy:** Program and Financial Support
 - Action: Expand the Enterprise Zone
 - Action: Explore Tax Increment Financing
 - *Other Action:* Continue to Raise Awareness of Existing Programs
 - **Strategy:** Upkeep and Beautification
 - Action: Support Upkeep through Public-Private and Other Partnerships
 - *Other Action:* Implement Entrance Corridor Overlay
 - *Other Action:* Establish Pop-Up Events

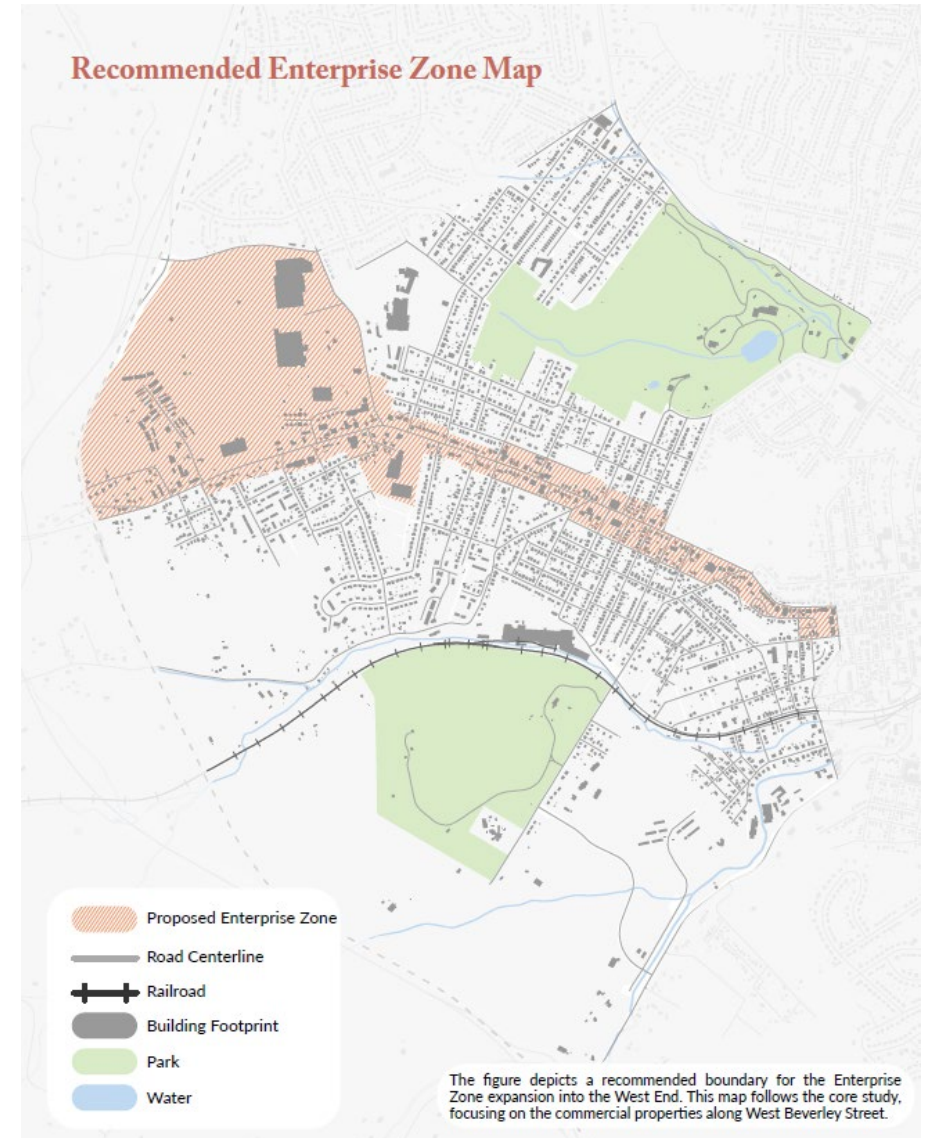


Vibrant Commercial Corridor

Foster a vibrant commercial corridor along West Beverley Street, which will be an active center of local businesses that serve the diverse needs of the West End's neighborhoods and the surrounding areas of Staunton.

