Downtown Gainesville
Strategic Plan

Strategic Plan Document

Adopted by Gainesville City Commission on October 20, 2022

MKSK   DEVELOPMENTSTRATEGIES®   eda

A community vision for Downtown Gainesville

This plan is the culmination of a yearlong process that engaged hundreds of Gainesville neighbors. We acknowledge the contributions of the stakeholders that supported this plan, including the members of our Neighbor Advisory Group, Alachua County, Greater Gainesville Chamber, Santa Fe College, and University of Florida. We particularly thank the passionate and dedicated voices of our Gainesville neighborhoods that shaped this plan.

Neighbor Advisory Group (NAG)

Jacob Ihde
GCRA Advisory Board

Trevor Schneider
University of Florida

Sean McLendon
Alachua County

Jim O'Connell
UF Innovate

Staci-Ann Bertrand
Chamber of Commerce

Gigi Simmons
Porters Community Resident

Melissa Montilla
Springhill Neighborhood
Resident

Darcie MaMahon
Duckpond Neighborhood
Resident

Matt Howland
Downtown Resident

Jeff McMullen
Downtown Business Owner

John Fleming
Developer, Property Owner

Meg The Losen
Downtown Business/Property
Owner

Hoch Shitama
Baird Center Owner

Dennayce Mavin
Owner, Salon Syx

Adam Livay
University of Florida Student

Project Leadership

Erik Bredfeldt
Economic Development and
Innovation Director, Department
of Sustainable Development

Sarit Sela
City Architect, Department of
Sustainable Development

Consultant Team

MKSK
Development Strategies
eda

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

To plan for the future of Downtown Gainesville, the city assembled a broad coalition of community leaders and neighbors.

Collaborating with this Neighbor Advisory Group (NAG), the planning team developed a Strategic Plan that aligns with and complements current plans and initiatives, amplifies existing assets, connects with and uplifts adjacent neighborhoods, adds needed vibrancy through new residential and business opportunities, and focuses on implementation.

Throughout this inclusive process, the City of Gainesville, the NAG, and the planning team engaged the community in the creation of this Strategic Plan. Gainesville neighbors were invited to participate in many different ways across multiple platforms from the Spring of 2021 to the Spring of 2022. More than 800 voices were heard through two community meetings, 15 stakeholder

focus group meetings, and online and paper surveys. An interactive website hosted at www.cityofgainesville.org/ DowntownStrategicPlan.aspx offered access to all meeting materials, online mapping and idea sharing activities, surveys, and project updates. In an effort to reach people where they are, city staff augmented this work with attendance at community events and gatherings. Finally, the GCRA Advisory Board and City Commission participated through the project through one-on-one conversations and regular project updates. Taken together, this community conversation resulted in hundreds of ideas that helped to shape and guide the plan. Throughout this planning process the community showed that they love and cherish downtown and are invested in its continued evolution and revitalization.

The Downtown Gainesville Strategic Plan is organized around six key findings from community engagement that are manifested in **16 Ideas for the future of downtown:**

Become a Destination

► **Idea 1:** Build Investment Around Local Strengths

► **Idea 2:** Shape Downtown Identity

► **Idea 3:** Create a Downtown Jewel

Connect the Dots

► **Idea 4:** Balance the need for parking with the desire for a walkable, urban core.

► **Idea 5:** Prioritize Streets to Meet City Standards

► **Idea 6:** Activate the Sweetwater Corridor

► **Idea 7:** Create a Greenway Loop

Strengthen the Relationship with Adjacent Neighborhoods

► **Idea 8:** Connect Neighborhoods to Downtown

► **Idea 9:** Establish Transition Areas

Increase Housing Opportunities

► **Idea 10:** Address Housing at Scale

► **Idea 11:** Support Affordable and Mixed Income Housing

► **Idea 12:** Facilitate Market Rate Housing

Create a Supportive Local Business Environment

► **Idea 13:** Unlock Real Estate Potential

► **Idea 14:** Increase Direct Small Business Assistance

Maintain and Enhance Downtown

► **Idea 15:** Form a Place-Management Organization

► **Idea 16:** Continue to Build Capacity

The plan explores these 16 Ideas, creating a framework of strategies and action items to enable change and transformation in Downtown Gainesville. From the very first community engagement it became clear that downtown is of tremendous importance to the community. There was a sense that downtown should be a place where the entire community feels welcome and a place that is a destination for the entire region. In doing so, it was also evident that downtown needed to be better connected and seamlessly integrated into the urban fabric and unique character of the neighborhoods that surround it. Beyond streets and sidewalks, this interconnectedness has the potential to create a system of lush, welcoming green spaces and linear parks and trails that circumnavigate downtown, enhance sustainability and resiliency, and provide equitable access. Aligned with the continued community work being conducted around housing, the Strategic Plan also makes strong recommendations to increase housing opportunities for all, considering ways to address both affordable housing and market rate housing at scale. To remain competitive with other commercial areas of the city and region, special attention also needs to be paid to creating a supportive local business environment that enables diverse small businesses and entrepreneurs to flourish in downtown.

This plan does more than merely set forth a vision for the future growth and revitalization of Downtown Gainesville. It also sets up a practical framework for implementation that will be sustainable and impactful. Through a survey of other communities and downtowns across the country, one common element of success is the presence of a professional implementation entity that has a singular focus on downtown.

800+
Total GNV voices engaged through this process

This implementation entity should begin by focusing on place management, addressing issues around making downtown clean, welcoming and safe. With an approach to place management established, such an organization can expand to more complicated tasks such as investments in streetscape, placemaking, parks, programming, retail tenanting and development.

Successful implementation of the Downtown Gainesville Strategic Plan will require continued cooperation. This plan is just the beginning. Following the adoption of this plan, the City of Gainesville, Alachua County, the University of Florida, and other downtown organizations, stakeholders, institutions, and other strategic partners should continue the work that has started here and begin the work of making sustainable, lasting change for Downtown Gainesville.

Introduction

BO DIDDLEY PLAZA

DOWNTOWN GNV 5PM
10.27 STRATEGIC PLAN
COMMUNITY MEETING
10.29-31 THE FEST

105

The Purpose of this Plan

The Downtown Gainesville Strategic Plan represents an opportunity to create a unified vision for the future of the urban core of the city.

Throughout the community engagement process, there was a universal agreement that downtown today is falling short of community expectations. It should be the heart of the community, but many see it only as a place that serves government employees by day and attracts college students by night. It should be a destination where the entire community comes together, but it is being outpaced by newer commercial development at the edges of Gainesville. It should be a place where all residents of Gainesville feel welcome. Downtown should be everyone's neighborhood.

The good news is that community planning work to create an active and equitable downtown are already underway. The City's Vision 2035 sets forth nine goals to create an alive and vibrant downtown (at right). Concurrent plans such

as the city's Comprehensive Plan (Imagine Gainesville) and the Exclusionary Zoning & Inclusionary Zoning Study informed the Downtown Gainesville Strategic Plan. Together all three of these planning efforts made it clear that the Strategic Plan needed to not just uplift the core of the city, but the neighborhoods areas surrounding it as well.

Beyond these guiding foundational plans and informative community conversations, the building blocks of a vibrant downtown already exist. Recent investment in streetscapes and parks represent a community commitment to high-quality public spaces. The growth of the Innovation District to the west of downtown and the dynamism of the University of Florida and Santa Fe College in the community provide ample opportunity to drive future

investment in 21st century employment and mixed-use development.

Downtown Gainesville and its adjacent collection of districts, neighborhoods, public spaces, and institutions have tremendous local and regional importance. The area must be re-connected to the greater community fabric and equitable economic opportunity, filled with the spark of innovation, and positioned to thrive in both the knowledge economy and main street economy. Most importantly, it must continue to be a source of civic pride for greater Gainesville to bring diverse people together in a downtown that equitably attracts new employers, residents, and visitors to a place that is active and vibrant 24/7.

Purpose of the Downtown Strategic Plan

The Downtown Strategic Plan will consider the past, present, and future of downtown and its surrounding neighborhoods, and strategically outline opportunities, preserve what makes downtown special, and move downtown forward for the next decade.

City Strategic Plan: Vision 2035
Principle 6: Alive/Vibrant Downtown

Choice of a variety of residential opportunities – types and price points

Successful locally owned retail businesses

Destination for 18/7 living, working and experiencing

Equitable development in adjacent neighborhoods

Community gathering places to hangout or to have events and festivals

Well-designed, well-maintained and attractive landscaping and buildings

Additional "mid-rise" mixed-use buildings providing office and residential opportunities

Neighbors and guests feeling safe with a well-lighted Downtown

Diverse mix of small locally owned retail, national retailer and entertainment/ unique experienced-based businesses

Process & Schedule

The process for the Downtown Gainesville Strategic Plan was guided by the city's Core Values for Community Engagement.

The planning team began working with city staff in early 2021 to create an Engagement Brief that outlined project goals, engagement methods and techniques, and required outcomes. Once reviewed by the GCRA and City Commission, the planning team used this as a framework to guide the planning process.

While the Engagement Brief was being created, the planning team also conducted one-on-one meetings with city commissioners to understand the needs, concerns, and opportunities downtown. This feedback helped to both inform the process and provide needed context as existing communities and opportunities were explored as part of the existing conditions analysis.

The community engagement process for the Strategic Plan formally began in June 2021, with the first Neighbor Advisory Group meeting and a series of 15 stakeholder focus groups that engaged more than 90 community members. Alongside the information gathered through an online survey and website activities, the planning team took all of this initial information and input and presented it to the entire Gainesville community in October 2021 at the first community meeting at Bo Diddley Plaza. This community engagement helped to verify project direction, allowing participants to react to initial thoughts and areas of focus for Downtown Gainesville that were distilled down into six key findings.

Throughout the Fall of 2021 and Winter of 2022, the planning team worked to align the community's input and feedback with ongoing city initiatives, market analysis, and best practices to develop Gainesville specific recommendations, strategies and ideas. The resulting 16 Ideas were presented to the community at a second workshop in April 2022 that formed the basis for this plan. Along with this review and community discussion, the planning team met with the GCRA and City Commission to gain additional feedback and direction. With clear community direction, the planning team documented the plan in the Spring of 2022 with a focus on catalyst projects, strategic policies and recommendations and actionable implementation steps. The plan was submitted for adoption in August of 2022.

Ongoing Community Engagement: Project Website | Online Surveys & Activities | NAG Meetings														
TASK 1 **Build on Local Strengths** **Community Assets** **& Opportunities**					**TASK 2** **Build For People** **Framework for Economic Opportunity** **& District Development**						**TASK 3** **Build Long-Term Value** **Catalytic Projects** **& Value Capture**			
▶2021							▶2022							
June	July	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	August

▲ Community Meeting 1   ▲ Community Meeting 2   ▲ Adoption

Plan Alignment

## Understanding and aligning previous and ongoing planning efforts.

In the last 10 years, Gainesville neighbors has engaged and shaped various planning efforts at various scales - from neighborhood planning narratives to citywide guiding documents. As a significant community hub at the seam of east and west Gainesville,

Downtown Gainesville holds special value to neighbors across the community. As such, a variety of plans include recommendations relevant to both downtown and its surrounding neighborhoods, and continue to shape its growth trajectory. Recognizing the value

of this important planning work, the planning team reviewed previous and current planning efforts to identify common themes relevant to downtown. The review included adopted plans, studies, and private efforts, including those listed below.

- ► Imagine Gainesville: On-Going Coordination
- ► City of Gainesville Strategic Plan: Vision 2035
- ► Gainesville Parking Program
- ► RTS Ten Year Development Plan
- ► SW 2nd Ave and SW 4th Ave Multimodal Corridors
- ► Vision Zero Action Strategy
- ► GCRA Downtown Redevelopment Plan
- ► Cultural Center Project & Update
- ► Understanding Racial Inequality in Alachua County
- ► GCRA 10-Year Reinvestment Plan
- ► Future Land Uses
- ► Power District Planning Studies (Various)
- ► Gainesville Housing Action Plan
- ► Old Fire Station Submittal
- ► CRA Fall 2019 Report
- ► GCRA 10-Year Investment Plan, Survey & Results
- ► Mobility Online Survey Results
- ► Neighborhoods As Community Assets: The Porters Community* ("Porters Narrative")
- ► University of Florida: Strategic Development Plan, Campus Framework Plan, Campus Master Plan

*Neighborhood is referred to as Porters Quarters elsewhere in this document.

Recent Master Plans

UF Strategic Development Plan (2019)

W University Avenue

UF Landscape Plan (2019)

SW Archer Road

SW 13th Street

SW 6th Street

SW Depot Avenue

Innovation Square Master Plan (2012)

N Main Street

NE 8th Avenue

Depot Park

Gainesville-Hawthorne State Trail

Power District Master Plan (2013)

SE 9th Street

NE Waldo Road

SE Hawthorne Road

SE 15th Street
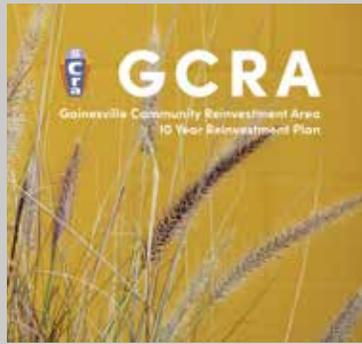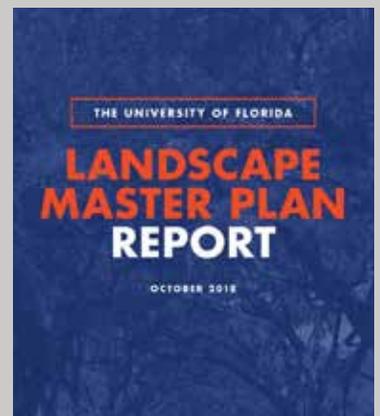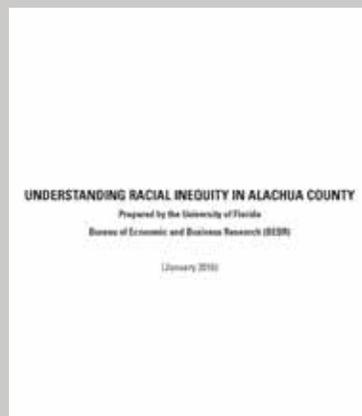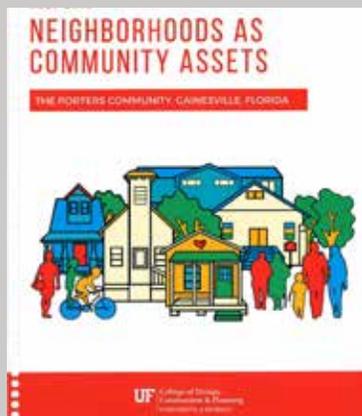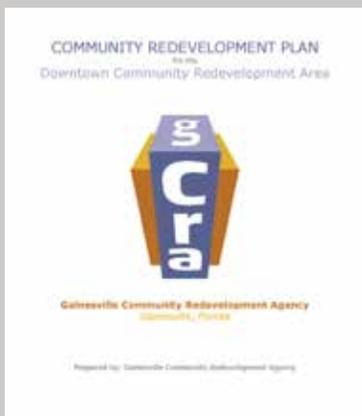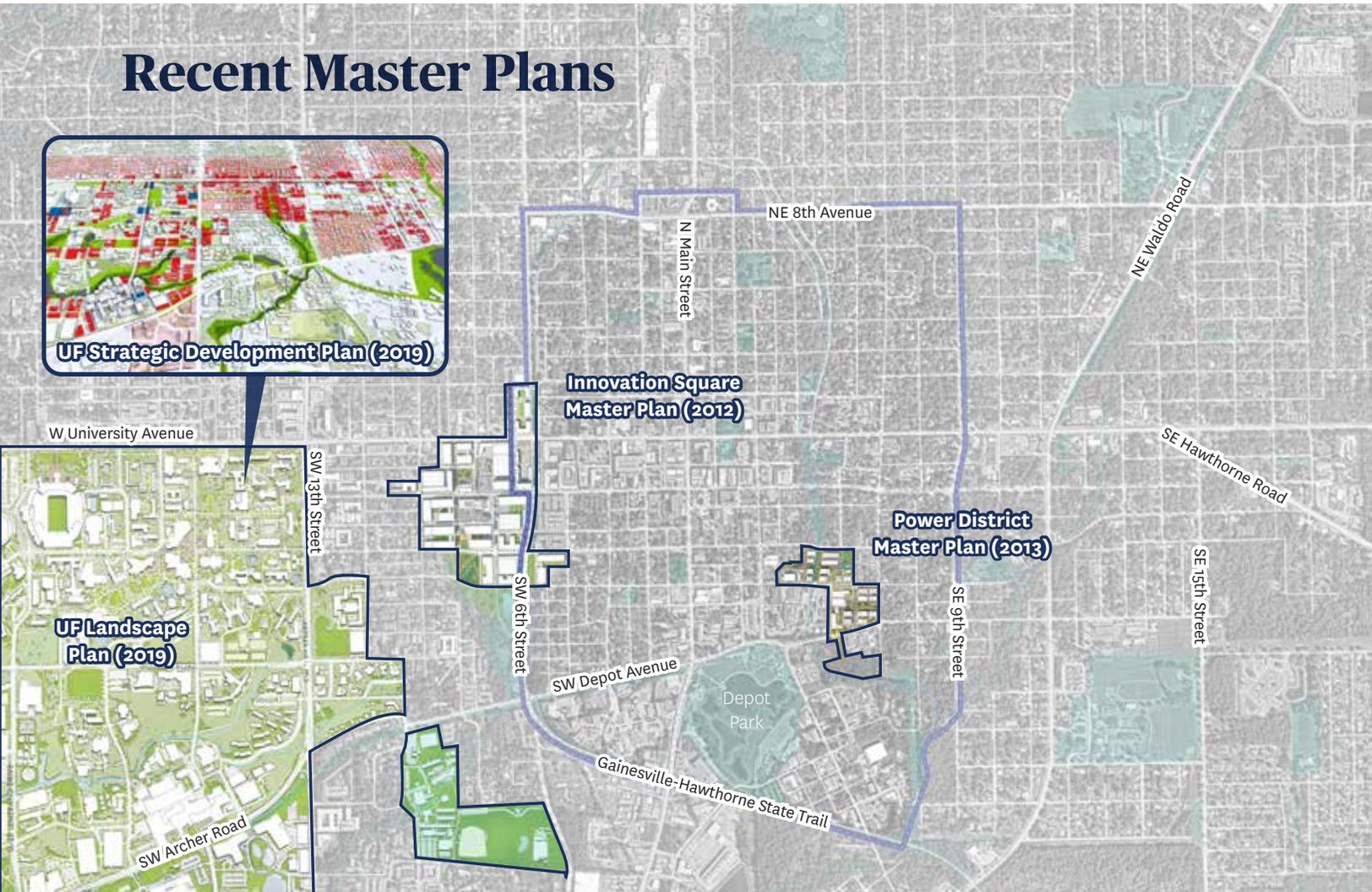
Downtown Today

Inventory of Existing Conditions

Understanding downtown and its environs by cataloging what is there.

In unearthing downtown's physical, demographic, and economic qualities and context, the planning team conducted an extensive existing conditions analysis. This analysis, outlined in this section, is an initial understanding of Downtown Gainesville to build the foundation for this plan. Augmented by our discoveries in our community engagement process, our cataloging of existing conditions focuses on what we can learn from available data sources, historical resources, and local and national databases.

This section starts with an overview of planimetric data, focusing on the physical and historic qualities of downtown and its surroundings. We start with an explanation of the boundaries we selected for our analysis, and share our impressions and take-aways from studying current neighborhood boundaries, zoning and overlays, safety data, and sidewalk gaps.

The result is a picture of downtown that starts to illustrate the commonalities and contradictions we later explore in our 16 ideas for downtown. For instance, the relationships with downtown and its surrounding communities, informs how to better connect them, and how to address the gaps and limitations in the existing pedestrian network.

Following this analysis is a summary of Gainesville's demographic and market conditions. The region and city's demographics are summarized to provide context on the community's makeup, and how it compares to other peer cities. Through this section, we explain that though Gainesville is growing as a region, downtown has experienced limited development activity in the last five to ten years. Additionally, we summarize regional development trends for multifamily housing, retail, office, and hotels. This market understanding creates

the foundation for a 10-year development program for downtown, which outlines the opportunity for non-student multifamily housing, retail, and office in downtown and informs a land use and real estate strategy later in this report.

Strategic Plan Focus Area and Greater Study Area

For the purposes of this plan, its analysis, and its subsequent recommendations, the downtown area is defined through two distinct boundaries: a focus area, and a greater study area. Together, these two boundaries give the planning team a holistic approach to analyzing the downtown area, its physical attributes, and its current regulatory context.

The **Strategic Plan Focus Area**, shown in red in the map on the following page, is where the bulk of the plan's analysis, exploration, and recommendations will focus their attention. This

Map labels:
- NW 8th Avenue
- 9th Ave.
- NE 8th Avenue
- Northeast Neighbors
- Fifth Avenue
- Pleasant Street
- Pleasant Street
- N Main Street
- NE 2nd Street
- Duckpond
- NW 3rd Ave.
- NE 2nd Ave.
- W University Avenue
- Strategic Plan Focus Area
- NE Waldo Road
- Dell St.
- UF Innovate
- North Lincoln Heights
- SW 13th Street
- SW 4th Ave
- Power District
- SE 9th Street
- SE 11th Street
- SW 6th Street
- Porters Quarters
- SW 2nd St.
- SE 3rd St.
- Springhill
- SE Depot Avenue
- Depot Park
- Greater Study Area
- Gainesville-Hawthorne State Trail
- Azalea Trails

geography generally follows the University Avenue and Main Street corridors, and includes a triangular swath of land west of Depot Park. The area near the intersection of University and Main and around Bo Diddley Plaza is generally understood as the core of downtown, home to many of downtown's restaurants and entertainment areas. As its most walkable and pedestrian-friendly area, this boundary also includes Sweetwater Park as the easternmost edge of the core, with Santa Fe College's Blount Center on NW 6th Street at the westernmost edge.

A larger geography, noted in the map above as the **Greater Study Area** in a blue outline, is used to understand the downtown core's relationship with surrounding areas. As such, the plan's recommendations extend toward this larger boundary as we explore downtown's connectivity and the impact of its continued growth.

This greater study area includes downtown's surrounding neighborhoods (refer to page 18), as well as existing and emerging destinations. South of the downtown core, Depot Park created a new vibrant destination since its opening in

2016. As a park and community gathering place, this plan anticipates Depot Park to continue to attract Gainesville neighbors from across the entire region.

The greater study area also includes the significant redevelopment opportunity near downtown known as the Power District. This plan assumes a continuation and implementation of the Power District planning effort, started in 2013 and revisited in 2019, and supports any continuing targeted engagement efforts for the refinement of this vision for the Power District.

Surroundings Neighborhoods*

The downtown core is surrounded by four vibrant and historic neighborhoods at its edges: Pleasant Street, Duckpond, Porters Quarters, and Springhill. As seen in the map above, these neighborhood boundaries overlap with the plan's focus and study areas. As established residential enclaves, these four communities each have individual and distinct characteristics and development patterns.

► **Pleasant Street:** Founded following the Civil War more than 150 years ago, Pleasant Street is distinctive as the first Black residential neighborhood in Gainesville. Known as a center of black life and history in the city, the neighborhood operated as a "town within a town" during Gainesville's decades of segregation. Several of the neighborhood's historic churches continue to serve the community, such as the Friendship Baptist Church and the Mt. Pleasant United Methodist Church.

► **Duckpond:** A part of Gainesville's Northeast Historic District, Duckpond is one of the city's oldest communities, dating back to 1854. Bisected by Sweetwater Creek, Duckpond is a largely residential community with historic homes of various architectural styles. The neighborhood receives its name from the damming of Sweetwater Creek into a pond, now located within a linear green on NE Boulevard. Its most significant landmark is the Thomas Center and Gardens, a former home then hotel built in 1910 that now serves as office space for the City of Gainesville, in addition to a community event and art space.

► **Porters Quarters**:** Platted in 1884, Porters Quarters is one Gainesville's original Black neighborhoods. Named after its 19th Century land owners Olivia and Watson Porter, the original tract of land around Porter Street (now SW 5th Street) was subdivided and sold to Black residents as a means to establish a black settlement near downtown jobs, yet reinforcing the city's segregation. The neighborhood's oldest church, Shady Grove Primitive Baptist Church, was organized in 1894 and still stands in a new building. With a community center and farm in its core, the neighborhood continues to be home to a passionate and engaged residential base.

Church in Pleasant Street

Thomas Center in Duckpond

Park in Porters Quarters

Springhill Park in Springhill

Map labels:

NW 8th Avenue
NE 8th Avenue
Northeast Neighbors
Fifth Avenue
Pleasant Street
N Main Street
Duckpond
NE Waldo Road
W University Avenue
Strategic Plan Focus Area
UF Innovate
North Lincoln Heights
SW 13th Street
SW 6th Street
Porters Quarters
Springhill
SE 9th Street
SE 11th Street
SW Depot Avenue
Depot Park
Greater Study Area
Gainesville-Hawthorne State Trail
Azalea Trails
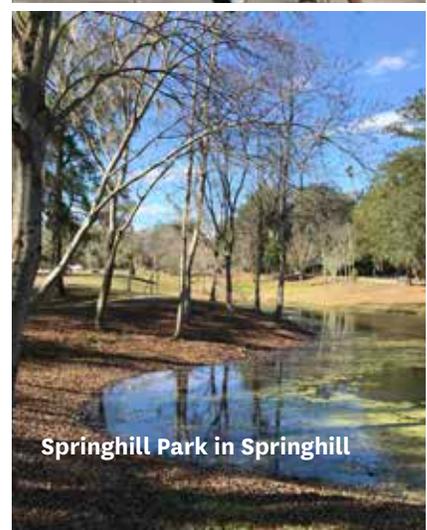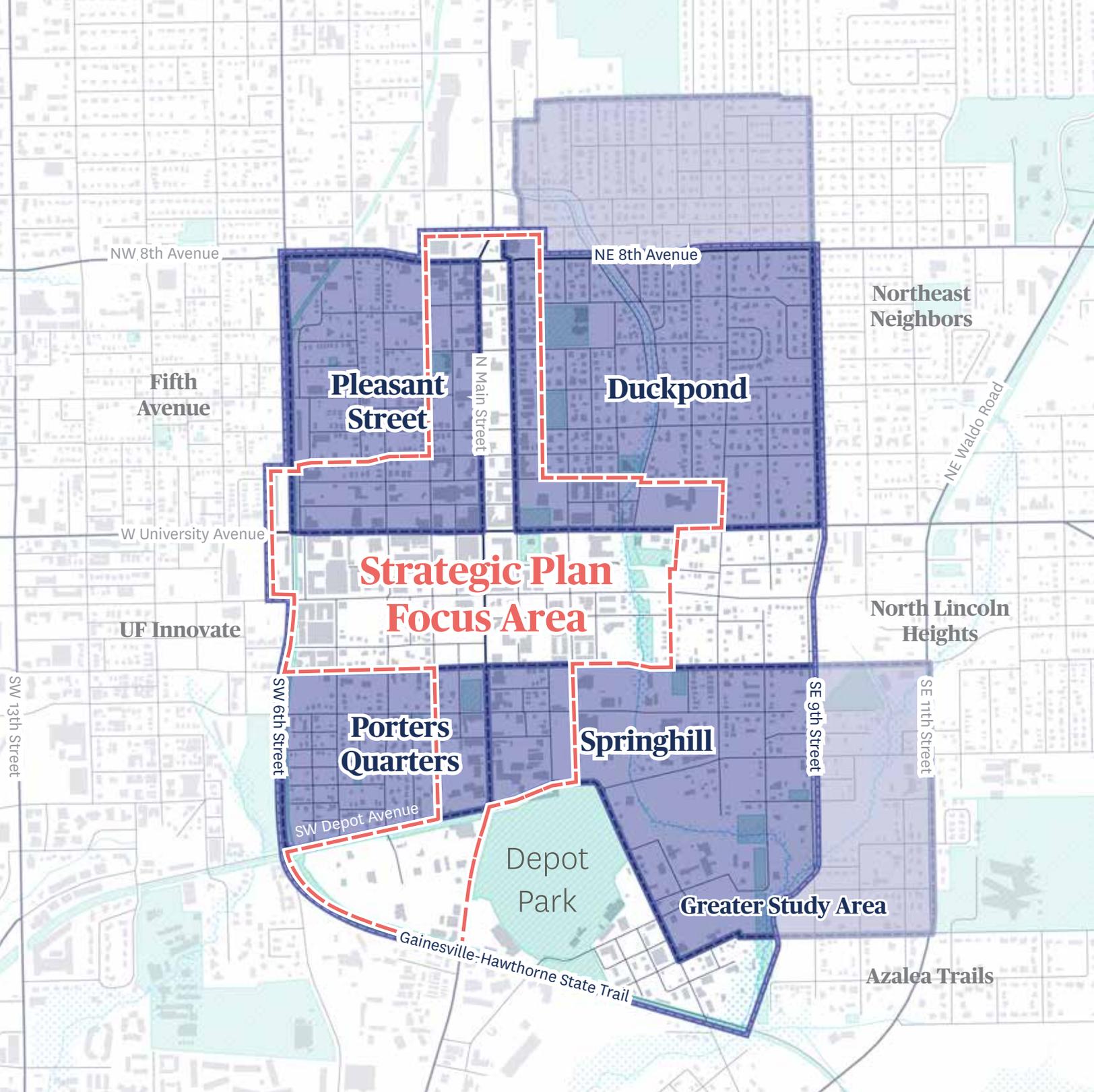
▶ **Springhill:** Located north and east of Depot Park, Springhill is one of Gainesville's oldest communities, with homes dating to the 1890s. With a residential core around Springhill Park in its northeast boundary, much of the neighborhood is home to industrial uses and land around Depot Park. Once a contaminated rail yard, the now Depot Park*** dates back to 1997, when the City of Gainesville was awarded a Regional Brownfield Pilot project grant. The 32-acre park was completed in 2016, and features a restored depot building, play areas, a large pond, and trails.

Cotton Club in Springhill

Pleasant Street Historic District

Northeast Historic District

NW 8th Avenue

NE 8th Avenue

Mixed Use

Conservation

Single Family

Single Family

Office

N Main Street

Single Family & Multi Family

NE Waldo Road

Southeast Historic District

Downtown

W University Avenue

Mixed Use

Planned Development

High Density Residential

SW 6th Street

Mixed Use

Mixed Use

SE 9th Street

SE 1th Street

Single Family & Multi Family

Single Family

SW 13th Street

SW Depot Avenue

Public Service

Industrial

Gainesville-Hawthorne State Trail

Industrial

"Downtown Zoning District: Consists of the highest density and height development, with the greatest variety of uses, and civic buildings of regional importance."

Current Zoning

Downtown's current zoning reflects its status as the city's logical and recommended location for high density development. Much of the core around the Main Street and University corridors is Zoned DT, which supports mixed use buildings up to 14 stories. The surrounding zoning districts largely step down in densities as they approach nearby single family residential areas. The areas between single family districts and the downtown district fall in the Urban Transect Zones 6-9, which provide buffers in building heights and uses.

Single Family
Single Family & Multi Family
Multi-Family Residential
Public Service and Operations
Business
Central City

Mixed Use
Office
Education
Industrial
Historic District Boundary

Map Legend:
- Historic District
- Residential Community
- Power District

## Historic Districts and Overlays

Historic residential districts surround downtown's retail and entertainment areas. These districts, shown in the map above, create a regulatory overlay that impacts building heights for new developments. For instance, maximum building heights for new buildings located 100 feet from district boundaries are limited to 3 stories or 36 feet. A stricter standard applies to new buildings in the Pleasant Street Historic District, where new buildings within the district are also limited to a height of 3 stories of 36 feet. Similarly, the Power District overlay restricts new building heights to 6 stories, with the stricter restriction of 3 stories when adjacent to residential zoning, with a step-back of 15 feet per additional building story up to the maximum permitted.

The City of Gainesville is downtown's largest landowner with 130 acres of land, representing 18% of downtown. The second largest landowner is Alachua County with 20 Acres.

Map labels:
- NW 8th Avenue
- NE 8th Avenue
- Thomas Center Gardens
- N Main Street
- NE Waldo Road
- Alachua County Schools
- W University Avenue
- SE 9th Street
- Judge Stephan P. Mickle, Sr. Criminal Court House
- SW 6th Street
- GRU Property
- SW 13th Street
- SE 11th Street
- Depot Park
- Gainesville-Hawthorne State Trail

Legend:
- City of Gainesville
- Alachua County
- Alachua County Schools
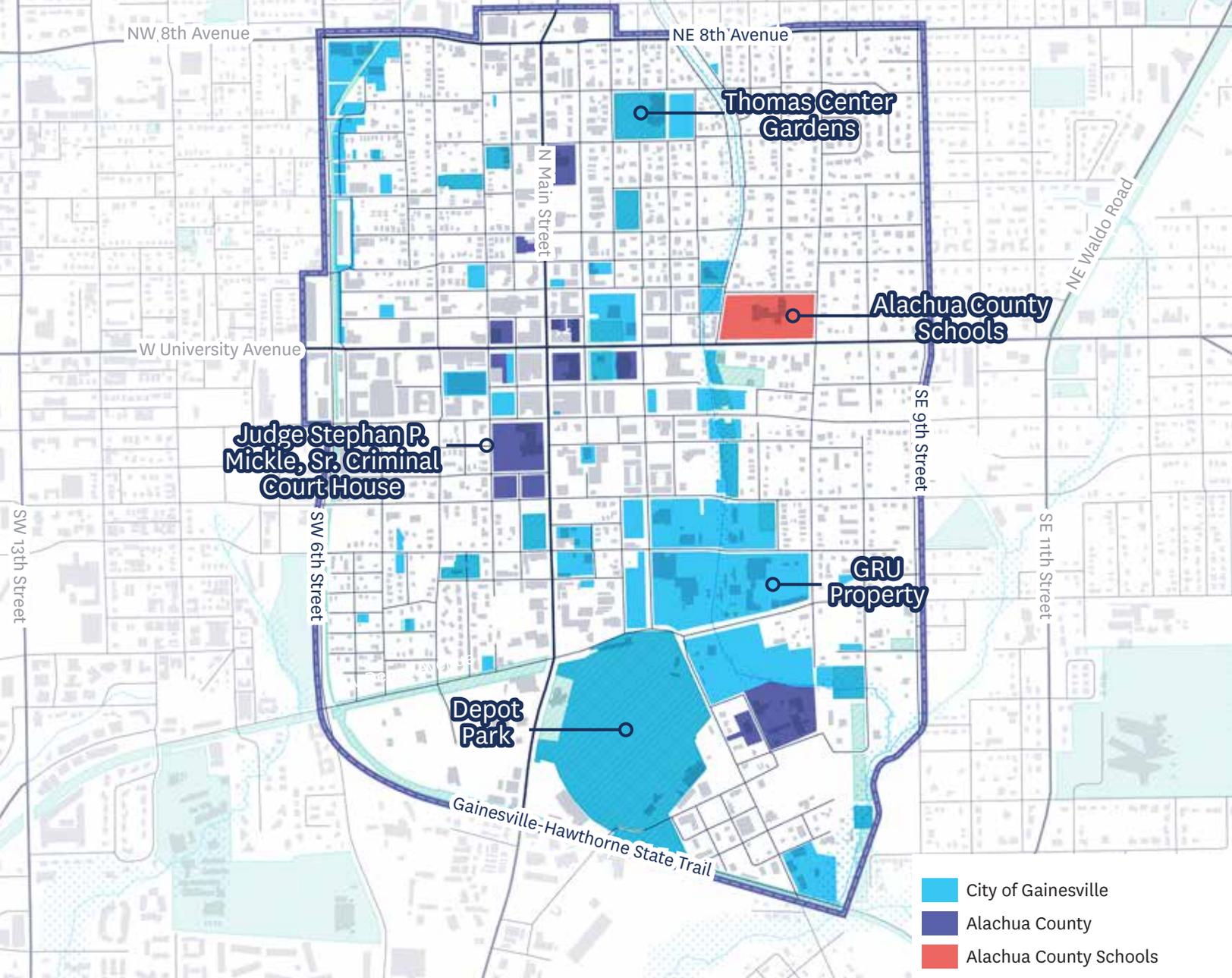
Major Land Ownership

As the city's central hub for civic uses and municipal office space, downtown's largest landowner is the City of Gainesville with 130 Acres. This acreage, which includes city offices and Gainesville Regional Utilities (GRU) property, nonetheless also includes parks, plazas, and other public gathering spaces. The downtown area's second largest landowner is Alachua County, which operates courthouses, office spaces, a library, and other facilities in about 20 acres of land throughout the downtown. Currently, the county is considering consolidating properties in downtown, which could open up redevelopment opportunities. Lastly, Alachua County Schools owns an administrative property, located in a landmark historic school house, in a 6.5 -acre former school along University Avenue, near Sweetwater Park.

Depot Park has created a destination just south of the downtown core. Sweetwater Branch is the opportunity to link downtown's urban parks and open spaces.

