

# Florence Neighborhood Action Plan

East Florence • North Florence • Northwest Florence • Downtown Florence



**Final Report**  
**January 2013**



in association with



and

**Planners for Environmental Quality**  
**APD Urban Planning and Management**

# Florence Neighborhood Action Plan

East Florence • North Florence • Northwest Florence • Downtown Florence

## Final Report

January 2013

### City of Florence

#### City Council

Stephen J. Wukela, Mayor

Teresa Myers Ervin, District 1

Edward Robinson, District 2

Buddy Brand, District 3

Glynn F. Willis, At-Large

Octavia Williams-Blake, At-Large

Robby L. Hill, At-Large

#### City Staff

Drew Griffin, City Manager

Phillip Lookadoo, Urban Planning & Development Director

Scotty Davis, Community Services Director

Kendra Cobbs, Planner II

### URS Corporation

Ernie Boughman, Senior Project Manager

Trey Hodges, Project Manager

### Planners for Environmental Quality

Inga Kennedy, President

James Davis, Planner

### APD Urban Planning and Management

Warren Campbell, Senior Project Manager

Glenda Matute, Urban Design Manager

# Table of Contents

---

Introduction.....	1
Public Planning Process .....	3
Neighborhood Priority Needs.....	10
Improvement Strategies.....	13
Path Forward .....	37

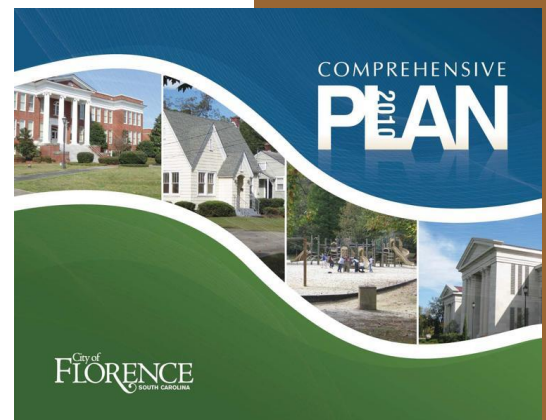
## List of Figures

<u>Figure</u>	<u>Page</u>
Figure 1 Neighborhood Planning Areas .....	2
Figure 2 East Florence Issues and Strengths .....	7
Figure 3 North Florence Issues and Strengths .....	8
Figure 4 Northwest Florence Issues and Strengths .....	9



## Introduction

Following the completion of its Comprehensive Plan in 2010, the City of Florence desired to move quickly to realize key aspects of the plan. Central to its goals and objectives, the Comprehensive Plan promoted the revitalization, stabilization, and maintenance of the City's core neighborhoods. Further, it recommended reinstating a neighborhood planning program, which had been discontinued a number of years earlier. Building on the premise that individual neighborhood health and well being reflect the City's overall health and well being, the City determined to undertake a group of neighborhood action plans for its core communities.



While the City is very concerned about the quality and livability of all its neighborhoods, it was prudent to select a small number of neighborhoods to begin the initial phase of neighborhood planning. It is the intent of the City to utilize strategies realized and lessons learned from these first action plans to grow the neighborhood planning program to encompass all areas of the City. To that end, action plans were developed for four of the City's oldest and most challenged neighborhoods – East Florence, North Florence, Northwest Florence, and Downtown Florence. The boundaries and interrelationship of these neighborhoods is depicted graphically in **Figure 1**.

City leadership was adamant that action plans be developed by the citizens within the neighborhoods; this process would be City-supported, but not City-directed. The goal was to ensure that residents identify their greatest concerns and that the action plans directly address those concerns. Additionally, the City encouraged the consultant team to craft strategies that could be realistically implemented in an efficient and cost effective manner.

This report documents the public participation process that was undertaken, neighborhood priority needs that were identified, improvement strategies developed, and next steps for realizing neighborhood improvement.

*Residents developed the action plans.*

*The process was City-supported, but not City-directed.*

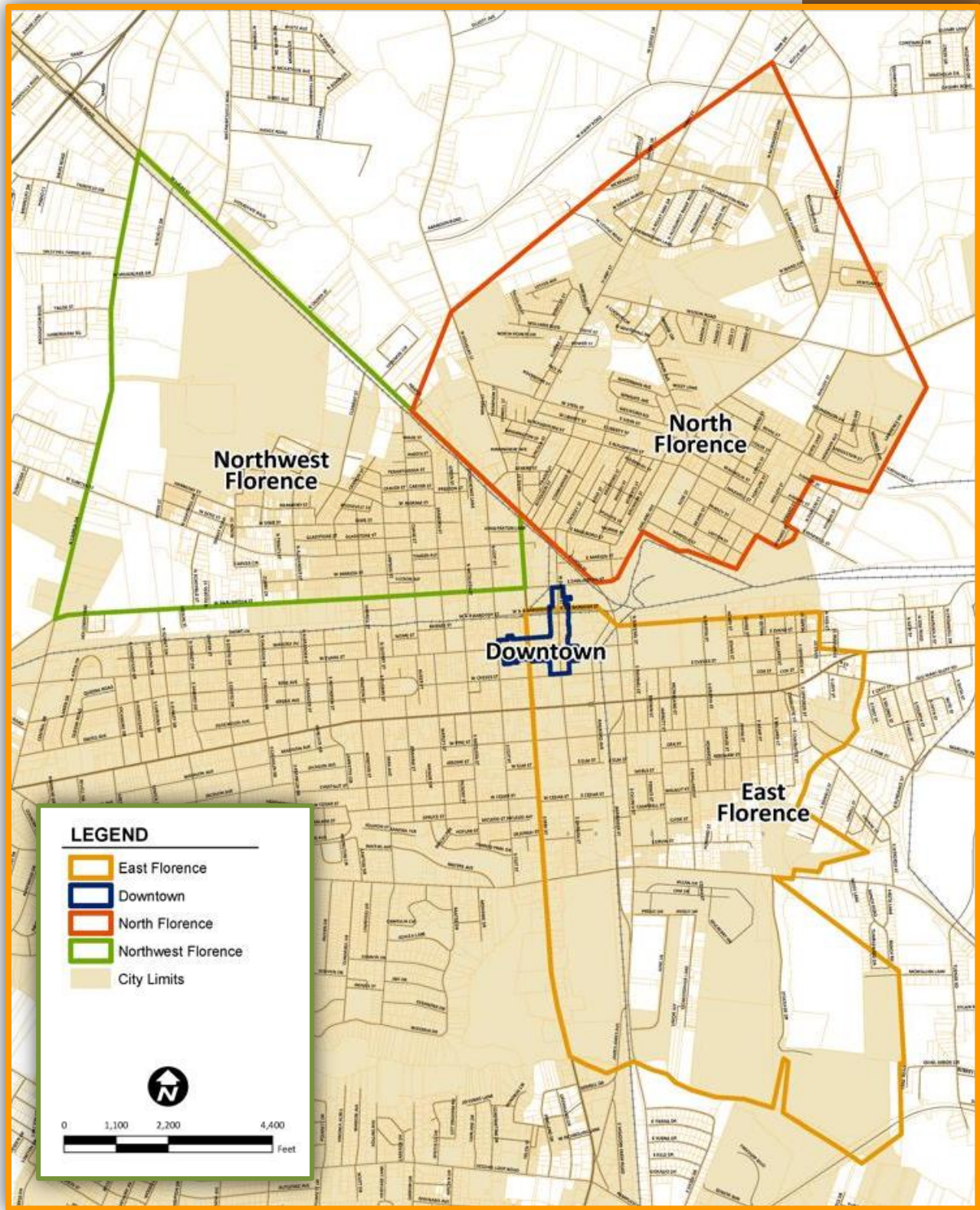


Figure 1: Neighborhood Planning Areas



## Public Planning Process

The foundation of action plan development was a robust and continuous public engagement program. Citizens were given multiple opportunities to get involved and all gatherings focused on their participation, their ideas for the future.

