



Preface

The Town of Mint Hill has grown as a largely suburban community without the blessing of coherent "Main Street" or Downtown as have its sister Mecklenburg County towns of Davidson, Matthews, and Pineville.

This Plan is intended to give a clear vision for the construction of a Downtown through a series of incremental, mostly private development decisions. This Plan is intended to be used in conjunction with the Downtown Mint Hill Overlay Code as this framework for growth.

Throughout this document are a series of recommendations that are non-Code related. Many of these recommendations are new policies or capital improvements and should be carefully implemented as is prudent.

This Plan is not without its barriers however. Future development decisions must be carefully guided by the Town staff and the Board of Commissioners to ensure that the vision of a pedestrian-friendly, active Downtown is fulfilled. The Code, in part, embodies this committment to higher quality growth. Patience will be warranted as the full build-out of this Plan may exceed 20 years, just as was the case for many of our historic precedents.

In addition, this Plan is contingent on the future widening of NC 51 as a mutli-lane boulevard with heavy landscaping and pedestrian-orientation. If this major thoroughfare is permitted to dissect the Downtown with the same lack of humanity as have so many other roads in our communities, then the utlimate reality of a true Downtown for Mint Hill will evolve as a hybrid at best. Only until current and future residents feel comfortable and have a reason to walk to The Square, will success be achieved.

Acknowledgements:

This Plan was prepared by The Lawrence Group - Town Planners for the Town of Mint Hill.

Board of Commissioners Mayor Ted H. Biggers Lloyd Austin Lewis A. "Tal" West Stephen M. Horton Carl M. Ellington

R. Todd Lamb, Town Manager

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DOWNTOWN MINT HILL MASTER PLAN



This Plan was prepared by The Lawrence Group - Town Planners and Architects in partnership with Kubilins Transportation Group

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We would like to thank the Board of Commissioners for their guidance and wisdom, and the many people who took time out of their busy schedules to join us at the charrette. We believe that this plan is the expression of that vision, set forth by those who lead the present, to endow for future generations.

> Craig S. Lewis, AICP, CNU Project Manager

Overview

	Tuesday – Nov. 13th	Wednesday – Nov. 14th		Thursday – Nov. 15th		Friday – Nov. 16th
8:00		Breakfast		Breakfast		Breakfast
8:30		8:30 Downtown Business Owners		8:30 Mint Hill Historical Society		DESIGN
	10:00 Team Arrives and Studio Set-Up	10:00 NC DOT/MPO		11:00 Mecklenburg County Engineering &		
	11:00 Overview by Local Staff during Lunch and Walking Tour of Area	11:00 Potential Development Projects		Building Standards		
12:00		Lunch		Lunch		Lunch
1:00	1:00 Lunch 1:00 Potential Development Projects		z	DESIGN	z	DESIGN
	2:00 Mint Hill Business Association	2:30 Potential Development Projects	DESIGN		DESIGN	
	4:00 Design Review Committee	3:30 Potential Development Projects			and Profession	
5:00	5:00 Dinner with Town Board/Planning Board	5:30: Pin-Up Session and Project Update		5:30 Pin-Up Session and Project Update	-	Close-Up Studio
6:30		Dinner	1	Dinner		Dinner
7:00	7:00 Opening Presentation by The Lawrence Group	7:00 Downtown Property Owners		DESIGN]	7:00 Reception and Closing Presentation by The Lawrence Group

A 4 day intensive planning and design charrette was held at the Mint Hill Town Hall on November 13-16, 2001. A temporary design studio was set up in the Town Board room complete with design tables, meeting areas, computer equipment and a presentation area. During this charrette, The Lawrence Group, in partnership with the Town staff and interested citizens, developed a consensus vision for the development of the downtown area.









Map showing property ownership interests of the charrette participants

Study Area Overview

PREVIOUS PLANNING EFFORTS

The purpose of this study was to revise the Master Plan for the Downtown as originally adopted in 1992 and updated in 2000.

