

Town of Chadbourn

# **DOWNTOWN MASTER PLAN**

August 2025



PREPARED BY

**LKC**

FUNDED BY







# TABLE OF CONTENTS

History of Chadbourn + Summary of Funding **1**

Events & Festivals **2**

Existing Conditions **3**

Traffic Congestion & Need **4**

Master Plan **5**

Zoning Recommendations **14**

Renderings **15**

Conclusion & Recommendation **19**

Local Businesses Letters of Support **Appendix A**

Maps **Appendix B**

Cost Estimates **Appendix C**



# HISTORY OF CHADBOURN + SUMMARY OF FUNDING



## HISTORY OF CHADBOURN

The Town of Chadbourn, North Carolina, has deep roots in the timber and agricultural industries. From the 1880s through the mid-20th century, these industries spurred economic growth and positioned Chadbourn as a thriving rural community. In the late 1800s, Several hundreds of families relocated from the Midwest to Chadbourn after newspapers advertised the area as the “Sunny South Colony” with land for \$10 per acre. In no time the farms began producing exuberant amounts of strawberries that were shipped out all over the country via railroad, another booming industry for the Town. Manufacturing plants and textile mills eventually made their way to Chadbourn, but began moving elsewhere in the 1990s. The decline of agriculture and the loss of industrial businesses have contributed to a steady erosion of economic development and community engagement in recent decades. This downturn has been fueled by the fading of these foundational industries and ongoing shifts in rural population trends.

Once a thriving hub of agriculture and industry, the Town stood as a proud testament to hard work, self-reliance, and community prosperity. Today, it is mostly known as a place motorists pass through on their way to the coast, often remembered more for its traffic than for the charm and character it once held and has the potential to embody once again. Through the Downtown Master Plan, local leaders and consultants are working collaboratively to reimagine and reinvest in the area, focusing on economic revitalization, enhanced public spaces, and the restoration of the Town’s unique identity.

## SUMMARY OF FUNDING

The Town is seeking to revive the charm that was once held by the Strawberry Capital through the revitalization of the downtown streets and creation of space for community and economic growth. In the spring of 2023, the Town of Chadbourn partnered with LKC Engineering to pursue revitalization efforts for its downtown area. Together, they applied for funding through the USDA Rural Business Development Program. The goal of this initiative is to create a Downtown Enhancement Plan that focuses specifically on the town’s core along Brown Street (NC-410), stretching from Railroad Avenue to 2nd Avenue. This strategic plan is part of a broader effort to stimulate local economic growth, attract business, and restore vibrancy to Chadbourn’s central district.



Photo Source: Postcard, Getarchive.net



Photo Source: Archives.ncdcr.gov



Photo Source: LKC Engineering





Photo Source: North State Journal, Vol. 8, Issue 11

## STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL: A HISTORIC TRADITION

Chadbourn's signature event, the Strawberry Festival, is held annually in April and takes place in Downtown Chadbourn. This beloved festival not only brings the community together but also celebrates the town's rich agricultural legacy.

The roots of strawberry cultivation in Chadbourn date back to 1895, when Joseph Addison Brown, a visionary merchant farmer and North Carolina State Senator, helped transform timberland into fertile farmland. His efforts, along with the promotion of the region through the Wilson Publishing Company, led to the creation of the "Sunny South Colony," drawing around 160 families to the area. Despite initial setbacks, strawberry farming flourished. By 1907, Chadbourn earned the title of Klondyke Strawberry Capital of the World, having shipped a record 180 boxcar loads of strawberries in a single day—harvested by 15,000 workers from sunrise to sunset.

To honor this booming industry, the first Strawberry Festival was held on May 26, 1926, marking the 30th anniversary of local strawberry cultivation. Today, the festival continues this tradition, offering entertainment, community pride, and a nod to Chadbourn's agricultural past.

## CURRENT VENUE CHALLENGES AND PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS

At present, the main events of the Strawberry Festival are hosted at the "event field" located north of the Food Lion. However, this location is not owned by the Town, which limits control, access, and long-term planning capabilities.

