ACTIVATE DOWNTOWN

REIGNITE EAST POINT

GEORGIA TECH SCHOOL OF CITY AND REGIONAL PLANNING
FALL 2015 STUDIO

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Planning Studio from Georgia Institute of Technology’s School of City and Regional Planning program conducted a twelve-week studio on several portions of the MARTA Red Line Corridor in Atlanta. The intent of the studio was to examine equitable transit oriented developments, which are a mix of uses within a walkable radius of a transit stop. Various groups were formed to address different MARTA stations or segments of the corridor. The scope of this document address the East Point MARTA station and surrounding downtown area. Concluding recommendations were formed based on research in transportation, development and urban form, placemaking, and economic development.

TRANSPORTATION

The first big proposal for the transportation network at Downtown East Point is to convert the current one-way pair (Main Street and East Point Street) to a two-way network. From the studies, we have found that two-way street networks have the following benefits, including:

- Increasing retail accessibility to generate additional revenue and support the local economy
- Increasing safety for pedestrians and cyclists by a slower traffic network. This will also encourage more people on streets and thus foster a more vibrant downtown atmosphere
- Drawing traffic flows TO Downtown East Point. A slower network will help Downtown East Point become a destination.

Capacity analysis also demonstrates the great potential for the two-way conversion at Downtown East Point. Even after the proposed conversion, the Main Street and East Point Street will still be capable of serving about 4 times the amount of vehicles that use them nowadays. With a comprehensive signalization at intersections throughout Downtown area, we will be able to manage an efficient traffic flow.

Based on the previous analysis, we proposed the following two-way design for Downtown East Point, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Two-Way Design for Main Street and East Point Street
Table 1: Current vs. Proposed Condition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Current</th>
<th>Proposed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main Street</strong></td>
<td><strong>3 Northbound lanes</strong></td>
<td><strong>2 Northbound lanes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>28 angled parking spaces</strong></td>
<td><strong>1 Southbound lane</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>0 bike lane</strong></td>
<td><strong>~ 100 parallel parking spaces</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>8 ft sidewalks</strong></td>
<td><strong>2-way protected cycle track</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>East Point Street</strong></td>
<td><strong>2 Southbound lanes</strong></td>
<td><strong>1 Northbound lane</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>2 turning lanes</strong></td>
<td><strong>1 southbound lane</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>15 parallel parking spaces</strong></td>
<td><strong>~ 200 parallel parking spaces</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>8 ft sidewalks</strong></td>
<td><strong>10 ft sidewalks</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Detailed roadway cross-sections for Main Street and East Point Street can be found in the transportation section in Main Report.

**DEVELOPMENT AND URBAN FORM**

As East Point prepares to develop a new City Hall and the property referred to as “the Commons,” a number of items should be considered to ensure the character of the downtown is retained and the absorption rate remains high. The following recommendations were based on research and observations are collectively promoting a lively and active downtown. Recommendations include:

- Small blocks to retain walkability and charm
- Height minimums and maximums that will support increased density but not dwarf existing developments
- Development Phasing to ensure low vacancy rate
- Suggested types of infill to encourage new development and accommodations to attract development
- Changes to the current Architectural Overlay to drive new developments and keep in line with intended architectural styling
- Form Based Code Proposal that will also drive development and shape downtown for years to come.

Community input confirmed many of our recommendations in keeping with the overall vision and future of East Point and can be found in the Development and Urban Form portion of the Main Report.
PLACEMAKING

Several interviews and meetings with individuals living and working in East Point led to the conclusion that East Point lacks a clear defined identity. In an effort to help East Point brand itself and improve its public spaces, the follow recommendations were made:

- Performing a cultural inventory to identify assets to the community and things or places of special meaning
- Creative placemaking that will channel creativity towards an immediate impact
- Incorporate public art including murals and sculptures
- Emphasize East Point’s rail history through rail motifs in the form of playgrounds, revitalization of the old streetcar, or murals.
- Incorporate wayfinding to orient visitors to local places of note
- Programming that would enhance public space and promote an active downtown

Placemaking is important to creating places where individuals actually want to go. It helps to foster physical, cultural, and social identities that will evolve over time rendering more enjoyable places.

HISTORIC CIVIC BLOCK

A recent Request for Proposal for the new City Hall calls for the tearing down of several iconic landmarks in East Point’s downtown to be replaced with a new City Hall and civic building. While a new City Hall is needed, the proposal raises concern not only for the future of several beloved places but also the character and functionality of the downtown. In the Main Report, the importance for preservation is explained and additional recommendations are made including:

- Alternative sites for the new City Hall and civic buildings that would save existing structures and utilize underused surface parking
- Revitalization of the Auditorium into a performing arts venue
- Preservation of the Fire Station as well as alternative uses

CONCLUSION

The intended goals of both our research and recommendations were to build on the strengths East Point already exhibits. Pinpointing these strengths and helping East Point to capitalize on them will contribute to a stronger, more cohesive vision for future growth. Our recommendations also suggest a strategic marketing strategy that promotes East Point as a viable location for development and desirable place to live or operate a business through branding that promotes an authentic and clear identity. Lastly, an incremental or phased approach to development will create tangible, small wins now and facilitate larger wins in the future.
1 | BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Studio
This study was conducted by a group of masters students in the Georgia Institute of Technology’s City and Regional Planning program as part of a planning studio course facilitated by Professor Michael Dobbins. The studio as a whole was intended to address equitable transit-oriented developments (TODs) along MARTA’s red and gold lines in West Atlanta. Other sections of the studio address the English Avenue and Georgia Tech interface, the Atlanta University Center, and the Lee Street corridor between Oakland City Station and Fort McPherson Station. This group focused on downtown East Point, recognizing its proximity to a MARTA station, historic character, and the existing street grid as strong foundational components of a transit-oriented community. The goal of this report is to provide East Point residents and business owners with an accessible, comprehensive overview of the existing conditions and plans for downtown and their implications, as well as to make recommendations for action steps that would foster a more vibrant, walkable neighborhood reflective of the expressed vision of the community.

Study Area
Geographically, the scope of this project is defined by Norman Berry Drive to the north, Hamilton Avenue to the south, with east-west boundaries being Main Street and East Point Street respectively. This encompasses the commercial elements of downtown East Point in full, as well as some of the surrounding housing stock. The building stock in the downtown area is primarily one-to-two-story, brick construction with varying types of fenestration and architectural details. Narrow sidewalks, moderate amounts of street furniture, and little green space define the pedestrian experience. A one-way pair of roads, East Point Street and Main Street, bisect the Downtown area creating two high-speed thoroughfares. Despite the MARTA station’s location directly across from the Downtown commercial district, the area lacks a certain luster to engage visitors and attract their business.
**Study Methods**

In order to ground recommendations in reality and the ongoing work of the City of East Point, a review and analysis of existing regulations, previous studies, and key data sets was conducted. A series of stakeholder interviews was then held with representatives of City staff, downtown organizations, regional planning agencies, and local community members. These sources included:

**Review of Existing Regulations and Previous Studies**

- 2036 Comprehensive Plan (2012)
- City of East Point Zoning Ordinance
- Main Street Corridor Transit—Oriented Development — Livable Communities Initiative Study (2012)
- Strategic Economic Development Plan (2012)
- East Point Economic Development Department Survey (2010)
- Traffic Study for East Point Street and Main Street (2012)

**Existing Conditions Assessment**

- Site Visits
- Architectural Character Assessment

**Stakeholder Interviews**

- Planning Department
- Economic Development Department
- Business and Industrial Development Authority (BIDA)
- Main Street Association
- Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA)
- Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC)
- Local business owners
- Local developer
- Community members

The information collected through this discovery process, synthesized in this chapter, was used to shape the recommendations for strategies to improve the viability and quality of life in downtown East Point.
REVIEW OF EXISTING REGULATIONS AND PREVIOUS STUDIES

Comprehensive Plan

The City of East Point Comprehensive Plan 2036\(^1\) addresses a holistic vision for the future of the city, including the land use, transportation, community needs, economic development strategies and other components. In this plan, the City of East Point replaced its former, parcel-based Future Land Use (FLU) map with a Future Development Map (FDM) to consider broader contexts in development decisions. The FDM divides the city into eleven character areas, neighborhoods and regions with unique development patterns. The character areas are: 1) Suburban Residential; 2) Traditional Urban Neighborhood; 3) Growing Residential; 4) Redevelopment Neighborhood; 5) Neighborhood Center; 6) Regional Center; 7) Town Center 1 -- Downtown; 8) Town Center 2 -- Lawrence Street; 9) Town Center 3 -- Willingham Warehouse District; 10) Legacy Industrial; and 11) Industrial/Business Park. The FDM also recognizes parks, commercial corridors, major highway corridors, and gateway locations. A vision and intent, goals, a description of future development patterns, typical zoning districts, and general uses are outlined for each character area, as well as limits on residential density and building height.

Downtown East Point is its own character area, Town Center 1 -- Downtown, and makes up 231 acres surrounding the East Point MARTA Station. The area is envisioned as the “pedestrian-oriented center of the community,” with a mix of uses targeting a range of income levels. Rehabilitate historic buildings, compatible infill development, higher densities and intensities, eclectic local businesses, gathering spaces, and quality streetscapes are central to the plan. Buildings should have minimal or no setbacks, and facades should have large windows and varied building materials to create engaging street frontages. Residential density is limited to 6---12 dwelling units per acre, and height is limited to 2---6 stories with proper height restrictions, such as step-backs.

Zoning Code

Commercial Redevelopment District

The local zoning ordinance, which is designed to regulate land use in such a way that supports the implementation of the vision established in the Comprehensive Plan, designates the downtown study area in its entirety as a Commercial Redevelopment (C---R) zone. The Commercial Redevelopment

category allows for a mix of 42 designated uses, including residential, office, and retail uses. There are no specific restrictions for building height, minimum setbacks, minimum lot area, or minimum heated floor area per unit. A minimum of 10 percent of the site must be landscaped open space.\(^2\) Other regulations for the C--R district follow the city---wide provisions for signs, landscaping, stormwater management, parking, and other topics. City---wide regulations require on---street, on---site parking for all properties, with the minimum number of required spaces varied by specific uses. For example, general office uses must provide three spaces per 1,000 square feet, retailers must provide five spaces per 1,000 square feet, restaurants must provide ten spaces per 1,000 square feet, multi---family housing must provide 1.75 spaces per unit, and single---family residential must provide two spaces per unit. Shared parking agreements are permitted.\(^3\)

**Downtown Architectural Overlay District**

In addition to a Commercial Redevelopment zoning, the downtown study area also falls under the Downtown Architectural Overlay District. It applies to a more narrowly defined geographic area than the Commercial Redevelopment district, looking only at the core commercial and mixed---use portion of downtown. (See Figure X.) The intent of the overlay district is provide a cohesive approach to protecting and enhancing the downtown area. The overlay is meant to promote the general welfare of the community through regulations that address design, location, bulk, size of buildings, structures, and the density of distribution of buildings. It addresses street activity and expresses a desire to unify the community around one solid vision. The document sets up a Downtown Architectural Review Board that is expected to review proposed development and enforce standards prior to the permitting process. The Overlay District address landscaping measures and the pedestrian experience including appropriate street furniture and pedestrian scaled lighting. The


\(^3\) City of East Point. City of East Point Zoning Ordinance - Sec. 10-2154 Off-street parking or loading area layout, construction, and maintenance. Retrieved from [https://www.municode.com/library/GA/east_point/codes/zoning?nodeId=CH2ZORE_ARTEOREPALO_S1_0-2154OREPALOARLACOMA](https://www.municode.com/library/GA/east_point/codes/zoning?nodeId=CH2ZORE_ARTEOREPALO_S1_0-2154OREPALOARLACOMA)
document recommends that shared parking be enforced and parallel on---street parking be utilized. In regards to the building form, the document simply requires that buildings reflect the downtown character and are prohibited to have drive---throughs. The document suggests an appropriate color palette and building materials as well as level of architectural detail expected on newly developed buildings. 4

**City of East Point Main Street Corridor TOD Plan (2012)**
The Atlanta Regional Commission conducted a Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) study of the City of East Point in 2012, re----envisioning the area surrounding the East Point MARTA Station as a transit---oriented development (TOD). The plan offers recommendations and implementations for a ten---year period, assessing a 430---acre study area centers around the Main Street and East Point Street corridors south of Fort McPherson and north of Washington Road. The vision breaks the study area into seven focus areas: Village North, Technology Research District, Gateway North, Gateway South, Historic Character Downtown, Neighborhood Live/Work, and the Historic Warehouse District. The Historic Character Downtown area is nearly contiguous with the scope of this report. The primary problems identified in the LCI study were underutilized buildings, deep and inconsistent setbacks, surface parking, a disconnect between the MARTA station and downtown, and the need for facade improvement and maintenance, bicycle facilities, a civic plaza, clearly defined gateways, streetscaping, landscaping, wayfinding, and public art. Seeking to address these concerns, the plan recommends three catalyst projects for downtown East Point: 1) redevelopment of the Commons site as a mixed---use center, 2) an expanded government complex, and 3) building a hotel and convention center on the current MARTA parking lots.

