



Smart Growth America
Making Neighborhoods Great Together

Quitman, MS

Planning for Economic and Fiscal Health Report and Suggested Next Steps

Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities Program

To: Mayor Eddie Fulton, City of Quitman, Mississippi

From: John Robert Smith, Smart Growth America
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Executive Summary

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

Chris Zimmerman and John Robert Smith, representing Smart Growth America (SGA), met with regional leaders and residents on December 13 and 14, 2016 to provide assistance via the *Planning for Fiscal and Economic Health* tool, supported by a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Office of Sustainable Communities.

Following a productive discussion with various stakeholders — including residents, advocates, business owners and elected officials — the following **Next Steps** are recommended:

- 1. Create a marketing and branding campaign for Quitman.**
- 2. Improve Quitman's visibility within the region as a destination through improved roadway signage marketing the community to passing motorists.**
- 3. Adopt a Complete Streets Policy and Implementation Strategy.**
- 4. Focus efforts on internal circulation within the town center and connections to nearby neighborhoods.**
- 5. Focus on placemaking and streetscapes in the town center to make it a destination where people want to visit and to linger.**
- 6. Utilize the Internet as a tool to market local businesses as well as the**

community as a whole.

- 7. Look for opportunities to increase affordable housing within and connected to the town center - including for an aging population.**
- 8. Create a long-term plan for redeveloping the Bazor Lumber Yard.**

Need for assistance

Like many small towns, Quitman is looking for ways to stimulate economic growth, foster a vibrant town center and improve the local quality of life, all with limited financial means. Quitman has a low population density facing an economic downturn. That means the city has limited tax revenue to fund improvements and little room to create tax incentives to attract private development. At present the city has identified \$20 million in needed improvement projects included in its Comprehensive Plan that have not been funded yet. Getting through that itemized list of plans will require an in-depth analysis of which projects will help the city achieve its goals — establishing a strong-branded town center and sustainable growth.

Economically, Quitman is a city in transition. Where historically Quitman has leaned on the timber and textile industry, in recent years the city's workforce has begun shifting toward jobs in the area's emerging oil sector. With the closure of textile factories in the region and falling timber prices, there has been a loss of 1,500-2,000 jobs in the area. Local vocational schools have responded by emphasizing work training for offshore oil jobs. While the transition to the oil and gas sector has softened the decline of textile- and timber-oriented employment, recent drops in the price of oil has led to some layoffs in that sector as well.

Quitman's economy is thus stable but stalled. Home prices have dropped to an average of \$83,000, and blighted homes and commercial buildings are common. Over the past two decades, very little construction has occurred in the area. Mayor Edward Fulton reports that nearly all of Quitman's current housing stock dates before 2000, reflecting a lack of private residential real estate investment in the community.

There is some private sector interest in locating in Quitman. Quitman does have economic assets and infrastructure that are attractive to private development. These include H.C. Watkins Memorial Hospital, a small core of local retail options, an underutilized but present hospitality sector, proximity to natural and cultural amenities such as the Archusa Creek Water Park, and fast broadband connectivity.

The SGA team noted that Quitman's small town center is anchored by some existing retail, the historic Clarke County courthouse, and city hall. There are existing structures with historic architectural quality. The Town Center has new restaurants and a coffee shop that have added to the dining options for residents and visitors. The town center is tight and walkable. Immediately adjacent to the town center, there is a large tract of developable property. There is a golf course on the Archusa Creek Lake that is in close proximity to the rest of the city.

The team also visited six properties with potential for redevelopment including affordable housing and public facilities. The team's fiscal analysis examined the properties to determine which would best support the town's vision of a vibrant, walkable community and produce the greatest return on public dollar investment. As Mayor Fulton noted, "We can choose here and we need to choose what fits us."

Quitman maintains close ties to its larger neighbor, Meridian, Mississippi. Based on the success of recent redevelopment efforts in Meridian, Quitman sees an opportunity for residential growth. Quitman feels that it occupies a niche within the region including easy access to Meridian's amenities in a more quiet, rural residential setting.

The bottom line is that Quitman is willing and interested in investing within city limits. The key is developing a strategy that uses that willingness and the city's financial capacities effectively.

Workshop Review

SGA's technical assistance visit began on December 13th with a meet and greet session with local officials, followed by a walking and windshield tour of Quitman in the afternoon. On the tour, the team visited the town center, the Archusa Park and golf course, and the six parcels of property to be analyzed. That evening, the technical assistance team gave an overview of the workshop's outline, purpose and goals in a public presentation, previewing many of the key themes to be discussed further at the workshop, particularly the emerging national demographic and economic trends at play across the American landscape.

On the second day, the workshop explored these trends as they pertain to Quitman's past and its future. The SGA team dug further into an examination of the economic impact of 20th century suburban development patterns, presenting quantitative evidence of the trend of migration by both Baby Boomers and Millennials to vibrant city and town centers. The workshop discussed 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.

The SGA team's presentation compared the infrastructure cost associated with suburban-style development patterns and single-use zones to the cost of walkable mixed growth and infill patterns, which take advantage of existing roads, pipes, and power lines, etc. Finally, the results of the fiscal analysis that SGA performed for Quitman were presented.

