

## Executive Summary

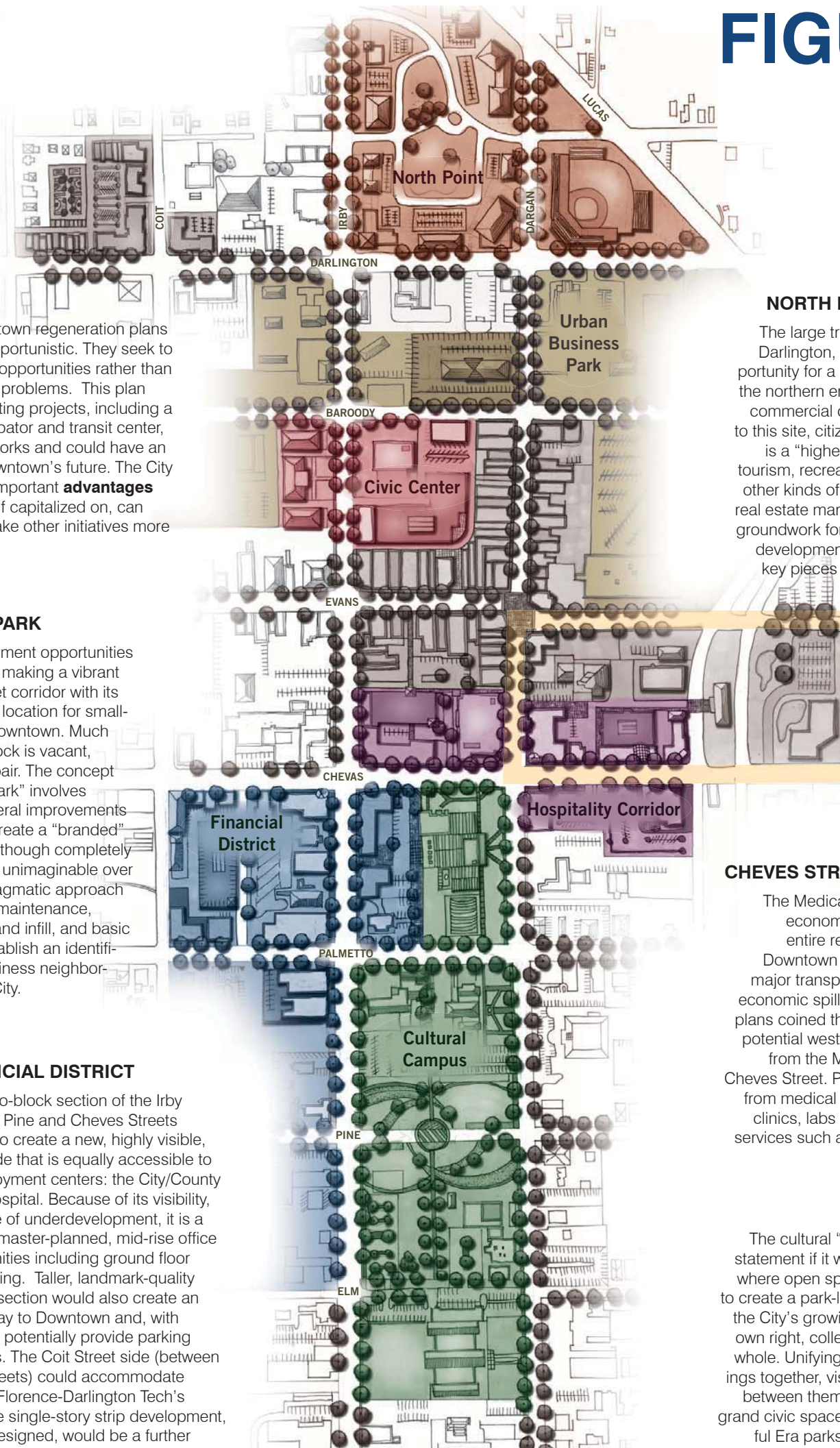
The Florence Downtown Master Plan (2010 - 2015) was developed in conjunction with, and as a component of, the City of Florence Comprehensive Plan. It encapsulates a body of planning work spanning approximately 10 years beginning with Vision 2010 (adopted in 2001). The impetus for this version of the plan is due to several factors not least of which has been the generous investments in major cultural institutions by the Doctors Bruce and Lee Foundation. These landmark projects have radically transformed portions of Downtown and solidified its role as the civic and cultural hub of the region. A number of new projects currently in the pre-feasibility or discussion phases warrant a plan update to ensure that they are being thought through collectively and in context with the entire Downtown.