The 1992 Downtown Study Design and Development Concepts, completed by Lu & Sears advocated a mixed-use downtown that balanced the needs of the pedestrian and the automobile. In addition, it presented a boulevard street system that connected "all elements of the community with each other, with the State roadway system and with proposed regional mass transit systems." In addition the plan identified the following as priorities:

- Active growth, streetscape and greenway amenities
- A finite downtown defined by concentric and radial roads, many of which are boulevards
- NC 51 as the major east-west vehicular corridor with access to the new outer loop
- Lawyers Road as the major north-south vehicular corridor and the most convenient way to access the new outer loop
- A rather neo-classical street pattern with advantage offered by the grid system of streets
- "Town Square" and Town Hall focus with opportunities for public landscapes and municipal services expansion such as the new library
- Light industry, employment expansion inside the outer ring boulevard near NC 218
- Numerous new park and new school sites
- Regional and local mass transit opportunities
- "Pasture" gateways and greenway connectors

Seven separate concepts were completed for the 1992 effort. The seventh scheme, known as the Composite Plan was the one ultimately adopted by the Town Board. In attempting to implement this plan, the town staff found great difficulty in interpreting

its building and use patterns due in large part to the scale and detail of the original plan.

In 2000, a Land Use Steering Committee that this planning area required a significant update due largely to the plan's obsolescence and confusion. This update was completed as part of the Mint Hill Future Land Use, a document that encompasses the entire planning jurisdiction for the Town of Mint Hill.

This Plan identified three major goals for the Downtown area:

- To encourage and promote the Mint Hill Downtown area (as defined in the 1992 Downtown Development Committee Study as the area near NC 51 and Lawyers Road and the areas along NC 51 and around the intersection of NC 51 and Wilgrove-Mint Hill Road) as a pedestrian-friendly, retail center of the town, which also offers medium density housing alternatives to residents, and encourages mixed-use developments.
- To encourage and promote appropriate amounts and types of commercial and office development to meet the shopping, service, and to an extent, employment needs of area residents.
- To protect and promote continued quality of life, amenities, and services which influence the Town's positive image

STUDY AREA

The study area boundaries are approximately 1 square mile in area, with NC 51 serving as the primary spine for development. In addition, the study area includes Lawyers Road, Wilgrove-Mint Hill Road, and Fairview Road (NC 218).

A ridge line runs along NC 51, dividing two separate drainage basins. To date, sewer is only available on the northern side, though some properties within close proximity to the ridge may be able to tap into the line in NC 51, with the provision of lift stations.

NC 51 is currently classified as a major thoroughfare on the Mecklenburg-Union Thoroughfare Plan, along with Lawyers Road and Fairview Road.









2000 Future Land Use Plan



Downtown Study Area Boundary

Development/Redevelopment Opportunities



Prior to the completion of any design work, a "ripe and firm" analysis was completed for all the properties in the study area. "Firm" properties are those that are generally in their final building/use pattern, also referred to as the "highest and best use" by the real estate and appraisal community. Once determined, little change is recommended to them.

Properties that are determined to be "ripe" for development/redevelopment include those that are currently undeveloped, under-developed (additional development opportunities exist on the property including expansion of existing buildings and new construction), or can be redeveloped (such as an old, vacant shopping center).

This type of analysis is necessary to identify both sacred cows, those properties that should be left alone, and development opportunities. While most development opportunities were identified through a combination of a windshield and a walking survey, some properties were classified after interviews with the property owner.

The map shown on this page indicates a significant number of properties that are ripe for development/redevelopment in the study area, with the largest tracts located to the southwest of the intersection of NC 51 and Lawyers Road.

Undeveloped Land

Redevelopment Opportunity







Population and Demographic Analysis

Population Summary				
Mint Hill	North Carolina			
Total Population:	14,922			
Total Households:	5,581			
Average Household Size:	2.67	Average Household Size:	2.49	
Total Families:	4,432			
Population in Families:	13,207			
Average Family Size:	2.98	Average Family Size:	2.98	

Population by	Age			Selected Economic Characterist	ics		
	Mint Hill		North Carolina		Mint Hill	Mecklenburg County	North Carolina
	<u>Number</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	Median Household Income	\$60,822	\$50,579	\$39,184
Under 5	866	5.8	6.7	Median Family Income	\$67,055	\$60,608	\$46,335
5 - 19	3,111	20.8	20.5				
20 - 24	709	4.8	7.2	Families below Poverty Level	2.9%	6.6%	9.0%
25 - 34	1,715	11.5	15.1				
35 - 54	5,146	34.4	29.5	Median Home Value	\$143,400	\$141,800	\$108,300
55 - 64	1,845	12.4	9.0				
65 and Over	1,530	10.2	12.0				

