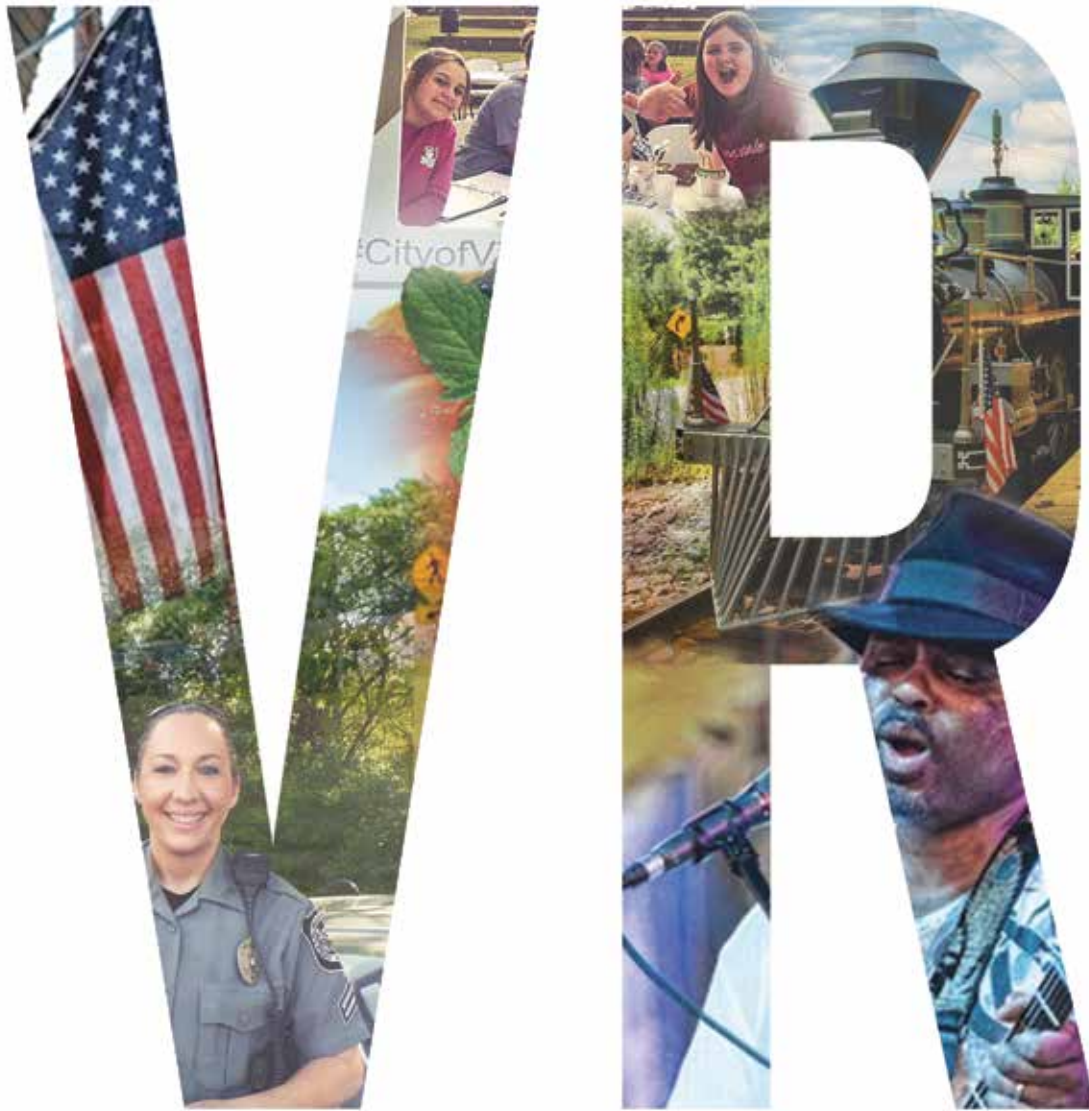


VILLA RICA

RENAISSANCE STRATEGIC VISION & PLAN





CONTENTS

6	GEORGIA DOWNTOWN RENAISSANCE PARTNERS
7	RENAISSANCE STRATEGIC VISION & PLAN (RSVP) USER'S GUIDE
8	THE RENAISSANCE STRATEGIC VISIONING & PLANNING PROCESS
11	TIMELINE
12	VILLA RICA RENAISSANCE STRATEGIC VISIONING AND PLAN
13	INTRODUCTION
13	BASIC DEMOGRAPHICS
18	COMMUNITY ANALYSIS
22	PLAN REVIEW
24	PUBLIC INPUT
30	VILLA RICA TOP ISSUES
36	VILLA RICA WORK PLAN
116	ACTION ITEMS
	Organization.....118
	Promotion.....121
	Design.....123
	Economic Development.....125

CRE

STEERING COMMITTEE

Bill Taylor, Villa Rica Downtown Development Authority
John Hannabach, Villa Rica Planning and Zoning
John Mount, Villa Rica Planning and Zoning
Erin Chambers, Villa Rica High School
Leslie McPherson, Villa Rica City Council
Ken Norton, Local citizen
Dennis Brown, Local citizen
Amy Brown, Carroll County Chamber of Commerce
Christopher Pike, Main Street Manager
Matthew Momtahan, Villa Rica Main Street & Downtown Development Authority
Janet L. Hyde, Director of Community Development

VILLA RICA MAYOR & CITY COUNCIL

J. Allen Collins, Mayor
Shirley Marchman, Ward 1
Verland Best, Ward 2
Mayor Pro-Tem Mike Williamson, Ward 4
Leslie McPherson, Ward 3
Danny Carter, Ward 5

CITY STAFF

Janet L. Hyde, Director of Community Development, RSVP Lead
Christopher Pike, Villa Rica Tourism Director and Main Street Coordinator
David A. Milliron, City Manager

Special thanks to Michael Valentine for contributing his photography for this report.



DITS

GEORGIA DOWNTOWN STRATEGIC VISIONING & PLANNING PARTNERS

Georgia Municipal Association/ Georgia Cities Foundation
Perry Hiott, Director of Community Development
Chris Higdon, Manager, Community Development

GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

Jessica Reynolds-Wiggins, Director, Office of Downtown Development
Corinne Thornton, Office Director, Regional Community Services

CARL VINSON INSTITUTE OF GOVERNMENT

Danny Bivins, Public Service Associate, Principal Investigator
Kaitlin McShea Messich, Senior Community Designer
T. Clark Stancil, Landscape and Urban Designer
Chris Stebbins, Graduate Assistant
Cecile Riker, Graduate Assistant
Whitney Cleveland, Graduate Student
Karen DeVivo, Editor

Special thanks to all of those who attended focus group meetings, took part in interviews, voiced their opinions at the town hall, and participated in the community survey.





The Georgia Downtown Renaissance Partnership,

which includes the Georgia Municipal Association, the Georgia Cities Foundation, the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government, and support from the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, facilitates the creation of strategic visions, plans, and work programs for communities in Georgia. The Georgia Downtown Renaissance Partnership works with government leaders, chambers of commerce, downtown merchants, property owners, lending institutions, and citizens to help ensure that all cities in Georgia have access to what they need in order to realize their vision and maximize their potential. One element of this important mission is the community master planning process facilitated by the Georgia Downtown Renaissance Partnership, the Renaissance Strategic Vision and Plan (RSVP). Working with communities across Georgia, the RSVP process is the result of the collaboration and dedicated efforts of the following partners:

- **Carl Vinson Institute of Government** – For more than 85 years, the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia has worked with public officials throughout Georgia and around the world to improve governance and people's lives. From Georgia's early days as a largely agrarian state with a modest population to its modern-day status as a national and international force in business, industry, and politics with a population of over 10 million, the Institute of Government has helped government leaders navigate change and forge strong directions for a better Georgia.
- **Georgia Municipal Association** – Created in 1933, the Georgia Municipal Association (GMA) is the only state organization that represents municipal governments in Georgia. Based in Atlanta, GMA is a voluntary, nonprofit organization that provides legislative advocacy and educational, employee benefit, and technical consulting services to its members. GMA's purpose is to anticipate and influence the forces shaping Georgia's communities and to provide leadership, tools, and services that assist local governments in becoming more innovative, effective, and responsive.
- **Georgia Cities Foundation** – The Georgia Cities Foundation, founded in 1999, is a nonprofit subsidiary of the Georgia Municipal Association. The foundation's mission is to assist cities in their efforts to revitalize and enhance downtown areas by serving as a partner and facilitator in funding capital projects through the revolving loan fund. Its services include the Revolving Loan Fund Program, the Heart and Soul Bus Tour, the Peer-to-Peer Mentoring Tour, the Downtown Development Authority Basic Training, and the Renaissance Award.
- **Georgia Department of Community Affairs** – The Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) was created in 1977 to serve as an advocate for local governments. On July 1, 1996, the governor and General Assembly merged the Georgia Housing and Finance Authority with the Department of Community Affairs. Today, DCA operates a host of state and federal grant programs; serves as the state's lead agency in housing finance and development; promulgates building codes to be adopted by local governments; provides comprehensive planning, technical, and research assistance to local governments; and serves as the lead agency for the state's solid waste reduction efforts.

RSVP *user's guide*

This Renaissance Strategic Vision & Plan is intended to be continually used to guide future downtown development.

Focused on positive outcomes for downtown, the work program and implementation items included in the Villa Rica Renaissance Strategic Vision and Plan (RSVP) are intended to be used continually as an everyday resource by local officials and citizens. Work program and action items are designed as approachable goals and should be checked off as they are completed. As new opportunities arise, additional work program items should be added to the plan with a focus on implementation. At a minimum, local officials should undertake an annual update of the Villa Rica RSVP by answering the following questions: what was completed; were enacted programs successful; what needs to be added or changed to; and how, when, and who is responsible for implementation. Long-term success is achieved by continuing to update and implement the plan.



the RENAISSANCE STRATEGIC VISIONING & PLANNING *process*

(RSVP)

Strategic visioning is a collaborative planning and decision-making process that relies on broad stakeholder involvement and focuses on asset-based development to create a shared community vision, plan, and implementation work plan.

Strategic visioning helps citizens better understand unique community assets and more clearly identify collective priorities. Together, these communal strengths and selected areas of improvement form the basis for effective community-led planning. Throughout the development of the plan, the community identifies pressing issues, articulates big-picture goals, and develops short-term and long-term strategies to address neighborhood concerns.

The RSVP process relies on a three-step process to evaluate current conditions in the community, address issues that are preventing success, and create a road map to enacting Villa Rica's vision for the future.



3 steps:

1) WHERE ARE WE NOW?

2) WHERE ARE WE GOING?

3) HOW DO WE GET THERE?

1.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Understanding the current conditions of downtown Villa Rica is an essential element of a successful planning effort. Step one, “Where are we now,” incorporates demographic research, a review of prior plans and studies, and public engagement to paint a comprehensive picture of Villa Rica. Focus groups, one-on-one interviews, community-wide surveys, town hall meetings, and visual preference assessments are tools that can be used to reveal the community’s story as well as current issues and opportunities.

Elements of step one include:

- Plan Review
- Demographic Scan and Analysis
- Visual Preference Assessment
- Steering Committee Meetings
- One-on-One Interviews
- Focus Groups
- Community Survey
- Town Hall Community Meeting

2.

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

In the second step of the process, the community looks to the future to shape a new vision. Built on the community desires and strengths discovered in community input sessions, Villa Rica’s vision is then interpreted in step two through illustrations and design recommendations. The final products of step two allow all community members to experience the physical translation of the collective vision.

Elements of step two include:

- Design
- Renderings
- Visualization

3.

HOW DO WE GET THERE?

The final step in the strategic visioning process creates an implementation plan to move Villa Rica toward the community’s vision for the future. Community input and effort form the foundation for the implementation plan, which is critical for successful outcomes.

Elements of step three include

- Work Program
- Design Solutions
- Short-term (1–12 months)
- Long-term (12 months–10 years)

timeline

november Initial Steering Committee Meeting, Interviews, and Focus Groups

december Town Hall, Steering Committee Meeting, Interviews, and Focus Groups

january Interviews, Focus Groups, Steering Committee Meeting, Preliminary Designs, Visual Preference Assessment, Public Input Results and Analysis, Community Survey Results and Analysis, Plan Review, Public Input Summary, and Top Issue Prioritization

february Steering Committee Meeting, Draft Work Plan, Design, Rendering, and Visualization

march Steering Committee Meeting, Design, Rendering, and Visualization

april Steering Committee Meeting, Design, Rendering, and Visualization

may Final Presentation

VILLA RICA

RENAISSANCE STRATEGIC VISION & PLAN

In Villa Rica, the Carl Vinson Institute of Government, Georgia Municipal Association, Georgia Cities Foundation, and Georgia Department of Community Affairs came together to assist the city in creating a strategic vision, plan, and short-term work program to guide future growth while ensuring that the city retains the small-town atmosphere and intense community pride that make Villa Rica a great place to call home. Villa Rica's strategic vision and plan was created via a three-stage process: 1) public input and engagement, 2) visioning and design, and 3) the development of an implementable work program.



INTRODUCTION

Drawn from across the young country, the first settlers of what would become Villa Rica arrived in 1830. Attracted to Georgia's bucolic western frontier by the promise of gold, these settlers brought life and energy to the settlement then known as Hixtown. Until 1825, Villa Rica and the surrounding area comprised a hub of the vast Creek Nation, and the influence of the Creek could still be felt in the early days of Villa Rica. Throughout the remainder of the 1830s, Villa Rica's dusty streets boomed with the motley influx of miners, horse thieves, and those seeking riches from the gold in Pine Mountain and at least 18 other bustling gold mines. These rough and tumble frontiersmen and women comprised Georgia's first gold rush and lent the city a Wild West-like frontier culture. While most of these treasure seekers gravitated to North Georgia, California, and other gold rush areas as Villa Rica's gold industry played out in the mid-1800s, the legacy of these miners lives on in attractions like the Pine Mountain Gold Museum and Villa Rica's heritage as the "City of Gold."

Like the gold rush of Villa Rica's past, new residents seeking the city's high quality of life, scenic beauty, and convenience to the growing economic engine of Metro Atlanta comprise the city's modern influx and population boom. First linked with regional hubs via the Southern Railway downtown, then Bankhead Highway (Montgomery Street), and now Interstate 20, Villa Rica's proximity to Atlanta and connection to the wider world make the city an attractive destination for commuters, travelers, and private industry. Drawn to Villa Rica's historic neighborhoods and new developments like Mirror Lake, the city's bustling population values Villa Rica's family-friendly small-town atmosphere, stellar dining options and local businesses, and the proactive, responsive local leadership. Villa Rica's intense community pride is palpable as citizens from across the city and the surrounding area are drawn to events like the Gold Rush Festival, Gold Nugget Drop, and Fourth of July Fireworks that bring activity and warm communality to beloved assets like The Mill Amphitheater and Villa Rica's busy downtown streets.

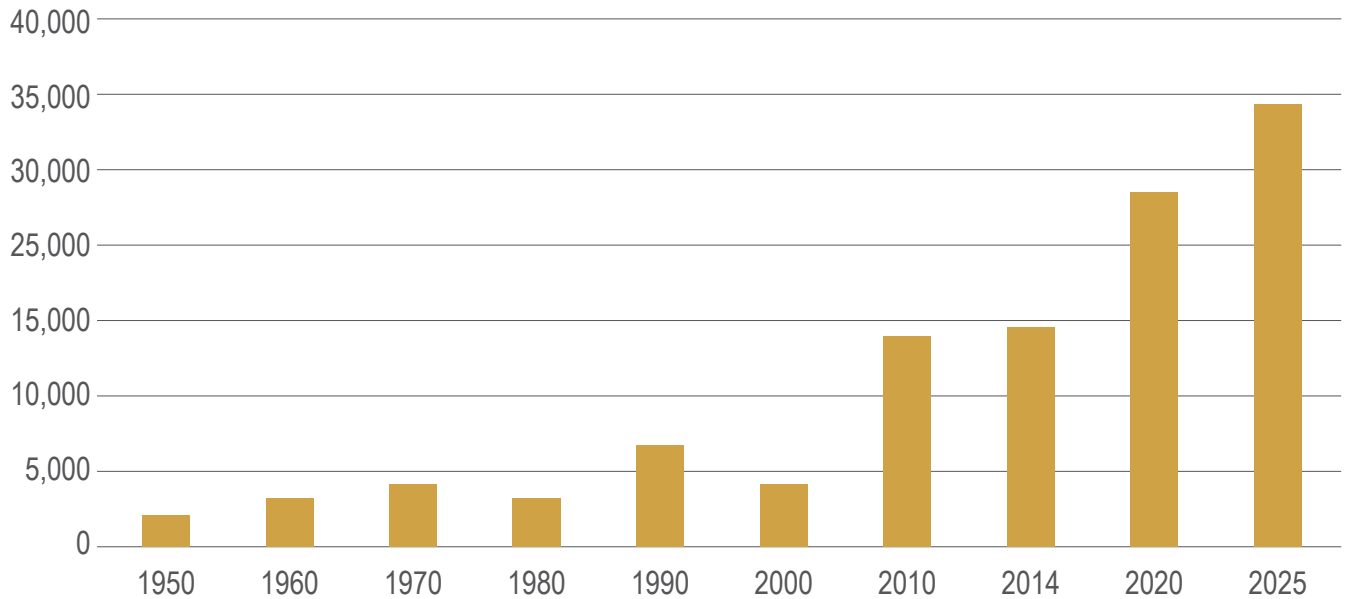
BASIC DEMOGRAPHICS: WE ARE VR

Historic population figures for the city clearly demonstrate the dramatic growth experienced in Villa Rica over the past 50 years, with the population expanding exponentially since the early 1990s. While growth has slowed following the Great Recession, Villa Rica continues to flourish with 10,566 new residents since 2000: a remarkable 256% growth rate. Villa Rica's diverse demographic profile closely mirrors Georgia's as a whole. Breaking down Villa Rica's population into groups, the majority of citizens are classified as white (54.2%), just over a third (34.6%) are African American, and just under 5% of Villa Ricans identify as Hispanic (4.7%). Across these demographics, commuting patterns from the city reflect that the overwhelming majority of locals leave the city for work, with Atlanta as the most common destination. As a burgeoning bedroom community over the past two decades, much of the city's recent growth has been driven by commuters to Atlanta and locations throughout the metro area. Creating more accessible, decent-wage jobs and employment opportunities within the city should be a priority to ensure a healthy tax base and sustainable mix of uses within the city in the years to come.

Throughout the RSVP process, Villa Ricans lauded the city's small-town atmosphere, intense community pride, responsive police force and government, and convenience to big city amenities as helping to make the city particularly well-suited to children and families. Looking at the city's demographic profile, Villa Rica's strong middle class (2013 median income: \$50,759), healthy percentage of family households (65.7%), and large proportion of youth (29.2% under age 20) all reinforce the city's reputation as a great place to raise a family. Creating more programming options that target families and youth could help to fill a void in the city's current programming mix, while building on Villa Rica's existing popularity with families.

population

OF VILLA RICA, 1950-2025



Demographic trends, population projections, recent construction, and the recovery of the housing market all indicate that Villa Rica will continue to grow significantly over the coming decades. With the inevitable growth of the city in future years, city leaders must be proactive to implement an ideal community vision for future growth. Throughout discussions with the community, locals expressed a desire to retain the small-town sense of place and community pride that make Villa Rica a special place to call home. Locals crave a walkable, connected, and friendly hometown for all ages with plenty of recreation options and a thriving, diverse downtown experience. Villa Rica is ideally placed in the path of growth, a position most communities would envy. How this growth will take place is entirely dependent on the actions of city officials.

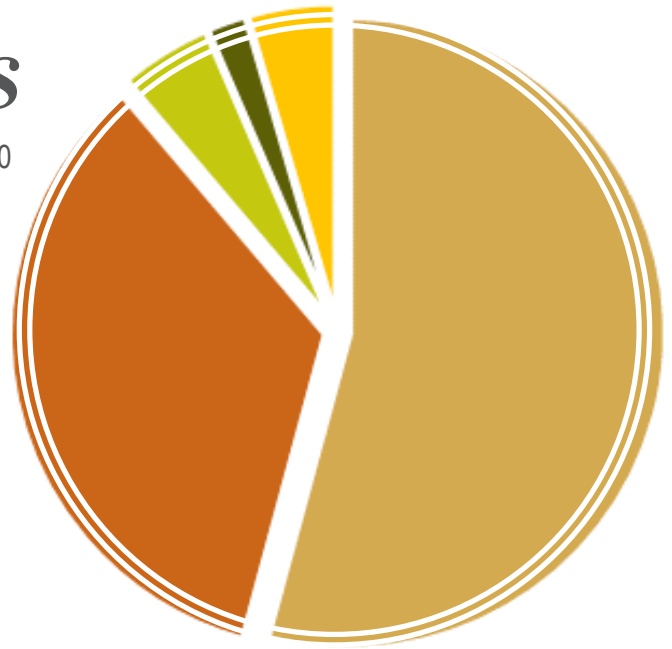
With growth on the way, city officials must prioritize downtown development and help ensure that new investment is focused on repopulating Downtown Villa Rica. Without the active encouragement and proactive planning of city officials, this growth will likely take the form of widespread and chaotic sprawl, harming the city's quality of life, surrounding natural environment, unique sense of place, and small-town community feel. Fundamentally, this type of growth would harm the qualities that make Villa Rica special. Instead, Villa Rica must work to bring this new development downtown. In addition to infill development within the current fabric of

downtown, the city could consider working with developers to extend downtown to adjacent undeveloped parcels to the north and east of downtown. At the same time, the city should act on community momentum for more bicycle and pedestrian connections between downtown and surrounding neighborhoods. These connections would help to tie downtown to neighboring residential areas to create a more vibrant downtown experience and build on the city's high quality of life. While encouraging the dense, walkable development desired by the community, the city must also ensure that new development meets community standards. As such, existing guidelines should be reviewed periodically and updated to encourage the type of development the community desires. By attracting new development first to the downtown area and creating the connections to surrounding areas desired by the community, city officials could help to boost Villa Rica's quality of life, create an environment attractive to new investment and residents, and ensure the long-term health of the city for decades to come.

demographics

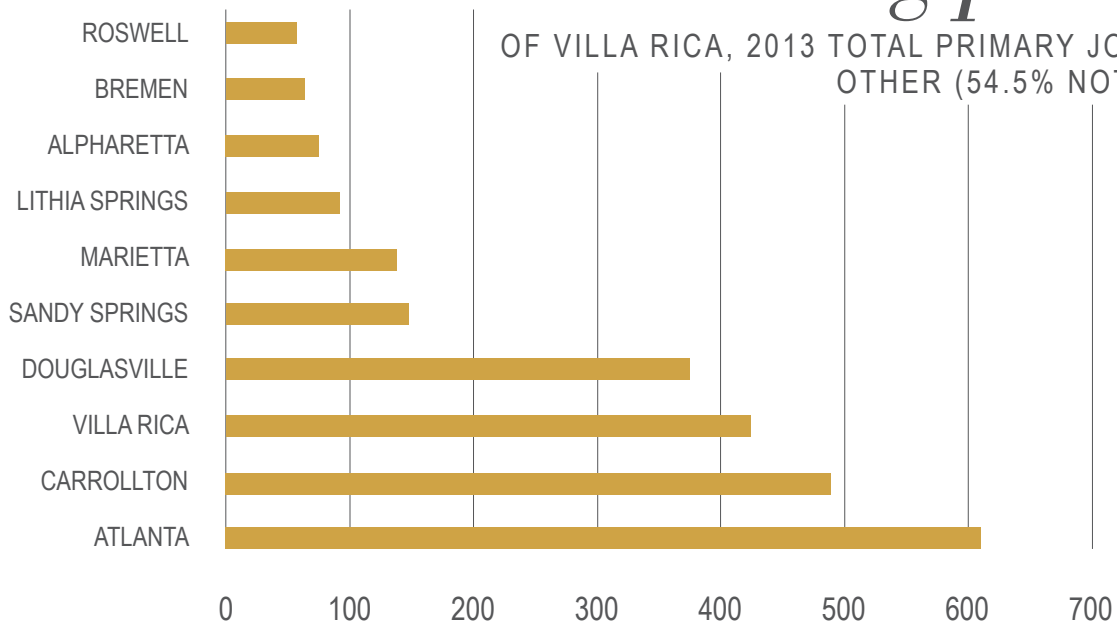
OF VILLA RICA, TOTAL POPULATION: 14,700

- WHITE
- AFRICAN AMERICAN
- HISPANIC
- ASIAN
- OTHER



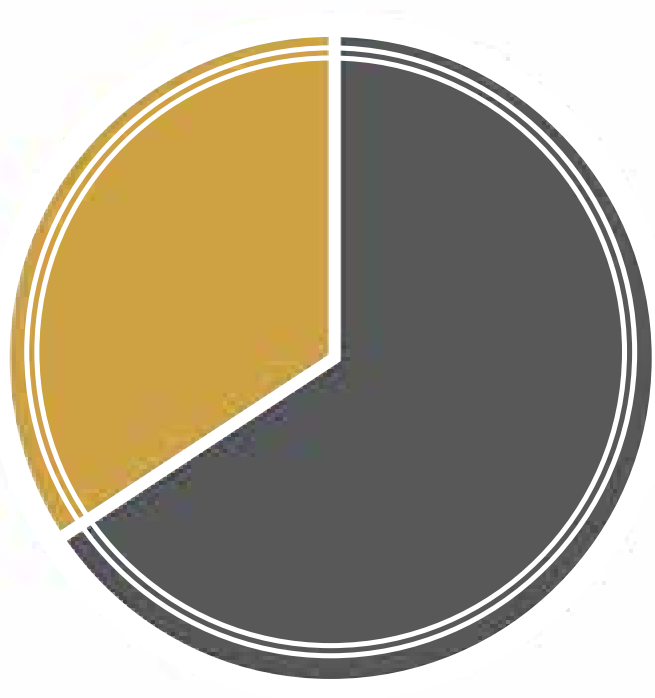
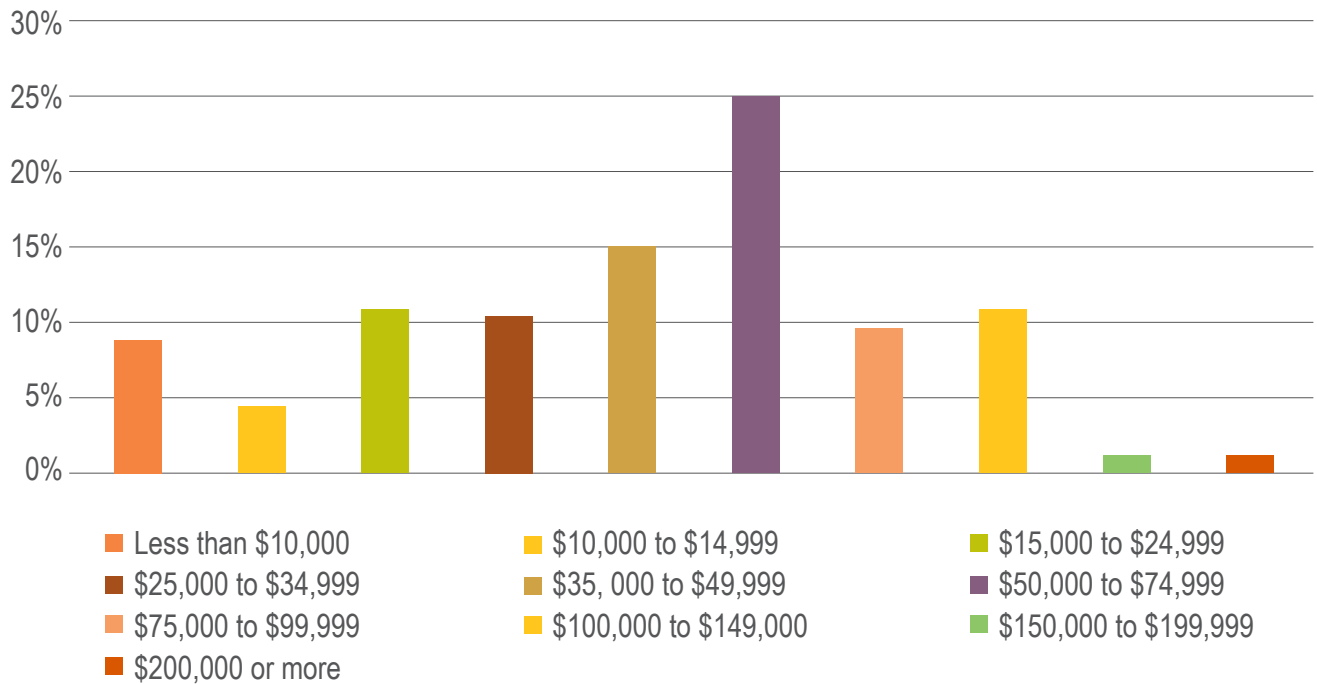
commuting patterns

