

# Abingdon Historic Properties Master Plan

Report Prepared By: Cooper Planning

April 2013



Cooper {CP} Planning



## **Table of Contents**

Firm Background	2
Acknowledgements	2
<b>Section One: Introduction &amp; Background Information</b>	<b>3</b>
The Power of Place	3
Planning Context	4
Planning Framework	5
<b>Section Two: Downtown Core</b>	<b>11</b>
Hassinger House	11
Fields-Penn House	15
<b>Section Three: Courthouse Hub</b>	<b>20</b>
Summers Law Office	20
Findlay House	26
<b>Section Four: Edge of Town</b>	<b>30</b>
Retirement/Muster Grounds	30
Fairview	34
Conclusion	38
<b>Appendix</b>	<b>39</b>
Potential Funding Sources	39
Public Feedback	41

# Cooper {CP} Planning

## **Firm Background:**

Cooper Planning is a Charlottesville, VA based planning firm that specializes in property analysis, project management, and community facilitation. Cooper Planning was established by Ashley Cooper in 2008 to successfully manage projects with ‘out of the box’ responses to modern needs. Cooper Planning provides the highest quality services, from visioning and consensus building, to identifying and assessing various strategies, incorporating property and zoning analyses, to entitlements and plan implementation. Given Ashley’s background in public sector planning, she maintains a firm commitment to the public good and a special understanding of the needs and perspectives of elected and appointed local officials, as well as community stakeholders. A primary goal of Cooper Planning is to create projects and proposals that are rooted in community values.

Cooper Planning has a variety of experience serving cities, counties, and communities. We also work with private development interests, on a selective basis, to bring creative solutions to the realm of land development. Cooper Planning works to bring the most effective planning process, while ensuring that projects conform to applicable development goals and regulations. Our focus is in creating lasting places of value as well as lasting relationships within communities in which we work.

We believe in helping communities grow and evolve in the most beneficial ways.

For more information, please visit our website at: <http://www.cooper-planning.com/>

### Contact Information:

Cooper Planning  
304 7th Street SW  
Charlottesville, VA 22903  
434-409-9127  
[acooper@cooper-planning.com](mailto:acooper@cooper-planning.com)

## **Acknowledgements:**

Many thanks to the staff members of the Town of Abingdon, the Historic Properties Steering Committee, and the community of Abingdon for guiding the process and sharing inspiring ideas. Thank you to Link Elmore of Mobius Geo for the creation of the GIS Maps in this report. Much appreciation to Maggie Guggenheimer for sharing her knowledge of creative placemaking and other creative programs happening around the Commonwealth.

## **Section One: Introduction & Background Information**

### The Power of Place

As the oldest settlement in Virginia west of the Blue Ridge, Abingdon has over 200 years of stories to tell and characters to reveal. It is easy to learn about some of the area's top attractions—The Barter Theater, the Martha Washington Inn, and the Virginia Creeper Trail. Marketing materials invite us to delight our senses through exploring, dreaming and discovering. The intact layers of history and an actively creative community are two primary reasons that Abingdon is both a successful tourism destination as well as a sought after community in which to live. This unique and interesting place is full of delightful and quirky characters and places; past, present and future.

As many small towns across the country are struggling economically and sacrificing history and beauty for commerce and efficiency, Abingdon becomes more highly valued for preserving its distinctive cultural and architectural heritage. This sense of authenticity has inherent value to the community, but it also creates a growing economic value as evidenced by the consistently strong tax base in the Town. According to the Virginia Tourism Corporation Economic Impact Report, in 2011 travelers had an economic impact of over \$93 million dollars in Washington County. Given the strength of the existing built and cultural framework, Abingdon has the opportunity to build on and enhance the community through a concept that's known as creative placemaking.

In creative placemaking, art, culture and creativity are expressed powerfully through a specific place that can create synergy and interest within the community. The goal of this process is attracting people, activities and value to a place and increasing the desire and the economic opportunity to thrive in a place. A vibrant community is both a physical place and a collection of people and their stories; both elements serve to make it what is it and what it could be.

The specific place in this case is Abingdon, and for the purpose of this planning process, the Town has chosen to focus on six properties that are currently under their ownership. The properties considered for this report include the Hassinger House, the Fields-Penn House, Summers Law Office, Findlay House, Retirement/Muster Grounds, and the Fairview property. Hassinger House and the Fields-Penn House are both located within close proximity to the central core of town. Summers Law Office and Findlay House are nearby to the Courthouse and the Creeper Trail; two important and popular spots for locals and visitors. Retirement and Fairview are two larger properties located diametrically opposed on the northern and southern outskirts of town.

The Town of Abingdon has the opportunity to set the stage for cultural engagement and entertainment from a broader perspective by viewing the entire community as a canvas. Specifically, the Town owns numerous properties of cultural and historical significance that create a unique context for supporting the needs of the community, enhancing the arts and connecting the story of Abingdon in interesting ways through the usage of physical space and modern technology. The six properties discussed in this report represent a broad spectrum of possibility. Half of the properties are currently vacant allowing for a variety of uses that could benefit the Town. The properties with

existing programming could potentially benefit from a change or reorganization of the uses housed in each space.

In an effort to understand how best to utilize the properties, we will review applicable goals within the Town's Comprehensive Plan. We will also take a look at regional tourism efforts such as the Crooked Road and other places, programs, partnerships that might inspire the use and success of each property. Potential funding sources and grant opportunities are also identified. The information included in this report is meant to spark ideas and conversations about the space rather than being overly prescriptive.

Each property is a physical marker that allows the opportunity to take a look at the finer grain of stories and connections that already exist, but need to be strengthened. Through each specific place, we can deepen the narrative of Abingdon and really begin to share a larger collection of interesting stories throughout the community. Through understanding the built form of the site as well as the people and activities with which it has been historically associated, we can explore new possibilities to activate the space that are authentic to the character and spirit of the place.

### Planning Context: Key Assets & the Comprehensive Plan

To organize the planning process and discussion of each property, four primary themes have been established to represent the key assets of the Town of Abingdon. The four themes are: Arts & Entertainment, History & Heritage, Food & Farming, and Recreation & Linkages. These themes emerged from the Comprehensive Plan, existing marketing materials as well as an assets discussion at the initial public input session. Each theme is listed below with applicable goals from the Town's Comprehensive Plan. These themes and goals can help to provide a framework for decision making regarding uses and programming for each of the Town's properties.

Arts & Entertainment: *Abingdon will be known for its talented artisans, diverse cultural opportunities, and architectural and archaeological history. Abingdon will be recognized as the Southwest Virginia capital for arts and culture.*

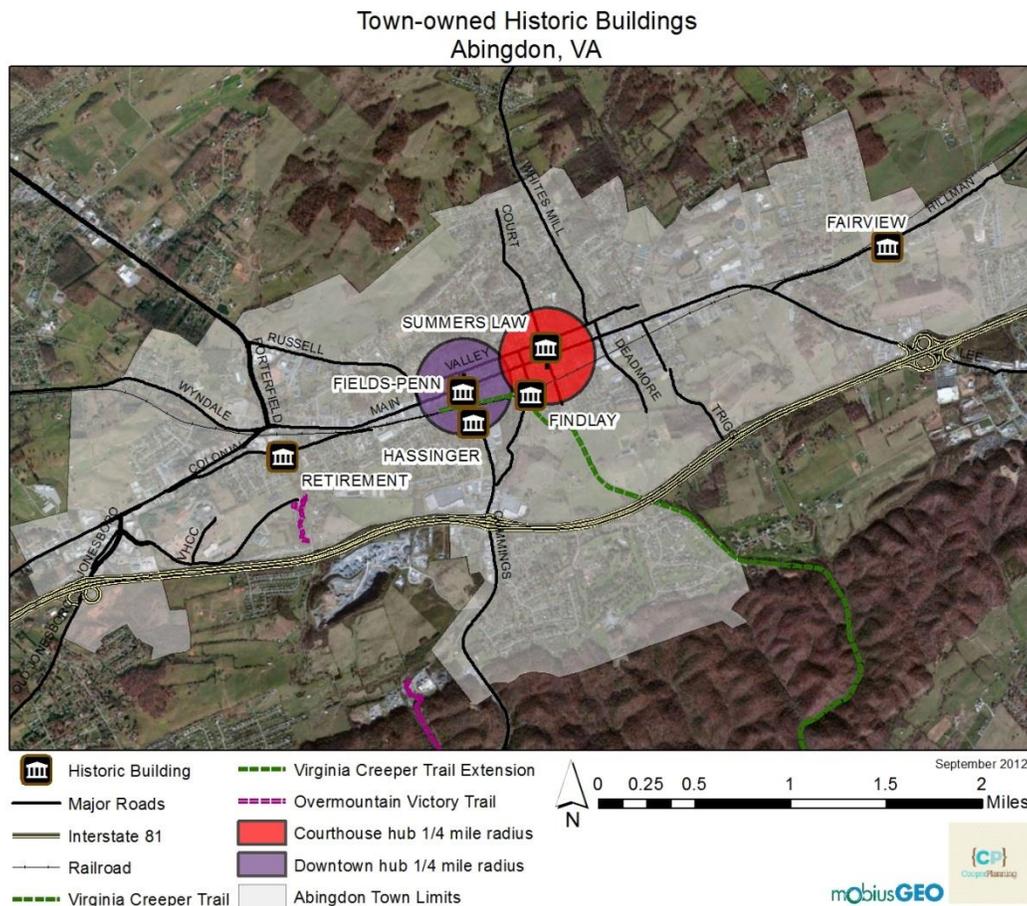
History & Heritage: *Marketing and Celebration of Arts, Culture and History: Community revitalization efforts and the economic success of downtown rely on increased marketing, events, and celebrations of the town's arts, culture and history. Protection of Resources and Unique Features: Abingdon's historical and cultural resources must be protected and preserved for the benefit of future generations and for the town's economic sustainability. Historic districts should be expanded to encourage investment incentives and to encourage appropriate rehabilitation and preservation methods.*

Food & Farming: *Agricultural soils reflect the heritage of Abingdon and contribute to long-term sustainability. Fertile soils contribute to the "green infrastructure" of the town and provide opportunities for cherished open space, pastures, community gardens, and active farmlands.*

Recreation & Linkages: *Abingdon will be a model community that provides outstanding park and recreation facilities to residents. The town's scenic open spaces and regional recreational facilities are special economic and social amenities that will be protected and sensitively integrated into the community's park system.*

