



MORGANTON  
THE MASTER PLAN



1861-1865



**D**owntown is the economic, historic and cultural heart of Morganton. It is the place that identifies us as a community to the outside world—the site where we gather for festivals, concerts and other cultural events, the center for successful, community-based businesses, and the home of our local governments and civic institutions. Downtown is the single most important place in our community, past and future.

A healthy, growing downtown does not happen by chance. One does not have to travel far from Morganton to find communities with downtowns that are depressed and run down. We know that the image, quality of life, and economic development opportunities of an entire community are profoundly affected by the condition of the downtown core.

Century-old downtown areas must compete against the newest fashions in retail, office and transportation development in an ever-changing world. Like any successful business, we must constantly seek to reinvent our product to respond to changing times and technologies. That is why, in Spring 1996, the Morganton City Council appointed a Downtown Advisory Committee and engaged Urban Strategies to lead a “visioning” process for our downtown. Together, we have created a Master Plan For Downtown Morganton that will keep our community strong and healthy well into the 21st Century.

After 18 months of work, hundreds of volunteer hours contributed by members of the Downtown Advisory Committee, and input from thousands of local residents, the Master Plan presents our vision and promise for the future of Downtown Morganton. This marks a beginning, not an end, and an ongoing process — not a final product.

The work of building a downtown that will be strong and successful in 2010 is really just beginning. New ideas, new strategies, new businesses, and new investments are needed to fulfill our vision for downtown’s future. We encourage your participation and support as we move ahead.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Mel L. Cohen".

Mel L. Cohen, Mayor

# MORGAN

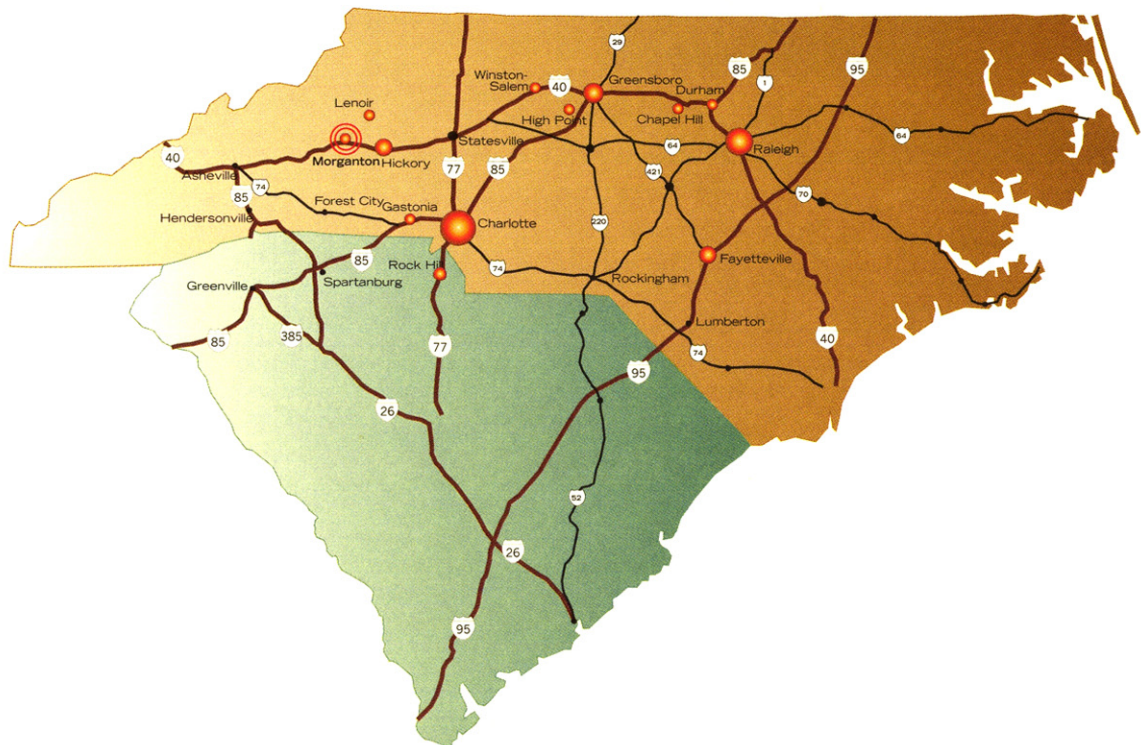


## PAST AND PRESENT

A charming and historic city of 16,000 residents, Morganton is located in the rolling foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains in North Carolina's western Piedmont region. It was here, in 1784, that Morganton was designated as the site for the first courthouse serving the western part of the state. During the 19th Century, Morganton continued to grow in importance—as the county seat and home to summer sessions of the State Legislature.

