



downtown strategies

HUNTSVILLE, TEXAS

Downtown 5-Year Action Plan

SEPTEMBER 2024



Who We Are

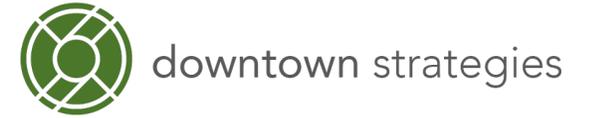
Downtown Strategies, a division of Retail Strategies, exists to provide realistic, implementable strategies to communities for revitalizing their downtowns. Led by a team of downtown revitalization practitioners and real estate experts, our combination of real-world experience, plus expertise in real estate and retail uniquely qualify us to assist communities with backfilling vacancies increasing tourism and enhancing the sense of place in their downtowns. Serving rural communities in 24 states, Downtown Strategies is the leading national firm for downtown revitalization planning with an emphasis on real estate and retail.

5-Year Plan

At Downtown Strategies, we believe that action and implementation are more important than a flash 20-year vision. Our process is based on our team's experience as practitioners. Our team members have been in your shoes as community leaders and know what it is like to manage downtown revitalization efforts.

Most communities do not suffer from a lack of ideas, they struggle with knowing where to start when it comes to implementing their ideas. Rather than brainstorming everything that you could ever potentially do in your downtown, we focus on a five-year timeframe. This plan is designed to help you identify where your community should focus its energy and effort in the near-term. Implementing these short-term, doable strategies will incrementally shift the trajectory of your downtown and create the spark that you desire.

Our Team



Jenn Gregory

President, Downtown Strategies

jgregory@retailstrategies.com

Key Focus Areas: Team Management;
Policy & Administration



Jeremy Murdock

Community Development Specialist,
Downtown Strategies

jmurdock@retailstrategies.com

Key Focus Areas: Design; Tourism &
Promotion



Laura Marinos

Director of Client Services, Downtown
Strategies

laura.marinos@retailstrategies.com

Key Focus Areas: Client Management;
Scheduling



Taylor Turner

Client Services Coordinator, Downtown
Strategies

tturner@retailstrategies.com

Key Focus Areas: Organization;
Resources; Communication

Types of Plans



downtown strategies

Traditional Strategic Plan

Master Plan

TIMELINE

6-8 Weeks

18-24 months

18-24+ Months

SCOPE

5-Years

20+ Years

20+ Years

COST

\$

\$\$

\$\$\$

FOCUS

Action, Incremental Change

Vision, Goals, Ideas

Drawings, Visions, Plans

RECS

Tactical, Practical

Big Picture, Visionary

Big Idea, Extensive

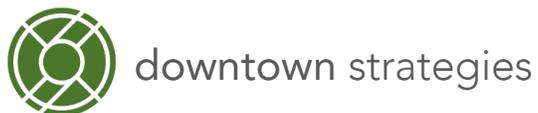
Our Partnership

Downtown Strategies appreciates partnering with the City of Huntsville, TX, on an action-focused 5-Year strategic planning process for Downtown Huntsville.

In Huntsville, Downtown Strategies conducted an in-market Strategic Visioning Workshop and provides strategies within this 5-year action plan that are implementable, practical, asset-based, and market-driven.

This action-oriented plan was informed by an extensive Market Analysis, electronic community survey, and input from a Stakeholder Input Session held on June 12, 2024. Below is an overview of the partnership schedule:

Partnership Began	February 2023
Kick-Off Call	April 2024
Strategic Visioning Workshop	June 2024
Market Analysis Presentation	August 2024
Strategic Plan Presentation	September 2024



Community Input Survey

310 community members completed the Community Input Survey. Below is a summary of the survey's findings:

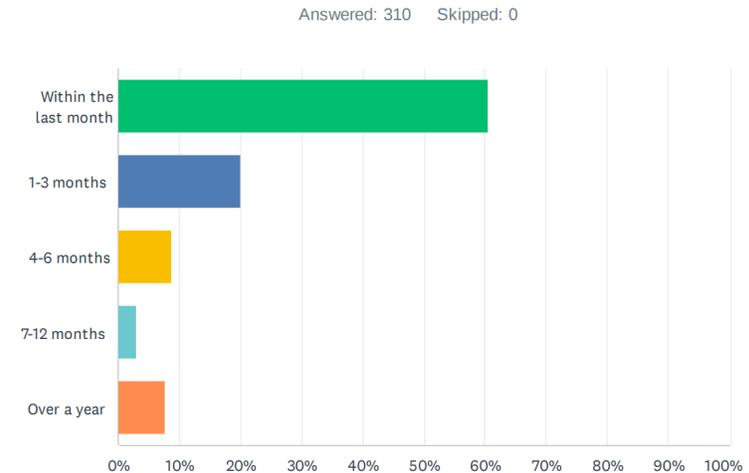
The survey conducted among the residents of Huntsville, TX, provides valuable insights into their perceptions and desires for downtown improvements. A significant portion of respondents (60.65%) indicated that they had visited a downtown business within the past month, suggesting a reasonable level of interaction with downtown. However, nearly 30% of respondents had not visited in more than three months, with reasons ranging from a lack of variety in businesses to parking and accessibility issues.

A recurring theme was the overabundance of antique stores, which, while appreciated by some, contributed to a lack of diversity in the types of businesses available. Multiple respondents expressed frustration with the absence of family-friendly entertainment, restaurants, and retail options that could draw different age groups and demographics downtown. Respondents also mentioned that downtown feels stagnant, with little innovation or excitement to entice regular visits.

Parking emerged as one of the most prominent issues, cited by numerous respondents as a key factor impacting their willingness to visit downtown. Many respondents found parking inadequate and noted the difficulty in navigating congested streets. Additionally, limited or inconvenient business hours further deterred visits, especially for those who work during typical operating hours.

Despite the concerns, many respondents acknowledged downtown's charm and potential. Positive descriptions such as "quaint," "historic," and "friendly" reflect a strong sense of local pride in the area's heritage. There is clearly a deep appreciation for the historical and small-town character of downtown, but this sentiment is tempered by the desire for more dynamic and relevant business offerings.

Q1 When was the last time you visited a downtown business (service, restaurant, or retail shop)?



Key Conclusions & Recommendations:

- 1.) Diversify Business Offerings
- 2.) Address Parking & Accessibility
- 3.) Enhance Vibrancy of Downtown
- 4.) Leverage Historic Charm while Modernizing

Focus Areas

In this 5-Year Action Plan created for Downtown Huntsville, we've identified four (4) Focus Areas that help organize similar thoughts and themes. Each focus area was identified based on feedback received during the In-Market Workshop, as well as the consultant team's expertise and analysis. The four (4) Focus Areas for this 5-Year Action Plan are:



Policy & Administration

Policy & Administration involves creating a strong foundation for a sustainable revitalization effort, including cultivating partnerships, community involvement, and resources for downtown.



Design

Thoughtful design supports a community's transformation by enhancing the physical and visual assets that set downtown apart.



Tourism & Promotion

Smart promotion initiatives position downtown as the center of the community and hub of economic activity, while creating a positive image that showcases the community's unique characteristics.

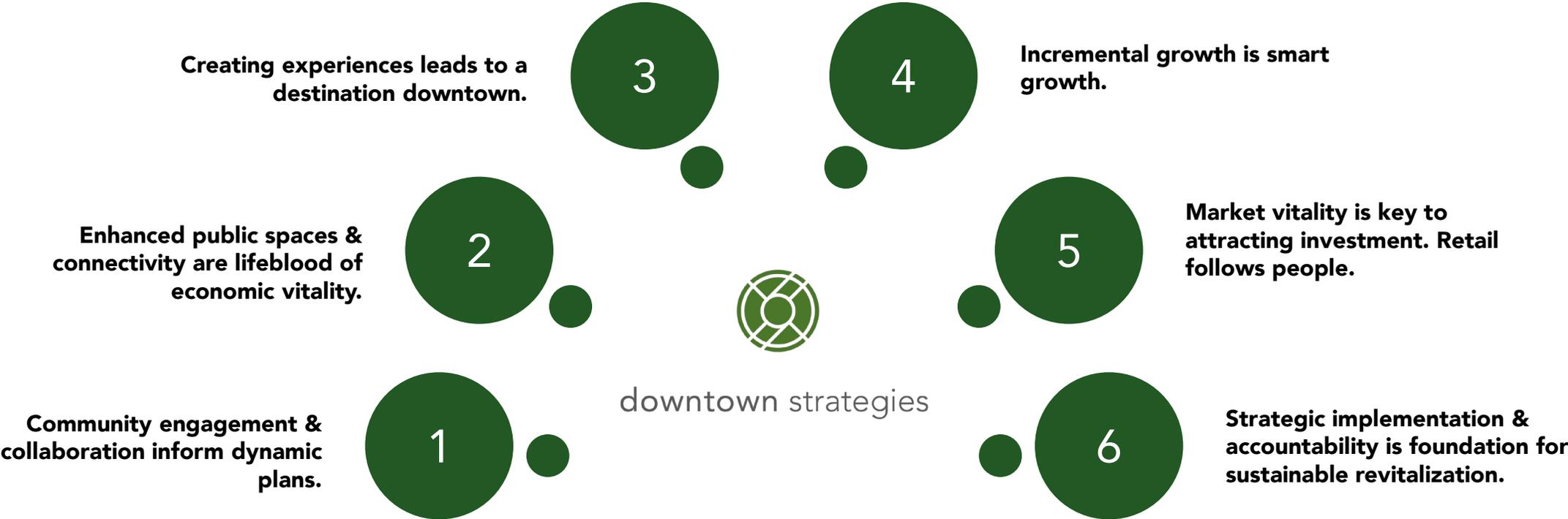


Economic Vitality

Economic Vitality involves analyzing the retail and real estate as the foundation of downtown's redevelopment opportunities and creating a supportive environment for entrepreneurs and innovators.

Guiding Principles

At Downtown Strategies, we believe that short-term action plans, focused on these guiding principals, lead to sustainable, palpable growth and development in rural downtowns. These principles were key to the development of Downtown Huntsville’s 5-Year Strategic Action Plan.



Guiding Principles

Short-term Wins Outweigh Years of Hoping for Catalytic Development

Incremental Development

Revitalizing downtown areas in rural communities is imperative, and executing this transformation incrementally is a pragmatic approach that aligns with the unique challenges and opportunities these areas present. Rural downtowns often serve as the heart of the community, embodying its history, culture, and economic potential. However, revitalization efforts must be carefully tailored to the specific needs and resources of these communities. **Incremental revitalization allows for a phased approach, prioritizing achievable short-term goals while laying the groundwork for long-term success.** By breaking the process into manageable steps, rural communities can make steady progress without overwhelming financial or organizational strain.

Incremental revitalization fosters community engagement and ownership, crucial factors for sustainable development. In rural areas, where residents often have deep-rooted connections to their surroundings, involving locals in the revitalization process builds a sense of pride and investment in the outcome. Through participatory planning and feedback mechanisms, residents can contribute their insights, ensuring that revitalization efforts are responsive to community needs and aspirations.

Additionally, **incremental changes can generate visible improvements over time, bolstering community confidence and attracting further investment and support.** By embracing a gradual approach to downtown revitalization, rural communities can pave the way for enduring prosperity while preserving their unique character and heritage.



Guiding Principles

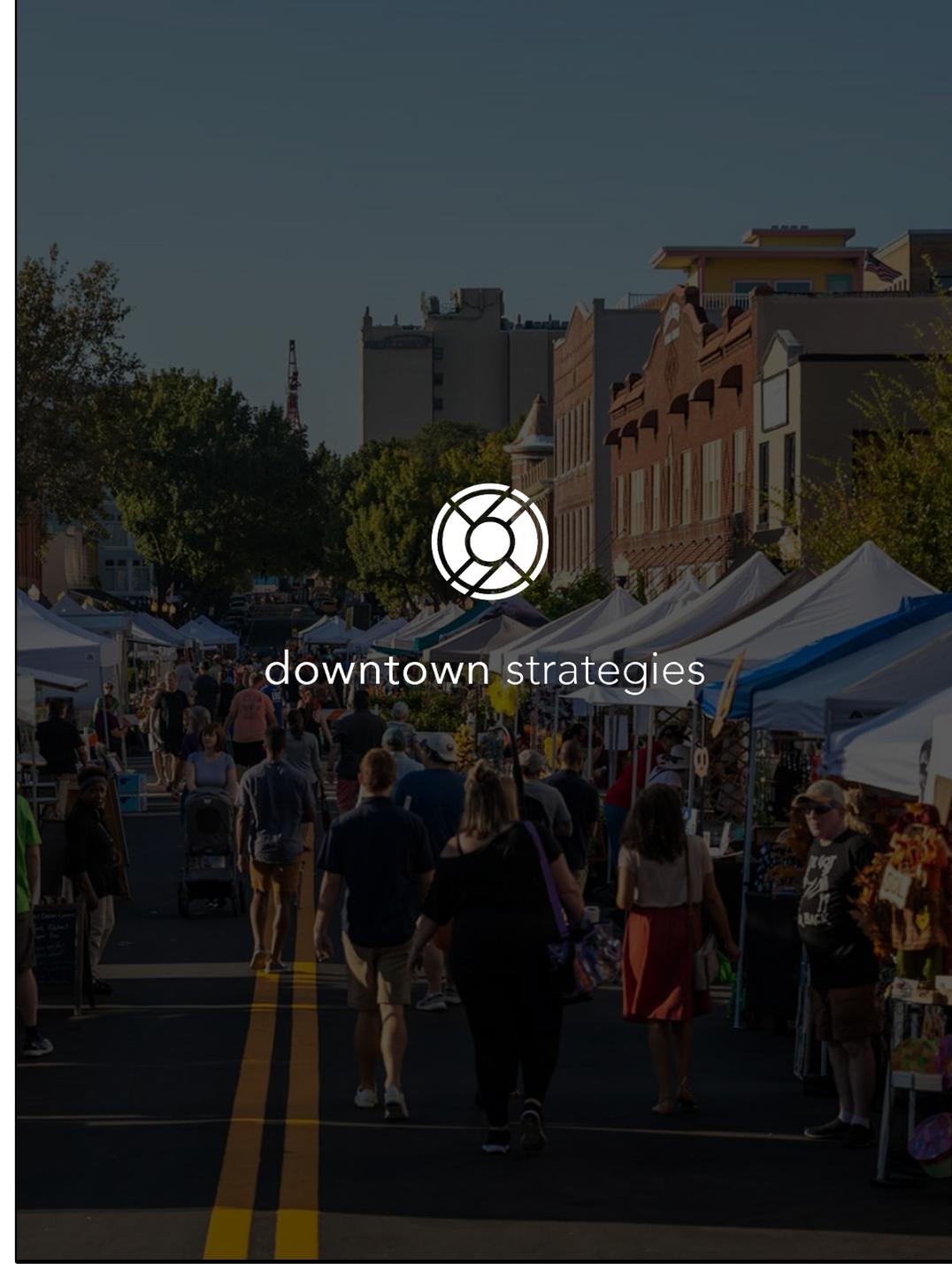
Prioritizing Market Readiness Key to Attracting Local Investment

Retail Follows People

The concept of "**retail follows people**" underscores the idea that vibrant downtown areas are created when there is a significant influx of foot traffic and activity. It begins with activating downtown common spaces, such as parks, plazas, or cultural hubs, to serve as focal points for community gatherings and events. By creating inviting and engaging spaces, people are drawn to spend time downtown, whether it's for leisure, socializing, or attending events. **This increase in foot traffic not only enhances the overall vibrancy of the area but also creates a fertile environment for businesses to thrive.**

When downtown common spaces become hubs of activity, it instills confidence in entrepreneurs and investors to establish or expand their retail and restaurant ventures in the vicinity. These businesses recognize the potential customer base created by the increased foot traffic and the vibrant atmosphere generated by community engagement. **As a result, they are more inclined to invest their money in opening or renovating establishments downtown.** This phenomenon is driven by the understanding that where there are people, there is demand for goods and services, presenting a lucrative opportunity for businesses to capitalize on.

Therefore, by strategically focusing on activating downtown common spaces to generate activity and foot traffic, communities lay the groundwork for attracting new businesses and revitalizing the local economy. **This approach not only enhances the livability and attractiveness of downtown areas but also fosters economic growth and sustainability by creating a thriving commercial ecosystem.**





downtown strategies

FOCUS AREA 1

Policy & Administration

Policy & Administration involves creating a strong foundation for a sustainable revitalization effort, including cultivating partnerships, community involvement, and resources for the district.

Action Teams

Focus Area 1: Policy & Administration

Strategy (1.1)

How many times has your community been through strategic planning? Are they jaded that not enough was accomplished afterwards? Implementation is a key focus of our process at Downtown Strategies. In our combined decades of practical experience, creating Action Teams is the most proven method to successful implementation. As the accompanying Project Mapping Workbook details, the City should assemble an Action Team for each Focus Area in this Action Plan. These teams may be represented by existing committees or boards, or they may be newly created groups of volunteers and staff. At the core, following the process of working through the workbook within each team will set your community up for maximum success.

