

DOWNTOWN FLORENCE 2030



FINAL
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SOUTH CAROLINA

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Introduction

Completed in conjunction with the 2021-22 update of the Florence Comprehensive Plan, *Downtown Florence 2030* recognizes the principles outlined in the previous Master Plans adopted in 2006, 2011, and 2015, and builds from the success of work completed by the City of Florence staff and community. Project staff for this Plan and the Comprehensive Plan coordinated efforts on a regular basis, and intend to continue that work as the Plans are implemented. Tremendous work has been accomplished in the past 10 years including programming and events; grant programs and other funding mechanisms; building renovations and new construction; streetscape and public space creation; and public art and wayfinding.

Most recently, Downtown Florence was named a semi-finalist for the Great American Main Street Award, the top level of recognition from the Main Street America program, which signifies comprehensive community revitalization that encompasses economic, social, physical, and organizational improvements. This designation and the many Downtown projects accomplished thus far contribute to creating a unique sense of place that makes Downtown Florence an enjoyable place for residents and visitors alike. This Plan reflects and builds on the Main Street Approach™, which is a preservation-based economic development and community building strategy based on four key principles: organization, economic vitality, design, and promotion. Together, these principles create Transformation Strategies that guide the work in Downtown Florence.

This Plan effort occurred from the fall of 2021 into the summer of 2022, and included in-person and virtual meetings with City staff, department leaders, the Florence Downtown Development Corporation (FDDC) Board of Directors, and Downtown stakeholders. These groups provided crucial feedback regarding new development and programs Downtown from the last 10 years, as well as a vision for how Downtown will continue to progress in the next decade.

Downtown Florence 2030 captures this vision, capitalizes on recent successes, recognizes and addresses existing challenges, and propels the community forward into the next decade. It proposes a series of new programs, development strategies, opportunities to create outdoor green spaces and to bring much needed housing Downtown to accommodate residents of all ages, backgrounds and socioeconomic levels. The Plan outlines a path for growth that centers good design, emphasizes the importance of collaboration, champions diversity, and invites residents and visitors to experience the unique cultural and place that is Downtown Florence.





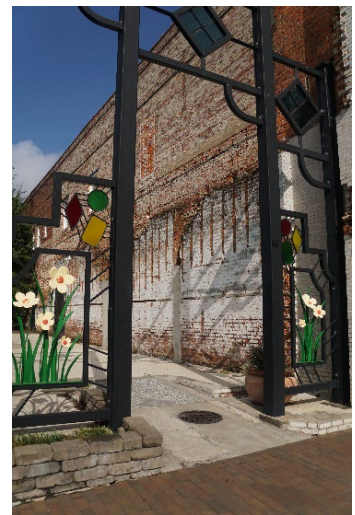
Executive Summary

In order to continue the momentum established by Florence's recent Downtown revitalization successes and accomplishments, a critical look must be taken at a number of key topics that will contribute to further Downtown enhancement. *Downtown Florence 2030* begins with a set of vision statements that capture the community input throughout the project, and further addresses the topics key to working toward the vision. A description of each key topic is included, along with a set of implementation items. These implementation items include:

- Key Areas of Downtown
 - Encourage businesses to locate in a redevelopment area (refer to Figure 4).
 - Further enhance the South Carolina Cultural District.
 - Focus redevelopment and new development within priority areas by assembling and purchasing property, especially along key corridors
- Corridors, Gateways, and Trails
 - Establish a palette of design elements for gateways and key intersections.
 - Improve the design and safety of key corridors, such as Irby Street and Palmetto Street, through the use of design standards and guidelines, and by identifying opportunities for redevelopment and new development.
 - Create a cohesive branding scheme for Downtown Florence.
 - Ensure codes enforcement is in place to prevent property deterioration.
 - Connect existing trails (off and on-street) and develop new connections to create a network of urban trailways.
- Housing
 - Establish more housing Downtown – a goal of 1,000 units by 2030, to be added incrementally – that cover a range of price points and housing styles.
 - Encourage strategic property assembly and purchase for larger development possibilities, especially for residential development.
 - Locate and design new housing to be a bridge to historic Downtown neighborhoods.
 - Work toward ensuring equitable housing for existing and new Downtown residents.
- Economy
 - Support the small business ecosystem at all levels including small business web presence, special events, etc.



- Consider spaces for vendor halls and co-working spaces, among other unique Downtown locations that would add to the character of Downtown.
- Thoughtfully recruit businesses Downtown to work with existing partnerships and fill gaps in available businesses and services.
- Partnerships
 - Establish a unique Downtown destination brand.
 - Continue dialogue and partnership efforts with stakeholders including Francis Marion University, The Bruce & Lee Foundation, Florence County and the medical community.
 - Work with existing partners and identify new partners for redevelopment and new development opportunities.
 - Work with existing partners to engage students, workforce, and patrons in Downtown.
- Infrastructure and Connectivity
 - Examine the existing street and alley network to determine the possibility of re-establishing connectivity opportunities, creating more access points and splitting large blocks to prepare for infill and redevelopment.
 - Continue streetscaping efforts along key corridors.
 - Consolidate parking to reduce the amount of surface parking by using structured parking, shared lots, etc.
- Built Form
 - Create more density Downtown – especially blocks and corridors around the historic core – through redevelopment, infill development, and new development projects.
 - Create and/or modify corridor design guidelines for key corridors.
- Public and Green Space
 - Enhance South Carolina Cultural District along South Dargan Street.
 - Identify locations for additional greenspace throughout Downtown.
- Office
 - Explore locations for Class A office space.
 - Continue keeping tabs on expiring leases and potential leases to assist in future development opportunities.
- Incentives
 - Analyze existing grants to determine ways to expand them, such as second-round grants for façade work.
 - Reassess and evaluate current incentives as needed and develop future incentives, such as a program supporting the conversion of upper stories into residential uses.



Key Themes

With the implementation of nearly all actions identified in the previous Downtown Master Plan updates, *Downtown Florence 2030* focuses on a series of key themes to expand the successes in the Downtown core to the entire redevelopment district Downtown as a whole.

Downtown as a Complete Community

Creating a complete, “18-hour” community requires that Downtown include diverse housing options, employment opportunities, and services. Looking for opportunities for additional housing that includes a range of housing types that are equitable and diverse in price points, as well as locations for new office space and employment centers that will position Downtown as a place where people can find all their daily needs.

Downtown as the Heart of the City

Located within two hours of three major South Carolina cities – Charleston, Myrtle Beach, and Columbia – Florence often acts as a pass-through location for travelers. In order to capitalize on people traveling through Florence, Downtown’s position must be leveraged to invite travelers to stop, dine, shop, and play. This includes expanding the current education and medical offerings, and exploring new opportunities to get Florence on the map. In addition to developing Downtown Florence into a stop for regional travelers, Downtown also remains an important destination and gathering space for local residents.

Downtown with Strong Corridors

Downtown Florence’s grid creates a series of north-south and east-west corridors that play unique roles in the development of and circulation through Downtown. While some corridors already have an established character, other corridors lack the defined character to capitalize on potential opportunities Downtown. The following sections describe the unique role of the primary north-south and east-west corridors through Downtown Florence.

Evans Street as the Core Corridor

Evans Street currently functions as Florence’s small, picturesque town Main Street, and is perhaps the most prominent success of previous iterations of the Florence Downtown Master Plan. While this Plan focuses on building off the Evans Street successes to move outward from the Downtown core, strengthening the remaining piece of Evans Street between Dargan Street and McLeod Regional Medical Center to provide multimodal options will create a more complete connection from Downtown running east to west.

Dargan Street as the Cultural Corridor

Dargan Street currently hosts Florence Little Theater, Florence County Museum, Francis Marion University Performing Arts Center, the Carolina Theater, and Florence County Library, making it the cultural corridor Downtown. Recently, Downtown Florence was named one of eight “Cultural Districts” of South Carolina – a geographic area distinguished by a concentration of walkable cultural facilities, assets, and activities. Maintaining these cultural landmarks and capitalizing on this designation, while focusing on future development and green spaces that strengthen the role of Dargan Street, will lead to a stronger corridor that draws people north to south from the Downtown core.

Irby Street as the Commercial Corridor

Irby Street (Highway 52) currently functions and will continue to function as the key north-south street and commercial corridor. Currently, some blocks along Irby exhibit potential for land assembly and large redevelopment projects, while others have potential for smaller infill projects to complement existing buildings. Determining the appropriate location for large and small infill projects along the Irby Street corridor will be the key to strengthening its role as a primary commercial center of Downtown Florence.

Coit Street as the Neighborhood Commercial Corridor

Coit bridges the gap between commercial and residential development in the Florence Downtown and is currently the location of many adaptively reused single-family structures for small office spaces including medical, law, and insurance companies. Coit's role as the neighborhood commercial corridor, running north to south, should remain a focus with new development Downtown.

Cheves Street as the Eds and Meds Corridor

Based on its connection from Circle Park to McLeod Regional Medical Center, and the current uses along the corridor including medical, educational, and law, Cheves' role as the education and medical corridor should be expanded. This means future development and streetscape improvements along this east to west corridor should continue and opportunities for employment and housing options along this corridor should be considered.

Palmetto Street as the Connecting Corridor

Many people passing through Florence currently utilize Palmetto Street (Highway 76) as an east to west corridor to continue through Downtown. Its low speeds, frequent stoplights and traffic volume slow much of the regional traffic passing through Florence, but it still creates a physical division between Downtown and adjacent neighborhoods. While work should be done to make Palmetto a safer and more aesthetically beautiful experience, it should continue to function as a connecting corridor rather than a key destination.

