

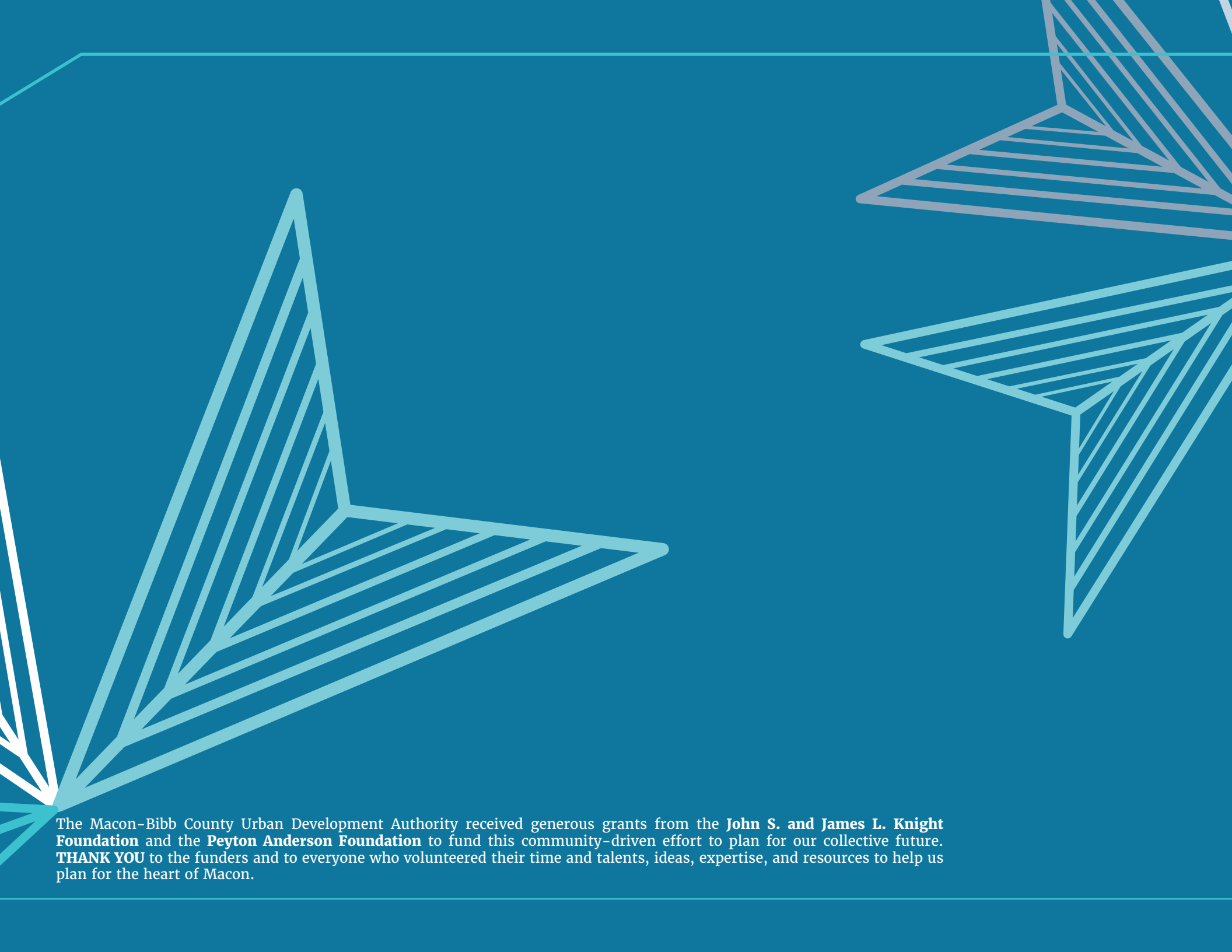


MMP

MACON ACTION PLAN
for the heart of macon

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

October 2015



The Macon-Bibb County Urban Development Authority received generous grants from the **John S. and James L. Knight Foundation** and the **Peyton Anderson Foundation** to fund this community-driven effort to plan for our collective future. **THANK YOU** to the funders and to everyone who volunteered their time and talents, ideas, expertise, and resources to help us plan for the heart of Macon.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Macon Action Plan (MAP) is a comprehensive, community-driven plan that envisions the future of Macon's historic downtown and intown neighborhoods.

