



Resource Team

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Introduction

The Hinesville Resource Team was brought together in December of 2000 through a collaboration between the City of Hinesville, the Georgia Department of Community Affairs and the Georgia Quality Growth Partnership, a statewide coalition of state agencies, universities, non-profits and business groups working to provide technical assistance on “smart growth” issues to Georgia communities. The multi-disciplinary team was made up of academics, professional design practitioners, planners and state agency staff chosen with Hinesville’s particular concerns in mind. The team’s mission was initially defined by the Hinesville Downtown Revitalization Committee, a group previously appointed by the Mayor to make recommendations regarding the downtown and its connections to Ft. Stewart. In addition, the team spent two days in discussions with groups and organizations identified by the city as having insights into local problems and opportunities.

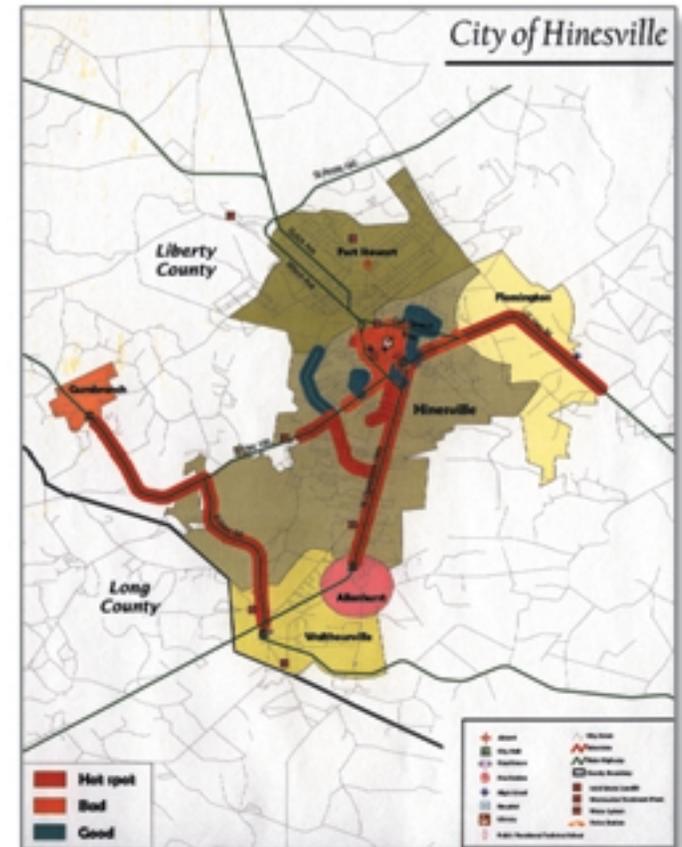
The team visited Hinesville for a week, beginning with a kickoff reception on Monday night and ending with a final presentation to the public on Friday. In the interim, they conducted interviews, took photos, visited specific sites under consideration, reviewed local ordinances and developed schematic design solutions and sketches. The city charged the team not only with generating advice and ideas, but also with preparing an implementation strategy and making recommendations on how to fund major projects. This report contains those recommendations.

This report is organized into sections based on the major issues and opportunities identified by the team during their visit in Hinesville. These include: Economic Impact of Ft. Stewart; Labor Force and Employer Recruitment; Education; Arts and Culture; Downtown Revitalization; Memorial Drive/Liberty Center Axis; Housing; Greenways, Parks and Open Space; Gateways and Corridors; and Revitalizing Intown Neighborhoods.

The report concludes with an Implementation Schedule section that suggests a strategy for carrying out the recommendation from the previous sections.

The Resource Team would like to thank the Mayor, city staff and citizens of Hinesville for making us so welcome and allowing us to learn from studying your city. The ideas and solutions proposed here are only a beginning point — a way to stimulate community interest in sustainable development, good urban design and community self-determination. The Resource Team wishes the City of Hinesville great success in achieving its goals.

