DOWNTOWN DOUGLAS DESIGN CHARRETTE
A design charrette is a multi-day workshop that brings designers and locals together to focus on a particular planning problem and arrive at a collaborative solution. The goal of this charrette is to revitalize the downtown area, enhance corridors that lead into the city, and showcase revitalization potential for appropriate new construction to attract investors.
The Douglas Downtown Development Authority (DDA) sought conceptual design solutions and consensus building to provide a vision for the future of their community. With a jurisdiction area that encompasses the entire 2.5-mile stretch of Downtown and includes commercial and residential areas, the DDA aimed to achieve Douglas’s potential for the entire in-town community.

Despite building occupancy in Downtown being around 90% and investors pursuing second-story loft developments and entertainment venues, the city is facing several challenges, including disinvestment due to absentee ownership and neglect, lack of affordable housing options, and declining strip mall developments. To address these issues, additional focus is needed on revitalizing the downtown area, enhancing corridors that lead into the city, and showcasing revitalization potential for appropriate new construction to attract investors. Your survey responses will help local leaders prioritize revitalization efforts Downtown.
The Center for Community Design and Preservation (CCDP) conducted a design charrette for the Douglas Downtown Development Authority to bring designers (CED students) and locals together to envision plans for the future.

The goals of this charrette were:

(1) to help the community move forward in their decision-making by creating citizen buy-in and an illustrated vision of solutions that address Downtown revitalization, corridor enhancement, and housing opportunities, and

(2) to give CED students the opportunity to apply their skills to a community project, work closely with a client, and learn participatory design techniques.
The Downtown Development Authority of Douglas requested assistance in creating a cohesive vision that addressed revitalization potential, corridor enhancements, and infill housing.

The weekend began with a tour of the downtown area and its commercial gateways followed by a community input session attended by 30 local stakeholders.

The students then facilitated a mapping analysis that asked locals what elements of downtown were worth keeping and which needed fixing. Also, residents were asked to imagine that they were returning to Douglas after 10 years and to describe what they hoped to see.
After the stakeholder feedback, the charrette team began to coalesce the information gathered into broad categories of need: Greenspace & Greenways, Entertainment & Placemaking, Streetscape & Circulation, Preservation & Housing, and a special focus on the Carver District.

CCDP Director and charrette facilitator Jennifer Lewis asked each student group to determine a handful of big ideas to be broken down into small wins achievable through strategies like “tactical urbanism” – short-term, low-cost, and scalable interventions to catalyze long-term change.

Concepts included using vacant lots for gathering spaces, temporarily closing streets or parking spots to allow for outdoor seating and nightlife, incorporating container plantings to beautify the downtown, fostering an interest in upper-story living through tours, and prioritizing plaza seating over a few parking spaces.
GREEN TEAM

Tommy Chambers, Alexis Eiche, Inglish Filbern, Julia Rothermel, and Madison Smrz

The following section focuses on vacant lots that have the potential for greenspace within the central downtown district. The team explored the Douglas Trail as a connecting artery and aimed to propose a vision for a community event space downtown that includes a park, parking deck, and apartment housing in the area.
We Heard:

Community members identified several areas in the vicinity of downtown that are not being utilized to their full potential. They are interested in transforming these areas into gathering spaces, particularly along the trail. Moreover, the trail itself requires some improvements to make it more attractive and functional for pedestrians.

We Observed:

- Certain areas were more ideal for development than others
- The central artery of our area of focus was the trail
- Trail infrastructure already exists close to downtown
- Some of the sites are contaminated brownfields
- More plantings, shade trees, lighting, parking would make these vacant spaces more enjoyable
- Private landowners may be unwilling to sell their land
The block that includes the police station and a large vacant parcel (at right) may be ideal for redevelopment as a central gathering space. This block is already being discussed by local government leaders for a future use. It is centrally located in town and is bisected by the Douglas Trail. The team used this site to:

- Establish a central community gathering space with a lawn for entertainment
- Connect the trail to smaller pocket parks/parking lots
- Improve the Downtown experience

*The Atlanta Beltline is a big-city example that small towns can learn from for how to activate abandoned land for a new public use.*
An amphitheater is a great way to activate a space and bring people together. This can be programmed to have specific events or be a general area for people of all ages to gather and socialize.

