

DOWNTOWN

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Brunswick
RSVP



2017

RENAISSANCE STRATEGIC VISION & PLAN

Credits & Thank-yous

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Special thanks to Georgia Power for providing the Brunswick Marketplace Profile and to all community members who participated in interviews, focus groups, the community town hall, and the survey.

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THE GEORGIA DOWNTOWN RENAISSANCE

PARTNERSHIP

Bringing together a diverse mix of public institutions, nongovernmental organizations, and private foundations, the Georgia Downtown Renaissance 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. With support from the Georgia Department of Community Affairs and the UGA Small Business Development Center, the Georgia Downtown Renaissance Partnership facilitates the creation of strategic visions, plans, and work programs for partner communities throughout Georgia. The Georgia Downtown Renaissance Partnership works with government leaders, chambers of commerce, downtown merchants, property owners, Main Street programs, downtown development authorities, and citizens to help ensure that all cities in Georgia have the resources and tools necessary to realize their vision and maximize their potential.

THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA CARL VINSON INSTITUTE OF GOVERNMENT

For 90 years, the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia 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 with a population of over 10

million, the Institute of Government has helped government leaders navigate change and forge strong directions for a better Georgia.

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.

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 Georgia Cities Foundation's services include the Revolving Loan Fund Program, the Heart and Soul Bus Tour, the Peer-to-Peer Mentoring Tour, Downtown Development Authority Basic Training, and the Renaissance Award.



2017 ELVIS FESTIVAL: The annual Georgia Elvis Festival is a four-day event celebrating the life and music of Elvis Presley through live performances held at Mary Ross Park in downtown Brunswick.

Beginning in November 2016, the Georgia Downtown Renaissance Partnership came together to assist downtown Brunswick in creating a strategic vision, plan, and short-term work program to address persistent challenges in the city and guide future growth. With support from the Downtown Development Authority, Brunswick's mayor and city commission, and the Downtown Brunswick Renaissance Strategic Vision and Plan Steering Committee, the resulting Downtown Brunswick Renaissance Strategic Vision and Plan (RSVP) helps to ensure that the city retains the unique history, vibrant community, and palpable sense of place that make Brunswick a great place to call home, while building on the city's existing strengths to achieve economic stability and attract desired development. Downtown Brunswick's strategic vision and plan was created via a three-stage process: 1) public engagement and analysis, 2) visioning and design, and 3) the development of an implementable work program.

The Downtown Brunswick RSVP is intended to serve as a living document to guide the future of downtown. As an everyday resource for local officials and citizens, the approachable goals included in the Downtown Brunswick Work Program and associated action items should be continually updated and removed as they are completed. As new opportunities arise, additional work program items should be added to the plan with a focus on implementation. At a minimum, local officials should update the Downtown Brunswick RSVP annually by answering the following questions: What was completed? Were enacted programs successful? What needs to be added? How, when, and who is responsible for implementation?

CITY OF BRUNSWICK

R S V P T I M E L I N E

NOVEMBER

INITIAL STEERING COMMITTEE MEETINGS, INTERVIEWS, FOCUS GROUPS, TOWN HALL, COMMUNITY SURVEY

DECEMBER

STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING, VISUAL PREFERENCE ASSESSMENT, PRELIMINARY DESIGNS, PUBLIC INPUT RESULTS AND ANALYSIS, COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS AND ANALYSIS, ECONOMIC ANALYSIS, PLAN REVIEW, PUBLIC INPUT SUMMARY, TOP ISSUE PRIORITIZATION

JANUARY

STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING, DESIGN, RENDERING, VISUALIZATION, DRAFT WORK PLAN

FEBRUARY

COMMUNITY GROUP AND STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING, PRESENTATION, ACTION ITEM DEVELOPMENT, DESIGN, RENDERING, VISUALIZATION

