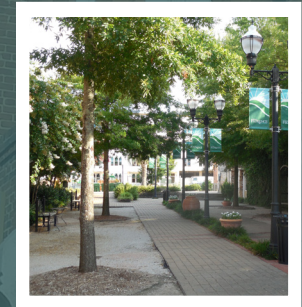


FULL LIFE. FULL FORWARD.
FLORENCE
SOUTH CAROLINA

DOWNTOWN FLORENCE
FIVE YEAR
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The City of Florence would like to thank every stakeholder person who volunteered their time, energy, and insight to the task of updating the Comprehensive Plan and Downtown Plan. Your thoughts, direction, and input were invaluable to allow the City to find consensus regarding the focus of the City for the next five years and beyond. Neighbors, civic leaders, business leaders, and all other stakeholders were justifiably proud of the five years of progress made since each plan was adopted and were frank and optimistic about the challenges and opportunities facing the City during the next five years. We learned from you and saw the City from your perspective, which is invaluable. Your efforts provided us clear insight into the pulse and state of Florence as we look forward. On behalf of the Mayor, City Council, City Planning Commission, Downtown Development Corporation, and staff, we acknowledge and appreciate your efforts and wisdom in helping us plan the future course for Florence.

Drew Griffin, City Manager

City Council

Stephen J. Wukela - Mayor
 Teresa Myers Ervin – District 1
 Pat Gibson-Hye Moore – District 2
 Buddy Brand – District 3
 George D. Jebaily – At-Large
 Octavia Williams-Blake – At-Large
 Glynn Willis – At-Large
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 Ed Hoffman

City of Florence Departments

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 Community Services
 Downtown Development
 Planning, Research, and Development
 Public Works
 Utilities

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ABOUT THIS UPDATE

The Downtown Master Plan (hereafter “the Downtown Plan”) is a major element of the 2011 Florence Comprehensive Plan (hereafter “the 2011 Plan”). As such, it was adopted as a separate element of the 2011 Plan and was the subject of much of the extensive planning process that guided the development of the Plan. In 2014, the Downtown Plan was updated to reflect the directives of the City in the two years following its adoption.

BEFORE (2010): NORTHWEST CORNER OF N. DARGAN STREET AND W. EVANS STREET



State law mandates a Five-Year Update of Comprehensive Plans. For that reason, the 2011 Plan and the Downtown Plan are both being updated concurrently. The Downtown Plan itself will not be modified, but rather updated, to serve as a guide for the next five years of decisions.

The 2017 Comprehensive Plan Update, *Next Steps: 2017-2022* (hereafter “2017 Plan Update”) includes:

- “Principles of Progress” to guide the overall planning directions of Florence;
- The reasons and rationale for the Plan updates;
- The goals of the planning process; and
- The stakeholders and their roles in the planning process.

Readers are encouraged to refer to the 2017 Plan Update for additional details that were considered as the basis for the 2017 Downtown Plan Update.

What did the Stakeholders Say?

The 2017 Plan Update includes an overview of the most significant comments of the stakeholders. It should be noted that special stakeholder meetings and interviews were scheduled to focus specifically on Downtown Florence. Stakeholder participation was excellent, and generally was in agreement that most of the goals and objectives from the 2011 Plan had been fulfilled, and in many aspects well beyond the original five-year targets.



The most significant issues that were mentioned were the need to:

- Expand downtown to the north and toward the south / southwest;
- Create inviting gateways into the downtown area from all directions and corridors;
- Connect downtown to the rest of the City via primary corridor arterial streets;
- Identify solutions for the “Downtown Food Desert”; and
- Push downtown energy into the adjoining residential and business communities.

Completed Downtown Planning Achievements

- Florence Pedestrian Master Plan (Pending Adoption);
- Florence Unified Development Ordinance (Pending Adoption); and
- Florence Downtown Parking Study (Pending Adoption).

