

DOWNTOWN OPELIKA REVITALIZATION

CPLN 7200 URBAN DESIGN STUDIO | DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE |
COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS | AUBURN UNIVERSITY | SPRING 2019 |

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INTRODUCTION

STUDIO PROCESS

- SENSING
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INTRODUCTION TO OPELIKA

Formerly known as Oppilika, the town of Opelika as we now know was established in 1733.

One of the most defining moments for this small, rural town was the introduction of the railroad – in 1846, the first railroad extension put Opelika on the map. The original town boundaries, were described as "being one mile in every direction from the railroad station", which was thought to be the center of town. In 1868, the first county courthouse was built, and in the next year, Opelika National Bank opened. In the next few decades, Opelika's industries were found in an electricity plant, a cotton mill, a manufacturing company, and a hospital. In 2000, current Historic Downtown Opelika had an urban design revitalization and began its branding. After the construction of Tigertown in 2005, Opelika had a similar boost in economic investment, and so became the town we see today.

This being said, the values that make Opelika unique are its willingness to embrace being a small town and a southern feel; with that comes its strong civic engagement and shared sense of community. It thrives on the small business, as it is juxtaposed by the larger box stores in Tigertown and the university in Auburn's downtown. Opelika's downtown is a walkable core of historic buildings, diverse retail, extensive dining options and grand churches and public buildings. The area is an attraction for students from Auburn University as well as the surrounding region. A growing body of young people are choosing to live and work in the Opelika and Auburn area, which means the pressure to expand downtown's appeal will only grow.

Working as a class for a project to Revitalize Downtown Opelika, each of the five teams tackled a different project. Team A focused on investment in a public art master plan, increasing community, using art as entertainment and function, and making Opelika's downtown more appealing. Team B focused on the Courthouse Square Park revitalizing through increasing pedestrian friendliness, social programs and revitalization, and promoting sustainability. Team C named their interest in revitalization 'Dust Off Downtown' an economic and community development strategy that draws pedestrian participation upwards. Team D consisted of a rejuvenation and investment of the Lewis Cooper Jr Memorial Library through investing in pedestrian walkability, connectedness, and public green space. Finally, Team E focused on creating an appealing and safe pedestrian footbridge over the railroad, which attracts community members and visitors.

RAILROAD AVENUE RECONNECTING DOWNTOWN

TEAM A

COURTHOUSE SQUARE

TEAM B

COURTHOUSE SQUARE

In recent years, Opelika, Alabama has successfully transformed its historic downtown into a destination which encourages visitors to step back in time and explore its streets, historic buildings, and congregate around the historical center symbolized by the railroad tracks. Downtown Opelika also offers several cultural and commercial experiences for its residents including wine-trails, farmers-markets, parades, fine dining restaurants, and shopping. The downtown area offers year-round opportunities for residents to partake in truly unique experiences. During holiday seasons, the city of Opelika comes alive! For example, during the Christmas season, the City of Opelika encourages both residents and visitors to wander the streets, where people often congregate next to a train that is brought to the center of the city, and parked on the railroad which runs through downtown. Opelika also organizes events for other major holidays such as Easter, in which the downtown area offers a family-centered festival based in the town square. When there are no holidays, downtown Opelika continues to attract activity. Visitors and residents will typically travel to the town square to use any available parking spaces, relax in the small seating area, or use the green field for recreation with family or pets. While the town square of downtown Opelika is beautiful, and plays a critical role as serving as an event space for major holidays such as Christmas or Easter, the space is not fully utilized throughout the remainder of the year in a significant way. According to our observations, the primary reasons the town square is underutilized is because of two discrete characteristics- the absence of viable seating, and the absence of shade. By offering more of these two physical features, the town square can be better utilized, and inspire more use by improvements in the urban design of its structure and space.



The Courthouse Square Park, located at South 9th Street, between Ave A and B, is the square park right in front of the Lee County Court House, in Opelika, Alabama. It is located in the historical downtown of Opelika, offering citizens open, green and public space to enjoy their free time, and family time. The location of the Courthouse Square is key to the economic, social, and sustainable development of the city downtown. This space has a potential to offer citizens free activities all year long, attract stakeholders and investors, provide people a place to exercise, enjoy outdoors activities, and revitalize the city of Opelika. Today, the Courthouse Square is underutilized and its only used to its fullest potential on special events. The Courthouse Square could be a great, democratic, accessible, enjoyable public space for everyone.

GOALS

- Increase pedestrian traffic through the town square as much as possible in order to build awareness of the space, contributing to the quality of life of the community through social revitalization.
- Reduce automobile dependency in the area surrounding the town square.
- Foster sustainability through the implementation of green infrastructure in the town square.
- Increase the amount of usable space by providing amplified event venue offerings, as well as shaded areas with seating

OBJECTIVES

- Revitalize the town square to increase citizen utilization.
- Add infrastructure that is able to be utilized for both public and private events to formally establish the area as a center on which the community can gather.
- Improve landscape elements and structures to be functional during each of the four seasons- so that events can be held in this space during Spring, Summer, Fall, or Winter, without major impediments to gathering.
- Reform and redesign open spaces around the primary structures of the square to encourage more physical activities, provide a number of significant benefits, and various important functions in order to improve the quality of life in the area
- Provide energy neutral features (fountains, lights, and other aesthetic design features) which are cost neutral on account of green energy designs implemented throughout the remainder of the square (solar panels, etc.)



SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS

- The city square provides seating area for visitors (all ages)
- The city square is surrounded by beautiful old buildings which is good to attract more visitor
- The city square is also have a good amount of green space for outdoor activities
- The square is also have a beautiful fountain as a symbol of downtown character
- There are so many good restaurants and pub around the city square and people can have a nice walk
- There is a good amount of parking spot for visitor.
- There are also small shops (boutique, cheese store, bakery, birthday supplies, boutique) in downtown area

WEAKNESS

- There is no enough facilities or features for kids and families to do activities at the city square (stage, proper seating area, playground, covers)
- There are some buildings which underutilized
- There is no event or crowd at the center of downtown to attract more people
- There are too many cars park around the city square which create a safety concern for bikers and pedestrian



SWOT ANALYSIS

OPPORTUNITIES

- Increase overall space and acreage of square by rezoning.
- Drive additional traffic to events. Increase utility of space to local economy and quality of life.
- Drive additional traffic by families to utilize child friendly spaces.
- Adding Stage for events- the small stage for events would emulate the design used in the municipal park (Monkey Park) with the critical difference being that the structure itself would be energy neutral, by TOWN SQUARE URBAN DESIGN MASTER PLAN The Harmonious Open Space 7 employing solar panels on the roof of the structure.
- Open space- The open space of the area can be improved by providing better seating areas, but also greater shade through gazebos, and shade trees. This will improve four-seasons use.
- Gazebos- These are intended to be small seating areas for picnics or social gatherings, which provide a year-round supplement for natural shade.
- Children's play area- Within the confines of the green space, build more functional, yet safe and constrained areas for young children to play and run.
- Maintain current Fountain- The current fountain area is beautiful and should be preserved.
- Amphitheatre- Around the central stage, we would propose expanded seating for both event and practical use which can accommodate larger numbers of people.
- LED Solar powered panel street light. Our plan is to use excess power from the pavilion to facilitate the power of the street lights around the square.
- Add bike lanes to incentivize alternative transportation methods.



SWOT ANALYSIS

THREATS

- Ease of access for the elderly or disabled may decrease slightly.
- Creation of additional regulations through rezoning is problematic.
- Movement of parking spaces according to plan may be unpopular with those using the courthouse.
- It may not be possible to re-zone and acquire sufficient parking for current use cases of the area.
- Funding.
- Historical perception of the area as unwelcoming to minorities.



LOGISTIC ANALYSIS

In order to observe the values and priorities of people who visit Downtown Opelika, We chose to actively observe the people particularly in City Square in front of the Court house. We decided to go there from approximately 11:00 A.M. to 1:00 PM on a Friday and Saturday (March 1st-2nd 2019) , because we assumed that it would be busy during those hours, and we could reasonably assume most of the people we were observing were professionals on their lunchbreaks, Parents who pick up their children from Baptist Church, and Residents who live there. During those two hours, we focused on people who we believed fit for our observation– between the ages of 30 -60 , dressed casually and formally, comfortably, or in athletic wear, possibly carrying a backpack or documents. Based off of our observations, we would postulate that the top six values and priorities of people who visit downtown Opelika – particularly the City Square area are:

- 1) Walking their kids or pets
- 2) Socializing with their relatives or friends
- 3) Working at the Court house, Law firm, Restaurant, Bar, Small Shops
- 4) Shopping and Eating at the Restaurant
- 5) Picking up or sending their children to Baptist Church

The majority of people we observed were there to apply for license plate, mobile home registration, or marriage certificates at the courthouse. Some of them we found waiting outside with their family or watching their kids playing with the fountain. Also we found many people went straight to the court house, restaurant, shops, and church.

For example, we talked to one person who was sitting on the bench while he and his children were waiting for his wife was applying for their license plate. As active observers, we did collect some pictures and interview these people with several questions on the following page

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Where are you from?
2. What items would you like to purchase or refreshments would you like to have?
3. What attracts you to this area/square?
4. What qualities of other cities or towns would you like to see in this area?
5. Do you think this place is considered underutilized
6. In the future, would you like to bike to or around this area?

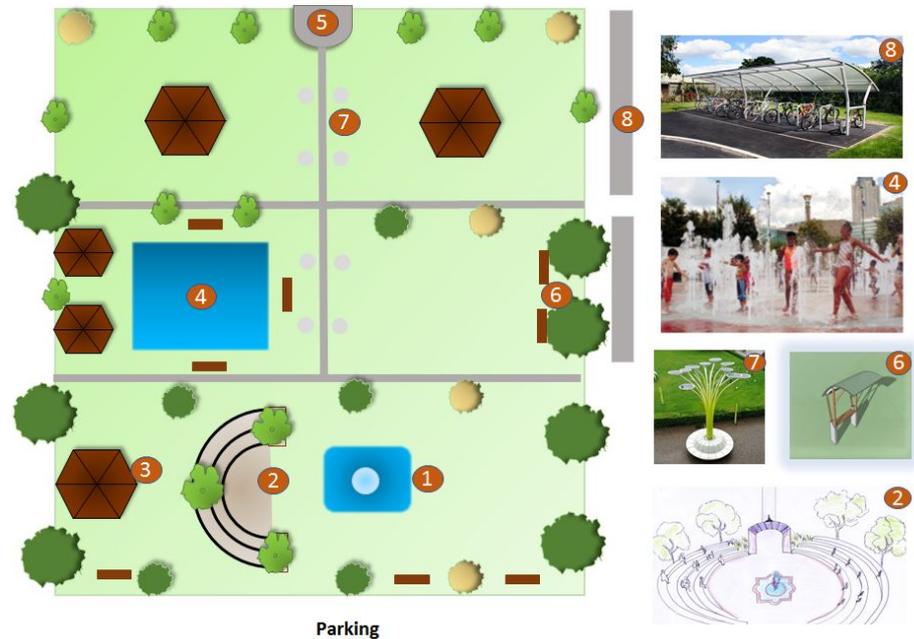
RESULTS

During our observation, we were able to interview more than 20 people – particularly adults (ages between 35- 65, some with children). Most of them are local residents – from Opelika, Auburn, or other Lee County area. We have found that a lot of people do not necessarily spend their time at the square except when there is something that they need to do. (Picking up their children from daycare, Applying for certain license or certificate at the courthouse, going to the restaurants or small shops around downtown). Residents would like to have - public events that provide a platform for local merchants, artists, musicians, food trucks. - bike paths, boulevard, and regular intervals of seating areas throughout the space. Also, the square is under-utilized as there is nothing much for children and older members of the population to do.

IMPLEMENTATION

Based on the research our group conducted both passively and actively, we are making a variety of recommendations- these are generally grouped along two general types. First, we make suggestions on the re-zoning of certain spaces to change uses of specific parts of the downtown square area. Second, we suggest several installations or additions to existing facilities and infrastructures within the area. These recommendations are all designed at improving the utility and usability of the space by the community itself. Our suggestions are: -

- Focus on aesthetics, make it more colorful and kid friendly
- Eliminate current benches and invest in better and more functional seating
- Add more physical elements such as an amphitheater, water features, picnic tables, stage for events, children's play area, gazebos, flowers, and solar street lights.
- Improve appearance to make the downtown more welcoming for visitors
- Improve signage, and accessibility to the open spaces
- Enact comprehensive changes but also preserve the historic and architectural character of the city.



Courthouse Square ,Opelika AL

- 1.Fountain
- 2.Amphitheater
- 3.Gazebos
- 4.Splash Pad
- 5.Stage for event
- 6.Semi enclosed Seating
- 7.Light poles with solar panels
- 8.Bike parkings

IMPLEMENTATION

- Stage for Events- the small stage for events would emulate the design used in the municipal park (Monkey Park) with the critical difference being that the structure itself would be energy neutral, and photo-enhanced, by employing solar panels on the roof of the structure we will elevate the perception of the surrounding space.
- Open Space- The open space of the area can be improved by providing better seating areas but also greater shade through gazebos, and shade trees. This will improve four-seasons use.
 - Gazebos- These are intended to be small seating areas for picnics or social gatherings, which provide a year-round supplement for natural shade.
 - Children's Play Area- Within the confines of the green space, build more functional, yet safe and constrained areas for young children to play and run.
 - Maintain Current Fountain- The current fountain area is beautiful and should be preserved.
 - Amphitheatre- Around the central stage, we would propose expanded seating for both event and practical use which can accommodate larger numbers of people.
 - LED Solar Powered Panel Street Light- Our plan is to use excess power from the pavilion to facilitate the power of the street lights around the square
 - WiFi – creating an office away from the office. WiFi would enhance the business district encouraging a change of scenery and a natural working space.
- Adopt -a- Garden – citizens would have the opportunity to adopt a raised planter where they can care and maintain plantings of flowers, fruits, and vegetables. Urban agriculture promotes healthy eating, active living, improving nutrition, physical activity, community engagement, agricultural education, and agrotourism in the city.
- Bike lanes – Provide bike lanes to incentivize alternative transportation methods.
 - Bike Rental Program – A bike program to be instituted in the park in conjunction with Downtown Opelika. This program would be similar to many larger cities, where bike rentals would be located in the park, and other locations throughout the downtown area. Users would access the bike rentals with the use of a credit card, ride the bike for the determined time, and return the bike to any bike station within the network.

DESIGN SUGESTIONS

































FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

- Quotes of Suggested Elements
- Small Gazebo Hayneedle
 - 12ft. - \$1,1679
 - Home Depot
 - 12ft. \$2,504
 - Amish Country
 - 10ft. - \$3,595
 - 12ft. \$ 4,295
- Large Gazebo Hayneedle
 - 18ft. \$5,187
- Fifthroom:
 - 20ft. - \$26,800
 - 28ft. - \$38,500
- Kids Splash Pad Pricing range \$2,000 - \$25,000
- Amphitheater Elevated Gazebo
 - Priced above
- Portable Stage
 - \$5,754 - \$7,514
- Pergola
 - \$400 – 3,500

POTENTIAL STAKEHOLDERS

- Project designers and developers
- Regional and local government, public authorities
- Financial institutions
- Department of Planning Environment
- Tourism department
- Environmental Organization's
- National Recreation and park Association, Play Space Grants



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CASE STUDIES

We have included several case studies which are relevant to this project as a reference for future development of the Town Square.

