

# Port Wentworth Downtown Strategy

*October 2024*



# Acknowledgments

## Downtown Strategy Core Team

City of Port Wentworth

Steve Davis - *City Manager*

Jason Stewart, AICP - *Assistant City Manager*

James Touchton - *Director of Economic Development*

Kimley-Horn

Laura Ballock, PLA

Eric Bosman, AICP

Jon Tuley, AICP

Gabe Hogan, PLA

Jonathan Demirci

Freja Carlson

Lauren Usher

## Stakeholder Committee

Brandy Adams

Amanda Beard

April Cameron

Katie Dunnagin

Amya Gober

Morgan Halloran

Kimberly Jardine

Tara Jennings

Glenn Jones

Wanda Keller

Tiffany Lancaster

Anne McDaniel

Lance Moore

Gabrielle Nelson

Gary Norton

Shawn Randerwala

Sean Register

Omar Senati-Martinez

Linda Smith

Mark Stephens

Kerry Thomas

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# Overview

## Background & History

Located in Chatham County, Georgia, Port Wentworth is a charming city that offers a mix of small-town charm and modern amenities. Bound by Houlihan Bridge and Saint Augustine Creek on the north, the CSX rail line to the west, Grange Road to the south, and a cluster of heavy industrial uses that separates it from the Savannah River to the east, the downtown spans approximately 600 acres and is home to almost 2,000 residents. While it may be known for its proximity to the bustling city of Savannah, downtown Port Wentworth has its own unique history and character. The downtown area is a testament to the city's past, with several buildings and landmarks that tell the story of its development. The downtown area is home to various historic churches and buildings, whose rich character is juxtaposed to the significant industrial developments along the Savannah River. Such developments include International Paper's Port Wentworth Mill, the US Sugar Savannah Refinery (formerly Imperial Sugar), and Georgia Ports' Savannah Transload Facility.

Downtown Port Wentworth has experienced a decline in its economic vitality compared to what it once was. However, there is optimism for the city's future given the notable investments in the northern parts of the city, such as the 150-acre Recreation Complex and Ghost Pirates Training Facility in Uptown. These developments are expected to generate a regional draw to Port Wentworth, bringing in visitors and potential economic opportunities. To fully capitalize on this anticipated draw, it is crucial for downtown Port Wentworth to generate its own demand and economic drivers. Through revitalization of the downtown and existing storefronts, Port Wentworth can create a vibrant atmosphere supporting existing business, attracting new investments, and restoring the area to a friendly, walkable downtown long time residents remember. By doing so, downtown Port Wentworth can reclaim its economic potential and uniquely contribute to, as well as benefit from, the overall growth and prosperity of the city.

### Downtown Context

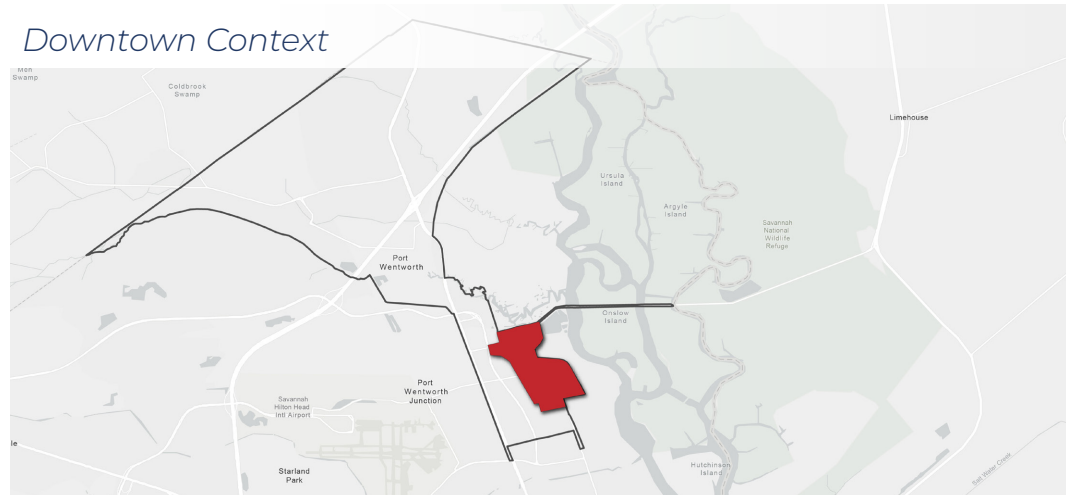


Photo Credits: Georgia Historical Society

# Downtown Strategy



## Engagement Summary

Dates of engagement events and meetings conducted:

Stakeholder Interviews	February 12-14, 2024
Stakeholder Meeting #1	February 27, 2024
Community Meeting #1	February 27, 2024
Stakeholder Meeting #2	April 23, 2024
Stakeholder Meeting #3	May 23, 2024
Community Meeting #2	May 23, 2024

## Why Downtown

Downtown Port Wentworth needs a downtown strategy to enhance walkability and livability for current and future generations. By focusing on improving the quality of life for residents, ensuring access to essential stores and services, and preserving its unique small-town ambiance, we can create a vibrant and thriving community. This plan will not only enrich the downtown experience, but also foster a sense of connection and pride among its inhabitants, ensuring a sustainable and prosperous future for Downtown Port Wentworth.

## Downtown Strategy

The goals of this downtown strategy are to:

- Renew the identity and experience of Downtown as a thriving and walkable part of the city
- Attract new retail, restaurants, and services to foster community livability and quality of life
- Identify catalytic strategies (public and private investments) to spur Downtown vision

This effort was divided into three phases:

### Phase 1 - Existing Conditions Assessment

- Land use and existing development trends
- Recent and planned investments
- Barriers to development
- Areas mostly likely to change

### Phase 2 - Developing the Vision

- Stakeholder involvement
- Open House engagement

### Phase 3 - Downtown Strategy Recommendations

# Existing Conditions

## Market Conditions & Forecast

KB Advisory Group conducted a downtown existing market conditions analysis, for both retail and housing.

### Existing Conditions



871  
Housing  
Units



\$199K  
Average Home Sale  
Price



127  
Home Sales  
Since 2018



90K  
Commercial  
Square Feet

In addition to existing conditions, KB Advisory projected out current market trends to 10 years, yielding a 10-year demand forecast, for both retail and housing.

