Bowling Green Main Street Revitalization Plan

Amy Guzulaitis

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Bowling Green Main Street Revitalization Plan

Amy Guzulaitis

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Master of Urban and Regional Planning Program
Virginia Commonwealth University
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Executive Summary

The Town of Bowling Green is a historic, rural community located in Caroline County, Virginia. The Town is the pride of residents who enjoy the community and small-town nature of the area. The Town currently has a small arts business cluster and sought ways to use that, as well as the Main Street Method, as a basis for spurring revitalization in the Town.

Research Methods & Findings

Today, the Town of Bowling Green faces challenges to its future growth and development due in part to the small market size available. Demographic indicators from ESRI Business Analyst show that Bowling Green’s market areas are generally older, although younger families are starting to move in, with a preference on spending on local goods and services. Merchant interviews and community surveys were also completed to understand the local market of the Town better. The following research questions guided this plan: What new and/or expanded businesses are needed in Bowling Green’s Main Street/downtown? How might Bowling Green leverage its existing arts-based businesses? What surrounding uses could affect and compete with Bowling Green?

The findings from this process showed that the Town is already in the process of revitalizing. A majority of the respondents had positive associations for the Town and said that they liked to frequent businesses in the Main Street area. The local support combined with demand for new businesses, such as a diner or breakfast restaurant, are poised to help Bowling Green’s future growth and development. Support for the Town using arts as a revitalization tool was also found throughout the community engagement process. The research findings are translated into the following goals and objectives. Most of these objectives focus on economic vitality in the Main Street area, and building a strong economic base for the Town, by using art and other means.

Goal 1: Promote Economic Vitality in Bowling Green
Objective 1.1: Improve the local economy and economic mix
Objective 1.2: Create opportunities to build the Town’s arts businesses, programs, and offerings

Goal 2: Encourage Good Design in the Downtown Area
Objective 2.1: Preserve and enhance the rural, historic nature of the Town

Goal 3: Promote Bowling Green’s Main Street
Objective 3.1: Attract more visitors/tourism to the downtown area
Objective 3.2: Create more opportunities for wayfinding in Bowling Green

Goal 4: Create a Strong Main Street Organization
Objective 4.1: Encourage Main Street/Downtown area support
Introduction

Purpose

The Town of Bowling Green, Virginia has a long rural, agrarian history that began in the 17th century. Its small downtown helped sustain the community throughout the years and helped to establish a clear sense of place. Things have changed and economic centers have moved farther away from communities. Although Bowling Green’s main street has traditionally been the lifeblood of the town, the exodus of smaller shopping in recent decades left many of the buildings on its main street vacant or underutilized. Bowling Green, not unlike many other small towns in the country, experienced increased vacancy and economic decline in the last few decades as sprawl increased, but now has the opportunity to make itself the economic and cultural heart of Caroline County.

This project aims to create a Main Street Revitalization Plan that would be an expanded form of Bowling Green’s Main Street Program. It details tools, policy recommendations to be implemented as part of Bowling Green’s plan. In particular, the plan will explore an arts-based revitalization for the Town. It will also analyze Caroline County to examine their market size and capability. This plan will be guided by Caroline County’s 2006 comprehensive plan for Bowling Green as well as the Town of Bowling Green’s comprehensive plan. It will facilitate the creation of a sustainable, cohesive Main Street Strategy for Bowling Green that will focus on revitalizing downtown and making it economically lasting while still preserving its rural history and culture.

Project Client

The Town of Bowling Green, Virginia is a rural incorporated town located within Caroline County, Virginia. The Town has limited population growth since its inception, with a population of approximately 4,600 in 2019. Town leadership is interested in using the Main Street Approach to foster revitalization in their downtown, and are specifically interested in arts-based revitalization. The Town of Bowling Green already has four art businesses and it is poised to capitalize on what it already has to foster growth and revitalization.

Figure 1: Map of Bowling Green, provided by ESRI
Literature Review

Main Streets and historic downtowns have significant importance and relevance to communities today, by providing an economic and community center. When traditional downtowns began declining in the latter half of the 20th century, many once vibrant and bustling downtowns turned into vacant ghost towns. Much of the existing literature focuses on how Main Streets and historic downtowns can be revitalized in order to create a strong economic base whilst keeping their distinctive character and culture. This issue is exacerbated in more rural areas as there is typically more conflict between new growth and keeping the land rustic and open. As this literature review will show, there is no real consensus on the best, long-lasting way to revitalize a rural area’s Main Street and/or downtown area. However, some common themes still emerge from the literature, these include (1) utilizing the Main Street Approach, (2) getting key community and stakeholder input, and (3) utilizing recreational programs and events to promote the downtown area.

Main Street

The Main Street Program, and its Four-Point Approach, has skyrocketed in use by towns and communities of all sizes since its inception. The Four-Point Approach model consists of four main points of the downtown to target for revitalization, these include; design, organization, promotion, and economic restructuring (Chang, 2011). The program also operates under these guiding principles: asset-based, comprehensive, incremental, implementation-focused, quality, changing attitudes, partnerships, and self-directed (Main Street America, 2018). While the Main Street Approach soared in popularity among downtowns in the latter half of the 20th century, there was concern that the program was better suited for mid-size or larger communities (population greater than 5,000), as there was little empirical evidence to back up those claims for rural communities. However, a quantitative study in Bradbury (2014) found that small communities (population under 5,000) actually received the greatest benefits from the Main Street Program.

Similar studies have also found that the Main Street Program is an economic boon to communities. A case study of the Iowa Main Street Program found that for “every dollar invested into the Main Street Program stemmed $72 in private investment” (Rypkema, 2013). This kind of financial return was found to be true even for smaller communities which may typically have a harder time attracting private investment or visitors (Bradbury, 2014). Nationally, the Main Street Program recorded approximately $6.45 billion in dollars reinvested into Main Street Communities, with a reinvestment ratio average of $30.09:1 (National Main Street Center, 2019). Another statewide study of Louisiana’s Main Street Program from 1984-2002 found that a community’s size or location were not the most important factors to a successful Main Street Program. Instead having strong, clear leadership and a dedicated community base resulted in the most sustainable economic revitalization seen in the program (Pitzer, 2003).

The Bowling Green Main Street Revitalization Plan will focus on the economic vitality sector of the Four-Point Approach. This helps to create a strong base for the remaining approaches. Economic vitality focuses on existing assets and capital, incentives, and other tools to help grow and attract businesses and create a healthy economic environment. Having an assessment of the current economic and business climate for a Main Street area can help point to the transformation strategy that the Town should employ. For example, an arts-based transformation strategy would use indicators such as the number of arts-related businesses in the area, number of housing units that are designated for artists (McMahon, 2019). This also includes conducting a market and leakage analysis of the Town. A market analysis shows a deeper understanding of the surrounding economic area and identifies areas of competitive advantages or weaknesses for the Town. A leakage analysis shows where the Town has unmet demand that it might grow (Smith & Bloom, 2018).
Community Support

It is now well recognized in urban planning that community input is needed for any truly comprehensive and equitable plan. Plans made with the knowledge and support of the community typically receive better results, especially for smaller and more rural communities. While public participation is extremely important for rural areas, a report on citizen participation for smaller area planning noted “Impediments to full participation come from multiple sources. The competing interests of residents, business owners, and local officials or organizations, set the parameters for citizen participation in local planning” (Silverman and Taylor, Jr., 2008). Many times, the planning process can be distorted by those who have more influence, creating a plan that does not truly reflect the entire community. Having more expansive public input in the planning process will help to ensure that the area reflects the values of all the different groups that reside there.

