



Introduction:

The Montross Success Story is taking place as we speak, with façade improvements being implemented this week, as they have been in the past couple of months and will continue in the coming weeks, along with landscaping and other public improvements.

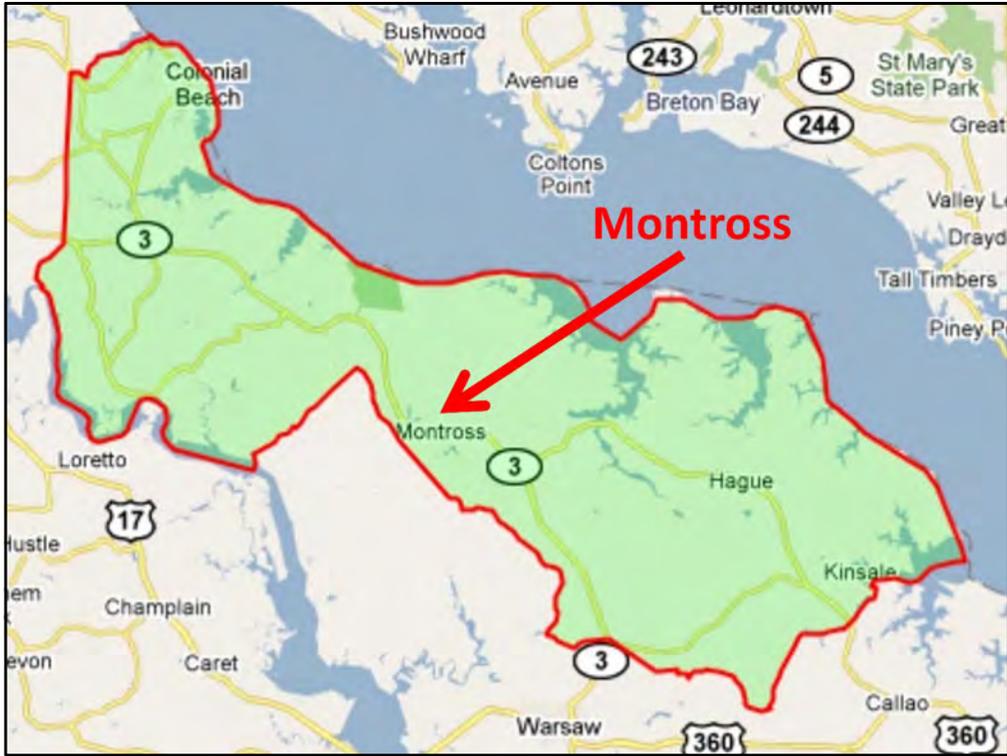
What makes Montross a success story is that it is part of the big picture of economic development of the Northern Neck region. It's not just about Montross.

In the last ten years, there has been a concerted effort by the counties of the Northern Neck and the Northern Neck Planning District Commission to develop a regional approach that can benefit all the localities equally.

Through organizations such as the Northern Neck Tourism Commission and the Northern Neck –Chesapeake Bay Region Partnership—with the assistance of the Virginia Tourism Corporation, the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, VDOT, the U.S. Department of Commerce, and other agencies—a number of local comprehensive plans have emerged, all connecting the dots to regional cooperation.



Town of Montross, with an estimated population of 384 in 2012, is the seat of Westmoreland County,



and located in the geographic center of the County.