The process began with a meeting of neighborhood leadership to discuss broadly the challenges that face not only the individual neighborhoods but the City of Florence as a whole. The intent of the action plan process was presented and attendees were asked to answer three basic questions about their community.

### *What makes you proud of Florence?*

- People
- Neighborhoods
- How it has grown – positive changes/job opportunity
- Weather
- Location
- Potential – future development
- Connection of the people – both historically and changing with new people
- Good place for family – quality faith-based organizations
- Arts/Culture – entertainment (Pecan Festival, Florence After Five, etc.)
- Schools provide foundation – produce lots of professionals
- Development – make it an even better place
- Quality/proactive leadership
- Excitement/sense of community
- Service industry

*Each round of public outreach saw more and more people involved in the planning of their community.*

*If you could, what would you change about Florence?*

- Better transportation – transit
- Drainage – condition of streets
- After school enrichment activities
- Improve housing stock – eliminate abandoned houses
- Not In My Backyard (NIMBY)
- Improved streets and sidewalks
- Better lighting
- More education services and support for seniors and the disabled
- Enforce peaceful enjoyment ordinances/implement stronger ones
- Retain young people – provide opportunities
- Better communication between residents and city leaders/staff
- Better, more affordable entertainment
- More cultural diversity
- More environmentally friendly – “green”
- Bicycle facilities – “on-road lanes”

*What is your desire for the future of Florence?*

- One Florence – no segmentation
- Beautiful/attractive downtown – heart and soul of community
- “People are people”
- Stronger affordable housing/communities
- Redevelopment of blighted areas
- Working together to advance community goals
- Housing, streets, services
- Senior Centers
- Businesses back downtown
- Expansion of TIF District
- Quality two-way communications, education of the “way things work”
- Active faith-based community

***Schedule of Public Engagement Events***

**February 28, 2012**  
*Leadership Kick-off Meeting*

**March 22, 2012**  
*Neighborhood Tours*

**April 30-May 1, 2012**  
*Focus Sessions*

**June 18 & 21, 2012**  
*Public Meetings to Present Draft Strategies*

**September 26, 2012**  
*Council Work Session to Present Action Plan*

## *Citizen Guided Neighborhood Tours*



Following the neighborhood leadership kick-off meeting, additional members of the communities were asked to join their leadership in providing a guided tour of their neighborhoods. Downtown Florence was toured on foot, while East Florence, North Florence, and Northwest Florence tours were by bus. As tours progressed, residents took the opportunity to point out critical issues and major strengths of their respective neighborhoods. This provided crucial insight for the consultant team in recognizing the areas of improvement that were desired by the communities.



## Neighborhood Focus Sessions



Following the initial identification of neighborhood issues and strengths during the guided tours, individualized focus sessions were conducted with each neighborhood. Again the outreach was broadened to now involve all interested citizens from each community. Issues and strengths were presented in both text and mapped formats and participants were asked to add to the lists as appropriate to ensure that all areas of concern and pride were included. Then, once the lists were deemed complete, attendees were provided a series of sticker dots to “vote” on the highest priorities for each neighborhood.

**Figure 2, Figure 3, and Figure 4** present geographical representations of issues and strengths for East Florence, North Florence, and Northwest Florence, as documented during the focus sessions. Issues and strengths for Downtown Florence were more over-arching generalizations without specific locations, so no map was created for Downtown Florence.

