

Murfreesboro, North Carolina

CPNI Workshop Report

November 15-16, 2018



Prepared January 2019



ABOUT CPNI

CPNI is an independent research institution focused on the construction industry and founded by the Construction Professional Network of North Carolina (CPN), a non-profit membership organization. CPN started the Institute in 2006 as a committee effort to expand its mission of service to the construction industry and communities throughout North Carolina. The mission of the Institute is to identify key issues related to industry performance, economic development, and the betterment of CPN members and the communities they serve. Through workshops in communities across North Carolina, members of CPN leverage their expertise to consult with local government and community leaders on redevelopment strategies for their town.

Learn more at www.cpni-nc.org



ABOUT NCGROWTH

NCGrowth is an EDA University Center at the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill that helps businesses and communities create good jobs and equitable opportunities through applied research and technical assistance. With a passionate staff and a dynamic pool of graduate student analysts, we partner with businesses, communities, governments and other organizations to tackle outcome-based economic development and entrepreneurship projects.

Learn more at www.ncgrowth.unc.edu

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CPNI and NCGrowth held a two-day workshop in Murfreesboro, NC on November 15-16, 2018. Team members met with town officials and community stakeholders to assess the built assets and economic conditions of Murfreesboro. In addition to touring buildings and land of interest, workshop participants identified key issues areas and brainstormed potential strategies for the town moving forward.

Discussions in the workshop rested on connectivity between the Murfreesboro's key assets: Chowan University, the riverfront, open space/recreation, and downtown. Recommendations focused on four key areas:

- Creating a Master Plan for the Town
- Planning a Historical/Cultural Path through the Town
- Increasing Lodging Opportunities for Visitors
- Strengthening the Partnership between Chowan University and the Town of Murfreesboro

WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

Town officials and community stakeholders in attendance included:

- Hal Thomas, Mayor
- Mitch Radford, Town Council
- Berna Stephens, Town Council
- Carolyn Brown, Town Administrator
- Daryl Williams, Murfreesboro Chamber of Commerce
- Lamar Van Brackle, Murfreesboro Historical Association representative
- Caroline Stephenson, Cultivator Bookstore owner
- Burnette Parker, Hertford County Public Schools PR
- John Tayloe, VP of Development of Chowan University
- Lee Ford, President of Riverview Elementary School
- Craig Dennis, Town Council

CPNI volunteers included:

- Mike Bedell, Barnhill Contracting
- Mike Barnes, Thomas & Hutton
- Marc Momsen, LandDesign
- Jim Schenck, Conner Gwyn Schenck
- Maurice Harrison, Schneider Electric



- Michael Cole, ColeJenest & Stone
- Jessica Freeman, CPNI Staff
- Carolyn Fryberger, NCGrowth
- Nicole Outlaw, NCGrowth
- Keiley Gaston, NCGrowth
- Sabria Futrell, NCGrowth

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Community Assets



1. *Historic District:* Murfreesboro prides itself in its connection to its history. The Murfreesboro Historical Association upkeeps the Town's Historic District to preserve and celebrate many museums, shops, offices, and private homes. A walking tour guides residents and visitors along a path to see and experience many of these historic buildings.
2. *Riverfront:* The location of an old fertilizer plant looks over the Meherrin River and was originally an entrance to Murfreesboro. Because the property is town-owned, there is ample opportunity for a recreation area and a pier for residents and visitors to enjoy the riverfront.
3. *Riverside Park:* Riverside Park consists of about 5 acres, originally funded by a grant. It includes a community garden, a playground, a baseball field, and a very popular set of basketball courts. It backs up to the river, with a small pier at the bottom of the drive that is used for fishing.
4. *Chowan University:* The University is one of Murfreesboro's greatest assets. About 1500 students and 50 professors and instructors fill the campus for the academic year, creating a huge opportunity to attract students and employees to Main Street and other Murfreesboro amenities. The university is about a ½ mile walk into town towards restaurants and shops. It boasts a top-notch graphic arts program, a newly renovated athletics center, and a 9-building apartment complex with room for more growth. Chowan University has bought buildings and land all around its campus, all the way to the Murfreesboro Bypass.
5. *Main Street:* Murfreesboro's Main Street contains about ten diverse restaurants, including Mexican and Chinese restaurants, seafood, pizza, a tavern, and a grill. West Main Street also features a Food Lion, Subway, Dollar General, Family Dollar, and an Advance Auto Parts. Other businesses along Main Street include a nonprofit bookstore, banks, a barber shop, a hair salon, a collectibles shop, and an embroidery shop.

