Smart Growth America
Improving lives by improving communities

Atmore, Alabama

Planning for Economic & Fiscal Health Report and Suggested Next Steps

USDA Rural Development Rural Community Development Initiative (RCDI)

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Date: March 28, 2019

Executive Summary

Pursuant to our technical assistance award with the City of Atmore, this Memorandum constitutes Smart Growth America's final report summarizing the recent *Planning for Economic and Fiscal Health* workshop, and suggesting possible Next Steps the city could take to craft a vision for the future development of the focus areas addressed during the workshop.

John Robert Smith, Chris Zimmerman, and Brian Lutenegger—all representing Smart Growth America (SGA)—met with local leaders and residents on February 19 and 20, 2019 to provide assistance via the *Planning for Economic and Fiscal Health* tool, supported by a grant SGA received under USDA Rural Development's Rural Community Development Initiative (RCDI) program. Under the program, SGA also conducted and delivered a *Hotspot Analysis* to Atmore identifying the most promising locations for development in the city. While results of this analysis are woven into our recommendations below, refer to appendix C for the results of the analysis.

Following productive interviews and discussions with various stakeholders — including residents, advocates, city and local agency representatives, business owners and elected officials — the following Next Steps are recommended:

1. **Create an advisory and implementation committee including the interests present at the workshop, to implement these action items.**
2. **Foster land uses that create fiscally sustainable development patterns.**
3. **Develop a cohesive plan for the integrated use of legacy buildings and historic structures in downtown Atmore.**
4. **Seek new development projects to fill in downtown's "missing teeth" while paying careful attention to building and site design.**
5. **Focus on placemaking and streetscapes in the city center to make it a destination where people want to visit and to linger.**

6. **Continue to invest in unique public arts in downtown Atmore that celebrate the city and region's unique history and culture.**
7. **Create a marketing and branding campaign for downtown Atmore including ongoing place management.**
8. **Adopt a Complete Streets policy and implementation strategy.**
9. **Create educational programs that attract new talent and keep young people in the community.**
10. **Engage service sector industry throughout the city as well as city employees in customer service training so they become ambassadors for Atmore.**

Need for assistance

The *Planning for Economic and Fiscal Health workshop* and the accompanying *Hotspot Analysis* that Atmore received from Smart Growth America was extremely timely for the community and region. The city is grappling with a number of key decisions regarding its future development patterns that will have a lasting impact on both its overall economic opportunity as well as the city's long-term fiscal sustainability.

Atmore has two distinct areas of development—one being its historic downtown and the other the Rivercane area about six miles north in the vicinity of I-65. Downtown has a wealth of potential redevelopment opportunities, including a number of vacant buildings and the historic Strand Theater. It is just beginning a resurgence with a number of new businesses opening in downtown.

Rivercane is home to the Wind Creek Casino, which attracts visitors from throughout the region and beyond. The I-65 interchange at exit 57 also includes a number of hotels and other service sector businesses aimed at those passing through the area on their way somewhere else. The area is also home to several major industrial employers as well as Coastal Alabama Community College, which is eyeing an expansion in the near future to better serve the community's workforce development needs.

The community has some critical decisions in the near future including whether to relocate its hospital to Rivercane and where to concentrate its overall future development—either in downtown or in Rivercane.

A goal of the workshop was to help Atmore think about how to leverage the exciting potential for redevelopment within its borders, particularly the asset that Atmore already has in its historic downtown. Pursuing smart growth offers the community an opportunity to work together to create an economic future that is more sustainable, fiscally healthy and economically diverse. The SGA team was excited to see the interest in and passion for the community among the several dozen individuals present at the workshop.

Review of SGA's Visit to Atmore

SGA's technical assistance visit occurred over two full days, February 19-20, 2019. The visit included the following components:

- A tour of major points of interest in Atmore and on the Poarch Band of Creek Indians tribal lands. Sites visited included:
    - City owned parcels

- Atmore Municipal Airport, which the city hopes to redevelop
- Atmore Community Hospital and surrounding medical campus
- Lindberg shopping area
- Escambia County High School
- Former Reid State Technical College site
- Former YMCA (and high school / middle school) building
- Heritage Park and splash pad
- A.C. Moore school (vacant)
- Ramey's (former Winn-Dixie)
- Downtown businesses and landmarks:
    - Former Strand theater and hardware store*
    - Atmore mural
    - Publican (new pub opening the week after SGA's visit)
    - Coffee House
    - Philanthropic Seed
    - Potential site across from Philanthropic Seed for green space / dog park
- Poarch Band of Creek Indians tribal facilities:
    - Poarch Creek Community Center
    - Tribal Health Department

* The SGA team had a subsequent opportunity to view the interiors of these facilities

- Five interviews with invited city and tribal stakeholders, each lasting 45 minutes. The following stakeholder groups were represented:
    - Industry
    - Business
    - Education
    - Healthcare
    - Poarch Band of Creek Indians

  The interviews provided the SGA team with additional perspectives on Atmore's economic and fiscal health, expanding the voices beyond those in the room at the next day's workshop.

  Interview questions asked of each group included:

  1. How long have you lived in Atmore? (Done business? Owned property?
  2. What brought you here? Or: What kept you here?
  3. What tells you that you are "home" in Atmore?
  4. How do interests of city and tribe intersect/diverge?
  5. What are Atmore's singular assets?
  6. What might hold Atmore back? (Challenges)
  7. Would you encourage kids to come back to Atmore to make their lives?
  8. What do you see Atmore looking like in 20 years?

  For the names of those interviewed, refer to appendix A.

- An evening presentation open to the public and local media.

The evening presentation, held in the auditorium of the Escambia County High School, provided an overview of emerging national demographic and economic trends at play across the American landscape. The SGA team examined the economic impact of 20th century suburban development patterns, discussing the trend of migration by both Baby Boomers and Millennials to vibrant city and town centers. The presentation considered the emergence of the Millennial generation as the predominant driver of economic demand and the workforce sought by today's job creators, emphasizing that generation's interest in walkable, bikeable, vibrantly social towns and cities. A longer discussion of these critical issues Atmore faces is included below.

Recognizing that communities are now in a ferocious competition over creating a sense of place, former Meridian, Mississippi Mayor John Robert Smith presented his city's story of downtown revitalization and economic development through the renovation and celebration of historic structures.

- A day-long workshop open to invited stakeholders

  The SGA team began with a review of the economic and demographic trends presented at the public presentation the previous evening. Setting the rural context, the presenters offered three overall goals for cities like Atmore looking to protect their economic and fiscal health over the long-term:

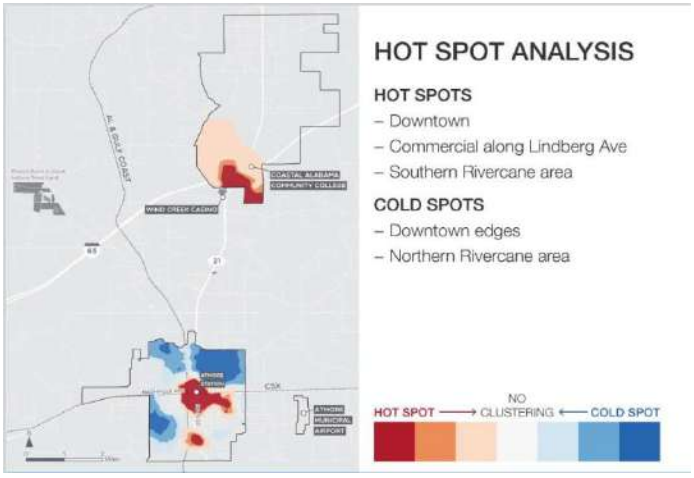
  1. Protect valuable farmland
  2. Enhance the existing downtown
  3. Build new neighborhoods adjacent to downtown

The presenters challenged participants to consider what kind of rural community Atmore is:

- Gateway
- Resource Dependent
- Retirement
- Edge
- Traditional Main Street

Those present felt that Atmore included aspects of several of these types of rural communities.

The SGA team next presented on the connection between community development patterns and local government expenditures and revenues. Suburban-sprawl style development at the edge of the community is expensive because it costs more in terms of the construction and maintenance of infrastructure (roadways, utilities, etc.) and police and fire coverage. These added costs must be paid for through higher taxes or user fees and mean this type of development rarely pays for itself. On the other hand, "Main streets" and dense mixed- use areas create synergies that produce substantially higher revenues than commercial sprawl.



The SGA team also presented the results of SGA's hot spot analysis—a visualization of clusters of high- and low-value properties within Atmore. The exercise identified the parts of Atmore that are hot spots and cold spots. See the figure for these locations. For more information about the methodology and results of this analysis, refer to appendix C.

Following the main presentation by the SGA team, two local speakers representing Atmore responded. Tucson Roberts provided an update on economic development. He noted Atmore's major employers like Muskogee Technology and Brown Precision need dependable trained labor for their operations. The public school and community college systems must be involved to ensure a reliable workforce for these and other businesses. The community college is getting close to starting construction on their expansion which will include new machinery for instruction.

While the SGA team heard from numerous individuals about issues with the public schools, they have improved relative to other schools in Alabama over the past three years -- from a grade of F to a grade of C in that timeframe. Tucson noted that almost all the top growing communities in Alabama have good schools. Continuing to improve its public schools is one important thing that Atmore can do.

A recent Atmore Power research report on appropriate retail targets will also inform Tucson's work over the next year to attract new commercial developments to Atmore. At the same time, he recognizes that franchisees and chains are probably not appropriate for downtown—entrepreneurial businesses make more sense there—but may make sense at the I-65 interchange where people exit to visit the casino. Once people exit I-65 to visit the casino, Atmore can do a lot to retain them.

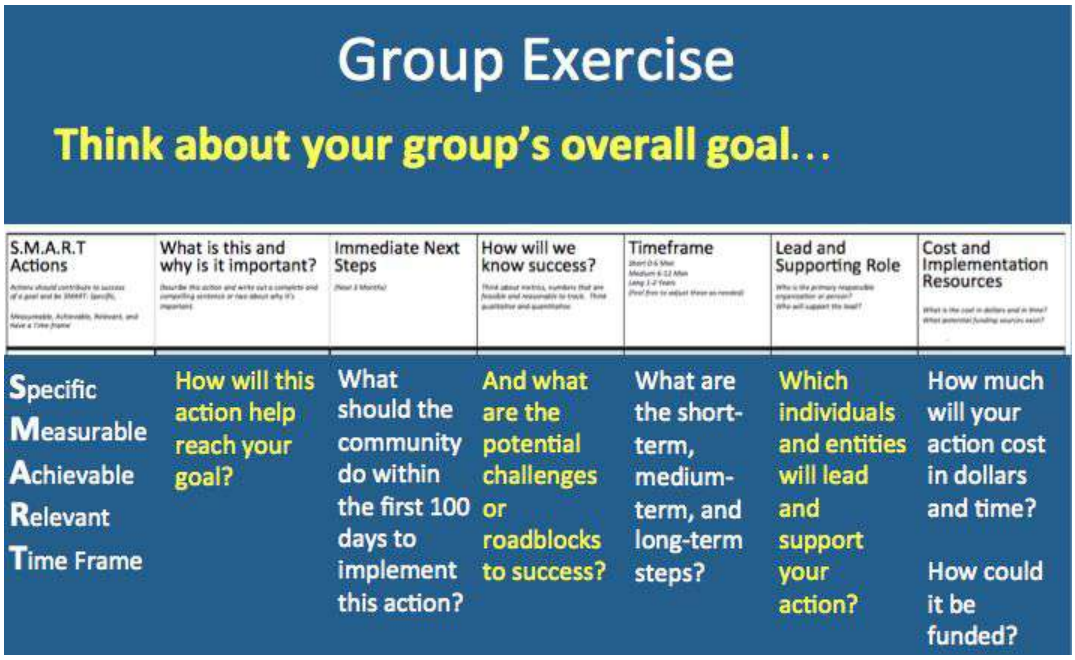
Wes Woodruff, President and CEO of Muskogee Technology provided an overview of his company's products and echoed Tucson's concerns about challenges with recruiting new employees. He has recently hired five qualified machinists from out of the area, but only able to retain one (who commutes from Pensacola rather than living in Atmore). They are teaching current employees new skills and also trying to recruit recent high school graduates. In several cases, recent graduates have been hired because of their strong work ethic. Wes noted that one reason other area employers have chosen Atmore is because of Muskogee Technology.

Wes reminded workshop attendees that decisions we make today are for the next seven generations. While we may not live to see the fruits of our labor, our children and grandchildren will live with them.

The remainder of the workshop was devoted to small group discussions and presentations back to the larger group. The participants broke up into five groups, three discussing Atmore's downtown and two focusing on Rivercane. The groups each received a large paper map of the city, tribe, and

surrounding area as well as an oversized worksheet for identifying a goal for their focus area and actions to achieve it.

The instructions for completing the worksheet were as follows:



On the worksheet, participants identified each action and a path for achieving it. They could also draw changes visually on their map.

For a list of participants at the workshop, refer to Appendix A and for a summary of the workshop discussions, see appendix B.

Note: The intent of these workshops is neither for Smart Growth America to create a plan nor bind the communities to any particular course of action, but to assist ongoing regional efforts to create a more vibrant, successful region, consistent with the goals of their envisioned plans.

Lessons from the workshop on the built environment and fiscal and economic health

Communities around the nation are always concerned about their fiscal and economic health. This is especially true of small towns and rural regions.

Fiscal health means a local government's bottom line: *Does the life cycle cost of a project's investment—upfront infrastructure, ongoing service provision and eventual repair and maintenance—cost more than what it produces in tax revenue?*

Economic health includes the general economic well-being of the community and its region: *How does new investment and development add to or detract from the creation of economic*

competitiveness, fiscal efficiency and sustainability, jobs, jobs access, retention of local talent, cultural identity and wealth?

In approaching these questions for Atmore, as in any part of the country today, it is important to bear three trends in mind:

Our nation's demographics are changing in a way that profoundly affects the housing market in large cities and rural areas alike.

