



THE CLAY CHRISTENSEN GROUP

PRODUCTIVE MEETINGS WITH REAL RESULTS

Town of Montross

Follow-Up Planning Project

Purpose: Build on Vision by looking at recent history, current realities and strategic opportunities

Process: Interviews with Key Leaders and Historic District Assessment

Key Economic Assets

- Natural Environment
- Historical connections
- Shopping/ Retail/Restaurant/ Enterprise Zone
- Westmoreland County Seat

Key Current Issues and Challenges

- Speed of drive through traffic/ Overall walkability
- Appearance of gateways, vacant buildings, inactivity
- Youth Flight/ Absence of Young Adults in leadership
- Question on Blight Status/ CDBG Funding

Historic District Assessment

- Branding Opportunity
- Revitalization Incentives

Infrastructure Opportunities

- Aesthetics—Lighting, Façade Improvements, Underground Wires, Green Space
- Pedestrian Experience—Traffic Calming, Cross Walks, Sidewalks,
- Access—Gateways/ Wayfinding

Other Potential Projects

- History
- Culture
- Shops
- Lodging
- Employment
- Gathering and Green

Critical to the Process

- Regional Engagement
- Private Investors

Guiding Recommendations for Moving Forward

- Finalize a Master Plan
- Go for a Village Feel—Preservation and New Construction
- Establish Guidelines for a Historic District
- Make DT Montross a real destination in the Northern Neck ;Market the area as if it were one facility; Create more eventfulness
- Pursue other funding outside of CDBG—Tea 21, RD, VHDA, VDCR

Vision Workshop and Draft Statement

What do we want to see in place in 2015?

Destination Driven, Unique Restaurants and Retail	Entertainment and Cultural Event Center	Planned Village Atmosphere	Outdoor Family Recreation	Montross Overnight Hospitality	Local Professional Sector	Environmentally Responsive Community
Small businesses that compliment each other (2) Specialty shops (2) Upscale restaurant Good shopping and restaurants (2) Antique Mall	Performing Arts Center (2) Cultural Center (historic, artistic) Historical complex Event center Prominent Visitor Center(2) Arts Festival	General colonial theme to the town Uniform look (brick walks, street lamps (4) Tree lined streets/ landscaping (2) Outdoor courtyard/ atmosphere Traffic pattern/ light control Renovated buildings Planned paved parking Quaint, rustic architecture (2)	Pedestrian and Bike Friendly Playground/ Park Center(2) Urban park/ skateboard Recreation Center (2) Nature/ Youth/ Family activities (3)	Overnight accommodations for tourist group attraction Overnight accommodations— Attract those that are compatible with the downtown's image	Expansion of Medical Health Facilities / Jobs Other Professional Services	Ergonomic community (green) Environmental role model

Draft Vision Statement

Downtown Montross is committed to becoming a unique, destination driven restaurant, retail and cultural center for the Northern Neck Region.

Both visitors and residents will experience a planned, environmentally-responsive village atmosphere, complete with outdoor family recreation, entertainment options, local professional services and Montross overnight hospitality.

Town of Montross: Downtown Development

**Opportunities, Challenges,
Next Steps**

June 2009

The Clay Christensen Group LLC...
Productive Meetings with Real
Results

Town of Montross: Downtown Development Opportunities, Challenges, Next Steps

Overview

The purpose of this project was to examine key areas of interest relevant to the Town of Montross, its declining downtown area and its recent Visioning Process to revitalize and strengthen its business climate.

The intention of this report is to clarify areas of opportunity and concern that would be relevant to the development of a full Master Plan and/or Economic Restructuring Plan.

The Information was gathered over a one month period in the Spring 2009 timeframe, primarily through interviews conducted by Bob Adams and Becky Clay Christensen. Additional support in analyzing the opportunities for a historic district designation was supplied by Ashley Neville, an historic preservation consultant.

In reviewing this report, the Management Team should understand that much of the information included is coming from its own key leaders and residents.

Finally, our Team has reserved one section of this report for our own recommendations for the Town as it moves forward. These comments are not absolute but to be taken from the perspective of our experience with other small towns and their commercial corridors.

Key Economic Assets

By virtue of its central location in the area and its traditional role, Montross is positioned to draw people into the downtown to revive its economy and create a vibrant, village center feel. The Northern Neck's environmental resources, and colonial history, combined with the traffic generating uses in the Town, create economic development opportunity which can capture tourism markets from a broad geographic footprint as well as retail buying power from the immediate area.

