

# DOWNTOWN OXFORD MASTER PLAN

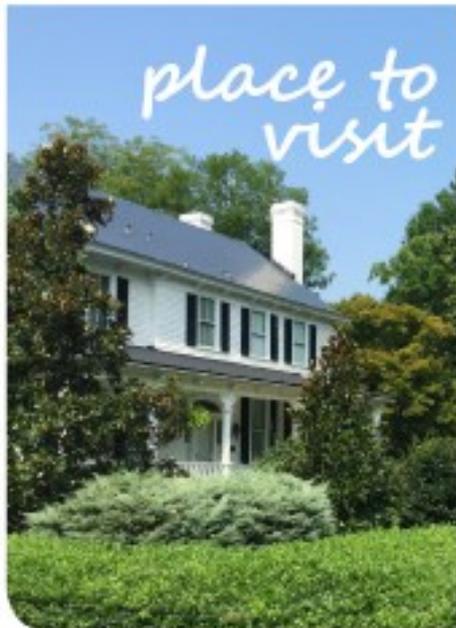


March 2016



City of Oxford

# I want Downtown Oxford to be known for...



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## PROJECT INTRODUCTION & PROCESS

The city of Oxford is a dynamic place with numerous opportunities for growth and prosperity as it moves towards its exciting bicentennial celebration in 2016. In 2011, city management identified the need for a Downtown Master Plan to continue the goals outlined in the Oxford Comprehensive Plan. These goals include becoming a regional destination, being a walkable community, and having a historic and vibrant downtown with a variety of shops, restaurants, housing, and entertainment.

In 2015, the process for creating the Downtown Oxford Master Plan began with a trip to visit West Jefferson and Statesville for nearly 40 community members. A Steering Committee comprised of city and business leaders and other stakeholders then convened to work towards creating a document that could help guide development in the downtown core. The plan is a result of months of research, data collection, site analysis, community engagement, learning, listening, and filtering stakeholder feedback. In addition to the Overall Streetscape Design, five other concept plans are included for the Downtown Square, Spring & Main St. Roundabout, Festival Space, Museum Interior Block, and the Courthouse Plaza.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Downtown Oxford has a lot of potential! Historic buildings and museums, existing retail and dining, proximity to historic houses, and the busy Granville County Courthouse already attract people to downtown. Although Oxford has a great framework for future development, there is room for improvement.

### Safety

The wide streets cause vehicular traffic to move too fast, and create a long distance for pedestrians to cross. Traffic calming improves the opportunities for bicycling downtown, and it makes for a much safer pedestrian experience.

### Economic and Business Development

First time visitors are confused by the off-axis intersection and the street name changes in the downtown core, and they don't know where to park. Providing gateways into the downtown area, and improving wayfinding will help clarify where you are and what is available downtown. More variety of retail and dining is needed to encourage people to enjoy downtown. A stronger identity and a new logo for brochures and marketing is needed for downtown businesses and events.

### Sense of Place

Downtown Oxford is very walkable from adjacent historic residential neighborhoods. Public places to stroll, sit, and dine will only increase the downtown's appeal as a place for multi-generational enjoyment. Street trees, attractive signs, seating, banners, and public art will foster community pride and set high standards for private development and investment in the downtown core.



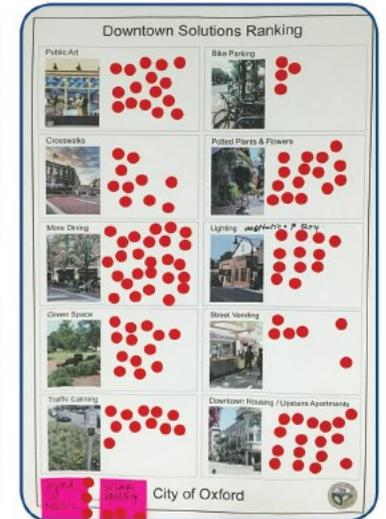
## PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Two public workshops and multiple Steering Committee meetings were held to gain feedback from the community. Sessions to develop a vision for what is unique about Oxford offered great insight – many Steering Committee members mentioned that the city is already known for having a family friendly, walkable, historic downtown. However, the members felt that well planned downtown development and improvements could lend new energy and excitement about the entire city of Oxford, making it a more attractive place for new residents and businesses.