A playground would add a much-needed children’s amenity. The design of the playground is inspired by trains and railcars.

A bridge is suggested for crossing the railroad because of desire lines (above) were observed across the railroad tracks.

The rendering here visualizes what the parking deck might look like when integrated into its Downtown storefront surroundings.

This rendering shows 5-on-1 style apartments to add housing downtown. Amenities have been added to the rooftop that can enhance nightlife in the Downtown.

This rendering shows added amenities, like seating and plantings, within the Downtown.

Redevelopment of the Police Station block into a central gathering space with infill housing, small parking deck, and connections to town.
Ball Ground Burger Bus: Ball Ground, GA

This case study exemplifies how an old bus (or train car, in Douglas’s case) can be used as an amenity to provide food or another little shop. It is an idea that we can foresee happening at the Museum Heritage Station where the red train car already stands with a deck and tables for visitors.
CASE STUDIES
Central Gathering Space

Jazz in the Park
Cathedral Square Park: Milwaukee, WI

This example was used to develop the central community gathering space. The gathering space includes open lawn space for seating, a semi-permanent stage/amphitheater structure, a children's play area, and space for food tents/trucks. While there are numerous outdoor amphitheaters, this one is distinct in that it includes a children's playground.
To take these big ideas for a central gathering space and achieve short-term results, consider starting with a smaller site, like the area between the Boys and Girls Club and the Heritage Station Museum.

The benefits of this site as a central gathering space include:

- Mature tree canopy for shaded trails
- Open space for lawn play and events
- Located along the Douglas Trail
- Centrally located in Downtown
- Adjacent public parking lot
- Connects two existing assets that would benefit from enhancements
This plan shows the proposed ideas for the lot between the Heritage Station Museum and the Boys and Girls Club. It includes connections that would allow the kids at the Boys and Girls Club to utilize the greenway and the added basketball courts provide an opportunity for outdoor recreation.

The historic buildings near the Heritage Station Museum are shown as a restaurant or snack bar. The site includes added connectivity via trails that connect to downtown and within the greenspace.
This section explores improvements that are necessary to enhance the greenway. Additionally, the team will discuss the establishment of a downtown plaza that serves the Martin Centre and the businesses surrounding it.
We Heard:
The greenway is an amazing asset, but it is currently underutilized by the general public. The connections between the college, downtown, and residential areas are very valuable.

We Observed:
The greenway could be enhanced by adding:

- Additional plantings for shade
- Public restrooms
- Water stations
- Lighting
- Seating
Conversations with stakeholders indicated that residents would be interested in a bike share program. This would allow for residents to use the greenway as a mode of transit from one area to another and would be quicker than walking.

The proposed bike rental program would have three stations connecting the north end of downtown (1), historic district (2), and the college (3).

This will increase interest for college students to travel to the downtown historic district from campus, which was frequently mentioned as a goal.
“Book-a-Bike” program in Athens, Glouster, The Plains, Nelsonville, and Chauncey, Ohio: Made possible by grant funds and local donations, this program allows library cardholders to borrow bicycles for free.

Some small wins regarding the bike share program include:

- Starting a bike share program by partnering with South Georgia State College with a small investment of inexpensive bicycles painted in college colors
- Bike repair stations along the greenway and within the Downtown Historic District
Conversations with stakeholders helped the team learn that Atkinson Plaza was once designed as a public seating area, but skateboarders found the infrastructure enticing for practicing tricks. This caused damage to some of the walls and benches, so the seating was removed for everybody.

Rather than abandon the idea of creating a plaza that everyone can enjoy, perhaps designate places for skateboarding adjacent to the greenway. This would:

- Eliminate damage to property caused by skaters
- Provide a safe place for youth recreation
- Further activate the greenway
The Skatepark Project
Provides resources, solutions, and grants to fund skateparks in underserved communities. The project also highlights ways temporary skate parks can be made using found objects.

