

City of Huntsville Downtown Master Plan Update

Master Plan and Implementation Strategies

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Prepared for:
**The City of Huntsville
Urban Development Department
Planning Division**



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Executive Summary

Introduction

In 1989, the City of Huntsville adopted a Downtown Master Plan. This Plan identified a study area that extended from Oakwood Avenue on the north to Governor’s Drive on the south, and from Memorial Parkway on the west to California Street and Andrew Jackson Way on the east (See Figure 1). The 1989 Downtown Master Plan primarily focused on recommendations for a subarea of the Study Area identified as the “Downtown Core,” which included Courthouse Square, Big Spring Park, and the rest of the City’s historic center.

In 2001, the City of Huntsville decided to update the Downtown Master Plan, and particularly to address the needs of other subareas of the Study Area. For this project, it was determined to place a particular emphasis on the area identified in 1989 as “Downtown North.” Downtown North is an area that has suffered from significant disinvestment and deterioration over the past several decades. The Downtown Master Plan Update was designed to develop strategies for comprehensively revitalizing this area. To do so, the Plan Update develops a framework of social programs, economic opportunities, redevelopment strategies and land use regulations. The goal of the Downtown North portion of this Master Plan Update is to provide the full range of tools that will be necessary for this neighborhood to become a vibrant, healthy place for people to live, work and find recreation.

The Downtown Master Plan Update was also expected to supplement the 1989 recommendations for the Downtown Core subarea. The Downtown Fringe was later added to this set of recommendations. This portion of the Plan Update was expected to provide strategies to capitalize on the City’s ongoing transportation and development plans and to ensure that the improvements constructed as a result of the 1989 recommendations become the centerpiece of a lively, multi-faceted downtown that is a regional center of entertainment, culture and commerce.

Perhaps most importantly, the Downtown Master Plan Update was expected to provide concrete, specific, implementable strategies for putting the Plan’s recommendations in place. In order to meet this wide range of goals and address the needs of the several distinct environments, the 2005 Downtown Master Plan Update consists of four separate sections: the Master Plan, Implementation Strategies, Opportunity Sites, and Downtown Liveliness Strategies.

1. Master Plan

The *Master Plan* articulates the primary objectives for the Study Area, particularly the three subareas that were the primary focus of this project: the Downtown North Subarea and the Downtown Core and Downtown Fringe subareas (see Figure 1). The *Master Plan* contains two sections that provide the basis for all of the items that follow. The first section of the Master Plan articulates the overarching Vision and Goals for the Study Area and for the Downtown

North and Downtown Core and Downtown Fringe subareas that were developed by the Plan's Steering Committee, which included Huntsville residents, business owners, leaders of organizations and city institutions.

The second section of the *Master Plan* breaks the Downtown North and the Downtown Core/Fringe subareas into a series of Policy Areas. The Master Plan text identifies a specific set of strategies for meeting the Vision in this Policy area. These include Implementation Strategies (items that are relevant to more than one Policy Area discussed below) and specific Policy Area Actions that are appropriate only to this location.

The Policy Areas are categorized as Preservation, Revitalization or Redevelopment Areas, depending on the major Strategy that will be taken in these areas. In Preservation Policy Areas, the vision and strategies are designed to reinforce existing land use and activities. The majority of buildings in these Policy Areas are historically significant and/or functionally sound, and their current uses will continue. Preservation Policy Areas do not necessarily have historic significance according to formal standards, but Preservation Policy Areas are characterized by a predominance of buildings and uses that will continue. In Revitalization Policy Areas, the vision and strategies are designed to facilitate the process of economic and land use change while protecting certain elements of the area's character. Revitalization may mean that the area's land use remains the same while the properties are redeveloped, or it may mean that the buildings and land features are preserved while their uses change. In Redevelopment Policy Areas, both buildings and land uses will be replaced with new activity. In these locations, current land uses, land use patterns and physical buildings are such that new development will be necessary to allow them to reach their potential.

The Master Plan for Downtown North divides the area into 10 Policy Areas:

1. The Lincoln Mill Village;
2. Meridian Street Neighborhood Commercial Corridor;
3. The Grove Street Neighborhood;
4. The Abingdon Live/Work Redevelopment Area;
5. The Lincoln Park Redevelopment Area;
6. The Memorial/University Commercial Corridor;
7. The Washington/Pratt Redevelopment Area
8. The Church Street Redevelopment Area;
9. The Dallas Bypass; and
10. The Justice Center.

The Master Plan for Downtown Core and Fringe also divides the area into 8 Policy Areas:

1. The City Center;
2. The Destination Entertainment/Culture Policy Area;
3. The Lowe Avenue Impact Area;
4. The Lower Core;

5. The Office Center;
6. The Downtown Support Area;
7. The Meridian Street Small Business Center; and
8. Visitor/Tourism Gateway.

Tables 1 and 2 provide a summary of the Major Strategies for the Policy Areas.

2. Implementation Strategies

The Implementation Strategies were designed to recommend specific, concrete strategies that can be used throughout the Study Area to bring the Master Plan to reality. The *Implementation Strategies* address issues relating to land use, historic preservation policy, streetscape and infrastructure improvements, and other issues that are relevant to several Policy Areas. Although many of the strategies identified below will be the responsibility of City agencies, including the Division of Planning, the Department of Community Development, the Parking Authority and others, reaching the goals that have been identified will require the support, involvement and initiative of a wide variety of participants in Huntsville's civic life.

The Implementation Strategies are as follows:

Strategy 1: Revise Land Use Regulations

- 1.1 Develop revised C3 and Planned Development (PD) zoning classifications that can be used more effectively to create a high-quality built environment that implements the policies and visions of this Plan.
- 1.2 Develop new zoning districts that permit appropriate uses to implement the policies and vision of this plan.
- 1.3. Rezone Study Area Properties
- 1.4 Develop a Design Review Overlay Zone to be applied to targeted corridors and economic development locations.

Strategy 2: Improve Infrastructure

- 2.1 Conduct inventory of infrastructure in Preservation and Revitalization Policy Areas and develop prioritized list of infrastructure improvements to be programmed into the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP).
- 2.2. Improve east-west connectivity through Downtown North whenever possible.
- 2.3 Improve linkages across Interstate 565 and between Policy Areas.

Strategy 3: Preserve Community Character

- 3.1 Designate eligible Policy Areas and subareas as local Historic Districts or Conservation Overlay Districts.
- 3.2 Avoid demolitions and facilitate rehabilitation of condemned buildings.
- 3.3 Construct Gateway Elements at Appropriate locations

Strategy 4: Improve residential property maintenance

- 4.1 Establish or extend a Community Development Corporation (CDC) to spearhead property improvement initiatives.
- 4.2 Expand existing property maintenance programs to Downtown North

Strategy 5: Increase homeownership

- 5.1 Develop homeownership education programs.
- 5.2 Raise local awareness of alternative mortgage products and home purchase assistance that is available via HUD, Fannie Mae and others state and federal agencies.

Strategy 6: Eliminate vacant lots

- 6.1 Clean and landscape existing vacant lots.
- 6.2 Coordinate with local Habitat for Humanity to target the Preservation and Revitalization Policy Areas for new housing construction.
- 6.3 Develop homestead construction incentives.

Strategy 7: Pursue the development of an artists relocation program, if necessary, to catalyze reinvestment

- 7.1 Reevaluate the artists' relocation program when the strategies identified previously have been effect for three to five years.

Strategy 8: Make Downtown Huntsville Visually Enjoyable and User-Friendly

- 8.1 Develop and implement a comprehensive system of Wayfinding to maximize use of Downtown Huntsville's assets and resources.
- 8.2 Construct the remainder of the Streetscape as developed in the 1993 *Downtown Streetscape Vision* with recommended alterations.

3. Opportunity Sites

As one of the elements of the Downtown Master Plan Update, this section presents eight Opportunity Sites within the Downtown Study Area. Opportunity Sites are specific locations within the Policy Areas, as identified in the Master Plan. These are locations where redevelopment is feasible and desired, but where site-specific issues present extraordinary challenges to redevelopment. Opportunity Sites are larger than a typical city parcel, include more than one potential building site, and identify an area that must be treated as a cohesive development site to address the site constraints.

4. Downtown Liveliness Strategies

The final section of the Master Plan Update develops an action plan for a strong and vibrant population of downtown residents, business establishments and entertainment venues. Although land use regulations, physical design enhancements and major new developments will have a significant impact on Downtown Huntsville, these activities alone will not create the environment identified in the Vision and Goals, which are outlined in the *Master Plan*. As Huntsville has learned in the years following its remarkably extensive implementation of the 1989 Downtown Master Plan, building physically attractive environments does not guarantee that people will use those environments, and it does not guarantee that those attractions will generate vibrant urban activity. This section recommends a series of strategies designed to bring people and activity to the Downtown area.

The experience of successful downtowns across the United States makes it clear that successful downtowns have the following characteristics:

1. Successful downtowns have a strong private organization whose sole purpose is comprehensively revitalizing their downtown.
2. Successful downtowns value their historic buildings and places and treat those as their prime assets.
3. Successful downtowns have residents.
4. Successful downtowns have a mix of retail, office, and entertainment businesses.
5. Successful downtowns actively promote themselves.
6. Successful downtowns pay attention to details.
7. Successful downtowns manage their cars.

8. Successful downtowns have people who want to walk.
9. Successful downtowns are in communities where people care about downtown.

The recommendations in this section are designed to bring these success factors to Huntsville.

Conclusion

Taken together, these four elements of the *Downtown Master Plan Update* provide a comprehensive, detailed, implementation-oriented strategy for moving Huntsville's urban core into its future.

Unlike many plans, this document is not intended only for use by City staff. Making Downtown North and the Downtown Core/Fringe into essential, vibrant, lively dimensions of Huntsville's urban core will require commitment from City agencies, business and institutional citizens, and private residents as well. By using the tools in this Plan to work toward the Downtown Master Plan Update's Vision, Huntsvillians will discover what cities across the United States have found: the economic, social and cultural benefits of a vibrant urban core.

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Introduction

In 1989, the City of Huntsville adopted a Downtown Master Plan. This Plan identified a study area that extended from Oakwood Avenue on the north to Governor's Drive on the South, and from Memorial Parkway on the west to California Street and Andrew Jackson Way on the east. This Plan also identified six subareas within that Study Area that included both the traditional central business district and surrounding neighborhoods.

The 1989 Downtown Master Plan primarily focused on recommendations for what was termed the "Downtown Core". This subarea included Huntsville's traditional central business district, including the Courthouse Square, Big Spring Park, and traditional office and commercial buildings. Like most conventional Master Plans, that plan focused on a series of specific physical improvements, including enhancements to Big Spring Park and what is now Big Spring Park East; new developments, such as the Huntsville Museum of Art; and improvements to the downtown streetscape, among many others. An exceptionally large number of the ideas proposed in the Downtown Master Plan were constructed, which testifies to Huntsville's commitment to revitalizing its urban core.

In 2000, the City of Huntsville determined that it was time to update the Downtown Master Plan, and particularly to address the needs of other subareas of the Study Area. For this project, it was determined to place a particular emphasis on the area identified in 1989 as "Downtown North." Downtown North is the portion of Huntsville between Interstate 565 and Oakwood Avenue, an area that has suffered from significant disinvestment and deterioration over the past several decades. Downtown North is also slated for significant public reinvestment as a result of the future realignment of Church Street. The Downtown Master Plan Update was designed to develop strategies for comprehensively revitalizing this area. To do so, the Plan Update develops a framework of social programs, economic opportunities, redevelopment strategies and land use regulations. The goal of the Downtown North portion of this Master Plan Update is to provide the full range of tools that will be necessary for this neighborhood to become a vibrant, healthy place for people to live, work and find recreation.

The Downtown Master Plan Update was also expected to supplement the 1989 Plan's downtown recommendations. This portion of the Plan Update was expected to provide strategies designed to capitalize on the City's ongoing transportation and development plans and to ensure that the improvements constructed as a result of the 1989 recommendations become the centerpiece of a lively, multi-faceted downtown that is a regional center of entertainment, culture and commerce. Finally, the Plan Update was expected to evaluate the impacts of existing plans on the remaining subareas within the Policy Area, including the Dallas Mill Neighborhood, the Medical District and the Twickenham and Old Town neighborhoods.

Perhaps most importantly, the Downtown Master Plan Update was expected to provide concrete, specific, implementable strategies for putting the Plan's recommendations in place. As was noted throughout the project, a plan that outlines grand ideas but fails to provide the tools to bring those ideas to reality would be of little use for Huntsville.

In order to meet this wide range of goals and address the needs of the several distinct environments, the 2005 Downtown Master Plan Update consists of four separate sections:

- *The Master Plan.* The *Master Plan* contains two sections that provide the basis for all of the items that follow. The first section of the Master Plan articulates the overarching Vision for the Study Area, including the Downtown North, Downtown Core, and Downtown Fringe subareas. This Vision and Goals was developed by the Plan's Steering Committee, which included Huntsville residents, business owners, leaders of organizations and city institutions.

The second section of the *Master Plan* breaks the Downtown North and the Downtown Core/Fringe subareas into a series of Policy Areas, which are smaller areas that have unique physical characteristics and issues. The *Master Plan* describes each Policy Area, outlines a Vision that is derived from the Plan's Vision, and identifies strategies for helping the Policy Area meet that vision. The Master Plan text identifies which Implementations Strategies (discussed below) are needed in each Policy Area, and also provides specific Policy Area Actions that are appropriate only to this location.

- *Implementation Strategies.* As the name implies, the Implementation Strategies were designed to recommend specific, concrete strategies for bringing the Master Plan to reality. The Implementation Strategies include those items that are relevant to more than one Policy Area. The *Implementation Strategies* include issues relating to land use, historic preservation policy, streetscape and infrastructure improvements, and other issues that are relevant to several Policy Areas.
- *Opportunity Sites.* Opportunity Sites are physical concept site plans that graphically demonstrate the recommendations of the *Master Plan* and *Implementation Strategies* sections on a more detailed level. This section provides eight conceptual site plans for specific locations in the Study Area, and demonstrates how building siting, urban design, transportation systems and other factors can be constructed in a manner that reinforces the Vision.
- *Downtown Liveliness Strategies.* This section addresses the organizations and activities that will be necessary to ensure that people view Huntsville's central business district as a great place to live, work, shop and be entertained.

Taken together, these four elements of the *Downtown Master Plan Update* provide a comprehensive, detailed, implementation-oriented strategy for moving Huntsville's urban core into its future.

Unlike many plans, this document is not intended only for City staff. Making Downtown North and the Downtown Core/Fringe into essential, vibrant, lively dimensions of Huntsville's urban core will require commitment from City agencies, business and institutional citizens, and private residents as well. By using the tools in this Plan to work toward the Downtown Master Plan Update's Vision, Huntsvillians will discover what cities across the United States have found: the economic, social and cultural benefits of a vibrant urban core.

Master Plan

Introduction

This portion of the Downtown Master Plan Update presents the primary policies and objectives that will set the direction for Downtown Huntsville during the next ten years. Master Plans are by their nature broad statements of general goals, directions and overarching principles. A clear understanding of the *Master Plan* is essential to understanding and evaluating the plan's *Implementation Strategies*, since these strategies are specifically designed to carry out the goals of the *Master Plan*.

The *Master Plan* articulates the primary objectives for the Downtown area, particularly the three subareas that were the primary focus of this project: the Downtown North Subarea and the Downtown Core and Downtown Fringe subareas (see Figure 1). Although this Study Area contains several other subareas, notably the Dallas neighborhood, Old Town, Twickenham and the Medical District, this Master Plan Update was intentionally directed to place primary emphasis on the Downtown North and Downtown Core subareas. The *Master Plan* and *Implementation Strategies* include general recommendations for the other subareas, but this Plan Update is primarily designed to address the Downtown North and Downtown Core/Fringe areas.

The Master Plan is rooted in the Vision and Goals, which were developed by a citizen Steering Committee in partnership with City staff and the public. The Master Plan Update used public feedback and structured visioning sessions with the Steering Committee and the Division of Planning staff to identify and articulate the characteristics that the participants wanted to see in Downtown Huntsville at the end of this Plan's 10-year window. This statement of Vision and Goals is the first element of the Master Plan, since it sets the direction for each element that follows.

The Master Plan divides the Downtown North, Downtown Core and Downtown Fringe areas into a series of Policy Areas. Policy Areas are smaller portions of the Study Area that exhibit similar characteristics, issues and needs. Each Policy Area has the potential to fulfill an aspect of the Vision and Goals, and each Policy Area has its own vision that reinforces the overall Vision and Goals. Building stock, land use patterns, physical barriers and reinvestment opportunities differentiate one Policy Area from another. Although many of the Policy Areas share common characteristics, such as flood plain impact or existing land use conflicts, identifying Policy Areas allows planners to understand the relationships between areas and mold implementation strategies specifically to the needs of that location.

Two other symbols will be noted on Figures 2 and 3: Key Development Locations and Linkage Opportunities. Key Development Locations are sites where redevelopment is particularly needed in order to stimulate revitalization of the subarea as a whole. The nature and scope of the redevelopment in these locations must be carefully monitored to ensure that the development has the desired effects. Some of the Key Development Locations are also identified as Opportunity Sites. Redevelopment of the Key Development Locations that are not identified as Opportunity

Sites is also important, but these sites generally do not have the site constraints associated with Opportunity Sites (See the *Opportunity Sites* section of this Plan Update for an explanation of the criteria for selecting Opportunity Sites).

Linkage Opportunities represent existing or potential travelways that are particularly crucial to the Policy Areas. These linkages include existing and proposed roadways, pedestrianways or pedestrian enhancements. The Downtown Core Policy Area Map also identifies Pedestrian/Vehicular Conflict Points within one series of Linkage Opportunities. For these Linkage Opportunities to be effective, these conflict points must be addressed.

Structure of the Master Plan

Each of the following sections summarizes the Master Plan for the Policy Area in question. There are four elements:

- **Existing Conditions.** This narrative summarizes the key facts relating to each Policy Area, including roadway systems, land use patterns and built environment characteristics. Much of the data used in this section was developed in the first stages of the Plan and is compiled in the *Findings Report*. The *Findings Report* is available as a separate document.
- **Major Strategy.** Each Policy Area is categorized in terms of one of three overarching strategies: Preservation, Revitalization or Redevelopment.
 - o In **Preservation** Policy Areas, the vision and strategies are designed to reinforce existing land use and activities. The majority of buildings in the Policy Area are considered historically significant and/or functionally sound, and their current uses will continue. Preservation Policy Areas do not necessarily have historic significance according to formal standards, although some do, but Preservation Policy Areas are characterized by a predominance of buildings and uses that must continue.
 - o In **Revitalization** Policy Areas, the vision and strategies are designed to facilitate the process of economic and land use change while protecting certain elements of the area's character. Revitalization may mean that the area's land use remains the same while the properties are redeveloped, or it may mean that the buildings and land features are preserved while their uses change.
 - o In **Redevelopment** Policy Areas, both buildings and land uses will be replaced with new activity. In these locations, current land uses, land use patterns and physical buildings are such that new development will be necessary to allow them to reach their potential.

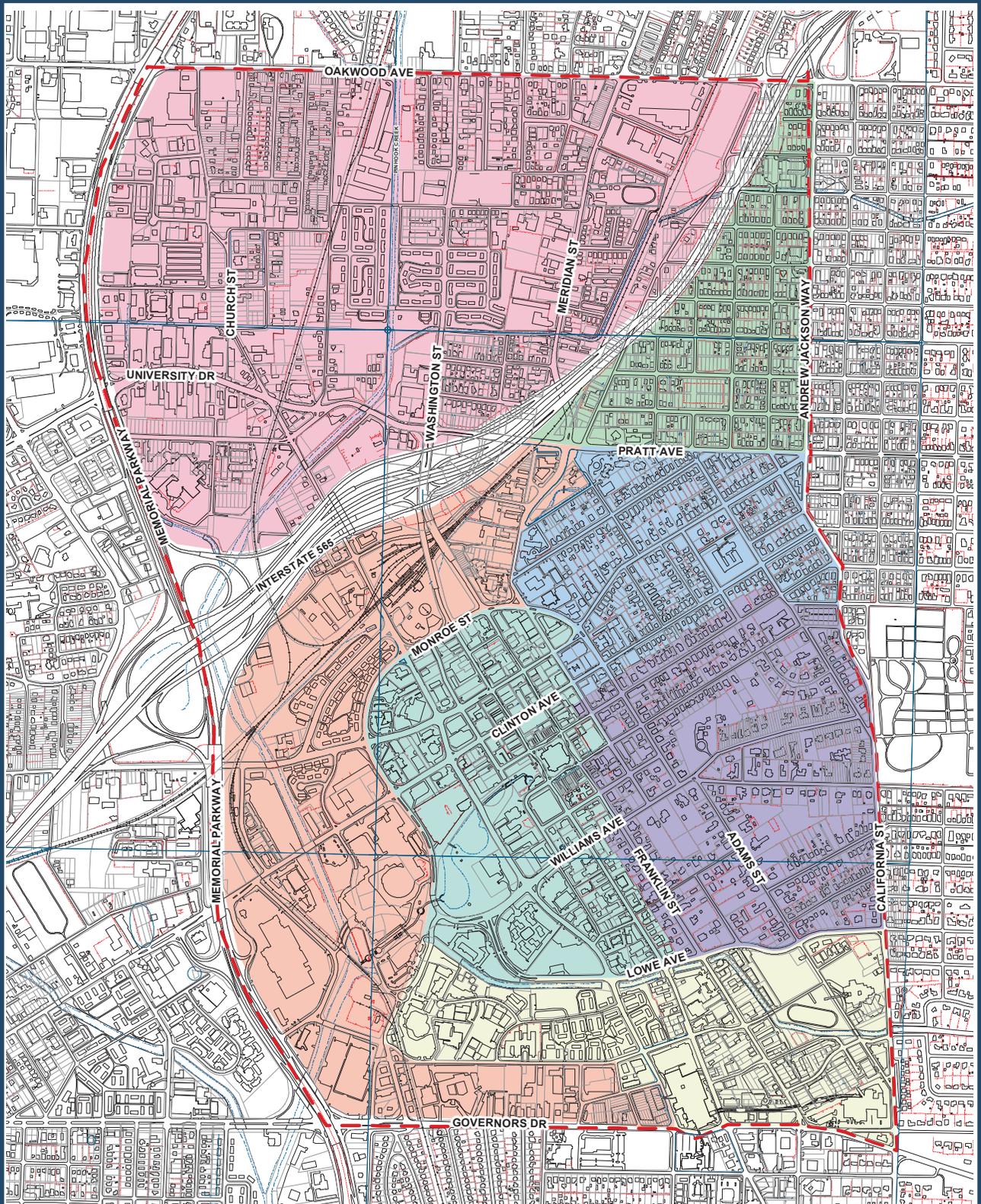
- **Vision.** This statement demonstrates the manner in which this Policy Area can most effectively participate in reaching the Downtown Master Plan Update’s Vision and Goals.

The Vision statement for each Policy Area provides a generalized understanding of the Plan’s direction with regard to this Policy Area.

- **Actions.** The Actions sections of the Master Plan identify the actions that must occur for the Policy Area to meet its Vision and Goals. Each Policy Area has two sets of Actions:
 - o **Implementation Strategies** are needed in more than one Policy Area and discussing them fully within the *Master Plan* would impair the reader’s ability to follow the Plan. Implementation Strategies are addressed in a separate section of this Master Plan Update. Within this *Master Plan*, each of the Implementation Strategies that is relevant to this Policy Area is summarized, with particular emphasis placed on how this Implementation Strategy will impact this Policy Area. The numbers at the beginning of the Implementation Strategy statements (for example, 1.2 or 3.3) reference the section of the *Implementation Strategies* document that addresses this issue.
 - o **Policy Area Actions** are specific to the Policy Area. These are numbered sequentially within each Policy Area.

Finally, this *Master Plan* includes two tables. Table 1 identifies the Preservation, Revitalization and Redevelopment Policy Areas for Downtown North. Table 2 provides the same information for the Downtown Core/Fringe Policy Areas.

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Legend

- Dallas Mills District
- Downtown Core
- Downtown Fringe
- Downtown North
- Medical District
- Old Town District
- Twickenham District
- Study Area



Downtown Master Plan Update

Huntsville, Alabama

Figure 1
Study Area Subareas

October 17, 2005



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The Vision for Downtown Huntsville

For the purposes of this Vision and the *Downtown Master Plan Update*, “Downtown Huntsville” is defined as including the entire Study Area that was developed during the process of the 1989 *Downtown Master Plan*. See Figure 1 for the boundaries of the Study Area.

Downtown Huntsville extends beyond the traditional Central Business District to include a wider and more diverse area that captures the historic urban core of the city. Downtown Huntsville stretches from Oakwood Avenue at the north to Governor’s Drive on the south, and from Memorial Parkway on the west to California Street and Andrew Jackson Way on the east. As a result, Downtown Huntsville includes a wide range of Huntsvillians, including residents, employees and business operators in several neighborhoods. All of Downtown Huntsville’s neighborhoods play essential roles in the health, vitality and economic importance of the city.

Downtown Huntsville will be a unique, vibrant and lively area that will take its place as the heart of Huntsville. Downtown Huntsville will provide a broad array of opportunities for living, working, and being entertained.

Downtown Huntsville will value its history and the sense of roots and community pride that its historic places create. Downtown Huntsville will capitalize on the economic opportunities created by historic buildings and Downtown Huntsville’s unique role in the City’s identity.

Downtown Huntsville will be a physically attractive place. Downtown Huntsville will be known for its beautiful, integrated landscapes and buildings, whether large or small. Downtown Huntsville will be clean and well maintained, and will have a level of infrastructure and maintenance appropriate to its importance to the City. Downtown Huntsville’s infrastructure will be designed to support future growth as well as current needs. Water resources will be managed to reduce flooding risks and to create opportunities for recreation, enjoyment of nature and multi-modal transportation. Zoning codes and building codes and their enforcement will support Downtown Huntsville’s variety of resources.

Downtown Huntsville will be populated by a diverse and lively cross-section of people, both residents and visitors. Education will be supported and valued, and the Huntsville public schools will be known for a level of excellence that will help attract downtown residents. Residents of the area will find it easy to travel on foot and will find that Downtown Huntsville provides activities for all ages. Downtown Huntsville will benefit from the great talents of its residents, workers and businesses, who will find themselves emotionally and economically invested in the community.

Finally, Downtown Huntsville will be regarded as a place of opportunity. Downtown Huntsville will be fully supported by City elected officials and agencies. The public, private and non-profit sectors will work in partnership to strengthen Downtown Huntsville, capitalize on its economic growth potential, safeguard its historic resources, and improve the standard of living of those who live in Downtown Huntsville. These partners will make the policy and financial commitments necessary to realize this vision.

Goals for Downtown Huntsville

1. *Identity that supports the Vision*
 - o Establish broad-based understanding of Downtown Huntsville as a single unit with distinct subareas.
 - o Establish identity of subareas based on existing and desired characteristics.

2. *Activity that Supports the Vision*
 - o Create or reinforce a variety of living and working opportunities as appropriate to each subarea.
 - o Use planning, regulatory and programming strategies to foster and reinforce desired characteristics, including physical, social and economic dimensions.
 - o Use design, regulation, economic strategies and programming strategies to foster new economic activity and support existing economic activity as appropriate to each subarea.
 - o Identify opportunities for significant new development and identify redevelopment strategies appropriate to site and surrounding area.

3. *Buildings and Infrastructure that support the Vision*
 - o Improve Downtown Huntsville infrastructure as necessary, including drainage, roadways and other systems
 - o Foster maintenance renovation and restoration of all appropriate Downtown buildings
 - o Create or reinforce distinctive visual identity for subareas.

4. *Transportation and Linkages that Support the Vision*
 - o Build upon existing roadways, bikeways and other corridors to create a fully integrated, multi-modal system of transportation between activity centers in Downtown
 - o Build upon existing roadways, bikeways and other corridors to create a fully integrated, multi-modal system of transportation between subareas of the Downtown
 - o Build upon existing roadways, bikeways and other corridors to create a fully integrated, multi-modal system of transportation between Downtown and other areas of Greater Huntsville.

5. *Positive Perception and Strong Support for Vision*
 - o Build public and private sector understanding for Downtown Vision
 - o Strengthen public and private sector support for Vision, including time and resources
 - o Strengthen market understanding of Downtown opportunities
 - o Build strong partnerships between public and private-sector organizations in support of Downtown Vision

The Vision for Downtown North

Downtown North will be distinguished from other portions of Downtown Huntsville by its village atmosphere. Houses, streets and sidewalks will be clean and well-maintained. The community will be safe and close-knit, and its residents will benefit from quality education, parks and playgrounds. Downtown North's environment will be comfortable and inviting for pedestrians. Downtown North will provide affordable homeownership opportunities for a wide range of Huntsvillians, and residential areas will benefit from being near each other and protected from incompatible businesses.

Downtown North will provide a wide range of employment and entrepreneurship opportunities, both for Downtown North residents and for other Huntsvillians. Service businesses will be readily available for local residents, and the area will continue to provide opportunities in appropriate locations for businesses that serve larger areas. Residential and business environments will be situated in a manner that compliments and supports each other's efforts. Residents will be able to find employment and entrepreneurship opportunities nearby, and will be able to walk or use other modes of transit to reach nearby employment. Businesses will be able to draw upon a strong local employment base and a supportive environment for small business operation and entrepreneurship. Business operators will also be free from concerns over conflicts with non-business neighbors.

Downtown North residents and employees will be able to travel throughout Downtown Huntsville with ease via several transportation modes, including public transit, walking, biking and driving. Physical barriers that might separate areas within Downtown North will be overcome, and barriers between Downtown North and other areas of Huntsville will be bridged. Downtown Huntsville's transportation network will bring people in and out of Downtown North, rather than simply shuttling them through the neighborhood.

Goals for Downtown North

1. *Land Use that supports the Vision.*
 - o Identify subareas that are characterized by distinctive combinations of living, working and playing opportunities, and distinctive physical characteristics.
 - o Create system of zoning and other regulatory tools to support desired character for subareas.
 - o Use building code and enforcement to support desired character for subareas
 - o Create open space and recreation opportunities for subareas where residences are encouraged.
 - o Create system of zoning and other regulatory tools that mitigate potentially harmful relationships between conflicting land uses.

2. *Housing Stock that Supports the Vision*
 - o Foster homeownership through purchase and maintenance incentives and support.
 - o Improve housing stock maintenance and appearance.
 - o Strengthen efforts to provide affordable housing, both ownership and rental.
 - o Ensure awareness of home improvement incentives and opportunities.
 - o Pursue opportunities to improve public housing.

3. *Business and Entrepreneurship Opportunities that Support the Vision*
 - o Create strategies to encourage and support businesses that serve local needs and/or provide local employment.
 - o Create strategies to appropriately encourage and support businesses that are located in Downtown North, but draw their employment and income from other areas.
 - o Identify and develop strategy for recruiting new businesses and creating entrepreneurship opportunities.
 - o Develop strategies and incentives for supporting businesses that are adversely impacted by changes in land use regulations but can support the Vision.
 - o Develop strategies and incentives for relocating businesses that are incompatible with Vision.
 - o Create strategies for supporting investment in real estate and business development.

4. *Transportation and Infrastructure that Support the Vision*
 - o Functionally and visually improve non-automotive transportation opportunities, including public transit, walking, bicycling, etc.
 - o Improve function and appearance of roads, roadway systems and other infrastructure to a level comparable with other portions of the City.
 - o Create strong linkages between activity centers in Downtown North, between Downtown North and the Downtown Core, and between Downtown North and the rest of the City.

5. *Positive Perception and Strong Support for Vision*
 - o Inform market of opportunities in Downtown North.
 - o Foster community involvement in revitalization efforts.
 - o Develop support for Downtown North objectives within City and other centers of power.
 - o Strengthen and improve perception of Downtown North public schools.

The Vision for the Downtown Core

Huntsville's Downtown Core will be an aesthetically appealing, economically and socially vibrant environment.

The Downtown Core will contain a mixture of uses that will foster around the clock vitality and economic viability. The Downtown Core will have a permanent residential population that, along with visitors from across the region, will benefit from a wide range of economic activity, including retail, entertainment conventions, and civic center and arena events. Older buildings will be renovated to support mixed uses. Younger adults will be attracted to the Downtown Core by its wealth of entertainment, employment and housing opportunities. The Core and Medical District will develop a strong synergy that will strengthen the area's role as a major economic engine.

The Downtown Core's buildings and public spaces will be clean, well maintained, well landscaped, and present a very high level appearance. The motif of flowing water will be a key element. The Riverwalk will be an essential portion of the Core's aesthetic appeal. Pedestrian activity will be comfortable and safe, and moving vehicles will not interfere with pedestrian movement. Parking will be coordinated to support pedestrian activity, and the entire Downtown Core environment will encourage people to enjoy its public spaces, creating a lively environment.

Movement between Downtown Core sites, and between the Downtown Core and other areas, will be easy and available via a variety of options. Travelers will know that they have reached the Downtown Core because the area will be visually defined and the sense of arrival will be unmistakable.

Goals for the Downtown Core

1. *A Lively and Active Urban Environment that Supports the Vision*
 - o Identify needs and strategies necessary to encourage downtown residential development
 - o Identify potential for retail development and develop strategies for recruiting and supporting retail development
 - o Identify potential for entertainment development and develop strategies for recruiting and supporting entertainment development
 - o Identify strategies for encouraging young adults to live and seek entertainment in downtown
 - o Support development of new convention and visitors-oriented developments, including hotel, civic center/arena, and other appropriate projects.
 - o Identify and develop strategies for enhancing Downtown Core's attraction to tourists.

- o Improve awareness of Downtown Core’s historic resources and historic buildings’ potential for reuse.
 - o Identify impediments to reuse of existing buildings and develop strategies to overcome these impediments.
 - o Identify sites that present significant redevelopment opportunities and develop strategies for ensuring their successful reuse.
 - o Create strategies for supporting investment in real estate and business development.
 - o Foster synergy between compatible economic activities.
2. *A Physical Environment that Supports the Vision*
- o Eliminate or improve surface parking, vacant lots and other “dead zones”.
 - o Improve linkages between Downtown Core and surrounding areas.
 - o Foster implementation of Riverwalk.
 - o Foster implementation of other strategies to control flood impact.
 - o Ensure that public spaces are attractive, clean, and not sterile.
 - o Develop strategies for replacing street-level parking garage use with uses more amenable to pedestrians.
 - o Improve awareness of parking options and appearance/perception of public parking facilities.
3. *Transportation and Infrastructure that Support the Vision:*
- o Create clearly identified and well-functioning entrance points into downtown Core.
 - o Develop multi-modal options, including rail, bike and other means of transportation.
 - o Strengthen physical links between downtown activity centers, between the Downtown Core and other parts of the Study Area, and between the Downtown Core and other regional attractions.
 - o Identify parking needs, including uses, locations, access strategies, design considerations and landscaping/buffering.
 - o Identify potential revisions to City parking policies and zoning and code requirements to facilitate more effective parking development.
 - o Identify road, roadway and infrastructure improvements needed to support the Vision.
4. *Improving Perception and Building Support for Vision*
- o Improve public perception of Downtown Core through promotional and educational efforts.
 - o Build coalition to actively support vision and initiatives.
 - o Develop time and money support for Downtown Core objectives within City and other centers of power.
 - o Create public relations initiative to build broad-based popular support for Downtown Core reinvestment.

Downtown North Policy Areas

Introduction

The Downtown North subarea was identified at the beginning of the planning process as the subarea that was in most urgent need of planning attention. This area, which was generally not addressed by the 1989 *Downtown Master Plan*, has suffered from a variety of negative impacts, including:

- Light industrial zoning that permitted a wide variety of land uses that are incompatible with the residential development that dominated the area prior to its rezoning in the 1960s. This zoning resulted in an extremely fragmented land use pattern that limited both redevelopment and the preservation of the existing residential neighborhoods, and created a high incidence of conflicting land uses.
- Deteriorated housing, which resulting from deferred maintenance and has led to the demolition of some buildings.
- Physical barriers, such as waterways and unconnected street systems, which impede movement between areas within Downtown North.
- Inadequate infrastructure, including roadways and stormwater management systems.

Addressing these issues was identified as one of the most crucial needs of this Downtown Master Plan Update.

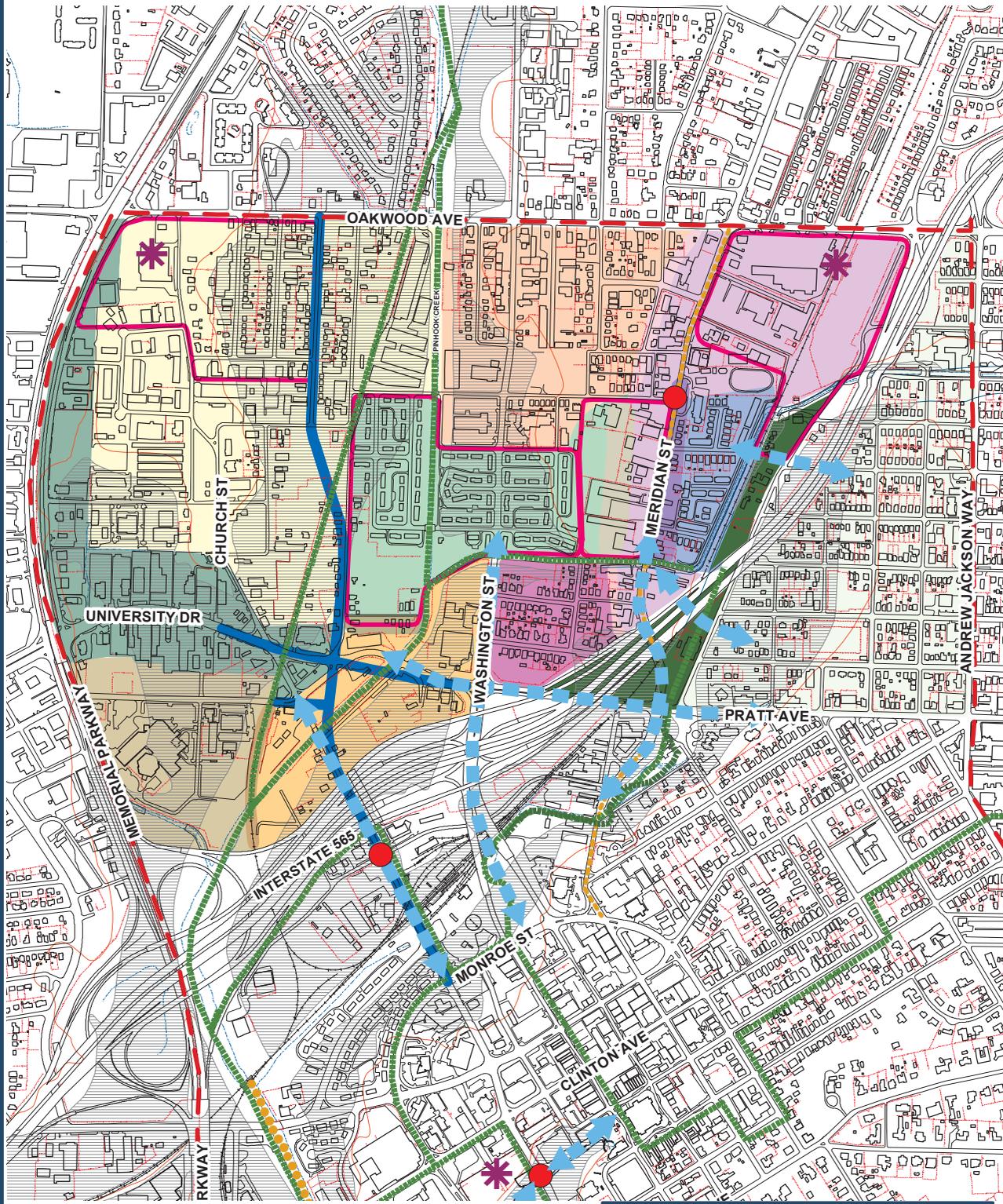
The Master Plan for Downtown North divides the area into 10 Policy Areas:

1. The Lincoln Mill Village;
2. The Grove Street Neighborhood;
3. Meridian Street Neighborhood Commercial Corridor;
4. The Lincoln Park Redevelopment Area;
5. The Abingdon Live/Work Redevelopment Area;
6. The Memorial/University Commercial Corridor;
7. The Church Street Redevelopment Area;
8. The Washington/Pratt Redevelopment Area;
9. The Justice Center; and
10. The Dallas Bypass.

The *Master Plan Update* also identifies Existing Conditions, Vision and Strategies for the Dallas Mills District, which is identified as a separate subarea from Downtown North. The Dallas Mills District is addressed in the “Other Subareas” section of this Plan.

Figure 2 identifies the locations of these Policy Areas. Table 1 identifies the Major Strategies for each Policy Area. Table 2 identifies and prioritizes the Policy Area Actions for the Downtown North Policy Areas; the Implementation Strategies referenced below are summarized in a similar table in the *Implementation Strategies* section of the Downtown Master Plan Update.

