



Downtown Revitalization Plan Hamilton, Alabama

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Prepared by the Downtown Hamilton Revitalization
Committee, Northwest Alabama Council of Local
Governments and KPS Group, Inc. for the
City of Hamilton, Alabama

Acknowledgments

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INTRODUCTION

This Revitalization Plan is intended to be used as a guide by both the public and private sectors in their efforts to physically and economically enhance and sustain Downtown Hamilton. The plan establishes a vision, built on the community's aspirations for the historic downtown area. A coordinated, comprehensive strategy lays out the path(s) the community will follow in achieving their vision. The strategy addresses five essential components of revitalization:

Design represents the function and form of Downtown, how all of its physical parts work together and create the best possible experience for visitors.

Economic Structure is the recipe for Downtown's business success—placing the right economic ingredients in the right proportions in the right places.

Promotion raises awareness of Downtown's economic, governmental and cultural assets. Promotion includes marketing Downtown to locals, out-of-towners and potential investors.

Organization is the assembly of diverse organizations and individuals, all with different types of authority and influence, to carry out revitalization tasks in a coordinated manner.

Community Connections is, in essence, a pledge to look for and understand the impacts of decisions, that may not appear to relate to Downtown, but that will ultimately have an effect on its future.

Project Area

The project includes two study areas: the primary or core downtown area and a secondary area surrounding that core. The primary downtown area includes approximately eleven blocks surrounding the Marion County Courthouse. This area comprises the bulk of Downtown Hamilton's traditional storefronts and other historic building stock. The secondary area extends for one or two blocks in all directions around the primary study area. This area includes a variety of uses (housing, institutions, retail and offices), building ages and design character. To the east, west and north this secondary area serves as a transition between downtown and adjacent neighborhoods. Along Military Street and Bexar Avenue, mostly to the south and east, this area includes conventional strip development that occurred long after the founding of Downtown Hamilton and its original neighborhoods.

Early in its history Hamilton was known as "Toll Gate". The Alabama Legislature selected the area as a toll gate on the Military Road, constructed under General Andrew Jackson as part of a route that connected Washington, DC to New Orleans. Military Road provided a shorter connection between Nashville and New Orleans than did the previously constructed Natchez Trace. A toll was charged to fund the upkeep of the road. In 1881, Captain Albert Hamilton donated forty acres of land to the county, which was then sold off in lots—funding the construction of a county court building and seeding the development of what is today Downtown Hamilton.

Process

The plan was developed from September 2010 through January 2011 by the Downtown Revitalization Steering Committee, the Northwest Alabama Council of Local Governments (NACOLG) and consultants KPS Group, Skipper Consulting, and Dr. Arthur Allaway. Public meetings were held each month to collect information from downtown stakeholders and to discuss emerging plan recommendations with the community. The Steering Committee met with the consultant team in advance of the public meetings to review and refine plan components. In an effort to keep stakeholders involved, the planning team developed a contact list from meeting sign-in sheets and sent email updates on the developing plan and reminders about upcoming meetings.

Following each public meeting, presentation materials, meeting notes, and draft documents were posted on a blog established for the project. The blog allowed visitors access to documents referred to in public meetings, to revisit previous presentations, and leave comments or questions for the planning team. In this way, those participating in or following the development of the plan had access to planning materials as they were developed at key points through the process.

The plan was released in two installments during the course of the public involvement process. Each release was posted in the City's website and the project blog, and a hard copy was made available for public review at City Hall. Following the third public meeting, the planning team prepared a complete draft of the plan and then met with the Steering Committee and Planning Commission for a work session prior to the Commission's holding a public hearing on the plan. The planning team then revised the plan and the Planning Commission and Council held public hearings to officially adopt the plan on behalf of the City and begin implementing the plan.

VISION

In the Fall of 2010, the City of Hamilton embarked upon a journey to revitalize its historic downtown. This plan is the first step in that journey. To understand the subsequent steps, as in any planning effort, it was essential to evaluate present conditions and to envision the end goal or destination.

To fully explore the community's expectations for revitalization, city officials, merchants, property owners and residents gathered at City Hall on October 12 for an interactive discussion on the future of Downtown Hamilton. During the course of the meeting, participants elaborated on their own desires for revitalizing the downtown area. After examining Downtown Hamilton's assets and issues, the planning team asked everyone to imagine Downtown Hamilton in a decade or so—as they would like it to be. After a few moments to think about this, the planning team engaged the crowd in a series of questions to help bring those individual visions to light. The following is a summary of the discussions that evening. A complete account of public comments from the meeting is included in the Appendix.

Assets

Meeting participants recognized the positive influence of local institutions on downtown such as the County Courthouse, area churches and banks, and the nearby North Mississippi Medical Center, Bevill State Community College, and the Nix Library. Others noted the historic Hamilton House and the local businesses clustered around the Courthouse and First Street SW. Downtown is conveniently located at the intersection of US Highways 43 and 278 and State Highway 17 and within easy walking distance of adjacent neighborhoods. Other assets mentioned were area restaurants and The Ramp, a nearby youth ministry facility.

Issues

Participants described several areas in which work must be done to improve Downtown Hamilton. A number of transportation-related concerns were mentioned: parking, traffic on Military Street, sidewalk and handicap accessibility conditions. Street lighting and the overall level of cleanliness and maintenance of public and private properties do not give a positive impression to visitors. Others noted stormwater drainage on First Street SW, building vacancies, and limited business hours as issues confronting downtown.

Visions for Downtown Hamilton

Participants envisioned an economically vital downtown with more retail, personal service and dining options. New businesses and activities would appeal to people of all ages and

Postcard Opportunities

Town meeting attendees listed several local features as being postcard-worthy, a few of which are:

- *Buttahatchee River*
- *Chickasaw Indian Mounds*
- *Toll Gate Historical Marker*
- *Hamilton House*
- *Marion County Courthouse*
- *Marion County Banking Co.*
- *Local art*

generate nighttime and weekend activity. Downtown Hamilton would be a safe, attractive, and unique shopping environment, in which visitors would window-shop and stay longer. Participants noted that improved parking arrangements and walkability would be key to business development. More housing in or adjacent to Downtown would increase foot traffic and the customer base for downtown merchants. A multi-purpose facility, such as a civic or community center, together with a civic park would reinvigorate Downtown as the “heart” of the community.

Benchmarks for Success

Finally, the participants were asked to offer a few benchmarks as a way to measure the success of revitalization efforts and to add a sense of priority during the next several years of plan implementation. Responses included:

- *Well-designed and maintained streetscapes, signage and parking areas will create a safe, attractive environment for motorists and pedestrians.*
- *Downtown buildings will be occupied with diverse businesses that attract customers both day and night and on weekends.*
- *Downtown will have open spaces and cultural and civic facilities in which the community gathers and connects.*
- *A well-preserved historic district, interpretive features and events will tell the story of the community.*

The Big Idea

Downtown—unlike conventional shopping centers or business districts that tend to serve either one or a very few purposes—is expected to serve many roles within the community. This was evidenced by the visions expressed by the community in revitalization meetings. Downtown serves as a center for:

- *government*
- *business*
- *shopping*
- *dining and entertainment*
- *community interaction*
- *culture and history*

Obviously, to effectively serve so many functions, Downtown Hamilton must be well-planned, properly designed and carefully maintained. And, because it serves many groups, its care must be in the hands of more than just city government. Citizen and business groups and county government must also assume responsibility for and take an active part in Downtown’s revitalization.

Early in the planning process, a strategic concept, or “Big Idea,” was devised to capture and build upon Downtown’s assets and existing conditions, to respond to the community’s expectations and to set out a coordinated foundation on which detailed revitalization actions are planned. This Big Idea primarily addresses the physical organization and enhancement of Downtown Hamilton but also involves fine-tuning Downtown’s economic structure.

The Big Idea includes:

Improving the visitor’s experience by establishing attractive gateways and—over the long term—raising the quality of the major streets entering Downtown and development alongside them.

Establishing community-oriented destinations to bring residents Downtown frequently for a variety of civic, cultural and social activities.

Building a pedestrian-friendly environment that makes opportunities for window shopping and social interaction more attractive, manages parking demand and encourages visitors to stay Downtown longer.

Preserving the historic charm and uniqueness of Downtown Hamilton through continued use, reuse and renovation of historic buildings and by encouraging compatible redevelopment.

Concentrating retail, dining and personal services in the Downtown Core flanked by compatible business uses, institutions and housing.

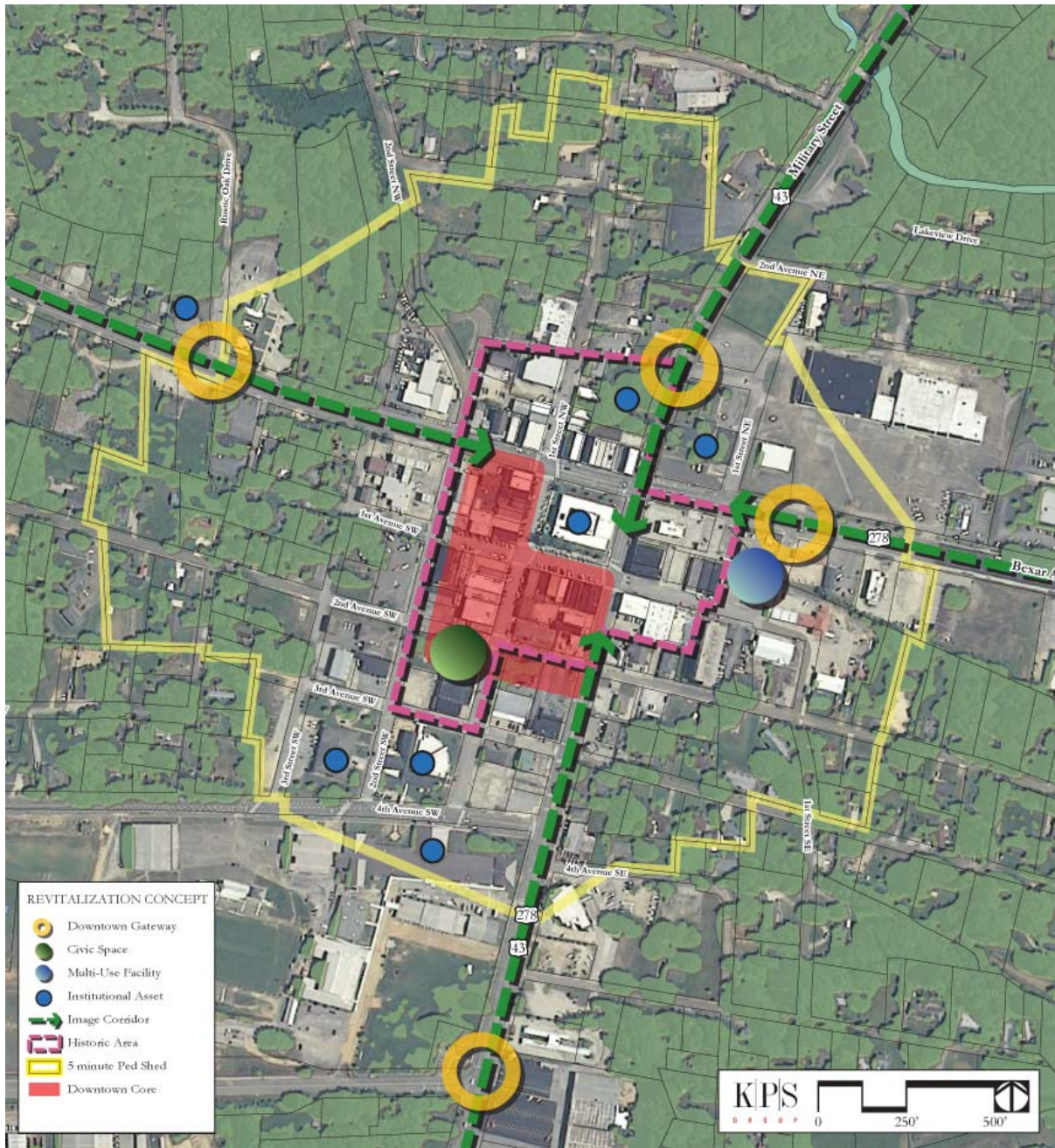


Figure 1: Downtown Revitalization Concept

Goals

The Downtown Revitalization Plan is based on the following goals, which address the five fundamental strategies necessary to set in motion a full, lasting revitalization of Downtown Hamilton:

- *Create a welcoming, convenient and attractive Downtown*
- *Assemble an appropriate mix of uses to give Downtown a competitive advantage*
- *Promote Downtown Hamilton*
- *Organize downtown stakeholders for ongoing management of revitalization efforts*
- *Integrate planning and decision-making for Downtown and the overall community*

The following chapters of the Plan elaborate upon these goals, their underlying objectives, and the individual tasks necessary to achieve them.