At the public workshops, citizens and other stakeholders were encouraged to comment on their vision, possible solutions, and recommendations for downtown Oxford. A questionnaire and other preference ranking activities showed that the participants wanted more of the following in their downtown (top 10 ranked from the most desired to lesser desired):

- More retail businesses
- More restaurants
- Improved appearance - trees, furniture, sidewalks, public art
- Historic preservation
- More entertainment venues
- Improved walkability & accessibility
- More green space
- Improved traffic flow - car & bicycle
- Improved roads, drainage, and utilities
- Improved parking - car & bicycle
- Improved signs & entrances

A preliminary Master Plan and five concept plans were presented to the public for review and comment at the last public workshop. Participants rated each of the major design components of the plan and offered comment.



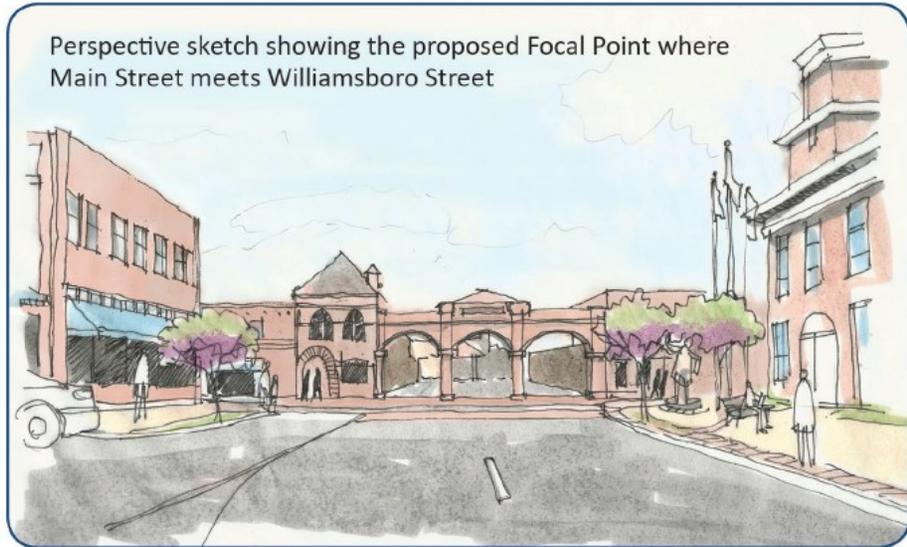
*“We need to let other people know what Oxford is all about”*

*“We need to encourage pedestrian traffic downtown and also apartments on the second floor of buildings”*

*“Would love to see more opportunities for dining, music, and art”*

*“New development could build a stronger sense of community”*

*“A good plan to give Oxford a unique look and attract new businesses and residents.”*



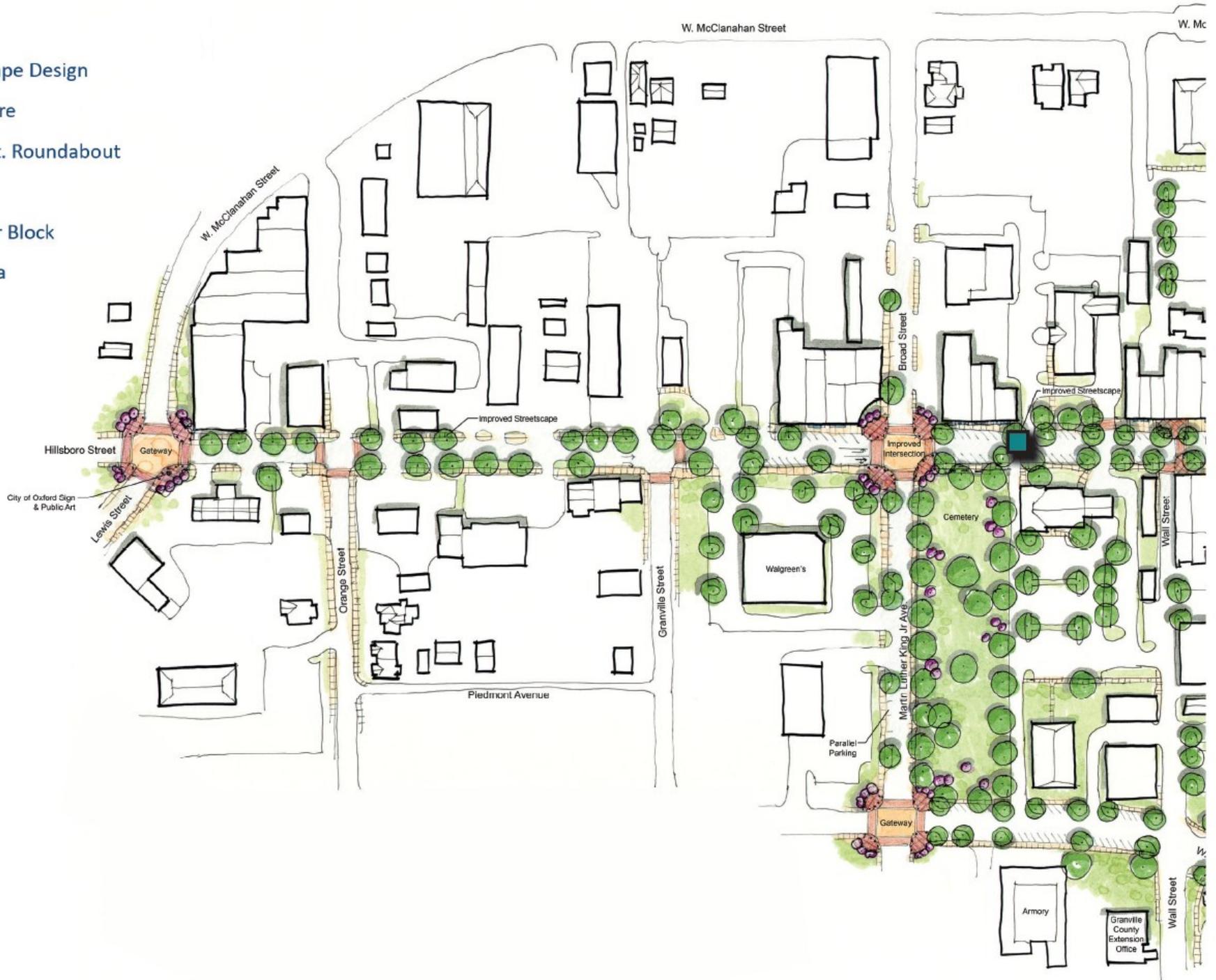
Perspective sketch showing the proposed Focal Point/Festival Space at Bank Street and Hillsboro Street

