



# Written Report of Final Recommendations

*Augusta*

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**FALL 2016**

# **GEORGIAFORWARD IS PROUD TO PRESENT THE FALL 2016 YOUNG GAMECHANGERS' FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE AUGUSTA COMMUNITY ▶**

*Margaret Mead once said “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”*

GeorgiaForward believes in this power of creative change and innovative collaboration by the young leaders in our State. In 2012, our statewide nonprofit brought together a small group of young leaders and tasked them with developing big, bold solutions to one Georgia community’s challenges. The process was impactful and the results were transformative.

Fast forward four years and we are still working as a catalyst for change and innovation in Georgia communities through Young Gamechangers that in turn unite our State through the thought exchange and facilitation of ideas through the next generation of leaders in Georgia.

The Fall 2016 Young Gamechangers have been diligently working in the Augusta community since August to grapple with some of their most persistent challenges. The focus areas for this program have been riverfront activation, county-wide housing, millennial attraction, and downtown/University connectivity. The 50 participants are from across the State with roughly one third living in the Metro Atlanta area, one third in Greater Georgia and one third from the Augusta community. They represent a variety of professional backgrounds and their ages range from 24 to 40 years old.

As you read through the Young Gamechangers’ Final Recommendations to the Community, we hope you recognize the out of the box thinking that went into the development of these ideas and appreciate the community input that was received from a variety of business, community and thought leaders in the Augusta area. We are proud of the Fall 2016 Young Gamechangers’ ideas and look forward to seeing how the community prioritizes and implements these recommendations.

Together, we can move Georgia forward.

  
Kris Vaughn  
Executive Director, GeorgiaForward



## SECTIONS

- 1 RIVER RATS
- 2 ASCENDERS
- 3 THE YOUNG AND THE RESTLESS
- 4 SOUL CITY CONNECTORS

GeorgiaForward is a statewide non-partisan nonprofit working to strengthen communities, unite our state and create a talent pipeline within Georgia. To learn more, visit [georgiaforward.org](http://georgiaforward.org).

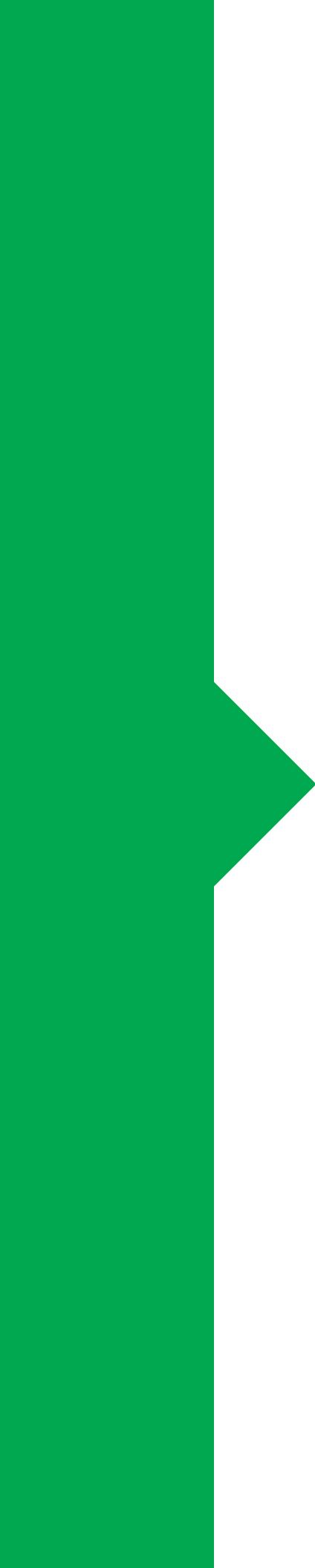
## YOUNG GAMECHANGERS

GeorgiaForward's Young Gamechangers is a leadership action program bringing the best and brightest minds under 40 from around the state together to focus on developing solutions to one Georgia community's most persistent challenges. In its fourth program, Young Gamechangers brought 50 young professionals to Augusta in the Fall of 2016 to grapple with issues including arts and culture, education, downtown, and economic development. The final recommendations to the community are found in this report.

## **SECTION 1**

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*With more than twelve miles  
of river frontage, how can  
Augusta capitalize  
on its riverfront assets to  
provide greater accessibility  
and connectivity to the  
community as a whole?*



# **River Rats**

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## THE TEAM

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# River Rats

*How Augusta can capitalize on  
its Riverfront assets.*

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Augusta was founded by Noble Jones in 1835, in part because of its strategic location and access to the Savannah River. Due to several floods in the late 1800s and early 1900s that threatened the region's low-lying resources, the City of Augusta built a protective levee, which began to change the city's relationship with the river. While the physical barrier served to protect the citizens from natural disasters, it unfortunately created a psychological barrier to the river.

Currently home to the Masters, the nation's cybersecurity and communications core, the premier institution known as Augusta University, and 12 miles of river frontage, Augusta has plenty to be known for. Yet its beautiful riverfront frequently serves as an addendum to that story, and not its own chapter. There is much progress on the river — and the building blocks in place — but there is still much to be done in leveraging this critical asset.

The newly consolidated Augusta University, combined with the relocation of the US Army Cyber Command to Ford Gordon and new cyber industry, has spurned rapid regional growth (Bernardo, Richie). When looking for a permanent home, these people of all ages, all sizes and races seek amenities offered nowhere else — like a pristine riverfront with greenway connectors, solutions to transportation issues, and recreational resources to engage in their community, among others. We want these new residents to come to love Augusta the way our generations-old families do, and that's through better health and well-being, increased real estate values, and greater economic development and neighborhood revitalization.

As the largest city in the Central Savannah River Area, Augusta is uniquely positioned to lead the efforts of appreciating a natural resource that formed the first building block of a thriving community.



Aerial view of the City of Augusta. Image courtesy Savannah Riverkeeper

## INTRODUCTION

Our group was challenged to determine how Augusta can capitalize on its waterfront assets to provide greater accessibility and connectivity to the community as a whole. We feel that Augusta is uniquely positioned to use its proximity to the Savannah River as a foundation to not only re-engage its citizens who have lived here for generations, but also serve to draw new residents and visitors to the area who will enjoy this natural resource.

Through conversations with Augusta community leaders, we discovered numerous projects in the pipeline and countless instances of positive progress in development. However, even with this progress, there are still many possibilities for future growth and expansion. We are excited for the future and

what the three “Big Ideas” listed below will provide for the City of Augusta and its surrounding areas, especially in assisting the community of Augusta with embracing its river frontage as a central part of its identity.

- Connecting Augusta’s River Region to the Community
- Accessibility for Recreation, Relaxation and Revitalization on the River
- Activating a Regional Riverfront Coalition

The pieces of the puzzle are present. Now is the time for Augusta to connect its current river assets and expand them into one united picture as the “Augusta River Region.”

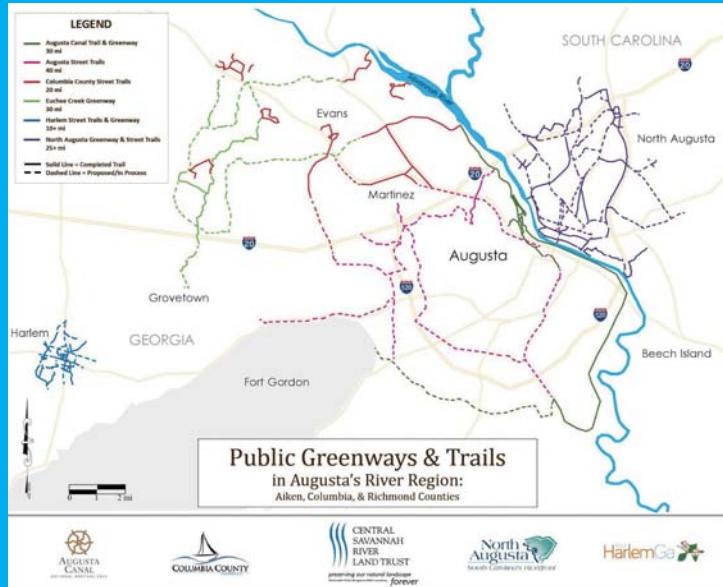


**BIG IDEA ONE**

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*Connecting Augusta's River Region  
to the Community*





## Creativity Corridor

**DESCRIPTION** Expand and connect Augusta to the sides of the river and beyond – not just by motor vehicles, but by bike, ferries, and your own two feet.

The desire is there in Augusta for more places to walk and bike (Augusta Recreation and Parks Master Plan), and successful examples are popping up around the state (the Silver Comet Trail, the Carrollton Greenbelt, amongst others). Creating more access points along the river frontage through greenway trails and multi-use paths (both paved and unpaved) connects communities and allows for safe passages for all users. Mirroring trail conditions in North Augusta provides a symmetry and cohesion to the river, while designing circuitous loops provides trails for people of all levels of athletic ability. Security improvements, as well as other amenities such as wi-fi, picnic areas, and preservation spots would also be included to enhance the environment. Trails and greenways such as this provide transportation alternatives for commuters, students, and others to get to work, to school, to parks, to shopping, and more, while encouraging active lifestyles and boosting economic development (Summary of Greenway Case Studies).

Additionally, many resources exist across the river, but the only way to access them is by car. Augusta University's intramural fields, new parking garages, businesses in Hammond's Ferry, the future Greenjackets Stadium, and surrounding development are all located in North Augusta, a thriving and growing community. A beautifully designed pedestrian and bicyclist bridge across the river would create a dramatic focal point and improve connectivity between the cities. The bridge would also become a community and tourism destination while serving as a venue space for city events and private rentals.



Serving as an example, the Frank K. Martin Bridge spans the Chattahoochee River and links Columbus, Ga. to Phenix City, Ala. The bridge that formerly carried cars is now used by people who walk and ride bikes. Photo courtesy Georgia Bikes.

In addition to bridging the river, Augusta and North Augusta should provide ferry service at selected dock points on both sides of the river. Through this, the cities will be able to provide cross-river transportation and open up potential for further development. By seeing the river not as an obstacle but as an accessible means of transportation, more private boat companies will open up for tours and other related business ventures, allowing for a revenue stream that reclaims the river.

**SCOPE OF INITIATIVE** Enhancing the accessibility to, from, and across the river, with the goal of creating engagement opportunities for all people in the community. Highlighting existing access points, completion of the 37-mile greenway trail in Augusta, and possible construction of a pedestrian bridge over the river and additional green spaces would further position the river as the center of the community and help promote a healthy lifestyle for our citizens. This project would include the Augusta Regional Riverfront Coalition (Big Idea #3) working closely with elected officials to ensure the importance of funding for trail completion is emphasized.

The objective of this project would be to create transportation alternatives connecting South Carolina and Georgia. Improvements to city docks and promotion of private investments such as water taxis and food vendors along the riverwalk will help tie the two states together, promoting the river as the “tie that binds.” The project would include improved access to the docks and help incorporate the levee as simply a hill in a contiguous landscape of inviting pathways and connectors.



Portion of the docks on the Savannah River.  
Image courtesy Savannah Riverkeeper



Kayaker along Savannah River.  
Image courtesy Savannah Riverkeeper

## ACTION STEPS & TIMELINE

### OVERALL

- Form a Connectivity Committee within the new Riverfront Coalition.
- Under the Committee, form Sub-Committees focused on various goals of connectivity. (Examples: Greenway Trail, Pedestrian Bridge, Green Spaces, Political Relations, Water Taxis)
- Each Sub-Committee will set goals and timelines for each expected action. Putting into various categories. (examples: <2 years; 2 to 5 years; >5 years)
- Secure budgeting for each short-term goal within 12 months.
- Review all construction contracts and add clauses to ensure connectivity actions and clauses are funded.

### ON LAND

- Create land-based connectivity plan highlighting and enhancing the various access points along the 12-mile Savannah River corridor.
- Advocate for connectivity improvements and educate both residents and visitors about connectivity opportunities.

### ON THE WATER

- Create water-based connectivity plan highlighting and enhancing non-motorized transriver transportation alternatives.
- Issue requests for proposal (RFPs) regarding docks and maintenance, ferry service, and other cross-river transportation options.
- Educate the public on the value of this access.

### TIMELINE – SHORT TERM

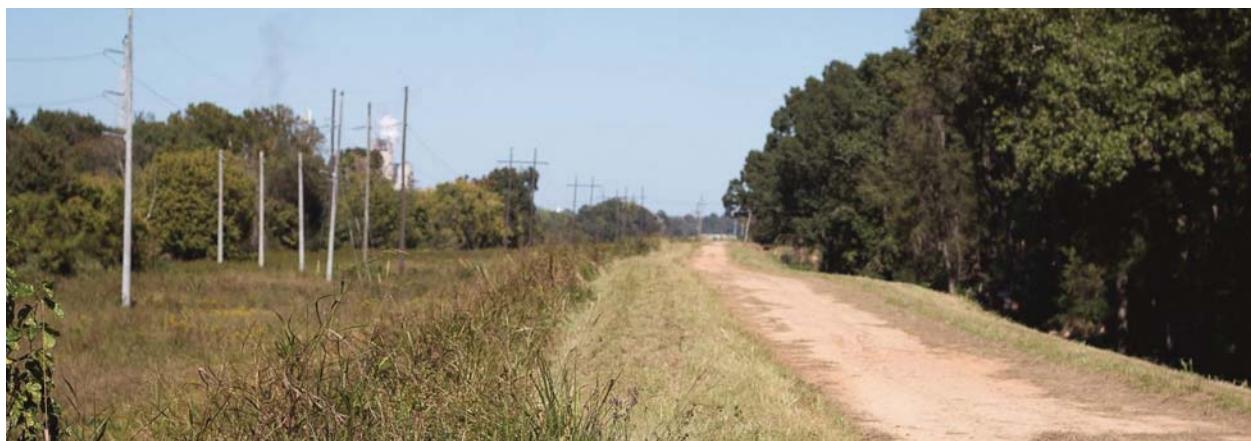
- River Coalition advocates for pedestrian bridge to be included in bridge replacement
- Collect all data needed to “rebrand” from a sports and outdoors lens.
- Find T-SPLOST funding to cover costs
- Water Taxi Strategic Plan
- Issue requests for proposal (RFPs) regarding docks and maintenance, ferry service, and other cross-river transportation options
- Create a partnership agreement within that RFP
- Work with existing landowners to create strategic vision for the future of those riverfront properties

### MEDIUM TERM

- Create cohesive marketing materials for use by both states and stakeholders
- I-20 bridges replacement includes foot bridge in replacement
- Establish greenway trails along river frontage, mixture of paved and unpaved
- Create solution to greenway trail issues at 13th Street and Sandbar Ferry
- Create signage and marketing materials

### LONG TERM

- Extend green space of Commons and other parallel underused spaces
- Work with existing landowners to bring in potential development options in line with overall strategic vision
- Build pedestrian/bicyclist bridge along 13th Street to coincide with greenspace and paved pathways for riding



Existing pathways along the protective levee. Image courtesy Caila Brown

## BUDGET

These projects are comprised of a variety of budget areas and concerns. While ultimately ferry service will be provided by a private company, the city and county may need to offer incentives and funding streams. A strategic development consultant to oversee the initial project phases and long-term vision would be around \$100,000. 3 miles of greenway corridor are approximately \$600,000, which includes paved surface, permits, design and amenities. For a 37-mile project, this indicates a base cost of approximately \$22 million – some of which is already accounted for in city/state funds. An integral part of this connection plan is the Bicyclist and Pedestrian Bridge crossing the river. Similar projects in the state look to be around \$10 million. Dock repairs (\$200,000) and improved signage (\$100,000) round out the budget planning, while monies may need to be allocated to the overall redevelopment process.

## POTENTIAL FUNDING RESOURCES & PARTNERSHIPS

### POSSIBLE FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES:

- T-SPLOST
- TIGER Grant
- Business Tax District(s)
- Municipal and County Bonds
- Property Tax
- County Sales Tax
- Business Improvement District
- Tax Increment Financing
- Occupancy Tax
- Conservation Tax Credits
- Transportation Investment Act

### LIKELY PARTNERSHIPS AND RESOURCES:

- Georgia DOT
- Americans With Disabilities Association
- City of Augusta (Recreation and Parks)
- Richmond County
- Aiken County
- North Augusta
- South Carolina DOT

## EXPECTED IMPACT

Enhancing non-motorized transportation alternatives and their connections to the river serves to overcome some of the challenges currently existing for citizens wanting to visit the river. The benefits of increasing the communities' connectivity to the river is far reaching. For example, studies (Saiidi, Uptin) show that millennials are more attracted by experiences than material goods.