OF VILLA RICA, 2013 TOTAL PRIMARY JOBS: 5,437
OTHER (54.5% NOT SHOWN)



household income

OF VILLA RICA, 2013 MEDIAN INCOME: \$50,759;
 GEORGIA MEDIAN INCOME: \$47,829



household types

2014 TOTAL HOUSEHOLDS: 5,333

- Family Households
- Non-family Households



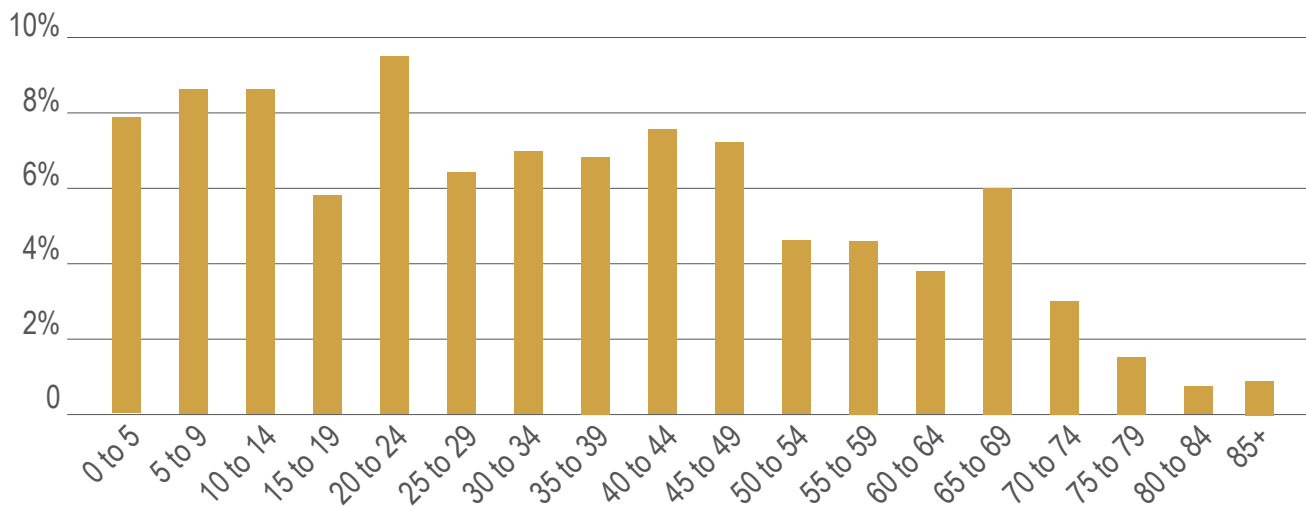
City of Villa Rica



#CityofVillaRica #WeAreVR

age of villa rica

2014 MEDIAN AGE: 31.9, GEORGIA AVERAGE: 35.7





COMMUNITY ANALYSIS

To better understand current conditions in downtown Villa Rica, faculty and staff at the Carl Vinson Institute of Government surveyed and documented existing resources in the downtown area. This analysis of current conditions included the presence and absence of pedestrian infrastructure and crosswalks, existing buildings and open spaces, available parking, the presence of institutional uses, and major gateways for motorists arriving downtown. This analysis provides valuable background for community issues outlined in both the public input and top issues sections of the Villa Rica Renaissance Strategic Vision and Plan. Taken together, these inventories of conditions on the ground illustrate downtown's top issues, which include connectivity, parking, and more.

CONNECTIVITY

The community analysis revealed a disjointed sidewalk network and absence of crosswalks at several major intersections. These conditions show downtown's connectivity problem, a top issue among public input participants. In addition to incomplete sidewalks and limited crossings, the analysis illustrates the multitude of connectivity issues caused by the Norfolk Southern railroad tracks that divide downtown. Currently, both pedestrians and motorists must travel long distances to cross the tracks and travel between both sides of downtown. Creating more direct pedestrian crossings must be a priority to tie together both halves of downtown and create the connected and pedestrian-friendly downtown experience desired by the community. In the long term, the

city could explore developing a pedestrian tunnel to connect North Candler and South Candler Streets beneath the railroad tracks. By creating safe, accessible, and attractive pedestrian infrastructure, the city would send a message that downtown values pedestrian activity and is committed to a vibrant, walkable vision for the city.

In addition to connectivity issues caused by the railroad, the community analysis further illustrated how downtown could be better connected with sidewalks and crosswalks. While downtown's most dense blocks typically contain some pedestrian improvements, many of these sidewalks terminate at the end of the block and fail to connect to back streets, surrounding streets, or adjacent neighborhoods. Additionally, while a significant portion of downtown contains on-street parking and several parking lots, much of this parking is not connected to the remainder of downtown by sidewalks. Prioritizing connecting downtown's existing pedestrian improvements should be a major priority for the city to enhance pedestrian safety and connectivity while taking full advantage of these existing investments.

PARKING

In addition to connectivity and pedestrian friendliness, the inventory of downtown's current conditions illustrates that despite parking emerging as a major issue in public input sessions, a substantial area of downtown is already devoted to public and private parking. In fact, only spaces listed in Villa Rica's recent downtown parking inventory were included in this analysis and the portion of downtown devoted to

A VISION *for* DOWNTOWN

“Villa Rica is embracing the growth that has propelled it into the 21st century much as it embraced the gold rush that created it in 1826. Villa Rica builds upon its fortune of being located 30 miles outside of the world-class city of Atlanta yet surrounded by natural beauty and bucolic offerings.

The city seeks to become a unique blend of small town and suburbia that offers its residents and visitors ample recreational opportunities, refreshing green vistas, all while having ready access to all necessary goods and services. Villa Rica is working towards providing citizens of all ages an array of housing choices, a diverse economic base and a quality of history and life that exceeds what could be provided in a typical suburb or a typical small town.”

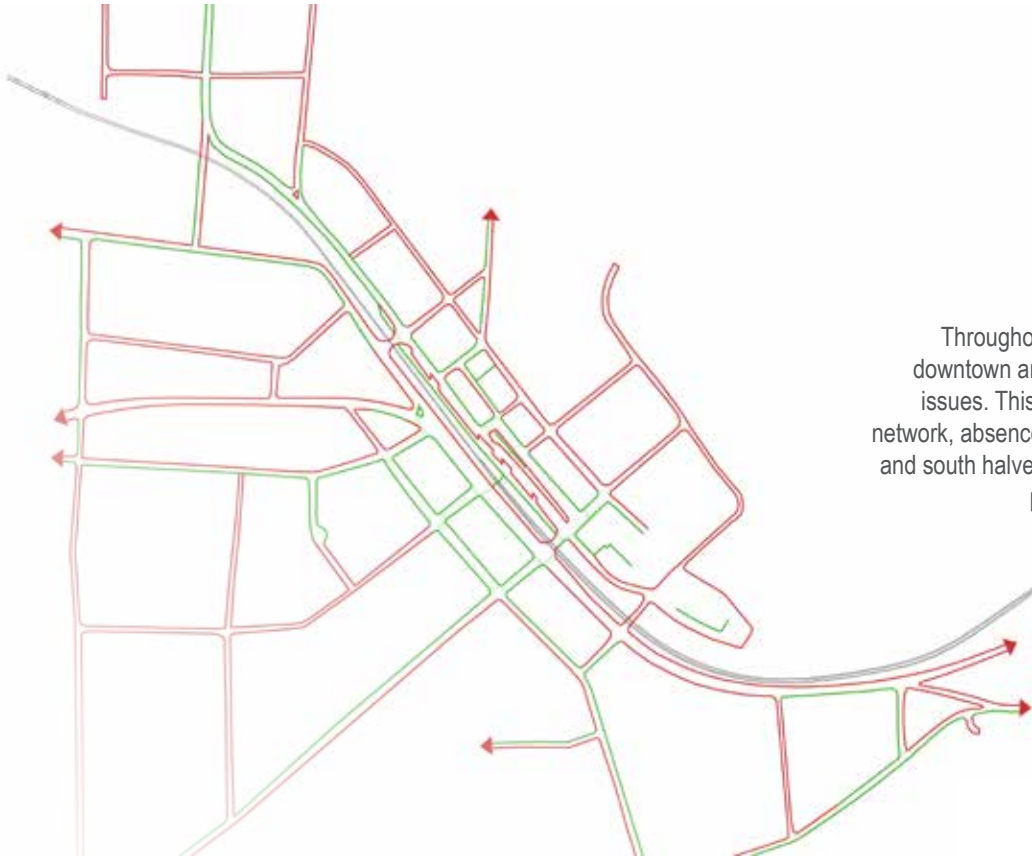
— CITY OF VILLA RICA 2026 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN, 2005

parking is significantly more than what is shown, particularly along Bankhead Highway east and west of downtown. By utilizing existing parking spaces more efficiently and better connecting these spaces to the remainder of downtown, the city could avoid developing more parking or investing in costly infrastructure like a structured parking deck.

DOWNTOWN INFILL OPPORTUNITIES

A figure/ground analysis of downtown with the solid forms of buildings illustrated in black shows the relatively small portion of downtown devoted to buildings. Figure/ground diagrams help to illustrate the urban form. By identifying spaces devoted to buildings in Villa Rica, we can visualize how density declines dramatically as setbacks and parking requirements increase along the auto-centric corridors leading into town. Even in the core blocks of downtown, this analysis shows a multitude of opportunities where density could be increased and new infill buildings encouraged to create the vibrant experience and mix of uses desired by the community. Incentivizing appropriate development within Villa Rica's downtown core and discouraging chaotic sprawl is step one to achieving the vital, unique, and thriving downtown experience desired by the community.





connectivity

SIDEWALK ANALYSIS

Throughout the public input process, better connecting downtown and encouraging walkability emerged as major issues. This analysis shows the city's disjointed sidewalk network, absence of important connections between the north and south halves of downtown, and opportunities to enhance pedestrian infrastructure throughout the area.



connectivity

PARKING ANALYSIS

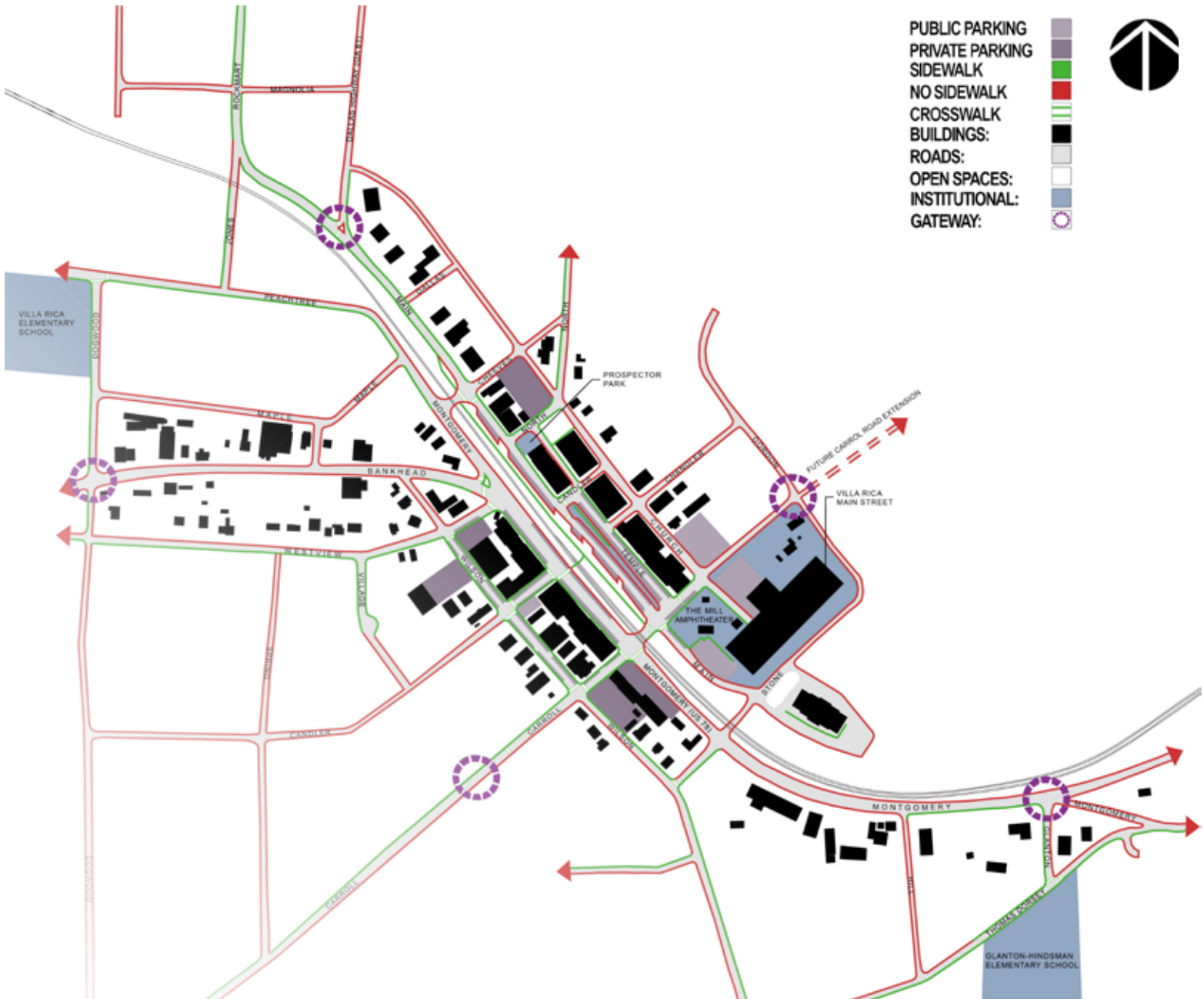
In nearly every city, the first issue voiced by focus groups and community members is the availability of parking. Because they are inherently densely packed, often historic areas, downtowns require a different mindset when it comes to parking. Focused solely on the downtown core, this analysis illustrates the wide availability of public and private parking options on both the north and south sides of downtown.

Better connecting downtown would make these existing parking options more attractive while addressing important issues of walkability and connectivity.



full analysis

OF VILLA RICA



This full analysis of current conditions includes the presence and absence of pedestrian infrastructure and crosswalks, existing buildings and open spaces, available parking, the presence of institutional uses, and major gateways for motorists arriving downtown. Taken together, this inventory of conditions on the ground illustrates downtown's top issues, while pointing to opportunities for boosting downtown connectivity, walkability, infill development, and progressive parking solutions.

PLAN REVIEW

Previous plans for Villa Rica recommend building on and diversifying the city's existing reputation as a thriving and friendly small town with an exceptional quality of life. The City of Villa Rica 2026 Comprehensive Plan, The City of Villa Rica Urban Redevelopment Plan, and The City of Villa Rica Downtown Unified Development Code all contain significant goals toward increasing the vitality of downtown by encouraging a mix of uses including developing infill housing and other urban living options, promoting the adaptive reuse of Villa Rica's historic buildings and historic character, diversifying the local economy, attracting residents and tourists, and retaining and complementing the city's family-friendly small-town character. Taken together and paired with the Code of the City of Villa Rica, these plans guide the form, type, and quality of growth in the city. These documents and city codes should be critically reassessed regularly to ensure that Villa Rica's established goals are being met and community standards are being upheld.

The 2005 City of Villa Rica 2026 Comprehensive Plan contains goals, objectives, and policies for preserving the city's natural and historic resources, growing an economy that equitably benefits all residents, providing a diverse array of quality housing, growing community facilities to maintain the city's high quality of life, creating a balanced land use pattern that accommodates future generations, expanding the transportation network to support future growth, and coordinating local planning efforts with local, regional, and state programs. Through Villa Rica's Unified Redevelopment Plan, the city builds on the desire to retain and preserve the historic heritage and architecture of downtown, promote historic resources to boost tourism, encourage affordable housing for all age groups/demographics, expand transportation options, make downtown pedestrian-friendly, increase mixed-use development and entertainment options, and ensure the character and look of new development is compatible with existing structures. These goals of the Unified Redevelopment Plan uniquely reflect the desires of the community for a pedestrian-friendly downtown

experience with plenty of housing, retail, and dining options. Additionally, like the Unified Redevelopment Plan and the city's Downtown Commercial Design Guidelines, locals put a premium on downtown's historic character. Overwhelmingly, citizens would like to see a downtown where historic buildings are rehabilitated and converted to preserve downtown's character while accommodating the new uses desired by the community. Many of the goals of the Unified Redevelopment Plan connect with the city's Downtown Commercial Design Guidelines, which focuses on the compatibility of architecture downtown but is intended to contribute to the character of downtown's historic building stock and encourage adaptive reuse of historic buildings. Locals who took part in public engagement sessions strongly supported a more cohesive look for downtown buildings and along major commercial corridors entering and leaving the city. The city's Downtown Commercial Design Guidelines could be amended to address these community concerns and create the cohesive look desired by the community.

When applied by developers and building owners, these plans and guidelines help to form the framework for future growth downtown. Ensuring that these plans and guidelines are kept up-to-date and reflect the desires of the community should be a major priority for local officials. Effective guidelines and progressive zoning that encourages downtown development will help to preserve the characteristics that make the city unique while creating the vibrant, diverse, and connected future desired by the citizens of Villa Rica.

PLANS INCLUDED IN THE REVIEW:

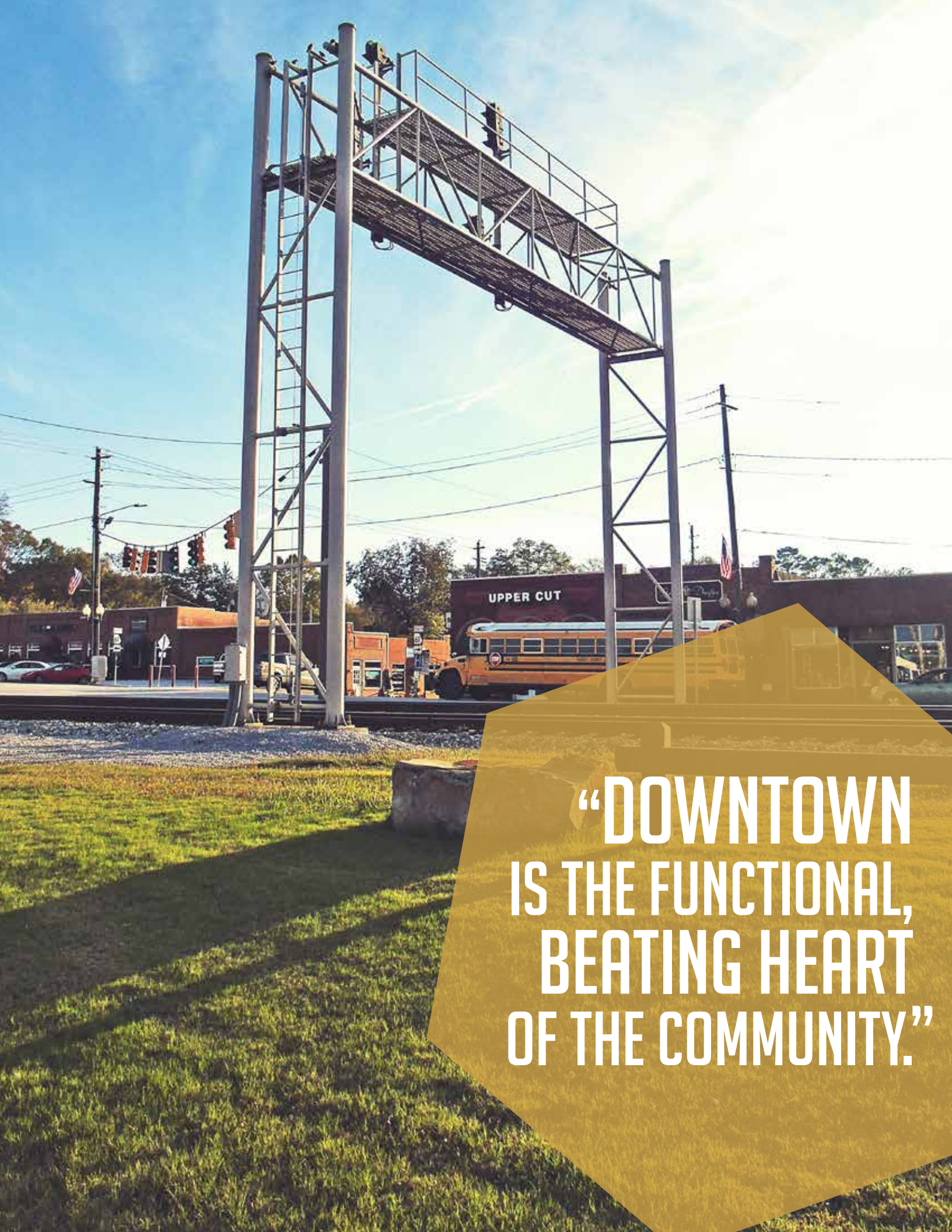
The Code of the City of Villa Rica
Prepared by the City of Villa Rica, 2016

Unified Development Code
Prepared by the City of Villa Rica, Working Copy

The City of Villa Rica Urban Redevelopment Plan
Prepared by the City of Villa Rica, 2012

The City of Villa Rica Downtown Commercial Design Guidelines
Prepared by the City of Villa Rica, 2012

City of Villa Rica 2026 Comprehensive Plan
Prepared by Chattahoochee-Flint Regional Development Center, 2005



**“DOWNTOWN
IS THE FUNCTIONAL,
BEATING HEART
OF THE COMMUNITY.”**

WE *are* VR: PUBLIC INPUT

As part of the public input phase, the Carl Vinson Institute of Government conducted 26 diverse focus groups and more than 20 one-on-one interviews to help develop a comprehensive picture of Villa Rica by the people who live, work, and regularly visit there. Focus group, interview, and survey participants first discussed positive features and aspects of downtown Villa Rica. During the second portion of the public input sessions, participants identified issues that need improvement downtown and topics that must be addressed in the future.

Focus groups were conducted with the following groups and civic organizations:

- Downtown Development Authority
- Villa Rica Development Authority
- Tourism Board
- Main Street Board
- Planning & Zoning Commission
- Historic Preservation Commission
- Carroll & Douglas County Economic Development and Chamber Representatives
- Villa Rica Arts Coalition
- Local Bankers
- Attorneys
- Medical Specialists
- Educators
- Business Owners
- Industrial Park Leaders
- Real Estate Agents
- Villa Rica City Staff
- Elected Officials
- Villa Rica High School Students
- African American Community Leaders
- Homeowner Association Representatives
- Mirror Lake Residents
- Fullerville Residents
- Villa Rica Police Department Staff
- Native Villa Rica Citizens
- Elderly Residents
- Local Mothers and Children



What's Working Well?

Focus group, interview, survey, and town hall participants acknowledged an array of assets that make Villa Rica a unique, fulfilling, and practical place to call home.

Of the many positive aspects identified by public engagement participants, The Mill Amphitheater is overwhelmingly viewed as the community's most beloved resource. Home to amazing summer concerts, the annual Gold Nugget Drop, the Gold Rush Festival, and other community events, The Mill is the heart and soul of downtown. Throughout the public engagement process, citizens voiced their support for the many events that bring the community together at The Mill. These community gatherings help to build on the intense pride and strong sense of place that gives "We Are VR." meaning. In addition to being a forum for local events, The Mill is seen as an important example of community investment. The community views the development of The Mill as an example of the city's proactive leadership and bright vision for the future of the city. Locals desire building on the momentum created by The Mill's construction by extending public investment and beautification efforts throughout downtown.

In addition to valuing the peaceful ambiance and multitude of events and gatherings enabled by the amphitheater, citizens throughout Villa Rica enjoy having an active and accessible downtown with dining, retail, and entertainment opportunities. Locals adore downtown's array of great restaurants, and many identify the city as a dining destination for the surrounding area. Locals love the diverse dining experiences of restaurants like Gabe's, Chat & Choo, Los Cowboys, Cinema Tavern, and the Olive Tree. Voices throughout the community expressed their love of walking to these and other downtown restaurants and following an enjoyable

meal with a walk to Uncorked on Main's tasting room and other evening destinations. According to one public input participant, "[Restaurants] are what has changed downtown." Making these popular hot spots accessible and promoting the pedestrian experience downtown are key to ensuring future success. Building on national trends favoring more pedestrian-friendly communities, enhancing walkability is seen as a top issue for city residents. Even with currently limited pedestrian connectivity downtown, sidewalks already ranked as the most common "favorite thing" about downtown—topping The Mill, dining options, and other assets among town hall meeting participants. Villa Ricans see expanding pedestrian options and capitalizing on the city's existing position as a walkable dining destination as a critical element for the continued success and growth of downtown.