Community Needs



1. *Lodging:* Murfreesboro leadership expressed need for additional lodging. A motel or hotel would allow for tourists to spend more time visiting, previous residents to return to their hometown, parents of Chowan University students to spend time with their kids, and for visiting sports teams to stay in Murfreesboro for multi-day tournaments. The former Murfreesboro Inn motel on Main Street is currently being renovated to include about 20-30 rooms.

2. *Infrastructure:* Murfreesboro is in the process of upgrading its older water and sewer systems. Many workshop participants also commented on the poor state of the town's sidewalks. The Riverview Elementary School Principal and Hertford County Public Schools representative both commented that historically many students walked to school, but that is less possible now due to the decaying sidewalks. Safety, health, and wellbeing would be improved with new sidewalks. Chowan University students would benefit from a better sidewalk to downtown businesses and the Food Lion.

3. *Pedestrian Connectivity:* While Murfreesboro's assets include Chowan University, downtown businesses, the riverfront, and recreation access, these appear very separate within the town and would strongly benefit from increased connectivity. For example, students are not frequenting downtown shops and visitors on Main Street and in the Historic District do not have a clear path to go enjoy the riverfront.



DOWNTOWN ASSESSMENT

The Town of Murfreesboro is renowned for its Watermelon Festival every summer in early August. It takes place across the street from Town Hall, attracting a crowd of 30,000 people over four days. This immensely popular event demonstrates Murfreesboro's tourism abilities that could be used throughout the year for more events.

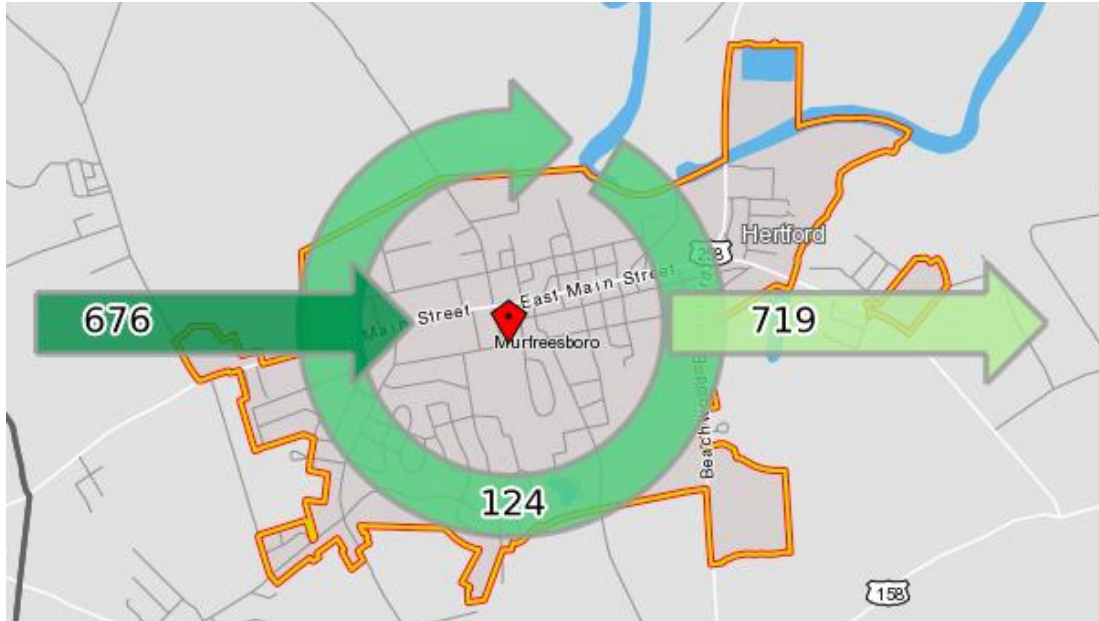
Downtown Murfreesboro is filled with a variety of thriving restaurants that is uncommon for a town of its size. These restaurants fill up on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights and parking can be tough to find. King's Coffee Shop has been very popular for college students since its opening. It also attracts residents as a vibrant place to work or a convenient spot for lunch, with counter service as opposed to mainly sit-down restaurants in the rest of town.

