

DOWNTOWN MARKET STUDY & VISION PLAN

Wauchula, Florida



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INTRODUCTION



INTRODUCTION

Downtown Wauchula is at a pivot point about place, investment, and the future of Hardee County. For decades, it has served as the cultural and governmental hub for the region. In recent years, downtown has enjoyed significant investment in infill mixed use housing, public infrastructure investment, and a combination of new and legacy businesses. At the same time downtown wrestles with a familiar set of challenges: potential for more reinvestment, underused buildings and undeveloped properties, and a lack of critical mass in retail and dining. This combination of conditions has led to a community opportunity to explore the market potential of downtown, engage with partners, and develop a strategy for ongoing and reinvigorated investment.

This Market Study and Vision Plan was launched to answer a straightforward question: what is the real potential of downtown Wauchula, and what will it take to unlock it? It is not designed as a branding or marketing exercise or a land use plan that will sit on a shelf. It is a data-driven, implementation-focused tool, crafted to inform action.

Critically, this plan arrives at a time when the right players are at the table. Main Street Wauchula continues to lead on design, activation, and engagement. The Development Group (TDG), historically focused on countywide business recruitment, has turned its attention toward site-specific downtown investment, representing a major shift in regional development dynamics and a symbol of a strong partnership seldom found in the downtown development arena. The City and County are also increasingly aligned, recognizing the foundational role that downtown plays in economic vitality and community identity.

With support from the Florida Heartland Economic Region of Opportunity (FHRO), this plan is the product of real community input, hard financial analysis, and a grounded understanding of how markets work in places like Wauchula.



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COMMUNITY CONTEXT



COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Wauchula is small but significant. As the seat of Hardee County, it anchors a region known for agriculture, family-owned businesses, and deep civic pride. The community is younger than much of Florida, more diverse than many of its peer communities, and increasingly open to new ideas, especially if they help create opportunity for the next generation to grow with the community.

The city's downtown is full of assets: historic buildings, centralized parks, a civic square, and a Main Street that is still walkable and well-defined. But it also faces a common problem: the potential is obvious, yet the return on investment is just out of reach without public and private partnerships.

What differentiates Wauchula today from even five years ago is the emergence of a clear coalition of public and private partners. These groups understand that downtown doesn't just "come back" on its own. It takes coordinated investment, regulatory support, and a willingness to be patient and persistent.

The city is also not operating in a vacuum. National trends are increasingly favorable to small downtowns: travelers want walkable experiences, restaurants and boutique hotels are becoming anchors of economic development, and communities with identity and authenticity are attracting both residents and investors. Wauchula checks many of those boxes. It now needs to take the next steps to make downtown even more attractive to investment.



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PLANNING PROCESS



PLANNING PROCESS

This plan was built from the ground up, starting with questions and ending with strategy. The process included:

Reconnaissance & Stakeholder Interviews

Two site visits and dozens of conversations helped define real conditions, addressing not only visible issues, but the root causes behind vacancy, cost, and business retention.

Community Survey

A public survey with 259 responses added clarity about what people love about downtown and what they want to see in the future.

Roundtables with Business Owners, Residents, and Leaders

Notes from these small-group sessions provided some of the most useful feedback in the process: identifying which buildings are seen as “dead zones,” which ideas feel unrealistic, and where there’s momentum.

Market Data & Geofencing Analysis

Claritas data helped define retail leakage and opportunity, while mobile geofencing from Placer AI revealed how people interact with downtown in real time.

Financial Feasibility Pro Formas, Plans, and Imagery

Several catalytic sites were tested for development potential under local rent structures, both with and without public incentives. These are accompanied by plans and before and after images. The result is designed to prepare the target sites for marketing as both standalone development projects and part of a whole strategy for downtown investment. These studies, while site specific, offer replicable guides to other investments in downtown.

Land Development Regulation Review

Although the City is embarking on an overall look at land use regulations, this study delved into specific related to downtowns overall policy approach as well as best practices used in other cities to encourage quality development in lieu of outdated policies and “settling” for the status quo.

Best Practices Portfolio

The plan also references a series of best practices used by downtowns across the country to activate and engage with the public, offer meaningful incentives to investors, and foster a positive trajectory for downtown.

The result is a layered view of downtown: not just what it looks like, but how it functions and how to make it work better. The plan concludes with an implementation strategy that outlines the what, when, and how to accomplish the recommendations in the strategy.



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COMMUNITY INPUT & SURVEY FINDINGS



COMMUNITY INPUT & SURVEY FINDINGS

A Ground-Level View of What's Working, What's Missing, and What's Next

Any revitalization plan needs the numbers, but it also needs the voices. For Wauchula, those voices were clear, consistent, and grounded in lived experience. Over 300 people contributed input through a structured community survey and a series of over a dozen stakeholder roundtables and individual interviews. They offered more than opinions; they provided clarity about how downtown works, how it doesn't, and what they're prepared to support moving forward.

Rather than listing isolated complaints or ideas, the community painted a cohesive picture of what downtown Wauchula is, what it could become, and what's in the way. Their feedback forms the foundation of this plan and is best understood as a SWOT narrative: an honest assessment of downtown's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, told by those who live, work, invest, and walk its streets every day.

Strengths:

What's Working and What's Worth Building On

There is no apathy in Wauchula. Survey participants and roundtable attendees alike expressed a deep sense of ownership over the future of downtown. While they were frank about its current limitations, they spoke with pride about its character, its history, and its role as the city's symbolic heart.

The city's walkable grid, charming building stock, and central civic spaces remain assets, especially Heritage Park, which was repeatedly cited as a cornerstone of downtown's identity. Businesses that have persisted or recently opened—such as boutiques, bakeries, and coffee shops—are known and appreciated. These “bright spots” were named frequently in open-ended survey responses and reinforced in every roundtable discussion.

Survey data confirmed this attachment:

- 91% of respondents live in or around the 33873 ZIP code
- The most common connection to downtown was not property ownership, but regular use, whether for dining, errands, or events
- Customer service, walkability, and public space ranked as the highest-performing attributes

Even among skeptics, there was a sense that downtown can work; it just hasn't reached its potential yet.

Weaknesses:

The Gaps That Undermine Momentum

Despite aesthetic improvements and periodic programming, downtown Wauchula could improve its day-to-day functionality. It's a place people want to enjoy, but often don't because it lacks a critical mass to be a magnet for regular use.

The survey and roundtables both pointed to a shared frustration: unreliable business hours, inconsistent offerings, and a perceived lack of energy. Many participants described making plans to visit downtown only to find shops closed or blocks quiet. Even buildings that are occupied can appear empty, whether due to papered windows, inconsistent signage, or low visibility.

Participants also expressed dissatisfaction with communication about downtown events and services. While Main Street and others are organizing meaningful programming, the channels of outreach feel fragmented, often relying too heavily on last-minute social media or word of mouth. This is a frequent concern in communities like Wauchula and is a signal that there is an opportunity to modify the narrative to be even more proactive and transparent.

Underlying all of this is a structural market weakness: low rent ceilings, rising insurance costs, and high rehabilitation expenses make it hard to renovate, lease, and sustain downtown properties. Multiple stakeholders noted that they've either deferred projects or opted not to invest further, citing the math just doesn't work yet.

COMMUNITY INPUT AND SURVEY FINDINGS

Opportunities:

What's Possible If the Pieces Come Together

What set this engagement effort apart was not just what people said was wrong, but how clearly they described what's possible. The survey asked residents what types of businesses they wanted downtown. The answers were overwhelmingly consistent and practical:

- Sit-down restaurants that serve lunch and dinner
- Coffee shops with longer hours and indoor seating
- Dessert and treat destinations such as ice cream, donut shops, bakeries
- Bookstores, boutiques, and youth-friendly retail
- Coworking spaces, gathering places, and small-scale wellness or beauty retail (e.g., cosmetics, supplements)

These aren't fantasy requests. They're the missing pieces of a livable, lovable downtown.

Stakeholders also noted specific locations where these uses could land and offered clear thinking about what would make them succeed. They know that a single restaurant won't fix downtown, but it can serve as an anchor. So can a small hotel, a brewery, or a multifamily housing development. These are the types of uses that don't just fill buildings; they extend hours, validate investment, and attract others.

In short: if the city and its partners want these things to happen, they need to continue the path to help make them happen.

What's also clear is that the partnership between Main Street, TDG, and the City has taken root. This is the first time many property owners and community members have felt those groups are aligned. They've seen incremental progress. Now, they want that alignment to translate into resources. In short, progress has been made, the alignment is now, and the opportunities are clear.

Threats:

What's at Risk If the Window Closes

While the tone of engagement was constructive, there was an undercurrent of concern: that this plan will join a list of others that were received, discussed, and eventually forgotten.

Participants used plain language. "We've had plans before." "We need to see something move." "I don't want to sit through another meeting unless something is actually going to happen." These aren't dismissals—they're a call to urgency.

Many property owners acknowledged that the longer buildings sit empty, the harder it becomes to renovate them. Business owners noted that another year of weak foot traffic might lead to closures. And several survey respondents expressed worry that downtown is becoming a place they talk about in the past tense, even as they try to support it.

The real threat isn't apathy. It's fatigue. Community members are eager for progress, but they need to see it. Not just big projects but also small wins and visible commitments. A grant that gets awarded. A new business that lasts. An incentive package that makes a project viable. These are the signals people are watching for.

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MARKET ANALYSIS



MARKET ANALYSIS

Understanding What the Market Will Support And What It Can't Do Alone

The public input for this plan was grounded in firsthand, local knowledge. Residents described a downtown they want to love but rarely use. Property owners named specific sites they would like to develop in the future. The business community spoke of ideas that might succeed if the right environment existed.

This section translates those sentiments into hard numbers. It uses nationally recognized retail datasets to show where demand is being lost, what categories are underserved, and what square footage downtown could reasonably support. It is not a wish list. It is a real-time view of the market, grounded in demographic data, retail behavior, and development economics.

It also serves as a reality check. The market potential exists. But capturing it—particularly downtown, rather than in outlying areas—requires sustained, intentional public and private action.

To assess the commercial potential of downtown Wauchula, this study relies in part on Claritas Spotlight, a nationally recognized market analytics platform that combines U.S. Census data, proprietary consumer modeling, and real-world spending behavior. Claritas provides localized insight into demographics, household spending patterns, retail leakage, and business performance across defined geographic areas. By applying this data to Wauchula's trade area, we are able to pinpoint which retail categories are underperforming, how much spending is leaving the market, and what types of businesses may be able to thrive downtown. Claritas doesn't just show who lives in the area; it reveals how people shop, where they go, and what they might support if given the option.

The demographic and retail leakage data from Claritas tells us what people are spending and where. Geofencing tells us what people are doing. To supplement retail demand analysis, the team used data provided by Placer.ai, a leading location intelligence platform that gathers anonymized cell phone data to understand foot traffic. Placer.ai geofences a designated study area—in this case, downtown Wauchula—and captures devices that enter and dwell in that area. Each device is associated with a ZIP code, time of day, and visit duration.

To translate these datasets into actionable insight, it's important to understand how market demand is categorized, how we measure opportunity, and what assumptions guide our projections. The following section defines key terms like NAICS codes and retail leakage, explains why we focus on a 20-minute drive-time trade area, and outlines how a conservative capture rate helps estimate what downtown Wauchula can realistically support. These definitions are not just technical; they are the foundation for understanding what the data is telling us and how it applies to the future of downtown.

What Are NAICS Codes and Why Are They Important?

Every retail or service business in the United States is classified using a six-digit NAICS code—short for the North American Industry Classification System. These codes group businesses by sector and subsector, allowing communities to analyze performance and identify gaps based on federal definitions. For example:

- NAICS 722511: Full-Service Restaurants
- NAICS 448120: Women's Clothing Stores
- NAICS 451211: Book Stores
- NAICS 812112: Beauty Salons

Using these codes, we can compare what residents in the Wauchula trade area are likely to spend (based on income and national trends) to what is actually being sold locally. The difference between those numbers reveals leakage—money that could be spent locally, but isn't.

MARKET ANALYSIS

Trade Area Recap: Why 20 Minutes Is the Goldilocks Zone

We analyzed three drive-time areas: 10, 15, and 20 minutes from downtown Wauchula. The 20-minute trade area, encompassing approximately 24,654 people, became the focal point for this study because:

- It captures the full extent of Wauchula's retail draw without overlapping Sebring or Lakeland's spheres of influence that would come into play at a 30 minute drive time.
- It reflects how far residents are likely to travel for regular purchases, dining, and services getting to just outside of Arcadia so it doesn't mistakenly capture sales in that community.
- It balances local insight with regional potential, making it the most actionable layer for downtown planning.

Leakage Defined and Why It Matters

Retail leakage occurs when residents in a defined trade area spend more in a given category than what's captured by local businesses. This means they are leaving the area or bypassing downtown for goods and services they could theoretically buy closer to home.

It's not just about recapturing lost sales. Leakage points to the types of businesses that are missing or underperforming. The leakage highlights opportunities to:

- Fill key gaps in the business mix;
- Provide incentives for priority categories; and
- Invest in infrastructure that supports private-sector activation.

Capture Rate: Why We Use 30-50%

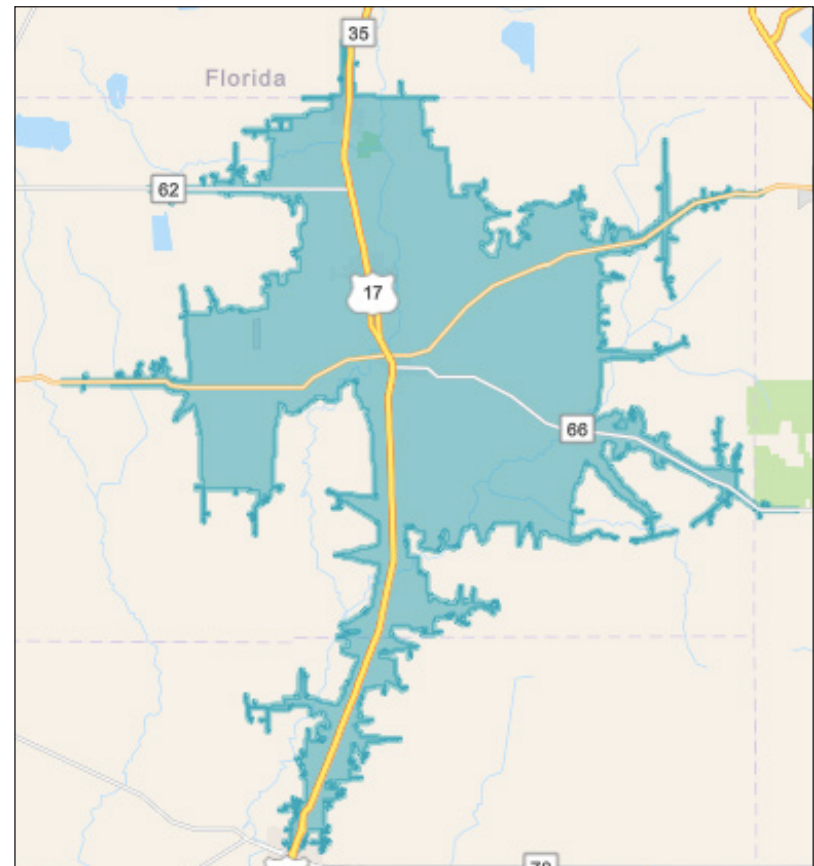
In practice, no downtown captures 100% of its trade area's demand. Some leakage is inevitable. People will continue to shop online, travel to larger cities, or seek specific brands unavailable locally.

That's why we apply a conservative 30-50% capture rate. This allows us to estimate

what could be supported if conditions were favorable, assuming that half of the current demand leakage could be retained or redirected to downtown.

This assumption accounts for:

- Wauchula's regional role and current draw;
- The reality of competing suburban development, both within and outside city limits; and
- The difficulty of shifting ingrained retail behavior without significant change in the downtown offering.

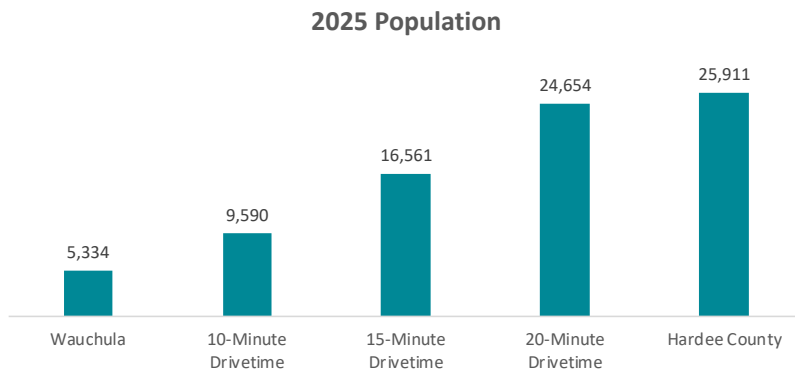


20-Minute Drivetime Trade Area

MARKET ANALYSIS

Market/Trade Area Demographics

Before we delve into the leakage, let's understand the market. Behind every data point is a population—real people with habits, incomes, and expectations that shape what downtown can support. Understanding who lives within Wauchula's trade area, how much they earn, how old they are, and what cultural makeup they represent gives us a clearer picture of demand. This context matters, because no market analysis is complete without acknowledging the community it reflects.



The focal geography of this analysis is the 20-minute trade area, which encompasses just under 25,000 residents. That number may appear modest, but its power lies in concentration: these are the individuals most likely to dine, shop, and seek services within close proximity to downtown, especially if compelling options exist.

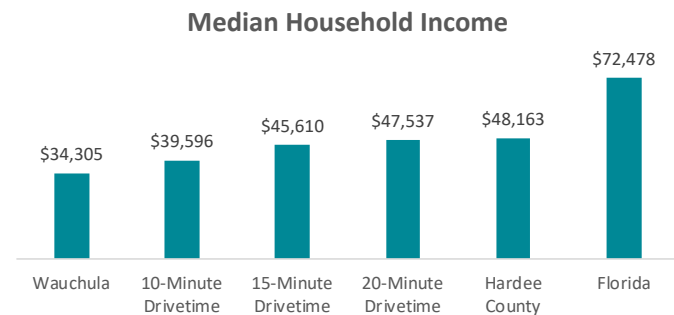
The city of Wauchula itself is home to just over 5,300 people. That number more than doubles within a 10-minute radius and increases nearly fivefold within 20 minutes. In fact, the 20-minute drive time contains nearly as many people as Hardee County as a whole. This makes it a uniquely useful boundary—broad enough to capture true trade potential, yet focused enough to reflect market dynamics downtown can realistically serve.

Demographically, the area is youthful and diverse. Over one-quarter of residents are under the age of 18, and nearly half identify as Hispanic or Latino. White residents make up 47% of the trade area, with Black residents accounting for just

under 6%, and all other racial groups comprising a small but meaningful share. This mix presents both an opportunity and a directive: future business development must reflect the culture, needs, and tastes of a broad customer base.

Age distribution is fairly balanced, with strong representation across every working-age group. Twenty-three percent of residents fall between ages 18 and 34, another 22% are between 35 and 54, and 20% are between 55 and 74. Only 9% of residents are age 75 or older. This evenly distributed age base provides a solid foundation for a mix of uses including restaurants, services, and retailers catering to families, professionals, and seniors alike.

Income is one of the most important market factors and is also one of Wauchula's biggest constraints. Median household income within the city stands at just over \$34,000, rising steadily as the radius expands outward. By the 20-minute mark, the median income reaches \$47,537, closer to Hardee County's overall average of \$48,163 but still significantly lower than Florida's statewide median of \$72,478.



This income gap carries implications. It may temper demand for high-end retail or fine dining. But it also signals opportunity for value-oriented retailers, service businesses, and independent entrepreneurs positioned to offer quality, affordability, and cultural relevance. It also reinforces the importance of downtown as a place where community identity, convenience, and experience outweigh price point alone.

In sum, the market for downtown Wauchula is rooted in a diverse, growing, and engaged regional population, with needs that are currently met elsewhere.

RETAIL LEAKAGE

Retail Leakage: What's Missing and What's Possible

While Downtown Wauchula has a strong foundation, there is also significant opportunity. Residents are spending money, and while some of that will always flow to neighboring markets, a closer look reveals just how much could be captured locally. With the right strategy, downtown can reclaim a meaningful share of this activity, not by competing on scale, but by offering something unique: experience, convenience, and a sense of place that suburban corridors can't replicate.

