



Inner Courtyard Project

A 2020 Reassessment

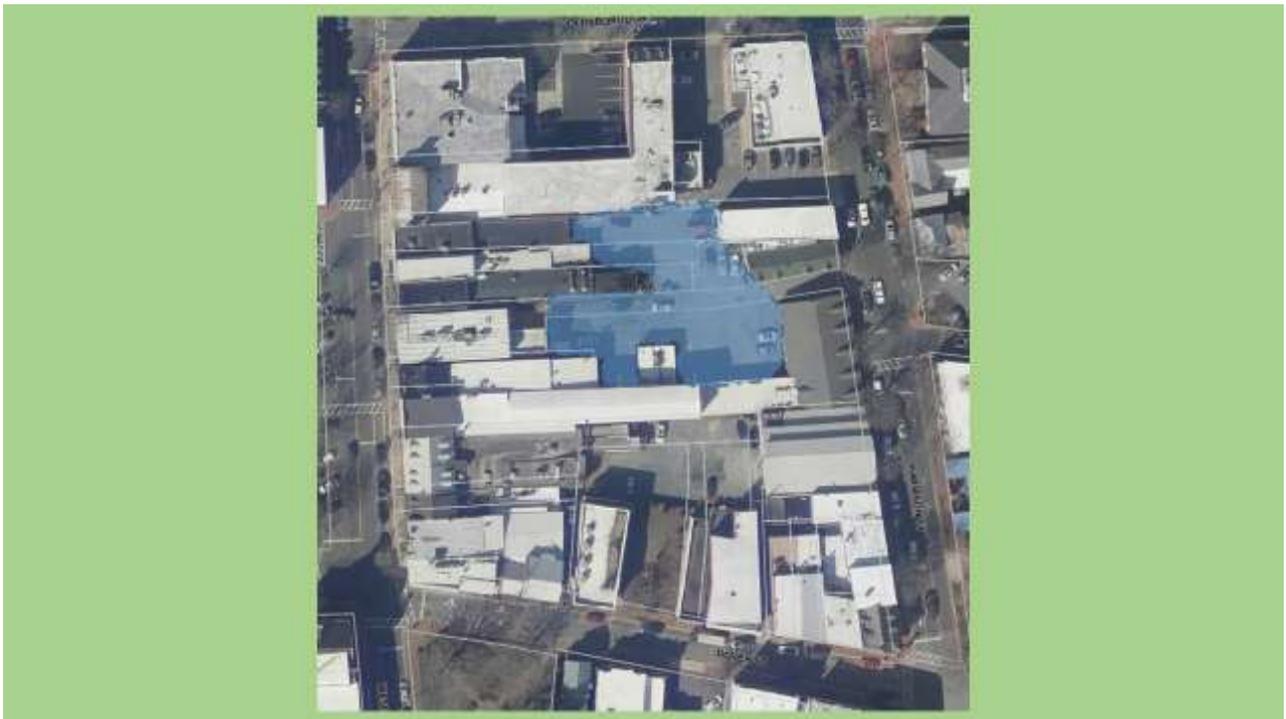


Overview

The Inner Courtyard Project was a concept first raised in a Town Center Revitalization Strategy developed over 25 years ago (in 1994). It refers to the interior of the primary Downtown Easton block formed by Dover, Washington, Goldsborough, and Harrison Streets. This area has long been utilized for informal parking, service deliveries, and storage. The Town Center Revitalization Strategy mentioned above envisioned a much higher and better use for this space. It proposed that it become a courtyard, for use for dining, potential second entrances to existing businesses (or second businesses in existing buildings), public gathering space, etc.

The document in which this idea first appeared was prepared by the consulting firm LDR International from Columbia, MD, who were hired by the Town through the efforts of the Easton Business Management Authority (EBMA). The study included a number of recommendations ranging from simple policy changes to bold physical improvements, of which the Inner Courtyard was clearly and by far the boldest. Several of the recommended changes were implemented relatively quickly and included such things as the establishment of the Easton Farmer's Market, a revamped Downtown parking management strategy, a more active and visible promotion of special events, and the hiring of a full time Executive Director for EBMA (and organization which has evolved to become Easton Main Street and, in its latest iteration, Easton Business Alliance).

The original Inner Courtyard referred to one singular area, bounded loosely by the Shannahan-Wrightson Building, the "L-shaped" McCrory's Building, and buildings in between fronting on Washington and Harrison (see below).



The LDR Report suggested that this space could be an attraction for locals and visitors alike, and referred to it as a “major, new Town Square [which] should be created as a focal element and attraction for the entire community, creating an impetus for reinvestment in the Town Center.”

The Inner Courtyard was widely supported as a concept. It was also recognized that a number of obstacles existed that would make successful implementation a challenge. For this reason, this project itself was subject to a second and more detailed study. This study was conducted by the design firm of Quinn-Evans Architects. It proposed an even bolder concept by envisioning not a single public space, but rather a series of connected Courtyards. It suggested accomplishing this connection by selectively demolishing a section of the Shannahan-Wrightson Building to connect to another existing “courtyard” located behind what is now Scossa Restaurant, and then continuing south by removing the fence separating this space from the green area across from (and owned by) Shore United Bank.

For a number of reasons that will be detailed later in this report, the project never advanced much beyond this second study and largely disappeared from the general Town consciousness when the Downtown Small Area Plan prepared by LDR in 1994, was updated and replaced by the Downtown Easton Master Plan for Infill Development, prepared by the consulting firms of AKRF and Streetworks in 2007-08. That Plan makes no reference to the Inner Courtyard at all, and presents its own series of recommendations for the advancement of Downtown, focused primarily on opportunities for new Infill Development at a handful of identified sites.

The reassessment of the Inner Courtyard project in 2020 has been brought about as a result of the global COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, which, beyond the obvious public health impacts, has dramatically and significantly impacted economies all over the world. Easton has not been spared from this impact.

Easton’s elected officials and senior staff have worked diligently to enact policies and take actions to ease this economic burden on our businesses. To date, Easton’s leaders have:

- Extended expiration dates of sidewalk café permits.
- Expanded the scope of sidewalk café permits to allow beyond limits of property.
- Permitted Outdoor dining on private property with no requirement other than completing a Form for tracking.
- Explored opportunities for more outdoor dining options for Downtown Easton Restaurants. This initially included a street closure which was revised to use of on-street parking spaces.
- Instructed and worked with the Easton Economic Development Corporation to explore longer-term opportunities to bring more people Downtown, beautify the area, and make it more pedestrian-oriented.
- Suggested this recap and reexamination of the Inner Courtyard Project.