Demographic trends are moving the housing market strongly away from conventional suburban housing.[1] That presents a significant opportunity for rural communities to compete for new growth. The two biggest demographic groups in the nation—retiring Baby Boomers and Millennials (18-39 year-olds) — both express strong preferences for a more walkable, urban/village lifestyle.

Data tells us that ten percent of all city-dwelling Americans would prefer to live in rural locales if those places are walkable, connected to the larger region and possess a strong sense of character and place. That represents a pool of 26 million potential transplants that the area could compete to attract. Indeed, forty percent of Millennials prefer to live in rural places, provided those places have a vibrant rural fabric. The vast majority of net new households formed have no children at home, and most of them are one- and two-person households, which are much more likely to prefer a walking lifestyle. These trends depart from those experienced in the latter half of the 20th century.

The formula for economic growth is changing.

Business growth used to be driven by large corporations that operated in a fashion that was both private in ownership structure and linear in manufacturing and production. In the past, new research breakthroughs occurred in sealed research laboratories controlled by the companies that owned them. Manufacturing and other business processes occurred in assembly-line situations, with little interaction across or inside industries. These conditions led to communities that featured large, sealed-off campuses and

[1] See "The Changing Shape of American Cities," Luke J. Juday, Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, University of Virginia, March 2015.
"Demographic Reversal: Cities Thrive, Suburbs Sputter," William H. Frey, Brookings Institution, State of Metropolitan America Series, June 29, 2012.

tended to be linear in their arrangements.

Today, business growth is driven by collaboration among many types of entities — private companies, research institutions, universities, and others — that must interact frequently and work together creatively. This trend requires cities and communities that encourage interaction and collaboration — the opposite of the older model described above. How communities are designed directly impacts their ability to create interactive and collaborative environments.

Most significantly, the innovation economy, as it is sometimes called, depends heavily on skilled workers. The companies that are driving innovation are pursuing highly educated talent, especially among Millennials. Increasingly, companies find it necessary to locate in places where their target workforce wants to live. Increasingly, that means walkable communities.

People on the move are looking to relocate to places with a high quality of life. In fact, they are willing to sacrifice salary for location. High quality of life is defined more and more by the character of the town center than by the size of a front yard or square footage of a home.

Every region, small or large, has ubiquitous “big box” retailers that are successful and generate major sales tax receipts. However, because they are ubiquitous and the same in every community, they do not create a shopping experience that is unique to a particular community. With online buying playing a bigger role for consumers (especially for bargain hunters), many are looking for a more authentic experience when they shop in person. This type of retail occurs most readily in downtowns along walkable city blocks.

There is a distinctive niche in downtown Atmore for additional small specialty retail, restaurants, and coffee shops that will attract locals as well. These types of establishments should make no effort to compete with Walmart or retail at Rivercane. Rather, they should seek out niches that those other areas cannot or has no interest in filling.

Major retailers that once developed in suburban locations only are now adopting a retail presence and footprint suitable for a storefront in a downtown. This is especially true in, for example, Franklin, TN. In addition, we are experiencing more online buying and some retailers are already imagining a downtown presence that is more cost effective because it has limited staff and no stock. Customers select their item locally and it is shipped to their home.

Consumers are demonstrating strong preferences for shopping locally at unique establishments that offer handcrafted, regional products. They prefer this experience to be a short distance from their homes and offices and within a comfortably walkable town center. This is bringing new value to traditional walkable main streets. Atmore and the tribal community are well suited to taking advantage of this shift in consumer choice.

Sprawling development patterns are making it more difficult for local governments to balance their budgets.

Development patterns that sprawl outward from a town center require extensive investments in capital infrastructure and ongoing service delivery. Sprawling development requires more infrastructure to serve relatively few people and requires service providers such as firefighters and school buses to travel farther. More compact development patterns reduce both life-cycle infrastructure costs and operating costs.[2]

A 2013 study by Smart Growth America, *Building Better Budgets: A National Examination of the Fiscal Benefits of Smart Growth Development*[3], concluded that, compared to conventional suburban development, smart growth patterns can achieve savings of one-third or more in upfront infrastructure cost, and 10% annually in ongoing operating expenses. Smart growth development patterns can generate up to ten times more revenue on a per-acre basis.

More recently, SGA's *Core Values: Why American Companies are Moving Downtown*[4] examines the characteristics, motives, and preferences of companies that have either relocated, opened new offices, or expanded into walkable downtowns between 2010 and 2015. Smart Growth America partnered with global real estate advisors Cushman & Wakefield to identify nearly 500 companies that have made such a move in the past five years. Of those, Smart Growth America interviewed representatives from more than 40 companies to gain a better understanding of this emerging trend. These companies' new locations are in areas that are dramatically more walkable than previous sites. The average Walk Score of companies' previous locations was 52; the average Walk Score of the new locations is 88. Similarly, Transit Scores grew from an average of 52 to 79 and Bike Scores bumped from an average of 66 to 78.

This trend is visible across the country, in big cities and small ones alike and should be a factor in the economic development strategy of all communities, including Atmore.

Note: *Not all of these trends will be completely relevant in every situation. Rural communities are*

[2] For more information, see: http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/research/the-fiscal-implications-of-development-patterns/

[3] The full report can be downloaded at, http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/building-better-budgets.

[4] The report is available for download from https://smartgrowthamerica.org/resources/core-values-why-american-companies-are-moving-downtown/

more reliant on private automobile ownership, and transit is often less feasible in these situations. But it is important to bear all three in mind in considering the fiscal and economic health of any community.

Takeaways from SGA's visit

Prior to the group discussions, the SGA team identified the following takeaways taking into account everything they heard and observed during their visit to Atmore.

- "Young people want things to do"
- "First thing is you have to give them a reason to want to be here"
- "The downtown area tells a story"
- "I want Atmore to be a place you come and build memories"
- Atmore is a family-friendly community, where people know each other, that is welcoming to new residents.
- While downtown is beginning to come back, that part of the city needs to remain its heart, providing new gathering places, even as the city creates development in Rivercane.
- When most Atmoreans think of what makes their city unique, they think of downtown. Older residents remember shopping, going to matinees, and spending time in downtown when they were younger. Younger residents can identify unique stores and restaurants in downtown that they enjoy patronizing. The intersection of two major roadways and the rail tell an important story.
- The casino may be among the largest employers in the city now, but like all industries, it is cyclical and won't always be there. The city needs to plan for a resilient and diversified economy to ensure a prosperous future.
- To recruit and retain talent—and encourage these new workers to live in Atmore instead of the surrounding areas—the city needs to provide the kinds of amenities that they want -- restaurants, movie theaters, nightlife, and other cultural amenities. This will create a high quality of life and a great place to raise a family.
- There are opportunities for the city and tribe to work together to improve downtown, particularly since people coming to the casino from Pensacola drive through it on the way. And people who work at the casino don't want to spend time there when they aren't working.
- The public schools, while improving the past few years, are a challenge for the community. School leaders need to make sure that the public knows about this improvement.

Assets and Opportunities

- Main Street, the heart of the city
- Rivercane, through appropriate continued development

- Parks, outdoor recreation
- Poarch Band of Creek Indians
- Potential new hospital
- The Strand Theater, the former YMCA, and other historic buildings ripe for redevelopment

Obstacles/Disconnects

- School system
- Hiring, retaining people
- "Talented young people leave"
- "People recruited tend to locate in Pensacola or Mobile"
- Need more people with technical skills
- "Social divisions"

Participant viewpoints

Appendix B summarizes each group's discussion, numbered in the order of verbal presentation at the workshop.

Actions for Success

Atmore and the tribal areas have a unique story to tell. There are two spheres of continued development—downtown and Rivercane—each should have its own appropriate land use and development vision. If these two important poles of Atmore are developed in complementary ways that enhance the value of each other and avoid pitting one against the other, there is a great opportunity for success. Keeping downtown as its heart, Atmore can create a community where new workers want to live and businesses thrive. Rivercane continues to have unique opportunities related to its highway access and proximity to the casino. The following recommendations seek to achieve the successful development of both poles.

The remainder of this memo takes into account everything the SGA team saw and heard during our visit to Atmore including our observations from the driving tour, the input received during the workshop, and breadth of work in other communities in similar circumstances.

We offer the following recommendations and associated action steps.

1. **Create an advisory and implementation committee including the interests present at the workshop, to implement these action items.**
   The workshop hosted by Smart Growth America was a great first step towards planning for

Atmore's long-term economic and fiscal health. The city, tribal community, and region should be proud of its local assets, history, culture, and amenities. Those present at the workshop were enthusiastic about the future of the community in terms of its vision and opportunities – and may form the basis for an implementation committee if a suitable body does not already exist.

However Atmore chooses to implement it, building local leadership capacity is vital to move these next steps forward. Smart Growth America recommends establishing an implementation committee to take responsibility for the next steps recommendations that follow.

This body should begin meeting as soon as possible. Members of the committee should come from, but not necessarily be limited to, the following sectors of the community – representing diverse stakeholders:

- Local governments – Atmore, Escambia County, tribal leaders (both elected officials and staff)
- Major employers
- Small business owners
- Representatives of the Strand Theater
- Atmore Chamber of Commerce
- Atmore Community Hospital and other healthcare facilities
- Escambia County School District, private schools, and Coastal Alabama Community College
- Other representatives of downtown and Rivercane

Further, it is clear that the City of Atmore and the Poarch Band of Creek Indians are both dedicated to creating a high quality of life for their citizens. While owned by the tribe, the casino is a shared asset that can help both entities prosper well beyond the boundaries of Rivercane.

Ensuring that both voices are among those represented during the implementation of these action items is critical. A strong partnership will ensure that the community creates buy in for a robust shared vision for downtown Atmore.

Rivercane's development should be a critical concern of the committee as well. The desire it that both downtown and Rivercane can seek their highest and best use.

The action items provided in the remainder of this document are intended to be comprehensive and, to maximize the chances for success, it is important that this implementation body designate a chair responsible for the overall effort and a lead for each action item.

Short-term Actions (1-6 months)

- Hold the first meeting of this body soon after receiving this finalized memo and establish a regular meeting schedule (at least monthly)
- Elect a chair and designate a lead for each of the recommended action items
- For the proposed new hospital, conduct an assessment of other suitable parcels of land within the portion of the downtown core that is eligible for New Market Tax Credits
- Report back to the city and tribe on a regular basis

Medium- and Long-term Actions (6 months and longer)

- Ensure that this body continues meeting on a regular basis and that all members are encouraged to be engaged in the process

2. Foster land uses that create fiscally sustainable development patterns.

In a small community, the temptation is to accept any development as a step forward, even if the project does not advance their established goals and vision—including an economically and fiscally sustainable future. Atmore's leaders are encouraged to put the long-term vision and goals for the city ahead of pursuing short-term financial gain comprised of uses incompatible with their long-term strategic vision for the community.

SGA's hotspot analysis shows that the most valuable properties per acre in the city – an average of $12,000 per acre – are located downtown. By contrast, the value per acre in Rivercane is only $1,200 per acre. Further, the downtown hotspots contain nearly three times as much total value as the Rivercane hotspot ($19.2 million vs. $6.6 million). See Appendix C for more information on the hotspot analysis.

The hotspot analysis supports the conclusion that walkable downtown Atmore is the place to focus on housing, including workforce units that will entice new hires at Atmore's major employers to live in the community. Further, the existing roadway and utility infrastructure to make these projects a success already exists in downtown. There are already sufficient lot sizes and existing housing units ready to be rehabbed in downtown.

Creating new residential at Rivercane, even if it is walkable, will be deleterious to existing and new downtown residential. The cost of additional infrastructure needed to be constructed and maintained at Rivercane to make a walkable residential area viable should create serious reservation. If the community attempts to build another such housing development in Rivercane, both are likely to fail.

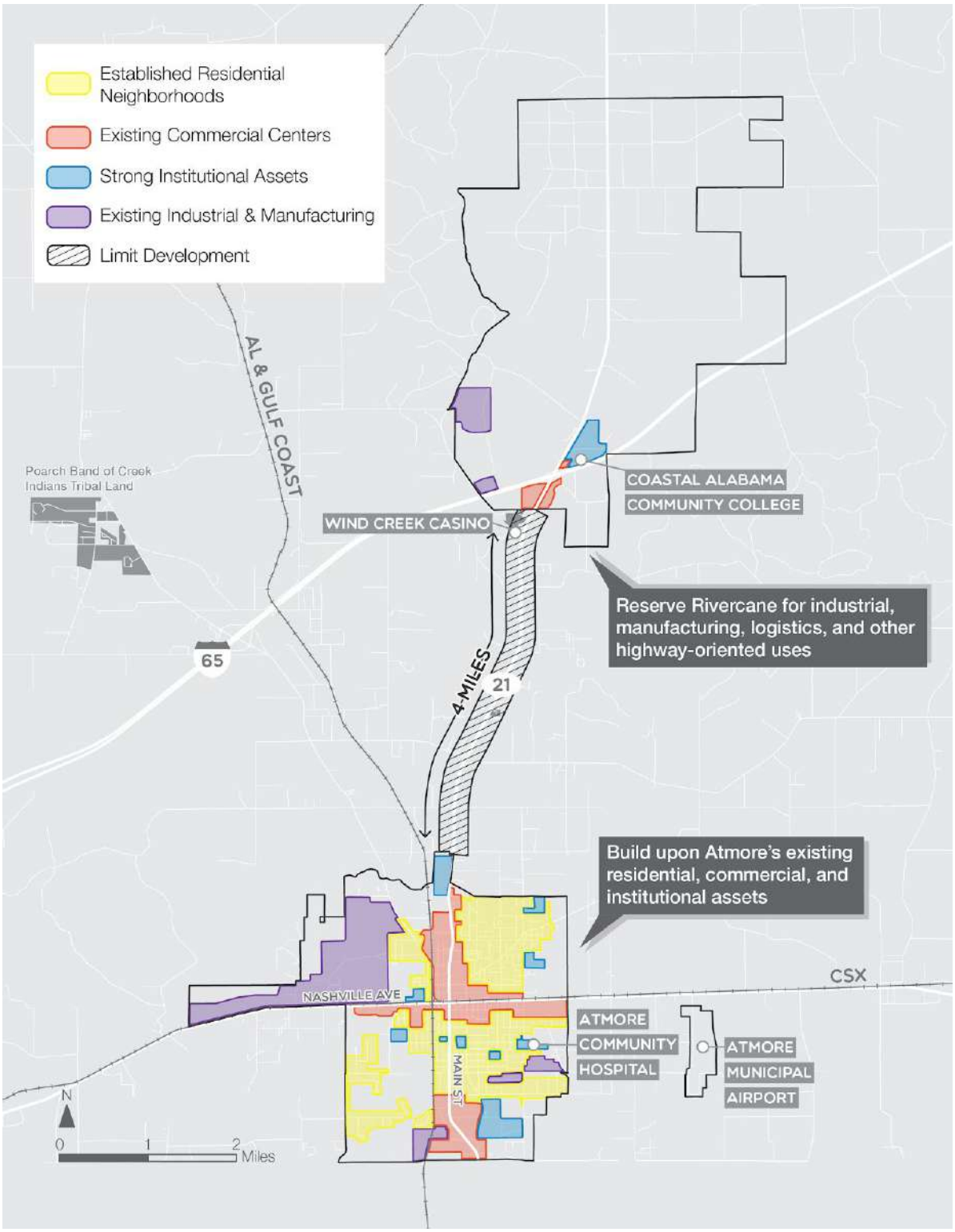
Rivercane and the surrounding area is already home to industrial land uses as well as the Alabama Department of Corrections facilities. These are the types of land uses that people don't want to live next to and Atmore should focus these types of development there. Keep incompatible land uses (like housing) away.