A study conducted in Colorado including ten small/rural towns looked into their different perceptions on how much tourism their area should encourage. The study found that residents in areas with both high economic and tourism development and areas with low economic and tourism development considered tourism beneficial. All groups studied also designated increased tourism with improved town beautification and recreation opportunities, as well as general quality of life (Allen, et al., 1993). However, a different study on revitalization efforts in Scranton, Pennsylvania found that smaller towns benefited more and gained more economic and population stability from focusing on creating community ties and a sense of home for residents new and old than they did by “solely attracting the creative class from outside” (Rich, 2013). The disengagement of stakeholders from the planning process creates weaknesses and hinders development that works for the community (Fall, 2005).

Arts-Based Revitalization

Arts-based urban revitalization has become more and more popular across the country as places with vacant downtowns are thought to be attractive to artists. A survey of different artists in Cuyahoga, Ohio found that artists prefer “relatively strong and consistent housing and neighborhood preferences for older and/or historic homes, walkable communities, proximity to galleries and/or performance venues, and access to public transportation” (Ryberg et al., 2013). Many Main Streets and historic downtown areas have sufficient housing stock that appeals to artists. Artists can help a community express itself culturally while also bringing positive economic impacts (Webb, 2014).

While arts-based programs can be helpful to some smaller/rural areas, ironically, it can also result in economic decline and/or gentrification. For example, a qualitative study on the arts-based revitalization in Tampa, Florida found no clear answer to whether instituting the arts-based program led to economic improvement or community revitalization (Buckman et al., 2019). A similar study of Baltimore, Maryland’s Station North Arts & Entertainment District indicated that many times the creation of these programs and districts pushes out the artists themselves - who can no longer afford to live in these areas if the program was successful (Rich and Tsitsos, 2016). However, these issues tend to happen in larger communities - art programs in small towns are typically successful.

Conclusion

Rural downtowns and Main Streets have the challenge of continuing to grow and compete with communities that have more resources and are better connected to other communities. However, that doesn’t mean that rural communities have to die out. If rural communities include the local community and other stakeholders when visioning the future, it will help guide the growth better and in a more sustainable way (Mishkovsky et al., 2010). This plan can use the existing knowledge to help inform the possibility of arts-based revitalization and general downtown revitalization.
Theoretical Framework

Rittel and Webber in Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning, defined planning problems as ‘wicked problems.’ Planning problems are wicked problems as they have both unclear aims and solutions when attempting to address planning problems and they are subject to real-world constraints that prevent risk-free attempts at solving them. Additionally, all wicked problems are unique in nature and can always be described as the symptom of another problem, making them challenging to address these planning problems (Rittel and Webber, 1973). Planning theory serves as the structure that will help guide a plan and explain how it progresses. This plan will be informed and influenced by Communicative Action, Placemaking, and Incremental theories.

Communicative Action theory stems from Habermas’s Theory of Communicative Action, which focuses on using communication as a form of action (Habermas, 1984). Adaptations of his work when it comes to urban planning have also used communicative action to help create equitable public processes. Communicative Action theory draws heavily on collaborative learning and having the public be able to equally contribute their knowledge and expertise into the planning process. It is also both normative and analytical, this theory helps guide analysis between different variables and ‘good’ planning outcomes (Goodspeed, 2016). This is why it will be used as a theoretical basis for the Bowling Green Main Street Revitalization Plan, as it focuses on going out to the public to acquire public input and knowledge instead of passively waiting for them to come to you. The residents, employees, property owners, tourists, etc. who live and work in Bowling Green are already local experts in the Town. Their knowledge is critical to creating a sustainable and usable plan that will benefit everyone in the community.

This project also utilizes Placemaking theory, which aims to strengthen the connection to people and the places that they inhabit. It focuses on public spaces in a community, but also looks at an area as a whole instead of breaking it down into smaller components. Placemaking theory relies on more grassroots kinds of public participation and gathering opinions from all community stakeholders, especially ones that are typically marginalized in the planning process to create their ideal community (Madden, 2021). This theory also typically heavily relies on local artists in the communities as they help add meaning and cultural/historical significance to places (Redaelli, 2018). This theory will be useful to the plan as it focuses on community collaborative input in creating a place that is recognizable not just to the community but to tourists and visitors that stop by.

Finally, Creative Class theory will influence this plan. Creative Class theory, pioneered by Richard Florida, focuses on the idea that the economy is shifting from being manufacturing and service-oriented to new drivers of economic development - the creative class. Creative professionals, including a ‘super-creative core’ such as artists and designers and ‘creative professionals’ such as managers or lawyers are the people that make up the creative class and are the jobs and skills localities should be trying to attract over more traditional economic development policies (Eaton, 2010). The creative class chooses to live and work in communities that offer cultural amenities and favorable environments, including diverse populations, and therefore communities should invest in trying to attract these creative professionals with the assumption that economic growth will follow them (Florida, 2002).
Methodology

Research Questions

The Bowling Green Main Street Revitalization Plan will focus on creating a plan that is equitable and includes input from stakeholders. The local experts of Bowling Green will help to inform this plan by sharing their thoughts on Bowling Green’s Main Street/downtown and identify what is appropriate and what will work for the community. To determine what is attainable in the study area will include Main Street America best practices, communication with Town representatives, and a physical assessment of the area.

The central research questions to this plan include:

What new and/or expanded businesses are needed in Bowling Green’s Main Street/downtown?
How might Bowling Green leverage its existing arts-based businesses?
What surrounding uses could affect and compete with Bowling Green?

The answers to these questions will be collected by various methods. The first and second question will be answered through various community surveys and stakeholder interviews. Main Street best practices will be ascertained by individual research on current policies and practices, especially for rural downtowns. The knowledge guided by local experts and best practices will help create the future recommendations for the Bowling Green Main Street Revitalization Plan.

Stakeholder Outreach

The first two research questions are dependent upon input from local experts. Multiple groups will be surveyed in order to get as comprehensive a view as possible in resident attitudes and opinions. To get information from local experts, community surveys will be conducted. The Bowling Green Alliance, their main street organization, was one of the groups surveyed in-person, as well as via email (Appendix A).

Community surveys (Appendix B) were also conducted at Bowling Green’s autumn Harvest Festival on October 16, 2021. This was done by soliciting responses from visitors to the festival at random. This survey also helps identify needed businesses in the downtown as well as the possibility of arts-based revitalization. This survey also collected zip codes of festival visitors, which can help indicate where Bowling Green’s tourist market stems from. Additionally, more community surveys will be solicited from the Town’s Facebook page that will link to an online survey that they can complete via a Google Form. This survey was open for approximately a month.

To get more technical input from stakeholders, business interviews will be conducted with local businesses located within the Town of Bowling Green (Appendix C). These interviews will help get a business’ perspective on what the market can sustain and what will help them grow their business. The business owners had been contacted via email and asked to be interviewed in-person or via zoom or telephone. A second email was sent by the Director of Community Engagement and Economic Development, encouraging businesses to participate. Finally, in-person, unscheduled drop-in engagement was conducted for businesses on December 2nd, 2021 and December 10th, 2021. The interview questions will help to gain a more well-rounded understanding of Bowling Green’s economic climate.