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The City of East Point conducted an updated market analysis in 2015 to determine the current market potential for the 2012 Livable Cities Initiative Transit Oriented Development Study (LCI TOD Study). The report highlighted a consistent trend of population attrition, the need to attract new residents to the city, and a weak economic base, noting “the East Point TOD market is not competitive within the local and regional market to sustain its current business base.” The report did note several positive indicators within the TOD study area, such as the retention and attraction of senior households (65+), an 85 percent increase in affluent households (earning over $75,000) between 2010 and 2014, and the proximity to MARTA as an attraction for residential developers.

**Residential**
With a current housing vacancy rate between 15 and 18 percent, the existing supply of housing within the market is sufficient to meet projected need for the next five to ten years. The majority of the existing housing stock within the study area—— 70 percent of all units—— is single---family homes, and a market may exist for multifamily units close to the MARTA station, particularly smaller, ADA---accessible units. Because of the limited potential per---unit pricing of $120,000 to $180,000, a public---private partnership involving assistance with land assemblage or cost reduction will likely be necessary. The report suggests the market absorption potential is limited to between 30 and 70 units per year.

**Office**
The excess of existing office supply will take 10 years to lease up with an aggressive absorption rate, limiting the potential for new office development; Wagon Works and Buggy Works along have 75,000 square feet of vacant space. The report recommends infill development targeted to specific---end users and owner operators for any additional office and/or industrial development and states “average asking lease rates do not appear adequate to support new speculative development in the TOD area at this time.”

**Retail**
The current retail leakage within a four---minute drive---time market of the East Point TOD area is $37.1 million which, assuming a 10 percent recapture of sales leakage, could support 20,300 to 67,600 square feet of new retail development. Small---scale, local retail has the greatest opportunity in the area, and the potential for the attraction of national retailers is low.

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5 City of East Point Department of Planning and Zoning. (October 2015). East Point Transit Oriented Development Plan - LCI Study: Market Assessment Update.
6 City of East Point Department of Planning and Zoning. (October 2015). East Point Transit Oriented Development Plan - LCI Study: Market Assessment Update. (p. 2)
7 City of East Point Department of Planning and Zoning. (October 2015). East Point Transit Oriented Development Plan - LCI Study: Market Assessment Update. (p. 2)
Based on this assessment, key report recommendations include infill development, a proactive marketing and recruitment strategy for the TOD area, a facade improvement program for downtown property owners, and increased code enforcement to improve the quality of the business environment.

**STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS**

Community stakeholders were interviewed to better understand perceptions of downtown East Point and the current conditions and opportunities in the area. Interviewees included the Department of Planning and Community Development, Department of Economic Development, Business and Industrial Development Authority (BIDA), East Point Main Street Association, Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA), Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC), local business owners, a local developer, and community members. Their insight provided a basis for the recommendations that follow.

**Department of Planning and Community Development**

Staff from the City of East Point Department of Planning and Community Development provided an overview of their ongoing assessment of the city and the status of key projects underway. Major takeaways were the imminent streetscape improvements, the release of a request for proposals (RFP) for a new city hall, and an emphasis on redeveloping Commons site as a catalyst for downtown revitalization. Staff comments included:

*Transportation*

- The City is currently pursuing downtown *streetscape improvements*
  - Plans for new 10---12---foot sidewalks, lighting, paving, and pedestrian improvements for intersections
  - Received a Transportation Economic Assistance (TEA) grant from Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) for improvements on the west side of Main Street
  - Main Street and Sims Street are currently in the acquisition phase

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**Table 1. Market Analysis Summary Statistics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Statistic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>East Point TOD Population (2010)</td>
<td>12,277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Point TOD Population (2014 estimate)</td>
<td>13,359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Point TOD Population (2019 projection)</td>
<td>12,738</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(---4.6% over 5 years)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Point TOD Median Household Income (2014)</td>
<td>$34,091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing Vacancy</td>
<td>15---18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor Force Participation</td>
<td>Below 60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential Per---Unit Residential Market Pricing</td>
<td>$120,000---$180,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multifamily Housing (Percent of All Units within TOD Area)</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Available Office Space (City of East Point as of June 2015)</td>
<td>$60,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Asking Rent for Office Space (City of East Point)</td>
<td>$1,20/sq. ft./month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Asking Price for Office Space (City of East Point)</td>
<td>$61/sq. ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail Sales Leakage (East Point TOD 4---minute drive---time market)</td>
<td>$37.1 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

o East Point Street is currently in the design phase

*Previously considered converting Main Street and East Point Street to bidirectional roads, but received pushback from GDOT, who controls the roads*
  o GDOT recently indicated they may be more open to converting the pair
  o Current street improvements show the pair will remain one-way

*City wants to create a bicycle connection to the BeltLine access point at Fort McPherson, but needs funding*

*Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) conducting a complete streets workshop for the city through the Walkable and Livable Communities Institute (WALC)*

*Georgia Tech’s Sidewalk Century is currently conducting sidewalk audits*

**Development**

*The only recent development in downtown East Point was the CVS at the corner of Main Street and Washington Avenue in 2014*

*A new Family Dollar will soon be developed at Main Street and Williams Avenue*

*There are two grocery stores in East Point----- Wayfield Food and Piggly Wiggly------ but they are not located within walking distance of the TOD area*

*Political and administrative issues, along with market forces, have previously stifled development, but the current administration and City Council want to project a pro-quality development image*

*Recently released a request for proposals (RFP) to build a new City Hall proposed on the site of the historic fire station*

*East Point Historic Civic Block recently listed among the 11 Most Endangered Historic Places in the country by the National Trust for Historic Preservation*

*Movie studios have shown interest in filming at historic civic buildings, especially the library and auditorium*

*The hotel/motel tax would provide sufficient funds to renovate the dilapidated civic buildings without dipping into the City’s general fund, and a pool of $2---3 million has already been set aside*

*Focus on redeveloping the eight---acre Commons site----- the block between Main Street, Ware Avenue, East Point Street, and Cleveland Avenue------ to create an attractive destination and using a real estate marketer to promote the sale of the property assemblage*

*The Business and Industrial Development Authority (BIDA) does not fully exercise its legislative powers and could implement additional policies*

*Need to modify downtown’s Architectural Overlay District, written in 2005*

**Placemaking**

*Need gateway features*

*City wants to incorporate public art downtown*

**Department of Economic Development**
The City of East Point’s Department of Economic Development is responsible for fostering business development and attracting new developers and businesses to the area. Notes from staff included:

- The City offers **unmatched affordability** for both residential and commercial property compared to other transit---adjacent communities in the metro area
- Increasing strength of the **film, hospitality, and distribution industries** in East Point
- **Difficulty attracting retailers**, largely because of the buying power of the area demographics; need to increase number of residents and/or incomes to attract retail
- The perceptions of **crime and safety and the reputation of the local public schools** are major barriers to attracting new businesses
- Need to **rethink the Downtown Architectural Design Overlay** to promote a higher quality business environment
- Recognize the **need to provide better online content**, but the current website platform only allows staff to edit text and the City’s Information Technology staff does not have capacity to make major, frequent changes to the site, so the department often sends information to the Main Street Association to publish on their website. The City is in the process of getting a new platform.

**Business and Industrial Development Authority (BIDA)**
The Business and Industrial Development Authority (BIDA) is authorized by the State of Georgia as the City’s development authority, giving it broad powers to promote the development of trade, commerce, industry, or employment opportunities. It may use such means as issuing tax exempt bonds, creating public---private partnerships, providing technical assistance, structuring sale---leaseback agreements on government---owned land, and developing property.8 BIDA provided insight into its current activities to promote business in downtown East Point:

- BIDA is overseeing the effort to **redevelop the Commons site**
- Previous attempts to redevelop the Commons had issues with entitlements, parcel assemblage, and city reputation within the development community
- BIDA, in cooperation with the other property owners, is currently working with a real estate marketing company to **market the sale of the Commons** as an assemblage of parcels
- BIDA’s vision for the Commons redevelopment is a **six-story mixed-use** development with ground floor retail, second floor office, and four stories of residential above
- The proceeds of the sale of government---owned properties in the Commons could potentially be allocated toward a fund that supports economic development, such as a **small business revolving loan fund**

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• BIDA has the authority to buy properties and hold them as a ground lease, allow discounted rents for tenants to rehabilitate properties, accept payments in lieu of taxes, and create a facade grant program, but has not done so previously
• The only development that has requested funds from the **East Point Corridors Tax Allocation District (TAD)** was Leadbetter Properties for the new Wal-Mart on Cleveland Avenue
• The Atlanta Regional Commission technical assistance to BIDA through its 2015 **Community Choices** program to research economic development incentives; the findings have not yet been published

**Main Street Association**
The East Point Main Street Association provided insight on the previous and current operations of the organization. Historically, Main Street has been an organization that functions to preserve and champion historic downtowns through targeting organizations, programs, and communities. Their belief that a united front can bring vitality back to dying downtowns has revolutionized countless cities across the nation. East Point, however, is currently not enrolled in the National Program, and thus has shifted the Main Street Association’s realm to one that primarily coordinates social and community centered events. Key takeaways from the Main Street Association meeting include:

• Need funds to be allocated to **hire full time staff person in order to regain accreditation**
• Fort McPherson’s closing dramatically impacted business along Main Street
• Optimistic that the redevelopment of Fort McPherson will lead to more business and residents in East Point

**Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA)**
The Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) was consulted to determine the agency’s view of the East Point Station in the context of the regional network, as well as any plans for changes to local service or utilization of the existing surface parking lots. Staff from MARTA’s Office of Transit---Oriented Development and Real Estate noted:

• MARTA recognizes the **need to focus on** transit---oriented development (TOD) at its rail stations on the **south and west lines** moving forward
• College Park Station has the most utilized parking lots in the MARTA system——— typically reaching 95 percent capacity——— and East Point provides necessary spillover parking capacity
• In order to consider TOD on its site in East Point, **parking replacement** must be addressed and would require substantial investment
• A **new commuter rail line (the “Peach Line”)** connecting south into Clayton County has been proposed, but is indeterminate at this time
• If implemented, East Point Station is one of several **possible transfer points** under consideration
• MARTA has yet to determine if it would use heavy or light rail technology for the Peach Line extension
• The existing **East Point Station may have to be reconfigured** to accommodate the Peach Line
Because of these technical complications and the current level of indeterminacy, **East Point Station is not at the top of MARTA's TOD priority list**

- To attract MARTA to redevelop the land more quickly, the city may consider fast tracked permitting, tax abatements, putting in necessary infrastructure, establishing a MARTA point person on staff, or ensuring the necessary entitlements are in place prior to the RFP stage
- The City of East Point currently has a **balance of approximately $130,000 available** in an account through MARTA, which it received through a MARTA Offset Program several years ago. The funds may be used for last mile connectivity, such as pedestrian or bicycle infrastructure, and have not yet been accessed by the City.

The redevelopment of the MARTA surface parking lots into a hotel and conference center is featured as a catalyst project within the 2012 Main Street Corridor TOD Plan. Given the findings from this meeting, which suggest MARTA will not likely redevelop its lots in the immediate future, this catalyst project should not be central to East Point’s short—term downtown revitalization strategy.

**Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC)**

The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) is the regional planning and intergovernmental coordination agency for the ten—county Metro Atlanta area. ARC staff offered insight into the perceptions of East Point throughout the region and available local resources to support downtown development:

- Communication difficulties and a lack of follow through from previous administration had tarnished East Point’s working relationships with external entities, both public and private
- As the first city outside of the airport’s height restriction and noise mitigation area, East Point has the potential to be a major player in the Atlanta Aerotropolis plan
- Preliminary research from the Atlanta Regional Commission, reveals that **roughly half of every proposed mixed—use development in the Atlanta Metro carries out to completion.**

**Local Business Owners**

Local business owners were consulted on their perceptions of doing business in downtown East Point, their reasons for locating there, and their experiences with City staff and regulations. Business owner comments included:

- View **affordability, accessibility, proximity to Atlanta, and the small town feel** as the primary attractors to doing business in downtown East Point
- Initially drawn to the location by the availability of affordable space
- Believe market demand for new restaurants and retail exists, but the **perception and reality of crime detract new business**

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9 City of East Point. (June 2012). Main Street Corridor TOD Plan - A Livable Centers Initiative. Atlanta Regional Commission.
• **One-way streets inhibit** customer access to retail locations
• Some business owners felt the **city staff was unresponsive** and unhelpful in dealing with permitting and other administrative processes
• **Deterred from posting signs** because of the annual permitting fees and frustrated with signage regulations, such as the inability to place signs in windows
• Some businesses have worked with the Department of Economic Development to secure **financial incentives**, some were unaware that any such incentives (including the Opportunity Zone Job Tax Credit) exist, and others were aware of opportunities but thought the application process was too complex to use them
• Appreciate the Department of Economic Development’s **marketing materials** and the City’s new **Eight at Eight** business owners gathering and would like to feel part of a stronger business community
• Businesses **should be more involved with the local community**, such as through an internship or workforce training program with students at Tri---Cities High School

**Local Developer**
A meeting with a local developer was arranged to gain perspective on East Point’s attractiveness to the development industry. The Developer discussed both pros and cons for developing in East Point and provided a number of relevant takeaways:

• East Point needs to clearly communicate its identity to the public
• Tell the story of East Point through marketing materials and many mediums
• Develop a social media presence
• Developers want to do as much independent research as possible prior to contacting the City, so accessible information and a user---friendly website are critical
• Common awareness of the difficult awareness process

**Community Members**
A community engagement meeting with East Point residents was conducted to obtain resident insight on community operations and their vision for the future. Residents were first presented with an overview of current plans for downtown, development trends in the metro area, and context for the scope of this study. They then broke down into smaller groups for interactive discussions about transportation, development, and placemaking. Emergent trends from community feedback included:

• Residents **desire an urban, walkable center** with a mix of uses, including day---to---day services (especially a grocery store), restaurants, and housing
• Preference for **one--- to four---story buildings** with shallow setbacks and narrow storefronts
• Desire to **maintain the existing historic civic buildings**
• Need for **street lighting** at a pedestrian scale
• Need for additional parking, but not in front of buildings------ supportive of **garage, parallel**, and **bike parking**
- People feel unsafe walking along Cleveland Avenue from the municipal parking lot to Corner Tavern
- Interest in a tactical urbanism bike lane event
- Preference for converting Main Street and East Point Street to bidirectional
- Lack of cultural identity (historic and current)
- Desire for placemaking with a hometown feel
- Most people prefer a city hall with an urban form

ANALYSIS

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT)
During the initial research phase, a SWOT analysis was performed to assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the study area. This framework guided our discussion with several key stakeholders who helped further refine the results of the SWOT analysis. Our recommendations build on the current strengths of the East Point Downtown in order to minimize the threats and capitalize on the opportunities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Summary of SWOT Analysis</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>STRENGTHS</strong></td>
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<td><strong>WEAKNESSES</strong></td>
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<td><strong>OPPORTUNITIES</strong></td>
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Key Takeaways
The vision for a compact, walkable, transit-orientated downtown East Point established in the City’s 2036 Comprehensive Plan remains consistent with the desires of local residents, business owners, and city staff. However, little traction has been gained toward the realization of this vision. Our analysis has identified several critical conditions that shaped our proposed approach to revitalizing downtown East Point (see Table 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Concern</th>
<th>Approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>East Point Street and Main Street, the main roads downtown, are one-way with excess capacity</td>
<td>The existing configuration prioritizes vehicle throughput, encouraging people to pass through the city, hurting local businesses, and creating a hazardous pedestrian environment</td>
<td>The street network should be reconfigured to allow for a road diet and bidirectional conversion of East Point Street and Main Street that would support a more walkable, active environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MARTA’s new Peach Line will likely connect at East Point Station</td>
<td>MARTA is uncertain of the necessary station modifications and impact on parking capacity that will result from the new line</td>
<td>East Point should not rely on the redevelopment of the MARTA surface parking lots as a catalyst project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market analysis shows the TOD area can absorb no more than 30 to 70 units annually</td>
<td>Proposals for the Commons redevelopment show four stories of residential across the majority of the property—far exceeding the realistic level of</td>
<td>Encourage additional housing density by phasing smaller developments—such as live/work units, townhomes, and small apartments—-that can</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Summary of Conditions Guiding the Recommended Approach to Revitalization
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Solution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Commons is currently being marketed without stipulations</td>
<td>This valuable, strategically located and primarily government-owned piece of property should not be turned over to the private sector without securing community benefits</td>
<td>Ensure the property will serve a public interest, such as by designating a portion of the proceeds to a fund to support small business owners or by creating a Community Benefits Agreement for the property, which could require a percentage of affordable housing or other benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The City has preliminary plans to construct a new City Hall on the site of the historic fire station</td>
<td>Demolishing a distinct, historical building unnecessarily eliminates local character, a quality valued by East Point residents and an attractor for commercial activity</td>
<td>The City should consider alternative site locations for the new City Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is no visibly expressed cultural identity in Downtown East Point</td>
<td>Placemaking</td>
<td>The City, with support from the Main Street Association, should utilize street furniture, public art, wayfinding, and other means to establish a sense of place downtown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2 | TRANSPORTATION

The transportation system in Downtown East Point will play a major role in the revitalization of East Point’s Main Street. As the downtown area sees growth and redevelopment, the transportation system will need to be adjusted to meet the needs of people living, working, and visiting the area. The ultimate goal of the proposed transportation system is to ensure that people can safely travel, by all modes of transportation, and enjoy the unique experiences that Downtown East Point has to offer. This section will outline the proposed changes to the transportation network in East Point to restore commercial vibrancy and active streetscapes for all users.

**Two-Way Roads**

A 2012 traffic impact study conducted by Southeastern Engineering set the framework for proposed LCI improvements to the road network in Downtown East Point. Southeastern Engineering focused primarily on automobiles travelling through Downtown East Point.\(^1\) Using Level of Service, a measure of the ratio of total vehicles to the road capacity, as the sole criteria, the report suggested a road diet for both Main Street and East Point Streets. The report also suggested keeping both roads one-way across Downtown East Point to maintain smooth traffic flows.

Free flow traffic as a measure of road performance does not consider walking or cycling conditions for whom fast-moving cars can pose significant safety hazard. In such, creating a safe and vibrant downtown for all users lends itself to a two-way road network. This group recommends in addition to a road diet, a **two-way road conversion**. The benefits of two-way streets are as follows:

**Economic**

Converting one-way streets to two-way can increase shops’ accessibility, positively impacting revenue. Two-way streets create higher levels of economic activity and improve the livability of downtown areas by improving the visibility of local businesses that rely heavily on pass-by traffic. Two-way roads require more traffic signals that one-way street which forces vehicles to stop more frequently, giving drivers more exposure to local businesses.\(^2\)

A report from Main Street News of 25 towns that had converted their Main Streets to two-way street showed significant reductions in vacant floor space after the conversion.\(^3\) Table 1 demonstrates the aforementioned impacts on 6 of the 25 towns.

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Table 1: Positive Impacts of Two---Way Conversion on 6 Downtowns, Edwards (2002)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Vacancy Rate Before</th>
<th>After</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sheridan, Wyoming</td>
<td>14,000</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>Traffic increase 200%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Palm Beach, Florida</td>
<td>85,000</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>Positive impact on reducing drug use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lafayette, Indiana</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>Manager reports positive results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington, Missouri</td>
<td>12,000</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>Business is very supportive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anniston, Alabama</td>
<td>26,400</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>Even those who opposed conversion now support it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Little Rock, Arkansas</td>
<td>61,700</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Safety and Increased Flow
Two---way conversion significantly slows down the average traffic speed because of traffic friction, narrower lanes, and parking maneuvers.4 5 On a downtown street, two---way operation can reduce the travel speed to 15 — 20 mph, resulting in increased pedestrian safety and additional vehicles passing through downtown.6

The risk of severe injury or death when a pedestrian get hit increases exponentially with higher travel speeds, shown in Figure 1 below.7 When travel speeds are 20 miles per hour (mph) or less, the risk of being severely hurt is less than 15%, and the chance of being killed is marginal. In the 40 to 50 mph range, the chance of being severely hurt or killed increases to 95% and 75%, respectively. A slower traffic network will increase safety and encourage more people on streets resulting in a more vibrant downtown atmosphere.

![Graph showing risk of severe injury and death](image)

*Figure 1: Higher the Speed, Higher Chances for Pedestrians to Get Hurt or Kill In Accidents, Teft (2011)*

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6 Ibid

Drivers are more willing to stop when they are travelling slower. A reduction in travel speeds will enable Downtown to become a destination rather than a drive-through and could increase retail sales by up to 105%.8

Capacity

Main Street and East Point Street are over built and currently under used. The following table, Table 2, demonstrate that even after the two-way conversion, there will still be enough capacity relative to the amount of vehicles per hour.

Table 2: Maximum Traffic Is Well Below Road Capacity9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Maximum Traffic Since 2010</th>
<th>Capacity After Two-Way Conversion</th>
<th>Capacity/Demand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>East Point Street Downtown</td>
<td>678 veh/hr</td>
<td>3,000 veh/hr</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Street Downtown</td>
<td>742 veh/hr</td>
<td>4,500 veh/hr</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Street @ Taylor Avenue</td>
<td>1460 veh/hr</td>
<td>6,000 veh/hr</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The maximum traffic data shown in Table 2 is the maximum vehicle count in the past five years. Since 2012 the hourly traffic in Downtown has been decreasing.

To guarantee that side streets such as Cleveland Avenue, White Way, and Thompson Avenue do not experience longer waits at intersections with a two-way conversion, this group recommends comprehensive signalization at intersections throughout Downtown to maintain efficient traffic flow.

Two-Way Network Design

Our roadway design for Downtown East Point is shown in Figure X below.

Figure X: Two-Way Design for Main Street and East Point Street

Major roadway changes are summarized in Table 3 below. East Point Street and Main Street should both undergo a road diet. The additional road width will be reconfigured to allow parallel parking, create a protected cycle track on Main Street, and widen the sidewalks.

Table 3: Current vs. Proposed Condition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Current</th>
<th>Proposed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main Street</td>
<td>3 Northbound lanes</td>
<td>2 Northbound lanes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28 angled parking spaces</td>
<td>1 Southbound lane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0 bike lane</td>
<td>~ 100 parallel parking spaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2-way protected cycle track</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2 below is a cross-section of Main Street showing the aforementioned changes. In this first alternative, there are 10---feet wide sidewalks and 2---feet gutters on both sides of the street. Starting from the left, Figure 2 shows an 8---foot parking lane and then three 10---feet travel lanes. To the right of the travel lanes is a 6---foot wide median and 10---foot wide protected cycle track.

![Figure 2: Main Street — Alternative 1](image)

Another alternative for Main St. is shown below in Figure 3. The only difference between Alternatives 1 and 2 is that in lieu of the on---street parking, the left sidewalk and the two---way cycle track were widened.

![Figure 3: Main Street — Alternative 2](image)

Additional cross---sections were designed for East Point Street, one for mid---section (Figure 4) and the other for crosswalk locations (Figure 5).
Similar to Main Street's design, 10---foot sidewalks and 2---foot gutters are proposed on both sides of the street. However, there will be only one travel lane for each direction with 8---foot wide parallel parking on both sides. To separate the Southbound and Northbound traffic, a 6---foot median in the middle.

At intersections, this median will be turned into a 10---feet turning bay for left turns, and a 6---foot wide sidewalk bulb---outs will replace the parallel parking lane.

These designs, allow for an efficient two---way setup Main Street and East Point Street that benefits businesses, drivers, pedestrians, and cyclists equally.

**Complete Streets**

Complete streets are streets that are built to meet the needs of all road users. All road users include but are not limited to: pedestrians, cyclists, transit riders, motorists, the young and older, and persons with disabilities. Roadways that are able to meet the needs of all users have increased ability to spark economic development, growth, and vibrancy.

**Pedestrian Experience**
Implementation of a complete streets model can help to spur activity in Downtown East Point. Streets that are developed to serve pedestrians are also equipped to meet the needs of all other road users. Because all transportation trips begin and end with the pedestrian environment, serving pedestrians is the cornerstone of a comprehensive transportation system.