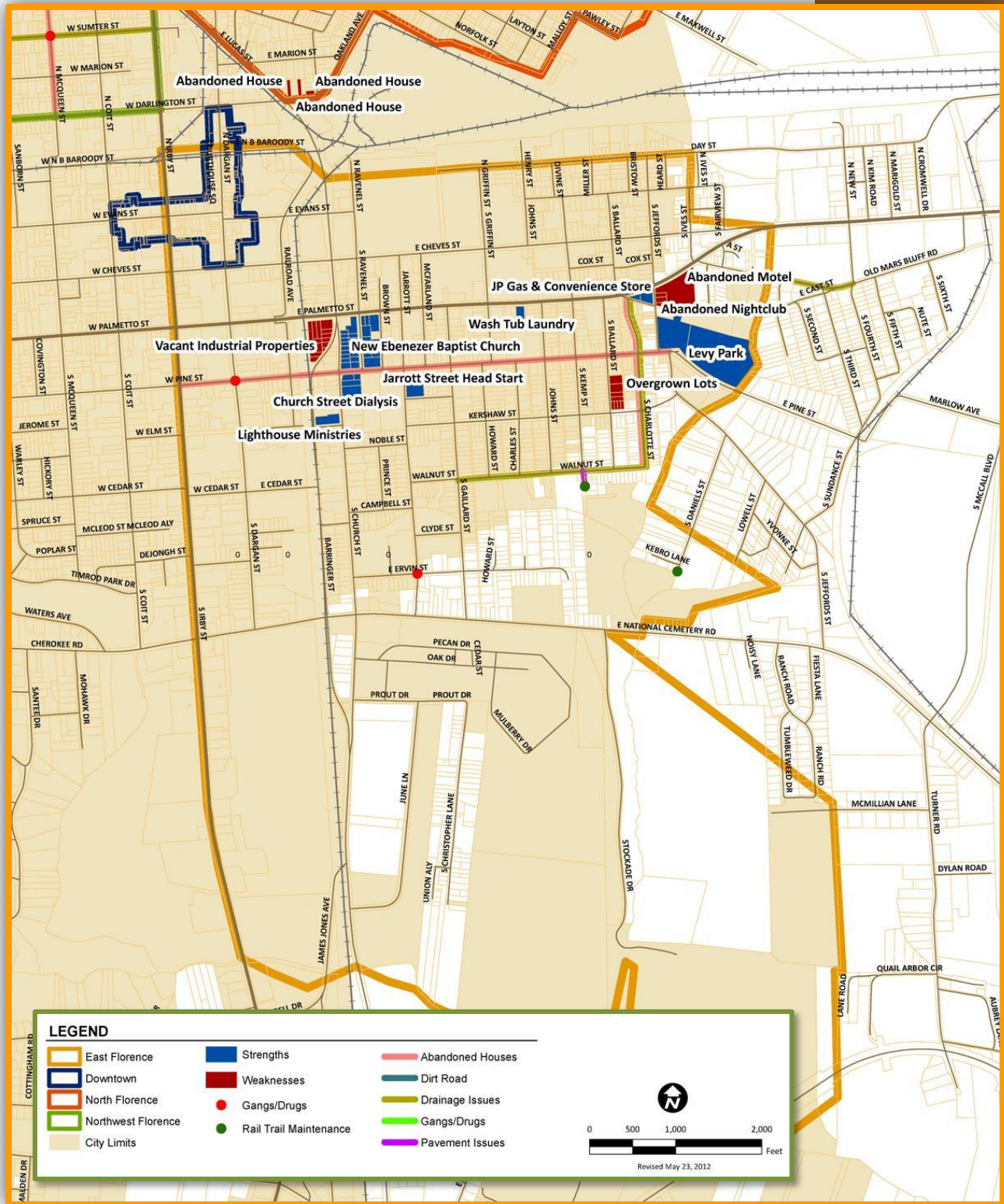


Figure 2: East Florence Issues and Strengths

# Florence Neighborhood Action Plan

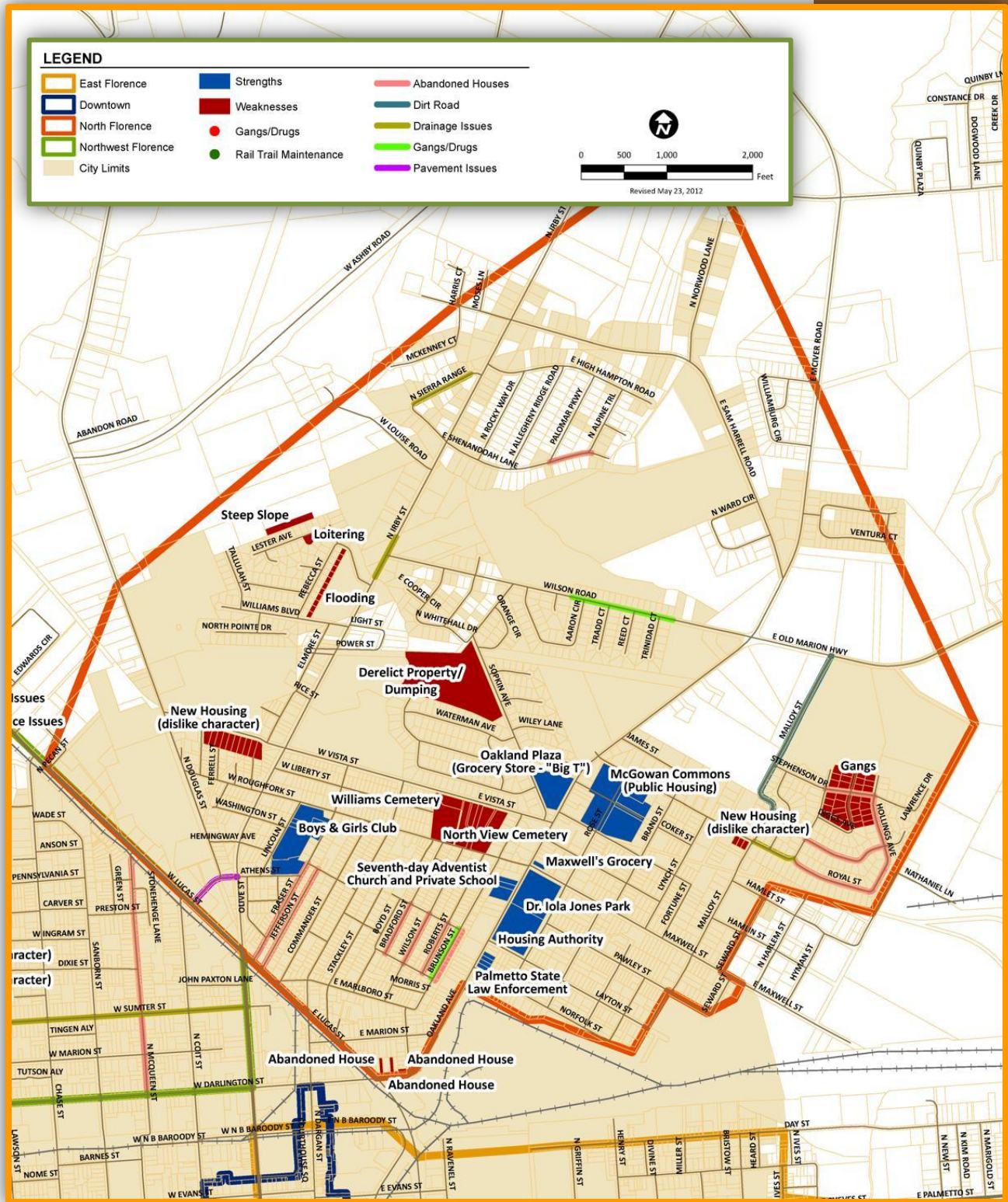


Figure 3: North Florence Issues and Strengths

# Florence Neighborhood Action Plan

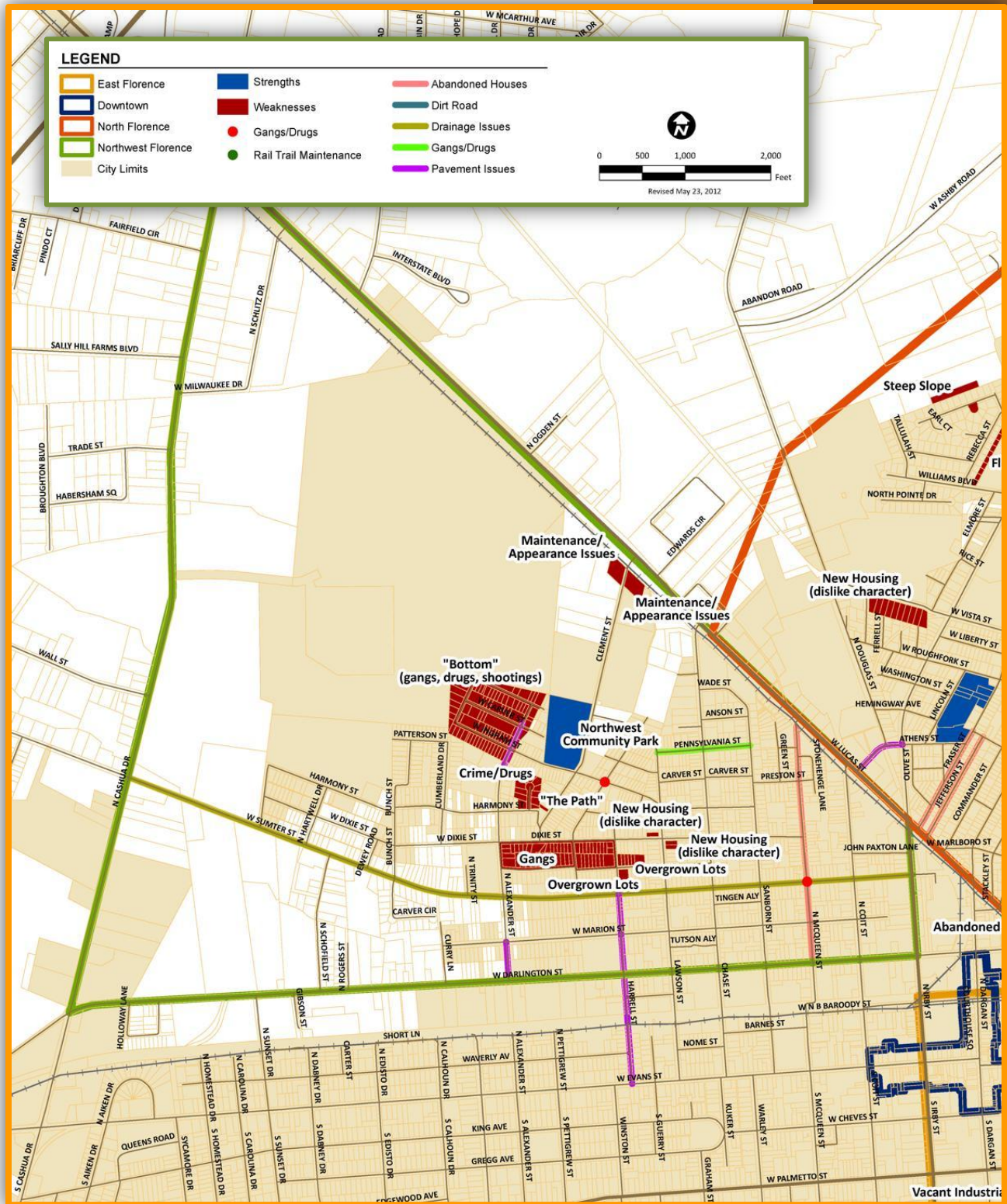


Figure 4: Northwest Florence Issues and Strengths



## Neighborhood Priority Needs

Through the multifaceted program of public engagement outlined in the previous section, needs for the neighborhoods of East Florence, North Florence, Northwest Florence, and Downtown Florence were identified and prioritized by the residents of these neighborhoods. These priority needs are presented below.

Needs are listed by neighborhood and are in the priority order indicated by residents. Some issue areas have been consolidated to maximize the efficiency of addressing the issues. The number of needs listed is not necessarily consistent from neighborhood to neighborhood, but rather were generated by listing those issue areas that received a consensus number of priority votes. Where items receive the same ranking, this indicates a tie in the number of votes received.