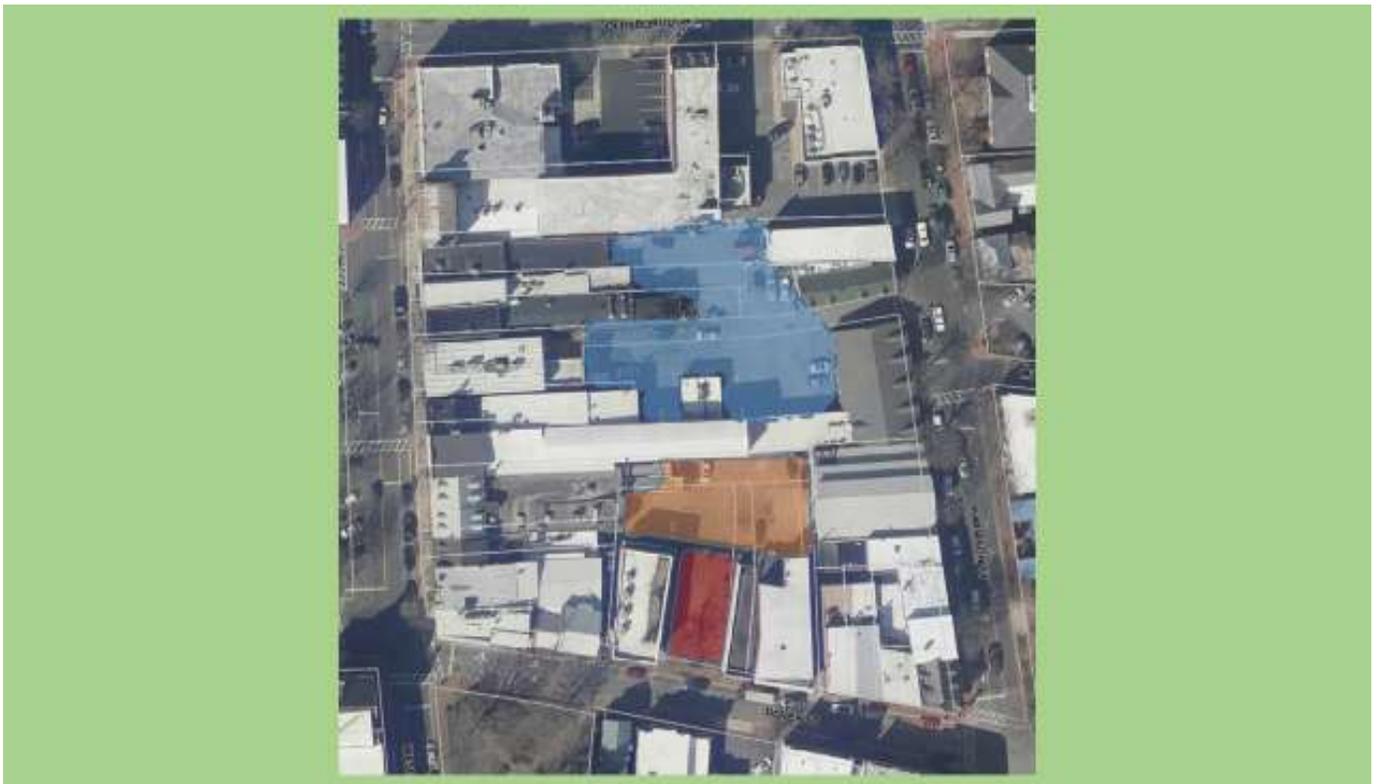


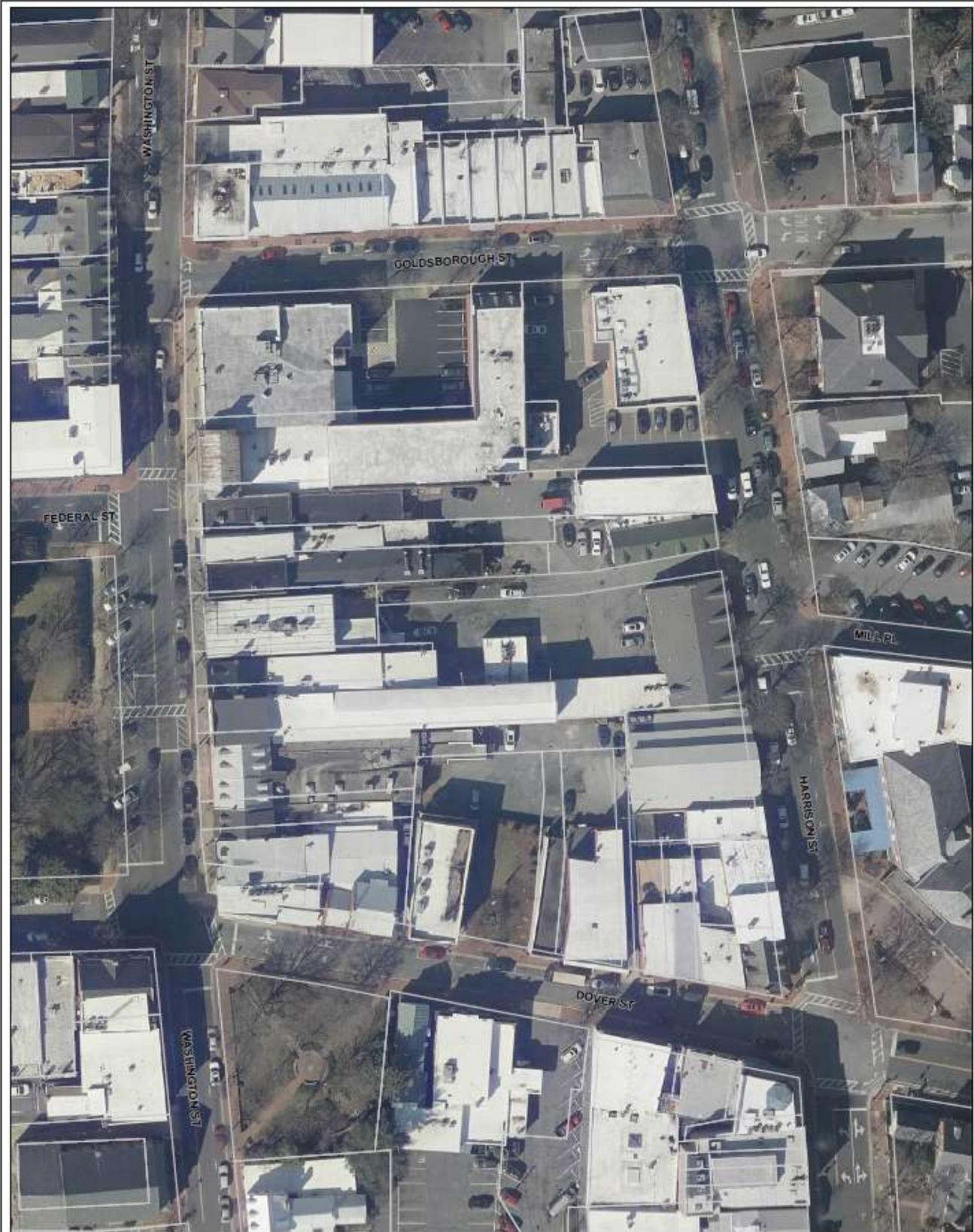
Outdoor dining utilizing parallel parking spaces on Washington Street.



Scope

As briefly described in the Overview section, the “Inner Courtyard” has meant different things over time. The figure on the following page depicts the area applicable to this project and consists of the interior of the block bounded by Washington, Goldsborough, Harrison, and Dover Streets. It is, and for a long time has been, considered the core block of Downtown Easton. Loosely speaking, the term Inner Courtyard initially referred to all of this interior area, as if it were all one large vacant area behind the buildings forming the block face. A closer examination though reveals that due to the fact that the Shannahan-Wrightson building extends completely from Washington to Harrison, the interior is split into at least two, if not three, smaller courtyards. These are depicted below:





0 30 60 120 Feet

2020-07-20

A rough estimate of each of these areas is as follows:

- “Original Inner Courtyard” (shown in blue on map) – 18,400 square feet
- “Scossa Courtyard” (orange) – 8,600 square feet
- “Shore United Bank Courtyard” (red) – 4,000 square feet

In total then, there is approximately 31,000 square feet of open-air space split between the three courtyard areas, all or any one of which could be utilized for outdoor dining, or potentially other uses. To put that figure in perspective relative to nearby space, the former Safeway building consists of 22,547 square feet under roof. Another comparison is Thompson Park, which is 13,780 square feet in area.

The following photo depicts former use of the Inner Courtyard area. Note that it was at that time also used for informal parking/deliveries and that it was improved with several structures not present today.



Here is a closer look at each of the previously described three smaller courtyards:

Original Inner Courtyard

The area originally suggested as the Inner Courtyard by LDR International is depicted in blue on the map above and as mentioned above, consists of approximately 18,400 square feet. There are a few different access points to this Courtyard, including the public Magazine Alley. A closer view of this area is shown in the photos below and the aerial photo on the following page.





As the photos indicate, this area possesses a significant amount of open space and is currently utilized for parking (some delineated, some not), presumably by employees, deliveries and trash service. The ground surface consists of a combination of asphalt, gravel, and stone. If the goal is simply to provide outdoor dining, it could be provided here quickly, provided those who use the parking spaces move their vehicles elsewhere and sufficient space is set aside for deliveries and trash pick-up. Clearly a longer-term utilization of the space suggests improvements to the pavement surface, a more permanent solution to the deliveries and trash collection issue, and perhaps improvements/enhancements to building facades, landscaping, and outdoor lighting are all needed. Depending on the intended hours of use, another consideration may be the addition of some structure for shade and/or protection from (at least light) rain.

Scossa Courtyard

The LDR Plan that originally suggested the Inner Courtyard project as part of their overall Town Center study, only considered the large area described above. The Quinn-Evans study that looked specifically at the Inner Courtyard project introduced the idea of an even larger courtyard project by connecting the area originally identified with two other courtyards. The first of these is referred to here as the Scossa Courtyard for the restaurant to which it is adjacent. The following provides a closer aerial view:



Although smaller than the originally proposed Inner Courtyard, the Scossa Courtyard consists of a very usable size of approximately 8,600 square feet. The following photos illustrate the current state of this space:



The Quinn-Evans Study proposed to connect this Courtyard to the original Inner-Courtyard by selectively demolishing (or creating a cut-through) a portion of the Shannahan-Wrightson Building. While this would certainly create a larger connected space, the decision to do so lies with the property-owner, including whether the cost associated with the project is worth the effort. There is no reason though, that these two courtyards could not be “developed” and opened separately and independently even if the goal is to ultimately connect them.

The Scossa Courtyard would have the same issue of surface improvement and continuing to accommodate deliveries and services. The smaller space creates a somewhat more intimate feel. It also suggests lower costs for necessary improvements. Access is a bit less obvious than for the Inner-Courtyard as it is via Hughes Alley, a narrow drive/access way off of Dover, between 29 East Dover (currently Exit Realty) and 27 East Dover (Lu-Ev) and a second, also narrow, private dead-end alley located between 17 (Shore United Bank Office) and 9 (Prim) East Dover.

Shore United Bank Courtyard

The Shore United Bank Courtyard is the smallest area of the three identified. It is located across Dover Street from the Shore United Bank, adjacent to their offices at 17 South Dover. It has been utilized for a few decades now as a well landscaped and maintained private open space. A picture of this space is provided below and a closer aerial view is shown on the following page:





The Shore United Courtyard is only approximately 4,000 square feet in area. It does have the advantage of being under just one ownership. There are also currently no paved surfaces as the area (but for the sidewalks adjacent to the bordering buildings) consists completely of grass and mulched landscape beds. It is separated from the Scossa Courtyard by a wood privacy fence.

Depending on how this area is utilized, it is potentially the quickest to be ready for activity. It could serve as essentially an outdoor food court with the addition of more picnic tables. Alternately, selective hardscaped areas could be installed for somewhat more formal outdoor dining. If Shore United is not interested in providing seating, another alternative that is less

Issues

Transformer

One of the issues associated with the use of the original Inner Courtyard area is the presence of an Easton Utilities Commission transformer. Although it could potentially be screened and/or landscaped, the most effective utilization of the space in the longer-term would require the relocation of this transformer, pictured below.



