
Covington Studio

Georgia Tech | School of City and Regional Planning



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Studio advisor

Aaron Fortner

Covington Housing Authority

Shamica Tucker

Student participants

Danielle Blumenthal

Freyja Brandel-Tanis

Micah Bray

Grace Yun-Hsuan Chen

Andrew Dunham

Alison Evans

Candace Foster

Quincy Haisley

Justin Johnstone

David Kobe

Bhaswini Kokitkar

Elena Oertel

Sanjana Zahin

Highway 278 CID

Kathy Morgan

Georgia Conservancy

Nick Johnson

Luben Raytchev

Newton County Arts

Association

Amanda Bonilla

Newton Trails

Maurice Carter

Community Stakeholders

Kim Carter

Randy Vinson

Atlanta Regional Commission

Byron Rushing

City of Covington

John King

William Smith

I. Introduction

A. History and Background

Covington, originally settled by European immigrants, was designated as the county seat of Newton County in 1822 due to its location at the county's geographical center. Located 35 miles east of Atlanta, the small town boasts a reputation as one of Georgia's most picturesque and historic locales. The town was initially named Newtonsboro but was later changed to Covington, in honor of General Leonard Covington, a hero of the War of 1812. The town grew with the advent of the Georgia Railroad between 1833 and 1842 and was incorporated as a city in 1854. The City takes pride in its rich historical past, although many significant historic structures were destroyed during General Sherman's "March to the Sea" in 1864, except several antebellum homes.

Sometimes referred to as the "The Hollywood of the South," Covington's long and colorful history has spurred its role as a favorite location for filmmakers in recent years, which has spurred a tourism industry. For example, Mystic Grill in downtown Covington served as a filming location for the popular *Vampire Diaries* television show.



Since the late 1800s, Downtown Covington, surrounding the historic square, has been the main commercial hub and the city's key attraction center. Over the decades, the vibrant character of the downtown became more robust and continued to support the unique blend of local boutiques, antique stores, and restaurants. Among the downtown's historic buildings, centered on the Square Park's green oasis, the most iconic is the Newton County Courthouse and clock tower centered on the Square Park's green oasis. The county courthouse was destroyed in the fire of 1883, along with the entire northern side of the square, and the existing courthouse was constructed on the same site in 1885. The courthouse symbolizes the City's historical heritage and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Although some structures have been demolished and rebuilt over the years, the present-day Covington Square maintained its historic character by preserving the façades of the original structures.

A. History and Background

(Continued)

However, at the center of Covington Square lies a Confederate statue, alluding to the history of slavery and racism in the city and surrounding areas. Despite its perceived historic value, a monument memorializing a cause that fought to preserve the institution of slavery makes the square unwelcoming to many people. In recent years, there have been efforts to remove the statue, and the Newton County Board of Commissioners voted to remove the statue in July 2020. The removal and relocation of the monument is still legally pending.

In terms of physical design, the historic core of Covington was laid out in a series of an interconnected grids of streets and lots, allowing for wide streets and a central public square. Block sizes in this original grid are approximately 250 square feet, and the blocks were subdivided and sold for both residential and commercial uses. However, the areas developed later exhibit larger blocks and more dendritic street systems, forgoing Covington's historic character.



The City of Covington is governed under a council-manager form. The council consists of six members. Three council members represent the west, predominately Black, part of Covington. While three members represent the east, predominantly white, part of Covington. The Planning and Zoning Department oversees the day-to-day planning operations of the city. However, the Planning Commission, appointed by the Mayor and Council, provide recommendations regarding comprehensive planning, zoning ordinances, and special-use permits. There have been recent discussions regarding the current composition of the Planning Commission, highlighting its lack of racial diversity, along with the need to instill some attendance and performance guidelines. Other planning-related fields, such as economic development, are led by the City through the Office of Economic Development, and the Covington Housing Authority serves as the public housing agency.

I. Introduction

B. Existing Conditions

The City of Covington is located approximately 35 miles east of Downtown Atlanta within Newton County. As the Atlanta Metropolitan Statistical Area's population continues to grow, Newton County is projected to see a 9.2% population increase over the next five years, per Esri BAO data. This growth will substantially impact the City of Covington, and it requires strategic planning to prepare for an influx of population.