The 20-minute trade area generates over \$384 million in consumer spending each year, yet only \$297 million in local retail sales are captured. That leaves an estimated \$87.5 million in annual leakage, representing dollars that are leaving the market or bypassing downtown entirely. This leakage is not specific to downtown, but it highlights regional demand that is unmet across various categories.

In this context, leakage is not a failure. It's a signal. It shows where unmet demand exists and points to the types of businesses, services, and experiences the community is actively seeking.

What's striking is how closely this data matches public perception. The community didn't ask for luxury brands or flashy entertainment districts. They asked for full-

service restaurants, places to shop for clothing and essentials, wellness-oriented retail gauged at the fifteen minute drive time to augment existing services, and gathering spaces. The market analysis backs them up and now it's time to translate that into scale.

Estimating What Downtown Can Support

While \$87.5 million in leakage is significant, not all of it can or should be recaptured. Residents will still travel, shop online, or frequent national chains. That's why we analyze leakage at two levels:

- 30% Capture Rate = Modest recapture under current conditions with incremental improvement.
- 50% Capture Rate = Aggressive but achievable target with infrastructure, incentives, and coordinated reinvestment.

The goal is not to compete with big box stores. The goal is to build a thriving, differentiated downtown that offers what no strip center can: experience, authenticity, walkability, and connection. Let's look at how this plays out in the highest-potential categories.

	Wauchula	10-Minute Drivetime	15-Minute Drivetime	20-Minute Drivetime	Hardee County
Retail Sales	\$130,563,956	\$164,173,966	\$226,027,820	\$297,142,729	\$332,848,319
Consumer Expenditures	\$67,354,990	\$133,429,514	\$247,643,187	\$384,675,200	\$455,548,174
Retail Leakage / Market Gain	\$63,208,966 <i>Market GAIN</i>	\$30,744,453 <i>Market GAIN</i>	\$21,615,367 <i>Retail Leakage</i>	\$87,532,471 <i>Retail Leakage</i>	\$122,699,855 <i>Retail Leakage</i>

Retail Sales, Consumer Expenditures, and Retail Leakage/Market Gain in Wauchula, Hardee County, and the 10-Minute, 15-Minute, and 20-Minute Drivetime Trade Areas (Source: Claritas)

RETAIL & RESTAURANT OPPORTUNITIES

Full-Service Restaurants (NAICS 722511)

Leakage: \$18.7 million

Restaurants represent the single most powerful category of retail leakage in Wauchula's trade area and the most catalytic opportunity for downtown. But this isn't just about opening another kitchen. It's about building an ecosystem: an interdependent mix of operators, spaces, events, and incentives that together generate foot traffic, reinforce a brand, and support sustained reinvestment.

Today, Wauchula offers only a handful of full-service dining options, and none that have yet been able to create steady foot traffic and activity in the evening hours downtown. At the same time, local leaders have invested significantly in the rehabilitation of a historic downtown property that is nearing readiness for a food-focused tenant. This will be explored in greater detail later in the report but it represents a critical pivot point. With the right concept, the right support, and the right market positioning, this site could signal a new chapter in downtown activation.

The market numbers support bold moves:

- **At 30% capture** = \$5.6M in local sales would support ~14,000 sf of restaurant space
- **At 50% capture** = \$9.3M in sales would support ~23,000 sf of restaurant space

But here's the nuance: standalone restaurants in rural markets—even with this level of demand—often require subsidy or incentive alignment to make the numbers work. Construction costs, tenant buildout, and the slower early ramp-up typical of small downtowns mean that pro forma gaps are real.

The solution is not just one restaurant. It's a strategy. That strategy might include:

- A small food hall with shared prep space, reducing overhead and increasing diversity.
- A permanent or seasonal food truck pad, incubating entrepreneurs while creating a consistent draw.

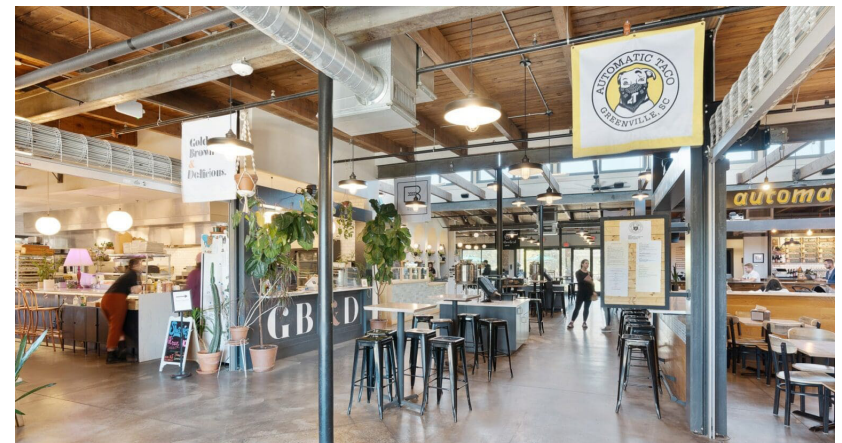
- Partnerships with event planners and Main Street to anchor dining with entertainment.

Here's how this might look as it plays out in Wauchula from a unit standpoint:

- 12,000 sf (conservative 30% capture) could support 3 to 5 small-to-mid-size independent restaurants
- 23,000 sf (50% capture) could support 6 to 9 independent restaurants, or a combination of:
 - » 1–2 anchor restaurants (3,500–5,000 sf)
 - » 3–5 smaller eateries or café-style concepts
 - » 1 shared kitchen or food hall with multiple vendors

Looking ahead, a potential hotel development downtown that includes on-site dining, further reinforcing demand and creating spillover opportunity for others.

Done right, the restaurant ecosystem won't just plug a gap; it will transform perceptions of downtown as a destination. And that transformation will extend far beyond the table.



MARKET ANALYSIS

Specialty Food & Beverage (NAICS 4453, 7224)

Between the opportunity for full-service dining and the evolving grocery landscape discussed below lies a space uniquely suited to downtown Wauchula: specialty food and beverage. These are the wine bars, dessert cafés, bakeries, craft beverage taprooms, and hybrid café-markets that extend dwell time, build cultural identity, and bring vitality to evenings and weekends.

The data suggests there's real demand. Beverage-specific retail leakage—from alcohol to soft drinks to sweet treats—totals more than \$5.1 million annually. But the story goes beyond numbers.

Downtown Wauchula already enjoys strong daytime visitation and regional foot traffic for events. What it lacks is small-format businesses that keep people downtown just a little longer. A place to get coffee and linger. A place to meet friends after work. A place to unwind after dinner with something sweet or something crafted.

Depending on the format and operator:

- 30% capture = ~\$1.5 million
- 50% capture = ~\$2.5 million
- This supports 2 to 3 small specialty food or beverage businesses.

This could include:

- A dessert café or artisan bakery that serves both morning and evening crowds. This is already underway.
- A craft beverage tasting room (coffee, beer, or wine) with regional branding appeal.
- A hybrid café-market offering retail shelves by day and communal tasting events at night

These businesses can thrive in smaller spaces (1,000 to 2,500 square feet) and often work best when clustered with restaurants, markets, and foot traffic generators.

Most importantly, they function as low-barrier, high-experience spaces: the kind of places where new entrepreneurs test concepts, where residents form habits, and where visitors get their first taste of what makes Wauchula unique.

In a revitalized downtown, specialty food and beverage businesses are not afterthoughts—they're the bridge between daily life and destination. And Wauchula's market demand is clearly ready for them.



MARKET ANALYSIS

Grocery and General Merchandise (NAICS 445 + 452)

Leakage: \$23.3 million combined

Grocery is one of the most complex and consequential categories in Wauchula's market story. While the city is served by longstanding supermarket anchors, the dynamics are shifting quickly. Wauchula's Winn-Dixie is currently being converted into an Aldi, signaling a major shift in the grocery landscape toward deep-discount formats. And while Walmart remains a dominant retail force in the market, its model favors scale over nuance. Meanwhile, Publix—headquartered in nearby Lakeland—still has no presence in Wauchula.

These changes matter downtown. If the grocery landscape tips more heavily toward low-cost, national chains, there may be growing space in the market for a new kind of food destination, one that blends specialty grocery, local produce, and prepared meals into a cohesive, experience-based concept.

Downtowns around the country are increasingly hosting:

- Fresh markets with curated grocery items and ready-to-eat meals
- Hybrid spaces combining deli counters, wine bars, and cooking classes
- Cultural food stores that serve and reflect the diversity of their communities

The trade area clearly supports it:

- At 30% capture = \$7M in sales
- At 50% capture = \$11.5M

This isn't about replicating the supermarket; it's about offering something different: something smaller, fresher, and more human-scaled that enhances downtown's role as a neighborhood hub rather than a one-stop warehouse.

A downtown food concept of this kind could also serve as a natural partner to the growing restaurant ecosystem. Shared vendors, cross-promotion, and even a shared commissary or prep kitchen could help operators reduce costs and create synergy. In short: grocery may not seem like a downtown story at first glance, but given the regional shifts underway, it might be one of downtown's biggest chances to lead rather than react.



MARKET ANALYSIS

Transition: From Dining to Downtown Retail

With food and beverage serving as downtown’s social core, retail plays a complementary but equally essential role. Wauchula’s downtown already features a mix of longstanding gift shops and newer retail concepts that attract both local and regional shoppers, especially during events. These businesses, often operated by committed locals, have demonstrated that downtown can function as a place of commerce, not just character. What’s needed now is scale, variety, and alignment with emerging retail trends.

Clothing & Specialty Retail (NAICS 4481)

Leakage: \$10.2 million

Among all the retail categories examined, apparel stood out in both the data and the public input. Community members consistently mentioned the need for better shopping options, particularly for everyday wear, youth fashion, and items that reflect local style without requiring a trip to a mall.

And they’re right. The market is leaking over \$10 million annually in clothing sales.

- 30% capture = \$3M would support ~7,500 sf of retail space
- 50% capture = \$5M would support ~12,500 sf of retail space

But not all square feet are equal. In small downtowns, the sweet spot for independent boutiques tends to fall between 1,200 and 2,000 square feet, depending on product type and turnover. That means downtown Wauchula could support 4–6 boutique-scale tenants—either clustered around a single block or dispersed strategically across the core.

What’s working nationally—and increasingly in Florida’s smaller cities—is not department-store scale. It’s style with personality: shops that sell curated selections, feature regionally made goods, or pair clothing with home decor, gifts, or wellness products. Concepts that offer custom fitting, subscription boxes, or personalized styling events stand out even more.

Just as food is becoming an experience, so too is retail. The best small-town shops are extensions of the owner’s personality, and when clustered together, they become part of a broader downtown brand.



MARKET ANALYSIS

A Reimagined Emporium for Vintage & Upcycled Goods

Another scalable opportunity is the development of a multi-tenant retail emporium focused not on dusty antiques, but on vintage, upcycled, and handmade goods. These retail collectives have been thriving in walkable districts, especially in towns with a blend of creative entrepreneurs and modest commercial rents.

This could be a repurposed downtown building subdivided into small retail bays, or an open-concept interior with shared displays and a unified checkout. Think less “antique mall” and more regional maker’s market with a fixed location.

Vendors might include:

- Upcycled clothing and home décor
- Vintage housewares or records
- Regional candle, soap, and accessory makers
- Print artists and handmade crafts
- Rotating pop-up booths for emerging businesses

The beauty of this model is that it encourages low-barrier entry while promoting consistency and experimentation. It also extends hours and drives foot traffic during events, with vendor-hosted workshops, evening tastings, or maker markets layered into the mix.



Wellness-Oriented Retail (NAICS 446 Subcategories)

While Wauchula already has a strong base of gyms, dance studios, salons, and estheticians downtown, retail data from the 15-minute trade area points to an opportunity in adjacent wellness-oriented retail, rather than an expansion of personal services themselves.

Categories such as health supplements, beauty supplies, and specialty wellness products collectively show more than \$2.3 million in unmet demand, suggesting space for new downtown retailers that support the community’s health and wellness goals without duplicating existing service providers.

These types of retailers could include:

- A beauty and skincare boutique
- A health supplements store with local/regional branding
- A wellness-focused retailer offering holistic products, gifts, and lifestyle goods
- A boutique offering cosmetics, natural skincare, or beauty supplies
- A health and supplement shop with regional or organic product lines
- A lifestyle retail store blending health goods with home or gift items

These businesses typically succeed in 800–1,500 square foot storefronts or additions to existing service business. Importantly, the opportunity is retail-specific, not an indication of demand for additional salons, gyms, or personal services.

MARKET ANALYSIS

The Big Picture

Downtown Wauchula is surrounded by opportunity. The numbers confirm what the community already knows: there is both need and desire for a more complete downtown experience. Capturing even a fraction of that leakage can reposition downtown as a daily destination, not just a pass-through.

But doing so requires more than just data. It requires site readiness, policy alignment, investor confidence, and public leadership. The next sections will address those tools because while the market may be supportive, it cannot do the work alone.

Geofencing: Proof of Activity, Not Just Potential

The market analysis tells us what people are spending as well as what is missing. But understanding where people go, how often, and when they engage with downtown adds another layer of insight. That's where geofencing comes in. By tracking anonymized mobile device activity, we can see actual patterns of visitation: how many people are coming downtown, where they're coming from, what time of day they're most active, and how often they return. This data doesn't just confirm demand—it reveals behavior. And in a place like Wauchula, where the perception of downtown's vitality can vary widely, having that evidence matters.

In this study, a "visitor" is defined as someone whose device was present in the downtown study area for at least seven minutes. The analysis covers the period from January 1, 2023, to December 1, 2024.

Between January 2023 and December 2024:

- Downtown Wauchula recorded 1.2 million visits
- 124,000 unique devices were captured, averaging 12.54 visits per person
- Visitors skewed older than the local population, with an average age of 43
- Income data showed visitors earning quite a bit more than local medians at \$66,914 per household
- Peak activity occurred Friday through Saturday, mostly from late morning through early evening.

Visitor Trends: Who Is Actually Downtown, and When?

Visitor Volume

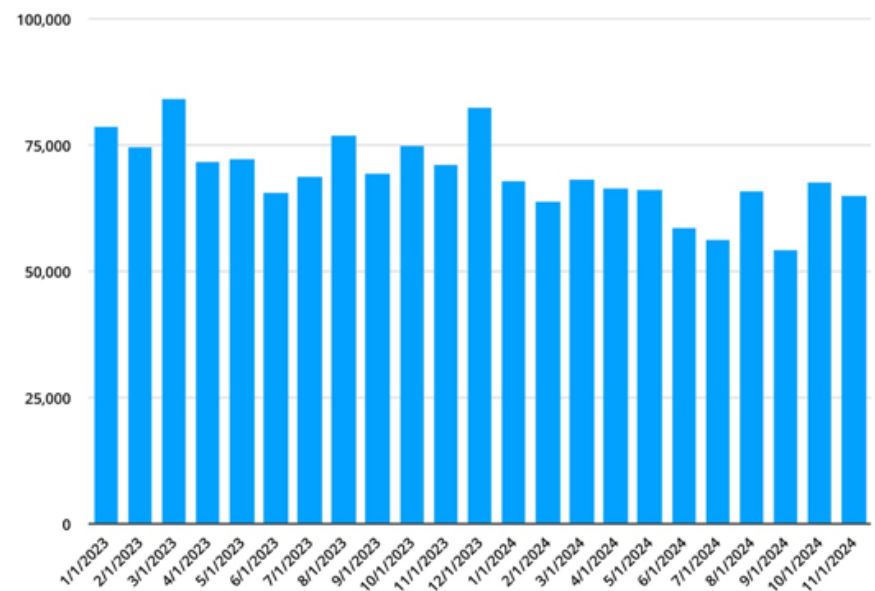
During this time, 1.6 million visits were made to downtown Wauchula by approximately 127,000 unique individuals.

Visits by Week

Weekly data from January 2023 through November 2024 shows consistent visitation, with peaks aligning around spring and late fall, likely due to seasonal events and holidays. Weekly traffic generally ranges between 13,000 to 20,000, with some surges above 23,000, often corresponding to special event weeks.

Visits by Month

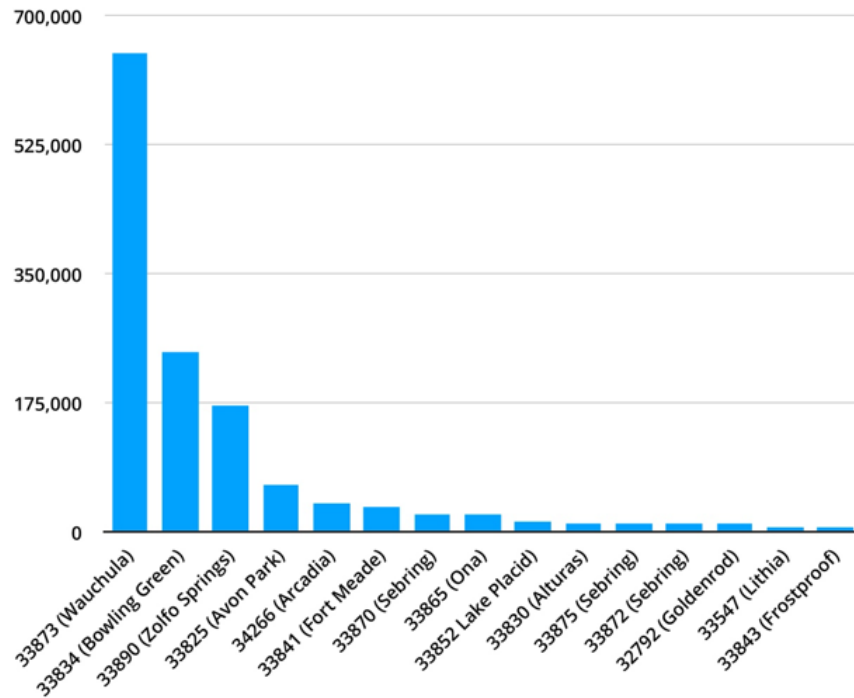
Monthly visits display similar seasonality. The district saw higher activity in March and December of 2023, while mid-2024 showed a dip, likely due to summer heat or reduced programming. Monthly visits range from approximately 54,000 to 85,000, highlighting the need for sustained activation strategies during slower months.



MARKET ANALYSIS

Top 15 ZIP Codes

Most visitors are local or regional. The top three ZIP codes—Wauchula (33873), Bowling Green (33834), and Zolfo Springs (33890)—account for over 1 million visits combined, indicating that downtown primarily serves a regional audience within Hardee County and nearby towns.

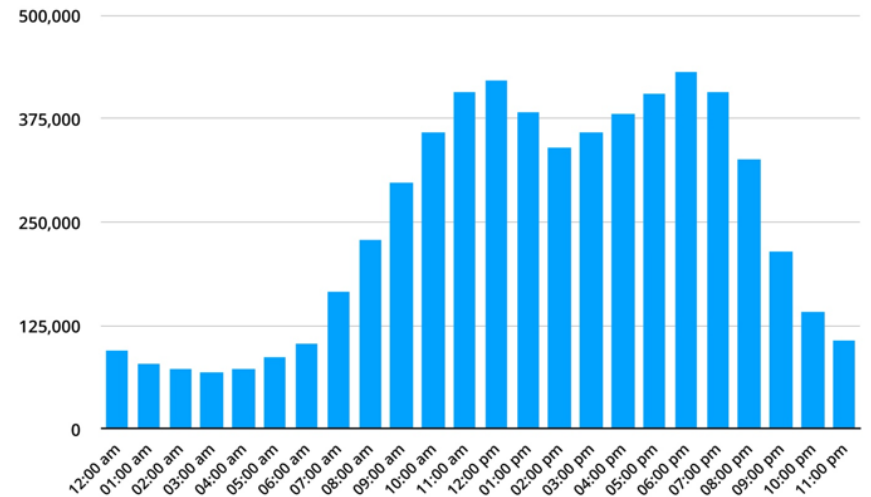


Visits by Days of the Week

Fridays led all days in visitation, followed closely by Thursdays and Tuesdays, with Sunday being the slowest day. This pattern suggests that downtown Wauchula sees strong weekday and end-of-week traffic, presenting opportunities for retail and dining promotions Thursday–Saturday.

