



# THOMSON

## *RENAISSANCE STRATEGIC VISION & PLAN*



Carl Vinson  
Institute of Government  
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA



Archway Partnership  
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA



ATLANTA  
134 MILES

# THOMSON

AUGUSTA  
37 MILES





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*The Thomson RSVP process kicked off in September 2019 with a robust public input process, including a well-attended town hall meeting.*





# GEORGIA DOWNTOWN RENAISSANCE

*partnership*

The Renaissance Strategic Vision and Plan is the premier planning and visioning process offered through the Georgia Downtown Renaissance Partnership. This partnership combines the skills and resources of the Georgia Municipal Association, the Georgia Cities Foundation, and the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government to revitalize communities across Georgia. Bringing together public institutions, nongovernmental organizations, and private foundations, the Georgia Downtown Renaissance Partnership facilitates the creation of strategic visions, plans, designs, and work programs for partner communities in Georgia. The Georgia Downtown Renaissance Partnership works with government leaders, chambers of commerce, downtown stakeholders, and local citizens to help ensure that all cities in Georgia have the resources and tools necessary to realize their vision and maximize their potential.



# PARTNERS

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## *CARL VINSON INSTITUTE OF GOVERNMENT*

Since 1927, the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government has worked with public officials throughout Georgia and around the world to improve governance and people's lives. From Georgia's early days as a largely agrarian state with a modest population to its modern-day status as a national and international force in business, industry, and politics, the Institute has helped government leaders navigate change and forge strong directions for a more prosperous Georgia.

## *GEORGIA CITIES FOUNDATION*

The Georgia Cities Foundation, founded in 1999, is a nonprofit subsidiary of the Georgia Municipal Association. The foundation's mission is to assist cities in their efforts to revitalize and enhance downtown areas by serving as a partner and facilitator in funding capital projects through the revolving loan fund. The foundation's services include the Revolving Loan Fund Program, the Peer-to-Peer Mentoring Tour, Downtown Development Authority Basic Training, and the Renaissance Award.

## *GEORGIA MUNICIPAL ASSOCIATION*

Created in 1933, the Georgia Municipal Association (GMA) is the only state organization that represents municipal governments in Georgia. Based in Atlanta, GMA is a voluntary, nonprofit organization that provides legislative advocacy and educational, employee benefit, and technical consulting services to its members. GMA's purpose is to anticipate and influence the forces shaping Georgia's communities and to provide leadership, tools, and services that assist local governments in becoming more innovative, effective, and responsive.

## *UGA ARCHWAY PARTNERSHIP*

The Archway Partnership, a unit of Public Service and Outreach, was created to enhance the University of Georgia's land-grant mission of teaching, research, and service while addressing self-identified community issues across the state of Georgia. The mission of the Archway Partnership is to connect Georgia communities with higher education resources to address locally-identified community and economic development needs. In fulfilling this mission, the Archway Partnership provides real-world learning experiences for students and important research opportunities for university faculty.







THOMSON

# INTRODUCTION

# GEORGIA'S CAMELLIA CITY,


the town of Thomson, Georgia, offers the community's 6,600 residents an inviting place to call home. Originally founded as a railroad crossroads called Slashes, Thomson owes its name and location to the founding of the Georgia Railroad in the 1840s. Developed by J. Edgar Thomson, the railroad brought commerce and prosperity to the community, with fine homes and neighborhoods radiating from downtown. In 1870, Thomson was made seat of the newly formed McDuffie County, cementing the city's growing role as the center of community life.

For decades Thomson served as a bustling regional hub, with residents of outlying areas drawn downtown to ship cotton and farm products, buy necessities from local merchants, and conduct business at the county seat. Well into the 1950s and 1960s, downtown served as the bustling heart of the community. However, with the arrival of Interstate 20 in the late 1960s and subsequent development along the Highway 78 corridor, much of the commercial heartbeat of downtown became a victim of sprawl.










While Thomson's overall population today remains at roughly 1970 levels, the city's commercial area has vastly expanded. Today, much of the commerce once found downtown has relocated along the six miles from the I-20 interchange to the intersection of the Georgia 17 bypass, an area largely outside the city limits. Easy access to Interstate 20 and Thomson's location along a busy CSX rail line (the former Georgia Railroad) make transportation a critical community asset. However, local leaders realize that steps must be taken to restore health and vitality to Thomson's historical downtown and grow in a way that preserves the qualities that make the community special.

Only 31 miles from downtown Augusta and 27 miles from growing Fort Gordon, Thomson's strategic location makes the area a logical location for expanded residential growth in the coming decades. With these issues in mind, local government leaders, dedicated citizens, critical businesses like Georgia Power, and the local nonprofit Knox Foundation banded together to enlist the assistance of planning professionals at the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government. With critical support throughout from the UGA Archway Partnership, the Thomson Renaissance Strategic Plan (RSVP) captures the vision of hundreds of local citizens to help chart the course for a rejuvenated downtown Thomson. The Thomson RSVP relied on a three-step planning process to determine community assets and issues, and used consensus to develop a community-supported vision for downtown. Answering three critical questions—Where are we now? Where are we going? And, how do we get there?—formed the basis of this 12-month planning effort.



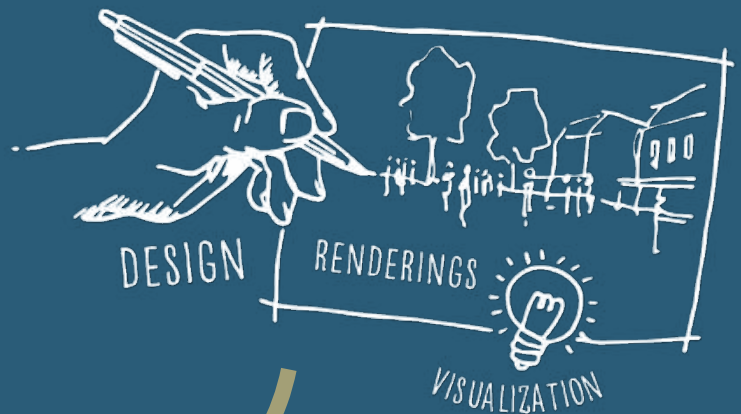


# THREE-STEP PROCESS



To know where you are going, it helps to know where you have been. Step one of the RSVP process provides a fundamental understanding of current conditions in Thomson through an extensive public engagement research process.

In the second step of the RSVP process, the community looks to the future to shape the shared vision for Thomson that emerged in step one. Built on the community desires and strengths discovered in community input sessions, in step two Thomson's community vision is interpreted through illustrations and design recommendations. Step two also involves creating a rendered illustrative masterplan showcasing the ideal vision for downtown Thomson.



During the final step in the RSVP process, community leaders come together to create an implementation plan and one-year work program to move Thomson toward the community's vision for the future. By focusing on achievable implementation items that harness community support, Step three builds momentum while helping to enact the shared community vision in a step-by-step process.



**D**uring step one of the Thomson RSVP, Thomson residents from throughout the community expressed their vision of a downtown that rises to the community's potential. Many residents pointed to Thomson's history as a thriving regional political, commercial, and transportation hub. Residents want a future that lives up to Thomson's thriving past. Historical photos of Thomson show the city's tree-lined sidewalks bustling with activity and storefronts filled with a variety of busy local businesses. Photos of downtown from past decades show neatly maintained residences and impressive works of civic architecture, all shaded by elms, oaks, and a towering canopy of street trees.

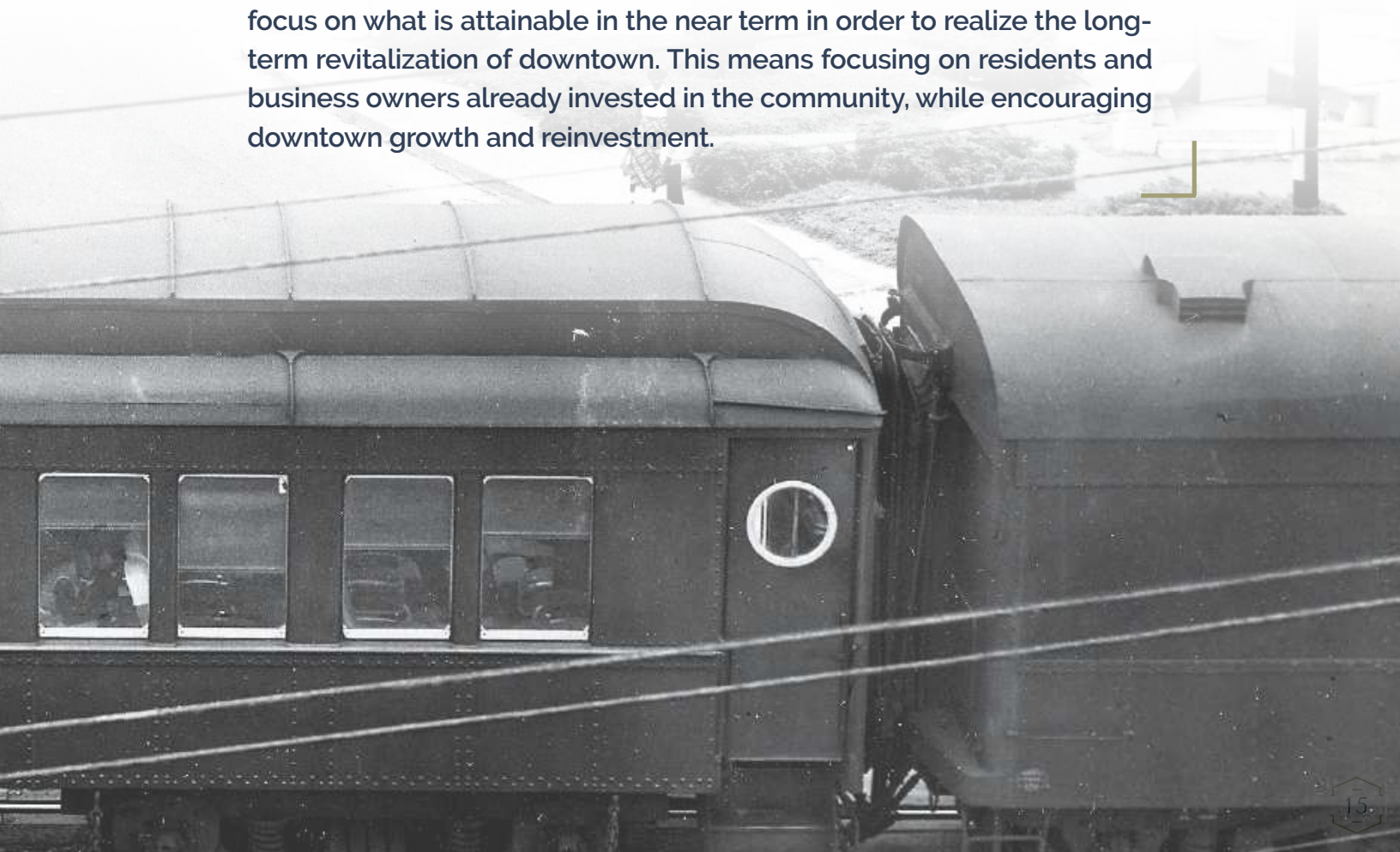
In conversations throughout step one of the Thomson RSVP, residents often expressed the desire to return to Thomson's thriving past, restoring the city's wealth of historical architecture and returning energy and life downtown. While the city has changed and lost some important landmarks over time, Thomson's downtown restaurants and unique assets like the Thomson Twin Cinema downtown and the beautifully restored Thomson Depot provide a strong foundation to build on in future decades. Major investments like the Thomson-McDuffie Government Center, attractive streetscaping on Main and Railroad Street, and new downtown businesses provide additional momentum to further grow and develop downtown.





In working to reestablish downtown as the vibrant anchor of community life and commerce, Thomson must embrace the character of the city and work to build on the strong foundation of local businesses, restaurants, and unique assets already downtown. Most residents recognize that these elements are already drawing community members downtown. In order for Thomson to realize the community vision outlined in step one, the city must rediscover itself. This means building on the unique assets, history, and character that make Thomson special. Rather than a chaotic sprawling growth pattern that destroys the city's past, Thomson must commit to restoring health and prosperity to the community's heart: downtown. Buildings need to be renovated and occupied, streets need to be beautified, and community members need regular, consistent draws to make downtown a lively local destination worthy of the community's rich past.


While the city retains many elements of this heritage and continues to draw residents from surrounding counties, restoring downtown into the bustling destination of decades past will take a dedicated investment of time, energy, planning, and hard work. While many residents identified long-term investments and structural improvements that the city should embark on, they must realize that the community has a finite amount of resources and time to devote to realizing the vision outlined by residents in step one of the Thomson RSVP plan. Community members must focus on what is attainable in the near term in order to realize the long-term revitalization of downtown. This means focusing on residents and business owners already invested in the community, while encouraging downtown growth and reinvestment.






*The Thomson Steering Committee, made up of 15 members, was instrumental in the Thomson RSVP process. They met several times over the past 12 months and visited two different Georgia downtown communities.*





Thomson officials must prioritize creating incentives that benefit both newly recruited outside industries and long-time downtown business and property owners, encouraging the growth of home-grown businesses, facilitating the renovation of existing properties, and attracting local investment in downtown. Encouraging the local government and property owners to get their own houses in order is an important first step in rebuilding the vibrant community desired by Thomson citizens. Residents and officials must see this planning effort as a rebuilding process, defining the priorities that will guide revitalization efforts in the community over the next decade. The top issues that emerged during step one of the RSVP process outline community priorities going forward. While residents also identified longer term needs, the issues included here prioritize the critical challenges that must be addressed over the next decade in order for Thomson to begin realizing the vision outlined by local residents.

Throughout this process, a dedicated group of local citizens, business leaders, volunteers, and government officials convened under the leadership of the city and the Archway Partnership to refine desired priorities and guide development of the final plan. This group, the Thomson RSVP Steering Committee, reviewed and honed the hundreds of individual public responses from step one to determine the community's top concerns. The resulting top issues guided the strategies and designs found throughout this plan.





*THOMSON*  
TOP ISSUES





## THE “LOOK” OF BUILDINGS

*Improve the appearance of buildings, maintain the historical building stock, and address vacancies*

### **Incentives and ordinances**

- Determine incentives program necessary to invite desired redevelopment  
*Study façade grants, sprinkler grants, signage grants, tax abatement programs, and other redevelopment incentives*
- Ensure a streamlined process for downtown redevelopment
- Prevent any additional demolition of historical downtown buildings
- Provide façade designs to property owners who are ready to make improvements

### **Attract residential development and redevelopment**

- Create an intown redevelopment housing incentive program
- Incentivize upper-story downtown living and infill development where possible

## CONNECTIVITY

### **Main Street/US-78 corridor**

- Reduce heavy truck traffic; add landscaped bump-outs, crosswalks, and trees
- **Address safety and parking access**
  - Improve lighting and signage along alleys and parking areas

## ACTIVATE DOWNTOWN/RECREATION

### **Develop consistent family-friendly downtown recreation options**

- Consider the creation of a downtown park as a community draw and amenity  
*Consider building a downtown playground*  
*Consider developing a downtown splash pad*  
*Consider building a dog park*

### **Create weekly activities and events**

- Hire a full-time event coordinator to organize and promote regular downtown events and activities
- Bring regular activity downtown

## GREENING AND BEAUTIFICATION

### **Improve the appearance of US-78 and key gateways**

### **Continue planting trees and landscaping throughout downtown**





# THE “LOOK” OF BUILDINGS

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With a history dating back to the mid-1800s, downtown Thomson boasts a wealth of historical commercial, residential, and institutional buildings. These buildings are concrete reminders of the city’s rich history and heritage. While local residents are proud of their history and praised the city’s architectural pedigree, throughout step one of the Thomson RSVP planning process, they overwhelmingly indicated that downtown suffers from a number of issues related to building condition, maintenance, and vacancy.

Community members see potential in downtown’s historical building stock and recognize that it is essential that these buildings be filled and properly cared for. Many noted that empty and unmaintained buildings send a negative signal to visitors, stunt attempts at reinvestment, and punish adjacent property owners. In the community-wide survey and elsewhere, residents noted that incentives and ordinance changes could be used to help spur redevelopment of historical downtown buildings. While recognizing that downtown buildings are a cherished community resource that must be preserved, restoring and properly maintaining historical

properties often comes with a heavy financial burden to property owners.

In addition to existing restrictions meant to preserve downtown buildings, property owners favor new incentives to help make downtown redevelopment more economically feasible. Specialized tax incentives, including property tax abatements, freezing assessment values, or other means could be instituted over a predetermined length of time to facilitate the redevelopment of historical downtown buildings. Downtown property owners envision many creative options for helping incentivize redevelopment downtown, including options like façade grants for the backs of downtown buildings, signage grants, specialized wiring or sprinkler grants for building renovation, and more. To determine what incentives make sense in the community, Thomson officials should work with property and business owners and groups like the Thomson-McDuffie Chamber of Commerce and the Thomson-McDuffie Development Authority. Creating and marketing an incentives package targeted at downtown redevelopment could be instrumental in creating the downtown experience desired by local residents.

## CASE STUDY

*The Thomson RSVP Steering Committee visited Madison, Georgia, and Sugar Hill, Georgia, in order to see examples of successful corridor developments with vibrant downtowns.*



Unfortunately, simply attracting more businesses and restoring buildings will not permanently address the long-term structural changes that have left much of downtown vacant. While working to fill and redevelop downtown buildings, community leaders must take a serious look at why so much of the city's commercial life has been siphoned from downtown to unincorporated and unrestricted corridor development approaching I-20. Like many other communities, unchecked corridor development from the 1960s onward has created highly visible,

growing blight entering and leaving Thomson. As strip developments reach the end of their design life, they often attract undesired and even predatory enterprises, including payday lending, pawn shops, and more. Further toward the interstate, new "greenfield" developments built to replace outdated strip malls soon fall victim to the same pattern.

Working to establish more restrictive zoning along key corridors and incentivizing higher quality development throughout the area could help balance development pressure and attract more commerce downtown.



“RESIDENTS LIVING NEAR DOWNTOWN RESTAURANTS, SHOPS, AND ENTERTAINMENT OPTIONS ARE FAR MORE LIKELY TO PATRONIZE THESE BUSINESSES THAN SIMILAR RESIDENTS LIVING AT THE FAR END OF TOWN.”

As much of the development along the US-78 corridor lies outside of the city limits, enacting these standards means Thomson leaders must partner with McDuffie County planners and leadership. City and county leadership should collaborate on mutually beneficial standards and work to attract quality development to the community. Local leaders should take a serious look at appropriate examples of corridor development in nearby cities, including Madison. Also located along I-20, Madison has successfully balanced high-quality corridor development with a thriving and vibrant downtown. By employing restrictions and incentives that work elsewhere, Thomson could help build the vibrant, healthy, and economically strong downtown desired by community members.

