

**Downtown Thomasville, NC
Community Interest Meeting, April 1, 2019
Priority Setting Retreat, April 9, 2019**

In February of 2019 Thomasville was one of twenty-four North Carolina communities selected to participate in the Downtown Strong program. This program is under the umbrella of Governor Roy Cooper’s Hometown Strong initiative, designed to bring immediate consulting resources to rural communities. Downtown Strong is administered by the North Carolina Department of Commerce, NC Main Street and Rural Planning Center.

Stakeholder input is key to the development of implementation strategies that will come out of the Downtown Strong process. This input was gathered through a Community Interest Meeting conducted on April 1, 2019, with sixty-six members in attendance, as well as five small-group interviews that took place on April 9, 2019 with Diane Young, Thomasville’s Downtown Strong consultant. The information below is a compilation of input received from both the Community Interest meeting and the small group interviews.

What are Thomasville’s Local Economic Drivers?

Note: responses are solely from group interviews held on April 9th, the number in parentheses indicates the number of groups that had the same response.

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|---|--------------------------------------|
| Small businesses (4) | Restaurants, locally- owned (2) |
| Large chain stores and chain restaurants (2) | Train, rail fanning (2) |
| Unilin (Mohawk) (1) | School System (1) |
| Government (1) | Interstate (1) |
| Food/grocery (1) | Baby-boomers/life-long residents (1) |
| Millennials and younger thinking outside (1) | Photography (1) |
| Transportation industry, providing well-paying jobs (1) | Medical services (1) |
| Manufacturing (1) | Affordable cost of living (1) |
| Unique shopping experiences – antiques/upcycling (1) | Flea Market – 11 acres (1) |

**OOLA
(Opportunities, Obstacles, Liabilities and Assets)**

Note: Below is a summary of responses gathered at both the Community Interest Meeting and the small group interviews. Those shown in black were gathered through the small group interviews, those in red were recorded at the Downtown Interest Meeting. At the Downtown Interest Meeting all comments were recorded and then attendees voted on the comments they felt were of the highest priority. Those comments that did not receive a vote are not included in this tabulation below, however, all comments are viewed as important to the overall discussion of Downtown Thomasville and are available in a separate document.

Opportunities:

Summary:

Organization - 19 responses

Promotions - 33 responses

Design – 48 responses

Economic Vitality – 49 responses

Organization

- Private sector volunteerism and cooperation: (9 total)
 - o Collaboration – interclub council, mechanism to pull together committees/organization to work together and see the full picture, partnership between organizations (3)
 - o Young professionals (1)
 - o Younger volunteers (1)
 - o Organize groups to “drive the bus” of downtown revitalization (1)
 - o Involve schools, develop the next generation of stakeholders (1)
 - o Connect leadership at local employers to community (1)
 - o New business owners, new enthusiasm (1)
- Funding: (2 total)
 - o Untapped potential for philanthropy (1)
 - o Foundation funding (1)
- Other: (8 total)
 - o Room for groups and businesses to better support small businesses (1)
 - o Up and coming school system (1)
 - o **More police foot patrol (6)**

Promotion

- Events: (23 total)
 - o Events related to the Farmers Market (1)
 - o Arts event (1)
 - o Evaluate existing events and reestablish (1)
 - o Get trains to stop for events (1)
 - o Festivals that highlight diversity (1)
 - o **More evening events offered (7)**
 - o **Use amphitheater more (5)**
 - o **More PACE park events (3)**
 - o **For Everybody’s Day have events on both sides of Main Street (not just south side of E. Main Street as it is now) (2)**
 - o **More music events downtown (1)**
- Marketing/new marketing initiatives: (8 total)
 - o Attractions” signs on interstate – Chair, etc. (2)
 - o More social media (1)
 - o Local Downtown Dollars program (1)
 - o Agri tourism (1)
 - o Marketing around trains (1)
 - o **Local history is deep – should be utilized through tourism (2)**
- Communication: (2 total)
 - o Communication (1)
 - o Better communication/promotion (1)