To address this, the proposed Downtown Enhancement Project aims to establish a Town-owned and controlled events space within the heart of Chadbourn. This would

not only ensure a stable venue for the Strawberry Festival but also provide the infrastructure to support additional community events year-round.

## VISION FOR EXPANDED COMMUNITY EVENTS

With a dedicated public event space, Chadbourn envisions a vibrant calendar of festivities that extend beyond April, including:

- Monthly community events such as farmers markets, craft fairs, or live music nights
- A Fourth of July Parade to celebrate Independence Day
- A festive Christmas Parade to bring holiday cheer and gather local families
- Cultural and recreational programming that would encourage civic engagement and attract visitors

By investing in a permanent, flexible-use event venue, the Town of Chadbourn seeks to build on its heritage while revitalizing its downtown core with inclusive, community-driven programming throughout the year.



Photo Source: Instagram, @NCStrawberryFestival



# EXISTING CONDITIONS



The following photographs provide a snapshot of the current conditions in the downtown area. They capture existing buildings, streetscapes, infrastructure, and public spaces, offering a visual reference point for understanding the present character and layout of the Town's core. These images serve as a foundation for identifying opportunities and guiding future improvements through the Downtown Master Plan.



Arts Building, Brown Street & First Avenue



Current Street Conditions- Brown Street



Empty Storefronts on Brown Street



Our Park- Playground Area



Brown Street & First Avenue



## TRAFFIC CONGESTION & NEED



This master plan emphasizes the needs and priorities of the local community while recognizing a significant opportunity to leverage seasonal traffic from out-of-town visitors. Economic development strategies are being shaped around this dual objective.

During peak tourism months, it is estimated that approximately 27,000 vehicles pass through the area each day, highlighting a significant volume of transient activity with potential implications for local infrastructure, commerce, and long-term economic development planning. The plan outlines the need to further examine seasonal traffic patterns to understand fluctuations and identify optimal opportunities to capture this influx. Doing so could generate tangible economic benefits through enhanced local business activity, tourism services, and infrastructure investments.

Strategically, the focus is on converting through-traffic into stop-in traffic to encourage visitors to engage with the community rather than simply just pass through. This approach provides a clear pathway for targeted development, ensuring the local economy reaps the benefits of its geographic and seasonal advantages.