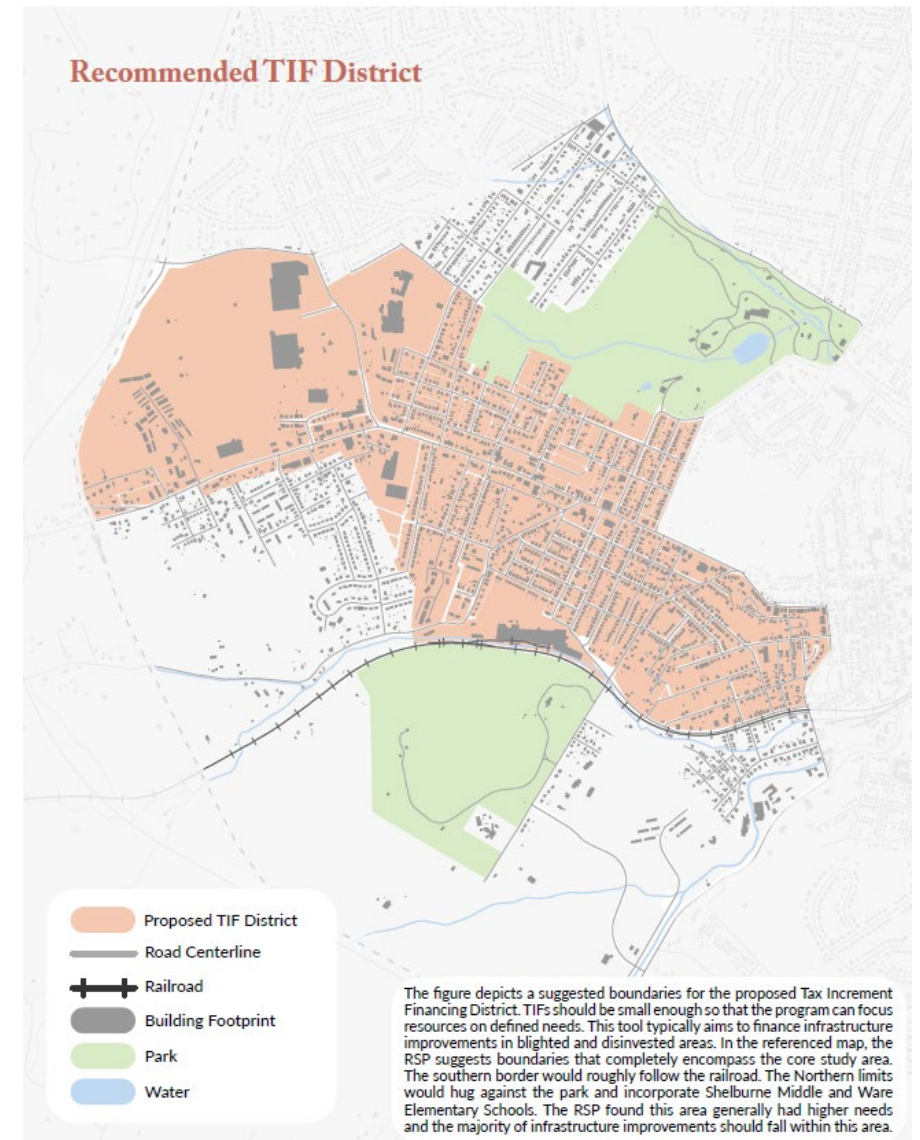
Action: Expand the Enterprise Zone

The Enterprise Zone unlocks incentives and grants to encourage new businesses and expand existing businesses. Incentives that best fit the community's needs include the creative class/entrepreneurship incentive, the minority business incentive, the property tax exemption incentive, and the incentive for increased property tax exemption for low-impact development.



Action: Explore Tax Increment Financing

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is a public funding tool to promote economic development and redevelopment in designated areas. It has been used with success throughout Virginia since 1988. TIF captures the future increases in property tax revenues generated by the rise in property values due to redevelopment and uses those funds to finance the necessary improvements. This powerful tool can help provide the resources needed for infrastructure upgrades, public amenities, and other key elements for revitalization.



Action: Support Upkeep through Public-Private and Other Partnerships

Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) and similar coordination can serve as another strategy for financing revitalization and redevelopment. These approaches may include less structured collaboration with non-profits and other community groups, such as the Staunton West End Business Association (SWEBA).

Case Study | *Rocky Mount, North Carolina* The Historic Douglas Block Project

The Historic Douglas Block Project in Rocky Mount represents a redevelopment effort to revitalize a historically African American business district. Initiated by the city in 2003, the project focused on a 3-block area designated as a Redevelopment Area, encompassing 16 parcels across approximately 15 acres of land. The redevelopment plan included renovating six buildings as part of Phase 1, completed in 2011. Rocky Mount's approach involved creating a public-private partnership to spearhead the redevelopment efforts, emphasizing preserving historical integrity and creating usable public spaces. Financing for the project, totaling approximately \$8 million, came from various sources, including a Section 108 HUD Loan, Brownfield Grant, Historic Tax Credits, and New Markets Tax Credits. This phase aimed to preserve the district's historic character while enhancing its economic viability. An important aspect of the success of this project in attracting visitors was street improvements, including wider sidewalks and human-scale lighting. For more details, refer to **Appendix E**.