On-Going Programs and Completed Physical Improvements

Following is a summary of the most significant programs the City has commenced during the past five years that have resulted in physical improvements to the Downtown, most which are on-going:

- Continued implementation of the Downtown façade improvement program;
- Implementation of the Irby / Palmetto professional services district;
- Implementation and expansion of a design plan for the lower Dargan Street corridor;
- Expedited development of the Judicial Center;

- Successful recruitment of FMU to locate a nurse practitioner facility Downtown;
- Facilitation of Downtown housing opportunities;
- Initiation of streetscape, parking, sidewalk, safety, and pocket park improvements; and
- In 2016, recruitment of a Hyatt Place as a second hotel Downtown.

Stakeholder Identification of the Next Steps Forward

Florence is blessed to have stakeholders that deeply care about, and are committed to, Florence. Below is a list of the various steps that the stakeholders identified with respect to “taking Downtown to the next level”:

- Begin to eliminate the Downtown “food desert”;
- Promote uses that enhance Downtown livability;
- Recruit a major employment anchor;
- Connect Downtown with surrounding neighborhoods, trails and parks;
- Install way-finding signage;
- Connect landmark buildings with usable outdoor green spaces; and
- Begin to expand Downtown by obtaining underutilized buildings and properties.

LOOKING BACK TO CONFIDENTLY STEP FORWARD

Years 2011-2016

Downtown Florence has made enormous strides since the 2011 Downtown Plan was adopted. City leadership has boldly, and in concert with private investors and philanthropic organizations, restored the downtown historic district. New

hotels, restaurants, urban style housing, and new educational, cultural and medical institutions have followed. Downtown Florence is a model for what a community can accomplish.



The change has been swift and dramatic. Buildings were razed, replaced with new businesses, parks, cultural uses, and soon, a new judicial center. Vacant lots were converted into multi-family residential

housing and a cultural center. Building facades are being restored to their original designs. Streetscape, parking, and other amenities have either been installed or proposed on approved plans to tie all the improvements together into comfortable public spaces. All told, approximately \$191 million in new public investment and \$69 million in private investment was committed to downtown between 2011 and 2016, bringing the total public-private investment to \$260 million.



BEFORE (2010): N. DARGAN STREET



AFTER (2016)

All of this planning and physical activity has helped burnish the City's image in the region as an award-winning "can do" place and has instilled justified confidence in the ability of the public and private sectors to compete with other metro areas in the state and region. These accomplishments are all the more notable given that most of this activity took place during the "slow recovery" of the post-recession years.

The City has successfully solidified Downtown as the hub of the region's arts scene, and more recently with the pending advent of the "food hub", have laid a Downtown-centered foundation for an artisanal local food economy. With the new Francis Marion University Health Sciences Campus, Hope Health Medical Clinic, and a growing hospitality sector, Downtown Florence continues to develop into an important supporting role in the region's growing medical economy. With such accomplishments, the City should step forward with additional Downtown projects with justifiable confidence.

Where We Are Today

Despite the many successes, Downtown Florence still faces many challenges in sustaining the momentum of the past five years. These challenges include:

- Extending the reach of downtown to connect it to adjacent neighborhoods, breaching the barriers of the railroad tracks and Irby Street on the north and west, respectively;
- Assembling larger redevelopment sites to accommodate urban-scale infill development;
- Preserving the best commercial sites for intensive, taxable commercial development;
- Encouraging greater development density and mixed-use by, in many cases, serving as lead

land aggregator, and by helping fund additional, public-private structured parking; and

- Attracting more residential development and a large downtown employer to enliven Downtown throughout the day and week, and as a means to attract talent and follow-on investment to Downtown Florence.