Housing Units by Year Structure Built				Housing Units and Household Population by Tenure: Vacancy Status by Type				
Year Structure Built	Mint Hill		North Carolina	Type	Mint Hill		North Carolina	
	<u>Number</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	Housing Status	<u>Units</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	
1999 to March 2000	72	1.3	4.1	Occupied	5,581	96.8		
1995 to 1998	540	9.4	12.3	Owner Occupied	4,697	84.2	69.4	
1990 to 1994	537	9.3	10.6	Renter Occupied	884	15.8	30.6	
1980 to 1989	1,473	25.6	19.7	Vacant 182	8.2			
1970 to 1979	1,778	30.9	18.2					
1960 or earlier	1,345	23.4	35.2	Total	<i>5,763</i>	100.0		

Information from Census 2000, Summary File 1 General Profile 1: PERSONS BY RACE, AGE, & SEX; HOUSEHOLDS AND FAMILIES BY RACE AND BY TYPE







As a predominately suburban town, Mint Hill is not unlike similarly-sized communities throughout North Carolina. A review of the most recent figures from the 2000 Census indicate a number of interesting facts about this community.

- The average household size for Mint Hill is slightly higher than the North Carolina average, while the average family size is exactly the same.
- There is a perception in the community that there is a significant elderly population, though it is consistent with the North Carolina averages.
- The median household income is approximately 50% higher than the State, though only 10% higher than the County. Median home value is equivalent to Mecklenburg County.
- Only 10.7% of the housing stock is less than 7 years old, with the median age of the homes dating to the 1970's.
- 15% of the housing in Mint Hill is renter-occupied, approximately 1/2 of the state-wide average

Green Infrastructure



The Green Infrastructure inventory map for Downtown Mint Hill

EXISTING CONDITIONS: The existing green infrastructure of the downtown is typified by numerous street corridors draining away from the ridge line along NC 51. A number of undeveloped properties including the Teeter property, the McEwen property, and the tracts surrounding the Town contain most of the forested areas for the downtown.

GREENWAYS:

Given the relatively small area of the downtown, the presence of such an abundance of natural features offers an opportunity to create a "green infrastucture" that compliments the urban, main street, environment that is envisioned for the downtown. Based on a preliminary evaluation of the corridors, it is very possible to develop a "green necklace" surrounding the downtown area, providing downtown residents and visitors an additional opportunity for passive recreation.

As a non-motorized transportation corridor, pedestrians and bicyclists from the neighborhoods surrounding the downtown can enter it without mixing with heavy traffic. This is a particularly appealing alternative for students who might attend either Bain Elementary School and the Kings Grant Charter School as well as users of the Public Library and the proposed YMCA facility.

Similar trail networks in Cary, Carrboro, Charlotte and Greensboro are enormously successful and are considered essential elements to their overall parks & recreation and transportation systems.

Because greenways and urban trails differ in use than sidewalks, they should be detailed separately. In the more rural greenway, either crushed and compacted stone or asphalt with a minimum width of 6-8 feet is appropriate. As the greenway converts to the urban trail, it should become an asphalt path a minimum of 8-12 feet wide. Asphalt is strongly preferred to concrete because it is easier for runners (reduces impact on the knees) and rollerbladers (no sidewalk joints). Additionally the width is essential to permit active users such as runners to pass amateur bicyclists (such as children) safely without either having to leave the trail.

Concrete is only appropriate for sidewalks within street rights-of-way where the predominate activity is walking or strolling and/or where frequent driveways or other vehicular crossings require a more durable surface.



A greenway/urban trail entering the Downtown





Green Infrastructure

This plan therefore recommends the following:

- **R1:** Preserve and protect the designated stream corridors during the development process through the stream buffer provisions of the Town's Ordinances.
- **R2:** Preserve and protect the designated non-stream corridors through the subdivision process.
- Require the construction of multi-use paths along the designat-*R3:* ed corridors through the development process.
- Where connections have not been created due to development, *R4*: identify other governmental resources to purchase easements/rights-of-way and construct multi-use paths.