Easton Utilities provided the following quick assessment of the various costs and issues associated with such a relocation:

We have done some preliminary (very preliminary) reviews of this area during the past few years. Given the quick turnaround and high level info you are seeking, we offer the following:

1. Town would need to provide a suitable new location for the transformer(s) with Easton Utilities agreement on the feasibility of the location. There are currently three surface mounted and one submersible. We would wish to consolidate these where possible.
2. The new location will greatly influence the cost of the project and engineered maximum length of services.
3. Our resources are quite buried in work right now given the impacts of COVID-19 on our ongoing project work, so it would be several months before we could put this project on our radar screen unless we forgo other high priority customer and capital projects already underway or planned. Note: It is not in our current fiscal year (FY21) plan.

4. A high level cost estimate to relocate the transformer (and all the related electric services to surrounding customers) is \$70K - \$90K. These costs include fiber relocation embedded within this project to continue providing internet and phone services to the surrounding customers. We could probably sharpen our pencil with some more details about the overall plan and new location agreed upon for the transformer.
5. This project is on our radar screen due to the age of the utility poles, some percentage of the work would be paid for by Easton Utilities, and any incremental costs beyond the normal overhead in kind replacement might need to be covered by others.
6. The project would take about two months +/- to complete and several overnight customer outages which complicate the schedule and the costs.
7. Easement and rights-of-way necessary for the project would need to be acquired by the Town for any and all utility locations. This process took about one year on the Hills parking lot due to the various property line and survey and deed work required.
8. Verizon will still be an issue similar to the Hills lot project.

Cost (initial and ongoing)

The second of the two studies which addressed the Inner Courtyard Project, prepared by Quinn-Evans/Architects, included a preliminary budget. It was developed in conjunction with the then Town Engineer, and consisted of the following elements and costs:

Site Demolition	\$40,000
Site Preparation & Hardscape	\$395,000
Storm Drainage	\$35,000
Underground Electrical & Lighting	\$95,000
Site Improvements & Furnishings	\$50,000
Landscape Work	\$25,000
Survey & Engineering Services	\$110,000
Selective Building Demo & Repair	\$170,000
Design & Construction Contingency	<u>\$100,000</u>
TOTAL	\$1,020,000

It should be noted that this estimate does not include individual building modifications such as mechanical and electrical equipment relocation work and that these are 1996 dollar figures. Each line item should be reviewed and updated, but as a starting consideration, based on an inflation calculator utilizing Bureau of Labor Statistics data, this \$1,020,000 would translate to \$1,684,404 in 2020 dollars.

Absent from the Quinn-Evans estimate is any discussion or estimation of maintenance or ongoing cost once the project is completed. Everything from installed landscaping to the

hardscaping and furnishings will require ongoing maintenance of some level, and eventually replacement. Depending on how the space is used and what entity (or entities) owns and operates it, there will also be regular operating costs to clean, maintain, etc. that space.

Defining the Project (what is it?)

The preceding section segues smoothly into the next section, which is deciding just exactly what the Inner Courtyard project is to be, if indeed it moves forward. A number of possibilities have been suggested in the Inner Courtyard studies or in the years since, to include:

- Public Space
- Outdoor Dining and/or retail
- Pedestrian Circulation
- Possible Building Expansion and/or access to upper stories of existing buildings
- Open Space for Public Events and Festivals
- More convenient access to/from nearby off-street parking lots
- Addition/reconfiguration of retail space at the rear of buildings along the pedestrian connection/public open space.

It should be noted that none of these proposed uses are necessarily mutually exclusive.

The most advanced and detailed suggestion of what the Inner Courtyard might entail, or even look like, is provided in the subsection of the Quinn Evans study titled “Inner-Courtyard Design Plan.” Given the pertinence of that subsection to this Reassessment, it is copied and provided on the following pages.

III . INNER-COURTYARD DESIGN PLAN

One of the recommendations of the 1994 "Town Center Revitalization Strategy Study" was to construct a large public space courtyard in Block 9 to provide a new space for public festivals and to improve service access to existing retail space. This central public space known as the "Inner Courtyard" was envisioned as a major stimulus to revitalize Block 9 and the Town Center area.

Following a more detailed analysis of the current physical conditions of Block 9 and a review with the EBMA planning committee, it was agreed that the Inner Courtyard design should strive to accomplish the following objectives.

- Enhance pedestrian circulation throughout the Town Center area.
- Provide enhanced access to existing buildings to encourage revitalization of retail, office and residential uses with rear access.
- Create a open public space that will support periodic public festivals and public events to encourage both local and tourist activity in the Town Center.
- Develop a plan that preserves the existing buildings and is sensitive to the historic character of the Town Center.
- Develop a plan that will stimulate long term economic revitalization of the Town Center.

Design Plan

The proposed Inner Courtyard Design Plan strives to satisfy the above development objectives. It was agreed that existing private parking should be eliminated from courtyard area to develop a pedestrian zone. Limited vehicular service access is retained to support commercial and office activities.

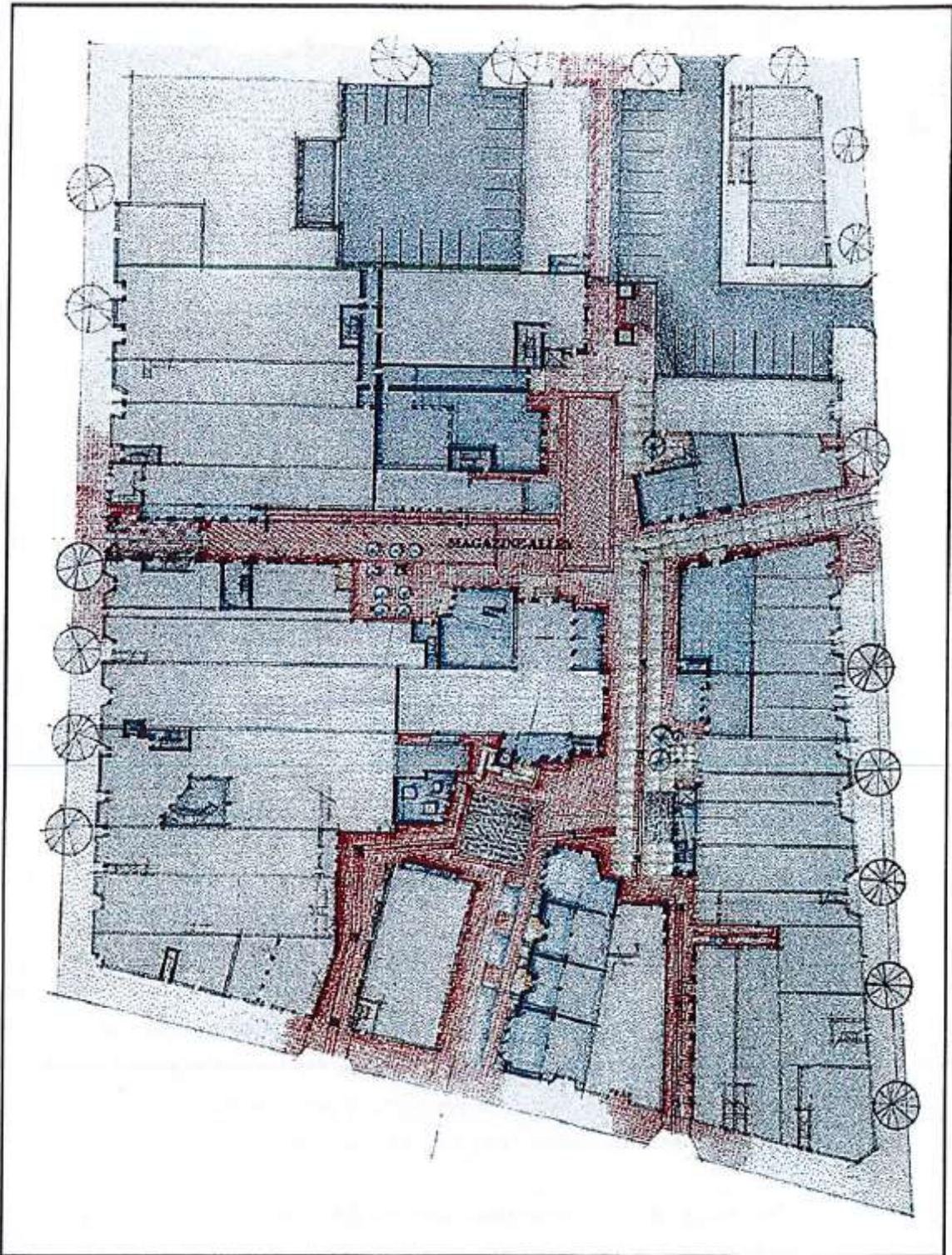
New pedestrian walkways are provided to cross the center of the block on both the north-south and the east-west axis by removal of a portion of three buildings. The proposed east-west pedestrian walkway involves the expansion of the historic Magazine Alley. The design proposes to cut through the ground floor of the Mee Building, at 16 North Washington Street, by removing the first-floor storefront and rear building walls, creating a 12' wide covered, pedestrian arcade.

The design proposes to create a north-south pedestrian walkway by extending from Dover Street through the existing open space area directly across from the Talbot Bank. A non-historic one story extension to the Shannahan building will be removed to connect the north and south halves of the block and the walkway will extend to Goldsborough Street.