Best practices will be found by researching what revitalization strategies for rural Main Streets, specifically focusing on the Main Street Approach and program. This, along with the collective knowledge and input from the local experts will help to inform what is possible and sustainable for Bowling Green’s Main Street.
Market Analysis

A market analysis for the Town of Bowling Green was conducted in order to understand the potential for new commercial development. The market analysis examined both the convenience and community trade areas surrounding Bowling Green. To determine the potential of the markets, population and shopping patterns were used to estimate market demand for the different groups. This includes data such as income, employment, and economic characteristics. To assess competition and existing conditions, ESRI Business Analyst data was used to inventory businesses within the trade area and show potential unmet demand or leakage. ESRI’s MarketPlace Profile and Retail Demand Outlook reports (see Appendix) were used to determine demographic and consumer information about the different trade areas. The Business and Facilities Locator Tool from ESRI was also utilized to find surrounding uses and competition and generate maps. Local business interviews were also completed to determine what the trade area market will be able to support in the Town of Bowling Green.
Description of the Planning Area

History

Located in central Virginia, the area was originally called home by Native Americans - the Rappahannock, Pamunkey, Dogue, Secobecs, and more tribes - the area that would eventually come to be Bowling Green has seen thousands of years of human history. The Town of Bowling Green is one that shows the evolution of the United States’ from the colonial period to modern day. The Town was originally called ‘New Hope,’ named after Hope Tavern, a prominent business in the area at the time. It has been part of Caroline County since 1728 when it was created out of land from Essex, King and Queen, and King William counties (Caroline Historical Society, 2017). The town was later renamed Bowling Green after the plantation of the town founder, Major John Thomas Hoomes. His estate was one of the first horse race tracks to be built in North America and the town is considered a birthplace of horseracing in the United States (Caroline County, 2010).

In the 20th century Bowling Green would be victim to two fires going through the town. The first happened in 1900 when there was no fire department in the town. By the time residents managed to put out the fire the entire business area of Bowling Green had been destroyed, about 35 buildings (Town of BG Planning Commission, 2006). 55 years later on the anniversary of the first fire the second fire of Bowling Green happened. More than 25 buildings were destroyed in this fire and the town had to rebuild once again. During World War II a USO recreation center was built (a second facility was built for African Americans in the County) that later became and still is the town hall (Town of BG Planning Commission, 2006). Caroline County was also the home of Richard and Mildred Loving, who in Loving v. Virginia helped invalidate all laws prohibiting interracial marriage in the United States (Caroline Historical Society, 2017). After the introduction of the interstate going nearby but not through the town, Bowling Green missed out on growth but got to retain its rural character and culture.

Related Plans

The Town of Bowling Green has been included and recently influenced by two plans, both over 10 years in age. One is the Bowling Green – Milford Community Plan, within Caroline County’s Comprehensive Plan, which was adopted in 2006. The second plan is the Town of Bowling Green’s own Comprehensive Plan, which was adopted in 2008. Caroline County’s plan is both a visioning document and one that is meant to guide future development in the Town of Bowling Green. The Bowling Green – Milford Community Plan focuses on preserving the community feel and historic/small town nature of the area. Preserving the rural, small town feel of the Town was noted as a main goal for the area, which requires that development in the area be consistent with and complement this goal. The plan also emphasizes keeping the Town of Bowling Green as the commercial center for the area and encouraging economic development opportunities to expand in Bowling Green. The Town of Bowling Green’s Comprehensive Plan is more of a document detailing existing conditions in the Town, which shows existing and future land use, sidewalk networks, and environmental conditions, among others.
Surrounding Influences

The proximity of other commercial and recreation centers has a strong influence on the Town of Bowling Green. Figure 4 above illustrates the location of some competing shopping and recreation influences to the Town of Bowling Green.

The Town of Bowling Green is surrounded by largely rural areas, with historic neighborhoods and houses featured in a variety of historically significant styles. Just outside the Town is Fort AP Hill, a military training center for the armed forces. Figure 4 shows some of the biggest shopping and recreation areas that potentially draw people away from the Town of Bowling Green. The higher the sales volume typically indicates a larger store/shopping center, which are located to the north and south of Bowling Green. The biggest influences and competition for the Town of Bowling Green comes from the City of Fredericksburg to the north and Ashland from the south. For most major shopping, residents from the Town of Bowling Green and Caroline County often have to go to either Fredericksburg or Ashland to get everything they may want. For example, there are close to no clothing or entertainment options available not just in the Town of Bowling Green but all of Caroline County.

Art Influences

While there are already four arts-based shopping options within the Town of Bowling Green, Caroline County has very few other arts-based retail or recreation to offer in comparison. The only other close-by arts-destination is the City of Fredericksburg, which has a number of art galleries/retail options available. This is potentially a positive indicator that an arts-based revitalization scheme could be successful in Bowling Green. The proximity of the different art businesses in the Town of Bowling Green is a positive factor for pursuing arts-based revitalization. They have already naturally started an arts cluster in the Town that can help focus the area into becoming an arts district or an arts-based economy.
Fort AP Hill

Fort AP Hill is an army training center that is used year-round by most branches of the military. The Fort was established in 1941 in response to World War II and continues to have a large military presence in the area. Fort AP Hill sits only about 2.5 miles away from downtown Bowling Green, and therefore has a strong influence on the Town. The population of Fort AP Hill was approximately 3,286 in 2020, larger than Bowling Green's own population. This year-round population, and the extra visitors that go to and from Fort AP Hill that do not live there fulltime, could be another possible market for the Town to cater to. Fort AP Hill does not have any of its own restaurants or shops to accommodate its population, which the Town of Bowling Green could help fill. The Town of Bowling Green is also the closest shopping area for those at Fort AP Hill to go to for all types of goods and services.

Trade Area

There are two trade areas for the Town of Bowling Green, using 10, 20, and 30-minute drive times from the Town due to its rural nature. The first trade area is for convenience goods and services, which are typically smaller in range since consumers do not travel as far for these basic goods and services, such as groceries and gas. Determining trade areas must take into account possible different barriers and features that could affect how far consumers are willing to go to shop for certain items. Trade areas must also take competition into consideration when determining the different boundaries. The City of Fredericksburg and Interstate 95 are examples of competition and barriers that were left out of the convenience trade area.

The Town of Bowling Green’s convenience trade area is within the 10-minute drive time from Town. This area is approximately 10-14 miles long in diameter that includes the Town of Bowling Green and surrounding areas. The community trade area encompasses a larger area, which includes the 20 and 30-minute drive time areas. The community trade area shows where most consumers may come from for a greater variety of goods and services. Most people are willing to travel further distances

Figure 7: Fort AP Hill Source: ESRI Business Analyst

Figure 8: Trade Areas Source: ESRI Business Analyst
for a larger variety of goods and services offered in an area. The community trade area for the Town of Bowling Green is approximately 30-40 miles in diameter and encompasses other commercial areas like the City of Fredericksburg and reaches into the Northern Neck region.

Population

Table 1 shows the current and future population and median income projections for Bowling Green's trade areas. The population of the convenience trade area (10-minute drive time) is projected to have a significant amount of growth, 3.0%, over the next five years. This includes the Town of Bowling Green and surrounding neighborhoods. While the convenience trade area has the highest projected growth, the community trade area (20 and 30-minute drive times) is also predicted to experience substantial growth at a combined rate of 4.7%. Median household incomes are estimated to increase across both trade areas, with the highest growth seen in the 20-minute drive time range at 1.4%.