Enhancing river transportation will help overcome the current perception of the levy as a wall, and more as an expansion of their greenspace environment. Both Georgia and South Carolina are both moving forward with projects in their downtown/river areas that will benefit and rely on the other side of the river.

Current transportation infrastructure does not meet projected transportation needs currently from land or water. (North Augusta Ballfield doesn't have the car parking that they need. The city would like visitors of the ballfield to use the GA side to keep traffic down.

The connectivity will provide a way for bicyclists and runners to access the riverfront regardless of the part of town they are in. Metro recreation facilities will be interconnected and make it easier for people to participate in Riverfront activities. Millennials will be drawn to the riverfront facilities. This plan will create the first project that extends to all parts of the Augusta metro area. This plan will create a blueprint for how the whole metro can come together and create projects that benefits all citizens.

Success can be measured for this big idea through counts of trail users, studies of economic impact, surveys of new and long-standing residents, as well as business and housing development.

## *Accessibility for Recreation, Relaxation and Revitalization on the River*



Volunteers prepare buoys to safely mark swimmers and pathways in the river.  
Image courtesy Savannah Riverkeeper.

## Connectivity – Tangible

**DESCRIPTION** When people think of Augusta, we want them to think they are “at home” on the river. Whether this is through facilities or events offered, this should be the first place they want to see. The goal is that the riverfront should be the premier space to entice event organizers both local and out-of-area. Bringing events back to the river and shifting the recognition of our resources available for events is crucial to bringing the River back to Downtown Augusta and her citizens. Growing the use of the riverfront amphitheater, and using events to bridge the connection between downtown and the River opens up the opportunity to use our resources more effectively.

Additionally, by rehabilitating public and private land, activity sites can be created for all users. Existing resources can find new purposes and new infrastructure, such as a recreational sports complex. New outdoor recreation centers would provide access to the river for swimmers, fishers, kayakers and stand-up paddleboard users, and facilities for runners, bikers, and disc golfers. Through strategic management of the facility(ies), storage space and rentals could be available for the increasing number of rowers. This recreational facility would also serve as the jumping-off point for triathlons and the Iron Man, thereby creating safer, more stable access points on the river. The Lock & Dam Park and whitewater rafting activity center creates a revenue stream for the city and a source of entertainment and revival for South Augusta. Finally, a business center on Columbia Nitrogen Road (replacing the polluting factories) helps to clean up the river while providing yet another access point and dock. Restaurants and service providers can open up to support both business complexes and river-goers, allowing for people to explore the river all day long.

**SCOPE OF INITIATIVE** The objectives of this project would be to develop reuse plans for currently abandoned and underutilized riverfront properties throughout the Augusta area and to support the ongoing reclamation efforts by providing a cohesive recreational theme throughout each of the projects. Three property zones each lying between the river and along the proposed greenway trail would be

the focus of this project. The Old Port (1-mile of land between the Augusta Boathouse Community Center and I-520) would undergo transformation from contaminated land to various outdoor recreational facilities with some private development opportunities. The conversions of Columbia Nitrogen Roads industrial complex to non-polluting manufacturing, cyber center and service mix will create a new community of employees to engage in the river and trails. The creation of a whitewater course and redevelopment of the Lock & Dam Park will create a large economic driver in South Augusta. These initiatives would provide the opportunity to re-establish the community’s connection to the river in that part of town and to create jobs that are not based on polluting into the river.

Significant focus should be placed on updates to the Jessye Norman Amphitheater and Riverfront Concert Site to ensure they are up-to-par for larger concerts. By renovating existing spaces, we can increase event capacity and the number of events that can happen. By extending and expanding green space in the city (including the Commons), previously underutilized land is given a purpose.

Encouraging and making it easy for large cultural events like Arts in the Heart of Augusta and Westobou Festival to use riverfront locations will broaden their reach. Similarly, event organizers for programs like TechNet should feel drawn to the riverfront and its assets. But this reach shouldn’t stop at large events. A focus on free community events can greatly improve the perception of the river. Events that have lost their organization, strategy and motivation can engage citizens and visitors along the riverfront, easing public safety concerns while introducing those participants to a greater wealth of resources.

## ACTION STEPS & TIMELINE

- Create/advocate for redevelopment/reuse plan of riverfront drive currently underused and contaminated land along the river in downtown Augusta.
- Create/advocate for the conversions of Columbia Nitrogen Roads industrial complex to non-polluting manufacturing, cyber center and service mix will create a new community of employees to engage in the river and trails.
- Create/advocate for enhancements of the lock and dam park and lower Augusta's river corridor
- Work directly with Augusta Parks and Recreation to identify needed improvements to Jessie Norman Amphitheater, the Riverwalk, Augusta Marina, and Riverfront Field
- Develop action plan to promote existing resources

### TIMELINE

#### RIVERFRONT RECREATION CENTER

##### SHORT TERM

- Designate contaminated sites as Brownfields cleanup sites
- Perform cleanup on sites identified
- Create comprehensive use plan for entire 1-mile stretch for 3 years

##### MEDIUM TERM

- Facilitate the sale of the 2 privately owned sections of land for mixed use redevelopment for 1-mile recreation center
- Construct new boathouse for 1-mile recreation center
- Construct new fishing docks

##### LONG TERM

- Construct other recreation center assets

#### LOCK & DAM PARK/WHITE WATER COURSE

##### SHORT TERM

- Issue RFP to bring in the desired mix of recreational opportunities
- Create comprehensive site use plan for existing area of Lock & Dam Park

Portions of underutilized riverfront property next to the levee.  
Image courtesy Caila Brown

##### MEDIUM TERM

- Dismantling of lock & dam
- Construction of assets in Lock & Dam Park
- Updated bathroom/changing facilities
- Walkways and viewing platforms
- Photo sites

##### LONG TERM

- Construction of White Water Course

#### COLUMBIA NITROGEN ROAD/INDUSTRY ROW

##### SHORT TERM

- Closing and dismantling of industries currently shutting down
- Create comprehensive use plan for Industry Row with community partners
- Work with community to ensure the right mix of recreational opportunities

##### MEDIUM TERM

- Brownfields and Superfund Cleanup Sites
- Economic development attracts desired economic mix to cleaned up sites

##### LONG TERM

- Retrofitting of facilities or introduction of new, clean industry
- Create and expand passive outdoor recreation areas surrounding the area for employees



## BUDGET

Anticipated costs vary from lower to higher end. Clean-up of the recreation site is approximately \$400,000, with the cost of needed properties on the river site at an additional \$500,000. A 10,000 sq. foot recreation center, including facilities, is valued at around \$2 million, with new docks and fishing piers adding \$150,000. New facilities and amenities at New Savannah Bluff Lock & Dam Park add \$2.5 million, with an additional \$4 million being earmarked for improvements to existing facilities along river frontage and parks.

## POTENTIAL FUNDING RESOURCES & PARTNERSHIPS

### POSSIBLE FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES:

- Existing companies are required to pay for clean-up of their sites on Columbia Nitrogen Road
- SPLOST in both states
- Federal and State Recreation Grants
- City of Augusta and City of North Augusta General Budgets
- Augusta Port Authority



Rail yards along Columbia Nitrogen Road.  
Image courtesy Caila Brown

### LIKELY PARTNERSHIPS AND RESOURCES:

- Augusta Parks & Recreation
- Greater Augusta Sports Council
- Savannah Riverkeeper
- Convention & Visitors Bureau
- Downtown Development Authority
- Augusta Arts Council
- Friends With Benefits Fund





## EXPECTED IMPACT

Fixing existing parks and upgrading their amenities helps bring people back down to the river, helps make the flow from downtown Augusta to the riverfront run seamlessly, and helps draw visitors from the surrounding areas. The Riverfront Recreation Center will transform a wholly underused section of land into a sports mecca for the existing Triathlons, IronMan competitions and more. Measurable success in this area will come not only from physical construction of this asset, but from number of registrants, competitor surveys, and number of additional community programs.

The Columbia Nitrogen Row Business Center will transform the currently blighted, contaminated, and ignored mix of land that makes up the riparian zone of the lower river in Augusta (downtown to South

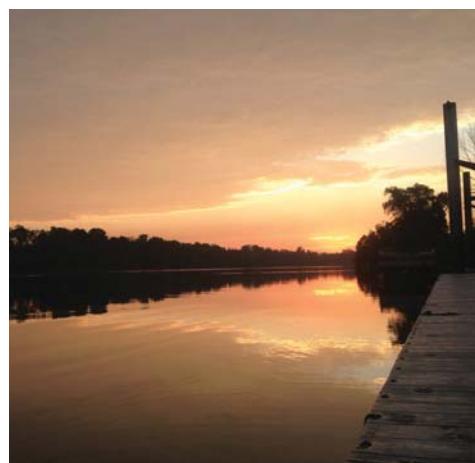
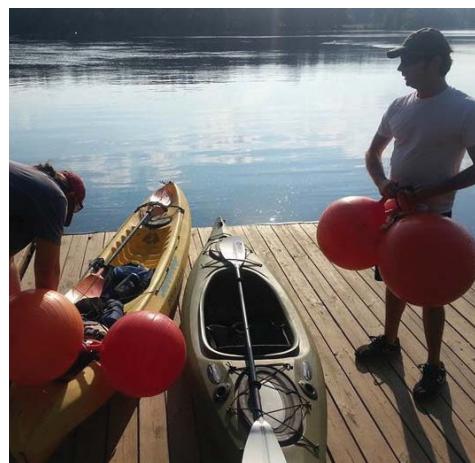
Properties along Columbia Nitrogen Road will be available within a few years, allowing for strategic redevelopment.  
Image courtesy Caila Brown

Augusta) completely shifting what is now a liability for the city into a network of some of its crown jewels. This will help grow the economy of South Augusta and provide the opportunity for growth of an employment mix promoting companies that do not pollute the environment in their processes, but that use the amazing resources to help attract the highest quality of young employees.

Cleaning up contaminated sites, and rethinking currently outdated river access areas transforms a liability for our community into shining assets. Augusta has the opportunity to rehabilitate and revitalize its communities and increase its ability to both conserve and protect, clean up and enhance and create economic zones.

## BIG IDEA THREE

# *Activating a Regional Riverfront Coalition*



## Creativity Corridor

**DESCRIPTION** The desire for a centralized entity that would serve as a “one-stop shop” for all river-related activities was raised throughout our research phase. While there are multiple efforts to enhance and maintain the river’s current assets, most groups are working in their individual silos and do not communicate with each other. This creates a lack of both a consistent brand identity for the river and an overall strategic plan, which has led to conflicting enterprises, conflicting project ideas, and no central gatekeeper through which the public can access information about the river. Additionally, the groups that do exist play host to tension and bias between their established members, which generates a lack of interest among younger participants.

The proposed regional riverfront coalition would include stakeholders from the entire greater Augusta community: from Augusta-Richmond County; Columbia County; and Aiken and North Augusta, South Carolina. The coalition would have a unique

opportunity to involve longstanding community supporters while driving the inclusion of new participants; without the pre-existing longstanding political tension or bias. The mission of the coalition is to help stakeholder groups work together in a successful partnership that benefits the community as a whole. Their job is to provide a sounding board for ongoing and potential projects, and to direct the efforts made by public and private organizations in a way that will benefit everyone who is impacted by the Savannah River. The coalition will serve as the gatekeeper for those who are interested in what the river has to offer by providing a centralized place to get information about the river, including assets, recreation, venue rentals, and more. The coalition will also maintain the overall image of the river frontage in a way that encourages tourism opportunities while still driving accessibility and enticing those who have remained in the region for generations, serving as record keepers for these efforts.

Image courtesy Savannah Riverkeeper.





Aerial views of the Savannah River.  
Image courtesy Savannah Riverkeeper..

The coalition's responsibilities would include creating and implementing a re-branding strategy for the river frontage, conducting marketing campaigns, maintaining a website, and hosting monthly roundtable discussions that create a "safe space" for conversations regarding the river's potential. In the future, they will direct project and event timelines; manage events and rentals of the assets (particularly on the Augusta side); and serve as the gatekeeper for public knowledge of these assets, with the opportunity to direct as needed to specific individual partners.

### SCOPE OF INITIATIVE

To further the efforts of the Georgia and South Carolina communities in the Augusta area which will promote the river's resources, as well as meet the goals outlined in the Young Gamechanger Program to raise awareness about the existing uses and possibilities of the Savannah River as a natural, economic, and social resource. To inspire locals to recognize the river as part of "Augusta's River Region" and help promote a greater sense of place and a recognition of the importance of the river in our communities.

## ACTION STEPS & TIMELINE

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### RECOMMENDED ACTION STEPS:

- Create Coalition
- Identify core organizing committee and leading organization
- Within this structure, identify part-time staff member
- Develop mission statement, strategic plans, and goals
- Create committees as needed to execute bi-state river focused cohesive mission action items
- Assign tasks to committee members to execute mission's specific action items
- Develop a branding strategy for the Regional Riverfront Coalition
- Identify a branding point person within the coalition
- Branding Research: gather public input, collect case studies from similar coalitions
- Identify target markets
- Refine branding message to hit target markets
- Establish a social media and event master calendar so that all groups in the coalition coordinate marketing efforts
- Execute branding strategy
- Facilitate and promote riverfront projects
- Advocate for river improvement projects with a focus on improving connectivity to the river and recreational opportunities
- Hire Executive Director and become own entity
- Spread the word about potential riverfront projects to the public
- Identify funding opportunities for riverfront projects and aid in connecting stakeholders together

### TIMELINE

#### SHORT TERM

- Establish Working group.
- Engage City of Augusta, area non-profits and businesses in conversation regarding their hopes and love for Augusta and the river.
- Establish staff person from partner agency to serve as administrative assistant.
- Establish name of coalition, membership rules, strategic plan/ mission statement/values
- In Kind Employee Time- Establish working group and ground rules for organizations

#### MEDIUM TERM

- Execute multi-pronged strategic plan including:
- Rebrand entire riverfront under coalition (including a potential rebrand city of Augusta/our community as a riverfront and recreational city)
- Logo and identity
- Website
- Develop marketing campaigns and assets to be used by area partners to have one cohesive message

#### LONG TERM

- Hire Executive Director for coalition

### BUDGET

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The budget for this Big Idea has been broken out into short term and long term planning. An upfront cost for new website and marketing efforts is approximately \$20,000, with a short term budget advocating for an additional \$30,000 per year. This would include paying for the time of a part-time staff person from a member organization to serve as an administrator role, in addition to subsidized office rental, bills, printing, etc. In the long term the annual budget jumps to \$115,000 per year, including an executive director, a more substantial general operating budget, and an additional events, programming and marketing budget.



Image courtesy Savannah Riverkeeper.

## POTENTIAL FUNDING, RESOURCES & PARTNERSHIPS

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### POSSIBLE FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

- State of Georgia
- City of Augusta-Richmond County
- Columbia County
- State of South Carolina
- City of North Augusta
- City of Aiken
- Membership fees from partner organizations, including Georgia Power, CORE, CVBs, Sierra Clubs, Savannah Riverkeeper, etc.