DESIGN

GOAL 1: *Create a welcoming, convenient and attractive Downtown*

Good design rarely happens by accident. It requires thought and intent. Making lasting improvements to Downtown Hamilton's physical environment will require a multi-faceted approach and involve financial and other types of investment by the public and private sector.

The following objectives provide a quick snapshot of the multiple efforts that must take place to achieve the physical design goal for Downtown Hamilton. Each objective includes one or more specific tasks to be taken on by a variety of parties, such as the City Council, city staff, downtown merchants and property owners, Chamber of Commerce, etc.

Objective 1.1. Create a positive gateway experience for Downtown Hamilton

Objective 1.2. Improve Downtown streetscapes

Objective 1.3. Improve traffic flow on state and local roadways

Objective 1.4. Improve parking availability

Objective 1.5. Encourage building improvements

Objective 1.6. Improve stormwater drainage along First St SW

Objective 1.7. Install safe, attractive lighting Downtown

Objective 1.8. Bury or relocate overhead utilities

Objective 1.9. Improve commercial and public signage

This chapter describes the existing physical conditions in Downtown Hamilton according to subject (i.e., gateways, architecture, traffic, etc.) and details strategies for improving each. In some cases, the tasks under one objective overlap with those of another. For example, making improvements to Downtown streetscapes will also involve drainage improvements, street lighting, and modifying overhead utilities. For this reason, each objective and underlying task should be considered in context with related efforts. Such forethought supports efficiency and effectiveness in each task.

1.1. Create a Positive Gateway Experience for Downtown Hamilton

Visitors generally arrive in Downtown Hamilton by way of Military Street or Bexar Avenue. Their first impressions of Downtown Hamilton are formed by what they see arriving via these two roadways. Military Street and Bexar Avenue, and the development alongside them, are Downtown Hamilton's "image corridors".

There are no designated Downtown gateways, points of arrival where signage or similar improvements are installed to let the motorist (or pedestrian) know that they have arrived somewhere special. However, there are certain locations along Military Street and Bexar Avenue that would be advantageous, where there is a noticeable transition from one part of town into the downtown area, due to the type and/or character of development, topography, and other contextual elements.

- *Southern gateway, at or near the intersection of 6th Avenue and Military Street*
- *Western gateway, at or near the intersection of Bexar Avenue West and Rustic Oaks Drive, possibly on the site of the library*
- *Northern gateway, due north of the Hamilton House along Military Street*
- *Eastern gateway, at or near the intersection of First Street SE and Bexar Avenue East*

In coordination with one another, the City of Hamilton, the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) and the businesses and landowners along Military Street and Bexar Avenue should strive over the coming years to improve the appearance of these roadways (regular maintenance, landscaping, lighting and public signage) and the development alongside them (building and property improvements and maintenance, landscaping and signage). This effort should not be focused solely in the downtown area but for the length of these roadways within the city limits. The city could adopt corridor overlay regulations in its zoning ordinance to set minimum standards for new development along these roadways. Alternatively, the City and business community could prepare a “corridor design and maintenance guide” and encourage voluntary—rather than City-mandated—compliance for existing and future development.

The City and downtown merchants should work together in designing and installing gateway improvements in the locations listed above, preferably within the public right-of-way or City-owned property. Improvements would include a combination of signage, landscaping and lighting. Signage could include a new brand or logo developed for the downtown business community. The signage type and any landscaping improvements should take advantage of the physical characteristics of the immediate setting and avoid obscuring motorists’ views of any existing positive imagery (i.e., the Hamilton House).



The Hamilton House on Military Street on the north edge of Downtown will make a pleasant backdrop for gateway signage and landscaping improvements while reflecting the history of the community. The Hamilton House is being acquired by the City to house a visitors center and museum.



The eastern gateway location (left) presently leaves much to be desired in giving a good impression to Downtown visitors. Public and private improvements are needed to enhance the appearance of Bexar Avenue East and the development alongside it. The southern gateway location (right) benefits from past investments in the plaza at the southeast corner of the school. However, the eastern frontage along Military Street leaves much to be desired.

Tasks:

- *Adopt mandatory zoning overlay district for image corridors OR voluntary design and maintenance guide*
- *Design and install gateway improvements*



1.2. Improve Downtown Streetscapes

Downtown Hamilton has good overall infrastructure, all of which has been well maintained. The dense street network, including US Highways 278 and 43, provides access from Downtown Hamilton to other parts of the community, county and state.

Downtown Hamilton is made up of small blocks and narrow street rights-of-way. The historic core of the downtown developed prior to the introduction of the automobile and therefore was not laid out to accommodate cars. Downtown's small blocks—the average is just over 200 feet x 200 feet—are not large enough to accommodate on-site parking for each business. In the traditional manner, historic buildings are generally built out to lot lines, constraining opportunities for on-site parking without demolition of existing buildings or portions of them. At the edges of the historic core, the traditional pattern of buildings

disintegrates. These properties were developed or redeveloped more recently (1950s and onward) and followed a more suburban model, in which the building (set away from the sidewalk) and site is designed exclusively for those arriving by car. This eroded important aspects of the pedestrian environment that once connected Downtown Hamilton to the surrounding community.



One need not walk more than a block or two from the center of Downtown Hamilton to see auto-oriented, strip development that has replaced the once charming historic character of the area.

The typical street in Downtown Hamilton has a 40 feet right-of-way. First Avenue and First Street have larger sixty foot rights-of-way (US Highways 278 and 43 at the edges of the historic core have 60 feet or larger rights-of-way, which have been expanded where possible since their original development).

These narrow street conditions are particularly limiting because of the demand for on-street parking as a substitute for on-site parking. Once space is dedicated for travel lanes and either parallel or angled parking, very little room is left for sidewalks. Typical sidewalks in Downtown Hamilton are currently very modest at five to six feet wide.



Little, if anything, can be done to make Downtown Hamilton's blocks or rights-of-way larger. Instead, the most reasonable response is to make the best use of what is available. This to some extent has already been done through improvements made to sidewalks and on-street parking around the courthouse. Because block sizes limit on-site parking, on-street parking must be maximized along area streets. On the wider streets, there is room for one row of angled parking and one row of parallel parking. On the narrower streets, there is room for parallel parking on one or both sides.

Sidewalks must also be preserved and improved, though greater width, say ten feet from curb to building front, is highly desirable—there is barely enough room on most sidewalks for two people to pass one another without one having to stand aside. The only way to make sidewalks wider is to sacrifice on-street parking or to require future construction (including redeveloping or altering existing buildings) to set back a few feet to afford more sidewalk space. This latter option will have an incremental benefit but will be of no impact in front of existing buildings built up to their property lines.

There are two untapped opportunities to improve downtown streetscapes. First, on those streets with either parallel or angled parking, bulb-outs may be installed at corners. This allows additional space for plantings, signage and other street furnishings (i.e., benches, newsstands, and lighting). It also gives a little extra space over to pedestrians—without sacrificing on-street parking—and reduces crosswalk lengths. See Figure 2. Second, angled parking allows the curb line to be modified so that street trees or other landscaping can be added, again, without sacrificing parking or sidewalk space. This can also be done on streets with parallel parking. In this case, enough “extra space” can be found for one curb extension and tree by re-striping the parking spaces along the block. Alternatively, three or four extensions can be added along a block if one parallel parking space is removed. These improvements are shown in context with private investment opportunities in the Illustrative Plan following this chapter.



Figure 2: Streetscape Improvements. Curb extensions and corner bulb-outs create space to add landscaping and street furniture, enhancing the walking experience without sacrificing on-street parking spaces.

These improvements are eligible for up to 80% funding through federal transportation grants. A local match of at least 20% will be required but can come from multiple sources, including the City of Hamilton, Marion County, and private entities.

Tasks:

- *Develop streetscape master plan*
- *Acquire DOT or similar funding*
- *Develop detailed plans and construct improvements*
- *Require redevelopment and infill projects set back to accommodate wider sidewalks*

1.3. Improve Traffic Flow on State and Local Roadways

With two U.S. Highways running through Downtown Hamilton, it is no surprise that there are congestion issues. U.S. Highway 43 (Military Street) is a major north-south route through Marion County and northwest Alabama, and these traffic patterns have only increased since the construction of Corridor X (future I-22). Similarly, U.S. Highway 278 (Bexar Avenue) is an important east-west route through the county. Because the blocks in Downtown Hamilton are relatively small, there are street intersections approximately 200 feet from the intersection of these two major roads, providing little stacking space for peak traffic. The traffic signal at Military Street and First Avenue South immediately south of the major intersection is so close that it exacerbates the problem. North-south traffic tends to back up. This issue can most likely be improved by altering and coordinating the phases of the two traffic lights on Military Street, allowing the north-south traffic to clear both intersections before changing.

Another issue brought up in community meetings is the difficulty large trucks have in turning right from Military Street North onto Bexar Avenue West. Because of the limited right-of-way and adjacent corner building being built up to the property line, 18-wheelers often swing into oncoming lanes on Bexar Avenue to clear the turn. One practical solution is to encourage trucks to continue south on Military and access the interstate by way of State Highway 17, County Road 35 or US 278 (see Figure 3). This will require coordination between the City of Hamilton and the ALDOT. Signage would be required at the Bexar Avenue intersection to prohibit right turns by trucks. The ALDOT is also considering plans to divert trucks onto First Street NE in order to make the right turn onto Bexar Avenue. Due to cost this solution would likely take place in the longer term while temporarily restricting turns at the intersection can be done relatively quickly.



North-south traffic on Military Street (U.S. Highway 43) tends to back up at the intersection with Bexar Avenue (U.S. Highway 278). This may be resolved by adjusting the timing of lights at this intersection and the one immediately south at First Avenue SW.