<table>
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<th>Population</th>
<th>2021</th>
<th>2026 Estimate</th>
<th>Projected Growth</th>
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<tr>
<td>10-minute drive time</td>
<td>4,289</td>
<td>4,923</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>20-minute drive time</td>
<td>21,359</td>
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<tr>
<td>30-minute drive time</td>
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<td>132,546</td>
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<table>
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<th>2021</th>
<th>2026 Estimate</th>
<th>Projected Growth</th>
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<td>10-minute drive time</td>
<td>$59,384</td>
<td>$61,362</td>
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<tr>
<td>20-minute drive time</td>
<td>$66,273</td>
<td>$70,780</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-minute drive time</td>
<td>$78,109</td>
<td>$82,849</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tapestry Segments

ESRI Business Analyst has an analysis feature called Tapestries which divide up different areas based on their socioeconomic and demographic composition and help show typical market behavior by the different Tapestry segments. The top Tapestries for an area can indicate what kinds of goods and services the residents there typically like to buy and their spending habits and can help identify a location’s pull factors. More information about the different Tapestry segments can be found on ESRI’s website.

Convenience Trade Area Tapestry

The number one Tapestry segment by far for Bowling Green’s convenience trade area (10-minute drive time) is Midlife Constants. This market segment tends to be older, with most residents at or nearing retirement age. They typically have lower than average labor force participation, but higher than average net worth. These are areas that usually consist of settled neighborhoods, with slow rates of change and long residences in the area. This market segment tends to be more traditional and enjoy convenience and comfort over the cutting-edge. Midlife Constants are also known to contribute to arts/culture, educational, health and service organizations. Midlife Constants spend the most on healthcare and typically spend the least on apparel and services, recreation and entertainment, and education.

Community Trade Area Tapestry

The main Tapestry market segment for the community trade area (20 and 30-minute drive times) is Middleburg. The Middleburg Tapestry segment comprises previously rural areas that are starting to change into semirural suburbs within the past 10 years. Most neighborhoods in this segment change rapidly and are primarily composed of single-family homes. This segment is younger than Midlife Constants, with an abundance of young couples with children and an average household size of 2.75. This segment is more comfortable with new technology and entertainment, but still tend to be traditional and focused on family. They typically spend the most on transportation and spend the least on ed-
Their entertainment is primarily family-oriented, with spending focusing on children and the home. This market segment indicates that the area around Bowling Green is getting younger and has more family (children) emphasis and is projected to continue to grow.

Public Safety

Public safety is a major concern for any area. Public safety can affect who lives, works, and comes to shop in different areas, if it is perceived that there are crime problems. Since 2010, the Bowling Green Police Department has not reported any violent crimes or offenses, showing a remarkably safe area. The only crimes reported are burglaries of properties, which culminated in approximately $1,000 of stolen goods over the past three years (FBI). This is still much lower than the state and national average, and shows that Bowling Green is a generally safe area to live, work, and visit. Perceptions of crime seem to be low for the Town of Bowling Green as well, as public safety issues were not brought up throughout the community engagement process.

Zoning

The zoning map below (see Figure 9) focuses on the main downtown commercial area between Chase St./Milford St. to around Sunset Drive. The Main Street/downtown area of the Town of Bowling Green is primarily zoned from Milford St. and Chase St. to about halfway to Broadus Ave. as B-1 and B-2, which allow for Commercial uses only. There is also a good amount of land that is zoned as Public within the center of Town, that is primarily green space or government buildings. The other half of Main St. to Broadus Ave. is comprised of Low Density Residential (R-1, A-1), A-1, also known as Rural Preservation (RP), which encompasses generally rural areas that is focused on preserving the rural, open space, and/or natural resources of the area. This area is also a designated ‘holding zone’ for possible future development that does not currently have the necessary public facilities, utilities, etc. to accommodate new development.

Along Broadus Ave. within Town limits there is a small Commercial district that follows the road, and extends to the border with Fort AP Hill on Route 301. On the other side of this section, still close to the border of Fort AP Hill, is a Mixed-Use zone, which allows for Low and Medium Residential, mobile home subdivision, and planned unit developments. The rest of the Town is primarily zoned with Low Residential, along with Rural/Agricultural/Historic Preservation areas mainly focused in the southwest of the Town.
Circulation

Figure 10 shows historic average weekday traffic data throughout Bowling Green from 2018. As shown in the figure, Bowling Green’s Main Street and interior roads experience moderate traffic throughout the day with 11,000 or less traffic counts. However, the arterial roads surrounding the Town such as the Bowling Green Bypass and Route 207 show a lot more traffic and usage than through the Town, more than 15,000 traffic counts per day, which could be a loss of potential customers for businesses there. There are also higher traffic counts heading into Fort AP Hill, indicating another area that Bowling Green could be gaining potential customers.

Stakeholder Attitudes

Residents’ Views

In order to understand local resident attitudes and opinions on Bowling Green’s Main Street, multiple community surveys were completed. The first was a survey of Bowling Green’s Main Street organization, BG Alliance, who are active in the downtown community. Random surveys were also collected at the 2021 Harvest Festival, as well as an online Facebook survey on the Town’s page. Most of the respondents are those who are typically more active in the community. Over half of the respondents currently live within the Town of Bowling Green, Figure 11.

![Figure 10: Traffic Circulation Source: ESRI Business Analyst](image)

![Figure 11: Zip Code Survey Responses](image)
The survey results show a community that loves its Town and its Main Street. When asked what they liked most about Bowling Green, the vast majority of respondents answered with the ‘small town feel’ and its rural community. Many respondents noted that the Town has already improved a lot within the past 20 years and are generally happy with the way things are going. However, residents also expressed concern for a number of negative aspects in the community. Losing its historic, rural feel and community to new development that doesn’t fit the area was a notable concern among respondents. The vacant buildings and their subsequent condition were also noted as an issue commonly brought up in the downtown area. Even with these issues coming up, the overall tone of respondents was largely positive of the direction Bowling Green is heading.

Attitudes Towards Local Businesses

All of the survey results revealed that this is a community that already wants to patronize and support the Main Street area. Nearly every single business in Town was listed at least once when asked what stores they frequently visit. The businesses in the Main Street/downtown area were some of the most frequently mentioned from all the responses. However, the top five improvements needed for the downtown area were found to be: (1) more and/or different restaurants (70%), (2) other stores/services (62%), (3) more entertainment events (45%), (4) later hours at local businesses (38%), and (5) more parking (24%). The desire for more restaurants was found throughout the surveys, specifically a place that is open for breakfast during the week and possibly a bar or place for adults that could also serve as an entertainment venue. Most of the respondents stated that they primarily do their shopping after 5 pm during the week or on the weekends. This causes some conflict with businesses in Town that tend to close earlier on weekdays.

Arts District Consideration

In terms of the possibility of the Town of Bowling Green becoming an Arts District or utilizing arts-based revitalization the surveys found that there is support in the community for it. As seen in Figure 12, over half of the respondents said that they would like to see more art come to Bowling Green. If not an Arts District, more art-centered events were noted as something of interest. While there is support for it, there is also a decent amount of concern over such a thing happening. Particularly if the Town could actually support it and if it would actually benefit the residents of the Town were found to be common themes of concern. 18% of respondents were unsure if arts-based revitalization would be beneficial.

Figure 12: Arts District Survey Responses
Merchant Interviews

Five businesses were interviewed in the downtown area. The survey asked merchants to describe their goods and services, business conditions, conditions of the area, and any opportunities they believe may help improve downtown. The businesses surveyed have been in operation from as long as 70 years ago to just opening in November 2021. Most of the businesses surveyed have been in operation two years or less. Altogether, the surveyed businesses employ a total of 26 full and part time employees.