### 2022 - 2033 Forecast



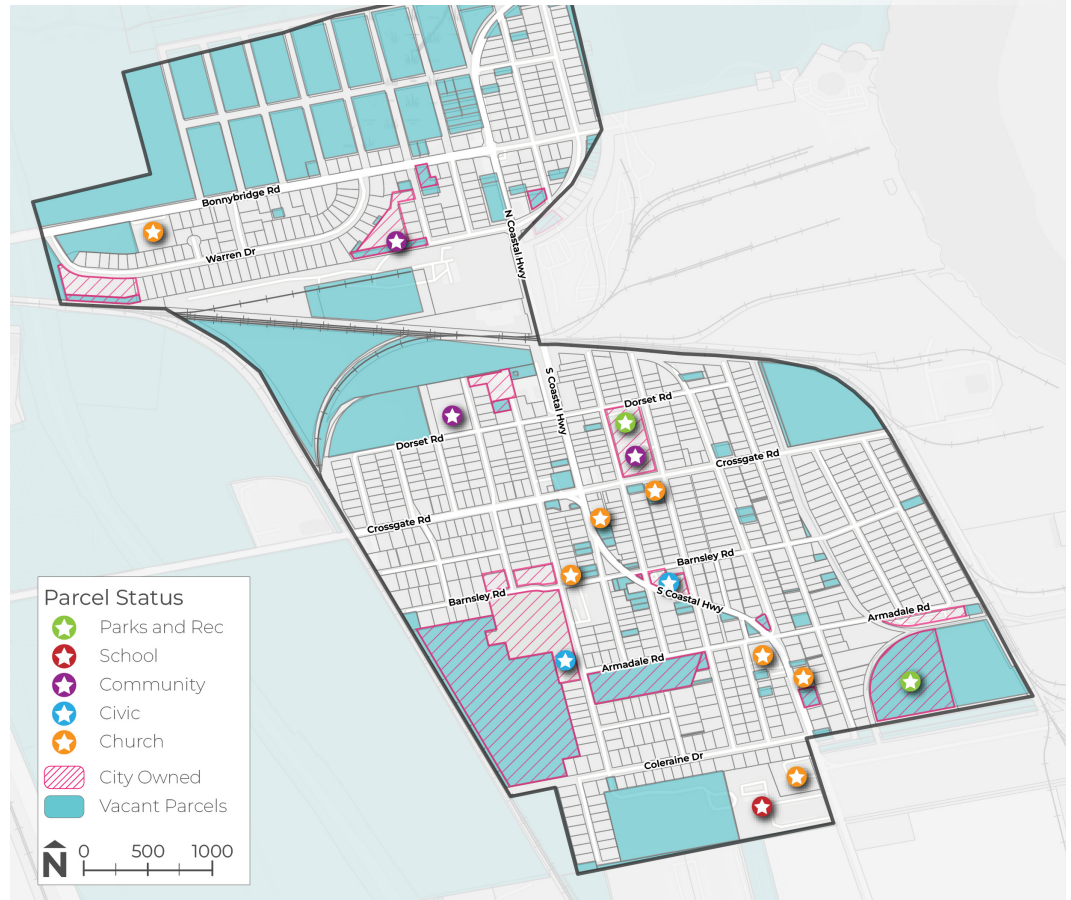
251  
Net New Housing  
Units



29K  
Net New Commercial  
Square Feet

Per the market demand and forecast, a business-as-usual approach alone will not generate adequate change for improved community livability and quality of life in downtown. However, creative strategies and strategic investment could generate renewed market interest, thereby improving the downtown experience.

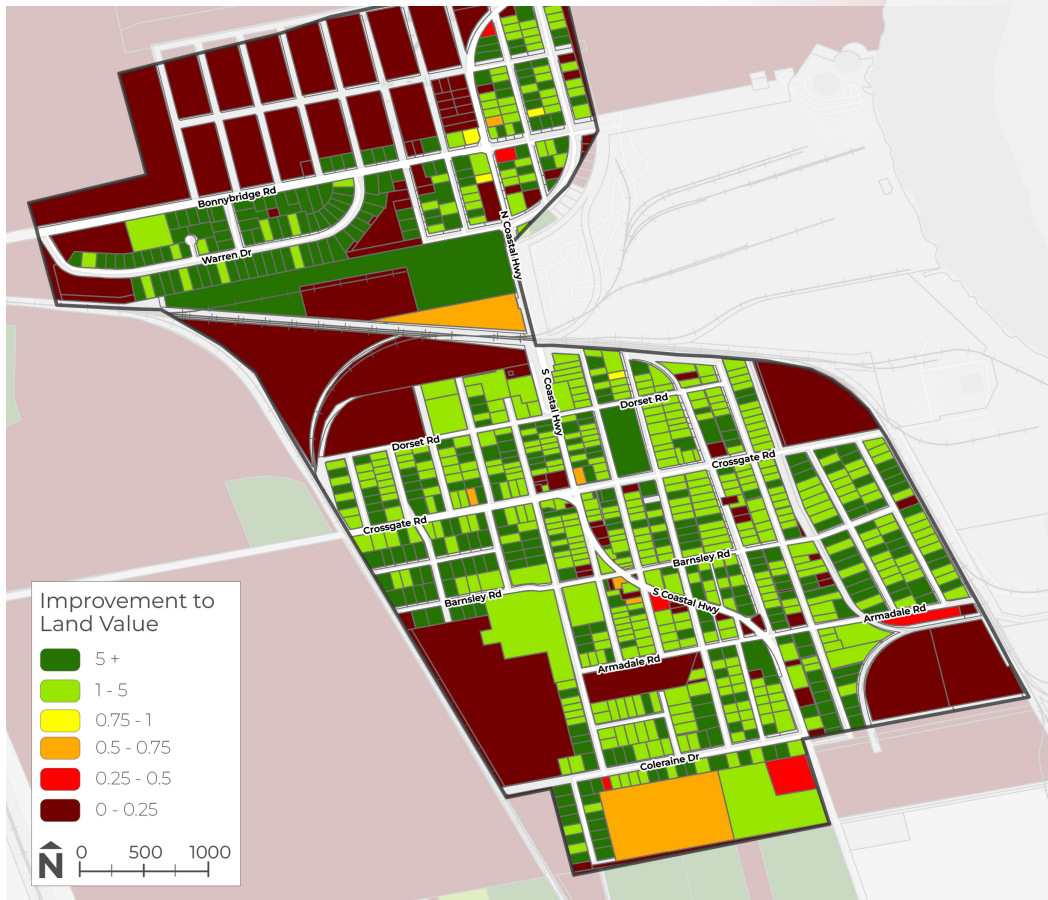
## Assets & Parcel Status



Community assets in Downtown Port Wentworth include parks, community centers, churches, and civic facilities. Many of these assets are situated around vacant and city-owned parcels, predominantly along the South Coastal Highway corridor. Notably, the city owns a number of larger sites within downtown. The proximity of vacant parcels to city-owned property and existing assets enhances their potential.

# Methodology

Improvement to Land Value Ratio

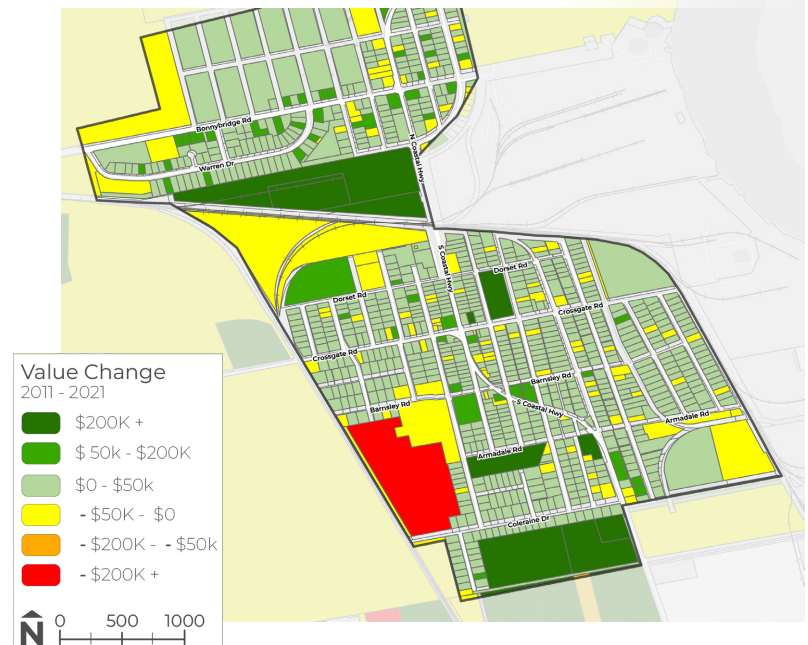


The Improvement to Land Value ratio map highlights the larger vacant parcels in dark red, indicating little to no improvement value in relation to their land value. Notably, there are several smaller parcels along South Coastal Highway that also show low ratios. These smaller street adjacent parcels may present opportunities for redevelopment. Similarly, the value change map shows larger parcels experiencing decreased values over the 10 year period, while the majority of the smaller parcels in downtown generally have performed well in assessed value.