Due to highway access and proximity to the Wind Creek Casino, Rivercane will likely include not only the potential industry and manufacturing opportunities, but also fast food and other amenities for highway users in response to market demand.

The SGA team recognizes that the tribe is building new housing on its land. That decision is up to the tribal leaders to make.

The SGA team recommends focusing the community's development on its existing assets in downtown and Rivercane, taking care to plan for the land uses for each as described above and in the accompanying figure. Any further development along the Highway 21 corridor between downtown and Rivercane will dilute city resources and divert resources from the city center, the most productive area in Atmore. This additional development would come at a cost, including new infrastructure such as utilities and police / fire coverage, which will be financially problematic for the future. Finally, this new development will create a traffic problem that will

further complicate the existing connection between downtown and Rivercane. Anything that impedes the flow between downtown and Rivercane makes either end less valuable and diminishes any synergy between the two.



Consider the potential economic damage of moving the hospital out of downtown.
The historic portion of Atmore is home to about 7,500 residents, which represents the vast majority of the city's population. These are many of the primary users of the existing Atmore Community Hospital. Tribal members receive free health care and most of the other existing population around Rivercane is housed at the prisons. If the hospital moves out of the center of the community, other medical offices are sure to follow.

To adequately serve the needs of Atmore's major population center as well as to provide the greatest economic impact and return on investment, the hospital should remain within the city's historic boundaries. It is not essential that the hospital be rebuilt on its existing site if a suitable alternative parcel can be found.

This is not about sick, elderly, or disabled patients walking from home to the hospital to receive treatment. And we do not expect that 250-275 doctors, nurses, and other hospital staff—as well as family members and friends visiting patients—will walk the 25-30 minutes to restaurants or other downtown amenities at lunchtime. Rather, once they finish their shift, hospital employees who are already close to downtown are more likely to stay there for dinner, a show, or other recreational activities. The same is true for those visiting patients.

Keeping the hospital in or adjacent to its current location—or moving it to another one in or around downtown—will be a boon for the city's economic prosperity over the longer term. The hospital is a place of treatment, a center of employment, and a convening space for other community activities. It throws off a halo to the surrounding area in terms of other employment and business. There is sufficient land surrounding the existing hospital or elsewhere in downtown to rebuild this important community facility at or near its current location.

Further, a hospital's reputation is based on the quality of care delivered and not its location. Receiving health care is not an impulse decision and, therefore, it is not critical to the facility's success (and patient outcomes) that it have highway visibility.

In short, the hospital can serve as a driver of economic activity to downtown simply by remaining in a location that encourages hospital employees and visitors to take advantage of what downtown has to offer.

3. Develop a cohesive plan for the integrated use of legacy buildings and historic structures in downtown Atmore.

Atmore must define its vision for downtown by creating a cohesive plan for the city center including plans for its historic buildings and how best to utilize existing open space. Every decision either adds to or subtracts from that vision.

This means that, as downtown renovations are planned, the community must not view each restoration project as merely a standalone building. Rather, these legacy structures collectively create a framework and context for both Atmore's history and its future that is worthy of celebration and community pride.

In the downtown core, Atmore should preserve historic buildings to the greatest extent possible (at least the facade if the whole building isn't salvageable). Each legacy building contributes to the whole of downtown, is critical to the storytelling of Atmore's history, and

provides unique spaces for adaptive reuse.

Several key properties should be among the first to focus on:

Strand Theater / Hardware store / Radio Shack (Anderson Family properties)
The Strand Theater originally opened in 1929 and is regarded as one of the most iconic landmarks in downtown Atmore even though it closed its doors in 2013. The *Strand Theater and Downtown Atmore Action Plan* offers a vision for the structure and surrounding buildings, referring to the project as a "catalyst for the entire Atmore community and neighboring areas".

Whatever the exact form of the final project, the Strand Theater is simply too valuable not to reinvest in because of the potential impact it can be expected to have on downtown Atmore.

Should the final project include a makerspace as suggested by the action plan, Atmore's leaders are encouraged to consult *Made in Place,* Smart Growth America's report on best practices in small scale manufacturing and the "maker" economy.[5]

Other communities have renovated historic theaters, many of them now home to robust performing arts spaces. Examples include:

Ritz Theatre in Sheffield, Alabama. (Source: Cinematreasures.org)

- Talladega, Alabama: The Ritz Theatre, originally opened in 1937, completed a major renovation in the late 1990s, transforming it into the "the premiere performing arts center of East Central Alabama".[6]
- Sheffield, Alabama: The Ritz Theatre opened in 1928 as a silent movie house. In the 1980s, after being closed for more than 30 years, it was purchased by the Tennessee Valley Arts Association and reopened as a performing arts space. Activities today include classes and programming for all ages.[7]
- Williamsport, Pennsylvania: The Community Arts Center (originally the Capitol Theatre) is another example of a renovated historic venue, successful through a community collaboration and vision.[8]

As part of the process, Atmore should reach out to these and other venues who have successfully renovated and reopened. Those involved may be able to provide valuable feedback on the process, including pitfalls to avoid.

Former YMCA building
The Atmore YMCA closed its doors on November 30, 2018, leaving its building (a former high school) vacant. This building offers the potential to be repurposed as downtown living space for

5 https://smartgrowthamerica.org/app/uploads/2017/11/made-in-place-small-scale-manufacturing-neighorhood-revitalization.pdf
6 http://ritztalladega.com/history/
7 https://www.tvaa.net/visit-the-ritz-theatre/theatre-history.html
8 https://www.caclive.com/us/

workers, young couples, or additional students who move to Atmore following the expansion of the community college.

There is a growing list of examples of former schools being converted into residential. Examples include:

- Scott School Apartments in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, which includes 60 low income one bedroom and studio apartments. The historic school building is the oldest surviving public school building in the city.
- Lee School Lofts in Richmond, Virginia, a historic elementary school which now includes 55,000 sq feet of residential space as market rate one and two bedroom apartments but still retains some of the original features of the school
- River School Lofts in Charlottesville, Virginia includes one and two bedroom units in a restored 1919 school building.

Main Street Jewelers
Several workshop participants suggested tearing this building down due to safety concerns, replacing it with grass. The SGA team urges Atmore to preserve and repair this structure rather than tearing it or other buildings down. As with each building in downtown, this building has economic value. It is not about this one building, but the economic value of the whole street.

The Main Street Jewelers building is located right at the Highway 31 and Highway 21 intersection, in the center of downtown. This building anchors the corner, contributing to the creation of a cohesive block. To replace it with a vacant lot for parking, greenspace, or any other use detracts from the overall block face and intersection.

4. Seek new development projects to fill in downtown's "missing teeth" while paying careful attention to building and site design.

Repair the street wall and fill in missing teeth:
By "missing teeth", the SGA team is referring to vacant properties or underutilized properties such as surface parking which could be redeveloped into a more productive land use. This will help make downtown into a more pedestrian-friendly area where people enjoy spending time. Atmore should aim for a continuous street wall of 4-6 blocks.

Site Design

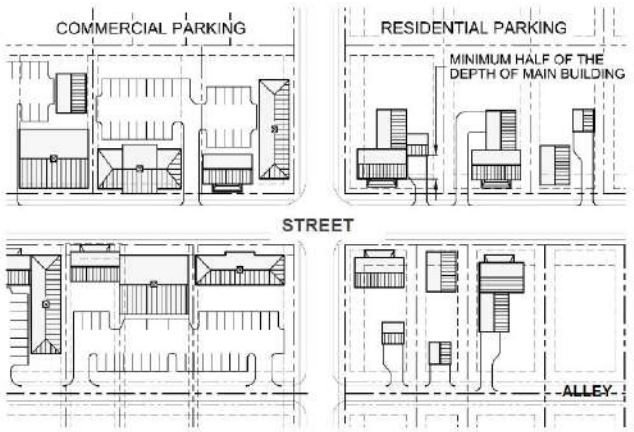
Buildings – active spaces, which generate people – serve to engage and activate the street space. This is done by both creating an attractive street wall and through buildings' permeability (doors and windows). These techniques promote human contact and make passersby feel comfortable. The building itself should front the sidewalk and meet the block face.

When any new buildings are being planned or redeveloped downtown, special attention should be paid to how any included parking is designed. Parking can often be wrapped within or behind the building faces to help screen the parking. Feelings of welcoming and comfort are lost if cars are in the way between the sidewalk and

the building itself. This is why parking goes behind the building -- not because we need to hide the parked cars.

The SGA team recommends that parking be accessible from side streets or rear alleys to allow the major streets to remain attractive walking environments for pedestrians. This will maximize the best use of the site for those walking between various destinations.

The figure demonstrates the proper placement of surface parking around project sites.



Proper design of surface parking around project sites. (Source: Source: Marshall, Virginia draft form-based code)

Locate the planned entertainment center downtown, if it is constructed, as part of a larger project serving as an additional catalyst for further redevelopment.

While the Strand Theater project is one potential catalyst for further development within downtown Atmore, locating the tribe's planned entertainment center—if it moves forward—downtown as part of a larger project could be another. The city should seek a partnership with the tribe and a private developer to create a catalytic mixed-use development project anchored by the planned entertainment center. A hotel, offices, and even various types of residential units would be important to bring people downtown, creating a vibrant center of the city.

Over time, this initial effort would entice and encourage further redevelopment and revitalization of downtown to take place.

Consider adopting a form-based code for downtown

To both facilitate new development and guide it to create the right building envelope, Atmore may wish to consider if a form-based code is right for downtown. A form-based code (FBC) is an alternative to the conventional zoning most localities adopted in the mid-20th century. It is intended to regulate development so as to achieve a desired form of the built environment, one that emphasizes walkability and the creation of appealing public spaces, in a mixed-use setting. This contrasts with conventional zoning, which emphasizes the separation of uses, and was developed largely to accommodate an automobile-centric development pattern.

One of the advantages of a FBC is to simplify the project approval process. Because the characteristics of acceptable and desirable development are established by the community beforehand, application review can become somewhat routine, or at least simplified. Protracted negotiations among applicant, government, and community members can be avoided. This has

benefits both for developers (concerned about the uncertainties of the entitlement process, and the associated costs that may be incurred) and for neighbors (concerned about the nature of the development that may occur next to them, and the impact on the neighborhood).

The potential benefits over time, in achieving a community's goals for development, do require significant "upfront" investment in a planning effort, including the time of municipal staff and citizens.

Refer to the Form-Based Code Institute (a program of Smart Growth America) resources page for more information on implementing FBCs.[9]

<u>Focus on small lot homes and small format multifamily units</u>
Traditional small lot homes and small format multifamily units are the right types of residential development to focus on around downtown. This will add some density and allow for housing choices while preserving the historic look and feel of downtown.

Photos of small lot homes and small format multifamily units suitable for a small community like Atmore.

Short Term Actions (1-6 months) for recommendations #3 and #4

- Within the advisory and implementation committee identified above, discuss a unified redevelopment of downtown. Work towards reaching a community vision on next steps for the district including prioritization of projects.
- Consider retaining an urban design and/or historic preservation consultant with experience doing smart growth projects to work in conjunction with the city's existing economic development consultant and help the community create this vision for downtown through a master plan.

Medium-term Actions (6-12 months) for recommendations #3 and #4

- Research funding options (such as USDA grants and loans, low to moderate income tax credits, TIF districts, historic tax credits and New Market Tax Credits) to help finance various redevelopment projects. Refer to appendix D for some potential resources.
- Proactively begin discussions with property owners of the above privately-owned projects (and the tribal government for the entertainment center if and when it proceeds) on the community's vision and goals for downtown
- Create a plan for reuse of each historic building that takes into account the building's historic use to the community and its best, most productive use for the future.
- Explore adopting a downtown form-based code overlay to encourage building and site design that promotes walkability and placemaking

[9] https://formbasedcodes.org/resources/

Long-term Actions (12 months and longer) for recommendations #3 and #4

- Using available funding sources implement the community's vision for downtown on a building by building basis, keeping the larger picture of the cohesive vision for downtown in mind.

5. Focus on placemaking and streetscapes in the city center to make it a destination where people want to visit and to linger.

