

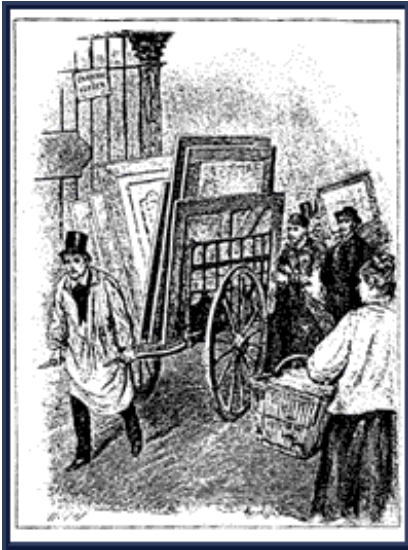
Uniquely Unadilla

The Report

Downtown Design Charrette

September 05-06 2003

Unadilla, GA



What is a Charrette?

The French word, "charrette" means "cart" and is often used to describe the final, intense work effort expended by art and architecture students to meet a project deadline. This use of the term is said to originate from the École des Beaux Arts in Paris during the 19th century, where proctors circulated a cart, or "charrette", to collect final drawings while students frantically put finishing touches on their work.

Today the term has come to describe an intense creative period that is combined with public workshops and articulated community goals. The charrette is a collaborative planning process that harnesses the talents and energies of all interested parties to create and support a plan. It is an insider's view expressed visually by outside experts.

It has been called a creative "tornado in reverse." The process begins with a multitude of information scattered about and, with a flurry of activity, concludes in a coherent vision for a real place.



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I. Introduction



The Unadilla Downtown Development Authority invited the University of Georgia's Center for Community Design and Preservation at the College of Environment and Design to conduct a community design charrette for improvements to downtown Unadilla.

On Friday, September 5, 2003, a group of staff and students from the University traveled to Unadilla and met with local community leaders. Discussions were lively as charrette participants recalled how vibrant and active downtown once was. The era of the interstate highway system marked the decline of downtown Unadilla when the cars driving along Highway 41 disappeared. This traffic once supported commerce and kept the downtown active. Now, cars traveling along Interstate 75 pass within a quarter mile of Unadilla, but few take the time to stop. Returning downtown to a place that draws people off the interstate was a common theme during the charrette. Additionally, charrette participants wanted downtown to become a place that meets the needs of the community. Unadilla needs places to shop, dine, gather, and conduct business. There is no better place for these activities than in the historic downtown. Currently, many of the buildings downtown are empty and in an extreme state of decay. Charrette participants enthusiastically spoke about reversing the decline of downtown Unadilla. From the charrette, it is clear there is a desire and motivation to revive downtown. The charrette products are intended to give community leaders the tools and vision needed to keep the momentum going.

Community leaders are urged to use this report and the work being done by Jaeger and Associates to leverage future engineering and design projects to implement improvements. The ideas presented here are to be seen as options for change. The successful coordination of consultant recommendations, community sentiment, political will, local ordinances and health and safety codes is in your hands. The challenge is great, but not insurmountable. The current strategy of using professionals to guide the process of change is a good one. It will allow Unadilla to reap many benefits in the years to come.

The physical repair of downtown structures is an immediate priority. Return of businesses and increased community activities downtown are essential to revive downtown. Empty storefronts can be transformed into buildings that serve the needs of the community by providing new restaurants, shops, and business space, which are conspicuously sparse in Unadilla. **The overarching policy in all future work must be sensitive improvement without losing what makes Unadilla special.**

During the charrette the UGA team began to get a sense of what makes Unadilla special. The following list is a snap shot of what we saw and heard:

- The historic buildings along Front Street and the Cotton/Peanut warehouse on East Railroad Street are obvious contributors to Unadilla's unique personality.
- Mr. Christmas' incredible collection of 1950-1960's memorabilia.
- Big Saturday is an important and unique event that brings community members and visitors in to downtown.
- Trains speeding through downtown are an event that may seem troublesome and noisy to some local residents, but railroad-based tourism can draw visitors and their financial support. The blast of the horns and the rhythm of the train cars should sound like cash registers ringing.
- The local agricultural tradition contributes to the identity of Unadilla. The views of agricultural fields from the middle of downtown are a unique and enduring symbol of the town. These vistas are worthy of protection, enhancement and perpetuation.