## Susceptibility to Change Process

Parcel-level real estate analyses were conducted to assess areas that may be susceptible to change within downtown. The Improvement to Land Value ratio assesses the value of buildings in relation to the land they occupy. By examining the Improvement to Land Value ratio map, areas appearing as red indicate parcels where the building values are less than half as valuable as the land itself. This suggests potential opportunities for redevelopment. Additionally, an assessment of property value change from 2011 to 2021 was conducted to identify areas where properties experienced significant value loss or gain.

Value Change 2011 - 2021



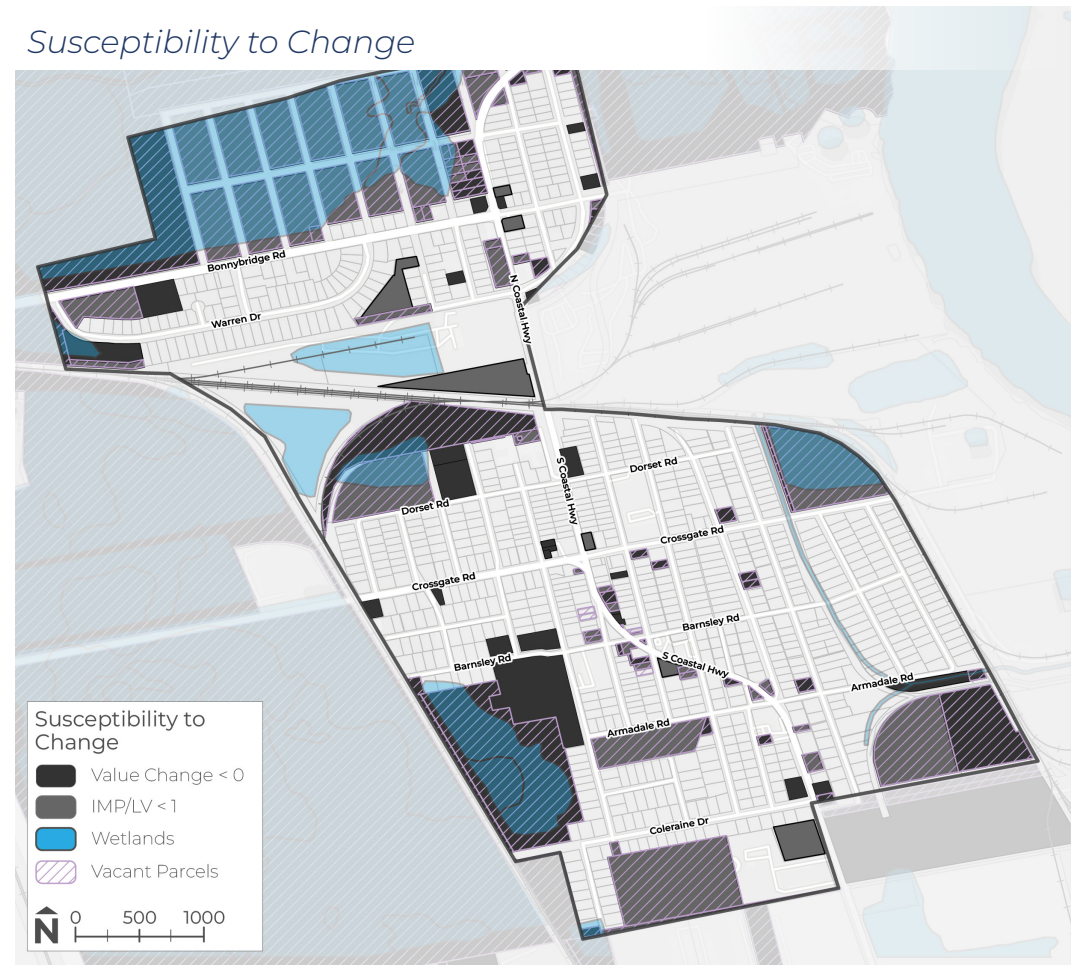
# Opportunities

## Susceptibility to Change Analysis

When considering all property value and parcel status analyses, the Susceptibility to Change map reveals areas with the highest potential for redevelopment, indicated by the dark gray parcels. It is important to note that the largest parcels with a high possibility of change may have limited development potential due to the presence of wetlands (blue shaded areas), active use as a park or city facility, or ownership by an industrial user or utility. Taking all factors into account, the primary opportunities for redevelopment emerge along South Coastal Highway, as these parcels have limited constraints in comparison to the larger parcels and could potentially benefit from high visibility and increased traffic being along key corridors.

The Susceptibility to Change map proved to be a valuable tool in identifying parcels throughout the downtown area that have the potential for transformation. As the map highlighted these parcels, key trends and clusters began to emerge, providing insights into the areas that were most ripe for development and revitalization. However, it was through conversations with city staff and stakeholders, conducted via stakeholder interviews, that the key opportunity areas truly began to take shape. Input from these individuals, combined with information gathered from on-the-ground site visits, helped to group the Susceptibility to Change parcels together based on their potential for growth and improvement. The categories that emerged included primary and secondary opportunity areas, primary and secondary corridors for investment, and placemaking and identity nodes. These areas were recognized as strategic locations where investment could yield significant benefits, both in terms of economic growth and the creation of vibrant and distinct places within the downtown area.

*Susceptibility to Change*



# Opportunities (cont.)

## Key Opportunities



**A**

Vacant buildings and parking lot at corner of Bonnybridge Road and North Coastal Highway



**B**

Underutilized city block between Dorset Road and Crossgate Road



**C**

City-owned facility and recreation fields at Barnsley Road and Cantyre Street



Primary opportunity areas, such as the South Coastal Highway corridor between Crossgate and Armadale Roads, offer significant potential for commercial development such as shops and restaurants. Similarly, South Coastal Highway from Crossgate to the southern downtown limits and the Barnsley Road Corridor present prime opportunities for streetscaping and enhancements. Additionally, three placemaking spots have been identified for potential improvements like lighting, signage, and public art.

Secondary opportunity areas could focus on residential development, park enhancements, or other investments. Two identity nodes could serve as downtown gateways with added signage and branding. Further, North Coastal Highway at Bonnybridge Road holds future potential for long-term planning.

# Community Engagement

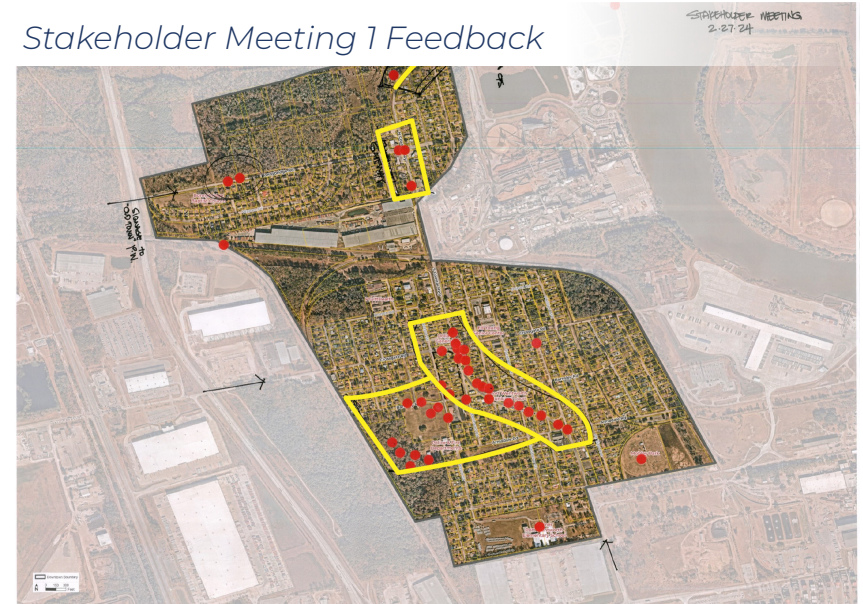
## Stakeholder Meetings

Three stakeholder meetings were held throughout the process. In the first stakeholder meeting, participants were asked to place dots in areas that they wanted redevelopment/enhancement efforts focused. Key themes were to focus attention on the South Coastal Highway corridor from Crossgate Road to the southern border of downtown, the city owned Barnsley Park property, and the North Coastal Highway and Bonnybridge Road intersection. Stakeholders also expressed a desire for future development to reflect the cultural and historic assets.