In working to restore downtown as the vibrant heart of the community, many see the need to attract a larger 24-hour population downtown. Few elements are as important in creating a vibrant area as a significant population living in or adjacent to downtown. Residents living near downtown restaurants, shops, and entertainment options are far more likely to patronize these businesses than similar residents living at the far end of town. People living downtown also means more “eyes on the street,” an important component of public safety. Many locals see opportunity in incentivizing second-story housing downtown. While only a handful of downtown buildings have the potential for second-story lofts, the wealth of historical homes and walkable neighborhoods surrounding downtown could provide fertile ground for revitalizing the area. Working to incentivize the renovation of historical housing and working to attract infill development on vacant lots could help stabilize historical neighborhoods and bring more people to live in or adjacent to downtown. The same methods mentioned above could be used to incentive residential development, or local leaders could consider developing specific targeted incentives to attract desired residential development.

## ———— DOWNTOWN ————

# STRATEGIC VISIONING

**D**owntown strategic visioning combines the best practices of community-led strategic planning, design, and action item implementation. Integral to the steps that follow, the initial public input process allows planners to discover the kind of future a community wants by giving stakeholders the opportunity to express their goals, objectives, and values. Through this community dialogue, residents discuss the future goals for their downtown. By discussing with each other ideal versions of their community, residents are able to arrive at a collective vision of their future.

Talking about local priorities and ideal futures only goes so far. The second step of developing a downtown strategic vision is bringing a community's ideal vision to life through design. Trained planners and design professionals listen to the community detail their unique vision. Designers use renderings, plans, and more to help illustrate the picture local citizens can see in their collective mind's eye. They create two-dimensional images that represent solutions to transform the built environment. Design interventions can be either short- or long-term, with solutions ranging from a simple fix with a can of paint to more complex improvements like streetscaping or the design of context-sensitive mixed-use infill developments. Whether small or large, the conceptual designs address the priorities and vision articulated by the people of the community, with their ideas and solutions captured and brought to life through design. Representing the goals and objectives of the community, these design concepts illustrate the community-determined, collective vision of how their downtown will be in the future. Design concepts are then used to guide strategic planning, prioritize decision making, and inform local officials who will direct the future of the downtown.



# — ADDIE'S —

## ◀ EXISTING

Formerly Addie's Hair Care and Beauty Salon, this building on Main Street was identified in public input as needing some improvement.

## PROPOSED ▼

This rendering shows a former beauty salon repurposed as the imaginary "Addie's Coffee." A coffee shop was often mentioned as one of the destinations people would like to see downtown. The building's exterior has been given a "face-lift," with simple improvements, including painting the awning and adding hand-painted business signage, restoring and painting the wooden storefront black, and installing white exterior shiplap boards to cover the stucco façade above the awning.



## | THE "LOOK"

► **EXISTING** | The Watson & Knox building is located on Main Street in downtown. Currently, the sign is small and hard to read from across the street.

▲ **PROPOSED** | In historical photographs of Thomson, large, hand-painted signs are seen all over downtown. They gave downtown character and personality, and made businesses easier to find. This rendering shows the Watson & Knox logo hand-painted onto the building and the small hanging sign removed.

► **COMPLETED** | The new sign was installed in March 2020.





— WATSON & KNOX —







▲ **EXISTING** | This beautiful, three-story, red brick building located on Main Street has much potential, but its wooden storefront shows weathering and chipping paint.

► **PROPOSED** | If the wooden storefront shows no signs of rot, it should be preserved if possible. The rendering shows the storefront after improvements, which include painting the wood with a dramatic glossy black exterior paint, complementing the ornate brickwork found on the upper stories with a more striking storefront. Window trim has been painted black to match. New, more period-appropriate double doors have been added, as well as new window details. Sophisticated gold business lettering adorns the storefront, giving it the finishing touch.





▶ COMPLETED,  
STEP 1 | New windows  
were installed in March 2020.







## — 136 — MAIN STREET

### ▲ EXISTING

This 1950s-era vacant building is located on Main Street in downtown. Features including large double-storefront and upper-story windows allow lots of natural light into the building.

### PROPOSED ►

It would not take much to make this building shine again. By simply painting all of the trim a fresh coat of black, installing new commercial doors, and adding a 1950s period-appropriate flat awning, this building once again has character and offers great opportunity for new businesses. The upper story could easily become downtown loft apartments, while the ground level could have a number of commercial uses. This rendering shows a restaurant on the left with midcentury-inspired signage and a yoga studio on the right. Café seating welcomes visitors to dine outside on the sidewalk.





NT

Sibley's

Sibley's

YOGA  
BHOGA

YOGA  
BHOGA

YOGA  
BHOGA

YOGA  
BHOGA









◀ **BEFORE** | Ivery's Restaurant offers some of the best home cooking in the area and has become a local favorite. Located on Railroad Street, both Ivery's and the adjacent building on the right are owned by a longtime Thomson resident. With small updates, these prominent downtown buildings could dramatically improve the look of this street.

▼ **PROPOSED** | A can of paint can go a long way in changing the look of a building. This rendering shows the Ivery's Restaurant exterior painted in pale blue with white trim. The adjacent building, which may become a salon in the future, is painted a lighter color to differentiate the two businesses without clashing colors. Other improvements include removal of the old awning and the installation of new awnings to define entrances. New black doors are added to give Ivery's a more updated and commercial look. Outdoor café seating welcomes patrons to eat outside under red umbrellas. Potted plants add that same welcoming touch of Southern hospitality to the exterior that one receives inside the restaurant.



## — VACANT STOREFRONTS —

► **EXISTING** | While in need of some aesthetic improvements, this vacant building on Railroad Street features a glass storefront façade and other features that could be valuable even before a tenant is found.



▲ **PROPOSED** | Located across from the historic Thomson Depot, this vacant building could be brought to life with a rotating collection of student artwork in the large glass display windows. Thomson could consider partnering with the local school system to host regular student art shows in vacant buildings downtown. These displays are sure to bring families downtown and can inspire the city's youth to get excited about downtown Thomson.





▼ COMPLETED, MARCH 2020



— AVAILABLE BUILDING —

# RAILROAD STREET



▲ **EXISTING** | Located at the corner of Railroad and Greenway Street, this prominent vacant building needs to be refreshed to appeal to potential tenants. Tattered blinds, repetitive for-rent signs, and the grubby stucco façade all send a negative message to visitors and potential downtown renters.



▲ **PROPOSED, OPTION 1** Consolidating all the relevant rental information on a single, large sign removes visual clutter from this building while promoting downtown Thomson. Pressure washing and paint touch-ups on the stucco façade help restore the appearance of this corner building.



## VINTAGE CLOCK



▲ PROPOSED, OPTION 2 | Suggested by RSVP Steering Committee Member Patsy Hall, installing a prominent street clock at this intersection could provide a focal point to the east side of downtown. Attractive streetscaping accents like the handsome clock shown here help downtown feel cared for and worthy of investment. The vintage clock will act as a new landmark anchoring the Railroad Street streetscape.



— JOURNAL STREET —

## VACANT STOREFRONT

▲ **EXISTING** | Located at the dead-end of Central Avenue downtown, this vacant midcentury storefront has undergone some unfortunate changes over the years. Enclosing the former storefront with wood paneling and cheap residential doors imparts a forlorn atmosphere along this side street.

▼ **PROPOSED, SHORT TERM** | Resurfacing Central Avenue, relocating signage, selectively repainting, and adding a large blues-themed mural could make this building an asset downtown, even prior to finding a long-term tenant. Similar improvements could help make downtown's alleys and side streets appear safer and more cared for. The short-term mural depicted here is a classic print by John Froehlich. The artwork is intended to be a concept; local or regional artists will paint their vision.

▶ **PROPOSED, LONG TERM** | In the long term, this vacant building could house a collection of downtown loft apartments. This design restores the storefront with midcentury architectural detailing, including glass and steel windows, refinished existing Roman-style brick, a streamlined aluminum awning, and more.







PROPOSED SHORT TERM ◀



PROPOSED LONG TERM ▲







▼ COMPLETED, MARCH 2020





# — HISTORIC PRICE THEATER —

► **EXISTING** | Once an architectural highlight downtown and a regional destination, the historic Price Theater on Journal Street has long been neglected. Over time, large turn-of-the-century windows and the first-story theater entry were bricked in, giving this historic building a sealed off, abandoned appearance.

▼ **PROPOSED** | Prior to the restoration of this important piece of Thomson's heritage, installing a large, colorful blues-themed mural by a local artist could make Journal Street feel safe and cared for. The mural could help build on downtown's unique identity, while distracting from unfortunate alterations made to this façade. The short-term mural depicted here is a classic print by Leonid Afremov. The artwork is intended to be a concept; local or regional artists will paint their vision.







◀ **EXISTING** | The historic Price Theater on Journal Street has lost much of its former glory. The original windows and façade have been bricked in. The original marquee is also missing.

▼ **PROPOSED** | The historic Price Theater could be converted to feature a ground-level restaurant, artist space, or community event venue. The upper floor could also be converted to artist studios or loft apartments. Historically appropriate windows, a metal awning, and glass storefront windows help make the space welcoming and restore the character of the dignified building. This rendering shows the original Coca-Cola mural restored.







▲ **EXISTING** | While Thomson's Old City Hall and Firehouse has seen better days, the fact that this building is no longer occupied but has an upstairs apartment offers hope for improvements along Journal Street. Like the neighboring Price Theater, large openings including the original pocket garage doors and other window and door openings have been sealed off over time. The color and low quality of materials used in these alterations makes them all the more obvious.

▼ **PROPOSED, OPTION 1** | Like short-term designs proposed for neighboring buildings, installing a blues-themed mural could be a first step in restoring vitality to Journal Street. Painting altered window and door enclosures dark helps them recede from view. Removing trash cans and receptacles to a centralized service area declutters the street. The short-term mural depicted here is a classic print by C'Babi Bayoc. The artwork is intended to be a concept; local or regional artists will paint their vision.







▲ PROPOSED, OPTION 2 | As Thomson's former city hall and firehouse, this building hosts a wealth of local history and should be a priority for preservation. Marketing historical properties like this one to investors who crave the history and charm of old buildings could help ensure the revitalization of this and other historic properties. This design restores large, dark-framed windows and doors to the original openings. A glass-and-steel garage door highlights the location of the former Thomson firehouse. Adjacent to the building, a formerly neglected side yard becomes a compact and inviting courtyard dining space, complete with lush plantings, romantic string lights, café tables, and pea gravel. Sophisticated black awnings, potted herbs and plants, and quality architectural finishes help restore beauty to this downtown landmark.

JOURNAL STREET

— HUGHES BUILDING —

► **EXISTING** | Long a downtown institution, the former site of Hughes Furniture at the corner of Journal and Greenway Street needs visual improvements to appeal to potential tenants. The ripped fabric awning, rusty metal overhang, and old artificial turf dissuade potential tenants and downtown visitors.



▼ **PROPOSED** | Painting the aluminum awning and flashing, removing tattered fabric and dated artificial turf, and adding string lights helps restore the streamlined midcentury aesthetic of the Hughes building. Consolidating leasing information on a single large-format sign helps remove visual clutter. An additional prominent corner sign could be used to promote downtown events. Regularly resurfacing asphalt and ensuring that crosswalks are crisply painted help make downtown side streets feel cared for.



► **COMPLETED, STEP 1** | The Hughes Building awning was removed in March 2020.





## — KNOX BUILDING —

▲ **EXISTING** | The midcentury Knox Building occupies a prominent location in the center of downtown Thomson. This building needs masonry repointing and other improvements to withstand the next 50 years.

▼ **PROPOSED** | Pressure washing and repainting the existing stucco, repointing the brick façade, removing visual clutter, and cleaning up the sidewalk and parking area help restore the clean 1950s appearance of this local landmark.

▼ **COMPLETED** | Building improvements were completed in March 2020.





## KNOX CENTER PATIO

### OPTION 1



◀ **EXISTING** | This outlying strip mall at the end of the Knox Shopping Center would benefit from façade and other improvements. Broken up, poorly defined paving, prominent dumpsters, and a lack of vegetation all make an unappealing area to visitors.





▲ **PROPOSED** | Selectively piercing the asphalt parking lot of the Knox Shopping Center could create space for planting beds and large-canopy street trees. The curbing for this bump-out is pierced to allow stormwater infiltration. Once the site of unnecessary additional parking, this new side patio is now a selling point to future tenants. String lights, potted plants, café tables and chairs, and more help create a festive and inviting ambiance. Screening dumpsters with attractive brick-and-steel enclosures helps contain these necessary services.

# KNOX CENTER PATIO

## OPTION 2

▼ **PROPOSED** | Transforming this additional side parking lot into a large, shaded patio could create a more vibrant atmosphere and offer an important selling point for future tenants. New landscaping strips with easily maintained liriope groundcover and Natchez crape myrtles help make this patio feel like a lush and inviting getaway. Crisply painted parking and resurfaced asphalt make the shopping complex feel well maintained.







## ◀ EXISTING

The end of this complex on the north side of the Knox Shopping Center complex is occupied by a secondary parking lot unnecessary for everyday demand. Grubby white cinderblock walls contrast sharply with the surrounding brick, drawing attention.







## GREENWAY & JOURNAL STREET

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# INFILL

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▲ **EXISTING** | Located across from the Thomson-McDuffie Government Complex, the vacant corner of Journal and Greenway Street could be the ideal site of future infill development.

▶ **PROPOSED** | With a handsome brick façade, open street-level retail, and attractive streetscaping, this new infill development concept restores life and activity to this section of downtown Thomson. The two floors of apartments in this development help feed demand for downtown restaurants and businesses. Angled on-street parking included along Greenway Street provides easy access to new businesses. This design shows the brick paving of Journal Street extended to the intersection, creating a well-appointed and attractive pedestrian-centric side street. Extending streetscaping elements like the city's existing streetlights to this district helps tie new development in with the rest of downtown. Attracting a complementary large infill development like the one shown could stimulate additional investment downtown, including revitalization of buildings like the former Hughes Furniture warehouse in the foreground of this image.









# THOMSON TWIN

## *CINEMA*

The Thomson Twin Cinema has been a destination in downtown Thomson since it first opened in the 1950s. Many residents during step one of the RSVP pointed to the Thomson Twin as a distinctive asset that brings regular, affordable, family-friendly activity downtown. At the same time, many locals commented that the theater could use some upgrades and improvements to better serve the community. Working with students from the UGA College of Environment and Design, in 2019 the Archway Partnership prepared a report for the theater that both describes this downtown institution's rich history and includes conceptual renderings for a potential exterior renovation. The report also includes designs for an adjacent park, with unique murals that reflect the history of the theater. The designs included here were produced by Benjamin Proulx for the Archway Partnership. In addition to these designs, a group of students from the UGA Terry College of Business provided recommendations for building rehabilitation, business organizational structure, and expanded uses. Thomson leadership should continue collaborating with the owners of Thomson Twin Cinema to preserve and promote this downtown landmark.







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OVERCOMER





# SOUTH THEATER WALL AND PARK



The large expanse of brick wall alongside the adjacent public parking and park on the south side of Thomson Twin Cinema provides an opportunity to highlight the history of the theater by incorporating some of the original newspaper art and ads from *The McDuffie Progress*. Graphics from the theater's original opening can be painted along the building's south façade, adding both interest and appeal to the existing public park and also creating a gateway for theater guests between the nearest parking and theater entrance. Downlighting not only highlights these billboards at night but also creates an attractive ambient lighting through the space that improves the park character and security. The proposed billboards would best convey their historic nature if painted in black and white in the same fashion they were printed in the newspaper. These billboards provide a simple way of utilizing more than just the theater's front façade, improve local public space, and increase the aesthetics of the theater's entire building. These proposed changes also offer an effective way to renovate the structure while highlighting local cultural history.





*PROPOSED MURAL RENDERINGS*

Designs and text courtesy of Archway Partnership







*TOP ISSUE*

# ACTIVATE DOWNTOWN/RECREATION

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**T**hroughout step one of the Thomson RSVP process, residents overwhelmingly reported that they want downtown to be the lively, vibrant heart of the community. Making this vision a reality requires that downtown buildings be occupied and well maintained. At the same time, creating a hub for community life means bringing more community events and regular activities downtown.

Particularly for young residents and families, downtown currently does not offer many consistent draws beyond dining. Many see community events and festivals as a way to regularly draw more locals downtown. In focus groups with school-age Thomson residents, students praised existing events downtown. Many see regular events like football games at the Brickyard and the Christmas parade as cherished elements of community life. Students in particular requested more events and free and affordable downtown entertainment options. Encouraging and promoting more student events, activities, and investment downtown could be an effective way to stabilize downtown and ensure the long-term revitalization of the area. Encouraging the community's youth to see downtown as a safe, fun, and vibrant area from childhood onward helps ensure that these locals remain active and invested in the community throughout their lives.

To create the active downtown experience desired by residents, Thomson should consider working with the Chamber of Commerce, the Thomson-McDuffie County Convention & Visitors Bureau, and others to hire a full-time event coordinator to organize regular downtown events. Hiring a full-time employee dedicated to supporting downtown programming and events would also be instrumental in Thomson achieving Main Street designation. Housed at the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA), Main Street exists to help build strong, vibrant communities across the state. Working with full-time professionals in over 100 Georgia cities, Main Street helps pair local communities with the tools they need to revitalize downtown areas.

Throughout the public engagement process, community members stated the pressing need for one person to wake up every morning working to improve and bring activity downtown. Becoming a Main Street community takes time and requires a full-time, designated downtown point person to oversee downtown revitalization efforts. If the city applies to the program and is selected, Thomson's full-time event coordinator could become the city's Main Street Director. In this role, this employee's job would be to oversee downtown revitalization and reinvestment efforts and to bring new funding and tools to encourage reinvestment in downtown Thomson.







In addition to regular events, residents also requested dedicated spaces for family-friendly outdoor activities downtown. Young families are regarded as a target demographic in discussions with local development professionals. To better serve this growing group, Thomson should look to incorporate quality of life improvements, including vibrant playgrounds, parks, and more. Already, the popularity of community destinations like the Thomson Family YMCA is a sign of the local demand for affordable family-friendly activities and programs. Several public spaces and parks exist downtown that could benefit from expanded family-friendly programming. Improving these spaces with amenities like a playground, a splash pad, walking trails, and more would help ensure that Thomson maximizes the potential of these community investments. Spaces like the wide swath of lawn at the Thomson-McDuffie Government Complex could become hubs of activity if programmed with regular events.





————— *ACTIVATING* —————

# THOMSON DEPOT

Many 1950s photos of the Thomson Depot show the landmark's historical signage with mileage to Atlanta and Augusta listed. This sign could inspire a similar mural or large art installation downtown.





▼ **PROPOSED** | Train watching is a popular pastime of many people. Thomson has the opportunity to create a beautiful outdoor space at the depot for Thomson residents and visitors to enjoy watching the trains. This space could also be rented out for events. The rendering shows some simple improvements, including cleaning and repainting the half wall, installing an enlarged historical train print, and adding string lights, hanging ferns, and bunting flags. Drawing inspiration from an old Thomson railroad sign found in the historical photograph on page 62, a new mural that nods to Thomson's historic railroad routes to Atlanta and Augusta can be seen from the tracks and offers a unique photo opportunity for events.

▲ **EXISTING** | This photograph shows a view of the Thomson Depot from the railroad tracks.