Note: All drawings and maps in this report can be found in the appendix at larger scale.



This map was developed by the Hinesville Downtown Redevelopment Committee as background for the Resource Team.

*What we've heard...
community comments
Throughout this report are quotes
in the margins. These come from
interviews the Resource Team
conducted with Hinesville residents.*

Economic Impact of Ft. Stewart



The economic impact of Ft. Stewart on Liberty County and the entire Coastal Georgia region cannot be overstated. Ft. Stewart represents a 1.85 billion-dollar annual economic generator for the state, which should be supported and protected in every way possible. Hinesville's leadership has been encouraged to view downsizing of other military bases under the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process, not as a threat, but as an opportunity for Ft. Stewart to assimilate personnel reassigned from closing bases. However, the factors considered by the military in making BRAC decisions are very much related to assuring quality of life for soldiers and their families. A competitive set of evaluation criteria are used to make military relocation decisions. These include:

- Availability of family housing
- Adequacy of family housing
- Cost of family housing/utilities vs. the Military Basic Allowance for Housing
- Access to health care specialists
- Employment opportunities for spouses
- Quality of primary & secondary schools
- Education opportunities for adults
- Off-base recreation
- Availability of commercial transportation
- Crime statistics
- Average commute distances for off-base personnel
- Access to a metro center
- Child care availability/cost
- Community demography as it relates to recruiting a civilian workforce
- Ability to support growth in the community if the installation receives new missions or units

The recommendations throughout this report are consistent with and designed to improve Hinesville's ranking in these areas.

Several initiatives to improve coordination between Ft. Stewart and the City of Hinesville on joint economic development and transportation projects are listed below. Other recommendations related to Ft. Stewart can be found in the Housing and Memorial Drive/Liberty Center Axis sections.

"Hinesville folks are very hospitable. You don't see the kind of segmentation that occurs in some military towns. Local governments communicate well with post planners."

Recommendations

- Establish a local joint military – civilian – civil service focus group to support the work of the Georgia Military Affairs Coordinating Committee (GMACC) and its local members by:
 - Reviewing and commenting on GMACC’s internal BRAC criteria;
 - Grading of Ft. Stewart/Hunter under GMACC’s internal BRAC criteria;
 - Developing an action plan for correcting any deficiencies of Ft. Stewart/Hunter reflected by the grading; and
 - Supporting FY2001 state budget request of GMACC and Governor Barnes.
- Continue efforts of present local partnership on Wright Army Airfield with the following 2001 goals:
 - Execution of Memorandum of Understanding, with appropriate publicity;
 - Completion of Airport Layout Plan and related engineering and planning supported by \$225k± state funding from FY2000 and local match of \$110k±;
 - Liquidation of existing Liberty County Airport facility;
 - Obtaining FY2001 state funds to support construction per the Airport Layout Plan;
 - Completion of definitive lease agreement(s) with Department of Defense;
 - Completion of definitive plans/specifications – letting of contract; and
 - Ground breaking for airport improvements
- Establish an approach to coordinate planning for the future between the military and civilian communities in such areas as transportation, drainage, etc.
- Coordinate support for Bosnia/Kosovo deployments by both civilian and military through existing groups.





Labor Force and Employer Recruitment

The economic benefits of Ft. Stewart being acknowledged, Hinesville is much too reliant on the military as its only industry. Development Authority interviews indicated that existing industrial park space is limited. In addition to suitable locations, a well-trained labor force is also required to attract large employers. There is a perceived lack of employment opportunities in Hinesville, and there appears to be a relatively untapped labor force in the spouses of military personnel. Many of these individuals are well educated and have computer or other technical skills greater than those of native populations in surrounding counties. There is concern that employers would not locate in Hinesville based on a labor force of military spouses that may be transferred after two or three years.