Downtown with Optimized Land Use

A quick look at Downtown building footprints, as seen in Figure 1, shows that existing development patterns in Downtown Florence often leave a block focused more on surface parking lots than developed land. This is especially the case along many of the key corridors moving outward from the Evans Street Downtown core. In order for Downtown Florence to become a complete community and a regional destination, land must be optimized and developed strategically. Identifying blocks where parcels can be assembled for larger developments may provide opportunities for a parking garage as a component of a new development to free up surface area for usable real estate. In order to create a stronger land use pattern Downtown, the design and location of buildings and parking is key. This may include locating opportunities for assembled parcels, or may focus on infill that creates additional density on a block, but will always focus on removing unnecessary surface parking in favor of density.

Figure 2 illustrates a proposed development pattern for Downtown's future. New development is focused at key intersections and along corridors, locates at or near the street, and consolidates parking through the use of parking garages and shared lots. Details about the strategies for infill development and types of development that may work on individual blocks is discussed in the Opportunity Analysis section starting on page 15. A side-by-side comparison of Figures 1 and 2 demonstrate the densification of Downtown, supporting other key themes of this Plan.

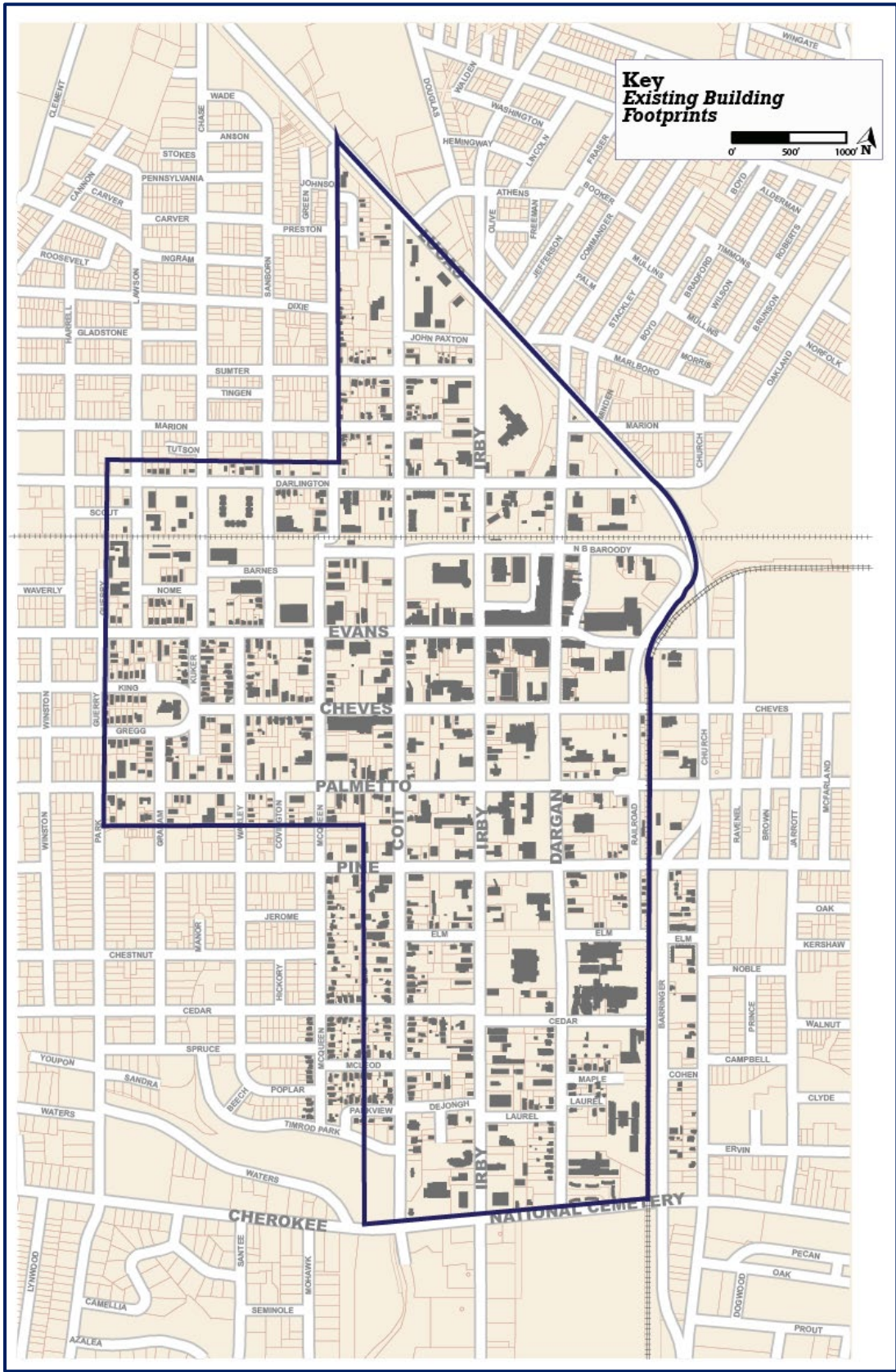


Figure 1: Existing Building Footprints

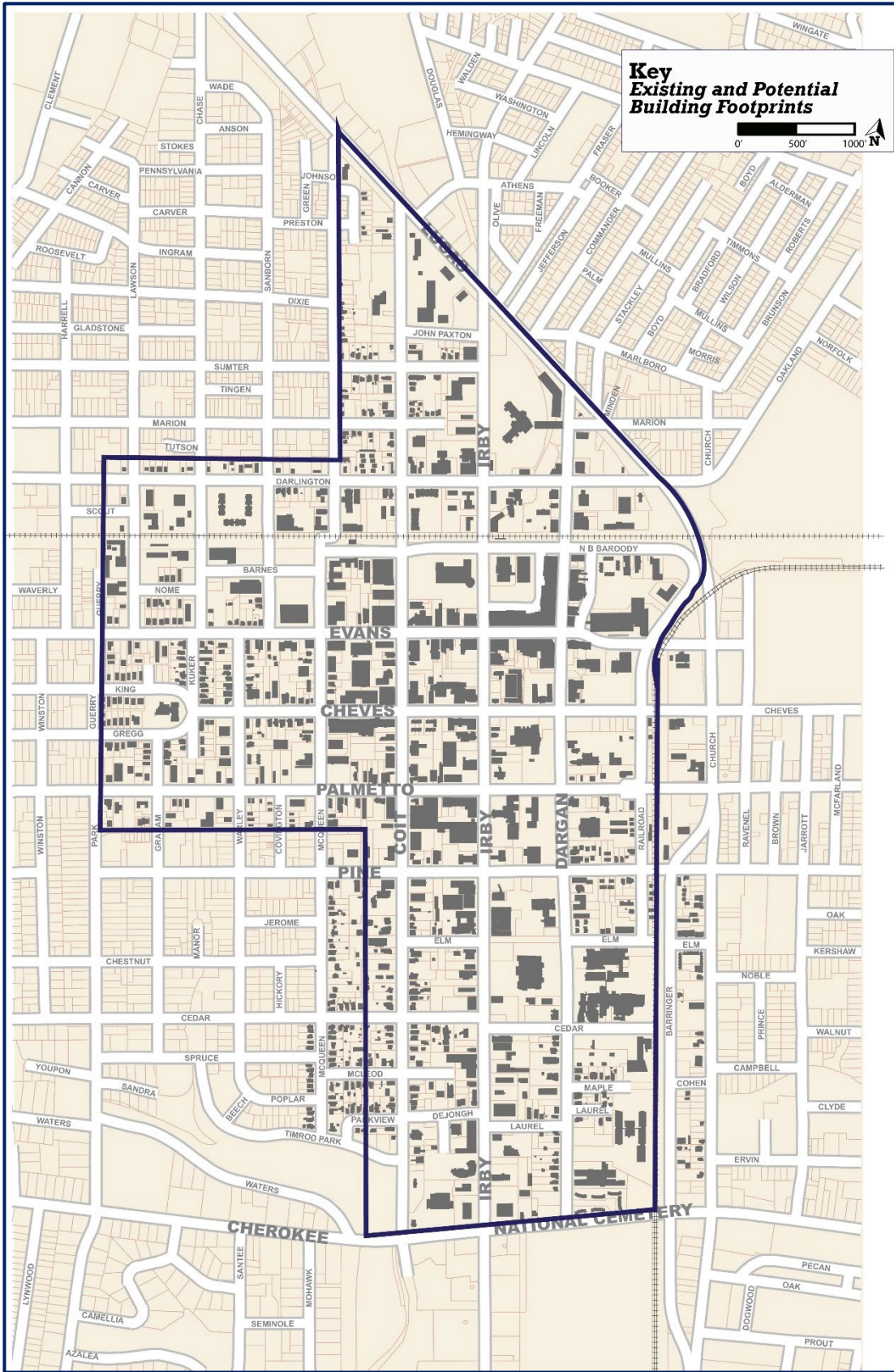


Figure 2: Proposed Development Pattern

Downtown as a Connected Place

New Downtown development succeeds only when people can safely and efficiently navigate to the location. Creating a strong network of transportation options to move to and through Downtown Florence will be key to achieving this objective. Providing opportunities for pedestrians, bicyclists, micro-mobility users, transit riders, and drivers to reach all destinations offers the choices necessary to create a complete transportation network. While some transportation options logically must remain within the street network, exploring options for off-street connections for pedestrians, cyclists, and micro-mobility users expands the transportation network and minimizes potential conflicts with vehicles Downtown. Connecting Downtown also means that surrounding residential neighborhoods must be physically connected and that the same options – walking, biking, riding a bike, and taking a bus – must be available to residents. Providing diverse transportation options throughout Downtown will lead to a more sustainable and equitable community that allows for connections to all neighborhoods.

