

Downtown Mobile



Public Space Action Plan Project for Public Spaces and Main Street Mobile

NOVEMBER, 2002

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I. Executive Summary

A Unique Opportunity - Why change should occur now

Currently celebrating its 300th birthday, Mobile has an opportunity to become one of the most livable cities in the country. In many ways, the downtown has "good bones." With its small scale historic streets, strategically located public squares, and working waterfront, it has the necessary ingredients to make a vibrant environment in which to live, work and visit. Imagine coming into Mobile on a beautiful tree-lined street, entering a busy downtown of restored historic buildings, thriving shops, sidewalk cafés and gardens, and staying after work or for a few days. Imagine a working waterfront that also has an active promenade, a marina, and destinations that draw people to it. And instead of being lined with drive-in banks and parking lots, Water Street is a boulevard with wide sidewalks for strolling, restaurants and shops, easy street crossings for pedestrians, and gateways at both ends that announce the arrival to the city. Imagine a downtown that is known for its burgeoning arts scene, renovated live-in lofts, and mix of funky shops that complement more traditional retail and entertainment venues for performing arts and cinema.

Mobile has seen some recent improvements - Cathedral Square has been renovated, development is beginning to occur around the waterfront and on Ryan Park, and a new park is being planned to mark the city as the home of the first North American Mardi Gras celebration. Yet there is still much to do. For example, there is little retail in the downtown and few restaurants; the downtown is deserted after work and on weekends. This, despite the fact that 18,000 people work downtown and each year an additional 800,000 visit the city during Mardi Gras and events at the Convention Center. Streets that are dominated by fast moving traffic, empty buildings, barren parking lots and vacant parcels further erode the downtown environment. Scores of reports on a variety of issues ranging from downtown residential uses to a green spaces master plan have been completed over the last few years, and many of them remain on the shelf, yet to be implemented.

If Mobile is to become the distinctive and multi-faceted city that is imagined, what's needed is not another report but a major campaign based on the involvement of all of its leaders -public, private, cultural and institutional. No one can afford NOT to be involved. Mobile's revitalization hinges upon calling into service all of its strengths - its local merchants, property owners, developers, enlightened corporate sector, town officials and engineers, artists, gardeners, historic preservationists, and nonprofit community - to fulfill its enormous potential to become a thriving center that serves local residents and the region. Fortunately, Mobile has a motivated public that is ready to participate, as was so clearly demonstrated during the last few months.

A public space plan for downtown Mobile is not only timely - it is essential. Immediate improvements to downtown Mobile are so sorely needed that we define this as a Public Space Action Plan. It is a prioritized guide to catalyst projects throughout downtown that range from making changes to streets and sidewalks, to revitalizing parks, plazas and squares, to establishing guidelines and a review process for how the bases of new buildings are designed and built.

A Different Approach

After more than half a century of urban planning and transportation policies geared largely to facilitating the safe, efficient movement of automobile traffic, a broader approach is taking hold and gaining momentum throughout the country. This approach, which we refer to as "placemaking," looks at the overall role that streets, parks, markets and other economic activities, as well as public institutions, can play in enhancing communities and creating new destinations. Placemaking aims to revitalize communities by creating human-scale public spaces that respond to community needs, where people feel safe and comfortable and where communities can come together. Placemaking can help communities grow their public spaces into vital, distinctive places that are well-integrated into the community fabric and enrich people's experience of public life. Often this can best be achieved through small-scale, doable projects, many of which can be phased in quickly (three months to 1 year) and with participation from a broad group of partners and residents.

The placemaking process allows diverse constituencies to identify how a public space can be reshaped to make it a welcoming, well-functioning and attractive place for people. This approach is based on a belief that it is not enough simply to develop design ideas and elements to improve or develop a public space. Improvements need to reflect community values and needs. One of the most critical factors in achieving a public space that is truly sensitive to its context is a public involvement process that defines and responds to community conditions and needs from the outset.

The Planning Process

Downtown Mobile, with Project for Public Spaces, Inc., began a process to work with the Mobile community to develop a plan for public spaces could be used as a catalyst for improving the downtown. This process included:

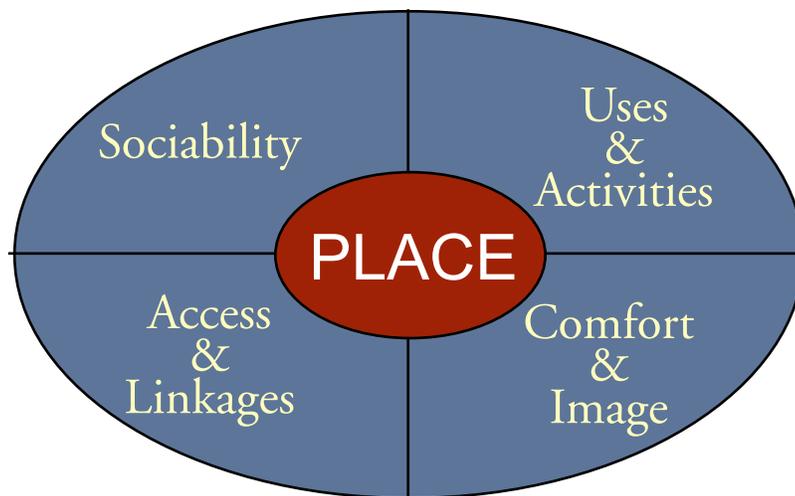
- Preliminary meetings to identify problems, goals and opportunities;
- Focus groups with over 100 stakeholders representing downtown businesses, institutions, city agencies, and developers;
- Surveys of local merchants and park users to determine perceptions, sensitivities and solutions to issues such as safety, programming and activities, maintenance, retail and art;
- On-site observations of user behavior in parks, streets, and other public spaces;
- Interviews with key individuals and institutions including the General Services Administration, RSA, Main Street Mobile, City and County representatives, and others;
- Photographic documentation of existing conditions downtown, including parks, plazas, streets, landscape features, popular uses and activities, pedestrian paths, lighting, etc.;
- A public workshop to learn which areas and features were best-liked, brainstorm ideas for improvement, and outline specific potential actions. PPS presented a slide show illustrating place-making examples from other cities to begin the brainstorming process. We then facilitated a group "Place Performance Evaluation Game," during which teams of people spread out across important downtown sites to draw their own conclusions about the challenges and potential solutions in those spaces;
- Preparation of a preliminary report and conceptual designs developed from the observations, surveys and comments made in the focus groups and public workshop.

THE BENEFITS OF GOOD PUBLIC SPACES

- **Places** nurture and define community identity through greater community organization, a better sense of dedication and volunteerism, perpetuation of integrity and values, and a common vision.
- **Places** benefit cities economically by encouraging small-scale entrepreneurship, local ownership, more desirable jobs, higher real estate values, and greater tax revenue.
- **Places** promote a greater sense of comfort because they are visually pleasing, generally stimulating, environmentally friendly, promote a sense of belonging, and are safer.
- **Places** draw a diverse population, including more women, elderly, and children, as well as a greater ethnic and cultural mix, by supporting a wider range of activities and uses, new service, retail, and customer niches, and encouraging people to get involved and take pride in the area.
- **Places** create improved accessibility, being more walkable, safer for pedestrians, compatible with public transit, less reliant on cars and parking, more efficient in terms of time and money, and offering better connections between uses.
- **Places** foster frequent and meaningful contact through improved sociability, cultural exposure and interaction, exchange and preservation of information, wisdom, and values, reduction of race and class barriers, and promotion of feelings of interconnection and community.

THE QUALITIES OF GOOD PUBLIC SPACES

Good places can be recognized at a glance, although few people can describe exactly what it is that distinguishes one. With 27 years of experience studying and defining public spaces, PPS has articulated the basic qualities that make up a great place, and distilled them into the following four basic ingredients:



ACTIVITIES AND USES

A good place has a range of opportunities for people to participate in a variety of activities - from a farmers' market to a playground, a corner bar, or a sidewalk café, among others. These activities and the variety of people participating in them keeps a downtown lively at all times of day.

ACCESS AND LINKAGE

A good place is visible and easy to get to. For example, not only the entrance to a park, but also the activities in the park should be visible and accessible to people passing by on foot and in cars.

COMFORT AND IMAGE

Good places are comfortable to use and help give the city a unique identity. Amenities, such as seating, shade trees, bike racks, and bulletin boards, well designed and in the right place, are essential in any good public space.

SOCIABILITY

A sociable place is one where people want to go to observe the passing scene, meet friends, and interact with a wide range of people that are different from themselves.

II. A Vision for the Future

In the initial focus groups, people were asked to talk about the "essence of Mobile," those qualities that not only expressed what they thought was precious and unique about the city now, but also what should be preserved from the past and focused on in the future. The responses included the history, the architecture, the live oaks, the arts, the culture and the diversity present in Mobile. People talked about what was needed in the future to bring Mobile back to life and they envisioned more spaces to live in downtown, small shops, restaurants, coffee shops, and better services both for tourists and residents. They also placed a strong emphasis on landscaping and flowers, some suggesting Mobile become a city of gardens and the arts. People imagined a vibrant hometown that was uniquely theirs - a town that didn't try to be a little New Orleans, but that expressed a character born of a resurgence of people living and working in a creative downtown community.

They expressed big dreams and a big vision and felt that Mobile was a city that always rises to the occasion! This process produced a great number of specific actions that are described in the body of this report. More than that, though, a consensus emerged around larger goals and recommendations that pertained to all of downtown. These goals can be summarized in the following points:

Goals

- **Activate downtown public spaces by developing strategies for attracting people to them on a regular basis.** Currently, even the signature public spaces of downtown are underused. For example, the historic Cathedral and Bienville Squares are not being used to their full potential. Although some of them are used (and overused) during parades and other large events, on a regular basis, they are underused in part because they lack both the amenities and the management that would encourage their ongoing and positive use.

However, with improvement, these spaces could be more attractive to children and families, employees and visitors and conventioners, people who are already in the downtown at the Convention Center, staying at the hotels, visiting the Exploreum or the History Museum, going to church, etc. Instead of coming solely to one of these destinations, people could be attracted to stay downtown for other purposes and to use other destinations as well.

- **Strengthen the perception that downtown is safe and full of positive energy.** At present, downtown is perceived by many visitors as abandoned and unsafe. This may be due to the numerous vacant buildings in critical locations, poorly maintained parking lots, lack of people on the streets, and lack of interesting retail in key areas. For example, visitors who walk near Bienville Square from the Adam's Mark to the con-

vention center get their first impressions of downtown Mobile from this dilapidated and seemingly dead area. And, for the person arriving in the downtown by car, the image of downtown presented at the gateways is negative and reinforced when one gets out of the vehicle.

- **Make the downtown a pedestrian friendly environment.** One of the primary observations by all involved in the planning process for the downtown public spaces was how un-walkable the downtown is. Two of the major streets in downtown - Water Street and Government Street - are heavy with fast traffic and are considered especially un-friendly to pedestrians. Not only are they difficult for pedestrians to cross, but they also act as barriers for people who would like to walk around the downtown and the waterfront.

There is also the perception that there are too many parking lots that are not well-designed or well-maintained, and that there is not enough on-street parking. At the same time, people felt that there were several improvements that could easily be made, including uniformed parking attendants, signs with parking prices posted, obvious entrances and exits, improved backs of buildings fronting on parking lots, and new back entrances to such buildings.

- **Leverage all new development so that it positively impacts the surrounding public spaces.** New building projects have the potential to act as catalysts for redevelopment of the downtown if they are considered in conjunction with the public spaces and if their design is successful at the street level. The type of architecture, the location and design of ground level uses, the design and management of the surrounding public spaces will all have an impact - either positive or negative - on downtown. Done right, new developments can be an engine for improving downtown, and be of benefit to more than their individual tenants, but also to the adjacent streets, public buildings, and passers-by. Done wrong, more and more areas of downtown will be come devoid of any sign of life and Mobile's chances will altogether fade in time.
- **Streamline city bureaucracy and regulations around enabling and encouraging the private sector to make improvements.** There is the perception that some city regulations may be hindering potential retail activity. For example, people feel that the regulations and codes for residential and office uses in downtown are difficult and expensive to comply with and may be causing some of the vacancies downtown. Others expressed frustration with the difficulty of getting outdoor cafes on city sidewalks where the sidewalks are wide enough. Sidewalk retail brings more people downtown and offers commuters places to linger, eat and shop after work. And, while minimum sidewalk clearances should be specified for the flow of pedestrians, this width

can be fairly small, and where sidewalks are too narrow, shops can be encouraged to open their fronts with French doors so that there is still a very strong connection to the sidewalk.