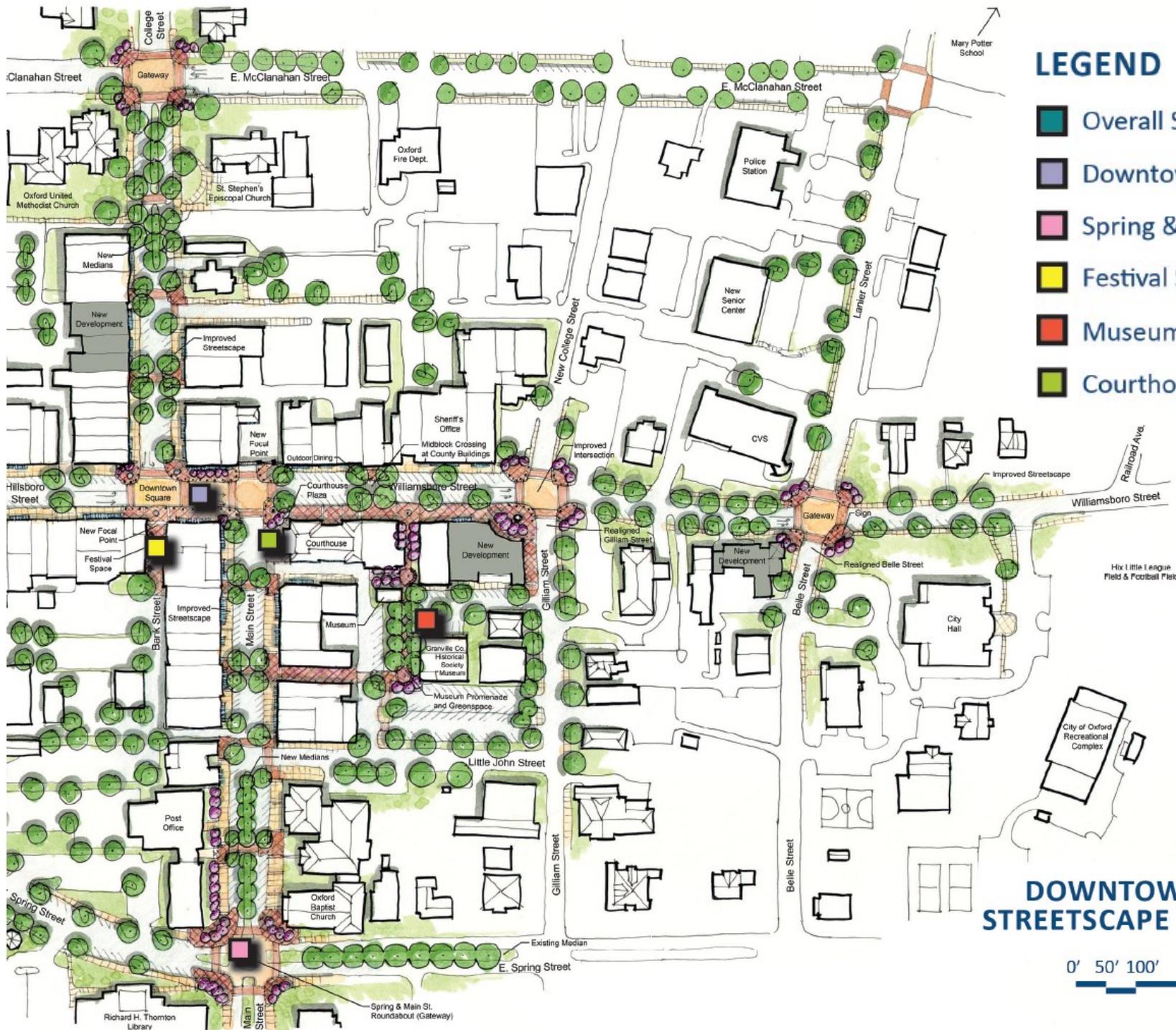
# Recommendations

1. **Narrow the main roadways in order to widen sidewalks, add trees, provide safer crossings, and create places for outdoor dining and seating**
2. **Implement improved signs and other wayfinding elements to help direct visitors to parking and key buildings and services**
3. **Develop a new graphic look and logo for downtown marketing purposes**
4. **Investigate opportunities for public art such as murals, statues, and fountains**
5. **Provide bulb out areas at key intersections and crossings to increase pedestrian safety and provide civic beautification**
6. **Provide a Downtown Square for the downtown intersection of College, Hillsboro, Williamsboro, and Main Streets**
7. **Provide a roundabout at Spring and Main Streets**
8. **Define entrances to downtown and create “gateways” at key intersections**
9. **Convert Bank Street into a festival street space for pedestrians which will create a focal point for the terminus of College Street**
10. **Add street trees to provide shade and an overhead canopy**
11. **Add tree lined medians along sections of Main and College Streets**
