

**INSPIRING
SPACES**



Master Plan Final Report

Inspiring Spaces Committee

May 8, 2014

The Inspiring Spaces Committee is a Council-appointed advisory group recently assembled to give input to a plan for public space improvements that will encourage private investment, revitalization and spur economic development in Hickory. The group has finalized its work on this stage of the planning process by discussing the merits of the proposed projects that intrigued them the most. The group, through consensus, was able to identify a list of priority projects for consideration by City Council.

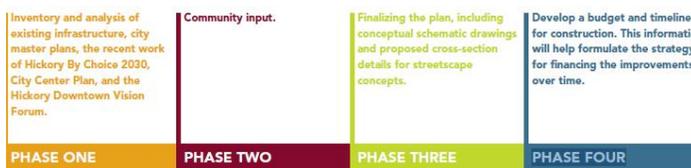
Background

Hickory City Council traveled to several southeastern cities, including Asheville, Chattanooga, Durham, Greenville, SC and others to learn how these communities dealt with a declining economy and transformed their cities into regional economies. Each city noted having a strong vision for their public areas. This vision was carried out by making public improvements encouraged that: strengthened property values, job creation, private sector redevelopment, areas that had been underperforming, encouraged pedestrian new venues for shining examples, created safe crosswalks and trails, and provided entertainment. These cities are now these cities have a vibrancy generated through economic development, and their leaders have had patience to tackle this transformation at a steady pace over time. They believe that success starts with a grand vision for the public realm.

Competing for success in the marketplace means creating places where workers, entrepreneurs, and businesses want to locate, invest and expand.

Committee and Citizen Involvement

As a result of those visits, the Inspiring Spaces Committee was appointed by City Council in July 2012 to work with Charlotte-based Land Design, Inc., city staff and City Council to identify and make



recommendations for areas of Hickory that could be candidates for improvement. The planning process sought extensive community input and included the participation of over 500 citizens and counting. The committee consisted of fifteen members including: Rick Berry, Merry Boone, Thelma Harold, Dewey Harris, Mike Johnson, Paul Kercher, Meg Jenkins Locke, Scott Mitchell, Steve Mull, Don Norwood, Helgi Shuford, Stephen Shuford, David Washco, Benny Yount and Nancy Zagaroli. The following list summarizes the priority projects of the Inspiring Spaces Committee. The projects are not in priority order, and the full Inspiring Spaces Plan is endorsed by the group. Yet these select projects represent the committee's priorities in terms of first actions, available funding resources, private partnerships, and iconic projects.

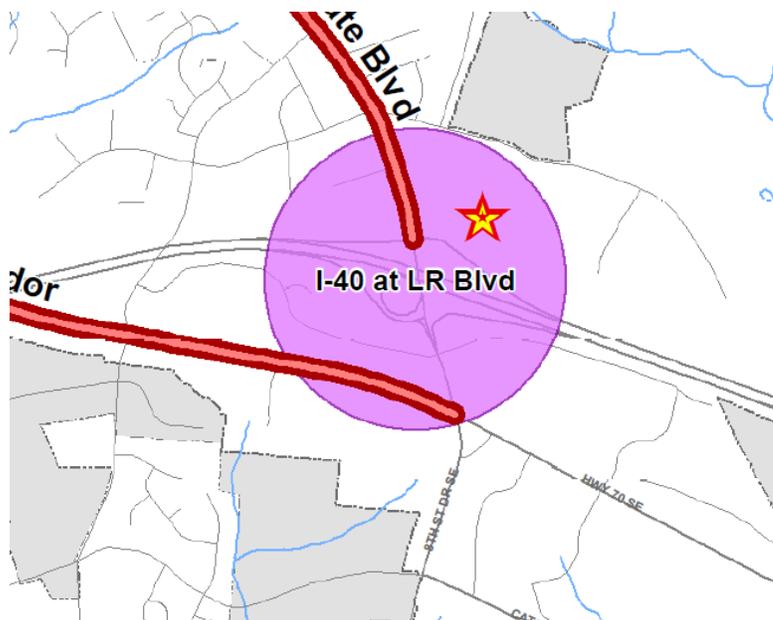
Inspiring Spaces Committee Priority Projects

General Note: The committee discussed many of these project in concert with each other. When incorporating street improvements with gateways and public art, for example, the return on investment in those areas is potentially much higher than the impact of a single project category. The group discussed possible phasing of some of the projects. For instance a possible Phase 1 would incorporate three primary vehicular travel paths into the downtown CBD, each with streetscape improvements and wayfinding:

1. I-70 to 4th Street extension coming into the central business district from the southwest;
2. I-70 to 127N and making way into the central business district; and
3. LR Boulevard into the central business district coming in at LRU (from I-40).