Downtown Context

Surrounded by residential neighborhoods, Downtown is positioned as an important place for employment, services, and leisure activities, serving as a gathering place for locals and a destination for travelers. Within the Downtown boundaries, some key services are located adjacent to one another or in nearby blocks to create specific activity nodes throughout Downtown, as seen in Figure 3, *Existing Context*. This is especially seen through the historic core that runs in a T-shape along Evans Street and Dargan Street. The cultural center also runs south along Dargan Street from Evans to Cedar, encompassing museums, library, theaters, and schools that face Dargan. Less centrally-focused are the “Eds & Meds” locations throughout Downtown, two key components of Florence’s economy. Currently, education and medical buildings are located throughout Downtown, with the biggest facilities to the north (Hope Health) and south (Medical University of South Carolina Health). While McLeod Regional Medical Center is located just outside the Downtown boundaries, its location impacts considerations for future development Downtown.

Other important anchors within Downtown include civic institutions – Florence County Judicial Center, Florence County Government Complex, and the Florence City Center – as well as health and wellness buildings such as the City Center Market and Kitchen and the Barnes Street Activity Center and Pearl Moore Basketball Center. These locations are noted on the Existing Context map along with other key buildings that are expected to remain part of Downtown’s built and natural environment as growth continues.

Understanding the location of key buildings and areas of similar economic activities provides an important base for beginning to identify opportunities for future development in Downtown Florence.

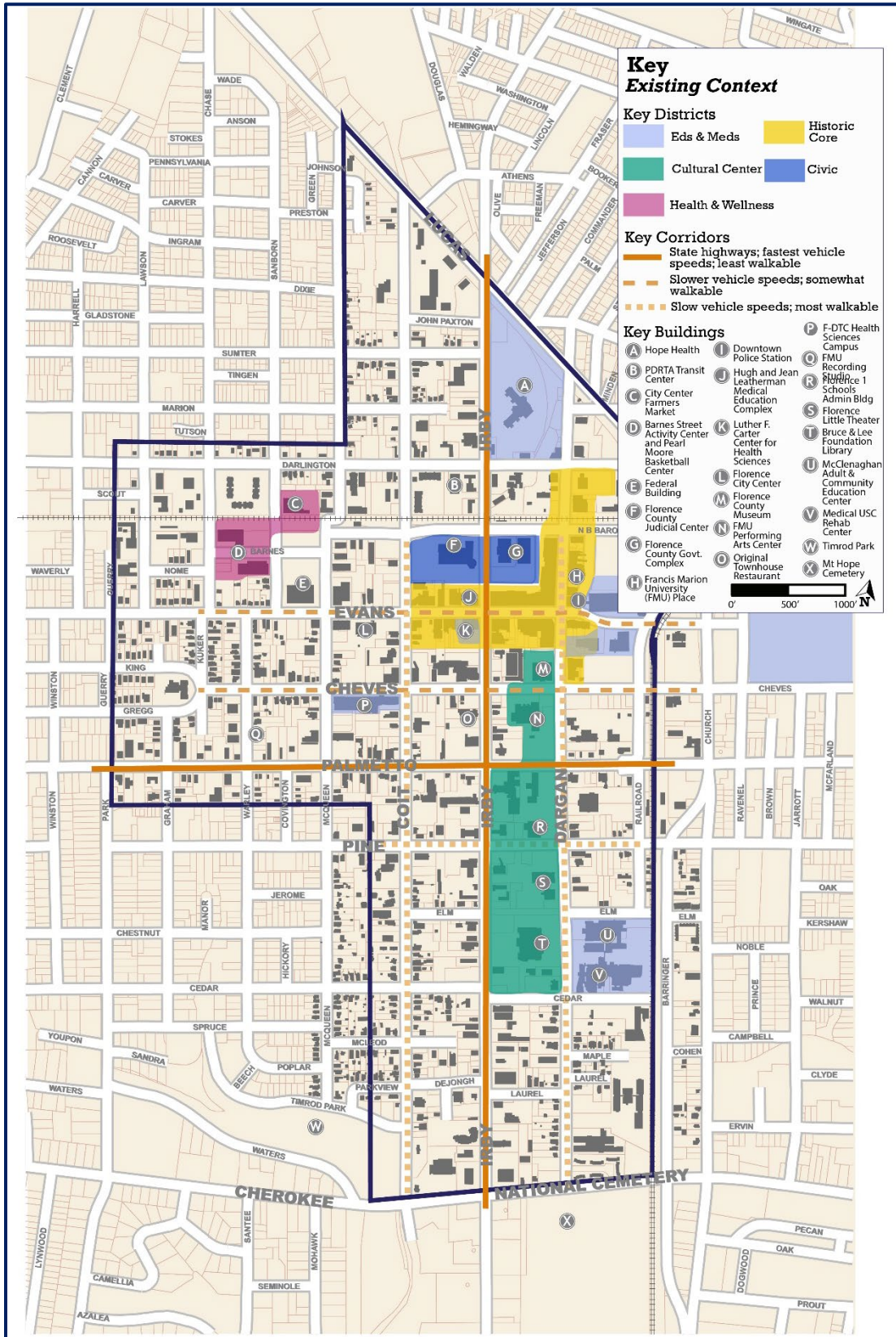


Figure 3: Existing Context

Opportunities in Downtown Florence

The key districts, corridors, and buildings in Downtown Florence, as seen in Figure 3, create a framework from which to build the future of Downtown. The districts highlight important uses and built characteristics, while the corridors establish the existing movement through Downtown. While the key buildings Downtown may change over time, those noted in Figure 3 are anticipated to remain part of the urban fabric for many years. These essential elements set the stage for determining opportunities moving forward for a range of factors that will help strengthen Downtown Florence.

Key Areas of Downtown

The districts noted in Figure 3 – Eds and Meds; Cultural Center; Health and Wellness; Historic Core; and Civic – recognize the primary use types that drive the current economy of Downtown Florence. Capitalizing on and cultivating those uses, while considering complementary new development, infrastructure changes, and the location of public spaces is crucial to creating a cohesive Downtown.

Business Node

Seen in orange on Figure 4, *Opportunity Analysis*, the Business Node captures some existing components of civic and historic core employment areas, but also recognizes the presence of many other professional services, such as law and insurance offices, that support civic, educational, health, and wellness offices throughout Downtown. Encouraging such services to locate in the highlighted area of Downtown creates a stronger network for these businesses to support one another and for easy customer access. While the highlighted areas are considered primary real estate for these professional services, those that exist beyond continue to contribute to this network and support the character and urban fabric of Downtown.

Cultural Corridor

Arts and cultural buildings along the western edge of Dargan Street create the current Cultural Corridor, shown in Figure 4. While this district recognizes the successes of grouping theaters, performing arts venues, museums, and a prominent library together, additional work can be done to expand this into a true Cultural Corridor capitalizing on the area's designation as a South Carolina Cultural District. Expanding to both sides of Dargan Street and capturing a wider swath of land on either side of the road, as seen in the Cultural Corridor in Figure 4, will create a more cohesive feel and intentional experience as someone walks, bikes, or drives along Dargan Street. Creating a cultural corridor requires not only the support of the built environment in use and building design, but also requires an intentional landscape and streetscape design, balancing the built environment with open space, both of which contribute to the corridor. These elements are further discussed in Public and Green Space starting on page 29. The Cultural Corridor is also a great opportunity for district "branding" with physical identifiers along the streetscape to recognize key components of the corridor, cultivating and growing the identity of this area.

Priority Redevelopment Areas

As previously mentioned, the current building footprints Downtown, as seen in Figure 1, show a very low density of buildings and high ratio of surface parking. Encouraging the redevelopment and infill of key blocks noted through the blue overlay in Figure 4 is essential to supporting the economy and creating an 18-hour Downtown. Incorporating additional residential, retail, and restaurants will be crucial to achieving an 18-hour downtown. Priority redevelopment areas include some overlap with the business node, but extend south along Irby, the Commercial Corridor.

In addition to the key area for redevelopment in the center of Downtown and along Irby Street, the northeast corner of Downtown also presents a prime opportunity for redevelopment. The low density of these blocks offers a chance for further investment that will extend to the edges of Downtown and begin to create a transition to the adjacent residential neighborhoods.

Potential Redevelopment Sites

Within the priority redevelopment areas, darker blue sections of Figure 4 highlight potential redevelopment sites to consider. The areas identify blocks or sections of blocks with particularly low building density and underutilization, making them prime areas for infill or redevelopment. For the purposes of *Downtown Florence 2030*, these sites are concentrated along key corridors at the central point of Downtown. This does not mean, however, that these are the only sites that are available for infill and redevelopment; instead, these are some key starting points to consider for new investment.

