

**FINAL**  
**OCTOBER, 2022**



# **DOWNTOWN** **ALBANY**

# **MASTER** **PLAN**



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# INTRODUCTION

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



# OVERVIEW

The City of Albany, along with the Downtown Development Authority of Albany (DDA) and the Albany Dougherty Inner-City Authority (ADICA) charged the consultant team comprised of TSW, KB Advisory Group (KBA), and Keck & Wood with creating a plan for the City's downtown area to outline a clear vision and achievable action items to facilitate and attract the best quality development and redevelopment to Downtown Albany.

Built upon previous planning efforts, this plan was fully vetted through stakeholders and the general public and aims to carry on the existing momentum and energy of Downtown Albany. Collaboration between the consultant team and other consultants working simultaneously on other plans affecting Downtown Albany ensured that all recommendations were thoughtfully integrated. Ultimately, this plan makes recommendations that can be easily achieved with what resources the City and its partners can invest in Downtown Albany.



## HOW TO USE THIS PLAN

The **Introduction** provides an overview of the Master Plan.

**Downtown Albany Today** discusses the existing conditions that impact the area. It includes information about previous planning efforts from the City and Dougherty County, physical and regulatory conditions, and a market study that examines demographics, market trends, and real estate trends.

**The Planning Process** outlines the process and means used by the consultant team to solicit community and stakeholder input, reports on those findings, and includes summaries of meetings and workshops conducted with the general public and local committees.

**The Plan** discusses the vision and goals set with the community, and master plan recommendations for the future of downtown.

**The Actions** discuss the implementation strategies for this Master Plan. It includes a phasing plan and an action matrix that outlines the City's 10-year strategic plan with regards to projects, costs, and funding sources.

# WHY COME TO DOWNTOWN ALBANY?

Albany is the hub of southwest Georgia for culture, shopping, education, healthcare, and recreation. As the heart of the City, Downtown Albany is nationally accredited. It has experienced many ups and downs in its history. Today, Albany is showing potential of becoming a regional attraction again with its assets and recent development energy.

## REGIONAL ATTRACTIONS

Downtown Albany is the home for the Flint RiverQuarium, the Thronateeska Heritage Center, the Albany Civil Rights Institute, the Ray Charles Plaza, and the Riverfront Park, all of which have been attracting tourists and visitors for many years.

The Civic Center, the Albany Municipal Auditorium, and Veterans Park Amphitheater can accommodate a variety of events, like shows, concerts, conferences, and celebrations.

## MAIN STREET

The Broad Street commercial area has always been the main street of downtown with a variety of businesses. Going through the COVID-19 pandemic, Downtown Albany has seen energy coming back with new businesses on the 100 block of Pine Avenue. There are also historic main street areas in the Harlem and old Sandy Bottom Districts which have unique characteristics that can catalyze the potential to revitalize.

## GOVERNMENT CENTER

The City and County government buildings occupy a significant part of downtown, bringing in a large number of daytime population and making downtown active. The presence of the Fire and Police Departments helps keep downtown safe.

## PARKS & TRAILS

Downtown Albany has the advantage of being along the beautiful Flint River. The Riverfront Park and Turtle Grove Park, integrated with the Ray Charles Plaza and Veterans Amphitheater, are great amenities serving the surrounding communities. The 2016 Flint River Trails Master Plan includes a series of trails that connect to this area. These trails will create not only a new transportation option for downtown, but also new, dynamic public spaces.

## ACCESSIBILITY

Downtown Albany presents a perfect street grid network which is easy to navigate and access. There are also many alleys located within the blocks. They provide opportunities for improved pedestrian connections and public spaces.

Currently, there are two ongoing projects to improve accessibility in downtown: a streetscape project and a bridge improvement project.

## LEGACY & CHARACTER

As the home of the Albany Movement, Downtown Albany is a key point on the Civil Rights Trail. The Albany Civil Rights Institute, along with Mt. Zion Baptist Church, are the repositories for Albany's African American civil and human rights legacy.

Downtown Albany is the home to 15 historical buildings listed in the National Register. It also has a rich history of art. Together, they tell a great story of the City's past and present.

## EVENTS

Downtown Albany hosts six major events each year:



- The Snickers Marathon in March;
- The Mardi Gras Street Festival in March;
- Independence Day celebration;
- Albany State University's homecoming in October;
- Chalk Fest in November; and,
- The Christmas parade.

There are many other events throughout the year, which attract people to Downtown Albany. There are opportunities for additional community events.

## RECENT MOMENTUM

In recent years, downtown has seen some successful development like Flats 249, Pretoria Fields, The Flint



restaurant, and new businesses moving into the Front Street Market buildings administered by the DDA and ADICA.

Several local partners - the Flint RiverQuarium, the Albany Civil Rights Institute, Thronateeska Heritage Center, and Albany State University (ASU) - are developing master plans to improve their facilities.

Some private development initiatives are also in the works, like the redevelopment of the Hotel Gordon into a boutique hotel, which will be a new landmark for Downtown Albany.

## DEVELOPMENT-FRIENDLY CITY

In recent years, the City of Albany has made tremendous progress in completing numerous plans and studies that will improve many aspects of the City and its downtown area. Aside from this Downtown Master Plan, the City has developed a series of plans for improving the City (see details on page 26).

The City is actively marketing both public and private development/redevelopment opportunities, and is ready to assist development by providing incentives and guidance.

## OTHER RESOURCES

Besides everything else listed in this chapter, there are other resources supporting downtown, including ASU, Albany Technical College (Albany Tech), and Phoebe Putney Health System.

# DOWNTOWN ALBANY HIGHLIGHTS

Flint RiverQuarium

Thronateeska Heritage Center

Ray Charles Plaza

Albany Civil Rights Institute

Civic Center

Albany Municipal Auditorium

Dougherty County Library

Turtle Grove Park

Veterans Amphitheater

Hilton Garden Inn

Pretoria Fields

The Flint

Cornerstone Coffee

# MARKET CONDITIONS IN ALBANY

## KEY MARKET ISSUES IMPACTING DOWNTOWN ALBANY

- The City, County and region are all losing population;
- There are not enough households located downtown;
- The daytime workforce has been shrinking;
- Downtown vacancy is very high and commercial rents are low; and
- Downtown is missing opportunities to capture other in-region spending.

## OPPORTUNITIES

- Albany is the only population and employment center in the region. There is low risk of losing market share to competitive locations.
- Downtown is unique in the market area in terms of density, history, and architecture.
- The overnight business travel and ASU student markets are significant and largely untapped by downtown.
- Regional employment losses have stabilized and recently reversed – Albany MSA’s current unemployment rate is at or near historic lows.
- There is likely pent-up demand for newer homes and apartment rentals after a decade of little-to-no new investment.
- A small, but growing, number of private entrepreneurs and “institutional”/non-profit entities appear willing and ready to invest in Downtown Albany.
- Emerging success stories demonstrate what is possible when experienced business owners repurpose vacant downtown sites and buildings.

- Several key properties are already under public sector control and can be offered for redevelopment, with incentives.
- Downtown vacancy issues are not (yet) insurmountable – a relatively small number of new housing units and commercial businesses can be significant in reducing vacancy and changing perceptions of downtown.

## MARKET POTENTIAL

Based on the existing conditions of Downtown Albany, it is estimated that the downtown market will have the following capacity:

### Multi-Family Development in Mixed-Use Buildings

- Convert upper floors of existing multi-story buildings into multi-family: estimated 175-180 units (Absorption period: 5 to 7 years)

### Residential Infill (Primarily Owner-Occupied)

- 80 to 90 vacant/undeveloped housing parcels.
- A minimum of 25 to 30 lots containing existing buildings which are either vacant or in very poor condition (Absorption period: 10-12 years)
- Total potential infill development is in the range of 105-120 owner-occupied units at current average densities. The number could easily be increased by 50% or more, if density is increased with the inclusion of more attached products.

### Commercial/Retail

- Current overall downtown vacancy rate is 35%, and it needs to be reduced to closer to 5%. This means existing ground floor vacancy needs to be reduced by roughly 90,000 to 95,000 SF.
- Albany could absorb an average of 10,000 –

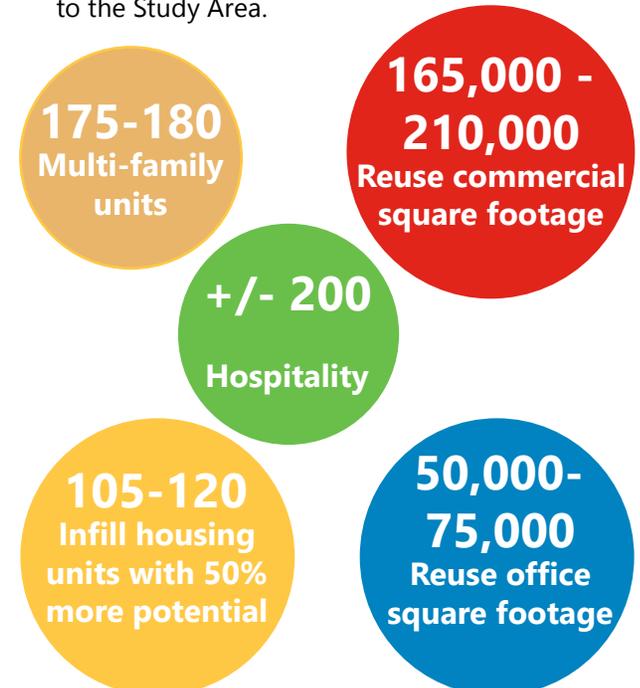
12,000 SF per year, indicating an 8 to 9-year absorption period assuming planned public improvements and upper floor residential development occurs during the same time frame.

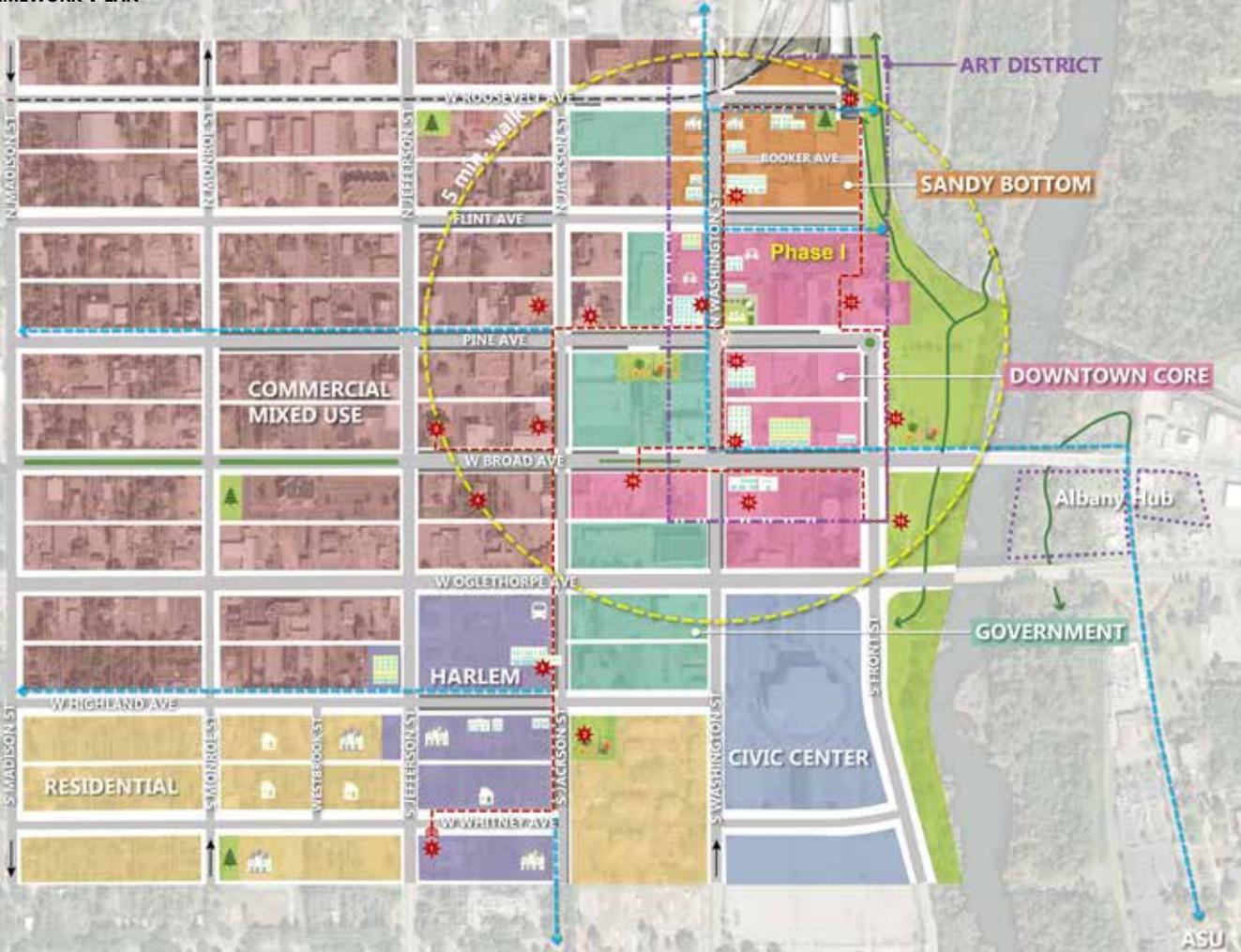
### Office

- Rehabilitate and reoccupy existing vacant office space - 50,000 to 75,000 sf.
- Downtown should focus economic development efforts toward assisting owners of viable multi-tenant office buildings to attract more downtown employers.

### Hospitality

- Rehabilitation of the Hotel Gordon, plus the potential future addition of a second hotel next to the Hilton Garden Inn could add 200+ rooms to the Study Area.





# 12 BIG IDEAS

01. Preserve and Rehabilitate Downtown Buildings
02. Housing Infill and Rehabilitation
03. Central Common
04. More Restaurants and Entertainment
05. Branding and Marketing
06. Heritage Trail (including existing Freedom Trail)
07. Albany Hub: New Mixed-Use District
08. Invest in Parks and Open Space
09. Preserve Historic Character
10. Promote Art
11. Support Streetscape Improvements
12. Connecting Downtown and ASU



Graphics on the left shows the Framework Plan and Concept Plan for the Downtown Core. More details can be found in Chapter 3.



# CHAPTER 1

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## DOWNTOWN ALBANY TODAY



# EXISTING CONDITIONS

As the heart of the largest city in southwest Georgia and government seat for Dougherty County, Downtown Albany is located along the Flint River. The Study Area, shown on the map on the next page, is bounded by Madison Street to the west and the Flint River to the east; it includes the properties north of Roosevelt Avenue and those south of Whitney Avenue. The total land area is 391 acres.

The Study Area can be viewed as several subareas which have distinct characters. Each of them is an indispensable component of Downtown Albany.

## CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT

The core of the Study Area is Albany's Central Business District (CBD), which includes the blocks between the river and Jefferson Street, and from Roosevelt Avenue to Oglethorpe Boulevard. As the City and County's government center, there are many institutional buildings in the CBD, which were mostly built in the late 20th century. "Main street" commercial and businesses, in the form of historic structures, are located throughout the CBD. However, many of these structures are vacant or underutilized, especially the upper floor spaces of multi-story buildings. Recent years has seen some positive development that has brought new life to downtown, including the opening of Pretoria Fields, The Flint restaurant, and several shops in the Front Street Market area. Nearby, the conversion of the historic New Albany Hotel into Flats 249 has provided some much needed housing downtown.

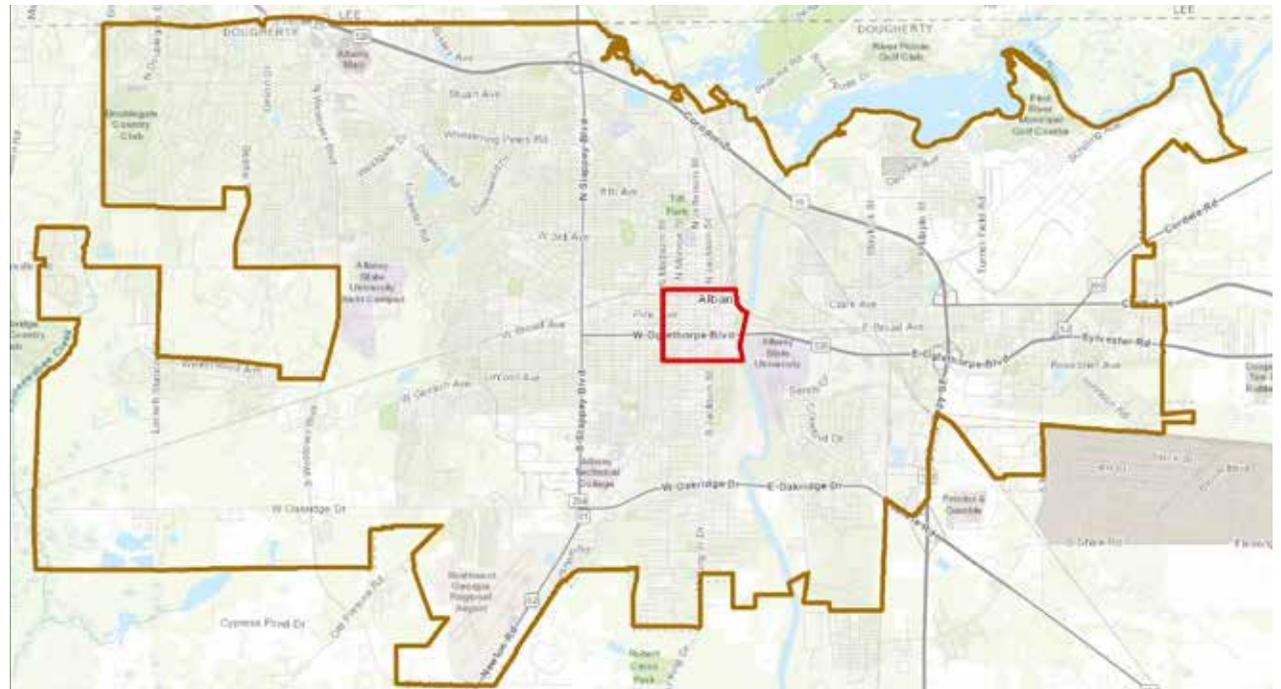
The CBD is also the home of several downtown cultural and entertainment facilities, which include:

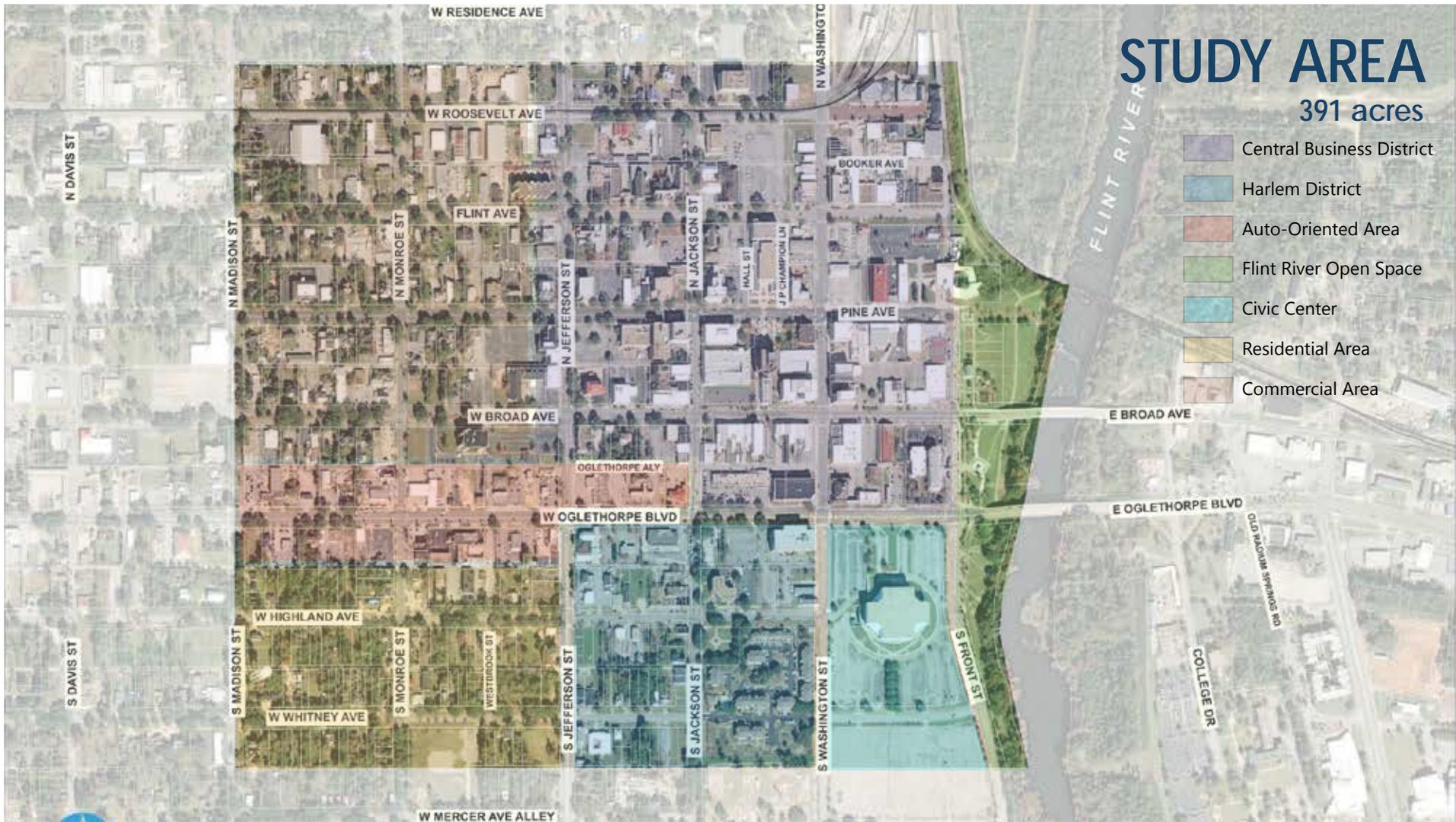
- The Flint RiverQuarium;
- The Thronateeska Heritage Center;
- The Albany Municipal Auditorium;
- The Albany Welcome Center; and
- The Dougherty County Public Library.