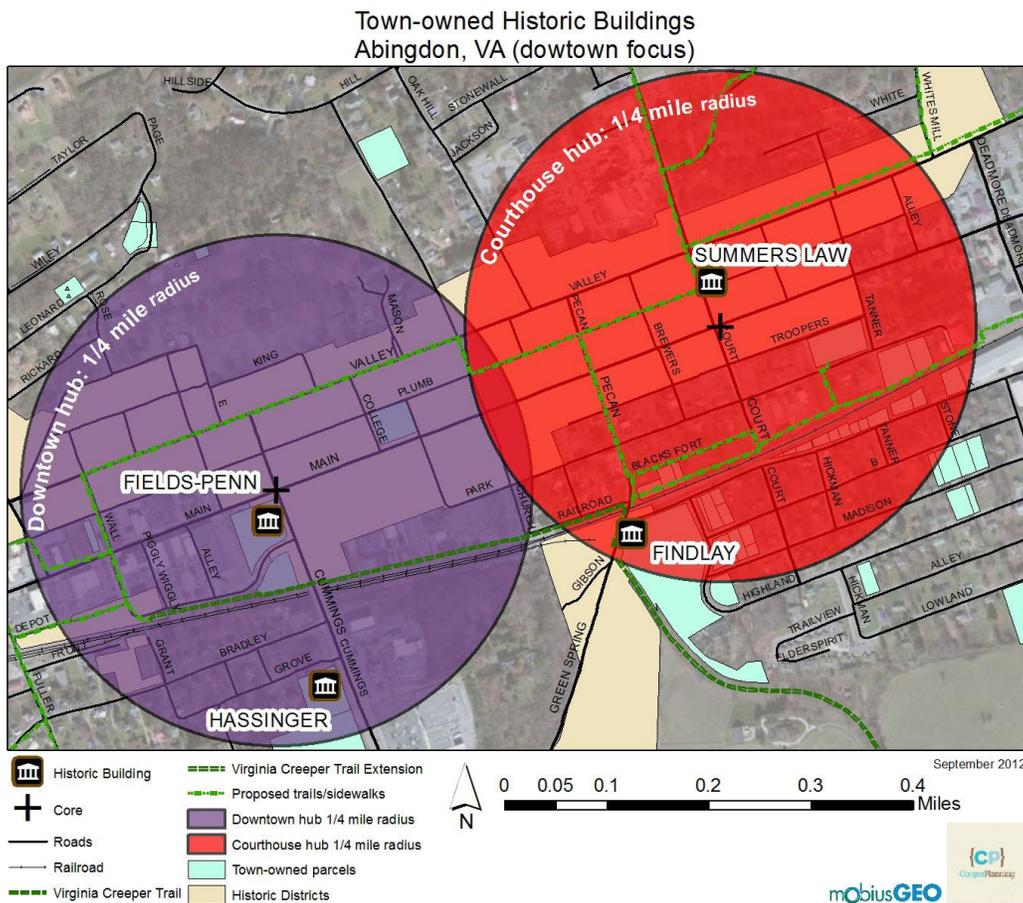
## Planning Framework & GIS Mapping

In order to review and discuss each of the properties, we have developed a physical planning framework to determine how each property relates to their immediate surroundings and to the larger context of the Town of Abingdon. A series of maps focusing on various physical elements that organize the built environment of Abingdon follow below.



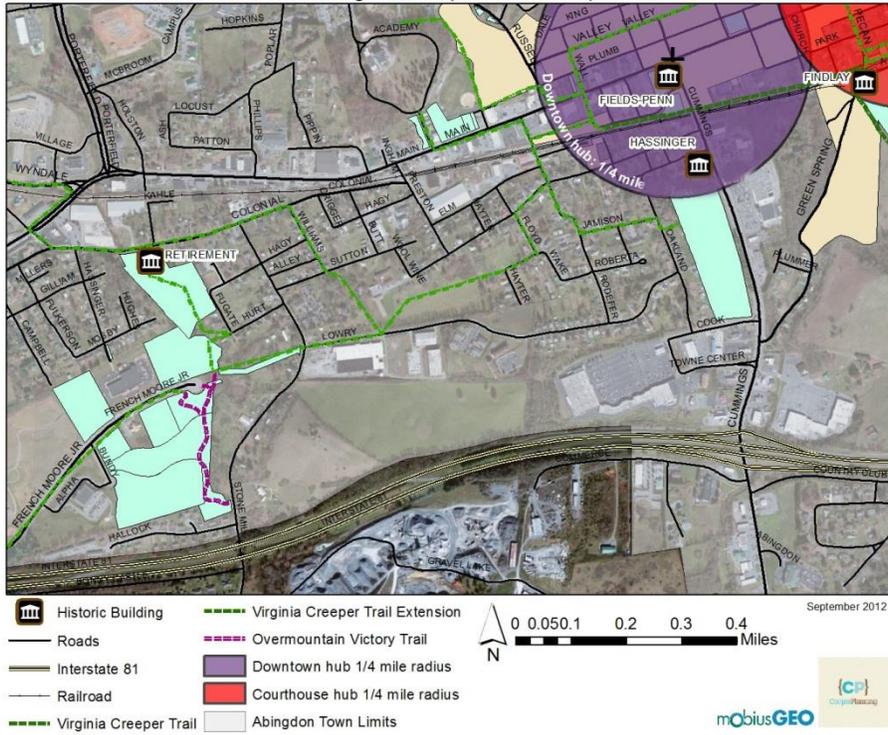
**Hubs & Core:** In urban design terms, a "hub" is a concentration of activity in a city or town. This concentration of activity usually is focused around a "core" element and often includes dining, shops, and major tourist or community attractions. Within a hub, uses tend to bunch together and create a critical mass to attract customers. Each hub is defined by a central core and extends to a 1/4 mile radius; representing a five minute walk from core to edge of the hub (or an approximately 10-15 minute walk across the entire hub). This distance correlates with a comfortable walking distance for the standard pedestrian in between attractions.

The history and influence of the railroad has always played an important role in the physical development of Abingdon. For this reason, the town follows a very linear development pattern along the railroad line with businesses and activities generally focused on the northern side of the line within one or two blocks. This study shows two main hubs for Abingdon: The Courthouse Hub with its core located at the intersection of Court and Main Street, was the historical activity center of town, especially given that Abingdon is the County Seat of Washington County. The primary activity center of modern times has shifted to what is denoted as the Downtown Hub with its core located at the intersection of Cummings and Main Street. These two hubs represent the primary pedestrian and tourism zone of Abingdon.

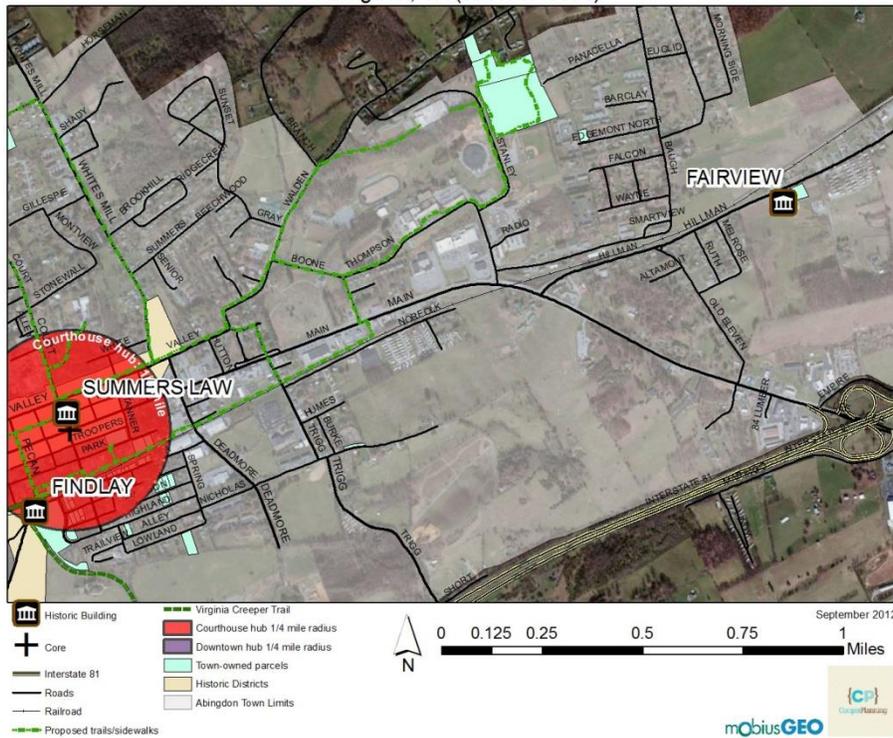


Connections & Trails: Between Hubs, areas of interest, and individual properties, it is important to establish a strong connection to encourage pedestrian and bicycle activity. For Abingdon, this includes the sidewalk network, alley network, urban trails and connections. Abingdon also has the distinction of being the trailhead to the Virginia Creeper National Recreation Trail and the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail. Each of these extensive trail systems attract visitors from all over the nation and offer an opportunity to market outdoor recreation and history on a local, regional and national level. Trail systems are shown in green on the maps.

Town-owned Historic Buildings  
Abingdon, VA (western focus)



Town-owned Historic Buildings  
Abingdon, VA (eastern focus)



## Master Planning Process:

- Property Tours
- Background Research & Planning Document Review
- Public Feedback & Focus Sessions
- GIS Mapping
- Report

## Public Feedback

An important part of the Master Planning Process involved working with the public to gain a better understanding of their perspective on each property as well as their thoughts on the needs of the community. Feedback was obtained through various methods including individual interviews, steering committee meetings, a public forum, and focus group sessions. A comprehensive list of public feedback for this Master Planning Process is included in the Appendix of this report.

In the Public Forum, the discussion was opened with an ideas session regarding Town Assets and Opportunities. This discussion helped to create a planning framework as to what makes Abingdon special and where might we have room for improvement. We also looked at each of the properties through the lens of existing Comprehensive Plan Goals for the Town of Abingdon. This perspective allows us to provide recommendations regarding the specific properties that reinforce the long-term vision for this area.

Some of the top Assets mentioned for the Town of Abingdon include: Quality of Life, Outdoor Recreation, Entertainment, and History of the Area. The primary Opportunities identified revolve around creating more entertainment options and more activity on the street, especially during the evening hours. People also felt that more emphasis should be placed on marketing the history of the area and preservation efforts.

During the remainder of the Public Forum and during the Focus Group Sessions, participants were asked to provide commentary on the six properties under consideration for this Master Planning Process. For some properties, there was a very clear theme and recommendations based on location or history. Other properties were more challenging to determine the exact significance and how this translates into a proposed use. The feedback specific to each property will be explored in later sections of this report.

Before looking at each property, it seems prudent to consider several questions. What is the public benefit of owning these six properties? Many of the town-owned properties are serving a direct need such as a visitor center, office space, or transit storage. This is true for the Hassinger House and Findlay House properties. Fields-Penn, Fairview and Summers Law Office were all deeded to the Town with the desire to protect and preserve the structures while also allowing the potential cultural benefit of opening the properties to the public. The Town proactively purchased Retirement due to its historic significance and its adjacency to the Muster Grounds. In many cases, the primary goal seems to be historic preservation and often, and secondary goal of making the

resource available to the public. Even if properties are serving a direct need of the Town, it is important to make sure those needs are being served in the most advantageous location. We will look at programming for each property to determine the best fit.

Do the properties further the goals of the Town in some way? Given the considerable investment of funds, the Town of Abingdon should ensure that properties are protected, enhanced and programmed in a way that connects directly with goals outlined in the Comprehensive Plan. Uses should also connect with current marketing and tourism efforts. Each property that is open to the public should also actively market other attractions throughout the town with the goal of keeping tourists in Abingdon longer.