### LIKELY PARTNERSHIPS AND RESOURCES

#### RICHMOND COUNTY

- Augusta CVB
- Fort Gordon/Fort Gordon Outdoor Recreation Program
- Army Corps of Engineers
- Savannah Riverkeeper
- City of Augusta (Recreation and Parks)
- Central Savannah River Land Trust
- Savannah River Trust Fund
- Port Authority
- Augusta Sports Council
- Chamber
- Development Authority
- Downtown Development Authority
- South Augusta Commission
- Neighborhood Alliances/Neighborhood Groups
- Greater Augusta Association of REALTORS
- Augusta University
- Augusta Striders Running Club
- Outspokin' Bicycles
- Tri-Augusta
- Sierra Club, Georgia & Augusta
- Unitarian Church

### COLUMBIA COUNTY

- CC Rental Facilities
- Columbia County Development Authority
- Columbia County CVB
- Columbia County Chamber of Commerce

### SOUTH CAROLINA

- North Augusta Municipal Government
- Audubon Society
- CVBs
- North Augusta Realtors Association
- North Augusta Chamber of Commerce
- Sierra Club, South Carolina

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## THANK YOU

---

*We would like to thank those who assisted in shaping our proposals, including:*

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**TOM ROBERTSON**

President of Cranston Engineering Group

**MARGARET WOODARD**

Executive Director of the Downtown  
Development Authority

**STACIE ADKINS**

CEO of the Augusta Sports Council

**TODD GLOVER**

City of North Augusta

**SENATOR HAROLD JONES**

**BARRY WHITE**

Augusta Convention and Visitor's Bureau

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Sierra Club of South Carolina

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## **SECTION 2**

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*“With the growth of Fort Gordon,  
the cyber industry and  
Augusta University, how can  
Augusta address the need for  
a mixture of housing within  
Richmond County?”*



# Ascenders

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## THE TEAM

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# Ascenders

*How can Augusta address the need for a mixture of housing.*

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Due to the recent designation of Fort Gordon as a Cyber Command Center, and planned expansion at Augusta University, Augusta-Richmond County (henceforth Augusta) anticipates a surge of new residents. Several cyber companies, including Cerner and Unisys, have already located in the heart of Augusta. The new data center project at Sibley Mill is likely to create hundreds or thousands more technology-focused jobs (Johnston, Santos). Many, if not most, of these jobs will bring new Augusta residents from the “Millennial” generation (i.e. individuals born between 1980 and 2000). In addition to the new technology-focused residents, we expect the area to attract a mix of students, young professionals, singles, couples and young families who will demand a range of housing options. Augusta is poised to capitalize on this in-migration, leveraging the trend of intown living and the realization of its housing opportunities for neighborhood revitalization.

We developed three proposals that encourage Augusta to leverage its existing livable areas in efforts to attract residents drawn by growth in the University, cyber and technology industries. These young, middle-income residents will support new growth and revitalization of Augusta.

We listened to key community stakeholders: Augusta University, the city, and housing-related community organizations. During this process, we learned of residential trends and observed the geographic disparity of Augusta’s intown communities.

We propose the development of a “Tech Park and Innovation District” which will house elements of the University that strategically align with the Cyber Command Center at Fort Gordon and the cyber and tech industries. The growth of Augusta University, location of new companies and eventually the development of the Tech Park in intown Augusta will encourage economic growth in the communities surrounding them. Therefore, we are also proposing that employers offer Employer Assisted Housing incentives for their employees. Finally, an Alliance of existing public, private, and nonprofit organizations focused on housing will initiate and steward housing development throughout intown Augusta.

## INTRODUCTION

Augusta local officials suggested that investment and revitalization of Downtown Augusta is a key focus of the city's future. This focus is evident in Augusta's decades-long history of soliciting plans focused on downtown and the Riverwalk, the most recent of which was the Downtown Redevelopment Plan Update published in September of 2016.

Achieving the vast potential of Downtown Augusta without the support of influential community stakeholders and bolstering economic growth will be difficult. Augusta's available housing, while abundant in neighborhoods surrounding downtown, is often ill-suited for 21st-century living. Many neighborhoods suffer from the blight of abandoned houses and vacant lots, which typically decrease the desirability of living in an area. This dereliction has led the majority of middle- and higher-income residents to choose suburban housing options in Columbia County, Georgia, and Aiken County, South Carolina. For nearly thirty years, these areas have experienced growth in new housing tracts while much of Augusta's core has seen abandonment.

Today, Augusta is trying to ameliorate derelict neighborhoods in its core. Many organizations are involved in the redevelopment of the Laney Walker/Bethlehem Area for instance, and there are increasing improved housing options for low-income and senior residents here and in other intown neighborhoods (Epstein). A mix of income levels is necessary to attract the new development and investment that will bolster the economies of these communities. However, efforts at attracting middle-income and new residents to these intown neighborhoods appear lacking.

Thanks to Augusta University and the Cyber Command Center at Fort Gordon, the answer is coming to Augusta. Many of these new residents will be young people in their 20s and 30s, "Millennials." They will be graduate students, inspired young professionals and young families looking for affordability and quality of life. From intown neighborhoods in Atlanta, Raleigh, New Orleans, Detroit, and Baltimore, it has been seen time and again that this generation wants to live in the heart of the city, they are eager pioneers, entrepreneurs, and want to be a part of efforts to improve urban living.



Housing Opportunity in Augusta

Augusta Housing  
(photo credit: lwbaugusta on flickr)

**BIG IDEA ONE**

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*Mixed Use Technology Park and  
Innovation District*





Image of a development plan in New Haven, Connecticut that illustrates the vision for Augusta's Tech Park Development set amidst the existing built environment.



Walkable streetscape

## Creativity Corridor

**DESCRIPTION** We recommend creating a Technology Park and surrounding Innovation District within walking distance of Augusta University's Health and Science campus that will align the strengths of Augusta University with the Cyber Command Center at Fort Gordon and the growing cyber and tech industries in Augusta.

The goal of this development would be to attract a significant investment of jobs and housing to the specified area. This investment will create a ripple effect of investment beyond the District as well. The Technology Park would consist of offices, institutional uses, student housing, multi-family housing, and retail in a pedestrian friendly environment that is walkable to the University campus.

Development of a Technology Park and Innovation District takes advantage of the University, which is actively seeking to increase its student body. It also allows Augusta to capitalize on the influx of the innovation companies hoping to benefit from the creation of the Cyber Command Center.

The Innovation District would include (a) an area comprised of educational and medical anchor institutions, (b) the Technology Park composed of two potential redevelopment sites for mixed use development with a significant number of new housing units, and (c) existing neighborhoods with opportunities for renovated or redeveloped single family housing

### SCOPE OF INITIATIVE

Augusta has a unique opportunity because of the following key factors: The University is positioned to grow its student body population from 5,500 students to 10,000 students, the US Army Cyber Command Center is located at Fort Gordon, and the area has already proven to be a draw for other cyber and technology-related businesses.

An influx of people and jobs creates an opportunity for focused efforts on housing to ensure Augusta benefits.

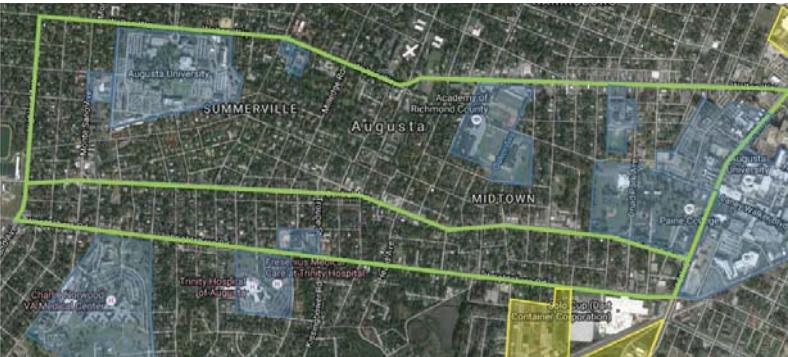
To capitalize on these opportunities, Augusta must consider the fact that the University consists of three

separate campuses that may benefit from stronger physical connections. We recommend a Technology Park located adjacent to existing University campuses so that no further decentralization of the University occurs.

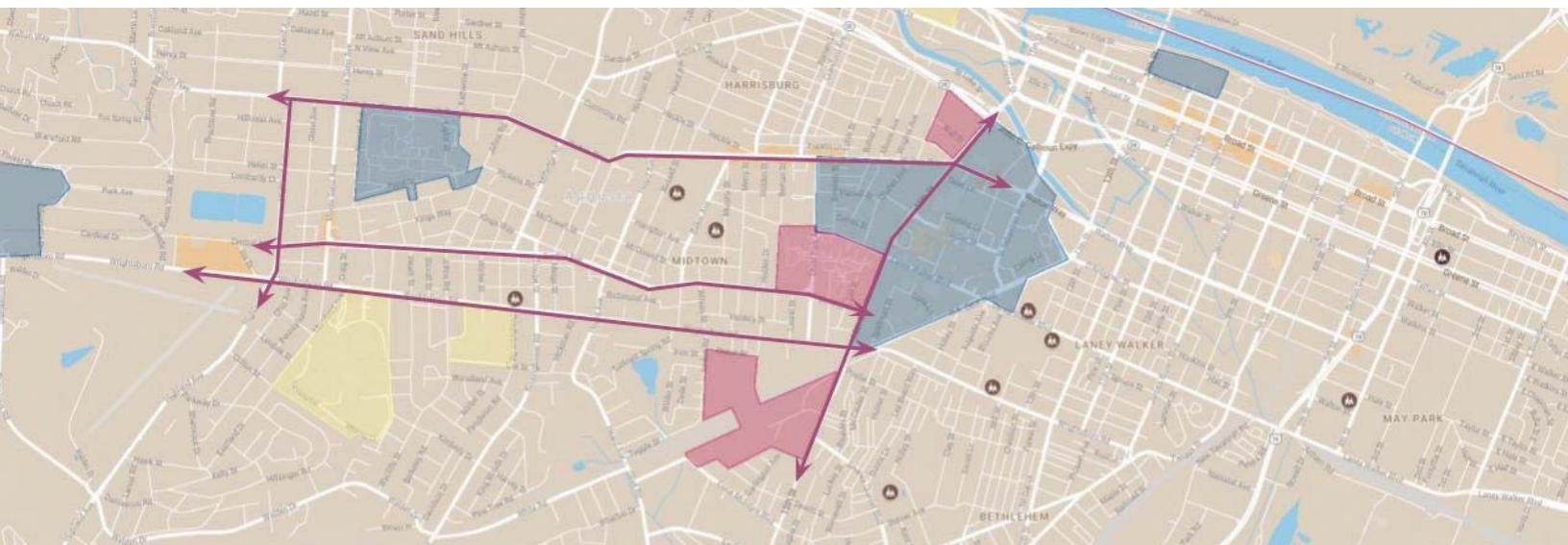
Since many new residents credit Augusta public schools as deterrents to living in the county, we recommend that any housing policies focus their marketing on a target audience that is less likely to include families that are reliant on the school system. Proposed Geography of the District

The following map helps illustrate the proposal. The streets that run through the Innovation District (highlight green below) should be upgraded with cohesive streetscapes to tie the area together visually. Potential redevelopment sites for the Technology Park are highlighted in yellow while the blue areas represent anchor institutions already located within the proposed Innovation District.

Innovation District – the District could encompass all the highlighted areas and streets on this map.



Potential Tech Park Redevelopment sites and corridors of the Innovation District (pink). Augusta University properties (blue), other institutions (yellow), and nearby schools (brown) are also marked.



## FITTING IN WITH EXISTING INSTITUTIONS

The proposed Innovation District connects the University's Health and Science Campus with the Summerville Campus and ties in other key institutions including Paine College, Trinity Hospital, the VA Medical Center, Academy of Richmond County (High School), Tubman Performance Learning Center (Virtual High School), Alternative Education School at Lamar, Saint Mary on the Hill Catholic School (K-8), Episcopal Day School (Elementary School), Appleby Library, and Monte Sano Elementary School.

The high concentration of educational institutions presents an opportunity for collaboration and crossover with technology-based occupational and university preparatory programs, paving the way for a pipeline of skilled workers for the technology industry. Several hospitals, schools and higher education buildings in the vicinity represent a robust workforce that could be incentivized to live in the area, creating a live-work-play district that, with new and rehabbed residences to revitalize the parts of the District that are currently economically disadvantaged (Kneebone and Reeves).

## INNOVATION DISTRICT IMPROVEMENTS

A consistent streetscape should be implemented to tie this neighborhood and these institutions together. The streets that should be part of the streetscape design include Walton Way, Central Avenue, Wrightsboro Road, 15th Street, and Highland Avenue. Consistent streetscape design would include sidewalk improvements along both sides of the streets, street trees and landscaped buffers between the sidewalk and street, and other improvements that promote pedestrian use and safety.

Any new plans proposed for the area should be pedestrian-centric in character and built to the scale which would be similar to the current University campus. Consistent with the University's long-term master plan, the District should include green space throughout and parking garages on the periphery. The University should lead the effort to create this community, work with Cyber Command to compete for corporate relocations in this community, and partner with multi-family and retail developers to invest in this community.

The vision for the Innovation District is an attractive space that would house the elements of the University strategically aligned with the US Army Cyber Command. Also, the University should locate a significant portion of its future student housing development in this location. These uses spurred by the University would attract thousands of people who would live and work in this community as the basis for the Innovation District.

With concrete plans to locate college facilities and student housing in a dedicated area, other for-profit investors will follow suit in order leverage the value that is being created by the school. The school is already in the neighborhood if they are unwilling to invest in their neighborhood, for-profit business will see no reason to do so either. Therefore, the school must invest first. Once the school makes a significant effort to create the Innovation District, for-profit companies will look to create even more value by providing comparable uses.

## TECHNOLOGY PARK REDEVELOPMENT SITES

The identification of starting points for much of the new development in the District led to three main redevelopment options: 15th Street Kroger site, Paine College, and the industrial site located to the southwest of the AU Health Sciences Campus. Any or all of these sites could comprise the Technology Park.

## VISION FOR THE KROGER SITE:

The Kroger site functions as a gateway to the University District along 15th Street as people come from Downtown. Augusta University already has some property in this area and could increase its presence with high-density Institutional, Commercial, Retail and Residential mixed use development.

## VISION FOR PAINE COLLEGE:

If Paine College were part of the Technology Park, the intent would be to leverage Paine College's proximity to Augusta University and work in partnership with each other to implement portions of this Technology Park. This is a premiere location and could provide significant benefits to Paine College.

## VISION FOR THE INDUSTRIAL SITE:

The Industrial Site is a large and largely vacant site within walking distance to Augusta University. The opportunity would be to create a pedestrian-oriented concentration of new mixed use development within these 80 acres that would provide the University room to expand its facilities and housing long into the future.

## REHABILITATION OF EXISTING HOUSING STOCK:

Existing neighborhoods within the Innovation District provide an opportunity for improved single family homes, thereby expanding housing options beyond the higher density housing that will be developed and encourage investment in these communities. Rehabilitation of the existing housing stock and appropriate infill construction should be encouraged through a variety of policies.

This initiative aligns with the goals of INSPIRE Augusta Inc. (Idea 3) and the use of Employer-Assisted Housing incentives (Idea 2).

Other policies that could be used to incentivize investment in this area include:

- Waiving Building Permit Fees
- Freezing Property Tax Valuations at pre-rehabilitation values
- Improvement of the street grid
- Housing incentives provided by the anchor institutions

## ACTION STEPS & TIMELINE

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**SHORT TERM** Once the area for the Innovation District is determined, determine and coordinate the specific incentives. Work with the companies in the Innovation District to help create relocation policies. The Consolidated Government of Augusta can work towards creating government incentives to attract people to live near their place of work. Both of these policies would necessitate the rehabilitation of housing.

Additionally, work on ways to increase a sense of place in the innovation district through common signage and improved pedestrian infrastructure. The design of these improvements could be done in temporal phases as funding becomes available.

Acquire land for the Technology Park. This process will involve purchasing property and negotiating with CSX for the purchase of excess land or easement rights to pass over the railroad tracks.

**MID TERM** Businesses located in the Innovation District incorporate the Innovation District relocation and rehabilitation incentives. These private sector incentives should be communicated to current and future employees along with the programs available from the government in a concerted manner.

Installation of these designs and pedestrian improvements in areas that serve as gateways for the Innovation District will improve the impression it makes upon visitors and locals.

Begin Brownfield Remediation in the Technology Park area and take steps to expand parts of the Augusta University campus into this area. Locate University classroom space, administrative offices, recreation facilities, and student housing in this area. Create an expansion of the campus that could seamlessly integrate with and provide the community amenities for the private sector to locate into this area.

**LONG TERM** Incorporate the successful ideas from the Innovation District into other parts of the Richmond County. Work with other Institutional Partners to replicate the same relocation and rehabilitation incentives in different areas of the city. Leverage the public investment into the Technology Park by working with private companies to relocate to the park with help from the Augusta Economic Development Office. Attract multi-family and retail developers for the purpose of attracting millennials to the live-work-play environment created by the University.

## BUDGET

### STREETSCAPE IMPROVEMENTS

Streetscape improvements on approximately 8.4 miles of streets. Both sides of each street equals 16.8 miles, or about 90,000 linear feet.