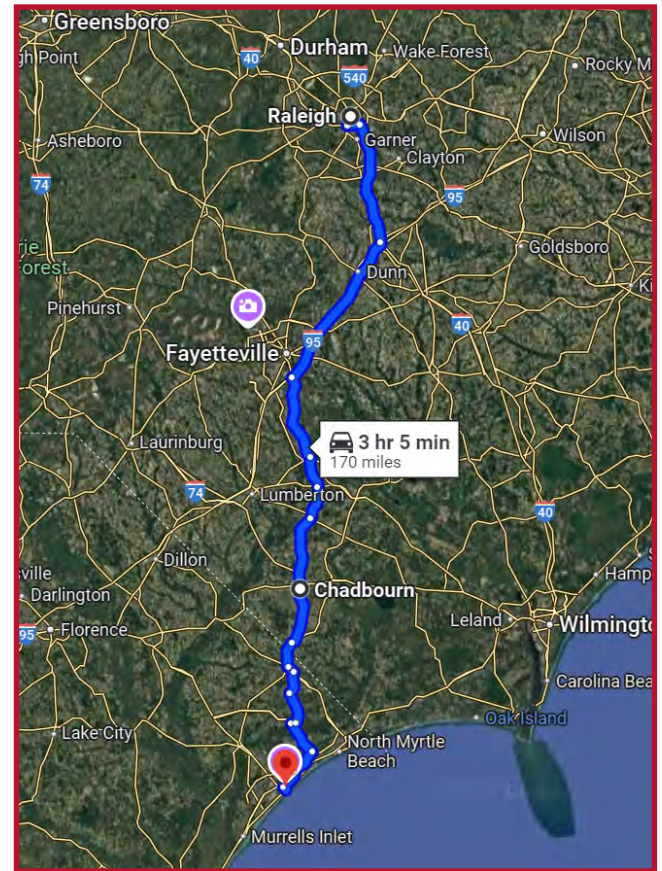


Photo Source: WECT.com



# MASTER PLAN - OVERVIEW



In response to the traffic congestion issues in downtown Chadbourn, the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) provided preliminary realignment plans for NC-410 (Brown St). This realignment is based on the concept of a couplet where southbound traffic would be re-routed to a new roadway while the existing NC-410 footprint would support northbound traffic. This project was unfortunately not included in NCDOT's 2026-2035 State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), however the master plan concept incorporates the couplet. All proposed development as shown in the master plan can be completed independently from the re-alignment of NC-410. The project team met several times throughout the life of the project and the final master plan is the culmination of efforts and input from Town staff, LKC's landscape architects, and public input sessions.

The master plan can be broken into three categories:

- **Town-Owned:** This consists of public use areas such as parks, event space, and parking lots.
- **Development Blocks:** The master plan sets aside three blocks for mixed use or commercial development with the intention of attracting private developers to support the vision of downtown Chadbourn.
- **Misc. Improvements:** Sidewalks and streetscaping – creating a more connected downtown.





REVISIONS			
SYM.	DESCRIPTION	DATE	BY
	HARDSCAPE AND PLANTING REVISION	MARCH 2025	

PRELIMINARY – DO NOT USE FOR CONSTRUCTION

LKC Engineering, PLLC  
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Engineering  
Landscape Architecture  
Surveying

LKC

CONCEPTUAL MASTER PLAN

PROPOSED ENHANCEMENT  
PLAN

DOWNTOWN ENHANCEMENT  
PLAN

CHADBOURN, NORTH CAROLINA

DATE: 7-8-25
DESIGNED: _____
DRAWN: _____
CHECKED: _____
NO. _____

L-3.0



PLAN PREPARED BY: LKC ENGINEERING, PLLC  
DATE: 7-8-25  
SCALE: 1" = 100'-0"



## MASTER PLAN

### TOWN-OWNED PROPERTY REST STOP / OPEN SPACE / PARK

Located at the northern gateway of the proposed couplet, the new Rest Stop and Open Space Park will serve as a key entry point into downtown Chadbourn. Positioned just before travelers continue southeast toward Myrtle Beach—or as one of their final stops on the journey home—this park will offer a safe, attractive, and comfortable space for visitors and residents alike to pause, refresh, and experience a first (or lasting) impression of the town.

Designed with both function and relaxation in mind, the space will feature public restrooms, shaded seating areas, and an open green lawn where visitors can stretch their legs, enjoy a moment of rest, or connect with others in a peaceful environment. Picnic tables will be placed throughout the park to encourage longer stays, while bike racks will support local residents and cyclists traveling through or stopping to explore the area. The simplicity and serenity of this park setting reflect Chadbourn's rural character while also providing much-needed infrastructure for travel convenience.

Strategically positioned and thoughtfully designed, this new open space anchors the north end of Chadbourn's revitalized downtown and helps define the visitor experience from the moment of arrival. It is a welcoming gesture—a place that offers comfort, green space, and a sense of arrival that invites travelers to stop, stay, and explore more of what Chadbourn has to offer.