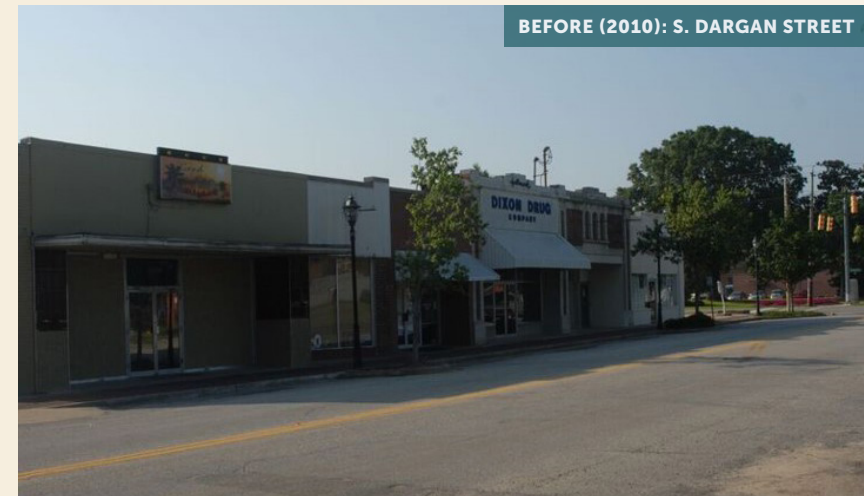
Years 2017-2022

Going forward, the addition of new employment and retail activity, particularly a new Downtown grocery store, will be critical to making Downtown a truly self-contained urban neighborhood. The City also needs to remain sensitive to the cultural identity of North Dargan Street as a center of African American commerce through targeted outreach, proactive business assistance efforts, and programmed events. Historic references back to the “Black Wall Street” tradition of North Dargan Street is a simple, but effective and meaningful measure that can help tie the neighborhood north of Downtown into the Downtown mix.

Full realization of the “food district” may require the addition of another public food venue, such as a permanent location for the City Center Farmers Market, to tie more directly into the Downtown activity-sphere. Continued efforts to also connect McLeod Hospital into this sphere will be critical in continuing Downtown’s momentum.

Further, evolving Downtown into a true regional destination will also likely require creating a unique signature attraction or “hook” to draw in visitors from I-95 and I-20 and other regional highways and beyond. This goes beyond mere branding and signage to include a special visitor experience unique to the City. The consultant team maintains that a regionally known, landscape-designed and actively

programmed “cultural commons”, molded from the more loosely defined cultural district, is one method that the City can create such a statement piece.



BEFORE (2010): S. DARGAN STREET



AFTER (2016)

Realizing this vision will happen incrementally and opportunistically over an extended period of time. Moreover, it will demand continued adherence to a long-term consensus vision for the project over successive political administrations and economic

cycles. The main phase will involve removing all non-contributing structures on the west side of Dargan Street, consolidating all parking to the rear in one or more decks along Irby Street, and introducing a unifying landscape design to set-off the existing landmarks fronting Dargan Street. Later expansions of this concept could include the phasing out of most or all commercial development on the west side of Irby between Cheves and Elm Streets to create a complete front-to-back “civic mall”.



Goals for the Next Five Years

These goals are illustrated in the Five-Year Plan Timeline on page 12.

- Complete the transformation of West Evans Street to complement the restoration of North Dargan Street (i.e. through continued hands-on public facilitation and project management);
- Extend the urban streetscape along West Evans Street from Dargan to Coit Streets;
- Obtain formal Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) detailing cost-sharing and maintenance agreements with SCDOT and the Federal Government to acquire shared control over the Irby Street and Palmetto Street rights-of-way (i.e. strive for “complete street” standards);
- Complete design work and capital improvements programming for secondary streetscape and intersection accents along Cheves, Irby and Palmetto Streets;
- Organize business and property owners along North Dargan and West Evans Streets into a formal business association with a view to establishing a Municipal Improvement District (MID) or a comparable district;
- Work with the Downtown Development Corporation to expand the number and type of programmed events Downtown (Holiday parades, outdoor films, antique auto shows, Mardi Gras, restaurant week, gallery nights, etc.);
- Implement one or more public-private redevelopment projects in the designated redevelopment “opportunity areas”. Establish a proper north-downtown gateway and “endcap” elements for North Dargan Street;
- Identify location and funding mechanism for a future parking structure as needed for further downtown development (to consolidate



cultural venue surface parking needs, and to stimulate new urban commercial development in the corridor);

