DOWNTOWN SAVANNAH
Vision Plan and Design Principles

Introduction
The Town of Savannah is a community blessed with abundant natural and cultural resources. Located at the heart of the Montezuma Wetlands Complex, the town has recognized that tourism associated with these resources has the potential to reinforce its agriculture based economy. The 2007 opening of the Montezuma Audubon Center one mile north of downtown Savannah is a positive step, but the historic business district that serves the local residents and could be an interesting stop for visitors exhibits signs of vacancy and disinvestment. Recently, targeted business owners became eligible to receive 50 percent grants for building improvements, funded by a grant from the NY Main Street Program. However, it became apparent that a vision for the overall design was absent. The newly formed planning board discussed this with the Chamber of Commerce, the Town Board and the Wayne County Planning Department and decided to pursue a visioning process for the central business district to provide guiding principles for the restoration and revitalization of downtown.

The Vision Planning Process
Vision Planning is a participatory process designed and facilitated to establish dialogue and collaboration among community members. The result is a shared vision for the future of the community that acts as the foundation to guide action. An advisory committee composed of local merchants, residents and town officials helped organize the vision planning process for Downtown Savannah.
A series of four workshops held in the fall of 2008 and winter of 2009 were the basis of Savannah's vision planning process. Each workshop was designed to progressively build upon and confirm information and ideas expressed by community members. Faculty and students from SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry (SUNY-ESF) Center for Community Design Research (CCDR) collaborated with the advisory committee to facilitate the workshops, prepare summaries and analysis of each session and document the final vision plan.

The Vision Plan and Design Principles
The Downtown Savannah Vision Plan and Design Principles are the result of this community based planning effort and will help guide decisions for the downtown business district. The Vision Plan includes a vision statement and a series of goals and action strategies that when implemented will help achieve the vision. The Design Principles provide guidance for new development and renovations downtown and in the surrounding area. Since there is no one way to accomplish a vision, additional strategies may emerge through continued community dialogue and experience working on projects. The detailed development of the vision plan, including workshop activities, community assessments, mapping and analyses, is documented in a separate Downtown Savannah Vision Planning Notebook.
Downtown Savannah is a thriving rural business district and community center that appreciates and draws upon its natural, historic, religious and agricultural resources as the foundation of a strong and sustainable economy, a high quality of life for residents of all ages and unique experiences for visitors.

**GOALS**

**GOAL 1: Encourage year round recreation, education and civic activities for residents of all ages.**

**STRATEGIES:**

- Plan and implement a year-round recreation program that includes activities for youth and adults promoting “active living” and outdoor recreation that takes advantage of the natural environment (kayaking, bicycling, hiking, cross country skiing).
- Organize warm season events that will attract residents (and visitors) to gather in outdoor spaces downtown, such as concerts and craft fairs.
- Design/improve public spaces on Main Street to serve as the setting for these events (see design studies) and consider closing Main Street to vehicular traffic during some events.
- Continue with renovations, including elevator access, of the Town Hall’s 2nd floor as a center for meetings, movies, educational programs, displays, and senior gatherings.
- Prepare a feasibility study for an ice skating rink (investigate the cost and market for both outdoor and indoor facilities).
- Initiate discussions with the Clyde-Savannah Schools to allow use of the gym for recreational activities.

**GOAL 2: Promote and support the care and maintenance of public and private property to encourage civic pride and improve the image of the downtown and the community.**

**STRATEGIES:**

- Develop a program to organize assistance to residential property owners who are having difficulty maintaining their properties. This might include establishing a volunteer yard maintenance and front yard improvement program, writing grants for renovations and repairs, and locating qualified, fair priced contractors.
- Organize a trap, spay/neuter and release program to address the problem of feral cats in the downtown area.
- Working with building owners, the town and community organizations develop a strategy to clean up and improve the areas behind the Main Street buildings.
- Establish a garden club or beautification committee to provide support to the town and businesses in installing and maintaining seasonal or high maintenance planting, such as annual or perennial plants at gateways, hanging baskets, and planters.
- Ensure year round maintenance of sidewalks, which might include clarifying responsibility for maintenance and repair, initiating an education program to reinforce the value of sidewalks, and investigating sources of funding and grants to assist property owners in sidewalk replacement where necessary.