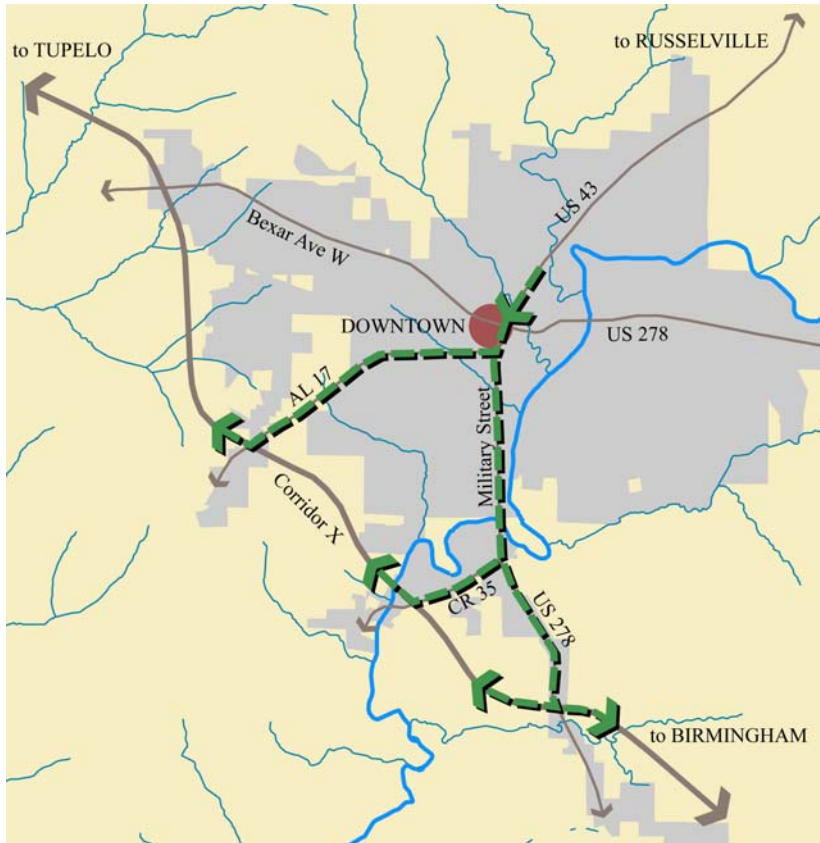


Figure 3: Alternate routes for truck access to Corridor X

Hamilton is blessed with four convenient connections to Corridor X (future I-22). To resolve problems with trucks traveling southbound on US 43 and turning right onto Bexar Avenue West, the City and ALDOT can instead encourage trucks to continue south on Military Street and access the interstate by way of AL 17, CR 35 or the southernmost interchange at Military Street.

Finally, on First Street SE four-way stop signs are placed at each of the intersections from Fourth Avenue South up to Bexar Avenue, making it inordinately difficult to drive through Downtown. This frequency of stop signs is also the case on Second Street SE. While the placement of these traffic control devices has prevented speeding, the overuse of stop signs can have two unintended effects on traffic: 1) drivers will tend to disregard the stop signs when they perceive them as unnecessary and 2) drivers will avoid the streets altogether, which can result in more motorists traveling north-south on Military Street and missing the retail and service opportunities Downtown. See Figure 4. To smooth traffic flow while also addressing traffic calming, the grid of four-way stops can be modified with alternating two-way stops with bulb-outs installed to narrow the roadway and calm traffic at intersections.

Tasks:

- *Adjust phases of traffic signal at Bexar Avenue and Military Street; link with traffic signal at First Avenue South and Military Street*
- *Establish truck route; prohibit right turns onto Bexar Avenue from Military Street north*
- *Replace four-way stops at identified intersections with two-way stops*

Existing Traffic Controls

Recommended Traffic Controls



Figure 4: Traffic Control Improvements

1.4. Improve Parking Availability

Parking availability is a common concern in downtown areas and Hamilton is no exception. To make the most out of existing on-street parking, two strategies should be implemented. First, on-street parking in the Downtown Core must be reserved for customers and visitors. This will require merchants and other downtown workers to park in the city-owned public parking lot, on-site parking lots wherever available, or other parking areas a block or two away from the core area. Second, time limits should be established and enforced for on-street parking. This can be done by the City or by a downtown business organization in partnership with the City. The purpose of enforcing time limits is to assure constant turnover so that there are always a few spaces available on each block for customers. Shorter time limits (two hours or less) would be appropriate in the Downtown Core while longer times could be allowed outside the core. Although not necessary (and perhaps irritating), parking meters can be beneficial in managing on-street parking while also providing a funding mechanism for improving downtown parking.

One drawback to using the existing public parking lot is monthly “court day.” When court is in session at the County Courthouse, the public parking lot fills quickly. Unfortunately, neither County workers nor court visitors have any dedicated off-street parking. One opportunity to remedy that is constructing a County parking lot on the east side of Military Street near the intersection at Bexar Avenue. This would be very convenient for access to the Courthouse and avoid overburdening already limited public parking on court days.

Most historic buildings take up the majority of the lots they occupy, particularly in the front. Therefore, there are few on-site parking areas, loading areas, or other types of private open spaces. But among those few spaces, conditions range from functionally organized and well maintained to unimproved and infrequently maintained.

Most parking will continue to be provided on-street, however, there are opportunities to add on-site parking through redevelopment. These opportunities are shown in the Illustrative Plan following this chapter. To encourage this, future construction in Downtown Hamilton should abide by a rear setback when, taking into consideration relationships with other buildings,

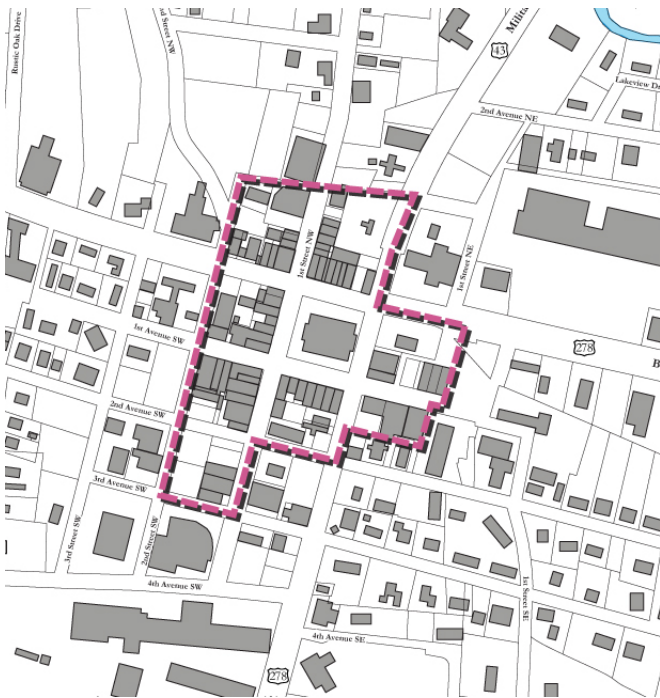
there is an opportunity to include an accessible parking or loading area on-site. Any existing parking and open areas should be well-maintained, particularly when they are visible from the street. Unused spaces should be kept clean and possibly improved as temporary green space until there is demand for it to be built upon.

Tasks:

- *Develop additional public or shared parking areas*
- *Improve and maintain on-site parking and loading areas*
- *Set new buildings back from rear to accommodate parking and loading, where practicable*
- *Install and maintain green spaces or other temporary uses for unused, remnant land*

1.5. Encourage Building Improvements

Downtown Hamilton’s traditional storefront buildings are clustered mostly around the Courthouse Square along First Avenue SW and First Street SW. Some remain also on Military Street, First Avenue SE, and First Street NW, all within a couple of blocks of the intersection of First Avenue SW and First Street SW. Over time some original buildings have been torn down and replaced with newer buildings. The majority of the historic buildings are



Potential area of a Downtown Historic District

one story, though some two-story buildings are present. Brick exteriors are typical among the historic buildings. The facades of a significant portion of these have been modernized, several with aluminum veneers, or covers. A popular practice in the ‘50s and ‘60s, these veneers have proved to be less durable than the original facades they now cover.

Several newer buildings are inconsistent with Downtown’s historic buildings. They are placed away from the street with parking in front and have pitched roofs and little window area on front facades. After the development of the historic core, national trends in construction and development financing changed. Downtown Hamilton’s newer buildings were typically financed and built for a much shorter lifespan than those constructed almost a century ago. Some new buildings are pre-engineered—what many refer to as “Butler buildings”—and have either bare metal facades or brick veneers.

Other new buildings are designed for specific uses, limiting their adaptability when the use, around which they were designed, leaves. In contrast, the simple rectangular shell and high ceilings of the original historic buildings make them easily adaptable to a wide variety of uses.

A downtown historic district should be created to convey a variety of benefits onto the community and property owners. Historic preservation, one of the community's objectives in this plan, would be initiated by this first step. For owners of historically contributing, income-producing buildings, historic district designation provides a significant property tax reduction and makes tax incentives available for exterior improvements that meet historic rehabilitation standards.

Any new buildings developed within the Downtown Core should be built up toward the sidewalk and include a high percentage of window area along the street level façade so that pedestrians can easily see the goods or activity within the building. New pre-engineered buildings should be prohibited in the Downtown Core and discouraged within the remainder of the Downtown area as well. Instead, developers should be encouraged to invest in more durable buildings. Buildings should be designed flexibly so that they may change uses with minimal expense.



Canopies and awnings are used extensively among old and new buildings to provide shade and rain cover. There are several instances of mansard and other roof-form awnings serving similar purposes. Mansard-style awnings were often added to commercial storefronts to differentiate them, while unintentionally adding an essentially residential architectural form to commercial buildings. Architecturally, these appear out-of-time and out-of-place as the buildings were never designed to have such architectural elements on them. They can also make good signage problematic.

Owners of contiguous buildings should work together on installing or changing awnings and canopies. These do not need to be uniform along a block but they should be visually compatible. Canopies, in particular, should be mounted at the same height along the block face. Mansard and roof-form awnings should be removed over time and replaced with canopies or awnings that are more suitable to the building design. Similarly, modern veneers that have been added to historic facades should be removed and the original façade restored where possible.

To encourage building owners to improve building exteriors, a local fund can be established—either through the City, business community, or some combination of funding—as a grant or loan pool. To assure that exterior improvements are consistent with the desired character of Downtown Hamilton, the grant or loan should be linked to a set of mandatory design standards.

Too many vacant buildings can give visitors a negative impression of Downtown Hamilton. Psychologically, vacancies can also give anyone who does not visit or do business Downtown regularly a sense that the area is not well-maintained or that it is unsafe. It is important for building owners to regularly maintain properties, whether occupied or not, and

look for other ways to breathe life into vacant buildings. This obviously would help in marketing such properties to potential tenants or buyers. A creative and inexpensive way to do this is placing art in vacant storefronts. This can be particularly effective along highly visible storefronts.

Tasks:

- *Survey and register a Downtown Historic District*
- *Apply for property tax reductions for contributing buildings*
- *Apply for tax credits and follow rehabilitation standards for exterior building improvements*
- *Revise zoning regulations to assure compatibility of new buildings*
- *Establish grant or loan fund (and design standards) to incentivize façade improvements*

1.6. Improve Stormwater Drainage along First Street SW

There is a somewhat isolated stormwater drainage problem on First Street SW. The properties along the east frontage of the 100 block of First Street are particularly susceptible to stormwater overflows because there is so little elevation change between the street and sidewalk. Because heavy rains can cause property damage to businesses in this part of Downtown Hamilton, this should be a high priority.

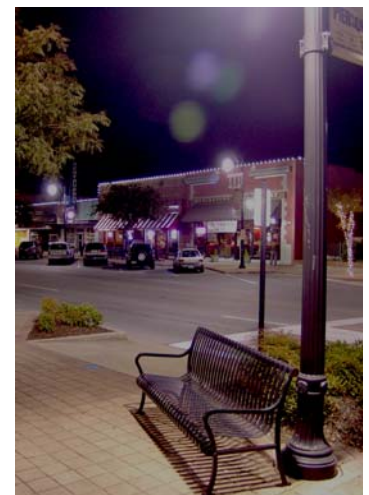
While it would be cost-effective to combine this work with the first phase of streetscape improvements, it may be necessary to resolve these drainage problems sooner. Depending on the funding source, streetscape improvements will likely not get started for at least two years. An engineering analysis should be performed as soon as possible to determine if the problem can be effectively addressed without duplication or conflict with the streetscape improvements to come later. A short term solution may be feasible that provides immediate relief but allows for a more permanent solution during streetscape construction.

Tasks:

- *Conduct engineering analysis to determine most effective solution(s)*
- *Construct improvements*

1.7. Install Safe, Attractive Lighting Downtown

There is very minimal lighting along public ways. Tall, cobra-type street lights are used in a few locations, directing light downward onto the streets below. These fixtures are designed and used to distribute light over as large an area as possible, but cast a ruddy color over



the lighted areas and leave large gaps of darkness when spaced far apart. Meeting participants noted that some of these lights do not work.