All members of the Macon community – those who live, work, worship, learn, and play in Macon's Urban Core – were welcomed participants, invited to help craft a collective vision for the future and identify key actions for change to make our shared vision become reality.

Facilitated by the Macon-Bibb Urban Development Authority, Macon-Bibb County, and their partners, MAP is our roadmap to guide change and decision making in coming years. Because the A in MAP is for Action, the MAP movement is already well underway, building upon the positive change afoot in Macon's Urban Core, which includes:

- Mixed-use development at Mercer Village and neighborhood revitalization in Beall's Hill
- New lofts in College Hill and downtown as well as a host of new businesses downtown
- Placemaking and creative entrepreneurship initiatives spurred by College Hill, both focused on urban vitality and economic development
- Park improvements and streetscape investments that brought the vision for the 2nd Street Connector to life
- Campus wayfinding initiatives spearheaded by the recently rebranded Navicent Health
- A bid to expand Ocmulgee National Monument as Ocmulgee Mounds National Park and Preserve, and complementary efforts to revitalize East Macon's Main Street neighborhood

With our plan now in place, we turn our full focus to the hard work (and fun!) of MAP implementation – the act of transforming ideas and inspiration into real places and spaces within our Urban Core for all to inhabit and enjoy. That “we” includes you. The success of MAP calls for sustained support and involvement by the whole of our community.

What is the Urban Core?

The “Urban Core” refers to Macon's historic downtown and nearby neighborhoods. The Urban Core is where the City was first established, and it remains a center of employment, entertainment, and institutions, as well as home to a collection of historic and diverse neighborhoods and communities. The urban core is the heart of Macon and is bound by I-75 to the west, 7th Street and the Ocmulgee National Monument to the east, Little Richard Penniman Boulevard to the south, and Emery Highway to the north.

#MaconActionPlan
FRI 4-9PM @
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The Making of MAP

MAP benefitted from an extraordinary body of committed stakeholders who engaged with the year-long planning process in multiple ways.

MAP launched its website (maconactionplan.com) in July 2014, offering an introduction to the plan and inviting the public to get involved. The website featured a collaborative map in which participants could offer place-specific input and served more generally as a platform for updates on progress. In total, the website received over 1,200 unique visitors.

MAP conducted interviews and focus groups with over 75 local stakeholders, community leaders, and elected officials to test ideas and gain insight from local expertise. MAP launched two surveys: a resident survey and an employee survey, available online and at MAP events. All told, 573 surveys were completed, each offering feedback on how people inhabit and utilize services in the Urban Core.

MAP met the community at numerous regularly scheduled meetings and events from a festive Second Sunday Concert in Washington Park to 30 formal presentations to community groups with a collective audience of approximately 750 people.

The community came to MAP, participating in a month-long Open House at the Georgia Sports Hall of Fame where visitors engaged in interactive activities that covered topics including visioning, programming, downtown spending, activating alleys, and transportation. More than 130 guests signed in on opening night, and over 300 community members attended in total in fall 2014. Come spring 2015, the community came out to celebrate at a MAP Party hosted at the Cox Capitol Theatre to unveil the plan's preliminary recommendations. 220 attendees helped prioritize the proposed strategies.

With the help of Goods PR, MAP maintained an active presence on social media, too, through Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. These platforms encouraged participation and a way for web visitors to share feedback and be kept abreast of updates, upcoming events, and key findings from public input.

Indeed, the community responded in force to MAP's call to action, and the plan is richer as a result. From the bottom of MAP's heart, we thank you for your ideas and input, and the time and energy spent thinking, together, about the future of the heart of Macon!

MAP's vision for the future echoes the community input and provides a road map for the future grounded in the values of the people who live, work, worship, learn, and play in Macon's Urban Core.

In **your words**:

A Vision Statement

for Macon's Urban Core

photo credit: Alexdi at English Wikipedia

Your words, highlighted in pink, are the building blocks:

We are proud of our city - its **good bones, rich history** and traditions that give rhythm to community life.