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Legend

- Lincoln Mill Village
- Grove Street Neighborhood
- Meridian St. Neighborhood Commercial Corridor
- Lincoln Park Redevelopment Area
- Abingdon Live/Work & Work/Live Neighborhood
- University/Memorial Commercial Corridor
- Church Street Mixed Use Area
- Washington/Pratt Development Area
- Justice Center
- Dallas Bypass Greenway
- Dallas Mills District (Subarea)
- Linkage Enhancement Opportunity
- Pedestrian/Vehicular Conflict Area
- Key Development
- Opportunity Sites
- Future Greenways
- Meridian Street Improvement
- Proposed Church Street Realignment
- 100 Year Flood Plain
- Floodway
- 500 Year
- Study Area



Downtown Master Plan Update

Huntsville, Alabama

Figure 2
Downtown North Master Plan

October 17, 2005



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**Table 1, Master Plan
DOWNTOWN NORTH MAJOR STRATEGIES**

<i>Name of Policy Area</i>	<i>Preservation</i>	<i>Revitalization</i>	<i>Redevelopment</i>
Lincoln Mill Village	▲	▲	●
Grove Street Neighborhood	▲	●	●
Meridian Street Neighborhood Corridor	●	▲	▲
Lincoln Park Redevelopment Area	●	▲	▲
Abingdon Live/Work Neighborhood	●	▲	▲
University Drive/Memorial Parkway Commercial Corridor	●	▲	▲
Church Street Mixed Use Area	●	●	▲
Washington/Pratt Development Area	●	●	▲
Justice Center	●	●	▲
Dallas Bypass Greenway	●	●	▲

- ▲ = Applicable
- = Not Applicable

Definition of Major Strategies:

Preservation: Existing physical character should be preserved, reinforced and enhanced.

Revitalization: Economic and/or land use change are necessary, but certain elements of the area’s character (as discussed in the text) should be protected.

Redevelopment: Buildings and land uses will be replaced with new structures and/or activities.

Lincoln Mill Village

Existing Conditions

The Lincoln Mill Village has the most historically significant building stock in Downtown North, and is a locally significant example of company-constructed housing associated with textile milling, Huntsville's primary industrial sector prior to 1945. The Lincoln Mill Village was constructed between approximately 1918 and 1945, and includes the historic Lincoln School, which was constructed in 1929.

The Lincoln Mill Village has largely retained its residential character. Although a few businesses do operate out of existing buildings, most notably in the buildings facing Meridian Street, the Lincoln Mill Village has not experienced the incursion of incompatible construction or alterations to the extent encountered in many Downtown North Policy Areas. Lincoln School is also essential to the character of the Policy Area, since it functions as one of the primary social and physical landmarks in Downtown North and surrounding neighborhoods. The close proximity of the houses in the Lincoln Mill Village and the presence of definitive physical boundaries create a strong sense of place and differentiate the Lincoln Mill Village from any other residential area in the Study Area.

The Lincoln Mill Village is one of a small number of Policy Areas that is not impacted by Flood Hazard District constraints. The Dallas Branch channel that parallels Cottage Street contains the full volume of a 100-year flooding event within this Policy Area. The Policy Area has no other known environmental constraints.

The Lincoln Mill Village does face severe challenges. First, a small but significant number of buildings have deteriorated to the point where demolition was necessary, creating a significant negative impact on the neighborhood. Although general building maintenance code citations in this neighborhood have not been unusually numerous in recent years, the neighborhood has experienced a higher than average number of citations under the Standard Unsafe Building Abatement Code (See *Findings*, section 1.4). Additionally, a higher than average number of these Code violations have resulted in the demolition of buildings. The number of buildings demolished to date has been small in terms of absolute numbers, but the visual impact of these demolitions is magnified by the small size of the neighborhood, the close proximity of the buildings, and the fact that many of these demolished buildings have been row houses, a type of building unique to mill villages.

Second, much of the neighborhood's housing stock is in poor condition. According to the 2000 Census, the Lincoln Mill Village has one of the lowest rates of homeownership in the Study Area, and has one of the highest vacancy rates, although vacancy rates from the 2000 Census are not assumed to be accurate for the City of Huntsville as a whole. A significant number of buildings are in need of repairs, ranging from paint and caulk to roof structures and wiring systems. Census data indicates a median age of 36.5 for

Lincoln Mill Village residents, which is approximately average for Downtown North residential areas.

Finally, existing infrastructure is largely substandard. Some roads, most notably Cottage Avenue, have less than standard roadway widths, while some minor roadways and alleys are unpaved. Storm sewers appear to be largely nonexistent. Meridian Street, which defines the western edge of the property, also presents several challenges. Not only are there few safe and comfortable opportunities for pedestrians to walk along or cross Meridian at present, but Meridian's overhead wires and lack of character-defining physical features on this corridor detract from the potential attractiveness of the Lincoln Mill Village.

Major Strategy: *Preservation and Revitalization*

Vision

The Lincoln Mill Village will remain a residential neighborhood. The neighborhood will have a high level of homeownership and support a stable population, and will capitalize on its unique physical appearance, environment and history to become a desirable place to live. Due to the size of the buildings and lots, the neighborhood will provide homeownership opportunities for people who may not be able to afford housing in other areas of Huntsville. Existing buildings will be preserved and rehabilitated, and streets and infrastructure will be upgraded in a manner that meets the needs of the residents without compromising the neighborhood's intimate character. The neighborhood will be home to a mix of incomes levels and races. The Lincoln Mill Village will retain an identity distinct from other neighborhoods in Downtown North and northwest Huntsville, but it will enjoy close ties to these neighborhoods through community programs and physical improvements that will make it easier to foster movement between neighborhoods.

Actions

Implementation Strategies

This section summarizes the Implementation Strategies that are appropriate to this Policy Area and indicates how these study area-wide strategies will be carried out in this specific Policy Area. See the *Implementations Strategies* section of this Plan Update for additional information.

1.2 Develop and Administer an R2C District.

1.3 Rezone Policy Areas. Light industrial zoning is not appropriate to this environment and will make it impossible to encourage the desired reinvestment for a residential

neighborhood. The Lincoln Mill Village should be rezoned to a residential classification to promote its revitalization as a quality residential area.

2.1 Conduct inventory of infrastructure in Preservation and Revitalization Policy Areas. When planning infrastructure improvements, general standards should be customized to fit this neighborhood's character-defining physical characteristics, including widths of roadways and alleys. Roads should be widened only where clearly necessary to accommodate appropriate traffic, such as the north end of Cottage Avenue. Widening roads in most of the Lincoln Mill Village will largely eliminate front lawns and will undermine efforts to increase the area's residential reinvestment. It is recommended that a review and evaluation of the existing inventory be performed by Engineering to determine what appropriate improvements are to be made.

3.1 Designate eligible Policy Areas and subareas as local Historic Districts or Conservation Overlay Districts. Local historic district designations have been consistently shown to have a significant positive impact on the property values and sales values of properties. This impact has been documented in several cities and states, and in both high-style neighborhoods and modest communities. Local designation is particularly vital to this Policy Area's revitalization, since property owners who chose to invest in their buildings should have confidence that their property will not be negatively impacted by incompatible alterations, demolitions or new construction nearby. It is extremely important that the risks associated with this investment be lessened to the greatest extent possible. Local historic designation will have that impact. This local designation, however, should be accompanied by a set of design guidelines that are appropriate to the character-defining elements of this district. Since the buildings are generally simple, the design guidelines should honor that character and focus on general features and materials, such as the shed-roofed porches, lap siding and fenestration patterns.

3.2 Avoid demolitions and facilitate rehabilitation of condemned buildings. Although the number of buildings that have been demolished as a result of failure to comply with the City's Unsafe Building Code in the Lincoln Mill Village is small, these demolitions have had a significant impact on the historic character of the district. More significantly, additional demolitions may make the district ineligible for National or local historic designation, which will severely hamper efforts to foster reinvestment. Demolitions will also impede efforts to recruit new residents and homeowners to the neighborhood by reinforcing the perception of a declining area.

4.1 Establish or extend a Community Development Corporation (CDC) to spearhead property maintenance initiatives. Improving property maintenance is particularly crucial in the Lincoln Mill Village. A Community Development Corporation (CDC) is the most appropriate entity to administer building maintenance and homeownership initiatives.

4.2 Expand existing property maintenance programs to Downtown North. A wide variety of programs are available and can be accessed by a CDC and partner

organizations. Almost all of the available programs will be beneficial to this Policy Area. The Lincoln Mill Village should be a particularly high priority for these programs.

5.1 Develop and administer homeownership education programs. This Policy Area's low homeownership rates present a particularly significant long-term threat to the neighborhood's revitalization. Increasing the rate of homeownership in this Policy Area will have significant positive impacts on all other aspects of this Policy Area's future.

5.2 Raise local awareness of alternative mortgage products and home purchase assistance. The Lincoln Mill Village presents a unique opportunity to make homeownership available to persons who may have the resources to own and maintain a home, but who may find it difficult to purchase a home using conventional methods. A variety of existing federal programs can be accessed to encourage homeownership among this population. Eligible residents of the Huntsville Housing Authority's Lincoln Park development may be particularly good candidates for homeownership in the Lincoln Mill Village.

6.1 Clean and landscape existing vacant lots. Given the close proximity of homes in this Policy Area, simple cleaning and landscaping of vacant lots will have a particularly powerful effect.

6.2 Coordinate with local Habitat for Humanity to target the Preservation and Revitalization Policy Areas for new housing construction. Because of its historic character, it will be particularly important for Habitat homes constructed in this Policy Area to reflect the general design characteristics of Lincoln Mill Village houses. This can be done very simply; in most cases it will require little more than the addition of a simple front porch built with dimension lumber.

6.3 Develop homestead construction incentives. New home construction may not be likely to occur in this Policy Area until the existing homes are fully occupied and well-maintained. Infrastructure improvements may increase pressure for new development. All new construction should comply with the Design Guidelines developed for this district as a result of the local historic district designation.

7.1 Review artist relocation program following implementation of strategies. This Policy Area may provide a particularly good opportunity for artist relocation as a result of its character. It is also possible that an arts community may develop in the Lincoln Mill Village without conscious intervention.

Policy Area Actions

- 1. Obtain National Register of Historic Places Designation for the Lincoln Mill Village.** It appears likely at this time that the Lincoln Mill Village will be

determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. National Register designation provides a formal, public validation of a neighborhood's historic character. This validation has a direct impact on property values. Several studies conducted in cities and states across the United States over the last 10 years have consistently identified a positive impact on property values as a result of local and National Register designation.

National Register designation will also facilitate access to Federal Investment Tax Credit for income-producing historic buildings, a significant financial incentive that supports the rehabilitation of rental properties, home occupation spaces and commercial buildings, such as the houses facing Meridian Street. National Register designation has no impact on a property owner's ability to alter or demolish a property.

A National Register nomination will require the retention of an experienced nomination preparer. The Historic Huntsville Foundation is an appropriate entity to retain a nomination preparer. In addition, it may be necessary to educate the Village's property owners about the benefits of National Register designation. This should be done by the Historic Huntsville Foundation in partnership with the Dallas-Lincoln Village District, Inc. Effective strategies may include Town Hall-style meetings, Frequently Asked Questions handouts, and informational posters. Students from area planning and public policy programs may be able to help prepare these materials.

Grove Street Neighborhood

Existing Conditions

The Grove Street Neighborhood is a small enclave of approximately 70 residential buildings in a four-block area. The majority of the neighborhood is occupied by late nineteenth and early twentieth century residential structures. The neighborhood has a strong traditional neighborhood character, including sidewalks, largely uniform setbacks, mature trees in tree lawns, and houses with front porches. Houses range in size from small cottages to a few Queen Anne-era structures. With the exception of six houses at the extreme northwestern and southeastern corners of the Policy Area, the neighborhood is not in the Flood Hazard District.

Building maintenance is generally at a higher level than observed in the Lincoln Mill Village, although the neighborhood has had a significant number of violations of the Standard Housing Code (See *Findings*, section 1.4). According to the 2000 Census, a majority of buildings in most of the Policy Area's blocks are owner-occupied, a percentage that is higher than most portions of Downtown North and is on a par with many blocks in Twickenham and Old Town. The exceptions are the block at the northeast and southwest corners of the neighborhood, which are most impacted by their proximity to incompatible land uses. The block at the northeast corner has a higher proportion of rental housing units, while the block at the southwest corner appears to have a higher than average vacancy rate.

The Grove Street Policy Area is constrained on every side by significant physical barriers. To the north, the neighborhood is bordered by the channelized Pinhook Creek, which separates it from the Lincoln Park housing development. To the west, Washington Street presents a significant impediment to pedestrian traffic, and the intersection of Washington Street and Pratt Avenue is not designed for pedestrian access. The Policy Area is bordered to the south by I-565 and ramps leading to the elevated highway; there is little buffering between the residential structures and the highway. Finally, the northeastern corner of the Grove Street neighborhood closely abuts a small number of commercial structures. These structures are largely oriented to Meridian Street, but at least one maintains truck access to its property through a driveway from Beirne Avenue.

Major Strategy: *Preservation*

Vision

The Grove Street Neighborhood will remain a desirable residential area, and should be supported. Efforts to support homeownership, and especially to support building maintenance, are necessary to ensure this neighborhood's continued viability. The

neighborhood will be properly buffered from incompatible land uses, and the physical barriers that isolate this neighborhood from others will be overcome, both physically and in terms of residents' perceptions. Grove Street Neighborhood residents will perceive themselves as being part of a larger community that includes their unique neighborhood.

Actions

Implementation Strategies

This section summarizes the Implementation Strategies that are appropriate to this Policy Area and indicates how these study area-wide strategies will be carried out in this specific Policy Area. See the *Implementations Strategies* section of this Plan Update for additional information.

1.3 Rezone Study Area Properties. In order to promote the continuation of this mature residential enclave, this policy area should be rezoned to a more suitable district. The Grove Street Neighborhood should be rezoned to R-1C to promote appropriate infill development.

2.1 Conduct inventory of infrastructure in Preservation and Revitalization Policy Areas. Although infrastructure needs do not appear to be as acute in this Policy Area as in others, the Grove Street Neighborhood should be examined during the infrastructure inventory.

2.3 Improve non-vehicular linkages through and between Policy Areas. This neighborhood has a particularly acute need for improved linkages to surrounding residential and residential support areas. Pedestrian-friendly streetscaping on Meridian Street and a convenient and safe crosswalk at Meridian Street to allow connectivity to Lincoln Village will have a significant effect. This Policy Area will also benefit more than any other from direct connections to the Dallas Bypass and Gateway greenways.

3.1 Designate the Grove Street Neighborhood as a Conservation Overlay District. A Conservation Overlay District will significantly benefit this Policy Area by raising its status and safeguarding home improvement investments. A Conservation overlay District is particularly vital to this Policy Area's revitalization, since property owners who chose to invest in their properties should have confidence that their investment will not be negatively impacted by incompatible alterations, demolitions or new construction nearby. This overlay district will require design guidelines that are customized to its character-defining elements. Since the structures are generally simple in design, the design guidelines should honor that character and focus on general features and materials, such as the shed-roof porches, lap siding, and fenestration patterns.

3.2 Avoid demolitions and facilitate rehabilitation of condemned buildings. Demolitions have not been a significant issue in this Policy Area. However, demolitions of residential structures should be avoided wherever possible.

4.1 Establish or extend a Community Development Corporation (CDC) to spearhead property maintenance initiatives. Although this Policy Area should not attempt to support a CDC independently, it should be included in the service area of any CDC that will serve Downtown North.

4.2 Expand existing property maintenance programs to Downtown North.

5.1 Develop and conduct homeownership education programs.

5.2 Raise local awareness of alternative mortgage products and home purchase assistance. Again, these programs do not appear to be needed as acutely in this Policy Area, but they may be useful in supporting ongoing reinvestment in this neighborhood which is important to the continued viability of the Downtown North subarea.

6.1 Clean and landscape existing vacant lots.

Policy Area Actions

- 1. Invest in buffering technologies or greenscape to lessen impact of Interstate 565.** The decision as to whether to use hardscape or greenscape buffering technologies will depend in part on the available space and whether the neighborhood has greater need for buffering from noise or visual impacts. Responsibility for designing and installing buffers falls to the City for lands that fall within the public right of way; lands that are part of the I-565 right of way will require Alabama DOT coordination and potentially construction. All buffering plans should be made in consultation with the local neighborhood organization.
- 2. Create buffering requirements for Meridian Street businesses.** See the Meridian Street Neighborhood Corridor Policy Area for more details. Meridian Street regulations should not permit truck traffic to access Meridian Street businesses through residential neighborhoods.
- 3. Pursue strategies to connect the Grove Street Neighborhood to other residential areas.** At present, the Policy Area's small population and small size place severe limits on its long-term ability to increase the capability of its neighborhood organization, since active members and leaders should be drawn from a very small group of residents.

In addition to the linkage strategies discussed above, it may also be appropriate to merge the Grove Street Neighborhood organization into the Dallas Lincoln Village District, Inc.

Meridian Street Neighborhood Corridor *(See Opportunity Sites #2 and #4)*

Existing Conditions

Much of this corridor's development since the 1960s has been dramatically out of scale with the surrounding residential neighborhoods. The central portion of this Policy Area, located generally between the Dallas Branch and Abingdon Avenue, is occupied by auto-oriented businesses, many of which involve small buildings set in large parking and paved storage areas. The density of this portion of the corridor is extremely low.

The northwest corner of the corridor includes a significant amount of vacant land, an active auto-oriented retail development that is heavily patronized by residents of the surrounding districts, and two historically significant but underutilized industrial buildings. This site presents particularly complex development and redevelopment issues.

Other portions of the Policy Area, including the corridor north of Abingdon and the eastern side of the corridor between Abingdon and the Dallas Branch, consist primarily of small buildings on small parcels, including several converted mill houses and mill-era commercial and residential buildings. The corridor's businesses include a mix of wholesale, retail and service businesses, as well as a small performing arts theater and a church. The corridor is not in the Flood Hazard District, and is abutted on both sides by residential areas.

Major Strategy: *Revitalization and Redevelopment*

Vision

The Meridian Street Neighborhood Corridor will support the character and social and economic viability of the surrounding residential neighborhoods. The Meridian Corridor will provide neighborhood retail and services, as well as a small number of specialty businesses that may function as small-scale regional destinations. Existing buildings will be preserved, particularly along the east side of the street between Abingdon Avenue as extended and the Dallas Branch channel. New development will be at a scale appropriate to the neighborhood, and will include appropriate buffering from adjoining residential uses. Although new development will incorporate off-site parking, the majority of this parking will be located to the rear of the buildings to maintain a pedestrian-friendly environment. Pedestrian access will be fully supported, and residents will have the option of walking to Meridian Corridor businesses in safety and comfort.

The northern portion of the Meridian Corridor will provide anchor neighborhood retail and services, employment opportunities and a unique environment for living and/or

working in an industrial loft environment. This northern portion of the Meridian Corridor has been identified as a Key Development location for three reasons:

- This area's extremely high visibility from major area transportation routes,
- Its central role in the viability of the neighborhood, and
- The relatively large amount of potential redevelopment space it can provide.

Actions

Implementation Strategies

1.2 Develop and administer a new office district.

1.3 Rezone Study Area Properties. The parcels fronting on both sides of Meridian Street from the I-565 overpass to Oakwood Avenue should be rezoned to Neighborhood Business, C-1 district. The currently unincorporated area east of Meridian Street should also be zoned Neighborhood Business, C-1 when it is annexed. The area east of the rail road and west of I-565 should be rezoned to Office District.

Rear yard and screening requirements as identified for this designation should receive particular enforcement attention. This rezoning will help to facilitate the redevelopment of smaller scale retail uses in character with the surrounding residential areas. New construction should be located close to the street, although zero lot lines are not necessary. A small amount of parking may be permitted in front of the building, but the majority should be placed to the rear. Access to parking should be clearly identified. Building scale should be complimentary to older areas.

2.1 Conduct inventory of infrastructure in Preservation and Revitalization Policy Areas. Although the Meridian Street reconstruction will address the curb and gutter and stormwater needs of this corridor, this Policy Area should still be included in the infrastructure inventory process. In particular, streets intersecting Meridian should be inventoried.

2.3 Improve non-vehicular linkages through and between Policy Areas. Meridian Street should have a complete sidewalk system. The bicycle route planned for Meridian Street will be implemented. Pedestrian crosswalks at the intersection of Abingdon and Meridian should be improved. Avoid widening the roadway or, if widening becomes unavoidable, incorporate generous pedestrian refuges in association with well-designed crosswalks and traffic signals that allow adequate time for roadway crossing.

Surface parking and auto access should be permitted, but the location and amount of auto access and parking should be limited by zoning and managed through site plan review and access management. Excessive surface parking or surface storage will be avoided, and access management standards will be implemented in conjunction with all new development or public improvements.

The corridor will benefit from a paved and landscaped trail connecting Meridian Street and the Dallas Branch and the Gateway Greenways.

3.3 Construct Gateway Elements at appropriate locations. As noted in this portion of the Implementation Strategies, Meridian Street provides two locations for neighborhood-scale gateway elements. These elements should be used to identify the Lincoln/Meridian neighborhood as an element of Downtown Huntsville. See the Implementation Strategies for potential design strategies.

Policy Area Actions

1. **Assess redevelopment needs for the northeast corner of the Meridian Street Neighborhood Corridor and the west side of Meridian between Abingdon and the Dallas Branch channel.** As noted above, the northeast corner of the Meridian Corridor is identified as a Key Development Location because of its potential to have a significant positive impact on the surrounding areas. Although redevelopment of the central portion of Meridian will have significant benefits for the neighborhood, it is not likely to have as significant an impact on the larger community as the northeast site. This central portion of Meridian may also be less likely to require public support to facilitate its development, since traffic and environmental remediation are less likely to significantly constrain its redevelopment than may be the case with the sites at the northeast corner of Meridian and Oakwood (See the *Implementation Strategies* section of this Plan for further details).

If adequate public sector support can be provided, redevelopment of the northeast corner of the Meridian Corridor is likely to occur before redevelopment of the central portion of Meridian Street. The central portion of Meridian Street is not likely to redevelop via pure market forces until the spending power of the surrounding neighborhoods has reached a point adequate to support new construction.

2. **Support the development of a combination of neighborhood services and retail throughout the district.** New development as identified in the Opportunity Sites may require some City support, since neighborhood-scale retail and services in this area may need to be provided at price points that do not readily support new building construction. Existing buildings, however, will continue to provide this opportunity.

The CDC proposed in previous section will also develop the capacity to spearhead the revitalization of this commercial corridor. The CDC will draw upon various resources to develop business district services. However, the CDC will not be able to develop these services until it has developed the organizational and fiscal capacity to deal effective with its residential issues.

Several of the strategies developed for the City Center Policy Area in the Downtown Core may also be extended in a more limited manner to this area, including financing incentives and small business technical support. Care should be taken to ensure that retail activity in this area compliments, but does not directly compete with, retail development encouraged in the City Center Policy Area and is appropriate to the Meridian corridor's unique environment.

Lincoln Park Redevelopment Area *(See Opportunity Site #3 and #4)*

Existing Conditions

The majority of this Policy Area is owned and operated as the Huntsville Housing Authority's (HHA) Lincoln Park housing development. The HHA has expressed an interest in redeveloping the site to serve a wider variety of residents, particularly those whose incomes are between 50% and 80% of the area's median income. This population generally includes entry-level public sector and service sector employees, who may be unlikely to be able to afford median housing prices in the Huntsville market. This shift in strategy will result in a population whose demographic characteristics more closely resemble those of the surrounding neighborhoods.

In addition to the parcels owned by the HHA, this Policy Area also includes approximately 10 additional acres. The portion to the southwest of the Lincoln Park housing development is primarily located within the Pinhook Creek Floodway, as is approximately one-quarter of the Lincoln Park housing development. All except the easternmost edge of the Lincoln Park housing development is located in the Flood Hazard District.

The portion of this Policy Area east of the Lincoln Park housing development is primarily occupied by the rear portions of a small number of businesses facing Meridian Street. As discussed in the Meridian Street Neighborhood Corridor Policy Area, these properties incorporate an excessive amount of paved surfaces, which is out of scale with the surrounding neighborhoods and may contribute to stormwater management issues in this vicinity. The additional acreage east of the Lincoln Park housing development is not located in the Flood Hazard District and has no known environmental constraints.

Major Strategy: *Revitalization and Redevelopment*

Vision

The Lincoln Park Redevelopment Area will be an essential source of housing for residents of the Downtown North Area. The area will be dominated by single-family homes whose scale and design are in keeping with surrounding neighborhoods. Recreational and greenway space will be provided in the Floodway, and will provide an amenity for residents throughout Downtown North. The roadway system within the Lincoln Park Redevelopment Area will connect to the roadway system surrounding it at every opportunity, making it easier for people to move seamlessly between different areas of Downtown North.

Actions

Implementation Strategies

1.1 Develop and administer revised PD system.

1.3 Rezone Study Area Properties. Although the Lincoln Park housing development is currently zoned R-2B, a Planned Development Housing District will be particularly essential for this site in order to manipulate the density of housing on the site to accommodate the Floodway constraint. The Planned Development should focus on permitting a variety of housing with integrated common open spaces that complement the overall development.

2.1 Conduct inventory of infrastructure in Preservation and Revitalization Policy Areas. Infrastructure in the Lincoln Park housing development is generally substandard. However, any construction of new infrastructure in this Policy Area should be carefully coordinated with the HHA's redevelopment to insure full compatibility.

2.2 Improve east-west connectivity through Downtown North whenever possible. East-west traffic movement through Downtown North is greatly impaired by the current configuration of the Lincoln Park housing development. Lincoln Park's road system has few roads that connect to the surrounding roadway network, and as a result the development and its residents are isolated from the rest of Downtown North. If the site is to be redeveloped to function as a valuable portion of the Downtown North residential community, the roadway system should have appropriate connections to surrounding traffic systems by redesigning the site's roads to maximize connections to surrounding transportation routes. The resulting roadway system should reinforce and continue the gridded roadway pattern of the surrounding area. The Pinhook Creek and Dallas Branch channels should be bridged wherever possible.

2.3 Improve non-vehicular linkages through and between Policy Areas. In addition to improving traffic patterns, new roadways should include sidewalks and landscape buffers.

Policy Area Actions

- 1. Support redevelopment plans for Opportunity Sites #3 and #4.** These two Opportunity Sites address all of the property within this Policy Area. It is possible that the developer responsible for constructing the Meridian Street buildings will construct the housing east of the existing Lincoln Park housing development, or this acreage may be developed by the HHA as a replacement for units that cannot be constructed on the existing site as a result of the Floodway.

2. **Pursue the development of a long-term strategy for the HHA to dedicate a portion of the Lincoln Park property after redevelopment to long-term lease or sales, depending on the HHA’s strategic direction and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requirements.** The HHA has a clearly defined and highly important role in the City of Huntsville as the provider of housing for those who cannot afford market rate housing. Moreover, sale of property owned by the HHA can only be done under limited circumstances under existing HUD requirements.

It is possible, however, that a redeveloped Lincoln Park may still fail to meet its potential because of the concentration of rental housing in this location. It may be prudent for the long-term health of the Lincoln Park housing development and the Downtown North community if the Lincoln Park housing development can create a program through which housing units may be sold or made subject to a long term lease.

Abingdon Live/Work and Work/Live Neighborhood

Existing Conditions

The Abingdon Live/Work and Work/Live Neighborhood Policy Area contains one of the most mixed land use patterns in the City, and is a key example of the problematic land use patterns created as a result of the broad application of light industrial zoning. Land uses in this Policy Area include single-family homes, auto-oriented service businesses, small industries and small shipping facilities. While this Policy Area contains several specific instances of conflicting land uses, City code administration officials have indicated that nuisance claims are reported less frequently in this neighborhood than in the Church Street Redevelopment Policy Area.

Approximately 50% of the buildings in this Policy Area are used for single-family homes. Of these, approximately 50% are owner occupied. The most significant incursion of non-residential scale development has occurred on Fletcher Avenue and along Washington Street. Most of the rest of the Policy Area's non-residential land uses consist of residential-scale buildings that have been retrofitted for non-residential use. This Policy Area is not impacted by the Flood Hazard District, and has no other known environmental constraints. Washington Street, which is a major corridor in the Downtown Core, primarily takes on a residential character through most of this area, largely as a result of the proximity of the Lincoln Park housing development.

Major Strategy: *Revitalization and Redevelopment*

Vision

The majority of buildings in the Abingdon neighborhood will continue to function as housing. However, this neighborhood will be distinguished by the fact that residents can conduct business out of their home through the Live/Work District or they can take advantage of the mixed use options of the Work/Live District. This strategy will create a unique environment in which entrepreneurship can flourish. A wider than usual variety of live/work and work/live opportunities will be available to residents, provided that they can configure their establishment to be compatible with surrounding residents. Live/work and work/live units will have buffering, screening, light and sound controls that will avoid creating negative impacts on surrounding residences. This neighborhood will be linked to surrounding neighborhoods via the Meridian Street Neighborhood Corridor, and will be buffered from the industrial areas to the west by the Pinhook Creek and its greenway.

Actions

Implementation Strategies

1.2 Develop and administer Live/Work and Work/Live districts.

1.3 Rezone Study Area Properties. The predominantly residential areas within this Policy Area should be rezoned to a Live/Work District and the predominantly commercial/industrial areas should be rezoned to a Work/Live District. Both the Live/Work and Work/Live Districts should include stringent performance standards addressing the following characteristics:

- Outdoor storage;
- Accessory structures;
- Outdoor lighting;
- Signs;
- Screening and Buffering;
- On-site parking;
- Noise and dirt;
- Hours of operation;
- Management and disposal of hazardous wastes and other factors as determined necessary for the specific environment.

Approval of new development or changes in land use in this district should address all factors that may create external impacts for residential neighbors.

2.1 Conduct inventory of infrastructure in Preservation and Revitalization Policy Areas. This Policy Area should be carefully reviewed during the completion of the inventory, and improvements should be given a proper level of priority in keeping with the vision of this Policy Area as a viable, stable mixed use district.

3.2 Avoid demolitions and facilitate rehabilitation of condemned buildings. Since this Policy Area is less dense and includes more variations in building types than other Policy Areas, demolitions will not present as significant a threat to this Policy Area as may be the case in other, less diverse areas. In many cases, particularly involving industrial buildings that are out of scale with the neighborhood, demolition may be encouraged.

However, demolitions in this Policy Area should be carefully monitored to determine whether demolitions are undermining this Policy Area's ability to meet its Vision.

4.1 Establish or extend a Community Development Corporation (CDC) to spearhead property maintenance initiatives.

4.2 Expand existing property maintenance programs to Downtown North.

5.1 Develop and conduct homeownership education programs.

5.2 Raise local awareness of alternative mortgage products and home purchase assistance.

6.1 Clean and landscape existing vacant lots. Home maintenance and homeownership support should be extended to this Policy Area to support its stabilization.

6.2 Coordinate with local Habitat for Humanity to target the Preservation and Revitalization Policy Areas for new housing construction.

6.3 Develop homestead construction incentives. The Abingdon Live/Work and Work/Live Neighborhood will provide a particularly good opportunity for new home construction.

7.1 Review artist relocation program following implementation of strategies. This Policy Area has some potential to be attractive to certain types of artists, particularly those who work in larger media.

Policy Area Actions

- 1. Promote the neighborhood.** Although the regulatory strategies identified above may work effectively, this neighborhood's revitalization may be hampered if potential residents are not aware of this opportunity. The Community Development Corporation (CDC) established to addressing home maintenance and homeownership in the Downtown North area should engage in small-scale public relations to promote the opportunities that this Policy Area can provide. Low-cost, effective strategies may include newspaper articles, a Web site or regular Live/Work special events. Promotions will be most effective if they promote all of the residential areas of Downtown North, but the Abingdon Live/Work Neighborhood will need active promotion more than any of the other districts.

University Drive/Memorial Parkway Commercial Corridor

Existing Conditions

At present, the University Drive/Memorial Parkway Commercial Corridor consists almost entirely of commercial and office land uses. Small auto-oriented buildings and lots dominate development along Memorial Parkway within the Study Area. Access to these properties from Memorial Parkway is only available via a northbound access road, and many buildings have no other access due to the fact that only two roads intersect the Memorial Parkway access road between University Drive and Oakwood Avenue. Buildings in this location generally appear to be approaching obsolescence, and a significant amount of vacancy has been reported. A small but highly visible number of buildings have been cited for building maintenance code violations. However, one large motel has been demolished as of this writing and some redevelopment is beginning to occur.

Deeper lots, larger setbacks, full access and a more modern development pattern characterize development along University Drive. This portion of University Drive creates a transitional area between the largely residential and small-scale commercial development that characterizes Pratt Avenue to the east, and the conventional, auto-oriented development that dominates University Drive to the west of Memorial Parkway. Businesses in this location include retail and service operations, as well as offices. Although buildings and lots on this portion of University are generally smaller in scale than those located on University west of Memorial Parkway, their scale and site orientation are in most respects more similar to suburban development patterns than is found in the rest of the Study Area.

The extreme eastern end of the University Drive area and a small portion of the Memorial Parkway properties are located in the Flood Fringe. There are no other known environmental constraints in this Policy Area. As in most areas of existing commercial development, there may be a few individual properties where environmental contamination may be present (e.g., active or former filling stations), but no known environmental contamination has been identified to date.

Major Strategy: *Revitalization and Redevelopment*

Vision

This portion of University Drive will provide opportunities for large-scale retail, service and other commercial uses that serve the region. The portion along Memorial parkway will serve as a gateway into the Research/Technology District. These areas will also provide employment for neighborhood residents, and will be accessible by foot as well as

by vehicle. This Policy Area will support the redevelopment of other portions of Downtown North by creating transition areas between the more traditional scale of land uses to the south and east and more suburban-scale commercial and residential development to the north and west.

Actions

Implementation Strategies

1.3 Rezone Study Area Properties. Rezone the portion of this Policy Area along University Drive to C-4 Highway Business District and the portion along Memorial Parkway to Research Technology District.

2.1 Conduct inventory of infrastructure in Preservation and Revitalization Policy Areas. Infrastructure in this Policy Area is generally in better condition than in some other Downtown North Policy Areas, but there is some evidence that the existing infrastructure may not be adequate to more intensive future development.

2.2 Improve east-west connectivity through Downtown North whenever possible. An east-west connector that accesses the Memorial Parkway access road will make adjoining parcels more developable by providing alternative access. Additional east-west roadways will also support the redevelopment of this portion of the Policy Area.

3.3 Construct Gateway Elements at appropriate locations. The University and Memorial corridors include two significant Gateway locations, as identified on the Gateways map, Figure 9 of the *Implementation Strategies*. This map identifies a Downtown Community Gateway at the intersection of Memorial Parkway and Oakwood Avenue, and a Downtown North Community Gateway at the intersection of University Drive/Pratt Avenue and the realigned Church Street. Construction of appropriate Gateway elements in these locations will benefit both the corridors and Downtown North by creating a distinctive positive identity for these locations.

Policy Area Actions

- 1. Develop comprehensive corridor revitalization strategies through a corridor land use management plan.** Although both the University Drive and Memorial Parkway portions of this Policy Area are not identical to the remainder of these roadways, a full revitalization of these areas requires that they be analyzed in the context of the full length of these corridors. Since corridors are experienced in a linear fashion, businesses along these segments of the corridors may be more likely to compete with businesses located along the same road than with businesses that may be closer, but located on a different route. Additionally, transitional portions of corridors are most effectively addressed within the context

of the corridor as a whole; plans that address a segment of a corridor in isolation from the rest of the corridor can create a disjointed environment that does not project a positive image and does not use public resources effectively.

A corridor management plan will create a strategy for fully coordinating land use with the transportation system, including zoning, site design requirements, site access management and traffic systems, along all or a great deal of the corridor. Corridor management plans generally divide the corridor into segments that have unifying characteristics, and provide strategies for addressing these segments within the context of the larger corridor. A corridor management plan is usually coordinated with recommendations for improving the physical appearance of the corridor to ensure that travelers have a positive perception of the corridor, and by extension of the area surrounding it.

Church Street Mixed Use Area (See Opportunity Site #1)

Existing Conditions

This Policy Area consists of buildings originally constructed for residential use and a variety of larger non-residential scale construction. While some pockets of these residential buildings are still being used as homes, many have been converted to commercial service uses. The remaining residential buildings are interspersed with larger-scale buildings, including light industrial establishments, truck transfer terminals and other uses that are out of scale with a residential neighborhood. The Policy Area is physically separated from other residential areas, both within Downtown North and across Oakwood.

This Policy Area is more heavily impacted by the presence of the Flood Hazard District than any other Policy Area in Downtown North. Virtually all of the historically residential portions of this Policy Area are located in the Flood Fringe; both Huntsville Flood Hazard District regulations and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) regulations severely constrain reinvestment in existing buildings located in Flood Fringe areas that do not meet modern stormwater management standards. Under FEMA regulations, investment in existing buildings that do not meet these standards is limited to 50% of the value of the property over 10 years; after that time only routine maintenance is permitted. Residential lots in this location are too small to meet those standards, either for existing buildings or for new development that only occupies a single lot.

Although both this district and the Abingdon Mixed Use Policy Area are characterized by combinations of residential and non-residential land uses, there is evidence that the conflicts are more pronounced in the Church Street Mixed Use Area. A large number of the converted residential buildings and buildings constructed on residential lots in this Policy Area are occupied by automobile or small machine repair establishments, including several that have been repeatedly cited for violations of the City's nuisance codes. Common violations in this area include parked or derelict cars on lawns or in the public right of way and unscreened or unsecured storage. The presence of automotive repair and light industry facilities in this setting also creates some potential for environmental contamination that may impact adjoining residents. No documentation of potential or actual contamination has been undertaken in this area to date, and no known cases of contamination have been reported.

The western portion of the Policy Area is not located in the Flood Hazard District and has few residential buildings. This area was largely developed in the 1960s and 1970s and, while still functional, many of buildings appear to be approaching obsolescence. Due to their limited access to Memorial Parkway and the limited nature of the Memorial Parkway access system in this location, properties in this area have experienced little redevelopment pressure.

The southern portion of the Church Street Mixed Use Area has an unusually low building density, despite a large number of small parcels. Most of the developed parcels in this area are occupied by light industrial uses. This area is almost completely within the Flood Fringe.

The Church Street Mixed Use Area will be extensively impacted by the Church Street realignment project, which is scheduled to begin construction in 2009. This project involves a massive realignment of Church Street to follow new and existing right of way that approximately follows what are presently Orchard and Hundley streets. The Church Street realignment is currently planned to consist of four travel lanes with a center median and will include enclosed storm sewer improvements. The current alignment will require the acquisition of at least a portion of as many as 150 individual parcels¹.

Major Strategy: *Redevelopment*

Vision

The Church Street Mixed Use Area will support a mix of economic uses, including research technology, related office, and laboratory. The area's redevelopment will be accomplished using assembled parcels to create properties that are large enough to develop according to modern standards and the City's stormwater management regulations. Open space stormwater management techniques will be employed to the greatest extent possible, and design guidelines and site plan review will protect the investments of those who redevelop properties in this Policy Area.

The Church Street Mixed Use Area will provide employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for nearby residents and support Huntsville's high-tech economy. The area's redevelopment potential will be promoted, and its central location and availability of inexpensive land will encourage new development. The Policy Area will provide incubator facilities for new businesses, and businesses that graduate from the incubator will be among the new occupants of the area. New development and existing businesses that choose to stay will manage their stormwater and potential environmental impacts in an appropriate manner.

¹ Estimates of numbers of parcels to be impacted are preliminary and are based on preliminary plans available at this time. Not all parcels are occupied by buildings, and many buildings occupy more than one parcel.

Actions

Implementation Strategies

1.2 Develop and administer a Research Technology District.

1.3 Rezone Study Area Properties. Rezone this area to the Research Technology District to permit uses that focus primarily on small scale research and technology enterprises with non-obtrusive manufacturing of products.

1.4 Develop a Design Review Overlay Zone for appropriate settings. The Church Street Mixed Use Area is a particularly appropriate location for design review, since most of the Policy Area will undergo new construction. Design review will provide a cohesive atmosphere for businesses and provide a sense of security for those investing in this redeveloped area.

2.2 Improve east-west connectivity through Downtown North whenever possible. East-west roadways will increase the developability of the Church Street Mixed Use Area by facilitating property access and creating an effective traffic circulation system, especially as density in the Policy Area increases.

2.3 Improve non-vehicular linkages through and between Policy Areas. Although the Church Street Mixed Use Area is not intended for residential redevelopment, employees should have the ability to walk or bicycle to work from residential areas in Downtown North and throughout central Huntsville. All roadways, including the realigned Church Street, should have sidewalks on both sides, and sidewalks should be accompanied by landscaped buffer strips between the sidewalk and street. Providing pedestrian and bicycle amenities will also increase the desirability of the Policy Area for redevelopment.

Policy Area Actions

- 1. Begin acquisition for the Church Street realignment as soon as possible.** Acquisition and relocation in connection with the Church Street realignment will create a period of uncertainty that may have an adverse impact on property values, potential redevelopers, and businesses that may be appropriate to remain in the Policy Area. Every effort should be made to convince persons being relocated that the acquisition and relocation will be handled in a fair and professional manner.
- 2. Implement a coordinated program of targeted incentives designed to encourage effective redevelopment projects.** The Church Street Redevelopment Area provides a significant opportunity for small-scale development projects that may find few other opportunities for projects of their size in a central Huntsville location. This location may be particularly well positioned to support small or startup firms in Huntsville's technology-oriented growth industries, and it may

provide an opportunity for locally-grown non-technology businesses. However, redevelopment in this Policy Area may be impeded by the higher level of risk commonly associated with urban redevelopment areas. Even if a site is free of development constraints, such as environmental contamination, potential developers may still find that they cannot leverage adequate funding due to funders' perception that the site may be a more risky investment than a site in an undeveloped location.

The business incubator strategy represents one tool for increasing the long-term development potential of the Policy Area by supporting the development of new businesses that can populate the remainder of the Policy Area. In addition, the partnership operating the incubator should develop a package of incentives that can be made available to businesses interested in relocating in this area.