This plan was developed over several months in conjunction with an ad hoc Downtown Advisory Committee. The results from a community-wide planning forum held on March 22, 2010, as well as numerous interviews with city business leaders and real estate professionals, were used to inform plan recommendations and implementation strategies.

# Downtown Master Plan

## FIGURE 2.7

DRAFT 12.03.10



The most effective Downtown regeneration plans are assets-based and opportunistic. They seek to take advantage of ready opportunities rather than try to tackle the toughest problems. This plan looks at a handful of exciting projects, including a potential Downtown incubator and transit center, that are currently in the works and could have an important bearing on Downtown's future. The City of Florence has several important **advantages** and **opportunities** that, if capitalized on, can create conditions that make other initiatives more successful.

### URBAN BUSINESS PARK

The expansion of employment opportunities in Downtown is critical to making a vibrant place. The Baroody Street corridor with its rail spur has long been a location for small-shop manufacturing in Downtown. Much of the current building stock is vacant, underutilized, or in disrepair. The concept for an "urban business park" involves several cosmetic, peripheral improvements and zoning changes to create a "branded" business environment. Although completely reinventing this area isn't unimaginable over the long term, a more pragmatic approach would focus on building maintenance, surgical redevelopment and infill, and basic aesthetics in order to establish an identifiable, attractive small business neighborhood in the heart of the City.

### IRBY STREET FINANCIAL DISTRICT

Redevelopment of the two-block section of the Irby corridor roughly between Pine and Cheves Streets presents an opportunity to create a new, highly visible, professional services node that is equally accessible to Downtown's major employment centers: the City/County complex and McLeod Hospital. Because of its visibility, access, and current state of underdevelopment, it is a prime location for a new master-planned, mid-rise office center with Class A amenities including ground floor retail and structured parking. Taller, landmark-quality development at this intersection would also create an important western gateway to Downtown and, with structured parking, could potentially provide parking relief for nearby churches. The Coit Street side (between Palmetto and Cheves Streets) could accommodate a potential expansion of Florence-Darlington Tech's Downtown campus. More single-story strip development, no matter how well it is designed, would be a further underutilization of this important cross-roads.

### NORTH POINT (AKA THE "TRIANGLE")

The large triangle-shaped area formed by Lucas, Darlington, and Irby Streets represents a rare opportunity for a large master planned development at the northern entry to downtown. While standard-box commercial development would likely be attracted to this site, citizens have repeatedly stated that there is a "higher and better" use that accommodates tourism, recreation, spectator sports, education and other kinds of "destination" development. While the real estate market recovers, the City can help lay the groundwork for quality master-planned, "mixed-unit" development by working to assemble and control key pieces of land and applying regulatory tools.