### *East Florence Priority Needs*

1. Abandoned homes and properties
2. Derelict properties/maintenance of overgrown properties
3. Improved lighting
3. Illegal activity
5. Lack of neighborhood retail
6. Strengthen maintenance ordinance
7. Road conditions
7. City/County “edge” issues (i.e., uncertainty regarding jurisdiction)
7. McLeod Health controls large portions of property in neighborhood

*Priority needs were identified and prioritized by residents of the neighborhoods.*

## *North Florence Priority Needs*

1. Illegal activity
2. Loitering/hanging out
3. Road conditions
3. More Community Action Team (CAT) patrols
5. Drainage/flooding
6. Abandoned homes and properties
6. People walking in the streets
8. Stronger architectural controls
8. City/County “edge” issues (i.e., uncertainty regarding jurisdiction)
8. Destruction of property (e.g., fence by basketball court constantly torn down)



## *Northwest Florence Priority Needs*

1. Maintenance of overgrown properties
2. Reduce opportunities for crime related activity (e.g., monitor path between Simmons and Habitat for illegal activity)
3. Abandoned homes and properties
4. Illegal activity
4. Enforce prohibition against parked/abandoned cars
6. Need parks/trails as positive outlets
6. Expand CAT patrols – very helpful
6. Afraid to walk outdoors at night due to debris and trash

## *Downtown Florence Priority Needs*

1. Downtown as “center”
1. Perception of safety (i.e., downtown perceived as unsafe)
3. Inviting/attractive environment
4. Get the “good word” out about vision (i.e., create buy-in)
5. More walk-in traffic
5. Expanding use of “spill-out” spaces
5. More multicultural
5. Properties are overvalued for sale
9. Impact (good and bad) of improvements on property/business owners
9. Land use types that are not in support of revitalization
9. Stronger merchant association and connection to Florence Downtown Development Corporation (FDDC)
9. Expand investment by young professionals





## Improvement Strategies

In response to the previously listed priority needs a comprehensive menu of improvement strategies has been developed and begins on the following page. Although each strategy is designed to be implemented independently, they will be most effective when pursued cooperatively, in as much is practical. Further, no one strategy should be considered a “silver bullet” to the issues and needs of the communities; the City and its residents are embarking on a process requiring time, on-going dialogue, and continuous effort to create strong and vibrant communities.

It is important to realize that although each of the priority needs lists is specific to the needs of the individual neighborhood it addresses, the spirit of many of the issues appear within all the lists. Also, it must be understood that in order to address many of the listed needs, the City must pursue strategies that may have effects beyond the individual neighborhoods, potentially resulting in citywide implications when implemented. Each strategy is intended to complement and work with existing City programs and policies.

*Although each strategy has been designed to be implemented independently, they will be most effective when pursued cooperatively.*



## NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING PROGRAM

### Issue:

Participation of residents in community issues is a key factor in the long-term sustainability of neighborhoods. Currently, there is a fragmented approach to engagement in the Florence neighborhoods, which has led to a reactive planning environment rather than proactive. A more consistent, ongoing approach would instill confidence in both residents and City staff in understanding community issues.

### Strategy:

Expand on the successes of the initial Neighborhood Action Plan process through the establishment of a formal Neighborhood Planning Program. The Neighborhood Planning Program would provide opportunities for residents to actively and continuously participate in planning and other community initiatives through ongoing dialogue and input. The program would allow citizens to express ideas and comment on City plans and proposals while assisting the City in developing plans that best meet the needs of their respective neighborhoods. The program would also be used as a method for disseminating information on all City functions to residents.

### Actions:

- The Neighborhood Planning Program would be housed within Planning & Development but would be a joint/coordinated effort between both the Planning & Development and Community Services departments.
- To coordinate and manage the program, one planning staff member would be assigned to a neighborhood (or multiple neighborhoods) and be the primary point of contact for that neighborhood.
- Bimonthly meetings would be led by an assigned/elected neighborhood chair person.
- Each meeting would have an agenda established jointly by the neighborhood and the assigned planner.
- Ultimately, the program would expand beyond planning assistance to implementation assistance of key recommendations generated by the planning process.

### Benefits:

- Ongoing, two-way communication
- Better understanding of community related issues by both residents and City staff
- Improved efficiency and effectiveness
- Technical and monetary support for neighborhoods

### Necessary Resources:

- City staff (i.e., could be one of several job functions)
- Funding source for implementation of planning recommendations (i.e., could be gradually built into budget)

### COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING

#### Issue:

Many of the older, in-town Florence neighborhoods have lost population over time, particularly young people, and are left with a need for increased organization and capacity. The strong tradition of civic engagement among social and cultural groups and government agencies is a key factor in economic success and neighborhood stabilization. In this context, building capacity of the various neighborhood groups is an important strategy for future sustainability.

#### Strategy:

Build capacity, pride, and motivation of the neighborhoods through a systematic approach. Initial capacity building should begin with a series of basic elements that will lead to a sustainable organizational structure to ensure the long-term success of revitalization.

#### Actions:

- Conduct a series of capacity building workshops/exercises for participating neighborhood residents.
- Encourage neighborhood residents to cross-train among themselves and increase communication between neighborhoods. Sharing across neighborhood boundaries, including experiences, skills, successes, failures, and lessons learned, is invaluable in increasing the capacity of all.
- Train and mentor the next generation of leaders to understand the important role participation plays in stable communities.
- Key topics for early capacity building include:
  - Membership and Board Recruitment – The effective recruitment of general members is a process that must be consistent and ongoing. Assessing an individual’s interest and willingness to commit and ultimately share in the responsibility of improving the organization’s function is a skill the organization must employ to ensure goals are supported and executed.
  - Government Relations – Building strong bipartisan support for issues and expanding and strengthening partnerships through the local, regional, state, and national political networks will assist participating neighborhoods in succeeding as an organization. Educating and persuading government officials, and the people who influence them, is an important advocacy role. Capacity building in this area will lead to long-term success.
  - Land Use/Zoning – Understanding the local land use and zoning processes, as well as consistent participation and influence in decision making is one of the most important capacity building strategies for participating neighborhoods. Implementing community goals and protecting community resources through zoning and land use is a critical factor for the successful implementation of short- and long-term plans.
  - Partnering Opportunities – Partnering with agencies and organizations to maximize resources is a capacity building strategy that will strengthen strategic alliances and general outreach. Understanding the range of external factors influencing partnerships can lead to successful joint ventures, funding support, and improved public relations.

## Florence Neighborhood Action Plan

### Benefits:

- Organizational education
- Ownership
- Community pride
- Responsibility

### Necessary Resources:

- City staff and/or consultant services
- Nominal funding to assist with initial facilitation efforts and ongoing meeting support

## CITY-COUNTY CAPACITY BUILDING

### Issue:

The lack of ongoing coordination between the City and County regarding planning and development issues has resulted in conflicts over governmental services and general oversight throughout the participating neighborhoods. Residents are confused about local government boundaries, which often appear arbitrary, and responsibilities for land use, infrastructure, and other services that affect their quality of life.

### Strategy:

Strengthen City-County coordination to provide success for citizens of both jurisdictions. Working toward an improved quality of life for residents should compel both City and County officials to collaborate for this common goal.

### Actions:

- Conduct a facilitated roundtable discussion with City and County officials to identify jurisdictional/geographical responsibilities and real and perceived conflicts over neighborhood services. The discussion should focus on:
  - Establishing ongoing communication between City and County officials.
  - Clear identification of City/County geographical boundaries and islands with potential conflicts.
  - Potential for “common sense” annexations.
  - Prepare a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that outlines roles and responsibilities; goal of working together to create successful neighborhoods.

### Benefits:

- Working relationship between City and County officials
- Stronger, more cohesive neighborhoods, regardless of local government boundaries
- Understanding of jurisdictional responsibilities by residents

### Necessary Resources:

- Consultant facilitation
- City officials and staff
- County officials and staff
- Nominal funding to assist with initial facilitation efforts and ongoing meeting support

### COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

#### Issue:

Florence’s core neighborhoods face many issues, including those related to illegal activity, disrespect of private property, safety, property maintenance, and quality of life. While addressing individual issues is important, recognizing and understanding the underlying causes for these issues is imperative to resolving them in a long-term fashion.