Demographics

The City of Covington's population is 58% nonwhite and 42% white, per Esri Business Analyst Online (BAO). Around 25% of the residents are living below the poverty line, which is significantly higher than Newton County (17%) and Georgia (18%). The median age of Covington is 35 years old with a growing population over fifty. The City of Covington experiences socioeconomic and geographic disparities delineating between East and West sections of the City.

Land Use and Zoning

The Georgia Conservancy identified seven main corridors and surrounding parcels to focus on within the Redevelopment Plan. These seven corridors include: (1) The Cricket Frog Trail, (2) Brown Bridge Road, (3) State Route 36, (4) State Route 142, (5) Turner Lake Road, (6) Washington Street, and (7) US278.

1. The Cricket Frog Trail is comprised of 384 parcels and 589 acres of land, 32 acres of which are owned by public entities. The Western portion of the corridors land use is zoned residential, single-family neighborhoods, and conservation land intended to be used as a golf course. The Eastern portion of the corridor is predominantly comprised of commercial, industrial, and mixed-use parcels that are much larger in size.
2. Brown Bridge Road is comprised of 64 parcels and 343 acres of land, 164 acres of which are owned by public entities. The corridor is mostly neighborhood residential and land reserved for the Turner Lake Park.
3. State Route 36 is comprised of 315 parcels and 337 acres, 36 acres of which are owned by public entities. The northern most parcels are devoted to mixed use within the downtown area of the City of Covington with single family zoning directly South of downtown. The southernmost parcels are dominated by commercial and office/professional zoning.
4. State Route 142 is comprised of 74 parcels and 1,124 acres of land, 433 acres of which are owned by public entities. This corridor is predominantly an industrial area with 66% of the parcels zoned industrial and 29% zoned commercial. The corridor is isolated from the downtown center of Covington and is bound by the interstate and railroad.

B. Existing Conditions

(Continued)

5. Turner Lake Road is comprised of 47 parcels and 340 acres of land, 176 acres of which are owned by public entities. The corridor connects Brown Bridge Road, US278, and Washington Street corridors and has a diverse zoning portfolio including single family, commercial, office, and mixed-use.
6. Washington Street is comprised of 258 parcels and 282 acres, 9 acres of which are publicly owned. Washington Street connects Covington to Porterdale and has a mix of zoning with mixed-use, commercial, and residential zoning.
7. US278 is comprised of 345 parcels and 766 acres, 82 acres of which are publicly owned. US278 is the main commercial corridor throughout Covington and is thus zoned predominantly commercial.

Housing

The City of Covington has a high percentage of renters, as well as a high percentage of residents living below the poverty line. According to Ersi BAO, 38.1% of Covington's housing stock is owner-occupied units, 14% of the housing stock is vacant, and 47.9% is renter-occupied units. Newton County owner-occupied housing is 64% of the housing stock, whereas Georgia's is 54%. This high number of renter-occupied units suggests there is a need for affordable housing throughout the City of Covington.

Transportation and Walkability

Covington's concentrated commercial properties and extensive automotive infrastructure cater to an automobile-centric lifestyle. Its interstate highway, major freight rail access, and local road network experience congestion issues typical for urbanized areas. The historic square downtown and the US 278 corridor experience notably high volumes of congestion.

Although there are some connected sidewalks, there is an overall lack of walkability and accessibility throughout Covington. There are many opportunities to expand connectivity and walkability throughout the City. The countywide trails organization Newton Trails is currently working on the Cricket Frog Trail, a multi-use linear park converted from a previously operated railroad. The Cricket Frog Trail will connect to and complement the existing Eastside Trail. Through extending this trail system and extending a connective network of sidewalks and on-street bicycling, Covington could reduce its congestion, improve air quality, and provide space for recreation and healthy transportation.

B. Existing Conditions

(Continued)

Green Space and Open Areas

The City of Covington's park network is centered around the historic Courthouse Square, which constitutes the most historic and well-preserved green space in the City. Within Covington's more well-defined, core neighborhoods, parks within walking distance are the most common; South Street Park features a playground and a small green space, while Springs Park features a lagoon, garden, and pavilions. Baseball diamonds and pocket parks are woven within the historic fabric of Covington's central neighborhoods; however, these public spaces are more prevalent on the whiter, wealthier east side of Covington.