The northwest part of the CBD around Washington Street and Flint Avenue is the old Sandy Bottom area. Commercial buildings in this area have a unique character but are mostly vacant. The most challenging part about this area is that it is located in the 500-year floodplain.

## HARLEM DISTRICT

South of the CBD is the Harlem District, a significant component of Downtown Albany because of its association with the Civil Rights Movement. Mt. Zion Baptist Church and the Albany Civil Rights Institute are major landmark attractions in the City. As the historic African American commercial center, there are historic buildings on S. Jackson Street and Highland Avenue, including the Ritz Theater and Cultural Center. However, these buildings are in poor condition and the community needs to find new uses for them to thrive again. Also in this area is the new Albany Transportation Center, which broke ground in October 2021. This key project will help bring revitalization into the Harlem District.





# STUDY AREA

391 acres

- Central Business District
- Harlem District
- Auto-Oriented Area
- Flint River Open Space
- Civic Center
- Residential Area
- Commercial Area



## AUTO-ORIENTED AREA

Despite the historic character in most of the Study Area, auto-oriented development prevails in certain areas, especially along Oglethorpe Avenue. This corridor is filled with fast food restaurants, motels, service stations, convenience stores, and auto dealers. There are a number of underutilized properties and vacant lots, which have potential to be redeveloped. It is important for this plan to set standards for redevelopment so it contributes to the historic character of Albany.

## FLINT RIVER OPEN SPACE

Downtown Albany has the advantage of fronting on the beautiful Flint River. From north to south, the Riverfront Park, Ray Charles Plaza, and the Veterans Park Amphitheater are connected by riverfront trails that provide amenities to residents and visitors. However, this area lacks connectivity to the rest of the City and is not fully utilized. Few people actually live close enough to this open space to activate and use it.

## CIVIC CENTER

The Albany Civic Center, which is the largest indoor venue in southwest Georgia, has the capability to host conferences and arena events. Built in the early 1980s, it shows a dated appearance with a sea of parking around it and lack of landscaping. It has the potential to be transformed with some landscape improvement along Oglethorpe Avenue.

## SOUTHWEST RESIDENTIAL AREA

The area west of Jefferson Street along Highland Avenue and Whitney Avenue is historically part of the in-town residential neighborhood with some commercial close to the Harlem District. It has a mix of single-family and multi-family units, most of

which are vacant or in poor condition.

## NORTHWEST COMMERCIAL AREA

The area west of Jefferson Street and north of Oglethorpe Alley is mostly commercial. Its character is mixed: some buildings are located close to the streets but others sit further behind with parking between buildings and the streets. Some properties are dominated with large parking areas, which goes against the character of a pedestrian-friendly downtown.

## ONGOING INITIATIVES

Concurrent with this planning process, there are several initiatives underway to improve downtown:

- A streetscape improvement project is ongoing for Pine Avenue and Broad Avenue from Front Street to Jackson Street, Washington Street and Front Street from Pine Avenue to Broad Avenue, and Jackson Street from Pine Avenue to Oglethorpe Avenue.
- The new Albany Transportation Center on Oglethorpe Avenue broke ground in October of 2021.
- The Albany Museum of Art is in the process of moving to the old Belk Building at 128 W. Broad Avenue.
- Environmental cleanup and renovation has begun for the Hotel Gordon, which will be transformed into a boutique hotel.
- The Mt. Zion Group is planning for a mixed-use redevelopment in the heart of the Harlem District.
- The City has received funding to bury utilities in the Sandy Bottom area.



Ray Charles Plaza with Hilton Garden Inn in the background



Auto-oriented area along Oglethorpe Avenue



Single family house on Whitney Avenue

# FUTURE LAND USE

The map on the facing page shows Downtown Albany with mostly commercial land uses, followed by public/institutional uses for government and religious functions. There is limited area set aside for residential uses. Park and recreation uses are concentrated along the banks of the Flint River. The rest of the downtown area lacks park space.

According to the Albany and Dougherty County Comprehensive Plan (2016), the downtown area no longer serves as the center of retail activity in the County, despite its commercial character, because of commercial expansion beyond the CBD. It needs to find its unique place as the center of the area with a variety of more inclusive and prosperous uses.



Multi-story commercial uses



Single-story commercial uses



Public/institution - Civic Center



Public/institution - library



Public/institution - church



Multi-family (Source: apartmentguide.com)



Low-density residential

# FUTURE LAND USE MAP



# ZONING

Current zoning designations in the Study Area are primarily mixed-use and commercial designations. The following is a list of zoning classifications in the Study Area:

## **C-1, Neighborhood Mixed-Use Business District**

This district is intended for pedestrian-oriented development with a mix of retail, restaurant, service, and office uses that serves nearby residents and does not generate large traffic volumes or parking issues.

## **C-2, General Mixed-Use Business District**

This district is intended for a wider range of uses and a greater height of buildings than permitted in the C-1 district. Most of downtown is within this zoning classification.

## **C-3, Commercial District**

This district is intended to permit businesses along major arterials that will attract regional customers and will need greater automobile accessibility.

## **C-5, Office-Institutional-Residential District**

This is a pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use district that is intended to permit office, institutional, residential, and certain restricted business uses that provide local employment opportunities.

## **C-R, Community Residential Multiple Dwelling District**

This district is intended for townhouses, duplexes and apartment buildings with limited sidewalk oriented commercial uses at the intersection of arterial and collector streets.

## **R-3, Single-Family and Two-Family Residential District**

Two-family dwellings must have the appearance of single-family homes and be compatible with the scale and character of surrounding single-family homes and neighborhoods.

## **FH, Flood Hazard District**

This district is intended to prohibit intensive commercial, residential, industrial, and institutional uses lying within the floodway of the Flint River, Kinchafoonee Creek, and the Georgia Power Company Reservoir.

## **Riverfront District**

The area east of Jefferson Street is part of the Riverfront District. The purpose of this district is to support and enhance Downtown Albany as the cultural and historic crown of the city, with a focus on the Flint River as its most sparkling jewel. The Riverfront District is also intended to establish a pedestrian-oriented, high-density, cultural, and tourism district within downtown, providing an environment where individuals and families can live, work, play, and discover.

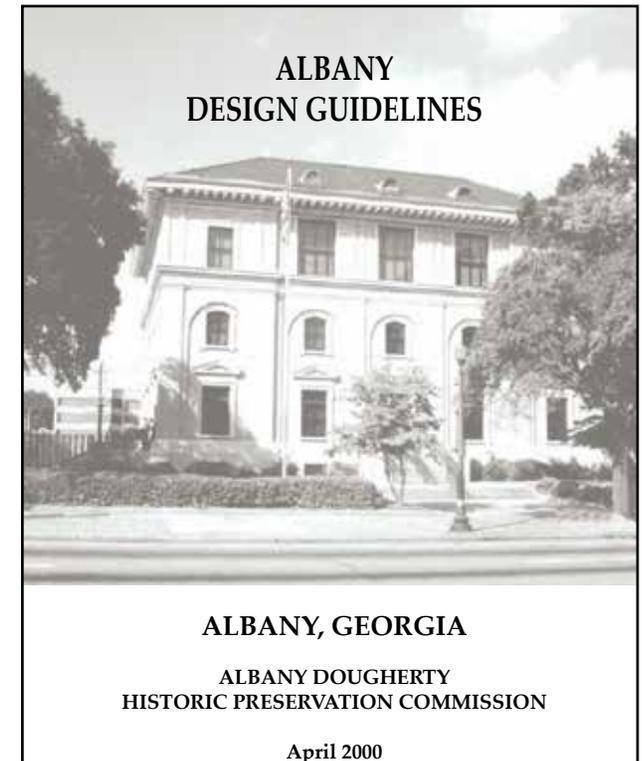
This district ordinance sets requirements for the following:

- Open space;
- Parking, driveway, and access;
- New streets and alleys;
- Sidewalk area;
- Building street facade;
- Building entrance;
- General site and building;
- General use; and
- General upkeep and care.

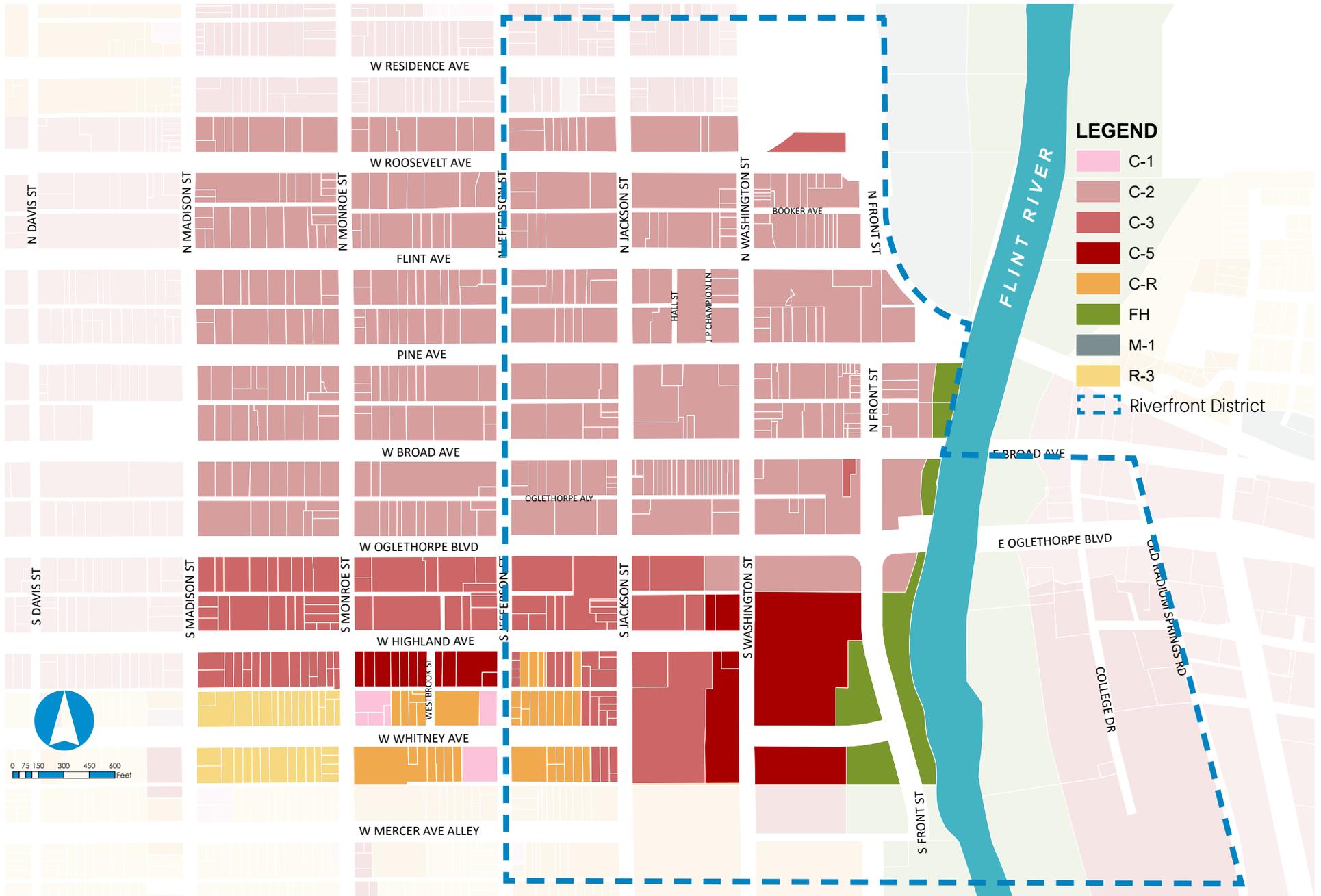
## **Historic Preservation Design Guidelines**

Albany established a historic district in 2000 and developed design guidelines through its Historic Preservation Commission (HPC). Currently, the design guidelines are administered by the HPC in evaluating the rehabilitation of existing historic properties or new construction projects. The guidelines work as an overlay on existing zoning regulations. It deals only with the appearance and not the use of the properties in the district.

The entire Study Area is within the Albany Historic District. As a result, development and redevelopment are subject to HPC review based on the design guidelines.



# ZONING MAP

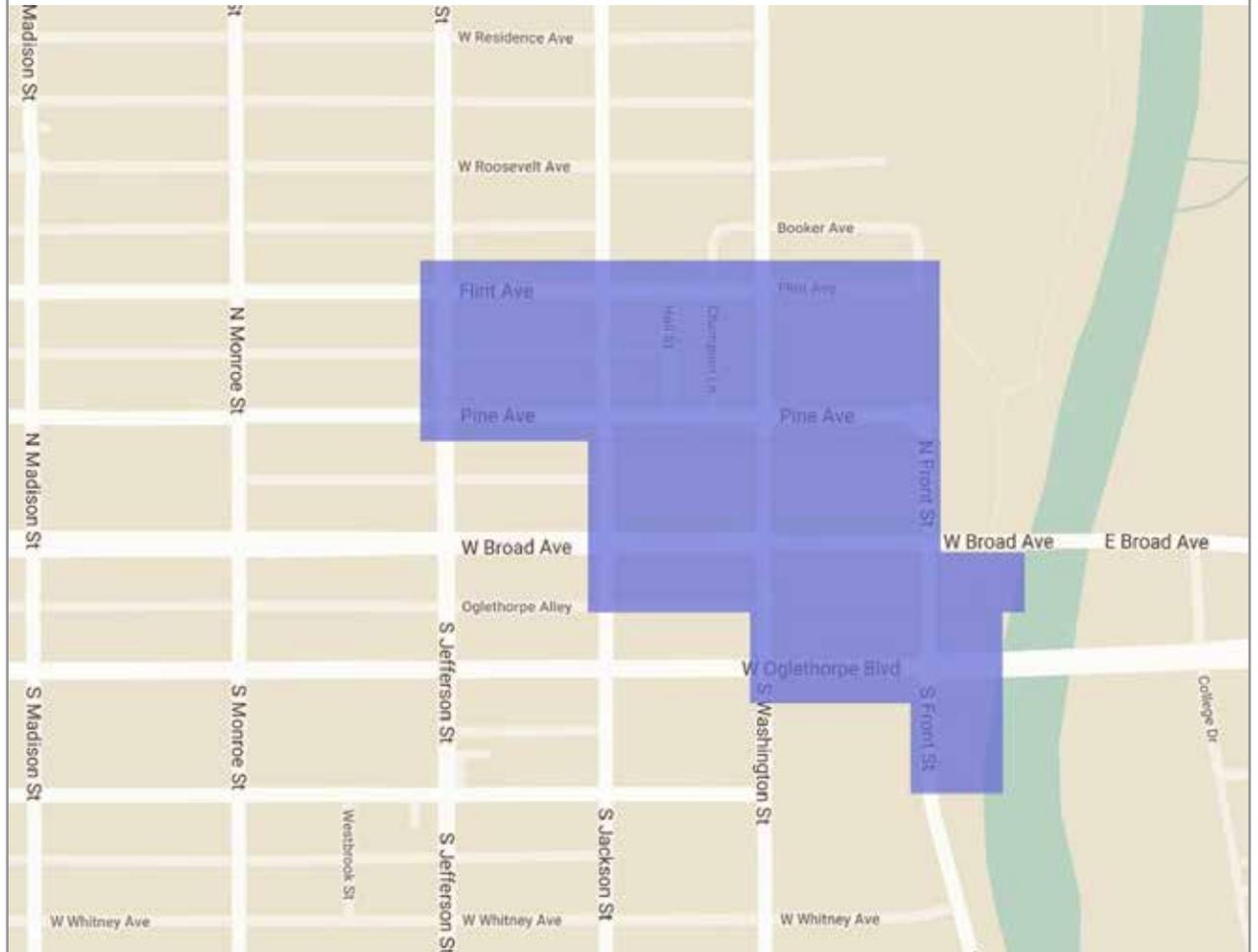


# ZONING

## Downtown Entertainment District

The City has established a Downtown Entertainment District to govern possession and consumption of alcohol within the district. This is the area where most entertainment facilities, as well as food and beverage businesses, are located. This is also the targeted area for new downtown restaurants and shops.

# DOWNTOWN ENTERTAINMENT DISTRICT



# COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Downtown Albany includes many important community resources. The map on the following page shows the resources in the Study Area and their geographic relationships to each other.

## CITY AND COUNTY FACILITIES

Most of the City and County offices and facilities are located downtown. The federal courthouse, several office buildings and two parking decks are located between the 200 block of Broad Avenue and the 200 block of Pine Avenue. In the center is the five-story Government Building, built in the 1990's. It has aged and needs renovation and programming for better utilization.

The police and fire departments are both located downtown. The county library at the corner of Jackson Street and Pine Avenue serves the core and broader area. The Albany Transportation Center, once completed, will bring more people to downtown.

## ATTRACTIONS & ENTERTAINMENT FACILITIES

There are a number of facilities that attract people to downtown. They include the Flint RiverQuarium, the Thronateeska Heritage Center, the Civic Center, the Albany Municipal Auditorium, and the Albany Civil Rights Institute. The Albany Museum of Art will join downtown in the near future.

## HOSPITALITY

The Hilton Garden Inn, located on Front Street facing the river, is the major hospitality facility in downtown. Hotel Gordon, which is under renovation, will provide additional hospitality for the area.

## COMMERCIAL AREAS

Broad Street has been the main street for

commercial and mixed-use activities throughout Albany's history. It has lost its vitality over the years and there are vacancies in many buildings, especially the upper floors.

Currently, the most successful commercial activity centers around the 100 block of Pine Avenue: Pretoria Fields, The Flint restaurant, and the Front Street Market shops are becoming destinations.

There are two other historical commercial centers in downtown, one in the Harlem District around Jackson Street and Highland Avenue, and another in Sandy Bottom along Washington Street and Flint Avenue. They are both in poor condition with many vacant buildings, which presents opportunities for redevelopment and adaptive reuse.