An incentive program should be based on a carefully-devised strategic plan created by a Task Force. The Task Force should include, at a minimum, representatives from the City's Department of Planning, the Economic Development Director's office, and the Chamber of Commerce. This Task Force should identify the following elements:

- The business sectors to be targeted for incentives. Incentives should be targeted as narrowly as possible to ensure that they are used to support businesses that will further the long-range goals for the Church Street Redevelopment Area and the Greater Huntsville community. Incentives should not be given to businesses that are not in targeted categories.
- The types of qualifications necessary to be granted incentives. Prospective incentive recipients should be required to present a well-developed business plan (which should be reviewed by small business development specialists), strong credit histories and evidence of adequate funding to support the project. Business plans, funding evidence and references should be scrutinized and cross-checked.
- Incentives that can be funneled to the Church Street Redevelopment Area from sources other than the local government. These may include advising through the Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE), loan support through the U.S. Small Business Administration, job creation incentives available through the State of Alabama, and other sources.
- Incentives that the City can provide. These may include Tax Increment Financing, tax abatements or tax credits. Since these incentives (with the exception of Tax Increment Financing) will require the City to develop new programs, these should not be implemented until it is determined that reinvestment will not occur without them.

3. **Construct necessary public improvements in connection with redevelopment.**
The use of a Tax Increment Financing District (TIF) will be useful to pay for public improvements, although it will be necessary to structure the TIF district carefully to minimize impacts on other taxing bodies. A TIF cannot be used in conjunction with tax abatements or other incentives that remove or significantly lessen the property tax burden on the property.

Washington/Pratt Development Area

Existing Conditions

This Policy Area creates a transitional space between the proposed residential and non-residential portions of Downtown North and between Downtown North and I-565. This Policy Area is largely cut off from other Policy Areas by physical barriers, including Washington Street and Pinhook Creek. The southern portion of the Policy Area adjoins both the new City Transportation Center and the Justice Center Policy Area.

Approximately half of this Policy Area is located in the Pinhook Creek Floodway, which cuts off the developable portions of this Policy Area from the University Drive commercial corridor. This Floodway area includes the majority of the Policy Area's major road access. The remainder of the Policy Area is almost completely located in the Flood Fringe. Current properties in this Policy Area are largely vacant or underutilized.

The Pratt/Washington Redevelopment Area has excellent highway access, but is largely invisible from I-565, both because of proximity to the overpass and because motorists' attention is primarily drawn to the south. The proposed Church Street realignment project will have a significant impact on the vicinity, although most of the new roadway construction will occur in the Floodway, according to the current proposed alignment.

Due to Flood Hazard District constraints, the Concept Area has two physically separate developable areas. One is located north of Pratt Avenue between Washington Street and the Pinhook Creek. This property is currently occupied by a largely vacant building that formerly housed a car dealership. The second developable area is located on the south side of Pratt Avenue. A portion of this property is occupied by a concrete manufacturing facility. Both properties fall within the Pinhook Creek Floodway.

Major Strategy: *Redevelopment*

Vision

The Washington/Pratt Development Area will provide opportunities for two separate developments that are of a scale and design appropriate for their location at the transition between land uses. Office uses are preferred. Successful developments on these sites will rely on the location's excellent highway access, but will not require high levels of visibility from the highway. Related design elements between the two sites are preferable, but not necessary. Both developments will have their primary access onto Pratt. Development of smaller portions of either developable area is strongly discouraged.

The portion of the Washington/Pratt Development Area that falls within the Floodway will be combined with the floodway areas to the north to create an integrated natural and greenway landscape.

Actions

Implementation Strategies

1.3 Rezone Study Area Properties. Rezone the northern side of Pratt Avenue to Neighborhood Business C-1 District. This will provide for neighborhood services to the redeveloped Lincoln Park and Grove Street Areas. The south side of Pratt Avenue should be rezoned General Business C-3 for consistency with adjacent zoning and uses.

Policy Area Actions

- 1. Proceed with detailed planning for the Church Street realignment project as soon as possible.** Market interest is unlikely to develop in this area until the realignment project is completed. The City will play a particularly central role in determining the development of the area south of Pratt, as it appears that the realignment may require the acquisition of at least a portion of almost all of the parcels within that area. The City should incorporate stormwater management infrastructure sufficient to support the development of these properties during reconstruction of roadway system.
- 2. Prepare a Master Plan for Pinhook Creek Greenway park system that incorporates all adjoining floodway properties and coordinates their development for green space and/or recreational uses.** Acquire the property that falls within the Floodway as soon as possible. Although the portion of the Floodway identified in the Lincoln Park area will be well used if developed for active recreational uses due to the proximity of a large number of homes, the portion of the Floodway that falls within this Policy Area should be reserved for passive recreational use and open space.

Justice Center

Existing Conditions

This area is occupied by the Municipal Justice & Public Safety Center and the Huntsville-Madison County Consolidated Jail, and property to the east of this facility that has been designated for future expansion. The site is isolated from other portions of the Study Area.

Major Strategy: *Redevelopment*

No additional vision or needs have been identified for this Policy Area. Future improvements in this area should create a quality streetscape presence to the greatest extent possible.

Actions

Implementation Strategies

1.3 Rezone Study Area Properties. Rezone the area to General Business C-3 District to establish compatible zoning in the area and eliminate possible light manufacturing uses.

Dallas Bypass Greenway

Existing Conditions

This narrow strip of land lies between the Norfolk Southern rail line and Dallas Street that parallels the I-565 overpass. The site has few buildings and few residents or businesses. The proposed Dallas Branch Bypass will extend through this Policy Area, and will provide an overflow stormwater facility for the Dallas Bypass, thus decreasing the area subjected to flooding impacts north and east of this location.

At present, the site is designated as a portion of the City's Greenway system and is expected to be developed entirely for recreational use. No site plans or programming has been prepared at this time. The Dallas Bypass is scheduled for construction in 2006. Design and property acquisition are in process.

Major Strategy: *Redevelopment*

Vision

The Dallas Bypass Greenway will provide an aesthetically appealing recreational amenity for the Dallas Mill and other surrounding neighborhoods.

Actions

Implementation Strategies

1.3 Rezone Study Area Properties. Rezone the west side of Dallas Street to Residence -2 (R-2) District to stabilize the neighborhood's boundaries and eliminate the intrusion of conflicting land uses.

Downtown Core/Fringe Policy Areas

Introduction

The Downtown Core and Downtown Fringe subareas represent the majority of the area that Huntsville residents traditionally associate with the urban center of the City. The Downtown Core is dominated by traditional Central Business District development patterns, while the Downtown Fringe includes an extremely wide variety of land uses, including a residential district, industrial facilities, regional destination entertainment and convention facilities, an early enclosed mall and a large, highly improved urban park. The two subareas are physically divided by Monroe Street, a five-lane roadway.

Although these two subareas demonstrate dramatically different land development and land use patterns, the two districts should function in an integrated and complimentary fashion in order to create a socially and culturally vibrant and economically healthy urban center. Policy Areas within these two subareas have distinct but complimentary visions and many common needs; these areas will mutually reinforce each other and, taken together, will create a diverse, interesting and enjoyable urban center for residents, visitors, employees and business operators.

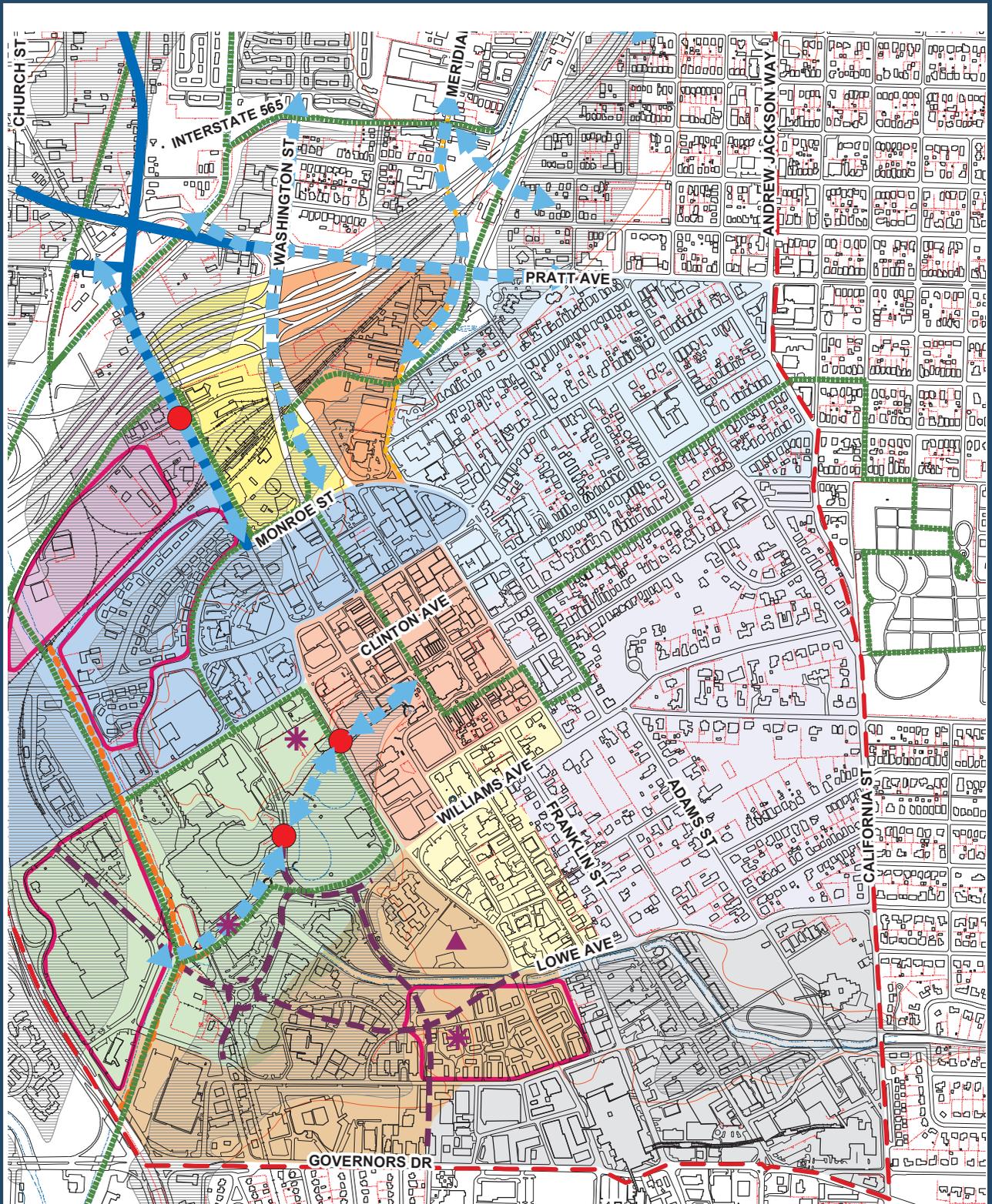
The Master Plan for Downtown Core and Fringe divides the area into 8 Policy Areas:

1. The City Center;
2. The Destination Entertainment/Culture Policy Area;
3. The Lowe Avenue Impact Area;
4. The Lower Core;
5. The Office Center;
6. The Downtown Support Area;
7. The Meridian Street Small Business Center; and
8. Visitor/Tourism Gateway.

Figure 3 identifies the locations of these Policy Areas². Table 2 identifies the Major Strategies for each Policy Area.

² Readers may note that the boundaries designated on this map for the Old Town and Twickenham Subareas do not exactly coincide with the boundaries of the Old Town and Twickenham Historic Districts. This difference does not indicate any actual or recommended changes to the boundaries of the Historic Districts, but instead reflects the fact that properties that are correctly excluded from the Twickenham and Old Town Historic District continue to have some needs that are more similar to the properties in the Historic Districts than to other area properties. For example, these properties have land use and transportation characteristics that are more similar to the properties in the Historic Districts than to other properties. In other cases, properties in these areas are included in the Old Town or Twickenham Historic Districts in order to ensure that their future development or redevelopment is designed to help create a buffer between these residential neighborhoods and the adjoining non-residential uses.

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Legend

Huntsville City Center	Future Greenways
Destination Entertainment	Pinhook Creek Riverwalk
Office Center	Meridian Street Improvement
Lower Core Policy Area	Proposed Lowe Avenue Reconfiguration
Downtown Support Area	Proposed Church Street Realignment
Visitor/Tourism Gateway	100 Year Flood Plain
Meridian Street Small Business Center	Floodway
Lowe Avenue Impact Area	500 Year Flood Plain
Medical District	Study Area
Old Town District	Future Federal Building Site
Twickenham District	Key Development
Opportunity Sites	Key Linkage
	Pedestrian/Vehicular Conflict Area



Downtown Master Plan Update

Huntsville, Alabama

Figure 3
Downtown Core/Fringe Master Plan

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Table 2, Master Plan

DOWNTOWN CORE/FRINGE MAJOR STRATEGIES

<i>Name of Policy Area</i>	<i>Preservation</i>	<i>Revitalization</i>	<i>Redevelopment</i>
City Center	●	▲	●
Destination Entertainment	●	▲	▲
Office Center	▲	●	▲
Lower Core	▲	●	●
Downtown Support Area	●	●	▲
Visitor/Tourism Gateway	▲	●	▲
Meridian Street Small Business Center	▲	●	▲
Low Avenue Impact Area	●	●	▲

- ▲ = Applicable
- = Not Applicable

Definition of Major Strategies:

Preservation: Existing physical character should be preserved, reinforced and enhanced.

Revitalization: Economic and/or land use change are necessary, but certain elements of the area’s character (as discussed in the text) should be protected.

Redevelopment: Buildings and land uses will be replaced with new structures and activities.

Huntsville City Center

Existing Conditions

This Policy Area includes 14 blocks surrounding the Courthouse Square. The City Center Policy Area constitutes the heart of the City's pre-1950 central business district. It includes the majority of the area's historic non-residential buildings and the highest density of buildings within the Study Area.

The buildings in the City Center Policy Area vary from 30-foot wide traditional commercial buildings to larger multi-story structures. Heights vary from one to eight stories, and most, although not all, of the larger buildings are located away from the Courthouse Square. Most buildings have a zero setback. Street level portions of buildings are generally dominated by office uses. There are less than 10 retail establishments operating in the City Center at this time, and there are a small but growing number of restaurants, cafes and small entertainment facilities. The rate of vacancy for first floor storefront space is relatively low, although significantly higher for upper story spaces. Thirty-eight buildings in the Policy Area are listed on the National Register of Historic Places via a Multiple Resource Assessment.

The City Center Policy Area is the site of a large amount of the investments made to date by the City of Huntsville within the Study Area. These include streetscape elements that date predominately from the 1970s (a portion of the West Side Court House Square and segments in several other locations have been rebuilt between the mid-1990s and the present) and Big Spring Park East, which was constructed in the mid-1990s. The park is well developed and in good condition, although it experiences little use. The recently-constructed portions of the streetscape are also in good repair, but the portions constructed in the 1970s have experienced significant deterioration. Brick surfaces are uneven, while several brick planters are also deteriorated and present an appearance that is more imposing than appealing. In general, the City Center streetscape is in need of upgrading in those locations where it has not been recently reconstructed.

The City Center Policy Area has relatively few surface parking lots or other vacant lots as compared to many downtowns, although some surface lots do exist. The majority of parking in this Policy Area is provided by multi-level parking decks. When the current Von Braun Center garage improvements are completed, the following public parking resources will be available in, or within one block of, the City Center Policy Area:

- 2660 spaces in 4 parking structures
- 406 on-street metered spaces
- 131 off-street metered spaces
- 339 non-metered spaces in surface lots
- 97 "thirty minute" spaces formerly called loading zones

This results in approximately 3,633, public parking spaces serving the policy area. This total does not include private parking lots, for which there is no data. There are no private providers of public parking in Downtown Huntsville.

Traffic circulation in the City Center Policy Area consists primarily of two one-way couplets. Although no formal traffic analysis was conducted for this Plan Update, it appears that all of the roads in the City Center have generally adequate capacities for their purposes.

At this time, there are almost no full-time residents of the City Center Policy Area, with the notable exception of the residents of the Russell-Erskine Apartments . A building rehabilitation project creating eight condominiums in the Terry-Hutchens Building is now complete. A small number of additional residential projects have been proposed to date, although none has completed construction at this time.

The southwestern three blocks of this Policy Area are dominated by City Hall and associated buildings. Although many of these structures are of a different scale and character than those of the remainder of the City Center, these buildings play a critical role in the future vitality of this district. City Hall and the associated buildings represent a significant percentage of the employees who are likely to use City Center businesses, residences and services, and they represent a significant market opportunity for City Center establishments. Efforts to draw these employees into the City Center will be particularly crucial to the early stages of the City Center's revitalization.

Other facilities within the City Center Policy Area include the County Court House and Constitution Village. These destinations are important to the City Center's future because of their ability to attract local and regional visitors.

Major Strategy: *Revitalization*

Vision

The City Center will be a socially, culturally and economically vibrant environment in which people enjoy working, living, shopping and being entertained. The City Center will retain, enhance and build upon its architecture and its historic role as the center of Huntsville's economic and social activity. Offices will be made more desirable by the presence of shopping and entertainment opportunities that are appropriate to the physical scale of the environment. Residents and visitors will enjoy walking through the City Center and between the City Center and other parts of Downtown Huntsville, thanks to high-quality public improvements and wayfinding signage.

Actions

Implementation Strategies

1.2 Develop and administer Central Business District Zoning.

1.3 Rezone Study Area Properties. Develop a central business zoning district or central business overlay district that focuses on the mixed use needs of the City Center. This District or Overlay District should:

- Promote commercial retail activity on the first floor of buildings through the establishment of such intent in the Purpose Statement of the district/overlay; the list of permitted uses, and through performance standards (e.g. “retail and other commercial uses that generate pedestrian activity shall be located on the street level of buildings within the downtown core area.”).
- Promote office and residential uses on upper floors of buildings (e.g. office uses; only when located on upper stories of the building).
- Establish office uses as a Special Exception Use on the first floor of buildings within the downtown core district. Office uses will be permitted as of right on all other floors within the downtown core district.
- Eliminate uses that do not generate pedestrian traffic or are not conducive to a downtown atmosphere (e.g. remove light manufacturing, trailer parks, gasoline service stations, personal storage facilities, etc. that are currently permitted uses in the C-3 General Commercial District which is applied to the City Center Policy Area).

The City Center’s zoning should be particularly designed to encourage small-scale residential development on upper floors. Mixed uses within buildings should be explicitly permitted and encouraged.

1.4 Develop a Design Review Overlay Zone. This recommendation is particularly relevant to the City Center Policy Area because of its extreme public visibility, density and role as the traditional center of City activity. Since buildings in the City Center are so close to each other, the visual appearance of adjoining buildings will have a profound impact on the resale value and redevelopment potential of buildings or lots. Additionally, increases in residents, visitors and businesses in the City Center Policy Area will further raise the public visibility of the City Center, which is already closely associated with Huntsville’s public image as a result of its historic role as the center of community activity. Revitalizing the City Center will require high quality visual design, not only with regard to public improvements, but private buildings as well. Design review guidelines will help support and protect the investment made by new property owners by ensuring that future developments will not adversely impact the value of their investment.

As noted previously, the larger goal of design review for the City Center may be met through use of the City's existing Historic Preservation ordinance, or through the creation of a new Design Review Overlay Zone³. Each approach will have its advantages and disadvantages. While there is clear precedent for the use of the Historic Preservation ordinance to review design issues, not all of the buildings that exist in the City Center Policy Area may be able to be included in a local historic district. As a result, some buildings in the City Center Area, particularly near the fringes, may not be subject to design review, to the detriment of neighboring structures. A Design Review Overlay Zone will not have this limitation, but this approach will represent a significant departure from local practice to date. The City should review both strategies, identify the strategy it prefers, and pursue that alternative.

2.3 Improve Linkages between Policy Areas. As noted in the *Implementation Strategies*, the Downtown Core and Fringe policy areas have experienced substantial public investments designed to facilitate pedestrian movement. A few obstacles to the pedestrian experience remain; improving these will increase the usefulness of the Downtown Core/Fringe pedestrian system.

In terms of the long-term economic health of the City Center Policy Area, the most significant linkage extends between the City Center Policy Area and the Destination Entertainment/Culture Policy Area along Big Spring Park East and Big Spring Park. Because of the extensive construction undertaken as a result of the 1989 Downtown Master Plan's recommendations, the physical improvements in this area are high quality and support the needs of the community. Though there are currently pedestrian improvements that do connect these two Policy Areas, there are spatial gaps that impede the use of these facilities to effectively link the Destination Entertainment/Culture and City Center Policy Areas. These two Policy Areas should be able to draw on each other's resources, and linking these two Policy Areas is crucial to establish and maintain that synergy.

The first element that impedes a strong connection is visibility. The path from the Court House Square through Big Spring Park East should be made clearly apparent to pedestrians around Court House Square. A sequential series of views and spatial experiences that entice pedestrians to move from Court House Square into Big Spring Park East, and from there to Big Spring Park and the Von Braun Center (as well as in reverse order) should be developed. At present, vegetation blocks several views from the West Side Court House Square to Big Spring Park East. Selected removal of some vegetation will provide a clear line of sight from Court House Square to Big Spring Park East. Landscaping is very important, however, visibility into Big Spring Park East is also important. Along the railing at the top of the staircase at the street level plaza to Big Spring Park East, the plant material should be low to the ground to entice pedestrians to look and visit the park. At present, one should be at the railing to see into the park. Trees surrounding the staircase should undergo select clearing or limbing up. These trees should frame views into the park, not block them.

³ Use of the existing Historic Preservation Ordinance will require that as much of the City Center as possible be designated as a Historic District. This item is discussed further in Implementation Strategy 3.1.

Pedestrian access to Big Spring Park East should be easy and clear, not only via the existing plaza and staircase along West Side Court House Square, but also along Spring Street via its connection to Big Spring Park East. Widening the northern sidewalk of Spring Street will increase pedestrian comfort along the steep grade of the street, and pedestrian amenities similar to those provided in the Court House Square area will improve the pedestrian environment in this block. Public art or a decorative information kiosk at the intersection of Spring Street and Spragins Street will further increase the use of this route. This location will draw people down Spring Street and bring people over from Big Spring Park East.

The comprehensive pedestrian wayfinding system identified in *Implementation Strategy 9.1* should explicitly address this linkage by providing clear, distinctive signs that lead the pedestrian to and from the City Center, Big Spring Park complex, the Von Braun Center and other entertainment destinations. The signs should indicate the Big Spring Park East/Big Spring Park linkage as the preferred pedestrian route through this area, although the Spring/Spragins route should also be indicated where appropriate.

The third element that currently impedes a successful link between the Destination Entertainment/Culture and City Center Policy Areas is pedestrian/vehicular conflict points along Church Street. Although it is important that Church Street retain its ability to move relatively high volumes of traffic smoothly, this increased traffic will also increase the need for safe and comfortable pedestrian crossing strategies.

Given the high Levels of Service (LOS) generally observed on roads in this area, a variety of pedestrian enhancement strategies are appropriate. Specific designs for these access points should be created based on more detailed traffic analysis than is available at this time. Development of design plans for any of these items should be based on detailed analysis of existing traffic patterns and simulations of future traffic movement.

At the Church Street conflict point, the following strategies will improve pedestrian use of the linkage:

- Create “bump-outs” along the western side of the street to define the existing on-street parking, as a vehicle is traveling southbound, to lessen the distance a pedestrian should cross from curblineline to curblineline across the street;
- Create a landscaped median over the current painted median to provide a pedestrian refuge area to assist with crossing multiple lanes of traffic;
- Install additional “Pedestrian Crosswalk” signs;
- Investigate the possibility of a grade separated crossing;
- Change the color and texture of pavement in the crosswalk to draw the motorists’ attention to their use by using pavers or scored and tinted concrete. Either material will perform in an adequate fashion.

Depending on the results of the traffic analysis, it may also be appropriate to raise the height of the pedestrian crossing to create a “speed table” and to install pedestrian-actuated traffic signals.

Since these improvements will require a larger amount of public investment, they should only be constructed if traffic analysis indicates that the less intrusive design strategies will be ineffective.

3.1 Designate eligible Policy Areas and subareas as local Historic Districts or Conservation Overlay Districts. Local historic district designation will also have a significant impact on the City Center Policy Area by encouraging high-quality reinvestment. Local historic district designations that are accompanied by architectural review have been consistently shown to have a significant positive impact on property values and economic activity in central business districts. This positive effect occurs for two reasons. First, local historic designation, like National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) designation, creates a differentiating factor for the district: its “historic” character sets it apart from other locations, which provides a fundamental marketing advantage. Second, architectural review processes of the type currently in place in Huntsville benefit a commercial district in the same manner as they do a residential district by lowering a property or business owners’ risk that the value of their investment will be undermined by incompatible development or alterations nearby. This protection is especially important in a traditional downtown business district because of the extremely close proximity of the buildings and the strong visual impact that one building can have on its neighbors.

Designation of a City Center local historic district will follow the same procedure as the designation of residential districts. Since a minimum of 60% of property owners should approve a local designation under Alabama law, it may be necessary to engage in a public education process to ensure that a sufficient number of property owners understand the benefits and are willing to endorse the designation. This effort should be led by the Big Spring Partners or other downtown advocacy organization, in partnership with the City of Huntsville and the Historic Huntsville Foundation. The public education effort should focus on the economic and marketing advantages of local historic district designation, and should emphasize the design guidelines that will be used to guide decision-making. It may be necessary to revise the bylaws of the Historic Preservation Commission to include a City Center property owner in order to provide a voice for the City Center. This revision will make the local designation more likely to gain the approval of a majority of property owners, as required by State law.

Excellent examples of appropriate design guidelines for commercial district are available through several sources, including the National Main Street Center and communities such as Chattanooga, Tennessee and Lexington, Kentucky.

8.2 Construct the remainder of the Streetscape as developed in the 1993 Downtown Streetscape Vision with recommended alterations. As noted in the *Implementation Strategies*, the streetscape hierarchy developed in the 1993 *Downtown Streetscape Vision* as a result of the 1989 Downtown Master Plan is appropriate to the City Center Policy Area and surrounding portions of the Downtown Core subarea. This streetscape program has been implemented to a greater extent in the City Center than in other Policy Areas. However, newly-constructed areas of streetscape throughout the City Center are interspersed with unimproved stretches of the aged streetscape constructed in the 1970s. This disconnected pattern is a result from a policy of generally upgrading the streetscape in conjunction with other development projects. While this policy has some merit from a fiscal perspective, the value and potential impact of the streetscape

improvements are greatly lessened by the lack of a connected, cohesive streetscape environment. The goal of a streetscape is to create an inviting and safe environment for pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists: a fragmented streetscape does neither and distracts from the Downtown experience.

Additionally, some of the 1970s streetscape elements are in need of replacement. Areas of sidewalk paver bricks have crumbled and heaved and some planters have become damaged, resulting in a street that is unattractive. Although the portions of the new streetscape that have been constructed are appealing and safe, their appeal is negated by the presence of these deteriorating elements.

Construction of the improved streetscape as designed in 1993 should be completed as quickly as practical. Although it may be possible to use less expensive construction methods in some locations (the *Downtown Streetscape Vision* identifies several alternative construction strategies), segments that have already been partially improved should be completed with the same construction techniques, or the investment in the earlier streetscape elements will be partially wasted. The construction techniques identified in the *Downtown Streetscape Vision* remain standard to the industry, if properly constructed.

If the angled parking identified in the Policy Area Action 7d is constructed, the 1993 streetscape design should be adjusted to reflect the changes in curb lines.

Although streetscape reconstruction is necessary and should be pursued as soon as possible, it will be necessary to phase this construction, both to spread out the cost and to minimize the disruption to the City Center economy. The exact nature of phasing should be based on a detailed prioritization of streetscape needs and on the availability of fiscal resources. The City should evaluate its capital improvements budget on an annual basis and determine the appropriate timing and phasing of streetscape improvements within the overall context of its citywide capital improvements.

Completing the streetscape successfully will also require the City to maintain close communication with City Center businesses, property owners and residents throughout the planning and construction processes. Businesses and property owners are at risk of significant operational losses during the construction period, although frequent communication about the schedule of construction will help lessen that risk. The City's representatives should be sensitive to the concerns and needs of City Center businesses, and should help lessen the impact whenever possible. For example, it may be necessary to provide alternative temporary parking locations to offset those made inaccessible during construction. The Huntsville City Center's current dependence on office employment may lessen this impact, as compared to what might be seen in a retail-dominated downtown environment. Establishments that rely on walk-in business, such as restaurants and retail stores, will be particularly susceptible during the streetscape reconstruction; the City and its contractors should take pains to minimize disruptions to these businesses.

A downtown advocacy organization will be particularly crucial during streetscape construction. This organization can pursue a variety of strategies to lessen the impact on City Center businesses, including:

- Publishing and distributing bulletins that alert business and property owners to upcoming meetings and construction events;
- Engaging in public relations to inform the community that the district is open to business;
- Encouraging the use of particularly susceptible downtown businesses (for example, by distributing coupons from local restaurants and retailers); and
- Helping business owners access business planning and funding to help them weather the construction period.

Finally, constructing the streetscape successfully may require the City to develop new financing strategies. Although assessments are generally used to fund improvements to public right of ways, relying solely on assessments to fund streetscape construction can easily destroy a downtown's economy, especially when new businesses and residents are desired.

When a large streetscape construction assessment is levied, property owners find themselves with an additional cost which they should either absorb or pass on to their lessees. If property owners attempt to absorb these costs, the amount of funding available for property improvements is decreased, which can result in deferred maintenance and building deterioration. If the property owner increases the building's rental rates, this increase may drive the occupants out of the structure in favor of areas that have lower rental rates. Given Huntsville's desire to increase its downtown retail and service businesses and to increase the number of residents, the City Center cannot afford for either scenario to take place.

Most urban streetscape project nationwide are not funded solely through assessments. While it may be appropriate to assess adjoining properties for a portion of the improvement costs, other funding sources should also be tapped. These sources may include:

- Tax Increment Financing;
- City Capital Improvement funding;
- City General Obligation funds;
- Transportation Enhancement funds.

Policy Area Actions

Because of the high level of complexity involved with the encouragement of social, cultural and economic activity in the City Center Policy Area, many of the strategies below are discussed in greater detail in the *Downtown Liveliness Strategies* section of this Master Plan Update. The actions below are primarily designed to facilitate appropriate redevelopment in the City Center. Needs that are primarily designed to bring social, cultural and economic activity to the City Center are mentioned here and discussed in greater detail in the *Downtown Liveliness Strategies*.

1. **Encourage and support a strong downtown management and advocacy organization that can lead the public/private sector partnership that will be necessary to carry out most of the needed improvements.** Neither City nor private efforts will be able to revitalize the City Center alone. Revitalizing the City Center Policy Area will require both City and private sector interests to develop a new model for working together. A recommended model based on a nationally-proven downtown organizational approach is outlined in the *Downtown Liveliness Strategies*.
2. **Continue to review and upgrade building codes, where applicable, to identify the most appropriate strategies for fostering the redevelopment of existing City Center buildings.** Building codes designed for new construction generally have several impacts on the revitalization of a central business district. First, strict adherence to building codes designed for new construction usually results in the replacement of functional elements, such as staircases or doors. Duplicating or replacing these features adds significant costs to the rehabilitation of an existing building: not only should these features be constructed, but their construction is likely to significantly decrease the amount of usable floor space, since removing the original feature that does not comply with the code will be cost-prohibitive. A 1991 study of building renovation trends in the Warehouse District of Cleveland, Ohio found that an apartment in a renovated building cost \$20,000 more when developers were requirement to meet traditional building code requirements than when they were permitted to use a code designed for existing buildings.⁴ Developers are likely to find that cost increases of this magnitude cannot be supported by any but the largest buildings. As a result, small buildings such as those that dominate the City Center Policy Area may be incapable of profitable redevelopment when new building codes should be met.

The majority of upper story space in the City Center is widely understood to be vacant. There are no up-to-date data sources available to this Master Plan Update to confirm this expectation, but an informal survey indicates that most upper story space is unoccupied or underutilized. Upper story vacancies have a profound but hidden impact on the vitality of a central business district. Not only do they represent residents and businesses that could be participating in the life of the City, but they indicate that rents for the first story

⁴ Hauser and Taylor, *Historic Warehouse District Housing Study*, 1991.

storefront areas of buildings should be high enough to support the maintenance of the entire building. If upper story spaces can be profitably rented, then there is less rent pressure on the first story storefront space, and storefronts can be rented for a wider variety of uses. However, if upper story spaces cannot be rented, and if the storefront space cannot generate enough rent to pay for the entire building's maintenance, the property will begin to experience deferred maintenance, which will accelerate the property's deterioration and further weaken its market value. This is a pressure faced by a majority of City Center building owners: first floor uses should generate the highest possible amount of rental income because upper stories are rendered minimally useful by code requirements. This pressure also works against efforts to encourage retail and other non-office commercial activity in storefront spaces, since the need to rent these spaces at the highest possible rates often pushes them to office rental rather than other uses.

In early 2005, the Mayor and City Council approved the adoption of the 2003 International Building Codes along with the 2002 National Electrical Codes. Internationally, code officials recognized the need for a modern, up-to-date code addressing repair, alteration, addition or change of occupancy in existing buildings. The *International Existing Building Code*, in its 2003 edition, is designed to meet this need through model code regulations that safeguard the public health and safety in all communities, large and small. This comprehensive existing building code establishes minimum regulations for existing buildings using prescriptive and performance-related provisions. It is founded on broad-based principles intended to encourage the use and reuse of existing buildings while requiring reasonable upgrades and improvements. The adoption of this code is a tangible step by the City of Huntsville to remove code-related barriers to downtown revitalization while meeting the important responsibility of administering building codes that are designed to protect health and safety. These efforts should have a positive impact on the redevelopment of existing buildings in the City Center.

- 3. Develop a full package of incentives to encourage and support appropriate retail and service business activity.** Although a variety of traditional economic development strategies may be used effectively in other Downtown Core/Fringe Policy Areas, many commonly-used initiatives, such as City-funded infrastructure investments, may be ill-suited to the smaller business spaces found in the City Center. Strategies for encouraging retail and service business activity in the City Center Policy area are outlined in the *Downtown Liveliness Strategies* section of this Plan Update. In brief, these strategies include targeted incentives and technical support, such as façade improvement seed grants, entrepreneurship training and cooperative marketing strategies.

These strategies will, however, be ineffective if they are not carefully coordinated with the other elements that will impact the City Center's retail and service economy, including zoning, residential development and the promotional activities cited below. It should be understood by all concerned that a retail/service/entertainment center in the City Center will not happen immediately, but will take several years of concerted effort

to develop. See the *Downtown Liveliness Strategies* for more information on potential retail/service incentives.

4. **Actively and consciously recruit appropriate retail and service businesses.** This point is also discussed in greater detail in the *Downtown Liveliness Strategies*. The downtown advocacy organization and other downtown stakeholders will find it necessary to establish a downtown business development and recruitment plan.

Like incentives, recruitment should be carefully targeted to attract the businesses that are desired. A scattered or “shotgun” approach to recruitment will have little benefit to the City Center and will not use public or private resources effectively.

5. **Support appropriate outdoor economic activity.** Outdoor activity in downtown areas creates a perception of vitality and leads to additional activity-generating development. Outdoor activity includes planned events, sidewalk dining and sales from kiosks or vendor carts. Kiosks and vendor carts may also present an opportunity for creating entry-level retail opportunities, since potential entrepreneurs who cannot afford the current high cost of storefront space may be able to start as cart vendors until they can develop the capital to lease a storefront.

Both sidewalk dining and vendor carts should be encouraged in any location where sidewalk depth is adequate to allow safe passage of pedestrians. City staff and officials should review appropriate codes and approval processes to ensure that they do not unnecessarily impede sidewalk dining and appropriate sidewalk vending. Promotional events are discussed in the *Downtown Liveliness Strategies*

6. **Undertake a comprehensive parking improvement program to maximize the effectiveness of existing parking resources.** Although additional parking spaces or structures may be needed for specific purposes in specific locations, it appears likely that the City Center’s existing parking resources can meet current and future parking demands if the efficiency and effectiveness of the existing resources can be improved. The following strategies will maximize the use of existing parking resources.

- a. **Conduct a parking utilization study of all public parking resources in the Downtown Core and Downtown Fringe Subareas.** Available parking utilization information is based solely on the number of parking permits sold. Although this data has some value, it does not indicate the actual amount of use of the parking spaces. Additionally, this information does not indicate changes in parking utilization over the course of a day or from one day of the week to another, and it does not provide any information relating to the use of parking by City Center visitors. A detailed understanding of actual parking utilization is necessary if existing parking resources are to be maximized.

The City should conduct or commission a parking utilization study examining, at the minimum, the percentage of use City parking facilities are currently

experiencing and the degree to which parking utilization rates change during the day. A parking utilization study will determine actual occupancy rates throughout the day and evening for permit, metered and other parking facilities, and will identify locations where parking resources are underutilized or operating at maximum capacity. This information will provide a necessary concrete foundation for future parking initiatives.

- b. **Design and implement an improved wayfinding system to guide motorists to off-street parking.** As noted above, Huntsville’s existing parking utilization data does not give any indication as to visitors’ use of off-street parking resources. However, visitors to downtown areas generally fail to use off-street parking because they cannot find the parking facilities or the entrances or because they are unsure if the parking facility is available for their use. As a result, visitors to a downtown area tend to perceive the on-street parking spaces that they can readily see as the only available parking. Since most downtowns can only accommodate a fraction of their parking needs with on-street spaces, this leads to a perception of a parking “shortage” in the downtown area.

Since there are a considerable number of off-street parking resources in and near the City Center Policy Area, it appears likely that visitors could make greater use of these facilities if they were comfortable finding and navigating them. City parking facilities are signed, but this signage is minimal and may be easily overlooked among the profusion of signs in a commercial area. Additionally, there is little signage designed to direct a person who is unfamiliar with the downtown area to appropriate parking facilities.

Specifically, a system of wayfinding signage should be developed that includes City parking facilities. This system should be visually coordinated with other wayfinding and linkage elements as noted in *Implementation Strategy 9.1*. The wayfinding system should include signage that directs motorists to off-street parking facilities, as well as vehicular and pedestrian entrance points. In addition, the City and/or a downtown advocacy organization will improve users’ understanding of parking resources by producing and distributing a brochure that identifies downtown parking facilities. This brochure should include a map that identifies the location and entrance points for each off-street parking facility that is available to the public. This brochure can be distributed at City Center government offices and places of business, made available at special events, and posted on the City and downtown businesses’ web sites.

- c. **Continue to upgrade the appearance of all off-street parking facilities.** Downtown visitors often balk at using parking garages because they perceive these spaces as uninviting or unsafe. Many of Huntsville’s parking garages were built in an era that emphasized utilitarian function over people-friendly spaces. Recognizing this, the City has made several improvements in recent years to make them more attractive and safe including fresh paint and upgraded lighting.

However, each garage should continue to be evaluated regularly and improvements programmed as needed. Potential improvements that may increase the perceived comfort and safety of these facilities may include the following:

- Increasing the level of interior lighting;
- Restriping travel lanes and spaces to accommodate different sizes of vehicles;
- Enhancing entrances with signage, lights and landscaping
- Replacing or installing façade treatments that screen vehicles from view.

- d. **Modify the parking supply in the City Center Policy Area by constructing angled parking in strategically chosen locations.** Installing angled parking in the City Center area has been identified as a possibility throughout this Plan process as a result of downtown business operators' needs for convenient short-term parking. Angled parking represents one strategy for increasing the amount of on-street parking.

The addition of angled parking should be focused only on appropriate locations within the City Center Policy Area and conform to an acceptable design criteria. Constructing angled parking outside of the City Center Policy Area is likely to impede traffic patterns and create a confusing environment for motorists.

- e. **Develop a remote parking lot with a shuttle to the City Center.** As noted in the Downtown Support Policy Area, the area adjoining Church Street under the I-565 right of way and the area south of Cleveland Avenue near I-565 both provide an opportunity for a remote parking lot. One of the goals of the parking utilization study noted above should be to identify existing and potential future demand for a remote parking facility. If the parking utilization study provides adequate justification, the City should create a remote parking facility in one or both of these locations. Given current City Center and Destination Culture/Entertainment district parking demands, these lots are not likely to become necessary until close to the end of this Plan Update's 10-year time frame.

A remote parking facility will require a dedicated shuttle line connecting the parking facility to the City Center; a proposed route is shown in Figure 5. This route may be customized if large employers express an interest in using the remote parking facility. To be effective, this shuttle should complete its route every 15 minutes on average. This facility should be dedicated to permit parkers during business hours and should be open to visitors during evening and weekend hours. It may also be beneficial to extend this shuttle system to include the publicly-owned surface parking facility northwest of the Von Braun Center so that the 550 spaces available there may be fully utilized.

