



creating the plan **2**



*The plan for Midtown Lynchburg was created through teamwork and collaboration.*

### **What is a Charrette?**

*Charrette* is a French word that translates as "little cart." At the leading architecture school of the 19th century, the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts* in Paris, students would be assigned a tough design problem to work out under pressure of time. They would continue sketching as fast as they could, even as little carts—charrettes—carried their drawing boards away to be judged and graded. Today, "charrette" has come to describe a rapid, intensive, and creative work session in which a design team focuses on a particular design problem and arrives at a collaborative solution. Charrettes are product-oriented. The public charrette is fast becoming a preferred way to face the planning challenges confronting American communities.

Community involvement was an essential component in creating a workable vision and plan for the future of Midtown Lynchburg. "Designing in public," the Dover-Kohl team conducted an open planning process in April 2005 to identify the ideas, needs and concerns of the community. Participants helped to create the Midtown Master Plan through an intensive design event called a *charrette*. Over the course of seven days, the community and the team of design professionals worked to design the plan. Over 500 interested residents and stakeholders participated in the planning process, including property owners, neighbors, business people, developers, elected officials, appointed officials, City staff, students, and community leaders.

## **CHARRETTE PREPARATION**

Prior to the charrette, the Dover-Kohl team focused their efforts on gathering base information and studying the existing physical conditions of the area. This included learning about local history, reviewing previous plans and studies, examining existing City ordinances and land development regulations, and analyzing the physical, social, and economic characteristics of Midtown. A more detailed overview of the team's review of background information can be found in Chapter 1.

Members of the team visited Lynchburg in March 2005 and met with City officials, staff, community leaders, business owners, and other local stakeholders in preparation for the charrette. The meetings served as a way to better understand the dynamics of Midtown and the area's role in the city and region. Team members met with City staff to further understand previous planning efforts and met with City officials to better gauge the leadership's vision and ideas for the future of Midtown. The team talked with representatives from Centra Health, impressed to learn of the hospital's expansion and continued presence in the area. The Chamber of Commerce offered information on recent business trends and activities and local property owners expressed their desires to see the area undergo a major revitalization.

A key element in preparing for the charrette was generating public awareness. City staff spread the word about the Midtown planning process by placing ads in the local newspapers, posting public notices, going door-to-door with flyers, and extensive mailings.



## STUDY TOURS

To further understand the planning context of Midtown, the team arrived a few days prior to the start of the charrette to allow time to study and tour Midtown and its surroundings, including Downtown, Rivermont, and Wyndhurst. The study tours helped the team to understand Midtown's place within the City and surrounding region and enhanced the team's understanding of current issues, concerns, and prospects. The team examined virtually every street in the study area on foot and by car, noting areas of particular interest or concern. With base maps in hand, the planners and designers analyzed the existing urban fabric, paying careful attention to the historic network of blocks and streets.

Team members walked and photographed a variety of urban conditions, noting building form, building placement, architectural character, street design, topographic conditions, and the natural landscape. Particular attention was devoted to analyzing the existing conditions of the Plaza site to prepare for a thorough review of the potential for future development of the site. On maps of the existing conditions of the study area, team members highlighted potential areas for infill development, buildings of architectural/historical significance, and unique conditions and characteristics of Midtown, such as the magnificent views to the mountains.



ONE WORD that comes to mind about Midtown:

NOW: Uninviting

IN THE FUTURE:  
Attractive  
(In my vision)

ONE WORD that comes to mind about Midtown:

NOW: Neglected

IN THE FUTURE:  
livable  
(In my vision)

ONE WORD that comes to mind about Midtown:

NOW: Stagnant

IN THE FUTURE:  
Vibrant  
(In my vision)

At the Kick-off Presentation, residents were asked to write one word to describe Midtown now, and how they envision the area in the future.



Mayor Hutcherson welcomed the community at the Kick-off Presentation.



The team answered questions at the end of the Kick-off Presentation.

## THE CHARRETTE

On Friday, April 22, 2005, a Community Kick-off Presentation marked the start of the charrette. Residents, City leaders, and local stakeholders gathered at Lynchburg College for the evening. After introductions by Mayor Hutcherson, Victor Dover, principal of Dover, Kohl & Partners and charrette leader, outlined the challenge for participants during the charrette week. Victor emphasized that the Plan would be created by the community, for the community. He stressed the importance of citizen involvement through the process to ensure the creation of a plan truly representative of community ideals. He provided background on traditional town building, community planning, and smart growth principles. The presentation included both old and new newspaper clippings about the evolving history of the Midtown area. Victor introduced other members of the team, including Rick Hall, of Hall Planning & Engineering, who spoke about transportation issues facing Midtown. The evening concluded with a lively discussion of questions and answers as excitement grew for the week-long event.

On Saturday, April 23, community members gathered at the former Heironimus store at the Plaza for the hands-on design session. Approximately 150 community members attended. Victor started the day with a brief "food for thought" presentation, and laid out the ground rules for the day. Participants then gathered in small groups at tables, each with several maps of Midtown. Residents came full of ideas and went to work, becoming "citizen planners." Participants talked with fellow neighbors about their fond memories of Pittman Plaza on opening day and their hopes of a better future for the area. Armed with markers and pencils, participants rolled up their sleeves and began to illustrate their vision for the future of Midtown on large maps. A member of the design team or a volunteer from the City was placed at each table to serve as a facilitator and guide the participants through a series of design exercises.