Today, Morganton is the urban center of Burke County (population 80,000), part of North Carolina's fifth-largest metropolitan area (population 310,000), and one of the state's leading economic centers. Furniture manufacturing is the flagship of a diverse industrial base; Burke County is home to such world-renowned companies as Drexel Heritage and Henredon.

Morganton continues to be an important regional center for state government. The beautiful and historic State Campus is home to Broughton Hospital, Western Carolina Center, North Carolina School For The Deaf, and Western Piedmont Community College. The City of Morganton's expanding Catawba River Greenway is a national model for the protection and public enjoyment of natural resources in an urban environment.



# MORGANTON

## THE DOWNTOWN

The foremost business, governmental, historic and cultural center of Burke County, Downtown Morganton serves several adjoining counties as well. More than 3,300 jobs are located downtown, making it by far the area's largest diversified employment center. According to a study by the N.C. Department of Transportation, Downtown Morganton accounts for 60 percent of all office jobs located in the area. The downtown area also retains a strong, competitive retail core, boasting the largest concentration of high quality apparel and other specialty stores in the region.

Downtown Morganton's importance to the community, though, transcends its economic role. Residents share a deep affection and pride for the history, symbols and places of downtown that largely define this special community. The beautifully restored Old Burke County Courthouse, located in a square at the center of downtown, is the icon of Morganton's civic identity and community pride. Each fall, the Historic Morganton Festival attracts more than 50,000 people to share in the history, arts, music and food of Downtown Morganton.

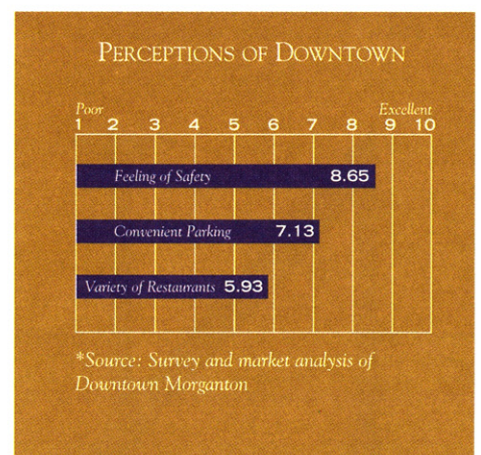
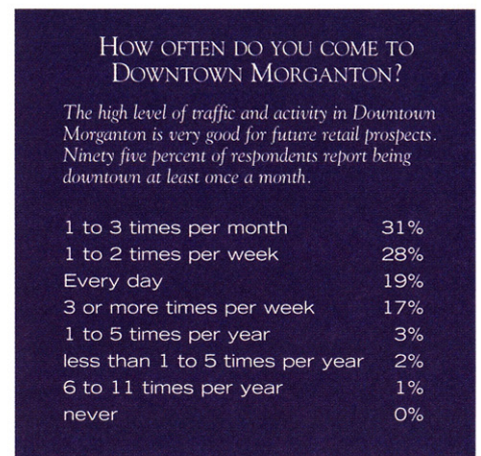
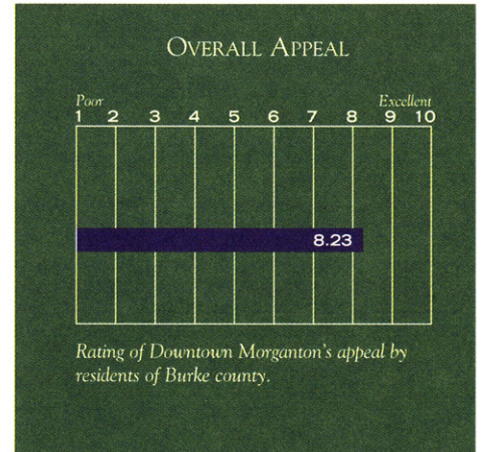
Unlike downtown areas elsewhere, Downtown Morganton is a place where people can be seen—day and night—walking, dining, shopping, or attending a movie. People feel safe here; they enjoy being pedestrians in this small town urban environment, and they long for additional activities that will enhance the Downtown Morganton experience.