Richmond, Indiana:

Bike Path The City of Richmond is currently in the process of implementing bike paths throughout the downtown area and Depot District. Their ideology is to connect Downtown Richmond to local businesses and attraction which is the Depot District. Many people in the community are in favor of the new bike paths, although several are upset about the loss of parking to create the bike path. For the City of Opelika, this proposal suggests something very similar to the City of Richmond. We would like to eliminate the street parking on Avenue A on the opposite side of the Lee County Courthouse. Our vision is to connect the courthouse square to other parts of the downtown area as well as neighboring residential areas. With the abundance on parking in throughout the downtown area, we do not see a parking issue arising from the decrease in parking along Avenue A. We think the would ensure safety by slowing traffic, and provide proper street crossing without people parallel parking and exiting their vehicles in oncoming traffic.

The screenshot shows a web page for 'RICHMOND MATTERS', a platform for commentary and conversations about life in Richmond, Indiana. The page features a navigation menu with categories: HOME, COMMUNITY LIFE, GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS, IN THE NEWS, and REGION AND STATE. The main content area is under the 'GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS' section, featuring an article titled 'Getting stuck on parking' posted on September 4, 2018, with 10 comments. The article includes a satellite map of downtown Richmond, Indiana, showing streets like NE St and NE St, and various businesses such as Richmond Furniture Gallery, Timmons Water Systems, and Better Homes and Gardens Real Estate. A sidebar on the right features a profile for Chris Hardie, who lives and works in Richmond, Indiana, and runs a small business. He mentions volunteering for local not-for-profits and campaigning for elected office. He also writes at ChrisHardie.com.

Want an email when there's something new here?



Bogotá, DC., Colombia: Economic Development

Parque El Virrey in Bogotá is a park in an urban area, that provides people an open space for recreation, to exercise, for old people to relax, while little kids can play safe. Even though the park is located between a highway and two 3 avenues, the design of the landscape, isolate the park making it safe for families to enjoy their free time, people walking their dogs, or young group of people to practice sports. Also, the park has a bike trail that connects the city, to provide transportation, but also offers space for recreational biking. For Opelika, is a great example of how a green space, can revitalize areas in an economic way, attracting more people to do outdoor activities.



Centennial Olympic Park Fountain, Atlanta, Georgia: Splash Pads

The Centennial Olympic Park Fountain, located in Atlanta, is the perfect example of an open space designed for people all ages. The splash pad are live elements, that people can interact with, sit around, or just watch. The dynamic that the splash generates, attract people, make them stay for longer periods of time, and convert the place into *the* place to be six months of the year. Around this element, activities, and commerce can grow, as well as social interactions between strangers, strengthens the relationships that already exist, and increases safety.



Dayton, Ohio: Courthouse Square

The City of Dayton Courthouse Square is flooding with life. The square is known as a place to see when visiting the area. This is where the local professionals enjoy their lunch daily with the Lunchtime Entertainment. The lunchtime entertainment includes live music and street lined food trucks. But that's not all! This courthouse square provides a communal environment for family gatherings, organization functions, weekly events, seasonal events, arts and culture, nightlife, festivals, and much more. It is a place where locals, and tourist love to visit.

As for the City of Opelika, we would like to provide the same atmosphere. With the implementation of the amphitheater, we wish to have weekly and seasonal events with live music and entertainment. We want families to utilize this space for family reunions. We want churches to utilize this space for religious gatherings. We want organizations to utilized this space for organizational events. We want school and community groups to utilize this space for outdoor classrooms, and community engagement. Our proposed courthouse square park would do just that, creating an environment for the enjoyment of all no matter the age group, demographic, or economic class.

SPATIAL ANALYSIS

Trends in the location of commercial and residential properties are evident through the use of GIS resources provided by the City of Opelika's Planning Department. General commercial, office and retail commercial, and residential commercial properties are concentrated primarily in the city center. The city center is concentrated around institutional buildings such as the Lee County Courthouse as well as local retail. Both low density and high-density residential developments are concentrated on the 16 city's outskirts, typically located alongside a grid network of residential streets. Industrial properties are situated in clusters adjacent to major roads and intersections. Low density and high density residential are located to the furthest extent away from the city center and take up the greatest degree of square footage. Commercial trends apparent in the analysis of building typology at the city scale are also apparent in an examination of Opelika's downtown. The categories of Neighborhood commercial and Office and Retail Commercial predominant Opelika's downtown, with high density residential properties located on the periphery of the city center. Further spatial analysis through a layer of satellite imagery in ArcMap demonstrates the extensive amount of available parking spaces available alongside North Railroad Avenue and Avenue B. As a consequence of the large amount of available parking spaces, there is a limited amount of open green space in Opelika's downtown with the exception of the town square located adjacent to the Lee County Courthouse and the First Baptist Church of Opelika. These geospatial analyses demonstrate the importance of the revitalization of the Town Square; there is an abundance of retail and a shortage of open green space. Commercial properties would benefit from the creation of an improve public park as it would serve to attract families from the outlying residential areas. The town square would serve to redefine Opelika's into the modern day while simultaneously celebrating the town's history.

CONCLUSION

In summary, this proposal provides an in depth analysis of ways which the Town Square of Opelika can be improved to serve all people. Initial evaluations and observations of the current use of the site highlighted several opportunities for improvement. An absence of outside amenities, such as open seating and natural shading, showcase that the location lacks key features. Simple alterations could improve the space by providing more opportunities for social interaction, creating a harmonious space. Additionally, improvements in the amenities of the Town Square would provide opportunities for the City of Opelika to host events and activities which would attract new sources of revenue. Having already realized substantial commercial development, the downtown area requires an open space which can service multiple needs. These events would also raise attention for Opelika, marketing the town to attract new businesses, residents, and talent to the city. Finally, value is added to the entire space through improvements in the visual aesthetics and atmosphere through the implementation of green infrastructure and sustainable practices. By providing inspiration for the re-discovery of the Town Square as a central piece of the community, the residents of Opelika are given a new reason to explore their city. The authors of this report believe that these recommendations are not only necessary but crucial in order for Opelika to realize the potential not only of its downtown, but to guide its development into the future.

DUST OFF DOWNTOWN

TEAM C

DUST OFF DOWNTOWN

Our team values the existing culture and character of Opelika. The brick buildings, as well as the history of the railroad help to shape and form this culture and character. The building form and facades are a result of this story. Our project goals seek to highlight, restore and reveal these cultural characteristics. The main part of downtown also faces the railroad and this spatial connection is also important to us, which is why we aim to connect downtown to the existing, underutilized railroad depot.

Another valuable part of Opelika that we see is the existing roastery and brewery. These new land uses are exciting, and oriented towards young people. These business and the improvements on 1st Ave are pushing downtown towards the north. We really value the public realm formed by these business types, and therefore our goals are to establish an official district for public manufacturing processes.

The existing historic facades of Opelika are also beautiful and valuable. Our team identifies these facades as something which makes Opelika unique. Other aesthetic things we value are the street trees and landscape elements on Railroad Ave. There are some really nice spaces which are pedestrian friendly due to their material, color, spatial design and tree cover. Our goals reflect these values by extending this treatment to a larger area. These qualities should reach throughout downtown without any dead space. This should also help with vibrancy and economic redevelopment.



Finally, the safety or perceived safety is a critical value that our team holds. Downtowns can sometimes give the image of crime or danger at night, yet Opelika crime data does not support. The value of safety is shared not only in our team but throughout the community. This can explain why some of the more active businesses and well-lit areas tend to be clustered together. The perceived safety is hurting several businesses downtown. Our objectives work to increase safety by increasing the vibrance and activity, and the lighting throughout downtown.

Vision

- To make an attractive downtown by improving vibrance, perceived safety, aesthetics

Mission

- To be the best Opelika we can be, using what Opelika already has.



GOALS

- 1) Vibrance
 - a) Establish and support Public Manufacturing District
 - b) Reduce vacancies, tackle the root causes
 - c) Create new programming, events, and walking tours that bring people downtown
 - d) Add street furniture (benches, trash cans)
 - e) Support fun businesses such as horse taxi, bike taxi
- 2) Perceived Safety
 - a) Create a safe environment through “Eyes on the street” (see vibrance)
 - b) Add new lighting improvements, under the bridge, etc.
 - c) Separate traffic and improve accessibility (Walkable sidewalks and road crossings, safe bike lanes)
- 3) Aesthetics
 - a) Install landscape improvements (tree cover, interesting plantings, open spaces and lawns, street furniture)
 - b) Protect, improve, and restore building facades
 - c) Repair and resurface roads (material, color, lane painting)
 - d) Increase tree cover throughout downtown
- 4) Cultural Identity
 - a) Tell the history of the town with the railroad - railroad park, railroad depot museum
 - b) Increase historic district tourism - reveal history and character of area, historic points, historic facades, historic businesses

Analysis

SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS

- Church traffic. (Sunday)
- Office traffic. (Lunch)
- Elderly people. (Mornings)
- Parking Areas
- Southern Union College Campus
- Railroad Attraction
- History and Culture
- Facade Quality



SWOT ANALYSIS

Weaknesses

- Zoning
- Maybe residential is limited to down
- Too many offices
- Not well connected to residence, located too far
- Too many cars
- Patrons side equality
- Lack of interesting building layouts
- Shapes of buildings
- Color of the area
- Light Quality
- Streetlights
- Old buildings/Infrastructure
- Control of Railroad
- A lot of Lawn/Walking Qualities



SWOT ANALYSIS

Opportunities

- Residential.
- Adding a farmers market on the weekend to attract more traffic, to increase revenue Needs venue space
- Murals along open walls (Pedestrian Directory)
- Way finding Signage
- Bank lawn
- Coors building
- Under the bridges
- Depot
- Green space/Food Truck Platform



SWOT ANALYSIS

Threats

- WalMart
- Tigertown
- Auburn Mall plus Opelika Road
- Winn Dixie
- Movie theatre/Tiger 13
- Citizen buying in
- Community buying in
- Community Involvement
- Money Costs
- Business Climate Change
- Competition w/Auburn • Demographics



INTERVIEW RESULTS

The SWOT analysis could give us a design instruction, however, we don't know whether this design result will be accepted by the local residents. In order to learn people's requirements and their desires for the downtown area, we design some questions, and interview people in the downtown area. Interviewee samples are various, including the elderly people living in the Opelika, the young students groups from Auburn, shop attendants and store owners.

From the feedback, people stated that they like people, their neighbor and the community atmosphere which people could gather, and chat with their acquaintance. They hoped there could be more store or shopping mall which can provide them more convenience. However, they also wanted to maintain the traditional atmosphere of the community. Some interviewees believed the downtown area could be more attractive if there are more pedestrians and advertisements.



INTERVIEW RESULTS

Based on our SWOT analysis and the design conceive, we showed some intention maps to interviewees, and make them select some sites which they like best.

The most popular spot is the farmer's markets followed by parks. Next popular sites are shopping malls and art music centers. Few people like the train historic museum and food trucks.

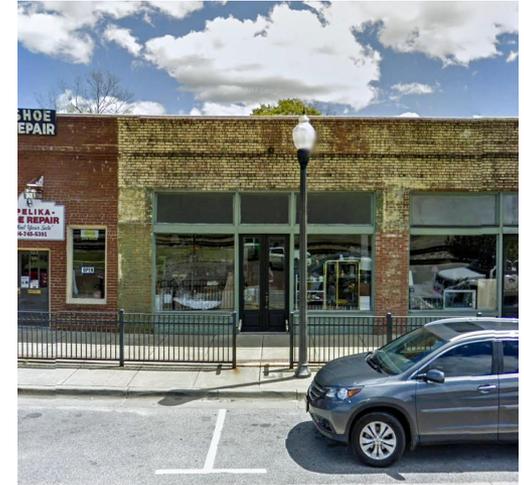


Goals and Objectives

Aesthetics

For the goal of aesthetics, our main objectives were to install landscape improvements (tree cover, interesting plantings, open spaces and lawns, street furniture); protect, improve and restore building facades; repair and resurface roads (material, color, lane painting); and increase tree cover throughout downtown.

The aesthetics are an important part of our vision and mission for downtown. Many of our goals are interconnected, and aesthetics always plays a part. Aesthetics can make or break the vibrance and perceived safety of an area, and the quality of aesthetics will also determine the cultural identity of an area. A specific focus on improving the aesthetics in downtown will therefore have a large impact. These objectives in the goal of improving aesthetics of downtown are also determined by the major problems we found with downtown during the SWOT analysis. For example, the lack of trees and interesting human scale plantings is a huge deterrent to the public sphere downtown. Improving these factors with the objectives we laid out will help Opelika to be a competitive downtown.



Aesthetics



Resurface roads/human scale detail

Protect, improve and restore facades

Increase Tree Cover downtown

Interesting open space and plantings

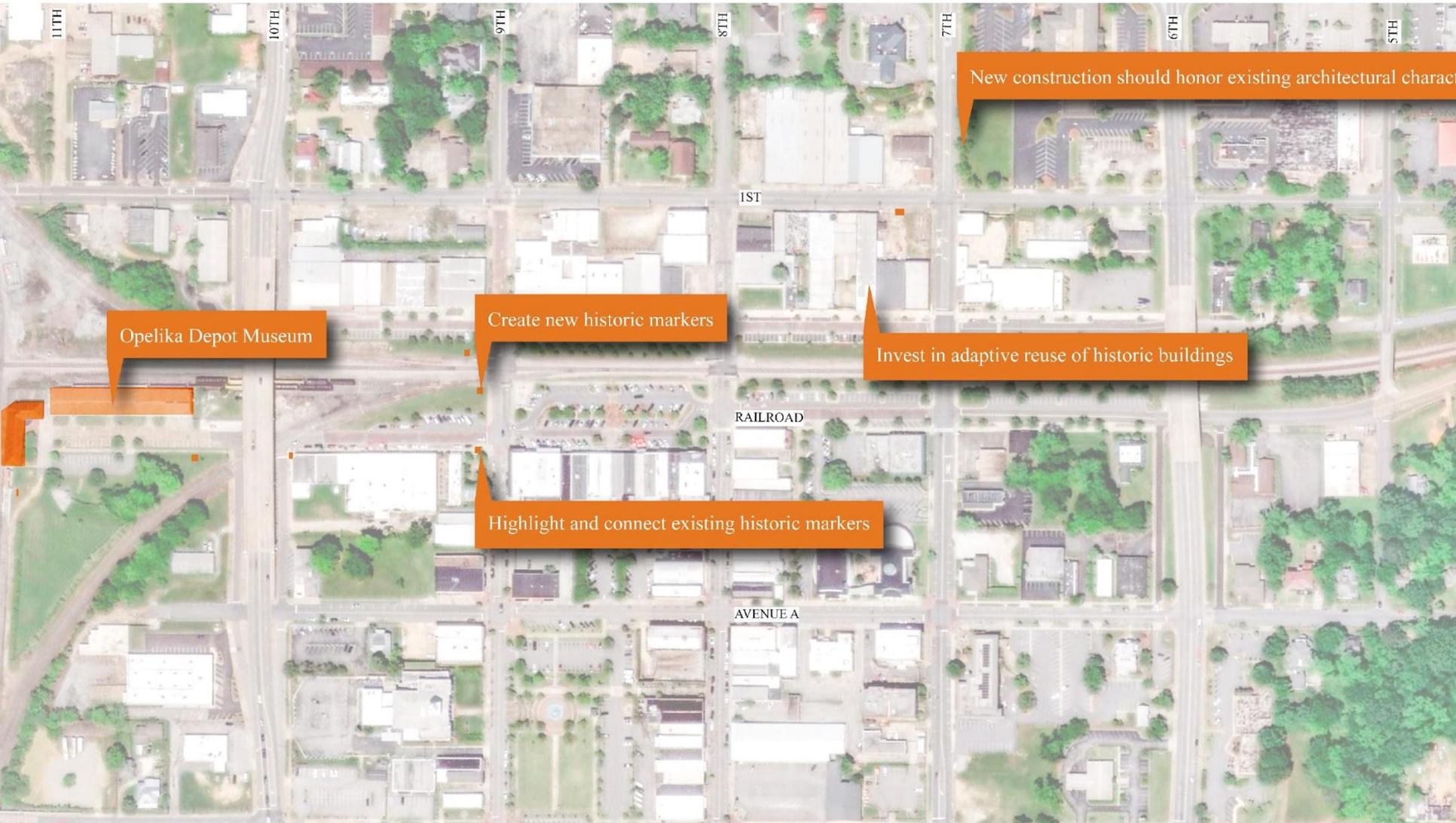
Cultural Identity

The cultural identity of downtown Opelika is a quality that we previously identified as a strength. The culture is currently expressed through downtown wayfinding, historic facades, historic districts, signage and public art exhibits such as the railroad ties or the train car in the park east of town. These identifiers of the unique heritage of Opelika help to determine a sense of space. As the downtown expands northward, and new development occurs in existing parcels, we want to be sure that the new blends in and adds to the old, rather than clashes.

