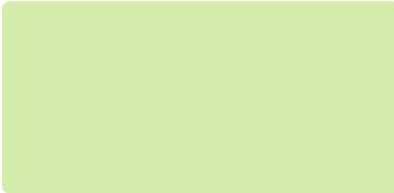
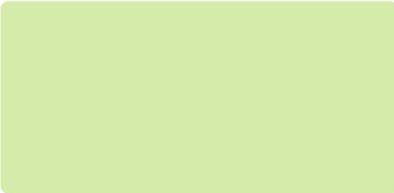
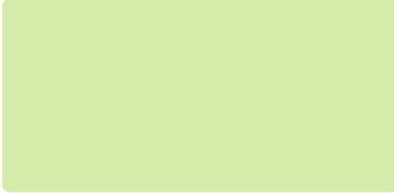


# Sustainable Communities in Appalachia Technical Assistance Program



Downtown Master Plan  
Implementation Action Plan  
Spruce Pine, NC  
December 21, 2012



### **About This Document**

This report is the result of technical assistance provided to the Town of Spruce Pine, North Carolina from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC). The EPA contracted with Renaissance Planning Group to provide support for the efforts. For more information contact:

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## 1. Community Background

The Town of Spruce Pine, NC is located in western North Carolina, in close proximity to the Blue Ridge Parkway, and had a 2010 population of 2,175. The town has a wealth of natural and cultural resources, summarized by the three key themes of “River, Rocks, and Trees,” as identified by town residents. The town is also home to many artists, with the Penland School of Crafts and the Toe River Arts Council (TRAC). Leveraging these cultural and natural assets, with a supportive and involved local government and community, position Spruce Pine for success in achieving its downtown revitalization goals.

In 2007, a fire set by an arsonist destroyed six downtown buildings. One building is now the site of the future Central Park. Another, on the eastern entrance of downtown, is a priority area for the town to remediate and rebuild into useable space. Several other buildings remain vacant. While the fire was devastating, some town residents believe it was a catalyst for revitalizing downtown and generated momentum.

The Town of Spruce Pine and Spruce Pine Main Street (SPMS), with the help of the High Country Council of Governments (HCCOG), drafted the first ever Spruce Pine Downtown Master Plan (referred to as the Master Plan for the remainder of this document). The Master Plan is an excellent start to revitalizing downtown, but the town requested assistance with determining specific action steps toward implementation. The workshop helped with this effort by bringing stakeholders together to formulate ideas, generate strategies, identify funding sources, and determine the lead and supporting agencies and organizations for projects. Specifically, the town requested assistance with walkability and sidewalk connections, the Central Park project, greenway extension, streetscape plan, signage and wayfinding, and marketing the town. This document supplements the Master Plan recommendations by providing specific action