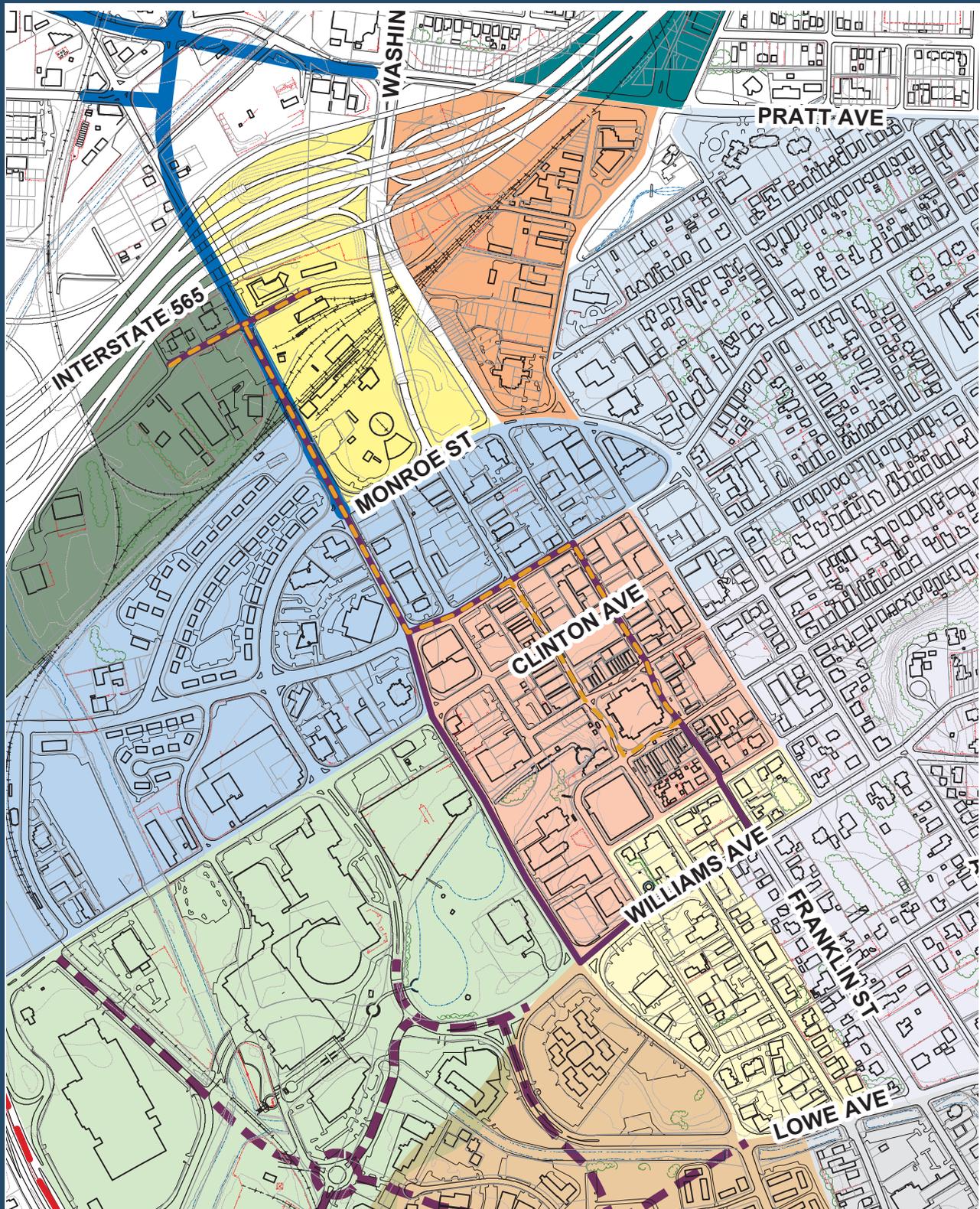
Ensuring use of these facilities will require careful attention to design details such as landscaping, lighting, protected access and user amenities, such as shelters at

shuttle stops. Parking areas should be well-lit at all times; parking areas under the I-565 overpass will require particular attention to creating comfortable levels of daytime and evening lighting. Parking facilities should also be regularly patrolled during all hours of occupation, and these patrols should be visible to facility users.

Use of the remote parking facility should be actively encouraged; it is unlikely that current downtown parkers will use it unless they find it necessary or to their advantage. There are several potential strategies, depending on the location used.

- If use of the land under I-565 can be obtained at no cost, the City may be able to provide parking on this parcel free of charge. This may be a significant incentive for City Center business owners to use the remote facility.
 - If the area south of Cleveland Street is used, the City may discount the monthly parking fee for City Center business owners who arrange for their employees to use the remote lot.
 - The City may require City employees to use the remote lot in order to free parking spaces near City Hall and to demonstrate to other City Center employees that using the remote parking is convenient, easy and safe.
- f. Avoid creating surface parking. As noted above, the creation of new surface parking lots within the City Center Policy Area should be strongly discouraged. Although surface parking lots may appear to provide a short-term solution to a perceived shortage of parking, surface parking lots have been consistently shown to have a negative effect on the economic strength of downtown areas. Not only do surface parking lots decrease the amount of economic activity in the area, but they discourage pedestrian movement and undermine downtown liveliness. Surface parking lots should only be permitted if they are supported by a parking utilization analysis that indicates a need for parking in a specific location. If such a need is documented, the surface lot should be as small as possible, set behind existing commercial buildings, and developed with appropriate landscaping and lighting.

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Legend

Weekday Route	Downtown Core/Fringe Concept Areas	Study Area Sub Areas
Evening/Weekend Route	Huntsville City Center	Medical District
Church Street Realignment	Destination Entertainment	Old Town District
Lowe Avenue Reconfiguration	Office Center	Twickenham District
Study Area	Lower Core Policy Area	
	Downtown Support Area	
	Visitor/Tourism Gateway	
	Meridian St. Small Business Center	
	Dallas Bypass Greenway	
	Lowe Avenue Impact Area	



Downtown Master Plan Update

Huntsville, Alabama

Figure 4
Concept Downtown Shuttle Route

October 17, 2005



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Destination Entertainment/Culture (See Opportunity Site #7)

Existing Conditions

The Destination Entertainment/Culture Policy Area is distinguished from other portions of the Study Area by a significant concentration of regional destinations and cultural institutions and a large amount of land available for redevelopment. The Destination Entertainment/Culture Policy Area includes Big Spring Park, the Von Braun Center, the Huntsville Art Museum, the Huntsville Public Library and the Holiday Inn hotel. The Policy Area also includes several sites that are underutilized or do not represent the optimal use of their site. These include the parking garage north of Big Spring Park, the former Meadow Gold site, and the Market Square shopping mall, formerly known as the Heart of Huntsville mall. Each of these sites has been the ongoing subject of scrutiny for a variety of developments during the previous ten year-period, and proposals for their redevelopment continue to circulate at this time. The Market Square site is the largest and potentially most complicated of these sites in terms of physical characteristics.

This area has also benefited from an exceptionally large amount of public investment as a result of the 1989 *Downtown Master Plan*, including improvements to Big Spring Park, the Huntsville Art Museum, and the South Hall of the Von Braun Center, among others. This Policy Area continues to be the focus of a significant amount of public investment: the Pinhook Creek Flood Control Project and Riverwalk, the reconfiguration of Lowe Avenue and several adjoining streets, and the reconstruction of Fagan Creek are all expected to be constructed during the next ten years and will have a profound impact on this Policy Area.

The Destination Entertainment/Culture Policy Area has a potentially strong link to the City Center via Big Spring Park. This link is underutilized at this time and is impaired by the pedestrian-unfriendly crossing at Church Street, which is discussed in greater detail in the City Center Policy Area portion of this Master Plan Update. Although these Policy Areas have the potential to create a strong, mutually-reinforcing array of urban environments and activities, the lack of effective linkages between them makes pedestrian movement between them extremely difficult. Additionally, vehicular movement between these two Policy Areas is often impaired by large volumes of traffic attempting to enter or leave the Destination Entertainment/Culture Policy area as a result of events at the Von Braun Center, the Policy Area's largest destination.

The Pinhook Creek Flood Control and Riverwalk project is also proposed to create a link between elements of the Policy Area that are currently disconnected. A branch of the Riverwalk will extend along the south side of the Von Braun Center between Monroe Street and the Market Square property. The Riverwalk will provide pedestrian promenades at and below street grades. The promenades below street grade will allow pedestrians to cross Monroe Avenue and other streets without conflicting with vehicular traffic.

Additionally, an extensive roadway construction and realignment program is planned for the Destination Entertainment/Culture and Lowe Avenue Impact policy areas. This roadway system

will significantly reconfigure traffic movement, land development and pedestrian activity throughout this area. Although the roadway system will include the realignment or extension of several roadways and the construction of other roadways that have not yet been named, no single name has been applied to this multi-phase project. For the purposes of this Plan, the entire project is referred to in this Plan as the Lowe Avenue System.

The proposed Lowe Avenue System will realign the intersection of Lowe and Williams avenues, as it has already been realigned at the intersection of Monroe Street and Williams Avenue. Also, a new connector street from Monroe Street south of the former Naval Reserve site to the eastern side of the Market Square site will be constructed. This roadway system will create an important linkage between the Destination Entertainment/Culture Area and the policy areas to the east.

At present, the Market Square development is oriented toward Memorial Parkway and separated from the remainder of the Destination Entertainment/Culture Policy Area and the rest of the Study Area by roadways, a rail line, and an electric transmission facility. Construction of the Lowe Avenue System will also help catalyze the redevelopment of the site and create opportunities for new development on this site to become an integral part of this Policy Area's social, economic and pedestrian activity.

The Destination Entertainment/Culture Policy Area has generally good highway access to the region via I-565 and Memorial Parkway, which has a full interchange at Clinton Avenue. Some specific properties within the Policy Area do not at present have easy access to Memorial Parkway, but the reconstruction of the Lowe Avenue System and its extension to Clinton Avenue will create a major new entrance route from Memorial Parkway into the Destination Entertainment/Culture Area and Policy Areas to the east.

Major Strategy: *Revitalization/Redevelopment*

Vision

The Destination Entertainment/Culture Policy Area compliments the City Center Policy Area and the rest of Downtown Huntsville by providing entertainment, dining, cultural and shopping opportunities that will draw visitors from throughout the Greater Huntsville area. Establishments in the Destination Entertainment/Culture Policy Area will differ from those in the City Center by providing an environment that, while generally urban in character, is of a different scale than those in the City Center. Retail and entertainment development in the Destination Entertainment/Culture Center will be generally at a larger, less specialized scale than may be feasible in the City Center, and may include activities that are not feasible in the City Center due to regulatory requirements and space limitations. Both national and regionally distinctive establishments will be available.

The Destination Entertainment/Culture Area will focus on the natural features of Big Spring Park and the Pinhook Creek Riverwalk. Pedestrian movement between the Destination Entertainment/Culture Policy Area and the City Center will be strongly encouraged through

urban design, wayfinding, parking policies and event programming, both to increase economic activity in both Policy Areas and to decrease the amount of auto traffic through the area.

Actions

Implementation Strategies

1.1 Develop and administer revised PD system. Opportunity Site #7 should be rezoned to a Planned Development district to promote the redevelopment of this area into a “Destination Entertainment/Culture District” with mixed uses and vibrant outdoor spaces. This site will have a profound impact on the economic health and visual character of Downtown Huntsville, and the City should insure that this development meets the City’s goals. Additionally, the City will need as much flexibility as possible in negotiating with potential developers in order to ensure that the City’s larger goals are met.

1.3 Rezone Study Area Properties. Also, the remainder of this policy area should be rezoned General Business C-3 to facilitate appropriate redevelopment and eliminate the possibility of industrial development.

1.4 Develop a Design Review Overlay Zone to be applied to targeted corridors and economic development locations. Properties along the extension of Lowe Avenue should be subject to a design review process to protect the public investment in the improvements in these areas. Given the expected large amount of investment that will be expended in this area, it will also be important to give developers a level of confidence that other new development will also adhere to high design standards.

2.2 Improve non-vehicular linkages through and between Policy Areas. As noted previously, effective linkages are particularly essential to the success of Downtown Huntsville because they will allow different areas of the Downtown to connect with each other and encourage movement around the City. If visitors can easily walk between the Destination Entertainment/Culture facilities and the City Center, they will have a greater variety of establishments from which to choose. As a result, these visitors will experience a richer and more enjoyable urban environment, and be more likely to return again. Additionally, requiring visitors to one establishment, whether in the City Center or the Destination Entertainment/Culture Area, to retrieve their cars and drive a few blocks to another venue will create an enormous amount of traffic congestion. This is particularly the case in the vicinity of the Von Braun Center, where special events can result in hundreds or thousands of cars trying to enter or leave the area simultaneously.

Although roadways within the Study Area are generally adequate for regular traffic volumes, additional traffic generated by new developments will only exacerbate this traffic congestion concern, and event-related traffic congestion will impair efforts to promote businesses in the area. Roadways in this area, however, cannot be widened or expanded to meet these atypical

levels of demand without severely impairing the desirability and economic viability of the Destination Entertainment/Culture Policy Area. As a result, visitors should be encouraged to walk between Destination Entertainment/Culture Area establishments and City Center establishments to the greatest extent possible.

See the City Center Policy Area portion of this Master Plan for recommendations on specific improvements in Big Spring Park East at the Church Street crossing.

3.3 Construct Gateway Elements at appropriate locations. Because of the expected high levels of visitation in the Destination Entertainment/Culture Policy Area, the Gateway location at the interchange between Memorial Parkway and Clinton Avenue will play a key role in forming visitors' first impressions of Downtown Huntsville. This gateway should be developed as soon as feasible, although it should be based on a coordinated design plan for all of the Downtown Huntsville gateways.

8.1 Develop and implement a comprehensive system of Wayfinding to maximize use of Downtown Huntsville's assets and resources. Given the destination character of the attractions in this Policy Area, wayfinding will be particularly key to the desirability of the area. Wayfinding elements in both this Policy Area and the City Center Policy Area should include destinations in both Policy Areas. Signage directing motorists to parking facilities and directing pedestrians to the Big Spring Park/Pinhook Creek linkage system will be particularly important.

8.2 Construct the remainder of the Streetscape as developed in the 1993 Downtown Streetscape Vision with recommended alterations. Given the expected new development in the Destination Entertainment/Culture Policy Area, the Parkway Streetscape design elements identified in the 1993 *Downtown Streetscape Vision* should be extended along Clinton Avenue to the Memorial Parkway intersection. Developing a reasonably pedestrian-friendly environment along this corridor will be a particular challenge, given the nature of surrounding development. However, improving this corridor's pedestrian character will be important if use of the parking facilities in this area are to be maximized. Assuming that most existing developments along this corridor may be expected to remain in place over the next ten years, some simple strategies to improve the pedestrian environment include the following:

- Install low brick walls and landscaping to partially screen adjoining parking lots and non-pedestrian oriented uses. Given the proximity of the roadway and some buildings to the sidewalk, and given pedestrians' need to see exiting and entering traffic, these buffering elements cannot reach higher than four feet and should be designed to soften the pedestrian space, rather than screening the adjoining land uses entirely. These features are not to be constructed in the right of way, but may be required as an element of the site design of adjoining property improvements as a strategy for defining the edge of the public space.
- Incorporate street tree plantings to provide shade and improve the pedestrian scale of the street as identified in the 1993 *Downtown Streetscape Vision*.

- If private sector leadership can be developed, an initiative to install public art along Clinton Avenue may have a significant impact on the perception of this corridor. See the *Downtown Implementation Strategies* for a discussion of public art as a downtown revitalization strategy. A mural or series of murals on the north wall of the Von Braun Center will soften the imposing effect of these blank walls and create an incentive to walk on Clinton Avenue.

Policy Area Actions

1. **Continue to support and encourage appropriate development at Big Spring Park Site.** As noted in the 1989 Downtown Master Plan, the VBC parking garage immediately north of Big Spring Park represents a poor use of a highly valuable site and should be replaced with a more intensive use that includes retail, restaurants and entertainment facilities, and potentially residential or hotel space, in conjunction with the pedestrian linkage along Big Spring Park.

The new Big Spring Summit project, underway on the eastern edge of this site, is consistent with this recommendation and represents a significant first phase in redevelopment of this important property. In addition, redevelopment of the full lagoon frontage in future phases is being discussed.

There are a variety of scenarios that may be feasible for this location, including entertainment, dining, retail, services, a small hotel or residential units. The successful project will probably include more than one of the above land uses, and should be designed to have varying facades and rooflines. Since the existing parking garage provides over 900 parking spaces, the new development should include a significant amount of public parking. The amount of parking that should be retained on the site depends in part on the results of future parking utilization analyses and the amount of parking that can be constructed on the Meadow Gold site and/or the Downtown Support Policy Area.

It is important to note that a successful urban redevelopment does not necessarily need a dedicated parking spot for every projected visitor. Unlike suburban developments, where patrons travel between different developments almost exclusively by automobile, visitors to establishments in an urban area are more likely to visit other establishments in the vicinity that are not part of the development. In an urban area, it should be expected that patrons will walk between establishments for two reasons: because it is more convenient for them to walk the short distances than to retrieve their cars, drive and park again, and because the walking environment is pleasant, inviting and interesting. With the exception of parking dedicated to residents or hotel guests, parking in any garage associated with a new development on this site should be open to the public, not only to patrons of the development's establishments. Doing so will have several benefits for the developer and the City:

- It will lessen the cost of the project by decreasing the amount of the limited space that should be dedicated to a non-income producing use (if free parking is provided) and increasing the amount of the space that can be used for profitable purposes;
- It will encourage patrons to use other, potentially underutilized parking resources that already exist in the City;
- It will encourage people to walk through Big Spring Park and Big Spring Park East, thus increasing the amount of benefit that the City gains from the public investment in these assets;
- It will reinforce the synergy between the Destination Entertainment/Culture establishments and the facilities in the City Center Policy Area by removing any incentive or requirement to drive between the locations; and
- It will increase pedestrian and economic activity throughout the City Center and Destination Entertainment/Culture Policy Areas by giving people the experience of walking through attractive Downtown Huntsville.

2. **Recruit hotel and/or residential development(s) for a location northeast of Big Spring Park.** The new Embassy Suites hotel currently being constructed at the south end of the Von Braun Center will help increase the amount of convention business available to the Huntsville Visitor and Convention Bureau. In addition, however, it will benefit the Destination Entertainment/Culture and City Center Policy Areas to pursue a smaller hotel as a part of the redevelopment of the parking garage north of Big Spring Park or at an appropriate nearby location. One appropriate strategy will be to recruit a hotel for this site that has a price point that is not in competition with the existing Holiday Inn or the new Embassy Suites being constructed south of the Von Braun Center. Either location, for example, may provide an appropriate location for a smaller-scale suite or boutique hotel, provided that economic conditions are acceptable. Alternatively, a residential development at this location will have many of the same benefits and may become economically feasible more quickly.

Office Center (See Opportunity Site #6)

Existing Conditions

This Policy Area's physical character is markedly different from that of the City Center Policy Area. The Office Center Policy Area is largely dominated by high and mid-rise office buildings, most of which are adjoined by surface parking lots. Uses include general office, financial services, media and the Greater Huntsville Chamber of Commerce. There is also one development that presents a significant challenge and a redevelopment opportunity: the Searcy Homes public housing development, owned and operated by the Huntsville Housing Authority (HHA). The Searcy Homes site is located in the northwest corner of the Policy Area, and consists of 100 housing units on 19.41 acres. There are also flood hazard constraints specifically on the Searcy Homes site.

The area has excellent highway and roadway access, and is intersected by several major arterial routes and transit routes.

Major Strategy: *Preservation and Redevelopment*

Vision

The Office Center Policy Area will be a significant center of Class A office space within Downtown Huntsville. Employees will enjoy excellent highway access, easy parking and proximity to the residences and dining, shopping and entertainment destinations of Huntsville's City Center and Destination Entertainment/Culture attractions as well as adjacent areas within this policy area. Development will be on a more auto-oriented model than in other Policy Areas, although new development will present a more urban appearance than earlier developments in this location. The Office Center will support a large and vibrant daytime population, and will generate support for the businesses in the Central City Area.

Actions

Implementation Strategies

1.2 Develop and administer an Office District.

1.3 Rezone Study Area Properties. Rezone "Opportunity Site 6" to Office District to promote and permit traditional office (administrative, professional, and business) uses. Also, rezone the two blocks encompassed by Monroe Street, Church Street, and Clinton Avenue to General Business C-3 District to further the goals of fostering downtown retail development.

3.3 Construct Gateway Elements at appropriate locations. This Policy Area is bordered by a Downtown Core Gateway on Clinton Avenue near Memorial Parkway. This Gateway may be addressed as part of the construction of the Pinhook Creek project through these areas. Creation of a Gateway may also be made a condition of approval of a development on the Searcy Homes site.

8.2 Proactively upgrade the Downtown Core subarea's urban design according to the 1989 Downtown Master Plan, with appropriate revisions. The 1993 *Downtown Streetscape Vision* identified improvements to be constructed as far north and west as Monroe Street. These improvements use the Parkway Streetscape portion of the design hierarchy and are less elaborate and more auto-oriented than in the Court House Square area. As in other locations, small portions of the streetscape have been constructed. Streetscape construction is still important in this location and will further support the redevelopment of this Policy Area.

Streetscape improvements should extend from the Gateway near Memorial Parkway into the City Center Policy Area, and the 1993 *Downtown Streetscape Vision* should be revised to include the extension of these elements along this primary corridor from Memorial Parkway to Monroe Street. Streetscape elements should be extended along Clinton, Monroe and Church streets in conjunction with the redevelopment of properties in the area to their intersections with Memorial Parkway and the improvements of the area under I-565, as identified in *Implementation Strategies 2.3*.

Policy Area Actions

1. **Redevelop the Searcy Homes site.** Although this site currently fills an important role in the provision of affordable housing, the Searcy Homes site is a poor candidate for the long-term maintenance of the existing 100 units of affordable housing. Searcy Homes is almost entirely located in the Pinhook Creek Floodway and 100-year Flood Fringe. As a result, the HHA will be required to bring the buildings into full compliance with Flood Hazard District regulations and FEMA insurance requirements when improvements to the properties exceed 50% of the property's market value. This limitation will render the Huntsville Housing Authority effectively incapable of conducting any more than routine maintenance on the property before the end of the 10-year time frame of this Master Plan Update, and will result in the severe deterioration of the housing units. As a result, the existing buildings should be demolished and the housing units replaced.

Since only the land in the Flood Fringe will be available for redevelopment, and since any new buildings in the Flood Fringe should comply with stringent site design standards to manage stormwater, construction on this site will be more expensive than similar construction on a non-Flood Hazard District site. Barring receipt of a Hope VI grant or similar large funding source, the Huntsville Housing Authority is not likely to be able to finance the construction of new public housing alone on this site. Total construction on this site should be able to generate a much higher rate of return than may be expected from housing development alone.

A second factor that makes the Searcy Homes site less suitable for a large housing development is its location. The Searcy Homes site is bordered by the Pinhook Creek, an active railroad line, and an area dominated by office, industrial and other non-residential uses. There are no other residences nearby, and few services that can be used by residents. The existing Searcy Homes site serves primarily families with children, but it is located along three major vehicular routes and is not near schools, playgrounds, stores or other facilities appropriate to the everyday needs of families. While this site is not ideal for any residential development, it is particularly not well suited to the needs of income-limited families.

The Huntsville Housing Authority has formally identified an interest in redeveloping the Searcy Homes site as a mixed-used facility that is dominated by office and local retail uses but retains a small amount of mixed-income housing on the site.

Lower Core Policy Area

Existing Conditions

The Lower Core area provides a key transitional area between the City Center Policy Area, the Medical District and the Twickenham neighborhood. Although the eastern edge of the district corresponds to the western edge of the Twickenham Historic District, the Lower Core Policy Area includes historic-era buildings and recently constructed structures. Although building heights and footprints have remained at a generally residential scale, new construction has generally included surface parking lots similar to those found in the Medical District.

The Lower Core Policy Area is also intersected by two major collector streets. Madison Street serves as a major route between South Huntsville, the Medical District and the City Center, while Lowe Avenue, particularly after its reconstruction, will provide a high-capacity route across the Study Area. Gallatin Street also has the capacity to function as a significant arterial, especially after Gallatin and Church Street to the north are reconstructed.

This district's future development pressures will be largely shaped by a few key factors that have not been finalized at the time of this writing. First, the potential location of the new federal building on a site immediately southwest of Lower Core Policy Area may create substantial pressure for redevelopment at a more intense level than at present. This will particularly be the case if the federal complex is oriented to Gallatin Street, as opposed to Lowe Avenue. No site plans for this development have been completed as of this writing. Second, the realignment of Lowe Street immediately south of this Policy Area has the potential to significantly alter traffic patterns in this vicinity. This roadway project has not been funded at this time for the segments in and near the Lower Core Policy Area, and the proposed roadway alignments may be modified from the current concepts. Finally, redevelopment pressure on this Policy Area will be substantially impacted by redevelopment south of Lowe Avenue, particularly at the Councill Court site (See Opportunity Site #8). If the Councill Court site or others nearby become available for redevelopment, the demand for property in the Lower Core Policy Area is likely to be reduced.

Major Strategy: *Preservation*

Vision

The Lower Core Policy Area will maintain its current density and character as an important transitional area between the more intensively-used commercial areas of the City Center and Medical District and the less intensive residential land uses of the Twickenham Historic District. This Policy Area will be carefully monitored during the course of this Plan's implementation, and revisions to the Plan will be prepared as necessitated by adjoining developments.

Actions

Implementation Strategies

None of the Implementation Strategies will address this Policy Area's needs.

Policy Area Actions

1. **Avoid permitting developments that significantly differ from the Policy Area's current character.** The Residential 2B and C-3 zones currently in place will be maintained. Heights and proximity to rear setback lines will receive particularly close attention on the east side of Madison Street, and variances to these requirements will not be granted. Slightly higher densities and heights and smaller setbacks may be permitted west of Madison Street.
2. **Re-evaluate this Policy Area after completion of each of the following: site plans for the federal complex, final alignment for the Lowe Avenue reconstruction, or redevelopment of the Councill Court site.** As noted above, this Policy Area's future development may be profoundly affected by any or all of these developments. Although the Policy Area's crucial role in buffering residential neighborhoods from commercial districts will not change, it is possible that increased development pressure may require some changes to the Policy Area's regulations.

Potential scenarios for this change may include the following:

- If the Federal building is constructed with its entrance facing Gallatin Street, it may be necessary to permit higher density development on the properties facing Gallatin Street. It will then be necessary to step down permitted densities and heights to a scale compatible with the Twickenham district in a very short distance. Rezoning of this area or the creation of an overlay Design Review District may then become necessary.
- If the Lowe Avenue realignment is constructed as it is currently projected, the block at the northeast corner of Lowe and Gallatin streets will come under strong development pressures. It may be acceptable to rezone this block to a significantly higher density and allow greater height and floor area ratio, but this should only be permitted if it can be shown that the proposed development will not adversely impact the Twickenham district. In this case, a Planned Development district may be appropriate for this block.
- If the Councill Court site is made available for development before either of the first two improvements, it is likely that demand for the Lower Core Policy Area will not increase. Because of its location and its unified ownership, the Councill Court site is likely to be in higher demand for large-scale redevelopment. In this case, no action may be necessary until the Councill Court site development has reached its capacity.

Under all of these scenarios, the permitted density, heights, setbacks, proportion of impervious surfaces and yard requirements should not be increased for any of the properties on the east side of Madison Street.

Downtown Support Area (See Opportunity Site #5)

Existing Conditions

This Policy Area represents a significant redevelopment challenge. The Policy Area includes a small number of buildings on the Church Street frontage, a small number of buildings accessed from Church Street, and a large amount of vacant land west of Church Street and along Cleveland Avenue. This site was historically dominated by a railroad junction; the line that extends along the southern border of this Policy Area remains active, while the line that extended north from this location has been discontinued. The entire site is located in the Pinhook Creek Floodway or 100-year Flood Fringe.

Major Strategy: *Redevelopment*

Vision

The Downtown Support Area will provide important, basic functional services that will support the vitality of the Downtown Core and Fringe subareas. These services will include office use, retail and service businesses, as well as remote parking for downtown employees and visitors and/or recreational facilities for Huntsville residents.

Actions

Implementation Strategies

1.3. *Rezone Study Area Properties.* The western portion of this site should be rezoned from Heavy Industrial to Office District to prevent the introduction of potentially intensive industrial and manufacturing operations. The frontage along Church Street should be rezoned to General Business C-3 to offer retail support to the tourism center.

Policy Area Actions

- 1. Identify appropriate development strategies and recruit appropriate development entities for the northwest corner of Church and Monroe Street and the rail yard site, if either appears likely to become available for redevelopment in the near future.** Regionally-oriented uses such as museums would be preferable for these locations. A museum or similar regional cultural attraction at this location will help generate appropriate levels of visitation for other nearby facilities, including the Visitor Center and the Depot Museum. However, this facility should also have a minimum of surface parking on its site, and should rely on the parking available from the Transit Center and the remote parking lot on the west side of Church Street in order to maximize

the use of available land. In addition, development of a regional attraction at this site will increase the importance of the development of a comprehensive wayfinding system: if visitors to this facility do not also patronize City Center and Destination Entertainment/Culture attractions, the development will fail to generate the additional economic impact that will be desired. Coupled with the remote shuttle system discussed in the City Center portion of the *Master Plan Update* and the Linkages portion of the *Implementation Strategies*, visitors to this facility will have ample invitations to explore the rest of urban Huntsville's attractions.

Visitor/Tourism Gateway

Existing Conditions

This small Policy Area contains a variety of land uses. The southern portion of the site is dominated by the Veterans' Park, a small open space between the ramps that extend from I-565 to Washington and Jefferson streets, a largely open area currently used as a staging ground for City busses and shuttles, and the Huntsville Depot Museum. The northern portion of the Policy Area, which extends under I-565, is occupied by the new Transit Center. This site includes parking for transit vehicles under the highway overpasses, a central administration building that also houses a tourist welcome center operated by the Huntsville Convention & Visitors' Bureau, and a staging area with a large passenger platform. This facility is separated from the southern portion of the Policy Area by an active rail yard.

Because of its proximity to the highway and the fact that several major surface roads intersect this site, this Policy Area is a largely auto- and transit-oriented area. The Gateway Greenway is proposed to intersect the site in the future, and may provide an opportunity for additional access to the area.

Major Strategy: *Redevelopment*

Vision

The Visitor/Tourism Gateway will serve the Greater Huntsville region by providing a central location for tourist information and transportation. Activities will be coordinated with and capitalize on any remote parking facilities developed in conjunction with the Downtown Support Policy Area.

It is not anticipated that the rail yard will be vacated and made available for development within this Plan Update's 10-year time frame. However, should this site become available for development, it will provide an excellent location for a museum, interactive educational center, arts facility or other destination that serves a regional audience.

Actions

Implementation Strategies

1.3 Rezone Study Area Properties. Rezone the Visitor/Tourism Gateway Policy area from Light Industrial to General Business C-3 District to promote the appropriate redevelopment of this property.

2.3 Improve non-vehicular linkages through and between Policy Areas. In order to create opportunities for visitors to move easily along the Church Street Corridor, it will be necessary to improve the pedestrian scale of the streetscape. Sidewalks should be provided on both sides of Church Street, and a pedestrian crosswalk should be constructed if and when the remote parking facility discussed in the Downtown Support Policy Area is constructed. Although Church Street has been redesigned to function as a major north-south arterial through the central portion of the City, a safe and reasonably comfortable pedestrian crossing location is necessary if the facilities of the Visitor/Tourism Gateway and the remainder of the northern portion of the Downtown Fringe are to function as part of the larger Downtown Huntsville system. This crosswalk should be designed in coordination with the streetscape and accompanied by appropriate traffic calming and pedestrian safety features, which may include signage, changes in pavement color and texture, or pedestrian actuated traffic signals. Additionally, it will be necessary to ensure a safe pedestrian crossing at the sidewalk's intersection with the rail line.

3.3 Construct Gateway Elements at Appropriate locations. Veterans' Park was designated as a primary gateway to Downtown Huntsville in the 1989 *Downtown Master Plan*, and that role will continue to increase in importance as Downtown Huntsville becomes a more important regional destination.

8.1 Develop and implement a comprehensive system of Wayfinding to maximize use of Downtown Huntsville's assets and resources. Since this Policy Area will serve as a primary entry point for many Huntsville visitors and will house several visitor destinations, wayfinding to these destinations and from this Policy Area to other destinations is particularly crucial. The Visitors Center is an excellent location for an information kiosk and permanent, mounted map of Downtown Huntsville.

8.2 Construct the remainder of the Streetscape as developed in the 1993 Downtown Streetscape Vision with recommended alterations. The Parkway Streetscape design should be extended at least as far as the driveways leading into the Transit Center.

Meridian Street Small Business Center

Existing Conditions

This small Policy Area will be substantially impacted in the immediate future by several public projects, including the reconstruction of Meridian Street through this area and the property acquisition and development associated with the Gateway Greenway. The Gateway Greenway is proposed to extend from the southern terminus of the Dallas Bypass through this Policy Area to the new Transit Center on Church Street. The extreme southern end of the Policy Area is occupied by relatively new construction similar in scale and design to that found in the Office Center Policy Area. These buildings do not fall within the Flood Hazard District.

The remainder of the Policy Area falls within the Floodway or the 100-year Flood Fringe. The center third of the Policy Area consists largely of underutilized buildings that have experienced some level of deferred maintenance. A small number of these buildings have been purchased by the City, as of this writing, for construction of the Greenway, and the remaining buildings in the Floodway will also be purchased.

The northern third of this Policy Area is occupied by a small grouping of early to mid-twentieth century, predominately traditional commercial buildings that are located on a remnant of the pre-1950 street grid. These buildings are occupied by a variety of small businesses, at least one of which functions as a regional niche destination. This enclave is physically separated from all surrounding commercial and residential areas by Meridian Street, which has five lanes at this location, as well as vacant land on the east side of Meridian and an active rail line and I-565 to the north and west. The reconstruction of Meridian will remove several traffic conflict points on Meridian in this location, but is not expected to improve vehicular access to this group of buildings, which is difficult. These buildings are also located in the 100-year Flood Fringe.

Major Strategy: *Preservation and Redevelopment*

Vision

The portion of the Meridian Street Business Center south of the Gateway Greenway will provide space for a small number of office buildings similar in size and scale to those of the Office Center Policy Area. The portion of the Policy Area north of the Floodway will continue to provide a unique environment for dining, shopping and entertainment. In the event that restrictions on investment in Flood Fringe properties begin to adversely impact these buildings' economic viability, the site may be redeveloped in a manner and scale similar to the southern portion of the Policy Area.

Actions

Implementation Strategies

1.3 Rezone Study Area Properties. Rezone the northern end of the “Meridian Street Business Center” (intersection of Pratt Avenue and Meridian Street) from Light Industrial to General Business C-3 to promote the existing small businesses.

2.4 Improve non-vehicular linkages through and between Policy Areas. The proposed Gateway Greenway that will pass through this Policy Area will provide a vital link to connect the Downtown North subarea with the Downtown Core and the pedestrian improvements along Meridian Street.

Policy Area Actions

No policy area needs have been identified at this time. It is possible that the eventual redevelopment of the northern portion of the Policy Area will require City regulatory or financial intervention in order to facilitate a development that meets the City’s goals, but this need is not expected to arise within the ten year time period of this plan due to the apparently acceptable maintenance of most of the buildings. It is possible, however, that deterioration or natural disaster may accelerate that time frame.

Low Avenue Impact Area (See Opportunity Site #8)

Existing Conditions

The majority of this Policy Area is defined in the 1989 *Master Plan* and the City's Zoning Ordinance as a portion of the Medical District subarea. At present, this Policy Area includes a number of small, auto-oriented office buildings, most of which house medical services. However, land uses in this Policy Area are hardly uniform, and the area also includes a large church, a large parking garage operated by the Huntsville Hospital, the former Councill School building, and the Councill Courts public housing development operated by the Huntsville Housing Authority (HHA). The Lowe Avenue Impact Area extends across Fagan Creek and the present alignment of Lowe Avenue to include the former County Mental Health Department building, which is the proposed location of the new federal administration building, and an office complex immediately northwest of the Mental Health site.

The primary unifying characteristic in this Policy Area is that these properties are likely to be the most significantly impacted by the proposed second phase of reconstruction of Lowe Avenue and several intersecting streets. The western portion of this project, including the extension of a connector road to Clinton Avenue is currently scheduled for construction in 2006. The eastern portion of the project, which will most directly impact this Policy Area, remains in a conceptual stage but is expected to be constructed near the end of this Master Plan Update's 10-year horizon. This project may also be accompanied by a relocation of the Fagan Creek waterway to a below-ground culvert and the creation of a surface waterway along a portion of the current Fagan Creek alignment. The construction of the Federal administration building will also significantly change the nature and intensity of development pressures in this Policy Area, since it will generate increased traffic and demand for property nearby.

The Lowe Avenue project and the Federal Building will have a profound impact on development patterns and pressures within this Policy Area. At this time, however, exact alignments and design characteristics for the eastern portion of the Lowe Avenue project have not been determined, and the siting of the Federal building has not been decided. These two elements present significant variables that will to a large extent determine the nature of redevelopment in this Policy Area following their resolution. As a result, planning for this Policy Area at this time requires a good deal of flexibility. It is likely that this portion of the Plan will need to be revised following the determination of the Lowe Avenue project's and the Federal building's design, alignment and site characteristics.

Finally, this Policy Area includes a large property that may become available for development within the 10-year timeframe of this Plan Update. The Councill Court development, operated by the Huntsville Housing Authority, occupies 17.78 acres and includes 196 units of low income housing. Although this property has provided housing for low-income Huntsville residents for over 50 years, the Councill Court development faces several limitations as a result of its age and location. The majority of the Councill Court buildings were constructed in 1952, and have been identified by the Huntsville Housing Authority as requiring an investment of approximately

\$29,000 per unit to meet existing physical needs. Additionally, almost all of the residential development that surrounded the Council Court site when it was constructed has been redeveloped for non-residential uses. As a result, the Council Courts development no longer provides affordable housing opportunities for persons who are displaced from nearby neighborhoods, as public housing complexes were originally intended to do. Although the provision of quality housing at an affordable price remains a crucial need for Huntsville, the Council Court site has become increasingly less suited to meet this need.

Major Strategy: *Redevelopment*

Vision

The Lowe Avenue Impact Area will continue to support moderate-scale office development. Building uses may be oriented to the Hospital system, the Federal building, or both, depending on the location, orientation and alignment of the roadways in the Lowe Avenue System project and the siting of the Federal building. Land uses will be largely auto-oriented, but will also support transit access. The water feature created by the reconstruction of Fagan Creek will enhance the desirability of the Policy Area and will create an attractive route for pedestrian movement between this Policy Area and the Destination Entertainment/Culture Policy Area. Vehicular and pedestrian linkages will encourage workers to use the City Center and Destination Entertainment/Culture Policy Areas for dining, shopping and recreation.

Actions

Implementation Strategies

1.3 Rezone Study Area Properties. Rezone this area as follows:

- Rezone the western portion of the policy area (west of Monroe Avenue) to Medical District, thereby permitting the current uses in the area and eliminating the possibility of incompatible industrial uses from locating in the area.
- Retain the General Business C-3 zoning classification on the portion of the area located between Gallatin Street, Lowe Avenue, and Williams Avenue.
- Rezone the portion of the area fronting on Monroe Street, between the railroad tracks and Monroe Street to Neighborhood Business C-1 District. This will support the existing small business in the area and conform to the adjacent zoning of First Baptist Church.
- Retain the Medical District zoning for the Council Court Housing Authority property (“Opportunity Site 8”) and the lands along Governors Drive. This will allow for the expansion of the medically related uses necessary to support Huntsville Hospital.

- Retain the Medical District zoning along Davis Circle until such time as either the Federal Building is constructed on Lowe Avenue or Lowe Avenue is relocated. Either occurrence will require the zoning of this area to be reevaluated.

1.4 Develop a Design Review Overlay Zone for appropriate settings. Given the expected high demand for property in this Policy Area and the extensive reconstruction that will take place, the Lowe Avenue Impact Area presents a particularly good opportunity for design guidelines. Depending on development trends and physical configurations, design guidelines might specify buffering and access requirements, sign characteristics, and architectural materials. Design Guidelines should encourage some continuity of design elements between this area and the Medical District; Lowe Avenue and Monroe Street will create a sufficient barrier to make design continuity with other areas less necessary. Access management will be a particularly essential element of this area's design guidelines, but access management guidelines cannot be developed until the design for Lowe Avenue and the associated streets is completed. Redevelopment that creates a gridded roadway system, as opposed to the existing arrangement that is dominated by cul-de-sacs, will be in the best interest of the City and property owners by distributing traffic across several alternative roadways.

Policy Area Actions

1. Re-evaluate this Policy Area after completion of each of the following: site plans for the Federal complex or centerline designs for the Lowe Avenue reconstruction. As noted above, this Policy Area's future development may be profoundly affected by the exact design and configuration of these developments. Although the Policy Area's fundamental use is unlikely to change, it is possible that increased development pressure may require some changes to the Policy Area's regulations.

Potential scenarios for this change may include the following:

- If the Federal building is constructed with its entrance facing Lowe Avenue, and if the configuration of Lowe Avenue and associated roadways provides easy vehicular and pedestrian access between the Federal building and properties on the south side of Lowe Avenue, then the mix of land uses in this area is likely to include a higher percentage of traditional offices, as opposed to medical offices. As a result, it may be feasible to permit higher density, multi-story development on the properties facing Lowe Avenue. In this case, zoning and design regulations for this Policy Area can be revised to require narrow setbacks from the street and surface parking at the rear of the buildings. This strategy will encourage a more urban appearance for Lowe Avenue and will create a more comfortable transition between this space and the Destination Entertainment/Culture Policy Area.
- If the Federal building is constructed with its entrance facing Gallatin Street, or if the configuration of the Lowe Avenue realignment does not facilitate movement

across Lowe Avenue, then the majority of the Policy Area is likely to redevelop for medical office and clinic uses. In this case, the existing Medical District zoning may be acceptable, but should be accompanied by design guidelines that will create a more visually cohesive appearance.

2. Conduct a feasibility analysis of the Councill School building. Given the current condition of the Councill School building, this building is unlikely to survive without the commitment of all key stakeholders and interest groups in identifying a strategy for preserving, rehabilitating and/or sensitively redeveloping the property.

Other Subareas

As noted in the Introduction to the *Master Plan Update*, this project was designed to focus on the needs of the Downtown North and Downtown Core/Fringe subareas of the Study Area as they were defined for the 1989 Plan. However, it is also important to evaluate the impacts of the proposals presented in this Plan on the remaining subareas within the Study Area, and to identify potential needs that, while outside the scope of this Plan Update, may need to be addressed in future planning efforts.

Medical District

Existing Conditions

The 1989 *Downtown Master Plan* identified the Medical District as extending between Memorial Parkway and California Street generally south of Lowe Avenue. Because of the proposed Lowe Avenue realignment project, this Plan Update has identified the western portion of the 1989 Medical District as the Lowe Avenue Impact Area.