- Environmental and Recreational Attractions-- The Northern Neck has significant natural resources that already draw visitors who are seeking both passive and active recreation. From bird watching to biking, the parks and nature preserves in the area attract tourists from a large region including population centers in Washington/Baltimore, Richmond, and Hampton Roads.

- History -- Montross owns a piece of important American history. Recent collaborative conversations around regional tourism marketing are exciting foundations for creating a brand niche for the entire area—a brand that would draw the destination traveler. This is multiplied when adding in the specialty travelers interested in genealogy, wine, art and environmental experiences.
- Shopping, restaurant, small business --
 - Beyond tourism, Montross daily draws steady reliable traffic counts from travelers commuting through the region--- for business or pleasure. In close proximity to the Washington, D.C. area, anyone going anywhere in the Northern Neck must wind through the downtown area.
 - Westmoreland County residents that want to attend to in-person business must come into the downtown in order to visit the County office location. In addition, the County is the town's largest employer. Downtown Montross is the County's seat of government and the Town of Montross also maintains a Town Hall in the downtown. A regional library is also housed in the downtown.

Positioning for future development, the County has extended its Enterprise Zone boundary into the Montross downtown corridor which is also an Economic Development District.

Key Current Issues and Challenges

There are several important physical challenges that must be overcome in the downtown area:

- Speed of traffic

For thousands of people everyday, coming to Montross is a “drive through” rather than a “stop and experience”.

- Gateways

There are no clear gateways into the downtown area that define the space clearly and communicate a message to the visitor that they have arrived at the center of the “village”

- Blight

While there are relatively few buildings in the downtown area that are “blighted” in the traditional definition, there are significant vacancies and the need for a

unified theme in terms of façade design. Unfortunately, the absence of true blight may be an impediment to obtaining a Community Development Block Grant.

- Pedestrian unfriendly

With the speed of traffic through the center of Town – combined with the sharp curve which limits line of site, pedestrians are at a disadvantage without clearly demarcated or controlled crosswalks. Sidewalks are deteriorated and not conducive to pedestrian movement in some areas. crossings

- Business decline

Some businesses are in decline, others have been lost in just recent years. This is a long term trend that has been exacerbated by current economic conditions. And although there are some vibrant key anchor stores, the vacant buildings and lots at the gateways and within the corridor are striking.

- Youth flight/ Young Adult Engagement

Beyond the infrastructure and business, Montross seems to have the same issues with its residents. Youth are leaving after high school. Concerns about school performance may discourage families from locating in the area. With the loss of young people, current residents wonder about whether the leadership of the future—civic and business—can energize and sustain a revitalization effort.

Historic District Assessment

The opportunity for the creation of an historic district in the Courthouse area is one that the Town should definitely pursue. A district not only enhances the branding of the community as a “village” with deep roots and historic traditions, but also creates the potential to raise additional equity investment in property rehabilitation through the use of Federal and State Historic Tax Credits. The attached letter from Ashley Neville outlines these benefits in more detail.

Where the Community Leadership Sees Infrastructure Opportunities:

People in Montross have a range of ideas about how the downtown space can be made more attractive and appealing. These ideas fall into several broad categories and will form the key elements of a new physical Master Plan for the area. The people of Montross are friendly and they want their downtown to reflect that.

Aesthetics: Improved lighting, façade design and renovation, coordinated street furnishings and green spaces will all contribute to improving the appearance and usability of the area.

Pedestrian Use: Improved sidewalks that are safe and inviting, including the use of sidewalk space by vendors and restaurants; traffic calming techniques – there are a variety of options for slowing traffic that do not include stop lights. For example, changes in the street surface at crosswalks, bump outs for plantings, parking patterns and signage can all serve this purpose.

Access: Changes are needed that will improve and simplify the access that visitors have to the center of the “Village”. These include clearer “gateways “ that are inviting; signage and “wayfinding” that can aid both the car driver and pedestrians in finding destinations, off street parking that can support the growth of new retail, dining and entertainment businesses.

