

# Courthouse Adaptive Reuse

## Examples & Possibilities



**December 23, 2020**

LINCOLN COUNTY, NC  
County Manager's Office

---

# Table of Contents

## ❖ Adaptive Reuse Classifications

- Local Government Reuse
- Private Non-Profit Reuse
- Private For-Profit Reuse
- Mixed Reuse

## ❖ Adaptive Reuse Examples

- North Carolina
- Around the U.S.
- Museums, Arts, Residential, Office Space, Libraries, Retail Shops, Government Offices, etc.

## ❖ By the numbers (Statistics & Data)

- Use Classification Percentages
- NC County by Category

## ❖ Important Considerations

---

# Adaptive Reuse Classifications

## *Local Government Reuse*

This classification is described by the reuse of the building by the local government itself and is quite common. Several local governments decide to utilize their original courthouse building as county offices or additional space for outward facing services such as the Register of Deeds or Tax Department. Usually this type of reuse stems from additional space needs that are already in consideration and may be a convenient way to grow without having the expense of a new construction project.

## *Private Non-Profit Reuse*

The Non-Profit reuse is a common way to utilize former government space that may be deemed unusable or unsuited for the local government due to factors such as high renovation costs. Typically the local government retains control of the property, but leases or rents the facility to a non-profit. In many cases, the rent is low or the lease is in exchange for the goods and services that the non-profit may provide to the community. Often times, examples of these uses include Arts Councils, Downtown or Historical Associations, Charitable Organizations, and other community service advocates.

## *Private For-Profit Reuse*

This type of reuse is very similar to the non-profit option; however can sometimes be seen from the local government perspective as being a bit riskier as business ventures are not always successful. Most of the examples in this category are either **single use** such as a Performing Arts Theatre or Museum; or **multi-use** such as variety shops, retail, event space, offices, and in some cases residential. The multi-use option typically provides for a more stable return on investment as several retailers, businesses and the like come and go; however a management entity that recruits and retains the users of the space is often necessary.

## *Mixed Reuse*

Mixed reuse includes a variety of uses similar to the multi-use options described above, but can also include Non-Profits, Community Organizations, and even local government offices all under the same roof. Usually, the local government retains control of the building and collects generates revenue through multi-year leases with the various tenants.

# Adaptive Reuse Examples

## Local Government Reuse

**68%**

of the locations studied  
were considered local  
government reuse.

### NORTH CAROLINA

The Henderson County Courthouse is an example of a local government reuse project where a heritage museum was established, but it also houses the Board of County Commissioners, Attorney's Office, The County Manager's Office, and other support offices with administrative functions.



Henderson County, NC

This building is very similar to the existing 1923 Lincoln County courthouse somewhat in size and surrounding acreage. It is a center piece of the Hendersonville, NC downtown streetscape and contributes not only to local commerce, but also the character of the town. Several similarities can be discussed between this building and the Lincoln County courthouse including the limited parking and handicap accessibility challenges.

### Caswell County, NC



While courthouse located in Caswell County may not exhibit the same architecture as Lincoln County, it is actually more comparable in size and functionality. The interesting reuse of this facility includes the County's Tax Office due to recent trends of development in the county incorporating the need to expand and plan for future growth of the department.



---

## AROUND THE U.S.

### Sherman County, OR



In Northern Oregon, there is a recent addition with similar square footage for court services that left the previous courthouse vacant. The space now houses the County Administrative Offices including the Manager, Tax Assessor, Finance Department, Clerk's Office, and other auxillary offices.

### Kings County, Brooklyn, NY



On the western side of Brooklyn, New York in Sunset Park there is a former courthouse that is almost identical in size and somewhat similar architecturally on the interior to the Lincoln County Courthouse. This facility has been repurposed by the local government into a branch of the Brooklyn public library.





With the central portion of the building open, there is not as much usable square footage as the Lincoln Courthouse, however, the shell of the building is very similar in dimension and houses three floors on the eastern and western wings. Courthouses are no stranger to being renovated into public libraries. Jackson County, North Carolina is a local example that is expanded on later in this report under the *mixed use* category.