While Downtown East Point benefits from a street grid and small navigable blocks, the walking environment remains hostile towards pedestrians. Main Street and East Point Street are one-way corridors with multiple wide vehicle travel lanes and very few safe, signalized pedestrian crossings.

Sidewalks in Downtown East Point typically range from 6 to 10 feet wide and vary in their condition. Sidewalk expansion and repair are an important component to improve the pedestrian environment. We propose that sidewalks in Downtown East Point be expanded to a minimum width of 10 feet to allow for a furniture zone. Furniture zones are portions of the sidewalk that can be used to locate street trees, lighting posts, bicycle racks, waste bins, wayfinding signs and other forms of street furniture.

Crossing signals and signal timing at intersections should be adjusted to serve pedestrians. The ability to safely cross streets in the downtown area is a major part of the pedestrian experience and increasing the amount of foot traffic in Downtown. Signal timing along Main Street and East Point Street should be adjusted to ensure that pedestrians have adequate time to safely cross these streets. Traffic signals should be added at the following intersections:

- Main Street and Dorsey Avenue
- Main Street and Thompson Avenue
- Main Street and White Way
- East Point Street and Ware Avenue
- East Point Street and White Way
- East Point Street and Dorsey Avenue

Cycling Experience
There are no bicycle lanes in Downtown East Point although the City has the only velodrome in Georgia. As streetscape and road improvement projects occur in the Downtown area we propose the incorporation of a two-way cycle track along the eastern side of Main Street.

Two-way cycle tracks (also known as protected bikeways, separated bikeways, and on-street bike paths) are physically separated cycle tracks that allow bicycle movement in both directions on one side of the road.\(^\text{10}\) Two-way cycle tracks share some of the same design characteristics as one-way tracks, but may require additional considerations at driveway and side-street crossings.\(^\text{11}\) Figure 6 shows a possible design for a two-way cycle track.

Bike parking should be included throughout Downtown East Point. The addition of bicycle parking at the East Point MARTA Station, along Main Street and East Point Street will improve the bikeability of downtown, allowing cyclists to visit shops and restaurants.

\(^\text{11}\) IBID
Transit use
Downtown East Point is served by the MARTA Red and Gold rail lines, and five MARTA bus routes: 78 Cleveland Ave, 79 Oakland Station/Sylvan Hills, 84 Camp Creek Marketplace, 93 East Point Station, and 193 Justice Center. Built in 1986, the East Point MARTA station plays an integral role in Downtown East Point. It is the primary source for multi-modal transportation in the area, offers a means of travel for persons who do not own a vehicle, and has two free park-and-ride lots.

The North parking lot is approximately 4.6 acres and the South lot is approximately 1.3 acres. These MARTA park-and-ride lots have been identified as major development opportunities for Downtown East Point. In the 2012 East Point Transit-Oriented Development Plan -- LCI Study, the park-and-ride lots were identified as one of three major development sites in Downtown East Point. While the LCI study points to the development potential for station there are multiple questions about the station’s future. If MARTA expands the rail system to include commuter rail towards Clayton County, the East Point station would likely become a hub connecting three rail lines. This creates a level of uncertainty regarding the East Point Station and therefore development at this station is unlikely to occur in foreseeable future.

One approach to integrating the East Point Station into Downtown East Point is by addressing barriers that separate the two. Main Street serves as a barrier between downtown businesses and the East Point Station. In order to improve the connectivity between Downtown East Point and the MARTA station we propose facade improvements at the station, wayfinding signage throughout Downtown East Point, and real-time arrival signs outside the station to facilitate transit use.

Parking
The City of East Point has only two forms of parking: on-street, angled, and unmetered, and off-street and unmetered. Parking was brought up by residents and council members alike at the community engagement
meeting; both were concerned with the amount of parking available as well as the precarious placement of angled parking on Main Street which obscures driver visibility when pulling—out.

On—Street Parking
In Downtown East Point there are 48 on—street parking spaces located on Main St. between Thompson Ave. and Cleveland Ave. as well as between Linwood Ave. and Thompson Ave., and finally on White Way.

The perceived lack on—street parking is highlighted as a major deterrent to visiting Downtown East Point. Residents noted that if they were unable to find parking driving past the commercial district they were unlikely to circle back.

In addition to the proposed one—way to two—way road conversion along East Point Street, a road diet that repurposes the two outer lanes into parallel on—street parking is also proposed (See Figure 7). This conversion would create approximately 150 additional on—street parking spaces. Converting the angled parking on Main St. into parallel would improve sight lines for drivers pulling out of parking spaces. Angled parking spaces have been found to increase the chances right angled collisions and provide decreased visibility for motorist exiting a parking space.

The additional on—street parking spaces created by the road diet could provide visitors with more parking locations increasing Downtown East Point’s accessibility. An added benefit in more on—street parking is a reduction in the amount of off—street parking in the downtown area, opening up Downtown East Point to more redevelopment.

Off—Street Parking
Off—street parking consumes one—fifth of Downtown East Point’s surface area. Of our 75 acre study area 15 acres are being used for off—street parking (see 8). Off—street parking only exists as surface parking in Downtown.

City—wide parking regulations require the businesses in Downtown East Point to provide off—street parking for their patrons. The parking regulation requires minimum off—street parking rates for each business based on their square footage and land use. This results in a large amount of off—street parking spaces. Businesses in downtown East Point do not share their parking, if a patron decides to shop at multiple locations they would be required to move their car each time they go

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to a different business. This limitation on off-street parking creates added burden to patrons in the downtown area.

One approach to minimize this burden is to use shared parking policies. Shared parking allows businesses to meet their minimum parking requirement by sharing parking spaces with another business. These businesses often have different operating hours or demands for parking. Shared parking can help to limit the number of parking spaces created in the downtown area, and sometimes allow customers to park in one location while patronizing other businesses. As currently applied, business have the option to share parking with each other but are not required to do so by a city ordinance. An ordinance that requires business in Downtown East Point to share parking or remove the ‘patrons only’ limitation may help reduce the surface area dedicated to parking.
Structured Parking

An additional option for reducing surface parking is the creation of a municipal parking garage. A central garage that is open to the public can help increase the quantity of parking provided while reducing the overall surface area dedicated to parking. The land being used for off-street parking can instead be used for infill development projects and help to create a fully developed Downtown East Point.
Once a central garage becomes an option for patrons, there will be less need to have on-site parking. Sites such as the Bank of America parking lot on White Way can be repurposed as restaurants or retail, with housing above them. This form of infill would also lower the need for automobile ownership by providing housing in a transit rich area.

Municipal parking is currently provided near the East Point Police Station in the form of off-street, unstructured parking. Residents of East Point expressed safety concerns when walking from the provided municipal parking area to businesses downtown. Addressing safety issues such as street lighting, blank walks, and safety patrols may help increase the use of existing and future municipal parking.

**SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

**ROAD RECONFIGURATION**
- Implement a road diet on East Point Street and Main Street
- Two-way road conversion
- Replace angled parking with parallel parking
- Expand sidewalks in Downtown East Point to a minimum width of 10 feet
- Incorporate a protected two-way cycle track along the eastern side of Main Street

**INTERSECTIONS**
- Signal timing along Main Street and East Point Street should be adjusted
- Include comprehensive signalization throughout Downtown

**IMPROVE TRANSIT/PEDESTRIAN EXPERIENCE**
- Include bicycle parking at the East Point MARTA Station and along Main Street and East Point Street
- Facade improvements at the station
- New wayfinding signage throughout Downtown East Point
- Real-time arrival signs outside the station

**PARKING**
- Create parallel parking throughout Main Street and East Point Street
- Modify city ordinance to requires business in Downtown East Point to share parking or remove the ‘patrons only’ limitation
- Build a municipal parking garage
3 | DEVELOPMENT AND URBAN FORM

GUIDING PRINCIPALS

BLOCK CONFIGURATION

Large Blocks vs. Small Blocks
Blocks, areas of land entirely bounded by streets, are a central element of land use and urban form. Various elements of blocks contribute to the quality of place, but none more so than their size. People's interactions with blocks vary according to block size:

Large Blocks
Large blocks, also called superblocks, are those with long distances between intersections. They are common for uses with large floorplates---such as shopping malls, big box centers, industrial complexes, or campuses------and are most often found in suburban commercial and industrial areas. Because of the long distances between destinations in superblocks, they favor automobile usage and inhibit walkability.

Small Blocks
Small blocks, typically found in historic city centers, result from a highly connected street grid and often contain developments of smaller scales, such as neighborhood retail, live/work units, and smaller office and apartment buildings. They promote pedestrian activity uses by reducing the distance between destinations, allowing for multiple paths between destinations, increasing the visual interest of the walk, and maximizing

Block Configuration: Recommendations
Smaller block sizes are more conducive to the walkable environment desired for downtown East Point and should be promoted throughout. Much of the study area already boasts many small blocks and its grid should be preserved; no streets should be closed. We also recommend the following modifications to the existing blocks:

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**Eliminate Superblocks**
Within the mostly walkable grid, one superblock——the block between Main Street to the east, Ware Avenue to the north, East Point Street to the west, and Cleveland Avenue to the south, referred to as “the Commons”——inhibits connectivity. Its north-south distance of approximately 750 feet is more than double that of adjacent blocks, creating a black hole of connectivity. We recommend extending Neely Avenue east-west across the Commons block to: reestablish connectivity, reduce the block size, and create additional street frontage for new businesses.

![Figure 3: Super block massing study](image1)

![Figure 4: Super block massing study, aerial view](image2)

**Incorporate Pedestrian Connections Within Blocks**
Sidewalks and alleyways within blocks provide pedestrian connectivity beyond the road network. This internal pedestrian circulation is already established within the City’s Downtown Architectural Design Overlay as a desired characteristic of development.² The Architectural Review Board should prioritize this feature and push developers to optimize pedestrian connections to nearby uses.

![Figure 5: Small Block; aerial view](image3)

![Figure 6: Small Block with proposed infill](image4)

² City of...
DENSITY

The American Planning Association defines density as “the amount of development within a given area.” Density can refer to both residential development, measured as the number of dwelling units per acre, and commercial development, measured as the ratio of building floor area to the lot size. Commercial density is sometimes referred to as intensity. Density can be construed as a negative term, as many equate it with high-rise buildings, heavy traffic, and a loss of architectural character. However, density can take many forms, including small—lot detached homes, townhomes, apartments, or live—work units. The purpose of this section of the report will be to expose the benefits and many shapes density could take in East Point. Figure 7 shows the same amount of density, in three different forms.

![Figure 7: Equal density represented in three forms](image)

**Density: Configurations and Floor Area Ratio**
Buildings can be configured in a number of ways to achieve the same level of density. Figure 7 illustrates the same block with the same amount of density in three different forms: evenly spread, on the outskirts of the lot, and concentrated at the center. Density is measured by floor area ratio (FAR), the gross building floor area compared to the net lot area. The first exhibit represents small lots with small front and rear yards. Because the combined building floor areas are almost the same as the total lot area, the floor area ratio is close to 1. The second exhibit incorporates buildings of varying heights with a maximum of six stories around a large green space in the center of the block. Due to the amount of green space, the building had to be more stories that in the previous example for the density to be comparable. The third exhibit illustrates one central building with over fifteen stories. In this example, the building has a small overall footprint on the lot area and ample green space and parking. For the FAR to be similar to the first and second exhibits, this building had to increase the number of floors. In sum, Figure 7 shows three forms of development with about the same amount of density.

**Density: Infrastructure**
Density allows cities to capitalize on existing infrastructure and provide a number of other services within a more compact area. A healthy approach to population growth focuses on

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3 Historica PAS Report. (1958). Floor Area Ratio. [https://www.planning.org/pas/at60/report111.htm](https://www.planning.org/pas/at60/report111.htm)
building density in urbanized areas where existing utilities and transportation networks are already in place to maximize those existing resources, rather than incur the cost of building and connecting extensions in new suburban developments. Consultation with Public Works is recommended to ensure that increased density does not overload the existing infrastructure (i.e. sewage, electric, communications, etc.).