We heard many older people describe vivid memories of spending time shopping, watching movies, and doing other activities in downtown Atmore when they were younger. Many younger residents can easily identify aspects of downtown that make Atmore feel like home. First and foremost, downtown Atmore should remain that heart of the city with which so many residents of the city identify. Like the human body, Atmore requires a healthy heart to prosper. This was reinforced by the tribal and casino representatives the SGA team met with who spoke extensively of the need to revitalize downtown to provide new amenities for both Atmore residents and visitors to the casino.

While the Wind Creek Casino and other major employers may be in Rivercane, those who work for them—particularly the casino—do not want to spend their time there when they are not working. For these—and for other residents of Atmore—it is critical to make downtown a place where these individuals look forward to coming to, even if they don't live there. The same is true of those who visit the casino but stay on-site or at one of the nearby hotels in Rivercane.

Despite the city's focus on Rivercane, there is a surprising energy in downtown that the city would do well to tend to. In short, Atmoreans need to see downtown as their greatest asset, that has to be consciously developed with an attitude of pride and promotion.

<u>Identify one or more "tactical" projects for downtown that are low or no cost to take the first steps.</u>

During the workshop, there was discussion about the chamber of commerce spearheading an effort to organize repainting of the street light poles. Whether it is this project or another, it was clear that there was the energy and leadership in the room to focus on small projects that volunteers—or city staff—can do which do not require the permission of other entities. These activities could not only make a big difference in the overall appearance of downtown, but serve to further energize and excite the community over the ongoing resurgence of downtown.

Simple projects such as painting crosswalks on city-owned streets, trimming shrubbery, and other clean up in downtown that can safely be done by members of the public can help bring the community together, engendering a sense of pride in downtown.

Further, community events that create temporary gathering spaces in downtown, including closing off of roadways, can be another driver to help residents see downtown in a new light. Atmore already has several community festivals throughout the year. Each of these events can be a catalyst to bring people downtown, either during the event itself or afterwards for a meal.

<u>Create a corridor of arrival at the north and south entrances to downtown Atmore.</u>

Shortly before arriving in downtown on each end, a visual narrowing by an allee of trees or other mechanism will encourage drivers to slow down and pay attention to their surroundings

before they get to downtown. Auburn University's extension service will be able to recommend the most appropriate trees from the state list, avoiding ornamental varieties, to create a consistent look.

At the entrance to downtown, a gateway monument like those shown in the photos will further heighten the sense of arrival. This artistic gateway should represent the culture and history of the area. It could be decided through a community design charrette, a competition, or by soliciting proposals from local or Alabama artists. Ensure that an overhead monument is high enough to allow all vehicles to pass freely beneath it. This monument differs from a landscaped sign at the edge of the community.

Monument in Parsons, Kansas.
Source: Flickr user J. Stephen Conn

Arrival gateway in Council Bluffs, Iowa.
Source: Travel Iowa on Pinterest

Use building awnings for both shading and business signage

An allee of trees leads the visitor into downtown and the monument announces their entry into downtown. Once in downtown, because of limited space, a linear sequence of balconies and awnings down Main Street and its cross streets would provide a seamless protection from rain and hot sun. This will make walking in downtown more enjoyable, encouraging more browsing in stores, restaurant meals, and other activities.

Building awnings can not only provide this needed shading, but can also provide a mechanism for business signing if done well.

Example of an awning in front of a hotel in New Orleans (Source: Travel Weekly)

Example of an awning in New Orleans. (Source: Trip Advisor)

Outdoor dining in Meridian, Mississippi

Improve pedestrian infrastructure including lighting upgrades

Atmore should ensure that all downtown roadways have useable sidewalks. The SGA team heard several times about the need to improve lighting in downtown. Energy efficient LED

lighting could be one way to ensure pedestrians and others feel comfortable walking around downtown in the evenings. Aim for a consistent look for pedestrian-scale lighting throughout downtown. For example, Meridian, Mississippi converted its street lighting and traffic signals to energy efficient LED fixtures, saving $250,000 in electrical costs the first year. Alabama Power, through one of its grant programs[10] or another mechanism, may be able to offer Atmore assistance with the conversion process, applying the savings to the cost of conversion.

Add signage for both pedestrian wayfinding and trailblazing for drivers

Wayfinding presents a set of destination choices that quickly orient the reader to where they are and how to get where they are going. Trailblazing points to a specific destination and assumes the user won't have the time to stop and read. Atmore needs both types of consistently designed signage leading people both to downtown and to specific destinations within it. These types of destinations may include, but certainly not be limited to, a renovated Strand Theater, city hall, the post office, parks, gathering spots, and other amenities.

For drivers, this additional signage should make them aware that they are heading towards downtown and encourage them to slow down and observe their surroundings as they drive through it. The goal is to entice them to stop for a visit to experience the local amenities that make downtown Atmore more than just a place to pass through between Pensacola and the casino. Signage directing drivers to existing off street parking located behind buildings will also encourage them to stop and explore downtown. The SGA team heard that this signage is in the works.

Once drivers are out of their cars, additional markers providing a self-guided walking tour of downtown telling its history and describing regional culture will encourage visitors to further explore downtown as they move from one marker to the next. The new markers will also help the city recognize and celebrate its local history.

All of the above signage and wayfinding should be designed around a consistent graphical theme as part of a larger branding effort for downtown described later.

Examples of trailblazing signs (left two photos), wayfinding sign (center right photo), and historical marker (far right photo). Sources: Seymour Tribune; Pinterest user Cloud Gehshan; Town of Leesburg, VA; Historical Marker Database (photographer: William Fischer)

[10] https://powerofgood.com/grants/

Add street name signage at intersections

Example of a stylized downtown street sign. Source: sojournsigns.ca

The SGA team encourages Atmore to ensure that every intersection in downtown has the names of the cross streets clearly identified. While locals may instinctively know street names, visitors may not. This will further orient these visitors as to where they are, whether walking or driving, in relation to downtown's businesses and gathering spots. Again, this signage can follow a unique graphical theme.

Manage parking in downtown

Almost without exception, cities believe they have a shortage of parking. However, there appears to be underutilized parking off Main Street in downtown Atmore. Managing parking means that Atmore should identify available downtown parking on city streets, behind buildings, and in surface parking lots. As noted above, providing trailblazing signage will ensure that drivers know about off street parking and how to get to it.

The city's off street parking should have a common system of control and not be exclusive to any one particular destination. The goal is to encourage Atmore residents and visitors to park once in parking that already exists off street and complete all of their business in downtown without moving their vehicle. This step will require coordination with owners of existing parking lots to ensure that certain parking spaces aren't reserved solely for patrons of one business.

Finally, Atmore should identify the existing gaps in the street facade that can be used to connect off street parking to businesses that front the street. There is at least one existing example of an alley with lights strung that leads to parking.

Alley connections off Main Street and other amenities to encourage outdoor dining

Restaurant patrons enjoy dining outside in nice weather. By bringing its alleys to life and allowing dining tables on the sidewalks where they are unobtrusive will encourage more people to try downtown's existing and new restaurants.

Example of a repurposed alley in Pittsburg, KS with lighting and outdoor dining. (Source: Pittsburg State University)

Alley in Culpeper, Virginia with dining. (Source: Culpeper Renaissance on Facebook)

Alleys need not be used solely for parking. Atmore's existing alleys could easily be made more engaging through additional lighting, outdoor dining, and cafe seating. This would make for engaging pockets of activity that, in particular, visitors will enjoy discovering. For reference, the development and public design in Pittsburg, KS and Springfield, MO provides a good example of what could be done with these spaces.

Sidewalk dining is another mechanism that attracts diners. A restaurant need only put a single table out on the sidewalk and passersby know the restaurant is open for business. This encourages them to sit down and have something to eat or drink.

Outdoor dining in West Chester, Pennsylvania

The SGA team heard that outdoor dining or patios may face some obstacles in downtown Atmore. We encourage the city to change its ordinances to allow for this type of use in a way that does not impact the use of sidewalks, alleys, or other rights of way. Examples of communities with outdoor dining ordinances include Alexandria, Virginia[11]; Covina, California[12]; and Winfield, Illinois.[13]

Additional downtown lodging

A boutique hotel or a bed & breakfast within walking distance of downtown Atmore would serve as a boon to the city center. Combined with other enticement to visit downtown Atmore, new accommodations will encourage visitors to Atmore interested in exploring beyond the casino to stay overnight downtown. These visitors will eat in downtown's restaurants, purchase their morning coffee at one of downtown's locally owned coffeehouses, explore the retail establishments, and have a drink at a bar.

Community gathering spaces and events

There are several existing parks within the historic portion of Atmore. Additional spaces for outdoor entertainment, including music and arts, as well as for community and holiday celebrations will bring people to downtown.

The SGA team heard that the community has a proposal for a green space / dog park across the street from the Philanthropic Seed. Although the land is expensive, this project would be a valuable amenity for downtown.

A community event in Erwin, Tennessee

Atmore already has several community events throughout the year. Gatherings in this space, another venue located easy walking distance from downtown businesses, or via temporary roadway closures are another way to bring Atmoreans and visitors alike into downtown who will then patronize local businesses before or at the conclusion of the event.

Beyond special occasions, recurring events that attract people—such as a young professionals event on, for example, the third Tuesday of the month—are also great ways to bring people to downtown. During the workshop, the SGA team heard that the chamber of commerce has been

[11] https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/planning/outdoor_dining_ordinance.pdf
[12] https://www.codepublishing.com/CA/Covina/html/Covina17/Covina1757.html
[13] http://www.villageofwinfield.com/documentcenter/view/8042

organizing some monthly events.

Building codes: enforcements and incentives

Blighted stock discourages new investment. As the community courts new retail to revitalize the downtown, many companies will avoid buying buildings that require hefty investments to make structures usable. A bad roof can negate a good deal.

The City of Atmore adopted in 2008 a set of building codes requiring maintenance, safety, and upkeep of privately-owned buildings. These codes provide a sound basis to ensure a safer and more marketable building stock for the community. However, they must be enforced. Not doing so creates a liability on surrounding properties. Consideration should be given to strengthening the penalties for failure to comply with the building codes.

A "demolition by neglect" ordinance has proven an effective tool for handling this issue. To address the fines levied under this program, building owners will either invest in their property to meet code requirements or sell it to another party who will do so. Fines will push them to invest into building maintenance to avoid expensive penalties. Conversely, reward programs encourage building owners to make a choice for their property compatible with the city's ordinances. The City of Meridian, Mississippi, for example, has established a process for handling reported code violations.[14]

However, both incentives and penalties should be utilized to ensure owners take care of their property and are a positive influence on community development. Greenville, South Carolina is an example of a successful incentive program.

In 2001, Greenville created a Commercial Corridors Façade Improvement Program that helps commercial property owners improve the appearance of buildings and properties and eliminate blight. Painting, decorative awnings, window or door replacements, storefront enhancements, landscaping, irrigation, streetscaping, outdoor patios and decks, exterior wall lighting, decorative post lighting and architectural features are all eligible under the program. For expenses under $10,000, the city reimburses 50 percent and for additional expenses, up to 20 percent with a maximum award of $10,000.[15]

Noblesville, Indiana offers both tax abatements and a facade grant program, among other incentives, for investments in downtown.[16]

Open vacant second story windows

Consider opening second story windows that have been blocked even if the space behind them is vacant. Dress the window exteriors to make there appear to be activity happening inside. This may include artwork and/or curtains.

Other downtown amenities

Trash receptacles and additional seating throughout all of downtown, perhaps funded by the

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[14] https://www.meridianms.org/city-departments/community-development/code-enforcement-division/

[15] https://www.greenvillesc.gov/341/Facade-Improvement-Program

[16] http://www.choosenoblesville.com/incentives-grants/

chamber of commerce, tax increment financing, Community Benefits District / business improvement district, local tourism tax revenues, or another entity, will be great assets. These amenities would beautify the area and encourage people to walk through the downtown by providing comfortable places to rest during their explorations.

Pursue traffic calming through downtown Atmore

The installation of traffic calming infrastructure—such as center islands and additional bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure—will further encourage drivers to slow down while passing through downtown. Once visitors are already driving more slowly, this will increase the likelihood that they will consider stopping to explore. Passing and implementing a Complete Streets policy as described below will help Atmore continue to ensure the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists is included in future roadway projects.

Atmore should consider the sidewalks and city-owned travel ways not as an inviolate piece of infrastructure that can't be touched but as an amenity that can be used in conjunction with private sector enterprise to vastly improve the ambiance of the entire downtown.

Short-term Actions (1-6 months)

- Develop themes for downtown gateway monuments that celebrate Atmore's local and regional identity.
- Identify suitable locations for outdoor entertainment spaces and related amenities in the city center such as benches and trash receptacles.
- Organize volunteers / city staff to implement the identified "tactical" project(s)
- Clean up, paint, and repair vacant storefronts to make them attractive to visitors even though no activity may be occurring inside.
- Identify local ordinances impacting outdoor dining, including on sidewalks, balconies, and in alleys.
- Review local ordinances regarding building upkeep and begin to enforce them where required among downtown building owners.

Medium-term Actions (6-12 months)

- Implement benches and trash receptacles at suitable locations throughout all of downtown to encourage residents and visitors to rest and linger.
- Begin discussions with the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) to utilize right of way owned by these agencies to place monuments where they will be visible by motorists.
- Look for opportunities to implement traffic calming to slow traffic through downtown, perhaps in partnership with ALDOT
- Install additional wayfinding signage that allows visitors to explore and learn about the history of downtown.
- Consider temporarily repurposing one or more parking spaces as outdoor dining at one or

Example of on-street parking temporarily repurposed as dining (Source: jsonline.com)

more restaurants on nicer days.[17]
- Investigate LED lighting (streetlights and traffic signals) to increase pedestrian safety during evening and nighttime hours while reduce costs.
- Work to change local ordinances impacting outdoor dining to allow more establishments to allow patrons to eat and drink outside where space allows
- Make any identified changes to local building codes to strengthen enforcement of and penalties for buildings in disrepair
- Identify a suitable space for a boutique hotel or bed & breakfast and market it through the chamber of commerce to potential proprietors within or outside the community.