## Private Non-Profit Reuse

**22%**

of the locations studied were considered private non-profit reuse.

### NORTH CAROLINA

The Chatham County Historical Association is housed in the former courthouse located in Pittsboro and is a private Non-Profit 501 (c) 3 museum. The organization receives no committed public funding and – as is most commonly done across the state – leases the building from the County at a reduced cost.

Museums can certainly serve as a rich cultural resource and asset to the community. However, the concern of this type of use is that without frequently changing exhibits, visitors are not attracted as often. The hours (Wed-Fri. 11AM-4PM) of this particular organization

and annual attendance poses some concern that sufficient revenues may not completely support operational costs. Other examples of non-profits in former courthouse buildings include museums in the counties of Cleveland, Rockingham, and Burke and formerly theatre in Cabarrus.

### Chatham County, NC





Earl Scruggs Center – Bluegrass Music Museum



Cleveland County, NC



Museum & Archives of Rockingham County



Rockingham County, NC



The Heritage Museum



Burke County, NC





## AROUND THE U.S.

### Old Courthouse Arts Center

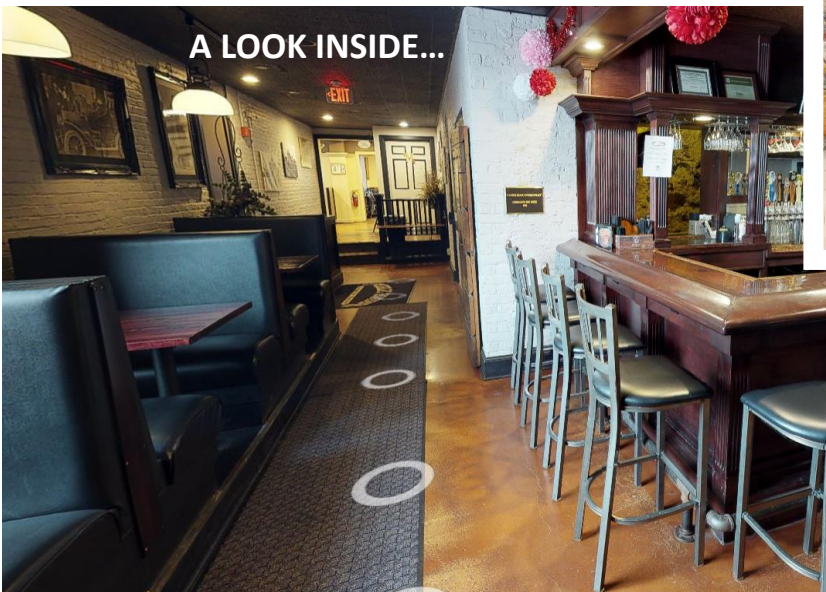
McHenry County, IL



This 30,000 square foot structure is home to Northwest Area Arts Council and Woodstock Square and includes a full Gallery operation, Art Shop, space and support for local artists, and classes for beginners. There is also a restaurant in the lower floor. The square footage and interior floorplan and layout of this courthouse are very comparable to that of the Lincoln County courthouse.

This courthouse has undergone extensive study and is currently being redeveloped in an effort to enhance the local community and promote sound economic development. It will still include the Arts Center, but will also house an additional cafe, business office space, and ground floor retail. Full renovation plans and proposals can be viewed at <https://woodstockcourthouse.wordpress.com>

This example is to show a Non-Profit Art Center and Studio, but also the possibilities of a mixed use venture that both the city and county are heavily invested in.



*Public House of Woodstock*



*The Art Shop*





## Town Square Community Center

Green Lake County, WI



**TOWN ★ SQUARE**



Town square is not a “community center” in the traditional sense that we have come to expect. This former courthouse facility is operated and managed by a 501 (c) 3 Non-Profit entity and includes everything from a fitness center to a tap room. It is a mixed use example just as well as it is a Non-Profit, but is far from having any similarity to the museum examples in this category. This organization has a very robust recruitment and retention plan that keeps tenant spaces filled with artisan names and popular venues.