**Density: Economics**
Density is also a valuable tool for increasing economic productivity and bringing more activity to downtown districts. Density can be increased by providing a variety of housing types and mixture of uses within the downtown. When a greater cross-section of individuals has easier access to downtown amenities, it adds customers and a new layer of vitality to the street. This has been shown to encourage community involvement, enhance culture, and promote safety. Currently Downtown East Point is home to a number of local businesses, but other parcels and storefronts also sit vacant or underutilized. These spaces are a great opportunity to provide more diversity of uses. In addition to increasing retail or restaurant space in Downtown East Point, providing more opportunities to live in Downtown is key to creating a lively street and successfully achieving a denser core.

**Density: Community Concern**
Increased density in East Point will be necessary to support a vibrant, mixed-use center, and answering the question as to how much density is appropriate in Downtown is crucial. In our meetings with community members, there was a great level of concern around density and the desire to preserve Downtown East Point’s unique, irreplaceable character. Residents expressed their desire for a “main street” feel rather than something
prefabricated. In a visual preference survey and subsequent discussion, most citizens gravitated towards smaller scale downtowns with ground floor retail and one or two additional residential stories. They favored the look and feel of Atlanta neighborhoods like Virginia Highlands, Cabbagetown, and Glenwood Park, which feature lower building heights, continuous street walls, human—scale design details, and more traditional architecture. (See Images 7,8,9,10 for frequently selected images in the visual preference survey.)

Density: Recommendations
After conducting several block studies, it became clear that increasing the height to even four stories in some places seemed out of proportion to the rest of Downtown East Point. The level of density and proposed heights laid out in the 2012 Livable Communities Initiative plan may not be readily absorbed by the market. A recent market study performed by Cooper Carry and RPK Associates\(^4\) emphasized the high residential vacancy rates in the City of East Point, and the relatively slow recovery since the recession. Despite the recent multi---family deliveries faring well, there is still ample housing in the East Point area, and according to Cooper Carry’s market study, the current supply surpasses what will be necessary in the next five or even ten years. Cooper Carry’s report also noted that no more than 30 to 70 units a year should be delivered in the TOD area market. This quantity of units is conducive to a smaller scale development with around three stories.

Not only are residents concerned with the aesthetics of a downtown overtaken with tall structures, economic analysis has shown that large developments may struggle to be leased. While Downtown East Point can successfully support increased density, it will be important moving forward to identify when and where density is appropriate. First steps include determining possible locations for infill and their appropriately scaled heights. For example, the portion of the commons closest to the Corner Tavern and the old Pharmacy may be scaled to a couple stories with height increases as towards the proposed gateway of the city. However, at this moment, it is advisable to build and develop incrementally and at a small scale. Economic analysis suggests to begin with infill on underused parcels or capitalize on the existing vacant spaces (i.e. the old Pharmacy) and use these sites as catalyst projects. Also, devise a phasing plan that not only dictates when new developments might occur but also scales the height requirements for buildings.

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\(^4\) City of East Point Department of Planning and Zoning, (October 2015). East Point Transit Oriented Development Plan - LCI Study: Market Assessment Update.
BUILDING TYPOLOGIES

The existing character of downtown consists primarily of one--- and two---story commercial buildings. Situated close to the street, they address pedestrian activity and help create a more active sidewalk. In order to enhance the downtown but retain the existing character, appropriate building typologies should be strongly considered. Previous plans recommended large, mixed---use developments with well over 100 housing units. However, considering Cooper Carry’s research, these large residential developments exceed the current absorption rate.

Residential or mixed---use building types should accommodate between 30 and 70 dwelling units to complement the existing character and avoid oversaturating the market. Additionally, it provides an opportunity to phase the Commons (Figure 14) and will attract smaller developers who infill at a more incremental level.

Examples of mixed---use with two to three stories of residential above the commercial component are illustrated in Figures 11 & 12. Townhomes or walk---up style apartments would also be suitable for a portion of the commons, providing a single---family alternative to the mixed---use/multi---family also proposed. Regardless of building types, the urban form should reflect the current context of the city to create a seamless downtown and an enriched public space.
Areas that might be more acceptable for particular typologies are illustrated in Figure 13.

**ATLANTA DEVELOPMENT TRENDS: DEVELOPMENTS OF REGIONAL IMPACT**

Relying on large, mixed-use developments to catalyze downtown revitalization is not only out of line with the physical character and projected market absorption for the area, but also contradicts successful development trends throughout the metro area. Preliminary research from the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) on developments of regional impact reveals that roughly half of every proposed large, mixed-use development in the Atlanta Metro carries out to completion (Figure 14). This analysis should be considered in light of development proposals for the Commons. While a large, mixed-use development or large scale development in general might be the end goal for the development of the commons, given these preliminary findings, it is less likely to be the catalyst project as previous plans touted.

<table>
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<th>Mixed Use Development</th>
<th>Douglas</th>
<th>Henry</th>
<th>Cobb</th>
<th>Rockdale</th>
<th>Cherokee</th>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>51.61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 13: Appropriate location for building typologies**

**Figure 14: Proposed Mixed Use Developments: ARC**
PROPOSED INFILL DEVELOPMENT

The City of East Point has experienced high vacancy rates due in large part to the decrease in population between 2002 and 2012. A recent report released by Huntley Partners summarizes the various real estate markets and their higher than average vacancy rates. Office space ranges from 8 percent to 25 percent, considerably lower than Metro Atlanta as a whole, while industrial space ranges from 9.5 percent to 15.2 percent. Similarly, housing vacancies remain high with a 24.8 percent vacancy rate within the TOD area alone. Within the TOD study area, owner-occupied housing accounted for 38.8 percent of the existing housing. Before the market will be ready for significant new development, the City needs to take action to reduce vacancies in the current stock. These strategies would include targeting key infill parcels that would support the vibrancy of downtown and identifying those well-suited for multi-family development. An incremental approach to developing the downtown, illustrated in figure 14, is necessary to ensure the supply entering the market is in line with current absorption rates and to create an authentic downtown environment with a varied building stock.

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5 City of East Point Department of Planning and Zoning. (Oct 2015). East Point Comprehensive Plan - LCI Study: Market Assessment Update. (p. 10)
6 Huntley Partners, Inc., City of East Point: Market Assessment and Demand Trends, August 2011.
PHASE 1: REHABILITATING EXISTING BUILDINGS & EXPANDING THE CIVIC BLOCK

Revitalizing the existing building stock and historic preservation would be of first priority. Several buildings downtown are vacant or in disrepair, so finding suitable tenants and making the necessary building improvements would enhance the quality of downtown with minimal construction. The highest priority for small infill parcels include the area the grassy space between Oz Pizza and Corner Tavern and a small parking lot located between East Point Avenue United Methodist and East Point Tower.

The enhancement development of the civic block is considered among the higher priority developments and would include the restoration of historic civic buildings, the construction of a new City Hall, and integrated public spaces. (See Phase 1 developments in Figure 14.) These areas are ripe for redevelopment and are crucial to creating a cohesive downtown street frontage, as well as providing government officials a suitable work environment. Additional detail is provided pertaining to the preservation of the existing Civic Block and Fire Station #1. See Section 7 for the Historic Civic Block Proposal.

Surface parking lots in the study area provide another opportunity to either encourage new development or create vibrant public spaces. A shared municipal parking garage (See Transportation Section for detailed recommendation) could accommodate for this loss of surface parking and provide sufficient space for future development. (See proposal for City Hall in Section 7 for additional information).

The intent of all the proposals is to convey the value of Downtown East Point’s historic buildings and structures and to put in place actions that enhance that value, primarily through historic preservation efforts. In a statement that affirms the power of such practices, there a large number of local and national resources that fund historical preservation work. The City of East Point should consider some of the following options as it seeks to address future projects involving historic assets.
With regards to the renovation of City Auditorium, East Point should look to the Fox Theatre Institute Preservation Grant Program. This sole work of this program is supporting historic theaters in the Atlanta region with preservation tools. The grant funds can cover maintenance, physical improvements, and a whole host of other necessary preservation actions.

When looking at the other historic buildings within the Civic Block and Downtown as a whole, the City of East Point should seek out other historic preservation grants. Two major resources are the Save America’s Treasures Grants and the Preservation Services Fund Grants.

**PHASE 2: INFILL DEVELOPMENT ON KEY PARCELS**

The second phase of development would include repurposing the existing Region’s Bank parking lot, located directly across from the MARTA Station entrance, and a portion of the adjacent Bank of America parking lot to create either a continuous street facade or a plaza. Currently, as MARTA riders exit the station, their first glimpse of Downtown East Point is an empty parking lot, which is neither welcoming nor enticing. A well-designed commercial development or public space would provide a more pleasant first impression, as well as a viable asset for the community. Next would be phasing for the Commons. There are several potential approaches to develop the property, including selling portions of the land to multiple developers versus one sole developer. There are pros and cons to both alternatives, both in terms of deliverables and benefits to East Point. Redeveloping the site under a single developer would enable the City of East Point to orchestrate the deal under the terms of a ground lease or to negotiate for a Community Benefits Agreement under the terms of sale. This would enable the city to create stricter contingencies for affordable housing and connectivity improvements. However, many developers are deterred by ground leases, and given East Point’s history with attracting developers, this would not be advisable. Selling the Commons to a number of developers is more likely to generate a diverse mixture of uses and types. Plots could be reduced and allow for a more incremental approach to development.

Regardless of which scenario is chosen, the city needs to ensure that the developer’s vision aligns with that of the community and will enhance the current character of the downtown. It is also crucial that the affordability component be retained. Replatting the land into smaller parcels could attract smaller developers and encourage diversity in design.

**PHASE 3: SOUTH DOWNTOWN**

The third phase centers around the development of a grocery store in south Downtown. In our community engagement meeting, the 2011 Economic Development Survey, and community feedback in the 2012 Livable Communities Initiative report, residents repeatedly voiced the need for a grocery store downtown, and Economic Development staff members discussed thwarted previous efforts to attract a full-service grocer to the area. A grocery store would not only serve the daily needs of current residents, but would also be an attractor to new downtown residents. Although we reaffirm the pressing need for a grocery store to provide continuous access to healthy food and household goods, the grocery store is slated for a later phase in light of the typical site selection criteria of national grocery chains. Grocery
retailers and commercial developers typically focus on the market analysis of a site’s trade area, which considers the demographics, population growth, crime and safety perceptions, physical conditions, and other indicators of potential success. By addressing vacancies, facade improvements, and streetscapes, and by bringing additional residents and through traffic to the area in earlier phases, East Point can improve its appeal to national grocery retailers and set itself up to successfully attract one.

The proposed site is an assemblage of parcels at the corner of East Point Street and Washington Avenue, the current location of a Wells Fargo branch and a U.S. Post Office. The site is recommended for its size, which is sufficient to accommodate the floor plate and parking requirements of a national grocer, and for its accessibility at the intersection of two arterial roads. The existing buildings on the site are set back from the road, creating a discontinuity in the urban fabric, so the placement of the grocery here would not only provide a necessary service, but also improve the quality of the street experience. (See Figure 16. for a diagram of the existing conditions.)

Figure 16. Diagram of the existing conditions of the proposed grocery site, including a Wells Fargo Branch (left), U.S. Post Office (center), and the Carriage Station retail plaza (right).
Figure 17. Conceptual site plan for the redevelopment of East Point Street between Dorsey Avenue and East Point Street, featuring: 1) new full-service grocery store; 2) shared parking behind buildings; 3) new two-story, small scale commercial infill; 4) new, four-story building with ground floor commercial and residential above; 5) new, three-story building with ground floor commercial and residential above; 6) retained small commercial buildings; and 7) shared parking behind buildings.

Figure 18. Perspective view of East Point Street facing north at Washington Avenue, illustrating the creation of a continuous street wall and an inviting pedestrian environment through the proposed redevelopment.

The conceptual site plan in Figure 17 shows the redevelopment of an entire block of East Point Street between Washington Avenue and Dorsey Avenue. The grocery store building in the proposal diagram has a floor plate of 31,000 square feet, which falls within the typical range for conventional
supermarkets. Alongside the full---service grocery store, moderate, two---story commercial buildings meet the sidewalk and share a surface parking lot behind the buildings. This configuration allows vehicular access to the rear lot on Washington Avenue, East Point Street, and Dorsey Avenue and convenient pedestrian access at sidewalk---facing entrances. On the east side of the street, a vacant lot is converted to active use with the addition of a three---story building and a four---story building, each with ground floor commercial, residential above, and shared parking in the rear. Several smaller existing commercial buildings on East Point Street are retained to maintain a mix of building types and price points.