For businesses and industries that must invest considerable time training their employees, this is considered to be a problem—the costs may be too high for a temporary labor solution. However, it may be possible for the city to recruit “back office” businesses, which need workers with basic computer skills, but have a very short industry-specific learning curve. The state offers Quick Start Programs that could be used to do rapid orientation for workers of major employers.

Among Hinesville assets, there are military retirees in the area that are welcome in the labor force — in fact, their past training and discipline make them a highly desirable work force. These retirees also have many of the skills needed to operate small businesses. To the extent that the community can encourage entrepreneurial ventures by retired or retiring military personnel they will be enriching the local area’s economy.

Recommendations

- Analyze the types of enterprises that might fit effectively into the local economy.
- Recruit some corporate “back office” enterprises that have short up-front learning curves suitable to military spouse workers.
- Investigate the Quick Start Programs offered by the Department of Technical and Adult Education.
- Hold University of Georgia Small Business Development Center sponsored entrepreneurial training sessions to encourage retiring military personnel to start their own businesses.
- Consider creating a buffered campus-like high-tech industrial or office park facility along the new bypass as an alternative to regular strip commercial.

“Our unemployment rate here is around 7%. More military spouses would be working if they had a transit system to get them to work.”



“Moneyed folks own everything. We need help for ordinary folks to go into business.”

Education

The real and perceived quality of Hinesville's educational system is related to many of the city's broader goals including attracting business and industry, intown revitalization, stimulating off-post housing and encouraging expansion of the base population. Some military families send their high school students to school in Richmond Hill, which is perceived as a better academic environment. The city and county recognize the need to counter this trend.

Although school policy is in the hands of the School Board and not the city government, focused discussions between the two groups might prove productive.

Recommendations

- Hold a brainstorming session with the School Board to look for areas of mutual cooperation and support.
- Make transportation from Ft. Stewart to the high school easier (See the Memorial Drive Trolley proposal).
- Discuss the idea of a "magnet school" approach with the School Board to offer classes not available in other area schools.
- Create community-focused extracurricular programs for students.
- Encourage Liberty Center to admit high school students in its gifted programs. (Students with acceptable grades could receive dual high school/college credits by attending classes at Liberty Center during their senior year of high school.)
- Use the Georgia Department of Education's "School Report Card" to realistically evaluate the perception that Hinesville's schools are secondary to Richmond Hill's.



"Our schools provide a great sense of home and community but we need someone to tell our story to all the parents before they move to Richmond Hill."



Arts and Culture

No community can make a positive impression on quality employers or attract residents with strong community values without supporting the arts and cultural activities. The city has expressed interest in expanding public/private support for the arts and creating local arts institutions, events and opportunities that will make Hinesville a richer, more exciting place to live.

Many military and longtime Hinesville residents have talents that could be put to use in community theater, orchestras, dance troupes, etc. Military spouses, teens and children might make good use of an arts center where they could learn to make pottery, paint pictures, or pursue photography. The creation of a community center facility for the arts is discussed in the Memorial Drive/Liberty Center Axis section of this report.



Recommendations

- Create a city/county task force on the arts (composed of educators, local librarians, the city/county recreation department, historic preservation groups, Ft. Stewart representatives and other civic groups) to develop recommendations on facility needs, programming, local organizational structure and ongoing funding to support the arts.
- Create a teen center where youth could gather after school, pursue interesting social and recreational activities in a safe, stimulating environment. The old Wal-Mart shopping center might be redeveloped with a bowling alley, skating rink, video game parlor or similar activities that appeal to teens.



“We’ve lost companies because of our image. CEO’s wives just didn’t want to live here.”

“All of the amenities are at Ft. Stewart — need something for our teenagers to do besides get in trouble.”

“We have a lot of history here we are not capitalizing on; we could have more tourism.”

