

1 Executive Summary

1.1 Background and Overview

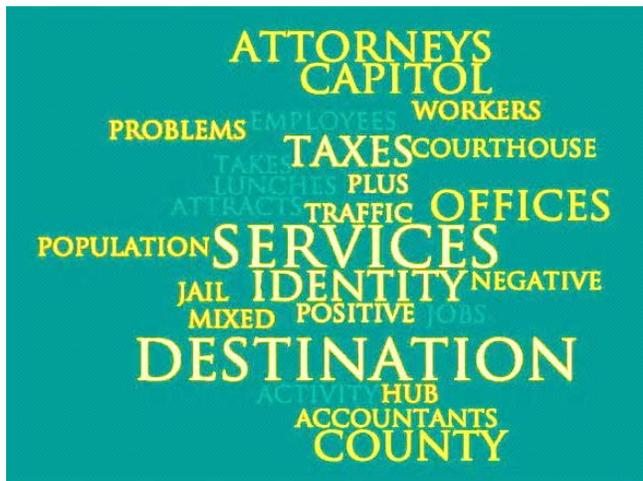
The Town of Newton adopted its first vision plan, the Town of Newton Urban Design Plan, in the fall of 2005. The Urban Design Plan described the vision for Newton as *“a holistic vision of a place where the people of Newton want to live, work and feel connected to; a pedestrian friendly place, which can be translated into feasible development opportunities to provide the opportunity for urban living for a variety of households, with additional services and amenities for the entire community.”*

The Urban Design Plan has served as the guiding vision document for Newton’s policies and decision making since its adoption in 2005. Implementation of the plan resulted in several measurable achievements including: the 2008 Master Plan Update; the 2009 Circulation Plan Element; designation of five redevelopment areas and a large rehabilitation area; creation of several redevelopment plans; construction of Thorlabs, Inc. World Headquarters; revised land use ordinances and a Form-Based Code for the entire Town; and several development and redevelopment projects throughout the Town.

The Urban Design Plan focused on the “spine” of the Town along US Route 206 and Sparta Avenue. The Town has implemented several recommendations from the plan; however, the Town continues to face economic and development issues, primarily along Spring Street, the Town’s downtown. As a result, the Town Council and Town Manager requested this update to the Urban Design Plan to sharpen the Town’s vision for 2013 and beyond.

The vision plan utilizes strategic planning to focus the vision in a way that can be easily implemented by creating a matrix of achievable short-term and long-term goals. It is also unique in combining planning techniques with a marketing study to link the Town’s economic development with the vision. This vision plan looks at the entire Town but focuses on creating a vibrant downtown, as a means for improving the overall health of the Town.

PUBLIC INPUT: PERCEPTION OF NEWTON AS THE COUNTY SEAT



Most participants felt Newton’s position as the County Seat was generally positive for the Town but also presents challenges. They felt it provides a unique identity to the Town as the County’s “Capitol”. They noted Newton’s position as the County Seat brought numerous professionals and individuals to the Town during the week. Most participants also noted the impact of having numerous social services located in Town, along with the County Jail, and how this could be impacting people’s perception of Newton and the downtown.

In some cases, stakeholder’s felt that there are “two Newtons”, Spring Street and the rest of the Town. The perception of Spring Street is often one of a location where crime occurs, while the rest of the Town is seen as safer and family-oriented.

1.3 Marketing Plan

The Marketing Plan builds on the findings from the public involvement sessions as its foundation then brings in demographic and statistical data to determine market support for the vision goals developed through the public process. The plan reinforces market support for job growth in healthcare and social services, accommodation and food services, and arts and entertainment, supporting the vision for an arts, entertainment and dining destination. The plan finds the Town’s location as the County Seat brings 2,600 employees to the Town daily, supporting the need to promote the businesses in the area to County employees. The 5-10-20 mile radius of demand in the plan shows that within the 20 mile radius, demand exceeds supply for many retail uses, showing potential for growth in the downtown. The Retail Market Power Analysis from the plan supports the perceptions, desires and vision from the public involvement sessions and stakeholder interviews. Hobby stores, books stores and music stores along with clothing and accessories stores such as men’s and ladies clothing and jewelry stores all have high demand versus supply regarding consumer spending.

The Marketing Plan recommendations are tied directly into the Vision Implementation Matrixes and support the overall Strategic Plan by providing demographic and statistical support for the findings of the public involvement sessions.

1.4 The Strategic Vision

The Strategic Vision builds on the existing vision of the Town from the Urban Design Plan. It describes the Town as a compact “urban” Town which has a unique sense of place that attracts people not just to visit, but to live and work as well. The community envisioned by the Urban Design plan is a tight knit mixed-use Town with the potential to encompass a wide variety of residential and commercial uses. The Strategic Vision plan focuses on the center of the Town, as the heart of the Town that provides life and vibrancy to the Town as a whole. When the center of the Town is not doing well, the whole Town suffers. The Strategic Vision for the Town envisions what the downtown can be: “Sussex County’s Downtown: a charming, unique place to live and visit that is compact, attractive and offers arts, entertainment, dining, shopping and activities for all ages.” The Strategic Vision is a focused look at the heart of the downtown, what it is today, what it can be tomorrow and how to get there.

1.5 Recommendations and Conclusions

The marketing plan results and the public process findings were filtered into three comprehensive goals for implementing the Strategic Vision. Goal 1 is to improve the conditions of hardscape and buildings in the downtown. The actions to reach this goal include aggressive code enforcement, addressing overcrowding and single room occupancy hotels, studying redevelopment designations in the area and maintaining and improving hardscape, landscaping and the public space. Goal 2 is to create a vibrant downtown. The recommendations to achieve Goal 2 include: studying the feasibility of a Special Improvement District (SID), supporting the existing merchants’ group, implementing a marketing campaign for the Town, identifying public/private partnerships for economic development, and improving the arts, entertainment and cultural experiences in the Town. Goal 3 is to improve the quality of life in the downtown. Recommendations to implement Goal 3 include: increasing police and security presence; advertising the presence of existing security cameras and installing speakers and playing music in the downtown. Each goal and the actions that support it are included in an implementation matrix which contains what will be done, by whom, when, what resources are needed, and what additional steps will need to be taken.

The Urban Design Plan has provided a solid vision for the Town and remains a strong foundation for the Town's overall growth and development. This Strategic Vision Plan focuses on the heart of the Town, Newton's downtown area, which is centered on Spring Street. The community's perception of the Town is based on the vitality of Spring Street and the overall health, economic vitality and sense of place hinges on Spring Street. Therefore, the Strategic Vision Plan provides a vision for a safe, vibrant and attractive downtown that will breathe life and vitality into the Town as a whole.