Potential Green Spaces

In addition to focusing on redevelopment sites Downtown, maintaining and enhancing existing green spaces such as Timrod Park, and identifying locations for new green spaces to support new development and existing residences and business is essential. Seen in green in Figure 4, green spaces concentrate along Dargan Street to tie together existing amenities within the Cultural Corridor and create a cohesive experience for the pedestrian to explore this area. Green spaces connect the Cultural Corridor to other pedestrian corridors, such as Pine Street and the Downtown core, but also highlight the importance of other key sites. As seen in Figure 4, this site presents a unique opportunity for new green space coupled with redevelopment. This is discussed in more detail on page 29. Additional green spaces, small parks, parklets, and pocket parks in the northern areas of Downtown support existing businesses and offer the best use of uniquely-dimensioned parcels. These spaces provide an opportunity to incorporate trees, shade, and landscaped surfaces into Downtown and provide places of respite throughout Downtown. Establishing a landscape and street trees palette for key corridors presents another opportunity to increase green areas Downtown, and to beautify corridors utilized to travel to and through Downtown Florence.

Cheves Street

Looking forward for the next 10 years in Downtown Florence cannot be done without recognizing the need to strengthen Cheves Street, the Eds and Meds Corridor, a key thoroughfare for local residents. As seen in Figure 4, Cheves intersects many key areas of Downtown – the business node, the cultural corridor, and potential redevelopment areas. Designing Cheves to accommodate all forms of transportation and to create a unique, recognizable design aesthetic that incorporates signs, landscaping, and streetscaping, will tie together the businesses and services that are located along Cheves. Cheves also presents an opportunity to strengthen connections to nearby residential neighborhoods such as East Florence, Maple, and Timrod. Developing an intentional design aesthetic while ensuring the safety of pedestrians, motorists, and cyclists to and from downtown along Cheves emphasizes the importance of this corridor for locals to avoid heavy traffic along Palmetto Street.

Infrastructure and Multi-Modal Connectivity Improvements

The gridded streets of Downtown Florence create an easily navigable space. However, as infill and the redevelopment of blocks occurs, a strong multi-modal infrastructure and connectivity network must be available to move people to and through Downtown in a safe and efficient manner. The design of the majority of Downtown Florence's roadways currently focuses on the vehicle. In order to diversify transportation options and focus vehicles on key corridors, as shown in orange in Figure 5, *Connectivity*, strategies must be applied throughout Downtown.

Goals and Action Items: Infrastructure and Multi-Modal Connectivity

- Determine potential locations for pathways Downtown during redevelopment projects.
- Implement pedestrian improvements such as streetscaping and wider sidewalks along key pedestrian pathways.
- Extend the existing bicycle network to connect to and through Downtown Florence.
- Determine the appropriate bicycle infrastructure (ie. sharrow vs. separated bike lane) for bicycle network components.
- Explore the use of micro-mobility options, especially along the Cheves Street and East Evans Street corridors.
- Consider potential blocks to apply placemaking strategies Downtown. Strategically locate structured parking to serve a variety of uses and destinations.
- Work with existing property owners to create a shared parking lot model to illustrate how to maximize use of surface parking while freeing up land for potential new development.

Pedestrian Pathways

Existing Downtown blocks measure approximately 650'x650', a very large block dimension. Many blocks, especially those just west of Irby Street, seem to contain abandoned or makeshift pedestrian pathways or cut blocks that connect surface parking to side streets. Examining these existing block cut-throughs and determining where consolidation and improvement of these connections should be completed will assist in creating a more usable network of streets and pedestrian pathways. As shown in Figure 4, *Opportunity Analysis*, an alley running north-south from Cheves and Dejongh between Irby and Coit would split this large block and help create a transition from the Irby commercial corridor to the Coit neighborhood commercial corridor that is much smaller in scale. Developing this continuous, rather than piecemeal, north-south alley also provides additional connectivity and access points that new development can utilize. Other alleys north of Palmetto that run east-west and north-south can also be seen in Figure 4 and would assist in creating more manageable development areas on these key blocks Downtown.

Pedestrian Connections

The Downtown core along Evans Street displays a great sense of walkability due to its wide sidewalks, relatively slow traffic speeds, buildings located near the street, and parking set to the rear of most buildings. Once a pedestrian ventures beyond the core Downtown area, however, walkability significantly declines. In order to create a pedestrian-friendly environment, streetscaping and wider sidewalks, among other improvements, must be implemented. As Figures 4 and 5 show, primary pedestrian pathways should avoid locations along key vehicular corridors. East-west connections are especially important to ensure pedestrians can safely walk between residential neighborhoods and commercial services. Connecting pedestrian paths to green spaces also provides the opportunity for pedestrians to walk on trails or through parks to reach a destination, removing potential vehicular conflicts. The City established a walking loop, shown in purple in Figure 5 to connect key locations such as the Barnes Street Activity Center, Timrod Park, the Downtown core, and cultural offerings along Dargan Street. The loop around the BTC site at Evans Street, railroad, and Baroody also tees this site up to be strategically used, as discussed in “Built Form” and “Public and Green Space,” two sections that follow. New pedestrian paths should build from the proposed walking loop to ensure they support, rather than compete with, one another, and help pedestrians reach a variety of destinations.

Bicycle Connections

Creating bicycle connections to and through Downtown creates another transit opportunity that decreases vehicular traffic and provides a form of exercise. Bicycle connections should be thoughtfully established to connect residents to amenities as well as an opportunity for daily ridership to and from work. Establishing bicycle connections may be done through a variety of methods including sharrows, where bikes share lanes with vehicles; on-street bike lanes; separated bike lanes; bikeways; and off-street trails, among other forms. A successful bike network is often comprised of a handful of these methods based on the appropriate type of bike infrastructure related to the vehicular infrastructure present. Most importantly, a bicycle network should be complete in that new components continue to connect to existing components to extend the network, and that the network connects residential to commercial spaces, services, and other destinations. The primary and secondary bike routes shown in Figure 4 provide connections to neighborhoods adjacent to Downtown, destinations such as the Barnes Street Activity Center and Pearl Moore Basketball Center, and are located on streets with less vehicular traffic. Figure 5 also shows Cheves playing a key role in the east-west bicycle connection. To the east, this connection (as well as that along Evans) links Downtown with the McLeod Regional Medical Center; to the west, the bicycle path extends existing bicycle pathways to Downtown, connecting people from the neighborhoods and destinations farther west to all Downtown Florence has to offer.

Micro-mobility Opportunities

Micro-mobility options, such as bike share programs and scooter services, provide transportation for short distances for a fee paid by the user. Some programs require designated docking stations, such as a bike rack, while others, such as scooter programs, set geographic boundaries for where the device can be used, but do not require docking stations. Selecting the appropriate model and analyzing program feasibility for Downtown Florence transit users includes considering key areas and destinations where the device will be used, as well as

projected ridership numbers and cost per use or by amount of time. While the micro-mobility choice that is selected may serve the majority of Downtown, centering it along the Cheves corridor to connect people between neighborhoods, businesses along Cheves, and to the medical center is crucial.

Parking Options

Large parking lots currently comprise a majority of Downtown Florence. As Figure 1 shows, south of Cheves, much of Downtown Florence is covered not by buildings, but by parking lots. As new development occurs (see “Built Form” on page 23), incorporating a variety of parking options that ultimately consolidate surface parking lots will provide more space for development Downtown. The [Downtown Florence Parking Study](#), completed in 2016, should be utilized to determine appropriate parking solutions. Parking options include:

- On-street parking – Dedicated space for on-street parking, like that along Evans and Dargan in the Downtown core, creates easy access to adjacent commercial uses. This also helps narrow the vehicular right-of-way and slow traffic speeds to create safer streets. While on-street parking typically does not meet the parking requirements for a development, it can be one option, especially for handicap accessible and quick, pick-up parking spots.
- Structured Parking – Consolidating large areas of surface parking into a structured parking garage frees space for new development. Structured parking can also be wrapped with residential, commercial, or a mix of uses to create an active street front rather than a garage located along a pedestrian path or vehicular corridor.
- Shared Lots – Surface parking may remain a suitable option for some uses. Where this is the case, shared lots should be considered in order for the parking lot to be used a higher percentage of the day. For instance, many churches may only have a busy parking lot one evening each week in addition to weekend services. In order to maximize use of a surface parking lot for a church, an adjacent commercial business may share this lot, making use of it during the weekday hours.



Downtown Streetscapes

In addition to right-sizing existing infrastructure and connectivity options, design elements applied to select streets creates an opportunity for placemaking of inviting and unique areas of Downtown. As seen in the images to the right, unique paving is often used as part of this placemaking effort in order to slow cars. Accompanied by traffic calming measures and much lower speed limits, these streets are designed primarily for pedestrians and cyclists, and could be closed off completely to cars for special events and festivals. Other design solutions for placemaking include landscaping and lighting, which both play an important role in creating a comfortable, well-lit environment. Placemaking strategies should be considered in Downtown Florence on secondary corridors with reduced vehicular traffic, and should be applied in a defined block or blocks. On corridors and arterials that are also US highways, partnerships with SCDOT are crucial to enacting roadway diets and accommodating pedestrians.



