

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Myrtle Beach Downtown Nighttime Lighting Masterplan

Myrtle Beach
South Carolina, USA
February 2025



VISION: Urban Lighting + Public Realm Strategy for the Coastal City of Myrtle Beach

Myrtle Beach is a coastal town with a permanent population of approximately 35,000–38,500 residents. However, it is a rapidly growing area, with the broader metropolitan area population exceeding 380,000 to over 479,000, depending on the defined boundaries. The city, a major tourist destination, experiences a significant population influx, hosting millions of visitors annually, per 2020 census.

The planning for the Myrtle Beach Arts and Innovation District in March 2019, aiming to redevelop the historic downtown area, specifically around Main Street and Broadway Street, into a walkable, mixed-use hub.

Leni Schwendinger Light Projects was commissioned to start nighttime planning in 2022. This scope was suggested by the Myrtle Beach Downtown Alliance, on behalf of the City, by suggestion from an economic development consultant.

Lighting Principles

- Illumination transforms Myrtle Beach from a daytime destination into a 24-hour coastal city with identity, safety, and economic life after dark.
- A coherent nighttime identity for Myrtle Beach—where lighting becomes civic infrastructure, connecting people, place, and coastline into a continuous and recognizable urban experience after dark.

Objectives

- Strong nighttime identity for Myrtle Beach
- Improved safety + walkability after dark
- Increased evening tourism and economic activity
- Flexible framework for events and seasonal programming



Walking and talking with stakeholders kicks off Nighttime Lighting Plan in 2022

OPPORTUNITY: Create a unified nighttime framework that strengthens identity, safety, and economic vitality.

OVERVIEW

The lighting masterplan is based on three key themes of vitality, connection, and equity. These overarching design principles emerged from community input that highlighted the way local residents and stakeholders currently use the downtown at night, and their aspirations for the future.

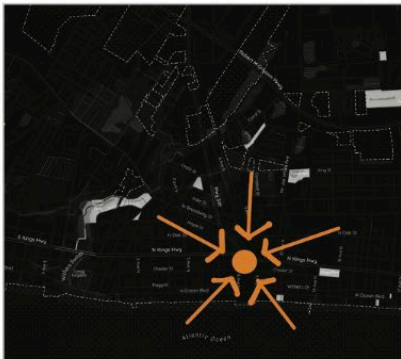
Vitality

Many respondents mentioned out of town nighttime attractions. A key strategy is to increase the nighttime economy in the downtown area. Food, music, festivals and other public programs were discussed as great options. Improved lighting can support this drive to bring people back to the center.

Connection: The Arts and Innovation district has a strong urban character with businesses, restaurants and is located close to the ocean, but this link could be strengthened through distinctive lighting. Increased urban density and active frontages at night would also provide city dwellers and visitors the opportunity to visit both the downtown and the waterfront.

Equity: The residential areas to the southwest and northeast of the downtown core were largely felt to be forgotten, and one nighttime strategy is to improve the street lighting for these areas in line with other downtown improvements.

1



Vitality: Bring life back into the center

2



Connection: Connect the water to the city

3



Equity: include the outlying residential areas

SUMMARY: THREE LIGHTING DESIGN STRATEGIES

1. *Vitality:* All lighting strategies are based on bringing urban vitality, safety, and investment and interest into the downtown area.
2. *Connection:* 9th Avenue is a key connector and would benefit from a strategic landmark lighting strategy to highlight this connection at night.
3. *Equity:* Equitable lighting includes lighting the residential neighborhoods of the downtown area as well as the more commercial and tourist areas.

OPPORTUNITY: Extend the Coastal Experience Into the Night

Myrtle Beach's evening and nighttime environment has become fragmented and unevenly lit. Legibility is reduced. Navigation difficult. Key corridors lose clarity and comfort

The waterfront is a key location for residents and visitors with exceptional economic activity including employment. It lacks nighttime activation continuity. This Masterplan proposes incremental steps to balance lighting to connect downtown and the water's edge. This way, illuminated features will stand out drawing pedestrians, cyclists and drivers alike to the beach front.

CURRENT NIGHTTIME ENVIRONMENT

Currently, there is an imbalance of both light intensity as well as investment in the public realm. The commercial/urban areas are often too bright, while the residential areas could benefit from improved street lighting.

DESIGN PRINCIPLES



Existing Lighting Conditions in the Downtown - very bright commercial areas and buildings, dark surrounding areas (Artist sketch by Emily Dufner)

PROPOSED NIGHTTIME ENVIRONMENT

Following detailed local discussions and observation, together international best practices, Light Projects proposes 'Re-balancing' the nighttime lighting in Downtown Myrtle Beach. It addresses a few key elements that will help to keep and attract both residents and businesses as follows: improve residential street lighting, reduce over-lighting of retail facades, reduce unnecessary spill light at oceanfront, and provide better lighting for key buildings. In summary, increasing the quality of the nighttime environment through implementing the correct proportions, scale, finishes, and performance of light fixtures will help to raise both the image and functionality of the downtown after dark for all.