*Fox Tale Brewing Co. at Town Square Tap*



*Artisan CO-OP and Corner Store on the lawn*

The main difference in this arrangement is that the local government has not turned the building over to a singular Non-Profit, but to a managing Non-Profit whose expertise is to best utilize the space in the interest of the community. The advantages of such an arrangement are plentiful. Most notably, the impact of turnover is not as significant due to having several tenants, and renting or leasing space is a revenue generator for the local government due to retaining ownership control.

---

These benefits are similarly true for the examples of the Crown Point Courthouse Shops in Indiana, the Fayette County Courthouse Square in Lexington, Kentucky, and the McHenry County Courthouse renovation project in Illinois even though these examples span multiple categories within this research report. More information about Town Square Community Center can be found online at <https://greenlaketownsquare.org/inside-town-square>

## ***Private For-Profit Reuse***

**7%**

of the locations studied  
were considered private  
for-profit reuse.

### **NORTH CAROLINA**

No for-profit organizations utilizing former courthouses were found during the research concerning North Carolina. This is most likely due to the difference in laws pertaining to each state and how both community and economic development authority are established.

### **AROUND THE U.S.**

Lexington, Kentucky is home to four local businesses that call the former Fayette Courthouse home. The newly renovated building and its tenants are managed by a for-profit company that has an agreement in cooperation with the local government as a public-private partnership.

Tax Credits were used to help make the project possible for the private developer that partnered with the City of Lexington and Fayette County.

Fayette County, KY



Surprisingly, although the architecture may be a bit more ornate there is not much more usable square footage of this facility than that of the Lincoln County Courthouse. As does the Lincoln Courthouse, the Fayette County building stands as the central focal point in the downtown area and draws many visitors and city dwellers. The former superior court building now sports a new type of commerce including the



VisitLEX (Visitor Center), the Breeders' Cup corporate offices (Professional Horse Racing Outfit), Zim's Café (Dining), and the Thirsty Fox (Hospitality). Although a full service restaurant may be difficult to imagine in the courthouse in Lincolnton, some hospitality or novelty shops could easily be achieved without extensive renovation costs.



*VisitLEX*

In addition to the tenants shown here, are several private offices, and an events venue. In many instances, the rents charged for these businesses would likely not be functional in Lincolnton. However, through partnerships with the City of Lincolnton's Small Business Loan and Community Development Programs as well as assistance provided by the local Tourism Board and Lincoln Economic Development Association's entrepreneurial growth staff, we can achieve far more than what one might imagine.

Most public private partnerships need some form of government assistance to be feasible. In many instances this requires incentives and tax credits. Tax Credits at the state level are something that would be investigated should retail and offices be explored as an option for the former Lincoln County Courthouse. One bit of good news is that after further research it doesn't appear that the buildings' Local Landmark Designation is going to be as much of an impediment to renovating the interior as staff had once thought. Additional information on this project in Lexington, Kentucky can be accessed by visiting

<https://historiclexingtoncourthouse.com/>



*Zim's Cafe*



*Breeders Cup, Limited*

## Mixed Reuse Option

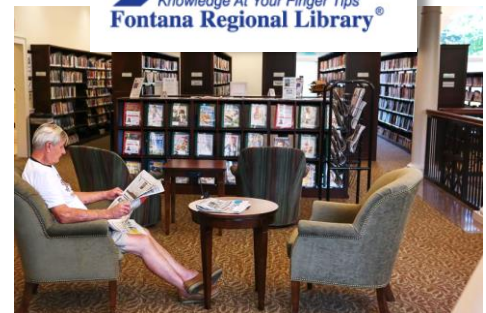
3%

of the locations studied  
were considered to be a  
mixed reuse.