The Medical District Policy Area is dominated by the Huntsville Hospital and associated buildings, and is addressed by the *Huntsville Hospital System Master Plan*. The Huntsville Hospital controls most of the property in this area.

Major Strategy: *Preservation/Revitalization*

Vision

The Medical District will continue to provide the widest possible range of health-related resources and facilities to serve the Greater Huntsville Area.

Actions

Implementation Strategies

1.3 Rezone a small complex of buildings located south of Lowe Avenue adjacent to Peter Fagan Creek from Residence 2-B to Medical District.

2.3 Improve Linkages across I-565 and between Study Areas. At present, pedestrians attempting to move through the Medical District or between the Medical District and adjoining Policy areas must cross wide streets with heavy traffic and surface parking lots with few pedestrian amenities. Dedicated pedestrian paths through or around the perimeter of large developments, in conjunction with public sidewalk improvements and

enhanced crosswalks, will increase the pedestrian accessibility of the Medical District and help lessen traffic congestion by increasing opportunities for District users to walk to nearby destinations.

3.3 Construct Gateway Elements at appropriate locations. Two significant gateways are located on the eastern edge of the Medical District. The gateway at California Street and Governor’s Drive is particularly important and should be constructed at the earliest possible opportunity.

Policy Area Actions

No Policy Area Actions were identified for the Medical District.

Twickenham

Existing Conditions

The Twickenham neighborhood is designated for the purposes of this Plan as the area that falls within the boundaries of the Twickenham Historic District. This neighborhood is dominated by large antebellum and early twentieth-century homes, and is generally considered one of the most desirable neighborhoods in the City. The current architectural review administered under the Historic Preservation Commission is maintaining the character and integrity of the neighborhood, although the administration of this review process will benefit from the development of the recently adopted design guidelines. Although this neighborhood may benefit in the future from planning attention, Twickenham is at this time considered quite successful.

Major Strategy: *Preservation*

Vision

Twickenham will continue to be a stable residential community with a unique character and charm. Its boundaries will be protected with appropriate transitional uses.

Actions

Implementation Strategies

1.3 Clarify the zoning lines along the southern boundary of the area adjacent to Lowe Avenue. The zoning line should be relocated to the center of Lowe Avenue to eliminate the split zoning on the properties within the R1A and R2 zoning districts.

Old Town

Existing Conditions

The Old Town neighborhood is designated for the purposes of this Plan as the area that falls within the boundaries of the Old Town Historic District plus a small number of parcels that create a transitional area between the neighborhood and surrounding areas. This neighborhood is dominated by late nineteenth and early twentieth-century homes, and is generally considered among the most desirable neighborhoods in the City. The current architectural review administered under the Historic Preservation Commission is maintaining the character and integrity of the neighborhood, although the administration of this review process will benefit from the development of design guidelines, which have now been completed. Although this neighborhood may benefit in the future from planning attention, Old Town is at this time considered quite successful.

Major Strategy: *Preservation*

Vision

Old Town will continue to be a stable residential community with a unique character and charm. Its boundaries will be protected with appropriate transitional uses.

Actions

Implementation Strategies

1.3 Rezone the northern portion along Howe Avenue to Neighborhood C-1 and the existing homes along Walker Avenue to Residence I-B.

1.4 Develop a Design Review Overlay Zone to be applied to targeted corridors and economic development locations. The intersection of Andrew Jackson Way and Pratt Avenue marks the southern terminus of the Design Review Overlay Zone, which is discussed in greater detail under the Dallas Mills Neighborhood section below.

Policy Area Actions

No additional Policy Area Actions have been identified for this area. Future plans should continue to monitor this neighborhood's physical and social characteristics, and should be particularly attuned to the potential impacts of an aging population and declining household sizes.

Dallas Neighborhood

Existing Conditions

The Dallas neighborhood shares a similar history to the Downtown North subarea, but several factors have worked in this neighborhood's favor. The Dallas neighborhood has remained zoned for residential use throughout the past 40 years and has not experienced the extensive intrusions of conflicting land uses that characterize Downtown North. Roads in the Dallas neighborhood are generally wide and arranged in a regular grid, and houses are not as densely located as in some areas of Downtown North. Roadways, while simple, appear to be more adequate than those in much of Downtown North, and houses have generally experienced better maintenance than in the Lincoln Mill Village.

The Dallas neighborhood also benefits from its proximity to other residential neighborhoods. Unlike the isolated residential enclaves of Downtown North, the Dallas neighborhood adjoins the Five Points and Old Town residential neighborhoods, which have experienced significant reinvestment in recent years. As the popularity of these neighborhoods has increased, the Dallas neighborhood has begun to experience significant reinvestment as well, as potential property owners interested in traditional neighborhoods have discovered the character and value of the Dallas neighborhood. Andrew Jackson Way has also reinforced this connection as a result of the neighborhood-scale businesses that are developing along this corridor, in part as a result of the success of commercial properties on Pratt Avenue and at the Five Points intersection.

The Dallas neighborhood does face some notable challenges. Retaining the neighborhood's unique residential character may become more difficult as property owners' affluence increases; some houses have already been significantly altered from their historic mill house appearance through incompatible window replacement and out of scale additions. At the same time, portions of the neighborhood have experienced deterioration, especially near the I-565 overpass. Most of the Dallas neighborhood is currently located in the Flood Fringe of the Dallas Branch.

Pressure for conversion to commercial uses has begun to develop for houses located near Andrew Jackson Way and Pratt Avenue. Although the City has resisted efforts to expand commercial zoning into the residential area, that pressure may be expected to increase. Several buildings along Andrew Jackson Way, particularly in the northern segment approaching Oakwood Avenue, remain in poor condition and underutilized or vacant. Finally, the northern three blocks of the Dallas neighborhood have been largely replaced by surface parking lots associated with the Jackson Way Baptist Church. Not only are there a small number of houses that are cut off from the remainder of the neighborhood by these parking lots, but there is concern among residents that further expansion of the parking lot will result in the demolition of more houses.

Major Strategy: *Preservation*

Vision

The Dallas neighborhood will be a stable residential community with a distinctive historic character. The neighborhood will enjoy its proximity to a vibrant, neighborhood-scale commercial district along Andrew Jackson Way.

Actions

Implementation Strategies

1.3 Rezone the East side of Dallas Street to Residence 2 (R-2) District to stabilize the neighborhood boundaries and eliminate the intrusion of conflicting land uses.

1.4 Develop a Design Review Overlay Zone to be applied to targeted corridors and economic development locations. Andrew Jackson Way will benefit from the creation of an overlay zone that will provide a process for reviewing site design against a set of corridor-specific standards. This overlay zone will further strengthen efforts to channel commercial development to properties fronting on Andrew Jackson Way and Pratt Avenue and will lessen pressure for the conversion of houses on side streets near Andrew Jackson Way and Pratt Avenue to commercial uses. This overlay district should review design and development, including signage, access management and infill development.

2.1 Conduct inventory of infrastructure in Preservation and Revitalization Policy Areas and develop prioritized list of infrastructure improvements to be programmed into the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). Although infrastructure needs are not generally as acute as in Downtown North, some residential streets in the Dallas neighborhood lack storm sewers and other public infrastructure. Additionally, Andrew Jackson Way is a good candidate for streetscape improvement and relocation of utilities. The Dallas neighborhood should be included in the infrastructure and prioritization process.

3.1 Designate eligible Policy Areas and subareas as local Historic Districts or Conservation Overlay Districts. Although the Dallas neighborhood does not appear to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, it may be eligible for local designation. A Dallas Neighborhood Historic District should be administered via a set of design guidelines that are specifically designed to address this neighborhood's character-defining features.

3.2 Avoid demolitions and facilitate rehabilitation of condemned buildings. As in the Downtown North residential areas, demolition of existing housing will damage the unique character and desirability of the Dallas neighborhood, and should be avoided.

Subarea Actions

1. Re-examine the Dallas neighborhood and adjoining residential neighborhoods as a whole in future planning efforts. The Study Area boundary divides the Dallas neighborhood from several other residential areas that share a number of characteristics and issues. As the Huntsville economy and housing preferences continue to change, these neighborhoods may face either increased desirability, or loss of desirability and disinvestment. Either evolution will have long-term repercussions for their quality of life, property values and character.

A future planning effort should address these neighborhoods in a comprehensive fashion and in greater detail than is possible in this Plan Update. This neighborhood plan should identify the community and physical needs that should be met in order for these neighborhoods to continue to provide high-quality residential, economic and community experiences for Huntsville residents.

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Implementation Strategies

Introduction

This portion of the *Downtown Master Plan Update* builds on the Master Plan outlined in the previous section and identifies the specific steps that will be required to reach the Master Plan goals.

Although many of the strategies identified below will be the responsibility of City agencies, including the Division of Planning, the Department of Community Development, the Parking Authority and others, reaching the goals that have been identified will require the support, involvement and initiative of a wide variety of participants in Huntsville's civic life. Reaching this goal will require important responsibilities fall to non-profit organizations, faith-based initiatives, and grassroots groups. In some cases, intimate collaboration between organizations will be necessary to bring these plans to reality, and this collaboration may extend well beyond their previous experience. The City cannot accomplish this plan alone. However, developing the collaboration needed between groups and the City should be a proactive goal shared by the City and the community.

Based on information gathered to date, it appears that Huntsville already has many of the resources that will be needed to revitalize the Downtown Study Area. Huntsville has enough existing organizations, existing programs, and existing agencies to meet many of these needs, provided that these organizations, programs and agencies can expand their capacity to meet the goals that this Plan identifies. Many of these key elements will require increased funding, increased membership or volunteers and increased empowerment to fulfill their role in this area's revitalization. Organizations across the United States often argue that funding and participants are in increasingly short supply, but Huntsville has demonstrated that it has the financial capacity and the community support necessary to meet such challenges. The key will be finding the willpower, the resolve and the commitment to make these things happen. This is the case in every community that has been successful: comprehensive revitalization requires deep commitment from across the spectrum of the community.

The challenges that Downtown Huntsville faces are, in many respects, unique in Huntsville, although not in the nation. Meeting the goals that have been identified for Downtown Huntsville will require the use of tools, strategies, and programs that have not been used in Huntsville before, or have not been used in this manner in several decades. Because of Huntsville's historical growth during the post-World War II era, most of Huntsville has not yet experienced an urgent need for revitalization. The Study Area identified for this Master Plan Update includes several of the City's oldest remaining neighborhoods.

While many of the strategies identified in this section rely on private sector market forces and non-profit leadership, responsibility for several key elements fall to the City. Some of these responsibilities fit traditional models, including infrastructure construction. Others, however, will require the City to use new tools to create a less risky investment environment. Although development regulations are sometimes portrayed as impeding development, the experience of most redeveloping cities has shown that areas that are subject to more stringent development

regulations will experience more redevelopment and more long-term redevelopment success than areas that did not have these regulations. The reason for this success is simple: new investors are more confident and face less risk in an environment where they can be confident that adjoining development will reinforce the desirability of their property. Huntsville has an excellent example in the Twickenham and Old Town neighborhoods, where median sales prices are consistently among the highest in the City. Both neighborhoods are subject to a City-administered design review process as a result of their local historic district designation.

Finally, although meeting these goals will require the City to learn new ways of working, this is not a lesson that must be learned from scratch. All of the strategies identified in this section have been successfully used in other United States cities; in some cases, cities have been using these strategies for decades. Although each city and each state are different, Huntsville can learn a great deal from the examples of other cities that have struggled with urban revitalization issues for much longer than Huntsville has.

Each set of Implementation Strategies are grouped under an overarching strategic goal, which is identified at the beginning of each section. A subheading under each Strategy identifies the Policy Areas (see the *Master Plan*) that will benefit from this Strategy. Since the Policy Areas vary widely in terms of their existing conditions, future potential and needs, not all strategies are appropriate to all Policy Areas.

The Implementation Strategies develop a set of specific recommendations designed to meet the overall Strategy. Implementation Strategies are numbered sequentially within their Strategy: for example, the three Implementation Strategies under Strategy 2 are numbered 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3. These numbers are provided for easy cross-reference, but they do not indicate that the items should be completed sequentially. Implementation Strategies are referenced in the Master Plan by these numbers.

The Implementation Strategies are as follows:

Strategy 1: Revise Land Use Regulations

- 1.1 *Amend the General Business C-3 and Planned Development (PD) Districts of the existing Zoning Ordinance to better direct development and redevelopment within the downtown core and downtown north policy areas. The use of these amended districts will be used as an effective tool in creating a high-quality built environment that implements the policies and visions of this Plan.*
- 1.2 *Develop the following zoning districts to facilitate the development and redevelopment of the downtown area:*
 - 1.2.1 *Central Business District*
 - 1.2.2 *Office District*

1.2.3 Research/Technology Applications District

1.2.4 Residence 2-C District

1.2.5 Live/Work District

1.2.6 Work/Live District

1.3 Rezone Study Area Properties

1.4 Develop a Design Review Overlay Zone

Strategy 2: Improve Infrastructure

- 2.1 Conduct inventory of infrastructure in Preservation and Revitalization Policy Areas and develop prioritized list of infrastructure improvements to be programmed into the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP).
- 2.2 Improve east-west connectivity through Downtown North whenever possible.
- 2.3 Improve linkages across Interstate 565 and between Policy Areas.

Strategy 3: Preserve Community Character

- 3.1 Designate eligible Policy Areas and subareas as local Historic Districts or Conservation Overlay Districts.
- 3.2 Avoid demolitions and facilitate rehabilitation of condemned buildings.
- 3.3 Construct Gateway Elements at Appropriate locations

Strategy 4: Improve residential property maintenance

- 4.1 Establish or extend a Community Development Corporation (CDC) to spearhead property improvement initiatives.
- 4.2 Expand existing property maintenance programs to Downtown North

Strategy 5: Increase homeownership

- 5.1 Develop homeownership education programs.
- 5.2 Raise local awareness of alternative mortgage products and home purchase assistance that is available via HUD, Fannie Mae and others state and federal agencies.

Strategy 6: Eliminate vacant lots

- 6.1 Clean and landscape existing vacant lots.
- 6.2 Coordinate with local Habitat for Humanity to target the Preservation and Revitalization Policy Areas for new housing construction.
- 6.3 Develop homestead construction incentives.

Strategy 7: Pursue the development of an artists relocation program, if necessary, to catalyze reinvestment.

- 7.1 Reevaluate the artists' relocation program when the strategies identified previously have been effect for three to five years.

Strategy 8: Make Downtown Huntsville Visually Enjoyable and User-Friendly.

- 8.1 Develop and implement a comprehensive system of Wayfinding to maximize use of Downtown Huntsville's assets and resources.
- 8.2 Construct the remainder of the Streetscape as developed in the 1993 *Downtown Streetscape Vision* with recommended alterations.

Strategy 1: Revise Land Use Regulations

Policy Areas: All

1.1 Amend the General Business C-3 and Planned Development (PD) Districts of the existing Zoning Ordinance to better direct development and redevelopment within the downtown core and downtown north policy areas. The use of these amended districts will be used as an effective tool in creating a high-quality built environment that implements the policies and visions of this Plan.

1.1.1 General Business C-3 District

- Amend the General Business C-3 District regulations to eliminate uses that are not conducive to the downtown atmosphere (e.g. remove trailer parks, personal storage facilities, mortuaries, etc.). Also, add buffer requirements in areas that abut residential districts, establish parameters where residential uses may be permitted on upper floors of buildings with specified commercial or office uses, and establish height and landscaping requirements.

1.1.2 Planned Development (PD) District

- A planned development (PD) or planned unit development (PUD) is a type of development, permitted under local zoning, in which an area of land is to be developed for different types, combinations or densities of dwelling units (single family detached, two family, multi-family) and non-residential uses such as commercial, industrial, public or semi-public uses. PD regulations can be either established with a planned development district where the property is zoned specifically for the PD or it can be an overlay district where the PD standards "overlay" underlying zoning district(s). In most cases, establishing PD standards as an overlay district are not preferable because it does not permit the City or developer to begin with a simple set of standards and regulations; it requires them to combine both the standards of the underlying district with those imposed by the PD. It is our recommendation that a PD be established as a freestanding district. Under the freestanding district scenario, both the City and developer are starting with a clean slate without any predetermined sets of regulations. PD's are important tools in zoning because they promote dialogue between the City and the developer in the establishment of cohesive, creative developments.

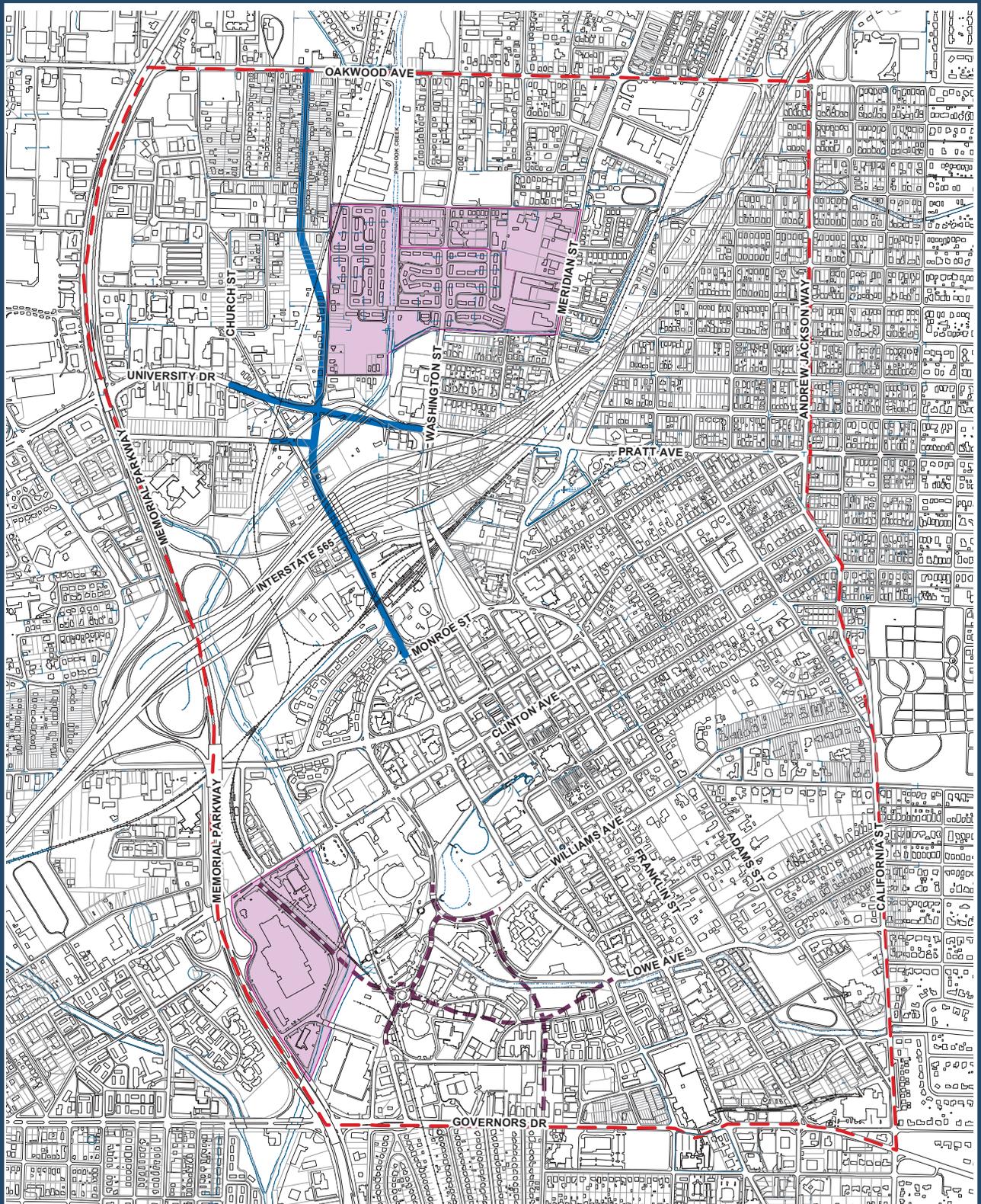
The land for the proposed PD should be under the control of a single land owner or an entity that represents multiple land owners, and a Unified Control Document should be submitted at the time of application for a Planned Development. In a PD, lot development standards such as minimum lot sizes, yard setbacks and lot coverage (floor area ratio and/or impervious surface ratio) are modified in order to achieve better site design and the preservation of open spaces. This is all achieved through *general* guidelines and the development of a

conceptual plan, a preliminary development plan and a final plan; each being reviewed and approved or approved with modifications by the City. The general guidelines and processes established in the PD regulations should be simple, easy to understand and provide both the City and the developer with a clear and concise process. A sample "general guideline" could be:

"The physical design of the proposed plan shall provide for the adequate provision for public services, provide adequate control over vehicular traffic, provide for common open space and further the goals, vision and policies of any plans adopted by the City for this site."

For a PD to be successful there should be an incentive for the developer to utilize the process. PD regulations will include incentives, such as permitting smaller lots than the underlying zoning district permits, a higher density for residential uses, smaller yard setbacks and a mix of housing types or uses within one development. In return, the City receives a comprehensive review and approval of the entire project, quality open space, which will be preserved in perpetuity and the ability to assure that the development will meet the goals and policies of the land use plan. The use of a PD should be an option that is considered by the City in the implementation of the Huntsville Master Plan. *See Figure 5, Proposed PD Sites, for locations of recommended Planned Districts.*

- The following recommendations are to be used as a framework to build a more workable planned development district within the Huntsville Zoning Ordinance. While not meant to be all inclusive, these recommendations focus on all the major issues that should be addressed in the new ordinance.
- A. Continue the practice of establishing planned development (PD) as freestanding districts and not as overlay districts. This will eliminate any confusion behind administering and enforcing underlying zoning regulations as compared to the overlay PD regulations.**
- B. Establish the appropriate PD's to meet the needs of the City by amending the Planned Development Housing (PD-H) District and creating a Planned Development Mixed Use (PD-MU) District**
1. PD-H: Planned Development - Housing
 - a. Continue practice of permitting different types of housing (detached single family, two family, multi-family, condominium, townhouses, etc.)
 - b. Continue to permit the mix of non-residential uses that complement the housing developments (educational institutions, non-commercial recreational facilities, etc.).



Legend

- Future Planned Districts
- Study Area
- Church Street Realignment
- Low Avenue Reconfiguration



Downtown Master Plan Update

Huntsville, Alabama

Figure 5
Proposed Planned Districts

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- c. Simplify the development standards for the district that may prove to be a disadvantage to use if too complicated or time consuming. For example, Section 31.3, Land Use Intensity (LUI) Ratings, requires an applicant to conduct a minimum of six calculations to establish a residential PD. Instead, incorporate the following development standards in place of the aforementioned Section:
1. Minimum District Area. Maintain the minimum district area for the PD-H at 5 acres.
 2. Maximum Residential Density. This will provide an overall density acceptable to the City, expressed in dwelling units per acre. This calculation will still be based on the pre PD-H zoning classification existing on the land. (e.g. R1A shall have a maximum density of 3 units per acre.)
 3. Impervious Surface Ratio. This standard, expressed in a decimal format, will apply to all individual lots within the PD controlling the amount of paved or impervious surfaces on a lot and preventing excessive surface water runoff (e.g. the impervious surface ratio for residential uses in the PD-H shall be .30). The number is the amount of land, on an individual property, that can be covered by an impervious surface.
 4. Minimum Open Space. This will establish the amount of "open space" required in the PD, exclusive of all private lots (e.g. the minimum amount of common open space, exclusive of private yards, in a PD-H shall be 20%).
- d. Provide qualitative and quantitative standards for acceptable "open space." These standards should focus on the types of open spaces (woodlands, stream corridors, neighborhood recreation areas, unimproved green areas, walking trails, etc.) and the placement thereof (common open space should be designed to permit connectivity between other open spaces adjacent to the PD). Consider:
- "No Planned Unit Development District shall be approved unless such district provides for passive or active open space of at least twenty percent (20%) of its gross density. Such space may take the form of parks, playgrounds, landscaped green space, nature walks, and natural areas. Land donated for any public purpose may be credited towards the open space requirement with the approval of the Planning Commission. Where a planned unit development is to be developed in phases, a portion of the required open space shall be provided in each phase. Maintenance of the

open space shall be provided for in the planned unit development's restrictive covenants recorded as part of the project."

2. Eliminate the existing Planned Development Shopping Commercial District and Planned Development Highway Commercial District and create a Planned Development Mixed Use District (PD-MU)
 - a. Permit residential uses within the PD-MU district to create cohesive and well planned neighborhoods mixing residential uses and neighborhood commercial type uses. The inclusion of residential uses shall not be a requirement for the establishment of a PD-MU district.
 - b. Establish a minimum of 5 acres for a commercial development and a minimum of 10 acres for a mix of commercial and residential uses.
 - c. Discontinue the listing of specific commercial uses within the PD-MU district. Create a more generalized list including: professional services, professional and business offices, retail businesses, restaurants and commercial entertainment. The lot development standards and floor area limitations, along with the conceptual, preliminary and final plans, will establish specific types of uses and how such uses are sited.
 - d. Discontinue the application of Floor Area Limitations as described in the PD-SC district (Section 32.7). However, stipulate height requirements and incorporate the following development standards as a part of this Section:
 - (1) Maximum Residential Density.
 - (2) Maximum Impervious Surface Ratio.
 - (3) Minimum Open Space.

C. Open Space – establish quantitative and qualitative standards for open spaces

The purpose of open space is to improve the visual attractiveness of the development, preserve natural features and vistas, and supply functional recreational areas.

1. Criteria for open space property

The following requirements shall govern the type and amount of open space in Planned Developments:

- a. Twenty (20) percent of the gross acreage in a project shall be retained as open space in a PD-H District.
- b. Ten (10) percent of the gross acreage in a project shall be retained as open space for PD-MU Districts that are strictly commercial.

- c. Twenty (20) percent of the gross acreage in a project shall be retained as open space for PD-MU Districts that contain a mix of commercial and residential uses.
- d. The following shall *not* be included as open space in a Planned Development: required private yards, street rights-of-way, open parking areas, including commercial parking lots, driveways for dwellings, land covered by buildings, required wet detention, retention ponds, and non-recreational facilities.
- e. Open space should be identified on the PD plan as one of the following categories within a PD-H District:
 - (1) *Common open space*: Parcel or parcels of land or water or combination of land and water, together with improvements within the Planned Development. Common open space may include accessory structures and improvements necessary or desirable with approval of the City Council.
 - (2) *Woodland preserve*: Areas of forest retention or reforestation that are to remain undisturbed by buildings, lawns, and roads and which are of adequate acreage and configuration to allow for wildlife management and or passive recreational use. As part of the application process in the Preliminary Development Plan stages, all trees of four inches in diameter or greater, as measured from grade, shall be identified and indicate which are to be removed from the PD site. Woodland preserves may include trails with approval of the City Council.
 - (3) *Undeveloped open space*: Land is undeveloped when a site's natural features are retained in their undisturbed, unimproved natural state, thus encouraging the preservation of unique natural assets such as unusual rock outcropping, groves of trees, ravines, wetlands, ponds, and stream beds. Undeveloped open space may include trails with approval of the City Council.
- f. Additionally, in a PD-MU District the following category may be considered open space:

Private open space: Private yards that are possessed and maintained by individual owners and reserved exclusively for such owners' use. Private open space shall be limited to sixty (60) percent of the total required open space acreage within the PD-MU.
- g. The location of open space land within a Planned Development shall take into consideration the natural features within the project, such as wetlands,

slopes and waterways. When possible large, contiguous areas protecting the most sensitive natural features on the property shall be delineated as open space. Furthermore, open spaces should be situated in such a way that upon development of surrounding properties they can be connected to provide a continuous greenway, park, or open space.

2. Ownership and use of open space property

Identified open space areas shall be utilized only for environmental preservation, agricultural, or passive recreational purposes and shall be deeded/restricted as such.

a. The following methods of ownership with restrictions may be used (listed in order of preference).

- (1) Deeded with permanent conservation restrictions to be owned jointly or in common by the owners of the building lots whether by association or corporation; or
- (2) Owned by the City or other recognized land preservation organization, subject to approval by the City Council; or
- (3) Owned privately in the case of PD-MU districts where a portion of the open space is allowed to be private yards.

b. Further subdivision of the open space or its use for other than conservation, agricultural, or passive recreation shall be prohibited. Structures and buildings accessory to the conservation, agricultural or passive recreation may be erected on the open space, subject to the review and approval of the building site plan by the Planning Commission.

3. Maintenance of open space

The Planning Commission shall require that a legal plan or contract for the perpetuation, maintenance and function of all the common open space or other common property be established and furnished to the City Attorney for approval by the Planning Commission prior to final approval. The legal plan or contract shall assure that all such common areas shall be provided for in a satisfactory manner without expense to the City. The documents shall be recorded in the Probate Judge's office by the applicant prior to occupancy of any building in the PD. Where applicable, a homeowners' association shall be established for the purpose of permanently maintaining all open space and potential non-commercial recreational facilities. Such homeowners' association agreements, guaranteeing continuing maintenance of the open space, shall be submitted to City Council for approval prior to the issuance of any permits.

D. The following items shall be addressed as a part of the application process for a Planned Development; this list should not be considered as all inclusive:

1. Location, size, orientation and shape of buildings (e.g. The development shall provide for efficient, safe, convenient, and harmonious grouping of structures, uses, and facilities).
2. Design standards; including architectural and building treatments.
3. Parking;
4. Signage;
5. Exterior renovation or alteration of existing structures;
6. Demolition of existing structures;
7. Landscaping;
8. Environmental and natural resource protection;
9. Erosion and sedimentation control;
10. Vehicular and pedestrian circulation (e.g. ; Provision shall be made at points of ingress, egress and within the districts to ensure a free and safe flow of vehicular and pedestrian traffic.)
11. Outdoor lighting;
12. Minimum lot area;
13. Minimum lot frontage;
14. Minimum lot width;
15. Minimum front yard setback;
16. Minimum side yard setback;
17. Minimum rear yard setback;
18. Maximum height of structures (principal and accessory);
19. Maximum lot coverage;
20. Site assessment (natural and man made features);
21. Site access (e.g. The site shall have direct access to a major street and not generate unnecessary traffic on local residential streets outside the planned development. This requirement does not apply to single family detached residential developments having an overall density of 2 dwelling units per acre or less.)
22. Location and types of screening and buffering (e.g. Off-street parking for more than five (5) cars, service areas for loading and unloading vehicles, and areas for storage and collection of trash and garbage shall be properly screened).
23. Location of dumpsters;
24. Location of open spaces; and
25. Overall density of project.
26. Underground utilities

E. Off-Street Parking and Loading

The requirements of Article 70 of the Zoning Ordinance regarding off street parking shall apply to Planned Developments. In addition, off-street parking and loading areas for

non-residential uses shall not be permitted within twenty-five (25) feet of any residential use located either in or out of the Planned Development, with the exception of mixed use buildings including residential uses.

F. Arrangement of Residential Uses

The arrangement of residential uses in a Planned Development shall be as follows:

1. Residential uses shall be located in such a way to maximize the amount and size of common open space provided in the development.
2. Residential uses shall be located in such a way to provide for a variety of housing types, sizes and forms.

G. Arrangement of Commercial Uses

The arrangement of commercial uses in Planned Developments shall be as follows:

1. When Planned Development Mixed Use (PD-MU) Districts include commercial uses, commercial buildings and establishments shall be planned as groups having common parking and common ingress and egress points in order to reduce the traffic conflicts with thoroughfares and to minimize the number of curb cuts internally within the development.
2. Screen planting and/or fences shall be provided on the perimeter of the commercial areas abutting residential areas as defined in the current City of Huntsville Zoning Ordinance.
3. All areas designed for future expansion or not intended for immediate improvements or development shall be landscaped or otherwise maintained in a neat and orderly manner as specified by the Planning Commission.

H. Streets

Streets within a Planned Unit Development shall be regulated as follows:

1. The proposed Planned Development shall not create traffic congestion nor overload existing roadway facilities. Points of ingress or egress shall be designed to discourage through traffic on minor streets in the Planned Development.
2. The internal traffic system shall provide for safe and efficient flow, being sensitive to such items as convenience, safety, access to living units and nonresidential facilities, separation of vehicular and pedestrian traffic, and general attractiveness.

3. There shall be no direct access from a single family residential lot to a major thoroughfare. Direct access from single family residential lots to minor collector streets shall be minimized.
4. There shall be access for emergency vehicles to all buildings.
5. Pedestrian and bicycle circulation systems are encouraged. Where possible, these paths should be segregated from vehicular traffic, especially at intersections.
6. Streets within the Planned Development may be dedicated to public use or may be retained under private ownership on the condition that they are built to the same standards applied to streets acceptable for public dedication. Requirements for private subdivisions detailed in Article 10 of the Zoning Ordinance should be met, if private streets are desired. Standards of design and construction of private roadways may be modified, if deemed appropriate by the City Engineer and approved by the Planning Commission and City Council. Right-of-way widths and street widths may be reduced, with Planning Commission and City Council approval, if the Planned Development plan provides adequate off-street parking facilities.
7. If future owners wish to dedicate private streets to public streets, it should be fully agreed to before acceptance by the City, that the owners will bear full expense of any action necessary to have the streets fully conform to the design requirements for public streets at the time of dedication and acceptance, with the exception of these standards which have been waived for the Planned Development by the Planning Commission and accepted by the City Council upon dedication.

1.2 Develop the following zoning districts to facilitate the development and redevelopment of the downtown area.

1.2.1 Central Business District

Establish zoning regulations that focus on the mixed use needs of the “downtown core” by specifically addressing the following issues:

- Promoting commercial retail activity on the first floor of building by stating this intent in the purpose statement of the district and specifying commercial retail uses in the list of uses permitted
- Establishing office uses as a Special Exception Use on the first floor of buildings, while permitting them by right on upper floors
- Promoting office or residential uses on upper floors, appropriate mixed uses within buildings should be explicitly permitted and encouraged

- Discouraging uses that do not generate pedestrian traffic or are not conducive to a downtown atmosphere (e.g. remove light manufacturing, trailer parks, gasoline service stations, personal storage facilities, etc.) that are currently permitted

Also, a “Developers Guide Handbook” that summarizes zoning and design guidelines for the Central Business District, should be created to aid entities desiring to develop within the downtown core area.

1.2.2 Office District

Current zoning regulations do not include an office district whose purpose is to promote and permit traditional office (administrative, professional and business) uses. This has resulted in the inclusion of office type uses in commercial, industrial and residential (multi-family) districts with varying standards of development.

The Office District should be established to provide for the appropriate and convenient location of a broad range of office uses. Also, the district should provide for multi story buildings permitting residential uses on the upper floors.

Development standards should particularly focus on providing adequate, not excessive, parking for mixed uses, placing impervious cover limitations on each site and requiring adequate landscaping between public and private spaces. The impervious coverage of a site should be limited to not more than seventy (70) percent. Regulating the amount of impervious cover will enhance the site’s stormwater management system and provide green space for the enjoyment of the employees and customers of the office.

1.2.3 Research/Technology Applications District

Develop a district whose purpose is to permit uses that focus primarily on small scale research and technology enterprises with non-obtrusive manufacturing of products. Performance standards will be required within the district to address concerns such as noise, outside storage, odor, parking and landscaping. Access should be convenient to major streets, so as not to adversely impact residential areas.

Building setbacks should be minimal, while parking setbacks should be greater to promote rear yard employee parking and a more pleasant street presence. Impervious cover should be limited to eighty (80) percent of the building site to provide for green space and an improved stormwater management system. Height with the district should be limited to four stories. If the district abuts a residential area the height should be modified to reflect that proximity.

This district should be utilized to create an environment conducive to the development of local businesses, particularly start up companies.

1.2.4 Residence 2-C District

The purpose of the Residence 2-C District shall be to provide a zoning district tailored to protect, preserve, and continue the distinctive configuration, scale, and appearance of Huntsville's mill villages as they were constructed during the early decades of the 20th century. The intent of this district should be to minimize non-conformities while encouraging the preservation and continuity of these neighborhoods which document a significant phase of Huntsville's history.

In order to accomplish the above stated goals, the district should emphasize the regulation of height, uses and setbacks. An historic mix of residential uses should be provided for, including single family, duplexes and row houses. Also, minimum, as well as maximum densities controls should be utilized to insure the integrity of the historic character is maintained. These regulations shall not be applied to new subdivisions.

1.2.5 Live/Work District

The Live/Work District should be established to allow a mixture of uses at a scale and character which is in keeping with a residential environment. This district would also provide the opportunity for more intensive home occupations than are currently allowed under the existing Zoning Ordinance.

Performance standards regarding the volume and hours of client and vendor visits; number of employees allowed per unit; traffic and parking considerations; storage and display of merchandise; storage and use of hazardous materials; landscaping, signage and density requirements; and any objectionable noise, light or odors would be established to govern this district.

The Live/Work District would be protected from encroachment of automobile-oriented large uses. No type of repair or assembly of vehicles or equipment with internal combustion engines or any other work related to automobiles and their parts would be permitted. Uses which are compatible with other residential uses and which maintain and preserve the character of the residential area would be permitted. No merchandise would be displayed or sold on the premises except articles made on the premises.

Live/Work units would be occupied by the business owner or by an employee of the business. Units would be permitted to be exclusively residential in use; however, no unit would be permitted to be exclusively commercial in use.

Live/Work Districts are an attractive option for people starting up businesses who may not be able to afford separate locations for a home and for a business; those expanding an existing home occupation beyond what is permitted in the Zoning Ordinance; and entrepreneurs, artists and others who want the opportunity and flexibility to produce and provide commercial goods and services from their home.

1.2.6 Work/Live District

The Work/Live District should be established to allow a more intensive level and mixture of uses than are permitted in the proposed Live/Work District but would retain a scale and character which is more in keeping with a residential environment. This district would encourage appropriately designed and scaled commercial uses mixed with significant residential uses in a pedestrian-friendly manner.

Performance standards regarding the volume and hours of client and vendor visits; number of employees allowed per unit; traffic and parking considerations; storage and display of merchandise; storage and use of hazardous materials; landscaping, signage and density requirements; and any objectionable noise, light or odors would be established to govern this district.

The Work/Live District would be protected from encroachment of automobile-oriented large uses. No type of repair or assembly of vehicles or equipment with internal combustion engines or any other work related to automobiles and their parts would be permitted. Uses which are compatible with the residential uses and which maintain and preserve the character of the area would be permitted.

Work/Live units, those units occupied by a business and a residence, should be occupied by the business owner or by an employee of the business. Units which are exclusively residential in use and units which are exclusively commercial in use would be permitted in this district. However, any conversions in use of a unit should meet the proper building codes and should receive approval from the Inspection Division and the Fire Marshall.

A Work/Live District is an important tool for creating a district that will promote a compatible mixture of commercial and residential uses. A Work/Live District is also an attractive option for people starting up businesses who may not be able to afford separate locations for a home and for a business; those expanding an existing home occupation beyond what is permitted in the Zoning Ordinance or under the proposed Live/Work District; and entrepreneurs, artists and others who want the opportunity and flexibility to produce and provide commercial goods and services from their home.

1.3. Rezone Study Area Properties

Rezoning should be accomplished as soon as possible in order to capitalize on the momentum currently developing in portions of the Study Area, most notably the Lincoln Mill Village.

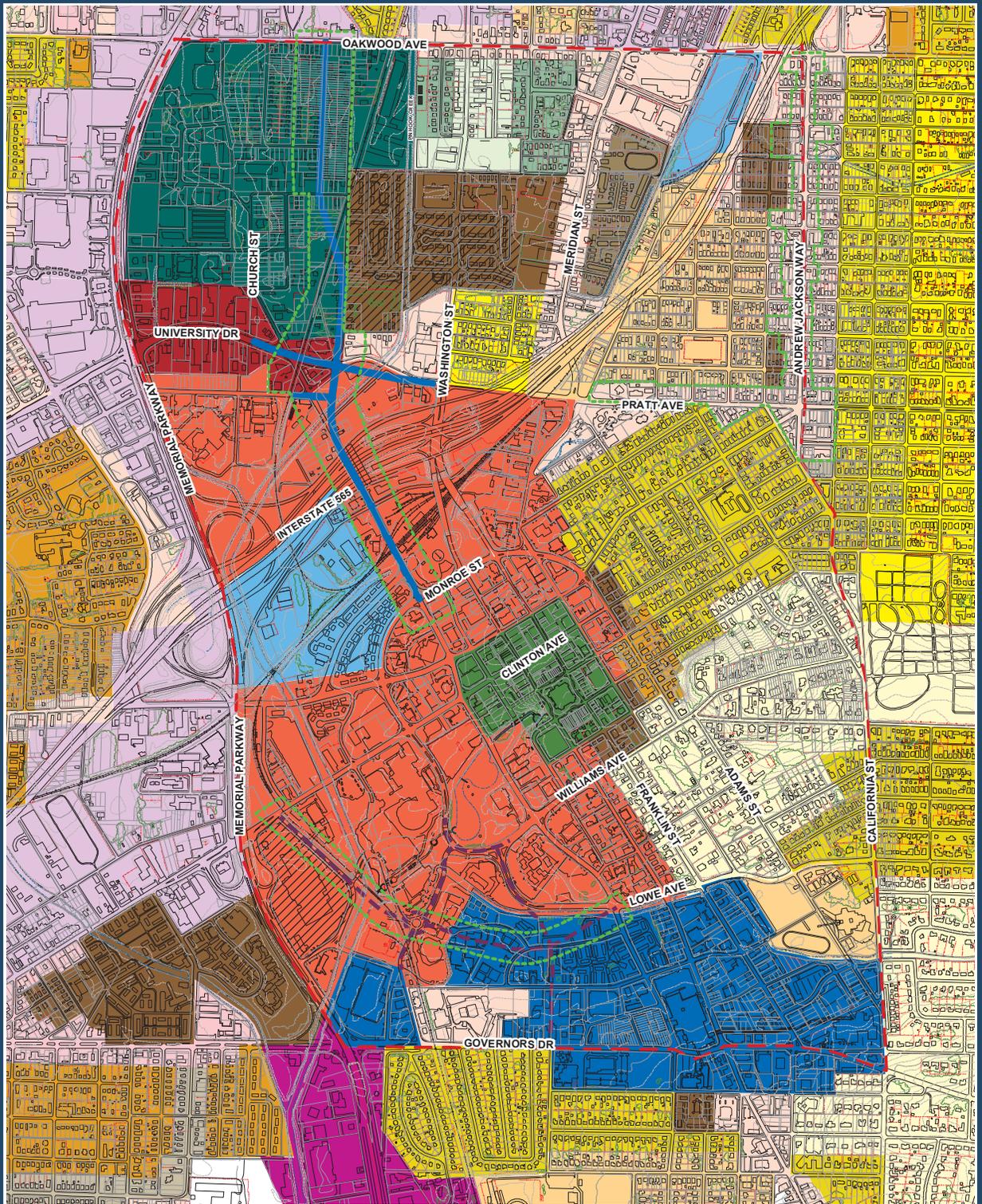
Figure 6, Proposed Zoning, identifies specific zoning categories for Study Area parcels. It should be understood that the parcels labeled with a "PD" designation or General Business C-3 designation do not reference the existing districts in the current zoning ordinance. The above designations reference the amended zoning classifications as detailed in Section 1.1 of this document.