With the removal of private automobile parking and the joining of individual land parcels, a large pedestrian open space is created. The proposed courtyard area design is conceived as a outdoor pedestrian market place that has evolved as part of the Town Center. As the visitor travels through the Inner Courtyard, he or she will experience a series of connected open spaces which are defined by the walls of the individual historic buildings. The courtyard will be a brick, concrete and stone paving system—which reflects historic roadway character—with pedestrian lighting and urban furniture and limited landscape plantings. A limited amount of building demolition (2,800 square feet) is proposed to create the Inner Courtyard space. The plan also recommends limited new construction to provide new access and to expand the existing buildings so that they can be more marketable.

The design plan recommends new building construction totaling 20,000 square feet over a number of years. The phased development will enhance revitalization of individual buildings and improve the shape, scale and aesthetics of the new public open space. A range of small two-story additions can be constructed to provide new courtyard entrances, stairs and elevators for access of vacant or underutilized second- and third-story office areas.

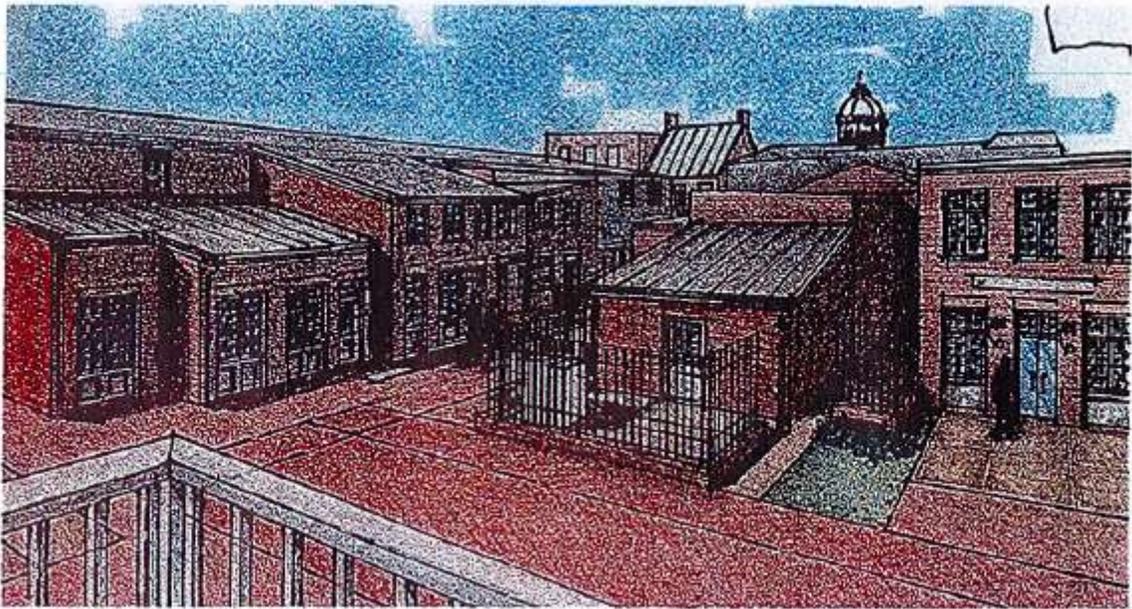
The existing vernacular character of this area will be encouraged and enhanced with limited new development. The proposed Design Plan reinforces the evolutionary character of the inner block and creates a contiguous pedestrian courtyard consistent with the existing historic character of the Town Center.



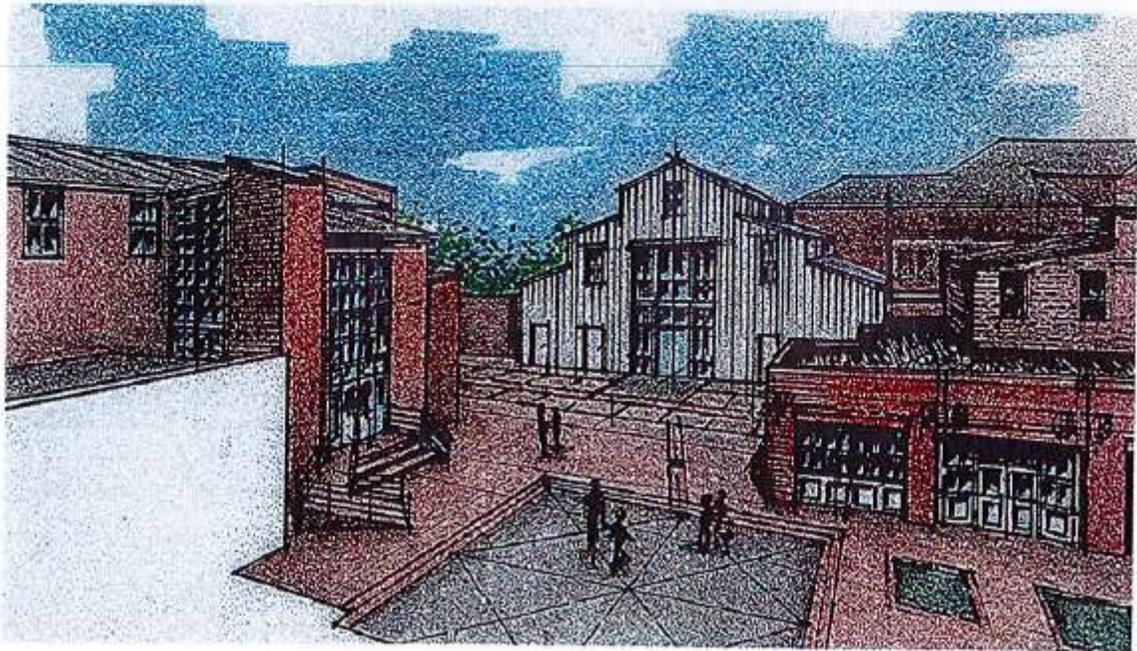
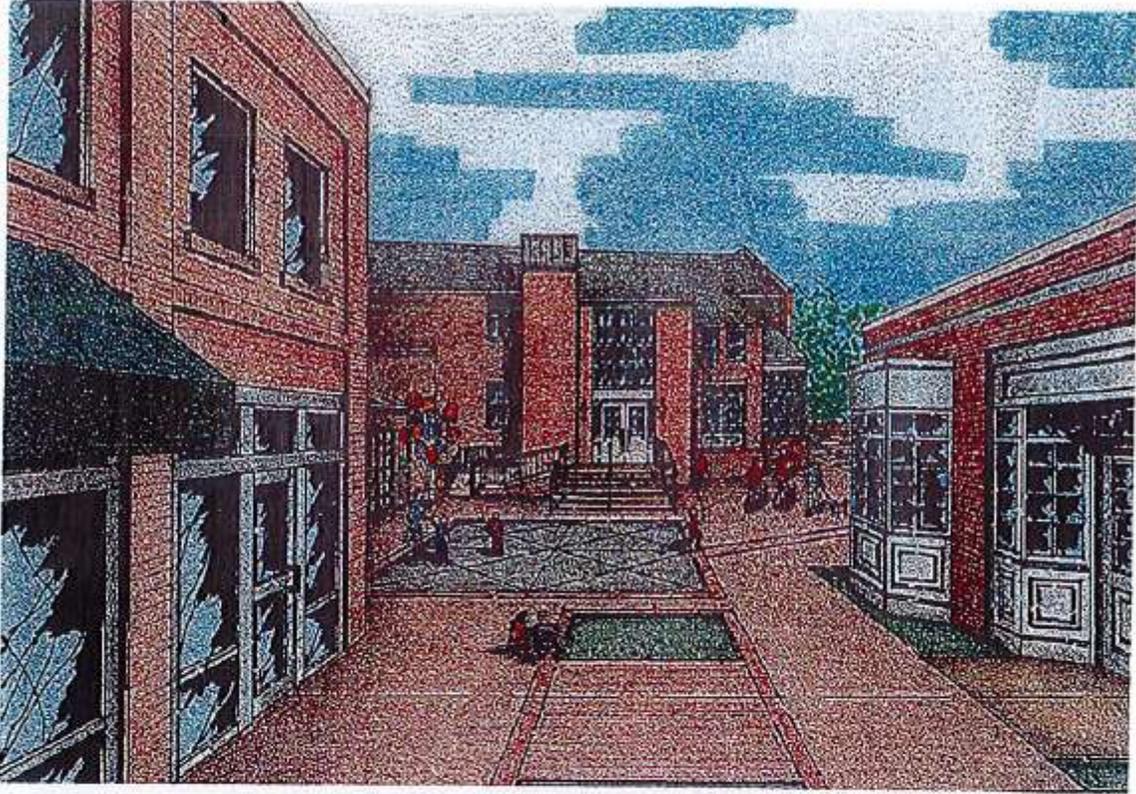
Inner-Courtyard Design Plan

Building Improvement Projects

The new courtyard project as envisioned will provide public access to the backs and sides of individual buildings allowing for new public access and egress to ground and second floors. Most retail shops should continue to face and open onto the surrounding streets. A select number of retail / service shops will open into the courtyard area. Several existing buildings facing Washington Street have a depth of over 200 feet. The rear halves of these structures are generally not marketable from Washington Street. The design plan will allow the rear halves of these buildings to open onto the courtyard as new retail or office space. The new courtyard will be the primary entry for 2nd and 3rd floor office and residential space.