Breakout sessions gave attending elected officials, business owners, and civic leaders the chance to take stock of the city's history and its current state of affairs in order to craft an aspirational vision for Quitman's future. A healthy back and forth developed through rotating small-group discussions, revealing common aspirations and perceived obstacles.

Pulling examples of technical work and research done in communities like Waterloo, IA; Bethlehem, PA; Greenville, SC; Rifle, CO; and Macon-Bibb County, GA gave participants some real world points of reference. Greenville provided aesthetic and visual reference for what can be accomplished with compact planning that emphasizes walkable, traditional town center/downtown development.

The SGA team guided the groups through exercises that narrowed a brainstorm of ideas into an organized set of actionable goals. Participants divided their goals, challenges, and visioning into **Long Term**, **Mid Term**, and **Near Term** action windows, and made specific comments regarding the **Bazor Lumber Yard**.

Organizing the community's aspirational vision this way created a structured, prioritized approach to tackling issues that ranged in scope and degree of achievability. Tasks identified were as simple and narrowly defined as mapping the ownership of town center buildings, or as comprehensive and programmatic as the creation of a complete streets policy.

Representatives from the USDA attending the workshop included:

- Allen Crosswhite
- Kelvin Jackson

In addition to numerous other stakeholders, leaders from local and regional agencies attending the workshop included:

- Lynnita Bartee (City of Quitman)
- Brian Dace (City of Quitman)
- Rick Durbrow (EPA, Region 4)
- Joy Foy (Mississippi Development Authority)
- Steve Hampton (Quitman School District)
- Mickey Long (Clarke County Board of Supervisors)
- Sonny Thomas (Mississippi Development Authority)

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.*

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 youth, cultural identity and wealth?

In approaching these questions for Quitman, 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 Quitman 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.² These trends depart from those experienced in the latter half of the 20th century.

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

² "Suburbs Try to Prevent an Exodus as Young Adults Move to Cities and Stay," Joseph Berger, New York Times, April 16, 2014 (on-line at, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/17/nyregion/suburbs-try-to-hold-onto-young-adults-as-exodus-to-cities-appears-to-grow.html?_r=0.)
"See ya, suburbs: More want to live in the big city," Greg Toppo and Paul Overberg, USA TODAY, March 27, 2014.
"Why urban demographers are right about the trend toward downtowns and walkable suburbs," Kaid Benfield, bettercities.net, February 28, 2014.
"NAR 2013 Community Preference Survey: Americans Prefer to Live in Mixed-Use, Walkable Communities," National Association of Realtors, November 1, 2013.

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 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 that their target workforce wants to live in. 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.**

Similarly, the market for retail is changing. Suburban shopping malls and retail centers that thrived for decades are struggling as a result of oversupply and a shift in shopping preferences. 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. 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. Quitman and its neighboring communities, oriented with traditional main street districts, 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 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.³

A 2013 study by Smart Growth America, *Building Better Budgets: A National Examination of the Fiscal Benefits of Smart Growth Development*⁴, 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*⁵ 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 Quitman.

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

³ For more information, see: <http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/research/the-fiscal-implications-of-development-patterns/>

⁴ The full report can be downloaded at, <http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/building-better-budgets>.

⁵ The report is available for download from <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/resources/core-values-why-american-companies-are-moving-downtown/>

Participant viewpoints

Common themes among the workshop's breakout groups were the use of existing assets and the renovation and redeployment of unused assets like old buildings, vacant lots or abandoned public spaces. Attendees identified several opportunities for adaptive reuse in the community, and several obvious starting points for beautification and placemaking projects. On the whole, participants believed that Quitman should develop more public spaces for community gatherings and more reasons to gather. They also felt that the community also needs better marketing and promotion for the city's tourism assets — namely the nearby Archusa Creek Water Park. That said, they were optimistic that such goals could be accomplished with the resources immediately available to them.

Participants discussed the following in their group sessions:

Actions for Success

- Gathering places in the town center
- More housing options
- Greater walk and bike connectivity
- Business recruitment

Obstacles/Disconnects

- Blighted property
- Unsightly public utilities (e.g. light poles, cracked sidewalks)
- Lack of signage, marketing plan

Targets for Near Term Success

- Clean town center streets
- Correct drainage problem
- Add bicycle racks around town, create a bike trail
- Improve accessibility
- Add WiFi to the town center area
- Banners on Hwy. 18

Targets for Mid Term Success

- Add more sidewalk infrastructure
- Establishing a local public concert
- Building a new sportsplex

Targets for Long Term Success

- Add more crosswalks (from courthouse to depot)

- “Welcome to Quitman” sign on Highway 45
- Bury Electrical Lines (pole-less streets)
- Increase outside lighting
- Festival in the town center
- Golf cart trolley
- New assisted living housing at Old Sports Complex

Opportunities for the Bazor Lumber Yard

- Convert into an entertainment zone
- Could serve as sportsplex next to existing complex
 - With community fitness center (weights, track, pool, basketball, etc.)
- Bowling Alley Skating rink
- Laser tag, mini golf, go-carts
- Rental properties, apartment complex
- Drive-in theater
- Short term improve park entrance
 - Add new driveway
- Add residential units
- Rehab Long Blvd (create new residential) Milltown w/fiber optics
- Bring a corporation/ continue search for new industry

Based on the SGA team’s observations from the walking and windshield tour, the input received during the workshop, fiscal analysis of the six potential redevelopment sites, and breadth of work in other rural communities, the SGA team offers the following recommendations and associated action steps.