## MASTER PLAN

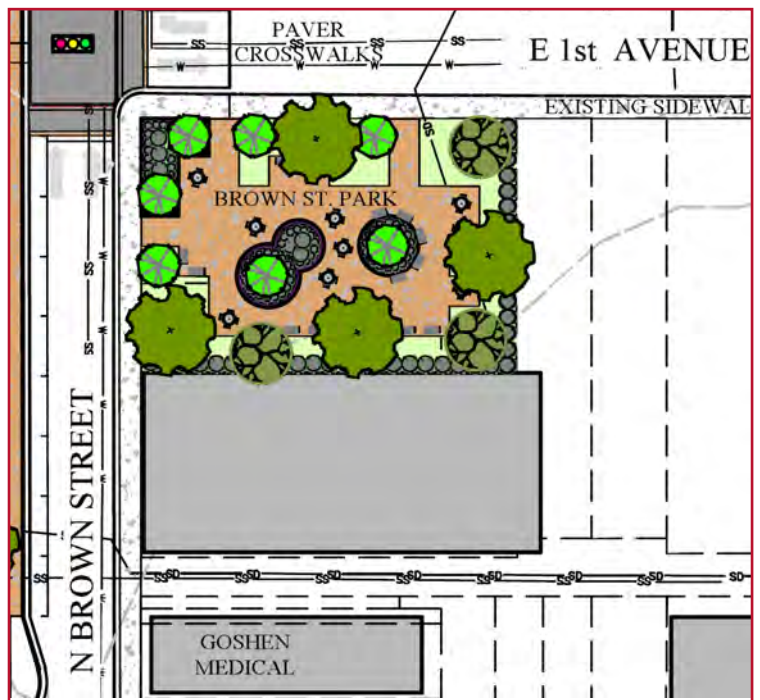
### TOWN-OWNED PROPERTY

#### BROWN STREET PARK

Located at the southeast corner of North Brown Street and East 1st Avenue, Brown Street Park will introduce a thoughtfully designed green space into the downtown landscape, at the site formerly home to the Town's historic railroad mural. This prominent corner lot will be transformed into a vibrant and welcoming public amenity that brings everyday beauty, comfort, and walkability to the heart of Chadbourne.

The new park will be characterized by an abundance of shade trees, offering relief from the summer sun and creating a natural canopy for relaxation. Strategically placed benches and picnic tables will allow visitors to sit, linger, and enjoy the outdoors in a peaceful setting. Whether someone is taking a break during lunch, meeting a friend, or simply enjoying a quiet moment of fresh air, the park will offer a space to pause and unwind within steps of local businesses, churches, and civic buildings.

This central downtown location makes the park easily accessible by foot and highly visible to passersby, helping to enhance the pedestrian experience and overall sense of place. Brown Street Park will serve as a welcoming environment for residents and visitors alike—a green corner in the middle of town where people can gather, rest, and feel connected to their community.



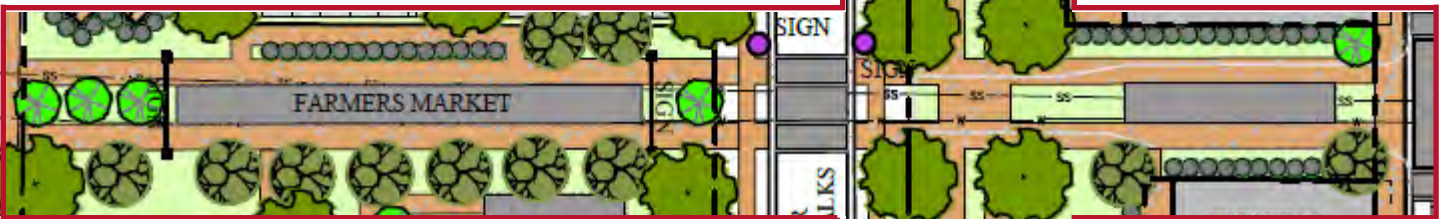


## MASTER PLAN

### LINEAR PARK / FARMER'S MARKET

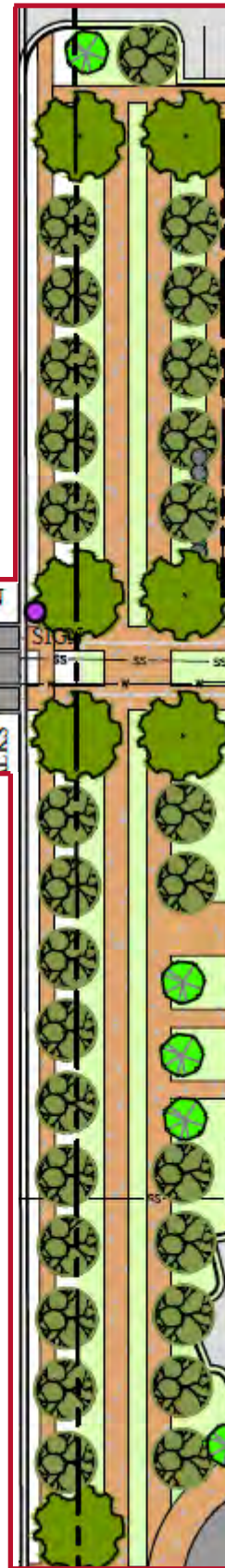
As part of the broader effort to revitalize downtown Chadbourn, the new Linear Park will span the length of the downtown couplet, running parallel to South Brown Street and serving as a continuous green corridor that links key destinations, businesses, and public spaces. This thoughtfully designed pedestrian connector will transform the experience of moving through downtown—providing shade, beauty, and walkable access from one end of the district to the other.