Skatepark Project Grants: https://skatepark.org/the-skatepark-project-grants/
The small grassy lot behind Harvey’s Supermarket has the potential to be used as a pocket park. Located along the greenway and next to the grocery store and South GA State’s campus, it could be used as a picnic space. A playground would be a nice amenity to have at this site.
BIG IDEAS
Greenway Enhancement | Harvey’s Supermarket Park

Potential playground (Treasa McHugh)

Perspective depicting amenities along trail (Treasa McHugh)
Atkinson Plaza is located in the center of downtown but is currently burdened by eight (8) parking spots that take up a significant amount of room.

A cursory inventory of available on-street and surface parking shows a significant amount of adjacent parking space is available.

If these 8 spots for cars were removed there would be significantly more room to provide the gathering spot the public is requesting.
BIG IDEAS

*Plaza Design*

- Eliminate parking and add seating and tables
- Screen road noise with trees
- Make atmosphere more welcoming – get people to stay for an extended period of time

*Plan view of proposed Atkinson Plaza design (Erin Ideker)*

*Perspective rendering of Atkinson Plaza (Treasa McHugh)*
BIG IDEAS

Plaza Design

Perspective rendering of proposed Atkinson Plaza (Treasa McHugh)

Digital rendering of proposed Atkinson Plaza (Brock Corbin)
SMALL WINS
Greenway Enhancement and Plaza Design

• Create a temporary skatepark along the Greenway using recycled/found materials

• Temporarily close the parking lot in Atkinson Plaza to test the appeal of an outdoor gathering place with comfortable amenities:
  • Place seating in public areas (bistro tables and benches)
  • Install potted plants in Atkinson Plaza
  • Create shade with umbrellas at tables to ensure the space is inviting for dining, coffee, conversation and lingering.

Tactical Urbanism Examples

Douglas Design Charrette 2023
This section will explore circulation in central downtown and enhancing the streets and sidewalk experience. The team focuses on identifying areas that lack shade trees, outdoor seating, and pedestrian-friendly zones. The aim of this section is to provide insight into how central downtown can be made more functional and comfortable for pedestrians.
We heard:
The participants share their desire for the following:
  • Aesthetics
  • Walkability
  • Shade trees/enhanced streetscapes
  • Consistency throughout central downtown

We observed:
  • A lack of shade and outdoor seating areas
  • Large sidewalks that allow for generous streetscape improvements
  • Wide streets with light traffic
  • Restaurants, cafes, and stores with open doors, wanting to take advantage of the streetscape at a pedestrian scale
  • Places like Johnny’s Pizza have created well-utilized outdoor seating
BIG IDEAS

Streetscapes

Take advantage of wide sidewalks, generous rights-of-way, and low-trafficked blocks to create people-centered spaces with shade trees and outdoor seating.

This would allow for comfortable and inviting streetscapes that provide shade, outdoor dining, and incentivize walking through downtown.
Shade trees along main circulation routes like Peterson and Madison Ave are sorely needed to make walking Downtown pleasant.

There appears to be enough right-of-way to include two travel lanes, on-street parking, a planted buffer, and sidewalks.

Given the large undertaking that a streetscape plan entails, the team explored options to enhance walkability in the short term.
The 100 block of College Avenue was closed during the 2020 Covid pandemic in hopes of providing more outdoor seating for struggling restaurants and safe gathering spaces for the public. With the support of a majority of adjacent business owners, the county invested in sturdy picnic tables of various sizes and umbrellas for shade.

The impact was very positive, and the temporary shutdown of College Ave was made permanent in 2021.

Although the Athens population is much larger than Douglas, attempting to implement something similar could provide the same positive impact and achieve many local goals.

https://athenspoliticsnerd.com/college-square-to-stay-closed-to-cars/
Areas of focus:
- Bryan St. In central downtown, adjacent to J&D café
- Businesses along Peterson Avenue like The Taco Place

Small wins:
- Pedestrian dedicated areas with outdoor seating
- Shade trees and streetscape that improve pedestrian experience and incentivize walking
These are the Bryan St. renovations.