- \$200 - \$300 per linear foot for demo, drainage, and sidewalk installation = \$18 – \$27 million
- 1,800 trees (one tree every 50') at \$750 per tree installed = \$75,000
- 900 street lights (one light every 100') at \$10,000 per light installed = \$9.7 million

Total cost of streetscape improvements is approximately \$36,775,000. Add 40% contingency = approximately \$50 million.

### PROPERTY ACQUISITION

The Industrial Property that makes up the Technology Park represents an assessed value of \$3 Million for 86.35 Acres. This value is the base assumption for this area. This property could be broken down into three categories, which include Primary Properties (including existing Right of Way acquisition), Secondary Properties, and a Pocket Park which would serve as a gateway to this development.



The property is shown to the right as one contiguous area.  
(<http://gismap.augustaga.gov/augustajs/>)

Description	Address	Parcel ID	Assessment	Acreage	Notes
<b>Primary Properties:</b>					
Mid-Cities Property	1812 SLATON ST	045-3-419-00-0	756,000	24.17	
Adjacent to CSX	1775 ESSIE MCINTYRE	058-1-143-01-0	113,290	14.16	
Mercy Mission Center	1621 FIFTEENTH ST	058-2-072-01-0	418,666	20.91	
Shiloh Orphanage	1635 FIFTEENTH ST	058-2-073-00-0	578,056	8.6	Orphanage to be preserved
<b>Primary Properties Totals:</b>			<b>\$ 1,866,002.00</b>	<b>65.84</b>	

The following parcels form the core of the Technology Park. Most of these properties are completely vacant or nearly vacant properties. As such, these are underutilized assets in proximity to the University.



The following ROW parcel has no owner per the Augusta GIS website.

(<http://gismap.augustaga.gov/augustajs/>)

#### Roads and ROW in the Primary Area:



The following parcels are located adjacent to the Primary Properties and would make the Technology Park a more contiguous parcel. Although these properties are not necessary, it would make sense to acquire them if possible.



(<http://gismap.augustaga.gov/augustajs/>)

**Secondary Properties:**

Recycling Center	1525 GOVERNMENT R	058-2-318-00-0	318,504	1.81
Recycling Center	1523 GOVERNMENT R	058-2-319-00-0	59,677	1.37
Residential	1575 FIFTEENTH ST	058-2-063-00-0	112,764	0.55
Bank Owned	1565 FIFTEENTH ST	058-2-062-01-0	176,640	0.69
<b>Secondary Properties Totals:</b>			<b>\$ 667,585.00</b>	<b>4.42</b>

The following parcels are located in a block of residential housing that fronts Wrightsboro Road and could function as a Pocket Park and entrance to the larger redevelopment.



(<http://gismap.augustaga.gov/augustajs/>)

**Wrightsboro Gateway Pocket Park:**

Residential	1722 WRIGHTSBORO	045-3-380-00-0	58057	0.15
Residential	1720 WRIGHTSBORO	045-3-387-00-0	58108	0.31
Residential	1702 WRIGHTSBORO	045-3-386-00-0	69506	0.14
Residential	1404 MADDOX ST	045-3-381-00-0	63786	0.13
Residential	1701 1/2 SLATON ST	045-3-382-00-0	70138	0.28
Residential	1409 HOLDEN ST	045-3-383-00-0	60292	0.13
Residential	1407 HOLDEN ST	045-3-384-00-0	34182	0.13
Residential	1405 HOLDEN ST	045-3-385-00-0	30000	0.13
<b>Wrightsboro Gateway Pocket Park Totals:</b>			<b>\$ 444,069.00</b>	<b>1.4</b>

## POTENTIAL FUNDING, RESOURCES & PARTNERSHIPS

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### STREETSCAPE IMPROVEMENTS

- Use funds from the Transportation Improvement Act to implement streetscape improvements.
- As Private investments impact the area, those properties should improve the streetscapes in front of their properties by the design requirements of the Innovation District.
- As part of the implementation of a pedestrian-friendly campus consistent with the University master plan, the University could fund the improvement of the streets that border University properties.

### PROPERTY ACQUISITION

- The Augusta Land Bank can purchase and consolidate properties that are delinquent on any city taxes.
- Tax Increment Financing could be used to collect revenue for redevelopment as the property values increase. This financing is possible on a project-specific basis as a bond issue, or on an area-wide basis as increased property values generate tax revenue.
- As the University is naturally expanding its footprint, it could pay for the acquisition and maintenance of property where it made sense.

### REHABILITATION INCENTIVES

- The county could use waivers of government impact or permit fees as incentives for people to rehabilitate properties that are in need of investment in the Innovation District.
- The University and other Employers might provide incentives equal to some percentage of an employee's salary that employees may use for purchasing a location near work. Structuring this incentive so that it vests, or is forgiven, over some period of years might serve as a mechanism for employee retention.

The effort to create an Innovation District and Technology Park will require the cooperation of many entities. Principal among the relationships necessary to initiate this project is that which exists between the University and the City. After its inception, the Innovation District and Technology Park will require other municipal agencies (e.g. the

Augusta Land Bank and the Downtown Development Authority) to provide input and guidance. Similarly, institutional partners may help in enacting community-wide housing policies. These include Paine College, the Augusta University Hospital, the Charlie Norwood VA Medical Center, and any businesses that may relocate to the area.

### EXPECTED IMPACT

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Housing rehabilitation in and around the institutions within the Innovation District will bring new residents with higher disposable incomes. This influx of new residents will lead to rising standards of living, support for local businesses and school improvement.

The Technology Park, an institutional presence in Augusta's urban core the current size of the University, would bring substantial economic benefits to the region. It provides the capacity to relocate thousands of jobs and house thousands of people in the heart of the city. These people would, in turn, lead to economic growth in not only the heart of the city but also other parts of Augusta (including downtown and suburban Augusta).

### MEASURES OF SUCCESS

Measures of success for this project include the number of new housing units created or rehabilitated, jobs created, and retail sales volume. Increased property tax revenue may also signal success.

Over a ten-year period, our goals include:

- The addition of 2,000 student housing units
- The addition of 1,000 multifamily units
- 100 homes rehabilitated
- 600,000 square feet of University expansion
- 600,000 square feet of office development

**BIG IDEA TWO**

*Live Augusta –  
Financial Housing Incentives for  
Employees to Live Near Work*



Detroit's Live Downtown program has helped revitalize places like Corktown in Detroit's Midtown District



Happy employees, happy home, happy family



EAH programs benefit employers by improving the quality of life for their employees - Those that take advantage of the incentives and thus reduce their commute time and those that don't but stand to gain significantly from the economic investment surrounding the employer campus.

## Connectivity – Tangible

**DESCRIPTION** We recommend creating Employer-Assisted Housing incentives for eligible employees to live and invest in the intown Augusta communities immediately surrounding their place of employment. Three options will accommodate those looking to purchase a new or existing home, those interested in renting, or those who wish to perform exterior improvements on an already-owned property in the designated area.

Employer-Assisted Housing (EAH) incentives are proven programs which allow institutions to become drivers for the revitalization of their surrounding areas. Universities are the primary institutions that have invested in such programs to build vitality around their campus. However, private companies may also leverage EAH programs to foster healthy, safe, and stable surrounding communities. We recommend that Augusta University spearhead this program, with the expected participation of other area employers (e.g. Fort Gordon, Unisys, and area hospitals) soon after.

The purpose of these incentives is to encourage employees to move to and remain in Augusta's core neighborhoods. They also serve as an incentive for employees to stay with employers. By living in these communities, residents actively support neighborhood revitalization and entice investment by external sources. As neighborhood revitalization occurs, the demand for quality housing and amenities increases, leading outside developers to invest in increasing housing capacity (Hoereth).

This revival should lead property owners to invest in improving existing properties, ultimately leading to increased property values and tax yield in Augusta. New residents may create income diversity in these communities, which may improve community economics and strengthen support for further revitalizing the downtown district.

Detroit's "Live Downtown" program is one such initiative that has successfully brought nearly 1,000 new residents to the Downtown and Midtown areas with the support of several major Detroit employers (LIVE Detroit). For the time being, we have chosen to call our program "Live Augusta."

**SCOPE OF INITIATIVE** The Live Augusta program could be administered by the new alliance, INSPIRE Augusta, Inc. in partnership with the University and other participating Augusta employers. The Community Foundation is also a potential partner who may be interested in supporting the program by providing grants for a portion of the housing incentives.

The program will provide:

- New homeowners to the district with up to \$20,000 Down Payment Assistance in forgivable loans toward the purchase of their primary residence.
- New renters to the district with an allowance up to \$2,500 toward the cost of their residence in the first year, and \$1,000 toward the cost of their residence in the second year.
- Existing homeowners in the district with matching funds of up to \$5,000 for exterior improvements for projects of \$10,000 or more



EAH rehab benefits would incentivize current property owner-employees to invest in exterior rehabilitation work

## ACTION STEPS & TIMELINE

### SHORT TERM

Establish partners, funding, and program guidelines. We recommend a pilot program for University employees, sponsored at least in part by the University with potential grant assistance from the Community Foundation. Administration of the pilot program performed by either the University OR INSPIRE Augusta, Inc., which would allow for more growth in the program.

Establish program boundaries whether it be separate boundaries for each employer or a selected district in which all the employers are equal participants. Establish a website that will be a central clearinghouse of information for the district(s). Properties for sale and rent, general information about the neighborhoods, amenities, and, of course, thorough information about the incentive programs. A well-designed, user-friendly, and an engaging site will be key to promoting the program and attracting people to the area whether they partake in the incentives or not.

### MID TERM

With partnerships and funding in place, the program can open up for applications and participants.

### LONG TERM

Encourage other Employer partnerships such as Fort Gordon. An Employer-Assisted Housing program at Fort Gordon would necessitate separate boundaries but contribute to the revitalization of suburban Augusta close to the base.



New infill housing is tailored for contemporary needs but fits in with the surrounding community

## BUDGET

Administration of the program would initially need at least one employee charged with educating the employers and helping them actively market the program. (\$50,000 salary)

Based on the success of similar programs (Detroit's Live Downtown and Mercer University's Down Payment Assistance), we recommend that the Augusta University's program allocate resources for fifteen homeowner assistance approved participants (\$10,000-20,000 each), twenty rental assistance participants (\$2,500 each), and ten to twenty rehab applications (\$5,000 each). This allocation means allocating \$450,000 in the first year for assistance

would be reasonable. From there, the popularity and needs of the program can be gauged more accurately year to year.

The design and establishment of a website should be budgeted at \$250 with an annual maintenance contingency of \$14.95 using a Weebly Pro site.

## EXPECTED IMPACT

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Encouraging employees to live in Augusta's intown neighborhoods will promote economic diversity and growth in those neighborhoods and contribute to the vibrancy and revitalization of Augusta's core. Since these programs affect the area immediately surrounding Augusta University campuses, they will contribute to the revitalization of the Technology Park and Innovation District.

Residential growth in the intown neighborhoods will attract further economic development and investment and will support the vitality of downtown Augusta. The programs provide an opportunity to bring Augusta-based organizations, including the University, in communion with their surrounding communities. It is also well-documented that stress-free commutes, particularly being able to walk or bike, make people happier, and happy employees are good employees.

As an obvious benefit to the city, the influx of intown residents will increase the tax base in neighborhoods that have significantly higher tax rates than suburban areas. Likewise, the residential and commercial areas concentrated in urban Augusta will contribute more tax dollars than big box developments and suburban sprawl in the suburbs.

The success of initiatives in Washington, DC, Macon, GA, and Detroit suggests that these types of programs have a significant impact on their surrounding communities.

### Measures of Success

- The quality of housing and availability near work for new residents
- More in-town residents and revitalized neighborhoods
- Increased tax base for the city

**BIG IDEA THREE**

*INSPIRE Augusta Inc –  
Innovative Network of Special Purpose  
Intown Residential Enterprises*



## Creativity Corridor

### DESCRIPTION

The Technology Park and Innovation District would centralize the complementary resources of Augusta University's tech talent and the cybersecurity industry in Augusta. We recommend establishing an organization that serves as a community quarterback for housing within the Innovation District to ensure it is an attractive, affordable and accessible area for Augusta's diverse population. A group such as INSPIRE Augusta Inc. could fill this role.

We recommend that the mission of INSPIRE Augusta Inc. be to forge key community partnerships and direct private investments to create a mixture of housing within the Innovation District's home base neighborhoods and surrounding areas.

### SCOPE OF INITIATIVE

INSPIRE Augusta Inc. could be a hub for public and private organizations that invest in the welfare of Augusta's tech and cyber security industries. A subsidiary non-profit, INSPIRE Augusta Partnerships, could serve as the fundraising arm for philanthropic investments in housing. This funding structure is similar to that of the Beltline in Atlanta, which is projected to bring in more than \$20 billion in economic development to the city ("How the Beltline is Funded").

Potential INSPIRE Augusta Inc. anchor institutions include:

1. The City of Augusta's Housing and Community Development Department
2. Flagship businesses in the Tech Park
3. The Community Foundation for the Central Savannah River Area
4. Augusta University
5. The Collaborative
6. Georgia ACT (Advancing Communities Together)

We recommend that INSPIRE Augusta Inc. aspire to launch and sustain housing programs via the economic strength of the Innovation District; housing can include a mixture of styles (single-family detached, townhomes, multifamily) and sizes.



Augusta, Holley Street porches in the LWB District

INSPIRE Augusta Inc. would be modeled, in part, on flagship foundations that have steered neighborhood-based investment programs in other areas, including the Arthur M. Blank Foundation's work on the Westside of Atlanta and the Annie E. Casey Foundation's work in the Pittsburgh neighborhood of Atlanta (please see the citations for links to these examples).

## ACTION STEPS & TIMELINE

### SHORT TERM

Establish a discretionary fund of \$2 million within the first two years of the Innovation District's launch. This fund could be designed to develop a mixture of market rate and affordable housing within the Innovation District. It could also offer affordable housing loans to residents who do not qualify for employer-assisted housing incentives.

Select particular sites for construction/redevelopment based on the following criteria: levels of dilapidation, proximity and potential value to the Technology Park, and the highest priority areas for individual INSPIRE Augusta Inc. members.

- Raising seed funding might require commitments from private foundations, corporate partners, and public funds.
- During the first two years, we recommend using the \$2 million to distribute micro-loans to redevelopment corporations working in the Innovation District. The Collaborative is a potential partner for this phase. Within the first two years, INSPIRE Augusta Inc. aims to redevelop 20-25 properties within targeted areas.

### MID TERM

Identify chartered urban redevelopment corporations that will use the funding to purchase abandoned properties in the target areas to build/redevelop as affordable housing. INSPIRE Augusta Partnerships invest funds alongside funds from the city of Augusta and federal/state funding for affordable housing. INSPIRE Augusta's work with local vendors and contractors will bolster the local economy as it redevelops local housing.

- As the Innovation District prospers, identify broader areas for redevelopment and renovation, starting with Block Programs, AU student and alumni housing, and housing for cybersecurity employees.
- Aim to redevelop 20-25 additional properties over 4-5 years (total of 40-50). Grow the discretionary fund for this development to \$3-4 million. At three years into the project, evaluate a collaboration with the Land Trust.

- INSPIRE Augusta could look to successful models of mixed-income developments in Boulder, CO, specifically the development Yarmouth Way, which uses market rate housing to fund affordable housing. In this development, 6 market-rate, single family detached homes fund the building of 2 affordable single family detached homes and 4 market-rate townhomes fund the building of up to 7 affordable townhomes ("Boulder, CO: Infill Workforce Housing").
- INSPIRE Augusta should also consider other housing development success stories that have been stewarded by an invested anchor institution. One such example is that of Washington University in St. Louis's medical school, which redeveloped housing and reduced blight in the neighborhood of Forest Park in the 1970s and 1980s, making it an attractive and affordable area for its medical students, residents and on-campus workers ("St. Louis Hospital").

### LONG TERM

We could assess potential expansion of a Tax Allocation District near 15th Street and Walton Way. Directing TAD funding toward the mixture of income levels available for housing in the district will create a more desirable and inclusive community. It could be beneficial to establish an MOU between INSPIRE Augusta Inc. and the Augusta Economic Development Authority so that TAD funding will support housing initiatives in the Innovation District.