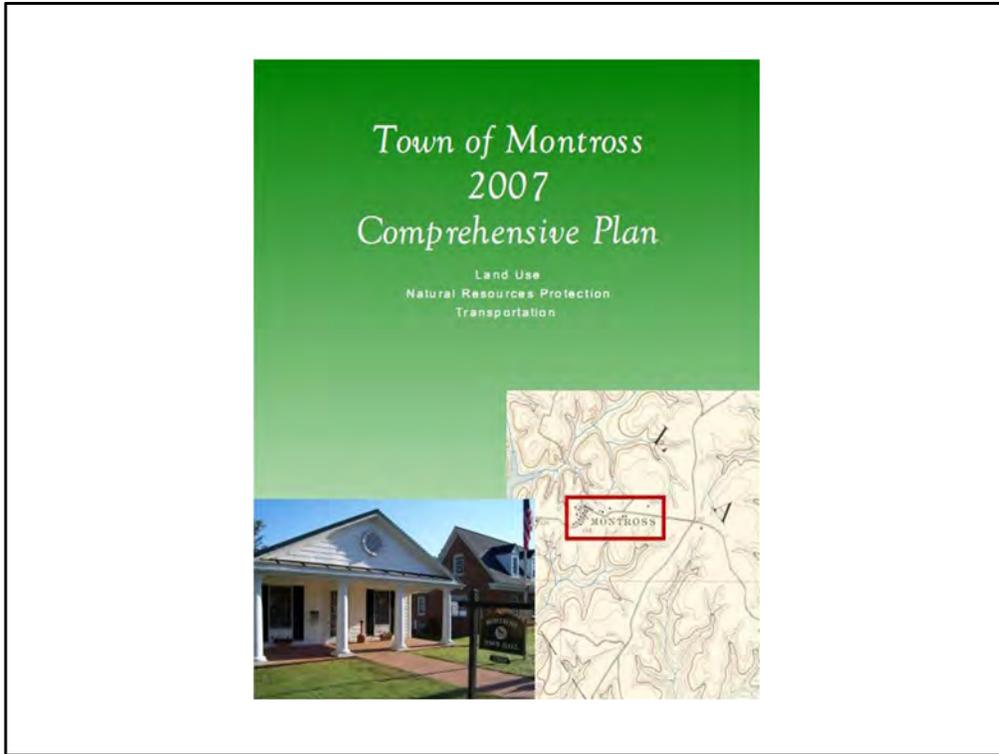
Montross prides itself in being a historical center of the Northern Neck.

European settlement started around the middle of the 17th century in the area, and the first courthouse on the land that eventually became the Town of Montross was built in 1667.



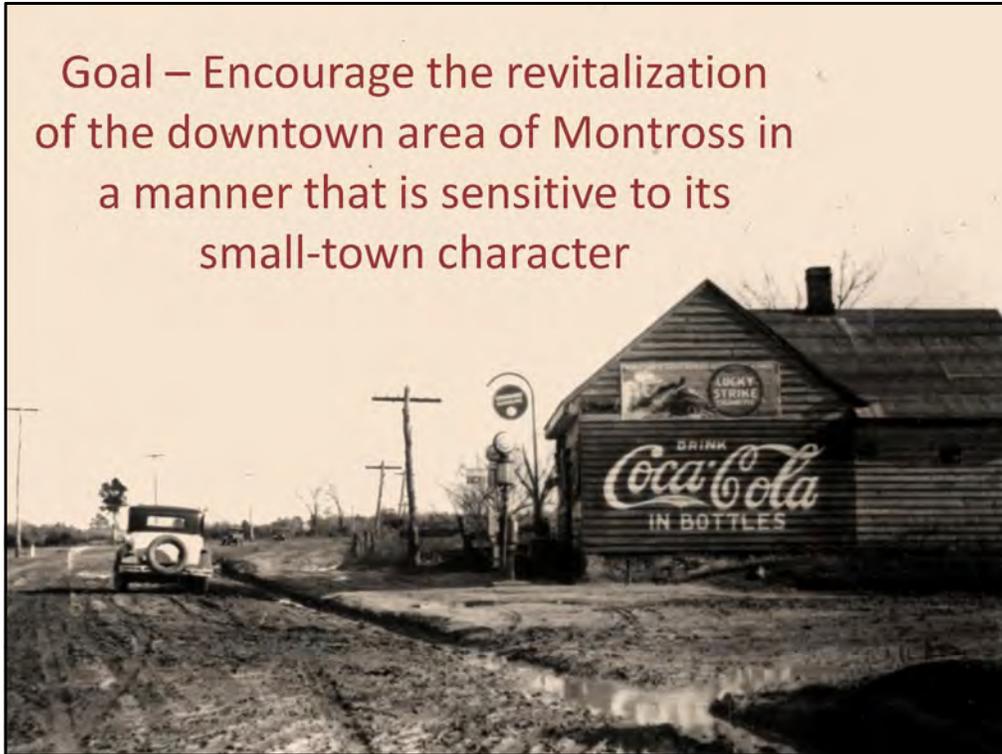
As the county seat, Montross is home to a number of historic structures that retain their small-town character.

