



Smart Growth America
Improving lives by improving communities

Fort Scott, Kansas

Planning for Economic and Fiscal Health and Suggested Next Steps

USDA Rural Development Rural Community Development Initiative (RCDI)

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Executive Summary

Pursuant to our technical assistance award with the City of Fort Scott, 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 future development of the focus areas addressed during the workshop.

John Robert Smith, Chris Zimmerman, and Andrew Justus—all representing Smart Growth America (SGA)—met with local leaders and residents on February 25-26, 2020 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 both a [Hotspot Analysis](#) and a [Fiscal Impact Analysis](#) to Fort Scott 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 to carry out action items included in these Next Steps.

The committee will provide a local source of vision and accountability for the improvements that flow from the workshop. The committee will be formed by workshop participants, and additional members to ensure representation from a wide array of stakeholders in the community. **The committee should use the momentum created by the workshop, holding its first meeting within the following month, and meeting at regular intervals afterwards.**

2. Foster land uses that create fiscally sustainable development patterns

Growth for its own sake can often create fiscal hardships in the future. Fort Scott should ensure that its growth plans do not trade short-term wins for long-term pain. The city should focus its growth in areas where utilities, public services, and other assets already exist to maximize their value.

3. Revisit Fort Scott's master plan

Every part of a city's master plan should further the vision it has for itself. The advisory and implementation committee can work with the city to find and initiate changes to the plan that are in alignment with the goals outlined by the committee.

4. Audit and reform land use practices, along with Fort Scott's zoning code

The city can implement a system of incentives and penalties to encourage blighted buildings to be put back into productive use. "Demolition by neglect" ordinances have proven effective elsewhere to prevent blighted buildings dragging down prospects of downtowns.

5. Develop a plan for reuse of legacy buildings and underused historic structures

As part of a cohesive downtown plan, city and stakeholders should view each renovation project in the downtown as part of a collective vision for the area. Leaders should avoid thinking of projects in isolation to avoid a disjointed downtown that doesn't build as much momentum for future prosperity.

6. Physical and Programmatic integration downtown with Historic Fort Scott (Civil War-era fort), and Fort Scott National Cemetery (National Cemetery No. 1).

It is possible to target new construction in the few "missing teeth" in downtown, and to help tie together the downtown and assets like Historic Fort Scott. Additionally, the city should consider a form-based code for the downtown area to preserve the unified aesthetic of the area while streamlining use rules.

7. Focus on placemaking within Fort Scott, and develop gateways at major entry points to the city

Identify and implement projects that improve the sense of place within Fort Scott, particularly the downtown area. Multiple projects should allow for different completion schedules, ranging from short term "tactical" projects along with longer term more aspirational changes.

8. Develop marketing and branding campaign for downtown, and Fort Scott as a whole

Establish a consistent and effective branding program to market the community, its

attractions, and businesses to outsiders from near and far. Marketing efforts should be available for local businesses and organizations.

9. Strengthen partnership between Fort Scott Community College and the city

Focus on improving the physical and mental connections between downtown Fort Scott and the community college. Encourage students to take sense of ownership in the city, and make it accessible to them.

10. Build cohesion between downtown and US-69

Recognize the opportunity that exists from close proximity and access to US-69. Signage and other street treatments are effective tools for piquing travelers' curiosity and drawing them further into the city where they are likely to buy food, supplies, or other goods and services.

11. Develop and implement a Complete Streets and Bike/Ped strategy

Ensuring that future street designs meet the needs of all users is good for the traveling public, and good for business. Both businesses and people do better when cars travel slowly and those outside vehicles feel safe and comfortable.

Need for assistance

The [Planning for Economic and Fiscal Health workshop](#) and the accompanying [Hotspot and Fiscal Impact Analyses](#) that Fort Scott received from Smart Growth America was timely for the community and region. The city is grappling with a number of key decisions regarding its future development patterns that could have a lasting impact on both its overall economic opportunity as well as the city's long-term fiscal sustainability. Fort Scott is facing challenges around retaining talented young workers, access to medical treatment, and other issues inherent with its rural character.

Fort Scott has a compact grid of streets that are relatively accessible for walking, biking, and rolling in and around its downtown that extends south and east of the historic Fort. It is clear that the city has taken steps to improve the built environment and draw activity into its downtown over the years.

The city has a remarkable and unique history extending from frontier times, through the Civil War, toward the present day. Fort Scott also has an impressive collection of human-scale historic buildings throughout its downtown, along with a network of brick streets throughout the city that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Fort Scott has a strong sense of identity, almost unanimously focused on the area just outside the historic fort, and a passionate corps of citizens who want to see their city thrive for present and future generations.

Fort Scott is dealing with challenges around retaining talented young workers and access to medical treatment for its residents. The city's main hospital closed in 2018, and was the subject of a National Public Radio series on healthcare in rural areas. Many residents list these two challenges

as primary causes of other hardships. Many residents also identified a shortage of housing in the \$100,000 to \$150,000 range, and agreed that the shortage of a variety of housing options created a problem with attracting middle-class residents to the city and growing its population. Another potential threat to growth, is the gradual, long-running population decline as people move away from rural areas that do not provide vibrant living experiences or host attractive job opportunities.

One goal of the workshop was to help Fort Scott think about how to leverage the exciting potential for redevelopment within its borders, particularly the assets that Fort Scott already has in its historic downtown and elsewhere. Pursuing smart growth strategies 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 from the diverse group of individuals present at the workshop representing a variety of stakeholder groups.

Review of SGA's Visit to Fort Scott

SGA's technical assistance visit occurred over two full days, February 26-27 2020. The visit included the following components:

Component 1 – A walking and driving tour of major points of interest in Fort Scott.