DESIGN PRINCIPLES



Re-balancing Myrtle beach at night - reduce 'over-lighting' in commercial areas and improve underlit outlying areas (Artist sketch by Emily Dufner)

THREE STRATEGIC MOVES: A Sustainable Arts and Innovation District Nighttime Framework

1. Coastal Gateway Identity

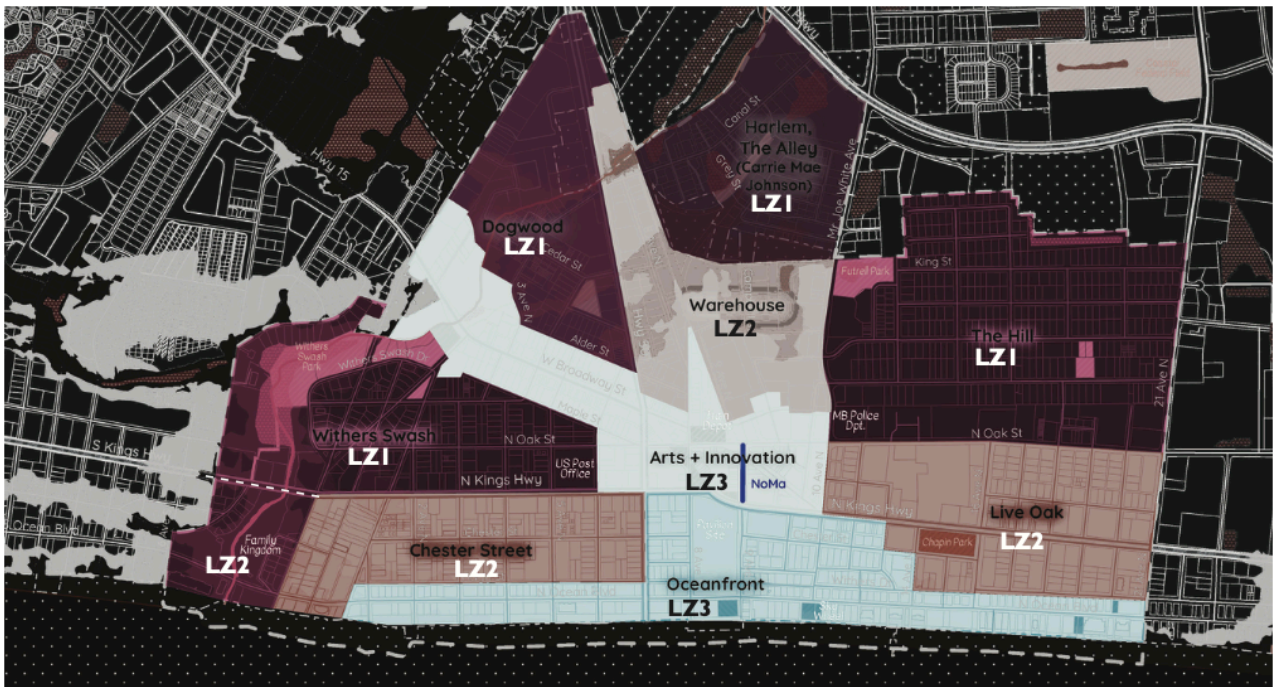
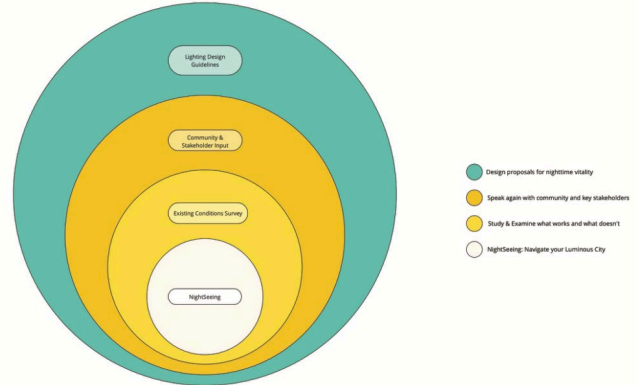
Define arrival through cohesive lighting and illuminated historic markers