NW 8th Avenue

Thomas Center Gardens

Roper Park

N Main Street

NE Waldo Road

Bo Diddley Plaza

W University Avenue

SW 13th Street

Sweetwater Creek

SE 11th Street

Porters Community Farm

SW 6th Street

SE 9th Street

Depot Park

Gainesville-Hawthorne State Trail

Parks and Open Spaces
Residential Areas
Commercial Areas
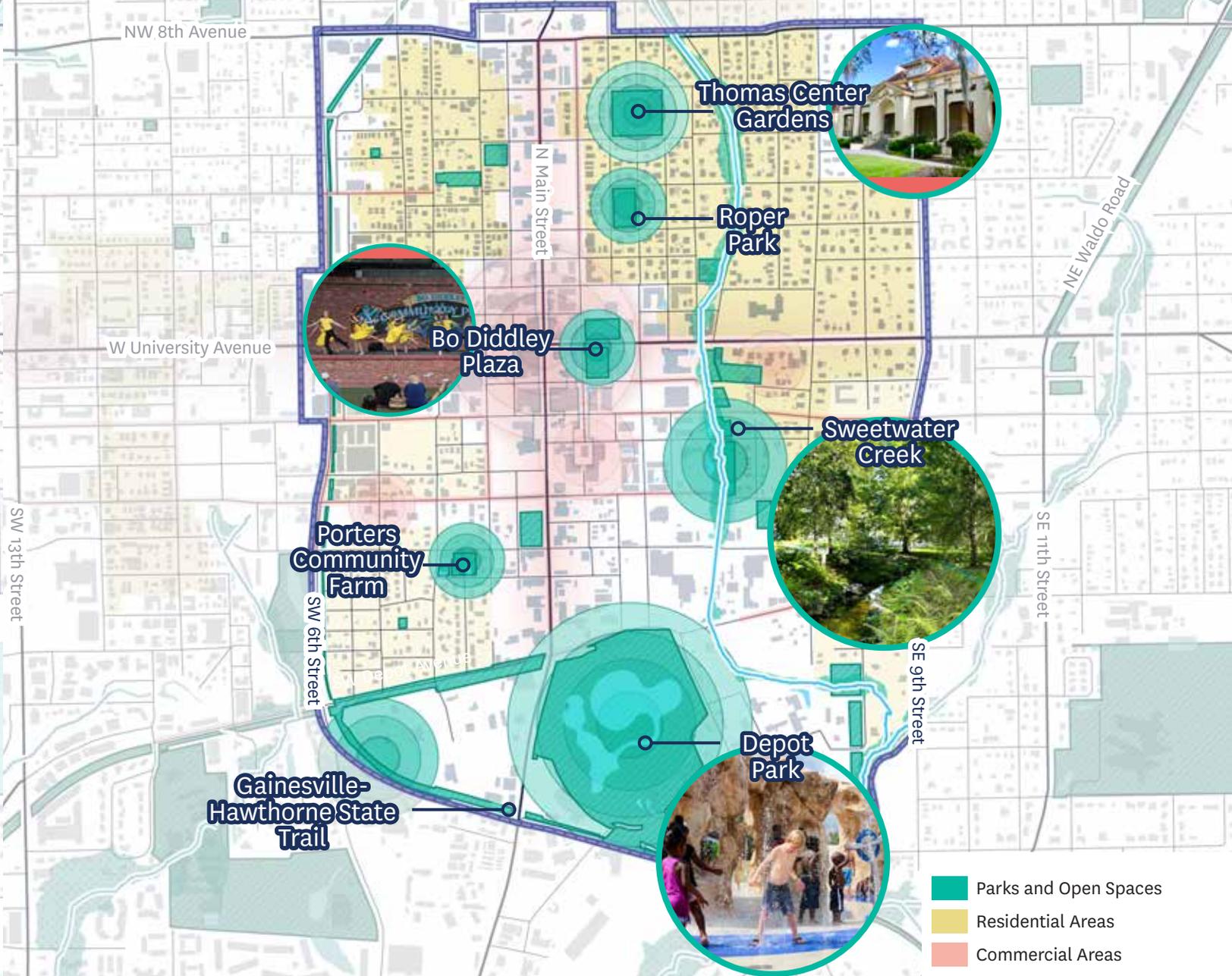
Parks and Open Spaces

As Gainesville's civic and cultural hub, downtown includes some of the community's most iconic parks and open spaces. At the heart of the core, Bo Diddley Plaza hosts events and festivals and includes a large stage and multipurpose lawn. Further south, the recent addition of Depot Park and the CADE Museum has created a new and immensely popular regional destination in what was once contaminated railyard. At the northernmost portion of the study area, the picturesque Thomas Center is home to manicured gardens in the heart of Duckpond.

An underutilized and often hidden Sweetwater Creek runs the entirety of the study area, connecting to various neighborhoods in its span. With the exception of Sweetwater Park near the Matheson Museum on University Avenue and segments along Duckpond, this natural feature is largely unseen and faces the backs of properties.

The downtown area has seen 60 vehicular incidents involving pedestrians in the last 5 years, 70% of which occurred near or along University Avenue and Main Street.


NW 8th Avenue

NE 8th Avenue

N Main Street

NE Waldo Road

University & 6th Street

Main & University

University & 6th Street

W University Avenue

Main Street & 4th Avenue

SW 13th Street

SW 6th Street

SE 9th Street

SE 1th Street

SW Depot Avenue

6th Street & Depot Avenue

Gainesville-Hawthorne State Trail
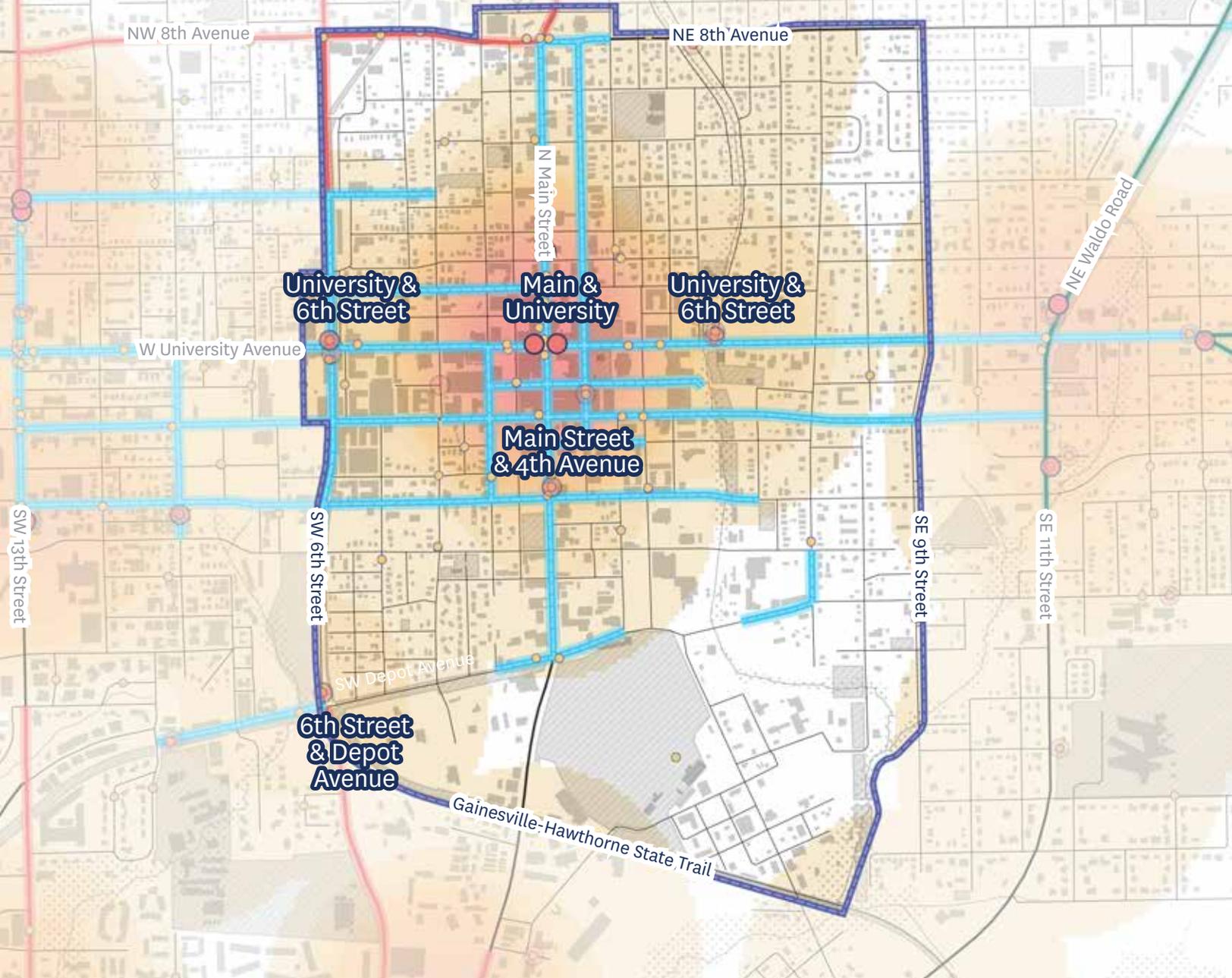
Roadway & Intersection Safety

The city's Land Development Code establishes street typologies to correspond with the transect described in the zoning map. As shown above, downtown's key corridors are categorized as "Storefront Streets," or those streets that are recommended to exhibit the most features conducive to a walkable environment. These include street trees, wide sidewalks, and spaces for outdoor dining. The planning team also looked at vehicular incidents occurring in the last 5 years, which highlighted safety issues at intersections along University Avenue, Main Street, and West 6th Street.

Legend:
- Storefront Streets
- Principal Streets
- Thoroughfares
- Local Streets
- Vehicular Crashes involving Pedestrians (2015 - 2021)
- Vehicular Crashes (2015 - 2021)
- Crash Density (weighed for Pedestrian Crashes)

Gaps in the sidewalk network are found in the residential areas of neighborhoods close to downtown.

Legend:
— Existing Sidewalks
— Known Sidewalk Gaps

Map labels: NW 8th Avenue, NE 8th Avenue, Pleasant Street, Duckpond, N Main Street, NE Waldo Road, W University Avenue, Strategic Plan Focus Area, Porters Quarters, Springhill, SW 13th Street, SW 6th Street, SE 9th Street, SE 11th Street, Gainesville-Hawthorne State Trail
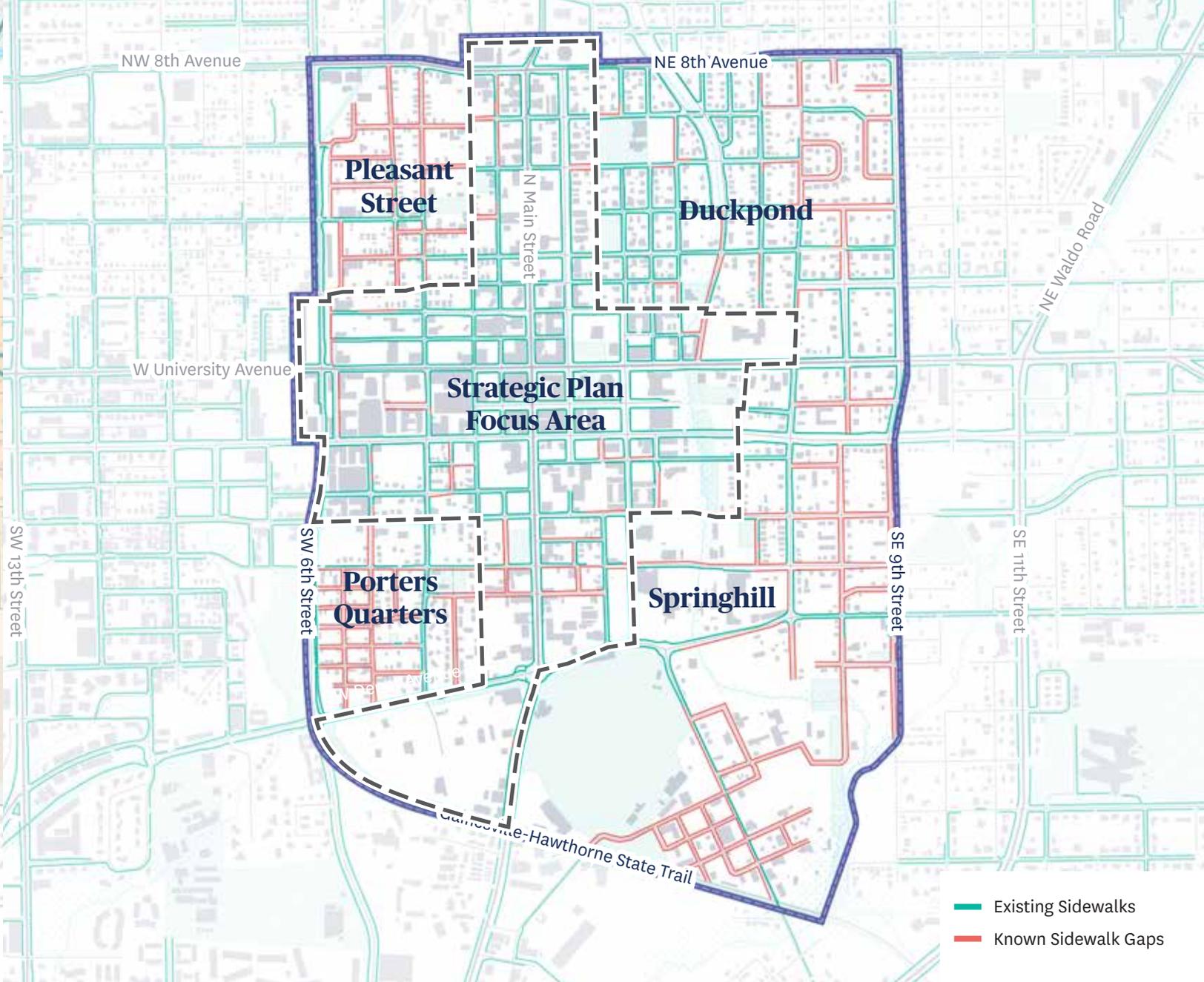
Sidewalk Gaps

The City of Gainesville inventories the location of sidewalks along public streets citywide. As seen in the map above, the plan's focus area boundary, with some minor exceptions, includes sidewalks along a majority of streets. However, there is a prevalence of sidewalk gaps just outside this boundary within the historic neighborhoods at the periphery of downtown. This is especially the case in the historically black neighborhoods of Pleasant Street, Porters Quarters, and Springhill. These gaps hinder walkability within the neighborhood, and with the downtown core.

Market Overview

The Gainesville region is growing, although Downtown has experience limited development activity given lack of developable parcels, higher development costs, and market pressures for student housing development. This is a missed opportunity since Downtown is better positioned to promote equity, sustainability, culture, innovation, and entrepreneurship.

Key Findings:

► Over the last decade, there has been **minimal population growth Downtown** compared to strong growth citywide.

► Downtown's **median household income is lower than the region** emphasizing the importance of future development serving the existing community and limiting displacement.

► **Demand for close-in housing in highly-walkable neighborhoods has pushed values upward** in parts of Downtown and placed market pressures on historically disadvantaged neighborhoods.

► There has been significant **growth in renter-occupied households across all income levels** highlighting a market opportunity for new rental housing development.

► **Alachua County's economy is strong and stable**, but with growth slower than the statewide average.

► **UF is not projected to increase enrollment** over the next decade tempering market opportunities for larger-scale office, retail, and housing development.

► **There has been minimal commercial real estate development of any kind Downtown** over the last decade with most new construction occurring in other commercial clusters and nodes citywide.

► Since 2010, **private student housing has flooded the market** adding more than 10,300 beds for an increase of 47 percent.

► Given regional competition and finite demand, **future development Downtown will need to be more intentional and differentiated** and aligned with investments in place and infrastructure.

Demographics

Regional Context

A large share of the City of Gainesville's population of around 141,085 includes students at the University of Florida that has an enrollment of more than 50,000. While Gainesville is the economic, cultural, and institutional hub of Alachua County, it contains about half of the county's population (278,468) highlighting the relatively large number of suburban and rural communities throughout, including Alachua, Newberry, and High Springs.

Gainesville is within a two-hour drive of the Tampa, Orlando, and Jacksonville regions, three of Florida's top four metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) with a combined population of nearly 7.5 million, is both an opportunity and limitation—while these regions offer abundant cultural and recreational amenities and are major transportation hubs, they are also offer a wide range of economic opportunities that draw from Gainesville's workforce as well as talent pool generated from UF.

These factors limit the economic growth potential of the Gainesville region as a major employment hub, but at the same time, Gainesville is positioned to offer a lifestyle alternative anchored by a smaller-scale, yet walkable and vibrant downtown.

Regional Map

KEY METRICS

City Population: **141,085 (15th largest city in Florida)**

MSA Population: **339,247**

County seat of Alachua County

University of Florida - **5th Largest University nationally**

Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates (2019), University of Florida (2020-2021), World Atlas (2020-2021)

Annual Population Growth 2010 to 2021

<0%   2.5%   >5.0%

Median Household Income 2021

<$15K $50K   >$135K
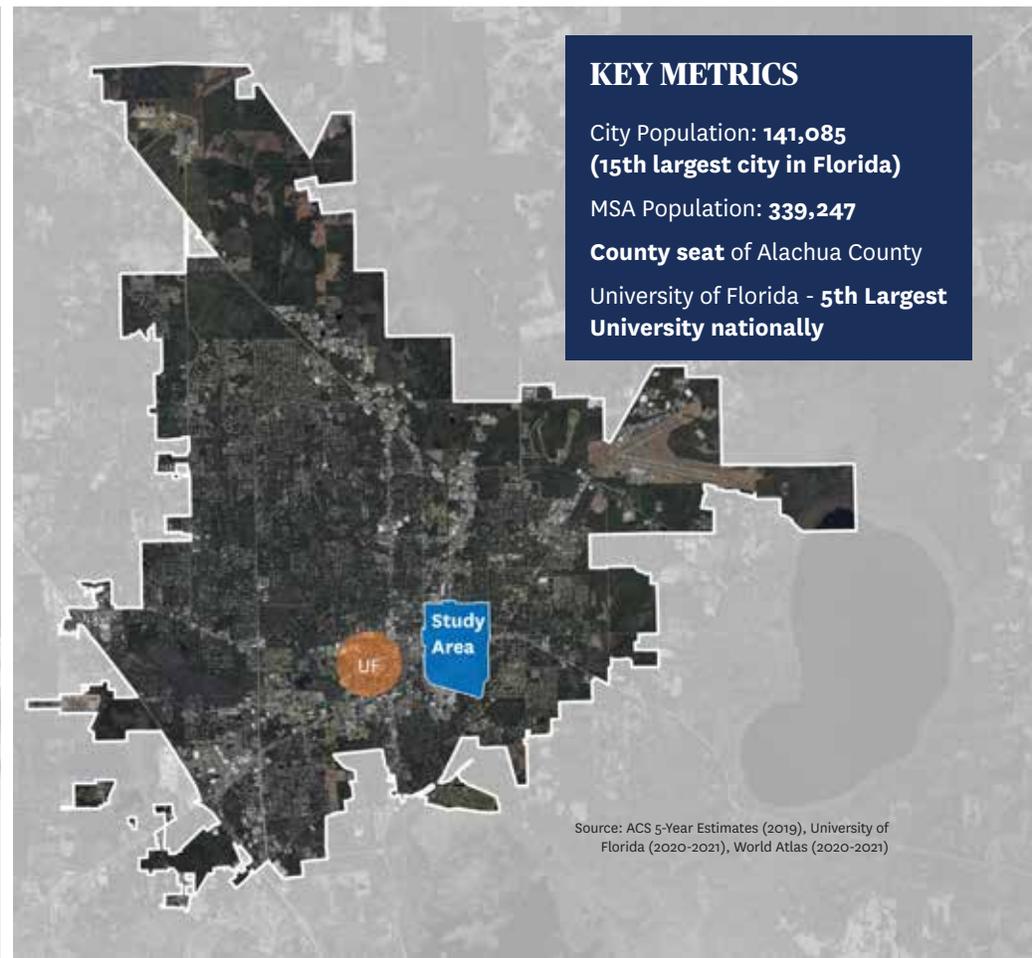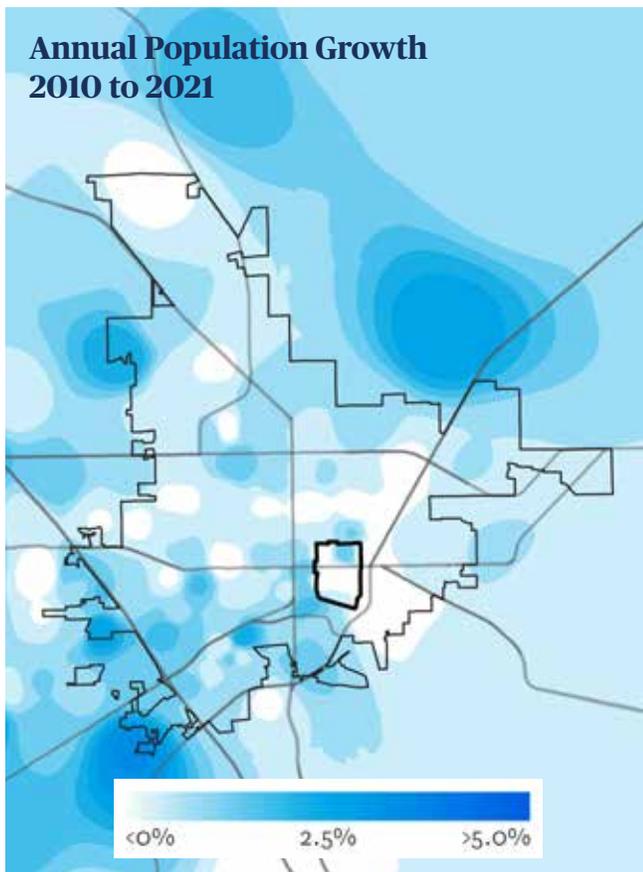
## Population

From 2010 to 2020, Gainesville had moderate population growth adding just over 15,600 net new residents for an increase of twelve percent; the portions of Alachua County outside of Gainesville grew at a similar rate of twelve percent adding nearly 15,500 net new residents and was relatively consistent with statewide growth of 14.6 percent. **Despite healthy regional economic conditions, the Downtown only added a few hundred residents for a rate of growth of under one percent.** This lack of population growth can be attributed to limited developable land and other development feasibility barriers, including the proliferation of private student housing.
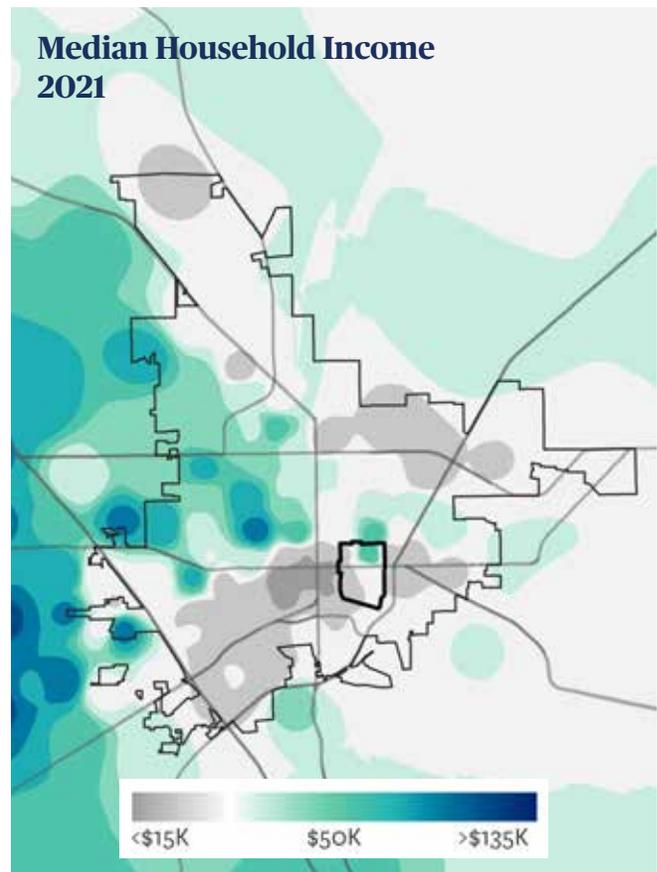
Income/Poverty

Median household income Downtown ($32,000) is somewhat lower than the city median ($39,000), but substantially lower than the county median ($53,000). These city-county disparities can be attributed to the large student population in Gainesville as well as historically disadvantaged and racially segregated neighborhoods in the urban core. In fact, of the approximately 2,000 households living Downtown, 43 percent earn less than $25,000 annually, highlighting the critical **importance of investing in affordable and mixed-income housing and ensuring that policies are in place to ensure that long-standing residents are not displaced.**

Median Home Value 2021

Legend: $50K — $250K — >$500K

Educational Attainment

Consistent with other college town markets in the southeast, Gainesville is highly educated with nearly half (48 percent) of its population aged 25 and older with at least a bachelor's degree compared to 45 percent for Alachua County and 31 percent statewide. **This highlights the economic potential for promoting entrepreneurship and talent attraction, in which Downtowns plays a critical role.**

Housing Tenure

More than 60 percent of households in Gainesville rent their housing, significantly higher than the state (34 percent) and county (45 percent) averages, although a large share of renters in Gainesville are students, which skews the data. **Over the last decade, there has been a significant shift in higher-income renters, with a net increase of nearly 3,100 renter-occupied households in Gainesville earning more than $50,000,** despite the market only adding around 2,000 units of non-student multi-family housing.

Housing Value

Despite Downtown's relatively low median household income, it has a higher median housing value compared to the city as whole and Alachua County. While population growth and development activity has been slow over the past decade, increasing demand for close-in housing in highly-walkable neighborhoods has pushed values upward and limited housing opportunities for low- and moderate-income households. Based on data from Zillow, sales of modest homes in Duck Pond are now well-above $400,000, and while sales of homes in Pleasant Street and Porter's Quarters have been generally under $300,000, values have increased substantially in recent years pricing out many long-standing residents. This validates that market demand exists to live Downtown—**what is needed is more market rate housing to alleviate excessive upward pressure on surrounding neighborhoods.**

Economic Development Trends

While the region has a steady based of university employment and has made promising gains in blue collar sectors, it has lagged in downtown-friendly industries, as well as those more commonly associated with start-ups in "new economy" industries. In other words, Downtown need more intentional effort to diversify Gainesville's economy.

Regional Employment Trends

As a result of the economic shutdown from the COVID-19 pandemic, from 2019 to 2020, the county had a net loss of more than 7,200 jobs (four percent decline). However, prior to the pandemic, from 2010 to 2019, Alachua County had very strong employment growth adding just under 29,000 net new jobs. This period of economic growth has generally followed national trends (18 percent increase in employment, although employment growth has been much more robust throughout Florida (31 percent increase). **Therefore, economic conditions in Alachua County are strong, but the economy is not booming like the state as a whole.**

Trends by Sector

Based on the distribution of employment by sector, Alachua County has more than five-and-a-half times the number of state government jobs compared to the national distribution of jobs in this sector. This can be attributed to University of Florida jobs classified by the Bureau of Economic Analysis as being in the state government sector. **Alachua County also has a relatively large share of Health Care and Accommodation and Food Services jobs, which is typical of communities with large state universities, especially those with a university medical center.**

Since 2010 to 2019, Alachua County had the most net growth in the Health Care sector adding nearly 5,500 jobs, in addition to net new jobs in Administrative and Support (3,940), and Accommodation and Food Services (3,000). During this time period, the county added around 5,000 blue collar jobs in Transportation and Warehousing, Construction, and Manufacturing, which provide low-barriers-to-entry opportunities and create better pathways for upward mobility. At the same time, **the county had less robust growth from downtown-centric industries such as Professional and Technical Services, Finance and Insurance, and Information and total county-wide employment in these sectors is below the nation average.**


Relative Change in Total Employment 2001 to 2020
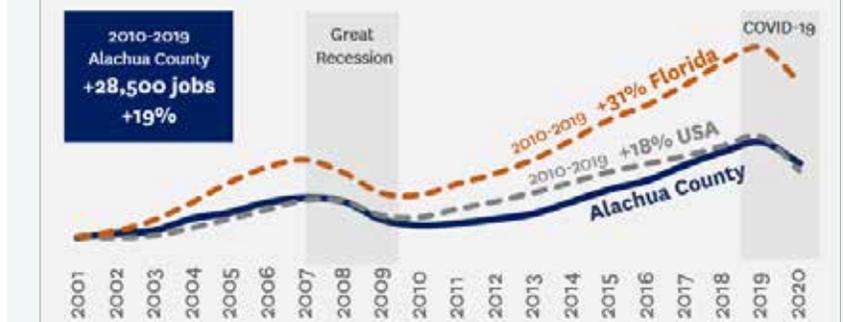
University of Florida On-Campus Enrollment 2015 to 2030
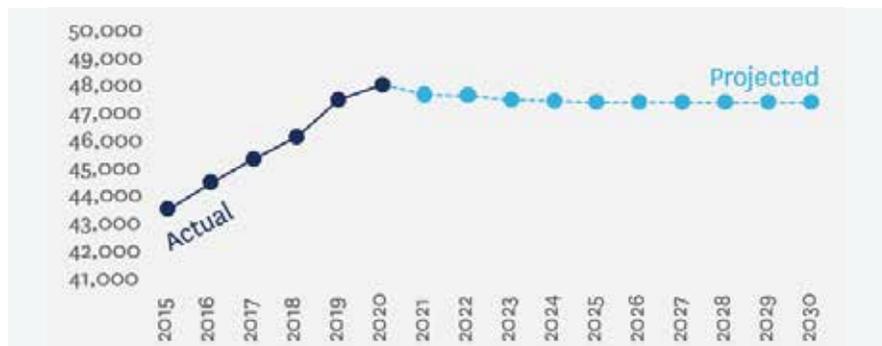
Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis and Campus Master Plan Update 2020-2030 by the University of Florida Business Affairs

University of Florida

Demand for student housing has been triggered by enrollment growth at University Florida adding more than 6,000 students over the last six years. While this trend will not completely limit new student housing development—given demand for luxury student housing, the market will continue to support the replacement of older and/or less competitive properties—there will be more market equilibrium and less of a boom in student housing development that was experienced over the last decade. Conversely, **as the region's top employer, lack of employment growth at UF will also temper market opportunities for office, retail, and housing.**

Real Estate Trends: Retail Development 2010 to 2021

Gainesville
2.9M SF
new deliveries
26% growth

Study Area
53k SF
new deliveries
5% growth

The Standard
Built 2017 | 62K SF
$23 - $29/SF

200K SF
Innovation District

Study Area

2.3M SF
Butler North and Celebration Pointe

Butler North
Built 2016 | 758K SF
$24 - $30/SF

185 E University
Built 2016 | 2K SF
$15/SF
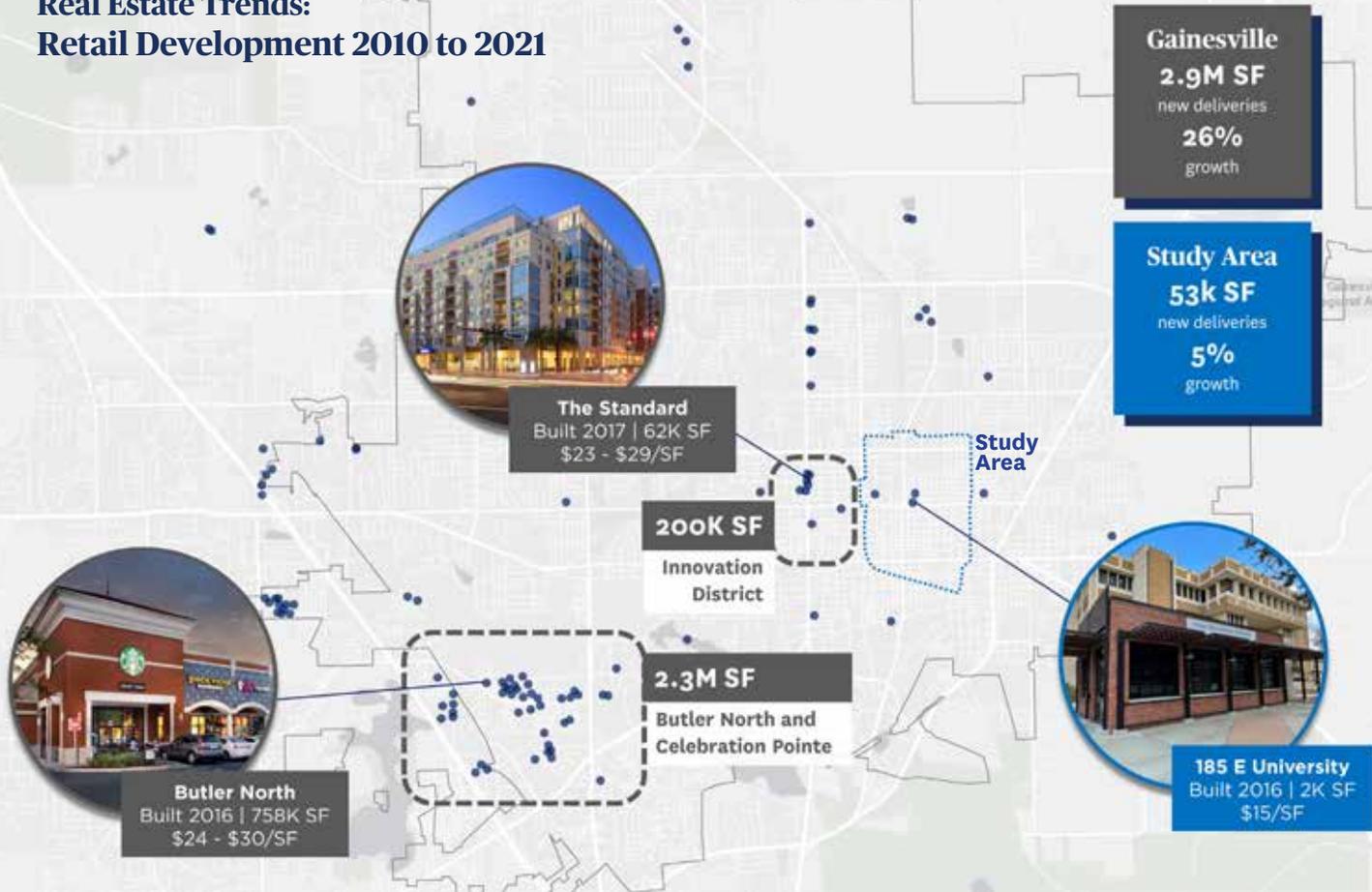
Source: CoStar (Dec 2021)

Retail Trends

From 2010 to 2021, nearly three million square feet of retail space was delivered in Gainesville, of which only 53,000 square feet, or less than two percent, was located Downtown. The vast majority of the new supply was delivered within Butler North and Celebration Pointe, which now contains 2.3 million square feet of space. Much of the new supply in the urban core has consisted of ground-level commercial space contained within student-oriented properties. Within the Study Area, only a few smaller-scale properties have been delivered.

There has been limit retail rent growth over the last decade with average rents peaking at around $20 per square foot in 2019. There has been very little new supply added to the market since the pandemic in 2020 and retail rents have declined over the last two years. While Downtown could support smaller-scale niche retail development, or retail space contained within mixed-use residential buildings, given that the Gainesville market has been very slow to deliver new retail supply over the last few years, this could temper new development opportunities Downtown in the near term.

Downtown contains around one million square feet of retail space with a vacancy rate of 4.2 percent and an average rent of $16.33 per square foot (note that the vacancy rate only reflects actively listed space and not vacant/obsolete properties). The citywide vacancy rate is 3.5 percent with an average rent of $21.75 per square foot for all space, and an average rent of $25.00 per square foot for space delivered in the last 10 years. Downtown's retail space has less marketability and businesses are willing to pay a premium for newer space in suburban locations.

