

DOWNTOWN WILMINGTON TRANSFORMING THE FUTURE TODAY



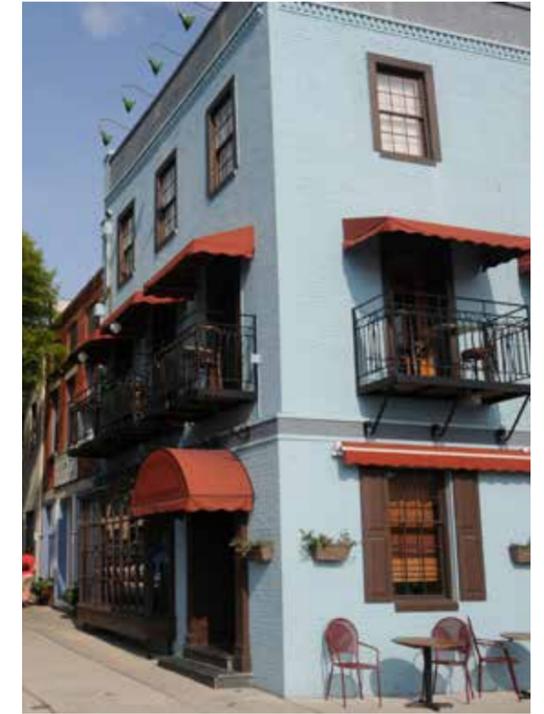
Downtown Wilmington is the economic engine for the community. With its jobs, businesses, attractions and people, Downtown Wilmington has no peer or rival in its economic and social importance to the region. Wilmington Downtown Incorporated (WDI) is entrusted with both nurturing and growing this critically important community asset.

This document is intended to accelerate the transformation process by identifying priority projects to address in the near term. The framework allows civic leaders to move beyond the status quo by envisioning and aligning new resources to strategically move forward.

THE WORK PROGRAM PROCESS

In December 2013, WDI adopted a process to craft a strategic plan for the organization. Different from a vision plan, this effort was designed to identify, evaluate and then prioritize potential projects for WDI to address. The process consisted of the following steps:

- 1 COMMUNITY INPUT:** WDI published a survey for Downtown residents and Downtown business owners to obtain input and thoughts about issues and concerns.
- 2 PROJECT REVIEW:** WDI committees and staff developed a list of existing and potential projects to implement.
- 3 CONSTITUENT BRAINSTORMING - PROJECTS:** WDI hosted an online suggestion box for the public to contribute project ideas and thoughts. This resulted in a total of about 225 different suggestions when combined with previous work.
- 4 CONSTITUENT FEEDBACK - PRIORITIES:** After the online suggestion box closed, WDI obtained citizen feedback through voting on priority projects. The projects were organized by WDI's committees. Participants were limited to five votes per committee to represent the restricted resources available for carrying out the projects. Approximately 180 people provided feedback on priorities.
- 5 BOARD REVIEW & RETREAT:** WDI's Board of Directors then examined the survey results and evaluated whether the projects fit WDI's mission, if WDI had the resources to implement the initiative and whether WDI should lead the project.
- 6 DRAFT WORK PROGRAM:** Based on this input, WDI staff developed an annualized, multi-work program for the WDI Executive Committee and board to review and evaluate.
- 7 WORK PROGRAM APPROVAL:** The Board finalized the work program during a regular monthly meeting.



A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

In order for Downtown to achieve its maximum potential, the community must remain committed to a sustained and comprehensive effort to meet its visionary goals. The key elements consist of initiatives to strengthen the center city as:

CULTURALLY VIBRANT • ECONOMICALLY PROSPEROUS • HIGH QUALITY OF LIFE

The following sections identify specific strategies and projects to advance the Downtown development effort. These strategies and projects are organized into a prioritized work program that will guide WDI to allocate the necessary human and financial resources over the next three fiscal years to accomplish the tasks. Stakeholders, policy makers and the community can measure WDI's success in revitalizing Downtown with the completion of each project.