Medical Center

### CHEVES STREET HOSPITALITY CORRIDOR

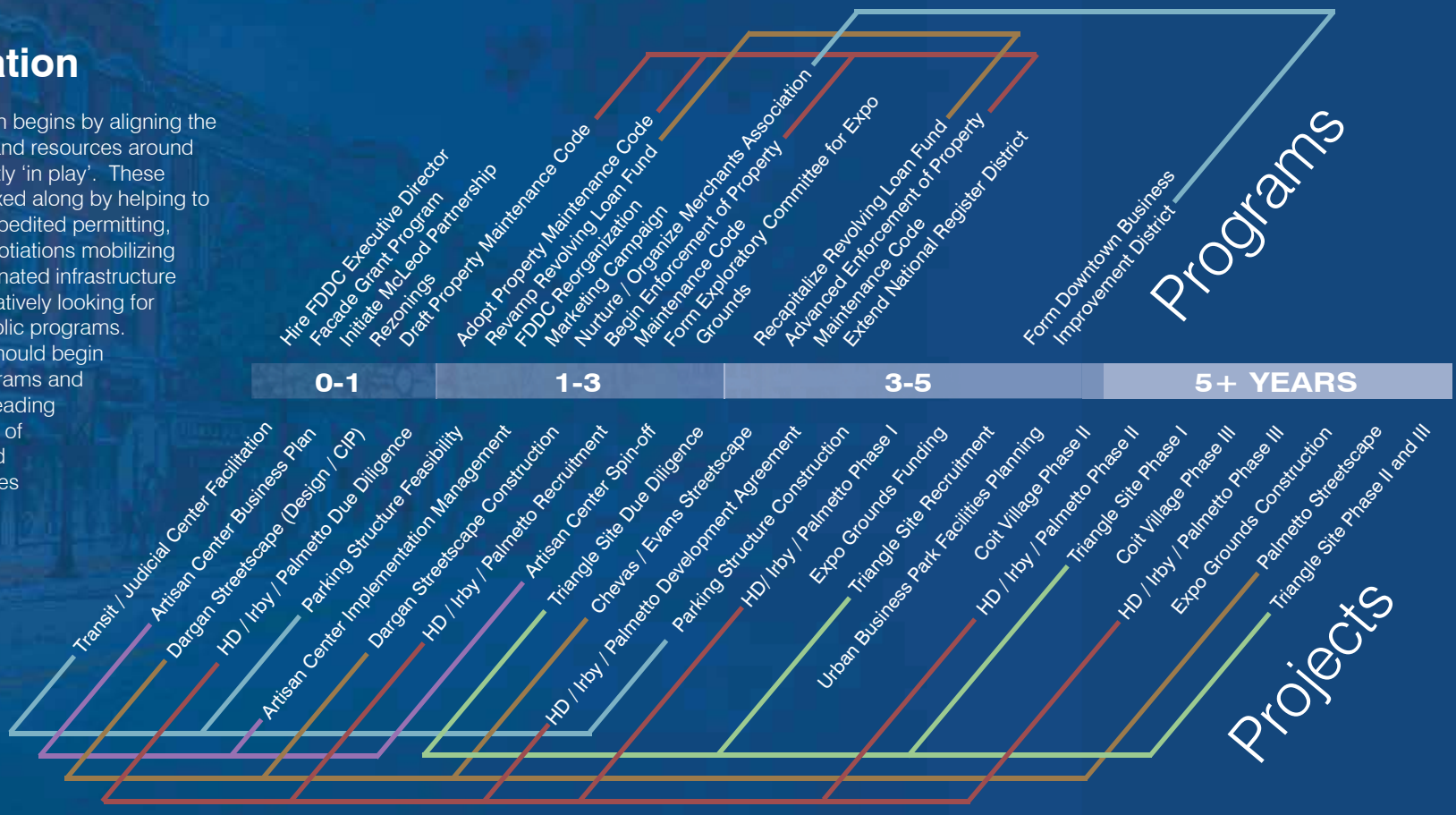
The Medical Center is perhaps the largest single economic catalyst and traffic generator in the entire region. It is separated from the heart of Downtown by only a few hundred feet (and by a major transportation corridor) yet there is very little economic spillover between the two areas. Previous plans coined the term "The Medical Mile" to define a potential westward path of development emanating from the McLeod campus into Downtown along Cheves Street. Possible uses along the corridor range from medical offices to medical supply companies, clinics, labs and the full complement of hospitality services such as hotels and restaurants to support a large and growing medical center.