Design

- Parking, traffic, pedestrian/biking features: (19 total)
 - o Bicycle – friendly (1)
 - o Create a walking/biking trail that combines history and art (8)
 - o Angled parking downtown (4)
 - o Speed bumps on Salem Street (3)
 - o Add “No U Turn” signs on Main Street, especially the south side of E. Main Street (3)
- Private property: (11 total)
 - o Historic Tax Credits for property development (1)
 - o Renovated buildings (1)
 - o Engaged property owners (1)
 - o Improve Sign Ordinance – limit window graphics, separate sign ordinance for downtown – uniform for all (7)
 - o Building Code – need for local ordinance to be put in place and enforced (1)
- Public property: (12 total)
 - o Seating for train watchers/park (1)
 - o Paintings on overpasses (1)
 - o Seating for train watchers/park (7)
 - o Upgrade the caboose (3)
- Other: (6 total)
 - o Addition of a water feature downtown (3)
 - o Downtown stage for events such as concerts (3)

Economic Vitality

- Specific types of businesses: (26 total)
 - o Restaurants (2)
 - o Arts businesses – supplies and classes, Arts in Davidson County (2)
 - o Arts and photography (2)
 - o Antique stores (1)
 - o Theme of businesses (1)
 - o Boutiques – clothing and gifts (1)
 - o Entertainment (1)
 - o Business recruitment built around trains (1)
 - o Hotels, boutique, upscale and unique (1)
 - o Attract a well-known business (1)
 - o Bakeries (1)
 - o Museum (1)
 - o Restaurants, Main and Salem Streets (3)
 - o Entertainment venues and unique shopping opportunities (5)
 - o Use existing structures for family entertainment (3)
- Redevelopment opportunities: (12 total)
 - o Real estate is available, some very large spaces, possibly for exhibits (4)
 - o TFI museum with working machinery/furniture being manufactured, build on furniture/design industry (3)
 - o Police Department building (1)
 - o Development of north side of town (1)
 - o Plant L – increased downtown residential (1)

- Lack of arts and culture facilities, projects (2)
- Other: (11)
 - Online sales, ecommerce (1)
 - Create more reasons for people to walk around downtown (7)
 - Wider WIFI area (2)
 - More night life (1)

Obstacles:

Summary:

Organization – 21 responses

Promotions - 3 response

Design – 15 responses

Economic Vitality – 22 responses

Organization

- Community dynamics: (8 total)
 - Negativity, especially on Facebook (2)
 - Resistance to change (2)
 - Lack of understanding ordinances and policies (1)
 - Cliques (1)
 - Lack of being solution-driven (1)
 - No “bus”, official organization or committee looking after downtown revitalization/no driver (1)
- Other: (13total)
 - Funding (1)
 - Food truck regulations (12)

Promotion

- Other: (3 total)
 - Political groups having a larger presence at events (1 total)
 - Large events are not pet friendly (2)

Design

- Private property: (5 total)
 - Property owners unwilling to make repairs (1)
 - Physical condition of private property (1)
 - Tough building code regulations (provide options) (2)
 - Sign Ordinance (1)
- Parking and bicycling: (5 total)
 - Not bicycle friendly (1)
 - Lack of bike racks (1)
 - Lack of public parking/bike racks (3)
- Other: (5 total)
 - Trains and tracks, noise, traffic, and potential for rail incident (4)
 - Physical condition of public property (1)

Economic Vitality

- Property owner/business owner obstacles: (20 total)
 - Funding for purchase of private property (1)

- Absentee property owners (1)
- No food trucks allowed to generate business and foot traffic (15)
- Need hospitality from City for new businesses (3)
- Other: (2 total)
 - Stores not open (1)
 - Economy moved to single benefactor (1)

Liabilities:

Summary:

Organization – 21 responses

Design – 135 responses

Promotions - 0 responses

Economic Vitality – 31 responses

Organization

- Safety: (18 total)
 - Not enough police presence, homeless (7)
 - Lack of control of illegal activities on the street (6)
 - Police chases on Salem Street (5)
- Leadership: (2 total)
 - No visionary (1)
 - Potential leaders work out of town (1)
- Other: (1 total)
 - Need to turn those who complain into positive assets (1)