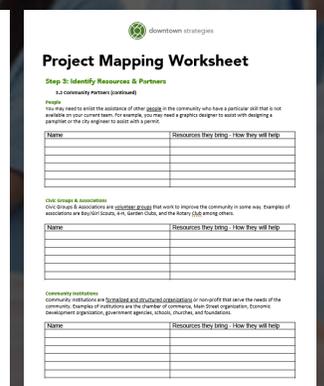
In Huntsville

In Huntsville, Action Teams should be formed with the mission to rejuvenate the downtown, thereby creating a vibrant atmosphere for business and social activities. Action Teams should work in conjunction with the City, Main Street and other entities and asset owners in the community to identify areas of need and steps to take to move forward. Action Team structure should eventually follow the focus areas of this plan; thus, the following teams should be established over time:

- Policy & Administration
- Design
- Tourism & Promotion
- Economic Vitality

The teams should rely on recommendations and strategies within this plan as their work plans, meet regularly, encourage collaboration and diversity, and keep themselves accountable for realistic timing of implementation of their various work plans. Communication with stakeholders is key, and notes and minutes should be kept for accountability and transparency.

The consultant team has developed a Project Mapping Workbook, which will be provided as an attachment and demonstrates how Action Team members can use this plan to spark action and guide revitalization efforts in the focus area of Downtown Huntsville. **Huntsville should begin by facilitating the creation of one Action Team.**



Organizational Structure

Focus Area 1: Policy & Administration

Strategy (1.2)

In Huntsville

In Huntsville, there is confusion amongst the public as to which organizations manage programming, promotion, advocacy, and beautification of downtown. Additionally, there are duplication of efforts between Huntsville Main Street and the Huntsville Downtown Business Association (DBA.) Ideally, these organizations would merge into one highly functional organization that is funded and supported by the City and the private sector. In the meantime, clear roles and responsibilities should emerge, and Huntsville Main Street should lean-in on areas not of focus for DBA currently, specifically the Organization, Design, and Economic Vitality points of Main Street's 4-Point Approach. That's not to say that Huntsville Main Street shouldn't also focus on adding high-quality events to the program of work but focus on low-hanging fruit first to generate quick wins.

- **Build trust with business owners by holding monthly merchant meetings that are organized with an agenda, updates, and a section of the meeting dedicated towards dialogue and open conversation.** Board members should try to attend and invite their peers and contacts to the meeting showing support. Invite DBA to these meetings but make it clear that these are Main Street meetings and provide only a small section of the agenda for DBA updates. Invite merchants by visiting with each one door-to-door leaving no stone unturned.
- **Reiterate during these meetings the clear partnership between Main Street and the City (invite a City liaison) by sharing policy updates, including clear processes for how events should be planned and executed, keeping in mind the real impact events have on businesses.**
- **Create a GroupMe text group for downtown merchants.** Send important reminders about upcoming events or road closures, even if Main Street isn't producing the event. Encourage merchants to send messages to the group as needed (non-solicitation.) This further establishes Main Street as the authority on all things Downtown Huntsville.
- **Through these meetings, establish Main Street as the clear leader in downtown revitalization, which will ultimately allow for Main Street to raise funds through its own membership dues.**



The Main Street Approach is centered around Transformation Strategies. A Transformation Strategy articulates a focused, deliberate path to revitalizing or strengthening a downtown or commercial district's economy. Each Transformation Strategy is implemented through activities in the four broad areas of work represented by the **Four Points: Economic Vitality, Design, Promotion, and Organization.**

There are a variety of resources on the [Main Street America website](#) that are reserved for member organizations, such as the **Community Transformation Strategies Workbook** and the **Main Street Approach Toolkit.**

External Relations

Focus Area 1: Policy & Administration

Strategy (1.3)

External communications are crucial for a Main Street organization because they serve as the primary means of engaging and informing the community about events, initiatives, and resources that directly impact the downtown area. Reaching the public is ever challenging because we're constantly inundated with information, so a multi-media, multi-faceted approach is best.

In Huntsville

Establish Main Street as the go-to organization for information by emerging as the leader in external relations. The following are channels to consider:

- **Social Media** - Utilize platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to share updates, event promotions, and community stories. Tailor content to different audience segments to ensure inclusivity.
- **E-Newsletters** - Send out regular newsletters to subscribers with information about upcoming events, local business highlights, and parking updates. Make sure to include a sign-up option on the organization's website and at local events.
- **Printed Flyers** - Distribute flyers, brochures, and posters in high-traffic areas, local businesses, schools, and community centers to inform residents and visitors.
- **Local Media Partnerships** - Collaborate with local newspapers, radio stations, and community television to feature events and updates, ensuring broader reach and credibility.
- **Website Blog Posts & Updates** - Maintain an up-to-date website that includes a calendar of events, a blog for news updates, and a section dedicated to parking information and other resources for visitors.
- **Press Releases** - Issue press releases for significant events or changes affecting the downtown area to engage local journalists and media outlets.
- **Public Meetings & Forums** - Host open forums or town hall meetings to discuss community issues and gather feedback. This encourages participation and shows that the organization values public input.

Event Promotion Cheat Sheet

- **Event Overview**
 - Event name, date & time, location, brief description
- **Key Features of the Event**
 - Main attractions, special offers, food & beverage options
- **Enhanced Attendee Experience**
 - Parking information, transportation options, accessibility
- **Event Schedule**
 - Timeline of events
- **FAQs**
 - Common questions for all downtown events
- **Contact Information**
 - Who to contact or tickets or for more information

Event Permitting Process

Focus Area 1: Policy & Administration

Strategy (1.4)

Special events in a downtown contribute to the economy and boost the quality of life in a community. It's also advantageous to the City or Main Street if other community organizations plan events to lighten the promotion and event production load. However, any event downtown reflects the City and Main Street, regardless of the promoting entity; therefore, it's imperative that quality controls be in place to streamline communication and to mitigate risk.

In Huntsville

In Huntsville, there are examples of events happening downtown with street closures, and merchants are not made aware. From conception to implementation, there should be a City process that dictates downtown events.

- **Begin with a clear, city-sanctioned process for obtaining an event permit for Downtown Huntsville. The existing policy states that only the City, County, or SHSU can apply for permits, except it's known that DBA is frequently awarded permits. The Main Street Director should be involved in the permitting process from beginning to end, even if Main Street isn't the promoting entity.**
- **Next, create a checklist that documents the process, using inspiration from the case study below.**
- **Once permits are issued, Main Street should take the lead on communicating event specific to downtown merchants via monthly meetings or door-to-door communication.**
- **Main Street should supplement the event promoters' efforts by also promoting these events on social media and other channels. These can be notices and not full-scale promotional strategies.**

Case Study

Starkville Mississippi is a college town that is home to numerous organizations, nonprofits, and volunteer groups. Connecting Downtown Starkville and the university campus is a priority of the community. In order to encourage activities and events, the Starkville Main Street Association created a [guide and checklist](#) for anyone wanting to host an event in the downtown area. This resource was created so that the process was simple, easy to follow, and reduced the approval time for applicants and staff members. The guide and checklist is easily found on the Starkville Main Street Association website and succinctly outlines the approval process.



HOW TO PLAN AN EVENT IN
DOWNTOWN STARKVILLE

DOWNTOWN EVENT CHECKLIST
Special events in Downtown Starkville contribute to our economy and boost our quality of life. Festivals, events, and parades all make Starkville a special place to live and visit. Use this checklist to keep track of the required forms and items for your application.

SPECIAL EVENT APPLICATION & POLICY

- ▶ Forms available on The Partnership's website: <https://www.starkville.org/about/plan-downtown-event/>
- ▶ [Fire Station Park reservation form](#) available on The Partnership's website

REQUIRED ITEMS FOR A DOWNTOWN EVENT

- ▶ Special event insurance. See Section 2 of the [Special Event Policy](#) for insurance requirements
- ▶ [City of Starkville Special Events Application](#)
- ▶ Map of the event area and/or road closures requested
- ▶ Mandatory attendance at one Special Events Committee meeting
- ▶ Application fee (see below)
- ▶ Copy of non-profit, 501c3 certificate (if applicable)
- ▶ Signed Application, Agreement to Indemnify, and Acknowledgment of Acceptance of Policy (part of the [Special Events Application](#))

EVENT SIZE	APPLICATION FEE
Under 100 persons	\$25
100 - 499 persons	\$50
500 - 999 persons	\$75
1000 - 3999 persons	\$100
4000+ persons	\$150

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION OR ASSISTANCE, CONTACT

 Paige Watson
Director of Main Street
662.323.3322
pwatson@starkville.org

 Daniel Havelin
City Planner
662.323.2525 ext. 3136
dhavelin@cityofstarkville.org

Parking Strategy

Focus Area 1: Policy & Administration

Strategy (1.5)

Regulating parking in a downtown area is essential for managing congestion, encouraging turnover, and promoting economic activity. In most rural downtowns, the Consultant team finds that parking congestion is generally due to employees parking all day in prime downtown real estate. While implementing a parking strategy may be uncomfortable to begin with, it opens valuable parking for visitors and ultimately leads to economic growth of the community and local businesses.

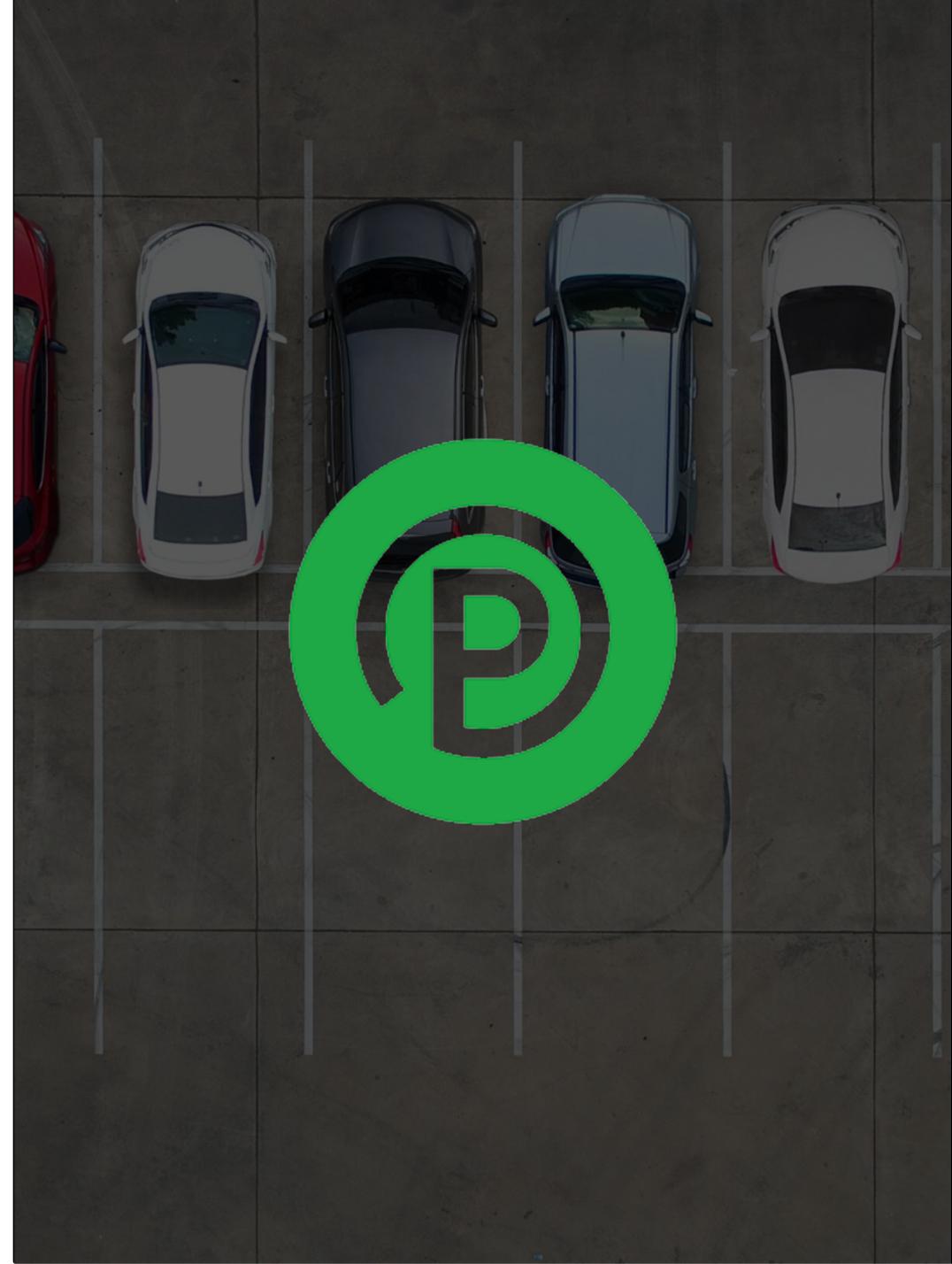
In Huntsville

The following steps should be incorporated into a parking strategy for Downtown Huntsville:

- **Implement branded signage throughout the downtown identifying public parking lots and parking expectations or standards such as hours and maximums.**
- **Create a tiered parking strategy that prioritizes prime parking spaces along the square with pay stations such as with third-party vendor ParkMobile.**
 - **Signage should be present in this area that compliments branded public parking signs throughout downtown.**
- **Conduct educational sessions and create interactive videos for city and county employees, business owners and their employees, and the greater community through social media and in-person sessions to share parking strategy and expectations.**

Once the parking strategy has been implemented, enforcement becomes critical. Fairness and equity, encouraging compliance, creating turnover, reducing congestion, and generating revenue are all reasons why enforcement should be prioritizing.

Education is also important on a continuous basis, not just as the strategy is rolled out. Continue to share in person and digitally about the importance of prioritizing available parking for visitors and consumers and ask business and property owners to share this message on the City's behalf.



Underperforming Properties

Focus Area 1: Policy & Administration

Strategy

Downtown areas are often seen as the economic and cultural heart of a city. Underperforming properties can have a negative impact on the overall economic health of the area. They may contribute to lower local tax revenue and economic activity, as well as the perception of blight, potentially affecting nearby businesses and property values.

There are a variety of strategies that can be used to elevate underperforming properties, and many times, a “carrot and stick” approach is most holistic and effective:



“Carrots” refer to positive incentives, such as financial incentives, recognition and awards, and support for redevelopment.



“Sticks” refer to negative consequences, such as code enforcement, taxes and assessments, and eventual loss of property.

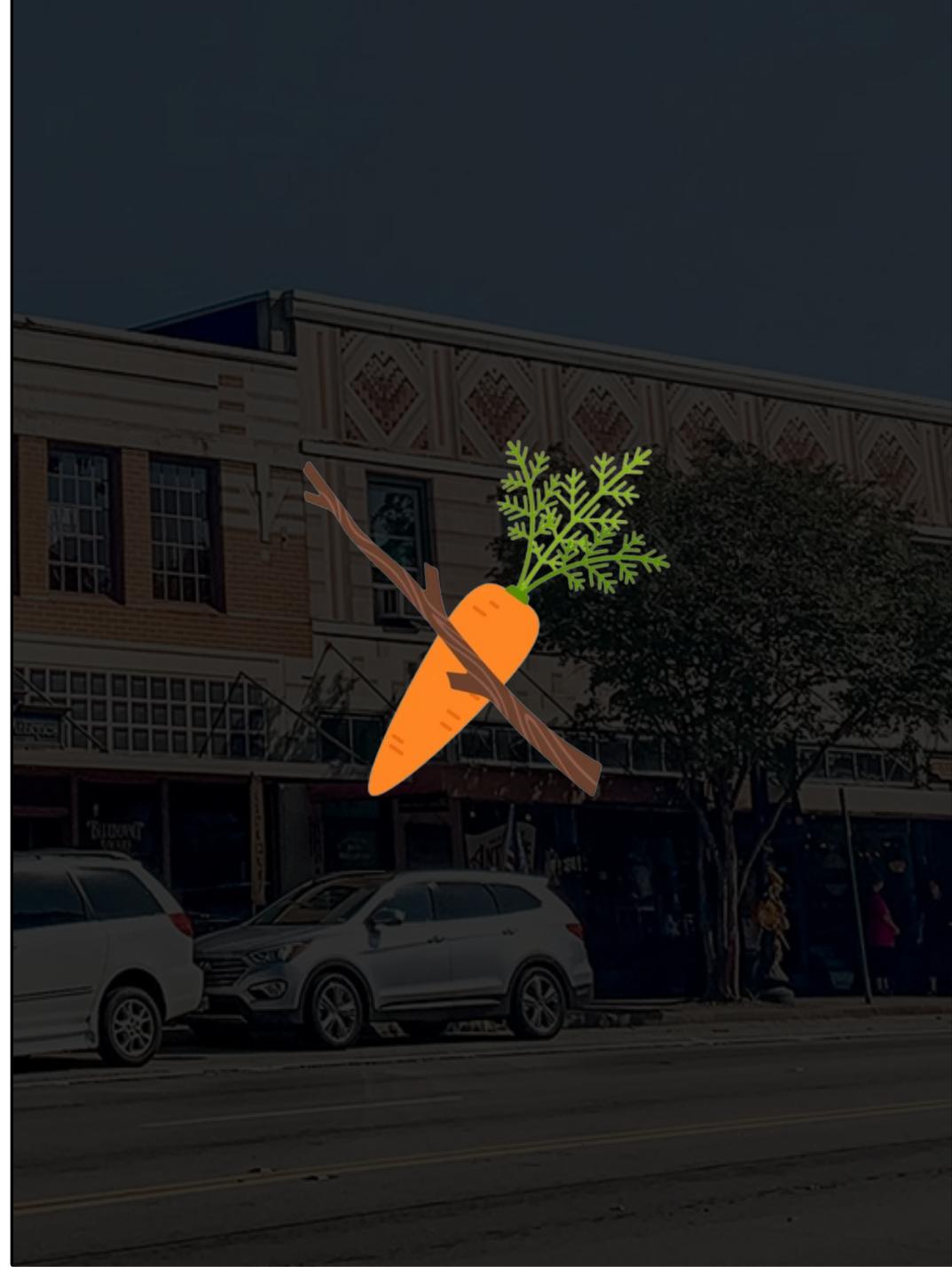
In Huntsville

In Huntsville, the consultant team recommends a “carrot and stick” approach to elevating and improving underperforming properties. The mix recommended is:

Carrots: Implement incentive opportunities for property owners

Sticks: Implement and enforce a Vacant Property Registry Ordinance

There’s an opportunity to implement and enforce policy to set the standard for economic vitality, while offering a more robust and formalized incentive program to support investors and property owners. The following slides detail the recommended approach.