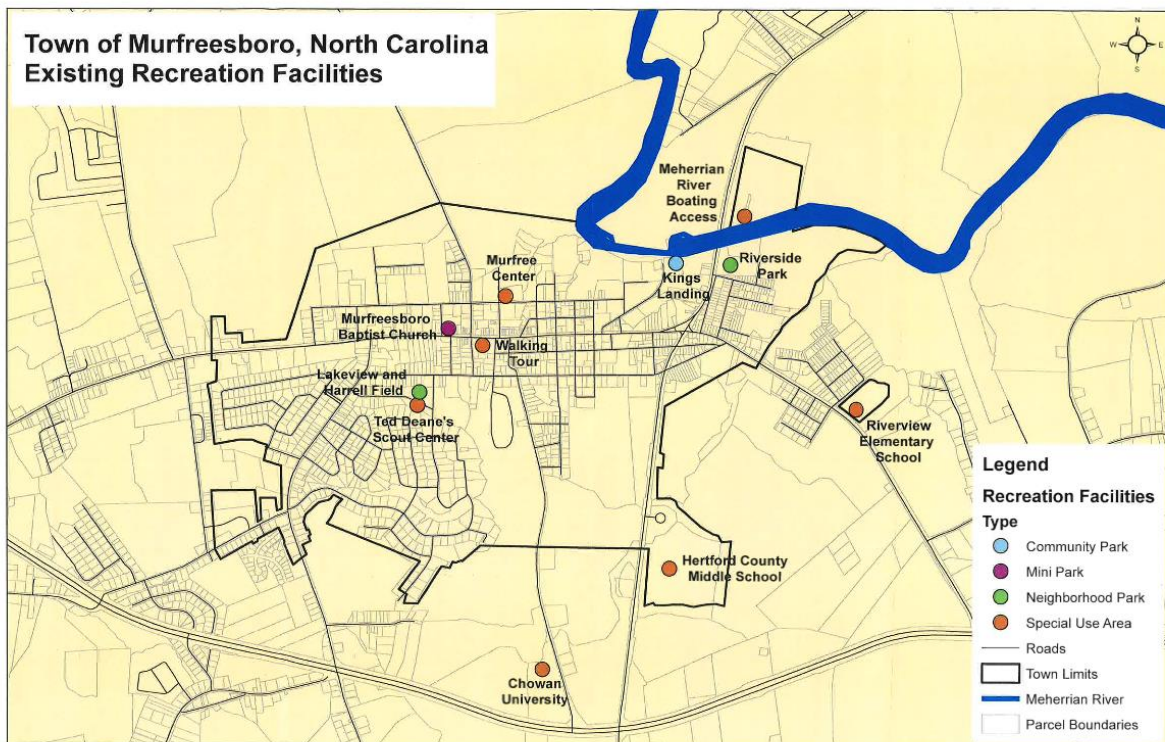
However, there are still many vacant buildings on Main Street. A notably vacant building further down Main Street is the Ruffin Brothers Grocery & Furniture Mart (1104 E. Main Street). It was a family owned business for nearly 60 years but closed down in December 2012. It has remained vacant since closing, and the building is now condemned. The CPNI group was not able to assess the interior of the building; they agreed that development of this site would be catalytic but were unable to comment on the condition of the existing building.

One issue in downtown is the lack of adherence to crosswalks. While some of Murfreesboro is very amenable to walking/running/biking with 25-35 mph speed limits, the Mayor is very concerned about pedestrian safety downtown. Drivers do not stop for pedestrians and it can be very difficult to cross Main Street, especially at night. Many community members and CPNI visitors echoed this sentiment.

Commuter Flow

According to the 2015 U.S. Census, about 85% of people employed in Murfreesboro live outside of the area (See map below). This influx of 676 employed people during the day helps demonstrate the market that downtown businesses are serving. For example, commuters coming from further away may have a stronger demand for counter-service lunch restaurants or coffee shops during their work day.