## THE VISION

For years, Downtown Morganton has been the hub of economic and community life for the region. Even so, community leaders felt the downtown area had the potential to be a more vital, vibrant center of community life.

To explore that untapped potential, the Morganton City Council appointed a Downtown Advisory Committee during the spring of 1996 and engaged the services of a consulting firm, Urban Strategies, to lead a "visioning" process for Downtown Morganton. Over a period of 18 months, some 350 members of the Morganton community were involved in research, discussion, and planning aimed at developing a strategic plan for the downtown area's future.

A summary of their findings and conclusions—indeed, their vision for Downtown Morganton—follows.



# I D E N T I F Y I N G

*Principal Values and Goals*

*To develop a Master Plan For Downtown Morganton, the community first had to define its values. What characteristics of Morganton's downtown are important, unique, and cherished? What conditions are vital to the health of businesses? What qualities are essential to a strong, distinctive market position? These "Morganton Principles" were designed to guide decision-making about the future of downtown:*

Photo by J. Randall Cotton



- A pedestrian environment that is friendly and inviting should be a distinguishing characteristic. Trees should be a primary element of the streetscape.
- To help define its character and image, Downtown Morganton should emphasize and dramatize its most prominent structures, landmarks, and vistas.
- The river, with both its beauty and the recreational opportunities it provides, should be linked to Downtown Morganton and in-town neighborhoods.
- Personality is what makes cities memorable. Progress means not making our downtown like others, but enhancing the themes that make ours unique.
- Distinctive entrances into downtown and high-quality signage should give Downtown Morganton a strong, impressive identity.
- All downtown properties should be maintained in an attractive and professional manner. Design excellence will be a hallmark of all new development.
- Sufficient parking is essential for a strong business climate. New plans and development standards will ensure attractive, well-maintained parking.
- As Burke County's office center, Downtown Morganton should aggressively look for opportunities to expand governmental and private office facilities.
- A strong, competitive retail position should be built around a concentrated mix of high-quality specialty stores and restaurants that are clustered to create a mutually enhancing synergy.
- To strengthen the downtown area's economic base, Morganton should encourage in-town residential development in the central city.
- Public investments must be planned and coordinated to create synergistic links within downtown, and between downtown and the rest of the city.
- Because history forms the special character of downtown, Morganton should protect, preserve, and carefully redevelop the buildings and streetscapes that tell its story.



# UNDER *the Marketplace* STANDING

To create the Master Plan, it was important first to understand the competitive marketplace, and then to define desired and achievable market positions. Market research for the visioning process included demographic and retail analyses, a psychographic study of community preferences, and surveys of downtown customers, employees, and businesses. A glimpse of the research is presented below. Copies of the entire market research study are available on request.

Downtown Morganton is the heart of a large and rapidly growing trade area. Within Morganton's primary retail trade area live approximately 130,000 consumers, a figure which is growing at a rapidly accelerating pace. Between 1989 and 1996, per capita income within the trade area grew by 31.6%. Households with incomes in excess of \$50,000 per year are the fastest growing segment of the population.

### A Dining, Entertainment and Retail Center.

How can Downtown Morganton capture existing retail expenditures by local residents who are presently spending their money outside the community? To find out, Morganton undertook a comprehensive market analysis which identified targeted uses for the downtown area. As a result, the city has chosen a specific retail market niche for downtown: In the future, Downtown Morganton will be a regional center for high-quality apparel and specialty retail, fine dining, and entertainment. Specific, targeted businesses include:

Restaurants	Hobby, Toys, Games
Theaters and other entertainment	Camera and Photo Supply
Apparel	Gift, Novelty and Souvenir
Shoes	Sporting and Bicycles
Books	Drug and Proprietary

**An Office Center.** Downtown Morganton is the foremost office center in Burke County. A primary goal of the master plan is to ensure that Downtown Morganton maintains its preeminent position and that it continues to grow as an office center. Because parking is a fundamental need of office users, a parking master plan has been developed to guide future investments. Additional restaurants, meeting facilities, retail and pedestrian improvements are also planned to complement the office environment.

