

Recommendations

“Cities must be talent magnets to succeed in today’s knowledge economy. To succeed, they must attract young mobile professionals who make up the knowledge workforce.”

– *Quote from Technology, Talent and Tolerance: Attracting the Best and Brightest to Memphis, A Report by the Memphis Talent Magnet Project.*

In order to attract the technology and knowledge businesses critical to Warner Robins’ future growth and development, it is critical to understand that “Access to talented and creative people is to modern business what access to coal and iron ore was to steel-making.” according to Dr. Richard Florida, in a new book, The Rise of the Creative Class. This means creating a “people climate” that is every bit as important to cities as the business climate we have focused on so diligently in the past.

“Creating a people climate” relates directly to lifestyle and the quality of place inherent in a city: a thriving street scene; a variety of distinctive neighborhoods and residential options; environmental quality; a visible vibrant city center; interesting building stock; walkability and short, easy commutes; universities and learning opportunities; areas of arts and culture; entertainment venues; social gathering places; restaurants; one-of-a-kind shops; sophisticated personal services; outdoor recreation facilities and environments. “Talented people are attracted to cities with status, amenities, creativity and creative energy, diversity and quality of place.” *Dr. Florida, op cit.*

The Resource Team’s recommendations focus on creating these types of people-attracting amenities that will advance the overall quality of life in Warner Robins while, at the same time, improving its long-term prospects for growth through diversifying its economy and building upon the expanding knowledge and technology needs of Robins Air Force Base.

The team identified several districts or focus areas that offer potential for creative redevelopment in Warner Robins:

- Commercial Circle
- Civic Corridor (City Hall, Macon College, Library)
- First Street
- Village At Town Center (Tech Park)
- North Gate Shopping Center
- Intown Neighborhoods
- Highway Corridors
- Greenspace and Pedestrian/Bikeways

Recommendations for each of these districts or focus areas are discussed in more detail on the following pages.

Recommendations for Short-Term Implementation

The following recommendations apply across all of the above districts or focus areas and should be implemented as soon as possible.

Since Sacred Heart Catholic Church and Macon State College have development plans underway, it is important to sit down with key representatives of these two organizations as soon as possible to discuss how their plans might be adapted to accommodate and complement the proposed College Forest Neighborhood Development plan. (See the Resource Team’s recommended plans for this area in the Intown Neighborhoods section.)

Reassess local development priorities and make decisions on how the community desires to balance new development between intown areas and the West Side of Warner Robins. Perhaps this can best be accomplished through an update of the land use and public facilities elements of the city’s comprehensive plan, undertaken with maximum involvement by all segments of the community. This process should carefully reevaluate the city’s plans for new public facility and infrastructure investments – to avoid favoring growth on the periphery over intown areas of Warner Robins. (See the toolkit topic “Using Public Facilities to Manage Growth” at www.georgiaqualitygrowth.com.)

Establish clear jurisdictional boundaries for the Downtown Development Authority. It is recommended that these boundaries be set to include just the following districts:

- Commercial Circle
- Civic Corridor (City Hall, Macon College, Library)
- First Street
- Village At Town Center (Tech Park)
- North Gate Shopping Center
- College Forest Neighborhood

In the future, once the above districts have been successfully revitalized, the Authority’s boundaries could be amended to take in new intown areas that are in need of revitalization.

Give the Downtown Development Authority clear redevelopment powers consistent with state law (OCGA 36-42 & 36-61). This will empower the Authority to use tools provided in Georgia’s Urban Redevelopment Law for implementing the plans recommended in this report. This law permits use of eminent domain to assemble key parcels and resell these for private development that is consistent with the redevelopment plan for the area. (See the Appendix for a summary of this law.)

In order to allow the Downtown Development Authority to focus its efforts on revitalization of the commercial districts identified above, the City should consider enlisting the local Housing Authority or creating a Community Housing Development Corporation (CHDO) to focus on housing revitalization activities recommended in this report. (See the Intown Neighborhoods section.)

Update the existing Urban Redevelopment Plan for the districts identified above. This update should be prepared with maximum involvement of the general public and key area stakeholders, and should include:

- Detailed representation of the desired development of each district once it is fully redeveloped. (See the Resource Team’s recommended redevelopment concepts for each district on the following pages.)
- Needed changes in land use regulations to promote the desired development patterns.
- Design guidelines for ensuring that new development enhances the appearance and character of each district.
- Public investments in infrastructure and public facilities (such as public gathering spaces, community centers, neighborhood parks and open space, sidewalks, streetlights, street trees, underground drainage and utilities, public safety facilities, or bike trails) to support redevelopment of each district.
- Phasing of redevelopment activities, so that only one or two districts are under redevelopment at any one time. The plan should clearly indicate the order and timing for undertaking redevelopment of each of the districts.
- Strategy for funding the proposed redevelopment activities.

(See the Appendix for possible funding sources.)

In addition to letting developers know what kind of development the city expects in each district, the plan can be an excellent marketing tool for selling neighborhood residents and businesses on the future potential of the area.

Determine a prioritized list of do-able first projects based on the above redevelopment plan. Arrange funding for these projects and partners (private developers, banks, non-profits, other government agencies) who can help make them happen.

Revise local development regulations to support implementation of the above redevelopment plan and to eliminate typical barriers to “smart growth” projects throughout Warner Robins. (See the toolkit topic “Reducing Barriers to Quality Growth” at www.georgiaqualitygrowth.com.)

Commercial Circle

Redevelopment Concept

Promote redevelopment of the Commercial Circle area as Warner Robin’s “downtown” – an active hub of pedestrian activity with interesting shops, restaurants and entertainment options surrounding a central civic greenspace. This area should also become the hub of commercial and service activity for the surrounding intown neighborhoods, where higher-density infill housing should be developed to provide a strong customer base to support this hub. New multi-family housing should also be included in the mix of uses within the Commercial Circle hub. Public intervention should be used to encourage a combination of new construction and rehabilitation of older commercial structures that results in a vibrant center, designed along “new urbanism” principles, that provides a unique shopping and entertainment environment quite different from the strip centers of west Warner Robins and other outlying areas.