Additional gateways and streetscapes could be added in subsequent phases to the extent desired.

- Gateway improvements should be made to the right-of-way at Exit 125 on I-40 at Lenoir-Rhyne Boulevard including signage, landscaping, and bridge facade improvements. (*Inspiring Spaces Plan, pgs. 36 and 117*)

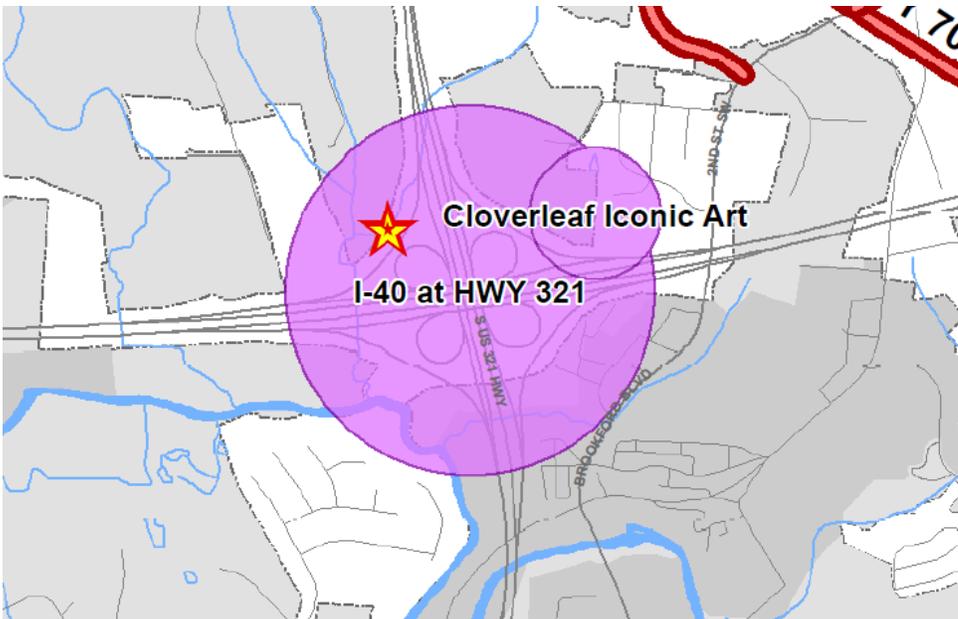


- Gateway improvements should be made to the Hwy 70 and Hwy 321 Exit as the western gateway into Hickory for travelers coming north and south along Highway 321. These improvements would include gateway signage and landscaping at the interchange as well as streetscape improvements along Highway 70 coming into Hickory. This gateway investment will further transform the Highway 70 West corridor, serving as the public investment to many private investments including the Benny Yount property at the former Pet Dairy as well as the Walmart Neighborhood Market being constructed at the 4th Street intersection on Hwy 70. This intersection will including

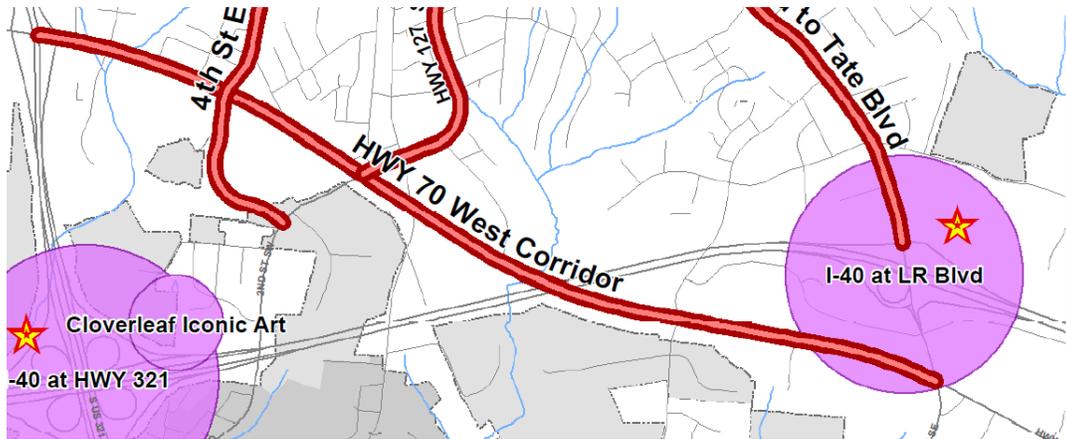
wayfinding that will direct traffic from this regional commercial corridor to the downtown central business district.