Along the urban fringe of Covington, parks with larger footprints and more park amenities are common; many of these were constructed in tandem with residential or industrial subdivision developments. Clarks Grove Park, constructed as part of the Clarks Grove residential development, features a public pool, playground, and multipurpose athletic fields. Other notable parks along the urban fringes of Covington include Turner Lake Park and City Pond Park. Despite the prominence of neighborhood parks in the historic neighborhoods of central Covington, many newer parks in Covington are disconnected from the neighborhoods and accessed primarily by the personal automobile. Furthermore, many of the postwar neighborhoods within Covington lack neighborhood parks altogether; much like the distribution of parks within the historic core of Covington, parks in these more modern neighborhoods are still oftentimes far less concentrated within non-white, lower-income neighborhoods.

In more recent years, the City of Covington, alongside Newton County, have embarked on various initiatives to better bridge the historic divide in access to green space. Legion Field, which opened in 2016, was constructed as a central event and fairground space within Covington and its proximity to the YMCA further creates a citywide node of recreation and community services. The Cricket Frog Trail, which is gradually expanding into Covington's west side, will eventually link much of the city to an emerald necklace of parks along the trail. Covington's Central Park will also make strides in bridging the inequality of green space access; the park, as proposed, will provide a much-needed infusion of green space to the lower-income neighborhoods in South Covington. Alongside this improvement in park access, Covington's Central Park will also be the first to emphasize Dried Indian Creek, which will provide a framework for future parks to capitalize off the natural feature.

B. Existing Conditions

(Continued)

Urban form

Covington is centered around a well-defined downtown area, which emanates from a historic square, anchored by the Italianate features of the spire of its renaissance revival courthouse. For at least one block in each direction, commercial block buildings ranging between one and two stories frame the downtown streets.

To the east of downtown, a historic residential neighborhood of stately two-story Greek revival and colonial revival homes with a lush tree covering and grid street network extends from Elm Street to Mill Street, where the grid continues but the homes become smaller, more recently constructed, and have a distinct vernacular frame or brick design.

The downtown street grid extends to the north and west of the square-block commercial nucleus, but development becomes less fine-grained and surface parking proliferates. The south and west downtown fringe are marked by a small ring of two-story colonial revival and Craftsman homes, while the near west and south side neighborhoods overwhelmingly consist of single-story vernacular homes. Despite the age of these core neighborhoods, lot sizes remain large and their historic boundaries, where urban development yielded to the woods of the area, appear to not have changed in recent decades. Just past what was the western boundary of the urbanized area, the new Clarks Grove neighborhood introduces a much more compact, inward facing, and traditional urbanist form with a prevalence of brick buildings containing Colonial revival design motifs. Washington Street cuts through the mostly forested southwest side of Covington, concentrating low-rise commercial and light industrial uses along its corridor with mid-century low-rise neighborhoods extending from the roadway, separated from the more core neighborhoods through Dried Indian Creek and woodlands.

Covington's topography also dictates the form of its southern neighborhoods, as a patchwork of streets and postwar homes expand and contract based on floodplains and hills, completely disconnected from the southwest side neighborhoods across the creek. Route 278 serves as the "main drag" for the city of Covington, serving as a hard, northern edge to the more historic, mixed-use, and fine-grained neighborhoods of the city. Low-rise commercial buildings are set back from the roadway by parking lots and are disconnected by ownership structures, forcing all traffic, express or local, onto the main highway. Though a historic corridor exists from Covington to Oxford along Emory Street, Highway 278 and I-20 interrupts that form and partially disconnects the northern neighborhoods from the downtown core. Along Elm Street and Route 142, a seamless retail-to-light industrial gradient is present, as industry proliferates along Covington's northeastern fringe, gradually increasing in scale before transitioning into a rural form. Aside from downtown, the city's form is defined by a patchwork of single-use zoning at low densities.

II. Context

A. Previous Plans

To preserve continuity in planning efforts, community goals, and desired results, our team went through and reviewed many of Covington's and Newton County's previous plans in search of community details and characteristics. Additionally, these documents provided insight into which initiatives have been proposed or are currently down the pipeline. The following is a list of aforementioned plans, which explore a wide range of subject matter:

Covington US Highway 278 Corridor LCI Study (2006)

The Covington US Highway 278 Corridor LCI Study, adopted in 2006, discusses the facilitation of positive change and thoughtful preservation of US Highway 278 corridor through the City of Covington and Newton County. The study strives to strengthen the transportation and land use relationship by:

- Improving traffic operations by focusing on more efficient and alternate means of travel.
- Balancing the needs of the City of Covington and US 278 with their context and maintaining or improving their vehicular Levels of Service.
- Balancing the citywide need to focus mixed-use development into corridors with potential impacts on neighborhoods.
- Establishing a series of pedestrian-oriented mixed-use nodes that build on historic or existing nodes.