Long-term Actions (12 months and longer)
- Implement building awnings throughout downtown as funding allows.
- Add additional human-scale street lighting around sidewalks and crosswalks, as well as at important destinations, in the downtown. Ensure there is sufficient lighting on connection routes to nearby neighborhoods.
- Place monuments at gateways to downtown and tree columns leading up to downtown gateways. Ensure that this signage, once placed, receives ongoing maintenance.

6. Continue to invest in unique public arts in downtown Atmore that celebrate the city and region's unique history and culture.

Art is important to Atmore and the community should continuously seek additional locations in downtown for public art. It is valuable for cities to harness their creative economy through arts and culture to create distinct places that celebrate a unique culture. The National Endowment for the Arts defines "creative placemaking" as the process of "leveraging the arts and engaging design to make...communities more livable with enhanced quality of life, increased creative activity, a distinct sense of place, and vibrant local economies that together capitalize on...existing assets".

Leverage existing and planned public arts to bring people into downtown

The SGA team heard about and saw several public arts and culture programs and installations during our visit:

- The "Atmore" mural
- Existing and planned arts activities
- Heritage Park – welcome center / museum
- Train motif that is in the works
- Plans to renovate the Strand Theater including film, music, and other mediums, as well as an artist-in-residence
- Arts workshops at the new Poarch Creek Community Center for tribal members

In short, it is clear that arts and culture are very important to the city and tribe. An action plan bringing together all of the area's unique arts, culture and history will create a marketable experience. The goal of this plan will be to take stock in what the area has to offer and to work together as a community to implement the plan and leverage the area's resources to the

[17] For more information, see http://archive.jsonline.com/business/two-east-side-parking-spaces-replaced-by-14-outdoor-dining-tables-b9982256z1-220860751.html/

outside world. At the same time, special sensitivity and respect must be given to the Poarch tribal culture when discussing any community marketing.

Further, vacant storefronts could be cleaned up and furnished with artwork made by students in the Atmore School District or local colleges as well as by local community, or with native arts including basketry and clay work. A competition with a purchase prize could be offered. These artists could also help dress up any blank walls in the town center through the creation of murals that reflect the community and its residents.

In 2016, Smart Growth America's Arts & Culture program launched *The Scenic Route*[18], a guide to creative placemaking in transportation. In 2017, they published *Arts, Culture, and Transportation: A Creative Placemaking Field Scan*[19]. These guides may help Atmore identify additional ways to incorporate arts and culture into their transportation network.

Carousel horses as public art in Meridian, Mississippi (Source:user Visitmississippi on Flickr)

Large mural in downtown Plain Dealing, Louisana (Source: Shreveport-Bossier Convention & Tourist Bureau on Flickr)

Short- and Medium-term Actions (1-12 months)

- Create a plan for public art in the city center that involves the community, both as participants in the process and as artists. As noted above, this may include artwork in vacant storefronts and second story windows, murals on otherwise blank walls, and other improvements.

Catfish Row Art Park, Vicksburg, Mississippi (Source: Michael Barera on Wikimedia)

Long-term Actions (12 months and longer)

- Implement the goals and visions of the public arts plan
- Pursue a competition among artists, including a purchase prize or otherwise set a fundraising goal to purchase artwork

[18] http://creativeplacemaking.t4america.org

[19] http://t4america.org/maps-tools/creative-placemaking-field-scan/

7. Create a marketing and branding campaign for downtown Atmore including ongoing place management.

Create a branding and marketing campaign for downtown.
A branding campaign specifically for downtown Atmore and the tribal community beyond the casino would help market the community and its unique identity to the outside world. This campaign should embody the unique features downtown Atmore has to offer both visitors (including those already visiting the casino) and potential new residents. It can include components such as a unique logo, moniker (perhaps consistent with the city's moniker on its website: "Old Friendships. New Beginnings". The city, tribe, and all other partners should use the branding consistently for it to be most effective.

As an example, consider the Pepsi logo or another well known corporate logo which does not require one to read the product name in order to recognize it.

The marketing campaign should focus around downtown Atmore's proximity to the casino as well as nearby destinations such as Pensacola and Mobile. It is also critical for the campaign to market what specifically makes Atmore unique both within the region and beyond. The city, chamber of commerce, or another established community group within Atmore should run the campaign. This does not need to be a new entity; it can be incorporated into one of these other entities but it requires a dedicated staff member to pursue.

Invest in a place management entity that is solely focused on downtown.
The best branding and most aggressive marketing fail if daily attention is not paid to downtown. Therefore, the SGA team recommends designating a place management entity -- an individual who only thinks about the cleanliness, safety, image, and overall attractiveness of downtown. This individual will perform or otherwise coordinate maintenance activities on a daily basis such as removing worn signage, and making sure flowers are watered.

This effort should ensure downtown offers a variety of programming throughout the year – such as festivals, markets, concerts, theater, and participatory activities – that bring people downtown. These activities can also further create an identity for Atmore that draws people from beyond the city's boundaries. In short, Atmore needs someone(s) whose job it is to think about downtown all day, every day—and is not burdened with other activities. This individual should be empowered to call upon volunteers and city staff to help perform needed tasks, whether maintenance or event planning is needed.

The place management effort could also include a program to help local small businesses apply for loans and grants that help them grow and expand.

Invest in marketing and trailblazing at and around the Rivercane I-65 highway interchange to entice casino and other visitors downtown.
Passing through a place (i.e. stopping for gas or a quick meal) is not the same as visiting the place. On an average day in 2017, more than 31,000 people drove along I-65 between exit 54 and 57.[20] While most were on their way from point A to point B without stopping, some fraction of these drivers stopped at exit 57 for gas or to take a break from driving. And hundreds or

[20] https://aldotgis.dot.state.al.us/atd/default.aspx

thousands of these drivers exited I-65 specifically to visit the Wind Creek casino not far from exit 57.

Atmore should make a major push to encourage those going past Atmore to somewhere else as well as those stopping to visit the casino to drive the short distance to downtown Atmore. It is worth noting that, while visitors from Pensacola and points south may pass through downtown on their way to the casino, those coming from Mobile and other points might never visit downtown unless they are enticed to do so.

Two critical tools will help get these visitors into downtown. First, the city and the tribe might consider partnering with some of the establishments at the highway interchange to provide cultural education about the area as people stop for fuel or food. The economic link between the Wind Creek Casino and downtown Is unique to Atmore. Encouraging tourists to visit both downtown Atmore and the casino is essential to the the success of each. Signage, social media, hotel flyers, radio spots, and other outreach needs to be coordinated by the implementation committee proposed above. It is imperative to have these interests work in harmony or neither district is likely to succeed. Hotel rooms or even information counters at the casino (and other nearby hotels) could provide information about amenities in downtown Atmore to visit—particularly any special events that occur during the year.

Even if couples visit the casino together, they may not want to spend all of their time there and may look for another venue to have a nice meal or evening out. And, in some cases, one spouse may be interested in gambling while the other is more interested in cultural opportunities in the area. Getting them to drive the few minutes to downtown is important. Experiencing the vibrancy of downtown may also entice visitors to extend their stay at the casino as they continue to explore.

Second, once visitors make the decision to visit downtown, trailblazing from the highway in both directions via signage will encourage people to take full advantage of the businesses and other amenities when they get there.

There is currently limited roadway signage directing motorists to Atmore and none that would encourage them to stop there for lunch or to browse downtown businesses. This signage should continue the entire way into the Atmore city center from both the south and north. It should call out important destinations and landmarks in the community that someone unfamiliar with the area should visit.

Market the multi-use trails

During the workshop, there was discussion of measuring the exact number of miles of multi-use trails that run through Atmore. While this is an important statistic to know, regardless of their exact length, the trails are a key amenity that the city offers both existing and new residents.

The trails can offer significant health benefits for existing residents. The city might promote their usage for walking, jogging, or biking as one part of a challenge to lose weight coordinated by city leaders.

The trails are also a key draw when marketing Atmore to potential new residents coming for

jobs at Muskogee Technology and other local employers.

Short-term Actions (1-6 months)

- Work with local businesses, and other partners to develop a branding and marketing campaign for downtown including a unique identity, informational materials, online presence, and/or a mobile phone app. Ensure all entities (tribe, city, county, chamber, and other partners) use the branding guidelines when referring about downtown.

Long-term Actions (12 months and longer)

- Ensure that the branding and marketing campaign continues to represent downtown and its amenities by updating it from time to time.

8. Adopt a Complete Streets policy and implementation strategy.

Atmore should adopt a Complete Streets policy to ensure that all future street design efforts consider the needs of pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users and persons with disabilities. Atmore should then work with the tribal government, Escambia County, and the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) to adopt their own policies and to implement Complete Streets throughout the region. Adopting a Complete Streets Policy demonstrates Atmore's commitment to establish, design, and implement transportation improvements, addressing and balancing the needs of citizens of all ages and abilities.

Refer to Appendix E for a list of helpful Complete Streets resources available online.

According to the National Complete Streets Coalition, an ideal Complete Streets policy:

1. Includes a vision for how and why the community wants to complete the street
2. Specifies that the term "all users" includes pedestrians, bicyclists and transit passengers of all ages and abilities, as well as trucks, buses and automobiles.
3. Applies to both new and retrofit projects, including design, planning, maintenance, and operations, for the entire right of way.
4. Makes any exceptions specific and sets a clear procedure that requires high-level approval of exceptions.
5. Encourages street connectivity and aims to create a comprehensive, integrated, connected network for all modes.
6. Is adoptable by all agencies to cover all roads.
7. Directs the use of the latest and best design criteria and guidelines while recognizing the need for flexibility in balancing user needs.
8. Directs that Complete Streets solutions will complement the context of the community.
9. Establishes performance standards with measurable outcomes.
10. Includes specific next steps for implementation of the policy

Taking a Complete Streets policy from paper into practice is not easy, but providing some momentum with specific implementation steps can help. Some policies establish a task force or commission to work toward policy implementation. There are four key steps for successful implementation:

1. Restructure procedures to accommodate all users on every project;

2. Develop new design policies and guides;
3. Offer workshops and other educational opportunities to transportation professionals, community leaders, and residents; and
4. Institute better ways to measure performance and collect data on how well the streets are serving all users. Each of these steps requires agencies to think in new ways and, in order to do so they must include a wider range of stakeholders in decision-making.

Short-term Actions (within 1-6 months)

- Create a timeline for the adoption of a Complete Streets policy within three to six months. The timeline should consider:
    - Who needs to be involved in the development of the plan.
        - Local elected officials and City of Atmore staff
        - Smart Growth America recommends the city work to bring seniors and people with disabilities together with ALDOT to work on accessibility issues
        - It is recommended that a meeting and tour with ALDOT be setup to demonstrate the accessibility issues some citizens face on a regular basis when interacting with state highways
        - This is a fantastic opportunity to affect change not only at a local level but also at a state policy level
    - When to release a draft of the plan to the public.
        - The timing of this release is critical to project success
        - The public should see a draft version
    - What type of feedback it will ask from the community and what it will do with the feedback.
        - To create community buy-in, Smart Growth America recommends sharing a draft of the plan with the public and asking for their buy-in. However, Atmore must be clear on exactly what type of feedback they are looking for (high level, such as does this fit your vision for the city, or more details-oriented, such as what do you think of this sentence) and how Atmore will use the feedback. This will create transparency and manage expectations for residents.
        - Host open houses within the community, otherwise known as meeting people when and where they are at. For example, Atmore could reach out to local church groups or have meetings on weekends, which may be easier for some residents to attend.
- Determine the type of plan(s) to adopt
    - A Complete Streets policy will change and add value to Atmore's decision-making process. Atmore should identify the type of policy that would be most effective in sparking change, while being realistic about the type of policy that can be passed and implemented successfully. Many communities begin with a simple resolution that then leads to a more complex internal policy.
        - A Resolution will allow the mayor and city council to lead the initiative on Complete Streets and leverage their leadership to highlight the importance of Complete Streets with the public and the media.
        - A Council-adopted ordinance will codify the policy into law.

- Plan a community/press event
    - Atmore should celebrate the success of the adoption of a Complete Streets policy

with a public event. This will help educate the public and media about Complete Streets, as well as allow the city and the community to celebrate the passage of the policy.

Medium and Long-term Actions (6 months and longer)

- Incorporate Complete Streets policy into roadway and intersection redesigns as they occur

9. Create educational programs that attract new talent and keep young people in the community.

The SGA team heard time and again during our visit about the struggles of the public schools in Atmore. But the real story is that the schools have improved over the past three years from an F to a C in the most recent survey. It is critical that this improvement is communicated to the wider community via local media and other channels.

Further, an internship or apprenticeship program between local industry and Escambia County High School—which the Chamber of Commerce is already working on—will help prepare students for jobs once they graduate and further improve public perception of the school district. Just as important, it will encourage students to remain in Atmore once they graduate, instead of escaping to Pensacola, Mobile, or elsewhere. Atmore needs to hang on to this next generation of young workers and ensuring they are ready for local job opportunities is a critical step to making that happen.

Atmore should also consider offering two years at the Coastal Alabama Community College paid by the chamber of commerce members or others in the business community. This has been done in Meridian, Mississippi, supported financially by the business community and embraced by the community college. This could be a nice fit for the community college, augmenting and ensuring the success of the programs offered.

Further, workforce development programs in partnership with Coastal Alabama Community College will ensure that those who have already graduated from high school have the opportunity to be trained to meet the needs of Atmore's existing and future employers.

Short- and Medium-term Actions (within 1-12 months)

- Partner with the high school (school district) and Coastal Alabama Community College to create workforce development programs

Long-term Actions (12 months and longer)

- Periodically evaluate the workforce development programs and modify them as needed to ensure they continue to meet the needs of employers and the community as a whole
- Establish a program offering two years of paid community college

10. Engage service sector industry throughout the city as well as city employees in customer service training so they become ambassadors for Atmore.