The chart below provides basic information about each of the properties included in this process along with the requested funding for the upcoming fiscal year.

Property	Address	Date	Acreage	Square Footage	2013-2014 Funds Requested
<b>DOWNTOWN CORE</b>					
Hassinger House	335 Cummings St	1909	1.32	3,900	\$28,000.00
Fields-Penn	208 Main Street	1860	0.58	4,330	\$58,800.00
<b>COURTHOUSE HUB</b>					
Summers Law Office	120 N Court Street	1872	unlisted	657	\$32,100.00
Findlay House	300 Green Spring Road	1870	6.42	1,100	\$14,000.00
<b>EDGE OF TOWN</b>					
Fairview	908 Hillman Hwy	1824	2 (+10)	1,500	\$42,600.00
Retirement	1780 Muster Place	1815	8.88	3,560	Grant money available

Finally, how might properties of historic, cultural and architectural value be best protected? During the course of this planning process, Town staff identified the need for consistent protection, maintenance and management of its historic properties. To answer this need, a new town staff position was created to oversee all of the properties included within this report. All of the historic properties will greatly benefit from a consistent maintenance schedule and budget. The Town also has a history of working with the Department of Historic Resources for preservation and restoration advice. Continue to use this valuable resource in conjunction with local expertise to ensure all preservation methods are consistent with current best practices.

**Recommendation: Create a Preservation Easement Program.** An example program from Lexington, VA is highlighted below to show one potential solution for preserving properties that would not require long term ownership by the Town.

Lexington, VA: Historic Preservation Easement Program

Founded in 1966, Historic Lexington Foundation is a non-profit, 501(c)(3) organization that provides preservation action and leadership in the areas of education, community development, and advocacy for businesses, individuals, and institutions in the Lexington, Buena Vista, and Rockbridge area of Virginia.

To ensure that the buildings would not again fall into disrepair, HLF also placed restrictive covenants in the deeds of sale requiring that the exterior of the buildings be maintained in a state of good repair and not be allowed to deteriorate. The easements were placed in perpetuity. This would be repeated with other buildings HLF would purchase over the next 30 years. In some instances, HLF merely purchased an easement on the building from the property owner.

Typically, the easements state with respect to the exterior of the buildings that “no alteration, attachment or extension, and no physical or structural change and no change to the color or surfacing and no cleaning or treating in any way of the exterior brickwork” shall be made without the written approval of HLF. Many of the easements specifically state that “no advertising signs of any kind shall be attached or painted on the exterior portion of the upper floors.”

Through the easement program, a private owner has the opportunity to guarantee the perpetual protection of an important historic resource without giving up ownership, use, or enjoyment of the property. While the landmark remains in private hands and on the tax rolls, its existence and sympathetic treatment are secured for the benefit of future generations.

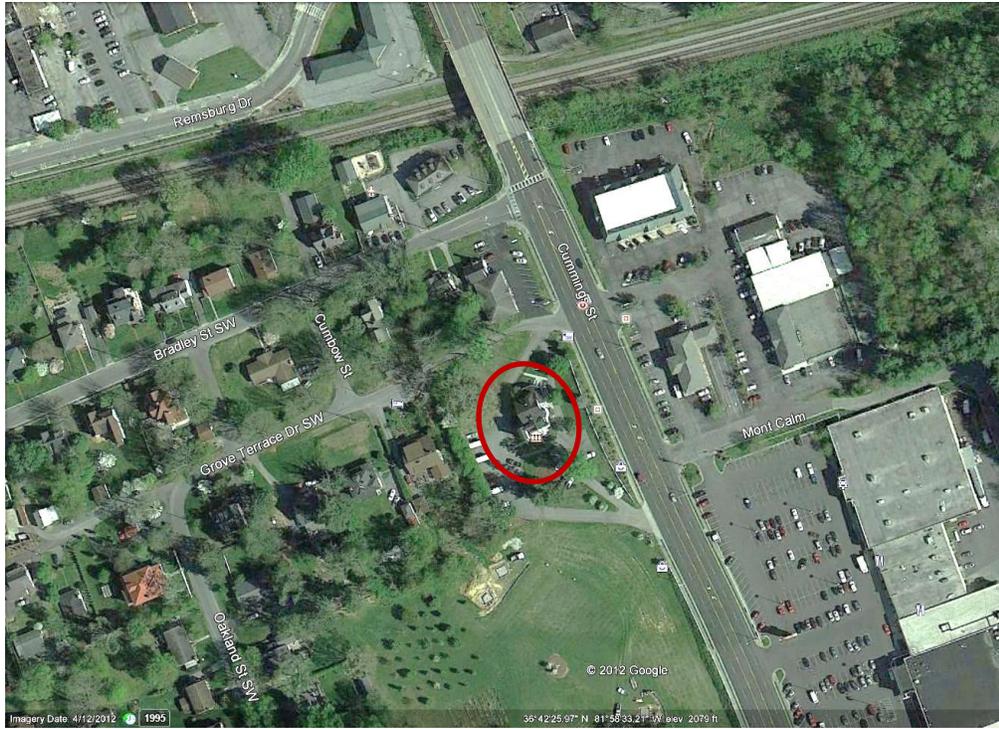
Sources: HLF website and online newsletter

<http://www.historiclexington.org/AboutUs.html>

Young Report, Abingdon Convention and Visitors Bureau Travel Market Research Study, August 2012

## Section Two: Downtown Core

### HASSINGER HOUSE



**Themes:** History & Heritage, Arts & Entertainment

**Significance & Background:** The Hassinger House is one of the few Queen Anne style buildings in Abingdon. The Hassinger family is significant on a local and regional level because of the Hassinger Lumber operation in Konnarock, VA. Owning White Top Mountain and over 30,000 acres, the Hassinger Lumber Company became one of the largest timber producers in the eastern United States, at one time helping make Washington County the largest exporter of timber in the country. At the height of operations, the company employed over 400 workers. The Hassinger family sold their timber holdings to the U. S. Forest Service when it began buying cut-over land between 1926 and 1930 to establish what has become the Jefferson National Forest.

Hassinger House, otherwise known as ‘The Grove’ was built by William Hassinger for his wife Almeda in 1909. William was a master builder and the lumber for this structure came from the beautiful white pine and hardwood logs cut from Whitetop Mountain and sawn in the family mill in Konnarock. He later sold the house and his share of the lumber operations to his brother John, a politician and editor of the local newspaper. John’s wife Mary was known for hosting ladies’ social events, afternoon teas, porch and lawn parties, and club activities at the house. Theme parties were popular, and each August, Mary Hassinger gave a Mother Goose party at the Grove, with guests dressed to represent different characters. John H. Hassinger died in 1948 leaving a legacy of philanthropy and public service. The third brother, Luther Hassinger, bought Bristol Builders Supply in Bristol, VA.

The Town of Abingdon, Virginia acquired the Grove from James A. and Bliss M. Brown in September 1981. The building now houses a variety of offices including Advance Abingdon, Tourism, Transportation, and most recently the Highlands Festival Offices. The Abingdon Visitor Center is located on the first floor, and a majority of the parking lot is dedicated to bus storage for the Washington County Public Transit.

**Primary Goal:** Public facilities should be easily accessible to citizens and located in central areas with the greatest population. Relocate the Visitor Center to a more central and accessible location. Remove conflicting uses to improve the functioning of this property.

**Considerations:** Given the importance of tourism to the Abingdon economy, the Visitor Center should arguably be the primary function of this space as it currently exists. The Visitor Center itself should be consciously designed as the first impression of the town, as often this is the first stop for tourists. As the “Welcome to Town” function, this space and site should be easily accessible and proper orientation to the core of Abingdon is essential. The first floor of the Hassinger House is ADA accessible, making it appropriate for a public use, however the site itself is difficult to access and easily missed as one drives into town on Cummings Street, a busy 5 lane road. Also problematic is the building’s location on the left side of the road, hidden signage and confusing entrances to the site. This situation forces tourists to turn left with oncoming traffic both entering and exiting the site. Once arriving on site, one has to practically circle the entire building and exit the site just to

find the few parking spaces that are available to the public. Visitors could easily become frustrated if this is their first impression of Abingdon.

**Recommendations: Move the Visitor Center to a location in the core of downtown.**

This use could be relocated within an existing building or a new construction. Ideally, the Visitor Center would be easy to locate, situated in close proximity to other attractions, and in a location with ample parking available. The existing location is neither downtown or near the interstate; two areas that would be the most convenient for tourists. The Young Strategies Report of 2012 also recommends that the Visitor Center be relocated to a major gateway or intersection of town that is highly visible and easily accessed. Instead, the existing Visitor Center falls in the in-between zone-- a no man's land of sorts. The Visitor Center is a hub of information, but locating in the core of town creates a physical hub of opportunity to market all that Abingdon has to offer. A downtown location would allow tourists to make one stop and leave their car while they explore Abingdon's attractions.

**Move the transportation offices and parked buses to allow for more public or employee parking at this location.** Parking should be easily accessible to the building. An alternative location for bus storage should be identified by the Town. This may also necessitate moving the Transportation Offices, thus freeing up office space within the building for other town functions.



*Parking Lot of the Hassinger House*

The Hassinger's legacy of philanthropy and public service can be celebrated and embraced on this property in a number of different ways. **One alternative use could be to move the Historical Society of Washington County to this location.** Located in downtown Abingdon, Virginia, the Historical Society of Washington County, Virginia is headquartered in the Old Abingdon Train

Depot. The Society is a leading center in the region for genealogical and historical research, including local and regional history, published genealogies, and family histories. ‘The Grove’ provides a beautiful and historic setting for research and other inquiries with ample space, natural light and beautiful vistas. The Historical Society and its extensive library are outgrowing the confined space of its current location. Tourism offices could relocate to the Old Abingdon Train Depot, leaving more of the Hassinger House available to the Historical Society.

The Grove is in good condition overall. This property has been studied for historic designation with the Department of Historic Resources, but due to exterior additions, it does not currently qualify. It has also been suggested that this property could be a good location for a Town Museum. During one of the public input sessions, a member of the community shared that they have memorabilia available from the Hassinger family including many of the house plans they created. These are considered to be a predecessor of the Sears kit houses. The story of the Hassinger family creates the opportunity to explore the history of the railroad and its importance to the overall development and success of this area. **The Hassinger memorabilia should be acquired and exhibited either in this location, a town museum elsewhere, or the Findlay House due to its location at the trailhead of the Virginia Creeper Trail.**

**This may also be a good property for community social events** such as those that were hosted by the Hassingers in years past. Tea parties, costume parties, musical jams, porch and lawn parties, and club meetings may be an interesting use worth looking into further. Furthermore, the relationship with Veterans Memorial Park could be strengthened to host collaborative events or displays that tie into the mission of the public park on the first floor of the building.