Sites visited included:

- o Downtown
- o Historic Fort Scott
- o National Cemetery No. 1
- o Historic Neighborhoods
- o Network of brick streets
- o Housing stock
- o LaRoche Baseball Complex
- o Industrial Park
- o Fort Scott Community College
- o Gordon Parks Museum
- o Lowell Milliken Center for Unsung Heroes
- o Gunn Park and trail network

Component 2 – Conduct interviews with invited stakeholders, each lasting 45 minutes. The following stakeholder groups were represented:

- o Downtown and Tourism
- o Business, Industry, and Manufacturing
- o Healthcare
- o Education
- o Faith-based and community leaders

The interviews provided the SGA team with additional perspectives on Fort Scott's shortage of quality middle-class housing, expanding the voices beyond those in the room at the next day's workshop.

During the interviews, the SGA team asked each group a series of questions that all began with, "If you had never been to Fort Scott, what place is quintessentially Fort Scott?" From there, the SGA team asked more specific follow-up questions based on each group's characteristics, and how the group was most likely to regularly interact with the city.

For interviewee details, refer to appendix A.

Component 3 – An evening presentation open to the public and local media.

The evening presentation, held in the River Room event center in Downtown Fort Scott, 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 Fort Scott 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.

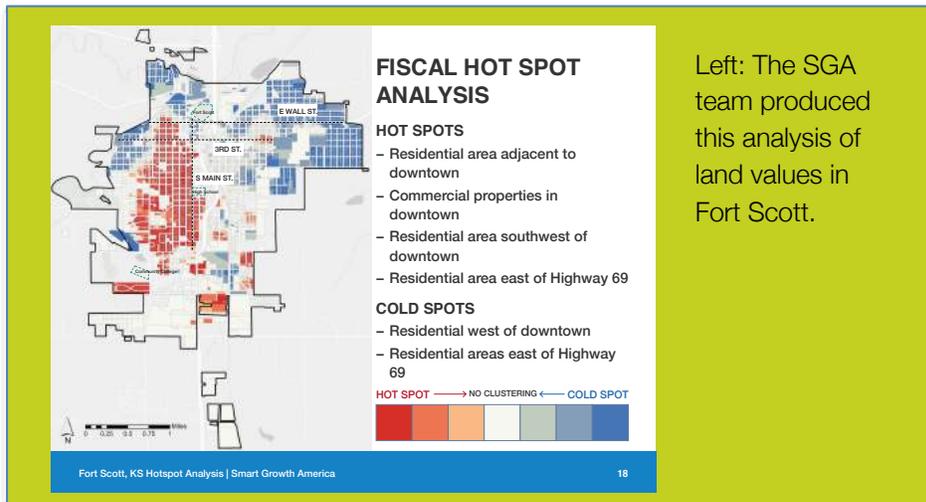
Component 4 – A day-long workshop open to invited stakeholders

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

1. Focus development on "main street" and downtown areas
2. Avoid fiscally unsustainable sprawl-type development
3. Increase access to middle-class housing
4. Improve sense of place to entice highway travelers to enter town, spend money.
5. Attract and retain skilled workers from a variety of fields

Next, the SGA team outlined 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 increases construction and maintenance costs for infrastructure (roadways, utilities, etc.), along with 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.



Left: The SGA team produced this analysis of land values in Fort Scott.

The SGA team also presented the results of SGA’s hot spot analysis—a visualization of clusters of high- and low-value properties within Fort Scott. The exercise identified the parts of Fort Scott that are hot spots and cold

spots of land values. For more information about the methodology and results of this analysis, refer to appendix C.

In addition to the main presentation by the SGA team, Fort Scott’s Director of Economic Development Rachel Pruitt, spoke about the city and the future they aspire to.

The SGA team heard from various stakeholders that lack of quality affordable housing is a barrier to further development, downtown building redevelopment faces financial hurdles, and that wages for skilled jobs are too low relative to regional peer cities and metro areas.

Fort Scott has a natural advantage due to its location at the crossroads of several larger cities. This draws a certain amount of chance and intentional travelers to the city. Historic Fort Scott is also a draw for visitors, and attracts people from across the country. Additionally, the city has a large amount of public parkland and natural areas. Finally, Fort Scott’s street grid and lack of cul-de-sac neighborhoods gives it potential for further improving active transportation networks.

Community members also said Historic Fort Scott is an incredible asset and gives the city an opportunity to build a sense of place within Fort Scott’s downtown. Fort Scott owes its existence to the historic fort, and the modest plateau it and the downtown area rest on. The city can leverage the fort and downtown for its future to draw in visitors and new residents alike.

Stakeholders multiple backgrounds identified opportunities for the community to better connect the community college, on the city’s near-southeast side with both the downtown and industrial areas for both access to jobs, but also to encourage students to patronize downtown businesses.

The SGA team 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 were divided into six groups. The groups each received a large paper map of the city, and surrounding area along with an oversized worksheet for identifying goals for the city and how to achieve them.

The instructions for completing the worksheet are shown here.

<h2 style="text-align: center;">Group Exercise</h2> <h3 style="text-align: center;">Think about your group’s overall goal...</h3>						
S.M.A.R.T Actions <small>Actions should contribute to success of a goal and be SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and have a Time Frame</small>	What is this and why is it important? <small>Describe this action and write out a complete and compelling sentence or two about why it's important.</small>	Immediate Next Steps <small>(Next 3 Months)</small>	How will we know success? <small>Think about metrics, numbers that are trackable and measurable to track. These are visible and quantifiable.</small>	Timeframe <small>Short 0-6 Mon Medium 6-12 Mon Long 1-2 Years <small>(Pick five to adjust these as needed)</small></small>	Lead and Supporting Role <small>Who is the primary responsible organization or person? Who will support the lead?</small>	Cost and Implementation Resources <small>What is the cost in dollars and in time? What potential funding sources exist?</small>
Specific Measurable Achievable Relevant Time Frame	How will this action help reach your goal?	What should the community do within the first 100 days to implement this action?	And what are the potential challenges or roadblocks to success?	What are the short-term, medium-term, and long-term steps?	Which individuals and entities will lead and support your action?	How much will your action cost in dollars and time? How could it be funded?