CULTURALLY VIBRANT

Downtown is the creative crossroads of commerce, culture and entertainment. With the urbane sensibility of its nationally recognized historic districts and vibe of a seafaring town, Downtown's confluence of people and activity provides a rich tapestry of exciting experiences. WDI will implement the following programs to make Downtown more vibrant:

EDUCATE & ENTICE PEOPLE TO VISIT, SHOP, DINE & PLAY DOWNTOWN

- 1 Continue to partner with the DBA for the Bring It! Downtown marketing campaign.
- 2 Develop a campaign to market Wilmington as an alternative to Savannah and Charleston with a positive and upbeat approach that highlights our identity.
- 3 Continue managing and updating WDI's website to promote shopping, dining, entertainment, cultural attractions and services.
- 4 Update business and attraction information on the large kiosk maps at key Downtown locations.
- 5 Develop and implement a sustained image building advertising campaign to redefine Downtown as a fun and lively destination for special events, cultural attractions and other similar activities.

PROMOTE, ORGANIZE & ADD SPECIAL EVENTS

- 1 Continue to produce, promote and organize the Downtown Sundown Concert series.
- 2 Continued support of the Downtown Farmers Market.
- 3 Expand partnerships to attract more special events/holidays such as Cinco de Mayo, New Year's Eve or other activities or celebrations to attract large crowds.
- 4 Identify and implement more family oriented activities.

EXPAND THE VARIETY & QUALITY OF DOWNTOWN CULTURAL OFFERINGS

- 1 Plan and develop a Public Market building similar to those in Charleston or Savannah.
- 2 Work closely with Cape Fear Community College to capitalize on the opening and operations of the new Fine Arts Center.
- 3 Encourage more use of the river for activities like kayak tours, water taxi, cruises to Carolina Beach and Southport, etc.
- 4 Evaluate a half-shell concert venue.
- 5 Advocate that the renovation work at Riverfront Park, from Market to Princess Streets, finishes quickly.



ECONOMICALLY PROSPEROUS

Downtown Wilmington is the economic hub for the region. With boundaries spanning from the Cape Fear River west, Isabel Holmes Bridge north, Memorial Bridge to the south and 5th Avenue to the east, Downtown is home to about 880 businesses, 10,900 workers and 2,100 residents. WDI implements a number of programs and initiatives to strengthen the economic climate in the center city with an emphasis on recruitment, retention and investment attraction. These initiatives focus on enhancing the investment climate for office, retail, residential and hospitality projects.



IMPROVE DOWNTOWN AREA BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

- 1 Evaluate the creation of a municipal service district to provide sustained funding for marketing, transportation, business recruitment, business retention, landscaping and similar programs.
- 2 Examine the WDI Loan Program to improve effectiveness and utility for potential borrowers.

ADDRESS SHORT & LONG TERM PLANNING & LAND USE ISSUES

- 1 Examine the possibility of prohibiting tattoo, vapor and other non-traditional businesses as a permitted use in the central business district zoning classification.
- 2 Encourage owners in the Brooklyn Arts District to develop, sell at a reasonable price or donate property in order to reduce the number of vacant properties and abandoned buildings.
- 3 Evaluate the need to extend current zoning restrictions on large clubs in Downtown.

ATTRACT NEW INVESTMENT TO DOWNTOWN

- 1 Assist the City in the redevelopment of the Water Street Parking Deck site into a mixed-use area.
- 2 Identify and recruit new retail shops, including a grocery store, and targeted national retailers.
- 3 Examine the current investment policies and recommend potential revisions.
- 4 Identify and assist potential entrepreneurs with business planning and site evaluation and analysis.





HIGH QUALITY OF LIFE

Wilmington has a strong and expanding residential base. While attention rightfully focuses on historic homes in the east and south sides of Downtown, the north side is attracting significant interest as well, with an emphasis on apartments. In addition to having an environment and setting that appeals to residents, Downtown must also meet the needs of area businesses by providing a place that is interesting and attractive to customers, clients and workers. The following initiatives will focus on improving the area for residential and commercial users.



1 INCREASE THE LEVEL OF PUBLIC SAFETY DOWNTOWN

Evaluate the current level of street light brightness throughout Downtown, especially Princess Street and other side streets, and identify priority areas for lighting upgrades.

2 Add more uniformed and non-uniformed police officers to patrol Downtown.

3 Assist the Police Department to monitor police patrols and visibility to insure adequate service during both daytime and nighttime.

1 PROVIDE CRUCIAL AMENITIES FOR RESIDENTS & VISITORS

1 Develop or designate a walking/biking/fitness path.

2 Support the improvement of public schools in Downtown to attract middle class families, particularly those who cannot afford private school.

3 Provide free Wi-Fi for Downtown that really works.

4 Promote and support the River to the Sea bikeway, its formal recognition, and the capital investment needed to make it viable for visitors and families to use for going to and from Downtown.