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Recommendations

Ensure that the update of the Urban Redevelopment Plan (called for in the Short-Term Recommendations above) provides for creating new storefronts and multi-family housing in this area.

Encourage developers to carry out elements of the redevelopment plan by offering incentives for undertaking projects consistent with the redevelopment plan. These incentives might include:

- Write-down of land acquisition costs.
- Property tax breaks.
- State and Federal tax incentives for rehabilitation of historic properties.
- Providing new public facilities or infrastructure to support the project.
- Waiver of specific requirements in local development regulations.
- Financial incentives, such as a low-interest revolving loan program .
- Mortgage buy-down program or down payment assistance for downtown housing.

(See the Appendix for possible funding sources.)

Have a market analysis done to identify retail and service businesses that could be recruited to the area. This market analysis should consider the student population that will be present in the area once Macon State College opens. Potential intown retail or service gaps already identified by the Resource Team include:

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|---|---|
| • Tablecloth restaurant | • Upscale pub |
| • College bookstore/variety store | • Ice cream shop |
| • Coffee shop, such as Starbuck's | • High-concept "soda fountain/pharmacy" |
| • Full service gym | • Drive-in restaurant, such as Sonic |
| • Printing/copying establishment, such as Kinko's | • Art gallery |
| • Art supplies | • Video rental store, such as Blockbuster |
| • Used book store | • Music store |
| • Mini-urban grocery store | • Vintage clothing |

After the market analysis is complete, identify commercial buildings that would be appropriate locations for the identified types of businesses. Recruit desired businesses to these locations, possibly enlisting local real estate firms for this task. Use the results of the market analysis and support data to help sell prospective businesses on this location.

Supplement the business recruitment effort with incentives for establishment of new small businesses in the area. The incentive program could be administered through the Downtown Development Authority or a new non-profit corporation. Incentives might include:

- Funds for rehab of existing commercial structures in the area (possibly including a façade rehabilitation program).
- Training in business start-up for prospective entrepreneurs (perhaps sponsored by the University of Georgia's Small Business Development Center).
- Loans for business start-up and expansion, drawing upon all available state and federal small business development resources.

Improve the streetscape around Commercial Circle by:

- Constructing, repairing or replacing sidewalks.
 - Sidewalks adjacent to residential development must be 2-5 feet from back of curb without street trees and a minimum of 8 feet with street trees. Sidewalks should be 5-8 feet in width.
 - Sidewalks in commercial areas should have a 15-20 feet minimum width from edge of building with street trees planted every 30 feet in 8x5 tree wells.
- Planting street trees (hardwoods).
- Installing attractive street lights.
- Relocating utilities off the street frontage or underground.
(See the toolkit topic “Utility Relocation” at www.georgiaqualitygrowth.com.)
- Hanging street banners from lightposts.
- Providing benches and trash receptacles.
- Improving signage design and limiting the size and number of signs.
- Creating 10 foot landscaped buffers to shield parking lots from view.
- Installing traffic calming devices, such as raised pedestrian crossings, on-street parking, or landscaped medians, in high speed areas to increase safety for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Consult with the Georgia Department of Transportation (DOT) during the process of planning and designing these streetscape improvements.

Test the market for public transit in Warner Robins by providing limited bus or trolley service on a trial basis. A possible initial transit route could link major destinations in Warner Robins, such as Robins Air Force Base, Commercial Circle, and the West Side commercial centers. Discontinue or expand service depending on local response. Make Commercial Circle the hub (or central transfer point) for this transit system – which will entail providing a small bus shelter and bus loading area somewhere within the Commercial Circle redevelopment area.

Nominate historic resources in the Commercial Circle area to the National Register of Historic Places:

- Commercial Circle Historic District—collection of commercial and religious historic resources which includes all 4 quadrants of Commercial Circle as well as the first Sacred Heart Catholic Church sanctuary on Davis Dr. and First Baptist Church and First Presbyterian Church on Watson Blvd.
- Robins Manor Historic District—collection of small bungalows dating 1942-1948 primarily, with few infill structures from later periods. The houses are all of similar type and style, of perhaps only 6 different designs.

The benefits of nominating these resources include federal income tax credits for rehabilitation of those buildings, which are income-producing and state property tax abatements for rehabilitation of both income and non-income producing properties. There are no restrictions put on listed properties by the National Register, unless federal funds or permitting are involved in any project that includes a historic resource.

Adopt and implement a historic preservation ordinance providing oversight of the Commercial Circle and Robins Manor districts. This ordinance should provide design guidelines, which would direct and guide growth and development in these two historic areas. Once an ordinance is adopted, and a historic review board appointed, the City should apply for Certified Local Government status. Once this status is approved, the City will be eligible for specific grants from the Historic Preservation Division of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. Additional grants for historic preservation activities are available from the Department of Community Affairs, and other agencies and organizations.

Revise local development regulations to support implementation of the redevelopment concept for this district by establishing a new **Mixed-Use Commercial Center** zoning district for this area that permits a mix of pedestrian-oriented commercial businesses (no gas stations or auto repair shops) and housing (over the shop apartments, multifamily townhomes, etc.). The development standards for this district should provide for:

- No limitations on entertainment uses (i.e., revise required distances from schools or churches) and outdoor or sidewalk dining.
- Maximum square footages for commercial uses to maintain human scale and encourage pedestrian access.
- Wide sidewalk requirements in front of store fronts to encourage street-side pedestrian activity.
- Adequate lighting requirements to help ensure pedestrian safety.
- Maximum setback requirements to bring the buildings close to sidewalks.
- Maximum and minimum building height requirements to help ensure pedestrian scale. (Minimum height 18 feet; Maximum height 35 feet.)
- Planting strip and street tree requirements along street curb to provide shade and help protect pedestrians from vehicles.
- Limit sign size to pedestrian scale and orientation.
- Store fronts with clear display windows required. No blank walls.
- Primary pedestrian entrance directly off public street sidewalks.
- Lower minimum parking requirements and/or shared parking requirements to minimize land areas dedicated to parking.
- Off-street parking located behind or beside structures.