MARCH

COMMUNITY AND STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING, DESIGN, RENDERING, VISUALIZATION

APRIL

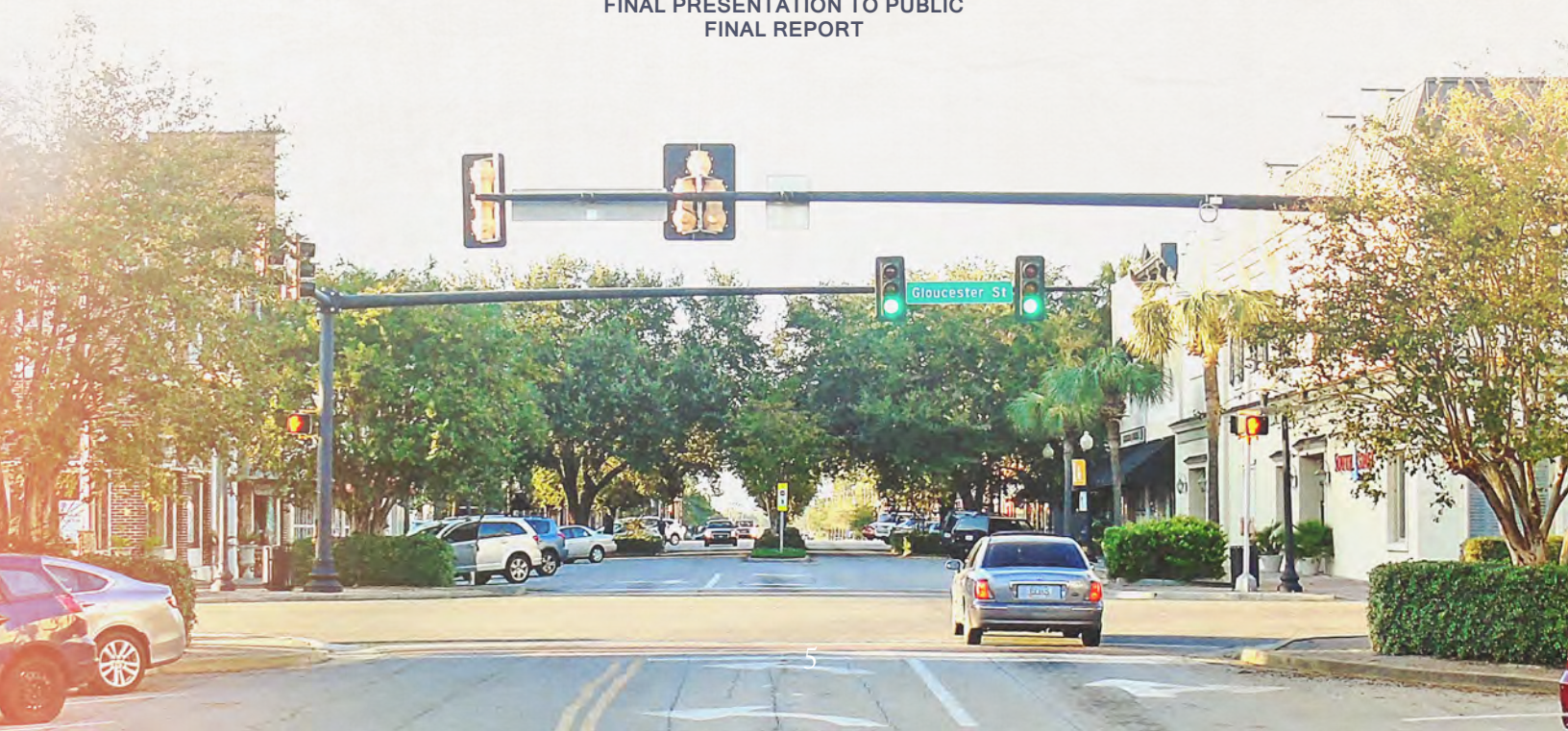
STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING, ACTION ITEM REFINEMENT, DRAFT FINAL REPORT