Our objectives for the goal of cultural identity were to use the long-standing history of the railroad to establish a unique cultural brand for Opelika; increase historic district tourism through revealing history and character in historic points, historic facades and historic businesses. One of the major ways we intended to accomplish this was by using the Opelika Depot as the site for a history museum. We also wanted to incorporate walking tours of downtown which could help to tell the stories of the past.



Culture



New construction should honor existing architectural character

Opelika Depot Museum

Create new historic markers

Invest in adaptive reuse of historic buildings

Highlight and connect existing historic markers

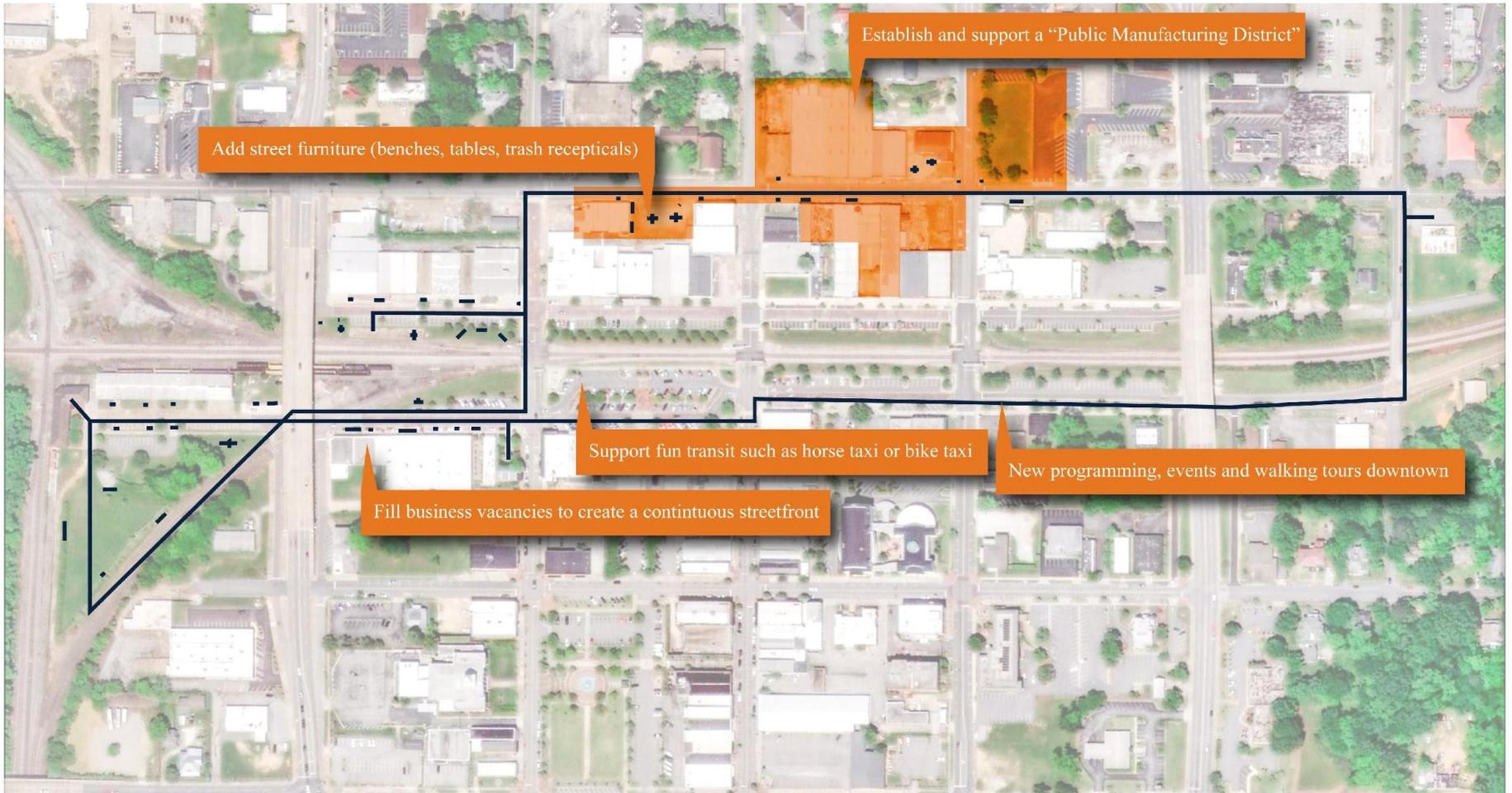
Vibrance

Vibrance is the quality of a space that is full of life, full of people. There are parts of downtown Opelika which currently have a great amount of vibrance, and we would like to capitalize on the power of vibrant public space to create new business and cultural opportunities. Vibrance is also connected to perceived safety through ‘eyes on the street.’

The objectives we created for the goal of vibrance were to establish and support a public manufacturing district; reduce vacancies and tackle root causes of vacancy; create a more walkable downtown with new programming and events; add more street furniture to make downtown more pleasant; and support local businesses such as horse taxi rides or bike taxis.



Vibrance



Establish and support a "Public Manufacturing District"

Add street furniture (benches, tables, trash recepticals)

Support fun transit such as horse taxi or bike taxi

New programming, events and walking tours downtown

Fill business vacancies to create a continuous streetfront

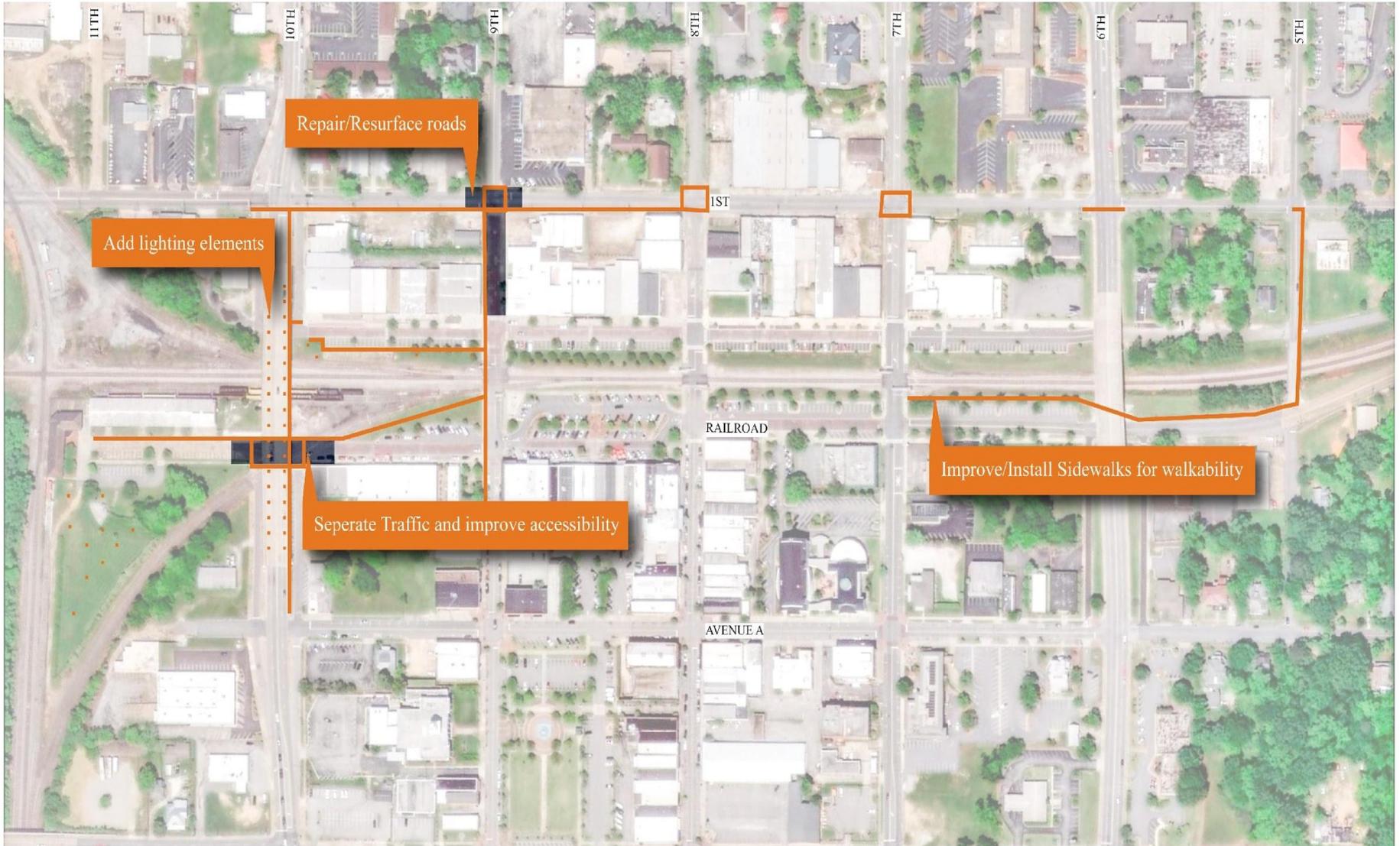
Perceived Safety

In our previous analysis of Opelika, we found that the crime data showed low amounts of crime and violent crime. However, despite this, many parts of Opelika don't feel very safe. There are problems that make you not want to stay in Opelika after it gets dark. Perceived safety is extremely important for the commercial and cultural success of downtown Opelika. Women and children are much less likely to participate in the public sphere in situations that are not safe, or appear to not be safe.

The objectives that we created for the goal of improving perceived safety in downtown Opelika were to repair and resurface roads; make the sidewalks more walkable and pedestrian friendly; add new lighting and improve the lighting situation; and separate traffic and improve accessibility downtown.



Perceived Safety



Project Strategies

The localities which we decided were best place to implement our goals and objectives are a new farmers market, the Opelika Depot, underneath the 10th street bridge, and a new commercial complex. We took these four sites into greater detail of analysis and design. The following plan view includes all four sites with our area-wide improvements.

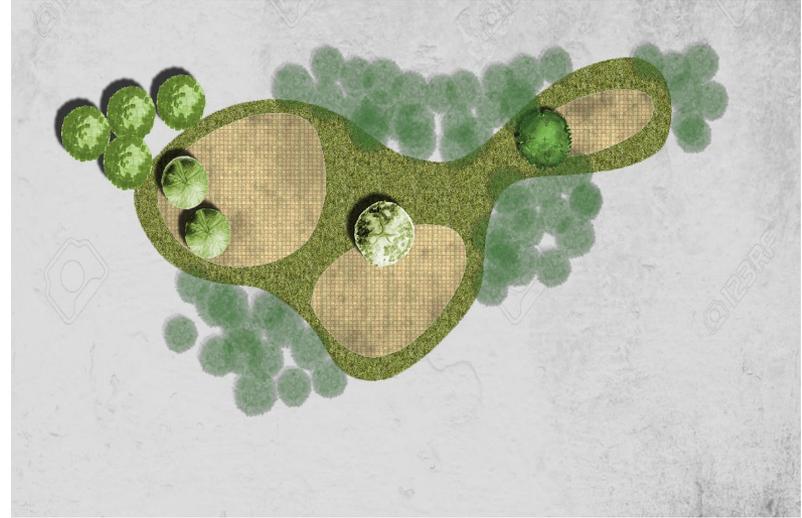


Farmer's Market

The farmers market concept polled really strongly with citizens who we interviewed. The farmers market is a temporary space downtown right next to the railroad tracks which can be improved with permanent structures, like paving, etc. The farmers market is a way for after-church traffic to come to the center of downtown



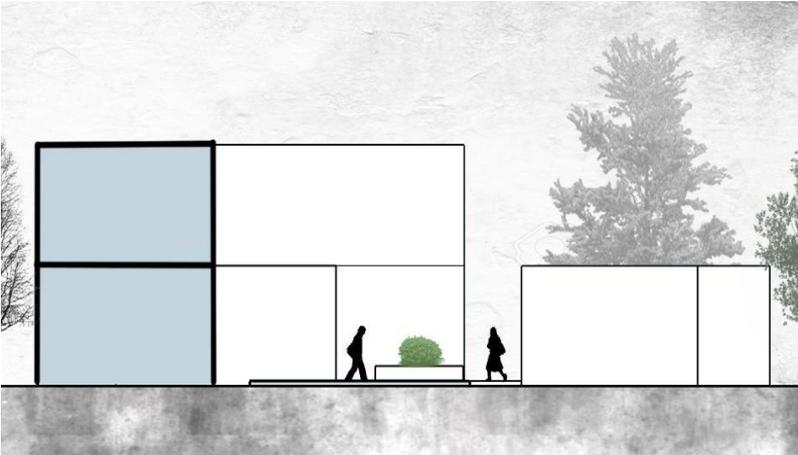
Train Depot Park



Music Venue



Shopping Mall



Implementation

Stakeholders

- Citizen Interest Groups
- City of Opelika
- Railroad Ave Historic District
- East Alabama Arts
- Opelika Main Street
- Cotton District LLC
- Coors
- PNC Bank
- Railroad Companies

Strategies

- Downsize PNC bank
 - Approach the bank with a profitable plan to redevelop their property
 - Reduce the land used by the bank, maintain or increase sq ft
 - Create more leasable space for our shopping mall plan, or alternatively they can sell part of their land for the shopping mall
 - Amend the zoning and comp plan if needed to allow the new uses,
 - possibly add city investment of infrastructure, etc. to negotiations

Strategies

- Citizen Participation Groups
 - Form different groups for streetscape, open space, historic district improvements
 - Get community input on the priorities and character for downtown improvements
 - Hire a firm to create concept drawings of different alternatives
 - Get community feedback on the proposals
 - Devote city money or find grants, and change comp plan/zoning as necessary to accomplish proposals

Strategies

- Move Coors Building
 - Use city money to prioritize façade improvements if the warehouse moves
 - Identify new locations for the coors building
 - Use some land value capture financing on nearby improvements for the food trucks, under the bridge venue, streetscape improvements, and road resurfacing – make it too expensive for the warehouse to stay a warehouse

Budget and Timeline

Project Name	Cost Estimate	Estimated Completion Date
Depot Park	\$300,000 - \$500,000	3-5 Years
Farmer's Markets	Private Capital	2-3 Years
Shopping Mall	Private Capital	3-5 Years
Outdoor Music Venue	Private Capital	1 Year
Food Trucks	Private Capital	1 Year
Train Museum	\$1 million - \$2 million	3-5 Years

CONCLUSION

The Opelika downtown area is a place under the history. The tran depot, warehouses, railroads, signs and special building facades show us that it used to be a thriving area. However, vacant lots, empty stores and poor sidewalks remind us that there should be some improvement to rejuvenate the downtown area. Our goals are making an attractive downtown by improving vibrance, perceived safety, aesthetics and cultural identity, so that many people can be attracted, and experience the traditional community atmosphere in the downtown.