Enhanced Façade Grant Program

Focus Area 1: Policy & Administration

Strategy (1.6)

A downtown façade improvement grant is a financial incentive program designed to help property owners and businesses enhance the exterior appearance of their buildings in a designated downtown area. These grants often cover a portion of the costs associated with renovations such as painting, new signage, window and door replacements, and other aesthetic upgrades that contribute to the overall visual appeal and historic preservation of the district. The primary goal of these grants is to stimulate economic development, attract more customers, and promote a vibrant, attractive downtown environment. By improving the facades, the program aims to boost property values, encourage further investment, and create a cohesive and inviting streetscape that benefits the entire community

In Huntsville

While façade grants are typically offered for improvement of any element of improvement on the exterior, street-facing part of the building, **it's recommended that Huntsville take a more targeted and strategic approach. Consider identifying a specific component of improvement for the first year of grant funding, such as awnings and canopies. By funding the improvement of this single element to multiple buildings, you may have a larger more visible impact.** If year one is successful, consider changing the scope of funding for year two to another element such as paint and so on.

Or, if there is a limited budget, consider awarding the entirety of the fund to one project to make a larger impact or splash. The goal of the program is to enhance the pedestrian experience one building at a time and also to give confidence to existing property owners that it's worth improving their spaces.

Façade grants in Huntsville should always focus on the front of buildings facing pedestrian and vehicular traffic. Vibrancy grants, detailed on the next page, should focus on activating the sidewalk in an engaging and aesthetically pleasing way.



Façade Grant Funding Precedent in Texas

Below are five (5) examples of Texas municipalities offering incentive funds through a Façade Grant Program. Some Texas municipalities implement incentives through an economic development agency or Main Street program. While others implement them at the discretion of the council:

- [City of Keller, TX](#)
- [Victoria, TX Main Street](#)
- [City of Balch Springs, TX](#)
- [Greenville, TX Main Street](#)
- [Roanoke, TX](#)

Vibrancy Grants

Focus Area 1: Policy & Administration

Strategy (1.7)

The foundation for a successful downtown streetscape is created through public investments in pedestrian infrastructure and streetscape enhancements such as streetlights, street trees, and benches among others. While infrastructure and streetscape enhancements are important, creating a truly active and vibrant downtown requires the involvement of the local business community through activating their storefronts and adjacent sidewalks. Activating sidewalks through the addition of potted plants, outdoor dining, sandwich board signs, outdoor merchandise displays, lighting, and creative signage can greatly enhance the vibrancy of a downtown and allow businesses to highlight their unique character. The combination of public investment and private sector engagement creates a unique sense of place and an active downtown district.

In Huntsville

Vibrancy grants are an excellent complement to the Facade Program that will assist in activating the sidewalks and storefronts to provide a more colorful, aesthetic, and enjoyable experience for pedestrians. Eligible projects could include:

- Planters/pots
- Landscaping/potted plants
- Sandwich board or A-frame signage
- Custom business signage
- Professionally hand-painted window signage
- Outdoor merchandise displays
- Outdoor dining
- Outdoor seating
- Exterior lighting enhancements
- Interior storefront display lighting enhancements
- Creative exterior storefront modifications
- Public art (murals, sculpture, etc. – designs and locations require prior approval)
- Activities (cornhole, oversized outdoor games, etc.)

To complement a Vibrancy Grant program, consider adding an Adopt-a-Block or Adopt-a-Planter program to enhance streetscape vitality.



Vacant Property Registry Ordinance

Focus Area 1: Policy & Administration

Strategy (1.8)

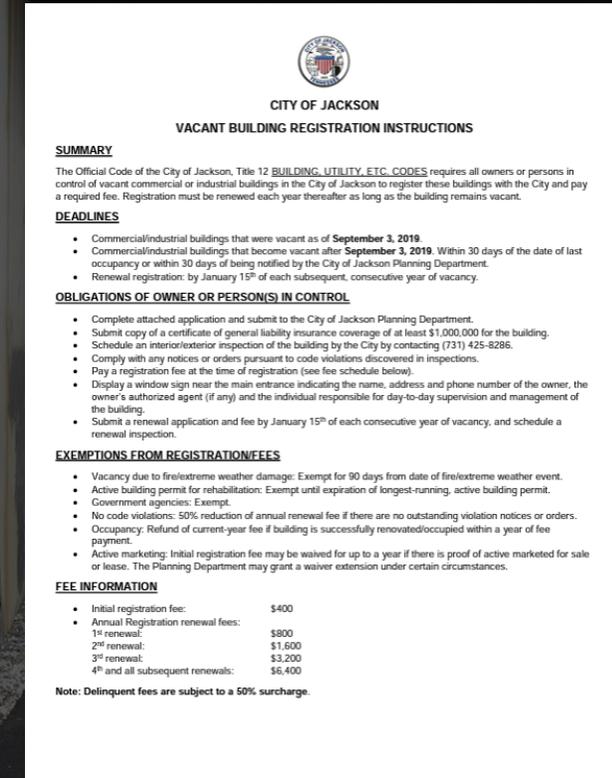
Vacant Storefront Registry Ordinances (VPRO,) implemented in numerous cities and towns across the country, require that owners of vacant commercial properties submit information to a registry and pay an annual fee for each year that the property remains vacant. In so doing, the municipality is able to track and monitor vacant properties, establish a dialogue with property owners to understand the nature of the vacancy, and develop strategies to help the owner either tenant the space, temporarily activate it, or else adhere to minimum standards for the appearance and maintenance of the property while vacant.

In Huntsville

While taxes and fees are never popular policy measures, there is a negative economic impact of vacant downtown properties, as well as the increased probability of crime and vagrancy within or near empty properties. While Huntsville municipal code does include maintenance requirements for commercial buildings, there does not appear to be a codified system to track vacancies and fine the property owner if necessary, specifically for commercial vacancies. Implement a VPRO that also offers the opportunity of a waiver to vacant property owners that would allow a temporary activation of their storefront with art installations while they are seeking tenants, making renovations, or working with architects. Lewisville, Watauga, Pilot Point, Wichita Falls, and Killeen, TX have implemented similar ordinances. If implementation is a challenge, consider a third-party vendor such as [MuniReg](#) that enforces the policy and collects fees without an annual retainer.

Case Study

[The Jackson, TN City Council passed a vacant property ordinance in September 2019](#) that targets commercial property in the downtown. The law requires property owners with a vacant building to register it with the city of Jackson and pay a fine. As part of the regulation, the city requires the owner of each property to have a local contact point for the building if they don't live in Madison County and submit a vacant building plan. Owners also have to maintain the building to the safety code required for empty buildings and have liability insurance that covers the building for at least \$1 million. Every year that a building remains vacant, the registration fee doubles. The law allows the city to waive the registration fee if the building is under construction or has hired a realtor to market the building for future tenants.



Action Team Implementation



downtown strategies

Focus Area 1: Policy & Administration

Focus Area	Identifier	Strategy	Timeline	Level of Investment	Responsible Party
Policy & Administration	1.1	Action Teams should be formed with the mission to rejuvenate the downtown, thereby creating a vibrant atmosphere for business and social activities. Action Teams should work in conjunction with the City, Main Street and other entities and asset owners in the community to identify areas of need and steps to take to move forward.	NOW	-	Main Street
Policy & Administration	1.2	There is confusion amongst the public as to which organizations manage programming, promotion, advocacy, and beautification of downtown. Additionally, there are duplication of efforts between Huntsville Main Street and the Huntsville Downtown Business Association (DBA.) Ideally, these organizations would merge into one highly functional organization that is funded and supported by the City and the private sector. In the meantime, clear roles and responsibilities should emerge – these are detailed in this plan.	Years 1-3	\$	Main Street
Policy & Administration	1.3	Improve external relations by establishing Main Street as the go-to organization for information by improving and enhancing digital messaging and promotions.	Years 1-3	\$\$	Main Street
Policy & Administration	1.4	There are examples of events happening downtown with street closures, and merchants are not made aware. From conception to implementation, there should be a City process that dictates downtown events, which should always include the Main Street Director.	Years 1-3	\$	City
Policy & Administration	1.5	<p>The following steps should be incorporated into a parking strategy for Downtown Huntsville:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement branded signage throughout the downtown identifying public parking lots and parking expectations or standards such as hours and maximums. Create a tiered parking strategy that prioritizes prime parking spaces along the square with pay stations such as with third-party vendor ParkMobile. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Signage should be present in this area that compliments branded public parking signs throughout downtown. Conduct educational sessions and create interactive videos for city and county employees, business owners and their employees, and the greater community through social media and in-person sessions to share parking strategy and expectations. 	Years 3-5	\$\$\$\$	City/Main Street

Action Team Implementation



downtown strategies

Focus Area 1: Policy & Administration

Focus Area	Identifier	Strategy	Timeline	Level of Investment	Responsible Party
Policy & Administration	1.6	Take a more targeted and strategic approach to Façade Grants. Consider identifying a specific component of improvement for the first year of grant funding, such as awnings and canopies. By funding the improvement of this single element to multiple buildings, you may have a larger more visible impact.	NOW	-	Main Street
Policy & Administration	1.7	Implement a Vibrancy Grant as a complement to the Facade Program that will assist in activating the sidewalks and storefronts to provide a more colorful, aesthetic, and enjoyable experience for pedestrians.	Years 1-3	\$	City/Main Street
Policy & Administration	1.8	Implement a VPRO that also offers the opportunity of a waiver to vacant property owners that would allow a temporary activation of their storefront with art installations while they are seeking tenants, making renovations, or working with architects. If implementation is a challenge, consider a third-party vendor such as MuniReg that enforces the policy and collects fees without an annual retainer.	Years 3-5	\$\$	Main Street



downtown strategies

FOCUS AREA 2

Design

Thoughtful design supports a community's transformation by enhancing the physical and visual assets that set the downtown district apart.

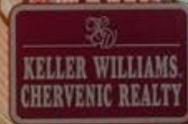
FOCUS AREA 2

Design

INTRODUCTION

Design enhancements are critical for creating a vibrant and welcoming downtown area that attracts people. Improvements that enhance walkability, such as wider sidewalks, crosswalks, and intersection enhancements make navigating downtown safer and more enjoyable. Streetscape enhancements, like decorative lighting, public art, street trees, and outdoor dining, contribute to the overall ambiance and encourage visitors to spend more time in the district. Vibrancy is achieved when these elements work together to create a sense of place, transforming downtown from a functional space into an engaging experience that appeals to all ages.

Equally important are the storefront activations and displays that bring energy and life to the streetscape. Merchants play a vital role by installing engaging window displays, activating their storefronts, and participating in collective beautification efforts. Simple additions, such as planters, seasonal decorations, and sidewalk signage, can make a storefront stand out while contributing to the district's overall charm. These details not only add "signs of life" to the sidewalks, but also showcase the unique personalities of the businesses. When paired with larger streetscape enhancements, these design improvements create a cohesive and vibrant atmosphere, ensuring downtown remains a destination where people want to shop, dine, and explore.



Parking Perceptions

Focus Area 2: Design

Strategy (2.1)

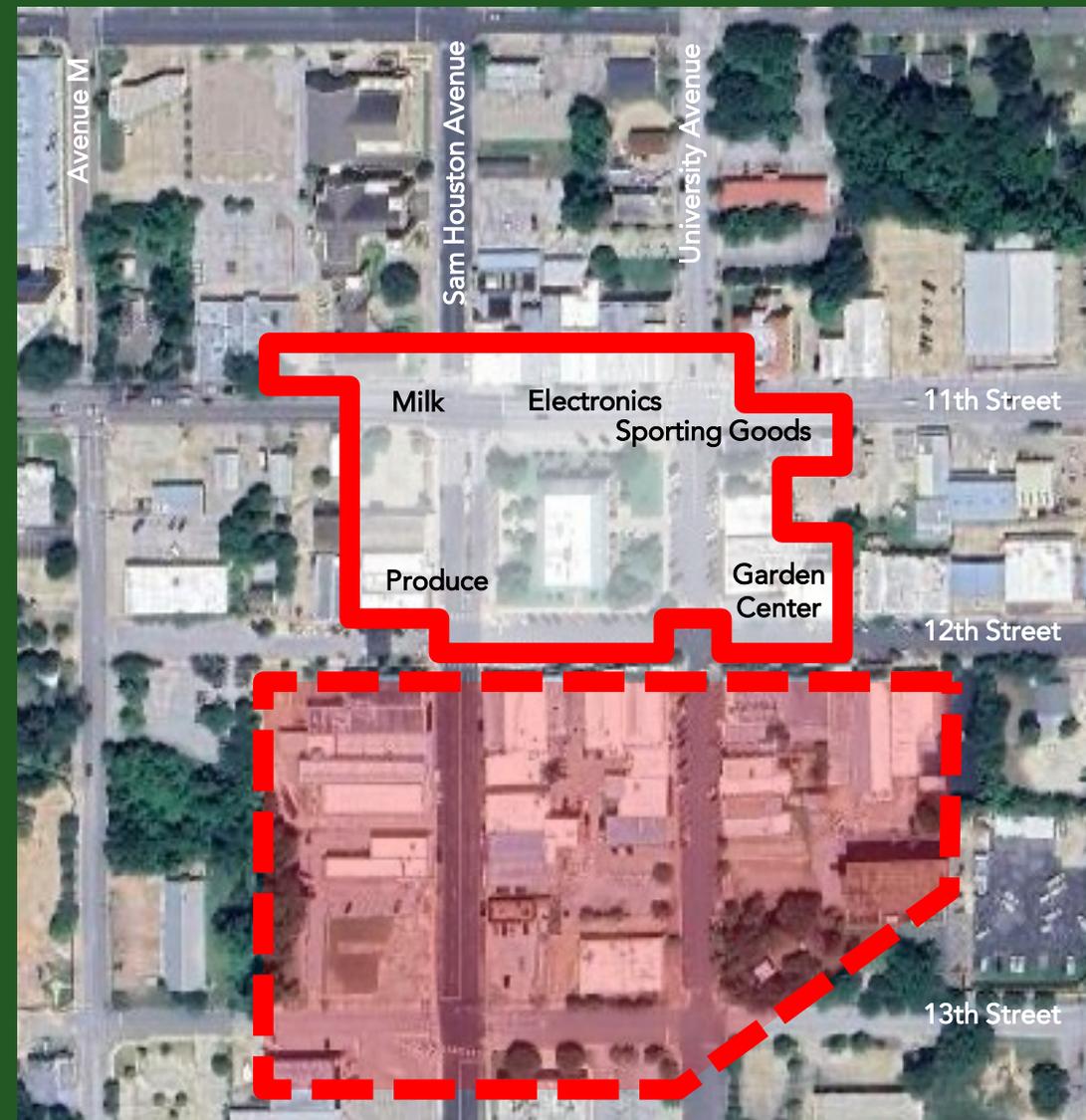
Parking is topic of discussion in every downtown across the country. Unless it is a ghost town, every downtown struggles with a perceived lack of parking. Rarely is the availability of parking truly an issue. Typically, downtowns have various on-street and surface parking options, but residents expect parking to be available directly adjacent to their destination. So, the issue is that they cannot find a parking space by the front door not that they cannot find available parking at all. Parking is a mindset issue.

Most citizens visit a Walmart or other big box retailer on a regular basis and do not perceive there to be a parking issue. However, when comparing the footprint of a typical Walmart and parking lot to a downtown the big box property dwarfs the downtown core. Customers fail to recognize that the walking distance between the produce and garden center departments in Walmart is the equivalent of 2-3 downtown blocks. So, during a typical shopping trip Walmart customers typically walk 10-20 blocks within the store itself, not including the distance from the parking lot to the store.

The most common issue impacting parking is downtown employees occupying prime on-street parking along the storefronts rather than side street or accessory surface parking lots. Customers are not able to utilize convenient parking spaces and form a negative perception about the district. Relocating downtown employees to other parking areas is an appropriate first step toward changing the perception of parking in the downtown. In communities where downtown employees continue to utilize on-street parking, other strategies should be used.