Our future will respect, honor, and **complement our past**.

We see **positive momentum** at work in our urban core, and we are ready to work together to continue this trend.

We are **full of promise**. We are **eager to take ACTION** and **grow** Macon's urban core.

We are ready for the heart of Macon to become Middle Georgia's **flagship downtown experience**.

Vibrant, diverse, and historic yet modern, our urban core will **thrive** as a unique collection of neighborhoods, a **college town**, and a **center of culture, commerce, 21st century jobs** and **new connections** -- all nestled within the **intimate, comfortable scale** of a small city.

Together, for our future we will:

1. Grow with grace



We will evolve as a city that is **historic** and **modern**, **inclusive** and **diverse**, home to **families** and people of all ages, with **walkable** streets, **new businesses**, and **riverfront connections** that add **vibrancy**, **livability**, and **sustainability** to daily life.

2. Build upon Macon's good bones



Our beautiful buildings, strong institutions, rich and ancient history, and big employers will continue to **draw people** and **jobs** to **strengthen** our urban core.

3. Dance to our local rhythm



Our local talent will **bring us together** through the calendar of **events** that form the beat of community life, and Macon's **charm** and **creative spirit** will remain a **magnet for tourists**, **new businesses**, people who come to play, and those who **choose to stay**.

4. Care for our heart



We will **revitalize** neighborhoods and meet the needs of our residents, businesses, and investors by adopting **progressive** policies and programs for a **clean**, **safe**, and **livable** urban core.

5. Coordinate & focus for maximum impact



We will be **strategic**, target limited resources, and leverage recent and proposed investments. We will cultivate **leaders** and **champions**. We will **take action**.

GOALS & STRATEGIES

The Macon Action Plan focuses on four main goals for Macon's Urban Core, each intended to increase vitality and support economic development for a sustainable future in the heart of Macon:

1) SUPPORT THE ENGINES OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Urban Core is, and should remain, the economic center for the region. A focus on diversifying the local economy is critical to ensure that the Urban Core is competitive and attractive for new businesses. The Urban Core must bring back anchor businesses and attract new businesses by creating a culture that is friendly to start-up businesses and new job opportunities. In short, the Urban Core needs a range of businesses to support a greater range of jobs as well as more residents that support local restaurants and stores. Part of how this will be accomplished is to create a place that offers an experience attractive to businesses and residents.

To ensure long-term economic growth, MAP is focused on enabling people to both live and work in the Urban Core. The first chapter – Support the Engines of Economic Development – sets the overall context for how Macon can ramp up economic opportunities for new and existing residents alike in the Urban Core. The strategies recognize that significant collaboration among those involved in attracting businesses and talent to Macon is essential and that MAP is just one initiative within a much larger economic discussion about the Urban Core, the City and the region. In subsequent chapters, MAP details many specific actions designed to make the Urban Core more lively, unique and welcoming to new investment, jobs and residents.



1.1 Support Macon's institutions as economic anchors for future growth

- Promote an Urban Core Health District via a medical corridor that helps to forge connections among the major health institutions in the Urban Core including Navicent, Coliseum Medical Center, Regency Hospital and the Mercer School of Medicine
- Create an attractive, 21st Century campus for Navicent Health that incorporates wayfinding, streetscape improvements, and a mix of uses that includes housing
- Build better support for economic anchors including Mercer University by expanding commercial businesses that cater to local employees, adding supportive services like hotels for visitors and by encouraging medical office space that supports the health institutions

1.2 Send a clear message that Macon is open for business

- Strengthen competition and re-establish natural churn in the local market by providing build-out assistance to prospective retailers, services and offices as well as offering pop-up storefronts to test business concepts
- Initiate Urban Core-specific business attraction efforts by redefining the draw area, pursuing business recruitment, and seeking to diversify the business mix
- Work with existing commercial property owners to encourage movement in market through outreach and education
- Initiate talent attraction efforts to build local economy and diversify the workforce
- Attract more customers through programming, clustering, and consistent hours