2. Pedestrian Comfort Corridors

Create continuous, human-scaled lighting networks across key streets

3. Waterfront Activation Edge

Transform the shoreline into a programmable civic and cultural asset



Zone Type	Light Trespass Limits	Details	References
LZ0	0.1 lux (0.01 fc)	Minimal outdoor lighting; intended to protect natural night environments.	IES MLO, IDA standards
LZ1	0.5 lux (0.05 fc)	Shielded fixtures recommended to prevent light from escaping into neighboring areas.	IES MLO
LZ2	2 lux (0.2 fc)	Basic limits for suburban areas, with moderate restrictions on glare and uplight, utilizing the BUG (Backlight, Uplight, and Glare) rating system for fixture selection.	BUG Rating System
LZ3	8 lux (0.8 fc)	Typically allows moderately high ambient lighting levels but still with shielded lighting to prevent light trespass into nearby residential or sensitive areas.	IES MLO, Local ordinances
LZ4	15 lux (1.5 fc)	Used in highly active areas such as stadiums or transport hubs; light containment measures are strict to prevent glare or uplight.	BUG and MLO standards

Observe best practice lighting zones for sustainable and navigational goals

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY: Including Two Hands-on Processes

Processes and Objectives

- Learn and share information with business owner, art gallerists, residents and city government needs
- Present and convene open meetings and exhibitions for the public
- Meet with City implementers, The Mayor and her office, Urban Planning division, Arts Council, Quality Oversight commission, etc.

Two Hands-on Engagement Events

1. A character card workshop. After a NightSeeing LightWalk, constituents are facilitated by laminated cards – atmospheres, “places” and words – to agree on three objectives for Downtown Myrtle Beach’s night
2. At several public meetings, attendees map after-dark activities



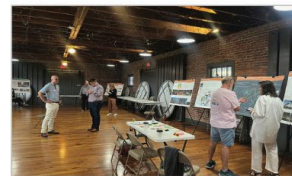
Table 1 at work

Custom character card workshop

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Session 1: Recreation Center (September 19)



Session 2: Train Depot (September 23)



Session 3: Train Depot (September 24)

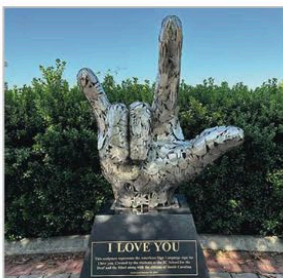
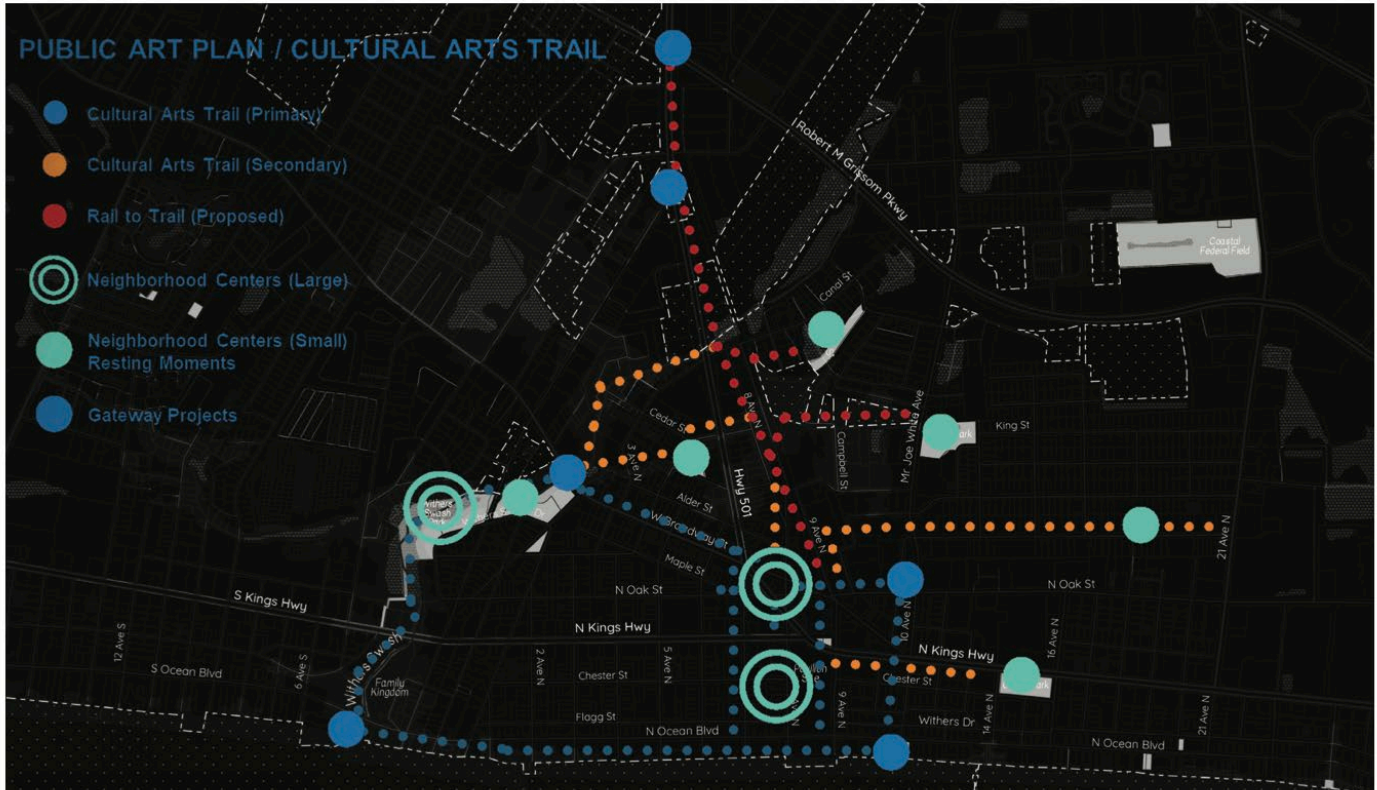
Mapping night activities, and night fearful hot spots