- After 5+ years, INSPIRE Augusta Inc. can take stock of its role in housing redevelopment, assess the level of blight and attendant social determinants (levels of poverty in the area, opportunities for economic growth for residents, education initiatives). It may consider moving into the development of community centers/job training programs/STEM education support as opposed to real estate development.
- INSPIRE Augusta could also advocate for inclusionary zoning laws that would give community redevelopment corporations more jurisdiction over the building in the Innovation District.



New infill construction in the LWB District

## BUDGET

Years 1-2: \$2 million

Years 3-4: \$3 million

As a model, the Atlanta Neighborhood Development Partnership recently estimated that a \$1 million grant would allow it to complete more than 100 homes in five years. As INSPIRE Augusta Inc. would be a new fund, we recommend that \$2-3 million would allow it to redevelop 40-50 properties (single family, multi-family and townhomes/condos) in a similar time frame.

## EXPECTED IMPACT

Over 15-20 years, INSPIRE Augusta Inc. could spur more than \$160 million in public and private investment to the Innovation District through new and redeveloped housing and mixed-income rental units.

## MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- Reduction of blighted housing by at least 50% in 20 years
- Housing tax base will grow by 20% due to reduced blight and abandoned properties
- Affordable housing stock increased by 30%

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## THANK YOU

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*The Augusta Housing Group (Team Ascenders) would like to thank and acknowledge the following individuals who contributed to our knowledge and understanding of Augusta. We greatly appreciate their time and desire to answer our questions, introduce us to the great community, and make us aware of both the challenges and opportunities that lie within Augusta.*

**FORMER MAYOR DEKE COPENHAVER**  
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**BARRY WHITE**  
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**TOM CLARK**  
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**STEVEN KENDRICK**  
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**CAROLYN “FAYE” HARGROVE, PHD**  
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**KELLY SHOUSE**  
Tutus and Dance Shoes

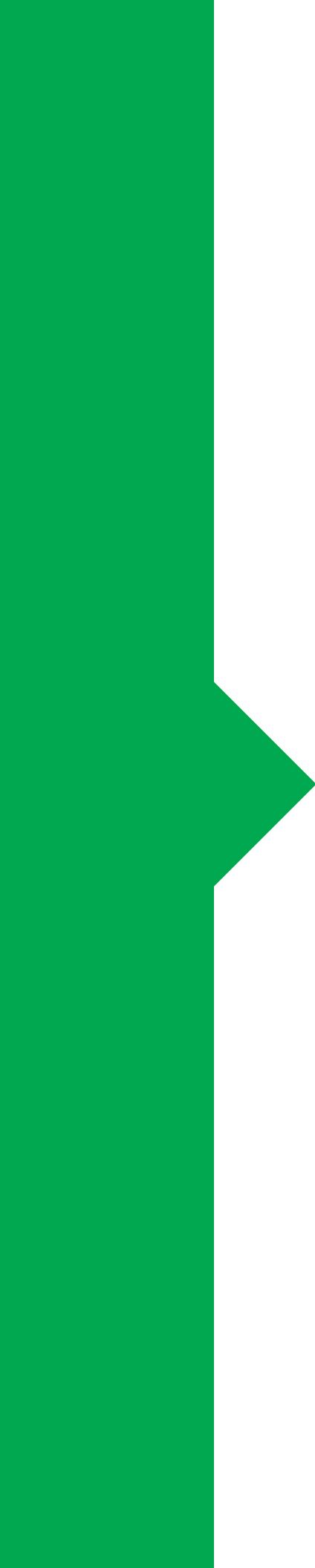
**ROBYN ANDERSON**  
Historic Augusta

**SHELL BERRY**  
Community Foundation

## **SECTION 3**

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*“What do you perceive to be  
Augusta’s greatest strengths  
and how should the community  
leverage those strengths to  
attract millennials to visit or  
move to Augusta?*



# **The Young and the Restless**

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## THE TEAM

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# The Young and the Restless

*Leveraging Augusta's greatest  
strengths to attract millennials*

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### **ALEX TURBYFIELD**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Our challenge question was *what do you perceive to be Augusta's greatest strengths and how should the community leverage those strengths to attract millennials to visit or move to Augusta?* Our three BIG ideas start with Augusta's strengths. We identified the main strengths to be: a low cost of living, the existing Downtown and River access, outdoor recreation, higher education opportunities, job opportunities, and the brand recognition of The Masters and Garden City. As we worked to answer the call of the question, we realized we needed to start with attracting millennials to move to Augusta. By focusing on the strengths to get young professionals to move to Augusta, millennials will see Augusta as a tourist destination as well.

From our first meetings with local officials and organizations, it became evident that while Augusta has much to offer, its strengths could be marketed more effectively. To address this opportunity, we recommend a rebranding social media campaign for Augusta to attract millennials to move to Augusta. According to the Cisco Connected World Technology Report, 90% of young people use their smartphone first thing in the morning, often before they get out of bed. Millennials need visual access to Augusta through a consolidated social media blitz to see the appeal Augusta has to offer. The campaign will focus on the strengths of a low cost of living, the Downtown and Riverwalk, outdoor recreation opportunities, as well as higher education and career and job opportunities. Augusta can boast a high quality of life in a city that offers both small town familiarity and the energy of a city with a growing job market. By marketing Augusta to young professionals in search of a place to begin their careers and start their families, the city will attract those millennials in search of an alternative to larger, busier cities. Augusta has all the right pieces and this campaign will put them together to show millennials  
**"It's All In Augusta."**

Our next step is **Building the Augusta You Imagine.** Augusta has worldwide brand recognition through the Masters Tournament. Eyes from around the globe look toward Augusta every April and see flawless perfection. The city is eloquently named the "Garden City." However, when people visit Augusta, expectations do not always meet reality. We recommend a City-wide beautification effort that will revitalize Augusta from Downtown to the connector arteries, including those between the Airport, Fort Gordon, and I-20. By building upon the expectations of high standards set for the home of the Masters, creating a focal point of a tourist attraction for the City, and addressing cleanliness, beautification, and safety in the urban core and major connections, Augusta can be an inviting and attractive place for millennials to visit, live, work, and play.

The final step in our vision is to build upon the urban core by both utilizing and enhancing current amenities to entice millennials to live and work in a **Downtown Hub.** We propose adding amenities such as playgrounds, bike shares, and expanded public markets. The additions will enhance the Downtown experience and increase the marketability of Augusta. We recommend continuing the regularly occurring events and festivals Downtown as well as adding more signature events in the Augusta Commons as not only an additional amenity, but as a stimulant to the cultural environment of Downtown. Lastly, we recommend an open container ordinance within the confines of Downtown Augusta to allow for breweries to be introduced. The above recommendations will enhance the existing community, culture, and attractiveness of Downtown Augusta to the millennial generation and create a "hub" or destination for millennials to come to. We believe that additional amenities and focusing on enhancing the urban core's lifestyle and culture will not only attract millennials to visit, but also to move to Augusta, Richmond County to further their careers.

## INTRODUCTION

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During the last five months, we have had the opportunity to get to know Augusta. In that time, we have discovered a city full of rich history and exciting opportunities for the future. Change is coming to Augusta. Cyber is here. Augusta University has rebranded and reimaged itself. The City of Augusta, Chamber of Commerce, Convention and Visitor's Bureau, Economic Development Authority, as well as countless other organizations and dedicated individuals are working every day to improve and enhance their beloved city. What did we see when we started to learn about Augusta? Potential. You've heard that before. But now potential for growth is actual growth you can see and touch, and it's time to catapult that potential into prosperity.

Our question was this: *What do you perceive to be Augusta's greatest strengths and how should the community leverage those strengths to attract millennials to visit or move to Augusta?* It was a big question, and our answer has evolved over the last five months. Defining the strengths was easy, because the strengths leaped out to us. We determined Augusta's greatest strengths to be: a low cost of living compared to the other major cities in Georgia and the South as a whole, the already existing Downtown with access to the River right at its feet, outdoor recreation opportunities associated with the River as well as the suburban and rural sprawl that is just beyond the urban core, opportunities for higher education and career advancement through the universities and colleges housed in Augusta, vast and varied job opportunities in Augusta's ever-growing job market, and finally, the world-wide brand recognition of the Masters--the juxtaposition of the elusive green City of Oz cocooned inside "The National," yet, through television and media, the also universally accessible Garden City, seen by hundreds of millions across the globe every April.

The next task--how to leverage those strengths to attract millennials to visit or move to Augusta, proved more difficult than the first. What is a millennial? What do millennials want? A millennial is the generation after Gen X and encompasses those born between 1980 and 1996. Urban dictionary defines a millennial as "a special little snowflake." There is some truth to that definition, however, because in fact, all millennials are not the same. Some crave the urban experience--easy, walkable access to work and play within a few blocks. But others want a white picket fence in the 'burbs with outdoor recreation surrounding them and the sounds of the city miles away. So what do millennials want? What attracts them? Our three BIG ideas focus on attracting all types of millennials by utilizing the strengths Augusta already has and showing off those strengths to a generation that asks, "What's in Augusta?"

**Answer: It's all in Augusta.**

## *All-In Augusta*





## Creativity Corridor

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Our recommendation is to combine the efforts of all of the organizations in Augusta to create one master plan of marketing that will attract millennials to move to Augusta and choose it as a destination to visit.

### DESCRIPTION

Focus a rebranding social media campaign for Augusta to attract millennials to **move** to Augusta. By focusing on the strengths to get young professionals to move to Augusta, you will in turn attract visitors. Visitors seem to like Augusta more than locals--our goal is to get the locals to buy-in and show off their city.

### SCOPE OF INITIATIVE

This would be a community wide initiative that takes all the active players and organizations who are the major influencers in Augusta (CVB, The City of Augusta, Economic Development, Chamber of Commerce, Augusta University) to collaborate with funds and ideas to market Augusta as a whole.

Augusta should be a destination for those who don't want the traffic and busyness of Atlanta, but still want the urban experience at an affordable price point. Augusta has the Savannah River as the focal point of the Downtown as a unique attraction to offer visitors and residents alike. Finally, just outside of the city you can find a quieter, rural setting to escape the sounds of the city. As such, Augusta can attract every kind of millennial--those who want an urban lifestyle as well as those who prefer the perks of suburban life and outdoor recreation. By offering affordable living, a varied job market with opportunities for career growth, and higher and continuing education opportunities, young professionals will choose Augusta over larger, more expensive cities.

Augusta has all the right pieces and this campaign will put them all together to show millennials, "It's all-in Augusta." The term "all-in" is a poker term that refers to having everything invested on the table. No holding back. All our chips are in. Augusta is putting it all on the table, giving it all for the recruitment of young talent and placemaking for the region.

## ACTION STEPS & TIMELINE

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- Compile lists of active organizations in the Augusta community who constitute the major players and influencers, beginning with CVB, The City of Augusta, Chamber, Economic Development, and Augusta University.
- Create list of individuals who are movers and shakers in the community.
- Reach out to colleges, community, and the local Young Professional group for potential community ambassadors.
- Organize an initial meeting of all organizations to discuss the vision for the future and how they are currently trying to attract millennials.
- Organize meeting of potential Augusta Ambassadors.
- Create a marketing plan that incorporates the vision of all organizations to draw millennials to Augusta.
- Discuss investment amounts for organizations. This is crucial, as buy-in from all of the major players over a period of several years is the key to success of the campaign.
- Hire a marketing firm to represent All In Augusta.
- Refine the message--Augusta is not Atlanta. It is not Savannah, or Greenville, SC.
- A high quality community calendar will be a major feature of the campaign. The calendar will contain video content and updated social media posts from locals who are experiencing Augusta every day. This calendar will showcase local millennial ambassadors who will provide authentic content to an interactive, constantly updating calendar for locals and visitors alike, to stay informed on the events and activities already taking place in Augusta.
- The driving force behind the content will be local millennial content creators who are authentic ambassadors and local influencers. This creates buy-in in the community. They share what they like, and as a result, others follow.
- Package weekend excursions to visitors through the community calendar.
- Research where current millennials live in Augusta and why they live in those areas of rather than others. Encourage entrepreneurs to develop the less populated areas and create mini-Renaissances all over Augusta.
- Create monthly local focus group sessions with a diverse set of millennials to stay up to date on current trends, ideas, etc. This will influence content.
- Compile a comprehensive database of professional growth opportunities like networking groups, classes, leadership programs, etc., showing that Augusta is a place to grow professionally and market these through the calendar and social media.

### TIMELINE

#### SHORT TERM

- Compile list of Organizations and ambassadors. Begin meetings.

#### MEDIUM TERM

- Discuss budget-- initial estimate from Wier Stewart was \$2 million, consult with WS and other firms to determine short term, medium term, and long term budget for campaign with high quality calendar. Consider internships or paid positions for content creators.

#### LONG TERM

- Create one marketing plan with buy-in from all major players. Each organization contributes the agreed upon amount for two to three years.



Photo courtesy of Digital Media Academy

## BUDGET

### SHORT TERM

- Discuss viable investments for each organization.

### MEDIUM TERM

- Make yearly commitment; we recommend at least \$25,000.00 per organization.

### LONG TERM

- \$2 million dollars over a period of two to three years.

## EXPECTED IMPACT

- Impact will start in Augusta community with local ambassadors.
- Honest and authentic message from locals with buy-in will be persuasive because it focuses on real people and what they love about Augusta. This authentic content will influence locals and will spread to visitors on social media, in turn attracting millennials to Augusta.

### MEASURE OF SUCCESS

Success will be measured by increased millennial tourism to Augusta, as well as increased social media presence via Millennial Ambassadors. By tracking digital marketing efforts, as well as statistics from local hotels and AirBnB rentals, we will be able to see the amount of millennial visitors to the Augusta area. By researching and looking at Google analytics of

the community calendar, we will be able to see how people were directed there and in what they are most interested. Over the long term, we should be able to track local tax revenue in areas where Ambassadors have been promoting and identify trends in the area.

## POTENTIAL FUNDING, RESOURCES & PARTNERSHIPS

### FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

- CDBG grants.
- Discuss investment opportunities based on each organization's ability to buy-in to the project over two-three years.
- Hold fundraising events that draw people Downtown and create interest in investment towards the millennial engagement.

### LIKELY PARTNERSHIPS AND RESOURCES

- CVB
- Chamber of Commerce
- City of Augusta
- Fort Gordon
- Young Professional Groups (i.e: Young Professionals of Augusta)
- Economic Development
- Local Elected Officials
- Augusta University
- Paine College
- Augusta Tech
- Wier Stewart and other marketing firms

**BIG IDEA TWO**

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*Building the Augusta You Imagine*





## Creativity Corridor

### DESCRIPTION

Augusta has worldwide brand recognition through the Masters Tournament. Eyes from around the globe look toward Augusta every April and see flawless perfection. The city is eloquently named the "Garden City." However, when people visit Augusta, expectations do not meet reality. We recommend a City-wide beautification effort that will revitalize Augusta from Downtown to the connector arteries, including those between the Airport, Fort Gordon, and I-20. By building upon the expectations of high standards set for the home of the Masters, creating a focal point of a tourist attraction, and addressing cleanliness, beautification, and safety in the urban core and major connections, Augusta can be an inviting and attractive place for millennials to visit, live, work, and play.

### SCOPE OF INITIATIVE

This would be a City of Augusta/Richmond County wide effort that would focus on beautification, cleanliness, and safety from the outer connectors into the urban core. By building upon the expectations of high standards set for the home of the Masters, creating a focal point of a tourist attraction for the City, and addressing cleanliness, beautification, and safety in the urban core and major connections, Augusta can be an inviting and attractive place for millennials to visit, live, work, and play.



Augusta National Golf Club,  
Photo courtesy of Scott Poag

## ACTION STEPS & TIMELINE

### ERECT A PUBLIC SYMBOL OF AUGUSTA

- Commission a local artist to create a sculpture of a symbol that best represents Augusta; a golf ball would be the clear choice. However, to gain more attention, Augusta can make it a local and/or national competition to see who can create the best sculpture of a symbol of Augusta. By making this sculpture a centerpiece of Augusta, the city can create a new attraction, inspire curiosity in outsiders that would draw tourists (a la The Bean in Chicago), and provide an excellent selfie/photo opportunity. It could even be a painting or mural on the side of a historic building in Downtown. The Augusta Utilities Facility on Wrightsboro Road is a great example of turning a “forgettable” building into a community feature by using murals.