Locals working in the service industry or for the City of Atmore have a role to play in creating a positive impression of Atmore. Simply saying "Thank you for visiting Atmore" or "We're glad you're here" will go a long way in creating a friendly environment that encourages tourists to visit Atmore again and again.

The Chamber of Commerce or another entity should invest in customer service training for those individuals who regularly come into contact with visitors to Atmore as they stop for gas or have a meal. These are opportunities to interface with the visitor, communicate positive feelings for Atmore and advise them of things going on. Those working in the service industry who come into contact with visitors on a daily basis should know how to create a memorable and welcoming experience to keep those visitors coming back.

The Chamber is likely the best placed entity to take the lead in creating the message or "script" that those working in customer service should offer. Classes should be offered on a regular schedule, perhaps as often as once a week. The specific day of the week and time of the class should vary from one to the next to ensure all service industry workers can attend.

The training should cover what the Chamber wants them to say, how to approach visitors, ideas about how to stay abreast on what is currently going on in Atmore to make recommendations to visitors, and other relevant topics.

Short- and Medium-term Actions (within 1-12 months)

- Partner with businesses and other entities invested in the community to create customer service training program

Long-term Actions (12 months and longer)

- Periodically evaluate the customer service training program and script and modify as needed to ensure they continue to meet the needs of employers, visitors, and the community as a whole

As with all conceptual plans, implementation is the challenge. The key here is to engage the most influential and passionate individuals and partners in the community. The success or failure of implementation will rest in the efforts of the implementation committee as supported city and tribal leaders. It has been our pleasure to work with the City of Atmore and the Poarch Band of Creek Indians, as we observe the unique opportunities afforded to both.

Appendix A: Interview and Workshop Participants

The following individuals participated in a 40 minute group interview at the Atmore Chamber of Commerce with Smart Growth America on February 19, 2019:

Industry

- Keith Martin, Member, Tribal Council
- Chris Harrison, Transportation Manager, Tiger Sul
- David Landa, Plant Manager, Alto Products
- Stephanie Rolin, President, Roland Construction

Business

- Destiny Morris, Owner, Philanthropic Seed
- Kevin Clausen, Owner, Southern Computer
- Rob Faircloth, Owner, David's Catfish
- Ann Gordon, Owner, Atmore Realty

Education

- Debbie Bolton, Principal of Escambia County Middle School
- Dennis Fuqua (Escambia County HS Principal)
- Patty Hughston (Coastal Alabama Community College)

Health Care

- Danny Cottrell, Owner, Buy Rite Drugs
- Michelle Smith, Public Health Nurse, Escambia County
- Doug Tanner, Administrator, Atmore Community Hospital
- Morgan Smith, Administrator, Atmore Nursing Home

Poarch Band of Creek Indians

- Keith Martin, Member, Tribal Council
- Brent Pinkston, Chief Operating Officer, Poarch Creek Gaming
- Martha Gookin, Tribal Member Services Division Director
- Robert McGhee, Vice Chair, Tribal Council

The following individuals attended the day-long workshop on February 20, 2019 at the Atmore Public Library facilitated by Smart Growth America:

February 20, 2019 - Workshop Attendees

Name	Title	Organization
Wes Woodruff	President / CEO	Muskogee Technology
Ann Gordon	Broker / Owner	Atmore Realty
Dale Ash	Owner	Pepsi of Atmore
Chris Walker	City Council, District 3	City of Atmore / United Bank
Emily Harp	Executive Director	Atmore Chamber of Commerce
Rob Faircloth	Owner / Board Member	David's Catfish / West Escambia Utilities
Kenny Smith	Manager / Superintendent	West Escambia Utilities
Jim Johnson	Owner / Board Member	Johnson Ford / Atmore Industrial Board
Brandon Smith	Commissioner	Escambia County Commission
Webb Nall	City Council, District 1	City of Atmore
Jim Staff	Mayor	City of Atmore
Will Ruzic	Executive Director	Coastal Gateway Regional Economic Development Alliance
Stephen VanPelt	North Region Market President	First National Bank & Trust
Emilee Waters	Branch Manager	United Bank
Willie Hawthorne	Senior Pastor	Greater Mt. Triumph Missionary Baptist
Tim Manning	Chief Operating Officer	Creek Indian Enterprises
Chris Harrison	City Council, District 5	City of Atmore
Debbie Rowell	Owner	Southern Real Estate
Greg Brown	Co-CEO / CFO	Brown Precision, Inc.
Frazier Payne	District Representative	Congressman Bradley Byrne

Name	Title	Organization
Tucson Roberts	Economic Development Consultant	City of Atmore
Lynne Steadman	Accountant	Coastal Alabama Community College
Susan Smith	City Council, District 4	City of Atmore
Joseph Witherspoon	Accountant	Alto Products Corporation
Stephanie Rolin	President	Rolin Construction
Jerry Gehman	Co-Owner	G&H Systems
Herb Hackman	President	Atmore Historical Society

Appendix B: Summary of Participant Viewpoints at Workshop

Group 1 - Rivercane

Goal: Attract and Retain Talent

S.M.A.R.T. Actions	What is this and why is it important?	Immediate next steps	How will we know success?	Timeframe	Lead and supporting role	Cost and implementation resources
Workforce Training Center	Need to support new and existing industry. Number one issue across the country. Need to keep young people in town.	• Generate community support • Create plan & financial support • Align business and education system.	Industry feedback – when Muskogee Technology has workforce to double output	Long (1-2 years +)	• Community college • Local and regional leadership	Multimillion dollars - $12 to $20 million
Develop marketing plan to identify appropriate	Understand our target market and ensure Rivercane and its businesses	Community leadership discussion	Growth	Long (1-2 years +)	• Local and regional economic development	Minimal – can do ourselves

S.M.A.R.T. Actions	What is this and why is it important?	Immediate next steps	How will we know success?	Timeframe	Lead and supporting role	Cost and implementation resources
industry and retail at Rivercane	don't compete with downtown				• City leadership	
More upscale high density living in Rivercane to create live, work, and play community.	Create walkability for retail without competing with downtown residential or creating sprawl	Identify potential developers Explore feasibility study	Growth	Long (1-2 years +)	City leadership	High cost
Support facilities	Need to understand the kind of services needed – police, fire, utilities, etc.	Identify growth targets	Controlled growth	Long (1-2 years +)	City department leadership	High cost
Continue to develop partnership between City of Atmore and Poarch Band of Creek Indians	Both have same quality of life goals. Casino is an asset.	Ensure continued cooperation	Growth for both entities	Long (1-2 years +)	Tribal and community leadership	Minimal cost

Group 2 – Downtown Atmore

S.M.A.R.T. Actions	What is this and why is it important?	Immediate next steps	How will we know success?	Timeframe	Lead and supporting role	Cost and implementation resources
Paint crosswalks Pressure wash sidewalks Trim shrubbery Fill in windows of vacant buildings	Improves appearance	Perform these actions.	N/A	Short (0-6 months)	City, ALDOT, contractors, store owners	Inexpensive
Tear down Main Street Jewelers and make grass	Building's appearance / safety (turning radius)	• Mayor talks to ALDOT regarding safety issues at building. • ALDOT visits.	When turned into greenspace	Medium-long (6 months +)	Mayor and ALDOT	
Main Street program	Grants for small businesses to improve building appearance				Mayor	

S.M.A.R.T. Actions	What is this and why is it important?	Immediate next steps	How will we know success?	Timeframe	Lead and supporting role	Cost and implementation resources
Downtown quaint bed and breakfast	Fill void in downtown	Market for a business owner		Long (1-2 years +)	Realtors	
Public parking painted across near railroad tracks						
Renovate the Strand Theater and hardware store in accordance with rendering	Entertainment	Capital campaign	Everyone works together toward goal	Long (1-2 years +)		
Improve pedestrian infrastructure and lighting	Need to walk safely from cars and encourage people to stop in downtown					
Signage			Grants	Short (0-6 months)	Mayor's office / Chamber of Commerce	
Utilize Trammell Square for parking	Parking	Purchase from Bob Burgee		Short (0-6 months)		

Group 3 – Rivercane

Goal: Make exit 57 on I-65 a gateway to Atmore and the Tribe

S.M.A.R.T. Actions	What is this and why is it important?	Immediate next steps	How will we know success?	Timeframe	Lead and supporting role	Cost and implementation resources
Light up and beautify the interchange	Legislation coming down to support this	Waiting on state government	Traffic counts			
Create electronic marquee at interchange with a mural to advertise artwalk and downtown businesses.	• Let visitors know downtown is six miles away. • Sustain and advertise Atmore.					Paid for, at least in part, by advertising businesses.
For those in or passing by Rivercane, mass texts advertising downtown including special offers.	Direct relationship between Rivercane and Atmore is helpful to both the city and the tribe.	In progress.		Technology in the works (within 15 months).	Chamber of Commerce	
Improvements to Coastal Community College and city schools to support						

S.M.A.R.T. Actions	What is this and why is it important?	Immediate next steps	How will we know success?	Timeframe	Lead and supporting role	Cost and implementation resources
workforce development and keep children in Atmore						
Brochure in all hotel bedrooms at Rivercane advertising downtown Atmore	Not everyone at the casino is interested in gambling – some people may want to do other things while their spouse gambles					Conversation and creative tools

Group 4 – Downtown Atmore

S.M.A.R.T. Actions	What is this and why is it important?	Immediate next steps	How will we know success?	Timeframe	Lead and supporting role	Cost and implementation resources
Gathering activity – bring people to a planned event (on a recurring date such as third Monday) that draws people in (such as a Millennial mash).	• Brings people into downtown. • City has already had several such events. • Opportunity to tell people, "did you see that?"	Create planning committee	• Traffic increases • Revenue increases from shopping • Increased taxes	3 months is sufficient to plan events.	• Committee • Local businesses • Everyone can offer input.	Depends on event – cost to city minimal.
Create marketing materials	Identifies points of interest and attractions for visitors so people know Rivercane isn't all Atmore has.	Put arrows on sidewalk pointing to places of interest.	Same as above.	3 months	City working with tribe.	Fairly minimal
Convert vacant 2nd story stores in	Will bring in Milennials and Baby Boomers who	Identify buildings that could	Same as above.	1-2 years	City, but everyone working	• Property owners

S.M.A.R.T. Actions	What is this and why is it important?	Immediate next steps	How will we know success?	Timeframe	Lead and supporting role	Cost and implementation resources
downtown into apartments.	want to live in a walkable area. Revenue	be lived in with renovations.			together.	• City projects
Add signage in Rivercane near I-65 interchange directing drivers to "Historic Downtown Atmore"	Increases visibility of downtown Atmore. Helps visitors (and locals) know what is there.	Talk with business owners about signage	Same as above	0-3 months		Funding by business owners, state, county, and city
Clean up downtown including signs off windows, add canopy trees, and repave parking lots	Not all businesses have signage and sidewalks aren't clean. Need to put accountability on business and building owners for exterior and interior of buildings. About 30 new	Talk with business owners about signage	Same as above	0-6 months	Planning commission, others. Need someone to care for new canopy trees and pressure wash. Once people start, others will follow.	Funding by business owners, state, county, and city

S.M.A.R.T. Actions	What is this and why is it important?	Immediate next steps	How will we know success?	Timeframe	Lead and supporting role	Cost and implementation resources
	businesses have opened up. The Chamber got 34 new members last year and 22 so far this year. Want to encourage entrepreneurship and new businesses. Get canopy trees from the tribe.					
Redesign and enforce building codes.	Need to not use buildings for storage and paint them.	Talk with city.	Same as above	0-3 months	City needs to lead on code enforcement	Funding by city, county, state
Pursue bank loans and a business plan.	Offer lower interest loans to “dress up” buildings.	Talk with city.	Same as above.	2 weeks	Local banks.	Funding by city, county, state
Hire a grant writer for the city.	Need to bring in grant money for projects. The tribe	Talk with city.	Same as above.	2 weeks.	City	City, county, state

S.M.A.R.T. Actions	What is this and why is it important?	Immediate next steps	How will we know success?	Timeframe	Lead and supporting role	Cost and implementation resources
	already employs one. ALDOT loans and other opportunities are available.					

Group 5 – Downtown Atmore

S.M.A.R.T. Actions	What is this and why is it important?	Immediate next steps	How will we know success?	Timeframe	Lead and supporting role	Cost and implementation resources
Code review and enforcement to ensure the compliance and vibrancy of our downtown legacy buildings / structures. Increased use of frontage.	Currently, we have usable storefront being underutilized for the purpose it was intended: COMMERCE Don't tear structures down – fix them. Buildings that get fixed increase tax revenues	1) List of buildings to be reviewed and create punch list. 2) Have those buildings reviewed and citations issued as applicable. Make results public.	1) Building improvements 2) Increased usage of current unused frontage. 3) Increased move in rate to community.		• Local business community • City • Chamber, to encourage businesses	

S.M.A.R.T. Actions	What is this and why is it important?	Immediate next steps	How will we know success?	Timeframe	Lead and supporting role	Cost and implementation resources
	which pays for local projects. Businesses should put their best foot forward year round.					
Repurposing of YMCA – turn into downtown living space Repurpose Campus 805 Club. AK Sutter Addition of green space at Ridgeley	YMCA is in walking distance of everything. Campus 805 Club is big empty space in downtown that can become something to increase property values. We need to	1) Search committee for grants and/or investors				

S.M.A.R.T. Actions	What is this and why is it important?	Immediate next steps	How will we know success?	Timeframe	Lead and supporting role	Cost and implementation resources
and Trammell	create / entice the Millennial generation to come downtown by providing what they want and ensuring the employers will then follow.					
Upgrade downtown lighting to brighter LED lights and paint street light poles black to match planters on	Safety of our residents and visitors, energy efficient, and visually friendly. Need to show that sidewalks	1) Search for grants 2) Buy paint (Chamber will buy). a. Organize prisoners b. Paint them			• Chris Harrison, City of Atmore • Alabama Power	

S.M.A.R.T. Actions	What is this and why is it important?	Immediate next steps	How will we know success?	Timeframe	Lead and supporting role	Cost and implementation resources
Nashville (possible grants)	don't roll up at 5pm.					

