

## Proposed Organization Strategy

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### Marshal Your Forces!

Organization is fundamental for a community-wide, comprehensive program to succeed. When financial resources are limited and there is great desire to accomplish an ambitious project, there must be a structure for determining projects, keeping volunteers invested, and organizing the work. Good ideas, teamwork, and an eager, committed group can make up for a small budget. The community has already demonstrated that this approach can work with the renovation of the Depot. A strong organization will help make the vision for Marshall become a reality.

### Recommendations

#### Leadership

***Recommendation: Establish the lead organization.***

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Over and over throughout the country it has been shown that the best organizational model for a revitalization effort is a public/private partnership. The public side is represented by the town, county, schools, library, cooperative extension office and other similar agencies financed primarily through public funds; the private side is made up of the business community (including merchants, financial institutions, Realtors and the like), property owners, churches, artists, community clubs, and interested people.

We recommend using the existing Steering Committee appointed by the Town Board as the backbone of the revitalization effort. There is lots of energy, enthusiasm, knowledge and leadership already present on the Committee, which is illustrated by the well-organized and coordinated resource team visit. Consideration should be given to changing the name from *Steering Committee* to one that will be used for the long-term; use of the word *board* might be appropriate since it implies more authority than a *committee*. Consideration might also be given to selecting a name for the revitalization program and/or organization.

***Recommendation: Identify other partners.***

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A public-private partnership requires partners. Extend your reach. While a variety of partners are important, it is crucial to obtain county input and participation. Marshall is the county seat; the county is the largest employer in town, and they must be involved. To accomplish this, the first step might be to broaden the board's base by obtaining an official representative from the County; ask the Commissioners to make the appointment. The appointee could be a commissioner, a staff person of the county, or a citizen who cares about the town and is active in county affairs.

Keep reaching out to find people who want to be involved. During the resource team visit there were comments from people who live across the river who said they felt left out of town affairs and wanted to be included. Create an organization where gifts of all varieties are honored and utilized. Think beyond the traditional players. Remember to involve the youth—it will be their community in a few years.

The perspective of both newcomers and long-time residents are needed. Newcomers have chosen to move to the community and have come to love it as much as the natives, who have the advantage of a long family history in the area. Once agreement is gained on the purpose of the group and complex goals are selected, who is expendable? Why discount anyone? Everyone's gifts, ideas, and energy need to be harnessed for this effort.

As you think about the long-term membership and size of the board, try using the *three W's* as a way to organize who serves: a member should be a source of **w**ealth, **w**isdom and/or **w**ork. If it is decided that the Board needs to be larger than the present Steering Committee, you might want to institute a smaller executive committee that meets monthly, for example, in between quarterly meetings of the full board. Members of the executive committee could include the board officers and chairs of the committees as discussed below. You may also decide that an executive committee is too complicated and prefer to retain the size of the current group. Remember as you make your plans for the board that it is difficult to have efficient meetings and obtain everyone's input with groups larger than 15 people or so.

**Management**

***Recommendation: Formalize the board's actions.***

The new Board must be grounded legally. Two options are to file for 501(c)(3) status or make the new board directly accountable to the Town Council. Since the Town Council appointed the Steering Committee, perhaps at this time reconfiguring and strengthening the current model might be the most expeditious and effective route. The advantage of tax credits to donors works in both models. Donors may take a tax write-off for their donation if it is given to the Town or a 501(c)(3) organization.

With either model you must establish the number of members and representation desired (for example, two members of the business community, two people with expertise or special interest in historic preservation and the like), set term limits and decide whether the terms are renewable. It would be a good idea to stagger the initial years' appointments so everyone does not come up for renewal at the same time. The board should adopt governing principles or by-laws, establish a regular meeting schedule that is in the newspaper, and elect a Chair and other officers as needed. In the past, it appears that many community groups in Marshall have acted less formally. The revitalization effort will be ongoing for a number of years and will likely involve a wide variety of people; a more formal organization ensures continuity and that records will be kept as membership and involvement changes over the years.

*Institutional memory* is important. This means having, and then keeping track of, documentation such as minutes, important papers, decisions, financial records, and other items. As the involvement of individuals change, the documents will be there to provide crucial information. If the group is tied directly to the Town Board, the meetings of the revitalization group must be open to the public; it is recommended that under other formats, the meetings also be open to the public. The minutes should be public record and kept in a public place such as the Town Hall. Since floods have been a problem in the past and will occur again, it is especially important to make sure that the records are in a safe place and back-up copies are kept in another location safe from fire and flood. This will help the public see that the board is acting in a careful and responsible manner, and is worthy of public trust and support.

