

# DOWNTOWN LYNCHBURG ASSOCIATION

2023 - 2025 STRATEGIC PLAN





# BACKGROUND

The **2023 Strategic Plan Update for the Downtown Lynchburg Association (DLA)** is intended to guide the organization's evolution over the next five years and beyond. The plan was informed by input from the DLA staff and Board of Directors, a Project Working Group, and City leadership, along with broad community feedback, current market trends, impacts from the Covid-19 pandemic, and best practices from comparable downtown markets.

DLA's latest strategic plan was completed in early 2020. The timing was right for a 2023 update for two key reasons:

01

To adapt to a changing world impacted by the pandemic and a changing Downtown Lynchburg that has experienced transformative public infrastructure investments.

02

There was still a need for financial stability for the organization that the 2020 plan did not directly address.



# ABOUT DLA

DLA, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, has been working as the champion for downtown revitalization for 25 years. Throughout its history – as both Lynch's Landing and Downtown Lynchburg Association – the organization has been a catalyst for positive growth. Lynch's Landing was rebranded during a restructure in 2017 to Downtown Lynchburg Association.



*To assist in the strategic planning process, DLA contracted with Progressive Urban Management Associates (P.U.M.A.), a real estate economics and planning firm specializing in strategic planning for downtown organizations.*

## VISION

*Downtown Lynchburg Association works to bring the vision outlined in the Downtown 2040 Master Plan to realization.*

In 2040, Downtown Lynchburg will be a bustling and thriving urban core, the economic, social, and cultural hub of Central Virginia – a destination for visitors and a livable neighborhood for residents. Both locals and tourists alike will enjoy a diverse offering of retail, restaurants, and recreational activities set in a downtown rich with historic architecture, unique topography, and vibrant public spaces. This is the exciting atmosphere that makes Downtown Lynchburg the heart of the region.

## MISSION

To build a strong, vibrant, and welcoming downtown

## CORE VALUES

1. Bring the energy. Passion for a strong, vibrant, and welcoming downtown.
2. Everyone is welcome. Dedication to inclusivity.
3. Do the right thing. Integrity and excellence in all that we do.
4. Be curious, flexible, innovative, and bold. Addressing the challenges and opportunities of the changing needs of our downtown.
5. Listen to evolve together—collaboration for a stronger community.

# MARKET DYNAMICS

An understanding of Downtown's market dynamics helped to inform the strategic planning effort. Many of these insights were drawn from stakeholder interviews and a review of past planning documents and site visit observations.

## RESIDENTIAL



- The residential sector has been the driver of downtown development over the last two decades. However, growth has been fairly one-dimensional, creating units predominately at high price points for the Lynchburg market. Downtown still lacks affordable and varied price points and housing types that would support a more diversified residential base.
- Indications are that demand for Downtown living remains strong, and there's room and desire to add more rooftops.
- The Covid-19 pandemic did not slow residential development momentum in Downtown as it did in many other downtowns throughout the country. The sector remains strong with several projects in the construction phase and development pipeline.

## RETAIL



- Downtown retail is a mix of predominately local and regional, independent businesses, driven by the dining sector. This offers an authentic atmosphere that is a unique attraction within greater Lynchburg.
- There are still not enough households and residents in Downtown to sustain a retail footprint on their own. The larger citywide trade area and visitors are still needed to support existing retail and further growth.
- Vacant storefronts are prominent – Downtown's current storefront vacancy rate is 25% – not to mention the presence of undeveloped properties and lots.
- There is room for more retail store variety. Some missing pieces include key amenities (such as a grocery, pharmacy, etc.), as well as varied entertainment options (nightlife, live music, etc.).

## OFFICE



- In terms of recent growth, the office sector lags more than the others Downtown.
- Furthermore, this is where there is the most uncertainty nationwide with regard to how the office sector will recover from Covid-19 impacts and adapt over the next decade to more hybrid work environments. Since Downtown Lynchburg is not as office-centric as many other downtowns nationally, it wasn't hit as hard by the pandemic and resulting remote work boom over the past two years.
- With a smaller employment base, Downtown Lynchburg's office sector and daytime worker population is reliant on a few key large tenants.