Adequate signage educating about and directing visitors to available public parking areas (on-street and off-street) is a critical first step. From an enforcement standpoint, time-enforced parking is typically an appropriate first step. When properly and consistently enforced, limiting parking to 2-3 hours forces parking spaces to turnover throughout the day and changes the behavior of downtown employees.

Some communities have invested tremendous resources into constructing a downtown parking garage. Despite the tremendous investment, those communities often continue to struggle with a perceived parking issue because visitors do not use the structure. Parking is often a perception and convenience issue, not a quantity issue.



The graphic above illustrates the size comparison of the Huntsville Walmart property overlaid on Downtown Huntsville. The solid shape is the footprint of the building, and the dashed line is the outline of the parking lot. Residents regularly walk from the parking lot to the store and from the grocery section to the garden center without considering the distance. The distance around the square and surrounding blocks is an easily walkable distance when compared to the Walmart footprint.

Parking Perceptions

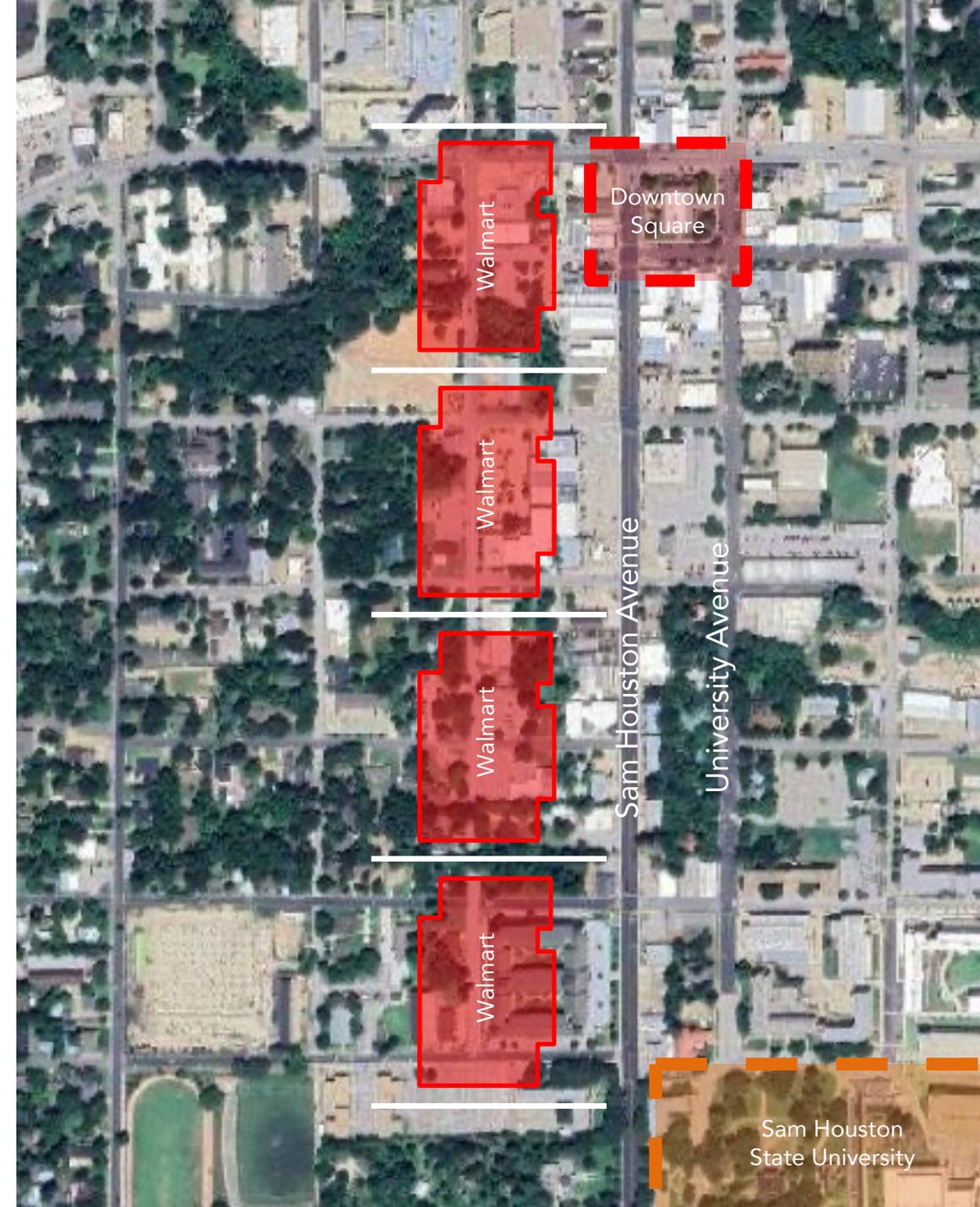
Focus Area 2: Design

Strategy (2.1) continued

In Huntsville

The entire Downtown Huntsville square fits comfortably into the building and parking lot footprint of the local Walmart. When comparing distances, the distance from the north side of the square to the south side is the equivalent of the distance from the Electronics department to the front door of Walmart. So, a typical Walmart shopping trip requires walking distances equivalent to 1-3 trips around the downtown square. This comparison showcases how the issue is related to the perception of parking rather than an actual parking issue.

Similarly, connecting the downtown core with the SHSU campus will involve showcasing the walkability of the area and the close proximity of the assets. While most residents likely recognize that the downtown and campus are close, they would probably assume that the distance between is much further than an average person would be willing to walk. However, comparing the Walmart footprint to the University Avenue corridor illustrates that the distance from the square to the edge of campus at 17th Street is equivalent to the length of approximately 4 Walmart buildings. So approximately 2 round trips within Walmart is the same amount of walking as from Downtown Huntsville to campus, which is a completely reasonable walking distance for the average citizen.



Parking Perceptions

Focus Area 2: Design

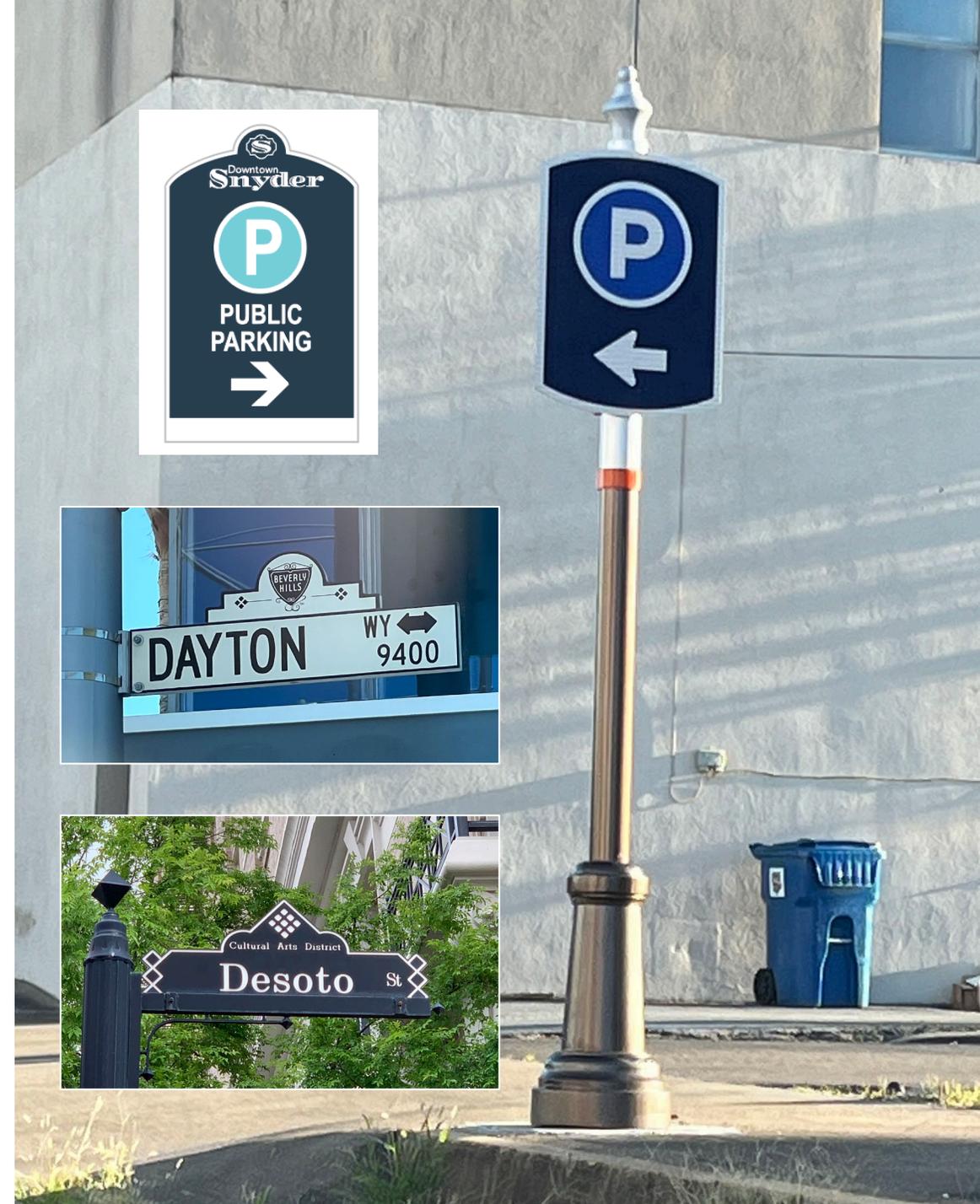
Strategy (2.1) continued

Although parking is largely a perception issue, Downtown Huntsville needs to improve the physical and visual connections to public parking areas. Vehicular and pedestrian-scaled signage should be installed to identify and direct visitors to parking areas. Additionally, community leaders must assess the connections between the public parking areas and popular downtown destinations to identify short and long-term strategies for improving the connectivity for pedestrians. Initially, lighting, ADA accessibility, striping, crosswalks, and the general pedestrian experience should be assessed to ensure there are safe connections for pedestrians. Then opportunities for improving and enhancing these streetscape layers should be identified and prioritized.

The Sam Houston Avenue and 11th Street corridors pose tremendous challenges for Downtown Huntsville as it relates to connectivity and walkability. On-street and off-street parking options are available on the north and west sides of these corridors, but crossing these major corridors is not inviting for pedestrians due to the design of the roadways. The city should work with TXDOT to identify short and long-term strategies for balancing vehicular and pedestrian traffic within the downtown core in order to create a safe and welcoming environment for visitors.

Other strategies for improving the perception of downtown parking and enhancing the connections to parking options could include:

- Develop a digital and physical map highlighting all available public parking areas throughout the downtown core.
- Opportunities for enforced parking should be explored. Park Mobile and other app-based services are commonly used in cities of all sizes to create parking turnover.
- Updating downtown street signs to include a custom branded sign design or a custom designed sign topper showcasing the Downtown Huntsville brand and color palette.



Campus Connections

Focus Area 2: Design

Strategy (2.2)

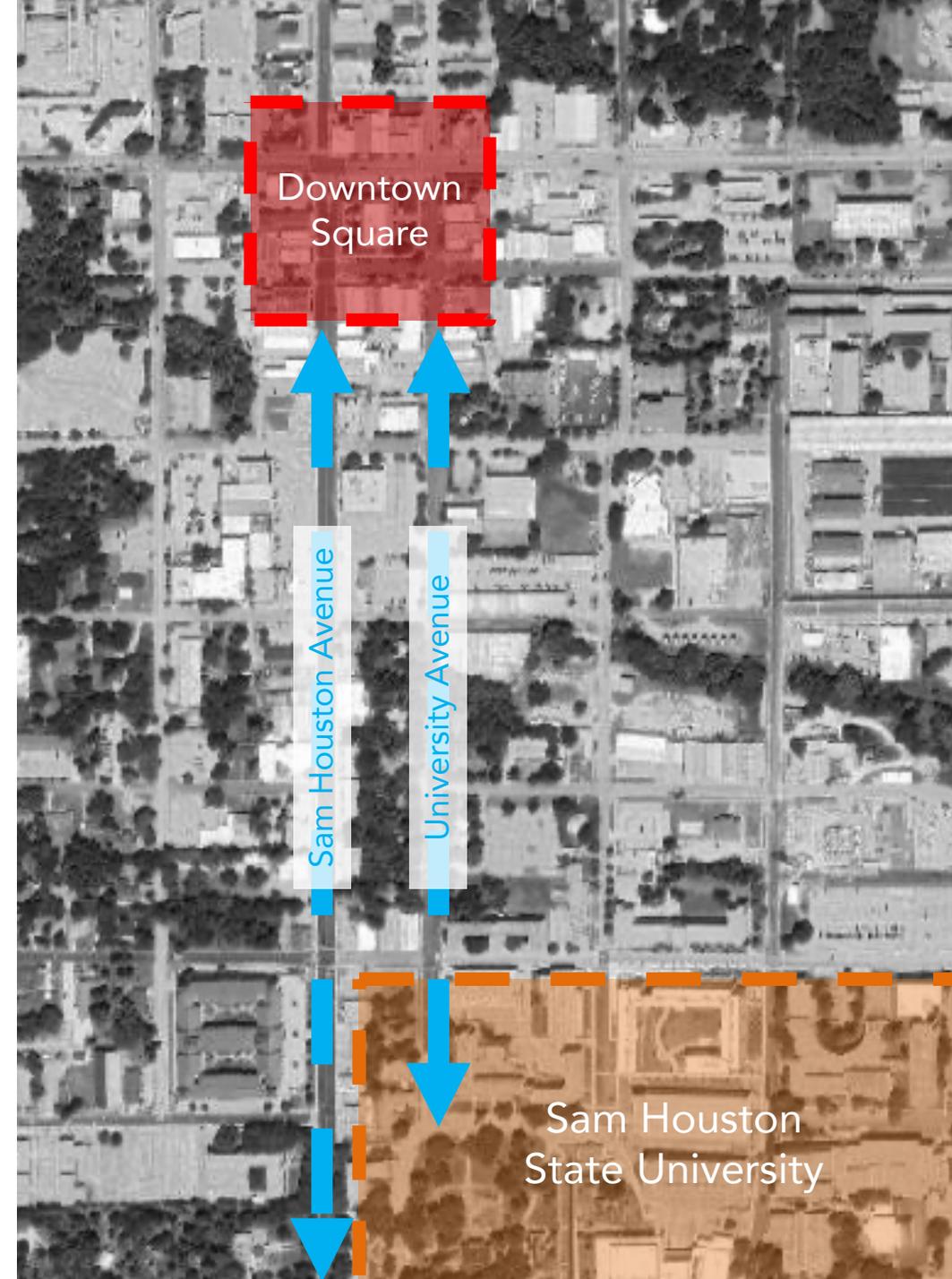
In Huntsville

Huntsville is blessed to be the home of Sam Houston State University (SHSU). The presence of a higher education institution adds tremendous amenities, assets, and opportunities for the community. Although Huntsville is a college town, community leaders recognize that they are not fully capitalizing on the presence of SHSU.

The long-term goal is to make downtown a regular part of the students' college experience during their time at SHSU. The short-term focus of Downtown Huntsville should be to provide better **physical, visual,** and **programmatic** connections with SHSU students, faculty, and visitors. Strategies to enhance the physical and visual connections between Downtown Huntsville and the SHSU campus are included in the Design focus area. Programmatic connection strategies are included in the focus area of Tourism and Promotion.