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 Fort Scott, as in any part of the country today, it is important to consider three broader trends:

First: 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 housing¹. 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.

Second: The formula for economic growth is changing.

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.

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

The 21st Century Economy

- Creativity, knowledge, innovation
- Importance of networking, interaction
- Demand for skilled workers

"A region's most important source of competitive advantage is its workforce. . . it's the pool of talent that attract firms, particularly in the knowledge economy."

-- Ania Ania Wieckowski,
Harvard Business Review, May 2010

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 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 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 Fort Scott 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 “big box” retailers. Rather, they should seek out niches that those other generic stores in generic places cannot fill.

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 or 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. Fort Scott is well suited to taking advantage of this shift in consumer choice.

Third: 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

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/>

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 Fort Scott.

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.

Takeaways from SGA's visit

The SGA team identified the following takeaways taking into account everything they heard and observed during their visit to Fort Scott.

- Fort Scott's economy relies more on manufacturing than others of similar size.
- The city's network of brick streets have an interesting history and make it a unique place
- A surprising number of people commute from Fort Scott to Kansas City, and elsewhere.
- It seems like people involved in real estate development are risk averse
- There is a fair amount of construction in the downtown
- Foot and car traffic are very light in the downtown during weekdays
- Strong entrepreneurial spirit within the city
- Apparent divide in property values east and west of US Route 69

Assets and Opportunities

- Historic Fort Scott
- Unique brick streets
- Walkable neighborhoods and downtown
- County will soon own the former Mercy Hospital building
- Community college is well regarded
- Food and lodging sectors have quality offerings
- Tight knit community

Potential Obstacles

- Hard to retain young, skilled workforce who are developed locally
- Long-term population decline
- Budget shortfalls in prior years
- Community identified as insular by some
- Historic renovation procedures appear prohibitively complex due to lack of local experience with processes and incentives.

Participant viewpoints

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

Actions for Success

Fort Scott has many strengths. Its downtown core is walkable and compact. Historic buildings lend it a strong identity and scale. Existence of Fort Scott Community College provides youthful energy to the city and creates a potential pipeline for future residents and entrepreneurs. Keeping downtown as its heart, Fort Scott can create a community where new workers want to live and businesses thrive. Building cohesion between the downtown, the community college, and industrial park, the city can grow its center and feed off these successful nodes by connecting them to each other.

The remainder of this memo takes into account everything the SGA team saw and heard during our visit to Fort Scott including our observations from the walking and 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 to carry out action items included in these Next Steps.

The workshop hosted by Smart Growth America was a great first step towards planning for Fort Scott's long-term economic and fiscal health. The city 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, Fort Scott 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. It should be clear to others in the community, and the committee itself, where the committee derives its authority from and who it answers to.

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 government – Fort Scott (both elected officials and staff)
- Major employers
- Small business owners
- Representatives of the arts community
- Fort Scott Chamber of Commerce
- Healthcare and Education
- Other downtown representatives

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
- Report back to the city on a regular basis

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

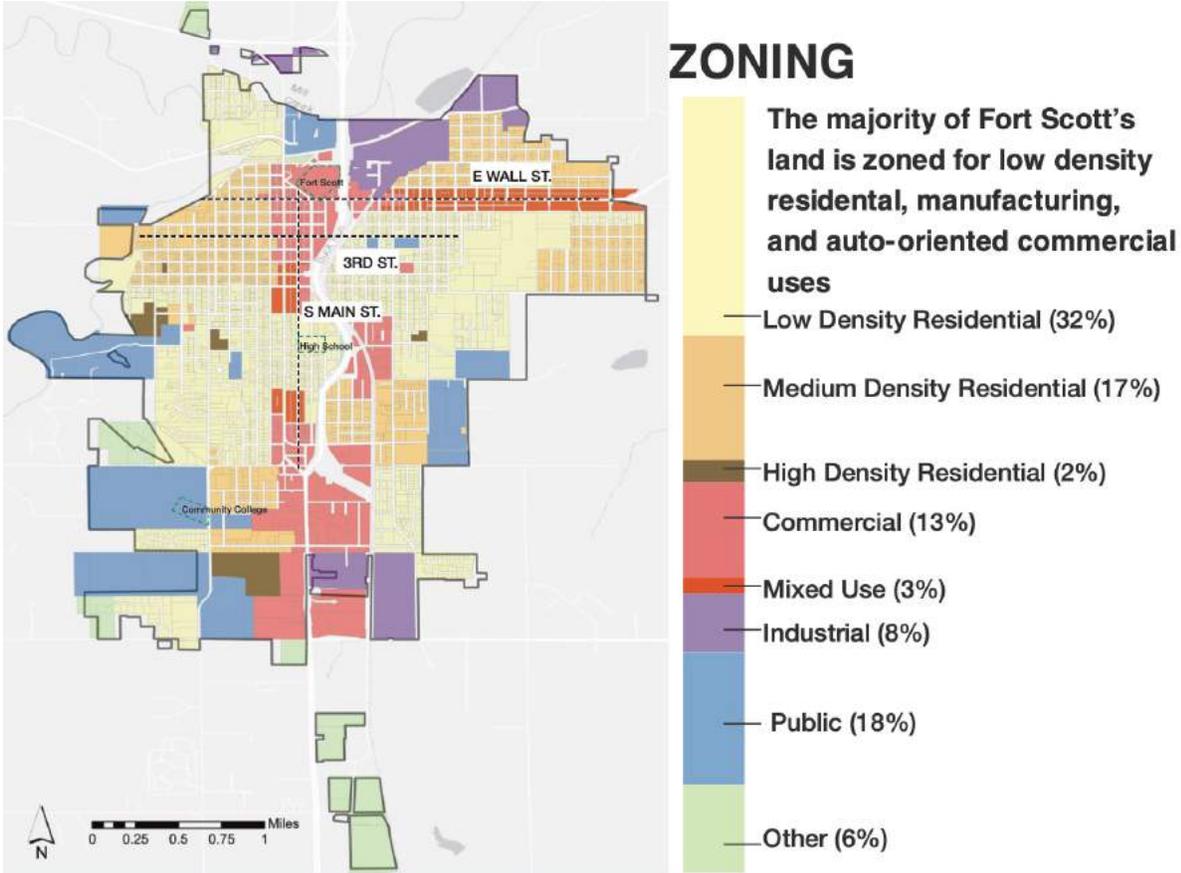
- Ensure that this body continues meeting on a regular basis and that all members are encouraged to be engaged in the process