Over the past two years, all the surveyed businesses that have been open that long found that their sales had increased. While the COVID-19 pandemic seems to have hurt some businesses, the surveyed businesses indicated that it seemed to mostly help their businesses. They noted that the smaller town and population seemed to draw more people as it seemed safer during the pandemic and more people tended to travel closer to home during this time. The community coming together to help support the local businesses was also considered a major reason for success over the past two years. The merchants largely have a positive outlook for sales in the next two years, expecting increases, if at a smaller pace of growth. Along with this, the businesses have plans to possibly expand operations in the future, which could help to increase their sales. However, there is some concern over rising prices and competition that could affect the next two years.

The businesses serve both the local surrounding area and areas outside of the convenience trade area. The farthest away merchants noted customers coming to Bowling Green from was predominantly the Northern Virginia region, the Richmond area, and the rest of Caroline County. Typically, retail businesses tended to list customers from farther away than food-based businesses. The local area is a huge supporter of the local businesses as well, as they all noted that locals make up a considerable portion of their customer base.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day of Week</th>
<th># of Businesses Open</th>
<th># of Businesses Open 6 am or Earlier - 10 am</th>
<th># of Businesses Open 10 am - 4 pm</th>
<th># of Businesses Open 4 pm - 10 pm or Later</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>17</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>34</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>29</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The businesses interviewed have limited hours during the week. Most tend to be open in the later days of the week and weekend, from Wednesday to Saturday. Business hours range in time from 7 am – 11 pm, with later hours tending to be on Fridays and Saturdays. The majority of businesses in Town tend to be open towards the middle of the day, especially during the week. Most merchants stated that their busiest days are on Fridays and Saturdays. The holiday season in November/December was listed as the busiest time of year for merchants. Table 2 shows the open business days and times for most of the businesses located in Bowling Green. The middle of the week has the greatest number of businesses open. Sunday in particular is a day where not many businesses are open in Town, restaurants and food-related businesses especially do not open as often on Sundays.

All of the retail businesses surveyed also sell online, which helps to bring in customers from different markets. When asked why they chose Bowling Green for their location, almost all of the merchants responded that they were from Bowling Green or have lived here for a decent amount of time and noticed something they thought their community was lacking. One of the biggest advantages merchants in the survey noted was the sense of community in Bowling Green, and that the local customer base is very supportive of local businesses. The lack of competition and larger chain stores or restaurants to have to compete with was also
noted as an advantage to being located in Bowling Green. The convenience to locals to not have to drive far for their goods and services was also a commonly listed advantage.

The biggest issue brought up about having a business in Bowling Green was the smaller market that is available there. Merchants rely on the local population to sustain them, but the Town of Bowling Green alone does not have the population to help dramatically increase sales for most businesses. Having to find ways to bring potential customers to Bowling Green was the biggest disadvantage to having a business in Town listed by merchants.

The merchants surveyed overwhelmingly agreed that all of the other businesses in Town help to bring in customers for the other businesses from foot traffic alone. Restaurants especially were noted as helping to bring more people to the downtown area that could then patronize other establishments in Town. The merchants identified new businesses they think could be viable in the downtown area, the main one that was named was a new restaurant. Specifically, a breakfast spot that is open early was mentioned multiple times by different merchants as something that would be beneficial to the Town. A women’s clothing boutique was another business that came up repeatedly during the surveys, although it was acknowledged that this may be a tougher business to keep open.

Answers concerning Bowling Green becoming an Arts District or arts focused were mixed, with concerns that the local market and population would not be able to support the arts businesses enough for them to be successful. Merchants noted that if it were implemented, it could help bring more people and potential customers to the Town. A market-style building with multiple artists was considered a way that could be a successful way to implement it.

Merchants gave several recommendations for improvements in the Main Street/downtown area. One of the main recurring suggestions was to fill the vacant buildings that are downtown, that can be an eyesore for consumers and hurt other businesses in the area. Beautification and design updates, especially updating the awnings and facades of buildings, was something that was also commonly brought up. Having the Town host more events that bring more people in was another recommendation. Keeping chains out and the small town feel of the community was also stated. Overall, the merchants surveyed have positive feelings about the future of their business in Bowling Green.

Survey Results

The community survey was online from November 9th December 10th 2021. The survey was posted online to the Town’s Facebook page and gathered 148 responses. The survey aimed to grasp people’s views on Bowling Green’s downtown area and what potential changes or opportunities were available. Questions were either multiple-choice or multiple selection or short answer, depending on the nature of the question. Question 1 was to determine the zip code of respondents to see where opinions are coming from and potential markets to reach out to. As seen in the market analysis, 54% of respondents were located in the same zip code as the Town of Bowling Green and Fort AP Hill. The other respondents mostly come from areas surrounding the Town of Bowling Green, including Caroline County and part of the Northern Neck region.

Question 2 asked respondents what they liked the most about Bowling Green. By far the most common answer was the small town feel and the local community.

Questions 3-5 established thoughts and opinions on Bowling Green’s downtown, including what businesses are most frequented, what improvements could be made, and if arts businesses should be encouraged. Results found that nearly every business in Bowling Green was mentioned as being frequented often, especially restaurants and food places. 70% of respondents cited new and/or different restaurants as the number one improvement for the downtown area (Figure 20). Other stores and services (62%) and more entertainment events (45%) were the two other most popular improvements. As discussed earlier in the market study, 55% of the respondents were in favor of the Town becoming more arts-focused.
Questions 6-8 were similarly used to determine attitudes toward future businesses in Bowling Green and shopping time preferences. The majority of respondents wanted a new restaurant in the downtown area, specifically a breakfast spot that is open early. A specialty store or boutique that sold a variety of local goods was also found to be popular among respondents.

What improvements would you like to see in Bowling Green?

![Bar chart showing survey responses](Figure 13: Improvements Survey Responses)
Market Analysis

Retail Market Analysis

A market analysis for the Town of Bowling Green was conducted in order to understand the different market strengths and weaknesses and show potential for new commercial development in Town. The market analysis examined the convenience trade area and the community trade area and looked at related data such as demographics and shopping perceptions and attitudes. A business inventory and competitive retail analysis to help find possible business clusters and areas of competition were also completed. The market analysis revealed that the highest unmet demand is for restaurants, new entertainment options, and more retail options.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High Level of Unmet Demand</th>
<th>Low Level of Unmet Demand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Breakfast/Diner Restaurant</td>
<td>Grocery Stores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment (Alcoholic Beverages)</td>
<td>Convenience Stores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialty Food Stores</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Restaurants

From the data collected, consumers indicated a strong desire for more and different restaurant options, and bars that serve as both a food/drink place and an entertainment space in the Main Street area. Currently within the convenience trade area, there are approximately 10 food and drink options available, Figure 13. While there is not much competition in the convenience trade area, the community trade area has substantial competition to the north with the City of Fredericksburg and to the south with the Town of Ashland/City of Richmond, both of which are partially within the community trade area. The convenience trade area spent a total of $5,240,881 in food away from home in 2021 and that is projected to grow by $1.2 million in spending over the next five years.

While there is significant competition in the community trade area (especially the 30-minute drive time range) there is still an opportunity for Bowling Green to support a new restaurant. Restaurants had a leakage (potential income/spending that Bowling Green is losing to other areas) of 2.7 for restaurants in the convenience trade area and the community trade area has a combined leakage of 7.1, which gets much more competitive in the 30-minute drive time range. This helps show that Bowling Green can only support 1-2 new restaurants in Town. Throughout the community engagement process, unmet demand for a restaurant/diner that is open for breakfast during the week from approximately 6 am through lunch was found to be very high.