Central Newton County Plan for Bicycling and Walking (2012)

In 2012, Newton County adopted the Central Newton County Plan for Bicycling and Walking in an attempt to present a combination of bicycle/pedestrian and greenway initiatives. The focus of the document was to facilitate decision-making for investments in conservation and non-automobile transportation.

The plan sought to achieve four primary goals:

- Goal 1: Create spaces that contribute to a walkable, bikeable community in the heart of Newton County by investing in appropriate infrastructure improvements
- Goal 2: Encourage residents and visitors to increase prevalence and safety of walking and cycling
- Goal 3: Build opportunities for increased coordination and communication among
• our communities, local organizations, and others
- Goal 4: Conserve natural corridors to protect habitat, water quality, potential recreation and transportation areas, scenic vistas, and historic resources

A. Previous Plans

(Continued)

City of Covington Comprehensive Plan (2018)

The City of Covington's most recent comprehensive plan was adopted in 2018. Based on input from the public and steering committee, the plan was created to serve as a decision-making guide for local officials and community leaders of Covington. Importantly, the document outlines needs and opportunities, goals and policies, land use practices, and an implementation framework.

Goals & Policies

1. Serve residents and attract newcomers and tourists by providing quality housing, recreation, education, shopping, employment, and transportation choices
2. Engage Newton County Schools and other community partners to create a world-class educational system
3. Develop a comprehensive system of paths, trails, and on-street facilities for safe, healthy walking and bicycling, gathering, and community development
4. Preserve natural and cultural resources by concentrating development in and around established areas
5. Promote the city to families, professionals, retirees, and others
6. Spur appropriate private development by focusing public investment to maximize consistency with stated planning priorities; utilize existing infrastructure where possible
7. Maximize the impact of the Covington airport in marketing and economic development efforts
8. Work with nearby communities to achieve the vision of this plan

Moving Newton Comprehensive Transportation Plan (2017)

In preparation to meet long-range transportation needs by 2040, Newton County Board of Commissioners, along with the many cities of Covington, initiated an update to the 2008 CTP. The 2017 CTP recommends strategies, projects and programs to address these long-term transportation needs in the county. The updated plan addresses the need for multimodal alternatives such as public transportation, multi-use trails, sidewalks, and bicycle lanes in addition to roadway improvements to improve access to employment and other destinations. The document identifies five primary goals:

- Promote system safety, accessibility, and connectivity improvements;
- Develop a multimodal transportation system that will enhance quality of life, the natural environment, and economic development;
- Seek and support additional transportation alternatives and funding opportunities;
- Ensure existing and future land use complements the transportation infrastructure; and
- Improve system management, monitoring, maintenance, and operation.

A. Previous Plans

(Continued)

To better understand what is and is not feasible for the City of Covington, our team felt it was necessary to review other community plans that share similar characteristics.

The following is a list of alternative plans:

Our Future in Motion - Henry Transit Feasibility Study (2015)

Due to its ever increasing population, Henry County performed a feasibility study in 2015 to identify transit needs, latent demand, service recommendations, implementation, funding sources and identify a pilot project. The study built on the 2008 CLT plan and further enhanced the previous set of goals with the development of new goals:

1. Enhance Mobility for People and Goods in Henry County and its Cities
2. Enhance Accessibility for People and Goods in Henry County and its Cities
3. Reinforce Growth Patterns that Meet County and City Visions
4. Protect and Enhance the County's and Cities' Environmental Quality
5. Ensure Coordination among the Planning and Development Activities of the County, its Cities, the School District, the Water and Sewerage Authority, and other involved Organizations
6. To achieve a significant reduction in traffic fatalities and serious injuries on all public roads
7. To maintain transportation infrastructure in a state of good repair
8. To maintain transportation spending at appropriate levels to fund needed system expansion and maintenance
9. To enhance citizens' quality of life through transportation improvements
10. To improve County truck routes, provide access to freight land use, and support economic development

Coweta County Joint Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) Update (2014)

Coweta County coordinated with the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT), Georgia Regional Transportation Authority, (GRTA), Three Rivers Regional Commission (TRRC), and the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) to create and establish the 2014 Joint Comprehensive Transportation Plan Update. The updated CTP ensures that the transportation system that needs to be in place to support existing and future growth is known and used when preparing project programs and funding.