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. Fort Scott’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 properties in the city’s hotspot were moderately valued relative to the rest of the city, an average of \$93,000 per acre. By contrast, the value per acre in the rest of Fort Scott is roughly \$40,350 per acre. See Appendix C for more information on the hotspot analysis.

The hotspot analysis supports the conclusion that walkable neighborhoods in and around downtown Fort Scott are the places to focus on housing, including workforce units that will entice community college graduates and new hires at Fort Scott’s major employers to live in the community. Further, the existing roadway and utility infrastructure to make these projects a success already exist in these areas. There are sufficient lot sizes, and existing buildings ready to be rehabbed in downtown.



The SGA team recommends focusing the community’s development on its existing assets in downtown, taking care to plan for the land uses for each as described above and in the accompanying figure. Any further development on the city’s outskirts will dilute city resources and divert resources from the city center and existing neighborhoods, which contain areas that could be the most economically productive part of Fort Scott. Additional development on the city’s edges would come at a cost, including new infrastructure such as utilities and police / fire coverage, which will be financially problematic for the future. Finally, such new development will

create a traffic problem, in the form of extra vehicle miles through the downtown rather than shorter trips to the downtown, some of which wouldn't have to be done by car.

It is extremely important that large institutions, like colleges and regional medical centers are closely connected to downtown to provide synergies.

To adequately serve the needs of Fort Scott's population, as well as to provide the greatest economic impact and return on investment, as it is reoccupied, the medical center should remain closely connected with downtown. Many major hospitals, most often flagship hospitals, are located in urban areas near a downtown or other nearby neighborhoods. The Cleveland Clinic's main campus occupies several city blocks on the city's east side Fairfax neighborhood. The University of Michigan's main hospital is very near its nearby downtown and Amtrak train station. The pattern holds for smaller places too.

This is not about sick, elderly, or disabled patients walking from home to the hospital to receive treatment. And we do not expect that hundreds⁵ of doctors, nurses, and other hospital staff—as well as family members and friends visiting patients—will walk or drive to Common Ground Coffee 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 at Sharky's, a event at Historic Fort Scott, or buy some baseball cleats at J&W Sport Shop. The same is true for those visiting patients. Taking advantage of nearby options for food, entertainment, and everyday errands is only possible with the health center located reasonably close to downtown.

3. Revisit existing master plan.

Audit plan to find elements that are out-of-date or don't fit with city's long-term objectives

A city's master plan should outline its desired trajectory. Each part of it should further, even indirectly, the general future vision for the area. Sometimes, master plans become aggregations of old plans or compilations of various different plans for smaller areas that make up the whole city. In those instances, the master plan is no longer a single guiding vision for the area.

The implementation committee should examine the existing master plan to ensure it is a clear and cohesive document that furthers the city's future vision for itself.

If the city's goal is to concentrate development downtown and limit annexation, the master plan should reflect that. The implementation committee should identify portions of the plan that are inconsistent with that new direction for the city and recommend alternatives to those officials in charge of Fort Scott's next master plan. If necessary, the committee should recommend, and the

⁵ <http://www.nlep.org/Regional-Data/Leading-Employers/Lincoln-Employers.aspx>

city should enact, revisions to the master plan to reflect changes in the community's long-term development priorities.

Include elements that further city's goals for downtown

The implementation committee should focus on the master plan's existing direction for downtown. The committee should account for what is and isn't mentioned. To the extent Fort Scott wants housing, businesses, hotels, and other uses in the downtown, they should look for where those uses are mentioned in the plan. If they are absent, the committee could draft language to integrate those uses into the plan.

4. Audit current land use policies and zoning regulations.

Building codes: enforcements and incentives

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

The SGA team heard many residents and business owners with concerns about the regulatory environment for buildings, particularly listed historical structures. Concerns about complying with historic property regulations were common. To allay these concerns, a workshop for city economic development staff and downtown stakeholders, along with a comprehensive audit of the city's building code, fire code, and other regulations would be helpful.

A "demolition by neglect" ordinance has proven an effective tool for preventing blight. To address the fines levied under such an ordinance, 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.⁶

However, both incentives and penalties should be utilized to ensure owners take care of their property and positively influence 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

⁶ <https://www.meridianms.org/city-departments/community-development/code-enforcement-division/>

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 \$10,000.⁷

Noblesville, Indiana offers both tax abatements and a facade grant program, among other incentives, for investments in downtown.⁸

Open vacant second story windows

Consider opening second story windows that have been blocked even if the space behind them is vacant or used for storage. Dress the window exteriors to create appearance of activity happening inside. This may include artwork and/or curtains.

Making the spaces behind upper windows appear occupied and alive creates an impression from the street that the area is more active than it really is. The look also adds architectural interest to each building individually.



Building with boarded upper windows
Source: Google Maps



Occupied windows, Thomas, WV
Source: Miles2Go/Michael Harding

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

- Audit local ordinances impacting outdoor dining to allow more establishments to allow patrons to eat and drink outside where space allows

⁷ <https://www.greenvillesc.gov/341/Facade-Improvement-Program>

⁸ <http://www.choosenoblesville.com/incentives-grants/>

- Educate staff and stakeholders on how to navigate historic preservation rules while retaining economic viability.