So the potential was definitely there to make Montross a downtown-revitalization success.

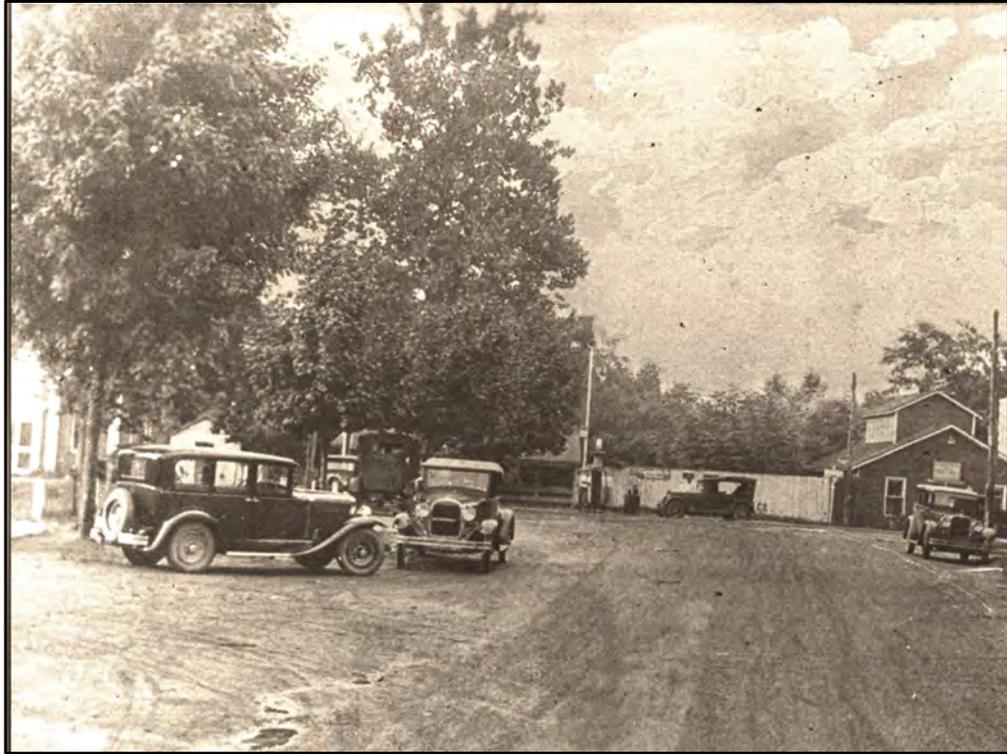


The process began with the Town's comprehensive plan, completed in 2007.

Goal – Encourage the revitalization
of the downtown area of Montross in
a manner that is sensitive to its
small-town character



Among the goals found in the Comprehensive Plan was . . . To “Encourage the revitalization of the downtown area of Montross in a manner that is sensitive to its small-town character.”



In essence: Keep the past present,



While creating . . .



The future.



MAIN STREET MODEL

- Economic Restructuring
- Organization
- Promotion
- Design

So the process began. The Town **applied** for a **community-organizing visioning grant** from DHCD (\$10K).

The idea was to **follow the Main Street model, whose Four Points include** Design, Promotion (bring them downtown again), Economic Restructuring (recruit and assist viable businesses), and Organization (keep it active, committee structure, membership, partnership development, etc.).



The community organized.

It formed a Management Team that began its work with a building inventory to calculate vacancy rates in the core downtown area.

The team was also key in getting residents and the business community involved.

A member of the Town Council, as well as the Town Manager, who is here today, were also important participants in the process.

What do we
want to see in
place in 2015?

The visioning session, which took place in 2008, simply asked: “What do we want to see in place in 2015?”

KEY POINTS

**Montross as a retail and cultural center
for the Northern Neck region . . .**

. . . for visitors AND residents

The answer provided a vision statement that contained these key points:

Montross should be a retail and cultural center for the entire Northern Neck region . . .

A center for both visitors AND residents.



PLANNING:
Master Plan

With that in mind, the next step was the production of a master plan.