## HISTORIC RESOURCES

Downtown Albany's character is centered around its abundant historic resources. There are many beautiful historic buildings throughout the town. The following are places/buildings listed in the National Register in the Downtown Master Plan Area (see next page for photos of some buildings):

1. Union Station Historic District
2. St. Nicholas/Lee Hotel
3. Bridge House
4. Rosenberg Brothers Department Store
5. Davis Exchange Building
6. Albany House Furnishing Company
7. New Albany Hotel
8. Carnegie Library of Albany
9. Municipal Auditorium
10. Albany Theatre
11. U.S. Post Office and Courthouse
12. Samuel Farkas House

13. Mount Zion Baptist Church
14. John A. Davis House
15. W.E. Smith House

Besides the national registered buildings, many other historic buildings contribute to downtown's character and are worth preservation. To name a few, they include:

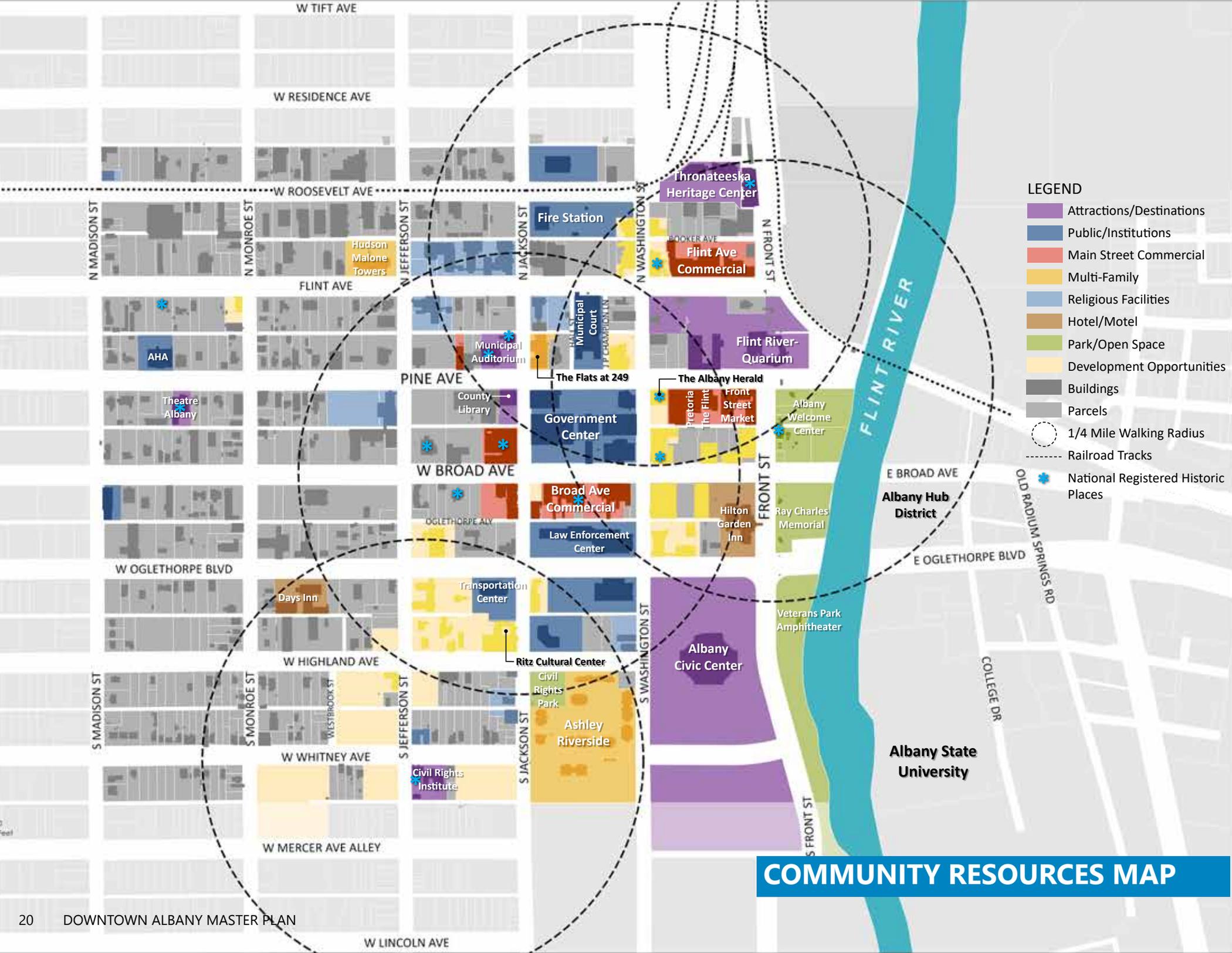
- The Chamber of Commerce Building
- The Ritz Theater
- The State Theater
- Sandy Bottom commercial buildings
- The Mule Barn



The Flint restaurant



Pretoria Fields



- LEGEND**
- Attractions/Destinations
  - Public/Institutions
  - Main Street Commercial
  - Multi-Family
  - Religious Facilities
  - Hotel/Motel
  - Park/Open Space
  - Development Opportunities
  - Buildings
  - Parcels
  - 1/4 Mile Walking Radius
  - Railroad Tracks
  - \* National Registered Historic Places

**COMMUNITY RESOURCES MAP**



Historic Bridge House



New Albany Hotel (Flats 249)



Mount Zion Baptist Church (Albany Civil Rights Institute)  
Todd Stone, <https://grouptourmagazine.com/georgia-civil-rights-trail/>



Albany Municipal Auditorium



Union Depot (Thronateeska Heritage Center)



St. Nicholas/Lee Hotel  
Blastoids, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons



Rosenberg Brothers Department Store (Herald Building)



The Albany Theatre



Davis Exchange Building  
Michael Rivera, licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons

# PROPERTY OWNERSHIP

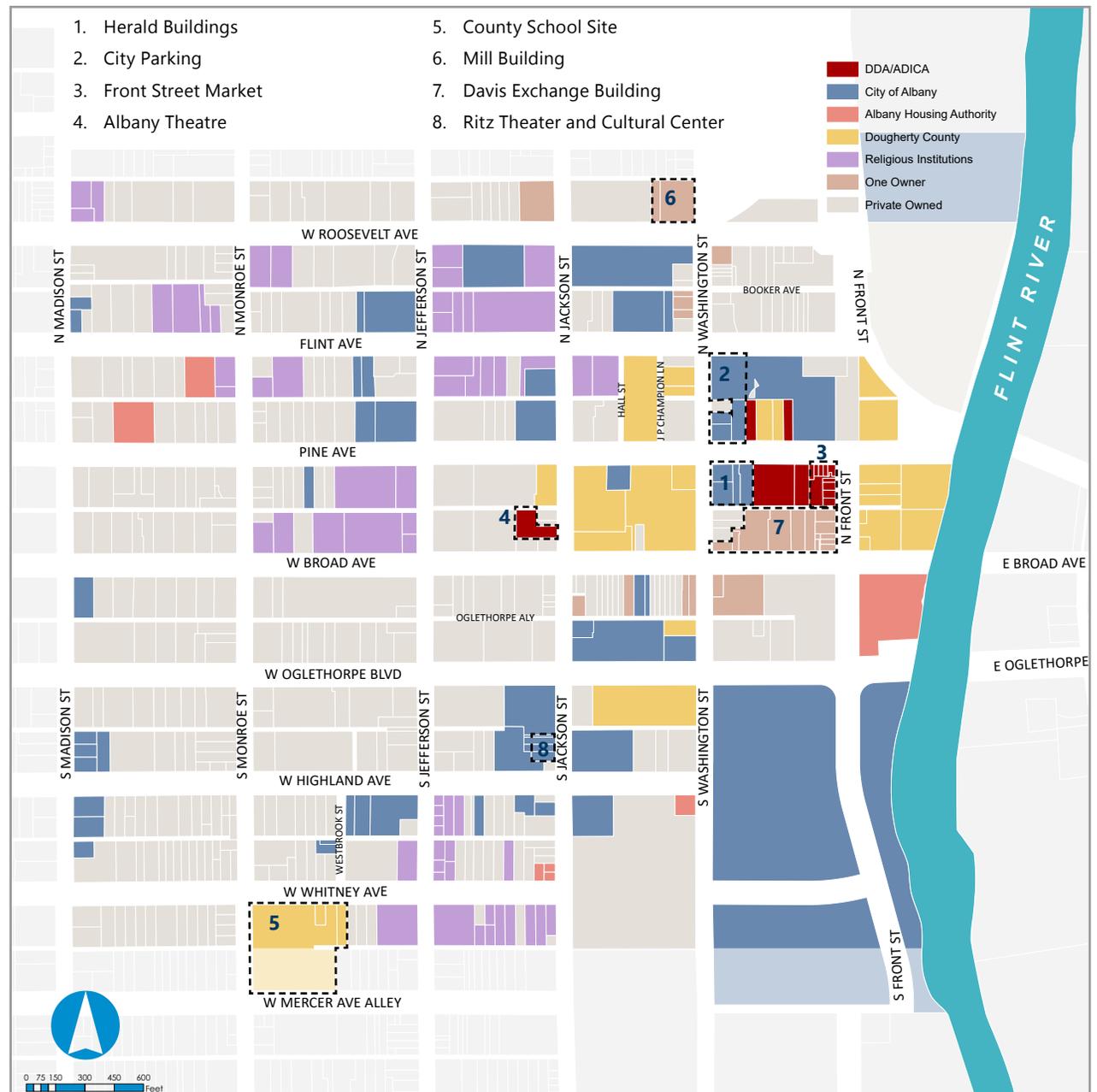
The map on the right shows properties owned by major public and private owners in the Study Area.

Currently, the City is making an effort to promote redevelopment of several DDA/ADICA and City-owned properties. They include the Herald buildings, the Front Street Market buildings, the Albany Theatre, and the Ritz Theater and Cultural Center.

A major development opportunity among the County-owned properties is the school site on Whitney Avenue.

Some of the properties owned by religious institutions also present opportunities for redevelopment. Among them, Mt. Zion Baptist Church and Shiloh Baptist Church have already started plans for some properties they own.

Among privately-owned parcels, there is one person who owns a significant amount of properties in the Study Area. Recently, the owner has donated the Belk property to the Albany Museum of Art for its new home downtown. This owner is considering redevelopment opportunities for other properties including the Mill Building at 211 W. Roosevelt Avenue, the Davis Exchange Building, and adjacent parcels on Broad Avenue.

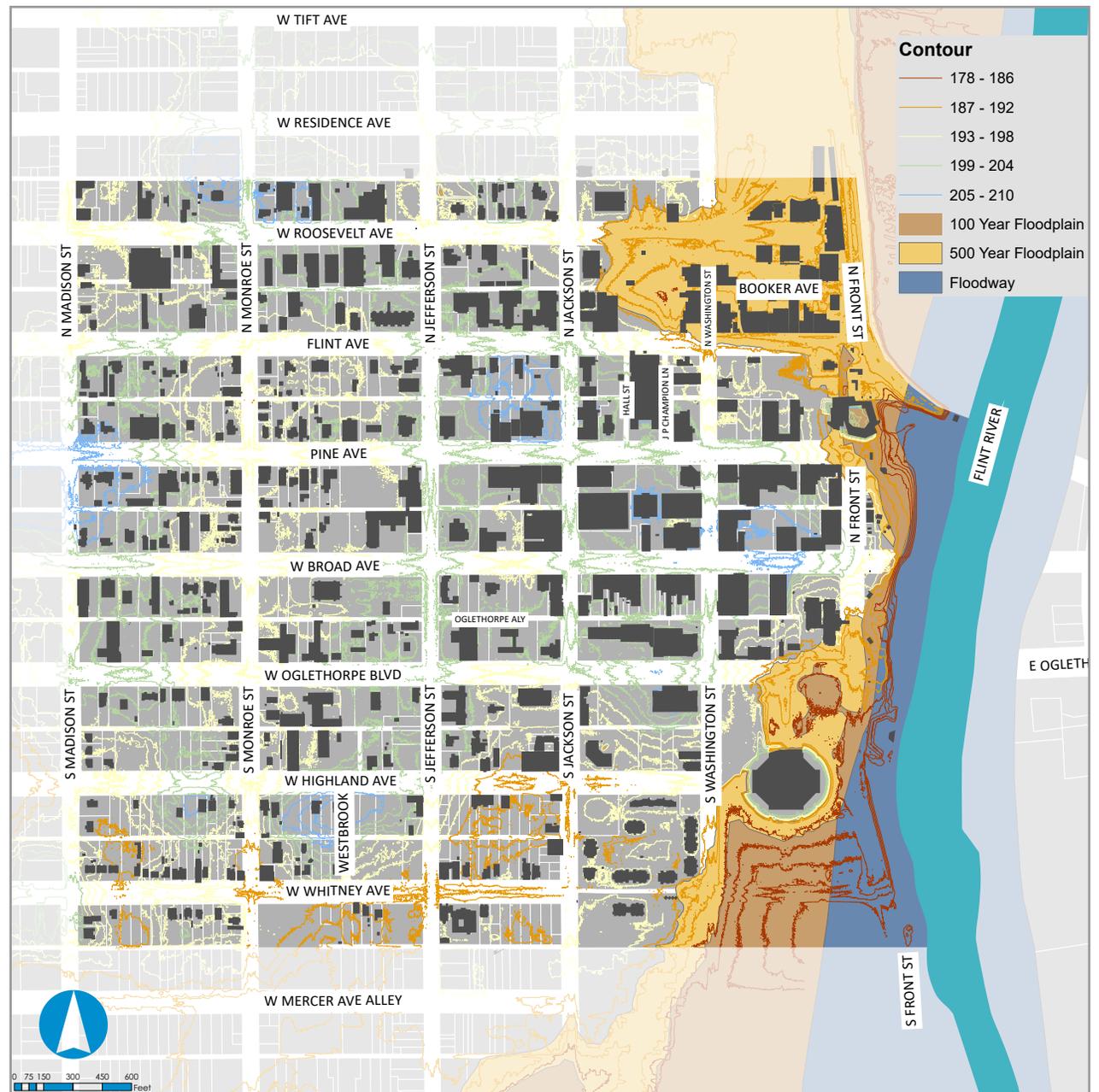


# ENVIRONMENT

Downtown Albany is shaped and affected by the Flint River corridor. Many Albany residents have vivid memories of the 1994 flood, which devastated the City.

According to the Downtown Riverfront Master Plan (1996), the Flint River corridor is characterized by a diverse geography dominated by limestone karst topography and including a steep-sided riverbank.

As shown on the map to the right, the Study Area is relatively flat with most land falling between 190 feet and 210 feet above sea level. Areas with elevations lower than 190 feet are in the 500-year floodplain. Future improvement within this 500-year floodplain should take a flood-ready approach to protect infrastructure, businesses, and owners.



# TRANSPORTATION

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

In order to determine downtown's transportation needs for the future, the existing vehicular and non-vehicular networks were studied. Existing roadway classifications, traffic counts, crash data, pedestrian and bicycle facilities, and public transit within the Study Area were examined.

## VEHICULAR NETWORK

### Roadway Classifications

The roads within the Study Area fall under three roadway classifications. These classifications include:

- **Arterials:** Roadways that provide mobility to allow traffic to move from one place to another quickly and safely.
  - Higher mobility
  - Lower degree of access
- **Collectors:** Roadways that link arterials and local roads and perform some of the duties of each.
  - Balance between mobility and access
- **Local:** Roadways that provide access to homes, businesses, and other properties.
  - Lower mobility
  - Higher degree of access

Within the Study Area, Oglethorpe Boulevard is the only Principal Arterial. The remaining roadways fall into the classifications of either Minor Arterial, Major Collector, or Local Streets.

### Traffic Counts

Traffic data from the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT)'s website was used to determine the Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT)

along the City's roadways. AADT is determined by dividing the total number of vehicles on a roadway in a year by 365 days. The data showed Oglethorpe Boulevard having the highest traffic volume in the Study Area with an AADT of 23,900. All remaining roads within the Study Area have an AADT of less than or equal to 10,400.

### Crash Data

Crash data from January 2017 to January 2022 was collected in order to have a better understanding of which areas have the greatest need for safety improvements within the Study Area. With 1,264 total collisions reported in that time frame, Oglethorpe Boulevard proved to be the street with the most crashes (483 crashes in total), especially near its intersections at Front Street, Washington Street, Jackson Street, and Jefferson Street. Other streets with high numbers of collisions were Broad Avenue with 239 crashes and Pine Avenue with 210 crashes, specifically at their intersections with Jackson Street and Jefferson Street. These three streets alone contain 74% of the total crashes within the Study Area.

## NON-VEHICULAR NETWORK

### Pedestrian & Bicycle Facilities

Albany has a multi-use trail along the Flint River called the Riverfront Trail. This trail connects the Flint River to Downtown Albany. The Flint River Trails Master Plan (2016) recommended trails connecting Downtown Albany to Radium Springs on the south and Sasser, almost 15 miles to the north.

Throughout Downtown Albany, streetscape projects are underway on several central core streets, such as Broad Avenue, Pine Avenue, Jackson Street, Washington Street, and Front Street. Approximately

16 miles of sidewalk are also provided throughout Downtown Albany.

### Parking

Parking conditions for Downtown Albany were found by referencing the Downtown Albany Strategic Parking Plan (2019). Sufficient off- and on-street parking is provided throughout Downtown Albany. Parking before, during, and after noon consists of utilized on-street parking spaces, especially within a two-block radius of the Government Center Parking Deck. However, on-street parking along Broad Street and the east end of Pine Avenue are not utilized. Off-street parking is provided by the Government Center Parking Deck and other parking decks and lots throughout the downtown area, which are not consistently used. Overall, off- and on-street parking in Downtown Albany is generally underutilized and available.

### Public Transit

The City has its own bus service, Albany Transit System (ATS), that connects all of Albany, including ASU's campuses. Buses run weekdays from 5:00 a.m. to 8:30 p.m., as well as Saturday from 6:15 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. There are 12 different routes, and all routes commence and conclude at the Albany Transit

# TRANSPORTATION

Station. Schedules and bus stops for each of the 12 routes can be found on the City's website.

## ONGOING TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS

### PI 0008384: Signal System Upgrade – Phase IV

This project includes signal system upgrades at the following intersections: Flint Avenue at Madison Street, Flint Avenue at Monroe Street, Flint Avenue at Jackson Street, Flint Avenue at Washington Street, Pine Avenue at Davis Street, Pine Avenue at Madison Street, Pine Avenue at Monroe Street, Pine Avenue at Jackson Street, Pine Avenue at Washington Street, Broad Avenue at Davis Street, Broad Avenue at Madison Street, Broad Avenue at Monroe Street, Broad Avenue at Jackson Street, Broad Avenue at Washington Street, Broad Avenue at Front Street, and Highland Avenue at Jackson Street. This project is in the concept phase.

### PI 0013992: SR 520 Business at Flint River

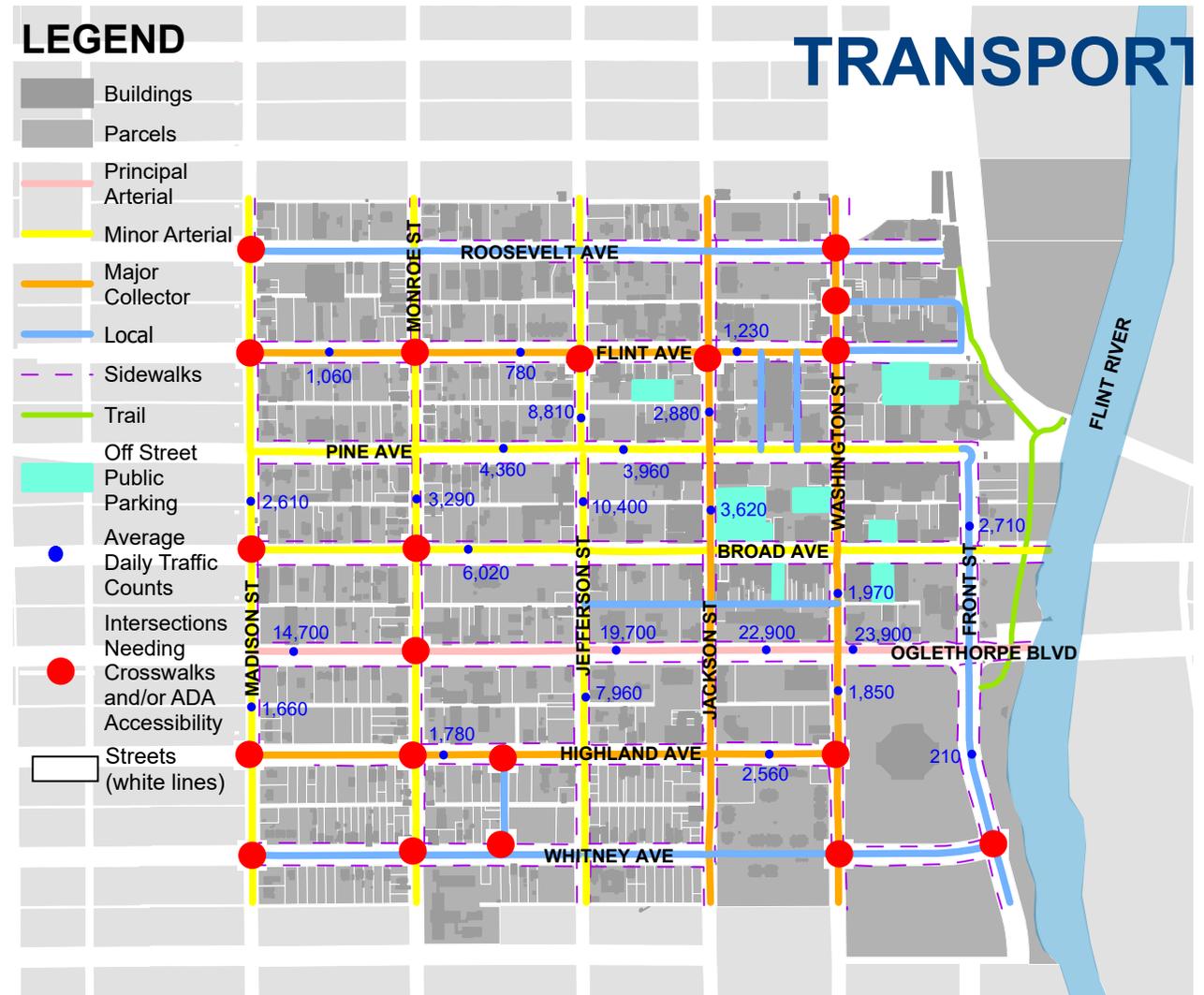
This project will replace the existing bridge on SR 520 Business across the Flint River. The new bridge will consist of four 12-foot lanes, 2-foot gutters, a 5.5-foot sidewalk on the north side of the bridge, and a 12-foot shared-use path on the south side of the bridge protected by a barrier. This project is in the final design phase.

