

Memo

To: Myles Busching, Smart Growth America

From: Alex Morrison, Macon-Bibb County Assistant Manager of Economic Development

RE: Smart Growth Building Blocks twelve month report

A little more than one year after hearing the dramatic benefits our community can see by utilizing the tenets of Smart Growth, Macon is realizing even more of its great potential. Collaboration across groups has increased, and more people are using downtown than ever before. Our community is growing around our vibrant urban core and is using multi-modal transportation as the backbone of our plans for even more revitalization. Through inclusion and planning we are turning Downtown Macon-Bibb into the robust hub of Middle Georgia we've all known it could be.

The follow is how Macon-Bibb is specifically addressing our year one goals.

One Month

1. Participate in planning – Begin audit of existing plans and zoning codes – Select County staff or retain volunteers with understanding of downtown redevelopment goals to review existing codes and identify areas of concern. Use a tool such as the Smart Growth Code and Zoning Audit.

Working with Macon-Bibb County's Attorneys Office and the Macon-Bibb Planning and Zoning Commission, many codes have been updated to provide increased clarity. We have engaged interns to look into best practices for form-based codes and smart growth policies compared to Macon-Bibb. Planning and Zoning staff are planning to investigate complete streets and road diet policies in the coming months.

2. Redevelop downtown – Communicate the economic and fiscal relationship between downtown redevelopment and the rest of Macon – Begin to use information about the economic and fiscal benefits of downtown redevelopment in op-eds, speeches, and talking points.

We have used the Smart Growth data in several presentations in building the case for the Macon Action Plan and other smart growth policies. We have brought in Gil Penalosa to share the vision on 8 80 Cities and have contextualized his visits within the framework of smart growth. We are also using an expanded bike network as the primary driver of new investments in the urban core.

3. Adopt MAP – Begin to explore different options to give MAP staying power. Investigate the different suggestions and additional mechanisms to incorporate MAP goals and proposals into official policy, focusing on questions of legality, political feasibility, and long-term effectiveness.

A downtown challenge grant program was launched to democratize and stimulate key components of the Macon Action Plan. The plan has been adopted and endorsed by several boards and Authorities as their primary work program. Macon-Bibb departments are using the document to guide many of their individual actions.

Six Months

4. Redevelop downtown – Identify groups that articulate a desire to be better represented in downtown revitalization. Seek their help in identifying public events and place-making projects that are important to them.

We have established a downtown neighborhood watch group that has become very engaged in keeping downtown clean and safe. We have also been able to engage specific neighborhoods around downtown in projects that affect their area of the urban core. We have made strides to include each neighborhood in projects.

Macon-Bibb has also made public meetings a hallmark of its planning process. A prime example is the public comment on the upcoming Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) that was built based upon public needs and desires.

5. Redevelop downtown – Continue to program events that bring everyone downtown to see and feel the impact of recent changes and investments.

The County and other agencies have expanded existing events and created new ones to highlight areas around the urban core. A highlight has been a new film series that has bounced to several locations to show off improvements in parks and recreation centers.

6. Redevelop downtown – Identify significant downtown events where County Commissioners can be included. Select at least one event and focus effort and attention on engaging and celebrating Commissioners' efforts.

New Year's Eve will take place again and several pop-up bike interventions were commended by commissioners. We are planning more events in hopes of celebrating improvements. Many events in Mill Hill have been geared to celebrate the commitment of several commissioners to the project.

7. Participate in planning – Complete audit of plans and zoning codes.

Still ongoing.

8. Participate in planning – Initiate process of proposing changes to plans and zoning codes.

Planning and Zoning staff is looking into ways to integrate more smart growth elements to current plans. They have also greatly increased efforts to include public comment in plans long range plans.

9. Participate in planning – Review the adopted plans of other City Authorities.

This has been accomplished along with the further advocating of MAP.

10. Participate in planning – Work with the Middle Georgia Regional Commission to identify relevant opportunities for participation and appoint representatives.

The regional planning process has been opened to a broad group of officials and citizens to ensure better participation. Macon-Bibb is working with the regional commission on an updated blight and urban redevelopment plan.

11. Participate in planning – Begin to appoint young leaders to Authorities and Commissions.

Mayor has begun including more young leaders and new faces in appointments to Authorities and Commissions.

12. Strengthen neighborhoods – Identify health-focused businesses, non-profits, and community groups who are already working on active living, safe housing, and healthy food initiatives.

Completed.

13. Strengthen neighborhoods – Identify opportunities to work with health-oriented partners in specific neighborhoods, prioritizing those adjacent to downtown.

Several lifestyle organizations like Bike Walk Macon are working to better connect these neighborhoods. Navicent Health has been aggressive in improving walkability around its campus and creating better connectivity to its campus and other assets.

14. Adopt MAP – Designate responsible staff to manage process of adopting MAP goals and recommendations.

MAP has been integrated into the work plans of several department heads and will continue to be led by a coalition of partners. The Urban Development Authority and NewTown Macon have signed a memorandum of agreement to work closely to implement the plan and devoted time of both directors to the task.

One Year

15. Strengthen neighborhoods – Identify additional resources – public or private – to allow for expansion of the 5x5 program

5x5 is ongoing and working in all neighborhoods across Macon-Bibb. Each affected department targets resources in a specific area, though the funding is not a separate line-item. Various agencies have agreed to support the 5x5 efforts through the OneMacon strategic plan process.

16. Strengthen neighborhoods – Appoint a committee to identify and prioritize bicycle, pedestrian, and transit improvements that link neighborhoods downtown.

A group of individuals with UDA, NewTown, Bike Macon, Main Street, and Macon-Bibb departments are working on this initiative, locally called Macon Connects. A separate group has been appointed to look at pedestrian safety county-wide.

17. Adopt MAP – Act on identified options to give MAP recommendations staying power.

The Downtown Challenge has accelerated MAP implementation, and big efforts like Macon Connects have given certain pieces of MAP staying power. Beautification and housing efforts have been redoubled in the last year.

18. Participate in Planning – Have at least 5 people under 40 on Authorities and Commissions.

This goal has not been met for traditional boards due to too few opportunities for appointments, but several outside agencies have been committed to growing by adding younger board members. Our transportation citizens board for MATS has several members under 40 and our Cherry Blossom Festival and Keep Macon-Bibb Beautiful commissions have benefitted greatly from the addition of younger members. A recently reconstituted College Hill Commission, the group that instigated several smart growth ideas in Macon, is primarily populated by younger members.