***Recommendation: Prepare a strategic plan, work program, and initial budget.***

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After the board has been established, the next recommended item for action is to develop a strategic plan. This will help the board decide what the priority projects are for the next six months, year, and two-to-five years (or whatever time frame is chosen). The recommendations in this report can be used as a reference for priority projects. Once the projects are chosen, the board can establish committees and people will be able to choose the interest area where they want to devote their time. Possible committees may include events/promotions, design/appearance, and fund-raising/finance.

Identifying projects will give the group a fund-raising goal that will frame the budget for the first couple of years. Funding can be obtained from a variety of sources, including the private sector, local government, foundation grants and fundraising projects. In-kind donations, such as staff time or access to a copier, should be sought and documented. Such in-kind contributions are often important factors in grant applications and are considered to be tangible signs of community interest and support for a project.

***Recommendation: Accomplish an initial project.***

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One way to get immediate recognition plus establish teamwork and cooperation within the board and community is to accomplish an inaugural project. Choosing, implementing, and completing a project will launch the organization's new status as the catalyst of the Marshall revitalization effort. We recommend that this project have the following characteristics. It should:

- Be non-controversial, one that everyone agrees needs doing,
- Be visible in the community,
- Be achievable in a relatively short amount of time, and
- Have an excellent chance of succeeding.

Such success will give momentum to the board and enable it to tackle projects that require a more long-term commitment, as well as give the board credibility in the community. An example of such a project might be landscaping a town-owned parking lot over one or two weekends. Donations of time, materials, or funds could be sought from the community. Signs could be posted on the site afterwards that announce "Another project for Marshall by the \_\_\_\_\_" (insert the name chosen for the group) so everyone walking or driving by would know who did the work.

Many short- and long-term projects that the organization might consider were mentioned during the course of the Resource Team visit. (See page 75 of this report for a list of suggested projects; additional ones are located throughout this document.)

**Recommendation: Promote teamwork and a shared workload.**

During the Resource Team Visit, successful groups who are already at work in the community were mentioned, including Neighbors in Need, the Madison County Health Consortium, Boy and Girl Scouts, AA and Al-Anon, Friends of the Library and the group working on the Depot. In discussions with people knowledgeable about these groups, several common characteristics emerged:

- There are lots of people involved; success does not depend solely on the efforts of one person.
- There is shared responsibility; no single person does all the work.
- It is a cause people believe in and care deeply about.

There are also activities, events, and projects active now in Marshall that are the responsibility of either one person or a very small group. To avoid burnout and execute projects, it is important to develop a larger core of people to carry the work of the revitalization effort forward. Achieving the goals of the revitalization effort will take an investment of years. To keep volunteers engaged, the journey along the way must provide fulfillment, achievement, and fun for those involved.

To sustain the effort, it is also important to develop a sense of teamwork and group commitment that can move beyond divisive issues. At times in small towns it is easy to discover issues or reasons that separate the community, and often it is more difficult to join together. For this revitalization effort to be effective, people must look beyond past personality differences and conflicts and travel in the same direction toward mutual goals.

**Recommendation: Consider creating a nonprofit organization.**

Typically, it is recommended that long-term revitalization groups form a non-profit agency that is able to receive contributions; certain types have tax advantages for the donor. Obtaining nonprofit status usually takes several months or longer. In Marshall's case, it is possible that putting energy into forming a not-for-profit organization might divert too much energy from higher-priority projects. One strategy might be to stay associated with the Town for now and form a nonprofit organization later.

***Recommendation: Provide staff for the organization.***

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A long-range goal to work toward is securing paid staff to execute the group's day-to-day operations instead of relying completely on volunteers. As the revitalization effort begins, a committed volunteer group is more than adequate, especially if town staff supplements and supports it.

The National Main Street program has found that ongoing staff dedicated specifically to revitalization is a critical success factor in breathing new life into center cities. Staff give the effort the dedicated attention, glue, credibility and focus that it must have to sustain itself.

 ***Action Steps for the Proposed Organization Strategy***

1. Decide what group of people will lead the revitalization effort.
2. Appoint a full complement of volunteers to the leadership group.
3. Organize committees around priority projects and/or the five topic areas.
4. Select priority projects on which to focus, using this report and other ideas.
5. Openly invite a wide range of partner organizations and individuals to get involved.
6. Set up professional systems to manage the affairs of the organization.
7. Get some strategic projects on the ground and running.