Highlight

- Streetscape enhancements to lighting and improved pedestrian access have increased foot traffic and patronage to local businesses
- Collaboration between the city, non-profits, local organizations, and businesses is key to success
- The downtown revitalization project was done in several phases, making the project more feasible with enhancements are ongoing today



Photo credit: City of Rocky Mount

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- **Strategy:** Maintain and Improve Connections
 - Action: Repair and Maintain Sidewalks and Roads
 - Action: Implement Bike and Pedestrian Improvements
 - *Other Action:* Add Bus Shelters
 - **Strategy:** Improve Public Safety
 - Action: Install High Visibility crosswalks
 - Action: Identify Street Lighting Improvements
 - Action: Regular Communication between the Police Department and the Community
 - *Other Action:* Prevent Crime Through Environmental Design
 - *Other Action:* Study Traffic Safety Measures

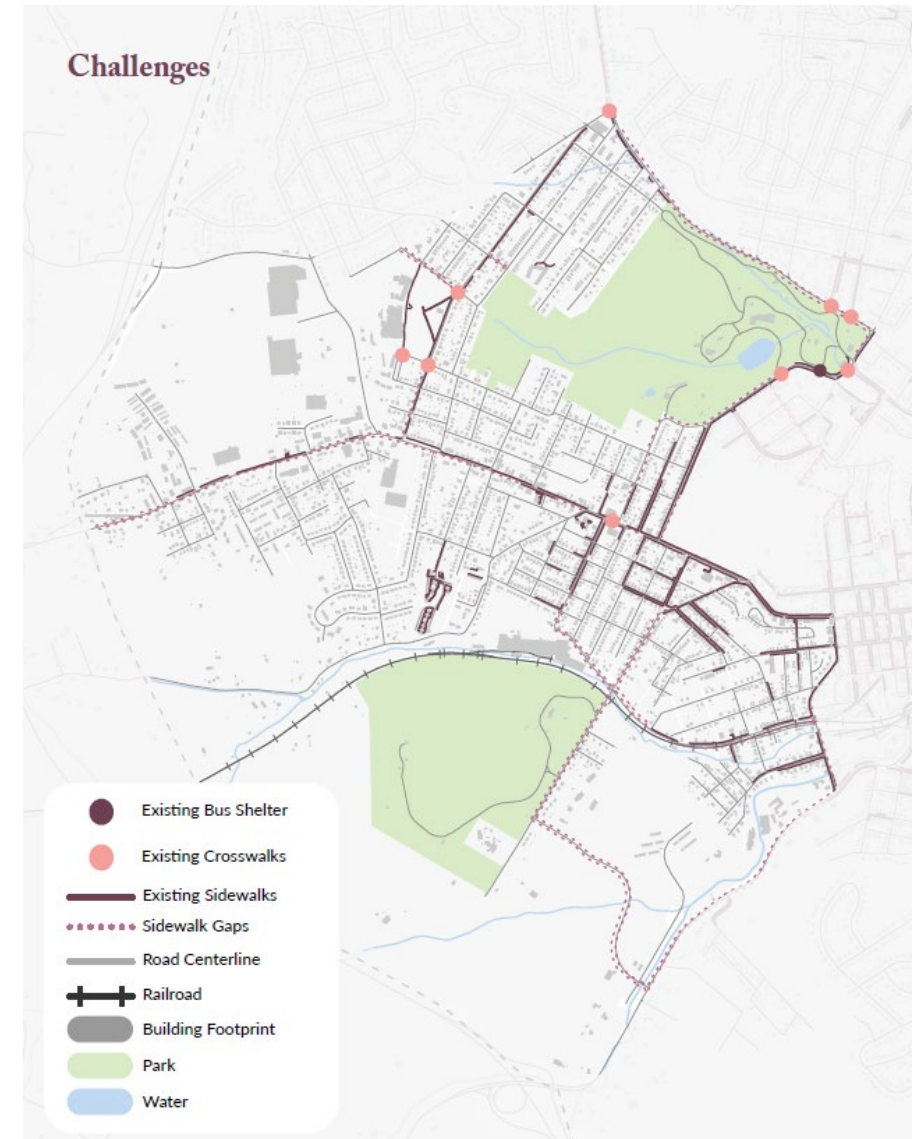


Healthy & Safe Connections

Shape a healthy and beautified West End that creates a safe and comfortable environment for people walking, biking, and taking transit.