**A Residential Center.** In order to achieve around-the-clock vitality, Downtown Morganton will grow as a residential center, with townhouses, residences located over retail in historic buildings, and residential conversions of older industrial and commercial buildings. Residents will walk to shop, to dine, or to a movie. Residential units in the Downtown area are in high demand. Potential sites for residential development are identified and the community will play an active role in supporting residential development.

### TRADE AREA SUMMARY

1990 Population	116,850
1996 Population	127,274
2001 Population (Projected)	130,283
Percent Increase '89-'96	6.4%
1989 Per Capita Income	\$11,291
1996 Per Capita Income	\$14,861
Percent Increase	31.6%
1989 Family Income > \$50,000	16.3%
1996 Family Income > \$50,000	30.2%

### TRADE AREA MAP



### WHAT ACTIVITIES BRING YOU TO DOWNTOWN MORGANTON?

Banking	38%
Festivals and Special Events	30%
Shopping	23%
Personal services (barber, dry clean, etc.)	18%
Restaurants	17%
Movies and Entertainment	13%
Drive-through/Other	12%
Leisure (Rec. Center, walking, etc.)	9%
Job	6%
Professional Services (attorney, etc.)	5%
Church	4%
Government Services	4%

# *a Vision* DEFINING *Morganton*

*In the future, Downtown Morganton will be the community's living room—a gathering spot and a common civic space which attracts people from across Morganton, Burke County and the region with its shopping, entertainment, restaurants, recreation, and culture. More than ever, Downtown Morganton will be a place for meeting friends, achieving and celebrating success in business, discussing the day's events, and being part of community life. Here, Morganton's people will nurture and affirm a sense of community, shared hopes and history, collective accomplishments and civic pride.*

**An Accessible Center.** Downtown Morganton will be the community's most accessible business center, easily accessed from all parts of the city and surrounding vicinity, with ample, attractive parking areas serving all of the downtown's activity centers.

**A Pedestrian-Friendly Center.** Downtown Morganton will become a vibrant pedestrian environment. Wide, shaded walkways, busy sidewalk cafes, and inviting store windows will attract people and activity, both day and night.

**A Symbolic Center.** The Courthouse Square will be enhanced as the symbolic center of the history, culture, economy, and identity of Morganton and Burke County. Not only will the Square be a source of community pride for residents, but it also will be a major focal point for visitor activities.

**An Economic Center.** Downtown Morganton will be strategically positioned as Burke County's foremost office market, the area's premier center for high-quality speciality retail shops and restaurants, a growing residential market, and a center for arts, cultural, and visitors activities.

**An Historic Center.** Downtown Morganton will be recognized for its historic character, highlighted by the Courthouse Square, historic signage and lighting, carefully restored buildings and neighborhoods, and new buildings designed with sensitivity to the historic environment.

**A Green Center.** Downtown Morganton will be distinctive for its abundantly landscaped entries, its green Courthouse Square, and other smaller green spaces, and for the greenway system that links Downtown Morganton to the natural beauty and recreational amenities of the Catawba River.

Photo by John S. Payne





## Morganton City Council

Mel L. Cohen, Mayor  
Dr. Alfred Hamer,  
Mayor Pro Tem  
Bob Choate

Carl Evans  
Steve Settlemyer  
Larry Whisnaut  
Sally Sandy, City Manager

## Downtown Morganton Advisory Committee

Bill Allman  
Lee Anderson  
Bryan Black  
Tom Blanton  
Laurie Bourgerie  
J. Hartley Bowen, MD  
John Cantrell  
Mike Cronk  
Don Danford  
Bobby Ervin  
Clark Erwin  
Clyde Eskridge  
Charles M. Fulenwider  
Sharon Jablonski

