



Innovative approaches
Practical results
Outstanding service

1001 Tuckaseegee Rd., Ste 120 + Charlotte, NC 28208 + 704-251-0178

www.freese.com

TO: Marie Parker, Town of Carrboro
CC: Christina Moon, Town of Carrboro
FROM: Danny Wilson, Freese and Nichols
SUBJECT: Carrboro Downtown Area Plan Community Guidance
DATE: 4/25/2025

Project Overview and Scope

This memo provides a brief overview of the Downtown Area Plan project and how public engagement has been incorporated into the draft Plan. The Town of Carrboro hired the Freese and Nichols (FNI) team to complete the Downtown Area Plan, which included a significant amount of community engagement. The purpose of the engagement events is to get public input about the downtown area to directly influence the recommendations reflected in the plan. The project kicked off in July 2024.

Prior to the Downtown Area Plan project, the Town adopted the Carrboro Connects Comprehensive Plan in 2022, which included significant public engagement. The input obtained during the Comprehensive Plan project included feedback on a wide range of items that apply town-wide; however, multiple items related to the downtown area are included in the Carrboro Connects Plan. While not all these items are anticipated to be directly addressed in the Downtown Area Plan, each one was reviewed and considered as part of the project background analysis to gain a better understanding of the community goals for the overall Town of Carrboro.

The numerous goals, projects, and strategies contained within the Carrboro Connects Plan guided the development of the Downtown Area Plan and include, but are not limited to, elements related to Affordable Housing; Transportation and Mobility; Green Stormwater Infrastructure, Water, and Energy; Economic Sustainability; Recreation, Parks and Culture; Land Use; and Climate Action and Environment. A list of projects and implementation goals from the Carrboro Connects Comprehensive Plan that pertain to the downtown area is included as an attachment to this memo.

To date, the FNI team has led nine community engagement events. Town staff also assisted with community engagement efforts and held additional events that were above and beyond the FNI team's scope. In addition to these meetings and events, a project webpage and survey hosted on the Town's online engagement platform (Social Pinpoint) were also used to encourage community interaction and feedback. All engagement materials, questions, and activities were developed in collaboration with Town staff.

The original FNI team scope included the following engagement activities:

- Virtual Project Initiation Meeting with Town staff
- In-person Kickoff Meeting and Study Area Tour with Town staff
- Online Survey
- Project Website
- Project Video
- Two Meeting Days of Town Council Small Groups, Stakeholders, Town Staff, and Business Community Meetings (four hours per meeting day)

- Four Virtual Joint Review Advisory Board Meetings
- Four In-person Community Events
- Two Stakeholder Group Presentations
- Two Town Council Adoption Meetings

The public engagement events that are remaining to be held include:

- the fourth Community Event
- the fourth Virtual Joint Review Advisory Board Meeting
- the second Stakeholder Group Presentation
- the two Town Council Adoption meetings

Planning Process and Public Input

The planning process for creating a downtown plan is heavily reliant on public input, as the plan is intended to help create the downtown that the community wants to see. To accomplish this, the FNI team and Town staff worked together to create materials and engage with the community. The raw data, notes, and comments were compiled and then used to create engagement summaries for each event. Some of the feedback in the summaries is quantitative in nature based on the type of activity or question. However, much of the information is qualitative in nature and is gathered through discussions with community members and open-ended questions. Responses and comments were reviewed and summarized to provide an overview of the sentiment voiced by the community. Individual responses and comments are included in the existing event summaries where possible (with the exception of the survey; these responses will be included in the plan appendix). Due to the large volume of individual comments and conversations that occur during these events, the engagement summaries are critical aspects of drafting plans that align with community preferences and goals.