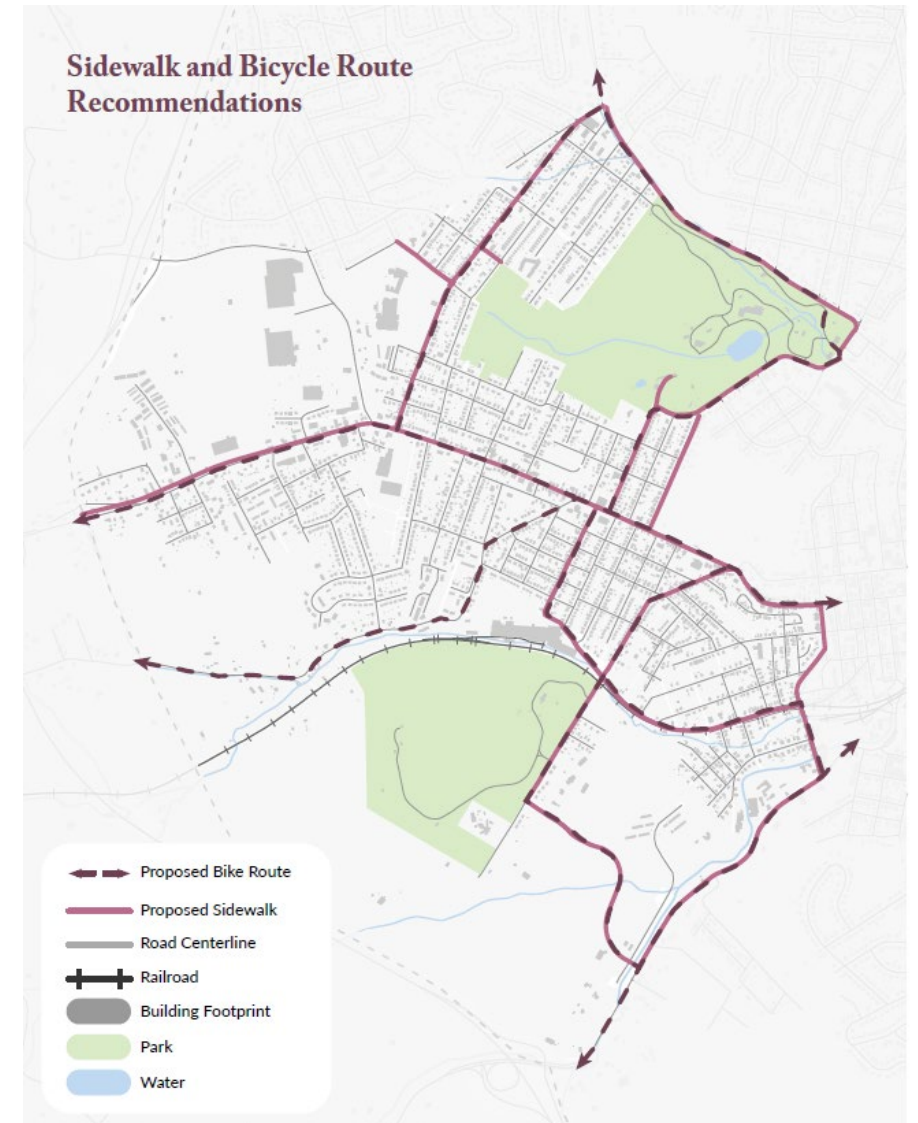
Action: Repair and Maintain Sidewalks and Roads

The West End neighborhoods requested additional attention to street maintenance, including sidewalks and roads. Much of the sidewalk network is in the West Beverley corridor (east of Grubert Street). However, Thornrose Avenue and Grubert Street have relatively consistent pedestrian accommodations. The three eastern neighborhoods (Thornrose, Montgomery Avenue, and West Johnson) have the most complete sidewalk networks due to their proximity to downtown. Most of the other residential areas lack pedestrian accommodations. Most residential areas have lower traffic volumes, and residents are concerned about losing yards and trees for streetscape improvements. Of existing sidewalks, the City's consultants documented numerous condition issues throughout the study area. The following summarizes those most common characteristics.