While less tangible than the lure of downtown restaurants, retail options, and The Mill, Villa Rica's family-oriented, small-town atmosphere is treasured by residents. Throughout the public input process, Villa Rica's intense community spirit was evident and eagerly expressed by residents of all generations and walks of life. Over and over during public engagement sessions, locals repeated proudly, "We are VR!" From first generation Villa Rica High School students to lifelong residents, Villa Rica's palpable community spirit is an amazing and unique asset that can be mobilized to enact desired improvements and inspire continued investment in the city. In addition to this intense love of community and passion for Villa Rica High School, many voices throughout Villa Rica cited the strong feelings of safety, familiarity, and local tradition as well as a strong sense of place and welcoming as elements of the city's hometown charm. The accessibility, responsiveness, and dedication of the local police force and the city's leadership also contribute to Villa Rica's intense community pride and the city's enviable small-town life.

Overwhelmingly, voices from throughout the community see their neighbors, friends, and welcoming fellow citizens as one of the city's main assets. Additionally, many citizens and business owners prize and rely on the city's metropolitan Atlanta location along Interstate 20. Combining a friendly small-town atmosphere with convenience and proximity to major metropolitan resources helps to make Villa Rica a great place to call home.



FAVORITE THINGS:

The Mill Amphitheater

Dining options

Walkability between downtown assets

Family-oriented small-town atmosphere

Public safety and responsive police force

Proactive local leadership and vision

Retail options

What Needs Improvement?

Capitalizing on what is working well, community members see a future where downtown Villa Rica is a hub of life and activity. While preserving the small-town sense of place and historic character that make the city special, Villa Rica citizens envision a more active, attractive, and accessible downtown experience with a healthy variety of dining, retail, and entertainment options along handsomely landscaped and well-connected, pedestrian-focused streets and sidewalks. To access the existing and future assets of downtown, residents feel strongly that parking, connectivity, and traffic circulation downtown must be addressed. Many locals avoid the angled parking along Bankhead Highway (US 78) and fear backing out into the busy thoroughfare. Efforts to promote back-in parking downtown are favored by some, but most residents find the prospect of back-in parking unappealing. Many public input participants suggested solving the perceived lack of downtown parking through the development of a downtown parking deck similar to the parking facility in downtown Carrollton. The city-owned lot behind the police department was often suggested as an ideal location for a parking deck. Other suggestions included using an underground tunnel to help connect the Main Street and Bankhead Highway sides of downtown, a major goal of many interview and focus groups.

In addition to improving parking downtown, citizens from throughout Villa Rica consider enhancing the city's aesthetic appeal a critical component of downtown revitalization. Locals demand more attractive storefronts and façades, a more cohesive appearance, unified signage, and inviting gateway experiences. While the community views addressing dilapidated and unkempt structures as a major priority, residents widely expressed the desire to retain downtown's historic buildings and homes. Many locals view downtown's historic character and architecture as important assets worthy of preservation. A significant number of community members want to see more support for developers attempting to renovate and convert historic buildings to support the growth and diversity of downtown. In addition to building reuse and façade improvements, wide consensus exists for aesthetic improvements along both downtown streets and major corridors like Bankhead Highway (US 78) leading into town. Beautifying Bankhead Highway, Main Street, Temple Street, and other streets downtown is a commonly stated community priority. Community members envision attractive streetscapes that accommodate pedestrian activity, outdoor dining, and all the amenities of downtown living. Many participants see beautification efforts as an opportunity to address other pressing issues downtown like enhancing



AREA ON WILSON STREET THAT COULD BE IMPROVED

the area's walkability, calming busy traffic along Bankhead Highway, and connecting both sides of downtown.

The community overwhelmingly sees promoting existing assets like The Mill Amphitheater and fine dining opportunities as important ways to increase Villa Rica's allure as a regional destination and hub of a two-county area. Reflecting the consensus that dining options are among Villa Rica's greatest assets, the community sees capitalizing on the city's allure as a dining destination as one of the greatest issues and opportunities facing the city. Although the community strongly supports existing downtown businesses and restaurants, many desire an enhanced diversity of retail and dining options. Convenient dining options like a coffee shop and food trucks and affordable places for young people were commonly suggested as potential draws catering to visitors and locals alike. While the community overwhelmingly favors expanding business opportunities downtown, preserving Villa Rica's small-town atmosphere and the city's unique sense of place is a critical priority.

While restaurants and events at The Mill help to bring the community downtown, many citizens see luring good jobs downtown, keeping existing businesses economically viable, attracting children and families, and developing options for downtown living as critical to the long-term health of the area.

To support the local businesses already on the ground, the community desires a more proactive public role in economic development. Incentivizing small businesses, removing roadblocks and hurdles to redeveloping historic buildings, easing ordinances, and attracting investment downtown were all common sentiments. Many see economic incentives, tax abatement, and, in particular, a strengthened façade grant program as possible solutions towards improving the maintenance and look of buildings downtown, a primary concern of many citizens.

Several residents voiced the opinion that the citizens of Villa Rica are the community's greatest ambassadors. Widespread support exists to reflect this friendly and welcoming character to visitors. The community sees improving gateway "front door" experiences and luring more visitors from I-20 as one way to boost downtown activity while reflecting the values and unique character of the community. To create a sense of welcome, many envision attractive, landscaped gateways to guide visitors downtown. Despite the desire for improvements downtown, locals demand that any new developments preserve the safe, family-friendly, small-town character of downtown. Preserving Villa Rica's strong sense of community must be a guiding principle to any prospective improvements downtown.

VILLA RICA

LOS COWBOYS
MEXICAN RESTAURANT

TOP ISSUES:

PARKING

LOCATION & AVAILABILITY

SAFETY

CONNECTIVITY & WALKABILITY

CROSSING THE RAILROAD

CONNECTING DOWNTOWN

“THE LOOK”

STREETSCAPING IMPROVEMENTS

GATEWAY ENHANCEMENTS

BUILDING SIGNAGE AND FAÇADES

HISTORIC PRESERVATION & REUSE; NO MORE TEAR-DOWNS

CONTINUE TO GROW A DESTINATION

INCREASE DIVERSITY OF DINING AND RETAIL OPTIONS

IMPROVE VARIETY OF ACTS AT THE MILL

CREATE ACTIVITIES FOR YOUTH DOWNTOWN

During the public engagement process, participants from throughout the community shared their vision for downtown Villa Rica's future and raised important issues that must be addressed for the city to achieve continued success. A diverse set of concerns were discussed, many of which can be compiled into broad categories. Priorities addressed in previous proposals and studies often mirrored the critical issues raised by the city's citizens. Together, these ideas laid the groundwork for a plan of action. Throughout this process, a steering committee of dedicated Villa Rica citizens reviewed all of the information compiled in public input sessions, previous plans, a demographic profile, and community analysis data. Working with these components, the steering committee honed down community priorities to create a successful strategy for downtown. Having too many priorities equals having no priorities, and Villa Rica has only so much time, energy, and resources. Thus, tackling a succinct list of priorities is an essential element of a successful plan.

Villa Rica's RSVP Steering Committee was instrumental in channeling public input, previous plans, and elements of responsible planning into four key categories addressed in the Villa Rica work plan: improving downtown parking, addressing connectivity issues and ensuring a walkable downtown experience, tackling aesthetic enhancements, and growing downtown as a destination. These top issues, in turn, informed and contributed to a succinct work plan for downtown arranged to integrate Villa Rica's top issues into Main Street America's successful Four-Point Approach® to downtown revitalization. All improvements undertaken should maintain and build on the assets beloved by the community, including Villa Rica's friendly and safe small-town feel and intense community pride and sense of place.

IMPROVING DOWNTOWN PARKING

Although downtown Villa Rica already contains 556 on-street and off-street public parking spots, many in the community see downtown parking capacity as inadequate. To meet the needs of current stakeholders and accommodate future growth, the city should consider improving the location, accessibility, and safety of downtown parking. Addressing downtown parking is vital to ensuring the continued success of downtown. Additionally, many see expanding downtown residential opportunities as an important means of encouraging a mix of uses downtown, enabling more walking trips, freeing up the demand for existing parking

spaces, and extending the downtown user base to create a continually lively destination. To create the easily accessible downtown desired by the community, local officials should prioritize maintaining and expanding access to convenient parking options while preserving the character of downtown. Locals see the development of a downtown parking deck as an important long-term strategy to improving parking access and availability downtown. However, until such time and prior to cost-intensive infrastructure improvements, the city can do more to ensure that current parking options are fully utilized.

As an example, downtown patrons rarely fully utilize the 93 parking spots along Main Street, despite the proximity of these spaces to destinations on either side of downtown. Even though most of these parking spots are within the ideal two- to three-minute walking distance to businesses along both Temple Street and Bankhead Highway, the wide railroad right of way, unvaried expanse of unbroken asphalt, high traffic speeds, lack of safe crosswalks, lack of shade, and absence of pedestrian infrastructure all work together to create physical and psychological barriers for potential users. Consequently, these 93 spaces—the majority of on-street parking downtown—are rarely used during regular business hours. Improving access to these and other parking spots by installing safe crosswalks, traffic-calming measures, and attractive, shaded pedestrian infrastructure is a good first step to solving connectivity, aesthetic, and parking issues.

While improving downtown parking touches several components within the Main Street Four Point Approach, projects designed to ease downtown parking issues are primarily included in the design and economic vitality sections of the Villa Rica Work Program. In the following work program, projects to address the parking issues downtown include:

Design:

- Streetscaping Improvements
- Montgomery Street (US Hwy 78) Improvements
- West Wilson Street Improvements
- Main Street Improvements
- Temple Street Improvements
- Infill Buildings

Economic Vitality:

- Residential Development
- Downtown Parking Deck

ADDRESSING CONNECTIVITY & WALKABILITY

Time and again in public input sessions, local citizens and business owners brought up problems associated with urban connectivity and walkability downtown. What is connectivity? According to the Transportation Research Board, connectivity is defined as “the degree that a street network provides multiple alternate routes between two points.” In simple terms, connectivity is the catchall term for the myriad pathways people use to get to where they need to be. Good connectivity in the form of gridded streets, short blocks, frequent crosswalks, and complete street and sidewalk networks are essential to creating the type of pedestrian-friendly downtown desired by the community.

The major barriers to connectivity in downtown Villa Rica are the wide, busy freight railroad corridor downtown as well as the width, speed, and traffic volumes of US 78 and Highway 61. While the railroad is an important part of Villa Rica’s identity and a draw for potential industry, steps must be taken to connect pedestrians across the Norfolk Southern tracks that divide downtown. Additionally, locals put a high value on the existing walkability of portions of downtown and would like to see sidewalks and pedestrian-friendly infrastructure expanded throughout downtown and surrounding neighborhoods. Many also suggested implementing traffic-calming measures and installing unified streetscaping and more pedestrian crossings to create the safe, pedestrian-friendly downtown experience desired by the community. In the following work program, projects targeted to address the walkability and connectivity downtown include:

Design:

- Downtown Wellness Walk
- Streetscaping Improvements
- Montgomery Street (US Highway 78) Improvements
- West Wilson Street Improvements
- Main Street Improvements
- Temple Street Improvements
- Flashing Pedestrian Crossings
- Connection to Mirror Lake

Economic Vitality:

- Regional Trail Connections
- Downtown Parking Deck
- Pedestrian Tunnel

“THE LOOK”

Locals commonly see improving the currently lackluster aesthetic appeal of major corridors, back alleys, side streets, and façades of Villa Rica’s buildings as a major issue facing downtown. Many citizens desire an attractive and more uniform appearance for buildings downtown, with appealing signage, pedestrian-scaled lighting, a complementary color and materials palate, and a more cohesive visual experience downtown. Frequently, public input participants noted various incongruous paint colors and architectural treatments of downtown buildings and the derelict appearance of several other buildings downtown and in the immediate vicinity that should be addressed in order to create the welcoming, attractive downtown experience desired by the community. The city has enacted the Downtown Commercial Design Guidelines outlined in the plan review, but if these guidelines fail to address the standards of the community, they should be reassessed and updated. While enhancing standards for buildings downtown proved very popular among the general public, the city should consider simultaneously expanding economic development incentives and the city’s façade grant program to invite the cohesive development desired by the community, aid the renovation efforts of current building owners, and catalyze growth downtown.

In addition to addressing the appearance of downtown buildings, many public input participants suggested implementing a unified streetscaping program downtown with attractive paving, crosswalks, lighting, and street trees to beautify the overall appearance of downtown while creating the active, pedestrian-friendly urban experience desired by the community. If fully implemented, locals see a cohesive streetscaping program as a major step toward tying together both sides of downtown, creating both visual and physical connections to realize the community’s vision for the future of downtown. Particular elements of the Villa Rica work program directed at improving the look of downtown include:

Design:

- Downtown Villa Rica Gateways
- Downtown Arrival/Welcome Signage
- Flyover & Community Gateway Signage
- Streetscaping Improvements
- Façade Improvements
- Back of Building Façade Improvements

Economic Vitality:

- Model City Ordinance
- Pursue & Capitalize on NRHP Designation
- Regional Trail Connections

CONTINUE TO GROW A DESTINATION

According to community survey and public input results, many locals already see downtown as an attractive destination for excellent dining at restaurants like Gabe’s, regional wine and art at Uncorked on Main, boutique shopping, and the variety of community events at The Mill. At the same time, most locals expressed a desire for keeping the area a “real,” working downtown with a healthy mix of community services while attracting more activity, dining, retail, and diverse entertainment options. To this end, moving important public institutions including Villa Rica City Hall, the Villa Rica Post Office, the public library, and more outside of downtown has adversely affected the long-term health of the area. When these institutions and the dozens of employees and visitors that they attract leave downtown, it sends the message to potential business owners that the heart of downtown has been abandoned by the local government and is not worth investing in. Over the long term, both attracting new businesses and returning more local government offices downtown should be considered to ensure a consistent user base and the continual economic health of the city. In the meantime, retaining important institutions like the Villa Rica Police Department and Villa Rica Main Street downtown are important steps to ensuring a healthy mix of services in the area.

While retaining these and other service uses downtown will help leverage and fully develop the existing strengths of downtown, Villa Rica should consider building on downtown’s reputation both as a dining destination and a family-friendly small town. Catering programming options toward diners, youth, and families would help downtown

to fill out the city’s existing niche and take advantage of its current demographic profile. Many locals demand that new developments complement the existing small-town character and historic identity as a former gold rush town, railroad hub, and textile mill town. Fully embracing Villa Rica’s past while programming downtown for the city’s future could help to create the local destination desired by the community. In the work program below, the following projects are aimed at further growing downtown as a destination:

Organization:

- No More Tear Downs
- Tourism
- Programming at The Mill
- Civic Center at Villa Rica Main Street

Promotion:

- Special Event Grants
- Live Music at Events
- Marketing Downtown Villa Rica
- Prom Send-Off & Events
- Winery Tour Package
- Restaurant Week

Design:

- Train Viewing Platform

Economic Vitality:

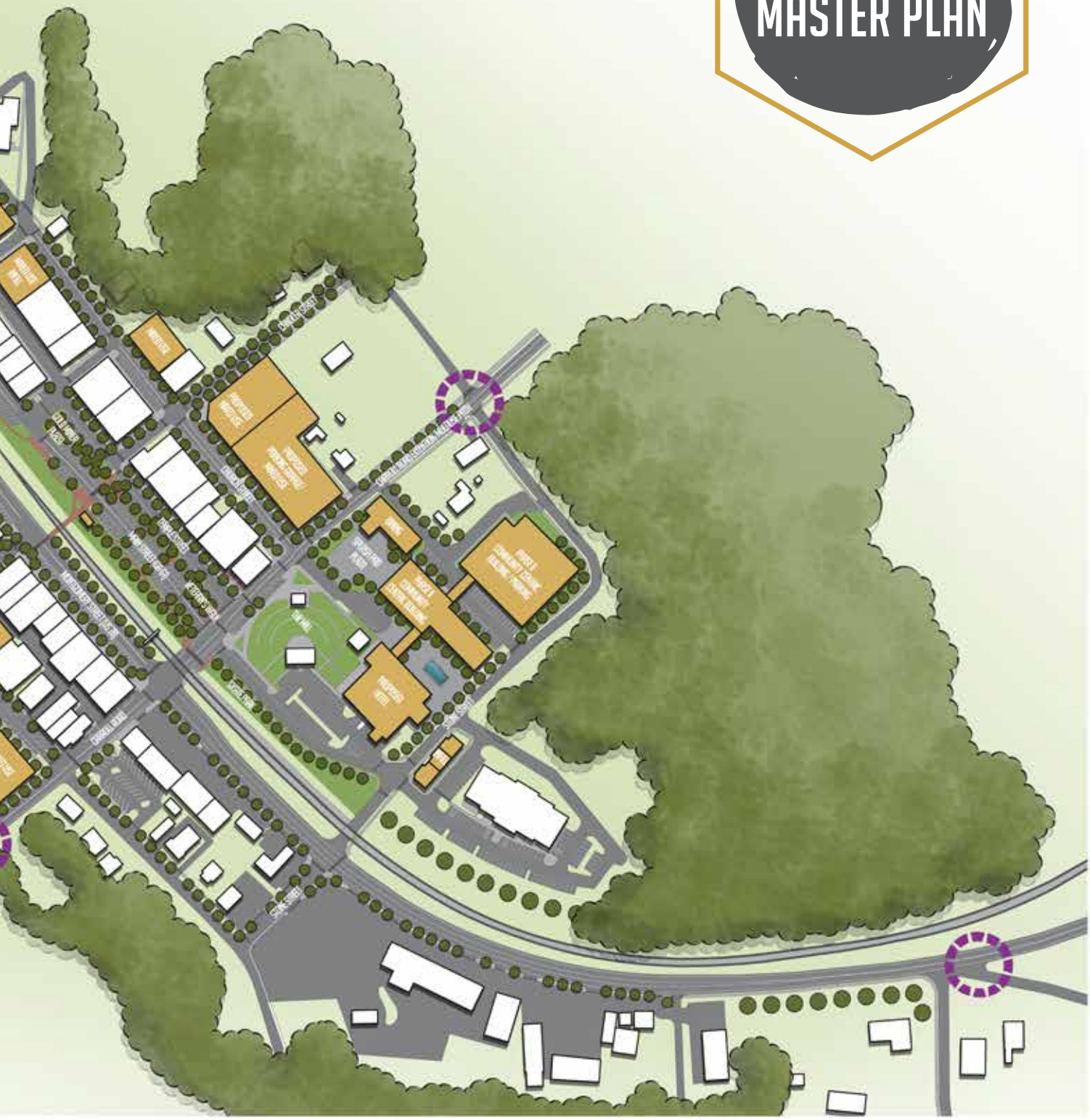
- Pop-up Markets
- Downtown Recruitment Card
- Food Trucks



conceptual master plan

ILLUSTRATIVE VERSION SHOWING PUBLIC & PRIVATE SPACES

VILLA RICA DOWNTOWN MASTER PLAN



- 
 STREET TREES
- 
 SIDEWALKS
- 
 ROADS/PARKING
- 
 PUBLIC SPACE
- 
 INFILL DEVELOPMENT
- 
 GATEWAY
- 



VILLA RICA DOWNTOWN MASTERPLAN

Following a review and analysis of current conditions in downtown Villa Rica, an extensive public engagement process, and a comprehensive review of previous plans and proposals for the city, faculty and staff at the Carl Vinson Institute of Government collaborated to develop a guiding masterplan for the future of downtown Villa Rica. This plan is intended to address the top issues that emerged during Step One of the RSVP process. These issues include: improving downtown parking, addressing connectivity and walkability to the north and south sides of downtown, improving “the look” of downtown corridors and gateways, and continuing to grow a destination downtown by attracting appropriate mixed-use development.

IMPROVING DOWNTOWN PARKING

While an analysis of current conditions illustrates that downtown has a significant amount of underutilized parking, parking was repeatedly addressed by public input participants as the most pressing issue facing downtown. At the same time, many within the city avoid pull-in angled parking along Bankhead Highway and elsewhere due to safety concerns. The Villa Rica Masterplan works to address these parking complaints while planning for expanded demand for downtown parking as the city grows.

While retaining as much existing parking as possible, the plan includes the following parking improvements:

- Currently underutilized parking areas along Main Street and elsewhere have been linked to the remainder of downtown with a complete network of sidewalks.

- Following plans by the City of Villa Rica, all pull-in angled parking has been converted to reverse angle parking.
- On Church Street and elsewhere, on-street parking has been installed in the existing undeveloped right-of-way.
- Throughout the city, parking has been beautified with permeable pavers and landscaped bump outs to create a cohesive look and address storm water management issues downtown.
- A mixed-use parking deck has been planned to meet future parking demands on the publicly-owned surface lot adjacent to the Villa Rica police department.

ADDRESSING CONNECTIVITY & WALKABILITY

Among the most important issues facing Villa Rica is realizing the community vision of a walkable and connected downtown experience. The community overwhelmingly favors investing in new sidewalks and trails linking downtown with surrounding neighborhoods and regional trail networks. While improving downtown walkability is popular with the community, a review of existing conditions downtown clearly shows the currently fractured nature of Villa Rica’s pedestrian network. Additionally, with the Norfolk Southern railroad dividing downtown and limited pedestrian crossings, currently Villa Rica operates as two separate downtowns. Bridging this gap and connecting both halves of downtown in a pedestrian-friendly manner was a major goal of the Villa Rica Downtown Masterplan.

The plan includes the following pedestrian and connectivity improvements:

- Along Bankhead Highway, West Wilson Street, Temple Street, and elsewhere, excessive travel lanes have been shrunk and sidewalks have been expanded.
- A complete sidewalk network has been added throughout downtown.
- Landscaped bump outs throughout downtown help to make pedestrian crossings safer and more attractive.
- The proposed connector to Mirror Lake has been included with a multi-use trail/sidewalk connection linking surrounding neighborhoods with downtown.
- Where possible, mid-block crosswalks and improved railroad crossings have been added.
- Crosswalks of varying materials have been included to calm traffic and designate pedestrian crossings.
- Throughout the city, street trees and planted areas along sidewalks have been incorporated to provide shade and enhance the pedestrian experience.
- A new, expanded pedestrian Veteran's Walk now connects Temple Street businesses and parking on Main Street.
- At North and South Candler Streets, a new pedestrian tunnel has been planned beneath the Norfolk Southern railway to accommodate safe pedestrian crossings between the north and south sides of downtown.

“THE LOOK”

Locals commonly see improving the currently lackluster aesthetic appeal of major corridors, back alleys, side streets, and façades of Villa Rica's buildings as a major issue facing downtown. The Villa Rica Downtown Masterplan addresses “the look” of downtown by implementing a unified streetscaping program downtown with attractive paving, crosswalks, lighting, and street trees. These improvements beautify the overall appearance of downtown while creating the active, pedestrian-friendly urban experience desired by the community.

The appearance of downtown is addressed in the following aesthetic improvements:

- Street trees and landscaping have been installed along streets and the railroad right-of-way downtown.
- Attractive permeable pavement have been utilized for parking and plaza-line pedestrian focused areas.
- Handsome granite curbing and fresh concrete sidewalks enhance the look of new streetscaping.

- Crosswalks in attractive pavers and concrete help to break up expanses of asphalt.
- Excess asphalt areas have been removed and incorporated into new landscaped and/or pedestrian areas.
- Handsome improved public spaces including a corner park at Westview Road and West Wilson, a skate park along the railroad, public plaza and splash pad in front of the Avanti building, Gold miner plaza and statue, and a Veteran's Walk between Main and Temple Streets all enhance the visual appeal of downtown.

CONTINUE TO GROW A DESTINATION

Whether coming downtown to enjoy a dinner at Gabe's or a concert at The Mill, many locals revealed during the public input stage that they already see downtown as an attractive destination for excellent dining, shopping, entertainment, and more. Locals want to see more variety of retail, dining, housing, and entertainment options downtown while building on the city's unique history and reputation as a family-friendly destination.

The Villa Rica Downtown Masterplan works to grow the city as a destination with the following improvements:

- The Avanti Building/Villa Rica Main Street has been re-imagined as a mixed use civic center with a housing component.
- A public plaza and splash pad are constructed adjacent to the re-imagined Avanti Building.
- Attractive new mixed use infill developments fill targeted lots in Villa Rica's downtown core.
- All existing historic buildings have been retained.
- A train viewing platform provides a safe place to watch trains for children and families.
- An attractive, shaded Veteran's Walk now links The Mill to the proposed gold miner statue.
- A new skate park taking advantage of a slope along the railroad tracks creates an attraction for teens.

