



NEWTOWN **MACON**

STRATEGIC PLAN 2017-2022

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INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

NewTown Macon, Inc. was founded in 1996 by a broad partnership of public and private leaders to revitalize downtown Macon. The Peyton Anderson Foundation provided the inspiration for these leaders to commit substantial time and resources to reverse the decline of downtown Macon. The initial goals for the organization included persuading the whole community to invest in quality of life improvements, creating a master plan for downtown, preserving and protecting our historic downtown, improving the region's economy, creating an environment where people could live, work and play, telling Macon's story at home and abroad, coordinating urban design, real estate development, downtown management and marketing, and building consensus around favorable public policy.

Since the beginning, NewTown has functioned as a community development corporation by raising funds for improvement projects, as a developer, lender, coach, intermediary and equity partner. That function has given NewTown a unique focus and competency in real estate finance and transactions.

In addition to NewTown's focus on downtown and specialty in real estate, NewTown is also the inspiration and driving force behind the Ocmulgee Heritage Trail. The Trail is a system of walking, biking and recreation resources along the Ocmulgee River. NewTown created, maintains and updates the master plan for the Trail, in addition to raising public and private funds to construct and improve the Trail. When completed, Trail projects are transitioned to the local government to operate as public parks in perpetuity.

To accomplish this task, NewTown engaged Chris Leinberger (www.chrisleinberger.com/bios) to serve as a consultant and keynote speaker for a weekend retreat with NewTown's Board of Directors, held at Callaway Gardens, Georgia on October 16 and 17, 2016. At this retreat, NewTown's Directors formulated the new strategic action plan, contained in this document. The plan is intended to launch on July 1, 2017 and remain in place until June 30, 2022.

DIRECTORS' ASSESSMENT

During the retreat, Leinberger led a SWOT analysis evaluating the Directors' perceptions of NewTown's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Highlights from this exercise are included below, by category:

STRENGTHS

- Downtown has exceptional architecture
- The entire community has enthusiasm about downtown revitalization, and that enthusiasm is spreading and gaining steam
- Actual and perceived safety has increased dramatically
- Downtown enjoys exceptional walkability, unmatched in the region
- Loft development has reactivated upper floors and provided a market for storefront development
- Downtown has beautiful parks
- Unquestionably, downtown is the regional cultural hub
- A great deal of the region's employment, and major employers are located downtown
- First Friday serves as a great way to entice and welcome new people to downtown, and successfully ignited a nightlife culture
- The Ocmulgee Heritage Trail is universally embraced and one of the region's foremost recreational assets
- NewTown employs sophisticated financial tools to enable development
- NewTown has a commitment to local developers and local entrepreneurs and effectively enables local people to succeed through training like the Developer's Academy and individual coaching
- NewTown provides visionary leadership for downtown revitalization and continues to push the envelope on what is possible for Macon
- NewTown is "tuned-in" to what's happening downtown and serves as a resource bank for Directors, partners and the public
- NewTown is committed to strong partnerships
- NewTown is well-resourced, and its financial strength adds credibility, influence and the ability to act quickly
- NewTown's close alliance with Mercer University at multiple levels is a major strength in achieving revitalization that appeals to potential students and retains them in Macon after graduation
- NewTown is seen as innovative, flexible and dynamic among other non-profit organizations
- NewTown has strong and capable staff that conducts themselves professionally and provides strong leadership
- NewTown has the strongest, most influential and most functional Board of Directors in Middle Georgia
- NewTown is integral to sustaining and increasing community civic pride

DIRECTORS' ASSESSMENT

WEAKNESSES

- Even though NewTown has been active for twenty years, some members of the general public still have a misunderstanding (or no understanding) about what NewTown does
- There are still perceptions in the general public that downtown is only for a certain group of people, and that downtown revitalization does not benefit the entire community
- Downtown needs more retail and a more diverse group of storefront tenants more generally
- More frequent and diverse family-friendly activities would broaden downtown's appeal
- Parking has not been adequately managed and lacks clear and easy-to-use signage, especially parking decks
- Police visibility (especially on bike and foot) has decreased significantly since consolidation
- Streetscape appearance, furniture, plantings and maintenance are not as high-quality as competing cities
- Downtown Macon does not have a Business Improvement District (BID) to supplement existing public services at a higher level
- The Dempsey constrains development opportunities, both in terms of real impacts and perceptions, especially for first-time or infrequent visitors and tourists