1.3 Support start-ups and attract job-creating businesses

- Embrace and support start-up culture by fostering collaborative workspace, improving infrastructure for high-speed internet, fostering initiatives for networking, small business promotion, and information accessibility, and supporting the Mercer Innovation Center
- Encourage modern industrial uses along 7th Street by remediating brownfields, assembling land, and marketing shovel-ready sites
- Establish creative work space within existing underutilized buildings for maker spaces and commercial offices

2) CREATE AN UNPARALLELED URBAN CORE EXPERIENCE

One of the primary features of successful downtowns across the country is that they offer a distinctive experience that draws visitors, attracts talent, drives investment, and creates jobs. The urban experience is rooted in a city's vibrancy and unique spirit, how much there is to do, the social life of a community, and the vibe of the spaces and events that bring people together or encourage them to explore and get to know a place. In other words, a successful urban center must offer a wide range of activities that make people want to visit, stay, play, live, work, launch, and invest.

One of the most frequently repeated comments throughout the public outreach process was, "We'd like more things to do" as well as programmed places and gathering spaces where people can come together. How can the Urban Core experience become the flagship downtown experience we all want in central Georgia? Strategies to do this address the following themes: cleanliness and safety, events and programming, parks and public space, branding the Macon experience, and promoting local culture and history.

"In large measure, our whole community is defined by downtown... we need to play it up and make it better."



2.1 Keep the urban core clean and safe for all to enjoy

- Enhance the comfort and appeal of the urban core's public realm through beautification projects and public art, additional lighting on buildings, street trees, and trails, and data tracking on crime in the Urban Core
- Introduce additional trash, recycling, and maintenance efforts from a comprehensive municipal recycling strategy to a trash and recycling bin audit

2.2 Transform Macon's sidewalks and public spaces as the center stage for community life

- Improve use of underutilized spaces, including alleys, medians, and vacant storefronts with movable furniture, stewardship by a friends of the medians group, and storefront installations
- Improve and expand passive open spaces to create a central gathering space in the historic downtown and in each neighborhood with opportunities for action in Bernd Park, Booker T. Washington Community Center, Central City Park, Cherry Street Plaza, Coleman Hill Park, Cotton Avenue Plaza, Daisy Park, Poplar Yards, Rosa Parks Square, Tattnall Square and Washington Square as well as potential new open spaces
- Integrate the Ocmulgee Heritage Trail as a key amenity by adding trail segments for a downtown river loop and connecting the trail throughout the Urban Core via medians, on-street bike lanes, and bridge improvements

Rendering of a Rosa Parks Square redesign



Proposed improvements to the Clinton Street entrance to the Ocmulgee National Monument

2.3 Program downtown's social life and build the local audience

- Maintain support for existing events (like First Friday, Second Sunday Concerts, Bragg Jam, and Cherry Blossom) and add new programs (from pop-up beer gardens or mini-golf to movie screenings and opportunities to bring people to the river)

2.4 Foster a sense of arrival and make good first impressions at gateways

- Improve Downtown approaches from main thoroughfares by investing in gateways with signage, landscaping, and public art
- Capitalize on local institutions and assets as gateways to the Urban Core by re-designing intersections for improved circulation and a more beautiful and navigable public realm
- Develop a signage & wayfinding system for key destinations, major employers and parking areas in the Urban Core

2.5 Generate national buzz about Macon's unique assets and broaden the tourism audience

- Brand Macon's Urban Core with a consistent and compelling message
- Support the Ocmulgee National Park & Preserve Initiative's (ONPPI) bid to expand the Ocmulgee National Monument as the Ocmulgee Mounds National Park and Preserve through community advocacy and investment in East Macon's public realm
- Focus on the broader story, past, present and future, to encourage tourism in Macon

3) FOCUS ON URBAN CORE LIVING

The Urban Core has a substantial amount of space to fill. Based on a detailed survey of all properties in the Urban Core conducted in spring 2014, 30 percent of parcels are wholly or partly inactive. The mixed-use historic downtown, for example, has a lower proportion of vacancy but is surrounded by “gaps,” or areas with a high concentration of vacant land or buildings and surface parking lots. These voids disconnect the historic downtown from other nearby, relatively prosperous neighborhoods, including parts of InTown and neighborhoods near Mercer University. Several residential neighborhoods suffer from high concentrations of vacancy and blight, as do industrial areas along the rail line and Seventh Street. High levels of vacancy and blight destabilize neighborhoods.