II. Context

B. Stakeholder Interviews

The Georgia Conservancy

Before our team began developing ideas for the City of Covington, The Georgia Conservancy had spent the previous months gathering data and conducting studies that helped guide our work. They identified the eight corridors that define our focus area, as well as provided supporting housing and economic data. Additionally, Katherine Moore, Luben Raytchev, and Nick Johnson of the Conservancy helped facilitate many of our stakeholder interviews and were present to provide any supporting input. Our team relied on their support, as their expertise and familiarity with the community was imperative to creating a product that is ultimately congruous with the City of Covington's scale and characteristics.

William Smith, Economic Development Director, City of Covington (September 4, 2020)

William Smith, the Economic Development Director of the City of Covington, is responsible for attracting new businesses and development to the city. With a professional career spanning economic development in rural cities and major metropolitan areas, Mr. Smith wants to match the small-town character of Covington with progressive planning and development. Mr. Smith wants to leverage business incentives to attract residential, commercial, and office development that will provide a high quality of life for all of Covington's residents and begin to reverse the growing percentage of residents who live in poverty. Additionally, Mr. Smith's strategy is to "fund the gap" or use economic development funds to help development projects be financially feasible in Covington and facilitate wealth building for Covington residents. Mr. Smith sees the identified corridors as critical to making Covington a more attractive place to live and work. He wants the corridors, especially U.S. 278 and I-20, to enhance Covington's identity and welcome newcomers and visitors to the city. Covington's trails are an important amenity for development to connect to and provide more opportunities for people to walk to destinations throughout the city.

Shamica Tucker, Executive Director, Covington Housing Authority (September 9, 2020)

Ms. Tucker shared with the class information on what other cities are doing to further compliment Housing Authorities to provide housing affordability across the country. Some cities are requiring developments of certain sizes or densities to provide affordable housing as part of the overall development. In other cities, developments are given the option to either provide mixed income developments or to pay a fee that funds affordable housing through existing Housing Authorities or similar agencies. She emphasized the importance of making sure developments and buyout options do not push people with low incomes further from amenities, services, and transportation access, as well as how new park spaces need to be explicitly accessible to everyone. Ms. Tucker stated that there are currently over 300 Housing Authority units across five different sites. The Housing Authority is currently in the process of rehabilitating three of those sites. When Ms. Tucker spoke to us, she expressed the hopes to create 5-8 mixed-income apartment communities from one large Housing Authority site. Currently, houses are under construction in the Walker's Bend area of Covington.

B. Stakeholder Interviews

(Continued)

Maurice Carter, President, Sustainable Newton & Byron Rushing, Walking and Bicycling Program Manager, Atlanta Regional Commission (September 18, 2020)

Maurice Carter is the President of Sustainable Newton and formerly the Chair of Newton Trails from 2009 to 2013. During his time at Newton Trails, Maurice worked to consolidate funding for the first leg of the Cricket Frog Trail. Maurice discussed the community opposition he experienced related to concern over public spending on trails, impact on residential property values, and crime. Maurice and Newton Trails focused on demonstrating the value of the trail to the community and, once the Trail was under construction, community sentiment changed and residents began making their own signs in support of trails to provide more biking and walking opportunities. Currently, 0.7 miles of the Cricket Frog Trail are paved, when complete, 4.9 miles of Cricket Frog Trail will be paved in the City of Covington; Newton County has shown willingness to pay for portions of the Cricket Frog Trail outside of the city. Maurice anticipates the Covington portion of the Trail will be complete by the end of 2021, and the portion of the trail near City Hall where an old railroad trestle is located. The trestle will be integrated into the final trail and Newton Trails is currently raising funds to make safety improvements starting in 2021. Maurice also mentioned the potential for a trail path along the north side of U.S. 278 and the need to connect it to the Cricket Frog Trail.