Civic Corridor

Redevelopment Concept

Watson Boulevard between Robins Air Force Base and Commercial Circle should be developed as the hub of governmental and cultural activities in Warner Robins. The existing City Hall complex and planned Macon State College campus provide a strong foundation on which to build a governmental/cultural hub. All new government offices or expansions (including county, state, or federal facilities) should be strongly encouraged to locate along this corridor, as should any new cultural facilities such as performance halls, auditoriums, libraries, museums, or galleries. Public intervention should be used to upgrade this important corridor with streetscape improvements and higher density commercial or residential development that supports the government/cultural hub.

Recommendations

Meet with appropriate officials of Macon State College, county, state, and federal agencies to discuss their expansion plans and make them aware of the city's desire that new facilities be located in the Civic Corridor area. Encourage location of new government or cultural facilities in this area by providing incentives such as:

- Use of eminent domain to assemble properties needed for redevelopment.
- Write-down of land acquisition costs.
- Providing new public facilities or infrastructure to support the project.
- Waiver of specific requirements in local development regulations.

(See the Appendix for possible funding sources.)

Promote cultural activities in the area by:

- Incorporating planning for new cultural activities and facilities into the regular recreation planning process. Focus plans on enhancing the importance of the Civic Corridor as the cultural heart of the community.
- Organizing more arts-related festivals and promotions for this area.
- Establishing a warm-weather public concert series.
- Developing a long range plan for adding public art along the corridor.

Create a park and public gathering area around the City Hall complex by:

- Installing a large water feature (fountain) with surrounding benches for relaxation.
- Building a band shell for outdoor concerts.
- Planting more trees.
- Installing scattered benches and picnic tables.
- Adding pedestrian pathways/sidewalks crossing the park area.

Improve the streetscape along Watson Boulevard by:

- Constructing, repairing or replacing sidewalks.
 - Sidewalks adjacent to residential development must be 2-5 feet from back of curb without street trees and a minimum of 8 feet with street trees. Sidewalks should be 5-8 feet in width.
 - Sidewalks in commercial areas should have a 15-20 feet minimum width from edge of building with street trees planted every 30 feet in 8x5 tree wells.
- Planting street trees (hardwoods).
- Installing attractive street lights.
- Relocating utilities off the street frontage or underground.
(See the toolkit topic "Utility Relocation" at www.georgiaqualitygrowth.com.)
- Hanging street banners from lightposts.
- Providing benches and trash receptacles.
- Improving signage design and limiting the size and number of signs.
- Creating 10 foot landscaped buffers to shield parking lots from view.

- Installing traffic calming devices, such as raised pedestrian crossings, on-street parking, or landscaped medians, in high speed areas to increase safety for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Consult with the DOT during the process of planning and designing these streetscape improvements.

Test the market for public transit in Warner Robins by providing limited bus or trolley service on a trial basis. The initial transit route could link major destinations in Warner Robins, such as Robins Air Force Base, Commercial Circle, and the West Side commercial centers. This route should run along Watson Boulevard, connecting the government offices and facilities within the Civic Corridor.

Nominate historic resources in the Civic Corridor to the National Register of Historic Places:

- Charles E. Thomas Elementary School
- Wellston Depot
- Buildings on Watson between 3rd and 5th streets – Burke Furniture building, Mills Auto Repair, Welding Supply building and a mid-50s gas station

The benefits of nominating these resources include federal income tax credits for rehabilitation of those buildings which are income-producing and state property tax abatements for rehabilitation of both income and non-income producing properties. There are no restrictions put on listed properties by the National Register, unless federal funds or permitting are involved in any project that includes a historic resource.

Revise local development regulations to support implementation of the redevelopment concept for this district:

- Revise zoning requirement to allow higher density development along the corridor, including multi-family residential development, while restricting auto-oriented uses such as gas stations, auto repair shops, and used car sales lots.
- Create an overlay district establishing special design guidelines for new development along the corridor. These guidelines should provide for:
 - Wide sidewalk requirements to encourage street-side pedestrian activity.
 - Adequate lighting requirements to help ensure pedestrian safety.
 - Build-to-lines to bring the buildings close to sidewalks.
 - Planting strip and street tree requirements along street curb to provide shade and help protect pedestrians from vehicles.
 - Inter-parcel access and alley requirements to limit curb cuts.
 - Restriction on the number, size and design of signs to encourage a coordinated signage “look” throughout the corridor.
 - Lower minimum parking requirements and/or shared parking requirements to minimize land areas dedicated to parking.
 - Off-street parking located behind or beside structures.

First Street

Redevelopment Concept

Promote redevelopment of First Street as an attractive, pedestrian-friendly commercial street with interesting shops, restaurants and entertainment options. This area could be viewed as the “off-campus” commercial and entertainment area serving Robins Air Force Base,

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much like downtown Athens caters to the University of Georgia. But this area need not limit its scope or market just to the Base population. It should include shopping, dining, and entertainment options unique enough to attract customers from throughout the Warner Robins area. Higher density multi-family housing should abut the west side of this district, both to provide a captive market for its commercial establishments and to offer a gradual transition to the lower density residential neighborhood (see the Intown Neighborhoods section) further west.

Recommendations

Ensure that the update of the Urban Redevelopment Plan (called for in the Short-Term Recommendations above) provides for creating new storefronts and multi-family housing in this area.

Encourage developers to carry out elements of the redevelopment plan by offering incentives for undertaking projects consistent with the redevelopment plan. These incentives might include:

- Write-down of land acquisition costs.
- Property tax breaks.
- Providing new public facilities or infrastructure to support the project.
- Waiver of specific requirements in local development regulations.
- Financial incentives, such as a low-interest revolving loan program .
- Mortgage buy-down program or down payment assistance for downtown housing.

(See the Appendix for possible funding sources.)