#### Strategy:

Community Development Corporations (CDCs) are not-for-profit organizations established by and for local communities to address housing, education, employment, crime, and other issues. Florence should evaluate the functionality of such organizations in its core neighborhoods. As community-based organizations, CDCs enable and empower local residents to take control of their communities and their futures. Key to a successful CDC is that residents realize that programs and projects should address the greater good of the community, not be focused on the individual needs of residents.

#### Actions:

- Investigate basic interest among residents for the establishment of a CDC in their community. This could be accomplished through City staff attending neighborhood association meetings and providing an overview of the purpose and responsibilities of and process for forming a CDC.
- To determine if a CDC would benefit Florence neighborhoods, a type of pilot program could be undertaken through a partnership with the Santee Lynches Community Development Corporation (SLCDC), an established CDC with a track record of success. Such could be in the form of consultancy by SLCDC.
  - One particular area that may benefit from the SLCDC’s expertise is creation and day-to-day maintenance of the vacant and abandoned property inventory included as part of the “Vacant and Abandoned Property Ordinance/Maintenance Ordinance” strategy. This would remove the ongoing pressures of this maintenance from City staff, allowing them to focus on more direct efforts within the neighborhoods. Additionally, it would place the responsibility of the database into the hands of a development-minded body, enabling the inventory to transition from a holding pattern approach to a disposition mindset.
- If the initial assistance from SLCDC is deemed successful, the resources and expertise of the South Carolina Association of Community Development Corporations (SCACDC) could be leveraged to assist in the establishment of dedicated CDCs for interested communities. The SCACDC provides a number of assistance services including those related to technical assistance, access to capital, and grassroots advocacy and leadership.

#### Benefits:

- Empower communities to take control of their futures
- Mechanism for generating participation, education, and funding potential
- Directly address the root causes of issues and develop long-term sustainable solutions

## Florence Neighborhood Action Plan

### Necessary Resources:

- City staff
- Dedicated time and energy of community residents
- Funding to engage SLCDC in a consultant role
- Additional technical assistance may be available through national organizations such as Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), Enterprise Community Partners (Enterprise), and NeighborWorks America

### VACANT AND ABANDONED PROPERTY ORDINANCE/MAINTENANCE ORDINANCE

#### Issue:

A large number of vacant, abandoned, and poorly maintained properties exist within Florence's core neighborhoods. These include overgrown properties, abandoned homes, abandoned cars, trash, and general upkeep issues. The attractiveness, safety, and quality of life of the neighborhoods is diluted by such properties, impacting the value of surrounding properties, eroding community pride, breeding pest and rodent issues, and encouraging illegal activity. The City currently places some requirements on such properties, including the boarding up of abandoned homes, but a more comprehensive approach would provide the necessary foundation to begin to transform these detrimental properties into community assets.

#### Strategy:

Implement a comprehensive approach of policy, legal ordinances, and enforcement to address vacant, abandoned, and poorly maintained properties. Such would include methods for the identification, documentation, and monitoring of these properties. Enforcement procedures would either compel owners to, at a minimum, stabilize their properties, but more desirable would be improvement of properties. Tools to assist the City in the acquisition and rehabilitation of critically neglected properties should also be included.

#### Actions:

- Develop and adopt a registration program for vacant properties. Compile registered properties into a geographic information system (GIS) database/inventory. As practical, link GIS inventory/database to the City's website so as to allow for greater marketing visibility of available properties. Further, there could be consideration towards transferring title of properties free and clear to buyers who are willing to undertake the repurposing/redevelopment of the properties within an agreed upon timeframe.
- Contact owners of long-term vacant properties to determine if any are interested in donating property in exchange for a tax benefit.
- Evaluate the feasibility of a "single point of contact" protocol for the disposition of abandoned properties. Such would allow for all functions of acquisition, stabilization, and rehabilitation or redevelopment to occur through a single "umbrella." The courts, inspection, police department, etc. would need to be engaged and coordinated. The City attorney along with appropriate department heads would need to draft a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that would outline how processes would be streamlined. Specifics of the MOU should include:
  - Review/evaluation of the current lien process for vacant or abandoned property with an eye for providing additional strength to the policy by addressing the expiration of the lien after ten years.
  - Consideration given to those home owners who truly want to address their properties, but lack the resources to do so. In these cases, help could be provided through financial assistance, technical assistance, and/or labor to perform improvements.
- Investigate the possibility of establishing a land bank for tax foreclosed properties. Engage City attorney to determine the most appropriate way to form and govern, as well as the possibility of methods to accelerate the foreclosure process. Also, discussions should cover methods to increase bonding capacity. The intent is to create a method by which properties in key nodes and corridors can be acquired in a reasonable timeframe and land banked for future development opportunities.
- Establish an asset management plan for those properties that the City does own. Specific steps and considerations include:
  - All vacant structures should have a "No Trespassing" sign mounted near the front entry. A photograph

## Florence Neighborhood Action Plan

- should be taken of the secured structure, with signs visibly mounted, and be placed in the file and digitally referenced to the GIS database/inventory.
- When first acquired, at least one pest control treatment should be performed. Additional treatments should be considered on a periodic basis.
  - All properties should receive a windshield inspection at least once a quarter to ensure that windows and doors remain secured, the lawn is not in need of immediate care, there are no readily apparent maintenance issues (e.g., roof, etc.), and that no unauthorized vehicles or other nuisances are within the property.
  - For those units that are occupied, the City should coordinate with the tenant to perform periodic inspections of the unit.
  - The Police Department should be notified in writing on a quarterly basis of units that are in the inventory, with the intent that these properties be placed on standard patrol, as feasible.
  - Develop a list of properties that require lawn maintenance on an appropriate periodic basis.
  - Develop a list of properties that are approved for demolition. Provide list to License & Inspection once approval has been received and funding has been appropriated for demolitions.
- Identify focus areas with the most critical needs (e.g., Ballard Street) and employ a targeted and expanded “Fix A Block” program (i.e., “Fix A Street”). In addition to such immediate plans, a longer ranging master plan of just the abandoned and vacant parcels could be cataloged with a proposed phasing plan shown.
  - To further leverage existing “in-neighborhood” resources, enlist CAT patrols to identify and catalog maintenance and upkeep issues (e.g., abandoned vehicles, trash, yard maintenance, etc.).
  - To reduce dumping and outdoor “storage” of old appliances, furniture, and other large items, expand the Florence Sanitation Division’s annual amnesty day – making it a quarterly or monthly program.
  - Coordinate with “Community Capacity Building” strategy to train community leaders to conduct clean-ups, monitor and report code violations, etc.

### Benefits:

- Enhanced aesthetics
- Reduction of illegal activity through removal of areas that encourage such activity
- Stabilization and greater likelihood for the redevelopment of marginal properties
- Improved property values
- Increased civic pride
- Improved quality of life
- Identifying both short- and long-term plans for vacant and abandoned properties should help to establish trust with the public and build momentum for greater revitalization efforts



## Florence Neighborhood Action Plan

### Necessary Resources:

- City attorney services
- Ongoing staff time to maintain property condition database (or contract with outside entity to perform this effort – see “Community Development Corporation” strategy)
- City personnel to conduct periodic inspection of properties and documentation of issues
- Potential for new/additional personnel to staff land bank and asset management programs
- It should be noted that several potential sources of funding are outlined in Chapter 5 of the City’s Comprehensive Plan (5.5) that could be tapped to leverage rehabs or technical assistance

### INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS

#### Issue:

The core neighborhoods of Florence represent some of the oldest in the City; as such, the existing infrastructure within these neighborhoods is also old and in need of evaluation and repair and/or replacement. Issues include drainage/flooding and road conditions. In other instances, infrastructure that is considered part-and-parcel to development today was not recognized as such when these neighborhoods were constructed; items like lighting and sidewalks are minimal, resulting in dark streets at night and people walking in the road.

#### Strategy:

Develop a comprehensive program for the evaluation and rehabilitation/implementation of major infrastructure components within the neighborhoods. Determine the desire of property owners and residents to have these improvements through their willingness to share in the cost of implementation and maintenance.