Overall Recommendations

Given these goals, the overall recommendations for downtown are as follows:

- **Improve the ground floor retail continuity throughout the downtown.** While parts of Mobile have the charm and village-like character that can be the basis for a good pedestrian environment, many sections are totally lacking in any sense of place, in large part due to parking lots, vacant land parcels, fast-moving traffic, and one-way streets. In fact, these factors can explain why people prefer the ambience of Dauphin Street to, for example, Conti or St. Francis Streets (each only one block away).
 - All parking lots in the key walking areas of downtown should be made a priority for improvement, including the creation of generous landscape buffers with trees and plantings along all street edges, sidewalks, and consolidated curb cuts, so that cars pass through narrow and well-defined entrances. These improvements should be mandatory on all city-owned lots; private owners could be given financial incentives to encourage adopting them, while zoning could be changed to require buffers on all new lots. The most important lots are those on Government, Conti and St. Louis Streets.
 - Several downtown side streets need new or upgraded sidewalks to improve pedestrian access throughout the area and upgrade the downtown's image for prospective new businesses. Priorities should be set according to the main walking routes identified on the accompanying plan of downtown.
 - Establish temporary markets in key locations on different days to incubate and support new and existing enterprises. Such markets should be located strategically so that they have a positive impact on their surroundings. Key locations are Conti Street and Bienville Square, which both require markets to enhance them as destinations, jumpstart adjacent retail, and highlight their connections to other areas. The details of each location are described at greater length in the following sections.

- Initiate a ground-floor-use plan for the downtown, based on a market analysis. The analysis could look at such issues as: What markets are currently being served by downtown, and how could the area be better served? What is the potential of existing uses and assets downtown, based on an understanding of the trade areas for downtown? What is the competitive advantage of downtown as a whole and who are its potential new markets? What potential new market-niche opportunities could downtown take advantage of in the future?

Convenience retailing downtown is weak, probably because most people commute there by car, which has prompted the construction of shopping centers and strip developments that take advantage of the larger assemblages located along main arterials. While there will be constant demand downtown for some convenience retail, especially as the number of downtown residents continues to rise, increasing the amount of comparison shopping, cultural destinations, and alternative culture will bring the most business downtown in the future, these elements should be emphasized in future planning

- **Develop a program for filling vacant buildings and storefronts.** The city needs to develop a more effective way of dealing with vacant buildings and storefronts with the objective of eliminating their negative impact and preserving the historic character of the buildings and the downtown district. The answer could involve expanding the historic district, establishing a vacancy time limit, encouraging temporary uses in at least the ground floors (e.g. for art exhibits), creating a master leasing program, using eminent domain to acquire long-vacant buildings and then improving them for artist use and housing, providing incentives for tenants and landlords, eliminating red tape, etc.. All of this should be done within the overall vision for the downtown area that is being established as part of this planning process.
- **Support and strengthen existing retailers.** Although many people do come downtown for the restaurants and bars, many of these and other retailers are struggling nonetheless. Some of the old-time downtown business owners feel that the building owners are not being sensitive to their needs, and feel dis-empowered by all of the new development. Some perceive that the city's approach to downtown development does not take into consideration the needs of existing retailers that are not entertainment-oriented.

An entity should be established to provide direct assistance to retailers and to expe-

dite their needs, including: design guidance and approvals for façade improvements and sidewalk vending; renovations and/or conversions of upper floors to apartments or live-work lofts; low interest loans for general exterior improvements; and general advice on marketing and merchandising to upgrade the quality of stores and displays.

In addition, Main Street Mobile should have its offices re-located from Government Plaza to Dauphin Street in order to assert its physical presence on Main Street.

- **Use frequent and regular events and art-related activities to jump-start the revitalization of the downtown and the use of existing public spaces.** The many events that are currently organized in Mobile could be used to revive downtown activity. Although Mardi Gras activities attract hundreds of thousands of people downtown in February and March, the city needs to develop a program for frequent, regular and targeted events. If done effectively, these events will form new habits and change people's perception of what goes on downtown. This also means developing events that are sustainable to organize and have a clear economic or other benefit to event sponsors. Among all the recommendations in this report, events are some of the lowest cost and quickest to start up, and can lead the way to activating spaces that will later enjoy longer-term investments.
- **Institute traffic-calming measures throughout downtown** to enhance its pedestrian nature, including:
 - Installing bumpouts or neckdowns at intersections, as well as at entrances into parking lots. The bumpouts will help slow traffic and make it easier for pedestrians to cross, while giving additional space for landscaping and trees. Sometimes concrete bumpouts need not be installed permanently, but the same effect can be achieved with, for example, wooden platforms or heavy planters that screen off an area of the street for other uses;
 - Consolidating curb cuts whenever possible and prohibiting new curb cuts;
 - Investigating the feasibility of reducing lane widths on every major street. Cities across the country and Europe are catching onto the fact that lanes in downtown traffic function better and safer when they are designed for low speeds. This may mean reducing widths to 10 or 9 feet, depending on the circumstance. Traffic engineers should be aware that even the AASHTO "green book" condones these standards for safer streets ;

- Investigating the feasibility of reducing the number of lanes on major streets downtown, such as Government Street, and widen the sidewalks accordingly;
 - Enhancing crosswalks and installing new ones at key locations, including such improvements as textured paving (or brick) and raised crosswalks;
 - Planting trees and other landscaping in conjunction with neckdowns to narrow the real and perceived width of streets that should be more pedestrian-oriented;
 - Converting many downtown streets from one-way to two-way. Research and experience in other cities have shown that one-way streets reduce the walkability of urban communities for many reasons. Converting them to two-way will slow (not reduce) traffic, double the opportunities that commuters have to patronize the shops on a given street, reduce driving by creating more direct routes, and vastly improve pedestrian access across the street and through the rest of the neighborhood. Specific locations are given throughout the following sections and we encourage the city to study all the streets of downtown for possible two-way conversion.
- **Establish pedestrian-friendly gateways at key entry points** to announce arrival to downtown Mobile and to indicate a special district. These gateways should be combined with art, landscaping and traffic-calming improvements so that drivers know they are entering a pedestrian-friendly zone. The key locations we identified were three triangles north of downtown: at Dauphin, N. Broad and St. Francis; at Spring Hill, N. Jefferson and N. Broad; and at Spring Hill, N. Broad and St. Anthony. The most prominent gateways should be installed along Water Street, at the intersections of Government Street and also Beauregard. These Water Street intersections should mark a transition from highway driving to city driving, and will therefore require dramatic treatments, possibly roundabouts, that declare unequivocally the pedestrian nature of the street.
 - **Establish guidelines and zoning codes to direct all future development** in a way that is compatible with the downtown historic context and supportive of pedestrian users. In the future, all buildings should be designed specifically for the passer-by, for it is the pedestrian, not the automobile, that will save the economy of downtown. Developments like the Convention Center, though attractive architecturally and an asset to the downtown, stand isolated, separated by a vast sea of traffic, without shops, restaurants or other tourist destinations nearby, and not even a row of trees to shade the concrete. The proposed RSA mixed-use office project and the Federal Courthouse will be a test for whether the city can learn and apply this lesson.

- **Create as many incentives as possible to attract diverse artists and young entrepreneurs** to live and work downtown. Mobile could stand out as a mecca for Alabama artists if it took simple steps to attract young creative people and marketed a program of incentives statewide. This should be a priority target audience for downtown, considering recent research that supports what has almost become a cliché: that artists, performers and other creative types can create an atmosphere that attracts investment and human capital. The newest research, by Richard Florida at Carnegie Mellon University, has been widely published for its potential implications on future planning decisions. It notes that the best predictor for a city's competitiveness is its ability to attract a "creative class" (professional-technical people, entrepreneurs, entertainers, scientists, musicians, artists, cultural producers, etc.), and that to attract this class a city needs to nurture a diverse and stimulating culture made up of the arts, cafes, nightlife, pedestrian and bike-friendly districts and other amenities that improve the quality of life. As Florida says in the interview, which is supplied as a report appendix:

"Cities have become cities of ideas and cities of consumption. They are no longer cities of production, and people in Detroit and Pittsburgh keep thinking, 'We're going to have a headquarters, we're going to have the stadium, mom and dad are going to come from the suburbs and take little Johnny to the game, we're going to have retail.' That's just not what drives a city now. What drives a city we know increasingly are good places to live, great neighborhoods, great cafes, night life, places to have fun. Austin [Texas] saw this from day one."

A comprehensive arts incentive program for Mobile could include:

- Provision of inexpensive flexible live/work spaces downtown for artists. Certainly there is an abundance of underused industrial buildings that could be converted for this purpose, as well as apartments above downtown retail;
- The procedures outlined in the public art policy should be used to identify art projects that can be marketed statewide and help establish Mobile's reputation of an arts-friendly city;
- Arts programs, such as those described in some detail in the Conti Street section, should be developed citywide in collaboration with arts groups and museums;

- Recruitment of artsy/funky retailers that would change the perception of downtown. For example, an especially charming Fairhope gumbo shop, which would be a highly desirable business in any downtown, expressed real interest when we asked if they would ever open a similar shop in Mobile;
- Tax exemptions on personal income tax for artists living downtown;
- Tax incentives to property owners who convert buildings formerly used for industrial or commercial use into residential units or live/work spaces;
- A grants program to help artists establish a foothold downtown by covering a down payment on purchasing property, home-studio improvements, or security deposits;
- Brainstorming workshops with regional artists and arts organizations to understand what other measures would attract them to Mobile to live;
- The public art policy can be seen, initially at least, as an overlay or supplement to the public space plan. As funding is committed to improve and upgrade downtown public spaces, and to implement the short- and longer-term enhancements outlined in this open space plan, a percentage of those funds could be set aside towards commissioning art.

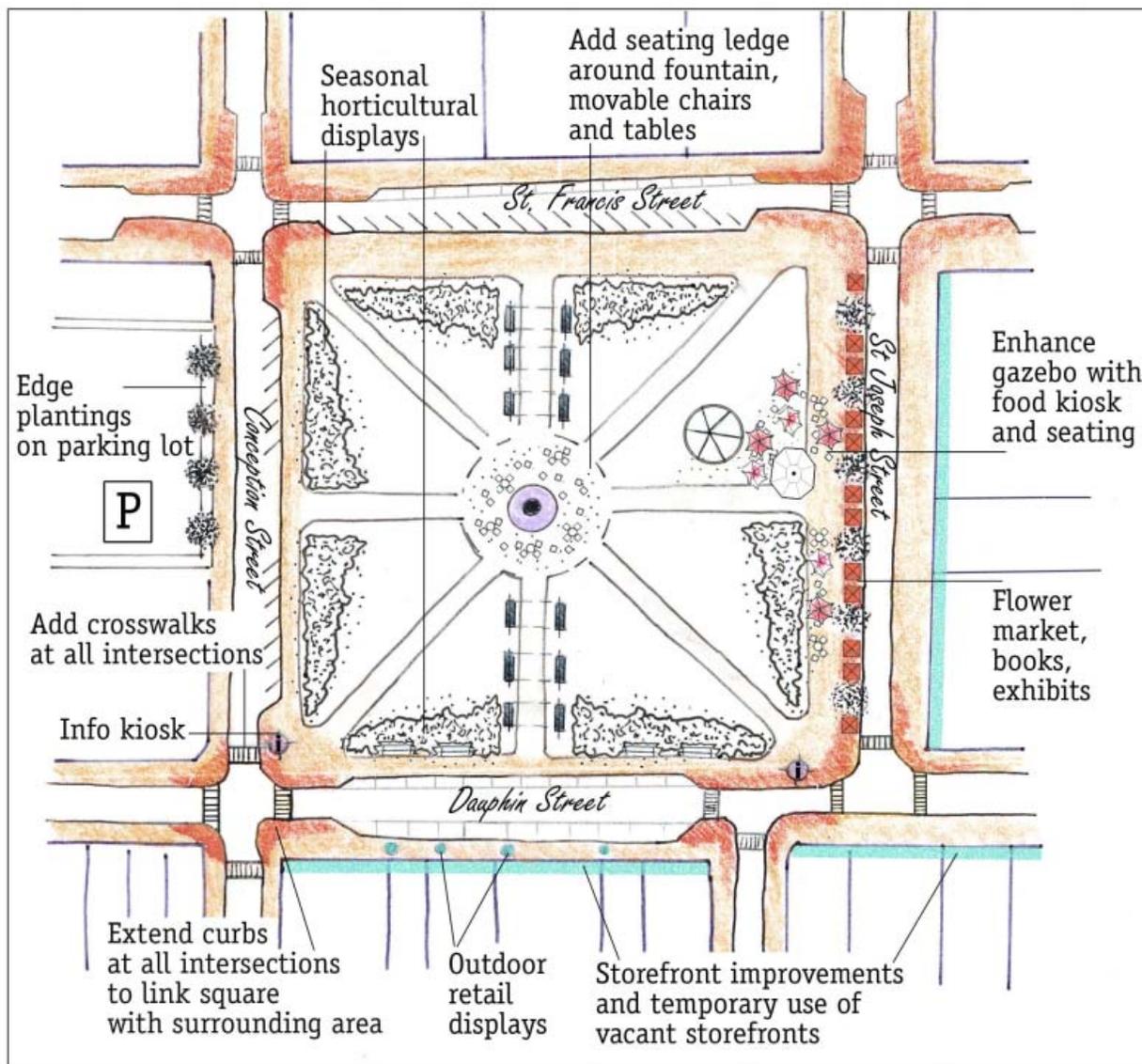
III. Site-Specific Recommendations

A. Gathering Places - Parks and Squares

I end, then, in praise of small spaces. The multiplier effect is tremendous. It is not just the number of people using them, but the larger number who pass by and enjoy them vicariously, or even the larger number who feel better about the city center for knowledge of them. For a city, such places are priceless, whatever the cost. They are built of a set of basics and they are right in front of our noses. If we will look.