Real Estate Trends:
Office Development 2010 to 2021

Gainesville
690K SF
new deliveries
9%
growth

Study Area
30k SF
new deliveries
3%
growth

800 Second
Built 2019 | 55K SF
$25/SF

200K SF

110K SF
Innovation District

Study Area

5001 Celebration
Built 2018 | 90K SF
$21 - $22/SF

160K SF
Butler North and Celebration Pointe

Nimbus at Gainesville
Built 2017 | SF
$28 - $35/S 16K F
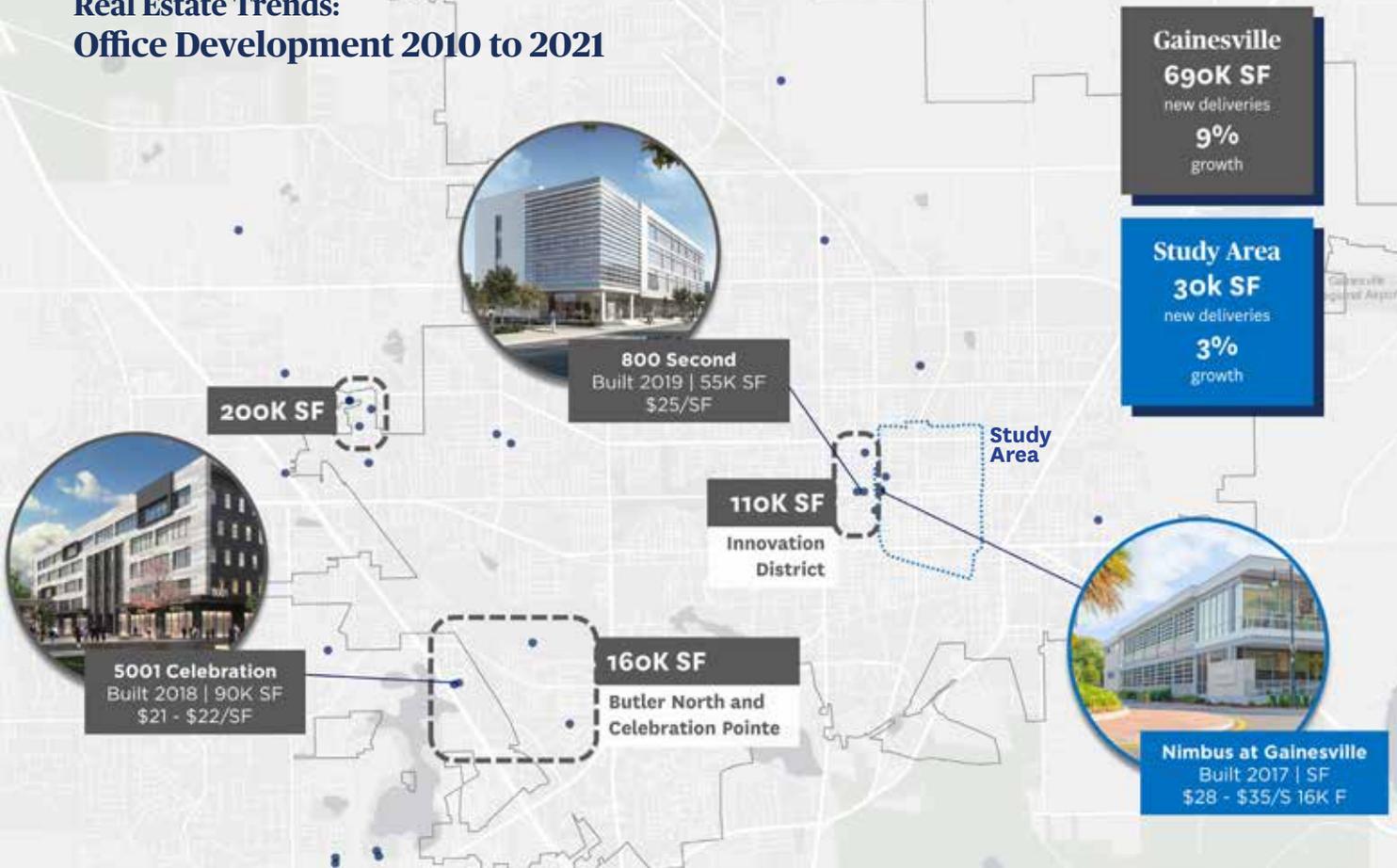
Source: CoStar (Dec 2021)

Office Trends

Downtown contains just under one million square feet of office space representing around 11 percent of the city's supply. From 2010 to 2021, just under 700,000 square feet of new office space was delivered in Gainesville for an overall increase of nine percent. Just over 100,000 square feet of this space was built in the Innovation District. The Study Area added around 30,000 square feet including the 16,000 square foot Nimbus at Gainesville that was delivered in 2017. Other key regional office development nodes, include Butler North Celebration Pointe that added 160,000 square feet and 200,000 square feet built near HCA Florida North Hospital.

Historic Office Deliveries and Office Rents
2007 to 2021
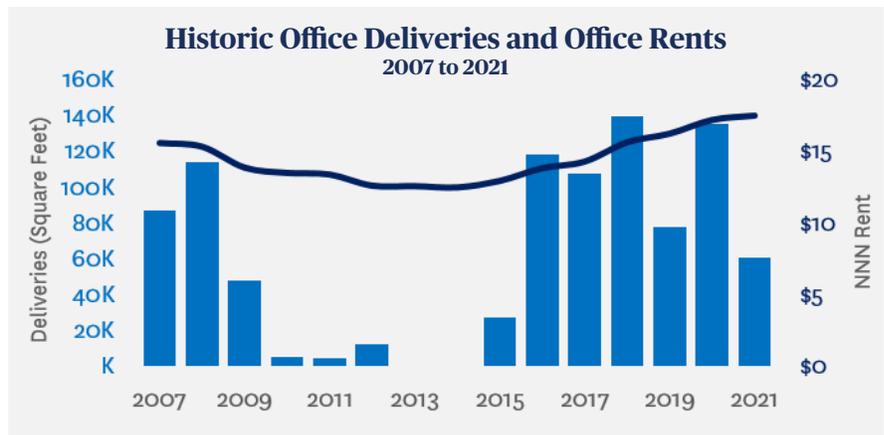
Source: CoStar (Dec 2021)

Average office rents have experienced modest increases since 2015 indicating a relatively health market; however, most of this rent growth has been in properties in lower-density suburban areas. Generally, average rents Downtown ($18.84 per square foot) are consistent with average rents citywide ($18.28 per square foot), although the newest office supply in the market achieves much higher rents of $25.24 per square foot).

33

Real Estate Trends:
Hotel Development 2010 to 2021

Gainesville
1,658 rooms
new deliveries
47%
growth

240 rooms
to be completed by
2022 & 2023
98 rooms
proposed for 2025

Study Area
0
new deliveries
0%
growth

520 rooms
Innovation
District

AC Hotel by Marriott
Gainesville Downtown
To Be Completed 2022
145 Rooms

Study
Area

800 rooms
Butler North and
Celebration Pointe

AC Hotel by Marriott
Gainesville Downtown
Built 2020 | 173 Rooms

**Staybridge Suites**
Gainesville I-75
Built 2018 | 109 Rooms

Source: CoStar (Dec 2021)

Hotel Trends

According to CoStar there are 5,165 hotel rooms in Gainesville, with 188 rooms located in the Study Area. There has been no new supply delivered Downtown since the 124-room Hampton Inn opened in 2009, although the 145-room Hyatt Place is currently under construction and is expected to open in 2022. Overall, the hotel market in Gainesville has been strong with 1,658 rooms delivered since 2010 for an increase of 47 percent.

After a slight decline in average daily rate (ADR) as a result of the pandemic, ADR is now slightly above pre-pandemic levels indicating a full recovery.

Historic Hotel Room Deliveries and Average Daily Rate
2011 to 2021
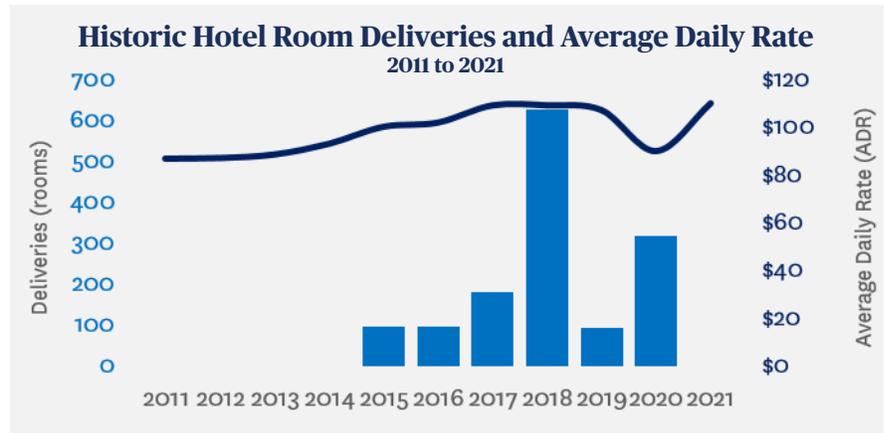
Source: CoStar (Dec 2021)

**Real Estate Trends:
Multifamily Development 2010 to 2021**

Gainesville
1,870 units
new deliveries
7%
growth

Study Area
0 units
new deliveries
0%
growth

Savion Park
Built 2014 | 55 units
$1,219 to $3,196

Integra Twenty Four
Built 2020 | 232 units
$1,450 to $2,238

Innovation District
80 MR units

Study Area

500 MR units
Butler North and Celebration Pointe

226 affordable units

- Market Rate
- Affordable
- For-Sale
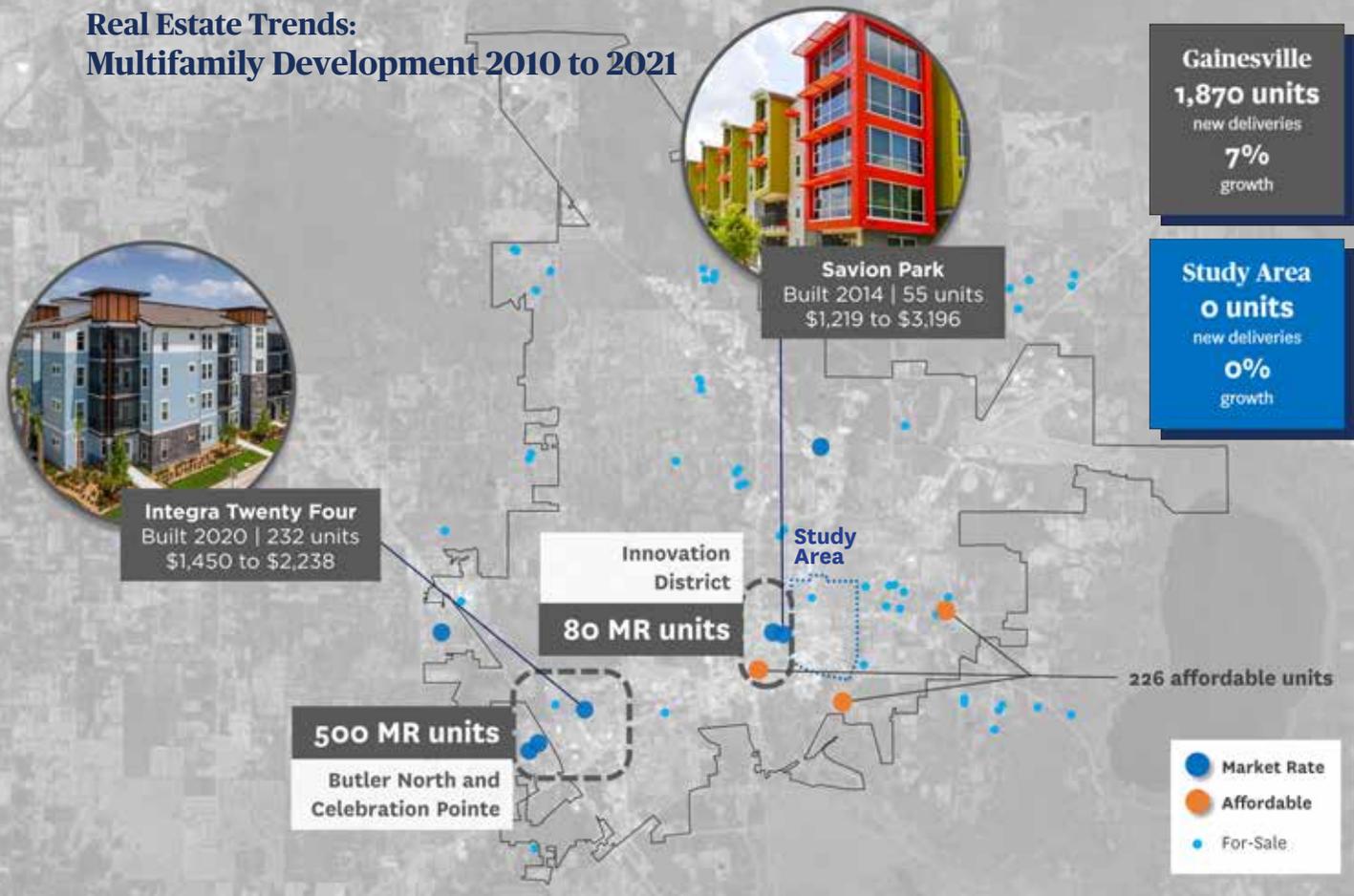
Source: CoStar (Dec 2021) and Zillow (March 2022)

Multifamily Trends

The Study Area only contains around 650 non-student multifamily housing units and no units have been delivered since before 2010. Conversely, the Gainesville market added just under 1,900 units since 2010. A large proportion of these new units are located in Butler North and Celebration Pointe with the 232-unit Integra Twenty Four being the newest and highest quality apartment in the market. The Innovation District has had some multi-family development activity, but only 80 non-student units have been delivered since 2010. There has been modest affordable housing development activity over the last decade with three new properties containing a total of 226 units.

Historic Multifamily Unit Deliveries and Asking Rents per SF
2000 to 2021
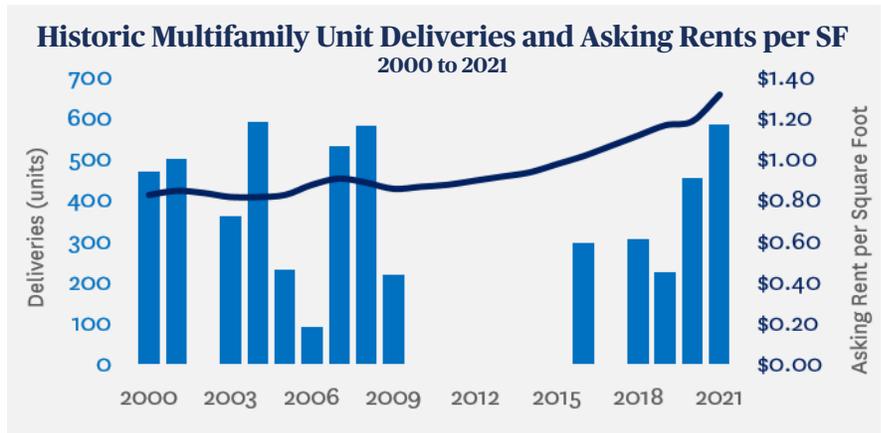
Source: CoStar (Dec 2021)

Multi-family development activity citywide was stronger prior to the Great Recession and did not rebound until 2016. New development activity has been relatively steady and average rents have been increasing annually since 2012. This could be attributed to the new supply with higher asking rents. Average rents Downtown ($1,172) are higher than the citywide average ($1,095), but well-below new supply with average rents of $1,600.

35

Real Estate Trends: Student Housing Supply

Gainesville
10,350 beds
new deliveries
47%
growth

1,800+ beds
to be completed by 2022 & 2023
140+ beds
proposed for 2023

Study Area
570 beds
new deliveries
66%
growth

Midtown Apartments $1,042/bed

Hub on Campus $887/bed

The Continuum $928/bed

Study Area

2nd Avenue Centre $782/bed

Under Construction or Proposed
More than $1,250
$1,000 - $1,250
$750 - $1,000
$500 - $750
Less than $500

Source: CoStar (Dec 2021)

Student Housing Trends

In total, the Gainesville market has nearly 31,000 private student housing beds, not including dormitories and other housing options on the UF campus. Over the last decade, student housing has been the primary commercial real estate product delivered in the market adding more than 10,300 beds for an increase of 47 percent. There are an additional 1,800 beds that are to be completed in 2022 and 2023 and more than 140 additional beds proposed. The Study Area has also had significant student housing development with The Continuum and 2ns Avenue Centre both delivered since 2010. The majority of
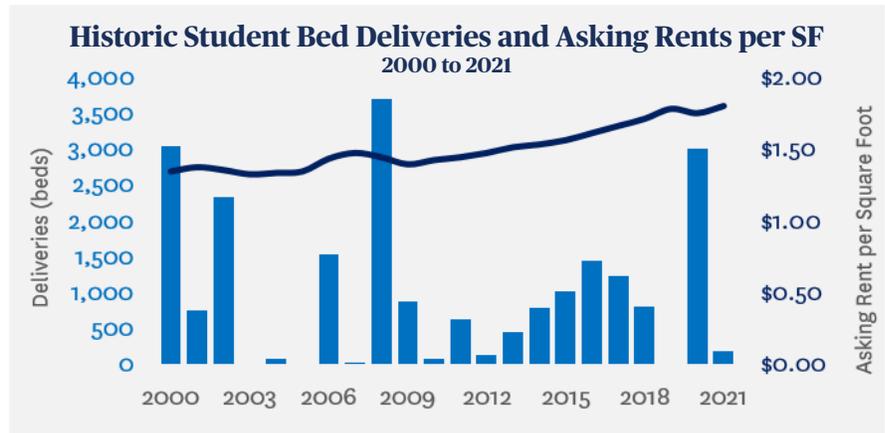
the student housing supply is located just west of the Study Area closer to the UF campus. According to CoStar, rent growth has been strong and will encourage continued development of luxury student products. The encroachment of student housing development

on the Study Area has limited the market feasibility for other types of commercial development—given the very high profitability of student housing, this tends to increase market pressure on potential development sites and pushes land values upward.


Historic Student Bed Deliveries and Asking Rents per SF
2000 to 2021

Source: CoStar (Dec 2021)

Peer Cities

Understanding development trends among Gainesville's peers—southeastern college town markets with state universities with at least 29,000 students—can help inform its market trajectory and competitiveness. From 2010 to 2021, population growth in Gainesville has been modest at around seven percent, generally consistent with Tallahassee (eight percent) and Tuscaloosa (seven percent), although below Auburn (23 percent), Chapel Hill (12 percent), and Athens (10 percent). **Gainesville had the slowest delivery of non-student multi-family housing with total supply only increasing by six percent compared to its peers** (which increases between 9 and 51 percent).

This relatively slow pace of development highlights challenges with non-student housing development Downtown—despite regional population growth and a net increase in high-income renters, the market as a whole has not kept pace with multi-family housing demand. This indicates pent up demand that could be unlocked with targeted strategies and creates opportunity to position Downtown to "capture" a share of regional apartment demand.

Historic Population Growth
2010 to 2021
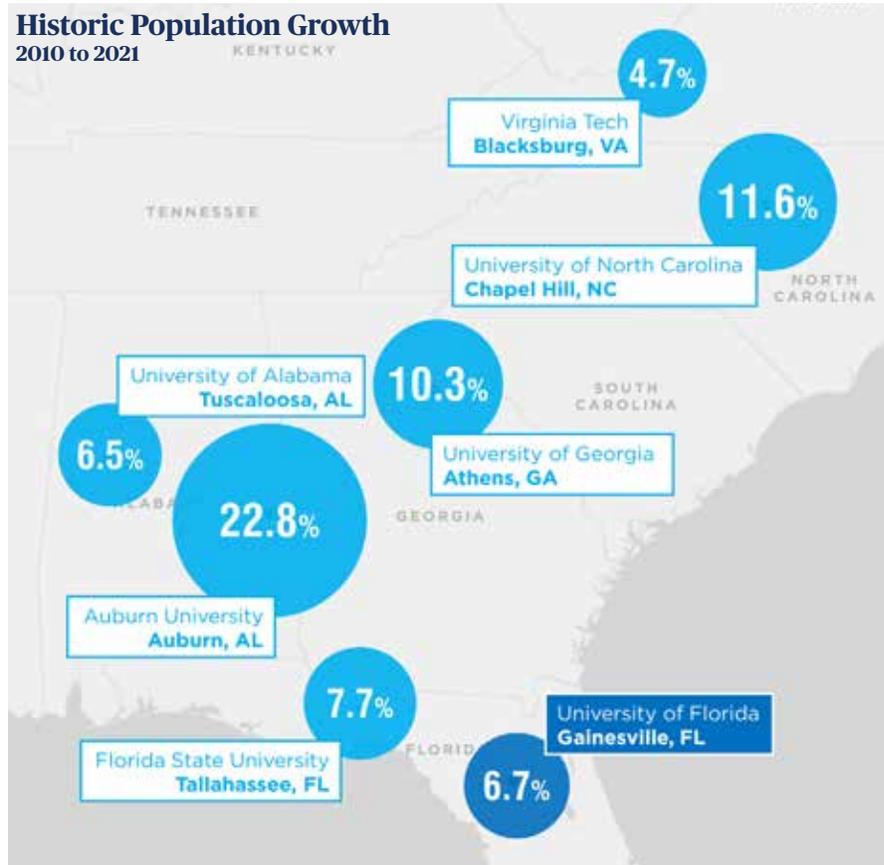
Source: ESRI (2021)

Growth in Multifamily Units
2010 to 2021
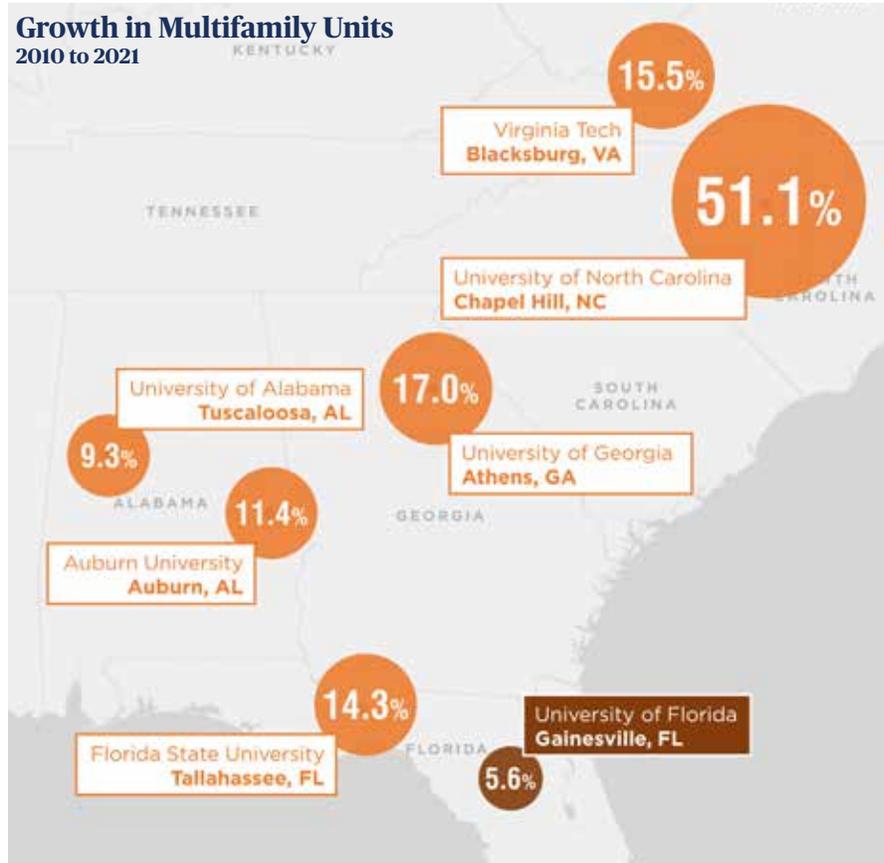
Source: CoStar (Dec 2021)

Downtown Gainesville:
10-Year Development Program

NON-STUDENT MULTIFAMILY
700-900
units

RETAIL
30-50K SF
of new retail space

OFFICE
50-90K SF
of new office space

Based on 1) real estate supply trends, including the pace development by product type, 2) an analysis of projected population, employment, student enrollment, and tourism growth in the Gainesville market, and 3) reasonable capture of demand for Downtown, **a 10-year development program was established to inform a land use and real estate strategy. This type of analysis is a blend of art and science that considers market data, but also community feedback, strategic objectives, land capacity and, development feasibility.** While there may be very strong demand for certain types of real estate such as multi-family housing, the

supply analysis helps level-set the amount and pace of this development. Conversely, as in the case of Downtown, while the supply analysis may indicate limited development activity for certain types of real estate products, we can rely on the demand analysis to show market support and devise a strategy to help change the market trajectory. This analysis is not without limitations—the development program represents "baseline demand" based on current market conditions and spending patterns. For example, if a major corporation decided to build a headquarters in Downtown Gainesville, this would have a major impact on Downtown's economic trajectory

and would be supportive of many of the goals of this plan, including generating new employment opportunities and supporting new housing and retail development. However, this type of economic development activity is highly variable and unpredictable and should not be the basis for a growth strategy. **The following development program aims to build upon existing Downtown assets, while supporting more of a growth-from-within economic strategy.**

Multi-family

Consistent with other similar downtown areas, housing demand will be the primary driver of real estate development activity. The student housing market has created barriers for non-student development (given the economic productivity of student housing, this tends to increase land values for all types of real estate), although **there is demand for 700 to 900 new non-student apartments throughout the study area, that if delivered, could be absorbed within a reasonable timeframe.**

Retail

Based on new hotel development activity, projected population growth within a 15-minute drive of Downtown, projected regional employment growth, and daily spending patterns for visitors, residents, and workers, **Downtown could capture between 30,000 and 50,000 square feet of net new retail demand.** This less-than-robust projection can also be attributed to abundant regional competition for certain types of retail, but can still inform a few strategic goals for Downtown: 1) smaller-scale, experiential, and differentiated retail development should be expected and encouraged, and 2) the viability and expansion of Downtown's retail offerings are very much tied to its ability to broaden the customer base both in terms of regional residents, visitors, and tourists.

Office

Based on the latest employment projections from Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, Alachua County is projected to add around 15,000 net new jobs over the next eight years (2020 to 2028). Based on average square footage per worker and office utilization by occupation, this translates to around 1.2 million of office demand county-wide. Based on the delivery of new office space over the last decade, regional employment distribution, and competition, **there is between 50,000 and 90,000 square feet of office demand for Downtown, much of which could be accommodated by exiting vacant space.** Any new office product will need to be smaller in scale and more niche, or delivered through an institutional partner (e.g. UF or a public-private partnership).

Commercial Strategy: Bending the Curve

While Downtown has a stable employment base, it will have to take a more active role to support startups, entrepreneurs, and storefront tenanting to become a more urban and diversified place. Downtown has the opportunity to leverage its density, walkability, and existing building stock to create a more experiential and competitive commercial district.

Tech and Professional Services		
1,500 jobs	**16%** of jobs	**17%** growth
Total Employment in Study Area	Share of jobs in Study Area	Proj. Employment Growth*

Retail and Hospitality		
1,100 jobs	**12%** of jobs	**13%** growth
Total Employment in Study Area	Share of jobs in Study Area	Proj. Employment Growth*

Government and Education		
5,300 jobs	**56%** of jobs	**5%** growth
Total Employment in Study Area	Share of jobs in Study Area	Proj. Employment Growth*

Industrial Space Jobs		
500 jobs	**6%** of jobs	**12%** growth
Total Employment in Study Area	Share of jobs in Study Area	Proj. Employment Growth*

Employment Density
2021

Study Area

Source: ESRI (2021) and Florida Department of Economic Opportunity

Key Sectors

There are approximately 9,500 jobs Downtown, of which, more than half (56 percent) are public sector given the concentration of city, county, state and federal government operations as well as ancillary UF operations. While only modest government sector employment growth is projected over the next ten years, Downtown's government employment base provides economic stability and is generally more diverse and representative of the community as a whole compared to other sectors. At the same time, **Downtown Gainesville will need to position itself to capture a greater share of other growing sectors county-wide that tend to gravitate to downtown areas,** including Professional, Technical, and Financial Services jobs (17 percent projected growth) and Retail and Hospitality (13 percent growth). Additionally, employment in light manufacturing and other industrial space jobs are projected to increase by 12 county-wide and the Depot Park could accommodate a portion of this growth with a cluster of maker and artisanal fabrication jobs.

Employment Density

There are abundant advantages of Downtown as an employment center given existing density, access to public transportation, presence of community services and civic resources, existing public spaces, and proximity to the UF campus. However, market barriers will need to be overcome to provide the types of real estate products, services, and investments in the public realm to enhance its overall competitiveness.

Gainesville's Competitive Retail Landscape

From a retail development perspective, Downtown Gainesville must compete with multiple retail and commercial clusters around the city, many of which are within a 15-minute drive. There is an estimated oversupply of 3.1 million square feet of retail based on local household buying power. Celebration Pointe has delivered approximately 2.3 million square feet of commercial space since 2010 and offers a differentiated product and experience in a more hermetic suburban setting. It captures a share of would-be Downtown customers given its ease of vehicular access and clean and safe environment.

The market is oversaturated in terms of total retail supply and the future of Downtown's retail environment will never compete with suburban retail clusters in terms of scale (e.g. home goods stores, supermarkets, etc.). Downtown areas are typically best positioned to offer a more authentic, vibrant, and pedestrian-friendly retail and cultural experience; however, investments are needed in the public realm, services, and marketing to allow it to compete with places like Celebration Pointe that has been created to emulate an urban experience.
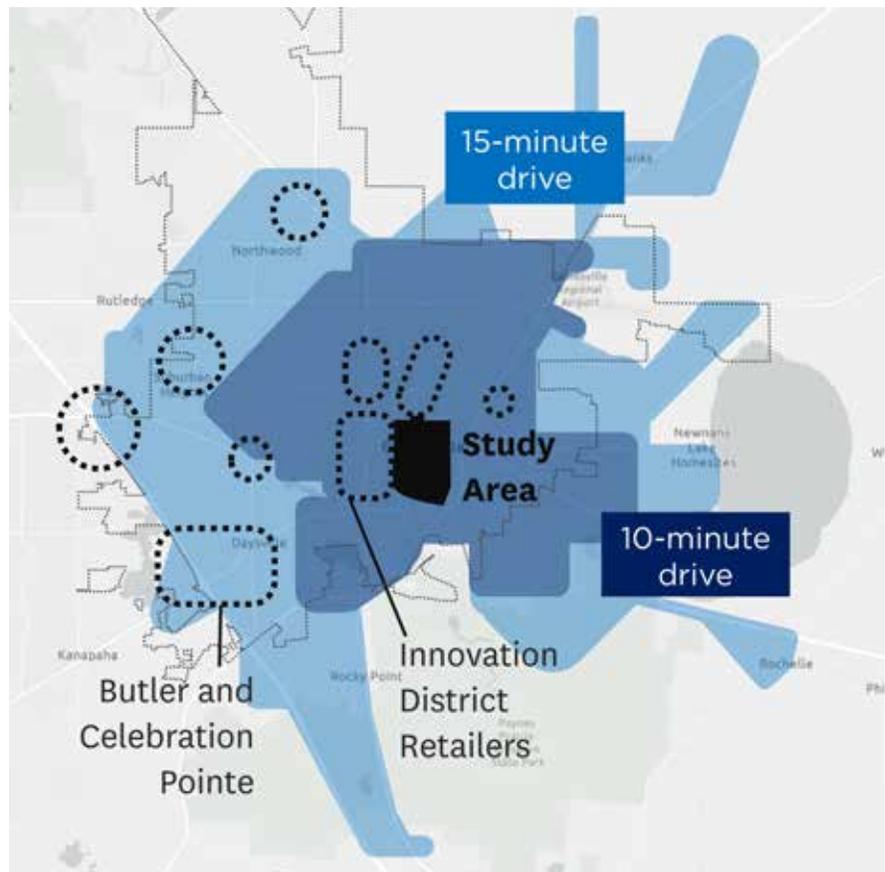
Source: ESRI (2021)

Demand is Finite

Considering the existing supply and competitiveness of nearby suburban retail clusters, **it is important to recognize that even as Downtown attracts new investment over the next decade by further leveraging the buying power of new residents, downtown workers, and hotel guests, demand is finite.** In total, based on a reasonable capture and estimated spending of 25,000 hotel guests, 1,000 new workers Downtown, and 7,000 new residents within a 15-minute drive, average annual retail spending of $41 million translates to market support of less 40,000 square feet Downtown or roughly 10 to 15 storefronts.

This emphasizes the importance of supporting smaller-scale, locally-owned businesses that can thrive in smaller spaces, but also offer a more authentic experience that cannot be found elsewhere in the region. If perceptions of safety and parking accessibility can be increased, in addition to a comprehensive marketing and branding program, a greater capture of regional customers would further strengthen the retail environment.

03

Community Engagement

Retail

Retail

Jobs that allow GNV musicians to EAT. ♪

Please Save Our Black Neighborhoods

PEDESTRIAN-ONLY STREETS!

Arts + Music

Easier Parking

DENSE AFFORDABLE PERMANENT HOUSING!!!
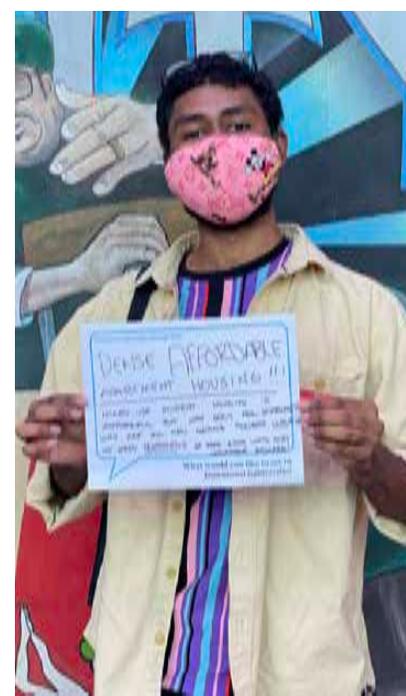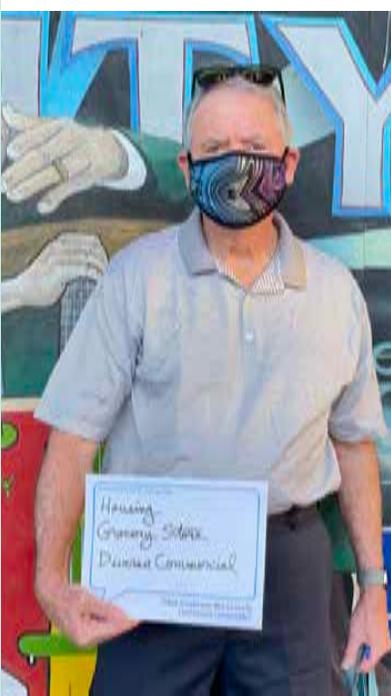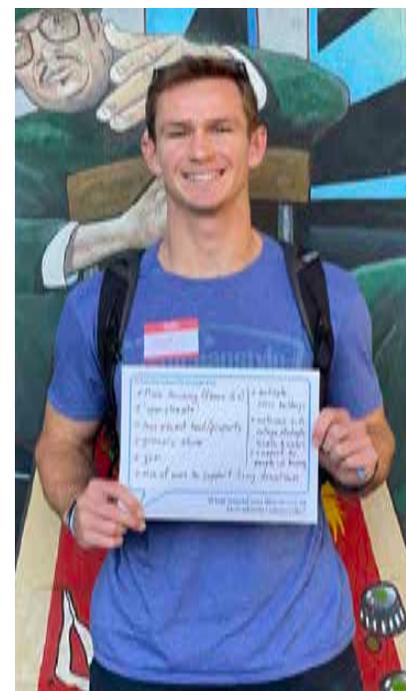
Engagement Methods

This plan represents the collective voices and ideas of hundreds of Gainesville neighbors.

Empowered through this planning process with decision-making roles, Gainesville neighbors from across the city had a direct and meaningful role in guiding the development of the Downtown Gainesville Strategic Plan. Through two Community Meetings, 15 stakeholder focus groups, and online and paper surveys/activities, the ideas in this plan represent the voices of 800+ Gainesville neighbors. Our

planning process engaged the community at large with the support from neighborhood leaders, the business community, institutional partners, and city staff and leadership.

A 16-member Neighbor Advisory Group (NAG) of key community leaders and neighborhood liaisons guided the process, meeting with the planning team at key project milestones. This group shaped the outcome of

this plan and served as trusted voices for communicating and encouraging participation in the planning process.

The engagement work was endorsed by City Commission at the onset of the plan and followed the City of Gainesville's Core Values for Community Engagement, shown below. This approach ensures an equitable process with shared accountability and meaningful participation.

Core Values for Community Engagement

We seek to ensure that individuals and groups most affected by a decision will be **involved in the decision-making process.** **1**	We seek to ensure that the public's contributions will **influence the decision.** **2**	We strive to make sustainable decisions by **recognizing and communicating the needs and interests** of all participants, including decision makers. **3**	We seek out and facilitate the involvement of those potentially **affected by or interested in a decision.** **4**
We seek input from participants in **designing how they participate.** **5**	We will **provide participants with the information they need** to participate in a meaningful way. **6**	We will communicate to participants how their **input affected the decision.** **7**	We will continuously improve our awareness of power and culture so that we can respect the **diverse histories, experiences and needs** of local residents. **8**

Source: City of Gainesville Engagement Toolkit
(adapted from the IAP2)

800+
Total GNV voices engaged through this process

2
Community Meetings at Bo Diddley Plaza

15
Stakeholder Focus Groups

150
Neighbors attended two Community Meetings

474
Neighbors responded to our Online Survey

63
Neighbors participated in our Online Activities

56
Neighbors filled out paper surveys at community events

90
Stakeholders engaged in 15 focus groups

16
Neighbor Advisory Group Members

170
Comments through online activities on the project website

320
Comments on our meeting activities and boards

45

Neighbor Advisory Group

The 16-member Neighbor Advisory Group (NAG) served as a representative voice for the Gainesville community in the development of a shared vision for the future of downtown. This group met four times with the project team at key project milestones to guide the process, establish priorities, and support the plan's engagement efforts.

Composed of neighbors from both downtown and nearby communities, business leaders, institutional partners, and downtown stewards, the NAG was critical in shaping the plan's recommendations and championing its ideas. Throughout the process, NAG members provided the project team with invaluable knowledge about downtown, confirming ideas and direction that resulted from our community engagement process.

In addition to the roles outlined above, NAG members also supported this process through the following actions:

► Refined and affirmed a community-driven vision for future growth and/or development in the downtown area.

► Augmented the planning team and city staff's communication and engagement with neighbors, local businesses, and stakeholders.

► Guided, evaluated, and helped refine recommendations that aligned with the key findings from the plan's engagement process.