### PI 0015401: Downtown Albany Revitalization

This streetscape project is located along Pine Avenue from Jackson Street to Front Street, Broad Avenue from Jackson Street to Front Street, Oglethorpe Alley, Jackson Street from Oglethorpe Boulevard to Pine Avenue, Washington Street from Broad Avenue to Pine Avenue, Front Street from

Broad Avenue to Pine Avenue, Front Street from

Broad Avenue to Pine Avenue, and 100 Broad Alley (Pretoria Alley). The streetscape improvements will consist of improving sidewalks, road resurfacing, lighting, safe pedestrian access, landscape planting



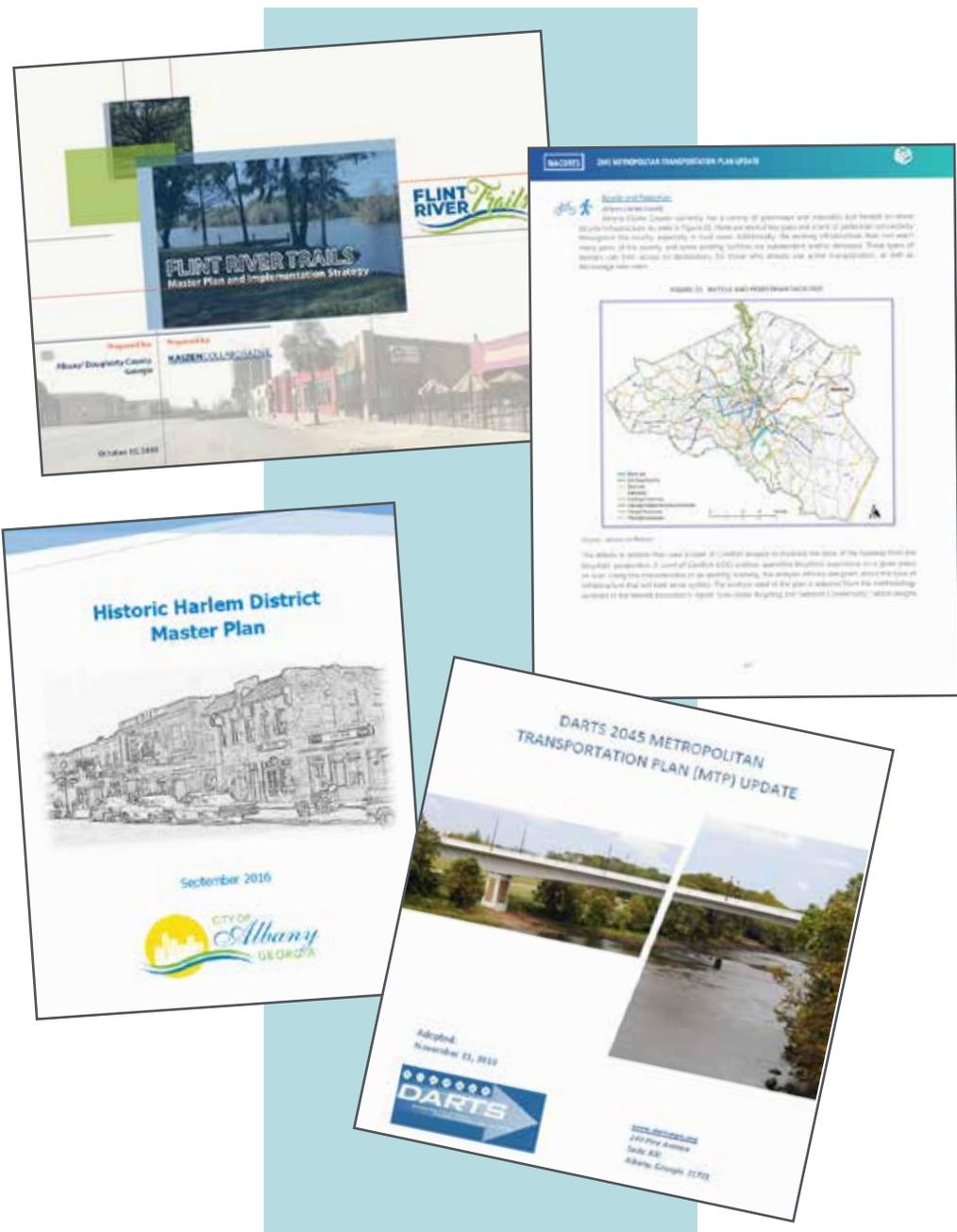
Existing Transportation Conditions Map

# PREVIOUS PLANS

The City of Albany has produced a series of plans over the years. The following is a list of plans relating to the Study Area:

- Downtown Riverfront Master Plan (1996)
- Albany Downtown Master Plan & Supplemental Design Guidelines (2005)
- Supplement Design Guidelines
- Riverfront and Gateway Tax Allocation District Redevelopment Plan (2008)
- Downtown Albany Housing Market Study (2011)
- Downtown Albany: 100 Block Study (SAG 2014)
- Albany and Dougherty County Comprehensive Plan 2026 (2016)
- Downtown Master Plan (2016)
- Flint River Trails Master Plan (2016)
- Historic Harlem District Master Plan (2016)
- Downtown Albany Revitalization Strategy (2017)
- Downtown Entertainment District Master Plan (2018)
- Young Game Changers Recommendations (2018)
- Development Master Plan - Downtown Entertainment District (2018)
- Downtown Albany Strategic Parking Plan (2019)
- City of Albany - Signage Master Plan (2019)
- 2045 Metropolitan Transportation Plan Update (2019)

The consultant team has reviewed the above plans and incorporated recommendations which are still valid for the Study Area.



# MARKET ANALYSIS

## SUMMARY FINDINGS

Based on the data and analysis detailed in the Market Analysis Report (Appendix A), the following provides a high-level summary of demographic, economic, and real estate trends that currently impact Downtown Albany's built environment and its local economy.

### DEMOGRAPHICS

The greatest impediment and long-term detriment to the economic health of Downtown Albany has been population and job loss. Stabilizing and eventually growing the City, County and MSA economy and population must be a top priority.

Income levels of the population living downtown are substantially lower than the surrounding area – limiting downtown's ability to capture retail sales.

- o The estimated median household income of downtown residents (\$22,735) is 68% lower than Dougherty County, 51% lower than the MSA, and 61% lower than the statewide median.
- o More than 83% of households living downtown are renters, compared to 57% of City households and 47% for the MSA.
- o The existing demographic/income characteristics of the residential population, coupled with the high vacancy rate and poor physical condition of many downtown buildings contributes to the perception that the area is less safe than the surrounding region.

To be successful, Albany must simultaneously attract more middle-income homeowner and renter households to live in the Study Area and expand downtown's ability to draw customers from a much

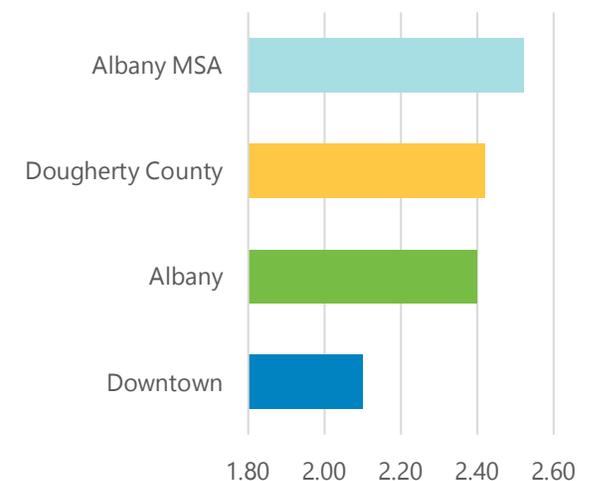
### POPULATION AND HOUSEHOLD TRENDS: 2000-2021

Population	Downtown	Albany	Dougherty County	Albany MSA
2000 Census	1,188	77,134	96,065	153,759
2010 Census	1,101	77,434	94,565	153,857
2021 Estimate	1,016	69,404	84,959	143,669
Annual Growth Rate 2010-2021	-0.73%	-0.99%	-0.97%	-0.62%
Households				
2000 Census	488	28,896	35,553	55,892
2010 Census	379	30,089	36,508	57,947
2021 Estimate	327	27,149	33,140	54,633
Annual Growth Rate 2010-2021	-1.33%	-0.93%	-0.88%	-0.53%

2021 Estimated Median Household Income



Household Size



# SUMMARY FINDINGS



Median value of 55 owner-occupied houses in downtown

83%



Housing ownership in downtown

17%



demand.

## EMPLOYMENT

Office employment and the daytime workforce that supported downtown retail activity in the past has decreased by nearly a quarter over the past decade.

- Employment data indicates that more than 450 public entities and private businesses employ more than 3,400 workers in Downtown Albany across a wide range of industry sectors.
- However, nearly 1,100 jobs (a 24% decrease) have left Downtown Albany since 2011 and downtown's share of citywide employment has declined from 11% to 8%.

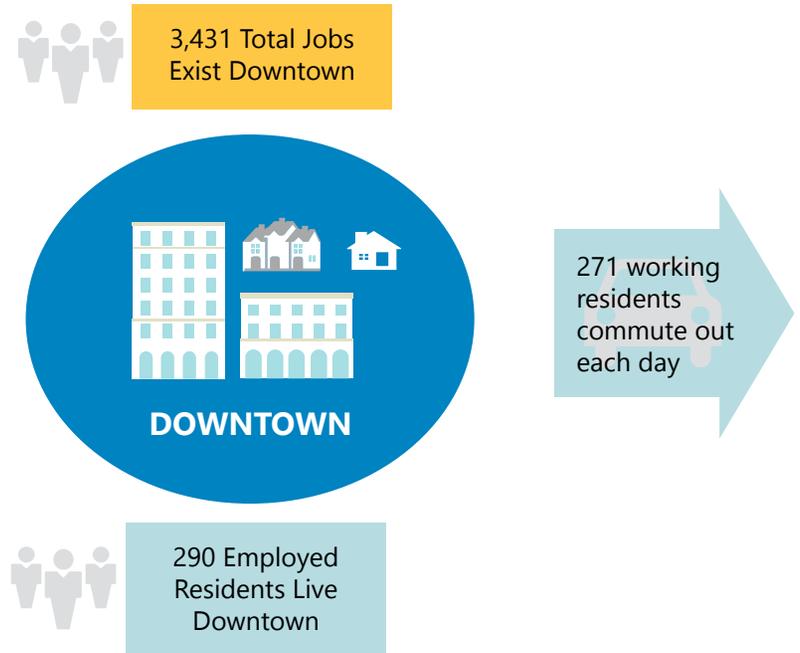
- At typical ratios of commercial square footage per employee, a net reduction of 1,100 jobs would reduce demand for and/or lower the occupancy rate of downtown commercial space by more than 260,000 SF.
- More than 98% of employees working downtown commute in from elsewhere and the largest percentage of the remaining downtown workforce (43%) hold jobs in the public sector..
- Total employment within the MSA has recently increased and regional unemployment is at or near historic lows, suggesting that economic conditions are becoming more favorable.

larger trade area than it has historically.

## HOUSING

The existing housing inventory in Downtown Albany is small, much of it is old and includes many units that are in poor condition.

- Downtown currently contains only 625 housing units including public housing, multi-family rental properties, owner-occupied housing and vacant units, some of which are substandard or not habitable.
- More than 69% of an estimated 55 owner-occupied housing units located downtown are valued below \$100,000, compared to 34% for the City and 30% for the MSA. No new owner-occupied housing has been constructed downtown in the past decade.
- There is limited demand for new market rate multi-family rental housing in the region, but most has recently been captured in Lee County.
- Historic rehab projects in Downtown Albany are the City's best option to attract a portion of that



Commuting Patterns in Downtown

# SUMMARY FINDINGS

## COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE

Nearly 71% of the full value of downtown real estate is associated with government owned land and other tax-exempt buildings, including former commercial properties that have been acquired to hold and re-sell to the private sector.

Using tax assessment records, KBA identified nearly 1.8 million SF of existing taxable “commercial” space in Downtown Albany. Of that total, roughly 800,000 SF is classified as office, 530,800 SF as retail, 250,000 SF as warehousing/storage and the balance as multi-family apartments.

CoStar estimates vacancy rates for downtown property at 35% for retail, 18% for the office sector, and 28% overall.

Due to high retail vacancy rates and the poor condition of many downtown buildings, rents are not adequate to finance the cost of improvements needed to make that space functional to lease. Until rents rise, the public sector will need to continue to participate in owning space and subsidizing commercial rents in key locations.

Rents for space in good condition are in the range of \$5.50 to \$8.50/SF. Typical rents are not true triple net leases, with tenants responsible for interior maintenance and utilities, and landlords for all other exterior repairs and property taxes. The DDA and County have been responsible for most of the recent leases in the Study Area.

Albany has a strong hospitality sector which is largely untapped by downtown-based businesses.

- KBA estimates that area hotels generate an average of 1,600 to 1,800 overnight visitors per day, who collectively spend \$20 to \$25 million per year on dining, entertainment and related services while in the City. Only a small portion

of hotel guest spending is currently captured downtown.

### COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE INVENTORY BY TYPE

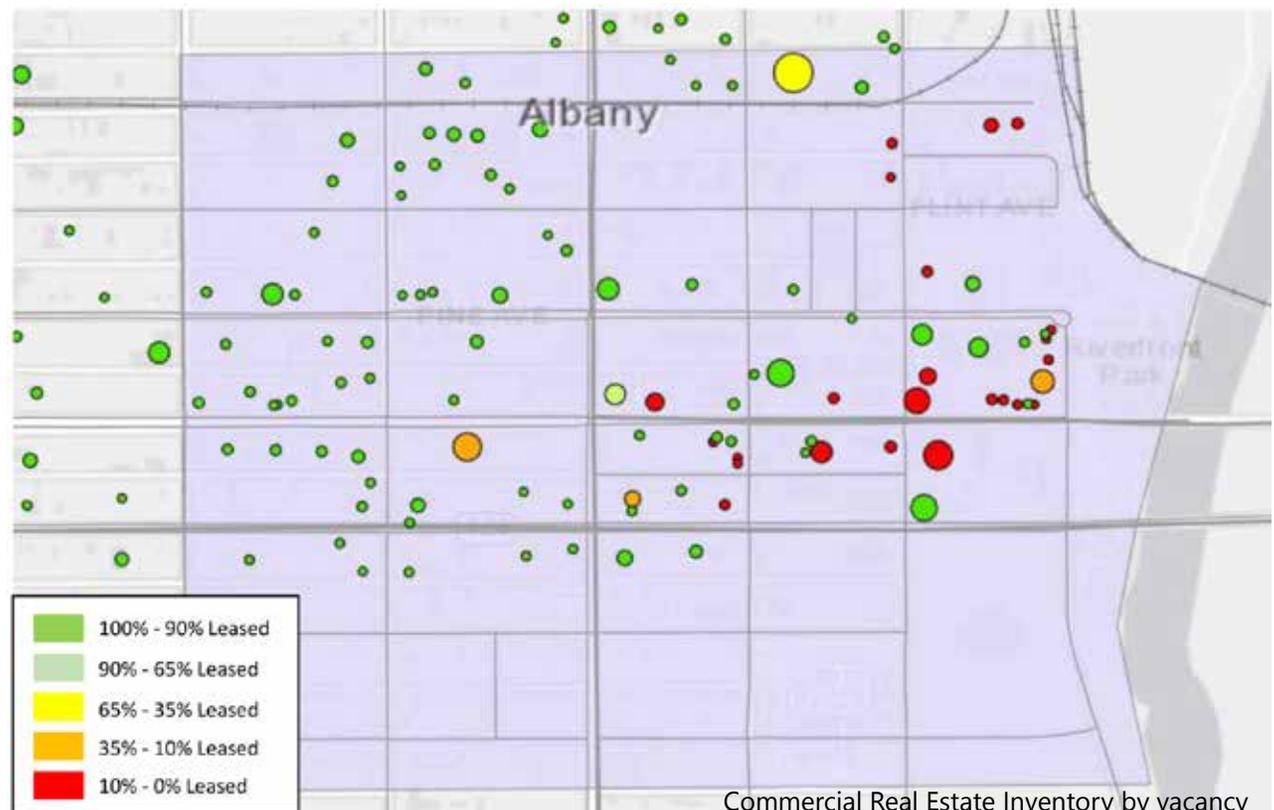
	Unit/SF	Buildings
Retail	436,626	48
Office	490,575	50
Hospitality	187,248	4
Total SF	1,114,449*	

\* Does not include government or religious structures

### COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE VACANCY

	Downtown	Albany MSA
Retail	35.0%	6.4%
Office	18.3%	8.2%

Total estimated downtown commercial vacancy:  
**All building types = 404,600 SF (~28%)**



Commercial Real Estate Inventory by vacancy

# MARKET OPPORTUNITIES

## OPPORTUNITIES FORWARD

While recent and long-term trends impacting Downtown Albany have been largely negative, there are several emerging opportunities and reason for optimism that revitalization efforts can be successful. These Include:

- Albany is the dominant and only population and employment center in the region, and thus faces low risk of losing market share to competitive communities and locations outside of the MSA. The Albany City Commission can limit future “threats” to Downtown Albany’s competitive position through its policy decisions.
- Downtown is unique in southwest Georgia in terms of its density, history and architecture.
- Regional employment losses due to the 2009 recession, storm-related impacts and COVID 19 have stabilized and begun to reverse. The regional (MSA) unemployment rate is at or near historic lows and job growth has been significant over the past 4 quarters.
- The overnight business travel and ASU student markets are significant and largely untapped opportunities for downtown. Pending construction of the Hotel Gordon, plus the potential construction of a second hotel adjacent

to the Hilton Garden Inn, will significantly increase downtown’s share of total lodging rooms and its ability to capture off-site spending by overnight guests.

- There is likely pent-up replacement demand for newer homes and apartment rentals after nearly a decade of little/no new investment. A large percentage of existing vacant housing in Albany and Dougherty County is substandard and obsolete and is not capable of satisfying that demand. Well designed new housing downtown could be competitive with alternatives in Lee County.
- A small but growing number of private entrepreneurs and “institutional”/ non-profit entities appear willing and ready to invest in Downtown Albany. Recent examples of new start-up businesses are beginning to demonstrate what is possible when experienced business owners repurpose vacant downtown sites and buildings.
- Several key downtown properties are already under public sector control and can be offered (with financial incentives) for redevelopment.
- Downtown vacancy issues are not (yet) insurmountable – a relatively small number of new housing units and commercial businesses can be significant in reducing vacancy and changing perceptions of downtown.



Interior Rendering of Future Albany Museum of Art (Courtesy of AMA)



Lobby Rendering of Future Hotel Gordon (Courtesy of Hotel Gordon Development Team)

# REAL ESTATE DEMAND FORECAST

**90**  
Vacant lots

**25-30**  
Lots with buildings that need rehabilitation or demolition

**8** Multi-story buildings  
with vacancy that are suitable for up-per-floor residential development

**GOAL:**  
Reduce commercial vacancy to 35,000-40,000 SF

As part of the Downtown Master Plan Market Analysis, KBA prepared forecasts of development (demand) potential associated with the following land uses:

- New For-Sale Residential (Single-Family and Townhouses)
- New For-Rent Residential (Multi-Family)
- Retail
- Office
- Other Commercial and Hospitality

These real estate demand forecasts are based on population and employment projections for growth for the Albany MSA under various assumptions, including the region’s recent history and Downtown Albany’s potential capture rate of a reasonable share of the MSA’s population, households, employment and future real estate development. These forecasts necessarily assume that (a) physical improvements proposed in the Downtown Master Plan will be implemented in some form and (b) City and County officials will undertake more proactive economic development and housing policies to slow and eventually reverse the recent outmigration of population and households from Albany and the County. Implementing the Downtown Master Plan will be an important component of that strategy. Failure to address decade-long population losses and declining market share will make these forecasts difficult to achieve.

## DOWNTOWN ALBANY, GA 15-YEAR REAL ESTATE DEMAND FORECAST

New Residential	Annual Average	Total
For-Sale ( Single-Family and Townhouses)	15	150-200
Multi-Family For-Rent*	25-35	175-180
<b>TOTAL RESIDENTIAL</b>	<b>40-50</b>	<b>325-380</b>
<b>New Commercial</b>	<b>Sq. Feet</b>	<b>Sq. Feet</b>
Restaurant/Retail/Commercial Services*	10,000-12,000	90,000-100,000
Office	5,000	50,000-75,000
Warehouse/Storage, Automotive and Other**	2,500	25,000-35,000
<b>TOTAL COMMERCIAL</b>	<b>17,000-20,000</b>	<b>165,000-210,000</b>
<b>New Hospitality</b>		<b>+/- 200</b>

\* Demand forecasts are targeted to rehabilitating and reoccupying existing vacant building space.

\*\* Several commercial properties, located mostly in the northern and western portions of the Study Area, do not easily fall under the categories of retail or office space. A percentage of this inventory can be expected to be redeveloped and/or transition to higher uses as core components of the Downtown Master Plan are implemented.