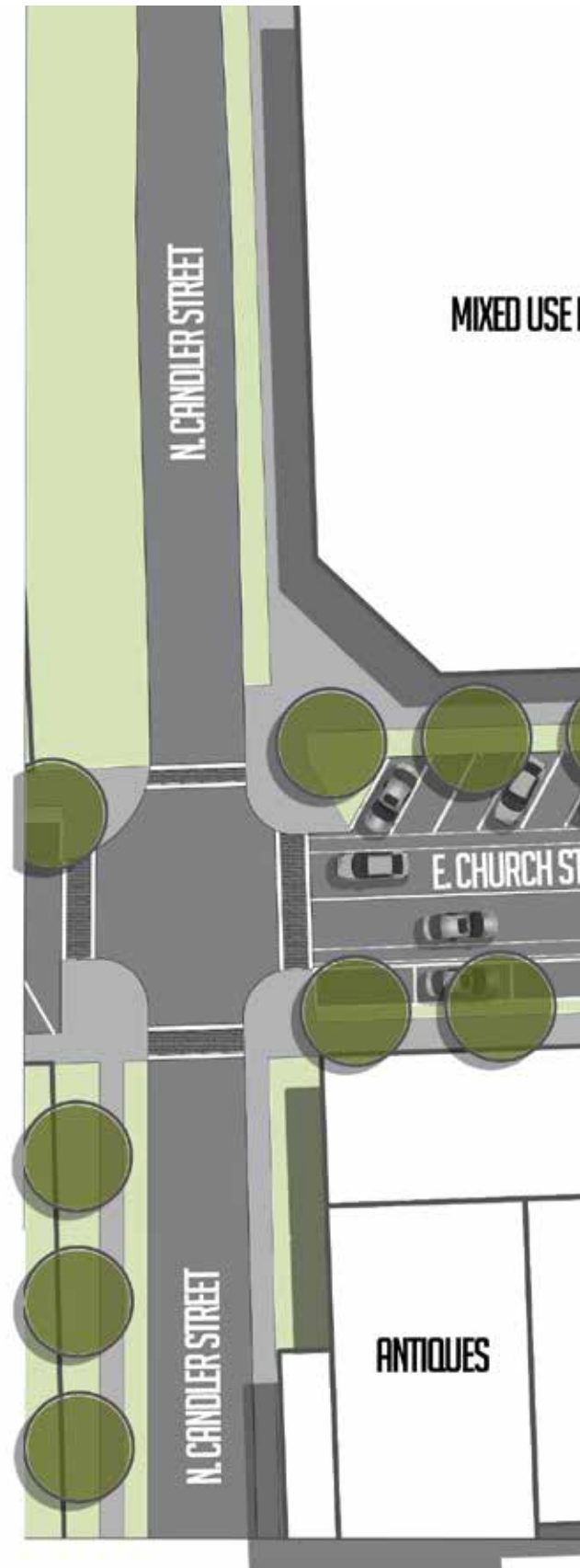
church street

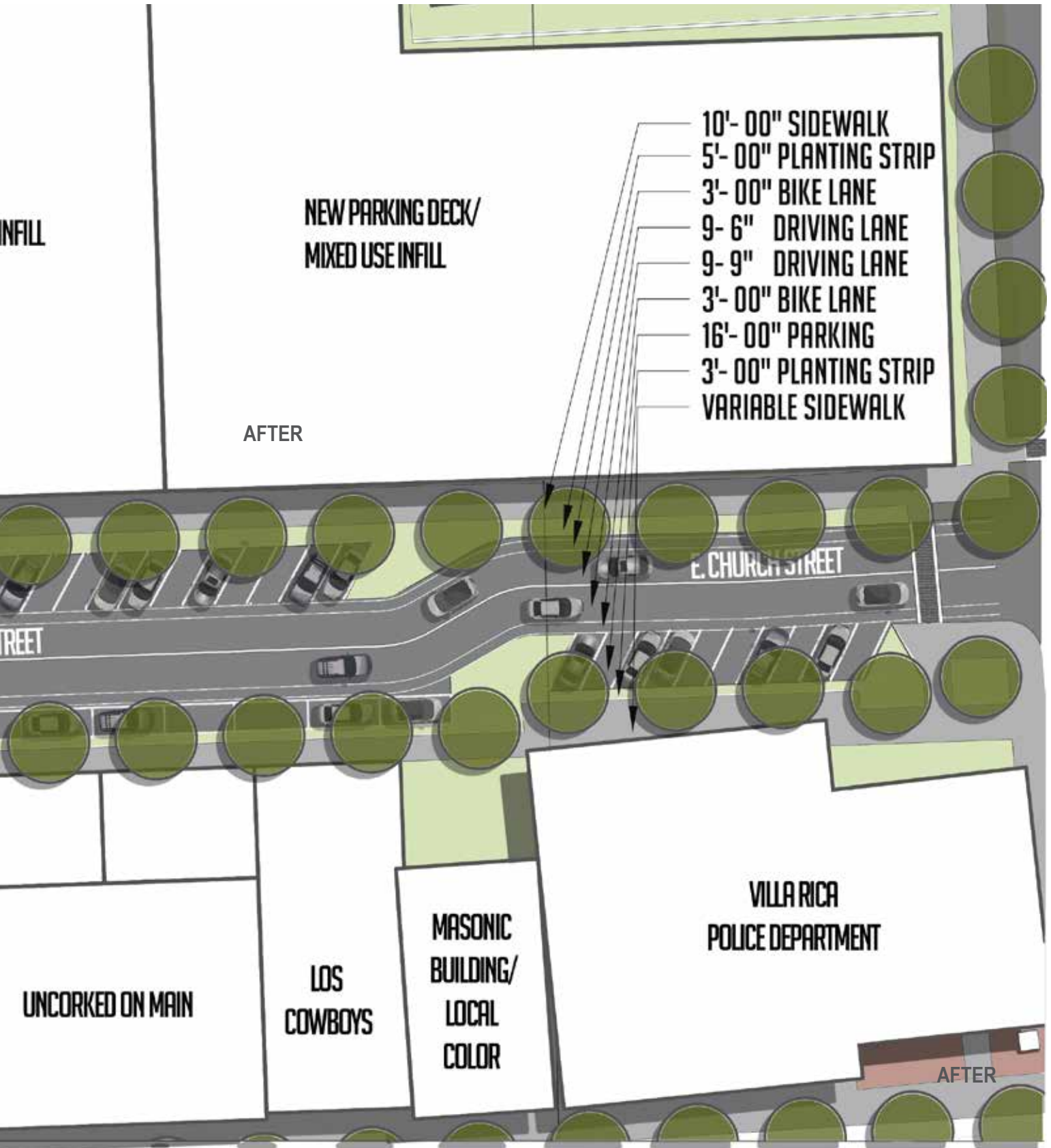
The street level plan for Church Street incorporates the standard Villa Rica streetscaping palette of concrete sidewalks, granite curbs, street trees (Chinese Elm, Ginkgo biloba, or Thornless Honeylocust recommended), gray permeable pavers, and gray paver-bordered concrete crosswalks.

Church Street is currently an unpainted, narrow street with two driving lanes. The future plan for Church Street uses existing right-of-way to incorporate pedestrian infrastructure, bike lanes, a multi-use trail to Mirror Lake, reverse angle and parallel parking, and more. The new parking deck and mixed use infill buildings occupy the site of a publicly-owned surface parking lot and Butler Building warehouse. In addition to being the sole connection between the south and north sides of downtown, with the addition of the proposed multi-use trail and connection to Mirror Lake, Carroll Road now functions as Villa Rica's "main drag." Fully programming this street will be essential for the future vibrancy of the city.

Elements of the Church Street Plan Include:

- A 10' sidewalk on the north end of Church Street connecting to the Mirror Lake multi-use trail connection
- 30 new on-street reverse angle parking spots
- 9 parallel parking spaces
- 3-5' integrated planting strips with street trees
- A 7' minimum sidewalk on the south side of Church
- Four gray paver-bordered concrete crosswalks
- Landscaped bump outs at intersections to improve the pedestrian experience and slow traffic







church street



AFTER



BEFORE

Before: Running parallel to Temple Street, Church Street runs behind the heart of Villa Rica's north commercial district. Currently this narrow road lacks striping and contains no provisions for pedestrians or parked cars. Many former industrial buildings along this street have great potential for adaptive reuse but could use some T.L.C.

After: Following an updated streetscaping program and aesthetic improvements, this stretch of Church Street has been transformed. While retaining and complementing this area's industrial flavor, the rear of this building now houses industrial lofts and a small coffee shop. A trendy sock mural honors Villa Rica's textile history as the home of Golden City Hosiery. Streetscaping improvements have been extended to Church Street, with attractive tree-lined sidewalks, granite curbing, permeable pavers, bike lanes, and handsome crosswalks.



church street

Before: (above, left) A large industrial lot sits directly across Carroll Road from the existing Mill Amphitheater as well as the New Mill Plaza concept. This lot also fronts the proposed streetscape developments along East Church Street. Consequently, this lot is in a key location to expand the downtown feel of Villa Rica.

After: (below) This concept introduces a mixed-use complex of buildings, expanding numerous economic and social activities downtown, including retail options on the street level and office or residential units on the upper floors. New bike lanes are continued down East Church Street.



candler street

Crossing the Tracks

In addition to standard streetscaping improvements recommended throughout the masterplan, the photograph below shows an example of a pedestrian tunnel going underneath railroad tracks. A similar tunnel could be installed in downtown Villa Rica, allowing for better connectivity between the north and south sides of downtown. Prior to this long-term investment, downtown could be better connected through short-term improvements such as crosswalks and a unified materials palette.





Candler and West Wilson Streets Conceptual Plan

The street level plan for West Wilson Street incorporates the standard Villa Rica streetscaping palette of concrete sidewalks, granite curbs, street trees, gray permeable pavers, and gray paver-bordered concrete crosswalks. This plan removes 10' parallel parking spaces on the east side of Candler Street to expand sidewalks on both sides of the street by 5 feet.

Elements of the Candler Street Plan Include:

- Expanded sidewalk along the east and west sides of Candler
- 3' x 5' landscaped strips with street trees incorporated into wider sidewalk
- Expanded landscaped bump outs at intersections to improve the pedestrian experience and slow traffic
- Three 5'-7' gray paver-bordered concrete crosswalks
- Two 9' driving lanes
- 16 attractively paved reverse angle parking spaces

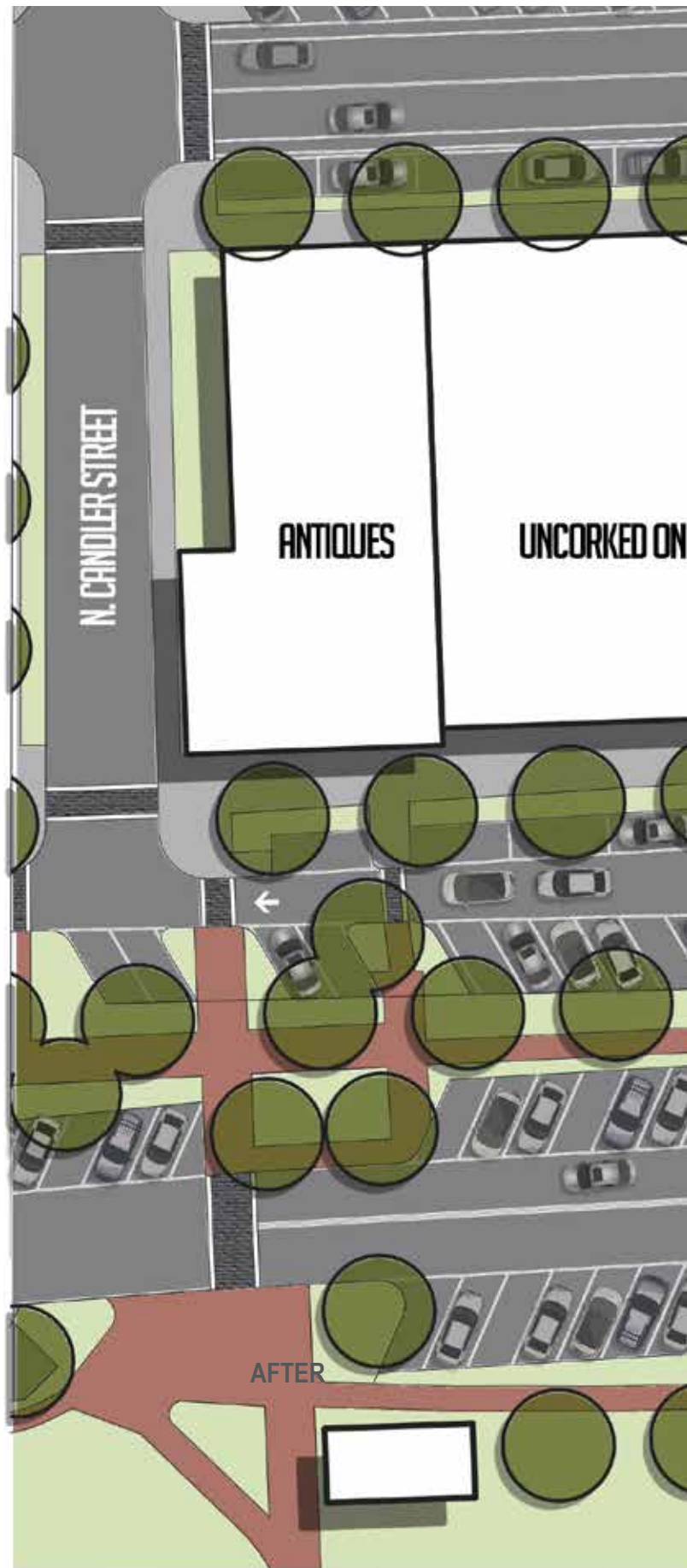
main & temple streets

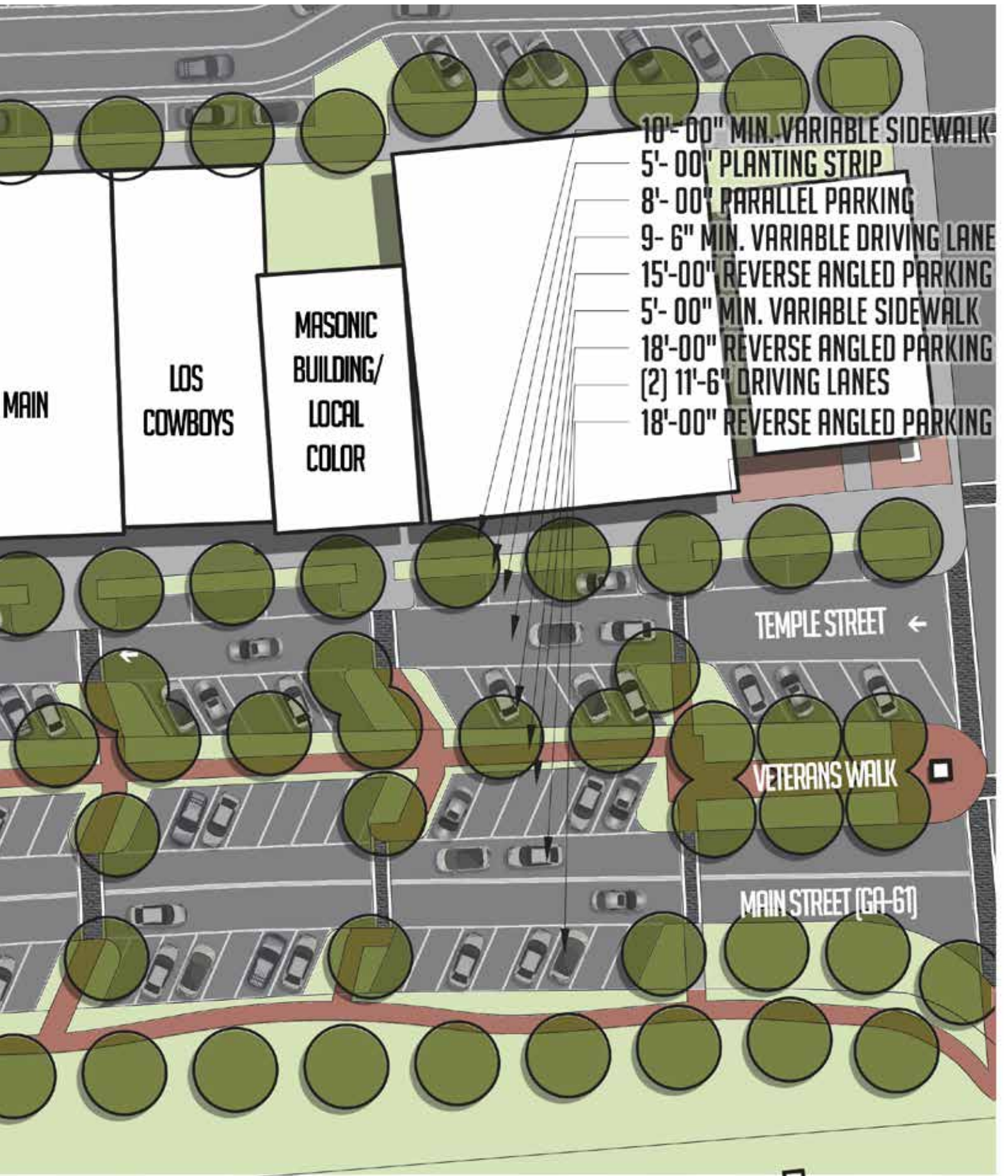
The street level plan for Main and Temple Streets incorporates the standard Villa Rica streetscaping palette of concrete sidewalks, granite curbs, street trees, gray permeable pavers, and gray paver-bordered concrete crosswalks.

Focused on Main and Temple Streets, this plan shrinks the excessive travel lanes of Main Street (GA 61) and removes striped paved areas to create an attractively landscaped Veterans Walk to link The Mill with the proposed gold miner statue. The plan incorporates expanded sidewalks, multiple mid-block crosswalks, street trees and planting strips, and a wide and direct connection to the south side of downtown and proposed train viewing platform. Several spaces along Temple Street have been removed to create attractive bump outs, pedestrian crossings, and ADA accessible ramp connections.

Elements of the Main and Temple Streets plan include:

- An attractive, landscaped Veteran's Walk median park
- An expanded 10' minimum sidewalk along the north side of Temple Street incorporating a 5' planting strip and street trees
- Six 5-7' gray paver-bordered concrete mid-block crosswalks connecting Main and Temple streets.
- Reverse angle parking spaces per city plans
- Expanded landscaped bump outs at intersections to improve the pedestrian experience and slow traffic
- Two wide, attractive crosswalks linking Main and Temple streets with Bankhead Highway





main & temple streets

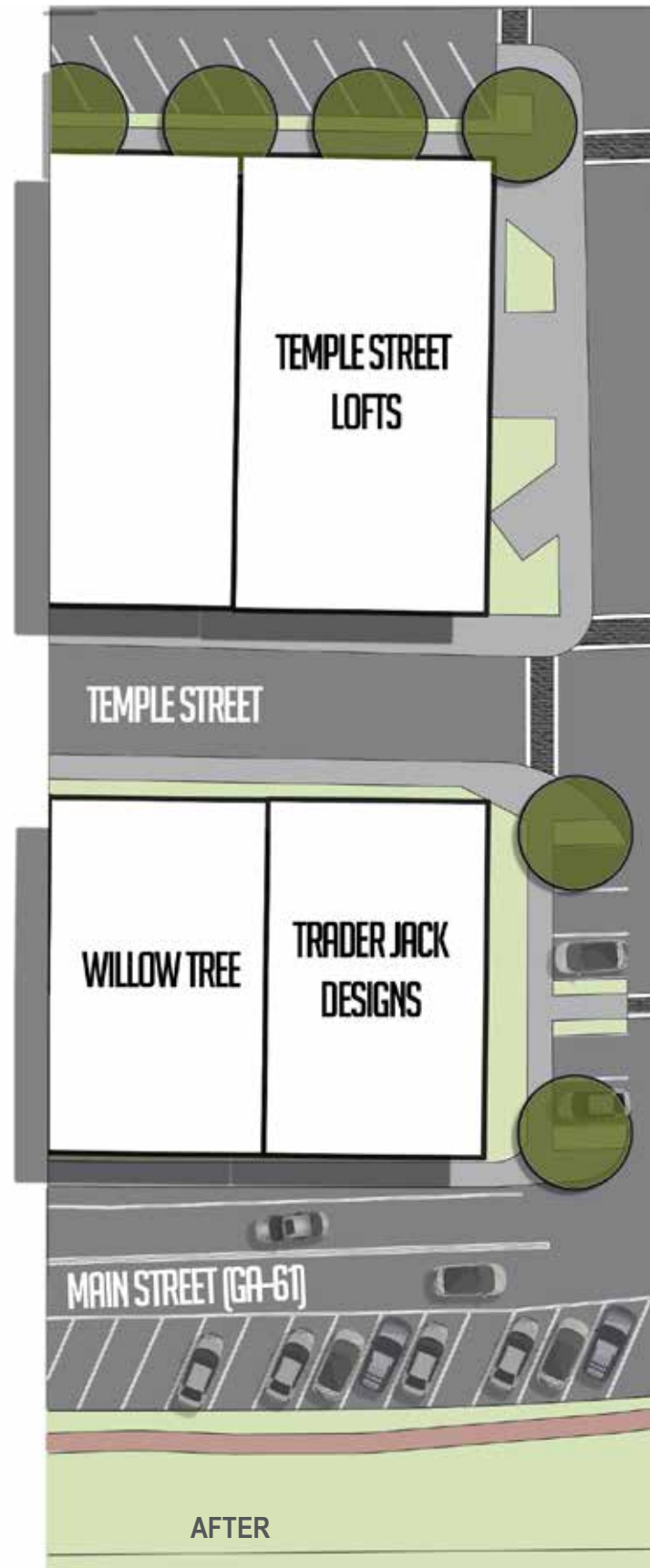
Conceptual Plan View

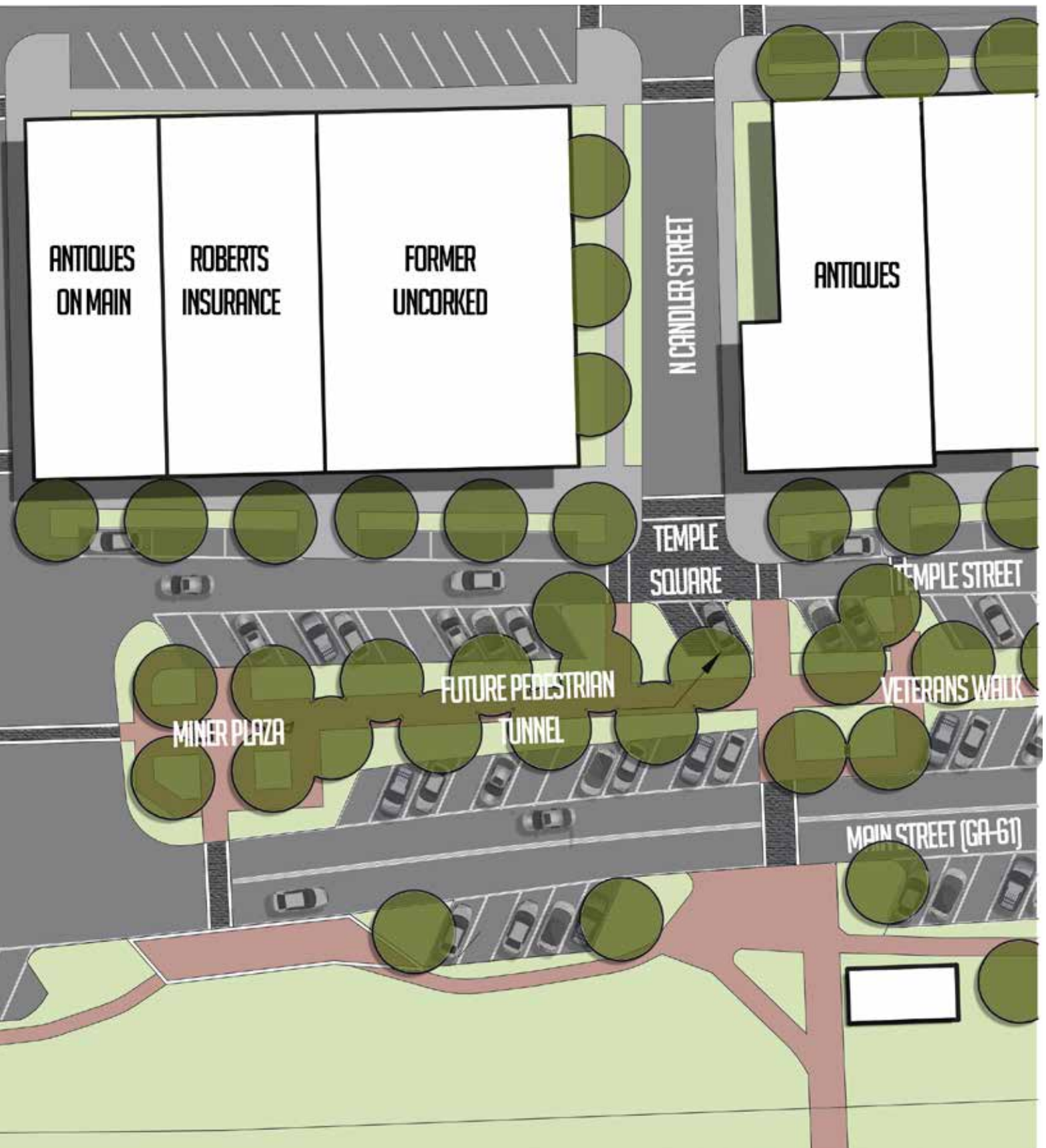
The street level plan for Main and Temple Streets incorporates the standard Villa Rica streetscaping palette of concrete sidewalks, granite curbs, street trees, gray permeable pavers, and gray paver-bordered concrete crosswalks.

Focused on Main and Temple Streets, this plan shrinks the excessive travel lanes of Main Street (GA 61) and removes striped paved areas to create an attractively landscaped Veterans Walk to link The Mill with the proposed gold miner statue. The plan incorporates expanded sidewalks, multiple mid-block crosswalks, street trees and planting strips, and a wide, and direct connection to the south side of downtown and proposed train viewing platform. Several spaces along Temple Street have been removed to create attractive bump outs, pedestrian crossings, and ADA accessible ramp connections.

Elements of the Main and Temple Streets plan include:

- An attractive, landscaped Veteran's Walk median park
- An expanded 10' minimum sidewalk along the north side of Temple Street incorporating a 5' planting strip and street trees
- Six 5-7' gray paver-bordered concrete mid-block crosswalks connecting Main and Temple Streets.
- Reverse angle parking spaces per city plans
- Expanded landscaped bump outs at intersections to improve the pedestrian experience and slow traffic
- Two wide, attractive crosswalks linking Main and Temple streets with Bankhead Highway





temple street



BEFORE

Before: Temple Street serves as the heart of Villa Rica's north commercial district. This view of Temple Street illustrates the street's lack of shade, the underutilized central median, underutilized parking along Main Street, lack of ADA-accessible crossings, obtrusive utility poles, and wide, unmarked travel lanes.

After: In this rendered view Temple Street has been transformed into a handsome pedestrian-focused, multi-use street. While still accommodating parking for the adjacent businesses, the human-scaled permeable paving, high-quality materials, and numerous crossings all lend this street a pedestrian plaza-like feel. Wider sidewalks with handsome street trees and landscaped bump outs soften the hard lines of the street while providing shade and bringing visual interest to the streetscape. Angled parking has been reversed to accommodate the city's reverse angle parking plan,s and the center median has been expanded with a granite retaining wall to accommodate a wide pedestrian path and an allée of shade trees. New ADA-accessible crossings ensure that all Villa Ricans can easily travel between both sides of downtown. Retractable bollards at the intersection with Carroll Road now allow Temple Street to be closed to vehicular traffic for temporary events and festivals.



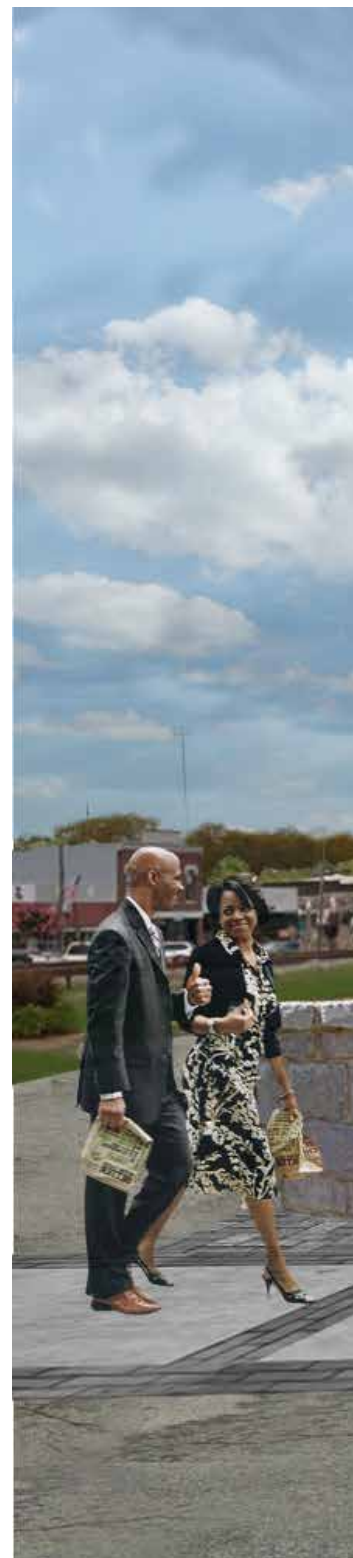
veterans walk

BEFORE



Before: The landscaped median between Temple and Main streets shown here divides parking on the upper end of Main Street from the businesses below on Temple. The expansive width of Main Street makes this area unappealing for pedestrians and limits safe pedestrian crossings between the north and south ends of downtown. Large paved areas like the one in the foreground are not utilized for parking or traffic lanes.

