

Downtown Matthews

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BY CAROLYN STEEVES

MATTHEWS — While many towns have adopted the mantra of “Out with the old, in with the new,” Matthews has focused on preserving its historic buildings for renovation and reinvention.



Myers

“I’m very proud that in Matthews, one of the things we’ve been able to do is preserve our historic buildings and structures,” Mayor Lee Myers said.

Myers recently appointed a Historic Preservation Task Force to study the town’s historic structures and make recommendations for protection.

Among other projects, the town has renovated the Matthews Community Center, a 100-year-old school building, while an old train depot now houses the Visitor’s Center and Chamber of

and adding wheelchair ramps.

Matthews also has made efforts to address parking, a persistent problem for many downtown areas. According to officials, the problem was aggravated by commuters who parked their cars in the town center before catching an express bus to jobs in Charlotte. A parking plan with permits and time limits has freed up places for customers and residents, the mayor said.

“Initially, there was some concern about it before it was implemented, but we were able to work through — not all, but many — of the issues,” Myers said.

While Matthews’ estimated population is 26,660, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, its annual Matthews Alive Festival attracted 200,000 people

last year, according to Myers. This and other annual events serve to let visitors know what downtown has to offer beyond serving as a commuter way-station, he said.

“We’d like to see a vibrant retail center that has a lot of pedestrian traffic, that is vibrant in the evening as well as in the day,” Blodgett said.

While many cities are losing their historic downtown areas, officials said Matthews will continue making preservation a priority.

“Some communities are so new that they don’t have (downtowns), so they have to create them,” Blodgett said. “I feel like most people want downtowns and do want to preserve them.”

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Commerce.

While cities often opt to tear down buildings as a way to save money on improvements, Town Manager Hazen Blodgett said Matthews did not lose any money by renovating the former school into a usable space.

“I think the downtown area is the heart and soul of Matthews,” Myers said. “We’re very fortunate to have a readily identifiable, historic downtown.”

Like other municipalities, however, Matthews is feeling the economic recession and has frozen its city budget — including funds for capital improvements.

“Last year, we budgeted about \$200,000 to do some improvements downtown, which were focused on making downtown more pedestrian-friendly,” Blodgett said. “The money has been budgeted and set aside, however, due to this unstable economy we froze it.”

In January, the Matthews Board of Commissioners will consider releasing those funds for downtown projects, Blodgett said. If approved, the work would include efforts to make downtown more pedestrian-friendly by improving sidewalks and crosswalks



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Renfrow Hardware is among a diverse group of businesses in historic buildings.