The most important recommendation for this property is to decide what it wants to be. Even though it is a large property, it should not continue to be a catch-all. The downstairs is accessible for public functions, but it makes sense that this property should be geared towards events for local residents or seasoned visitors versus first time tourists because of the challenges of the site location. Alternatively, the entire building could be used as office space for the town. With the removal of the buses, necessary parking for most uses would be available. **In all cases, returning the Hassinger House to its original paint scheme could create a unique visual amenity within this important Entrance Corridor to the town.**

Source: Department of Historic Resources

# FIELDS-PENN HOUSE



**Themes:** History & Heritage, Food & Farming (Farmers' Market)

**Significance & Background:** The Fields-Penn House is an architecturally significant example of Georgian proportions with an Italianate roofline and Greek Revival details at the doors and windows. Sitting at the busiest corner of downtown Abingdon, the brick structure is highly visible and located on a key piece of property within the community. The home was constructed by James Fields, for his wife, Susan, and their eight children, in 1860. The Fields were a middle class family and their story is of local significance in that it offers a window into a certain time period of Abingdon's past. The family of George and Estelle Penn moved into the house in the 1890's and made it their home for 75 years. Fields-Penn is a house museum, filled with period antiques. Guided tours are available showing how the Fields family lived during the 1860's.

The property is located next to a large public parking lot and across the street from the Abingdon Farmer's Market. The Market is an active public space that is inviting and family friendly. The Fields-Penn House, by contrast, often seems devoid of activity and with lots of delicate antiques isn't particularly geared towards children. The home is surrounded by green space and gardens on a block that is otherwise occupied by buildings and parking areas, offering the possibility of a lush oasis. However, the fence surrounding the property sends the message that this space is private. The only public restroom facility in this area is located on the rear of the property.

In 1976, The Penn House Preservation Foundation was formed and took ownership of this .58 acre property. Then in 1978, the Town of Abingdon acquired the property. Since that time, considerable effort and funding have been invested in this site as a house museum. Approximately 3,000 people visit the museum each year.

**Primary Goal:** Protect and preserve this historic property while recognizing the opportunities available for this prominent location in the community.

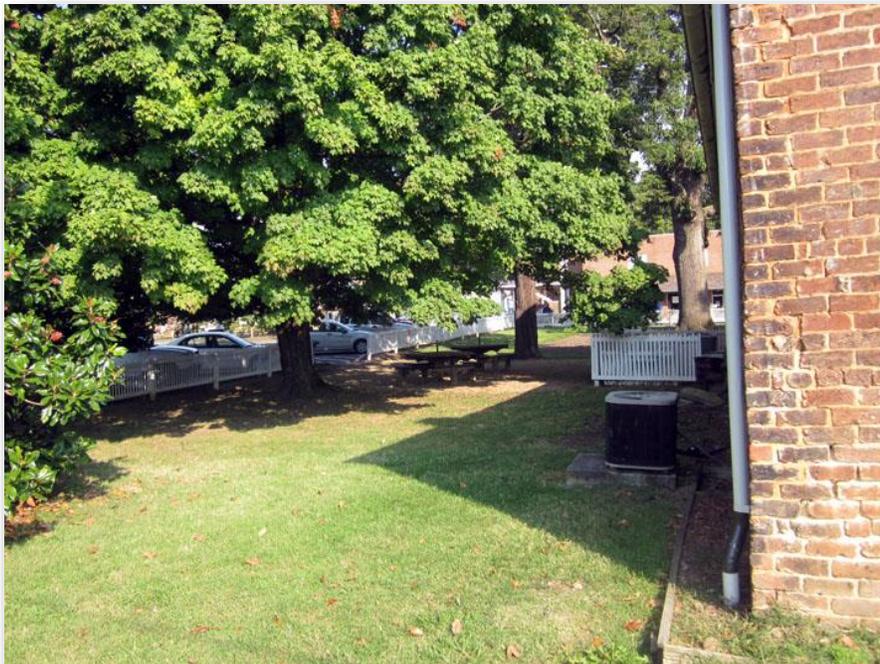
**Considerations:** In 2011, the Department of Historic Resources studied the Fields-Penn House and found issues related to the handling of rainwater. Gutters, downspouts, and the sloping grade at the ground surface have been causing the house to subside on the northwest corner slowly for years, and the impacts have increased lately causing cracks in the house and doorways. The study found that the majority of the rain caught in the gutters is channeled toward the northwest corner where it overwhelms the downspouts and reaches the ground very near the house's massive 17-inch thick walls. Further exacerbating the problem is overhanging tree branches whose leaves clog the gutters seasonally.

The study suggested a closer inspection of gutters and to fix any problems as soon as possible. After drainage and subsidence issues have been corrected there will need to be cosmetic repairs of plaster, joinery, and masonry. The budget for the Fields-Penn House is \$41,308, and more studies will need to be conducted to determine financial viability of the repairs. The home currently has ADA accessibility issues, so any public use at this location should address accessibility.

The question we must ask is how effective is the Fields-Penn Museum as a house museum? This property tells the story of a local middle class family in the 1860's, but the Fields and the Penns hold no national significance. Most often, house museums are associated with a prominent historical figure to draw a larger audience. Due to structural issues, the Town has made considerable financial investments in the maintenance of the building over the years and more repairs are needed. Entrance to the house museum is currently free so income is minimal. If the house is to remain a museum, consideration should be given to charge an entrance fee to offset some of the operational and maintenance costs.

**Recommendations: Charge admissions to the house museum.** If the Town is committed to keeping a house museum at this location while also preserving the building, then admission should be charged for the house tours. It may seem counter intuitive, but people will associate more value to this resource if they have to pay to be admitted. Free admission leaves the public feeling non-committal about a 'product' and questioning its worth. It is standard practice to charge admission for this type of museum.

**Make use of the property as a public green space.** It is rare to find such pleasant green spaces within an urban setting, and this should be considered an asset of the Town. While it is currently a visual amenity, the property should be designed in a way to allow the enjoyment of the space. Hire a landscape architect to design the space to coordinate well with the historic structure.



*The side yard of the Fields-Penn House*

**Consider locating the Visitor Center within a portion of the house, on this property, or in the immediate vicinity.** Besides the architectural legacy of this home, the next most important feature of this site is its prime location. The Fields-Penn property is a natural epicenter for history and heritage tourism. Members of the Abingdon community view this spot as the place of arrival and the “Welcome to the Town” function. Some members of the community doubt there is room to accommodate both the new use and the existing museum pieces, but this should be more closely examined. The location of the Fields-Penn House would be ideal for serving as the cultural-historical hub of Abingdon and a place where people can easily be directed to the abundant resources in the area.

A variety of solutions are possible with this recommendation. **On the far end of the spectrum, this property could be completely converted to a Visitor Center and Tourism offices.** The downside of this option is that the property would no longer function as a house museum and the collection would need to be moved to a different location. By converting this space to a Visitor Center, the benefits are substantial. For a huge number of tourists, the Fields-Penn House would be their architectural introduction to historic Abingdon. This type of use also has the ability to create more economic momentum and pedestrian activity for this side of the downtown. Tourists are drawn to the other side of Cummings Street to go to the Barter Theater or the Martha Washington Inn. A Visitor Center at this location could benefit the retail shops and provide an impetus for further investment in this block. This scenario would also allow the Town to tap into outside funding sources geared towards tourism for the preservation and renovations needed in the house.

**A second scenario would be the construction of a Visitor Center on the rear of the site or next door on a portion of the public parking lot.** Alternatively, the Visitor Center might locate in an existing space in the Downtown Core. This option retains Fields-Penn as a house museum while creating a public synergy between the house, the Farmer’s Market and the Visitor Center. The dynamic of these three uses all in one space could create a lot of energy in this part of town.

**A third scenario would be a hybrid space within the Fields-Penn House.** In this case, the Visitor Center would be located in a portion of the house while still keeping many of the areas as interpretive space. This scenario has the positive benefit of bringing many people into the space while allowing the opportunity to begin telling the story of Abingdon immediately. Tours of this space could educate visitors about ‘The Story of Abingdon’ and create a jumping off point to direct guests to all of the other top attractions that are woven into that story.

In Danville, Virginia, there is a program titled Sounds Around Virginia that narrates the story of Danville through a website containing audio files on various highlights of the City and its history. This project is sponsored by the Institute of Museum and Library Services. **Abingdon could create a similar website that captures the oral history of this area while introducing sites and stories from around town.** This can be the beginning of delving deeper into the story of Abingdon and making it available to the public. Similarly, buildings and historic sites around town could be coded to the proper audio files for a self-guided tour using smart phone technology.

From Danville, Virginia's Digital Audio Tours web site:

*“In the heart of Southern Virginia, Danville and Pittsylvania County are home to three great museums and a multitude of cultural opportunities. From historical landmarks to state-of-the-art research laboratories, there is something for everyone to learn and experience in the region. Stories abound, woven in and around the rich and varied history of the region. This menu of audio podcasts provides a glimpse of some of the highlights here. We invite you to listen -- and then to come and visit us in person.”*



*Abingdon's bustling Farmers' Market*

Sources:

Property Deeds

Wilderness Road, Virginia's Heritage Migration Route

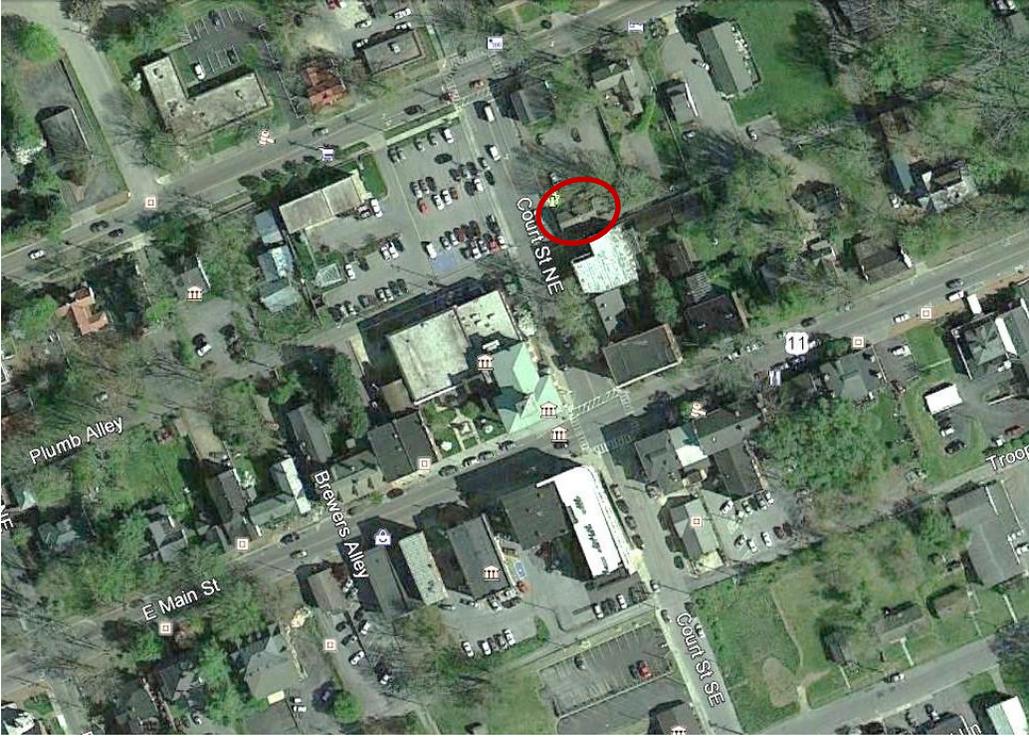
<http://206.113.151.20/wildernessroad/wrSites.asp?comm=Abingdon&commid=14&site=114>