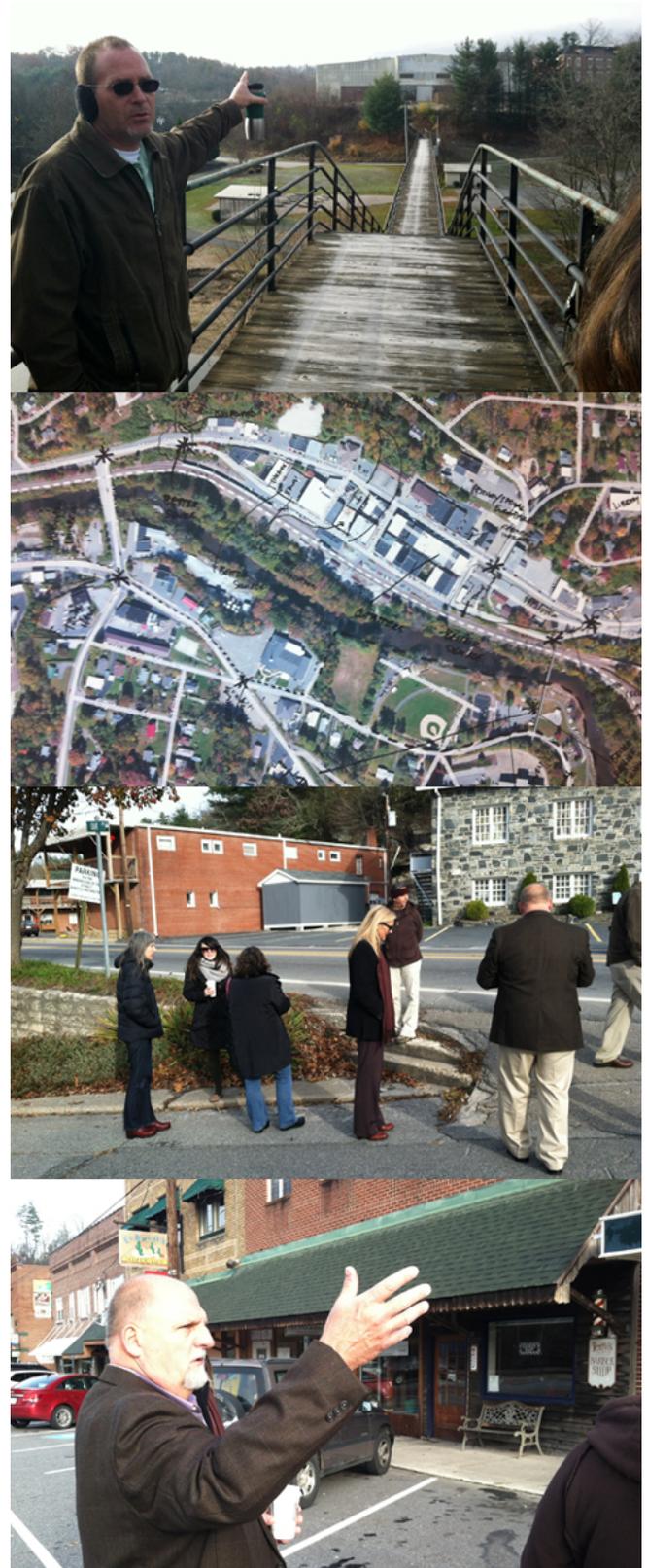
Figure 1- Various images from Downtown Spruce Pine. From top to bottom: view of the North Toe River from the historic footbridge, vacant buildings on Locust St, the newly renovated TRAC building and alley, and the CSX tracks through town.

steps to follow to achieve goals and complete projects in the areas of development, transportation, stormwater management, marketing, signage, amenities, beautification, and recreation, and land use and design.

## 2. Workshop Summary

On November 14 and 15, 2012, the town of Spruce Pine hosted a team of consultants to aid with the development of an implementation strategy for the draft Master Plan. The team consisted of Jen Horton representing EPA, Pam Hysong, Sandy Laurence, and Debbie Sexton representing USDA Rural Development, and Alan Steinbeck and Alana Brasier representing Renaissance Planning Group. The workshop was also supported by the participation of Duncan Cavanaugh from the High Country Council of Governments. Representatives from the Town of Spruce Pine, Spruce Pine Main Street, Penland School of Crafts, Mitchell County, AMY Regional Libraries, Toe River Arts Council, Mayland Community College, business owners, and residents also participated in the two day workshop. The intent of the workshop was to bring together specific stakeholders for focused discussions on the Master Plan, identify action steps to follow, and involve the public in order to gather their input and allow the whole community to participate.

The first day began with a walking tour of the downtown for a firsthand view of the Master Plan focus areas, including vacant buildings, the “burnt building”, east parking lot, sidewalk conditions, connectivity issues, historic foot bridge, CSX Depot, Carolina Theater, and Central Park and visitor center site. Following the walking tour, participants gathered in the Blue Ridge Regional Hospital meeting room to begin organizing and documenting ideas. This began with an overview of the Master Plan status and the desired outcomes from the workshop. Participants identified on maps the assets and opportunities in the town, followed by a “What’s Missing?” group activity to further define the vision for downtown. This helped the town see



*Figure 2 - Workshop sessions included a walking tour, small working groups and public sessions to further define the vision for Spruce Pine and the action steps to get there.*

the abundance of physical and cultural assets the community possesses and the areas in which to build upon using those assets. With the help of USDA Rural Development and EPA staff, funding sources for various types of projects were identified and reviewed with the group.

Day two began with a presentation of case studies covering a variety of topics areas relevant to Spruce Pine. Much of the remainder of day two concentrated on an “On the Wall” group exercise to populate implementation tables with projects, lead and supporting organizations, timelines, and funding sources. The prioritization process organized projects under the goals of development, transportation, stormwater management, marketing, signage, amenities, beautification, and recreation, and land use and design. The outcome of this is a detailed action plan, shown in section 4. The two day workshop ended with a community open house in which the outcomes of the two days were presented to the public. Copies of all of the workshop presentations are in Appendix C.