Zoning represents one of the key sources of the challenge that faces Huntsville's Downtown. While zoning can channel development and control its character for the good of the community, inappropriate zoning can block development or lead to development that is not wanted. The following text identifies recommended rezonings for each of the subareas.

Downtown Core

The goal of the zoning recommendations for the Downtown Core area is to establish a zoning district that is capable of fostering a central business district environment, unique to the City, for the central business district area of Huntsville.

- Rezone the "City Center Policy Area" as a fourteen block zoning district surrounded by Holmes Avenue, Greene Street, Gates Avenue, and Spragins Street, focusing on the predominant "historic" or traditional core of the downtown area. This district would also include a two block area to the west of the aforementioned area bounded by Holmes Avenue, Spragins Street, Big Spring Park and Church Street. This area exhibits a critical mass and character conducive to a downtown atmosphere.
- Establish zoning regulations through the development of a central business zoning district that focuses on the mixed use needs of the "downtown core" which:
 - o Promotes commercial retail activity on the first floor of buildings through the establishment of such intent in: the Purpose Statement of the district; through the list of permitted uses; and through performance standards (e.g. "retail and other commercial uses that generate pedestrian activity shall be located on the street level of buildings within the downtown core area.").
 - o Establish office uses as a Special Exception Use on the first floor of buildings within the downtown core district. Office uses will be permitted as of right on all other floors within the downtown core district.



Legend

- Commercial Overlay
- Mfg/Research
- Live/Work
- Work/Live
- Central Business District
- Residential PD - H
- Mixed Use PD - MU
- Residential - R1A
- Residential - R1B
- Residential - R1C
- Residential - R2A
- Residential - R2B
- Residential - R2C
- Office - O
- Commercial - C1
- Commercial - C3
- Commercial - C4
- Medical - M
- Light Industrial - LI
- High Industrial - HI
- Study Area
- Church Street Realignment
- Lowe Avenue Reconfiguration



Downtown Master Plan Update

Huntsville, Alabama

Figure 6
Proposed Zoning

October 17, 2005



Edwards
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- o Promotes office or residential uses on upper floors of buildings (e.g. office uses; only when located on upper stories of the building).
- o Eliminate uses that do not generate pedestrian traffic or are not conducive to a downtown atmosphere (e.g. remove light manufacturing, trailer parks, gasoline service stations, personal storage facilities, etc. that are currently permitted uses in the C-3 General Commercial District which is presently applied to the downtown core area).
- Establish a "Developers Guide Handbook" that summarizes zoning and design guidelines, through regulations and graphics, for the "Downtown Core" area which would be available to entities desiring to develop or redevelop in the downtown core.

Downtown North

The goal for the zoning recommendations in the "Downtown North" area is to rezone property in a proper manner that will provide for and sustain a mixed use environment of housing, retail, office, and, in limited fashion, light industrial uses.

- Lincoln Mill Village

Rezone the Lincoln Mill Village area to Residence 2C District to promote reinvestment and stabilization of an historic residential neighborhood. The new zoning classification will strengthen the preservation efforts in the community by facilitating appropriate residential uses (single family, duplexes and row houses), while protecting the neighborhood from incompatible industrial uses.

Also, the district will focus on density standards that are compatible with the historic character of the area.

- Grove Street Neighborhood

Rezone the Grove Street Neighborhood to Residence 1C District to promote the continuation of redevelopment of this area to a single family neighborhood. Although a relatively small geographic area, bordered by commercial uses and the interstate, this neighborhood has experienced renewed interest and investment in recent years as an historic residential area. This zoning change will allow single family housing but preclude the possibility of redevelopment to multi-family housing.

- Lincoln Park Redevelopment Area

Rezone the Lincoln Park Redevelopment Area, "Opportunity Site 3", to Planned Development district to promote the reuse and redevelopment of this area as a varying density residential housing area. The use of the Planned Development district will maximize the ability of the Huntsville Housing Authority to redevelop the site given the constraints of the property, particularly the floodway.

- Abingdon Live/Work Neighborhood

Since this area reflects the most diverse mix of land uses in close proximity to each other, several different approaches to zoning are recommended. First, the portion of the area along Oakwood Avenue should remain neighborhood business C1 District. The majority of the uses abutting Oakwood Avenue are commercial in nature and this portion of the neighborhood can serve to provide retail and service needs to the adjoining residential section. Several variances have been granted along this section of Oakwood in recent years. Care should be taken in the future to maintain the integrity of the Neighborhood Business C1 District regulations to insure that inappropriate uses are not permitted.

Next, the area south of Abingdon Avenue within the Abingdon Live/Work Neighborhood subarea should be rezoned Residence 2B district to conform and complement the proposed Residence 2B zoning adjacent to its east, south and west. The Boys and Girls Club, American Red Cross and Opportunity Center have facilities in this area which offer valuable community services. Their location here should be utilized in the redevelopment of the residential area to both their north and south.

The central area of this subarea, along Washington Street and Fletcher Street, is predominately commercial and industrial in nature, with a small percentage of the area remaining residential. However, is surrounded on both the east and west by areas that have predominately held their residential character and use. Therefore it is recommended that this area be rezoned to the new Work/Live district. This would allow commercial only, mixed use or residential only uses in the area, however standards would be utilized in the district to protect the surrounding residential uses.

This district will serve as a transition area both providing commercial opportunities while promoting residential reinvestment in the neighborhood.

The remainder of the Abingdon Live/Work Neighborhood should be rezoned to the new Live/Work zoning classification. The areas along Bass Street, Virginia Boulevard, Parkway Drive and Maple Avenue have remained predominately residential in nature. The implementation of the Live/Work classification will promote the stabilization of the residential community, but still allow limited commercial activities to occur in structures that have an occupied residence. The new district will continue to allow a mix of uses but address performance standards to protect the residential component of the mix. Specifically, issues such as, outdoor storage, accessory structures, outdoor lighting, signs, screening and buffering, on-site parking, noise, hours of operation and management and disposal of hazardous wastes and other factors as determined necessary for the specific environment.

- Meridian Street Neighborhood Commercial Corridor

Rezone land fronting Meridian Street along the east and west sides from the I-565 overpass to Oakwood Avenue to Neighborhood Business C1 District to promote neighborhood retail uses and services for the surrounding residential areas.

Two “Opportunity Sites” are located within this corridor, “Opportunity Site 2” and “Opportunity Site 4”. “Opportunity Site 2” is the key retail site for neighborhood commercial activity to support this section of the study area, particularly as it relates to the location of a grocery store. The portion of the opportunity site located within the city and north of Neely Avenue, east of Meridian Street, south of Oakwood Avenue and west of the railroad track, should be rezoned to Neighborhood Business C1 District to encourage neighborhood retail uses while concurrently prohibiting incompatible uses, such as light industrial activities. When the section of this site that is currently located in the county is annexed into the city, it too should be zoned Neighborhood Business C1 District. It should be noted that a portion of the Lincoln Mill buildings located on the property are outside the city limits. Ideally this property will be redeveloped with neighborhood retail and service uses, while also utilizing the upper floor residential use opportunity available in the Neighborhood Business C1 District. The eastern portion of this opportunity site, located east of the railroad tracks, should be rezoned to the new Office District. Uses allowable under this zoning classification are the most appropriate for the site due to its close proximity to the Dallas Mill residential area and the restricted access to the site.

“Opportunity Site 4” consists of the lands between Meridian Street and the Lincoln public housing property. As previously recommended the frontage of Meridian Street should be rezoned to Neighborhood business C1 District. The land behind the frontage (approximately 500 feet) should be rezoned Residence 2B District. This will permit a transition area between the commercial frontage of Meridian Street and the residential area along Washington Street. It is noted that the existing parcels will be split by the zoning classification line. However, as redevelopment occurs the need to protect residential uses in the area and stabilize property values can not always be reconciled with existing property boundaries.

- University/Memorial Commercial Corridor

Rezone the property fronting University Drive between the Parkway and realigned Church Street, as well as the property fronting Memorial Parkway immediately north and south of the University Drive intersection to Highway Business C4 District. This will conform to the current land uses in the area but eliminate the possibility of industrial uses. The area along Memorial Parkway north of the above portion of the corridor to Oakwood Drive should be rezoned the new Research Manufacturing Applications District to serve as the “front door” of this new district encompassing the Church Street Mixed Use Area.

- Church Street Mixed Use Area

Rezone the Church Street mixed use area, including “Opportunity Site 1”, to the newly established Research Technology Applications District to facilitate the redevelopment of the area into a research, development and light manufacturing center. This district will build on the recent reinvestment in the area and create an employment center within the downtown north policy area. Where the district abuts residential uses, performance standards should be written that protect the residential area. These performance standards should address issues such as buffers, setbacks and lighting.

- Washington/Pratt Development Area

Rezone the portion of this area lying north of Pratt Avenue and west of Washington Street to Neighborhood Business C1 District. Changing this zoning classification will promote the provision of neighborhood services to the adjacent residential communities, while also offering protection from incompatible uses that would have negative impacts on the stabilization and reinvestment in the nearby residential areas.

Rezone the portion of this area lying south of Pratt Avenue and along the 1-565 right-of-way to General Business C3 District to provide sales and service opportunities for the support of the nearby governmental uses, but eliminate the opportunity for inappropriate light industrial uses to locate in the area.

- Justice Center

Rezone the Justice Center area as General Business C-3 District. While it is not anticipated that the governmental use in this area will change, consistency in zoning throughout the area is desirable. Also, the modification will eliminate the possibility of light industrial uses being located within the area, which could be detrimental to the overall development of the property.

- Dallas Bypass Greenway

While this area is projected for recreational use as a greenway and park, it should be rezoned to reflect adjacent land uses and zoning classifications. Therefore, the southern subsection of the area (south of Pratt Ave.) should be rezoned to Neighborhood Business C1 District and the northern section (north of Pratt Ave.) should be rezoned Residence 2 District.

DOWNTOWN FRINGE

- Destination/Entertainment/Culture

Rezone the area designated as “Opportunity Site 7” and the area between Pollard Avenue and Heart of Huntsville Drive to General Business C3 District maintaining a consistency with the surrounding downtown zoning. Ultimately, the rezoning of “Opportunity Site 7” to Planned Development Mixed Use will be preferred to promote redevelopment of a retail plaza with associated out parcels.

Also the land fronting on the east side of Monroe Street should be rezoned from Medical District to General Business C3 District. This will facilitate appropriate retail development complementing the new hotel and VBC improvements on the west side of Monroe Street. The remainder of the Destination/Entertainment Area should continue to be zoned General Business C3 District.

- Office Center

Rezone “Opportunity Site 6” as well as the area west of Pollard Street and north of Clinton Avenue to Office District to promote the establishment of offices as the preferred land use. This will provide a key office support center for the downtown area, as more retail and residential uses are established in the downtown fringe and core. The remainder of the Office Center policy area should remain General Business C3 District.

- Lower Core Policy Area

The Lower Core Policy Area should remain as currently zoned General Business C3 and Residence 2B. The revised General Business C3 district regulations will offer protection to the area along the east side of Madison Street, which directly abuts the historic Twickenham residential district.

- Downtown Support Area

Rezone the majority of the Downtown Support Area, including “Opportunity Site 5”, to Office District, which will foster the development of professional, administrative and business offices to support downtown and particularly the Justice Center Area. The frontage along Church Street should be zoned General Business C3 to encourage development of retail uses to support the nearby Office and Visitor/Tourism Areas.

- Visitor/Tourism Gateway

Rezone the Visitor/Tourism Gateway to General Business C3 District to promote the appropriate infill development of the property and encourage a retail element.

- Meridian Street Small Business Center

Rezone the Meridian Street Small Business Center, south of Pratt Avenue, to General Business C3 to foster the continued commercial redevelopment of the area and stabilize existing retail businesses.

- Greenway Corridor

Rezone the Greenway Corridor north of Pratt Avenue to Residence 2 District to conform with adjacent land uses and zoning. The area south of Pratt Avenue should be rezoned to Neighborhood Business C1 District, again to conform with adjacent land uses.

- Lowe Avenue Impact Area

The Lowe Avenue Impact Area is proposed to have a diversity of land uses and several projects may impact land use decisions over the next several years. Therefore, there are five separate recommendations for zoning within this area.

- 1) Rezone the western portion of the policy area (west of Monroe Avenue) to Medical District, thereby permitting the current uses in the area and eliminating the possibility of incompatible industrial uses from locating in the area.
- 2) Retain the General Business C3 zoning classification on the portion of the area located between Gallatin Street, Lowe Avenue and Williams Avenue.
- 3) Rezone the portion of the area fronting on Monroe Street, between the railroad tracks and Monroe Street to Neighborhood Business C1 District. This will support the existing small business in the area and conform to the adjacent zoning on First Baptist Church.
- 4) Retain the Medical District zoning for the Councill Court Housing Authority property (Opportunity Site 8”) and the lands along Governors Drive. This will allow for the expansion of the medically related uses necessary to support Huntsville Hospital.
- 5) Retain the Medical District zoning along Davis Circle until such time as either the Federal Building is constructed on Lowe Avenue or Lowe Avenue is relocated. Either occurrence will require the zoning of this area to be reevaluated.

- Medical District

The only zoning changes recommended within the Medical District Area are minor in nature and include rezoning a small complex of buildings located south of Lowe Avenue adjacent to Peter Fagan Creek from Residence 2 B to Medical District.

- Twickenham District

No zoning changes are recommended to the Twickenham District Area, except clarification of the zoning lines along the southern boundary of the area adjacent to Lowe Avenue. The zoning line should be relocated to the center of Lowe Avenue to eliminate the split zoning on the properties within the R1A and R2 zoning districts.

- Old Town District

Rezone the portion of this area along Howe Avenue, south of Pratt Avenue and east of Meridian Street to Neighborhood Business C1 District to promote small scale neighborhood business adjacent to the Old Town Historic District. Neighborhood Business C1 district will also offer more protection through setbacks and buffers to the adjacent Old Town neighborhood.

Rezone the two existing single family houses on the south side of Walker Avenue, east of Meridian Street to Residence 1B District to protect the residential use of the property and conform with the remainder of the adjacent residential area.

The remainder of the Old Town District area should remain as currently zoned. However, the commercial lands fronting the south side of Pratt Avenue should be overlain with a design review zone to facilitate the development and redevelopment of the area to an appropriate scale and character.

Other Subareas

- Dallas Mills District

Establish overlay zone along Pratt Avenue and Andrew Jackson Way to facilitate commercial development and redevelopment to an appropriate scale and character. The overlay zone will address such issues as access management, building orientation (requiring buildings to face Pratt Avenue and Andrew Jackson Way) and signage. (See section 1.4 for further information on the overlay district.)

1.4 Develop a Design Review Overlay Zone to be applied to targeted corridors and economic development locations.

Design Review Overlay zones are used effectively by communities throughout the United States to support an additional level of design quality for highly visible corridors and locations that have been targeted for significant economic investment. Design review processes provide an additional level of security for investors in these locations by ensuring that the visual appearance of neighboring developments will not adversely impact their investment. As with other regulatory mechanisms, design review processes are triggered by change in use or significant redevelopment.

Design Review Overlay zones are administered on the basis of district-specific design standards. Design standards are published and made available to the public, and include both text and graphic representations of acceptable and unacceptable alternations. Design standards may address several aspects of the built environment, including:

- specific styles and types of signage (e.g. awning, projecting and wall mounted signage);
- fenestration and storefront windows;
- the use of specific types of building materials for new construction and renovated buildings (e.g. brick);
- colors that are appropriate for the area (e.g. muted earth tones);
- orientation of buildings so that the primary entrance or façade faces the appropriate direction (typically the street the building is fronting on); and
- style and massing of new or renovated buildings that reflect the surrounding environment.

The level of design standard ultimately adopted by the City should be of a nature that the City is comfortable in regulating and implementing on a consistent basis. Differing levels and degrees of detail in design standards will be appropriate to different districts.

The City should be able to include Design Standards in the Zoning Ordinance in accordance with Alabama Code Section 11-52-72 which states:

"Such [zoning] regulations shall be made with reasonable consideration, among other things, to the character of the district and its peculiar suitability for particular uses and with a view to conserving the value of buildings and encouraging the most appropriate use of land throughout such municipality."

And Alabama Code Section 11-52-70, which states:

"Each municipal corporation in the State of Alabama may divide the territory within its corporate limits into business, industrial and residential zones or districts and may provide the kind, character and use of structures and improvements that may be erected or made within the several zones or districts established and may, from time to time, rearrange or alter the boundaries of such zones or districts and may also adopt such ordinances as necessary to carry into effect and make effective the provisions of this article."

Depending on the extent of the area that is determined eligible for local historic district designation (See *Implementation Strategies* 3.1), design guidelines for the City Center Policy Area can also be developed and administered under the existing Historic Huntsville Preservation Commission. Design guidelines are particularly crucial for the City Center Policy Area because of the extremely high visibility and pedestrian scale of this district.

For each district to be addressed by a Design Review Overlay, the City should also develop a "Developers Guide Handbook." Each handbook will summarize zoning and design guidelines using text and graphics and will be available to entities desiring to develop or redevelop in districts addressed by a Design Review Overlay.

Strategy 2: Improve Infrastructure

Policy Areas: *Lincoln Mill Village, Grove Street Neighborhood, Meridian Street Neighborhood Corridor, Abingdon Live/Work Neighborhood, University Drive/ Memorial Parkway Commercial Corridor, Church Street Mixed Use Area, Washington/ Pratt Development Area, City Center, Destination Entertainment*

2.1 Conduct inventory of infrastructure in Preservation and Revitalization Policy Areas and develop prioritized list of infrastructure improvements to be programmed into the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP).

As noted in the Master Plan, improving the appearance and stormwater management of the Study Area, particularly in the Downtown North area, is vital to recruiting new residents, businesses and investors. Investing in public facilities demonstrates the City's commitment to the area and creates a perception of a neighborhood whose value is increasing.

As the Master Plan indicates, several Policy Areas need significant infrastructure improvements. Potential improvements fall into several categories:

- Curb and gutter and storm sewer improvements. These improvements should represent the highest priority, and should be constructed in all Preservation and Revitalization Policy Areas as soon as possible. Standing water has been observed well after rain events in several Downtown North locations, presenting not only a health hazard but also a perception of disrepair.
- Roadway repaving. Many road surfaces in Downtown North have worn and deteriorated surfaces. Road resurfacing will be necessary in conjunctions with all curb and gutter and storm sewer projects; roadways with adequate stormwater management systems should also be evaluated and programmed for resurfacing as appropriate.

Narrow streets and alleys are essential elements of the character of urban neighborhoods, particularly in the Lincoln Mill Village, where they help create the visual impression of a tight-knit traditional neighborhood community. As noted in the *Master Plan*, extensive street and storm sewer construction will be necessary to support this and other Downtown North neighborhoods' revitalization. However, all road improvement projects should stay within the existing roadway. Widening the roadway should not be permitted except for the segment of Cottage Avenue just north of the Dallas Branch. Widening to a full two lanes at this location is appropriate and will be necessary when the former mill sites are redeveloped.

- Alleys. Alleys are common in Downtown North, particularly in the Lincoln Mill Village, and are generally not paved. Since alleys provide essential internal circulation for this neighborhood, and since drainage in these areas has been historically poor due to the high clay content of the soils, these alleys should be paved. Alleys should not be widened and do not need curbs, gutters and storm sewers except in those locations that require them

for proper storm drainage. However, these alleys should be paved in order to promote their use and the health of the district.

- Sidewalks, tree lawns and pedestrian buffers. Sidewalks should be constructed wherever possible on both sides of all roadways in and connecting to the Preservation and Revitalization Policy Areas. Construction of sidewalks, tree lawns and pedestrian buffers, if possible, is particularly important on portions Meridian Avenue, Pratt Avenue and Washington Street, given these roads' importance as primary routes within the Downtown North area. Focus group participants from the Downtown North neighborhoods expressed concerns over pedestrian safety in this area.
- Fiber optic or high capacity data transmission lines. In the event that the opportunity is available to extend industry-standard high capacity data lines in conjunction with any road improvement project, incorporating those lines into the improvement should become a high priority. Providing high capacity data transmission lines presents a significant opportunity for improving Huntsville's attractiveness to high-tech businesses, and such facilities often catalyze reinvestment along a corridor.
- Conventional utilities. If possible, electric lines, telephone and other cables should be buried in conjunction with all roadway and streetscape improvement projects. Although burying utilities will have a positive impact on the physical environment of the Preservation and Revitalization Policy Areas, items such as sidewalks and alleys are more urgent and more necessary to the revitalization of these neighborhoods. Burying any remaining utilities on a proactive basis may become an appropriate policy after the more basic infrastructure needs of Downtown North have been addressed.

Although these needs were noted during this course of this Master Plan Update, a detailed and prioritized inventory of infrastructure needs is beyond the scope of this project. The City should conduct such an inventory before assigning projects to the CIP to ensure that City resources are used to leverage the greatest economic benefit. The inventory should address all of the elements noted above, and should record existing conditions and needed improvements for each infrastructure element in each location.

Needed improvements should then be prioritized on the basis of several predetermined elements that may include

- urgency of need,
- potential impact on community revitalization,
- potential number of new residents gained or jobs created,
- cost of improvement,
- ability to coordinate with other improvements, etc.

A predetermined point system may prove useful, although the participants should retain the right to revise the results to accommodate other issues and needs.

Potential projects identified by the Infrastructure Improvement Strategy should be programmed into the CIP as aggressively as possible. The City should evaluate its capital improvements budget on an annual basis and determine the appropriate timing and phasing of the improvements outlined above within the overall context of its citywide capital improvements. Alternative funding sources, including CDBG funds and resources that may be available after the reauthorization of the federal Transportation Act (known as SAFETEA-LU) should also be pursued for these projects.

2.2. Improve east-west connectivity through Downtown North whenever possible.

The City of Huntsville Long-Range Planning Section has identified a need to improve north-south travel between Oakwood and the Downtown Core area, and has proposed the Church Street realignment (see the *Master Plan*) in part to address that need.

In conjunction with this improvement to local traffic flow, all available opportunities should be pursued to create and enhance direct east-west routes through the Downtown North area. While the realigned Church Street will serve as an important major collector roadway, the Downtown North subarea's redevelopment potential is hampered by the lack of east-west local collector roadways.

At present, traffic circulation in most of Downtown North requires movement to either Oakwood Avenue or the Pratt/University corridor to travel east or west. The only alternative to these major roadways is a confusing, circuitous route along non-aligned local streets. As a result, traffic moving across the Downtown North area may create turning movement conflicts on Oakwood and Pratt/University Drive. Downtown North does not currently generate enough traffic to create significant levels of conflict, but it may be expected that successful revitalization and redevelopment will increase traffic demands and conflicts. If more local east-west routes were available, local traffic could find alternative routes for short trips within the Downtown North subarea.

Current roadway patterns also create long or irregularly-shaped blocks, which limit the redevelopment potential of properties. When roads are arrayed in a regular grid, site designs can be developed with access alternatives, and fewer parcels of land remain undeveloped because of their lack of acceptable roadway access. The rear portions of the parcels facing the west side of Meridian Street, for example, represent a significant amount of land that has remained underutilized, in part, because it lacks the road frontage that would be available if east-west roadways passed through the site.

Proposed projects should create new east-west local routes, except when the project adjoins an existing east-west route that is determined to be sufficient to meet the project's internal circulation needs.

2.3 Improve linkages across Interstate 565 and between Policy Areas.

Linkages support the synergy of a community's development by creating strong ties between complimentary areas. Roadway systems can create linkages for vehicles, but those same roadways often do not accommodate pedestrians in a comfortable manner. As a result, it is important that both roadway and non-roadway linkages within and between Policy Areas be developed and enhanced for the comfort of their users. By enhancing the motorist experience and creating opportunities for alternative modes of transportation between key centers of activity, linkages enhance the liveliness of a community.

Two linkage strategies need to be developed. The first type of linkage will connect Downtown North to the Downtown Core, overcoming the barrier created by the width and visual character of the I-565 overpass. The second type of linkage focuses on improving pedestrian movement within the Downtown North and Downtown Core subareas. Both sets of linkages are essential to the long-term health and vitality of Downtown Huntsville. Key linkage locations are identified in Figure 7.

A. **Construct and enhance linkages that connect Downtown North and Downtown Core.**

Although the Downtown North and Downtown Core/Fringe subareas have had separate histories and characters, the construction of Interstate 565 accentuated the separation between these two locations. As a result of the I-565 overpass, Downtown North is psychologically and, in some locations, physically cut off from the Downtown Core and Fringe. Four major roadways provide vehicular access between the two subareas, but these roads lack amenities for pedestrians, bicyclists and other non-motorized travelers and fail to create an environment that encourages people to move from one side of the overpass to the other.

Two types of linkage opportunities are available to bridge this gap. First, the Greenways system currently under development will bridge this gap by creating opportunities for people to travel on foot or bicycle between the areas. The Greenways system is a network of pathways and trails that follow non-roadway routes throughout the City. Many Greenways follow natural features, including waterways and ridges, while others follow abandoned rail right-of-ways.

As noted in the City's *Greenway Plan* and in the *Master Plan* portion of this Master Plan Update, several potential greenway locations have been identified that will strengthen connections between Downtown North and the Downtown Core/Fringe. These include:

- the Pinhook Greenway (Phase 1),
- a branch of the Pinhook Greenway that extends along portions of the Pinhook Creek and Dallas Branch;
- the Gateway Greenway, and
- the Dallas Bypass Greenway

The Pinhook Greenway provides a particularly good opportunity for linkage between Downtown North and the Downtown Core/Fringe. It is recommended that the section of the Pinhook Creek Greenway (Phase 1) which follows the abandoned railway be located along the creek. Relocating the greenway will create a more aesthetically pleasing experience for the user and allow for better integration into the residential area of the Downtown North. The City is proactively acquiring properties within this Floodway and removing these structures in order to minimize flooding outside of the Floodway. The acquisition and removal of the structures provides two major benefits to the City. First, stormwater management is simplified because there are fewer structures at risk during times of flooding. Second, the resulting system of interconnected floodways provide opportunities for the development of natural, open public corridors through urban areas. With minimal improvements, these floodways allow residents to move around freely without the use of motorized vehicles.

Constructing the Greenways identified in this *Greenways Plan* and revised in this *Master Plan Update* as soon as possible will reinforce the revitalization and redevelopment potential of the Downtown North and Downtown Core/Fringe subareas. Although the *Greenway Plan* document ranks the Pinhook Creek Section 1 Greenway as a low priority, these improvements should be regarded as important opportunities to reinforce the investments being made in the Downtown North and Downtown Core areas. The City should evaluate its capital improvements budget on an annual basis and determine the appropriate timing and phasing of greenway improvements within the overall context of its citywide capital improvements. These and all Greenways should have signage that directs community members to the appropriate greenway access points and signage within the Greenway to direct the user to destinations along the Greenway.

A second type of Downtown North to Downtown Core/Fringe linkage opportunity extends along the current roadway corridors extending under the I-565 overpasses. Pedestrian linkages adjacent to the roadway corridors need to be emphasized at the following I-565 crossings:

- Church Street,
- Pratt Avenue, and
- Meridian Street

The intersection of Washington Street and I-565 does not provide the optimal pedestrian environment due to vehicular conflicts, and this area should not be considered for pedestrian linkage enhancements. The pedestrian linkage system should include wayfinding signage and design elements that lead pedestrians away from this intersection and channel pedestrian activity into more appropriate corridors, such as the reconstructed Church Street. The Washington Street corridor should, however, receive enhancements designed to encourage automobile movement between the Downtown North and Downtown Core/Fringe subareas.

To improve the linkages associated with the roadways identified above, attention should be given to providing a pedestrian scale level of improvements. Pedestrian amenities will help reinforce the perception of the underpass areas as safe and comfortable spaces, and may encourage use of these linkages for recreational walking, bicycling, etc. Amenities may include decorative pavement, wide sidewalks, site furniture (i.e. benches, trash receptacles, etc.), lighting and landscaping that is appropriate to partial shade locations.

Incorporating public art into the underpass areas will also help to humanize the environment and may provide a good opportunity to capitalize on the relatively sheltered environment created by the overpass. Establishing public art in this setting will require careful coordinated with activities in the City Center Policy Area, and is likely to require a public/private partnership initiative.

B. Improve strategic linkages within the Downtown North and Downtown Core/Fringe subareas.

Figure 7 also identifies several linkages within the Downtown North subarea and the Downtown Core and Fringe subareas that will play a key role in facilitating pedestrian movement through these areas. These linkages are particularly important because of their potential role in fostering non-automotive movement in locations where pedestrians will generate economic activity and lessen traffic congestion.

Policy Areas in Downtown North are frequently separated from each other by physical barriers and areas that are not conducive to pedestrian activity, such as parking lots and streets that lack sidewalks. Improving Downtown North's internal linkages will require the construction of sidewalks along every collector or arterial street. Enhanced streetscape improvements, such as decorative pavement, site furniture (i.e. benches, trash receptacles, etc.), lighting and landscaping, should be incorporated on Oakwood Avenue, Meridian Street, Washington Street, Church Street, and University Drive/Pratt Avenue throughout the Downtown North subarea.

These linkage needs should be addressed in a coordinated fashion. A streetscape plan similar to that prepared for the Downtown Core in the 1993 *Downtown Streetscape Vision* is necessary to support the revitalization of Downtown North. An appropriate streetscape plan will include a hierarchy of improvements that are appropriate to the scale and physical character of Downtown North. This streetscape plan will identify appropriate levels of treatment for specific locations, appropriate unifying elements, and appropriate materials and construction methods.

As noted previously, the streetscape needs of the Downtown Core subarea were addressed by the 1993 *Downtown Streetscape Vision*, a streetscape plan and hierarchy prepared as a result of the 1989 Master Plan. This Master Plan Update recommends the continued implementation of that streetscape plan, with some revisions as noted elsewhere that are intended to coordinate with new development opportunities. When fully implemented and complimented with an effective wayfinding system, the

Downtown Core streetscape will enhance linkages between Policy Areas in the Downtown Core and Fringe.

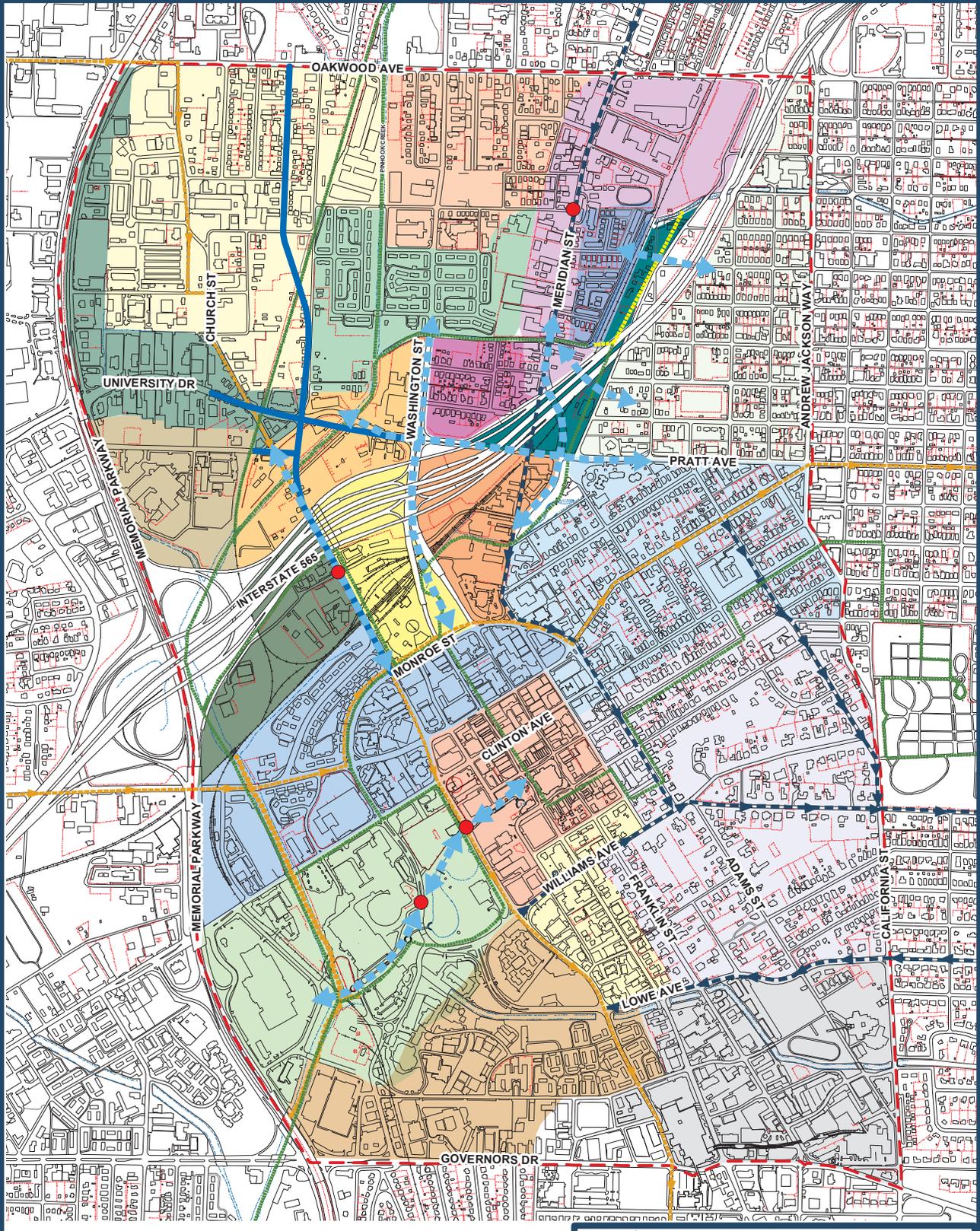
In addition to the streetscape improvements cited above, particular attention should be paid to creating a strong, attractive and pedestrian-friendly linkage between the City Center Policy Area and the Destination Entertainment Policy Area via Big Spring Park. As noted in the *Master Plan*, these two Policy Areas should compliment and support each other, and pedestrian movement between these two areas should be frequent and enjoyable.

Although the City has invested significantly in the Big Spring Park resources with the intention of creating this activity, little pedestrian activity occurs. Part of this failure stems from the physical barriers facing potential users of this corridor. Not only is Big Spring Park East not visible to pedestrians on Court House Square due to foliage and a lack of signage, but pedestrians walking through Big Spring Park East and crossing Church Street between Big Spring Park East and Big Spring Park are likely to feel unsafe.

Linkage improvements at this location should include the following, which are outlined in more detail in the *Master Plan*:

- Improve the visibility of the Big Spring Park from the Court House Square vicinity.
- Construct all elements of the proposed streetscape along Spring Street to provide a more inviting alternative access to Big Spring Park East.
- Consider increasing the amount of lighting within Big Spring Park to improve pedestrians' evening comfort level in the Park.
- Program activities and vendors in Big Spring Park to increase activity in the park and encourage more individuals to use the park (See the *Downtown Liveliness Strategies* for recommendations)
- Improve the pedestrian access across Church Street. One solution would be to create a landscape median in place of the painted median to provide for a pedestrian refuge zone as a person crosses the 6-lane street. At the current crosswalk, eliminate the sixth lane by moving the curb into the street until the parallel parking begins. By moving the curb line, the distance that a pedestrian must walk across Church Street will be lessened. As an alternative, the City should investigate the possibility of a grade separated crossing.
- Maintain the current pedestrian access through Big Spring Park
- Continue to improve the Pedestrian access at Monroe Street to the Convention Center. The recently completed improvements surrounding the intersection of

Monroe Street and Williams Avenue included pedestrian enhancements that extend under Monroe Street without conflicting with the roadway system. The Riverwalk itself will be a draw for tourists and residents, and this connection will play a key role in making the visitors' experience pleasant and enjoyable. The City should continue enhancing pedestrian access as new development in this area occurs.



Legend

Linkage Enhancement Opportunity	Pedestrian/Vehicular Conflict Area	Downtown North Concept Areas	Huntsville City Center
Proposed Church Street Realignment	Bicycle Routes 2002	Grove Street Neighborhood	Destination Entertainment
Future Greenways	Pinhook Creek Flood Control Project	Meridian St. Neighborhood Commercial Corridor	Office Center
Dallas Bypass Flood Control Project	Study Area	Lincoln Park Redevelopment Area	Lower Core Policy Area
		Abingdon Live/Work Neighborhood	Downtown Support Area
		University/Memorial Commercial Corridor	Visitor/Tourism Gateway
		Church Street Mixed Use Area	Meridian Street Business Center
		Washington/Pratt Development	Greenway Corridor
		Justice Center	Low Avenue Impact Area
		Dallas Bypass Greenway	Study Area Sub Areas
			Medical District
			Old Town District
			Twickenham District

Downtown Master Plan Update

Huntsville, Alabama

Figure 7
Linkages Plan

October 17, 2005



Strategy 3: Preserve Community Character

Policy Areas: *Lincoln Mill Village, Grove Street Neighborhood, Meridian Street Neighborhood Commercial Corridor, Abingdon Live/Work Neighborhood, Dallas Neighborhood.*

3.1 Designate eligible Policy Areas and subareas as local Historic Districts or Conservation Overlay Districts.

Huntsville's existing historic preservation ordinance has given the City-appointed Historic Preservation Commission the power to approve or deny approval for exterior alterations, demolitions and new construction in locally-designated historic districts. Local designations have also been consistently shown to have a significant positive impact on the property values and sales values of properties. Local historic designation is particularly vital to urban neighborhoods' and business districts' revitalization, since property owners who choose to invest in their buildings should have confidence that their property will not be negatively impacted by incompatible alterations, demolitions or new construction nearby. Since the vision for several Policy Areas is to encourage new reinvestment, it is extremely important that the risks associated with this investment be lessened to the greatest extent possible. Local historic designation will have that impact.

Obtaining a local designation for any of the appropriate Policy Areas will require a concerted public education effort. Alabama State enabling legislation requires the approval of 60% of the district's property owners. There is some anecdotal evidence that property owners in the Policy Areas addressed by this strategy may be beginning to understand the benefits of local designation, in part because of the success of the Old Town and Five Points local historic districts. However, it is likely that some property owners at this time may not support local historic designation. An alternative to being designated as a local historic district would be for an area to be designated as a Conservation Overlay District. This would provide the neighborhood with protection from incompatible and inappropriate alterations, unnecessary demolitions and would reduce conflicts between new construction and existing development. A Conservation Overlay District, while not under the comprehensive guidelines and criteria of a local historic district designation, would still serve to preserve and protect the unique or distinctive character and the valued features of an established neighborhood.

Property owners often have misconceptions about the impact of a local designation on their property rights, and it will be necessary to overcome these misperceptions and raise awareness of the benefits. The public education process will be most effective if it is led by the Historic Huntsville Foundation (HHF) in partnership with the Dallas-Lincoln Village District, Inc., and the downtown advocacy organization identified in the City Center Policy Area of the *Master Plan*. The HHF is an appropriate lead entity for this effort because of that organization's familiarity with historic preservation issues, but the other nonprofit organizations should be involved at every step in order to provide local

validity and support. Planning students from local universities and colleges may also be able to assist this effort by conducting surveys or preparing public education materials.

Local designations for these Policy Areas should be accompanied by a set of historic preservation and conservation design guidelines that are appropriate to the character of the district and are explicitly designated as the basis upon which the City's Historic Preservation Commission will make decisions regarding the district. Creating and using clear design guidelines will avoid any concern that the Historic Preservation Commission's decisions will be capricious and will give the Historic Preservation Commission a legally-defensible basis for its determinations in the event of a challenge.

Design guidelines should identify character-defining features of buildings in the district, appropriate and inappropriate treatments for these features, and design criteria for new construction and additions. Because the design guidelines are intended to help lay people understand the design review process, design guidelines should be written in clear language with as little technical terminology as possible, and should include as many graphic illustrations as possible. Design guidelines will be most effective if they are published, distributed to all property owners in the districts and available to Huntsville residents and persons interested in acquiring property in the districts.

3.2 Avoid demolitions and facilitate rehabilitation of condemned buildings.

The need for this strategy is particularly urgent in the Lincoln Mill Village, although it can also play an important role in other residential areas. Although the number of buildings in Downtown North that have been demolished as a result of failure to comply with the City's Unsafe Building Code is small, these demolitions have undermined the overall historic character of the Lincoln Mill Village. More significantly, additional demolitions will make the district ineligible for National or local historic designation, which will severely hamper efforts to foster reinvestment. Row house structures, which are unique to mill villages and are key elements of the Lincoln Mill Village's historic character, appear to be particularly likely to be demolished, and they present unique challenges to redevelopment because of their internal configurations, which include several small, separate units within one building.