Amid the drawing, photographing, and information gathering that accompanied the charrette the word unique kept being used to describe the town's character. Somehow, "Uniquely Unadilla" seemed to fit the charrette and the concept for design recommendations evolved from this phrase. The concept of "Uniquely Unadilla" is straightforward: preserve what is unique and develop an identity for downtown that serves the needs of the community while treating visitors to something new.

II. Building Improvements

The drawings vividly illustrate the transformation that will occur along Front Street. The evolution shown here is literally a “back to the future” vision for change.



Current Condition



Outline for the future



Vision of the future

A vibrant historic town center with a handsome row of turn of the century structures mirroring a busy train corridor is an image burned in the memories of many of Unadilla’s residents. This image is also an attractive calling card for business, a draw for tourists, and a great gathering place for community activities. Unadilla is almost there, but is missing the healthy row of businesses in historic storefronts. Big Saturday proves the attraction of Front Street as a gathering place. The popularity of train viewing platforms and rail watching in Georgia is proven in towns such as Folkston and Manchester and can be utilized as another means of bringing people to Unadilla (see appendix A and B).

The charrette team easily envisioned a bustling row of beautiful storefronts emerge from a neglected row of buildings. The transformation will be an easy one aesthetically and a bit more difficult financially. Our recommendations follow for building-by-building improvement. The process is one that is easy to remember:

1. Repair rather than replace
2. If replacement is necessary, replace deteriorated features with identical material and design.

3. Missing features should be replaced with exact duplicates only when photo-documentation is available.
4. If that is not possible, replace with material that is similar and compatible with surroundings.

There is no need for additional demolition of buildings that are in moderately good repair. DEMOLITION MUST STOP IN UNADILLA.

New businesses should locate in existing buildings before new structures are added to the town's core.

Unique buildings like the triple Quonset, the historic brick buildings on Pine Street, the former auto dealership, the former brick post office on Pine Street, the old city hall and the cotton warehouse make excellent buildings for reuse. They are investments that should be recycled rather than destroyed. In most cases, they represent a building type that is almost impossible to rebuild today. The quality of materials, the story they tell and their "differentness" contribute to their value as community symbols.

All building improvements should be made following the broad standards established for historic rehabilitation work by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior. By adhering to these standards, a property does not become ineligible to participate in federal and state tax incentive programs.

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation are ten basic principles created to help preserve the distinctive character of a historic building and its site, while allowing for reasonable change to meet new needs.

The Standards apply to historic buildings of all periods, styles, types, materials, and sizes. They apply to both the exterior and the interior of historic buildings. The Standards also encompass related landscape features and the building's site and environment as well as attached, adjacent, or related new construction.

The Standards are applied to projects in a reasonable manner, taking into consideration economic and technical feasibility.

1. A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment.
2. The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.
3. Each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken.
4. Most properties change over time; those changes that have acquired historic significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved.
5. Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a historic property shall be preserved.
6. Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible,

- materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.
7. Chemical or physical treatments, such as sandblasting, that cause damage to historic materials shall not be used. The surface cleaning of structures, if appropriate, shall be undertaken using the gentlest means possible.
 8. Significant archeological resources affected by a project shall be protected and preserved. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures shall be undertaken.
 9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.
 10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

The standards and information about tax credit programs can be found at the following websites:

Tax Credits and Grants

<http://www.cr.nps.gov/helpyou.htm>

Secretary of the Interiors Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties

<http://www2.cr.nps.gov/tps/standguide/index.htm>

Georgia Tax Credit Programs

<http://www.dnr.state.ga.us/dnr/histpres/>



III. Recapture the Corners

The corner of Front and Borum, Pine and Borum and Front and Third

1. The site of the old drug store, the vacant lot at the corner of Borum and Front, should be maintained as mowed lawn until a suitable developer with appropriate plans can “fill the gap” with a new building. The literal rebuilding of the former drug store is not necessary, but a new building with similar proportions, exterior materials and roof shape will redefine the empty intersection. A new building with appropriate materials, scale and window openings can unify and stabilize this important anchor to downtown. It redefines the now amorphous intersection with a strong edge and punctuates the entire downtown with a visual exclamation point.