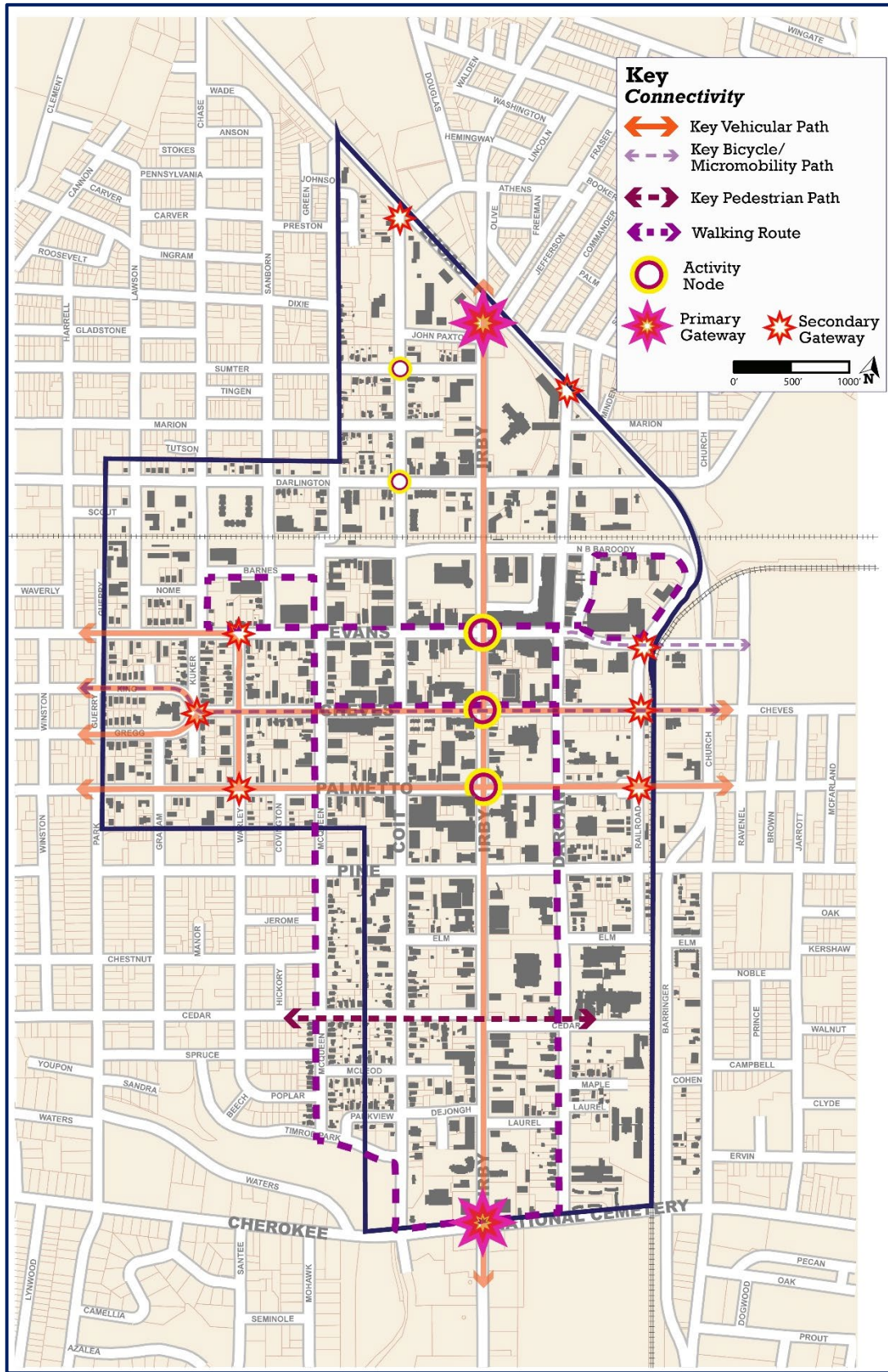


Figure 5: Connectivity

Built Form

Apart from its historic core centered at the intersection of Evans and Dargan Streets, Downtown Florence is relatively under-developed overall when comparing “rooftops to blacktop”. That is, it has a very choppy development pattern dominated by larger buildings surrounded by large parking lots and greenspace, along with a thin spread of small buildings set in large parking lots. Much of the original urban fabric on the west side of Downtown (originally a combination of small-lot single-family homes and main street businesses), has been broken-up through residential to commercial conversions and the loss of much building stock to surface parking. Of particular note, Downtown’s main road junctions at Irby and Palmetto/Cheves are markedly underdeveloped considering their high visibility and geographic centrality. Despite these changes, Downtown

Goals and Action Items: Built Form

- Re-densify Downtown by:
 - Encouraging new residential development;
 - Encouraging/ facilitating new mixed-use, urban-scale infill development;
 - Instituting building design standards that establish appropriate building scale, massing, materials, roof-shape, and building/sign placement and orientation; and
 - Reducing the coverage of surface parking by instituting maximum parking allowances, min/max lot coverage requirements, and working toward more shared, district-wide parking solutions.
 - Continue working to assemble (option) larger infill sites in prime redevelopment blocks for new vertical mixed-use development and recruit quality housing developers.
- Implement or update corridor/district overlay design guidelines for Irby, Palmetto, Cheves, and Coit corridors that encourage greater development intensity and urban architecture.
- Facilitate urban-scale infill development by matching/introducing developers to available sites.
- Strategically control/acquire key redevelopment sites that can be combined into larger redevelopment opportunities and actively market the assemblages
- Broker creative deal-structures with reluctant land owners by possibly partnering them into the deal (with land as equity).
- Implement an historic preservation ordinance and/or amend the Downtown historic district to include non-contiguous single-site additions.
- Institute a strong code enforcement process with respect to existing downtown multifamily properties to avoid further deterioration in quality.

Florence is still a physically well-defined urban area featuring an intact historic core, a very walkable grid of 650'x650' blocks, a large collection of standout landmark buildings, and a framework of urban-scaled streets lined with remnant traditional building stock.

The current combination of large blocks and low-density development Downtown creates opportunities for infill. Anchoring key intersections and major corridors, identified as large activity nodes at Irby and Evans/Palmetto/Cheves on Figure 5, *Connectivity*, takes priority. Other priority areas include blocks that offer full or partial redevelopment opportunities due to low density, un-used or underutilized buildings, and deteriorating building conditions. Identifying these areas in order to assemble property and create opportunities for larger redevelopment will contribute to the objective of anchoring. As seen in Figure 4, *Opportunity Analysis*, many of these opportunities can be seen along the Irby Street and Cheves Street corridors. Where full or half block redevelopment is not feasible, identifying locations for smaller infill development that contributes to the urban fabric and creates a more defined streetscape is the goal.

As stated in the key themes for this Plan update, in order for Florence's central core to evolve to an 18-hour Downtown, new development must encompass a range of uses including residential, office, retail, and other services to allow residents to access all they need within the Downtown boundary. Figure 6, *Opportunities for Infill*, illustrates scenarios of how new development may densify individual blocks. This hypothetical scenario demonstrates how potential redevelopment sites shown in Figure 6 can incorporate many new types of development. Key to the full or nearly-full block redevelopment scenarios shown along Irby, Palmetto, and Cheves are the following key principles:

- Buildings set near the street to create a more walkable environment.
- Parking located to the rear of new buildings, or to the side and buffered from the street using landscaping.
- Structured parking added to consolidate surface parking lots and create more space for infill development.
- Alley access created for structured and surface parking, where possible.



Figure 6: Opportunities for Infill

Infill and Redevelopment

Encouraging infill and redevelopment requires different strategies for a variety of scenarios. While some blocks lend themselves to full redevelopment, others may need redevelopment on half the block, as shown through the Potential Development Sites in Figure 4. On other blocks, individual parcels may be ripe for smaller, singular infill projects. Examining each block and set of opportunities and constraints is a crucial step to determining how to better densify the block and create an urban environment that contributes to the connected, 18-hour city. Historically, the City of Florence has worked with multiple partners to accomplish redevelopment in downtown. Private property owners and other partners will need to work together similarly in order to fully utilize the redevelopment potential.

Where a block does not currently contain key buildings, buildings that are fully utilized, or buildings that are in reusable condition, redevelopment of the full or partial block presents itself as the most feasible option. The ultimate goal for redevelopment should include strategies to:

- Strengthen infrastructure;
- Increase connectivity;
- Consolidate parking to the interior of the site;
- Locate buildings closer to the street; and
- Increase walkability through landscaping and streetscaping.

This effort will not happen overnight, but will occur as parcels are assembled and redeveloped and as smaller infill projects occur. As seen in Figure 7, *Incremental Redevelopment of Partial Block*, the top image shows the existing condition of an example block. Commercial development is piecemeal along the eastern edge and while an alley does not split the block, it appears that there once was one and that space for one still exists. On the western half of the block, low-scale buildings (primarily single-family homes) remain in their original development pattern and are used as residential buildings or offices. Based on this change in building scale and building use from commercial on the east to residential and office on the west, the presence of a residential neighborhood to the west of the block is likely.

With these existing conditions in mind, the scenario shown in Figure 7 focuses on the redevelopment of the eastern half of the block. As previously mentioned, gradual redevelopment is the most likely scenario. The second and third images in Figure 7 illustrate how redevelopment could occur over time on this particular block. The second image illustrates the beginning of this infill – first along the southeast corner of the block with a three-story commercial building and parking to the rear, as well as a partially developed alley to access this parking. The third image illustrates the final changes to the block – the reuse of one building and the demolition of another, which is replaced with a larger building. Parking for those buildings is consolidated, and still accessed by the alley, which now runs the length of the block. In addition to providing access to consolidated rear parking, the alley also creates a buffer and transition between larger buildings and higher intensity commercial uses on the east, to the residential and office uses on the western half of the block. The building on the northeast corner

remains untouched throughout all the scenarios, indicating its active and productive use.