#### Actions:

##### Drainage/Flooding

- Utilizing the priority lists and mapping included in this Action Plan as a starting point, generate a list of perceived drainage/flooding issue areas in the neighborhoods. Based on this list, conduct in-field observation of issue areas to determine if the issues are real and to what magnitude.
- Where legitimate issues are identified, document the locations in GIS. Perform analysis and evaluation to determine the most appropriate course of action. This may require drainage or flood studies to determine causes and test potential solutions.
- From the analyses conducted, generate an implementation plan for addressing the issue areas, complete with priority ranking, cost estimates, methods for funding, and responsible parties.
- Where necessary, coordinate and work with Florence County and SCDOT to resolve issues that pertain to their facilities.

##### Road Conditions

- Based on the priority lists and mapping included in this Action Plan, identify specific roads that are in need of improvement and determine ownership (i.e., City, County, SCDOT).
- Document necessary improvements and forward to responsible jurisdiction. Where necessary, coordinate and work with Florence County and SCDOT to move issues toward resolution.
- For City-owned/maintained roads, develop an implementation plan for road improvement, complete with priority ranking, cost estimates, and methods for funding.
- Coordinate roadway improvements with needed water, sewer, and drainage improvements to make the most efficient use of resources, reduce construction impacts, and avoid tearing up recently completed surface improvements to make underground improvements later.
- For City-owned/maintained roads, consider all major water/sewer infrastructure improvements an opportunity to also implement full-width roadway resurfacing.

##### Lighting

- Use the priority lists and mapping included in this Action Plan to determine areas where lighting is desired. Complete an inventory of existing lighting in these areas and document in GIS. Conduct in-field observation to verify need and determine specific streets, lots, and parks where need exists.
- Where areas of need are identified, perform analysis and evaluation to determine the exact magnitude of

## Florence Neighborhood Action Plan

the need. This may require a lighting analysis to determine the most efficient solutions, including fixture type, necessary lighting levels and coverage, and placement/proximity of fixtures.

- Develop an implementation plan for lighting improvements, complete with priority ranking, cost estimates, and methods for funding.
- Where possible, work with Progress Energy to develop this plan and implement it; implementation cost sharing/savings may be possible through a partnership with Progress Energy where Progress agrees to install and own the fixtures, if the City, property owners, and/or residents agree to pay for monthly operation.

### Sidewalks

- Conduct in-field observation to determine predominate patterns and pathways for pedestrian travel.
- Inventory all existing sidewalks and their conditions and document in GIS.
- Based on in-field observation and inventory of existing sidewalks, develop a priority list of sidewalk improvements, including locations, width, associated improvements (i.e., does it require improvements beyond the sidewalk itself, like drainage, utility pole relocation, curb and gutter, etc.), cost estimates, and responsible jurisdiction.
- Where necessary, coordinate and work with Florence County and SCDOT to address sidewalks that are adjacent to their facilities.
- Regarding sidewalks along SCDOT roadways, work with the Florence Area Transportation Study (FLATS) to apply for and receive Transportation Enhancement Grant funding. These are 80/20 matching grants with annual maximums, so the City would need to be in a position to provide the required 20% match and compete for such funds.

### Residential Improvement Districts

- Conduct informational meetings in neighborhoods to determine the willingness of property owners and residents to share in the cost of infrastructure improvements through the establishment of Residential Improvement Districts as allowed/defined by SC Law (South Carolina Code §6-35-10).
- If there is a level of willingness for the establishment of Residential Improvement Districts, work with City attorney to determine potential issues/pitfalls of such districts and the most appropriate method for implementation, should property owners determine to move forward (i.e., petitioning for the establishment of a Residential Improvement District must come from property owners within the proposed district).
- If property owners petition the City for the establishment of one or more Residential Improvement Districts, educate City Council members on the benefits and challenges of Residential Improvement Districts to assist them in making an informed decision on whether or not to create such districts and to determine areas that will benefit most from such.

### Benefits:

- Stabilization and improvement of critical infrastructure
- Improved safety and quality of life, both real and perceived
- Enhancement of property values
- Potential for new funding sources through implementation of Residential Improvement Districts and securing of Transportation Enhancement funds.

## Florence Neighborhood Action Plan

### Necessary Resources:

- City staff time to perform in-field observation, inventories, and documentation
- Possible consultant assistance to conduct analyses and evaluations
- Willingness of property owners and residents to share in cost of improvements
- City attorney services
- Funding sources
- County engagement
- SCDOT engagement
- Progress Energy engagement

### EMPLOYER ASSISTED INITIATIVES

#### Issue:

In the East Florence neighborhood, McLeod Health (and its affiliated holding companies) owns a large percentage of the property that comprises the community. In some instances, these properties represent former anchors of the community, including sites that were once grocery, retail, and service uses. Residents desire a larger involvement by McLeod Health in the stabilization and revitalization of East Florence beyond the development of additional medical uses.

#### Strategy:

Although the issue above is specific to the East Florence neighborhood and McLeod Health, the concept of forming partnerships with employers and businesses throughout Florence's core neighborhoods and Downtown is universal and should be pursued comprehensively. Employer assisted initiatives should be investigated to determine how local businesses can assist in and benefit from the revitalization of the neighborhoods in which they reside.

#### Actions:

- To combat perceptions of unsafe/undesirable conditions, establish a marketing campaign to promote greater awareness of redevelopment successes and the vision for the future. Such should be targeted at key employers/businesses and focus on getting the "good word" out.
- In combination with a marketing campaign, the City should enlist the assistance of business leaders and property owners that already have bought into the vision to serve as champions. Champions should be provided a list of talking points and engagements should be constructed for them to speak to the larger business community and express their enthusiasm and excitement for what is happening in their neighborhood.
- The City has fostered dialogue with McLeod Health regarding the possibility for partnership on initiatives in both East Florence and in Downtown, and McLeod is open to investigating such to determine the most appropriate path forward. These conversations should continue and similar discussions should occur with other employers. Brainstorming should occur to determine what might be feasible.
- The City itself could demonstrate a commitment to employer assisted initiatives through the implementation of a "Cops on the Block" program. Such a program would encourage police officers to purchase homes in the core neighborhoods of Florence by offering low interest loans and other housing incentives. By having police officers not only patrolling these neighborhoods, but also living in them, round the clock police presence is achieved and officers have a greater investment and ownership in the communities they serve.
- A library of best practices and case studies in employer assisted initiatives should be developed to be used in marketing to employers. Such best practices may include walk/bike to work incentives, home financing assistance, and landscape/streetscape sponsorship. Being able to cite "chapter and verse" on initiatives in peer cities throughout the United States that have been successful will help the City to sell these concepts to local employers. City staff can develop, maintain, and periodically expand such a resource library.

## Florence Neighborhood Action Plan

### Benefits:

- Engagement and investment of employers in communities
- Return on investment to employers through improved communities
- Improved perception of community by existing and future businesses
- Improved perception of existing employers by residents

### Necessary Resources:

- Staff time and funding for marketing campaign
- Time and commitment of business champions
- Staff time to develop, maintain, and expand best practices/case study resource library

### NEIGHBORHOODS AS GATEWAYS TO DOWNTOWN

#### Issue:

While the neighborhoods of East Florence, North Florence, and Northwest Florence geographically surround Downtown, they are not currently connected to one another or Downtown. This lack of connectivity, both physical and perceived, inhibits these areas from working together for their combined greater good – placing Downtown as the “center” and strengthening Florence as a whole.

#### Strategy:

Each neighborhood has critical corridors that run through them and serve as major roadway connections to/through Downtown. By accentuating these corridors and attracting retail uses, the neighborhoods of Florence will be enhanced both aesthetically and economically and be elevated as gateways to Downtown. At the same time, Downtown will benefit through improved connection to the neighborhoods and promotion and exposure.