OPPORTUNITIES

- NewTown needs to better engage diversity at all levels of activity
- Downtown Macon's strategic location will continue to be an asset
- Downtown Macon needs a hotel to enable tourism
- Although many employees of Robins Air Force Base live in downtown Macon, increasing visibility in Warner Robins could draw more people to visit, shop and live in downtown Macon
- Although the river is no longer a liability, we have not exploited its value to the full extent possible
- Baby Boomers are a steadily increasing audience for downtown dining, nightlife, events and lofts.
- Central City Park is underutilized, and could be elevated to an attraction
- College students could play a more prominent role in downtown
- NewTown's real estate loan fund provides flexibility and opportunities that we have not fully explored or exploited

DIRECTORS' ASSESSMENT

THREATS

- The vacant 300-room hotel on First Street (which most recently functioned as a Ramada) is an eyesore and a liability for extending revitalization efforts towards the river
- Mayor Robert Reichert has provided exceptional executive leadership and exhibited a strong commitment to downtown revitalization, but he is term limited so it will be important to elect another candidate who is committed to downtown
- Downtown's fate is inextricably intertwined with and perhaps even dictates the community's future
- Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) is a major threat to the entire region, and would have major negative consequences for downtown Macon
- NewTown's financial stability depends largely on the Peyton Anderson Foundation's continued support
- NewTown's success depends on continuing commitment from Mercer University to downtown revitalization, especially the President of Mercer University
- The bonds that back the real estate loan program are expensive, and could require substantial subsidy from operations if they are not managed properly or if market conditions change
- Several challenges related to the location of the river, contamination of surrounding land, infrastructure such as the interstate and railroad make it difficult to exploit the river
- If downtown Macon cannot institute a BID, it will forever diminish and constrain revitalization efforts
- Macon's public education system hinders every economic development effort, downtown included
- The I16/I75 interchange redesign will have many impacts on the trail and downtown, some of which we cannot even predict
- NewTown must continuously look at challenges with "fresh eyes," looking for creative solutions
- Some property owners choose to maintain derelict properties in prominent locations instead of selling or leasing for current market rates, and neither NewTown nor the government has found a way to renovate these properties



VISION

Prior to this retreat, NewTown did not employ a vision statement. A strategic plan cannot succeed unless it is derived from a clear vision of what the organization will look like at a specific point in the future. Therefore, the Directors proposed a new Vision Statement for NewTown Macon:

NewTown’s vision is a vibrant and authentic city experience unparalleled in the South.

MISSION

NewTown Macon’s mission has not changed since the organization was formed and launched in 1996. Before the retreat our mission statement was:

NewTown Macon is a non-profit organization dedicated to implementing the community’s vision of a comprehensive, coordinated, and continuous plan for revitalizing downtown Macon, Georgia.

In evaluating the mission statement, however, the directors felt that it no longer captures the way that NewTown works or our increasing ambition for the future of downtown Macon. Therefore, the Directors proposed a new mission statement:

NewTown Macon’s mission is to attract, leverage and invest in self-sustaining transformation.



CORE VALUES

NewTown Macon has several core values that dictate how we set priorities, solve problems and achieve revitalization.

VISION

NewTown will continue to create the vision and lead the transformation of downtown.

RELATIONSHIPS

NewTown will identify and cultivate relationships in the private, public and quasi-public sectors to leverage additional participation in efforts to continue the transformation of downtown.

ADVOCACY

NewTown seeks to sustain and increase its credibility to serve as the principal advocate for the transformation of downtown.

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

Thanks to the generosity of the Peyton Anderson Foundation and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, community partners recently completed the Macon Action Plan (known as “MAP,” www.maconactionplan.com), which was unanimously adopted by NewTown’s Board of Directors. Our primary goal is to ensure the success of MAP and the complete implementation of the plan. This strategic plan takes the goals stated in MAP and matches them to NewTown’s abilities and assets. In addition to stating how NewTown will implement MAP, this strategic plan also sets internal goals and objectives for how NewTown will operate sustainably and generate resources to implement MAP.

GROWING JOBS

Increase Office Occupancy

Determine and database the existing inventory of office space in the central business district, including occupancy and rental rates. Develop and implement a strategy for increasing occupancy and rates. Track occupancy and rates annually, publishing market reports and trends.

Support Traditional Economic Development Partners

Cultivate partnerships with the Greater Macon Chamber of Commerce, the Macon Economic Development Commission and the Macon-Bibb Industrial Authority to ensure that downtown Macon is a key component of attracting and retaining talented workers and employers.

