The draw of uptown actually helps fuel the draw of other cities’ centers.

By Alex Marshall

Appealing residences for all

The goal should be a high-quality place for all who make this region their home:

• A young professional who likes his condominium off Tryon Street for its five-minute commute and proximity to the urban “action.”

• An elderly couple in Fort Mill’s Baxter Village who like the community’s compact design, which lets them walk to breakfast and for groceries.

• A mother with three small children who likes small-town living in Mooresville because the school and Main Street are so accessible.

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By Alex Marshall and Neal Peirce

8 WAYS TO MAKE OUR CITIES SHINE

What’s the successful formula for downtown Charlotte and the region’s centers, both historic and new? Here, beyond the clear need to expand bus and rail lines to connect them more easily, do the downtowns build on recent successes to become the centerpieces of a green, great, global region? By Alex Marshall and Neal Peirce

• Include vest-pocket parks and fountains wherever you can afford them.

• Have green – seriously! Cemeteries too easily take on a solemn-gray aura. There are easy fixes.

• Install networks of planters, summer-time flowers and winter greenery, and not just downtown, but every downtown. Charlotte is just now beginning to change. Lots of Rock Hill folk think they’re living in Charlotte. And our uptown has a lot to do with it. The shift’s driven by lifestyle changes – baby boomers leaving those cul-de-sacs, replaced by Gen Xers. I predict uptown will have 100,000 residents by 2028.”

• Include green streetscapes – adding trees lining those cul-de-sacs, replaced by Gen Xers. I predict uptown will have 100,000 residents by 2028.”

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Nearby town and city centers have much to contribute to the region.

**WESTERN SECTOR: FROM OLD MILL TOWNS TO POTENTIAL NEW CENTERS**

With easy access via I-85 and I-277 as soon as Calabar River, this region is a natural part of the Queen City's orbit. It's the epicenter of what's usually termed the West End. The struggles of grand old Galvanos, quintessential mill city in transition, may have played a role. More potential for the small cities to offer thriving downtowns, surrounded by great landed. Belmont was an early leader in more compact development, and Shelby has a master for forward-looking planning. Needed but missing: express buses or train lines that run through the region.

**BOLMONT**

A town of about 8,000, Belmont is one of the places where New Urban-style development was pioneered, before it was adopted in countless spots around the region. With its repurposed downtown and redeveloped Mills, Belmont is an example of a town doing many things right.

**BESSEMER CITY**

With about 3,000 people, a picturesque and active Main Street, a nicely shaped street grid and a rail line running straight through the center of town, Bessemer City is a growth center in coming decades.

**ROCK HILL**

The rest of Cleveland County, with 70,000 people, is the southern tip of the Carolinas' fourth largest city, and South Carolina's fourth largest city – firmly in the Queen City's orbit but happy to be south of the border city – with less tourism, but more intellectualism and relative peace and quiet. With less than 62,000 people, Rock Hill is a hardy population center. But with its exemplary planning and insistence on Main Street style development, it could grow substantially, yet remain rural, if it wants to retain its small town flavor. While college town, Salisbury is an example of a town doing many things right.

**SALISBURY**

A city about 50 miles southeast of Charlotte, it's located on the edge of the Charlotte growth belt. If the region were to grow, the nearby household projects are built. Shelby will be of vital importance to the Charlotte region. If the region moves more in transit, and less in highways, Shelby will remain a more independent city still outside Charlotte's orbit proper.

**GASTONIA**

Just from Charlotte's spinoff. It's far enough from Charlotte to avoid waves of suburbanization. It has a rail link to Charlotte via Amtrak. A fast commuter line is now a reality. Gastonia, with 70,000 people, is a small railroad town with potential for urban-style growth.

**BELMONT**

A kind of mini-Charlotte in its own right, Belmont has a collection of old mill towns and has a collection of cafés that make the architecture uncommon in the region. Its street grid and street trees grow and grow in coming decades.