Changes made:

- Central Lane closed and pushed adjacent to J&D café
- Tables added to sidewalk to allow outdoor seating at J&D
- Vegetative buffer placed between pedestrian circulation and vehicular circulation
- Lighting placed overhead to encourage nightlife and create a more appealing pedestrian experience
- Like College Ave, could be temporary to test its success before making permanent installments
SMALL WINS
Streetscapes | Bryan St. Renovations

Close up of the proposed changes on Bryan St. Rendered by Clare Smith
Visible:

- Wrap around seating for J&D Café
- Pedestrian walkway
- Light canopy over pedestrian walk and seating
- Two-way Vehicular circulation on Bryan St.

*Perspective of J&D café, Viewed from Peterson Ave., rendered by Sarah Adams*

*Section of Bryan St. Viewed from Peterson Ave., rendered by Clare Smith*
Section of Bryan St. Viewed from Peterson Ave., rendered by Clare Smith
Areas of focus:
- South Peterson Avenue – The Taco Place
- Other businesses along Peterson Avenue/throughout downtown

Small wins
- Encourage pedestrian activity and circulation
- Shade trees and streetscape that improve pedestrian experience and incentivize walking
SMALL WINS

Streetscapes | Outdoor Area Inspiration

Douglas Design Charrette 2023
CARVER DISTRICT

Ezra Lewis, Lauren Prokop, and Molly Williams

The team recognizes the rich history and culture of the Carver District and aims to replicate the preservation and investment efforts observed in the Douglas Historic District. Additionally, this section aims to provide infrastructure to support existing neighborhood traditions and foster new community engagement opportunities.
We heard:
• George Washington carver shopping center is known locally as the Block. The Block has always been an important gathering space for the Black community. The shopping center buildings are in decline, but property owners are exploring rehabilitation options.
• The former equalization school is now a freshman campus for all 9th graders in Douglas.
• Roundtree Center Park is an active and well-loved recreation area.

We observed:
• The Block currently has one active business, a restaurant called Taste of Georgia. The shopping center has newly paved parking lot but would benefit from shade and outdoor seating at the restaurant, as has been recommended for Downtown.
• There is barbed wire around the freshman campus. It is not welcoming and makes the neighborhood appear unsafe.
• The Rosenwald School is an important part of our nation's history and deserves a more active use for the community.
• Additional greenspace is needed throughout this sector of town.
BIG IDEAS

Carver District

Community Engagement
- Create a space for gathering and events
- Public Art opportunities
- Implementation of community garden at school

Beautification
- Reduce heat island
- Make the area more friendly (school and shopping)
- Make it a place that people care to take care of

Culture
- Celebration of the Rosenwald School
- Better Signage for GWC Shopping and Rosenwald School
- Enhancing the cultural traditions of the area
BIG IDEAS
Carver District | George Washington Carver Freshman Campus

A. Proposed Public Art

B. Proposed Community Garden

Goals:
(1) Reduce Heat Island Effect for students in George Washington Carver Freshman Campus through new plantings
(2) Proposed Community Garden
(3) Provide Opportunities for Community/Student engagement
**BIG IDEAS**

*Carver District | Post Office Park*

**Goals:** To provide a greenspace connection from The Block area closer the downtown area, to provide space for patrons of the farmers market, and to allow for large open lawn as well as pavilions for gatherings.
SMALL WINS
Carver District | Pop-Up Plaza

Location: 670 S. Pearl Ave
Douglas Fire Dept. Back Lot
A: Stage for community performances
   • Emphasis on public gathering
B: Pop Up Shops
   • Owners can come and have their own space—people can walk around the center ring to shop
C: Movable Pallet Seating
D: Food Trucks
   • Outer ring of plaza—owners can come and park their trucks while people walk around and sit at the tables
Amy Andrews, Jennifer Lewis, Olivia Rothstein, and Shelby Stamback

Downtown Douglas should capitalize on the opportunity for unique loft housing. Ongoing efforts to restore its buildings to the original character and allowing for loft living would increase activity downtown day and night.