► Served as champions for the plan's ideas and vision, helping spread the word on the plan's 16 ideas for downtown.

► Set the stage for the plan's implementation by providing insight on how to best translate the ideas in this plan into real outcomes.

Conducted virtually, NAG meetings included brief presentations from the project team, followed by lively discussion. Fully engaged throughout the entire process, the NAG met four times with the project team at all stages of the plan.

Stakeholder Focus Groups

The project team moderated 15 virtual stakeholder sessions with more than 100 participants between July, 2021 and August, 2022. Below are our major findings and take-aways from these conversations:

► **Neighborhoods around downtown** would like to preserve and enhance their existing character.

► **Downtown's strengths** are its walkability, diversity, authenticity, and destinations.

► **Density in and around downtown** is associated with housing for the University of Florida students. Community members recognize that there is a need for more housing downtown that goes beyond products for students.

► **Downtown needs to reinvent itself** and find a competitive niche to become viable, especially considering its local and regional competition, such as Celebration Pointe.

► **For downtown to be successful** there needs to be a critical mass of local retail in a walkable environment. While downtown has the foundation for this to flourish, it feels dirty and littered.

► **A perceived lack of safety** is exacerbated and augmented by a lack of lighting and the prevalence of a homeless population.

► **Connectivity is a big concern** - there are gaps in walkability and bikability between downtown and its nearby assets.

► **A perceived lack of parking** may be rooted in the fact that parking, though plentiful, is located in paid parking garages or within a short walk away from destinations.

Following these conversations, the planning team conducted additional stakeholder discussions in January and February of 2022. These meetings engaged key community leaders and parties to address on-going topics being discussed. As part of these follow ups, the planning team met with the following groups:

► Santa Fe College

► UF Innovate

► AMJ Group Inc.

► Mickle Family

► Alachua County

► Alachua County Public Schools

► Downtown Business Watch

► CADE Museum and the Thriving Cities Team

90+ Stakeholders
Engaged through this process

Neighborhood Leadership: Downtown, Porters Quarters, Duckpond, Springhill/Power District, Pleasant Street

Downtown Businesses

Educational Institutions

Emerging Leaders

Former Downtown Business Owners

Hospitality

Development and Real Estate

Arts and Culture

Planning and Design Professionals

Social Services

GCRA Advisory Board (GCRA members also attended various sessions)

City Staff (City staff also attended various sessions)

Online/Analog Engagement

A key part of any engagement process includes engagement methods outside traditional public meetings. Guided by the city's Engagement Toolkit, the planning team and city staff devised a strategy to augment engagement through both online and analog means.

Online Engagement

Online engagement launched with the plan's official public roll-out and occurred concurrent with all phases of work. Through a project website, online activities, two online surveys, and the city's official social media channels, Gainesville neighbors with Internet access were able to view meeting materials, provide input, and contact members from the team. The plan's online tools included:

► **Project Website:** A dedicated page on the city's official website served as an online repository of project information, meeting materials, and links to online surveys and activities. Updated continuously throughout the entirety of the process, this website allowed visitors to subscribe for email updates, and linked to social media events for upcoming meetings.

► **Online Activities:** A variety of online tools allowed for neighbors to directly share input and ideas with the planning team. These tools included an interactive map where users could geolocate opportunities, issues, and general comments about downtown, and an ideas wall that served as a community bulletin board where neighbors could up-vote and comment on others' ideas.

► **Online Feedback:** Conducted at two stages of the planning process, online surveys engaged the community to augment questions asked at in-person events, and ask for input on draft ideas and recommendations. With 474 responses, these surveys were invaluable in reaching a wide swath of the community.

Paper Surveys

While we find that there are certain populations that are comfortable attending community meetings or responding to online surveys, other groups are traditionally under-represented in these forums. In order to reach these under-represented voices, the planning team worked with city staff to identify key groups that would benefit from additional in-person engagement. As such, city staff attended various gatherings in East Gainesville following the larger community meetings, and distributed more than 400 paper surveys mirroring questions asked through our online engagement platforms. These surveys resulted in 56 responses from Gainesville neighbors who largely self-identified as Black or African-American.

Project Website
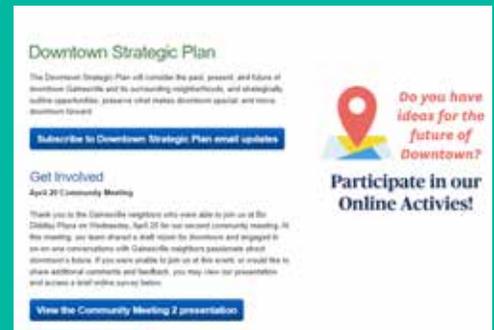
Ideas Wall

Interactive Map
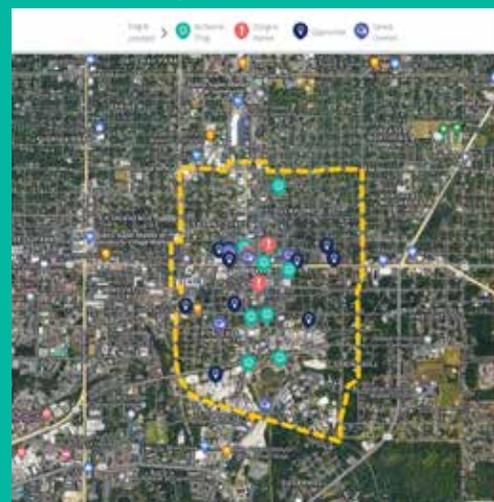
Spotlight: How Neighbors Experience Downtown*

▶ **HOW OFTEN do you visit downtown GNV?**

Daily 33%

Once a Week 12%

2-3 Times/ Week 38%

Special Events 5%

Hardly Ever 2%

Monthly 9%
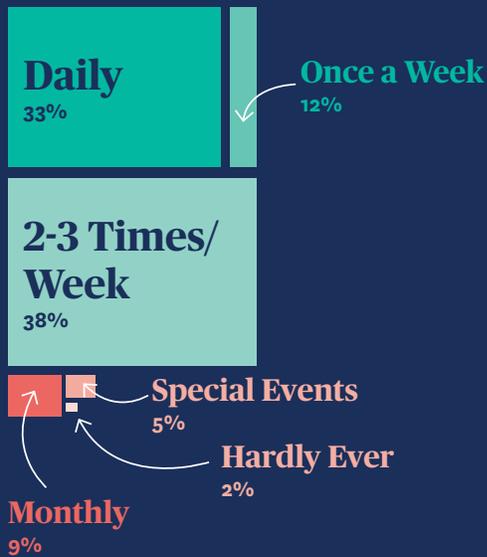
▶ **What do YOU USUALLY DO in Downtown GNV?**

Visit a Cafe or Restaurant — 20%

Meet with friends — 16%

Enjoy a show — 15%

Enjoy a public park — 14%

I work Downtown — 8%

Exercise — 7%

Go to a night club/bar — 7%

Shop — 6%

I live Downtown — 5%

▶ **WHEN do you usually visit downtown GNV?**

	WEEKDAYS		WEEKENDS
Late Evening	10%		14%
Evening	31%		30%
Afternoon	23%		25%
Lunchtime	19%		15%
Morning	17%		15%
Never	2%		2%

BO DIDDLEY PLAZA

*Feedback collected from GNV neighbors at community events and online surveys

49
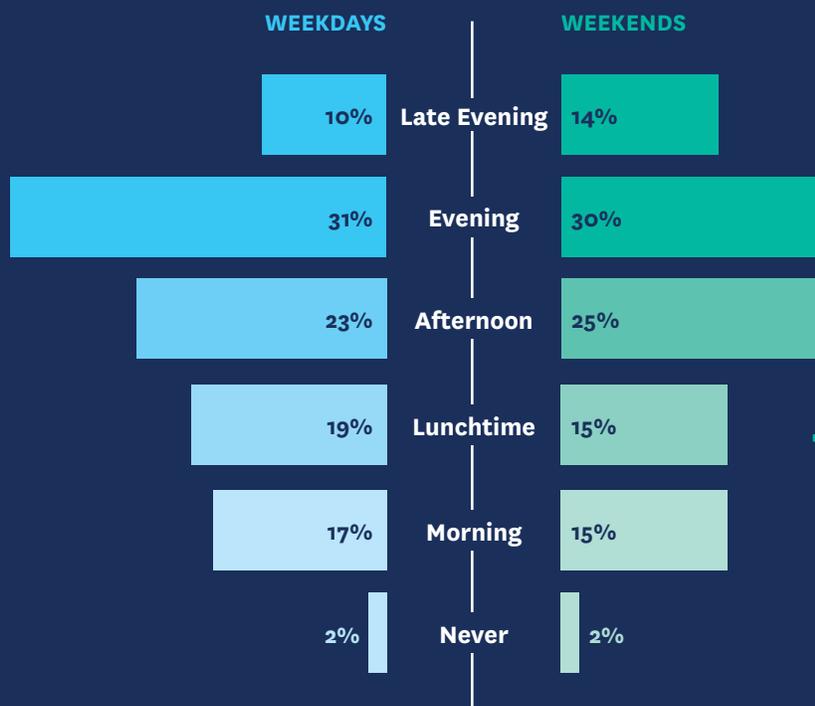
Community Meetings

Held at Bo Diddley Plaza, two community meetings brought hundreds of Gainesville neighbors together to help the planning team craft a vision for downtown. These meetings served as an invaluable tool in engaging the community at key milestones in the planning process. Through presentations, displays, activity stations, and one-on-one conversations, our meetings served a critical purpose in learning about how Gainesville neighbors use and perceive downtown, getting input on draft concepts and recommendations, and celebrating the vision for downtown. At both meetings, the planning team was joined by community organizations that provided informational materials on their current programs and initiatives. These parters included the CADE Museum, Greater Gainesville Chamber, Visit Gainesville, and the GCRA, which also provided volunteers to support planning staff at both events.

► **Community Meeting 1:** At the end of October 2021, more than 70 Gainesville neighbors joined the planning team to discuss downtown's assets, issues, and opportunities. Culminating the plan's first phase of engagement, this meeting included various activity stations in an open house format. Neighbors

▶ **What BEST DESCRIBES you?**

I visit Downtown Gainesville | 39%

I am a resident of Downtown Gainesville | 15%

I work in Downtown Gainesville | 14%

I own property in Downtown Gainesville | 10%

I would like to live in Downtown Gainesville | 8%

Other | 8%

I am a renter in Downtown Gainesville | 5%

I own a business in Downtown Gainesville | 4%

were asked to share their feedback on what they like about downtown, what issues they would like to see change or improved, and what opportunities they envision for the future.

► **Community Meeting 2:** Toward the end of April 2022, Gainesville neighbors joined the planning team for a second event at Bo Diddley Plaza. At this meeting, the planning team shared a presentation outlining 16 Ideas for downtown that directly reflected six key

findings we learned through our engagement process. These findings, discussed at the end of this chapter, create the backbone for the plan's recommendations. Following the presentation, the planning team gathered around various activity stations to solicit feedback and input, while holding one-on-one conversations. This meeting, which marked the culmination of the second of three project phases, provided the necessary direction to complete this plan.

▶ **What would you LIKE TO SEE in Downtown Gainesville?**

#1 **More Businesses and Retail Options**

> " Evening retail! Mixed variety."

> " Housing, grocery store, diverse commercial."

> " Build economy for black business owners in predominately black neighborhoods."

#2 **More walkable and transit-friendly streets**

> " Calm speeds on University Ave. Wider Sidewalks."

> " Pedestrian streets and walkability/cycling"

#3 **Celebrate downtown's uniqueness and diversity**

> " Stand out, don't be just like another American small town."

#4 **Parking concerns (both surplus and deficit)**

Community Meeting 1 & Online Survey Results: What are your favorite places/things Downtown?

NW 8th Avenue

4 | Thomas Center

Pleasant Street

N Main Street

Duckpond

3 | Bo Diddley Plaza

W University Avenue

2 | Hippodrome Theater

SW 6th Street

Porters

Springhill

SE 9th Street

SE 11th Street

1 | Depot Park

Depot Ave SE

Gainesville-Hawthorne State Trail
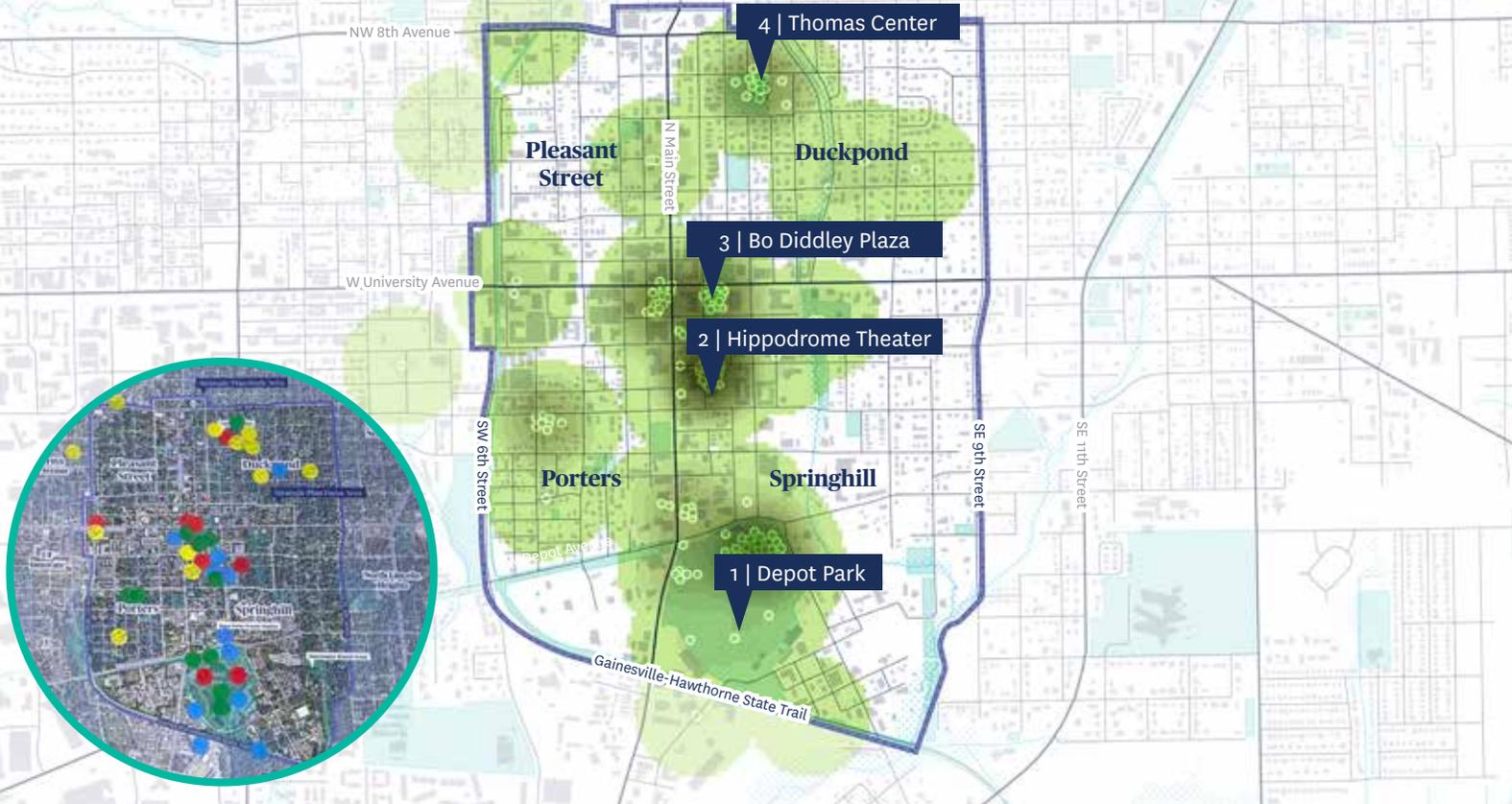
At the first community meeting and through online and paper surveys, we asked Gainesville neighbors to share their favorite places and things about downtown.

The places we heard the most were the enduring assets most commonly associated with downtown, such as the Hippodrome Theater, Depot Park, Bo Diddley Plaza, and the Thomas Center. As seen in the map above, these places fall on a north-south orientation and are within walking distance to each other. Nonetheless, when asked if they would walk between these destinations, some neighbors hesitated due gaps in walkability. Similarly, when asked what things they

liked to do downtown, most neighbors commented on downtown's great restaurants, parks, and walkable streets.

**#1
Food/Restaurants**

**#2
Parks/Trees**

**#3
Walkable**

**#4
Arts/
Theater**

**#5
Hippodrome
Theater**

**#6
Music**

**#7
Character/
History**

Community Meeting 1 & Online Survey Results: What opportunities should we address?

Connect Sweetwater Creek

Improve University Ave

Pedestrian Improvements to SE 1st Street

Infill Vacant Lots

Activate the Power District

Pleasant Street

Duckpond

Porters

Depot Park

Springhill
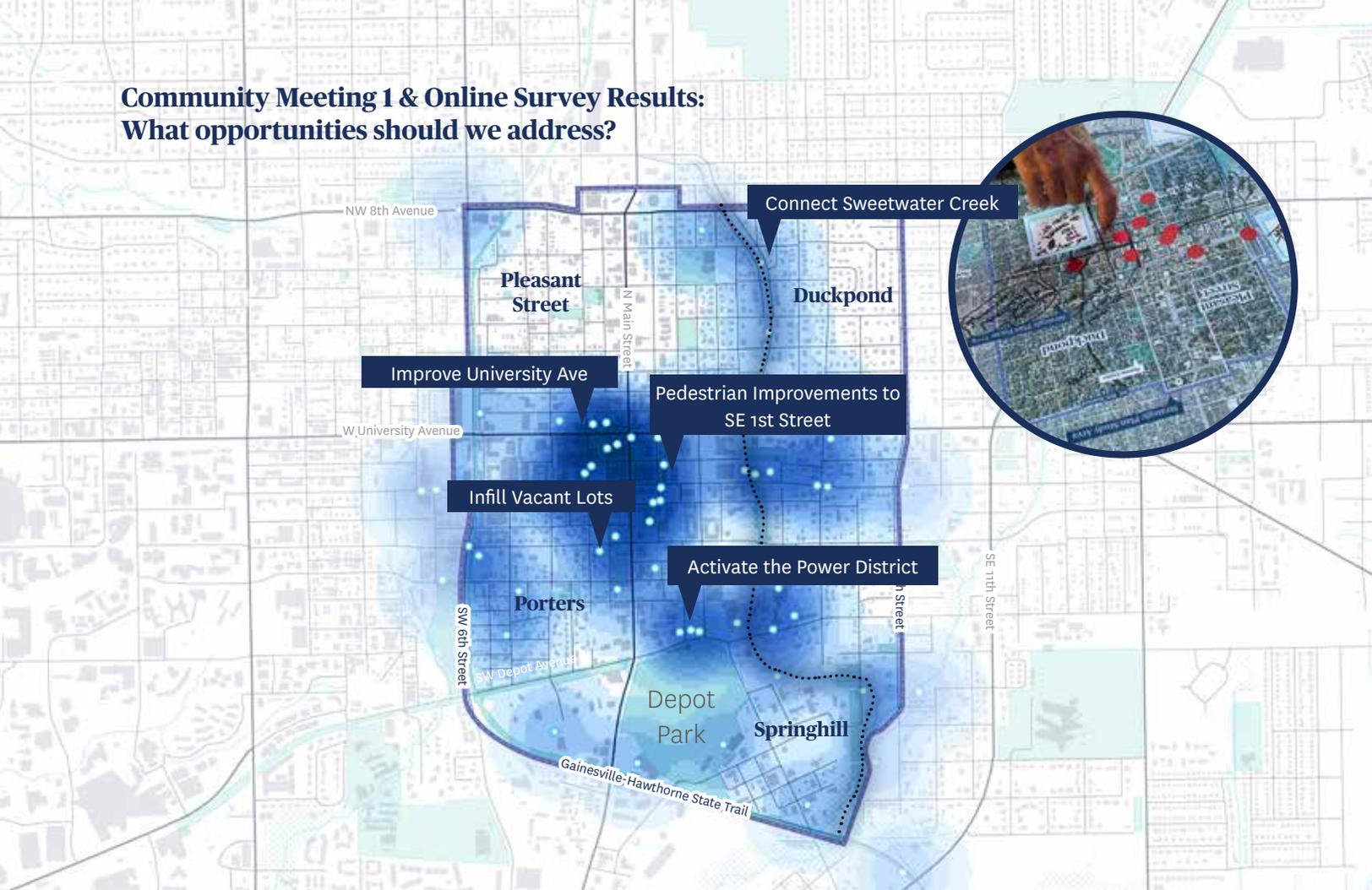
When asked to share their vision for opportunities in downtown, most neighbors focused on downtown's vibrancy as a potential magnet in attracting more local businesses to the area. Neighbors noted that while downtown already has an eclectic mix of restaurants and retailers, more local and unique offerings were needed to help bring a critical mass of activity.

Other opportunities shared were topics previously noted as challenges faced by downtown. For instance, downtown's lack of connectivity was seen as an opportunity to build a network of pedestrian-friendly streets.

As seen in the map above, one of the most popular opportunities was the

Sweetwater Creek corridor. Drawn on various maps by several neighbors, this corridor was described as a "hidden gem" that was ripe for a rediscovery.

> "Consider more year-round regular programming to attract visitors from citizens and visitors alike. Make downtown more accessible."

#1 More Businesses

#2 Ped/Bike Options

#3 Affordable Housing

> "Expand opportunities for unique and local businesses."

#4 Parking

#5 Safety/ Lighting

#6 Transit

#7 Homelessness

Direction from the GNV Community

This plan reflects the diverse and engaged community that shaped it.

The recommendations in this plan reflect hundreds of voices engaged in this process through community meetings, surveys, stakeholder focus groups, and online tools. From neighbors who lived walking distance to downtown, to those who drive in from the surrounding region, the comments we received reflected the diversity and richness of this community. In this diversity, we found six common threads that permeated across the hundreds of ideas and comments we received. These are listed below and serve as the backbone of this plan.

► **Become a Destination:** Downtown should strive to become a magnet that draws in visitors from across the Gainesville region. Building on its enduring assets like Depot Park and the CADE Museum, downtown needs to position itself as a destination for all Gainesville neighbors.

► **Connecting the Dots:** Downtown needs to focus on improving connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists. Though downtown's assets are within walking distance of each other, they often feel disconnected due a lack of walkable, comfortable, active and safe. Similarly, downtown needs to improve its connections to surrounding neighborhoods.

► **Strengthen the Relationship with Adjacent Neighborhoods:** Neighbors living near downtown value the character and charm of their neighborhoods, and would like to ensure that growth in downtown is mutually beneficial and compatible with the scale of their residential areas.

► **Increase Housing Opportunities:** Because of its proximity to services and destinations, downtown is the most equitable and logical place for denser housing. Housing in the downtown needs to expand beyond student housing to offer affordable and market-rate options that serve the needs of families, young professionals, and an aging population.

► **Create a Supportive Local Business Environment:** Downtown's eclectic, walkable, and vibrant environment is a natural fit for locally owned businesses. In tandem with additional housing, downtown needs more businesses to thrive and expand economic opportunities.

► **Maintain and Enhance Downtown:** It is imperative that the ideas in this plan are implemented and result in real and tangible outcomes. For this to happen, downtown needs a dedicated steward that focuses on maintaining current assets, and enhancing what is already there.

Six key findings from our community engagement...

Become a Destination

Downtown needs to establish itself as a regional destination that attracts all Gainesville neighbors.

Connect the Dots

There is a lack of continuous walking, biking and transit connections in the downtown area.

Strengthen the Relationship with Adjacent Neighborhoods

Neighborhoods around downtown would like to preserve and enhance their existing character.

Increase Housing Opportunities

There is a lack of affordable and market-rate housing in the downtown area beyond student-oriented housing.

Create a Supportive Local Business Environment

Downtown needs a critical mass of locally owned businesses that support a vibrant local economy.

Maintain and Enhance Downtown

Establish an entity and implementable action plan to maintain and enhance downtown's assets.

16 Ideas For Downtown GNV

Setting a Vision for Downtown

Responding to the community's direction, the planning team created six overall themes that will shape the evolution of Downtown Gainesville.

This clarity of purpose allowed focused time, attention and detail to be paid to the issues and opportunities that mattered most to the Gainesville community. From these six themes, 16 Ideas were created to provide a framework for the strategies and action items that will enable change and transformation in Downtown Gainesville.

In this chapter, each of the six themes are explored, with the relevant ideas providing greater explanation and detail in to the why, what and how for each. This will solidify **why this idea** is important and **why it matters**. It will answer what it could look like and what needs to be done. It will offer suggestions on how it can be successfully accomplished and achieved. With additional detail on objectives and recommendations for each

idea, it will become clear how each idea can be enacted and implemented.

This section concludes by answering the most important question of all: **Who is going to do all of this?** Just as this plan was created by the community, implementing this plan will no doubt be a community-wide effort. However, it must be guided by a consistent, focused and supported organization. The final idea lays the groundwork for the **creation of an Implementation Entity** to begin the work of transforming downtown. Successful in other cities across Florida, the region and the country, such organizations work collaboratively with all community voices and leaders to make sustainable, lasting change in downtowns. Gainesville should be no different in continuing this

successful model for downtown revitalization. This plan sets in place the roadmap for the community to take hold of these 16 ideas and turn them into actionable projects and policies that fulfill the vision for a more vibrant, equitable, and active Downtown Gainesville.

Based on the direction from the GNV community, the 16 Ideas for downtown are...

Become a Destination

► **Idea 1:** Build Investment Around Local Strengths

► **Idea 2:** Shape Downtown Identity

► **Idea 3:** Create a Downtown Jewel

Connect the Dots

► **Idea 4:** Balance the need for parking with the desire for a walkable, urban core.

► **Idea 5:** Prioritize Streets to Meet City Standards

► **Idea 6:** Activate the Sweetwater Corridor

► **Idea 7:** Create a Greenway Loop

Strengthen the Relationship with Adjacent Neighborhoods

► **Idea 8:** Connect Neighborhoods to Downtown

► **Idea 9:** Establish Transition Areas

Increase Housing Opportunities

► **Idea 10:** Address Housing at Scale

► **Idea 11:** Support Affordable and Mixed Income Housing

► **Idea 12:** Facilitate Market Rate Housing

Create a Supportive Local Business Environment

► **Idea 13:** Unlock Real Estate Potential

► **Idea 14:** Increase Direct Small Business Assistance

Maintain and Enhance Downtown

► **Idea 15:** Form a Place-Management Organization

► **Idea 16:** Continue to Build Capacity

Become a Destination

Across the spectrum of our conversations in the Gainesville community, the desire for a great downtown was a common theme.

There is widespread recognition of the significant role that downtown serves in support of daily life and commerce in the City as well as its critical function of driving fresh investment, drawing talent, and attracting visitors.

Downtown wears multiple hats and serves a variety of audiences, and there is not a singular move or stand-alone idea that will sustain Downtown Gainesville as a destination over the long term. Downtown is at various times an entertainment venue, ceremonial space, leisure space, public market, cultural center, commercial hub, and community living room.

To effectively deliver these various public functions and serve as a welcoming attraction for both residents and visitors, the approach to making downtown special requires a combination of efforts related to business diversity, quality of place, unique experiences, and a commitment to stewardship. Most importantly, downtown must tell an authentic story about Gainesville that captures the spirit of the community.

To achieve these aspirations for downtown and create a beloved destination, three ideas have emerged from the community-driven planning process:

▶ **Idea 1: Build Investment Around Local Strengths**

▶ **Idea 2: Shape Downtown Identity**

▶ **Idea 3: Create a Downtown Jewel**

❝ **Stand out! Don't be just like any other American small town."**

❝ **Downtown should tell a story about who we are."**

Create complementary and connected niches of unique public use and business activity around key local assets.

Institutional Cultural Amenities

Cultural Amenities

Open Space Amenities

Potential Cultural Amenities

Idea 1: Build Investment Around Local Strengths

Create complementary and connected niches of unique public use and business activity around key local assets.

The first step in strengthening Downtown's role as a local, regional, and national destination is understanding the unique assets of the urban core. These natural features, cultural amenities, historic landmarks, institutional assets and human resources contribute to Downtown Gainesville's authentic vibe and flavor.

Once identified, these local assets can form the foundation for guiding investment, development, business mix, and public activity. Many of these assets also have a stabilizing effect on real estate value and business viability and can sustain the long-term value of both public and private investment. Commonly attractive resources such as rivers, parks, and historic architecture can serve as anchors for business and development activity by drawing foot traffic, repeat visits, social media visibility, and community activity.

When future development in Downtown Gainesville is built on a foundation of local assets, two important goals can be achieved:

> **"[Anchoring] occurs when multiple businesses co-locate around a commonly attractive external resource."**
>
> **Source: The Amenity Mix of Urban Neighborhoods, Habitat International, 2020**

1. **Places, qualities and experiences** that hold value for local residents are protected and enhanced, creating a familiar and welcoming environment for the whole community.

2. **Authentic placemaking and storytelling** built around unique local attributes forms a competitive niche, attracting investment and spurring economic development.

Character Areas

Local assets are often grouped geographically around drivers of urban form, such as historic infrastructure (e.g., railroads), natural features (e.g., waterfronts), civic resources (e.g., public squares), or institutional assets (e.g., universities or hospitals). These groupings can be thought of as Character Areas within the downtown that possess distinct features that are complementary. The unique attributes of a Character Area can be aligned with the needs of varied business types and real estate products forming a symbiotic relationship between the qualities of place and the type of development.

Well-defined Character Areas built around local assets convey a strong sense of place and create recognizable districts. The definition of these areas is an important component of responsive planning (protecting features valued by the local community) and a key ingredient in business success and economic competitiveness. Articulating Character Areas and their core strengths should inform:

► Historic Preservation Policy
► Design and Prioritization of Capital Improvements
► Economic Development Policy and Targeted Business Recruiting
► Land Use Planning and Zoning Regulations
► Downtown Identity and Branding

> **"A distinct sense of place is the glue that holds any commercial district together."**
>
> Source: Entrepreneurial Ecosystems and the Role of Commercial Districts, Main Street America

The City of Gainesville, GCRA and their like-minded civic partners can play an important role as a first mover in these Character Areas. By identifying public realm improvements (e.g., parks, streetscapes, public art, restoration and adaptive reuse of landmark structures) that leverage the impact of existing assets and strengthen the sense of place, the public sector can both attract and anchor investment around targeted placemaking projects.

Downtown has three Character Areas with strong potential for near-term catalytic impact. These districts have distinct features authentic to Gainesville, the ability to collectively shape the identity of Downtown, and the potential to be connected as a series of destinations that form a one-of-a-kind experience:

► **Historic Core:**
Anchored by the Hippodrome, Bo Diddley Plaza, a growing hospitality cluster, and walkable streets with historic commercial architecture, the Historic Core is one of the most widely recognized and frequented destinations in the Gainesville community.

► **SoMa:**
With the strong popular appeal of Depot Park and the Cade Museum, access to trails and greenways, and the character of historic industrial architecture, the district along South Main Street (SoMa) is a vibrant district of arts, culture, craft manufacturing, and boutique businesses.

► **Innovation District:**
The strong institutional presence of UF Innovate and the new Santa Fe College Blount Campus make this district of industry and innovation a key attraction for new business, talent, and investment in Gainesville.

Character Areas: Create distinct, but complementary, character areas with unique local qualities that can be matched with the needs of different types of businesses and developments.

Duckpond
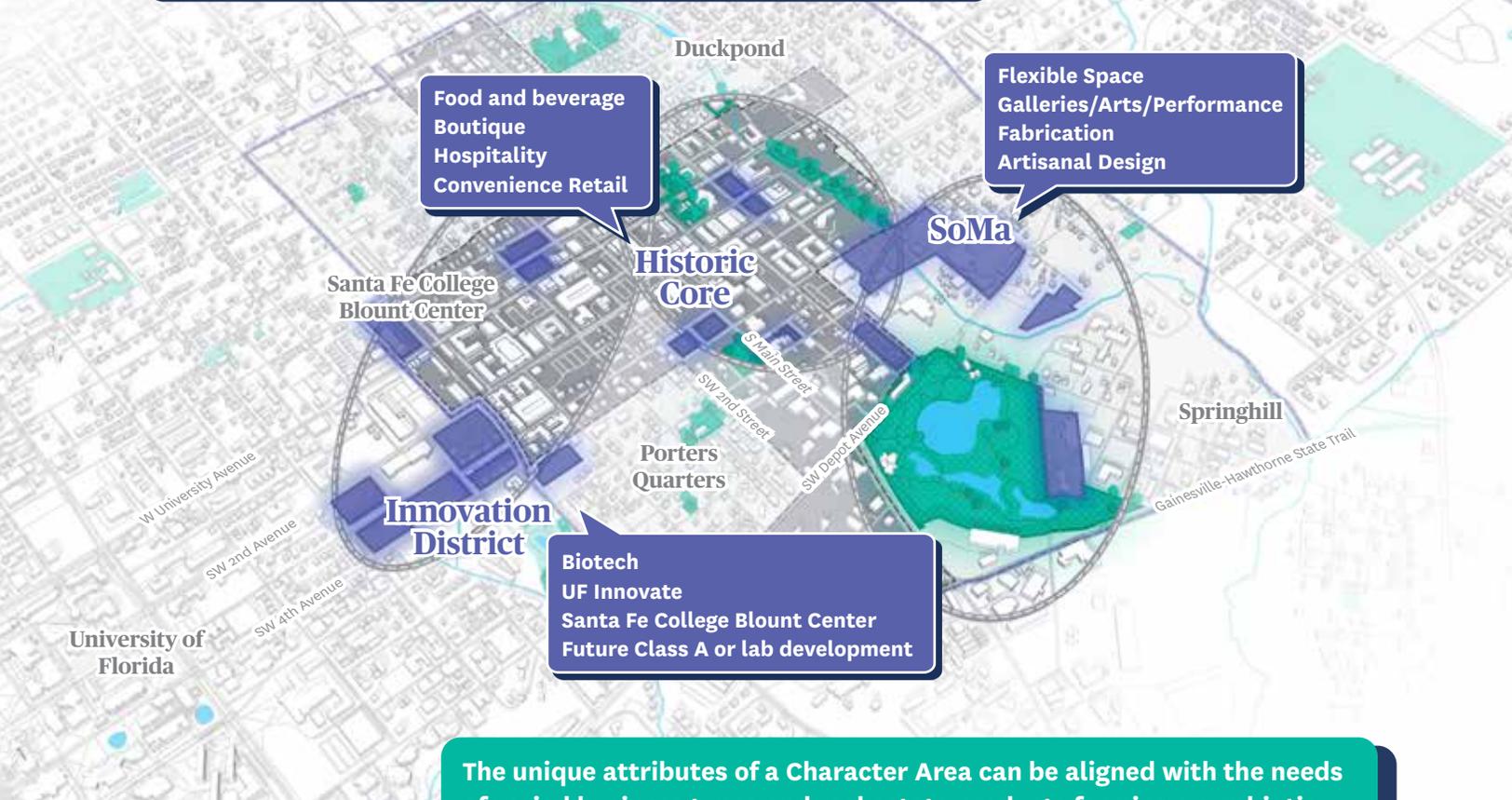
Food and beverage
Boutique
Hospitality
Convenience Retail

Flexible Space
Galleries/Arts/Performance
Fabrication
Artisanal Design

SoMa

Historic Core

Santa Fe College Blount Center

S Main Street

SW 2nd Street

SW Depot Avenue

Springhill

Gainesville-Hawthorne State Trail

Porters Quarters

W University Avenue

Innovation District

Biotech
UF Innovate
Santa Fe College Blount Center
Future Class A or lab development

SW 2nd Avenue

SW 4th Avenue

University of Florida

The unique attributes of a Character Area can be aligned with the needs of varied business types and real estate products forming a symbiotic relationship between the qualities of place and the type of development.
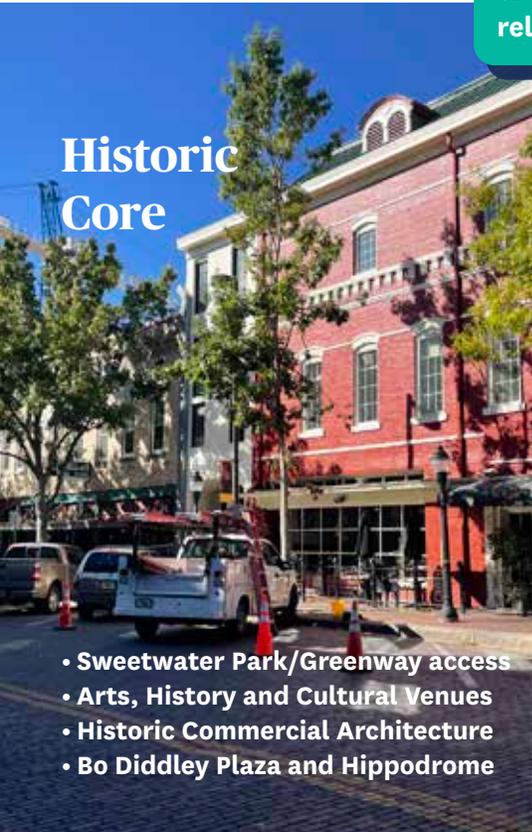
Historic Core

- Sweetwater Park/Greenway access
- Arts, History and Cultural Venues
- Historic Commercial Architecture
- Bo Diddley Plaza and Hippodrome
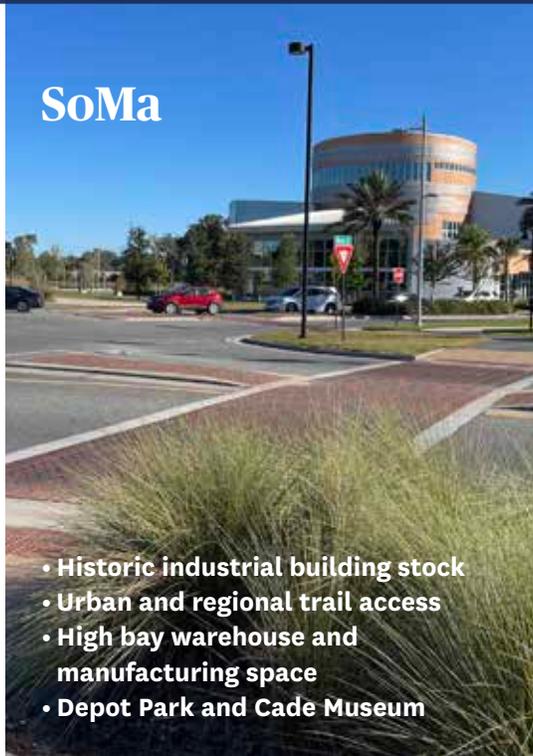
SoMa

- Historic industrial building stock
- Urban and regional trail access
- High bay warehouse and manufacturing space
- Depot Park and Cade Museum

Innovation District

- Downtown proximity
- Higher education presence, talent flow, and resources
- Park and rail trail access
- UF Innovate and SF Blount Campus entrepreneurial support resources

Clustering: Prioritize business recruitment, development activity, and public investment in the identified areas to create a critical mass of business activity and a nucleus of pedestrian energy.