Recommendations

1. **Create a marketing and branding campaign for Quitman.**

A branding campaign for Quitman would help market the community to the outside world. This effort should include the development of a unifying logo and moniker that is used on stationery and signage in both the private and public sectors of the community. The logo and moniker (“Clarke County’s Capital City”) included on Quitman’s website offers a starting point for this campaign as does another city moniker, “A Very Special Place to Call Home”. This campaign should embody the unique features Quitman has to offer visitors and potential new residents.

The branding campaign should market Quitman’s proximity to nearby destinations such as the golf course at the Quitman Country Club, Archusa

Creek Water Park and Clarkco State Park as destinations. The campaign could be run by the Clarke County Chamber of Commerce, a business group, or another existing community group within Quitman.

Short-term Actions (within 3-6 months)

- Work with the Clarke County Chamber of Commerce, local businesses, and other partners to develop a branding and marketing campaign including a logo and moniker that unifies the community.

Medium-term Actions (within 6-12 months)

- Adopt the logo and moniker and encourage all public sector agencies as well as private sector businesses and organizations to utilize it in their letterhead, websites, social media, and signage as appropriate.

Long-term Actions (12 months and longer)

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

2. **Improve Quitman's visibility within the region as a destination through improved roadway signage marketing the community to passing motorists.** Quitman is located to the west of U.S. Highway 45, a four-lane divided highway. From Highway 45, several major roadways lead into town, including Mississippi State Highway 18 and County Roads 145 and 511.

The town's location adjacent to Highway 45 offers the community a perfect opportunity to market its amenities and attractions to those passing through the area. However, there is currently limited roadway signage directing motorists to Quitman and none that would encourage them to exit the highway to stop there for lunch or to browse town center businesses.

The community should invest in a monument advertising the community at each major gateway intersection from Highway 45, such as a "Welcome to Quitman" sign with well-maintained landscaping. These markers should entice motorists to exit the highway and visit Quitman to eat in its restaurants, shop at its retail establishments, and visit its attractions.

This signage should direct motorists from Highway 45 and continue the entire way into the Quitman town center. It should call out important destinations and landmarks in the community that someone unfamiliar with the area should visit.

Short-term Actions (3-6 months)

- Develop the marketing and branding campaign described above to create logos to be included on signage.

Medium-term Actions (6-12 months)

- Begin discussions with Clarke County and Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT) to utilize right of way owned by these agencies to place monuments and markers where they will be visible by motorists.

Long-term Actions (12 months and longer)

- Place monuments and markers along Highway 45 as well as other roadways leading into town.
- Ensure that this signage, once placed, has attractive landscaping that receives ongoing maintenance.

3. Adopt a Complete Streets Policy and Implementation Strategy.

Quitman 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. Adopting a Complete Streets Policy demonstrates Quitman's commitment to establish, design, and implement transportation improvements, addressing and balancing the needs of citizens of all ages and abilities.

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

- Includes a vision for how and why the community wants to complete the street
- Specifies that the term "all users" includes pedestrians, bicyclists and transit passengers of all ages and abilities, as well as trucks, buses and automobiles.
- Applies to both new and retrofit projects, including design, planning, maintenance, and operations, for the entire right of way.
- Makes any exceptions specific and sets a clear procedure that requires high-level approval of exceptions.
- Encourages street connectivity and aims to create a comprehensive, integrated, connected network for all modes.
- Is adoptable by all agencies to cover all roads.
- Directs the use of the latest and best design criteria and guidelines while

- recognizing the need for flexibility in balancing user needs.
- Directs that Complete Streets solutions will complement the context of the community.
 - Establishes performance standards with measurable outcomes.
 - 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 3-6 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 staff
 - Smart Growth America recommends the city work to bring seniors and people with disabilities together with the state transportation agency, the MDOT, to work on accessibility issues
 - It is recommended that a meeting and tour with MDOT 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, Quitman 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 Quitman 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, Quitman 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
 - Complete Streets policy will change and add value to Quitman's decision-making process. The city 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 Mayoral Resolution will allow the mayor to lead the initiative on Complete Streets and leverage his leadership to highlight the importance of Complete Streets with the public and the media.
 - A Council-adopted ordinance will codify the policy into city law.
- Plan a community/press event
 - Huntsville 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.

4. Focus efforts on internal circulation within the town center and connections to nearby neighborhoods.

Quitman has two one-way streets in the town center. The design of these streets impedes the community's ability to create a viable town center that is walkable and supportive of local retail. Retail does not flourish on a one-way street. Making these streets two-way would improve access to retail and restaurants located in the town center.

Although MDOT has previously stated that at least one of these roadways was not readily adaptable for a redesign to accommodate two-way traffic, Smart Growth America recommends that Quitman retain an engineering consultant with experience on Complete Streets projects to advise and design a workable solution for presentation to MDOT for approval.

Quitman has great potential for a fully walkable town center. However, many sidewalks in the town center are broken or hazardous to pedestrians. During the team's visit, heavy rain resulted in ponding on roadways and sidewalks. The team also observed that utility poles impede pedestrians on sidewalks in the town center and affect the overall visual quality. At night, inadequate street lighting made walking uncomfortable. These issues should be addressed so that reaching destinations on foot in the town center is seamless and safe.