It is essential that the Unsafe Building Code be appropriately enforced in the Lincoln Mill Village, and no recommendation should be interpreted as proposing any change in the Unsafe Building Code or its enforcement. However, the deterioration of buildings to the point where they may be demolished under the Unsafe Building Code presents a particularly difficult and urgent challenge to the revitalization of this district. Strategies for improving the maintenance of buildings are identified under points 4.1 and 4.2 of this Implementation Strategy. It is also crucial, however, that a plan of action be developed to allow appropriate parties to gain control of buildings that are in danger of being demolished. Strategies to gain control of and rehabilitate condemned buildings are used in most older major U.S. cities, including Baltimore, Chicago and Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

A potential strategy is outlined below. The key participants should establish a Task Force to refine this strategy, identify an appropriate lead agency, raise the necessary funds and lead the administration of this process. Fundraising will be particularly crucial to the success of this project; funds may be recruited from local residents, businesses and institutions. This strategy will require the participation, at a minimum of the following agencies and organizations:

- Department of Community Development;
- Huntsville Historic Preservation Commission;
- Historic Huntsville Foundation;
- Dallas-Lincoln Village District, Inc.; and
- The Community Development Corporation identified in the *Master Plan*

In the event that a building is either condemned or likely to be condemned under the Unsafe Building Abatement Code, the following strategy shall take effect:

1. The Community Development Department notifies the other key participants as soon as possible that a given building may be determined Unsafe.
2. An appropriate entity obtains a quitclaim purchase or charitable donation from the current owner. Charitable donation of the property should be encouraged; it may be necessary in some cases to buy the property for the amount that the owner would incur to demolish the building. Depending on the capacity of the organizations at the time of the notification, the purchasing agency may be the Historic Huntsville Foundation, the Dallas-Lincoln Village District, Inc., or another nonprofit organization. It may be feasible for Community Development to purchase the property, but this should be pursued only as a last resort due to the fiscal and legal constraints under which this department operates. If the owner has expressed a willingness to give the property to the Department of Community Development for demolition, the Department should transfer the property to the identified appropriate entity.
3. The entity that gains ownership of the property will be required to comply with the rehabilitation requirements of the City's Unsafe Building Abatement Code, including the correction of violations and the obtaining of appropriate permits and approvals. This process will require the involvement of an experienced buildings contractor or a coordinated group of building rehabilitation specialists to identify the improvements needed to bring the structure into compliance. The Historic Huntsville Foundation and/or the Dallas Lincoln Village District, Inc. will need to identify a number of qualified parties who are willing to assist in such situations. Depending on the needs of the specific building and the persons involved, it may

be possible to arrange for rehabilitation services to be made as a charitable donation to one of these organizations, or to do the work at cost. Donations of materials and funding should also be sought from building supply businesses, local businesses and financial institutions. All of these parties may benefit from the positive publicity that will be associated with these efforts, and some financial institutions may be interested in using this initiative to meet a portion of their Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) requirements. Funding, materials and labor will be identified, and agreements will be prepared, during the initial phase of planning for this strategy. It may also be possible to seek capitalization for a revolving loan fund for this purpose. Buildings will not be completely remodeled or restored, but will be stabilized and brought into compliance with City codes.

4. Recruit an eligible buyer. This strategy will provide a good opportunity to reinforce efforts to increase homeownership in this Policy Area. The property should be priced as inexpensively as possible, given the need to recoup any direct investment. Potential buyers should be required to undergo a screening process to ensure their ability to able to finish the rehabilitation of the building. Evaluation criteria and procedures should be developed at the beginning of the strategy's development. This process will benefit from the assistance of mortgage administrators and homeownership educators. Oakwood College's Business & Information Systems Department or the Alabama A&M University Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) Small Business Institute (SBI) Center for Entrepreneurship and Economic Development may be able to assist this effort. Potential buyers should have reasonably good credit and employment histories, undergo homeownership and credit management education, if necessary, and work out a general plan for funding and completing work on the building. Owner improvements on items that do not require professional licensing should be encouraged.

3.3 Construct Gateway Elements at Appropriate Locations

The delineation of gateways makes a traveler aware that he or she is entering a unique and distinctive area within the community. Recently-constructed residential communities in Greater Huntsville provide good examples of the gateway concept: they often feature elaborate large masonry walls, landscaping and signage intended to mark the entrance to an area of the community and clearly state that community's unique character.

For the same reasons, gateways will be beneficial to the urban design culture of the Downtown Huntsville Study Area. Unlike a suburban residential community, which has limited entrance points, Downtown Huntsville can be approached from multiple directions, with each approach corridor having numerous visual distractions that detract from any sense of arrival in a location that has a distinct character. Motorists and pedestrians can enter the Downtown area or a neighborhood within that area without even knowing that they have done so.

Huntsville has several areas that are marked by gateway elements, and these features illustrate some potential gateway strategies. Two areas with distinct character include Twickenham and Five Points, and they are clearly demarcated, both through signage and through the area's distinct physical character. Other areas of urban Huntsville, including the neighborhoods of Downtown North and the Downtown Fringe, are largely undifferentiated from their surroundings. The establishment of gateways at key locations in this area will help the subarea develop a positive public identity. This positive identity will, in turn, reinforce residents' sense of community pride and will encourage new investment.

The 1993 *Downtown Streetscape Vision* identified gateway locations for the Downtown Core area, but this plan focused almost completely on this small portion of the Study Area. While these gateways would be beneficial to the Downtown Core area, a wider examination of gateway opportunities and strategies is necessary to meet the full needs of the entire Downtown Huntsville Study Area.

Figure 8 indicates preferred locations for gateways throughout the Study Area. These locations provide particularly good opportunities for gateways because of their high traffic volumes and visibility to motorists, but the majority of these locations will also serve pedestrian traffic and should provide appropriate pedestrian amenities.

The City of Huntsville should develop a strategy for designing and constructing appropriate and coordinated gateways. This strategy will be coordinated with the extension of the existing Downtown Core streetscape hierarchy and the development of a streetscape plan and hierarchy for Downtown North. The strategy will emphasize three types of gateways:

- **The Downtown Community** – located on the major thoroughfares, these gateways announce one's arrival in downtown Huntsville as a whole. These gateways will also emphasize that the Downtown North area is considered part of Downtown Huntsville.
- **Downtown North** - located within the Study Area in locations that differentiate Downtown North from the Core and surrounding neighborhoods. Separate gateway designs will be appropriate for the residential and nonresidential portions of Downtown North, and a locally-accepted neighborhood name, such as Lincoln, should be used in the residential area.
- **Downtown Core** - located within the Study Area in the locations that differentiate the Downtown Core from the surrounding neighborhoods. These gateways may be used to define the Destination Entertainment and City Center Policy Areas as separate places, but their designs should be highly compatible and emphasize the interrelationship of these two districts.

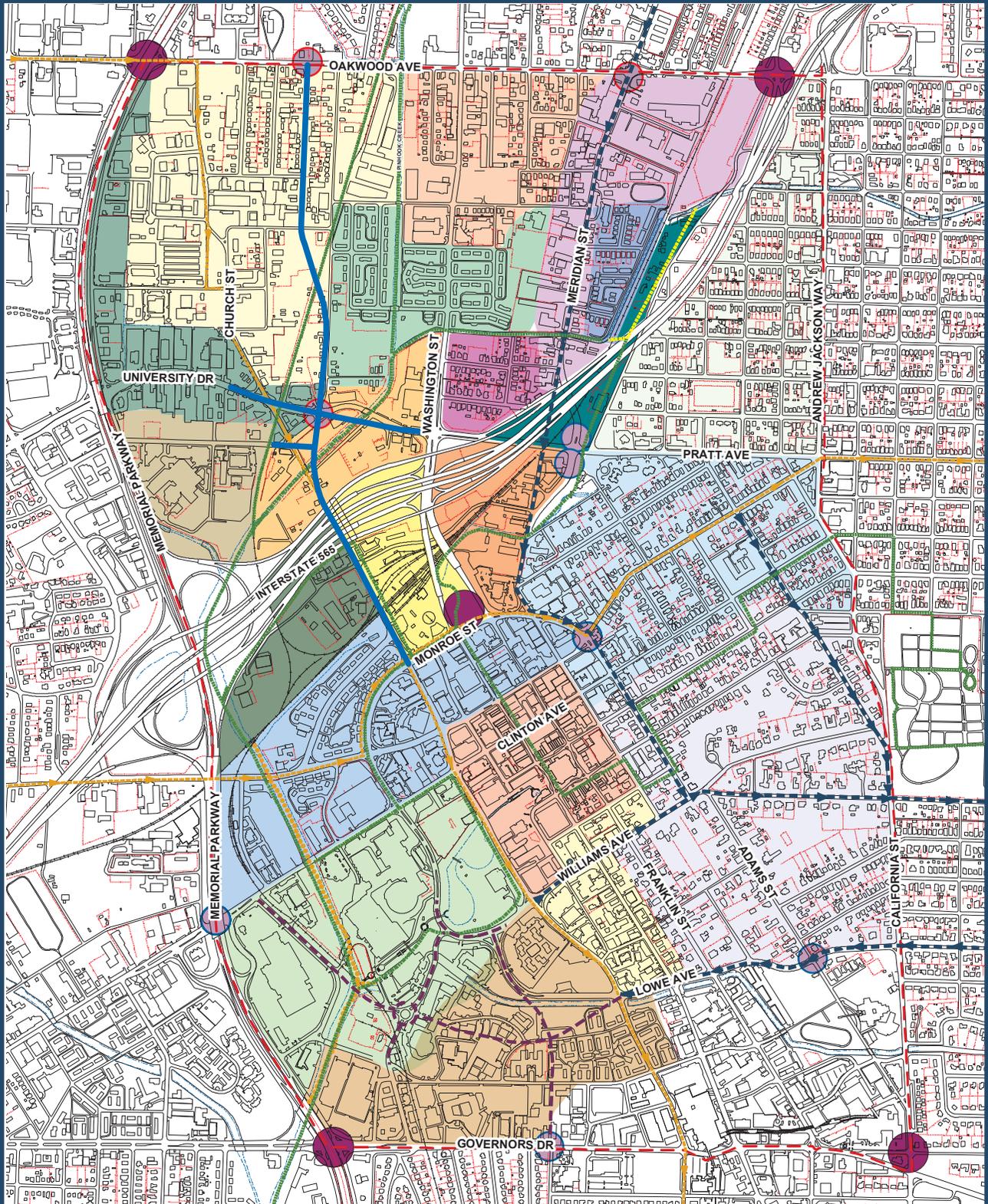
The City should develop a Gateway design plan. This plan should identify an appropriate palette of design elements that will visually invite individuals into the area. Each

gateway should be designed to respect the “scale” of the area within the urban fabric in that location while incorporating enough common design elements to reinforce the perception of a distinctive area. For each gateway category, similar elements should be reinforced in each location. This may occur through the repetition of signage graphics and color or other unifying design elements. A continuity of materials and colors should be used across the three categories of Gateways.

Gateway elements can be defined via several design strategies:

- Enhanced streetscape improvements (such as sidewalks and lighting),
- thematic graphic pole signage,
- landscaping,
- structural elements,
- or a combination of these elements.

In some locations, a simple sign and landscaping may be sufficient, while other gateways may require a more permanent structural feature. There will be constraints at each gateway location but those constraints are what make that location unique from the other areas in Huntsville. The Gateway Design Plan should identify a common graphic language of design elements and determine an appropriate design strategy for each gateway location.



Legend

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Downtown Community Gateway ● Downtown Core Gateway ● Downtown North Gateway — Proposed Church Street Realignment — Proposed Low Ave Avenue Reconfiguration — Future Greenways — Bicycle Routes 2003 — Bicycle Routes 2002 — Pittfork Creek Flood Control Project — Dallas Bypass Flood Control Project — Study Area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Downtown North Concept Areas ■ Lincoln Mill Village ■ Grove Street Neighborhood ■ Meridian St Neighborhood Commercial Corridor ■ Lincoln Park Redevelopment Area ■ Adairson Live/Work Neighborhood ■ University/Memorial Commercial Corridor ■ Church Street Mixed Use Area ■ Washington/Pratt Development Area ■ Justice Center ■ Dallas Bypass Greenway 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Downtown Core/Fringe Concept Areas ■ Huntsville City Center ■ Destination Entertainment ■ Office Center ■ Lower Core Policy Area ■ Downtown Support Area ■ Visitor/Tourism Gateway ■ Meridian St Small Business Center ■ Greenway Corridor ■ Low Avenue Impact Area Study Area Sub Areas ■ Dallas Mills District ■ Old Town District ■ Twickenham District
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Downtown Master Plan Update

Huntsville, Alabama

Figure 8
Gateways Plan

October 17, 2005



Edwards AND Kelcey

In addition, redevelopment sites located at Gateway locations should be designed to emphasize the Gateway experience. A building oriented towards a gateway point, instead of being sited so that it ignores the Gateway, will reinforce one's sense of arrival into the Downtown.

The following examples illustrate various gateway strategies and the different scale of elements that can define a gateway. A Gateway Design Plan should identify a general design strategy that is appropriate to each of the gateway categories and should determine the best strategies for customizing these strategies to each specific location.

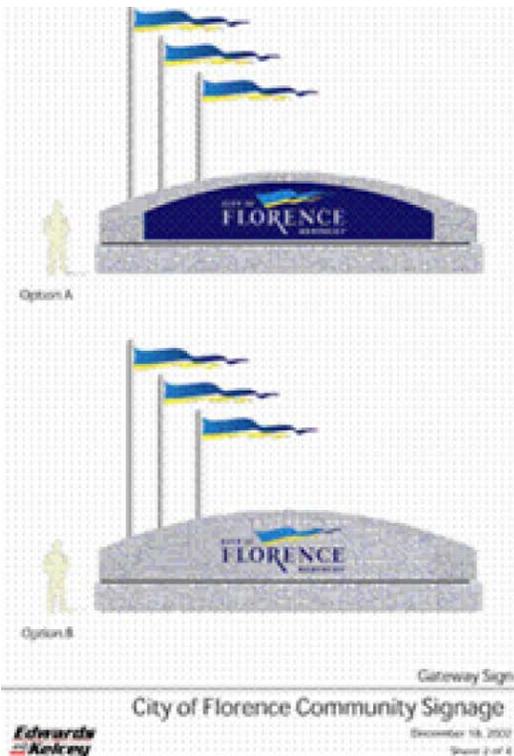


Figure 9: Community Scale Gateway



Figure 10: Neighborhood Gateway – Vehicular and Pedestrian

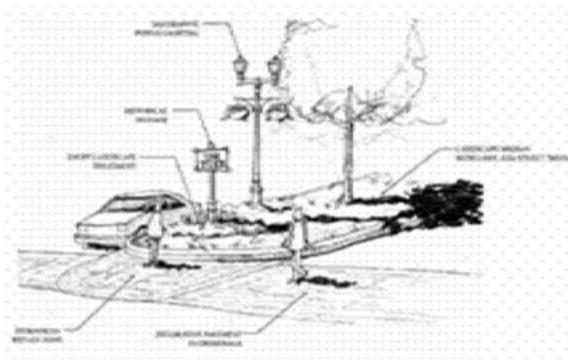


Figure 11: Intimate Scale Gateway Designed for Pedestrians and Motorists

Strategy 4: Improve Residential Property Maintenance

Policy Areas: *Lincoln Mill Village, Grove Street Neighborhood, Meridian Neighborhood Business Corridor, Abingdon Live/Work Neighborhood.*

Many buildings throughout the residential areas of Downtown North and the Dallas neighborhood suffer from deferred maintenance. In some cases, deferred maintenance may develop because of owners who are unaware of their buildings' conditions or unable or unwilling to make improvements. In other cases, deferred maintenance may occur when the occupants are unable to make repairs as a result of disability, age, or income. Improving the overall maintenance of properties is essential to creating an environment in which people will invest.

4.1 Establish or extend a Community Development Corporation (CDC) to spearhead property improvement initiatives.

Community Development Corporations (CDCs) are nonprofit corporations that have access to specific funding and technical resources that are not available to non-CDCs. A CDC is the most appropriate entity to administer building maintenance and homeownership initiatives in Downtown North.

It is essential that one CDC be established to serve eastern Downtown North; separate CDCs for the different Policy Areas will be counter-productive. If there is more than one CDC attempting to access funding and political support for this small area, the initiative will be perceived as fragmented and the amount of support that can be leveraged will be limited.

4.2 Expand existing property maintenance programs to residential Preservation and Revitalization Policy Areas.

In general, a variety of property maintenance programs are already being used in Huntsville by the Division of Community Development. These include programs to rehabilitate existing rental housing, provide financial and technical assistance for the rehabilitation of owner-occupied structures, replace household sanitary sewer lines, and conduct weatherization and home repair programs through CASA, World Changers initiatives, and Community Development's Emergency Repair program. The first two programs are particularly notable in that they use volunteer labor to meet many of the basic needs of residents. These tools have the potential to meet many of the needs that have been identified in the Preservation and Revitalization Policy Areas of Downtown North.

An additional tool that can be valuable are "how-to" sessions, in which building trades professionals teach simple home improvement methods. CDCs and community organizations in many communities sponsor such workshops; in many communities, such programs are sponsored by local building supply companies.

The existing programs will need increased funding in order to expand to the appropriate Policy Areas without adversely impacting the neighborhoods in which they are operating. Lincoln Mills Community Initiative should develop a strategy to increase their financial and volunteer capacity if they are to have a significant impact on building maintenance in the Lincoln Mill Village and nearby residential districts. Potential strategies include:

- Recruiting corporate sponsorship and employee volunteer days (in some communities, this is known as the “Christmas in April” program)
- Recruiting the volunteer time of students at the Alabama A&M University, Oakwood College and Lee High School.
- Recruiting the sponsorship or donation of materials of building improvement specialists and building supply firms.
- Soliciting the financial support of local philanthropic organizations, including faith-based organizations, Rotarians, and fraternal organizations.

Partners in the formation of the new CDC or the extension of existing CDCs to Downtown North will identify ambitious benchmarks for progress in the community. Such benchmarks may include a yearly number of houses to receive improvements or families to receive housing maintenance assistance.

Strategy 5: Increase Homeownership

Policy Areas: *Lincoln Mill Village, Grove Street Neighborhood, Abingdon Live/Work Neighborhood, and Lincoln Park*

Although well-maintained rental properties will continue to play an important and appropriate role in these Policy Areas, increasing the percentage of properties that are owner-occupied is crucial to the long-term health of the Downtown North residential area. Housing studies have consistently shown that persons who own their homes are more likely to maintain their properties, more likely to report crime or code violations on other properties, more likely to intervene in activities that undermine the community's safety and security, and are more likely to take an active role in community events.

As noted in the Master Plan, the revitalization of the Downtown North residential policy areas will be significantly influenced by the rate of revitalization in the Lincoln Mill Village. Since the Lincoln Mill Village is the most visually distinctive and best-known residential area in Downtown North, its revitalization will have a catalyzing effect on the rest of the area historically associated with the Lincoln community. Conversely, if the Lincoln Mill Village continues to deteriorate, public awareness of this fact will color common perceptions of the surrounding areas, further depressing their potential for residential revitalization. At present, the homeownership rate in the Lincoln Mill Village is among the lowest in urban Huntsville. If this Policy Area is to lead the revitalization of Downtown North residential areas, the majority of its homes should be owner-occupied.

Despite this low ownership rate, the Lincoln Mill Village and the residential areas of Downtown North do have several strategic advantages that will help make them attractive to potential owner-occupants. First, as noted previously, the Lincoln Mill Village has a distinctive physical and historical character. Neighborhoods with intact historic character are consistently easier to rehabilitate than neighborhoods that do not enjoy this differentiation. The historic character of the Lincoln Mill Village will become a significant enticement to potential property owners.

Second, the small size of most residential buildings and lots in these policy areas will keep the value of these properties affordable to a significant portion of the Huntsville population, for whom Huntsville's median housing prices are too expensive. Several sources have noted that Huntsville, like most cities, has a shortage of housing available for low to moderate income residents. Historic communities often provide valuable sources of affordable housing, but as these communities' popularity increases, property values sometimes accelerate to levels that are out of reach of low-to-moderate income residents, including entry-level service employees and public sector professionals. Although property values are likely to rise in these Policy Areas, the small lots and small house sizes will keep housing prices from rising out of reach of this population during the ten-year window of this Plan Update.

Finally, the simple construction methods used on Downtown North houses, particularly in the Lincoln Mill Village, means that owners can do much of the necessary rehabilitation work themselves. Tasks such as repairing windows, replacing siding boards, and installing fixtures that

do not require plumbing or electrical permits can be done by a home owner with relatively simple tools and some effort. Many Lincoln Mill Village houses will need repairs that should be done by specialists, but owners will be able to do more repairs themselves on these houses that they might be able to do on more elaborate structures. This “sweat equity” can play a significant role in filling the financing gap that some homeowners will face, as discussed below.

5.1 Develop homeownership education programs.

Homeownership education programs have been successful in many urban cities, and can have a significant impact in Huntsville by making homeownership an option for people who do not fit standard lending criteria or may not know how to purchase a home. Homeownership education programs generally follow two approaches. First, most programs help participants understand the home buying and home ownership process. Topics include credit management, types of mortgages, savings and budgeting, home inspection, and the home purchase process. Additionally, homeownership education programs are often linked to specialized mortgage products, such as loans with discounted interest rates and down payment assistance. Other resources are available through HUD; Fannie Mae; and locally through Family Services Center, Inc.

A homeownership education program in Downtown North may be best implemented by a partnership between a neighborhood organization, such as the Lincoln Mills Community Initiative and the Huntsville Housing Authority. Eligible residents of the Lincoln Park development should be particularly targeted for this initiative.

5.2 Raise local awareness of alternative mortgage products and home purchase assistance that is available via HUD, Fannie Mae and others state and federal agencies.

There is an extensive array of such programs available, including down payment assistance, underwriting support, and programs that reduce or waive closing costs for qualified buyers. Like many federal and state incentive programs, these tools are not widely known and require the user to understand the terms and conditions of the agreement. The Lincoln Mills Community Initiative can sponsor a “Home Fair” to facilitate awareness and access to programs.

Strategy 6: Eliminate Vacant Lots

Policy Areas: *Lincoln Mill Village, Grove Street Neighborhood, Lincoln Park Redevelopment Area, Abingdon Live/Work Neighborhood*

As noted previously, several Preservation and Revitalization Policy Areas, including the Lincoln Mill Village, has experienced the demolition of a small but significant number of its buildings. Vacant lots have a negative impact on efforts to revitalize a neighborhood. Not only do they create a void in the physical pattern of the neighborhood, and create a health nuisance if they are not properly maintained, but vacant lots have also been found in many urban communities to provide a location for criminal activities. Vacant lots create or reinforce a perception of a neighborhood in decay.

In a mature residential community, however, infill construction is unlikely to occur through purely market forces. Several strategies can be pursued to facilitate infill housing; most of these will require public and nonprofit sector support.

6.1 Clean and Landscape existing vacant lots.

This simple strategy can have a significant impact on the perception of the neighborhood and is used by urban CDCs throughout the United States. The Lincoln Mills Community Initiative should identify two or three highly visible vacant lots, gain permission from the owners to work on the sites, and use the relationships that it is developing with church groups, schools and other nonprofits to conduct a clean-up day. The Lincoln Mills Community Initiative should also seek donations of plant and landscaping materials, and should use its volunteer labor partners to create simple landscape improvements. Elaborate effects are not necessary; the goal of these efforts should be to create a maintained, appealing space that improves the aesthetics of the community and provides an opportunity for neighborhood residents to work together to improve their community.

Cleaning and landscaping of lots cannot be pursued without the permission of the property owners.

6.2 Coordinate with local Habitat for Humanity to target the Preservation and Revitalization Policy Areas for new housing construction.

Habitat for Humanity has proven to be an effective provider of affordable housing construction in urban areas nationwide. Habitat for Humanity is also a well-established national program with well-developed screening and funding processes. Although the amount of construction undertaken by Habitat chapters is often limited to a very small number as a result of its reliance on donated funds, materials, and volunteer labor, a small number of Habitat buildings constructed in a small area can have a significant impact on the health of the community. Habitat projects also generate positive publicity, which can help support momentum behind a community's revitalization.

Community leaders from the Lincoln Mills Community Initiative, the Planning Division and the Community Development Division should meet with appropriate Habitat for Humanity leadership at the earliest possible opportunity to discuss potential opportunities and requirements for housing construction in the Preservation and Revitalization Policy Area. Planning and construction may be led by Habitat, although other organizations may be able to provide fundraising support and volunteer assistance. Houses constructed by Habitat should be designed to complement the design characteristics of the surrounding neighborhood, for example, by including a simple shed roofed porch.

6.3 Develop homestead construction incentives.

Although it is possible that market-driven interest in the Preservation and Revitalization Policy Areas may lead to the purchase of vacant lots and the construction of homes or, where appropriate, business structures on them, it is also possible that incentives may be needed to support new building construction. These incentives will need to be offered by the City in coordination with the Lincoln Mills Community Initiative, a CDC and other appropriate organizations.

Homestead construction incentives are used in most major U.S. cities to encourage new construction in urban neighborhoods. The Department of Community Development may be a particularly appropriate City lead agency. The specific strategies used vary widely, but they generally include at least one of the following:

- the purchase of mortgage points,
- the long-term lease of the land upon which the house is constructed (ownership remains with the City or with a nonprofit corporation),
- down payment assistance,
- discounted sale of the land upon which the building will be constructed

The following outlines an appropriate strategy:

1. Community Development receives ownership of vacant lots, either through existing avenues, such as condemnation of unsafe buildings or through other means.
2. Community Development uses the homeownership education program in section 5.1 to screen and select potential new homeowners.
3. Community Development and the CDC help the new homeowner identify and access the appropriate federal housing incentives.

4. As a condition of property conveyance, the City requires the recipient to have her or his primary abode on this parcel for a specified period of time.

Strategy 7: Pursue the development of an artists relocation program, if necessary, to catalyze reinvestment.

Policy Areas: Lincoln Mill Village, Grove Street Neighborhood, Lincoln Park Redevelopment Area, Abingdon Live/Work Neighborhood, Meridian Street Neighborhood Corridor

As discussed in the Lincoln Mill Village portion of the Master Plan and in connection with Opportunity Site 2, it may be possible to use an artists' relocation program as a strategy to attract new investment to the district. Although this approach has become popular nationally in recent years, there is not enough evidence at this time to indicate whether this strategy can succeed in Huntsville, or to verify that it will have the desired effect.

More significantly, no existing Huntsville organization has been identified to date that has the capacity and expertise to lead this project. Although a few artists recruitment programs are run by municipal offices, and significant public sector participation invariably necessary for a successful program, a program is likely to be most effective if it is spearheaded by or has a close partnership with an arts organization or a neighborhood organization that has the organizational and financial capacity to handle a complex program involving property sales and management.

It is entirely possible that an arts community may develop in Downtown North, particularly in and around the Lincoln Mill Village, strictly as a result of the homeownership strategies identified in previous sections. An arts community that develops in this fashion will have significant benefits to the Huntsville community, and the development of appropriate arts facilities should be strongly supported by City and nonprofit revitalization partners.

7.1 Reevaluate the artists' relocation program when the strategies identified previously have been in effect for three to five years.

Since most of the strategies that have been identified rely on incremental improvements, it is likely that significant widespread change may not be apparent to observers until two to three years after these programs have begun. By that time, changes in the Preservation and Revitalization Policy Areas may indicate an increased or decreased need for an artist relocation initiative. It is also possible that an organization may develop the capacity to lead such a program during this period. Finally, reevaluating this strategy in the future may mean that more information is available from other communities' experience, allowing the Huntsville program to avoid the mistakes that other communities have encountered.

Strategy 8: Make Downtown Huntsville Visually Enjoyable and User-Friendly

Policy Areas: *City Center, Destination Entertainment, Lowe Impact Area, Lower Core, Office Center, Visitor/Tourism Gateway, and Medical District*

The 1989 *Downtown Master Plan* focused a great deal of attention on the physical design characteristics of the Downtown Core and Downtown Fringe subareas, and an impressive amount of the physical improvements proposed by that Plan have been constructed. This strategy supports the improvements that were made as a result of the 1989 Plan, and proposes a small number of physical improvements to the same area that will further enhance the existing assets.

8.1 Develop and implement a comprehensive system of wayfinding to maximize use of Downtown Huntsville’s assets and resources.

As noted previously, the Policy Areas that make up the Downtown Core and the Downtown Fringe subareas feature an impressive array of public destinations, including regional entertainment and cultural attractions, centers of government activity, regional business centers and medical services. These subareas also appear to have a generally sufficient amount of many of the basic resources that visitors to these destinations need, including parking, restaurants and hotels. However, downtown users may not know where to find these resources or attractions, particularly if they do not commonly navigate in urban environments or are new to downtown Huntsville. Lack of wayfinding leads to a variety of common, long-term urban challenges, including

- wasted parking and frustration over a perceived lack of parking,
- erratic driving behavior,
- parking violations,
- resistance to walking in the downtown area,
- negative impacts on surrounding neighborhoods,
- negative perceptions of the downtown area, and
- decreased visitation to downtown attractions.

Good wayfinding systems provide the information that motorists and pedestrians need to make the best use of the downtown area. Wayfinding systems include a variety of signs, maps and other graphic information, and range from directional signs that lead the motorist to an attraction to kiosks where pedestrians can read notices of upcoming events. Good wayfinding is also visually distinctive, which not only helps the viewer differentiate it from other signs, but also adds to the distinctive character of an urban

environment. At the same time, however, wayfinding elements should not be so visually dominant that they interfere with motorists' ability to find other sign information or create a "cluttered" visual environment.

The City of Huntsville has some wayfinding elements, but these are fragmented at best. A few individual attractions have directional signage, but these are erratic in their placement and uncoordinated in their design. There is no directional signage leading motorists or pedestrians to downtown destinations, and there are no maps to help pedestrians get their bearings. As noted in the City Center Policy Area portion of the *Master Plan*, the majority of available parking is in off-street parking structures and surface lots located behind buildings, but there are very few signs directing users to these resources or identifying them as available to the public. Many of the most significant regional attractions, such as the Huntsville Hospital, are not indicated by any signage in the Downtown Core subarea, and there is no signage in the Medical District directing travelers to the Core or Fringe attractions. There is also no signage in the City Center area, particularly in the Court House Square vicinity, to help visitors find government offices or other attractions. A variety of important resources, including Big Spring Park, are not marked by directional signs from the Court House Square or other key locations, and there is no directional signage leading pedestrians or motorists from surrounding neighborhoods. There are also some existing signs in the Downtown Core and Fringe subareas that are remnants of an earlier wayfinding effort; these signs present a faded appearance and in some cases direct the user to a resource that no longer exists.

The City of Huntsville should design and install a comprehensive wayfinding system that covers, at a minimum, the Downtown Core, Downtown Fringe and Medical District subareas. Since Downtown North is not expected to develop regional destinations, it will not be appropriate to include this subarea or any of the other primarily residential neighborhoods in the wayfinding system, although regional destinations in Downtown North may be added to the wayfinding system as necessary. This wayfinding system should have a cohesive design vocabulary, including logos, icons, shapes, colors, and materials. The wayfinding system should include the following elements:

- Directional signs to general areas and major destinations. These signs should have several "layers," or types of locations where different types of wayfinding elements will be necessary. The first wayfinding elements will be located at the Gateway sites identified in the *Implementation Strategies*, and will proceed in a logical fashion to the last layer, which is the sign that identifies the destination. Several intervening layers may be necessary, depending on the complexity of the route between the gateway and the destination. These signs should be designed to be visible to both motorists and pedestrians, but are particularly vital for motorists.
- Locational signs for parking facilities and other resources that do not have their own signage. Locational signs should mark both vehicular and pedestrian access points.

- Pedestrian-scale directional signs for key pedestrian-only routes, such as through Big Spring Park.
- Map kiosks or standing maps with major destinations indicated.
- Information kiosks or information panels on map kiosks to post notices about downtown events.

8.2 Construct the remainder of the Streetscape as developed in the 1993 *Downtown Streetscape Vision* with recommended alterations.

The 1993 *Downtown Streetscape Vision* identifies design strategies for a hierarchy of seven different streetscape types. Each of these strategies includes design direction for street furniture, signs, sidewalk finishes, signage and other elements. The *Downtown Streetscape Vision* also identifies alternative construction techniques that are intended to minimize construction costs when necessary. As a result, the 1993 *Downtown Streetscape Vision* provides an array of options for design and construction. The design elements and materials identified remain appropriate, and should continue to form the basis for streetscape design and construction throughout the Downtown Core and Fringe areas. The City should determine which of the available options it wishes to employ and move forward according to that direction.

Implementation of the improved streetscapes has been sporadic, and has generally occurred only in conjunction with construction projects. Although this strategy minimizes direct costs, it lessens the visual and potential economic impact of the investment in most locations because the new streetscape only extends a short distance before the user abruptly encounters the old, unimproved streetscape. Since the purpose of an improved streetscape is to improve the public's perception of the area, a few isolated areas that have been improved make little impact when they are surrounded with unimproved streetscapes. These isolated improvements may also create a perception among the community of the downtown area as a stagnated location in which the City is not willing to invest. Although this perception may be inaccurate, the condition of the downtown streetscape will play a strong role in the popular perception of the City and its downtown. Efforts to recruit new businesses and visitors will be further impaired by this perception.

It should be noted that the City has begun to take this approach on its most recent streetscape project which included several blocks of Clinton Avenue. When financially feasible, this approach should be followed in the future.

The City Center Policy Area portion of the *Master Plan* includes some specific revisions to the *Downtown Streetscape Vision*. If the angled parking mentioned in the City Center portion of the *Master Plan* is constructed, that design should include all appropriate streetscape elements.

The Master Plan Update recommends several alterations to the *Downtown Streetscape Vision* as follows:

1. Streetscape locations that were previously identified as Retail Core streetscapes, shall become Address Streetscapes. These changes are recommended because the initial construction and material costs of these full brick streetscape designs is becoming prohibitive. In addition, the City's experience with areas previously installed, indicated that these designs are more difficult and costly to maintain.
2. The appropriate paving material for Transitional Streetscape sidewalks shall be concrete in lieu of brick pavers.
3. Decorative colored and/or stamped or scored concrete shall be used at all address streetscape locations. Brick borders may be considered.
4. All lighting throughout the streetscape should be the same style, regardless of the streetscape treatment. Based on technology available at the time, the 1993 *Downtown Streetscape Vision* recommends different types of fixtures for street and pedestrian lighting. However, there are options available now which allow the city to use similar style lights for both pedestrian and street lighting.

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Downtown Liveliness Strategies

Introduction

The Downtown Liveliness Strategies portion of this Master Plan Update develops an action plan for a strong and vibrant population of downtown residents, business establishments and entertainment venues. Although land use regulations, physical design enhancements and major new developments will have a significant impact on Downtown Huntsville, these activities alone will not create the environment identified in the Vision and Goals, which are outlined in the *Master Plan*.

As Huntsville has learned in the years following its remarkably extensive implementation of the 1989 Downtown Master Plan, building physically attractive environments does not guarantee that people will use those environments, and it does not guarantee that those attractions will generate vibrant urban activity. This document recommends a series of strategies designed to bring people and activity to the Downtown area.

Why is a Comprehensive Approach so Important?

Before the modern era, Americans patronized downtowns because they had no other choice. Before the widespread availability of automobiles and good roads, downtowns were the primary location where people found goods and services, and downtowns thrived because they were the only marketplace of their size in the region. In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, of course, Americans have developed a stunning array of residential, retail, service and entertainment options, and downtowns have become one of only several available choices.

But blaming of the struggles of downtowns on cars, or parking, or highways, or sprawl, or any other single factor is to oversimplify the story and create the wrong solutions. People chose to patronize successful downtowns for several interrelated reasons, not just any single one. These are only a few of them:

- Downtown is a place where you can see interesting or beautiful things, including buildings and parks.
- Downtown is a place where you can find shopping, dining or entertainment options that you can't find anywhere else.
- Downtown is an easy and pleasant place to walk
- Downtown is a place which fosters informal and formal gatherings of people.

Regardless of the reasons downtown patrons may give, they are using downtown for one fundamental reason: *Downtown is a unique and enjoyable environment.*

When people do not choose to patronize downtown, however, it is because of factors that prevent them from enjoying that environment. Common complaints may sound like this:

- “*Downtown is dirty.*”
- “*There’s no reason to go there -- there’s nothing good downtown.*”
- “*I can’t find a place to park.*”
- “*I can’t find anything downtown.*”
- “*It’s not safe.*”

Downtown revitalization is often difficult because people who work in downtown every day frequently lose the ability to see the details that visitors notice immediately. Downtown regulars know where to find the excellent deli or the unique furniture store, but the visitor may only see offices that are of no interest. Downtown regulars know where to park and how easy it is to walk downtown, but the visitor may not know how to get around and may decide that downtown is hard to use. Downtown regulars become accustomed to the crumbling sidewalks, faded storefronts and the small pile of windblown debris lying in the corner, but most visitors will see these immediately and develop their impression of downtown based on these images. Downtown visitors look for the destinations and the big attractions, but they also see minor details that regulars may overlook.

The big items and the small items are equally part of the equation that forms an individual’s perception of downtown, and only focusing on major improvements can mean that visitors’ opinion of downtown may not change as much as it should. But it is often psychologically and politically easier to focus on major improvements and allow smaller issues to continue under the radar. Successful downtown revitalization requires a long-term commitment to the gradual process of improving and maintaining all aspects of the downtown environment, both big and small.

The Challenge of Comprehensive Revitalization

These liveliness strategies are both easier than physical development, and harder. Unlike the construction of a park or a streetscape, these recommendations require relatively little funding and can be completed effectively in very small increments. However, these strategies present some challenges:

- These strategies cannot be implemented by the City alone. As indicated in the *Master Plan* and the *Implementation Strategies*, the City will play a crucial role in creating an economic, regulatory and physical environment that will make downtown a good place for new businesses and new activity. But the City cannot make people come. Creating a lively downtown will require downtown businesses and organizations, and the community as a whole, to consciously decide to make Downtown Huntsville a high priority, and it will require them to develop close working relationships with the City government. Effective downtown revitalization will require a level of cooperation and coordination between government, business and community.
- These strategies will not change downtown overnight. Although large developments can change the appearance of an area in a matter of a few months, changing people’s activities and perceptions will take much longer. Most

revitalizing downtowns, including Chattanooga, Atlanta, Denver, Pittsburgh and Cleveland, are benefiting now from revitalization efforts that started ten to twenty years ago. Downtown revitalization requires patience with incremental improvements and a long-term dedication to reestablishing downtown as the heart of the community.

- Not all of these strategies result immediately in a “product” that can be touched or experienced. Although people will attend events and patronize new businesses, much of the work that must be done to make them happen will occur behind the scenes. And much of this work will be so mundane that the average visitor will not notice them. But they will notice the results. Downtown advocates must understand how the small details move downtown Huntsville toward the goal of a lively community, and downtown supporters must be able to maintain commitment to these items as well as the more flashy events. Without the attention to details, the “products” will fail to materialize, or they will lack staying power.

Characteristics of a Successful Downtown

All downtowns are different. Buildings are newer or older, storefronts are filled or vacant, users live nearby or several miles away, and other characteristics vary across the spectrum. But experience with successful and unsuccessful downtowns makes it clear that successful downtowns of any type have several common characteristics, including the following:

1. *Successful downtowns have a strong private organization whose sole purpose is comprehensively revitalizing their downtown.*
2. *Successful downtowns value their historic buildings and places and treat those as their prime assets.*
3. *Successful downtowns have residents.*
4. *Successful downtowns have a mix of retail, office, and entertainment businesses.*
5. *Successful downtowns actively promote themselves.*
6. *Successful downtowns pay attention to details.*
7. *Successful downtowns manage their cars.*
8. *Successful downtowns have people who want to walk.*
9. *Successful downtowns are in communities where people care about downtown.*

The recommendations in this document are built around these success factors.

The recommendations that follow also address some of the needs identified in the *Master Plan* and the *Implementation Strategies*. Where necessary, the sections below identify which of the City Center Policy Area's needs or Implementation Strategies are also impacted by this recommendation.

A Final Note: Where is the Art?

Communities across the nation have used arts and artwork as a strategy for revitalizing their downtowns, and there is strong interest in Huntsville in developing an arts district or art theme in downtown. Arts-oriented businesses and organizations are in many ways ideal for downtown settings:

- They tend to appreciate the high design quality and design potential that many downtown buildings present;
- They may have low overhead costs and may find space in older buildings more affordable than new buildings,
- They usually have trade areas that extend beyond a neighborhood (and may extend beyond the City boundaries); and
- The business and the employees benefit from and enjoy their proximity to other people, businesses and events.

However, attempts to develop an arts center in Downtown Huntsville will face some challenges that arts advocates alone cannot fix. As noted above, art-related businesses thrive in places where they can find inexpensive space that is accessible to the public. Huntsville's existing downtown storefronts, however, have been largely occupied by offices and restaurants, and finding affordable first floor space for an arts business is becoming increasingly difficult. The cost of storefront space is a function of market demand for that space, and office space and restaurants almost always demand higher rents than general retail space. As a result, arts businesses may find it difficult to find storefront space in Downtown Huntsville. The zoning recommendations for the City Center in the *Master Plan* and *Implementation Strategies* will help lessen that pressure, but it will also be necessary for other organizations and building owners to work together to change the general downtown real estate environment if arts are to be a central part of Huntsville's downtown liveliness. Recommended strategies are outlined in this section.