Long term Actions (12 months and longer)

Reform regulations to provide clarity and ease barriers to infill development and ultimately encourage such development.

5. Develop a cohesive plan for the integrated use of legacy buildings and historic structures in downtown Fort Scott.

Fort Scott 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 Fort Scott’s history and its future that is worthy of celebration and community pride.

In the downtown core, Fort Scott 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 Fort Scott’s history, and provides unique spaces for adaptive reuse.



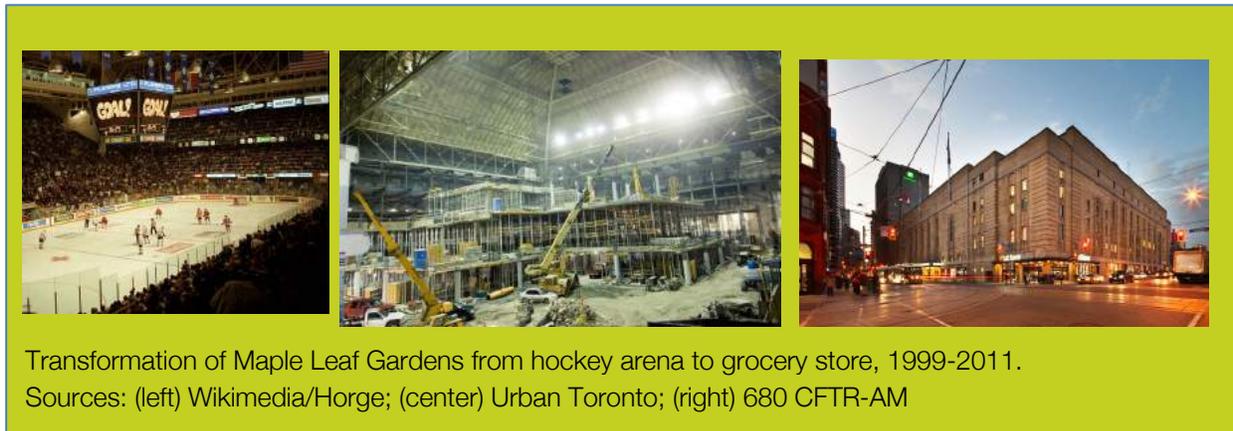
A few key properties should be among the first to focus on:

Lowell Milliken Center and Scottish Rite Temple: The Lowell Milliken Center is already a popular community asset and gathering space. Its success shows that local leadership and nonprofits can create hubs for public gatherings and discourse. Next door, the empty lot where buildings used to stand before a 2005 fire destroyed them. The empty lot has limited landscaping but is otherwise empty. It represents an attractive opportunity to expand the Lowell Milliken Center’s

programming outdoors while creating a natural gathering space in downtown.

Dumont Plaza in Meridian, Mississippi, is similar to the lot next to the Lowell Milliken Center. The space was previously occupied by a large building that burnt down. The space was repurposed as a park that compliments the surrounding buildings and provides a natural event space.

Fort Scott, can leverage its almost fully intact downtown to make the open space an asset rather than a drag on downtown in much the way Grand Rapids turned a triangle-shaped parcel into the center of the community's soul.



The Scottish Rite Temple in downtown Fort Scott is a looming presence on Main Street. The building houses a large meeting room, 550-seat auditorium, and other spaces that are unique to its designed role.⁹

Similar to the Temple in Fort Scott, Maple Leaf Gardens in Toronto, Canada, loomed over its surroundings after their NHL and NBA teams moved out in 1999. The arena, which opened in 1931, sat dormant until a grocery chain bought the structure and undertook a renovation to convert the space, into its flagship location and a multisport athletic complex for a nearby university.

The building is now a community asset; providing jobs, groceries, recreation, and entertainment for the area. The Temple in Fort Scott could undergo a similar transformation, but on a smaller scale. Downtown Fort Scott could benefit on multiple fronts by occupying the historic structure, and gaining a grocery store, with spillover foot traffic for other businesses.

The city could also pursue a more traditional approach, restoring the Temple into a theater, along with other office or residential space.

The Dixie Theatre opened in 1928 as the New Astor Theatre. Over several ownership and name changes, the building is has potential to be a regional center for the performing arts. Operating since 2006 as the Dixie Center for the Arts, the theater hosts a variety of events ranging from community theater shows to professional networking mixers.

⁹ <https://www.fstribune.com/story/2046044.html>

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

- 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”.¹⁰
- 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.¹¹
- 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.¹²

As part of the process, Fort Scott 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.

6. Seek new development projects to fill in downtown’s “missing teeth” while paying careful attention to building and site design, and overall housing supply.

Repair the street wall and fill in missing teeth:

The street wall describes the “wall” created by buildings being lined up right against each other. It creates an impression that someone is in a dense, fully occupied place. 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. Fort Scott has a mostly intact street wall throughout much of downtown, but there are a few places where gaps exist. If it’s not practical to construct buildings in the empty spaces, develop programming for the sites to turn them into sources of activity rather than dead space.