Mike Jackson  
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Nancy Lindquist  
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Kim Mauney  
Jerry Norvell  
James F. Owens  
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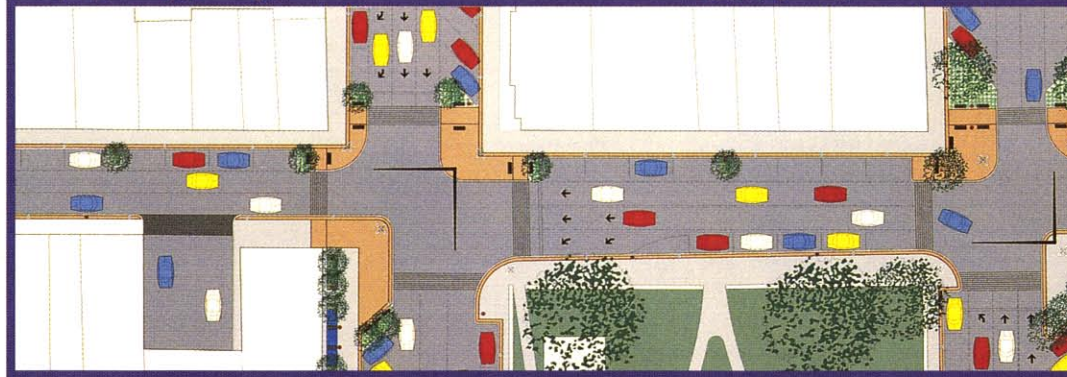
# MORGANTON

## THE MASTER PLAN

The Master Plan for Downtown Morganton is based on a citizen-inspired vision for this historic city. As illustrated here, the Master Plan is a work in progress—and in preservation. It involves not simply improving our community, but also protecting and perpetuating the best of its history and heritage. This exhibit details some of the initiatives aimed at enhancing Downtown Morganton as a center of commerce and community.

### An Accessible Center

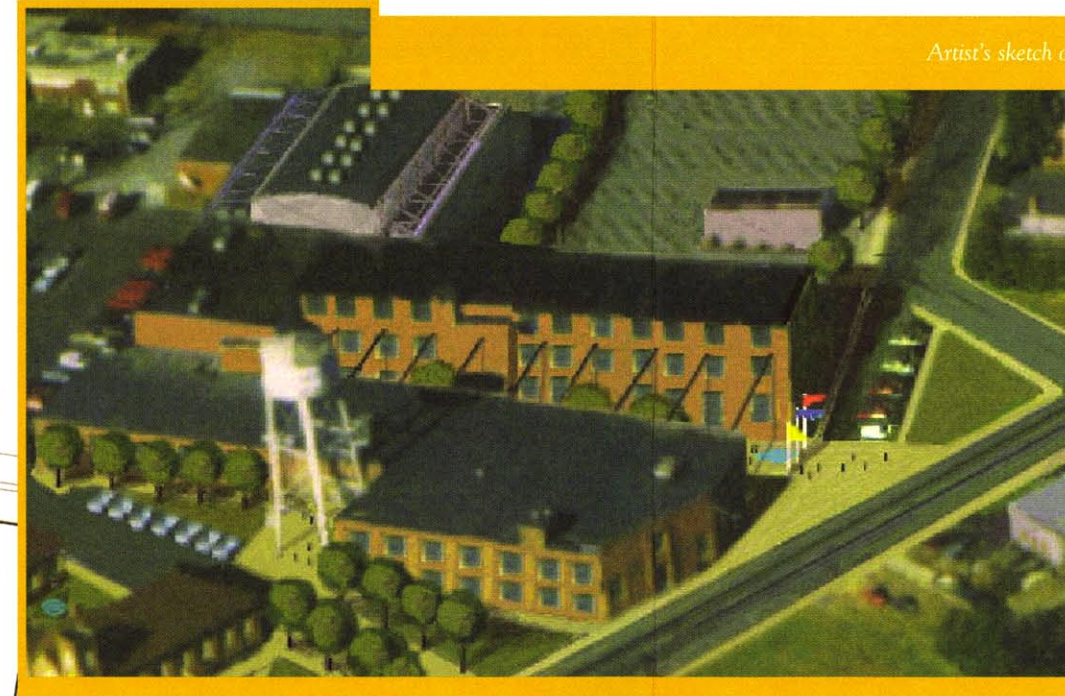
In the future, it will be easy for visitors and members of the community to come into Downtown Morganton. Expanded, well-lit and landscaped public parking (shown on the map below) will be available throughout downtown to meet the needs of new businesses, employees, and customers. A new network of sidewalks will make it easier than ever to walk from parking lots to scores of downtown destinations.