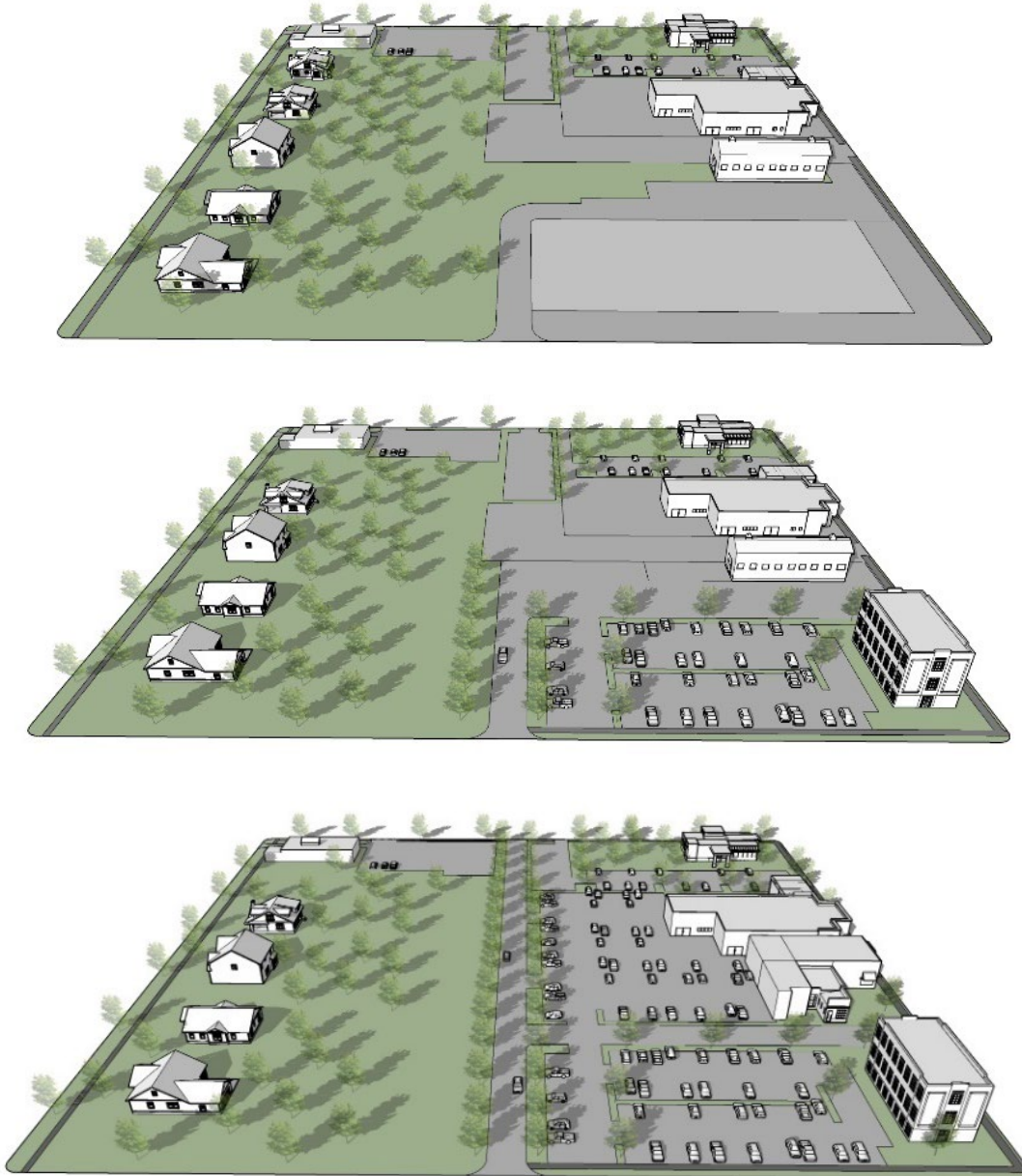


Figure 7: Incremental Redevelopment of Partial Block

As shown in Figure 4, some blocks may lend themselves to complete, or almost complete, redevelopment. Figure 8, *Redevelopment of Full Block*, illustrates one such scenario. In this scenario, a block with low productive use and high surface parking coverage is conducive for redevelopment of the full block, although two existing buildings, shown in the southwest corner and the western edge office building, remain. With the two existing buildings as the primary constraints, the

block can be analyzed for opportunities in use, design, and infrastructure improvements. Similarly to Figure 7, the block in Figure 8 incorporates an alley running north-south, as well as a partial alley running east-west to connect the street to the new structured parking. This structured parking consolidates much of the existing parking and locates it to the center of the site to allow new development to be constructed at or near the street. Varying scales of new development are seen, but indicate that this block is located along some key corridors with higher traffic volumes. On the eastern side of the block, new commercial and mixed-use developments anchor the edges. Their placement near the street and the landscaping along the street creates a more walkable environment for pedestrians to access the buildings on this site. On the western half of the site, new commercial, mixed use and residential development steps down in scale, indicating a transition to a different type of corridor to the west, and to a lower-scale area. The new development fits around the existing buildings and makes use of the existing surface parking.

This redevelopment scenario illustrates one of many ways that a full (or almost full) block could incorporate new development of varying scales and for varying uses. While this would likely occur over time, as shown in the progression of images in Figure 7, the full redevelopment shows a denser block that responds to the community's desire for a walkable, connected, 18-hour Downtown.

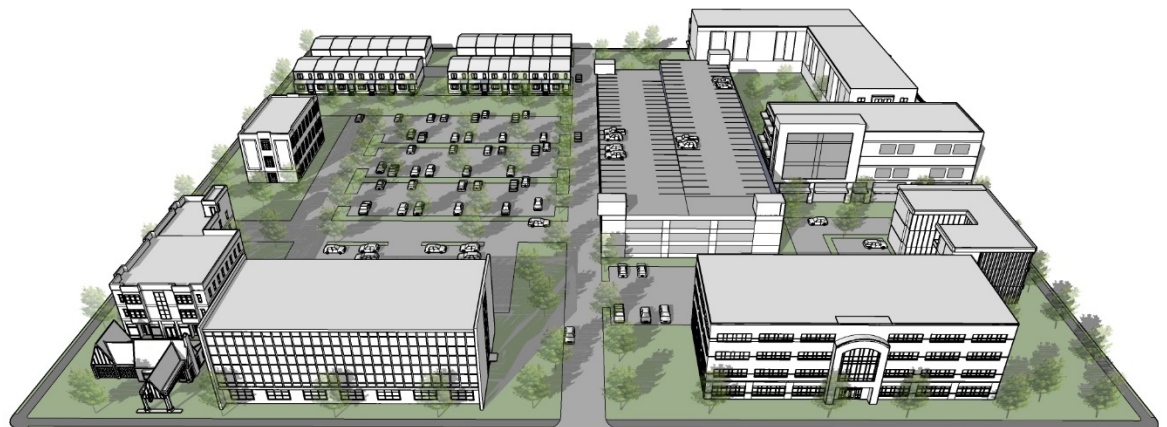


Figure 8: Redevelopment of a Full Block

Public and Green Space

Public space in Downtown Florence consists mainly of creatively improvised plazas, pass-throughs, and the pedestrian environment of its historic core. These smaller spaces combine into an increasingly intimate and explorable walking experience within the historic district and the cultural district immediately to the south. Outside of this immediate area however, there are few truly public spaces that extend and animate the pedestrian experience, or that provide focal points for other programmed or spontaneous public events and activities. Although a large “town green” or central park is not an essential place-making ingredient as some would suggest, additional useable public space will need to be incorporated Downtown in order to attract and support a growing Downtown population. As development continues and density increases, it is imperative that development capitalizes on green infrastructure opportunities. Green space contributes to the equity of a community in many factors including health, economics and housing; therefore, urban green space opportunities for residents and visitors need to be incorporated throughout Downtown.

Goals and Action Items: Public and Green Space

- Work with a landscape architect to study the South Dargan Street corridor and the potential for the development of a cultural corridor.
 - Include business owners and representatives of civic and institutional entities (Francis Marion University, Florence County, Florence Little Theater) in the conversation, especially when discussing the design, programming schedules, and maintenance responsibilities of the cultural corridor.
- Extend streetscaping to additional corridors that serve pedestrians including Dargan, Cheves, and Coit.
- Identify locations for smaller parks throughout Downtown to provide greenspace to existing and future residential areas, as well as commercial businesses.
- Consider locations to incorporate public art and placemaking strategies.
- Work with property owners for leases to utilize as public spaces.
- Develop a formal public art plan.
- Activate existing public space through implementation of complimentary programs and opportunities such as sidewalk dining, public art, parklets or other placemaking strategies.

Creating a Cultural Corridor

Downtown's biggest opportunity to make a large civic design statement (and to add useable greenspace), is to connect and enhance existing grand lawns of major institutional assets to define the South Carolina Cultural District and increase human-scale connectivity between campuses. This corridor would provide a pedestrian-centered outdoor space that links many of Downtown Florence's key assets. Achieving this vision will require the cooperation of existing institutional property owners, a redesign of existing surface parking, the replacement of non-historical and non-institutional buildings, and a unified landscape design. Mid-block connections, public art and places to gather should be prioritized.

Completed in phases, a five-year vision would focus on physical improvements to Dargan Street, which should be pulled together by strong design elements. This would start with all overhead lines buried, and a continuous line of landscaping and outdoor amenities. Crosswalk improvements throughout the cultural corridor would ensure safer pedestrian crossings to access destinations throughout the area. In addition to streetscape improvements to lead the pedestrian along Dargan, a meandering trail would traverse the block to provide access to the cultural amenities as well as new features that encourage active and passive use. These features that punctuate the corridor could include sculpture gardens, fountains, small gathering areas, and other amenities that are accessible and provide activities for all community members. A central point of amenities should be located at a key intersection along the corridor to concentrate opportunities for a variety of uses. These features also create an opportunity for formal programming to support existing annual events or host new events.