Visits by Time of Day

Activity is heavily concentrated between 8:00 AM and 9:00 PM, with traffic ramping up after 7:00 AM and peaking between 11:00 AM and 7:00 PM. This accounts for over 3.1 million visits in that 8-hour stretch—the busiest window in the dataset. This underscores the importance of ensuring shops, restaurants, and events are active during peak daytime hours.



Top 15 Other Destinations

Visitors to downtown Wauchula are also frequenting regional commercial centers such as Walmart, Lakeshore Mall, and McDonald’s, as well as destinations in Sebring, Bartow, and Orlando. This demonstrates that Wauchula’s downtown is part of a broader regional consumer ecosystem and may benefit from a boost in positive reinforced shop Wauchula/Hardee promotion.

MARKET ANALYSIS

The Suburban Challenge: Capturing More of What Already Exists

Even within Wauchula, retail demand is being met outside of downtown. Suburban strip centers, stand-alone fast-food, and auto-oriented shopping venues capture much of the city's existing purchasing power.

Downtown cannot and should not compete with those centers on their terms. But it can differentiate. It can offer experiences, aesthetics, walkability, and multi-purpose spaces that strip development never will. That's what's missing, and that's what the data suggests can be captured if the environment supports it.

Market Takeaway

The numbers are clear that Downtown Wauchula can support more than it currently offers. But that supportable space is not infinite as outlined above in the retail leakage analysis., and the types of uses that are missing (restaurants, fitness, retail) are sensitive to environment.

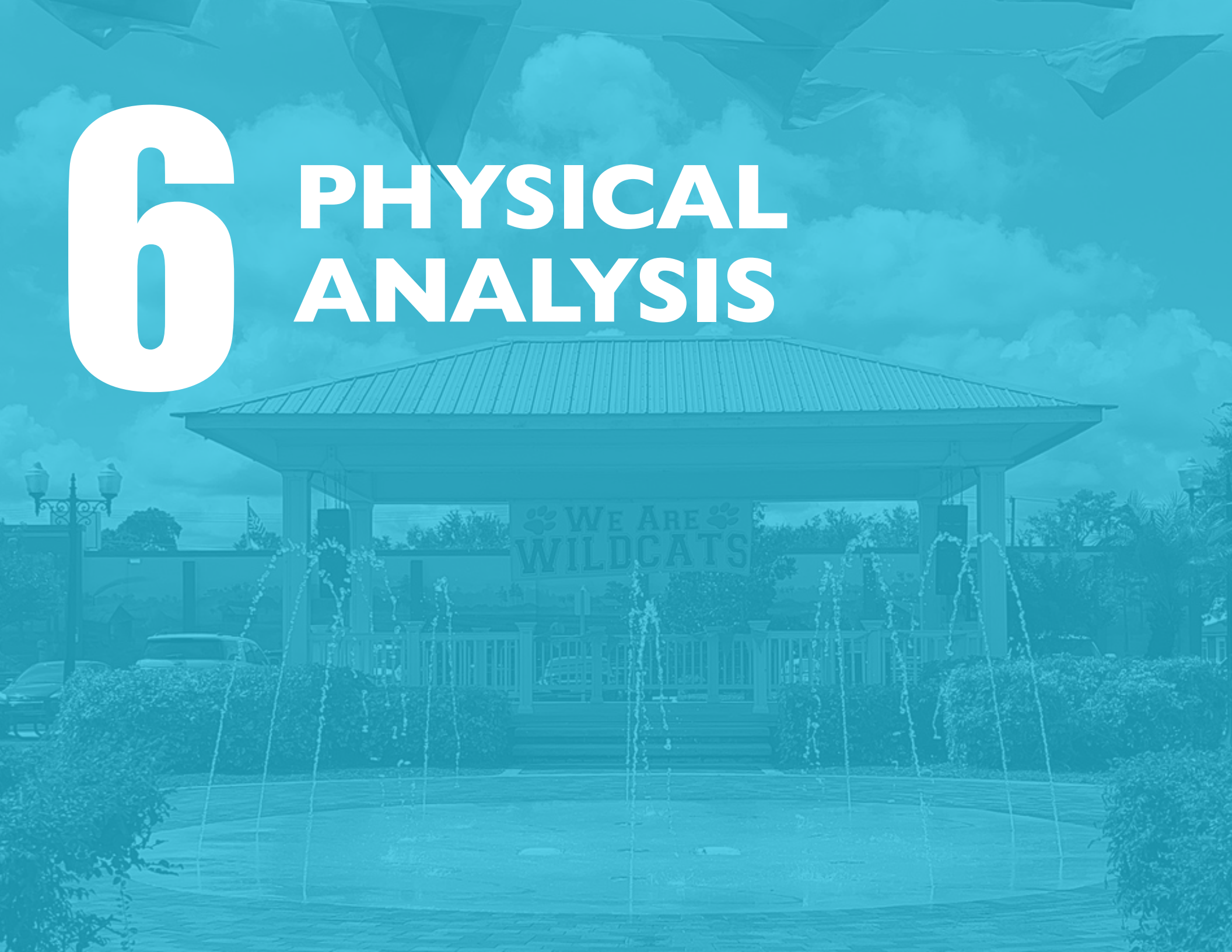
What the market tells us is this:

Yet another reinforcement that there is enough demand to support multiple new businesses, particularly in food, apparel, and select retail categories adjacent to wellness and personal care, such as cosmetics and supplements. Moreover, that demand will not be captured without intentional planning, incentives, and a clear message that downtown is open for business. The gap between potential and performance is not demand—it's delivery.



6

PHYSICAL ANALYSIS



PHYSICAL ANALYSIS

Downtown Wauchula, Florida, presents a blend of small-town charm and historical character, shaped by its agricultural roots and close-knit community. As you enter the area, the layout is organized around Main Street, where restored brick buildings and vintage storefronts create a nostalgic atmosphere. Many of these structures date back to the early 20th century, showcasing architectural details like decorative cornices and arched windows. The area is pedestrian-friendly, with wide sidewalks and street amenities such as benches and outdoor seating.

Physical reconnaissance of downtown reveals a mix of active businesses and underutilized spaces. There are family-owned restaurants, shops, and local service providers, with some storefronts currently vacant or in need of renovation. The area's compact size allows for thorough visual assessment on foot, making it easier to identify potential sites for revitalization or development. Street parking is generally available and free, although limited in certain sections during peak hours. Public amenities like the Wauchula Train Depot and Heritage Park add cultural value and provide focal points for community engagement.

Observations also highlight the potential for strategic enhancements. Improved signage, landscaping, and lighting could further enhance the downtown experience and attract more visitors. There's evidence of local pride in the form of public art and seasonal decorations. However, increased investment in infrastructure, such as updated crosswalks and bicycle-friendly options, could support more dynamic uses. Separated by Highway 17, Downtown Wauchula has an opportunity to expand Main Street revitalization efforts, improve pedestrian safety, and provide economic development opportunities, both to the east and west. With its historic charm and visible potential, downtown Wauchula stands as a strong candidate for thoughtful revitalization that respects its heritage while encouraging future growth.

The “East Side”

East of Highway 17 presents opportunity for public and private investment to expand Downtown. The Historic Wauchula City Hall, home of the Peace River Entertainment & Performing Arts Center, provides a strong anchor to an improved streetscape. R Riveter, a local handmade bag distributor, will be relocating to another location in Hardee County, providing an opportunity for infill, redevelopment, and potential downtown housing. A vacant site is at the corner of Highway 17 North and East Main Street and has the potential to be an anchor development with pedestrian improvements to connect to the Historic Wauchula Depot and additional downtown restaurant and retail destinations.



PHYSICAL ANALYSIS

The “West Side”

West of Highway 17, similar to the East, presents an opportunity for Downtown to grow and infill with mixed-use and residential developments. Existing streetscape improvements with on-street parking, landscape, raised planters and site furnishings terminate at North 8th Avenue. At the end of the streetscape improvements, there is a vacant site (previous blighted building removed) with available sites along North and South 8th Avenue for retail and restaurant developments. Site and development plans for existing sites and buildings are underway with private development corporations and, with public realm improvements, will expand downtown offerings.



PHYSICAL ANALYSIS

Infrastructure and Streetscape Conditions

Main Street in Downtown Wauchula showcases a revitalized streetscape that harmonizes historical preservation with modern enhancements. Since its designation as a Florida Main Street community in 1995, the area has undergone significant transformations, including the creation of Heritage Park, the installation of hanging plants throughout the park, and the introduction of seasonal banners. These efforts have fostered a vibrant community atmosphere, making downtown Wauchula a center of activity enjoyed by locals and visitors alike.

Infrastructure improvements have been a focal point in downtown Wauchula's development. Notably, the city initiated a milling and resurfacing project on East Main Street (SR 636) to address pavement conditions. Additionally, the Wauchula Community Redevelopment Agency has undertaken parking enhancements at the intersection of US-17 and Main Street, including the construction of approximately 34,000 square feet of asphalt parking area complemented by lighting and landscaping improvements. These projects aim to improve accessibility and aesthetic appeal, contributing to the overall functionality and charm of the downtown area.

While the aesthetics and functionality of the Downtown streetscape is adequate, there are areas where improvements would increase opportunities for economic development. Consideration should be given to removing the raised planters for a wider sidewalk and to reduce conflicts with vehicular parking. Canopy trees, flowering shrubs, and seasonal flowers and grasses should be planted and maintained in all bulb outs. Crosswalks across Main Street should be stamped asphalt to match all cross streets.



PHYSICAL ANALYSIS

Walkability, Parking, Lighting

Downtown Wauchula offers a walkable environment, particularly along Main Street west of Highway 17 North, where wide sidewalks, pedestrian-friendly crossings, and accessible storefronts create an inviting atmosphere. The area features amenities such as Heritage Park, providing shaded seating areas and a central gathering space that enhances the pedestrian experience. Crossing Highway 17 North has been a deterrent to Downtown investment along East Main Street. While the three-lane crossing does have pedestrian signage and push button activation, the high speed and noise from the irregular pavement is a noticeable impediment. While only the paving has been identified to move forward, the pedestrian enhancements proposed in FDOT's schematic plan—such as lane reductions and safety upgrades—are not currently scheduled for implementation.

Parking in downtown Wauchula is generally accessible, with a mix of on-street spaces and dedicated lots. The Wauchula Community Redevelopment Agency has initiated projects to improve parking infrastructure, including the construction of approximately 34,000 square feet of asphalt parking area complemented by lighting and landscaping enhancements. Street lighting has been upgraded in various parts of downtown, contributing to a safer and more welcoming environment during evening hours.



PHYSICAL ANALYSIS

Key Challenges: Vacancies, Code Issues, Visual Clutter

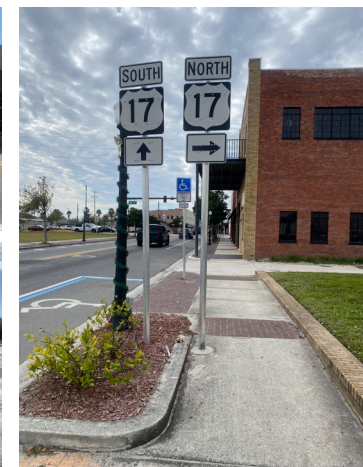
Key challenges for Downtown improvements include vacancies, blighted buildings, code compliance, visual clutter, and aesthetic and physical improvements.

Aesthetic and physical challenges occur along Main Street. The brick pavers and crosswalks are unlevel in some places and create hazards for pedestrians and raise concerns regarding ADA compliance. The raised planters along Main Street create conflicts for parallel parking and deter residents and visitors from utilizing a park and walk mentality.

George Burris Avenue, where an opportunity exists to develop a festival street, overhead power lines and trash refuse areas create visual clutter. Signage is duplicative, and consolidation of FDOT, redundant County pedestrian, and local signage should be considered.

A key challenge to the expansion of Downtown east is the pedestrian crossing of Highway 17 North. While pedestrian improvements have been completed, the speed of vehicles, distance to cross, and lack of amenities are a clear barrier to private investment. FDOT proposed improvements should be reconsidered as private development plans are integrated into public realm improvements (eg. Streetscape, lighting, landscape, etc.).

The physical conditions of downtown Wauchula tell a clear story: the bones are good, the charm is authentic, and the groundwork has been laid through years of incremental investment. But just as the market requires more than desire, the built environment requires more than aesthetics. The next layer of revitalization depends not only on what downtown looks like, but how easy or difficult it is to build, renovate, or invest in it. And that's where policy comes into play.



The background image shows a public square with a large fountain in the foreground and a gazebo in the middle ground. The gazebo has a sign that reads "WE ARE WILDCATS" with paw prints on either side. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent teal color.

7

**LAND
DEVELOPMENT
CODE REVIEW
FOR DOWNTOWN WAUCHULA**

LAND DEVELOPMENT CODE REVIEW

Every thriving downtown is underpinned by a development code that either opens doors or impedes opening them. In Wauchula, well-meaning but some outdated regulations may put the greatest burden on the very areas the city most wants to activate. This chapter looks at the current land development regulations through a downtown-specific lens. It identifies structural barriers in zoning, signage, parking, and process, and offers best practices that can help Wauchula unlock development potential without compromising quality, character, or community intent.

Key Issues Identified in Current Code

1. HC-I and Design Review

Wauchula does maintain a distinct zoning district tailored to its historic downtown core: Historic Downtown Commercial (HC-I), as defined in Section 2.02.02.09 of the City's Unified Land Development Code. The HC-I district was created with a stated purpose of fostering pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use development that respects the city's historic structures, while allowing for compatible commercial and residential activity.

This designation addresses several downtown-specific concerns, including reduced reliance on off-street parking, allowances for upper-floor residential, and discretion for the Development Director to limit high-traffic uses that would disrupt the character of the area. The code also includes specific exceptions for parking in historic structures and encourages design compatibility with adjacent historic buildings.

Moreover, the City of Wauchula has adopted historic preservation guidelines and a Certificate of Appropriateness process, managed by the Historic Preservation Board, which applies to properties within the HC-I district and designated historic districts. These include criteria for designation, design standards based on the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, and review processes for alterations, demolitions, and new construction within the district.

Recommendation:

- While the framework exists, there is room for refinement. The HC-I district and overlay could benefit from:
- A consolidated visual-based form code or design manual to simplify interpretation.
- Streamlined administrative approvals for projects aligned with adopted downtown plans.
- A more proactive incentive structure tied to the historic overlay to attract reinvestment.

2. Parking Requirements Not Fully Calibrated to Downtown

The Historic Downtown Commercial (HC-I) zone does not include parking requirements. Although the city-wide off-street parking regulations (Article 3.03.00) include several provisions that offer flexibility for developments in general and downtown specifically, they stop short of establishing a clear, context-sensitive standard for the HC-I zone. Downtown has exemptions allowing public and on-street parking to satisfy requirements. Notable elements include:

- Shared Parking (Section 3.03.04(D)): Allows for reductions when uses have staggered peak hours, contingent upon a parking study and a legal agreement between property owners.
- Deferred Parking (Section 3.03.04(C)): Developers may defer required spaces through submission of a study showing lower anticipated demand. However, they must reserve land to accommodate the full parking count in the future if necessary.
- Historic Structures Exception (Section 3.03.02(D)): Off-street parking requirements may be waived or reduced if they would hinder a compact row of commercial buildings, provided the use is not auto-oriented and the reduction supports the historic and pedestrian character of downtown.
- Off-site Parking (Section 3.03.04(B)): Permitted under certain conditions, including proximity and compatibility of use.

LAND DEVELOPMENT CODE REVIEW

Recommendations:

- Revise the code to include automatic parking reductions or exemptions for parcels in HC-I, particularly for small-scale development, reuse of historic buildings, or mixed-use projects. A payment-in-lieu option, combined with designated municipal/shared parking lots, could further reduce barriers to investment.
- Shared and deferred parking rely on staff discretion and detailed traffic engineering studies, which can deter small-scale infill or adaptive reuse. This may need to be examined.

3. Use Restrictions May Need Slight Modification

The City of Wauchula has established the HC-I Historic Downtown Commercial zoning district, which is indeed intended to support pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use development and includes provisions for upper-floor residential, small-scale retail, and low-density multifamily housing. However, the permitted and conditional uses are drawn from a generalized Table of Land Uses that lacks fine-grained categorization for emerging or hybrid uses such as artisan manufacturing, craft beverage production, or micro-retail suites.

For example, while light manufacturing and finished goods assembly (such as those resembling R. Riveter’s operations) are defined in Article 9, there is no explicit linkage to their allowance within the HC-I district without referencing the generalized land use table or pursuing a conditional or special exception use route. Similarly, craft food and beverage manufacturing, though defined, is separated into “light” and “heavy” industrial use and may be limited to C-2 or I districts. There’s a lack of clarity if such uses can occur in HC-I when paired with retail or tasting room formats, despite their increasing presence in comparable downtowns

Outdoor dining is not explicitly referenced in HC-I provisions, though it may be allowed by practice. There is also limited language about sidewalk cafés, patios, or accessory outdoor uses by right. Live/work units are not directly named or

encouraged in any residential or commercial category, despite their relevance to downtown revitalization and small-scale entrepreneurship. Home occupations are allowed under Section 2.04.03 and Article 9 definitions, but they are still restricted to largely residential neighborhoods and do not appear to support expanded mixed-use downtown environments where dual-use is desirable.

Recommendation:

- Update the use table and HC-I provisions to explicitly accommodate:
 - » Craft manufacturing and assembly with on-site retail.
 - » Micro-retail and flexible retail bay structures.
 - » Live/work units and hybrid commercial-residential uses.
 - » Outdoor dining, sidewalk vending, and accessory patio spaces by right.

4. Signage Regulations Present a Good Foundation—but May Still Constrain Creative Expression

Wauchula’s sign regulations offer a solid start for a walkable downtown, especially in the HC-I Historic Downtown Commercial district. Projecting signs, under-canopy signage, and modest exceptions for historic character are allowed, and the Historic Preservation Board has some discretionary authority to approve deviations in HC-I. However, the overall framework remains rooted in formulaic frontage-based calculations and limited to traditional sign types.

Critically, the code does not go quite far enough to actively encourage creative or artistic signage, such as sculptural, integrated, or custom-format signs that are increasingly part of placemaking in small downtowns. The permit pathway also lacks an express fast-track or administrative process for signs that align with adopted Main Street or design guidelines. These constraints may unintentionally limit small businesses from adding character, clarity, or vibrancy to their storefronts.

LAND DEVELOPMENT CODE REVIEW

5. Administrative Processes Lack a Clear Pathway for Downtown-Oriented Projects

The current development review process in Wauchula—including conditional uses, variances, and design approvals—can involve multi-step hearings and board-level reviews that may unintentionally discourage small-scale infill or entrepreneurial investment in downtown.

While the code does offer procedures for conditional and special uses, there is no clear, expedited pathway for projects that align with the adopted downtown vision or Main Street revitalization goals. This means there is no formalized “fast track” or administrative relief mechanism for proposals that are demonstrably in the public interest such as those that restore historic buildings, add upper-floor housing, or align with Main Street design standards.

In communities similar to Wauchula, successful downtown plans often rely on streamlined, staff-level approvals or administrative design review for conforming projects, reducing uncertainty and timeline risk for small developers. Encouraging the types of development this plan supports will require procedural clarity and flexibility, especially for projects that meet the spirit of the zoning code.

6. Design Standards Are Not Fully Calibrated for Historic Downtown Context

Article 5 of the code provides baseline development standards (e.g., height, setbacks, landscaping), but these appear to be written primarily for conventional commercial or suburban development. As such, they fall short in guiding context-sensitive infill or adaptive reuse in Wauchula’s historic downtown.

The HC-1 district acknowledges downtown character, but the code lacks block-sensitive or frontage-type standards that reflect the nuances of historic storefront patterns, such as narrow lots, zero setbacks, or articulated facades. No visual guidance or form-based standards are included to help applicants or staff evaluate building massing, scale, or rhythm. These standards are critical in maintaining architectural cohesion. The result is that some new construction or renovations may either overreach or under-deliver, unintentionally diluting the quality of place downtown Wauchula is trying to cultivate.