# CHAPTER 2

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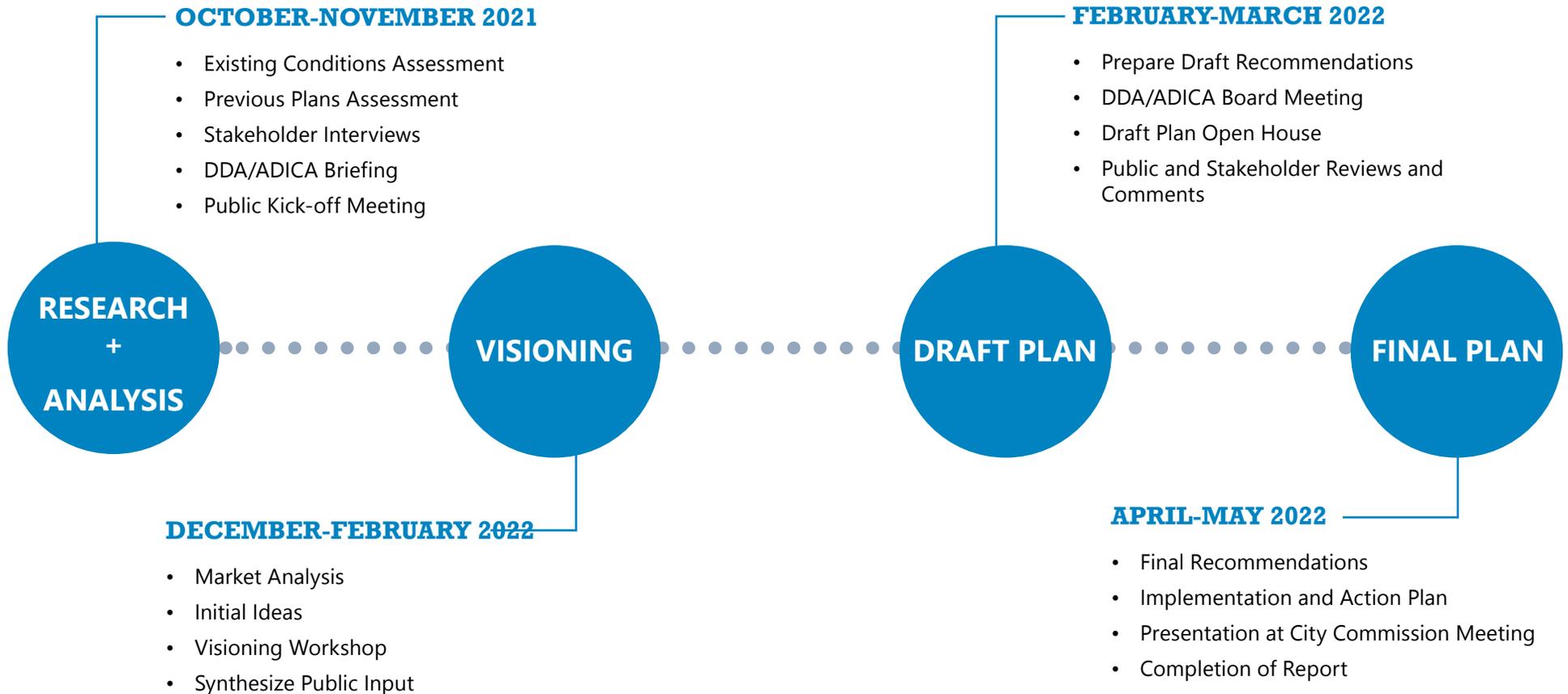
## THE PLANNING PROCESS



# PUBLIC OUTREACH PROCESS

During the public outreach process (outlined in the following diagram and described in more detail on the following pages), the consultant team:

- Met with the City to craft the project schedule;
- Created and maintained a project website to communicate the plan status and contents;
- Interviewed a variety of stakeholders to gather input on issues, challenges, and future visions for Downtown Albany;
- Coordinated with local and regional organizations and entities about ongoing plans and initiatives;
- Hosted three public meetings: a public kick-off meeting, a visioning workshop, and a draft plan open house;
- Presented at several City committee meetings:
  - » Update at DDA meeting, October 13, 2021
  - » Update at ADICA meeting, October 20, 2021
- » Update at Historic Preservation Commission, November 3, 2021
- » Draft Plan at DDA meeting, March 9, 2022
- » Draft Plan at ADICA meeting, March 16, 2022



# STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS AND COORDINATION

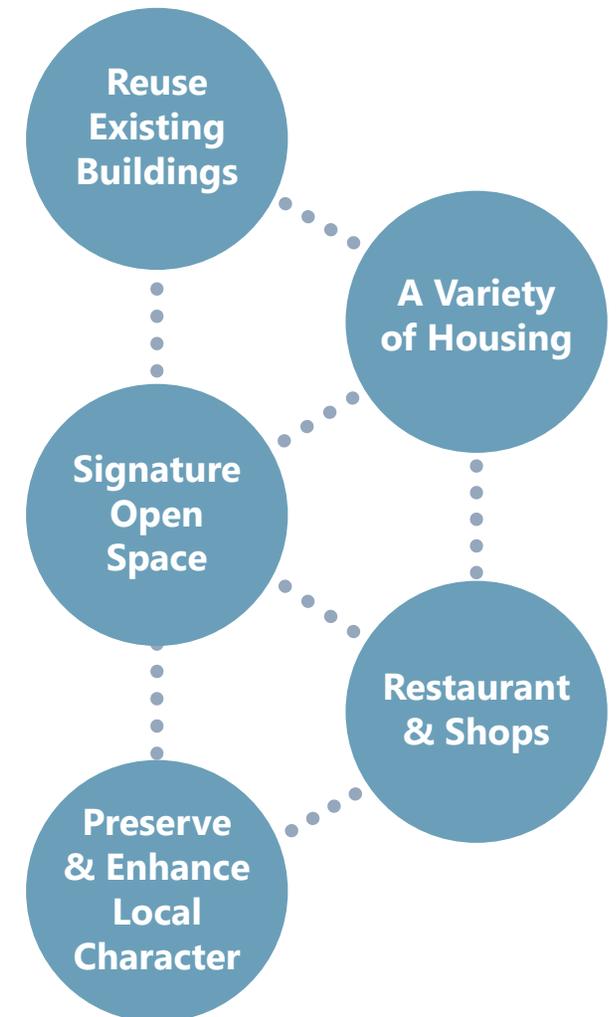
During the planning process, the City and consultant team conducted interviews and coordinated with a variety of stakeholders through Zoom meetings and phone calls. Below is a list of major stakeholders the consultant team met with during the process:

- DDA Board members, ADICA Board members, and other City representatives
- Flint RiverQuarium
- The Thronateeska Heritage Center
- The Albany Museum of Art
- Albany State University
- Albany Technical College
- Phoebe Putney Health System
- Albany Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB)
- Flint River Entertainment Complex
- Albany Area Chamber of Commerce
- County Administrator, Dougherty County Commission
- Southwest Georgia Regional Commission
- Georgia Municipal Association, Georgia Cities Foundation
- Electric Cities of Georgia (ECG)
- Commodore Conyers College and Career Academy (4C Academy)
- Albany-Dougherty Economic Development Commission
- Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA)
- Downtown streetscape project consultants
- Georgia Main Street Program
- Flint Riverkeeper
- Hotel Gordon development team
- Business and property owners

## COMMON THEMES

- Redevelopment and reuse of existing vacant buildings
- Increase downtown residential population through attracting different types of residential development
- How to encourage downtown property owners to convert upper floors of multi-story buildings into residential units
- A signature open space/plaza as focal point of downtown activities
- Host more events and activities for all families and age groups
- More restaurants, breweries, boutiques, and unique businesses
- Beautification and upkeep of existing buildings
- Create identity and focus on branding
- Connect ASU to downtown
- Change safety perceptions of downtown
- Promote art
- Revitalize the Harlem District
- Coordination with other plans by local organizations and entities
- Start with City-owned properties to bring up redevelopment
- Preserve and enhance downtown character

## BIG IDEAS



# PUBLIC MEETINGS

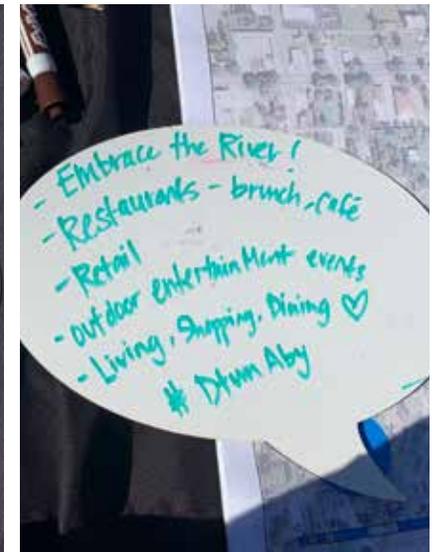
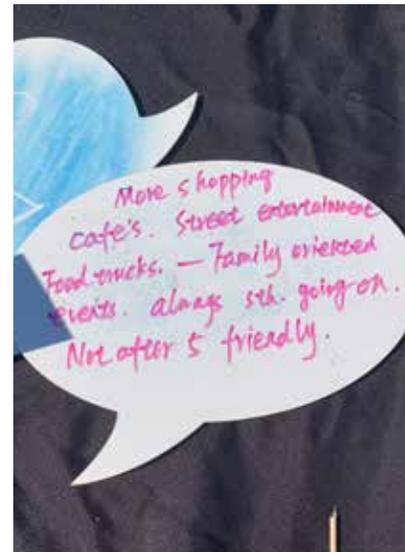
## PUBLIC KICK-OFF MEETING

On the morning of November 19, 2021, the consultant team set up a table at the local ChalkFest and informed passersby about the Downtown Master Plan process and gathered big ideas on how to improve downtown. The photos on the right are from the event.

At the public kick-off meeting later that afternoon, the consultant team presented information regarding existing conditions and current market conditions for the Study Area. Following the presentation, participants were asked to take part in a visual preference survey to provide feedback on the appropriate types of improvements for downtown, as well as big ideas for the Downtown Master Plan.



**POP-UP & KICKOFF MEETING  
PARTICIPANTS**



# VISUAL PREFERENCE SURVEY RESULTS

During the kick-off meeting, participants were asked to view a set of six images for varied topics (mixed-use, streetscapes, placemaking, etc.) and use dots to indicate what they feel is appropriate or inappropriate for Downtown Albany.

The most-liked images for each topic are displayed on the right and on the following pages.

## STREETSCAPE

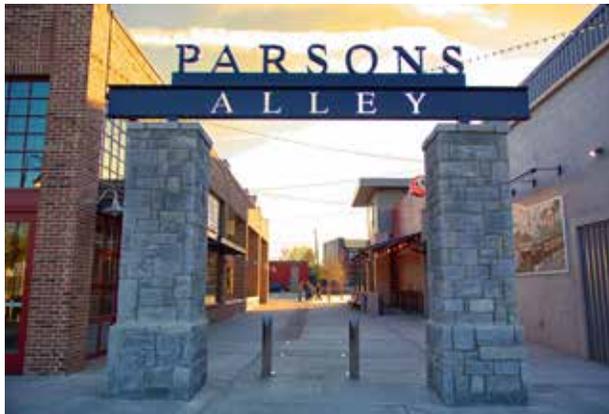


Outdoor dining

## COMMERCIAL



Reuse of existing buildings as commercial



Retrofitting alley space



Fresh market/grocery

**MIXED-USE**



Retrofit main street buildings for mixed-use

**RESIDENTIAL**



Redevelop historic/old buildings for flats

**GREEN/OPEN SPACE**



Plaza



Potentially retrofit historic buildings for mixed-use



Quadplexes



Event lawn

# VISUAL PREFERENCE SURVEY RESULTS

## WAYFINDING



Directional map



Building sign

## PLACEMAKING



Painted mural



Branded signage



Functional art

# VISIONING WORKSHOP

A visioning workshop was held at the Flint RiverQuarium's Imagination Theater on February 8, 2022.

The workshop began with a presentation on findings to-date and initial plan ideas, followed by an hour of public input and discussions for the initial plans at several tables.

The photos on the right illustrate the presentation and work session of the workshop.

Input gathered from this workshop was synthesized to develop draft plan recommendations.



**VISIONING WORKSHOP  
PARTICIPANTS**



# DRAFT PLAN OPEN HOUSE

The City and consultant team hosted an open house event at the Flint RiverQuarium's Imagination Theater on March 22, 2022 from 4:00 to 7:30 pm.

Eight boards were set up in the reception hall to show draft plan recommendations: the general Framework Plan, the focus area plans, a list of recommendations, and projects. People dropped in during their preferred time frame to look at the plan and ask the consultant team questions and provide feedback. The consultant team presented the draft plan recommendations at 6:00 pm and answered questions. The photos on the right show the activities and the open house event.

Feedback gathered from the open house were used to refine recommendations and finalize the plan.



The image shows a large poster titled 'DOWNTOWN ALBANY MASTER PLAN Project List'. The poster is organized into columns and rows, with green dots indicating the status of various projects. The projects listed include: Albany Theatre, Front Street Market, Davis Exchange Market, Sandy Bottom area, Ritz Theatre and Culture Center, Albany Museum of Art, and Gordon Hotel. The poster also includes a section for 'Initiatives Underway'.

**50+**  
**OPEN HOUSE**  
**PARTICIPANTS**



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# CHAPTER 3

## THE PLAN



# GOING FORWARD

## VISION

**The vision of this Master Plan is to create MY ALBANY for everyone, make it a creative and inclusive place for people to live, work, and play without compromising the community's traditional features.**



## GOALS

- Create a livable downtown environment
- Create a thriving commercial and entertainment core
- Revitalize historic main street commercial areas as unique activity centers
- Preserve the history and culture of the Harlem District as its own distinct character
- Foster compact, walkable, mixed-use development
- Encourage new development that is compatible with the traditional features of the community
- Provide housing downtown through renovation, restoration, and new construction
- Create more greenspaces and plazas to help bring residents and the community together
- Improve pedestrian and bicycle facilities
- Improve public safety
- Promote events and activities for families and people of all ages



# FRAMEWORK PLAN

As the big picture for Downtown Albany, the Framework Plan details the following:

- Buildings with potential adaptive reuse opportunities;
- Potential residential infill and redevelopment opportunities;
- Future development opportunities;
- A route to connect historic buildings and places of interest for heritage walk;
- A proposed trail network based on the recommendations set forth in the Flint River Trails Master Plan (2016);
- Phase I for improvement and development;
- Potential new open space; and
- On-street parking and near term parking improvement.

## LEGEND



RENOVATION/ADAPTIVE REUSE



FUTURE REDEVELOPMENT



RESIDENTIAL INFILL



EXISTING PARKS



CENTRAL COMMON



POTENTIAL NEW PARK



PLACES OF INTEREST



HERITAGE TRAIL



BIKE/PEDESTRIAN FACILITIES



EXISTING TRAIL



ON-STREET PARKING



PARKING IMPROVEMENTS



# 01



## PRESERVE AND REHABILITATE DOWNTOWN BUILDINGS

Successful mixed-use development is one of the major components for a livable downtown environment. In Albany, there are many vacant and underutilized buildings in downtown which provide opportunities for a variety of uses through renovation and adaptive reuse. For multi-story buildings, the upper-floors can be converted into much needed housing, while the ground floors can become restaurants, retail, and small-scale grocery stores. Single-story buildings can be renovated for retail, restaurants, entertainment, or event space.

Following is a list of buildings that the City should focus on facilitating and promoting redevelopment activities:

### 1. The Herald Buildings

Owned by the City, the Herald and two adjacent buildings on Pine Street are of top priority for redevelopment. See details on page 48 and 68.



Albany Theater

### 2. The Silvers Building

Currently vacant and privately owned, the Silvers Building is another candidate for mixed-use development. Considering its close proximity with the Herald Building, it is ideal to see both buildings being re-purposed for mixed residential and commercial development. See details on page 48.

### 3. Albany Theatre

Also owned by the City, this two story historic building is another priority for redevelopment. It has a total of 16,896 SF of space. See details on page 71.

### 4. Front Street Market

The Front Street Market includes several buildings along Pine Avenue and Front Street. Currently, all the buildings on Pine Avenue have been leased. During this process, several investors have expressed interest in these spaces and it is likely these buildings will be leased soon.



Front Street Market Buildings

The City is looking to expand the Front Street Market for a second phase, and the buildings near Broad Avenue along Front Street are potential candidates in the future.

### 5. Davis Exchange Building

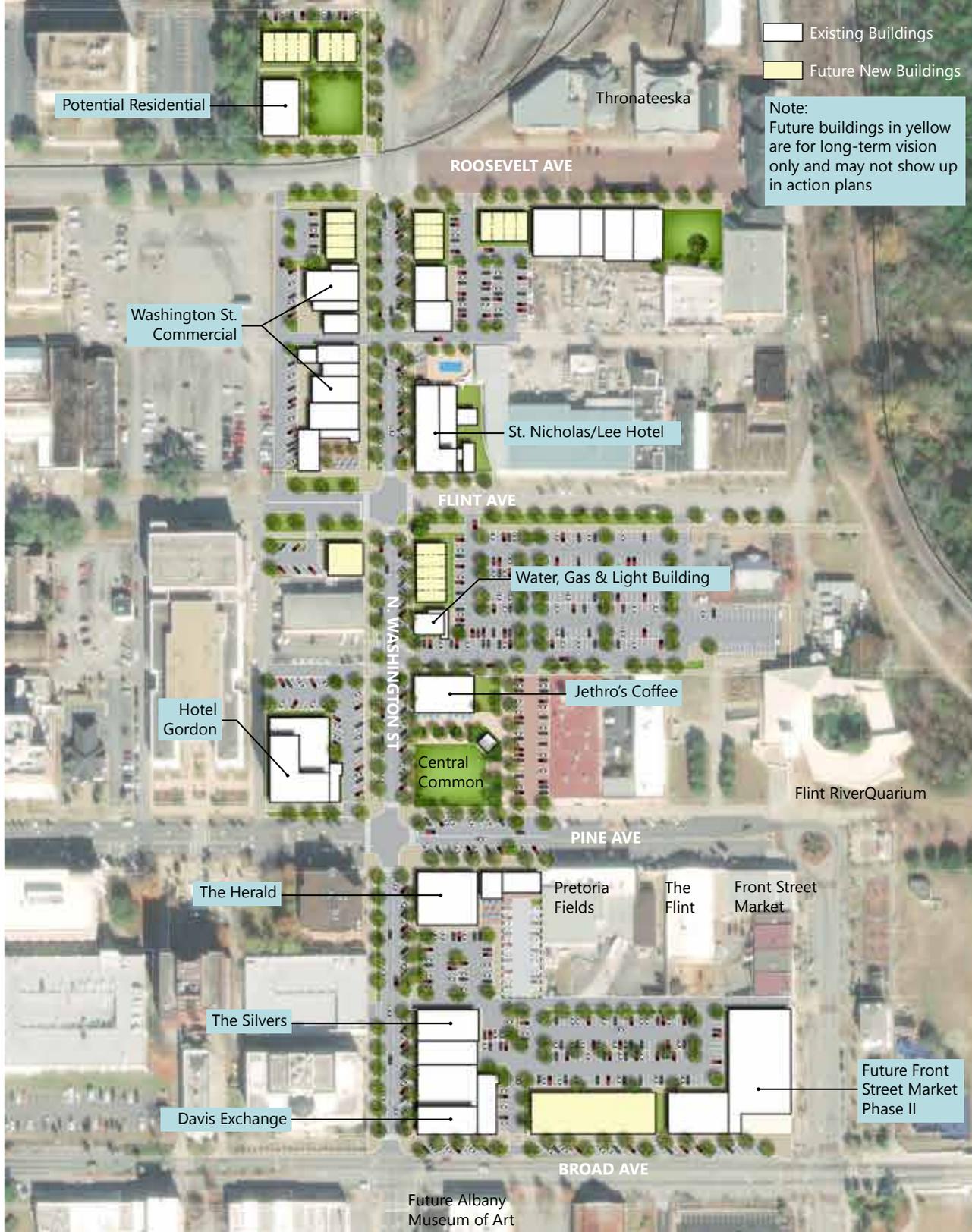
This six-story building at the corner of Broad Avenue and Washington Street provides a great opportunity for mixed residential and commercial uses. It also has the advantage of facing the Belk Building across the street, which will be renovated to house the new Albany Museum of Art in the near future.

### 6. Sandy Bottom Area

Along Washington Street in the old Sandy Bottom area, the historic St. Nicholas/Lee Hotel (304 N. Washington Street) and the commercial buildings across the street can be rehabilitated and become a mixed-use node with residential, commercial, and entertainment uses. The buildings in this area have a unique character that should be preserved.



Commercial Buildings at Sandy Bottom Area



## 7. Ritz Theater and Cultural Center

Located at the heart of the historic Harlem District, the Ritz Theater and Cultural Center has received funding to facilitate renovation and adaptive reuse. The City and its stakeholders should continue to figure out the best use for these properties with historic significance.

Generally, there are also many other underutilized buildings in the downtown area. Those with upper-floor spaces are ideal for residential conversion while the single-story buildings stay as commercial and attract new tenants. One of the major single-story buildings is the Mule Barn, which is ideal for an event space. However, it is currently under lease by the Hilton Garden Inn and the potential uses for it need to be worked out with the hotel.

It is important that the City encourage development that incorporates features which enhance downtown safety, such as better lighting, surveillance systems, secured parking areas for residents and related public improvements. As population and business activity increase, it is assumed that law enforcement will also increase its visibility in Downtown Albany.



# 01



## CATALYTIC PROJECTS: HERALD AND SILVERS REDEVELOPMENT

Shown on the left, the Herald Building at 126 Washington Street, the 132 & 136 Pine Street buildings, and the Silvers Building can provide approximately 34,000 SF of ground floor retail and 31 residential units on the upper floors.

Potential Development Program

Building	Ground Floor Commercial	Residential Above
Herald Building (126 N. Washington Street)	8,900 SF	16 units
132 Pine Avenue*	2,290 SF (Front)	-
138 Pine Avenue**	1,950 SF (Front)	-
Silvers Building (114 N. Washington Street)***	5,300 SF	10 units
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>18,440 SF</b>	<b>26 units</b>
Parking	76 off-street spaces	

\* Use the rear building for parking.