Promotion

(no liabilities identified)

Design

- Private property: (73 total)
 - Lack of maintenance, proximity to buildings that are in disrepair (3)
 - Appearance – vacant buildings, unattractive signs, window displays (2)
 - Vacant commercial properties, private property (1)
 - Garbage/debris around properties (1)
 - Boarded up windows (1)
 - Unattractive uses of private property (1)
 - Pigeons (1)
 - Multiple rundown buildings (17)
 - Old rundown factory buildings (14)
 - Vacant/rundown buildings (8)
 - Lack of maintenance, proximity to buildings that are in disrepair (5)
 - Empty buildings, birds/storage/water damage (6)
 - Rundown, empty storefronts (5)
 - Broken awnings, windows, structures (3)
 - Vacant commercial properties, private property (2)
 - No code enforcement (2)
 - Aging buildings (1)
- Public property: (43 total)
 - Entryways need to be improved (2)

- Lack of green space, places to congregate (2)
- Need more lighting, too dark (1)
- Condition of streets, worn-out infrastructure (1)
- Pedestrian underpass needs to be cleaned, have signage (8)
- Keep all lights working including rooftop lights (6)
- Need more street lights and planters along side streets (5)
- Need more trash cans (4)
- Road maintenance – pot holes (3)
- Need more parking (3)
- Bad landscaping and clutter at USPS (3)
- Bare planting beds around trees (2)
- Curbside trash pickup creates eyesore for business owners (2)
- Public works being done during regular business hours (1)
- Other: (19 total)
 - Train tracks (1)
 - No passenger depot (1)
 - Speed and noise on Salem Street residential area is a concern – including city vehicles (9)
 - Massive election signs look trashy (8)

Economic Vitality

- Specific types of businesses that are lacking: (25 total)
 - Lack of entertainment (2)
 - Lack of dining (1)
 - Need more restaurants/markets (12)
 - Need a trendy grocery store downtown (10)
- Business practices: (3 total)
 - Nothing open on Sundays (1)
 - Nothing open on Sundays (1)
 - Businesses close too early (1)
- Other: (3 total)
 - Nearby residential (1)
 - Farmers Market (1)
 - Chair City Lofts (1)

Assets:

Summary:

Organization – 27 responses

Promotions - 11 responses

Design – 36 responses

Economic Vitality – 11 responses

Organization

- Governmental: (11 total)
 - Police Station (1)
 - Parks and Recreation Department (1)
 - Progressive Zoning (1)
 - Supportive Town Council (1)
 - Leadership in government (1)

- Like the new Assistant City Manager (4)
- Like the Downtown Strong Orientation meeting, great start (1)
- Police Station (1)
- Private sector volunteerism and cooperation: (10 total)
 - PACE (2)
 - Davidson County Local Food Network (1)
 - Volunteerism – seventy to ninety volunteers on Memorial Day Committee (1)
 - Business owners working together (1)
 - Support for a thriving downtown (1)
 - New interest (1)
 - We Love Thomasville (1)
 - Passionate owners/volunteers (1)
 - New sense of business community in Salem Street district (1)
- Funding: (4 total)
 - Foundations, High Point Community Foundation (3)
 - Golden Leaf grant for manufacturing education (1)
- Other: (2 total)
 - Arts Community (1)
 - Patriotic Community (1)

Promotion

- Events: (7 total)
 - Well established events (2)
 - Strong Memorial Day Parade (2)
 - Blocktoberfest (1)
 - Sunset Sounds Music Series (1)
 - Everybody's Day – largest street festival (1)
- Communication Avenues: (2 total)
 - City's online communication (1)
 - Local TV Station (1)
- Other: (2 total)
 - Photography (1)
 - Videos of trains coming down tracks – prime location (1)