Encouraging a strategic mix of uses by building depth (for example, retail or restaurant in the front and office/professional in the rear) could help preserve vibrancy while accommodating multiple tenant types.

Introducing a simple, graphic-based design guide, or incorporating form-based overlays, could provide the clarity needed to ensure new development contributes to the downtown’s visual and functional fabric.

7. Code Language and Format Limit Accessibility for Everyday Users

The existing code is largely written in legalistic, text-heavy language with few tables, visuals, or explanatory notes. While this may satisfy legal sufficiency, it limits usability for property owners, business operators, and small-scale developers—the very people this plan hopes to empower. Understanding that the code is being rewritten, the following suggestions would help both staff and the public.

A modest reorganization—starting with summary tables, process flowcharts, and illustrative examples for downtown-specific scenarios—would go a long way toward making the code a tool for activation rather than a barrier to reinvestment.

LAND DEVELOPMENT CODE REVIEW

Best Practices for Downtown-Focused Codes

The City of Wauchula’s code is generally sound but would benefit from refinement rather than reinvention. The following best practices are offered to introduce new tools, not restate the existing code analysis:

1. Create a Visual Companion to the Code

Develop a simple illustrated handbook separate from the ordinance that helps property owners and small-scale developers interpret key requirements, such as building placement, signage, and pedestrian-friendly design.

2. Introduce a Downtown Minor Works Process

Allow staff-level approval for small exterior changes (awnings, paint, signage) to reduce procedural burden while maintaining character. This preserves consistency without discouraging improvement.

3. Pilot a Temporary Use Program

Adopt a framework for short-term or pop-up uses in vacant lots or storefronts, such as retail carts, food trailers, or art installations. This builds vitality and lowers entry barriers for emerging businesses.

4. Establish Pre-Entitlement Templates for Target Sites

For priority infill parcels, create pre-reviewed development templates or “ready-to-go” site programs with pre-calculated parking waivers, building envelopes, and streamlined approvals. This approach is particularly effective in public-private partnerships.

5. Allow Adaptive Use Flexibility in Historic Buildings

Permit a broader set of uses in historic structures including small-scale manufacturing, assembly, and mixed commercial production, without triggering onerous upgrades or conditional use reviews.

6. Encourage Vertical Mixed Use Through Incentives

Offer density bonuses, expedited review, or small façade grants for projects that include residential units above commercial space, reinforcing housing and foot traffic downtown.

Downtown Wauchula has all the ingredients of a revitalization success story—history, identity, walkability, and a community that cares deeply about its future. The previous chapters of this plan confirm what local leaders have long sensed: the market is ready, the partners are aligned, and the community is engaged.

Conclusion

What this section adds is clarity. It confirms that Wauchula’s current land development code is not fundamentally broken, but that thoughtful refinements could unlock new opportunities for investment, creativity, and growth. It also highlights the need to keep improving the user experience, both for developers and for residents, through simplified processes, flexible standards, and clear alignment with downtown’s goals.

Most importantly, this is not a chapter about barriers; it’s about readiness. The analysis above shows that Wauchula is not just hoping for progress; it is preparing for it. With the right development tools, continued collaboration, and a shared commitment to reinvestment, downtown can evolve into a more complete version of itself: a place where history meets opportunity, and where small moves add up to big change.

The next chapters focus on target sites, development concepts, and implementation, and marks a transition from analysis to action. With the groundwork laid, the focus now turns to planning tangible projects, prioritizing investments, and equipping partners to deliver results. Wauchula doesn’t just need analysis—it needs a roadmap.

8

TARGET SITES & DEVELOPMENT CONCEPTS



TARGET SITES & DEVELOPMENT CONCEPTS

Downtown revitalization is not just about policy; it's also about property. In Wauchula, that means identifying where momentum is possible and what it will take to bring stalled or underutilized sites back into productive use.

The following section introduces a set of catalytic properties, each with unique constraints and potential. These are not the only properties with promise, but they represent a strategic cross-section of what downtown could become: a blend of hospitality, retail, housing, and adaptive reuse that reinforces walkability and economic vibrancy. It is important to note that while these specific properties were identified through an iterative process with the community, they also represent model locations and typologies that can be replicated on other sites and with other buildings. This is critical because not every site will develop as it is proposed here, and other opportunities may arise. These sites can be viewed in three ways:

1. A portfolio of sites that can be marketed to investors for public private partnerships.
2. Synthesized alongside tactical recommendations to come in the next chapter into a plan for the future.
3. Templates that can be replicated and used over and over on different sites.

Before diving into individual site concepts, it's critical to understand the conditions shaping real estate in downtown Wauchula. These dynamics affect every building, every deal, and every attempt at reuse. They also form the backdrop for why specific public or private interventions may be needed as part of a future action strategy.

Key Real Estate Challenges in Downtown Wauchula

Low Rent Rates: Low rent rates can devalue properties, making them less attractive to investors and property owners. When rent income is reduced, property owners may struggle to cover maintenance and operational costs, which discourages reinvestment. As rent prices remain low, the area may attract lower-quality tenants, contributing to an environment of instability and stagnation. This cycle can further erode the economic vitality of the district, creating challenges in attracting new investments and hindering long-term growth.

Lack of Spaces for Lease: A shortage of available leasing options significantly limits the ability of new businesses to enter the market, stifling potential economic growth. Existing businesses looking to expand also face constraints, which could result in them closing or relocating to more favorable locations. Furthermore, a lack of spaces for lease makes the area less attractive to developers and entrepreneurs looking to invest or open businesses, ultimately restricting the area's capacity to diversify and thrive economically.

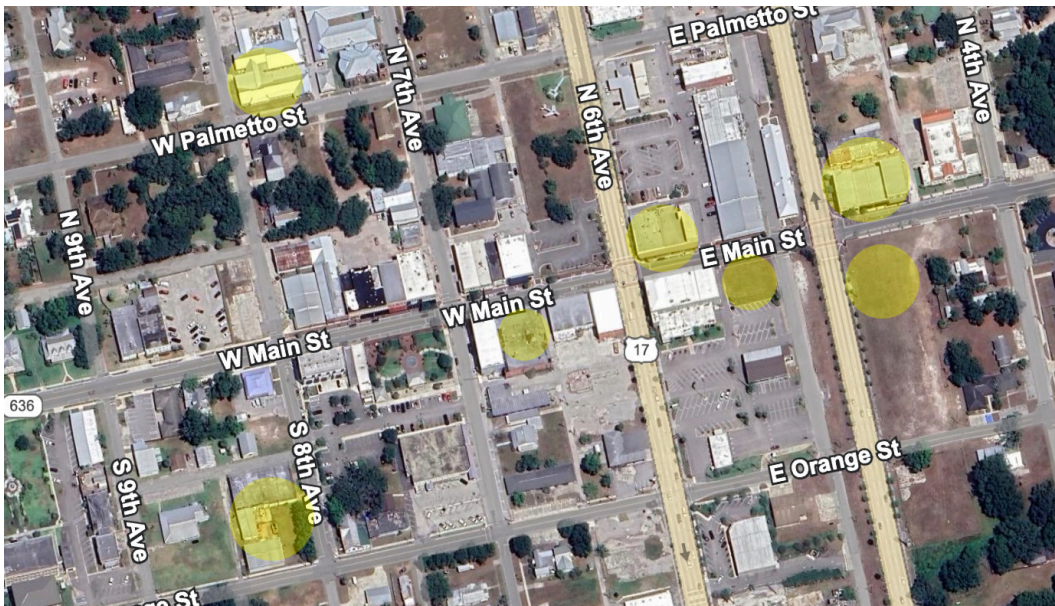
Lack of Local Development Experience: The absence of experienced local developers means redevelopment projects may lack the necessary expertise to navigate challenges such as zoning, financing, and construction. This can result in poorly executed or failed projects that don't align with the area's needs. Developers without a deep understanding of the community's market conditions may struggle to create developments that are viable and sustainable. Additionally, the lack of a skilled development network can deter outside investors, who may be concerned about the feasibility of projects without local expertise.

TARGET SITES & DEVELOPMENT CONCEPTS

Deferred Maintenance of Unoccupied Properties: When unoccupied properties are left in disrepair, they can become eyesores that contribute to blight and negatively impact the overall value of the area. This not only diminishes the area’s appeal but also creates health and safety risks, such as structural issues and fire hazards. These problems make the properties less attractive to potential tenants and customers, and increase the cost of future renovations or redevelopment, further deterring investment. Over time, the neglect of properties can lead to a downward spiral, where property values decrease and community confidence diminishes, ultimately slowing down revitalization efforts.

DIY Ability: The ability for property owners to save on costs comes down to their own ability to do the physical work themselves (also known as “do it yourself (DIY)” or “sweat equity”) versus having to hire out contractors to do the work. The more work a property owner can do themselves, presumably at a lower cost than the market, the more savings can be found.

This context frames the need for tailored solutions including design support, financial tools, or technical assistance. These solutions will be explored in the sections that follow. With that foundation in place, we now turn to the properties themselves, beginning with a set of signature sites that offer the greatest potential for near-term catalytic impact.



TARGET SITES

1. 217 East Main Street (Residential / Educational Reuse)
2. 121-125 West Main Street (Micro-Retail)
3. 122 West Main Street (Restaurant)
4. 206 West Palmetto Street (Phased Mixed-Use)
5. 122 South 8th Avenue (Brewery or Maker Hall)
6. George Burris Avenue / 5th Avenue Alley (A Shared Space for the Community)

SITE ONE: 217 E MAIN ST - RESIDENTIAL/EDUCATIONAL REUSE

Anchored at the eastern gateway into downtown, 217 East Main Street presents one of the most flexible and promising reuse opportunities in Wauchula. It is currently home to R. Riveter, a military spouse-operated manufacturing and distribution business which may be relocating out of the site.

The scale and layout open the door to new kinds of energy downtown: a blend of upper-floor housing and institutional or educational reuse that would bring consistent foot traffic, diverse activation, and longer daily presence on the street.

Reuse Potential: A Hub for Living and Learning

While many downtown structures are constrained to retail or restaurant configurations, 217 East Main stands apart. The building's two-story form offers separation of uses—commercial or institutional on the ground floor and housing above—without the need for extensive modification. This layout lends itself particularly well to partnerships with regional institutions such as for an extended learning center.

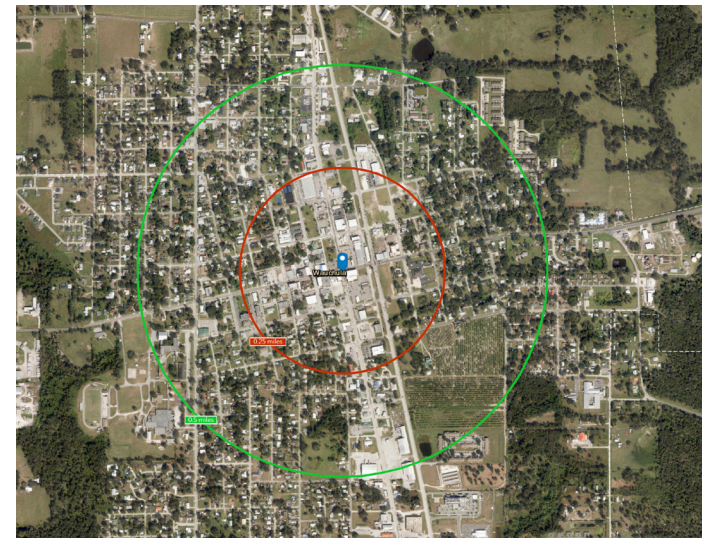
Recent conversations with South Florida State College have identified a clear need for satellite classroom, special programs such as culinary or services, or public coworking/incubator space in a walkable downtown setting. Whether serving workforce development programs, small college outposts, or hybrid community learning centers, the reuse of 217 East Main could provide a natural home for such programming. In doing so, it would also reinforce the city's efforts to position downtown as a space not just for leisure and commerce, but for opportunity and education.

The upper floor could support workforce-oriented residential units, targeting young professionals, interns, or students connected to training or college programs. This type of housing stock is limited in Wauchula, and the proximity to civic buildings, a potential hotel, and the Peace River Center for the Performing Arts, the emerging development adjacent to the site could help establish downtown as a live-work-learn environment.

Site Attributes and Design Potential

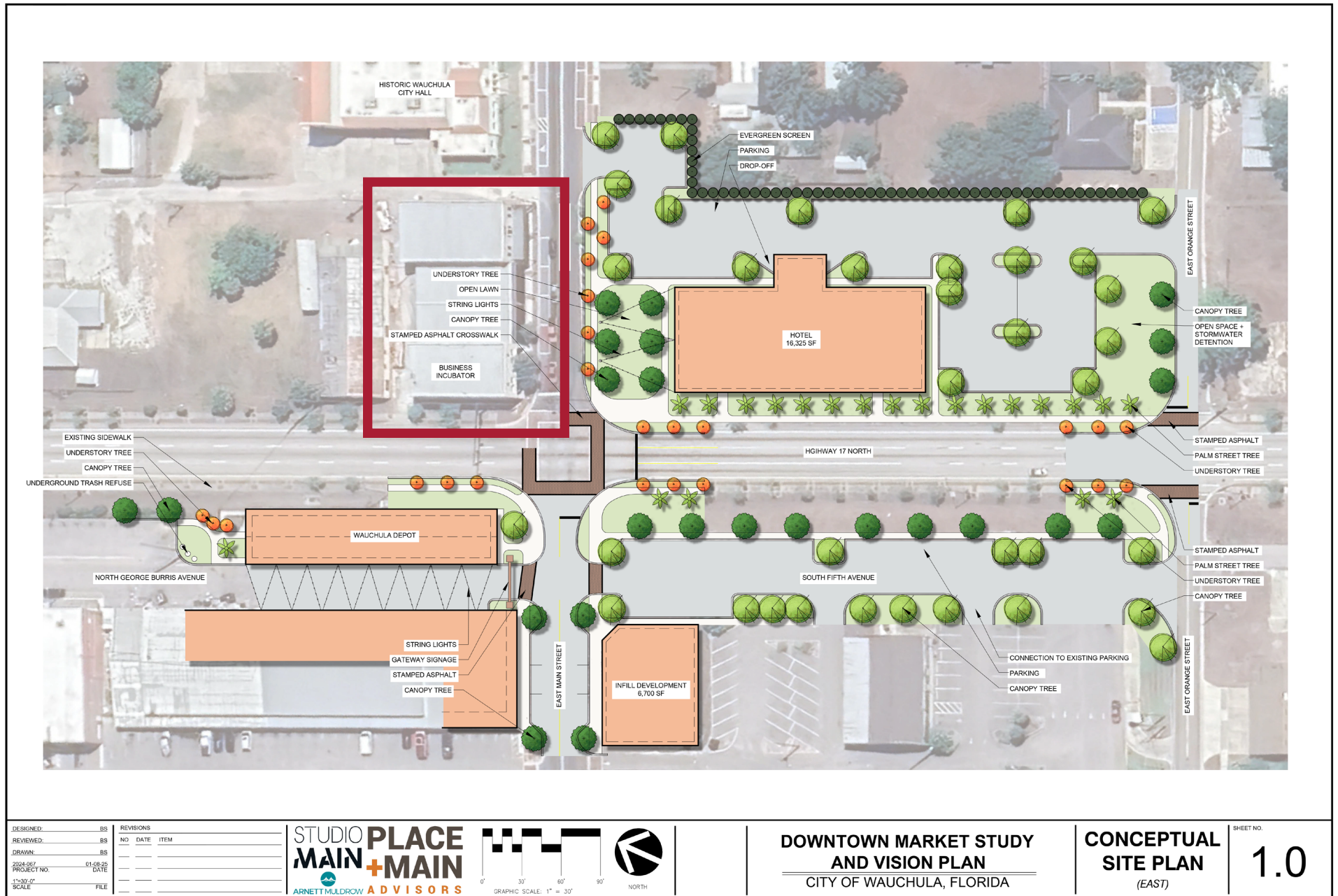
- Solid two-story construction with structural integrity and flexible interiors
- Excellent location at the eastern edge of downtown, helping bridge development across Highway 17
- Direct adjacency to a potential hotel site, creating synergy between lodging, learning, and local life
- Compatible with surrounding uses, especially if paired with improved crosswalks, signage, and landscape enhancements as part of broader streetscape investment

The architectural quality of the building and its corner visibility make it a natural candidate for creative signage, soft lighting, and branding, whether tied to a school, co-working space, or mixed-use enterprise. Large storefront windows provide transparency and the opportunity for active display, while upper-floor fenestration and access could be optimized for residential privacy and outdoor terrace space.



The quarter-mile and half-mile radius of downtown shows that there is limited housing available within a half mile of downtown.

SITE ONE: 217 E MAIN ST - RESIDENTIAL/EDUCATIONAL REUSE



DESIGNED:	BS	REVISIONS
REVIEWED:	BS	NO. DATE ITEM
DRAWN:	BS	
2024-06-27	01-09-25	
PROJECT NO.:		
DATE:		
1"=30'-0"		
SCALE:	FILE	

STUDIO PLACE MAIN+MAIN
ARNETT MULDRUP ADVISORS

GRAPHIC SCALE: 1" = 30'

DOWNTOWN MARKET STUDY AND VISION PLAN
CITY OF WAUCHULA, FLORIDA

CONCEPTUAL SITE PLAN (EAST)

SHEET NO. **1.0**

SITE ONE: 217 E MAIN ST - RESIDENTIAL/EDUCATIONAL REUSE

Financial & Partnership Considerations

While a full pro forma was not developed for this site, the project's feasibility would depend heavily on use mix and the presence of an institutional partner. If used for educational programming, lease rates would likely need to reflect mission-oriented terms, requiring public or philanthropic participation in buildout or operating costs. Housing development on the upper floor could be supported by local or state incentives for adaptive reuse, upper-story housing, or workforce housing strategies.

Potential partners include:

- South Florida State College and/or educational institutions offering workforce certification programs
- University extensions looking to pilot rural educational models
- Nonprofit or mission-driven housing developers experienced in historic rehabilitation

Even without a traditional commercial tenant, the presence of learners, educators, and residents downtown would dramatically increase daytime and early evening activity, supporting surrounding businesses and reinforcing Wauchula's revitalization.



Existing Conditions: The former R. Riveter complex.



Proposed Conditions: The redevelopment of the R. Riveter complex as a business incubator could once again anchor this intersection for entrepreneurial endeavors.

SITE TWO: 121-125 WEST MAIN STREET, MICRO-RETAIL

At the heart of Downtown Wauchula, 121–125 West Main Street stands out not just for its size—over 10,000 square feet—but for its redevelopment potential as a creative retail destination. Currently vacant, the building spans six distinct storefront bays and has been the subject of detailed analysis and design consideration as part of this planning effort. While much of its original historic character has been lost to earlier renovations, it remains structurally sound and well-positioned for adaptive reuse.

A New Concept for Downtown: The Micro-Retail Emporium

One of the most prominent and underutilized structures in Downtown Wauchula, 121–125 West Main Street looms large in both size and symbolism. This single-story, approximately 10,500 square foot structure sits in the heart of downtown, yet has remained vacant for years under the ownership of a longtime property holder who has historically resisted overtures for redevelopment or sale. Despite its location, scale, and architectural character, the building has become a point of frustration for many, emblematic of the kind of underperformance that dampens broader revitalization efforts.

Rather than a single-use tenant or speculative office space, the proposed

redevelopment envisions this property as a modern emporium. Each of the six bays would support small, independent retail or maker-oriented tenants, potentially including upcycled furniture vendors, specialty foods, apparel, florals, or handmade goods. The goal is to create an affordable, flexible launchpad for local entrepreneurs while bringing new energy and activity to Main Street.

This format builds on national trends of re-energizing downtowns through collective retail: shared common space with individualized signage, an engaging pedestrian experience, and an interior layout designed to feel lively, even at partial occupancy. Randy’s design concept features a new canopy to support blade signs and transom visibility, shared sidewalk spillout areas, and vinyl-cling storefront graphics that keep costs low while maximizing curb appeal.

Existing Conditions and Challenges

Although structurally intact, the building’s long period of vacancy and a history of difficult ownership have posed barriers to activation. The interior will require significant buildout to meet code for multiple tenants, including mechanical and fire suppression upgrades, ADA access, and restroom facilities. Still, its central location and wide Main Street frontage make it one of the most promising “move-in ready” opportunities for a future retail collective downtown.