### NORTH CAROLINA

In Sylva, NC there is a unique blend of uses in the former courthouse building. The historic structure has been extensively remodeled in the past 10 years to accommodate the new Jackson County Library and also houses the offices of the Genealogical Society, Historical Association, and Arts Council. This use is classified as a true “mixed use” not because of the types of different uses alone, but primarily due to the authority and make up of each partnering entity. The library is a department of the local government whereas the other entities are private non-profits.

#### Jackson County, NC



One important note to keep in consideration of this facility is that the building was expanded in the 1970s and in large part, the library takes up that space alone. The facility all in all is more of a complex to the North side of the building, which creates a different dynamic than the county courthouse in Lincolnton, where expansion is not a feasible option. Mosley Architects have ruled that out during our facility assessment of the building in 2018.



## AROUND THE U.S.

### Lake County, IN



*Crown Point Courthouse Shops & Offices*

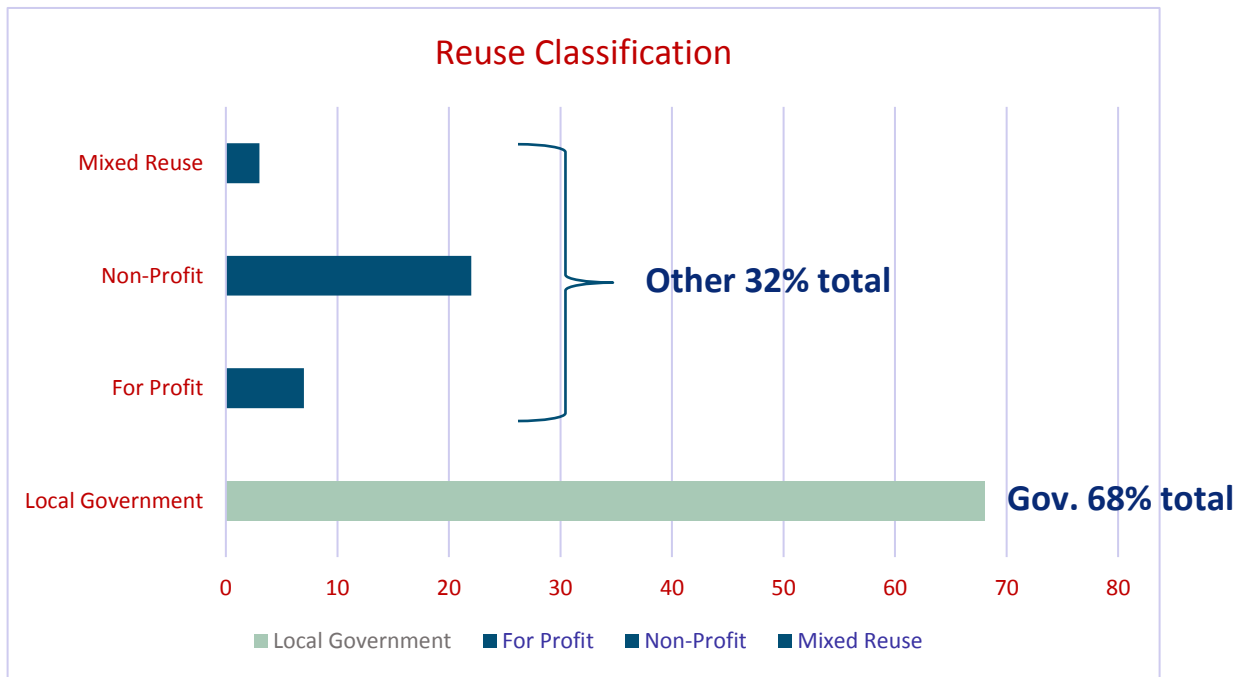
In the city of Crown Point Indiana, there is a mixture of uses managed by a foundation that had former partnerships with the City of Crown Point and Lake County. This former courthouse classifies as a true mixed use because it retains a full court room on the third floor that the superior court still occupies from time to time.

The second floor is reserved for professional offices and serves as event space, while the first floor and lower level are retail and boutique style shops. A local non-profit museum of Lake County also occupies part of the second floor. The courthouse is currently exploring dining options as well.