After: This “after” image shows the same area anchored with an attractive plaza dedicated to Villa Rica’s military veterans. By installing a short retaining wall on the north end of the median and expanding the landscaped area into the adjacent unused paved area, this space now has ample room for an allée of attractive shade trees and a handsome Veterans Walk pathway. The seat wall on the left mimics the appearance of the retaining wall while partially enclosing the space from the traffic on Main Street (GA 61). While partially enclosed by seat walls, the plaza contains multiple openings for pedestrians traversing downtown. This view also shows proposed streetscaping improvements along Temple Street, including reverse angle parking, plaza-like permeable paving, and attractive crosswalks.



AFTER



gold miner statue

Before: The landscaped median between Temple and Main Streets divides parking on the upper end of Main Street from the businesses below on Temple. Currently the attractive brick walk here terminates at an underutilized bench and trash can. This area lacks a significant focal point.

After: This “after” image shows the same area anchored with the proposed gold miner statue honoring Villa Rica’s heritage as home of Georgia’s first gold rush. With the bench and trash receptacle relocated and new greening installed, this plaza now serves as an attractive gathering space downtown.





"CITY OF GOLD"
VILLA RICA
SITE OF GEORGIA'S FIRST GOLD RUSH 1828
ERECTED 2016 BY THE CITIZENS OF VILLA RICA

uncorked

A SHORT-TERM SOLUTION



Before: A local destination and buzzing gathering space downtown, the tasting room and gallery at Uncorked on Main serves as one of downtown Villa Rica's greatest assets. Uncorked has proven successful enough to necessitate relocating to a larger space a block over on Temple Street. Currently this perfectly serviceable building could better reflect the unique local character of Uncorked. Accommodations for outdoor events might also prove popular.

After: With a little paint and creative wine-themed additions, Uncorked's new building draws the eyes of locals and tourists alike. Patrons now sip wine beneath elegant recycled bottle lighting and Uncorked's fun existing distinct signage. Illuminated walls constructed of old wine bottles enclose a new parklet located in a formerly unused painted area along Temple Street. Re-purposed wine barrels now serve as planters to soften the space while an entrance mat constructed of wine crates now welcomes visitors to this community hub and anchor for the downtown area.

AFTER



AFTER



AFTER



train watching depot

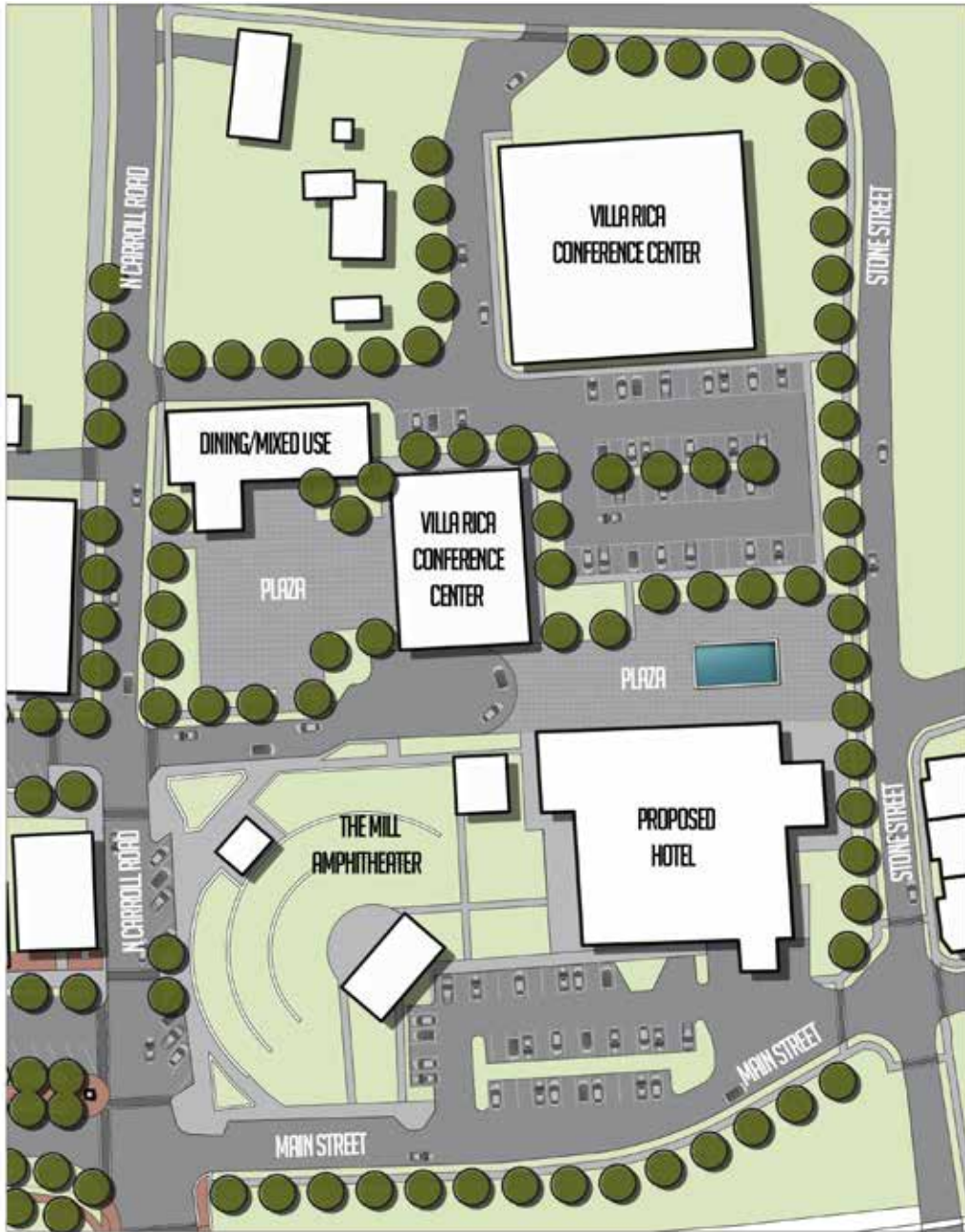




Before: A large grassy expanse runs along the railroad tracks right in the heart of downtown that could be better utilized as public space.

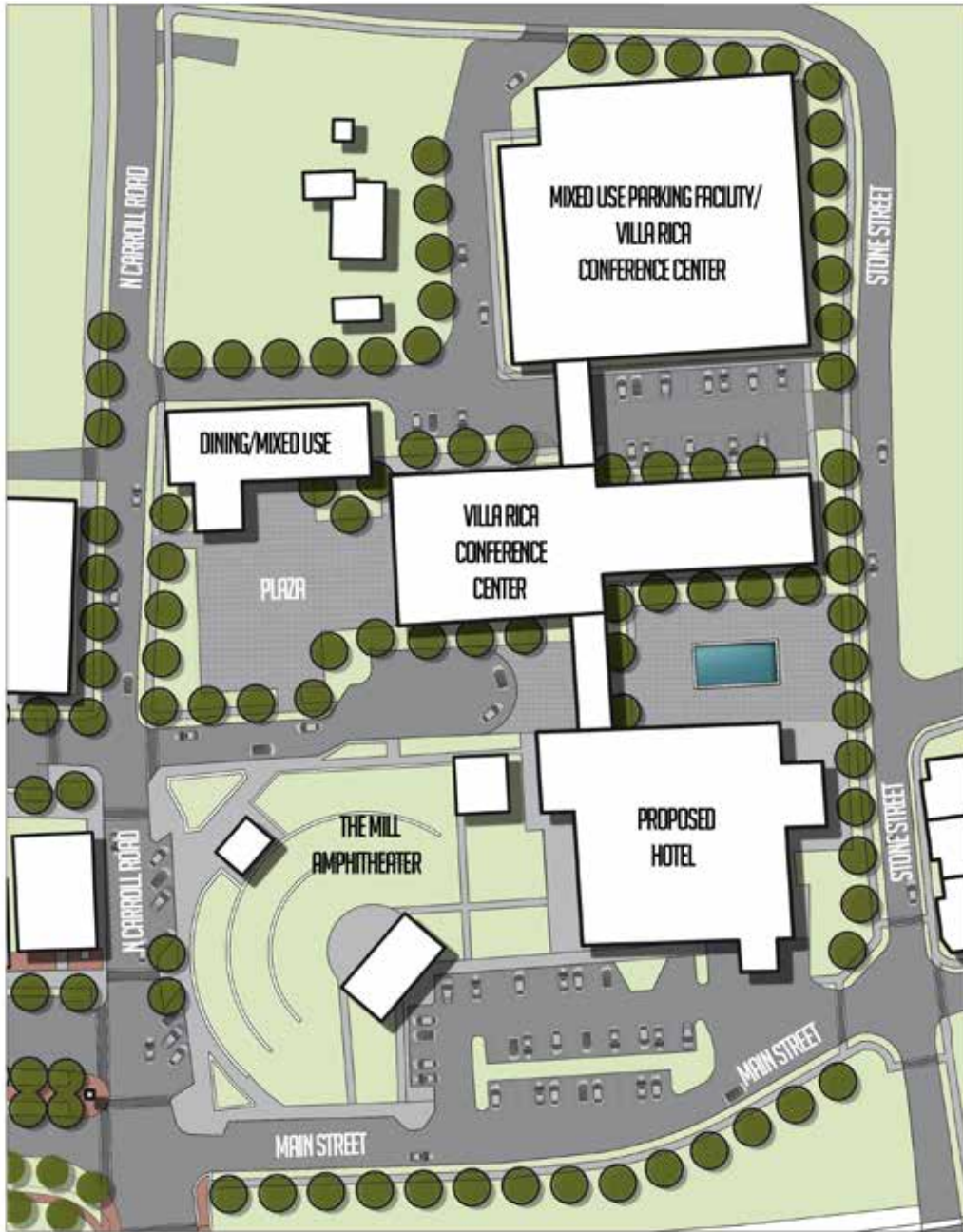
After: The rendering (left) shows a new train watching depot built in the allowable area outside of the railroad jurisdiction property line. This space offers a safe, covered, and shaded area to watch the trains, eat a picnic lunch, or just relax downtown.

avanti building



PHASE I

At over 83,000 square feet, the former Avanti Building is a hulking presence in downtown Villa Rica. The current industrial building houses Villa Rica Main Street and the city's fleet of maintenance vehicles but is largely underutilized. This plan envisions the site as the home of a new downtown hotel and 28,000 square foot conference center. A hotel plaza with pool and convenient parking lot now occupy the site of a portion of the former Avanti Building, while both the front cinder block section of the building as well as a rear portion of the butler-style building have been reprogrammed for use as a community meeting space/ conference center.



PHASE II

If Phase I of the plan proves successful, the city could consider working with private developers to create a permanent conference center facility and city hall complex. While this plan incorporates the downtown hotel proposed in Phase I, two new structures take the place of the industrial and utilitarian Avanti Building. Overlooking a new landscaped plaza and linked to surrounding buildings with covered walkways, the central building of the conference center complex could house Villa Rica City Hall as previously planned in addition to incorporating meeting spaces on the ground floor. While retaining a central surface parking area, the Phase II plan takes advantage of the existing grade of the north side of the Avanti site to incorporate structured parking beneath a mixed-use conference center. In addition to meeting spaces, this building could house downtown lofts or city offices in upper stories.

splash pad

Before: The parking lot for The Mill Amphitheater is currently underutilized. Typically this lot is only filled with cars during programmed events throughout the year; otherwise, it often sits empty as seen here.

After: There is an opportunity to create a public space adjacent to the amphitheater, which serves as a social and economic amenity for Villa Rica, and can be utilized every day. The space is defined with new paving, plantings, seating, and a splash pad, which can be turned on throughout the year. The edges of this new plaza may be bound by a new restaurant with outdoor seating, as well as a new public multipurpose wing of the Avanti Building.

AFTER





BEFORE



skate park

Before: An empty gravel area sits directly across Main Street from The Mill Amphitheater, abutting a slope next to the railway.

After: The city could expand public amenities downtown by providing an active and social destination for the city's young people. This skate park is within view of the existing public spaces, providing visual amusement for citizens at the plaza and amphitheater. The top edge of the skate park includes a platform to view the trains going by.



AFTER

BEFORE



avanti building



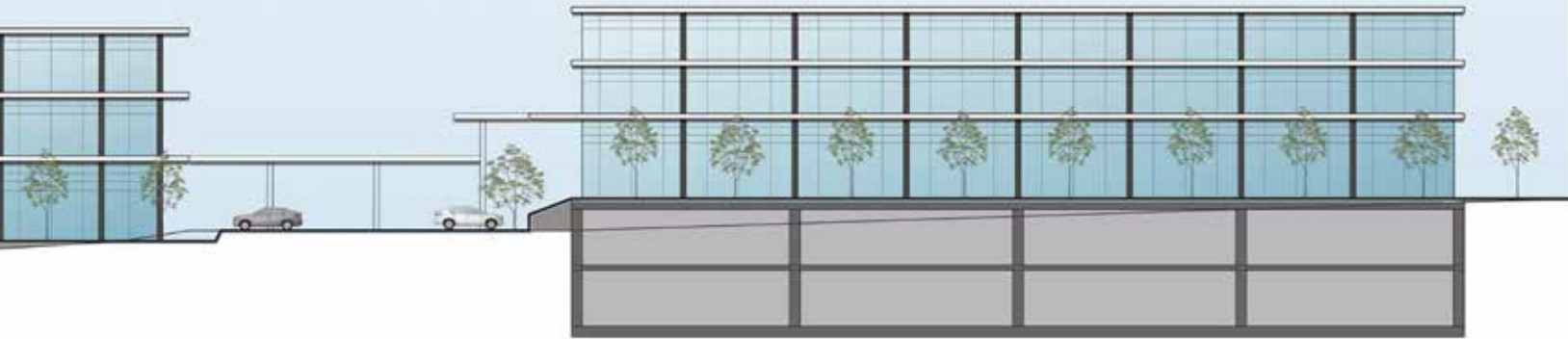
Phase II Avanti Section

A section elevation is an architectural drawing that cuts a vertical slice through a building or landscape to allow a glimpse of what occurs inside. This section elevation shows the proposed hotel and community center complex at the site of the current Avanti Building. The two buildings to the right of the section are both intended as community-centric buildings and could house a civic, arts, or community center in addition to government offices and other uses. Building II of the complex takes advantage of the existing slope, indicated with a black line, to incorporate structured parking beneath the facility. The hotel, shown at the far left, is also included as well as connections and uses between buildings in the complex.

An Alternative Concept for a New Avanti Building Complex

Rather than use the existing Avanti structure, a new complex of multistory mixed-use buildings could be introduced on both sides of Stone Street. The new building façades would front wide sidewalks that would create an environment more characteristic of an active downtown. The rendering (right) shows these changes.

COMMUNITY-CENTRIC BUILDING I



AFTER

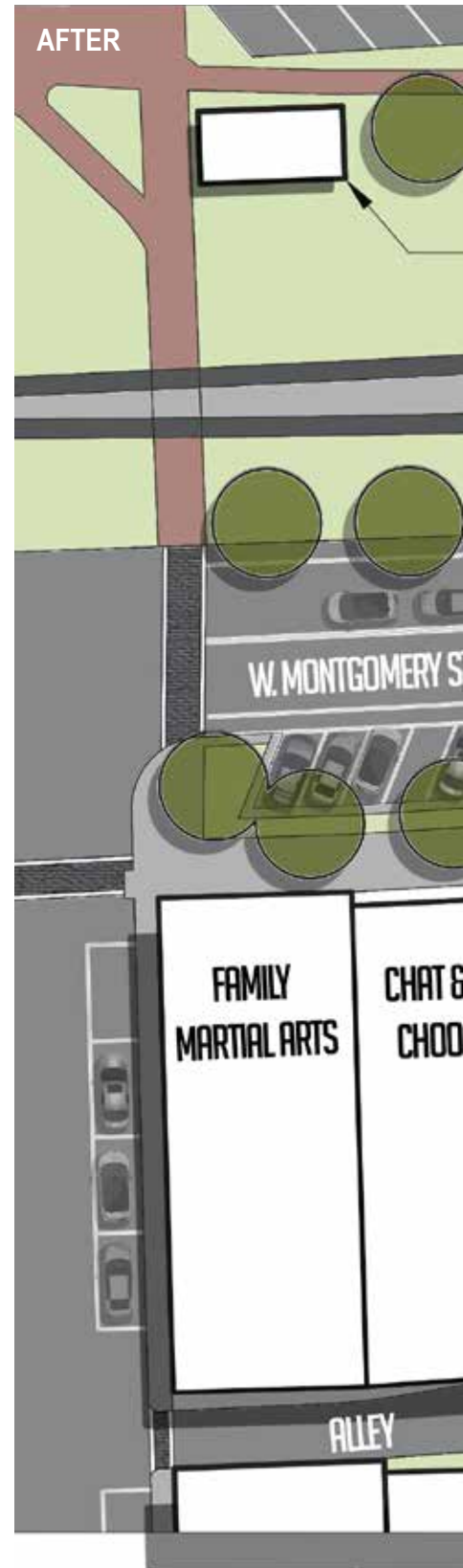
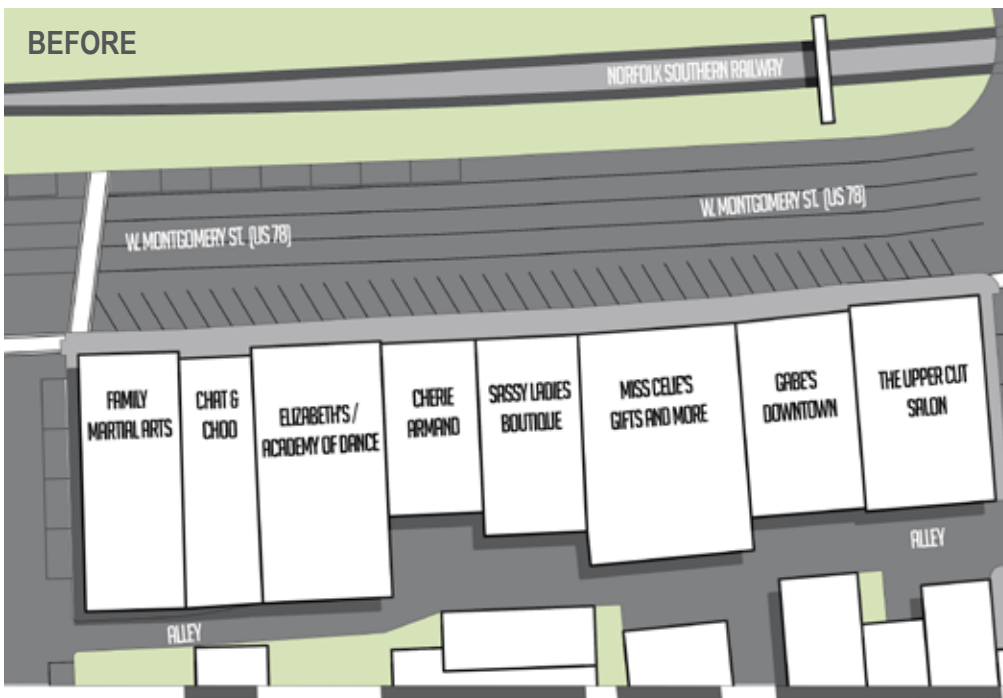
montgomery street

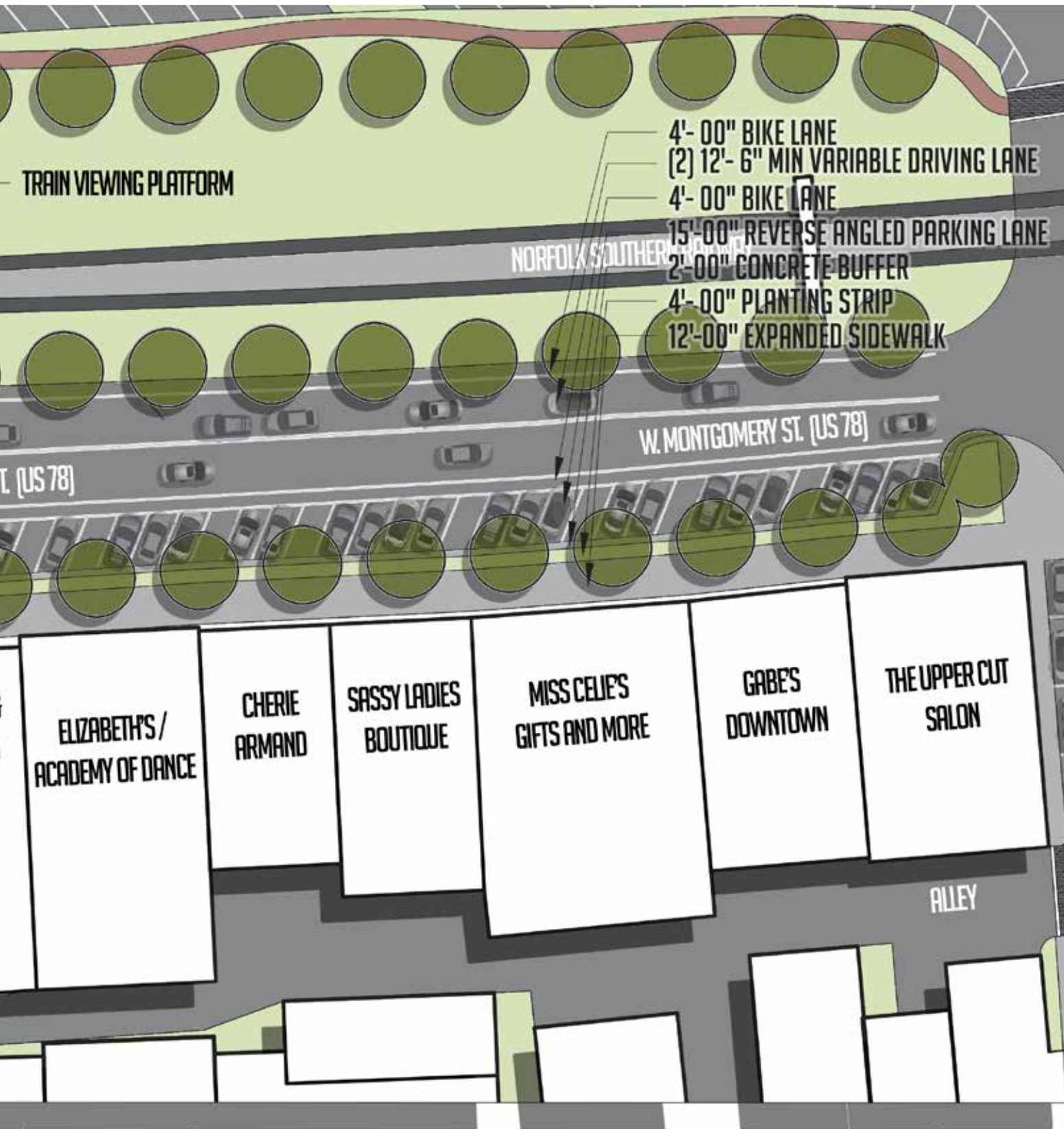
Conceptual Plan: The street level plan for Montgomery Street / Bankhead Highway incorporates the standard Villa Rica streetscaping palette of concrete sidewalks, granite curbs, street trees, gray permeable pavers, and gray paver-bordered concrete crosswalks.

The plan for Bankhead Highway plan shrinks the excessive travel lanes of Montgomery Street / Bankhead Highway and removes underutilized parallel parking on the north side of the road to accommodate expanded sidewalks, street trees and planting strips, and two bike lanes.

Elements of the Bankhead Highway Plan Include:

- An expanded 12' minimum sidewalk along the south side of Bankhead Highway
- 4' x 5' landscaped strips with street trees incorporated into wider sidewalk
- Expanded landscaped bump outs at intersections to improve the pedestrian experience and slow traffic down
- One 7' gray paver-bordered concrete crosswalk connecting Bankhead to Main and Temple streets
- 12'-6" minimum variable driving lanes
- Two 4' bike lanes connecting to local and regional trail networks
- 34 attractively paved reverse angle parking spaces





montgomery street



Before: This view of Montgomery Street /US Highway 78 near the intersection of Westview Drive shows the relatively narrow sidewalks in this busy stretch of downtown. While these sidewalks are among the widest downtown, utility poles, neglected street trees, benches, and more create cramped conditions for pedestrians and effectively prohibit desired sidewalk activities like outdoor dining. Overly wide driving lanes here encourage speeding, while sparsely utilized parallel parking across the street lacks a safe pedestrian crossing. Pull-in angled parking, while convenient, creates a dangerous situation for motorists when parked cars back out into the busy highway. The wide expanse of asphalt and lack of safe, defined pedestrian crossings cut this area off from the north side of downtown.

After: This rendered view of the same stretch of Montgomery Street shows the street transformed into a pedestrian- and bike-friendly boulevard. Overly wide travel lanes have been shrunk and underutilized parallel parking spaces have been removed to create wide, handsomely shaded sidewalks perfect for outdoor dining and other elements of downtown living. Attractive, appropriately scaled lighting has been installed out of the main pedestrian traffic area, and the formerly obtrusive utility poles have been removed. Attractive reverse angle parking planned by the city has replaced the formerly dangerous angled parking, and new pervious pavement for parking areas helps to address downtown stormwater issues while breaking up the wide expanse of asphalt. Two wide new bike lanes helping connect downtown to surrounding trails have been easily accommodated within the formerly excessive travel lanes.



AFTER

montgomery strip retrofit

Before: This area along Montgomery Street could use some improvements to make it an attractive gateway into downtown.

After: The rendering below shows what simple improvements can do to improve a space. Improvements include the following:

- A planted grass area separates the parking lot from the road, decreasing curb cuts and improving vehicular and pedestrian safety.
- Trees offer shade and a visual screen around the property.
- A sidewalk has been added to connect the existing sidewalk to the businesses and direct foot traffic away from the road and directly next to the businesses.
- Crosswalks have been changed to become ADA accessible.