- Gateway improvements should be made to the right-of-way at Exit 123 on I-40 at Hwy 321—the cloverleaf including signage, landscaping and iconic art welcoming travelers to Hickory. (*Inspiring Spaces Committee project, discussed on July 23, 2013 minutes and March 24, 2014 notes*)



- Streetscape improvements to Highway 70 east and west, but particularly the west section as it could be paired with gateway entrances from Hwy 321 and from I-40 at LR Boulevard. (*Inspiring Spaces Plan*, pgs. 76, 86 and 116)



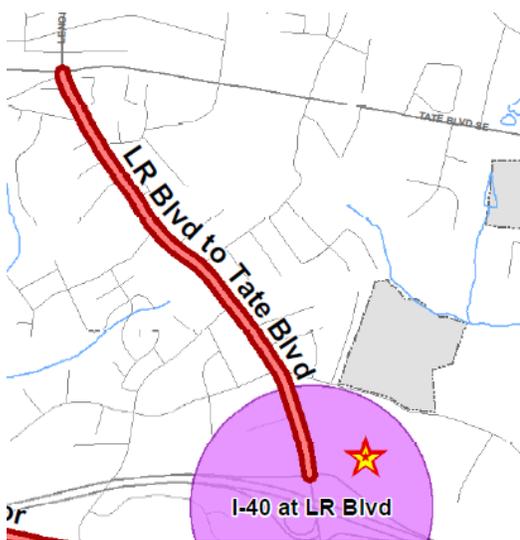
- Streetscape improvements to Highway 127 north and south of the railroad tracks would redefine a major corridor through Hickory. Sections south of the railroad tracks have the potential to allow additional landscaping, lighting and pedestrian connections with the adjacent neighborhoods. (*Inspiring Spaces Plan*, pgs. 76, 84, 116)



- Streetscape improvements to 4th Street Extension. This street is a gateway from Hwy 127 South across Hwy 70 and into the southern portion of the central business district. (*Inspiring Spaces Committee, April 14, 2014 notes*)



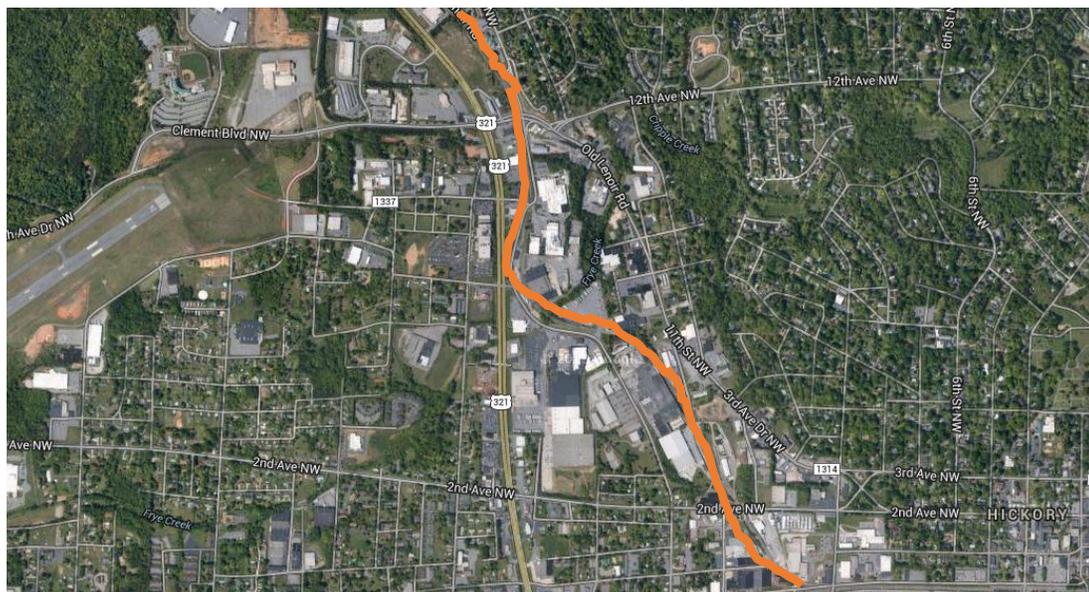
- Streetscape improvements to Lenoir-Rhyne Boulevard from I-40 to Tate Boulevard would include shifting and consolidating power lines, additional street trees, more prominent pedestrian crossings and improved lighting. This is the main gateway into Hickory for travelers. (*Inspiring Spaces Plan, pgs. 76 and 84*)