*Figure 1. Cooperation among property owners to maintain the service alley west of Main St. will improve the image of downtown Savannah. In addition, using environmentally sensitive stormwater management techniques, such as a bioswale, would serve as a model for sustainable practices in the town.*
GOAL 3: Re-establish downtown as the center of welcome and access to the natural and cultural resources of the area.

STRATEGIES:
• Initiate a strategic planning process to guide implementation of priority street and sidewalk improvements and site furnishings based on the design ideas developed through the vision planning process.
• Encourage the establishment of overnight lodging that respects the scale and character of the hamlet, such as Bed and Breakfasts or a boutique hotel.
• Seek funding to prepare a feasibility study to develop a trail on the recently acquired railroad right-of-way.
• Participate in the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor planning to understand how Savannah can benefit from and support the trail and to determine the possibility of becoming a service center on the bikeway map.
• Develop a coordinated and comprehensive signage program that welcomes and informs visitors, from the gateways, to downtown and beyond to the area’s features.
• Initiate a feasibility study that examines several alternatives for developing a visitor information and welcome center in downtown.
• Develop a comprehensive marketing program aimed at the upstate New York regional audience that promotes Savannah’s natural, cultural, recreational and historic resources and supporting businesses.

GOAL 4: Revive and promote the traditional character and historic aspects of downtown.

STRATEGIES:
• Continue to utilize the NY Main Street grant to assist downtown building owners to renovate and upgrade their buildings, guided by the downtown vision and design principles.
• Share with the Clyde-Savannah Board of Education the importance of the Savannah School to the community and seek to participate in the strategic planning that determines the future of the school.
• Develop a program to identify historic homes and other structures in the hamlet.
• Develop strategies to assist owners with repairs and restoration that respect the historic characteristics and details.
• Create interesting and visually appealing displays of local history in highly visible and accessible locations such as vacant storefronts, Town Hall and the Audubon Center or through murals on prominent building walls.
• Develop engaging educational programs and materials about local history that appeal to different age groups, especially children and youth.
• Develop a program to highlight the historic buildings and features in the hamlet and town (such as historic markers or plaques; walking, bicycling or driving tours).

GOAL 5: Encourage involvement among individuals of all ages and organizations to strengthen community relationships to contribute to the well-being and growth of downtown Savannah.

STRATEGIES:
• Provide organized opportunities for children and youth to participate and provide community service in civic activities, in coordination with the school district and other youth focused organizations.
• Establish regular communication and coordination among all civic and municipal organizations in the community to help ensure that resources are combined when necessary to achieve their shared goals.
• Distribute the vision plan broadly so that people can support its adoption by the town board and become involved in its implementation.
• Organize celebrations and events that involve multiple organizations.
GOAL 6: Nurture a strong local economy by promoting and supporting local resources and new and existing small businesses.

STRATEGIES:
- Develop a program to collaborate with owners of vacant buildings to help them appear less vacant, including regular maintenance, window cleaning, and repairs.
- Pursue Brownfield Opportunity Area (BOA) funding to determine new uses and market viability for the former fertilizer plant site and other vacant and underutilized structures on Main Street that will reinforce and contribute to the community vision.
- Develop a program to promote local businesses and encourage residents to buy local.
- Organize a farmers market and local craft market downtown, starting with a weekly, warm season market and then determining feasibility and required resources to develop a year round permanent market.
- Encourage new businesses that support or reinforce people visiting for the natural environment and outdoor activities including bird watching, hiking, fishing, and bicycling.
- Investigate ways to ensure continuation and possibly expansion of the community organized nature and local culture tours.
- Investigate the creation of a local development corporation to orchestrate the revitalization and business development process.

ACTION

The action strategies described under each goal require varying amounts of resources and time to plan and implement. Some can be completed in a short amount of time using currently available resources while others require a longer time frame to organize and gather resources. To keep community interest and excitement focused on Downtown Savannah revitalization it is important to engage and accomplish short-term, immediate actions even as planning is occurring on longer-term projects. Each action strategy requires an action plan that includes the following information:

- **Tasks**: Identify what needs to be done
- **Techniques**: Describe how the tasks can be accomplished
- **Resources**: Determine what resources are needed to work on the tasks, including people, funding, materials
- **Time Frame**: Determine how long the action will take, when it will occur and develop a schedule that is coordinated with the tasks

The following example demonstrates some possible tasks to implement a priority action strategy related to Goal 3, which is to re-establish downtown as the center of welcome and access to the natural and cultural resources of the area.