William H. Whyte, Jr.

Bienville Square: Recommended Improvements



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Bienville Square



Bienville Square

Goal: Increase the use and improve the image of Bienville Square by building on its reputation and historical significance and by leveraging its central location to attract new retail to the bordering streets

Bienville Square is the historic "heart" of downtown Mobile. Its design - the radial walks, the center fountain, and Live Oak trees - gives an attractive historic character to the square, making it a refreshing green oasis downtown. The square is used throughout most of the day, until evening. People utilize all its areas, the central fountain area being the most popular. A variety of users - professionals, families, and tourists - are attracted by its pleasant historic character

and central location. Still, the square is not without its issues: the homeless are prominent and the preacher's aggressive presence disturbs the peace and no doubt discourages many people from using the area.

While the "inner" Bienville Square is well-maintained and used, the square is not benefiting enough from its prominent location downtown. This is due in part to the poor appearance and lack of supportive uses in the "outer" square - the four streets immediately connecting to it. Vacancies are a big problem both in terms of the negative image they give and the lack of uses that would attract people into the area. Six vacant storefronts face the square directly, while another seven are located in the immediate vicinity, mostly on Dauphin Street. In addition, some of the existing ground-floor uses do little to enhance the park's image or activities, such as the large parking lot on Conception Street, or the blank parking garage façade of the AmSouth Bank building.

Opportunities

1. **Develop a short-term program for eliminating the impact of vacant properties and storefronts surrounding the Square.** The area surrounding the square looks devastated and is giving a poor image to the entire downtown. Although there is a hot-dog shop, a small convenience store and a bus stop, all elements that could be used for creating a successful place, there is also an alarming number of vacant properties surrounding the Square.

Creating a program to minimize the impact of vacant properties and storefronts is essential to changing the image of Bienville Square in the eyes of both users and merchants. Such a program could include using vacant storefronts for temporary displays - both art and commercial. In addition, derelict vacant properties could be screened with art proj-



Bienville Square



Plantings around bench - Copenhagen, Denmark



Bienville Square



City Hall Park, New York



Bienville Square



Bonn, Germany

ects such as decorated scrims, or with banners and large attractive poster-boards.

These treatments will not only improve the area visually, by adding color and filling up the empty display windows, but also will make a strong statement to local residents and visitors alike that Mobile is taking measures to improve the situation, that things are happening downtown, and that positive change is under way. Existing businesses around the Square should also be aided and encouraged to improve their window displays, as well as possibly take some of their displays out, onto the sidewalk.

All parking and vacant lots around Bienville Square should be made a priority for improvements, including the creation of generous landscape buffers with trees and plantings along all street edges, sidewalks, and consolidated curb cuts, so cars pass through narrow and well-defined entrances.

2. **Improve amenities to increase use of the square by attracting office workers, convention goers, and tourists.** Currently, people don't use the Square as much as one would think, given its prominence and reputation. There is very little to do there and the vacant buildings which surround the Square give little reason to go to the area in general. In addition, the Square is not developed either as a tourist destination or for area employees, with no services or amenities provided, such as comfortable places to sit, programs or events related to specific conventions, games, or an outdoor cafe. The sad result is a no-win situation: the Square does little to bolster adjacent retail, and the retail does little to support use of the Square.

In the short term, more benches and moveable seating should be added to Bienville Square. A seating ledge could be placed around the fountain, as well as movable chairs around the fountain and on the sidewalk facing St. Joseph Street. These improvements should be accompanied by organized lunch programs, in addition to the existing brown-bag lunch events.

Providing food in the park could be done in several different ways, the simplest being a food-cart. A food kiosk or a gumbo shack would be a less temporary, but still not permanent, structure. Ideally a café area could be created near the rotunda on the sidewalk facing St. Joseph Street.

Another positive addition to Bienville Square would be tables around the fountain to increase activity during the day. These tables could be used both for lunch, and for chess or checker games rented out in the Square.

On St. Joseph Street, the sidewalk could be widened significantly, since the street island is no longer needed for the bus station. This expanded sidewalk could be used for a variety of activities. For example, art displays, possibly for public art installations, such as



Boston Public Garden, Boston, MA



St. Paul, MN



Central Park - 5th Avenue, New York



Central Park, New York

interactive sculptures could be installed on this side.

Moreover, this area could become the site for a "Catalyst Retail Program" that capitalizes on its location on the park and creates new interest in the block as a retail destination. This would include temporary vending stands for books, newspapers, postcards, records, CDs, area maps, and the like. The existing flower market, especially popular among office workers around Bienville Square, could be moved to this area as well in order to triangulate with activities already occurring in the Square. The flower market should be held regularly on a weekday to maximize use by downtown workers.

Information kiosks displaying maps of downtown and directional signage to nearby destinations and attractions should be strategically placed on both corners of the Square along Dauphin Street. Kiosk information could be specifically geared towards tourists and conventioners, as this would probably be their first stop along Dauphin Street from both the Convention Center and the Adam's Mark Hotel. The information kiosk could also inform area residents and office workers of the formal program of events held in the Square and throughout downtown.

3. **Develop a more comprehensive management program for the Square. A management program that addresses landscaping, flowers, and cleanliness, along with other managerial tasks would enhance the image of the place and invite more use.** Currently, the rest-rooms are cleaned daily, but even that is not enough. There is a general lack of color in the park; flowers and other landscaping elements are almost absent.

Colorful plantings and flowers could be added to the historic landscape. For example, dramatic flowerbeds with seating alcoves facing Dauphin Street should be located along the park edges to enhance the image and attract additional visitors. Such gardens can also have an impact on Dauphin Street exactly where it needs help the most: with all its vacancies, shoppers have little incentive to walk east past Conception Street. Therefore, the highest priority should be placed on improving the Dauphin Street edge of the park as part of catalyzing interest in this part of downtown.

New flowerbeds may also require a new approach to tree care, since there is such a thick tree canopy that the shade may prevent flowers and even grass from thriving. Although shade is certainly very desirable, trees need to be pruned back and certain new trees might even be eliminated, so that the community desire for grass and flowers can be balanced with the need for shade.

Another problem that was mentioned was the squirrels, which are in such great numbers and so aggressive (to the point where they eat plants and even Christmas lights) that they



Outdoor concert



Bienville Square



Zurich, Switzerland



Bienville Square



Luxembourg Gardens, Paris, France

have become a pest issue, which needs to be dealt with.

To alleviate the burden on the parks department and elicit more active community participation, a Friends' group could be created including residents, park users, and local business. The Friends could take charge of some of the managerial tasks, such as planting and maintaining flowers and landscaping, and planning events. The Botanical Gardens and Horticultural Society should also become partners and take the opportunity to display their work in Bienville Square.

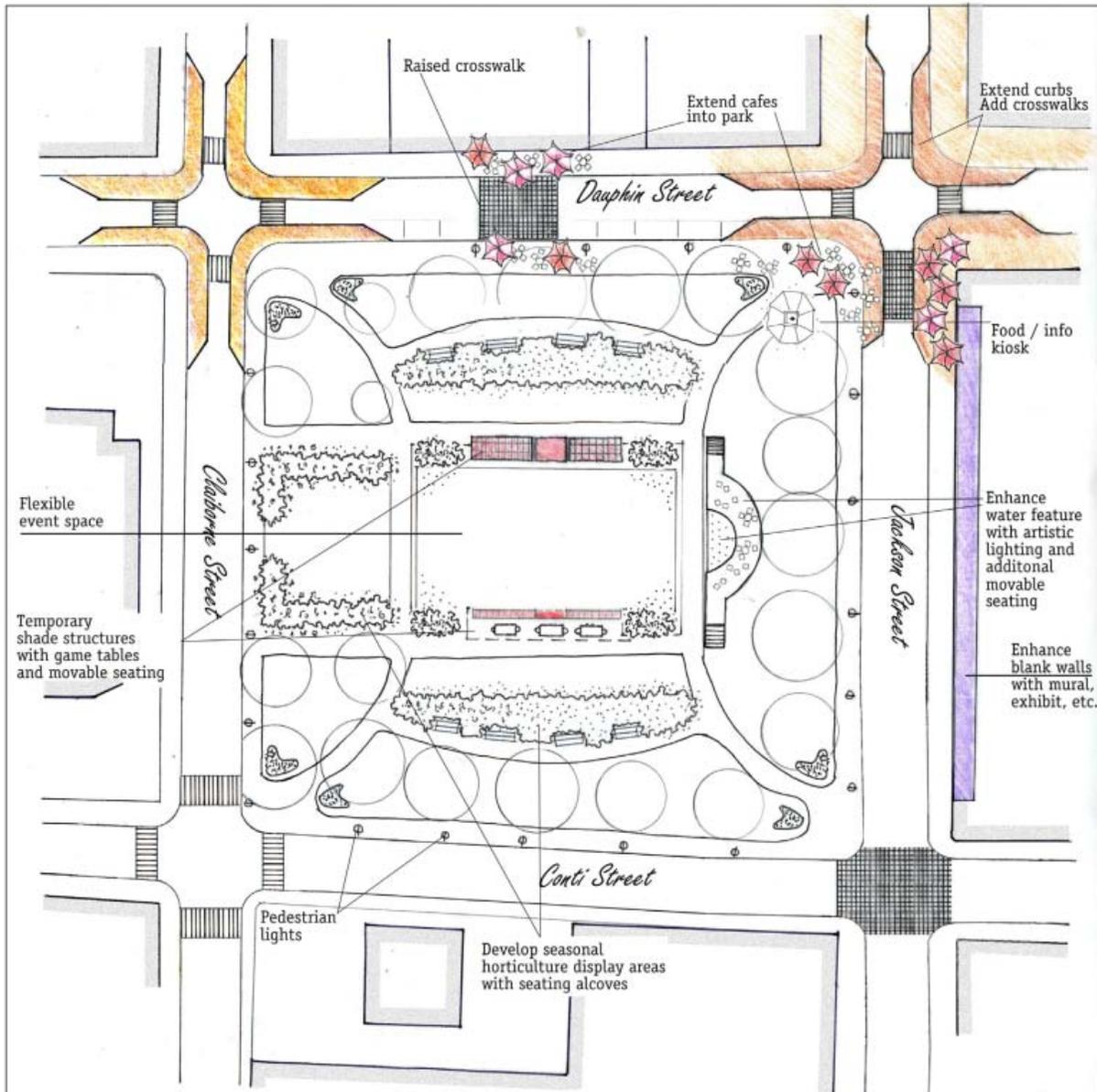
4. **Develop an events plan for the Square that suits the space and accomplishes the goals set out in the public space plan.** Currently the Square is used for a variety of events, not only because of its greenery and shade, but also because it is well equipped with electric wiring and outlets. Very few of these events are regular - e.g. Kids' Day in the park (once a week in the spring and summer), and brown-bag lunches. Most events are seasonal and large: First Night, Mardi Gras, Easter, Bay Fest, Do Dah Day, etc. These and other larger downtown events are held partially in the park once a year. The park suffers from this type of use because the larger events in particular impact the delicate grass areas significantly. Such intense use interferes with the possibility to schedule regular events, and has been reported by some merchants to have an adverse impact on local retail because it requires closing streets for traffic.

Bienville Square needs a consistent schedule of smaller, more frequent events, in addition to, or even possibly replacing, some of the larger seasonal events. This regular calendar is necessary to jump-start the revitalization of the Square and the downtown area. Events programmed in the Square should be complementary to the physical improvements in order to create a multiplier effect and underline the exciting positive changes occurring downtown.

The Square needs to capitalize on its proximity to the Convention Center and the Saenger Theatre, and schedule convention related events that would attract visitors to the Square and downtown. These events should not only be tailored to specific conventions, but also should be timed to best fit with a particular convention schedule.

5. **Improve pedestrian circulation and provide additional parking.** We propose corner sidewalk extensions (bump-outs), together with crosswalks at all intersections to link the Square with the surrounding area. Bump-outs are designed to slow traffic without reducing the street's capacity, making it safer and easier for pedestrians to cross the street.

Cathedral Square: Recommended Improvements



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Cathedral Square



Cathedral Square

Goal: Capitalize on the positive image and wide-open spaces and increase the variety of uses and activities, in collaboration with adjacent businesses.