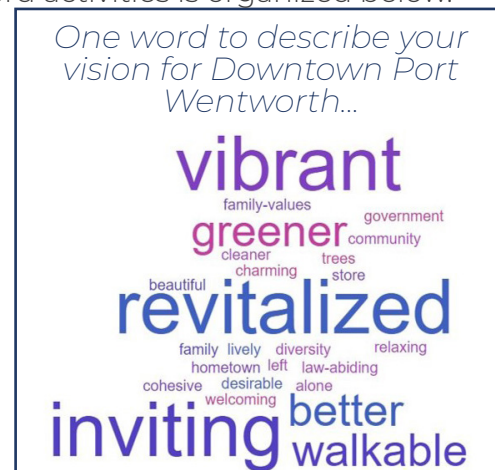
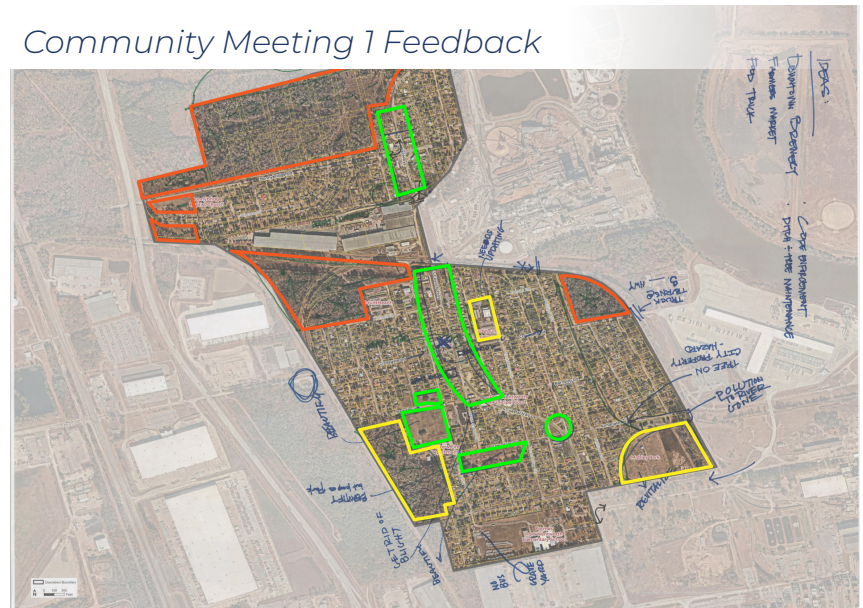
## Community Meetings

Two community meetings were held following the stakeholder meetings. The public community meeting following Stakeholder Meeting 1 included a visual preference survey, mapping discussion, and one-word activities. The mapping discussion highlighted key themes such as focusing redevelopment on South Coastal Highway, Barnsley Park, and North Coastal Highway at Bonnybridge Road. Orange outlines represent areas where participants did not want changes, while yellow outlines indicate mixed opinions on development. The meeting also emphasized community gathering spaces, park beautification, truck rerouting, code enforcement, and public building updates. Feedback from the one-word activities is organized below.

Stakeholder Meeting 1 Feedback



Community Meeting 1 Feedback



# Community Engagement (cont.)

## Visual Preference Survey

The visual preference survey was organized into six categories of pictures: Beautifying Downtown, Downtown Identity, Gathering Places in Downtown, Getting Around Downtown, Everyday Downtown Destinations, and Ways to Live in Downtown. Participants were given six sticker dots and asked to place them on pictures that resonated with them, across all six of the boards. Images of each of the boards are shown below. Some have clear clustering around certain images, whereas others reflect widespread preferences.

The image displays six boards from a visual preference survey, each featuring a grid of images and a space for sticker dots. The boards are:

- Beautifying Downtown:** Six images showing various urban scenes. The bottom row shows a high concentration of red dots on the first two images.
- Downtown Identity aka what says "you are in Downtown":** Six images including murals, parks, and landmarks. The bottom row shows a high concentration of red dots on the first two images.
- Gathering Places in Downtown:** Six images showing public spaces, parks, and community events. The bottom row shows a high concentration of red dots on the first two images.
- Getting Around Downtown:** Six images showing streets, sidewalks, and transportation. The bottom row shows a high concentration of red dots on the first two images.
- Everyday Downtown Destinations:** Six images showing shops, cafes, and public buildings. The bottom row shows a high concentration of red dots on the first two images.
- Ways to Live in Downtown:** Six images showing various housing styles. The bottom row shows a high concentration of red dots on the first two images.

Each board includes the text "Please place a dot in the space provided below each image to indicate if it fits your vision for Downtown Port Wentworth." and logos for "Port Wentworth Downtown Strategy" and "Kinley+Horn".

# Recommendations

From input received in stakeholder interviews, stakeholder meetings, the community meeting, and conversations with city staff, recommendations fall into the following three focus areas:

## 1 Beautification & Civic Pride

- To increase the beauty and appeal of downtown
- To bolster property values and attract private investment
- To increase public awareness of the City's efforts to improve downtown

## 2 Transportation & Connectivity

- To increase accessibility and mobility in and throughout downtown
- To protect vulnerable populations, improve safety, and reduce congestion
- To enhance and strengthen alternative modes of travel

## 3 Development / Redevelopment Areas

- To stimulate and attract growth that aligns with the character and needs of downtown
- To set forth an achievable development agenda that unfolds over time
- To support neighborhood and commercial growth and vitality

# Beautification & Civic Pride

Beautification and civic pride initiatives are unique and personal to each city, requiring the active involvement of Port Wentworth's staff and residents to develop strategies that align with their specific needs and goals. While there is no one-size-fits-all approach, we have prepared a case study and a range of ideas that can serve as a starting point for Port Wentworth. These initiatives can be adapted and customized to fit the distinct characteristics and aspirations of the city, ensuring tailored and successful beautification and civic pride initiatives that embrace the rich history and culture of Port Wentworth.

## Existing Initiatives & Efforts

Beautification initiatives and efforts that the city is undertaking currently include:

- Pressure washing and painting the gym and senior center
- Adding restrooms and concessions at the Festival Site
- Painting buildings, adding picnic tables and benches, and repairing fences at Mobley Park
- Continuing Bulk Pick Up Day on a consistent basis
- Water and sewer infrastructure improvements
- Downtown vegetation/landscape maintenance

## Potential Initiatives

Beautification initiatives and efforts that the city could consider undertaking include:

### Public Art Initiatives

- Explore partnership with local artists to implement art installations that would reflect the history and culture of Downtown Port Wentworth

### Wayfinding Signage

- Explore opportunities related to implementing distinct branding and wayfinding signage throughout downtown to ease in navigation and draw visitors to key attractions

### Home Repair Program

- Pursuing funding for home repair programs that can help homeowners with repair costs

### Community Partnership Program

- Support citizen initiatives to promote the cultural and historic richness of Downtown (neighborhood associations, special interest community groups, etc.)

### History and Culture Initiative

- Assessment, organization, and documentation of downtown history and culture

## Case Study: Opelika, Alabama

Opelika, Alabama is known for its charming small-scale downtown area, characterized by historic buildings and an industrial feel due to its past as a rail town. Recognizing the vibrant art community in the city, Opelika has embarked on a series of public mural installations with local artists. Additionally, they have implemented a unique sculpture rental program, allowing the city to rent sculptures from local artists and install them in designated downtown areas for short periods of time. This approach not only reduces costs compared to purchasing permanent sculptures, but also supports a large number of local artists as the sculptures rotate. The program has been successful in keeping the downtown area fresh and engaging, providing residents and visitors with something new to look forward to and explore on a periodic basis.