SITE TWO: 121-125 WEST MAIN STREET, MICRO-RETAIL

Existing Conditions: This building has undergone significant renovations over the years that have regrettably removed almost all of the original historic fabric (see historic photo below that shows this building in the left foreground; “McCrorry’s”).



Proposed Conditions: It is likely too cost prohibitive to return the building back to its former glory so the most logical approach is to work within the constraints of the current architecture. Thankfully, the proposed use as a micro-retail venue (think “food hall for businesses”) that includes multiple, independent businesses sharing a common building can work ideally in this structure that features six storefront bays (see historic photo and the “after” rendering below). The use of a canopy instead of a metal awning allows for both the opening of the original transoms and a platform for signage along the leading edge. Vinyl cling signage on doors and display windows allows for individuality for each business located with the overall building.



SITE TWO: 121-125 WEST MAIN STREET, MICRO-RETAIL

Financial Feasibility and Public Policy Considerations

Two pro formas were prepared for this property. The pro formas include placeholder assumptions for up to \$1.2 million in incentives, including CRA support and historic tax credits. However, the availability of those incentives is uncertain. CRA grants currently cap at \$50,000, and while TIF rebates may help close a small gap, they are unlikely to approach this scale. Additionally, the building's extensive prior alterations and further changes in this concept may disqualify it from historic tax credit eligibility.

At present, the concept as modeled does not yield a profit margin without major incentives, and both assumed sources, the CRA and HTC, are likely off the table. With this in mind we need to be straightforward about the timeframe and potential of this buildings.

- First, the concept remains illustrative: it shows a parcel with visibility and scale could be repurposed into an anchor use like a restaurant or food hall.
- Second, this site needs to be viewed as a longer-term or catalytic opportunity, not one ready for immediate private development.
- Third, this property is likely to need:
 - » Creative development tools (e.g., 1031 exchanges, multi-tenant subdividing, or lease-to-own structures);
 - » Phased redevelopment; or
 - » Public acquisition, demolition, and land banking if the long-term vision is strong enough.

Rather than oversell the economics, the challenges of this site as a blighted property is an impediment to downtown's economic vibrancy. It can be kept as a "watchlist site" a high-potential property that will need external drivers or patient capital to move forward.

Design and Policy Support

- 6 storefront bays supporting diverse small tenants
- Shared use concept ideal for pop-up, seasonal, or rotating tenants
- New canopy design, vinyl signage, and streetscape spill-out spaces envisioned
- Potential use of façade improvement grants, historic tax credits, and targeted vertical gap financing

SITE TWO: 121-125 WEST MAIN STREET, MICRO-RETAIL

Pro Forma (Simple) for 121-125 West Main Street, Micro-Retail

121-125 W Main								
Current Configuration		10,500 sq ft (Vacant)						
Potential Redevelopment		10,500 sq ft (Restaurant and Commercial Space)						
Redevelopment Costs								
1	Acquisition							
	Rehab	\$	2,625,000	\$250 sq ft	*			
	New Construction	\$	-					
	Developer Fee							
	Total Acquisition and Rehab	\$	2,625,000					
Redevelopment Incentives								
	Federal HTC	\$	(446,250)	20% (.85 Syndication Value)				
	Local Incentive	\$	-					
	Total Incentives	\$	(446,250)					
	Net Investment	\$	2,178,750					
	Equity	\$	525,000	20% Owner Equity				
	Loan Amount	\$	1,653,750					
Income								
			Annual Gross Rent	Units	Sq Ft	Total Sq Ft	Monthly Rent per Unit	
3	Commerical 1	\$	120,396	1	8,600	8,600	\$ 10,033	
	Commercial 2	\$	22,800	1	1,900	1,900	\$ 1,900	
	Total Annual Income	\$	143,196					
	Annual Debt Service	\$	(165,772)	8%	*			
	Gross Cash Flow	\$	(22,576)					
	Annual Operating Expenses	\$	(43,000)	Taxes, Insurance and Maintenance to be calculated				
	Net Cash Flow	\$	(65,576)					
	Internal Rate of Return		-12.3%					
Notes:				Restaurant lease rates calculated \$14.00 sf annually				
* = Key cost variable and dependent on negotiation				Commercial lease rates calculated \$12.00 sf annually				

SITE TWO: 121-125 WEST MAIN STREET, MICRO-RETAIL

Pro Forma (With Incentive) for 121-125 West Main Street, Micro-Retail

121-125 W Main							
Current Configuration		10,500 sq ft (Vacant)					
Potential Redevelopment		10,500 sq ft (Restaurant and Commercial Space)					
Redevelopment Costs							
1	Acquisition						
	Rehab	\$	2,625,000	\$250 sq ft	*		
	New Construction	\$	-				
	Developer Fee						
	Total Acquisition and Rehab	\$	2,625,000				
Redevelopment Incentives							
	Federal HTC	\$	(446,250)	20% (.85 Syndication Value)			
	Local Incentive	\$	(1,200,000)				
	Total Incentives	\$	(1,646,250)				
	Net Investment	\$	978,750				
	Equity	\$	525,000	20% Owner Equity			
	Loan Amount	\$	453,750				
Income							
			Annual Gross Rent	Units	Sq Ft	Total Sq Ft Monthly Rent per Unit	
3	Commerical 1	\$	120,396	1	8,600	8,600 \$ 10,033	
	Commercial 2	\$	22,800	1	1,900	1,900 \$ 1,900	
	Total Annual Income	\$	143,196				
	Annual Debt Service	\$	(45,544)	8%	*		
	Gross Cash Flow	\$	97,652				
	Annual Operating Expenses	\$	(43,000)	Taxes, Insurance and Maintenance to be calculated			
	Net Cash Flow	\$	54,652				
	Internal Rate of Return		10.1%				
Notes:							
* = Key cost variable and dependent on negotiation			Restaurant lease rates calculated \$14.00 sf annually Commercial lease rates calculated \$12.00 sf annually Assumes Local Incentive of \$1,200,000				

SITE THREE: 122 WEST MAIN STREET, RESTAURANT

A recurring theme in Wauchula’s revitalization strategy has been the clear market demand for more food and beverage offerings downtown. Community input, leakage analysis, and foot traffic data all point to the same conclusion: the market is ready for more dining options. Yet that market opportunity doesn’t always translate into easy real estate math, especially in smaller spaces requiring substantial reinvestment. That tension is embodied in 122 West Main Street.

This small sized but architecturally grand, 1,800-square-foot building sits in a prime location on the west side of downtown, surrounded by legacy businesses and key redevelopment sites. It is exactly the kind of space that could support a small, independent restaurant, serving as a lunch-and-dinner option for downtown workers, eventgoers, and visitors staying at the proposed hotel just blocks away. But like so many older buildings in rural cores, it requires extensive rehabilitation to meet code and market expectations.

The Investment Story

The Downtown Group (TDG), a leading nonprofit economic development partner in Hardee County, recognized the potential of the site and stepped up. Working closely with the City and local stakeholders, TDG has already invested heavily in the property, completing significant portions of the required buildout.

The total project cost is \$742,000, including \$75,000 in acquisition and \$667,000 in renovation costs, most of which have already been paid out-of-pocket. A \$50,000 state grant and a \$400,000 local investment have been secured to reduce the financial burden. With this public and philanthropic commitment, the remaining capital stack includes \$148,400 in equity and a \$143,600 loan, making the remaining financing relatively light compared to the total cost.

At a projected lease rate of \$2,700 per month (or \$18 per square foot annually), the building is expected to generate \$32,400 in gross annual income. After accounting for debt service and operating costs, the property would yield a net annual cash flow of just over \$8,200 and an IRR of 3.3%.

Framing It Right: A Public Good, Not Just a Private Deal

On paper, this return is too thin for a traditional private investor. But that’s not the point. This project should be seen for what it truly is: a catalytic, mission-driven investment in downtown vitality. TDG’s involvement—along with CRA support—reflects a deliberate strategy to close the gap between what the market demands and what real estate can support. The \$400,000 already spent should be treated as a public or organizational subsidy, not an expenditure expected to be recovered in full. Instead, it’s a statement: that downtown Wauchula is worth investing in, and that quality space for food entrepreneurs is foundational to a thriving Main Street.

Design and Programming Potential

The before and after rendering shows the vision clearly: a reactivated storefront with welcoming transparency, fresh signage, and the potential for sidewalk spill-out dining. Inside, the building would be outfitted to support a flexible restaurant concept (fast-casual, dine-in, or hybrid) ideal for a chef-driven venture or a rotating local pop-up.

This location also creates a critical “dining anchor” on the western half of downtown, helping stretch the pedestrian zone and encouraging broader investment in surrounding storefronts.

SITE THREE: 122 WEST MAIN STREET, RESTAURANT



Existing Conditions: 122 West Main Street, former bank building



Proposed Conditions: 122 West Main Street, potential restaurant space

SITE FOUR: 206 WEST PALMETTO - PHASED MIXED-USE

At 206 West Palmetto, Wauchula has an opportunity to demonstrate how former residential space can be repositioned into productive, income-generating property. This currently vacant 15,400-square-foot building offers ample square footage and strategic downtown adjacency, making it a prime candidate for phased redevelopment. The site's flexibility and manageable scale make it attractive for the local developer looking to test the waters with a smaller investment before scaling up.

Phased Redevelopment Strategy

The project is evaluated in two distinct phases, each addressing one half (7,700 sq ft) of the building:

- **Phase 1** envisions conversion of one half of the space into eight residential units.
- **Phase 2** builds out the other half into office space after Phase 1 is complete and stabilized.

This phased approach helps control risk while testing market absorption. It also reflects real-world developer behavior in smaller communities, where equity is limited and sequencing matters.

Pro Forma Analysis: A Story of Scale and Sequencing

The pro forma analyses explore four different development strategies:

Phase 1 Only

- Total development cost: \$1.17 million
- Equity: \$400,000
- IRR: 5.1%
- Net Annual Cash Flow: ~\$20,000
- Modest, but positive. A safe on-ramp for a cautious developer.

Phase 2 (Post-Phase 1 Payoff)

- Uses equity built in Phase 1 to reduce borrowing needs
- Debt: \$1.23 million
- IRR: 19.4%
- Net Annual Cash Flow: ~\$49,000
- A very strong return. Proof that staggered investment can produce sustainability.

Both Phases Simultaneously (No Incentive)

- Debt load: \$1.85 million
- Net Cash Flow: -\$13,093
- IRR: -12.0%
- Not financially feasible. Too much debt service up front.

Both Phases Simultaneously (With \$500K Local Incentive)

- Debt reduced to \$1.35 million
- Net Cash Flow: \$37,093
- IRR: 8.0%
- Viable and practical. Delivers complete activation with manageable risk.

Catalytic Potential Without the Flash

While this may not be Wauchula's most architecturally distinctive site, its scale, location, and straightforward redevelopment path make it important. Bringing 15,400 square feet of space back to life with additional housing and viable office square footage would provide tangible community value and help normalize investment downtown.

From a policy standpoint, this site shows where modest investments unlock full building reuse. A \$500,000 local investment makes this project viable as a whole, compressing years of phasing into one efficient construction effort. It's a textbook case of how to bridge the gap between feasibility and impact.

SITE FOUR: 206 WEST PALMETTO - PHASED MIXED-USE

PHASE I Pro Forma 206 West Palmetto, Phased Mixed-Use

206 W Palmetto								
Current Configuration		Phase 1- 7,700 sq ft (vacant)						
Potential Redevelopment		8 Apartments						
Redevelopment Costs								
1	Acquisition	\$	400,000	\$100/sq ft *				
	Rehab	\$	770,000					
	New Construction							
	Developer Fee							
	Total Acquisition and Rehab	\$	1,170,000					
Redevelopment Incentives								
		Total Incentives						
		Net Investment						
	Equity	\$	400,000	Equity (Land)				
	Loan Amount	\$	770,000					
Income								
		Annual Gross Rent		Units	Sq Ft	Total Sq Ft	Monthly Rent per Unit	
3	2 Bedroom Apartment	\$	30,600	2	850	1,700	\$ 1,275	
	2 Bedroom Apartment	\$	48,600	3	900	2,700	\$ 1,350	
	3 Bedroom Apartment	\$	59,400	3	1,100	3,300	\$ 1,650	
	Total Annual Income	\$	138,600					
	Annual Debt Service	\$	(77,287)	8%	*			
	Gross Cash Flow	\$	61,313					
	Annual Operating Expenses	\$	(41,600)	Taxes, Insurance and Maintenance to be calculated				
	Net Cash Flow	\$	19,713					
Internal Rate of Return		5.1%						
Notes:				Residential lease rates calculated at \$1.50 per sq ft monthly				
* = Key cost variable and dependent on negotiation				Operating Expenses calculated at 30% of Income				

SITE FOUR: 206 WEST PALMETTO - PHASED MIXED-USE

PHASE 2 Pro Forma 206 West Palmetto, Phased Mixed-Use

206 W Palmetto							
Current Configuration		Phase 1 + 2- 15,400 sq ft (vacant)					
Potential Redevelopment		8 Apartments + 8 Office Spaces					
Redevelopment Costs							
1	Acquisition	\$	1,170,000			*	
	Rehab	\$	1,540,000			\$200/sq ft *	
	New Construction						
	Developer Fee						
	Total Acquisition and Rehab	\$	2,710,000				
Redevelopment Incentives							
			Total Incentives				
			Net Investment	\$	2,710,000		
	Equity	\$	1,478,000	Equity (Building/Land = \$1,170,000 + Cash Equity- \$308,000)			
	Loan Amount	\$	1,232,000				
Income							
			Annual Gross Rent	Units	Sq Ft	Total Sq Ft Monthly Rent per Unit	
3	2 Bedroom Apartment	\$	30,600	2	850	1,700 \$ 1,275	
	2 Bedroom Apartment	\$	48,600	3	900	2,700 \$ 1,350	
	3 Bedroom Apartment	\$	59,400	3	1,100	3,300 \$ 1,650	
	Office	\$	23,808	2	850	1,700 \$ 992	
	Office	\$	37,800	3	900	2,700 \$ 1,050	
	Office	\$	46,188	3	1,100	3,300 \$ 1,283	
		Total Annual Income	\$	246,396			
		Annual Debt Service	\$	(123,659)	8%	*	
		Gross Cash Flow	\$	122,737			
		Annual Operating Expenses	\$	(74,000)	Taxes, Insurance and Maintenance to be calculated		
	Net Cash Flow	\$	48,737				
	Internal Rate of Return		19.4%				
Notes:							
* = Key cost variable and dependent on negotiation			First Phase Paid Off Residential lease rates calculated at \$1.50 per sf monthly Operating Expenses calculated at 30% of Income				

SITE FOUR: 206 WEST PALMETTO - PHASED MIXED-USE

BOTH PHASES Pro Forma 206 West Palmetto, Phased Mixed-Use

206 W Palmetto							
Current Configuration		Phase 1 + 2- 15,400 sq ft (vacant)					
Potential Redevelopment		8 Apartments					
Redevelopment Costs							
1	Acquisition	\$	1,170,000			*	
	Rehab	\$	1,540,000			\$200/sq ft *	
	New Construction						
	Developer Fee						
	Total Acquisition and Rehab	\$	2,710,000				
Redevelopment Incentives							
			Total Incentives				
			Net Investment	\$	2,710,000		
	Equity	\$	1,478,000	Equity (Building/Land = \$1,170,000 + Cash Equity- \$308,000)			
	Loan Amount	\$	1,232,000				
Income							
			Annual Gross Rent	Units	Sq Ft	Total Sq Ft Monthly Rent per Unit	
3	2 Bedroom Apartment	\$	30,600	2	850	1,700 \$ 1,275	
	2 Bedroom Apartment	\$	48,600	3	900	2,700 \$ 1,350	
	3 Bedroom Apartment	\$	59,400	3	1,100	3,300 \$ 1,650	
	Office	\$	23,808	2	850	1,700 \$ 992	
	Office	\$	37,800	3	900	2,700 \$ 1,050	
	Office	\$	46,188	3	1,100	3,300 \$ 1,283	
		Total Annual Income	\$	246,396			
		Annual Debt Service	\$	(123,659)	8%	*	
		Gross Cash Flow	\$	122,737			
		Annual Operating Expenses	\$	(74,000)	Taxes, Insurance and Maintenance to be calculated		
	Net Cash Flow	\$	48,737				
	Internal Rate of Return		19.4%				
Notes:							
* = Key cost variable and dependent on negotiation			First Phase Paid Off				
			Residential lease rates calculated at \$1.50 per sf monthly				
			Operating Expenses calculated at 30% of Income				

SITE FOUR: 206 WEST PALMETTO - PHASED MIXED-USE

BOTH PHASES WITH INCENTIVE Pro Forma 206 West Palmetto, Phased Mixed-Use

206 W Palmetto								
Current Configuration		Phases 1 & 2- 15,400 sq ft (vacant)						
Potential Redevelopment		8 Apartments + 8 Office Spaces						
Redevelopment Costs								
1	Acquisition	\$	400,000	* \$100/sq ft (Residential) + \$200/sq ft (Office) *				
	Rehab	\$	2,310,000					
	New Construction							
	Developer Fee							
	Total Acquisition and Rehab	\$	2,710,000					
Redevelopment Incentives								
	Total Incentives	\$	(500,000)	Equity (Building/Land = \$400,000 + Cash Equity- \$462,000)				
	Net Investment	\$	2,210,000					
	Equity	\$	862,000					
	Loan Amount	\$	1,348,000					
Income								
			Annual Gross Rent	Units	Sq Ft	Total Sq Ft	Monthly Rent per Unit	
3	2 Bedroom Apartment	\$	30,600	2	850	1,700	\$ 1,275	
	2 Bedroom Apartment	\$	48,600	3	900	2,700	\$ 1,350	
	3 Bedroom Apartment	\$	59,400	3	1,100	3,300	\$ 1,650	
	Office	\$	23,808	2	850	1,700	\$ 992	
	Office	\$	37,800	3	900	2,700	\$ 1,050	
	Office	\$	46,188	3	1,100	3,300	\$ 1,283	
		Total Annual Income	\$	246,396				
		Annual Debt Service	\$	(135,303)	8%	*		
		Gross Cash Flow	\$	111,093				
		Annual Operating Expenses	\$	(74,000)	Taxes, Insurance and Maintenance to be calculated			
	Net Cash Flow	\$	37,093					
	Internal Rate of Return		8.0%					
Notes:								
* = Key cost variable and dependent on negotiation			Both Phases Simultaneously, \$500,000 Local Incentive Residential lease rates calculated at \$1.50 per sf monthly Operating Expenses calculated at 30% of Income					

SITE FIVE: 122 SOUTH 8TH AVENUE & 302 COURT STREET

Anchoring the western end of downtown, the area now dubbed “8 Barrel” offers one of the largest and most adaptable redevelopment opportunities in the study area. Comprising two structures totaling nearly 13,000 square feet including a 9,200-square-foot primary building and a 3,700-square-foot outbuilding. The site at 122 South 8th Avenue features strong bones, solid visibility, and a footprint suitable for a wide range of future uses. Together, these buildings make up the “8 Barrel” concept and are positioned just one block from Main Street, presenting a key opportunity to anchor revitalization efforts on the western edge of downtown.

Immediately adjacent to this property is 302 Court Street, which contains a 1,200-square-foot building under separate ownership. Though independent, this structure sits in close proximity to the 8 Barrel Facility and presents a unique opportunity for complementary development. Together, the three buildings could catalyze a dynamic food and beverage district, with each site playing a distinct but interconnected role.

Phased Redevelopment Opportunity

This cluster of buildings lends itself naturally to a phased redevelopment strategy but they are under different ownership. The first phase should focus on activating 302 Court Street with a small-scale, destination-caliber taproom or tasting room. Its intimate scale and street presence make it ideal for establishing a market presence, testing concepts, and building a local following.

In the second phase, attention would shift to the larger 8 Barrel Facility at 122 S. 8th Avenue which will require environmental remediation. Once remediation is complete, this site offers the scale and adaptability to support a more expansive operation such as a full-scale brewery with a taproom, flexible event space, and possibly a cluster of dining and production uses. The primary structure’s wide footprint and open-span interior can easily accommodate brewing equipment, public seating, and service areas. The adjacent outbuilding could serve as complementary back-of-house or production space, such as food processing, light manufacturing, or a shared commercial kitchen.