Because of the compact size of the town center and the close proximity of neighborhoods, the SGA team recommends the addition of bicycle lanes to facilitate travel between residential areas and the town center. These bicycle lanes should be extended to connect to walking trails at Archusa Creek Water Park.

Short Term Actions (3-6 months)

- As part of the Complete Streets policy development, consider where bicycle lanes could be added to offer connections to nearby residential neighborhoods and to Archusa Creek Water Park.
- Paint / repaint crosswalks in the town center
- Create a committee of Quitman residents with mobility issues to demonstrate challenging pedestrian infrastructure and offer recommendations for improvement.

Medium Term Actions (6-12 months)

- Begin repairing sidewalks and design them to be Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant.

Long Term Actions (12 months and longer)

- Consider the application of the following features to increase pedestrian safety and visibility to drivers:
 - Raised crosswalks
 - Different pavement types or colors to distinguish them from the

roadway pavement

- High-Intensity Activated crossWalk (HAWK) or Rectangular Rapid Flash Beacons (RRFBs)⁶
- Implement bike lanes to connect the town center with neighborhoods and recreational destinations such as Archusa Creek Water Park.
- Correct ponding issues on roadways and sidewalks during heavy rain events.
- Add additional human-scale street lighting around sidewalks and crosswalks, as well as at important destinations, in the town center. Ensure there is sufficient lighting on connection routes to nearby neighborhoods.
- Work with Mississippi Power and other utility providers to relocate utility line poles away from town center sidewalks or, preferably, bury them underground.

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

In addition to the availability of a seamless and safe pedestrian network to travel within the town center, other factors influence the number of people who visit the town center and how long they remain there. This directly influences the success of town center businesses.

Spaces for outdoor entertainment, including music and arts, as well as for community and holiday celebrations will bring people to the town center. Give particular attention to the area surrounding the courthouse.

Reuse of currently vacant properties would be ideal for such amenities. Vacant storefronts could be cleaned up and furnished with artwork made by students in the Quitman School District or local colleges as well as by local artists. These artists could also help dress up blank walls in the town center through the creation of murals that reflect the community and its residents.

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 curtains.

The branding and marketing campaign described above, in conjunction with the Downtown Merchants Association, could fund trash receptacles and additional seating in the town center. These amenities would beautify the area and

⁶ For more information on this technology, see <http://www.bikewalknc.org/2015/04/understanding-pedestrian-signals/>

encourage people to explore the town center by providing places to rest.

Finally, although the city does not have transit, Quitman could partner with the golf course at the Quitman Country Club during special events to establish a golf cart transportation system to move visitors from their cars to the event venue.

Short-term Actions (3-6 months)

- Assess the condition of existing vacant properties and storefronts in the town center.
- Map ownership of existing building stock in the town center.
- Create a list or database containing basic information about each including the property owner, condition of structure, tax status, and any other pertinent information.

Medium-term Actions (6-12 months)

- Identify suitable locations for outdoor entertainment spaces and related amenities in the town center such as benches and trash receptacles.
- Clean up, paint, and repair vacant storefronts to make them attractive to visitors even though no activity may be occurring inside.
- Create a plan for public art in the town 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.

Long-term Actions (12 months and longer)

- Transform vacant properties into outdoor entertainment spaces that bring people from the surrounding neighborhoods to the town center as well as visitors from throughout the region.
- Implement benches and trash receptacles at suitable locations throughout the town center to encourage residents and visitors to rest and linger.
- Incorporate public art at strategic locations in the town center that enhance the pedestrian environment.
- Consider establishing a golf cart system during special events, perhaps in partnership with the golf course, to move people between parking, event venues, and other important town center destinations.

6. **Utilize the Internet as a tool to market local businesses as well as the community as a whole.**

Due to the leadership of Mayor Fulton, Quitman has some of the fastest Internet speeds available in the United States. High speed broadband Internet infrastructure in the town center will serve as a boon to businesses, both existing and future. It offers the city the opportunity to attract new high tech industries to the community. Further, the Internet offers a powerful marketing tool that can be harnessed by these businesses, as well as the rest of the community, to market themselves to new customers, visitors, and residents.

The presence of the broadband Internet access by itself will not revitalize the community. The city and its business community must learn to take advantage of the marketing opportunities provided by the Internet to grow and expand. An expanded web and social media presence can allow these businesses to reach potential customers far beyond Quitman city limits.

A training program, perhaps in partnership with a local college or other organization, would help businesses understand how to utilize this technology to market themselves through an improved website, e-commerce, or using social media tools such as Facebook. The business incubator offers an ideal mechanism for training business owners in these skills. And the community's efforts to teach entrepreneurship and technology skills to students at Quitman High School will also pay off in the long term if it encourages graduates to remain in the community and establish businesses that take advantage of Quitman's Internet connection speed.

For example, Quitman's restaurants are beginning to gain a regional reputation for their quality. Internet marketing will allow these restaurants to increase their customer base from beyond Quitman residents despite local restrictions on serving alcohol. This will ensure these restaurants continue operating in Quitman versus relocating to another community in the region.