Downtown Revitalization

Downtown Hinesville is not living up to its full potential as an activity center and focal point for the community. Military personnel point out that even enlisted soldiers have traveled the world and would be likely to patronize a more pedestrian-oriented downtown with coffee houses, sidewalk cafes and other more urban-feeling amenities, especially if more entertainment and shopping opportunities exist. It is clear that for downtown to become a retail destination for Ft. Stewart and the rest of the community, a larger critical mass of shops and restaurants must be attracted.

However, attracting retailers would require presenting hard market data, since most retailers believe Hinesville is just too close to the Savannah market area to justify additional retail facilities. The comparatively low disposable incomes of residents in Hinesville may be limiting retailers from coming to town. Additionally, the uncertainty with regard to military deployments, which could substantially affect retail sales over an extended period of time, works against the capture of additional retail businesses and restaurants in Hinesville.

It is just as likely that people are going to Savannah to shop due to the lack of particular types of retail facilities in Hinesville. Some people have indicated there is a need for a shopping mall—this perception is due in part to the need for a larger variety retail facilities in the city. Adjacent communities west and southwest of Hinesville could contribute to the Hinesville market area potential. When this larger market area is considered, there should be sufficient population thresholds to support more diversified retail facilities and restaurants in Hinesville, preferably located in the downtown area. Interestingly, many of the existing downtown merchants are not local, but have moved businesses from Savannah. This also supports the contention that local businessmen are underestimating market potential for downtown Hinesville.

Other Observations:

- ◆ Too many downtown buildings are unavailable for viable commercial uses.
- ◆ Building owners have remodeled and refaced building facades in historically inappropriate ways.
- ◆ Closing in of storefront windows is particularly unfriendly to shoppers.
- ◆ There are not enough large street trees downtown to provide shade and canopy.
- ◆ Downtown parking and traffic circulation could be improved.
- ◆ Court functions are running out of office space in the downtown area.
- ◆ The area behind the courthouse complex mixes vehicular and pedestrian uses ineffectively.



“Retailers have two good weekends a month, and two bad weekends a month.”



“In the courthouse they’re scrambling for room — they’re cramped, crowded and security is minimally adequate.”

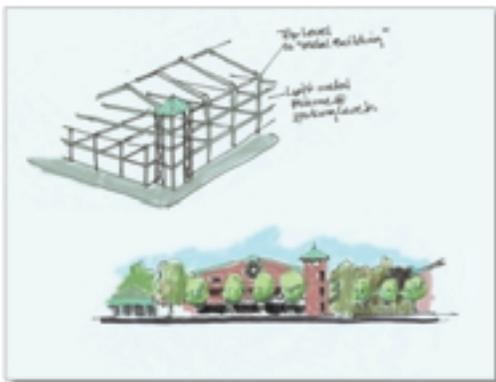


Recommendations

- Promote redevelopment of downtown Hinesville as an active hub of pedestrian activity with interesting shops, restaurants and entertainment options.
- Improve entrances to downtown that increase its visibility and importance in the community. (See the Memorial Drive/Liberty Center Axis section.)
- Establish a façade grant program, and use other financial incentives to encourage revitalization and reuse of previously owned downtown buildings. (For example, attract merchants who fear loss of business during deployments by renting city/county owned buildings with sliding-scale rents that would go down during deployments, thereby reducing costs during these down cycles.)
- Utilize public/private partnerships for remodeling or replacing publicly owned buildings in order to increase availability of viable retail space downtown.
- Commission a “niche market” study to identify the types of businesses that could succeed in the revitalized downtown buildings.
- Enlist the local realtors in implementing a focused retail recruitment strategy.
- Use development regulations and design guidelines to ensure that new downtown development is compatible with the existing historic architecture.
- Complete a parking, circulation and streetscape master plan for downtown that continues brick sidewalks in the manner of the existing streetscape, restores diagonal parking and replaces small crepe myrtles with more substantial shade-producing street trees.
- Create more off-street perimeter parking (heavily buffered and landscaped) and manage city/county employee parking more effectively to leave more spaces free for retail customers. (For example, the records storage parking lot could be assigned parking for merchants and county staff.)
- Encourage the county to remove the gas annex building, plan for a new courthouse annex (built on the front of the existing parking lot so that it creates a terminus for Memorial Drive), and redesign the space gained as a pedestrian-oriented courthouse square and interior shopping block. (See illustration.)
- Support the county in doing a space needs assessment for its courthouse and public offices. The city needs information about the county’s future building needs in order to develop a viable plan for the courthouse area.