The proposed detail for the greenway trail

PARKWAYS:

The common practice of land development backs lots up to existing streams. In many cases, this is the most economical solution in the short-term. Unfortunately, this practice effectively privatizes the public amenity of this significant environmental feature.

The recommended practice is to construct a parkway along the stream, with homes facing into a greenway, similar to popular in-town parks such as Latta Park in Charlotte, Vermillion in Huntersville and Cleveland Park in Greenville, SC. The public amenity is opened up for everyone in the neighborhood to use and enjoy, thus spreading the premium of its value beyond those homes with direct access to it. This leveraging of an environmental benefit to the entire neighborhood may partially or completely offset the added cost of building a single-loaded road.

Greenways constructed in this manner are considered to be better used and safer because they are more public and have an appropriate number of "eyes on the street" from the fronting homes to police them.

While this practice should be considered for all stream corridors, the top priority should be for perennial streams. As with all streams, an adequate buffer should be maintained to ensure the overall water quality.

R5: Parkways should be constructed along stream basins where practical







A cross-section of a typical parkway through a neighborhood with adequate buffers and public access

Downtown Boundary Revision



Map of the Downtown Area showing the revised boundaries

Based on the analysis completed during the master planning process, it was determined that the study area boundary extended too far east along NC 51 and NC 218. This determination was based on an analysis of current and future land use potential for the periphery areas.

As it is presently, the "Downtown area" is much larger than most other towns with historic core areas. Ideally, the maximum walking distance from one end of the downtown to the other does not exceed 1/2 mile, though the gateway corridors can often extend another 1/2-1 mile.

Additionally, the development patterns along Fairview Road (NC 218) are typically light/flex industrial uses, many of which are incompatible with pedestrian uses and mixed-use development. Further, the area beyond the Food Lion shopping center on NC 51 is currently vacant and undeveloped.

R6: Revise the boundaries of the downtown area and remove those areas on the periphery that are incompatible with the goals of downtown development











INTRODUCTION

The Master Plan has been developed to show a realistic build-out of the downtown area in accordance with the vision set forth by the charrette participants, town staff, and elected officials. For the purposes of this Plan, the Downtown area has been broken down into seven sub-areas. These areas are shown on the map and are as follows:

- NC 51 Corridor
- Teeter Property
- Northeast Neighborhood
- **-** Fairview Road Corridor
- Bain School/Philadelphia Presbyterian Church Neighborhood
- The Square
- McEwen Green

Special emphasis was placed on The Square and McEwen Green during the charrette and each are noted separately in the report. McEwen Green is important because the Master Plan attempts to rectify a previously approved plan (with relatively high intensity of uses permitted), the existing Library, and an adjacent neighborhood. The Square, with its high potential for establishing a sense of place for the community, is similarly highlighted.

NC 51 CORRIDOR

There are a variety of built conditions along the Matthews-Mint Hill Road (NC 51) Road from Lawyers Road to Fairview Road. In general, the character of the area is residential in form but not in function. The area consists of a myriad of shopping center and freestanding commercial uses, residential homes, office uses in existing homes, and the McEwen Funeral Home. The commercialization of this corridor has largely resulted due to an increase in traffic through the corridor that has become quite hostile to residential living.







The front setbacks along the corridor are generally 50 feet, reflective of the current zoning code requirement. Within this setback however, are a number of significant canopy trees that are worth preserving due to both their age and aethetic value in establishing a sense of arrival into the Downtown.

R7: Preserve the existing canopy trees in the NC 51 corridor larger than 24 inches in caliper.

New buildings and the redevelopment of existing buildings through this corridor, given the current parcelization, will likely be free-standing structures. As such, they should be construced as detached buildings similar in scale to the existing residential structures.

R8: In blocks of existing residential structures, new structures should be constructed as Detached Homes. Complete redevelopment of existing blocks may use Shopfront Buildings built to the street.