Design

- Destinations/Features: (14 total)
 - Big Chair (4)
 - Amphitheater (2)
 - Fountain (1)
 - Murals (6)
 - Farmers Market (1)
- Beautification: (9 total)
 - Beautification initiatives (1)
 - We love PACE and Beautification (2)
 - Love the flowers, courtyards, planters, etc, (1)
 - Flowers (1)

- Landscaping and Holiday Decorations (1)
- Planting trees (1)
- Like downtown beautification work (1)
- PACE Park (1)
- Parking and traffic: (5 total)
 - Convenient parking (1)
 - Traffic counts (1)
 - Good parking (1)
 - Salem Street has great parking (1)
 - City provides NorthState parking lot as public (1)
- Other: (8 total)
 - History (1)
 - Gentle pace, friendly (1)
 - “Americana” (1)
 - Improvements new property owners are making to existing features (5)

Economic Vitality

- Business/development community: (9 total)
 - Out of town developers, Thomasville is on the radar for investors/developers (2)
 - Small businesses (1)
 - Reasonable rents for commercial spaces (1)
 - Business startup is affordable (1)
 - Out of town developers, Thomasville is on the radar for the investors/developers (1)
 - New businesses on Salem Street (3)
- Trains: (4 total)
 - Trains, attracting photographers (3)
 - Trains (1)

Draft Implementation Strategies

Draft strategy #1: Develop a toolkit for the redevelopment of Downtown Thomasville’s building stock to assist and encourage property owners, business owners, and developers in making positive improvements that will support the revitalization of Downtown Thomasville. The toolkit will include best practices for design improvements including storefronts, awnings, signage, and upper story windows, as well as sidewalk amenities that add character and interest to the storefront. In addition, the toolkit will cover financial tools currently available to property owners and business owners: Opportunity Zone, Historic Tax Credits, Façade Grants, and MSD incentives.

Derived from the following strategies suggested during the group interviews:

- Develop a tool kit with resources (including tools for redevelopment), standards, and best practices (ie. signs/awnings), and use as an educational tool for business owners and property owners. Design program for private properties. Point out tools currently available for redevelopment: Opportunity Zone, Historic Tax Credits, Façade Grants, and MSD incentives. (recommended by 4 interview groups)
- Physical improvements to a targeted area to improve storefronts. Signs, color, awnings, clean windows, City lighting and hanging baskets at the square. Develop a façade improvement program.

Draft strategy #2: Leverage train fanning as an economic tool to attract more visitors to Downtown Thomasville.

Derived from the following strategy suggested during the group interviews:

- Build around the trains – social media, draw of visitors, new event

Draft strategy #3: Organize a committee inclusive of representatives from a cross-section of the community to coordinate future downtown initiatives.

Derived from the following strategy suggested during the group interviews:

- Broaden the pool of community residents tapped to get involved. Communicate/coordinate efforts between different groups. Main Street designation
- Community stakeholder group made up of visionaries. A group to drive the bus.
- PR – promote opportunities including forums, Q and A, monthly videos
- Interclub/committee council
- Continue and build on current strategies and efforts

Draft strategy #4: Develop a Business Recruitment Package to proactively attract new businesses/developments to Downtown Thomasville. Package to include pertinent information on the City of Thomasville and Downtown Thomasville, local incentives, information on specific available properties and spaces, testimonials from existing business owners and property owners.

Derived from the following strategy suggested during the group interviews:

- Business Recruitment Package for business recruitment.
- List of desired businesses paired with available spaces and market research.
- Attract a boutique hotel with upscale clients.
- Recruit a destination business for one of the large properties.

Draft strategy #5: Develop concepts for the redevelopment of one of the large mill buildings or the TFI headquarters.

Derived from the following strategy suggested during the group interviews:

- Business Recruitment Package for business recruitment.
- Recruit a destination business for one of the large properties.

Additional strategies suggested during the group interviews:

- Improve ability of pedestrians to get from one side of the tracks to the other.
- Identify green space locations.
- Look at expanding the Farmers Market area.
- Add two to three more large events to the annual calendar. (Note: one could be a new event built around train fanning.)