Cathedral Square, an open lawn area with trees, walkways, and a water feature, is downtown's newest and best-maintained park. Given its good condition, open spaces, adjacent retail, and image as an upscale space, it may well have more potential than any other place to become an active destination within a very short time. While the Square is already the venue for some events, such as this year's Mobile Symphony Orchestra Barbeque Fundraiser, few people currently use it on an average day and the space is under-performing in terms of its impact on the surrounding area.

Opportunities

1. **Enhance use and appearance through events and amenities. Cathedral Square is a perfect and flexible venue for a variety of events.** The central green space should be used for movies, concerts, and other events. Temporary structures such as a tent, large umbrellas, or awnings, could provide shade and rain shelter along the central quad, adding color to the square and making it a popular venue for events.

Around the central quad and by the water fountain amenities such as benches and moveable seating could be added to attract additional users. The fountain could further be enhanced by artistic night-time lighting, and synchronized with light music piped into the area.

Game tables can also be explored under the temporary shade structures around the central quad. Cathedral Place, the museum, or one of the surrounding restaurants could be involved in renting out chess and checkers to people to play in the Square.

2. **Increase use by working with local partners, adjacent properties, and institutions.** Cathedral Square benefits from a number of good supportive uses along the park edge, such as the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, Cathedral Place, Spot of Tea restaurant, and Heroes Sports Bar, etc. All these places present a tremendous opportunity for collaboration with the square to create an active, balanced, pleasant public space. Currently, many buildings on the edges of the square, although not vacant, appear to have little involvement in activities in the Square and almost go unnoticed.



Cathedral Square



Bryant Park, New York



Avignon, France



Community Theater, Midway Caravan



Cathedral Square



Art show - New Orleans, LA

Café tables serviced by Spot of Tea and the Heroes Sports Bar could be set up in the park near Dauphin and Jackson Streets, to attract people for lunch and snacks in the Square. Exhibit pieces and art classes for kids could be organized by the Art Gallery, attracting residents and visitors alike. Another possibility is to organize temporary art and craft fairs in the Square. The senior art classes at Cathedral Place could be held in the Square when weather permits.

The east and north sides of the Square could be made more open to Dauphin and Jackson Streets by extending the sidewalks on both sides. Placing more seating, benches, and, possibly, tables with chairs will help the park engage the street.

The Mobile Botanical Gardens and Horticultural Society could be attracted as a partner to plant and maintain colorful plantings and flowers in the Square. Horticultural displays could also be added to the areas north and south of the central quad. For example, dramatic flowerbeds with seating alcoves facing Dauphin and Conti Streets could enhance the image and attract more visitors. Such flowerbeds should also be planted in front of the Cathedral, along with flower corners at each of the entrances to the park.

The Jackson Street edge of the park faces the blank façade of the Saenger Theatre. As a long-term improvement, the Saenger Theatre, along with other business owners, could be encouraged to upgrade and improve the façades of their buildings, and possibly open the blank walls onto the park if building layout allows it. Along with tables serviced by the nearby Heroes Sports Bar, the park corner of Jackson and Dauphin Streets could be enhanced with a food or information kiosk inviting visitors into the square.

3. **Improve pedestrian circulation around the Square and provide additional on-street parking.** Corner sidewalk extensions (bump-outs) are proposed to link the square with the surrounding area. These extensions will slow down traffic on Dauphin Street without affecting the street's capacity, and will make it safer and easier for pedestrians to cross.

Extensions are desirable for the intersections of Dauphin with Claiborne and Jackson Streets, completed with freshly striped crosswalks on all four corners of the Square. In addition, a raised mid-block crosswalk could be installed in front of Spot of Tea, linking its terrace with additional seating in the park. A raised crosswalk is also desirable on Jackson Street, connecting the Heroes terrace with the park.

The bump-outs make it convenient to locate on-street parking spaces within the curb extensions between Claiborne and Jackson Streets.



Hobby show - Long Beach, CA



Kungstradgarden, Stockholm, Sweden



Bryant Park, New York



Kungstradgarden, Stockholm, Sweden



Cathedral Square



Coffee cart - San Rafael, CA



Cathedral Square



Outdoor art exhibit



Cathedral Square



Channel Garden, Rockefeller Center, New York



Cathedral Square



Butchart Gardens, Vancouver, BC

Cooper Riverside Park

Convention Center at Water and Government Streets



Cooper Riverside Park

Goal: Increase park use by improving accessibility, expanding park to the street, and developing partnerships with nearby entities.

One of the newest of Mobile's public spaces, Cooper Riverside Park was meant to provide much needed access to the city's waterfront, yet in many ways, the Park is the most inaccessible and invisible public space in town. Access is the "Achilles' Heel" of this site. Coming from downtown, the intersection on Water Street leading to the park is extremely dangerous for pedestrians, particularly for seniors and mothers with children. The push-button on the

timed signal is not visible and there is no car access to the park to drop off or to park. From the water, there is no boat access allowed; neither are there places for boat owners to dock, pump out sewage, buy supplies or have dinner. There is even a sign that says "No docking."

The park's design is pleasant, with attractive plantings and very good maintenance. Unfortunately, the park is rarely used aside from hosting a few special events. There is no place to buy food or beverages, and not enough shade near the bench-lined path. Fishing is not allowed and the high fence with cables makes it difficult for boats to both dock and get access to the land. The park's most obvious potential users include conventioners, people who work in the convention center, guests to the Adam's Mark hotel and visitors to the Exploreum. However the Adam's Mark and the Exploreum are cut off from the park by six lanes of fast-moving traffic and conventioners may not even be aware the park exists.

Opportunities

1. **Improve all access routes to the park - across Water Street, from the Convention Center, and from the water.** The intersection of Water and Government Streets is the key point of access to the park and to the convention center. Water Street needs to be treated with traffic-calming measures to reduce speeds and assure that commuters exiting the highway realize they are entering downtown. As it stands now, drivers speed by downtown before it has even occurred to them that there might be a reason to stop there. Reducing speeds on Water Street cannot happen by simply posting an unenforceable speed limit. Speed reduction and better access can only be achieved through road design by:

- Narrowing the overall width of Water Street by reducing lane width and number;



Cooper Riverside Park - Entrance



Miami, FL



Cooper Riverside Park - CSX Station



Key West, FL



CSX Station



Little Rock, AR

- Extending sidewalks at intersections to reduce further the crossing distance for pedestrians;
- Resurfacing Water Street with textured pavement or bricks from the point where cars exit the highway through the intersection of Government Street. This pavement treatment would also clearly delineate new crosswalks, which should be fitted with automated pedestrian light-signals and sidewalk bollards;
- Adding parallel parking along Water Street to encourage cars to stop downtown and to create a buffer between pedestrians and traffic. This addition would also provide much needed parking for those visiting the park; and
- Introducing other gateway treatments such as large banners on the Exploreum announcing exhibitions; art on the median and in the center of the Government street intersection; improvements, like gardens and art added to each corner of the intersection and sponsored by the Exploreum, Convention Center, and the Adam's Mark; new pull-off parking on the north side in front of the old CSX station and the convention center; and new amenities, described in detail below.

2. **Extend Cooper Riverside Park out** into the intersection and up the Water Street boulevard. Dramatic reductions in speeding and a major reorientation of Mobile toward the waterfront could be achieved by bringing the park out of its current hiding place. New gardens and trees should be generously planted along the edges of Water Street on both sides so that cars perceive not only a narrowing of the road, but also that they are entering an environment in which cars are not the priority. Plantings should be especially intensive east of Government Street, making a strong gateway statement. Water Street should be redesigned as an urban boulevard with continuous tree-lined sidewalks, and medians planted with lush, well-maintained landscaping.

The extended sidewalk and plaza area between the Convention Center and CSX Station should become the real entrance to the park, visible from a distance, and easily accessible. The existing high planters with trees located in that area should be eliminated and instead, a fountain with a seating ledge could be installed as a focal point leading to the park. High trees, and raised planters hiding the park from view should be replaced with lower colorful plantings and flower displays. The railway tracks could be treated simply with bollards or low fencing to draw attention to them and for pedestrian safety. An information kiosk or area map should be located near the crosswalk displaying a plan of the park, its attractions, and its programs. Finally, a food cart with umbrellas and moveable seating could be located in the plaza near the CSX building.



Vancouver, BC



Banners



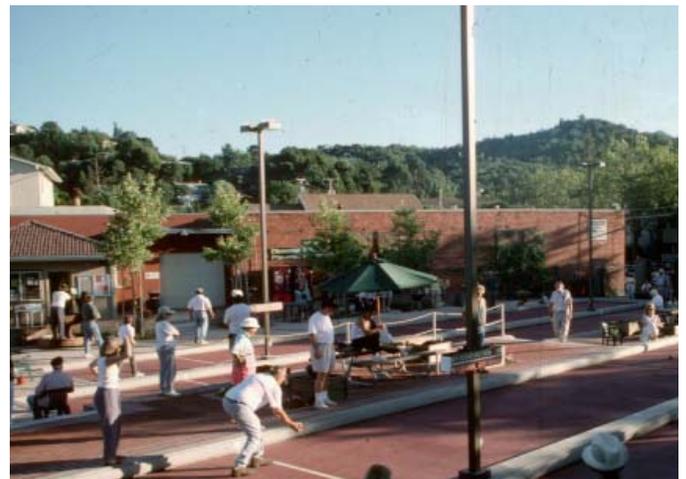
Cooper Riverside Park



Water playground - Grainville Island, Vancouver, BC



Water playground - Grainville Island, Vancouver, BC



Bocce courts - San Rafael, CA

The paved area between the Convention Center steps and the current entrance to the park should be treated in a similar way by eliminating high planters, trees, and bushes hiding the park from view. Shade trees could be planted behind the park's fence while the park entrances are enhanced with landscaping and flowers on the plaza. This area is also an ideal location for a food kiosk, or café with seating overlooking the water. Horticultural displays should be used for emphasis and to attract visitors to the plaza and the park's entrances.

The generous proportions of the sidewalk in front of the Convention Center are an invitation to treat this area with particular care and transform it from an unfriendly, automobile-oriented entrance to a useable public park.

3. **Add amenities and uses to the park to encourage people to use it.** Cooper Riverside Park has almost no amenities that would encourage people to stay and visit, such as play equipment, picnic tables, game tables, or barbeque areas.

In order to attract families with children, the park needs a playground, or some interactive climbable art on which children could play. An interactive water feature would also be appropriate. For older children and adolescents, a skateboard ramp, and a designated bike path connecting to the city-wide bike path-system could be added. The park has a lot of seating that is away from shade, so trees and trellises should be placed near seating areas. Another solution would be to use a temporary structure - an awning, a tent, or umbrellas, to provide shade near seating and for events. In addition, such a structure could be used as a color accent in the park. Building a gazebo or a pergola for events is another possibility.

4. **Create a partnership between the park, the Convention Center, the Adam's Mark hotel, and the Exploreum** to enhance the park as a place and bring in programs and events. Conducting focus groups with these institutions could elicit a variety of good ideas. For example, the Exploreum might create an interactive outdoor exhibit for children to learn about the working waterfront, even with a miniature river equipped with toy boats, trains, trucks, and cranes. For adults, the Convention Center could provide picnic tables, or tables and chairs for temporary waterfront dining. The Convention Center could also operate a food kiosk outside the entrance to the park where it would be visible from across Water Street.

New uses should also be developed outside the existing park in the sidewalk areas on Water Street, which would keep with the idea that the park should actually extend to and even across Water Street. For example, new uses could be developed inside and outside



Cooper Riverside Park



Brooklyn Botanic Garden, Brooklyn, NY



Cooper Riverside Park



Dumbarton Oaks, Washington D.C.



Cooper Riverside Park



Docking facility - Auckland, NZ

the CSX station, such as a bike rental, ice cream parlor, rooftop restaurant, outdoor water feature with seating around it, or interactive play fountain closer to the entrance to the park.

5. **Encourage and allow boats to access the Convention Center, Cooper Riverside Park and new waterfront development.** Mobile should not miss this excellent opportunity to attract tourists to downtown shops, restaurants, and other attractions.

Gateways



Potential gateway

Several locations, including intersections, parks and triangles, could have an impact on the perception of downtown if they were improved with better landscaping and amenities:

- o Ryan Park, a small triangle that could be improved to highlight its role as a gateway to downtown and the Dauphin Street corridor. Improving the park would also benefit the new housing being developed on adjacent lots.
- o DeTonti Triangle, a wonderful de facto park space is one of the most functional public spaces in downtown. Rather than recommend improvements to it, it would be better to conduct interviews with the current users and implement small incremental changes according to their wishes.
- o Traffic islands and triangles could also provide opportunities to add landscaping or a gateway feature to a key intersection. For example at the intersection of Dauphin and Broad Streets, the existing bus stop could be improved and combined with plantings, sculpture elements, and pedestrian improvements. Other opportunities exist at Broad and Spring Hill Avenue.