### HOMEGROWN RESOURCES

- Incorporate a clean-up program into the Richmond County School System; assigning clean-up details, e.g., giving credit to students who volunteer to clean up Augusta is another economically savvy way to incentivize young people to aid in Augusta's efforts to keep Augusta Beautiful.

### CODE ENFORCEMENT

- Use existing codes as an economic development tool to get property owners who are neglecting their properties to abide by unified standards that portray a fluid image.

- Educate property owners on their responsibilities.
- Streamline process for County staff to enforce existing lot ordinance, mothballed building, and unsafe building abatement code.
- The amount of red tape and inefficiencies make it difficult for these programs to make a meaningful impact in addressing the problems they are designed to fix.
- Work with local Legislative Delegation to change GA Law governing Tax Sales. Reduce time period to 6 months and allow purchasers to access the property to maintain. Maintenance expenses should be reimbursable if the property reverts to original owner.
- Assist elderly and/or impoverished property owner's in clean-up through programs like Habitat for Humanity; Work with local churches and organizations on clean-up efforts in their neighborhoods such as Turn Back the Block and Icebox Ministries.

### DESIGN STANDARDS

- Look at other benchmark historic Downtown design standards such as Downtown Alexandria, VA, Downtown Greenville, SC, Savannah, GA, and Downtown Golden, CO. Take the best of those programs and identify lessons learned.
- There should be a grace period for building owners to implement the changes (several years).

- It is cheaper for the County to give a tax incentive for this kind of development than spending the money themselves. There will be a return on the investment, once tax values are reevaluated.

### **FACADE PROGRAM**

- Implement a facade improvement grant program for business owners in targeted districts (i.e. Gateway Districts and Downtown). An example would be a 50% match in business owners investment up to a certain amount. This would help spur private investment and start the implementation of previously mentioned design standards. Over time, property values would go up, increasing tax revenue, with the goal eventually to create enough core density that the private sector would implement program on its own.
- Program could also include an allotment for a “Stormwater Category.” There has been a recent struggle in Augusta with a new Stormwater fee. Part of this program could go to help small businesses reduce their stormwater fee by improving the permeability of their property through creative landscaping. This would reduce long term costs to small business owners, promote changing “concrete jungles” to greener spaces, and reduce the burden on the stormwater system.

### **INCREASED SAFETY MEASURES**

- Increase walking police presence Downtown after dark.
- Improve lighting throughout Downtown, especially along the convention and Riverwalk area to attract and welcome visitors and residents.
- Add call boxes for safety in targeted areas.
- Work with Augusta Council of Garden Clubs to determine current projects and which areas to concentrate on short term, medium term, and long term.
- Establish a Keep Augusta Beautiful or Keep Richmond Co. Beautiful as an affiliate to Keep Georgia Beautiful. Enforce Litter prevention and fines, community and neighborhood clean-ups.

### **TIMELINE** **SHORT TERM**

- Establish an afterschool program that would give students credit for cleaning up an area of Augusta; make cleaning up a portion of the city an alternative to detention/suspension. Create buzz for an upcoming design competition.
- Focus larger efforts and prioritize main thoroughfares and gateways into the City to enhance first impressions. Look at traffic counts and around major transportation routes such as I-20, I-520, and between the airport and Downtown.
- Develop Education Program to educate residents and businesses on their responsibilities for maintaining property. Partner with local UGA Extension Office to include “handy tip.” Information could be distributed electronically to real estate agents, mortgage offices, and neighborhood associations to reduce costs.

### **MEDIUM TERM**

- Create a bureau that would be solely responsible for ensuring/enforcing the codes, especially on weekends; contacting the Adopt-a-Highway organization to discuss partnerships with local Augusta businesses that would provide sponsorship opportunities in exchange for cleaning up the community; Host the design competition.
- Facade Program

### **LONG TERM**

- Place a public art/photo opportunity in the center of Downtown Augusta (Ex: the Bean in Chicago, the Statue of Liberty, etc) that would serve as a centerpiece and culmination of what Augusta is known for (and would be an excellent opportunity for selfies!). Pick the winning sculpture and publicly dedicate it.
- Change Georgia Legislation Governing Property Tax Sales in order to reduce duration and so that purchasers can maintain property and be reimbursed should property revert to original owner.

## BUDGET

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### SHORT TERM

- Education programs for school and community-minimal depending on marketing strategy and whether print materials are used; If a new traffic study is required, approximate cost is \$3,000 per intersection.

### MEDIUM TERM

- \$6 to \$8 million would allow City of Augusta/Richmond County to front the money to tear down abandoned structures, maintain overgrown vegetation, and initiate the Facade Improvement Program. Funds that are recovered from fines to these ordinances should be reinvested into the program so that it is eventually self funded. This is a high dollar item because it is currently not adequately funded. Once the community is able to “catch up” with the problem, the budget would be able to shift from “initiation” to “maintenance.” The City should consider including a “maintenance” line item in new road construction and streetscape projects.

### LONG TERM

- A recurring \$500,000 allotment to public art would be a great starting point toward beautifying the City.

## EXPECTED IMPACT

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Visually, the city will live up to its “Garden City” name. Concentrating on the main roadway connectors and Downtown will enable visitors to be able to look out of their car windows and see a community that looks clean, green, and safe. The city will be inviting to guests who are driving through and make them want to stop and explore beautiful Augusta.

By erecting a public centerpiece, the city can create a new attraction, inspire curiosity in outsiders that would draw tourists, and provide an excellent photo opportunity (a la The Bean in Chicago). Augusta will become a destination for millennials to visit year round by offering its own unique experience apart from any other city in the South.

## MEASURES OF SUCCESS

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Success can be measured by the visual product that results from the beautification efforts. The streets and neighborhoods will be more inviting from property owners and residents complying with codes and laws already in place. The better their community looks, the more pride the residents will take in their property and community. Most significantly, an appealing city will attract new businesses, residential property investors, and in turn, will attract millennials to consider Augusta as a desired destination to live, work, and play.

## POTENTIAL FUNDING, RESOURCES & PARTNERSHIPS

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- Keep Georgia Beautiful
- Augusta Council of Garden Clubs
- Augusta City Council
- Richmond County Commissioners
- Richmond County Sheriff's Department
- Augusta City Police Department
- Augusta Economic Development Authority
- City of Augusta
- Augusta schools and universities
- Augusta CSRA Habitat for Humanity
- Local and national artists in Augusta and around the country
- Adopt-A-Highway
- Turn Back the Block
- Icebox Ministries

**BIG IDEA THREE**

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*Developing a Downtown Hub*



## Connectivity – Tangible

### DESCRIPTION

This initiative focuses on the existing strengths of Downtown Augusta and proposes to build upon the urban core anchored by the Augusta Commons by both using and enhancing current amenities to interest millennials. This initiative will work to both attract and retain millennials within Augusta, Richmond County. Downtown's Broad Street is one of the widest streets in America, and used to be over 300 feet across - which is the length of a football field (Augusta Downtown Historic District)! Broad Street's history as a commercial corridor translates into modern day walkability, which is an asset we propose to capitalize on through additional amenities and events.

To attract and retain millennials, we propose adding amenities such as playgrounds, bike shares, and public markets. Adding these amenities will enhance the Downtown experience and increase the marketability of Augusta. We also recommend regularly occurring events and festivals Downtown in the Augusta Commons as not only an additional amenity, but as a stimulant to the cultural environment of Downtown. Lastly, we recommend an open container ordinance within the confines of Downtown Augusta, also by the Augusta Commons, to allow for breweries to be introduced. The preceding recommendations will enhance the existing community, culture, and attractiveness of Downtown Augusta to the millennial generation and create a "hub" or destination for millennials to come to. We believe that additional amenities and focusing on enhancing the urban core's lifestyle and cultural aspects will not only attract millennials to visit, but move to Augusta, Richmond County.

### SCOPE OF INITIATIVE

We propose the creation of a Downtown Hub targeting millennials through new amenities, organizing a Downtown event showcasing local appeal, and ordinance changes in the Downtown and Riverwalk to provide greater recreational activities.



Downtown Augusta,  
Photos courtesy of the Augusta Convention and Visitors Bureau

## ACTION STEPS & TIMELINE

### RECOMMENDED ACTION STEPS

Adding amenities to the Downtown area, with a focus on the areas surrounding the Augusta Commons will create a clear destination for millennials and promote the livability and community aspects of the Augusta area.

- First, bringing a new, unique playground to the area will appeal to millennials who have or plan to have children in the near future. A strong example of a playground with a fresh approach is New York City's Imagination Playground at Burling Slip. The Imagination Playground consists of giant foam blocks which children may move and shape into a playspace of their own creation. Such a space combines activity with creativity and cooperation, and it also adds an element of whimsy into the Downtown space.
- Secondly, implementing a bikeshare program will help to nurture a community of people which will result in increased neighborhood safety as a whole. The visible presence of people outside riding bikes will help to combat the incorrect notion that Downtown is "not safe" and "not family friendly".
- When implemented properly, bike share programs can also be tourist destinations in and of themselves, as they are in New York and Chicago. In addition, bike share programs appeal to those who wish to have a healthy, ecological alternative to driving and are a nice complement to the Riverwalk.
- Finally, a Downtown public market will serve as a public gathering place for people from different ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic communities to shop for local, fresh food. The Project for Public Spaces, with the support from the Ford Foundation, researched the impacts that markets have on their communities. The renewal of Downtown was one of the six most prominent impacts they found:  
"Successful public markets are the heart and soul of Downtowns and neighborhoods, infusing our cities and towns with new energy and social and economic activity. Markets attract new life to a Downtown and encourage customers to spend more money and time, not just in the market, but in nearby shops and businesses" (Endless Bounty: The Transformative Benefits of Public Markets).

Together, these three additional amenities surrounding Augusta Commons will serve as anchors to a Downtown "hub" that will attract and retain millennials.

- Additionally, with proven research that the millennial generation highly values events and experiences, we propose to enhance and build upon the current monthly First Friday Festival in Downtown Augusta.
- With successful festivals such as Westobou and Arts in the Heart already taking place annually in Augusta, there is potential to draw further millennial traffic by serving as a festival destination.
- According to Eventbrite's nationwide research study of millennials (defined as Americans born between 1980 and 1996) conducted by the Boston Consulting Group, 8 out of 10 millennials surveyed had attended an event in the past year, with over 70% planning to increase spending on event attendance in the coming year. Upon research and review of other First Friday Festivals and organizations in the Southeast region such as the Savannah Waterfront Association, we make the following recommendations to enhance and organize the structure of First Friday in Augusta.
- First, we recommend an organized coalition of core Downtown business owners to form a board of directors that will regulate and champion the growing First Friday festival. It may be appropriate for the Downtown Development Authority of Augusta to own this initiative with the support of the core Downtown business owners. The nurturing and growth of the First Friday festival will continue to attract more visitors to Downtown, and it is imperative that the businesses in the central Downtown core of whom will be most benefited economically have central ties to the running of the festival.
- Secondly, we recommend unique themes of festivals with visiting vendors and live music. Researched cities have themes such as the Bacon and Beer Festival, and Oktoberfest. Further research to gauge interest for specific festival themes that relate to Augusta could be done by the proposed board with the support of the Downtown Development Authority.
- Lastly, we recommend the amendment of zoning regulations Downtown, specifically as it applies



to open container laws and allowing breweries to locate in the urban core. Relaxing laws on outdoor drinking will engender a culture of socialization and further exploring Downtown. This could lead to new events such as art walks, which could highlight local art galleries like Westobou. Cities in Ohio such as Canton and Toledo have used this as part of their strategy to attract and retain millennials and have seen larger weekend crowds Downtown as a result.

## **TIMELINE** **SHORT TERM**

- Adjust open carry container policy and Downtown zoning ordinance for craft beer brewing in Downtown.
- Current open carry container policy: Augusta, Georgia Code, Title 6, Chapter 2, Article 1, alcoholic Beverages, Section 6-2-5.
- Explore physical and financial options for a riverside or Downtown playground.
- Draft strategic plan for a bike share program. Use a city like Philadelphia's business plan as a model.

New York's Imagination Playground  
Photo courtesy of the Rockwell Group

## **MEDIUM TERM**

- Identify properties and redevelopment areas in Downtown for public market.
- Target and secure potential partnerships and grants to generate a cost-effective solution for Downtown property renovation.
- Explore best options for bikeway types and routes and implement bike share program.
- Create Downtown business district organization board of directors to maintain monthly First Friday festivals.
- Encourage breweries to establish themselves Downtown.

## **LONG TERM**

- Build playground.
- Build public market.

## BUDGET

We recommend that each initiative be managed by specific organizations within the Augusta community who can further identify secondary avenues for funding or support.

### SHORT TERM

- We propose the Downtown Development Authority initiate the campaign to amend the open container policy.

### MEDIUM TERM

- For the Bike Share Program, we anticipate a budget of \$130,000 per mile. We propose that the Augusta Convention and Visitors Bureau manage this project along with Augusta Parks and Recreations, with funding provided by the Federal Highway Administration Transportation Alternative Program and community grants.

### LONG TERM

- The projected budget of the playground will be a minimum of \$315,000. This budget provides park space for fifty children. Funding options include the Appalachian Regional Commission Grant, Robert W. Woodruff Foundation Grant Program, Wells Fargo Corporate Giving Grant, Weyerhaeuser Company Foundation Awards, and KaBOOM!. We recommend the Augusta Convention and Visitors Bureau, City of Augusta, and the Downtown Development Authority manage this project.
- We propose the Downtown Development Authority to champion the Public Market expansion.

## EXPECTED IMPACT

Our proposal recommends the creation of a Downtown Hub by a strategic focus on the urban core with enhanced amenities, festivals, and changes to zoning laws. We believe that the recommended changes will result in an increased number of millennials attracted to visit and move to Augusta, Richmond County. An increase in millennial visitation and residency will enhance the economic development and impact on the urban core by sustaining and increasing growth in retail, cuisine, and attractions.

Continuing and expanding the First Friday festival will have both cultural and business impacts with increased millennials in attendance.

Changing the open container ordinance will allow for breweries Downtown, which will greatly increase millennial tourism and create a sense of place and fellowship Downtown and on the River.

### MEASURE OF SUCCESS

- Percent growth of the City of Augusta population between the ages 25-44.
- Percent of total City of Augusta population aged 25 to 44.
- Percent growth in overnight hotel stays within the city of Augusta.
- Percent growth in sales tax revenue from Downtown Augusta businesses.
- New capital investment and development expenditures in Downtown Augusta.
- Increased foot traffic in Downtown Augusta.
- Increased customer traffic in Downtown Augusta.
- Increase average attendance of community events in Downtown Augusta.
- Number of people using bike share program.
- Number and type of posts on social media about Downtown Augusta.

## POTENTIAL FUNDING, RESOURCES & PARTNERSHIPS

### FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

- A number of grants exist that can provide funding for amenities such as a playground space. The Robert W. Woodruff Foundation Grant Program offers funding between \$100,000 to \$1,000,000 to support charitable, scientific and educational activities.
- Both the Weyerhauser Company Foundation Awards and Well Fargo Corporate Giving Grants offer funding to build and strengthen communities.
- Grants may also be available for an Imagination Playground through their partner, KaBOOM!.
- In the pursuit of creating a bikeshare program, Georgia Bikes provides resources for promoting bicycling, and implementing bicycling conditions throughout Georgia. As a local, statewide non-profit organization, they are prepared with the experience useful to promote such a program in the state.

### LIKELY PARTNERSHIPS AND RESOURCES

- For Augusta/Richmond County to accomplish each task in the above proposal, we recommend that community organizations be given a shared responsibility to champion these ideas.
- We recommend additional amenities to be divided upon the following organizations; Convention and Visitors Bureau, City of Augusta, City of Augusta Department of Parks and Recreation, and Downtown Development Authority.
- The initiative of building a playground in the urban core is recommended to be assigned in collaboration between the Convention and Visitors Bureau, City of Augusta, and Downtown Development Authority.
- The initiative of the bike share program is recommended to be assigned to the Convention and Visitors Bureau, Augusta Parks and Recreation, with a possible partnership with Columbia County.
- The initiative of the public market is recommended to be assigned to the Downtown Development Authority.
- The enhancement of the First Friday festival and adjoining organization is recommended to be assigned to the Downtown Advisory Board currently comprised of the Convention and Visitors Bureau, Downtown Development Authority, and Downtown business owners.