Considering the construction process and the cost, we set different goals in different plan stages. According to our analysis and the feedback from interviewees, we decide to focus on the depot park, farmers' markets, shopping mall and the outdoor music venue in the early stage (First one or two years). When those facilities would be built in future, more people will gather in the downtown area, and increase the tax revenues. Therefore, the government would have enough budget to complete other goals such as repair the poor sidewalks and add new lighting improvements.

OPELIKA PUBLIC ART MASTER PLAN

TEAM D

Michaela, Aaron N., Brad, Tabb, Cong Li, and Weiwei

Introduction

Opelika is a magical town that is passionate about protecting its unique history. The historic Lee County Courthouse and the city's railroads that cross Opelika's downtown have become bustling locations that attract far-reaching tourists. Opelika is also a community-conscious town that strives to create a comfortable and laid-back atmosphere, such as Victorian Christmas, Garden in the Park and the Azalea Trails. Opelika has the Alabama Arts Council, whose mission is to improve the quality of life and economic vibrancy of all Alabama people by supporting the state's rich artistic resources. The committee's goal is to make art an essential element of all Alabama education experience, to participate in and appreciate art, to identify, preserve and display folk traditions.

We believe that the Public Art is of great importance to the vitality of the community. When considering the urban design, we hope to attract more people to the area by creating a public art space and build a more lively downtown. Having a master plan, the city will have guidelines to follow for future projects downtown that everything can fall into.

Why Public Art?

The corner encounters art and has become the norm in current urban life — parks, squares, streets, paintings, sculptures, public facilities. The spread and expansion of public art seem to be leading the development of the city into the aesthetic era. Public art can't just have the same visual stimuli, copy and paste. It also needs to consider the geographical environment, take into account the public's feelings, and finally convey a unique and rich spiritual value, while attracting more people to go out of the house and enter the community.

Why a Public Art Master Plan?

We need a clear understanding of how public art contributes to the livability and prosperity of Opelika. Our mission is to create an attractive outdoor space for Opelika citizens. With that in mind, a public art master plan with several goals in mind:

- Create a pocket park where there is currently a neglected area.
- Create connectivity and walkability for N Railroad Ave and 1st Avenue
- Create art sidewalks, creating a vast resource for active traffic
- Create more active street life and make downtown retail activities more active
- Creating streetscape paintings in the retail store's backdoor parking lot makes this trail a viable way to get to the city center.
- Create more public art and seating, providing space for people to rest and relax

Master Plan Components

The master plan recommendations are organized into three main sections.

The first section, “Vision for Public Art”.

The second section, “Potential Locations for Public Art” describes the locations that should be the focus for new projects.

The final sections, “A Roadmap for Getting There,” “Governance of the Public Art Program,” “Processes for Public Art,” “Administration of the Public Art Program” and “Guidelines for the Public Art Program,” all describe how the Opelika should move forward with public art.

Vision for Public Art

Art + Entertainment

Public art not only stays on the surface of aesthetics, art in the community should have more interactive and entertaining.

- The umbrella themed Park and small parks which connected to the main line, provide a good area for the public to enjoy the entertainment of art in the community.
- The entertainment of art should not be limited to children, but should be universal to all ages. In order to achieve entertainment, we should be more diversified and creative, such as encouraging people to use their senses through sound or light to enhance people's interaction.
- The entertainment of art also needs to pay attention to the distance between the art project and the pedestrian. Closer contact with the project will increase people's sense of participation, and they will become more involved in the art project to learn about other related projects.
- The entertainment of art should be through the works of art to enhance the downtown visual experience. Through the art projects of different forms and themes, people can feel different sense of belonging, and connect different small areas through art.

Vision for Public Art

The mural under the bridge



Vision for Public Art

Art + Function

Public art does not exist alone, and there must be functional support behind it. Public art not only brings beauty to the city, but also plays an effective and practical role in community design

- When displaying the functionality of public art, sidewalk is a good area to show how to integrate art and functionality. Sidewalk is the only way for people to go from one scenic spot to another in the downtown area. Therefore, in order to enhance the experience of pedestrians, different walking routes can be designed. People can experience the public art with different atmosphere according to the different directions on the sidewalk.
- Essential things that could be implemented into art. Infrastructure plays an Essential role in city life, but is often difficult to implement into their surroundings. Through artistic means, colors and pictures can revitalize the cold infrastructure.
- Public art helps people establish connections between downtown and different locations, whether walking or driving. Downtown Opelika has a number of scattered art projects and iconic attractions that can be merged through artistic connectivity. The Downtown Opelika is divided into two parts because of the railway. The connection between the two sides of the railway can be strengthened through the artistic connection and the echo of the works of art on both sides.

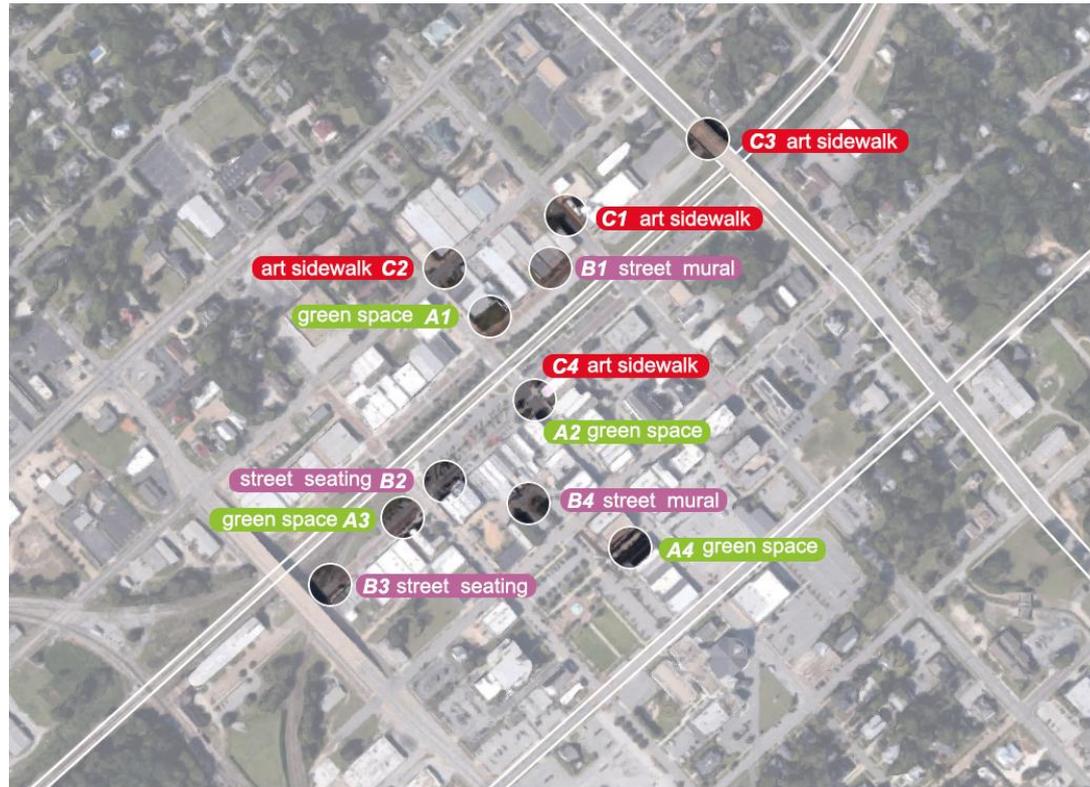
Vision for Public Art

Street Park



Potential Locations

The following is a list of locations where Opelika should consider public art projects over the next decade. The list includes recommended sites for new green space corner, recreation street seating area, street mural and other temporary artworks.



Potential Locations

A. Green space

Downtown now still has some idle green Spaces, which can be redesigned to provide space for people to play and have a rest. We experienced Opelika's street green spaces in person, choosing places we thought could be transformed.

A1 is where we decided to remodel the terminal. The land is now a vacant lot, so it is highly malleable. We hope to add artistic elements to this land and provide a space for people to have a rest and play.

Potential Locations



Potential Locations

A2 is a small resting space that has been built, but the utilization rate is very low. There is only one seat for rest inside, and the green vegetation is too surrounded, making it easy for passing pedestrians to ignore its role.

A4 is an open space located in the two houses, connecting the front and rear roads of the houses and providing a buffer rest space. We think we can make some artistic changes to make it more than just a simple passageway space.

Potential Locations

B. Recreation street / street mural / street mural

Most of the existing streets are too simple to attract more people to stop and admire. Most people just make it through the streets quickly to the retail stores. Therefore, we selected neighborhoods that can be modified and redesigned, and added art and green elements, hoping to increase people's attraction.

B3 is the entrance to a retail store, but the physical walls are too rigid to attract visitors. So we hope to make some artistic changes to attract tourists to stay.

Potential Locations



Potential Locations



Potential Locations



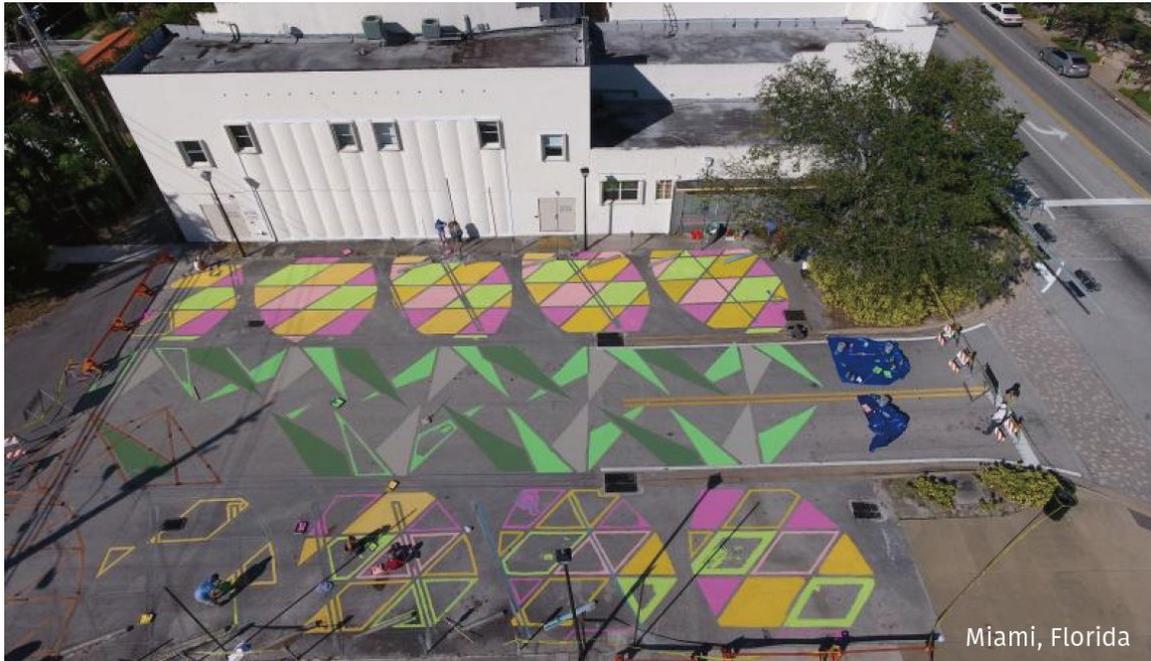
Potential Locations



Potential Locations

C. Art sidewalk

Sidewalk will be an unchanging and boring art renovation, increasing street connectivity and communication. Sidewalk can be specifically designed for residents living in Opelika to experience artistic creativity.



Roadmap to Getting There

This Public Art Master Plan sets a vision for public art throughout Downtown Opelika. The path ahead could lead in many directions. The city may pursue some of these projects on its own; others will require donated funds, grants, and sponsorships from businesses and residents; others will depend on donations of artworks; still others will require collaboration with developers.

Roadmap to Getting There

Do it now:

- There are currently capital improvement plans underway in Downtown Opelika, specifically along 1st Avenue and North Railroad Avenue. With new businesses and new infrastructure being implemented on 1st Avenue, this makes for the perfect location to start when thinking of implementing art throughout the downtown area. Starting simple is best. There is currently an empty wall space outside one of the buildings on 1st Avenue. This empty space has an ad inviting artists to use the space. Something simple such as a mural or even one solo piece of art on this wall could kick off the public art downtown.

Do it next:

- There are additional opportunities that Opelika can pursue when it obtains the external funding to do so. These projects are contingent on public capital projects or private development so they could be implemented at any time. It is important to identify the private stakeholders during this process. Business owners in the Downtown area should be at the top of the priority list for investment opportunities. The art house and any art associations in Opelika are also a top priority. Citizens should not be excluded. There could be citizen artists that would love the chance to be a part of something such as a city wide art plan.

Roadmap to Getting There

Do it later:

- An example of location(s) that could benefit from new public art are:
 - The grass lot beside Farmers Insurance on the corner of N. Railroad Ave and N. 8th street.