- Deliver an additional 200 new downtown housing units to the market – and have another 150 units in the pipeline - by Year 2022;
- Achieve stakeholder consensus on a “Cultural Commons” concept. Hold a national landscape design competition for a Cultural Commons;
- Acquire and remove all non-contributing structures on the Dargan Street side of the cultural district (e.g. along Pine Street);
- Implement creative ways to apply Tax Increment Financing (TIF) to public-private development projects. e.g. sale/leasebacks, parking condos, public use easements, etc.;
- Rezone the northern tier of Downtown (particularly along Darlington, Irby and Coit Streets) to phase-out auto repair and salvage businesses;

- Embark on a sustained Downtown retail recruitment strategy;
- Identify potential sites for mid-sized Downtown grocery store;
- Implement corridor design guidelines for Downtown segments of Irby and Palmetto Streets;
- Study the potential to relocate the City Center Farmers Market in a permanent facility in the Baroody Street corridor “food district”;
- Achieve full installation of Downtown way-finding signs;
- Complete the planning of a Downtown bike path / trail system, including painting / striping work on the on-street segments; and
- Fund and promote a ‘rear façade’ improvement program in the historic district to accentuate the parking lot / back-of-house interface.

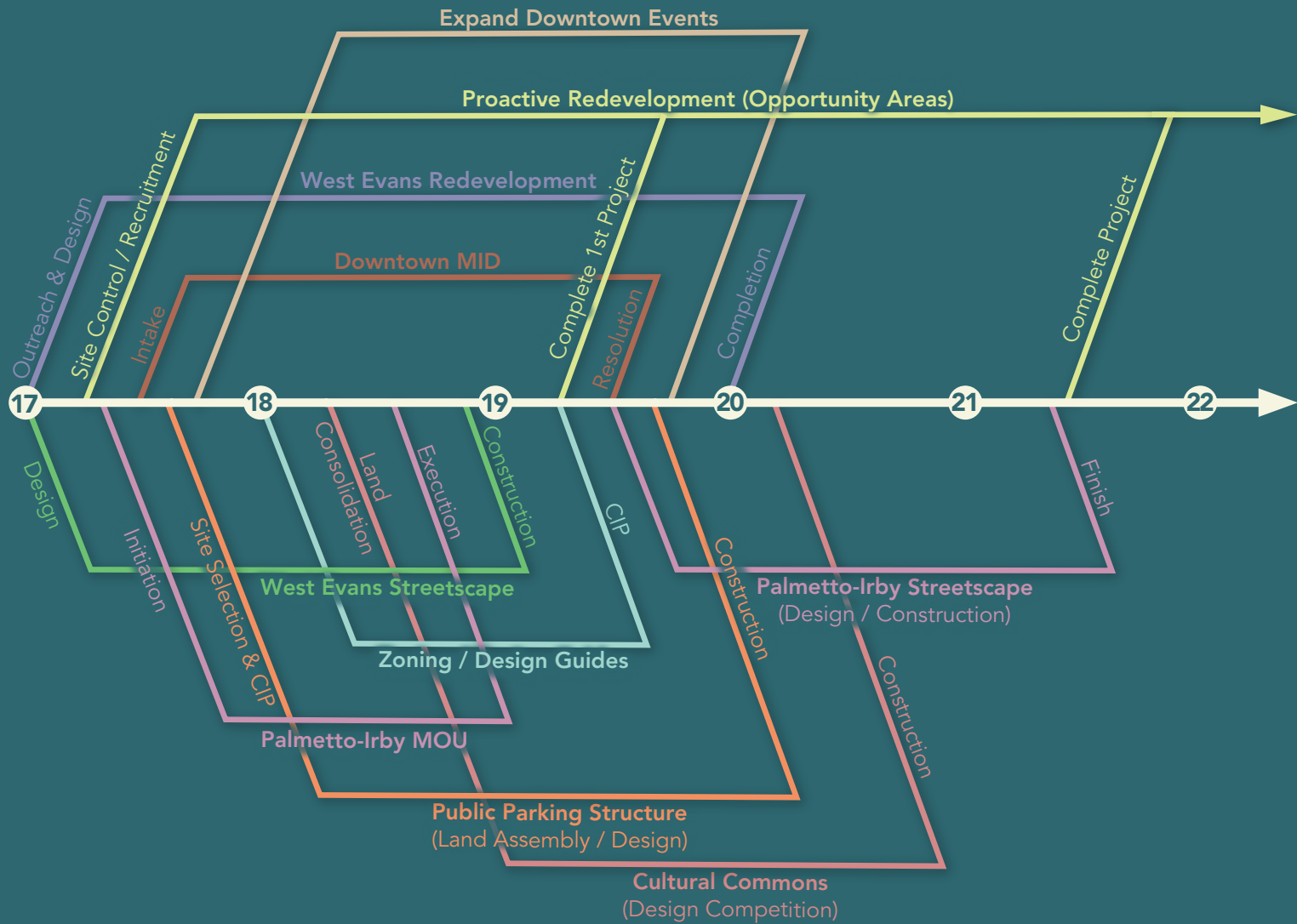


THE NET RESULT OF STREETScape, BUILDING FACADE, AND LANDSCAPING RESULT IN DOWNTOWN LIVING

Five-Year Timeline
 The timeline below depicts project initiation and completion dates from the previously mentioned goals based in the 2017 to 2022 time frame.

Public & Private Projects

Public Projects



The Heart of Florence: Aerial Photograph Comparison



These photos illustrate the degree that work was completed during the past six years to the area that many citizens referred to as “the Heart of Florence”. When comparing the two photos, note the rooftop improvements. Rooftop improvements are indicative of major investments that were made below the roof, such as