The Clarke County Chamber of Commerce maintains an online membership directory⁷. The City of Quitman's website also has a webpage for local businesses⁸, but it does not profile any specific businesses or provide general information about the local business community. However, it is notable that the

⁷ <http://clarkecountychamber.com/who-we-are/membership-directory/>

⁸ <http://quitman.ms/about-us/businesses/>

city connects its Facebook presence to its website. The city's web site is one tool that could be expanded and updated to promote local businesses, encourage visitors to the town center, and attract potential new residents. Consider including a map or list of town center businesses that visitors might want to patronize while in town.

Further, some small towns are beginning to look to broadband Internet as a tool for town center revitalization. High speed Internet access attracts new types of businesses that require this infrastructure to do their work. The business incubator will offer a place for new businesses to get off the ground. But the marketing efforts should extend beyond Quitman's borders to bring new types of high tech businesses -- and the workers to support them -- to the community. Quitman's ability to attract and retain a bright, young workforce -- which then draws new jobs into the community -- is an opportunity made available to the community by the availability of high speed Internet access.

Short-term Actions (3-6 months)

- Work with a web developer to retool and update the city's website while increasing its technical capabilities. This will enable it to become a portal of information on the community for residents and visitors alike. For example, include the latest news and events, maps and lists of town center businesses as well as rotating business profiles to highlight the community assets.
- Reach out to local colleges or other organizations to provide training to local businesses on how to market themselves using the Internet and social media.

Medium-term Actions (6-12 months)

- In conjunction with the Chamber of Commerce and other community partners, create a plan for marketing the town center and the availability of broadband Internet access there to attract new high tech industries to the town center.

Long-term Actions (12 months and beyond)

- Continue to keep the city's Facebook page and website up-to-date as the community redevelops and changes over time.

7. Look for opportunities to increase affordable housing within and connected to the town center - including for an aging population.

During the workshop, residents identified a need for affordable housing as well

as a need to address the needs of an aging community. Housing for older residents must take into account that they are less likely to be licensed drivers and may have mobility issues. Therefore, any assisted living facility or other senior housing should not be far removed from the walkable town center. Residents should be able to easily reach their daily needs on foot including groceries and church.

Many Quitman residents' social lives revolve around their church. Often, large churches are willing partners in affordable and senior housing projects, particularly if these projects are located near them.

Quitman has a need for clean, affordable low income housing. Every effort should be made to remove blighted housing causing a negative impact to neighborhoods. Trailer parks in the town center need to be targeted by city enforcement for any violations. The community needs more aggressive enforcement of demolition by neglect and removal of abandoned housing. Every effort should be made to make land owners responsible for the safety and upkeep of their property.

As the existing Sportsplex facility is redeveloped, the surrounding land could include a new affordable housing development.

Short-term Actions (3-6 months)

- Reach out to potential affordable housing partners - developers, churches and other parties -- to assess interest in creating affordable housing in or connected to the town center.
- Begin a program to target blighted housing causing a negative impact to neighborhoods and to the town center.
- Research potential local, state, and federal funding mechanisms for affordable housing. Appendix A includes USDA and other potential resources for funding.
- Convene a committee of seniors to understand their housing needs and existing mobility issues in the community.

Medium-term Actions (6-12 months)

- Assess the viability of redeveloping the existing Sportsplex facility as a site for affordable housing.

8. **Create a long-term plan for redeveloping the Bazor Lumber Yard.**

Under separate funding by USDA Rural Development, the SGA team performed a fiscal analysis to inform prioritization the six parcels recommended by the community for potential mixed use redevelopment including retail and needed public facilities. Using Quitman's own cost of the provision of infrastructure and having visited the subject properties during the visit, the SGA team's analysis (included in appendix B) suggests that the Bazor Lumber Yard parcel provides the greatest opportunity for successful and fiscally sustainable development to further Quitman's vision of a walkable, bikeable town center.

The SGA team's analysis showed that the Bazor Lumber Yard property possesses the following characteristics that make it favorable as a focus for redevelopment in Quitman:

- Adjacency to downtown
- Location on a major thoroughfare
- Walkable to town center
- Ability to spur further healthy growth of retail and restaurant possibilities,
- Fiscal impact analysis indicates that this parcel would likely return the greatest ROI to the local government of the six analyzed.

It will be critical to redevelop the Bazor Lumber Yard site near the town center in a manner that reflects a unified vision for the community. During the workshop, participants identified several possible uses for the site including as an entertainment zone or a sportsplex. The site was considered a Brownfield but has been tested and is ready to move towards redevelopment.

Through a rehab of Long Boulevard, the Bazor Lumber Yard could provide a site for new residential units adjacent to the town center. It is also a potential site for a new corporation to establish a presence in the city as a result of the broadband Internet access and the city's marketing efforts.

It is imperative that the visioning and planning process for this large site begins as soon as possible. Otherwise, they may redevelop piecemeal and the opportunity for the community to take full advantage of redeveloping them as a whole may be lost.

Short-term Actions (3-6 months)

- Conduct a visioning and planning process for the future of the Bazor Lumber Yard site that includes the entire community.
- Begin conversations with potential developers of the sites to design and implement the community's vision.

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

- Plan a grid of walkable and bikeable street connectivity within the site, to the town center, as well as to the adjacent neighborhoods and recreational activities
- Be diligent in selecting businesses and amenities for this property that are complementary to the town's long-term vision.