Where Community Leadership sees Potential Projects

Revitalization often breaks down to specific project ideas – that fit into an overall vision framework. Montross and its downtown have a variety of project theme areas that support economic renewal, physical transformation and a stronger community. Project ideas include:

- History—Important to preserve the remaining historic elements within the town rehabilitating structures with strong architectural integrity and link to the past (such as the Coca Cola Building, Old Jail, Blue and Gray, Courthouse Square). With the recent expansion of geneology research space outside of the museum, the town may realize even greater tourism potential.
- Culture—making Montross a stronger destination with ongoing activities like a Farmers Market, Virginia’s Finest Shop, Artist Studios. This gives both a regional flavor to Montross, but added reason to stop and spend time & money.
- Shops—providing diverse, compatible commerce opportunities – that support each other and market downtown Montross – as its own “facility” with unique clothing, entertainment and dining options.
- Lodging—extending Montross hospitality into an overnight experience with **the restoration of the Inn**, B & B development and a hotel in the Town or close by.

Overnight lodgers are more likely to spend money food, supplies, souvenirs and services.

- Employment—strengthening the economy with jobs and entrepreneurial opportunity that engages retirees, young adults and workers who are now driving away from Montross to earn a living. Increased employment will build the spending power within the community and provide more sustainability options for the small businesses.
- Gathering and Green—connecting people and nature to bring a vibrant, town center and regional experience that people will drive to and stay to enjoy (music, parks, crafts or local produce). The Courthouse Square area is particularly conducive to a green destination that could be extended throughout the downtown with trees, plantings, bench seating and space for children to play.

Critical to the Process

Ideas for re-building Downtown are plentiful from committed key leaders and stakeholders in Montross. What they also recognize, however is the need for larger scale buy-in from key public investors and private citizens in the region who have already shown a financial commitment and belief in the Town.

Also critical will be for Montross to continue its regional engagement in tourism attraction--- a move that greatly increases the scale of potential attraction of destination tourists. Appealing to the Northern Neck tourist to visit Montross as part of an overall vacation experience in the region is far superior to Montross by itself trying to attract tourists to its historic buildings and artifacts.

Finally, recognizing that a town of 300 plus is limited in its own economic viability by scale, the leaders of Montross will do well to involve and inspire the additional 600 to 1,000 residents in the immediate region. In fact, both Montross and Westmoreland County need a shared sense of commitment and value in the re-establishment of Downtown as the commercial/ social/ historic hub of the area.

Guiding Recommendations for Moving Forward

- Finalize a Master Plan that creates a common design theme and conceptual framework for downtown development and infrastructure improvements.

- Preserve older structures and use care in the design of new structures to ensure that they contribute to the “village” feel that residents want
- Establish design guidelines for the historic district
- Existing businesses need to band together to create a constant eventfulness spirit in Montross. Make it a real destination in the Northern Neck.
- Market the area as if it were one facility. Market throughout a drive-time region of 20-30 minutes.
- Pursue other funding options for revitalization beyond CDBG (Montross may be “too small” and not blighted enough to compete successfully.) Some that need careful exploration include:
 - Tea – 21 – Kilmarnock style phased revitalization that includes bicycle transportation, pedestrian walkways and a recreation trails program.
 - Rural Development Community Facilities
 - VHDA Mixed Use/Mixed Income
 - Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation

Potential Historic District in Montross, Virginia

Montross is the county seat of Westmoreland County, which was formed in 1653 from Northumberland County with part of King George County added later. Many of the state's courthouses or courthouse villages are listed on the National Register of Historic Places because they were the governmental center of a county and frequently became commercial centers of the area also. At the present time, there is no historic district in Montross and the Westmoreland County Courthouse is not listed on the National or State registers.

In 2000-2001, an architectural survey of Westmoreland County was conducted by Kate Miller as a cost-share project undertaken by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (VDHR). The county would have contributed monetarily to this project. Several resources in Montross were included in this architectural survey and the report has a separate section on the town. The town was not recommended for a potential historic district in this survey but it was included on a list of potential historic districts compiled by VDHR about twenty years ago. Given the architectural resources that survive in Montross and their local historical importance it may be possible to have a historic district listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) and the Virginia Landmarks Register (VLR). Listing of these resources will provide tangible benefits to the property owner and to the locality. Historic tax credits that are available that are available to appropriately rehabilitated buildings that are listed as a contributing resource in a historic district are probably the most important and direct benefit of creating a historic district in Montross. More information is provided below on what the National and State registers are, how resources are listed on the NRHP and what benefits are available.