One other significant property in this corridor is the future Mint Hill Historic Society to be located in the old First Charter building with the Mint Hill Country Doctor's Museum to its rear. As an assemblage of historic structures in close proximity to the elementary as well as prime frontage on the main street, this location has the opportunity to be a tourist destination and living museum that gives Downtown Mint Hill its unique brand.

R9: Support the construction and expansion of the Mint Hill Historic Society's museum

TEETER PROPERTY

A development proposal for this property was pending during the charrette. A review of this development proposal included the construction of a traditional neighborhood with a variety of housing types along with a neighborhood shopping center. As a test to the design appropriateness of this proposal, a number of different alternatives





Mint Hill Country Doctor's Museum located on NC 51





Diagram showing the future street and open space network

were produced during the charrette.

The final plan for this area is remarkably consistent with the proposed development plan. The key elements that should be emphasized in the final planning phases are as follows:

- Interconnected street network designed for both the automobile and the pedestrian
- Variety of housing styles and types with the highest intensity of uses in close proximity to the Neighborhood Shopping Center and The Square transitioning to single family uses adjacent to the surrounding neighborhoods
- Pedestrian-scaled neighborhood shopping center
- Network of open spaces from playgrounds to greenways
- Visual and physical connectivity to The Square along NC 51

In addition to these development specifications, pedestrian crosswalks should be constructed across NC 51 to provide residents access to the Library and Charter School across the street. This is an essential connection as these important civic uses need to folded into the downtown in a pedestrian-friendly manner, reducing the amount of automobile dependence for its users.

R10: Construct pedestrian crosswalks across NC 51 to the Library and the Charter School

NORTHEAST NEIGHBORHOOD

Like the Teeter Property, this area should also be developed in the manner of a Traditional Neighborhood with specification identified in the previous section. Because of its physical proximity to The Square, more downtown-oriented residential uses are recommended including townhomes and narrow-lot detached homes.

A proposed greenway is shown along the creek and surrounding the existing pond. This greenway should serve as the transition from the more-intense residential uses to larger lot single family homes on its north side, providing as a like-kind adjacent use to the existing homes in the area.

Like the Teeter Property, there is an opportunity to construct a mixed-use neighborhood center when the market can support a third center in the area. Buildings along the NC 51 corridor related to that center should preserve the tree canopy along the corridor as mentioned previously.

FAIRVIEW ROAD CORRIDOR

Serving as an eastern gateway into the Downtown from the outerbelt (I-485), the Fairview Road (NC 218) corridor faces a unique challenge. It has a row of the oldest buildings in Mint Hill, the buildings that originally served as the post office and general store, in a traditional main street pattern.

These historic structures are juxtaposed against a number of non-pedestrian friendly uses including a number of light industrial uses. As this corridor redevelops, and particularly as the sparsely developed south side develops, the buildings should be constructed along the sidewalk in respect for the historic precedent as well as to create a gateway appearance from the outerbelt with nicely detailed mixed-use buildings.

Future streetscaping along this corridor should rely heavily on the historic rock wall at Philadelphia Presbyterian Church as a precedent, particularly at the intersection of Fairview Road and NC 51.

R11: When the streetscape treatment at The Square is extended, the use of stone or rock should be incorporated in the final design

The old Food Lion shopping center (currently the location of the Family Dollar store) should be redeveloped. Strong consideration should be given for multi-story, mixed-use development, particularly for apartments over retail or office uses. The location next to the new Food Lion center as well as the proximity to other retail, Bain Elementary School, and the Church make this an excellent site for higher quality condominiums or apartments over shopfronts.



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BAIN SCHOOL/PHILADELPHIA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH NEIGHBORHOOD

Little development is expected or suggested in this area as the lack of public sewer prevents anything other than 1/2 acre lots in this area. There are two parcels between the Church property and Fairview Road that would be opportunities for townhome development. These developments might serve as elderly living units for church members, a trend that many churches are actively pursuing to permit them to care for their aging populations.

Gateway streets to these important civic uses should be appropriately landscaped with decorative lighting, walls, street trees and ground plantings.



The Philadelphia Presbyterian Church and its historic rock wall

The Square

A detailed study of the area around The Square was completed to show individual property owners the redevelopment potential around the Town Hall. The results of this study are shown on the detail plan on this page.