#### Actions:

- Through the efforts of the newly established Neighborhood Planning Program, work with communities to identify critical corridors to be elevated to “gateway” status. Such corridors will be primary routes in and through the City of Florence and might include Palmetto Street, Irby Street, and Lucas Street.
- Seek opportunities that allow for neighborhoods to work and link together, not only with Downtown, but with one another as well. One example would be an enhancement of W. Lucas Street, which borders both North Florence and Northwest Florence and leads directly into Downtown.
- Working with communities and design professionals, create a vision for what gateways should look like and how they would work to promote both the neighborhoods and the downtown. A design charrette could provide an intensive and efficient method to generate these visions.
- Develop an implementation plan for improvements to include design elements (i.e., streetscape and landscape), priority, cost, and potential funding sources. This plan should be coordinated with plans drafted as part of the “Infrastructure Improvements” strategy to ensure efficiency and avoid overlap and duplication of efforts.
- Work with SCDOT to address gateway improvements along their facilities.
- Seek to attract retail commercial uses to the gateway corridors. Such uses would reestablish retail in the neighborhoods, while enabling more automobile-oriented uses (e.g., shopping centers, fast food restaurants, gas stations, etc.) to be located in close proximity to Downtown but outside the historic boundaries.
- New funding sources may be available, either through the Residential Improvement Districts or Transportation Enhancement Grant program outlined in the “Infrastructure Improvements” strategy.
- This work could be leveraged with the actions included in the “Vacant and Abandoned Property Ordinance/Maintenance Ordinance” strategy for even greater impact.

#### Benefits:

- Stabilization and beautification of critical gateway corridors
- Improved quality of life, both real and perceived
- Enhancement of property values
- Enhanced image of neighborhoods, Downtown, and Florence as a whole
- Interconnection and coordination between neighborhoods and Downtown
- Increased promotion of Downtown

## Florence Neighborhood Action Plan

### Necessary Resources:

- Staff time (or consultant services) to develop gateway visions
- Residents' time and commitment to develop gateway visions
- Consultant design services
- SCDOT engagement
- Funding sources for gateway enhancements



## DOWNTOWN BUSINESS CAPACITY BUILDING

### Issue:

The successful revitalization of Downtown Florence is dependent on active and involved business and property owners. The City of Florence has assigned resources to stimulate more business activity in the downtown core, including the establishment of the Florence Downtown Development Corporation (FDDC). The FDDC is a non-profit organization whose mission is to foster revitalization in the downtown area. Membership includes business and property owners. The Florence Downtown Merchants Association is a separate organization consisting of downtown business owners whose mission is also to foster revitalization and generate interest in growing more business in the downtown area. The mission of the two organizations are very similar, however, very little coordination exists between the two. Both organizations are composed of very energetic and committed individuals and would benefit from some level of collaboration.

### Strategy:

Coordinated capacity building for and between the FDDC and the Florence Downtown Merchants Association could foster a greater understanding of the efforts and focus of each and lead to greater synergy in the downtown area.

### Actions:

- Conduct a facilitated discussion with both organizations to help assist with maximizing the opportunities and benefits of a collaborative effort.
- Discussions could be conducted during regular meeting dates for the organizations.
- Specific recognition should be given to the strengths and weaknesses of each group and determine how each can support and supplement the other to make both stronger.
- Consider and evaluate the establishment of a Business Improvement District as allowed/defined by SC Law (South Carolina Code §5-37-10):
  - Gauge willingness of property owners to share in the cost of improvements.
  - If there is a level of willingness for the establishment of a Business Improvement District, work with City attorney to determine potential issues/pitfalls of such districts and the most appropriate method for implementation.
  - Educate City Council members on the benefits and challenges of Business Improvement Districts to assist them in making an informed decision on whether or not to create a district.

### Benefits:

- Heightened awareness of downtown revitalization initiatives
- More cohesiveness between downtown interests and stakeholders
- Accomplishment of more project related activities
- Stronger partnerships with the City of Florence
- Potential for dedicated funding source through implementation of Business Improvement District

### Necessary Resources:

- City staff and/or consultant facilitation
- Nominal funding to assist with initial facilitation efforts and ongoing meeting support
- Business and property owner participation, including potential cost sharing
- City attorney services
- Additional strategic and technical assistance may be available through the National Trust Main Street Center

## DOWNTOWN BRANDING/MARKETING

### Issue:

While the Florence Downtown Development Corporation (FDDC) has made great strides to improve downtown and attract new investment, poor perception of downtown by those outside the revitalization efforts continues to be an issue. In fact, anecdotal information indicates that when the vision for downtown and its recent successes are shared, excitement and a desire to be part of the revitalization results. The downtown must overcome issues of poor perception if it wishes to engender widespread support.

### Strategy:

Building off the recent successes of the FDDC, expand and formalize a branding and marketing initiative for the downtown area. Such a program should include both traditional efforts such as promotional materials and advertising, but should also include an equal dose of more subtle and strategic efforts that seek to instill quiet confidence in the downtown and get the “good word” out.

### Actions:

- Assemble statistics and figures to support a positive campaign for downtown. For example, comparing crime statistics in downtown against those of comparative areas or the overall city average – assuming such presents a positive image. Additionally, regularly advertise/announce new downtown property purchases and investments.
- A library of best practices and case studies in downtown marketing initiatives should be developed to be used as “boilerplate” material. Such best practices may include promotional materials, advertising campaigns, and investment incentive programs. FDDC staff can develop, maintain, and periodically expand such a resource library.
- If resources allow, the FDDC should go beyond the resource library mentioned above and engage a marketing firm to assist in the development of a unified message to promote downtown.
- In combination with a marketing campaign, the FDDC should enlist the assistance of business leaders and property owners that already have bought into the downtown’s vision to serve as champions. These champions should be assembled into a “speakers’ bureau” that will strategically communicate the downtown vision to other investment and thought leaders. Champions should be provided a list of talking points to ensure that the message presented is unified and in concert with the downtown vision. The speakers’ bureau should be scheduled to make presentations to area business groups, real estate developers, major employers, tourism professionals, and neighborhood associations.

### Benefits:

- Improved perceptions of downtown
- Increased support and investment in downtown

### Necessary Resources:

- FDDC staff time to assemble and maintain resource library
- Funding for advertising expenses
- Consultant services to develop formal marketing program
- Dedication of time and commitment by champions to work as part of speakers’ bureau
- Additional branding/marketing ideas and technical assistance may be available through the National Trust Main Street Center

### DOWNTOWN APPEARANCE/URBAN DESIGN

#### Issue:

While Downtown has seen a number of improvements in recent years, it continues to have many appearance challenges. Additionally, in the past when urban design improvements have been implemented, construction of such has negatively impacted existing business owners.

#### Strategy:

Building on current initiatives in the Downtown and other strategies recommended here (i.e., “Vacant and Abandoned Property Ordinance/Maintenance Ordinance”, “Infrastructure Improvements”, and “Neighborhoods as Gateways”), encourage a higher level of urban design and appearance quality. Solutions should be cognizant of impacts to existing business and property owners, finding methods for minimizing impact and maximizing benefits.