### 3. The Spruce Pine Downtown Master Plan Vision

Spruce Pine has a solid vision of how they want the town to grow, and has documented this in their recent Downtown Master Plan, which contains many ideas and projects. The November workshop was designed to help the town prioritize which projects to focus on first and how to accomplish them. Additionally, many partnerships arose from the workshop to carry out specific projects. The graphic to the right displays the outcome of the Assets and Opportunities exercise, which helped the town zero in on their vision and the projects to concentrate on.

During the workshop, it was confirmed that the completion of Central Park and visitor center is the primary project for the town and SPMS to focus on completing. Another priority project is the adoption of a unified arts and marketing program, including rebranding the town to move away from “The Home of the Perfect Christmas Tree.”

Other specific projects include remediating the “burnt building” on Oak Street, redeveloping the Carolina Theater, increasing the number of downtown residents, creating a new Town Hall, filling in sidewalk gaps and connecting to residential areas, creating a greenways and trails plan, streetscape improvements, stormwater installations, a signage and wayfinding plan, new and better lighting, a public art plan, and renovating the CSX depot. The action plan for these projects is detailed out in section 4 of this document and Appendix A.



***Community Assets***  
Momentum and interest  
Proactive and engaged city government and community  
Arts community  
Riverside Park  
Restaurants  
North Toe River  
Historic footbridge  
Library

***Community Opportunities***  
Central Park  
Signage and wayfinding  
Sidewalk connectivity and rehabilitation  
Walking loop and trail system  
Innovative stormwater management solutions  
Cohesive aesthetic vision  
More retail and entertainment  
Downtown housing  
Unique/challenging buildings and development opportunities  
Funding

The table below is presented as a guide to demonstrate how the overall goals of the Master Plan support livability principles developed by the interagency Partnership for Sustainable Communities.

Table 1

Livability Principles	Goals of Master Plan
Provide more transportation choices. ⇒	Improve and expand the sidewalk network and enhance the streetscape for attractive, accessible, and safe transportation infrastructure.
Promote equitable, affordable housing. ⇒	Create adequate and affordable housing choices to encourage new and existing residents to relocate downtown.
Enhance economic competitiveness. ⇒	Continue to develop partnerships with local businesses and developers to expand businesses and fill vacant buildings.
Support existing communities. ⇒	Continue to support redevelopment efforts in downtown.
Coordinate and leverage federal policies and investment. ⇒	Continue involving EPA, HUD, ARC, USDA, National Endowment for the Arts, etc.
Value communities and neighborhoods. ⇒	Develop a unifying town brand that encompasses the unique physical and cultural characteristics of the town.

*[The table above illustrates how the goals of the Spruce Pine Downtown Master Plan support the livability goals of the federal interagency Partnership for Sustainable Communities.]*

#### 4. Action Plan

The following goals and action steps were identified during the two-day workshop. They range from short-term to long-term goals, which will help to prioritize projects and tasks. Detailed implementation tables are located in Appendix A.

##### Goals and Actions

##### *GOAL 1: Development*

- **Action 1.1.** - Remediate burnt building on Oak Street. The burnt building is one of the first buildings seen from the eastern entrance to downtown and detracts from the aesthetics of the area.
  - **Lead:** Town of Spruce Pine
  - **Support:** SPMS, HCCOG
- **Action 1.2.** - Renovate Carolina Theater. If successful, the theater can be a focal point for activities and events in town and be one of the main catalysts for drawing more people and businesses in to town.
  - **Lead:** Carolina Theater Foundation, Interest Group
  - **Support:** Town of Spruce Pine, Mitchell County
- **Action 1.3.** - Increase residential space downtown. Very few people actually live in the core of downtown. If there were more people living there, there would be an increased need for businesses to stay open later and bring more people to downtown.
  - **Lead:** Town of Spruce Pine
  - **Support:** “Example” building owner/developer
- **Action 1.4.** - New Town Hall location. The existing Town Hall is a maintenance burden due to its condition and the Town has the potential to move to a location that represents the town in a better light.
  - **Lead:** Town of Spruce Pine
  - **Support:** SPMS



Figure 3 – These pictures capture several of the key focus areas for the Master Plan. From top to bottom: the site of the future Central Park and visitor center, the “burnt building,” signage, and sidewalk improvements and connectivity.