Sam Houston State University



Campus Connections: Physical

Focus Area 2: Design

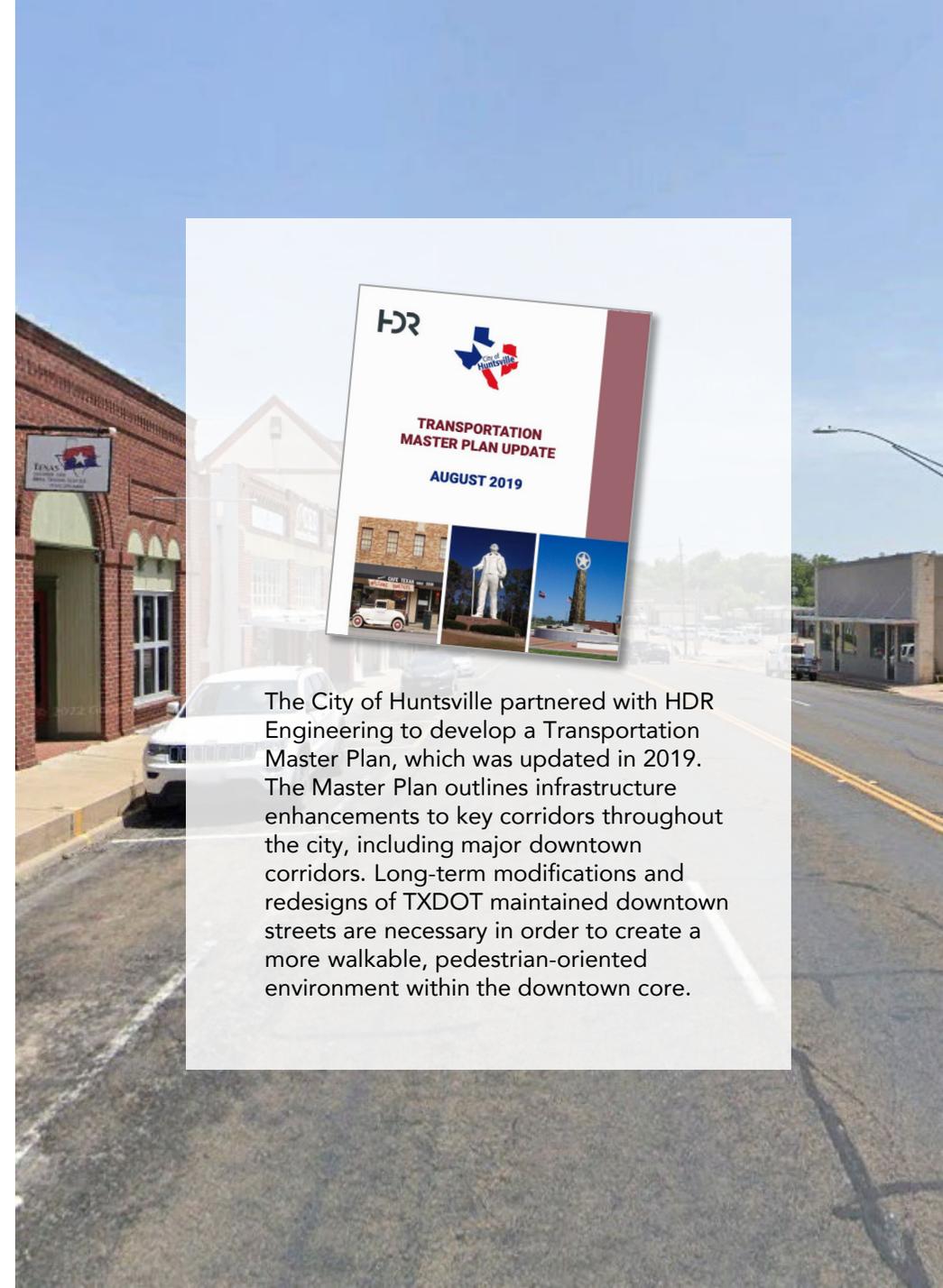
Strategy (2.2.1)

Physical Connections

The SHSU campus is located less than a ½-mile from the downtown square. The two north-south corridors of the square (Highway 75/Sam Houston Avenue and University Avenue) connect directly with the campus. In fact, University Drive terminates directly into campus at 17th Street. Although the corridors provide direct connections, the character of the corridors create drastically different experiences.

Sam Houston Avenue is a state-maintained highway (Highway 75) and has evolved over time to prioritize vehicular traffic. The corridor follows highway design standards with four wide travel lanes. Much of the development along the corridor also follows an automobile-oriented pattern with the buildings set back from the street, parking lots adjacent to the roadway, and car-oriented signage. Although sidewalks exist along most of the corridor, the experience for pedestrians is unpleasant and frankly, unsafe.

Transforming the Sam Houston Avenue into a corridor that balances vehicular, bicycle, and pedestrian activity is possible, but would require an extensive redesign and reconstruction. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) supports implementing “Road Diets” on these types of corridors when traffic counts, measured in Average Daily Traffic (ADT) counts, is below 25,000. Based on data from the Texas Department of Transportation (TXDOT), the ADT along Sam Houston Avenue is 11,132, which makes it a great candidate for implementing Road Diet principles. These enhancements are critical to improve the safety, walkability, and bikeability of the corridor in order to connect downtown with the SHSU campus. A common Road Diet strategy would include reducing the number of travel lanes from 4 to 2 plus a dedicated turn lane. This would allow space for the addition of a bike lane and/or parallel on-street parking. Adding planters, landscape strips, and other buffers between the sidewalks and automobile traffic is also a common addition to these types of corridors. The additional space created from reducing and narrowing travel lanes also creates space for the addition of streetscape elements such as street trees, streetlights, and other features. Unfortunately, these enhancements will likely remain a long-term solution due to TXDOT’s lack of support for Road Diet principles around the state. However, **the City of Huntsville and SHSU should collaboratively lobby regional TXDOT representatives and advocate for Road Diet principals and walkability enhancements along the Sam Houston Avenue corridor between downtown and SHSU.**



The City of Huntsville partnered with HDR Engineering to develop a Transportation Master Plan, which was updated in 2019. The Master Plan outlines infrastructure enhancements to key corridors throughout the city, including major downtown corridors. Long-term modifications and redesigns of TXDOT maintained downtown streets are necessary in order to create a more walkable, pedestrian-oriented environment within the downtown core.

Campus Connections: Physical



Before (Tupelo, Mississippi)



After (Tupelo, Mississippi)



Tupelo, Mississippi



Statesville, North Carolina

Campus Connections: Physical

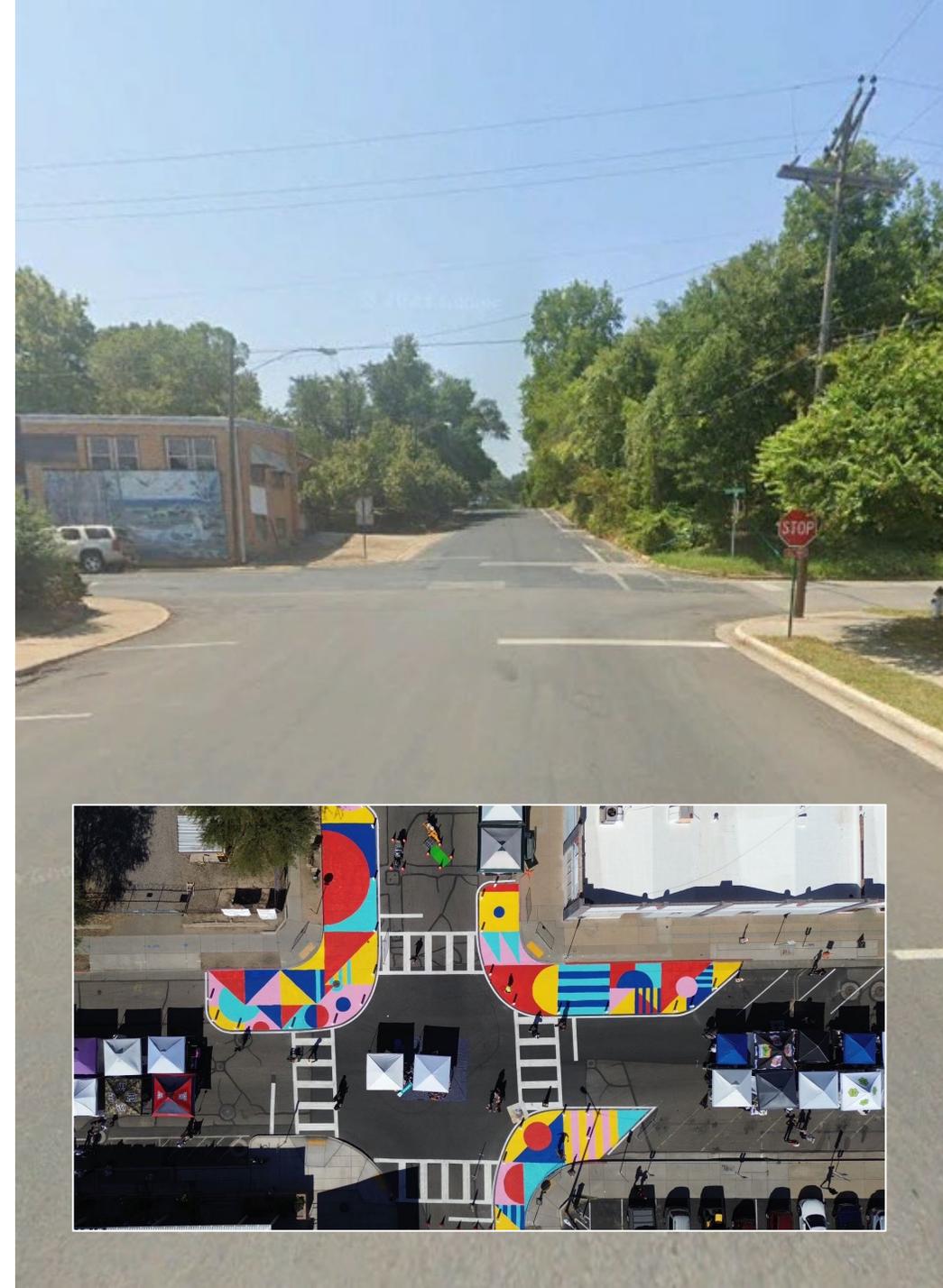
Focus Area 2: Design

Strategy (2.2.1)

Physical Connections (continued)

Alternatively, **University Avenue**, which also provides a direct connection between downtown and the SHSU campus, is a low-speed street that has a completely different character than Sam Houston Avenue. University Avenue is a low-speed street with a residential character. It transitions from the downtown to campus through a quaint historic neighborhood. Although the corridor is not as visible as other thoroughfare, it provides a much safer and walkable connection for pedestrians and cyclists.

In the short-term, University Avenue should be used as the primary walkable and bikeable connection between downtown and campus. Infrastructure and streetscape enhancements should be made to create a welcoming and safe connection. Enhancements could include the proper striping of travel lanes, on-street parking, and crosswalks, as well as the addition of a dedicated bike lane. Sidewalks should be repaired, added, expanded, and ADA accessible. Intersections should be properly striped with crosswalks, and ADA accessibility ramps. In the short-term painted curb extensions should be added to enhance the intersections and permanent curb extension planters can be added in the future as resources allow. Asphalt Art Grants have been pursued by the city in the past. Other potential funding sources should be explored. Enhancing the entire corridor will take time but can be done incrementally by connecting existing infrastructure and prioritizing the corridor for future improvements.



Campus Connections: Visual

Focus Area 2: Design

Strategy (2.2.2)

Visual Connections

While physical connections typically involve costly infrastructure enhancements, visual connections can be improved through strategic initiatives focused on visually connecting downtown and campus. Creating visual connections can include strategies such as streetlight banners, signage, public art, lighting, and other projects. Although Sam Houston Avenue requires extensive changes to create a high-quality physical connection between downtown and SHSU, strategies should be implemented to create visual connections. Visual connection strategies should also be implemented along the University Avenue corridor, throughout the downtown core, and even on the SHSU campus.

- Downtown businesses should be encouraged or incentivized to decorate their storefronts with school colors during high traffic events. This could include themed merchandise, creative displays, window paintings, balloons, flowers, and other details to showcase school spirit and downtown vibrancy. For example, the current “Paint the Town Orange & White” campaign for Bearkat Family Weekend is an excellent example of Main Street, SHSU, and downtown merchants partnering to create a welcoming experience for visitors and visual connection between downtown and campus. Storefronts should also be decorated seasonally to provide a fresh, vibrant appearance throughout the year.
- Infrastructure for a cross-street banner should be installed across 12th Street to promote upcoming events and activities. This should include a “Welcome Back Students” banner in the fall and “Congratulations Graduates” banner at the end of the school year.
- Huntsville and SHSU should partner to install the updated co-branded “Welcome Back Kats” streetlight banners. Custom banners with Huntsville and SHSU branding showcase a strong town/gown relationship. Typically, the city’s Public Works Department or the local utility company installs banners as an in-kind partnership.
 - Initial phase should be installed around the downtown square.
 - Phase 2 should be installed along University Avenue from 12th Street and 17th Street.
 - Phase 3 should be installed along Sam Houston Avenue between 10th Street and 17th Street
 - Long-term phases should incrementally expand the installation of custom streetlight banners along Sam Houston Avenue from Montgomery Road to 10th Street.



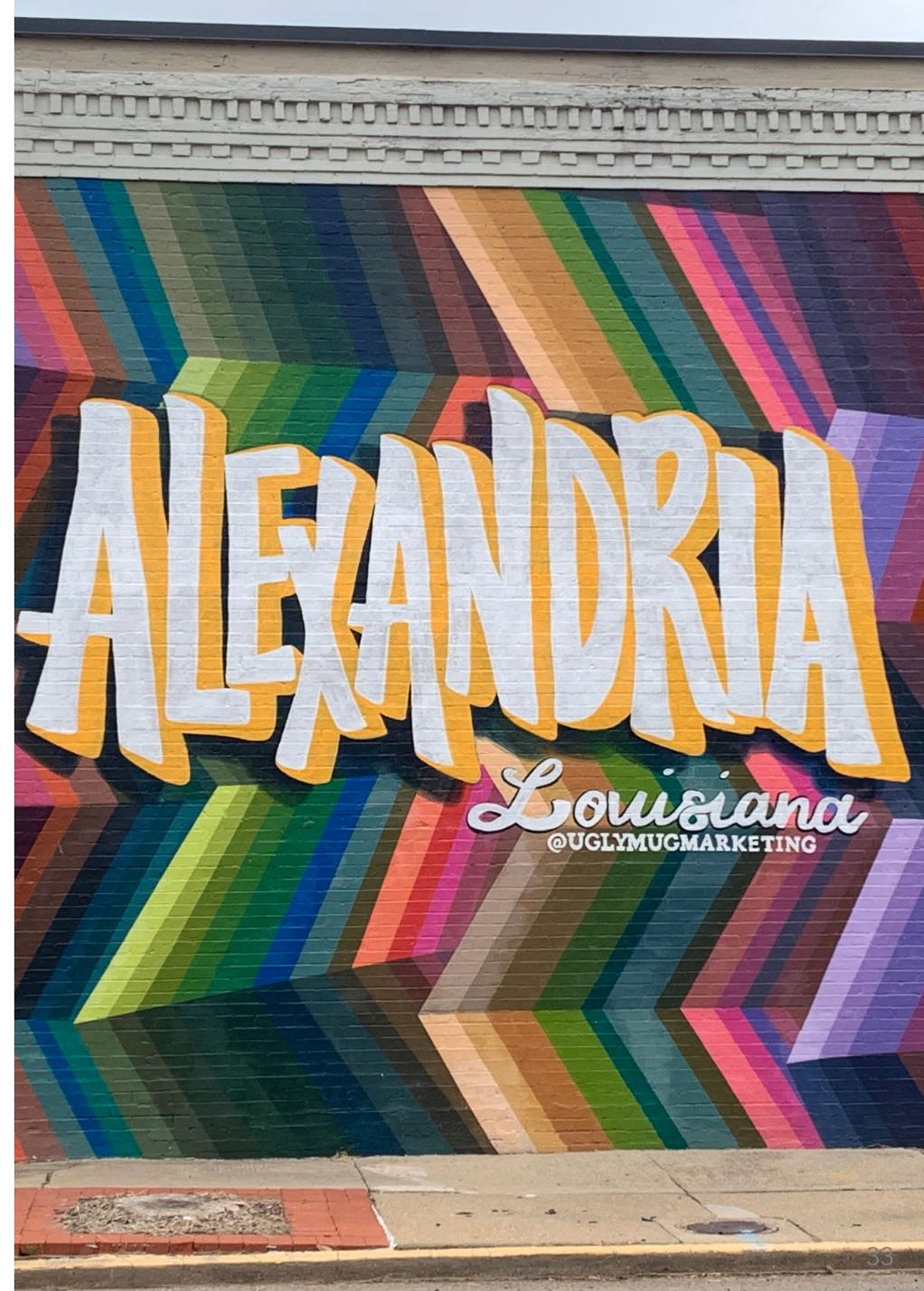
Campus Connections: Visual

Focus Area 2: Design

Strategy (2.2.2)

Visual Connections (continued)

- Vehicular wayfinding signage should be strategically placed along the Sam Houston Avenue and University Avenue corridors to guide visitors to Downtown Huntsville and SHSU as well as other key destinations and attractions.
- Public art should be installed in key locations throughout the downtown core.
 - The initial phase should focus on installing a simple **SHSU “selfie wall” mural** in a highly visible downtown location. The blank wall along University Avenue on the two-story building at the corner of 12th Street and University Avenue could serve as a prime location since it anchors the town-gown connection along the corridor. The most effective selfie wall murals have simple graphics and color palettes.
 - A **Huntsville-themed mural** should be installed on the large blank wall on the property on the south side of the Sam Houston Avenue and 12th Street intersection. This wall is highly visible along Sam Houston Avenue and could serve as an excellent location for a Downtown Huntsville welcome mural with simple graphics and a bold color palette.
 - Explore other opportunities for public art installations along the corridors. These could include traditional installations like murals or sculpture, but also small-scale initiatives like utility box art, painted curb extensions, and temporary photo op installations. Art can be used as “breadcrumbs” along the corridors and throughout downtown to create visual connections between downtown and campus.
 - Landmark public art installations could serve as “bookends” to University Avenue. One landmark feature could be located in the downtown core along University Avenue and the other could be a partnership with SHSU and installed at the terminus of the street at 17th Street near the Old Main Memorial. These features would serve as gateways into the downtown core and campus.



Campus Connections: Visual



Streetscape Layers

Focus Area 2: Design

Strategy (2.3)

The streetscape is what offers the first impression to visitors as they experience the downtown. A vibrant streetscape includes layers of elements and details that establish the character and “vibe” of the downtown. Layers include public infrastructure enhancements such as creative crosswalks, decorative streetlights, street trees, streetlight banners, and landscaping. They also include elements such as street furniture like benches, bike racks, and trash receptacles. These investments set the stage for private sector activation.