2. This same treatment is needed at the other end of the downtown block. The old car dealership at the corner of Front and Third makes an ideal redevelopment property. The reuse of the large open spaces of the former dealership can accommodate larger functions like a farmers market, small grocery, furniture or carpet store. The building is an excellent example of early twentieth century automotive related architecture. Its Mediterranean revival details are important and should be treated sensitively during rehabilitation.



3. The corner of Pine and Borum serves a different purpose for downtown. It is an attention grabber but accomplishes that with a green welcome mat rather than a brick one. The charrette team agreed that this corner is an important spot to attract the passerby and direct them downtown. It is a spot to show that this is a special place with unique attributes. We therefore designed a backdrop of leafy and flowering trees with a directional sign prominently placed in the foreground on the corner of the lot.



IV. Planter's Warehouse

The Planter's Warehouse is a unique resource poised to become the crown jewel of Unadilla. The open floor plan and towering ceiling make the building suitable for a variety of uses. It's easy to imagine town meetings, concerts, and even wedding receptions here. With a prime location within easy walking distance of downtown and a massive 11,000 square feet of floor space, this stately century-old warehouse promises to be an ideal gathering place and community center.

Though the building is in very good condition, it needs some work in order to realize its potential. As with many historic structures, water damage is the chief problem in the Planter's Warehouse. New gutters, flashing, and other water egress systems need to be installed. Water has also infiltrated the building from below. Rising damp is a serious problem that has caused some floor joists to rot. These water issues should be addressed as soon as possible.

Many historic industrial buildings in Southern cities and towns have been successfully rehabilitated. The Cleveland, Mississippi grocer's warehouse now serves as an antique mall. In Athens, Georgia, an old foundry has been transformed into meeting spaces, a restaurant and pub, and even a spa.



V. Streetscape, Railroad Park and Train-Viewing Pavilion

Initial Streetscape Observations

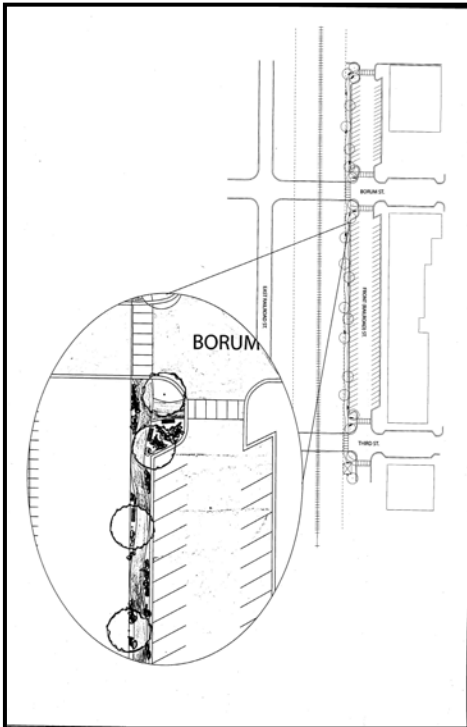
1. Pine Street is the corridor with the most traffic and has the most visual discord – street trees should be concentrated along Pine Street with clearly defined entrance features at either end of town. These street trees should be more uniform and evenly spaced to bring unity to the corridor. The use of a signature tree would be ideal to give identity to the city.
2. The increased tree placement and re-greening of the city along Pine is contrasted to Front Street where few trees existed historically and conditions are such that new trees would be expensive to install and maintain. Landscape improvements along Front Street should be relegated to a new vegetated path along the railroad right of way. The tree canopy and plant materials along Front Street’s railroad should *lack* uniformity—large canopy trees should be located at the ends of blocks and smaller tree-like shrubs and low growing plants should be grouped in nodes with open views to the tracks along the railroad walk and viewing platform. The added, vegetated space along the right of way can be obtained from narrowing Front Street slightly and regrading the area where new plants and the walk will be installed. Beds for seasonal plantings can be included in the design for added punch.
3. The width of the downtown sidewalk is historic as is the poured concrete paving surface. This relationship of size and material should be maintained. The only alteration to sidewalk design should be in terms of accessibility requirements and surface repair. The steps along Front Street are historic, too.
4. Angled parking should be the rule in downtown with minimal parallel parking.
5. Concentrated planting along Third and Borum is strongly encouraged. It is both a historical precedent and will frame the entrances to downtown. The problem is overhead power lines. Lower-growing species that can be accommodated beneath the lines should be planted here.
6. Of course, drought tolerant, native species should predominate.
7. Minimize hard to maintain and nonfunctional sidewalk accessories such as potted plants, and accessories made of synthetic materials.