those made to the **Hotel Florence** and **Chamber of Commerce** buildings. The new rooftops indicate that significant investments were made to many buildings in these blocks. Major in-fill projects, including the **Florence County Museum** and a large multi-family residential housing development, and pocket parks will “fill out” a block that was previously under-utilized. The completion of the **Center for Health Sciences** and the on-going improvements to the **Kress Building** show a downtown that is re-emerging as an employment center with housing and night-life; all of which will restore downtown as a local and regional destination. The site of the new **Florence County Judicial Center** is also clearly apparent.

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Downtown Florence Focus Areas

Evans / Baroody Corridor Focus Area

- Evans Streetscape Extension to the west
- Scattered infill and redevelopment development opportunities
- Maker district
- "Baroody Foody"
- Grocery Store Target Area

North Gateway Focus Area

- Triangle (Downtown Gateway) Park
- Intersection design accents, traffic control improvements, and way finding signage
- Professional/medical office infill and redevelopment
- "Green Edge" Design
- Dargan Street "End Cap"

"Palmetto - Irby" Professional / Services Core Focus Area

- Land assembly / control
- Mixed commercial: Office, Retail, and Service
- Publicly subsidized parking structure
- Major intersection accent and streetscape improvements
- Application of urban design standards

Cultural / Residential Core Focus Area

- Urban infill housing / redevelopment
- Removal of non-contributing buildings and under-utilized spaces and replace with greenspace or united into larger developable spaces
- Unified landscape design
- Unify the core with major street corridors, trails, transit routes, and other downtown improvements

MAP LEGEND

- Secondary Streetscape
- Primary Streetscape
- Intersection Accents
- Bike Path/Trail
- Rear Facade/Special Pavements
- Contributing Buildings
- Public Building
- Proposed Mixed-Commercial
- Proposed Residential