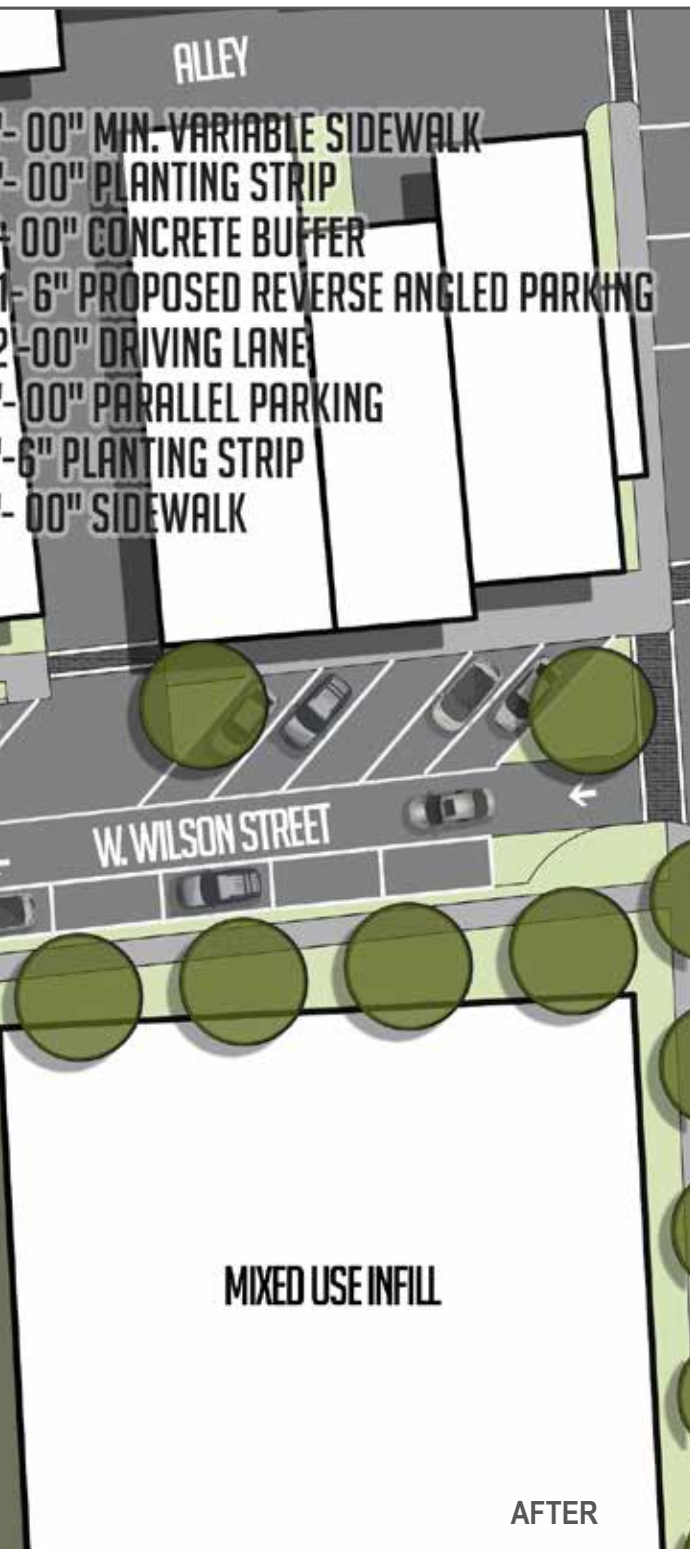
BEFORE



AFTER

wilson street





West Wilson Street Conceptual Plan

The street level plan for West Wilson Street incorporates the standard Villa Rica streetscaping palette of concrete sidewalks, granite curbs, street trees, gray permeable pavers, and gray paver-bordered concrete crosswalks. This plan reflects city plans for reverse angle parking, and former parallel parking spaces along the north side of W. Wilson have been replaced. Per city plans, two-way traffic has been reduced to a single traffic lane going west.

Elements of the West Wilson Street Plan Include:

- An expanded 5' minimum sidewalk along the north side of West Wilson
- Expanded landscaped bump outs at intersections to improve the pedestrian experience and slow traffic
- A 3' planting strip with street trees incorporated into the north sidewalk
- Per city plans, 21'-6" reverse angle parking
- An attractively paved 12' one-way traffic lane
- Two 5' gray paver-bordered concrete crosswalks
- 9' parallel parking areas with permeable pavers
- A 2'-6" planting strip on the southern side of W. Wilson Street
- An existing 5' sidewalk on the south side of W. Wilson Street

wilson street



Before: This view of West Wilson Street between South Candler Street and South Carroll Road shows a large, vacant commercial building and unappealing razor wire fencing and cargo container storage in the middle of downtown. Sidewalks along this stretch of Wilson Street are generally the minimum width, creating uncomfortable conditions for pedestrians and prohibiting any potential outdoor dining or other sidewalk activities. Parallel parking along both sides of the street creates wide driving lanes that encourage motorists to travel at unsafe speeds.

After: This rendered “after” image of West Wilson Street shows the proposed reverse angled parking plan developed by the city. This image shows W. Wilson converted to one-way traffic, with the space formerly occupied by the wide driving lanes utilized to provide wider, shaded sidewalks for pedestrians. Granite curbs and handsome street trees help convey a sense of public investment and community pride while inviting residents to enjoy a walk along the city’s attractive new sidewalks. In addition to a narrowed one-way driving lane, new, attractive permeable pavers add visual interest while calming traffic, addressing stormwater runoff, and creating a safer environment for pedestrians and bikers. With architecture modeled on the successful mixed-use neighborhood Glenwood Park in Atlanta, the formerly neglected container storage lot now contains an attractive infill building with ground-level retail and upper-story housing. The adjacent vacant commercial space has been repainted to better complement surrounding buildings.



AFTER





candler street park

Before: City officials have recently explored acquiring the shaded corner lot at West View Road and W. Wilson Street for a pocket park. Directly adjacent to Villa Rica Drugs and across from a potential infill development site, this currently underutilized corner could serve as a small neighborhood park for future downtown residents as well as existing homeowners in the historic neighborhoods along Candler Street and West View Road.

After: This illustrative rendering shows the same corner transformed into a neighborhood pocket park. Fragrant native azaleas have been planted along beneath the expansive canopy of the existing oaks and other hardwood trees. An improved, ADA-accessible path loops the property and connects to existing assets like Villa Rica Drugs with attractive lawn areas for passive play and small gatherings. New, intimately-scaled signage matches the industrial aesthetic of Villa Rica's proposed welcome signage and beckons users to this new public space. Attractive streetscaping improvements along Wilson Street help to calm traffic and invite investment and activity to this side street.



BEFORE

cottages: save your historic fabric

Before: This view of the old houses on Montgomery Street shows an opportunity to have a creative mixed-use neighborhood.

After: This rendered view shows the houses fixed up with new landscaping and businesses occupying the spaces.





AFTER

butterball's property

Repurposing Old Buildings

Once seen as eyesores and utilitarian structures not warranting preservation, historic service stations are being given a second look by communities around the country, and many of these structures are being successfully rehabilitated and restored for community purposes. As seen in the National Park Services' The Preservation and Reuse of Historic Gas Stations brief, (<http://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/46-gas-stations.htm>) service stations remain "one of America's most common commercial building types," "are emblematic of the twentieth century," and serve as "physical reminders of the transportation revolution and the influence of increased mobility on the landscape." As these service stations are often housed in sleek Mid-century, Art Moderne, or stylized Art Deco structures and commonly sited at prominent intersections, many communities are reconsidering the value of these buildings and seeing success converting these important historic resources to hip retail outlets, handsome start-up business venues, nostalgic welcome centers, art galleries, meeting rooms, and more.

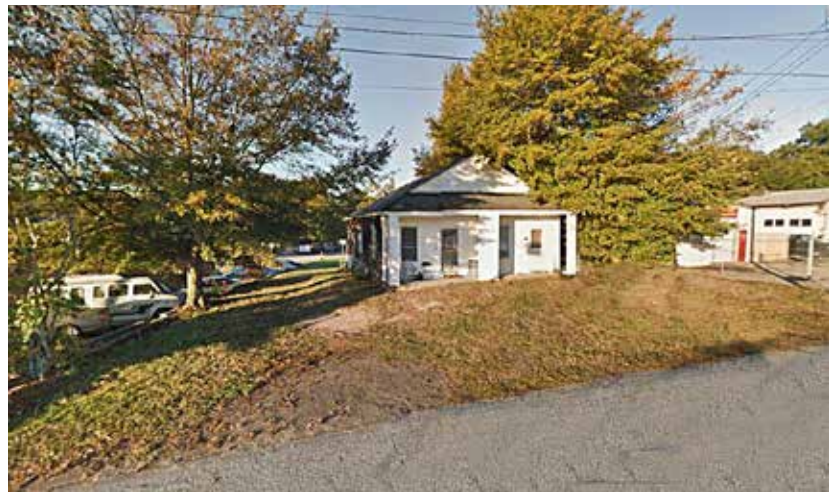
The Old Butterball's Auto Building

Like the Southern Railroad in the 1800s and I-20 today, from 1916 until the 1950s, Bankhead Highway served as a critical transcontinental transportation corridor that brought life and vitality to Villa Rica. Built to serve motorists along Bankhead Highway, since 1932 the service station at the intersection of West Montgomery Street and Bankhead Highway (US Highway 78) has been an important landmark of downtown Villa Rica. Most recently home to Butterball's Auto Repair, for over 80 years this building has served as downtown's front porch and helped to define the parameters of downtown Villa Rica. With a wide canopy, sliding glass doors, and a simple modern structure, this building continues to contribute to the character and architectural diversity of downtown Villa Rica while evoking the golden age of the automotive era. Now owned by the city and occupying a predominant downtown

location, this building and the adjoining 1950s mill housing should be prioritized for rehabilitation and adaptive reuse. By serving as the new home of a combined Main Street, Tourism Board, and Downtown Development Association, a restored structure would ensure that the next generation and onward can experience the unique features and characteristics that define historic gas stations and the automotive age while utilizing these assets to fill community needs in downtown Villa Rica. Additionally, to address the demand for downtown housing, the adjoining duplex should be prioritized for conversion into lofts, preserving the mill town heritage while helping to ensure a 24-hour population base downtown.

BEFORE





butterball's property

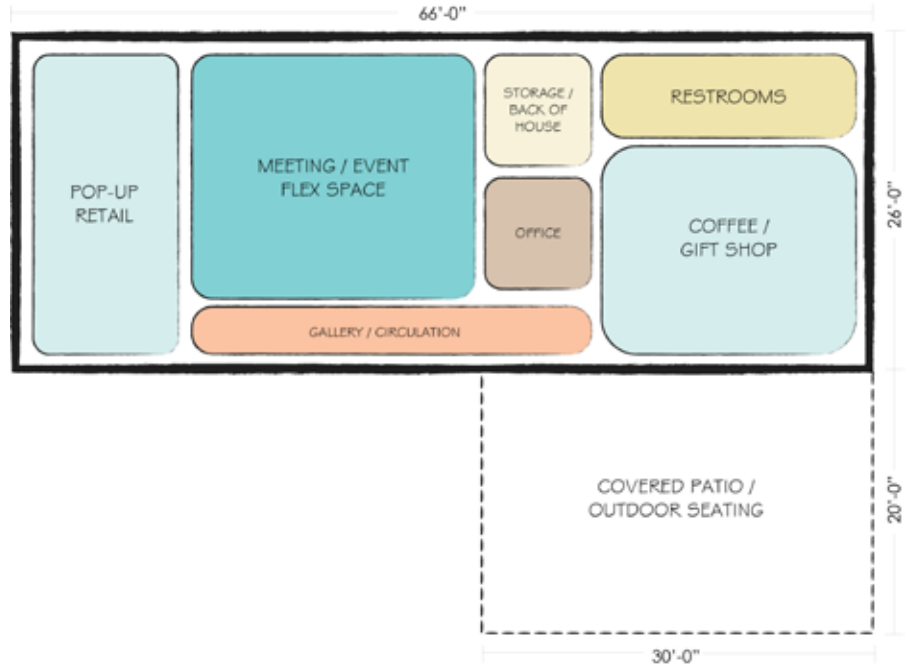
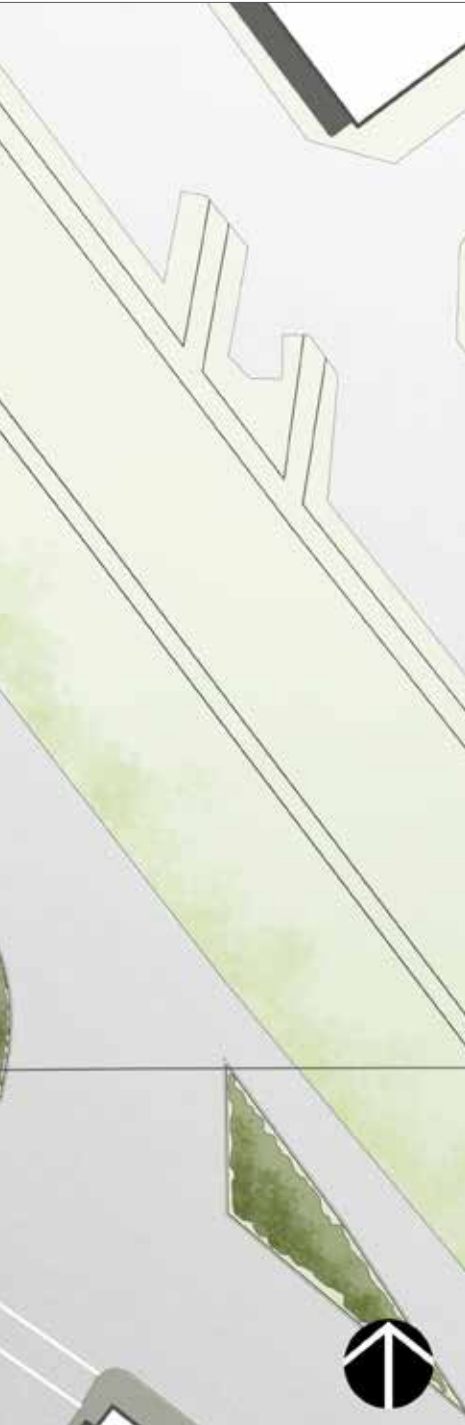


After: The digital rendering shows what the exterior could look like after rehabilitation. New blue-tinted glass windows and garage doors have been installed, giving the building a clean and retro look. New welcome signage and murals brand the welcome center, and the billboard is utilized as another welcome sign.



butterball's property





Interior Space Programming Diagram

The diagram above shows how the space could be reused after renovation. The building could be used as the city’s welcome center, but have additional functions that activate the space. For example, the lobby can function as a visitor information center, but also a coffee and gift shop that will draw locals in as well. A flexible meeting and event space can host a variety of groups and can be rented out from the city. A pop-up retail space can serve as a small shop where vendors can be changed out easily. This space can be separately accessed by its own garage door. Finally, the walls could feature work from local artists that could easily be switched out monthly or seasonally.

Butterball’s Property Conceptual Plan

The plan view (left) shows the overall streetscape improvements to the Butterball’s Auto property and surrounding area. The streetscape improvements reflect the same design that is proposed in the 2016 Downtown Villa Rica Strategic Vision and Plan. Parking can be shared between the proposed welcome center and the adjacent duplex property. A number of street trees and landscaping improvements are shown on West Montgomery Street and Bankhead Highway (US 78).

butterball's property

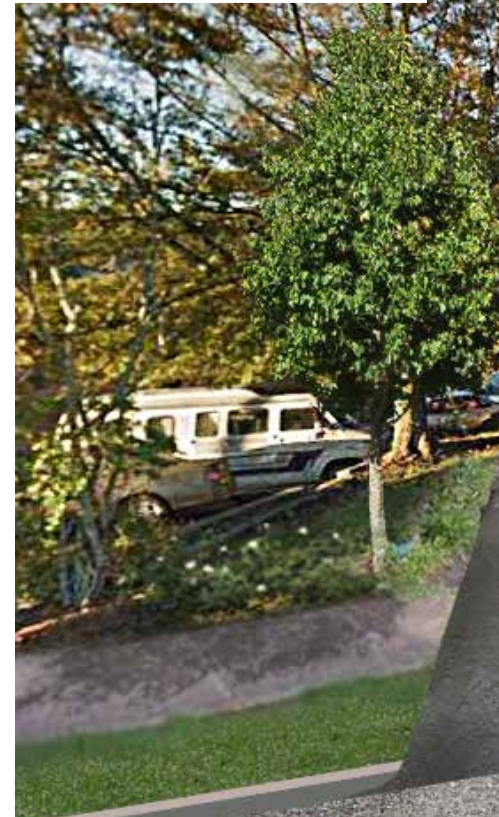
Butterball's Property Rear

The rear of the Butterball's building faces a major gateway into downtown Villa Rica. As shown in the "before" image, the back of the building is in need of some maintenance and landscaping. The rendering shows what it could look like with new plantings, a repaired and cleaned-up wall, and new welcome mural painted on the back. A sidewalk has also been added to improve connectivity to downtown.



Adjacent Property: Quaint Duplex

Next door to the Butterball's Auto building is an old duplex that could be restored to a quaint and attractive place to live. The rendering (right) shows how new paint and some landscaping can improve the look of the entire property, making it an attractive place to live. The properties near the Welcome Center are just as important as the Welcome Center itself because they also serve as the "front porch" to downtown Villa Rica and leave a lasting first impression on those who visit downtown.





ADJACENT PROPERTY, BEFORE



ADJACENT PROPERTY, AFTER

highway 78

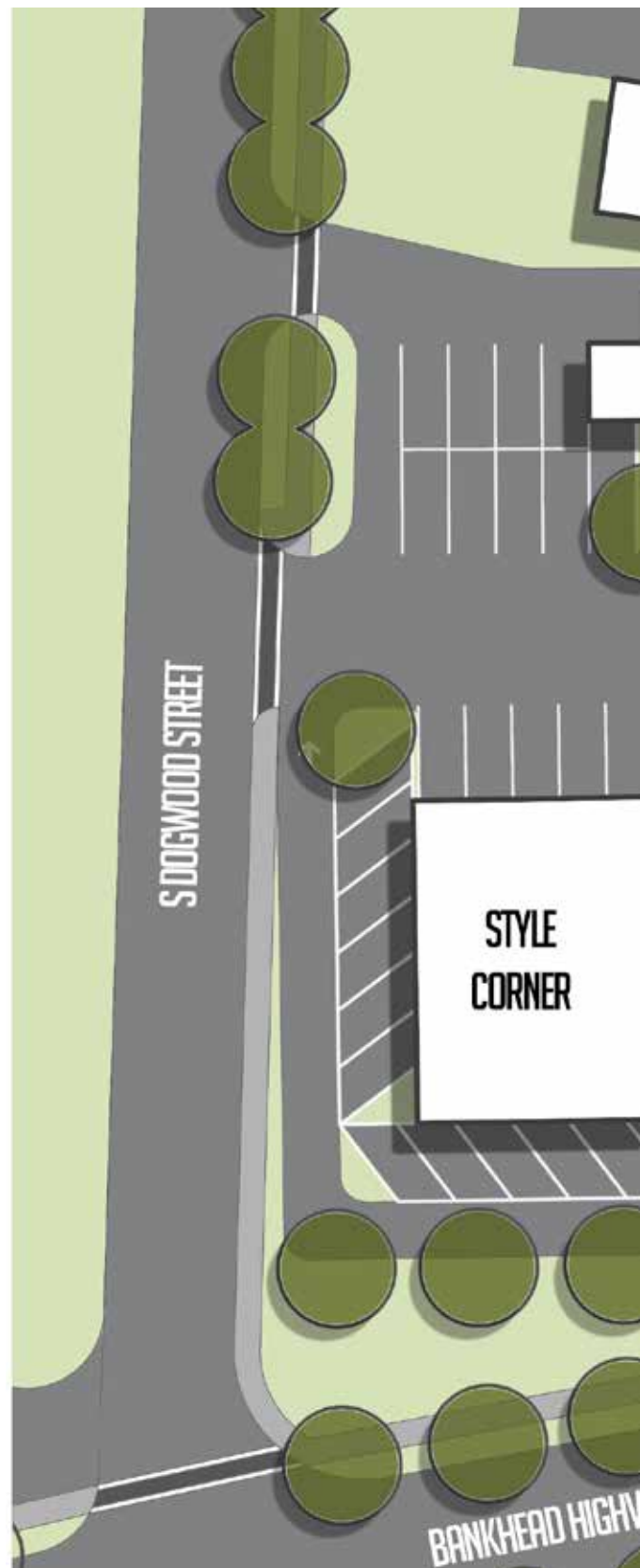
Plan View

The street level plan for Church Street incorporates the standard Villa Rica streetscaping palette of concrete sidewalks, granite curbs, street trees, gray permeable pavers, and gray paver-bordered concrete crosswalks.

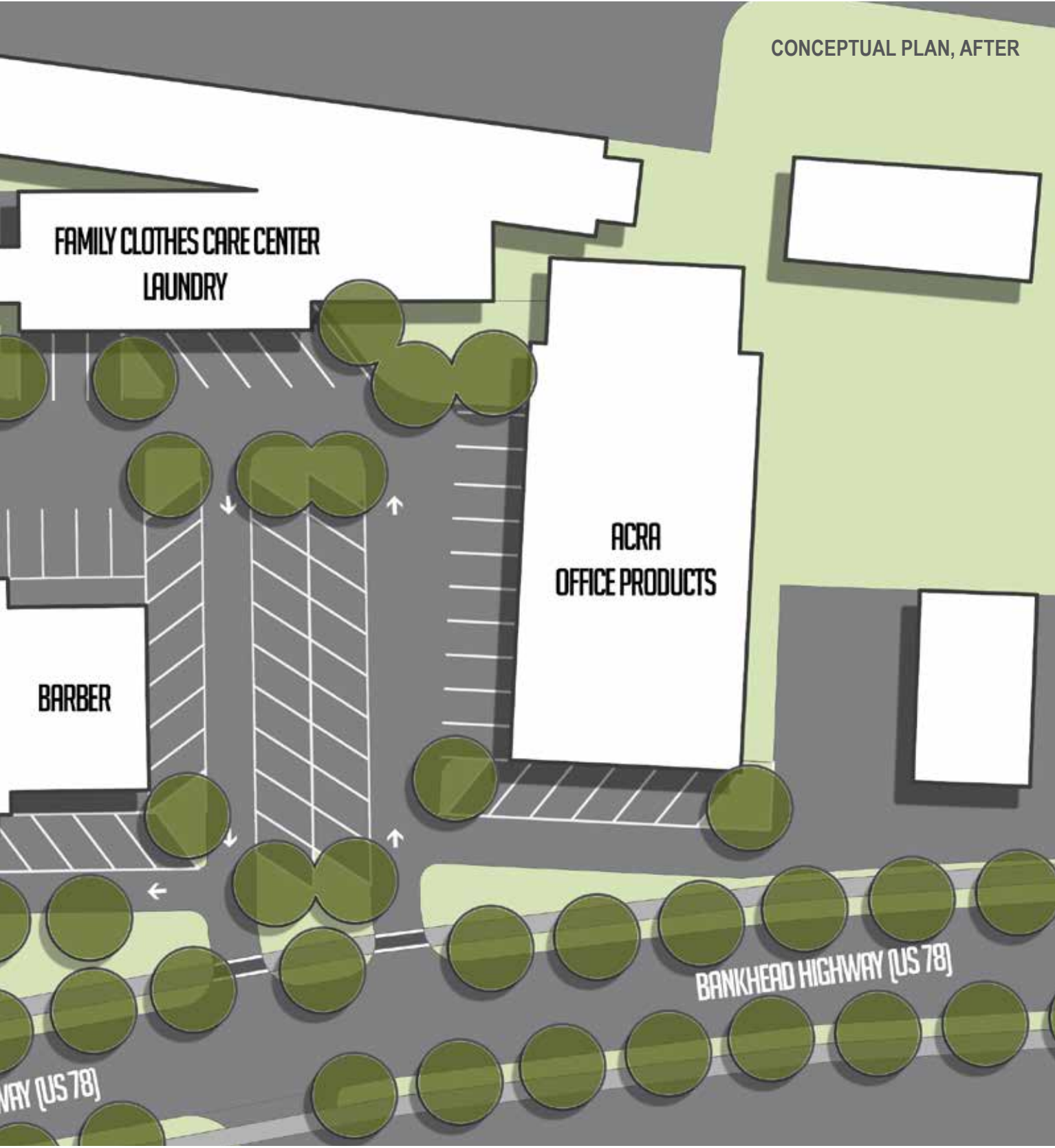
Currently this section of Bankhead Highway at the intersection with Dogwood Street includes a wide and unattractive expanse of underutilized asphalt paving. A continuous curb cut at the Spanish Corner complex creates unsafe conditions as parked cars back up into the busy highway. Despite the proximity of this location to Villa Rica Elementary School and the historic residential neighborhood along West View Road, currently this site lacks any pedestrian infrastructure. The current absence of shade trees and landscaping contributes to the unattractive appearance of the parking lot. In public input sessions, addressing the appearance of this and other Bankhead Highway corridor businesses emerged as a major issue. This plan utilizes existing underutilized paved areas to incorporate street trees, landscaping, and pedestrian infrastructure. The parking lot has been redesigned and continuous curb cuts removed to create a safer and more appealing appearance. Trees and greenery have been incorporated throughout the redesigned parking lot where possible.

Elements of the Spanish Corner Plan Include:

- A 5' minimum sidewalk on Bankhead Highway and Dogwood Street
- A 5' integrated planting strip along Bankhead Highway with street trees
- Gray paver-bordered concrete crosswalks at major intersections
- Landscaped bump outs at intersections to improve the pedestrian experience and slow traffic



CONCEPTUAL PLAN, AFTER



highway 78

BEFORE



Before: Located on Highway 78, this shopping center was a frequent topic in public input sessions, and improvements are needed to make it a more attractive space along a major gateway into downtown.

After: The rendering shows what simple things such as changing paint color and planting trees can do to improve a space. Improvements include the following:

- A planted grass area separates the parking lot from the road, decreasing curb cuts and improving vehicular and pedestrian safety.
- Trees offer shade and a visual screen around the property.
- The pink building has been painted neutral tones of off-white and brown.
- Signage has been removed from the roof line and placed in a centralized ground sign on the corner with attractive landscaping. Businesses would still be able to advertise on windows and doors.
- Parking has been reconfigured to diagonal spaces to allow room for the planted area.
- The background building has been painted with neutral tones.





AFTER

arrival signage

Gateways are the “front door” to downtown. Having cohesive, attractive, and welcoming signage at gateway areas gives visitors a sense of arrival, as well as helping to brand the community. The following concepts were designed to reflect the character of Villa Rica. Materials used consist of iron, steel, galvanized metal, concrete, and brick. These are materials found in downtown Villa Rica.



TRAIN TRUSS CONCEPT



MODERN INDUSTRIAL CONCEPT



TRAIN TRUSS CONCEPT 2





gateway signage

Billboard Design Concept

Billboards can be attractive gateway signs leading into the community. They are opportunities for branding downtown and announcing events, and they are designed to catch a person's attention and create a memorable first impression very quickly, leaving the reader thinking about the advertisement after they have driven past it. They have to be readable in a very short time because they are usually read while being passed at high speeds. The design below is used as welcome signage and is placed on an existing billboard at the intersection of South Carroll Road and GA 61.

Overpass Signage Concept

The concepts on the following page show how a can of paint can be used to create welcoming gateway signage.