In a small community, the temptation is that any development will be a step forward but which may lead to incompatible land uses. Quitman'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.

Appendix A: USDA funding and development resources

USDA – Rural Development Mission

“To increase economic opportunity and improve the quality of life for all rural Americans.”



Population Guidelines

Business Programs: 50,000 and below (exception is local foods projects)

Community Programs: 20,000 and below

Housing Programs: 35,000 and below

Water and Waste Water Programs: 10,000 and below

Community Connect Grant

Program Purpose:

Program helps fund broadband deployment into rural communities where it is not yet economically viable for private sector providers to deliver service.

Who May Apply:

Most State and Local Governments/Federally-Recognized Tribes/Non-Profits/For-Profit Corporations

Special Considerations:

SUTA/Strikeforce and Promise Zone Areas (Extra 15 points for scoring)

Application Grant Request Limits:

MINIMUM = \$100,000 MAXIMUM = \$3,000,000

Application Match Requirements:

Minimum = 15% of Grant Request

FY2015 Funded Projects:

\$11 Million (5 out of 68 applications)

FY2016 Budget Allocation:

\$11,740,000 Available

Grant Application Period:

Opened April 18, 2016 and Closed June 17, 2016 (www.grants.gov or Paper applications)

Distance Learning & Telemedicine Grant

Program Purpose:

Assists rural communities to use telecommunications by purchasing equipment to connect remote locations to urban areas or other rural areas for purposes of increased education or healthcare opportunities.

Who May Apply:

Most State and Local Governments/Federally-Recognized Tribes/Non-Profits/For-Profit Corporations

Special Considerations:

SUTA/Strikeforce and Promise Zone Areas (Extra 15 points for scoring)

Application Grant Request Limits:

MINIMUM = \$50,000 MAXIMUM = \$500,000

Application Match Requirements:

Minimum = 15% of Grant Request

FY2015 Funded Projects:

\$23 Million (75 out of 191 applications)

FY2016 Budget Allocation:

\$19,000,000 Available (182 Applications Received)

Grant Application Period:

Opened January 12, 2016 and Closed March 14, 2016 (www.grants.gov or Paper applications)

Business and Industry (B&I) Guaranteed Loans

Program Purpose:

Bolsters the existing private credit structure through the guaranteeing of loans for rural businesses, allowing private lenders to extend more credit than they would typically be able.

Who May Apply:

Lenders with legal authority, sufficient experience, and financial strength to operate a successful lending program

Eligible borrowers:

For-profit business, Nonprofits and cooperatives, Federally recognized Tribes, Public bodies

Loan guarantee limits:

80% for loans of \$5 million or less

70% for loans between \$5 and \$10 million

60% for loans exceeding \$10 million, up to \$25 million maximum

Terms:

Interest rate negotiated between lender and borrower, subject to Rural Development review.

Real estate – 30 years, machinery and equipment -15 years and working capital – 7 years.

Initial guarantee fee of 3% with annual renewal fee of 0.5% on outstanding principal.

Rural Business Development Grant (RBDG)

Program Purpose:

Assist small and emerging businesses in rural areas

Who May Apply:

Public bodies, units of government and community-based non-profit organizations

Special Considerations:

Eligible costs include real estate improvements, equipment, utility/infrastructure, feasibility studies, engineering services, and/or technical assistance to small businesses

Competitive application process

Application Grant Request Limits:

Grants less than \$100,000 have highest competitive priority

FY2015 Funded Projects:

\$674,519 (18 Grants)

FY2016 Budget Allocation:

\$610,000

Rural Economic Development Loans and Grants (REDLG)

Program Purpose:

Assist economic and community development projects in rural areas

Who May Apply:

Rural electric or telecommunications utilities

Special Considerations:

Real estate improvements, equipment, working capital

Pass-through funding

20% Match Required from utility

Application Grant Request Limits:

Up to \$300,000 to establish Revolving Loan Fund for electric or telecommunications utility

FY2016 Budget Allocation:

\$40,000,000 (National Competition)

Rural Energy for America Program (REAP)

Program Purpose:

Assist rural small businesses and agricultural producers by conducting and promoting energy audits, and providing renewable energy development assistance.

Who May Apply:

Farmers and rural small businesses

Special Considerations:

Grant is 25% of eligible project costs

Application Grant Request Limits:

\$500,000 maximum for renewable energy projects

\$250,000 maximum for energy efficiency

\$100,000 maximum for energy audit and rural energy development assistance

FY2015 Funded Projects:

\$1,978,341 (85 Grants)

FY2016 Budget Allocation:

\$819,000

Community Facilities Grant Program

Program Purpose:

Provides affordable funding to develop essential community facilities

Who May Apply:

Public body or community-based non-profit organization

Special Considerations:

Essential community facility is defined as a facility that provides an essential service to the local community for the orderly development of the community.

Does not include private, commercial or business undertakings.

Application Grant Request Limits:

Grant for up to 15%, 35%, 55% or 75% of proposed project depending upon population and MHI of proposed service area

FY2015 Funded Projects:

\$314,000 (21 Grants)

FY2016 Budget Allocation:

\$543,780

Economic Impact Initiative (EII) Grant Program

Program Purpose:

Provides funding to assist in the development of essential community facilities in rural communities with extreme unemployment and severe economic depression

Who May Apply:

Public body or community-based non-profit organization

Special Considerations:

Essential community facility is defined as a facility that provides an essential service to the local community for the orderly development of the community.