Over time, this evolution from intimate taproom to multifaceted dining and brewing destination could establish a compelling regional draw and a cornerstone of downtown’s west side.

Adaptive Use Concepts

Two distinct, but compatible, reuse strategies have emerged through the planning process: a brewery / tap room and a maker hall / creative production hub.

Phase 1: Brewery and Taproom

The 1,200-square-foot building at 302 Court Street under separate ownership but directly adjacent to the 8 Barrel site offers an ideal starting point. A small-scale brewery and taproom here could serve as a proof-of-concept and early activation of the district’s potential. Beyond just beer, the site could include:

- Seasonal outdoor seating and event programming
- Partnerships with local food trucks or culinary startups
- Extended hours of operation to drive foot traffic into the evening

This format is proven in similar rural towns, providing both community identity and a regional draw. Over time, this initial taproom could evolve into a broader destination, leveraging the adjacent 8 Barrel Facility for expanded brewing capacity, larger-scale dining, and flexible event space.

Phase 2: Maker Hall and Creative Production Hub

The 8 Barrel Facility at 122 S. 8th Avenue, which includes two buildings totaling nearly 13,000 square feet, represents the next phase of investment. This site can support a variety of adaptive uses, from an expanded brewery and culinary destination to a shared manufacturing and micro-retail concept. Potential uses include:

- Artisan workshops or co-packing facilities
- Public access events or instructional space
- A test kitchen or small batch food/beverage production

This phased approach supports both business incubation and long-term destination-building, with the flexibility to accommodate a single anchor tenant or a cluster of creative users.

SITE FIVE: 122 SOUTH 8TH AVENUE & 302 COURT STREET

Public Infrastructure and Incentive Framing

To succeed, this site will likely require targeted support. Public investments could include:

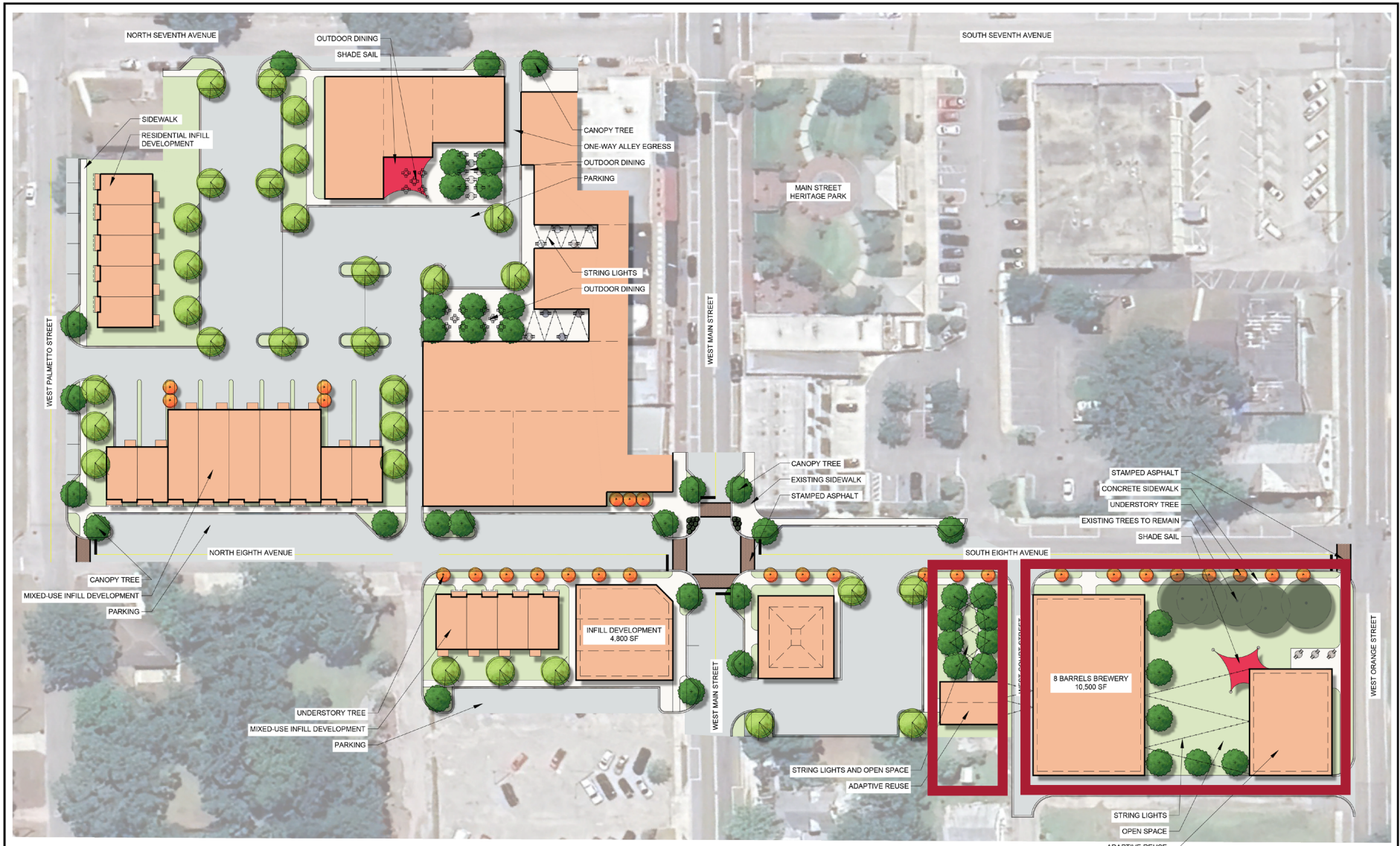
- Clean-up of stored barrels on the site
- Structural upgrades to meet code and ADA compliance
- Upsized utility connections (e.g., water, sewer, power)
- Outdoor public realm features (e.g., beer garden space, parking, lighting)
- Tenant fit-out or flexible-use infrastructure for light industrial or food-based tenants

Any local incentive should be framed as a performance-driven, site-specific investment designed to unlock economic development and broaden the tenant mix west of Highway 17.

Design and Activation Potential

- Large storefront façade for branding, murals, or public art
- Interior volume suitable for event space or industrial-scale work
- The site could be an anchor for this part of downtown
- Potential to serve as a launching point for west-end wayfinding or district identity

SITE FIVE: 122 SOUTH 8TH AVENUE & 302 COURT STREET



DESIGNED:	BS	REVISIONS
REVIEWED:	BS	NO. DATE ITEM
DRAWN:	BS	
PROJECT NO.	2023-007	
DATE	01-08-22	
SCALE	1"=30'-0"	
FILE		

STUDIO PLACE MAIN + MAIN
ARNETT MULDROW ADVISORS

DOWNTOWN MARKET STUDY AND VISION PLAN
CITY OF WAUCHULA, FLORIDA

CONCEPTUAL SITE PLAN (WEST)
SHEET NO. **2.0**

SITE FIVE: 122 SOUTH 8TH AVENUE & 302 COURT STREET

Taproom Beer Garden

Existing Conditions: This entire complex of buildings could be developed into a distillery, taproom, and beer garden. However, the full development would take years to come to fruition and, therefore, an intermediate stage could include a more modest development of the garage into a taproom, with the lawn serving as a beer garden.



Proposed Conditions: For the first phase of redevelopment, paint the building bold, branded colors of the tap room. It is illustrated as having a gold wainscot topped by a black accent stripe (to anchor the building to the ground visually) with an off-white/tan body color. Install a roll-up garage door at the dock to provide indoor/outdoor dining capability. Install poles as necessary to support colorful shade sails and string lights. The shade sails would not only provide comfort in absence of shade trees, but their bold color would enliven the space. Provide movable outdoor furnishings as well as vibrancy amenities such as interactive games to create a dynamic and family-friendly space in the forecourt lawn.



SITE FIVE: 122 SOUTH 8TH AVENUE & 302 COURT STREET

Pro Forma Analysis for 122 South 8th Avenue

The two pro formas for 122 S 8th Avenue evaluate the redevelopment of a 9,200 sq ft main building and a 3,700-square-foot outbuilding into a brewery and associated storage or light industrial use. In the scenario without the additional local incentive, the total development cost is \$1.89 million, partially offset by \$312,800 in federal historic tax credits. This leaves a net investment of \$1.58 million, requiring a significant loan of nearly \$1.2 million. While the project is expected to generate \$132,600 annually in lease revenue, the high debt burden drives annual debt service above \$103,000. After operating expenses, the project operates at a loss of more than \$10,000 annually and carries a negative internal rate of return of -1.8 percent. Under this scenario, the project is not financially viable.

In the alternative version that includes additional incentives—\$153,000 in Brownfield cleanup tax credits and an estimated \$300,000 local incentive—the financial structure improves significantly. The net investment drops to approximately \$1.12 million, which in turn reduces the loan amount to \$746,200. With the lower debt service of just over \$64,000 annually, the project shifts into positive territory. It generates \$28,448 in annual net cash flow and a 6.6 percent internal rate of return. While still a modest return, this scenario demonstrates that the project can be financially sustainable if properly supported by layered incentives.

From a public policy perspective, the additional \$300,000 incentive could be framed as a strategic investment in environmental remediation and adaptive reuse. Since the site includes \$240,000 in cleanup costs, it would be reasonable to structure the incentive to cover remediation, utility upgrades, or other eligible site prep costs. The incentive could also be tied to job creation, local procurement, or community access goals given the brewery's potential role as a catalytic anchor. Supporting this type of redevelopment not only helps address underutilized or environmentally challenged properties but also creates small-scale industrial and commercial space that aligns with broader downtown and economic development goals.

Pro Forma Analysis for 302 Court Street

The pro forma for 302 Court Street reflects the redevelopment of a small, 1,200 sq ft vacant building into an owner-operated tap room. The project cost includes approximately \$50,000 to buy out other family members' interest in the property and \$150,000 in rehabilitation, for a total of \$200,000. A local incentive of \$30,000 is conservatively assumed (with a maximum of \$50,000 possible), reducing the net investment to between \$170,000 and \$175,000. This balance is projected to be financed with roughly 20 percent equity (\$34,000–\$35,000) and the remainder as debt (\$136,000–\$140,000).

Unlike a lease-based scenario, the income side comes from direct taproom operations. At an average of \$500 in daily sales, annual revenue is approximately \$182,500. After accounting for typical industry costs at 30 percent cost of goods sold, 20 percent labor, and 15 percent other operating expenses; the business is projected to generate about \$63,875 before debt service. With annual debt service of about \$7,800, net cash flow before owner compensation is roughly \$56,000.

This structure highlights the difference between a conservative lease return and the stronger potential of an owner-operated model. While one-year cash-on-cash returns appear high because of the small equity contribution, the more meaningful measure will be a multi-year internal rate of return (IRR) that accounts for ongoing cash flows and eventual exit value. Even under conservative assumptions, the analysis demonstrates that the project is not only financially feasible but also has significant upside if sales meet or exceed expectations.

SITE FIVE: 122 SOUTH 8TH AVENUE & 302 COURT STREET

Simple Pro Forma for 122 South 8th Avenue

Current Configuration		9,200 sq ft main building; 3,700 out building					
Potential Redevelopment		Brewery (main building); Storage/Light Industrial (out building)					
Redevelopment Costs							
1	Acquisition	\$	50,000	*			
	Rehab	\$	1,840,000	\$200/sq ft *			
	New Construction						
	Developer Fee						
	Total Acquisition and Rehab	\$	1,890,000				
Redevelopment Incentives							
	Federal Historic Tax Credit	\$	(312,800)	(.85 Syndication Value)			
	Total Incentives	\$	(312,800)				
	Net Investment	\$	1,577,200				
	Equity	\$	378,000	20% Owner Equity			
	Loan Amount	\$	1,199,200				
Income							
			Annual Gross Rent	Units	Sq Ft	Total Sq Ft	Monthly Rent per Unit
3	Brewery	\$	110,400	1	9,200	9,200	\$ 9,200
	Storage	\$	22,200	1	3,700	3,700	\$ 1,850
	Total Annual Income	\$	132,600				
	Annual Debt Service	\$	(103,097)	8%	*		
	Gross Cash Flow	\$	29,503				
	Annual Operating Expenses	\$	(40,000)	Taxes, Insurance and Maintenance to be calculated			
	Net Cash Flow	\$	(10,497)				
Internal Rate of Return			-1.8%				
Notes:		Brewery lease rates calculated \$12.00 sf annually; Storage at \$6.00 sf annually					
* = Key cost variable and dependent on negotiation		Operating Expenses calculated at 30% of Income					

SITE FIVE: 122 SOUTH 8TH AVENUE & 302 COURT STREET

Pro Forma with Incentive for 122 South 8th Avenue

Current Configuration		9,200 sq ft main building; 3,700 out building					
Potential Redevelopment		Brewery (main building); Storage/Light Industrial (out building)					
Redevelopment Costs							
1	Acquisition	\$	50,000	\$200 per sq ft (incl. \$240,000 in Clean Up Costs)			
	Rehab	\$	1,840,000				
	New Construction						
	Developer Fee						
	Total Acquisition and Rehab	\$	1,890,000				
Redevelopment Incentives							
	Federal Historic Tax Credit	\$	(312,800)	(.85 Syndication Value)			
	Brownfield Clean Up Tax Credit	\$	(153,000)	(.85 Syndication Value)			
	Incentive	\$	(300,000)				
	Total Incentives	\$	(765,800)				
	Net Investment	\$	1,124,200				
	Equity	\$	378,000	20% Owner Equity			
	Loan Amount	\$	746,200				
Income							
			Annual Gross Rent	Units	Sq Ft	Total Sq Ft	Monthly Rent per Unit
3	Brewery	\$	110,400	1	9,200	9,200	\$ 9,200
	Storage	\$	22,200	1	3,700	3,700	\$ 1,850
	Total Annual Income	\$	132,600				
	Annual Debt Service	\$	(64,152)	8%	*		
	Gross Cash Flow	\$	68,448				
	Annual Operating Expenses	\$	(40,000)	Taxes, Insurance and Maintenance to be calculated			
	Net Cash Flow	\$	28,448				
Internal Rate of Return			6.6%				
Notes:							
* = Key cost variable and dependent on negotiation							
Brewery lease rates calculated \$12.00 sf annually; Storage at \$6.00 sf annually Operating Expenses calculated at 30% of Income Additional Incentive of \$450,000 needed							

SITE FIVE: 122 SOUTH 8TH AVENUE & 302 COURT STREET

Pro Forma for 302 Court Street

302 Court St							
Current Configuration		1,200 sq ft building (Vacant)					
Potential Redevelopment		Tap Room					
Redevelopment Costs							
1	Acquisition	\$	50,000	\$125/sq ft *			
	Rehab	\$	150,000				
	New Construction						
	Developer Fee						
	Total Acquisition and Rehab	\$	200,000				
Redevelopment Incentives							
	Local Incentive	\$	(30,000)	50,000 maximum			
	Total Incentives	\$	(30,000)				
	Net Investment	\$	170,000				
	Equity	\$	34,000	20% Owner Equity			
	Loan Amount	\$	136,000				
Income							
				Units	Sq Ft	Total Sq Ft	Monthly Rent per Unit
3	Tap Room Avg Daily Sales	\$	500	1	1,200	1,200	\$ 1,200
	Sales Annualized	\$	182,500				
	Cost of Goods (COGS)	\$	(54,750)				
	Labor	\$	(36,500)				
	Operating Expenses (OPEX)	\$	(27,375)				
	Total Costs (EDI)	\$	(118,625)				
	Earnings Before Debt Service	\$	63,875				
	Annual Debt Service	\$	(7,794)	8%	*		
	Gross Cash Flow	\$	56,081				
	Owner Salary Draw	\$	40,000	Taxes, Insurance and Maintenance to be calculated			
Net Cash Flow	\$	16,081					
Cash on Cash Year One ROI		165.0%					
Notes:							
* = Key cost variable and dependent on negotiation							

SITE SIX: GEORGE BURRIS AVE / 5TH AVE ALLEY

Site Seven: George Burris Avenue / Fifth Avenue Alley, A Shared Space for the Community

Not every downtown transformation begins with a building. Sometimes, it starts with a street.

George Burris Avenue (also historically referred to as Fifth Avenue) is one of the most meaningful spaces in downtown Wauchula today. Framed by the Wauchula Train Depot (now home to the Chamber of Commerce) and Cat's on Main, a vibrant and beloved retail anchor, the corridor already carries pedestrian activity, local pride, and deep potential. But it could be more. With strategic improvements and creative programming, this passageway can become a true shared street, connecting destinations, activating adjacent businesses, and setting a new benchmark for public space downtown.

The potential of George Burris Avenue lies not in reinvention, but in enhancement. String lights, public art, seasonal seating, and pop-up activity zones can create an environment that feels alive—one that invites people to stay, not just pass through. The proposed “alley” improvements would not compromise the function of the street. Rather, they would elevate it: enabling cars and people to share space during the day, and allowing for full closures during evening events, markets, or festivals.

Just as importantly, this space functions as a backdoor commons for the east side of Main Street. Businesses like Cat's on Main could expand into the alley through secondary entries, outdoor dining, or display space. New development on the west side of the street would benefit from visibility and direct access to one of the most photogenic and animated corridors downtown.

Existing Conditions

This roadway adjacent to the train depot has the potential to function as a place as well as a pathway. Wooden poles and overhead wires create visual clutter. Dumpsters are exposed to view, and the sides and rears of the buildings on the left do not create visual appeal.

Proposed Conditions

By burying or relocating the wooden poles and overhead wires, visual clutter is removed. Install aluminum poles to carry string lights so that it is unnecessary to attach the lights to the buildings that flank the alley. Suspend colorful and artistic

banners from the poles. Paint mural artwork to the sides and rears of the buildings on the left. Another option for the artwork is to apply it to the surfaces of the buildings using a product similar to Alumigraphics (www.alumigraphics.com).

To create interest and marketing potential, consider painting or applying an interactive photo wall on the walls nearest the entrances to the alley. Install privacy screens around dumpsters, HVAC units, and other mechanical equipment. Consider painting the screens in an artistic fashion. Install removable bollards so that the alley can be closed off to vehicular traffic when events are taking place in the alley. Consider painting a ‘magic carpet mural’ on the roadway surface to create visual interest and to break the visual monotony of the asphalt.

In addition to privacy screening and enclosure improvements, the City may also explore in-ground trash receptacles and shared grease trap solutions to reduce visual clutter, improve sanitation, and support food-oriented tenants. While these concepts may be challenging to implement, they are worth evaluating alongside more conventional screening and waste management upgrades.

Place a significant sculptural piece in the forecourt yard of the train depot to create a visual lure to the alley. Finally, populate the alley with interactive games, musical instruments, and outdoor furniture to create a space where people can linger in the heart of downtown.

Strategic Role in the Downtown Vision

- First Impression Opportunity for northbound US 17 traffic
- Shared Use Street that balances vehicle access with safe, animated pedestrian zones
- Business Growth Catalyst for adjacent retailers and future development
- Public Realm Enhancement that ties into broader streetscape improvements
- Gateway Role that supports wayfinding and placemaking goals

Name Consideration

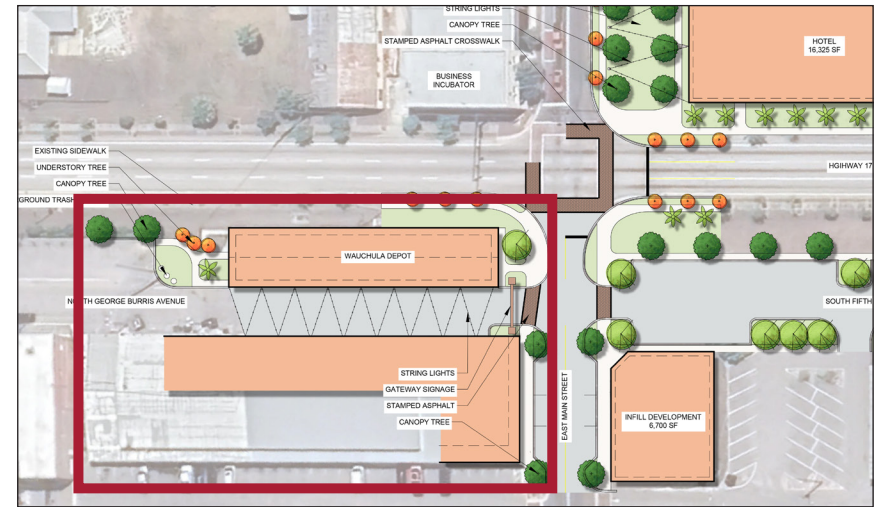
The site could be reintroduced with a dual-identity:

- George Burris Avenue for formal designation and local history
- Depot Alley or Fifth Avenue Alley as a branding tool that speaks to both past and purpose

SITE SIX: GEORGE BURRIS AVE / 5TH AVE ALLEY



Existing Conditions: The alley adjacent to the train depot has potential but currently suffers from visual clutter and lacks appeal.