**NORTHERN SECTOR: NEW METROPOLISES**

This quadrant buzzes with expanded business and industry: Lowe's corporate headquarters outside Mooresville, Davidson and Cornelius, and other Salisbury businesses; Lowe's Motor Speedway in Concord and Rowan County. This quadrant buzzes with expanded business and industry: Lowe's corporate headquarters outside Mooresville, Davidson and Cornelius, and other Salisbury businesses; Lowe's Motor Speedway in Concord and Rowan County. This quadrant buzzes with expanded business and industry: Lowe's corporate headquarters outside Mooresville, Davidson and Cornelius, and other Salisbury businesses; Lowe's Motor Speedway in Concord and Rowan County. This quadrant buzzes with expanded business and industry: Lowe's corporate headquarters outside Mooresville, Davidson and Cornelius, and other Salisbury businesses; Lowe's Motor Speedway in Concord and Rowan County.

If the growth belt continues to expand, there may be a potential new movement – a small town. And in south Huntersville a tantalizing prospect is under consideration: Byford, an emerging development in N.C. 127, designed to work with a proposed commuter rail line, which is only in the planning stages. Byford is evidence of the lure that rail transit has for development.

**SOUTHERN SECTOR: ACROSS THE BORDER, PARTNERSHIP POTENTIAL**

This region's growth has been a focus for growth in recent years.

**CLOVER**

A town on Main Street-style development, it could grow sub-stantially, but with its preserved older buildings. A potential home for future urban-style growth.

**CORNELIUS**

This old railroad town has a historic rail depot and a charming Main Street that's a waiting for Confederate commissioners to OR 4 to work their way through the Charlotte region. The line would also pass the economically critical – and worker rich – Lake Norman's 13,000 residents. Cornelius would likely see executives and developers using it to try and build homes near the train tracks. With a strong downtown presence, Cornelius could integrate Kannapolis and its new growth center site.

**KANNAPOLIS**

A huge old mill town is being transformed into a bio-technology research center and a significant economic en-ergy center for the region. (Note of special interest: this old mill town is the site of the new Kannapolis research site, being built on the old mill site.)

**Statesville**

This old railroad town has a historic rail depot and a charming Main Street that's waiting for Confederate commissioners to OR 4 to work their way through the Charlotte region. The line would also pass the economically critical – and worker rich – Lake Norman's 13,000 residents. Cornelius would likely see executives and developers using it to try and build homes near the train tracks. With a strong downtown presence, Cornelius could integrate Kannapolis and its new growth center site.

**MOORESVILLE**

This is a small town. And in south Huntersville a tantalizing prospect is under consideration: Byford, an emerging development in N.C. 127, designed to work with a proposed commuter rail line, which is only in the planning stages. Byford is evidence of the lure that rail transit has for development.

**REHAUSE THE TREES**

*The Charlotte Observer*
Proud Charlotte, proud ring cities

Along with the historic downtown, the region will need new, people-oriented centers, such as the New Urban Style Brickland Village in Mint Hill.

8 WAYS TO MAKE OUR CITY SHINE

1. Use more targeted, place-specific programs to encourage downtown development in a way that builds on each neighborhood’s unique assets and opportunities.

2. Protect and revitalize historic buildings and landmarks.

3. Discourage big blank office walls. These blanket the urban “action.”

4. Encourage farmers markets and festi- vals.

5. Discourage big blank office walls. These blanket the urban “action.”

6. Make downtowns a place to live, not just work or play. It’s great to have a downtown that is open and inviting, even in the middle of the night.

7. Focus on streets for everyone. That means cars and delivery trucks, but also people riding bikes and walking.

8. Show a friendly, welcoming face.

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Make downtowns a place to live, not just work or play. It’s great to have a downtown that is open and inviting, even in the middle of the night. But catching up with companions or colleagues during the day won’t work any longer. downtowns are dynamic places that can be engaging places for both residents and visitors.

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