Have a market analysis done to identify retail and service businesses that could be recruited to the area. Potential intown retail or service gaps already identified by the Resource Team include:

- | | |
|---|---|
| • Tablecloth restaurant | • Upscale pub |
| • College bookstore/variety store | • Ice cream shop |
| • Coffee shop, such as Starbuck's | • High-concept "soda fountain/pharmacy" |
| • Full service gym | • Drive-in restaurant, such as Sonic |
| • Printing/copying establishment, such as Kinko's | • Art gallery |
| • Art supplies | • Video rental store, such as Blockbuster |
| • Used book store | • Music store |
| • Mini-urban grocery store | • Vintage clothing |

After the market analysis is complete, identify commercial buildings that would be appropriate locations for the identified types of businesses. Recruit desired businesses to these locations, possibly enlisting local real estate firms for this task. Use the results of the market analysis and support data to help sell prospective businesses on this location.

Supplement the business recruitment effort with incentives for establishment of new small businesses in the area. The incentive program could be administered through the Downtown Development Authority or a new non-profit corporation. Incentives might include:

- Funds for rehab of existing commercial structures in the area.

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- Training in business start-up for prospective entrepreneurs (perhaps sponsored by the University of Georgia’s Small Business Development Center).
- Loans for business start-up and expansion, drawing upon all available state and federal small business development resources.

Improve the streetscape along First Street by:

- Constructing, repairing or replacing sidewalks.
 - Sidewalks adjacent to residential development must be 2-5 feet from back of curb without street trees and a minimum of 8 feet with street trees. Sidewalks should be 5-8 feet in width.
 - Sidewalks in commercial areas should have a 15-20 feet minimum width from edge of building with street trees planted every 30 feet in 8x5 tree wells.
- Planting street trees (hardwoods).
- Installing attractive street lights.
- Relocating utilities off the street frontage or underground. (See the toolkit topic “Utility Relocation” at www.georgiaqualitygrowth.com.)
- Hanging street banners from lightposts.
- Providing benches and trash receptacles.
- Improving signage design and limiting the size and number of signs.
- Creating 10 foot landscaped buffers to shield parking lots from view.
- Installing traffic calming devices, including raised pedestrian crossings, curb bump-outs, and on-street parking along the length of the street.

Consult with the DOT during the process of planning and designing these streetscape improvements.

Test the market for public transit in Warner Robins by providing limited bus or trolley service on a trial basis. The initial transit route could link major destinations in Warner Robins, such as Robins Air Force Base, Commercial Circle, and the West Side commercial centers. This route should include a stop at Watson Boulevard and First Street to provide easy access to this district from other parts of Warner Robins.

Campaign for eventual establishment of a commuter rail stop in Warner Robins, preferably at the existing train depot located at Highway 247 and Watson Boulevard. In the statewide context of commuter rail development, a strong case could be made for extending the proposed line between Macon and Atlanta to include Warner Robins. The commuter population passing through this station each day would provide an additional market for the shops and restaurants located in the First Street district.

Revise local development regulations to support implementation of the redevelopment concept for this district by creating an overlay district establishing special development standards that provide for:

- No limitations on entertainment uses (i.e., revise required distances from schools or churches) and outdoor or sidewalk dining.
- Maximum square footages for commercial uses to maintain human scale and encourage pedestrian access.
- Wide sidewalk requirements in front of store fronts to encourage street-side pedestrian activity.

- Adequate lighting requirements to help ensure pedestrian safety.
- Build-to-lines to bring the buildings close to sidewalks.
- Maximum and minimum building height requirements to help ensure pedestrian scale. (Minimum height 18 feet; Maximum height 35 feet.)
- Planting strip and street tree requirements along street curb to provide shade and help protect pedestrians from vehicles.
- Limit sign size to pedestrian scale and orientation.
- Store fronts with clear display windows required. No blank walls.
- Primary pedestrian entrance directly off public street sidewalks.
- Lower minimum parking requirements and/or shared parking requirements to minimize land areas dedicated to parking.
- Off-street parking located behind or beside structures.

Village at Town Center

Redevelopment Concept

Warner Robins was forward-thinking in developing this high-tech light industrial park in close proximity to its downtown area and Robins Air Force Base. This park could have even greater impact on the intown area, and perhaps be more attractive to prospective tenants, if redesigned slightly for:

- a) Stronger street and pedestrian connections to neighboring areas. This would enable employees in the park to live in surrounding neighborhoods and walk to work or, alternatively, walk to nearby amenities (such as the shops at Commercial Circle, City recreation facilities, or classes at Macon State College).
- b) A mix of uses on site. The additional uses should include housing and a small amount of commercial space where supporting businesses, such as printing/copy shops or restaurants, could locate. Mixing uses would make the park more visually attractive, would facilitate living-near-work options for employees, and would provide businesses with quick access to needed services.

Recommendations

Ensure that the update of the Urban Redevelopment Plan (called for in the Short-Term Recommendations above) provides for creating new commercial space and single or multi-family housing in this area.

Meet with existing Village at Town Center tenants to inform them of proposed changes in the development plan for the park. If necessary, re-write the existing property covenants to allow inclusion of complementary uses within the park.

Encourage developers to carry out elements of the redevelopment plan by offering incentives for undertaking projects consistent with the redevelopment plan. These incentives might include:

- Write-down of land acquisition costs.

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- Property tax breaks.
- Providing new public facilities or infrastructure to support the project.
- Waiver of specific requirements in local development regulations.
- Financial incentives, such as a low-interest revolving loan program.
- Mortgage buy-down program or down payment assistance for downtown housing.

(See the Appendix for possible funding sources.)

Have a market analysis done to identify businesses and industries that could be recruited to the area. After the market analysis is complete, identify buildings or sites that would be appropriate locations for the identified types of businesses. Recruit desired businesses to these locations, possibly enlisting local real estate firms for this task. Use the results of the market analysis and support data to help sell prospective businesses on this location.