<http://www.myswva.org/explore/fields-penn-1860-house-museum>

<http://visitdanville.ialr.org>

**Section Three: Courthouse Hub**

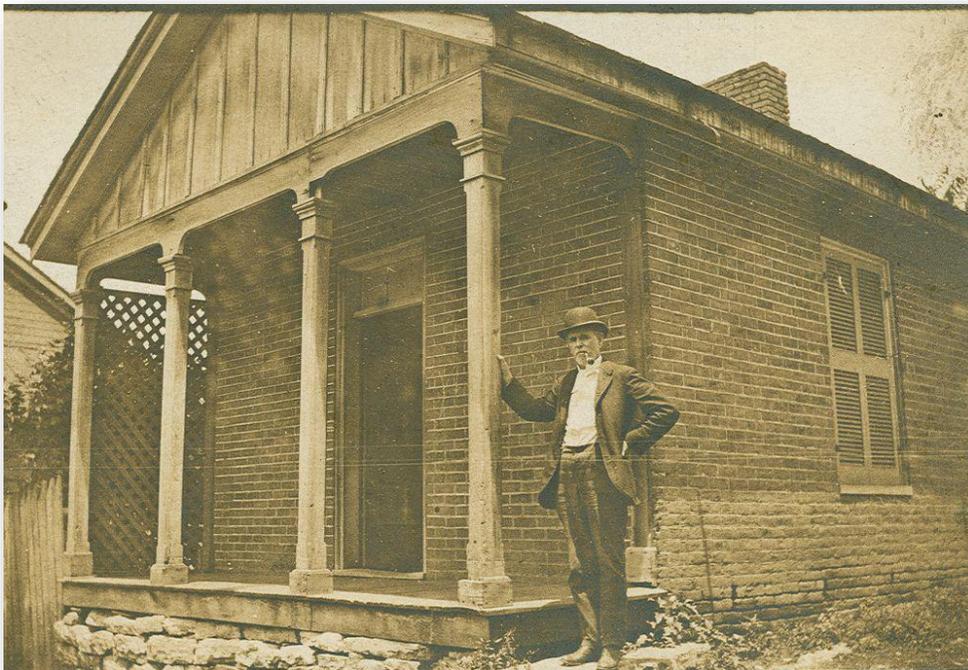
SUMMERS LAW OFFICE



**Themes:** History & Heritage, Arts & Entertainment

**Significance & Background:** At just 657 square feet of interior space, the Summers Law Office is one of the smallest buildings in Abingdon, yet its harmonious proportions and unique architectural detailing exude a certain confidence and charm. This building, often referred to just as ‘The Office’, is an iconic building located within a stone’s throw of the Courthouse and the Tavern. Individually designated as a contributing structure to Abingdon’s local historic district, the building was originally constructed in 1872 as the Johnston & Trigg Law Office. The Summers family acquired it in 1918 for use as a law office. Although the space was primarily conceived for the practice of law, it emerged as a space for significant creative expression and historical research. Over the years, The Office has been used as a writer’s haven, an artist’s studio, a bachelor pad and most recently the headquarters of the Highlands Festival. The building is currently vacant for the first time in many years.

Lewis Preston Summers used this space to practice law, but more importantly he wrote the *History of Southwest Virginia, 1746-1786, Washington County, 1777-1870* and *The Annals of Southwest Virginia, Volume I & II*, among other historical accounts at The Office. His interest and dedication led to the first comprehensive documentation of the regional history. Through his work, an important piece of the cultural legacy of this area will live on in print. He is widely considered the person who did the most to preserve Southwest Virginia's history.



*A historic photo of the Summers Law Office courtesy of the Washington County Historical Society*

Lewis Preston Summers youngest son Andrew also took a keen interest in the preservation of culture and history. Andrew Rowan Summers is one native of Abingdon that, through his creative prowess, keen curiosity, and dedication to the arts, had a significant impact locally, nationally and even internationally. Though he was a lawyer professionally, his interest was sparked through creative and artistic pursuits.

Andrew's interest in preserving the songs of Appalachia, their origins, and authentic instrumentation was first sparked at the White Top Music Festival. There he met an elderly man, John Testerman, who introduced him to the dulcimer. As Andrew split time between Abingdon and Manhattan, he popularized traditional ballads and dulcimer instrumentation to larger audience whilst performing in his white tuxedo. He is recognized by the Smithsonian for his work as a musicologist and the traditional ballads from around the world that he popularized and preserved through his recordings. Smithsonian Folkways Recordings is the nonprofit record label of the Smithsonian Institution, the national museum of the United States.

In 1947, after successfully selling his personally designed household accessories through Lord and Taylor Department Store, Andrew was able to leave the law and dedicate his time to interior design, antiquing and music. His custom lamps were especially popular. During this time period, Andrew also dabbled in architecture and started his own antiques store, Abingdon House.

In 2010, Robert Weisfeld of The Star Museum created a comprehensive exhibit on Andrew Rowan Summers entitled, 'A Summers for All Seasons'. His extensive research on the Summers family is an excellent resource for any future exhibits or marketing materials on the topic. Weisfeld, along with other members of the community, have a variety of Summers' personal effects that could be displayed within the Summers Law Office or elsewhere.

The contributions of both Lewis Preston Summers and Andrew Rowan Summers, two exceptionally talented men, bring unique significance of the Summers Law Office. Their body of work and passionate dedication to history, cultural and creative pursuits are the spirit of this place. The Summers Law Office is significant both architecturally and culturally.

**Primary Goal:** Repair and restore the building and gardens as an iconic property of historic Abingdon while finding ways to incorporate the Summers story into local and regional marketing efforts.

**Considerations:** Any use or event located at this property must be appropriate for the size of the spaces available. Public events must be more intimate, and uses inside the building should be geared towards small business or small groups. The brick office has two primary interior rooms that are centrally divided by a fireplace, meaning that each room is just over 300 square feet. A small covered porch marks the front entrance to the building, and there is an intimate garden courtyard behind the building. This 'secret garden' has historically been used as a space for entertainment.

The building itself is currently in a state of disrepair. The roof needs to be replaced and the exterior brickwork has significant water infiltration and evidence of inappropriate repairs in the past. Once exterior work has been completed, the interior plaster should be repaired and repainted.

**Recommendations: Incorporate the Summers story into Town marketing materials and Crooked Road marketing.** Host special events at this site that promote local artisans and draw connections to the current musical heritage of the area. Partner with existing and well-reputed organizations such as The Crooked Road and The Highlands Festival to plan events at the space and in the immediately surrounding area that coordinate with existing celebrations and bring people into the space for learning and entertainment opportunities.

**Use the property for Special Events.** Given the building's location at the intersection of Court Street and Plumb Alley, Plumb Alley Day is key local event in which to participate. Create specialized events around the unique history of this space such as Dulcimer Festivals and workshops throughout the year. The Summers Law Office property also has the potential to become a unique outdoor music and special events venue for the Town of Abingdon.

By highlighting outdoor events, the Town can create a fundraising opportunity to cover the much needed repairs and maintenance of this site. Through special events, the community can enjoy the courtyard and learn more about the Summers family. By starting with primarily outdoor events, Abingdon can build excitement about the venue while the building is being renovated. The Summers Law Office, in keeping with the history of the building and its significance, could feature traditional music of the area and provide opportunities to learn more about the dulcimer. Programming of the space can support modern and creative interpretations of regional music.

**Start an Outdoor Concert Series in the garden.** Abingdon is a haven for artists and musicians. By making the courtyard space of 'The Office' available for more informal 'jam sessions' during the warmer seasons, people become more familiar with the space and start to associate it with the musical heritage of the region. There are several jam sessions already in existence within the community; the acoustic music jam meets on Thursday at the Abingdon Senior Center and Capo's Music Jam happens every Saturday night. Abingdon is also home to one of Virginia's Dulcimer Clubs. This group, comprised primarily of mountain and hammered dulcimers, meets twice a month to play music. When the space is not being rented or utilized otherwise, the Town could make it available or rent it specifically for musicians' gatherings.

**Create the Summers Institute** Given the ambition and dedication that both Lewis and Andrew had to preserving the history of this area, it seems appropriate that the Town of Abingdon would build off this good work and continue to 'spread the word' by using their research to educate both residents and visitors about the region. Not only is it important to ensure that the story of the area continue to be told, Abingdon should strive to promote this type of ambition and curiosity for current and future generations. The Summers story is also an untapped tool for marketing the distinctive cultural qualities and artistic talent of Southwest Virginia to new audiences. For this

reason, a permanent Exhibit for Lewis Preston Summers and Andrew Rowan Summers should be established as a first step in recognizing the importance of their accomplishments.

Rather than making the Summers Law Office a museum itself, Abingdon should consider alternative spaces for The Summers Institute where an in-town heritage center could be created. ‘The Office’ is an intimate space that works well for smaller gatherings or creative studio/office space. The Summers exhibit and ‘artifacts’ should be on display within the building as a conversation starter and background piece for whatever primary purpose the building is serving, such as special events or concerts.



*Iron gate entrance to the garden space behind Summers Law Office*

One potential model for The Summers Institute is the Ralph Stanley Museum in Clintwood, VA. The Museum provides interactive exhibits and live performances. They use the career of Ralph Stanley and a jumping off point to explore traditional mountain music. In much the same way, Abingdon could truly explore and highlight the works of Lewis Preston Summers and Andrew Rowan Summers to explore the past, present and future of Abingdon’s cultural influences.

The Summers Law Office could serve to foster a deeper appreciation and understanding of authentic music by creating a community of music makers and music lovers. Using the example of The Pickin’ Porch in Floyd, VA, one potential use of the space, both interior and exterior, could be actively supporting musicians by offering music lessons and learning opportunities. Lessons could be offered in the evening or during times when the space isn’t being used for other events as a way to make the space more consistently economically productive to the Town.

Given Andrew Rowan Summers' eclectic collection of creative talents, another alternative would be to promote the creative ambition in general by **renting the space to people within the creative industries**. By actively promoting and encouraging people within creative industries to locate in the Town of Abingdon, it is possible to further boost the local economy and enhance the quality of life with minimal investment. In the rental agreements, Abingdon should negotiate town usage of the space and ways that the user might give back or enhance the creative community of Abingdon. In this scenario, the building may remain open to the public certain times of the year and available during the Highlands Festival, Plumb Alley Day and available for incorporation in a future music/dulcimer festival.