This proposal requires the relocation or reconfiguration of existing tenants:

**Wells Fargo**
The Wells Fargo branch and drive through would need to be relocated to accommodate the grocery store. However, there is another Wells Fargo branch located one block away, at the corner of East Point Street and Dorsey Avenue. That location also offers drive through service, but its placement on what is currently a one---way street limits its convenience. By redesigning the road network to allow for bidirectional traffic on East Point Street, the access and viability of that location would be improved, potentially eliminating the need for the location at the corner of East Point Street and Washington Avenue. Wells Fargo may also consider an in---store location within the grocery store, as it has done in Atlantic Station and other sites, in keeping with a national trend of locating smaller branches in grocery stores to capitalize on the high traffic and customer convenience they offer.

**U.S. Post Office**
The U.S. Post Office currently located on the site does not have significant distribution facilities and may be suited to one of the commercial buildings on the west side of the block, depending on its logistics and design criteria. Several vacant or underutilized sites on Main Street south of Washington Avenue, such as the lot at the corner of Main Street and Taylor Avenue, may be alternative nearby sites.

**Carriage Station Tenants**
Carriage Station, the strip center on the southwest corner of East Point Street and Dorsey Avenue, would be eliminated in the proposed site plan, as its large, corner parking lot creates a vacuum in the continuity of the street wall. The current retailers and restaurants may choose to locate in one of the new commercial units on the site, across the street, or in other spaces created by the infill developments built in previous phases.

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If the City wants to prioritize attracting a grocery store to this site or another location downtown, it will need to actively pursue a potential developer by formally organizing stakeholders, gaining media coverage on the issue of healthy food access, improving real and perceived safety, conducting a targeted retail trade area assessment, marketing and potentially assembling sites suitable to grocery store layouts, and providing incentives.9 The East Point Corridors Tax Allocation Bond District (TAD) specifically references the provision of better supermarkets as a goal.10 We recommend the City assess the available TAD funds and consider applying them to the public improvements and eligible capital costs necessary to attract a full-service grocer.

In conclusion, infill development is key to creating a cohesive downtown and future phasing of the commons. While larger parcels like the Commons are suitable for development, existing vacant buildings are first priority as well as undeveloped parcels within the current downtown network. Phasing will help to ensure that character is retained and development is in keeping with the overall vision of East Point. Overall, East Point provides a great opportunity for small and large developers alike and holds great promise for a vibrant, active downtown.

**ZONING**

Zoning regulations provide an enforceable, legal framework for implementing the vision established in a city’s comprehensive plan and should be designed to align with that vision. By definition, zoning prescribes regulations concerning building and structure designs, building and structure placement, and uses to which land, buildings, and structures within designated areas and districts must adhere.

Two existing zoning categories govern land use within the study area: Commercial Redevelopment (C---R) and the Downtown Architectural Design Overlay. The Commercial Redevelopment district is the traditional, Euclidean zoning category applied to all parcels in the study area as well as parcels beyond its boundaries. It regulates allowable uses, density, and building configuration standards. In addition to this traditional zoning, the study area falls under the Downtown Architectural Design Overlay, which layers supplementary design standards on top of the C---R requirements for a designated downtown area. Both sets of regulations apply to all properties in the study area and together form the standards for future development in Downtown East Point.

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MODIFICATIONS TO EXISTING REGULATIONS

The Commercial Redevelopment district applies to a broader area than does the Downtown Architectural Design Overlay, so modifications to that zoning category would have broader entitlement implications for properties outside of the study area. Therefore, we recommend focusing primarily on strategic modifications to the Downtown Architectural Design Overlay in order to enhance the quality of future development and minimize infringement on properties beyond the study area. The main objective of the recommended regulations is to facilitate the continuous street frontage and human—scale design elements that characterize walkable downtowns. Certain existing regulations support the vision for downtown and should be maintained, others inhibit it and should be modified, and several new regulations may be added. This section of the report will address regulations, which should be maintained, modified, and added.

The following recommendations were made in consideration of national model zoning ordinances for mixed—use districts and transit—oriented development (see references below) and a comparison of the existing zoning regulations for the town centers of neighboring municipalities (Hapeville and College Park) and Georgian cities with downtowns emulating East Point’s desired characteristics (Decatur and Valdosta). For more information on the comparative zoning analysis, see Table in the appendix.

MAINTAIN

Permitted Mix of Uses
The current Commercial Redevelopment zoning allows a full range of 41 commercial, residential, institutional, and entertainment uses, which supports the necessary mix for an active, vibrant downtown by allowing people to live and work within close proximity, increasing foot traffic throughout the day, and creating synergies between uses.

No Minimum Lot Area or Minimum Floor Area Per Unit
There is no minimum lot area or minimum heated floor area per unit required within the Commercial Redevelopment district. This flexibility permits smaller developments that reflect the character of downtown East Point and supports the development of future buildings that will contribute to a fine urban grain.

No Maximum Floor Area Ratio (FAR)

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Floor area ratio refers to the total (gross) floor area within a building divided by the total lot area. This type of regulation is an optional measure to regulate bulk and intensity, sometimes used to supplement building height limits and lot coverage ratios. FAR limits can add to the number of development regulations without substantial improvement in the quality of the built environment, when other bulk regulations are already in place.

No Drive---Through Facilities Allowed
Drive---through facilities, already prevalent in Downtown East Point, encourage customers to remain in their vehicles rather than treat downtown as a destination and are not appropriate for an urban environment. The Downtown Architectural Design Overlay currently prohibits “facilities that allow for transactions of goods or services without leaving a motor vehicle.” Despite this provision, the City made an exception to allow a drive---through for the only recent new development downtown, CVS. The prohibition of drive---through facilities should be maintained and enforced by the Architectural Review Board.

The zoning ordinance addresses a number of other minor regulations that should be maintained, unless otherwise specified below.

MODIFY

Parking
Current regulations for the Commercial Redevelopment district and the Downtown Architectural Design Overlay address the configuration of parking, but not the amount of parking required. They defer to the general parking provisions, meaning downtown currently abides by the same high, suburban parking ratios established for the rest of East Point.

Quantity
Excess on---site surface parking limits the ability to create a continuous urban environment and should be discouraged. As the City pursues a district approach to downtown parking by creating shared capacity through parallel spaces and a municipal garage (See transportation section), the amount of required on---site parking should be reduced. Even with a reduction in the number of spaces required by regulation, business owners and lenders will likely continue to provide ample on---site parking in the near future, but they will be able to more flexibly determine the number of spaces demanded by the market. The City may consider several alternative approaches to reducing the amount of parking required by regulation:

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A. **No parking requirements for nonresidential uses**

As has become common practice for downtown districts, the City may consider eliminating parking requirements for nonresidential uses altogether.\(^\text{18}\) \(^\text{19}\) A parking requirement for residential uses may remain in place, but should be reduced to one parking space per standard unit and 0.5 spaces per unit for senior housing.

B. **Establish lower parking regulations for downtown than for the suburban portion of the city**

If the City is not ready to eliminate parking requirements altogether, we recommend at minimum it create separate requirements for the Downtown Architectural Design Overlay (DADO) to reduce the number of spaces required. Municipalities that require parking within transit—oriented development zones typically apply a percentage reduction of 50 to 80 percent of the standard parking requirements. For example, under the current regulations, a restaurant in Downtown East Point must provide ten parking spaces per 1,000 square feet of gross building space. By allowing a 50 percent reduction in the number of parking spaces within the DADO, their parking obligation would be reduced to five spaces.

C. **Establish an in-lieu fee alternative to on-site parking**

As an alternative to eliminating or reducing the by-right parking requirements, the City may allow developers to pay an in-lieu fee per required parking space, rather than provide the space on their lot. The proceeds from this fee may be allocated to the construction of a municipal garage, streetscape maintenance, or another related fund rather than to the City’s general fund. This approach, though revenue-generating, increases the administrative and financial burdens of development, and is therefore the least preferred alternative.

**Configuration**

In an active commercial district, streets should be accommodating to people and parking should be unobtrusive to the pedestrian experience. Some regulations for the configuration and treatment of parking lots have already been established in the Downtown Architectural Design Overlay, such as the provision of landscape strips, screening, and lighting. We recommend the following additions to the existing parking configuration requirements:

A. **Prohibit parking in front of buildings**


Parking in front of buildings, between the facade and the sidewalk, intrudes upon the pedestrian experience and should not be permitted. It also encourages patrons to park, visit a single business, and get back in their car, rather than to park and walk to multiple destinations, which increases the number of people on the streets and reduces the vehicular traffic generated by short trips between nearby businesses. We recommend the City regulate that no parking shall be located between the front facade and the curb; parking must be located in the rear or to the side of the building. On—street parking, which buffers pedestrians from moving vehicles rather than separating them from active uses, should be permitted and encouraged.

B. Limit the amount of parking on street frontages

Given the prohibition of parking in front of buildings, large parking lots next to buildings may still create vacuums in the urban environment. Therefore, we recommend adding the regulation that parking may be located to the rear or side of the building, but no more than 35 percent of the primary street frontage shall be devoted to parking or drives.

C. Prohibit surface parking on corners

Corners are key points of visual definition in urban areas and are inappropriate locations for surface parking. We recommend regulating that surface parking shall not be permitted within thirty feet of a corner.

D. Require adequate screening of parking lots

To maintain a sense of continuity in the street wall, where a parking lot faces a primary street, a screening device should be used. The current Downtown Architectural Design Overlay requires all parking areas be screened from view of any public street by means of “1) a 15—foot—wide landscape strip planted to buffer standards or 2) a berm planted with a continuous hedge or evergreen shrubs.” These particular buffering methods consume significant amounts of land and are better suited to suburban environments. We recommend the City replace these forms of buffering with several options better suited to urban environments, such as 1) a pier, fence,

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and hedge\(^{21}\) (see Figure 19), 2) a short wall and hedge, 3) a narrower landscaping strip with hedges and/or trees, or other means that provide a visual barrier without consuming space.

**Setbacks**

Setbacks are the space between the exterior of a building and the adjacent property line, and apply to the front, side, and rear of the lot.\(^ {22}\) In a walkable, urban environment, most building fronts should meet the sidewalk to create a continuous street wall and an inviting sense of enclosure for the public realm (Figure 20).

Zoning requirements can establish maximum and/or minimum building setback requirements. The existing regulations for the Commercial Redevelopment district have no specific restrictions for front, side, or rear yard setbacks.\(^ {23}\) This lack of restriction has the desirable effect of allowing new developments to build all the way up to the sidewalk, however, its lack of a maximum setback means buildings may also be sited with deep setbacks typical of suburban environments.

![Location of Lot Lines and Setbacks](image)

**Figure 20: Setback diagram image source: American Planning Association**

We recommend the City consider a maximum setback requirement,\(^ {24}\)\(^ {25}\) prohibiting building frontages from being placed more than ten feet from property line to create a continuous street wall and urban character. A minimum of 65 percent of the building frontage would be located at this build---to line, and the remainder of the facade may be set back to allow for recessed entryways, outdoor seating areas, courtyards, or other similar features. As a small portion of the DADO covers single---family homes, a provision should be added allowing single---family residential uses to be set back up to 20 feet from the street right---of---way.

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Facade Variation
Facade variation through the use of architectural detailing encourages pedestrian activity by creating a human-scale environment, visual variety, and interest.\textsuperscript{26} The current regulations for the Downtown Architectural Design Overlay require “for every 40 feet of building length on a single face, there shall be a variation in the exterior.”\textsuperscript{27} However, the defined means for achieving exterior variation include a roof offset of more than ten feet, which promotes deeper setbacks and may contradict proposed requirements for a maximum setback line. We recommend this option be reduced to a roof offset, without qualification of the distance to encourage building walls close to the sidewalk. The other specified means for achieving variation----- a change in details, patterns, or materials----- is appropriate.

Streetscape and Landscape Strips
The Downtown Architectural Design Overlay currently requires “a minimum ten---foot---wide strip along all public streets. The ten (10) foot---wide strip shall be planted with a minimum 2” to 3” caliper overstory tree. Additional overstory trees are encouraged.”\textsuperscript{28} The regulation allows flexibility for either landscaping, hardscaping (such as plazas, planters, benches, fountains, or tables), or a combination of the two. If the City adopts a maximum setback of ten feet and prohibits parking in front of buildings, it may consider rewriting this regulation to specify that the entire area between the building frontage and the street frontage shall be treated with landscape or hardscape elements.