Additional parking and new sidewalks enhance the accessibility of downtown Morganton. Shown above, improvements on Union Street.

### An Economic Center

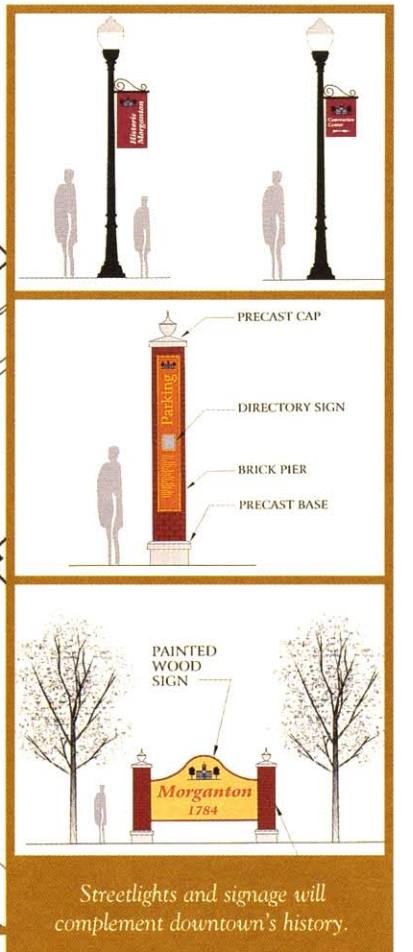
Downtown Morganton offers abundant opportunity for development, redevelopment and, ultimately, a vibrant and diverse economic base. An entertainment complex featuring a modern multi-screen theater, restaurants, and small retail shops is planned at the northeast corner of the Square. One block from Courthouse Square, the historic Morganton Manufacturing and Trading Co. building will be transformed into an expanded City Hall and sophisticated residences featuring balconies and rooftop decks. The southwest corner of Sterling and Meeting Streets is also a prime site for new development. One possibility is an "Inn on the Square" that would allow visitors to enjoy, day and night, the hospitality of Downtown Morganton. Another dramatic opportunity exists on the south side of Courthouse Square. There, a proposed "Morgan Center" complex could provide space to house the Chamber of Commerce, arts and community organizations, and a host of new or expanding downtown businesses.



The historic Morganton Manufacturing and Trading Co. will once again be an economic catalyst for downtown.

### An Historic Center

Enhancing and preserving Downtown Morganton's historic architecture is a primary element of the master plan. Wherever possible, building facades will be restored or otherwise improved. New signage and lighting, designed to accent Downtown Morganton's distinguished historic character, will offer direction and welcome to visitors.



Streetlights and signage will complement downtown's history.



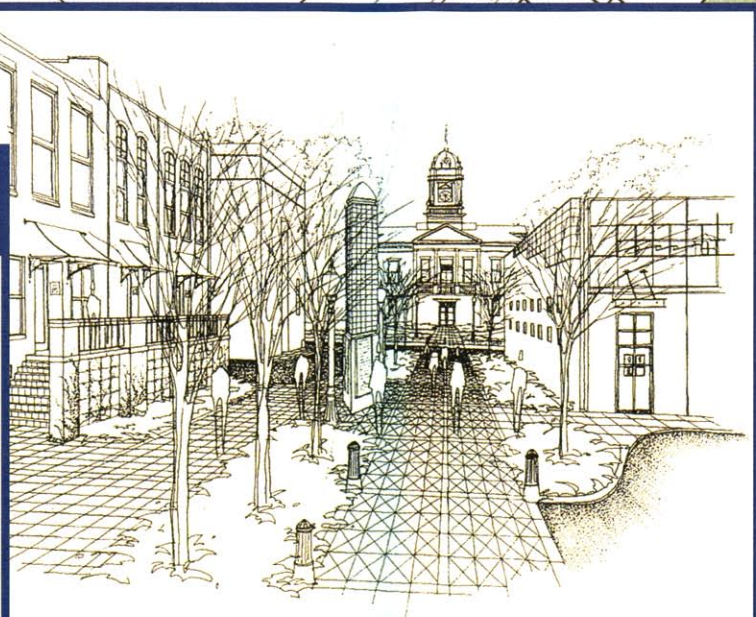
Design and financial assistance will be offered to encourage restoration of historic facades.