JUNE

PRESENTATION TO MAYOR AND COMMISSION

JULY

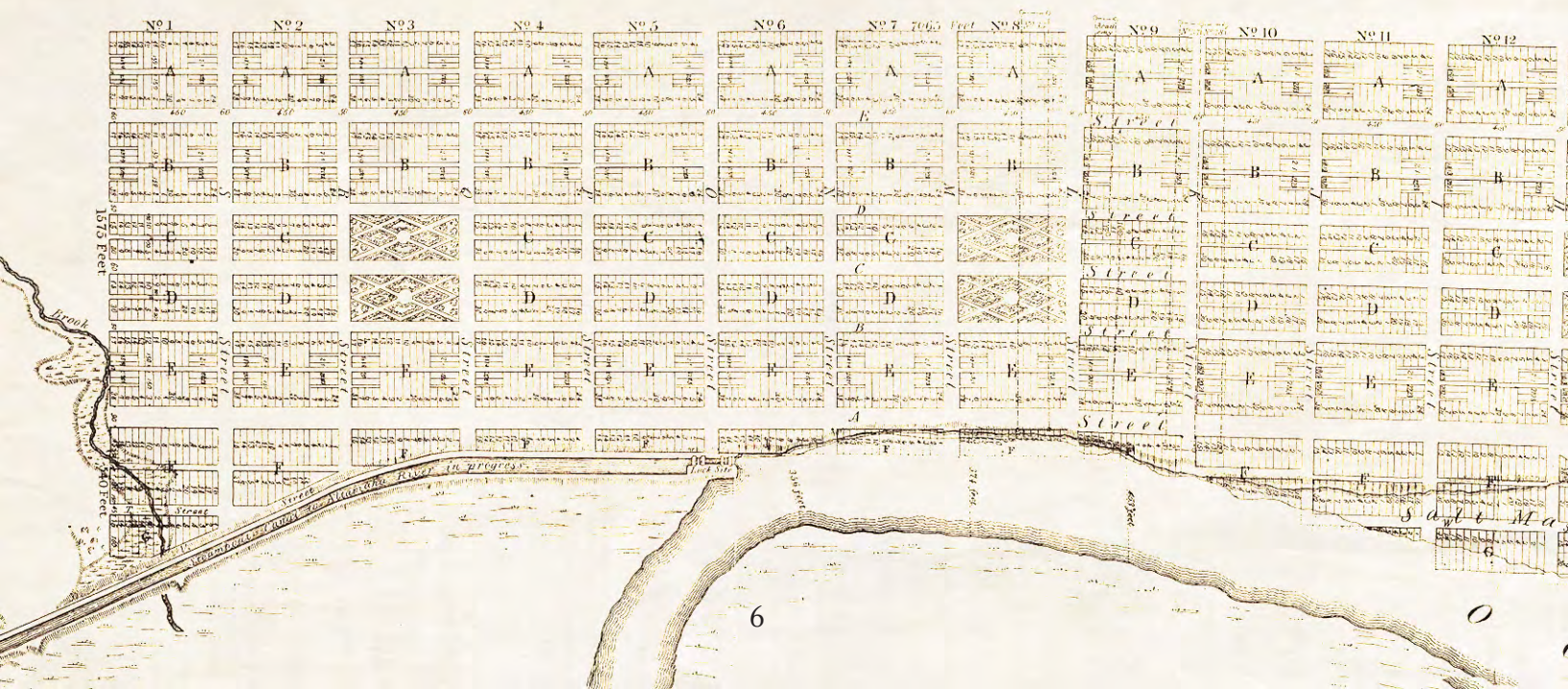
FINAL PRESENTATION TO PUBLIC
FINAL REPORT