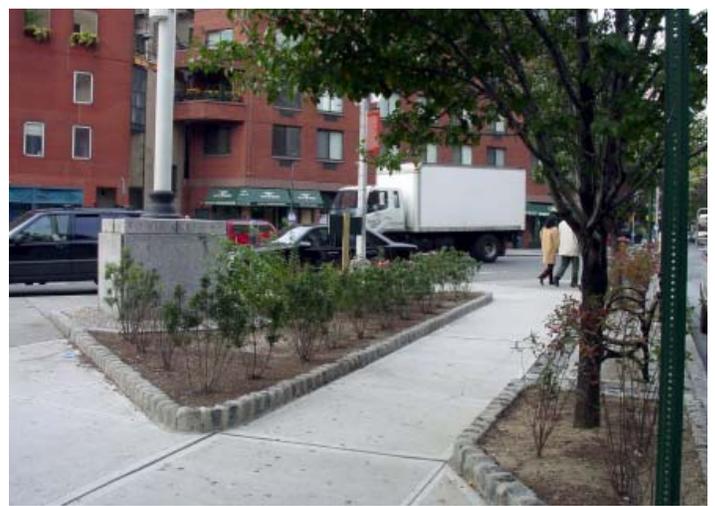
Green streets triangles - New York City



Green streets triangles - New York City



Green streets triangles - New York City



Green streets triangles - New York City



Green streets triangles - New York City



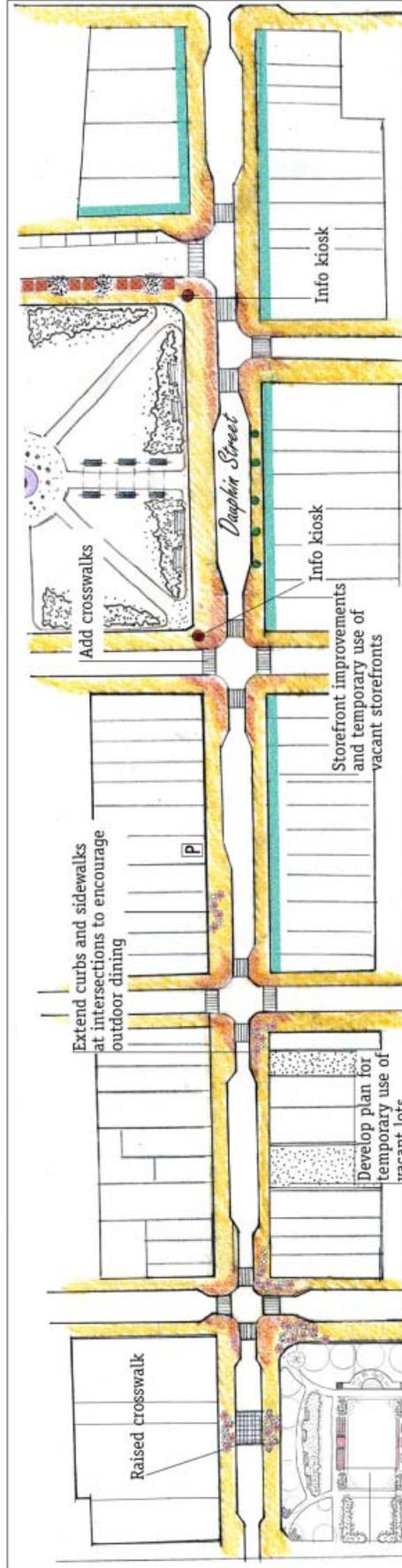
Green streets triangles - New York City

B. Connecting Places

The erosion of cities by automobiles proceeds as a kind of nibbling. Small nibbles at first but eventually hefty bites. A street is widened here, another is straightened there, a wide avenue is converted to one way flow and more land goes into parking. No one step in this process is in itself crucial but cumulatively the effect is enormous.

Jane Jacobs, 1961

Dauphin Street: Recommended Improvements



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Dauphin Street



Dauphin Street

Goal: Broaden the mix of people and times of day when people use Dauphin Street by improving the variety of stores and services located here.

Mobile's historic main street and a symbol of downtown, Dauphin Street is its most important retail street, and the connector between two of Mobile's prominent public spaces - Bienville and Cathedral Squares. Although Dauphin Street has become a destination for evening entertainment, with a number of bars and clubs catering to the college population, the street is not a major shopping destination, as it lacks variety, and certain essential "Main

Street" businesses. Despite this serious shortcoming, Dauphin Street is the key shopping destination downtown, as no other downtown street has the healthy retail mix necessary to attract a broader public, including suburban and neighborhood residents, tourists, and conventioners.

Dauphin Street is suffering from the perception that it is not safe and that teenagers overrun it in the evenings. Although it still has a number of abandoned properties and vacant storefronts, the street has improved in recent years. In addition, Dauphin Street has a number of attractive historic buildings, which give the street an old-fashioned charm.

Opportunities

1. **Develop a retail strategy to attract a more diverse clientele.** Currently, there are not enough people shopping in the area, and a number of stores are vacant. Some of the existing retail outlets are in bad need of merchandising advice, as well as physical façade and retail space upgrades. Even as an evening entertainment center, the mix on Dauphin Street lacks retail that complements this use (e.g. bookstores, coffee houses, trendy thrift shops, cinemas, etc.).

Dauphin Street needs a consistent retail strategy, including tenant recruitment for certain vacant storefronts. The strategy should address, among other things, the best ways to take advantage of and offer goods and services to the evening crowd. One possibility is organizing an "evening economy" focus group, where evening users are invited to give their opinion about what other services and stores they would visit if available.



Dauphin Street



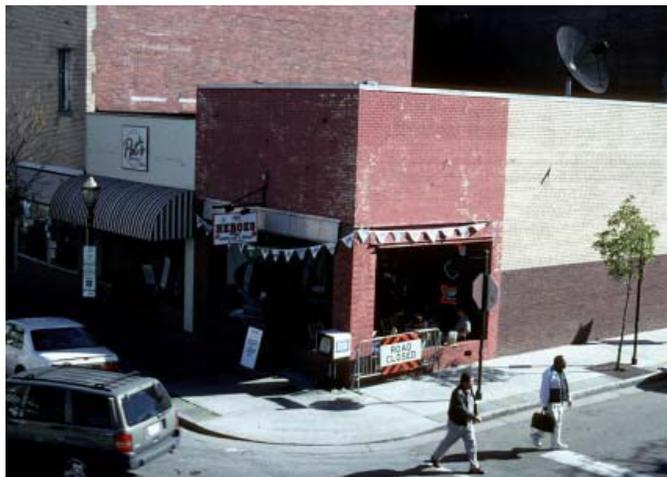
Dauphin Street



Dauphin Street



Victoria, BC



Dauphin Street



Smith Street, Brooklyn, NY

2. **Develop a landlord-tenant-city support group.** Some Dauphin Street landlords are perceived to be a problem because they are absentee or not involved in the downtown. In addition, retailers not engaged in the evening economy (i.e. restaurants and bars) feel they have little support, and sometimes have antagonistic relationships with both the city and the Convention Corporation. Both landlords and retailers sometimes perceive the city simply as a bureaucratic obstacle rather than a partner in the revitalization of Dauphin Street.

Dauphin Street in particular needs to create a group to support existing retailers in a meaningful way, and create good relationships with landlords. City ordinances should be reviewed and discussed, eliminating obstacles for redevelopment where necessary in order to encourage landlords to maintain and rent their properties. In addition, landlords should be encouraged to develop and remodel existing structures incorporating upper floor residential uses. Establishing good relationships with landlords is particularly important since some of them currently own a number of properties on Dauphin Street. Such landlords could improve all of their properties and thus have a significant impact downtown.

The support group should also seek to reconcile downtown Mobile retailers with the Convention Corporation, so that they integrate their activities to ensure that convention goers and other visitors to Mobile visit Dauphin Street and patronize its businesses.

3. **Improve vacant storefronts with temporary art-related displays.** Vacant storefronts and vacant buildings are damaging the overall image of Dauphin Street, and are one of the reasons the street is perceived as abandoned and unsafe.

As around Bienville Square, improving vacant storefronts is crucial. A short-term program to minimize the impact of vacant properties should focus on temporary art and commercial displays, screens, scrims, and banners. Ultimately, vacant retail spaces could be offered to existing retailers for display, or even leased at reduced rents in order to encourage new businesses to locate on Dauphin Street and attract more people downtown. An effective landlord support group should be able to convince landlords of the benefits of such arrangements for future business. Another approach would be to require owners of vacant buildings to improve buildings' maintenance, replace worn-out overhangs, re-paint façades, and so on.

Finally, a street and retail/business signage program, encouraging contextual historic and perpendicular signs on the street could help upgrade the overall look of the street, including that of vacant storefronts. The signage program should also provide information about Dauphin Street, including the history of Dauphin Street, its important destinations, and where other destinations both on and off the street are located.



Dauphin Street



Wenatchee, WA



Vienna, Austria



Edinburgh, Scotland



New York, NY



New York, NY

4. **Develop a pro-active plan for encouraging sidewalk dining.** Given that some sidewalks are too narrow to accommodate outdoor dining and other outdoor activities, efforts should be made to develop innovative ways of encouraging and allowing sidewalk dining and bringing activity that is inside to the outside. At selected locations on Dauphin Street, such as street corners and in front of active dining places, the sidewalk could be extended through permanent or temporary bump-outs and platforms. These will not only make crossing the street easier for pedestrians, but also would provide the necessary outdoor seating space. Another solution would be to help existing restaurants remodel their facades by installing large folding doors opening to the street. In such a way the atmosphere of outdoor dining could be achieved without actually placing tables on the sidewalk.

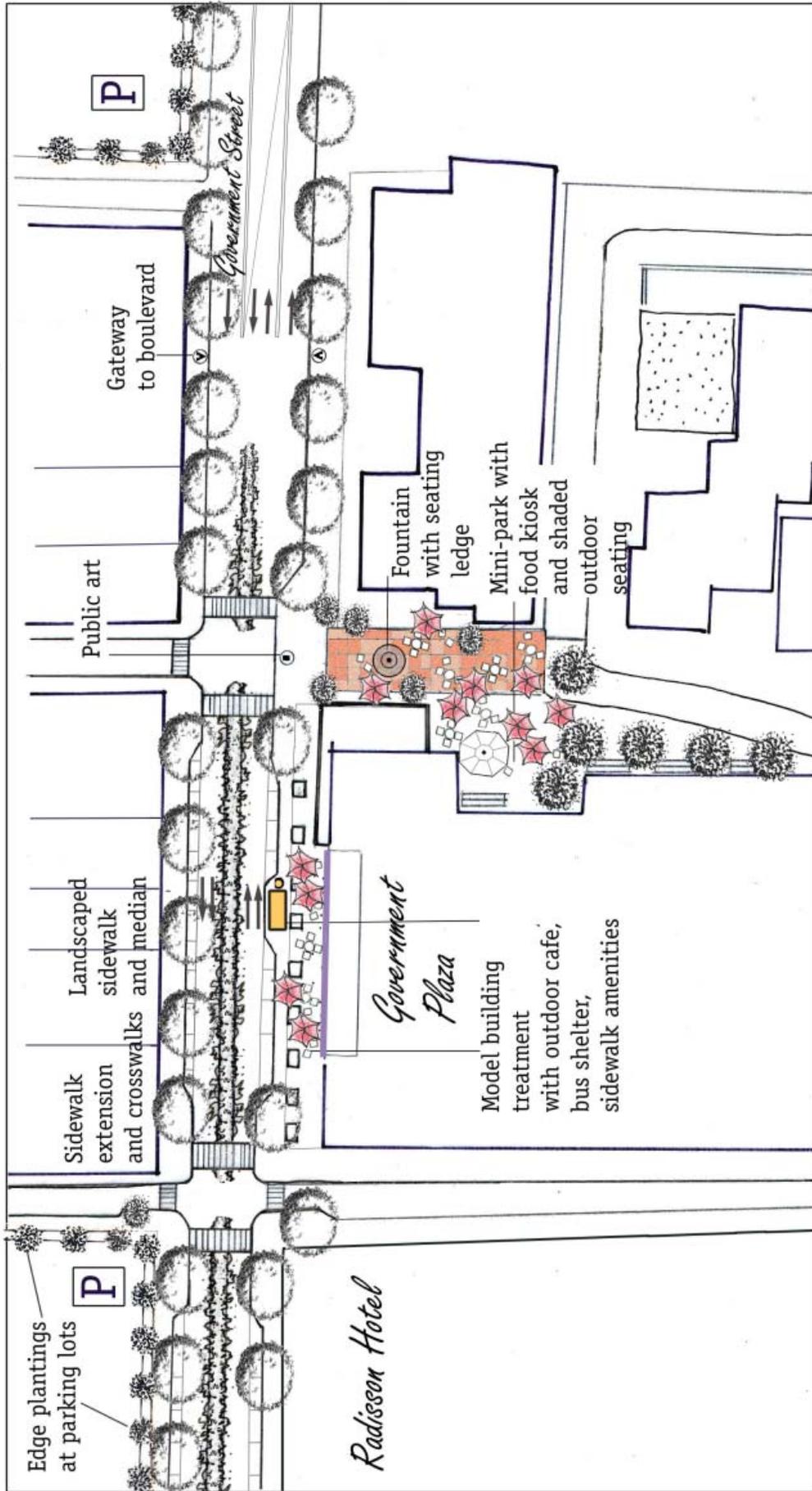
5. **Improve pedestrian circulation and provide additional on-street parking.** Corner and mid-block sidewalk extensions on Dauphin Street would not only slow-down traffic without affecting the street's capacity, but also make it safer and easier for pedestrians to cross the street. In addition, the extensions would provide space for the outdoor dining mentioned above. New and existing crosswalks should be re-striped to make them more visible to both motorists and pedestrians.