The Town applied for a \$25,000 planning grant from DHCD and a \$10K grant from the Virginia Housing Development Authority---and received both grants.



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- **Economic Restructuring**
- Marketing & Branding
- Physical Improvements
- Blight Identification & Removal/Remediation
- PER

A key section of the master plan was Economic Restructuring, as recommended by DHCD to achieve the National Objective of benefits to LMI individuals.

Other important elements of a master plan include Marketing & Branding, Physical Improvements, Blight Identification & Removal, and a Preliminary Engineering Report.

DHCD has been involved community development for a long time.

The agency knows what works and what doesn't.

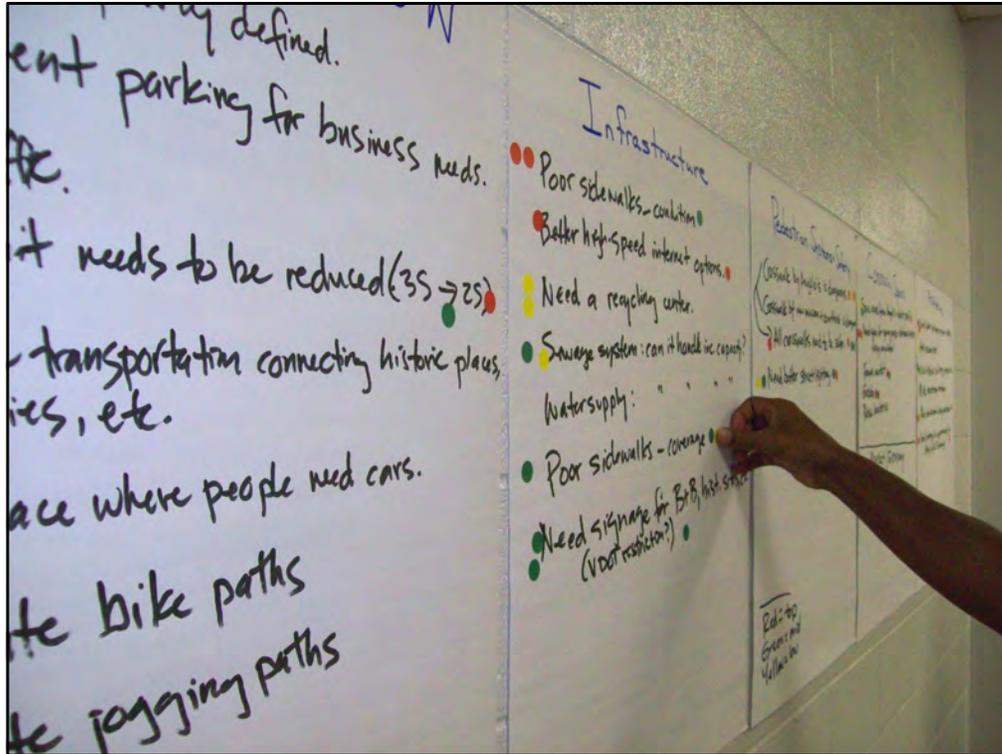
It makes sense to have them as a partner from the very start.



During the planning process, a consultant worked with the MT.

