



**To:** Durham Board of County Commissioners  
**From:** Sarah Odio, Senior Project Manager, Development Finance Initiative  
**Date:** February 19, 2021  
**Re:** *Overview of Phase I community engagement for redevelopment of DSS Main and proposed guiding public interests*

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Durham County engaged the [Development Finance Initiative \(DFI\)](#) at the UNC Chapel Hill's School of Government in November 2020 to provide pre-development services for the former Durham County Department of Social Services (DSS) building at 220 E. Main Street ("DSS Main"). The pre-development process involves several key components – public engagement, a parcel analysis to understand current conditions in downtown, a site-specific market analysis, site planning, and a financial feasibility analysis. This process will help the County identify a redevelopment plan that meets both public and private sector interests and find the right partner to realize its vision for DSS Main.

As part of this process, Durham County and DFI are undertaking a comprehensive community engagement approach. The engagement plan was outlined in a December 9, 2020 memo to the commissioners and is structured in two phases. The first phase focused on helping the Durham Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) define the guiding public interests for the redevelopment of DSS Main. The second phase of public input sessions (anticipated for August 2021) will gather feedback on feasible development options and inform the selection of a preferred development program.

Due to the pandemic, Phase I was implemented virtually through one-on-one stakeholder conversations, an online survey, and two online community input sessions.

- Beginning in November 2020, staff and representatives from the following organizations were engaged directly:

Downtown Durham Inc.	American Underground
Durham Chamber of Commerce	Durham Area Designers
Preservation Durham	Durham County Economic Development
Self-Help Real Estate	City of Durham Cultural Advisory Board staff
NC Central University	Durham County Public Arts liaison

One-on-one conversations with stakeholders and community organizations are ongoing and DFI welcomes additional direction from the Board.

- An online survey, mimicking the format of the community input sessions described below, went live on January 15, 2021 and remained open until January 29<sup>th</sup>. The form received 27 unique responses. See Appendix 2 for complete responses.

- The Community Input Sessions were held online on Saturday, January 16<sup>th</sup> at 10am and Tuesday, January 19<sup>th</sup> at 5:30pm in order to accommodate differing schedules. Community members could attend by video conferencing or a phone number for those without internet access. The sessions were attended by 18 community members (not including DFI staff, County staff, and elected officials in attendance). See Appendix 1 for notes that were taken on the feedback received.

The virtual engagement options were advertised using the following means: County press release, project webpage on the County site, County social media, stakeholder distribution lists, neighborhood listservs, and printed flyers distributed by a third-party throughout Durham. The project webpage ([www.dconc.gov/DSSMain](http://www.dconc.gov/DSSMain)) was created in December 2020 and is updated periodically with news regarding the project and any upcoming engagement opportunities.

DFI believes that the virtual nature of this approach and competing priorities due to the pandemic have resulted in lower levels of engagement relative to the high levels of community interest in DFI's prior engagement efforts for the [300 and 500 East Main](#) sites. In our experience, community interest in some projects like DSS Main may be lower at this point in the process when there are no development plans or investment scenarios to galvanize participation. We expect that community interest in DSS Main will continue to grow as the pre-development process continues. That said, when incorporating one-on-one feedback from organizations with strong ties to the community with the results of the online survey and input sessions, we believe the feedback gathered so far represents a thoughtful and broad range of opinions.

#### Considerations when Determining the Guiding Public Interests

In drafting a set of guiding public interests from the feedback received, DFI considered the following:

- The public interests for the redevelopment of this site, if crafted well, will create a set of project values to aid DFI, the County and private development partners in molding development programs that could best meet the needs of the community and the County.
- The redevelopment of 220 East Main St. cannot accommodate all possible county-wide public interests. Some public interests can only be addressed through other County programs or through development of other sites. DFI attempted to focus on public feedback that was directly related to the subject site.
- Public opinion is not dichotomous, so where possible, DFI attempted to refine the public interests in a way that captured the range of interests expressed.
- In the next phase of work, DFI will perform additional feasibility analysis that is informed by the guiding public interests. The BOCC will have the opportunity to evaluate various public investment scenarios for the project. The development program that the BOCC ultimately endorses will define total commercial and non-commercial space, and other elements of the building and surrounding area's reuse. At this point, the County may need to explore tradeoffs between the public interests.
- The public interests as drafted allow for scenarios that include continued County ownership and use, or sale (in various forms) to a private developer.
- The impacts of COVID-19 have been various and profound. The pandemic's enduring impact on downtown Durham and the County are yet to be determined. The public interests must allow for flexibility to respond to changes in the market.