“In the early 1980s, downtown was a real downtown. Most all the commercial was concentrated on Main Street, the Courthouse Square, and downtown MLK. The community could draw on this ‘small town’ legacy. The older commercial area has real potential, lying as it does in the ‘arms’ of the Ft. Stewart gateways.”

Redesigning the area south of the courthouse would give citizens a central outdoor space for festivals and civic activities and encourage merchants to move into underutilized storefronts.



"Some of these folks have been around the world and are pretty sophisticated and would love a place to sit outside, have a nice meal, and sip a glass of wine."



“Memorial Drive needs more majesty!”

Memorial Drive/ Liberty Center Axis

The team agreed that the city should place a priority on redeveloping Memorial Drive as a vital, pedestrian friendly connector route between Ft. Stewart, Liberty Center and Downtown Hinesville. This corridor should include medium to high density housing (townhouses facing the street) mixed with neighborhood commercial uses. (See illustration.)

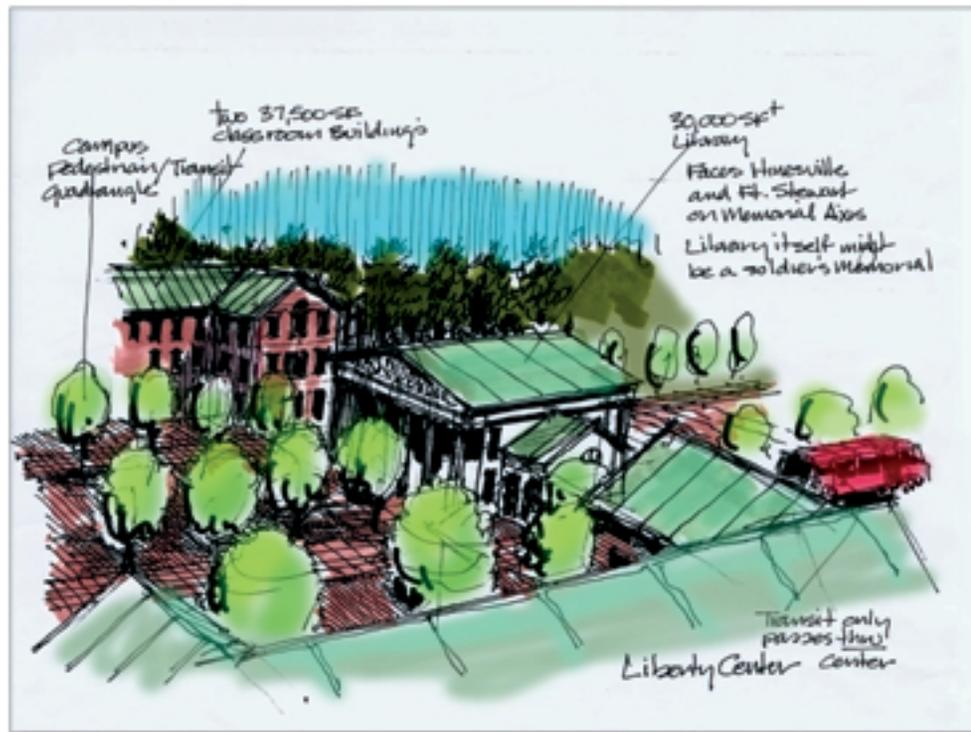
A key concept of the proposed redevelopment approach is to let the market generate the development activities. A combination of public investment in the corridor’s future (Liberty Center, transit, landscaping) and the availability of low-cost housing financing should attract development in pace with market demand. When the value of existing (but marginal) commercial uses falls below the value of surrounding properties, redevelopment will occur as a natural and economically feasible recourse.