What is the National Register of Historic Places and the Virginia Landmarks Register?

The National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) is the official list of the Nation's historic structures, sites, objects, and districts worthy of preservation. The National Register is administered by the National Park Service, which is a part of the U.S. Department of the Interior. Authorized by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the NRHP is part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate and protect American's historic and archaeological resources. The State of Virginia has a corresponding list of resources that are important in Virginia history and prehistory that is known as the Virginia Landmarks Register (VLR). It also began in 1966 and is administered by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources and its regional offices. More than 80,000 historic resources of all kinds (including 700,000 contributing buildings in historic districts) are listed nationwide. The National Register of Historic Places already includes more than 2,000 properties in Virginia.

How are Properties Evaluated?

To be considered eligible, a property must meet one of the four National Register criteria for evaluation. This involves examining the property's age, integrity, and significance.

- **Age and Integrity.** Is the property old enough to be considered historic (generally at least 50 years old) and does it still look much the way it did in the past?
- **Significance.** Is the property associated with events, activities, or developments that were important in the past? With the lives of people who were important in the past? With significant architectural history, landscape history, or engineering achievements? Does it have the potential to yield information through archeological investigation about our past?

What is the process to have resources listed on the National and State Registers?

- Nominations are submitted to the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (VDHR) regional offices from property owners, historical societies, preservation organizations, governmental agencies, and other individuals or groups.
- The locality or group interested in listing a resource on the National Register and Virginia Landmark's Register should consult early with the VDHR regional office to decide what properties are potentially eligible for the NRHP and where boundaries for a historic district should be drawn. Westmorland County is located in the Tidewater Region Preservation Office, 14415 Old Courthouse Way, 2nd floor, Newport News, Virginia 23608, (757) 886-2807.
- If someone is interested in having a property listed on the National and State registers, the first step after contacting the VDHR regional office is to complete the VDHR's Preliminary Information Form (PIF). VDHR then reviews the PIF to determine if there is a possibility that the property or area will be eligible for the NRHP and VLR. Once that step is cleared, the property owner can proceed with a full nomination.
- Proposed nominations are reviewed first by VDHR's regional office before being forwarded to the National Register section at VDHR in Richmond. Assuming the staff approves of the nomination, it will be reviewed by the State Review Board and the Historic Resources Board at one of its quarterly meetings. The deadline for historic district nominations to be placed on the board's agenda is four months before the next board meeting for historic districts and generally three to three-and-a-half months for individual nominations.
- For historic districts, an architectural survey must be conducted of all resources located within the proposed boundaries of the historic district.

- Each resource is photographed and entered into the VDHR database (data sharing system or DSS) and a form is produced for each resource.
- Once a nomination is placed on the board's agenda, the VDHR notifies affected property owners and local governments and solicits public comment. For historic districts, a public meeting is held in the locality and all owners and adjacent owners are notified and invited to the meeting. If the owner (or a majority of owners for a district nomination) objects, the property cannot be listed but may be forwarded to the National Park Service for a Determination of Eligibility (DOE).
 - Complete nominations, with certifying recommendations, are submitted by the state to the National Park Service in Washington, D.C. for final review and listing by the Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places. The National park Service makes a listing decision within 45 days.
 - It generally takes about a year to have a historic district listed on the National and State registers.

Benefits and Owner Information

Listing in the National Register of Historic Places provides formal recognition of a property's historical, architectural, or archaeological significance based on national standards used by every state. Benefits include:

- Becoming part of the National Register Archives, a public, searchable database that provide of wealth of research information.
- Encouraging preservation of historic resources by documenting a property's historic significance.
- Providing opportunities for specific preservation incentives, such as:
 - Federal and state preservation grants for planning and rehabilitation
 - Federal and state historic tax credits
 - Preservation easements to nonprofit organizations
 - International Building Code fire and life safety code alternatives
 - Involvement from the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation when a federal agency project may affect the historic property

Property Rights

- National and State Register listing places no obligations on private property owners. There are no restrictions on the use, treatment, transfer, or disposition of private property.
- National Register listing does not lead to public acquisition or require public access
- A property will not be listed if, for individual properties, the owner objects, or for districts, a majority of property owner object.
- National Register listing does not automatically trigger local historic district zoning or local landmark designation.

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