Downtown Augusta,  
Photos courtesy of the Augusta Convention and Visitors Bureau

- Finally, we recommend the rezoning of Downtown for open containers to be championed by the Convention and Visitors Bureau and Downtown Development Authority.

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## THANK YOU

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**BARRY WHITE**  
Augusta Convention and Visitors Bureau

**JENNIFER BOWEN**  
Augusta Convention and Visitors Bureau

**SUE PARR**  
Augusta Metro Chamber of Commerce

**HARDIE DAVIS, JR.**  
Mayor of Augusta

**AUBREY HINKSON**  
Augusta University

**DANIEL STEWART**  
Wier/Stewart

**ALEX WIER**  
Wier/Stewart

**NANCY GLASER**  
Augusta Museum of History

**TOMMY WAFFORD**  
MealViewer

**KRISTI KINLAW**  
the Bee's Knees

**JENNIFER JENKINS**  
Easter Seals

## **SECTION 4**

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*How can Augusta and  
Augusta University strategically  
plan their growth and  
development to strengthen their  
connectivity and increase the  
vitality of the urban core?*



# **Soul City Connectors**

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## THE TEAM

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# Soul City Connectors

*Increase the vitality  
of the urban core*

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The long and storied history of Augusta, Georgia, from Revolutionary outpost, to turn of the century mill-town, to the home of the Masters, to the nation's cyber security and communications core, winds through history in much the same way as its eastern boundary winds towards the sea. Recent developments have poised Augusta to morph once again into something she's never been before – a true college town.

According to the International Town Gown Association – A collaborative relationship between the community (town) and the local college or university (gown) contributes to an overall quality of life for everyone involved. Initiating a dialogue and opening up the lines of communication between the campus and its neighbors can foster a positive relationship based on a common understanding of the role that each plays—or can play—to promote a healthy and thriving community.

The consolidation of Augusta State University and Georgia Health Sciences University in 2012 elevated the resultant Augusta University to tier one research status (R1) in Georgia, placing it in the same research classification as the University of Georgia, Georgia Institute of Technology, and Georgia State University. The implications of the consolidation are significant. The vision of the new institution is to be a top-tier university that is a destination of choice for education, healthcare, discovery, creativity, and innovation. Augusta University President Brooks Keel, describing his vision for the then Georgia Regents University, describes the evolving relationship between Town and Gown in his introduction to the institutional Master Plan as follows, “But the benefits [of consolidation] extend far beyond our campus borders. In close partnership with our home city of Augusta, we will create a new and boundless future for our community, or state, and beyond.”

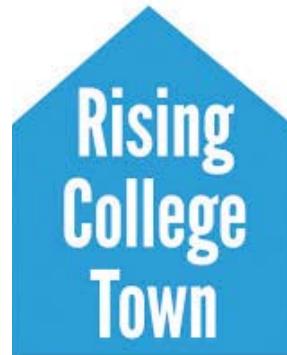
Additionally, the regional growth spurred by the relocation of the US Army Cyber Command to Fort Gordon “will likely be felt in the arts community, which tends to attract newcomers whose passion include dance, music and theatre. By 2020, at least 3700 new jobs will be created by cyber alone, but with the multiplier effect there will be myriad of additional jobs created beyond that. 10-14k new people will be moving into the area which will create a large demand for housing, schools, retail, healthcare, social services, family activities and entertainment.” A thriving “Gown Town” will be an attractive place for these newcomers to invest time, talent, and resources.

## INTRODUCTION

Our group has been challenged to propose three “Big Ideas” to help Augusta and Augusta University strategically plan their growth and development to strengthen their connectivity and increase the vitality of the urban core. Our thoughts immediately turned to the physical environment and the many challenges and opportunities that were apparent during our initial driving tours. With more community input and conversation, however, we discovered that, in addition to the built environment, there were also many possibilities for enriched experiences for both residents of the urban core and University students alike.

Taking these positive changes into account, we developed three Big Ideas that will help turn Downtown into “Gowntown.”

1. Intangible Campus Connectivity Initiatives
2. Physical Connectivity
3. Augusta University Investment in Downtown



**BIG IDEA ONE**

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*Intangible Connections*





## Gown Town

### DESCRIPTION

Work to strengthen and establish deeper and broader relationships between Augusta University as an institution, its' students, and the citizens, businesses, and community organizations throughout the urban core. We see this interaction as containing both physical and programmatic elements which will represent a true weaving together of the fabric of the University into the daily lives of the district. Much more than spotty volunteer efforts, infrequent special events, or easily overlooked decorative signage and banners, we envision a true and visible daily working relationship which can strengthen both entities.

### SCOPE OF INITIATIVE

The initial focus of this initiative would be to create a mechanism to bring students downtown – to shop, dine, and be entertained. A second step builds on this newfound relationship between students and the urban core and proposes establishing a permanent presence by which the spirit of Augusta University, in the form of Augustus the Jaguar, is linked with the already vibrant arts scene downtown. Finally, we submit that creating lasting relationships between Augusta University's colleges and faculty members and the neighborhoods within the urban core will result in a more vibrant and connected corridor. Augusta University is currently working to strengthen its experiential and service learning programs, as directed by their recent Quality Enhancement Plan. The recent formation of the Office of Experiential Learning offers Augusta University the mechanism with which to engage in service learning and applied research within their community.

## ACTION STEPS & TIMELINE

**SHORT TERM** - “Jag Swag” - Work with merchants in the urban core to establish a program whereby students could use their “Jag Card” to make purchases. This would incentivize students to venture off campus for shopping, dining, and entertainment.

**MEDIUM TERM** – “Jaguar Journey” - Partner with a local charity to implement a program, similar to the Athens “Bulldawgs on Broad” or “Eagle Nation on Parade” in Statesboro. This type of installation builds on the strong arts culture that already permeates downtown, but adds a school spirit twist and helps to brand the district. Additionally, if implemented in the fashions described above, this could potentially fund small projects within the urban core neighborhoods.

**LONG TERM/ONGOING** – “Augusta in Action” - Work with the newly established Augusta University Office of Experiential Learning to engage in **community-driven and identified** service learning and applied research projects within the urban core neighborhoods. Establish a committee of community stakeholders and faculty who are already engaged in service learning to begin building rapport and discussing community needs. This will give Augusta University insight into opportunities for research and service learning and will give urban core residents, businesses, and leaders a single point of contact to interface with the University. Examples uncovered in our time spent in Augusta include the following:

- Link Chris Shelly and Marsha Jones from St. Luke United Methodist Church with Jeff Tarver of Middle Georgia State College who pioneered the successful Life League model, which formalizes the mentoring and life skill elements of the current basketball club program. Bring in Augusta University athletics to create mentorships with Jaguar Basketball players. Pull in all elements of AU – financial aid, career planning, admissions, diversity & inclusion, etc. to familiarize students with opportunities in their own neighborhood.



Bulldog Statues, Athens, Georgia

- Link Augusta University’s College of Education Center for Innovation and Community Engagement (<http://www.augusta.edu/education/cice/>) with the nascent Westobou Montessori School to provide curriculum and technical expertise. This will serve to build critical key relationships between the University and an urban core community and can serve as a model for further and more expansive efforts with other colleges within the University.



AUGUSTA UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

## BUDGET

Most of these are low to no-cost interventions that involve strategic stakeholder engagement and project champions to see them through to completion. Some, like the Jaguar Journey proposal, could even serve to raise funds to provide start up and seed money for the ongoing initiatives. The Jag Swag project costs were estimated using the Bulldawg Bucks model and would require a total merchant investment of around \$500. Participating merchants would be reimbursed monthly or weekly by the University.

## EXPECTED IMPACT

Jag Swag – Estimates from the University of Georgia's Bulldawg Bucks program show sales increases from 10-60% depending on business after acceptance of the campus card program. The Bulldogs on Broad program raised over \$300,000 to benefit local charities. It is difficult to track the benefit of a program like this from a marketing outreach standpoint, but if each Jaguar was a “check in spot” on social media, then those could be tracked and used as an incentive to expand the program.

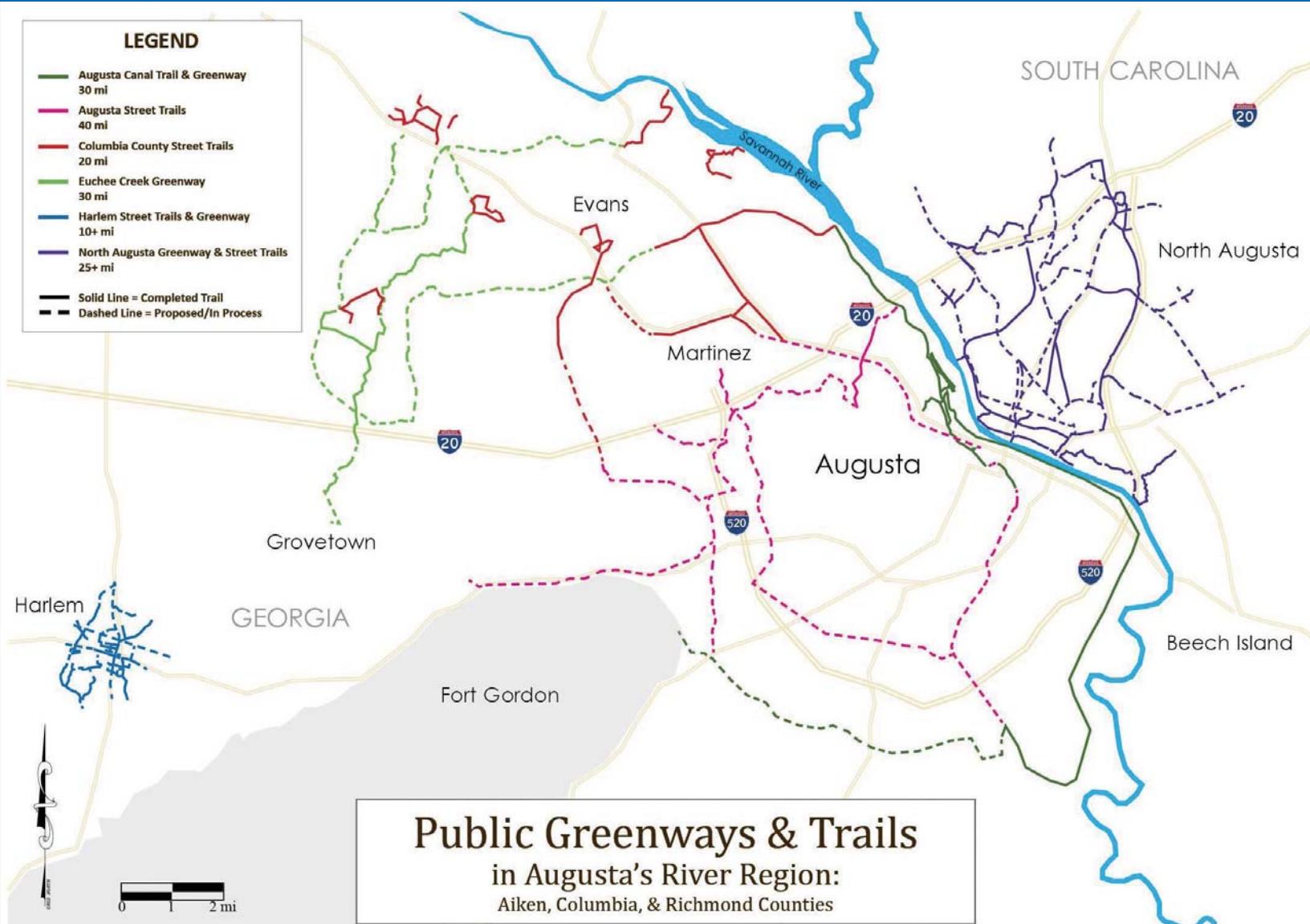
The impact of a more full experience for Augusta University and additional, highly qualified resources for the communities within the urban core is difficult to measure. Building lasting relationships between the faculty and students and community organizations as mentioned will enrich both parties and lead to valid programming that leads to real community empowerment. These incremental community changes will become more and

## POTENTIAL FUNDING, RESOURCES & PARTNERSHIPS

Georgia United Methodist Foundation  
Life League, Jeff Tarver, MGSC  
Community Foundation of the CSRA  
Junior League of Augusta  
Augusta University Athletics  
Augusta University Foundation  
Greater Augusta Council for the Arts  
(Jaguar Journey)

## BIG IDEA TWO

# Physical Connectivity





## Campus Connectivity

### DESCRIPTION & SCOPE OF INITIATIVE

Drawing upon the desire for more places to walk and bike in Augusta, evidenced by feedback from numerous local and regional studies on the project, we propose a coordinated effort to develop a singularly branded path, sidewalk, and protected bike lane network that could connect to street infrastructure in Augusta's urban core education, commercial, and residential and districts. Similar concepts for multi-use and multi-purpose paths such as the Atlanta Beltline, the Carrollton Greenbelt, and the Silver Comet Trail have been met with success in other parts of Georgia.

Conceptually, the proposed network is made of two major segments –

1. A downtown multi-use path and protected bike lane loop connecting the Health Sciences Campus to downtown Augusta, and
2. A longer loop connecting the Summerville and Health Sciences Campus with Harrisburg, Laney Walker, the Savannah River and all areas in between.

A well branded, highly accessible series of paths and broader protected bike lane and sidewalk network could provide unique marketing opportunities for current businesses and attract additional investment along the network. The plan would also provide a location for daily recreation for residents and students as well. This network presents a tangible opportunity to show unity among the Augusta University campuses and urban core district, and highlights the area as an active community focused on promoting exercise and healthy living.

The proposed network would connect both the Health Sciences and Summerville campuses of Augusta University, as well as Paine College, with the existing in-town Augusta Canal Trail section originating in Harrisburg. It also connects to the popular Canal Trail and complements the planned Complete Streets renovation of the 15th Street corridor.

Carrollton Greenbelt -  
Imagine a path branded with AU signage.

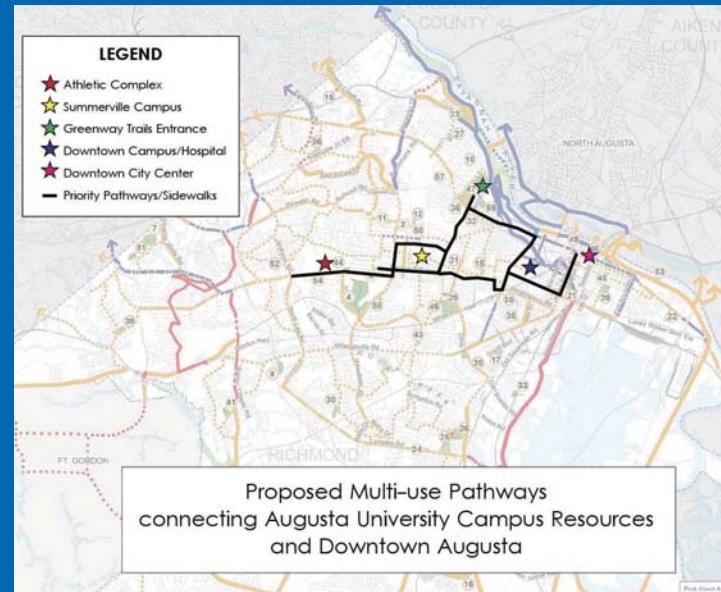
Atlanta Beltline

With the passage of a county-wide Complete Streets policy, Augusta-Richmond County could develop other corridors in a similar fashion, helping to fill in the in-town gaps between the central business district and Laney Walker/Bethlehem. We suggest an initial focus on Fenwick Street and Laney Walker Boulevard, as they already have existing bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.

The connection between the Summerville and Health Sciences Campuses of Augusta University would be more challenging but could be accomplished through a combination of multi-use paths and street infrastructure, using the Central Avenue as the primary corridor (including a potential trail in the grassy median near the Summerville Campus) and two-way protected bike lanes to connect to the Eve Street entrance to the Augusta Canal Trail as well as the Laney-Walker bike lanes on the western edge of the Health Sciences Campus.