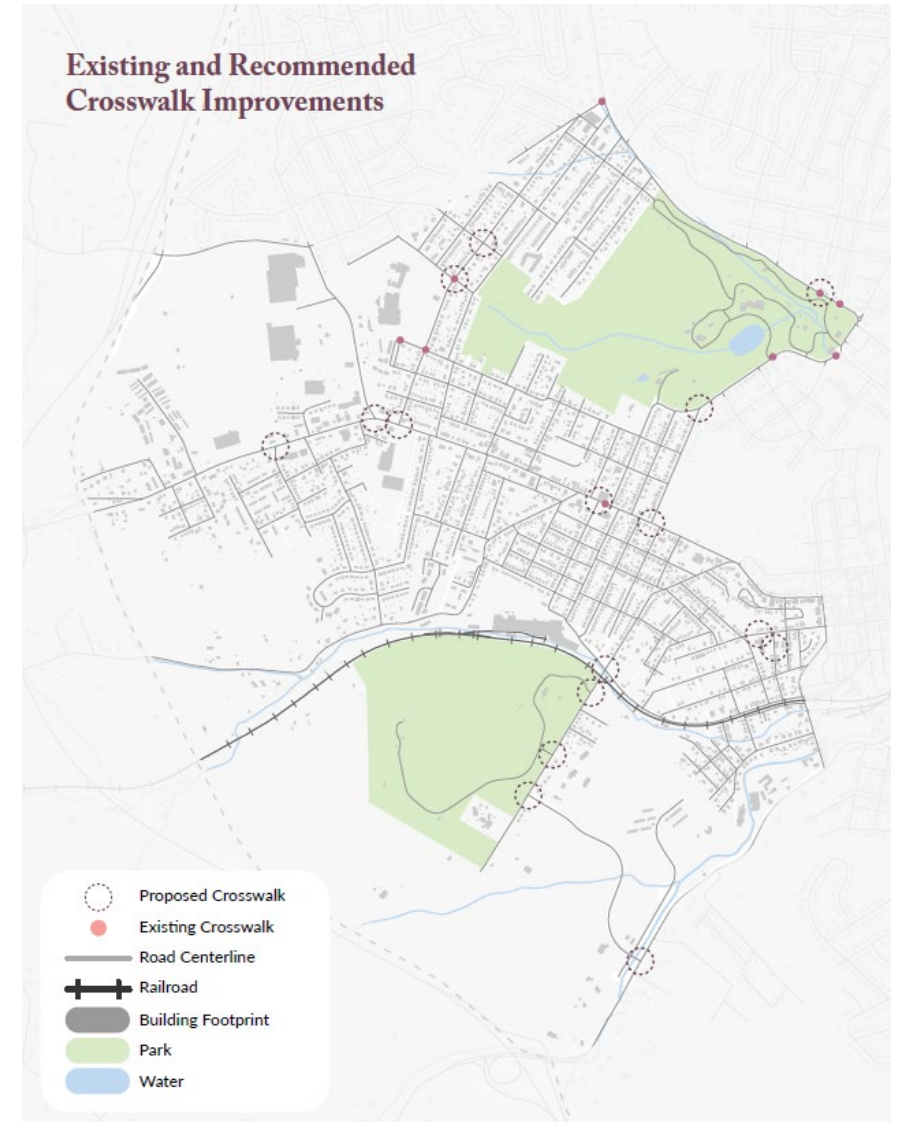
Action: Implement Bike and Pedestrian Improvements

Bike and pedestrian routes arose from public input, data analysis, observation, and existing conditions. In 2018, the city passed the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. There is a one-to-one overlap between this 2018 effort and the RSP. Each recommendation relevant to the West End within this plan should be implemented to increase healthy and safe connections throughout the community.



Action: Install High Visibility Crosswalks

High visibility crosswalks make walking safer from vehicle and pedestrian collisions. According to VDOT crash data from 2019 to 2024, ten pedestrian-related crashes have occurred in the Primary Study Area. Two of these crashes resulted in visible injuries, and four resulted in severe injuries. Adding high-visibility crosswalks to critical intersections and community connection points makes the West End safer and more walkable. The biggest challenge for crosswalk installation is the need for proper curb ramps. Most of the existing sidewalks lack the proper areas to receive people in wheelchairs.



Action: Identify Street Lighting Improvements

The community identified the need for better lighting to improve pedestrian safety at night as a top priority. Three out of twelve pedestrian-related accidents occurred at night in the West End. Survey respondents also expressed concerns about near misses with individuals walking during these times. Although streetlights are near businesses and parks with well-lit internal roadways, residential neighborhoods and identified pedestrian routes have limited visibility at night.



Action: Regular Communication between the Police Department and the Community

Regular communication between the police and the community is vital for creating a sense of safety and trust. This ongoing conversation helps close gaps, provide direct feedback, address shared concerns, and work together to solve local issues. By keeping communication channels open, police can understand community needs, respond quickly to incidents, and improve crime prevention strategies. Encouraging community involvement with safety measures also helps prevent crime and strengthens community relations, ultimately enhancing the overall well-being of neighborhoods. Ongoing partnerships exist between the police and private landowners, including landlords for multifamily areas. Additionally, more robust community involvement in community safety can connect individuals needing health-related resources.