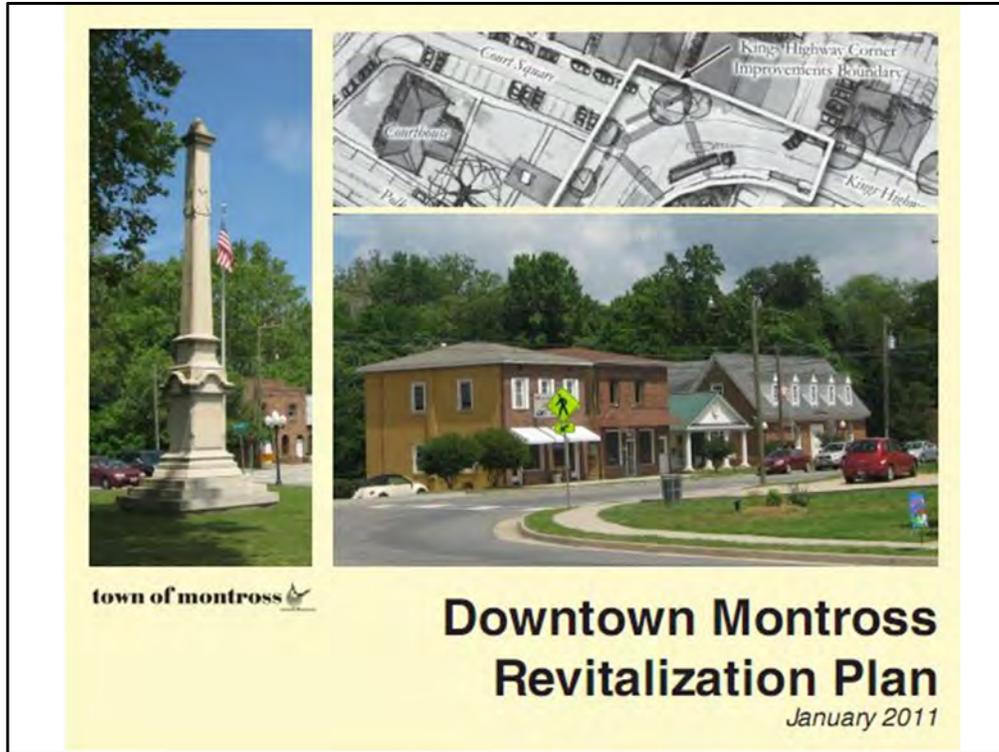


They spent a great deal of time on economic restructuring, which included a sales-leakage study, always keeping in mind the Main Street model based on what made sense for Montross.



the various steps engaged the participants.

That is really key. If not enough residents or business owners are on board, the project will not succeed.



Master plan completed in 2011.

used as the base for the application for a CDBG grant that year.

And the Town's application . . .



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CDBG Application

2011 = ☹️

ended up not being funded.

The Management Team kept on working together

Improved application and plan to better address the national objectives

And . . .



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CDBG Application

2012 = 😊

The next year, the State found the application to be competitive enough to award it a grant.

Again, all this shows that a locality has to have patience.

These projects take time.

Project Elements

- **Façade Improvement Grants**
- **Revolving-Loan Fund**
- **Marketing Website**
- **Public Improvements**

The Montross project included several elements that, together, addressed key points of the Main Street model.

Façade Improvements



The façade-improvement grants are actually forgivable loans that require a 50/50 match. Five years, forgiven at 20% per year.

There were more applicants for façade-improvement grants than the budget could cover, so the Façade Committee had to prioritize commercial properties based on which could provide the greatest visual impact by improving its facade.



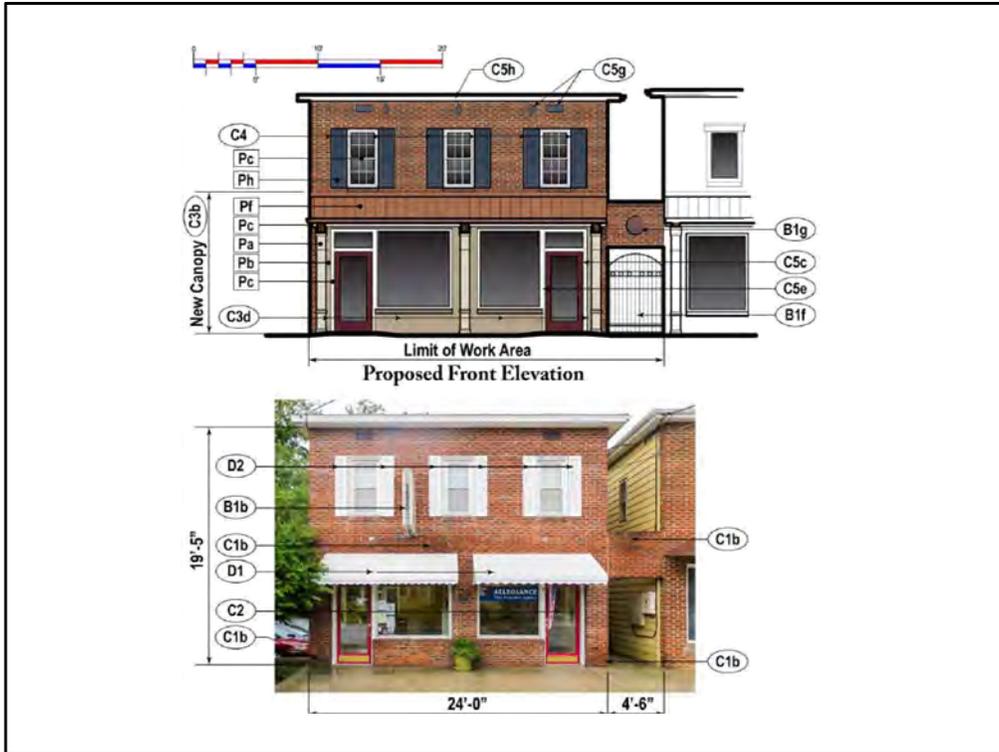
We had \$80,000 in the budget for façade improvements, being matched with \$80,000 from the property owners.