THE DOWNTOWN BRUNSWICK STRATEGIC VISION & PLAN

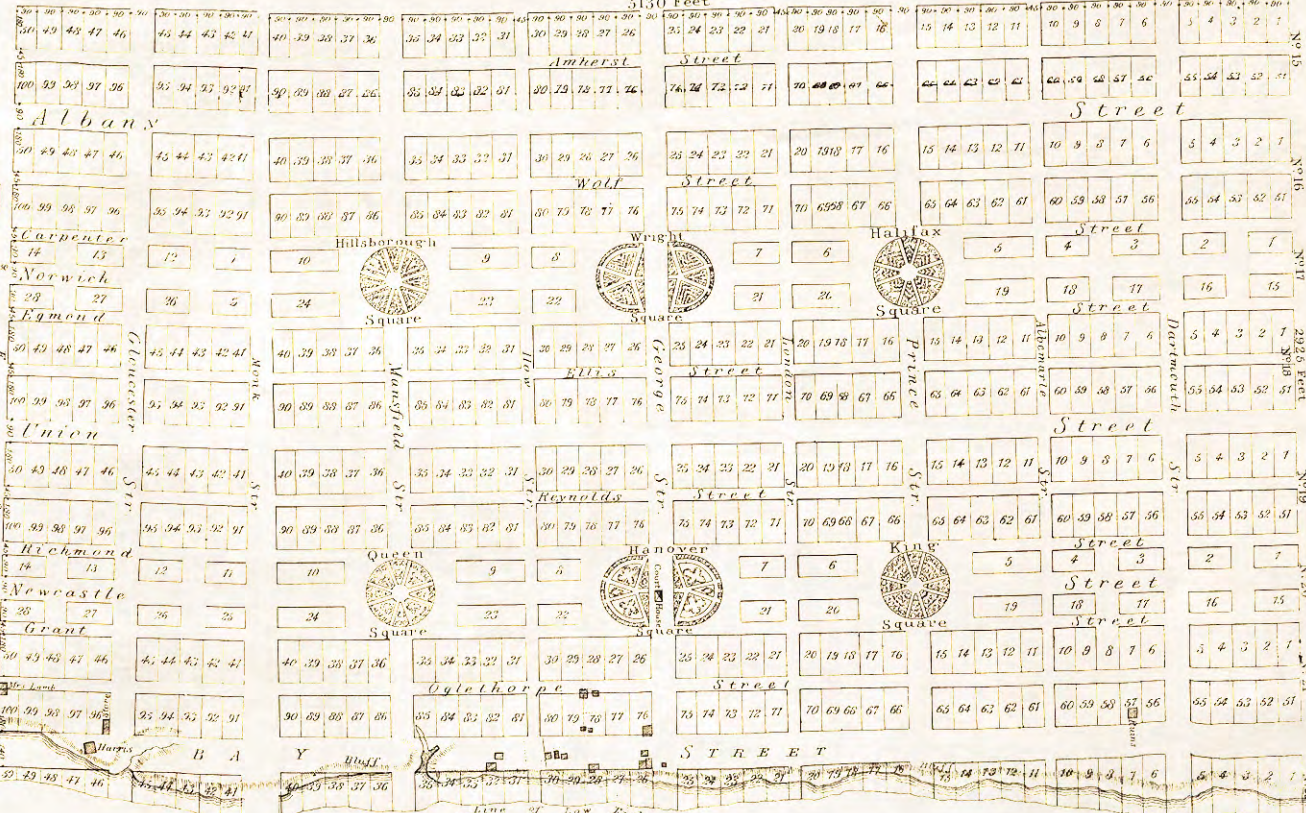
With the salty breeze of the nearby Atlantic and the Old World at his back, Captain Mark Carr of General James Oglethorpe's regiment sailed in 1738 to the fledgling Royal Colony of Georgia. Traveling west along an inlet from the mighty Atlantic, Carr settled in a protected harbor along the Turtle River. Here Carr and his family developed Plug Point, a sprawling tobacco plantation between the riverfront and the expansive marshland to the east. From this single point of origin, the modern city of Brunswick arose.

Planned by General Lachlan McIntosh to embody the values of the flourishing Enlightenment and reflect the designs of Georgia's master builder and founder General James Oglethorpe in 1771, Brunswick's compact, gridded layout, lush squares, and walkable streets continue to delight visitors and invite exploration. Sited on a peninsula near the convergence of the Brunswick, East, and Turtle Rivers, Brunswick's natural harbor and protected location allowed the city to develop into a colonial port of call and major center for trade. As one of five colonial ports of entry designated by President George Washington in 1789, Brunswick's waterfront has served for over two centuries as a bustling maritime hub, with development ebbing and flowing along with the fate of the fledgling country.





5130 Feet



Albany

Amherst Street

Walf Street

Wight Square

Halifax Square

Prince Street

King Street

Hanover Square

Oglethorpe Street

S T R E E T

Norwich
Edmond
Union

Richmond
Newcastle
Grant

Hillborough
Mansfield
Queen

York
Oglethorpe

Albany

No 15
No 16
No 17
2925 Feet
No 19
No 20
No 21



If the city's ancient live oaks could speak,

they would tell of the city's journey through the boom and bust of the American Civil War, Reconstruction, and the early 20th century, as Brunswick's increasingly industrialized waterfront thrived. By the early 1900s, Brunswick's waterfront teemed with activity. The joint Atlanta, Birmingham & Atlantic Railroad and Southern Railway terminal along the waterfront served steamboats and cargo ships loaded with cotton, turpentine, timber, and the fruits of Southern fields. Shrimp boats clogged the channel, depositing their sweet cargo for hungry consumers.