Grants may made in combination with other Rural Development financial assistance.

Community facilities may include

FY2015 Funded Projects:

\$118,700 (14 Grants)

FY2016 Budget Allocation:

\$118,700

Rural Community Development Initiative Grant (RCDI)

Program Purpose:

Provide funding to help non-profit housing and community development organizations support housing, community facilities, and community and economic development projects

Who May Apply:

Public bodies and non-profit organizations

Eligible Uses:

Training sub-grantees; for example, home-ownership or minority business entrepreneur education

Technical assistance such as strategic plan development, board training, effective fundraising techniques

Application Grant Request Limits:

\$50,000 minimum award

\$250,000 maximum award

Matching funds equal to the amount of the grant award

FY2015 Funded Projects:

\$155,000 (1 Grant)

Housing Preservation Grant (HPG) Program

Program Purpose:

Provides grants to sponsoring organizations for the repair or rehabilitation of housing occupied by low- and very-low-income families and individuals.

Who May Apply:

State and local government entities and non-profit organizations

Eligible Uses:

Home must be in a rural area or community under 20,000 population

Repairing or replacing electrical wiring, foundations, roofs, insulation, heating systems, water/waste disposal systems

Handicap accessibility features

Labor and materials

FY2015 Funded Projects:

\$86,273 (3 Grants)

Single Family Housing 504 Grants Program

Program Purpose:

Provides loan and grant funds to be used to pay for needed repairs to dwellings of very low income families. To remove health and safety hazards – leaky roofs, bad heating systems, structural problems, handicap accessibility.

Who May Apply:

Very-low income families or individuals

Special Considerations:

Home must be in a rural area or community under 35,000 population

Lifetime grant assistance up to \$7,500. Grants only available to applicants 62 years or older who do not have repayment ability.

FY2015 Funded Projects:

\$379,383(154 Grants)

FY 2016 Budget Allocation

\$367,834

Community and Economic Development (CED)

Partners With Potential to Assist Downtowns / Communities:

- Mississippi Development Authority– Community Development Block Grants (CDBGs)
- Small Business Administration (SBA)
- Mississippi State University (MSU) Extension
- Mississippi Department of Transportation
- Mississippi Department of Archives and History – State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)
- Community Development Finance Institutions (CDFIs)
- Community Foundations
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Local Foods/Local Places Initiative
- Brownfields Program (EPA and Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality)

Let's Talk!

What projects do you have underway or under consideration in your community?

What barriers/obstacles exist to successful implementation or completion of the project?

Are projects being hindered or threatened by government processes?

What projects would you undertake if money were not an issue?

What assistance or expertise do you need in your community to bring your project to fruition?

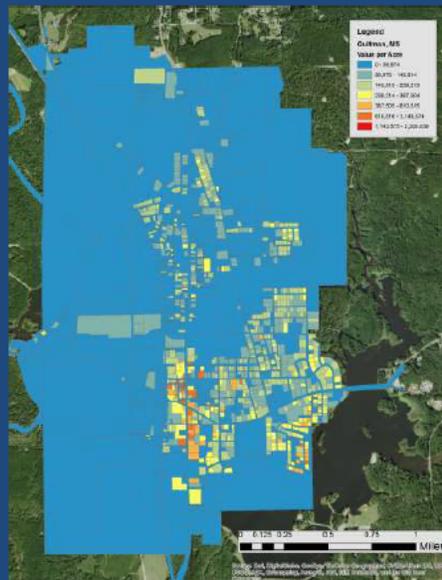
What assets are present in your community which are not currently being utilized fully?

Appendix B: Fiscal Impact Analysis Results for Quitman

Summary of Fiscal Analysis Quitman, Mississippi

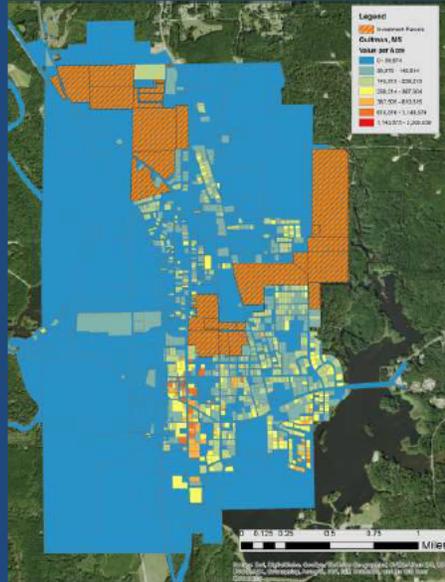
Value per Acre

- Concentration in the core of downtown and by the lake.
- Certain key corridors (Jackson Ave)
- Most of town is relatively low value land