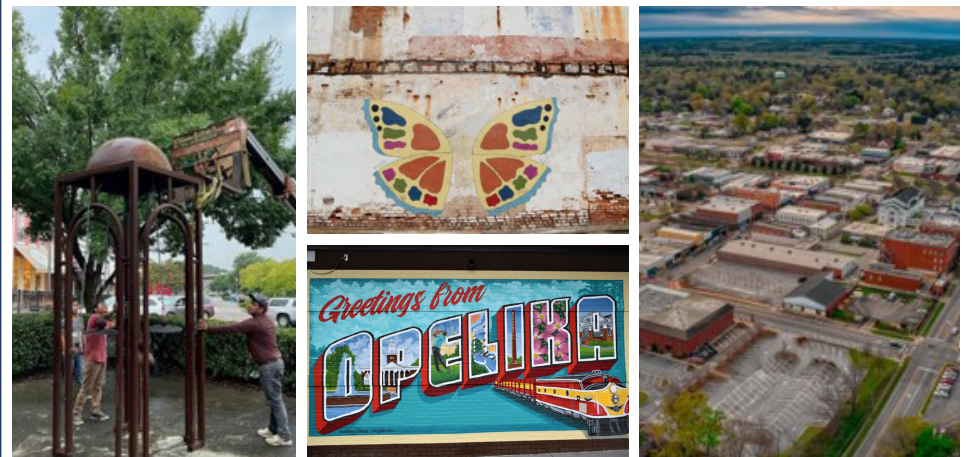


Photo Credits: Opelika-Auburn News, Visit Auburn-Opelika, Christopher Johnson, Lambert Moving Systems

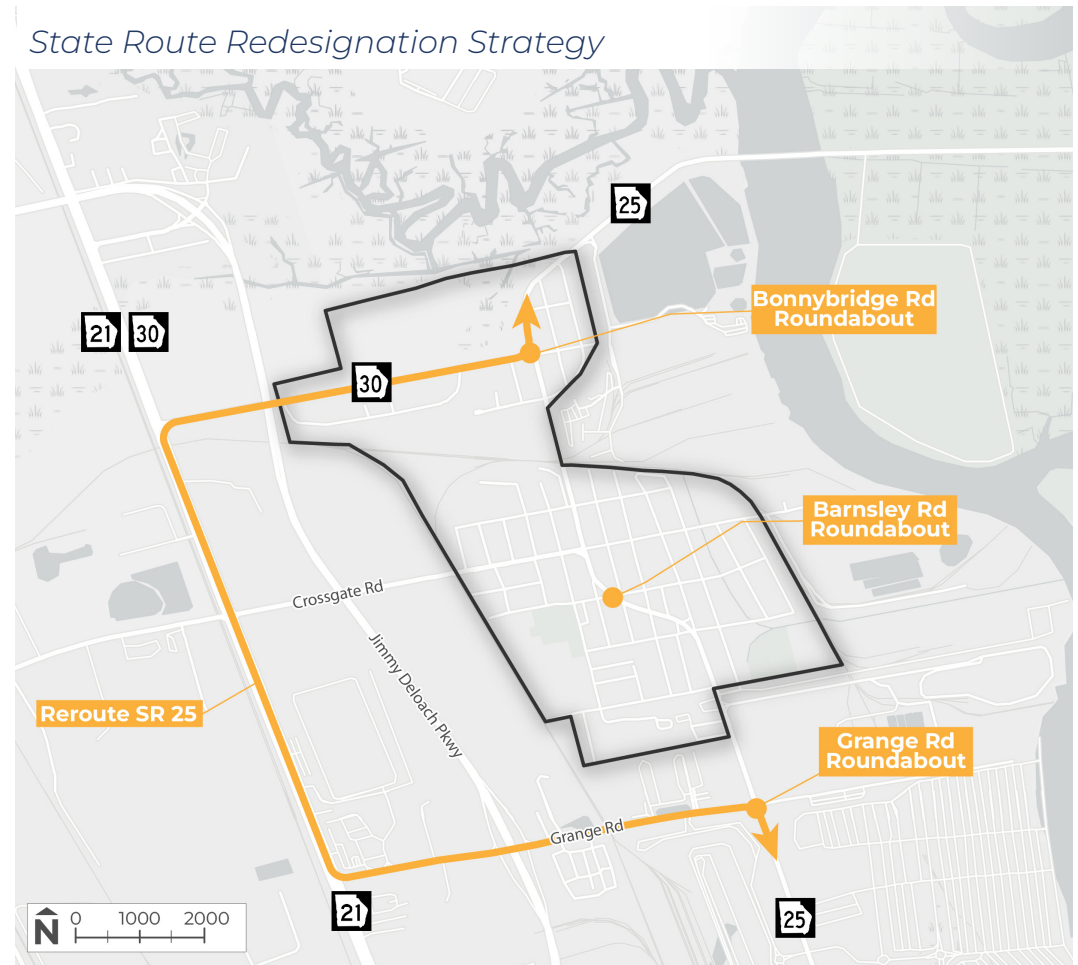
# Transportation & Connectivity

The volume of truck traffic passing through Downtown Port Wentworth via SR 25 (South Coastal Highway) poses numerous challenges for the area, notably diminishing walkability and creating a less hospitable environment for pedestrians. Moreover, the heightened frequency of trucks contributes to safety concerns on the road and escalates maintenance expenses.

A potential strategy to alleviate truck congestion along South Coastal Highway through Downtown involves reassigning the state route designation from this section of SR 25. Under this strategy, trucks heading North to South would divert from SR 25 onto SR 30 (Bonnybridge Road) to access SR 21, providing a North-South route. Similarly, trucks traveling from South to North could utilize Grange Road to access SR 21, and then rejoin SR 25 via SR 30. To facilitate these redirected truck movements safely and efficiently, the implementation of roundabouts at key intersections such as Grange Road and SR 25, as well as SR 30 and SR 25, could be explored.

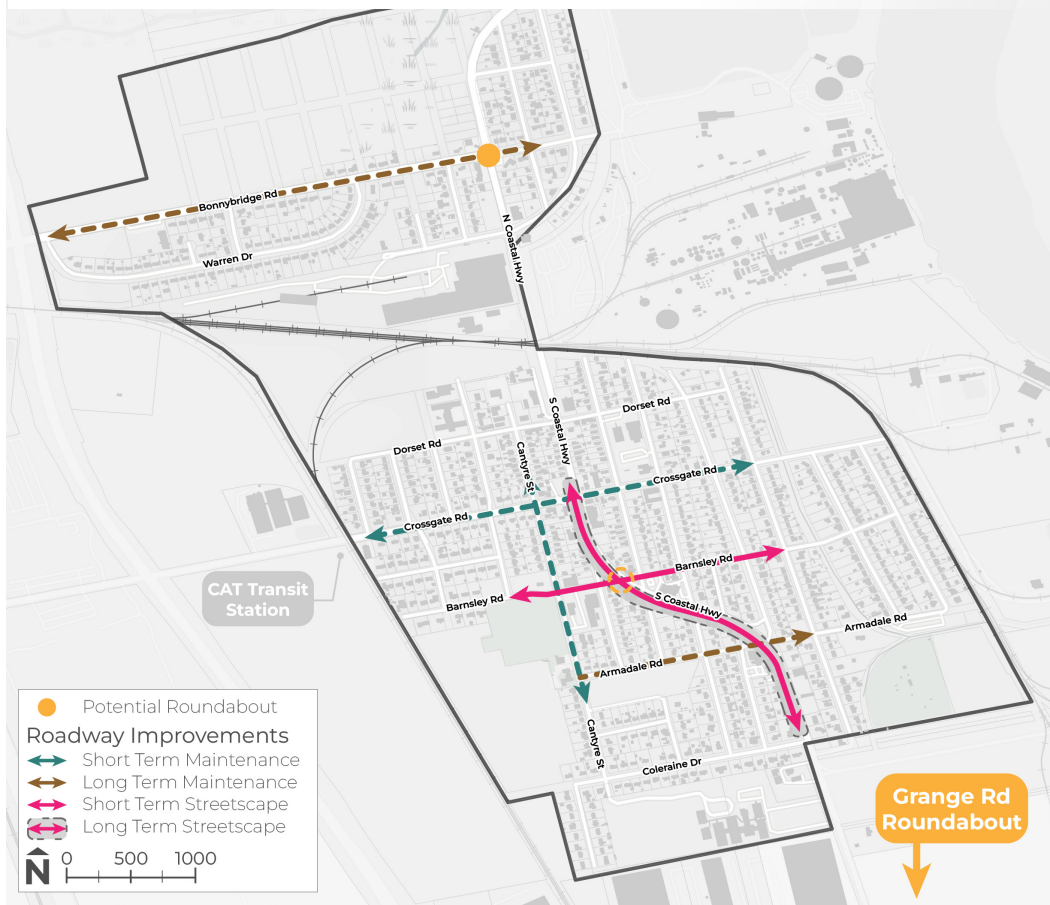
Furthermore, introducing a roundabout at the intersection of Barnsley Road and South Coastal Highway could not only enhance traffic flow but also promote traffic calming measures, foster a pedestrian-friendly atmosphere in the commercial heart of Downtown, and cultivate a distinct sense of place along South Coastal Highway.