Governance of Program

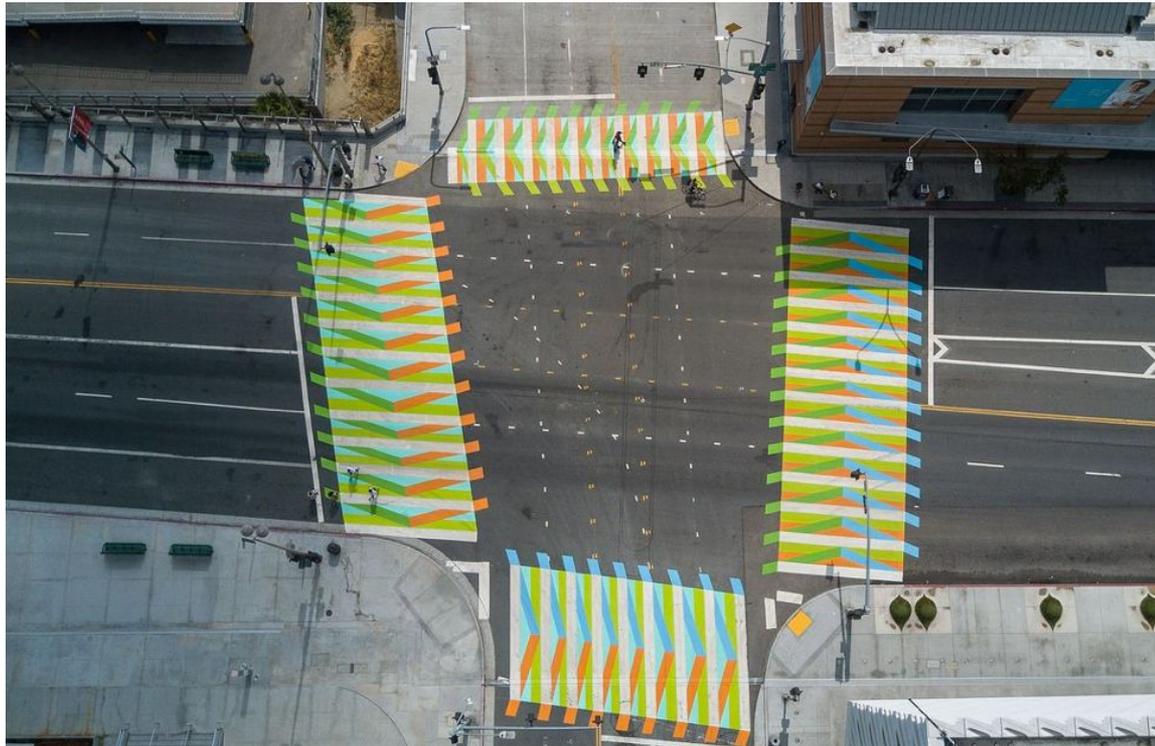
Three Main Ways of governing the Public Art program:

- City Commission (controlled by local elected officials)
- Downtown Arts Committee appointed by City Commission (a group of city leaders nominated and selected by elected officials)
- Local Nonprofit Organization or Coalition (controlled by existing organization whose focus is on the arts)

Processes

New Programs:

- Crosswalk program: allows artists and citizens to create colorful, artist new designs along the crosswalks.



Processes

- Bike rack program: artists can incorporate the history of Opelika by creating unique bike racks for the Downtown.



Processes

- Trash cans and Fire Hydrant artist program: artists, citizens, groups, or businesses can get together and paint a trashcan downtown or a fire hydrant.



Administration of Program

Funding

Securing adequate funding is the cornerstone of any public art program. Aside from donations from private individuals and corporations, there are a number of approaches through which to garner financial support for art. These ways can be broken into four broad tracts.

1. Public/Private sector endeavors
 - a. On the non-development side, opportunities for public art could be nurtured as part of the ongoing, existing local programs. A city or business could partner with these organizations to involve artist in:

Administration of Program

- i. Designing gardens and plantings
- ii. Creating destinations in green spaces, along paths and at nodes, anchoring spaces for rest, recreation, play, and gathering
- iii. Installing art exhibits in vacant storefronts to improve a buildings/community's overall image
- iv. Encouraging local museums/universities to loan out works of public art for temporary placement throughout the downtown
- v. Hosting exhibits in publicly accessible places, including municipal, state, and federal buildings

Administration of Program

2. Percent/Non-Percent for art programs
 - a. Passing percent-for-art legislation encumbers a percentage of publicly funded capital improvement projects per year for the commissioning of public artworks, which will usually be sited in, on, or adjacent to the building or project being constructed. Percent-for-art ordinances guarantee a funding stream for public art projects regardless of what happens to city budgets or art funding. The policy also guarantees that public art projects will be planned each year as long as capital improvement projects are underway and municipal construction continues

Administration of Program

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Administration of Program

b. Benefits of a percent-for-art ordinance:

- i. It can provide a mechanism for obtaining funds from a broad range of city agencies and departments
- ii. It can offer legal recourse to obtain funds for public art from non-compliant city agencies
- iii. It can provide an opportunity to work with and introduce public art to many city agencies, in many different types of projects, and in many locations city wide
- iv. In some cases it allows for siting of art in adjacent or nearby communities to offset the negative impacts of a project, or to place public art in more diverse areas of the city

Administration of Program

c. Examples of Non-Percent-for Art Sources

- i. Houston, TX - The Cultural Arts Council of Houston also receives a percentage on the lodging tax for art. In addition, the Council contracts with a variety of city agencies, as well as within Harris County.
- ii. New Orleans, LA - The Arts Council of New Orleans funds public art projects through a joint partnership between public/private sectors in order to create more stable funding basis.
- iii. City of New Orleans, local and state governmental agencies, as well as other non-profit organizations, are funding sources for public art program
- iv. Phoenix, AZ - Phoenix's public art program is funded through the city's general-purpose fund, public art funds, state lottery revenue, and regional and federal grants
- v. San Antonio, TX - The San Antonio Design Enhancement Program is operated through the city's Public Works Department's City Architects' Office. The design enhancement program is maintained by art allowances and budgets that are identified and developed by each project-design team
- vi. San Diego, CA - The public art program in San Diego is a department of the San Diego Commission for arts and Culture. Administrative cost are covered by a portion of the city's lodging tax, which helps funding and operation expenses for nearly 90 arts and cultural programs

Administration of Program

3. Developer participation

- a. In cities around the country, private developers are realizing that commissioning works of art for their projects benefits more than their bottom line. These can:
 - i. Improve employee and tenant working environments
 - ii. Create a unique look or landmark feature for the project
 - iii. Demonstrate a larger civic commitment
 - iv. Translate into higher rents and more desirable office location
- b. For city agencies, expenditures on public art can:
 - i. Highlight and publicize agency initiatives, missions, and objectives
 - ii. Communicate important information or instructions to the public

Administration of Program

- i. Contribute to the community's acceptance of a plant or facility in which they are to be sited
 - ii. Increase the public's recognition of the important work provided by that agency or city department
- c. The first step to soliciting developer participation is to take stock of the public and private investment occurring in your city.
- d. For example, in 2002 in Mobile, AL, nearly \$400 million in public and private investment was underway. Private projects included the \$165 million RSA tower, a \$75 million Mobile Register Building, and a \$1.2 million Larkin Music Center. Public sector funded projects included the \$90 million GSA Federal Courthouse (with its own 1% art budget), a \$9 million Social Security building, a \$16 million federal government rehabilitation of train station as a multi-modal transportation/retail center, and the \$40 million Mobile Landing/Alabama State Docks expansion and waterfront park project

Administration of Program

- e. There are a number of ways of encouraging the development community in funding public art projects
 - i. Include art in the incentive package given to developers. For example, developers are often requested or required by cities to provide parking, a certain number or amount of coverage by street trees, curbs and sidewalks, etc.
 - ii. Public art could be added to this list, or developers given the opportunity to include public art in a project as a way of meeting the requirement for providing these kinds of onsite amenities. Fees paid by developers, or requirements that developers provide more affordable housing or a parks a part of a project, also could be set aside to fund works of public art.
 - iii. In instances where Nexus or Environmental Impact Study has been ordered to determine the potential negative impacts of a project, a percentage of fees paid by a developer as part of this mitigation could be set aside for a public art project, where the art would be considered a mitigation tool.
 - iv. Have the “plaza bonuses,” or floor-area ratio bonuses, given to developers who set aside a certain amount of ground floor as public space, also be awarded including public art.

Administration of Program

- f. No matter how the developers are encouraged to fund art, they are responsible for maintaining and conserving works once they have been commissioned.
- g. Developers need their own advisors or consultants and/or public art review panel should be convened on private projects to ensure quality and that the artworks commissioned complies with the overall goals of the public art policy and public art vision of the city.

Administration of Program

4. Alternate funding sources

- a. TIF (Tax increment financing) of vacant buildings for use by artist for housing and studios
- b. Foundation grants, including those from National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH)
- c. Neighborhood appeals
- d. Parking meter revenue
- e. Hotel/Motel taxes
- f. Sales tax revenue
- g. Proceeds from the sale of city land
- h. Funds pooled with the county
- i. State and city governments
- j. Historical societies and commissions
- k. Local companies
- l. Utilities
- m. Arts councils and advisory boards
- n. Museums
- o. Art Centers

Potential Strategies to Raise Funds for Public Art Policy

- Tie funding of public art to a possible foundation endowment for the care and management of downtown parks and public spaces. The endowment could pay for art selection, commissioning, and maintenance.
- Tax large-scale events and festivals to pay for art. For example, a motel/ hotel tax can be dedicated to public art during the event. This funding can be put toward art projects that would occur before and after the event.
- Some projects may be eligible for a state tax credit for historic renovation
- Have City Council members fund public art projects in communities within their districts
- Use the public art policy as a marketing tool to funders
- Have a 501(c)(3) administer the public art program, so that donated monies could be used tax-free and would represent taxable deductions

Roles and Responsibilities

- Administering the money
 - A Public Art Trust Fund can be set up as a discreet fund of a Public Art Program. Public art program staff would deposit all funds earmarked for public art projects whether they are from public/private sources or donations in to this fund.
 - Each project can be assigned to a separate account within the trust, or at least a specific project number used for tracking payments.
 - Additional funds can be deposited into the Public Arts Trust Fund for a project's contingency or for use on other types of public art projects, both new and existing.
 - The Public Art Program would contract with artist and pay them from this Public Art Trust Fund

Guidelines for Program

We want the city to invest in its arts & humanities in order to yield a more vibrant, lively, and involved community. To do this we have three guiding principles:

- Restore
- Create
- Sustain

By installing public art in downtown Opelika, we are restoring the livelihood of a once vibrant downtown. We are creating a new environment that the community will be proud of. We hope the citizens will rally around the idea of public art to sustain the ongoing economic development and growth in recent years.

Guidelines for Program

By using these guidelines, we believe the community will increase its economic activity by involving the community with public art projects in downtown Opelika. Involving the citizens in public art projects creates more foot traffic downtown. Once art installations are completed, new foot traffic in the form of visitors and guests of the art works will further increase activity in downtown Opelika. This type of activity brings economic benefits to the local businesses in close proximity to the art. All in all, we believe that public art will help restore, create, and sustain historic downtown Opelika.

OPELIKA'S LEWIS COOPER JR MEMORIAL
LIBRARY
TEAM E

A Community Asset: Why the Library Matters

A Community Asset: Why the Library Matters

Lewis Cooper Memorial Library is a major asset for the downtown area. It acts as a gathering space for families, a safe place for children, and a nexus for adults to come and connect with resources.

Citizens see the value in the library. Library program offerings and program attendance have both risen sharply in the past year, indicating high demand for library services. Circulation is up too, with a dramatic spike in 2018 despite a continuous clamor for digital media.

The library is within walking distance of Opelika's vibrant and growing downtown and could play a key role in helping create and grow a core, walkable area as the city center.

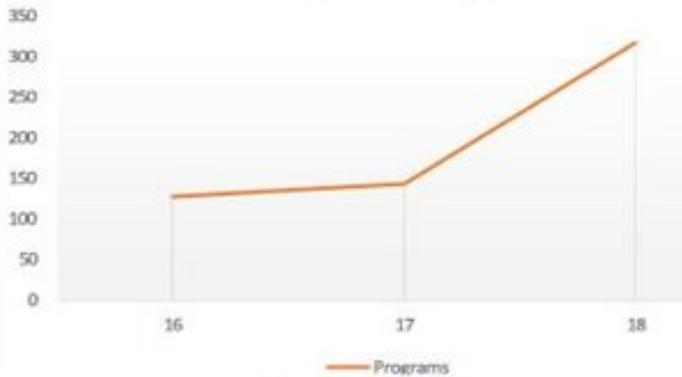
The library functions as a key asset to lower-income families. Low income households were 50 percent likely to have used a library in the past year, with most people seeing them as places to obtain materials and as a place for work and assistance (Pew Research).

The library is located within walking distance of a residential neighborhood. Many households to the east and northeast of the library are a relatively short distance away. The library could act both as a destination for these residents and as a gateway to the greater downtown.

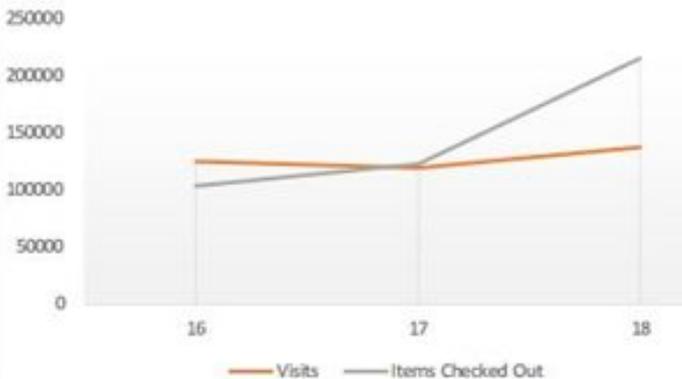
Program Attendees



Program Offerings



Circulation and Use



The library has significant strengths and opportunities for continued growth, including a favorable political climate, valuable proximity to downtown, and some space for physical growth.

But a few key physical factors place limits on that growth, including 6th Street as a high-speed barrier to walkability, an increasingly-cramped building footprint and a lack of connectivity between the library and the surrounding residences and downtown area.

Addressing these issues will be important for the evolution of the library as Opelika's moves forward in its development plans. Our group identified a mission and vision for the site

STRENGTHS

- The library sits on nearly two acres of land and a roughly 15,000 square foot building.
- The library is located on a high-traffic highway.
- The Library is adjacent to the redeveloped areas of downtown.

OPPORTUNITIES

- The political climate is ready for improving the library.
- The space is wide enough to improve sidewalks and construct bike lanes.
- A one acre lot beside the library remains empty and could be developed.

OPELIKA LIBRARY

SWOT Analysis

WEAKNESSES

- The lack of bike lanes and insufficient sidewalks offer poor circulation for pedestrians and cyclists.
- The library is disconnected from downtown Opelika, decreasing possible foot traffic.
- The library building is too small to meet the needs of the population.

THREATS

- A lack of funding could inhibit the city's ability to address identified weaknesses.
- Improving the circulation to the library could make it more difficult to serve the population at its current size.

Project I: Enhance Downtown Connectivity

Opelika's library is a vital asset to the city that is growing in popularity and relevance. But pedestrians who want to travel from the downtown core to the library are faced with several major barriers:

- Pedestrians face 48 feet of relatively-heavy traffic between curbs
- There is no functioning crosswalk at either the intersection at 6th and Ave A or 6th and Ave B
- Lane widths are wide and encourage speeding
- Wide expanses of concrete and grass contribute to a feeling of vulnerability for the pedestrian
- Connection points trying the library to the downtown in general are weak

Though within close proximity to each other, these barriers between downtown Opelika and the library severe connectivity. As a result, limited pedestrian traffic occurs. To address this issue, we recommend the following goal and objectives:

Goal: Enhance the connectivity between the core of downtown Opelika and the library.

- Objective 1 – Introduce pedestrian crosswalks for crossing 6th and Avenue A and to slow traffic.
- Objective 2 – Implement a road diet along 6th street.

Objective 1: Introduce pedestrian crosswalk for crossing 6th street and Avenue A

The first, and most necessary objective, is to install a crosswalk at the intersection of 6th and Ave A. This intersection is the main gateway between the downtown core and the library.

A striped crosswalk can complete the picture. However, additional traffic-calming benefit may come by designing the crosswalk to further emphasize pedestrian safety. Using materials like brick or concrete (rather than simple striping) or alternate coloring can send a visual signal to drivers that this is a sensitive area. It should be noted that the FHSA has [issued extensive guidance](#) on this issue.

In addition to a crosswalk, other tools are needed to signal drivers to use caution. However, consultation with the Planning Dept. indicates that a full traffic signal would not be feasible at this intersection. Our team agrees and recommends the use of an alternative HAWK Beacon for this intersection. The HAWK beacon remains green for motorists until a pedestrian triggers the crossing button. The beacon then flashes a warning, signaling cars to yield. The HAWK beacon allows for minimal disruption to vehicular traffic, but also allows pedestrians to cross the street safely.