12. **Provide improved circulation inside the block for better access and wayfinding to the museum complex**
13. **Create a focal point by improving the view at the terminus of Main Street**
14. **Provide for a civic space around the courthouse**
15. **Change on-street parking to diagonal spaces, and add parallel parking on several streets close to downtown**
16. **Investigate potential building infill around the downtown areas to increase density and provide an urban edge at the street**
17. **Work with utility companies to improve overhead utilities by undergrounding or consolidation**
18. **Investigate new or updated policies to promote development aligned with Master Plan goals**

# LEGEND

- Overall Streetscape Design
- Downtown Square
- Spring & Main St. Roundabout
- Festival Space
- Museum Interior Block
- Courthouse Plaza





## LEGEND

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## DOWNTOWN OXFORD STREETScape MASTER PLAN

0' 50' 100' 200'

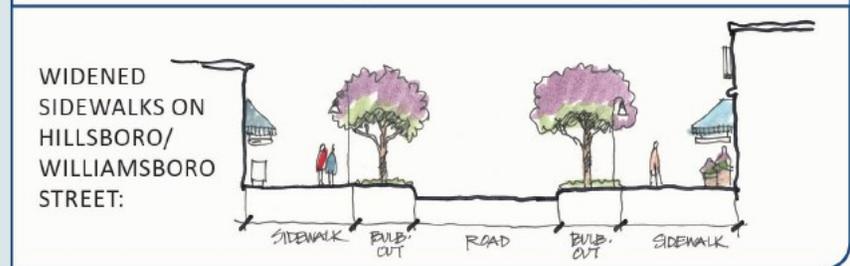
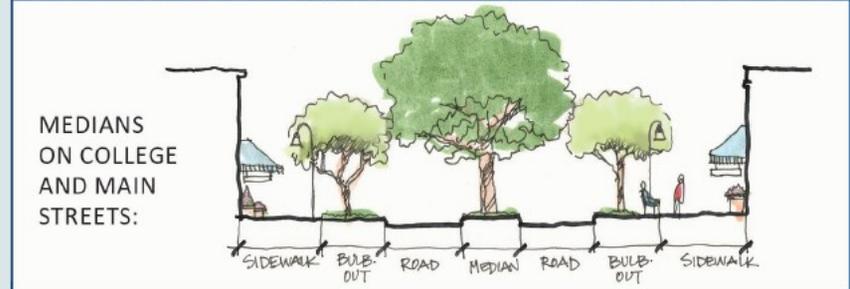
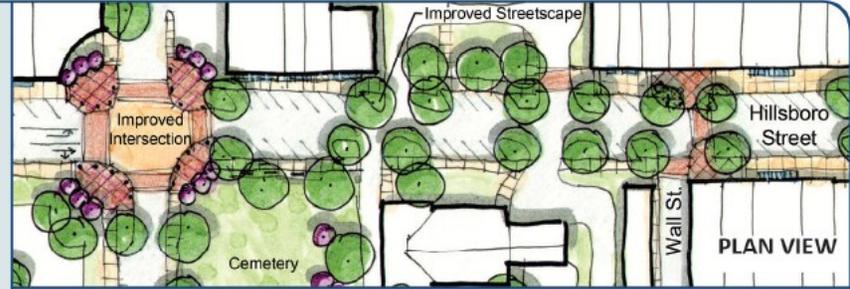