AFTER





BEFORE



AFTER



BEFORE



AFTER



VILLA RICA

WORK

PROGRAM

Modeled after the Main Street Four-Point Approach®, the Villa Rica Work Program developed by the Carl Vinson Institute of Government uses an organized and systematic approach to downtown redevelopment and revitalization. Based on broad community engagement and input, the Villa Rica Work Program outlines an implementation plan with a step-by-step guide for successfully achieving the vision of the community. The plan focuses on four program components: organization, promotion, design, and economic vitality. To be successful, Villa Rica must address issues and opportunities in each of these components, working with broad public support for the betterment of the community.

Across each of the four program components, there is one critical element: public input and engagement. Those who live in a place know more than anyone what is needed and what is wanted in the community. The buy-in and support of local citizens is essential to ensuring that Villa Rica can address issues and seize opportunities. A community must, first and foremost, meet the needs of its residents—after that, opportunities to increase tourism and other economic opportunities will follow. Built upon the input of the city’s residents, the Villa Rica Work Program addresses the following components:

ORGANIZATION

Organization refers to working to establish accord and co-action among the various and diverse groups that have a stake in the downtown district. Organization involves getting everyone in the downtown district as well as other community stakeholders to work together toward a unified goal.

PROMOTION

The goal of promotion is two-fold: creating a positive image of downtown that will both ignite community pride and improve consumer and investor confidence in the downtown. Promotion includes advertising, retail promotion, special events, and the marketing of events.

DESIGN

Design simply means re-creating downtown to be a safe, beautiful, and welcoming space for all who visit, work, and live there. Design includes giving attention to public and private buildings, storefronts, signage, public spaces, parking areas, street furniture, public art, landscaping, merchandising, window displays, and promotional materials.

ECONOMIC VITALITY

Economic development means building on and strengthening a community’s existing economic assets while diversifying the economic base. Economic development can be achieved through techniques to retain and expand successful businesses and thus providing a balanced commercial mix. Other strategies include sharpening the competitiveness and merchandising skills of business owners and attracting new businesses the local market can support.

These four points work together, each supporting and assisting the others, to improve the social, political, physical, and economic vitality of downtown.



Organization

No More Tear-Downs

Preserving and rehabilitating Villa Rica's historic building is the number one priority. Historic preservation is the most important philosophical underpinning for downtown revitalization. Preserving and rehabilitating must be embraced by all, from elected officials to the citizens of Villa Rica. No more historic structures in the downtown should be torn down or allowed to fall down due to demolition by neglect. Keeping the remaining historic fabric is priority number one.

Organizational Restructuring of Main Street and the Tourism Bureau

To create a uniform and streamlined approach to downtown development, marketing, and promoting Villa Rica, the idea of combining Main Street and the Tourism Bureau is being discussed. The new structure would place Main Street and Tourism under one umbrella. Tourism would also help to market and promote all the wonderful things going on downtown.

Tourism Logo

Another priority is creating a new tourism logo that fits into an overall Villa Rica branding campaign. It could incorporate a tagline like "City of Golden Opportunities."

Programming at The Mill

Villa Ricans overwhelmingly see The Mill Amphitheater as one of downtown's most important assets. While the community supports the many programmed events and concerts that bring activity and excitement to The Mill, many would love to see this asset open on a daily basis. Several simple options were suggested to bring more daily visitors to The Mill. By playing music daily through The Mill's existing speaker system, workers downtown might be more tempted to bring packed lunches and enjoy the scene. The city could also consider incentivizing food trucks to set up shop, creating a daily source of foot traffic and expanding the user base of The Mill. By planting large canopy street trees along the perimeter of The Mill, patrons would have the option of enjoying the sun or cooling off in the shade on warm summer days.

Civic Center at Villa Rica Main Street

The large former Avanti warehouse that houses Villa Rica's Main Street building takes up a significant portion of downtown. Much of this building's massive square footage is considerably underutilized. Throughout the public input process, locals made suggestions for how to better use this space: creating a community art or civic center, installing a children's museum, or using it as a large event and convention space for the city. Large local events like Villa Rica High School's prom are often forced to take place out of town due to the city's lack of a large event space. To fully utilize the city's public resources and create the vibrant downtown experience desired by the community, the city could consider partnering with a private developer to redevelop the warehouse building into a mixed-use convention, retail, and loft space. By re-imagining this huge resource, the city could create the downtown anchor and 24-hour population necessary to fully activate downtown.

Promotion

Special Event Grants

Existing city-run events like the Gold Nugget Drop, the Gold Rush Festival, and the Independence Day Annual Fireworks Display & Extravaganza are beloved community attractions that help bring visitors and activity downtown. While more events are desired by the community, Villa Rica has limited resources and support staff for additional events. One solution to this gap might be developing a Special Event Grant program to incentivize privately operated festivals and other programming downtown. Cities like Monroe, Georgia, have been very successful bringing private events downtown with Downtown Community Event Grants of \$250 or less. To make this process accessible for prospective event holders, the city should consider creating a streamlined “one-stop shop” for event programming in conjunction with Special Event Grants.

Live Music at Events

The community strongly favors attracting more diverse live music downtown. Many locals in public input sessions raved about the quality of musical acts attracted to The Mill Amphitheater but complained that most of the musicians featured at public events perform only country music. Locals, particularly students and younger residents, enjoy popular music and would like to see more genres represented at local events. At all programmed events, Villa Rica Main Street, the Tourism Bureau, and others should capitalize on the demand for a diverse array of live music and take advantage of the existing popularity of The Mill Amphitheater. Attracting more live music and diverse musical acts would build on Villa Rica’s appeal as a dining and entertainment destination while drawing more young people downtown.

Marketing Downtown Villa Rica

Throughout the public engagement process the idea that Villa Rica just needs to market downtown arose countless times. Ultimately the community would like downtown Villa Rica to be a destination for the local community and for travelers along nearby Interstate 20. Public input results clearly show that Villa Rica is a unique community with assets that both local residents and tourists do not know about. Significant demand exists to develop marketing plans to capture both local and tourist traffic downtown.

Prom Send-Off & Events

The Mill Amphitheater is a critical asset for the city and a major draw for the community. As an accessible and attractive gathering space, The Mill is already a popular destination for local students to coordinate before big events like prom night. To formalize this attraction, Villa Rica Main Street, the Downtown Development Authority, and Villa Rica High School could partner to bring a temporary arbor, photo booth, themed decorations, and a designated limo pick-up spot for a prom send-off event at The Mill. Capitalizing on The Mill’s existing popularity with prom couples, downtown restaurants could organize candlelight dinners or special prix fixe menus on prom night. A prom night fireworks display would be a potential draw for all ages. Providing safe youth-oriented programming downtown would go a long way toward helping students build a relationship with downtown, increasing activity and the long-term health of the area.

Winery Tour Package

From the 1890s until Prohibition, the area around Villa Rica was the heart of Georgia’s wine industry. Now entrepreneurs are seeking to revive the West Georgia wine industry with wineries like Little River Winery just outside of downtown. According to public input results, the community supports local wineries and sees the downtown tasting room Uncorked on Main as a major asset and regional attraction. Building on Villa Rica’s popularity as a dining destination, the city could consider partnering with local merchants to create a West Georgia wine discovery package for visitors. A tour package could include lodging, meals at downtown restaurants, tours of Little River and other local wineries, and sampling privileges at Uncorked. Showing off Villa Rica’s assets in an exciting and unique tourist package could help build a bond between visitors and downtown Villa Rica.

Restaurant Week

With options like Gabe’s, the Chat & Choo, Olive Tree, and more, people throughout the community view restaurant and dining options as a critical attraction and activity generator in downtown Villa Rica. While the city’s existing dining options bring the community downtown, many also feel that downtown would benefit from greater variety in dining options. Building



on existing popular festivals and events, a “foodie”-centric event that targets locals and visitors could create a popular draw downtown. Working with Villa Rica Main Street and downtown businesses, the city could develop a Restaurant Week Festival to boost activity downtown and promote Villa Rica as a dining destination. Local restaurants could set up booths, and food trucks could be encouraged to do business on downtown streets or around The Mill. The city could temporarily rescind the open container ordinance in certain areas to allow festival goers to sip wine while sampling food from around the city.

Downtown Splash Pad

Throughout the public input process, lifelong residents often stated what a special experience it was to grow up in Villa Rica. These and other citizens often repeated that the city was a great place to raise a family. Villa Rica has the

potential to build on the city’s family-friendly, small-town atmosphere and nurture the strong sense of community pride visible in Villa Rica by creating more attractions for children and families. Many in the community voiced the desire for a splash pad at a central location downtown. Splash pads are a popular draw for families and could be themed to reflect Villa Rica’s heritage as “the City of Gold” or history as a textile hub. Besides helping to grow a relationship between downtown and the next generation, splash pads are cost-effective investments requiring no life guards and little maintenance.

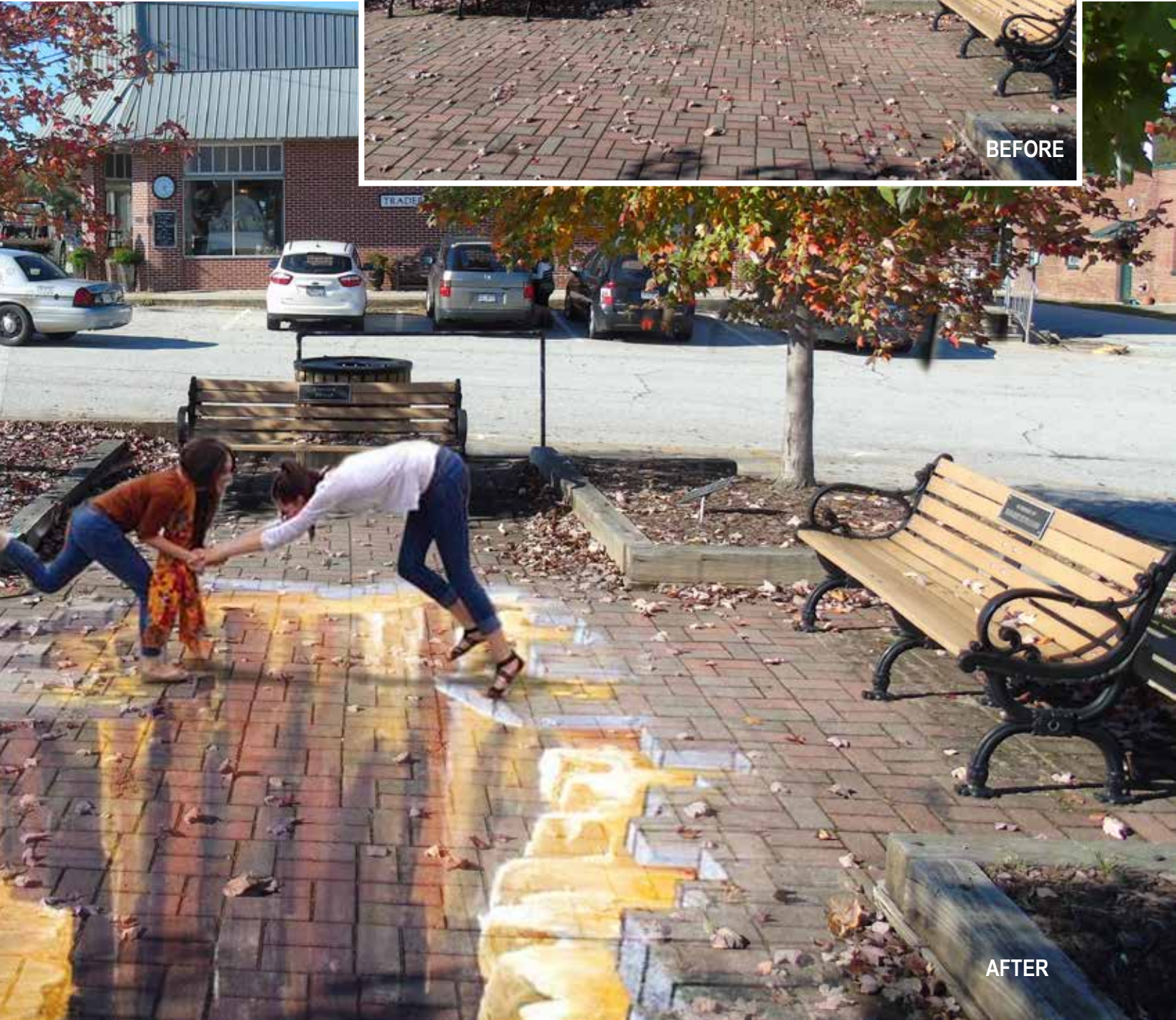
gold miner theme

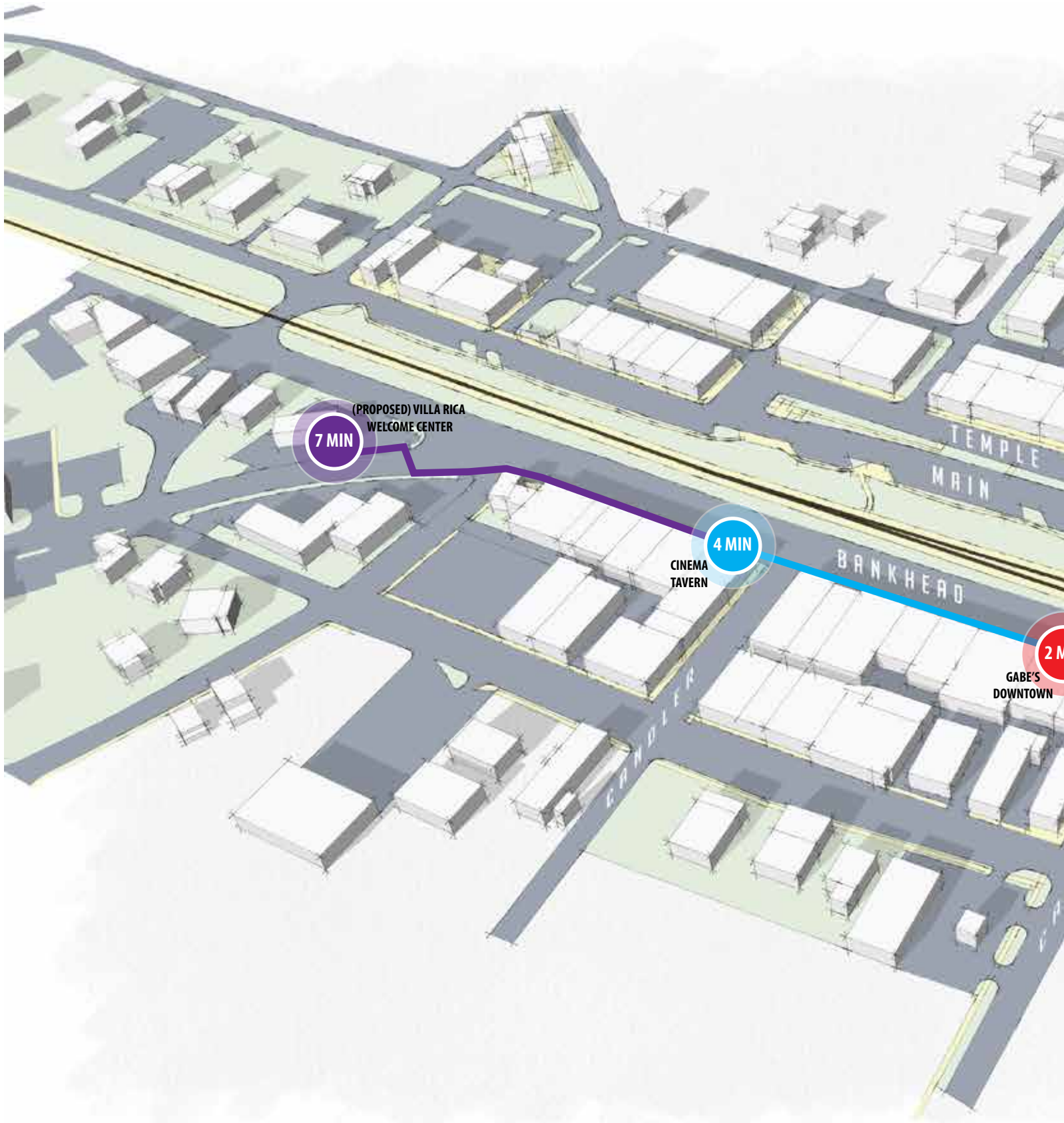


Gold Miner Fundraising Thermometer: Placing the attractive proposed gold miner statue at a prominent point downtown is an important community priority and long-term goal of the city. Prior to the final installation of the statue, a large cutout of the gold miner sculpture silhouette could be used to publicly display fundraising goals and achievements downtown. With a goal of \$42,000, the gold miner cutout will show how much has been raised toward the goal while also acting as a “placeholder” for the future work of art.

3D Street Art: In cities all over the world, artists are composing 3D murals and chalk art on walls and streets to engage and entertain pedestrians and visitors. These creative attractions are particular draws for children and families, an important consideration of most public input participants. Composed in chalk, this 3D work of art imagines an active gold mine in the plaza space between Temple and Main streets.







walkability map

Villa Rica has an extremely walkable downtown that allows pedestrians to move between downtown landmarks quickly. The map below shows that if someone started walking from The Mill, it would take only two minutes to get to Gabe's Restaurant by foot, four minutes to get to Cinema Tavern, and only seven minutes to get to the old Butterball's building. This is a characteristic that should be promoted and advertised about downtown Villa Rica.





Design

Prom Send-Off & Events

The Mill Amphitheater is a critical asset for the city and a major draw for the community. As an accessible and attractive gathering space, The Mill is already a popular destination for local students to coordinate before big events like prom night. To formalize this attraction, Villa Rica Main Street, the Downtown Development Authority, and Villa Rica High School could partner to bring a temporary arbor, photo booth, themed decorations, and a designated limo pick-up spot for a prom send-off event at The Mill. Capitalizing on The Mill's existing popularity with prom couples, downtown restaurants could organize candlelight dinners or special prix fixe menus on prom night. A prom night fireworks display would be a potential draw for all ages. Providing safe youth-oriented programming downtown would go a long way toward helping students build a relationship with downtown, increasing activity and the long-term health of the area.

Winery Tour Package

From the 1890s until Prohibition, the area around Villa Rica

was the heart of Georgia's wine industry. Now entrepreneurs are seeking to revive the West Georgia wine industry with wineries like Little River Winery just outside of downtown. According to public input results, the community supports local wineries and sees the downtown tasting room Uncorked on Main as a major asset and regional attraction. Building on Villa Rica's popularity as a dining destination, the city could consider partnering with local merchants to create a West Georgia wine discovery package for visitors. A tour package could include lodging, meals at downtown restaurants, tours of Little River and other local wineries, and sampling privileges at Uncorked. Showing off Villa Rica's assets in an exciting and unique tourist package could help build a bond between visitors and downtown Villa Rica.

Restaurant Week

With options like Gabe's, the Chat & Choo, Olive Tree, and more, people throughout the community view restaurant and dining options as a critical attraction and activity generator in

downtown Villa Rica. While the city’s existing dining options bring the community downtown, many also feel that downtown would benefit from greater variety in dining options. Building on existing popular festivals and events, a “foodie”-centric event that targets locals and visitors could create a popular draw downtown. Working with Villa Rica Main Street and downtown businesses, the city could develop a Restaurant Week Festival to boost activity downtown and promote Villa Rica as a dining destination. Local restaurants could set up booths, and food trucks could be encouraged to do business on downtown streets or around The Mill. The city could temporarily rescind the open container ordinance in certain areas to allow festival goers to sip wine while sampling food from around the city.

Downtown Splash Pad

Throughout the public input process, lifelong residents often stated what a special experience it was to grow up in Villa Rica. These and other citizens often repeated that the city was a great place to raise a family. Villa Rica has the potential to build on the city’s family-friendly, small-town atmosphere and nurture the strong sense of community pride visible in Villa Rica by creating more attractions for children and families. Many in the community voiced the desire for a splash pad at a central location downtown. Splash pads are a popular draw for families and could be themed to reflect Villa Rica’s heritage as “the City of Gold” or history as a textile hub. Besides helping to grow a relationship between downtown and the next generation, splash pads are cost-effective investments requiring no life guards and little maintenance.

Downtown Wellness Walk

Villa Ricans love the option of walking to downtown dining and entertainment options. To further develop downtown as a pedestrian-friendly destination, the city could consider developing a Wellness Walk. Villa Rica’s Wellness Walk could be a designated one-mile loop around the city that links prominent assets like The Mill Amphitheater, Uncorked, Gabe’s, and other attractions. Distances to these destinations could be listed with a pedometer-like step count and/or minutes between assets. Villa Rica’s Wellness Walk could also be an important component of a themed downtown app.

Train Viewing Platform

Villa Rica is proud of the city’s railroad heritage and continues to be a major corridor for freight traffic. Currently, avid train watchers are forced to cross dangerous traffic and steep terrain to catch glimpses of the many trains passing through the area regularly—creating hazards for both train operators and visitors. Georgia cities like Folkston, Locust Grove, Manchester, and others have all had success drawing railroad enthusiasts downtown with safe and attractive train viewing platforms. Villa Rica could consider developing a similar platform to safely accommodate rail fans and honor the city’s history as a railroad hub.

Downtown Villa Rica Gateways

Gateways are the first and last opportunity a community has to communicate the city’s values and unique sense of place. While serving as wayfinding aids, attractive, landscaped gateway experiences are an announcement to visitors and locals that they have entered a place of community pride and a place worth investing in. Many gateways to downtown, including sprawl along Bankhead Highway (US Highway 78), do not reflect community pride or promote Villa Rica’s unique sense of place. The purpose of gateway signage is to announce the presence of and entry into a community. By defining the main entrances into Villa Rica with distinctive signage and a unified planting pattern, passersby would be more likely to recognize and access downtown. Well-styled and landscaped gateways are also public signals that the city cares about how people perceive their downtown.

Downtown Arrival/Welcome Signage

Three visible, key entryways along major highways leading into downtown—Dallas Highway (Georgia Highway 61) and Main Street, East Montgomery Street (US Highway 78) and Hill Street, and West Bankhead Highway (US Highway 78) and Dogwood Street—represent great opportunities to welcome and direct visitors downtown. With attractive landscaping and signage that reflects Villa Rica’s unique character and sense of place, these intersections could become major assets that attract activity and investment downtown.

Flyover & Community Gateway Signage

Several prominent locations around Villa Rica are important entryways for out-of-town travelers entering the city. Among

these, the flyover at Mirror Lake Boulevard/Liberty Road and Montgomery Street (US 78) and the intersection of Georgia 101 and Highway 78 represent major opportunities to attract visitors downtown and broadcast Villa Rica's community values to outsiders. Developing creative welcome signage on the flyover and additional signage directing motorists to downtown from Georgia 101 would help to entice more visitors and boost economic activity.

Streetscaping Improvements

Although Villa Ricans cherish the ability to park downtown and walk to dining, entertainment, and retail destinations, the railroad and busy traffic bisecting downtown makes pedestrian activity between the north and south sides of downtown difficult and unappealing. Addressing these issues to create a more connected and pedestrian-friendly downtown experience were chief priorities among public input participants. Widespread support exists for extending sidewalks throughout downtown and into surrounding areas, particularly high-traffic destinations along Bankhead Highway (US 78). In public input sessions, the community applauded the attractive streetscaping improvements along the railroad tracks on the north side of town. Further momentum exists to continue a streetscaping program downtown that would create a unified and signature appearance along the city's major streets. Developing and implementing a unified plant and materials palette for downtown would go a long way toward physically and visually linking both sides of downtown, easing psychological barriers to connectivity and enhancing pedestrian activity.

Montgomery Street (US Hwy 78) Improvements

Montgomery Street is Villa Rica's busiest thoroughfare and a hub of downtown activity. While plantings, sidewalks, murals, banners, and more help brighten the pedestrian experience along Montgomery Street in the downtown core, currently much of Montgomery Street/Bankhead Highway away from downtown lacks any significant pedestrian infrastructure or aesthetic appeal. From Dogwood Street to West Wilson Street, no sidewalk exists on either side of this busy corridor, prohibiting downtown workers from walking to popular destinations like Evan's Barbeque. On the east side of town, no sidewalk exists between South Carroll Road and

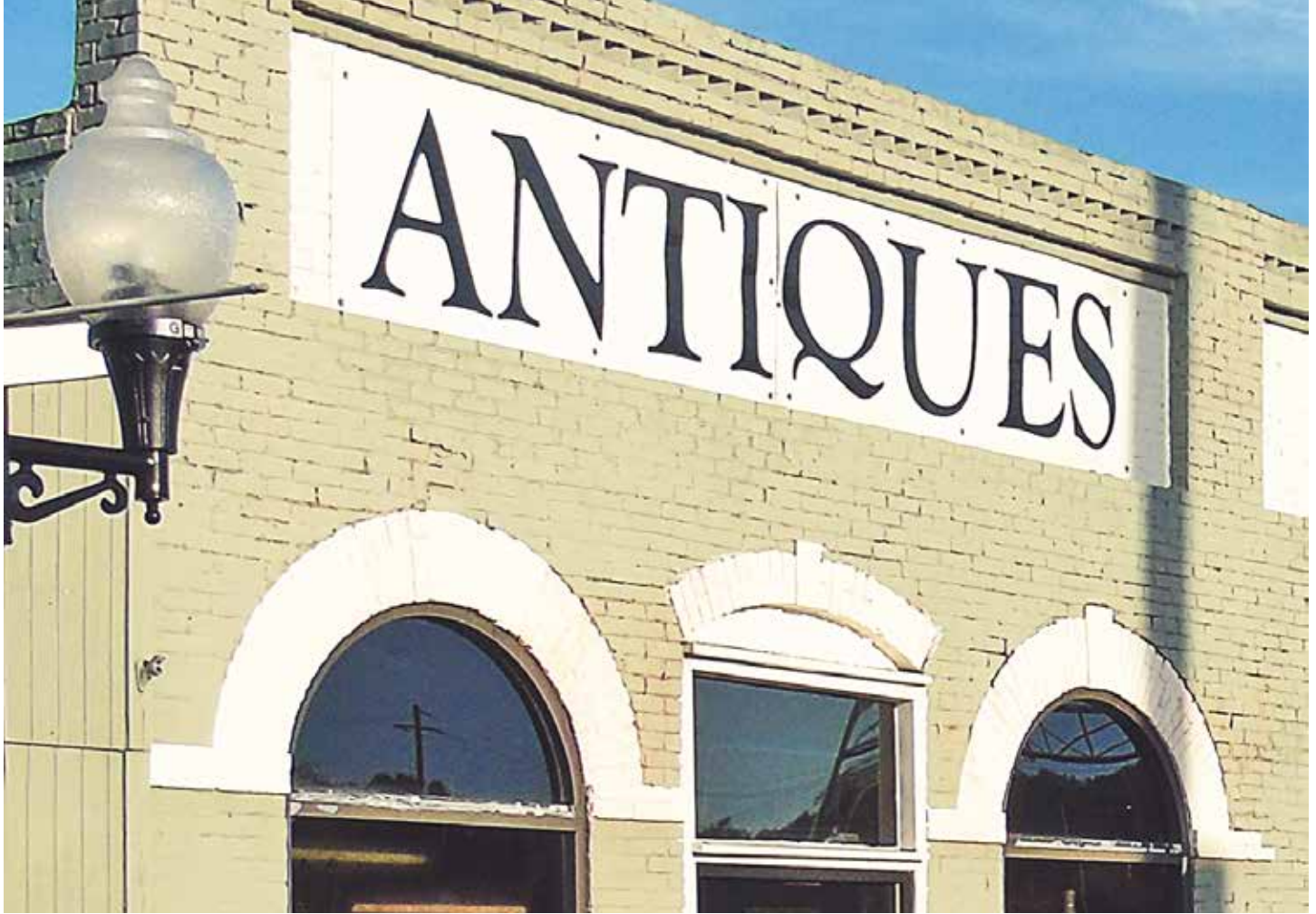
Hill Street, creating a major barrier for students at Glanton-Hindsman Elementary School. Even in Villa Rica's downtown core, Montgomery Street's busy traffic, narrow sidewalks, wide expanses of unbroken asphalt, and lack of shade detract from the city's friendly, small-town image while further dividing the area. Implementing a "road diet" by reworking traffic lanes and creating safer parking could allow the space for the shade trees, landscaped bump-outs, biking infrastructure, and wide sidewalks desired by the community.