For 60 feet of roadway, assuming a pedestrian walking speed of 3 feet per second, the full crossing time [should be no less than 20 seconds](#), based on federal standards. Current crossing speeds vary based on time of day, but are all significantly dangerous and unprotected.

[Compliance is high](#), according to one study, but drivers may require education on the use of the signal.



A [case study from the Federal Highway Administration](#) found that drivers yielded with 95 percent frequency to HAWK beacons. Other municipalities have reported compliance rates of 97 percent. The case study found a 29 percent reduction in total crashes, and a 69 percent reduction in pedestrian crashes, compared to no signal.

Cost: Costs for the beacon can vary. [A survey of nine installations](#) found a median cost of \$51,460, with a minimum of \$21,440 and a maximum of \$128,660. The cost depends on a number of factors, such as whether to use a mast arm or wire to hang the signal.

For comparison, a full traffic signal is estimated to cost anywhere from \$250,000 to \$500,000, depending on conditions, [according to the Washington State DOT](#). A painted crosswalk costs an average of \$770 and a high-visibility crosswalk costs an average of \$2,540, according to PEDSAFE. Raised crosswalks, which slow traffic much like speed bumps, are more expensive.

Funding may be available for this improvement through CDBGs, Transportation Alternatives programs from the Highway Administration, state grants, public-private partnerships, etc.

Objective 2: Implement a road diet along 6th street

To slow traffic and create a more welcoming atmosphere for pedestrian and improve accessibility more generally, we propose implementing a road diet on S. 6th Street (2nd Ave. to Columbus Pkwy).

Road Diets have been implemented successfully in hundreds of cities, and have been promoted by state and local governments as cost-effective traffic calming and revitalization measures. Road diets remove some space for driving and reconfigure it to support current traffic as well as pedestrian and bicycle traffic.

Road Diets are a key part of the AOMPO Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, which encourages conversion of candidate streets. The plan does not single out 6th Street as a candidate, but recommends study on busier arterials like it.

Traffic peaks (18,650 AADT) on 6th are higher than ideal (17,500 AADT is the AOMPO upper scale), and more detailed traffic studies may be necessary, but we feel this conversion is feasible.

There are several possible configurations, which could be tested through traffic cones and temporary striping in the short term to test feasibility and best-fit. All dimensions conserve the city's pavement and right-of-way standards for major arterials.

Current Streetscape



Proposed Streetscape



The configuration below restripes the roadway to include a center turn lane, two travel lanes, expanded sidewalks and bike lanes.



The second configuration adds a median to improve safety and sense of enclosure, and also adds on-street parking to the northeast side (library side) of the road to help address parking issues with the current library lot. A 4-foot buffer prevents “dooring” of cyclists.

Costs: Pricing for road diets varies, but one of the easiest ways to reduce costs is to perform the project in conjunction with routine maintenance of the roadway, either a resurfacing, restriping, realignment, etc. Coordinating projects between the municipality and the state DOT can allow road diets to be implemented at minimal cost to the city.

Funding for road diet work is available from Road Diet projects is available through the Surface Transportation Program (STP) and Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP), Safe Routes to School grants and other sources.

Project II: Improve Walkability

Sidewalk infrastructure is the most important element in pedestrian circulation. After analyzing the surrounding area of the library, we identified two problems regarding pedestrian circulation:

- Surrounding residential sidewalks are in disrepair and need improving
- Many residential areas within walking distance of the library lack sidewalks

Improving sidewalk accessibility would lead to numerous positive externalities. Encouraging walking as a mode of feasible transportation decreases Opelika's traffic, increases parking, and improves the overall environment. We recommended the following goal and objectives to improve walkability:

Goal: Improve walkability to the library with a sidewalk plan.

- **Objective 1 – Implement a 10-year sidewalk plan to repair existing sidewalks and construct new sidewalks in nearby residential areas.**

After analyzing the area, our team created a 10-year sidewalk plan that identifies areas of repair and new construction (see below). The solid red lines represent new sidewalk construction within the first five years of the plan, while the dotted red lines represent sidewalks to be repaired within the first five years.

Additionally, the solid orange lines represent new sidewalk construction between five to ten years of implementation.



Costs: Currently, the City of Opelika has appropriated funds to repair 2,000 square feet of sidewalks surrounding the library. Estimating \$100 per linear foot, this sidewalk plan calls for an additional 8,800 feet of new sidewalk construction within the first five years (\$880,000) , and 13,500 feet of new sidewalk construction between five to ten years (\$1,350,000), totaling \$2,230,000 for the entire sidewalk plan. Length estimates were based off calculations from ArcGIS Maps, and cost estimates were gathered from Opelika Planning Director Matt Mosley.

Project III: Transform the library green space into an asset

The current green space is approximately 1 acre located directly behind the library's main building. It is an overgrown piece of land, with a steep grade leading to a drainage area.



This space, which abuts a residential neighborhood that surrounds the library, could be transformed into an active, usable park. This space would be used both for passive recreation, quiet reading, and for library educational programs.

Additionally, it would work as a magnet to draw people from the surrounding neighborhoods to the library and to downtown in general.

Goal: Transform green space to a usable public park

Objective 1: Develop unused greenspace into a passive park area.

A rain garden is an attractive feature that serves as both a functional rainwater mitigation feature and as an attractive centerpiece for a park area. Rain gardens use a soil mixture, which is designed to efficiently hold rainwater, to support a garden of hardy local plants.

This garden can be used as an educational asset to teach local programs about gardening, horticulture, the water cycle, biology, ecology, or any number of other library programs. It will also serve as a reimagining of what rainwater collection can look like in Opelika



Rain Garden Costs: For a simple rain garden installation, costs are estimated by the Rain Garden Alliance and the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin to be approximately \$3-5 per square foot for self-installation, with a ceiling of \$15 per square foot for a more advanced installation. Plants are the most expensive physical materials.

Until the brush is cleared, it will be difficult to determine the exact area of the rain garden space. Current estimates are that it be approximately 150 to 200 square feet, giving a cost estimate of between \$750 and \$3,000.

Donated material and private-public partnerships with local organizations may defray this cost significantly. Maintenance is minimal, with only monthly inspections and regular re-mulching needed once the garden is established.

Landscaping Extent and Costs:

A small pocket park could surround the rain garden, with shade trees, a leveled walkway, and benches. This would create a secondary area for reading and for library programs.

Costs: Extensive cost modeling is difficult for this project without extensive site work. But similar “pocket park” projects, such as a recent undertaking in Sandy Springs, Ga., were estimated to cost about \$100,000, labor included. Another project in Austin, Texas., the Drury Lane Grackle Green Pocket Park, came to \$130,000.

Funding is available for pocket parks from a number of resources, including state and federal land trusts. But many parks have been funded either entirely or majorly by a combination of private funding from private state and local groups, according to the National Recreation and Park Association.

Volunteers, who could be placed in positions of responsibility overseeing the park area as a function of the library, could save the city significant money in maintenance costs. This model has been successfully implemented in other cities, like the Austin park.

Summary

These projects will enhance the livability of Opelika and boost engagement for a valued social asset. Citizens will have increased access to the library and to the vibrant downtown, and a more-attractive, urbanized 6th Street would draw more people from nearby residential areas into the downtown proper.

Combined with public-private partnerships and assistance from state and federal funding sources, these projects are both financially feasible and a possible win for many different stakeholder groups.

Goal: Enhance the connectivity between the core of downtown Opelika and the library.

- Objective 1 – Introduce pedestrian crosswalks for crossing 6th and Avenue A and to slow traffic.
- Objective 2 – Implement a road diet along 6th street.

Goal: Improve walkability to the library with a sidewalk plan.

- Objective 1 – Implement a 10-year sidewalk plan to repair existing sidewalks and construct new sidewalks in nearby residential areas.

Goal: Transform green space to a usable public park

- Objective 1 – Develop unused green space into a passive park area.

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Railroad Avenue Reconnecting Downtown



**Tamara Brooks, Deonta Brooks,
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Introduction

First appearing on maps as far back as 1733, Opelika was originally settled as part of Russell County, and was incorporated February 9, 1854. The original town boundaries, specified by the legislature, were described as "being one mile in every direction from the railroad station", which was thought to be the center of town. Present day Opelika is located in Lee County, Alabama at the eastern part of central Alabama. The single most important industry which aided Opelika's growth in the 19th century was the coming of the railroads and was to be proven of singular importance to the growth of this tiny Alabama town in 1848. The Montgomery and West Point Railroad Company completed an extension of the railroad from Montgomery to Opelika on March 1, 1848. Between the years of 1851 - 1869, Opelika became a true railroad crossroads with routes to West Point, GA., Columbus, GA., and Goodwater, AL. A dummy line also operated between Opelika and Auburn from 1894-1899. The railroad from Opelika to Birmingham was opened all the way in 1888. Present day Opelika still has trains which run through the city; however, the last passenger service train was discontinued January 7, 1970 ("Museum of East Alabama," n.d.).



Figure 1 Opelika Railroad Postcard Source Unknown

Project Location

Because of the historical importance of the railroad to downtown Opelika, Reconnecting Downtown is a fitting endeavor to further revitalize the downtown area, specifically the area between along North Railroad Avenue, specifically between 8th and 9th Street, while also increasing the quality of experience for both local community members and visitors. In addition to creating an inviting and safe walkable space for pedestrians, including a pedestrian footbridge that contributes to a thriving, vibrant community built for residents and visitors alike. This bridge will allow safe passage for walkers, runners, and bikers.

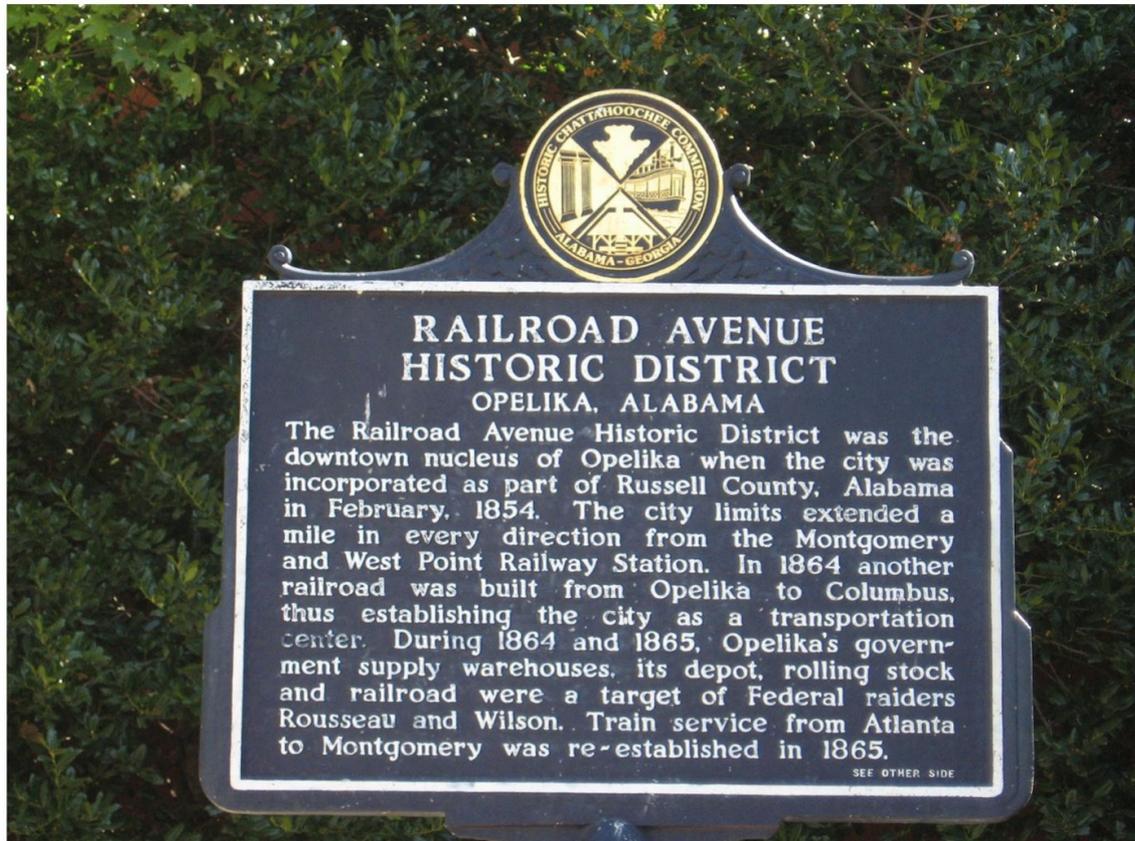


Figure 2 Railroad Avenue Historic District Marker

Mission

The mission for this project is to create an inviting and safe walkable space for pedestrians along North Railroad Avenue, specifically 8th and 9th Street, while also increasing the quality of experience for both local community members and visitors.

Vision

For this project we envision a pedestrian footbridge that contributes to a thriving, vibrant community built for residents and visitors alike.



Figure 3 Project Focus Area

Project Development

Our first step in developing this project was to conduct an analysis based on site visits, research and data analysis. Upon completing this, we created a SWOT Analysis that highlighted the areas strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Some of the strengths we found in this area of Opelika are its strong sense of community, proximity to Auburn University, proximity to Auburn University, and the amount of established businesses. Some of the weaknesses in this area of Opelika included the age demographics, particularly the aging population, limited walkability, and pedestrian railroad crossing that presented questions about safety. There are many areas for opportunities in Opelika. For the context of this project some of the more obvious opportunities include green opportunities, growth potential, available land, and redevelopment opportunities. Finally, we reviewed the potential threats facing the area. Some of the threats that could have an impact on this project include regional competition, neighboring community competition, energy costs, and environmental regulations.



Figure 4 SWOT Analysis

There were three particular points of strengths and weaknesses that we focused on to develop our design concept to revitalize Downtown Opelika. The first thing we looked at was downtown's most prominent feature and that is its railroad track. The origin of Opelika as a city is embedded in the history of its railroad track which cuts right through the core of the downtown. Hence, we sensed that taking this strong feature of the downtown into consideration in our design would provide a relatable creativity that the downtown needs. We basically wanted to take the presence of the railroad track; respecting its historical importance, as the base of enhancement and revitalization. Hence, our project area is centered around the North Railroad Avenue and South Railroad Avenue.

It is fascinating to realize that although a more vibrant Tiger town has established itself in its vicinity, downtown Opelika still serves as a central hub of social activities. However, our on-site market analysis of the area showed that the railroad track is somehow dividing the downtown not only spatially but also in terms of social activities as well. The map below (Figure 5) is showing how the businesses in the downtown are mostly flourishing on the southside of the railroad track along the South Railroad Avenue with building typologies ranging from retail stores, restaurants, entertainment to official buildings. While the North Railroad Avenue still waits for more vibrancy along its path with vacant garages, there is a considerable difference in its street façade that aligns the downtown core. This brings us to our second point of focus. Our focus of the design was to re-connect the downtown from both of its avenues so that it reflects a cohesive social environment and a marketplace where the community can come to enjoy and experience a downtown feel that is built around a railroad track.