◀ **EXISTING** | This photograph shows the depot's train-viewing platform before improvements.





▼ **PROPOSED** | The rendering shows the following improvements to the depot's train-viewing platform: pressure washing the concrete; installing string lights along the roof-line; hanging red, white, and blue bunting flags and ferns; installing an enlarged print of a train with a historical railroad sign; and installing additional sconce lighting to better display the artwork. In March 2020, string lights were added to the pavillion.



# THOMSON DEPOT

## ELEMENTS SPECIFICATION SHEET



Indoor/Outdoor Metal Dining Chairs, Set of 4

Price: \$109.99 (set of 4)

Where to buy: Amazon | <https://bit.ly/redchairs1>



Indoor/Outdoor Xunny American US Flag Bunting (3'x1.5')

Price: \$11.99 (set of 2)

Where to buy: Amazon | [https://bit.ly/flag\\_bunting](https://bit.ly/flag_bunting)



Flash Furniture 31.5" Square Red Metal Table

Price: \$125.00

Where to buy: Amazon | [https://bit.ly/red\\_table](https://bit.ly/red_table)



Boston Fern Plant 9.25" Hanging Basket

Price: \$21.98

Where to buy: Home Depot | [https://bit.ly/boston\\_fern](https://bit.ly/boston_fern)



24 ft. 12-Light Filament LED String Light

Price: \$39.98

Where to buy: Home Depot | [https://bit.ly/LEDstring\\_lights](https://bit.ly/LEDstring_lights)



Behr White Flat Masonry, Stucco, and Brick Interior/Exterior Paint

Price: \$21.98 per gallon

Where to buy: Home Depot | <https://bit.ly/behrwhitepaint>



# THOMSON DEPOT

## ELEMENTS SPECIFICATION SHEET (CONT.)



18" x 36" City of Thomson Public Restrooms Sign

Price: \$61.12

Where to buy: [Signs.com](https://Signs.com) | [https://bit.ly/thomson\\_sign](https://bit.ly/thomson_sign)



12" x 18" Smile You're on Camera Sign

Price: \$30.66

Where to buy: [Signs.com](https://Signs.com) | [https://bit.ly/thomson\\_sign](https://bit.ly/thomson_sign)



Indoor/Outdoor Security Camera (2)

Price: \$38.89 each (need 2)

Where to buy: [Amazon](https://Amazon.com) | [https://bit.ly/security\\_camera1](https://bit.ly/security_camera1)



Schlage FE595 PLY 626 ELA Plymouth Keypad Entry with Flex-Lock and Elan Style Levers, Brushed Chrome

Price: \$121.27

Where to buy: [Amazon](https://Amazon.com) | <https://bit.ly/schlagelock>

\*Select FLEX lock version.



"Come on in! Public Restrooms" Window Vinyl Decal

18" x 24," Horizontal, Clear, Inside Glass

Where to buy: [Vistaprint.com](https://Vistaprint.com) | [https://bit.ly/custom\\_decals](https://bit.ly/custom_decals)



— *FERNANDA'S* —  
MURAL

▲ **EXISTING** | Fernanda's Grill and Pizzeria is a local favorite in downtown Thomson. The photograph shows the restaurant's outdoor patio located in a side alley adjacent to the restaurant. This patio, which is already a beautiful space, could be embellished further to become a nighttime destination and improve lighting in the alley.

▶ **PROPOSED** | The rendering shows a hand-painted sign reading "Fernanda's" under new lighting, posts, and string lights. String lights and other elements around the patio create a fun and inviting atmosphere. Additional patio furniture for outdoor dining also helps bring more utility to this space. New planters sitting atop the brick columns create a welcoming gateway entrance to the outdoor space.





YORK-STYLE PIZZA  
**NANDA'S**  
& PIZZERIA









HEARD THE HOOT OWL SINGING  
AKING DOWN THE TENTS  
S ABOVE THE BARREN TREES  
WERE HIS ONLY AUDIENCE  
AL GYPSY MAIDENS  
I STRUT THEIR FEATHERS WELL  
Y CAN SING THE BLUES  
ND WILLIE MCTELL

*Bob Dylan*



◀ EXISTING | This blank wall located at the corner of Journal and Main Street in downtown is a perfect spot to install public art that speaks to Thomson's history and character. This is the north exterior wall of the Highrail, a popular downtown restaurant.

▲ PROPOSED | This rendering shows local legend Blind Willie McTell painted on the wall along with the lyrics from Bob Dylan's "Blind Willie McTell" ballad.

— HOAGIE JOE'S —  
MURAL



▲ **EXISTING** | This alley is located next to Hogie Joe's restaurant in downtown.

► **PROPOSED** | Alleys are great places to have fun with public art. This rendering shows a colorful hoagie mural with tomato slices on the ground and wall. This mural advertises Hogie Joe's delicious menu offerings while creating a unique outdoor dining opportunity. Complete with bright yellow outdoor café furnishings and string lights hanging above, this alley is playful and piques your appetite.







— THOMSON —  
MUSIC MILE

During step one of the Thomson RSVP, dozens of community members requested more healthy activities downtown. Many believed that a designated downtown walking route would be a popular amenity with both locals and visitors. Building on proposals developed by local citizens, designers at the Carl Vinson Institute of Government created a variety of route options for short- and intermediate-length walking routes downtown. The half-mile, mile, and 1.5-mile routes shown could be further promoted with unique branding that honors Thomson's rich musical heritage as the home of Blind Willie McTell. A "Music Mile" walking path with attractive signage, pavement stencils, and specialized features like a customized app or playlist could create an exciting new downtown attraction. Thomson could help fund the Music Mile by partnering with health-conscious local organizations like University Hospital McDuffie. Many foundations and health care organizations, including the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Aetna, and Kaiser Permanente, offer grants for projects that promote healthy lifestyles in communities.



## .5 MILE PATH



This half-mile walking route creates a small downtown loop linking existing greenspace and downtown attractions. Terminating at the government complex, this route was designed to minimize unnecessary street crossings and potential conflict with vehicles.

## 1 MILE PATH



Creating a one-mile walking route around downtown could encourage physical activity and bring more residents downtown regularly. This route also helps connect downtown attractions and public spaces.

## 1.5 MILE PATH



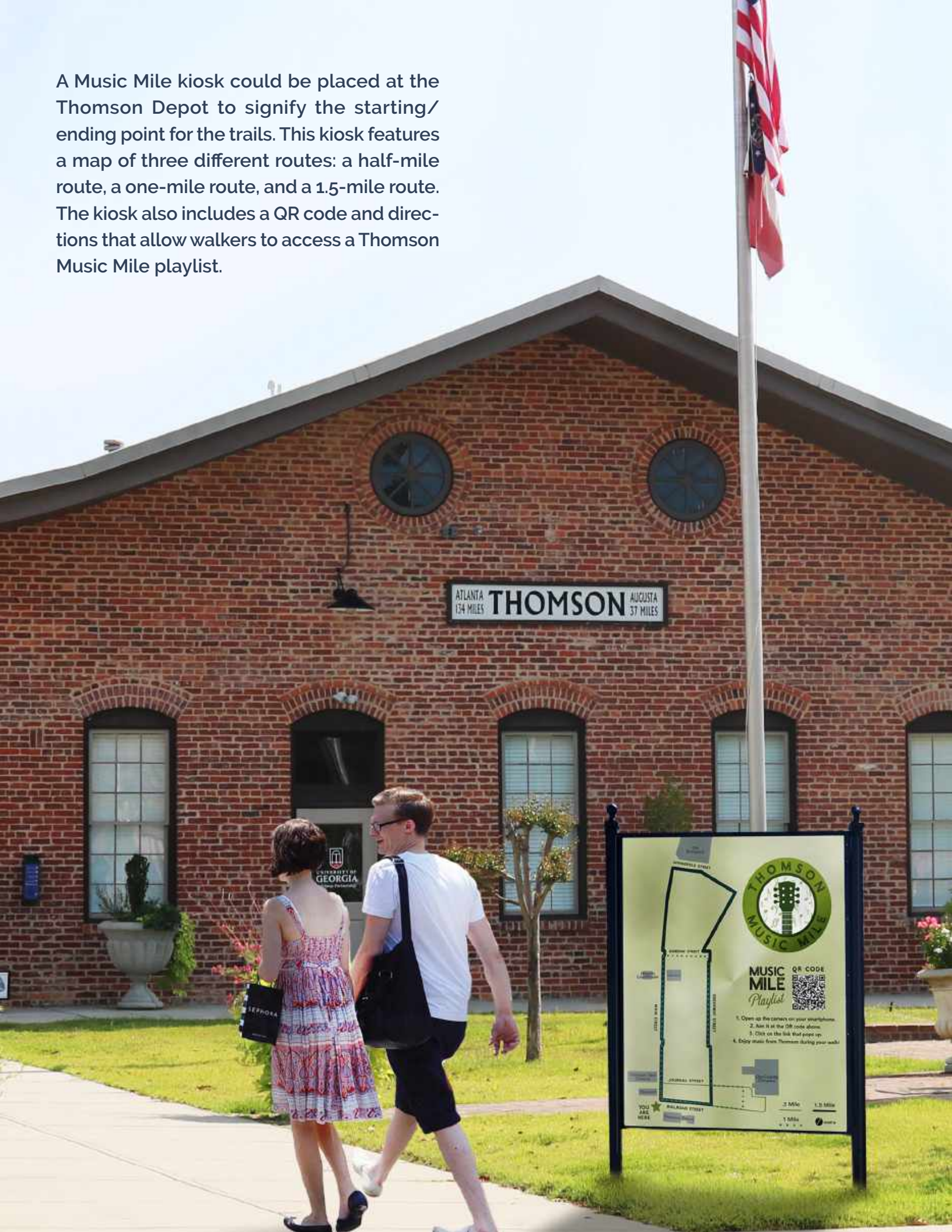
Extending a downtown walking route further could help connect downtown greenspace and attractions.



The Thomson Music Mile logo could be used on signage and promotional items that encourage walkers or downtown visitors to explore downtown Thomson. The bright green color used here borrows from the Thomson–McDuffie County Convention and Visitors Bureau’s existing color palette, complementing existing downtown signage. The logo gives a nod to the history of Blind Willie McTell by featuring the headstock and neck of a guitar with a background of musical elements like a base clef and eighth notes.



A Music Mile kiosk could be placed at the Thomson Depot to signify the starting/ending point for the trails. This kiosk features a map of three different routes: a half-mile route, a one-mile route, and a 1.5-mile route. The kiosk also includes a QR code and directions that allow walkers to access a Thomson Music Mile playlist.







Providing wayfinding for the Thomson Music Mile can be accomplished by creating a vinyl stencil and applying the design on sidewalks along the route. Vinyl stencils are an inexpensive branding and wayfinding strategy that provide a simple first step to activate an area. Another way to delineate the routes is by adding route markers to lampposts along each path. The markers shown in this rendering are in the shape of a guitar pick.





The Music Mile playlist could include songs by Blind Willie McTell and other blues artists. The image above shows a Spotify playlist, but any similar music playlist platform would suffice. Generating a QR code for the playlist allows downtown visitors to easily access it from any smartphone. There are several free QR code generators and playlist platforms available.

— *THOMSON* —

# RAILROAD PARK

**T**homson's history and location along the former Georgia Railroad provided the inspiration for the design of Thomson Railroad Park, an exciting new community amenity and downtown attraction. The park includes a playground, a splash pad, public restroom facilities, and a dog park, in addition to a picnic area and other amenities. Designed as a journey across the Georgia landscape, the proposed 12,000 square foot playground facility accommodates a diverse mix of play types. The centerpiece of the playground is a functional rail track featuring old-timey, hand-powered cars that users can operate themselves, bringing delight to children and a sense of nostalgia to their families. The rail track encircles the play area, terminating at a mini "Thomson Station," a shaded platform where parents can wave as train cars pass by. From the station, the track passes by a "nature play" area, where children can challenge their abilities on natural play materials in a wooded setting. The track continues past a country town, complete with tiny houses, a country store, and a seasonal variety of vegetables. Next the train passes through a tunnel in the hillside where spectators can wave from an overhead bridge. Riders dismount in the railyard, where junior conductors can explore and climb aboard model locomotives and train cars.





In the summer months, families can enjoy a railroad turntable-themed splash zone, with water pouring from an old-fashioned water tower onto a leaky steam locomotive gushing water in all directions. Restrooms, a changing room, and a shaded picnic area are conveniently located nearby. Furry family members also have a place to play, with a shaded dog park for both small and large dogs. Adjacent to an existing downtown public parking lot and with on-street parking incorporated into the design, the proposed Thomson Railroad Park features a total of 70 parking spaces and full ADA accessibility. With amenities for all ages, Thomson Railroad Park complements recent investments in the Thomson-McDuffie Government Center and creates a unique downtown attraction for all ages. For additional information on recommended materials, plant selection, and pricing, please see the Railroad Park Material Library in the appendix of this document (beginning on page 158).





► **EXISTING** | Downtown Thomson currently does not have outdoor spaces for family recreation. This vacant lot adjacent to the Thomson-McDuffie Government Center is a prime location that is currently underutilized. With a parking lot already constructed to the right of the image shown here, this grassy lot has the potential to become a community amenity.



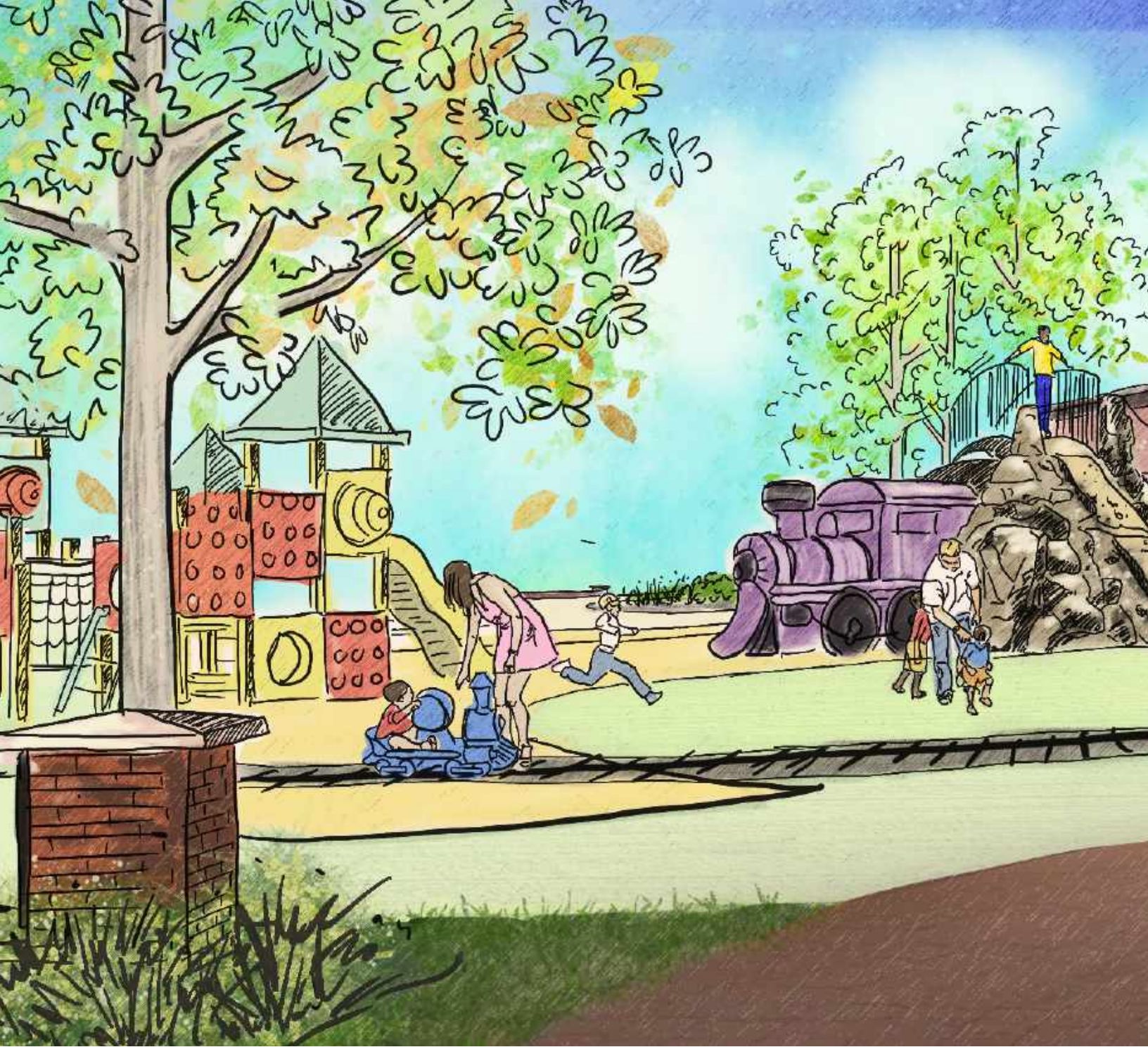


— RAILROAD PARK ENTRY —



▲ **PROPOSED** | An added crosswalk brings visitors from the government center directly into a welcoming new community park. Brick-and-steel panel fencing creates visual consistency between the government center and the park. Lush plantings of native grasses and perennials provide pops of color and texture while highlighting Georgia's beautiful native ecosystems. Large deciduous trees provide a comfortable shade canopy to a new community park with amenities for all ages. Honoring Thomson's history and location on the historic Georgia Railroad, the themed splash pad and playground are designed to spark the imagination of young visitors. The splash pad includes a water tower, railroad crossing signs, and a spouting steam locomotive for interactive play. Visitors to the park will also enjoy the dog park, restroom/changing rooms, and picnic areas included in the plan.





◀ **EXISTING** | This grassy area is a large, mostly flat site with no current programming. This lot, adjacent to the Thomson-McDuffie Government Center, is in a convenient location walkable from downtown. The parking lot in the foreground is currently underutilized and could accommodate increased activity.





# RAILROAD PARK

## — PLAYGROUND —

▲ **PROPOSED** | Entering into the playground from the parking lot, families are greeted by a pavilion built to emulate Thomson's train depot. Kiddie hand-crank railcars can roll right into the station, giving child conductors the chance to wave at onlookers as they pass by. The playground is encircled by a miniature track that

allows kids to power themselves down the line. The centerpiece of the playground is a climbable locomotive complete with a mountain tunnel. The playground features nature-play elements in addition to traditional play sets, providing opportunities for discovery and invention and a range of different play types.