- Streetscape improvements to Old Lenoir Road would improve a key gateway from Hwy 321 into Hickory for travelers. Improvements would include sidewalks, lighting, landscaping, pedestrian crossings, and the potential for bike facilities. (*Inspiring Spaces Committee, April 14, 2014 notes*)



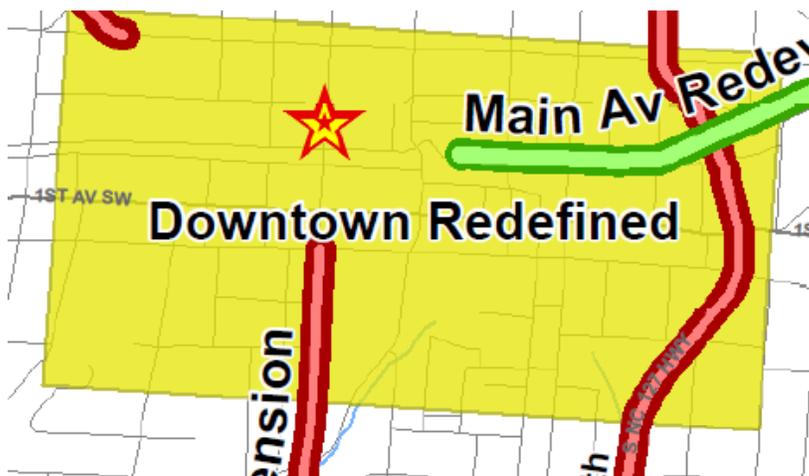
- The committee also explored the possibility of working with current property owners to create a rail-and-trail pedestrian/bikeway from the baseball stadium area to the central business district. The committee recognizes that the rail-trail is likely to be more complicated than the on street improvements to Old Lenoir Road, but they believe that it would create a more “inspiring” experience. The committee believes that this has the potential to be the most iconic of all the contemplated investments. The potential for the rail leaseholder to generate incremental revenues with a passenger trolley might be an incentive for him to work with the City of Hickory to create such an iconic amenity. (*Inspiring Spaces Committee, April 28, 2014 notes*)



- Wayfinding Signage Implementation--The Wayfinding Plan was completed in 2008 by Frazier Associates, Architects and Land Planners of Staunton, VA. The North Carolina Department of Transportation released updated standards for interstate and highway signage, and the plans were preliminarily approved. Work needs to be done to update the plan based upon changing conditions, verify NCDOT approval and then move forward to make edits to the graphic design and sign locations. (*Inspiring Spaces Plan, pgs. 130 and 139*)



- Downtown Redefined--Improving the pedestrian experience in the broader downtown area from 3rd Avenue NW on the north, to 3rd Street NE/SE on the eastern edge of the SALT Block, to 2nd Avenue SW on the south and 4th Street NW/SW on the west side. This would include developing plans for coordinated sidewalk and enhanced pedestrian crossings, additional street lighting, street trees, signage, and public space improvements. The plan will also further identify underutilized properties that could be targeted for future redevelopment of mixed use, corporate campus headquarters sites, commercial and residential infill. (*Inspiring Spaces Plan, pgs. 46, 104, and 110*)