Along busy Newcastle Street, crowded streetcars jostled tourists and locals downtown en route from the waterfront passenger depot and the city's surrounding residential neighborhoods. The turreted city hall, customs house, opera house, and magnificent Oglethorpe Hotel rose above the city's smoky waterfront skyline. Here Gilded Age millionaires with names like Morgan, Rockefeller, Vanderbilt, and Pulitzer bound for the pleasures of Jekyll Island awaited transport to their private winter retreat under the hotel's generous veranda. With the development of the US highway system in the 1920s, Brunswick boomed with traffic bound for the coast. Georgia's famous coastal highway, US 17, brought tourists, visitors, and locals through the heart of the city. Under the leadership of visionary city manager F.J. Torras in 1924, the city of Brunswick completed a new bridge to St. Simons Island, initiating a decades-long influx of tourist and residential development on St. Simons and Sea Island and cementing Brunswick's status as the Gateway to the Golden Isles.








7. ZSC-1 4K - Squadron ZPC - Kahuja No.1





While the Depression brought hardship and stymied development in Brunswick and surrounding islands, the 1940s and World War II brought a new prosperity to the city as 16,000 former farmers, housewives, and sharecroppers from across Georgia and the South sacrificed for the war effort and built new lives in the teeming industrial city. Gravitating to the J.A. Jones Construction Company's massive shipyard, these laborers worked 24 hours a day to construct the mighty Liberty Ships so vital to Allied victory. North of the city, the new Glynco Naval Air Station housed massive hangars for dirigibles that scanned the coast for Nazi U-boats. Accompanied by these hovering blimps, 99 Liberty Ships set sail from Brunswick's shipyard to traverse the Atlantic and Pacific to supply American troops with all the equipment necessary to win the war.

While the end of the war brought newfound prosperity to the nation and the city, the changing postwar economy and new patterns of development quickly created unprecedented challenges for Brunswick. While Brunswick had long served as the Gateway to the Golden Isles, with the purchase of Jekyll Island by the state of Georgia in 1946, Brunswick's industrial and maritime economy increasingly became eclipsed by the growing tourist trade. Compounding this shift, a new bridge constructed by the state in 1956 allowed for further development of the once-private Jekyll Island as a haven for regular Georgians. Dedicated to the Marshes of Glynn poet, the Sidney Lanier Bridge provided easy vehicular access to the Golden Isles, contributing to a decades-long boom of tourist and residential development on the barrier islands and further de-concentrating the local economy and residential patterns.

While the advent of air conditioning and new industry lured more Americans to make a life in the South, new development in Brunswick after the 1950s typically occurred outside the city's core. With the mass availability of the automobile, strip malls, drive-throughs, and surface parking lots increasingly took the place of his-

torical homes and turn-of-the-century commercial businesses. Following patterns seen throughout the nation, in-town residents began leaving the city's historic core in favor of new developments outside the city's urban center. In the heart of downtown, beloved if aging landmarks like the Oglethorpe Hotel were demolished in favor of the welcoming neon glow of America's Innkeeper and a modern Holiday Inn. Following the relocation of US Highway 17 and new growth outside of downtown, many businesses struggled to lure customers downtown. To suit the changing tastes of a newly suburban clientele, businesses demolished aging Victorian commercial buildings or refaced these structures beyond recognition with contemporary metal or simple masonry façades. By the 1960s, many in-town neighborhoods were entering into a decades-long period of population decline. Further declines in the city's industrial and shrimping economy throughout the late 20th century continued to put pressure of the city's increasingly fragile economy.

While many in-town neighborhoods still face challenges, today Brunswick is once again a growing and diverse city on the rise. Draped in Spanish moss, arcades of ancient live oaks continue to shelter the city's quiet residential neighborhoods, which feature an unparalleled stock of 19th century homes, many recently renovated. Like Brunswick's first settlers two centuries ago, new residents continue to come, seeking their slice of the coastal life in Brunswick's historical in-town neighborhoods. Here peeling paint, centuries-old sidewalks, and massive canopies of live oaks contribute to the Brunswick's unique sense of history and speak to the city's romantic past. Seemingly untouched by the fears of their elders, morning in these neighborhoods brings a parade of children on bikes, foot, skateboard, and more making their easy progress to the leafy campus of Glynn Academy, the South's second-oldest public school. Where the Navy once constructed the world's largest wooden hangars during World War II, today recruits from across the United States come to train to become US Marshals



United States come to train to become US Marshals at the headquarters of the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, contributing to the local economy and consistently attracting new visitors to the area. Nearby more than 3,100 students study at the growing College of Coastal Georgia, creating an educated base of young professionals to manage the next generation of Brunswick's growth and development. Long known as the Shrimp Capital of the World and now serving as a major port for vehicle import and export, Brunswick continues to build on a maritime heritage that has long played an important role in the city's unique culture and economy.