Business owners and property owners add life and activity to the sidewalks through sidewalk vibrancy elements such as potted plants, merchandise displays, outdoor dining, seating, sandwich board signs, and other details. The final layer of the streetscape involves the building facades.

Ensuring that every building has activated storefronts regardless of if the building is occupied or vacant is an important factor in creating a vibrant and inviting downtown. Storefronts should be activated with merchandise, curated displays, local art installations, window clings, or other artistic displays. Boarded storefronts should be covered with murals, artwork, or other features. Empty storefronts should be activated with window clings of art, historic photographs, or other graphics. Underutilized storefronts should be activated with local art or curated display related to the business. Active businesses should ensure their storefront displays are properly lit and are activated with seasonally relevant displays. Business signage should reflect the unique personality of the business and add to the character of the downtown district.

In Huntsville

Although all layers of streetscape elements are important to the vibrancy of the downtown, **community leaders should focus their efforts in two main areas: Sidewalk vibrancy and maintaining street trees.**



Streetscape Layers

Focus Area 2: Design Strategy (2.3) continued

Sidewalk Vibrancy

Downtown Huntsville is attractive and provides a positive first impression for visitors. Much of this is due to the greenery added by the street trees and landscaping, as well as the addition of details like the decorative streetlights and historic architecture. The foundation is strong but needs additional details to bring life into the district.

Façade enhancements, storefront activation, and sidewalk vibrancy are the responsibility of property and business owners. **Education, training, inspirational mood boards, contests, and incentive programs should be used to encourage downtown merchants to activate their storefronts.** Activation could include quality business signage, storefront displays, potted plants, benches, outdoor merchandise displays, sandwich board signs, flags, and other details to show “signs of life” along the sidewalk. Storefront display contests and seasonally themed events can be used to incentivize and encourage merchants to participate.

One of the most impactful sidewalk vibrancy elements is outdoor dining. Nothing attracts people to a downtown area like seeing other people. Outdoor dining provides instant impact and shows activity in the district. Huntsville faces the challenge of overly wide streets and undersized sidewalks, but there are still short-term opportunities for outdoor dining. Even a couple of small bistro tables adds life to the downtown sidewalks. **Downtown restaurants should be encouraged and incentivized to add outdoor dining areas to downtown sidewalks.**



Streetscape Layers

Focus Area 2: Design

Strategy (2.3) continued

Street Trees

The sidewalks of Downtown Huntsville feature mature Crepe Myrtle trees, which add much needed softscape and “green” as well as shade. Without the trees, the downtown core would be dominated by hardscape (concrete and asphalt), creating a harsh environment for visitors.

In some areas the trees are outgrowing their planting well and causing maintenance issues with broken or disrupted concrete. Although Crepe Myrtles are not a preferred species of street tree, the existing trees provide tremendous value for the downtown atmosphere. The existing trees should be retained and maintained. However, as the Crepe Myrtles are replaced due to damage or health, they should be replaced with a more appropriate urban street tree species such as the Lacebark Elm. Proper species will remain compact for an urban growing environment, but the canopy will reach a mature height above the storefronts and awnings.

Management strategies should include:

- Proper pruning and maintenance of the trees to ensure they do not become overgrown or damage the storefronts.
- Expand the existing growing wells by cutting the surrounding concrete to accommodate the growth of the trees.

Enhancement strategies could include:

- Adding string lights or up lighting to highlight the trees and enliven the nighttime environment. This type of initiative can be easily implemented in phases over time as resources allow.



Create Vibrancy with Lighting

Focus Area 2: Design

Strategy (2.4)

Decorative lighting enhancements are relatively low-cost projects that create a tremendous visual enhancement for downtowns. Ambient lighting from business signage, storefronts, string lights, streetlights, and other projects create a vibrant nighttime environment. Many downtowns accentuate the downtown buildings by installing rooftop lighting along the upper parapets. This creates nighttime vibrancy and creates a cohesive look within the downtown area. This type of project does take coordination with the property owners and requires a legal agreement between the city (or lead organization) and the property owners. Many downtowns have also added overhead string lights to add ambient lighting and serve as a vibrancy element to activate the district. These sites often become popular photo op destinations.

In Huntsville

Many downtown stakeholders mentioned that lighting in the downtown core was poor and created an unsafe nighttime environment for pedestrians. This observation was often linked with discussions regarding downtown parking since visitors did not feel safe walking from public parking areas to downtown destinations. Lighting is an important component of downtown vibrancy and involves a combination of public infrastructure such as streetlights, storefront lighting, and ambient lighting.

Streetlights

Currently Downtown Huntsville has two types of streetlights. Decorative pedestrian-scaled streetlights are located along the sidewalks throughout the downtown core. Additionally, some utility poles include cobra-head vehicular streetlights. While the pedestrian-scale lights are spaced at regular intervals, the vehicular streetlights are not. There are only 1-2 lights per block and no lighting appears to be located around the courthouse lawn.

The City of Huntsville should collaborate with Entergy and Mid-South Synergy to identify incentives, programs, or strategies for enhancing the lighting throughout the downtown core. This could include the installation of additional lighting or improvement of existing lighting as well as a balance of short-term and long-term solutions. Initial efforts should focus on the square, then expand to key side streets, and then along the University Avenue corridor to SHSU. Walker County should add matching streetlights around the courthouse square to increase downtown lighting.

As an example, Stephenville, Texas, partnered with Oncor Electric, their regional energy provider, to update the streetlights around the downtown square with modern LED, decorative streetlight fixtures.



Updated streetlight fixtures in Stephenville, Texas

Create Vibrancy with Lighting

Focus Area 2: Design

Strategy (2.4) continued

Storefront Lighting

Although public infrastructure lighting enhancements are needed, the private sector plays a critical role in creating a quality nighttime environment throughout downtown. Merchants should be encouraged to leave their storefront window display lights on to spill ambient lighting onto the sidewalk and add nighttime vibrancy. Even if businesses are not open after 5:00 p.m., the light from their storefront will help create a welcoming nighttime environment. If merchants are concerned about energy costs, the storefront display lights can be put on a timer ending at midnight, or they can compromise to leave their lights on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights.

Merchants should also consider enhancing their facades to include lighting for their signs, entries, and storefront displays. Bright, LED strip lights commonly seen at service stations should be prohibited, but soft, warm ambient lighting should be encouraged and incentivized.

Ambient Lighting

A popular trend in downtowns across the country is the addition of overhead string lights. These projects add an immediate impact and create a sense of vibrancy in the downtown. String lights are typically added above key streets, in parks, or plazas. The lights can be anchored into the buildings, to utility poles, or decorative posts can be added to support the lights.

Huntsville has explored the possibility of an overhead string light installation but was concerned about heavy automobile and tractor-trailer traffic. While this is a legitimate concern, safety standards exist to guide the installation of any cross-street infrastructure, wiring, or lighting. These standards are usually associated with fire truck clearance standards. The minimum height is usually 13'-6" but the city engineer should be consulted for precise local guidelines. As a short-term vibrancy initiative, Huntsville should pursue some type of downtown string lighting project.

The string light installation should occur around the square, but in the interest of short-term action, locally maintained streets should be prioritized to avoid TXDOT regulations. This would focus on 12th Street or University Avenue as potential locations since they would also be visible for travelers along Sam Houston Avenue and 11th Street. An alternative location for a string light installation is the block along University Avenue between 12th Street and 13th Street. The northernmost half-block has buildings and utility poles on both sides of the street which could serve as anchor points for the string lights. Although this location would not be highly visible from Sam Houston Avenue, it would activate a portion of University Avenue as a connecting corridor to campus.



Create Vibrancy with Lighting

Focus Area 2: Design

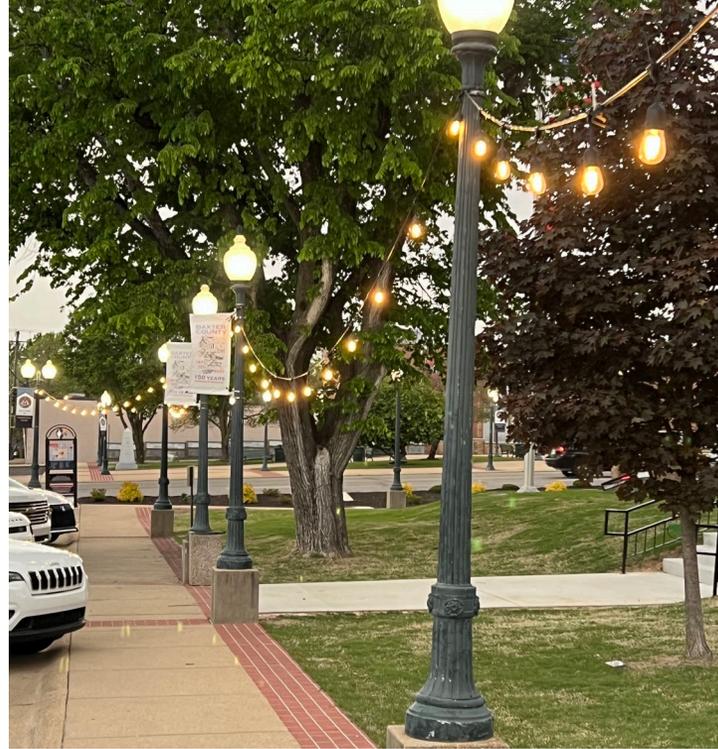
Strategy (2.4) continued

While an overhead string light installation is preferred, if that type of project is not feasible an alternative installation method could be explored. The communities of Mountain Home, Arkansas, and Clinton, Mississippi, used the decorative streetlights as an anchor for a simple line of string lights along the sidewalks. This method does not provide the impact of an overhead installation, but still adds vibrancy to the downtown district and is easily installed as a short-term project.

Another option for ambient lighting is the addition of rooftop lighting along the parapets of the downtown buildings. This is a classic lighting scheme that highlights the skyline of the buildings and adds visual interest and vibrancy. These projects do require legal agreements between the property owners and the city, which can be challenging. Some cities enter into agreements with each individual property owner while others develop a single joint agreement that is signed by every property owner. The city or lead organization purchases the lights, the city or electric department leads the installation, and the city provides the electricity by tying the system into the streetlights. Long-term maintenance is managed by the lead organization. The property owners simply provide permission to access their building and for the equipment to be attached to their building. These projects can easily be phased in block-by-block as resources become available. Phasing the project also makes the process of gaining property owners' approval more manageable.

Finally, the landmark of Downtown Huntsville is the Walker County Courthouse, which anchors the square. Many communities have highlighted their historic courthouse by installing rooftop lighting along the roofline of the building. This adds vibrancy to the downtown by highlighting the landmark building. [The Walker County Commissioners should install rooftop lighting along the roofline of the courthouse.](#)





Action Team Implementation



downtown strategies

Focus Area 2: Design

Focus Area	Identifier	Strategy	Timeline	Level of Investment	Responsible Party
Design	2.1	Vehicular and pedestrian-scaled signage should be installed to identify and direct visitors to parking areas	Years 1-3	\$	City
Design	2.1	Community leaders should assess the connections between the public parking areas and popular downtown destinations to identify short and long-term strategies for improving the connectivity for pedestrians.	NOW	-	City & Main Street
Design	2.1	The city should work with TXDOT to identify short and long-term strategies for balancing vehicular and pedestrian traffic within the downtown core in order to create a safe and welcoming environment for visitors.	Years 1-3	-	City
Design	2.1	Develop a digital and physical map highlighting all available public parking areas throughout the downtown core.	Years 1-3	-	DBA
Design	2.1	Opportunities for enforced parking should be explored. Park Mobile and other app-based services are commonly used in cities of all sizes to create parking turnover.	Years 3-5	\$\$	City
Design	2.1	Update downtown street signs to include a custom branded sign design or a custom designed sign topper showcasing the Downtown Huntsville brand and color palette.	Years 3-5	\$\$	City & Main Street
Design	2.2.1	City of Huntsville and SHSU should collaboratively lobby regional TXDOT representatives and advocate for Road Diet principals and walkability enhancements along the Sam Houston Avenue corridor between downtown and SHSU.	Years 1-3	-	City & SHSU
Design	2.2.1	Infrastructure and streetscape enhancements should be made to University Avenue in order to create a welcoming and safe connection. Enhancements could include the proper striping of travel lanes, on-street parking, and crosswalks, as well as the addition of a dedicated bike lane.	On-going	\$\$-\$\$\$	City & SHSU
Design	2.2.2	Downtown businesses should be encouraged or incentivized to decorate their storefronts with school colors during high traffic events.	NOW	-	DBA
Design	2.2.2	Infrastructure for a cross-street banner should be installed across 12 th Street to promote upcoming events and activities.	NOW	\$	DBA & Main Street

Action Team Implementation



downtown strategies

Focus Area 2: Design

Focus Area	Identifier	Strategy	Timeline	Level of Investment	Responsible Party
Design	2.2.2	Huntsville and SHSU should partner to install the co-branded "Welcome Back Kats" custom streetlight banners. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial phase should be installed around the downtown square. Phase 2 should be installed along University Avenue from 12th Street and 17th Street. Phase 3 should be installed along Sam Houston Avenue between 10th Street and 17th Street Long-term phases should incrementally expand the installation of custom streetlight banners along Sam Houston Avenue from Montgomery Road to 10th Street. 	-	\$\$	Main Street & SHSU
Design	2.2.2	Vehicular wayfinding signage should be strategically placed along the Sam Houston Avenue and University Avenue corridors to guide visitors to Downtown Huntsville and SHSU as well as other key destinations and attractions.	Years 3-5	-	City & Main Street
Design	2.2.2	A SHSU "selfie wall" mural in a highly visible downtown location.	NOW	\$\$	Main Street & DBA
Design	2.2.2	A Huntsville-themed mural should be installed on the large blank wall on the property on the south side of the Sam Houston Avenue and 12 th Street intersection.	Years 1-3	\$\$	Main Street & DBA
Design	2.2.2	Explore other opportunities for public art installations along the corridors. These could include traditional installations like murals or sculpture, but also small-scale initiatives like utility box art, painted curb extensions, and temporary photo op installations.	Years 3-5	(various)	Main Street & DBA
Design	2.2.2	Explore opportunities for landmark public art installations as "bookends" to University Avenue in downtown and at the edge of campus.	Years 3-5	\$\$-\$\$\$	City, Main Street, DBA, and SHSU

Action Team Implementation



downtown strategies

Focus Area 2: Design

Focus Area	Identifier	Strategy	Timeline	Level of Investment	Responsible Party
Design	2.3	Education, training, inspirational mood boards, contests, and incentive programs should be used to encourage downtown merchants to activate their storefronts.	NOW	-	DBA
Design	2.3	Downtown restaurants should be encouraged and incentivized to add outdoor dining areas to downtown sidewalks.	NOW	-	Main Street
Design	2.3	As the Crepe Myrtles are replaced due to damage or health, they should be replaced with a more appropriate urban street tree species such as the Lacebark Elm. .	On-going	\$\$	City
Design	2.3	Maintain existing street trees: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Proper pruning and maintenance of the trees to ensure they do not become overgrown or damage the storefronts.</i> • <i>Expand the existing growing wells by cutting the surrounding concrete to accommodate the growth of the trees.</i> 	On-going	\$	City
Design	2.3	Enhance existing street trees by adding string lights or up lighting to highlight the trees and enliven the nighttime environment.	Years 1-3	\$	Main Street
Design	2.4	The City of Huntsville should collaborate with Entergy and Mid-South Synergy to identify incentives, programs, or strategies for enhancing the lighting throughout the downtown core.	Years 1-3	-	City
Design	2.4	Walker County should explore options for adding matching decorative streetlights to the courthouse square.	Years 3-5	\$\$	County
Design	2.4	Merchants should be encouraged to leave their storefront window display lights on to spill ambient lighting onto the sidewalk and add nighttime vibrancy	NOW	-	DBA
Design	2.4	Merchants should be encouraged to enhance their facades to include lighting for their signs, entries, and storefront displays.	Years 1-3	-	Main Street & DBA
Design	2.4	Huntsville should pursue some type of downtown string lighting project (overhead, rooftop, courthouse, etc.)	Years 1-3	\$\$	City, Main Street, DBA, & County



downtown strategies

FOCUS AREA 3

Tourism & Promotion

Smart promotion initiatives position your Downtown or commercial district as the center of the community and hub of economic activity, while creating a positive image that showcases a community's unique characteristics.

FOCUS AREA 3

Tourism & Promotion

INTRODUCTION

Tourism and promotion efforts are essential for the vitality and growth of downtown districts, as they draw visitors who boost local economies and help build a sense of community. A well-planned mix of large-scale festivals and smaller, more frequent promotions creates a dynamic environment that appeals to a broad audience. Large events generate significant foot traffic, drawing people from surrounding areas and providing an opportunity for merchants to showcase their products and services. Smaller-scale activities, such as themed shopping nights, pop-up markets, or open houses, sustain engagement by offering more personalized and intimate experiences on a regular basis. Together, these efforts create a lively atmosphere that encourages visitors to return, fostering a strong connection between customers and the downtown businesses they support.