HICKORY
THE CITY OF

**DOWNTOWN
 REDEFINED**

KEY DESTINATIONS + OPPORTUNITIES

- A. Main Ave Greenway
- B. Epperson Park
- C. SAIT Plaza
- D. Jay Arboretum w/ Carolina Park
- E. Robinson Park
- F. Art Walk
- G. Streetscape + Pedestrian Improvements
- H. Harzer House Museum
- I. Truck Alley
- J. Union Square
- K. 2nd Street Bridge
- L. Passerina Bridge over NC-127
- M. 1st Avenue SW

KEY BUILDINGS

- 1. Court House
- 2. Post Office
- 3. World Forge
- 4. B&B
- 5. Bank of Georgia
- 6. ELCS
- 7. First Baptist Church
- 8. First Presbyterian Church
- 9. First Regional Medical Center
- 10. Calwood Elementary School

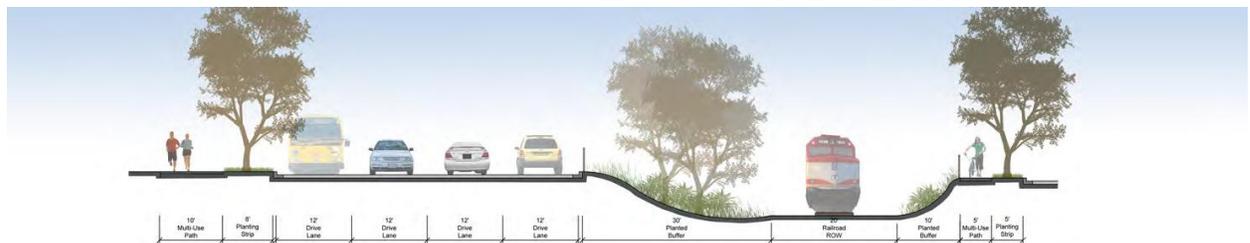


HICKORY INSPIRING SPACES DOWNTOWN CRAFT EXPERIENCE 27





- Main Avenue Redevelopment from Union Square to Lenoir-Rhyne University to Union Square-- Main Avenue is a key link between important destinations of LRU and downtown Hickory. Private investment is already taking place along this corridor, further strengthening the opportunity to leverage public improvements. Enhanced pedestrian and vehicular flow along Main Avenue can further spur development of office, headquarters, service and professional jobs in existing buildings and underutilized vacant parcels creating an effective business campus and residential core in the center city- a key space seen in all redeveloping communities benchmarked by the committee. These improvements create a stronger connection from LRU to downtown that sets the stage for further commercial redevelopment along the railroad corridor. *(Inspiring Spaces Plan, pgs. 62, 105, 111, 114, 115, and 116)*