Event	Participation (some numbers are estimates)
Community Event 1	100
Community Event 2	42
Community Event 3	30
Stakeholder Meeting Day 1	15 + Town Council
Stakeholder Meeting Day 2	6
Stakeholder Presentation 1	1
Joint Advisory Board Meeting 1	28 (incl. staff)
Joint Advisory Board Meeting 2	48 (incl. staff)
Joint Advisory Board Meeting 3	24 (incl. staff)
Community Survey	286
TOTAL	580*

*plus, the attendance at additional events held by Town staff

Key Input from Each Event

Some of the input and the highest-ranking comments from each public event are as follows. Full engagement summaries are included as attachments to this memo. Looking through the draft Downtown Area Plan, one can see how the information gathered through the public engagement events is reflected throughout the document. In particular, the illustrative renderings depict elements that were heard directly from the community as priorities.

Community Event 1: The first engagement event for the Carrboro Downtown Area Plan was held on August 25, 2024, at the Fiestas en la Calle (Festival Latinoamericano) on W. Weaver Street in downtown Carrboro. The engagement featured a large map of the downtown study area where participants could place dots on the map to indicate a place they love or a place that needs improvement.

- Places that Need Improvement: Out of 52 comments, 16 people identified a desire for 201 N Greensboro Street to be used as a public park.
 - The next closest option was 9 people mentioning needing traffic calming on Davie Road.

Community Event 2: Two visioning workshops were held on September 19 and 26, 2024. The purpose of these events was to foster a community vision and begin brainstorming projects and strategies to achieve that vision. The event included two mapping stations asking people to identify places they love, places that need improvement, and ideas for downtown. There were also topic stations related to climate action and race and equity, a kid's station, and a tactile exercise for people to "create their ideal downtown."

- Places People Love: Out of the 36 comments, 10 people indicated Weaver Street Lawn.
- Places that Need Improvement: Out of 40 comments, 7 indicated the desire for crosswalks with lights where there are none.

Community Event 3: Two community input sessions were held on October 20 and 23, 2024. The purpose of these sessions was to receive more detailed community feedback about the look and feel of future development and improvements in the downtown area. A mapping activity split the study area into four sections and asked people to describe if they wanted to see more development in that area and, if so, what they would like to see there (e.g., type, size, height, appearance, function). There were also visual preference boards asking people to select their top preferences for design elements related to public space, plants and landscapes, and streetscapes.

- Public Spaces: Out of 11 options, *Gardens* received the most votes with 19. *Splash Pad*, *Performance Venue* and *Interactive Art* tied for second with 10 votes.
- Plants and Landscaping: Out of 9 options, *Shade Trees* received the most votes with 16.
- Streetscape Elements: Out of 11 options, *Street Trees* received the most votes with 20. *Art Crosswalks* came in a close second with 19 votes.
- See the meeting summary for information about preferred development types in each mapping area.

Stakeholder Meeting Day 1: Three stakeholder meetings were held on October 7, 2024, and attended by 15 community stakeholders. Meetings with Town Council members were also held concurrently. The meetings included open-ended visioning questions and general discussion, so all responses were qualitative in nature.

- Some of the feedback included:
 - Desire to show new buildings up to 5-7 stories in height
 - Desire to preserve the historic buildings and quirky feel of Carrboro
 - Desire to improve pedestrian and non-motorized transportation opportunities
 - Need for considering adjacent neighborhoods and how they will be impacted
 - Desire to improve the cohesion of the downtown area

Stakeholder Meeting Day 2: Two stakeholder meetings were held on January 31, 2025, and were attended by 6 stakeholders. The meetings included open-ended questions and discussion about specific elements that may be included in the built environment, so all responses were qualitative in nature.

- Some of the responses included:
 - Desire for both passive and interactive public art
 - Using art for social functions (slowing down traffic and as a gathering place)
 - Creating rotating temporary art installations around downtown
 - Desire for pedestrian-scale lighting, especially at crosswalks
 - Using lighting to enhance and identify areas, not just for utility
 - Continuing the brick sidewalk treatment that already exists in part of the downtown
 - Having wider sidewalks to accommodate the large volume of users

Stakeholder Presentation 1: A virtual stakeholder presentation was held on February 19, 2025, and one person attended. The presentation consisted of open-ended questions about what type of elements would like to be seen included in private development on various sites and in a public park, so all responses were qualitative in nature.