Increase Storefront Occupancy

Develop, publish and maintain a comprehensive list or map of downtown dining, shopping and entertainment resources. Increase the total number and diversity of storefronts. Baseline number of tenants in each sector against comparable downtowns. Develop a system to track and increase sales generated in these sectors downtown. Track total storefront occupancy in the same target blocks from the 2012 plan on a monthly basis. Achieve 80% occupancy in these target blocks by 2022. Track overall parcel occupancy in the Central Business District halfway through the campaign and at the campaign conclusion. Reduce overall parcel vacancy to 15%.

Support Entrepreneurship

Continue programming to entice, incubate and launch new businesses, including those with high-growth potential. Rely on partnerships with SCORE, the Mercer Innovation Center and economic development partners to coordinate efforts. Leverage at least \$5 million of private investment in start up businesses in downtown.

OCMULGEE HERITAGE TRAIL

Connect to Downtown

Plan, fund and construct several enticing connections from the existing Ocmulgee Heritage Trail network to downtown Macon.

Connect Neighborhoods to the Trail

Create pedestrian and bicycle connections across the river to connect neighborhoods to downtown. Connect downtown-adjacent neighborhoods to downtown with quality bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.

Leverage the River

Create more activity and cultivate a more intimate connection to the water.

Increase Visibility

Increase the physical visibility of the Trail system and develop and implement a signage master plan for the entire system to make it easier to access and navigate the Trail.

ADVOCATE FOR PROGRESS

Ocmulgee National Park and Preserve

Achieve designation of the Ocmulgee National Monument as a National Historical Park, including significantly expand the boundaries. Advocate for the relocation of the main entrance of the park to Clinton St.

Increase Bicycle Access

Implement Macon Connects by implementing a bike path system throughout the urban core.

Parking Management

Implement and sustain a comprehensive parking management plan to increase turnover and enable a vibrant retail environment.

Advocate for Passenger Rail

Continue to pursue passenger rail connections through Macon, especially to Atlanta.



GOALS & OBJECTIVES

CREATING A SENSE OF PLACE

Increase Walkability

Invest in pedestrian safety, comfort and accommodation, including diverting log truck traffic outside of the Central Business District. Consider eliminating vehicular access to certain areas to create pedestrian malls.

Activate Public Spaces

Use event, furnishings, design and programming to bring underutilized public spaces and parks to life.

Improve Poplar Street

Implement the “Poplar Yards” concept proposed in MAP to improve the median parks on Poplar Street.

Implement and Manage a Business Improvement District (BID)

Conduct a successful campaign to gain the support of half the owners of downtown property owners by value or parcel number to create a six-year five-mill tax to be used for cleanliness and safety in downtown and enhance the level of public service delivery.

Tactical Urbanism

Continue to develop fun, accessible, low-cost programs to engage the public in beautifying and improving downtown Macon.

INCREASING RESIDENTS

More than double loft housing to over 1,000 total market-rate units. Incubate a market for for-sale condos in downtown. Achieve 85% occupancy within one year of completion and sustain 85% occupancy within entire loft market. Survey active occupancy in projects with active loans monthly. Survey entire loft market annually to report on relevant changes and trends.

SUSTAINABILITY

Produce adequate income from operating and investment activities to operate sustainably separate from ongoing capital campaigns.

Bond Fund Breakeven Strategies

Eliminate projected losses from the operation of the bond fund by investing the funds in NewTown-controlled projects where the money can be fully amortized. Use investments to create catalytic developments and prove new markets and concepts, such as coworking. Develop and invest in joint ventures, especially with public and non-profit partners. Continue to purchase and develop a diverse portfolio of downtown properties to provide cash flow and appreciating assets to support NewTown’s operations and improving downtown Macon.

Godsey Initiatives Fund

Grow the Godsey Initiatives Fund to \$10 million in private cash to allow NewTown a private alternative to government-backed bond funds. Invest in new projects using the flexibility of the Godsey Initiatives Fund instead of the bond fund.

Program Related Investments

Encourage local investors with significant assets to divert a portion of holdings from their portfolios from traditional intermediate- and long-term fixed income products to low-interest investment funds in NewTown. Raise at least \$10 million in new investments from major endowments.

Complete the Campaign

Raise at least \$6.5 million in the 2017-2022 Capital Campaign to implement this strategic plan.





NEWTOWN MACON

ATTRACT. LEVERAGE. INVEST.