# CONNECTIVITY

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Like the need to address the appearance of downtown buildings and attract more regular local activity, community members largely voiced consensus about the desire for connectivity improvements downtown. Connectivity means the ability and ease of safe travel in and around an area, whether by car, bike, or on foot. During step one of the RSVP process, locals repeatedly raised similar issues concerning downtown connectivity. In focus groups and interviews, residents pointed to issues along Main Street/US-78, particularly the lack of visible on-street parking, pedestrian safety issues, and excessive tractor-trailer traffic along this main corridor. In the past decade and a half, local officials have been progressive in planning and implementing streetscape improvements downtown. In 2006, Thomson was awarded \$1,020,415 in Community Development Block Grants and \$675,000 in Transportation Enhancement Grants for downtown infrastructure. With these funds and significant local investment, Main Street in downtown Thomson was redesigned to incorporate ADA-accessible sidewalks, brick-patterned crosswalks, and more. While residents like the look of the new streetscaping and appreciate the improved sidewalks and crosswalks, many also feel that Main Street functioned better with on-street parking. Although the new streetscaping and road layout prevents the addition of significant on-street parking areas, opportunities do exist to calm traffic, encourage the use of the ample rear parking areas, and discourage heavy truck traffic along Main Street. Traffic-calming measures have the simultaneous goals of improving pedestrian safety, reducing traffic speeds, and improving aesthetics. Thomson has already been proactive by installing brick-patterned midblock crosswalks in various locations along Main Street downtown. Working to incorporate landscaped bump-outs at intersections and vegetated pedestrian refuge islands could help to further calm traffic, reduce speeding, and enhance pedestrian safety and connectivity.

Historical photos of Main Street show downtown with an impressive shade canopy. In the era before air conditioning, Thomson's founders recognized trees as an essential element of creating a livable city. While bringing beauty, creating shade, and making downtown more inviting to explore, street trees have also been proven to slow traffic. Elements like street trees and brick crosswalks signal drivers that they are entering a dense area and need to slow down. Slower vehicular traffic, in turn, encourages locals to walk to nearby restaurants and destinations, creating more visible activity and a more vibrant downtown for all users. As Main Street is a state highway, local leaders must work with the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) to pursue any significant improvements along the corridor. GDOT cites midblock pedestrian crossings with pedestrian refuge islands as a recommended traffic-calming strategy that can be designed to reduce turning conflicts while improving pedestrian safety and aesthetics. Thomson leaders should continue working with GDOT to incorporate pedestrian refuge islands and other approved traffic-calming measures along the Main Street/US-78 corridor.

Despite the Thomson bypass constructed by GDOT in 2010, large tractor-trailers continue to primarily use US-78, traveling through the heart of downtown. Several locals pointed out that constant tractor-trailer traffic clogs roads, increases road maintenance needs, and creates safety hazards on small downtown streets. In addition to traffic-calming measures, many see the need to designate the bypass as a truck route and restrict tractor-trailer traffic downtown. Thomson officials should also consider working with trucking companies to make sure trucks are routed through the area via the bypass.







Upper Cut  
Salon



STOP



# CROSSWALKS



◀ **EXISTING** | The midblock crosswalk in front of the Thomson Twin improves pedestrian access downtown.

▼ **PROPOSED** | Ensuring that crosswalks are well maintained alerts drivers to the presence of pedestrians, enhancing safety for both drivers and pedestrians downtown.





► **EXISTING** | While Thomson's Main Street features attractive landscaping and improved sidewalks, the city's stamped crosswalks are becoming worn.

▼ **PROPOSED** | Keeping crosswalks crisply painted and maintained encourages safe pedestrian travel downtown.





◀ **EXISTING** | Thomson's stamped asphalt crosswalks are significantly worn in high traffic areas.

▼ **PROPOSED** | Regular maintenance and fresh paint on these crosswalks help welcome visitors and enhance safety.








— *US-78* —

# CORRIDOR

Main Street/US-78 serves as the primary vehicular corridor in downtown Thomson. From I-20 to the intersection of White Oak Street, US-78 features four traffic lanes and a typical pavement width of 40'. Already slated for improvement, as part of the RSVP planning process, the US-78 corridor from the Brickyard southward was a key project for local officials and planners from the Carl Vinson Institute of Government. Previous plans developed for this stretch of the corridor recommended reducing the four 10' travel lanes to two 12' travel lanes and an unbroken 16' center turn lane. Particularly along a corridor already known for high tractor-trailer volume, the wider traffic lanes and unbroken center median in the original design would likely have encouraged both excessive traffic speeds and large truck traffic. In the revised plan developed for the community, the 16' continuous center turn lane has been replaced in four key locations with pedestrian refuge islands. Measuring 12' in width and 60' in length, these pedestrian refuge islands are a GDOT-recommended traffic-calming element that can be designed to reduce turning conflicts while improving pedestrian safety. With a raised planting bed capable of incorporating small street trees, these refuge islands also help create a sense of arrival and improve the appearance of this key corridor.



THOMSON MAIN STREET CORRIDOR



GDOT  
DETENTION  
POND

THE  
BRICKYARD

MAIN STREET

SPRINGFIELD  
STREET





Visitors along the corridor are now greeted by traffic-calming vegetated pedestrian refuge islands that protect the crossing pedestrians heading to and from the Brickyard. The west side of Springfield Street has been realigned for an easier flow of traffic and now connects to Bethany Drive on the west. Seventeen large oaks on the west side of Main Street now guide visitors into downtown Thomson and shade pedestrians along the corridor.

- ROADS & PARKING
- SIDEWALK
- EXISTING BUILDINGS
- LARGE STREET TREE
- SMALL STREET TREE



▲ **EXISTING** | Main Street at the Brickyard has four lanes of traffic with 10' drive lanes. The road width is just over 40' and the total right-of-way is 75'. Under the original GDOT plan for Main Street/US-78, the corridor would transition from four to two lanes just north of the Georgia National Guard Armory. Travel lanes would increase to 12', and a continuous 16' center turn lane would extend from the armory to Cobb Street. Oversized travel lanes and an unobstructed center turn lane could encourage speeding and expanded truck traffic along the corridor.



▲ **PROPOSED** | Using portions of the center turn lane for pedestrian islands could discourage trucks and speeding, enhance pedestrian safety, and create a welcoming gateway to downtown.





◀ **EXISTING** | Main Street/US-78 is the main entry to downtown Thomson. Main Street between White Oak Street and I-20 is currently a busy four-lane road lacking visual cues for drivers to slow down. GDOT has proposed reducing the street to two drive lanes between West Street and White Oak Street to help reduce traffic speeds and increase pedestrian safety.



▲ **PROPOSED** | This landscape island is compatible with the existing GDOT plan for Main Street/US-78, but with the added benefits of traffic calming and beautification. Similar designs are incorporated into GDOT routes throughout the state.





◀ **EXISTING** | Downtown Thomson's beautiful downtown Main Street is a desirable place to walk and explore, but it can be difficult for pedestrians to cross the road safely between destinations. The current center turn lane configuration adds unnecessary pavement between turns, encouraging vehicles to speed through town.





▼ **PROPOSED** | The addition of a landscaped pedestrian island adds aesthetic as well as safety benefits to Main Street. The raised buffer protects pedestrians from oncoming traffic as they cross the street, while the tree canopy encourages drivers to slow down. Without impeding traffic flow, landscape buffers help create a sense of arrival as visitors enter town. The GDOT-approved Natchez crape myrtles shown add seasonal color to the downtown landscape and provide shade to improve pedestrian comfort. Locating a crosswalk at this intersection helps connect visitors to nearby parking while improving ADA accessibility downtown.





# PARKING

In addition to connectivity issues along Main Street, many residents expressed the need to improve the visibility and accessibility of existing public parking areas behind Main Street businesses. First-time visitors are likely unaware of the large public parking areas behind businesses on either side of Main Street. Ensuring that visitors are aware of the ample parking areas downtown is an important first step in creating the vibrant downtown desired by community members. Prominent signage directing visitors to these parking areas could help attract more visitors to downtown shops and restaurants. Using an artistic approach to parking signage instead of traditional GDOT metal signage is highly encouraged, as creative signage could both better indicate parking areas and improve the appearance of downtown. Adding ample lighting to side streets, alleyways, and parking access routes could further improve evening access and safety while encouraging more nights out at downtown businesses. Working with property owners to beautify rear parking areas, including improving and consolidating service areas at interior parking lots, could enhance the appearance of these important resources, expanding community use and utility for business owners.



# — FIRST AVENUE — PARKING



◀ **EXISTING** | First Avenue behind busy Main Street in downtown Thomson has recently undergone significant improvements including the addition of a public parking area. Attractive directional signage along Main Street highlights the new parking area but is likely too small for drivers to recognize.



▲ **PROPOSED** | The blank wall at the corner of First and Main Street is an opportunity to both direct visitors and celebrate local art. This mural (or a similar large-scale vinyl sign) encourages visitors to use the newly improved rear parking area.

► **EXISTING** | Thomson's Highrail restaurant is a regular attraction downtown. First-time visitors are likely unaware of the large parking lot in the back of the restaurant.



▲ **PROPOSED** | The blank wall at the corner of First and Main Street is an opportunity to both direct visitors and celebrate local art. This mural (or a similar large-scale vinyl sign) encourages visitors to use the newly improved rear parking area.





▲ **PROPOSED** | Festive string lights make Journal Street more inviting in this rendering. Lighting side streets and alleyways downtown could help restaurant patrons feel safer walking back to parked vehicles in the evening.



◀ **EXISTING** | Visitors to the Highrail restaurant and other downtown establishments use Journal Street and other side streets and alleys to access midblock parking areas. Increasing lighting along these access routes would improve the visitor experience.



▲ **EXISTING** | Once home to a downtown theater and Thomson City Hall, Journal Street historically ranked among the top downtown retail streets. Today this route mainly provides access to the large parking area behind Main Street and Railroad Street businesses and restaurants. The jumble of inefficiently arranged parking areas, lack of vegetation and lighting, and prominent open dumpsters and trash receptacles make this an unappealing first impression for visitors. While the area is in need of maintenance, elements like the brick street point to Journal Street's rich past.



▲ **PROPOSED** | Rearranging rear parking areas creates the opportunity to introduce landscaping, sidewalks, and other important visitor improvements. This image shows existing dumpsters and trash receptacles contained behind an attractive steel-and-brick service enclosure. Designed to centralize services for the surrounding businesses and neaten downtown, this area offers easy access for both businesses and waste collection vehicles. Improving Journal Street could spur reinvestment in surrounding buildings. This rendering shows the warehouse to the right transformed into a sleek new brewery.





▲ PROPOSED, NIGHT | Ensuring that side streets and parking areas are well lit is important to encourage a broader mix of safe evening activity downtown. Different types of lighting, including traditional streetlamps, industrial business gooseneck lighting, retro neon signage, and attractive string lighting provide visual interest and help lend a welcoming ambiance to this street.

# KNOX SHOPPING CENTER

## *PARKING*



▲ **EXISTING** | Located in the center of downtown Thomson, the underutilized Knox Shopping Center needs updating to bring activity and life downtown. The large parking lot shown lacks trees or visual interest and is much larger than necessary.

▼ **PROPOSED, OPTION I** | Selectively removing unnecessary parking and creating planted bump-outs at corners could create opportunities to bring vegetation, sidewalks, and visitor amenities to this prominent downtown retail space. Planting new beds with fast-growing broad-canopy street trees including willow oaks, laurel oaks, or Shumard oaks would create an abundant and inviting shade canopy in the future. Intimately scaled, mid-century-inspired lighting helps make this area feel more accessible while tying improvements to the design of the complex. Resurfacing old asphalt and crisply repainting parking lines help this area feel active and cared for.

► **PROPOSED, OPTION II** | Anchored by a tree-lined median, the Knox Shopping Center is transformed into a vibrant boulevard-like mixed-use retail complex by removing the central parking bays. Excess asphalt and parking area could be used to expand sidewalks, creating opportunities for sidewalk cafés and other businesses. These changes could encourage redevelopment of surrounding strip retail and commercial buildings and create a more vibrant mix of retail, office, and downtown residential uses.



OPTION I



OPTION II





*DOWNTOWN*

THOMSON  
MASTERPLAN

The conceptual masterplan for downtown Thomson illustrates how downtown public parking can be improved by adding vegetation and selectively rearranging key parking lots. In this proposal, the number of spaces in the downtown area remains roughly consistent, with 541 regular and 31 handicapped spaces before the changes and 532 regular and 37 handicapped spaces after the changes. For a detailed look at parking locations and availability, see the map and chart on page 110–113. The proposal reorganizes parking on White Oak Street and Journal Street and adds parking on Greenway Street, creating a more organized and appealing area. Approximately 70 large trees and 47 small trees have also been added throughout the parking areas to increase their aesthetic appeal and provide shade. The plan proposes the following changes:



## *MAIN STREET*

- Adding two pedestrian refuge islands along Main Street, north of Knox Shopping Center and south of Journal Street, to assist in slowing traffic and to create a pedestrian-friendly environment.
- Repainting the existing brick-patterned crosswalks to highlight pedestrian crossing areas.

## *PUBLIC PARKING AREAS*

- Adding large and small trees in available areas for beautification and shade.

## *KNOX SHOPPING CENTER*

- Removing every seventh parking space to create planting beds for large-canopy street trees that bring shade and beautification.
- Relocating two ADA-accessible parking spaces to the center of the north and south parking strips.
- Maintaining north-south through traffic from White Oak Street to Journal Street for easy access to a centralized service area on Journal Street.

## *JOURNAL STREET*

- Continuing Journal Street's existing brick pattern to Greenway Street for an appealing and uniform appearance.
- Rearranging parking areas and sidewalks for better organization and efficiency.
- Adding large and small trees for beautification and shade.
- Adding a gated, brick-enclosed service area capable of holding three commercial dumpsters and a communal grease trap for local businesses.
- Including a rear door in the central service area for easy access.
- Providing additional space for future utility and service areas behind businesses.
- Potentially adding rear entrances to local businesses for customer convenience.

## *GREENWAY STREET*

- Identifying two areas for future infill developments with alley access for service and deliveries.
- Adding parking on the southbound side of the street that would provide access to the potential infill structures.

## *WHITE OAK STREET PARKING LOT*

- Rearranging the parking area to create vegetated buffers along the street and a more contiguous sidewalk.
- Incorporating large and small trees for additional shade and beautification.
- Realigning the edges of parking areas for efficiency and flow.





GREENWAY STREET

EAST HALL STREET

WHITE OAK STREET

MAIN STREET

CHURCH STREET

MILLEDDGE STREET

JOURNAL STREET

POTENTIAL  
INFILL

POTENTIAL  
INFILL

KNOX SHOPPING CENTER

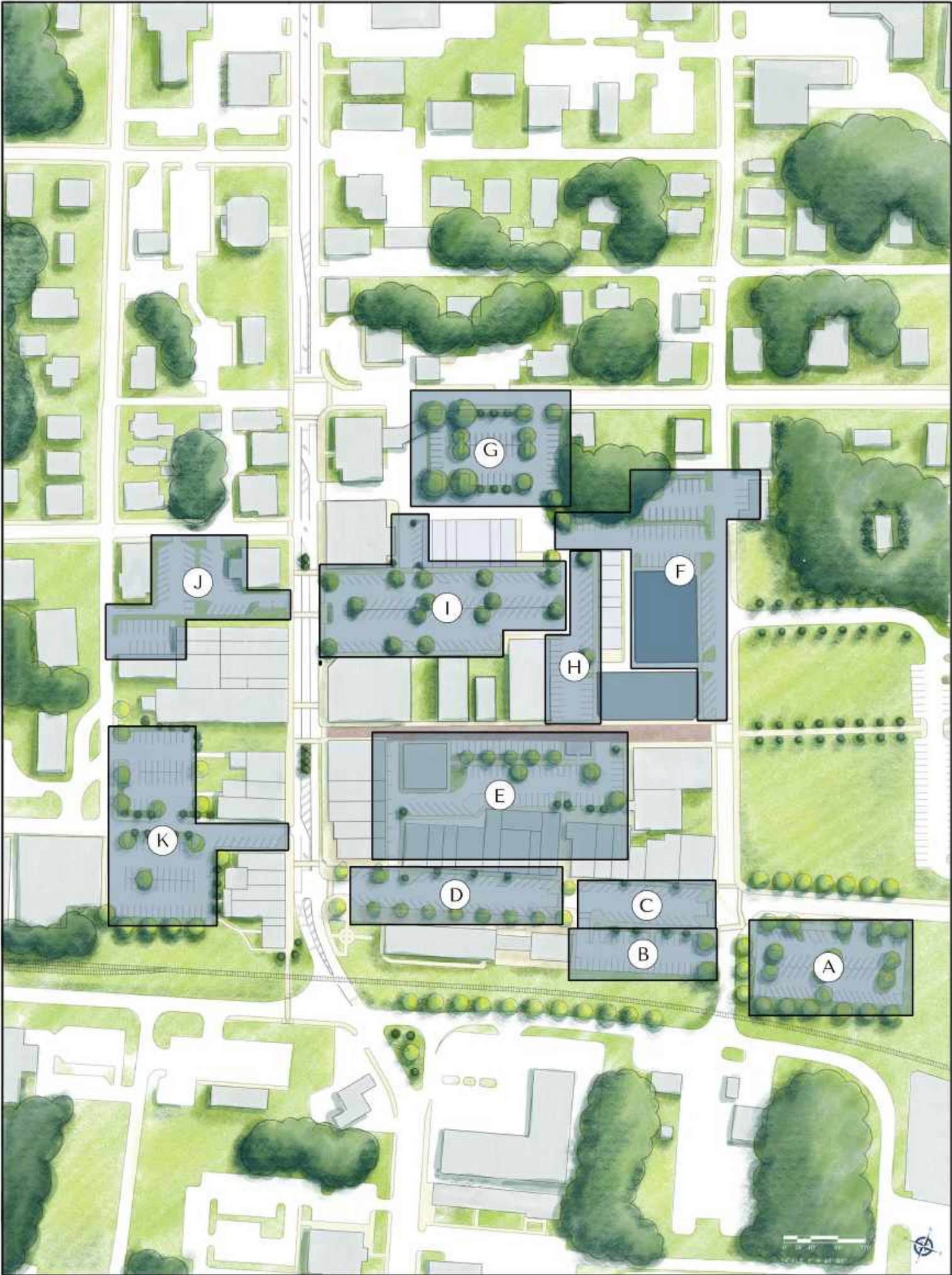




- ROADS & PARKING
- SIDEWALK
- EXISTING BUILDINGS
- POTENTIAL INFILL
- LARGE STREET TREE
- SMALL STREET TREE

# THOMSON MASTERPLAN







◀ This annotated plan illustrates the arrangement of existing and proposed downtown parking areas in the Thomson Downtown Masterplan shown on page 111. Parking has been rearranged in the highlighted areas, with current and proposed parking counts listed in the table below. Currently, the highlighted area includes 541 regular parking spaces and 31 ADA-accessible spaces. The proposed design includes 532 standard parking spaces and 37 ADA spaces, a loss of three spaces overall.