*State Route Redesignation Strategy*



# Transportation & Connectivity *(cont.)*

*Downtown Transportation Framework*



The transportation framework for Downtown involves a number of short-term and long-term actions for consideration. The key program and project areas include:

## **Minor Improvements and Maintenance** *(short and long term)*

- ADA ramps
- Crosswalks
- Resurfacing and restriping

## **Streetscape** *(short and long term)*

- ADA ramps
- Crosswalks
- Surfacing and striping
- Sidewalks
- Curbs
- Lighting
- Landscaping

## **Wayfinding and Signage Program**

- Design and implement signs and navigational aids to contribute to placemaking and help visitors navigate Downtown

## **Multipurpose Trail Planning**

- Engage in study and design of multipurpose trail network to connect Downtown to the rest of Port Wentworth

Additional long-term considerations include:

- Roundabouts at Bonnybridge Road and Grange Road
- Potential rerouting of SR 25 off of South Coastal Highway through Downtown

# Primary Development / Redevelopment Areas

The development and redevelopment framework plan closely follows input heard from stakeholders and the public. The primary focus area is South Coastal Highway and the areas adjacent to it, such as the city-owned Festival Site property. These areas can be targeted for infill commercial development as well as a reimagined greenspace surrounded by new residential.

**A**

## Downtown Core

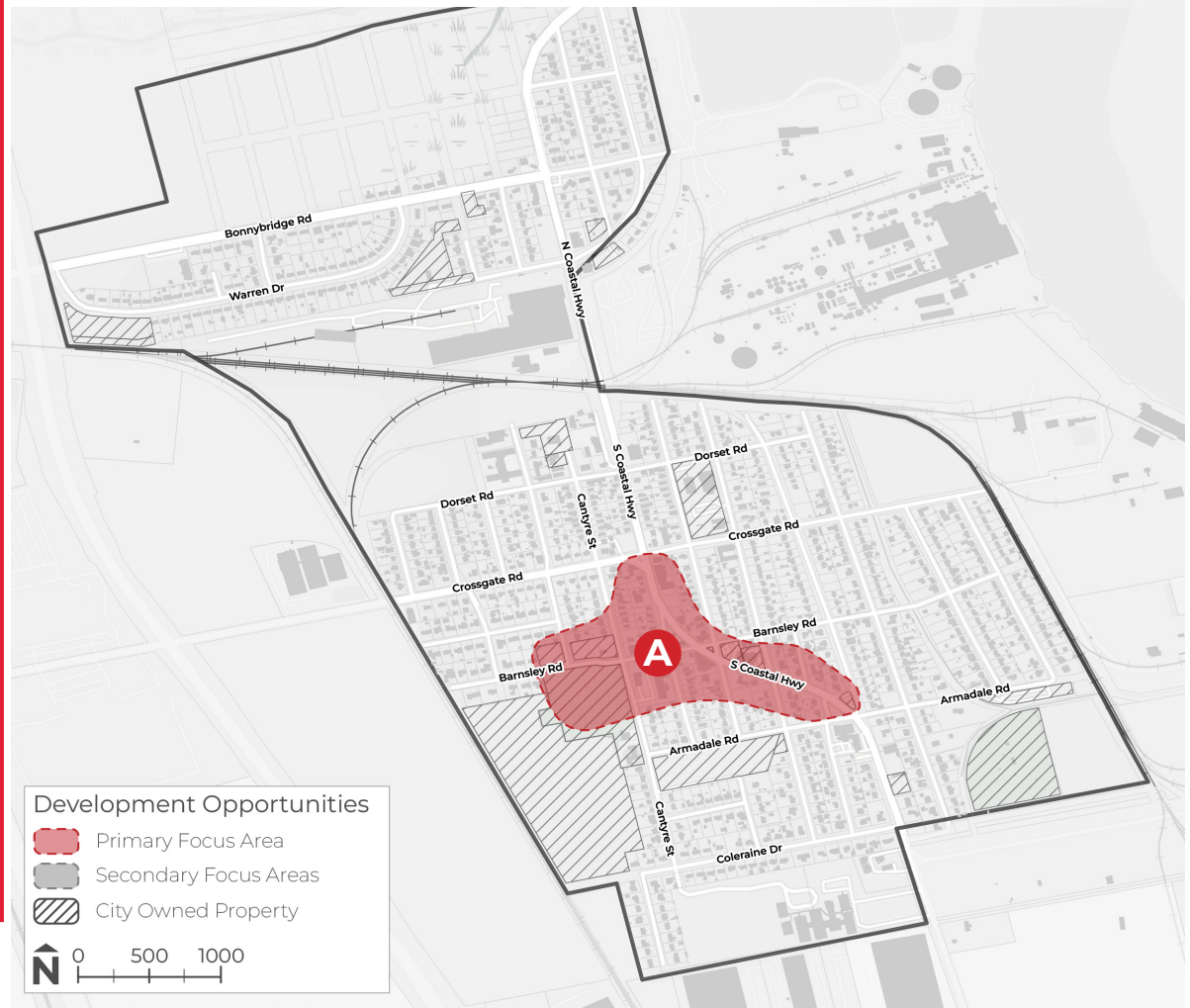
### Vibrant Main Street on Coastal Highway (SR 25)

- Sidewalks, street trees, plantings, crossings
- Gateway features from North and South
- Diversity of businesses
- High-density second story residential
- On-street parking, bike racks, transit stops
- Wayfinding signage
- Civic presence via a public facility
- Pocket parks, landscaping, seating
- Points of historical and cultural interest
- Public art and lighting

### Neighborhood Village on Barnsley and Cantyre Streets

- Locally-oriented small-scale businesses
- Pedestrian friendly environments
- Variety of housing types, including low and high intensity
- On-street and small lot parking
- Safe pedestrian connectivity to parks and trails
- Development centered around enhanced Festival Park

Primary Development / Redevelopment Framework



# Primary Development / Redevelopment Areas *(cont.)*

The following character areas represent the two distinct places this strategy aims to create within the downtown core:

## Vibrant Main Street on Coastal Highway (SR 25)

The vision for this area includes spacious sidewalks and greenery, that makes walking safe and enjoyable. Welcoming gateways mark the entrances, leading into a downtown with diverse businesses housed in attractive storefronts. Easy parking, bike racks, and transit stops, along with clear signs make navigation and transportation simple. The area provides safe and clear access to parks and civic uses, such as a library, and art and cultural sites that add to the area's charm.