Maurice envisions a regional trail network throughout Newton County, connecting Covington, Conyers, and Oxford. The biggest obstacle for a cohesive regional trail network is connecting all the trails, especially with current transportation infrastructure. For example, there needs to be a pedestrian bridge along the Highway 81 bridge. Maurice mentioned there will be a Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (T-SPLOST) and revenue will be allowed to be spent on the pedestrian bridge.

Maurice says this bridge will help connect students in Oxford to Covington. Byron Rushing, the Walking and Bicycling Program Manager at ARC, stressed interjurisdictional coordination is critical for regional trails to be successful additions to the transportation network rather than only being used for leisure and recreation. There was significant discussion regarding how to leverage the City of Covington and Newton County's trails to add more transportation options and limit automotive trips. Byron stressed that complete streets are crucial on state and transit routes, as they connect people to their jobs and provides opportunities for non-automotive trips. Byron mentioned support and ongoing efforts by the community and local government for redesigning streets for pedestrians and bicyclists is critical to getting technical support and funding from GDOT.

B. Stakeholder Interviews

(Continued)

Kathy Morgan, Director of U.S. 278 Community Improvement District (September 25, 2020)

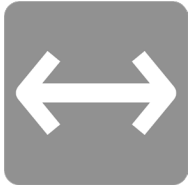
Kathy Morgan, Director of the US 278 Community Improvement District (CID), leads efforts for infrastructure, transportation, and placemaking improvements along US 278. Like all CIDs, the U.S. 278 CID is a self-taxing district where businesses fronting the corridor elect to join the CID and pay for improvements of mutual benefit. The major themes expressed by Kathy include making the U.S. 278 corridor safer for pedestrians and bicyclists, enhance access to US 278 businesses for those without a vehicle, increasing traffic safety, and creating a more attractive corridor by putting utilities underground and increasing signage. Kathy also discussed the potential for a trail on the northside of US 278 that will provide a new option for trips taken by pedestrians or by bike.

Kathy expressed their current focus is working with the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) to receive a grant focused on safety and traffic improvements. The CID is planning to install seven roundabouts along the corridor to slow traffic. Additionally, the CID is interested in increasing pedestrian connections along the north and south sides of the highway. These connections will allow pedestrians and bicyclists to access businesses on both sides of the highway. These connections could also connect to the Cricket Frog Trail. The CID is also willing to provide sidewalk and roadway improvements along redevelopment properties, like the Ohco property at the intersection of US 278 and Robinson Street.

Lastly, the CID is interested in various forms of public transit. Kathy said the CID is receptive to placing bus stops along US 278, which would increase more access to the CID businesses. Kathy also mentioned the potential for a regional rail line and depot along US 278. This rail line could ultimately connect to Atlanta.

Master Plan Overview

The Covington Development Plan is guided by five principles that were identified during the planning process. The advancement of these principles and goals are realized through the individual concepts outlined in the latter portion of this document. The five principles include:



Improve connectivity.

The private automobile is the de facto mode of transportation within the City of Covington, which necessitates the prevalence of automobile-oriented infrastructure and building forms. The goal of improving connectivity aims to better develop active transportation (walking, cycling, transit) modes in the City of Covington in order to provide more equitable and environmentally friendly transport options and support more dynamic and vibrant development.



Connect people to green space.

Despite containing a diverse offering of parks, Covington park network does not fully serve all of the City's neighborhoods and it does not fully capitalize on all of the city's natural offerings. This goal aims to facilitate the equitable placement, connection, and programming of future and current parks while further diversifying the offerings of public spaces to the residents and visitors of Covington.



Equity in all.

The equity component is central in the concepts outlined in this document. As Covington continues its trajectory of rapid growth and economic development, our equity focus aims ensure that future development and investment in Covington benefits all residents of the city and sets forth a series of physical and policy recommendations that focus on the empowerment and preservation of historically neglected and marginalized communities with the City.



Preserve housing affordability.

The population growth and introduction of amenities into the City of Covington has created considerable demand for housing within the City and has begun to financially squeeze many of the City's lower-income residents. This goal will manifest itself in the form of policy and land use recommendations that preserve affordability for Covington's legacy residents while continuing to encourage growth that is accessible by all income groups.



Reinforce Covington's identity.