Lined with trees, benches, and landscaping, the Linear Park will offer a safe and attractive route for residents, visitors, and workers alike. In addition to supporting foot traffic to local shops and restaurants, it will serve as a central gathering place where people can enjoy open space, connect with neighbors, and experience Chadbourn's small-town charm in a refreshed and active environment. The Linear Park strengthens the overall downtown framework by unifying individual blocks and reinforcing Chadbourn's identity as a walkable, people-first community.



Where East 1st Avenue previously crossed North and South Brown Street, a new Farmer's Market and Food Truck Rodeo area will create a dynamic hub of community activity. Outfitted with permanent vendor stalls that include electrical hookups and running water, the market will support local growers, artisans, and food vendors year-round. The space will also accommodate food trucks and mobile vendors, making it an ideal venue for weekend markets, seasonal events, and culinary gatherings that draw visitors from across the region.

Together, the Linear Park and Farmer's Market will activate the full length of Chadbourn's downtown core, drawing residents and visitors in and encouraging them to explore, engage, and support the local economy. This integrated public space honors Chadbourn's agricultural heritage while offering new opportunities for community connection and economic growth.





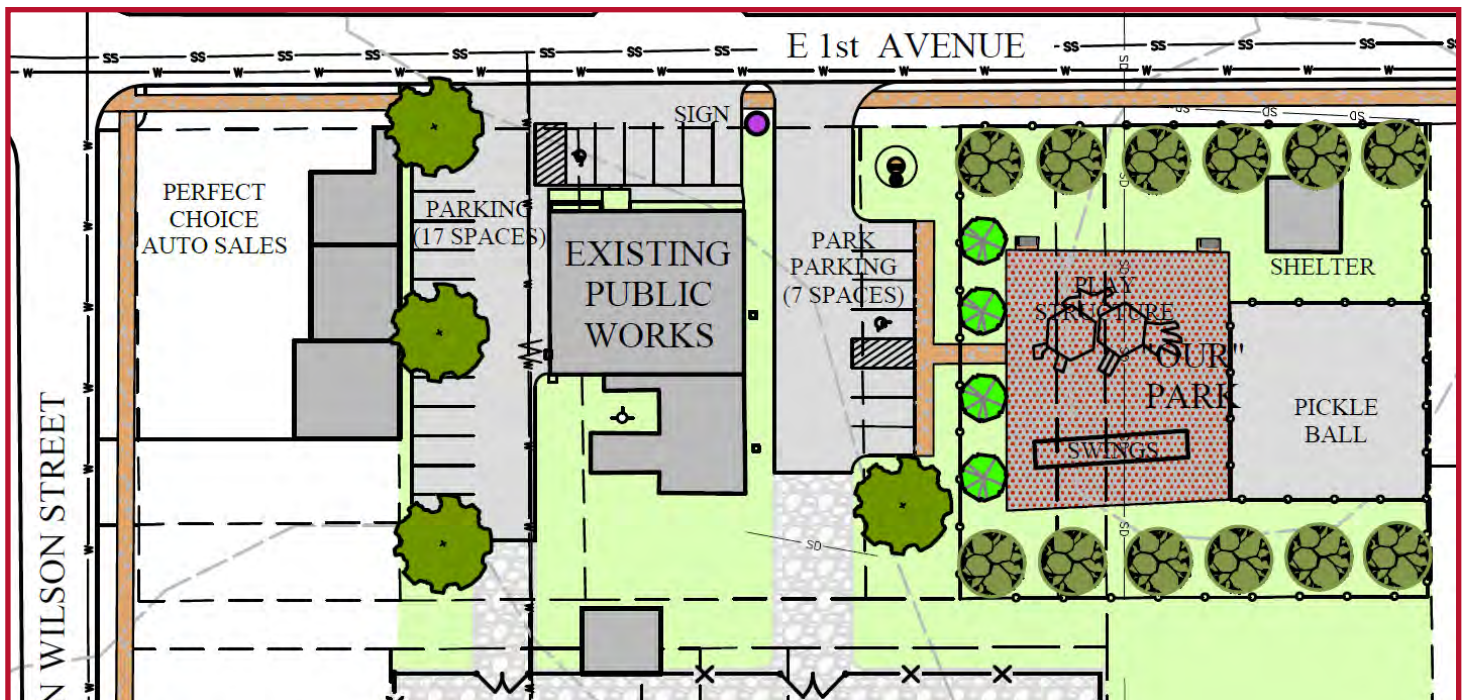
## MASTER PLAN

### "OUR PARK" AND PUBLIC WORKS IMPROVEMENTS

Located on the block between East 1st Avenue and East Railroad Avenue, "Our Park" is a central and well-loved part of daily life in Chadbourn. Already home to a newly upgraded playground, swings, and pickleball courts, the park offers a safe and welcoming space for families, children, and residents of all ages to enjoy outdoor recreation. As part of the Downtown Master Plan, the Town will build on these recent improvements by enhancing the entire park environment to create a more cohesive, comfortable, and attractive experience.