## Neighborhood Village on Barnsley and Cantyre Streets

This area includes residential areas and small businesses that seamlessly integrate into a pedestrian-friendly environment, directly linked to Main Street. The storefronts and facades are visually appealing, complementing a range of housing options from high to low intensity. Parking options include on-street and small lot spaces, along with bike racks to ensure accessibility. Safe pedestrian pathways connect to nearby parks and trails. The focal point of development is the enhanced Festival Park, spanning approximately 3.5 acres, designed to accommodate various civic and recreational activities.

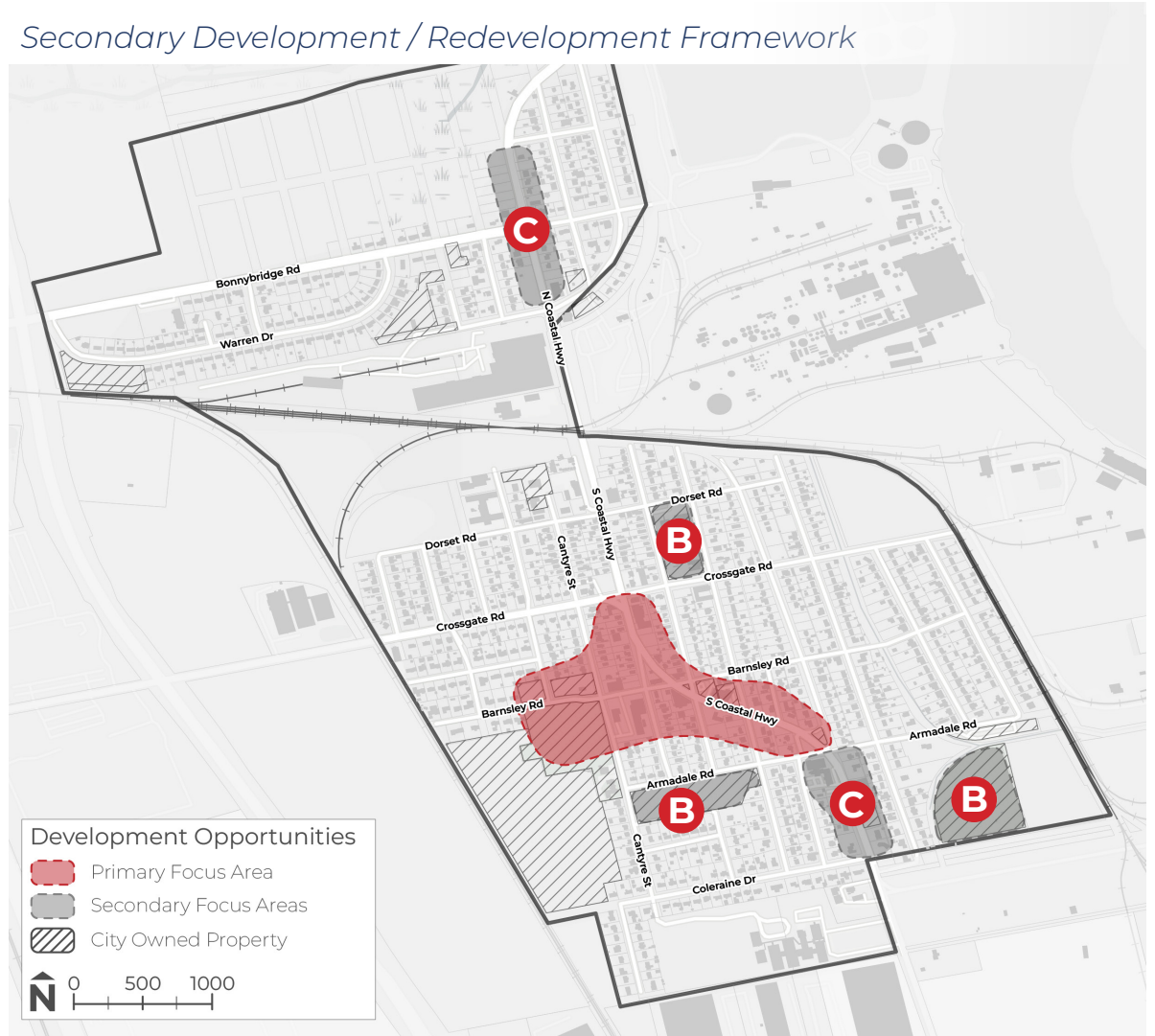


# Secondary Development / Redevelopment Areas

Secondary focus areas include enhancing and redeveloping other city-owned property throughout the Downtown, as well as attracting further commercial infill development on the north and south ends to serve as a gateway to the heart of Downtown. Images illustrating the desired character of these secondary areas are represented throughout the following pages, along with descriptions of potential elements.



Secondary Development / Redevelopment Framework



# Secondary Development / Redevelopment Areas *(cont.)*

**B**

## City Owned Infill

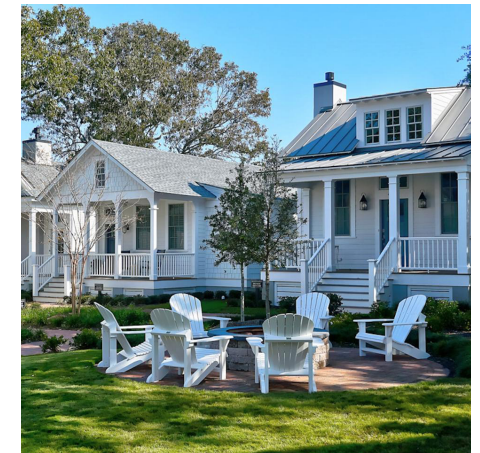
- Civic presence via public recreation space or senior center
- Small-scale neighborhood-supportive commercial uses
- Low-intensity residential infill
- Potential for public/private partnerships
- Low and high-intensity housing
- Pocket parks, landscaping, seating
- On-street parking, bike racks, transit stops
- Points of historical and cultural interest
- Small-scale locally-oriented businesses
- Safe pedestrian connectivity to parks and trails
- Safe crossings, street trees and plantings
- Points of historic and cultural interest
- Public art
- On-street and small lot parking
- Bike racks and transit stops
- Safe pedestrian connectivity to parks and trails

**C**

## Downtown Village Commercial

### Gateway Commercial Infill at Bonnybridge and North Coastal Highway and South Coastal Highway and Armadale

- Long term commercial infill with locally-supported businesses
- Safe crossings, street trees and plantings
- Gateway placemaking features
- Landscaped medians and curbs
- Wayfinding signage
- Access to Houlihan Landing
- Roundabout at Bonnybridge and North Coastal Highway