Views of Magazine Alley



Views of Tin Alley

Reinforce Retail Use

The required shift in the present retail strategies of the Town Center is encouraged by the Inner Courtyard Design Plan. The benefits achieved by the introduction of the pedestrian connections through Block 9, listed above, will be further reinforced by:

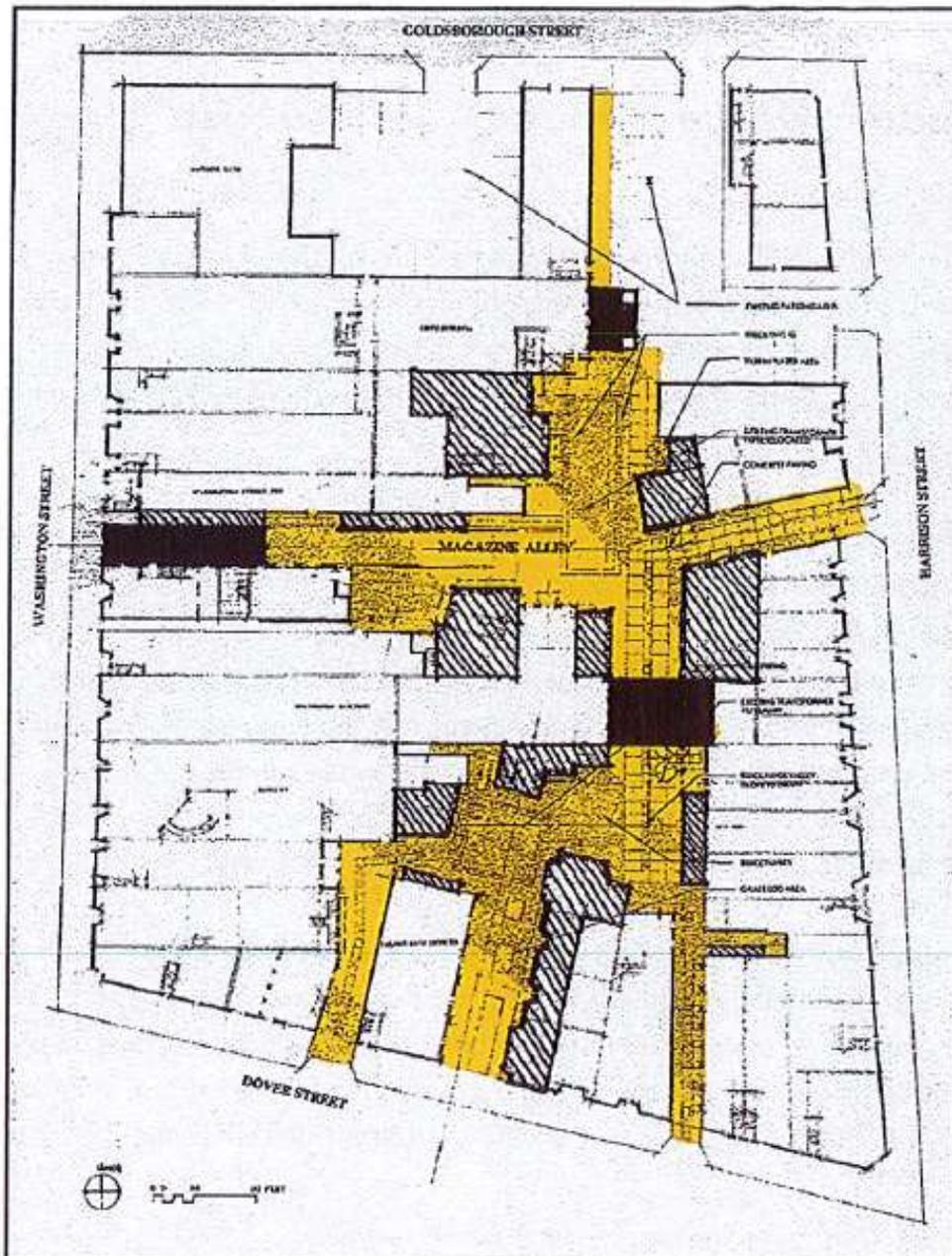
- Subdivision of existing large Retail Areas into tenant spaces ranging from 500 sq. ft. to 1500 sq. ft.
- Additional retail development along the inner courtyard pedestrian connection.
- Adaptive use of second and third floor space for office and residential use thereby providing a twenty-four hour pedestrian presence within the downtown area.
- Adopt parking management plan promoting shopper/ visitor-friendly parking environment.
- Maximize development of street level retail space by encouraging office functions on the second and third floors within the Town Center area.

Expand Office and Residential Use

Currently, 30,940 square feet of second and third floor space is vacant in the Easton Town Center area, much of which has been vacant for years and needs renovation. In review of similar towns throughout the country, a demand exists for both small business office space and upper level residential space within historic downtown areas.

Additional office space on the upper floors will provide more retail patronage during the day while the expansion of residential use will introduce a night time pedestrian presence and activity. A number of existing historic two or three story buildings can and should be converted to or re-established as residential apartments facing both the outer street and the Inner Courtyard. Mr. Ripkema confirmed in his study that there is a demand for upper level residential and that the space would be leasible at 80-85 percent of the top local market rental prices for quality housing. He estimated that as many as 15 to 20 apartment/condominium units could be created.

Outdoor stairs and balconies can be added to provide new courtyard entrances. In selected locations, shared elevators should be provided to accommodate disabled individuals and provide enhanced access. The pedestrian access to the offices, apartments and shops from both the courtyard and the existing street fronts will reinforce the comprehensive marketing strategy inherent within the Design Plan.



Proposed Development Plan

	Existing Building Area	175,230 s.f.
	Proposed Demolition	-2,800 s.f.
	Proposed New Construction	20,450 s.f.
TOTAL PLAN		192,880 s.f.
	Public Courtyard	

Parking and Deliveries

As described at the outset of this report, among the functions currently served in the area where the Inner Courtyard would be located, if built, are parking and deliveries. It is difficult to determine the number of parking spaces currently present in the area as some are formally delineated, but many are not. The Quinn-Evans study states that the number of spaces is (or was in 1996) 55. Suffice it to say that there are dozens of such spaces in the area and most, if not all, of them will have to be “replaced” in some way. The good news on that front is that there are ample parking spaces within close proximity of the Inner Courtyard. The bad news is while such spaces are indeed close, they are obviously more distant than the current spaces.

Depending on the ultimate layout of the inner Courtyard, there may be very limited opportunities to retain/provide a few parking spaces at the site. However, the extent to which property/business owners insist on more than those precious few spaces could well determine whether this project moves forward or not.

Another issue to address is that of the provision of services (e.g., trash pick-up) and deliveries, which are especially vital to the food and drink establishments. A convenient location for customers to pick up larger, bulkier items such as antiques or furniture is also an important consideration. Some of these issues might be accommodated with short-term on-street loading/unloading areas, although that could be difficult to accomplish depending on what happens with another project(s) under consideration to expand outdoor dining into the parallel parking spaces.

Ownership/Legal

One of the obstacles to successful implementation of an Inner Courtyard project (in whatever form that ultimately takes) that has been identified from very early on concerns issues of ownership. There are at least a couple of different layers to this issue. The first aspect of this issue is determining just who owns what land in the area to be improved through this project. Establishing property ownership limits is a fundamental step in any development project. More often than not, it is a relatively straightforward process involving surveying and title research. The exercise can become somewhat more complex in older and more densely developed parts of communities. The land on which the Inner Courtyard would be established was part of the original Town survey authorized by the State Legislature in 1785. Some of the parcels were likely created prior to that, possibly back to the original establishment of Courthouse in 1710. Under this scenario, it is not hard to imagine the difficulty associated with establishing exactly where property lines are legally located.

The second significant aspect of this issue is that of who would take ownership of the Inner Courtyard after it has been improved. The Quinn-Evans study acknowledged this issue and addressed it as follows:

Existing open space which is owned and controlled by over a dozen entities will have to be granted, leased, or purchased so that it can be assembled for the courtyard development as (1) a public, (2) private, or (3) quasi-public development.

Further study and evaluations need to be undertaken to determine which of three stewardship options is most appropriate. The stewardship options under consideration include

- *The land is deeded to the Town and becomes public open space developed and maintained by the Town similar to a roadway or park,*
- *A private ownership team retains control and establishes a new ownership structure to share in the development of the Inner Courtyard, and*
- *The land is leased to a quasi-government group who controls and operates and maintains the open space.*

A final legal issue is that of the entitlement process to create/build whatever project is ultimately agreed upon. There are no issues in terms of Zoning with regards to any of the likely uses (or those that have historically been described). The study area is located within the Town's Central Business Zoning District (CR), which is the most intense and least rigid districts in Town. The only development standard that may require some relief is lot coverage, which is established at 70% of the lot. That is, however, limited to buildings and structures, not all impervious surfaces, so even that standard may be able to be met without regulatory relief, depending upon the degree of (net) new construction on any given lot. Design approval for additions/demolitions will also be required from the Easton Historic District Commission. The other development-related regulation that will likely need to be addressed is that of stormwater management and although this seemingly could be a burden, it could also prove to be beneficial if there are opportunities to incorporate water features that double as both stormwater management and a site amenity.

Accessibility

One issue which was not addressed in either of the earlier studies of the Inner Courtyard was that of accessibility. That is, providing access to the Inner Courtyard for disabled persons. This should generally not be a significant issue and merely requires attention to design detail when creating the site and development plans. This is something that should be done routinely in this day and age by any qualified design professional.