Eventually, forgivable loans were set at a maximum of \$10,000 per building.

This building is part of the Westmoreland County Museum, the way it looked like at the bottom.



In the end, the façade committee came up with a list of ten buildings that would make a significant impact in the project area, and offered the owners forgivable loans from between \$4,000 and \$10,000 each.

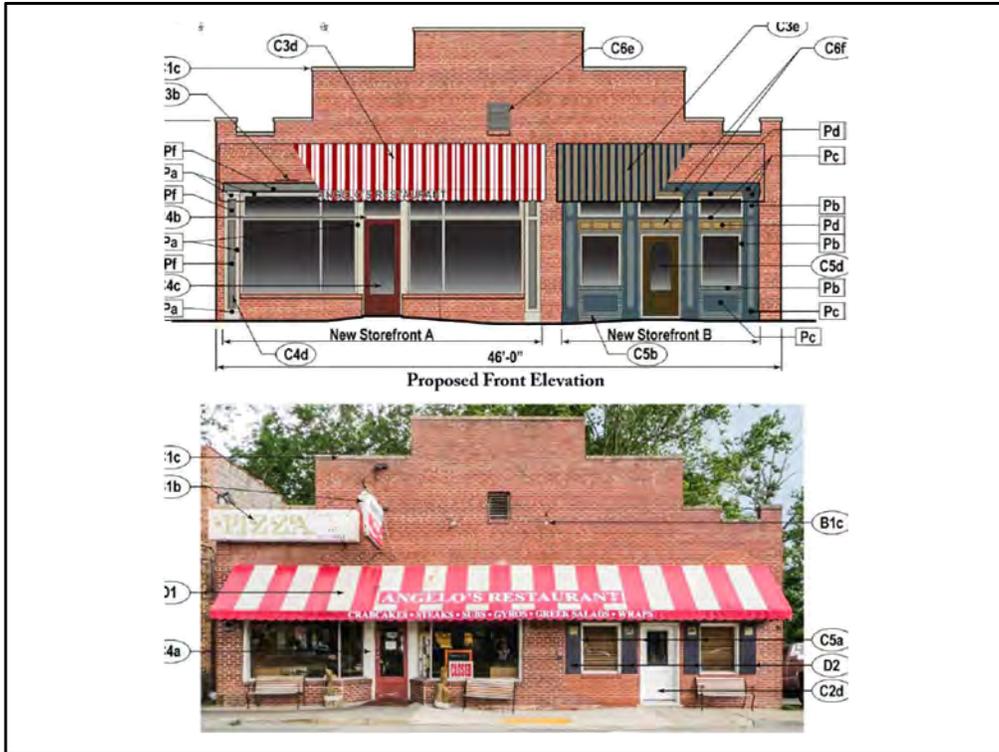


Those ten buildings also received full design services from the architects hired by the Town.



\$80,000 in public funding seems like very little money to have a real impact on the façades of several buildings in a town.

But here is the psychology of it.



Remember we chose to offer the \$80,000 to the ten properties that would have the greatest impact.

More Than a Match

EXAMPLE

Forgivable Loan = \$ 8,200

Match Required = \$ 8,200

Actual Cost = \$48,200

Private investment = \$40,000

Remember we chose to offer the \$80,000 to ten properties that would produce the greatest visual impact with improved façades.