Supplement the business recruitment effort with incentives for establishment of new businesses in the area. The incentive program could be administered through the Downtown Development Authority or a new non-profit corporation. Incentives might include:

- Establishment of a small business incubator in the park.
- Training in business start-up for prospective entrepreneurs. (Perhaps sponsored by the University of Georgia's Small Business Development Center.)
- Loans for business start-up and expansion, drawing upon all available state and federal small business development resources.
- Assistance with workforce training. (Investigate the Quick Start Programs offered by the Georgia Department of Technical and Adult Education.)

Improve the landscaping throughout the Village at Town Center by:

- Constructing pedestrian pathways or sidewalks throughout the park.
- Planting trees (hardwoods).
- Installing attractive street lights.
- Providing benches and trash receptacles.
- Regulating the design and size of signage to ensure a consistent look throughout the park.
- Creating landscaped buffers to shield parking lots from view.
- Installing traffic calming devices, such as raised pedestrian crossings or bumped-out landscaped areas, to increase safety for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Test the market for public transit in Warner Robins by providing limited bus or trolley service on a trial basis. The initial transit route could link major destinations in Warner Robins, such as Robins Air Force Base, Commercial Circle, and the West Side commercial centers. The route should include a stop within the Village at Town Center, making its jobs accessible from other parts of Warner Robins.

Northgate Shopping Center

Redevelopment Concept

This shopping center was chosen to provide an example of how older commercial strip centers throughout Warner Robins might be retro-fitted to be more aesthetically appealing and, therefore, perhaps also more marketable to prospective tenants. This center could be enhanced by:

- Building new commercial structures at the streetfront, taking up a portion of the oversize parking lot and creating a shopping “square” around a smaller internal parking lot.
- Upgrading the appearance of existing older commercial buildings with façade improvement, new architectural elements, or awnings.
- Reconfiguring the parking lot and circulation routes for automobiles.
- Providing pedestrian amenities, including covered walkways, benches, and lighting.
- Adding landscaping and other appearance enhancements.

Recommendations

Encourage developers to carry out improvements suggested above by offering incentives that might include:

- Write-down of land acquisition costs.
- Property tax breaks.
- Providing new public facilities or infrastructure to support the project.
- Waiver of specific requirements in local development regulations.
- Financial incentives, such as a low-interest revolving loan program.

(See the Appendix for possible funding sources.)

Have a market analysis done to identify retail and service businesses that could be recruited to the area.

Potential intown retail or service gaps already identified by the Resource Team include:

- Tablecloth restaurant
- College bookstore/variety store
- Coffee shop, such as Starbuck’s
- Full service gym
- Printing/copying establishment, such as Kinko’s
- Art supplies
- Used book store
- Mini-urban grocery store
- Upscale pub
- Ice cream shop
- High-concept “soda fountain/pharmacy”
- Drive-in restaurant, such as Sonic
- Art gallery
- Video rental store, such as Blockbuster
- Music store
- Vintage clothing

After the market analysis is complete, identify older commercial strip centers that would be appropriate locations for the identified types of businesses. Recruit desired businesses to these locations, possibly enlisting local real estate firms for this task. Use the results of the market analysis and support data to help sell prospective businesses on this location.

Supplement the business recruitment effort with incentives for establishment of new small businesses in older commercial strip centers. The incentive program could be administered through the Downtown Development Authority or a new non-profit corporation. Incentives might include:

- Funds for rehab of existing commercial structures in the area.
- Training in business start-up for prospective entrepreneurs. (Perhaps sponsored by the University of Georgia's Small Business Development Center.)
- Loans for business start-up and expansion, drawing upon all available state and federal small business development resources.

Improve the “streetscape” of the center by:

- Constructing or repairing sidewalks.
 - Sidewalks in commercial areas should have a 15-20 feet minimum width from edge of building with street trees planted every 30 feet in 8x5 tree wells.
- Planting street trees (hardwoods).
- Installing attractive street lights.
- Relocating utilities off the street frontage or underground.
(See the toolkit topic “Utility Relocation” at www.georgiaqualitygrowth.com.)
- Hanging street banners from lightposts.
- Providing benches and trash receptacles.
- Improving signage design and limiting the size and number of signs.
- Providing landscaped islands and trees in the parking lots.
- Installing traffic calming devices, such as raised pedestrian crossings or bumped-out landscaped areas, to increase safety for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Revise local development regulations to support redevelopment of older commercial strip centers:

- Reduce minimum parking requirements and/or institute shared parking requirements – to enable part of the parking lot to be taken up by new buildings.
- Establish build-to-lines to ensure that new buildings are located close to the streetfront.
- Increase allowable densities (floor area ratios) to permit new buildings on each site.
- Require off-street parking to be located behind new structures.
- Require store fronts with clear display windows facing the street. No blank walls.
- Require a planting strip and street trees along the street to provide shade and help protect pedestrians from vehicles.
- Limit sign size to pedestrian scale and orientation.
- Institute design standards to ensure the new structures and older center combine to create an attractive, pedestrian-scale, shopping “square.”

Intown Neighborhoods

Redevelopment Concept

The residential neighborhoods that surround the redevelopment districts discussed above must be healthy and well-designed to support the viability of these districts. Their housing density and variety must be adequate to attract a mix of residents who will support the shops, restaurants, entertainment venues, and workplaces located in Commercial Circle, Civic Corridor, First Street, or Village at Town Center. Strong pedestrian and bicycle connections should also be provided to encourage these residents to walk to work, shopping, or other destinations in the area. These intown neighborhoods can be broken into three general types, each calling for a different approach to redevelopment:

Stable Neighborhoods

These neighborhoods have relatively well-maintained housing and higher rates of homeownership, but because of location near declining areas of town these neighborhoods may also decline over time. The redevelopment strategy for these neighborhoods should focus on reinforcing stability by encouraging more homeownership and maintenance or upgrade of existing properties.

Declining Neighborhoods

These areas have most of their original housing stock in place, but housing conditions are worsening due to low rates of homeownership and neglect of property maintenance. The redevelopment strategy for these neighborhoods should focus on strategic public investments to improve conditions, appropriate infill development on scattered vacant sites, and encouraging more homeownership and maintenance or upgrade of existing properties.