Current trends in retail and the economy emphasize the importance of delivering memorable experiences, whether through innovative storefronts, unique dining options, or the overall ambiance of a downtown district. Consumers are increasingly seeking destinations where they can do more than just shop or dine. They want to explore, connect, and immerse themselves in vibrant settings through unique and authentic experiences. Downtown tourism strategies should align with these expectations by offering cohesive, engaging experiences that blend retail, entertainment, and culture. By focusing on these experiential elements, promotion efforts not only support local businesses but also strengthen the identity of the district, making it a go-to destination for both residents and tourists.



Create a Brand

Focus Area 3: Tourism & Promotion

Strategy (3.1)

Creating a strong brand is a crucial component of any organization or business. Although it is often overlooked, it is also important for communities to have a strong brand that captures the unique qualities and character of the place. Oftentimes cities rely on the official seal or a basic wordmark as the primary logo and do not understand the important role those graphics play in promoting the overall community.

City seals are appropriate for internal communication and official governmental business; however, they are not appropriate for external communication and marketing efforts. Universities are great examples of the different applications of an internal brand and an external brand. Universities often use seals for official documents, diplomas, formal communications, etc. However, that is not the graphic that is seen on merchandise, flags, and marketing material. Universities develop a strong external brand that is used to promote the organization to an external audience. That brand is used on everything from t-shirts and flags to advertisements and gear for their athletic teams. Communities should function in a similar manner with a strong external brand and logo to promote the quality of life, events, and character of the community.

In Huntsville

College towns face unique challenges of establishing a unique identity while building a cohesive brand alongside the local university. The community can have an established, stand-alone brand. It does not have to be submissive to the university brand. However, the two brands should work well together and complement each other.

Huntsville should **hire a qualified graphic designer who specializes in community branding to create a logo and brand package to highlight the community and Downtown Huntsville.** The package should identify strategies for promotions, storytelling, and marketing efforts to a local, regional, and tourism audience. The package should also generate concepts for brand extension material such as custom streetlight banners, public art, signage, etc. The Huntsville brand should capture the historic nature of the community but present a message that is applicable to the modern economic climate.



University seal (internal)



University logo (external)

Create a Brand

Focus Area 3: Tourism & Promotion

Case Study

Stephenville, Texas is home to a tremendous number of unique assets. It is home to the Rodeo Walk of Fame, it claims to be the Cowboy Capital of the World, has an active downtown square, beautiful brick streets, and is home to Tarleton State University (TSU).

While community leaders appreciated the importance of these assets, they realized that they were not fully capitalizing on them and that they were not adequately telling the unique story of their community. The city logo was a basic wordmark that had been copied from a consultant report years previously. Through their partnership with Downtown Strategies, Stephenville was connected to a premier community marketing and branding firm and trusted partner Arnett Muldrow and Associates.

Arnett Muldrow partnered with Stephenville to develop a custom brand package that captured the unique assets, stories, and character of the community. The updated brand gave them a suite of material to use for promotions and physical enhancements to better market the community as a destination. It also allowed them to better connect with TSU students and campus visitors.

Learn More

[Arnett Muldrow and Associates](#)



Former logo



Updated logo



Small-scale Promotions

Focus Area 3: Tourism & Promotion

Strategy (3.2)

In simple terms, tourism involves connecting visitors with retailers and restaurants. This can take place through large community-wide events and festivals or small-scale retail promotional events such as wine tastings or farm-to-table dinners. Rather than large events and festivals that require extensive planning and resources, the largest return on investment can often come from simple but targeted promotional events. The key is to find any simple or sometimes silly reason to invite people downtown. Coordinating with retailers and restaurants to create an experience for customers can drive activity into the downtown area and have a financial impact the businesses.

Small-scale promotions can be focused on anything. The sillier the better in most cases. Simply give people a reason to come downtown and visit a local retailer or restaurant.

Social media opens the door to free and inexpensive outlets for promoting events, stories, businesses, etc. Using this tool to tell your target audience about your businesses, downtown activities, improvement projects, etc. is key to communicating a positive message about the downtown area and generate a positive perception. Every new business that opens, ribbon cutting event, streetscape improvement project, or other “win” must be promoted on social media under the downtown brand.

In Huntsville

Small-scale promotions are strategic activities designed to intentionally connect a target audience with local businesses. These could include promotions focused on a local audience such as Sip-and-Shops, First Fridays, Art Crawls, Ladies Shopping Nights, or seasonal open houses. Small scale promotions could be organized around an interactive activity such as a scavenger hunt, Bingo game, or “passport” program. Some could be targeted toward the SHSU audience with promotions organized around high traffic events. Some communities find any excuse to connect visitors with downtown merchants by using quirky holidays like National Coffee Day, National Selfie Day, and other silly occasions.

The Downtown Business Association (DBA), Main Street Huntsville, Visit Huntsville, and others host regular events, festivals, and promotions within the community. [Downtown Huntsville should continue expanding the slate of regular small-scale promotions into the regular scope of work for downtown activities.](#) A combination of university-focused and locally focused promotions should be included.



Small-scale Promotions

Focus Area 3: Tourism & Promotion

Strategy (3.2) continued

In Huntsville

University focused events should include promotions designed to connect students, family members, and fans of SHSU with the downtown core such as:

Bearkat Brunch & Browse: This extended hours campaign should be hosted during high traffic weekends for SHSU. Downtown merchants should commit to coordinated, extended hours on the days of key SHSU events. Special discounts and special menu items could be offered by the merchants, storefronts should be decorated, sidewalks should be activated, and a coordinated promotion via social media and traditional outlets should be launched. For example, Starkville, Mississippi, began hosting Bulldog Brunch & Browse on the Sundays following home football games at Mississippi State University. What began as a pilot event in 2011, has grown into a way of life in Downtown Starkville with merchants remaining open on Sunday afternoons and restaurants offering a brunch menu. Sundays remain one of the most profitable days for downtown merchants whereas prior to Bulldog Brunch & Browse most of them were closed.

Packaged Experience: Downtown Huntsville should provide experiences that complement high traffic university events rather than compete with them. Offer add-on experiences that enhance the visitor experience and connect them to downtown merchants during their time in Huntsville. The goal should be to create an extended day experience. For example, SHSU football games attract thousands of visitors onto campus on Saturdays in the fall. Efforts should be made to connect those visitors to Downtown Huntsville, ideally on Friday and Sunday to create a weekend experience. This could include creating a simple Friday night activity like a sip-and-shop or open house prior to a Saturday SHSU football game. The Bearkat Brunch & Browse promotion encourages visitors to enjoy everything the community has to offer for a few hours on Sunday prior to departing. Create promotional materials to show visitors how to experience the community during their visit. Creating a packaged experience will better connect to visitors, encourage multi-day stays, and economically impact the merchants.

Locally focused events should include promotions designed to connect local residents and regional visitors with the downtown core such as:

Seasonal Open House Events: Open houses are easy to organize and can generate a significant economic impact on downtown merchants. Open houses are extended hour promotions where downtown merchants and restaurants have coordinated hours, often extended past regular operating hours; offer merchandise relevant to the seasonal theme; and decorate their storefronts and displays with seasonally themed decorations.

Open houses can be organized around traditional seasons (Spring Open House, Summer Open House, etc.); traditional holidays (Christmas Open House, Halloween Open House, etc.); or non-traditional events and seasons (Valentine's Day, Back to School, Summer Break, etc.).

Regular Sip-and-Shop Events: The existing "Wine Down Whiskey Up" event is an excellent example of a ticketed sip-and-shop event. These types of events are easily promoted, generate revenue for the lead organization, and generate an economic impact on participating businesses. These events should continue and eventually expanded to at least 4 times per year (once per season).

Small-scale Promotions

Focus Area 3: Tourism & Promotion

Case Studies

Braselton, Georgia offers an extensive calendar of retail and restaurant promotions. The fun and creative promotions are designed to intentionally connect customers with businesses in the downtown area. "Explore Braselton" finds any excuse to celebrate and invite visitors downtown. Promotions such as St. Patrick's Day's "Paddy's Day," Wine Walk, ArtRageous, Wine Hop, Bonbon Trail, Cravin' Bacon Walk, and Zombie 5K Run offer creative, fun activities for visitors.

Starkville, Mississippi utilizes social media to constantly highlight reasons to visit Downtown Starkville. Managed by the Greater Starkville Development Partnership (GSDP), the "Starkville: Mississippi's College Town" brand actively promotes shopping and dining opportunities through constant social media activity. Whether it is a major holiday like Valentine's Day and Mother's Day, a quirky holiday like National Selfie Day, or a seasonal occasion like graduation, Starkville is constantly reminding residents and visitors that the community is vibrant and worth visiting.

They also organize fundraising events that only require some coordination and promotion but generate funds for the organization. One creative event was their "Cash Cal" promotion. "Cal" was a life-sized,posable skeleton that made his appearance at the beginning of October to kick off the Halloween season. The Main Street Association created a program where downtown businesses could host a day with Cal for a \$100 sponsorship. As part of their day, the business would use Cal to showcase their business through funny and creative photographs. In addition to the business promoting the quirky activity on their social media outlets, the Starkville: Mississippi's College Town account shared posts and promoted Cal's shenanigans throughout the day. It became a fun way to promote downtown merchants and provided important marketing for the participating merchants. The event was wildly successful and attracted over 20 sponsoring businesses which raised over \$2,000 for the organization.

Learn More

[Explore Braselton - Braselton, Georgia](#)



Small-scale Promotions

Focus Area 3: Tourism & Promotion



SEASONAL

- Seasonal Open House Events (Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter)
- Holiday Open House Events (Christmas Open House, Halloween Open House, etc.)
- Holiday Promotions (Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, Fourth of July, St. Patrick's Day, Black Friday, etc.)
- Themed Promotions: Back to School, Homecoming, Summer Kick-off, Football season, Prom, etc.



QUIRKY

- Quirky Holiday Promotions (National Coffee Day, National Margarita Day, National High Five Day, etc.)
- Super Bowl Weekend
- Scavenger Hunt
- Happy Hour dining and shopping event
- Trivia Night



REGULAR

- Wine Tasting Events
- Ladies Night Out
- First Fridays
- Craft Beer Tastings
- Market on Main
- Arts Festivals
- Concerts/Live Music



STORYTELLING

- New Business Ribbon Cutting Ceremonies
- "Humans of New York"-style storytelling campaigns
- Videos and interviews with downtown merchants and local heroes

Targeted Nightlife Event

Focus Area 3: Tourism & Promotion

Strategy (3.3)

In Huntsville

Downtown Huntsville has a burgeoning nightlife scene through activities at anchors such as the Old Town Theatre, The Vintage, The Café Texan, and others. Although some nights can be active when multiple events occur simultaneously, there is a tremendous desire locally to expand nightlife offerings to occur on a more regular basis.

Some common hurdles that were identified included the lack of adequate lighting throughout the downtown core; lack of public parking near nighttime destinations; lack of coordination between downtown anchors; and the need for more programmed nighttime activities. **Planning promotions specifically focused on creating a vibrant nightlife should be a short-term priority.** Some efforts could include small scale promotions specifically targeted on nighttime festivities and others could include events that bring after-hours activity into the downtown core.

After Hours Promotions: Using the Small-scale Promotions strategy as inspiration, some promotions could be created to specifically drive after-hours activity. These could include promotions such as a Happy Hour, Open Late, After Dark, Trivia Night, Under the Stars, or other activity. The Downtown Merchants Association in Snyder, Texas, hosted "Downtown Snyder Nights" on a regular basis. These extended hours shopping promotions were organized and promoted by downtown merchants, which included branded maps, discounts, and social media promotions. Starkville, Mississippi, hosted an "Open Late Till 8" promotion during the start of the fall school semester as a way to attract a younger audience into downtown.

Night Market: Vendor markets are a common type of downtown event. Art, craft, and food vendors set up vendor tents/booths along downtown streets in a street fair style event. A slight twist on this type of event can create a unique experience for visitors. Hosting a "Night Market" event would create a special nighttime atmosphere and a unique shopping experience. Vendors for this event should be high quality artisans or retail vendors (not flea market or reproduction vendors). Local retailers could also participate as vendors if their merchandise meets the style of the event. The vendor tents could be wrapped with string lights or overhead string lights could be temporarily installed over the street. Chinese lanterns or other details can be used to further enhance the ambiance. The details included for this event should invoke a high-quality style that is different from other festivals and events. Wine tastings, live music, craft beer, and other amenities can also be added to enhance the atmosphere.



Campus Connections: Programmatic

Focus Area 3: Tourism & Promotion

Strategy (3.4)

Programmatic Connections

While it is important to physically and visually connect downtown and campus*, it is also critical to connect the two through events, promotions, activities, and other programmatic initiatives focused on creating quality experiences for visitors. Students, fans, visitors, and faculty should be constantly invited to visit the downtown core. This is not intended to exclude local citizens they will also enjoy the activities. This is an effort to intentionally extend invitations to SHSU stakeholders and ensure they feel welcomed.

Programmatic connections could include hosting a Back-to-School Block Party to welcome students back in the fall; organizing a Homecoming parade from downtown to campus; hosting pep rallies downtown; or other creative activities. Current efforts include programs that are distributed on campus include information about downtown shopping and dining options. During high traffic weekends, businesses share orange-colored snacks to customers, which is an excellent example of creating a strong town/gown experience.

Some communities have partnered with various university departments to organize events like live music nights or art walks showcasing student talent. Portales, New Mexico, engaged art students from Eastern New Mexico University to install seasonally themed paintings on storefront windows. Students and merchants could collaborate on a fashion show event with students modeling clothing and merchandise from downtown retailers. Starkville, Mississippi, partnered with the Mississippi State University Fashion Board (student club) to host a downtown fashion show that attracted friends, family, and visitors to support the “models.” They also partnered together during the downtown fall festival as the students served as live models and creepy mannequins in storefront windows during the event.

Programmatic connections do not have to be events and festivals that require extensive planning and resources. They can also be simple **small-scale promotions** (outlined in more detail in the *Tourism & Promotion Focus Area*) that simply require some coordination with the downtown merchants and social media promotion. The city’s comprehensive plan refers to these as “micro-events.” These could include downtown Happy Hours, late night shopping or extended hour shopping events. College towns have also hosted trivia nights, scavenger hunts, and game nights as simple strategies to connect students with downtown.

**Physical and Visual connection strategies are outlined in the Design focus area.*



Campus Connections: Programmatic

Focus Area 3: Tourism & Promotion Strategy (3.4)

Programmatic Connections (continued)

The ½-mile distance between the courthouse square and the SHSU campus provides tremendous opportunities for student-focused events. A 1-mile fun run starting at campus, traveling along University Avenue to downtown, and back to campus is an easy event for most students. Activities, food trucks, promotions, live music, or other festivities could be used to entertain students while downtown before they return to campus. For example, cities have hosted “Witches Rides” where participants dress as witches and ride bicycles along a designated route, or a “Zombie Walk” where attendees dress as zombies and do their best zombie walk along the route. The “Tripod Trot” could be launched as a way to connect the history of the university into a fun event connecting campus with downtown. These can easily be used as a shopping and dining promotion which are fun for students and locals.

Community leaders should also collaborate with SHSU representatives to brainstorm potential opportunities for creating a new town-gown tradition or strategies for getting capitalizing on existing traditions such as the “March to the Grave” and “Baptized a Texan” events. Again, using the ½-mile distance as an asset. For example, Pikeville, Kentucky, home to the University of Pikeville (UPike) has a long-standing tradition for incoming freshmen. The UPike campus is located directly adjacent to Downtown Pikeville, but the topography of the area is challenging. The transition between downtown to campus is connected with 99-steps up to the campus entrance referred to as “The 99.” Each fall before classes begin, incoming freshmen travel up “The 99” during a tradition known as “The Climb.” This tradition immediately connects new students with the historic downtown in a creative way. A similar tradition could be incorporated into Bearkat Camp.



Action Team Implementation



downtown strategies

Focus Area 3: Tourism & Promotion

Focus Area	Identifier	Strategy	Timeline	Level of Investment	Responsible Party
Tourism & Promotion	3.1	Hire a qualified graphic designer who specializes in community branding to create a logo and brand package for the community.	Years 1-3	\$\$	Main Street & City
Tourism & Promotion	3.2	Continue expanding the slate of regular small-scale promotions into the regular scope of work for downtown activities. Some should focus on a broad audience and others should specifically target SHSU students, faculty, and visitors.	NOW	-	Main Street & DBA
Tourism & Promotion	3.3	Pilot targeted events specifically focused on creating a vibrant nightlife and after-hours experiences.	Years 1-3	\$	Main Street & DBA
Tourism & Promotion	3.4	Small-scale promotions ("micro-events") specifically focused on connecting downtown with SHSU should be incorporated into the regular program of work for Downtown Huntsville.	On-going	-	Main Street & DBA
Tourism & Promotion	3.4	Community leaders should collaborate with SHSU representatives to brainstorm potential opportunities for creating a new town-gown tradition to link downtown with campus.	Years 1-3	-	Main Street, DBA, and SHSU



downtown strategies

FOCUS AREA 4

Economic Vitality

Economic Vitality focuses on capital, incentives, and other economic and financial tools to assist new and existing businesses, catalyze property development, and create a supportive environment for entrepreneurs and innovators that drive local economies.