Looking ahead another five years, a 10-year vision of the Cultural Corridor could include an expansion of streetscaping, while focusing on incorporating amenities along the pathway. In this case, the City could close a segment the street, likely a side street, to create a main square featuring a strong focal-point design element. The closure of this segment would create a safer environment for pedestrians to traverse during programmed events as well as leisure use. New development could include a parking garage with commercial or mixed-use buildings along the street, and a drop-off point for access to the Cultural Corridor.

Designed and programmed well, this Cultural Corridor could give Downtown Florence its elusive anchor attraction, while further driving the market for Downtown living. It would also help reinforce Dargan as Downtown’s Cultural District. Governance and control over this space, as well as maintenance responsibilities will ultimately require much dialogue and cooperation among respective property owners and the City.



Pocket Parks and Greening Connections

Elsewhere, the City should encourage more, small plaza-like spaces Downtown where/when the opportunity presents and where they will be actively used and stewarded by adjacent land uses.

Finally, the City should further enhance Downtown's walkability by extending streetscaping along the entire lengths of its principal pedestrian routes (Dargan, Evans, and Cheves), and connect-up peripheral public spaces and attractions (Timrod Park, Cemetery, City Center Farmers Market, and the Barnes Street Activity Center and Pearl Moore Basketball Center) with signage, pavement striping, and other design treatments.



Gateways and Wayfinding

As residents and visitors approach Downtown, gateways should visually and physically indicate that someone is entering a unique part of Florence. Applying a variety of strategies and design elements, such as signage, lighting, curb cuts, and unique paving treatments can contribute to creating gateways that welcome people into Downtown Florence.

Goals and Action Items: Gateways and Wayfinding

- Establish a palette of design elements for primary and secondary gateways, as well as key approach intersections outside of Downtown, including signage, landscaping, paving, and lighting.
- Consider unique design elements for under-rail gateways.
- Reduce the amount of existing signage along key corridors and instead, utilize branded Downtown wayfinding signage.
- Continue to work with regional and federal transit agencies, including CSX.

Primary Gateways

Key entry points into Downtown act as primary gateways. As shown on Figure 5, *Connectivity*, two key intersections – Lucas and Irby, and Cherokee and Irby – act as primary gateways into Downtown. These large intersections direct people as they turn onto Irby Street, a major north-south corridor through Downtown. In order to create a visually branded experience for those while entering Downtown Florence, a series of cohesive design elements must be applied at these intersections. Consider using a series of design elements including:

- Signage palette that offers unique branding for Downtown and also provides wayfinding to key destinations Downtown;
- Landscaping at the intersection and within the streetscape design that is visually identifiable (note that landscaping may also be designed to accommodate signage depending on the sign type selected)
- Lighting that illuminates the intersection, signage, and landscaping; and
- Paving and curb treatment unique to the primary gateway that may also act as a speed reduction method as people enter Downtown.

In addition to applying a palette of design elements to primary gateways located at the Downtown boundary, special attention should be given to approaches into Downtown, such as the “split” east of Downtown at Palmetto/Cheves, an intersection that many visitors driving into town or coming in from the airport pass through. A similar design palette of signage, landscaping, and lighting should be applied here to guide visitors to Downtown Florence.



Secondary Gateways

Compared to primary gateways, secondary gateways occur much more frequently as entrances into Downtown from secondary corridors. These gateways are located at railroad intersections and key vehicular routes through town along Evans, Cheves, and Palmetto, and are also present at smaller intersections entering Downtown from the north at Lucas and Coit/Dargan. Coit Street especially provides an important pedestrian connection to downtown, and opportunity to improve the block. Secondary gateways should establish a palette of design elements that are similar, but more muted than, those of primary gateways.

Unique opportunities exist for secondary gateways along the eastern edge of Downtown with the railroad underpass intersections. Signage and lighting are of particular interest at these intersections and could create unique branding for people entering Downtown from the medical campus, the airport, or outside of Florence.

Wayfinding

Once visitors enter Downtown, wayfinding and signage should be located throughout the area to direct them to key destinations. These signs should be designed to be unique to Downtown. While the City has installed some of these signs already, as seen on the left, there are additional opportunities to expand their use by locating them near key intersections and by consolidating existing signage, especially along key corridors like Palmetto Street, so that the focus remains on the branded Downtown signs.

Housing

The next 10 years of FDDC/City work must be focused on establishing a true 18-hour Downtown. The City has made tremendous strides in both restoring its historic buildings and bringing activity and quality tenants back downtown; positioning Downtown as an eds and meds hub and making significant public investments in things like the Food Artisan and Warehouse District, the recreation complex, structured parking and major street reconstruction. But in order to create a Downtown that supports activity for 18 hours, rather than just business hours, housing must become a main focus for new development. Offering a range of housing types and price points will be key to ensuring equitable housing investment and home ownership, and attracting new residents Downtown.

On the soft infrastructure side, the City and FDDC have greatly elevated events programming and resident/visitor engagement and have also implemented a wide range of economic incentives and small business development tools. These lead investments have sparked new energy Downtown and have sent strong signals to the private market. While Downtown is far livelier than it used to be because of these efforts, it will need many more people living there long-term to become a fully activated, retail-sustaining 18-hour city. As previously discussed, creating an 18-hour city emphasizes the need for residential, retail and restaurant uses Downtown, but should also include adequate lighting, safety, security and should consider noise impacts. This also includes hosting an appropriate number of events downtown, meaning that the existing event schedule should be maintained and evaluated annually.

Goals and Action Items: Housing

- Establish more housing Downtown – approximately 1,000 additional residential units by 2030– that includes quality affordable housing, missing middle housing types, and a range of price points.
- Identify vacant or underutilized buildings that could be adaptively reused to create housing Downtown.
- Assemble sites for large development projects.
- Recruit and work with developers to build more housing, incentivizing when appropriate through the conditional grant program and existing or modified redevelopment grant programs.
- Identify locations for smaller infill housing projects.
- Extend the existing rehabilitation grant program to cover upper-floor conversions to housing (i.e. a residential upper story fire/life safety upgrade grant – sprinkler/fire separation).
- Review the zoning code to determine appropriate amendments to allow and encourage live-work and adaptive reuse to housing.
- Advocate for more mixed-income (i.e. LIHTC) developments in or near downtown to support a demographically diverse downtown population.



At current count, the core Downtown area has only about 120 housing units – the majority of which are in a single project, the Emerson. Applying the commonly cited five percent rule of thumb (which suggests that five percent of an average city’s population generally resides Downtown), Florence conservatively should be able to support 900 additional housing units (assuming two people per household).



Admittedly, this is a rough guide that does not take into account cultural/regional preferences, regional growth dynamics, or physical (land area) constraints, but can be used as a benchmark. With this target in-mind, the City should establish a goal of adding 1,000 residential units by 2030, completed in phases. As the housing market grows, affordable units must be a part of the growth, requiring a set percentage of affordable units for new developments. Working with The Housing Authority of Florence to determine the appropriate required percentage and potential incentives will set clear expectations for bringing new quality affordable units to new Downtown housing developments.



Achieving this goal will involve more than just focusing on more big developments like the Emerson, but also many smaller unit-count projects such as upper-floor conversions within the historic district, adaptive use opportunities for aging office buildings, and myriad small urban-infill projects including townhouses, mixed-use buildings, and cottage court developments, all of which can be seen in the images on this page and the following page. These new units must also cover the entire spectrum of the market from affordable/workforce housing to luxury units and all segments in-between. In order to address the shortage of housing downtown, the City will need to actively work to assemble sites and recruit developers to meet the aggressive goal of 1,000 additional units by 2030.



The City will also have to incentivize many of these projects through its conditional grant program, subsidizing structured parking (for larger projects), and extending its existing rehabilitation grant program to cover upper-floor residential conversions. The City's zoning rules may also need to be revisited to fully allow live-work options and the reconversion of commercially-adapted, former single-family homes, back to residential use.

The most immediate opportunity to add housing is on the thinly developed City Center block bounded by Evans, Coit, McQueen and Cheves. The interior of this block is made up mostly of large, individual surface parking lots (mostly City-owned) whose main users' peak parking needs are temporally opposite of each other. This presents an ideal opportunity for the City to work with adjacent uses and other surface parking users to consolidate parking through shared use agreements and/or providing them nominally free parking in a new City-financed multi-user parking structure. This, in exchange for contributing some or all of their existing surface parking areas to a new housing-focused master infill development project. (Surface lot owners benefit through a combination of freedom from parking lot maintenance, and/or free or discounted covered parking for their patrons.



Economy

Downtown Florence is a regional center of culture and government as well as the coveted economic sectors of education and medical services (“Eds & Meds”). Increasingly, it is also emerging as a center of hospitality, recreation, food and entertainment.

Goals and Action Items: Economy

- Expand and enhance the Downtown small business ecosystem by recommitting to building a “full-stack” business support network.
- Assist small businesses in their web presence and online sales capacity.
- Host special events including speaker series, networking, small business accelerator series, etc.
- Assist startups in landing contracts with Downtown’s largest employers.
- Expand business lending and technical assistance by identifying new partnerships.
- Continue business outreach and retention programs and “second location” recruitment efforts.
- Work with property owners to create a co-working office space to assist local start-ups and be a home for remote telecommuters.
- Work with City Center block property owners on a shared/consolidated parking agreement with the City.
- Work with interested property owners to try to partner them into new development (land equity) if outright land sale is not an option.
- Utilize a collaborative approach to sustain and grow the downtown entrepreneurial ecosystem through an equitable lens to ensure downtown remains an accessible space to launch and grow businesses.

