



Out of the car, into your world

□ BY GARRET K. WOODWARD □

It's another sunny day in downtown Hendersonville, but David Hazzard has other reasons for the smile on his face.

"I've really enjoyed this project, it's been a positive experience," he said, gazing down Main Street. "Day in and day out I see the effects of this project – it's pretty amazing to see how far it's come in the last decade."

Senior project manager for Luther E. Smith & Associates PA (LSA), Landscape Architecture/Land Planning firm, Hazzard has spent the better part of the last decade working on improving the aesthetics and viability of downtown.

"What we wanted to do was make downtown more vibrant, more pedestrian-friendly, to make it work better in all scenarios of everyday life, and also make it flex-

ible for parades, outdoor markets, art installations and other events," he said.

For decades, Main Street in Hendersonville was your typical downtown, with two opposing lanes of

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— David Hazzard, Luther E. Smith & Associates

traffic and parking. A curvilinear street was added in the 1970s, to help revitalize it after many shops had relocated to malls and commercial highway corridors as had happened in most Main Streets around the country.

This original design served the city well, but the street-scape along with aging utilities were in need of an update and upgrade. So in 2007,

Luther E. Smith & Associates, working with the City's Engineering Department, were brought in to change all of that.

"In the [new design], we felt the pedestrian should come first. There

are plenty of highway corridors in the region, state and country. In our downtown setting, it's about the pedestrian and the pedestrian experience. It's not just about the car," Hazzard said. "We designed for the pedestrian and allowed for the car, as opposed to a design for the car [and traffic] with the pedestrians an afterthought."

In planning out their design,

LSA employed numerous traffic-calming measures, including bulb outs to decrease crosswalk distances, street trees to slow cars, and mid-block brick cross walks. They also wanted to open up down-

town, let the space breathe and move, where pedestrians can not only move about freely, but are also encouraged to spend as much time as possible enjoying their downtown experience.

One of the first major changes was to remove numerous large brick planters lining Main Street. Though they held vegetation, they were more cumbersome and a

waste of prime useable space. Hazzard looked at their removal as creating more opportunities for the pedestrian gathering spaces.

"We took out the planters and made each [space] into a plaza, where you now have tables, chairs and benches. Prior to that, the space was there, but it had this large object right smack in the middle making it unusable," he said. "Main Street before had outdoor dining seating, but no real congregation space. There are now places to just sit and read the newspaper if you want, and the furniture is moveable to allow for maximum flexibility, street performers and festivals."

The creation of the open-air plazas included several green building/streetscape initiatives. One of those was to increase the urban forest and increase the focus on native vegetation. Purple cone flower, black-eyed susan's, rhododendrons, itea's, clethra, fothergilla, oakleaf hydrangeas and switch grass were planted in the plazas, while trees like red maples, fruitless sweetgum and honey locust created bosque shady areas.

Within those bosque-designed plazas (a geometrical organization of trees), the trees within tree grates and up-lights became the highlight. Purposely placed in the plazas to create "outdoor rooms," the trees grow up and out exponentially in a short period of time (usually five to seven years), ultimately providing a natural outdoor ceiling for pedestrians wanting to sit, cool off and soak in their surroundings.

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 Engineer, cityofhendersonville.org
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General Contractor: Trace & Company, Inc., Mountain Home,
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Landscape Contractor:
 John Ross, Inc., Hendersonville,
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"In an urban environment, the soil tends to be poor and compacted. So, we also used a structural soil mix in the planting pits, a granular mix, which allows water and air to get to the roots of the trees, increasing their overall health and growth while reducing sidewalk up-heave from the roots," Hazzard



Luther Smith (left) and David Hazzard of Luther E. Smith & Associates PA along with the City of Hendersonville, just finalized a seven-year project that renovated and revitalized Main Street in downtown. The senior project manager, Hazzard and his team implemented numerous green initiatives into the layout, which included more pedestrian-friendly crosswalks, shaded seating areas and stormwater collection (opposite page). Garret K. Woodward photos

said. "Stormwater is also being directed to the soil mix, so it's naturally filtering the water and slowing it down before it enters a perforated pipe and connects to the city's stormwater system."

LSA created entry nodes at the intersection of Main Street and 6th and 7th Avenue (U.S. 64), which included up-lit dogwood trees and signs constructed out of recycled, historic granite curb stones and Hendersonville's logo cut out of Corten steel. Six circular raised brick planters for future art were designed within the plaza areas, as well as a small raised stage that could accommodate performances but would function as seating for everyday use.

Encouraging residents and visitors alike to wander and immerse themselves in downtown, the new design also called for connectivity to nearby neighborhoods and parks. Since LSA's design, 4th Avenue, which intersects Main Street, became Hendersonville's first street with Shared-Lane Markings to increase cyclist safety. Fourth Avenue

connects downtown to Jackson Park, one of the largest public green areas in the Henderson County, and the Oklawaha Greenway. Bike racks were installed on Main Street, and there are hopes for more bike lanes as the need increases.

The downtown design also points out the future possibility of the Ecusta Rail Trail, following the railroad line going from Hendersonville to Brevard. The 18-mile trail is still in the planning stages, but if made a reality, would open up a whole host of multi-modal transportation and recreational opportunities to connect into.

"The rail trail would create a multi-use path that would connect Hendersonville and Brevard and all of the communities in between," Hazzard said.

Design studies have shown how large residential areas in the city are within a five- to 10-minute walk from downtown. Hazzard noted one of the biggest pieces in the revitalization puzzle was how to simply get people out of their cars, relying on them less, and instead go walk

or bike to and from Main Street.

Strolling Main Street, Hazzard points out every detail of the downtown design. As a landscape architect, he is proud of how this project has made Hendersonville more of a destination, with pedestrian-friendly spaces, aesthetically pleasing lush native landscapes, and an overall expanding vibrant community. Where once there was silence and emptiness when the sun went down, now there's live music, the aroma of restaurants, and the excited voices and faces of people participating in a growing, vivacious community.

"I'll come out here and go for a walk on my lunch break and it's just incredible to see the progress of downtown Hendersonville," he said. "I've been working here for 10 years, and back then you'd never really see anybody out past five or six o'clock. Now, you can go out any night of the week and people of all ages are out everywhere. There are a number of factors in the city's growth, with the [new] streetscape being a major one."