If overhead utilities can be buried, the utility poles on which street lights are currently attached should be removed. New, attractive poles and fixtures should be installed as part of overall streetscape improvements. Lighting designs that include a fixture directed to the sidewalk and a fixture directed onto the roadway should be considered. Generally, a small number of tall, powerful lights—as used now—provides very poor light quality and can cause disruptive glare. Instead, shorter lights spaced more closely together should be used. New lights can be installed in bulb-outs and curb extensions rather than the sidewalk.

Tasks:

- *Install new, more appropriate lighting in conjunction with streetscape improvements*

1.8. Bury or Relocate Overhead Utilities

Because of Downtown Hamilton’s constrained rights-of-way, utility poles are placed in the sidewalk area (and in a few cases in the roadway along the curb line). Overhead utility lines and their support poles should be placed underground or relocated as appropriate. This will free up space along sidewalks for pedestrians, reduce power interruptions associated with storms and downed lines, and greatly improve the appearance of Downtown. It is an expensive, but worthwhile, effort and will require the cooperation and assistance of the power company. Burying of the overhead lines should be performed as part of streetscape improvements.



A stronger commitment to pedestrian safety and better coordination between ALDOT, the City of Hamilton and utilities companies should correct problems such as the one above right and prevent future mistakes.

Tasks:

- *Hold meetings with utility providers*
- *Coordinate utility relocation with streetscape enhancements*

1.9. Improve Commercial and Public Signage

The appearance and functionality of existing building signage varies. Several businesses use awning signs to good effect—using appropriately sized letters and contrasting colors that make the signs easily legible from across the street. Still, many use window signs that are difficult to read from any distance and that are in some cases completely obscured by cars parked on the street.

Businesses, particularly retail, should use two types of signage along their building fronts—one that can be easily seen by motorists (and pedestrians from across the street) and one that can be seen by window shoppers. Traditional storefront buildings typically include a sign band above the storefront, which is also sometimes used to attach canopies or awnings.



Signage should be installed along this portion of the building (or applied to the awning) that is large enough to be read from across the street. Providing good building signage is another reason mansard and similar roof-form awnings are problematic. Unless there is sufficient room for signage on the façade above the roof-form awning, these types of awnings should be avoided.

Signage directed at those along the sidewalk is provided through window or projecting signs. Window signs work well to advertise to the window shopper but not motorists or people on the opposite side of the street. Projecting signs, if used, must be kept out of the pedestrian clear zone, which extends generally eight feet above sidewalk level. These signs then can be larger when there is no awning or canopy or when the bottom of the awning or canopy is sufficiently above the pedestrian clear zone.



Highway signs should be relocated out of the pedestrian clear zone, potentially over the roadway.

Highway signs are placed in sidewalk areas, further decreasing pedestrian clear zones. The ALDOT's highway signage along Military Street and Bexar Avenue should be moved and mounted on monopole supports hanging over the roadway rather than sidewalk. Some stop signs have been located overhead because there is so little room at street corners. Views of ground-mounted stop signs can be obscured by cars parked on-street at corners. Stop signs located overhead can be moved to a more standard location when bulb-outs are installed at street corners. Ground-mounted stop signs can also be moved to more visible locations with the addition of bulb-outs.

Tasks:

- *Develop a set of commercial signage guidelines appropriate for Downtown*
- *Coordinate with the ALDOT on relocation of highway signage in conjunction with streetscape improvements*
- *Relocate local traffic signs in conjunctions with streetscape improvements*

1.10. Build a Downtown Park

All great downtowns have a downtown park, a gathering place for the people of the city. A downtown park would be a great benefit to the community by providing space for various downtown events, such as a Christmas Tree lighting ceremony. A convenient, well-designed civic space can also boost business activity by bringing locals downtown more frequently and by providing outdoor space for dining and entertainment. During weekdays, such spaces are popular lunch spots for downtown workers. They can be used as gathering points for community events, host concerts and movies, and any number of other activities that draw people downtown.

A possible location for a downtown park is indicated in the following Illustrative Plan, however, other sites may also be appropriate. The size of the space will affect the size and types of activities it can support. This should be kept in mind during site selection. The park should also be located in easy walking distance of the Downtown Core in order to have the greatest positive impact on downtown businesses. A Downtown Organization and other private supporters should assist the City in purchasing land for and constructing the downtown park. A land swap or other creative means of acquiring the right property should be considered—land donated to the City offers a tax deduction for the donor. Once built the park should be dedicated to the City of Hamilton for purposes of ongoing maintenance.

Tasks:

- *Evaluate potential park sites, costs and acquisition and financing strategies*
- *Construct and dedicate park*





Downtown Hamilton Illustrative Plan

- ① Infill/redevelopment opportunities for commercial or mixed-uses
- ② Infill/redevelopment opportunities for residential uses
- ③ Potential downtown park site
- ④ Public or shared parking locations
- ⑤ Courthouse parking
- ⑥ Hamilton House Visitors Center and Museum
- ⑦ Phase 1 streetscape improvements
- ⑧ Gateway signage and improvements
- ⑨ Potential site for multi-purpose facility, City Hall expansion/relocatiuon; alternative downtown park site

ECONOMIC STRUCTURE

GOAL 2: Assemble an appropriate mix of uses to give Downtown a competitive advantage

To improve and sustain Downtown Hamilton as a center of business, the right mix of businesses and other complementary uses must be assembled and properly arrayed—the location of each type of business or other land use is important. To inform recommendations for Downtown Hamilton’s economic structure, a market analysis was conducted.

Market Analysis

The analysis identified four market segments for Downtown businesses (see also Figure 5):

- *Residents in 1.5 mile radius of Downtown*
- *Visitors to Downtown from rest of County*
- *Middle and upper income residents in a five mile radius of Downtown*
- *Motorists along Corridor X between Memphis and Birmingham, who could be attracted into Downtown Hamilton by the right concentration of businesses*

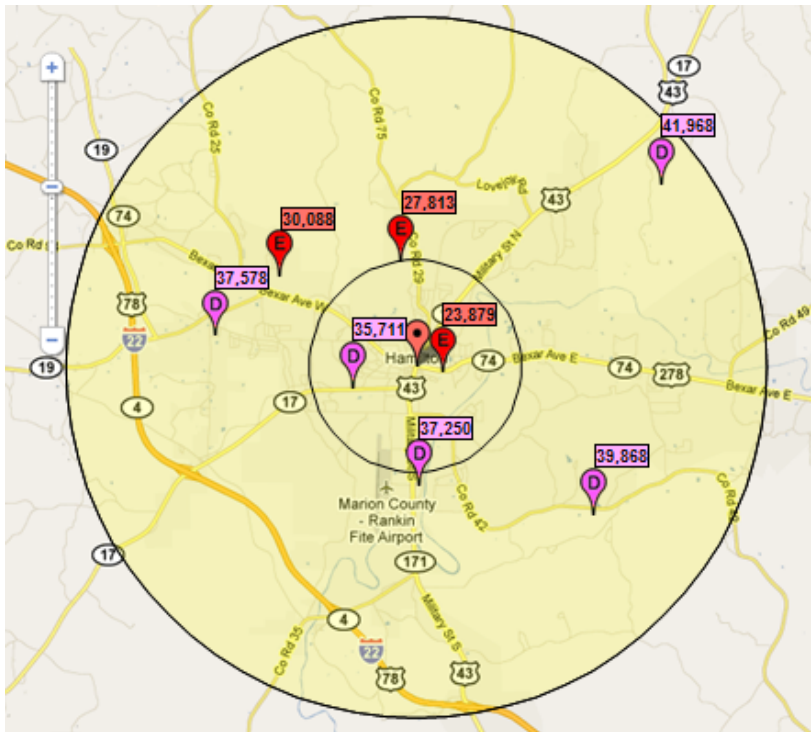


Figure 5: Household incomes from block groups in the one-mile and five-mile radii around Downtown Hamilton (est. 2010)

The spending habits of these groups (“the demand”) was researched and compared to the supply of goods and services already available (“the supply”) in Hamilton and Marion County. This quantitative analysis highlighted a few key opportunities for retail growth (“the gap”) that could be realized in Downtown Hamilton. It is likely that residents of

Hamilton and surrounding Marion County frequent these types of stores in Tupelo, Jasper, Tuscaloosa, or Florence due to their limited availability in the area.

Development Opportunities based on Retail Gap Analysis

- *Furniture Stores*
- *Home Furnishing Stores*
- *Building Material and Supplies Dealers*
- *Electronics and Appliance Stores*
- *Specialty Food Stores*
- *Book, Periodical and Music Stores*

To further define retail opportunities available *and* appropriate to Downtown Hamilton, the market analysis considered more specific business types that have been successful in revitalizing downtowns with similar retail gaps. This qualitative analysis also identified business types that could draw travelers from the interstate by creating a “downtown draw”—a combination of related or compatible businesses that could not only attract first time visitors, but turn them into repeat customers of Downtown Hamilton.

“A number of the buildings are already occupied with interesting, viable businesses. However, there is not enough coordinated development to have reached the critical mass necessary for creating a ‘downtown draw.’ More importantly, there is little currently in Downtown Hamilton to satisfy anything more than specialty shopping needs of *occasional* visitors. Perhaps more critical in the long run, there is nothing unique to attract visitors in to Downtown Hamilton from the new I-22 superhighway connecting Birmingham and Memphis passing five miles south of the area. The corridors leading into downtown Hamilton offer the standard types of food-related and fuel-related products and services which typically appeal to travelers. Future I-22 visitors have no reason to drive past the existing entry corridor businesses to downtown if it does not offer something unique.”

“Economic Revitalization Opportunities for Downtown Hamilton”

-Arthur W. Allaway, PhD

Retail Recommendations

- *additional locally-owned lunch and dinner restaurant*
- *artist studios and workspaces with retail sales and classes*
- *multiple antiques and architectural collectibles stores*
- *“nostalgic” general or mercantile store*
- *regional offerings store specializing in locally-made art or regionally-made food products, unique gifts, candies, and clothing*
- *additional clothing stores (women’s apparel and accessories, men’s)*
- *additional furniture store*
- *electronics store*
- *book store*
- *hardware-type store*
- *downtown market*

The following objectives highlight the multiple efforts necessary to achieve the economic goal for Downtown Hamilton. Each objective includes one or more specific tasks to be taken on by a variety of parties, such as the City Council, downtown merchants, property owners, Chamber of Commerce, etc.

Objective 2.1. Retain and support existing businesses

Objective 2.2. Recruit desirable retail businesses

Objective 2.3. Promote entrepreneurship

Objective 2.4. Encourage land use patterns and design strategies that foster business success

Objective 2.5. Create daytime/nighttime and weekend activity Downtown

2.1. Retain and Support Existing Businesses

Business retention and expansion activities are essential to any economic development effort. This is often a priority for local Chambers of Commerce and can include a variety of activities such as “buy local” promotions and business awards programs. Small Business Administration (SBA) loans may be available through a revolving loan fund administered by the Northwest Alabama Council of Local Governments to support job-generating expansion activities. And locally, a program can be created to provide funding for building improvements in the form of low-interest loans or grants. Also, through a chamber or merchant’s organization, the needs of the (existing) business community can be collectively addressed with the city, county, utility providers, or other entities.



Tasks:

- *Continue and improve upon current Chamber of Commerce retention and expansion programs*
- *Host special events Downtown in coordination with retailers*

2.2. Recruit Desirable Retail Businesses

National chains, anchor stores, shopping center developers, and large corporations are common business recruitment targets. However, business recruitment for Downtown should seek different targets. Hamilton’s economic development representatives, including its real estate professionals, should seek out successful independent businesses in other locales, particularly downtown businesses, and suggest expanding into the Hamilton market. An already successful merchant opening a business in a new market generally is more likely to

thrive than a start-up, because of their past experience (however, supporting entrepreneurs will also be an important business development strategy).