The Urban Core needs additional residents as well as healthy and stable neighborhoods in order to sustain a pattern of growth and increased vibrancy. The strategies addressed in this section include: increasing residential development in downtown and nearby, and fighting blight and revitalizing neighborhoods throughout the Urban Core.

“We’re headed in the right direction with the new housing going in. We need people who don’t leave with the sun.”



3.1 Encourage more households to locate in the historic downtown

- **Focus on key sites for mixed-use development** to grow the historic downtown’s mixed-use center and extend the urban fabric to the River
- **Increase the diversity of housing choice** through adaptive reuse and loft development, urban infill with for-sale and rental homes, and townhomes
- **Welcome new residents** as members of a close-knit community

3.2 Update regulations and codes to encourage investment

- **Upgrade Urban Core zoning with a form-based code overlay** to streamline development review process
- **Add capacity to streamline the design review process** for historic preservation through training and/or the creation of a Preservation Commission

3.3 Strengthen Urban Core neighborhoods to offer the best of both worlds – Downtown or Intown living

- **Stabilize and grow neighborhoods in the Urban Core** through blight removal, vacant land management, land acquisition, code enforcement, and selective rehab and infill
- **Continue to invest in Beall’s Hill** with single-family rehab, new apartments, and public realm improvements
- **Revitalize East Macon’s Main Street neighborhood** through blight removal and land stewardship, Main Street improvements and greening, Clinton Street improvements, and the Mill Hill Arts Village
- **Focus investment in Pleasant Hill** beginning with community organizing through a collaborative planning process to guide blight removal and land stewardship, strategic residential rehab/ infill, and investments in neighborhood institutions including the Booker T. Washington Recreation Center and Bobby Jones Performing Arts Center

Rendering of the proposed Mill Hill Arts Alley and revitalization effort in the Main Street neighborhood

4) CULTIVATE CONNECTIVITY

As the hub of business and government in Central Georgia, the Urban Core has excellent local and regional vehicular connections through its grid network and interstate highways. The movement of vehicles to and from Downtown has long been a priority of its transportation system.

The Urban Core needs a different approach to transportation. Pedestrians are critical to the success of the Urban Core and their safety should be the highest priority in the design of its streets. A streamlined parking system will improve the Downtown experience for residents, employees, and visitors. Improvements to public transportation and bike infrastructure will increase transportation choice. They will furthermore alleviate some of the challenges faced by drivers and pedestrians through the reduction of traffic, which in turn results in better parking and pedestrian conditions. These types of improvements will help to attract the next generation of residents, employees, and business owners. In the meantime, it is likely that these choices will require public investment before the market, demographics, and Downtown can fully support private investment. This section addresses parking, pedestrian safety, and active forms of transportation.

“The parking situation is the most frustrating aspect of living downtown.”