## PARKING IN DOWNTOWN THOMSON

### *EXISTING*

### *PROPOSED*

Regular	ADA	Area	Regular	ADA
55	3	<b>A</b>	55	3
32	2	<b>B</b>	32	2
20	3	<b>C</b>	20	3
32	5	<b>D</b>	32	5
66	5	<b>E</b>	64	6
57	0	<b>F</b>	59	2
53	2	<b>G</b>	46	2
24	0	<b>H</b>	29	1
91	3	<b>I</b>	79	4
42	4	<b>J</b>	41	5
69	4	<b>K</b>	75	4





# GREENING *and* BEAUTIFICATION

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In addition to addressing the appearance of downtown buildings, attracting more family-friendly activity, and working to improve connectivity downtown, community members want Thomson to be a beautiful place to visit and call home. As with other issues confronting the community, in beautifying downtown, Thomson need only look at the city's past to move forward. Historical photos of Thomson show beautiful, well-maintained civic buildings, handsome schools, tidy tree-lined streets and sidewalks, and welcoming private homes. Photos of the city's streets from the 1920s show an impressive canopy of street trees, providing graceful beauty and shade for downtown visitors. In conversations during step one of the RSVP, many residents were quick to praise the lush flower arrangements, one-of-a-kind rocking chairs, and artistic guitars already making downtown more attractive. Residents also recognize that recent community investments like attractive streetscaping and the impressive Thomson–McDuffie Government Complex are public, community commitments to making downtown a more vibrant and beautiful destination.

Recent improvements, including the large public parking lots on Railroad Street and First Avenue, represent investments in the long-term economic health and stability of downtown. However, currently both lots are underutilized, and neither features street trees for shade. To ensure that these and other community investments live up to their potential, Thomson leaders, residents, and volunteers should prioritize planting along downtown streets, in public parking lots, and more. All over downtown, in both public and private lots, opportunities exist to bring more beauty to the area. Like building great schools, libraries, and public buildings, the act of tree planting represents a gift of beauty and health to future generations. Involving local schools and youth groups in regular tree planting could bring Thomson's diverse community together, offering the city's youngest residents a chance to make a lasting contribution to downtown.



◀ **EXISTING** | Railroad Street has recently undergone significant streetscaping enhancements, including widened sidewalks, improved parking, and new street trees and landscaping. The empty tree grate at the center of this image makes this area seem uncared for.



▲ **PROPOSED** | Few elements do more to enhance the appearance and visitor experience than trees. When planted close to existing buildings, taller, narrower species including *Ginkgo biloba* "Princeton Sentry," *Nyssa sylvatica*, and *Ulmus Americana* "Valley Forge," are often more effective than shorter, broad-canopied street trees that can block signage and obstruct sidewalks.





◀ **EXISTING** | This photo shows unused painted asphalt at the corner of the prominent Knox Shopping Center parking lot. This space could be changed to make visiting downtown more attractive.

▼ **PROPOSED** | Selective piercing of continuous asphalt paving creates the opportunity for landscaped bump-outs like the one shown here. This attractive planted bump-out features inlets to allow stormwater infiltration.







◀ **EXISTING** | The public parking lot at the corner of Greenway and Railroad Street provides supplemental parking for downtown businesses and events. This resource could be improved to enhance the experience of visiting downtown.



▲ **PROPOSED** | Planting large-canopy willow or laurel oaks enhances the appearance of the parking lot and brings shade downtown. Over time, these trees will create an impressive shade canopy and reduce maintenance requirements. Properly signing this public parking lot could encourage more visitors to use this resource.



# FIRST AVENUE

## *PARKING*



◀ COMPLETED, STEP 1  
Crape myrtles were planted in April 2020.





## RAILROAD STREET & GREENWAY STREET — *PARKING* —

▲ **EXISTING** | Recent public parking improvements at First Avenue help ensure ample downtown parking for downtown businesses.

▶ **PROPOSED** | Filling landscape beds and bump-outs with trees helps to make the most of this public investment. These willow oaks and Natchez crape myrtles improve the appearance of this parking area while bringing much-needed shade downtown.



► **COMPLETED, STEP 1**  
In April 2020, Thomson planted 24 oak trees on Railroad Street in a joint city and county effort.





— THOMSON-MCDUFFIE —

# GOVERNMENTAL COMPLEX

As with tree planting in public areas, local leaders must ensure that when community investments are made, they are well taken care of. Like the city's private buildings, streets and sidewalks must also be kept clean and well maintained. By properly caring for trees and plantings, local officials ensure that the significant community investment in streetscaping downtown is money well spent. Many residents in step one of the RSVP process pointed to the maintenance of the landscape at the Thomson–McDuffie Government Complex. While many areas of the grounds are immaculate, others need attention. Landscape maintenance at the joint-government complex may involve jurisdictional conflicts, but both city and county leaders must agree that the grounds of this prominent and highly trafficked building should meet the standards of the community. First impressions are important. Few people would build an impressive home and then neglect to plant a front yard. Like any great civic building, the government complex reflects the community's image of itself. Ensuring a landscape that matches the dignity of the structure should be seen as an important indicator of the community's value. Working with leaders from the city and using the original plans created by the Archway Partnership, planners at the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government created a simplified, more maintenance-friendly landscape plan for the Thomson–McDuffie Government Complex. While enhancing the overall appearance of the grounds, highlighting entry areas, and introducing more shade, the revised plan includes high-impact, low-maintenance plantings better suited to local conditions. Working with city and county crews to develop a regular schedule of maintenance could further ensure the long-term beauty and health of these important public grounds.





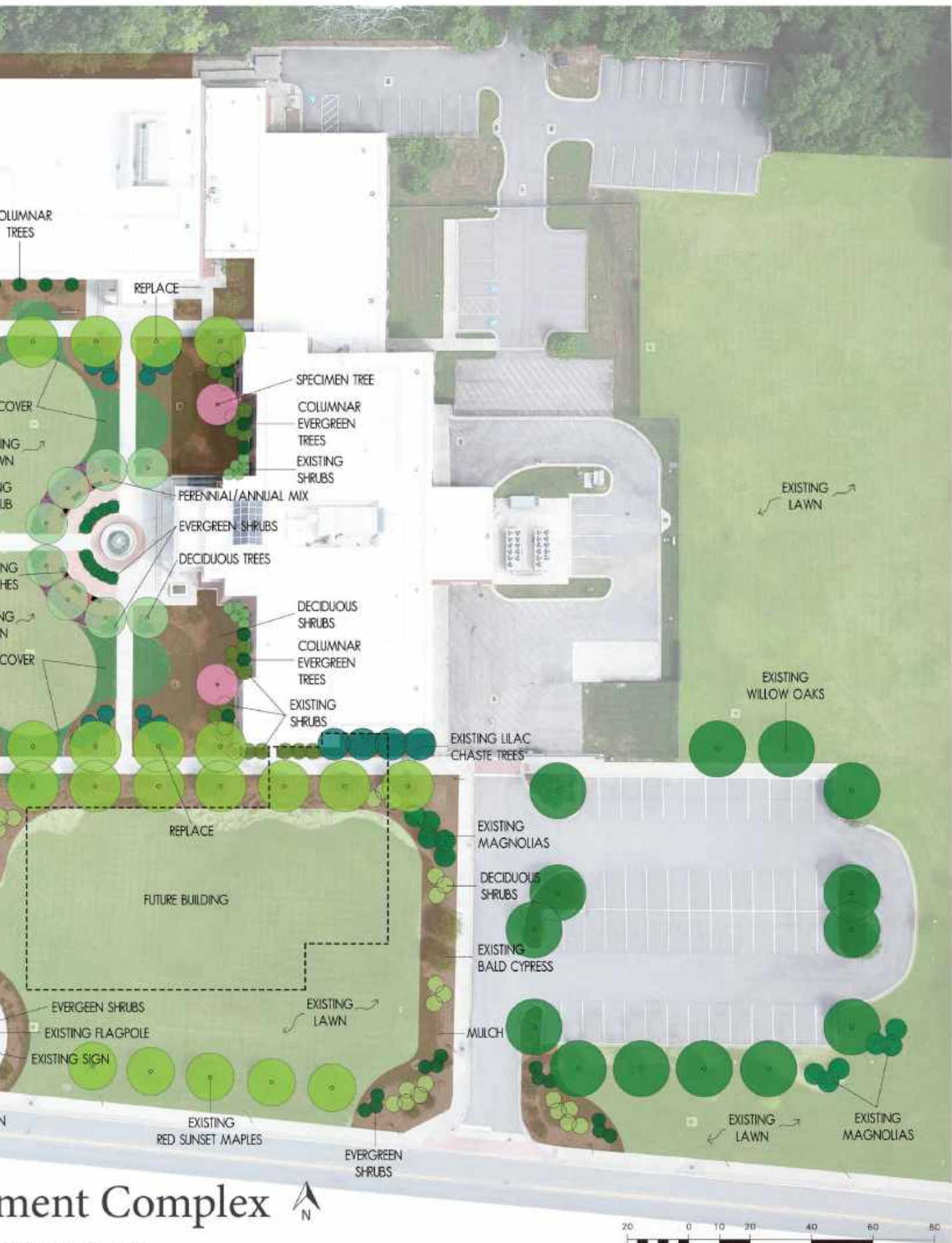


McDuffie County Courthouse



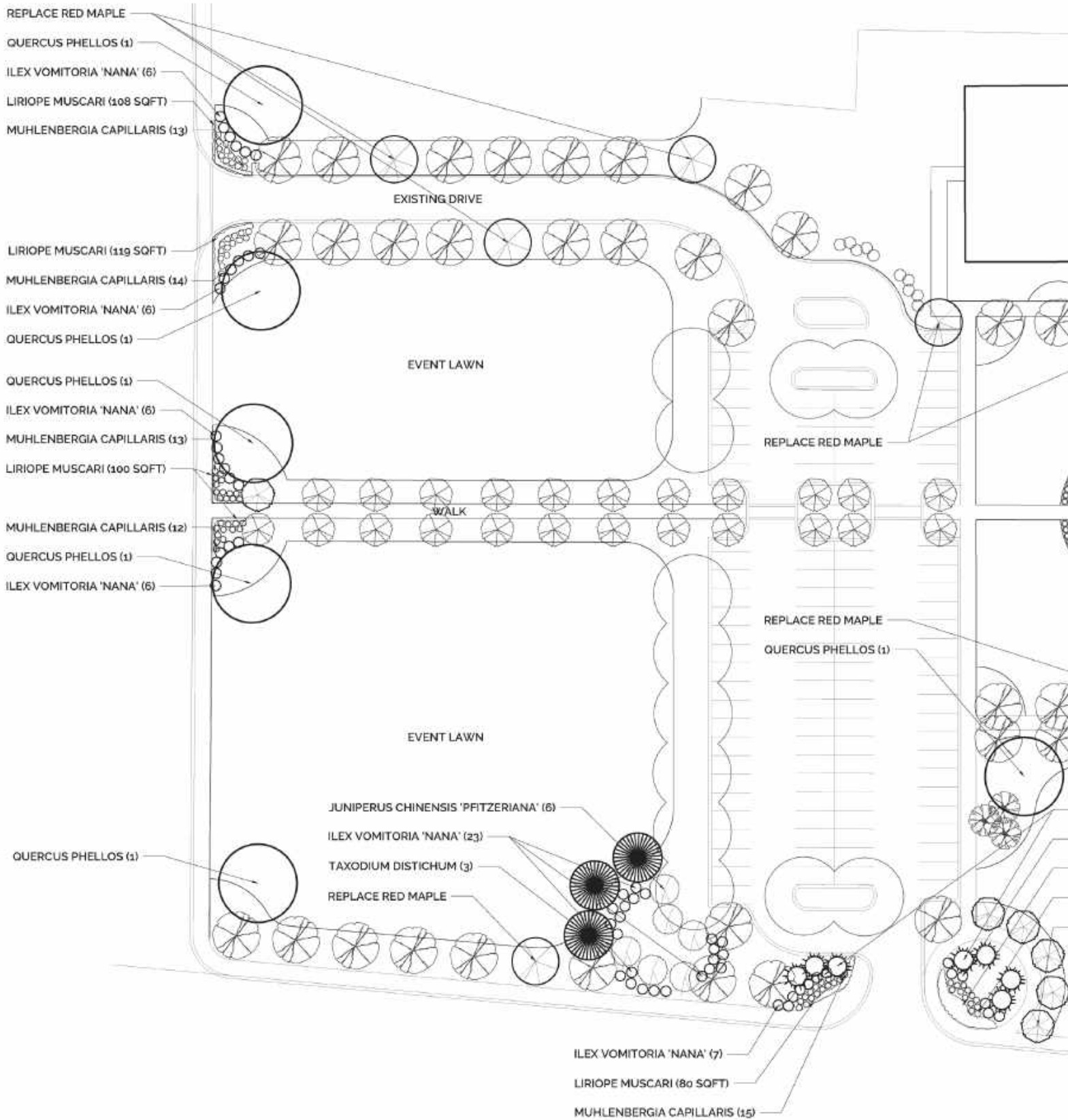






ment Complex  
 MASTER PLAN



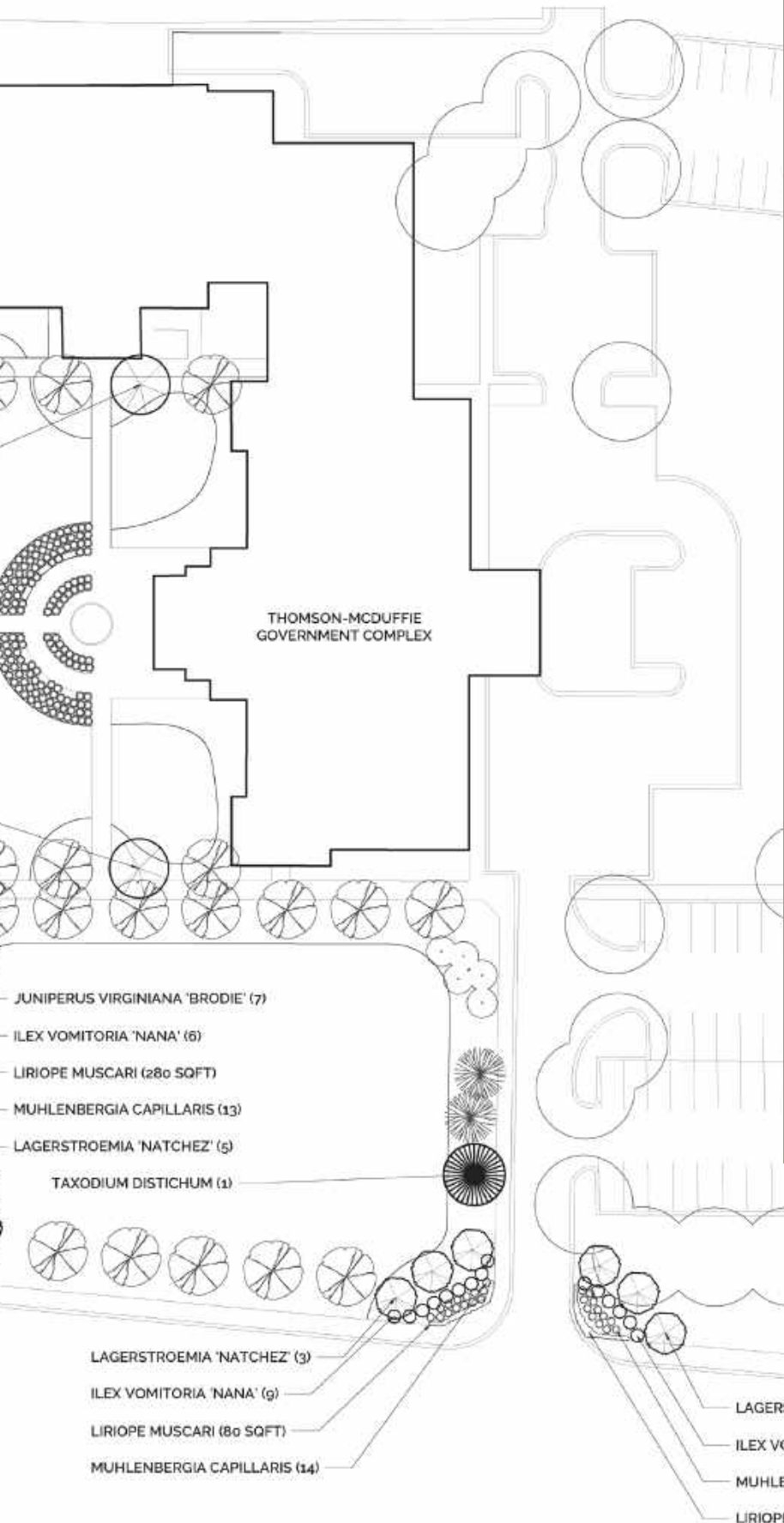


THOMSON-McDUFFIE GOVERNMENT CENTER

LANDSCAPE PLAN | SCALE: 1" = 30'-00"







The revised landscape plan for the Thomson-McDuffie Government Center simplifies existing plans for the grounds and proposes low-maintenance alternatives to designs previously proposed. Planners at the Carl Vinson Institute of Government recommend that community leaders focus first on maintaining the original design, replacing trees and plants where necessary, and screening the drainage basin on Railroad Street, before introducing any new plantings or improvements.

This landscape plan revises previous designs by removing difficult-to-maintain perennial and annual beds. Landscaping at the entrances off Railroad Street and Journal Street have been altered to include plants that are already featured in the landscape and are performing well. For example, this design substitutes perennial species for muhly grass in the improved entrance designs. Substitutions including Skyrocket juniper or Brodie eastern red cedars are proposed to better cope with the lack of consistent irrigation. This design also proposes planting large-canopy trees along the periphery of the property, bringing more shade to sidewalks while preserving the expansive event lawn and unrestricted views of the building.



## — GATEWAYS —

Although largely outside of the scope of this downtown plan, the city's gateways and the Main Street/US-78 corridor were identified by many Thomson residents as areas that must be improved for the community to reach its potential. Gateways are the first and last opportunity a community has to communicate its values and unique sense of place. The purpose of gateway signage is to announce the presence of and entry into a community. Through the assistance of graduate design assistants at the Archway Partnership, Thomson now has an attractive portfolio of gateway signage options to select from. With the main entrances into Thomson defined with distinctive signage and a unified planting pattern, passersby would be more likely to recognize and access downtown. Attractive landscaped gateways are also public signals that the city cares about how people perceive the community.

Thomson and McDuffie County officials should work together to select appropriate designs and collaborate to fund improvements at key gateways and corridors. Local leaders should also look into the Roadside Enhancement and Beautification Council (REBC) Grant Program offered by the Georgia Department of Transportation. The REBC grant offers up to \$50,000 in funding for roadside beautification and enhancements along state highways.