First and foremost, the four corners around The Square should be formalized with buildings on the south side of the intersection built to the street, creating a Main Street appearance. The branch bank proposed for the southeast corner could be placed as an in-line building further to the east, reserving the corner for a significant mixed-use building.

Adjacent to the Town Hall on the north side is an opportunity for the construction of a community pavilion or other civic structure on the ATM site. This structure would serve as a visual landmark and could be combined with a reconfigured Town square in front of the Town Hall. By moving the driveway to the east of the side and re-landscaping the front yard, this space can be redesigned to accommodate public events such as festivals, receptions, and farmer's markets.

On the northwest corner, the plan shows the redevelopment of this property as a public plaza. Landscaped in a formal baroque pattern, this site could serve as a formal trail gateway to an extensive greenway system throughout the downtown. In addition, with some improvements, a natural water feature can be integrated into the site, similar to Boulder Creek as it traverses through downtown Boulder, CO, creating a wonderful, natural amenity that enhances the urban environment.

- **R12:** Realign the Town Hall driveway to the northeast and create a formal, usuable public space
- **R13:** Encourage buildings around The Square to be built to the street to help visually enclose the space, thereby making it more pedestrian-friendly
- **R14:** Explore the feasibility of acquiring the northeast and northwest corners for future public plazas as shown in the plan







The Square



Existing view of the Square looking north on Lawyers Road



Diagram of The Square showing the outdoor rooms created through the definition of public space with buildings



Proposed view of The Square looking looking North on Lawyers Road. Note the pedestrian-friendly space that is created when the buldings are aligned on the street edge.







The Square



A birdseye view looking south of The Square at its potential buildout.





A birdseye view looking north of The Square at its potential buildout.

McEwen Green

As a method to rectify the connections between the Farmwood East neighborhood, the McEwen property and the Library, the plan recommends the creation of a neighborhood green (McEwen Green) in a low area that includes an existing farm pond.

Using this water feature as a natural design element, the plan recommends the creation of a pedestrian/bicycle connection to the Green using an existing undeveloped lot that is not suitable as a house lot. The Green could be surrounded by welldesigned, brick townhomes or large homes similar to a square in Alexandria, VA.

This Green serves as a public park that connects the neighborhood to the south with the Public Library, offering children and active adults the opportunity to walk or bike to the Library in lieu of driving. This Green also serves as an excellent transition from the single-family homes in Farmwood East to the more intense office and retail development approved for the site.



Plan view of proposed McEwen Green



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Birdseye view looking north of the proposed McEwen Green

Building Design



Rather than transplanting a home design used in the northeast or some other part of the country, builders should first look to the architectural precedent of both Mint Hill and the greater Charlotte region.

Durable materials such as brick, stone, clapboard, cementacious fiberboard, and cedar shingles should be considered in lieu of inexpensive vinyl and EIFS (exterior insulated finishing systems) or stucco. For residential buildings, porches and stoops should form the predominate architectural motif of the facade.

Particularly on smaller lots, the garage and related parking

areas tend to dominate the streetscape if not considered in the initial design. Multi-family development often garners the most derision because of the placement of parking lots in the front yard, rendering them incompatible to other residential uses.

Homes should be designed as places where people live, not just where cars are parked. To that end, no garage should extend beyond the frontage line of the house and should be designed as a secondary volume. The pictures on the top line illustrate this technique well for different building types, and clearly show how different types can be integrated together by hiding the parking areas. For multi-family buildings, all off-street parking should be accessed from the rear only. For commercial buildings, parking should be to the side or rear of all buildings. Parking in the front yard should be by special exception only and should be generally discouraged.

Existing parking requirements should be reduced to minimize the impact of the parking on the environment and encourage the use of shared parking.

The interaction of buildings close to the street not only encourages pedestrian use across the frontage, it also improves the overall aesthetic of the street by minimizing the parking and

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highlighting the architectural design.

- **R15:** Reduce the impact of parking and garages in all site planning
- **R16:** All buildings should be designed using the architectural vernacular common throughout the Piedmont
- **R17:** Buildings should be close to the street to encourage social interaction and pedestrian scale

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