

MEMO

DATE August 8, 2012

FROM LandDesign

TO Lake Lure Town Council

CC Town of Lake Lure Staff, TCMP Steering Committee & Zoning & Planning Board

RE Initial Recommendations & Implementation Strategies

The following recommendations and implementation strategies are intended to outline initial steps in moving toward a complete Town Center Master Plan (TCMP). These recommendations and implementation strategies may be updated and expanded in future phases of work as the vision for the future of this important area becomes clearer.

1. **Adopt the Concept Plan.** The Town Council should formally adopt this concept plan as a basis for future tasks required to complete the Town Center Master Plan (TCMP). By adopting the plan, the Town Council will be acknowledging the community's support for changes that will benefit the town as a whole and formally documenting the community's expectations regarding future development, which will inform future planning and investment decisions made by the Town as well as other entities (i.e., NCDOT, Chimney Rock State Park, the Village of Chimney Rock, etc.).
Note: Council should adopt the concept plan and the guiding principles; adoption of the recommendations in this memo is not necessary.
2. **Maintain the TCMP Steering Committee.** As the champions of the plan, the committee members are equipped to be the best advocates for the completion and implementation of the plan. In addition to guiding the next steps (see #4 below) and promoting specific action steps as well as the funding of them, the committee should confirm priorities and monitor progress on implementation.
3. **Continue to communicate.** The Town has been effectively disseminating information about the Town Center Master Plan, utilizing the web site, public meetings and other mechanisms to keep the community informed. To maintain momentum and community interest and support, provide periodic updates and raise awareness of ways in which individuals and organizations can participate in the refinement and implementation of the plan.
4. **Complete the Town Center Master Plan.** With this being the first step in the development of a master plan for the Town Center, continue with remaining tasks to develop a complete master plan. The following are the recommended steps to be undertaken:
 - a. **Market Study.** Conduct a Market Study to determine the Town Center's competitive advantages as well as the specific target audiences in order to attract the



appropriate types of investors and tenants, especially those that reinforce the Town Center “brand.” Consider a range of uses that meet the needs of residents and visitors, particularly the anchors that bring people into the Town Center on a regular basis, and maximize opportunities to generate additional tax revenue from non-residential development.

- b. **Branding and Branding Strategy.** In conjunction with the Market Study, develop the Town Center identity to differentiate it from other destinations and attract the appropriate types of investment. Couple this with a strategy for communicating the brand (i.e., logo, “official” colors, design of promotional materials, design of signs, events, programs, landscaping/streetscape, etc.).
 - c. **Concept Plan Update.** Update the TCMP illustrative concept plan to reflect the recommendations of the Market Study and Brand Strategy, complement the concept plan with additional illustrations and a ‘3D sketch’ that will convey the look and feel of the place—this destination—that residents and visitors will experience in the future.
 - d. **Town Center Master Plan: Vision Book.** Package all of the components of the TCMP in a single, cohesive document that serves as a marketing tool as well as a policy guide. An organized presentation of the TCMP communicates to investors the level of commitment the Town leaders have made to improving the Town Center, and it is therefore an effective way to build investor confidence. The components of this book should include the updated Concept Plan supplemented by compelling imagery, a narrative explaining the overall character of this future place and the smaller areas within it, the results of the Market Study, and an updated and expanded set of recommendations and implementation strategies. The Branding should be evident in the design of the document, but graphic standards established at this point in the process should be included in the appendix.
5. **Build on the work completed through the master planning process by studying various aspects of the Town Center in more detail or update affected plans.**

Consistency in decision making requires the leadership of informed decision makers, particularly those who are engaged in the planning process, and is key to realizing the TCMP. The work completed to date is an early step in a multi-step process to develop a plan that will guide the decisions of both public and private sectors, and it will set the stage for more detailed studies that will enhance efforts to effect positive change. With each subsequent step, the types of uses, amenities and other improvements that are appropriate will be better understood. The following is a summarized, sequential list of future phases (plans or studies) that should be considered and funded.

 - a. **Comprehensive Plan Update.** Review the 2007-2027 Comprehensive Plan to identify any conflicting provisions, and update the Comprehensive Plan to incorporate the policy decisions reflected in the TCMP. In updating the land use section, ensure the flexibility in land use is maintained or increased. Based on input received to date in the master planning process, the types of uses that should be supported in the study area include the following:

- i. Shops and restaurants (retail uses)
- ii. Hotel/hospitality uses
- iii. Business and office uses
- iv. Civic and governmental uses
- v. Educational uses
- vi. Residential uses
- vii. Recreational uses

Note: This list of uses will be refined by the Market Study.

