



MASTER PLAN | JANUARY 2014

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## PREFACE

The single most compelling argument for pursuing a visionary effort such as this, and one which all parties were in agreement on, was that a Downtown Elon does not presently exist in the consciousness of town residents. As such the future creation of an identifiable, memorable and commercially viable "sense of place" is ultimately necessary to define such an area as a true "downtown" for the Town of Elon.

A small, but diverse, group of design professionals worked with the Elon Downtown Committee in an effort to envision that which "could be" for Downtown Elon. The study area referenced by this book is defined as "Downtown Elon" and the resultant Master Plan, along with its development criteria, is intended to define the potential opportunity available for the creation of a future viable commercial center for the Town of Elon at large.

Every aspect of site planning adds a vital layer to one's "perception of place" and to success or failure in creating a sense of community. One's arrival into "downtown", whether as a pedestrian or by vehicle, requires an understanding of its perimeter limits or edges and thereby highlighting and outlining one's entry and "sense of passage" through those limits. Once within downtown, the presence of continuous and common visual clues and identifiable character elements, such as town lampposts, benches, trees, paving, signage, etc., work collectively to reinforce and remind one of downtown's cohesive identity.

This new master plan for downtown Elon seeks to identify, and provide guidelines for achieving, a built environment rooted in creating a "sense of community" for residents, university students, property owners and visitors alike.



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## DOCUMENT PURPOSE AND INTENT

### PURPOSE

The Pattern Book and Regulating Plan are documents that are to be used together. Their combined purpose is to regulate various aspects and details of the Downtown Master Plan. The array of guidelines and recommendations within the Pattern Book are intended to facilitate the appropriate implementation of development efforts over time within Downtown Elon and to ensure that the plan comes to fruition in the manner envisioned by the Town of Elon.

### PATTERN BOOK

This document is based on defining those anticipated details and elements occurring in future land development within Downtown Elon, both public and private, or a combination of both, that are necessary to guarantee the eventual and envisioned built environment is one of quality and character. These guidelines are meant to encourage each new development to work towards the larger and comprehensive vision for Downtown Elon. Guidelines for land use, roadway enhancement, building development, and the development of Elon's open spaces and sidewalks are found in the following sections of the pattern book and collectively the adherence to their tenants will ensure the eventual built environment constituting Downtown Elon will occur in an orderly, comprehensive and cohesive manner, both in the two dimensional and in the three dimensional realm.

### THE REGULATING PLAN

The regulating Plan is based upon the approved Master Plan. It serves to locate specific land uses and to regulate the framework of roadways, parking lots, sidewalks, parks and other "town" components that define the physical layout of Downtown Elon.



THE MASTER PLAN IN CONTEXT

This Master Plan presents a vision of what could and should be as an inspiration and guide to developing a powerful community based retail, office and residential "center". As we discovered in the process of developing this plan, there are other plans that are possible, but the plan presented is thought the best. The various plans that were considered all have the same elements in common – a central gathering space or town commons; high density mixed use development facing the commons; the importance of College Avenue for two-sided development and connectivity to N. Williamson Avenue and the University campus; urbanizing and pedestrian-izing College, Holt, Lee and Manning, but most importantly Haggard Avenue; adequate parking both on-street and off-street to support major development and finally the unifying and community building of branding, signage and street furniture. The Master Plan is not meant to be "cast in stone" but be an evolutionary document that is likely to change over the years always meeting the program objectives listed in the previous paragraph. The ideal is for the Master Plan to be updated as development occurs. Unlike a Master Plan for a single developer of a large parcel of land, our Plan depends on so many factors that cannot be controlled except through organization, cooperation and hard work on the part of a team, which has a full-time responsibility for executing the Plan.

FIRST ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Implementation section of this report discusses a downtown development organization, without which we cannot see the Master Plan moving forward. A two to five year commitment would be a minimum requirement for evaluation of the success of such an entity. Forming the organization, staffing and defining the early goals of this organization, is the first order of business.

EARLY ACTION ITEMS

The program items, which can be started immediately, would be the branding and public signage, as well as new merchant signage following the new Master Plan guidelines. This can begin on a modest scale and build over time until there are significant milestones for which the branding can be more extensively utilized. Surprisingly simple could be storefront and interior renovations along with improved retail merchandising of the existing retail buildings along N. Williamson. While these building do not represent a large amount of square footage, they could be configured into a very solid block of shopping so the positive impact far exceeds the square footage. Of course, this would not even be considered as having any potential were not such an extensive amount of frontage be controlled by a single entity – in this case the University -through a combination of ownership, leases or development agreements. Without getting into the detail, except to say the numbers depend on the potential of the vacant Town Table being converted into three retail stores, this block could have ten stores/cafes and if each were well designed, with upgraded façade and interiors and well merchandised, this one block could be an immediate image changer. If the Town Table space remains a single restaurant space or other non-retail use, upgrading this block is still important. What does change is the ability to create a shopping environment with an adequate number of stores with impact beyond its critical mass.

Renovating this hundred block of N. Williamson Avenue is suggested, however the Master Plan team does not think the existing buildings are of any practical or historic value and that replacing these buildings with new construction is preferred for the long term. Eventually as buildings are developed and non-student retail is inserted in the mix, a balance will be reached in which the significance of location will not be as critical. However, presently the complete domination of student retail & food along the avenues of N. Williamson and Lebanon, deters stores and restaurants which cater to other market segments from locating Downtown. Stores and restaurants, which cater to the target market described in the Marketing Analysis section must be the basis for the tenancy for any new development and merchandising or redevelopment and re-merchandising. The success of this new merchandising effort would be measured by the new stores and restaurants having little to no decrease in business when the students leave for the summer and winter breaks. That target market for new stores and restaurants is the residential neighborhoods, which in the east start in the historic residential area of Burlington, continue through Northwest Burlington, extend through Elon to include residential areas on the east side of Gibsonville. Target market area development would be ideal on the east and west side of the proposed Town Commons as shown on the Master Plan. With this area requiring much time for cooperative development to take place, the best alternative for more immediate action would be new development on W. College Avenue between N. Williamson and Holt avenues. 131 W. College Avenue (Tap Room/Lighthouse) and the adjoining Town-owned property provide an adequate development parcel. Additionally, the Master Plan envisions that a portion of the property owned by Elon Community Church and presently used as a surface parking lot along W. College Avenue become a taxable private development parcel, possibly with the Church as partner, and these properties along with the recently built Town Center development would make College Avenue a major expansion of commercial development downtown and the preferred double-loaded commercial street. With this block of W. College Avenue there could be a critical mass of retail and office development to provide the credibility and incentive to complete the Master Plan to the west.

SUMMATION

Those Early Action Items chosen for their ability to be executed relatively easily still require an organization charged with the full time responsibility of making them happen since wide support is needed and much negotiation necessary. The individual consultant members of the Master Plan team would welcome the opportunity to be involved in the details of the execution phase, if such assistance is required. We particularly thank the members of the Downtown Committee and the many individuals and representative who participated in the Stakeholder Meetings.