Recommendations

- Make Memorial Drive the primary entryway into Downtown from Ft. Stewart, restoring an attractive, civilized entryway into Downtown.
- Develop a public trolley or tram system that would run from the residential areas of Ft. Stewart through Liberty Center to Downtown.
- Close Memorial Drive at Liberty Center and use a traffic circle (with monument) to define the base entry and route through traffic smoothly around the Liberty Center Learning Complex to General Stewart Way and General Screven Way.
- Relocate the proposed Liberty Center buildings so that most sit on the Memorial Drive axis. Make the entire campus pedestrian-only (except for the tram, which would pass through along the Memorial Drive axis), and retain as much parklike open space as possible and providing plenty of perimeter parking.
- Encourage a vital, mixed-use commercial “campus corner” area on Memorial Drive near the Liberty Center to provide student housing and activities to support the complex.
- Convert the existing city library to a community arts center once the library is relocated to the Liberty Center. Use the center for art, drama, music classes and community events.
- Promote a neighborhood commercial node around the community arts center, maintaining existing neighborhood commercial uses (such as the Zippy Mart and the dry cleaners), but also providing incentives for new businesses that support surrounding neighborhoods.
- Encourage redevelopment of the remaining properties along Memorial Drive for medium-to-high density residential uses (consider using the Federal “Dollar Home” program to finance housing redevelopment projects. (See Appendix.)

Recommendations continued

- Establish a uniform maximum setback along Memorial Drive that would bring buildings closer to the street. Require large windows and front porches on residences, courtyards and outdoor seating or other appropriate public spaces in front of commercial buildings to encourage pedestrian interaction. Require parking to be located at the rear or side of buildings.
- Create a green, shady pedestrian-friendly streetscape along Memorial Drive by widening sidewalks, consolidating curb cuts and planting live oaks between existing palm trees (so that in a few years when the palms reach the end of their life cycle, a majestic, shady canopy will be well on its way to maturity).
- Change local development regulations to support the Memorial Drive redevelopment concept (see Appendix for detailed zoning analysis and land use recommendations for the corridor).
- Explore arrangements with Liberty Center to give public housing clients an opportunity for higher education. Since several current housing projects are located near Memorial Drive, the proposed tram system would improve access to these educational facilities.
- Brief the senior command of Ft. Stewart/Hunter on the report and recommendations of this resource team.



Recommendations continued

- Continue present local group's activities involving Liberty Center with the following goals:
 - A briefing of key state legislators on this project.
 - A coordinated effort of civilian groups (university system, local government, schools and GMACC) to develop state budgetary support for existing and future operations;
 - A coordinated effort of civilian groups to bring the project forward in the federal budget; and
 - Integration of this project into the City of Hinesville's redevelopment plans for Memorial Drive.
- Establish a military-civilian-civil service focus group to explore the feasibility of a joint federal, state and local library to be located in the area of Liberty Center, with building to be provided through state and local resources, and with land and operations to be provided by the military.

*"We need gathering places.
This is a community that talks!"*

Property along Memorial Drive is underutilized. Higher density housing is one key to creating vitality around the Liberty Center campus and more market base for downtown Hinesville. A Community Arts Center at the site of the current library would establish an anchor midway down the corridor, serving both the high school and public housing clients.



Housing

Housing is critical to Hinesville's revitalization and economic development prospects. Local realtors identified several positive qualities that help them sell homes: Hinesville is quiet, laid back, and has a friendly atmosphere. The city is a great place to raise children. Another positive factor is that Hinesville does not exhibit the civilian/military friction that exists in most military towns—there is ongoing, collaborative dialogue between Ft. Stewart and city officials.