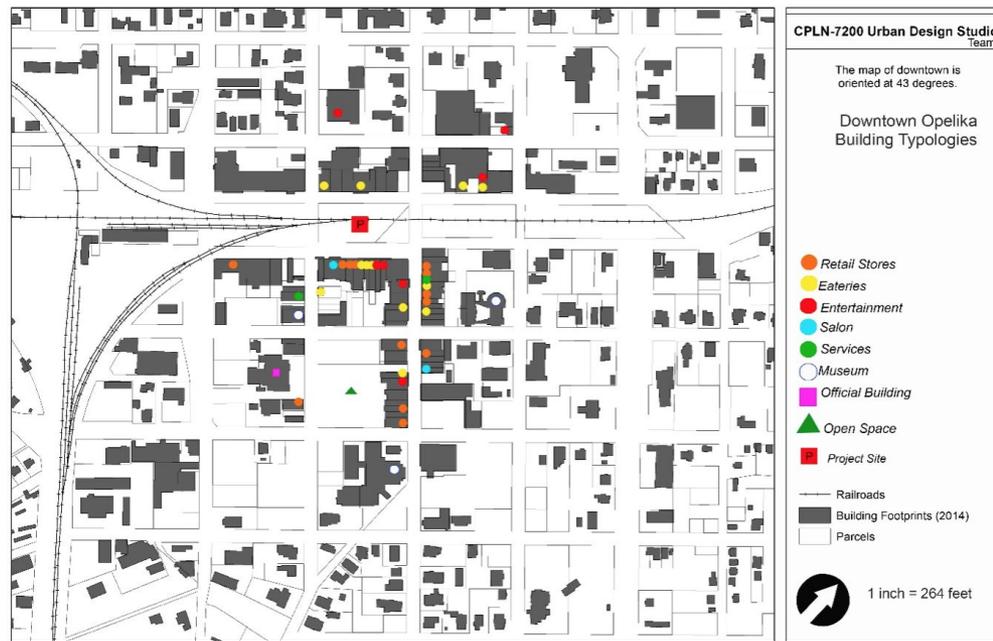


Figure 5 Downtown Opelika Building Typologies

The third point of focus was simply induced by the necessity of a downtown to be a pedestrian friendly venue. If we look into the definition of downtown, it basically describes the streets as its life line. It is a nervous system that communicates how well a downtown of a city is and can do. The real potential of a downtown lies in its streets and as a planner it is essential to realize that there are many ways that we can exploit the opportunities that the streets present in order to revitalize the downtown. Downtown Opelika seemed of no exception. The streets along the railroad track actually seems to provide that clear opportunity. Hence, we focused on enhancing the streets around the railroad track with the provision of a railroad plaza and a green landscape.

Our concept for the revitalization of the downtown railroad avenue is followed by seven design elements:

1. Footbridge
2. Sidewalks and Railroad Plaza
3. Improvement of Street Scape
4. Street lighting
5. Green space
6. ADA design
7. Parks

Case Studies

Because of the size of Opelika and our chosen project, we faced some challenges finding case studies for successful footbridge implementation that were similar in population and land size. Among those that were researched, there seemed to be a repeating theme challenges in finding adequate financing for the projects. The specific case studies we researched includes the cities of Billings, Montana, Portland, Oregon, Santa Rosa, California, and Tucson, Arizona.

Billings, Montana

The city of Billings, Montana recently decide to build a pedestrian bridge over the railroad in their downtown area. This had been planned for almost a decade, but due to funding issues the process was delayed. The solution for funding came in the form of donations collected from different stakeholders in all phases of the project. The primary contributions for the project came from donations and bonds approved by a prior established committee. The committee also approved giving the project \$719,000 in federal funding through the Community Transportation Enhancement Program.

Portland, Oregon

The Portland pedestrian bridge is still in the process of being built. The Union Pacific Railroad Company will cover \$1.7 million of the cost of the bridge. The remaining \$2.2 million will be covered by the Orange Line Project. The Orange Line project consists of contributions the federal government and various state, local and regional governments.

Santa Rosa, California

The city of Santa Rosa, California had been receiving complaints about the long wait times residents experience when waiting to cross the railroad tracks due to running trains. The railroad crossing also poses a threat to the safety of individuals wanting to cross, especially for elderly residents and children. Though city officials are well aware of the problem, like many other places, funding for a pedestrian bridge remains an issue. With the assistance of an \$8.2 million federal transportation grant for construction, 90 percent of the total cost of the pedestrian bridge will be funded.

As the city of Tucson, Arizona continues to grow, the residents continue to have challenges crossing the railroads. Unlike the three other case studies we researched, Tucson does not have an issue with finding funding for their pedestrian bridge. Despite having enough money to build the bridge, they are facing concerns from local residents and business owners about the impact construction will have on businesses since the construction will inevitably lead to some road closures. The local government has assured all concerned parties that they will provide general signage to let people know that local businesses are still open during construction. The construction company has also agreed to help make people aware of the businesses remaining open during construction.

Goals and Objectives

The next step in our project development was to determine our goals, objectives and strategies.

Goals:

1. Improve vehicular traffic flow along 8th Street and 9th Street by minimizing pedestrians.
2. Foster an inclusive environment by offering a safe breezeway for pedestrians of all ages and abilities.
3. Connect North Railroad Avenue and South Railroad Avenue.
4. Preserve the rustic character of Opelika's Downtown Core.
5. Create a new landmark to attract more visitors and continue to revitalize Opelika's Downtown Core.

Objectives:

1. In order to leave North Railroad Ave and visit South Railroad Ave, or vice versa, pedestrians are funneled to 8th St. or 9th St. due to the train tracks. This can be extremely dangerous for pedestrians due to high volumes of vehicular traffic in this area. An alternate route for pedestrians will create a safer environment and allow vehicular traffic to move with ease.
2. Pedestrians and patrons of Downtown Opelika must be able to pass train tracks safely. Wheelchairs, walkers, crutches and strollers have to be considered when constructing a pedestrian bridge. Disabled or walking impaired individuals are at a major disadvantage when attempting to travel from North Railroad Ave to South Railroad Ave. A pedestrian bridge with a gradual slope or elevator will provide access for all.

Connect North Railroad Avenue and South Railroad Avenue

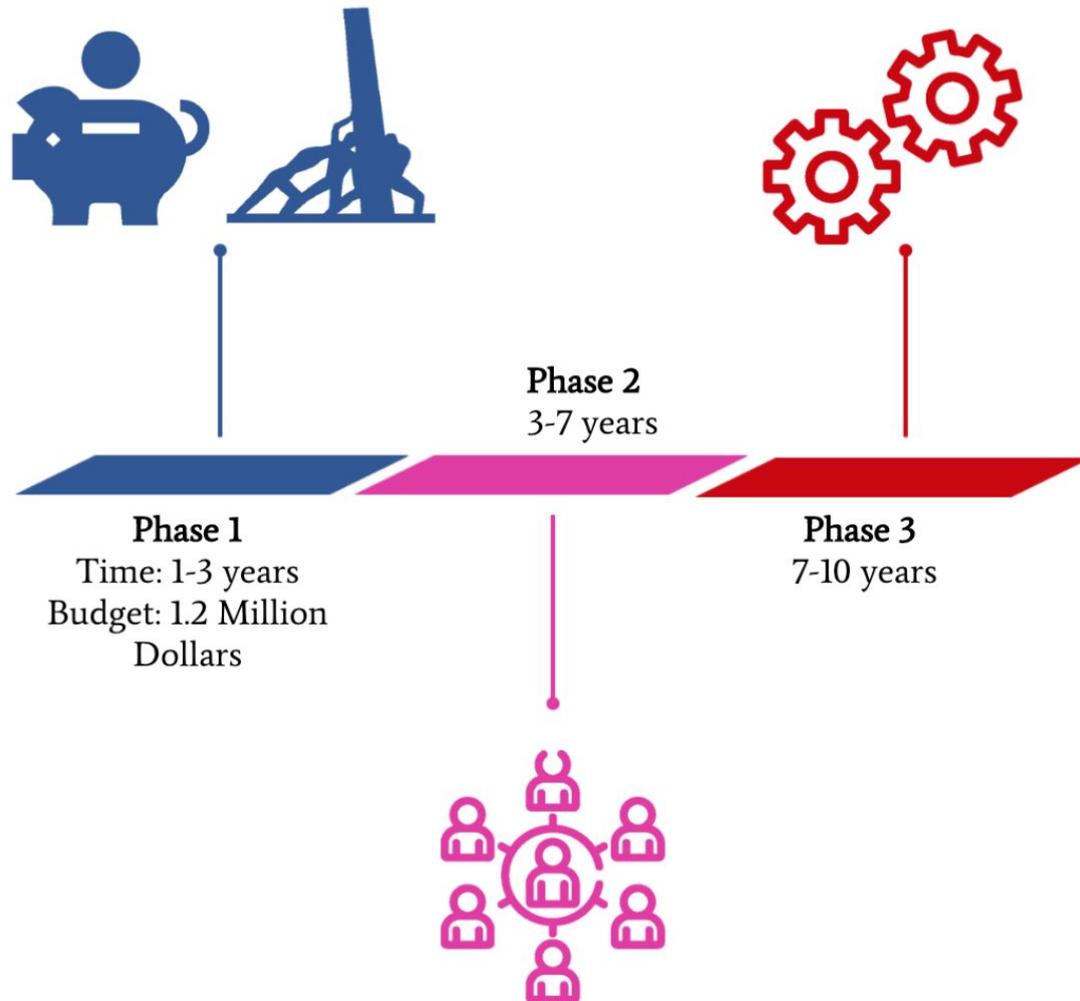


Improve sidewalks to provide better accessibility to
the proposed public Railroad plaza

3. Railroad tracks divide commercial and social activities in Opelika's Downtown Core. Businesses on both sides of the tracks will benefit economically by increasing connectivity.
4. Producing a state-of-the-art pedestrian bridge will not fit in with Downtown Opelika's character. The bridge must be sturdy enough to support thousands of pounds at one time. Also, it must be able to withstand extreme weather conditions and rumbling from passing trains. The finish should have a brick or rusted color with a latticework pattern to contribute to the current rustic aesthetic of the Railroad Avenue Historic District.
5. The addition of a pedestrian bridge will bring a new attraction to Downtown Opelika. Opelika's Planning Director Matt Mosley stated a yellow umbrella painted on the side of a building was Lee County's most popular photograph in 2018. With social media's influence continuing to rise, this can be another attraction to invite outsiders to Downtown Opelika.

Strategies and Implementation

An essential aspect to the completion of any project is a timeline. “Reconnecting Downtown” is no different. Success in the creation of this project’s proposal will stem from strict adherence to the following timeline.



PHASE 1: (2019-2023)

Funding

Opelika's first step in creation of this pedestrian bridge must be centered around funding. Pedestrian bridges of this scope have been benchmarked at well over \$1,200,000. These bridges typically cost \$250 per square foot to construct. Based off of these figures, the pedestrian bridge will cost a minimum of \$1,255,000 to construct.

The Federal Railroad Administration is an organization overseen by the United States Department of Transportation. This administration focuses solely on railways in the United States and projects surrounding them. The Federal Railroad Administration, or FRA for short, offers grants and loans to municipalities that are trying to promote safer railroad crossing for their constituents.

The checklist below shows the funding process and criteria applicants need to meet in order to receive funding from the Federal Railroad Administration.

Grant Readiness Checklist

Entities selected to receive funding must generally satisfy the following requirements as a precondition to the Federal Railroad Administration issuing a grant award. Not all requirements will apply to all projects.

Definition (Statement of Work)

- **Scope:** Objectives, rationale, benefits, description of work to be performed
- **Schedule:** Timing of steps and milestones
- **Budget:** Budgets by project milestone and cost category, with documented assumptions: [See the FRA Budget Tool](#)
- **Special Conditions:** Specific requirements applicable to this project (e.g. milestones, FRA approvals, reporting requirements, etc.)

Financials

- **Operating Financials:** Ridership and revenue projections; operating and maintenance costs
- **Capital Program:** Capital plan for infrastructure, rolling stock, and stations
- **Financing Approach:** Institutional authority, financial condition, capital sources (including for cost overruns), and annual operating sources

Delivery

- **Risk Management Approach:** Identified risks and mitigation strategies
- **Management Capability & Approach:** Plan for management structure of project, including org charts and staffing plans
- **Project Implementation & Procurement Approach:** Description of project delivery method, including information on procurement and compliance
- **Safety and Security Approach:** Consideration of safety and security concerns and approaches for both construction and operations

Agreements

- **Host Railroad Agreements:** Legal agreements with all applicable host railroads, with details on engineering, statement of work, construction, service outcomes, cost sharing, or any other relevant issues
- **Service Operator Agreements:** Commitments and concurrences from the operator of the intercity passenger rail service that will benefit from the project
- **Other Agreements:** Other agreements as necessitated by specific project conditions, such as with real estate owners, utilities, other states, local governments, etc.

Prerequisites

- **Engineering Documentation:** Conceptual engineering, preliminary engineering, final design
- **Environmental Documentation:** Service NEPA (P-EIS, P-EA) and/or Project NEPA (EIS, EA, CE)
- **State Rail Plan:** Long-term vision for rail services in state, as prescribed in PRIIA (if applicable)
- **Service Development Plan:** Proposed service characteristics for corridor

Figure 5 Source US Department of Transportation Federal Railroad Administration

Community Engagement

The addition of a landmark in any city will draw a high amount of interest in the community. Owners of businesses along Railroad Ave will be positively affected by the introduction of a pedestrian bridge. This landmark will attract residents of Opelika and surrounding areas. Therefore, owners of businesses in Opelika's Downtown Core may witness an increase in commerce. These local business owners can be contacted as a fundraising effort. Opelika can ask for donations from these businesses in exchange for a plaque or brick on the bridge with the company's name. Wealthy residents serve as another fundraising opportunity. As stated earlier, the addition of a major landmark will be very intriguing to residents. Opelika can ask residents for donations in exchange for a plaque or brick on the bridge with their name on it.

Engaging stakeholders will give Opelika a better understanding of what the community wants. Residents will have the opportunity to discuss the project's scope, including design elements and overall support or opposition to the pedestrian bridge. It is imperative to record all feedback, so the community is pleased with the outcome of the project. After three community outreach efforts, we've received mixed reviews towards the proposed pedestrian bridge. Of the 30 people questioned, one business owner and four pedestrians were in strong opposition of the pedestrian bridge. They all believe the construction of a pedestrian bridge is a waste of money due to train activity in downtown Opelika being so infrequent. The other respondents concluded the pedestrian bridge will be an excellent addition to the character of downtown Opelika by creating a much-needed visual element. All respondents believe the bridge will create more "foot traffic." This increase in pedestrian activity may lead to an economic boost for Opelika and businesses operating downtown.

PHASE 2: (2023-2026)

Funding, Community Engagement & Partnerships

The aforementioned funding strategies in Phase 1 must be continued during Phase 2. In addition, the aforementioned community engagement strategies in Phase 1 must also be continued in Phase 2. Opelika city staff will benefit from hosting charrettes and public meetings to receive feedback from the general public. Attendees must be able to voice their opinion on the scope of the project, specifically design elements. During Phase 2, Opelika should begin exploring partnerships with various construction companies. This will help the city have a better estimate on construction costs regarding the design of the bridge.

PHASE 3: (2026-2030)

Construction

Phase 3 will focus on construction. Opelika will have adequate funding, a visual design and a construction company to begin working on this project. Pedestrian bridges typically take 9-15 weeks to construct.