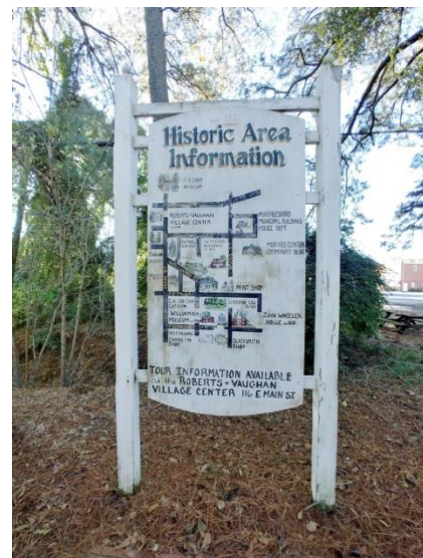
ASSET OPPORTUNITIES

There are four key asset opportunities for the town of Murfreesboro: a historic district, riverfront land, a planned pier location, and a riverside park. These four locations could be nodes on a walking path around Murfreesboro, along with downtown and Chowan University.

1. Historic District – Walking Tour



The Historic District is one of the main draws of Murfreesboro, featuring many museums, old shops, and historic private residences. While the buildings and the walking tour do attract tourism for their historic and educational value, these amenities can struggle to continuously attract visitors over time and a few of the buildings are deteriorating. They also do not contribute to the property tax base for the town.



The Historic District could be highlighted as the heart of a possible cultural trail. The historical homes could also be used as bed and breakfast lodging to accommodate visitors to Murfreesboro.

2. Riverside Manufacturer

An old, deteriorated basket plant that was once the epicenter of the town's business sits next to the cemetery and river. The property is valued around \$350k, and currently owned by Kirby Brown. The riverfront area in this section of Murfreesboro lies upon a 50-foot bluff. It is very central to Murfreesboro, backing up to downtown, the Historic District, and the riverside (located between Murfree Center and Kings Landing in the map above).



3. Planned Pier location- Kings Landing

A new pier overlooking the waterfront is being coordinated with the NC Wildlife Resources Commission and a permit is imminent. This town-owned property contains the foundation of an old fertilizer plant and used to be the original entrance to the town, with a bridge crossing to the other side. The bridge is now gone and there is a wildlife landing a little further down the river.

NC Wildlife is planning to fund the pier at this spot, but the town is trying to satisfy the requirements of a small area in a flood plain. The fertilizer plant's foundation would make an ideal spot for a picnic pavilion or a gazebo.



4. Riverside Park

The Riverside Park is very popular in Murfreesboro for its community garden, playground, sports fields, and especially its basketball courts. It also has a path down to a small pier that is used for fishing. However, the road/path is deteriorating and is not inviting to residents or visitors to go down. The park could also benefit from increased access to river activities, like kayaking.



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Create a 20 – 25 Year Master Plan for the Town of Murfreesboro

- a. Develop a shared vision statement for the town.
- b. Build upon the many positives of the town (like Chowan University and the riverfront).
- c. Include the type of businesses, recreation, infrastructure and standard of living that residents envision for their community.
- d. Identify achievable projects that support the community vision, like a walking path to connect community assets, and create action steps.

2. Build a Historical Trail/Path through Murfreesboro

A main discussion of the workshop was the possibility of a pedestrian trail or path that could connect Murfreesboro's key assets. It would build upon existing sidewalks, Chowan University paths, and the Historic District walking tour. Many residents have created their own walking paths around the university campus, demonstrating an existing culture of exercise, lack of paths elsewhere in town, and a demand for more walking opportunities. The CPNI team made the following suggestions to promote the development of such a path:

- a. Plan an intentional 6-10 ft. wide path for walking/running/biking that connects downtown with the historic district, the river and Chowan University.
 - i. A town council committee or task force should take a map of town with all the important nodes and find a compelling way to get between them.
 - ii. Develop an alignment for the trail, then break it into sections for phased development pending funding availability.
- b. The path should include a historical/cultural aspect by going through the Historic District.
 - i. Graphics and historical facts can unify the path.
 - ii. Connect the new path with the existing Historic District walking tour path.
- c. Involving community members in planning and fundraising is important to ensuring the path's vitality.
 - i. Seek sponsorship from local businesses who have demonstrated an interest in supporting other community events, like the Watermelon Festival.
 - ii. Setup a booth at the next Watermelon Festival as a way to fundraise, gather input, and spread the word about the trail or other economic development projects.