Footprint of 10-year development demand at maximum density of allowed zoning.

Footprint of 10-year development demand at density of existing downtown core.
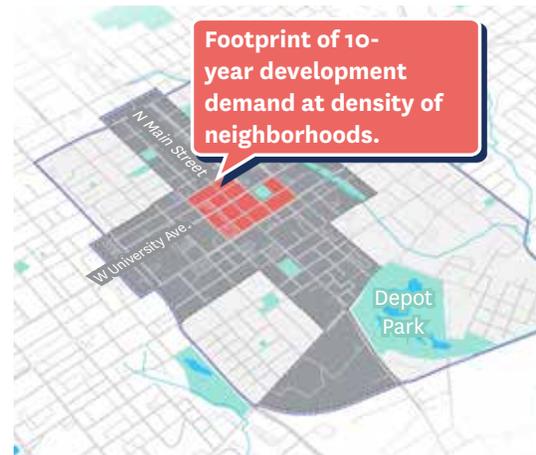
Footprint of 10-year development demand at density of neighborhoods.

Maximum density of allowed zoning

Density of existing downtown core

Neighborhood-scale density

Clustering

Building on the idea of Character Areas outlined above, the next step in shaping downtown as a thriving destination is to **prioritize business recruitment, development activity, and public investment in these Character Areas** to create a critical mass of business activity and a nucleus of pedestrian energy. By focusing public and private investment in clusters that are anchored by local assets the community can:

▶ **Leverage the agglomeration benefits** that are so critical for business viability and the marketability of new development.

▶ **Stimulate a positive spillover** effect on surrounding areas of Downtown.

The importance of clustering is also highlighted by the relatively modest projection of the demand for commercial development over the next decade in downtown Gainesville. At densities matching the current scale of development in the downtown core, the amount of projected investment in new commercial development over the next 10 years would only cover 3% of the total downtown area.

To capture this limited resource of new investment and deploy

it in a way that maximizes positive spillover effects for businesses throughout downtown and for the greater Gainesville community requires a commitment to planned investment in critical areas. By identifying key public realm investments that strengthen the quality of place in the identified Character Areas and working with the private investment community to align development opportunities, scale, and building heights with those qualities, the City will lay the foundation for a critical mass of downtown business activity and hub of community life.

"Businesses do not simply gravitate towards customers but also cluster with each other to form more attractive destinations."

Source: Location & Agglomeration: The Distribution of Retail and Food Businesses in Dense Urban Environments, Journal of Planning Education and Research, 2014
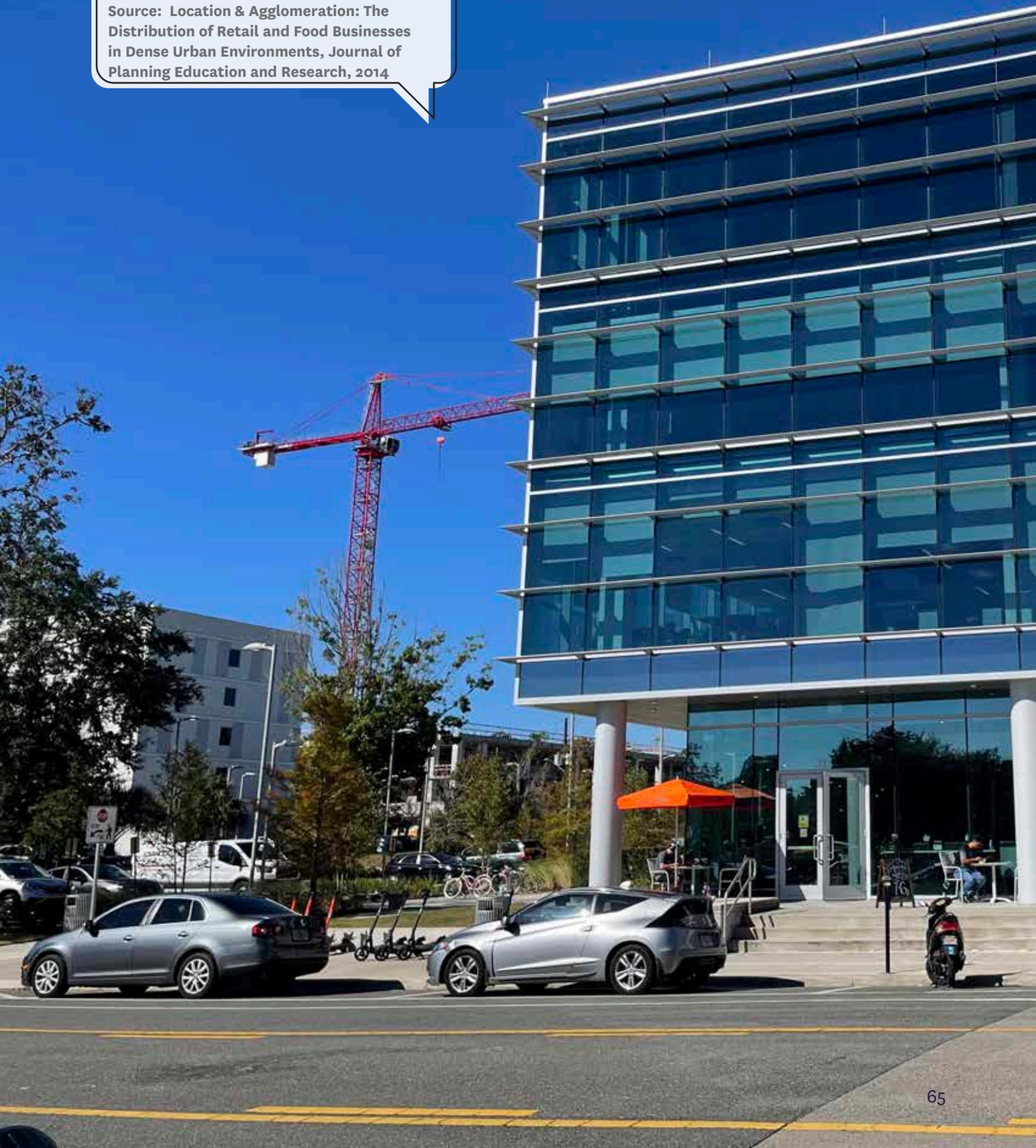
Honey, let's move to Gainesville!

Civic Identity
Downtown must feel like everyone's neighborhood: welcoming, culturally relevant and accessible

+

Destination Brand
Downtown must be one of the top factors in influencing decisions to visit, live, and invest in Gainesville

Build Around *Enduring* Assets
The identity must be rooted in place-based assets that can weather business churn and shifting economic conditions

CADE Museum

Sweetwater Creek

Hippodrome Theater

+

Build Around *Evolving* Assets
The identity must shine a light on the entrepreneurs, innovators, creatives, and small businesses that collectively create the fresh and evolving spirit of Downtown

Matrixx Technologies

Diva Kouture Boutique

Wyatt's Coffee

Idea 2: Shape Downtown Identity

Develop a coordinated marketing and branding program around Downtown Gainesville's authentic built and living heritage.

One of the questions that emerged in our conversations with the Gainesville community is "What is the identity of Downtown," and "What are we trying to say and project about Downtown?" This question gets to the root of the need for a strong downtown purpose and identity.

To create an identity for downtown that inspires civic pride and a brand for downtown that supports economic competitiveness, the community must discern and creatively shape a story and experience that is meaningful and uniquely Gainesville. It is important to

have both of these elements: a story without a corresponding lived experience is superficial and an experience without story is a missed opportunity to attract business and investment to the community.

The first consideration in discerning and highlighting a successful story about downtown is to simultaneously develop a Civic Identity and a Destination Brand. The Civic Identity is how local residents and workers perceive Downtown. It must be welcoming, culturally relevant and socially accessible to all Gainesville residents; downtown must feel like everyone's neighborhood. The Destination Brand is how the outside world perceives downtown and it must serve as one of the top drivers in influencing decisions to visit, live, and invest in Gainesville.

A second consideration in crafting the story of downtown

is to identify and build around Enduring Assets while celebrating Evolving Assets. The Enduring Assets are place-based qualities (e.g., historic landmarks, natural resources) that can weather business churn and shifting economic conditions. Bo Diddley Plaza, the Sweetwater Creek, the Hippodrome, Cade Museum and Depot Park are all examples of the built and natural heritage of Gainesville that can form the foundation of and sustain a powerful downtown identity over the long term. The celebration of Evolving Assets involves shining a light on the entrepreneurs, innovators, creatives, and small businesses that collectively create the fresh and evolving spirit of Downtown. This celebration of the living heritage of Gainesville is a key ingredient in the success of the small business environment Downtown.

More than a Logo

When considering the development of a brand and identity the first thing that leaps to everyone's mind is a logo; a graphic design exercise that populates digital and print marketing collateral. But a downtown brand is much more than that.

A strong downtown brand for Gainesville must be supported by three pillars:

Social Campaign	**Place Campaign**	**Experiential Campaign**
Robust local communication and national marketing, with consistent tone and identity.	Locally-inspired design of environmental graphics and public space.	Diverse program of public events and activities.

▶ **Social Campaign**
The Social Campaign is a dedicated program of local communication and national marketing with consistent tone and identity. The Social Campaign is a tool to share news, history, stories, and to promote the businesses and activities Downtown. With content ranging from profiles of small business owners to economic development initiatives, the communication aspect of the downtown brand requires dedicated personnel committed to real time information sharing across multiple digital platforms.

▶ **Place Campaign**
The Place Campaign involves the locally-inspired design of public spaces and environmental graphics to strengthen sense of place and civic pride. This effort involves small and large capital projects that build a consistent vocabulary of public realm improvements. Public art, wayfinding signage, district identification signage, parklets, public greens, streetscapes, and trails are all prime candidates for physical improvements that are unique to their local environment and tied to the greater identity of Downtown.

▶ **Experiential Campaign**
The Experiential Campaign is a diverse program of public events and activities appealing to a wide range of local audiences. This is especially critical since programming is essential to the success of downtown and its public spaces, and plays a role in the perception of a welcoming downtown. Rooted in engagement and conversation with the community to ensure that the program of events meets (and evolves over time to meet) the needs of the Gainesville community, the Experiential Campaign is about bringing people together. It is the sum of activities, events, and experiences downtown that are welcoming for everyone and capture the spirit of Gainesville.

Idea 3: Create a Downtown Jewel
Re-imagine Sweetwater Park as a signature public green space in the urban core of Gainesville

Urban parks are one of the most significant assets of any city due to the multivalent benefits they provide to the surrounding community: improved public health and wellness (through recreation, social interaction, and access to nature), improved ecological services (through cleaner air, cleaner water, and thermal comfort), enhanced economic competitiveness (through quality of life attraction), sustained fiscal performance (through increased real estate value), and strengthened community life (through community events, activities, and informal social interaction in a neutral, public-serving environment). For these reasons, and additional locally specific benefits, Sweetwater Park and the surrounding greenspace parcels provides a signature opportunity to drive Downtown Gainesville forward as a local, regional and national destination.

Sweetwater Park is both a valuable existing public park and an asset with tremendous untapped potential. It is part of the larger (and in-progress) Sweetwater Creek Greenway network; it is situated at a natural interface between East Gainesville and Downtown; it is adjacent to the historic core; it has ample public parking within one block, and it touches many of the signature institutions that comprise Gainesville's cultural and educational landscape.

By focusing on a refresh of this under-looked public amenity, the Gainesville community can achieve several key objectives:

► **Create a distinctive and welcoming public space** at the crossroads of Gainesville.

► **Spur investment in the historic core** through the creation of high value greenspace that draws pedestrian activity, drives positive real estate value, and connects cultural assets.

► **Creatively unlock community benefit**, environmental uplift and economic value from an urban floodplain that is largely undevelopable and surrounding natural areas that are ripe for restoration.

With significant portions of the Sweetwater Park and surrounding greenspace under the ownership of the City of Gainesville, Alachua County entities (Schools Administration, Library), and the Matheson Museum, and given the generally aligned missions of these public-serving entities, the potential for transformative change through strategic partnerships is viable.

Re-imagine Sweetwater Park as a signature public green space in the urban core of Gainesville.

Boltin Center

Alachua County Schools

Matheson Museum

Matheson Museum

Alachua County Library

Sweetwater Park

Bo Diddley Plaza

US District Court

Radiant Credit Union

Springhill

Springhill

University Avenue

SE 2nd Avenue

SE 1st Avenue

SE 4th Street

SE 3rd Street

SE 4th Avenue

▲ The Current Experience

▼ The Potential Experience

Recreation

Restoration

Discovery

Community

Leisure

Education

Play

69

To maximize the benefits of Sweetwater Park to downtown and the greater Gainesville community, there are several key design principles that should serve as a framework for future improvements:

► **Public Orientation**

All existing buildings and future development should positively address Sweetwater Park. The Alachua County Library and Matheson Museum have architectural qualities (entrances, generous glazing/views) that lend themselves to orientation toward the park. This re-orientation, in conjunction with park improvements, can create opportunities for outdoor learning and programming that complement these cultural assets.

► **Public Entries**

Each adjacent neighborhood and district should have welcoming and accessible entries to the park. Springhill, Duckpond and adjacent neighborhoods will benefit from well-developed entries to the park that are safe, lighted, and inviting. The historic core of Downtown, just west of the Sweetwater Park, lacks a clear connection to the park and would benefit significantly from a formal entry along SE 1st Avenue. This connection is ideal given the low speed of traffic (SE 1st Ave is not a through street), connectivity to restaurants and businesses, relationship to Bo Diddley Plaza, proximity to hotels (existing and proposed), and pedestrian connectivity across the creek.

► **Public Edges**

Public streets and/or trails should line the perimeter of the park and provide clear navigation, lighting, and amenities. This provides a signal to park users of the availability of the entire public green space for community use and benefit.
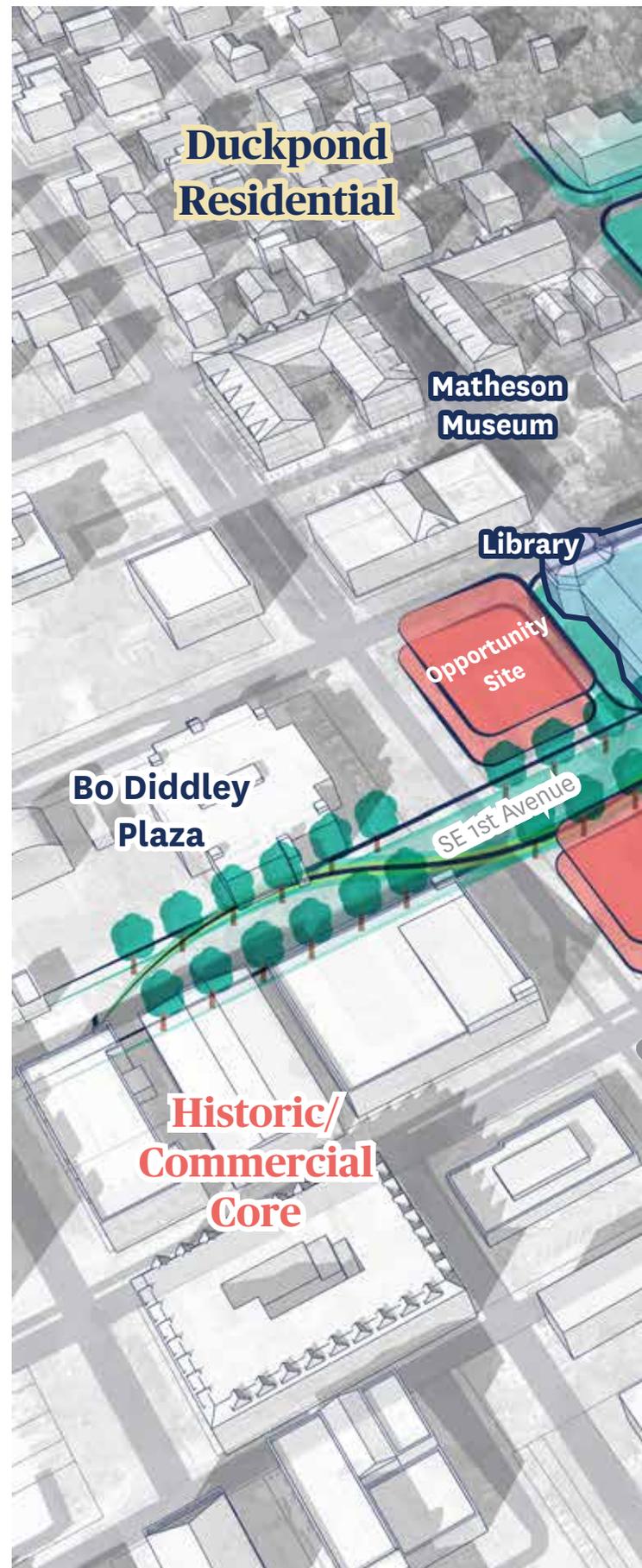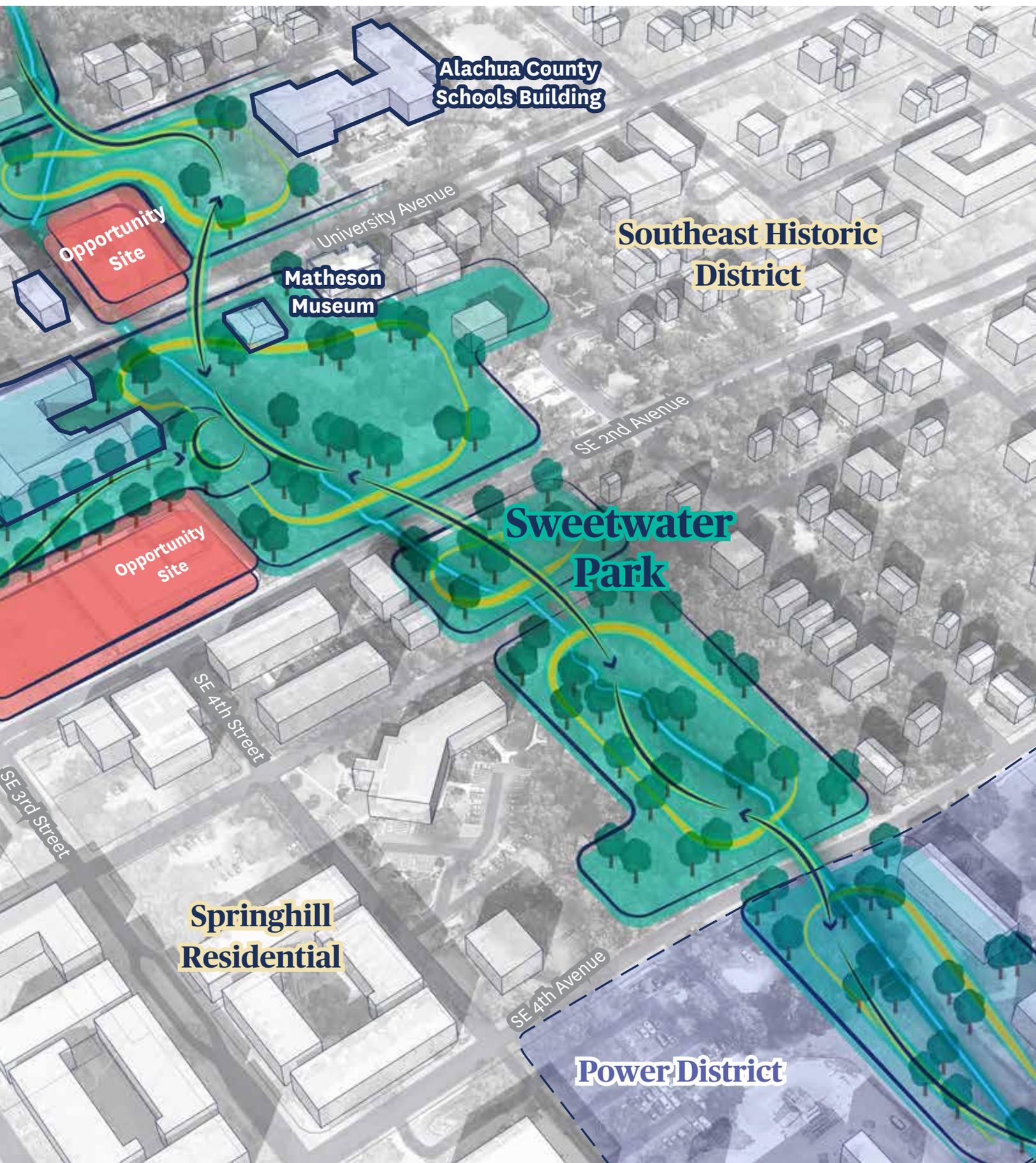
Alachua County
Schools Building

University Avenue

Opportunity
Site

Matheson
Museum

Southeast Historic
District

SE 2nd Avenue

Opportunity
Site

Sweetwater
Park

SE 4th Street

SE 3rd Street

Springhill
Residential

SE 4th Avenue

Power District

Connect the Dots

Gainesville neighbors asked for a more walkable, bikeable, and transit-friendly downtown.

Though described by many neighbors during our engagement process as having a walkable core, downtown's overall lack of connectivity is a top community priority. Downtown's most visited destinations, such as Depot Park, Bo Diddley Plaza, and the Hippodrome Theater, are located within a short walk from each other. Nonetheless, these assets feel disconnected from each other due to gaps in downtown's network of safe, walkable streets. This issue is especially heightened at downtown's periphery, where a lack of sidewalks and substandard streetscapes create barriers to walkability between downtown and surrounding neighborhoods.

In fact, neighbors living within walking distance to downtown anecdotally referenced times when they would rather drive and find parking, than walk. While some neighbors are able to choose to drive, others may not have access to a personal vehicle. Thus, establishing walkable connections are key in advancing community-wide equity and accessibility goals.

As a regional attraction that brings in people from the entire city and beyond, many Gainesville neighbors will continue to drive to downtown from their respective communities. Once in the downtown area, many expressed difficulty in finding parking that felt convenient

and understandable. The need for parking and the desire for a walkable, connected core are not mutually exclusive. This section starts with recommendations aimed at addressing parking by establishing a "park once" strategy where visitors are able to park at a single location and walk to various destinations. This strategy is augmented when paired with solutions that make that pedestrian experience a safe, comfortable, and pleasant one. As such, the remainder of this section focuses on ideas aimed toward improving this pedestrian and cyclist experience, while transforming existing assets like Sweetwater Creek into neighborhood connectors.

▶ **Idea 4: Balance the need for parking with the desire for a walkable, urban core**

▶ **Idea 5: Prioritize Streets to Meet City Standards**

▶ **Idea 6: Activate the Sweetwater Corridor**

▶ **Idea 7: Create a Greenway Loop**

> "Prioritize walking, biking, and personal mobility uses. Improve north-south bike/ped connectivity to Depot Park."

> "Center pedestrians and bicyclists first, then transit."

Idea 4: Balance the need for parking with the desire for a walkable, urban core.
Simplify regulations to make parking user friendly and clear.

As Downtown Gainesville continues to evolve, with mixed-use development replacing city-owned surface parking lots, concerns over parking availability inevitably will increase. It is important to continue to manage this important resource to balance the need for parking with the desire for a walkable, urban core that is not interrupted by vacuous surface parking lots. There are many things the city is already doing right. Paid parking has been instituted to begin to manage supply and demand, and there are no minimum parking requirements for development in downtown. Looking ahead, the city should consider the following recommendations to continue to address parking needs and foster a vibrant downtown.

► **Continue to monitor parking supply (refer to map on following page) and utilization:** The city's transportation staff already monitors supply and occupancy rates for on-street and off-street (public and private lots and garages) and catalogs all current parking regulations and cost. As a general rule, parking utilization would need to be above 90% for several hours, several days per week to have justified supply concerns. Currently, parking utilization rates in downtown surface lots only exceeds 90% in Lot 4, Lot 13, and the GRU lot on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. On-street utilization in the downtown core was only over 80% in certain locations for a short time period. This information should be updated regularly to understand the changes in supply and demand, the drivers of those changes, the impact of pricing and regulation modifications, and opportunities for additional strategic improvements. This knowledge will also

	Lot 3	Lot 4	Lot 5	Lot 6	Lot 13	GRU
Occupancy Rate at 8 PM						
Mon-Wed	54%	82%	45%	13%	90%	55%
Thu-Fri	80%	97%	79%	56%	96%	97%
Sat	80%	97%	79%	56%	96%	97%

Off-street parking occupancy (Source: City of Gainesville, 2019)

help to inform community conversations and address concerns with real-world data.

► **Continue to monitor regulations and pricing** to address supply and demand issues: City transportation staff recently made adjustments to regulations and pricing to address parking issues within downtown. Moving forward, the following general goals should inform additional changes.

- On-street parking should be regulated/priced to create turn over to allow for availability of spaces.
- Encourage employees and employers to park outside of the core.
- Long-term parking should be located in garages or surface parking lots.

► **Create a "park once" downtown:** Uncoupling parking requirements from development is a great first step to creating a "park once" downtown. With that accomplished, the city needs to foster a shared pool of parking that is widely available to all users enabling them to park once and access multiple destinations without moving their car. This can be augmented by continuing to invest in pedestrian, bicycle and transportation improvements to make it both easier and safer to get to and around downtown.

► **Improve signage, wayfinding, and communication:** To make the parking experience user-friendly, regulations should be simplified and

Daytime on-street parking occupancy (Source: City of Gainesville, 2019)

Boltin Center

Southwest Downtown Garage

GRU

City Garages
City Parking Lots
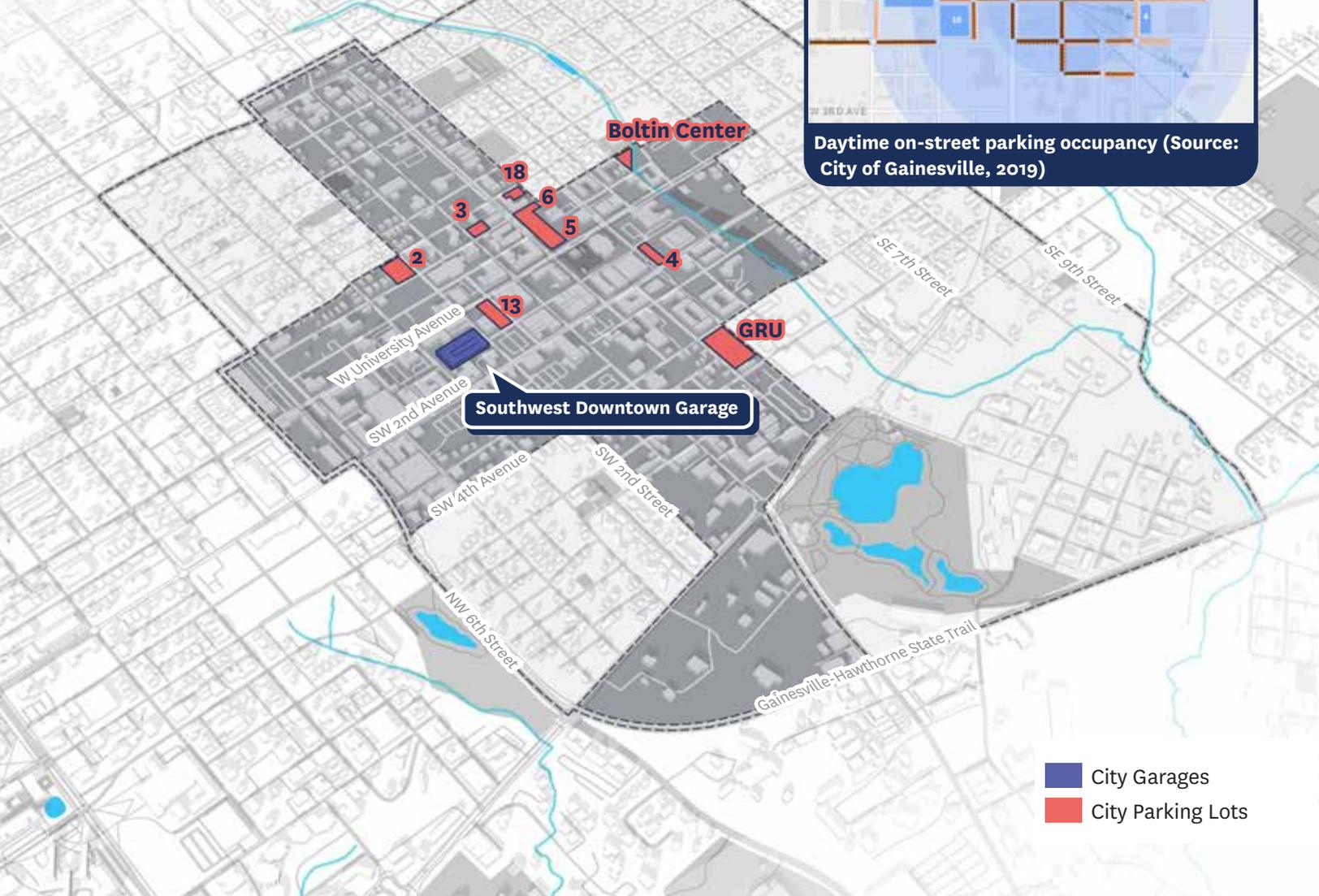
understandable. This communication should exist online so that people can plan their trips downtown, but also be readily evident on signage and wayfinding in and around downtown to direct people to parking and make the regulations clear. Making these improvements will also help to make people more aware of all of their parking options to spread out parking demand.

► **Continue to invest in technology:** The city is already investing in a mobile pay system to replace its obsolete meter system. Doing so will reduce maintenance costs, make parking more user-friendly and accessible and enable greater sharing of parking.

Southwest Downtown Garage

Idea 5: Prioritize Streets to Meet City Standards

Proactively improve downtown streets not meeting the city's current design standards.

A critical step in creating a walkable downtown is ensuring that streets are designed with pedestrians and cyclists in mind. The city's Land Development Code encourages such human-centered design through a transect strategy, in which development standards coexist with street typologies. This transect provides a hierarchy of street types that establish a symbiotic relationship between streets and buildings. These standards guide the design for streetscape elements, such as landscaping, street trees, and space for outdoor dining. When implemented and in place, the results are safe, comfortable, and walkable streets.

Proactively improve downtown streets not meeting the city's current design standards.

As seen on the map to the right, downtown's key corridors are currently classified as "Storefront Streets," or those recommended to provide the highest quality pedestrian realm with wide sidewalks, street trees, and narrow roadways. Though some of these corridors live up to this designation, others are lacking in their experience. The map in the following page illustrates where these corridors that currently fail to meet the city's design standards are located. The least
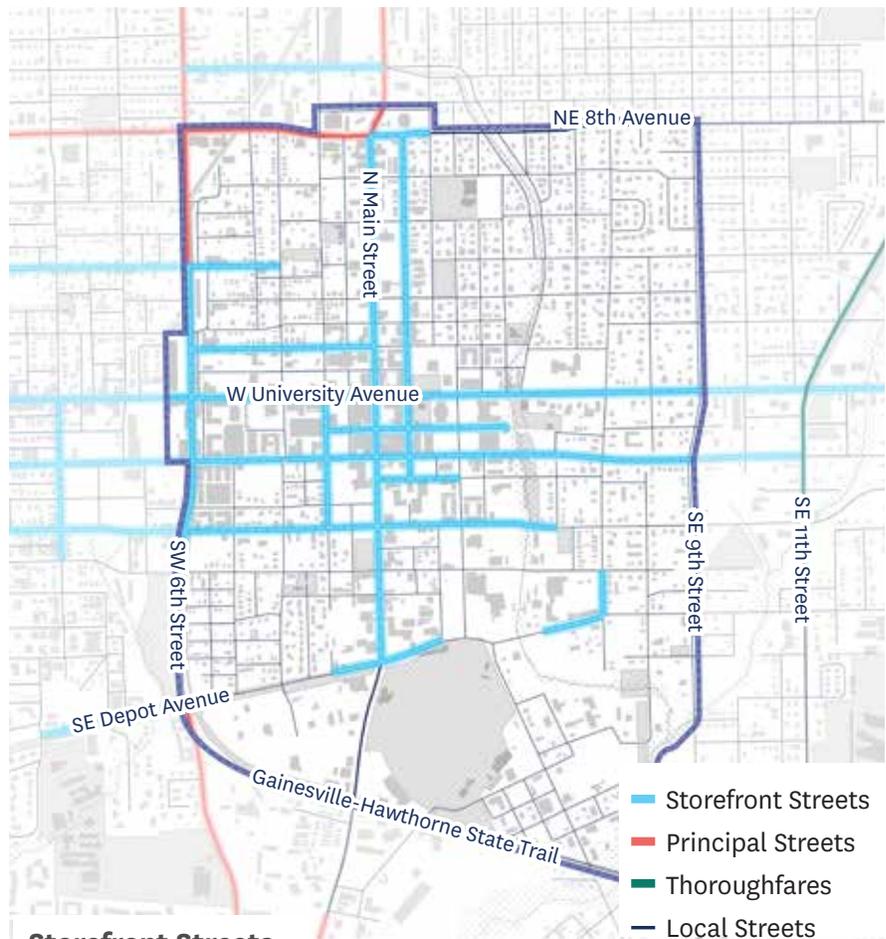
Storefront Streets

The city's zoning code identifies a hierarchy of street types with design standards for landscaping, sidewalks, and relationships to new buildings. Key downtown corridors are classified as "Storefront Streets."

walkable corridors tend to be east-west streets connecting downtown with neighborhoods, such as Porters Quarters, Fifth Avenue, and Springhill.

Addressing these gaps and upholding these standards is paramount to not only creating a walkable downtown, but ensuring that downtown remains well connected to its surroundings. This environment

will also allow visitors driving into downtown to "park once" and walk to multiple destinations.

This commitment to walkability that is already solidified in the city's Land Development Code requires commitment at the funding level. **In addition to holding developers to these standards when undergoing a project, it is important to**

Proactively improve downtown streets not meeting the city's current design standards.

Map labels:
- NW 8th Avenue
- NE 2nd Street
- N Main Street
- Pleasant Street
- NW 6th Street
- NW 2nd Ave
- NW 1st Ave
- University Ave
- SE 1st Ave
- SE 2nd Ave
- SE 11th Street
- SE 9th Street
- SE 7th Street
- W University Avenue
- SW 2nd Ave
- SW 2nd Avenue
- SW 4th Avenue
- SW 3rd Ave
- SW 4th Ave
- SW 2nd Street
- SW Depot Avenue
- Depot Park
- Cora P. Roberson Park
- Gainesville-Hawthorne State Trail

Legend:
- ▬ Streets in focus area built according to city standards
- ▬ Streets not meeting city standards

prioritize investments on entire corridors currently lacking private development projects. For instance, SW 4th Avenue, a major threshold between downtown and Porters Quarters, often lacks curbs, crossings, and has an excessive amount of curb cuts. Improving streetscapes along these key corridors will connect neighbors to downtown and bridge gaps between downtown destinations by creating multiple walkable and safe routes.

NE Boulevard

University Avenue

SW 4th Avenue

Idea 6: Activate the Sweetwater Corridor

Design, improve and program to activate the Sweetwater Creek corridor into a network of urban parks, green spaces, trails, and recreation areas for the entire community.

Building on the idea to transform Sweetwater Park into a downtown jewel, activating the entire downtown segment of Sweetwater Creek re-imagines this corridor as **a connected and seamless natural amenity.** This idea is one championed by the community - throughout the entirety of the planning process, Sweetwater Creek was identified to the planning team as one of downtown's greatest and most transformative opportunities.