The one exception to the statement of this not being a significant issue is with regards to access to the Inner Courtyard from the west (Washington Street). There is currently no break in this block face but for historic Magazine Alley which runs between the Washington Street Pub and

the building now known as Washington Street Plaza, and a smaller private alley on the opposite side of this same Washington Street Plaza Building. Magazine Alley is very narrow, only 33 inches from wall to wall at its narrowest point, right at the Washington Street entrance. This would, at best, just barely satisfy the clearance requirements for disabled persons in a wheelchair. It would likely prove problematic for emergency responses to the Inner Courtyard via Washington Street as well, although clearly there would be other means of accessing the area from the remaining three streets.



Magazine Alley

Although the issue was not raised in the earlier studies, the Quinn-Evans report suggested a solution in the form of the demolition of a portion of what was then referred to as the Mee Building, now home of offices in the Washington Street Plaza (as depicted on the Proposed Development Plan – see page 24 above). This would certainly be an effective, though drastic, solution to the access issue from Washington Street. The most salient point is that so long as this area, as well as any other which proposes demolition or new construction, remains part of private property, the decision of when, or even whether, to pursue such an undertaking lies with those property owners.

Next Steps

The following section of this Report identifies the various steps necessary to advance the Inner Courtyard from an idea to an actual project. An attempt has been made to list them in approximately the order necessary to lead to the smoothest and most expeditious implementation of the Plan. It is certainly possible (even likely) that (a) multiple steps can be in process simultaneously and (b) a host of circumstances may arise which would dictate a change in the order these steps are pursued and indeed, perhaps even whether certain steps need to be pursued and/or new steps added. With those caveats in mind, the following are a best guess and good faith estimation of how the Inner Courtyard project can come to fruition.

Step 1 – Determine What the Project is

The first and perhaps most obvious step involved in the Inner Courtyard Project is to determine just what it is that will be created. At least two conceptual ideas have been identified in previous studies dating back to the 1990's. The original LDR Study suggested in at least one illustration, a significantly opened-up interior Courtyard, with very formal and regular public space. The follow-up Quinn Evans study was more detailed and depicted more of a series of connected and meandering Courtyards. The first and most basic question (aside from the essential “go/no go” question) is deciding which plan to pursue. The options include:

- The LDR concept
- The Quinn Evans concept
- Either of the above, but modified in some way
- Something altogether different

Given that the LDR concept was further studied, updated and refined by the Quinn Evans Plan, it seems reasonable to remove it from consideration. Aside from this evolutionary fact, it also appeared overly accommodating of automobile access (to the detriment of pedestrians) and would involve significant building demolition. The choice of what to pursue then seems to be slightly simplified to the Quinn Evans concept as presented in their report, the same concept but as may be revised, or some completely new and different plan.

The most expedient path to implementation would clearly be to start with an option that has already been developed, presumably with some level of input from affected property owners, businesses, and the general public, albeit more than 20 years ago. Given this, the assumption at this point will be that the Quinn Evans Concept (or something fairly close to it) is the one that will be pursued.

From the Town of Easton's perspective, for the purpose of advancing the Inner Courtyard project, the concern is not so much on the building additions or modifications and how they

might extend beyond the walls of the buildings. Those changes will all remain on private property. The aspect of the project that the Town is looking to advance or facilitate is the area(s) identified as some sort of common, public or quasi-public space. This is the area shown in yellow on the Quinn Evans Proposed Development Plan and identified thereon as “Public Courtyard.”

At the present time, with the possible exception of whatever remains of Magazine Alley, all of this area identified as “Public Courtyard” is part of private property. A vital step in the development process then is for the Town (or its designated agency/representative) to acquire the actual land (or the rights to improve said land) that is to be part of the Public Courtyard. The development of this public portion would then serve as a catalyst for private-sector improvements on the portions of the lots that remain in private ownership. This could take the form of new building accesses oriented to the Courtyard, building modifications, and/or improvement of currently unused or underutilized upper story space.

This is both a critical and potentially complicated process in the ultimate development of the Inner Courtyard. There are many challenges associated with acquiring the public courtyard. Each individual owner has to be willing to donate or sell the land. If they choose to sell rather than donate, the Town (or designated organization) has to have the money required to pay for it. There are other possible arrangements such as some type of entity ownership where the owners own it together. That entity and arrangement would need to be fleshed out and would likely be difficult to facilitate. Also, regardless of the ownership structure or approach, issues such as lenders and liens need to be resolved, as well as possibly subdivisions of all of the properties/lot line revisions, etc.

Step 2 – Develop Planning and Engineering Documents

Using the Quinn Evans Proposed Development Plan as the basis, once it is determined precisely what area is to be improved as a public courtyard, the next step is a key one and involves the preparation of the site plan and associated plans and documents. This will build upon the Quinn Evans conceptual level plan to provide the level of detail necessary for such things as:

- The specifications of the project so that they can be properly budgeted and (if applicable) bid.
- Communication of what is envisioned in the project. This will be important when approaching property-owners, for conveying information to interested citizens and possibly investors, and to accompany applications to agencies which may have grant funding for some aspect of the project.
- Permit documents.
- Design of infrastructure or site amenities necessary or desirable to support the project. This will include landscaping, stormwater management features, location of street furniture, trash receptacles or pick-up areas, and utility locations.

The most crucial and immediate first steps in implementing the Inner Courtyard then are to reach consensus on precisely what area is to be developed as public (or quasi-public) courtyard(s) and to prepare a site plan depicting the boundaries of that area as well as the details of what is to occur on that land. These are the prerequisites to the actual “shovels in the ground” phase that will likely signal to many that the project is finally on the way to becoming a reality.

Step 3 – Budget and Bid (and Build) the Public Aspects of the Project

Once the scope and nature (i.e. where and what) of the project are determined, the project can begin. Paramount in this step is developing an as accurate as possible estimate of the costs associated with the public courtyard space. Earlier in this report, an inflation-adjusted estimate of the cost to build the project, as identified in the Quinn Evans study, of \$1,684,404 was presented. This is an obvious starting point in preparing the estimated budget. It should be thoroughly examined though for a few reasons, including:

- The scope of what we want to build today may be different than the project presented in the Quinn Evans Study.
- Some of the component parts may have experienced a rate of inflation that is either less or greater than the general rate of inflation used in calculating the updated estimate of cost.
- There may be some components that could possibly be accomplished in-house in 2020 that were not an option in 1997.

With an estimated cost that the Town is reasonably confident is accurate, the process of determining how to fund the project can begin in earnest. There will likely be a number of options to consider and almost certainly more than one of them will be required to see the project through to fruition. Some of these could include:

- **Budgeted Funds:** While it seems unlikely that any significant funds exist in the current (FY 21') budget, it is certainly possible to include some funds in future budgets.
- **Tax Increment Financing (TIF):** Under this scenario, the Town would pursue a municipal bond to fund the construction cost and dedicate the incremental increase in tax revenues from the affected properties resulting from increased property values (as reflected in increased assessed values).
- **Grants:** While there almost certainly will not be one organization able to provide a grant for the complete scope and cost of the project, various aspects might be eligible for some funding. A number of possible applications of the State of Maryland's Community Legacy Grant Program come to mind, though most would likely be more applicable to the private property aspects of the project. Still, such opportunities should be explored, as should those that relate to historic preservation, improving walkability and

pedestrian access, general economic or community development, and possibly environmental enhancements (assuming stormwater management can be made part of the project). It is even possible that there may be Federal COVID-19 response related funding available for some aspect(s) of the project, depending on the timing.

The primary issue associated with the majority of grant fund sources is that of timing. Grant awards are often made several months after applications are due and applications are often only accepted within a single window each year. Miss the window, even by a matter of days, and it will be nearly a full year before the Town could apply again (and again, several months thereafter before grants are awarded, and often, still more time before the funds are available). It thus becomes imperative to identify the grants that seem like the most logical fit for the project and prepare the strongest possible application as soon as possible, to be ready for submission when the opportunity presents itself. Likewise, steps one and two above should be completed as “Readiness to Proceed” is frequently the key aspect that potential funders are looking for when reviewing applications.

Regardless of the mechanism used to fund the project, with few exceptions, the Town will have to go through the public procurement and bidding process for those aspects of the project that are publicly-funded. This is one of the reasons why a site plan and associated detailed specifications are important to prepare as soon as possible in the process. Simply put, the better and more detailed a plan that can be shared with bidders, the more informed the bid should be that they submit, and the less likelihood there is later for change orders, renegotiated bids, etc.

Step 4 – Assist Private Property-Owners Identify/Obtain Funding Opportunities

The steps outlined above have to this point focused primarily on the public improvements necessary to implement the Inner Courtyard and while at its heart, this project is all about a new public or quasi-public space in Downtown Easton, there are clearly issues that will need to be addressed on private property. Furthermore, however nice of a public space the Town might create, it will be significantly less enjoyable (and likely, utilized) if it is simply a nice public space surrounded by buildings that remain in the same state that the majority of them are in today. The attractive vignettes depicted in the Quinn Evans study (and reproduced on pages 21 and 22 above) clearly represent varying levels of improvements (e.g., new entrances, windows, façade improvements, etc) to each of the buildings surrounding the Courtyard. Not only will such improvements enhance the experience of the Courtyard itself, but they also potentially represent opportunities for new usage of these same buildings. Complimentary uses could be added with exclusive Courtyard access (e.g., a coffee shop carved from one of the existing restaurants). Secondary uses could also be an option (e.g. a tapas restaurant located in the rear of a traditional restaurant). Access to upper story offices, apartments or condominiums are

also a possibility and certainly many potential uses present the prospect of “spilling out” onto the Courtyard, particularly the food and beverage uses.