If, for example, we offered \$8,200 to one of them . . .

. . . the architectural designs made the buildings stand out so nicely, their owners could not resist investing more in order to incorporate as much of the designs as they could afford.

When work on the first building was completed, the result was so striking, other building owners decided to invest more. So far, there has been \$171,000 in private investment on the façades alone, and we still have another building to put under contract.

\$171,000 is more than twice the original match of \$80,000 we were expecting in private investment.



This is what that Westmoreland County Museum building looks like now.

Many of the property owners also applied for low-interest loans from the revolving-loan fund to cover their private investment, including the match. We had \$140,000 in the revolving-loan fund, and all of it has been loaned out already.



Façade improvements led to expansions, to additional investment by the property owners--in the improvement of parking space, for example---and



in details that, without the assistance of a professional architect, might not have taken place without free architectural services to the property owners.

Marketing Website

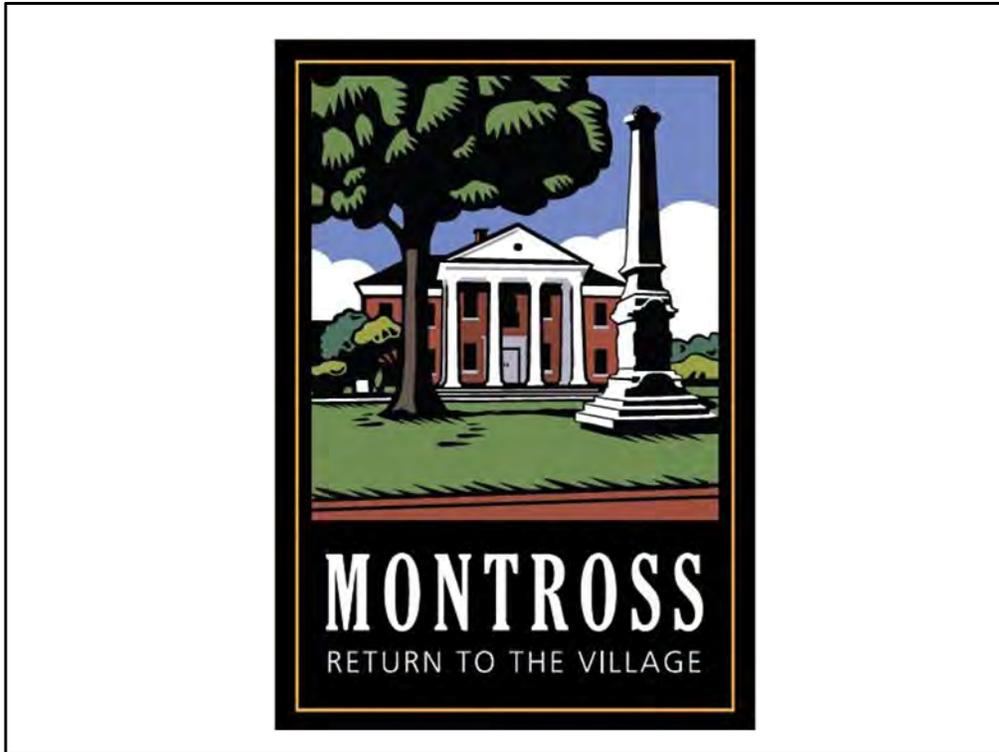


The marketing element of the project includes the development of a new website, VisitMontross.com.

The downtown organization, the Greater Montross Partnership for Revitalization (GMPFR), which is a Main Street Affiliate, is working at a regional level with the Northern Neck Tourism Commission and the Westmoreland County Tourism Office.

It is also participating in the formation of an Artisan Trail and Heritage Area with the assistance of the Virginia Tourism Corporation.

Marketing efforts are just now gaining momentum and will continue to increase as the various phases of the project are completed.



Professional signage is one of those phases.

It includes the development of a new logo for the Town, using the phrase “Return to the Village,” in keeping with the Town’s original goal, as stated in its comprehensive plan.



The overall public-improvements plan includes street lamps, pedestrian crosswalks, landscaping, gateway signs, other signage, and an additional marketing tool that emerged at some point during the process---almost by chance---and that has become a success beyond everyone's expectations.

