



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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“Upstairs & Underground” Walking Tour To Highlight Downtown Living/Working Spaces
Fundraiser for Main Street Lexington also includes a beer, BBQ, music party under Nelson St. Bridge

(Lexington, VA)--For everyone who has strolled through the streets of Lexington glancing at the upper floors of downtown buildings or peeking into below-street-level windows and wondering what those places are like--your day has come!

On Saturday, May 20th, MAIN STREET LEXINGTON (MSL) is hosting a brand-new event. **Upstairs & Underground: A Walking Tour of Downtown Lexington** will showcase 13 properties that are on top floors, below street level, or hidden in plain sight. The self-guided tour includes a wide variety of spaces, spanning residential to commercial uses, civic organizations to start-up businesses, some recently renovated, some works-in-progress, and some awaiting a fresh eye.

“As far as we know, this kind of a tour has never been done in Lexington before,” says Melissa Gladwell Sayre, event coordinator and chair of MSL’s Economic Vitality Committee. “Last year the area Realtors organized a successful holiday house tour, and the annual Garden Week Tour is always popular. But there’s never been a tour of the hidden gems of our downtown.”

Included on the route are properties that are rarely seen by the public, such as the Masonic Lodge at 103 W. Nelson St., above the Palms restaurant, and some that have never been open to the public, such the recently renovated Jacob Ruff house at 21 N. Main St, the former office of Mead Associates realty. Upper floor residential will be represented by second-floor apartments at 24 N. Main St (above Napa Thai), the lovingly refurbished condominium of Theresa Bezold at 18 E. Nelson St. (above the Chamber of Commerce), and a penthouse home on the top floor of the Robert E. Lee Hotel on Main St.

Commercial-use space includes an unoccupied suite of offices on the second floor above the Lexington Pharmacy at 146 S. Main St., several spaces in the Rockbridge Building at 13 S. Main, above Ladles & Linens, a large open space featuring oversized-paned windows that formerly housed Halestone Dance Studio at 18 E. Nelson St., and a unique multi-floor historic building with two frontages--5 E Washington St and 17 Courthouse Square.

As for the “underground” portion, Sayre says, the tour includes Start Here!, the business incubation and co-working space below Old Lex Mercantile at 113 W. Nelson St. and Rockbridge Environmental Consulting at 22 S. Main St., below Hess & Co. Jewelers. Both represent productive use of lower levels in historic buildings.

Finally, two “hidden in plain sight” spaces will showcase the reuse of buildings for innovative business purposes. The first, 312 S. Main St., commonly known as the Old Library Building, is in the process of being repurposed as a temporary indoor mini-golf venue while its future long-term use as a children’s interactive museum is in the works. The second, in a rear portion of 18 E. Nelson St. behind the Chamber of Commerce offices, is the site of the future Lexington makerspace--a place where tools and ideas are shared by the community--expected to open in June.

Simultaneous with the event, there will be BBQ & beer for sale under the Nelson St. bridge where tour-goers can stop to refresh and catch up with friends and neighbors. JJ’s Meak Shak will be serving up their signature barbecue meats, and Great Valley Brewing Company will offer a variety of beers. Soft drinks will also be available. Music will be provided by the local band Amherst Recreation.

The purpose of Upstairs & Underground is twofold, says Stephanie Wilkinson, executive director of Main Street Lexington, adding that they’re linked by the common goal of keeping downtown Lexington economically healthy for years to come.

First, the event is a fundraiser for MSL, with all ticket sales and a portion of the beer and barbecue revenues going to support its mission.

“MSL is our city’s downtown development organization, charged with supporting and improving economic and cultural life. To achieve everything we tackle--whether it’s promoting events that encourage local shopping or dining or mounting parades and holiday events for families--we need to supplement our city funding with fundraisers and private donations,” Wilkinson says. “We are hopeful that this will be one of our most successful fundraisers to date.”

The second purpose, which takes a longer view, underscores a primary goal of MSL: To encourage increased engagement of citizens with downtown, whether through direct investment such as property ownership or via more people living downtown, or the housing of new businesses in unoccupied commercial spaces on second and third floors.

“Economic prosperity in small cities is driven by full use of available space,” Wilkinson says. “In a city like Lexington, which has the highest percentage of tax-exempt properties in the Commonwealth, every square foot of developed space needs to contribute to the overall health of the city. People living downtown add to its vitality and help stimulate downtown business. And from a preservation point of view, we know that when historic spaces are being used, they’re more likely to be cared for and preserved.”

CornerStone Bank and Kendal at Lexington are premier sponsors of Upstairs & Underground. Additional generous support is being provided by Home Instead Senior Care, Atlantic Bay Mortgage Group, Dupont Community Credit Union and the City of Lexington.

The tour takes place on Saturday, May 20, from 1 to 4 pm. Advance tickets are \$20 and can be purchased on the Main Street Lexington website at www.mainstreetlexington.org. Day-of tickets will be available at 41 S. Main St., (the former McCorkle's Hallmark store) for \$25. The beer & BBQ party is open to the general public (no tour ticket required), during the hours of 2 pm to 6 pm, under the Nelson St bridge, where food and drink will be available for purchase. Both events will take place rain or shine. *Please note: Access to all but one tour properties will involve climbing or descending stairs.*

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Tour Properties: Sample Photos (high resolution available upon request)

1. Masonic Lodge



2. Robert E. Lee Hotel Penthouse – exterior & balcony view





3. Jacob Ruff House



4. 17 Courthouse Sq.

