

'About To Turn The Corner'

# Eyes on downtown Gastonia

*Developers join move to urban center, give new look to historic buildings*

Like much of the nation, the city of Gastonia saw its stores and services flee downtown during the early 1970s.

Now, it's part of another trend sweeping the nation: the movement back to the urban core.

Typically, these kinds of efforts occur in baby steps, not a giant leap. Gastonia leaders and developers say the small steps are starting to add up.

"I think we are about to turn the corner" said Brian Borne, executive director of the Gastonia Downtown Development Corp. "Through the years we've built on the smaller projects, and now the larger projects are bringing in investment dollars."

About \$28 million has been invested, 327 jobs created and 56 buildings and facades renovated during his six years with the development corporation.

Also, 53 new businesses opened downtown, 11 relocated there and four expanded.

Perhaps most promising for the city's historic business district: outside developers are taking notice and taking part.

Developer and contractor Gregg McAllister of Charlotte's McAllister Obsessive Constructive is teaming, for example, with Gastonia's Chuck McClure of Enhance Development Corp. on a 48,000-square-foot, \$5 million renovation of four buildings.

Their project is called The Standard, a complex of offices, shops and loft apartments. It takes its name from the Standard Hardware Building, which dates to 1922.

Gastonia is attractive to renovators, McAllister said, because it has 77 designated national historic buildings eligible for state and federal tax credits in the 46-acre historic district.

The Standard renovation, designed by Charlotte's Narmour Wright Creech Architecture, qualified for credits that he estimates will cover about 20 percent of the construction expense.

McAllister is so pleased with the way things are going that he has purchased two more historic downtown buildings to restore in later development phases.

Based on the real estate speculation under way - 18 buildings and properties sold over the past six years - Borne expects to see more such projects in the future.

He said The Standard meshes perfectly with the city's vision: mixed-use development that includes residential units.

Only a handful of people live in the downtown commercial district today, but Borne said, "We would

like to see several hundred residential units there" including for-sale as well as rental dwellings.

People living in the core will form a neighborhood and fuel commercial growth as restaurants, shops and services move in to become part of it, he believes.

Last year, Charlotte's Spectrum Properties helped Gastonia officials with a vision statement and suggested they start with a couple of core blocks, make public investments and not take too big a bite at once.

"What we told them is if you start at the core, it will have a ripple effect," said Spectrum Chairman Jim Dulin. "I believe they have a good story to tell."

Among other projects, the city has invested \$6.3 million in renovating the 1911 Gaston County Courthouse, which now houses a one-stop government services facility.

Downtown Gastonia has about 1.1 million square feet of buildings compared with Charlotte's more than 14 million square feet of offices uptown.

But unlike Charlotte, whose booming financial growth resulted in massive demolition and redevelopment, many of Gastonia's oldest commercial buildings are still standing.

In addition to The Standard, McAllister acquired the 1899 Craig & Wilson Carriage Co. building and the 1893 Frost Torrence Building.

Those older structures are an attraction in themselves, Borne believes.

"The building stock in downtown is what gives it a sense of place," he said. "You're not going to find them anywhere else - if you have these buildings you need to keep them."

McAllister can see the convenience and price of Gastonia housing luring people from Charlotte to live.

In off-peak hours, it takes just over 20 minutes to drive nearly 25 miles from uptown Charlotte to downtown Gastonia.