Having learned from the mistakes of the past, since 1979 Brunswick's venerable downtown has been protected and recognized as the Old Town Brunswick National Register District. Here, the city's large stock of 1800s buildings house the city's determined local artists, chefs, professionals, and entrepreneurs as they hone their crafts and pursue their dreams. Launched in 2005, Signature Squares of Brunswick has since partnered with the city and downtown stakeholders to restore many of the city's key historic squares, bringing life and activity back into these sacred community spaces. Attracted by the city's wealth of architecture,

history, walkability, and authenticity, major new attractions and businesses are set to relocate downtown. Along the city's once bustling industrial waterfront, Mary Ross Waterfront Park has replaced the competing rail lines of the old Atlantic Coastal Line Terminal and associated warehouses. Recently the city has commissioned a masterplan for the park and is working to implement a \$15 million improvement plan aimed at restoring the city's waterfront as the center of the community. Adjacent to the waterfront, the site of the former Oglethorpe Hotel is once more attracting the attention of developers.

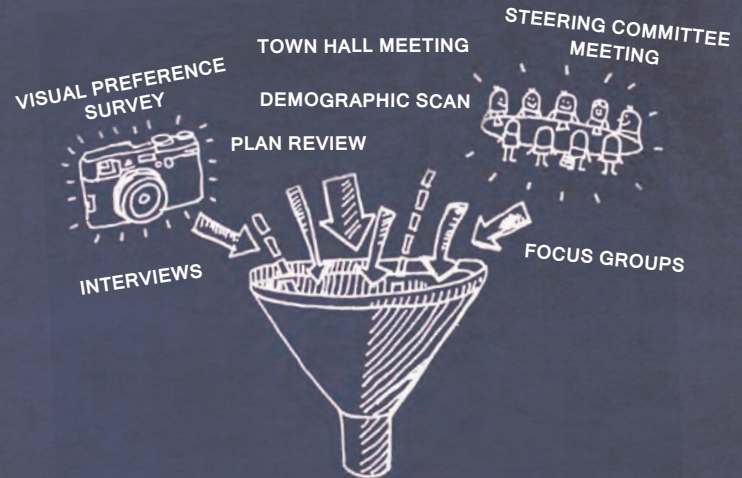
With both the promise of new growth on the horizon and persistent challenges in the city's historical core, Brunswick contracted with the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government and partners to develop a guiding, community-supported vision for downtown. The resulting Downtown Brunswick Renaissance Strategic Vision and Plan (RSVP) relies on three basic questions to evaluate current conditions in the community, address issues to ensure success, and create a road map for enacting Brunswick's vision for the future. These questions—Where are we now? Where are we going? How do we get there?—provide the foundation of the eight-month strategic visioning effort outlined within this report.

THE DOWNTOWN BRUNSWICK RSVP

Three-Step Process

1 STEP ONE: WHERE ARE WE NOW?

A successful planning effort is built upon a fundamental understanding of current conditions in Brunswick. Step one creates this foundation through a demographic profile, an analysis of market conditions, a review of prior plans and studies, and an extensive public engagement process. Together, these elements paint a comprehensive picture of Jefferson while creating a consensus on current issues and opportunities.