### Proposed Guiding Public Interests

The feedback received in Phase I of community engagement centered on a series of themes: preservation of the building; potential uses with an emphasis on its historical use as a community-oriented asset; enhancing the public space around the building; honoring Durham's Black history and supporting minority-owned businesses; using the space to uplift the community; creating continuity throughout downtown; providing affordable housing; and generally improving the appearance of the building and space around it. The appendix, below, highlights all the feedback received including full survey responses.

The following draft public interests are proposed:

Redevelopment of DSS Main should:

- Preserve the unique architectural features of the exterior and allow for enhancements consistent with the building's prominent location at a key gateway to downtown Durham.
- Maintain the primary use of the building for community-oriented activities and/or office space accessible to businesses with needs unmet by downtown market.
- Incorporate ground-floor uses that increase street-level vibrancy and invite community interaction.
- Include design elements that facilitate pedestrian traffic to and from nearby commercial nodes.
- Optimize public investment and attract private investment.

DFI will present the proposed guiding public interests at the March 1, 2021, BOCC work session. If you have any questions or concerns in advance of the meeting, please contact Sarah Odio, Senior Project Manager, at [odio@soq.unc.edu](mailto:odio@soq.unc.edu).

## Appendix I – Community Input Sessions

*Notes for both meetings were taken publicly in the chat function and participants were asked to reflect after each question whether the notes were an accurate summary and if any opinions were missing.*

### Notes from Saturday, January 16, 2021, Community Input Session (Online)

*Total Participants: 8 (excluding staff)*

How important is the preservation of the DSS Main building? Why?

- Cost to tear it out and build new construction might not make economic sense.
- Buildings 50+ years old and have some character should probably be preserved - important to maintain historic fabric (general agreement). Eligibility for Historic Tax Credits is important consideration — study should be updated.
- Location is significant due to topography, where it sits, gateway.
- Potential to better utilize outdoor patio space that surrounds the building.
- It *could* be a beautiful building with some slight architectural tweaks (general nods).
- Interesting retro building, representative of 60s architecture
- Is the marble on the ground floor original?
- Any potential to utilize the roof?

What type of activity would you like to see on this corner (E. Main Street and S. Roxboro Street)?

- Setback from the street provides opportunity for some outdoor activation of space — cafe, art, etc.
- Outside space matters even more these days.
- There is not a lot of pedestrian activity / street life in this section of E Main Street
- Smaller, more affordable storefronts / retail spaces seem to be more successful
- County buildings don't contribute to life after 5
- Should be more student life downtown to add vibrancy, bring youth/innovation on weekends and at night
- Future of nearby building for sale is important to this site — could work together to create a new node of activity
- This site feels like the “edge” - a dividing line - the reuse of this building could be key to making connections between two disparate areas of downtown
- 300 and 500 E Main redevelopment, new library, along with Oldham Towers redevelopment, could help shift more activity this way. Bring new life to this area of downtown.
- Loop makes rear of building inaccessible to pedestrians — future and revisioning of the loop could make a big difference

What's missing in downtown Durham that this property can potentially provide?

- Food desert - major grocery store needed
- Not enough local flavor and institutions, particularly at night
- Not enough affordable space for nonprofits and small businesses - this need isn't being met by the market
- Challenging for small businesses/upstarts to upfit cold, dark shells - access to capital/financing
- More housing needed
- NCCU would be interested in bringing business incubator, virtual justice program, Telehealth, other educational uses to this building. Would generate student traffic, energy, bring sound professionals to the area. Could potentially occupy 3-4 floors.
- Need to support small businesses, help them overcome financial/technical barriers to starting. Space is a factor, but additional supports also needed.

Is there anything else you would like to share related to the redevelopment of this property?

