

## Developing Downtown Dublin through Vision, Principles, and Priorities

### VISION STATEMENT

To develop, through public and private partnerships, a core area of Dublin that is walkable, beautiful, full of people, respectful of our community's unique history, economically vibrant, and alive with private and public events.

### MISSION STATEMENT

#### *Downtown is Different -- Embrace the Difference*

- (1) Find new purposes for old buildings.
- (2) Create beautiful public spaces.
- (3) Attract engaged audiences.

Downtown favors

**small business** over chain stores,  
**walking** over driving,  
**historic** buildings over modern construction,  
**green** spaces over parking spaces, and  
**culture** over convenience.

Downtown is a niche market that is different from the current, dominant commercial scene:

<b>Downtown</b>	<b>Dominant Commercial</b>	<b>Industrial</b>
Small Businesses, Locally-Owned	National and Regional Franchises and Chain Stores	National and International Corporate Ownership
Walking	Driving	Railroads/Interstates
Parks and connected Green Spaces	Medians or Islands of green	No or limited green space
Old Buildings/Materials	Modern Buildings/Materials	Utilitarian structures (non-ornamental)
Public Spaces	Private Spaces open to public	Private Spaces closed to public
Centralized Parking away from businesses	Parking directly in front of businesses	Parking only as needed for employees
Mixed Residential & Commercial Uses	Commercial Only	Industrial Only

Downtown-style development is a growing niche market. Empty-nesters and millennials are especially attracted to the qualities of a good downtown, and they are the two largest demographic markets. The more downtown tries to be like the dominant commercial theme, the less appealing it becomes to its own market.

For downtown to succeed, it has to embrace the qualities that set it apart: small business-oriented, walking-friendly, historic, green, and cultural.

**The mission of the Board and Staff is** to prioritize our resources consistent with our organizational vision.

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## Levels of Priority in Considering Physical Development Projects

- 1 Old Buildings
  - 2 New Buildings
  - 3 Corners
  - 4 Green Space
  - 5 Parking
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### **1 Old Buildings**

Buildings built prior to World War II shouldn't be torn down unless they are structurally unsalvageable. Some quality has allowed them to endure, whether it be materials, location, construction, design, or some intangible quality. Buildings from the pre-war period are generally the work of craftsmen rather than industrial processes, and therefore contain details and designs that cannot be matched by newer construction methods. The older the building, the more deference should be given to its continued existence.

If possible, old buildings should be renovated according to the standards set out in the Secretary of Interior handbook on historic renovations. In any case, the less added or destroyed, the better.

If it's not currently possible to put an old building back into use, mothball it for future renovation (secure the roof and windows against water intrusion).

### **2 New Buildings**

Our downtown has too many empty spots; to create a true, walkable downtown, we need more buildings, more businesses, and more activities packed in close together. So, new construction to fill in the gaps should be a high priority.

New buildings don't need to look like old buildings, but they should follow the defining principles of downtown construction:

- (1) new buildings should sit as close to the street and sidewalk as possible, with parking in rear;
- (2) lots of windows looking out onto the street;
- (3) the size of the building should be harmonious to the surrounding buildings; and

(4) pedestrian flow should connect to surrounding pedestrian routes.

**More compact buildings are better than buildings that occupy a lot of street space.**

For a downtown to be walkable, you have to be able to access a lot of different businesses or sites within a short distance.

Downtown Macon has the problem of huge banks taking up entire city blocks -- that makes those areas of town virtually unwalkable. If the building is large, such as the Fred Roberts or Lovett & Tharpe buildings, then the bottom floors should be divided up into multiple spaces -- also, economically speaking, smaller spaces attract a wider audience of potential small business renters.

**3 Corners**

Priority should be given to protecting and developing attractive intersection corners. Our eyes are drawn to corners and they create the first impression of an area of town. Attractive corners make up for a lot of ugliness behind them.

**4 Green Space as Pedestrian Infrastructure**

Green space doesn't solve all problems and shouldn't be a default choice. Green space works only when it reinforces and develops natural pedestrian patterns. A good green space should be connected to sidewalks, buildings, and activities. It should be as attractive to look out of from within as it is to look into from without.

Green space can quickly become dead space if it is not connected to buildings, businesses, and other human activities. Plopping a green island into the middle of a parking lot is almost useless, because people cannot access it or use it.

For these reasons, green spaces should be a cornerstone in the development of pedestrian infrastructure. Green spaces can be implemented as corridors of mixed sidewalks and trees that lead to both commercial areas and larger open spaces, twining the two together within a densely developed downtown core.

**5 Parking**

*Walking defines what a downtown is all about.* Walking distinguishes downtown from other parts of town. When you are going to a particular store to buy something, parking convenience is definitely a top priority, and the entire rest of Dublin offers this convenience. However, when you're going somewhere to spend an afternoon or do multiple activities, close parking is less important.

For downtown, we don't want any *one* place to be a *single* destination. We want the whole downtown area to be the destination, so that people park one time and walk to multiple activities: art class, lunch, walk in the park, theatre show. If there's enough to do, people will find a place to park.

*If lack of close parking alone stops people from coming downtown, then the downtown needs work, not the parking.*

For these reasons, for our downtown area, parking should be the last concern of development. Where parking is added, it should be very intensive with as many spaces packed into as small of an area as possible. Any off-street parking should be behind the buildings, and never in front. Whenever possible, parking lots should be as hidden from the view of main streets as possible, and for this reason lots of signs pointing to parking are needed.

### **Additional Criteria for Prioritizing Downtown Development Projects**

**General Purpose v. Single Purpose.** Any project should aim for a building that is as general purpose in design as possible, to allow for future alternative uses. Macon's museum district shows the dangers of building single purpose structures -- when the public funding for the museums dried up, the buildings were not easily re-adapted for private uses.

**Private Use v. Public Use.** Private uses are preferable to public uses because

- (i) public funding is always at risk, and when it's gone it's hard to re-purpose the building;
- (ii) it costs more and takes longer to renovate a building to public standards;
- (iii) private uses generally generate more foot traffic and economic energy than public uses;  
and
- (iv) when private uses fail, new private uses come in quickly; when private uses succeed, they often expand.

**Residential.** Residential opportunities are the key to a vibrant, 24-hour downtown and increasing safety. Where possible, the upstairs of core downtown buildings should be converted to loft apartments. For new construction, the DDA should encourage mixed upstairs-downstairs/residential-commercial use. The borders of downtown, within a walking distance to restaurants and retail, become the next field of development, with all the same principles and priorities as in the cored downtown area.

## **The Key Role of Downtown Events**

Regular events are vital to the success of downtown. Effective events have the following impacts:

- Foster civic pride by showcasing our beautiful public spaces and the historic sites of our downtown area.
- Develop stronger cohesion among the members of our community by allowing people to engage in positive interactions and build new relationships.
- Provide exposure to under-utilized spaces, to incite ideas of new re-development.
- Excite, entertain and educate the citizenry.
- Allow expression of local creative talents.
- Create economic activity for downtown merchants.

Continuation of the the downtown St. Patrick's Arts & Crafts festival, programming at Theatre Dublin, the Farmers Market at Madison Square, the Shamrock Drop, Jingle & Mingle, Pop-Up Boutiques, Pig-in-the-Park BBQ Contest, Carnegie Art Shows, and Plaza weddings and special events all create a sense that downtown is the core public space of our community.