# Area Plans

## OVERALL STREETScape DESIGN

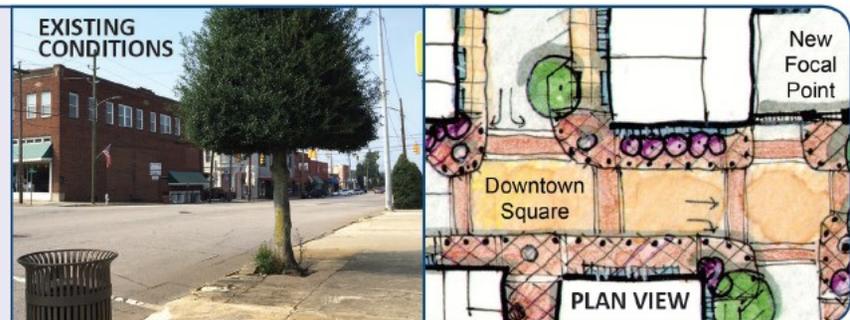
The “Complete Streets” concept adopted by the North Carolina Department of Transportation offers guidelines for new streetscape and road improvements. These guidelines include encouraging alternative transportation, building more sustainable and vibrant communities, increasing connectivity, and improving aesthetics, safety, and accessibility for all.

Hillsboro/Williamsboro (east-west) and Main and College Streets (north-south) are the historic “Main Streets” for the downtown core and the focus of civic, retail, dining, and office functions. The Master Plan includes narrowing the streets to one lane each direction with left turn lanes and adding bulb outs. Medians are shown on College and Main Streets. Bulb outs and medians improve pedestrian safety by calming traffic and allowing pedestrians to become more visible. Narrowing the streets also creates opportunities to add on-street parking, sharrows or bike lanes, wider sidewalks, street trees, seating, gathering areas, and spaces for outdoor dining. The midblock crossing at the county buildings is one location that could really benefit from these improvements. The addition of a specialized paving pattern at intersections, plazas, and crosswalks aids in wayfinding and helps to create a unique “look” for the downtown. Other streetscape amenities such as improved pedestrian lighting, bollards, awnings, waste receptacles, container plantings, and public art add to the overall aesthetics and vibrancy of the downtown core.



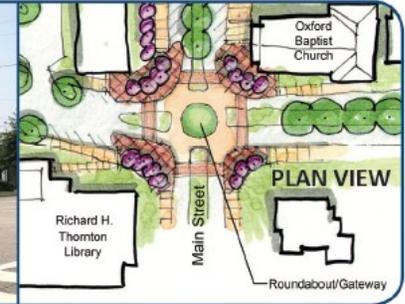
## DOWNTOWN SQUARE

The new “Downtown Square” will be the centerpiece of the streetscape improvements. With bulb-outs, bollards, crosswalks, and wider sidewalks, this flexible and versatile space will accommodate many gatherings and activities, and create a central hub for downtown.



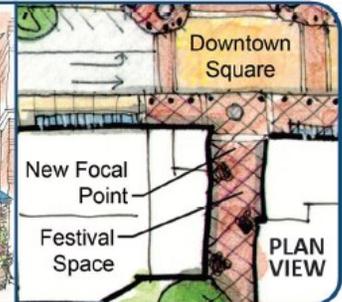
## SPRING & MAIN STREET ROUNDABOUT

The proposed roundabout at the intersection of Spring and Main is designed to slow traffic. Oxford residents expressed concern that the change from a four-way stop to the existing two-way configuration had done little to improve the dangerous intersection. The clearly defined crosswalks and refuge offered by the medians will increase pedestrian safety. The roundabout and distinctive planting on the corners will define the intersection as a gateway into downtown.