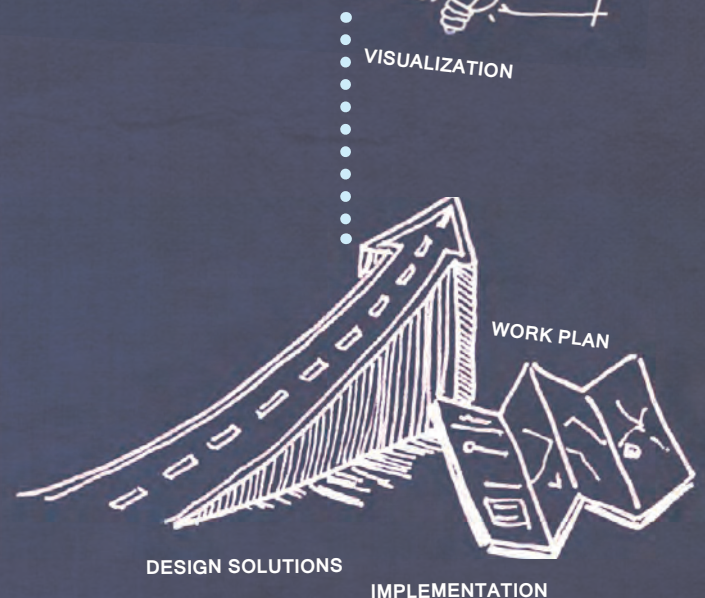
2 STEP TWO: WHERE ARE WE GOING?

In the second step of the process, Brunswick looks to the future to shape the shared vision for the city that emerged in step one. Built on the community desires and strengths discovered in community input sessions, Brunswick's vision is interpreted through illustrations and design recommendations. The final products of step two allow all community members to experience the physical translation of their collective vision.



3 STEP THREE: HOW DO WE GET THERE?

During the final step in the RSVP process, community leaders and citizens come together to create an implementation plan to move Brunswick toward the community's vision for the future. By focusing on achievable work program items with community support, step three builds momentum while helping to enact Brunswick's vision in a step-by-step process. Community input and effort form the foundation for the resulting work and action plan, and citizen-led implementation is critical for successful outcomes.



DOWNTOWN BRUNSWICK PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT



During the “Where are we now?” phase of the RSVP process, representatives of the Institute of Government partnered with the Brunswick Downtown Development Authority, the UGA Small Business Development Center, and the Georgia Department of Community Affairs to conduct an extensive public engagement process that included multiple focus groups, one-on-one interviews of downtown stakeholders, a community-wide town hall forum, and a public survey that received more than 400 individual responses. The results of this effort (included in full in the digital appendix) help to paint a comprehensive picture of current conditions in the city.

Who

WE HEARD FROM:

Interviews and focus groups were conducted with members of the following groups:

- BRUNSWICK CITY COMMISSION
- BRUNSWICK DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
- BRUNSWICK URBAN REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY
- BRUNSWICK-GOLDEN ISLES CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
- BRUNSWICK AND GLYNN COUNTY DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
- BRUNSWICK HISTORIC PRESERVATION BOARD
- BRUNSWICK PLANNING, DEVELOPMENT, AND CODES DEPARTMENT
- BRUNSWICK POLICE DEPARTMENT
- THE BRUNSWICK NEWS
- COLLEGE OF COASTAL GEORGIA
- GLYNN COUNTY COMMISSION
- GLYNN COUNTY AIRPORT COMMISSION
- GLYNN COUNTY FINANCE DEPARTMENT
- GOLDEN ISLES ARTS & HUMANITIES
- LOCAL REALTORS
- LOCAL DEVELOPERS
- DOWNTOWN BUSINESS OWNERS
- DOWNTOWN PROPERTY OWNERS
- HISTORIC NORWICH DISTRICT BUSINESS OWNERS
- SIGNATURE SQUARES OF BRUNSWICK
- SOGLO NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION



What You SAID:

"WE'RE RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF EVERYTHING"

"I LOVE THE PEOPLE"

"WE'RE EXCITED ABOUT OUR TOWN"

"WE MAKE A POINT OF ACCEPTING INTO THE COMMUNITY"

"YOU GET THAT FEELING OF COMMUNITY IN BRUNSWICK"

"IT MAKES ME FEEL GOOD TO COME DOWNTOWN"

"IT'S JUST BEAUTIFUL"