On-street parking should be allowed on both sides of Dauphin Street wherever possible. Additional on-street parking spaces could be located within the curb extensions without affecting the street's capacity.

6. **Create an overall street-management program.** Such a program should address regular street and sidewalk clean-up, trash pick-up, sidewalk repair and maintenance, and proposed improvements to landscaping and street amenities. Civic groups and businesses could be encouraged to adopt planters on Dauphin Street, and keep areas of the street clean. The street management program could also deal with on-street parking, like enforcing a two-hour limit for on-street parking, making sure local business employees park in off-street parking lots, and imposing time restrictions for delivery trucks.

Management of the street should also include activities and other kinds of sidewalk retail, namely street artists and street performers; sidewalk art outside Dauphin's museums and galleries; and upgraded sidewalk retail displays.

Government Plaza: A Demonstration Building



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Government Street

Government Plaza



Government Street

Goal: Make Government Street a pedestrian-friendly street and use Government Plaza to showcase how a large mixed-use building could be designed to relate well to the street and serve as a catalyst for change in the community.

Government Street is heavily dominated by vehicular traffic. Although the street has wide sidewalks, it is not pedestrian-friendly, due to the wide roadway and fast moving traffic. Lack of crosswalks, poorly timed pedestrian lights, and speed limits that are neither enforced nor supported by street design make the street very difficult for pedestrians.

The entrance to the downtown at the tunnel is virtually unmarked and contributes nothing to the image of the city. This section of the street is severely over-designed and underused, with four lanes each way - three lanes coming out of the tunnel and a fourth lane for right turns only, which is underused even during rush hours.

There have been some positive efforts to re-green the street, including as the newly planted trees in front of the Radisson hotel and the planted edge of the parking lot on the corner of Government and Joachim Streets. That same parking lot is the site of the very successful Saturday farmer's market. This location however, is far from ideal for the market. Although it is accessible to drivers, the vicinity is deserted, especially on weekends, and thus the market is missing the opportunity to activate the surrounding area.

Opportunities:

1. **Transform Government Street into a boulevard** by implementing model traffic-calming improvements aimed at making the street more pedestrian-friendly: This can be achieved by:
 - Transforming Government Street into an urban boulevard, rather than simply a highway and tunnel exit, by adding large shade trees on both sides of the street (just like on Water Street), a planted median (where possible), and consistent gateway features announcing to drivers their arrival downtown.
 - Designating crosswalks along the entire length of Government Street, from Water to Broad Streets. At key locations, especially at Joachim Street and Conception Street, the crosswalk should be re-done, either raised or textured, to assure pedestrian safety. Additionally, at these two intersections, the sidewalks could be extended, shortening the crosswalk distance and slowing vehicles down.



Government Street



Prague, Czech Republic



Government Street



San Antonio, TX



Government Plaza



San Francisco, CA

- Adjusting pedestrian-light signal timing to accommodate pedestrians, rather than speeding vehicles. Roadway lane widths could be revised in order to reduce speed through design instead of by posting a speed limit that is neither respected nor enforced.
- Reconfiguring road lanes to accommodate on-street parking at Government Plaza and up to Water Street. Parking spaces could be located within the extensions wherever sidewalk extensions are applied.
- Reconfiguring lane widths and reducing the number of lanes to allow for the introduction/extension of a raised landscaped median. The median would provide a visual buffer from vehicles and act as a pedestrian safety island, which would make crossing the street easier. Since sidewalks in that area are quite wide, and reducing lane widths would provide more sidewalk space, landscaped green buffers could be used to screen the sidewalks from vehicles.

2. **Re-design the ground floor of Government Plaza** as a model space showcasing ideas for how new development could function at the street level. Ideas should include outdoor seating, consisting of both benches and moveable chairs outside of the building's cafeteria, and opening the building to the street.

The redesign could also incorporate a model transit stop at Government Plaza. The transit stop should have a sidewalk extension, a shelter, and good directional and route signage. MODA needs places to go and places to stop. Government Plaza could become an opportunity for showcasing a destination and transit stop that interacts with other sidewalk uses. This model could be used to create a citywide partnership with transit to transform the city's transportation network.

In addition to outdoor seating at the cafeteria, more street vendors or a food kiosk should be encouraged to locate in the existing plaza across from Conception Street. This area could be activated with a fountain, an outdoor eating area, public art displays facing Government Street, and benches with umbrellas and trees for shade.

Additional pedestrian amenities could include bike racks, trash and recycling receptacles, flowers, planters and shade trees. These should be added not only to the plaza area, but also consistently along Government Street in appropriate locations.



Government Street



New York City



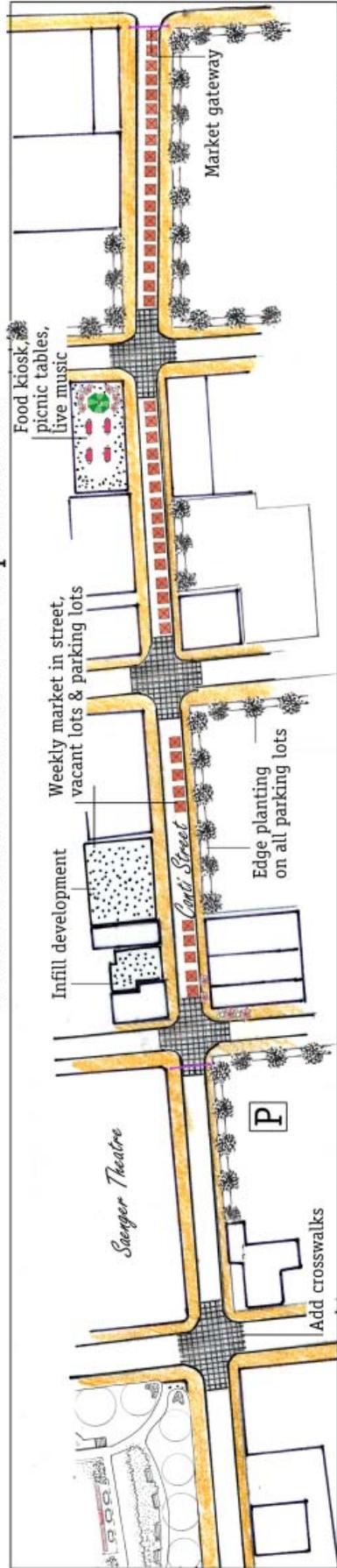
Zurich, Switzerland



New York City

3. **Develop both temporary measures and a long-term strategy for improving at least the ground floors of the vacant building directly across the street from Government Plaza.** This part of Government Street, which is used mostly by office workers getting to and from their offices, is perceived as being unsafe in the evenings. Although there is activity inside the government building, there is little street life even during the day and the vacant buildings across the street make the area stark and deserted at the street level. There is a real opportunity for government to act as a leader in this area, particularly in showing what good ground level architecture and uses can do for a street.
4. **All parking lots facing Government Street should receive a consistent planted edge treatment** similar to the one on the corner of Joachim Street. In addition to landscaped buffers and contextual historic fencing, the treatment should include consolidating curb cuts, which would create safe pedestrian linkages between the parking lot and the sidewalk.

Conti Street: Recommended Improvements



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Conti Street



Conti Street

Goal: Facilitate Conti Street's development as a historic, artistic, and pedestrian-oriented street through collaborating with artists, developing "alternative" programs and events, beautifying the area, and creating new housing.

Despite its vacant storefronts, unattractive parking lots, vacant lots, and prolific curb cuts, Conti Street has great potential to be a charming pedestrian-oriented street. With creative thought given to new attractions to draw pedestrians, combined with the recently upgraded sidewalks and lights, it could easily be transformed into an ideal walking and shopping street.

Conti Street is a strategic connector in downtown Mobile, linking several major anchors - Cathedral Square, the Saenger Theatre, and the Adam's Mark. It is also a shortcut for office workers to get downtown from their parked cars. Add to these advantages the fact that there are some lovely historic buildings and a few good ground floor uses - the coffee shop on the corner of Joachim Street, Loretta's restaurant - Conti Street should be

seen as a place to expand Mobile's existing retail core. This could be the best place in downtown Mobile to try to develop an artsy and hip identity, in collaboration with local artists. The City should initiate some of the following suggestions, while other recommendations will depend on a close collaboration with artists and arts groups. There also needs to be a willingness by the City to step back in some cases and give these groups the freedom to try new things that might seem unconventional.

Opportunities

1. **Develop a series of street markets and other events to bring new activity and support existing retail.** A weekend street market, preferably related to arts, crafts, and performance as well as food, would lend more identity to Conti Street and capitalize on its key location downtown. It could be combined with the existing farmer's market, which could be relocated from the parking lot on Government Street to Conti Street, where it would have a more beneficial impact on businesses. In its current location, an empty parking lot without adjacent uses, the farmers-market has little opportunity to serve as a catalyst. Other aspects to this market should include:

- Artists and crafts-people selling and exhibiting their work;



Conti Street



SOHO, New York City



Street fair - Montpelier, VT



Union Square, New York City



Conti Street



St. Augustine, FL

- Vendors of prepared foods, such as ethnic food, burgers, soul food and other southern specialties. These vendors should be concentrated around Conti's pocket park, where picnic tables could be located to make it attractive for families and those having lunch;
- Live music and other entertainment, which should also be located near the food and picnic tables;
- Outdoor eating areas and display stands outside the existing cafés, restaurants, and shops on or near Conti Street. Likewise, the Saenger Theatre could have information on upcoming events;
- Some items that would be attractive to tourists, such as local food, hot sauces, and the like. This is especially appropriate since Conti Street terminates at the Adam's Mark Hotel and many of its rooms look out over Conti Street.

2. Develop a plan for ground-floor uses for what this area could become in the future.

Besides retail uses, ground floors should include uses related to the biggest anchor on the street - the Saenger Theatre. Actor studios, art studios, performance, exhibit and rehearsal spaces, and other similar uses should be encouraged to locate in nearby buildings. This could create an "art" corridor along Conti Street, making it a funky alternative street.

3. Improve the parking lots that give the street such a forlorn appearance.

The large number of parking lots breaks the continuity of the retail experience and gives the impression of a vehicle-dominated street. Therefore, parking lot fences should be upgraded and generous garden edges (minimum 6' wide) should be planted wherever parking lots meet the sidewalk. Especially at the Royal and Conti parking lot, the edge between cars and the sidewalk needs to be improved and landscaped, adding flowers, and possibly, benches and banners. One idea for how these and other improvements could be implemented is a concept that might be titled "In Our Own Backyard" and emerged during PPS' discussion with the Main Street Mobile board in July 2002.

In Our Own Backyard would seek to treat parking lots as potential sites for public art projects involving local artists and school students from every neighborhood. Different schools and/or neighborhoods would decorate fences along the edges of the lots in different ways, and a series of events would be developed related to these events.