Example of a mobile parking application, Parkmobile

4.1 Manage the parking system in the historic downtown in a comprehensive manner

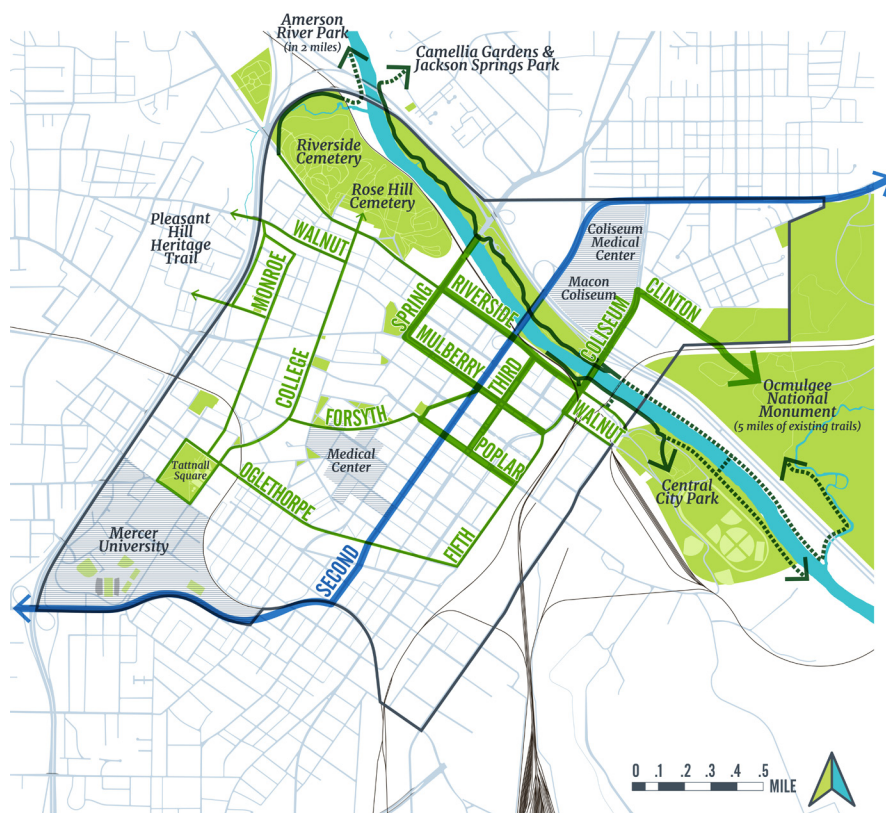
- Install parking meters and price meters to encourage turnover where demand is highest
- Utilize technology and mobile applications for both payment and enforcement
- Consider creating a parking authority
- Encourage use of parking garages through improved signage
- Introduce a residential permit parking program
- Selectively convert angled parking to reverse angled parking, only in concert with planned roadway restriping

4.2 Enhance safety

- Mitigate truck traffic on MLK by re-routing trucks along 7th Street
- Prioritize pedestrian safety and connectivity at signalized intersections by adding pedestrian countdown signals, leading pedestrian intervals, prohibiting right turns on red, eliminating double signals, and introducing international crosswalks
- Develop pedestrian encouragement and education programs

4.3 Improve multi-modal transportation options

- Improve bus/shuttle connections to link Terminal Station with regional destinations such as Atlanta's airport, and explore Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)
- Improve bicycle infrastructure with additional on-street bike lanes, bike share, and support for group rides
- Improve the pedestrian experience by instituting streetscape standards, investing in sidewalk improvements, and relocating utilities
- Make it easier to live in the Urban Core without a car through car share, electric car infrastructure, and ride share



Map of proposed Ocmulgee Heritage Trail network throughout the Urban Core

- existing river trail
- proposed river trail
- downtown heritage trail
- on street connection
- 2nd street connector
- open space
- rail