- b. **Amendments to Zoning Ordinance and Design Guidelines.** Review Zoning Ordinance and Design Guidelines to identify any conflicting provisions, and modify each document to acknowledge the range of uses reflected in the plan (see list above) and set forth design standards that are consistent with the TCMP. While regulations are an effective way to implement an adopted plan, such amendments must be made with awareness of “regulatory tolerances” so that adherence to the regulations does not bring about the unintended consequence of discouraging private investment. Public funding of some improvements made in accordance with the design guidelines or the design standards in the Zoning Ordinance may be appropriate to simultaneously demonstrate the Town’s sensitivity to development costs and its commitment to improving the quality of development.
 - c. **Engineering Studies.** Conduct engineering studies as appropriate to ensure improvements to roads, utilities, the waterfront and other infrastructure indicated in concept plan(s) are examined in terms of regulatory compliance, safety, function and capacity.
 - d. **Other Design Plans and Studies.** To ensure a cohesive environment in the Town Center, develop conceptual design plans for the following. Such plans may be a precursor to a town-funded project and may need to include preliminary cost estimates. Others may simply provide the guidance necessary to enhance standards in the Zoning Ordinance and/or Design Guidelines. All such design plans should commence only after the Branding effort is complete.
 - i. Architectural Concepts
 - ii. Parks, Green Space and Linkages Concepts (this should be followed by an update to the Parks and Recreation Master Plan)
 - iii. Pedestrian Circulation (building on existing plans)
 - iv. Streetscape
 - v. Signage / Wayfinding
 - vi. Morse Park
 - vii. Multi-purpose building and site (between Town Hall and Morse Park)
6. **Pursue grants to facilitate the implementation of the TCMP, particularly the projects identified above.** The Town has had some success in supplementing the Town’s budget with grants that have funded small projects. While there is a lot of competition for such funding, the importance of Lake Lure to the County’s economy, the biodiversity of the Hickory Nut Gorge, the potential issues associated with the infrastructure and the quality of

the water in the basin are among the circumstances that should place the Town in a competitive position. Investigate specific grant opportunities available through organizations whose missions align with the goals of the Lake Lure community.

7. **Coordinate with the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) to ensure the TCMP, specifically the proposed details of the transportation-related facilities within it, are acknowledged and incorporated into their plans.** NCDOT is currently developing the Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP). The details of the Town Center Master Plan should be incorporated into the NCDOT plan currently under development to ensure a balanced set of transportation objectives, related to the following design principles, are met.

- A welcoming entrance to the Lake Lure and Chimney Rock State Park
- Scenic views protected by open space
- Important vistas terminated by landmarks framed by architecture, trees and public space
- A strong visual and physical connection to the beach
- Natural assets protected and importance elevated through sensitive integration into the built environment
- A mixture of uses that make the Town Center equally appealing for visitors and residents; a vibrant destination for recreation, shopping, dining, and cultural activities; and supportive of a range of lifestyle choices
- Architectural and streetscape features designed with variety to add interest, repetition to ensure cohesiveness, and style to reinforce the character and sense of place
- Inviting, well-organized public realm comprised of formal and informal spaces suitable for a range of activities (i.e., events, community gatherings, farmers' and artists' markets, meditation, etc.)
- Connectivity that improves circulation, aids orientation, and increases visibility and access
- A street network that gives priority to the safe movement of pedestrians and bicyclists while maintaining an adequate level of mobility and minimizing congestion

To be consistent with the Town Center Master Plan, major recommendations that should be included in the NCDOT plan should include the following:

- a. **Relocate US-64/74A to follow an alignment on the south side of the Town Center.** The noise and other impacts of the state park traffic anticipated in the future could negatively affect the quality of the Town Center and beach experience. By creating a new route that distances park traffic from the beachfront and the developed area adjacent to the beach, the enjoyment and safety of visitors and residents alike will be enhanced.