Residents work together, sharing ideas for the future of Midtown.



As the day progressed, participants continued to draw on the maps and write down their ideas for the future of Midtown. Participants examined the existing road network and discussed various possibilities for the Crosstown Connector. The table groups highlighted areas in need of improvement and identified neighborhood resources and civic sites. At the end of the day, a representative from each table presented their table's ideas to the entire assembly. Common themes began to emerge quickly, as the important goals for Midtown were identified. Some of the most widely shared ideas are included along the bottom of this page.

The goal of the hands-on session was to forge an initial consensus and develop an overall community vision for Midtown. In addition to the group presentations, each participant filled out an exit survey at the end of the session. The surveys allowed the consultant team to gain more detailed insight into the ideas of the many individuals that participated. Feedback was very valuable and the event was essential for creating a realistic and unified plan.



One representative from each table presented their work to the entire group.

*“would like to see an interconnected system of green spaces, walkways, neighborhoods, businesses, and services”*

*“a center for intergenerational interaction!”*

*“take advantage of the mountain views”*

*“create a world class gateway to the medical district”*

*“create the heart of the city”*

*“would like a comfortable, quiet, enjoyable place to live, work and raise kids/grandkids”*

*“a dynamic mixed-use area with good housing choices, supported by traditional neighborhood design”*

- community comments from the Hands-on Design Session



Over 100 students from E.C. Glass High School visited the on-site design studio.

From Sunday through Thursday, the design team ran an open design studio at the former Heironimus store. Citizens and local leaders were encouraged to stop by the studio throughout the week to check the status of the plan, provide further input, and to make sure the design team was on the right track. The location of the studio at the Plaza, as well as the immense community interest, led over 100 people to participate throughout the week. The workgroup drawings and plans from the Saturday design session were placed around the room for easy review as new people became involved. While community members visited the studio, the design team continued to analyze the information gathered at the hands-on session site analysis in order to formulate the initial concepts for the plan. The team was tasked with synthesizing the many ideas heard from the community throughout the week into a single cohesive master plan. The planners and designers created lists, graphs, diagrams, drawings, and plans, working to combine and refine the ideas. Working on-location allowed the design team ready access to the study area during all hours and on different days of the week. The planners observed day-to-day traffic patterns, public uses, and other details of everyday life in Midtown.

In addition to the public design studio, members of the design team met with specific stakeholders in scheduled technical meetings. The team met with City officials, representatives from the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), Centra Health, Lynchburg College, the Community Monitoring Committee, Lynchburg Redevelopment and Housing Authority, and other community organizations and local businesses. The technical meetings helped to further shape the detailed elements of the plan and to ensure that the ideas being processed were consistent amongst many viewpoints. The owners of the Plaza, Sandor Development Company, were also active participants in the design studio. The design team worked with a representative from Sandor for two days to explore redevelopment opportunities for the Plaza site.



Technical meetings during the week helped to shape the details of the plan.



The design team worked on-site to create the plan for Midtown.

The charrette week ended with an evening "Work-in-Progress" presentation on Thursday, April 28 at Lynchburg College. Over 150 citizens returned for the presentation eager to hear and see how the planners and designers were able to synthesize the community's ideas into the vision for the future of Midtown. Victor Dover began the presentation with a summary of the week's events, then presented sketches and computer visualizations illustrating the hypothetical future build-out of Midtown. Focusing on specific areas, Victor walked the audience through a "future tour" showing both short and long-term changes that are possible under the plan. Renderings showed "before and after" illustrations of possible development scenarios. At the end of the presentation, a new survey was distributed to gauge the community's opinion on the ideas presented that evening.

## AFTER THE CHARRETTE

At the conclusion of the week-long charrette, the design team departed Lynchburg and returned home to their offices. Over a period of six weeks the illustrative master plan produced during the charrette was refined and this report was created. The plan documents were then submitted for City and community review. The following report represents a synthesis of desires and goals for the future of Midtown within a workable framework of specific implementation measures.

*"(The Midtown Plan) is something that reflects the wishes, desires, and values of our community."*

*- - Kimball Payne, City Manager*

**Midtown Area Plan**  
Work-in-Progress Presentation, April 28, 2005

Did you attend the Community Kick-off Presentation (Friday, April 22nd)?  
Yes  No

Did you attend the Hands-on Design Session (Saturday, April 23rd)?  
Yes  No

Did you visit the Design Studio (Sunday, April 24th - Thursday, April 28th)?  
Yes  No

Of the many ideas you heard tonight, which idea should be made a top priority?  
Confidence Corridors  
↑ Civic landmarks  
improve historic/church buildings.

Are there any elements of your vision for the future of Midtown we might have missed?  
To see how it comes together in your plans, my vision seems so limited. What I liked most is the cohesiveness of the plan.

Do you think the plan is generally on the right track?  
Yes, this is the #1 reason I moved to Lynchburg from the Philadelphia area. I am excited to be a part of this.

Please write additional comments on back of sheet. Thanks for your help and your ideas! Please leave this on the table at the door or fax it to Scott Whelan, Science City Planner at 842-7030.

Sample exit survey response

### Work-in-Progress Survey Results:

Do you think the plan is generally on the right track?

Yes = 66%

Somewhat = 4%

No = 0%