Pedestrian crosswalk / bridge over Nashville at Main to promote walkable lifestyles in downtown life while ensuring safety.	Safety and livability. Need people to know that they can walk at events.	1) Search for grants (TIGER / BUILD)			• U.S. DOT (TIGER / BUILD grant)
					  ○ Southern Alabama Regional Planning Commission
					  ○ City of Atmore	

Truck route / bypass of the downtown business district – use it, particularly	Slow down the traffic and allow for easier access in and out of our storefronts	1) Contact ALDOT 2) Educate truck drivers about truck route. 3) Fine the speeders (which will help with			• AL DOT (particularly questions on turning radii, safety hazards, etc.) ○ City of Atmore	

S.M.A.R.T. Actions	What is this and why is it important?	Immediate next steps	How will we know success?	Timeframe	Lead and supporting role	Cost and implementation resources
south of downtown.	which will increase dollars spent. This will increase revenue to city / county / state.	revenue) 4) Signage for speeding and truck routes.				

Appendix C: Atmore Hotspot Analysis Results

PROPERTY VALUE HOTSPOT ANALYSIS
ATMORE, AL

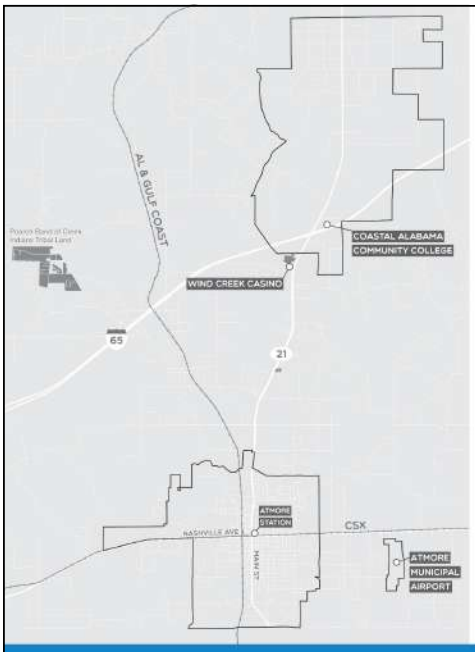
Smart Growth America
Improving lives by improving communities

ATMORE, AL

- Original city boundaries encompassed 8.6 square miles

At the intersection of two transportation connections:

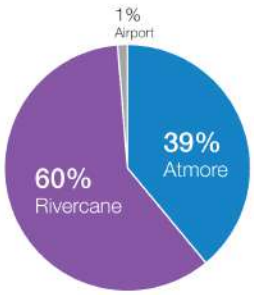
- US Route 31 & AL Route 21
- CSX Rail Line & Sunset Limited Passenger Rail (until 2005)

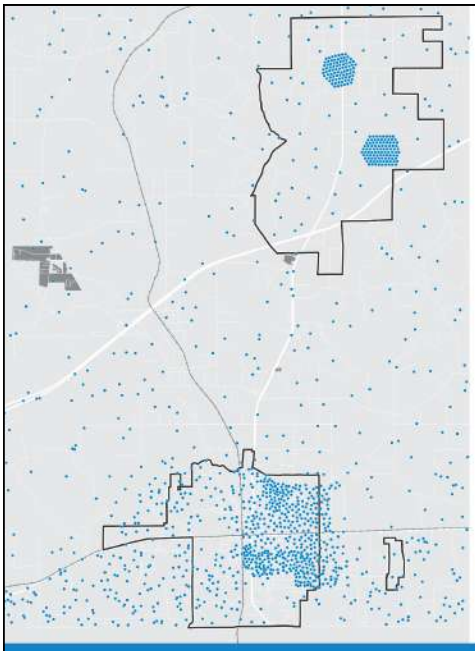


ANNEXATION

- In 2008, Atmore annexed the Rivercane area north of the city.
- Annexation more than doubled Atmore's land area to ~22 square miles.

Percentage of Land Area





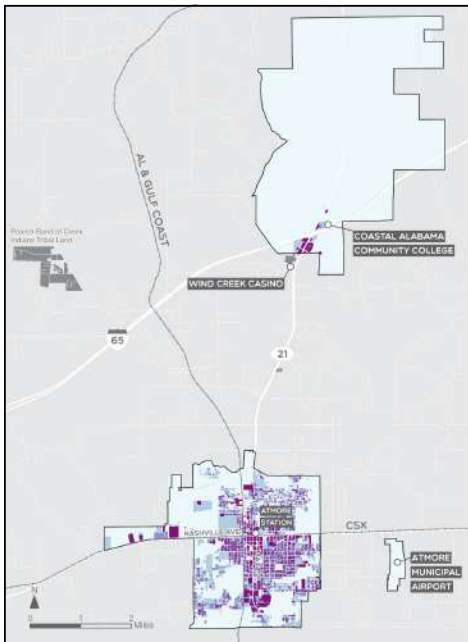
ATMORE'S POPULATION

2017 Population: 9,969

- At the time of annexation, Atmore added about 2,400 people to its population.
- Majority of Atmore's population lives within the original city limits.
- Most—but not all—of the population within Rivercane boundaries is made up of incarcerated populations at Holman Prison and Fountain Correctional Facility.

● = 10 people

** Dots demonstrate population density within census block groups and do not show exact place of residence*



PROPERTY VALUES

- Property values in Atmore vary from $11/acre to $1.1 million/acre

Higher Value Properties

- Along Main St & Nashville Ave, particularly to the southeast
- By Wind Creek Casino

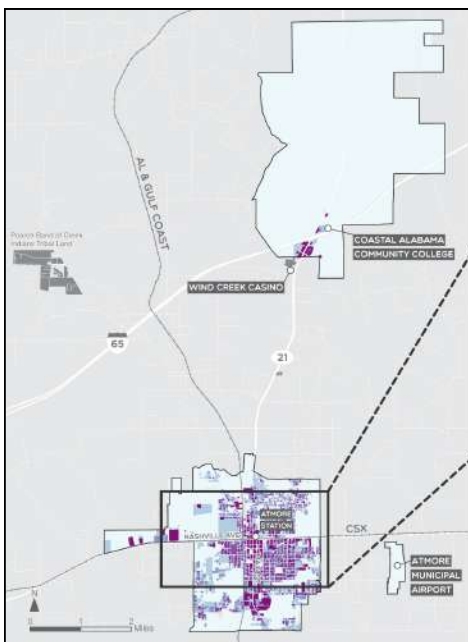
Lower Value Properties

- Around the periphery of Atmore
- North Rivercane

Price per Acre

- $11 - $3k
- $3k - $11k
- $11k - $22k
- $22k - $37k
- $37k - $1.1 mil

Source: Escambia County



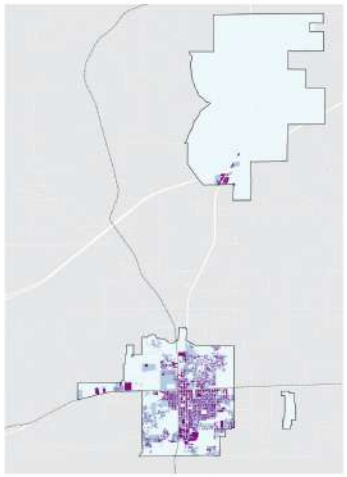
PROPERTY VALUES

Price per Acre

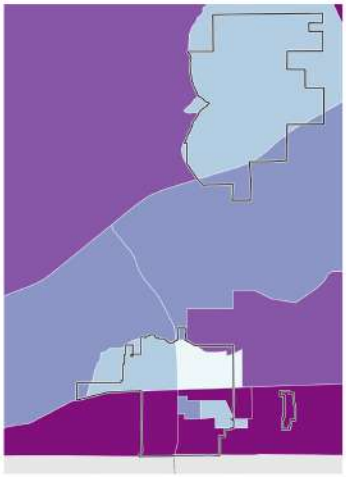
- $11 - $3k
- $3k - $11k
- $11k - $22k
- $22k - $37k
- $37k - $1.1 mil

Source: Escambia County

PROPERTY VALUES & INCOME-LEVEL

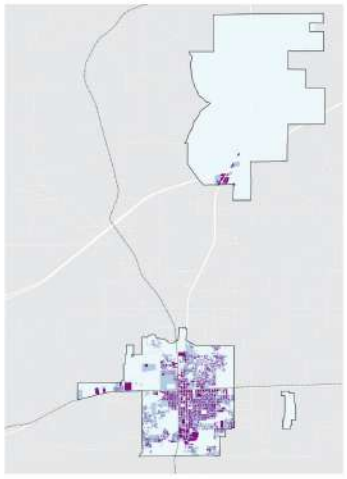


Price per Acre
LOW → HIGH

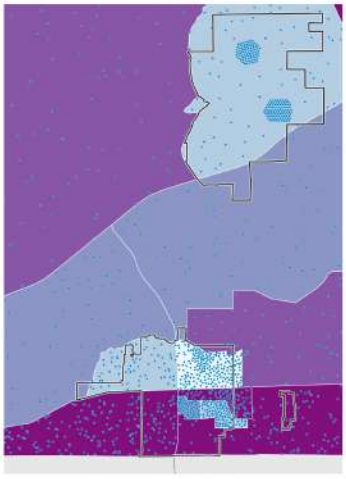


Median Household Income
LOW → HIGH

PROPERTY VALUES & INCOME-LEVEL



Price per Acre
LOW → HIGH



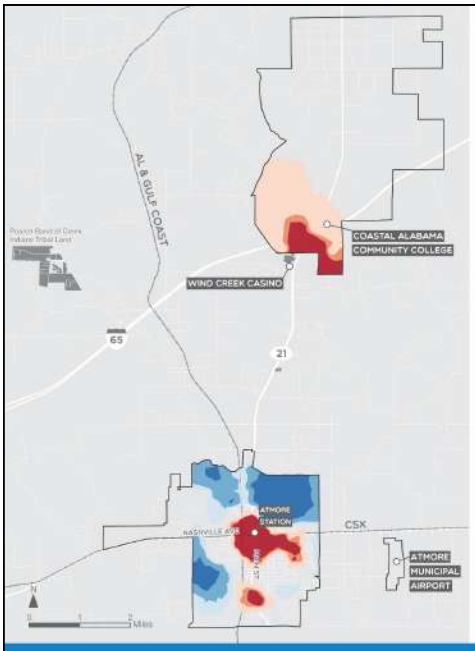
Median Household Income
LOW → HIGH

HOTSPOT ANALYSIS

A property's value is often influenced by the value of surrounding properties - both positively and negatively. A "hotspot analysis" is a useful tool to visualize where high- and low-value properties are clustered.

A **hot spot** is an area where high-value properties are clustered.

A **cold spot** is an area where low-value properties are clustered.



HOT SPOT ANALYSIS

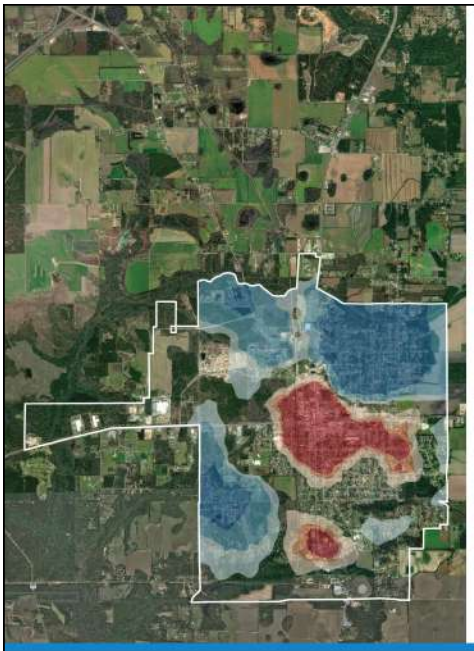
HOT SPOTS

- Downtown
- Commercial along Lindberg Ave
- Southern Rivercane area

COLD SPOTS

- Downtown edges
- Northern Rivercane area

HOT SPOT ⟶ NO CLUSTERING ⟵ COLD SPOT



DOWNTOWN ANALYSIS

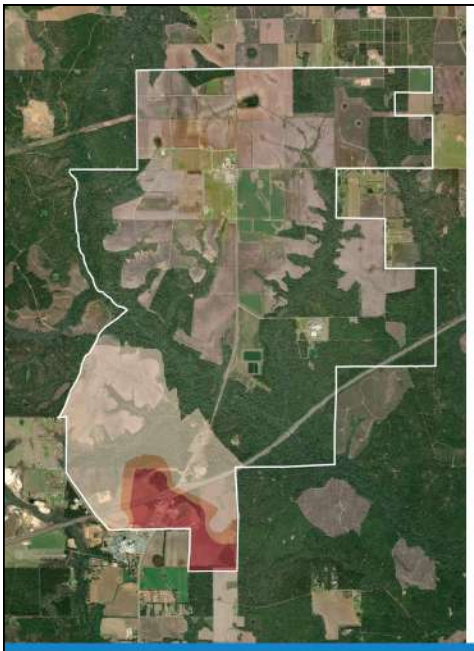
HOT SPOTS

- The largest downtown hot spot is clustered around the intersection of Main St & Nashville Avenue, stretching to the southeast
- There is another large hotspot in the commercial area on Lindberg Ave

COLD SPOTS

- Cold spots can be found north and southwest of downtown
- Many are adjacent to hot spots

HOT SPOT ⟶ NO CLUSTERING ⟵ COLD SPOT



RIVERCANE ANALYSIS

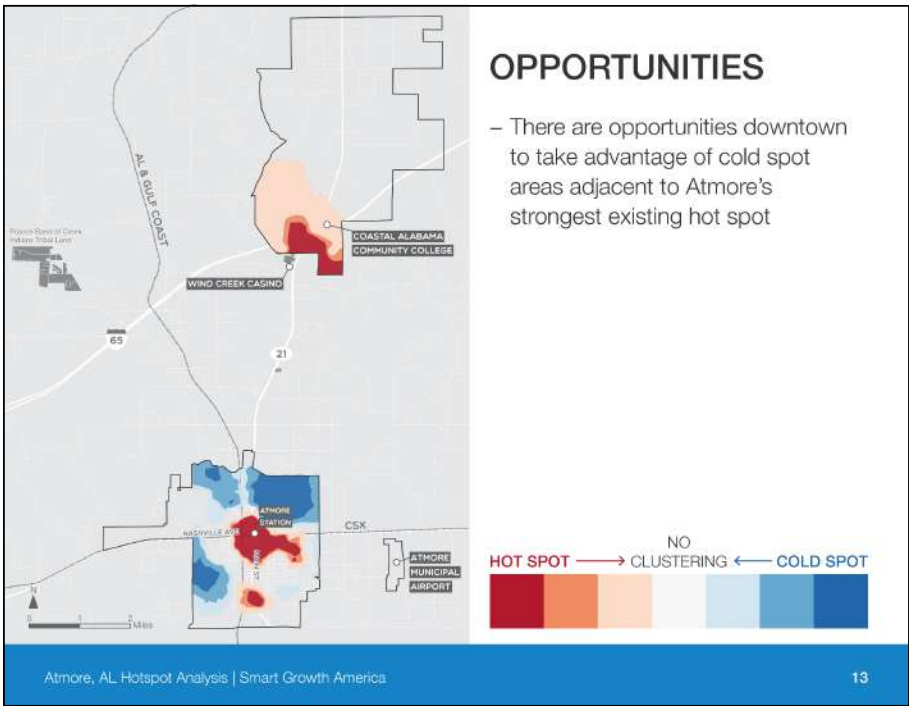
HOT SPOTS

- There is one hot spot in Rivercane, that radiates up from the intersection of 65 & 21 and the Wind Creek Casino area

COLD SPOTS

- There are no cold spots in Rivercane; however, the majority of the land has no clustering of property value.