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- **Strategy:** Improve Access to Parks
 - Action: Improve Pedestrian Connections to Parks
 - Action: Create a Public Square at the J&DR Site
 - Action: Update Zoning to Require Common Space Amenities
 - *Other Action:* Make School Amenities Available After Hours
 - **Strategy:** Incorporate Beautification
 - Action: Facilitate the Planting of New Street Trees
 - *Other Action:* Create a Streetscape Beautification Program
 - **Strategy:** Preserve Natural Systems
 - *Other Action:* Encourage Native Planting
 - *Other Action:* Improve Stormwater through Natural Features

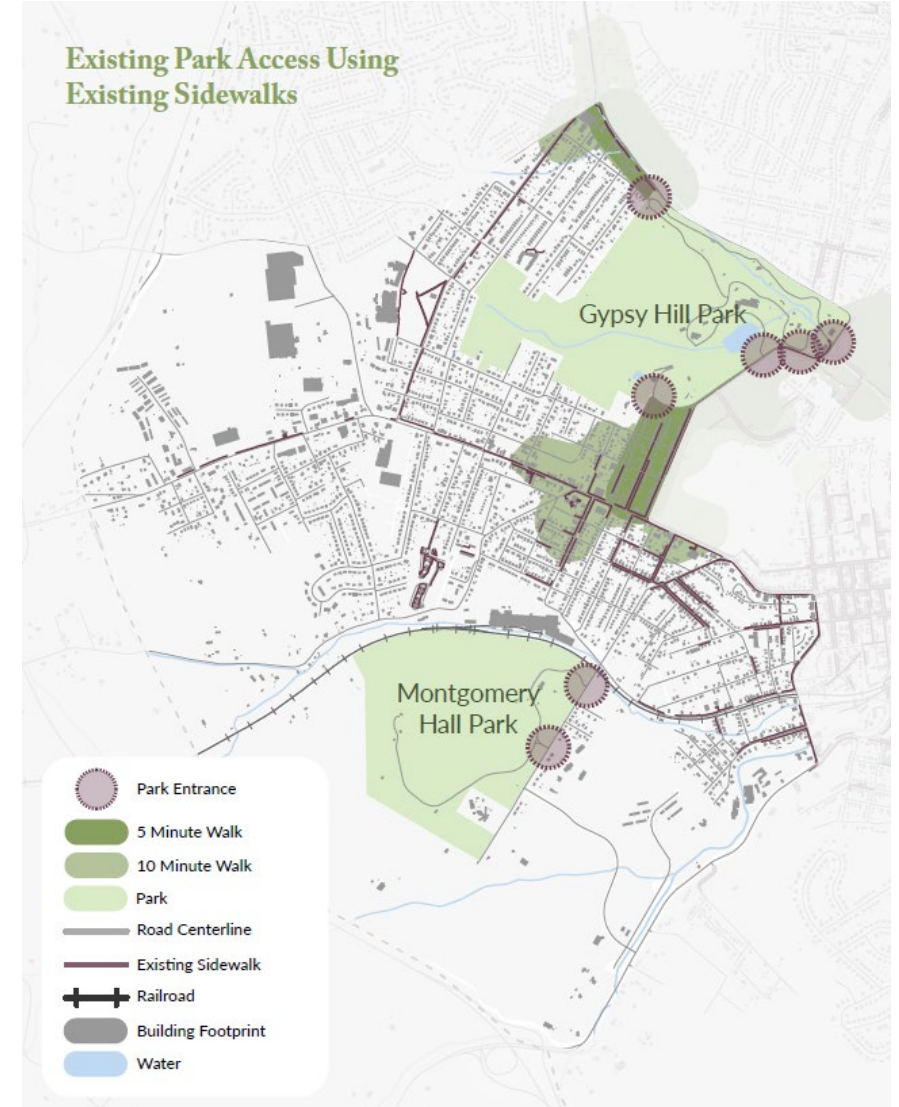


Green Neighborhoods

Preserve and strengthen the West End's environmental assets, promote green infrastructure, and offer enhanced city parks and community spaces.