**A third**, much longer term part of the network would be a project to connect the Augusta University Forest Hills Campus and University Village with the Summerville Campus through a connected bicycle boulevard network of low speed/low traffic streets through the Forest Hills neighborhood; if there is increased demand and desire, a multi-use path along the south side of Wrightsboro Road on the northern border of Daniel Field could be built as a more direct link. The bicycle boulevard network and multi-use path could provide connectivity for sporting events held in venues on the Forest Hills Campus, as well as daily use for Augusta University students residing in the area.

The overall network would emphasize connectivity to social, cultural, and economic hubs of Augusta while also extending to parks, green spaces, and multi-use paths. Crucial to the success of the network is the concept of a “Minimum Grid” where multi-use paths and on-street infrastructure (like protected bike lanes and sidewalks) connect to each other in a useable and safe way. Such connections maximize use by people who may have just started biking and walking. The in-town section of this “Minimum Grid” would emphasize connecting currently underserved neighborhoods to places important to those communities - schools, faith institutions, workplaces, and social, cultural, and recreational spaces. One key element would be a re-imagining of 13th St/13th Street Bridge and Broad Street to offer better connections to the Augusta Riverwalk and Riverfront district, the North Augusta Greenway, as well a number of other planned trails along the levees into East and South Augusta.



Many of the large events and festivals in Augusta (Half-Ironman Triathlon and Westobou Festival) already have bicycle and pedestrian elements that need to be drawn out as a way to incentivize this kind of network. In addition, many downtown and in-town streets are on a grid system and many of them are currently overbuilt for the amount of automobile daily traffic, allowing for road diets and creativity in Complete Streets design. All major studies supporting bicycle and pedestrian paths and infrastructure emphasize broader connectivity to community institutions. By creating more places to bike and walk, Augusta will help create better health outcomes, have safer and more vibrant streets, provide transportation and recreation options, and move forward, and expand economic opportunity and development.



Carrollton Greenbelt - simple pocket park



Examples of parklets and pocket parks

## ACTION STEPS & TIMELINE

### SHORT-TERM:

- Gather stakeholders to create a public-private partnership involving Augusta University, Augusta Canal Trail, and Augusta-Richmond County among others to set goals, establish process, delineate responsibility, and explore brand development and activations for the path and broader network.
- Pass a best practice Complete Streets policy in Augusta-Richmond County with a thorough implementation plan for the entire county that includes this network. Concurrently develop a citizen's pedestrian-and-bicycle committee through Augusta-Richmond County that is inclusive of the public-private partnership that can help guide the entire process.
- Pilot the bicycle network and pedestrian path through a smaller-scale demonstration project featuring a temporary bike lane network. The project could be rolled out at as a one-day, multi-hour, open streets event where road paths are temporarily closed to vehicular traffic and open to bikes and foot traffic. This programming would both familiarize community members with and reinforce the benefits of a bike-and-pedestrian-friendly path.

**MEDIUM-TERM:** Conduct a master plan with robust citizen engagement and input to figure out preferred on-and-off infrastructure, already existing routes, and gaps in network. Ultimately work toward passing a Complete Streets policy in Augusta-Richmond County so that prioritized in-town grid streets that are up for repaving in the near-term can be included as part of network plans to paint bike lanes and build connecting sidewalks. Continue to roll-out temporary open space and path activations like the open streets event.

**LONG-TERM:** Break ground on and launch the bike-and-pedestrian path. Eventually incorporate barrier-protected bike lanes throughout the network to prioritize safety along with connectivity, thus ultimately encouraging path adoption and behavior-change from non-bikers. Additionally, work in open space spots along the path to create temporary, mini-destinations. Possibly conduct a competition in which AU students select mini green spaces (approved by the city/private owners) and create pop-up parks using temporary materials/structures, the purpose of which would be to create mini resting/gathering destinations along the larger path. The winner of the competition would be awarded a fully funded maintenance plan

## BUDGET

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Initially, an allocation of \$50,000 would help establish a public-private partnership and provide seed funding for a nonprofit that can work on coordination, education, and outreach as well as branding and marketing. A \$40,000 investment on behalf of Richmond County would offset expenses incurred by the planning department in time and labor, and would fund a contract with a planning firm to develop a master plan for the network. Construction costs will vary according to segment and section but it would likely be a \$5+ million overall project with some of that cost already earmarked as a part of ongoing projects like the Augusta Canal Trail, 15th Street Corridor, and routine repaving.

## EXPECTED IMPACT

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This project will ensure physical connectivity between the Augusta University campuses and Augusta's urban core and serve as a major gateway between the destinations. Augusta University is currently a driving force in the Augusta community, so this is an opportune time to take advantage of the growth of the University by showing a distinct physical connection between the campuses and the urban core. The prioritization of pedestrians and bicycles and their safety by the Augusta community has the potential to be a significant win and major differentiator for Augusta, signaling to bicyclists and pedestrians--both local and incoming visitors--that the city is progressively bike-friendly. Furthermore, the path project has the potential to spur economic development and revitalize the surrounding neighborhoods. Success can be measured through user adoption, including pedestrian and bike counts on a quarterly or monthly basis, as well as business and housing development around and along the path.

## POTENTIAL FUNDING, RESOURCES & PARTNERSHIPS

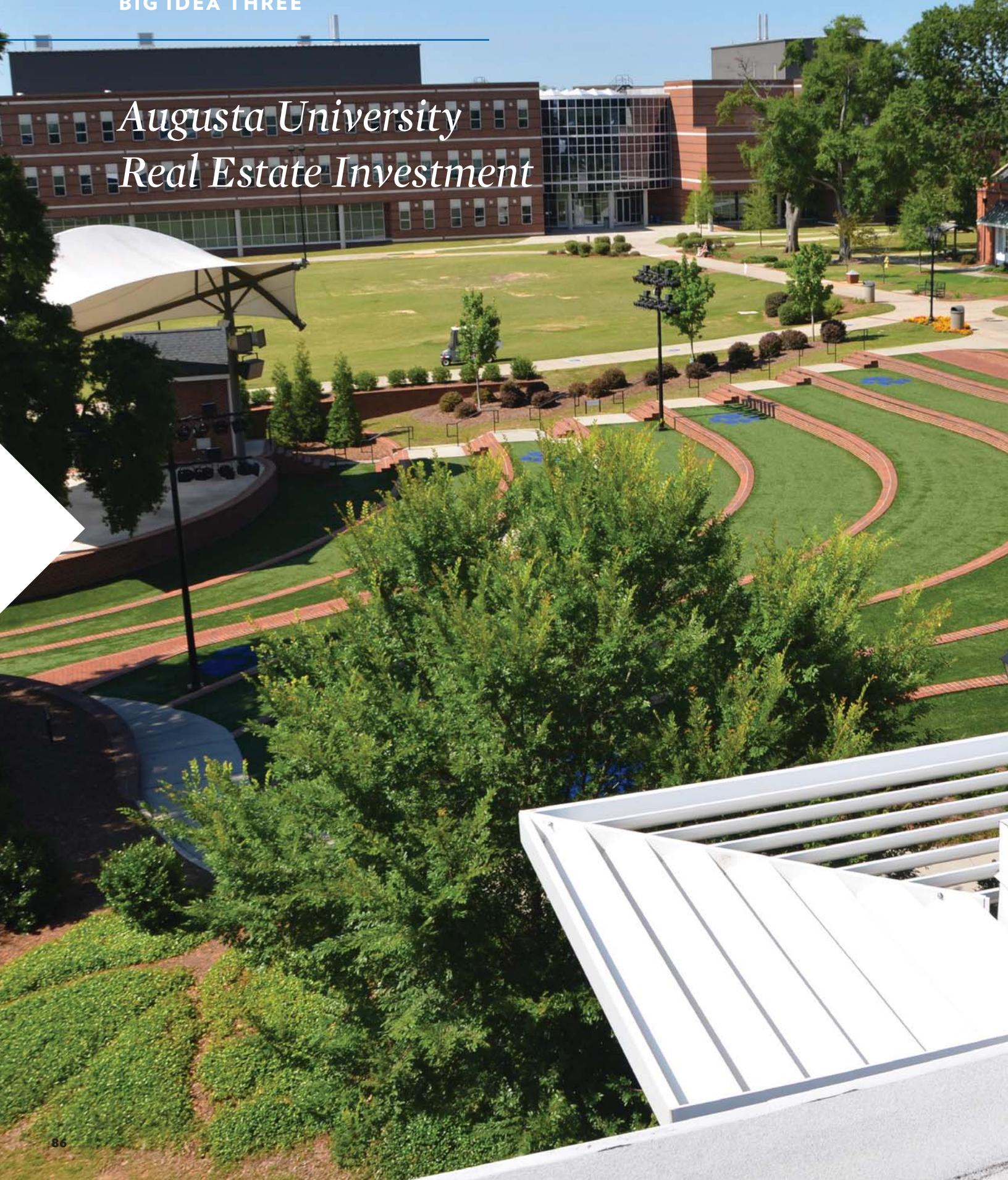
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Creation of a nonprofit “friends of” path/network support organization that could raise private funds  
Augusta University Foundation  
Augusta Canal Authority  
Augusta Recreation and Parks  
ARTS MPO – Augusta Regional Transportation Study  
SPLOST and TSPLOST  
Georgia Department of Transportation  
CSRA Regional Commission  
AARP  
Community Foundation of the CSRA  
Central Savannah River Land Trust  
Augusta-Richmond County Road Paving & Maintenance Program  
Wheel Movement of the CSRA  
Local businesses, including bike shops Andy Jordan's, Outspoken, and Chain Reaction

**BIG IDEA THREE**

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*Augusta University  
Real Estate Investment*



## Real Investment

### DESCRIPTION:

Create a Real Estate Planning Committee within the Augusta University Planning Department. By strategically planning growth and relocation of several University departments, programs and key facilities, the Augusta University Health Sciences campus can be better connected to the urban core and central business district. A coalition between University and local government officials, real estate developers, investors, downtown residents, students, visionaries, and other key stakeholders could implement, maintain and grow the project. By focusing on the urban core first and building upon that, this partnership has the potential to grow a robust and dynamic "Gown Town".

### SCOPE OF INITIATIVE:

After referencing several communities throughout the state (Savannah, Columbus, Macon) it is evident that downtown urban environments thrive from the vibrant culture of an academic community. By relocating the fine arts, design and music programs of Augusta University to the central business district, students, faculty, and staff will be centrally located in the heart of the city helping to establish a vibrant community that will attract more people to the urban core.

Sidewalk Arts Festival,  
Photography by John McKinnon, courtesy of SCAD.



## ACTION STEPS & TIMELINE

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### SHORT-TERM:

Augusta University Real Estate Committee Formation  
Form of a committee within the Augusta University Planning Department that would facilitate initial discussions and ideas for deciding on which departments, facilities and programs could be moved to or located in downtown Augusta. These initial discussions would provide a framework for Augusta University, the City of Augusta, and property owners and developers to work together on a plan that would occupy vacant and underused properties. Taking a strategic approach as Augusta University evolves would enhance the urban core of Augusta in a manner that would benefit all parties involved and the community of Augusta as a whole. This committee should be made up of Downtown Augusta stakeholders from the public and private sectors to ensure that varying viewpoints and goals are represented. The committee would be tasked with reviewing and selecting potential sites or buildings for proposed relocation of Departments/Divisions into the Downtown Augusta area.

### MEDIUM-TERM:

Community Engagement: “Designated Champion” Formation  
In order to ensure the successful transition of University functions into the Downtown Augusta area, a designated champion of this initiative should be designated. The champion will guide the process and continue to secure community support and buy-in as the area begins to transform. The champion will also troubleshoot any issues that arise as the presence of more students and faculty in the downtown area increases. The local real estate community, developers and building owners, Augusta Downtown Development Authority, and the Augusta Convention and Visitors Bureau are all potential advocates for this role. These individuals would serve as the accountability and advocacy function for them more strategic integration of Augusta University into the urban core, focusing on a core mission of vision, vibrancy, and vitality.

### LONG-TERM:

Downtown Transportation Solutions  
Connecting Augusta University functional located downtown to the other campus locations via some form of revolving transit will be key to the long term success of this initiative. While transit and transit solutions are a complex, multi-faceted challenge, a fully integrated transit system between all campuses and the urban core is vital. The transit solutions should take into account not only connecting the Health Sciences Campus, but also the Summerville Campus as well. A variety of transit investment solutions should be examined. Best practices and solutions often come in the form of public-private partnerships, but ensuring that there are quality transit options and connectivity of the campus(es) to Downtown Augusta should be a long-term priority. Collaborating with “Downtown Loop” project from Big Idea 2 will also be an integral component the implementation of a cohesive plan.

## BUDGET

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The costs for implementing the short and medium-term ideas of forming the Real Estate and Planning Committee are marginal. The costs associated with implementing this idea would be derived from in-kind costs related to time and already accounted for overhead within University Administration budgets. The costs associated with having members from the community involved in this committee would also be classified as in-kind in the form of the donation of their time for planning and providing insight and guidance to the committee. The designation of a champion for this initiative would also be of marginal cost, as this would be another form of in-kind support from the members of the community. There are several organizational models that could house the champion function, including the formation of a not-for-profit entity that would lead the efforts, but if at all possible, we recommend that it be accommodated within an existing organization which would be open to leading the charge through a collective, cohesive voice of members of the community.

The costs associated implementation of a “JAG Express” line to primarily serve as a circulator for a route between the Augusta University Campuses and the urban core could be phased into the budgets for the existing city or University transit systems. While there are a multitude of options and solutions that could be implemented to provide various forms of multi-modal transit that would increase connectivity, a long-term solution would be to increase the number of routes and options serve the downtown area.

## EXPECTED IMPACT

The relocation of offices and departments from Augusta University to the urban core will have a substantial multiplier effect by allowing room for Augusta University to grow while providing tenants for vacant and underused properties, increasing foot traffic and number of potential patrons for local businesses in the downtown area, and invigorating the urban core of Augusta by infusing it with students, faculty and staff from Augusta University. Such steps would create the vibrant and walkable environment that will attract citizens and visitors alike to the urban core. Many of the most vibrant and thriving downtowns in the state of Georgia, as well as the rest of the United States, have seen that having a built-in customer base is an excellent model for ensuring the long-term sustainability and vibrancy. Augusta University has the opportunity to be the catalyst to lead the effort for implementing an idea that could be a “gamechanger” for Augusta’s long-term growth and success.

The long-term effects and metrics for success will be seen in measuring the data and impact on the retail sales and foot traffic in urban core businesses, as well as the increases in property values and rental rates that will come with increasing demand. The City of Augusta will also be able to measure the success by increasing its tax base through rising property values, sales taxes generated, hotel-motel taxes generated, and decreases in the number of underutilized properties in the urban core. These are all concrete measures that can demonstrate the tangible benefits of implementing this proposal. The intangible benefits will be seen in the overall increase in aesthetics to the downtown area and developing connectivity to Augusta University campuses and the urban core which will be a major catalyst for growth and sustainability for the City of Augusta as a whole.



Former JC Penny's Department Store on Broad Street in Downtown Augusta - Photo courtesy of Historic Augusta



Unseen Patterns Exhibition Opening Reception at Westobou Gallery (a Collaboration with Augusta University’s Pamplin College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences), Scott Thorpe, Sherri Foster and Larry Millard, Photography by Adam Kuehl, courtesy of Westobou.

## POTENTIAL FUNDING, RESOURCES & PARTNERSHIPS

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Community/Augusta University  
Augusta University Foundation  
Community Foundation of the CSRA  
Augusta Downtown Development Authority  
Facilitated Options:  
Low Interest Loans  
Downtown Development Programs  
(State/Federal Funds)  
SPLOST Funds  
Forgivable loans  
City of Augusta Programs:  
Facade Grants - City of Augusta Housing &  
Economic Development Department  
State and Federal Programs  
Historic Preservation Grants - Federal  
Georgia Municipal Association (GMA):  
Loan Programs  
DCA (Department of Community Affairs) :  
Infrastructure Grant Programs  
Georgia DOT/US DOT - Grants; Loans; EV Buses  
U.S. Department of Energy – Grants;  
Loans; EV Buses

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TEDxAugusta. Mar. 2016. Lecture.

“Technical Reports.” Augusta Recreation and Parks Master Plan. City of Augusta: Recreation, Parks, and Facilities, 08 Aug. 2016. Web. 10 Nov. 2016.

## THANK YOU

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Executive Director of the Downtown Development Authority



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