On the other hand, Hinesville is one of toughest markets on the Georgia coast. The housing market is dominated by the needs of military personnel and their families. There are 8,100 military personnel residing off post, with 80 percent of these living in the Hinesville area. The local single-family housing market is therefore distorted by the influence of military transitional use. The majority of service families may be choosing to live on-base due to limited transportation options, and to be close to schools, the PX and the commissary. In addition, many military personnel have night or irregular shifts. Amenities such as public transportation, 24-hour day care and afterschool activities for older children and teens are clearly needed to attract military families to invest in off-post housing.

Incomes of servicemen and their families are generally quite limited, reportedly less than \$2,000 a month for the lower ranking (E-5 or less) personnel, plus a housing benefit. For personnel who choose to live off base (which significantly reduces the housing allowance they would receive for living on base) affordable housing would be in the price range of \$300-\$600 per month. Mobile homes rent for \$350-\$475, while rental houses rent from \$650-\$750 per month. For military personnel, purchase prices on homes are primarily limited to the \$50,000-\$80,000 range. Given these findings, new housing must be produced to serve this market of military personnel with limited incomes.

There are typically a number of repossessed VA-financed homes on the market at any given time. There seems to be agreement for short-term use of these units as rental housing for military personnel in order to avoid the negative impact of vacant homes on neighborhoods. However, in the long term it would be good to put these units back on the market to provide stable, long-term home ownership opportunities. The target market for these units could be retiring military and the local non-military population.

There is some indication of a preference in the local marketplace for "larger" (i.e., approximately 3/4-acre) lots for detached single-family homes. This preference could work against a small lot infill development strategy, unless new infill housing developments can be designed according to neotraditional design principles with amenities such as pocket parks and located close to the military post or other amenities such as a revitalized downtown area.



"We have 1,400-1,500 military families on the waiting list for on-post housing. If only some of them would move into our in-town neighborhoods and get more interested in the local community."



"V.A. loans are financed at 102% and seller pays closing costs. With every move, you lose."



Recommendations

- Create a Community Development Corporation, Urban Redevelopment Authority, or work within the framework of the Liberty County Development Authority (See Appendix) to coordinate housing development and redevelopment activities including:
 - Owner rehab program,
 - Homeowner education program,
 - VA repossession project,
 - Acquisition (condemnation?)/land banking of slum and blighted properties,
 - Public sector components of creating Memorial Drive student and multifamily housing), and
 - Provision of attractive off-post housing for Ft. Stewart.
- Develop a coordinated strategy to meet short term and longer term Ft. Stewart housing needs, including potential use of VA foreclosures. Establish a joint military-civilian-civil service housing focus group with the following goals:
 - Review and confirmation of Ft. Stewart’s short term and longer term housing needs (January housing study),
 - Review and confirmation of community’s existing housing inventory available and appropriate to meet the Ft. Stewart need, and
 - Ensure that the city’s housing goals and those of Ft. Stewart are in alignment.
- Preserve and encourage rehabilitation of older homes located in intown neighborhoods wherever possible.
- Investigate creation of a National Register Historic District that includes intown residential areas. This would enable property owners to qualify for a 20% federal tax credit for rehabilitation of rental housing in these areas.
- Expand the homeowner rehabilitation program that targets properties with greater than 50 percent physical depreciation. Local banks should be encouraged to contribute to a housing rehabilitation consortium that expands the program with a target of 20 units rehabilitated per year.
- Examine and revise city/county development regulations to encourage new housing developments that follow “traditional neighborhood development” principles.
- Plan and encourage development of new multifamily and student housing in the proposed Memorial Drive redevelopment corridor.
- Identify vacant parcels, severely deteriorated buildings, tax delinquent properties, poorly maintained parcels owned by absentee landlords, poorly platted parcels, substandard mobile home parks, brownfield sites, unbuildable land that might be useful for recreation and other property that might be acquired or assembled as part of a redevelopment and/or land banking strategy.