## LED SIGN

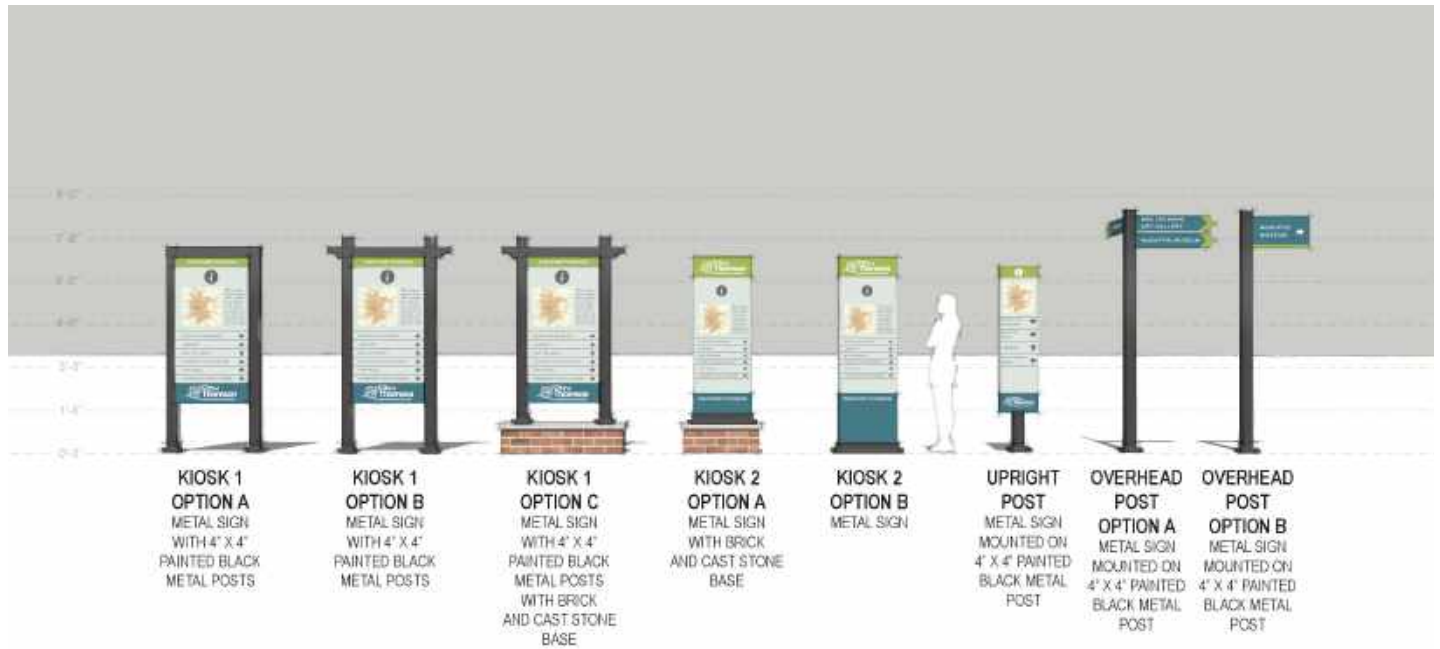


## VEHICULAR WAYFINDING

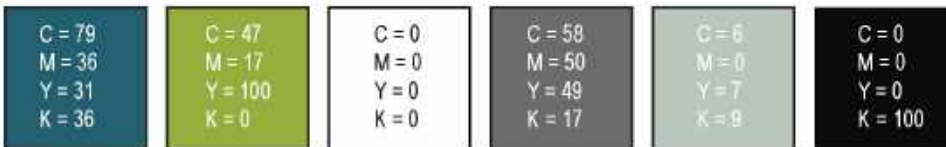


Produced by Ben Proulx and Kelsey Broich for the Archway Partnership, the arrival and wayfinding concepts shown create a signage palette that can be used to improve key gateways and other areas in and around Thomson. Please see the full report, *Updated Thomson-McDuffie Gateway Signage and Wayfinding Proposal*, in the digital appendix to the RSVP.

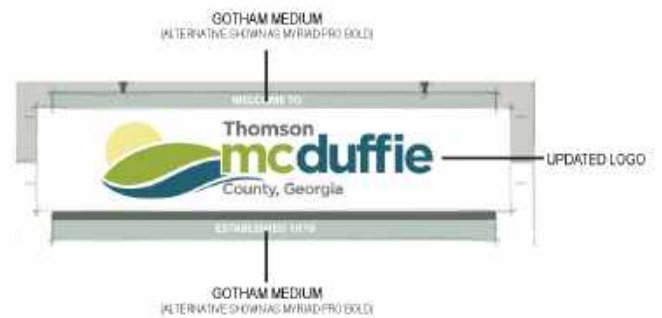
# PEDESTRIAN WAYFINDING



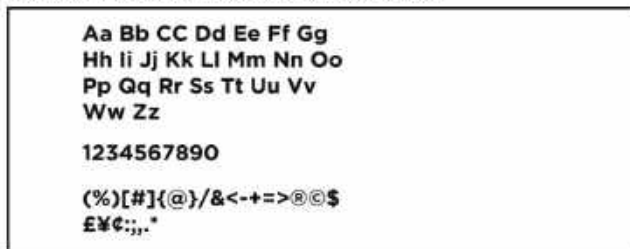
## COLOR PALETTE AND TYPEFACE



To match colors identified in the Thomson-McDuffie Georgia Brand Standards Book

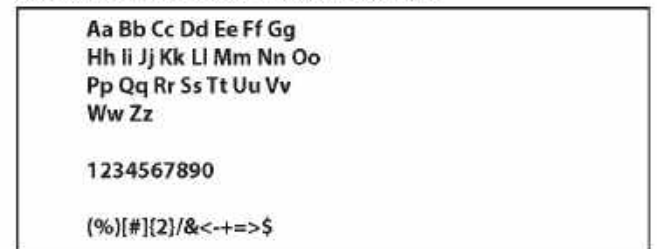


PRIMARY TYPEFACE - GOTHAM BOLD/MEDIUM



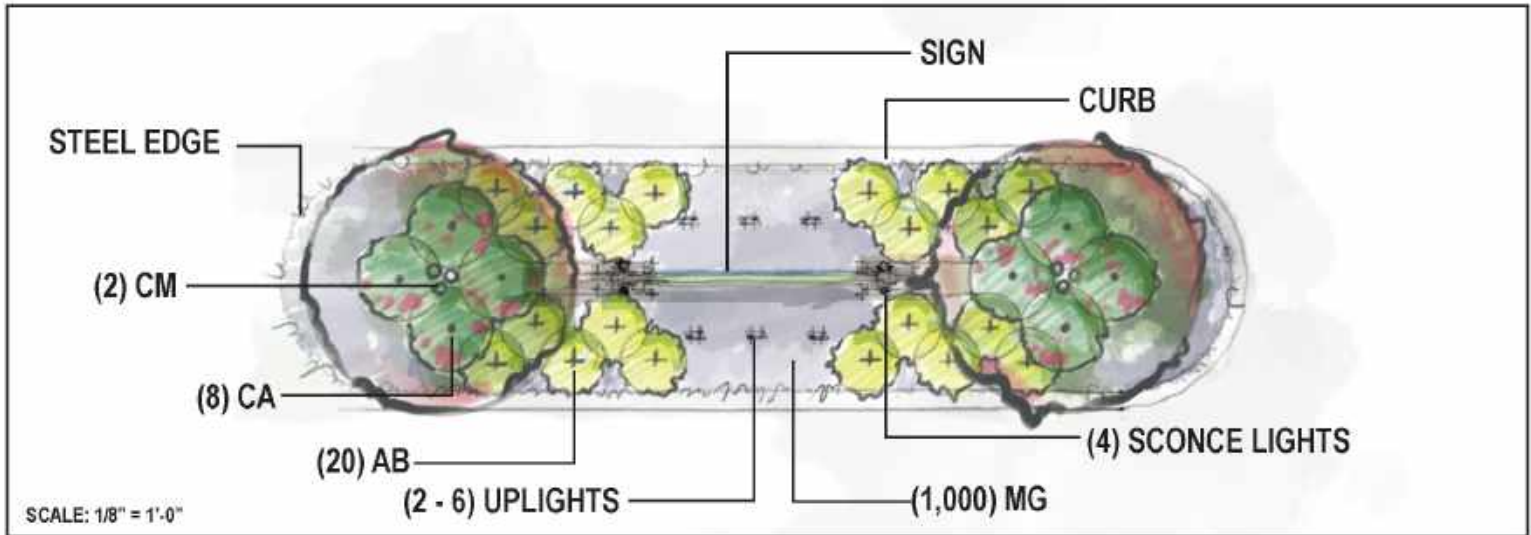
PROPOSED TYPEFACE

ALTERNATIVE TYPEFACE - MYRIAD PRO BOLD





## PLANTING PLAN AND PALETTE



### PLANTING SCHEDULE - OPTION 2

TREES	BOTANICAL NAME / COMMON NAME	CONTAINER	QUANTITY
CM	Lagerstroemia indica 'Whit II' / Dynamite Crape Myrtle	7 gallon	2
SHRUBS	BOTANICAL NAME / COMMON NAME	CONTAINER	QUANTITY
CA	Camellia sasanqua 'Susy Durr' / Susy Durr Camellia	5 gallon	8
AB	Abelia x grandiflora 'Kaleidoscope' / Kaleidoscope Abelia	3 gallon	20
GROUNDCOVER	BOTANICAL NAME / COMMON NAME	CONTAINER	QUANTITY
MG	Ophiopogon planiscapus 'Nigrescens' / Black Mondo Grass	4"	1,000

DYNAMITE CRAPE MYRTLE

KALEIDOSCOPE ABELIA

SUSY DIRR CAMELLIA

BLACK MONDO GRASS



# IMPLEMENTATION

## *and* CONCLUSION

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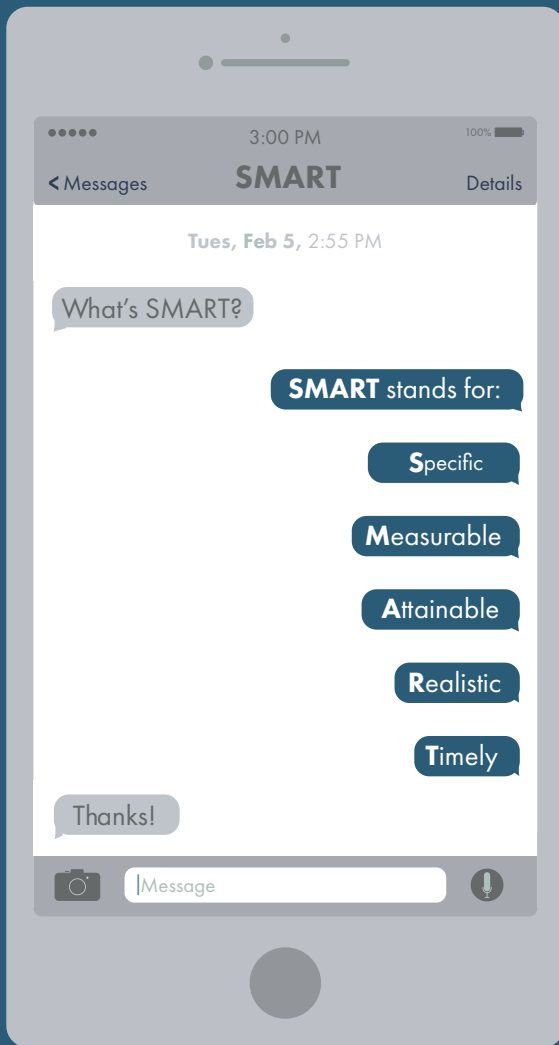
Already, Thomson leaders are taking big steps toward creating the vibrant downtown destination desired by the community. Community leaders have worked with GDOT to improve downtown crosswalks and will soon begin improving the Main Street/US-78 corridor near the Brickyard. Through the efforts of the Thomson RSVP Steering Committee, additional projects are underway to bring more activity and life downtown, including updating the Thomson Twin Cinema, planning a future trail network, bringing a pop-up ice cream parlor downtown, and more. The active and diverse Thomson RSVP Steering Committee, with representation from local government, the downtown business community, private foundations, and more, has readily accepted the challenge of improving downtown. Many members, including Stephanie Ivery, David Williams, and Andy Knox, Jr., are implementing action items like façade redesigns and new murals. Special recognition should go to community leaders including Mayor Ken Usry, who has taken charge and assumed responsibility for over a dozen individual action items aimed at improving downtown. Hardworking leaders and staff, including Mayor Usry, Don Powers, Elizabeth

Vance, and Sam Perren, provided invaluable assistance throughout this planning process, from organizing the public input process and facilitating meetings with community members to working early on to address key issues like improving the Main Street/US-78 corridor. Paired with energetic volunteers and steering committee members, their efforts have led to a better and more comprehensive community plan.

Building on the ongoing efforts of the Thomson RSVP Steering Committee, community leaders should continue committing resources to address the top issues that emerged during step one of the RSVP process. Any strategy included in the Thomson RSVP has the potential to serve as a future action item. For any potential action item, a designated lead should be assigned to oversee implementation efforts and develop concrete steps toward project completion. In every effort undertaken to improve downtown, those involved should think through each step of actualizing their goals and determine the “who, what, and when” critical to community implementation:

- Who is responsible?
- What will be achieved?
- When will these improvements take place?





Each of these questions is critical to community implementation. While the following action items are arranged by issue, strategic action items often address a number of community issues. Potential action items should meet the criteria for SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely) goals. The SMART process allows community leaders to make Thomson's future vision a reality through practical and achievable steps. By dividing the long-term vision encompassed in the Thomson RSVP into achievable short-term action items, Thomson can begin to fully restore downtown as the vibrant heart of the community.

In addition to short-term action items that can be implemented in the next five years, the Thomson RSVP work program includes a number of long-term issues that must be addressed for the community to reach its potential. From creating housing rehabilitation incentives and working with private partners to develop downtown infill, to working with GDOT to improve traffic conditions on Main Street, these more complex long-term items require resources above and beyond those available to the Thomson RSVP Steering Committee. Long-term items like major infrastructure and other improvements require intensive partnerships with outside agencies, local governments, and private businesses. Additionally, these long-term items often require identifying and committing substantial sources of outside funding. The RSVP work program also includes short-term action items for Thomson that if completed will help build momentum and experience to address the long-term hurdles critical for community revitalization.



*THOMSON RSVP*

# ACTION ITEMS





## THE “LOOK” OF BUILDINGS

*Improve the appearance of buildings, maintain the historical building stock, and address vacancies*

### **Incentives and ordinances**

- Determine incentives program necessary to invite desired redevelopment  
*Study façade grants, sprinkler grants, signage grants, tax abatement programs, and other redevelopment incentives*
- Ensure a streamlined process for downtown redevelopment
- Prevent any additional demolition of historical downtown buildings
- Provide façade designs to property owners who are ready to make improvements

### **Attract residential development and redevelopment**

- Create an intown redevelopment housing incentive program
- Incentivize upper-story downtown living and infill development where possible

## CONNECTIVITY

### **Main Street/US-78 Corridor**

- Reduce heavy truck traffic; add landscaped bump-outs, crosswalks, and trees
- **Address safety and parking access**
  - Improve lighting and signage along alleys and parking areas

## ACTIVATE DOWNTOWN/RECREATION

### **Develop consistent family-friendly downtown recreation options**

- Consider the creation of a downtown park as a community draw and amenity  
*Consider building a downtown playground*  
*Consider developing a downtown splash pad*  
*Consider building a dog park*

### **Create weekly activities and events**

- Hire a full-time event coordinator to organize and promote regular downtown events and activities
- Bring regular activity downtown

## GREENING AND BEAUTIFICATION

### **Improve the appearance of US-78 and key gateways**

### **Continue planting trees and landscaping throughout downtown**

# THE "LOOK" OF BUILDINGS

**M**ore than any other issue, Thomson residents agree that improving the appearance of buildings, maintaining the historical building stock, and addressing the high rate of downtown vacancies must be addressed in order to restore downtown as the vibrant heart of the community. Residents in step one of the Thomson RSVP process requested a review of the existing ordinances as well as building a mix of financial incentives to attract reinvestment downtown. Downtown business and property owners in particular suggested a variety of ways that development could be streamlined downtown. Many pointed to incentives available elsewhere, including front and rear façade grants, sprinkler grants, signage grants, tax abatement programs, waiving costs like pouring



fees, and other redevelopment incentives. Residents requested that the community examine these or other means to encourage new business downtown. To attract the type of redevelopment desired by the community, city and county leaders should view downtown redevelopment like they view industrial recruitment. Aggressively pursuing the type and quality of development desired could forever change the community for the better.

<p><i>SHORT TERM</i></p> <p><b>INSTALL ARTWORK DISPLAYS IN EMPTY WINDOWS</b></p>	<p>Vacant buildings in downtown Thomson often feature prominent glass storefront windows. Filling these highly visible windows with a curated selection of local art could bring more activity and life downtown. Thomson leaders could also consider working with local artists, businesses like MAC on Main, or even local student art classes to incorporate one-of-a-kind art in vacant windows.</p> <p><b>Lead:</b> Elizabeth Vance, Mark Swann, Andy Knox, Jr., Molly McDowell</p> <p><b>Prospective Completion Date:</b> Completed, March 2020, Implementation Ongoing</p> <p><b>Potential Funding:</b> TBD</p>
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SHORT TERM

## CREATE AND MARKET A DOWNTOWN INCENTIVES PACKAGE

With feedback from property owners, developers, and groups like the Chamber of Commerce, Thomson's leaders should work to develop an incentive program to specifically focus on downtown development. This incentive program should support and expand existing businesses, recruit new business, and actively encourage redevelopment projects.

**Lead:** Don Powers

**Prospective Completion Date:** January 2021  
**Potential Funding:** City of Thomson, Land Bank Authority, Private Sources

- Currently, the Thomson McDuffie Industrial Development Authority utilizes an array of incentives to expand existing industries and develop new sites or start-ups locating within McDuffie County. It is recommended that the City of Thomson consider a similar structure and approach, but focused on the downtown.
- A key tool at the city's disposal is a Downtown Development Authority (DDA). The Thomson DDA, as an entity, is registered with the state as an authority, yet has been inactive for some time. The City of Thomson could simply reinstate its DDA, with staff support from Forward McDuffie's office.
- Additionally, a strong commitment from the city's elected officials is needed to take full advantage of the downtown development resource. A seven-member board is recommended. To be successful, a DDA must operate as a true development organization and thus needs directors with expertise in development, construction, banking, accounting, small business operations, housing, and law.
- All of the downtown development tools, such as, public-private partnership ventures, facade grants, sign grants, property sales, low interest loan programs, available governmental and nonprofit grant funds, and the myriad of local, state, and federal tax incentives should be considered when developing a comprehensive incentive program.

SHORT TERM

## ATTRACTIVE FOR-RENT SIGNAGE

Numerous vacant downtown properties feature multiple for-rent signs and leasing information. Creating an attractive large-format rent sign template could assist property owners while improving the appearance of downtown properties. This sample sign could also be used to help brand downtown as a unique destination.