INTO ACTION: *our first year*

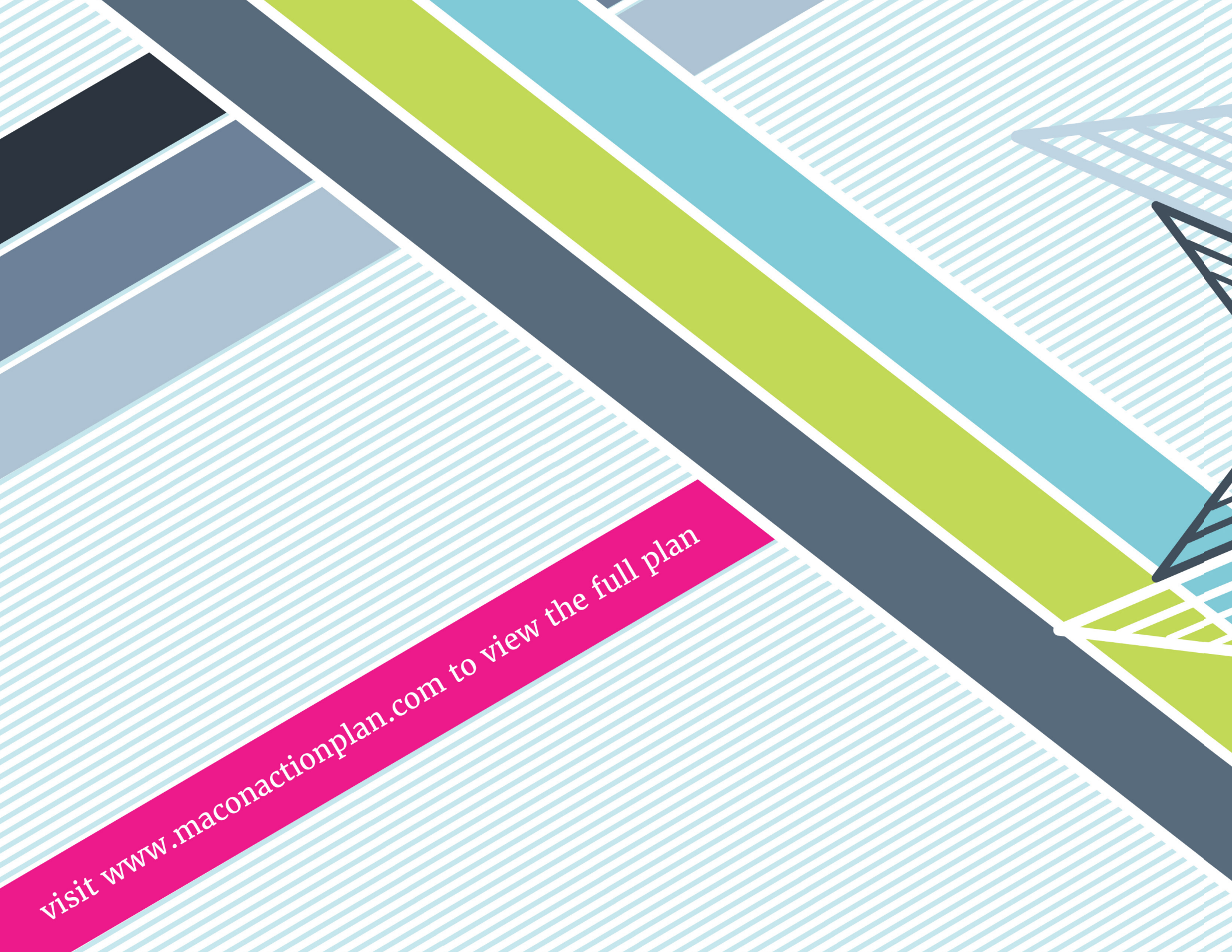
As the plan's name suggests, from the very beginning, the Macon Action Plan has been about action. To maintain interest and momentum in the Urban Core, implementation must proceed quickly. While some strategies will take many years to bring to fruition, MAP includes a range of shorter term action steps that can and should progress in the coming year.

To help MAP transition from planning to implementation, leverage partnerships, and maximize existing resources to effect early change that the community wants to see, necessary first steps include:

- **Form an Implementation Committee** tasked with stewarding the plan from vision to reality
- **Dedicate staff time for focusing on MAP implementation** so that not a day goes by when the plan sits on the proverbial shelf
- **Seek dedicated and sustainable funding** to provide regular dollars to support a range of activities in the Urban Core from programming and sidewalk improvements to ongoing business attracting efforts
- **Involve the community** through a host of new strategies for action across the Urban Core; launch a next generation challenge grant for the Urban Core to empower neighbors, the emerging downtown neighborhood association, and other community groups throughout the Urban Core as agents of change
- **FOCUS, FOCUS, FOCUS** by directing resources to targeted projects for maximum impact. This plan outlines many strategies that cover a broad range of topics and geographies in the Urban Core. Strategic implementation of these action items is critical so as not to dilute their impact.

The Macon Action Plan is a living document. It is important to remember that MAP's success relies on actions both big and small. The early, incremental actions and stepping stones between projects are just as necessary as the larger catalyst projects; every step forward should be celebrated to maintain energy and support for the Urban Core.

We built this plan together, Macon. Now, let's roll up our sleeves and take **ACTION**.



visit www.maconactionplan.com to view the full plan