Continuing preservation efforts into the north and south gateways into town will allow for a cohesive appearance throughout the DDA sections and encourage more investment in areas experiencing property degradation.
We Heard:

- Douglas has many rehabilitation success stories, including the Martin Centre theater (fan favorite), Union Bank Company building, and the Heritage Station Museum.
- More historic buildings in the DDA boundary need to be better maintained and rehabilitated.
- Housing options are needed Downtown, including short-term rentals and long-term options.
- The motels on the north side of town are problematic due to perceived crime and unkempt appearance.
- Decatur, Macon, Thomasville, Madison, Moultrie, Brunswick, and Athens have qualities Douglas aspires to have – walkable, dining and entertainment, beautiful public spaces.
We Observed:

• There are a large number of structures with historic integrity: 62 Contributing buildings, structures, and objects.

• The downtown is inactive at night due to lack of residents and entertainment/dining options.

• The attractive architectural characteristics of some key historic buildings are disguised by false fronts.

• There are multiple empty or underused parcels with infill potential.

• There are historic buildings north and south of the central historic district which can be adaptively reused: e.g., gas stations.

• The mid-century motels on the north side have rehabilitation potential but are also meeting an affordable housing need unavailable elsewhere.
BIG IDEAS

Preservation in Character Areas

• Take advantage of the upper stories of Downtown buildings and available tax incentives to create housing options in the historic district.

• Target key historic buildings in the central district and the north and south gateways for impactful rehabilitation projects.

• Incorporate features and components of Douglas' history to create a cohesive narrative to be used throughout the DDA area.

• Create and enhance the affordable housing stock in Douglas
**BIG IDEAS**

*Preservation in Character Areas*

Target key historic buildings in the central district and the north and south gateways for impactful rehabilitation projects.

- The central district has traditional two-story buildings that are not reaching their full potential.
- The gateways have later, auto-centric developments that also have historic interest.
These rehabilitations show the reuse of early 20th century “ice box” style gas stations reimagined as new uses, including a laundromat and burger joint in Decatur GA and a brunch restaurant in Charleston SC.

There are several vacant gas stations in this same style located in the northern gateway of the DDA that could serve as various new businesses.

The DDA should consider promoting rehabilitation of existing building rather than demolition of interesting buildings and continuing the sprawl south of town.
This historic gas station located at 404 N Peterson Ave (formerly Spivey Auto Sales) is shown reimagined as a fitness center.
Take advantage of the upper stories of Downtown buildings and available tax incentives to create housing options in the historic district.

Historic building in Downtown’s central core have available state and federal historic preservation tax credits and RURAL zone incentives.

The Bordeaux Building has one of the largest second-floors available for redevelopment as downtown living. Located across from the Martin Centre, it is prime real estate for individuals interested in staying overnight to see a show or residing in the heart of the Downtown’s entertainment area.
Let historic photographs be the guide in realizing the potential of historic buildings.
These Pure Oil gas stations in Hartwell and Hahira have been restored to their original historic character.

When automobiles and gas stations became part of our built environment, gas companies favored this residential-like style as a way to appeal to potential customers. This architectural style is called Tudor Revival, which was popular between 1920–1940 and is based on an English cottage.

CASE STUDY

Southern Section of the DDA: Pure Station

These Pure Oil gas stations in Hartwell and Hahira have been restored to their original historic character.

When automobiles and gas stations became part of our built environment, gas companies favored this residential-like style as a way to appeal to potential customers. This architectural style is called Tudor Revival, which was popular between 1920–1940 and is based on an English cottage.
By retaining the existing architectural features of the gas station and adding landscape plantings to soften the surrounding concrete, this site could be adapted to a new use such as a restaurant or brewpub. This could activate the DDA area in a unique way by providing indoor-outdoor dining and a desired entertainment destination.
The motels on the north side of town could be rehabilitated as boutique hotels. However, they are currently serving a need for affordable housing.

If the former motels are deemed unsightly, code enforcement could be used to maintain community standards. But removing the motels will not solve the societal problem at hand, which is poor neighbors in need of a social safety net.

- Shelter is a basic human need, and hardest to come by for those with the least access to resources.
- Government, non-profits, and faith-based services often join forces to address pathways to better mental and physical health, employment, and housing.
- New partnerships should coalesce in Douglas to find solutions.