**Lead:** Don Powers and Elizabeth Vance

**Prospective Completion Date:** September 2020  
**Potential Funding:** RSVP Funding and Property Owners/Real Estate Agents

 <p><i>SHORT TERM</i></p> <p>FUND AND IMPLEMENT FAÇADE IMPROVEMENTS AND EXPAND TO THE REAR OF BUILDINGS</p>	<p>In the past, Thomson has used façade grants as a tool to assist downtown property owners with building improvements. Promoting this program to downtown business owners could help quickly improve the appearance of many prominent downtown buildings. City leaders should consider developing a similar program to improve the rear façades of downtown businesses accessible from downtown parking lots.</p>
	<p><b>Lead:</b> Don Powers  <b>Prospective Completion Date:</b> April 2021  <b>Potential Funding:</b> TBD</p>

 <p><i>SHORT TERM</i></p> <p>CORRIDOR DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS</p>	<p>For over 40 years, corridor development has syphoned much of the commercial life out of downtown Thomson toward I-20. At the same time, developers wishing to invest downtown must clear hurdles that do not exist for developers outside city limits. To balance growth in the community, encourage higher quality development, and improve the local quality of life, the city and McDuffie County should partner to establish corridor standards for development along Main Street/US-78. Leaders from the county and city should consider enacting standards similar to those in Madison, which features both a vibrant downtown and a bustling corridor development area.</p>
	<p><b>Lead:</b> Chase Beggs  <b>Prospective Completion Date:</b> May 2021  <b>Potential Funding:</b> N/A</p>

 <p><i>SHORT TERM</i></p> <p>REVIEW HISTORIC PRESERVATION ORDINANCE</p>	<p>To incentivize the vibrant downtown desired by the community, the city should review the city's existing Historic Preservation Ordinance to ensure it allows an appropriate level of flexibility for potential developers and property owners. The city could look at guidelines elsewhere to see if its current guidelines meet, exceed, or fall short of best operating practices.</p>
	<p><b>Lead:</b> Chase Beggs  <b>Prospective Completion Date:</b> December 2020  <b>Potential Funding:</b> N/A</p>





*SHORT TERM*

ADVERTISE  
AVAILABLE  
PROPERTY

Thomson residents recognize that vacant buildings need to be occupied before downtown can become a vibrant community hub. At the same time, Thomson's vacant or underutilized downtown buildings are often historical, with many unique features of architectural interest. Using an inventory of available property downtown, the city could creatively market vacant buildings and lots online to attract investment in the area. Featuring attractive photos of architectural or historical features, this list could be posted on the city's website and be sent to regional real estate investors and publications.

**Lead:** Don Powers, Elizabeth Vance, Debbie Jones  
**Prospective Completion Date:** January 2021  
**Potential Funding:** RSVP Funding and Property Owners/Real Estate Agents



*SHORT TERM*

RURAL ZONE  
APPLICATION

Administered by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA), a Rural Zone designation enables businesses and investors to obtain tax credits for reinvestment projects across the state. Each year, DCA establishes Rural Zones in up to 10 communities to incentivize job creation and spur private investment in rural downtowns. Incentives offered with Rural Zone status include a job tax credit, investment credit, and rehabilitation credit. Following completion of the RSVP, Thomson leaders should use the plan as a springboard to apply for Rural Zone designation. If the city is successful, Thomson should heavily promote Rural Zone tax benefits and incentives to potential investors.

**Lead:** Ken Usry, Linda Grijalva  
**Prospective Completion Date:** August 2020  
**Potential Funding:** City of Thomson

*SHORT TERM*

**PUBLIC ART DOWNTOWN**

Expanding public art downtown makes exploring previously underutilized streets and alleys a fun and interactive experience for residents and visitors, regardless of age. Creativity helps fuel innovation and investment in many downtown areas. Economic developers know the benefits that flow to communities that embrace creativity and the arts. Thomson should consider working with local artists to expand murals and public art downtown. By partnering with local artists, galleries like Mac on Main, downtown businesses, and other stakeholders, Thomson could begin transforming blank walls and vacant buildings into unique works of art.

**Lead:** Andy Knox, Jr., David Williams  
**Prospective Completion Date:** Benchmark December 2020, ongoing  
**Potential Funding:** RSVP Funding, Property Owners

*LONG TERM*

**DOWNTOWN INFILL**

Adjacent to the Knox Shopping Center and elsewhere downtown, large vacant lots and forlorn properties near the city's historical downtown core could be developed to create the vibrant city center envisioned by the community. With efforts like the implementation of a downtown overlay district and the formation of a public-private partnership, Thomson could incentivize infill development with the potential to revitalize downtown as a lively community hub. By matching the scale of existing downtown buildings, using timeless materials like brick, and more, the city could ensure that infill development feels cohesive. Providing on-street parking, wide sidewalks, and integrated landscaping would also extend a downtown ambiance to new development.

**Lead:** Ken Usry, Don Powers, Forward McDuffie, Downtown Development Authority  
**Potential Funding:** City of Thomson and Others



<p><i>LONG TERM</i></p> <p>CREATE AN INTOWN REHABILITATION HOUSING INCENTIVE PROGRAM</p>	<p>Local citizens, business owners, development professionals, and more agree that downtown needs more residents in order to thrive. Thomson has many close-in residential neighborhoods that could be restored to bring more residents downtown. Above and beyond incentives for new businesses, Thomson should consider specialized incentives and tax policies that favor residential redevelopment downtown. Whether by tax abatement, freezing assessment values, or other means, the city must seriously consider creative ways to restore life and vitality to the city's historical intown neighborhoods.</p>
	<p><b>Lead:</b> Chase Beggs <b>Potential Funding:</b> City of Thomson</p>

<p><i>LONG TERM</i></p> <p>REUSE HISTORIC THOMSON HIGH SCHOOL ON MAIN STREET</p>	<p>Constructed beginning in 1939, the historic campus of Thomson High School on Main Street brings fond memories to many residents. After the high school relocated in the early 1990s, the historic campus housed Thomson Middle and Norris Elementary Schools. As both schools have now relocated outside of downtown, historic Thomson High sits largely empty. Identifying an appropriate tenant with the ability to restore and reuse this large complex is critical to preserving this community landmark. Other small towns, including Madison, Georgia, have brought new activity and life to former school campuses as senior living apartments and condominiums. Thomson leaders and school board officials should come together to restore and reuse the former school. Local leaders should consider reaching out to successful developers of similar buildings and touring example developments.</p>
	<p><b>Lead:</b> Ken Usry, Charlie Newton, Andy Knox, Sr., Mychele Rhodes <b>Potential Funding:</b> SPLOST, Private Investment</p>

# ACTIVATE DOWNTOWN/ RECREATION

Community members want a vibrant downtown that offers consistent, affordable family-friendly activities. Public input participants indicated that Thomson could benefit from expanded public spaces, outdoor activities, and amenities that can attract residents from across the community downtown. Children and families in particular want more interactive spaces where Thomson's youngest citizens can explore, enjoy, and grow to love downtown. Through regular events and activities that bring life to underutilized areas like the Thomson-McDuffie Government Complex



lawn, community members want to reestablish downtown as the heart and soul of the community. Moving forward, the city and local partners should continue to support places and events that already bring the community downtown and should work to grow venues that attract local families.

<p>SHORT TERM</p> <hr style="width: 20%; margin: auto;"/> <p>CREATE A TRAIN-VIEWING PLATFORM AT THOMSON DEPOT</p> <hr style="width: 20%; margin: auto;"/>	<p>Thomson's historic stone depot is a community treasure and frequent gathering space for community events and activities. Creating a train-viewing platform in the canopied area between the historic depot and the annex could help attract regular activity to the area. With funding assistance from the Thomson-McDuffie County Convention &amp; Visitors Bureau and the city, improvements like outdoor tables and chairs, attractive lighting, specialized speakers to hear railway signaling, and more could create a regular downtown activity for locals and visitors.</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Lead:</b> Elizabeth Vance  <b>Prospective Completion Date:</b> November 2020  <b>Potential Funding:</b> Hotel/Motel Tax, RSVP Funding, City of Thomson</p>



*SHORT TERM*

**DOWNTOWN  
PUBLIC RESTROOM  
FACILITIES**

To host regular public events and activities downtown, Thomson needs easily accessible public restrooms. Thomson leaders should consider studying public restroom facilities constructed in other downtown areas. Adding similar facilities in downtown Thomson would help encourage more festivals, events, and tourism downtown. The Depot Annex could be a potential public restroom location.

**Lead:** Ken Usry  
**Prospective Completion Date:** TBD  
**Potential Funding:** City of Thomson

*SHORT TERM*

**CREATE A  
DOWNTOWN  
WALKING  
ROUTE**

Residents often come to downtown areas to walk pets, jog, or take a regular walk. During step one of the RSVP, many residents voiced the idea that a marked walking path downtown could help draw community members. By establishing a convenient start/end point and marking both short and intermediate paths, downtown could have a new attraction in a few weeks. Thomson could consider partnering with health-conscious local organizations like University Hospital McDuffie to promote the path and create marketing materials for the Thomson “Music Mile” downtown walking trail.

**Lead:** Elizabeth Vance, Debbie Jones  
**Prospective Completion Date:** December 2020  
**Potential Funding:** RSVP Funding

*SHORT TERM*

**STUDENT POP-UP  
ICE CREAM SHOP**

In conversations as part of the RSVP process, many of Thomson’s youth requested more free and affordable places to spend time downtown. Students frequently mentioned that an ice cream parlor would be a hit with younger residents and families. The local development authority should partner with advanced groups from Norris Elementary School to bring a “pop-up” ice cream parlor to a vacant storefront downtown. In the short term, this pop-up venture could be set up to benefit and fund the activities of the Norris Elementary LEGO League Team.

**Lead:** Ken Usry  
**Prospective Completion Date:** TBD  
**Potential Funding:** TBD

*SHORT TERM*

**INVESTIGATE A  
DOWNTOWN  
OPEN CONTAINER  
ORDINANCE**

Locals want more entertainment and dining options downtown. Many cities, including Dalton, Bainbridge, and Gainesville, have successfully created open container districts in designated downtown overlay areas. For such districts to be successful, it is important to study communities where they work. Cities like Gainesville specify that these sales must originate at downtown restaurants and must utilize a special cup, with funds benefiting downtown businesses. Researching alcohol ordinances and open container districts in similar cities could help Thomson officials gain perspective on these districts. If desired by the community, Thomson could consider enacting a similar ordinance to ease restrictions on open containers in designated areas of the overlay district at specific times.

**Lead:** Ken Usry, Chase Beggs, Forward McDuffie  
**Prospective Completion Date:** October 2020  
**Potential Funding:** TBD

*SHORT TERM*

**HIRE A FULL-TIME  
DOWNTOWN EVENT  
AND PROMOTIONS  
COORDINATOR**

For downtown to offer the regular activities desired by community members, Thomson needs a full-time employee whose job is to host successful downtown events. All too often, even successful events fail when volunteers move or retire. Successful community-wide events only happen with the commitment of dedicated event organizers and volunteers. Whether the city funds the position or partners with the other organizations, to raise the necessary funding, recruiting a capable, full-time event coordinator could mean the difference in creating a vibrant downtown Thomson. This should be seen as a first step toward a full-time downtown manager position. A downtown manager would oversee the events and promotions activities, but would also provide expertise for the economic vitality aspect of the downtown redevelopment. This would then align with the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, Main Street program. Throughout the public engagement process, community members emphasized the pressing need for one person to wake up every morning working to improve and bring activity and economic vitality downtown.

**Lead:** Ken Usry  
**Prospective Completion Date:** TBD  
**Potential Funding:** TBD



*SHORT TERM*

CONTINUE  
FORWARD MCDUFFIE  
BRANDING EFFORTS

Over the past two years, Forward McDuffie has worked to establish a unified brand for community organizations. This branding campaign has produced a unique set of logos and complementary color palette. With cooperation from local groups and organizations, Forward McDuffie should continue working to implement this unified community brand. Branding materials could also be used to advertise valuable downtown real estate through the creation of customized for-rent signs and other materials.

**Lead:** Don Powers, Elizabeth Vance, Debbie Jones  
**Prospective Completion Date:** June 2021  
**Potential Funding:** Forward McDuffie, RSVP Funding

*LONG TERM*

BUILD A  
DOWNTOWN  
PLAYGROUND

Residents believe that downtown must be an active and attractive destination for all local citizens, including young children and families. Thomson should work to support this vision by developing creative, fun, and exciting play areas downtown. With a little creativity, the city could reimagine underutilized spaces like the vacant lot across from the Thomson-McDuffie Government Center and transform this area into a themed playground. Bringing a railroad-themed splash pad, one-of-a-kind railroad playground, and other features to this and other areas would create an interactive regional attraction for children and families.

**Lead:** Ken Usry  
**Potential Funding:** SPLOST

*LONG TERM*

CONSIDER A  
DOWNTOWN  
SPLASH PAD


In addition to a potential downtown playground, children and families would be more likely to come downtown if the area offered features for outdoor play during the hot summer months. Transforming a vacant lot into a vibrant splash pad has the potential to create a regional draw, increasing daily foot traffic and benefitting downtown businesses. This attraction could help reposition downtown Thomson as the center of social activity for the community.


**Lead:** Ken Usry  
**Potential Funding:** SPLOST


<p><i>LONG TERM</i></p> <p><b>ACTIVITIES AT THE GOVERNMENT COMPLEX LAWN</b></p>	<p>Repeatedly during step one of the Thomson RSVP process, residents pointed to the Thomson-McDuffie Government Center as an important community asset. However, many see the expansive lawn area of the complex as underutilized. The city could partner with the county, the downtown business community, the Thomson-McDuffie County Convention &amp; Visitors Bureau, or other organizations to bring regular community activities to the event lawn. Events like a regular farmers market, an artist market, outdoor movie screenings, food trucks, outdoor music, or other events could catalyze more energy and investment downtown. A full-time event position most likely will need to be created for events and activities to take place on a regular schedule.</p>
	<p><b>Lead:</b> Forward McDuffie  <b>Prospective Completion Date:</b> January 2021  <b>Potential Funding:</b> City, County, Private Funding</p>

<p><i>LONG TERM</i></p> <p><b>EXPAND FESTIVALS AND EVENTS</b></p>	<p>Popular events like the Camellia City Festival, Christmas Parade, Blind Willie McTell Music Festival, and more bring the community together and help to cement Thomson's small-town character. Locals would love to see more special events and festivals in downtown to draw the community together and bring activity to the area. For large events like the Blind Willie McTell Festival, hosting satellite events downtown makes sense to draw more visitors, energy, and tourism to the area. Encouraging the city, the Thomson-McDuffie Chamber of Commerce, and the Thomson-McDuffie County Convention &amp; Visitors Bureau to relocate elements of ongoing events downtown could bring more events and activities to the area regularly</p>
	<p><b>Lead:</b> Forward McDuffie  <b>Prospective Completion Date:</b> Ongoing  <b>Potential Funding:</b> City, County, Private Funding</p>




	<p>Existing events like the Christmas Parade are beloved community attractions that help bring visitors and activity downtown. While more events are desired by the community, Thomson has limited resources and support staff to organize and run them. One solution to this gap might be developing a Special Event Grant program in cooperation with the Chamber of Commerce or Convention &amp; Visitors Bureau to incentivize privately operated festivals and other programming downtown. Cities like Monroe, Georgia, have been very successful in bringing private events downtown with Downtown Community Event Grants of \$250 or less. To make this process accessible for prospective event holders, the city should consider creating a streamlined “one-stop shop” for event programming in conjunction with Special Event Grants. A full-time event position most likely will need to be created for events and activities to take place on a regular schedule.</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Lead: TBD</b>  <b>Prospective Completion Date: TBD</b>  <b>Potential Funding: TBD</b></p>

	<p>Thomson's location near the famed Augusta National Golf Club creates opportunities to generate tourism and investment in the community. Many Thomson residents are avid golfers and take pride in the nearby Masters Tournament. Constructing a “Mini Masters” putt-putt golf course downtown to coincide with the tournament might get local school children and youth excited about the game and create more family-friendly activity downtown. This activity could be designed as a children's competition with funds benefiting a local charity. A full-time event position most likely will need to be created for events and activities to take place on a regular schedule.</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Lead: TBD</b>  <b>Prospective Completion Date: TBD</b>  <b>Potential Funding: TBD</b></p>

	<p>Thomson is home to a variety of talented local artists, musicians, and performers. Creating a home for the arts downtown could help fill vacant spaces with life and bring more of the community downtown regularly. Steering committee members should consider working with artists, performers, and the theater department at Thomson High School to create a home for the performing arts downtown.</p>
	<p><b>Lead:</b> Don Powers, Molly McDowell <b>Potential Funding:</b> TBD</p>

	<p>Students from the UGA Terry College of Business presented recommendations to the owners of the Thomson Twin Cinema for building rehabilitation, organizational structure, and expanded uses of the building. Theater owners and city leaders should continue exploring the implementation of these options.</p>
	<p><b>Lead:</b> Molly McDowell, Jerod McDowell, Don Powers <b>Potential Funding:</b> TBD</p>

	<p>Local leadership should continue to explore the creation of a downtown meeting/event space that can hold more than 100 people. This event space would provide locals and visitors with a place to meet downtown, bringing more people into the area throughout the day and evening. There are multiple existing structures in the downtown area that may be able to be adapted for this purpose.</p>
	<p><b>Lead:</b> Don Powers, Elizabeth Vance, Molly McDowell <b>Potential Funding:</b> TBD</p>



# CONNECTIVITY

**A**cross the community, Thomson residents recognize that downtown connectivity must be improved for the area to thrive. Community members want to alleviate heavy tractor-trailer traffic downtown and make walking downtown safer and more appealing. At the same time, locals recognize that convenient, easily visible parking is an important commodity for downtown businesses. Prioritizing improving parking access and the appearance of rear parking areas is important to making these assets feel safe and inviting. Many residents do not realize the efforts underway to improve connectivity downtown. Already, Thomson is working with GDOT to improve Main Street between the Brickyard and downtown. At the same time, following the recommendations of this plan, city leaders have worked with GDOT to repair and



restripe downtown crosswalks. On Railroad and Main Street, the city has continued to invest in downtown streetscapes and expand downtown streetscaping over time. Moving forward, the city must continue to prioritize enhancing connectivity downtown and work to maintain and expand these amenities.

*SHORT TERM*

**US-78 CORRIDOR IMPROVEMENTS**

Over the past year, Thomson officials have worked with engineers from GDOT to propose improvements to Main Street/US-78 from the Brickyard to White Oak Street in downtown. City leaders should continue working with GDOT to fund and implement improvements to this key corridor. Traffic-calming measures like vegetated pedestrian refuge islands, street trees, landscaped bump-outs at intersections, and more will help ensure that Main Street is a safe and attractive gateway to downtown Thomson.

**Lead:** Ken Usry  
**Prospective Completion Date:** July 2021  
**Potential Funding:** TSPLOST, City of Thomson, SPLOST

SHORT TERM

REPAINT  
CROSSWALKS  
DOWNTOWN



Main Street's raised brick-patterned crosswalks are an important element of pedestrian safety downtown and a fine addition to downtown connectivity. Unfortunately, traffic and sunlight over time have worn down and faded the brick-patterned asphalt. The city should work with GDOT to repaint these important downtown crosswalks.

**Lead:** Ken Usry, Kerry Bridges  
**Prospective Completion Date:** Phase I Complete, Ongoing through July 2021  
**Potential Funding:** City of Thomson

SHORT TERM

INSTALL STRING  
LIGHTING



Ensuring public safety must be the first priority of local leaders. With parking accessed via small, poorly lit side streets and alleyways, installing string lights and other attractive lighting along these access routes could increase the perception of safety and encourage more evening patrons at downtown restaurants and businesses.