Home to both the FMU incubator and the City’s own shared use kitchen and farmers market facility, together with the various programs available through the City; the Florence Downtown Development Corp (FDDC), and FMU, Downtown is also now clearly positioned as the geographic center of the region’s entrepreneurship ecosystem. Additionally, Downtown’s recent reaccreditation through Main Street America is also testament to the major strides the City has made in rebuilding both the physical and economic environment of Downtown over the past decade.

Going forward, the City and its economic development partnering organizations should continue to expand and enhance the Downtown small business ecosystem by recommitting to building a “full-stack” business support network. FMU currently runs an incubator space, which the City could work with to develop a targeted array of support services. This could include small business support services such as: legal, accounting, marketing, web, mentoring and a host of non-traditional lending products. A special focus should be on building businesses’ web presence and online sales capacity.

Additionally, the City and FDDC should continue their existing business outreach and retention programs and “second location” recruitment efforts with an eye to curate a synergistic mix of unique local products and services. The City should also work with property-owners (particularly owners of Class B office buildings) to create additional Downtown co-working space – both as a way to provide step-up space for local start-ups, but also as a basecamp for a new generation of remote telecommuters. Public private partnerships will be crucial to establishing such a space. The City of Florence and FDDC must continue building a sustainable and equitable entrepreneurial ecosystem through previous proven methods.

Partnerships

Florence’s economic development leaders should also look to further expand business lending and technical assistance work by identifying new partnerships with area corporations, banks, foundations and institutions of higher education to increase business financing resources and entrepreneurship training. It is important that many of these resources continue to be geared to the needs of Main Street type businesses and historically disadvantaged entrepreneurs.

Economic development leaders should proactively work to help startups land contracts with some of the largest employers in Florence and specifically Downtown including McLeod, Hope Health, and both the City and County of Florence. While the City may help facilitate bringing the appropriate entities to the table, managing a new business or assortment of businesses will best be left to the private market.

Office

Most Downtowns of a county seat include larger blocks of modern, multi-tenant professional office space. Downtown Florence, however, does not currently include such spaces. Most existing offices are either in older class C buildings constructed in the 1980s or in small single-tenant buildings – including many older conversions of homes to commercial use.

Goals and Action Items: Office

- Obtain market intelligence on expiring leases and potential lessees to assist in future development opportunities for prospective developers.
- Determine an appropriate site for a modern, Class A office building, and assist the developer by utilizing TIF funds, and providing public parking and other public infrastructure.
- Assembly of property through purchase or securing options.

As of this writing 30,000 new square feet of Class A office space is projected to be constructed as part of the new mixed-use development immediately north of the City Center building. Even with this addition to supply (amounting to a single floor of a modern commercial multi-tenant building), it still appears that Downtown may remain underserved with modern Class A office space going forward.

In addition, as noted earlier, Downtown currently only has one small co-working space to help support its growing residential base or to attract increasingly mobile and untethered professional knowledge workers.

Office development also tends to be a lagging market in the modern talent driven, place-based economy. It may take the addition of much more Downtown housing stock (i.e., talent concentration) for the office market to react in-kind.

Long lead times notwithstanding, Florence must not lose complete sight of this issue for fear of losing out on a major office user who may pass on Downtown Florence because of a lack of accommodations available within its preferred expansion/relocation timeframe (note that it generally takes two years or more to deliver a new class A office space to the market, but most relocating companies want to move within one year).

Using proven methods of private/public partnerships, the city must take a leadership role in initiating office development within downtown. As previously accomplished, the city has creatively incentivized and established more secure market exposure with the previous public/private partnerships. The city must take this same unique approach in order to capitalize on the future need.

As shown in Figure 4, the best location for new office development is in the “professional service” node located on the west side of Irby near the intersections of Palmetto and Cheves and immediately to the west.

In the meantime, the City can methodically obtain market intelligence on expiring leases and try to aggregate expressions-of-interest from prospective lessees, and then “package” future development opportunities for prospective developers. Obtaining options on real estate will also provide a chance for the City to assemble opportunities for developers interested in Downtown. While these are long game strategies that will take time and patience, this approach will contribute to an overall strategy to bring new development and amenities to Downtown.

Incentives

The City has had great success with its façade grant, sign grant and its Business Redevelopment and Historic Building grant programs. These, together with the Business License Credit program and FDDC's microenterprise loan program (MELP) and Low Interest Loan programs, have been instrumental in bringing the historic district back from the brink. The City has also made a major leap into Downtown's real estate market by building and managing its first shared-use parking structure, and by gifting land through its Conditional Grant program. Combined, these programs have powerfully accelerated Downtown's transformation.

Goals and Action Items: Incentives

- Work to control and land bank approximately 1.5 to 2 acre contiguous site for a future Class A office or mixed-use development within the Irby-Palmetto/Cheves target area.
- Change façade grant rules to allow for second-round grants depending on funds availability and eligibility.
- Recapitalize a grant fund or competition oriented specifically to non-retail food-production-based businesses.
- Explore a suite of options to add to the current MELP program, considering another soft loan product oriented specifically to real estate gap financing and subject to "but for" analysis.
- In long term planning, add another project coordinator/business outreach position to the City's community development team to assist with new project lead generation and intakes.
- Work with McLeod Regional Medical Center and other Downtown medical institutions on creating an institution-funded walk-to-work grant program for employees (i.e. ~ approximately \$5,000 in exchange for giving up employee parking privileges, and maintaining Downtown residence for a minimum of three years).
- Extend the Upfit grant program to include upper-floor residential conversions: (\$15,000/unit, \$45,000 maximum per project, minimum/maximum 500 to <1500 square feet per unit).
- Consider implementing a \$10,000 per unit general incentive for the delivery of any new Downtown housing unit where average construction costs are at least \$200,000 per unit (e.g. and where the City is not already subsidizing structured parking or providing free or discounted land).
- Explore a community health program in partnership with existing strategic business units and local healthcare entities similar to Beaufort, SC.

As the City and FDDC move into the next phase of Downtown renewal, the addition of new programs and the modification of existing ones, will be needed to continue momentum. Specifically, the one-grant-per-building rule that generally applies to the existing façade program, may need to be revised going forward to facilitate additional phases of redevelopment work as individual situations and resource availability warrant.

Additionally, eligibility for the redevelopment upfit grant program (currently limited to commercial uses only) should be considered to include upper-floor residential rehab/conversions. Alternatively, a separate and perhaps even larger grant or abatement program should be considered specifically for this purpose given the high costs of this work and the criticality of additional housing to Downtown's vibrancy.

Finally, an intermediate incentive program that stretches farther than the \$30,000 cap on redevelopment grants but is far less than the conditional grant threshold of \$500,000 is needed.

One approach may be to offer more low-interest, second deferred "soft" rehab loans. These "patient capital" loans are generally non-amortizing, non-recourse, interest-only loans that get repaid only at resale or at some predetermined future refinance date. They are subordinate to any primary mortgages and the property-owner's original equity, meaning that they are no/low risk to the borrower and are secured only by the appreciated value of the property.

This type of program essentially gives the City a more financially sustainable source of developer financing – akin to a grant in terms of borrower risk and repayment obligation – but allows the City to participate in any future upside. Such soft loans could be anywhere from \$50,000 to \$250,000 depending on funds availability and post-renovation appraisal estimates.

Main Street Approach and Downtown Identity

While detailed corridor design projects, redevelopment opportunities, transportation options, and green space strategies all contribute to Downtown Florence, the ultimate goal of this Plan is to build upon the unique identity of Downtown to create a place for residents and visitors to live, work, play, learn and explore. Momentum is already underway, and the Goals and Actions presented in this Plan build upon the quality work that is already underway. The final Goals and Action items presented below reflect the need for a consistent approach to Downtown projects and programs in order to unite efforts moving forward and to highlight the unique Downtown identity.

Goals and Action Items: Main Street Approach and Downtown Identity

- Establish a unique Downtown organization and destination brand suite reflective of its use of the Main Street Approach™ and its uniqueness to Florence.
- Continue involvement with the National and State Main Street organizations and continue to implement the Main Street approach that highlights Economic Vitality, Design, Promotion and Organization.
- Create a unique design aesthetic for downtown that highlights the historic resources, public art, and branding, through the use of new tools such as incentives and the expansion of tools such as maintenance and appearance codes.
- Continue promotion of downtown to residents, daytime workers, FMU students, and others in order to increase the number of visits and time spent Downtown.
- Continue to support small, local, and minority-owned businesses Downtown, and identify opportunities for new businesses to locate Downtown.
- Ensure that every implementation strategy works toward creating a more equitable, inclusive and diverse Downtown.
- As new housing is built Downtown, continue identifying potential new retail opportunities that could relocate to or open in Downtown to support the 18-hour day.

The City and FDDC should work to establish a unique Downtown brand identity that highlights Florence's rising status as a regional center of culture, education, health and wellness and food and entertainment, while remaining complementary to the City. The brand should evoke the history of Downtown and the Pee Dee region, the Florence food scene, and its outsized cultural offerings for a city of its size. Implementing this Plan will require commitment to the Main Street ideals, and strong and consistent collaboration between elected officials, government entities, local businesses and community partners, all while centering the voice of residents. Ultimately, a successful Downtown Florence will be seen in a place that celebrates diversity, embraces its role in the region, capitalizes on its position as a cultural hub, and offers more opportunities to live, work and play, and to find shared community.