5 Examine sidewalks and aggressively seek repairs.



COLLABORATIONS & CONNECTIONS

Downtown operates within a larger environment that includes the entire community. WDI directs many programs to insure Downtown's interaction and place within the region. We also work with a large group of interested citizens that contribute time, talent and/or treasure to make Downtown more special. For Downtown to thrive, WDI must nurture relationships in the following areas making Downtown more collaborative and connected:

1 IMPROVE LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICES FOR DOWNTOWN

1 Advocate appropriate continued City and County funding for protecting and enhancing investments within Downtown in both facilities and people.

2 Examine options to provide sustained funding for Downtown events and organizations.

3 Encourage the City and County to include Downtown projects in their Capital Improvement Program (CIP) budgets.

1 FOSTER COMMUNICATIVE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN RESIDENTS, NIGHTLIFE, BUSINESSES & MERCHANTS

1 Continue hosting the Downtown Economic Series Luncheon to inform the community about economic progress made in Downtown during the previous year.

2 Maintain formal relationships with the Residents of Old Wilmington, the Chamber of Commerce, the Association of Bar Owners And Restaurants Downtown, DBA and other organizations.

3 Continue representing the business community on City Boards and Commissions including the Downtown Parking Advisory Committee, Vision 2020 and the Convention Center Authority.

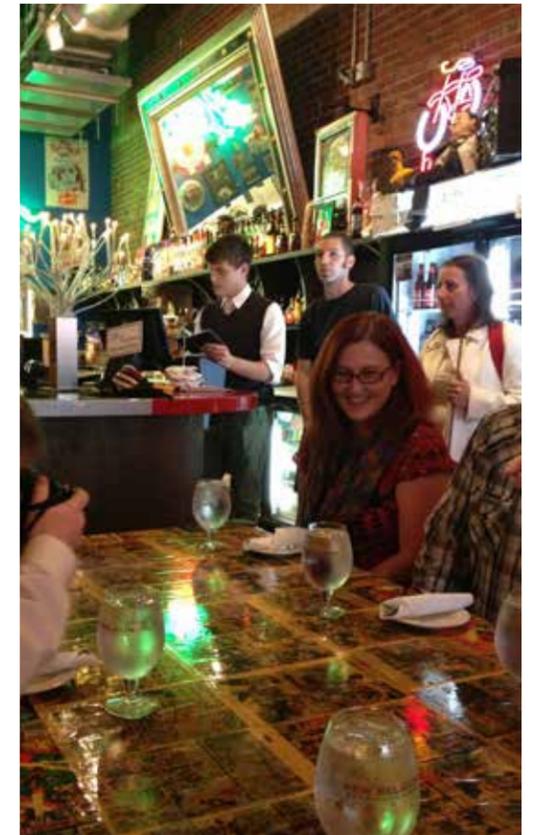
4 Maintain formal designations on the WDI Board of Directors with Downtown stakeholder organizations and entities.

5 Partner with Historic Wilmington Foundation and the Wilmington Regional Association of Realtors to recognize significant efforts to spur investment in Downtown.

1 GAIN COMMUNITY INPUT ABOUT DOWNTOWN ISSUES & CONCERNS

1 Conduct an annual survey of Downtown residents to assess the level of satisfaction with WDI's services.

2 Conduct an annual survey of Downtown business and commercial property owners to identify issues and concerns.



MISSION & VISION

Wilmington Downtown, Inc. has an adopted mission statement and vision statement. As part of this process, the Board reviewed and affirmed the mission statement and expressed the desire to have a more aspirational vision statement. Provisions include:

MISSION: Promote the economic growth and development of downtown Wilmington.

VISION: Downtown Wilmington is the culturally vibrant and economically prosperous center of the southeast region, and is nationally recognized for its outstanding quality of life.



MOVING FORWARD

The 36-member Board of Directors of WDI along with its professional staff is now tasked with implementing the outlined projects. To maximize results, we must continue to engage and involve more constituents and civic leaders. WDI has many volunteer opportunities and the organization thrives on citizen participation and involvement.

Completing the projects defined in this document will enhance, not complete, Downtown's redevelopment efforts. New opportunities and conditions will arise that require the attention of WDI, stakeholders and local government. Working together, the community can continue to strengthen Downtown Wilmington as the premier location in the region to live, work, play, shop, dine, visit and entertain.

SUMMER 2014



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