## HOSPITALITY



- Downtown has a modest visitor market and a number of Downtown hotel rooms. The local universities drive a strong, consistent base of out-of-town visitors – some of whom may stay Downtown. However, there is also a large number of hotel rooms around Liberty and further out in the region that pull many of the out-of-town guests.
- The region's two higher-end boutique hotels are both located Downtown. This is the type of concept that is Downtown's strength and accentuates the local and authentic appeal of the neighborhood.



# STAKEHOLDER INPUT (CONT.)

## SURVEY FINDINGS

In the **online** survey, which was open to anyone interested, respondents were asked to select a single action that would be most important to achieve their vision for Downtown. The top selections – with the top three similar in that they are all economic development-oriented actions – were:

**01** More restaurants/retail/entertainment amenities.

**02** Redevelop and repurpose vacant buildings and lots.

**03** Provide support to small businesses and entrepreneurs.

**04** More events and festivals.

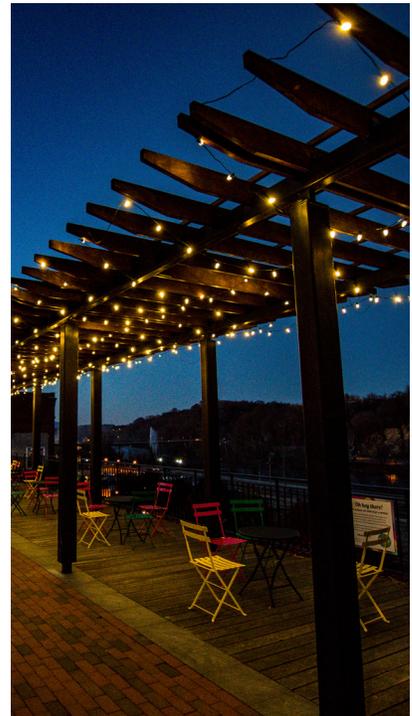
In **roundtables**, participants helped brainstorm and prioritize roles for DLA over the next five years. The top priorities in this prioritization exercise were:

**01** Events, programming, and space activations.

**02** Cleaning, maintenance, and beautification.

**03** Marketing, promotions, and storytelling.

**04** Advocacy for top priorities.



# GOALS & OBJECTIVES

## NEAR TERM GOALS (NEXT 2 YEARS)

The 2022 Plan lays out four near-term goals for the next two years and two longer-term goals that require additional funding for DLA before undertaking. Within each goal, objectives are identified.

### GOAL 01

#### Storefront Business Support

- A Activate vacant storefronts Downtown.
- B Provide ongoing support and advocacy for existing storefront businesses.
- C Work with businesses to help mitigate impacts from ongoing construction work.
- D Proactively recruit diverse and targeted businesses to Downtown Lynchburg based on recommended retail mix outlined in the 2021 Retail Positioning and Tenancing Strategy.
- E Advocate for the exploration and potential adoption of the recommended City efforts outlined in the 2021 Retail Positioning and Tenancing Strategy.
- F Collect, maintain, and disseminate key Downtown market data.
- G Incorporate the Fifth Street business corridor into DLA's new suite of storefront business support services.

### GOAL 03

#### Marketing, Promotions, and Branding

- A Elevate and promote Downtown businesses and events.
- B Maintain and grow a digital presence and the DLA brand.
- C Integrate storytelling that celebrates and promotes Downtown Lynchburg and its local merchants and small businesses.
- D Incorporate Fifth Street businesses into DLA's marketing and promotions efforts.

### GOAL 02

#### Placemaking, Activations, & Programming

- A Enliven public spaces through placemaking (with projects like Art Alley).
- B Animate Downtown public spaces through small-scale and/or temporary activations and programming.
- C Continue the production of a handful of signature events as capacity allows (i.e., Get Downtown, Fireworks, etc.).
- D Curate and/or encourage other events and festivals that will bring people Downtown throughout the year.
- E Encourage, assist, and promote storefront businesses in their own programming and special events.

### GOAL 04

#### Advocacy

- A Maintain a strong relationship with the City of Lynchburg and other key partner organizations.
- B Elevate DLA's profile and influence in the community.
- C Advocate for policies important to Downtown's future and align with DLA's mission.
- D Drive forward (or be a catalyst for) priority strategic initiatives and projects that DLA constituents want to see – such as trail and river access, Riverfront Park improvements, Bluffwalk enhancements, a dog park, etc.