HOT SPOT ⟶ NO CLUSTERING ⟵ COLD SPOT


AL 8 GULF COAST
COASTAL ALABAMA COMMUNITY COLLEGE
WIND CREEK CASINO
65
21
ATMORE STATION
CSX
ATMORE MUNICIPAL AIRPORT
OPPORTUNITIES
– There are opportunities downtown to take advantage of cold spot areas adjacent to Atmore's strongest existing hot spot
HOT SPOT ⟶ NO CLUSTERING ⟵ COLD SPOT
Atmore, AL Hotspot Analysis | Smart Growth America
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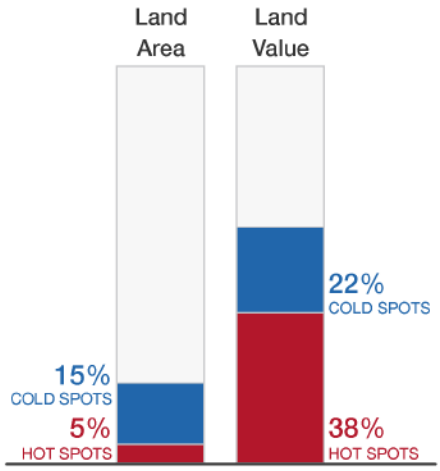
CENSUS TRACT 9704
AL 8 GULF COAST
COASTAL ALABAMA COMMUNITY COLLEGE
WIND CREEK CASINO
CENSUS TRACT 9705
21
CENSUS TRACT 9706
ATMORE STATION
CSX
ATMORE MUNICIPAL AIRPORT
OPPORTUNITIES
– Much of Atmore is covered by New Market Tax Credits, including many areas within the city's original boundaries.
Atmore, AL Hotspot Analysis | Smart Growth America
14

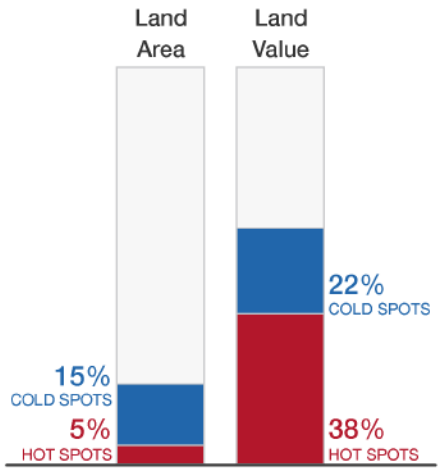
LAND VALUE IS HIGHER IN HOT SPOTS



Hot spots are 5% of Atmore's land area, but contain 38% of the city's land value.

Atmore, AL Hotspot Analysis | Smart Growth America 15

LAND VALUE IS HIGHER IN HOT SPOTS



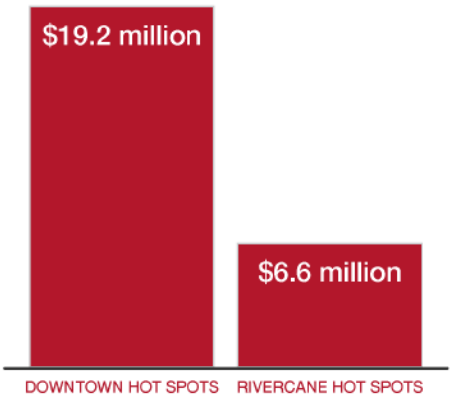
Hot spots are 5% of Atmore's land area, but contain 38% of the city's land value.

Value per Acre is Higher in Hot Spots

Atmore, AL Hotspot Analysis | Smart Growth America 16

LAND VALUE IS CLUSTERED DOWNTOWN

Downtown hot spots contain nearly 3x more value than those in Rivercane



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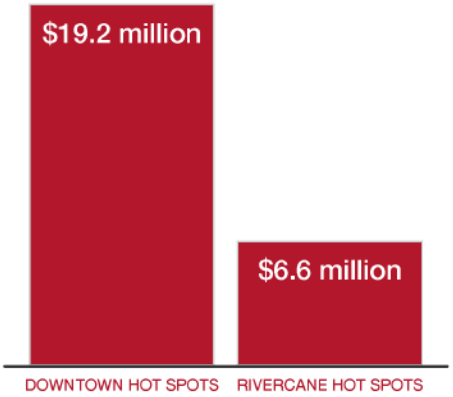

Value per acre **of all land** is 10x higher within Atmore's original boundaries

Appendix D: USDA and Other Funding Resources for Projects

The City of Atmore, developers, and the tribal government may be able to take advantage of USDA Rural Development grants and loans to help pay for renovation projects of historic buildings as well as construction of new buildings in downtown. These include:

Multi-Family Projects
Multi-Family Housing Direct Loans
https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/multi-family-housing-direct-loans

Multi-Family Housing Loan Guarantees
https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/multi-family-housing-loan-guarantees

Single-Family Projects
Single Family Housing Direct Home Loans
https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/single-family-housing-direct-home-loans

Single Family Housing Home Loan Guarantees
https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/single-family-housing-guaranteed-loan-program

Community Facilities Projects
Community Facilities Direct Loans & Grants
https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/community-facilities-direct-loan-grant-program

Community Facilities Loan Guarantees
https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/community-facilities-guaranteed-loan-program

Community Facilities Relending Program
https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/community-facilities-relending-program

Economic Impact Initiative Grants
https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/economic-impact-initiative-grants

The above list is not an exhaustive list of all available programs through USDA. Atmore is encouraged to refer to USDA's website for eligibility and application instructions for these and other programs (https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/all-programs).

Other funding options include low to moderate income tax credits, tax increment finance districts, historic tax credits and, in some portions of downtown, New Market Tax Credits.

Appendix E: Complete Streets and other resources

The following is a list of Complete Streets resources providing information from the fundamentals to implementation. Click on any of the links to go to the resource.

Fundamentals

Communities just getting started with Complete Streets will find these materials most useful. They present a comprehensive overview of the benefits and basics of the Complete Streets planning and design approach. The resources listed in this section can be found at the link below or by clicking on the titles below.

https://smartgrowthamerica.org/program/national-complete-streets-coalition/policy-development/

- Introduction to Complete Streets. A comprehensive PowerPoint presentation on why we need Complete Streets, available to download for use and adaptation in your community.

- Presentation and Fact Sheets: Benefits of Complete Streets. A free PowerPoint provides an overview of the research-backed benefits of safe, multimodal street planning and design. The Coalition's series of research-based fact sheets explores the many benefits of Complete Streets for various groups of users and outcomes.

Topics include: Health; Safety; Economic Revitalization; Children; People with Disabilities; Older Adults; Public Transportation; Climate Change; Gas Prices; Lower Transportation Costs; Livable Communities; Equity.

- Other Resources. A variety of Complete Streets handouts, downloadable presentations, articles and reports

Changing Policy

After a community has agreed to the concept of Complete Streets, the next step is to develop a formal policy. The Coalition provides many resources to illuminate best practices, share actual policy documents from across the country, and help communities develop the best, most appropriate policies for their needs.

- Complete Streets Local Policy Workbook. A comprehensive workbook for communities to follow when writing their own Complete Streets policies. For use by city and county agencies, the guide is based in national existing policy and best practices and encourages a thoughtful, inclusive process for developing locally appropriate policy language.

- Complete Streets in the States: A Guide to Legislative Action. AARP and the National Complete Streets Coalition developed a toolkit to use in a state-level Complete Streets effort. This report includes model legislation and a discussion of the various elements of an

ideal law, a roadmap for legislative action, and analysis of existing state Complete Streets laws.

- Presentation: Complete Streets: Changing Policy. Use this PowerPoint presentation and its comprehensive presenter's notes to lead a discussion of Complete Streets policy development in your town. The presentation covers the reasons to adopt a policy and details on the ten elements of a Complete Streets policy.

- Complete Streets Policy Atlas. The Coalition compiles information on all policies adopted to date in our Policy Atlas. The Atlas includes an interactive map of all regional and local policies, and downloadable lists of known Complete Streets policies, across all jurisdictions and at the state level.

- Best Complete Streets Policies reports. The Coalition also reviews all the policies adopted each year and assesses how well they fulfill the ten elements of an ideal Complete Streets policy. The annual Best Complete Streets Policies report highlights exemplary policy language and provides leaders at all levels of government with ideas for how to create strong Complete Streets policies.

- Ten Elements of a Complete Streets Policy. This is a helpful document for others reviewing your draft policy.

Implementation

Once a Complete Streets policy is in place, the day-to-day decisions a transportation agency and community leaders make in funding, planning, design, maintenance, and operations should be aligned to the goals of that adopted policy document. The Coalition helps communities implement their policies by collecting and sharing best practices and examples.

- Taking Action on Complete Streets. This guide describes five types of activities identified by the Coalition that are needed to reorient a transportation agency's work to fully and consistently consider the safety of all users:
    - Planning for Implementation;
    - Changing Procedure and Process;
    - Reviewing and Updating Design Guidance;
    - Offering Training and Educational Opportunities; and,
    - Measuring Performance.

- Resources, activities, and best practices from communities across the country are available here.

- Answering the Costs Question. A handbook and slide presentation that helps transportation professionals, advocates, and decision-makers make the case that implementing Complete Streets won't break the bank.

- Do Complete Streets cost more than incomplete streets?
  Shapard, J. and Cole, M. (2013). "Do complete streets cost more than incomplete streets?" Proceedings, Transportation Research Board Annual Meeting, 2013. Paper 13-4283.

- Implementation Resources. The Coalition's series of research-based fact sheets on specific elements of Complete Streets implementation is available for download.

Topics include: *Costs of Complete Streets; Change Travel Patterns; Ease Traffic Woes; Complete and Green Streets; Networks of Complete Streets; Rural Areas and Small Towns.*

Other General Resources

1. *Arts, Culture, and Transportation. A Creative Placemaking Field Scan.* Transportation for America. http://t4america.org/maps-tools/creative-placemaking-field-scan/.

2. *The Scenic Route. Getting started with Creative Placemaking and Transportation.* Transportation for America. https://creativeplacemaking.t4america.org/

3. *Dangerous by Design.* National Complete Streets Coalition. https://smartgrowthamerica.org/resources/dangerous-by-design-2019/

4. *Resorting Properties, Rebuilding Communities*. Center for Community Progress. https://www.communityprogress.net/restoring-properties--rebuilding-communities--transforming-vacant-properties-in-today--039-s-america--pages-405.php

5. *Core Values: Why American Companies are Moving Downtown.* Smart Growth America. https://smartgrowthamerica.org/resources/core-values-why-american-companies-are-moving-downtown/

6. *(Re)Building Downtown: A Guidebook for Revitalization.* Smart Growth America. https://smartgrowthamerica.org/introducing-rebuilding-downtown-a-guidebook-for-revitalization/

7. *Made in Place: Small-Scale Manufacturing & Neighborhood Revitalization*. Smart Growth America. *https://smartgrowthamerica.org/resources/made-in-place/*

8. *Building Better Budgets: A National Examination of the Fiscal Benefits of Smart Growth Development*. Smart Growth America. https://smartgrowthamerica.org/resources/building-better-budgets-a-national-examination-of-the-fiscal-benefits-of-smart-growth-development/

9. *The Fiscal Implications of Development Patterns.* Smart Growth America. https://smartgrowthamerica.org/resources/the-fiscal-implications-of-development-patterns-overview/

10. Form-Based Codes Institute Resources https://formbasedcodes.org/resources/

About Smart Growth America (SGA)

Smart Growth America envisions a country where no matter where you live, or who you are, you can enjoy living in a place that is healthy, prosperous, and resilient. We empower communities through technical assistance, advocacy, and thought leadership to realize our vision of livable places, healthy people, and shared prosperity. Learn more at www.smartgrowthamerica.org.

The Rural Community Development Initiative (RCDI) grant that supported this assistance was awarded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of Rural Development (USDA RD) to Smart Growth America through a national competition.