While there are currently some coffee and bakery options available in the mornings, there is currently not a place that offers full meals for breakfast. Having the restaurant open for breakfast/brunch on the weekends, when most consumers say they tend to shop and on Sundays in particular when there are not as many restaurants open could be beneficial. Unmet demand was also noted for some additional nightlife/bar to the area that could cater more to the younger population that is grow
ing in the community trade area, see entertainment analysis. Throughout survey responses a preference for a small, local restaurant instead of a chain was also apparent and could help differentiate Bowling Green from other nearby restaurant hubs.

**Art Businesses**

Overall, there is community support for Bowling Green to become an Arts District, with arts businesses being clustered in the downtown area. The best way to achieve this is where many differing opinions have occurred. Figure 14 shows music and live entertainment, animal and outdoor photographers, sculptors, fine artists, musicians, portrait painters, folk art, and mixed-media artists in relation to Bowling Green and the trade areas. Figure 15 displays art galleries that are nearby.

As can be seen above, the main competition for the Town of Bowling green in arts-related businesses is the City of Fredericksburg. Fredericksburg is already its own destination and has its own arts cluster, as well as the City of Richmond to the south. Since part of Fredericksburg is within the community trade area, this drastically increases competition in that trade area, anyone past a 20-minute drive from Bowling Green will more than likely go to Fredericksburg instead for art related businesses. A better trade area for this type of business would be to try to attract from the Northern Neck and the Chesapeake Bay region, Figure 16, which has far fewer artists and art galleries/businesses to compete with. The Town of Bowling Green alone may not be able to support new art businesses, but with assertive marketing and promotion in those areas, could draw more visitors in from the Chesapeake area.
The average startup cost of an art gallery is $40,000, with operating costs averaging a minimum of $5,000 a month (Starter Story). However, instead of individual arts businesses, having a market hall style building with different studios/galleries for multiple local artists or craftsmen could be more beneficial than encouraging singular businesses.

A market hall style artists’ gallery could allow for multiple different local artists, craftsmen, etc. to sell in one place in different stalls/stores, which would attract larger and more diverse groups of consumers, who could see multiple stores in one. This would help offset some of the startup and monthly costs that can be difficult for just one seller to cover, and make it more accessible to artists/craftsmen who might not have the time to have their own full-time store. The market could promote all the artists within, and other art businesses in Town, and give it more power and influence than if it was just one business. Having artists/craftsmen sell online could also help with promotion and sales. Events such as a monthly art showcase/First Fridays and/or cultural events could also be held in this space that promote the market and arts businesses in general, as well as bringing in other types of art like music to the space.

Entertainment/Events

There was also found to be demand through the community engagement for more entertainment options in Town. Currently most of the entertainment options available to consumers within both trade areas are located in the City of Fredericksburg or to the south in the Town of Ashland or City of Richmond. Figure 17 displays movie theaters, live theaters, bars, beer and ale retail, and tourist attractions. As can be seen on the map, there are very few entertainment options available in the Town of Bowling Green or in the convenience trade area. Bowling Green is currently losing entertainment spending to Fredericksburg and Ashland/Richmond.

According to ESRI data, $227,537 was spent on tickets to live theatre/concerts, movies, and parks or museums in the convenience trade area in 2021. This spending is projected to grow by approximately $50,000 over the next five years. However, startup and operating costs tend to be rather high for these types of businesses, for example movie theaters cost approximately $30,000 a month in operating costs at a minimum (Martins, 2021), which would be a hurdle to bringing them into Town. This, as well as competition in the community trade area from Fredericksburg and Ashland/Richmond could make it difficult. Community
events that are hosted by the Town or local businesses may be better for family-oriented entertainment in the area.

However, alcoholic beverages in the convenience trade area are projected to grow approximately $200,000 in sales from 2021 to 2026. In the community trade area, these sales are expected to grow by about $6.8 million in the same time period. Opening a bar typically costs at least $125,000, with approximately $10,000 in monthly operating costs (Tarver, 2021). The projected increased sales in this field and the lower costs of operation make a bar more likely to succeed than other entertainment options. According to ESRI data, there is a leakage (potential income/spending that Bowling Green is losing to other areas) of 100 for alcoholic beverage drinking places for the convenience trade area and half of the community trade area (20-minute drive time range), which means Bowling Green is losing any/all potential alcoholic beverage spending to other communities. A bar that also doubles as a restaurant for families during the day could help to tap into the family-oriented spending market that is also projected to grow. Holding events like trivia nights that appeal to a broader audience would also be beneficial to bringing in more customers.

Boutiques/Retail

From the community engagement completed, there was a gap noticed in terms of retail stores available in the Town of Bowling Green. A preference for retail that sold local goods was found throughout community engagement. Figure 18 shows the closest other retail businesses near Bowling Green, which include retail clothing (both men’s and women’s), gift shops, and general retail merchandise. Once again, the City of Fredericksburg is the main source of competition for boutique retail as it already has a number of stores located there. There are fewer options for boutique retail in the convenience trade area than the community trade area.

ESRI data shows that consumers spent $2.9 million on apparel and services, with women’s clothing alone making up $1 million of that spending in the 10-minute convenience trade area. Overall, spending in this category is projected to grow by $673,345, with women’s apparel seeing the biggest gains. While the Town of Bowling Green itself is too small to support a new boutique store on its own, marketing and promoting to other areas would help to expand the potential customer market. As with art businesses, a different trade area (Figure 19) for boutique/retail could be more beneficial, as it would offer far less competition from more established areas like Fredericksburg and Ashland/Richmond.

A new clothing boutique can have startup costs anywhere between $50,000 to $150,000, depending on size of the store, location, etc. (Hudson, 2021). Any new boutique would need to also sell online to help boost sales, as well as market and promote itself in the region. A program like ‘Launch Gloucester’ used in Gloucester, Virginia may be helpful in bringing new businesses to Town. Launch Gloucester was part of a Virginia Community Business Launch initiative, administered by the Department of Housing and Development (DHCD). The Gloucester Village
Community Village Launch helps to provide tools to multiple entrepreneurs to operate successful businesses and allow them to compete for funding opportunities for their business in the downtown area.

**Grocery & Convenience Stores**

The convenience trade area contains four grocery or convenience stores that serve the area. Within the community trade area, there are numerous options for grocery and convenience stores, increasing in number closer to bigger metropolitan areas like Richmond and Fredericksburg. According to ESRI’s Retail Demand Outlook (see Appendix), there is a surplus of grocery and convenience stores in the convenience trade area. The community trade area is in equilibrium when it comes to grocery and convenience retail, with not much surplus or leakage. Due to there not being any unmet demand for grocery or convenience stores in both trade areas, a new grocery or convenience store is not needed in the area. A smaller, locally owned grocery or deli may be able to tap into the specialty food stores market, see below.

**Specialty Food Stores**

Specialty food stores, such as a wine and cheese shop, were another potential business that was mentioned during the community engagement. In 2017, there was a leakage in specialty food stores for both the convenience and community trade areas. The convenience trade area had a 100% leakage for specialty food stores, with $208,000 in potential demand, while the community trade area already has approximately 13 specialty food stores and a much lower overall leakage. There was a clear preference in community engagement results for local goods and services, and a specialty food store specializing in local goods may be beneficial to the area. A facility offering specialty food closer to home could attract some of the customers that have to travel outside of the convenience trade area to buy specialty food products.
Streetscape Analysis

Design plays an important role in the livability and functionality of an area. The physical appearance of the downtown area can shape perceptions and attitudes about it and determine if people want to have a business or shop there. Elements such as well-maintained wide sidewalks, large storefront windows, and benches can improve the streetscape and help promote business. The Town of Bowling Green has a good starting point for design, as the buildings in the downtown area are mostly historic and follow a similar design style and are surrounded by historic residential neighborhoods. Design can also be used as a tool to help the Town of Bowling Green keep development confined to where it wants it and have a say in what that development looks like. This can be a useful way to ensure that the development that does happen follows the Town’s vision and wants, as well as keep buildings from being vacant or abandoned for extended periods of time. The following streetscape analysis will discuss what possible improvements could be made to enhance the downtown streetscape of Bowling Green.