#### Actions:

- Promote the newly adopted downtown maintenance ordinance from the perspective of how it positively impacts property owners – ensures that neighboring properties are properly maintained to protect the value of one’s property. Additionally, the tools that are in place to assist with this process, including façade, design, and sign grants, should be widely publicized. This could be one element of the talking points utilized by the downtown champions as part of the speakers’ bureau recommended in the “Downtown Branding/Marketing” strategy.
- Consider modifying the existing \$500 downtown design grant intended to offset architectural fees. In reality, \$500 provides minimal assistance to the owner when a façade redesign could reasonably incur architectural fees ranging from \$5,000-\$15,000. The City/FDDC should consider retaining either a single architect or small group (no more than 3) of architects to be on-call for all downtown façade improvements. Such services would be provided part-and-parcel to the façade grant and the expense of such could be factored into this process. This approach has several benefits, including:
  - By selecting on-call architects through a qualifications-based procurement, rather than allowing each individual property owner to secure their own architect, the City ensures that designers are qualified to perform historic rehabilitation work.
  - Consistency of designs throughout the downtown.
  - Potential for more economical fees, since on-call architects are guaranteed a larger percentage of work.
  - Remove the obstacle of design from the property owner – one less hurdle in the revitalization process.
- When major infrastructure and streetscape improvements are planned for the downtown, engage property and business owners in a dialogue regarding how such improvements may affect them. Public engagement should include downtown stakeholders in the design process, allowing them to take ownership of the plans, and they should be given opportunity to express their concerns with how construction will occur.
- When advertising infrastructure and streetscape construction services for bid, the City should include special provisions that require maintenance of traffic along roadways, maintenance of access to properties/businesses, and reduction of noise, debris, and dust during construction. Closing off full city blocks for construction to occur is generally unacceptable to business owners and detrimental to their survival. Additionally, the City could consider requiring construction to occur during off-peak times to further reduce impacts on businesses. However, all such requirements impact the cost of construction and the feasibility of such within the constraints of the project budget must be considered.

## Florence Neighborhood Action Plan

- The City should consider implementing targeted, increased promotional campaigns to benefit downtown businesses affected by construction projects. The purpose of such campaigns would be to draw special attention to these businesses in the hopes of luring more customers to them when it might otherwise be difficult to attract customers during construction projects. The level of partnership between the City and merchants could be as simple as increased advertising, or it could go beyond this to include City-subsidized incentives (e.g., coupons, discounts, etc.) to the consumer for shopping these downtown businesses during construction periods.

### Benefits:

- Improved appearance of downtown properties and surroundings
- Improved relationships between the City and downtown business/property owners
- Greater potential for business/property owners to take advantage of appearance programs
- Reduced impacts of construction on business/property owners

### Necessary Resources:

- Staff time to promote downtown programs
- Funding to cover potential increase in cost of construction due to special provisions aimed at reducing impacts to businesses
- Funding to engage architectural services through on-call contract
- Staff time and funding to cover costs of increased promotional advertising during construction projects

### HIGHEST AND BEST USE OF PROPERTY

#### Issue:

A number of properties in Downtown are not currently utilized in a manner that encourages redevelopment to flourish. Some properties are overvalued by their owners, making them improbable candidates for purchase and redevelopment. Other property owners rent out their existing storefronts to uses that provide monthly income to them but do not support revitalization. Finally, a proliferation of any single use type is never a recipe for the development of a vibrant, diverse downtown environment.

#### Strategy:

To realize a broad revitalization of Downtown, the City should take steps to encourage the highest and best use of property. As property values rise throughout Downtown, the market will eventually overcome these issues. However, until such a time, and to hasten it, a comprehensive program of educational, promotional, and, in some cases, regulatory actions should be implemented.

#### Actions:

- Engage property owners who have overvalued their properties in a facilitated discussion to determine if this is a function of naiveté, greediness, and/or obstinacy. Once motives are understood, it may be easier to work with the property owner to find common ground and affect positive outcomes for all.
- Communicate with property owners to understand why they are currently using their properties in the manner they do today. Is it a function of easy rental income, path of least resistance (e.g., no variances or permits required), and/or quick conversion (i.e., little to no improvements were necessary)? Work to provide owners with alternative use scenarios and tenants that meet their needs but also promote the vision for Downtown.
- The FDDC should continue to work with property owners that are willing participants in the revitalization of Downtown. Technical assistance should be provided to assist these owners in the marketing and promotion of their property if they desire to sell it or in the improvement of their property if they desire to rehabilitate it themselves.
- City planning staff, along with the City attorney, should investigate the most appropriate means to address issues surrounding the proliferation of a single use type in the downtown. This may include enacting ordinance language that has proximity, square footage, and/or parking requirements for certain use types. If requirements are applied globally to all uses to avoid the appearance of preference or bias, then it may be necessary to also create certain exceptions for desired “district” uses, such as restaurant or entertainment.
- In some extreme instances, if a property is critical to Downtown’s continued revitalization, and the owner is not willing or able to cooperate with the vision, the City may need to consider acquisition through condemnation. Of course, such action should not be taken without careful consideration of the affects of such and consultation with the City attorney.

## Florence Neighborhood Action Plan

### Benefits:

- Use of Downtown properties in a manner that supports the overall vision for revitalization
- Mutual understanding of the desires of the City and property owners
- Stronger communication between the City and property owners

### Necessary Resources:

- Staff time
- City attorney services



## Path Forward

It is understood that action plan strategies presented in the previous section are intended to provide a baseline for demonstrating the City's commitment, building momentum, and moving the neighborhoods forward. Further refinement and technical analysis is recommended as strategies are pursued to determine the most appropriate applications. While the City did not engage the development of a full implementation plan as part of this effort, recommendations for logical "next steps" are presented below.

### *Explore Funding Options*

A process of funding identification will be critical to the long-term success of the strategies included here. Not only will ongoing funding be necessary to pursue a neighborhood planning program, but the discovery of larger funding for capital expenditures will be critical as well. The analysis should include evaluation of how each source can be used to leverage private investment through the creation of public/private development partnerships. In today's development environment, very few single organizations can accomplish revitalization on their own. The most dynamic and successful projects are accomplished through a cooperative arrangement that marries the resources and expertise of public, private, and nonprofit sectors. Funding strategies must be identified that will work in concert with each of the key components of the presented action plan strategies.

*Action plan strategies provide a baseline for demonstrating the City's commitment, building momentum, and moving the neighborhoods forward.*



### *Advance Capacity Building Strategies*

The Community Capacity Building, City-County Capacity Building, and Downtown Business Capacity Building strategies should be implemented in the very near term. These strategies are critical to the success of all other strategies. By empowering citizens to understand the workings of government, educating them on what can be accomplished, and helping them to understand the role of the City and its staff, residents will be confident to move forward with enthusiastic but realistic expectations. In forging a stronger, mutually beneficial relationship between City and County governments, citizens will be better served and limited resources will be more efficiently utilized. And, by linking downtown businesses together in a unified mission for increasing the appeal and demand of downtown, camaraderie, strength in numbers, and teamwork will be the foundation for the future of the City's central business district.

### *Reinstate Neighborhood Planning Program*

Much like the capacity building strategies, reinstating the neighborhood planning program will provide another pillar on which to support the remaining strategies. This should be formalized as soon as possible to capitalize on the momentum that has been generated by this action plan process. The assignment of City staff to each neighborhood as their exclusive representative in and conduit to the City will further empower citizens and raise confidence and engender trust.

## *Establish a Multi-Year, Funded Capital Plan*

Many of the recommended strategies require the expenditure of capital funds to be implemented. Some can be realized within the City's current budget levels and classifications; however, others will most likely require additional, more significant funding sources. Because of this reality, it is clear that all capital improvement strategies cannot be accomplished for all neighborhoods in a single budget year. At the same time, funding a strategy for a singular neighborhood in a given year, while not funding it in another, could be perceived as biased, capricious, or arbitrary, which is not the City's intent for this program. Therefore, it is critical that a multi-year capital plan be developed outlining how strategies will be implemented in each neighborhood over the course of several years. It is recommended that the capital plan address a five-year period and be updated and refined every other year. Funding must be committed to the plan for the five-year period and obligated in the City's budget on an annual basis.

## *Implement Model Project*

The City should pursue a model project, incorporating several strategies into a single, tangible outcome. For the greatest impact it would be beneficial to find a location where at least two, if not three neighborhoods intersect so that the project provides success for more than one community. Consideration should be given to a project that allows for a combination of the removal or rehabilitation of vacant and/or abandoned property and drainage, street, lighting, and sidewalk improvements. To further incorporate additional strategies, the City could enlist a local business or employer to assist with the project through either monetary support or in-kind services. If properly positioned, the project could also serve to advance neighborhoods as gateways to downtown. A streetscape project with a residential improvement component would be ideal as a model project and prime locations for bridging multiple neighborhoods would be Lucas Street and/or Irby Street.