- \*Request for COVID-safe virtual tour and/or detailed photographs\*

### **Notes from Tuesday, January 19, 2021, Community Input Session (Online)**

*Total Participants: 10 (excluding staff)*

How important is the preservation of the DSS Main building? Why?

- Architecture and structure should be preserved and have a meaningful use - police HQ as example
- Keep something that looks like Durham
- Preserve the landscape of community, promote reuse when possible. Keep community feel.
- Maintain historical context, need to preserve mix of building typologies.
- Love building - emblematic of era, windows, marble, nice setback.
- Could density be added?
- SAVE THE BUILDING!
- Should be open to reconsidering layout of interior. (But keep the exterior.)

What type of activity would you like to see on this corner (E. Main Street and S. Roxboro Street)?

- Step Up Durham's workforce development perspective: transportation challenges and housing instability. Good location for them. Looking for a place to expand (in co-working space currently) - have partners interested too. Nonprofit office space opportunity.
- Agree with encouraging ground floor engagement with the street
- Just want to point out there is parking across the street. And I like the idea of retail on the ground floor.
- Multipurpose and mixed use. Nonprofits, retail, job incubators/training, creative space.

What's missing in downtown Durham that this property can potentially provide?

- Continuity is missing. Vibrancy and bringing bodies downtown. Want full spectrum available - jobs, creative, activities. Vibrancy is missing. Downtown shouldn't be chopped up by districts (e.g., business, poor people's districts) - all should flow together.
- Not many restaurants in that immediate three block area. Coffee shop? Sandwich place?
- affordable space for businesses to rent
- Need evening activities and vibrancy.
- Way to connect with new library?
- Uses that connect the dots and make the transition between these separate areas of downtown.
- Space that honors & revives Durham's rich Black history. Those efforts would need to be led by folks from Durham's black community who are boots on the ground/community rooted
- Affordable space for artists to create
- Connect, integrate, and mix uses.
- Like idea of complementing library, programming for children. Join different aspects of city.
- Community college
- I'd like to see this accessible to people of all socioeconomic levels
- Job Training
- Step Up has a youth workforce training component.
- Affordable housing
- There is already affordable housing coming in and around this site.
- An educational use would be a good fit for downtown Durham, if the parking issue could be addressed. Not much existing public, private, HBCU student presence downtown. Would add a vibrant group of people downtown at day and night (for night classes).
- Educational use could also use nighttime density.

Is there anything else you would like to share related to the redevelopment of this property?

- Q: Possibility for environmental sustainability/LEED uplift within existing building fabric?
- I'd like to make sure that the various offerings speak to diverse interests. for example: Durham has a lot of breweries. my friends and I don't necessarily go to breweries for fun. Doing more digging to figure out what's interesting and fun to various sections of Durham's diverse community will be important