The following are thoughts for discussion on how this might work:

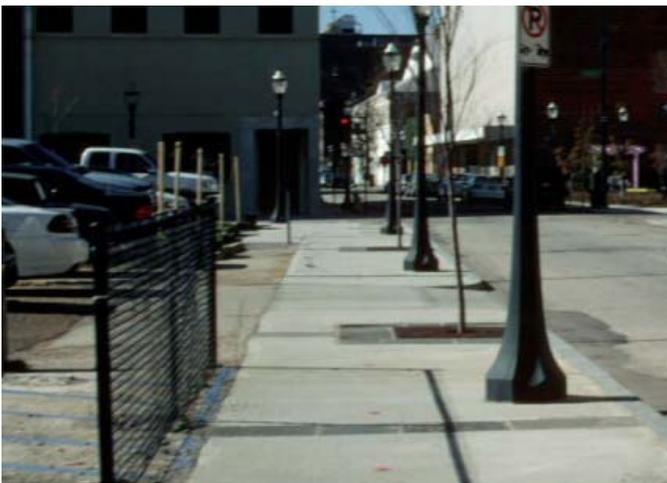
- A company like Home Depot might donate enough picket fences and gates to edge



Conti Street



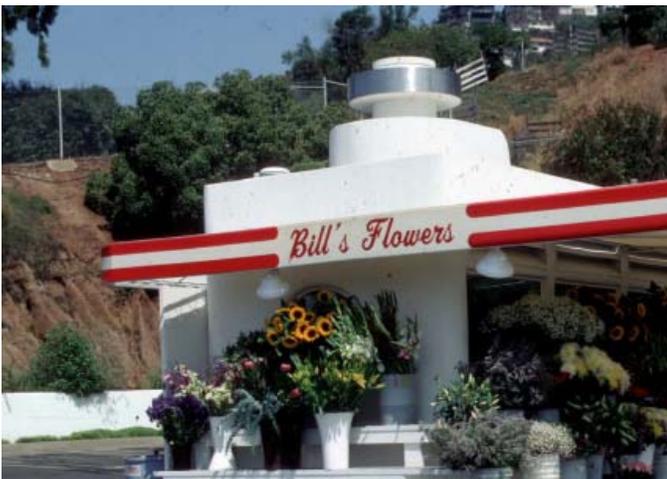
Flower stand - San Diego, CA



Conti Street



Oakland, CA



San Diego, CA



Ventura, CA

all the street frontage of Conti Street's parking lots;

- Neighborhood and downtown institutions might sponsor each section of fence to pay for materials and raise money for related improvements;
- Artists could work with Mobile schools to help develop and implement different concepts for different sections of the fences;
- A series of "backyard events" could be held in the parking lots and along Conti Street after the fences are completed. Among these happenings could be barbecues; ping pong and other games (e.g. full size chess); movies, music and other entertainment; school camping "trips", perhaps in conjunction with some museums; petting zoos; food vendors, lemonade stands, bake sales, and other fundraising stands for local organizations;
- An awards program could give prizes to the best sections of fence and a brochure, poster, or calendar created showing all the fences and naming the neighborhoods, schools, and artists that participated.

4. **Enhance Conti Street's historic character by building improvements and historic signage programs.** Some of the historic buildings on Conti Street are in need of a clean-up and repair. In some cases, utilities and HVAC equipment need screening to preserve the historic look (e.g. O'Gwynn building).

Although several of the historic buildings are marked with signs, a consistent historic signage program for the street could be used to mark and provide information about the destinations that are in the area. The informational signs should be located in several strategic places along Conti Street, and especially near the Adam's Mark Hotel in order to inform and draw visitors to the street and to downtown in general.

5. **Develop a housing program in this area that would provide constant regular street foot traffic.** This program should be closely developed with landlords and potential developers, and should aim to eliminate unnecessary bureaucratic red tape that may be hindering development along the street.

New development and re-development should focus on small, infill, mixed-use projects, possibly art-related, consistent with Conti Street as an art corridor. For example, the Gayfers building could be re-developed for residential use as affordable condos, rentals or live/work spaces for artists. Supportive retail development, such as a laundromat, grocery store, dry cleaners, and art supplies store should also be encouraged by giving incen-



Conti Street



Venice Beach, FL



Conti Street



Rockford, IL



Portland, OR

tives (e.g. tax breaks, small business and capital improvement loans) to both landlords to rent vacant properties, and to appropriate tenants to locate in the area.

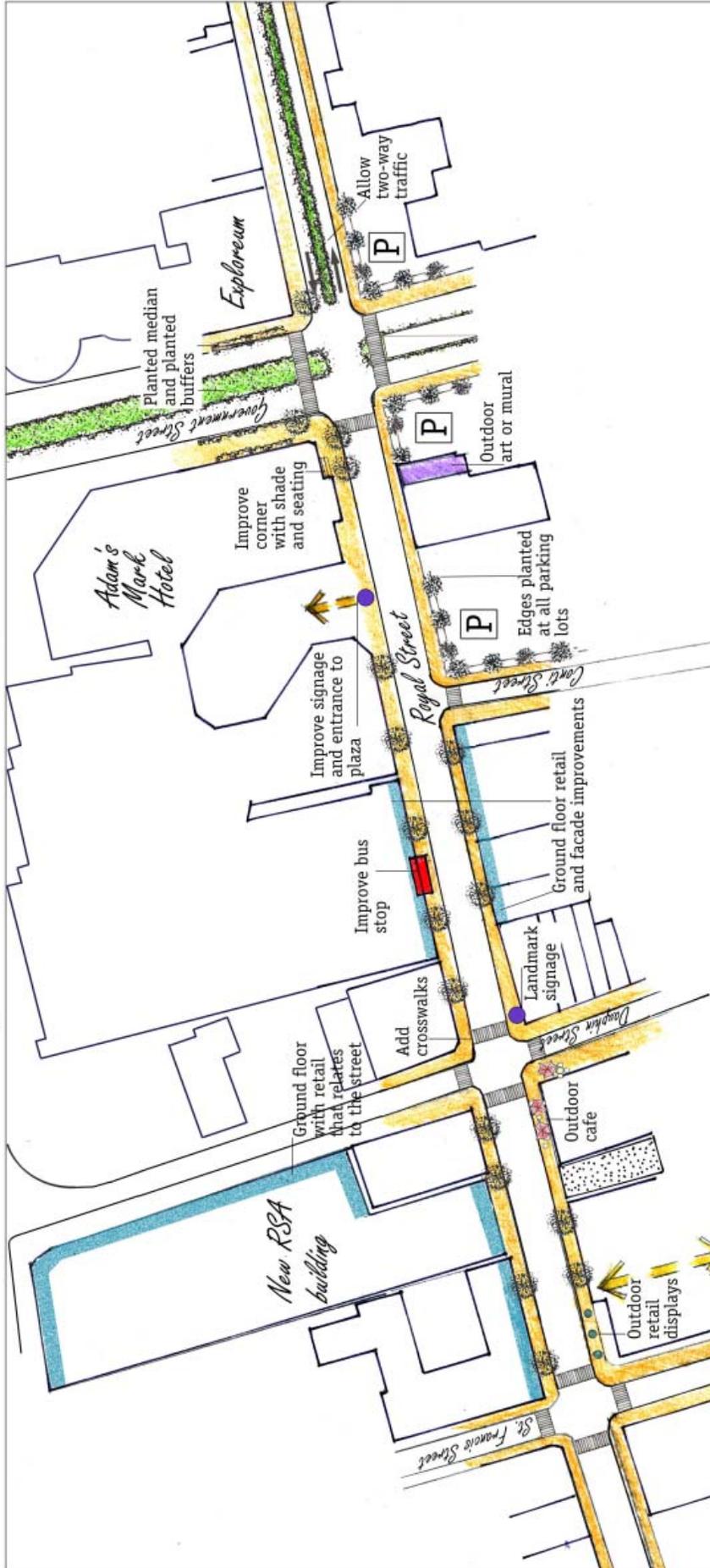
6. Work with area art organizations to promote other cultural arts events along Conti Street. Identify organizations that would sponsor a variety of "alternative" programs throughout the year, such as:

- An outdoor film series projected onto the side of one of the buildings, accompanied by small-scale sales of food and drink;
- A changing mural program on the blank building walls on Conti Street;
- Special outdoor art exhibits and temporary art installations along the street and in vacant lots;
- Educational seminars for artists on how to obtain live/work spaces downtown, how to submit materials to Mobile's public art program, and so on.

7. Improve pedestrian circulation and provide additional on-street parking. In order to make Conti Street safe for pedestrians, raised speed-table crosswalks could be installed at each intersection, starting at Cathedral Place. Such a treatment will give consistency and a truly pedestrian feel to the street.

On-street parking should be allowed on both sides of Conti Street wherever possible.

Royal Street: Recommended Improvements



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SPACES, INC.
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NEW YORK, NY 10014
TELEPHONE: (212) 625-5600
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Royal Street



Royal Street

Goal: Make sure that all future development on Royal Street relates architecturally to the existing historic building and contributes to the retail continuity of the street.

Royal Street has a number of existing and proposed business anchors including the Adam's Mark Hotel, AmSouth offices, the Exploreum, and the proposed RSA building. There are also a few nice shops, small businesses and attractive historic buildings. Although the newer construction, such as the Adam's Mark Hotel, has brought people to the area, unfortunately it has not helped to turn Royal Street into an economically viable or busy street. There are reasons for this, among them that the Adam's Mark is turned inward, with blank ground-floor façades on both Water and Royal Streets, and its Royal Street entrance and lobby are set back from the sidewalk behind a courtyard. All effort should be made to ensure that the new RSA building is not designed using the same principles.

Although vehicle traffic is slower in this area, and the street is easy to cross, pedestrian traffic is very light.

Opportunities

1. **Develop a plan for the envisioned retail mix on Royal Street.** The street has a poor mix, but great potential because of the location of the street in relation to tourists (at the Convention Center and the Adam's Mark Hotel), as well as the number of employees in the area. In addition, the RSA will bring even more workers to the area.
2. **Apply the guidelines for new development, as described in the overall recommendations.** These guidelines should also help guide the retrofitting of certain existing buildings. For example, a redesign of landscaping at the AmSouth Center and the Adam's Mark should include removing existing hedges and opening spaces to the sidewalk, installing tables and chairs, and making the courtyards visible from the street with signage and other visual references.
3. **Encourage use of the street and parking areas for outdoor dining or displays, as described in the overall recommendations.** For example Drayton Place could be expanded with outdoor seating by eliminating three parking spaces and putting tables and umbrellas on the sidewalk and in the street.



Royal Street



Fairhope, AL



Fairhope, AL



Fairhope, AL



Royal Street bus stop



Bus stop - Corpus Christi, TX

4. **Improve the streetscape, using signage, art, plantings, and amenities.** Benches, bike racks and seating designed by artists could be introduced as a new streetscape program. The bus stop at Royal Street between Conti and Dauphin Streets needs to be redesigned, made more user-friendly and furnished with interesting useful amenities. The corner of the Adam's Mark Hotel at Government Street needs some amenities - a bench, shade trees, landscaping, trash receptacles - as it is used as a pick-up/drop-off spot by hotel guests and employees.

Improved signage and a directory of existing landmarks and attractions should be applied to the overall street. All these amenities could be commissioned as an art project.

5. **Improve pedestrian and vehicular circulation, and provide additional on-street parking.** In order to make Royal Street pedestrian-friendly, existing crosswalks should be re-striped and new ones installed on each intersection, and particularly on Dauphin and Government Streets.

On-street parking should be allowed on both sides of Royal Street wherever possible. Parking lot edges should be lavishly planted and consistently treated with fencing and consolidated curb cuts.

Royal Street should be open for two-way traffic north of Government Street with one moving lane in each direction. Any remaining roadway space could be converted into a small planted median.

Water Street: Recommended Improvements



Water Street



Water Street

Goal: To transform Water Street from a highway into a grand urban boulevard with pedestrian amenities and gateway features at both ends of the boulevard clearly marking the entrance to Downtown Mobile.

Currently Water Street looks and functions more like a highway than an important downtown street. Water Street connects to both I-10 and I-165, and its design and vehicular speeds don't differ significantly from the highways. The street is very wide, over 100' in most areas, with 3 to 4 lanes of fast-moving traffic in both directions and a wide, under-used median. Coming off I-10, vehicles speed along Water

Street, disregarding speed limit signs, and essentially bypassing downtown Mobile at 45 - 50 miles per hour. Neither the design of the roadway nor that of the sidewalks and buildings along Water Street conveys to motorists that they have entered downtown, and that they should adjust their speed and behavior accordingly.

In addition, the automobile-oriented design of major anchors along Water Street - the IMAX / Exploreum, the Adam's Mark, and the Convention Center - does little to invite commuters to stop downtown, or even slow down.

Opportunities

1. **Transform Water Street into an urban boulevard with a clear transition from highway to an urban pedestrian streetscape.** If Water Street is to become anything more than a highway, speeding needs to be dramatically reduced. Although the official speed limit along Water Street is 35 mph, the current design of the roadway does not promote reduced speeds and even the most law-abiding motorists tend to disregard the speed limit. We propose that the number of lanes and lane widths on Water Street, between Government and Beauregard Streets, be reduced to create a design that slows traffic without reducing the road's capacity, and to make for a better pedestrian experience. Instead of the current 3 + 1 turn lanes in each direction, we propose a 2-lane configuration, with a turn lane where necessary. In addition, lane widths should be reduced from 11' to 10'. The gained space should be used to extend the median on the east side of Water Street, to extend the sidewalks on the west side, and to add on-street parking. Street signage should be treated differently on the boulevard, where green highway signs should not be used.



Water Street



Mexico City



Water Street



Aukland, NZ



Water Street



Second level cafe - New York City

We propose applying a park-like treatment to the sidewalks to change the general perception of the street and slow traffic. Such treatment should include generous plantings of large shade trees and gardens to buffer the sidewalk from vehicles and signal to drivers to slow down, pedestrian level lights and banners, and parallel parking. This park treatment should continue at least as far as Beauregard, and preferably beyond (following Beauregard). One additional advantage to this linear park is to tie in the waterfront park with the city by making it more visible and using parks to change the balance between cars and pedestrians.