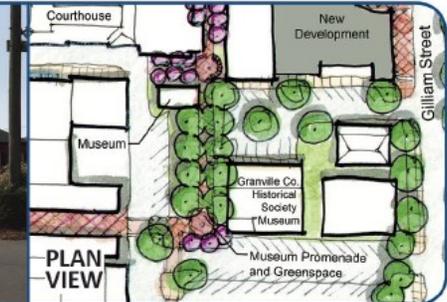
## FESTIVAL SPACE

This plan would close Bank Street to all vehicular traffic except deliveries. By limiting delivery hours, the street will become a place for pedestrians to be used during lunch hours, evenings, and weekends as well as for festivals. The space would provide a focal point at the terminus of College Street where it meets Williamsboro/Hillsboro. Benches, tables and chairs, festive lighting, and potted plants could make this a fun, enjoyable place for people to gather and spend time downtown.



## MUSEUM INTERIOR BLOCK

The Plan includes a museum promenade and green space to attract and lead visitors to the Harris Exhibit Hall and Granville History Museum. The proposed changes to the space will improve circulation inside the block and allow for better access and wayfinding to the museum complex, while improving the order and aesthetics of the parking lot.



## COURTHOUSE PLAZA

A new civic gathering space is proposed around the existing historic courthouse. Already a bustling place on court days, the addition of street trees, bollards, specialized paving, seating areas, flag poles, and public art will be enjoyed by the public everyday.



# Streetscape Elements

## SENSE OF PLACE

Attractive awnings, light poles, benches, and planting will add to the beauty of downtown. These aesthetic improvements, along with other amenities such as museums, entertainment, and attractions, will enhance and unify the character of downtown Oxford.

## PLACES FOR PEOPLE

By providing plazas, festival spaces, a farmers market, and a variety of seating options (benches, tables and chairs, seat walls), downtown will become a place where people want to gather and spend time.

## TRAFFIC CALMING

Bulb-outs, medians, and roundabouts are all useful in slowing vehicular traffic and increasing pedestrian safety. Medians are included in the overall streetscape design for portions of College and Main Streets. A new roundabout at Spring & Main will slow traffic and direct all cars in the same direction to pass through the intersection. Sidewalk bulb-outs will offer a place for plantings, break up large sections of on-street parking, and shorten the distance pedestrians need to travel in order to safely cross the street.

## VARIETY OF SHOPS

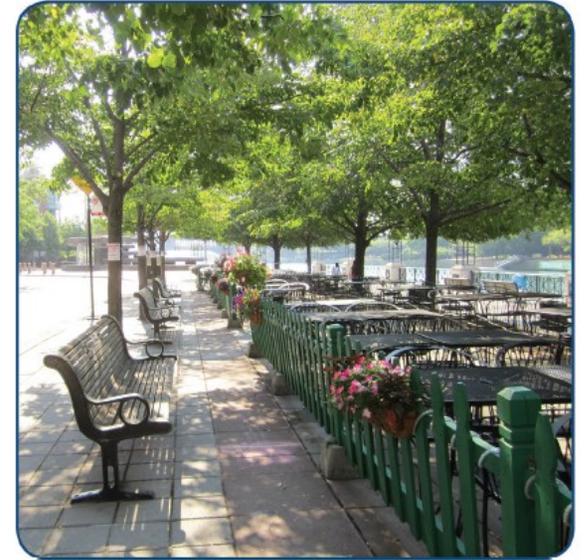
When asked what they wished for their downtown, Oxford citizens most often mentioned “more retail” and “variety of shops.” Increasing the amount and diversity of retailers and shopping opportunities in downtown Oxford will attract more residents and visitors.

## WALKABLE COMMUNITY

Wider sidewalks, clearly defined crosswalks with signals, and traffic calming measures to slow vehicular traffic will make downtown more pedestrian friendly. Other amenities such as street trees, seating areas and a variety of shops and restaurants will encourage residents and visitors to enjoy walking once they arrive downtown.

## NARROWING STREETS

Narrower streets slow traffic, making the streets more pedestrian and bicycle friendly. Traffic calming measures such as medians and bulb-outs also increase pedestrian safety.





## DINING OPTIONS

Oxford residents ranked “restaurants” as the second most important thing they would like to see added in the downtown area. Increased dining options will attract residents and visitors to downtown. Wider sidewalks will allow opportunities for sidewalk dining as well as offering spaces for street vendors.