Major Redevelopment Opportunities

These neighborhoods have large areas of vacant land, due to demolition/removal of sub-standard housing. The redevelopment strategy for these areas should focus on building new, attractive neighborhoods following the principles of traditional neighborhood development. (See the toolkit topic “Traditional Neighborhood Development” at www.georgiaqualitygrowth.com.)

Recommendations

Stable Neighborhoods

Do periodic windshield surveys to identify vacant lots and existing violations of health and safety codes. Notify property owners of violations and step up code enforcement in a fair and consistent manner.

Look for signs of neighborhood decline (such as gradual transition from owner-occupied to rental) and invoke a housing rehabilitation program (see recommendations for declining neighborhoods, below) in the early stages rather than waiting for the neighborhood to decline to the point where such a program would be ineffective.

Take advantage of state and federal programs to encourage housing rehabilitation and home ownership. Enlist the local Housing Authority or establish a community housing development corporation (CHDO), either of which have access to a variety of public housing funding sources. A few possibilities include:

- Home rehabilitation funds for individual owner-occupants through DCA's CHIP program.
- Low cost home loans through DCA Home Buyer Loans, Federal Home Loan Bank/Affordable Housing Program (FHLB/AHP), or USDA/Rural Development funds.
- Down payment assistance through DCA's OwnHOME Loan or CHIP programs, or FHLB/AHP.

Keep residents involved in maintaining their properties, participating in neighborhood clean-ups and helping their neighbors when possible. Involve residents in landscaping public areas in the neighborhood to build pride among the residents for the area in which they live.

(Contact Georgia Clean & Beautiful for assistance.)

Enlist the local Housing Authority to maintain or make necessary improvements to any public housing facilities in the neighborhood.

Provide incentives for development of compatible infill housing on vacant lots. These incentives might include:

- Write-down of land acquisition costs.
- Property tax breaks.
- Providing new public facilities or infrastructure to support the project.
- Waiver of specific requirements in local development regulations.
- Financial incentives, such as a low-interest revolving loan program.
- Mortgage buy-down program or down payment assistance for purchasers.

Consider retaining some of the vacant lots for community recreational uses, such as pocket parks, community gardens, or ballfields. These could also be good interim uses for vacant lots held in public ownership until market conditions are favorable for redevelopment.

Establish strong pedestrian and bicycle connections to schools, shopping areas, and other major destinations in surrounding areas of the community.

Declining Neighborhoods

Implement a coordinated housing revitalization program for distressed neighborhoods. This program should be administered by the CHDO or Housing Authority, should draw upon all available state and federal housing finance resources, and should include the following elements (see recommendations for stable neighborhoods, above, for details on incentive programs):

- Comprehensive survey of housing stock, to determine whether owner-occupied vs. rental, housing condition, potential infill locations, and rehab opportunities.
- Strict, but fair enforcement of building and maintenance codes.
- Incentives for rehabilitation (vs. tearing down) existing houses.
- Incentives for compatible infill development on vacant lots.

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- Incentives for adding garage apartments or other accessory unit housing to existing single family homes. This is an effective way to infuse affordable housing without changing the single-family character of a neighborhood.
- Assistance to homebuyers, such as down-payment assistance, low-cost mortgages, home buyer education, credit counseling for moderate and low-income households.
- Loans to homeowners for repair and maintenance of their homes.

Make strategic public investments in the neighborhood as soon as possible. This will show residents and developers that the city is committed to revitalization of these areas. Possibilities include:

- Plant street trees.
- Install attractive street lighting.
- Repair and expand sidewalks and properly mark street crossings where needed.
- Locate police precinct stations or bicycle police in these areas (to counter perception of crime).
- Work with the school board for reuse of vacant school properties as community centers or housing.

Keep residents involved in maintaining their properties, participating in neighborhood clean-ups and helping their neighbors when possible. Involve residents in landscaping public areas in the neighborhood to build pride among the residents for the area in which they live. (Involve Warner Robins Clean & Beautiful if possible.)

Enlist the local Housing Authority to maintain or make necessary improvements to any public housing facilities in the neighborhood.

Establish strong pedestrian and bicycle connections to schools, shopping areas, and other major destinations in surrounding areas of the community.

Example: Old Town (or Wellston Villas)

Redevelopment of the Old Town Area (Wellston Villas) offers the opportunity to provide a neighborhood of new single-family detached homes in a currently distressed area. While redevelopment of one street in the area has already taken place, there are opportunities for strategic public investments in this neighborhood that could go a long way toward ensuring continued momentum for revitalization of the neighborhood:

- Closed street should be reopened (and repaved as necessary) to connect Old Town to its surrounding neighborhoods and provide residents with more pleasant entrances to their area. Current entrances into the neighborhood are Orchard Way and Township Drive, which both run off of Watson Boulevard. This makes ingress and egress to the neighborhood difficult due to the volume of traffic on Watson Boulevard. These streets also do not provide an attractive entrance to the neighborhood since both pass through the commercial strip along Watson Boulevard.
- The playground is in disrepair and needs immediate attention.
- Demolished structures need to be removed.
- Streets need to be resurfaced where utilities were installed.
- Vacant land should be mowed and all debris removed.

Major Redevelopment Opportunities

Conduct a windshield survey to identify all vacant land in the area, location of existing street and public infrastructure, and the location and condition of structures remaining in the area.

Prepare a plan (as part of the update of the Urban Redevelopment Plan – called for in the Short-Term Recommendations above) for traditional neighborhood development of the area. (See the toolkit topic “Traditional Neighborhood Development” at www.georgiaqualitygrowth.com.) The redevelopment plan should provide for development of a neotraditional housing mix that includes single family homes, garage apartments, townhomes, and small apartment complexes that relate to the street (i.e., no gated communities, front yard fences, etc.). Existing structures in the neighborhood should be saved and reused, where possible. The plan should also provide for pocket parks, small squares, similar neighborhood-scale open spaces; strong pedestrian and bicycle connections to schools, shopping areas, and other major destinations in surrounding areas of the community; as well as small commercial centers where small groceries, drug stores, cleaners, or similar neighborhood service establishments might locate.