Additional Observations

1. Parking is ample in Unadilla! New paved parking areas and other nonporous surfaces are discouraged.
2. One of Unadilla’s strengths is the agricultural edges of the town. In fact, planted fields can be viewed from the center of town. This relationship of urban building traditions (downtown’s historic building stock) juxtaposed with agrarian environments (fields and row crops) must be maintained.
3. Rear entrances should be improved, especially since they are easily viewed from Pine Street. The historic alleyways should be cleaned, maintained and used as alternate entrances to the buildings along Front Street.
4. Decorative paving, while appropriate for newer areas, should not be a part of downtown improvements. Your historic buildings are the showstoppers. The

background palette should remain simple and unadorned. The only time that this does not apply is in crosswalk design.

For the City of Unadilla, having a major railroad right-of-way cutting through downtown is both a blessing and a curse. The fascinating array of locomotives and rolling stock that passes by on a regular basis attracts the interest of young and old and provides a reminder of the economic importance of the railroad to Unadilla's past. The passing trains are loud, however, and the open space created by the right-of-way robs the downtown of important edge qualities. What Unadilla needs is a new relationship with the rail line that would take into account the dual nature of its presence.

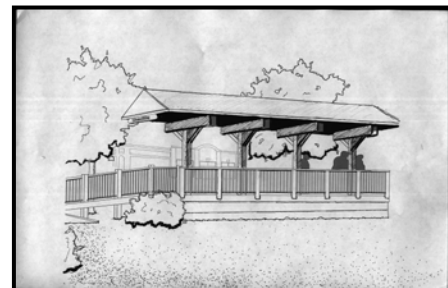


Therefore, a linear park that runs alongside the right-of-way is a solution for the edgeless feeling of Front Street. This park has been designed to create both a softer border along Front Street to provide a buffer against the commotion of passing trains as well as a gathering area for those who come to watch the passing trains and for those who come to Big Saturday. The details of the park address problems and highlight assets, without costing a fortune to implement.

The main body of the park consists of a meandering pathway paralleling Front Street. This path, surfaced with crushed brick reminiscent of Georgia red clay and well represented in downtown buildings, is surrounded by scattered shade trees and smaller plants. These plantings will be atop bermed and banked soil to provide a subtle variety of terrain alongside the path. Scattered natural boulders will provide support for these small berms. Benches are also suggested along the path. Though the open space available for

construction demands a very narrow park, the addition of this slice of horticultural diversity in an otherwise barren strip of turf and asphalt will enhance downtown and the visitor's experience.

At the far eastern end of Front Street, where the street narrows and where a train depot historically stood, we recommend a new structure. This structure would be a train-viewing platform to delight rail fans who come to enjoy the passing trains. The city of Folkston, Georgia has had great success with a platform of similar design, and we anticipate Unadilla benefiting in the same way. The platform is an open-sided, covered structure with a pleasant sitting area and a close-up view onto the tracks. Optional features are a permanently mounted radio scanner to pick up the radio traffic of the approaching trains, barbeque grills and restroom facilities. The architectural details of the platform should allude to the design of the old Unadilla depot but not literally copy it.



VI. Options for Environmental Graphics

Environmental graphics can help clarify a visitor's experience or forever befuddle them. Directional and informational graphics play a big role in making Unadilla understandable. The coordination of design, materials and placement can result in a long lasting memory for residents and tourists alike.



Graphic identity programs that work well use colors, sculptural elements and size to communicate ideas and information.

The places where signage can be most effective are gateway positions. Obvious locations are at the edge of towns (city limits) but also at important breaks and changes in landscape, use and street patterns. For Unadilla these locations are at the corners of entrances into downtown, especially at the intersection where Front Street veers off Pine at either end of town.

The charrette team recommended an approach for sign and graphic communication that might serve as ideas for final implementation. The sign system works off elements found in former signs in Dooley County and architectural elements from buildings and landmarks. Final solutions for the community sign system should be coordinated with other master planning efforts currently being proposed by Jaeger and Associates.