While outside sources of funding might not be as readily available for projects on private property as they are on public property, there are some possibilities. The Quinn Evans Study identified the following three such possibilities:

- Private sector bond financing to fund improvement costs based on anticipated increase in value and sales.
- Federal Historic [20%] Tax Credits for certified rehabilitation that exceeds the adjusted basis value of the building.
- Low interest short-term loan program that could be set up and funded by local bonds. This program helps to stimulate immediate rehabilitation investment.

Other possibilities not included in the Quinn Evans Study include State of Maryland Historic Tax Credits, Energy Efficiency Tax Credits, Opportunity Zone funding, and sources such as the State of MD’s More Jobs for Marylanders Program that is available to properties located within an Opportunity zone. All of the Inner Courtyard is within Easton’s Opportunity Zone and this program is described by the State of Maryland as follows:

One of Governor Hogan's top legislative priorities of 2017, More Jobs for Marylanders, promotes the growth of manufacturing in Maryland by providing tax incentives for manufacturing job creation, encourages manufacturers to invest in new equipment through accelerated and bonus depreciation, and funds job training and apprenticeship programs to help strengthen Maryland's workforce. In 2019, the tax credit program was expanded to non-manufacturers that locate or expand in Opportunity Zones.

More Jobs for Marylanders Tax Credits

Tax credits are available to new and existing manufacturers that locate or expand in Maryland and create new manufacturing jobs and to non-manufacturers that locate or expand in Maryland Opportunity Zones.

BENEFITS

The benefits are available for a 10 year period.

- **TIER 1 NEW MANUFACTURING BUSINESS:** (a) a refundable credit against the State’s income tax of 5.75% of wages for each qualified position; (b) a credit against the State’s portion of the property tax; (c) a refund of sales and use tax; and (d) a waiver of fees charged by SDAT.
- **TIER 1 OR TIER 2 EXISTING MANUFACTURING BUSINESS:** A refundable credit against the State’s income tax of 5.75% of wages for each qualified position.

- **OPPORTUNITY ZONE NEW NON-MANUFACTURING BUSINESS:** (a) a refundable credit against the State's income tax of 5.75% of wages for each qualified position; (b) a credit against the State's portion of the property tax that is the lesser of 100% of state property tax OR \$250 per qualified position; (c) a refund of sales and use tax; and (d) a waiver of fees charged by SDAT.
- **OPPORTUNITY ZONE NON-MANUFACTURING EXISTING BUSINESS:** A refundable credit against the State's income tax of 5.75% of wages for each qualified position.

Conclusion

This report represents primarily a compilation and summary of work done in previous studies of the Inner Courtyard, dating back to the mid 1990's. It has been shared with, and reviewed by, a small group of interested stakeholders which included owners of property in the Inner Courtyard Block, representatives from agencies involved with Economic Development in Easton and officials from the Town of Easton and Easton Utilities. Information, including draft versions of this report, were shared via email and two in-person meetings were held to review the Report and to generally discuss whether the Inner Courtyard remains an idea worth pursuing in 2020.

The consensus of the group was that not only is the Inner Courtyard still worth pursuing some 20+ years after it was last seriously considered, it is probably (a) more urgent to do so today and (b) the most opportune time to do so. Among the reasons for this conclusion are the following:

- The project has generally always been viewed as a good idea. It simply faced obstacles that for a variety of reasons no one chose to attempt to overcome some 20+ years ago.
- Interest levels amongst property and business owners seems high, and there is an urgent desire to do something in to both assist businesses so dramatically impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in the short-term and simultaneously create a new amenity/attraction to boost the long-term economic stability of Downtown Easton.
- The need for such a project is at least perceived to be even greater today. The Downtown faced challenges even before Covid. As a result of the pandemic, these challenges are actually genuine threats to the survival of a host of businesses. The Inner Courtyard is potentially a short-term aid in the form of something novel, with new opportunities for outdoor dining, and limited scale special events. Longer term it has the potential to enhance the Downtown by providing a pedestrian-focused amenity that many suggest is lacking.
- There seems to be momentum that perhaps did not exist in 1997. New property-owners appear to be genuinely supportive of the concept and some who assisted in an advisory capacity in the review of this report provide firsthand accounts of customers expressing enthusiasm for the project.

One of the sections of this Report described the steps necessary to bring the Inner Courtyard to fruition. Sometimes complex projects such as this suffer from "Can't See the Forest for the Trees" syndrome. In such situations, it can be helpful to focus on the most immediate and critical next steps. In the case of the Inner Courtyard project in 2020, the most immediate needs to advance the project seem to be the following:

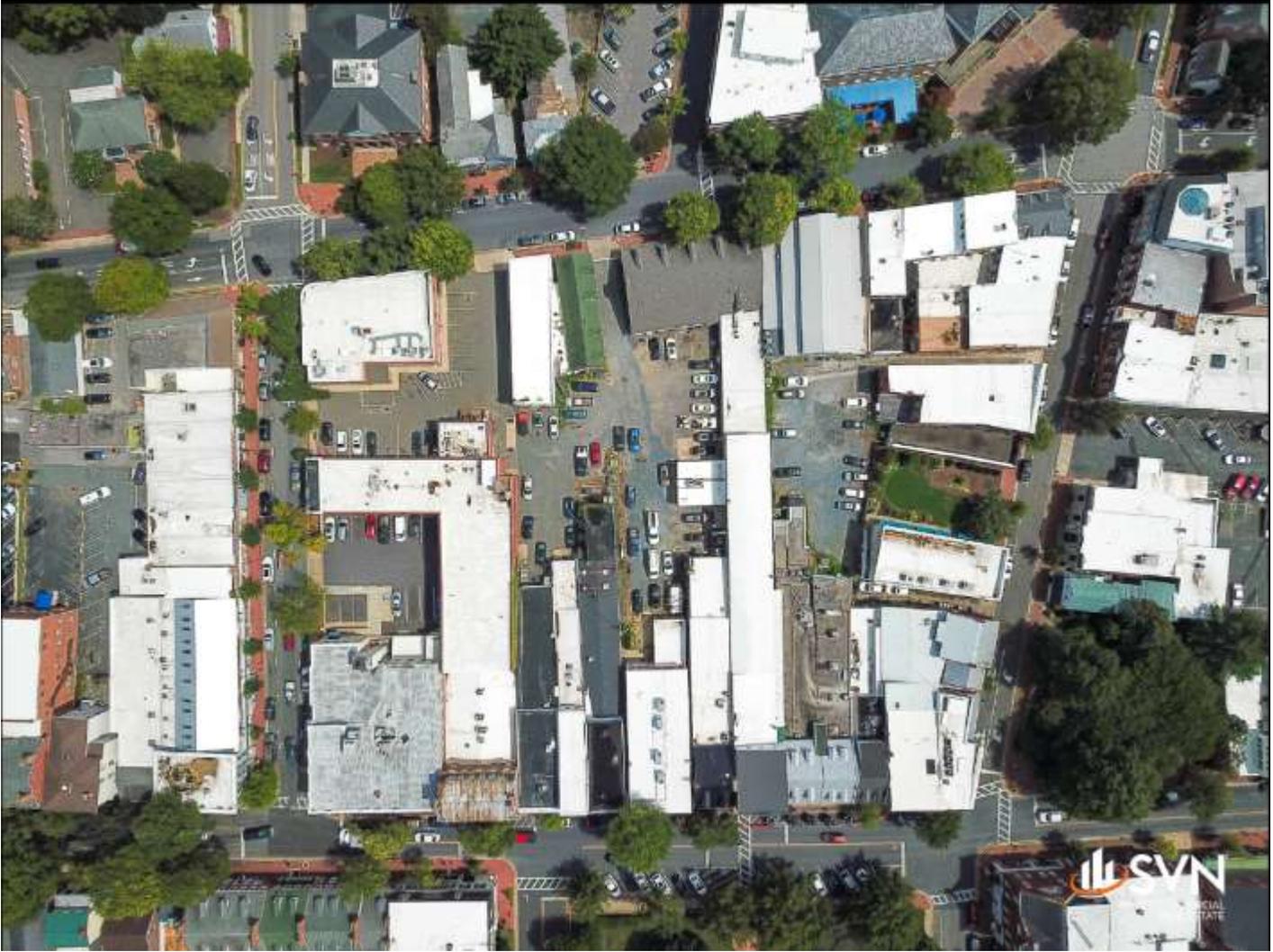
- Decide that the Inner Courtyard is a project worth pursuing. The conclusion of this Report, as stated above, is that it is and the consensus of the stakeholders who reviewed this work was also that it is. It should help advance the project if organizations like the Easton Business Alliance, the Easton Economic Development Corporation, and elected bodies endorsed the project. This would conceivably provide some level of assurance to the business community that such organizations are committed to making the project happen, which could be key in persuading them to make the private-sector improvements necessary to make the project as successful as it possibly can be. Such endorsements will also likely be helpful in some grant applications as an indicator of community support.
- Work with a broader array of stakeholders and interested parties to determine just what the project should be. This can be advanced through the use of a charrette* or similar type of intensive, hands-on, facilitated design-oriented process. The Town and its affiliated partners should look for opportunities to do this in the next 2 to 3 months so as to maintain and build on existing interest and build momentum.
- Plan the financing of the project. This will involve obtaining a better estimate of the costs associated with the project, identifying possible grant-funding opportunities, and including some level of funding in the next Town budget cycle.