Planned enhancements include the addition of shade trees and new landscaping throughout the site, which will increase comfort during hot summer months and provide a greener, more inviting backdrop for everyday play and special events. A covered shelter will also be added to accommodate gatherings, picnics, and informal community events, giving families and visitors a place to rest and spend time together in all weather.

To improve access and encourage continued use, two small parking lots will be added or refurbished near the park site, providing a total of 24 spaces for those arriving by car. The project will also incorporate landscaping improvements around the adjacent public works facilities to unify the visual character of the entire block and reinforce the park's role as a well-maintained and thoughtfully designed community space. With its upgraded recreational features, expanded amenities, and renewed landscape, "Our Park" will offer an enhanced atmosphere that supports wellness, play, and connection.





## MASTER PLAN

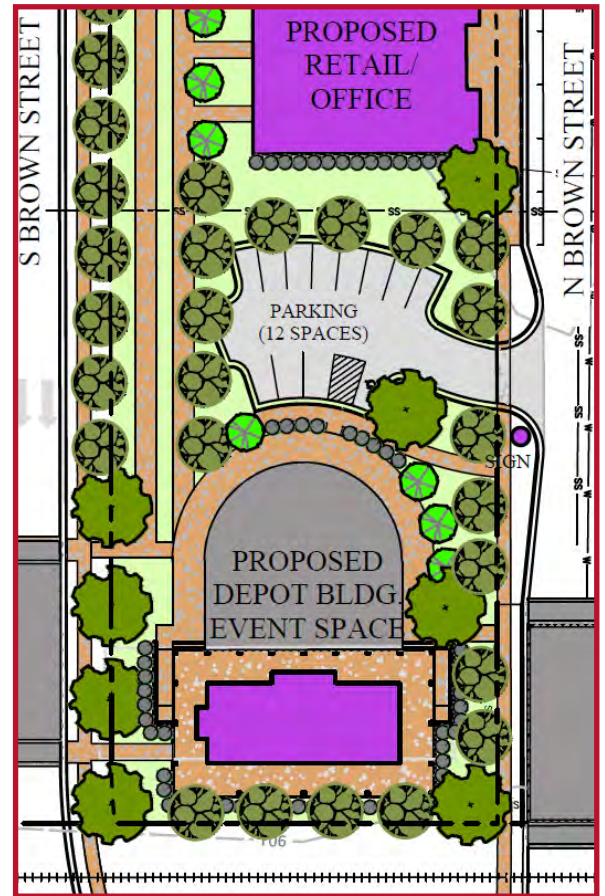
### DEPOT BUILDING EVENT SPACE

Positioned near the south end of the downtown couplet between North and South Brown Street, a new Depot Building Event Space will be constructed to serve as a premier venue for community events, performances, and gatherings. Designed to reflect the character of Chadbourn's historic rail town roots, the building will provide a flexible, modern space that meets the growing need for public event infrastructure in the heart of downtown.