The development of an arts district in a downtown also usually requires a strong organization focused on building an arts community and building awareness of the arts district in the region. A renewed interest in arts is developing at this time in Huntsville, and it may be possible for an organization to spearhead this approach in the future. If such an organization develops over the next ten years, that organization may be able to sponsor an Arts District Master Plan. This Arts

District plan should identify preferred physical locations, types of businesses and activities and other strategies for fostering the development of an arts district. Development of an Arts District Master Plan should focus on the blocks surrounding the square, where small storefronts, historic character and proximity to the potential arts activities in Big Spring Park will hold the greatest potential for development of a vibrant array of arts businesses.

Downtown advocates must be somewhat careful about fostering a downtown that is dominated by a relatively small economic niche. As noted below, some of downtown Huntsville's lack of liveliness stems from the over-dominance of offices, especially in storefront spaces. While niches can provide economic strength and reinforce downtown's distinctive reputation, any kind of over-reliance on a single sector has the potential to make downtown less appealing to a general audience, and can lead to acute difficulties if that niche falls out of general favor. An arts niche in downtown Huntsville should certainly be supported to the greatest extent possible, but downtown advocates must not assume that recruiting only arts businesses, or restaurants, or any other single type of business will make downtown lively.

Downtown Huntsville's primary goal must be to become an excellent, vibrant district, regardless of what exactly it offers. The mission is to develop the ability to support a lively community, whether that liveliness comes through arts, entertainment, shopping, or other opportunities. Downtown Huntsville can support a wide array of opportunities, and greater diversity in offerings will mean greater diversity in visitors. Participants in this Plan Update's Steering Committee and focus groups repeatedly identified Huntsville's diversity as one of its best assets. There is room in Downtown Huntsville for all of Huntsville's diversity.

Successful downtowns have a strong organization whose sole purpose is comprehensively revitalizing their downtown.

Huntsville's downtown revitalization must be led by a strong organization that can focus on downtown needs. This organization must be incorporated, governed by a Board of Directors that represents a cross-section of downtown and community interests, and established by a mission and charter in accordance with the laws of the State of Alabama. Developing this organization may be the most important element of Downtown Huntsville's revitalization, since this organization must be a leading participant in almost every activity that follows.

It is recommended that a Task Force be formed as soon as possible to examine the options for establishing a downtown revitalization organization. Invitations to join the Task Force may be issued under the Mayor's name in order to demonstrate the City's support for the initiative, but the invitation must be open to any interested person or organization. A successful downtown revitalization program must be led by community members, and any expectation that the City will lead the effort, rather than the City being one of several participants, must be discouraged. The Task Force must include, at a minimum, representatives of the following organizations and interest groups:

- The Chamber of Commerce;
- The Historic Huntsville Foundation;
- The Arts Council;
- The City of Huntsville;
- The Huntsville-Madison County Convention and Visitors Bureau;
- The Early Works organization;
- Downtown business operators and building owners, and
- Interested citizens.

The Task Force will be responsible for further investigating the issues discussed below, determining Huntsville's best plan of action, reporting those recommendations to the downtown stakeholders, including the City, and taking the steps necessary to start the program.

Role of the Downtown Organization

The downtown revitalization organization's primary roles will be as advocate, manager and facilitator. The downtown organization will be primarily responsible for organizing downtown interests, identifying downtown needs and developing strategies to meet these needs. The downtown organization will be responsible for downtown events and initiatives, which may range from basic physical maintenance to planning, promotion and organizing special events. Almost all downtown efforts will require a coordinated response from several parties, including City departments, other nonprofit organizations, corporate sponsors and local business operators. As a result, a large part of the downtown organization's responsibility will be to facilitate communication and coordinate activities between the different parties that must be involved.

The downtown organization must not limit itself to only one aspect of the downtown environment. If the downtown organization focuses only on rehabilitating buildings, or recruiting new businesses, or any one aspect of the downtown environment in the hopes that advances in that area will create improvements in others, then that organization is likely to have few and only short-term successes.

Organizations that assume that achievements in one aspect of downtown will generate broad success in others are almost always disappointed because factors they have not considered are working against their efforts. When downtown organizations focus solely on business recruitment, they may recruit businesses that work against the long-term desirability of the downtown simply because they fill storefronts. Or they may find that the businesses they recruit do not stay because of the unattractive surroundings or the lack of public attention to the district. Downtown organizations that focus solely on design, meanwhile, may find that they have created a beautiful district that no one visits.

At a minimum, the Huntsville downtown organization must focus on the four elements identified by the Main Street Approach ©: Organization, Design, Economic Restructuring and Promotion. All four elements are necessary, and all four will reinforce each other to create a truly effective downtown organization. Depending on the stakeholders' perceptions of the Huntsville environment, the organization may find it necessary to add other elements to this framework (e.g., public relations or fundraising) in order to create a truly comprehensive approach to downtown Huntsville's needs.

Organizational Models

The downtown organization must establish as its mission the goal of comprehensively revitalizing Downtown Huntsville. There are a variety of organizational models that can be used to set up a comprehensive revitalization program. The Main Street Approach© is the best-known organizational model, and Main Street programs nationwide have experienced exceptional levels of success in using this approach (See Appendix A for introductory materials regarding the Main Street Approach). The Main Street Approach relies on a volunteer-driven set of four committees (Organization, Design, Promotion, and Economic Restructuring) to develop initiatives that will address downtown revitalization needs. Main Street programs have at least one staff member, and occasionally more, whose responsibility is to manage the day-to-day affairs of the organization and coordinate the volunteer efforts.

The Main Street Approach has several advantages. The Approach provides a structure that is logical and can be readily understood, and the reliance on volunteers helps ensure that the program remains in touch with the actual needs of the downtown and the community. The use of volunteers can also help a Main Street program create a sense of excitement in the community by raising the program's visibility and building an enthusiastic body of downtown supporters. Finally, the four standing committees are intended to maintain the comprehensiveness of the effort, with each committee pursuing its own set of activities under the coordination of the program manager and the oversight of the Board of Directors.

However, the Main Street model was originally developed for cities smaller than Huntsville, and larger communities often find that they need to modify the Four Point Approach© (the basic structure of Main Street programs) to better meet their environments. Larger city programs sometimes find it more difficult to recruit volunteers, and larger city programs usually find that they have a more difficult time establishing themselves as a high priority for the City government, local charitable donors and the media. Larger cities often find that they must add a fifth committee to focus on a particular area of concern, such as public relations or marketing. Finally, larger city programs generally require a larger staff, and may be more likely to rely on the staff to develop and implement programs, rather than expecting the volunteer committees to do so. Larger city programs often resemble small chambers of commerce or Community Development Corporations (CDCs) more than the traditional Main Street model.

Other models for downtown revitalization organizations can be found through the International Downtown Association (IDA) and the Local Initiatives Support Foundation (LISC). Both organizations have a stronger orientation toward larger cities, although LISC primarily addresses neighborhood business districts. Like the National Main Street Center, both LISC and IDA provide networking and educational opportunities that the Huntsville downtown organization will find valuable, but neither LISC nor IDA has a formulated approach that can provide a ready template for the Huntsville organization. The Huntsville downtown organization must become familiar with the Main Street and IDA programs, and staff, Board members and key volunteers should attend conferences held by both organizations.

The size of Huntsville's physical downtown area and the tradition of community involvement indicate that an organization modeled on the Main Street Approach may be appropriate for this community. An organization modeled on the Main Street Approach will be able to maintain several areas of focus more effectively than a traditional nonprofit organization because the standing committees will be able to maintain a level of attention to several areas of need simultaneously. A modified Main Street program will also require less initial investment than a traditional staff-driven downtown program, which may make it easier to establish and fund the organization. The Task Force examining the creation of a downtown organization must make a particular effort to learn from the experiences of Main Street and other downtown organizations and determine the organizational structure that will be most appropriate for Huntsville.

The downtown Huntsville organization must be an IRS-designated 501(c)3 non-profit if possible, or a 501(c)6 corporation if arguments that the organization is fulfilling a charitable purpose are unsuccessful. Although 501(c) 3 designation is preferable, since it will allow donors to take the charitable contribution tax deduction, downtown organizations are often designated as 501 (c)6, which provides some advantages but does not allow tax deductions for charitable donations.

Funding and Staffing

An effective downtown organization must have full time professional staff and must have a stable funding base to support that staff and other activities. A downtown in a community the size of Huntsville should have at least two full time staff: an Executive Director and an assistant professional, in addition to clerical support. Staff can come from a variety of professional and educational backgrounds, including marketing, historic preservation, communications, real estate development and small business. Compensation must be competitive with other employers, including those in the private sector.

The Task Force charged with establishing the organization must determine an annual budget based on expected payroll, office expenses and other expenses, and must develop a strategy for raising commitments for this funding.

Over time, these funding sources may be supplemented by one of several alternatives:

- net proceeds from the downtown organization's activities, including promotional events, concessions and other sources, depending on the types of promotional activities pursued;
- grants, including CDBG funding;
- a Business Improvement District, similar to the district Birmingham has established in its City Center area and the districts that exist in most other major U.S. cities' downtowns. Business Improvement Districts use a self-imposed levy that is agreed to by a majority of property owners to fund higher levels of services to the downtown area than the City can provide. Most BIDs fund at least part of the expenses of the downtown organization. A BID is not likely to pass at this time, but this recommendation should be reconsidered periodically.

Establishing a New Organization or Using an Existing Organization

Although there are a large number of existing nonprofit organizations operating in Huntsville, none of these organizations have as their mission the comprehensive revitalization of Downtown Huntsville. Additionally, none of the existing organizations has the capacity to take on the intensive demands of a comprehensive revitalization process. The possible exception to this rule is the Chamber of Commerce, which has expressed a strong dedication to Downtown Huntsville's revitalization and has a high level of organizational capacity. However, downtown organizations operated by Chambers of Commerce in larger cities usually struggle with the internal conflict between the demands of the downtown area and the needs of Chamber members, who are spread across a much larger region. Although the Chamber of Commerce must be a key participant in all downtown revitalization efforts, the Chamber should not take on the responsibility of running the downtown organization.

At the time of this writing, one organization, Big Spring Partners, may be able to fill the role identified above. However, key participants in the Big Spring Partners initiative have stated that they do not wish to include promotional activities in their scope of work. Although other organizations, including the City, host several promotional events in the Downtown Huntsville area, these activities are not designed to bring visitors to downtown businesses or to raise public awareness of the attractions and benefits of Downtown Huntsville. Additionally, the proceeds of these events are directed to other sources.

If Big Spring Partners is to become the downtown Huntsville organization, this organization must develop a strategy for incorporating promotional events into its activities. The organization may chose to work with the City and other nonprofit organizations to participate in staging events in and near Downtown Huntsville, but this organization must play a key role in the development of promotional activities to make sure that they directly benefit downtown Huntsville by increasing the base of patrons and raising Downtown's visibility. Recommendations for manageable promotional events are found later in this document.

Successful downtowns value their historic buildings and places and treat those as their prime assets.

Huntsville understands better than many communities that historic places are unique and economically valuable. The exceptionally high property values in the Twickenham and Old Town districts demonstrate that Huntsvillians place a high value on historic places. Downtown Huntsville is also regarded by most residents and visitors as a unique district with a one-of-a-kind character, and a place that has intrinsically desirable characteristics. Huntsville has also demonstrated a strong commitment to historic preservation, both in the community and in City policies. This strong preservation ethic is already leading to reinvestment in Downtown Huntsville, and the national trend of increasing interest in history and historic places is a good sign for the future of Downtown Huntsville.

In addition, Downtown Huntsville is already promoted as a center of history education in the Greater Huntsville region. The Early Works facilities, the Constitution Village complex, the Harrison Brothers Hardware store and the walking tours sponsored by the Historic Huntsville Foundation all draw visitors interested in historic settings and help reinforce the public perception of Downtown Huntsville as a historic and, as a result, unique place in Greater Huntsville. These facilities and other history-oriented resources within Downtown Huntsville are vital to the district's long-term desirability and must be supported.

The *Master Plan and Implementation Strategies* includes several recommendations that will help preserve Downtown Huntsville. These include:

- Rezoning the City Center Policy Area to avoid permitting uses that are incompatible with the district's character, such as light manufacturing (*Implementation Strategy 1.3*);
- Developing a Design Review Overlay Zone to protect the district's visual character (*Implementation Strategy 1.4*);
- Designating as much of the area as possible as a local Historic District, governed by an appropriate set of Design Guidelines (*Implementation Strategy 3.1*);
- Identify the most appropriate strategies for fostering the redevelopment of existing City Center buildings, which will prevent upper story vacancies and their negative impacts on building maintenance (*City Center Policy Need 2*);
- Avoiding the creation of additional surface parking (*City Center Policy Need 7f*).

In addition, the downtown organization should partner with other appropriate organizations to publicize the historic nature of Downtown Huntsville. Although such promotions may not appear to have an immediate effect on the amount of visitation or spending downtown, such initiatives are important because they will reacquaint residents with the fact that Downtown Huntsville's environment is unique and beautiful. Potential strategies include the following:

- Guided historic tours of downtown, similar to those offered by the Historic Huntsville Foundation in the Twickenham district. Tour guides may also be in costume.
- A series of articles in the *Huntsville Times* or a local magazine featuring a specific building and its history
- An architectural scavenger hunt, in which photos of small building details are published and people identifying the details correctly are entered in a drawing for a prize.

Successful downtowns have residents.

Cities of all sizes have learned over the past 15 years that downtown revitalization strategies that rely on retail alone do not work. Most retail-oriented developments or revitalization efforts of the 1970s and 1980s failed, largely because they were competing at a disadvantage for the business of area residents who lived closer to suburban shopping outlets than downtown retail developments. Downtowns that had residents, however, found that they could support a larger amount of retail development because their downtown residents would find these businesses more convenient than those in suburban settings. Downtown residents in several cities have also demonstrated that they are willing to pay the higher prices that downtown businesses must charge to cover their higher expenses. As Chattanooga, Nashville, Cleveland, Indianapolis and other cities have proven, downtown residents are necessary to create a lively social and economic environment.

As noted in the *Master Plan* and *Implementation Strategies*, Huntsville has almost no residents in the Downtown Core subarea. The Master Plan Update's *Findings* report also notes that the Chamber of Commerce has conducted a study that indicates that Huntsville faces significant challenges in attracting young professionals to its businesses. Young professionals dominate the downtown residential markets in most U.S. cities, and offering downtown-style accommodations is one of the factors that will help make Huntsville more attractive to these workers.

It is impossible to determine at this time the number of residents that Downtown Huntsville will need. Different types of businesses will require differing numbers of residents within their trade areas, and existing information does not make it possible to determine the amount of existing upper story space that is available for residential conversion or the amount of new residential construction that could be accommodated on downtown sites currently available for development. However, a target of 500 to 1,000 downtown residents by the end of the 10-year period of this plan is not unreasonable given current evidence of demand in Huntsville and in downtowns nationwide. This number also represents a population large enough to help support a variety of downtown businesses.

The *Master Plan* and the *Implementation Strategies* recommend several strategies for helping residential development happen:

- Rezone the City Center Policy Area to specifically permit residential development in upper story spaces (*Implementation Strategy 1.3*);
- Identify the most appropriate strategies for fostering the redevelopment of existing City Center buildings. (*City Center Policy Need 2*);
- Undertake a comprehensive parking improvement program to maximize the effectiveness of existing parking resources. (*City Center Policy Need 7*).

In addition, several other strategies will help increase interest in and awareness of downtown residential opportunities. Most of these strategies must be led by the downtown Huntsville organization, but should be done in partnership with the City and other organizations:

- **Recruit potential developers of residential units in upper stories of existing buildings.** Most available upper story space in downtown Huntsville is located in older buildings, and includes former offices and residential units. Because of the size of these buildings, most of these buildings will support less than five market-rate units, and many conventional developers of residential units may be uninterested in pursuing projects at this scale. As a result, potential residential developers of most existing downtown Huntsville buildings will differ from those who are involved with large new construction projects. Potential developers may include current building owners or tenants, entrepreneurs and persons interested in getting started in residential development.

Recruiting potential small redevelopers can be done through word of mouth or via media announcements. A formal Request for Proposals process will probably be unnecessary for development at this scale. The downtown Huntsville organization should serve as the facilitator, helping potential developers find potential projects and helping them access City and state support services.

Although there may be some upper story spaces that can be rehabilitated for residential development with relatively small amounts of investment, most properties will require substantial renovation before they become salable.

- **Develop a residential lease policy for City-owned parking spaces.** This is one of the few items in the *Downtown Liveliness Strategies* that is the City's sole responsibility to address. Most cities with downtown residents either require the developer to provide parking inside the property, or develop a residential lease program that allows downtown residents to use a public parking space, usually in a public garage, at a modest cost. Since most of the available buildings that can accommodate residential development are too small to include on-site parking, requiring residential developments to provide parking on site would further decrease the likelihood of significant residential development occurring in the downtown area, particularly within the existing buildings that need upper story activity.

The City does have an established lease program for downtown employees, and the *Master Plan* recommends some changes to that system. Downtown residents who need parking will have different parking needs than downtown employees, and the existing policy may not address their situation satisfactorily. The City will find it in the City's best interest to establish a lease policy specific to downtown residents that addresses their access needs and location requirements if it wishes to support downtown residential development. This lease program must be based on the parking utilization data that is recommended in City Center Policy Area Action 7a.

- **Hold a yearly Downtown Tour of Living.** Events of this type have proven successful in many cities to raise awareness of downtown residential opportunities, and provide good promotional opportunities for both existing residential developments and recruiting new residential developers. The Downtown Tour of Living can be a ticketed event, thus raising additional funds for the downtown organization. The Tour should feature the widest possible range of available downtown residential units, including both luxury and loft-style units. Planning for the Tour should also include extensive media coverage and press tours. The inaugural event should be conducted as soon as possible, even if the number of units that can be shown in the first year is small.

Successful downtowns have a mix of retail, office, and entertainment businesses.

As noted in the *Findings* and the *Master Plan*, Downtown Huntsville's economic structure is dominated by office uses and a relatively small but growing number of restaurants and other entertainment-related businesses. Retail establishments are rare in Downtown Huntsville, and one of the most prominent retail businesses is operated by the Historic Huntsville Foundation, a non-profit corporation. The Vision and Goals for the Downtown Master Plan Update, however, assert that Downtown Huntsville will “benefit from a wide range of economic activity, including retail, entertainment, conventions, and civic center and arena events. Of these categories, retail uses appear to face the most obstacles at this time.

For Downtown Huntsville to become the vibrant environment envisioned in the Vision and Goals, Downtown Huntsville's strong and valuable office sector must be complimented by a substantial and diverse mix of service, entertainment and retail businesses. The following recommendations are primarily designed to increase Downtown Huntsville's economic diversity by building its retail sector. It is understood that the other sectors identified, including the office sector, are currently robust and growing or will be significantly strengthened over the next 10 years by the construction of a new hotel near the Convention Center and increased programming resulting from this amenity. Additional strategies may become necessary if any of these sectors fail to perform as expected.

Several of the recommendations of the *Master Plan* and the *Implementation Strategies* are designed to support the development of a diverse range of downtown businesses:

- Rezone the City Center Policy Area to create a central business zoning district or central business overlay district that focuses on the mixed use needs of the City Center. (*Implementation Strategy 1.3*);
- Identify the most appropriate strategies for fostering the redevelopment of existing City Center buildings. (*City Center Policy Action 2*);
- Develop a full package of incentives to encourage and support appropriate retail and service business activity (*City Center Policy Action 4*);
- Actively and consciously recruit appropriate retail and service businesses (*City Center Policy Action 5*);
- Support appropriate outdoor economic activity (*City Center Policy Action 6*);
- Undertake a comprehensive parking improvement program to maximize the effectiveness of existing parking resources. (*City Center Policy Action 7*).

All of these strategies will have a profound impact on Downtown Huntsville's ability to attract a lively and diverse range of businesses. However, these strategies cannot directly address one key

factor: the difference in market demand, and as a result in real estate costs, between small office and small retail businesses.

Small-scale retail often thrives in downtown settings because independent specialty shop owners find relatively inexpensive storefront space there. This is particularly the case in business districts that have experienced decline: if the retail stores that departed in the mid-20th century were not followed by well-paying tenants, then the later specialty businesses found attractive small spaces at bargain prices in downtown areas. In downtowns where many such businesses found affordable space, businesses often find that the increase in their sales over time generally stays in proportion to increases in the cost of their space as the district becomes more popular. As a result, downtown retail districts that have this history can often maintain a base of successful specialty retail businesses over the course of many years.

This has not been the case in Downtown Huntsville. Downtown Huntsville's historic retail businesses have been largely replaced by professional offices, businesses that can generally afford higher space costs and are willing to pay a premium for proximity to government offices, attractive settings, and other downtown features. As a result, most of downtown Huntsville's available commercial space, especially storefront space, has been occupied by professional offices.

A strong office base in a downtown setting has several benefits (for example, creating a convenient base of potential customers). However, districts that become dominated by office uses, particularly in storefront spaces, often find that the higher prices that can be demanded from the office sector raises the average price of storefront space to the point that retailers, especially independent specialty retailers, cannot compete for space. In these circumstances, office uses continue to occupy an increasing percentage of the available storefronts over time, and the number of retailers declines. Huntsville faces this challenge: downtown Huntsville's exceptionally strong office sector leaves little room for the growth of other types of businesses.

Although office uses will continue to generate significant economic benefits for the City, support the maintenance of historic buildings and have other positive effects, an overabundance of storefront offices makes the downtown less lively. Without interesting businesses to visit and attractive storefront displays, people have less reason to spend time in the downtown district and are less likely to consider downtown a place where they want to spend their leisure time. Restaurants and entertainment facilities can play an important role in attracting and keeping visitors, but most successful downtown entertainment districts have a compliment of retailers to encourage visitors beyond a meal.

In order for Downtown Huntsville to develop strong retail base, it will be necessary to create some space in the downtown area in which retail can get a foothold. The following strategies may provide an opportunity to do this.

- **Create an incentive for first floor office tenants to dedicate a portion of their storefront area to retail.** This strategy may not be possible for offices that are at capacity, but it may be feasible for businesses that have more space than they require or where some office functions can be moved to upper stories. Creating a

small amount of retail space at the front of the office can also make the office areas more private from the street. Retail space can be directly incorporated into the office space, or can be physically separated from office activities by a temporary divider.

Some downtown offices may create a storefront space for their own reasons because of the need for privacy or an additional income stream, provided that the zoning and building codes in effect at the time allow for this mix of uses. The downtown organization may be able to foster the development of these small stores simply by publicizing the benefits to office owners. However, it may also be necessary to provide incentives to make this unusual arrangement more attractive. If an incentive program appears to be necessary, this program must be carefully designed by a joint committee of the downtown organization and the City. Incentives can take one of several approaches:

- o *Public sector financial incentives (seed grants).* Many cities in the United States provide small grants to support building improvements and small business development in priority areas. These grants are usually competitive and require matching funds. In many successful grant programs, the amount of money available is only a fraction of the project's cost, and no larger than the gap between costs and funding available through conventional financing. To encourage small retail development, it may be prudent to limit eligible costs to signage, equipment, basic building cosmetics such as paint, etc.
- o *Private sector financial incentives.* This approach will provide the most flexibility and may be the easiest to finance. Private sector incentives can include all of the eligible costs above, and may be able to include more. For example, some downtown organizations hold business plan competitions: submissions are evaluated by small business development professionals, and the plan that appears most likely to result in a successful business receives a start-up grant. Not only does this strategy help get one small business started, but it fosters the creation of other good business plans that may be implemented without the grant.

Funding for a private sector grant program can come from the program's general funding, from special donations or grants, or from City funds that are provided to the nonprofit to further its mission. An effective program does not need to be large; grants of \$500 to \$5000 may have a profound effect on helping establish new retail businesses.

- **Establish a retail business incubator.** Although this strategy is not common and will require some investment, it may be possible to grow strong retail businesses that will serve as a retail destination within the Downtown area and may be able to occupy storefronts at a later date. This strategy may be particularly successful

if the incubator focuses on a specific niche, such as artists and artisans (there are also more national examples of arts incubators than general retail incubators).

A successful retail business incubator will also require inexpensive space, and for the purposes of this Plan that space must be located in the Downtown area. Given the relatively high demand for storefront space at this time, there are no buildings that are obvious candidates for the business incubator facility. When an incompatible use vacates a downtown building, it may be possible to acquire that property for the retail incubator purpose. New construction of incubator space will be possible, but will require extraordinarily extensive public and private subsidy if constructed in Downtown Huntsville. For reasons of financing, preservation and aesthetics, an existing building will be preferable.

- **Expand outdoor retailing in Downtown Huntsville.** As noted in the *Master Plan*, sidewalk vendors can provide an opportunity for retailers to build a business in a downtown area when storefronts are not available. Sidewalk vendors also add to the perception of a downtown as a lively and active place. Sidewalk vendors of appropriate foods and materials must be permissible in the Central Business District zone, although it will be appropriate to regulate their number and location for health, safety and general welfare purposes.

In addition, outdoor retail events will provide an outstanding opportunity to draw people to Huntsville's natural attractions, especially Big Spring Park. A farmer's market or craft market held in Big Spring Park will draw pedestrians into this space, increasing awareness of the park's convenience and increasing the likelihood that they will use the space as the linkage and natural amenity it was designed to provide. A successful market will be held on a regular basis (weekly or monthly), will be regulated so that the quality and number of vendors does not overwhelm the space or project an undesired image, and will be promoted through signs, flyers and media coverage. The market must not involve any permanent construction of buildings or platforms; Big Spring Park should look the same after the market as it does at this time. All structures involved must be temporary and be stored at a separate location.

Although the City must play a key role in the development and administration of this program because of its ownership of Big Spring Park, the market must be administered by an existing or new nonprofit corporation. The downtown organization may wish to spearhead the planning for this effort, but should either have partners in its administration or give responsibility for the market to another entity. Otherwise, the demands of operating a market are likely to overwhelm the organization and distract it from its mission of serving all of downtown.

- **Actively recruit new businesses.** It is possible that new retail and service businesses may move into downtown strictly as a result of these and other programs. It is also possible, however, that these strategies may not have the desired effect if they are unknown to potential downtown business operators. If

new retail activity does not occur at a satisfactory pace, the downtown organization may find it necessary to actively recruit new businesses. Recruitment is a common role for downtown organizations, and a downtown Huntsville organization such as the one outlined previously will be particularly well suited to this role.

Recruitment strategies can range from sophisticated mass communications, such as brochures or Web sites, to simple personal visits to prospective business owners. As part of its yearly strategic planning, the downtown organization must evaluate the amount of recruitment required and the most appropriate available methods for supporting recruitment. Effective recruitment will be based on a market analysis and an inventory of available space, which the organization will find it necessary to develop before beginning recruitment. Recruitment must also be carefully targeted on the basis of market information and the program's goals for the district.

Successful downtowns promote themselves.

Downtowns must promote themselves for one simple reason: they are in competition with other destinations. Although downtowns were historically the most prominent retail and entertainment district in any city, downtowns today are only one of a stunning array of shopping, dining, entertainment and recreational opportunities that are available to the residents of a region. Downtowns are in direct competition with a wide range of other places, including shopping malls, lifestyle centers, big box stores, entertainment complexes and other downtowns that are now a short drive away.

Like shopping malls, Downtown Huntsville will have some businesses that are capable of doing their own sophisticated promotions, but other establishments will draw the majority of their customers from people who come to the district for the wide range of opportunities it provides. As a result, Downtown Huntsville must promote itself as a destination, and as a place that is unique and desirable in the context of the competition.

Successful downtown promotion is a sophisticated endeavor that employs a wide range of tools. Downtowns across the United States promote themselves by doing one or more of the following activities:

- **Staging special events.** Events can range from large festivals like Panoply to small, targeted activities, such as lunchtime concerts. Events should be designed to meet a specific goal (bringing new visitors to downtown, getting office workers to spend time in Big Spring Park, etc), and must be promoted in a manner that fits the event. Events require extensive organizational effort, including planning, finding sponsors, recruiting volunteers and managing logistics such as materials storage. The Huntsville downtown organization's first events must be small or developed in partnership with another organization, or the process is likely to overwhelm its limited capacity. The downtown organization must seek opportunities to partner on special events whenever possible.
- **Producing informational materials.** These can range from historic walking tours, which help develop an appreciation for downtown's unique environment, to maps of parking locations and visitor's guides. Informational materials should also be designed to meet a specific purpose, but they should be made available as widely as possible. Informational materials should be available in print form, on the Internet, and through other appropriate methods. Informational materials are vital to the promotion of downtown because they help visitors understand and use its assets. Informational materials are also usually easier and less costly to prepare because they are less reliant on graphics and media. Informational materials can often be prepared by general staff or volunteers. However, all informational materials must be as visually attractive as possible.
- **Positioning.** In marketing terminology, positioning activities are designed to convince the viewer that the item being marketed is unique and has distinctive advantages over the competition. Positioning materials, whether print, television,

radio, or internet, generally use strong graphics and succinct statements of facts or opinions to convey the general impression quickly, in the expectation that the viewer will become interested and seek out more information on the item.

Some positioning will occur naturally, as Downtown Huntsville develops a positive public reputation based on general knowledge of its assets. It may be necessary, however, for the downtown organization to undertake some positioning activities to reinforce Downtown Huntsville's competitive strengths. If positioning is needed, marketing professionals should be recruited.

Successful downtowns pay attention to details.

Traditional approaches to downtown revitalization tend to focus on big projects: new buildings, parks, sports facilities, and other landmark projects. However, visitors, customers and employees experience downtown on a very different scale, and this is a scale that many traditional downtown initiatives miss. Making these visitors' experience as successful as possible is one of the most important tasks of any downtown revitalization program.

Visitors to downtowns, whether sight-seers or new customers, notice the details of the urban environment, particularly the details that they come in contact with while walking. Broken sidewalks and crumbling planters have a powerful impact on their perceptions of downtown, as do faded or outdated signs. These items are addressed in *Implementation Strategy 9.3*, which recommends the rebuilding of the portions of Downtown Huntsville's streetscapes that have not yet been reconstructed according to the 1993 designs.

However, visitors also notice the level of day-to-day maintenance: debris on streets and sidewalks, peeling paint on storefronts, even the unused storefront windows that have been accumulating dust on their sills. Visitors do not distinguish between areas that the City maintains and that private building owners maintain: if the downtown environment appears to be uncared-for, they will assume that downtown is an unpleasant place that is not worth their attention. Although such details may go unnoticed by downtown regulars, visitors will notice them quickly. Improving the quality of the downtown environment is a responsibility that falls to all concerned.

Although the City is fundamentally responsible for the maintenance of downtown public spaces, the downtown organization and downtown businesses may choose to supplement the City's efforts in order to ensure that downtown meets high standards. Many downtown organizations, especially in cities of over 50,000 population, establish a Business Improvement District (BID) to ensure this high standard. Such a program is currently operating in downtown Birmingham, Alabama and under consideration in other Alabama cities, and BIDs are in place in most cities of Huntsville's size in the eastern U.S. As discussed previously, a BID is created when a majority of property owners in a downtown district agree to pay an annual fee for the provision of additional downtown services through a nonprofit downtown organization. In addition to funding the operation of the organization, BIDs are frequently used to pay for more frequent street cleaning, trash pickup, plant maintenance, downtown ambassadors and similar activities. BID funds are also often used to pay for streetscape enhancements, such as banners.

Poorly maintained private property also has a negative impact on visitors' perception of downtown. Downtown Huntsville has relatively few vacant or poorly maintained storefronts; the downtown organization may wish to limit its efforts to improve downtown property maintenance to informal advising when necessary. If maintenance of storefronts or private parking lots becomes a concern, the downtown organization may work with the City and/or the property owners to identify strategies for making these improvements.

Successful downtowns have people who want to walk.

The *Master Plan* and the *Implementation Strategies* place a great deal of emphasis on creating an environment where people will want to walk. Encouraging pedestrian activity in the downtown area will have a wide range of benefits:

- it will increase foot traffic past storefronts, making them more desirable for retail and entertainment businesses;
- it will increase use of Big Spring Park, a valuable asset that receives limited community use at this time;
- it will decrease the number of auto trips in the downtown area, lessening traffic congestion and reducing the demand for parking;
- it will help define downtown Huntsville as a unique and attractive place within Huntsville's largely auto-oriented environment;

Huntsville's downtown needs to be oriented to pedestrians, rather than to automobiles, both for economic and for community reasons. Downtown streets and buildings were largely designed according to models that predate auto traffic. While automobiles are necessary and must be accommodated downtown, downtown character and features must be designed for pedestrians. Visitors must find that the preferred mode of operation in downtown Huntsville is to park the car and walk, rather than driving short distances to a variety of destinations.

Many of the strategies in the *Master Plan* and the *Implementation Strategies* are designed to encourage people to walk downtown, including the following:

- Improve Linkages between Policy Areas (*Implementation Strategies 3.1*).
- Construct the remainder of the Streetscape as developed in the 1993 Downtown Streetscape Vision with recommended alterations (*Implementation Strategies 9.2*)
- Support appropriate outdoor economic activity (Policy Area Action 6)
- Undertake a comprehensive parking improvement program to maximize the effectiveness of existing parking resources. (Policy Area Action 7).

In addition, the recommendations of this document designed to encourage residential development, retail and service businesses, streetscape maintenance and outdoor economic activity will also foster walking within Downtown Huntsville.

The downtown organization may find it beneficial to pursue a few more initiatives and expand initiatives to foster the public perception of downtown Huntsville as a pedestrian-friendly environment.

- Conduct walking tours of Downtown Huntsville. As noted in a previous section, walking tours can be effective promotional tools because they reinforce the perception that Downtown Huntsville is a unique and special environment. Walking tours also reinforce the notion that downtown Huntsville is an easy and enjoyable place to walk.
- Hold walking events downtown, such as a 5K race.
- On maps of downtown Huntsville that are published for promotional or parking purposes, highlight available pedestrian pathways, such as the route through Big Spring Park.

Successful downtowns are in communities where people care about downtown.

Although downtown Huntsville is one of many parts of the City, there are compelling reasons to make the downtown area a top priority for City government, local organizations, businesses and residents:

- **Downtown Huntsville is the public face of the community.** Downtown is one of the locations most commonly identified with the City, whether in Chamber of Commerce publications or in the photos that visitors take of the City.
- **Downtown Huntsville is a major center of community activity,** with destinations that draw people from across the region.
- **Downtown Huntsville is the heart of Huntsville's identity.** Downtown is one of very few parts of Huntsville that preserve what Huntsville was like before the space program. This heritage is clearly valued by City residents now, and will become even more valuable to Huntsville residents as the City grows.
- **Downtown Huntsville is the site of a notable amount of the City's public investment over the last 30 years.** The City of Huntsville has a substantial interest in supporting the revitalization of downtown Huntsville in order to ensure that its investments are well used.
- Despite these investments, **downtown Huntsville is still a location of the City that has significant needs.** Most of these needs stem from the effects of aging and attempts to mold the downtown area to contemporary economic, transportation and aesthetic standards at various points in the City's recent past.

If downtown Huntsville is to become the lively, vibrant, beautiful heart of the City that was identified by the residents who developed this Plan Update's Vision and Goals, then both the City and the community must become active participants in making that happen. The documents prepared as part of this Plan Update identify a range of strategies that are designed to help these areas reach the potential that the Vision and Goals identify, but these strategies will be only as good as their implementation.

Many important responsibilities fall to the City, but the City alone cannot make many of the necessary changes by itself. At the same time, however, the City and the entire range of private sector partners must commit to truly collaborative processes, where both private organization and public entity work together to refine the solutions and find ways to implement them. Public-private partnerships have been essential to nearly all of the successful downtown revitalizations of the past two decades, and these partnerships developed only when government and the private sector consciously accepted their shared responsibility for the future of their downtown.

True public-private partnerships will require the City to play a variety of roles. Depending on the project, the City's job may be to facilitate the process, help access funding, ensure that the

project meets legal requirements or simply serve as a technical advisor. In some cases, the City may need to develop the ability to turn responsibility over to a nonprofit corporation, even when City funds are involved. This is a component of virtually all successful public-private partnerships across the United States.

At the same time, true public-private partnerships will require Huntsville businesses, nonprofit corporations and residents to become more actively involved in downtown initiatives, rather than assuming that the City will take care of all its needs. These entities must be leaders or key participants in virtually every downtown project, and must be willing to commit their time and their resources. If downtown Huntsville is to become the lively, vibrant, beautiful heart of the City that was identified by the residents who developed this Plan Update's Vision and Goals, both the City and the private community will have to commit to downtown's long-term revitalization.

Downtown revitalization is, at its core, a commitment to the future of the community. When we work for downtown revitalization, we are affirming that the historic center of our city's economy and government is also the heart of our city: it is the place, more than any other, that is shared by everyone and makes us become a community. Downtown revitalization is about more than making a part of the city generate income and look good: downtown revitalization is about understanding who we are as a community and where we are going as a community. Downtown revitalization is a long and often difficult process, and results do not always appear overnight. But if Huntsville commits to downtown revitalization, Downtown Huntsville will be worth the effort.

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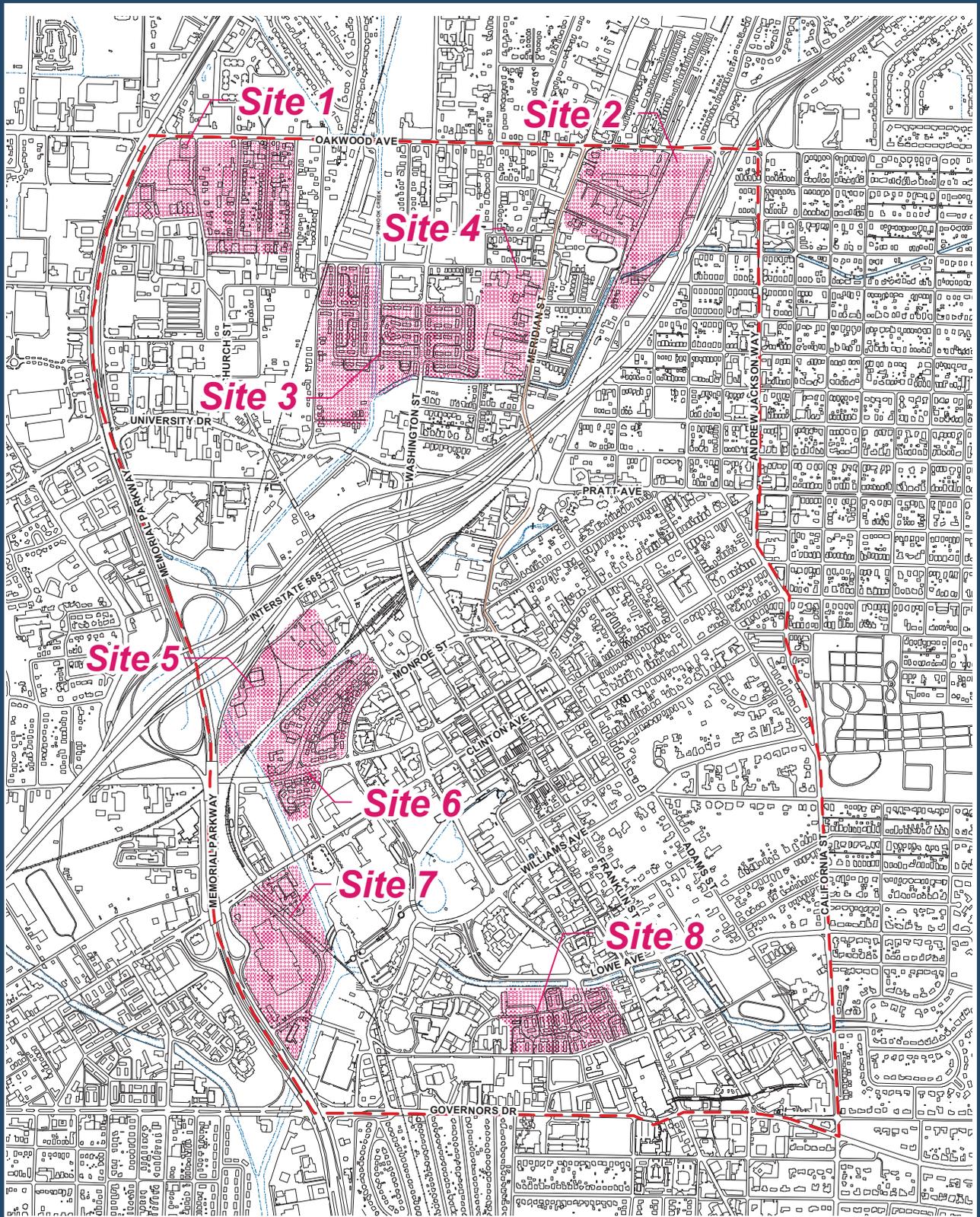
Appendix - Opportunity Sites

Introduction

As one of the elements of the Downtown Master Plan Update, this section presents eight Opportunity Sites within the Downtown Study Area. Opportunity Sites are specific locations within the Policy Areas, as identified in the Master Plan. These are locations where redevelopment is feasible and desired, but where site-specific issues present extraordinary challenges to redevelopment. Opportunity Sites are larger than a typical city parcel, include more than one potential building site, and identify an area that must be treated as a cohesive development site to address the site constraints.

Some Opportunity Sites are currently under the ownership of a single entity, but most Opportunity Sites currently consist of a number of smaller parcels with multiple owners. Several Opportunity Sites are significantly impacted by Flood Hazard District restrictions, including Floodway and 100 Year Flood Fringe areas. Other opportunity sites are constrained by active rail lines and other physical barriers, or are occupied by land uses that are defunct or appear unlikely to maintain economic relevance over the next ten years. In all cases, Opportunity Sites represent specific strategies for remaking the urban environment. Development of these Opportunity Sites will improve the Study Area's physical, economic and social environment and support the implementation of the Vision and Goals identified in the Master Plan.

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Legend

- Study Area
- Opportunity Sites



Downtown Master Plan Update

Huntsville, Alabama

Figure 12
Opportunity Sites

October 17, 2005



Edwards
AND Kelcey

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