# GOALS & OBJECTIVES (CONT.)

## LONG TERM GOALS

Additional, sustainable funding needed prior to undertaking

### GOAL 05

#### Clean & Green

- A Provide supplemental cleaning to ensure a high level of cleanliness Downtown.
- B Incorporate beautification throughout Downtown, such as flower baskets, planters, banners, etc.
- C Provide temporary seasonal beautifications, such as holiday decorations.
- D Maintain, repair, and improve Downtown's tree canopy.
- E Improve pedestrian lighting throughout Downtown via both permanent and temporary or decorative offerings.

### GOAL 06

#### Mobility & Parking Management

- A Encourage walking, biking, and transit to connect to Downtown from other parts of the community.
- B Work with partners to achieve better accessibility and walkability around Downtown.
- C Consolidate the management of all Downtown public parking under the DLA umbrella.
- D Coordinate and contract with private parking owners to better incorporate these lots into Downtown's overall parking network.
- E Create a more consistent and visitor-friendly experience for paid parking options.



# IMPLEMENTATION

One of the chief desired outcomes of this strategic planning process was to find a pathway to a stronger and more sustainably-funded DLA. The following recommendations will help DLA achieve its new organizational goals. Like the goals, these recommendations are sequenced and listed in terms of priority via the same near-term (next two years) and longer-term (2+ years) bundles.

## NEAR TERM GOALS

### INCREASED SUPPORT FROM THE CITY OF LYNCHBURG

DLA currently receives approximately \$150,000/annually in financial support from the City. It is recommended that the City's contribution be increased by \$100,000 to boost the total support from \$150,000 to \$250,000 per year for the next two years. This funding will allow DLA to:

1. Fortify its existing staff.
2. Establish a storefront support pilot program to jumpstart Downtown's ground-floor economy.
3. Provide additional program funding for marketing, events, placemaking, and promotions.

### MORE AGGRESSIVE UTILIZATION OF 501(C)3 STATUS

DLA can, and should, continue to take advantage of its status as a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. Nationally, many downtown organizations utilize this type of status to maintain diverse revenue sources. Examples of project investments that have been driven by 501(c)3 organizations in other downtowns include public art and placemaking and capital improvements ranging from landscaping to lighting.

# IMPLEMENTATION (CONT.)

## LONGER-TERM GOALS (2+ YEARS)

### MOVE FORWARD WITH A BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT (BID)

A BID is a private sector funding mechanism designed to improve the environment of a business district with new services financed by a self-imposed and self-governed property assessment. If there is a strong desire to address Goal 5 (Clean and Green), additional funding will be required, and a BID is an appropriate tool to fund this type of enhanced service Downtown. The option of forming a BID in Downtown Lynchburg has been discussed and evaluated in the past. It is recommended that this tool be re-evaluated in light of Downtown's continued development and growing demand for core services. Initial analysis indicates that a BID could create \$200,000 or more in revenue for enhanced Downtown services.

### CONTRACTS FOR SERVICES

If a BID is formed, it is possible to leverage assessment dollars with contracts for services. BIDs often take over contracts that the City operates within the district's boundaries for services such as maintenance, beautification, tree care, etc. There is also opportunity for contracts with private property owners within the district boundaries.

### PARKING MANAGEMENT

Parking management is currently operated out of the City, without a dedicated authority or staff, and receives minimal attention beyond tracking financials. DLA used to manage Downtown parking. There has been an appetite recently for transitioning parking management back to DLA – and general agreement that parking is now big enough that it needs to live somewhere where it can get the proper attention it warrants. The ultimate goal should be to reactivate parking as a revenue source, dedicated program area, and tool for economic development, and to view parking in general as part of the user experience Downtown.

### ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

In particular, if a Downtown BID is formed (and under the assumption that DLA manages it), it is recommended that DLA should change its organizational structure from a non-profit that's housed within the City of Lynchburg to an independent non-profit.

### COMMUNITY MARKET MANAGEMENT

The Community Market is one of Downtown's most popular attractions – and a differentiator when compared with the rest of the Lynchburg region. There's an opportunity for it to be an even more impactful incubator for new businesses, giving entrepreneurs a space that offers a low-risk opportunity to test and prove their business's viability. It is recommended that the City and DLA explore a potential transition of management to DLA in the longer term.



*Downtown*  
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— association —

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