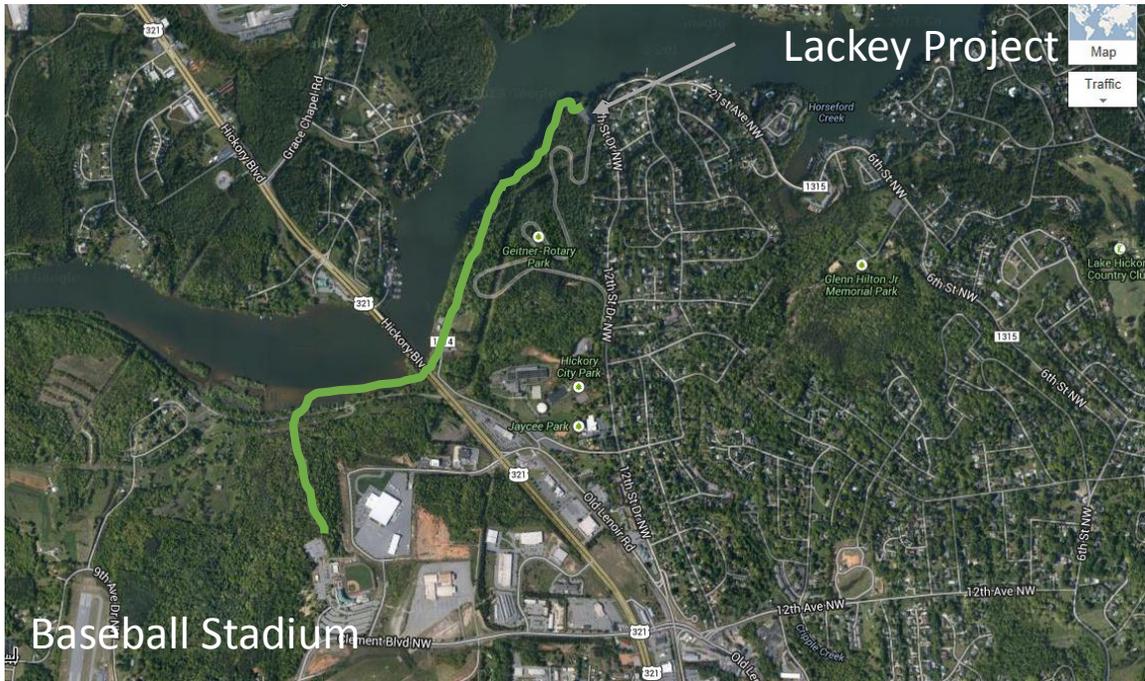
- Waterfront Park along Lake Hickory east and west of the Highway 321 Bridge—develop a conceptual design with an estimate of probable cost for the areas both east and west of the Hwy 321 Bridge. Hickory could develop a River Trail pedestrian/bicycle loop between Downtown, Crawdad Stadium, waterfront along Jaycee Park, and back to Downtown using the Hwy 321 to 2nd Ave, "Old Lenoir Road" or 6th street or RR right-of-way. It might even be able to loop from 321 along 70 and 4th Street back to downtown. It could feature splash pads, pocket parks, and other features along the way. (*Inspiring Spaces Plan, pgs. 60, 103*)



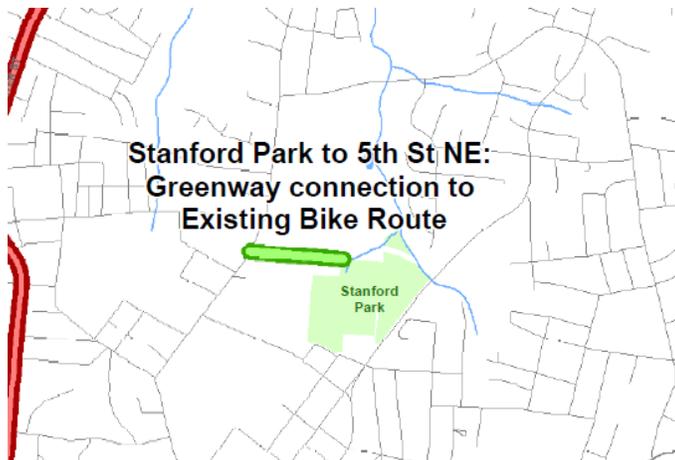
(Examples of waterfront spaces from other communities)



- Riverwalk and Mixed Use Commercial Area: The public investment and private philanthropy through the Lackey Family will create an environment for new private commercial and residential investment from the newly renovated L.P. Frans Stadium to the waterfront. Commercial retail and housing along with entertainment venues and water access could create a unique regional destination on Lake Hickory. (*Inspiring Spaces Committee, April 28, 2014 notes*)



- Greenway connectivity of Highland Recreation Center with a greenway trail from that facility over to 5th Street in order to connect people to the bike lane on 5th. Currently this property is in private ownership. Right-of-way would need to be acquired. (*Inspiring Spaces Committee, April 28, 2014 notes*)



Summary

These priority projects are outlined in greater detail in the Inspiring Spaces Plan or referenced in the notes from the last four meetings of the Committee. All of the information related to Inspiring Spaces is located at www.hickorync.gov. Use the Quick links pull down tab and click the Inspiring Spaces link. For additional information or questions, call Assistant City Manager Andrea Surratt at 828-323-7412 or email asurratt@hickorync.gov.

The opportunities that this project brought to the forefront are numerous. The Inspiring Spaces Master Plan includes a collection of over fifty projects that will spur economic growth. Collectively, the places comprise a system that is intended to elevate the City as a choice location to conduct business, to visit, and to live and raise a family. The Inspiring Spaces initiative works in tandem with the regional revitalization efforts of Innovate Catawba and more specifically Innovate Hickory, a series of strategic economic strategies to grow jobs and population for the future of Hickory.