

# Downtown Living

## SUMMARY

This Community Transformation Strategy is designed for Main Street programs who wish to focus on developing a downtown environment conducive to residential living. This strategy should seek to provide multifaceted living environments that cater to the community's complex and diverse existing and potential regional economic climate. Keeping in mind that retail follows rooftops, this strategy should also be coupled with incentives to open and to develop convenience-based goods and service hubs that can support downtown residents, as well as residents in the broader community.

## KEY DESCRIPTORS

Diversity in housing options, varied price-points and style, developer relationships, codes and ordinances, walkability, community needs, community wants, commuter metrics, engagement, promotions, incentives, uses, convenience, community gathering spaces, beautification, user experience, partnerships, grocery stores, entrepreneur-friendly, safety, transportation solutions and amenities, greenspace, programming, education, public/private services, social opportunities and accessibility.

“The generation that grew up watching shows like ‘Sesame Street’ and ‘Seinfeld’ sees living downtown as a totally viable option.”

— *Patty Burk*

## PROS

Downtown living creates after-hours vitality.

Downtown residents are a captive market.

Downtown living utilizes vacant upper-story units.

Downtown living can meet additional housing needs with lower infrastructure costs.

## CONS

Parking and traffic are important considerations.

Property owners may be unwilling to invest.

Accessibility may be a challenge.

Some people perceive high rehabilitation costs.

Some people have a negative perception of downtown residents.

## SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Housing should cater to varied price points and family sizes.

Building codes and the permitting process are important considerations.

Consider infill projects and building rehabilitation.

Rehabilitation should be preservation-sensitive.

## QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

Do our current codes and ordinances support downtown living?

Who is going to live downtown?

Are there any design guidelines or special processes that would need to be taken into consideration?

What amenities are needed to support downtown living?

Rome, ExploreGeorgia.org



# FOUR-POINT APPROACH ACTIVITIES

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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- Encourage property owners to offer rental rates that the market can bear; this will require statistical data when considering setting the rates.
- Identify developers who have completed other downtown housing projects within your region.
- Activate businesses that will encourage, support and serve downtown residents.
- Encourage business owners to consider residents' schedules when setting hours of operation; this will most likely require the support of statistical data, particularly drive-time and commuter metrics.
- Encourage the use of state and federal rehabilitation incentives to preserve historic homes and buildings.
- Incentivize a home ownership program to reduce renting.
- Work with banks to develop a first-time home buyers' programs.
- Establish a land bank to allow you to acquire property more easily for development/redevelopment.
- Consider using the DDA to purchase properties that could become mixed use or lofts and then redeveloping them through a public-private partnership.
- Consider a parking management program.
- Consider requiring developers to provide parking on- or off-site for residents.

## DESIGN

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- Develop design guidelines that specifically speak to downtown residential living for mixed-use commercial spaces.
- Create green spaces where kids and animals can play.
- Create a downtown that is pedestrian-friendly and enhances walkability.
- Update and maintain public spaces for Americans with Disabilities Act compliance.
- Develop a list of trusted professionals and workers skilled in preservation-sensitive rehabilitations.
- Install public art to enhance and encourage engagement in the built environment.
- Create pet-friendly amenities, e.g. dog park and dog sanitation stations.
- Consider form-based codes to promote the types of development sought.
- Consider revising codes to encourage smaller setbacks from the sidewalk and requiring parking behind the building or in a deck that integrated into the construction.
- Incentivize new construction projects that save historic trees and replant new trees when an old tree dies or is damaged and must be cut down.
- Consider requiring larger-scale redevelopment or new construction projects require greenspaces as part of the construction.

## PROMOTIONS

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- Develop promotional materials to educate and inform people regarding historic tax credit programs and local/state incentives available for redevelopment.
- Host a developer's "open house" for vacant properties that have potential to be redeveloped to accommodate downtown living.
- Develop a list of available properties in both print and digital media.
- Once properties have been redeveloped to offer residential living, host a downtown open house to showcase available units.
- Host or create downtown events specifically geared towards residents, such as a back-to-school event, homecoming event, trick-or-treating, holiday event or celebratory parade.

## ORGANIZATION

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- Develop ordinances that address the use of sidewalks by businesses, e.g. tables, chairs and product merchandising. Ensure ADA compliance.
- Apply for Georgia Department of Community Affairs Rural Zone designation.
- Nominate the downtown district or individual properties for National Register designation so that historic tax credits can be utilized on eligible projects.
- Create a community revitalization/redevelopment plan to aid in the application of Low-Income Housing Tax Credits.
- Define or refine ordinances that address downtown living.
- Maintain strong residential zoning for historic traditional neighborhoods surrounding downtown.
- Work with local code enforcement officer to educate residents and property owners regarding downtown ordinances.

# PARTNERS

Realtors

Developers and property managers who have experience with mixed-use projects

Downtown property owners

Local tax commission

Local tax assessor

Georgia Department of Community Affairs

State Historic Preservation Division

Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation

Georgia Cities Foundation

Local planning and zoning staff

Your downtown's building inspector

Local historic preservation commission

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development

Parking and Transportation Association of Georgia