Though a single natural amenity, Sweetwater Creek changes character as it moves its way through Duckpond, downtown, the Southeast Historic District, the Power District, and Springhill. Through much of Duckpond, the waterway remains a mostly naturalized amenity along a roadway median that, at times, lacks sidewalks and crossings. Conversely, through the Power District the waterway becomes a channelized or piped feature hidden from view. Once south in Springhill, the creek faces the backs of properties and is mostly inaccessible and lacks any visibility.

The opportunity in transforming this corridor is consequential to both downtown and the eastern neighborhoods it touches. In creating a consistent experience where the creek is framed by a wide greenway, trail amenities, linear greens, open spaces, and a healthy riparian edge, the communities directly east of downtown are also connected. This new north-south amenity also has the potential to connect some of downtown's most treasured assets, such as Depot Park, the Downtown Library, the Matheson Museum, and the Thomas Center.

A key priority in establishing this greenway connection goes beyond the creek itself, and in **establishing and ensuring safe and consistent pedestrian and bicycle travel and crossings along the corridor's thresholds.** This planning process has identified two key locations where this connectivity must be prioritized.

► **The first of these is the University Avenue corridor** near the Matheson Museum and Sweetwater Park, where there is a lack of a safe north-south pedestrian crossing.

► **The second location is through the Power District**, through which a channelized portion of Sweetwater Creek moves its way through GRU property that will likely continue to be inaccessible to public access in the near future. For this segment, streetscape improvements along SE 3rd Street that include a multi-use path, street trees, and safe crossings can provide an alternate path.

Addressing these key potential gaps is critical for the success of this corridor - if one part of the experience feels unsafe, the overall connectivity goals will be compromised.

There is palpable community excitement around a transformed Sweetwater Creek corridor that features a greenway with interwoven open spaces. Gainesville neighbors engaged in this process are ready to tackle the potential challenges that may arise in establishing a seamless connection between various communities. The improved access to open space, and the addition of a safe and pleasant connection to downtown and east side neighborhoods will continue to energize the community in transforming this natural amenity into a regional destination.
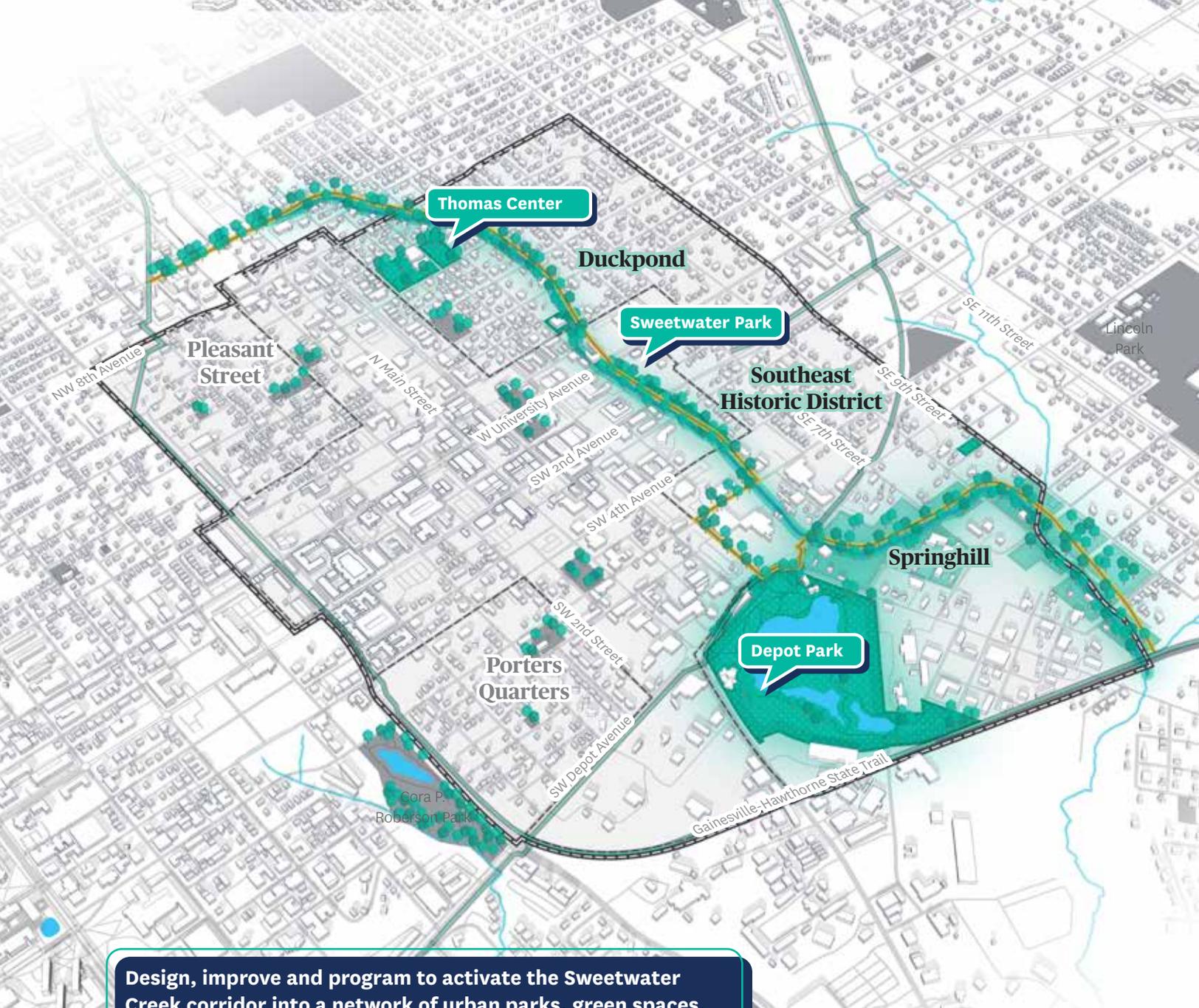
Sweetwater Park

Sweetwater Creek in Duckpond

Existing signage

Thomas Center

Duckpond

Sweetwater Park

Pleasant
Street

Southeast
Historic District

Springhill

NW 8th Avenue

N Main Street

W University Avenue

SW 2nd Avenue

W University Avenue

SW 4th Avenue

SE 7th Street

SE 9th Street

SE 11th Street

Lincoln
Park

Porters
Quarters

Depot Park

SW 2nd Street

SW Depot Avenue

Cora P.
Roberson Park

Gainesville-Hawthorne State Trail

Design, improve and program to activate the Sweetwater Creek corridor into a network of urban parks, green spaces, trails, and recreation areas for the entire community.
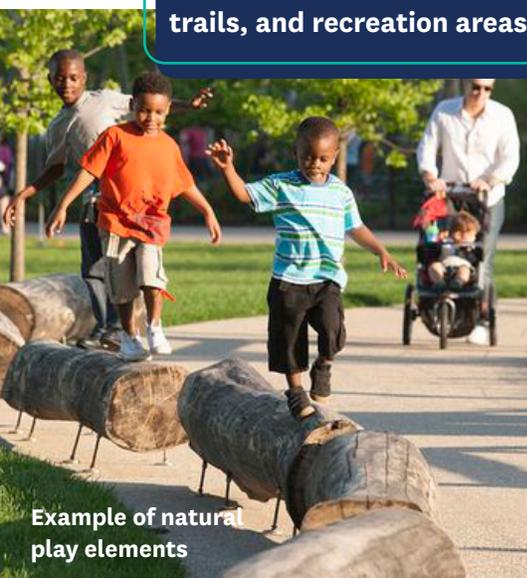
Example of natural play elements

Potential intersection treatments

Trail signage and wayfinding

79

Idea 7: Create a Greenway Loop

Develop a Greenway Loop that connects neighborhoods, links to regional trail networks, and is within 6 min. walk of all downtown destinations.

While the idea of a greenway along the Sweetwater Corridor uses an existing natural amenity to create a new connection, the remaining portions of a potential Greenway Loop around downtown largely focus on connecting existing trails with downtown and its surrounding neighborhoods.

The concept for a greenway loop capitalizes on one of downtown's greatest strengths - the fact that its most visited and prominent destinations are within a six-minute walk of each other. Despite this proximity, gaps in walkable connections at significant thresholds and a lack of coordinated signage and wayfinding cause these assets to feel disconnected from each other.

This plan thus recommends a greenway loop that connects the following segments, starting near Depot park and moving clockwise:

► The Sweetwater Creek Corridor described in Idea 6 of this plan.

► The existing Gainesville-Hawthorne State Trail and the existing multi-use path on Depot Avenue.

► The existing multi-use path on 6th Street toward 10th Avenue.
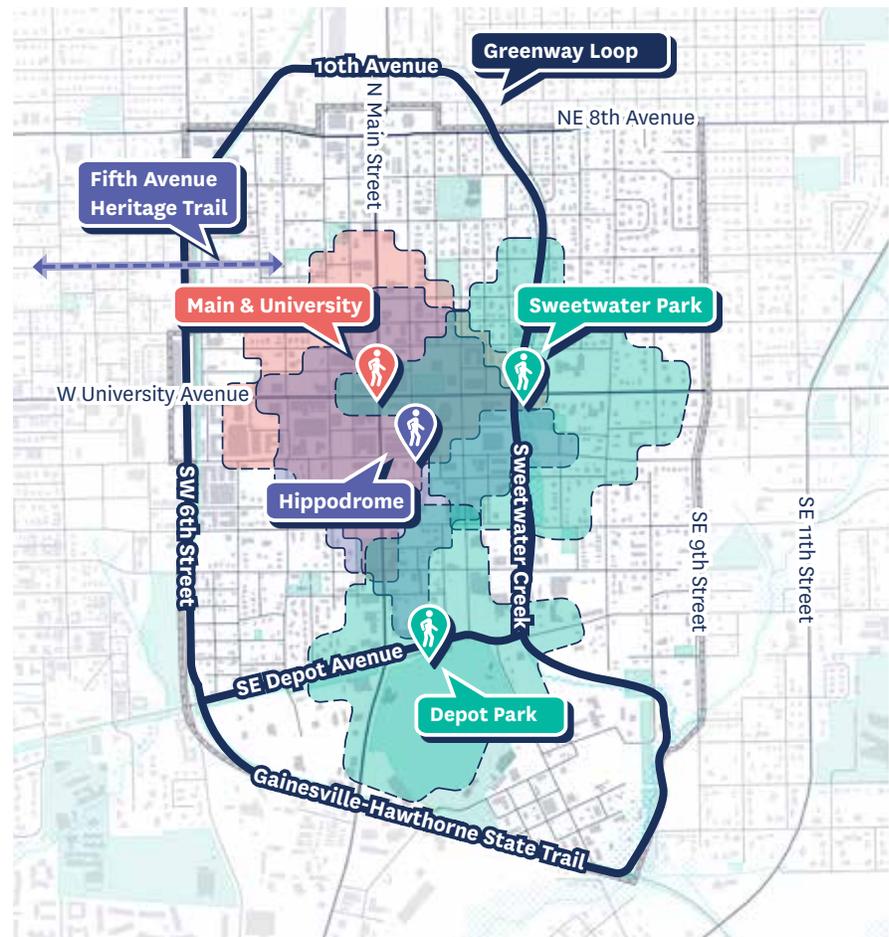
Downtown's major attractions and destinations are within a 6-minute walk of each other. However, they feel disconnected due to gaps in walkability.

► A new greenway through 10th Avenue on the northernmost side connecting to Sweetwater Creek.

Together, these connections create a seamless and coordinated trail experience both around downtown, and to its neighboring neighborhoods and institutions.

The formalization of a greenway loop has the opportunity to create meaningful connections to neighborhoods like Porters Quarters and Fifth Avenue. These connections can occur through improved crossings and trail markers, historical signage, placemaking opportunities, wayfinding directing to community assets such as the Fifth Avenue Historic Walk, and connections to improved east-west corridors as outlined in the portion of this chapter centered around strengthening the relationship between downtown and its adjacent neighborhoods.

The potential greenway loop also strengthens a pedestrian connection between downtown and the University of Florida campus and UF Innovate. This idea advances concepts shown in previous planning documents reviewed through the plan alignment, through which

Develop a Greenway Loop that connects neighborhoods, links to regional trail networks, and is within 6 min. walk of all downtown destinations.

Thomas Center

Duckpond

Sweetwater Park

NW 8th Avenue

Fifth Avenue Heritage Trail

Pleasant Street

Southeast Historic District

SE 11th Street

Lincoln Park

SE 9th Street

SE 7th Street

W University Avenue

SW 2nd Avenue

Santa Fe Blount Center

SW 4th Avenue

Springhill

Fifth Avenue

UF Innovate

SW 2nd Street

Depot Park

Porters Quarters

Roberson Park

Gainesville-Hawthorne State Trail
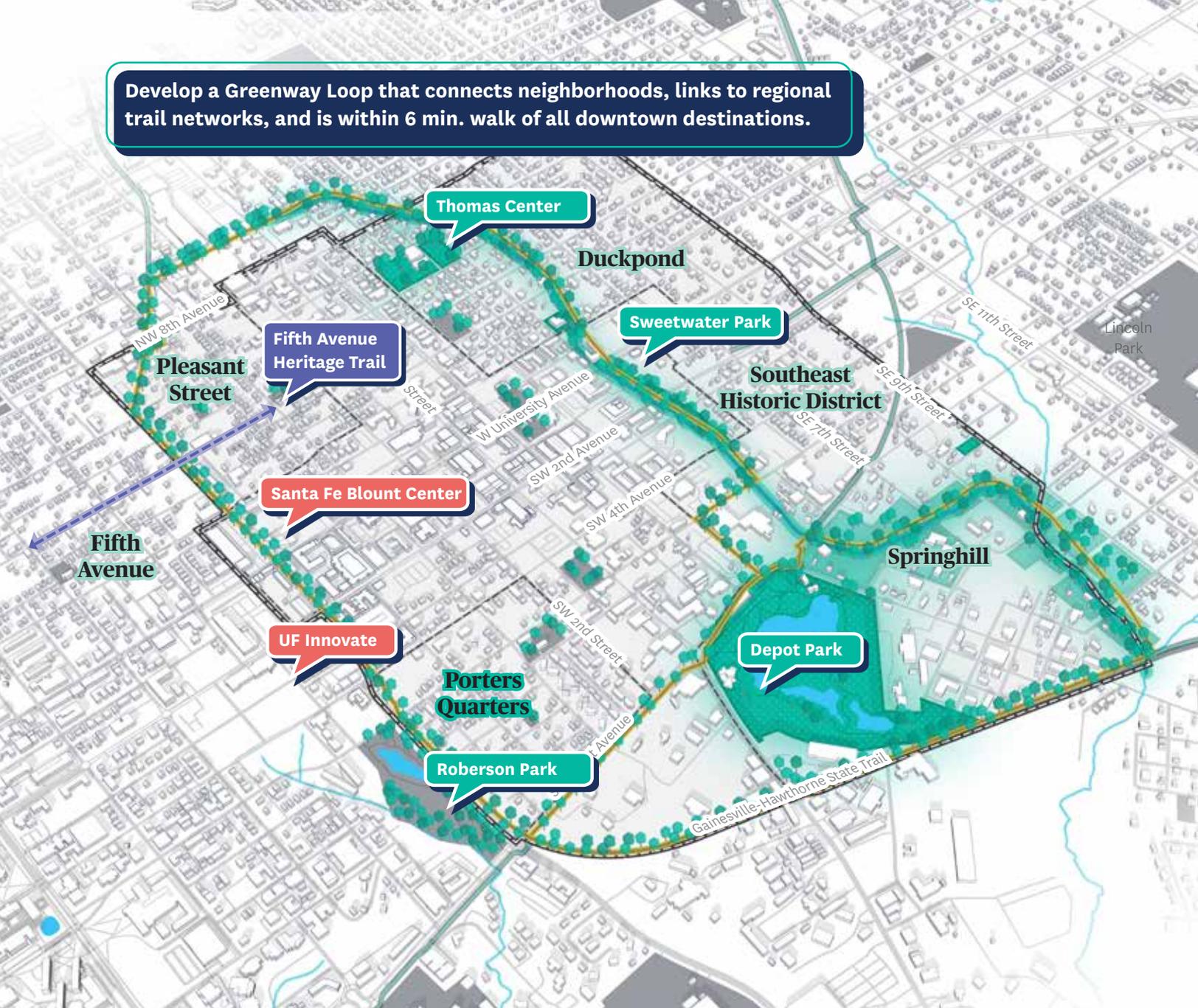
creating a safe and pleasant connection between UF, Depot Park, and downtown was highlighted as a priority.

While some portions of the loop will require improved connections, crossings, and a coordinated identity and signage, many of the segments leverage existing high quality trail systems to support a new downtown destination that will attract residents, visitors, and students alike.

81

Strengthen the Relationship with Adjacent Neighborhoods

Seamlessly connect downtown with nearby communities.

Gainesville neighbors from across the region shaped this plan and its recommendations. Through the Neighborhood Advisory Group, community meetings, stakeholder roundtables, online surveys, and community events, the planning team engaged on a multitude of one-on-one conversations with neighbors from the communities that immediately surround downtown. Whether they lived in Porters Quarters, Springhill, Duckpond, Fifth Avenue, or downtown, there was one common thread in the conversation - the neighborhoods that surround downtown are special and have their own character and identity. Nonetheless, understanding downtown's unique role as a regional destination with amenities that attract neighbors from all parts of the city, we also heard a strong desire to improve connections between these neighborhoods and downtown's amenities.

This section focuses on ideas that enable neighborhoods adjacent to downtown to guide future growth, so communities build on their current character and feel, while supporting growth in downtown. The ideas are twofold - one focused on improving physical connections to downtown so neighborhoods feel like part of the downtown area, and another ensures that the thresholds between downtown and the neighborhoods feel seamless and allow for each community to have a unique scale and character.

▶ **Idea 8: Connect Neighborhoods to Downtown**

▶ **Idea 9: Establish Transition Areas**

> **Make downtown feel like part of the surrounding neighborhoods, not foreign to it."

> **Policies to maintain character rather than become just another city through nondescript development."

> **Keep development in sync with neighborhoods, existing areas."

Idea 8: Connect Neighborhoods to Downtown

Establish thresholds and gateways to connect neighborhoods to the opportunities happening downtown.

Creating meaningful connections between downtown and its surrounding neighborhoods is essential to ensuring that downtown feels like a part of its surroundings. Through our engagement process, neighbors living within walking distance to downtown expressed that they would like to see better sidewalks, improved pedestrian crossings, and more consistent lighting. As seen on the map to the right, the city has already allocated funding through 2025 that will address some of these items, both within downtown, and along its edges.

While these improvements alleviate some gaps, having a clear focus on key corridors will better concentrate these efforts. Following a review of previous plans that included the SW 2nd Ave and SW 4th Ave Multimodal Corridors Vision(ing) report, the planning team identified four corridors that provide key connections.

University Avenue

► **What does it connect:** University Avenue is downtown's main east-west connector. Destinations include the UF campus, UF Innovate, the downtown library, the Bed and
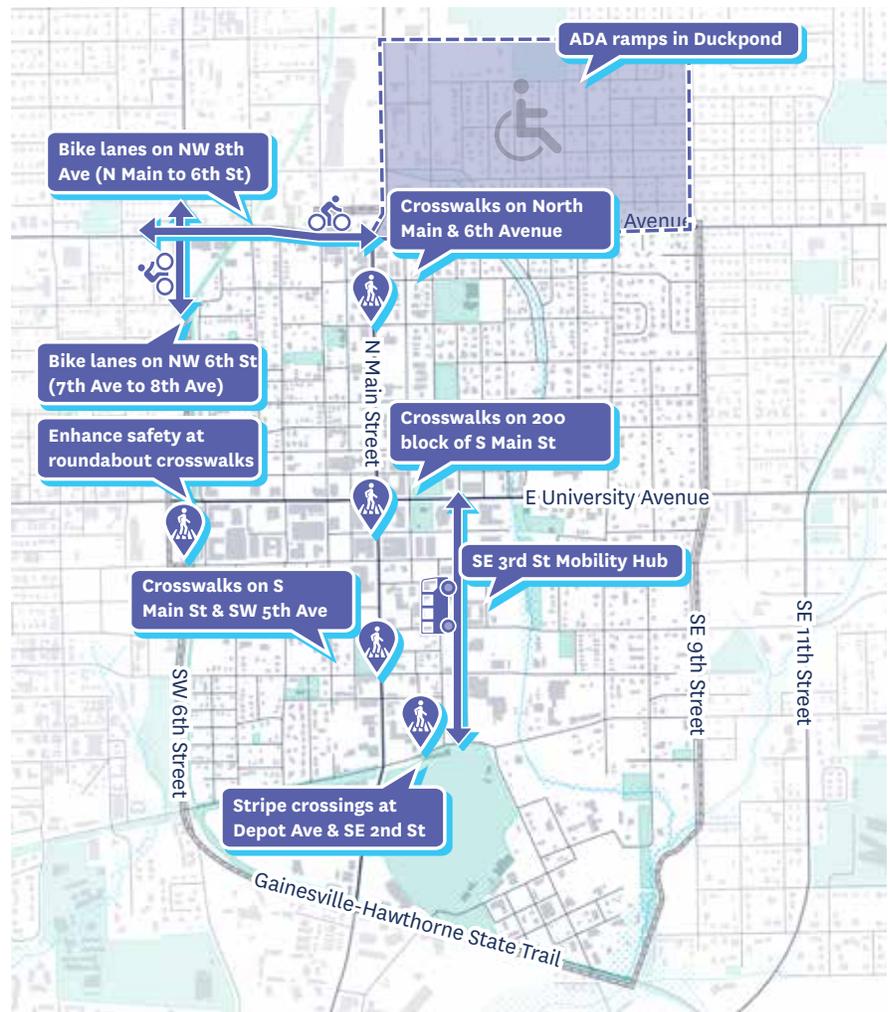
Between 2022 and 2025, mobility improvements totaling $743,000 in the greater study area will improve crossings, bike infrastructure, and the transit travel experience between downtown and nearby neighborhoods.

Breakfast district, and the neighborhood edge between Duckpond and the Southeast Historic District.

► **The opportunity:** A recent Vision Zero study identified various strategies to make this corridor safer for pedestrians and cyclists.

South 4th Avenue

► **What does it connect:** SE and SW 4th Avenue serve as thresholds between UF innovate, downtown, Porters Quarters, Springhill, and the Southeast Historic District. The corridor also

includes pedestrian access to Sweetwater Park.

► **The opportunity:** Though a key corridor, streetscapes along 4th Avenue lack adequate sidewalks, street trees, and pedestrian-scale lighting. Improving streetscapes, adding sidewalks where there are gaps, adding north-south crossings, and consolidating or removing excessive curb cuts, will help transform this corridor from a street that divides neighborhoods, into one that brings them together.

Implement Vision Zero recommendations along University Avenue

Improve 4th Avenue from Innovation Square to Sweetwater Branch Crossing.

Northeast Historic District

Pleasant Street Historic District

Transform 1st Avenue into downtown's outdoor dining destination

Southeast Historic District

Duckpond

Pleasant Street

Springhill

Develop the 2nd Avenue South corridor into the premier urban street experience in Downtown

UF Innovate

Porters Quarters

Enhance Connectivity Between Power District to downtown Core (SE 3rd Street)

NW 8th Avenue
NW 6th Street
University Avenue
1st Avenue
2nd Avenue
3rd Street
4th Avenue
SW 2nd Street
SW Depot Avenue
SE 9th Street
SE 11th Street
Gainesville-Hawthorne State Trail

South 2nd Avenue

► **What does it connect:** SE and SW 2nd Avenue span from UF innovate, through downtown, and Sweetwater Park toward the Southeast Historic District.

► **The opportunity:** Though already exhibiting a high quality streetscape with sidewalks and bike lanes, there are additional opportunities for improvements to transform this corridor into downtown's premiere urban street, such as additional north-south crossings and street trees.

East 3rd Street

► **What does it connect:** From Depot Park to the Thomas Center, SE and NE 3rd Street connects Springhill with downtown and Duckpond.

► **The opportunity:** Improvements to sidewalks, crossings, and bike facilities will create a safe and convenient north-south connection to Depot Park from the heart of downtown, as an alternate to South Main Street.

South 1st Avenue

► **What does it connect:** From the Southwest Parking Garage, through the "Streetery" and Bo Diddley Plaza, 1st Avenue terminates as an access drive for the downtown library near Sweetwater Park.

► **The opportunity:** With a span through the heart of downtown, this corridor has the opportunity to reflect a pedestrian-first environment. At its terminus near Sweetwater Park, there is an opportunity to become a new front door for a re-energized park.

85

Idea 9: Establish Transition Areas
Identify transition areas between downtown commercial areas and nearby residential neighborhoods.

Growth in downtown can support and uplift those communities closest to the core. As downtown infill continues to bring new neighbors, businesses and jobs to the area, it can also support positive and community-serving growth in the neighborhoods around it.

The neighborhoods located along downtown's edges each have a distinct history, character, and scale. These communities, shown on the map to the right, are Porters Quarters, Springhill, Pleasant Street, and Duckpond. Through our engagement, these neighbors largely expressed a desire to retain what makes their neighborhoods special and ensure that growth in downtown is sensitive to the scale and densities of their residential areas.

A development pattern that contextually transitions from downtown toward the neighborhoods is already supported by policies in the city's Land Development Code. The transect established in the zoning chapter outlines recommended maximum densities for a Downtown District, which this plan supports maintaining as-is, and its subsequent Urban Zones 1 through 9. While not encompassing the entirety of downtown's edges (shown
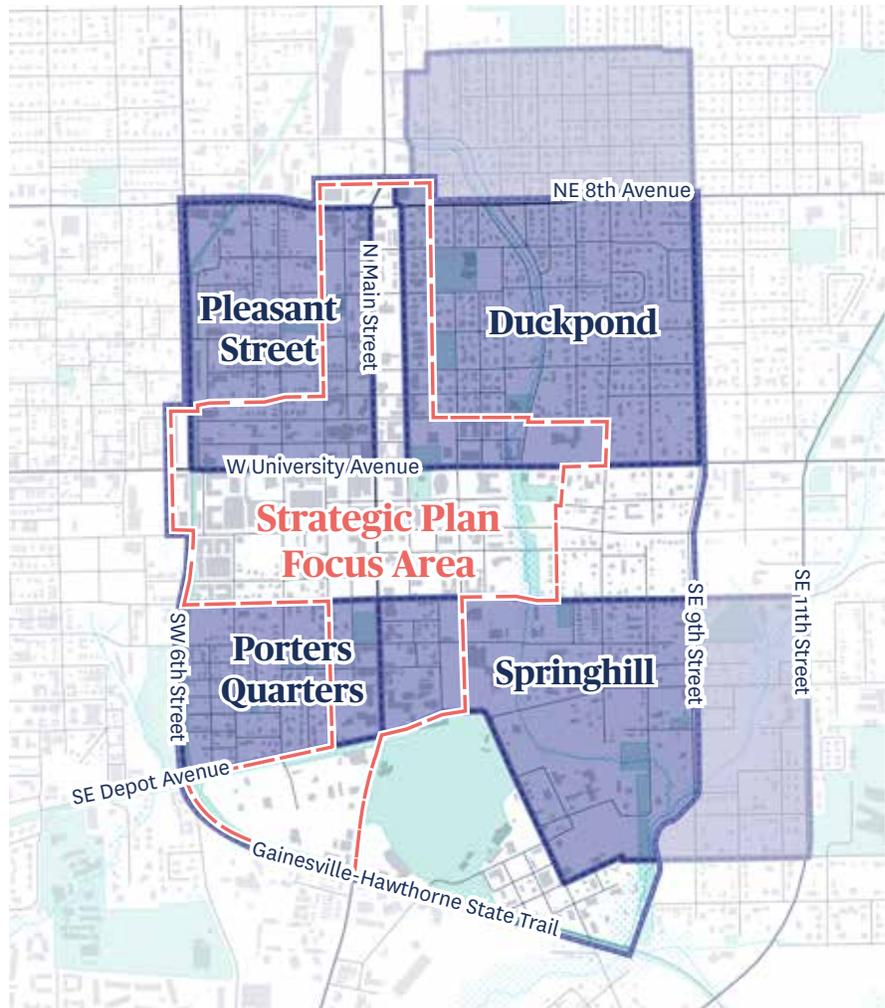
The greater study area includes four neighborhoods within its boundaries: Pleasant Street, Duckpond, Porters Quarters, and Springhill.

in dark red in the map on the accompanying page), these zones start to establish transition areas where a downtown district steps down in building heights and scale as it approaches single family areas, or communities with lower residential densities.

It is important to note that downtown and the downtown zoning district is where, as a city and community, high density development was deemed as both supported and encouraged. Throughout this process, Gainesville neighbors have firmly validated this notion

- that downtown is the most equitable place for high density housing because of its location, its access to amenities, and its access to services. As such, this plan supports the densities and building heights already established in the downtown zoning district.

Nonetheless, as growth occurs at downtown's edges with nearby neighborhoods, and where current zoning falls outside the transect zones, there is an opportunity to establish clear transition zones to guide new development. These zones can supplement

Map Legend:
- Single Family
- Single Family & Multi Family
- Multi-Family Residential
- Public Service and Operations
- Business
- Central City
- Mixed Use
- Office
- Education
- Industrial
- Historic District Boundary

Map labels: Northeast Historic District, Duckpond, Pleasant Street Historic District, Pleasant Street, Southeast Historic District, Springhill, Porters Quarters

Street labels: NW 8th Avenue, 9th Street, SE 11th Street, W University Avenue, SW 2nd Avenue, SW 4th Avenue, SW 2nd Street, SW 6th Street, SW Depot Avenue, Gainesville-Hawthorne State Trail

and build on the existing transect zones through dimensional standards and development requirements that adequately consider a surrounding residential context. **Potential strategies for these transition zones include:**

► **Height compatibility standards** that step down building heights and rooflines near single family communities.

► **Encouraging high quality infill** through the use of design guidelines that establish a harmonious relationship in building form between new and existing structures.

► **Supporting affordable housing types** beyond detached single-family or traditional multifamily, such as housing commonly associated with "missing middle" housing. These housing types include: duplexes, townhomes, small garden apartments, quad apartments, and courtyard buildings.

South Main Street gateway into Porters Quarters

Duckpond Neighborhood

87

Increase Housing Opportunities

Future housing development should meet the needs of the community at various scales and affordability levels.

Because of its central location, transit accessibility, public spaces, and civic services, downtowns are the best, most equitable and environmentally sustainable place to grow jobs and housing at all economic levels. Once strictly hubs for commerce, both in terms of jobs and shopping, downtowns across America have evolved over the last several decades into multi-faceted places with an increasing emphasis on residential neighborhood identity. This is particularly critical for Downtown Gainesville considering there has been no new non-student housing development over the last decade, while its adjoining residential neighborhoods have faced new demand pressures that have priced-out and displaced many long-standing residents. This is why the greater study area needs to address housing at various scales and affordability levels, while addressing the specific housing needs depending on typology and area.

In the case of Downtown Gainesville there are several key reasons for encouraging investment in new and existing housing development:

1. Downtown's residents need to be **more reflective of the broader community.**

2. Housing is a **value-add to employers**.

3. Housing provides **added tiers of demand for retailers.**

4. Housing can **enhance vibrancy.**

5. **Housing preservation** directly supports existing communities.

▶ **Idea 10: Address Housing at Scale**

▶ **Idea 11: Support Affordable Mixed-Income Housing**

▶ **Idea 12: Facilitate Market Rate Housing**

Housing Ecosystem
Recently Built Housing Supply by Typology

Neighborhood
Recent Built For-Sale Supply sold in the last three years

Affordable

Market Rate

Student

570 student beds

226 affordable units

500 MR units
1,200 student beds
800 hotel rooms

80 MR units
64 affordable units
4,500 student beds

Source: CoStar (Dec 2021) and Zillow (March 2022)

Housing Typologies and Contexts (What)

Understanding the breakdown of housing typologies (e.g. single family homes vs. apartments; owner vs. renter), their appropriate locations, and affordability levels are critical for establishing a framework for future housing development, redevelopment, maintenance, and preservation.

► **Neighborhood**: Though downtown is a neighborhood unto itself, in this context, "neighborhood" reflects primarily lower-density residential areas that are part of the Study Area, including Pleasant Street, Duckpond Springhill and Porters Quarters, but not considered the "urban core," which is higher density and includes a mix of commercial and civic uses. Future strategies for these areas should focus on preservation, anti-displacement, home repair, and context appropriate infill.

► **Affordable**: This type of housing encompasses a wide range of income levels based on Area Median Income (AMI), described on following page. Affordable housing can accommodate very low-income households (those earning below 30 percent AMI), to moderate-income households (30 to 60 percent AMI) to workforce housing (60 to 80 percent AMI). Affordable units can be incorporated within mixed-income developments and target and/or be restricted to seniors, families, and in some cases, artists.

► **Market Rate**: Consists of higher-quality housing that targets professionals and empty nesters that generally earn above $50,000 annually. These target groups often prefer urban living in highly-amenitized mixed-use areas. Currently, Celebration Pointe offers the newest and most competitive market rate units in the Gainesville area.

► **Student:** The proliferation of student housing, with more than 10,000 beds delivered in Gainesville since 2010, has been a deterrent to the delivery of other housing products Downtown— student housing is very profitable and drives up land costs. This plan strongly emphasizes the need for non-student housing development in the greater study area, with student housing focused closer to campus.

89

Current Challenges

Beyond student housing, there has been little residential development of any kind downtown; at the same time, the Gainesville market as a whole has been relatively slow to deliver new multi-family units with the city only adding around 2,000 non-student units since 2010.

There is also a two-sided challenge of development—making development feasible generally requires high enough rents and sale prices to overcome development costs. **Given their densities and central locations, downtown areas typically have some of the highest land values in a given region, which is why rental and sale prices for new market rate development are typically at the very high-end of the market.** However, these market dynamics often exclude low- and moderate-income households. Given market pressures for student housing, residential investment has stagnated Downtown.

Affordability (Who)

Housing affordability is not about a type of real estate product, it is about who you are trying to serve.

There is a general mis-perception about affordable housing. It can come in many forms, but fundamentally, housing affordability is about cost burden—according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), if a household pays more than 30 percent of income towards rent, it is considered cost burdened. Based on this definition, households across a wide range of socio-economic levels can be cost burdened, not just very low-income households. This is even more relevant for places like Gainesville where the cost of living is becoming increasingly more expensive coupled with the lack of adequate wage growth in many sectors.

Analyzing community-wide housing needs requires an understanding of the distribution of household income and how it relates to area median income (AMI). As a market with a large student population, it is also important to isolate the non-student population, since many students have very low incomes, or no income at all. For example, when considering all households, 28 percent in Gainesville earn less than $18,000, or less than 30 percent AMI, but when excluding households ages 25 and younger (the many of which
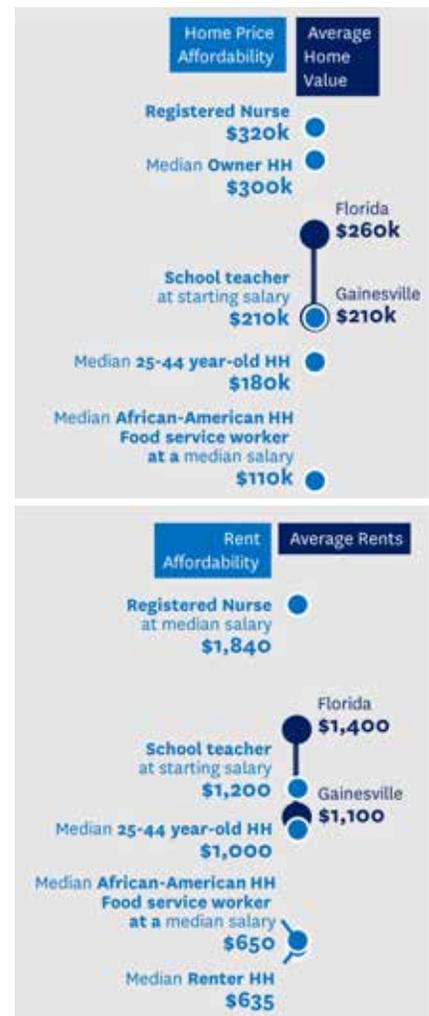
Source: ESRI (2020), Zillow (March 2021), ACS 5-Year Estimate (2019), Bureau of Labor Statistics (May 2020), Glassdoor (May 2021), CoStar (May 2021) and Bill HB 641 by the State of Florida

are students), this income bracket represents 19 percent of the households citywide. The graphic on the following page shows the household income and AMI distributions and housing prices that would be affordable within each of these brackets.

Understanding housing affordability by occupation or household composition is also critical. For example,

a teacher in Gainesville can generally afford the average rent ($1,100), although food service workers could only afford rents of nearly half of the citywide average. Disparities in housing affordability are also substantial based on race—the median income for an African American household is $26,000 and these households could only afford monthly rents of around $650.

There are increasing affordability challenges for long-standing residents, especially renter-occupied households, but the region will also need to accommodate the new workforce migrating to the market. Based on the latest employment projections for Alachua County, the county will have strong growth in higher-paying industries, including Health Care and Social Assistance and Professional and Technical Services, which will increase demand for higher-quality rental housing and potentially impact housing values, but the projected growth for Accommodation and Food Services as well as other lower-wage jobs, including those in Retail Trade and Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation, will put housing demand pressure on the affordable housing supply.