Vacant Buildings

Vacant buildings were identified as a main issue for the downtown area from the community engagement process. vacant properties, especially retail properties, can significantly lower neighboring property value and cause a decline in town centers (Accordino and Johnson, 2000). A vacant storefront can cost the Town a lack of economic vitality and can contribute to overall community decline. Bowling Green’s Main Street currently has a few buildings that appear to be vacant. However, most of these buildings are in the process of being renovated or rehabilitated for new businesses to come in. There is also movement in the Town between already established businesses that are moving into different buildings but are staying in the Town of Bowling Green. While there are no current issues with abandoned buildings, it is still important to ensure that the storefronts look clean and inviting as it helps with the appearance and perception of the entire Town. Simple measures such as hanging local art or coming soon signs in the windows of the renovating buildings can help with building anticipation and the overall design of the street. Buildings that are being renovated without anyone set to come in should try to have a plan for who will use the building and for what.

Facades

Facades, the outer appearance of a building, are the most important factor when defining the public realm (Arendt, 2017). In the downtown area, there were approximately seven buildings that needed significant facade improvements, such as door and window repair and repainting. Approximately 3 awnings in the downtown area should be updated to maintain the aesthetics of the Main Street. There are a few low-cost options for facades rehabilitation and maintenance in Bowling Green (see Figures 20, 21). Simple improvements such as newer and larger signs can have a big impact for the downtown area. Other improvements could include: masonry/brick pointing, fixing or updating windows, and exterior facade lighting. Having cohesive and maintained facades are essential in sustaining a healthy downtown area. Updating and improving building facades downtown will have an immediate positive impact on the Town and can help attract new businesses to the area.
The Town of Bowling Green can help to promote facade improvements by initiating a Facade Improvement Program for businesses in the downtown area. Facade Improvement Programs are incentive-based programs that encourage property owners to improve the exteriors of their buildings. These programs provide financial incentives, such as matching grants or loans, tax incentives, and design assistance. The National Parks Service and Main Street America offer grants to help provide for these programs. Alternatively, hiring a firm for design assistance for the entire Main Street commercial area can be a cost-effective way of having a design master-plan for the Town that property owners and businesses can follow.

### Gateway Signage & Wayfinding

Gateway signage marks the boundaries of Town centers and helps create a sense of place. These signs help introduce and welcome visitors to the Town and can be beneficial in pulling people in from off of major roads. Implementing gateway signage will help convey Bowling Green’s image and brand to people that may not know about it. Gateway signage does not need to be an expensive or large project, but does need to be attractive, well-kept and maintained, and large enough to catch people’s interest. It should also keep in mind human scale for banners and signs in the downtown area, with a cohesive design that can help reinforce the Town’s branding.
Summary of Existing Conditions & Development Potential

Strengths

The Town of Bowling Green has a multitude of strengths to draw upon. The area still retains its quaint, friendly small town feel and the rural and agricultural roots of the community are still in good shape. The physical fabric of the Main Street and downtown area show the Town’s progression throughout history, with historic buildings blending into the downtown and creating an area that tells Bowling Green’s story. Bowling Green’s local community is passionate about the downtown and willing to patronize the businesses there. The proximity to larger population centers to the north and south also offer more potential markets to the area. The Town’s low crime rate helps ensure that it has a positive reputation. There is room for growth in the Main Street/downtown area, and the increasing younger population and increasing population in general in the convenience and community trade areas can help to support a new range of businesses in Town. Finally, the already existing businesses, including the small cluster of art businesses, have themselves already begun to revitalize the Main Street area and there is desire to keep improving into the future.

Weaknesses

One of the main issues for the Town of Bowling Green is not having enough businesses in general in the downtown to make it a thriving shopping destination. While the Main Street/downtown area has had increasing rates of businesses entering, there are still storefronts that are vacant and underutilized. These can become an eyesore and be off-putting both to residents, shoppers, and potential new businesses. The small market size of Bowling Green is another obstacle for businesses to overcome. Trying to reach out to larger markets is met with fierce competition from destinations like the City of Fredericksburg, the Town of Ashland, and the City of Richmond which all have entertainment, food, and shopping options within a 30 to 60-minute drive from Bowling Green. The smaller market size also means that businesses there need to promote and market themselves heavily to areas they are trying to attract potential consumers from.

Opportunities

There are many opportunities for the Town of Bowling Green to improve. Based on the already existing cluster of arts businesses there is the opportunity to turn Bowling Green into a small Arts District, with more arts-based businesses and related events to help those businesses thrive. With the strong interest in downtown, there is potential for new investment. Adding a new restaurant to the downtown area, as well as arts businesses and new events could help attract customers from across the region. Businesses that capitalize on what people love most about Bowling Green: the small town atmosphere, friendly community, and local goods and services, will also help differentiate Bowling Green from other communities. The market for Bowling Green is poised for growth. The convenience trade area’s population alone is projected to grow by 3% over the next five years, creating a larger market in that area for existing and new businesses. The Town of Bowling Green has the opportunity to grow in a way that complements its rural roots and make Bowling Green itself a destination.
Recommendations for Bowling Green

Vision Statement

The Town of Bowling Green is a vibrant oasis for Caroline County and the surrounding area, offering art/music, events, and food and retail. The Town attracts visitors and residents alike by maintaining its rural, historic nature while also remaining a valued place that raises the profile of art in the community.

Transformation Strategies

Transformation Strategies are used for the Main Street Approach and are guided and created by community engagement and an analysis of Bowling Green’s market position. Transformation strategies help to guide the revitalization work and create a focused, deliberate path towards revitalizing and strengthen the Town of Bowling Green. The corresponding map outlines possible areas where some of the recommendations can be utilized.

Figure 25: Transformation Strategies Provided by Main Street America
Goal 1: Promote Economic Vitality in Bowling Green

Objective 1.1: Improve the local economy and economic mix

Strategy 1.1.1: Add/recruit companies, makers, and businesses that specialize in local products to the downtown area. Community engagement showed a strong preference for local and hand-crafted products and locally-sourced food. New businesses should be located close to the downtown area and could be located between Trewallan Street and Main Street, along with areas on Chase Street. See map for potential new business locations.

Strategy 1.1.2: Change the zoning in the downtown area into a Business District to provide for and promote the development of a variety of business, commercial, and service activities. Downtown Bowling Green is surrounded by residential uses and projects that occur nearby could impact the downtown’s visitorship. Ensure that zoning and development processes support growth that supports the historic area of Bowling Green.

Strategy 1.1.3: Provide incentives to move and keep businesses downtown. In order to keep existing businesses and encourage new businesses in the downtown area, introducing incentives such as tax credits or loan guarantees can help.

Strategy 1.1.4: Recruit a diner/breakfast restaurant. This was one of the most requested improvements/additions to the downtown area for new businesses.

Strategy 1.1.5: Introduce a ‘Shop Local’ campaign that promotes local businesses and local spending.

Strategy 1.1.6: Periodically survey district residents and/or conduct focus groups with them to learn about their shopping habits, the things they like (and don’t like) about the district. In order to ensure Bowling Green continues to have a healthy economic mix that appeals to both residents and visitors, a periodic survey should be conducted.