Multi---family Development Requirements
The Commercial Redevelopment district regulations specify amenity package requirements for apartment, condominium, or townhome projects.\textsuperscript{29} The regulation requires all such projects to include a minimum of two amenities, including but not limited to: “1) pool and cabana; 2) majority brick building materials; 3) enhanced landscaping; 4) clubhouse with meeting rooms and/or exercise facilities; 5) significant recreational opportunities, such as a swimming pool, water park, lighted tennis courts, basketball courts, playground, tot lots, baseball field, soccer/football field, walking track with exercise stations; 6) benches, architectural lighting, bike racks, and gazebos; 7) ponds/enhanced detention facilities; 8) mixture of uses within the development; and 9) trails.” The regulation also specifies the number of amenities required to obtain various levels of density bonuses; however, no maximum floor area ratio, dwelling units per acre, or building height is specified for the district, so density bonuses are irrelevant.

The range of amenities is not limited, allowing flexibility but subjecting it to the discretion of the Architectural Review Board. Of the specified amenities, some are incompatible with an urban environment (e.g. soccer/football fields) and many are so cost prohibitive and land intensive as to be realistic only for large, upscale developments. To encourage smaller multi---family residential development, we recommend this requirement be amended to either 1) specify its application only to developments above a designated threshold of units, 2) replace suburban amenities with urban amenities (e.g. public art, planters, trash/recycling cans, wayfinding signage, porches/balconies), or 3) eliminate the amenity requirement altogether.

ADD

Transparency
Facade transparency refers to “the degree to which people can see what lies beyond the edge of the street or public space,” through windows, doors, fencing, outdoor seating, or other building elements. **Minimum transparency requirements between 50 and 90 percent are common in mixed---use districts, as increased transparency increases the perception of activity, promotes pedestrian activity,** and improves the vibrancy of a place.\(^{30}\)\(^{31}\)\(^{32}\) A facade transparency regulation should be considered for all nonresidential buildings within the Downtown Architectural Design Overlay, requiring at least “60 percent of the street---facing building facade between two and eight feet in height must be comprised of clear windows that allow views of indoor nonresidential space or product display areas.”\(^{33}\) A similar provision already exists for secondary retail and mixed---use buildings within the Cleveland Avenue Overlay District.\(^{34}\)

Height
East Point’s existing Commercial Redevelopment\(^ {35}\) and Downtown Architectural Design Overlay do not currently limit allowable building heights. In accordance with the existing character of Downtown East Point and expressed resident preferences, we recommend the City establish a by---right height limit of four stories, with any development desiring additional height requiring a

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variance. Not only would taller buildings be a sharp contrast to the existing character, higher buildings are not a realistically viable form of development, given the most recent market analysis. A single tall building may account for most of the available absorption in the market and would likely either 1) minimize the feasibility of developing additional smaller infill lots or 2) sit vacant and undermine surrounding property values. Establishing a height limit allows the City to maintain some flexibility and leverage in future development situations. For instance, if a developer wanted to build a five--- or six---story building, the City could negotiate to obtain community benefits, such as affordable housing, from the project in the variance approval process.

**Lighting**

East Point residents and business owners repeatedly underscored the need for better pedestrian--scale lighting to improve the safety and walkability of the area and to deter crime. The Downtown Architectural Design Overlay already requires site lighting for parking lots, pedestrian paths, and public entrances. We recommend the addition of a requirement for building wall lights, such as sconces, spaced at regular intervals on facades facing public streets to provide additional illumination of sidewalks.

Table 2. Summary of Recommended Zoning Modifications

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<th>Modify</th>
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<td>Permitted Mix of Uses</td>
<td>Parking</td>
<td>Transparency</td>
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<td>No minimum lot area</td>
<td>Eliminate or reduce nonresidential requirements</td>
<td>Minimum 60 percent for nonresidential ground level</td>
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<td>No minimum unit floor area</td>
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<td>Facade Variation</td>
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<td>Multi--family development restrictions</td>
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C---R: Modification to Commercial Redevelopment district regulations
DADO: Modification to Downtown Architectural Design Overlay regulations

These zoning regulations are reflective of the type of development necessary in the short---term future to move downtown East Point toward the vision established in the 2036 Comprehensive Plan and should be regularly revisited as its character evolves. As with any update to a zoning ordinance, if the recommended changes were to be adopted, they would apply only to new development or substantial renovations; existing developments not in compliance with new regulations would be effectively grandfathered in. Property owners may also apply for variances to these regulations, which should be approved if the proposed design is in line with the overall vision for the area.

ALTERNATIVE REGULATORY FRAMEWORK: FORM---BASED CODE

During the past few years, there has been a growing trend toward the use of form---based code in different small---scale cities across the United States. The commitment to a more applicable model indicates an increasing need to cultivate ecological sensitive, pedestrian friendly and more sustainable urban communities.
First, small town governments usually do not have sufficient resources to modify their zoning regulations on a yearly basis, and producing master plans and zoning ordinance require tremendous work, which cannot be accomplished within a short period.

Second, it has been acknowledged that good policies should be easy to understand, even for non—professionals. Also, planning regulations shall let planners forecast the effects and outcomes of the planning decisions, which thus generate more economic opportunities and social benefits. Form based codes specifically define the building forms that will be allowed, and specify the streetscapes to facilitate future developments. Therefore, the product of form based codes become streamlined and predictable, and tends to bring less negative impacts than traditional planning methods.

Third, form based codes are usually created from community preferences. The process requires inputs from various stakeholders such as community leaders, local residents, and business owners, hence, form—based regulations are tailored and calibrated for local interests, which shall result in less contentious hearings.

Fourth, whereas conventional zoning ordinance tends to produce generic urban forms, form based codes are established based on specific site locations. More importantly, form based regulations not only focus on the façade, material and form of building, but investigate its relation to the streetscapes and building forms surrounding it. Therefore, form based codes are conducive to preserve community characteristics and generate continuous streetscapes.

Last but not least, form—based codes center on the creation of compact, mixed—use developments. They create pedestrian friendly environments by controlling physical elements of buildings such as setbacks and minimum transparency levels. They also use street type requirements that work cooperatively with building type regulations to create an attractive, pedestrian—friendly environment. The planning methods integrated in form—based codes have proved to be efficient in generating more pedestrian flows.

Figure 21 gives a comparison between conventional planning process and form based planning process. From the graph, it can be detected that traditional planning process consumes a significant amount of time due to a series revisions, hearings and public involvements. In contrast, the form planning process simplifies prepare/analyze/decide steps, and produces a variety of scenarios based on the consensus developed for planning goals, objectives, and future use(s). Thus, it is suggested small town governments should embrace form—based codes for the sake of public health and economic vitality of their communities.
Figure 21: A comparison of traditional vs. form planning processes; Source: Roy Lash of MSHDA
After numerous conversations with East Point residents and public servants, it is clear that the city lacks an identity. With regards to both history and culture, interviewees only alluded to East Point’s beginnings as a railroad town. Follow up questions revealed that no participants knew the name of the rail line or where it went, simply that it served as the primary reason for settling East Point. The only other piece of history that was known was that Jerry Lee Lewis once performed in the municipal auditorium, and even this fact was called into question. When asked about East Point’s culture, the only answers offered were those describing various facets of the city’s diversity. Individuals used such terms as openness, acceptance of others, and friendly to all people, but while these traits are all valuable, they speak to a singular cultural facet. No other characteristics were offered to describe the array of ideas that can contribute to the culture of a city or place.

SEEKING IDENTITY
The presence of a distinct and recognizable identity is of major value to a city that is seeking to grow and to attract development, both internally and externally. Within the community, residents cherish prized assets and shared values, which fosters civic pride and encourages individuals to do their part in helping to bring about positive change. Outside of the city, a community’s identity serves as its branding and communicates its competitive advantage. This representation of the place’s distinguishing assets is the primary means through which developers are introduced to the area’s value.

It stands to reason then that the absence of such an identity can be a significant hindrance for a city, and this is evidenced in East Point. Residents lack shared community resources in which they can take pride, and external developers cannot easily see a vibrant culture that will enhance demand for their investments. While East Point does in fact possess history and culture, little work was done in the past to champion such assets. This is clearly demonstrated through how many residents are unaware of these enduring values.

CULTURAL INVENTORY
Our recommendation is that the City of East Point should complete a cultural inventory in order to seek out and measure its cultural assets. A cultural inventory----- which is also sometimes called cultural mapping----- is defined as the “process of collecting, recording, analyzing and synthesizing information in order to describe the cultural resources, networks, links and patterns of usage of a given community or group.”¹ This practice provides many benefits to a community. Among other things, the process defines local culture, charts the narrative of a place, identifies previously unknown resources, detects networks of similar uses or users, locates gaps and needs, provides information for evaluating future projects, and serves as a catalyst for strategic cultural planning.

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A cultural inventory is typically a three---month to one---year long process that is led by a team of dedicated volunteers. There are a number of resources in place that would support East Point in this endeavor. First, the city’s Cultural Enrichment Commission was created to support projects, like this one, that further East Point culture. The commission’s leadership has confirmed that the group could accept the responsibility to take on the role of overseeing the project. Additionally, East Point possesses a large community of creative individuals who are seeking a place in which they can get involved. These are the ideal candidates to assist with the process. Additionally, the Atlanta Regional Commission has composed a Cultural Inventory Toolkit to aid communities that are interested in embarking in the process, and the agency desires to support such undertakings with its expertise.

While the findings of a cultural inventory could be put to many beneficial uses, our recommendation is that the City of East Point should focus its efforts on channeling the results into creative placemaking projects. Such projects prove beneficial in conveying the identity of the city, producing the most immediate and valuable impact for the community.

**PLACEMAKING EXPLAINED**

The term “placemaking” is a relatively new concept in the urban planning and urban design fields, and as a recent industry buzzword, it has broad definitions and is used in different ways. Despite some variations, most all would agree that the term refers to the intersection between public space and the culture of the communities that surrounds it. Project for Public Spaces, the preeminent advocate for placemaking describes the concept in this way: “As both an overarching idea and a hands---on approach for improving a neighborhood, city, or region, placemaking inspires people to collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces as the heart of every community. **Strengthening the connection between people and the places they share**, placemaking refers to a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to maximize shared value. More than just promoting better urban design, placemaking facilitates creative patterns of use, paying particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution.”

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**Public Art**

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*Figure 1: Mural conveying the Main Street of Montgomery, MN*
In East Point, creative placemaking could take a number of forms, but as proposed, it would be a means to highlight the unique identity of the city. For example, **murals could be painted on blank walls throughout downtown.** Some of the artwork could chronicle specific events in East Point’s history, and it could also be painted by local artists and supported by talented students in the art program at Tri---Cities High School, all of which are assets that might be revealed by the cultural inventory’s findings. A number of forms of public art could follow this same process. Statues could be erected to celebrate historic figures or notable residents highlighted in the cultural inventory.

**Landmarks**

Community engagement findings made it clear that citizens are undoubtedly aware of East Point’s roots as a railroad town, and many individuals felt it was a vital part of the city’s historical narrative. However there does not seem to be any imagery of, or allusions to, railroad traditions anywhere in Downtown East Point. Placemaking efforts could be used to effectively highlight this noteworthy attribute for the city. In conversations on this matter, a number of residents mentioned that the rail cars located at the East Point Historical Society were an underutilized resource. Instead of sitting behind a tall fence on private property, could these attractions instead be relocated into a public space in the Downtown area, where they could serve as a valued landmark for the entire community? Utilizing a placemaking approach, decision---makers could also consider **playground equipment** that

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*Figure 3&4: The Betchel Museum in San Francisco, CA which houses a small exhibition of the railroad construction history of America*

*Figure 4*
makes use of railroad motifs. Any of these techniques that showcase East Point’s ties to its rail history will generate valuable outcomes, as they begin to foster a definite identity for the area.

Figure 5: A number of statues created to convey the life and activities around the railroad in Union Station in Indianapolis, IN

Figure 6: “The General” Playground in Marietta, GA

Figure 7: Union Depot Playground in St. Paul, MN
Wayfinding
Another way to communicate the rich identity of East Point would be to pair historical and cultural accounts with the City of East Point’s proposed wayfinding system. The City has received two major grants that will help to shape the streetscapes of Downtown, and plans include a coordinated wayfinding strategy that could bring any number of the following elements into the area: directional signs, informational maps, signposts listing attraction proximities, communication kiosks, arrival gateways, orientation landmarks, and promotional banners. A number of cities around the world have used these beneficial devices to not only orient residents and visitors geographically, but also chronologically and culturally, by employing facts about area’s history and identity.