### CULTURAL CAMPUS

The cultural "district" would make a more powerful statement if it was reconceived as a cultural campus where open space is increased and knitted together to create a park-like setting. Although each building in the City's growing Cultural District is impressive in its own right, collectively, they don't constitute a greater whole. Unifying landscape features that tie the buildings together, visually or spatially, and the open lawns between them could transform Dargan Street into a grand civic space, reminiscent of the great City Beautiful Era parks when iconic cultural institutions were placed in lushly landscaped urban parks.

# Implementation

Effective implementation begins by aligning the community's energies and resources around projects that are currently 'in play'. These projects should be coaxed along by helping to plug financing gaps, expedited permitting, facilitating property negotiations mobilizing political support, coordinated infrastructure improvements, and creatively looking for ways to tap existing public programs. Concurrently, the City should begin to put in place the programs and institutional structures leading to a sustainable climate of reinvestment. Policy and project-specific measures are presented below in three- to five-year intervals.



Alongside physical planning elements, the Florence Downtown Master Plan addresses policy-based issues that are integral to a comprehensive revitalization strategy and full revival of Downtown.

## THE HISTORIC DISTRICT

The City's admirable efforts to garner recognition for its Downtown historic district, including getting parts of it listed on the National Register, is a solid first step in building more local appreciation for it (and developer interest in it). A rigorous code enforcement program will protect the buildings from prolonged periods of deferred maintenance; many of them are at risk of demolition through neglect. It helps instill investor confidence by protecting the value of new projects against encroaching blight, and helps "mothball" historic buildings awaiting renovation. The implementation of such a code would empower the City to take preventative action.

Historic renovation projects in smaller cities like Florence are often very difficult to make work financially. Even with various tax credits, the costs of renovation often exceed the building's revenue generating potential. The City should be receptive to project ideas that require creative "deal structuring" to make work including those involving affordable housing tax credits, rehabilitation tax credits, New Markets Tax Credits, potential TIF financing.

## PARKING

Downtowns must accommodate parking without becoming overwhelmed with parking. As voiced in the public meetings for this plan, the city is in need of comprehensive, shared parking strategies in order to move away from the 'one building, one parking lot' development pattern that has left large holes in the City's urban fabric.

Florence will need to maximize off-street parking opportunities by strategically placing public lots and structured parking. Parking structures, however, are very expensive to build (\$15,000 - \$20,000 per space) and generally don't make financial sense where land costs are low and land vacancy is high. Greater development density or major public incentives will likely need to accompany the private development of structures. Three locations are under consideration: City/County Building lot; north side of Cheves Street roughly between Coit and Baroody Streets; and along Irby Street in the vicinity of the Little Theater and Library.

## HOUSING

Downtowns need people living in them in order to thrive. Most successful Downtown rejuvenation efforts over the past 20 years have actually led with housing which has provided a market for Downtown businesses and provided consistent activity at various times of the day and week. Although most cities prefer "market rate" housing, the leading edge of the housing market

usually consists of a significant percentage of affordable housing. Any effort therefore to encourage Downtown reinvestment should focus on housing as one of the first courses of action.

At present, there are far too few people living in the heart of Downtown to support local businesses and maintain consistent activity. Also, given current conditions Downtown, and the limited size of the local luxury urban housing market, the City shouldn't expect a flood of condo developers even once the market does recover. The City therefore would be wise to encourage more high-quality affordable housing developments Downtown, particularly in some of the historic buildings that probably won't get restored without some type of major tax incentives (i.e. where the cost of rehab is likely to greatly exceed resale value or projected rental income). As a good local example, Coit Village is a newly

the street get redeveloped, they should better define the street space by being oriented to the street and placed closer to it.

Such a facility needs to be located near a concentration of potential ridership generators, and where buses can be staged without conflicting with adjacent uses. Most importantly, the project will have to tie in to Amtrak's Palmetto line service in order to be considered truly multi-modal. This will require relocating the current Amtrak station to a more central Downtown location.