## PARKING

By providing a variety of on-street diagonal and parallel parking spaces, and well marked small parking lots on the interior of some blocks, there will be plenty of parking options throughout the downtown for residents and visitors.



## STREET TREES

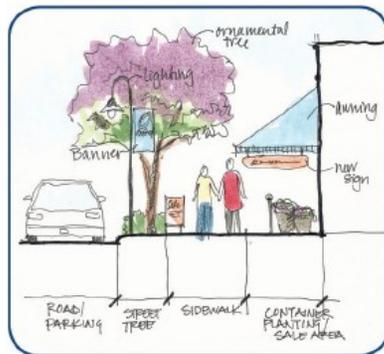
Providing street trees is a great investment for any downtown area. Street trees provide shade, bring down the scale of large buildings, and increase the amount of time people stay downtown.

## BICYCLE FRIENDLY

Downtown streets will include shared lane markings (sharrows), in accordance with the City of Oxford Bicycle Plan. Bicycle parking will be offered at key locations throughout the downtown core such as the Library and the Post Office.

## INFILL DEVELOPMENT

Adding infill development is a great way to increase activity and visitors to downtown. Placing new development on vacant lots creates an “urban edge” that encourages pedestrians to continue walking and window shopping.



## WAYFINDING & GATEWAYS

Clearly defined entrances into downtown let visitors know they have arrived. Prominent signs for parking, shops, restaurants, and civic buildings help visitors and residents find the places they want to go.

## HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Preserving the historic character of Oxford is an essential component of the Master Plan. New development should honor and enhance the historic architectural context of the downtown area.

## PUBLIC ART

Public art provides character and whimsy, and provides benefits for everyone. Work by local artists can strengthen the sense of community.

## STRONGER IDENTITY

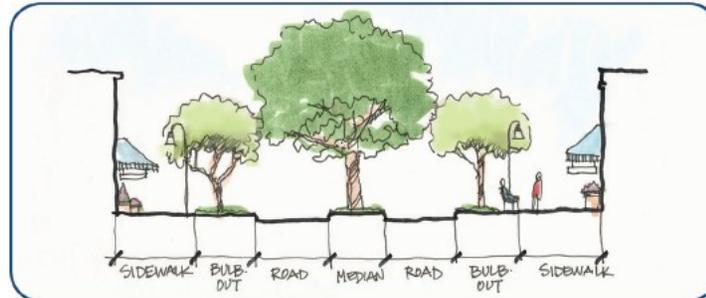
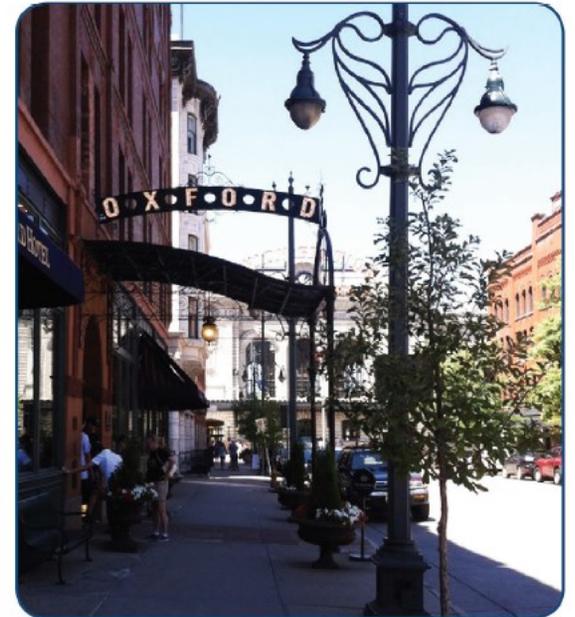
Creating a new brand for downtown Oxford will help efforts to attract new tourists and visitors. A new logo for downtown and a map of attractions are examples of ideas that help create a new excitement and identity for downtown.

## FOCAL POINTS

New eye-catching focal points are proposed at the terminus of both Main and College Streets to replace building facades that have been lost over time.

## WIDER SIDEWALKS

Wider sidewalks allow opportunities for street trees, potted plants, new lighting, public art, benches, and outdoor dining, all of which improve appearance, and encourage pedestrians to linger.