- Comments included:
 - Look at a wider range of architectural styles for creative ideas
 - Consider not using real grass in lawn areas
 - Install shade trees in groups to create natural shade
 - Consider including public restrooms in the public park
 - Incorporate more nature throughout downtown

Joint Advisory Board Meeting 1: This meeting was held on October 9, 2024, and included open-ended visioning questions and discussion, so all responses are qualitative in nature. Board members were asked to identify strengths and opportunities for downtown.

- Strengths included local small businesses, community character, and local events
- Opportunities included more outdoor public open space and parks; improving infrastructure and experience of biking, walking, and using transit; encouraging diversity and hosting multicultural activities and events; and more landscaping

Joint Advisory Board Meeting 2: This meeting was held on December 5, 2024, and included open-ended questions about what type of elements they would like to be seen in private development on several specific sites and in a public park. All responses were qualitative in nature.

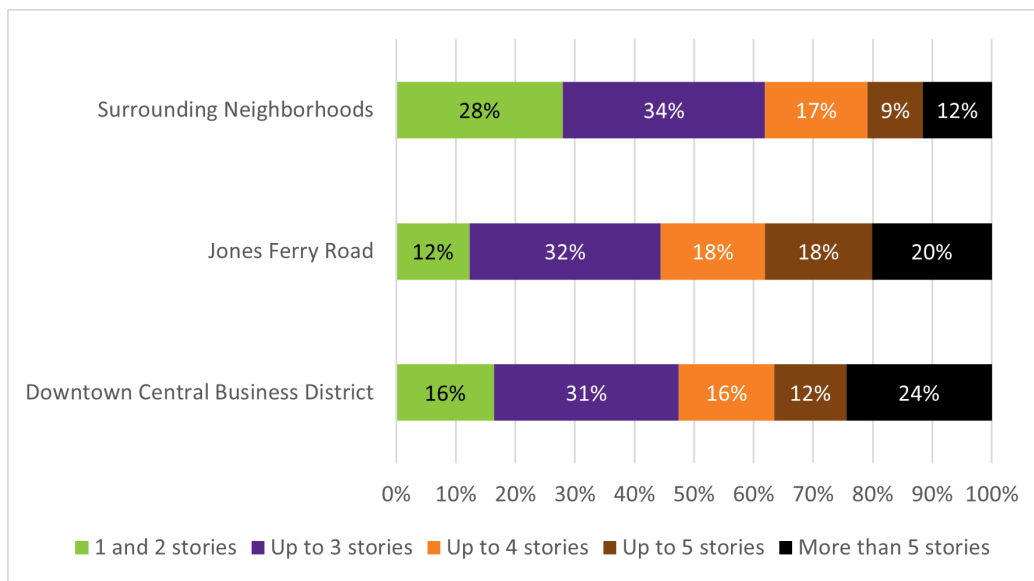
- Discussion included elements such as:
 - Focusing on walkability
 - Need enough density for mixed-use and transportation improvements
 - Creating inviting spaces for people to use on private property (similar to Weaver Street lawn)
 - Locate a public park on the way to something, not isolated on the edge of downtown
 - Include more greenspace and less building construction to stay with the ethos of the Carrboro Connects Plan
 - Limit the amount of new parking, as there is an abundance of parking already
 - Opportunities to extend the greenway down Jones Ferry Road
 - New developments should include stormwater friendly elements

Joint Advisory Board Meeting 3: This meeting was held on February 20, 2025, and included open-ended questions and discussion regarding three draft renderings (mixed-use development along a greenway, mixed-use development with quasi-public space, and downtown green space). All responses were qualitative in nature.

- Comments included:
 - Importance of having a diversity of spaces to allow for a range of business and residential opportunities
 - Look for opportunities for safer pedestrian environments and crossings
 - Find opportunities to decrease impervious coverage
 - Consider how to incorporate existing buildings without tearing them down for full property redevelopment

Community Survey: The survey was hosted on the Town’s Social Pinpoint site and included 26 survey questions, multiple of which were open-ended. There were 286 survey responses. While all comments were pertinent to the plan drafting effort, the following table shows the building height results.