*Action Strategy: Initiate a strategic planning process to guide implementation of priority street and sidewalk improvements and site furnishings based on the design ideas developed through the vision planning process.*

Possible tasks to get this accomplished include:

1. Establish an advisory committee including business owners, local residents and a code enforcement officer.
2. Determine resources needed, including materials, labor and design ideas to implement improvements.
3. Research funding opportunities in addition to NY Main Street Program.
4. Develop an overall plan for improvements and specific ideas for each building area.
5. Provide incentives and remove disincentives for making improvements.
6. Introduce this plan to business owners and start a dialogue on how this can help the local economy.
7. Involve community groups by starting an adopt a building program.
While the Vision Statement, Goals and Strategies provide guidance for actions the community of Savannah can take, design principles were developed to guide development decisions both on Main Street and in the surrounding area. These principles were developed through input during workshop activities and through an analysis of existing conditions. The design principles should guide all improvements and proposals for the area, and should be the criteria to determine if development is appropriate to the community.

- Highlight and preserve the rural character of the gateways and entrances into Savannah.
- Capture attention and interest at the entrances to downtown Savannah.
- Appeal to the pedestrian and reinforce the downtown experience.
- Strengthen connections to places beyond Main Street to promote “active living” and access to area attractions.

Highlight and preserve the rural character of the gateways and entrances into Savannah.

Routes 89 and 31 act as gateways into Savannah which makes the rural, agricultural landscape along these roads an important resource (see figure 8). Preserving and maintaining the character visible from these roads can positively contribute to the experience of both residents and visitors. Development Guidelines should be created to help define the character of these roads.

**Desirable characteristics:**
- Actively farmed agricultural land
- Farm houses, barns and related buildings
- A mix of close and distant vistas
- Forests, waterways, fields and other natural features

**Features that detract from the character:**
- Storage buildings and units
- Abandoned or neglected houses
- Numerous houses along the road edge instead of farmland
- Hamlet entrances

The entrances into the hamlet should reinforce a shift in character, from rural agricultural to rural hamlet (see figure 8).

**Desirable characteristics:**
- Denser development on smaller lots
- Historic buildings
- Mature street trees

**Features that detract from the character:**
- Abandoned or neglected homes or buildings
- Cars parked in the front yards
- Out of place uses such as the used car lot
- Larger scale buildings

Buildings such as the Savannah Fire Hall or Town maintenance building are important and valued by the community, but could fit into the character of the hamlet better. They should be buffered or screened to keep drivers focused on the corridor instead of large open spaces or lots. This should be done at the appropriate scale since people are moving by quickly.
Capture attention and interest at the entrances to downtown Savannah.
The approach to downtown should slow motorists and inform them that they are arriving at an interesting destination. These areas should be attractive, well maintained and stand out, while still addressing the need for a positive pedestrian experience.

- Slow traffic and capture attention and interest at the Four Corners
  - Place bump outs at the corners and use alternate paving for crosswalks
  - Install welcome and directional signage

- Emphasize Seneca St. as an alternative entry to downtown (see figures 2 and 15)
  - Plant street trees along Seneca Street and at the corners
  - Add signage at the intersection of Church and Seneca Streets
  - Place a fence or vegetation to screen the service area behind the Post Office
  - Install signage at both parking lots
  - Change the Main St. parking lot entrance to the northern end and add a fence or vegetation screening the parked cars

- Capture attention and interest along routes 89 and 31
  - Use consistently designed signage entering town in all directions
  - Repeat elements along these roads, such as a particular tree, flower type, built structure or artistic piece. These elements must be at the appropriate scale and be repeated for motorists to notice.
  - Add vegetation, fencing or other elements along the side of route 89 before crossing the bridge from the south. (see figure 7)

Strengthen connections to places beyond Main Street to promote “Active Living” and access to area attractions.
Savannah and the surrounding countryside have numerous resources that can be attractive to both visitors and community residents. The key to utilizing these resources is to improve wayfinding, access and connections within the hamlet. This can be done using some or all of the following features:

- Within the hamlet improvements to reinforce connections between places of interest should be primarily for pedestrians and bicyclists, highlighting that bicycle use and walking are respected and encouraged.
  - Stripe bicycle lanes on major roadways within the hamlet or at a minimum install “share the road” signs.
  - Create a coordinated signage and map system that highlights areas and features of interest, including businesses that provide services of interest to bicyclists.
  - Create a downtown “nature trail” that highlights “in town” environmentally sensitive practices, such as use of native plant material, creation of in town wildlife habitat, ecologically sensitive storm water practices, etc. (see figure 1).
  - Improve and maintain sidewalks within the hamlet.

- Focusing on outside of the hamlet, shared roadway improvements should be made.
  - Signage system providing clear guidance, including mileage, to features of interest
  - Shared roadway signage

- Off road hiking/bicycling/cross country ski trail system, that provides access to the natural areas outside of the hamlet and connections to destinations such as the Audubon Center and Howland Island, should be considered (see figure 12). Provide kiosks or signage at trail heads (see figure 7).
**Appeal to the Pedestrian – Reinforce the downtown experience**

Once you have slowed people down, you really want them to get out of their cars or off the bus to explore downtown. There are a number of characteristics that should be present to support a good pedestrian experience, including safety, detail, amenities, destinations and continuity.

- Safety, such as crosswalks, pedestrian scale lighting and well maintained sidewalks.
- Interesting detail, including window displays, detailed planting and attractive signs.
- Building and façade renovations that recall the traditional style and detailing of downtown commercial buildings.
- Comfort amenities such as places to sit, public restrooms and drinking fountains.
- Destinations to walk to.
- Public park and open spaces that are comfortable for individuals or small groups but that also allow public events will add to the interest and experience in downtown.

**Address the fertilizer plant and site:**

Determining the future of the fertilizer plant site is especially important due to the large presence it holds downtown. The following ideas came out of the vision process:

- Remove the current structure that exists which is a safety concern and visual blight
- Reactivate the site to provide for a mix of uses currently lacking in the community, (i.e. lodging, recreation and retail)
- Use the site to provide a visual terminus for Main Street
- Future development should speak to the historic character of the community
- Any new buildings should respect the downtown scale, character and layout
- Have uses on the site that will draw people and support the economy
- Create a more welcoming entry along Seneca Street
Main Street Use and Architecture Design Recommendations

The design, appearance, and use of Main Street’s architectural resources are critical factors in making Savannah’s downtown an attractive destination. The following recommendations are based on preferences expressed by community participants and on guidelines developed by the Main Street Grant Committee.

- Maintain and encourage a mix of uses on Main Street
  - Provide a variety of reasons to come downtown (retail, offices, residences, etc).
  - High foot traffic uses (restaurants, retail) should be located in first floor spaces.
  - Low foot traffic uses (residential, offices) should be located on upper floors.

- Reveal and restore shop fronts and establish a consistent image through façade design
  - Open up and restore brick facades on Main Street
  - Restore storefronts, including window openings and panel surrounds
  - Use compatible and welcoming storefront doors

- Hire a preservation architect to provide greater specificity to these guidelines.
  - Establish an overall color palette
  - Identify appropriate replacement materials as needed
  - Develop sketches of renovated Main Street facades to provide inspiration and guidance to individual property owners
  - Provide guidelines for the rear and side facades

- Develop commercial signage guidelines for Main Street businesses that recommend the size, placement, quality of materials and craftsmanship of commercial signage.

- New construction on Main Street should be contemporary in design, but also compatible with the area’s historic architecture (see figure 15). Important characteristics to reflect include:
  - Brick construction
  - 2-3 story height
  - Ground-floor commercial shop fronts
  - Regular window patterns on upper stories
  - A matching setback from the street
  - On street or rear parking

Figure 14. Larger windows in storefronts encourage people to come inside.

Figure 15. New construction along Main Street and Seneca Street should complement the area’s historic architecture and development characteristics.

Figure 16. Use appropriate replacement materials when renovating storefronts to give a consistent image for Main Street.

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Get involved: If you are interested in learning more about the revitalization of downtown Savannah, contact Ken Lauderdale at 315 - 365 - 2811.

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