The facility will include both indoor and outdoor areas to accommodate a wide range of activities year-round. Inside, the new building will feature a large, open indoor space suitable for community meetings, private functions, and cultural programming. Outside, a spacious open-air courtyard will offer seating and staging capacity for larger audiences—making it ideal for concerts, festivals, public ceremonies, and seasonal markets.

Twelve new parking spaces will be added to serve the site, ensuring convenient access for attendees and supporting nearby downtown businesses. Pathways, landscaping, and lighting will help integrate the facility into the surrounding streetscape, reinforcing its role as a welcoming and accessible anchor within the revitalized district.

As a newly constructed facility, the Depot Building Event Space represents both a physical and symbolic investment in Chadbourn's future—creating a dynamic new gathering place where the community can come together to celebrate, connect, and grow.





## MASTER PLAN

### ADDITIONAL PARKING + TOWN IMPROVEMENTS

To support the anticipated growth in visitor activity and foster a vibrant downtown atmosphere, the plan includes the development of a new parking lot off of East 2nd Avenue, providing 67 additional parking spaces. This lot is strategically located to serve the core downtown area, easing congestion on primary streets and improving accessibility for shoppers, residents, and visitors alike.

Complementing the parking expansion, a series of town-wide improvements are proposed to enhance the overall pedestrian experience and aesthetic appeal of Chadbourn's downtown. These include the installation and upgrade of sidewalks, creating safe, continuous, and attractive pathways that encourage walking and connectivity between key destinations. Landscaping enhancements will incorporate native trees, shrubs, and flowering plants to beautify streetscapes, provide shade, and improve the environmental quality of public spaces.

Lighting improvements will focus on installing energy-efficient fixtures designed to improve safety during evening hours while adding charm and character to the downtown ambiance. Wayfinding signage will be carefully designed

and placed to guide visitors to important landmarks, local businesses, public amenities, and new event spaces. These signs will reinforce the town's identity and help orient visitors, ensuring they can easily navigate and fully experience all that the revitalized downtown has to offer.

Together, these parking and infrastructure improvements aim to create a welcoming, accessible, and visually cohesive downtown environment that supports economic growth and community engagement.





## MASTER PLAN

### DEVELOPABLE MIXED-USE BLOCKS

To spark long-term economic revitalization and attract private-sector investment, the master plan sets aside three distinct mixed-use development blocks within the downtown corridor. These blocks are strategically located along and near Brown Street, the Town's primary thoroughfare, and are positioned to serve both residents and the thousands of seasonal visitors who pass through Chadbourn en route to coastal destinations.

Each mixed-use block is envisioned as a vibrant blend of residential, retail, office, and service-oriented spaces, designed to foster a walkable, connected, and engaging downtown environment. The aim is to create flexible building footprints and inviting storefronts that can adapt to a wide range of commercial tenants — from boutique shops and local cafés to co-working hubs and healthcare providers — while integrating upper-level housing to increase downtown residency and round-the-clock vitality.

These blocks represent a unique opportunity for developers and entrepreneurs to participate in the community's transformation while tapping into a steady stream of potential customers. Chadbourn sees an estimated 27,000 vehicles pass through daily during peak travel months, positioning the downtown core as a prime stopover

point for beach-bound traffic. With strategic design and marketing, these blocks will not only enhance the town's economic base but also convert drive-through traffic into meaningful foot traffic for local businesses.

Key features of the mixed-use blocks include:

- Pedestrian-first design with wide sidewalks, street trees, and crosswalks that connect seamlessly with the adjacent Linear Park and event spaces.
- Proximity to major anchors like the Farmers Market, Brown Street Park, and the new Depot Event Building — ensuring constant activity and visibility.
- Ample off-street and shared parking to support tenants and visitors without compromising walkability.

By establishing these three blocks as high-impact opportunity zones, the Town of Chadbourn is laying the groundwork for a more resilient and dynamic local economy. They are essential to the town's broader vision: a reimagined downtown that balances historic charm with forward-looking growth — one that invites people to stop, shop, live, and invest.