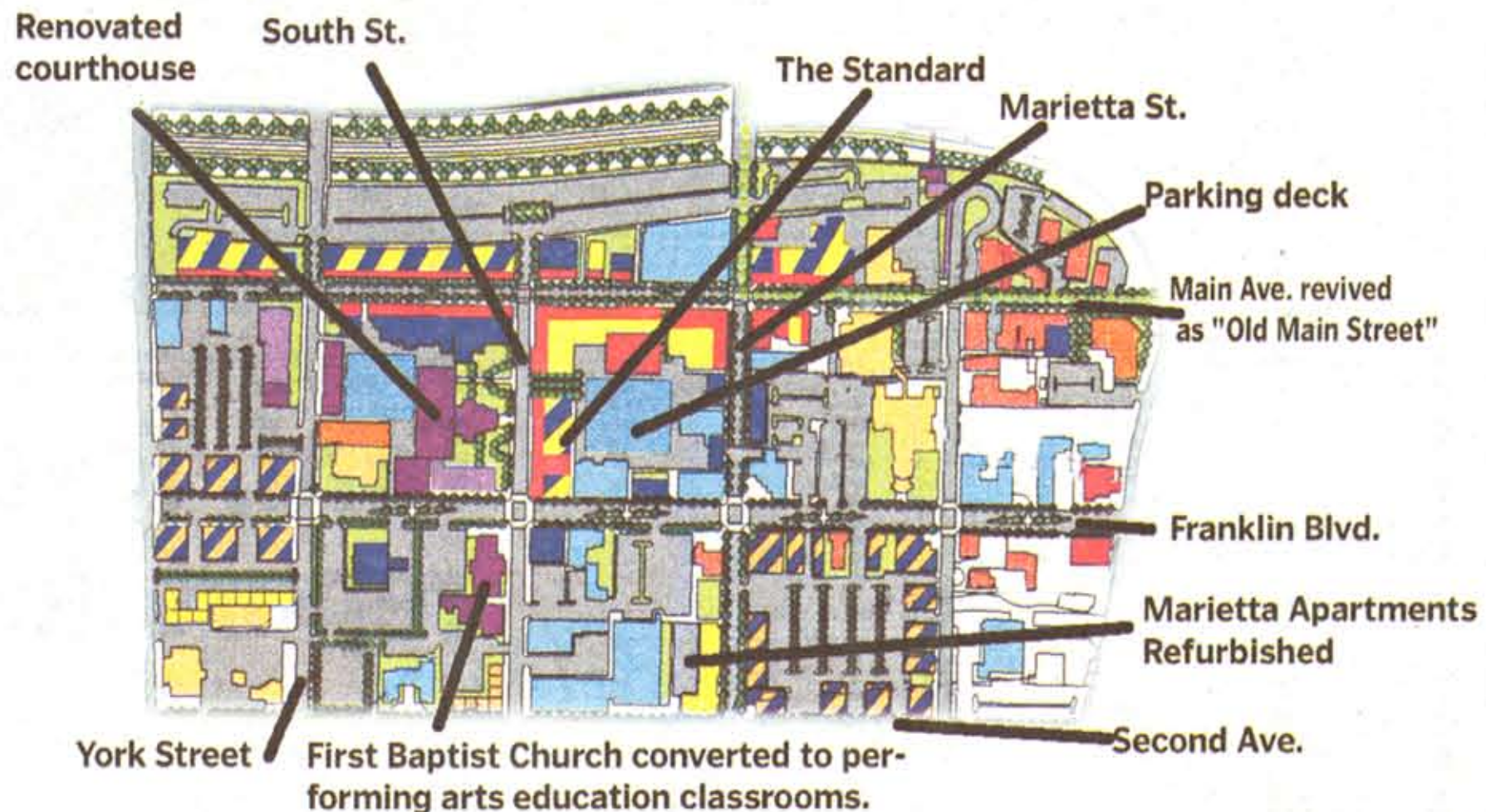
Loft apartments in the first phase of The Standard, 700 to 1,200 square feet, rent for \$750 to \$1,200 a month. The first six to be completed have been leased.













One of the initial tenants, Gaston native Tom McPhaul, was signing a lease last week as McAllister conducted a tour of the complex.

"I was looking for something unique," he said. "I think Gastonia is getting ready to explode."

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## Downtown Gastonia Master Plan



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|--|---|--|
|  EXISTING OFFICE    |  OFFICE    |  LIVE-WORK          |
|  EXISTING CIVIC     |  CIVIC     |  PARK / GREEN SPACE |
|  EXISTING RELIGIOUS |  RELIGIOUS |  PARKING DECK       |
|  EXISTING RETAIL    |  RETAIL    |  |
|  EXISTING HOUSING   |  HOUSING   |  |



PHOTOS BY CIARLANTE PHOTOGRAPHY  
 The Standard, a mixed-use renovation on South Street, includes four buildings, one of which housed Standard Hardware. They're being converted to loft apartments, offices and shops.



Residential units in The Standard feature exposed brick walls, hardwood floors and ornate vaulted ceilings.

### Downtown projects

McAllister Obsessive Constructive is involved in restoring these downtown Gastonia buildings:

■ **The Standard:** Four buildings totaling 48,000 square feet at 156, 162, 170 and 174 South Main St. The project includes 17 loft apartments, two live-work lofts and 19,500 square feet of retail and office.

The building at 156 South Main is the Standard Hardware Building, constructed in 1922. It has first-floor retail, second-floor office and third-floor loft apartments.

The 1930-vintage building at 162 South Main will have first floor office-retail with common hallways and elevator and second floor live-work lofts.

The building at 170 South Main, built in 1922, will have first-floor office-retail and second-floor loft apartments.

At 174 South Main, a 1922 building will have first-floor office-retail and loft apartments on floors two through four.

More information: [www.thestandardonsouthstreet.com](http://www.thestandardonsouthstreet.com).

■ **100 West Main:** Formerly the Craig & Wilson Carriage Co. and Rayless Department Store, this 28,000-square-foot, three-story building was constructed in 1899. Details are to be announced. It's expected to open in 2008.

■ **201 West Main:** The former Frost Torrence Building had an opera house on the second floor and also was the home of Morris Jewelers. Built in 1893, it totals about 9,500 square feet. Renovation - details to be announced - is scheduled for 2008.



Part of a painted Standard Hardware sign is visible on the brick in this unit. The sign had to remain as part of the historic restoration.