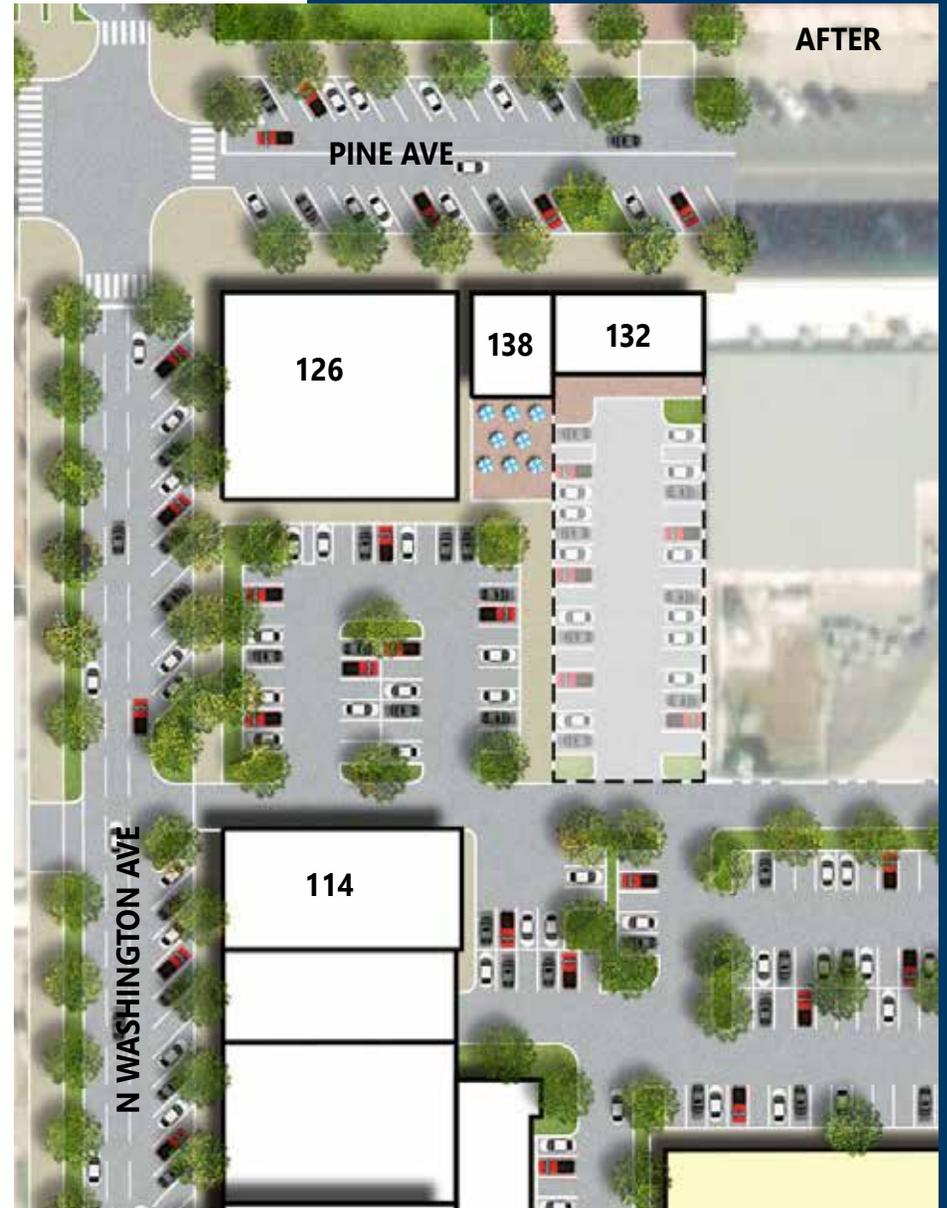
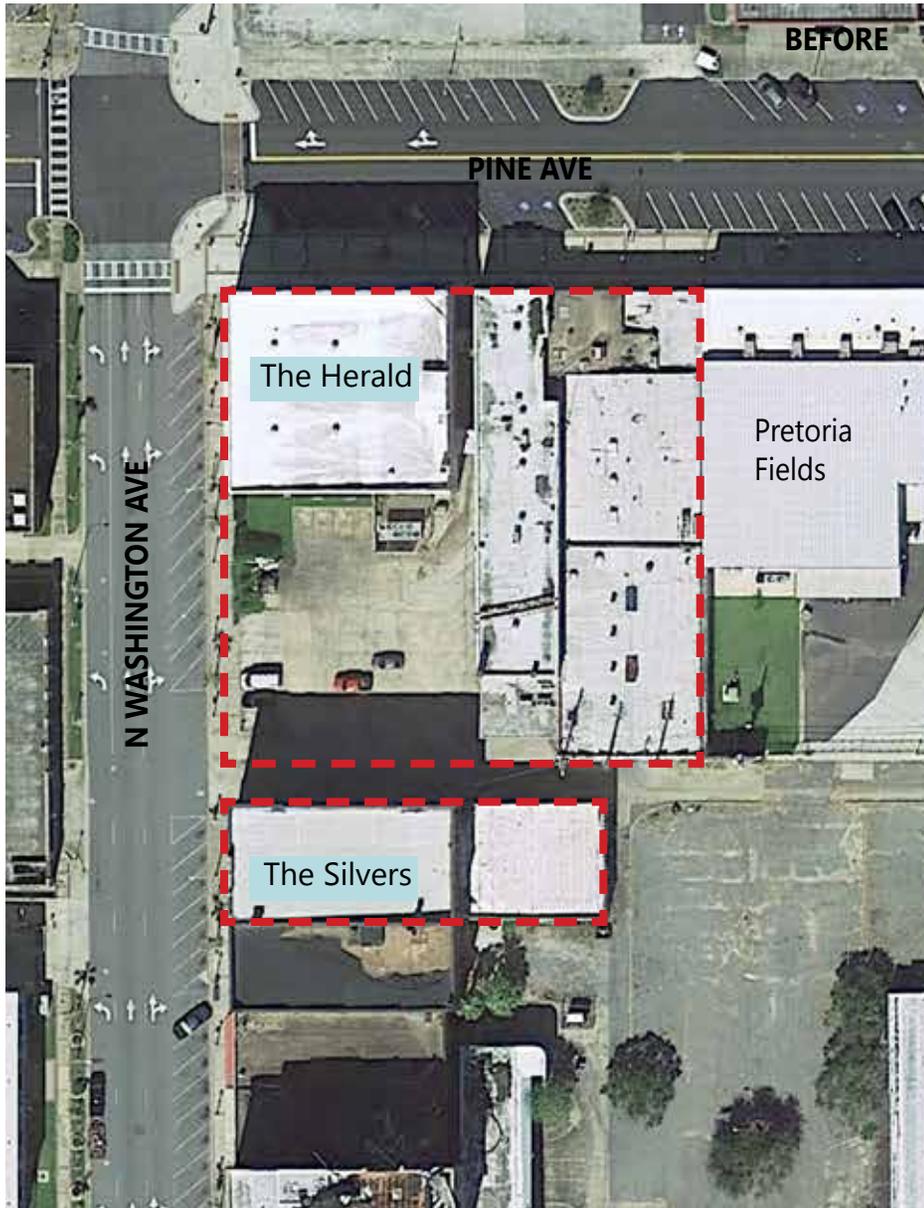
\*\* Demolish rear building for parking and pedestrian access.

\*\*\* Demolish rear building for parking.

The above recommendations for demolition of the rear buildings are optional. Future development may have different program for building renovation/demolition.

Note: Assumes ~1,100 SF per residential unit





# 02



## HOUSING INFILL AND REHABILITATION

A key ingredient of successful downtowns is in-town housing appealing to a range of residents. Currently, Albany has very few residential options fitting that description.

There are many properties throughout downtown, especially in the area close to the Harlem District where such housing could be added in small increments, using a variety of building types that integrate with the downtown fabric. This kind of infill can take several forms.

- New single-family houses compatible with existing historic houses;
- Accessory dwelling units such as garage apartments or in-law suites;
- Duplexes, quadplexes, and other small apartment buildings;
- Townhouses (attached row houses); and
- Groups of cottages organized around small green spaces.

There are also some homes in downtown that are in need of repair. Improvements to these homes should occur in a way that allows existing residents to stay in order to preserve the neighborhood social fabric.

The City and County should also consider targeted tax incentives for home ownership. To the extent that Albany could adopt targeted local homestead exemptions designed to encourage more investment in owner-occupied housing and more homeowners living within or near Downtown Albany, the resulting net fiscal impact is likely to be positive compared to status quo conditions.



# 02



The Harlem District used to be the center of African American commerce in the City. Infill and redevelopment activities should respect the historic names and significant uses that are already in this area:

- Ritz Theater and Cultural Center - The City has received funding to assist in the renovation and redevelopment of these properties. Detailed scope is to be developed.
- Albany Civil Rights Institute
- Mt. Zion Baptist Church
- Albany Transportation Center
- Civil Rights Park
- Micro-Business Enterprise Center
- Shiloh Baptist Church
- Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church
- St. Mark House of Prayer
- Carter's Grill & Restaurant
- Jimmie's Hot Dogs

Following this Master Plan, a separate plan is to be developed for Harlem District in more detail. In the future, please refer to the Harlem District Plan for final recommendations for this area.



# 03



## CENTRAL COMMON

An ideal location for Central Common is at the northeast corner of Washington Street and Pine Avenue. Currently, it is a parking lot with 71 spaces. The illustration on the facing page shows the concept plan, which includes a lawn for activities and events with a stage, paved plaza, and planters next to the building to the north, and parking on the east next to the Riverfront Resource Center. The total number of parking spaces before and after the space is reconfigured is 151 versus 142. The few spaces lost can be regained by adding additional on-street parking on Washington Street near the park.

The building north of the existing city parking lot is the home of Jethro's Coffee. The owner is in the process of renovating it. It will become an active part of the Central Common in the future. The vacant Water, Gas & Light Building on the north is ideal for office or retail use.



Rooftop use is for illustrative purpose only. Future improvement will depend on feasibility.





# 04

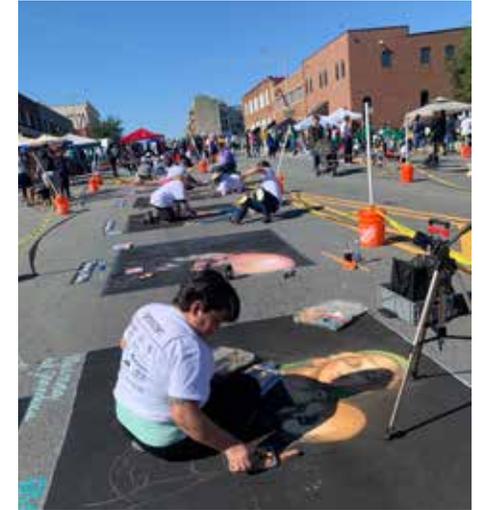


## MORE RESTAURANTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

A lively and attractive downtown always needs good restaurants and entertainment spaces. With the exception of The Flint and a few others, restaurants are rare in the downtown area. Creating a restaurant district in the area located off of Pine Avenue and Washington Street could draw visitors, students, and others from Albany and throughout southwest Georgia. A mix of informal and more formal “sit-down” restaurants, with a focus on local ownership, is important. The new restaurants should bring a variety of food types currently missing in the downtown market.

Downtown could also benefit from more breweries, like Pretoria Fields, and with other food and beverage amenities. Food trucks should be encouraged to appear more often.

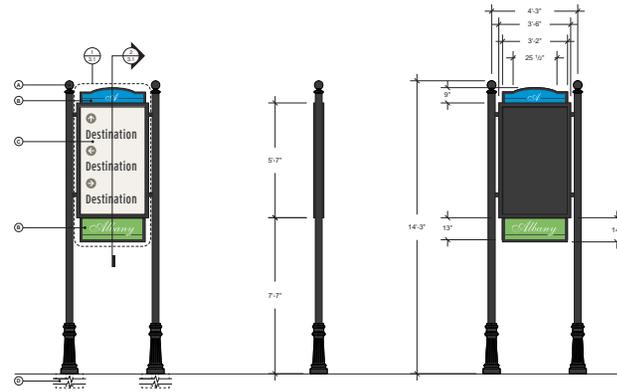
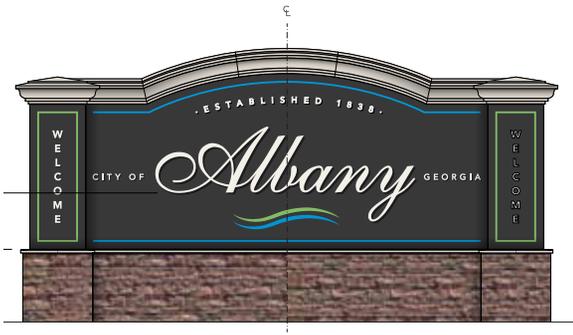
One way to support more food and beverage opportunities is to have more entertainment downtown. The current entertainment is mostly offered by the Artesian Alliance and the Flint River Entertainment Complex. With the Albany Museum of Art relocating downtown, more activities will be offered. The City should seize upon the opportunity to draw more activities to downtown. Offering river-related activities will be a huge draw, based on Columbus’s example. Coordinated downtown events and large festivals will also help attract a variety of audiences.



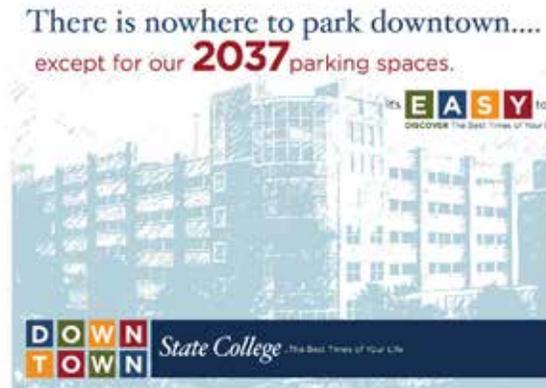
# 05



## BRANDING AND MARKETING



Existing gateway and vehicular directional signs from the City of Albany-Signage Master Plan (2019)



Additional signage options to consider

Downtown Albany is a special place with a rich history. In order to make it a successful destination and keep attracting people, Albany has to tell its unique story and let everyone know what it has to offer.

An effective branding and marketing campaign requires long-lasting “all-in” commitment and coordination on the part of the City and its partners.

Currently, as a first phase of the branding plan, the City of Albany-Signage Master Plan (2019) addresses gateway and vehicular directional signs. In later phases, the City should expand the program to address the following and make it an effective component of the branding initiative:

- Wayfinding signs for pedestrians, especially tourists;
- Building signs;
- Improve signage design to emphasize Albany’s identity;
- Historic marker signs to tell stories; and
- Parking signs.

In addition to the signage and wayfinding program, the City should work with its partners to develop other marketing strategies to showcase downtown history, historic buildings, businesses, and attractions.

# 06



## HERITAGE TRAIL

To help create identity and promote the diverse cultural history of Downtown Albany, it is recommended that the City create a heritage trail in addition to the existing Freedom Trail to connect historic buildings, places, and attractions as a tourist route to tell the unique story of downtown's past and present.

This trail can take the form of specially paved sidewalks or a multi-use trail integrated with wayfinding signs and historic markers. It can be a self-guided tour with prerecorded descriptions at each point of interest to help visitors understand the stories. The City can also work with local partners to have volunteers conduct guided tours.



[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:U.S.\\_Post\\_Office\\_and\\_Courthouse,\\_Albany.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:U.S._Post_Office_and_Courthouse,_Albany.JPG)





The following is a list of major points of interest along the Heritage Trail. The trail can be expanded in the future as downtown improvement continues and additional places can be added:

1. Mt. Zion Baptist Church and Albany Civil Rights Institute
2. Civil Rights Park
3. Ritz Theater and Cultural Center
4. Samuel Farkas House
5. U.S. Post Office and Courthouse
6. Albany Theatre
7. Albany Municipal Auditorium and Carnegie Library
8. New Albany Hotel
9. Hotel Gordon
10. St. Nicholas/Lee Hotel
11. Union Station at Thronateeska Heritage Center
12. Flint RiverQuarium
13. Bridge House/Albany Welcome Center
14. Ray Charles Plaza
15. Future Albany Museum of Art
16. Albany House Furnishing Company
17. Davis Exchange Building
18. The Herald Building



## ALBANY HUB: NEW MIXED-USE DISTRICT

The Albany Hub District is located across the Flint River on East Broad Avenue (see map on the right). Electric Cities of Georgia (ECG) has developed a concept plan for the area to provide physical, social, and economic connections for the Greater Albany area.

ECG's concept plan for this area has been updated to include a riverfront hotel, outdoor dining areas, and a river outfitter which offers a variety of activities. The hotel should consider amenities like indoor and outdoor seating with views to the river, and/or a rooftop lounge to attract hotel guests and local residents. A successful example for the river outfitter is the Whitewater Express at Downtown Columbus's Riverfront. Based on that model, it can offer similar experience like the cross-river zipline, treetop challenge courses, canoing and kayaking, rock climbing walls, etc. Potential partners for this initiative include the Flint Riverkeeper, the Flint RiverQuarium, and local officials.

Across the street from College Drive, live-work units and townhouses are recommended to provide both housing and ground floor commercial and office uses.

The existing skate park will be relocated based on the City's ongoing Recreation Master Plan.



Columbus Riverfront



Live-work units



# 08



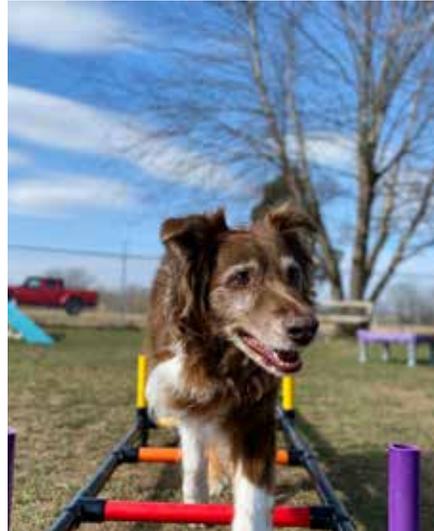
## INVEST IN PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

The Flint River and Riverfront Park are great amenities for downtown. Besides the river activities recommended on the previous pages, the existing riverfront park on the west bank could be improved so that it is more inviting to visitors. The existing turtle mascot can be revamped with the support of local businesses and organizations to have more sculptures or related art pieces installed throughout the park. The park would also benefit from more lighting after dark.

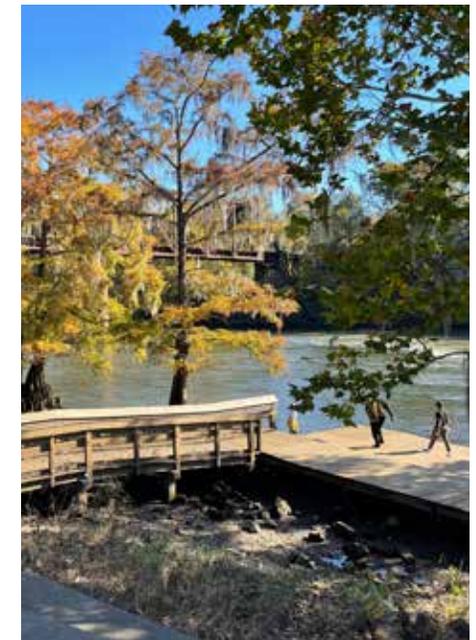
It is also recommended that the City improve existing downtown parks to meet the needs of residents and visitors. Basic improvements include, but are not limited to:

- Pedestrian lighting;
- More seating;
- Area to accommodate active park activities like chess, skate board, dog park etc.; and
- A community garden.

In addition to the Central Common recommended on page 52, future downtown revitalization should look for opportunities to create pocket parks and open space for the area west of Jackson Street. The Framework Plan shows a few potential new parks in the area for consideration.



Courtesy of local resident AE Jenkins





## PRESERVE HISTORIC CHARACTER



Albany's historic architecture is a significant and irreplaceable asset for downtown. Currently, most of downtown is designated as a historic district and subject to design guidelines administered by the HPC. The design guidelines were established in 2000 and provide a good base for historic preservation.

In addition to the existing places listed in the National Register, the following buildings should consider to apply national registration.

1. Ritz Theater (231 S. Jackson Street)
2. Chamber of Commerce Building (225 W. Broad Avenue)
3. State Theater (313 Pine Avenue)

A related issue is the presence of vacant, physically deteriorated structures in some parts of the Study Area. Some of these properties appear to have been vacant too long, or are too functionally obsolete to be salvageable, and should be demolished. Others could be significantly improved with more aggressive code enforcement. At minimum, the City should prioritize the "clean up" of the worst of these properties, particularly those in visibly prominent locations or locations which negatively impact nearby residents and businesses.

# 10



## PROMOTE ART

Downtown Albany has always seen artist activities. With the relocation of the Albany Museum of Art (AMA) to the heart of downtown, the City should promote an art district as one of the themes of downtown. Washington Street, from the future home of AMA, at 140 Broad Avenue, to Roosevelt Avenue, would be the ideal area for this district (see Framework Plan).

This art district should target promoting art-related businesses. The Central Common could be promoted as an art park to encourage more artistic activities.

Public art has the unique power to draw people together and create vibrant gathering spaces. An art program should be developed to provide all types of art in the district and throughout downtown. Art should take into consideration themes related to the legendary Ray Charles and the art history of Downtown Albany.