- b. **Provide safe and efficient access to Chimney Rock State park via US-64/74A.** State road access to the state park should minimize congestion in Lake Lure's Town Center, protect the environment and natural aesthetic, and allow for safe ingress (and emergency egress) at the park entrance. These end results will likely be achieved with a roadway facility designed to have the fewest possible impediments to traffic flow and to respect the natural features (topography and vegetation).
 - c. **Consider the land uses within and adjacent to the Town Center in the design and location of state highways.** While the state highway should provide access to through Lake Lure and to Chimney Rock State Park, serving these purposes should not outweigh the need to create a safe, inviting downtown environment.
 - d. **Expand the road network to improve connectivity.** In addition to improving circulation, the additional roads will increase access and visibility of parcels that comprise the "business center" area of the Town Center, thereby increasing the value of parcels and the economic viability of businesses that occupy those parcels.
 - e. **Consider "complete streets" where feasible to provide a balanced transportation network.** Complete streets are streets that are designed for multiple users. Facilities for bicyclists and pedestrians are as important if not more important than the facilities designed for vehicular traffic. Through design, streets can become a safe passageway for multiple modes, and specific design details can slow vehicular traffic and improve the safety of streets for bicyclists and pedestrians. Alternate routes for pedestrians and bicyclists may be provided to adhere to the urban design principles (i.e., paths outside of the right-of-way to avoid unnecessary grading, or bikes in traffic lane to eliminate excessive street width or avoid an unsafe condition presented by a bike lane.)
 - f. **Complement the road network with off-street pedestrian routes.** Where complete street are infeasible, develop walkways and trails suitable for pedestrian traffic to better connect destination within and in the vicinity of the Town Center.
 - g. **Delineate the appropriate bike routes.** Where the topography, sight distances and/or traffic volumes and speed would make bike travel on US-64/74A unsafe, designate streets that offer a safe alternative to the US highway.
8. **Consider other transportation improvements to enhance access, increase safety and give priority to the pedestrian.** While NCDOT's primary concern is mobility and safety along US-64/74A, the Town's primary concerns should be the quality of the Town Center. Other improvements pertaining to transportation should seek to increase access to the Town Center, enhance economic opportunities and improve pedestrian safety. The following specific recommendations aim to address the transportation goals that are important to the Town. Note: All recommendations and conceptual plan details are subject to engineering studies to determine feasible options with respect to cost, constructability, regulatory compliance, maintenance, safety, function/capacity, etc.
- a. **Design local streets for pedestrians.** Include pedestrian facilities and traffic calming devices to alert drivers and slow vehicular traffic to speeds that improve safety for pedestrians. Crosswalks constructed with a different pavement, speed



tables, vertical elements such as trees in planting islands or “bump outs”, and on-street parking are among the elements that accomplish this objective. Note: The redesign of existing streets may require the Town to take over the rights-of-way for maintenance. New streets designed in this manner will be constructed as private or town-maintained public streets.

- b. **Expand boat access.** A few temporary or hourly boat slips are available in the Town Center. To support alternatives to vehicular trips, consider lengthening the dock adjacent to the boardwalk between the beach and the marina to accommodate more boat parking for Lake Lure residents approaching from other areas of town.
9. **Coordinate with Chimney Rock State Park to ensure their future plans for park improvement, particularly those for ingress, egress and parking, enhance the Town Center experience and viability of businesses within it.** The State of North Carolina acquired Chimney Rock Park in 2007. Since then, the State has been working to improve the park and the visitor experience. The current master plan for Chimney Rock State Park (dated July 2011) indicates a new primary access point adjacent to Lake Lure's Town Center. While the park traffic will expand opportunities for creating a vibrant center, the traffic and the parking must be managed in a manner that prevents park traffic from having a negative impact on the quality of the Town Center.
 - a. As noted in the recommendation above pertaining to NCDOT plans, relocate US-64/74A to a new alignment on the south side of the town center.
 - b. Determine the potential impacts of parking in the Town Center by CRSP visitors. Mitigate such impacts with a parking management strategy developed with CRSP.
10. **Coordinate with the TDA.** Since the lake, the Town Center businesses, Chimney Rock shops and Chimney Rock State Park are—and will continue to be—a draw for visitors to the region, being a component of the Town Center will provide the TDA the visibility it needs and desires. Its physical presence should respect the TDA's program while enhancing the mix of uses and visitor experience.
11. **Redevelop the Visitors Center for a multipurpose building.** With assistance from TDA, redevelop the site that is currently the location of the Hickory Nut Gorge Visitors Center. In addition to being an underutilization of this highly visible and accessible site in the Town Center, the structure and adjacent courts are aging and insufficient in size and quality to attract the range of users envisioned.
12. **Relocate the Town's Public Works Department (building, outdoor storage area, etc.) to increase opportunities for infill development in the Town Center to accommodate the appropriate mix of uses.** Located behind the Arcade Building, the Public Works building and storage facility is occupying a site that could be better utilized by commercial and/or residential uses that would contribute to the vibrancy of Town Center.
13. **To the extent practicable, assist the NCDOT, CRSP, and TV with land acquisition efforts to accommodate facilities in optimal locations.** Such assistance should take into account the following:
 - a. efficient use of limited resources
 - b. economic development
 - c. environmental stewardship

d. the safety and enjoyment of residents and visitors

14. Initiate an Infrastructure Phasing Plan. The specific infrastructure projects, some of which may be catalysts for the desired changes in the Town Center, can be identified initially and confirmed as the comprehensive Master Plan is completed. Those projects can then be prioritized to reflect an appropriate phasing sequence. Not all projects will not be accomplished through Town-funded construction; some will be implemented with private development while others may require a public-private partnership. An understanding of the projects, the timing of each and the role/responsibility of the Town in each will inform decisions about the Town's capital improvement program (CIP) and budget.