Programming
A final suggestion in the area of placemaking would be targeted events for Downtown East Point that not only showcase the city but also compel visitors to engage with the city’s resources. While gatherings like the Fourth of July celebration are important, a placemaking approach would advocate for additional events that draw people into Downtown shops and introduce them to East Point’s daily life. Holiday events typically rely on temporary booths and stages that visitors can only see one day a year. The temporal nature of these assets are not extremely effective at enticing guests back, as individuals are keenly aware that the majority of the elements will not be there upon their return. In contrast, a placemaking approach might entail events like a “Small Business Saturday” where Downtown shops stage open house events to showcase their
products. Other examples might include live music nights, when all Downtown bars and restaurants have bands perform on their premises, or art walks, in which local artists display their work throughout Downtown businesses and public spaces. These types of events may utilize some short-term programming, but they are supported by more established cultural assets, allowing individuals to experience the everyday culture of East Point, a valuable step in shaping its identity.

CONCLUSION

The substantial value of numerous agencies and municipalities across the nation, and as a result, there are a number of funding sources available. Should the City of East Point pursue a placemaking strategy, financial resources could be secured from local, regional, and national foundations. Locally, the Atlanta Regional Commission has embraced placemaking as a valuable tenet of livable communities within its LCI program. As well, the organization is supporting the Atlanta Regional Public Arts Program, which is a competitive grant program intended to commission and install public art around the region. ARC even hosts grant writing seminars in order to support area communities pursuing funds. At a statewide level, both the Georgia Council for the Arts and the Georgia Humanities Council host rich grant programs that support artistic and cultural projects at the community scale. Nationally, the two leading funders of placemaking are the National Endowment for the Arts and ArtPlace America. This year alone, the NEA awarded the Atlanta region with roughly $2 million in funding through its Our Town Grants. That sum encompasses 14 area organizations whose projects were winning recipients. Looking specifically at placemaking on that national level, Southwest Airlines oversees its Heart of the Community Grant, which awards select communities with anywhere between $100,000 and $200,000 to support creative placemaking in shared public spaces.

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5 | CIVIC BLOCK PROPOSAL

BACKGROUND

The Historic Civic Block is comprised of three historically significant buildings built between 1930 and 1939, and a memorial park. These structures are the East Point City Hall, City Auditorium, New Deal Library, and Victory Park. All three buildings have fallen out of use and into disrepair. In 2015, the East Point Historic Civic Block was named to the National Register of Historic Places’ “11 Most Endangered Historic Places” list as well as the Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation’s annual “Places in Peril” listing; With their continued neglect, they face a constant threat of structural decay that could lead to necessary demolition.1 2

The Rehabilitation and Adaptive Use Study recently conducted by the Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation, Inc. suggested that City Hall be used as a visitor’s center and museum for the city, which is an extremely beneficial use of a beautiful building. The study also suggests taking City Auditorium back to its original use as a civic auditorium and performing arts venue, with its suggestions more on the latter use. The library is proposed for adaptive reuse, and fortunately, a film studio is currently renovating the space with that very approach in mind.3 We agree with these suggestions about City Hall and the library, but our recommendation for City Auditorium supplements the proposed use as a performing arts venue to also include some use a movie theater as well.

NEW CITY HALL

The City already has plans to relocate its City Hall offices from rented space on the east side of the railroad tracks back to the civic block on the west side of East Point Street. This relocation has the potential to positively impact downtown by reactivating underutilized land, enlivening the area with City employees, and contributing to the creation of a more continuous street wall. As one of the City’s most significant real estate assets, City Hall’s siting and design should be strategically positioned to communicate to the private development community the type of downtown development the City desires.

In September 2015, the City issued a request for proposals (RFP) for design and engineering services for the new City Hall and closed the bidding process on November 30.4 The proposed site for the new

1 National Trust for Historic Preservation. 11 Most Endangered. Retrieved from https://savingplaces.org/11-most
3 Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation, Inc. East Point Historic Civic Block: A rehabilitation and adaptive use study.
building is the current location of Fire Station No. 1 on East Point Street. We strongly recommend the City consider:

- **Locating the new City Hall on an alternative site nearby and adapting the fire station to an alternative use** in order to retain the valuable character and history it provides,
- Broadening the definition of the Historic Civic Block to include Fire Station No. 1.

**Current Design Concept**

The conceptual site design for the new City Hall proposed by the City of East Point calls for the demolition of Fire Station No. 1, the closing of Cleveland Avenue between East Point Street and Church Street, and the placement of the building deep within the site at a setback of approximately 310 feet from East Point Street (Figure 1). This proposal directly counters the values of historic character, connectivity and walkability, and a strong urban form repeatedly underscored in the 2036 Comprehensive Plan, 2012 Livable Communities Initiative Main Street Corridors TOD Plan, and resident preferences.

The design of city hall as requested by the City relies on a very suburban model, in which the city hall is set far back from the street behind a large lawn and surrounded on all sides by dead space. This approach would do much to take away from the urban fabric that the City is trying so hard to protect in other actions. The proposed model has city hall as a stand-alone structure that gives architects freedom to build anything —– it does not have to respect the existing urban context and surrounding architecture character. The suburban model proposed by the City follows a trend in the Atlanta region whereby suburban communities are building new, stand-alone city halls.

Figures 2---3 show Riverdale’s new civic center and city hall complex. As an isolated structure, the building required dramatic architecture, and the results are stunning, with the project having received numerous awards for its architecture. Figure 3 shows the location and context of the Riverdale Civic Center. Sitting on 15 acres of otherwise empty land with cul-de-sacs to its east and an exaggerated strip center to its west, the complex is in an area that is the textbook definition of suburban. This stark setting forced the City of Riverdale to build in communal assets—— like the community center and amphitheater—— in order to activate the space and make it something of a town center for a community that lacked one.
The City of East Point must acknowledge that its city halls’ sites exist in a very different setting than those described above. Acknowledging its small, downtown urban character as one of its most valuable assets, the City should be working towards a context-sensitive design that reflects the desired urban morphology.

A more appropriate city hall form would be one that follows the existing urban character of Downtown East Point, which has been thoroughly described in previous sections of this report. In turn, the design of such a complex would not require a design that screams “Look at me!” It would be more appropriate that it blend in with surrounding buildings, such that the complete composition of all buildings is beautiful with no one element trying to steal the spotlight. Figures 4---7 show different city hall buildings that fit into the surrounding urban fabric. In these images, it is clear that a city hall within this framework can still be stately, monumental, and impressive without being overly dominant. But with that in mind, it is worth noting that findings from community engagement revealed that East Point citizens would prefer a more muted and restrained design for a new city hall, as they would prefer to retain historic City Hall as the ornamental gem of an expanded civic complex.
Alternative Design Concepts

Rather than demolish Fire Station No. 1, we recommend the City consider using one of several nearby, city-owned lots to construct a new City Hall with an urban form that meets the street. Under either of the proposed scenarios (below), the historic Fire Station No. 1 could be retained and adapted to a new use, either by the City for a civic purpose or sold for private redevelopment. Alternative sites include:

**Scenario 1: Behind Fire Station No. 1**
The City’s current proposed layout for City Hall on the Fire Station No. 1 site shows the building set back behind the existing building, demolishing the fire station and replacing it with a passive lawn. The site could easily be reconfigured with the new City Hall facing Cleveland Avenue, the fire station retained and adapted to a new use, and a public plaza incorporating the two to accommodate public events. Simple modifications to the Fire Station #1 and appropriate landscaping on the property make it a viable City Hall structure (Figure 8).
**Scenario 2: Customer Care Center Lot**

The Customer Care Center and surrounding parking lot would make a suitable alternative for the new City Hall (See Figure 9). The expansive parking lot surrounding the Customer Care Center would provide sufficient space to develop a City Hall large enough to accommodate multiple government offices, including the absorption of the Customer Care Center. Residents at our community meeting requested this consolidation of government services into a single location, and it would provide citizens, business owners, City staff and representatives greater access and communication with government officials. Figure 10 illustrates a conceptual rendering of Scenario 2.
Public Plaza

Both scenarios allow sufficient space to develop a public plaza around multiple civic buildings, providing a location for the farmer’s market, public festivals, and other events. By interspersing active uses, seating areas, and design features throughout the public space, it is more likely to be utilized by residents on a regular basis than would the large, passive lawn in the City’s proposed layout. The segments of Cleveland Avenue and Linwood Avenue between East Point Street and Church Street may also be designed with a distinct stamped concrete pavement and outfitted with retractable bollards (Figure 11), allowing the streets to provide functional connectivity when they are retracted under regular operating conditions or providing additional pedestrian-only space when they are extended during major events.

Many cities hold festivals in their streets and other public spaces, rather than in large green spaces. All of the East Point’s programming could be just as effective on downtown streets and sidewalks, where stages and carnivals would very easily fit. Of course, great priority should be given to creating public places and green spaces downtown, but in a small and charming downtown setting like East Point, those should be small pocket parks and intimate human-scale spaces rich with engaging resources, not immense, unembellished lawns.

Alternative Design Concepts: Fire Station

Immediately across West Cleveland Avenue, the East Point’s historic Fire Station #1 also sits vacant. A charming example of a late Art Deco and Art Modern architecture styles, it is a unique and special sight amidst East Point’s Downtown. With its large open garage, broad windows, and moderate setback from the street, it would be an extremely flexible space to use for other purposes.

Within this historic preservation strategy, Fire Station #1 should be considered an asset worth protecting. It is a publicly owned historic building, but because its original use was a utilitarian one that was not functionally open to the public, it has never thought of as a “civic institution.” Consequently, it has never been
officially considered part of the East Point Historic Civic Block and has not been offered the same protections. It most respects, Fire Station #1 functions the same way as the other Civic Block buildings and carries the same value as a historic landmark and potential setting for an adaptive reuse project, and it should be protected accordingly.

With this in mind, the building could be adapted for a number of unique purposes. One suggestion is turning the historic fire station into a food hall. Projects like Ponce City Market and Krog Street Market show that there is a great desire to return to old-fashioned markets of this nature. As well, as the fire station currently houses the East Point Farmers Market, the transition to this new role would be rather easy. The building could be fitted with a shared industrial kitchen, which would be a great asset for Downtown and could serve as an incubator space for up-and-coming culinary entrepreneurs.

Auditorium
East Point’s need for a Downtown performing arts venue is well-founded consideration, but given the city’s small size, it would not be able to host the types of touring showing suggested in the report by the Fox Theatre Institute on an extremely regular basis. The performance hall would sit quiet and empty most evenings as an underutilized resource, adding only minimal value to the city’s life, which would be unfortunate, considering the comprehensive rehabilitation that would have come at the City’s expense. These types of the performances should undoubtedly take place, but extending this cultural programming would be relatively easy by showing movies at times when performances are not scheduled, which would likely be the majority of the time. In order to host the types of performing arts presentations mentioned, a venue most outfit itself with a wide range of technical audio—visual equipment, but once in place, these systems provide almost all the necessary elements in order to showcase films. In other words, a modernized City Auditorium need only put films on the schedule in order to operate as a movie theater.
Given that the space would only house one screen and also that performing arts tours do not fall at regular intervals around which one can easily schedule, movie showings would not operate under the same business model as large, chain, multi-screen movie theaters. But numerous historic movie theaters and performing arts venues around the country are faced with similar constraints and have created unique programming schedules involving both art forms, as well as other activities like event rentals, so with regards to unique business models, the road has already been paved with numerous strong precedents. The Strand in Marietta (Figure 15) and the Plaza Theatre in Atlanta (Figure 16) are two examples of historic venues in the Atlanta region that operate with unique programming.

On top of a more robust revenue stream for the City, a movie theater in Downtown East Point would offer a number of other benefits to the district. It would create additional jobs, provide a steady source of entertainment in Downtown, and maybe most importantly, serve as an anchor institution to activate Downtown, especially in the evenings. The positive effects of this would trickle over into other Downtown businesses, which could also benefit. Assuming that the theater would be restored to its former splendor, it would create a unique movie-going experience that would draw patrons from around the Atlanta region. This will provide some visitors that come early to dine in East Point as well as MARTA riders, whose path from the station to City Auditorium will lead them right through the center of Downtown East Point’s shopping and dining area.
Lot Size Summary in Downtown East Point

Lot Size in Square Feet

- 0 - 1500
- 1501 - 3000
- 3001 - 5000
- 5001 - 10000
- 10001 - 1755468
Downtown East Point Parcel Ownership
Appraisal Value of Property from 2009 to 2014
-- Downtown East Point

2009

2011

2013

2014