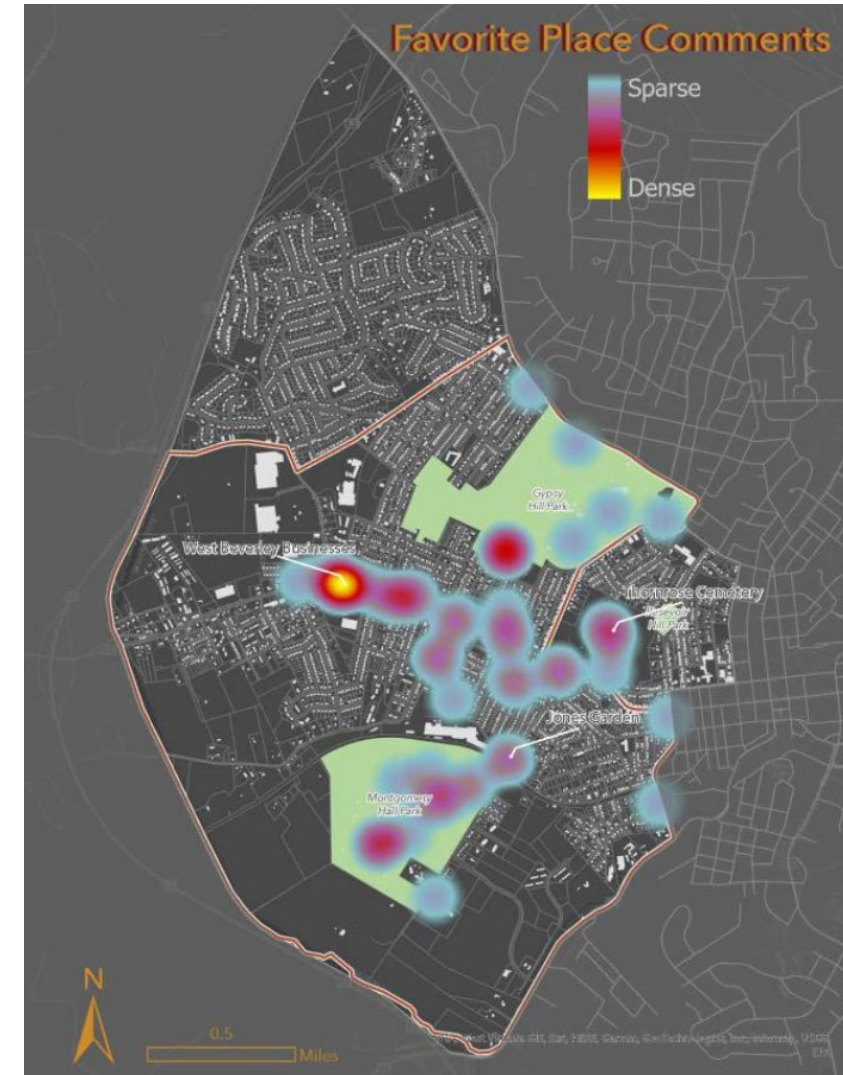
Action: Improve Pedestrian Connections to Parks

Montgomery Hall Park currently has two park entrances along Montgomery Avenue. Neither entrance has crosswalks or sidewalks leading to the entrances or within the park. Gypsy Hill Park has five park entrances: one on Park Boulevard, three on Thornrose Avenue, and one on A Street. Only two out of the five entrances have crosswalks. The neighborhoods on the western sides of Gypsy Hill Park and Montgomery Hall Park do not have access to their respective adjacent amenities. The city should make the existing park entrances safe and accessible by installing crosswalks at all entrances and having sidewalks leading to each park entrance. In the long term, the city should identify new pedestrian-only entrances to the parks with the appropriate infrastructure to increase the number of neighborhoods within a 10-minute walking distance of a park entrance.



Action: Create a Public Square at the J&DR Site

As depicted in the park access map, the West End has abundant open space and limited pedestrian access. With eastward-facing park entrances, western neighborhoods are outside of walking distance. Additionally, the community pointed to the Morris Mill Road and West Beverley Street areas as essential places. With those considerations, the new Juvenile and Domestic Relations (J&DR) site would be ideal for a public square that allows residents to gather, sit outside, and be present in the corridor.



Action: Update Zoning to Require Common Space Amenities

The city's current zoning ordinance requires “Unusable Open Space” for multifamily uses on parcels zoned R-3 and R-4. However, these open space requirements are vague and can lead to unusable areas that offer no amenities to residents in those residential developments. R-3 parcels require open space of not less than 400 square feet for each dwelling, while R-4 requirements for multifamily uses are based on the number of stories. The city should consider defining ‘Usable Open Space’ to increase public visibility of these areas and include language to require defined amenities such as benches, swings, or slides. Establishing a definition of Usable Open Space also provides an opportunity to define the space for residential use only and not accessible to the larger public.



Action: Facilitate the Planting of New Street Trees

There is a noticeable absence of street trees in the West End, particularly along the existing walking routes. While the right-of-way near the Downtown area on West Beverley Street is narrower, there are wider areas where new sidewalks should include tree infrastructure. Business parking lots would greatly benefit from general landscaping, bioswales for stormwater retention, and the installation of trees. Research has shown that street trees can enhance property value and attract more local business visitors. In residential neighborhoods, there is limited space to plant trees on public property; however, private property owners should consider planting trees near the street to compensate for the lack of right-of-way.



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- **Strategies:** Support Home Renovations
 - Action: Connect Residents to Existing Resources
 - *Other Action:* Develop a Homes Conditions Program
 - **Strategies:** Reinvest in Community Centers and Resources
 - Action: Reimagine Booker T. Washington as a Community Center through Private Partnerships
 - Action: Develop a Neighborhood Arts Initiative
 - *Other Action:* Reuse Brownfield Sites
 - **Strategies:** Support Neighborhood Advocacy
 - *Other Action:* Provide Renter Education Programming
 - *Other Action:* Organize Active Neighborhoods