Public input participants overwhelmingly praised Brunswick's incredible sense of history, scenic coastal surroundings, beautiful architecture, walkable streets, handsome squares, busy restaurants, and vibrant arts and cultural scene. Locals enjoy living in an ideally situated coastal small town with a strong and energetic local community. Above the city's wealth of history, beautiful architecture, and scenic coastal location, the city's people make Brunswick a great place to call home. With beloved public institutions like Glynn Academy and the Ritz Theater and events like First Friday that bring locals together, downtown serves as a magnet for the wider area and helps cultivate a strong community in Brunswick. Participants and tourists love coming downtown to visit Brunswick's successful restaurants, shops, and services. Locals praised downtown Brunswick's active restaurant scene, with Tipsy's, Indigo Coastal Shanty, and The Farmer & The Larder standing out as consistent favorites. Because Brunswick serves as the county seat of Glynn County, locals and residents of the islands are drawn to the variety and quality of professional services downtown including law offices, accountants, and banks. Businesspeople in particular praised the quality of life in the area and Brunswick's strategic location near Interstate 95 and a short drive from major metropolitan areas. Buzzing with activity during popular events, Brunswick's walkable tree-lined streets, attractive squares, and compact Grid plan continue to charm visitors and bring the community together. The city's inherent walkability and bike-friendly topography contribute to the local residents' quality of life.

Many locals who participated in the public input process are migrants from other areas around Georgia and the nation, drawn to Brunswick to make a new life. These residents in particular praised the city's proximity to the coast, low cost of living, incredible historical architecture, and unique sense of place. One downtown business owner called Brunswick a place of "high ceilings and low expectations," where locals can live a slow coastal life, become entrepreneurs, or pursue their dreams surrounded by a supportive local community and the architectural and historical heritage of this beautiful city. The availability and affordability of Brunswick's housing stock is a key element that drives entrepreneurship and creative expression in the city. Ensuring that Brunswick continues to accommodate and attract new residents is essential

to reversing declining population rates in the city. Encouraging new residents, nurturing local entrepreneurs, continuing public investment downtown, and cultivating a welcoming climate for business are critical for continued success downtown.

In addition to identifying existing strengths, the extensive RSVP public input process revealed several critical issues that informed all subsequent planning efforts. A steering committee of dedicated local citizens honed community priorities to determine the following top issues facing Brunswick: addressing the maintenance of buildings and issues of vacancy, ensuring the safety of residents and visitors, addressing the appearance of gateways and signage, bridging gaps in downtown connectivity, providing safe and ample public parking, creating a draw for visitors and locals downtown, promoting Brunswick's existing assets, and cultivating a warm climate for local businesses. While other serious and long-term issues were introduced during the public input process, above all, this plan must be achievable. Therefore, concrete and addressable problems were drawn out of the broader issues identified during the public input process.

Community priorities that emerged during the public input process overwhelmingly echo plans that already exist for downtown. Summarized in the Brunswick RSVP digital appendix, the wealth of existing downtown planning documents for Brunswick reiterate widespread community desires for an activated, revitalized waterfront; a better connected downtown across Bay Street; solutions for vacancy; maintenance; and more. For over a decade and a half, city-sponsored efforts have developed a series of ambitious proposals for an activated waterfront, a bustling hotel and convention center at the former Oglethorpe Hotel site, rejuvenated corridors along Gloucester Street and Norwich Street, expanded housing opportunities throughout the city, and more. To be successful, city officials must begin implementing real, perceptible improvements that address these long-term goals. Committing to implementing items included in the Downtown Brunswick Work Program will help build the momentum necessary to achieve the long-planned revitalization of downtown and tackle larger city-wide issues.



BRUNSWICK'S FAVORITE THINGS:

STRONG COMMUNITY TIES

FRIENDLY PEOPLE, SENSE OF COMMUNITY, ARTS, LOCAL GOVERNMENT,
DOWNTOWN EVENTS

DOWNTOWN'S PHYSICAL STRUCTURE

HISTORICAL BUILDINGS, WALKABLE SQUARES,
SMALL TOWN FEELING

BUSINESS INFRASTRUCTURE

LOCAL SHOPS AND RESTAURANTS, TOURISM, VALUE

NATURAL FEATURES

WATERFRONT, PARKS, OAKS, GREENSPACE, LOCATION



BELIEVE
IN
BRUNSWICK

City officials should work to confront the serious and persistent challenges that threaten Brunswick's quality of life and the future of the city. Poverty, homelessness, intergovernmental tensions, and other important issues emerged during the public input process and must be addressed to achieve the long-term success desired by the community. While these problems all pose serious city-wide challenges for the community, they are outside the scope of this plan as a downtown strategic planning document. Focusing first on implementing real, perceptible improvements downtown may help build the momentum necessary to tackle these systemic long-term issues.