Location of Depot and Alley

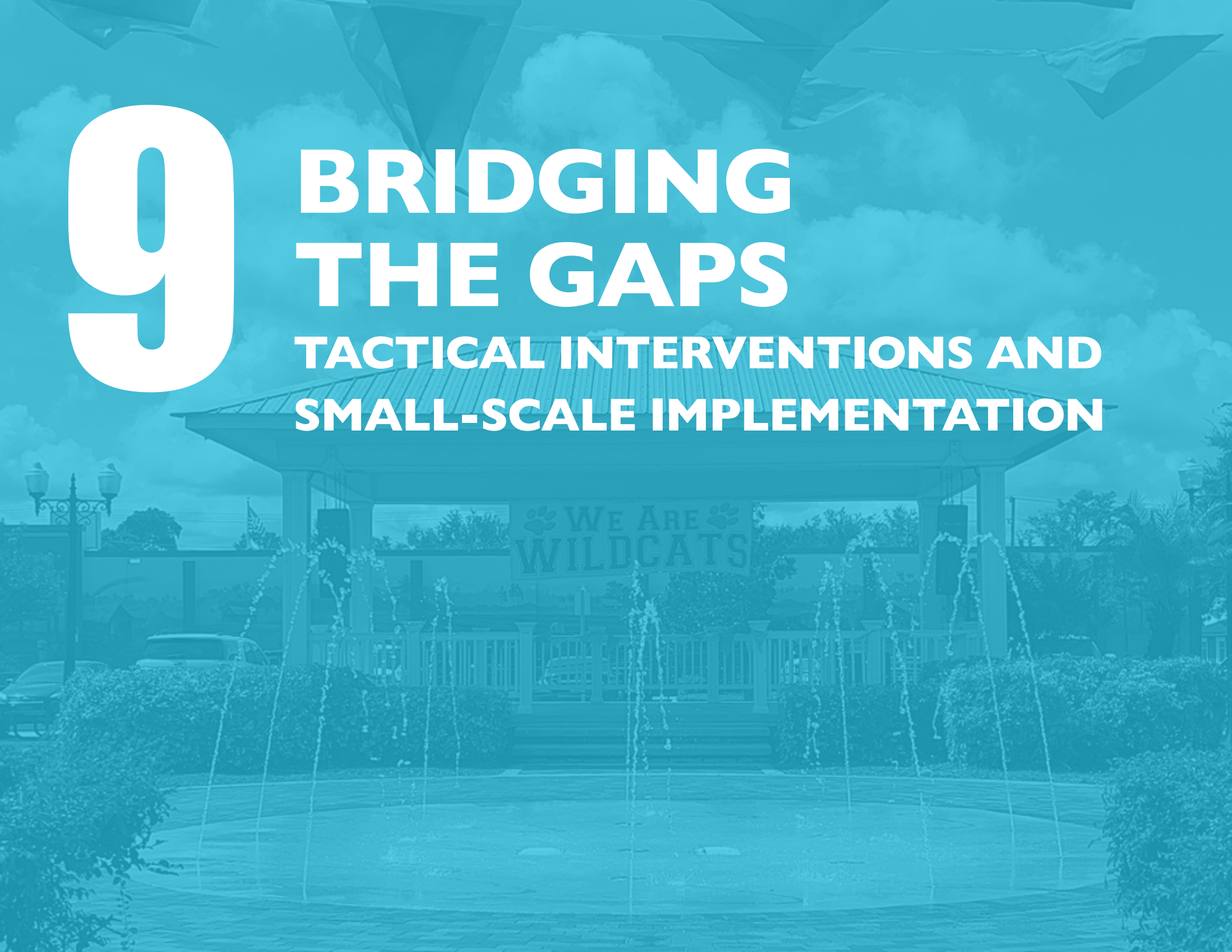


Proposed Conditions: By eliminating overhead wires and adding string lights, artistic banners, and murals, the space is transformed. Other options include painting the roadway, adding sculpture art, and placing removable bollards to close off the alley for events. The alley can also be populated with outdoor furniture and interactive games.

9

BRIDGING THE GAPS

TACTICAL INTERVENTIONS AND
SMALL-SCALE IMPLEMENTATION



BRIDGING THE GAPS

Downtown revitalization is not only about buildings, but is also about the spaces in between. The story told so far in this report, from the market analysis to the signature redevelopment sites, reflects a community poised for transformation. But the most successful downtowns don't just rely on large catalytic projects; they thrive because they layer in incremental, everyday improvements that reinforce the character, safety, and activation of their core.

In Wauchula, this kind of tactical, small-scale improvement isn't theoretical. It's already happening.

The Peace River Center for the Performing Arts is drawing visitors. The CRA has made strategic investments. The Main Street program is seeding energy with events and beautification. TDC is linking investment of its own with grant funds. And, last but not least, the city is building out infrastructure. But to truly bridge the gap between vision and reality, Wauchula must continue to pair its large-scale redevelopment efforts with a clear set of street-level strategies designed to elevate the entire downtown experience.

This chapter outlines those strategies, placing them in the context of what Wauchula has done, what it can do next, and what resources already exist. It draws from four tactical strategy guides developed by the team, which should be inserted at the appropriate locations noted below. These tools fill in the physical and perceptual gaps that remain between the signature sites and serve as the connective tissue that brings the full downtown plan to life.

STREET-LEVEL ENHANCEMENTS: THE PHYSICAL FOUNDATION

Street-Level Enhancements: The Physical Foundation

Downtown Wauchula has a strong base to build from including heritage buildings, a defined Main Street, and a civic core that anchors daily activity. But even the best destinations need refinements. The following improvements represent some of the most effective, affordable, and visible changes Wauchula can make to improve downtown's walkability and perception of care.

- **Curb Extensions (Bulb-Outs):** These small extensions of the sidewalk at intersections dramatically improve pedestrian safety. They shorten crossing distances, slow turning vehicles, and provide room for landscaping. In Wauchula, bulb-outs are especially effective at intersections with high traffic volume and visibility challenges such as at Highway 17 North to 8th Avenue, and serve as a strong visual and pedestrian-friendly feature. Future enhancements should focus on ensuring continuity, visibility, and possible enhancements at key intersections or corners that currently lack them.
- **Crosswalk Improvements (Stamped Asphalt or Decorative Treatments):** At present, many crosswalks downtown are difficult to see, the redundant crossing signage creates visual clutter, and crossings on East Main Street and Highway 17 feel disconnected from the pedestrian grid. Stamped or colored asphalt, as well as painted crosswalk art, can both beautify and signal pedestrian priority without duplicative signage. Crosswalk improvements should be prioritized at all key intersections, particularly:
 - » **Main Street at Hwy 17 North (5th Avenue):** This key intersection serves as a primary downtown gateway and proposed hotel site, and would benefit from higher-visibility crosswalk treatments to encourage guest walkability and visibility.
 - » **Main Street at Hwy 17 South:** Similar enhancements here would improve pedestrian safety and connectivity to the southern end of downtown, especially near future redevelopment sites.
 - » **Crosswalk near Heritage Park:** Improvements should be made near the park's entrance to strengthen connections across Main Street.
- **String Lights and Trash Refuse Consolidation on 5th Avenue:** Aesthetics matter. Installing overhead lighting creates ambiance and signals a cared-for

space. In areas where refuse bins are clustered visibly on the street, improved enclosures and strategic screening can reduce visual clutter and improve the pedestrian experience. This strategy is especially important in alleyways and near back entrances of key businesses.

- **Moveable Seating, Parklets, and Shade Structures:** Simple, low-cost amenities like movable chairs and tables, umbrellas, or shade sails make a world of difference. In areas where storefronts are vacant or too quiet, these features signal life, even before a new business opens. Consider pop-up parklets in front of underused buildings and along the east side of Main Street as interim activations.
- **Street Murals and Colorful Intersection Treatments:** Public art in the street, especially at pedestrian crossings, builds identity and encourages drivers to slow down. These treatments are low-cost and highly visible, and should be part of any seasonal or event-based activation effort.
- **Transparent Storefronts and Clear Windows:** Ground-level windows are essential to a walkable, inviting downtown. Storefronts that are covered with reflective glass, paper, closed blinds, or curtains block visibility into the space and often give the impression that the business is closed or vacant. Encouraging business owners to maintain clear, transparent windows—especially during operating hours—enhances the pedestrian experience and signals activity. Where sun protection or security is a concern, newer glass technologies and creative window treatments can achieve those goals without sacrificing visibility.

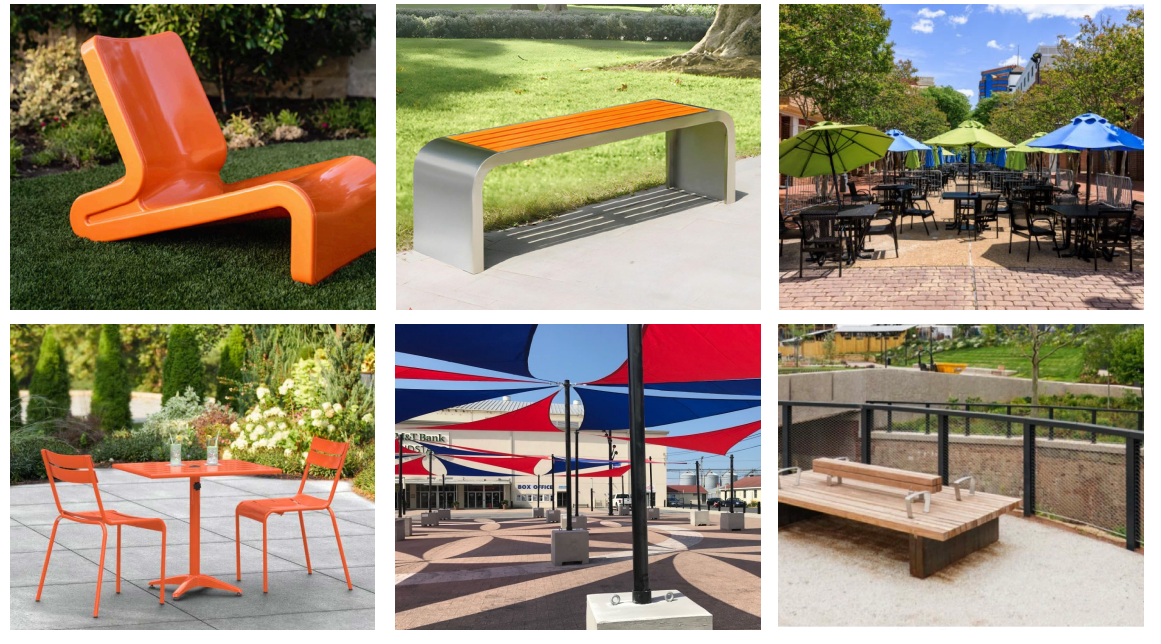
The following pages provide illustrative examples of vibrancy amenities including:

- Furniture;
- Interactives;
- Landscaping;
- Lighting;
- Programming; and
- Art.

STREET-LEVEL ENHANCEMENTS: THE PHYSICAL FOUNDATION

FURNITURE

Creative, flexible, moveable furniture enhances Creative Placemaking by fostering dynamic, adaptable spaces that encourage social interaction, artistic expression, and community engagement.



INTERACTIVES

Interactive games in Creative Placemaking activate public spaces by fostering social connections, encouraging playfulness, and creating memorable, engaging experiences for diverse community members.



STREET-LEVEL ENHANCEMENTS: THE PHYSICAL FOUNDATION

LANDSCAPING

Landscaping, whether through moveable planters or permanent installations, enhances Creative Placemaking by adding beauty, improving environmental quality, and creating inviting, vibrant spaces that foster community connection and well-being.



LIGHTING

Lighting—whether string lights, catenary lights, tree lights, or colorful installations—enhances Creative Placemaking by creating ambiance, improving safety, and transforming spaces into inviting, vibrant, and visually engaging environments.



STREET-LEVEL ENHANCEMENTS: THE PHYSICAL FOUNDATION

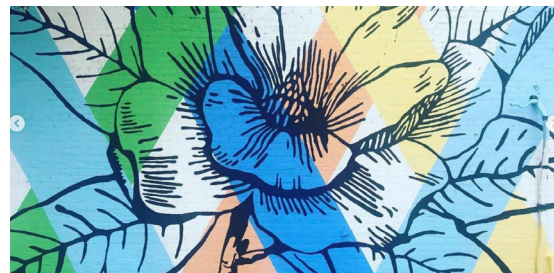
PROGRAMMING

Programming in public spaces—such as yoga classes, buskers, small concerts, and one-act plays, enriches Creative Placemaking by fostering cultural vibrancy, encouraging social interaction, and making spaces more dynamic and engaging.



ART

Art in public spaces—such as murals, sculptures, artistic crosswalks, and functional art—enhances Creative Placemaking by adding visual identity, sparking dialogue, and transforming ordinary spaces into inspiring, meaningful, and culturally rich environments.



TACTICAL USE OF VACANT BUILDINGS AND STOREFRONTS

Tactical Use of Vacant Buildings and Storefronts

Vacant buildings are not only economic challenges—they are visual cues to a community’s trajectory. In Wauchula, several of the buildings that remain inactive could play an interim role in revitalization if approached tactically.

Some of the most effective tools include:

- Vinyl window coverings that simulate activity such as in bakeries, bookstores, or co-working offices
- Pop-up retail arrangements with low-cost, short-term leases for entrepreneurs or artists
- Rotating exhibits or public art displays in vacant storefronts
- Partnering with school or college programs to install displays, marketing campaigns, or student work

These are small moves, but they change perception. And perception is the first step toward reinvestment.

Dealing with Vacant, Abandoned, and Dilapidated Buildings

In cities and towns of all sizes, municipal officials point to dilapidated structures as a challenge in their efforts to promote the highest possible quality of life and bring economic growth to their hometowns. The failure of offending property owners to repair or demolish dilapidated structures creates blight and a financial drain on community resources. It shifts the cost of abating violations from the responsible party to all taxpayers.

Dealing with these unsafe commercial and residential structures is a challenging task that requires officials to consider and carefully balance the rights of the offending property owners with rights of the owners of adjacent properties and the community at large. Because of the wide array of situations encountered and sensitivity of the property rights issue, municipalities must have a variety of tools that can be selected and effectively applied to the specific circumstances of each code enforcement case.

What’s Available

Cities and towns can adopt ordinances relating to the upkeep of property. These ordinances may provide for notification to the owner outlining the conditions needing to be corrected and may require the owner to take the necessary steps to correct the conditions. The ordinances may also outline how the municipality may correct the conditions if the owner fails to take appropriate action.

As with any ordinance, cities and towns must have procedures in place that provide for due process and proper notification to the property owner when the city moves to abate a problem. Likewise, any local ordinance needs to spell out explicitly the notice procedures, method of notice as well as a procedure for appeals of decisions made by the code enforcement officials.

State law gives cities and towns the authority to enforce the International Building Codes and to adopt by reference certain appendices to this code. One of the most widely adopted appendices is the International Property Maintenance Code, which establishes standards to help ensure public health, safety and welfare of the community by requiring the maintenance of existing structures and premises. The International Property Maintenance Code provides a framework for dealing with dilapidated structures in any city no matter the size.

The International Property Maintenance Code contains a prescribed and tested process of providing proper notice as well as a specific method of serving the notice to property owners. Because this code can be adopted by reference with only minor modifications, it is a good option for municipalities starting a new code enforcement program or looking to modify their existing program. A PDF version of this code may be found by following this link:

https://www.dropbox.com/s/upw4ttgdgusxoz0/2012_International_Property_Maintenance_Code.pdf

What happens when property owners fail to correct serious code violations? One option available to the municipality is to correct the violation. If the municipality corrects the unsafe conditions associated with the property, most state law allows the municipality to place a lien equal to the cost of the abatement on the property and collect the lien in the same manner as municipal taxes.

TACTICAL USE OF VACANT BUILDINGS AND STOREFRONTS

Challenges

These code enforcement methods have limited effectiveness in certain situations. Liens on property generally can only be collected when a property is sold, and many county governments do not recognize code enforcement liens at tax sales. This means that liens might not be collected at tax sales.

Another problem with liens is that there is often a significant lag between filing the lien and collecting payment because sales of dilapidated properties occur infrequently. Likewise, ordinance summons are not effective when a property owner cannot be located or lives outside of the community or state. Ordinance summons must be personally served upon the offender.

These tools also have limited effectiveness when the property owner lacks the financial resources to abate the violations. Jailing offenders only increases the cost to the municipality and often fails to correct the violation.

Clearly, there are no “silver bullet” solutions that can solve each unique situation in every community. However, all across America certain strategies for dealing with abandoned and dilapidated buildings have begun to gain traction in dealing with this issue. A few of these strategies are noted below.

Adapted from December 2012 issue of Uptown, a publication of the Municipal Association of South Carolina

Strategies for Vacant, Abandoned, and Dilapidated Buildings

I. Early Warning Database

Use an early warning database to identify problem properties and to facilitate collaboration.

Too often, municipalities only find out about vacant properties after they have started to cause serious problems. An early warning database collects and organizes basic information about conditions that suggest a property is likely to become vacant. Local officials and organizations can use that information to identify at-risk properties and take action before a problem grows or gets out of control. A database can be useful for code enforcement officials, police and fire departments, community development departments, Main Street programs and neighborhood organizations.

A database can be as simple as a spreadsheet that lists problem properties and indicates whether each property has one or more of the key indicators of vacancy or abandonment, such as tax delinquency, nuisance abatement actions, utility shut-offs, or foreclosure filings. It can also be expanded to include information about the district where the property is located, such as demographic data, crime statistics, and real estate conditions. An even more comprehensive database could include information about these properties from various municipal departments. Many municipalities already collect much or all of the information in a basic database, and it is just a matter of putting that information together in one place. Even the most simple database can be used to identify problem properties and neighborhoods, guide decision making, and coordinate activity across municipal departments.

Key Benefits

Identify problem properties

A database helps a municipality identify properties that are vacant or at risk for vacancy, making it possible to intervene early and avoid more serious problems for the property.

Coordinate municipal action

A database helps a municipality share critical information with various local government departments and other key stakeholders and use it to coordinate action and facilitate collaboration.

TACTICAL USE OF VACANT BUILDINGS AND STOREFRONTS

2. Minimum Maintenance Ordinance

Use a minimum maintenance ordinance to provide an objective, district-wide standard of care for properties.

The failure to maintain property directly impacts property values of adjacent property and, in the worst case, can provide an area that attracts criminal activities. To protect a district from deterioration, a number of local governments have established property maintenance standards. There is a limit, however, on how far a jurisdiction may go in regulating unsightly areas on private property. It is an open question in many states whether their courts would uphold a beautification ordinance or a property maintenance or appearance code if the regulation is based purely upon aesthetic grounds.

The premise is that failure to provide minimum maintenance creates unsanitary and unsafe conditions, negatively impacts the aesthetic value of the community, and reduces property values. Local governments considering property standards need to work with legal counsel to make sure that the necessary procedural requirements are included in any public nuisance or property maintenance ordinance and that staff responsible for enforcement receive the necessary training.

The hardships encountered when enforcing MMOs are typically two-fold. First, the local government lacks the political will or manpower to enforce the ordinance. Second, the municipality lacks the funding required to enforce the ordinance by providing temporary clean-up and/or stabilization and weatherization measures.

Key Benefits

Objective standards

Every property owner is held to the same standard of care. This should hopefully address concerns that enforcement is due solely on the grounds of subjective aesthetic standards.