More about that in a moment.



All the planning and talk about revitalization since 2007 has gradually created a momentum in the Town of Montross that now seems unstoppable.



There are now **regular events scheduled** throughout the year, like **Montross Market Days** and the **First Friday Art Walk**.



The traditional fall festival, which this year we expect will attract a great number of visitors since most of the revitalization work will be completed by the time it takes place.



Thanks to the revitalization of downtown Montross, the Project Area is already becoming a gathering point for residents and visitors.

This event in particular was a success. It took place in early June and was the unveiling of three murals.

The murals have become a fantastic marketing tool.



The artists hired to do the three murals are internationally known, and that has brought Montross a good deal of attention.



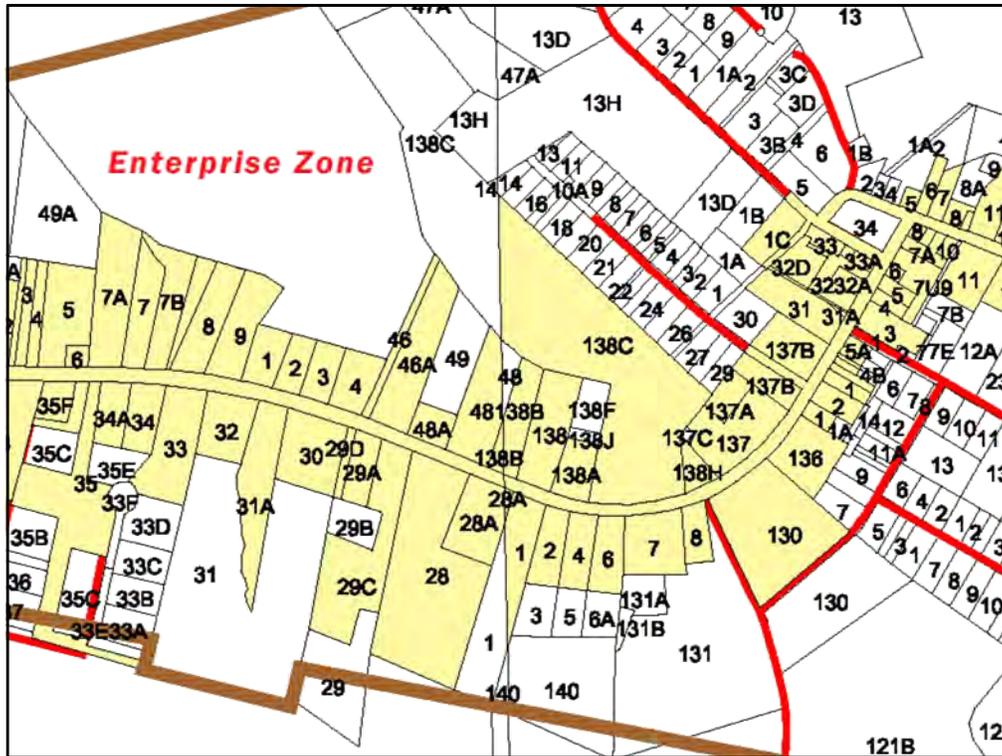
Some individuals read on social media that the artists were working here during the first week of June, and made the trip from outside Virginia to Montross just to see the work in progress.

These were visitors who had never been in the Northern Neck.



The murals will continue to feature prominently in the marketing efforts of the Town.

There is even talk of having another two painted, and to designate Montross “the Mural Capital of the Northern Neck.”



In summary:

Why has this project been a success?

It incorporates as many of the available community-development tools to create incentives for private investment.

Early on, for example, the Town asked Westmoreland County to expand its Enterprise Zone (another DHCD program) to include several commercial parcels in the Project Area.



That Enterprise Zone designation was crucial for the Inn at Montross, whose owners made a sizeable investment in this historical structure, which had been abandoned for several years at the time they purchased the building.

It is now a historical anchor of the downtown area.



So, a modest public investment from DHCD through a CDBG grant has generated a great deal of private investment.



The combination of loans, grants, public improvements, and the patient participation of the community created the right conditions for success.



That's something to be proud of for a small town of 384, and for Virginia's Community Development Program.