# Next Steps & Implementation

This long range Downtown Master Plan is a planning tool the community can use as new and revitalized interest in the downtown becomes a reality. With the overall economic prospects of many communities in North Carolina improving, Oxford is in a perfect position to implement a “catalyst project” as funding allows. Initial steps include:

- Hire full time staff to organize and spearhead downtown improvements.
- Work with the NC Main Street program to gain insight and assistance with many downtown improvement initiatives.
- Seek possible partnerships with the private sector to leverage finances and build excitement.
- Work with Duke Energy and other utility companies to determine feasibility and cost of placing power lines underground, or improving appearance with consolidation.
- Involve NCDOT in future planning of any Complete Streets or streetscape improvements.
- Identify one or more “catalyst projects” to kick-off efforts. For example:

1. Streetscape improvements such as bulb-outs and wider sidewalks at the midblock crossing at the County Buildings would increase pedestrian safety and create the opportunity for outdoor dining at Milano’s.
2. Provide signs to direct first time visitors to important destinations and convenient parking.
3. Create a brand and logo for the downtown area that represents the exciting things happening in Oxford for wayfinding signs, brochures, and other marketing information.
4. Improve key gateway intersections at the edges of downtown with new pavements, crosswalks, lighting, signage, planting, and site amenities to create a cohesive look for downtown Oxford.
5. Create a roundabout at Spring and Main Streets to eliminate existing safety issues at that intersection while showcasing new streetscape improvements.
6. Identify key locations downtown suitable for public art initiatives such as murals, sculpture, site amenities, and specialty pavements. Invite local and regional artists to create art that reflects the history and culture of Oxford.
7. Develop a Downtown Square to create a central hub. This is an exciting way for the public to see an improved streetscape and it sets a precedent for future development!



# Oxford at a Glance...

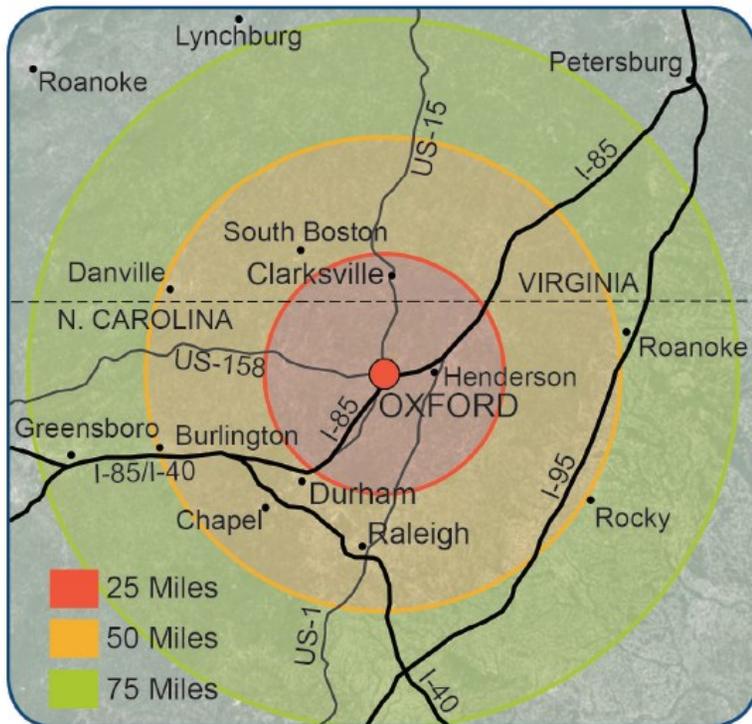
Year Incorporated: 1816

Population: 8,713 (2014 US Census)

Growth Rate: 2.9% (2014 US Census)

Land Area: 6.05 Sq. Mi. (US Census)

Home of the N.C. Hot Sauce Contest



## Oxford Mayor, City Manager, and Board of Commissioners:

Jackie Sergent, Mayor	
Calvin "CJ" Harris, Jr., Mayor Pro Tem	
Mike McLaurin, Interim City Manager	
Quon Bridges	Ron Bullock
Danny Currin	Patricia Fields
Frank Strickland	Al Woodlief

## Steering Committee:

Lori Dutra - Chair	Bishop Phillip Betts
Danny Currin	Larissa Daniels
Michael Felts	Vincent Gilreath
Wills Hancock	Cheryl Hart
Harry Mills	Julia Overton
Sandra Pruitt	Jackie Sergent
David Smith	Frank Strickland
Peter Tocci	Chance Wilkinson

## Former City Officials Involved in the Project:

Randy Hemann	Howard Herring
Bob Williford	

## Plan prepared by:

**Susan Hatchell**  
Landscape Architecture, PLLC

**The Office of Rodney Swink**