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

¹⁰ <http://ritztalladega.com/history/>

¹¹ <https://www.tvaa.net/visit-the-ritz-theatre/theatre-history.html>

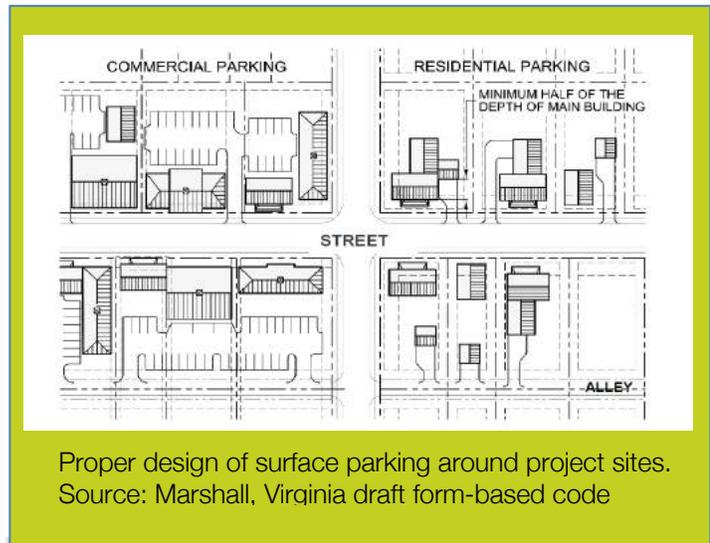
¹² <https://www.caclive.com/us/>

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 welcome and comfort are lost if cars are in the way between the sidewalk and the building itself.

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.



Consider adopting a form-based code for downtown

To both facilitate new development and guide it to create the right building envelope, Fort Scott 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 an FBC is to simplify the project approval process.

Because the community establishes the characteristics of acceptable and desirable development beforehand, application review can become somewhat routine, or at least simplified. Protracted negotiations among applicants, 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.¹³

Focus on small lot homes and small format multifamily units

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. These types of homes fit the character of downtown, and the most neglected market segment.

Short Term Actions (1-6 months) for recommendations #5 and #6

- 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 #5 and #6

- 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 targeted properties 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.

Long-term Actions (12 months and longer) for recommendations #5 and #6

- 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.

¹³ <https://formbasedcodes.org/resources/>

7. Focus on placemaking and streetscapes with a consistent brand 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 Fort Scott when they were younger. Many younger residents can easily identify aspects of downtown that make Fort Scott feel like home. First and foremost, downtown Fort Scott should remain that heart of the city with which so many residents of the city identify. Like the human body, Fort Scott requires a healthy heart to prosper.

While Fort Scott has major employers and activity centers outside the downtown, such as Peerless Products and Briggs Automotive, people working or studying at those places would likely enjoy stopping by Fort Scott's downtown at the end of their day or on days off. Downtown businesses, and the city's treasury would also benefit from strengthening downtown's position as a community-gathering place and center for commercial activity.

Identify one or more "tactical" projects for downtown that are low or no cost to take the first steps. During the workshop, there was discussion about getting more students to stay in Fort Scott after graduation. Without getting into heavy lifts such as building more housing and attracting large, technically sophisticated employers, we heard some interviewees say they thought cultivating more pseudo-public spaces would help create an emotional attachment between students and the city. Also called, "third places," meaning the next place someone is likely to be after 1) home, and 2) work/school; these can be permanent businesses like coffee shops or diners, or recurring but temporary spaces like a sidewalk where food trucks gather. In an economy where much creative and technical work can be done remotely over wireless internet, people can spend a substantial amount of time at their favorite "third places." This time can help form a bond between the community college students and their city, increasing the desire to stay post-graduation.

To cultivate this, the city can encourage pop-up coffee shops or other unique businesses to experiment in empty storefronts. It can also organize times and space to corral food trucks in a central location at regular intervals (weekly, monthly...) in the 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 and common ownership in downtown.

Further, community events that create temporary gathering spaces in downtown, including temporarily closing off of roadways, can be another driver to help residents see downtown in a new light. Fort Scott already has balconies on many downtown buildings in the area around historic Fort Scott, creating a sense of place that sets the area apart from other parts of the city. The city and National Park Service already hosts regular events downtown and at the fort. Further coordination between the city and NPS to leverage the visitors coming to each other's events will

improve economic impact for the city, and make the visitors feel like they got more out of their trip. Each event can be a catalyst to bring people downtown, either during the event itself or afterwards for a meal or other commercial activity.



Add street name signage at intersections

The SGA team encourages Fort Scott 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, perhaps drawing inspiration from a historic sign design from the city’s past.

Manage parking in downtown

Almost without exception, many cities believe they have a shortage of parking. However, there appears to be underutilized parking within Fort Scott’s greater downtown area. Managing parking means that Fort Scott 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. Signage can also include maps with circles radiating out from a parking lot to show how close particular destinations or intersections are from the lot.

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 Fort Scott 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, Fort Scott should identify the existing gaps in the street facade that can be used to connect off street parking to businesses that front the street.

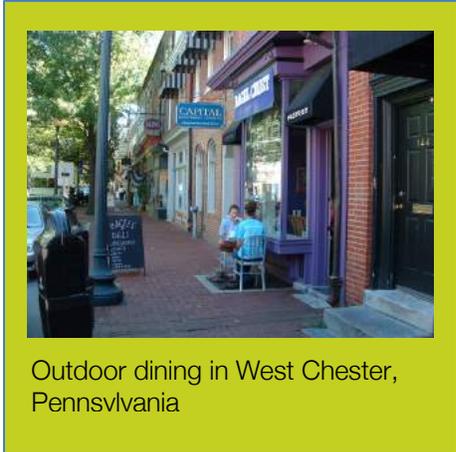


Alley connections and other amenities to encourage outdoor dining

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.

Alleys need not be used solely for parking. Fort Scott’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. Fort Scott has a number of alleys with an appropriate scale and aesthetic for conversion.



Outdoor dining in West Chester, Pennsylvania

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.



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

The SGA team heard that outdoor dining or patios may face some obstacles in downtown Fort Scott. 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, Virginia¹⁴; Covina, California¹⁵; and Winfield, Illinois.¹⁶

Promote downtown lodging

Fort Scott has multiple hotels in and near its downtown that cater to a diverse clientele ranging from families on vacation, to railroad workers. The city should take efforts to promote itself to those already traveling for work in the city. These travelers may decide to enjoy a meal at a local establishment, but they may also see an upcoming event or historical attraction and decide to bring their family to the city for a trip in the future. These visitors will eat in downtown’s restaurants, purchase their morning coffee at one of downtown’s locally owned coffeehouses, explore the retail establishments, have a drink at a bar, and visit the historic fort and national cemetery.