The following ideas show the potential for reuse of the motels and additional avenues for affordable housing, which has been identified as a need.
If the community desires the motels to become something more attractive and profitable, there are many examples of hip, boutique hotels that have embraced the kitschy qualities of these mid-century lodges, known for balconies, mature plantings, and front yard pools. Two successful examples nearby are the Thunderbird Inn in Savannah, GA, and the Sunset Motel in Brevard, NC.

The rehabilitation of Douglas’s motor courts could serve a need for lodging within walking distance of the Downtown Historic District.

However, a suitable alternative for long-term rentals at an affordable price point should be developed to offset the loss of housing that a conversion could bring.

https://tinyurl.com/WAPOroadsidemotels
New apartments could be located on vacant parcels along the corridors.

- Infill outside of the central historic district could have a blending of commercial and residential elements. Buildings should be directly accessible from the sidewalk and have street trees.
- Athens Housing Authority and Columbia Residential partnered to create this multi-family housing (at right) that includes affordable and voucher units in addition to market-rate units.

New housing should look like adjacent historic houses, whether they are single- or multi-family on the inside.

- Habitat for Humanity in Hartwell is building new single-family houses [https://www.harthabitat.org/](https://www.harthabitat.org/) and Historic Macon is building duplexes in historic neighborhoods.
- Land Trusts and other non-profits rehabilitate historic properties using Community Development Block Grant funding combined with home ownership classes that stabilize neighborhoods and keeps them affordable.

[https://athenslandtrust.org/our-work/affordable-housing/](https://athenslandtrust.org/our-work/affordable-housing/)

Clockwise L to R: Gaskin Ave, Macon, Athens, and Hartwell
Create a buzz about historic properties through unique programming in order to attract potential investors.

- **Historic Tours**
  - Upstairs, Downtown tour of rehabbed and not-yet-rehabbed upper stories
  - Tour of homes in Gaskin District
  - Food and walking history tours

- **Educational Markers**
  - Temporary signage telling the story of different areas throughout the DDA
  - Old photos in the windows of buildings showcasing their former appearance.

**SMALL WINS**

*Preservation in Character Areas*

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**Sandersville, GA’s Upstairs, Downtown tour brochure**

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**Douglas Design Charrette 2023**
SMALL WINS

Preservation in Character Areas

Use a unified signage design to signify districts that is reflective of local history.

- Use a cohesive narrative that can be incorporated throughout the DDA
- Details from historic buildings or railroad elements could be used as a brand (at right).

Create a housing coalition and visit other communities using successful affordable housing programs, such as:

- Habitat for Humanity chapters
- Georgia Initiative for Community Housing (GICH)
- Community Land Trusts
- Faith-based and youth-led home improvement efforts
By working with stakeholders to identify issues within the Downtown area, the UGA charrette team blended what they heard with their own observations to focus on solutions that could be approached incrementally. This approach can preserve Douglas’s unique character and create opportunities for all businesses and residents to thrive. In summary, consider prioritizing efforts from these small wins:

- Develop greenspace around the Station Museum and Boys and Girls Club.
- Partner with South Georgia State College on a small fleet of shared bicycles.
- Temporarily close Atkinson Plaza to cars and install cafe tables, chairs, potted plants and string lights to test interest in plaza seating.
- Allow restaurants to take over parking spaces and wide rights-of-way to create outdoor dining opportunities.
- Create a "pop-up plaza" for vendors and food trucks beside the Farmers Market.
- Host an Upstairs-Downtown tour of current lofts and vacant upper stories.
- Place old photos in the windows of buildings to showcase their former appearance.
- Create a housing coalition and visit other communities that are tackling affordable housing.
It has been our pleasure to work on this project. Thank you to our CED students for volunteering their time and talent to put their studies into practice and give back to Georgia communities. We are grateful to the town of Douglas for this experiential learning opportunity. Most importantly, thank you to the residents of Douglas and over 20 stakeholders who partook in the community input session. Your feedback was invaluable to the charrette team’s work and will assist local leaders in prioritizing the preservation of the town’s historic character and future development. Thank you for your commitment to our students’ experiential learning and for engaging in such an important civic planning process.

Scan the QR code above to find the survey or go to: https://ugeorgia.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_cMxwFCQDdB5sojY