A similar tactic is to recruit businesses from other parts of the Hamilton area into downtown, either by relocating or opening a new location. There are several locally-owned and much loved restaurants in Hamilton though only a coffee shop is located in Downtown. But to attract such a use, both the City and the business community must also be reinvesting in Downtown, improving parking, walkability and other physical conditions.



Finally, landlords must also be discerning of prospective tenants to support the right mix of businesses Downtown. Low rents attract good and bad tenants equally. While realtors and building owners may be focused on filling vacancies, short-sighted decisions can delay Downtown's economic revitalization.

Tasks:

- *Schedule visits for economic development representatives to successful downtowns*
- *Contact successful businesses in the Hamilton area and in nearby communities regarding possible Downtown location*
- *Maintain inventory of available properties and tenant spaces*

2.3. Promote Entrepreneurship

Independent businesses are often the foundation of downtown economies. Small, local start-ups are often less glamorous than recruiting a large chain store but they can be much more important to the local economy. Local businesses employ local accountants and other



personnel that national chains centralize in a single headquarters. They also make more of their own purchases locally and more of their profits are kept within the community rather than the locale of a chain's corporate office. And for downtown, local businesses are a part of the potential draw to visitors. It is unlikely that out-of-towners will plan a trip to Downtown Hamilton specifically to visit a chain store (they will likely be able to find the same chain store in their own area).

All independent businesses start as entrepreneurial efforts and so the City and business community should support entrepreneurialism. In Birmingham, Tuscumbia, Bessemer, Mobile, Montgomery, Anniston and other Alabama communities have had success with business incubators, programs in which several start-up businesses operate out of one

location with shared resources. Some incubator programs also include mentoring and support services to help accelerate entrepreneurial development. Given the wealth of local artists in Hamilton, an incubator program might begin in the form of a studio, where multiple artists can produce work and collectively display and sell it. An incubator may house different types of businesses, simultaneously. An incubator will need public or private seed money to get started—for building space, utilities costs, office equipment, etc. There are sites available in Downtown Hamilton to house such a program. Finally, an important benchmark for a business incubator, like the businesses it hopes to help along, is to become self-sustaining, with rent, utilities, and other bills being paid by the profits generated within it.

Tasks:

- *Identify local entrepreneurs/potential entrepreneurs*
- *Research business incubator organizational and funding models*
- *Develop a public and/or privately funded business incubator*

2.4. Encourage Land Use Patterns and Design Strategies that Foster Business Success

The most important thing in real estate is, as they say, location, location, location. The location of various types of uses—offices, retail, services, government facilities and private institutions, and housing are all located in and around Downtown Hamilton—is important to the viability of those uses. As described earlier in the plan, Downtown Hamilton consists of two discrete areas: its traditionally developed historic core and the transitional area that surrounds it. To assure that future investments fully enhance economic growth potential, there are a few important principles that should be recognized when decisions are made regarding future uses in the Downtown Area:

Downtown Land Use Principles

- ***Retail, dining and entertainment businesses** should be clustered tightly together in the Downtown Core to create a walkable, active shopping environment. These types of businesses feed off of one another's foot traffic. With limited parking downtown, retail, restaurants and similar businesses need to be located where the heaviest foot traffic is.*
- ***Offices, government facilities and private institutions** are important activities. They bring people into Downtown, and their employees may frequent downtown shops. However, a large concentration of offices and institutions in the Downtown Core can displace retail businesses and eateries to the edges of downtown where they are less likely to thrive. These uses are destinations to which people travel intentionally rather than on impulse. They do not require a central location in the same way as retail or dining. Future offices and institutions should locate at the edges of and around the Downtown Core. Offices and some types of institutions may also locate in upper floors of buildings that are shared with another use on the ground floor.*
- ***Personal and professional services** are beneficial to Downtown in the same way that offices are. They increase traffic. And, personal services can be highly complementary to retail and dining uses, because patrons of personal service establishments are apt to be interested in other downtown offerings. However, these services require a lot of parking.*

Generally, new professional services and larger personal service establishments should be located at the edges of and the Downtown Core.

- **Housing** once was a frequent component of downtowns—small business owners often lived above their shops—but became less common during the 20th Century partly due to zoning regulations that prohibited housing in business districts. In the last twenty years there has been an increase in downtown living. Housing is a supportive, beneficial use for downtown, both at its edges and above it, in the upper floors of buildings. Downtown living creates a “captive” market for businesses and increases activity at night, which then helps keep downtown safe. There are limitations to downtown living, however: 1) downtown dwelling units should generally not be located at ground level and 2) housing requires parking either on-site or within the same block. Like personal services, too much housing can absorb parking quickly, although that parking is used mostly at night and little during the day.
- **Parks and open space** located downtown provide locations for visitors to relax and for the community to gather for special events. A downtown park with areas for outdoor dining or just sitting and relaxing is a great amenity for a downtown shopping district. Such spaces should be used sparingly and be placed in visible locations with a lot of activity.

Following these principles will also support greater activity at all times (as described in Objective 2.5). Uses that support nighttime and weekend activity tend to be retail, dining, entertainment uses, personal services and housing. Offices, professional services and institutional uses do not typically operate in the evenings and are open only for a limited time on weekends, if at all. Churches may be busy on Wednesday evenings and on Sundays but are mostly inactive for all other parts of the week. A large concentration of offices and institutions in the Downtown Core, which pushes retail, dining and services to the edges, would limit Downtown Hamilton from achieving greater activity.

The Existing Land Use Map (Figure 6) and Future Land Use Map (Figure 7) illustrate how businesses and other uses may be arranged to improve the way private investments work together to bolster economic growth. As shown in the Future Land Use Map, the Downtown Core is intended primarily for retail, dining and entertainment uses. In accordance with the Downtown Land Use Principles, new secondary uses—offices, institutions, services and housing—are most appropriate in upper floors or at the edges of the Downtown Core. In the “Secondary Mixed Use” area surrounding the Downtown Core, various businesses, housing and institutions may be mixed more equally.

The City should evaluate at least two locations for a civic park in Downtown Hamilton: 1) the southern end of the shopping district along First Street SW and 2) across Military Street either north or south of Bexar Avenue but touching the downtown shopping district. During the development of the plan, it was acknowledged by city officials and by other meeting participants that city functions may soon outgrow the current City Hall and that a multi-purpose facility (to house a senior center, civic center and similar community services) is also needed. One alternative explored in community meetings was the possibility of acquiring and redeveloping a nearby, vacant shopping center to house expanded city facilities, including the multi-purpose building and a downtown park.

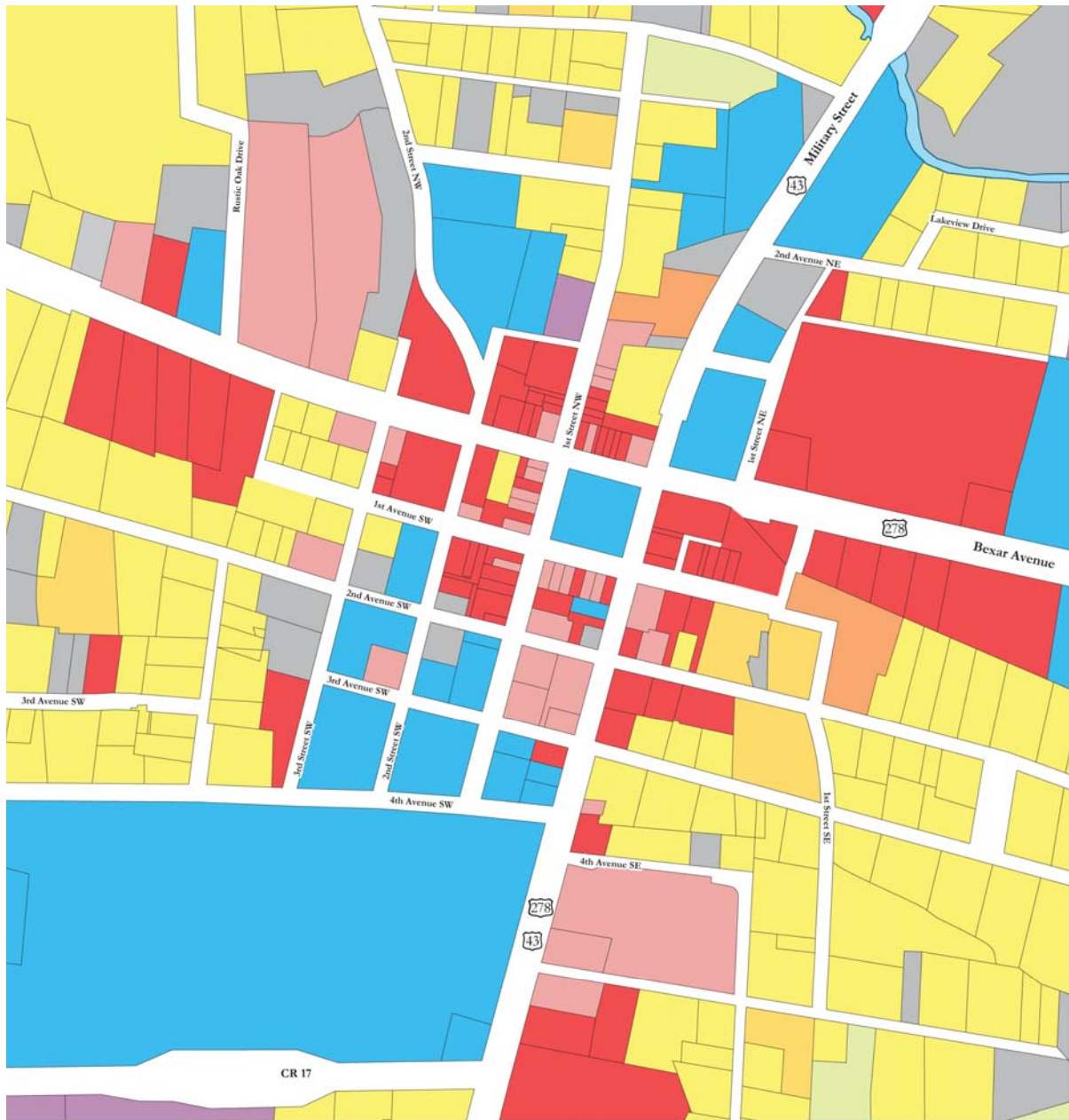


Figure 6: EXISTING LAND USE



The desired pattern of land use investments can be fostered through downtown-specific zoning standards specifically written to reflect the downtown land use principles. Care should be taken in the development of such regulations. It is not the intent of the land use principles to prohibit secondary uses, for example along First Street SW or First Avenue SW within the Downtown Core, but that they be the exception rather than the rule. This flexibility can be built in to the standards by providing regulatory incentives for the most desired uses or by treating secondary uses as “special exceptions” or “conditional uses,” requiring review and approval to determine that such uses are needed in the Downtown.