## Appendix 2: DSS Main Survey Results

Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
How important is the preservation of the DSS Main building? Why?	What type of activity would you like to see on this corner (E. Main Street and S. Roxboro Street)?	What's missing in downtown Durham that this property can potentially provide?	Is there anything else you would like to share related to the redevelopment of this property?
It marks a piece of history for Durham as the location of social services for many years, close to other county offices.	More consolidation of human services or other services the county provides in a downtown location close to other services.	A day drop-in center for homeless or other uprooted people which could provide services they lack such as space for 12-step or other programs.	
Historical significance at a prime location	Office space for community organizations, nonprofits, and MWBEs.	Space for these kinds of organizations.	Community engagement space for County Government
Not important. It's ugly. Maybe a taller building could go there. I've never been inside so I can't comment on that.	To be more human scale, Roxboro needs to not be like a major highway. If Roxboro could be reconfigured, that would change a lot of my ideas. If it can't, then it's hard to get too excited about this building. Plus there's no really close parking.	Durham Tech extension with adult ed, parks and rec classes, community theater, computer access, small apartments for homeless people. I always want an affordable grocery store and dining, but I don't think there's any parking, meaning lugging groceries would be hard.	
Very. The architecture is iconic and representative of its era. Preserving buildings from all eras is vital to having a vibrant and interesting downtown.	Housing.	There's probably enough room for a City Target on the ground floor.	
Due to the location of the building/site, redevelopment is crucial.	Honestly, I'm hoping it's not going to be another set of apartments for those with a lot of money to buy and live in. I'd like to see it be ALL affordable housing if that is the direction that is picked (housing/apartments). It would also be a great place for innovative businesses, entrepreneurs to use. Maybe turning that Innovate Durham team into an Innovate Durham lab on that site.	Affordable housing.	
If preservation reduces waste, that's great, but I don't think it should stop the best use of the space.	Housing, and retail selling healthy food.	Affordable housing!	There are far too many parking lots and parking decks in downtown, which makes it unsafe and unpleasant to walk. Let's use the ground-level space for public-facing services and not encourage even more driving here.
Minimally important. Focus on the best land use possible to meet Durham's needs	Something to help the people of Durham (e.g. childcare center / Head Start, Youth center) or businesses (e.g. incubator or coworking)	We really need affordable housing. That may not be the best use for this building site, but is really key. We need zoning to allow 4-plexes and other ways to make housing possible	Ensure it doesn't become parking or that there is additional parking built because of it. There's already plenty
Not very	Community activities or services	Something for families or children.	
Very. It is something we can't get back	Community activity! Public activity and art	A community center	It should remain focused on the public good, not given over to private ownership or private business
Extremely important. This location always served as a place of hope and assistance to Durham County residents. It should continue to do so.	Affordable housing	Affordable housing	
To me it's not that important but I would prefer not to have more construction in downtown Durham.	I would like something with an outdoor space especially during COVID. It would be wonderful to see somewhere for children and youth to go during COVID that could provide help with virtual school and activities.	A large grocery store. Right now the only option downtown is Buldega which is not affordable for many residents and the only grocery stores in East Durham are smaller stores. A lower price grocery store (like Aldi or Trader Joe's) would be ideal.	Please don't make it into more luxury condos. If they are going to be residences, they need to be affordable. 519 E Main (Oldham Towers) and other DHA properties need to be torn down and rebuilt and this building could be an option to house residents while that happens.
Preservation is the most sustainable building strategy. Modernize the building and keep much building material out of our landfill.	Public space	Shaded, well considered public outdoor space	Either re-purpose the building, a sensitive re-purposing/modernization of this mid-century building OR take it down and make public space. Please don't do a poor quality "renovation" of this building and ruin its original design intent.

How important is the preservation of the DSS Main building? Why?	What type of activity would you like to see on this corner (E. Main Street and S. Roxboro Street)?	What's missing in downtown Durham that this property can potentially provide?	Is there anything else you would like to share related to the redevelopment of this property?
Eh, not very. It's not much to look at!	COFFEE. people in the HHS building need it! And decent fast-ish lunch maybe?	Low-income housing.	Again, COFFEE
Fairly important...a unique building	Ideally either affordable housing or use for small businesses/nonprofit organizations	Space for people to live that have been pushed out by gentrification	
Not incredibly important to me. I would be fine with tearing it down and redeveloping it if it benefits the city. The building is pretty but not, to me, a monument.	Anything community oriented; food hall, restaurants, artist space, maybe even community non-profit center. Anything like that.	As silly as it sounds, I would love new restaurant spaces (e.g., a food hall; I would go to that all the time). I would also be fine for some sort of central space where people can go and connect with non-profit organizations (that might be something that already exists and I don't know about it). Another potential option would be to turn it into a collection of community art galleries, or a community fitness class center, anything like that.	I happy with anything that brings the community of Durham together and celebrates it's diverse cultural talents.
Affordable housing	Affordable housing	Affordable housing	It is shameful that Durham can accommodate so many million dollar condos within a mile of downtown but can't offer affordable housing as well.
I think it's important. We are slowly erasing this style of mid century modern office building architecture and i really love it.	I'm not sure. Something that serves the broader Durham community and not just wealthy folks.	It would be nice if durham tech had space downtown.	
Unimportant; affordable housing is more important than preserving any architectural structure. If it is possible to preserve the structure while converting it to affordable housing for people who have been displaced from their homes through gentrification or who are living in dilapidated public housing developments, then we should keep the structure. If not, we should replace it with as many housing units as possible.	High-rise affordable housing for people (particularly persons of color) displaced by gentrification or who are currently living in neglected public housing developments	Affordable housing!	The city and county have repeatedly failed the most vulnerable members of our community, particularly persons of color, by promoting policies that have facilitated gentrification and the displacement of people of lesser means from their homes, especially in the downtown area. The only acceptable use of this property is to convert it into affordable housing units so that all members of our community can live dignified lives.
very important - unnecessary to send the deconstruction of a perfectly good bldg to a landfill	low income apartments &/or senior housing or consolidation of county services for one stop.	decent priced housing to make up for out of control gentrification	
Idk	Something that brings people together	Community	
Old and outdated. Do not waste money on trying to save it.	Don't know	No idea	Tear down the existing building and start something new. I do not know what that should be.
Not completely, but it's better to keep an existing building than tear it down and build a whole different building on the same site (less money/energy/materials needed)	Normal social activity	Some sort of indoor public space or place that has services to help people - not as specialized or professional as the actual social services, but maybe where nonprofits could come set up temporary areas or volunteers or community members could run workshops or other kinds of helpful educational/professional/community building events	I strongly urge Durham to prioritize the environment if any renovations are made! Pursue LEED certification or otherwise consider how the space can lessen its environmental impacts.