### A Symbolic Center

Courthouse Square, the setting for Morganton's classical revival-style courthouse, is the symbolic center of Downtown Morganton. As such, it forms the centerpiece of the Master Plan. Built in 1837, this historic structure and its surrounding green will again become the center of community life, surrounded by a dynamic mix of new offices, shops, restaurants, and entertainment opportunities. Throughout the year, citizens will gather here to enjoy community events, celebrate national holidays, and savor the experience of living in a friendly, harmonious community.

### A Pedestrian Center

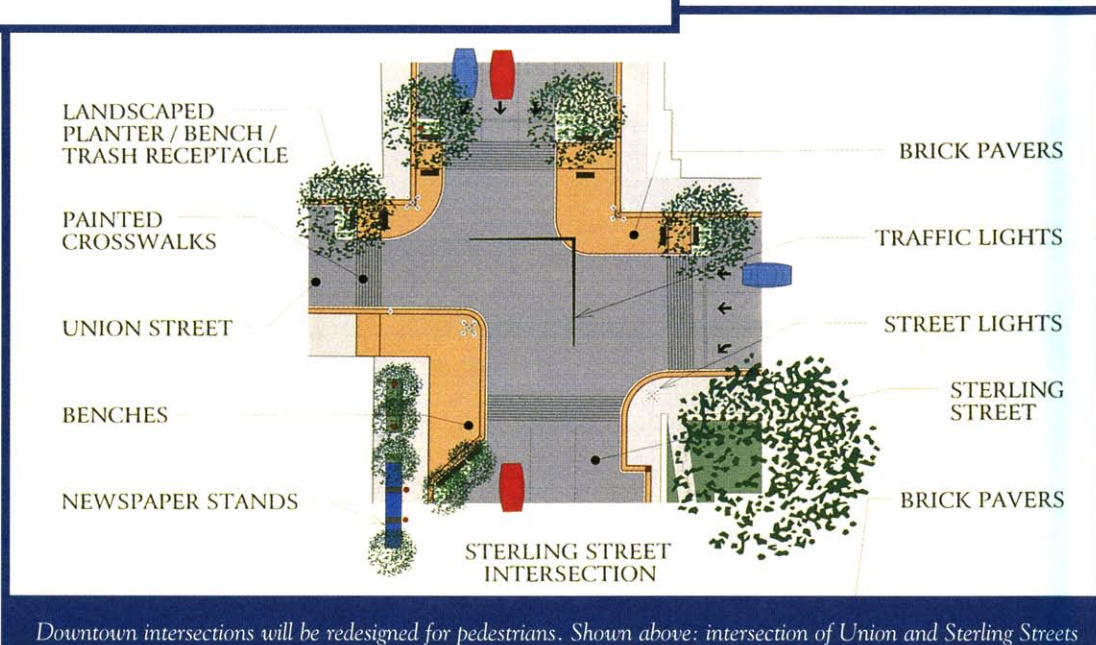
More than ever, getting around downtown will be like a walk in the park. Wider sidewalks, new landscaping, and additional trees will create a more gracious and appealing Courthouse Square. Some streets will be narrowed to create a gracious "pedestrian promenade" with sidewalk cafes and expanded on-street parking. Alleyways will be transformed into special spaces with small shops and kiosks to draw pedestrians. These improvements, designed to enhance downtown as a pedestrian space, will be carried out in several phases.



Back alleys become inviting pedestrian spaces. Shown above, pedestrian way from City parking to Sterling Street.

### A Green Center

Most people think of Downtown Morganton as a business center. In the future, they'll also think of it as a place of uncommon green ambience, connected to and reflecting the natural beauty of the surrounding mountains and rivers. Soon, the lower end of Courthouse Square will become the Courthouse Green, a terraced lawn suitable for children at play, lunchtime concerts, and lively community festivals. Throughout downtown, landscaping will be upgraded and enhanced. New, protected greenways also have been proposed to link Downtown Morganton to nearby neighborhoods and to the Catawba River—one of Morganton's greatest natural resources.



Downtown intersections will be redesigned for pedestrians. Shown above, intersection of Union and Sterling Streets.