¹⁴ https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/planning/outdoor_dining_ordinance.pdf
¹⁵ <https://www.codepublishing.com/CA/Covina/html/Covina17/Covina1757.html>
¹⁶ <http://www.villageofwinfield.com/documentcenter/view/8042>

Community gathering spaces and events

Fort Scott already has several community events of various types and sizes 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 Fort Scott residents 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 are also great ways to bring people to downtown. During the workshop, the SGA team heard that the park service and city are working to better coordinate their events to leverage synergies between them.

Other downtown amenities

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

While motorists are generally well behaved in Fort Scott, some extra measures could make those outside cars feel safer and more likely to walk further after parking their vehicles. The installation of traffic calming infrastructure—such as center islands and additional bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure—will further encourage drivers to naturally 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 Fort Scott continue to ensure the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists is included in future roadway projects.

Fort Scott should consider the sidewalks and city-owned streets 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 Fort Scott’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, movable furniture, and trash receptacles at suitable locations throughout all of downtown to encourage residents and visitors to rest and linger.
- Begin discussions with the Kansas Department of Transportation to utilize right of way owned by the agency 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 KDOT.
- 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 more restaurants on nicer days.¹⁷
- Investigate LED lighting (streetlights and traffic signals) to increase pedestrian safety during evening and nighttime hours while reducing electricity costs.
- Market the city’s 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)

- Encourage proliferation of building awnings throughout downtown as funding allows.
- Ensure there is sufficient lighting on connection routes to nearby neighborhoods and the city’s parkland.
- Place monuments at gateways to downtown and tree columns leading up to downtown gateways. Ensure that this signage, once placed, receives ongoing maintenance.

8. Create a marketing and branding campaign for downtown Fort Scott including ongoing place management.

Create a branding and marketing campaign for downtown.

¹⁷ <http://archive.jsonline.com/business/two-east-side-parking-spaces-replaced-by-14-outdoor-dining-tables-b9982256z1-220860751.html/>

A branding campaign specifically for downtown Fort Scott would help market the community and its unique identity to the outside world. This campaign should embody the unique features downtown Fort Scott has to offer both visitors and potential new residents. It can include components such as a unique logo and moniker. The city 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 that does not require one to read the product name in order to recognize it.

The marketing campaign should focus around what specifically makes Fort Scott unique both within the region and beyond. The city, chamber of commerce, or another established community group within Fort Scott 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. The person will also plan events and activities in the area.

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 Fort Scott that draws people from beyond the city's boundaries. In short, Fort Scott needs someone 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 entry points to Fort Scott and the downtown to draw visitors further into the city.

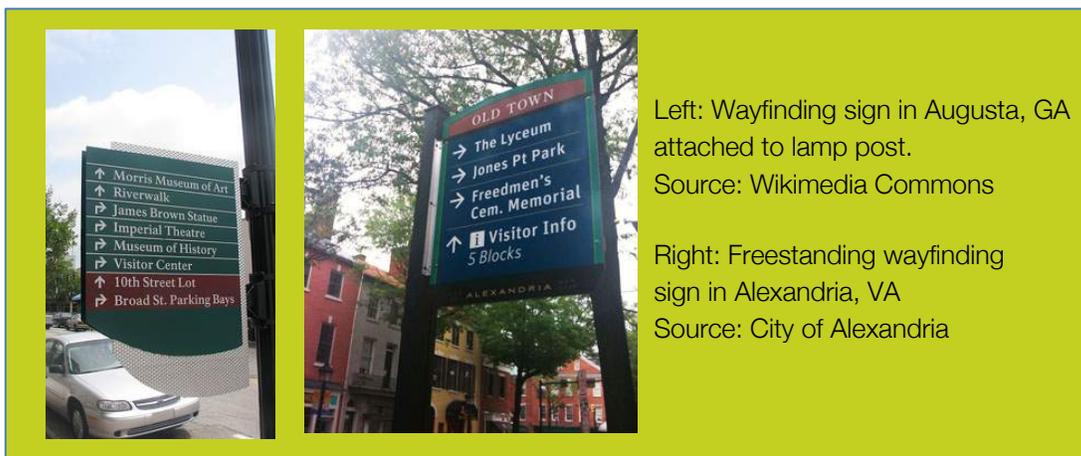
Passing through a place (i.e. stopping for gas or a quick meal) is not the same as visiting the place. On an average day in 2018, more than 5,000 vehicles drove along US-69 through Fort Scott.¹⁸ While most were on their way to and from destinations outside Fort Scott without stopping, some fraction of these drivers stopped for gas, food, or just to take a break from driving.

¹⁸<http://www.ksdot.org/Assets/wwwksdotorg/bureaus/burTransPlan/maps/CountMaps/Districts/countmap2018.pdf>

Fort Scott should make a major push to encourage those going past Fort Scott to somewhere else to drive the short distance to downtown Fort Scott. Since Wall Street is also part of the US Highway system, Fort Scott should focus on slowing and enticing those through travelers to stop while passing through the downtown or before turning onto US-69.

Two critical tools will help get these visitors into downtown. First, the city could consider partnering with some of the establishments near the US-69/Wall Street interchange to provide cultural education about the area as people stop for fuel or food. The implementation committee proposed above should coordinate signage, social media, hotel flyers, radio spots, and other outreach. It is imperative to have these interests work in harmony or neither district is likely to succeed. Hotel rooms or even information on events at the historic fort and the LaRoche baseball complex could provide information about amenities in downtown Fort Scott to visit—particularly any special events that occur during the year.