Sculptures and other semi-permanent installations can be monumental, whimsical, or help tell a story, and could be combined with landscape enhancements in existing parks or new pocket parks to turn the walking experience into a sculpture garden or arboretum tour. Functional art like seating and site furniture is another good way to promote art. Temporary art, murals, and performance art can also be a low cost, interim solution and provide activity during other events, or give locals another reason to come downtown.



# 11



## SUPPORT STREETScape IMPROVEMENTS



Downtown Albany has a grid street network ideal for connectivity and good urbanism. Most of the streets have wide landscaped areas as well as on-street parking.

Based on the Flint River Trails Master Plan (2016), it is recommended to improve bike and pedestrian connections for the major transportation corridors, including Highland Avenue and Pine Avenue to the west, Oglethorpe Avenue to the east, and S. Jackson Street to the south, in addition to the trails recommended along Broad Avenue and Washington Street. These trails will link downtown with adjacent communities and resources, including ASU, Phoebe Putney Memorial Hospital, Ragsdale Park, and Albany Tech. These bike and pedestrian improvements can take different forms, as shown by the images on the left, depending on existing roadway conditions.

Intersections are key nodes for streetscape improvements. They should take into consideration the following aspects:

- ADA compliance;
- Pedestrian crossing and signalization;
- Signage;
- Street furniture; and
- Landscaping.



# 12



## CONNECTING DOWNTOWN AND ASU

A series of initiatives would mutually benefit Downtown Albany and ASU, located directly across the Flint River.

It is about a 15-minute walk between ASU and downtown. This pedestrian experience can be improved with better sidewalks, shade trees, and street furniture along E. Broad Avenue and College Drive leading to ASU. Bike routes could be added along these streets to encourage biking to and from downtown. The Flint River Trails Master Plan (2016) recommended trails along the east side of the river. If implemented, it would better serve bicycle and pedestrian connections to downtown.

Future development at Albany's Hub District will enhance the connection by providing a destination on the route to and from downtown. In addition to physical connectivity to downtown, the City and its partners could collaborate with ASU to explore the following opportunities for mutual enhancement:

- Establish a downtown book and school merchandise store to build a university presence and attract students;
- Encourage downtown businesses to give discounts to ASU students and faculty to boost businesses and attract more customers;
- Promote student-friendly businesses by providing social gathering spaces, classes, and activities;
- Work with downtown businesses to provide internship opportunities for ASU's business program; this could also apply to Albany Tech's related academic programs;

- Encourage downtown businesses and organizations to hire ASU graduates; and
- Explore opportunities to convert downtown vacant buildings into specialized academic buildings and student centers.

ASU recently finished its 2025 Strategic Plan. One of its major goals is to continue building cultural and economic partnerships with local, state, national, and global communities. Institutional support for this Downtown Master Plan would be consistent with this objective. It is assumed ASU will work with the City and local partners to facilitate implementation of the Downtown Master Plan.



Albany State University 



# CHAPTER 4

## THE ACTIONS



# IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS

In order to realize the vision of the Downtown Master Plan, public and private partners must work together. The City, the DDA and ADICA will be involved in most aspects of implementation, but will need to work with the other partners outlined below.

Some projects will need to be funded and

implemented by the public sector; others are funded through public/private partnerships or private efforts that require some public sector incentives. Some projects may be led entirely by the private sector.

Ongoing work on these projects will require funding from a variety of sources. Grants and other public

funding sources will ensure that the financial burden for implementation does not fall entirely on local taxpayers.

## CITY AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT PARTNERS

- City of Albany
- DDA
- ADICA
- Dougherty County

## OTHER PUBLIC SECTOR PARTNERS

- Southwest Georgia Regional Commission
- State of Georgia
  - Georgia Cities Foundation
  - Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA)
- Federal Government

## OTHER LOCAL INSTITUTIONS

- Albany State University
- Albany Technical College
- Phoebe Putney Health System
- Albany Chamber of Commerce
- Albany Convention and Visitor Bureau
- The Artesian Alliance
- Albany Museum of Art
- Local civic and non-profit organizations and churches
- Flint River Entertainment Complex

## PRIVATE SECTOR PARTNERS

- Developers and investors
- Local property and business owners
- Other local citizens

# IMPLEMENTATION PROJECTS

This ambitious plan for Downtown Albany, outlined in the previous chapters, will require the long-term cooperation of the public and private sectors to come to fruition. The following pages provide details on how this plan will be implemented in the future.

## PHASING

This plan will take at least 10 years to fully implement. As a phasing strategy, the plan sets priorities for implementation based on available opportunities, funding sources, and community input.

### Priority Projects (0-2 years)

Some projects lend themselves to priority because they may catalyze future investment with the amenities they would provide. Pages 68-71 lists five priority projects that the City should focus on. They include the predevelopment disposition of the Herald Building, the Central Common, reuse of the Water, Gas & Light Building, Front Street Market building improvements, and predevelopment disposition of the Albany Theatre.

### Short-Term Projects (2-5 years)

Short-term projects are initiatives that improve the public realm and can be implemented fairly quickly to activate more of Downtown Albany. They include multi-use trails, branding- and marketing-related projects, and existing park improvements.

### Mid-Term Projects (5-10 years)

The mid-term period is relatively quiet, but steady, in order to devote more resources to completing short-term projects and coordinating longer-term projects.

### Long-Term Projects (10+ years)

Most private development will be long-term projects, which require more time and funding to implement. The Downtown Master Plan identifies the potential projects and serves as a guide for their realization.

## ACTION MATRIX

Based on the visions, goals, and recommendations outlined in the previous chapters, a series of project and policy recommendations are developed for implementation of this plan. The action matrix on pages 72-74 outlines each project's timeline, the responsible parties, the estimated cost, and known funding sources.

## FUNDING SOURCES

The last section lists a series of funding sources that can be explored by the City, local organizations, and the private sector to help carry out the implementation of this plan. In addition to the funding sources identified in the action matrix, these sources can be explored for eligible projects.

## OTHER INITIATIVES

The ongoing initiatives led by other entities also contribute to this master plan and the improvement of Downtown Albany. One of these is the new home for the Albany Museum of Art (AMA). AMA has created a strategic plan for it to move to downtown by 2025. The other major project is the renovation of Hotel Gordon as a new boutique hotel. When opened, it will be Marriott International's first black-operated facility.



Hotel Gordon Concept ( Courtesy of Hotel Gordon Development Team)



Future Albany Museum of Art (Courtesy of AMA)

# PRIORITY PROJECTS

## LU.1 HERALD BUILDINGS PREDEVELOPMENT DISPOSITION

Prepare 126 N. Washington Street, 132 and 138 Pine Avenue buildings to be development-ready through building stabilization, environmental remediation, and interior demolition.

<b>Lead by</b>	DDA, ADICA
<b>Estimated cost</b>	\$900,000 ~ \$1.2 Million (Partial demolition and predevelopment for disposition)
<b>Funding source</b>	SPLOST

This project will make the Herald buildings development-ready so they can be handed over to the private sector to further realize the plan's vision. The concept plan on the right shows an option to develop the 126 N. Washington Street building with ground floor retail/restaurant and upper-story residential. To keep the historic character and make development more economically feasible, one option is to keep the front portions of the other two buildings, and convert the warehouse part in the rear for outdoor activities and parking. Since the Herald Building is listed in the National Register, it could utilize state and federal tax credits to make the rehabilitation more economically feasible.

### POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Building	Ground Floor Commercial	Residential Above
Herald Building (126 N. Washington St.)	8,900 SF	16 units
132 Pine Ave.	2,290 SF (Front)	-
138 Pine Ave.	1,950 SF (Front)	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>13,140 SF</b>	<b>16 units</b>
<b>Parking</b>	<b>69 off-street spaces</b>	

Note: Assumes ~1,100 SF per residential unit



Note: the concept plan shown is for illustrative purpose only and the final design may vary when implementation occurs. This applies to all other concept plans shown in this document.

# PRIORITY PROJECTS

## LU.2 CENTRAL COMMON AND PARKING

Park and parking improvement of 2.4 acres area east of Washington Street between Pine Avenue and Flint Avenue. It includes a restroom building in the park.

**Lead by** City  
**Estimated cost** \$4.0M  
**Funding source** SPLOST/Federal Earmark

## LU.3 REUSE WATER, GAS & LIGHT (WGL) BLDG.

Renovate and reuse the building at 218 N. Washington Street (5,100 SF) for City office; potentially the Downtown Development Center.

**Lead by** City  
**Estimated cost** \$800,000 (Full rehab including environmental)  
**Funding source** SPLOST/Federal Earmark

In this block, all properties showing improvements are owned by the City, except for Jethro's Coffee. It is privately owned and the owner intends to improve the business to align with the vision of this plan.

### CONCEPT PLAN LEGEND

1. Event Lawn
2. Stage
3. Restroom Building
4. Jethro's Coffee
5. Water, Gas & Light Building



# PRIORITY PROJECTS

## LU.4 FRONT STREET MARKET BUILDINGS IMPROVEMENT

Facade improvement, interior renovation, and white box for buildings located at 115, 121, and 129-131 N. Front Street and 108 Pine Avenue (total 7,443 sf).

**Lead by** DDA, ADICA

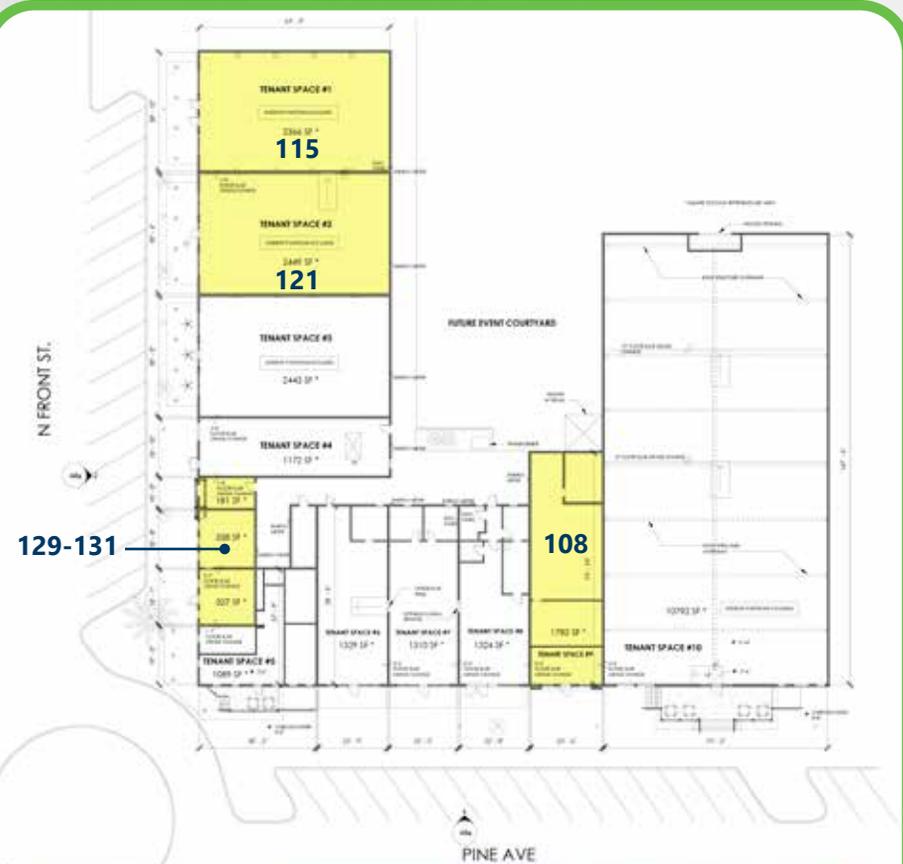
**Estimated cost** \$680,000

**Funding source** DCA

In 2017, the City hired a consultant to develop a document to guide facade improvements. The next step will continue to follow the guidelines in the document and secure funding for improvement of the remaining buildings shown on the right.



Available buildings at the Front Street Market



# PRIORITY PROJECTS

## LU.5 ALBANY THEATRE

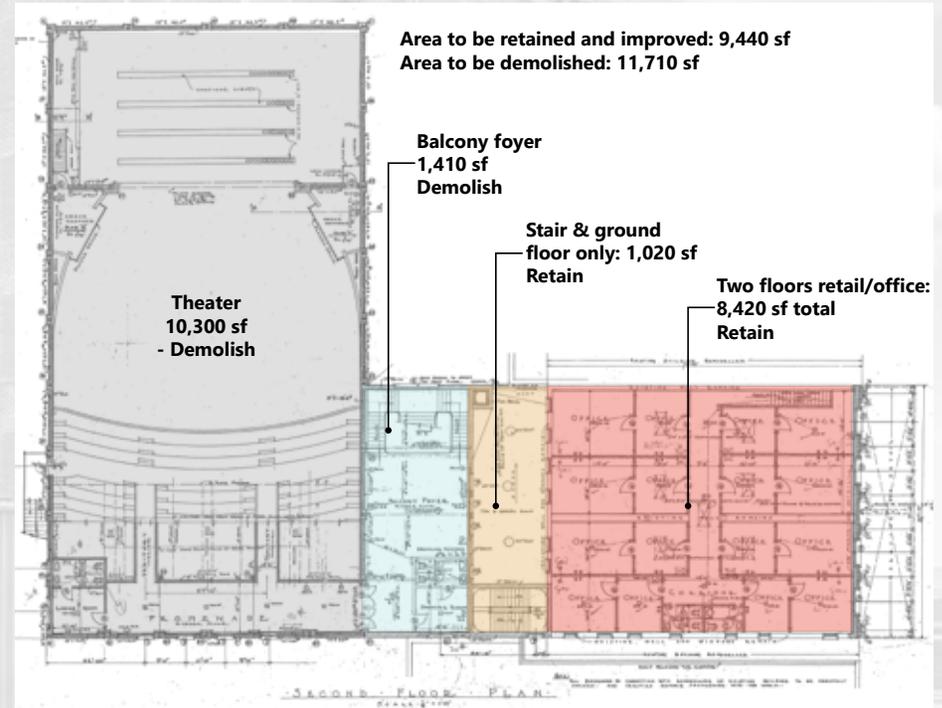
### PREDEVELOPMENT DISPOSITION

Prepare the front two-story building at 107 N. Jackson Street for improvement through building stabilization and environmental remediation, if necessary.

The theater and balcony foyer in the back has been severely damaged due to fire. It is recommended to demolish and use the area for a new building and/or parking, unless it is economically feasible to keep and renovate the theater for better uses. Tax credits can be utilized since the building is listed in the National Register for Historic Places.

<b>Lead by</b>	DDA, ADICA
<b>Estimated cost</b>	\$1.5 ~\$2.0 Million (Partial demolition and predevelopment for disposition)
<b>Funding source</b>	DCA

Note: Yielding Wakeford & McGee Architects was hired by the City in 2016 and conducted a cost estimate for stabilizing and demolishing different portions of the Albany Theater building. The cost was estimated to be \$1.13 million. Considering the cost did not include environmental remediation, and the inflation over the years, it is estimated today's cost would be around \$1.5 to \$2.0 Million.



Albany Theatre Improvement/Demolition Plan



Two-story building at the front of 107 N. Jackson Street



Fire and weather damaged theater in the back

# PROJECT MATRIX

	PROJECT NAME	ESTIMATED COST	PHASE	LEAD BY	FUNDING SOURCE
<b>LAND USE &amp; DEVELOPMENT</b>					
LU.1	Herald Buildings Predevelopment for Disposition	\$900,000 ~ \$1,200,000	Priority	City	SPLOST/Earmark
LU.2	Central Common and Parking Development	\$4,000,000	Priority	City	SPLOST/Earmark
LU.3	Renovate and Reuse Water, Gas & Light Building	\$800,000	Priority	City	SPLOST/Earmark
LU.4	Front Street Market Buildings Improvement	\$680,000	Priority	City	DCA
LU.5	Albany Theatre Predevelopment for Disposition	\$1,500,000 ~ \$2,000,000	Priority	City	SPLOST
LU.6	Ritz Theater and Cultural Center Renovation and Reuse	\$4,000,000 ~ \$7,000,000	Short-Term	City	SPLOST/FY22 Community Project Funding
LU.7	Silvers Building Redevelopment	N/A	Mid-Term	Private Sector	Private
LU.8	Sandy Bottom Redevelopment	N/A	Mid-Term	Private Sector	Private
LU.9	Davis Exchange Block - Redevelopment and reuse of underutilized buildings at 100 N. Washington Street, 113-141 W. Broad Avenue, and 103-113 N. Front Street. Potential for mixed residential and commercial uses. The properties along Front Street are ideal for phase II of Front Street Market.	N/A	Long-Term	Private Sector	Private
LU.10	Redevelop Previous School Site at 400 S. Monroe Street	N/A	Long-Term	Non-profit, Private Sector	Public/Private
LU.11	Harlem Area Residential Rehabilitation and Infill (depends on availability of vacant and underutilized properties)	N/A	Long-Term	AHA, Private Sector	HUD/Private
LU.12	Albany Hub-Hotel, River-Outfitter, Townhouses, and Live/Work Units	N/A	Long-Term	Private Sector	Private

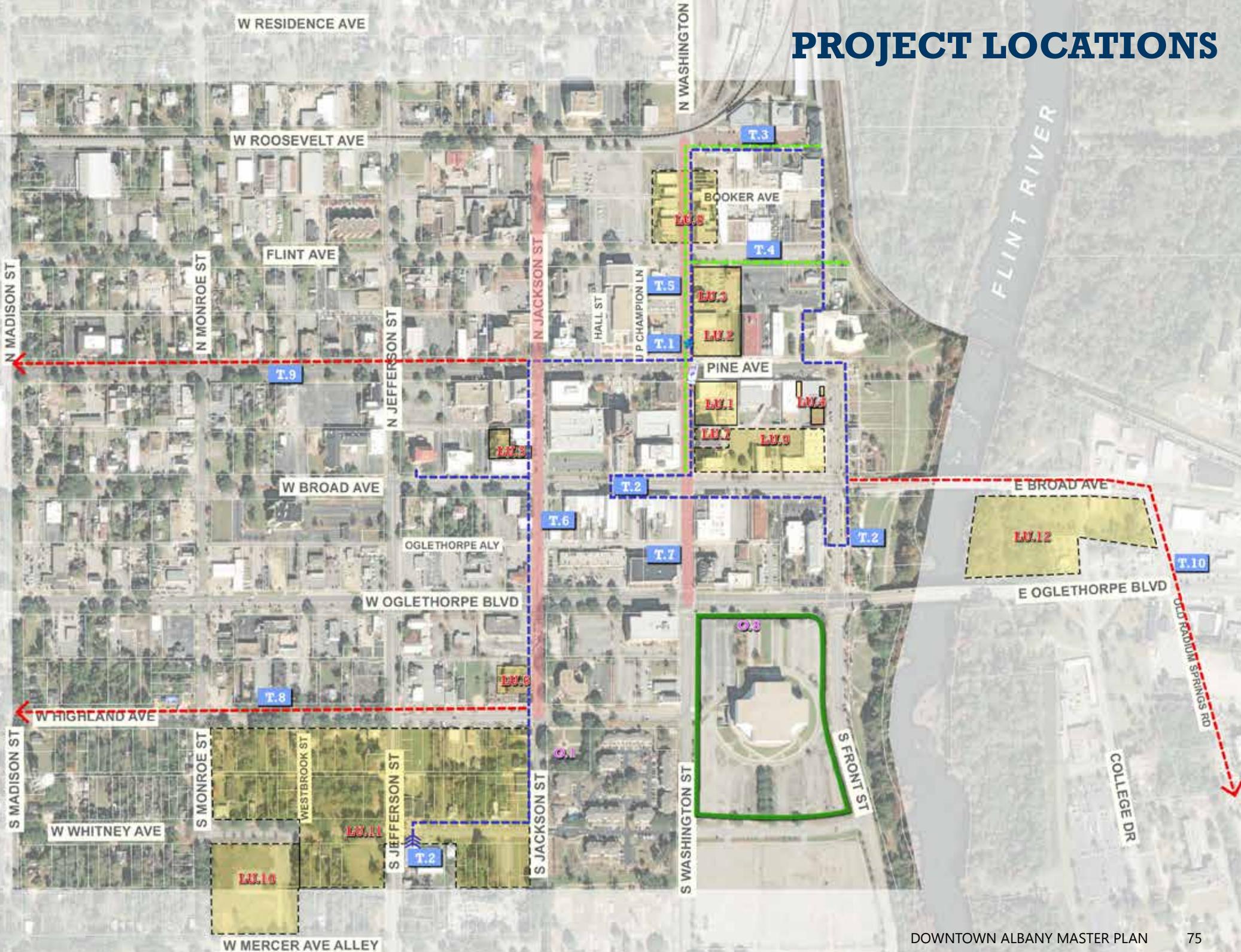
# PROJECT MATRIX

	PROJECT NAME	ESTIMATED COST	PHASE	LEAD BY	FUNDING SOURCE
LU.13	Zoning and Code Enforcement - address dilapidated buildings in the study area	Staff Time	Short-Term	City	City
<b>TRANSPORTATION</b>					
T.1	Bus Stop Relocation - move existing stop at the corner of Washington Street and Pine Avenue north to Flint Avenue.	Staff Time	Short-Term	City	City
T.2A	Heritage Trail - Branding and marketing for Freedom Trail and potential extension route, put together materials and create self-guided and weekend guided walk tours. It can start with a section of best conditions.	Staff Time	Mid-Term	DDA/ADICA,CVB	City
T.2B	Heritage Trail - Physical improvement of existing Freedom Trail and extend it to major downtown historic buildings and attractions. Focus on bike and pedestrian improvements and place markers for storytelling. See project location map on page 75.	\$5,306,400	Long-Term	DDA/ADICA	TAP/SPLOST/DNR GOSA or RTP
T.3	Multi-Use Trail along Roosevelt Avenue: from Washington Street to Riverfront Trail	\$383,500	Short-Term	City, State	TAP/SPLOST/City/County
T.4	Multi-Use Trail along Flint Avenue: from Washington Street to Riverfront Trail	\$392,500	Short-Term	City, State	TAP/SPLOST/City/County
T.5	Multi-Use Trail along Washington Street: from Roosevelt Avenue to Broad Avenue	\$858,500	Short-Term	City, State	TAP/SPLOST/City/County
T.6	Jackson Street Conversion from One-Way to Two-Way Street	\$1,051,875	Mid-Term	City	SPLOST/City/County
T.7	Washington Street Conversion from One-Way to Two-Way Street	\$844,500	Mid-Term	City	SPLOST/City/County