In this question, respondents were asked what they think the maximum building height should be in the Downtown Central Business District, Jones Ferry Road, and Surrounding Neighborhood areas.



Incorporating Input into Plan Development

Downtown plans can contain a wide range of information and focus areas, as well as being presented in multiple formats. For the Carrboro Downtown Area Plan, after reviewing the Town’s physical framework, talking with staff, and evaluating how the implementation of the Plan may be accomplished; the following format was selected:

1. Using illustrative renderings and example photos to demonstrate how development could occur in the future that contain a variety of design elements to guide conversations with developers and property owners.
2. Not depicting development on specific private property, as there is no guarantee that the properties will be redeveloped in the foreseeable future. This prevents artificially showing changes that may never materialize and limits alienating property owners by depicting changes to their property without their consent.
3. Maximizing the project effort on ideas that could work in a variety of situations, given the numerous small properties that each have their own challenges and opportunities that impact future development. The unique tapestry of properties in the Downtown Area will necessitate the Town to implement a range of options for practical changes to occur in this area.

4. The limited publicly owned property in the Downtown Area hinders the ability for new public projects.
5. The limited width for road rights-of-way and the existing overhead utilities create significant hurdles for making monumental changes to the transportation corridors in the public realm.
6. Many of the existing buildings in the study area are 1-2 stories in height and most of these buildings are not anticipated to be enlarged or redeveloped in the near future.

Due to these, and other considerations, the FNI team and Town staff evaluated options for how to best provide inspirational guidance that could actually be implemented and help direct significant change in the downtown. This evaluation led to the draft Plan format of providing descriptive information about a variety of physical considerations when developing in the Downtown Area and guidance on how to achieve the community goals, all of which tie back to the community's vision and Plan goals.

Several of the larger properties in the study area were identified for potential redevelopment, as these sites provide opportunities to create significant impacts on the area. Illustrative renderings were created using real site constraints, while also blurring the edges/limiting the view to keep the sites anonymous. The illustrative renderings are major elements of the Downtown Area Plan; however, the Plan includes many other details and specific direction for guiding changes to the existing built environment and use of properties in the study area.

Some specific elements identified during public engagement that are included in the illustrative renderings are as follows:

- Having buildings up to six stories in height, with shorter buildings and step-downs near the smaller adjacent buildings to maintain sensitivity to the residential context in close proximity to many of the commercial areas
- Using various architectural styles to reflect the range of architectural aesthetics in the area
- Incorporating a variety of residential and commercial space sizes to encourage a range of affordability
- Showing the inclusion of environmentally sustainable elements such as solar panels, shade trees, gardens with educational signage, rain gardens, and spray plazas
- Creating outdoor gathering spaces in a variety of settings: plaza, outdoor event space, open lawn, playground, shaded seating areas, and a public park
- Multimodal considerations for wider sidewalks, development along the Libba Cotten Greenway, and bus stops
- Incorporating passive and interactive art elements
- Reinforcing a pedestrian and bike focus by locating parking decks to the rear of the property and behind buildings
- Depicting residential, recreation, restaurant, retail, office, and other uses that help create live, work, and play opportunities

Summary

By taking the approach documented above, the Downtown Area Plan will provide the Town with the direction and flexibility needed when evaluating public and private project considerations in the study area. As the Plan takes direction from the community, it also helps to create the future Downtown Area as envisioned by the community.

The final draft Plan has not been created yet. Edits and adjustments are still being made in close coordination between Town staff and FNI. The Implementation and Monitoring and Reporting chapters have not been drafted yet but are scheduled for drafting to begin in April. It is anticipated that the final draft Plan be ready for Town Council consideration within the next few months.

Attachments:

1. Community Engagement Summaries
[\[staff note: this is included as Attachment C in the agenda materials\]](#)
2. Partial List of Carrboro Connects Comprehensive Plan Projects and Implementation Goals
[\[staff note: this is included as Attachment E in the agenda materials\]](#)