Legal authority

Assuming due process and clear communications are in effect, a MMO provides solid legal grounds for enforcing upkeep on any individual property for the sake of the community good in terms of safety and welfare.

3. Visual Enhancement Treatments

Use visual enhancement treatments as a temporary means of improving the appearance of a building while it is being prepared for occupancy or sale.

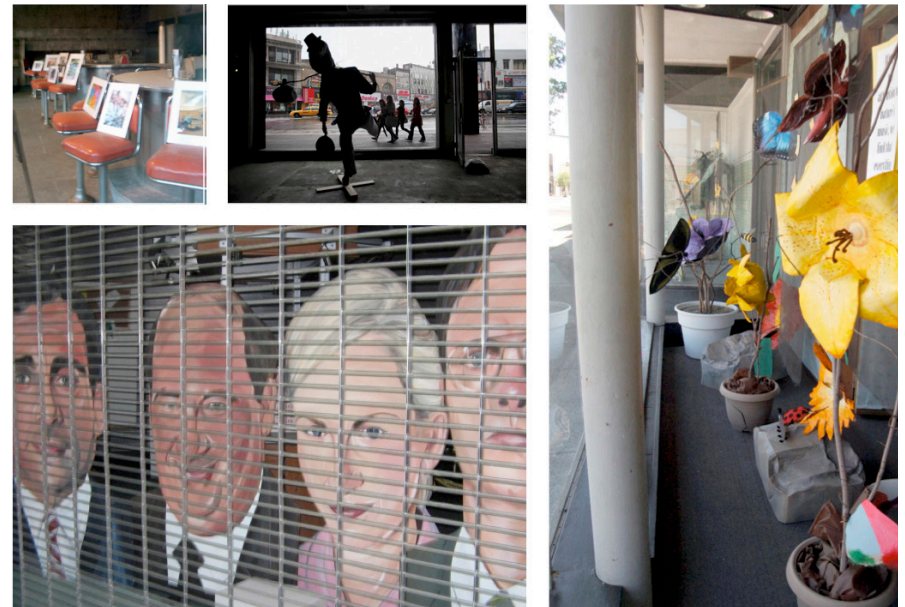
The appearance of vacancies in the downtown area can send a negative message and create the perception of a lack of retail vibrancy. To combat those perceptions and “buy time” until a building becomes occupied, any of the approaches noted and illustrated below can be considered.

Place artwork in vacant display windows if the interior space appearance is satisfactory. If the interior space is in detrimental condition, consider masking the windows from the interior with butcher paper or from the exterior with vinyl cling wraps. The masks can feature nostalgic photos or historic postcards of the community or images such as a map of downtown highlighting shopping and dining destinations. Place “community hero” posters in the windows to build community pride and draw attention away from the vacant building.

Key Benefits

Inexpensive

The above-noted techniques are inexpensive yet can reap significant visual rewards and temper perception of the district while buildings are being rehabilitated or sold.



A variety of art forms occupy the storefront windows of these vacant buildings. Consider featuring work by local artists or art students.

TACTICAL USE OF VACANT BUILDINGS AND STOREFRONTS

4. Financial Incentives

Use financial incentives to stimulate private sector building renovation investment.

While it can be argued that a property owner that has neglected their property should not be rewarded with a financial incentive, by the same token, the economic and community benefit derived from an improved building typically outweighs perceived injustices. There are a whole host of potential incentives that can be brought to bear on this issue. Some of the most common and strategic methods are noted below.

Facade Grants: Either single components (e.g. signs, awnings, paint) or overall facade grants can motivate an owner to enhance their building.

Historic Preservation Tax Credits: Qualifying buildings are eligible for either 10% or 20% federal tax credits while many states match the federal credits up to 25%.

Tax Abatement: This strategy freezes the taxable rate at the pre-renovation value so that improvements to the building do not render an immediate spike in property taxes.

Key Benefits

Gap financing

Sometimes these financial incentives are the difference between rehabilitating a building or letting it sit vacant. Through a nominal incentive from the public sector, the private sector might be motivated to invest in the renovation of an otherwise marginal property.

5. Vacant Building Registry

Use a vacant building registry to motivate owners to maintain buildings and return them to productive use, identify the party responsible for problem properties, monitor vacant properties, and defray costs of providing related municipal services.

A vacant building registry is an ordinance that requires owners (and, in some cases, financial institutions with an interest in a property) to register vacant buildings with a municipality. Effective registry programs also require registrants to pay a fee at regular intervals, which defrays the additional costs of providing municipal services associated with such properties. Fees also create a strong financial incentive for owners to secure and maintain vacant property and return it to productive use. Effective programs require registrants to provide 24-hour contact information, which makes it easier for a municipality to contact the owner or the owner's agent if there is a problem with the property. Some registry programs go further and include provisions that compel registrants to maintain, secure and insure vacant properties, and prepare and implement plans to return them to productive use. Good registry programs are implemented in conjunction with strong code enforcement and often include steep fines for noncompliance. A model Vacant Building Ordinance from Emporia, Kansas may be found at the following link: http://www.communitydesignsolutions.com/public/VBO_Emporia_Kansas.docx

Key Benefits

Motivate owners

Code enforcement alone isn't always enough to motivate owners to maintain vacant properties. Vacant building registries usually require payment of fees, and these added costs create an additional incentive for owners to maintain their properties.

Identify responsible parties to contact if there is a problem

Municipalities can use the information collected in the registry to contact the party responsible for a property if there is a problem.

Defray costs

Revenue generated from registration fees helps cover costs incurred by municipalities in monitoring vacant properties and enforcing vacant property requirements.

TACTICAL USE OF VACANT BUILDINGS AND STOREFRONTS

6. Receivership

Ensure that someone with the necessary expertise and resources repairs or rehabilitates a vacant property.

Receivership is a powerful but infrequently used tool for ensuring that seriously troubled properties are repaired or rehabilitated. Receivership is sometimes used as a last resort when other strategies, like traditional code enforcement, don't motivate an owner to perform necessary maintenance and repairs and a property is a danger to the community. If a property is not being properly maintained, a municipality can go to court and seek to have a receiver appointed to take care of the property. If the court appoints a receiver, this third party is authorized to act as if it owns the property. The receiver can take any step the court authorizes to repair or rehabilitate the property.

Receivers can finance the work with cash loans from banks or the municipality. In exchange, the receiver gives the lender a special certificate, which basically guarantees that it will get the full value of the loan back with interest. If the owner of the property doesn't pay back the receiver's loan with interest, the certificate becomes a lien on the property, which must be paid back before all other encumbrances on the property except taxes. This process provides the receiver with funds needed to repair the property and allows the bank or municipality financing the repairs to make a profit on its loan.

Key Benefits

Repair and rehabilitate vacant property

When other methods fail to motivate an owner to maintain a property, this process, enabled by state law, can give a receiver powerful tools to ensure that troubled properties are repaired or rehabilitated.

Pay for repairs and rehabilitation

It is often difficult to get financing to repair or rehabilitate a vacant property. The receivership process, if enabled by state law, gives receivers this critical tool to finance such repair activity.

Property owner rights

Since the property owner may retrieve the property at any point in the process by reimbursing the receiver for all costs associated with the project, the issue of property takings is addressed.

7. Acquisition or Demolition

Acquire properties to stabilize or rehabilitate individual properties or to redevelop an entire area or district in communities with large numbers of vacant properties. Demolish vacant properties that pose significant danger to the community and cannot be adequately addressed in any other way.

Acquisition: In districts where property values have fallen significantly, owners and private investors may not take proper care of a property. This neglect can cause problems for adjacent properties, and the problems can begin to spiral out of control. In situations where the private market has little incentive to act, the best alternative may be for a municipality to acquire properties.

The municipality can act aggressively (especially if it possesses a Community Development Corporation or a Redevelopment Authority) to improve a single property that is causing problems, or to improve several properties in an effort to redevelop a larger area. Municipalities can acquire properties individually or as part of a coordinated acquisition and redevelopment strategy. Where downtown stabilization or revitalization efforts require acquisition of larger numbers of properties, land banks have proven to be a very effective strategy. Though acquiring properties can be a useful and powerful tool, it is not a quick solution to a pressing problem—the process often takes a very long time.

Demolition: When a property is causing very serious problems that present a danger to the surrounding community, and the owner is not taking necessary steps to address the problem, a municipality may initiate demolition proceedings. After complying with procedures specified by state law and/or municipal ordinance, the municipality can demolish the property.

While the preservation of a downtown's architectural assets --especially its historic buildings-- is of paramount importance, occasionally the demolition of a delinquent building may cost a municipality less than taking care of a troubled property. What's more, under some circumstances, a municipality can recover the costs associated with the demolition. Carefully targeted demolition can help stabilize property values in the surrounding community and help lay the foundation for redevelopment.

Key Benefits: Acquisition

Return properties to productive use

By acquiring vacant properties that have no near-term prospect of being

TACTICAL USE OF VACANT BUILDINGS AND STOREFRONTS

redeveloped by the private market, municipalities can return them to productive use, helping to stabilize communities more quickly.

Promote redevelopment

Property acquisition allows municipalities to reshape an entire district.

Key Benefits: Demolition

Remove blight

Demolishing seriously troubled buildings can help stabilize or improve struggling districts. Demolition may be the best option when vacant properties are hurting the community around them and nothing else can restore the property to productive use.

Prompt owners to take responsibility

Sometimes a threat by the municipality to demolish a property compels recalcitrant owners to take responsibility for troubled properties.

Minimize municipal costs

While demolishing a building is expensive, it is sometimes less expensive in the long run than incurring all of the municipal costs associated with taking care of a troubled building.

8. Land Value Tax

A land value tax is a tax that is assessed on the value of a piece of land, rather than the value of the buildings that sit on it. Under a land tax, you are effectively taxed on the value of your location, which is mostly a result of what is nearby.

In contrast, in most American cities, property taxes are assessed on both land and buildings (“improvements”). Taxing improvement value acts as a disincentive to put land to productive use—since by increasing the value of your building, you will also increase your tax liability—and encourages land speculation. Taxing only land, or mostly land, helps resolve these issues.

An informative article and video that explains the Land Value Tax by the professionals at Strong Towns may be found at: <https://www.strongtowns.org/>

[landvaluetax](https://www.strongtowns.org/landvaluetax)

STRATEGIC INCENTIVES: BUILDING MARKET CONFIDENCE

Strategic Incentives: Building Confidence in the Market

Many of the pro forma analyses in this report point to the same conclusion: without layered incentives, even strong projects can fall short of financial viability. Wauchula's efforts to date, particularly through the CRA and state grants, are the foundation for a robust, outcome-driven incentive strategy that does more than close gaps. It builds confidence.

The following is drawn verbatim from the previously developed memo, with added context to highlight how Wauchula can continue to lead with tools that work.

Leveraging Incentives for Small-Scale Redevelopment in Wauchula, FL

Incentives such as historic tax credits (HTCs) and brownfield redevelopment programs are essential for making small-scale redevelopment projects financially viable, particularly in rural and historic communities like Wauchula. Without these tools, many historic buildings would remain vacant or fall into disrepair due to the high costs of rehabilitation compared to new construction. By leveraging federal and state incentives, developers, small business owners, and local investors can transform underused properties into community assets, strengthening Wauchula's downtown district.

The Federal Historic Tax Credit (HTC) program provides a 20% credit on qualified rehabilitation expenses for income-producing properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places. This program is particularly beneficial for small-scale projects, where every dollar of financing is critical to project success. Florida does not currently offer a state historic tax credit, but property owners in Wauchula can still benefit from other incentive programs that support historic rehabilitation, including local grants and property tax abatements.

In addition to HTCs, Florida's Brownfield Redevelopment Program helps property owners address environmental concerns that can make older buildings difficult to redevelop. Many historic properties, especially former commercial and industrial buildings, may have contamination issues such as lead paint, asbestos, or underground storage tanks. Florida's program offers incentives such as Brownfield

Site Rehabilitation Agreements (BSRAs), tax refunds, job creation incentives, and liability protections, reducing financial and legal barriers to redevelopment. Wauchula property owners undertaking redevelopment in designated brownfield areas can leverage these benefits to offset environmental remediation costs.

For small-scale developers, combining these incentives with local grant programs, tax abatements, or low-interest loan funds can make otherwise infeasible projects successful. Programs such as façade improvement grants, and tax increment financing (TIF) districts can provide additional layers of support. The City of Wauchula's Community Redevelopment Agency, The Development Group, and other local agencies may offer funding assistance to help revitalize downtown Wauchula, encouraging adaptive reuse of historic properties.

Beyond tax credits and brownfield programs, grant funding from sources such as the USDA and local foundations can further support small-scale redevelopment projects, particularly for mixed-use and upper-floor housing initiatives. The USDA's Rural Development programs, including the Community Facilities Grant and Rural Business Development Grant, can provide funding to improve building infrastructure, support small businesses, or enhance downtown revitalization efforts in Wauchula. Similarly, local and regional foundations often offer grants or low-interest loan programs to encourage the redevelopment of underutilized spaces, such as second-story housing above commercial storefronts. These funds can be used to offset costs associated with code compliance, accessibility improvements, or structural upgrades, making it more feasible for property owners to create much-needed housing in small-town markets.

By pairing these grant opportunities with historic tax credits and local incentive programs, Wauchula can foster vibrant mixed-use development that strengthens its downtown economy and increases the availability of quality housing. These tools are critical in helping small businesses and local investors restore historic buildings, preserve Wauchula's unique character, and enhance the overall economic vitality of the community. By leveraging multiple incentives, small-scale redevelopment projects can achieve financial feasibility while ensuring the long-term sustainability of Wauchula's historic assets.

FACADE GRANTS AS VISUAL CATALYSTS

Façade Grants as Visual Catalysts

Wauchula's existing façade grant program has been well-administered and impactful. But as this plan moves forward, additional enhancements may be considered:

- Creating a tiered system that rewards buildings with larger visibility or higher vacancy
- Offering match bonuses for properties that pair façade work with interior buildout
- Integrating design services as a technical assistance layer before grant funding is released

The role of façade improvement is not cosmetic alone—it is an economic signal. Properties that appear maintained draw more investment. Grants should be tied to visible public benefit, strong design standards, and long-term occupancy goals.

The Benefits of Façade Grants

The revitalization of a commercial district or residential neighborhood often starts with improvements to a single building or storefront. Even small changes—such as removing non-historic materials, making repairs, or applying fresh paint to highlight a building's original architectural details—can signal positive change and inspire similar upgrades in neighboring properties.

While individual property or business owners sometimes initiate these improvements on their own, the process can accelerate when a community establishes a façade improvement program. For this reason, such programs are often key implementation strategies in comprehensive plans, downtown revitalization efforts, and historic preservation initiatives.

Façade improvement programs provide incentives to encourage property owners and businesses to enhance the exterior appearance of their buildings and storefronts. These programs, which may apply to commercial or residential properties in both historic and non-historic areas, typically offer financial assistance such as matching grants, low-interest loans, tax incentives, and design guidance.

There are three basic approaches to facade grants and each have pros and cons as noted herein. The three principle facade grant approaches are: *Facade Component Grants*, *Overall Building Grants*, and the *Facade Master Plan*. Each approach is described and illustrated on the following pages.

FACADE GRANTS AS VISUAL CATALYSTS

Facade Component Grants

Since many building owners are intimidated by overall façade renovations coupled with a grant process, the City or Main Street Program might consider simplifying the initial phases of the façade grant program and focusing on individual façade elements or components instead of expensive, overall façade improvement approaches. In other words, consider conducting an annual facade component grant program such as an awning grant program, or a slipcover removal program, or a signage grant program. Once property owners become familiar with individual façade component programs and the process of improving one's building is demystified, then consider moving on to overall-façade-based grant programs or a comprehensive Facade Master Plan if needed or desired.

Rear of Building Treatment Component Grants



Example of Rear of Building Treatments from Lake City, SC (above): This row of buildings had all manner of unsightly items behind them ranging from trash dumpsters to HVAC units to weatherbeats to downspouts and much more. But since they fronted a town green it was imperative that these items be concealed. The approach taken was to paint the buildings a common palette of autumnal colors, then erect a simple structure comprised of 4x4 posts with 1x strips screwed into them and painted gray. This lattice conceals the unsightly elements and unifies the entire row of buildings. Foreground landscaping completes the rear of building treatments.

FACADE GRANTS AS VISUAL CATALYSTS

Slipcover Removal Component Grants



Conway, SC: This furniture company removed the metal slipcover from their building to expose a beautiful building underneath.



Conway, SC: The local government, in association with the Main Street program, realized the positive impact slipcover removal made. Therefore, they enacted a component facade grant program for slipcover removal and five other buildings in downtown removed their slipcovers. The visual improvement to their main street was remarkable!



Awning Component Grants



Beaufort, SC: Main Street Beaufort initiated a component grant program featuring awnings.

FACADE GRANTS AS VISUAL CATALYSTS

Signage Component Grants

One of the quickest ways to make a positive first impression from a design perspective is to have downtown buildings that feature quality, eye-catching signage. By coupling a public sector incentive with a private sector investment, the building and/or business owners are able to design and install signs of a caliber and quality that might otherwise be unaffordable. As part of the signage grant, a thoughtful review of existing sign ordinances is likely in order to ensure that quality signs like those featured at right are not prohibited by an outdated code requirement.

Should the community lack local sign designers and fabricators to execute the kinds of signs depicted at right, they might consider participating with the CoSign project. CoSign is a program developed by the American Sign Museum that helps communities create unique signage for revitalizing business districts. More information about this cutting edge program may be found at:

www.cosigncincy.com



FACADE GRANTS AS VISUAL CATALYSTS

Overall Building Facade Grants

Once the methodology for applying for component facade grants is established and the City or Main Street Program has a proven track record for administering them, consider 'graduating' up to overall facade grants that address the entire face of a building. This approach would be reserved for more 'troublesome' buildings that require far more physical enhancement than a singular component approach could provide. However, this approach requires far more financial capital and administrative oversight to execute than a facade component grant approach.



Lake City, SC: (Left/Below) The owner of this building took advantage of a matching facade grant to convert the vacant space into a photography studio and office. The redesign featured a contemporary paint scheme, bold awnings, creative lighting, and professional signage.

Lake City, SC: (Below) The owner of this building took advantage of a matching facade grant to convert the vacant space into a butcher shop. The redesign featured a contemporary paint scheme, painted and projecting signage, a steel canopy, and aluminum storefront system.



CLOSING GAPS, BUILDING TRUST

Closing Gaps, Building Trust

The strategies outlined here are not standalone; they work together. Public realm improvements make downtown more inviting. Façade grants make investment visible. Temporary storefront uses change the feel of a block. And behind it all, incentives give developers, small businesses, and institutions a reason to say yes.

What's also clear is this: Wauchula has done this before. Many of the ideas in this chapter are rooted in previous work. What this plan does is systematize them, align them with new development, and move them from tactical to strategic.

The next chapter will pull these ideas into a unified, phased implementation matrix. It will outline what needs to happen, when, and by whom.



10

**CONCLUSION &
IMPLEMENTATION
STRATEGY**

CONCLUSION & IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

Downtown Wauchula is not starting from scratch. This plan builds upon years of dedicated work including streetscape improvements, civic investments, private projects, and the tireless efforts of Main Street Wauchula, the City, TDG, and a broad coalition of community partners. What's new is the moment. The alignment. The clarity of opportunity. The willingness to act.

Through public input, market analysis, financial modeling, and design, this plan has moved deliberately from understanding to action. It has named six signature development sites, each with a specific path to feasibility and reuse. It has paired those sites with public realm strategies that “fill the gaps,” activating overlooked spaces, softening visual clutter, enhancing walkability, and building pride.

Now, the final pivot begins. This chapter turns vision into assignment, concept into cadence. It identifies what comes first, what can happen in parallel, and what requires long-term persistence.

Looking Ahead: The Implementation Matrix

This matrix is not a static checklist. It is a living roadmap that assigns timelines and responsibility across short (0–1 year), medium (2–3 years), and long-term (4–7 years) horizons. Each action is linked to a strategic theme that emerged from the planning process.

Final Thought: Wauchula Has Already Started

This report is not the beginning. The work is underway. This plan simply names the pieces, connects the players, and lays out the path. Downtown Wauchula has a vision. It has momentum. And now, it has a plan to match. Let's get to work.