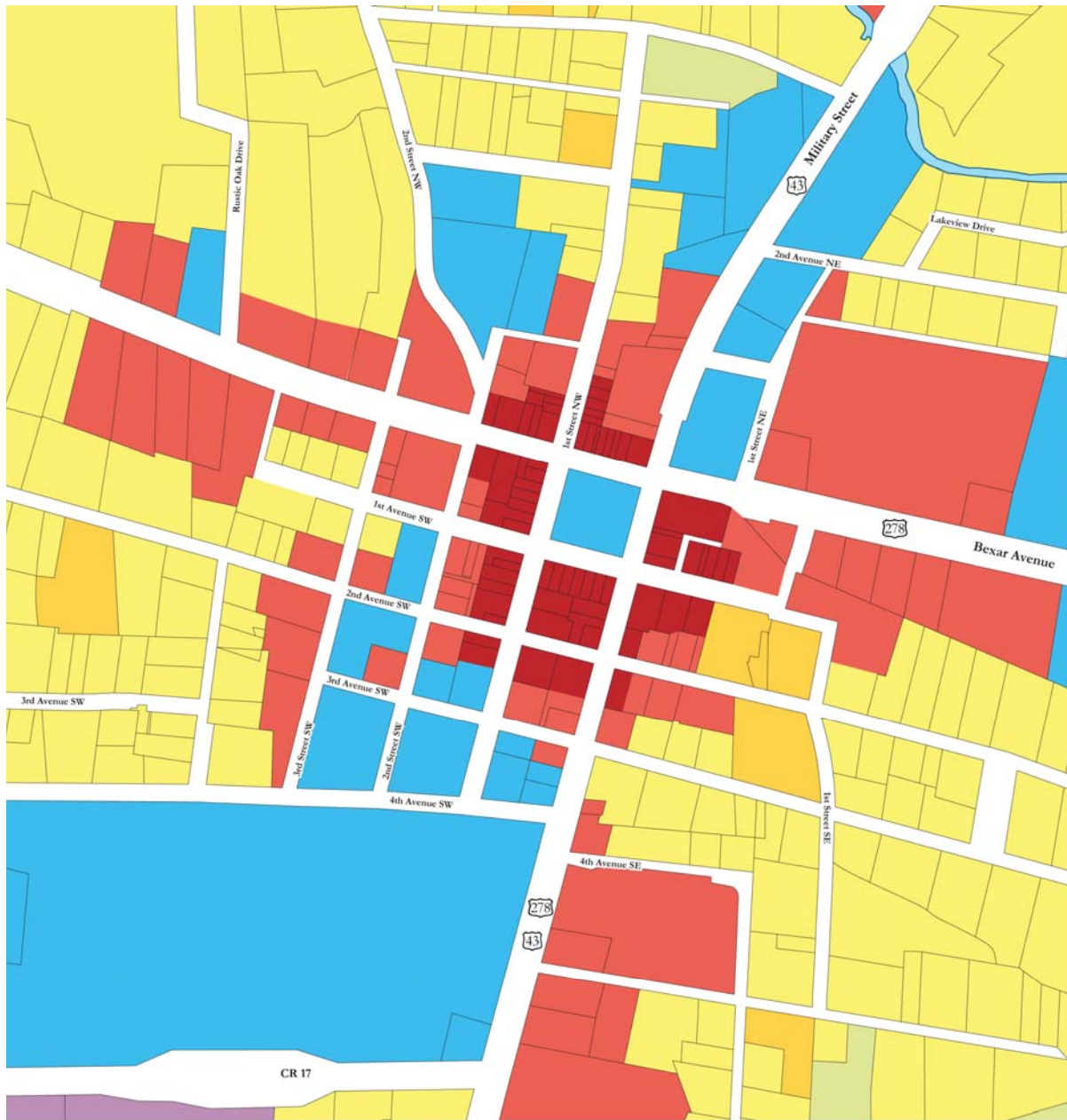


Figure 7: FUTURE LAND USE



Tasks:

- *Adopt downtown zoning standards that reflect the Downtown Plan’s land use principles and design strategies*
- *Recruit or support development of desired new businesses in appropriate locations*

2.5. Create Daytime/Nighttime and Weekend Activity Downtown

Another strategy to bolster business success in Downtown Hamilton is to extend business hours or bring in new businesses that would logically be open later, such as restaurants that are open for lunch and dinner. This effort should also include weekend business activity. In this way, Downtown's retail businesses should emulate the shopping center model. Most would agree that it would be illogical for a shopping center to close at 5:00 PM on weekdays and not be open on weekends. Such operating hours would surely cause the demise of a shopping center. Most families today are two-income households, meaning mom and dad are at work on weekdays and only have time for shopping after 5:00 PM or during the weekend. Limiting retail hours to weekdays (and Saturday mornings possibly) is a practice that is all but extinct except in downtowns that have failed to evolve with the times and are thus... failing.

Coordinating and extending business hours should be done incrementally, not all at once. Until there is a critical mass of the right businesses downtown, associated costs (additional employees, higher utility bills, etc.) may not outweigh returns to fully extend business hours. One way to begin extending hours would be for a group of merchants to open—or stay open longer—on Saturdays in concert with special promotions to make the community aware. Community or merchant-sponsored events can also increase traffic, when coordinated with newly extended business hours.



Increasing overall activity Downtown is not just a business strategy, it is also a community-building strategy. For Downtown to be “open” at night and on the weekends means that residents have a place to go to eat, shop, and see and be seen. Unlike a shopping center, Downtown is public, it is the community's common ground. Many people feel more at home strolling the sidewalks and parks of an active, interesting downtown than in a shopping center. And so it must be properly lighted (including storefront windows) to be perceived as a safe place to walk. In most small towns, parades, Christmas tree lightings and similar outdoor community events happen downtown. When businesses are open at night and on the weekends, it encourages more such events to happen downtown. Then the businesses can benefit from the presence of those attending community functions downtown.

Tasks:

- *Coordinate and extend retail business hours incrementally*
- *Recruit new businesses with nighttime and weekend hours*

PROMOTION

GOAL 3: *Promote Downtown Hamilton*

Promotion is essential to improving business activity downtown as well as instilling community confidence in the revitalization process. The following objectives highlight the steps needed to create a positive reputation for Downtown Hamilton. Each objective includes one or more specific tasks to be taken on by a variety of parties, such as the City Council, downtown merchants, property owners, Chamber of Commerce, etc.

Objective 3.1. Develop marketing strategy and materials

Objective 3.2. Create joint advertising and promotional program

Objective 3.3. Develop a variety of Downtown community events

3.1 Develop Marketing Strategy and Materials

Branding Downtown Hamilton

The first effort to promote Downtown Hamilton should focus on publicizing the overall revitalization effort, rallying community support for the long road ahead. A useful tool in this endeavor will be an identifiable brand or image. A graphic logo and a short slogan or catchphrase can be used to promote the revitalization effort and also to advertise the community, its downtown and its unique businesses and history in many different contexts: banners and signage (including downtown gateway signs), brochures and print advertisements, and website placements.



Care should be taken in developing the downtown brand as it will represent many stakeholders, will be used over and over again, and will be seen by many different audiences. Ideally, Downtown Hamilton's marketing materials will capture the essence of downtown, its best assets and reflect to viewers that downtown is more than just a business district, that it is unique and indivisible from the community.

Promotion takes many forms, but the goal is to create a positive image that will rekindle community pride and improve consumer and investor confidence in your commercial district. Advertising, retail promotions, special events, and marketing campaigns help sell the image and promise of Main Street to the community and surrounding region. Promotions communicate your commercial district's unique characteristics, business establishments, and activities to shoppers, investors, potential business and property owners, and visitors.

-National Trust for Historic Preservation

The process of developing these materials can be an exercise in promotion as well, by involving individuals within the community in a design competition. Whatever process is followed to generate the basic concept, it should be handed off to a capable graphic designer to develop the necessary graphics for use in different media.

Downtown Website

Once the brand has been created, it can then be used as a starting point in developing a downtown website hosted by the Downtown Organization. The website should not simply be created in an effort to have a web presence. The website should include useful information about Downtown Hamilton, such as the different businesses, institutions and amenities

Web Tips

Look at other downtown websites, inventory their content, and make notes about how the better websites are organized. Web hosting services range from free to very cheap. Choose a web host service that supports the functions desired for the downtown website. While Facebook and similar social networking sites are free and popular, a Facebook page for Downtown Hamilton will have limited uses—a freestanding website is best. That being said, because of the amount of traffic on Facebook, it would be worthwhile to also have such a Facebook page for the sole purpose of directing “fans” or “friends” to downtown’s official website.



located there, events that are scheduled in or near downtown, and information about the revitalization effort and how to be involved or donate to the cause. It can also include information on available properties and similar information potential investors would be interested in.

Once a website has been created, it is essential to get the site linked onto a variety of other websites that will drive different types of traffic to it. Linking to state, county or regional economic development websites will be helpful in recruiting new businesses and investors to downtown. Linking to the Alabama Tourism Department’s website and similar pages provides the opportunity to attract tourists. The Downtown website should interconnect with downtown merchant websites. The website address can also be included in print materials.

To assure that the website remains effective over time, it must be updated regularly. New information (such as revitalization progress report), photos, blog entries, or other content can be added from time to time to keep the website fresh and interesting. Capable, tech-savvy volunteers can likely be found who will be able to maintain a useful, interesting downtown website.

Print Materials

Marketing materials, such as brochures, will also be useful in getting word out about the renaissance of Downtown Hamilton. Brochures

will be most helpful once the revitalization effort has gathered some steam—once physical improvements have begun, new businesses have opened, or other exciting or transformative events have occurred. These, and all other marketing materials, should be well-designed—fashioned around the unifying downtown brand—and professionally printed. Brochures can be distributed in a variety of locations: the proposed visitors center, downtown shops, city hall, the county courthouse, area hotels, businesses at interstate interchanges, rest areas throughout the state, and other locations where out-of-town visitors are likely to stop.

In the near term, pamphlets may be crafted to promote the revitalization effort itself. These would be distributed locally in an effort to raise awareness, recruit volunteers, attract donors, and to celebrate revitalization successes. These materials could be combined with joint advertising for downtown merchants or developed in a newsletter format published multiple times throughout the year. While brochures aimed at an out-of-town audience should be professional and polished, newsletters and pamphlets generated locally can be more casual in tone.

Tasks:

- *Develop logo/branding materials*
- *Establish website*
- *Create and distribute marketing materials*

3.2 Create Joint Advertising and Promotions Program

One of the inherent assets of a downtown business district is the variety of goods, services and other activities available. To take advantage of this, local merchants, service providers, and institutions may develop a joint advertising campaign, including recurring, seasonal, and/or special event-oriented advertisements for print, radio and/or television. As previously mentioned, joint advertising can also be included in marketing materials prepared by the Downtown Organization. For the individual merchant, there are two benefits to taking part in joint advertising: 1) the cost of the ad is shared with others and a larger (or longer, for radio and TV) advertisement becomes financially more feasible, and 2) joint advertising can generate more visits to downtown, increasing opportunities for window shoppers to notice each of the different businesses in the vicinity.

Joint retail sales events are another opportunity to generate additional visits to downtown and its businesses. These involve multiple businesses hosting and promoting special sales days to bring a combined customer base downtown. Downtown merchants currently hold a “Customer Appreciation Day” event each summer. This event should be continued and improved upon each year and similar events held at other times of the year. Food vendors, entertainment, exhibits and other interesting elements can keep visitors downtown longer so that they experience more than the



one or two businesses they originally had in mind as destinations. For greatest success these events need to be properly advertised, and activities should be included to lengthen visits.

Tasks:

- *Develop joint advertising strategy for Downtown merchants*
- *Organize and hold joint retail events*

3.3 Develop a Variety of Downtown Community Events



Similar in approach to joint retail sales events are downtown community events. While joint retail sales events are focused primarily on downtown merchants, community events are focused on bringing people together downtown to socialize, celebrate, and enjoy various activities—with downtown shopping and dining a secondary, but intended, consequence. The point is to give people a reason to visit downtown and stay for a while. For those who are less familiar with downtown, these events can create a good impression and encourage visitors to come back regardless of special events.

There are two types of community events that the Downtown Organization should focus on: annual events and recurring events.

Annual Events

Annual events have the potential of bringing visitors downtown from within and outside of Hamilton. Because they occur only once each year, there is considerable time for planning



and coordinating a variety of activities to entertain visitors. During the downtown planning meeting on December 14, 2010, participants discussed existing annual events that could be expanded upon or that could be shaped to have a stronger downtown connection, including the Christmas parade, Buttahatchee River Fall Fest and the Jerry Brown Arts Festival.