Sources:

The Washington County Historical Society

Star Museum Exhibit: *A Summers for All Seasons*

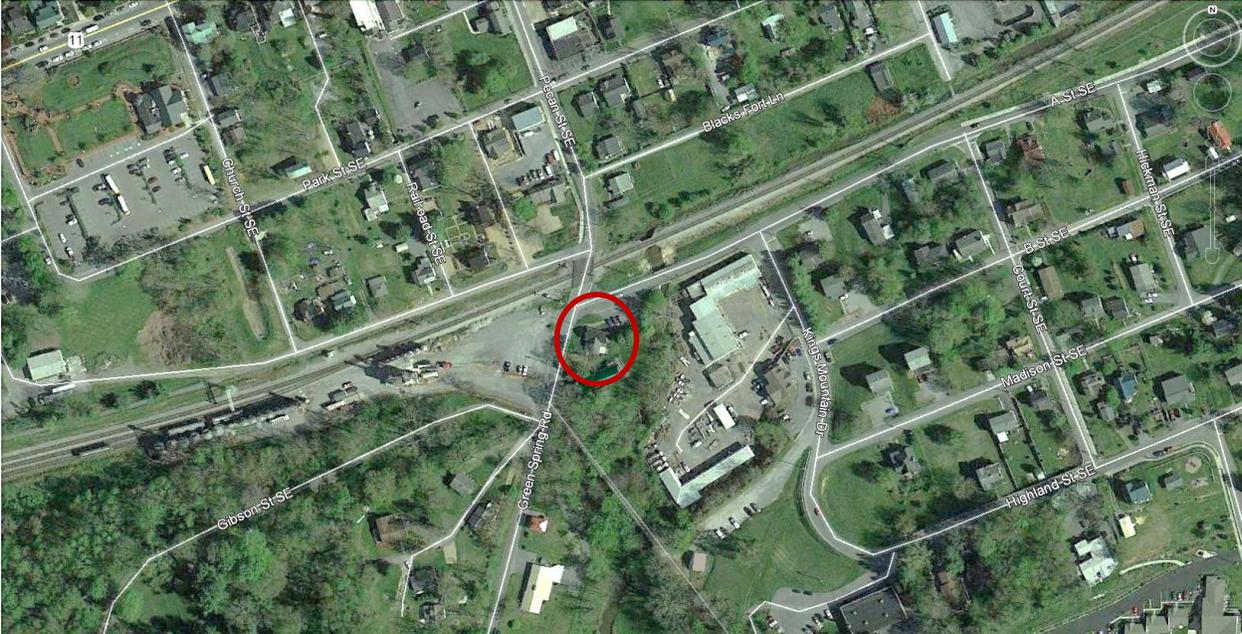
Brown, Douglas Summers. "Sweet Singer of the Virginia Highlands", Virginia Calvacade, 1996

<http://thecrookedroad.org/>

<http://www.thepickinporch.com/>

<http://www.ralphstanleymuseum.com/>

# FINDLAY HOUSE



**Themes:** Recreation & Linkages, History & Heritage

**Significance & Background:** The Findlay House is significant primarily for its location at the trailhead of the Virginia Creeper Trail as it comes into Abingdon. Consumer research conducted by Young Strategies in 2012 has confirmed the Creeper Trail as one of the top three attractions in this area. The location of Black's Fort, one of the original settlements of this area, is also believed to be on this property or in the immediate vicinity. The house was built by Frank Findlay in the 1870's.

Construction of the Virginia Carolina Railway began in 1887 and various sections were constructed through 1907 when the Hassinger family completed the connection to Konnarock, VA where their lumber yard operations were located. The railway was operational until 1977 and since that time, it has been converted to a recreational trail. Thousands of visitors make the trip to this area to enjoy this 34 mile trail that was once the Virginia-North Carolina Railroad line leading up to Whitetop Mountain.

The Town of Abingdon has owned this property since 1936. For at least the past two decades, the brick building has been home to the offices of the Abingdon Housing Authority. The exterior of the building is in good condition and is ADA accessible. The interior was gutted and walled off into office and meeting spaces for the Housing Authority. The Abingdon Public Works has a shop also located on the back side of this same parcel.

In the area surrounding the site, there are numerous visitor amenities. A large public parking lot is located across the street. Nearby there is lodging, restaurants, retail shops and a bike rental shop that caters to the Creeper Trail experience. A new brewery has recently opened and there are other cultural enhancements nearby. There are current plans to add interpretive signage about the history of the railroad at various points along the trail.

**Primary Goal:** Create an anchor at this end of the Virginia Creeper Trail to provide information, education and amenities for the thousands of visitors who use this trail annually.

**Considerations:** The Housing Authority has been located in the Findlay House for over two decades, thus members of the community are familiar with this particular location for this government function. Great care and consideration would be required in the selection of a new location for the Housing Authority that would also be convenient for members of the public to access this service. The interior layout of the building is problematic. The first floor is dedicated to office and meeting space, and the second floor is an attic storage area. All original architectural details have been removed from the interior and the space is not inviting for any public function, including its current use.

**Recommendations: Repurpose this space as a Visitor Center outpost at the trailhead.** The location of this house at the start of the Virginia Creeper Trail is an opportunity not to be missed. For many visitors, this site is their first impression of Abingdon as they start their journey along the trail. For others, they have just completed a 34 mile epic trek and may need refreshment or

restrooms. A Visitor Center space at this location would help to filter this group to local shops, restaurants, lodging and other attractions.



*Trailhead to the Virginia Creeper Trail on the Findlay House Property*

There is interpretive signage at various spots along the trail and other communities along the trail are creating educational exhibits about the Creeper Trail, however, **this public space and the grounds could certainly be used for additional exhibits that are customized to Abingdon.** In particular, this building would be an ideal location for the collection of O Winston Link locomotive photography that is currently housed in the entrance foyer to the Washington County Historical Society. Link is known for his large scale railroad photographs and the custom flash equipment he created to capture steam engines in a way that no other photographer has duplicated. He produced over 2,400 images along the railroads of Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland and North Carolina. This site could also exhibit information about the Hassinger family’s legacy in this area.

**Any new use of the space will require that the interior be completely renovated to create an open and inviting first floor space.** The attic area could be renovated to create meeting space for the Creeper Trail Club or “Creeper Keepers”, a volunteer group that maintains the trail, installs interpretive signage, and would likely assist in the management of the space. Although this is an expense for the Town, the space is in need of renovation for any use to be successful here and the investment will likely increase tourism revenues.

The recently constructed Interpretive Center on the Muster Grounds has been a huge success locally and is attracting tourists from all over the country. An Interpretive/Visitor Center at this location could serve a very similar function—bringing the railroad history of Abingdon to life while also cross marketing other attractions.



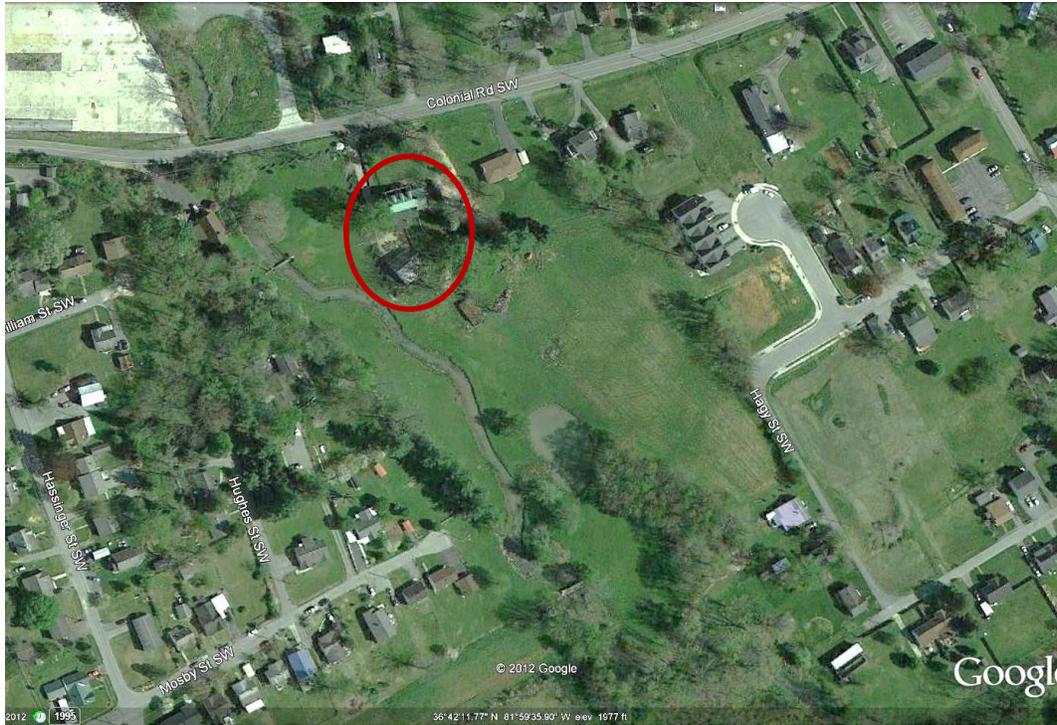
*Abingdon's Mollie Steam Engine is directly adjacent to the Findlay House*

Sources:

Washington County Historical Society  
O. Winston Link Museum  
<http://www.linkmuseum.org/linkbio.html>

## Section Four: Edge of Town

### RETIREMENT / MUSTER GROUNDS



**Themes:** History & Heritage, Recreation & Linkages

**Significance & Background:** The Muster Grounds site holds national significance as the location where, in 1780, members of the volunteer militia started their march through the Appalachian Mountains to the Battle of Kings Mountain. This victorious battle ensured independence from Great Britain in the Revolutionary War. The Muster Grounds are positioned at the trailhead of the Overmountain Victory Trail, a national historic trail project sponsored by the National Parks Service and stretching from Virginia all the way down to the battlegrounds in South Carolina.

In 1813, the home known as 'Retirement' was built at this site along Wolf Creek. The home still stands today, although there have been several additions over the ensuing years. Since our country gained its Independence, home and the property have connections to many other significant wars for the United States. Judge Samuel Fulkerson of Abingdon, an officer during the U.S.-Mexican War, purchased the property in 1857. Later, during the Civil War, Judge Fulkerson died after being wounded in the Battle of Gaines Mill. It is believed that wedding taking place on the property during the Civil War was raided. This story should be researched and interpreted at the property. The house is currently vacant and in need of significant interior renovation and exterior maintenance. The Town of Abingdon has a grant valued at \$137,580.00 to spend for the restoration of this property.

In 2007, the Town of Abingdon purchased the house and 9.1 acre property for \$800,000.00. Since that time, an Interpretive Center has been constructed on the property in what was a garage behind the house for approximately \$115,000.00. Many educational events and enactments are held at this site to portray the history of the trail and the Overmountain Men. The National Parks Service and the Daughters of the American Revolution are funding an exhibit costing \$169,000.00 for the Interpretive Center. The Town has also received several requests for private special events and weddings at this location.

**Primary Goal:** Restore Retirement and establish a use that coordinates well with the existing activities and uses of the Muster Grounds. The property and home have interesting connections to the Revolutionary War as well most American conflicts since that time.