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 are currently no signs directing motorists to downtown Fort Scott and none that would encourage them to stop there for lunch or to browse downtown businesses. From a windshield off US-69, a motorist has little impression a walkable downtown off the exit. Fort Scott can and should alert motorists that its downtown exists, and give drivers a reason to stop by calling out activities like eating, shopping, or antiques as things available downtown. Specifically, the signage 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 trails in the city's parks, especially Gunn Park. The SGA team would add that trails that are important as part of a connected network perform best,

and it's important that any trail from outside the city connect with multiple street corridors to enable circulation into and within the city.

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

Trails can be a key draw when marketing Fort Scott to potential new residents coming for jobs at large employers like Ward-Kraft, Peerless products, or a healthcare provider, 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 (city, county, chamber, and other partners) use the branding guidelines when referring to 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.

9. Strengthen partnership with Fort Scott Community College so students can make Fort Scott their own place, and entice them to stay in area after graduation.

Making a strong partnership stronger

The SGA team heard Fort Scott already enjoys a strong partnership with FSCC, and understands that the partnership flows from the close working relationship between the city and college leadership. Present city and college leadership can leverage their close partnership to create lasting benefits for the community, further the city's identity as a college town, and encourage students to stay in Fort Scott after graduation.

Connecting FSCC to downtown Fort Scott for those coming on foot, bike, or even transit is already a recommendation, and is a key part of drawing students into downtown more often and maybe even living downtown.

Additionally, the city could empower students as individuals or as part of formal organizations, to get involved in changing the city's streetscape and overall built environment. This would leverage some students interested in architecture, landscape architecture, and other disciplines. Allowing students to have a hand in designing Fort Scott's new look will increase students' perceived ownership of the city and encourage them to stay. It also will inject new, diverse design ideas and aesthetics to the city.

10. Work on cohesion between downtown and US-69.

Fort Scott naturally enjoys close proximity to US-69 and all the travelers it brings past the city's front door. The city can strengthen its position by improving the visual and practical connection to those two assets and help draw people into downtown.

Create a corridor of arrival connecting US-69 to downtown Fort Scott.

Shortly before arriving in downtown, a visual narrowing by an alley of trees, overhead signage or other mechanism will encourage drivers to slow down and pay attention to their surroundings before they get to downtown.



Monument in Parsons, Kansas.

Source: Flickr user J. Stephen Conn



Arrival gateway in Council Bluffs, Iowa.

Source: Travel Iowa on Pinterest

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 showcase 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 Southeastern Kansas 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.

Use building awnings for both shading and business signage

An alley 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 along downtown streets would provide a seamless protection from rain, snow, and hot sun. This will make walking in downtown more enjoyable, encouraging more browsing in stores, of restaurant menus, and other activities.

Building awnings can not only provide this needed shading, but can also provide a mechanism for business signing if done well. Empowering building owners without awnings to erect awnings throughout the downtown would help make the walking and window-shopping experience better throughout the area by lowering sidewalk temperatures and keeping people dry. Additionally, street trees can spread shade more broadly to the street, building facades, and surrounding sidewalk areas.

Improve pedestrian infrastructure including lighting upgrades

Fort Scott should ensure that all downtown streets and the corridors leading into downtown from I-20 and FSCC have useable sidewalks. Energy efficient LED lighting could be one way to ensure pedestrians and others feel comfortable walking around downtown in the evenings and create a consistent feeling of cohesion along the corridors connecting downtown with Neighborhoods and FSCC. Aim for a consistent look for pedestrian-scale lighting throughout downtown and along the above corridors. Additionally, any inter-neighborhood pedestrian path should be well lit, feel well maintained, and safe throughout the day and night. When Meridian, Mississippi converted its street lighting and traffic signals to energy efficient LED fixtures, saving \$250,000 in electrical costs the first year. The city could find grant mechanisms for lighting upgrades or another funding mechanism that may be able to offer Fort Scott 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. Fort Scott 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, historic Fort Scott, the Lowell Milliken Center, City Hall, Gunn Park, National Cemetery No. 1, and other amenities. Additionally, any inter-neighborhood pedestrian paths should have signage directing potential users to the destinations it serves, and how far those destinations are.

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 Fort Scott more than just a place to pass through. Signage directing drivers to existing off street parking located behind buildings will also encourage them to stop and explore downtown.

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.

11. Adopt a Complete Streets policy and implementation strategy.

Fort Scott 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. Fort Scott should then work with Bourbon County, and KDOT to adopt their own policies and to implement Complete Streets throughout the region. Adopting a Complete Streets Policy demonstrates Fort Scott'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 Fort Scott staff
 - Smart Growth America recommends the city work to bring seniors and people with disabilities together with KDOT to work on accessibility issues
 - It is recommended that a meeting and tour with KDOT 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, Fort Scott 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 Fort Scott 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, Fort Scott 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 Fort Scott's decision-making process. Fort Scott 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
 - Fort Scott 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.

Conclusion

While there are thousands of towns across the United States with similar populations to Fort Scott, the city has unique assets and challenges. The city's brick streets and strong employment base would be envied by many peer communities. Fort Scott has also shown a willingness to improve their city's appeal to current residents and outsiders. However, challenges related to housing, financing, and talent retention are not insurmountable. If Fort Scott adopts the measures laid out in this memo, which the city and its residents collaborated on, the city can make real progress toward its goal of becoming a more attractive, vibrant, and fiscally sound community for future generations.

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 leaders. While there are individual steps to implement in short, medium, and long timelines; the timeline for Fort Scott's overall improvement may exceed the tenure of individual committee members or local leaders. It has been our pleasure to work with the City of Fort Scott as we observe the unique opportunities before it. Fort Scott has a great downtown that it can leverage to attract visitors, while directing future investment to further improve this key asset to its full potential. The SGA team believes that if Fort Scott follows their recommendations, as well as the city's own vision, Fort Scott can grow into a thriving and fiscally sustainable community that sets an example for its peers to follow.

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