Strategy 1.1.7: Vigorously promote and market the Town as an arts and music destination to possible new market areas including Essex County, King and Queen County, Richmond County, and Westmoreland County.

Objective 1.2: Create opportunities to build the Town’s arts businesses, programs, and offerings

Strategy 1.2.1: Create a public arts strategy/plan. Providing a public arts strategy/plan, such as the City of Alexandria’s Public Art Policy Implementation Plan, will help to organize, plan, and fund arts projects in the Town. While the City of Alexandria’s plan is more in-depth, a simple arts strategy for the Town with funding opportunities will be helpful.

Strategy 1.2.2: Create a market-hall style building within Town that can be used as both studio space and vendor space for artists. A market hall will cut down on upfront costs to opening new art businesses and can help ensure business owners get the support they need. This will be a significant draw for the Town and should be located close to the downtown, such as Chase Street. See map for possible location.

Strategy 1.2.3: Pair artists with retailers for window displays. Promote both artists and businesses, especially with buildings that are vacant or coming soon, by pairing them together to create displays in business window fronts.

Strategy 1.2.4: Launch an ‘open studios’ day. An open studios day is an event where artists and makers open their studios to the public. Having an open studios day at a recurring time/day, such as on the first Friday of each month, can help to promote arts businesses in Town.

Strategy 1.2.5: Develop live/work space that appeals to artists. Developing live/work space for artists, buildings where they can both work and sleep, can help encourage new artists to the area, as well as economic and cultural growth. This could be located a little farther away from downtown, along Broaddus Ave, see map.
Strategy 1.2.6: Create a cultural venue: Museum / Art Gallery / Theater, Dance, Arts center facility. Create or repurpose a building or green space, such as the Circuit Court grounds, that can be reliably used for cultural and art events.

Strategy 1.2.7: Create potential additional venues for music and entertainment, within the Main Street District.

Strategy 1.2.8: Host art competitions such as branding competition for the Town’s art-focused name. This will help engage the community in the arts and will help promote the arts in Bowling Green.

Strategy 1.2.9: Encourage an arts-theme in all of the businesses downtown, to help promote the Town as a whole and ensure all businesses benefit from the Town’s art focus.

Source: BG Future Land Use Map 2021, Provided by the Town of Bowling Green

Map of Recommendations - Key

Potential for new commercial businesses -

Potential for market hall or commercial businesses -

Potential for live/work artist housing or commercial businesses
Goal 2: Encourage Good Design in the Downtown Area

Objective 2.1: Preserve and enhance the rural, historic nature of the Town

Strategy 2.1.1: Potential creation of a Bowling Green Main Street - State Historic Register District, for the Downtown area, to recognize the place, and provide opportunity for Historic Tax Credits to support proper development. Adding a Historic Register District or an Historic Overlay District will open up more funding opportunities for the downtown area and ensure that development that does happen suits the historic nature and wants of the Town.

Strategy 2.1.2: Continue to encourage and promote facade renovation projects, as well as other interior renovations in the downtown area. Facades are an important part of the Town’s image and branding and should continue to be renovated and maintained.

Strategy 2.1.3: Continue to encourage, and promote streetscape improvements to improve the pedestrian scale and character of Bowling Green, especially in the Main Street District. Continue beautification, such as flower baskets and banners, also add more pedestrian-friendly components including benches and shade.

Strategy 2.1.4: Promote safety, slower pace, human scale rather than automobile/highway development. Ensure that Bowling Green remains walkable and pedestrian friendly. Consider adding more crosswalks across the street (that could also have art incorporated into them) and connecting the main street area to other parts of the Town.

Strategy 2.1.5: Add public art when possible in the downtown area. Consider adding murals and public art installations to help solidify the Town’s image and branding as an arts Town.

Goal 3: Promote Bowling Green’s Main Street

Objective 3.1: Attract more visitors/tourism to the downtown area

Strategy 3.1.1: Gather regional tourism information and tourism professionals to share data. The Virginia Tourism Corporation offers statewide and regional tourism plans (the Northern Virginia region for Bowling Green) that provide insights on where and how to focus promotion and development efforts. Consider working with VTC staff as well.

Strategy 3.1.2: Develop events, big and small, that are focused on arts, such as First Fridays to hold in the downtown area. First Fridays are a monthly celebration of arts and artists in Town and can help promote other businesses as well.

Strategy 3.1.3: Create a ‘Taste of Main Street’ restaurant guide. Create a brochure or pamphlet, that is also available online, that explains the different restaurant options in Town and where they are located.

Strategy 3.1.4: Consider the possibility of creating partnerships for an ‘arts-path’ with other cities and towns nearby, including Fredericksburg. When positioning Bowling Green as an arts destination, teaming up with nearby localities that also have an arts focus can be beneficial to all as it promotes tourism and awareness of different areas.

Strategy 3.1.5: Consistently promote Bowling Green’s position as a regional arts and entertainment center. Add details of Bowling Green’s art businesses and culture to the Town website and social media, as well as for different events in Town like the Harvest Festival.

Strategy 3.1.6: Create a Promotion Committee that will be responsible for creating retail promotions, special events, and a positive image of the Town to residents and visitors. A promotion committee, even if just volunteers, can help ensure there is a strategic plan for tourism and bringing people into Town.
Strategy 3.1.7: Continue to support a website for the downtown area that promotes retailers as well as special events in Bowling Green, such as the BG Alliance website. Expand to include more details on arts in Bowling Green.

**Objective 3.2: Create more opportunities for wayfinding in Bowling Green**

Strategy 3.2.1: Ensure the downtown area has complete streets and connects to other areas of the Town. Ensure safe, convenient, and comfortable travel to Bowling Green, for a variety of modes of transportation including walking and cycling.

Strategy 3.2.2: Install wayfinding signs geared toward those unfamiliar with the district. Install cohesive wayfinding signs throughout the Town that help to direct and promote businesses, significant sites, or events.

Strategy 3.2.3: Create a wayfinding system for the district that reflects the district’s emphasis on arts and entertainment. Utilize the Town’s artists and art businesses to help create wayfinding and ensure that it is a focus of the wayfinding system.

**Goal 4: Create a Strong Main Street Organization**

**Objective 4.1: Encourage Main Street/Downtown area support**

Strategy 4.1.1: Work collaboratively with local government and partner organizations to monitor changes, communicate with stakeholders, and advocate for the needs of the downtown area. The downtown area is ever-changing and should be monitored by multiple groups that work collaboratively to help improve the area.

Strategy 4.1.2: Explore opportunities to collaborate and coordinate projects and programming to support district businesses, and implement projects that meet the needs of the district.

Strategy 4.1.3: Consider creating a Junior Main Street group to attract the downtown area to youth and partnering with Caroline County Schools. Students could assist businesses and learn how to run a small, local business and help connect them to main street and the downtown area.

Strategy 4.1.4: Recruit a college student from UMW or VCU for an internship to help with events and create an events plan for the Town. This would be a low-cost option to further the downtown’s development and help create future plans.
## Implementation

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*The strategies in this plan are meant to be implemented by the Executive Body of the Town Government, as well as any other potential partners to help achieve these goals.*
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Chang H-T. (2011). Place making versus place marketing: implications of the Main Street Approach to neighborhood commercial revitalization. Published online. file:///home/chronos/u-ef54b0809ab2b0548008e-7041b4ecb678eca3bb3/MyFiles/Downloads/Place_making_vs_place_mark.pdf