**Considerations:** Given the national significance of this site and the budding success of the Muster Grounds as the start of the Overmountain Victory Trail, Retirement should be restored and used in a way that creates additional synergy at this site. This property has the potential to become hugely popular for tourism in this area. One major issue with this site as it currently exists is a lack of parking. Onsite parking is limited to only a few spaces, and additional parking would negatively impact the historic nature of the Muster Grounds.

**Recommendations:**

**The Town of Abingdon should immediately procure and establish additional parking on an adjacent or nearby property.** An ad hoc agreement for parking on a neighboring property currently exists, however, a more secure and permanent parking situation should be established to

ensure the success of the site as a tourism destination. This site should also be included on a local Trolley route, allowing visitors to leave their car at a convenient downtown location and take public transportation to the site.

**The Museum of the Confederacy would like to partner with the Town of Abingdon to create a special museum and exhibit at Retirement.** The exhibit would include a variety of Washington County Civil War artifacts. This public use could locate on the first floor with the renovations of the structure to include accessibility for this level. The upstairs of the home could be converted into a research library space, for Civil War and Revolutionary War materials, as they pertain to Abingdon and those conflicts. This use respects the history of this site while also providing an additional venue for tourists to learn about the unique history of this region through a special collection of artifacts that have never been displayed in Abingdon.

**The Town of Abingdon should allow private Special Events at this property.** The property is incredibly scenic and the historic home provides a beautiful backdrop for events. With precious items exhibited on the main level of the home, weddings and other special events should most likely be limited to outdoor events either utilizing temporary tent structures or the covered section of the new Interpretive Center. The garage section on the basement level of the home could be renovated as multi-functional space that could be used in coordination with special events (catering and gather space) and the Interpretive Center (educational and meeting space).



*The newly constructed Interpretive Center at the Muster Grounds*

Sources:

Virginia State Regents Project

<http://www.vadar.org/srp.html>

<http://www2.tricities.com/entertainment/2010/sep/24/abingdon-opens-interpretive-center-muster-ground-ar-522662>

FAIRVIEW



**Themes:** Food & Farming, History & Heritage

**Significance & Background:** The Fairview is a historic farmstead site with 1.9 acres of land directly located with the house and 10 additional acres of farmland available for lease. The property is of local significance as a farmstead of Swiss/German settlers to this area, and the Hagy family established the Hagy Wagon Company. Abingdon was an important stop along the Great Wagon Road, so the Hagy story can link to a more regional history of migration and the settlement of this part of the country. The house, originally constructed in 1824, has recently been stripped of its siding and is being restored to the original appearance. A pioneer park and museum loosely based on the Frontier Culture Museum in Staunton, VA has been proposed at this site that would require considerable funds to construct and operate. The park would highlight the construction techniques for the log cabin as well as the settlement of this region. It is important to note that operations such as this typically require significant annual fundraising and support from the State. In recent years, state funding has been greatly reduced for these types of programs.

There is a website dedicated to the restoration work at this site with periodic updates. At the bottom of the site, this guiding mantra is listed: *“Historic buildings and their immediate surroundings provide tangible links to our past that allow us to establish a sense of orientation about our place in time. We can learn from the past and, through preservation of historic buildings and their attendant grounds, we can continue to benefit from the accomplishments of our ancestors.”* The question remains of this and all of the historic Abingdon properties, how can historic properties be properly maintained while serving useful, valuable and educational functions to an evolving community? Must they all become museums, or can we imagine uses that interpret the past while linking into the current goals and assets of Abingdon. Some might argue that historic properties become even more interesting through this type of rebirth.

The house and 1.9 acres surrounding it were deeded to the Town in 2005 for a minimal sum, however the deed itself is problematic. The agreement requires restoration to the standards of an 18<sup>th</sup> century site. Even though the original farmstead was an 18<sup>th</sup> century site, no structures remain from this time period except the foundation to the spring house. The logs of Fairview date to the 19<sup>th</sup> century structure and other more modern structures already exist on site. If the property is not used strictly for historic preservation, educational and tourism purposes it can be forfeited to the previous owners at any time. The Town has already invested significant funds towards the restoration of Fairview with no legal guarantee that the property will even be retained to create a real public benefit from this investment. From the language of the deed, it is clear that the descendants of the Hagy family value the preservation of their homestead and wish it to bring an educational component regarding the agricultural history of the area. Given the site only has local significance, it is unclear why the Town of Abingdon should bear this cost.

**Primary Goal:** Showcase and support the agricultural heritage of Southwest VA and the local food movement.

**Considerations:** Is there an option for private or nonprofit ownership of this site? If the intent of the Hagy descendants is to create a pioneer park and museum at this location, it should be pursued and managed either by a family foundation or other non-profit organization created for this

purpose. If the goal is to ensure that the house be preserved and maintained at its 19<sup>th</sup> century appearance, this could be accomplished through placing preservation easements on the property using the Lexington, VA program as a model for success. For any use proposed at the property, a sustainable business plan should be thoroughly vetted by the Town.



*The Fairview Property*

**Recommendations: Consider creating a unique Artist in Residency Program centered on an organic farm.** The site has its history in farming and that legacy should be respected. Virginia Center for the Creative Arts (VCCA) is an example of a highly successful program of this sort in the state. VCCA provides a creative space for artists from all over the world. This non-profit artist in residence program is located on a 400 acre farm in Amherst, Virginia. The residency provides a peaceful and serene setting that allows artists to work uninterrupted for weeks or even months. Artists of all genres can focus their attention on the production of their craft. VCCA is the only artist community that is directly connected with Sweetbriar College, a relationship that allows the artists usage of campus facilities. In return, this area of Virginia is constantly infiltrated with artists of the highest caliber collaborating on creative work. The community is enriched by the work and the philosophy of the artists.

*“Why do artists from around the world leave their studios behind to come to the VCCA? It's all about the work. Many artists find they accomplish more in a matter of weeks at VCCA than they can in a year at home. The*

*VCCA also offers a chance to work privately but in proximity to more than twenty other highly accomplished artists with fresh insights, new ideas and stimulating conversation. All of this, far from the distractions and disruptions of everyday life in quiet, spacious, light filled studios. The commute is not bad either: a short walk from the Fellows' Residence up a gravel path, the mountains of the Blue Ridge hazy in the distance, horses placidly grazing in the pasture.”*

**Building on the local food and Farm to Table movements, cooking classes that teach traditional cooking and food preservation techniques of the region could be accommodated in one of the buildings on the site. Another idea is to create a restaurant in Fairview that uses food farmed on the property.** Abingdon has a variety a fine dining options, but this site and setting would be unique. The home itself is not currently ADA accessible making any public use a challenge and this type of use would most likely conflict with the deed as it currently exists. However, Abingdon has always been a destination for fine dining. With Barbara Kingsolver’s successful Harvest Table Restaurant in Meadowview, this area is ripe for the farm to table experience.

Fairview is currently being used as a meeting spot for the local tractor club and the property has been the site for several Tractor Shows, often featuring antique tractors. Members of the community liked this connection to the historic usage of this site a farm. If the property once again became a working farm, there could be the opportunity to use historic farming techniques and equipment as an educational component. **This could also be the site of a Fall Harvest Festival celebrating the agricultural heritage of the area and supporting the local farming community.** The site itself is largely undeveloped, leaving ample room for temporary special event parking and any displays and temporary structures that would be needed for the festival.

Sources:

Senior book, Daniel Dart, Virginia State BLA  
<http://fairviewhistory.blogspot.com/>  
<http://www.vcca.com/main/about-vcca>

## CONCLUSION

**The six properties discussed in this report are physical markers that marry the history and communal identity of Abingdon.** The properties represent a broad cross-section of architectural eras and time periods, with each offering a unique opportunity for creative placemaking. By understanding the history and significance of these properties, we connect more deeply with the distinctive story of this region. The common threads of arts & culture, history & heritage, and food & farming represent some of the major assets in the community of Abingdon. The suggested programming and recommendations in this report are meant to link directly to the history of each site while recognizing the modern context and current community needs. By considering these various components as we plan for the next chapter of these historic properties, we further the goals of Abingdon's Comprehensive Plan and bring that vision to life.

## **Appendix**

### Potential Funding Sources

Various funding sources are available for building preservation, creative placemaking, economic development and programs to benefit arts and culture. Grant money is primarily available for non-profit organizations, although some grants are also available to local governments.

#### Certified Local Government Grants

Certified Local Governments are eligible for grants that can be used to survey architectural resources, prepare nominations to the National Register of Historic Places, create preservation planning documents and programs, create public education programs, and rehabilitate publicly owned buildings listed on the national register.

#### Our Town Grant: National Endowment for the Arts

Through Our Town, the National Endowment for the Arts will provide a limited number of grants ranging from \$25,000 to \$150,000 for creative placemaking projects that contribute to the livability of communities and help transform them into lively, beautiful, and sustainable places with the arts at their core.

This specific grant could be used to cover pre-development or design fees for a cultural facility. This grant could also be used for community asset mapping, cultural district planning, community engagement efforts and innovative programming around the community.

#### Art Place America Grant

In an unprecedented private-public collaboration, 11 of America's top foundations have joined with the National Endowment for the Arts and seven federal agencies to establish ArtPlace ([www.artplaceamerica.org](http://www.artplaceamerica.org)), a nationwide initiative to drive revitalization in cities and towns with a new investment model that puts the arts at the center of economic development. ArtPlace supports projects in which cultural groups operate in concert with other community partners, private and public.

By leveraging the arts and culture with all of a community's other existing assets, ArtPlace aims to help communities achieve vibrant growth while doing more with less. This program seeks truly innovative ideas and collaborations that are part of a larger portfolio of strategies to change the trajectory of communities.

ArtPlace makes grants ranging in size from \$1 million to \$63,100. The average grant was \$349,784 and the median grant was \$275,000. The next round of funding for ArtPlace will be announced in September 2012.

## Virginia Commission for the Arts

([www.arts.virginia.gov](http://www.arts.virginia.gov))

The Commission provides ongoing support for established non-profit arts organizations and helps in the development of new arts organizations which fill a community need. In deciding which organizations to support, the Commission looks for high standards of artistic quality and management and the amount of local commitment to an organization in terms of attendance and financial support. Local governments are not directly eligible for most of their grant categories, however, a non-profit may be established depending on the mission and programming for the space. Grant deadlines are throughout the year depending on the application type.

The Commission has various grant programs including the Local Government Challenge Grant that could be a source of matching funding of up to \$5,000 for arts initiatives having a positive community impact. Also available is as Project Grant for newer organizations (less than 3 years old). This funding of up to \$10,000 can provide:

Operating support for new and emerging arts organizations. New or expanded arts education programs, such as artist residencies, workshops, classes, or summer arts camps, new or expanded performances or exhibitions, and services to artists and arts organizations, such as research studies, shared administrative and/or technical services, professional development workshops, and shared promotional materials.