## ZONING RECOMMENDATIONS

To support the vision laid out in this Downtown Master Plan, LKC Engineering recommends that the Town of Chadbourn's Planning and Zoning Boards formally evaluate the creation of a new Downtown Enhancement District (DED). This district would function as an overlay zone with special development guidelines tailored specifically to the downtown area, with the goal of ensuring new projects align with the Town's long-term revitalization goals.

The DED would grant the Town greater influence over key aspects of downtown development—including site design, architectural standards, signage, and usage—helping to shape a cohesive and high-quality environment that supports both economic development and community character. The Downtown Enhancement District would:

- Establish local design and development standards that reflect Chadbourn's small-town charm while supporting modern mixed-use needs.
- Guide private investment by clearly outlining expectations for site layout, building materials, parking, landscaping, and pedestrian access.
- Encourage consistent, quality development that complements public investments in parks, event spaces, and streetscape enhancements.

- Allow for strategic flexibility, so the Town can promote key goals such as housing, retail, or business incubation in specific areas.

The proposed zoning map (see Map L-1.1) outlines new Downtown Enhancement Zoning Classifications, including:

- MU-DE – Mixed Use Downtown Enhancement
- GB-DE – General Business Downtown Enhancement
- CV-DE – Civic Downtown Enhancement

These classifications are overlaid on key development blocks and civic areas to promote compatible growth and ensure alignment with the Master Plan. For example, areas marked MU-DE encourage vertically mixed uses (retail below, residential/office above), while GB-DE supports more traditional commercial storefronts with flexibility in uses.

By creating a Downtown Enhancement District, the Town of Chadbourn can take a proactive role in shaping the next chapter of its story. This tool gives the Town the ability to guide, not just react to, the types of development and businesses that take root, ensuring downtown becomes not only revitalized, but resilient.







## AERIAL VIEW FROM NORTHEAST



## AERIAL VIEW FROM SOUTHWEST







## NORTH PARKING AND PARK



## OPEN SPACE







## NORTH MIXED USE DEVELOPMENT PLAZA



## SOUTH MIXED USE DEVELOPMENT AND DEPOT







## LINEAR PARK, SOUTH BOUND PEDESTRIAN CROSSING



## FARMERS MARKET





## CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION



The Town of Chadbourn stands at a turning point. With a proud history rooted in agriculture, rail, and community tradition, the Town now has an opportunity to write a new chapter — one that reimagines downtown as a place where residents, businesses, and visitors come together in a vibrant, walkable, and economically active setting.

This Downtown Master Plan is more than a document; it is a blueprint for long-term, sustainable revitalization. It reflects input from local residents, business owners, and civic leaders, and translates that vision into actionable steps. From the creation of signature parks and public spaces, to a new Depot event venue, to thoughtfully planned mixed-use development blocks, each element of the plan supports a shared goal: bringing new life and lasting value to Chadbourn's core.

Strategic zoning updates, including the proposed Downtown Enhancement District, will ensure future growth aligns with the Town's vision. Investments in walkability, beautification, event infrastructure, and small business space will lay the foundation for both economic development and enhanced quality of life.

Chadbourn's position along a major coastal travel route offers unique potential. By converting seasonal pass-through traffic into meaningful foot traffic, and by fostering spaces that invite people to stop, explore, and connect, the Town can reclaim its role as a destination, not just a detour.

LKC Engineering recommends that the Town of Chadbourn:

- Adopt the Downtown Master Plan as a guiding framework for capital improvements and development policy.
- Prioritize implementation of key catalyst projects such as the Depot Event Space, Brown Street Park, and the mixed-use development blocks.
- Move forward with zoning updates and the creation of the Downtown Enhancement District to support and regulate revitalization.
- Continue to engage community members and stakeholders through implementation to ensure transparency, equity, and long-term success.

The work ahead will require sustained effort, creative partnerships, and continued investment, but the foundation is now in place. With vision, leadership, and community support, Chadbourn's downtown can once again be a place that honors its past while boldly stepping into the future.