How important is the preservation of the DSS Main building? Why?	What type of activity would you like to see on this corner (E. Main Street and S. Roxboro Street)?	What's missing in downtown Durham that this property can potentially provide?	Is there anything else you would like to share related to the redevelopment of this property?
Extremely Important. Cities build character when old buildings are refurbished and continue to live on as they are, rather than to be torn down. People enjoy cities of all sizes because of the unique architecture found there, from New York City to Santa Fe, New Orleans to Seattle. Being unique and historic draws visitors.	I think a variety of businesses could move into this space. I think Durham is missing a small scale comedy venue that has weekly performances. Something similar to the PIT in Chapel Hill. Also downtown could use a grocery store. My vote is Trader Joes. Also, the higher levels could be apartments. With Durham's housing crisis, we need more housing and density to lower the cost of living downtown.	Again, as mentioned above, I think grocery and housing are the main priorities, and a comedy club/small scale theater venue could add to Durham's night life and event scene, driving economic impact. All of those things together may not necessarily work, but all three of those are needed.	DO NOT TEAR IT DOWN. Additions maybe, and if there is enough space, make the parking lot elevated or below ground. While walkability should lower traffic, we need a dependable public transit system in order for people to utilize before we will see a drastic reduction of vehicles on the road. Duke really messed that up for us.
	It would be great to see something implemented in this space that would help activate that part of Main St. to better connect City Center with the Golden Belt district. Something with artistic, cultural, and/or community value that will bring folks together to activate the space. Would be amazing if Durham could develop an affordable housing complex that is dedicated to artists, perhaps with a gallery on the first floor that would showcase the work of artists living onsite. Indianapolis has an "artist colony" like this, and it seems like a great way to help prevent community artists from being priced out of the city.		
Assuming the building is in good condition and would work feasibly for future use purposes, not sure that it needs to be torn down. I would only argue to demolish the building if it would make space for a project that simply would not work with the current infrastructure.	Another idea is something that would elevate/activate our nightlife scene in Durham. We often lose out on group business to Raleigh because we have fairly limited nightlife experiences. A dedicated dance hall and lounge could be another idea.	More elegant nightlife opportunities, more artistic/community experiences, more affordable housing, a grocery store that isn't niche/gourmet	
I don't know. It's not exactly beautiful, but it looks like it's in decent condition.	Is it possible to convert it to low income housing? We need more low income housing on bus routes and this fits the bill.	Low income. Housing.	I own a building two block away, 115 E Main.
Very important as it's apart of Durham, history		Providing affordable office space for small business owners or a center that provides education/life skills fir those transitioning from prison. They need to know how to function in a world of technology	Make it affordable for whatever it will be
I believe it's somewhat important, but it could also be used for more beneficial purposes (see below).	The type of activity I'd like to see there is a shelter for the homeless or something along those lines. Or it could be turned into a recreational center for minority youth.	What's missing is an outlet for those that are underrepresented. By pursuing either of the options I listed above, you'd be working towards addressing the needs of those underrepresented persons.	Not really. I just think that downtown Durham has been gentrified enough, so building an environment for something other than alcohol distribution would be better for all.