Use redevelopment tools powers to assemble properties and to relocate incompatible uses from areas slated for housing redevelopment to more appropriate sites in other parts of the city.

Encourage developers to build the traditional neighborhood development by offering incentives for undertaking the project (perhaps in phases) consistent with the redevelopment plan. These incentives might include:

- Market study to demonstrate demand for housing and commercial space.
- Write-down of land acquisition costs.
- Property tax breaks.
- Providing new public facilities or infrastructure to support the project.
- Waiver of specific requirements in local development regulations.
- Financial incentives, such as a low-interest revolving loan program.
- Mortgage buy-down program or down payment assistance for purchasers of the housing.

(See the Appendix for possible funding sources. Also consider applying for a federal Hope VI grant to help fund this traditional neighborhood development.)

Example: College Forest Neighborhood Development

The area south of Watson Boulevard, between Davis Drive and First Street contains large tracts of vacant land, already served by streets and public infrastructure. This arrangement is perfect for location of a new Traditional Neighborhood Development (which the Resource Team arbitrarily named “College Forest Neighborhood”). This development would add significantly to the housing mix and population of this part of Warner Robins, while also improving the appearance of the area and bringing in new customers to support other redevelopment activities in the area.

Macon State College and Sacred Heart Catholic Church have development/expansion plans underway which could be nicely tied into the proposed College Forest Neighborhood plan. Both the Church and College could redirect their expansion plans toward the neighborhood, linking their facilities with neighborhood amenities such as parks, sidewalks/trails, attractive shared parking areas, housing (for

students, faculty, or indigents supported by the church) and convenience shopping, all within short walking distance.

All Intown Neighborhoods

Revise local development regulations to support all housing redevelopment activities recommended above:

- Establish a new **Mixed-Use Residential** zoning district that permits traditional neighborhood development patterns, including small lot sizes (5000 square feet), a mix of housing types (single-family and multi-family) and sizes, and limited commercial development (neighborhood centers) within the neighborhood.
- Adopt design standards to ensure that new development is compatible with character of the neighborhood. Traditional architectural styles, housing sizes and setbacks should be reinforced through these design codes.
- Revise the zoning map to ensure that intrusive uses (heavy commercial or industrial) can not locate in the neighborhoods or along the periphery. Intensive development (multi-family units, office or shopping areas) should be permitted at the periphery along the major thoroughfares, but the regulations should provide for proper buffering to reduce impact on neighborhoods. (See Greenspace section.)

Highway Corridors

Redevelopment Concept

In order to encourage pedestrian activity that capitalizes on the existing neighborhood fabric in the older parts of the community a hierarchical or tiered approach to corridor design should be adopted. This approach should focus on pedestrian comfort, safety and convenience in areas near the community's center (Commercial Circle), where smaller lots and greater proximity to a range of services exists. As corridors move farther from the center and parcel sizes and development patterns work against easy pedestrian circulation, the focus should shift to vehicular safety, corridor appearance and traffic speeds while accommodating pedestrians to a limited degree. Finally, on major thoroughfares that serve as gateways to the community, the focus should be limited to corridor appearance only – providing a high quality image of the Warner Robins community.

The recommended tiers for major highway corridors in Warner Robins are as follows:

Route 247: community image

Watson Boulevard

- From Hwy. 247 to Pleasant Hill Road: pedestrian priority
- From Pleasant Hill Road to Houston Road: safety, speed and image
- West of Houston Road: safety, speed and image

North Davis Drive

- From Watson Boulevard to Green Street: pedestrian priority
- From Green Street to Ignico: pedestrian priority
- From Ignico to Hwy 247: safety, speed and image

South Davis Drive

- From Watson Boulevard to MLK: pedestrian priority
- South of MLK: pedestrian priority

Russell Parkway: community image

Recommendations***Community Image*** Corridors

Work with DOT to develop and implement an attractive design plan for these high-speed roadways. This should include heavy landscaping with trees along the roadsides, and a landscaped median separating opposing directions of traffic (instead of paved turning lanes).

Restrict the number of curb cuts along the corridor. Coordinate with DOT where these roads are also part of the state highway network. Take advantage of opportunities to close existing curb cuts whenever possible (such as including this in negotiations with property owners for the “streetfront landscape easements” discussed above).

Adopt more restrictive sign regulations that limit the size and number of signs and spell out design details to provide a unified look to Warner Robins’ signs. Ideally, sign sizes and setbacks should be tied to road widths and driving speeds:

- Maximum heights:
 - 4-6 lane streets: 12 feet
 - 2 lane streets: 8 feet
- Maximum sign areas:
 - <35 mph: 32 square feet
 - 35-45 mph: 42 square feet
 - >45 mph: 64 square feet
- Sign setbacks
 - 10 feet for buildings more than 50 feet from curb
 - No freestanding sign for buildings closer than 50 feet from curb

Amend local parking standards, including display lots at car dealerships and similar establishments.

Revised standards should:

- Establish MAXIMUM parking requirements based on appropriate “smart growth” standards.
- Require a large percentage of parking be located on the rear or to the side of the buildings they serve.
- Require parking lots to include a landscaped buffer along the street frontage, sides and rear.
- Require parking lots on separate properties to be interconnected (to reduce the need for multiple curb cuts).
- Require raised pedestrian walkways between rows of parking spaces in large parking lots.

Re-evaluate existing zoning along major corridors. Reduce the amount of commercial zoning where possible or shift zoning districts to promote nodal commercial concentrations at intervals along these roadways. To avoid downzoning conflicts, consider adoption of overlays to encourage properties already zoned for commercial development to be developed as mixed-use Planned Unit Developments instead.