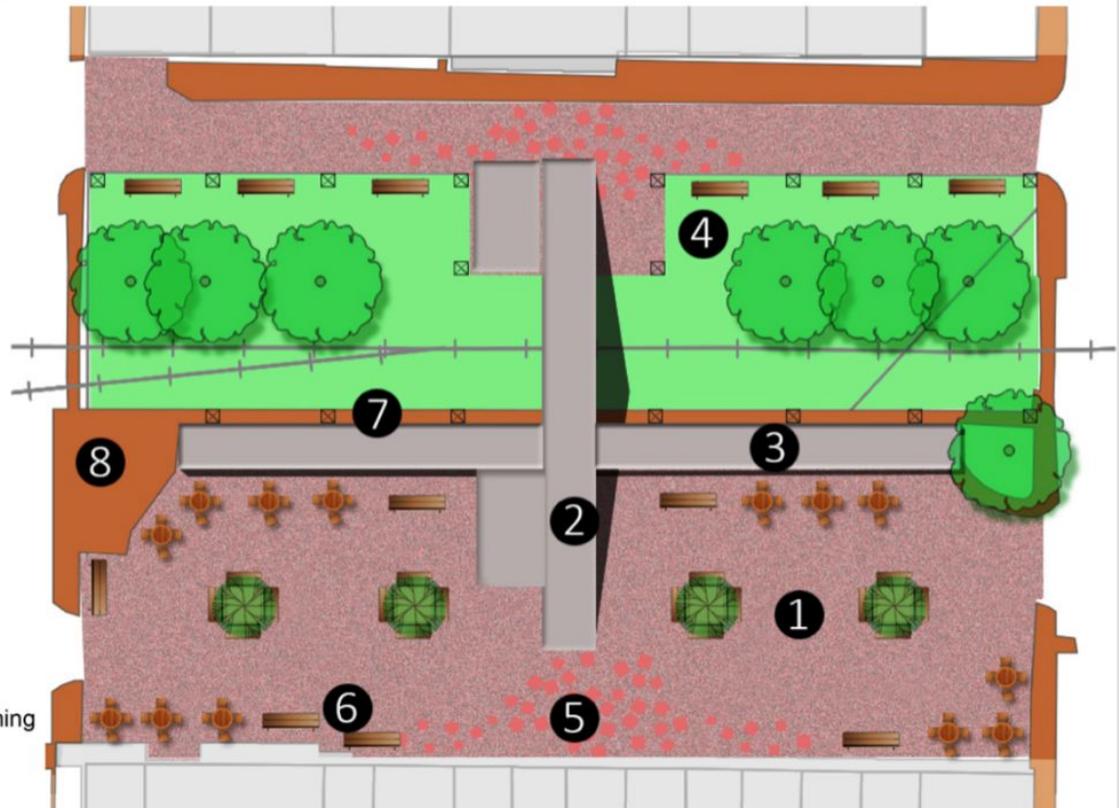
Design Suggestions

Our first design suggestion consists of a master plan that includes a footbridge with viewing platform, ample green space, sidewalks, and a pedestrian plaza.

Master Plan

LEGEND

- 01. Pedestrian Plaza
- 02. Pedestrian Bridge
- 03. Train Viewing Platform
- 04. Green Space
- 05. Entry Foyer for Bridge
- 06. Outdoor setting for restaurant/dining
- 07. Street lighting
- 08. Sidewalks



1. Footbridge

The primary goal of our project is to foster an inclusive environment by offering a safe breezeway for pedestrians of all ages and abilities. In line with achieving this goal, we decided to introduce a footbridge that provides a physical connection across the railroad track. The foot bridge will serve not only as a basic infrastructure to the Downtown Opelika but also will act as a landscape element and a focus of attention where people can come to have an experience. This concept also stems from the idea of providing an element of surprise to the pedestrian population by giving a vertical movement to the outside downtown environment.

One of the ways that we can exploit the opportunities given by the location of downtown is considering the railroad track. The idea of a viewing platform provided near a railroad track specifically for the purpose of viewing the movement of trains is something that many big and small cities have explored. Considering the historical importance of the railroad line in Opelika, the footbridge with a viewing platform incorporated in its design will give the downtown a landmark that is unique and worth visiting. The introduction of these elements will help enhance the outside movement and most importantly re-connect downtown from both sides of the railroad track.

2. Sidewalks and Railroad Plaza

As discussed earlier, streets are the lifeline of downtown. And sidewalks and railroad plaza can be considered its many variations. The presence of a plaza along the side of a railroad track hints at an opportunity of an interesting public space where people can have a unique experience of socializing, dining or spending time with their loved ones and be in view of a moving train. Considering the downtown trying to keep its history alive, a plaza can be a tool to provide that opportunity to showcase the history that to this day exists in downtown.

Downtown Opelika today already exhibits this potential with many outdoor settings provided by the restaurants in the area. The railroad plaza is going to be just an expanded version of an open public space where people have different types of landscape seating to relax and enjoy the time and the view.



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3. Improvement of Streetscape

After analyzing and synthesizing the existing condition of the railroad avenues of the downtown core, there seems to be an opportunity of improving the streetscape in order to revitalize downtown. This goal can be achieved by incorporating the following points in our strategy.

- Prioritize incentives for business owners for new developments
- Civic engagement
- Prioritize maintenance and repair for Downtown Opelika
- Encourage compatibility of new development with the feel of existing Downtown Opelika to retain the historic architecture
- Encourage outdoor activities with improvement in landscape features
- Encourage more entertainment options

4. Street Lighting

With the provision of a footbridge and a railroad plaza comes great responsibility. Indeed, the primary concern of a pedestrian population while deciding to visit or experience downtown is its level of safety and visibility. This makes street lighting one of the important elements of a downtown area especially in and around an open space that is meant to invite more people and social activities. In order for a downtown to breathe life again, it requires a night life that caters to all demography. The proper placement of street lights; below the footbridge and around the plaza will not only fulfill the safety concerns of the area but also will be pivotal in enhancing the social connectivity from one side of the track to another. Hence, while the purpose of the street lights will be more prominent during the night time, the use of solar lamps would prove to be more economically and environmentally feasible.

5. Green Space

Downtown Opelika has maintained its green open space due to the mandatory green buffer required as per the railroad regulations. However, our attempt at bringing this element into our design is through using the same green buffer as an open public space with landscape seating arrangements that provides a viewing platform. One of our goals for the project is to retain the already existing ambience of the rail road avenues and in the process of rejuvenating the avenues, not just introduce something entirely foreign to the location. Hence, retaining the green pervious surface on the north avenue and enhancing the open space on the south railroad avenue will keep the existing ambience intact but provide a different but exciting experience.

6. ADA design

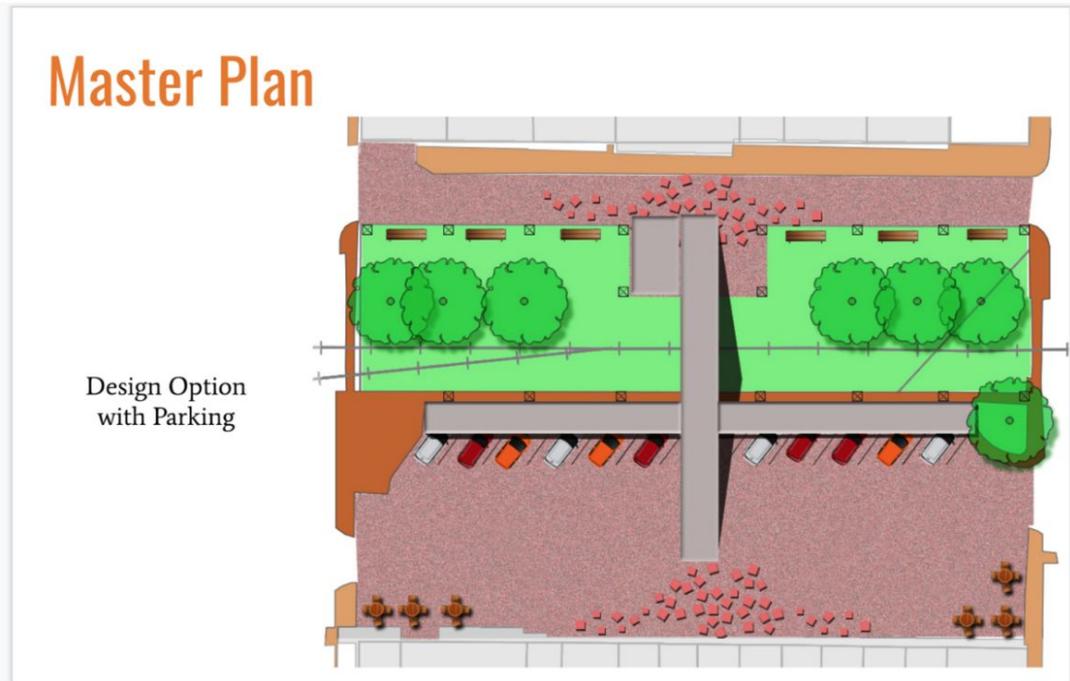
The provision of ADA design aligns with our goal to make downtown inclusive to people with all abilities. The ADA will be incorporated in all of the design elements that have been introduced to the downtown area.

All of these elements that we have included in our design works at supporting our concept of re-connecting downtown area.

Design Option

Based on feedback we received from local businesses, we included another Masterplan option that kept the parking spaces but maintained some room for ample green space. We have also developed a design option that focuses on retaining the number of parking lots at the existing location that is being designed to be a plaza. We acknowledge that the removal of a parking lot from the core of the downtown area might not be approved by the community as one of the driving factors of downtown is the provision of parking. Hence, we came up with a design option that includes a footbridge and a viewing platform and still retains the parking spot below it.

The idea is to give access to spaces encouraging social activities along the railroad track but at the same time provide a parking system in the same location. This could mean organizing and clearing out the parking lot to cater different entertainment options during special occasions and yet again resuming the purpose once the events are over. This idea is not new to a public space as it has been practiced in many cities throughout the country and has proven to be a feasible alternative to provide a public space for people to organize special city events.



Why do pedestrian bridges matter?

- The walkers might find the railroad tracks as a barrier obstructing their access to the other side of the town.
- The bridge can provide a platform to view the movement of the train.
- The platform can create a scenic tourist attraction.
- The bridge connects the pedestrians to their destinations to both sides of the railroad track.
- The bridge can symbolize itself as the city's efforts to encourage pedestrian-friendly area.
- The proximity of the destination from the bridge can be determined by the design of the bridge.

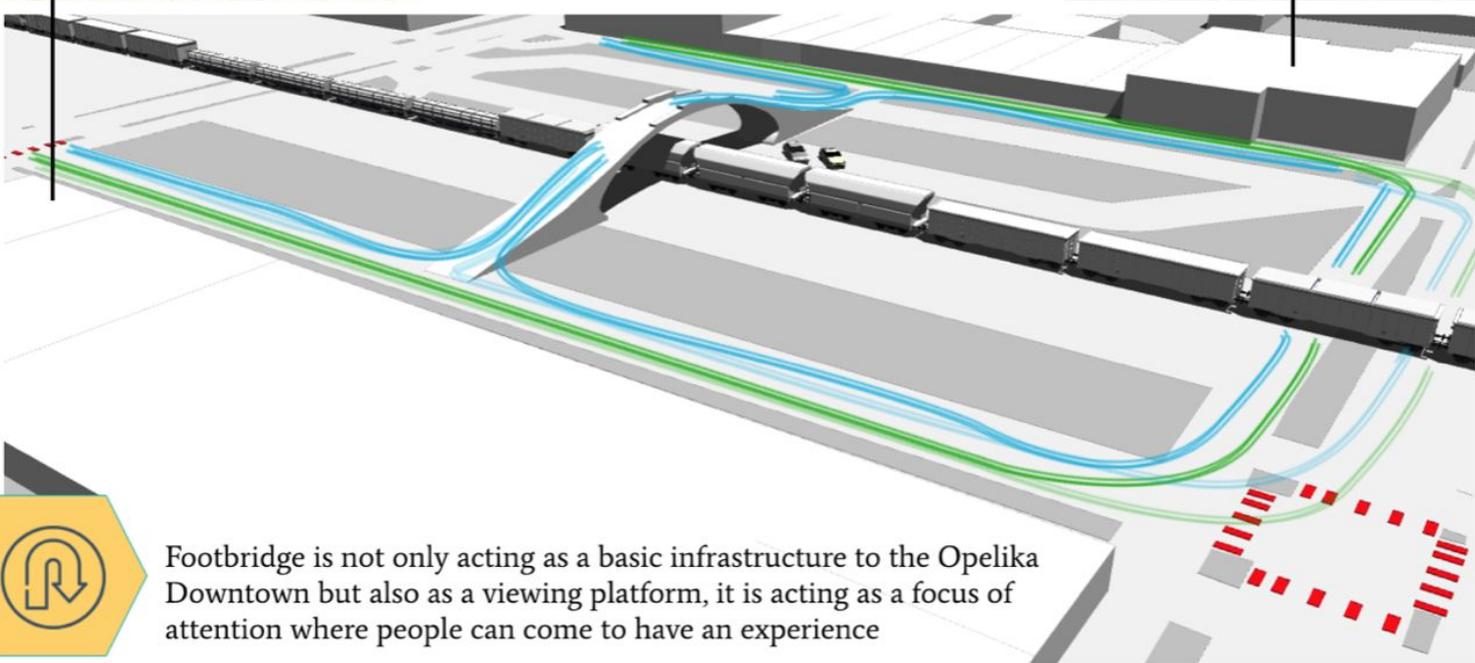
Parameters to evaluate pedestrian destinations

- Elementary, middle and high schools
- Community colleges and universities
- Parks, open spaces and community gardens
- Community centers, libraries, convention centers and hospitals,
- Residential neighborhoods
- Bus stops, light rail stations and multi-modal transit centers
- Business districts and employment centers
- Stadium and arenas

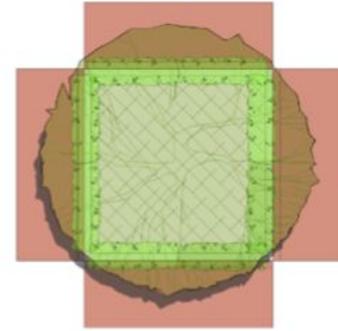
Design Concept Images



Connect North Railroad Avenue
and South Railroad Avenue



Footbridge is not only acting as a basic infrastructure to the Opelika Downtown but also as a viewing platform, it is acting as a focus of attention where people can come to have an experience



RailRoad Plaza will add a more open social focus to the downtown where the outdoor settings suitable for restaurant/fine dining will encourage more vibrancy and the outdoor seatings and landscape features encourage more hours of visits to the area.



Retaining the green space on one side of the railroad track and creating a paved railroad plaza on the other side retains the existing feel of the area. The provision of seatings as landscape elements will improve the amount of time people prefer to stay.

Conclusion

The Reconnecting Downtown Project is important to Opelika for several reasons. Downtown Opelika needs improved connectivity, particularly for pedestrians. Improved connectivity will enhance the experience of patrons and business owners alike along Railroad Avenue. By creating an inviting and safe walkable space for pedestrians along North Railroad Avenue, specifically 8th and 9th Street, we will also be increasing the quality of experience for both local community members and visitors. Finally, the inclusion of a pedestrian footbridge will improve connectivity in addition to creating a landmark that will attract tourist and locals to the area, thus contribution to local economic growth.

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