City-owned Commercial Property

Focus Area 4: Economic Vitality

Strategy (4.1)

Many cities are repurposing old municipal buildings for economic development by issuing Requests for Proposals (RFPs) to developers. This process allows cities to attract private investment while preserving historic structures, transforming them into vibrant spaces for mixed-use developments, commercial properties, or cultural centers. By leveraging these sites, cities can revitalize underutilized areas, create jobs, and contribute to the local economy.

In Huntsville

City of Huntsville staff moved into the former Police building at 1221 10th Street in January 2023 to prepare for the demolition of the old City Hall and construction of a new one on the same site. In November 2024, the construction progress was at approximately 65%. Once the new building is complete and staff moves into the new space, the former Police building will be vacated providing a real estate opportunity.

Real Estate Strategy

In Texas, cities often repurpose historic municipal buildings for economic development by issuing Requests for Proposals (RFPs) to attract developers. This process typically involves:

- **Issuing an RFP:** The city releases a detailed RFP outlining the project's scope, objectives, and submission requirements.
- **Developer Proposals:** Interested developers submit proposals demonstrating their qualifications, project plans, and financial strategies.
- **Evaluation & Selection:** A committee reviews submissions based on criteria such as feasibility, design quality, and economic impact.

This structured approach enables cities to capitalize on key real estate, stimulate economic growth, and enhance community engagement. The City of Huntsville should consider issuing an RFP for the 10th Street Police building to the development community to see what types of proposals and ideas are submitted. The City should entertain providing the asset to the chosen developer as a development incentive if the developer commits to key strategic concepts in their proposal, such as a mix of uses, residential units, etc.



Business Recruitment Packet

Focus Area 4: Economic Vitality

Strategy (4.2)

Almost every downtown desires to have more retailers, restaurants, and other businesses. Ideally this growth would happen organically as the perception and reputation of the downtown shifts to become a destination. Building a strong sense of place within the downtown is important. The downtown should be clean, inviting, safe, and attractive. The properties and buildings should be well maintained and ready for tenants. The area should be active and frequently used for events. While all of these elements are important pieces of the puzzle, communities can also take an active role in recruiting businesses to the downtown.

Many communities have successfully targeted specific businesses in nearby cities or regions and recruited them. This could be a relocation, convincing the business to open a second location, or convincing them to open another concept in the new community. Successfully pitching the community to this business requires a structured and organized presentation of data and real estate details.

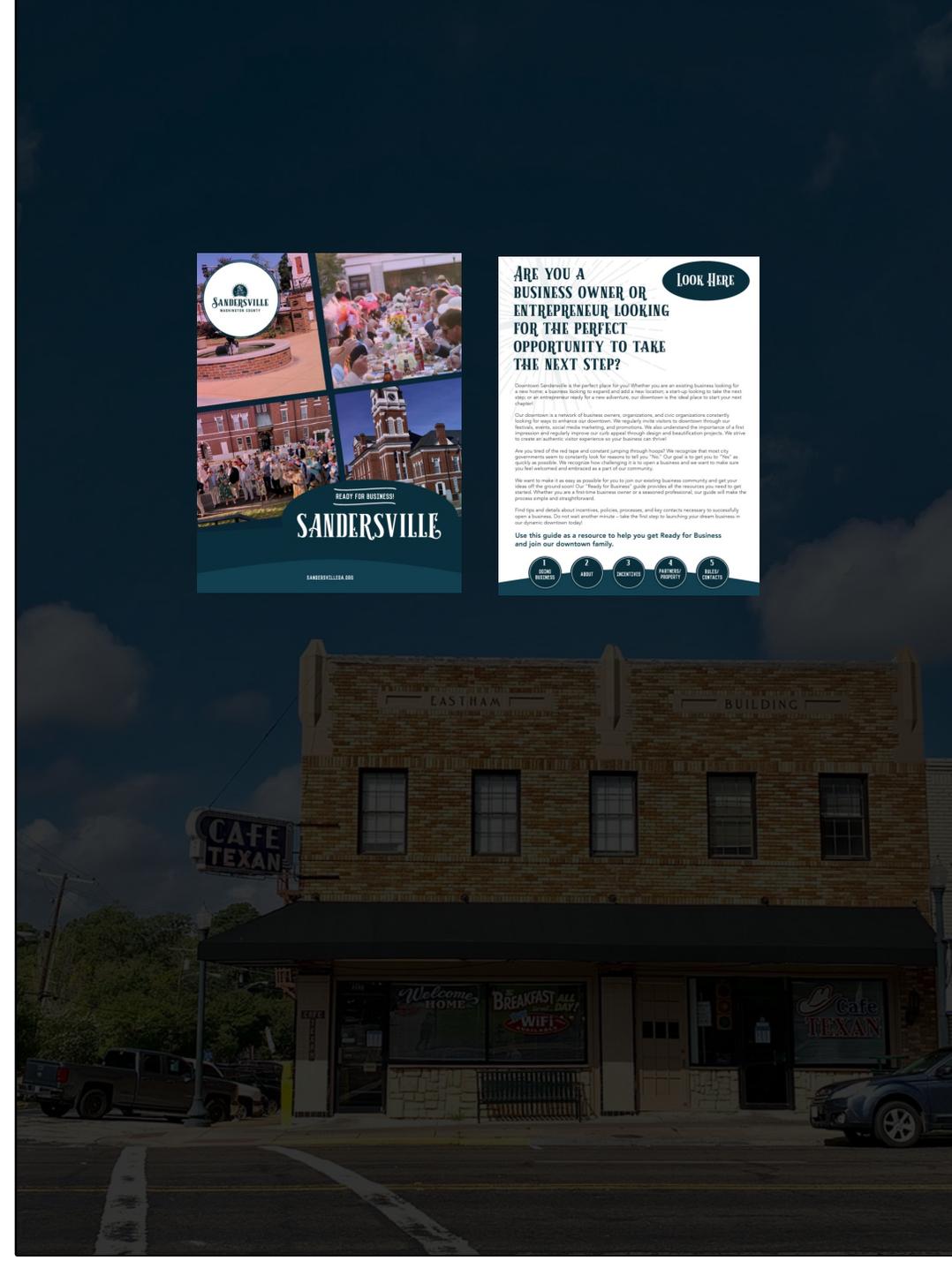
A Business Recruitment Packet contains information relevant to recruiting a potential business in an easy-to-follow format. The packet should include:

- **Market analysis data summary**
- **Map of the downtown district**
- **List of available properties with real estate information**
- **Guide to necessary approval processes**
- **Guide to available incentives and programs**
- **Point of contact information**

In Huntsville

In Huntsville, the Business Recruitment Packet should include any focus properties, key elements of the market analysis from this plan, incentives available, and contact information for the City and Main Street to ensure that no balls are dropped.

If desired, Downtown Strategies can create this Business Improvement Packet for Huntsville through our Implementation partnership for quick implementation.



There's Opportunity Here

Focus Area 4: Economic Vitality

Strategy (4.3)

Vacant buildings and storefronts are common in many Downtowns throughout the country, but when there are more vacancies than activated retail and restaurant spaces, a constant row of "for rent" and "for sale" signs can give the impression of blight. Take control of this perception by providing property owners with printed signs showcasing opportunity rather than vacancy. Make sure these signs are especially displayed during Downtown events and when there's high activity so that tourists and potential investors can take note of the prospect.

In Huntsville

- Send letters or make personal contact with property owners and ask for plans and intentions for these downtown buildings.
- Assemble an inventory of available commercial property downtown and include specifications such as square footage, year building was constructed, purchase or lease terms, and photos and post online. Main Street doesn't need to act as a real estate agent, but rather a conduit and central clearing house of information. Provide contact information for building owner or leasing agent and make the connections necessary to jump start future development.
- Collaborate with real estate professionals so they understand Main Street's intention as a clearinghouse and liaison.
- Design and print window cling signs with a QR code to the City's inventory website and ask property owners of available properties to install these signs.
- Monitor the traffic via the QR code analytics to determine level of interest and continue to promote an opportunity-based vision for downtown.



Google Business Profile

Focus Area 4: Economic Vitality

Strategy (4.4)

Having a current Google Business Profile is essential for a local mom-and-pop business because it enhances visibility and credibility in an increasingly digital marketplace. This profile allows businesses to appear in local search results and Google Maps, making it easier for potential customers to find essential information such as operating hours, location, contact details, and services offered. An updated profile can significantly influence customer decisions, as it provides an opportunity to showcase positive reviews and high-quality photos, helping to build trust and attract new clientele. Google Business Profile can differentiate a local business and contribute to sustained growth and customer loyalty in the following ways:

Increased Visibility: Businesses with a complete Google Business Profile are 70% more likely to attract local visits compared to those without.

Customer Engagement: About 56% of consumers who find a local business through Google search are likely to visit the business within a day.

Call to Action: Listings that include a phone number can see up to a 25% increase in call volume, as consumers prefer to connect directly for inquiries.

Positive Impact of Reviews: Approximately 84% of consumers trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations. A high number of positive reviews can significantly boost conversion rates.

Enhanced Local Search Rankings: Businesses with optimized profiles can rank higher in local search results, driving more traffic. Listings that rank in the top three local search results can account for 30% of click-through rates.

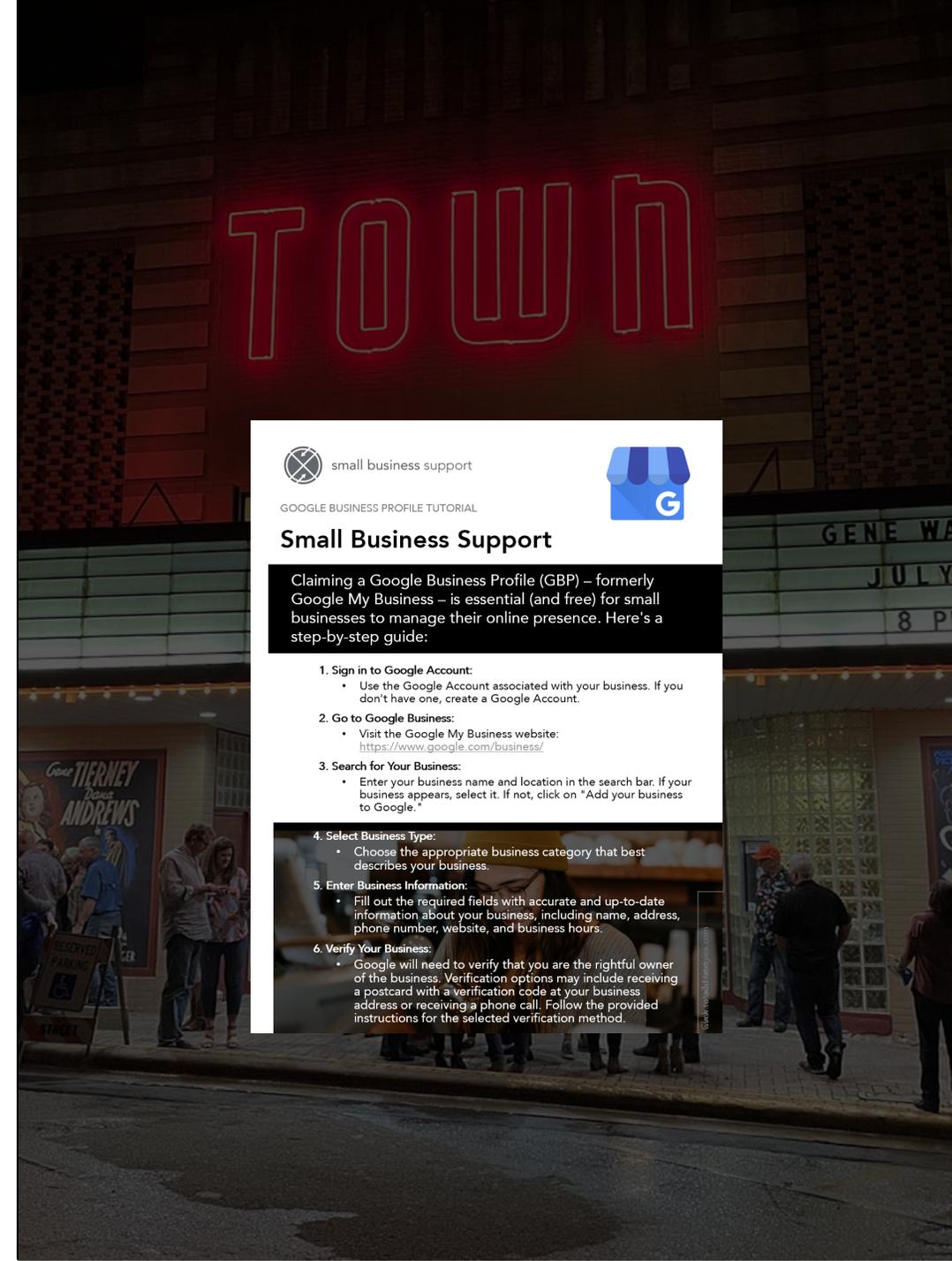
Click-Through Rate (CTR): Listings with photos receive 42% more requests for directions and 35% more click-throughs to their websites compared to those without images.

Conversions from Posts: Businesses that regularly post updates on their Google Business Profile can see up to a 10% increase in engagement from potential customers.

User Intent: Around 78% of mobile local searches result in an offline purchase, indicating that a strong online presence directly influences consumer behavior.

In Huntsville

Share the Google Business Profile guide, provided by Downtown Strategies as a supplement to this Action Plan, with downtown business owners at a Main Street monthly merchant meeting. Encourage businesses to claim their presence on Google and update their own Google Business Profile.



Apple Pay & Bearkat Bucks

Focus Area 4: Economic Vitality

Strategy (4.5)

As mobile payments become increasingly popular, customers expect seamless, contactless options that streamline transactions and reduce wait times. By modernizing their point-of-sale systems to include Apple Pay, local businesses can attract a tech-savvy clientele, improve customer satisfaction, and ultimately increase transaction volumes. Several studies and statistics indicate that offering Apple Pay can lead to increased transactions and higher customer engagement. Here are some key statistics related to the impact of accepting Apple Pay on consumer transactions:

Higher Average Transaction Values: A study by Adobe Analytics found that mobile wallet users, including those using Apple Pay, spend approximately \$100 more per transaction than non-mobile wallet users.

Increased Purchase Frequency: According to a report from PYMNTS, nearly 55% of consumers stated they would shop more frequently at retailers that accept mobile wallets like Apple Pay.

Faster Checkout Process: A survey conducted by Square revealed that businesses that accepted Apple Pay saw a 30% faster checkout process, which can lead to more transactions being completed in a shorter amount of time.

Consumer Preference: Research by Curalate indicated that 62% of consumers reported that the ability to use mobile payments like Apple Pay makes them more likely to shop at a store. This preference can directly correlate to increased foot traffic and sales.

Rising Adoption Rates: As of 2021, Apple Pay was accepted by 87% of retailers in the U.S. that have contactless payment capabilities, showcasing the increasing consumer demand for mobile payment options. This broad acceptance often leads to higher transaction volumes.

Enhanced Customer Experience: A study by Adyen noted that businesses offering mobile payment solutions like Apple Pay experienced a 10% increase in customer satisfaction, which can lead to repeat business and higher overall sales.



In Huntsville

Share these statistics with downtown merchants at a monthly Main Street meeting. Encourage retailers to adopt mobile payment such as Apple Pay.

Businesses that move towards these more modernized payment options should promote this by placing decals in their windows and sharing these options on their social media pages.

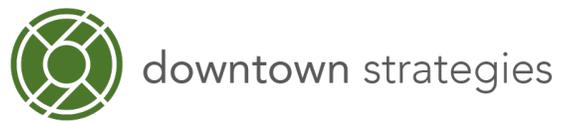
Action Team Implementation



downtown strategies

Focus Area 4: Economic Vitality

Focus Area	Identifier	Strategy	Timeline	Level of Investment	Responsible Party
Economic Vitality	4.1	The City of Huntsville should consider issuing an RFP for the 10 th Street Police building to the development community to see what types of proposals and ideas are submitted. The City should entertain providing the asset to the chosen developer as a development incentive if the developer commits to key strategic concepts in their proposal, such as a mix of uses, residential units, etc.	Years 3-5	\$\$\$	City
Economic Vitality	4.2	Create a Business Recruitment Packet and include any focus properties, key elements of the market analysis from this plan, incentives available, and contact information for the City and Main Street.	Years 1-3	\$	City & Main Street
Economic Vitality	4.3	Design and print window cling signs with a QR code to the City's property inventory website and ask property owners of available properties to install these signs.	Years 1-3	\$	Main Street
Economic Vitality	4.4	Share the Google Business Profile guide with downtown business owners at a Main Street monthly merchant meeting. Encourage businesses to claim their presence on Google and update their own Google Business Profile.	NOW	-	Main Street
Economic Vitality	4.5	Share statistics with downtown merchants at a monthly Main Street meeting about the benefits of mobile payment. Encourage retailers to adopt mobile payment such as Apple Pay.	Years 1-3	-	Main Street



downtown strategies