- d. Include Chowan University and its students in the planning process.
 - i. Hold a competition for students to contribute to the graphics and communications around the path.
 - ii. Include other surrounding universities to contribute to landscape architecture and urban design needs for the path.

3. Increase Lodging Opportunities for Murfreesboro Visitors

- a. Perform a market analysis for lodging in Murfreesboro to assess the total lodging numbers from current bed and breakfasts and understand demand in the town.
- b. Support the motel being renovated on Main Street to ensure it meets the needs of tourists and University visitors.
- c. Kinston, NC's Mother Earth Motor Lodge could be a helpful model for Murfreesboro: <http://motherearthmotorlodge.com/>. The original motel was built in 1963 and was recently revived to reopen in 2017 as a boutique lodge.
- d. Williamsburg's colonial housing is another helpful model. The colonial houses were transformed into bed and breakfast accommodations for visitors: <https://www.colonialwilliamsburghotels.com/accommodations/colonial-houses/houses/>. The website includes pictures of the historic homes, details on number of rooms, historical facts, and booking options. Current innkeepers and bed and breakfast owners in Murfreesboro could work with the Historical Association to maintain these important assets while also offering a unique lodging option for visitors.

4. Develop a Stronger Partnership between Chowan University and Murfreesboro.

Chowan University is a key asset for Murfreesboro and can be more closely involved with the Town's economic development. The University would be a key stakeholder in a historical/cultural path because it would most likely go through campus. Below are a few examples of how the University and the Town could strengthen their existing partnership for mutual gain.

- a. Chowan University students could engage with Murfreesboro through a student community service program. Campbell University in Buies Creek, NC, has an in-depth community engagement program through the Office of Spiritual Life. It offers students the opportunity to engage with a campus pantry, community garden, campus kitchen, a day of service, and other service work with community partners. These kinds of service projects will further build relationships between students and the town, perhaps making them more likely

to stay in the area while also enriching their campus experience.

(<https://www.campbell.edu/life/spiritual-life/community-engagement/>)

- b. Chowan has a 450-acre campus, including a lake, a park, and many newly renovated buildings. The University has also purchased a few houses off campus that now serve as campus buildings, such as the Department of Public Safety. There are empty storefronts on Main Street that could be a potential spot for Chowan to put new office buildings or a University bookstore, a model employed by college campuses to integrate campus life with the broader community.

Examples at other schools include:

- i. Duke University recently moved its Innovation & Entrepreneurship department center to a vacant downtown Durham building as a way to encourage students to venture downtown and for the university to better partner with Durham businesses and resources. Duke's I&E center serves as an anchor tenant for the building; this lease arrangement serves as a win-win, stabilizing the project finances for the developer, providing tax revenue for the city and providing affordable space to the university.
 - ii. The University of Rochester recently partnered with the city of Rochester, NY to build a College Town district off campus. The area features a Barnes and Noble university/community bookstore, restaurants, retail, a hotel, and apartments for students, faculty, and staff as well as all Rochester residents to enjoy. (<http://www.collegetownrochester.com/>)
 - iii. Davidson College's College Store is located on Main Street of its home community of Davidson, NC. While still close to campus, this location draws students, their families, and other campus visitors directly into the downtown business district.
- c. A student government position focused on Murfreesboro relations could help gather student input on the types of stores, restaurants, or recreation that would draw students downtown and to other Murfreesboro amenities. It would also help students discover what is already available downtown. As an example, Duke University has a student position called the Vice President for Durham and Regional Affairs. The student oversees a committee that facilitates engagement between Duke and the surrounding community. Completed and ongoing projects include a Duke-Durham discount program, on-campus voting sites, organized student activities in Durham (like a downtown scavenger hunt), and mentorship between Duke students and Durham middle/high school students. (<http://www.dukestudentgovernment.org/durham-and-regional-affairs>)
- d. Highlighting some of Murfreesboro's assets on Chowan University's webpage would add to the Town's marketing efforts. The "About Chowan" or "Student Life" sections could feature information on restaurants, lodging, and the historical district to encourage students and their families to spend time downtown.