# PROJECT MATRIX

	PROJECT NAME	ESTIMATED COST	PHASE	LEAD BY	FUNDING SOURCE
T.8	Bike Route on Highland Avenue: from Jackson Street west to Study Area Boundary	\$960,000	Mid-Term	City, State	TAP/SPLOST/City/County
T.9	Bike Route on Pine Avenue: from Jackson Street west to Study Area Boundary	\$960,375	Mid-Term	City	TAP/SPLOST/City/County
T.10	Bike Route on Radium Springs Road: from Broad Avenue to ASU	\$1,179,375	Short-Term	City	TAP/SPLOST/City/County
<b>OTHER</b>					
O.1	Civil Rights Park Improvement - Add chess play area with more seating, improve lighting and landscaping.	\$200,000	Short-Term	City	City
O.2	Restaurant and Retail Strategy - Recruit a variety of restaurants and retail for downtown buildings.	\$30,000	Short-Term	DDA/ADICA, Private Sector	Public or Private
O.3	Branding and Marketing Strategies - Coordinate programming and marketing for downtown development potential, branding, events and cultural attractions.	Staff Time	Ongoing	City, CVB	City
O.4	Historic Building Registration - Apply to have Ritz Theater, Chamber of Commerce Building, and State Theater considered for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.	\$24,000	Short-Term	City, State Historic Preservation Office	City
O.5	Art District - Create an Art District for 100 block from Broad Avenue to Roosevelt Avenue. Collaborate with local partners to develop programs for art projects.	\$50,000	Mid-Term	City, AMA , Private Sector	Georgia Council for Arts
O.6	Work with ASU and Albany Tech to develop downtown community kitchen and food truck initiative for student intern program.	\$30,000	Short-Term	City, ASU, Albany Tech	City/ASU/Albany Tech
O.7	Bury Utilities in Sandy Bottom Area	\$10,972,200	Ongoing	City	Federal/SPLOST VII
O.8	Landscape Improvement for Civic Center - along all street frontage.	TBD	Short-Term	City, Flint River Entertainment Complex	City

# PROJECT LOCATIONS



# POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES



Properties in Downtown Albany qualify for a broad range of local, state and federal incentives. Although the DDA effectively “advertises” the availability of incentives that are available to support redevelopment projects, there has been no concerted effort to quantify the actual collective financial impact of layering multiple incentives to a specific development pro forma, including which incentives are significant and which are not. Such an analysis is complex and is most accurate when focused on a specific project, in concert with an actual developer. We recommend that the DDA allocate resources for such an analysis as part of an overall disposition strategy for the Herald Building(s) as an initial case study. Information learned from that effort can be used to more effectively “model” the application of similar incentives to inform developers of other properties.

The following is a list of potential funding sources that can be explored for such development effort:

## FOR DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT

### The DCA Downtown Development Revolving Loan Fund

The purpose of the Downtown Development Revolving Loan Fund (DD RLF) is to assist cities, counties, and development authorities in their efforts to revitalize and enhance downtown areas by providing below-market rate financing to fund capital projects.

The ultimate user of funds may be a private business or a public entity such as a city or development authority. Applicants must demonstrate that they have a viable downtown development project and clearly identify the proposed uses of the loan proceeds. Once approved, funds may be

used for such activities as: real estate acquisition, development, redevelopment, and new construction; rehabilitation of public and private infrastructure and facilities; purchase of equipment and other assets (on a limited basis).

The maximum loan is \$250,000 per project. Applications will be accepted throughout the year and as loan funds are available to DCA.

### Downtown Façade Grant

The Albany Façade Grant awards up to \$5,000 for the exterior improvement of a storefront and/or signage for businesses located within the CBD.

### The Georgia Cities Foundation Revolving Loan Fund

Applications are evaluated based on leadership, accountability, long-term sustainability, and potential for private investment. Each application must also undergo credit underwriting. Projects should encourage spin-off development, add jobs, promote downtown housing, or add to the cultural enrichment of the community. Eligible projects include real estate acquisition, building rehabilitation, new construction, and green space and parks.

### Georgia Cities Foundation Green Communities Fund Rebate Program

The Green Communities Fund provides a 25% rebate for preapproved, eligible energy-efficient improvements to downtown commercial, mixed-use, and multi-family buildings within the state of Georgia.

# POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES

## **Georgia State Tax Incentives for Historic Preservation**

The Georgia State Income Tax Credit Program for Rehabilitated Historic Property allows eligible participants to apply for a state income tax credit equaling 25% of qualifying rehabilitation expenses capped at \$100,000 for a personal residence, and \$300,000, \$5 million or \$10 million for all other properties. All properties must be listed in, or eligible for, the National/Georgia Register of Historic Places, either individually or as part of a National/Georgia Register Historic District.

## **Federal Tax Incentive Programs for Historic Preservation (RITC)**

The Federal Rehabilitation Investment Tax Credit (RITC) is a federal income tax credit equal to 20% of qualified rehabilitation expenses. It is available only to income-producing properties. Listing in the National Register is a prerequisite for eligibility.

## **New Markets Tax Credit (NMTC)**

The NMTC Program attracts private capital into low-income communities by permitting individual and corporate investors to receive a tax credit against their federal income tax in exchange for making equity investments in specialized financial intermediaries called Community Development Entities (CDEs). The credit totals 39% of the original investment amount and is claimed over a period of seven years.

## **Albany Community Together (ACT)**

This financial institution offers loan programs ranging from small business revolving loans for commercial real estate to smaller accelerating loan programs that can be used for working

capital. Loan programs max out at \$50,000 for sole financing and can go up to \$200,000 with bank participation.

## **EPA Brownfields Revolving Loan Fund**

EPA has selected Albany for a Brownfields Revolving Loan Fund Grant. The grant will be used to capitalize a Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) from which the City will provide loans and sub-grants to non-profits interested in cleaning up and repurposing properties in under-served areas plagued by the exodus of commercial business and industry. Grant funds also will be used to market the revolving loan fund, oversee cleanup activities, and conduct community engagement activities. Revolving loan fund activities will focus mostly on the abandoned Broad Avenue Corridor, an area with more than 20 industrial blighted structures that also serves as the main gateway into Downtown Albany, and is located within an Opportunity Zone.

## **Synovus Bank's Small Business Loans**

Synovus Bank in Albany provides business loans to help expand business, make capital improvements, and consolidate or refinance debt using collateral. Synovus partners with the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) to connect eligible businesses with financing needed.

## **Opportunity Zones Tax Credit Program**

In 2010, Albany received authorization from the DCA to designate several parts of the City as Opportunity Zones. Businesses that are located within these designated zones qualify for the state's maximum job tax credit of \$3,500 per job.

## **Tax Allocation District**

Albany's Tax Allocation District (TAD) #1 was created in 2008 and is nearing the end of its initial useful life as a financing tool. We understand that debt service payments of roughly \$360,000 per year are being made on a bond that was issued to develop the site of the Wal-Mart shopping center on Cordele Road. (We could not verify the remaining number of annual payments due on that bond.) Unless alternative provisions are made to retire that debt, the TAD cannot be dissolved or reconstituted until that obligation is repaid. The City's FY 21 financial report also indicates that the "Tax Allocation District Fund reported a deficit fund balance of \$2,627,177 as of June 30, 2021. This deficit is intended to be eliminated through future tax revenues and PILOT payments." This statement verifies that the current assessed value of TAD #1 is not sufficiently above the District's 2008 Certified Base to generate enough property tax increment to service the TAD's existing debt. The City has been advancing funds to make bond payments from other sources, which now exceed \$2.6 million.

Although it may not be a short-term priority, we recommend that the City explore alternatives to either (a) restructure existing financing and reconstitute the TAD to cover a much smaller geography focused on Downtown Albany or (b) secure County and School District consent to extend the life of the TAD and provide financing options for future downtown redevelopment projects.

Priority uses for future TAD proceeds should include incentives to:

- Contribute to the cost of developing owner-occupied for-sale housing on downtown

# POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES

infill sites, and market rate multi-family rental projects, particularly if developed within existing vacant buildings; and

- New construction or substantial rehabilitation of vacant commercial sites or buildings.

The scale of most future projects is likely to be small and inadequate to support individual bond issues or “TAD financing.” The City will need to be creative to provide a menu of financing mechanisms that could include revolving funds, multi-year reimbursement (pay-go) agreements, or supplemental financing offered through agreements with lending institutions.

Absent of investigating these alternatives, the City will be restricted in its ability to offer tax increment financing for downtown redevelopment, possibly over the next several years.

## **One Georgia EDGE Fund Program**

Dougherty County is conditionally eligible for the EDGE fund, which provides financial assistance to eligible applicants that are considering a relocation or expansion site, and are competing with another state for location of a project. Projects related to public infrastructure, land acquisition, site development, job expansion and retention, as well as new business locations, are eligible to use EDGE funding. A local development authority must be the applicant for an EDGE application and the application must be supported by a recommendation letter from a state agency, typically the Georgia Department of Economic Development.

## **OneGeorgia Equity Fund Program**

Projects related to water and sewer infrastructure, road, rail and airport improvements, industrial parks, workforce, technology, and tourism are eligible

for this fund. Eligible recipients of funding include general-purpose local governments (municipalities and counties), local government authorities, and joint or multi-county development authorities in rural counties suffering from high poverty rates. Sub-recipients may include for-profit entities or non-profits. Financial underwriting of a sub-recipient company is required. All applicants are urged to consider using Equity Fund monies only when other funding is not available or not sufficient to address a project’s needs. Thus, the OneGeorgia Equity Fund Program should be viewed as a last resort option when no other public or private funding is available.

## **FOR ART PROGRAMS**

### **Georgia Council for the Arts**

State arts council that provides multiple grant programs for arts projects. ([www.gaarts.org](http://www.gaarts.org))

### **South Arts**

Regional arts organization that provides grants to present theatre, music, dance or guest writers. ([www.southarts.org](http://www.southarts.org))

### **Georgia Humanities**

State humanities council that provides grants for humanities-based cultural and education programs such as history exhibits, lectures, walking tours, oral history projects, etc. ([www.georgiahumanities.org](http://www.georgiahumanities.org))

### **Fox Theatre Institute (FTI)**

The FTI provides grants for the restoration of historic theaters. (<http://foxtheatre.org/the-fox-theatre-institute>)

### **ArtPlace America**

Art Place America is a national organization awarding large grants in creative placemaking projects where the arts play a central role in a community’s planning and development strategies. ([www.artplaceamerica.org](http://www.artplaceamerica.org))

### **National Endowment for the Arts (NEA)**

NEA is a national organization with multiple grant programs for arts projects. Rural communities should take note of two programs: Challenge America (\$10,000 to reach under-served audiences) and Our Town (up to \$200,000 for creative placemaking projects that are partnerships between arts organizations and local government). ([www.nea.gov](http://www.nea.gov))

### **National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH)**

NEH is a national organization with multiple grant programs for humanities projects. ([www.neh.gov](http://www.neh.gov))

### **USDA**

The USDA’s Rural Development program forges partnerships with rural communities, funding projects that bring housing, community facilities, business guarantees, utilities, and other services to rural America. ([www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov))

## **FOR OUTDOOR RECREATION**

### **Strong Towns**

This is not a funding source, but Strong Towns provides resources and examples on how to help make bike-friendly downtowns. (<https://www.strongtowns.org/journal/2018/5/3/an-incremental-approach-to-bike-friendliness>)

# POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES

## **GDOT TAP Funding**

GDOT partners with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) in facilitating and providing an opportunity for local governments to pursue non-traditional transportation-related activities such as pedestrian facilities, bicycle facilities, and pedestrian streetscape projects. (<http://www.dot.ga.gov/IS/Funding/TAP>)

## **Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Act (GOSA) Funding**

The Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) administers funding that comes from the passing of GOSA, which provides funding for state parks, wildlife management areas, local parks and trails, and conservation land protection. Some of the grant criteria for local trails and parks includes a regionally-significant project, costs over \$500,000, a 25% match, uniqueness, access, connectivity, etc. It would be a good fit for a tourism-related project. The current funding cycle is closed, and future funding cycles are to be determined.

## **DNR Recreational Trails Program**

Funding is offered biannually with a \$200,000 limit and covers trails, signage, and many other facets.

## **Georgia Tourism Development Act**

The Georgia Tourism Development Act (GTDA) will allow certain companies that build new tourism attraction projects within the State to maintain a portion of their sales tax revenues for 10 years. Under HB 318, which Governor Nathan Deal signed in 2013, projects that meet the following criteria may qualify for the program:

1. Construct a qualifying tourism attraction project that costs a minimum of \$1 million;
2. Attracts at least 25% of its visitors from out of State following its third year; and
3. Contributes to a significant and positive economic impact on the State considering, among other factors, the extent to which the tourism attraction project will compete directly with tourism attractions in this State.

# PROPERTY ACQUISITION AND DISPOSITION STRATEGIES

Working with the DDA and ADICA, Albany has a long history of selectively acquiring prominent downtown properties, either for public purposes or to “control” the eventual return of the real estate back to private sector use. In most cases those properties were vacant and/or in very poor condition when acquired. The Herald buildings, the former Albany Theatre, and the Front Street Market are relevant examples.

In all cases the buildings were basically purchased “as is” at very reasonable acquisition costs (below \$30/SF), without thorough inspection of roofs, mechanical systems or other expensive repair items prior to taking title. Funds were initially appropriated for acquisition only, with no immediate alternative uses secured to reoccupy vacant space and generate adequate rental income to fund physical improvements. Consequently, the condition of vacant space has continued to deteriorate while in public ownership. Uncertainty over unknown structural and environmental conditions has also hampered disposition efforts, as developers weigh the risk of assuming unknown rehabilitation costs in a market with comparatively low commercial and apartment rents.

The DDA’s recent success in leasing portions of the Front Street Market demonstrates that it is possible to re-tenant vacant buildings after physical improvements are completed. The City should continue to offer fully rehabilitated shell space that is ready for tenant fit up.

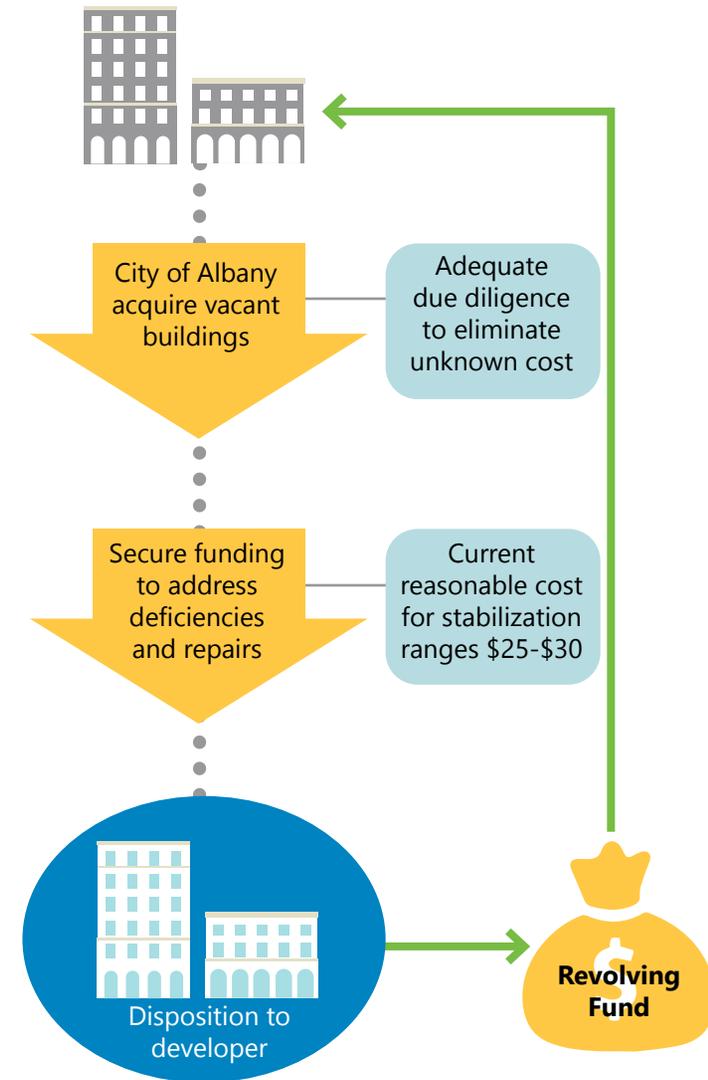
Based on the above observations, we would offer the following recommendations.

- Any future negotiations to acquire vacant buildings should provide for an adequate due diligence period prior to closing, to include

through inspections and cost estimates to remediate environmental conditions and stabilize the building shell. Adequate funds to complete these inspections would need to be appropriated prior to closing. To the extent possible, significant negative findings, or the discovery of previously unknown conditions should be reflected in negotiation of the final purchase price.

- In addition to acquisition costs, adequate funds should be appropriated to immediately address major deficiencies and repair items identified during the due diligence period, with the goal of fully stabilizing the building shell to prevent further physical deterioration, remediating known environmental issues and, to the extent possible, removing all “unknowns” that would otherwise need to be discovered by developers or tenants during their own due diligence.
- Based on limited experience learned from properties the City has already acquired, it appears that a reasonable stabilization budget for an older multi-story commercial building with high vacancy would be in the range of \$25 to \$30/SF at current pricing. If the DDA can acquire and immediately stabilize key downtown buildings for a total investment of \$55 to \$65/SF, it would have a higher probability of attracting development and recovering a significant portion of those invested costs at eventual disposition.
- The DDA/ADICA should attempt to set aside and maintain a minimum budget reserve or revolving fund of \$2.0 to \$2.5 million to incrementally acquire and stabilize properties in key locations, as space becomes available and current assets are occupied and/or sold to the private sector. A budget of this size would be enough to

fund future acquisitions in 30,000 to 40,000 SF increments.



# LEASING POLICIES AND PURCHASE OPTIONS

The long-term goal for public acquisitions of commercial buildings should be their eventual re-sale to the private sector, fully stabilized and occupied with users that contribute to the economic success of Downtown Albany. In some cases, properties will be sold to master developers. In other cases, such as the Front Street Market, the DDA and ADICA have worked together to rehabilitate and lease individual tenant spaces under the DDA's management, toward the eventual goal of either selling the entire property to a single buyer or conveying occupied spaces to individual owners/end-users.

The City of Duluth successfully implemented a similar-scale restaurant-centric multi-tenant project known as Parsons Alley, which included the former Duluth City Hall as an anchor building. That project includes a mix of individually owned anchors, with the remaining leased space owned by a single entity. The development agreement between the Duluth DDA and the original developer of that project included provisions, drafted with KBA's assistance, which permitted the sale of individual spaces to end-users under certain circumstances. These provisions helped to accelerate marketing and occupancy of the project. One building pad was sold to an individual restaurant owner and a second was initially leased and eventually purchased by the tenant within two years after opening.

We recommend that options be incorporated into the marketing strategy for the Front Street Market to provide the DDA flexibility to sell individual units under certain circumstances, if determined to be in the City's interest to do so. Provisions may include the following:

- Well capitalized prospects with committed financing and a successful track record at

other locations can negotiate to purchase rather than lease their space. This option would most likely apply to the larger remaining vacancy and require satisfaction of certain conditions including: (a) initial design approval; (b) commitment to a minimum required level of investment in interior and exterior improvements; (c) a grant of right of first refusal to the DDA to buy back the space in the event of a future business closing or mortgage foreclosure; and, (d) enforceable restrictive covenants and limitations concerning future occupancy of the space, ensuring adequate property maintenance, minimum required hours of operation and related provisions to enhance the value of adjacent spaces.

- Remaining tenants could be granted an option to purchase their individual units under similar provisions, after demonstrating successful operations in their respective spaces over a reasonable time period. The DDA could include incentives in the lease agreement to credit a portion of paid rent toward a future down payment. To the extent that ADICA may participate in financing the sale of an individual unit to an end-user, the City could maintain adequate long-term control over future occupancy of that space.
- In addition to sale options for individual units, the DDA should anticipate the eventual sale of the Front Street Market to one or more private parties by considering required covenants, easements, design controls and other enforceable leasing provisions that would enable the DDA to maintain a degree of long-term control to preserve the future occupancy and condition of that property.



Front Street Market Businesses



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