## TRANSIT CENTER

Exciting efforts are currently underway to build a new intermodal transit center Downtown. Such a facility promises to stimulate other investments and will help reinforce Downtown as the place where all things come together. Such a facility needs to be located near a concentration of potential ridership generators, and where buses can be staged without conflicting with adjacent uses. Most importantly, the project will have to tie in Amtrak's Palmetto line service in order to be considered truly multi-modal. This will require relocating the current Amtrak station to a more central Downtown location.

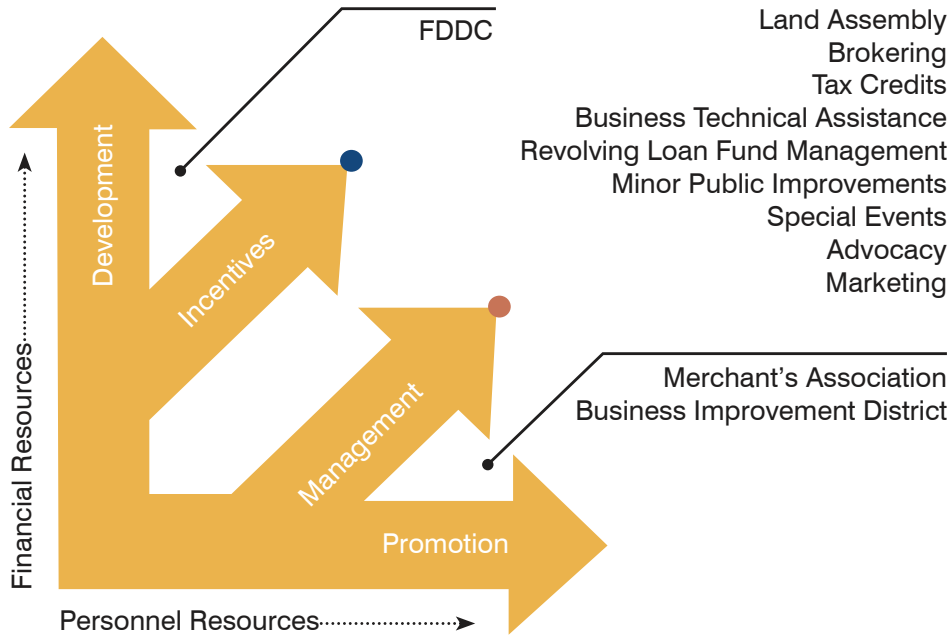
## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

In today's economic environment, a singular focus on real estate development (supply) without a complementary effort to develop or recruit businesses to occupy it (demand) will have limited success. Incentives and supports need to be created for businesses as well as buildings, and the City will sometimes need to facilitate difficult projects into existence using all resources at its disposal.

The City's main role in getting private real estate projects off the ground will typically involve three things: assembling and reselling land (possibly at a discount), providing low-cost subordinated 'gap' financing to businesses and developers, and ensuring fair and timely permitting. With regard to business creation, it also involves helping to line-up no/low cost business technical assistance such as through a university or technical college and providing an overall environment conducive to business formation.

Targeting economic development resources on Downtown is part of a larger economic development strategy for the city as a whole. It will involve building the capacity of the Florence Downtown Development Corporation with dedicated, professional leadership, including a fully empowered and experienced executive director and specialized FDDC board members. It will also require a combination economic development incentives, offering direct and indirect financial assistance.

## FOUR PLANKS OF DOWNTOWN REGENERATION



constructed project that has, by most accounts, been positively received in the market.

## MOBILITY

Downtown Florence is a fairly easy place to get around by automobile. It isn't as convenient to navigate by other means, and walking is inhibited by the distance between major building groups and heavy traffic on through streets. The edges of Downtown and its major attractions are also not well marked giving it a pass-through quality. In all cases, the city needs to place greater emphasis on the overall user experience for visitors and pedestrians by accommodating alternative forms of transit such as bike and bus.

This plan doesn't put forth any new recommendations for major street improvements except for those that add to overall street functionality and appearance such as streetscaping, wayfinding signs, and maximizing opportunities for bike lanes and on-street parking. New sidewalks should eventually be added to improve the walking experience. If and when any of the sites along