West Wilson Street Improvements

Running parallel to Montgomery Street on the south side of town, West Wilson Street is an important downtown corridor and the planned site of Villa Rica's reverse angle on-street parking. By converting West Wilson to a one-way street between Carroll Road and Westview Drive, recent plans call for expanding on-street parking by seven spaces, creating landscaped bump outs, and constructing safe, defined pedestrian crossings. While reverse angle parking remains controversial, these improvements should go a long way toward improving access to parking on the south side of downtown. While undertaking these improvements, city leaders should commit to extending sidewalks and a unified streetscaping and planting palette throughout this corridor.

Main Street Improvements

Main Street (Georgia Highway 61) is the major vehicular corridor on the north side of downtown Villa Rica. Many of downtown's recent streetscaping improvements, including pedestrian infrastructure and plantings along the railroad right-of-way, lie immediately adjacent to the Main Street corridor. Currently Main Street features 96 angled on-street parking spaces and many attractive landscaped areas. While Main Street has many positive features, the street's wide expanse of asphalt, heavy truck traffic, elevated topography, disjointed and stepped pedestrian crossings, and hazardous intersection with North Carroll Road and West Montgomery Street are all seen by local citizens as issues that must be addressed. Installing attractive landscaping and pedestrian infrastructure in new bump-outs and currently underutilized striped areas could help to slow traffic and create a more pedestrian-friendly experience.



Temple Street Improvements

Home to popular destinations like Los Cowboys and Uncorked on Main, Temple Street is the hub of commercial activity on the north side of downtown. Many public input participants expressed the opinion that Temple Street could benefit from pedestrian improvements, enhanced connectivity, better lighting, street trees, and more activity. Merchants in particular would like a pedestrian-centric, plaza-like area along Temple Street. These and other voices see Temple Street as the most appropriate location for a splash pad, the proposed miner statue honoring Villa Rica's gold rush heritage, and an eventual pedestrian crossing beneath the railroad corridor and Main Street. Although businesses along this stretch would likely suffer from restricted vehicular traffic and parking, improvements could be undertaken to promote public space along Temple and make the street a more active and attractive pedestrian experience. Without removing any of the street's 61 on-street parking spaces, 13 underutilized striped areas exist that could be transformed into attractive parklets or landscaped bump-outs. Additionally,

converting Temple Street to one-way traffic would create the space necessary for wider sidewalks, outdoor dining areas, shade trees, and the amenities desired by the community. When undertaking these streetscaping improvements, local officials should also consider extending sidewalks along the side roads on the north side of town. West Church Street, Cheeves Street, and portions of Candler Street and North Avenue all lack pedestrian infrastructure.

Flashing Pedestrian Crossings

Public input responses and an analysis of pedestrian infrastructure downtown reveal that downtown has limited connectivity and that many locals feel unsafe crossing busy streets like Bankhead Highway and Main Street. Along critical access points to downtown, repaving existing crosswalks with pavers and installing flashing crosswalk signs where possible would visually tie both sides of downtown while breaking up bleak, unwelcoming expanses of asphalt. Installing these lights and creating new crosswalks would create safe and attractive connections for pedestrians while broadcasting a sense of arrival to drivers and pedestrians alike.

Infill Buildings

As downtown continues to grow, there is a need to encourage new infill and mixed-use development in currently vacant lots. In future years, infill development could possibly occur where parking lots currently exist. Over time, it is important to preserve and develop the existing historic downtown instead of building and growing a new version.

Connection to Mirror Lake

With popular new destinations like Carrollton's Greenbelt and the Silver Comet Trail bringing activity and investment to other West Georgia communities, many Villa Ricans see the potential of developing more bike lanes and dedicated pathways in the city. Throughout the public input process, countless participants voiced support for a multi-use trail connecting downtown with the Mirror Lake development to the northeast. By creating a dedicated path for runners, golf carts, and bicyclists, the city would send a powerful message that downtown is the heart and soul of the surrounding community. This trail could run alongside the right-of-way of a proposed vehicular connection between downtown and Mirror Lake Boulevard, creating a complete street connection between downtown and Villa Rica's largest population center. Multi-use trails, while embodying a commitment to Villa Rica's quality of life, would also help to activate the north side of downtown and invite the kind of investment in downtown desired by the community.

Façade Improvements

During public input sessions, improving "the look" of downtown and surrounding areas consistently emerged as one of the great challenges facing Villa Rica. The local community has a strong desire for a more cohesive downtown appearance, with complementary paint colors and attractive signage on downtown façades. The city must prioritize working with existing businesses to improve their façades when the time comes to renovate buildings. This approach will take time, but working with and assisting downtown property owners creates a win-win situation and builds healthy relationships between the city and business owners. Often the best first step to address the negative appearance of neglected buildings is to start with a can of paint. The city could work with local

business owners to develop a recommended color palette for façades and provide property owners with a go-to resource for appropriate paint colors and signage. Many downtown buildings could be vastly improved with a coat of paint and other minor exterior cosmetic fixes. The city could consider boosting Villa Rica's existing façade grant program to make building renovations a more attractive option for downtown property owners.

Back of Building Façade Improvements

Throughout the public input process, local citizens continually indicated that buildings along West Church Street and West Wilson Street hold a great deal of potential and could be updated and occupied to bring activity to Villa Rica's back streets. At the same time, many locals see these buildings as unattractive and in need of basic aesthetic improvements. To incentivize building renovation and new activity, Villa Rica should consider expanding the city's existing façade grant program to apply to the backs of these buildings. The city could also develop conceptual graphics for appropriate screening of utility features and other service functions necessarily present on backstreet buildings.

Veteran's Walk

Villa Rica is proud of the city's military history and the many veterans that call the city home. This was demonstrated most recently by the thousands who gathered to recognize the military vehicle preservation convoy. The numerous veterans who reside in the city represent service to the country in every conflict since World War II. Additionally, Villa Rica is proud to have a retired four-star general call the city home. As a part of the proposed streetscaping improvements, the large plaza area created between Main and Temple streets could be the ideal location for a Veteran's Memorial Walk to showcase pride in Villa Rica's military veterans. While details would be at the discretion of the city, plaza bricks could be engraved with the names of local veterans, and seat walls in the plaza could recognize the contributions made by Villa Rica's veterans to the country. Further, the city could host a special annual parade and event between The Mill and Veteran's Walk featuring military vehicles, special music, and presentations honoring and recognizing local veterans.

alley

The backs of buildings are important, too. Alleys can be creepy, unkempt places or they can be beautiful connections throughout downtown, providing enjoyable spaces for outdoor dining, live music, and public art. The rendering below shows what one alley downtown could look like if simple improvements were made.



Economic Vitality

Model City Ordinance

To create the downtown experience desired by the community, Villa Rica officials could also study and modify proven models of success. Woodstock, Georgia, a city similar to Villa Rica in several ways, has successfully rejuvenated its downtown over the past decade. Downtown Woodstock has generated new income and activity and brought in new residents while preserving its character and historic feel. Adopting model ordinances like Woodstock's downtown zoning to guide new development is an important consideration for Villa Rica officials.

Pop-up Markets

Citizens throughout Villa Rica continually requested a greater variety of retail options downtown. Similarly, many voices in the community want vibrant storefronts and activity in vacant spaces downtown. One solution to these issues could be pop-up markets in vacant building and lots downtown. Also called "flash retailing," pop-up markets serve as temporary retail spaces selling any manner of merchandise in empty storefronts and other underutilized spaces. To encourage pop-up markets as a unique draw for downtown, the Downtown Development Authority should consider working with downtown property owners to determine which vacant storefronts or vacant lots could serve as venues for such events. These spaces could then be listed on Storefront.com or similar sites that market these temporary spaces to pop-up retailers. The resulting funds could serve as a supplemental income stream for building owners while bringing interesting and ever-changing retail options downtown.

Downtown Recruitment Card

Many local residents see recruiting desired businesses, dining options, and employers downtown as a critical need for the city. To facilitate this process, the city or Downtown Development Authority could consider developing a one-page "fact sheet" with information like available properties, contact information, and vital market statistics to lure prospective businesses downtown. Creating a handy recruitment resource could help to attract desired businesses downtown.

Food Trucks

While Villa Rica's existing restaurants are a treasured community asset and a major draw downtown, public input results reveal that increasing the diversity, quantity, and operating hours of dining options downtown is a key community desire. Many public input participants suggested building on the city's allure as a dining destination by allowing more food trucks downtown, particularly during Mondays and other times when many local restaurants are closed. Food trucks at The Mill, the Butterball's property, or elsewhere downtown would provide a unique service to visitors and locals, while bringing activity to programmed community assets. Many focus group participants, particularly Villa Rica High School students and young people, mentioned that downtown needs more affordable dining options. Food trucks are often very diverse and affordable and could bring exciting new flavors to downtown Villa Rica.

Food Truck Incubator

Many cities around the country have developed incubator spaces to provide food truck operators with a central commissary or commercial kitchen space to prepare and store food. Public input participants suggest working with the Culinary Arts Program and the College and Career Academy at Villa Rica High School to develop a shared kitchen incubator space downtown. Such spaces incentivize food truck operators to relocate to the area, bringing more activity and investment downtown. At the same time, working with the local high school and bringing innovative programming downtown helps ensure that the next generation sees downtown as an exciting and attractive destination. Due to its location, Villa Rica could act as a regional food truck support enterprise for other towns like Douglasville and Carrollton.

Regional Trail Connections

Working with surrounding municipalities, Carroll County, Douglas County, and other stakeholders, Villa Rica could explore further activating downtown by connecting the city to regional trail networks like the Silver Comet Trail and Carrollton's Greenbelt or even pursuing a rail-with-trail connection to Douglasville. Particularly among millennials

and younger generations, access to alternative transportation networks and recreational opportunities are major factors in deciding where to call home. In the long term, a multi-use trail connection between the Silver Comet Trail and Carrollton's Greenbelt could remake Villa Rica as the hub of West Georgia and attract investment for generations to come.

Pursue and Capitalize on National Register of Historic Places Designation

Currently, much of the north side of downtown is included in the North Villa Rica Commercial Historic District. Two options exist for the south side of downtown, which is also eligible for registry as a historic district: Main Street could expand Villa Rica's existing registry or separately register the South Villa Rica Commercial Historic District with the National Park Service. National Registry status grants access to certain tax benefits for downtown rehabilitation and renovation of historic properties downtown. Villa Rica should consider extending these benefits to property owners on the south side of town by applying for National Registry status. To leverage benefits already available and promote them to downtown property owners in the North Villa Rica Commercial Historic District, the city should consider retaining a tax credit consultant. A dedicated point person could assist downtown property owners with the appropriate paperwork and help guide interested investors through the process. The same employee could work to promote the National Park Service's existing 20% Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit available to downtown property owners.

Residential Development

Villa Rica residents repeatedly expressed the desire for downtown living and improved connectivity between downtown and surrounding residential areas during public input sessions. People are the key to a vibrant downtown. For downtown Villa Rica to reach its full potential, the area needs more people living, working, and playing in it. While much of downtown is composed of one-story buildings, the city and local developers have already done an admirable job converting spaces like the Pope Brothers Warehouse and downtown's few two-story buildings to accommodate urban living. While the footprint of downtown is only so large and most applicable properties already contain second-story lofts and other residential options, many underutilized buildings and empty lots surrounding downtown have the potential for residential conversion. To fully ensure the continued health of downtown, the city should consider incentivizing residential

conversion and urban living options in and around downtown.

Downtown Parking Deck

As a long-term strategy to ensure the continued health and economic vitality of downtown, the city should consider planning a parking deck in the downtown area. Many public input participants supported the idea of a downtown deck and suggested structured parking as a potential solution to the perceived lack of downtown parking. Many local citizens recommended developing a parking deck similar to the parking facility in downtown Carrollton. In whatever form, this parking facility should fit the scale and aesthetic of downtown. Additionally, the ground floor of any parking facility should contain a mix of uses to complement and further the community vision of a vibrant downtown experience. A new city-owned downtown parking deck in Athens, Georgia, for example, contains offices, retail spaces, and restaurants on the ground floor, while the top floor is devoted to penthouse-style lofts. Although this example would not be a likely fit for Villa Rica, city officials and the wider community should take note of appropriate mixed-use parking facilities in other Georgia cities and model Villa Rica's proposed deck on successful parking facilities elsewhere in the state. The city-owned lot behind the police department was often proposed as an ideal location for a parking deck.

Pedestrian Tunnel

In nearly every conversation with community members during public input sessions, locals pointed out that downtown is currently divided by the Norfolk Southern railroad tracks. The community sees connecting the north and south ends of downtown across the tracks as critical to the long-term health and vitality of downtown. While expanding at-grade pedestrian crossings should be explored and undertaken, additional crossings would likely be subject to significant scrutiny by the railroad company. Although many residents suggested going over the tracks with a pedestrian bridge, the grade of the north and south sides of downtown is better suited to connecting via a pedestrian tunnel beneath the railroad right-of-way. A pedestrian tunnel at Candler Street could connect both sides of downtown at the rough center of Villa Rica's downtown core, putting destinations on the north and south sides of the city in comfortable two- to three-minute walking distance.



ACTION PLAN



Villa Rica's Action Plan guides the city's mayor, council, and local officials by identifying the resources required to reach the community's vision for downtown. Through a series of action items, the action plan communicates the "when, what, and who" critical to community implementation. These steps include when action items need to be completed, what resources are required, and who is responsible for implementation. A well-developed action plan serves as a blueprint for the project managers, Villa Rica's Community Development Director and Main Street Coordinator, to break down a sweeping community vision into smaller, more manageable action items. These action items should meet the criteria for SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-based) goals. Through the SMART process, Villa Rica's future vision becomes a reality through practical and achievable steps.



ORGANIZATION

1

Action Item: No More Tear-Downs

Lead: Janet Hyde

Partners: City Manager/Main Street Manager

Timeline: Now – May Council Meeting

Funding: None required.

Obstacles: Could be opposition because of the cost incurred to property owners to repair blighted buildings

How to Achieve:

- Campaign to elected officials to adopt the No More Tear-Downs policy.
- Take the policy to the City Council for a vote.
- Allow a provision for properties that are beyond repair.

2

Action Item: Organizational Restructuring of Main Street and the Tourism Bureau

Lead: Main Street Manager

Partners: Main Street Board | DDA

Timeline: January 2016 – May 2016

Funding: Hotel Motel Tax | DDA

Obstacles: Desire from parties involved

How to Achieve:

- Secure approval from the DDA and City Council.
- Work with the DDA to develop an appropriate organizational structure.
- Work with other Main Street, DDA, and tourism communities with a similar structure.

3

Action Item: Tourism Logo

Lead: Main Street Manager

Partners: DDA | Tourism Committee

Timeline: January – December 2017

Funding: Hotel Motel Tax

Obstacles: Not budgeted for this year

How to Achieve:

- Work with the DDA/Tourism Committee to develop a logo.
- Identify a graphic designer to assist with the project.
- Appoint a focus group to provide feedback on the designs.

4

Action Item: Programming at The Mill

Lead: Main Street Manager

Partners: John Hannabach | Main Street | CVB | Parks and Rec Department

Timeline: May 2016 – Continuing

Funding: \$5,000 plus Grants | Donations | CVB

Obstacles: Community interest in changing programs

How to Achieve:

- Source desired music genres, e.g., 40s & 50s, military theme.
- Connect the programming with veterans appreciation.
- Consider scheduling around Veterans Day and similar occasions.
- Coordinate with local and regional schools to promote participation.
- Promote the programming as historical education to youth.

5

Action Item: Civic Center/Conference Center at Villa Rica Main Street

Lead: Main Street Manager

Partners: DDA | City of Villa Rica | Main Street | UGA

Timeline: Long range

Funding: Hotel Motel Tax | Bonds | Private Investment | SPLOST

Obstacles: Budget

How to Achieve:

- Secure support and approval from the City Council.
- Work to secure support and approval from the DDA.
- Identify potential funding sources.
- Develop an RFP to identify potential developers/partners.

PROMOTION

6

Action Item: Live Music at Events

Lead: Promotions Committee Chair

Partners: Main Street Board | Promotions Committee

Timeline: Ongoing

Funding: Main Street Board | City of Villa Rica | Sponsorships

Obstacles: Available bands to perform at low or no cost

How to Achieve:

- Identify events needing live music.
- Seek input from the community about the types of music desired.
- Work with local and regional talent managers to secure acts.

7

Action Item: Marketing Downtown Villa Rica

Lead: Main Street Manager

Partners: Main Street, Promotions Committee | DDA/Tourism Committee

Timeline: June 2016 – Ongoing

Funding: Hotel Motel Tax | City of Villa Rica

Obstacles: Lack of funding

How to Achieve:

- Work with a marketing firm to help develop strategies for success.
- Identify desired marketing avenues.
- Monitor results to measure success.

8

Action Item: Winery Tour Package

Lead: Melissa Garrett

Partners: Main Street, Promotions Committee | DDA/Tourism Committee

Timeline: June 2016 – Ongoing

Funding: Hotel Motel Tax | City of Villa Rica | Private Investment

Obstacles: Ability to get owner of vineyard on board for tours

How to Achieve:

- Develop a Winery/Vineyard Committee.
- Identify potential locations and opportunities for tours.
- Develop packages and pricing for tour.
- Identify potential advertising and marketing opportunities.
- Monitor success and make adjustments when necessary.

9

Action Item: Downtown Splash Pad

Lead: Main Street Manager

Partners: Main Street, Design Committee | DDA/Tourism Committee | Parks & Recreation

Timeline: June 2016 – April 2018

Funding: Private sources | Hotel Motel Tax | City of Villa Rica | SPLOST

Obstacles: Buy-in from council

How to Achieve:

- Develop a committee to discuss options for a splash pad.
- Identify potential locations.
- Work to develop a framework splash pad.
- Address maintenance and upkeep.



DESIGN

10

Action Item: Train Viewing Platform

Lead: Main Street Manager

Partners: Main Street, Design Committee | DDA/Tourism Committee | Parks & Recreation

Timeline: June 2016 – April 2017

Funding: Private sources | Hotel Motel Tax | City of Villa Rica | SPLOST

Obstacles: Buy-in from council

How to Achieve:

- Identify a location for the proposed viewing platform.
- Determine whether this project is a viable community build.
- Seek help with the design of the viewing platform.
- Work with the University of West Georgia to interpret rail history in Villa Rica.

11

Action Item: Streetscaping Improvements

Lead: Main Street Manager

Partners: Main Street, Design Committee | Street Department

Timeline: June 2016 – April 2017

Funding: Private Sources | Hotel Motel Tax | City of Villa Rica | SPLOST | State & Federal Grants

Obstacles: Railroad and GDOT ROW

How to Achieve:

- Identify areas needing streetscape improvements.
- Develop design and renderings for the identified areas.
- Garner buy-in from stakeholders.
- Identify state and federal funding opportunities.

12

Action Item: Main Street Improvements

Lead: Main Street Manager

Partners: DDA | City of Villa Rica | Main Street, Design Committee

Timeline: May 2016 – April 2018/ongoing

Funding: Hotel Motel Tax | Bonds | Private Investment | SPLOST

Obstacles: Lack of funding

How to Achieve:

- Identify areas that need improvements.
- Work to come up with concepts and renderings to build community buy-in.
- Identify appropriate funding opportunities.

ECONOMIC VITALITY

13

Action Item: Pop-Up Markets

Lead: Main Street Manager

Partners: Main Street, Economic Vitality Committee | DDA

Timeline: June 2016 – April 2017

Funding: Private Sources | Hotel Motel Tax | City of Villa Rica | SPLOST

Obstacles: Location availability

How to Achieve:

- Research successful pop-up markets in similar sized cities.
- Identify a location appropriate for this type of market.
- Develop marketing, promotion, and advertising materials for the market.

14

Action Item: Downtown Recruitment Card

Lead: Main Street Manager

Partners: Main Street, Economic Vitality Committee | DDA

Timeline: April 2016 – May 2017

Funding: City of Villa Rica | Main Street, Organization Committee

Obstacles: None

How to Achieve:

- Research and acquire data to complete the card.
- Have the cards printed.
- Distribute the cards to stakeholders.
- Monitor the success of the project.

15

Action Item: Residential Development

Lead: Main Street Manager

Partners: Main Street, Economic Vitality Committee | DDA

Timeline: August 2016 – Ongoing

Funding: Private Sources | DDA | City of Villa Rica

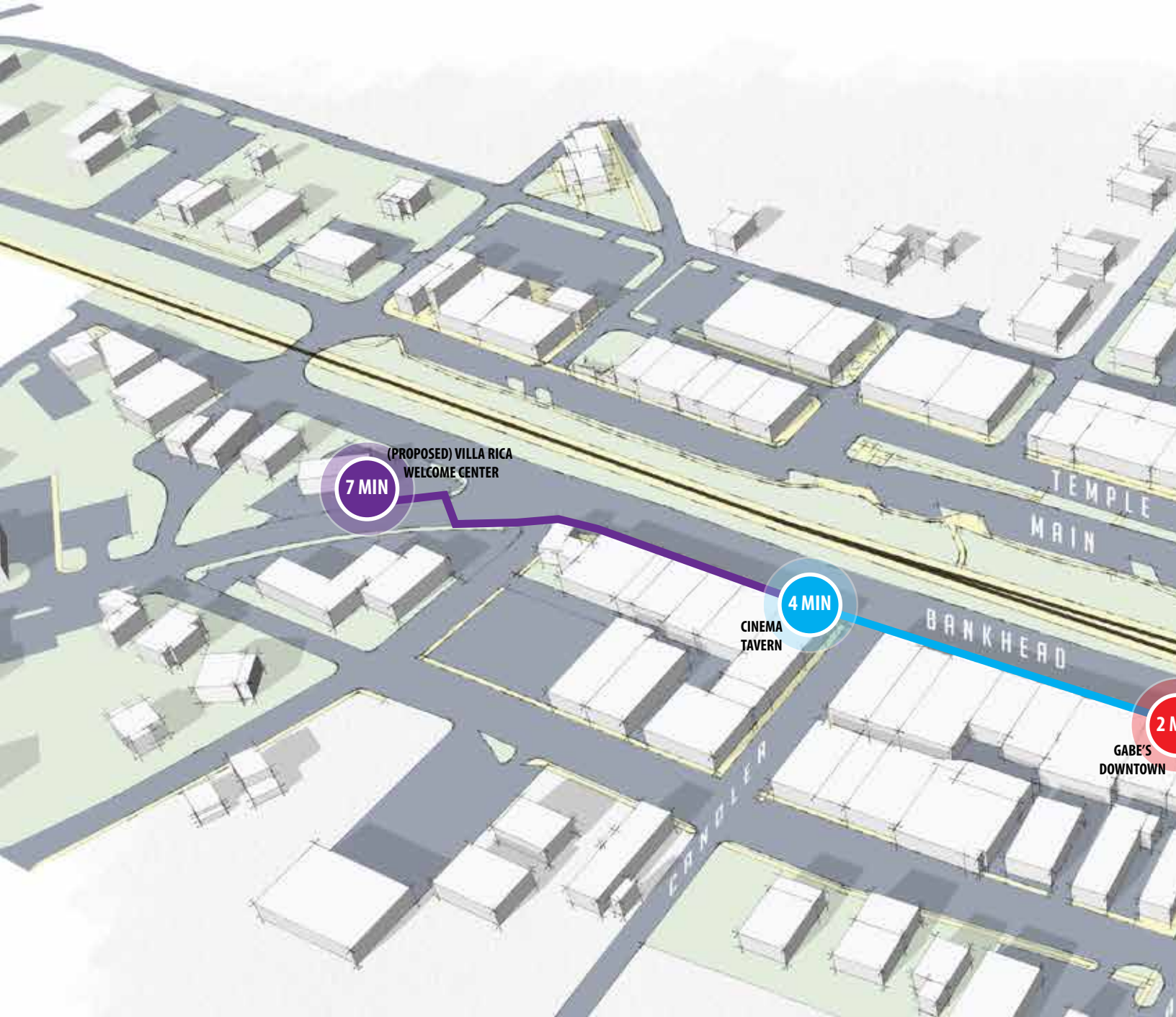
Obstacles: Council buy-in

How to Achieve:

- Inventory current residential options.
- Identify areas for new opportunities.
- Get feedback from the community and market about desired options for new residential space.
- Work with realtors to develop opportunities for success.
- Identify potential private developers for specific projects.







walkability map

ADDRESSING CONNECTIVITY & WALKABILITY

Close distances between assets help to make Villa Rica a very walkable downtown. However, because the railroad tracks visually separate one side from the other, the general perception is that downtown is not pedestrian-friendly. This map shows how long it would take an average person to walk between several downtown landmarks.





VILLA RICA
**DOWNTOWN
MASTER PLAN**





The Carl Vinson Institute of Government, a public service and outreach unit of the University of Georgia, supports state and local entities within the state of Georgia with technical assistance and training. The Institute of Government has been successfully working with state and local governments to establish and attain community goals for over 85 years.

The Institute provides access to a multidisciplinary faculty who serve local governments and communities throughout Georgia, the nation, and across the globe. Core service areas include economic analysis and forecasting by experts with a keen understanding of Georgia's economy; facilitation by trained, certified, and experienced facilitators; community economic development with skilled practitioners; city and community planning with proficient and certified city planners; law and public policy with experienced public sector attorneys; strategic planning; and mediation and conflict resolution.



201 NORTH MILLEDGE AVENUE
ATHENS, GEORGIA 30602
(706) 542-2736