**Lead:** Elizabeth Vance  
**Prospective Completion Date:** Phase I Complete, Ongoing through July 2021  
**Potential Funding:** Hotel/Motel Tax, RSVP Funding, City of Thomson



*SHORT TERM*

**CLEAN UP AND IMPROVE ALLEYS**

Accessed by alleyways and side streets, Thomson's rear parking lots are a critical resource for downtown businesses. Often disorderly and unattractive, these service alleys and rear parking lots offer the first impression of downtown to many visitors. Ensuring that parking access routes are clean and well maintained is essential to making patrons feel welcome. Downtown business owners should band together to improve shared parking areas, centralizing services like trash receptacles and grease traps to create a more organized and attractive "back of house" area. Business owners should work with the city to ensure these access routes are maintained and trash is regularly picked up.

**Lead:** Ken Usry  
**Prospective Completion Date:** January 2021  
**Potential Funding:** TBD

*SHORT TERM*

**WHIMSICAL PARKING SIGNAGE**

Attractive, well-organized, and convenient parking make downtown businesses and restaurants accessible for visitors. Installing fun and attractive signage that clearly indicates the availability of free parking at the rear parking lots on Journal Street and First Avenue could encourage more visitors to use these important downtown resources. Steering committee members should consider working with local artists to craft and install unique parking signage at key entry points.

**Lead:** Andy Knox, Jr., David Williams  
**Prospective Completion Date:** July 2020  
**Potential Funding:** TBD

*SHORT TERM*

**TRAIL NETWORK PLANNING**

As part of its work in the community, the Archway Partnership has engaged students from the UGA Terry College of Business to help Thomson and McDuffie County officials build consensus around trail funding and implementation. Terry students will assist the community with funding options for trail layout proposals and implementation of designs produced for Thomson.

**Lead:** Debbie Jones  
**Prospective Completion Date:** February 2021  
**Potential Funding:** TBD

*LONG TERM*

**REDUCE SEMI TRAFFIC ON MAIN STREET**

Throughout the public input process, locals complained about the excessive tractor-trailer traffic along Main Street. As a community, Thomson has invested millions of dollars in the construction and ongoing maintenance of the Thomson bypass. In 2018, plans were brought forward to extend the bypass west of the city, connecting with I-20 northwest of town at Three Points Road. In order for this investment to make sense, the tractor trailers need to be using this infrastructure. Leaders from Thomson, McDuffie County, and the local development authority should prioritize working with trucking companies to divert truck traffic to the bypass. Designating a truck route along the bypass, limiting tractor trailers downtown, and ensuring that the bypass appears as the preferred route on GPS systems used by trucking companies are potential ways to limit excessive truck traffic downtown.

**Lead: Ken Usry, City Administrator**  
**Potential Funding: TBD**

*LONG TERM*

**CONTINUE GDOT IMPROVEMENTS ALONG MAIN STREET**

Following efforts to improve US-78 at the Brickyard, Thomson officials should continue working with GDOT to improve Main Street in downtown Thomson. While this area already includes marked crosswalks with brick-patterned paving, constructing pedestrian islands in key locations could further enhance pedestrian safety, slow vehicular traffic, and improve the appearance of this key corridor.

**Lead: Ken Usry**  
**Potential Funding: TSPLOST**



<p><i>LONG TERM</i></p> <p><b>JOURNAL STREET/ REAR PARKING IMPROVEMENTS</b></p>	<p>While Main Street and other downtown streets are generally well-maintained and attractive, many of the “back-of-house” areas in downtown are unattractive and chaotic. To become the destination that locals desire, all of downtown must adhere the community’s high standards. Addressing shared rear parking areas and alleys by installing attractive dumpster and service enclosures, centralizing garbage collection and grease pits, reorganizing inefficient parking arrangements, and maintaining unified paving could help make rear parking areas more attractive and accessible for visitors and business owners. The addition of trees, rear sidewalks, and lighting could help transform these rear service areas into amenities for downtown business owners.</p>
	<p><b>Lead: City Administrator</b> <b>Potential Funding: SPLOST</b></p>

<p><i>LONG TERM</i></p> <p><b>DOWNTOWN BROADBAND CONNECTIVITY</b></p>	<p>Reliable high-speed internet is an essential service in today’s environment that will only grow in importance in the future. Broadband access is critical for economic development, education, and social connections. In the coming years, the City of Thomson and McDuffie County will partner on a county-wide broadband initiative, with a particular focus on downtown Thomson as a hub for high-speed connectivity. Affordable high-speed internet downtown will help to spur economic revitalization and draw people to the downtown area.</p>
	<p><b>Lead: Don Powers, David Crawley</b> <b>Potential Funding: City of Thomson, McDuffie County, SPLOST</b></p>

# GREENING AND BEAUTIFICATION

In step one of the Thomson RSVP, citizens from across the community envisioned a more attractive and appealing downtown. Many residents commented on how much the flower pots and existing enhancements have already improved the experience of visiting the area. Thomson residents want additional improvements to make downtown as attractive as it once was. Historical photos of downtown show a lush canopy of street trees, expansive and well-maintained residential yards, and verdant trees and landscaping at public buildings and churches. Planting trees ranks among the most affordable, effective, and enduring improvements that any community can make. Properly planted trees beautify downtown, signal arrival to the area, bring shade and comfort to pedestrians, and slow vehicular traffic. For the greatest impact, Thomson



should consider investing in large-canopy, fast-growing street trees over labor-intensive, high-maintenance flowering shrubs, annuals, or perennials. Species well suited to Thomson include Shumard oak (*Quercus shumardii*), laurel oak (*Quercus laurifolia*), willow oak (*Quercus phellos*), New Harmony American elm (*Ulmus americana* "New Harmony"), and more.

<p><i>SHORT TERM</i></p> <p>PRESSURE WASH AND CLEAN JOURNAL STREET PARKING LOT</p>	<p>The first impression of many visitors to downtown businesses and restaurants is the rear parking area on Journal Street. This disorganized parking lot features an inefficient mishmash of parking styles and includes the service areas of businesses along Main and Railroad Street. Numerous trash cans, dumpsters, grease pits, and unattractive service areas surround the parking lot. Making sure this area is clean should be a priority to keep people visiting downtown businesses. Local leaders and the downtown business community should work together to pressure wash dumpsters and rear service areas and keep the common parking area as clean as possible.</p>
	<p><b>Lead:</b> Ken Usry <b>Prospective Completion Date:</b> October 2020 <b>Potential Funding:</b> City of Thomson, SPLOST</p>



*SHORT TERM*

PLANT TREES IN ALL PARKING LOTS



Completed, Spring 2020

Local leaders have done a good job investing in public parking downtown in recent years. Large public parking areas on Railroad Street and First Avenue help meet the demand for regular business and special event parking. While designed to incorporate planting beds, neither of these parking lots are planted with trees. The city should prioritize planting trees in available planting beds at these parking lots. In addition to beautifying these areas, trees help shade parked cars and could increase the use of these resources.

**Lead:** Ken Usry

**Prospective Completion Date:** Phase I Complete, Ongoing through October 2020

**Potential Funding:** City of Thomson, SPLOST

*SHORT TERM*

MAIN STREET CORRIDOR OF OAKS PLANTINGS

From the Brickyard south to Hall Street, much of the frontage along Main Street is public property controlled by the local school board, the city, county, or other entities. Focusing beautification efforts on these prominent properties could help build momentum for additional improvements along the corridor. The city should consider partnering with local nurseries, volunteers, and more to plant large-canopy oak trees at community-owned parcels along the corridor. Regularly spaced plantings of a mix of Shumard, willow, laurel, or other oaks, would create a handsome, long-lived canopy in a few years.

**Lead:** Ken Usry

**Prospective Completion Date:** November 2021

**Potential Funding:** City of Thomson, McDuffie County, SPLOST

*SHORT TERM*

GOVERNMENT  
CENTER LANDSCAPE  
MAINTENANCE

The Thomson-McDuffie Government Center represents a major public commitment to downtown. While the building itself is a beautiful addition to downtown, some elements of the grounds need attention. Replacing dead or dying plants and shrubs, regular weeding of planting beds, and screening the drainage basin on Railroad Street should be prioritized by city maintenance crews. Proper maintenance of ornamental grasses differs considerably from conventional lawn maintenance. The city should consider working with the local McDuffie County UGA Extension Office to develop a detailed maintenance plan for the grounds. Working with landscaping crews to ensure they are aware of best practices is an important element of keeping the government center beautiful.

**Lead:** Ken Usry, David Crawley  
**Prospective Completion Date:** December 2020  
**Potential Funding:** SPLOST, City of Thomson, McDuffie County

*SHORT TERM*

REMOVE LITTER  
AND ADD  
TRASH CANS

Clean streets, parks, and sidewalks all send a message that a community is proud of downtown. Particularly at key intersections and gateways, local officials and civic groups must prioritize maintaining a clean and attractive environment for locals and visitors. Providing trash receptacles and adequate numbers and funding of maintenance crews to clean up litter around the city is an essential step in ensuring that visiting downtown is a clean and attractive experience. Adequate maintenance helps ensure that Thomson feels worth investing in and assists the city in attracting the new restaurants, businesses, and development desired by the community.

**Lead:** City Administrator  
**Prospective Completion Date:** TBD  
**Potential Funding:** N/A





As the home of world-renowned blues musician Blind Willie McTell, the City of Thomson is an ideal place to celebrate his legacy with a life-size statue. This statue could be incorporated into the Thomson Music Mile and the Thomson Railroad Park and would serve as both a tourist destination and a local point of pride.

**Lead:** Ken Usry, Don Powers, Elizabeth Vance  
**Potential Funding:** SPLOST, City of Thomson, McDuffie County, Community Fundraising, Grant Funding



## APPENDIX A

### — THOMSON RAILROAD PARK —

# MATERIAL LIBRARY

Thomson's history and location along the former Georgia Railroad provided the inspiration for the design of Thomson Railroad Park, an exciting new community amenity and downtown attraction. The park includes a playground, a splash pad, public restroom facilities, and a dog park, in addition to other amenities. Designed as a journey across the Georgia landscape, the proposed 12,000 square foot playground facility accommodates a diverse mix of play types. The centerpiece of the playground area is a functional rail track featuring old-timey hand powered cars that users can operate themselves, bringing delight to children and a sense of nostalgia to their families. The rail track encircles the play area, terminating at a mini "Thomson Station", a shaded platform where parents can wave as train cars pass by. From the station, the track passes by a "nature play" area, where children can challenge their abilities on natural play materials in a wooded setting. The track continues past a model country town complete with tiny houses, a country store, and a seasonal variety of vegetable crops. Next the train passes through a tunnel in the hillside where spectators can wave from an overhead bridge. Riders dismount in the railyard, where junior conductors can explore and climb aboard model locomotives and train cars.

In the summer months, families can enjoy a railroad turntable-themed splash zone, with water pouring from an old-fashioned water tower onto a leaky steam locomotive gushing in all directions. Restrooms, a changing room, and a shaded picnic area are conveniently located nearby. Furry family members also have a place to play, with a shaded dog park for both small and large dogs. Proposed adjacent to an existing downtown public parking lot and with on-street parking incorporated into the design, Thomson Railroad Park features a total of 70 parking spaces and full ADA accessibility. With amenities for all ages, Thomson Railroad Park complements recent investments in the Thomson-McDuffie Government Center and creates a unique downtown attraction for residents and visitors alike.



## Model Example: Turkey Thicket Park Location: Washington, DC

Designed by: Landscape Structures  
Georgia Sales Contact: Michael Hinson  
m.hinson@adreprs.com

Turkey Thicket Park offers examples of many elements in the proposed Thomson Railroad Park. The park is designed for ages 2–12, with variation in play equipment to appeal to multiple age groups. The park is successful because of a consistent narrative and theme throughout the design. Attention to various play styles helps to fuel imaginative play across a wide age range.



This railroad tunnel features a highly detailed locomotive.



A climbable mountain leads to a bridge in this example.



Hills and mounds create unusual topographical features for memorable creative play.



Caves in the mountain landform create secluded play areas.

## Thomson Railroad Park Materials and Site Furnishings List



### Playhouses

Potential designs for themed playhouses include:  
Cabins, Caboose, Ticket Booth, Country Store

Example Retailer:

<https://www.kidscrookedhouse.com>



### Hills and Mounds

Changes in topography are a simple way to add interest to  
play surfaces, allowing users to test their agility.

Example Retailer:

<https://www.playlsi.com>



### Rubberized Colorful Play Surfaces

Rubberized surfaces are more accessible to wheelchairs and strollers  
than traditional mulch, and are also safer and more hygienic.

Example Retailers:

PlayBound™ Poured-in-Place [https://www.surfaceamerica.com/  
product/playbound-poured-in-place](https://www.surfaceamerica.com/product/playbound-poured-in-place)

PebbleFlex: [https://www.playlsi.com/en/commercial-  
playground-equipment/play-surfacing/pebbleflex](https://www.playlsi.com/en/commercial-playground-equipment/play-surfacing/pebbleflex)





## Natural Play Materials

Countless studies show that children benefit from play that connects them with the natural world. Use of natural materials in “freeform” play structures make a stimulating addition to the traditional playscape.

Example Designer: Earthscape Design Studio

<https://www.earthscapeplay.com/project/story-mill-community-park>

Thomson Railroad Park  
Materials and Site Furnishings List



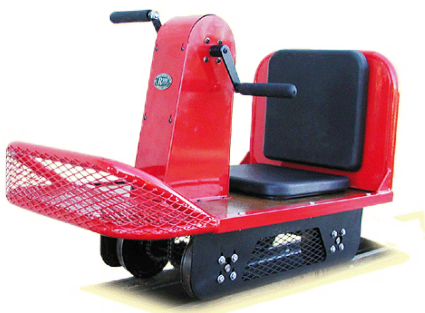
**Kiddie Hand-Crank Rail Cars**

Children and adults alike will be delighted by these hand-propelled mini rail cars that travel on a miniature train track. A throwback to similar designs found in amusement parks, these cars allow kids to power themselves down the track while parents follow.

Self-propelled individual cars for 7.25" gauge track.

Example Retailer: RMI Railworks

[https://www.rmirailworks.com/kids\\_hand\\_crank\\_car.asp#.Xfek4ehKguU](https://www.rmirailworks.com/kids_hand_crank_car.asp#.Xfek4ehKguU)







## Railroad Splash Pad

Inspired by the old-fashioned water towers traditionally used to fill steam locomotives, this interactive water feature creates a memorable focal point at this splash pad. A railroad turntable, used to move locomotives, creates a fun centerpiece for the themed water park design.



Example Design:

Stanton Central Park by David Volz

<https://dvolzdesign.com/project/stanton-central-park/>

Example Retailer: Aquatix

<https://aquatix.playlsi.com/item/water-tower/>



## Thomson Railroad Park Materials and Site Furnishings List



### Benches and Trash Receptacles

Traditionally inspired with clean, contemporary styling, these park furnishings feature a range of color options to help achieve a cohesive appearance in downtown Thomson.

Example Retailer:

Anova Furnishings "Exposition" line

<https://www.anovafurnishings.com/collection/exposition>



### Picnic Tables

Example Retailer: The Industrial Farmhouse

<http://theindustrialfarmhouse.com/product/outdoor-modern-industrial-style-picnic-table/>



### Traditional Light Poles

Example Retailer: Eaton

[http://www.cooperindustries.com/content/public/en/lighting/products/post\\_top\\_lighting/\\_182881.html](http://www.cooperindustries.com/content/public/en/lighting/products/post_top_lighting/_182881.html)





## Stamped and Painted Brick Crosswalks

This pattern matches the existing crosswalk designs in downtown Thomson.



## Brick Pier Fencing

This brick and metal fencing helps create continuity between the park and the adjacent brick Thomson-McDuffie Government Center.

Specifications:

Fence Height: 3'

Brick piers: 2'x3'

Brick base course

Cast stone cap

Running bond rustic red brick

Black steel pickets or fencing panel



## Entry Signage

This brick base sign design matches the signage at the nearby Thomson-McDuffie Government Center.

## Thomson Railroad Park Materials and Site Furnishings List



### Architectural Inspiration: Historic Thomson Train Depot

The architectural features of the historic Thomson Depot can be applied to park buildings including restrooms and shade pavilions to create continuity between the park and the nearby depot.



### Roof Brackets



### Station Signage

Font Name:  
Flareserif 821 Std Bold



### Window Styles



### Industrial Lighting



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Native landscape plants connect families to the natural beauty of Georgia, with the added benefits of heat tolerance and pollinator attraction. A mix of textures and colors provides year-round interest. Georgia-bred blueberries grow well across the state and are a treat to pick off the bush, helping connect children with food production.



**Scarlet Sage**  
*Salvia coccinea*



**Blanketflower**  
*Gaillardia pulchella*



**Oakleaf Hydrangea**  
*Hydrangea quercifolia*

## APPENDIX A

### Thomson Railroad Park Materials and Site Furnishings List

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Wild False Indigo  
*Baptisia alba*



Rabbiteye Blueberries  
*Vaccinium ashei*



Sweetbay Magnolia  
*magnolia virginiana*



Willow Oak  
*Quercus phellos*





**Bald Cypress**  
*Taxodium*  
*disticum*



**River Birch**  
*Betula nigra*



**Shenandoah Panic Grass**  
*Panicum virgatum* 'Shenandoah'



**Indiangrass**  
*Sorghastrum nutans*



Prior to Thomson's founding, "Frog Bottom" and "Frog Pond" were former names associated with the community. Thomson could honor this history with a playful frog statue located within Thomson Railroad Park. Local historian and RSVP Steering Committee member Patsy Hall envisions a verdigris frog statue as a potential downtown focal point "that will entice parents and children alike ... a fun and frolicking element of art, a new permanent, cherished landmark for our city." Ms. Hall sees the statue as a memorable landmark "where fond and lasting memories might be formed for children and reminisced again when they are adults."

*Source: Copper Frog Sculpture Art by Beau Smith*  
<http://beautifulfrog.com/index.html>





## APPENDIX B

# MASTERPLAN

## *OPTION II*

An alternative or future vision for downtown was created in the event of unforeseen growth pressure downtown. This conceptual design focuses on the area surrounding the Knox Shopping Center and could only be realized through an extensive public-private partnership between the Thomson-McDuffie Development Authority, the city, and private property owners. In this conceptual design, two bays of parking have been replaced with a tree-lined median featuring large-canopy trees for beautification and shade. The existing service street would be extended to intersect with Greenway Street, removing the existing building at the end of the shopping center. This extension allows for new infill, on-street parking, and an extended vegetated median. Extending the existing service street across the property could create a small downtown boulevard, better connecting the Thomson-McDuffie Government Center with the remainder of downtown. In this plan, businesses at Knox Shopping Center would also benefit from wider sidewalks capable of housing sidewalk cafés and other businesses. The north-to-south cross-street from White Oaks Street to Journal Street remains to provide access to the central service area and additional parking on Journal Street.



GREENWAY STREET

EAST HALL STREET

WHITE OAK STREET

MAIN STREET

CHURCH STREET

MILLIDGE STREET

JOURNAL STREET

KNOX SHOPPING CENTER





- ROADS & PARKING
- SIDEWALK
- EXISTING BUILDINGS
- POTENTIAL INFILL
- LARGE STREET TREE
- SMALL STREET TREE

# THOMSON MASTERPLAN

## OPTION II







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