NEXT STEPS

The next step for addressing these recommendations is for the Murfreesboro Town Council to form an ad hoc committee, such as a Town Master Planning Task Force. This committee could work first with a Chowan University group for early consulting services. If budget allows, this committee could eventually hire a planning consultant to assist with:

1. Create a Murfreesboro Vision Statement based off public input that captures a sense of Murfreesboro's identity, values, and what makes it special.
2. Perform a market analysis – what are the town's needs in terms of lodging, parking, and other amenities?
3. Prepare a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for the Historical Trail/Path, including for landscaping, and adaptive reuse aspects.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Professional groups

These groups can be a starting point for identifying professional consultants.

- Urban Land Institute (ULI): <https://uli.org/>
- American Institute of Architects (AIA): <https://www.aia.org/>
- American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA): <https://www.asla.org/>
- American Planning Association (APA): <https://www.planning.org/>
 - American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP): <https://www.planning.org/aicp/>
- American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE): <https://www.asce.org/>
- American Council of Engineering Companies of North Carolina (ACEC/NC): <https://www.acecnc.org/>

Potential funding sources

Trails and Parks

- Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF) Grants <https://www.ncparks.gov/more-about-us/parks-recreation-trust-fund/parks-and-recreation-trust-fund>
 - Funding Cycle: Applications due May 1, 2019, granted in August 2019
 - Award Amount: Maximum \$500,000, applicant must match 50% of the total cost of the project
 - Project Types Funded: Local governments can apply to acquire land for parks and build recreational facilities for use by the public.

- Department of Transportation (DoT)
 - Planning Grant Initiative
 - <https://connect.ncdot.gov/municipalities/PlanningGrants/Pages/Planning-Grant-Initiative.aspx>
 - Funding Cycle: Call for Proposals in August; Deadline in November; Decisions in February
 - Project Types: Annual matching grant program to encourage municipalities to develop comprehensive bicycle plans and pedestrian plans.
 - Transportation Alternatives (TA) Funds <https://trade.railstotrails.org/index>
 - Project Types: Federal government funds for projects that expand travel choice, strengthen the local economy, improve the quality of life, and protect the environment. Eligible projects include pedestrian and bicycle facilities, safe routes for non-drivers, and historic preservation.
 - Contact: State DoT TA Coordinator, Johanna I. Cockburn (919) 707-2601; jcockburn@ncdot.gov

Community Projects

- Z. Smith Reynolds (ZSR) Community Progress Fund <https://www.zsr.org/community-progress>
 - Funding Cycle: Letters of Intent accepted starting Oct. 1, 2018; Selected proposals receive an invitation to submit a full application in Feb. 2019; Grant decisions made in May 2019
 - Award Amount: \$20,000 - \$30,000 per year for one or two years
 - Project Types: Short-term funding for projects with community momentum; primarily for organizations serving people of color that are in areas of NC with limited philanthropic resources

Economic Development

- NC Department of Commerce – Downtown Development and Site Development funds – Main Street Solutions Fund
 - <https://www.nccommerce.com/grants-incentives/downtown-development-funds>
 - Funding Cycle: Announced in May
 - Award Amount: Up to \$200,000
 - Project Types: Economic development planning assistance to designated micropolitans in Tier 2 and 3 counties to activate North Carolina Main Street communities; retaining and creating jobs in association with small business

Real Estate Development

- Opportunity Zone Program:

- Program description: The 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act designed opportunity zones to spur investment in distressed communities through tax incentives to investors; Murfreesboro is one of 252 designated opportunity zones in North Carolina. This program could make a development project in Murfreesboro more attractive to an investor – however, the incentive accrues only to the investor and not the project so the project itself needs to be financially feasible on its own.
- For more information, visit:
 - [IRS Guidance issued Oct 19, 2018](#)
 - [Opportunity Zones Frequently Asked Questions, IRS](#)
 - [School of Government Resources for Local Governments and Investors](#)
- Direct IRS contact for questions related to Opportunity Funds and Opportunity Zone Investments:
 - Phone: (414) 231-2240
 - E-mail: CC.ITA.Section.1400@irsounsel.treas.gov