Meeting participants offered ideas for potential annual events that could be held in Downtown Hamilton in order to draw crowds. These events can be associated with something unique to

Hamilton, like nearby Winfield's Mule Day, or they can become a new tradition. Certain events will appeal primarily to local residents while others may capture the imagination and interest of out-of-towners. Here are some of the ideas generated during the meeting:

- *National Day of Prayer*
- *Veterans Day Parade*
- *Homecoming Parade*
- *Doo Dah Parade*
- *Lawnmower race, soapbox derby or similar event*

Birmingham, Alabama's Do Dah Day event started initially as a reason for neighbors to get together and enjoy music and eventually grew into an all-day festival and parade, attended by upwards of 40,000 people. Funds raised by the all-volunteer effort now go to area animal charities.



Recurring Events

Smaller in scope, but equally effective in bringing people downtown, are recurring monthly or seasonal events. These are designed to bring local people downtown again and again throughout the year. Several downtowns host a monthly downtown gathering such as a "First Friday." These events often include food vendors, some form of entertainment and various activities to engage visitors. They can be quite simple affairs that take place for just a couple hours around lunch or at the end of the workday or more elaborate and last a full day. Scottsboro, Alabama's "First Mondays" tradition has become a multi-day event.

Tasks:

- *Organize and host annual community events*
- *Organize and host recurring (monthly, quarterly, etc.) downtown events*

ORGANIZATION

To implement downtown revitalization, the right people and organizations and the right resources must be aligned behind a clear—yet flexible—strategy. This is particularly important given that revitalization is complex and takes time. And, even when a certain level of success is achieved, maintaining that success requires continuous management. An effective downtown organization requires a real downtown champion and a core of committed volunteers. Most successful downtown revitalization programs start as grassroots operations—local people who are willing to take the lead.

The following objectives highlight the major steps needed to coordinate Downtown supporters

Objective 4.1. Form a non-profit Downtown Organization

Objective 4.2. Develop funding, work programs and volunteer-base

During a downtown revitalization meeting on December 14, 2010, participants discussed various individuals, businesses, and organizations that might be advantageous to tap into when forming a downtown organization. The intent was to begin a list from which to form an organization that has a vested interest in Downtown and that includes the community's "movers and shakers." The following are individuals and organizations that were mentioned during this discussion:

- *Kiwanis Club, Civitan International and similar organizations*
- *Northwest Alabama Arts Council, Marion County Historical Society and Hamilton Beautification Committee*
- *Downtown merchants and property owners*
- *Local media*
- *City of Hamilton, Marion County Commission and state representatives*
- *Local banks, attorneys and realtors*
- *The Ramp, United Methodist Church, First Baptist Church and other area churches*
- *North Mississippi Medical Center, Bevill State Community College and area schools*
- *Hamilton Chamber of Commerce*

Downtown Hamilton is too important to wait around trying to build unanimous support or even consensus behind either the downtown plan or the organization that should spearhead plan implementation. There will be a lot of people in favor of it once they know what it is and how it works. As with most other grassroots ventures, the "20-60-20 Rule" applies to downtown revitalization, and especially in its early years.

No matter how good your ideas, no matter how good your organization and promotions, there will still be 20% of downtown people absolutely convinced that nothing good is going to come of your efforts, 20% convinced this is the best thing that's ever happened to Downtown Hamilton, and another 60% just hanging around, waiting to see if you succeed or fail before committing one way or the other.

Principles of Success

The National Trust Main Street Center has years of experience helping communities revitalize commercial centers of all sizes. Success has shown eight principles to be essential to success:

- *Avoid single-focus solutions.* Downtown is complex and serves many roles in the community. A comprehensive approach is critical.
- *Start with basic, simple activities.* Even small accomplishments early on demonstrate that "new things are happening." This incremental change leads to much longer-lasting and dramatic positive change.
- *Mobilize local resources and talent.* Only local leaders can produce long-term success by fostering and demonstrating community involvement and commitment to the revitalization effort.
- *Combine public and private resources.* Both the public and private sectors have a vital interest in Downtown and must work together to achieve common goals. Each sector has a role to play and each must understand the other's strengths and limitations in order to forge an effective partnership.
- *Capitalize on Downtown's unique assets.* These assets—distinctive buildings, a mix of activities, community history and a sense of belonging—give Downtown a competitive advantage over other commercial districts.
- *Emphasize quality.* In every aspect of the revitalization program, from storefront design to promotional campaigns, Downtown must reflect a strong, quality image. While the budget for a particular effort may be tight, "cut and paste" efforts can convey a negative image.
- *Change attitudes and practices.* Engaging in better business practices, altering ways of thinking, and improving the physical appearance of Downtown Hamilton should be taken on slowly but deliberately. A carefully planned program will help shift public perceptions and practices to support and sustain revitalization.
- *Make frequent, visible changes.* Constant improvements, even small ones, will be a reminder that the revitalization effort is underway—and succeeding. Small projects at the beginning pave the way for larger ones as the effort matures. Constant revitalization activity creates confidence and greater levels of participation.

4.1. Form a Non-profit Downtown Organization

For greatest advantage, Downtown Hamilton needs a freestanding, non-profit organization of volunteers who are exclusively committed to overseeing revitalization efforts. Existing community organizations have their own focuses and agendas. This organization should consist of volunteers who are willing to give of their time and talents toward its physical, social, economic and political health.

The organization will require an operational structure, which can initially be fairly simple. At a minimum, there should be several offices created (chairperson or president, secretary, treasurer, etc.) and at least four committees—Design, Economic Structure, Promotion, and Organization. Each would then pursue plan tasks pertinent to that committee and work with other committees as appropriate where there is overlap. The purpose of the Organizational Committee

When it comes to successful downtown revitalization programs, most resources are local. There are very few grants of any significant size to support the kind of work needed to transform downtown's economy. In any case, this task is too important to wait for someone else to pay for it or to negatively influence it by attaching strings to relatively small amounts of money.

Responsibilities of the Downtown Organization

The Downtown Organization will serve several purposes: initiating action on plan items, engaging others in support of downtown revitalization, fundraising, promoting Downtown Hamilton, and monitoring and managing continued downtown improvement. Tasks that the Downtown Organization (as well as other entities) will be responsible are described in the following section “Implementation Strategy.”

Several revitalization tasks can be taken on with the Downtown Organization taking the lead with others taking on supporting—yet, essential—roles. Among others these include business recruitment, planning and holding special events, developing downtown marketing materials (logo, website, brochures, etc.) and campaigns, and maintaining and analyzing a variety of information relative to downtown and the revitalization process.

For certain revitalization tasks the organization will play a secondary role—encouraging and supporting other parties in accomplishing work beyond its ability or authority. For example, streetscape improvements must be undertaken by the City of Hamilton since downtown streets are under the authority of the City. Any changes to Bexar Avenue East and Military Street will also require the approval and assistance of the ALDOT, a state agency. While these improvements cannot be undertaken directly by the Downtown Organization, it may support the City in lobbying for government funds or through private fundraising, finding design consultants for the work, reviewing design proposals, and coordinating with businesses and the design and construction team to minimize disruption as streetscape improvements are installed.

The Downtown Organization will also be important in supporting changes that are more directly undertaken by businesses and property owners, such as coordinating business hours. These changes must inevitably be made by the individual merchants, but the organization will be essential in getting the merchants together to explore ways this can be accomplished and apply pressure, as needed, to see that the changes are made.

Tasks:

- *Identify and recruit individuals to form Downtown Organization*
- *Establish organizational structure*
- *Apply for 501c3 (non-profit) status*

4.2. Develop Funding, Work Programs and Volunteers

Fundraising

To help pay for downtown revitalization activities, the Downtown Organization will need to raise funds for *projects*, which have “one-time” costs, and for *programs* that appear in the organization’s annual budget and have recurring costs. Having tax-exempt (501C-3) status is essential to fundraising because donations to a tax-exempt organization are deductible.

Project fundraising is generally more glamorous than raising money for the organization. Several projects identified in the plan may be funded completely or in part through monies raised by the Downtown Organization. The design and installation of downtown gateway signs could be financed altogether by an early fundraising drive. Many downtowns have “sold” brick pavers and trees to donors to offset the costs of streetscape improvements.

To raise money for its annual budget, Downtown Organization’s seek private donations as well as yearly allotments from the local government. Special events work as fundraisers for the organization while promoting downtown and generating downtown activity and, ideally, more business activity for merchants. While less exciting than project fundraising, getting the seed money for the organizational budget is essential and allows the organization to continue year after year. A strong annual budget would enable the organization to take on larger programs (i.e., a façade improvements loan pool), to buy or lease property, or to hire a staff person.

Work Programs and Volunteers

To be effective the Downtown Organization must distribute its work load among its committees; and each committee should develop and utilize a pool of willing volunteers. Like many small towns, the organization is likely to include members and volunteers who also serve in some capacity with other community organizations. For this reason it is particularly important to have reasonable and clear expectations for members and volunteers—so that they are not overworked, given too little to do, or given work that is not personally fulfilling. A well-run program that strategically uses its personal resources is more likely to retain members and volunteers. In this way, it is able to accomplish more and therefore attract new supporters, both volunteers and donors.

Volunteers’ unique talents and interests should be aligned with the various tasks to be accomplished. In a traditional structure, an organizational committee will be responsible for making sure that volunteers are involved in work programs that best suit them. The Promotions work program requires the most volunteers and the greatest range of talents. Promotion involves recurring work throughout each year, whereas the largest projects undertaken by a Design Committee will happen only once—though they may take a long time to achieve. An economic structure committee may require few personnel but will continuously invest its time in business enhancement and recruitment.

The work program for each committee should use the following Implementation Strategy as a guide.

Tasks:

- *Establish an annual fundraising strategy and budget*
- *Develop fundraising activities for specific projects*
- *Develop committees and work programs*
- *Recruit and organize volunteers*

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

Task		Plan Reference	Lead Organization	Supporting Organization(s)	Expertise	Priority	Level of Cost	Dependencies, Notes	Possible Funding Sources
1	Develop and adopt mandatory zoning overlay district for image corridors OR voluntary design and maintenance guide	1.1	City of Hamilton (Planning Commission/Council) OR Downtown Organization	Downtown Organization	planning	Mid Term	Very Low	together with Tasks 6, 18, 37	
2	Design and install gateway improvements	1.1	Downtown Organization	City of Hamilton	graphic design; sign manufacture	Long Term	Low or Medium		Alabama State Council on the Arts; City of Hamilton
3	Develop streetscape master plan	1.2	City of Hamilton	Downtown Organization	landscape architecture, civil engineering	Mid Term	Low	together with Task 23	
4	Identify funding source and acquire funds for streetscape improvements	1.2	City of Hamilton	Downtown Organization, NACOLG		Mid Term	n/a	ALDOT approval of design if state road involved together with Tasks 21, 22, 24, 26, 27	Transportation Enhancement Grant
5	Design and construct streetscape improvements (Phase 1)	1.2	City of Hamilton (City Council)	Marion County, Downtown Organization	landscape architecture, civil engineering	Mid Term	High	20% local match required for Transportation Enhancement Grant	
6	Require redevelopment and infill projects set back to accommodate wider sidewalks	1.2	City of Hamilton (Planning Commission, City Council)	n/a	n/a	Mid Term	Very Low	together with Tasks 1, 18, 37	
7	Adjust time/phase of traffic signals at Military Street and Bexar Avenue, Military Street and 1 st Ave S	1.3	ALDOT, 2 nd Division	City of Hamilton	traffic engineering	Mid Term		ALDOT approval	
8	Establish truck route	1.3	City of Hamilton	ALDOT	transportation planning, traffic engineering	Short Term	Very Low or Low	ALDOT approval	City of Hamilton, ALDOT
9	Develop additional public or shared parking areas	1.4	Downtown Organization	City of Hamilton, Marion County	civil engineering	Mid Term	varies		City of Hamilton, Marion County
10	Improve and maintain on-site parking and loading areas	1.4	Property Owners			Ongoing	Very Low to Low		
11	Set new buildings back from rear to accommodate parking and loading, where practicable	1.4	Property Owners			Long Term	n/a	can be included in zoning or design rules/guidelines	
12	Install and maintain green spaces or other temporary uses for unused, remnant land	1.4	Property Owners	Downtown Organization	varies	Ongoing	Very Low to Low		
13	Modify four-way stops at intersections of local streets	1.5	City of Hamilton		traffic engineering	Long Term	Very Low	see also Task 27	City of Hamilton