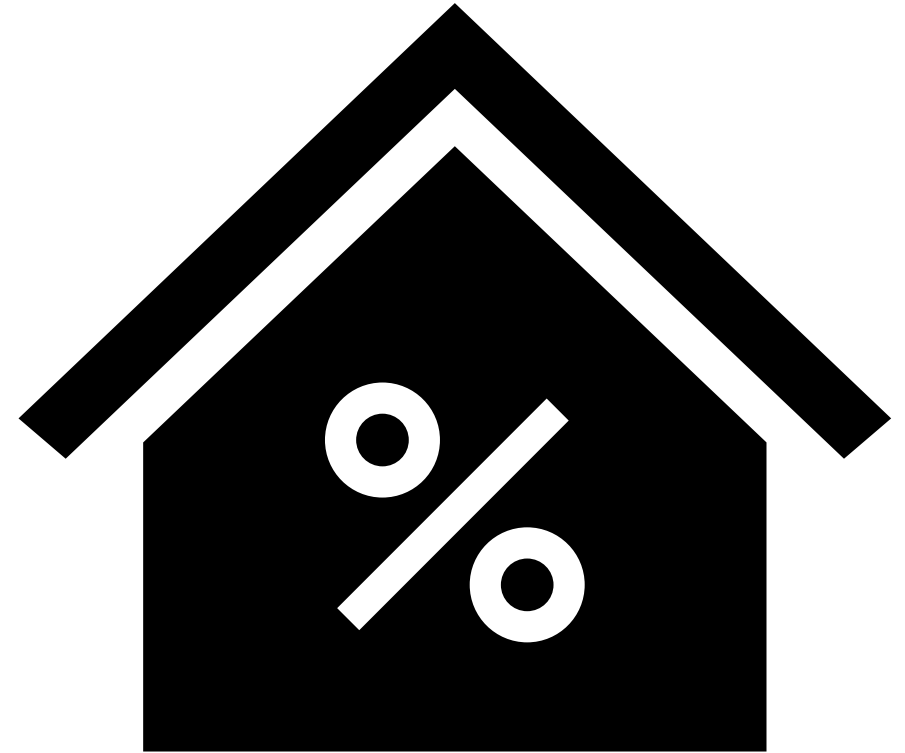


Reinvestment & Affordability

Foster reinvestment in the West End's neighborhoods and homes while maintaining affordable living and homeownership opportunities.

Action: Connect Residents to Existing Resources

The Housing Programs Division in Staunton advises and leads the city's housing activities, policies, and initiatives, focusing on affordable housing and housing for working families. This division also administers the city's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Entitlement Program, funded through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Housing is crucial in providing residents shelter, safety, and financial security and is a significant economic development driver.



Reimagine Booker T. Washington as a Community Center through Private Partnerships

The Booker T. Washington Community Center is a cultural and historical landmark housed in the former Booker T. Washington High School. Built in 1937, Booker T. Washington served as a high school for African American students during segregation. The building closed as a school in 1966 and later became the Staunton Police Station until 1986. After lying vacant for 15 years, the building was repurposed in 2001 as a community center. Staunton's Department of Public Works reported approximately \$300,000 in repairs and upgrades between 2001 and 2003. In collaboration with community members, a later 2007 study by Frazier Associates highlighted the Center's potential to better serve the public by transforming the vacant first floor into a hub for community events and services.

Case Study | Charlottesville, Virginia

The Jefferson School

Jefferson School Heritage Center, located in Charlottesville, Virginia, offers educational programs, exhibits, and events that highlight the rich heritage of African Americans in Charlottesville and beyond. Their programs include educational tours, lectures, workshops, and youth programs designed to engage visitors of all ages and backgrounds. They host events such as heritage festivals, cultural celebrations, and community dialogues that provide dialogue, reflection, and celebration opportunities. Additionally, the center serves as a venue for artistic and cultural expressions, featuring performances, art exhibitions, and storytelling sessions that showcase African American artists' and performers' talents and creativity. For more details, refer to Appendix E.

Key Takeaways

- The Jefferson School exemplifies the importance of preserving history and heritage while repurposing for modern use
- Collaboration between the city, non-profits, local organizations, and businesses is key to success
- Developing flexible multi-use spaces can maximize the impact of the project



Photo credit: Jefferson School African American Heritage Center

Action: Develop a Neighborhood Arts Initiative

Neighborhood arts programs are a cost-effective way to beautify public spaces and local neighborhoods. Citizen-led initiatives can be immediate, low-cost, and offer temporary changes that can test placemaking concepts before committing to permanent upgrades. Critical considerations for successful arts-oriented placemaking include identifying and highlighting local assets, preserving historical elements, enhancing local character, and promoting cultural tourism such as mural walks. Additionally, murals and street art can improve public safety by calming traffic and making crosswalks and intersections more visible. Direct community engagement to create art that reflects the West End's unique culture, history, and identity can foster a strong sense of place and community pride. Additionally, this will complement the "incorporate small public spaces" theme in public feedback.





Questions