As can be seen in the photo on the left, signage was generated to mimic the colors and architecture of the building. This may seem like a simple item, but is critical in letting residents and visitors know what is in the building; otherwise the risk of patrons missing the retail shopping is very possible.

Wayfinding signage has been discussed with the City of Lincoln in regards to how attention could be drawn to the court square and how pedestrian mobility would function with improved sidewalks and high visibility crossings.

# By The Numbers



It is important to note that all three of the categories outside of Local Government Reuse options are complimentary of one another and are so very interrelated in structure and in concept, that they can easily be grouped together to better gauge overall how options other than local government reuse – while less in percentage – are far from a minority. **68% Government Reuse versus 32% Other Reuse (22 – Non Profit, 7 – For Profit and 3 – Mixed)**

## NORTH CAROLINA

Local Government Reuse	Non-Profit Reuse	For-Profit Reuse	Mixed Reuse
Henderson County	Burke County		
Caswell County	Dare County	N/A	Jackson County
Rockingham County	Cleveland County	N/A	Henderson County
Jackson County	Gaston County	N/A	
Cabarrus County	Chatham County		
Clay County			

Since those interested in this report will likely not be keenly aware of the geographical locations of counties outside the state, the other states studied have been left off the table. However, in summary – they include mainly those in the Midwest, Great Lakes Region, and Eastern Seaboard.



# Important Considerations

Community Considerations	City and County Considerations	Business Climate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Stakeholders on the downtown steering committee have assembled to discuss this topic, but have only done so at a high level.</li> <li>❖ ADA Accessibility of the building and safety of immediate grounds including sidewalks and pedestrian cross walks.</li> <li>❖ Catawba Valley Pottery Center needs potential space in downtown.</li> <li>❖ The City is working on constructing public restrooms and 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> floor loft space at the former Tax Appraisal Building. If DDA had space in the Courthouse, the City could create <b>additional living space</b> in the former Appraisal Building.</li> <li>❖ A pocket park would be ideal on the grounds with additional benches, picnic tables, potentially some additional lighting, and a small events venue would provide for additional revenue generation and attract more residents and citizens to downtown.</li> <li>❖ Where do citizens prioritize this type of investment? Is it important enough to the community to invest in? To invest <u>heavily</u>?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ The City of Lincolnton is interested in <b>partnering with the county</b> if business and retail is pursued. Small business loans and community development programs are available.</li> <li>❖ The County is interested in partnering with the City of Lincolnton throughout the <b>Parks and Recreation Master Plan</b> Process to create a pocket park and small events venue on the courthouse grounds.</li> <li>❖ The City Steering Committee would like the County Manager's Office to present the latest ideas regarding the adaptive reuse of the facility to them at a future meeting in Winter 2021.</li> <li>❖ The Courthouse is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and has been designated by the Board of County Commissioners as a Local Landmark with <b>exterior</b> architectural protections. Recently it has been identified that interior protections are not mandated.</li> <li>❖ Either the second or third floor of the building could be used as an event space with restaurants on the square contracted for catering events that are held at the outdoor venue.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Startup Businesses could take advantage of prime storefronts on first floor with a reduced lease for first 6 months.</li> <li>❖ Building Code issues could prohibit some businesses being attracted to the building depending on how much renovation is decided upon.</li> <li>❖ Public-Private Partnerships are always a possibility. Companies like <b>Community Smith, Black Pine Development, and Landmark Design</b> are all North Carolina based and have experience in this area.</li> <li>❖ Stakeholders such as the Tourism Board, Arts Council, and Theatre Guild should be consulted.</li> <li>❖ Lincoln Economic Development Association will be instrumental in helping recruit and retain businesses in tenant spaces.</li> <li>❖ Entrepreneurial growth and support in partnership with Gaston College, City of Lincolnton, Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Development Association, Tourism Board, Career Center, and NC State Cooperative Extension could help create a sense of community center.</li> </ul>

---

End of Report