ALDOT-Alabama Department of Transportation
 NACOLG-Northwest Alabama Council of Local Governments n/a-not applicable
 AHC-Alabama Historical Commission
 C3-C3 Economic Development Alliance

Priority
 Short Term-within 2 years
 Mid Term-within 5 years
 Long Term-more than 5 years
 Ongoing-recurring task

Level of Cost
 Very Low-\$5,000 or less
 Low-\$5,001 to \$20,000
 Medium-\$20,001 to \$100,000
 High-more than \$100,000
 TBD-to be determined

Task		Plan Reference	Lead Organization	Supporting Organization(s)	Expertise	Priority	Level of Cost	Dependencies, Notes	Possible Funding Sources
14	Survey and register a Downtown Historic District	1.5	Downtown Organization	City of Hamilton (City Council), Alabama Historical Commission	architecture, preservation	Mid Term	Low	Federal and State Register approval	Gwyn Turner Preservation Fund for Alabama; other
15	Draft and adopt Historic Preservation Ordinance	1.5	City of Hamilton (City Council)	Downtown Organization, AHC	planning, preservation	Mid Term	Low	creates a Local Historic District and Preservation Commission, must follow Task 18	Gwyn Turner Preservation Fund for Alabama; other
16	Adopt mandatory design review/standards OR (optional) design guide	1.5	City of Hamilton (Preservation Commission)	Downtown Organization, AHC, Alabama Main Street Program	architecture, planning, preservation	Long Term	Very Low or Low	mandatory design review must follow Tasks 18, 19	Alabama State Council on the Arts
17	Apply for property tax reductions for contributing buildings	1.5	Individual property owners	Downtown Organization, AHC		ongoing	n/a	only after Task 18	n/a
18	Revise zoning regulations to assure compatibility of new buildings	1.5	City of Hamilton (Planning Commission/Council) OR Downtown Organization	Downtown Organization	planning	Mid Term	Very Low	Amend zoning ordinance, together with Tasks 1, 6	n/a
19	Establish grant or loan fund to incentivize façade improvements	1.5	Downtown Organization	Marion County Historical Society, Alabama Main Street Program	financial/banking	Long Term	Very Low or Low (annually)	Award grants/loans for projects meeting local historic criteria	
20	Apply for tax credits; follow rehabilitation standards for exterior building improvements	1.5	Individual property owners	AHC	architecture, preservation	ongoing	n/a	only after Task 18	n/a
21	Improve drainage on/around 1st St SW	1.6	City of Hamilton	Downtown Organization	civil engineering	Short Term	TBD	together with Tasks 5, 22, 24, 26, 27	CDBG and/or Transportation Enhancement funds
22	Install new street lighting	1.7	City of Hamilton	Downtown Organization	landscape architecture; engineering	Long Term	TBD	together with Tasks 5, 21, 24, 26, 27	may be included in Transportation Enhancement project
23	Meet with utility providers to determine options for relocating or burying overhead lines	1.8	City of Hamilton	Downtown Organization	landscape architecture; civil engineering	Mid Term	n/a	together with Task 3	n/a
24	Relocate or bury overhead lines	1.8	City of Hamilton	Utility providers	civil engineering	Long Term	TBD	together with Tasks 5, 21, 22, 26, 27	may be included in Transportation Enhancement project
25	Develop commercial signage guidelines	1.9	Downtown Organization	City of Hamilton, Alabama Main Street Program	planning; sign manufacture	Short Term	Very Low		
26	Relocate highway signage	1.9	City of Hamilton	ALDOT		Long Term	TBD	ALDOT approval together with Tasks 5, 21, 22, 24, 27	ALDOT and/or part of Transportation Enhancement project

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C3-C3 Economic Development Alliance

n/a-not applicable

Priority
Short Term-within 1 year
Mid Term-within 3 years
Long Term-more than 3 years
Ongoing-recurring task

Level of Cost
Very Low-\$5,000 or less
Low-\$5,001 to \$20,000
Medium-\$20,001 to \$100,000
High-more than \$100,000
TBD-to be determined

Task	Plan Reference	Lead Organization	Supporting Organization(s)	Expertise	Priority	Level of Cost	Dependencies, Notes	Possible Funding Sources	
27	Relocate overhead stop signs	1.9	City of Hamilton			Long Term	Very Low	together with Tasks 5, 21, 22, 24, 26 (see also task 13)	may be included in Transportation Enhancement project
28	Acquire property, design and construct Downtown Park	1.10	City of Hamilton	Downtown Organization	landscape architecture	Long Term	High		CDBG, community foundation
29	Enhance Chamber of Commerce retention and expansion programs	2.1	Chamber of Commerce	Downtown Organization, City of Hamilton	economic development	ongoing	n/a		n/a
30	Host joint retail promotions	2.1	Downtown Organization	Merchants, Chamber of Commerce	event coordination, advertising	ongoing	Very Low		Downtown Org., Chamber operating funds, Merchants
31	Schedule visits to successful downtowns	2.2	Downtown Organization	C3, Chamber of Commerce, City of Hamilton	n/a	ongoing	Very Low		Downtown Org., Chamber, C3 operating funds
32	Recruit successful businesses in the Hamilton area and in nearby communities	2.2	Downtown Organization	C3, Chamber of Commerce	economic development, real estate, finance	ongoing	n/a	together with Tasks 38, 40	n/a
33	Maintain inventory of available properties and tenant spaces	2.2	Downtown Organization	C3, Chamber of Commerce	real estate	ongoing	n/a	publish available properties through Downtown, C3 and Chamber websites	n/a
34	Identify local entrepreneurs/potential entrepreneurs	2.3	Downtown Organization	C3, Chamber of Commerce, Northwest Alabama Arts Council	n/a	ongoing	n/a		n/a
35	Research business incubator organizational and funding models	2.3	Downtown Organization	C3, Chamber of Commerce	real estate, finance	Short Term	n/a		n/a
36	Develop business incubator	2.3	Downtown Organization	varies	real estate, finance, retail	Mid Term	TBD	seek reduced cost lease in vacant building	contingent on Task 34
37	Adopt downtown zoning standards consistent Downtown Plan	2.4	City of Hamilton (Planning Commission/Council) OR Downtown Organization	Downtown Organization	planning	Mid Term	Very Low	together with Tasks 1, 6, 18	
38	Recruit or support development of desired new businesses in appropriate locations	2.4	Downtown Organization	C3, Chamber of Commerce	economic development, real estate, finance	ongoing	n/a	together with Tasks 32, 40	n/a
39	Coordinate and extend retail business hours incrementally	2.5	Downtown Organization	Downtown Merchants		Short Term	n/a		n/a
40	Recruit new businesses with nighttime and weekend hours	2.5	Downtown Organization	C3, Chamber of Commerce	economic development, real estate, finance	ongoing	n/a	together with Tasks 32, 38	n/a

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 High-more than \$100,000
 TBD-to be determined

Task		Plan Reference	Lead Organization	Supporting Organization(s)	Expertise	Priority	Level of Cost	Dependencies, Notes	Possible Funding Sources
41	Develop logo/branding materials	3.1	Downtown Organization		graphic design, advertising	Short Term	Very Low		
42	Establish website	3.1	Downtown Organization		web design, graphic design	Short Term	Very Low	together with Task 41	
43	Create and distribute Downtown Hamilton marketing materials	3.1	Downtown Organization	City of Hamilton, economic development and tourist agencies	graphic design, advertising, publishing	Mid Term	Very Low or Low	only after Task 41	
44	Develop joint advertising strategy for Downtown Merchants	3.2	Downtown Merchants	Downtown Organization	graphic design, advertising	Short Term	n/a		n/a
45	Organize and hold joint retail events	3.2	Downtown Merchants	Downtown Organization		ongoing	Very Low (per event)		
46	Organize and host annual community events	3.3	Downtown Organization	various organizations	events planning	ongoing	Very Low or Low (per event)		
47	Organize and host recurring (monthly, quarterly, etc.) downtown events	3.3	Downtown Organization	City of Hamilton	events planning	ongoing	Very Low (per event)		
48	Identify and recruit individuals to form Downtown Organization	4.1	Revitalization Committee	City of Hamilton		Short Term	n/a		n/a
49	Establish organizational structure	4.1	Revitalization Committee	City of Hamilton		Short Term	n/a	together with Task 51	n/a
50	Apply for 501c3 (non-profit) status	4.1	Downtown Organization		accounting, attorney	Short Term	Very Low	only after Task 49	
51	Establish an annual fundraising strategy and budget	4.2	Downtown Organization		fundraising	Short Term	n/a	together with Task 49	n/a
52	Develop fundraising activities for specific projects	4.2	Downtown Organization	project-related organizations	fundraising, events planning	ongoing	n/a		n/a
53	Develop committees and work programs	4.2	Downtown Organization			Short Term	n/a	together with Tasks 49, 51	n/a
54	Recruit and organize volunteers	4.2	Downtown Organization			ongoing	n/a	only after Task 53	n/a

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Priority

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High-more than \$100,000
TBD-to be determined

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Every influence the community has should somehow be positioned to support downtown revitalization. Not all of the causes of downtown decline or revitalization occur downtown. This is why it is advantageous to consider downtown revitalization in the context of a citywide growth and investment policies—such as through a Comprehensive Plan. It is essential to recognize and account for the effects that different types of public and private decisions can have on downtown’s sustainability. One simple example addressed in this plan is the truck traffic turning west onto Bexar Avenue from Military Street North (US 43). This truck traffic neither originates from nor is destined for Downtown Hamilton. Nevertheless, this has had an impact downtown for years. This plan had to look beyond downtown in order to craft a feasible solution. Likewise, private development decisions outside downtown can affect revitalization efforts. Citywide policies and regulations can have effects, sometimes unrecognized, on efforts to revitalize downtown. The following are a few ways the community may better coordinate citywide issues with downtown revitalization:

- *The Chamber of Commerce is concerned for all of its members and acts generally in its business promotion efforts. Good communication with the Downtown Organization, can help ensure that Chamber activities support, or at least, do no harm to downtown improvement activities.*
- *The City and the Downtown Organization should work with C3 Economic Development Alliance to address Downtown Hamilton’s unique economic structuring objectives within the context of the C3’s multi-county effort.*
- *The City’s capital improvements plan and annual budgets should reflect some level of commitment to downtown revitalization. If the community is serious, then local tax dollars should help carry out plans for revitalization—or at least not interfere with them.*

CONCLUSION

This plan is designed to build on the spirit of the people and history of Hamilton and their commitment to downtown as the heart of the community. The intent is to capitalize on:

- *the physical charm of Hamilton's traditional, historic downtown;*
- *the many functions that Downtown Hamilton serves for the community and surrounding county;*
- *residents' desire for downtown to serve as a center for community interaction; and*
- *downtown's central role within the natural, political, and artistic heritage of Hamilton.*

Revitalization efforts must be organized and must be a grassroots effort – *led* by merchants and property owners, residents and other interested parties and *supported* by the City.

Success of these efforts will rely on a comprehensive approach consistent with the National Trust's "Four Point Approach" to Main Street revitalization—physical improvements to make downtown a more attractive, welcoming place; economic changes to bring together the most appropriate and desirable activities; organization of stakeholders and volunteers to carry out both short and long-term revitalization tasks; and touting Downtown Hamilton and its revitalization accomplishments, both within and outside of the community. And finally, the City of Hamilton, Marion County and a host of private sector decision-makers must acknowledge and improve downtown's connections to the broader community and region.

Never doubt that a *small group* of thoughtful, committed *people* can *change the world*.
Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

-Margaret Mead