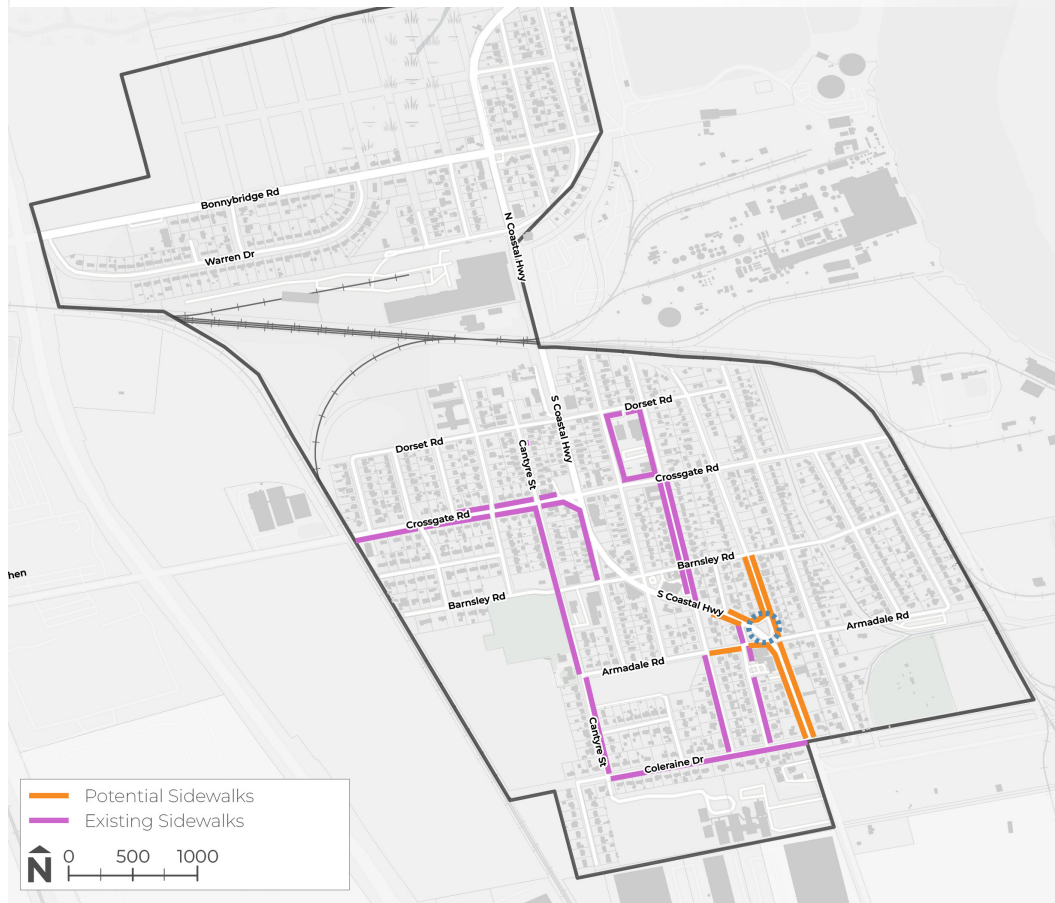
# Gateway Park

The Gateway Park design utilizes the existing fountain and transforms the surrounding space into a passive pocket park. It includes a prominent monument sign announcing the entry to the City on the south side, welcoming visitors to Port Wentworth. The park's purpose is to provide a beautiful gateway to the City reflecting what residents value, while visually enhancing this prominent area on the route to downtown. It conveys the feeling of Downtown Port Wentworth as an vibrant and inviting community, and adds a family-friendly charm at this entrance to the City.



# Gateway Park (cont.)

Sidewalk Inventory



The sidewalk inventory in Downtown Port Wentworth reveals a lack of existing sidewalks throughout areas of the downtown core, as indicated by the purple lines. This deficiency in sidewalk infrastructure results in limited mobility for pedestrians, making it challenging for them to navigate the area safely.

Additionally, the proposed Gateway Park, denoted by the blue circle, highlights the need for an expansion of the sidewalk network to facilitate access to it. The proposed orange lines demonstrate a planned sidewalk network aimed at providing convenient and secure access from surrounding neighborhoods to the Gateway Park. This expansion is crucial in ensuring that pedestrians have safe and easy access to the park, enhancing connectivity, and promoting community engagement.

# Action Plan

The following section outlines the immediate, near-term and future actions for each foundational element. The funding needed to support these actions will need to be further articulated in an investment summary, and then revisited over time as part of ongoing efforts to oversee the implementation.

## 1 Beautification & Civic Pride

- To increase the beauty and appeal of downtown
- To bolster property values and attract private investment
- To increase public awareness of the City's efforts to improve downtown

### Immediate

- 1. Downtown public space and city building cleanup (pressure wash and paint gym, senior center)
- 2. Mobley Park improvements (planning efforts to include paint buildings, add picnic tables, benches, and repair fencing)
- 3. Festival Site improvements (planning efforts to include add restrooms and concessions)

### Near-Term

- 4. Scheduled downtown community cleanup events
- 5. Continue bulk pick up day on a consistent basis
- 6. Additional Festival Site improvements (basketball court rehabilitation, additional basketball court, and pickleball courts)
- 7. City mobile application (for contacting city to request information or report a problem)
- 8. Holiday parade

### Future

- 9. Water and sewer infrastructure improvements
- 10. History and culture initiative (assessment, organization, and documentation of downtown history and culture)
- 11. Home and business repair program (to support facade improvement, aging in place)
- 12. Community partnership program that supports and/or funds citizen initiatives to promote the cultural and historic richness of downtown (for example, Keep Port Wentworth Beautiful)
- 13. Downtown landscaping maintenance
- 14. Public art initiative

KEY MAP: Immediate Projects and Initiatives



# Action Plan *(cont.)*

## 2 Transportation & Connectivity

- To increase accessibility and mobility in and throughout downtown
- To protect vulnerable populations, improve safety, and reduce congestion
- To enhance and strengthen alternative modes of travel

### **Immediate**

- 1. Continue conversations with Georgia Department of Transportation regarding the potential of rerouting SR 25 off of South Coastal Highway through downtown
- 2. Develop an inventory of current, upcoming, and potential regional transportation and connectivity projects impacting Port Wentworth to identify and prioritize future projects

### **Near-Term**

- 3. Explore minor improvements and maintenance along Crossgate and Barnsley Roads (ADA ramps, crosswalks, resurfacing, and restriping)
- 4. Multi-use trail planning (engage in study and design of multi-use trail network to connect downtown to the rest of Port Wentworth)
- 5. Explore wayfinding and signage program
- 6. Develop cost estimates for near term and future transportation projects in updated Comprehensive Plan's Transportation Element

### **Future**

- 7. Short and long term streetscape improvements along South Coastal Highway (ADA ramps, crosswalks, surfacing, restriping, sidewalks, curbs, lighting, landscaping)
- 8. Short term streetscape improvements along Bonnybridge Road
- 9. Short term streetscape improvements including a multi-use path along Armadale Road
- 10. Explore possibility of roundabouts at Bonnybridge, Crossgate, and Grange Roads

KEY MAP: Near-Term Projects and Initiatives



# Action Plan *(cont.)*

## 3 Development/Redevelopment Areas

- To stimulate and attract growth that aligns with the character and needs of downtown
- To set forth an achievable development agenda that unfolds over time
- To support neighborhood and commercial growth and vitality

### Immediate

- 1. Evaluate future potential and essential functions of Festival Park site with the development of small area plan (as part of comprehensive plan)
- 2. Update Future Land Use Map and Zoning Districts to reflect the intended character of the development framework for Downtown (as part of comprehensive plan)

### Near-Term

- 3. Cultivate a Downtown Economic Development Strategy and consider financial incentives to encourage locally-owned small businesses in downtown
- 4. Consider development of a Streetscape Plan and Guidelines to establish a street hierarchy and aesthetic
- 5. Consider development of a Downtown Parks and Open Space Plan and Guidelines to develop high quality greenspaces and adequately distribute resources throughout downtown, while also considering appropriate areas city-wide for a Veterans Memorial
- 6. Conduct funding opportunity analysis to identify grant opportunities that could be utilized for current and upcoming projects
- 7. Evaluate future potential and essential functions of city-owned properties throughout Downtown

### Future

- 8. Explore public-private partnerships to support and reinforce Downtown placemaking initiatives
- 9. Fund, design, and implement gateway open space and signage (ex: Gateway Park)
- 10. Fund and implement public art initiatives
- 11. Pursue historic designation opportunities where possible to interpret or protect historic structures and/or features

## KEY ELEMENTS

- Vibrant commercial areas with local businesses



- Inviting and walkable small-scale mixed-use areas



- Range of housing, from high to low intensity



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#ChoosePortWentworth