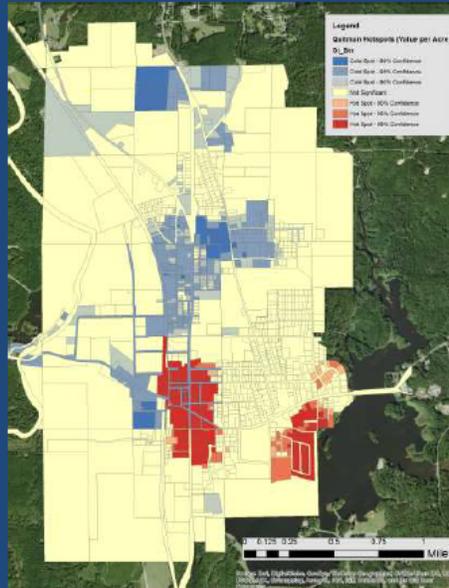
Investment Properties

- Clusters of investment properties
- Primarily in lower value-per-acre land



Hotspot Analysis

- Identifies value per acre “hotspots”
- Uses GIS techniques to account for value as well as distance to other high-value spots
- Two main spots:
 - Downtown
 - Near Archusa Creek Lake



Hotspot Analysis

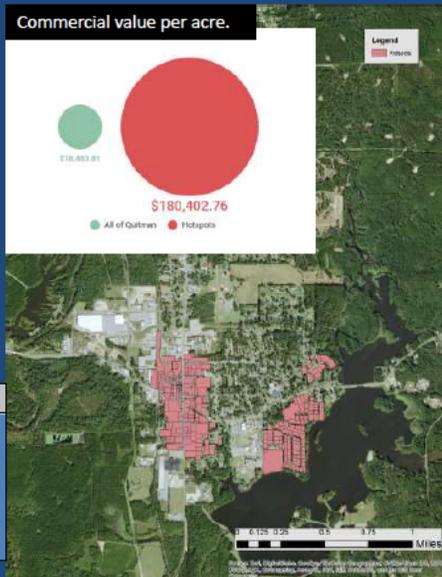
- 5% of land has 32% of value
- Has 13.4% of roads

	All Quitman	Hotspot	Percent
Area	2,919	146	5.0%
Parcels	856	189	22.1%
Total Value	\$ 89,416,390	\$ 28,682,880	32.1%
Land Value	\$ 15,282,160	\$ 5,370,420	35.1%
Building Value	\$ 74,134,230	\$ 23,312,460	31.4%
Road Length	246,356	33,065	13.4%



Hotspot Analysis

- Hotspots have a much higher commercial value per acre (approx. 10x)

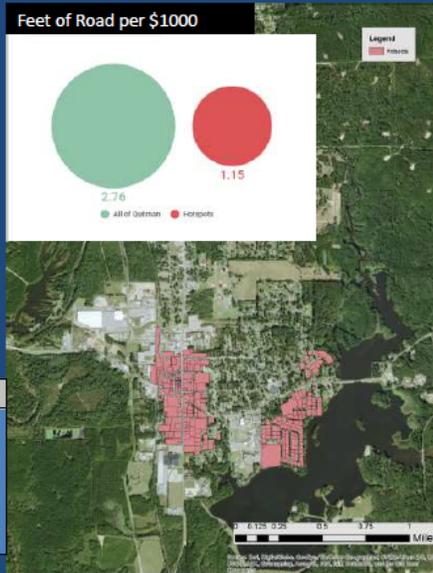


	All Quitman	Hotspot
Total Value	\$ 89,416,390	\$ 28,682,880
Commercial Value per Acre	\$ 18,483.81	\$ 180,402.76
Road Length (linear ft)	246,356.4	33,065.0
Road per \$1,000 value	2.76	1.15
\$ value / ft road	\$ 363	\$ 867

Hotspot Analysis

- Hotspots use less road per unit of activity (value)
- Seen another way, for foot of road,
 - Quitman services \$363 per unit of road
 - Hotspots service \$867 per unit of road – more efficient

	All Quitman	Hotspot
Total Value	\$ 89,416,390	\$ 28,682,880
Commercial Value per Acre	\$ 18,483.81	\$ 180,402.76
Road Length (linear ft)	246,356.4	33,065.0
Road per \$1,000 value	2.76	1.15
\$ value / ft road	\$ 363	\$ 867



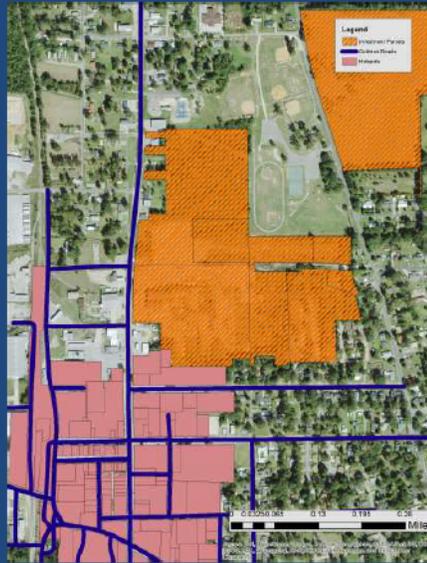
Investment Sites

- Only spot near hotspots is the Bazor lumber site
- Total 49.0 acre site
- Present value of \$459,770
 - = \$4,080 per acre
 - Compares to \$18 k /acre in Quitman
 - Compares to \$180 k / acre in Hotspots



Investment Sites

- Site not presently well-served by road internally
- Would need to expand road and create a greater gridded network



Assistance provided with grant support from U.S. EPA's Office of Sustainable Communities under their Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities Program