### **Other Funding Sources**

- Capital Improvement Program Funds
- Government Bonds
- Community Development Block Grant Funds
- Historic Tax Credits
- Appalachian Regional Commission Grants
- Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development
- Virginia Tourism Corporation
- Virginia Coalfield Economic Authority Grants
- Virginia Tobacco Commission
- Rural Development Program of the United
- State Department of Agriculture

## Public Feedback

Abingdon Public Meeting Notes  
July 11, 2011

### **Page 1. Meeting Agenda**

Introduction

Goals

Outcomes

Comp Plan Review

Assets, Gaps, Opportunity

Historic Properties Discussion

Summers

Findlay

Retirement

Fields-Penn

Fairview

Hassinger

Meeting wrap-up

### **Page 2. Master Plan Project Purpose**

1. Determine use/purpose significance
2. Potential for special events at properties
3. Coordinated preservation and maintenance plan
4. Identify funding and implementation plan

### **Page 3. Town Assets**

Quality of life

Asset-based tourism

Creeper trail (200 members)

Outdoor recreation

Family-friendly

Pedestrian friendly (some gaps)

Linear development (nodes)

2 retail streets

History - architecture and genealogy 1200 in 12 months

Music events / venue

Farmers market

Ambiance and attractive and trees

Safe and authentic

Arts - Barter / wm king/ holston - grassroots - town investment

Sinking springs cemetery

Restaurants

Higher education

### **Page 4. Town Opportunities**

Education

More evening programming

Business - arts - incubation  
Mobile app  
Preserve what we have  
Specialty groceries / expand hours market  
4-H counter  
Ongoing communication  
Local scholars  
More retail - Sunday and evening hours  
Activity on the street  
Night life  
Musician venue  
Exit 17  
Live/work/lofts downtown  
Local businesses  
Sports complex  
Docents  
Outdoor wedding

#### **Page 5: Findlay House**

Creeper Trail  
Housing Authority - now home?  
Visitor Center Info  
Elder Spirit Community  
Black's fort - wayside sign  
Kings mtn neighborhood  
Link museum - Roanoke interactive

#### **Page 6. Fields-Penn**

500 people - one day!  
Lynchpin - web out to the rest of town  
Central location - epicenter  
Hub of info/publicity - visitor services  
\*how to make financially viable\*  
Farmer's market  
Organic garden - boy scouts  
Pay to enter??

#### **Page 7. Fairview Homestead**

1790's Hagy Family Homestead  
Legacy  
Swiss family  
\*early settlers in the town  
Farming - wheat  
Tractor club presentations  
ASD agricultural incubator

#### **Page 8. Retirement - Muster Grounds**

\$200,000 grant from DHR restoration of the house

Smiley Ratliff foundation - source of funding  
Civil war + war of 1812 - over mtn victory trail - revolutionary war museum  
Unique parties and weddings?  
8 acres in town-natural asset  
Parking limitations  
Outdoor events  
Crosswalk  
\*accessibility ramps

### **Page 9. Hassinger House**

Visitor Center  
Tourism office  
Veterans park museum??  
Highlands's festival  
Public transportation  
Advance Abingdon  
Parking problems - 2 spots for visitors  
#s dropping  
Traffic issues  
Signage  
Bus parking

### **Page 10. Special events**

Weddings  
Meetings  
Street parties

---

Eras of History  
Pairing together as the unit- charge  
Technology - physical -  
Make it easy

## Abingdon Focus Groups Meetings Minutes

September 17th, 2012

### Master Planning Themes:

Arts & Entertainment  
History & Heritage  
Food & Farming  
Recreation & Linkages

Think in terms of hubs, nodes, districts & connections

Create a comprehensive narrative for visitors that links with top sites for marketing

Session #1: Fields-Penn & Hassinger House

Area: Central Hub/ Town Core

### Fields-Penn:

Epicenter & Central Hub of Town

Information Center

People relate to this building

How effective is this property as a house museum

Represents local history, no major regional or national significance

Easy to access site from various directions

Visibility: good site, but pine trees block the view

3 trees—very difficult to get approval to remove or cut trees

Trees problematic to gutters and drainage

Ample Parking Available for Visitors

Public Restrooms

Potential Site for Visitor Center

Guest Services

Interior upfit needed

Post sign on the back of the property—WELCOME TO ABINGDON

What would happen to the large collection of furniture, etc.?

Serves the “Welcome to the Town” function

ADA Accessibility issues for the Building

Approximately 3,000 visitors per year to House Museum

Free Admission

Christmas Tree Display brought in more local groups

Farmer’s Market and Stage across the street—attracts kids and families

Cross-market with the Farmer’s Market

Road Closure for events and concerts

Garden in rear yard

Tractor Trailer traffic along Lee Highway is a problem for the Town

Fields-Penn viewed as a porcelain figurine up on the shelf—afraid to use the space.

Is it child friendly?

Create User-friendly pathways around the building  
Property Fence and Opaque Door may dissuade some visitors  
Partial Fencing to make the site more permeable  
Maintain fence—paint & repair  
Maintenance Budget: \$20,000 per year (Total Budget is \$58,000)  
Don't lose the opportunities available at this site

### Hassinger House:

Current Visitor's Center  
First Floor is ADA Accessible  
Hodge podge of uses—Advance Abingdon, Highlands Festival/ Tourism/Transportation Offices/  
Bus Storage/ Visitor Center  
Find another location to store buses  
Only 2 parking spaces for visitors that are difficult/confusing to find  
Visitor Center should be located out by the Interstate or Downtown, not in between  
Street is scary—lots of traffic and difficult to make left hand turn  
Property addition- stairwell- cannot currently qualify for historic designation. Is it possible to  
remove addition?  
Answer why? What? Who? For this site  
Approximately 3,000 visitors per year  
Too many committees involved  
Associate with Veteran's park  
Create more parking by moving buses  
Should this building become just town office space?  
Create opportunity—town Museum  
Partner with William King  
Hassinger memorabilia is available  
Hassinger House Plans—Predecessor of the Sears House  
Important to record history now—aging population  
Miller Bradley Family  
Think about layers of history including the Railroad and Agricultural Heritage of this area  
Maintenance Budget: \$20,000 per year

Session #2: Fairview & Muster Grounds  
Area: Periphery

### Fairview:

Swiss German Influence  
2 acres with the house + 20 acres that are leased by the Town of Abingdon  
House/Site only ties in with local and regional history—no national significance  
Could be any number of similar sites in the area/region  
House is more difficult to interpret now that it has been stripped of siding and returned to earlier  
phase—more family items available from later periods  
Most restrictive deed agreement  
Use the property as a working farm

Represents the story of the early settlers of the this region  
 No ADA Accessibility currently, but possible for first floor  
 Home is not primitive—fine construction for what it is  
 Interpretive Space  
 Meeting Space  
 Consider dollars and sense for programming ideas  
 Frontier culture museum option is not viable economically—no funding available  
 Food pantry space and coolers/fridges in barn  
 Appalachian Sustainable Development program—first attempt to have others farm was not successful  
 Create a rare breeds show  
 Host a seed saver exchange at the site  
 Tap into the FOODIE culture/experience  
 Secret Suppers—Farm Supper Experience  
 Cross market with Barbara Kingsolver and Harvest Table  
 Create a culinary institute at this site: Traditional preparations, canning, sustainable techniques  
 Restaurant on site that uses food harvested on site  
 Pick Your Own veggies/fruit—pumpkin patch  
 Tractor Club Shows—antiques—picks up on some of the early 20th century history of the area  
 Different crowd than other Abingdon attractions  
 Planting and Harvesting Wheat on site  
 Bridge the history gap with this site  
 Create a fall harvest festival here  
 Extension of the Highlands Festival?  
 Connect with Brewery & White's Mill—how can we grow more local products for local businesses?  
 Jail Garden—could inmates farm?  
 QCC urban farm in Charlottesville as a case study

#### Muster Grounds:

The history of this area—Scots-Irish, German, Presbyterian  
 Interpretive Center and new exhibits  
 #3 Historical Site in the State according to Virginia Living Magazine  
 DAR: State Regents Office Reception & Exhibit  
 Visitors come from all over the state to see this site  
 Call to Arms –Reenactments Revolutionary War  
 Connection to war history—Revolutionary War, Civil War, War of 1812  
 Samuel Fulkerson- Civil War History  
 Wedding Invasion Story  
 Property is located within Floodplain—soggy at times  
 Retirement—Significant maintenance needed. Start with gutter and drainage system update to protect building and prevent further damage.  
 ADA—accessibility issues. Accessible route must be designed that does not detract from house and site.  
 Location for Special Events & Weddings  
 Grant application for additional interpretive signage throughout the site  
 Add signs from I-81 to bring more visitors to the site  
 Ideal location for House Museum or Civil War Museum

Potential to get Civil War artifacts/relics from Richmond House Museum with each room dedicated to the various owners of the property and the various timeframes for each addition.  
Create more local awareness of the site  
On Festival Trolley Line  
Parking Issues: Barbara Farris currently loans field for parking. Need a more permanent agreement or location.

Session #3: Findlay House & Summers Law Office  
Area: Court House Hub/Virginia Creeper Trailhead

#### Findlay House:

Virginia Creeper Trail Trailhead  
Current Offices of the Abingdon Housing Authority  
Steam Engine: Abingdon's Mollie  
Location of Black's Fort  
Black's Fort Lane—Public park opportunity  
Public Restrooms located on other side of the bridge  
6 acre site  
Ample parking lot across the street and several spots on site  
ADA accessible  
Create a Tourism and Visitor Hub that is geared towards visitors of the Creeper Trail (mini Office/Outpost for Tourism)  
Outposts at all top visitor sites  
Urban Trail connection throughout Town  
Where are some ideal sites for the relocation of the Housing Authority Offices? Other Town Properties in this area? Space for Lease or Rental? Hassinger House?  
Business Opportunity to lease this space  
Signage & Wayfinding: Reference Blowing Rock Example  
Town Shops & Maintenance on back portion of the property  
Bike Rental, Lodging, Retail and Restaurants in this area  
Brewery & New Museum Site nearby  
Create more retail and breakfast spot

#### Summers Law Office:

Lease Opportunity for the Town  
Working Studio  
Artist Incubator  
Meeting Space for Lawyers  
In Town Meeting Space/Conference Room for rent  
Qualities: Small, intimate and formal space  
Back Garden: Receptions & Acoustic Concerts  
Use Wall space inside to show exhibit regarding Summers Family  
Smart Phone Application—scan it for history info—choose your own adventure  
Reference Ottawa Example  
How to create a useful space with 657 sq ft?

1st Thursday: Advance Abingdon Arts Event  
Arts Trolley—Trolley only runs during special events currently  
Trolley will soon run full time for free—13 stops  
Route 11: problems with trucks, signage, traffic  
Enhancement Grant  
Urban Trails Installation—extension of Creeper Trail & Over Mountain Victory Trail  
Connects Highlands all the way to Coomes  
Maintenance & Water Damage Issues at building  
Business Incubator  
Capo's Music—Dulcimer Gatherings  
Connect with Highlands Festival and Plum Alley Days for Programming of space and area  
More Public Art is needed in Abingdon  
Create Art Installations around Town  
Create Summers Institute—creative expression/ regional history and arts  
Who are the interested user groups for each site?