### ***GOAL 2: Transportation***

- **Action 2.1.** - Sidewalk gap fill and maintenance. There are many significant gaps in and surrounding downtown. These gaps need to be prioritized and sorted into small and large levels of investment and effort.
  - **Lead:** Town of Spruce Pine
  - **Support:** SPMS, NC DOT
- **Action 2.2.** - Greenways and Trails Plan and Map. There is an opportunity to create a trail loop around and through downtown. Additionally, the river presents a good opportunity to continue the river trail further down river to the water treatment plant.
  - **Lead:** SPMS
  - **Support:** Town of Spruce Pine
- **Action 2.3.** - Oak Street (Upper Street) Design Concept. Oak Street is in need of sidewalk rehabilitation, new crosswalks, ADA accessibility, landscaping, and sidewalk gap fill.
  - **Lead:** Town of Spruce Pine
  - **Support:** NC DOT, SPMS

### ***GOAL 3: Stormwater Management***

- **Action 3.1.** - Riverside Park installation of rain garden and wetland. Riverside Park is a great location to implement a rain garden and wetland due to its close proximity to the North Toe River. This project will result in a demonstration project for other areas of the town to follow.
  - **Lead:** SPMS
  - **Support:** Town of Spruce Pine
- **Action 3.2.** - Downtown stormwater installations. Downtown experiences large influxes of stormwater during rain storms. Strategically placed stormwater management projects throughout downtown will help manage flooding during storms.
  - **Lead:** SPMS
  - **Support:** HCCOG, US Fish and Wildlife Service Division of Water Quality

### ***GOAL 4: Marketing Spruce Pine***

- **Action 4.1** - Unified Arts and Cultural Marketing Program to develop and brand Spruce Pine to attract more visitors and potential residents. Transition from “Home of the Perfect Christmas Tree” to a new town theme.
  - **Lead:** TRAC, Penland, SPMS
  - **Support:** Volunteers
- **Action 4.2.** - Business information online assistance. Creating a larger presence of Spruce Pine businesses on the internet will make the town more visible to web browsers and possibly help bring more visitors to town.
  - **Lead:** SPMS
  - **Support:** Technical College
- **Action 4.3** – Updated Website. Updated Website that is more intuitive to navigate and presents relevant information to residents and visitors.
  - **Lead:** SPMS, Town of Spruce Pine

- **Support:** Mitchell County Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development Council

### ***GOAL 5: Signage***

- **Action 5.1.** - Implement Signage Improvement Program. Better and more signs are needed leading into and around town.
  - **Lead:** SPMS
  - **Support:** Penland
- **Action 5.2:** - Wayfinding Signage Plan. Develop plan for placement and design of artistically constructed signs and maps to direct people to town and important destinations.
  - **Lead:** SPMS Design Team
  - **Support:** TRAC

### ***GOAL 6: Amenities, Beautification, and Recreation***

- **Action 6.1.** - Complete Central Park and Visitors Center. The completion of the park will help draw more people in to town. This is the first project that must be focused on completing before others, and will potentially catalyze other projects.
  - **Lead:** SPMS
  - **Support:** Town of Spruce Pine
- **Action 6.2.** - Improved and New Lighting. Better lighting needs to be provided throughout the town, especially at the entrances to the town from the highways.
  - **Lead:** Town of Spruce Pine
- **Action 6.3.** - Public Art Plan. Incorporate local artists work around the town for sale or as permanent installations to add to the character of the town and display the artistic identity of the region.
  - **Lead:** Penland
  - **Support:** SPMS, TRAC
- **Action 6.4.** - CSX Depot. The Depot, which sits in the middle of town, is in need of paint, at the least. The current state of the depot detracts from the aesthetics of the town.
  - **Lead:** Town of Spruce Pine, SPMS
  - **Support:** CSX

### ***GOAL 7: Land Use and Design***

- **Action 7.1.** - Zoning Recommendations Presentation. Create a presentation of the zoning concepts in the Master Plan and deliver to Town Council before creating draft text amendments.
  - **Lead:** SPMS
  - **Support:** Town of Spruce Pine
- **Action 7.2.** - Zoning Text Amendment. Develop, vet and adopt specific text amendments to the zoning ordinance for downtown.
  - **Lead:** SPMS
  - **Support:** Town of Spruce Pine

## **5. Appendix**

Appendix A: Implementation Action Plan Tables

Appendix B: List of workshop participants

Appendix C: Powerpoint presentation slides – Introduction, Overview, Place-making, Case Studies, and Open House

Appendix D: Potential Funding Sources