The existing medians should become another section of the linear park described above, planted with lush vegetation and trees. At crosswalks, the median should be designed for easy access from the sidewalks, with textured paving and bump-outs planted with additional landscaping to help tie both sides of the street together, with the median as a refuge in the middle. Art on the median should be of a scale that is suitable for both pedestrians and vehicles. In addition, it should have more lights and banners at heights that will not be obscured by the trees.

- 3. Change the relationship to the street of existing anchors/institutions along Water Street.** As recommended for the intersection of Water and Government Streets, all buildings on Water Street need to enhance their public spaces fronting the street. The Government Street gateway is particularly prominent and benefits from the fact that such major civic institutions occupy it, but every building on Water Street needs to make improvements to support the notion that this is a dignified boulevard that has pedestrian attractions.

If the vision for Water Street as a boulevard is to become a reality, the City should consider a special zoning overlay for Water Street to require that future developers consider carefully how they design for this street.

C. New Development

Blank walls are an end in themselves; they proclaim the power of the institution, the inconsequence of the individual, whom they are clearly meant to put down, if not intimidate.

William H. Whyte

Proposed Federal Courthouse Building

Goal: To develop a project that is both a positive anchor for this part of town and a positive transition to the surrounding neighborhood.

The location for the new Federal Courthouse building is its biggest challenge. The site is located between an existing downtown neighborhood with historic houses on both St. Anthony and Conception Streets. Lined with historic buildings and lovely trees, the neighborhood has a character that makes it special. A new building of this magnitude is not good for downtown by definition: it is only good for downtown if it is designed right. In this case, it means designing it with attractive ground-floor uses (such as retail), architecture that shows consideration of the historic context, and respect for human scale.

In its extensive work providing technical assistance to the GSA in more than 30 cities across the U.S., PPS has observed that public buildings, such as offices, courthouses, post offices, and transit facilities, are all too often "public" in name only. In enhancing public buildings there needs to be an integration of both their interior and outdoor public spaces, safely, within their communities, so that they become dynamic presences that both attract and serve their users well. Working to build positive connections between these buildings and their communities and to site them in central locations, PPS recognizes their potential to provide community identity, comfort, and convenience, as well as to strengthen and embellish their surrounding locales. Should anyone argue that neighborhood-friendly GSA buildings cannot be built with today's public safety concerns, we refer them to the Center for Urban Development, a branch of the GSA that is wholly devoted to the above concepts. The Center has worked on some of the most high-profile buildings in the U.S. and Washington.

Opportunities

- 1. Make short-term pedestrian and public-space improvements in the area around the proposed Federal Courthouse building prior to its construction.** Currently there is a poor pedestrian environment between the downtown and the neighborhood on St. Louis Street, where sidewalks are in disrepair. Before the new Federal Courthouse building is built, improvements to the existing infrastructure could be made to signal to the Mobile community that the GSA is serious about creating a building and environment that is pedestrian-friendly. For example, existing sidewalks could be repaired, landscaping could be upgraded, and sidewalk amenities, such as high quality light fixtures, benches, and trash receptacles could be installed.

The existing tree cover should be retained and protected and new street trees planted now, before construction begins (trees would be mature by time building comes on line).

Overall utilities could be consolidated and made more attractive through small improvements before construction begins.

- 2. Develop a plan for the ground-floor uses or opportunities for adaptive re-use of existing area buildings.** Guidelines for new development, street, and related public spaces could be developed to ensure that the area evolves into a pedestrian-oriented place. These guidelines should include location of entrances on the street, e.g. entrances to the Mobile Register building and the new Federal Courthouse building should be located directly on the street, as to encourage people to walk to restaurants, and other destinations downtown.

In addition, the plan could provide incentives for property owners and new businesses to locate in buildings adjacent to the proposed Federal Courthouse site. 450 federal employees will be located in the new building, which will not have a cafeteria in it, and local businesses should take advantage of this opportunity. Alternatively, retail could be incorporated into the new building with a condition that it be accessible directly from the street and open to non-employees.

The Ship Chandlery building should be preserved and developed for adaptive re-use. The building should be kept to ease the transition between the surrounding residential area and the Federal Courthouse building.

New public art objects could be introduced: interactive sculptures and art benches, fountains, bike racks, drinking fountains, trash receptacles, and so on.

- 3. Develop a plan for street and roadway improvements prior to construction.** St. Louis Street could become a two-way street. This is an opportunity as several development sites are along it. Conception Street between the buildings, which should remain open to traffic, could also be converted to a two-way street.

In addition, extending the MODA line on Conception Street up to the Mobile Register building could create a link between the building and Bienville Square.

Examples of successful public art



Aachen, Germany



Paris, France



Cincinnati, OH



Zurich, Switzerland



Aachen, Germany



Temporary art - Paris, France

RSA Building

Goal: To develop a project that will have a positive impact on the way downtown Mobile looks and functions from a pedestrian standpoint, and to further the goal of transforming Water Street into an urban boulevard.

The new RSA tower is one of the many exciting new downtown development projects that are planned or already underway. Together with the new federal courthouse that the General Services Administration is building, the new Maritime Center, and the renovated GM&O Station, the RSA Tower has the potential of becoming a major catalyst in the revitalization of the entire downtown.

Opportunities

- 1. Create ground-floor uses, access, and information points that contribute to a pedestrian-friendly environment both on Dauphin and Water Streets.** In order for the new RSA building to have the impact that everyone hopes for, its ground-floor uses and design should be considered carefully. The layout and configuration of ground floor uses - retail, entranceways, lobbies, location of driveways, HVAC systems, and parking entrances - should be done to contribute to the vision for the adjacent streets as active, pedestrian-oriented places.
- 2. Encourage as much ground-floor retail facing the street as possible.** We recommend locating retail along both Water and Dauphin Streets - even if it is only a café or information kiosk surrounded by a garden with outdoor seating. Ideally all retail and service shops would face the streets directly instead of being located away from the street within an arcade or within the building lobby. The new RSA building should not repeat the mistake of many of the recent buildings in downtown, like the AmSouth, Adam's Mark hotel, or even the Convention Center, which although attractive from a distance, do not have active uses at the ground level that contribute to the street, and instead have retail spaces internalized within the buildings.

The RSA building has the potential to become a catalyst for the revitalization and transformation of downtown, and missing such an opportunity could be devastating for Mobile.

Examples of pedestrian-friendly ground-floor uses



Santa Monica, CA



New York City



Old Pasadena, CA



New York City

Examples of pedestrian-friendly ground-floor uses



Santa Monica, CA



New York City



Rockefeller Center, New York City



Rockefeller Center, New York City



Vancouver, BC



Vancouver, BC

IV. Conclusion

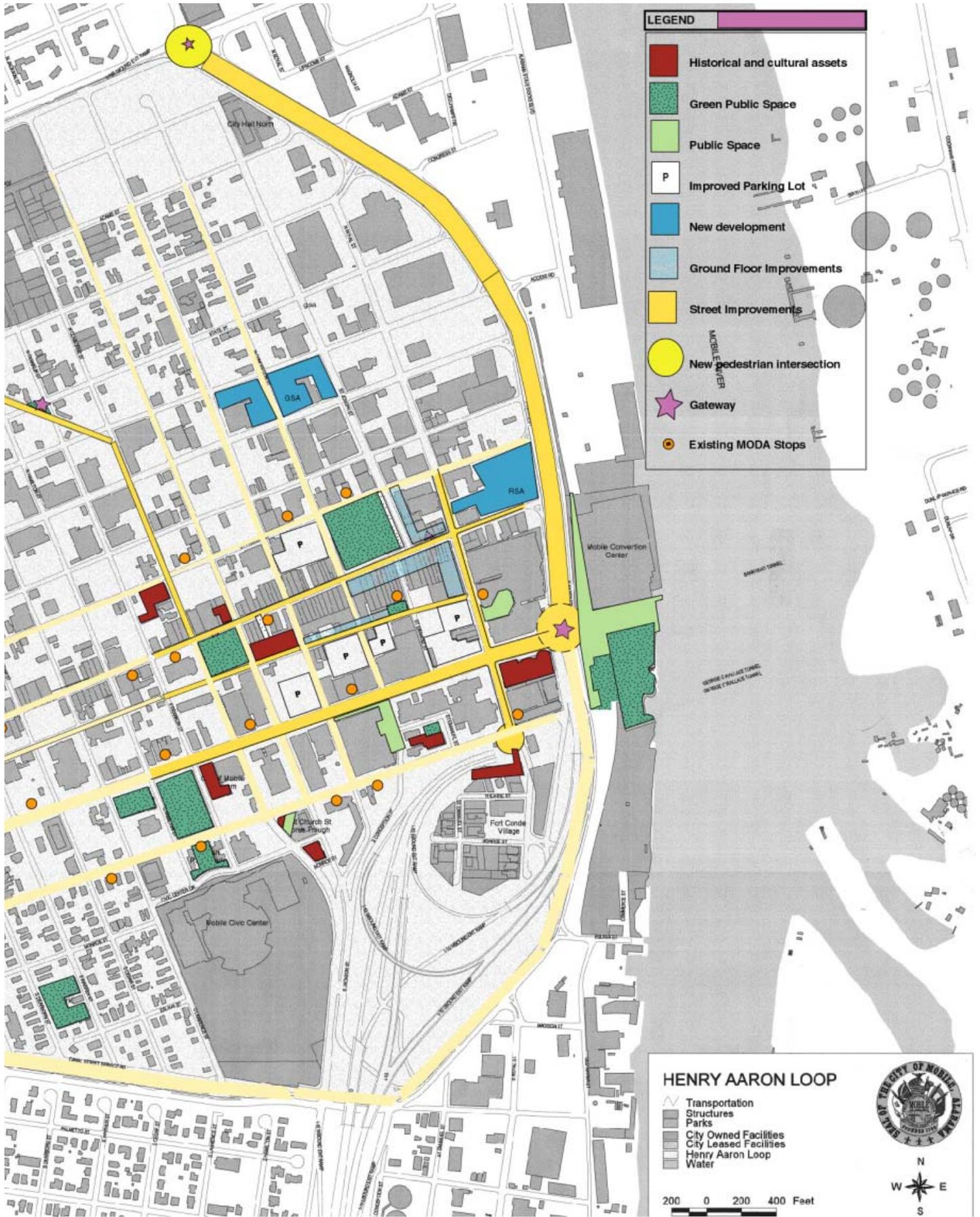
Mobilizing Mobile

It is vital that the effort to revitalize Mobile's public spaces, and downtown in general, spring from many places. No one should be given the opportunity to say that they were waiting for some other agency to act. Thus, while leadership from the public sector is essential, others need to take action without always depending on the city. The private and nonprofit sectors, specifically, including potential new retail and market entities, arts groups, and all other potential groups, need to be encouraged to capitalize on the opportunities at hand.

Mobile has huge potential, inherent charm, and a ferociously loyal citizenry to engage. The effort to spark a new interest in downtown has to be undertaken as a multi-pronged campaign that has elements to excite many audiences. This may mean widely broadcasting report recommendations in brochures and posters, appealing to every downtown civic group to put a discussion of public spaces on its agenda, and starting with public events like In Our Own Backyard or outdoor movies and markets. Immediate, visible change is paramount to building a sense among Mobilians that something exciting is happening...and that it is just a beginning on which to build.

Once change has begun, there will be a diversity of opportunities to continue the conversation about what steps will make the best of Mobile's public space. These opportunities are the crux of making change happen: when people express an interest in the changes that are occurring, they must be harnessed for their excitement and their involvement. Every meeting or forum should have a sign-in sheet so participants can be kept abreast of events and initiatives through e-newsletters or called upon for volunteering. Forums such as the one suggested for the "evening economy" should continue to evolve the concepts outlined here. Outdoor picnics can occur to kick-off community meetings about how people can contribute to re-making downtown, or there are even precedents of "conversation cafes" that can be organized outdoors around topics like site-specific public art projects, what kinds of new businesses to recruit for downtown, and so on, according to need.

As Margaret Wheatley writes in a recent *Utne Reader*, "There is no more powerful way to initiate significant social change than to start a conversation. When a group of people discovers that they share a common concern, that's when the process of change begins.... Change doesn't happen from a leader announcing the plan. Change begins from deep inside a system, when a few people notice something they will no longer tolerate, or when they respond to someone's dream of what's possible."



LEGEND

- Historical and cultural assets
- Green Public Space
- Public Space
- P Improved Parking Lot
- New development
- Ground Floor Improvements
- Street Improvements
- ★ New pedestrian intersection
- ★ Gateway
- Existing MODA Stops

HENRY AARON LOOP

- Transportation
- Structures
- Parks
- City Owned Facilities
- City Leased Facilities
- Henry Aaron Loop
- Water

200 0 200 400 Feet

Seal of the City of Mobile, Alabama, featuring a central figure and the text "SEAL OF THE CITY OF MOBILE ALABAMA 1800".

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