Upgrade corridor appearances where commercial clutter has already happened by:

- Encouraging redevelopment of existing commercial centers consistent with the example provided for Northgate Shopping Center. (See the Northgate Shopping Center section.)
- Seeking streetfront landscaping easements from property owners. In exchange for granting the easement, the local government provides free landscaping that enhances the visual appeal of the property and the entire corridor.
- Using powers granted under the Georgia Urban Redevelopment Law (see the Appendix for a summary of this law) to acquire marginal or poorly maintained properties and offer them for new development that is consistent with the community's redevelopment plan for the area. The brief period while property is in public ownership (between acquisition and sale to a new developer) is an opportunity to clean up the property by removing non-conforming signs, demolishing unattractive buildings, or eliminating unnecessary curb cuts and paving.

Safety, Speed and Image Corridors

Landscape roadside rights-of-way with trees to soften the harsh appearance of strip development. Where the right-of-way is not wide enough for streetscape improvements, seek easement donations from property owners (in exchange for free landscape improvements).

Prohibit deceleration lanes. They make it more difficult to do streetscape improvements as described above.

Develop a phased program for converting "suicide lanes" into landscaped medians with periodic left turn lanes. (Although it would seem that removing the center turn lane would reduce traffic capacity, landscaped center medians handle just as much traffic, as long as they incorporate extra turn lanes at important intersections). These center medians present the opportunity for the city to work with DOT to replace the suicide lanes with attractively landscaped center median.

Restrict the number of new curb cuts along the corridor. Coordinate with DOT where these roads are also part of the state highway network. Take advantage of opportunities to close existing curb cuts and align them with left turn lanes whenever possible (such as including this in negotiations with property owners for the "streetfront landscape easements" discussed above).

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Improve street lighting. Replace sodium vapor lights with more attractive lighting where possible.

Relocating utilities off the street frontage or underground. (See the toolkit topic “Utility Relocation” at www.georgiaqualitygrowth.com.)

Require sidewalks. These should be at least 6 feet wide and no less than 6 feet from the curb with street trees planted between the curb and sidewalk.

Encourage new developments to incorporate neo-traditional design elements, particularly connective grid street patterns (vs. cul-de-sacs) that offer alternatives to forcing all traffic onto the nearest arterial.

Take advantage of opportunities to build new street connections (particularly in older commercial and industrial areas) to reduce traffic on major arterials.

Establish maximum building setback requirements for new development – to pull buildings closer to the street.

Pedestrian Priority Corridors

Improve the streetscape by:

- Constructing, repairing or replacing sidewalks.
 - Sidewalks adjacent to residential development must be 2-5 feet from back of curb without street trees and a minimum of 8 feet with street trees. Sidewalks should be 5-8 feet in width.
 - Sidewalks in commercial areas should have a 15-20 feet minimum width from edge of building with street trees planted every 30 feet in 8x5 tree wells.
- Planting street trees (hardwoods).
- Installing attractive street lights.
- Relocating utilities off the street frontage or underground. (See the toolkit topic “Utility Relocation” at www.georgiaqualitygrowth.com.)
- Providing benches and trash receptacles.
- Creating 10 foot landscaped buffers to shield parking lots from view.
- Installing traffic calming devices, including raised pedestrian crossings, curb bump-outs, and on-street parking along the length of the street.
- Where “suicide lanes” exist, convert them into landscaped medians with periodic left turn lanes.

Restrict the number of new curb cuts along the corridor. Coordinate with DOT where these roads are also part of the state highway network. Take advantage of opportunities to close existing curb cuts and align them with left turn lanes whenever possible (such as including this in negotiations with property owners for the “streetfront landscape easements” discussed above).

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Establish maximum building setback requirements for new development – to pull buildings closer to the street.

To support all landscaping efforts recommended above:

- Enlist the local garden clubs or schools to help maintain landscaping.
- Expand the public works budget to add additional horticultural workers and watering vehicles.
- Contract with a landscape architect or arborist to oversee landscape projects and train landscape maintenance personnel.
- Develop a partnership program for assisting property owners downtown and along priority corridors with watering and maintenance of new plantings.

Greenspace & Pedestrian/Bikeways

Redevelopment Concept

Warner Robins should encourage preservation of more greenspace – to partially counteract the acres of paved surfaces that already exist in the community. There is an opportunity to expand upon the trails already underway (along creeks in the city), to link greenspaces into a pleasant network of greenways, set aside for pedestrian and bicycle connections between schools, churches, recreation areas, city centers, residential neighborhoods and commercial areas. These greenways can provide safe, efficient pedestrian linkages and at the same time give users an opportunity to enjoy the natural environment. Properly designed greenways can serve as an alternative transportation network, accommodating commuting to work or shopping as well as recreational biking, skateboarding, walking and jogging.

Recommendations

Develop a plan for establishing a citywide network of greenways and parks, including:

- Identification of logical greenway connections between high-use pedestrian areas, public destinations and major places of shopping and employment.
- Inventory of existing utility easements, stormwater retention areas, reservoirs and environmentally sensitive lands (such as riparian buffers, wetlands, floodplains and steep slopes) that should be integrated into the local greenway network.
- Where it is not possible for greenways to connect, use sidewalks in existing street right-of-ways to create a continuous trail network throughout the community.
- Convenient crossings of the major highways (which are quite wide and busy).
- Development of a comprehensive map of planned greenways and a detailed strategy for acquisition and development of the system.

Implement the greenways plan incrementally, even if this means that the network cannot be fully interconnected for several years:

- Make trail right-of-way acquisition a priority. It is important to secure rights-of-way early, while land is still undeveloped and affordable.
- Explore alternatives to fee-simple acquisition of greenway rights-of-way. For example, property owners can be encouraged to grant conservation easements in return for tax and legal benefits.

Revise local development regulations to promote preservation or more greenspace:

- Establish tree protection and replacement requirements for new development.
- Require set-aside of open-space (natural landscape areas) in new development (15-20% minimum of total site area).
- Require 10 to 50 foot buffers (natural landscape areas) between high-intensity commercial areas (such as along the major highway corridors) and residential areas.