Affordability Metrics

| | 0% AMI | 30% AMI | 60% | 120% | 200% | % AMI (Area Median Income) |

City (all ages)

| Subsidized 28% | Affordable 20% | Workforce 26% | Upscale 15% | Luxury 12% |

City (ages 25+)

| Subsidized 19% | Affordable 21% | Workforce 29% | Upscale 18% | Luxury 14% |

HH Income: $18,000 | $36,000 | $73,000 | $122,000

Housing Affordability: $70k | $150k | $320k | $670k
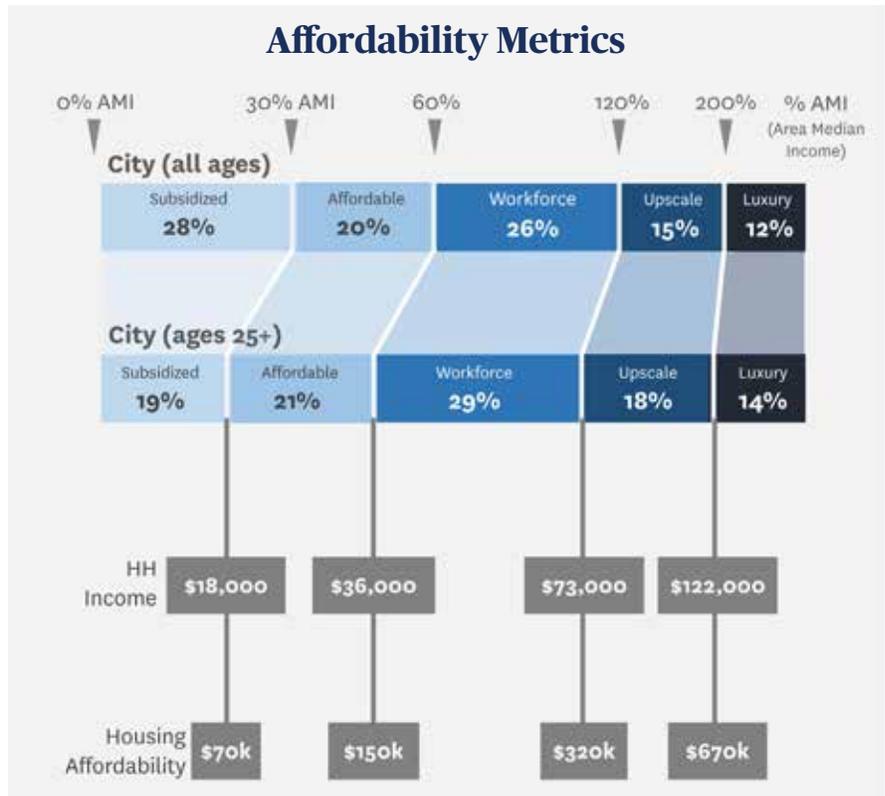
Source: ESRI (2020) and ACS 5-Year Estimate (2019)

What home prices could growing jobs afford?

average wage by occupation (2020)

- Management $310k
- Educational Services $310k
- Professional and Technical Services $330k
- Information $290k
- Health Care and Social Assistance $260k
- Manufacturing $270k
- Financial Activities $270k
- Construction $220k
- Transportation and Warehousing $210k
- average home value in Gainesville
- Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting $140k
- Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation $190k
- Other Services $150k
- Administrative and Waste Services $140k
- Retail Trade $120k
- Accommodation and Food Services $80k

projected new jobs by occupation (2021-2029): 0, 500, 1,000, 1,500, 2,000, 2,500, 3,000

Source: Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (2021)

Supporting a Housing Ecosystem

New housing development needs to meet the character and density of its neighborhoods and align with broader community goals and objectives.

The Study Area includes a wide range of housing types, uses, and densities—with the core parts of downtown closer to Bo Diddley Plaza consisting of a mix of medium- to high-density commercial and civic structures. Duckpond, Pleasant Street, Porters Quarters and Springhill are primary single-family neighborhoods with smaller-scale commercial and community-based uses throughout.

In addition to aligning with community character, meeting the broad spectrum of housing affordability levels does not have a one-size-fits-all approach and requires a more customized approach by location. At the same time, the planning process should not be too proscriptive in terms of specific development locations, but create a framework that addresses the *housing ecosystem* by district and typology.

Neighborhood: Current and future housing stock consists of single-family attached and detached homes with some smaller-scale multi-family properties as well as scattered neighborhood commercial and community-based uses throughout. Preservation of

Neighborhood		Avg. Sales Prices*	Affordable	
$300K Duckpond	**$180K** Pleasant St.	**$80K** Porter's		
*Based on homes sold in the last three years			**Based on city's avg. household size (2.2)	
For-Sale Income Affordability			**Income Limit****	**Rent Limit****
$80K Duckpond	**$53K** Pleasant St.	**$25K** Porter's	**$38K** County	**$1,020K** County
Market Rate			Student	
Avg. Rent/Unit **$1,240** Study Area	**Income Affordability** **$50K** Study Area		**Avg. Rent per Bed** **$845** Study Area	

Source: CoStar (Dec 2021), Novogradac HUD Data (2021), and Redfin (March 2021)

character and community are critical success factors.

Affordable: New mixed-use construction should utilize lot sizes and depths along North Main Street in addition to inclusionary set asides and subsidy for new multi-family development in Depot Park, Power District, and catalyst sites in the core of Downtown. Housing affordability throughout the residential neighborhoods should support socio-economic diversity.

Market Rate: The urban core provides the highest visibility and marketability for new higher-density multi-family development. Co-locating with major employers, retail amenities, and services can provide a value-add to

development opportunities. The areas around Depot Park also provide redevelopment opportunities given the availability of underutilized properties.

Student: While student housing demand may level out over the next decade, given the lack of UF enrollment growth, developers will almost certainly seek opportunities to replace obsolete or less competitive properties and serve an increasingly affluent student population. It should be encouraged near the UF campus. Strategic development in the Study Area should diversify housing and commercial offering to make downtown more inclusive and diverse.

Idea 10: Address Housing at Scale
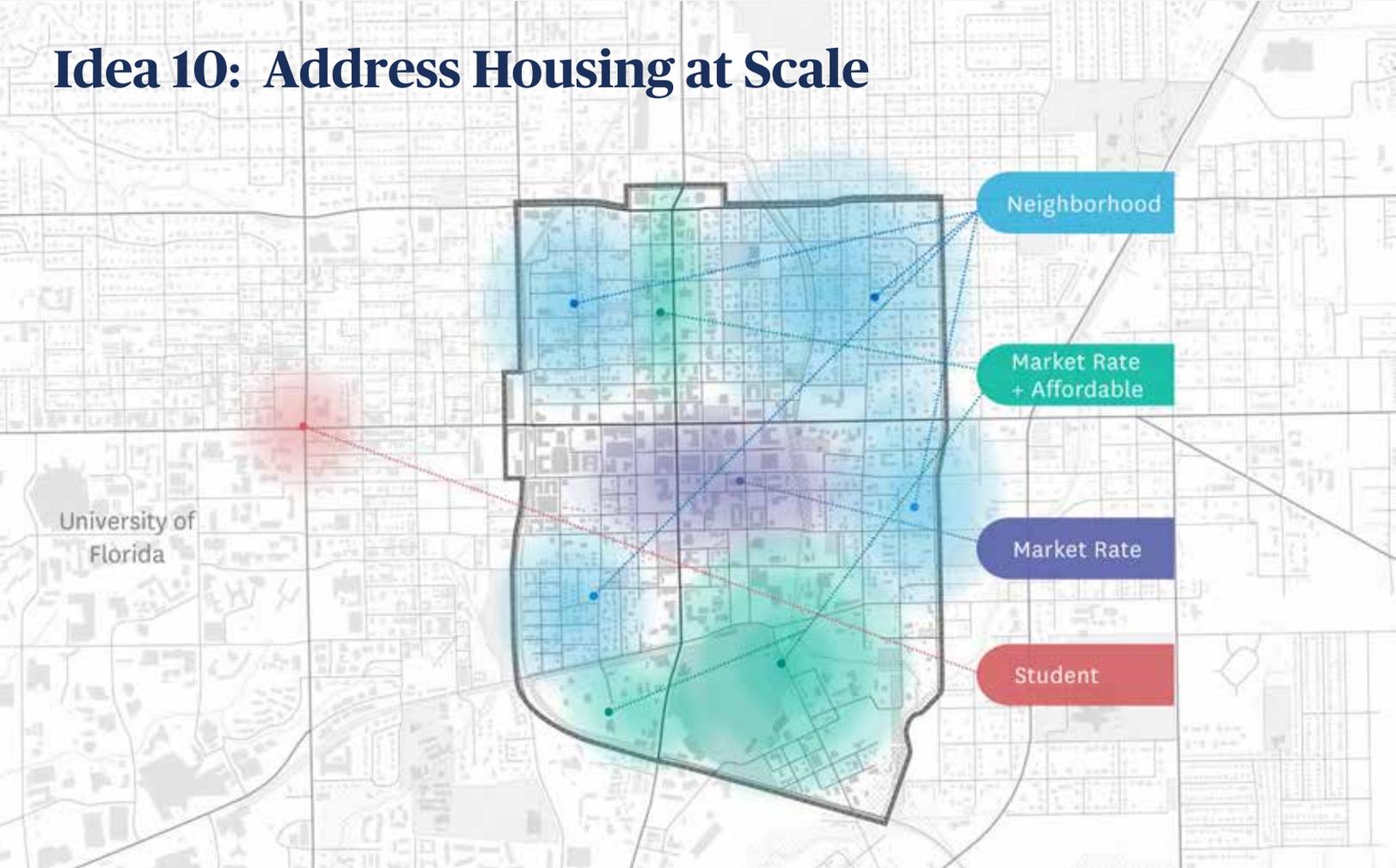
Idea 10: Address Housing at Scale

There are numerous of definitions and policy implications for "affordable" housing, but at its core, regardless of income level, if monthly rents or for-sale housing costs exceed 30 percent of monthly income, they are *cost burdened* and housing is no longer affordable. **With rising housing values and rents, even those with good-paying essential jobs such as nurses, teachers, and policemen can even struggle to find affordable rents or homes.** Recognizing these challenges, the Florida Housing Coalition prepared the *Blueprint for Affordable Housing for the City of Gainesville* in September 2020 ("Action Plan"), which indicated that in 2020, more than half of households in Gainesville are cost burdened and around a third (19,900 households) pay more than 50 percent of income towards rent.

As a follow up to this strategy the City of Gainesville commissioned the *Exclusionary Zoning & Inclusionary Zoning Study* released in late 2021 ("Inclusionary Study") that recommended a mandatory set-aside of 10 percent of units in new multi-family development and that they be affordable to household earnings below 80 percent area median income. While this policy has been successful in delivering affordable units in very competitive housing markets, it will have a relatively minimal impact on alleviating pent-up demand for affordable rental housing. From 2010 to early 2022, just over 2,000 multi-family units have been delivered in Gainesville, which under this policy would deliver 200 affordable units, or 20 annually, and would only satisfy a fraction of demand.

Given this overwhelming need for affordable housing, it can be easy to lose sight of the need for non-student market rate housing Downtown.

Mixed-Income Housing within the Study Area

330 affordable units

+15 affordable units — CATALYST SITES

+190 renovated units — NEIGHBORHOODS

+75 affordable units — NORTH MAIN CORRIDOR

+50 affordable units — DEPOT PARK SET-ASIDES
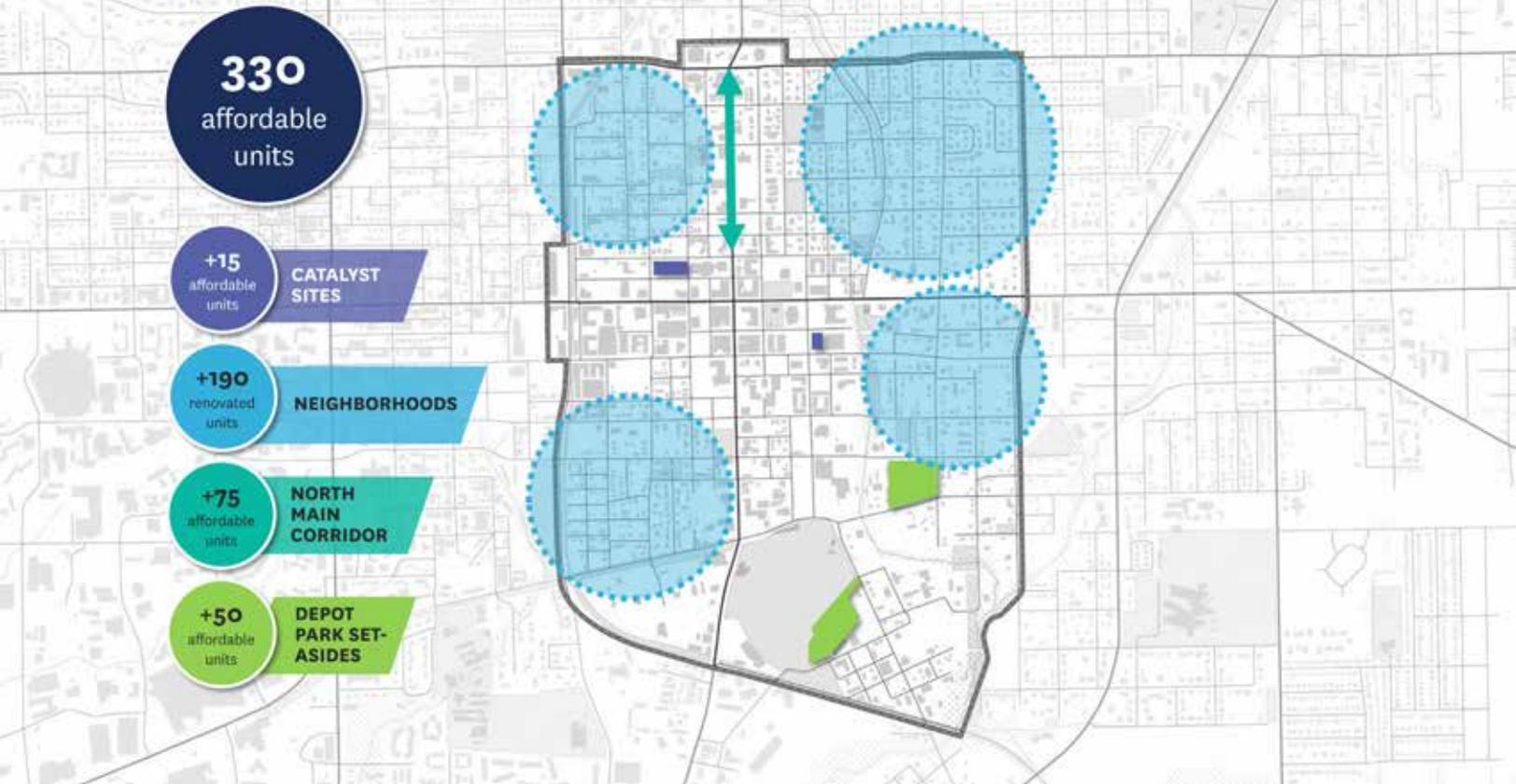
When considering future housing development Downtown, there is need to think holistically and to *address housing at scale*, which means applying a wide variety of housing policies, tools, and funding sources in the core of Downtown, but also recognizing the community needs and development potential throughout the Study Area, including corridors and adjacent lower-density residential areas.

Catalyst Areas (15 affordable units): There are two catalyst sites near downtown that have capacity for 100 total units, with 15 affordable units given a 15 percent set-aside. The development would consist of four- to five-story mixed-income apartments at a density of 40 units per acre.

Neighborhoods (190 renovated affordable units): There are 380 housing units that are vacant or paying well-below market rate rents within the study area. Assuming that half of these properties are vacant or undervalued due to neglect or poor conditions and can be feasibly renovated to great conditions, an additional 190 quality, renovated, affordable units can be introduced to the study area.

North Main Corridor (75 affordable): Large, underutilized properties along North Main Street have capacity for at least 75 affordable units. The development would consist of four- to five-story mixed-income apartments at a density of 40 units per acre.

Depot Park Set-Asides (Inclusionary) (75 affordable units): Large developable properties near Depot Park have capacity for 335 total units, with 50 affordable units given a 15 percent set-aside. The development would consists of four- to five-story mixed-income apartments at a density of 35 units per acre.

Idea 11: Support Affordable and Mixed-Income Housing

Capitol Gateway, a mixed-income development in Atlanta, GA (Source: Apartment Ratings)

Idea 11: Support Affordable and Mixed-Income Housing

Supporting affordable and mixed-income housing development will require establishing a toolkit that links funding sources and policy actions. The Gainesville Housing Action Plan and Inclusionary Study set the stage for comprehensive citywide approach, but for Downtown Gainesville there needs to be a customized approach based on location/district, housing type, and household need.

The following actions are not intended to be mutually exclusive—one action alone cannot fully address community housing needs at scale.   These are part of a toolkit of interactive policies, interventions, and governance structures that communities across the county have used to support affordable housing development, redevelopment, and preservation, in addition to direct support for homeowners and policies and programs to minimize displacement. Additionally, a fully-realized and effective downtown housing strategy will need to leverage the required citywide policies and funding sources.

Continue pursuing alternative funding streams to support affordable housing fund

In most cases, subsidy is needed to overcome affordable housing development feasibility gaps, especially in urban areas like Downtown Gainesville given higher land and construction costs. The establishment of the Alachua County Affordable Housing Trust Fund supports the Action Plan's strategy to "Diversify Funding Sources," but the city should explore alternative funding for Downtown-specific development, including 1) leveraging student housing student housing development with an affordable housing

fee structure, 2) bolstering foundation, corporate, and institutional support, 3) payment in Lieu of affordable unit set-asides, and 4) bond issuance that targets downtown redevelopment opportunities.

Continue to pursue low-income housing tax credits (LIHTC) in key areas

The LIHTC program is the largest and most effective affordable housing funding source nationwide; however, these resources are finite and the application process can be onerous and very competitive requiring multiple applications over a several year period before approval. Though allocation cycles limit how much cities and counties receive annually— only around 430 LIHTC units have been delivered in the city over the last 10 years, or 43 annually—LIHTC would provide the best opportunity to fund higher-density mixed-income housing in select corridors or around Depot Park over the mid-term. While the program is geared to support for-profit and non-profit development entities, partnerships with the city, county, and community organization can increase the competitiveness of funding applications.

Increase capacity of community development organizations (CDOs)

Given the diversity of housing and community needs throughout the study area, Pleasant Street, Duckpond, Porters Quarters and Springhill will need a different type of neighborhood-focused entity compared to a Business Improvement District (BID) or downtown organization. A dedicated CDO, a 501(c)3 organization, can often balance housing, economic development, and social service needs in a community, and also act as a conduit for public, private, and philanthropic funds. The CDO could pursue all housing subsidy funding sources for new construction, rehabilitation, and homeowner assistance. In addition, this type of organization could coordinate and improve existing services for youth and local economic development initiatives.

A successful (and impactful) CDO generally evolves over time. In many cases, these organizations are formed with a volunteer board and a single staff person primarily engaged in community organizing. Over time, the CDO can evolve into have a more direct role in property maintenance, new development, and public realm improvements, which generally requires additional staff and funds. Given economies of scale and capacity, a single

CDO is recommended with representation from each of the neighborhoods.

Establish RFP process for publicly-owned land/catalyst sites

The redevelopment of publicly-owned land provides an opportunity to mandate affordable units within the development plan. Given the number of publicly-owned assets downtown with redevelopment potential, establishing a request for proposals (RFP) process for private developers will support transparency and accountability and ensure that community-based goals are incorporated in the development plan.

Pursue neighborhood stabilization programs and policies

While higher-density development is recommended for the urban core and select areas surrounding of Depot Park, the surrounding residential neighborhoods have limited capacity for new development and future development will need to be context sensitive. A more one-the-ground approach is needed that directly supports existing homeowners and renters to ensure that they can remain in their homes over the long term. This approach can be more sustainable and viable in the long run with a well-resourced CDO to serve as a neighborhood liaison between property owners and resources.

Hudson Village, a mixed-income development in Hollywood, FL
(Source: Housing Trust Group)

Support the creation of a community land trust (CLT)

In alignment with the Action Plan, the creation of a CLT in select parts of the study could help support long-term ownership and affordability for the community, especially in Pleasant Street, Porters Quarters, and Springhill. Future CLT initiatives pursued by the city should prioritize these specific neighborhoods given development pressures and increasing vulnerability to gentrification.

Bolster home repair funding programs and initiatives

Continue marking, outreach, and expansion of the City of Gainesville's Housing Rehabilitation Program (HRP) that assists eligible homeowners with resulting health and safety violations with their homes, but also explore ways to expand program funding wit alternative public and philanthropic sources.

Provide technical assistance and outreach to long-standing homeowners

In many cases, long-standing and/or multi-generational homeowners are not aware of the programs and resources that may be available or refinancing opportunities to support reinvestment in their properties. Homeowners may also need support with title assistance or other legal documentation related to ownership and deed transfer. Community outreach and technical assistance programs should specifically target Study Area households.

Repurpose obsolete student housing as workforce housing

Although the Study Area does not have a supply of older student housing properties, the city should explore an initiative to engage with property owners with aging and/or obsolete student housing properties (or those struggling with occupancy) to assist with the repositioning of these properties as workforce housing. Potential programs could support the transfer of ownership to affordable housing developers and other entities as well as fundraising and financing for renovation.

Idea 12: Facilitate Market Rate Housing

Griffis at Riata, a market rate development in Austin, TX (Source: Griffis Residential)

Idea 12: Facilitate Market Rate Housing

Given the lack of new market rate development, there are barriers that need to be overcome. While direct subsidy is not recommended for supporting market rate development there are policies that can help facilitate development and reduce risk for developers, including tax abatement, land assembly, flexible zoning, and partnerships with UF and other local employers.

Pursue tax abatement for new construction and major rehabilitations

Property tax abatement policies have been successful in other cities for prompting new residential and commercial development. While some argue that this limits near-term tax revenue for local jurisdictions, it can help bridge the feasibility gap for multi-family development. A targeted tax abatement program is select areas of downtown would encourage new market rate development, and after expiration of the abatement (typically 10 years), local jurisdictions would have a significant net gain in tax revenue.

Explore use of GCRA funds to support mixed-income housing development

The GCRA should continue exploring ways to leverage its funding and resources to support new residential development. Similar to its development agreement to fund public infrastructure improvements for the development of Hyatt Place, the GCRA should engage with developers to align strategic development interests, especially for the several catalyst sites throughout Downtown, along the North Main corridor, and around Depot Park. Potential investments include co-locating right-of-

way improvements, bike-ped infrastructure, beautification, tree planting, and other place-based investments with redevelopment sites as well as providing technical assistance to property owners and development entities.

Leverage UF Innovate as value-add for market rate development

As the hub and facilitator of growing Gainesville's technology and knowledge-based economy, UF Innovate is a beacon for talent development and attracting industry to the region. However, the lack of quality market rate housing, especially higher-end non-student apartments somewhat hinders its ability to attract companies Downtown. The presence of UF Innovate does provide a value-add to developers given that it is an activity generator and source of future tenants. UF Innovate should assist with developer outreach and marketing efforts and provide community support and communications with future residential development projects (e.g. letters of support for local officials, etc.).

Repurpose and assemble public land

Often the greatest barrier to urban reinvestment efforts is access to land or sites that have the capacity for larger-scale redevelopment and the process of assembling land can be lengthy and costly with significantly higher levels of risk compared to greenfield suburban development. The city and other local jurisdictions, especially those with significant real estate assets or holdings, can provide opportunities for new development, while still ensuring that future development is consistent with community needs and vision. The process for redeveloping public land should be formalized to ensure the needed efficiencies with development entities coupled with the necessary levels of transparency and accountability to build community support.

Explore master leasing model to lower developer risk

In the case of office or retail development, the risk of speculative real estate development (or space that will be leased to other businesses or entities) is often minimized when an agreement is in place for an entity to lease a significant portion of the space prior to construction. This same entity can occupy the space itself or sub-lease the space. This type of model continued to be explored for residential development. In some cases, a master lease agreement

can be in place for a portion of an apartment building for the use as short-term rentals to overcome development feasibility challenges, and once the market is tested, these units can be converted to conventional leases.

Leverage existing parking structures and assets to unlock development potential for vacant parcels and/or above-floor spaces

While downtown has the density, pedestrian infrastructure, and access to public transportation that can reduces the need for an automobile as well as flexible zoning that minimizes parking requirements for new development, the marketability of housing, retail, and office space is dramatically reduced without offering parking access. However, incorporating on-site parking can be challenging in downtown areas from a design or development feasibility perspective, especially for older commercial properties with above-floor space with residential redevelopment potential. The repositioning of the Southwest Downtown Garage and other city-owned parking assets and creating a process for shared-use agreements should be explored for unlocking the potential for new housing development.

Create a Supportive Local Business Environment

The small business community can collectively generate vibrancy and cultivate an identity for a district.

Based on community and stakeholder engagement and feedback, it was clear that diversifying the business offerings in Downtown Gainesville is a desired top priority. Interestingly, the business environment was also highlighted as one of the most attractive aspects of downtown, so the feedback can be interpreted as a call for more, while increasing opportunities for people of color-owned businesses and aligning overall marketing and branding efforts to support local businesses. While suburban-style automobile-centric commercial development is best positioned to satisfy certain types of retail demand such as supermarkets, big box stores, drive-through fast food restaurants and home improvement stores, downtowns provide a more walkable and experiential environment with smaller-scale storefront retail spaces that are better suited for locally-owned food and beverage, boutique, personal services, and creative uses such as art galleries and studios.

Unlocking the true potential of downtown will require creating a supportive small business ecosystem that leverages technical assistance and funding resources, marketing, and placemaking, while linking the right types of businesses with real estate product.

▶ **Idea 13: Unlock Real Estate Potential**

▶ **Idea 14: Increase Direct Small Business Assistance**

Economic Challenges in Downtown

Few Actively Listed Retail Spaces
3,000 SF of Vacant Space

Limited Office Market Potential
82,000 SF of Vacant Space

Lack of Non-Student Housing Development
No apartments delivered since 1980s

Limited Market Support
Less than 40,000 square feet of net new retail space

Decrease in Businesses
6 percent decrease since 2010

Increasing Regional Competition
Celebration Pointe 2.3M SF retail 500 apartments

Economic Diversification
50+ percent of Downtown jobs are public sector

Source: CoStar (2022), ACS 5-Year Estimates (2019), ESRI (2021)

What are the challenges?

Lack of actively listed retail space: While vacancy persists, there is a relatively small supply of actively listed retail spaces (according to CoStar, in 2021, there were only 15,400 square feet of vacant space Downtown).

Limited leasing activity: Leasing activity downtown has been very slow over the last several years with annual average leasing of only 12,000 square feet over a four-year period (2018 to 2021) compared to an annual average of 206,000 square feet citywide. When considering net leasing activity, there was a decline of around 45,000 square feet downtown compared to an increase of 246,000 square feet citywide. *Source: CoStar*

Decline in small businesses: From 2010 to 2019, there was a six percent decrease in small businesses (establishments with fewer than 20 employees) in downtown zip codes compared to a six percent increase in the county and 15 percent increase citywide. *Source: U.S. Census, County Business Patterns*

Lack of non-student housing development: Successful retail districts rely on and serve multiple tiers of demand, including regional visitors, tourists, employees, and residents. The lack of higher-density non-student housing has limited retail support especially for neighborhood retail uses such as food stores, personal services, and more diversified food and beverage offerings.

Increase in regional competition: The continued development of Celebration Pointe with its 2.3 million square feet of commercial space and 500 apartments has pulled spending activity out of Downtown, which has emphasized the need for downtown to create a clean, safe, and accessible environment, while promoting its identity, culture, and authenticity to remain competitive.

Economic diversification: With more than 50 percent of downtown jobs in the public sector, there is a critical need to support economic diversification. Downtown can provide added value to prospective employers given its walkability, access to transportation and services, and proximity to the UF campus. Investments in the public realm and housing development can also support economic diversification.

Limited market support: Given competition from nearby retail clusters and modest projected regional growth, between 30,000 and 50,000 square feet of net new retail space can be supported.
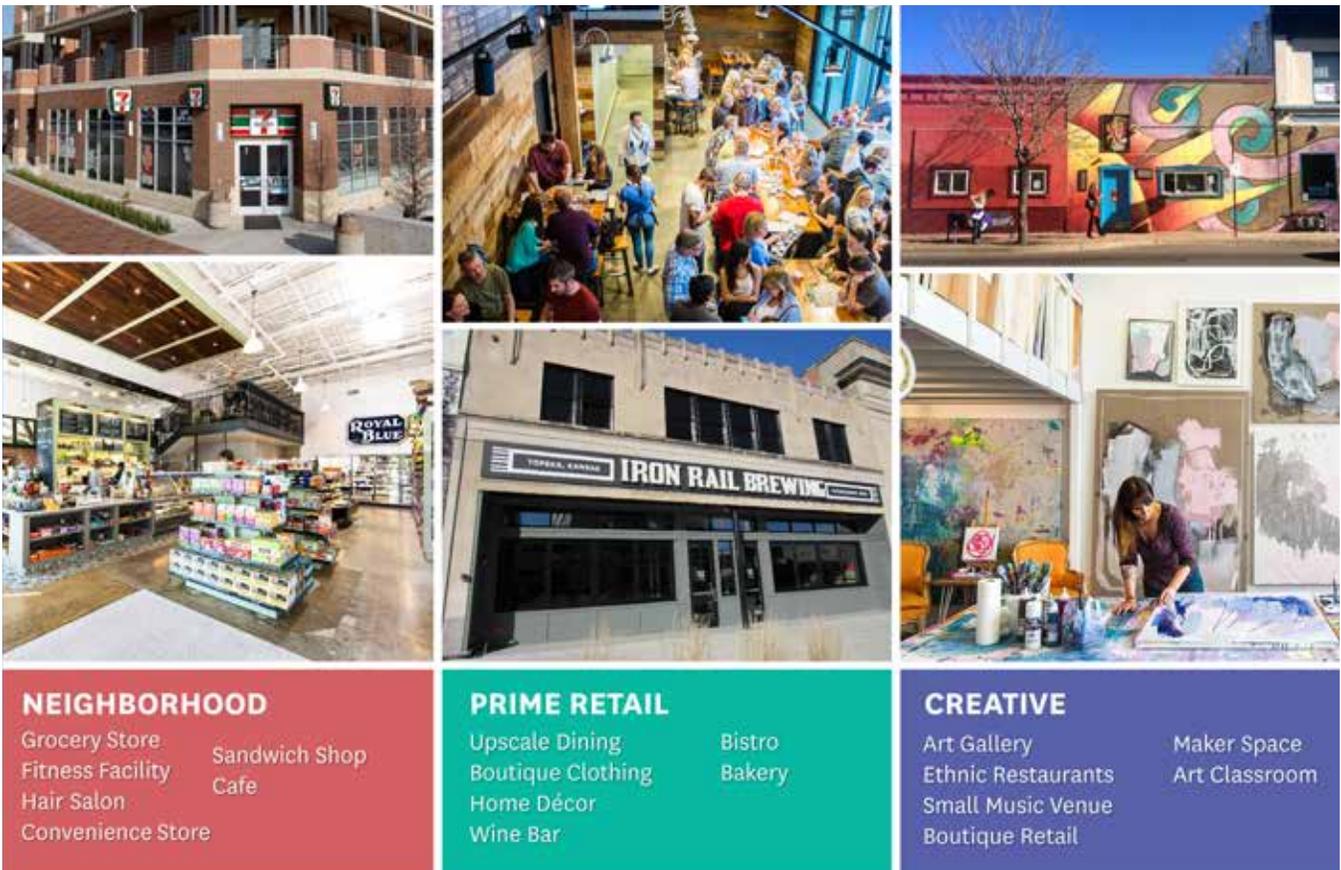
NEIGHBORHOOD
Grocery Store
Fitness Facility
Hair Salon
Convenience Store
Sandwich Shop
Cafe

PRIME RETAIL
Upscale Dining
Boutique Clothing
Home Décor
Wine Bar
Bistro
Bakery

CREATIVE
Art Gallery
Ethnic Restaurants
Small Music Venue
Boutique Retail
Maker Space
Art Classroom

Right Sizing Opportunity

With an oversupply of retail space within a 15-minute drive of Downtown, this competitive landscape limits development opportunities. At the same time, as the retail market evolves with the proliferation of online shopping and continued evolution of suburban-style strip centers, town centers, and shopping malls, **downtowns across the country have had to adapt and provide more experiential offerings that meet the needs of multiple tiers of demand, including residents, employers, regional visitors, tourists, and in the case of cities with major universities, students.**

There are effectively three types of retail categories that "work" in downtowns:

Neighborhood: These meet the day-to-day needs of nearby residents and employees, such as small and specialty grocery stores, health and beauty, salons, lunch spots, fast casual restaurants, and cafes.

Prime Retail: These are primarily hospitality-based offerings and need to be supported by a much broader customer base, including regional visitors (e.g. those living outside of the study area or in suburban areas) as well as business travelers and tourists. Tenants include full-service restaurants, bistros, boutiques, and higher-end home decor.

Creative: These uses include galleries, ethnic restaurants, performance venues, maker spaces, and other recreational amenities that serve as destinations and activity generators for locals and visitors. They occupy a wide range of spaces from repurposed light industrial space to smaller storefronts to pop-up establishments such as those within temporary retail spaces, repurposed shipping containers, or food trucks. Given the existing types of businesses and built environment surrounding Depot Park as well as the CADE Museum, this area is prime for more destination-creative uses.

What is a Downtown small business ecosystem?

Foot Traffic · Skill Development · Place · Marketing · Brand/Identity · Safe & Clean · Business Capital · Cost Environment · Parking Management

Unlocking the true potential of downtown is more than just filling vacant storefronts. It requires the cultivation of an ecosystem that links small business resources, technical assistance, marketing, and the built environment.

A future economic strategy for downtown needs to consider the diverse range of stakeholders and entities with a focus on creating opportunities for entrepreneurs and small businesses. This includes meeting an establishment's retail estate needs, but also providing resources, technical assistance, collaborations, marketing, and programmed public spaces to allow them to grow and thrive. From a small business perspective, creating a clean and safe environment for their customers is paramount in addition to parking management and enhanced pedestrian infrastructure.

In the case of Downtown Gainesville, given regional competition, finite demand for retail, and relatively soft office market, there is a need to right size opportunity and focus on a growth-from-within strategy. The organic growth of food and beverage, retail, and cultural uses around Depot Park demonstrates the creative potential, identity, and character of Gainesville's small business community and sets the stage for continued momentum in the core areas of Downtown. While future development should not be prescriptive, there should be more intentionality and curating of uses and business types, in addition to supporting the overall downtown experience.

Much like the housing affordability and development feasibility conundrum, a major component to this process is recognizing the importance of retail space affordability, while balancing the need for property owners to derive enough revenue to support reinvestment in their properties. This also speaks to the need to create a full spectrum of opportunities throughout the Study Area.

Downtown Small Business Ecosystem

| Innovation District	Professional Services	Main Street	Established Employers	Makers/Creative
$24/SF - $30/SF Lease Rate	$20/SF - $25/SF Lease Rate	$12/SF - $15/SF Lease Rate	$20/SF - $22/SF Lease Rate	$6/SF - $10/SF Lease Rate
› Biotech › UF Innovate › UF strategic positioning › Future Class A or lab development	› Finance › Legal › IT › Step-Up Space › Architecture and Engineering	› Food and beverage › Boutique › Personal services › Fitness	› Local government › UF › Santa Fe College › GRU	› Flexible Space › Galleries/Arts/Performance › Fabrication › Artisanal Design

Link business type with real estate product and location

One of the most fundamental components to the downtown business ecosystem is the linkage between business type their real estate needs, both in terms of physical space, but also sustainable lease rates and locational attributes. For example, a coffee shop often needs to be in a highly-visible location with ample foot traffic, but in a smaller space with a more affordable lease rate, while artisanal and creative industries prefer open and less finished space that is accessible to amenities, but with less priority for visibility.

While the **Innovation District** is just west of the Study Area, it is still relevant to the downtown plan since it offers some of the highest quality office space in the region coupled with entrepreneurial support resources to bolster the regional innovation industry. Lease rates are at the top of the market and future Class A office development—or other supportive tech resources such as wet lab space—can be accommodated in the future, which is the focus for the Study Area is more on repurposing existing commercial space, programming, and tenanting strategies.

Professional Services: This sector includes financial services, legal, architecture/engineering, administrative, and smaller tech businesses, including startups and setups. Much of this demand can be accommodated with existing office space (1.2 million square feet with around 80,000 square feet of vacant space), which also provides a market opportunity to reinvest in existing spaces, including historic office space. Lease rates generally need to be positioned below Class A leases, in the $20 to $25 per square foot range. These uses are the most appropriate in the core areas of Downtown, but also the North Main corridor. Access to parking is critical for workers and customers.

