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## Downtown Durham on a spurt

By **MICHAEL BIESECKER**, Staff Writer

DURHAM -- Strolling along Duke Street, across from abandoned cigarette factories awaiting redevelopment, two dancers from Long Beach, Calif., parroted the reputation Durham is trying to shake by spending millions on its downtown.

"Crime and humidity," Amythyst Fritzier and Jacinto Delgado-Guizar said in unison Tuesday when asked what they heard about the Bull City before traveling here. "You know, kind of dead," Delgado-Guizar expanded.

Among the packs of willowy women and muscular men donning tight sweats and leotards for the American Dance Festival, few said they were aware that on Monday the City Council approved plans for a \$31 million performing arts center to serve as the annual event's new home.

The board also gave its support to the long-awaited \$148 million renovation of the former Liggett & Myers Tobacco Co. factory complex and plans for a \$9 million office tower on historic Parrish Street that would be the first major addition to the downtown skyline in more than 20 years.

Along with the second phase of the American Tobacco project, downtown boosters touted announcements of developments topping \$262 million in the center city for the month of June -- enough money to create the elusive "critical mass" needed to spur spinoff businesses and fill vacant storefronts.

"Over a quarter of a billion dollars," said Bill Kalkhof, the president of Downtown Durham Inc. "Who would have thought that for little ol' Durham?"

All four projects rely on public money.

The 2,800-seat performance center will be built using \$22 million in city-issued certificates of participation, a type of bond that does not require voter approval. Much of the money would be repaid with future revenue collected through the city's hotel and occupancy taxes. Duke University, the host of the annual festival, would contribute \$5.5 million for the center, which will be situated next to the city-built \$16.1 million Durham Bulls Athletic Park.

West Village II, Blue Devil Ventures' redevelopment of the remaining seven buildings of the Liggett complex for loft apartments and commercial uses, is being aided with \$11.3 million in street improvements and tax incentives.

The new office tower is to be built on four city-owned lots sold for \$229,000 and bolstered by a pledge from the city to lease space for a museum to celebrate the history of Parrish Street. Parrish once was known as the Black Wall Street for minority-owned businesses that boomed despite racial segregation.

The American Tobacco redevelopment is served by a pair of parking decks built with \$43.2 million in city and county money.

A handful of critics spoke before the council Monday to question whether the local governments should be investing so much in revamping downtown when so

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many residents are searching for jobs and quality affordable housing. Duke could have built a performing arts center, they said, just as American Tobacco developer Capitol Broadcasting Corp. could have afforded to build the parking decks.

"This was a done deal before I was here, and it will be a done deal come hell or high water," said council member John Best Jr. before casting the sole vote against the new arts center. He predicted the venue would become an albatross for the city and draw patrons from the historic Carolina Theatre, also kept afloat with public money.

Kalkhof shrugged off such protestations Tuesday, saying that a revived downtown will spread the wealth and make Durham an international destination for business and culture.

"Most communities are defined by the health of their downtowns," he said. "It's not something that happens overnight. It takes decades. ... But all those dots will connect. It's always been about the big picture."

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