* - A charrette refers to an intense and highly-participatory design-oriented public meeting, or series of meetings. It involves quickly updated design work, resulting from dynamic feedback from all interested parties, including property-owners, residents, government officials, potential investors, and, really, anyone interested in the project. It provides the somewhat unique advantage of providing designers almost immediate feedback, and in turn allows the designers to present updated plans and illustrations to the participants in short order. Most importantly, it allows all participants to legitimately feel as if they are authors or designers of the final plan, generally contributing to broader plan acceptance.

Drone Photography

The following series of photos are provided by Bob Greenlee, a member of the advisory group for this 2020 Reassessment of the Inner Courtyard. The photos were taken using a drone on Friday, August 21, 2020 and depict the area of the Inner Courtyard and surrounding properties from multiple angles.











Gallery of Outdoor Dining Courtyards

The following photographs are merely a few examples of outdoor dining areas around the country. While the exact nature of the use of the Inner Courtyard is not known at this time, it seems a near certainty that places to consume food and beverages will be a key component, on both the Public portion as well as on some of the private properties. These illustrations have therefore been included as just a few examples of what might be possible on these spaces.



Philadelphia



New York City



Boston



Boston



Baltimore



Mobile







New Orleans (the preceding five photographs)

August 2020 Property Ownership Summary

The attached property information was compiled by advisory committee member, Bob Greenlee. It represents the best available information as of August 2020. Evaluation and investment figures are based on Maryland Department of Assessment and Taxation Records, except in instances where more recent appraisal information was available. A special thanks is extended to Mr. Greenlee for both this compilation as well as the drone photographs presented previously in this Report.

CORKRAN INNER COURTYARD
OWNERSHIP AND UTILIZATION
AUGUST 2020

	STREET ADDRESS	VALUE	% TOTAL	LAND	BLDG	% TOTAL	OWNERSHIP & CONTACT	TENANT-Primary	TENANT-Other	INVESTMENT
DOVER STREET										
Alley	29 N/S E. Dover	\$368,000	3.3%	1,718 SF	3,182 SF	2.4%	29 East Dover Street LLC Scott Wimbrow	Exit Realty/Latham	3,182 SF	
IC 1	25 N/S E. Dover	\$435,000	3.9%	4,865 SF	3,503 SF	2.7%	Lu-Ev Building Ptnrshp Bob Johnson	Lu Ev Framing Shop	3,503 SF	3,840 SF
IC 2	23 N/S E. Dover	\$167,200	1.5%	1,920 SF	1,457 SF	1.1%	Kristen Dukes Kristen Dukes	Flo-Mir	1,457 SF	
IC 3	17 N/S E. Dover	\$1,133,400	10.1%	10,264 SF	4,928 SF	3.8%	Shore United Bank Scott Beatty	Talbot Bank, book-keeping & discount bro	4,928 SF	
Corner	1 N/S E. Dover						D & M Properties Dave Valliant	Jennifer Gilmer Kitchen & Bath	3,866 SF Prim, M. Randall, Atelier II	01/18/12 \$300,000 \$69.35
HARRISON STREET										
Corner	1-3-5-7 W/S N. Harrison						One North Harrison LLC Doug Walker	Berrier LTD	7,307 SF	12/09/19 \$819,000 \$112.08
	1-3-5-7 W/S N. Harrison							Vacant		
	1-3-5-7 W/S N. Harrison							Vacant		
	7 W/S N. Harrison							Trading Post		
IC 4	9 + 11 W/S N. Harrison	\$237,500	2.1%	1,738 SF	2,981 SF	2.3%	Nine North Harrison LLC Dave Valliant	Vacant	523 SF	07/28/16 \$265,000 \$88.90
IC	11 W/S N. Harrison							Vacant	1,766 SF	
IC 5	13 W/S N. Harrison	\$482,800	4.3%	5,376 SF	5,120 SF	3.9%	Coastal Blue Talbot Comm Brad Callahan	Vacant	1,653 SF 13-15 = 5120 SF	09/03/19 \$425,000 \$83.01
IC	13A W/S N. Harrison							La De Da!	1,560 SF	
IC	15 W/S N. Harrison							Trade Whims	1,907 SF	
IC 6	17 W/S N. Harrison		0.0%				Kennedy Rose LLC Fitzgerald Family	Coldwell Banker	836 SF	See Below
IC	?? W/S N. Harrison							Meredith Real Estate	700 SF	
IC	19A W/S N. Harrison							Powell Real Estate	1,300 SF	
IC	19B W/S N. Harrison							Optical Galleria	350 SF	
IC	21A W/S N. Harrison							Acupuncture	350 SF	
IC	21B W/S N. Harrison							Levity	750 SF	
IC 7	23 W/S N. Harrison	\$281,100	2.5%	3,500 SF	2,554 SF	2.0%	Shannahan, RG & JS Bob Shannahan	Trippe Gallery	1,650 SF Upstairs Apts.	1,320 SF 05/15/01 \$325,000 \$127.25
IC	25 W/S N. Harrison	\$389,700	3.5%	2,340 SF	4,500 SF	3.5%	Shannahan, RG & JS Bob Shannahan	Easton Antiques and Art	2,250 SF Upstairs Apts.	2,250 SF
IC	27 W/S N. Harrison								2,250 SF	
IC 8	31 W/S N. Harrison	\$919,300	8.2%	13,812 SF	8,943 SF	6.9%	Legacy Real Estate LLC Paul Prager	Vacant	1,316 SF	See Below
IC	33 W/S N. Harrison							Regent Barber Shop	621 SF	
IC	W/S N. Harrison							Sailor	1,581 SF	
IC	W/S N. Harrison							RBC	1,957 SF Vacant? (former Law Office)	1,695 SF
GOLDSBOROUGH STREET										
IC *	20 S/S Goldsborough						Legacy Real Estate LLC Paul Prager	Lizzy Dee	986 SF Claggett Engineering	1,473 SF See Below
IC	22 S/S Goldsborough							Out of the Fire	3,679 SF	
WASHINGTON STREET										
IC 9	4 E/S N. Washington	\$526,600	4.7%	5,104 SF	9,921 SF	7.6%	D&M Properties LLC Dave Valliant	Vintage	6,552 SF 9921 Total	02/06/13 \$375,000 \$97.15
IC 10	6 E/S N. Washington	\$375,400	3.3%	3,325 SF	3,860 SF	3.0%	Guo Properties, LLC	Jin-Jin Chinese Rest.	1,902 SF Office & Apts. 3860 total	1,901 SF 01/06/05 \$450,000 \$116.58
IC 11	8-10 E/S N. Washington	\$795,100	7.1%	9,347 SF	8,159 SF	6.3%	10 North LLC JB Spear	Scossa Restaurant	13,147 SF Apartment	04/21/15 \$750,000 \$91.92
IC *	12 E/S N. Washington	\$1,012,300	9.0%	24,336 SF	19,878 SF	15.3%	Kennedy Rose LLC Fitzgerald Family	A Happy Place	22,816 SF	06/29/18 \$1,075,000 \$54.08
IC 12	14 E/S N. Washington	\$809,400	7.2%	4,543 SF	7,200 SF	5.5%	14 North Washington LLC Stein Olavsrud	Doc's Restaurant	3,100 SF Fitzgerald, All Gutters, 7632	2,400 SF 12/21/12 \$767,542 \$106.60
IC 13	16-18 E/S N. Washington	\$988,000	8.8%	4,294 SF	6,408 SF	4.9%	Washington Street Plaza Cliff Meredith	Wye Financial and Trust	3,755 SF 6456 T	1,660 SF 01/14/16 \$800,000 \$124.84
IC 14	20 E/S N. Washington	\$552,100	4.9%	6,183 SF	4,851 SF	3.7%	Marshyhope Ventures LLC Dan Ruegg	Washington St.Pub	5,715 SF	01/28/10 \$550,000 \$113.38
IC 15	22 E/S N. Washington	\$345,000	3.1%	3,816 SF	3,075 SF	2.4%	22 N Washington Street LL Steve Shearer	Shearer the Jeweler	2,175 SF SVN Listing	900 SF
IC 16	24 E/S N. Washington	\$555,500	4.9%	6,000 SF	4,665 SF	3.6%	Trappe Station LLC Chuck Mangold	Benson and Mangold Real Estate	4,665 SF	04/05/04 \$665,000 \$142.55
IC *	26-30 E/S N. Washington	\$887,900	7.9%	13,354 SF	24,743 SF	19.0%	Legacy Real Estate LLC Paul Prager	Talbot Oriental Rugs	1,995 SF Vacant	1,133 SF 03/11/14 \$950,000 \$38.39
Corner	36 E/S N. Washington						36 N Washington Holdings Stoltz / Jeff Nugent	Bank of America	2,573 SF Kopen & Collison, Other SVN Listing	3,100 SF
		\$11,261,300		129,928 SF				TOTAL INNER COURTYARD AREA	686,381 SF	37,827 SF
								TOTAL TOWN CENTER	724,208 SF	\$8,516,542

18% of Town Center