PUBLIC ART NOW: Put the Art into the Arts & Innovation District at Night

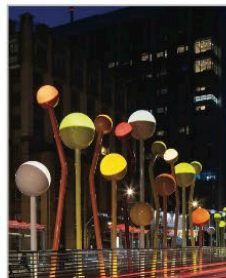
The lighting guidelines propose parallel opportunities for light art in the recently accepted public art cultural trail

1. Two layers of light are proposed: functional lighting for walkability and individual element lighting for art elements and feature gateways
2. Illuminate all routes, projects and neighborhood centers.
3. Consider the use of colored light to differentiate from street lighting

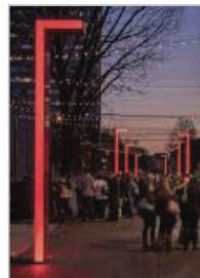
DESIGN GUIDELINES



Light sculptures



Highlight routes and neighborhood centers



Illuminated gateways

OUTCOMES + IMPLEMENTATION: A Phased, Scalable Urban Lighting System

Objectives

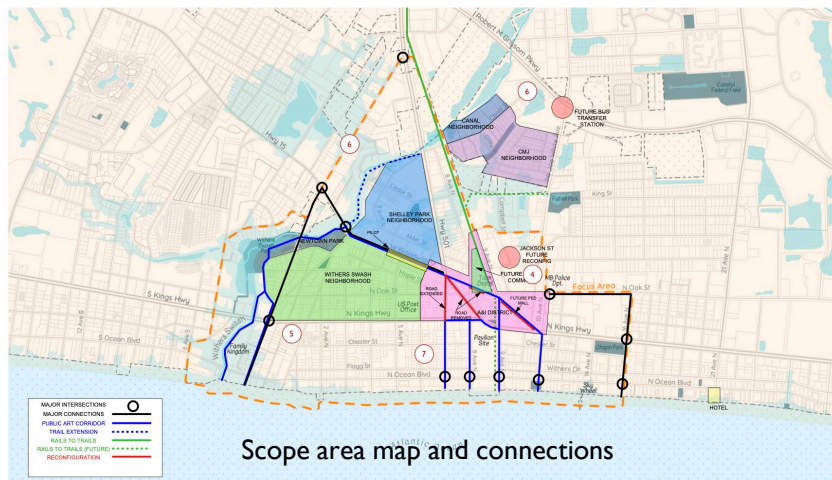
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Phasing

- Phase 1: Gateway + pilot corridor
- Phase 2: Expand pedestrian + waterfront zones
- Phase 3: Full downtown integration + controls system

2. AREA MAP

MBDA District



Compliance Summary

- 1 The shape and form of light fixtures are to be 'coastal organic', not too modern or traditional in nature
- 2 To create a coherent nighttime appearance, all functional light fixtures are to be neutral white in color (4000K)
- 3 A clear hierarchy of routes and spaces, with associated fixture heights, intensity and lighting elements is to be implemented
- 4 Facade lighting is to be targeted, focused on the building and not in excess of brightness guidelines
- 5 Lighting control is recommended, where fixtures can be dimmed late at night or turned off when no longer necessary.



Rendering of varied lighting applications to connect to the waterfront

This sketch rendering of 9th Avenue indicates lighting elements that would augment the walkable link between the Arts and Innovation District and the Oceanfront

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by Leni Schwendinger Light Project

For more information:

Chris@LSLP.net

Leni@LSLP.net