Downtown Small Business Ecosystem
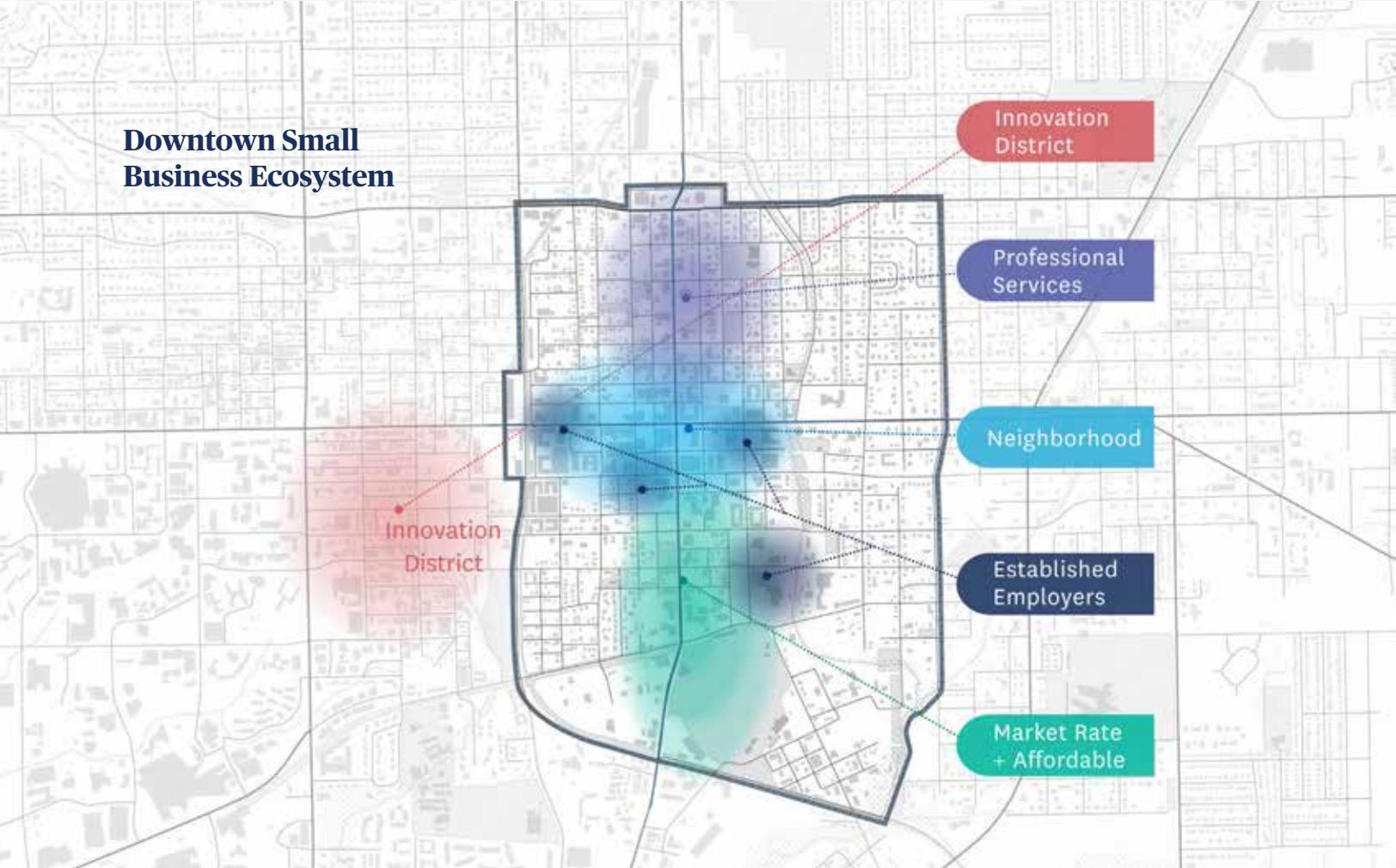
Main Street: This category generally includes street-level storefront businesses such as smaller retail, boutiques, food and beverage, personal services, and some professional service uses such as real estate offices. These are the most visible businesses with the most potential for promoting community identity and vibrancy. The most important criteria are visibility, signage, customer accessibly, district cleanliness and safety, and lease affordability. Ideal lease rates for locally-owned businesses are around $15 per square foot—lease rates of $20 per square foot and higher are generally only achievable for national chains or highly-productive full-service restaurants. Property owners seeking to achieve these higher rent thresholds can often result in prolonged periods of vacancy.

Established Employers: More than half of the jobs downtown are the public sector, which limits growth opportunities, but these employers also serve as community anchors and provide long-term economic stability. While lease rates are less critical, their general locations and operations can be leveraged to support complementary uses such as retail and residential as well as community services.

Makers/Creative: These include fabricators, artisanal designers, craftspeople, and production companies as well as gallery spaces and studios that typically occupy existing and/or repurposed industrial spaces. Generally, users require open flexible floorplans and affordability with lease rates of less than $10 per square foot. The areas around South Main Street and Depot Park are ideal for this type of activity given the existing building stock, existing small business community, and alignment with the mission of the Cade Museum. This should also be leveraged as part of a marketing and branding initiative.

Idea 13: Unlock Real Estate Potential

Though storefront vacancy is not widespread throughout the Study Area, creating opportunities for space activation, especially for those spaces that are not being activity marketed, as well as tenant diversification are still critical for the district's future viability. **Given the ever evolving nature of retail, space needs to be adaptive to changing trends and needs and must be customizable to a broad range of uses beyond traditional storefront users.** The City should continue working with existing and prospective businesses for occupying city-owned property, including the parking garage, Bo Diddley Plaza, and Power District.

Curate a Broad Mix of Ground-Floor Uses

A successful commercial District maintains a diverse mix of ground-floor tenants in order to serve the needs of multiple segments of demand (workers, residents, and visitors) and allow for greater vibrancy throughout the day and evening.

In order to attract more visitor spending, destination and entertainment retail is needed, including bars, restaurants, venues, breweries, and boutiques; however, there is also a need to capture more local household spending with more service-oriented businesses such as dry cleaners, salons, fitness centers, or other daily needs retailers as well as daytime offerings for the local workforce, including cafes and lunch spots.

Given the demand capture needed to support brick and mortar retail in the face of competition from big box stores, online sales, or other retail districts, the Study Area also needs to incorporate a mix of non-retail tenant users such as storefront offices, galleries or arts-based uses, or live-work residential spaces. Though not direct contributors to the sales tax base, these types of uses can "fill the gaps" and offer additional market support for existing retailers. The diversification of retail users should be positioned to further enhance the broader sub-district vision and strategies, as presented previously.

Curate a Broad Mix of Uses

DAYTIME AND LOCAL RETAIL	STOREFRONT OFFICE SUITES	CIVIC ANCHORS	SERVICE RETAIL	CREATIVE/ ARTS	EXPERIENTIAL & DESTINATION
Artist Shops and Galleries, Antiques, Local Shops, Cafes, and Lunch Spots	Small Creative Firms, and Service Providers	Library and Student Spaces	Personal Care Services, Barber Shops, and Salons	Galleries, Art Studios, and Practice Spaces	Bars, Full-Service Restaurants, Indoor Sports, Eatertainment, Music Venues, and Breweries

Daytime and local retail
Storefront Office Suites
Civic Spaces
Service Retail
Creative/Arts
Experiential & Destination

8am   10   12pm   2   4   6   8   10   12am

Establish a **diverse mix** of uses during **all active hours** of the day

Idea 13: Unlock Real Estate Potential

Source: storefront.com

Activate Storefronts: Facilitate Startups and Popups

Installing temporary or "popup" retailers, restaurants, art studios, and other uses in vacant storefronts can add vitality to an otherwise quiet block, provide property owners a modest source of revenue, and help local entrepreneurs test business concepts that could become permanent fixtures in the future.

Popups also complement community events designed to bring visitors to the area for a special experience. Visitors that participate in these events will be even more likely to leave with a positive impression of Downtown Gainesville—and be more likely to return—if they see a district with more unique local businesses and a continual change in programming and offerings.

A Place-Management Organization (see Idea 15) would play a role in facilitating these types of uses—ranging from one weekend to six months—by matching entrepreneurs with willing and interested owners of vacant space, and by developing a framework for these short-term arrangements. Resources such as a template popup lease could identify and address issues specific to a short-term occupancy, and offer a balanced starting point for negotiation between landlord and tenant.

The facilitating organization could also offer small matching grants ($1,000 to $2,000) for modest improvements that make space move-in ready for a temporary use, such as by clearing space, painting walls white, or building simple display cases. Finally, stakeholders could work with the City's Department of Sustainable Development to codify occupancy permit standards appropriate for this special type of short-term use. A "popup toolkit" could outline this approvals process, and connect interested parties to key resources and information.

Repurpose Obsolete Space: Continue or expand assisting upgrades and improvements to commercial district building stock

Maintaining Downtown Gainesville's character will be critical for its long-term positioning as an attractive destination for visitors and future residents, which emphasizes the importance of maintaining its commercial building stock, especially its ground-floor retail environment.

One such program is the Gainesville Community Reinvestment Area's (GCRA) Business Improvement Grant that provides a 50 percent matching grant for eligible improvements to building exteriors with rewards of up to $50,000 for most properties and up to $150,000 for historically designated properties. Dick Mondell's Burgers and Fries on SW 4th Avenue provides a success story from this program. GCRA should *actively* engage with downtown property owners to continue marketing the program and to build support for increased funding.

Source: Guide to Greater Gainesville

Idea 14: Increase Direct Small Business Assistance

- ▶ CENTER FOR INNOVATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (CIED)
- ▶ GREATER GAINESVILLE CHAMBER
- ▶ UF INNOVATE / ACCELERATE at THE HUB
- ▶ GAINESVILLE TECHNOLOGY ENTREPRENERUSHIP CENTER (GTEC)

☐ Incubator Space
☐ Technical Assistance
☐ Startup and Entrepreneurial Support
☐ Networking and Mentoring
☐ Access to Capital Assistance
☐ Marketing Support
☐ Workforce Training

Idea 14: Increase Direct Small Business Assistance

Building upon a growth-from-within strategy, programs, spaces, and resources need to be in place to ensure that aspiring entrepreneurs and small businesses have the tools to thrive in Downtown Gainesville. From the engagement process, the small business community was identified as one of the most prominent assets of Downtown, which could be further bolstered through continued partnerships with local entrepreneurial service providers and resources as well as expanded direct funding for small businesses. Embedded in this strategy is also creating a more intentional and expansive marketing and branding campaign that celebrates Downtown's business community.

Leverage Entrepreneurial Support Resources

Gainesville is fortunate to already have many of the key resources and entities needed to support this ecosystem, including Center for Innovation and Economic Development (CIED), Greater Gainesville Chamber, UF Innovate and Accelerate at The Hub, and Gainesville Technology Entrepreneurship Center.

In many ways, there is less of a need to create new programs, but to expand existing programs, create better alignment between providers, and assist with acclimating aspiring entrepreneurs and existing small business with Downtown. Maintaining an entrepreneurial ecosystem generally requires the following assets, tools, programs, and resources:

Technical Assistance: This includes direct advising and assistance on small business planning and operations, financial management, administrative management, growth/expansion, among others, and are often provided through the U.S. Small Business Administration Small Business Development Centers (SBDC);

Startup and Entrepreneurial Support: This includes the needed supports for launching new businesses, which includes Main Street, professional services, and tech and high-growth businesses. The types of services vary depending on the sector, which tech and high-growth business programs are often aligned with accelerator programs and linkages to venture capital investment, while Main Street startup assistance can provide general new business support and advising on real estate and workforce needs.

Access to Capital Assistance: One of the biggest deterrent to startup growth is the lack of capital, which is especially challenging for people of color given disparities in income, wealth, and property ownership. Increasing the role of CDFIs, micro-lender, and other investment entities and enhancing financial literacy will critical for the economic future of startups and small

businesses, but these efforts represent a citywide and regional challenge that will require a coordinated approach. The City should revive efforts around the Opportunity Loan Fund.

Marketing Support: Businesses in downtown districts need foot traffic to survive. Many small businesses do not have the revenue or resources for enhanced and targeted marketing and advertising, although a coordinated district marketing campaign and event programming schedule would have a profound impact on expanding market share.

Networking and Mentoring: Though seemingly fundamental, engaging with friends, colleagues, or business peers is often the most effective way of assessing business challenges. Local non-profits and economic development organizations can provide more formalized and structured business support resources, but facilitating peer-to-peer

networking opportunities is also a very critical component to the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Events should be informal, inclusive, and multi-generational.

Workforce Training: Linking startups and small businesses with capable staff (temporary or full-time) is critical. Given the presence of UF, Gainesville has a very deep talent pool, although accessing the workforce and ensuring that it meets the needs of local businesses should be a seamless process. Partnerships are currently being pursued by the City, County, Santa Fe College, and private sector.

Incubator Space: More than just providing work space, incubators are a portal into the innovation and entrepreneurial community. They can take many forms from basic co-working spaces to spaces with more programmatic elements that include accelerators and on-site entrepreneurial support organizations. There is no one-size-fits-all incubator and they should be positioned to serve a wide range of industries, including retail, arts/creative, and Main Street businesses. The City has experience with incubator space through the establishment of the GTEC in East Gainesville, but it should explore a satellite operation within the Study Area.

Arch Grants
St. Louis, MO

**ARCH GRANTS**

$50K grant for startups to move to Downtown St. Louis for at least one year

Startups encouraged to lease space at **76,000 SF co-working/ incubator** (T-REX)

Facility includes the offices of **entrepreneurship support organizations and venture capital firms**

20 percent of startups led by people of color and **40 percent** are led by women.

Broad Street Tenant Recruitment Grant
Richmond, VA

VENTURE richmond

$10K grant for moving to select stretch of Broad Street; one-year minimum lease term

Types of qualifying businesses include **retailers, restaurants, makers, entrepreneurs,** and other startups

Partnership with **Metropolitan Business League** (MBL) to assist recruitment efforts to include **small, women, and minority** (SWaM) and **immigrant-owned businesses**

Create Startup Grant Program

Access to capital is almost always the primary barrier to entry for aspiring entrepreneurs. This is especially challenging for people of color given the generational wealth gap and/or lack of equity from homeownership, personal savings, or other assets. Capital can come in many forms, including conventional lenders, micro-lenders or CDFIs that have less stringent underwriting requirements and can offer below market loan products, private equity investors, venture capital investors, and startup grant programs. All of these sources are critical to the startup ecosystem and creating better communication and pathways to these sources should continue to be explored.

Startups need funding more than anything, but most conventional lending products are unavailable for startup businesses, and without access to equity, aspiring entrepreneurs do not have the ability to test their products or services.

Accelerator programs can be very effective, but they can also be very competitive and some startups are often unwilling to commit equity shares for program participation. Creating a startup grant program for regional, national or international businesses to relocate to downtown Gainesville would provide much needed capital support for startups, broaden the pool of startup companies to relocate Downtown, and enhance visibility and marketability of the region as an entrepreneurial hub. A future grant program should also intentionally target people of color-owned businesses. These types of programs are typically established using a combination of public, private, institutional, and philanthropic funds.

Maintain and Enhance Downtown
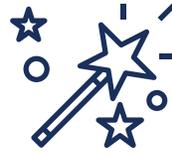
An implementation entity should begin by focusing on place management, addressing issues around making downtown clean, welcoming and safe.

Throughout the engagement process for the Downtown Strategic Plan, we heard from leaders, stakeholders and community members concerned about everything from broken and dirty sidewalks, unsafe conditions, a lack of lighting, and poorly maintained landscaping. To make downtown welcoming and attractive to residents, businesses, employees, and visitors we must first address these basics concerns. Only then can we build momentum to address the larger community vision around creating vibrant places, spaces and storefronts and a connected, green, walkable and bikeable downtown. Focusing on these baseline issues will both support existing downtown businesses, public spaces, and arts and culture institutions and enable the recent, new and planned investment in downtown to succeed. With stability in place, downtown can them move to the next task of investing in the built environment and additional redevelopment, opening the next chapter for Downtown Gainesville's evolution. Two ideas have emerged from the community-driven planning process:

▶ **Idea 15: Form a Place-Management Organization**

▶ **Idea 16: Continue to Build Capacity**

"Make it beautiful and welcoming."

"Our public spaces don't attract people. Maintenance is a big issue."

"Focus on making downtown cleaner, safer and more welcoming to families."

113

Idea 15: Form a Place-Management Organization

Organize around the protection/enhancement of core assets (Downtown's competitive niche) and addressing key livability/business viability issues (maintenance/ cleanliness, safety, etc).

Establish an Implementation Entity

Given the complex nature of downtowns—and the different constituents necessary to develop and implement a shared vision—an implementation entity that is completely focused on downtown has been proven to be effective in numerous communities across the region and the country. Such an organization would be able to facilitate, build and sustain the public-private partnerships necessary to guide and execute implementation. These organizations are usually placed outside of governmental and institutional frameworks and have dedicated funding sources, allowing them to be insulated from changes in leadership and variations in budget cycles. Combined with the ability to focus 100% on downtown, this enables implementation entities to effect change quickly.

It is important to note that this organization would a convener of the many voices, actors, and entities involved in downtown. It is also important to recognize that this group is distinct from others that many might associate with taking on some of the tasks of downtown advocacy, programming, or review and approval. As the management entity for downtown, this work would go beyond advocating for downtown resident concerns (GDOT) or the allocation and disbursement of funds for infrastructure projects (GCRA). It would seek to collaborate with these groups and others, in addition to working with the city, county, business owners, arts and culture institutions, etc. to maintain and improve downtown. It has been suggested that bringing the "Friendship 7" back together could help jump start this new implementation entity. Tasking this mix of public, private and institutional partners and leaders (Alachua County, the City of Gainesville, University of Florida, Gainesville Area Chamber of Commerce, UF Health, Santa Fe College and Alachua County Public Schools) has been proven to be a successful model for creating such organizations in other cities.

Roles and Responsibilities

This new organization should be the lead facilitator for the Downtown Strategic Plan with an initial focus on place management. As this implementation entity becomes more established, it can continue to add capacity and take on more complex roles and responsibilities. Depending on the community, these downtown-focused groups

take on various forms: Special Improvement District (SID), Business Improvement District (BID), Downtown Investment Authority, Community Investment Corporation, Community Development Corporation, Downtown Partnership, or Community Improvement District. Based on community need, these groups tend to focus on specific areas of concern, but most start with ensuring that downtown is clean, safe, and welcoming to visitors. Building from that foundation, many take on greater responsibilities to lead the transformation of downtowns. Funding sources vary from organization to organization with most clean and safe services offered by SID/BID type organizations funded by special assessments, and other special projects or more advanced organizations are funded by a combination of membership dues, corporate sponsorships, service and development fees, real estate leases, and operating asset revenue streams.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Capital Crossroads Special Improvement District in Columbus, Ohio operates clean and safe services for downtown as well as providing security services, homeless resources, and ambassadors.

The Midtown Alliance in Atlanta established a brand that provides a unique sense of place, defining the district and building awareness.

The Louisville Downtown Partnership invested in the South Fourth Street streetscape to provide space for retail, outdoor dining, seating and gathering space, new street tree plantings, permeable paving on-street parking and speed tables to slow traffic.

Clean and Safe Services

Provide dedicated staff to deal with litter removal, graffiti removal, planting, watering and beautification. Many have "downtown ambassadors" trained to help visitors with directions and recommendations, as well as trained safety personnel that interface with local police to help make downtown feel welcoming and safe. Others also offer homeless outreach services to connect people with need assistance and resources.

Marketing/Branding

Marketing downtown and communicating about activities, programming and events is a critical function. Establishing a downtown or district brand identity is key to building awareness and inviting people to visit.

Streetscapes

Investing in downtown in the form of improved streetscapes and pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure can help to support retail, drive activity and make downtown more welcoming. Providing space for outdoor dining, seating, wide sidewalks, and shady comfortable streets improves the walkability and usability of downtown.

Roles and Responsibilities

Partnering with a local developer, the Upper West Side Community Improvement District created a pocket park to provide needed green space in this growing district in Atlanta.

The Columbus Downtown Development Corporation has invested in a range of downtown park spaces over the past 15 years from the Scioto Mile, Columbus Commons, the Scioto Greenways, and Dorrian Green. This investment in public space has driven private development adding nearly 6,000 residents in the past 10 years.

Public spaces require programming. The 3CDC has invested in Washington Park and Fountain Square and has focused on culturally relevant programming to ensure that downtown and Over the Rhine are welcoming to all Cincinnati residents. In 2021 it put on 667 events for a total of 11 million visitors.

Placemaking

Improving public spaces in downtown through landscaping, plazas, pocket parks, and other gathering places provides a platform for downtown residents, workers, and visitors to interact. These small-scale investments can transform a vacant lot or underutilized space into a valued community asset.

Parks/Open Space

Leveling up from small-scale placemaking, some organizations have invested in parks and open space, providing needed recreational, play, event and gathering space in downtown. These signature investments provide a needed urban amenity that helps to attract not just day-to-day activity but also help to catalyze redevelopment and reinvestment.

Programming

The programming of public spaces – large and small – is critical to the success of downtown. These spaces require activities and experiences to draw people to downtown. Scaled from street musicians to concerts, from food trucks to festivals, it is important to plan, support and fund diverse, relevant programming that welcomes everyone downtown.

Idea 16: Continue to Build Capacity

Define the roles and responsibilities of the new organization.

Building from the clean and safe services that are a recommended baseline function for this new organization, an eye should be kept on the next steps that need to be taken to work toward greater responsibility and implementation steps. This could include a focus on programming, placemaking, branding, tenanting and investments in the public realm and redevelopment.

To build the capacity of this new implementation entity, the city and others should start with the following steps:

► Host an Implementation Retreat that brings City Staff, stakeholders, and leadership together to discuss a downtown management organization.

► During this retreat, reach out to other Business Improvement Districts, Special Improvement Districts, Downtown Development Corporations/ Authorities to better understand the process of creating such an entity.

► Following this retreat, develop a memorandum with summary of interviews, start-up considerations, lessons learned, and step-by-step tasks for implementation

The Gordon Square Arts District has curated retail in several Detroit Avenue storefronts providing rotating pop-up spaces to help small businesses test concepts to attracting unique retailers to provide a diverse mix of business types to attract visitors to the district and provide services to existing residents.

3CDC has invested in $820 million in the Over the Rhine District and Downtown Cincinnati including 417 affordable and 176 market rate unit of mixed income housing in 15 total projects.

Retail Tenanting

Vibrant retail is key to creating a downtown experience that is unique and interesting. Some downtown organizations assist in matching interested tenants to vacant storefronts, facilitating leases and curating a mix of retail to appeal to a broad audience. Others have taken a more hands-on approach in master leasing space, facilitating start up and pop up and providing financial assistance for small business.

Guide Redevelopment and Enable Affordability

Acquisition, control and development of vacant or underused property in downtown is the most advanced level of investment guided by downtown organizations. Doing so allows groups to shape the redevelopment of downtown, providing both needed catalytic projects but also responding to community needs through the prioritization of certain types of development be it office, hospitality, market rate and affordable housing, or commercial space.

117

Case Studies

The peer investigation should focus on why and how each peer entity started, the roles and responsibilities of each, and their identified lessons learned. To jump start these efforts, the planning team created four case studies that highlight groups that offer a range of different types of services from the fundamental clean and safe services to more advanced groups that have actively participated in real estate redevelopment and public realm investments. Working from this initial list, we encourage the city and others to reach out to these and other organizations to ask more specific questions and gain more insight into the establishment of an implementation entity.

Louisville, KY
Louisville Downtown Partnership

Downtown Ambassadors

South Fourth Street

Founded:
2013 and comprised of two existing organizations: Downtown Management District and Downtown Development Corporation.

Operating Budget:
$1.7M in expenditures/revenues (FY 2021). Funding sources include BID assessments, contracts for services, and other sources.

Mission:
To take the long view on downtown success, through strengthening commerce, providing high-quality placemaking, improving visitor, resident, and workforce experiences, and to stimulate high-quality development and vitality in Louisville's Downtown.

Roles & Responsibilities:

► Economic and physical planning
► Development of downtown and surrounding areas
► Marketing and special events
► Manages Commercial Loan Fund and Downtown Housing Loan Fund
► Facilitate events that other groups develop and run
► Clean and safe services

Projects & Accomplishments:

► Streetscape improvements
► 4th Street Live!
► Hotel projects
► Downtown housing projects
► Commercial corridor development
► Downtown Louisville Master Plan

Columbus, OH
Columbus Downtown Development Corporation

Columbus Commons

Scioto Peninsula Development

Dorrian Green Park

Yoga at the Commons

National Veterans Memorial & Museum

Clean and safe services

Founded:
2002 to implement the Downtown Columbus Strategic Plan and to address the decline of investment in and prioritization of Downtown Columbus.

Mission:
To lead catalytic, transformative developments in the heart of Ohio's capital city.

Operating Budget:
$13.8M in expenditures and $20M in revenues (FY 2019). Funding sources include contributions, program services, and rental property income.

Roles & Responsibilities:
- ► Lead catalytic development
- ► Make initial investments
- ► Provide proof of concept for private development community to make further investments
- ► Manage Housing Investment Funds
- ► Clean and safe, homeless outreach and ambassador services are provided by Capital Crossroads Special Improvement District, a related, but separate organizations.

Projects & Accomplishments:

- ► Restoration of the Scioto Riverfront (Scioto Mile and Scioto Greenways)
- ► Transformation of City Center Mall to Columbus Commons, a mixed-use development ($100 million in public space investment into $400 million in private investment)
- ► Strategic Planning for downtown and Master Planning for downtown districts
- ► Dorrian Green Park
- ► National Veterans Memorial & Museum
- ► Scioto Peninsula Redevelopment, the 26-acre Phase I is nearly complete with 329 residential units, 231,000 square feet of office space, and a 198-room hotel
- ► Topiary Park Crossing, a 100-unit affordable housing development
- ► Variety of programming events ranging from audiences of 100 to 7,500:
  - · Family events
  - · Fitness
  - · National act concerts
  - · Arts performances

Jacksonville, FL
Downtown Vision, Inc. & Downtown Investment Authority

Downtown Vision, Inc.

Founded:
2000 as the Business Improvement District (BID) for Downtown Jacksonville.

Operating Budget:
$2.1M operational budget (FY 2021). BID funding from $1.10 per $1,000 of assessed value.

Mission:
To create and support a vibrant downtown and promote downtown as an exciting place to live, work, visit and invest.

Roles & Responsibilities:

► Provide Clean and safe services

► Provide marketing and stakeholder support

► Research – collect data, analyze trends and publish a State of Downtown report

► Events and programming

► Placemaking - Public space beautification, activation and management

► Aligns services and projects with the Downtown Investment Authority

Downtown Investment Authority

Founded:
2012 as the Public Economic Development Agency to promote general business interests in downtown.

Operating Budget:
$1.1M operational budget (FY 2022). Funding source is the city's general fund.

Mission:
To serve as a clearinghouse to establish an identity for the region that capitalizes on partnerships to guide the revitalization of the core of the City of Jacksonville. To attract investment, facilitate job creation and residential density, while assuring a unified effort is strategically focused to implement action through capital investments, planning, advocacy, marketing and the establishment of policy for the general community and downtown stakeholders.

Roles & Responsibilities:

► Acts as the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) and implements near-, mid, and long-term projects, programs, incentives, and initiatives.

► Manages allocates funds from the Tax Increment Finance (TIF) Trust Fund

► Acts as the Economic Development Agency of the city within the boundaries of downtown

► Oversees the Office of Public Parking, which manages city-owned parking lots and garages.

Projects & Accomplishments:

► Restoration of the Barnett National Bank Building with a mix of uses and 107 loft-style apartments and the University of North Florida Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation

► Broadstone River House, a six story, 264-unit apartment development

► Florida Blue Parking Garage, a 862 space garage that freed up a riverfront surface lot for development of the FIS headquarters that will employ 500 people

► Four mixed-income affordable housing developments that total more than 500 units

Miami, FL
Miami Downtown Development Authority

Biscayne Green

Programming

Flagler Street Beautification

Ambassadors

Downtown Baywalk concept

Founded:
1967

Operating Budget:
$13.6M operational budget (FY 2021-2). Funding through a special tax levy of properties within the district and reimbursements from the City of Miami for community projects.

Mission:
To grow, strengthen, and promote the economic health and vitality of Downtown Miami.

Roles & Responsibilities:
► Advocate, facilitate, plan, and execute business development, planning, capital improvements, and marketing and communication strategies

► Is the economic development and marketing agency charged with bringing businesses, people, and visitors to Downtown Miami

► Provide business assistance and help them navigate the requirements of opening or expansion

► Clean and safe, homeless outreach services, and landscape installation and maintenance through its Downtown Enhancement Team and Downtown Ambassadors

Projects & Accomplishments:

► Downtown Baywalk, a five-mile long pedestrian promenade along the waterfront

► Downtown Riverwalk and Greenway, a 10-mile pedestrian path and on-road facility

► Reconstruction of Flagler Street in 2015 featuring a new $13 million streetscape with new bike racks, enhanced crosswalks, new street lighting fixtures and upgraded sidewalks, and live oak trees along both sides of the road

► Biscayne Green which is in preliminary design to transform six blocks of Biscayne Boulevard by reducing vehicle lanes, adding on-street parking, building wider sidewalks, providing a dedicated bicycle facility, and space for retail kiosks and outdoor dining.

Implementation

Implementation Matrix

From Vision to reality. Implementing this plan will require focus across organizations and stakeholders.

Successful implementation of the Downtown Gainesville Strategic Plan will require diligent focus from the City of Gainesville, Alachua County, the University of Florida, and other downtown organizations, stakeholders, institutions, and other strategic partners. While implementation will eventually be guided by a new place-based management organization that expands capacity over time, in the short term implementation will need to be guided by the leadership that participated in this planning process.

The planning team has created an implementation matrix that highlights each of the 16 Ideas presented in this plan. For each Idea, there are related recommendations, identified partners to lead and provide support, and a suggested timeframe.
This matrix is a dynamic tool to both evaluate success and to identify needed adjustments or changes. As some are completed, others might be added. Likewise, funding availability and other opportunities may alter priorities or enable projects that had not been considered at the time of this plan completion. Successfully utilized, this implementation matrix will provide strategic direction, guide priorities, and ensure accountability.

▶ **Immediate = 0-1 years**

▶ **Short term = 1-3 years**

▶ **Medium term = 3-5 years**

▶ **Long term = 5+ years**

▶ **Ongoing = Consistent annual area of focus**

Idea	Lead Agency	Partners	Timeframe
Become a Destination			
Idea 1: Build Investment Around Local Strengths ► Create distinct, but complementary, character areas with unique local qualities that can be matched with the needs of different types of businesses and developments. ► Prioritize business recruitment, development activity, and public investment in the identified areas to create a critical mass of business activity and a nucleus of pedestrian energy	City of Gainesville, Implementation Entity	Downtown property owners, businesses, residents, Arts and Culture Institutions, Greater Gainesville Chamber	Ongoing
Idea 2: Shape Downtown Identity ► Develop a coordinated marketing and branding program around Downtown Gainesville's authentic built and living heritage. ***Order of magnitude cost of $70,000 to $115,000.*** ► Establish this as a priority project for the newly-formed Place-Management Organization dedicated to promoting and enhancing Downtown (see Idea 15)	City of Gainesville, Implementation Entity	Downtown property owners, businesses, residents, Arts and Culture Institutions, Greater Gainesville Chamber	Ongoing
Idea 3: Create a Downtown Jewel ► Re-imagine Sweetwater Park as a signature public green space in the urban core of Gainesville. ***Order of magnitude construction cost per acre of $850,000 to $1.2M*** ► Prepare a Conceptual Design and Feasibility Study to attract funding, implementation and programming partners. ***Order of magnitude cost of $155,000 to $215,000.***	City of Gainesville, Implementation Entity	Downtown property owners, businesses, residents, Arts and Culture Institutions, Greater Gainesville Chamber	Short term

Idea	Lead Agency	Partners	Timeframe
Connect the Dots			
Idea 4: Balance the need for parking with the desire for a walkable, urban core. ► Continue to monitor parking supply and utilization ► Continue to monitor regulations and pricing ► Create a "park once" downtown ► Improve signage, wayfinding, and communication ► Continue to invest in technology	City of Gainesville, Alachua County	Downtown property owners, businesses, residents	Ongoing
Idea 5: Prioritize Streets to Meet City Standards ► Proactively improve downtown streets not meeting the city's current design standards, prioritizing streets identified through this planning process (refer to map on page 77 and corridors identified in Idea 8).	City of Gainesville, Implementation Entity Alachua County, Florida DOT	Downtown property owners, businesses, residents	Medium to Long term
Idea 6: Activate the Sweetwater Corridor ► Design, improve and program to activate the Sweetwater Creek corridor into a network of urban parks, green spaces, trails, and recreation areas for the entire community. ***For segments with unimproved trails, order of magnitude construction cost per linear foot of trail of $190 to $250.***	City of Gainesville, Implementation Entity	Downtown property owners, businesses, residents, Arts and Culture Institutions, Greater Gainesville Chamber, Alachua County Schools	Medium term
Idea 7: Create a Greenway Loop ► Develop a Greenway Loop that connects neighborhoods, links to regional trail networks, and is within 6 min. walk of all downtown destinations. ***For segments with unimproved trails, order of magnitude construction cost per linear foot of trail of $190 to $250.***	City of Gainesville, Implementation Entity, University of Florida, Santa Fe Community College, UF Innovate	Downtown property owners, businesses, residents, Arts and Culture Institutions, Greater Gainesville Chamber	Medium term

Idea	Lead Agency	Partners	Timeframe
Strengthen the Relationship with Adjacent Neighborhoods			

Idea 8: Connect Neighborhoods to Downtown
 	
► Establish thresholds and gateways to connect neighborhoods to the opportunities happening downtown.
 	
► Prioritize the University Avenue, South 4th Avenue, South 2nd Avenue, East 3rd Street, and SW 1st Avenue corridors. *Order of magnitude Cost per improvement type shown below:*
 	
  - *Intersection improvements with pedestrian signalization: $300,000 to $450,000 per intersection*
 	
  - *Intersection improvements without pedestrian signalization: $125,000 to $200,000 per intersection*
 	
  - *Sidewalk gap improvements: $85 to $115 per linear foot of sidewalk*
	City of Gainesville, Alachua County, Florida DOT, UF Innovate, University of Florida	Downtown property owners, businesses, residents	Short to medium term

Idea 9: Establish Transition Areas ► Identify transition areas between downtown commercial areas and nearby residential neighborhoods.	City of Gainesville	Downtown property owners, businesses, residents	Short term
Increase Housing Opportunities			
Idea 10: Address Housing at Scale ► Implement site specific strategies for Catalyst Areas, Neighborhoods, the North Main Corridor, and Depot Park	City of Gainesville	Gainesville Housing Authority, Alachua County Housing Authority, housing developers	Short to medium term

Idea	Lead Agency	Partners	Timeframe
Idea 11: Support Affordable and Mixed Income Housing ► Continue pursuing alternative funding streams to support affordable housing fund ► Continue to pursue low-income housing tax credits (LIHTC) in key areas ► Increase capacity of community development organizations (CDOs) ► Establish RFP process for publicly owned land/ catalyst sites ► Pursue neighborhood stabilization programs and policies ► Support the creation of a community land trust (CLT) ► Bolster home repair funding programs and initiatives ► Provide technical assistance and outreach to long-standing homeowners ► Repurpose obsolete student housing as workforce housing	City of Gainesville	Community Development Organization, Gainesville Housing Authority, Alachua County Housing Authority, housing developers	Short to Medium term
Idea 12: Facilitate Market Rate Housing ► Pursue tax abatement for new construction and major rehabilitations ► Explore use of GCRA funds to support mixed-income housing development ► Leverage UF Innovate as value-add for market rate development ► Repurpose and assemble public land ► Explore master leasing model to lower developer risk ► Leverage existing parking structures and assets to unlock development potential for vacant parcels and/or above-floor spaces	City of Gainesville, Alachua County	University of Florida, UF Innovate, GCRA, housing developers	short, medium, and long term

Idea	Lead Agency	Partners	Timeframe
Create a Supportive Local Business Environment			
Idea 13: Unlock Real Estate Potential ► Curate a Broad Mix of Ground-Floor Uses ► Activate Storefronts: Facilitate Startups and Popups ► Repurpose Obsolete Space: Continue or expand assisting upgrades and improvements to commercial district building stock	City of Gainesville, Alachua County, Implementation Entity	Downtown property owners and businesses, GCRA, Greater Gainesville Chamber, Visit Gainesville	Short to Medium term
Idea 14: Increase Direct Small Business Assistance ► Leverage Entrepreneurial Support Resources ► Create Startup Grant Program	City of Gainesville, Implementation Entity	Center for Innovation and Economic Development (CIED), Greater Gainesville Chamber, UF Innovate and Accelerate at The Hub, Gainesville Technology Entrepreneurship Center, CDFIs	Short to Medium term
Maintain and Enhance Downtown			
Idea 15: Form a Place-Management Organization ► Organize around the protection/enhancement of core assets (Downtown's competitive niche) and addressing key livability/business viability issues (maintenance/ cleanliness, safety, etc).	Alachua County, the City of Gainesville, University of Florida, Gainesville Area Chamber of Commerce, UF Health, Santa Fe College and Alachua County Public Schools	GCRA, Downtown residents, business owners, and employers	Immediate
Idea 16: Continue to Build Capacity ► Define the roles and responsibilities of the new organization.	Implementation Entity	City of Gainesville, Alachua County, University of Florida, GCRA	Short term

Gainesville, FL

2022