Covington's rich history and culture are exhibited in the built environment of the city. As recommendations for the built environment of the city are created, this goal encourages the embracing, rather than the erasure, of Covington's unique identity in the proposal of new concepts.

Big Idea 1

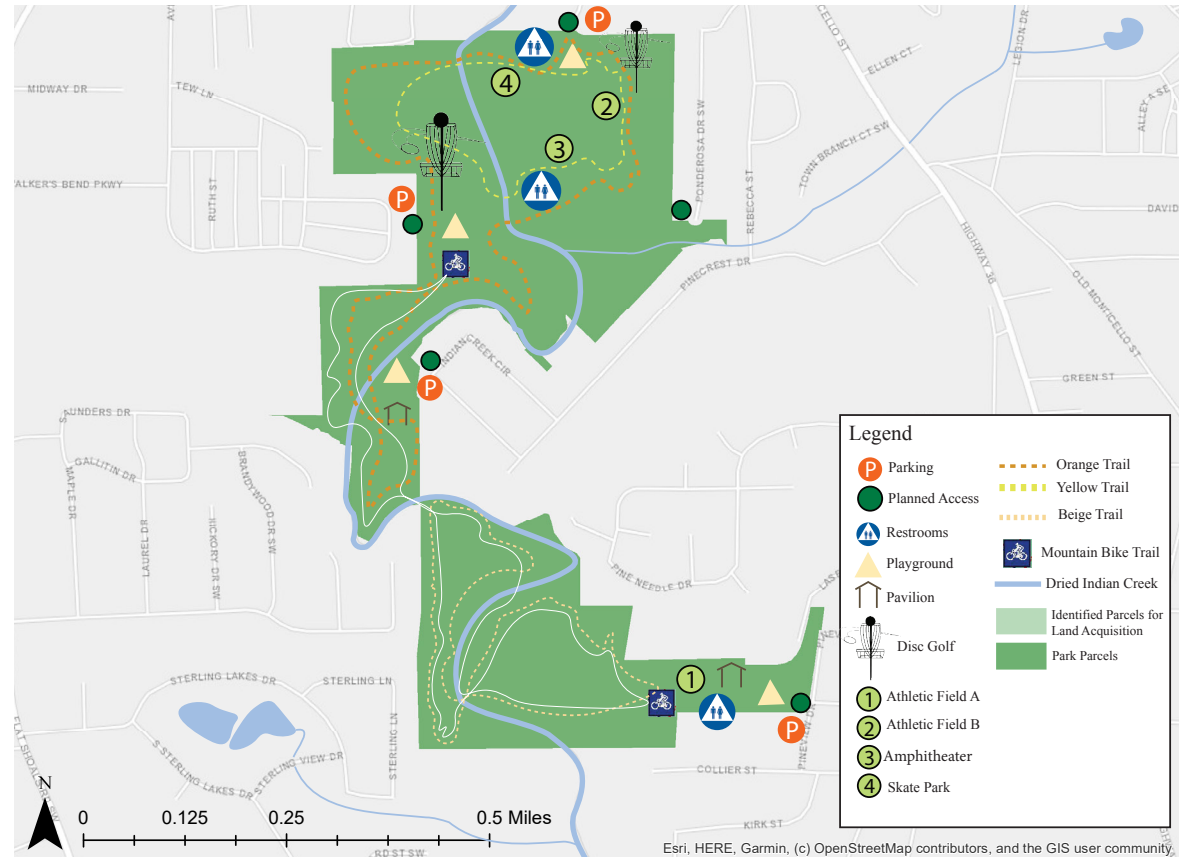
Central Park For All

In 2017, The City of Covington released proposed plans for Covington's Central Park. The plan includes a 93-acre greenspace with five access points, four of which have designating parking. The amenities of the park include: three walking trails, one mountain bike trail, two disc golf courses, four playgrounds located at each entry point, two pavilions located at two of the entries, two athletic fields, an amphitheater, and a skate park.

The original design has concentrated the park amenities in clusters around the four entry points with parking. The mountain bike trail also crosses over the pedestrian walking trails a few times. The park's recommended walking trails do not interconnect or connect to the North/South/and East nodes. These specifics are worth noting for future recommendations and opportunities for expansion.

Covington's initial park plan has many key elements that will serve as the basis of our recommendations.

Central Park City of Covington Plan, 2017



Big Idea 1 (continued)

Central Park For All

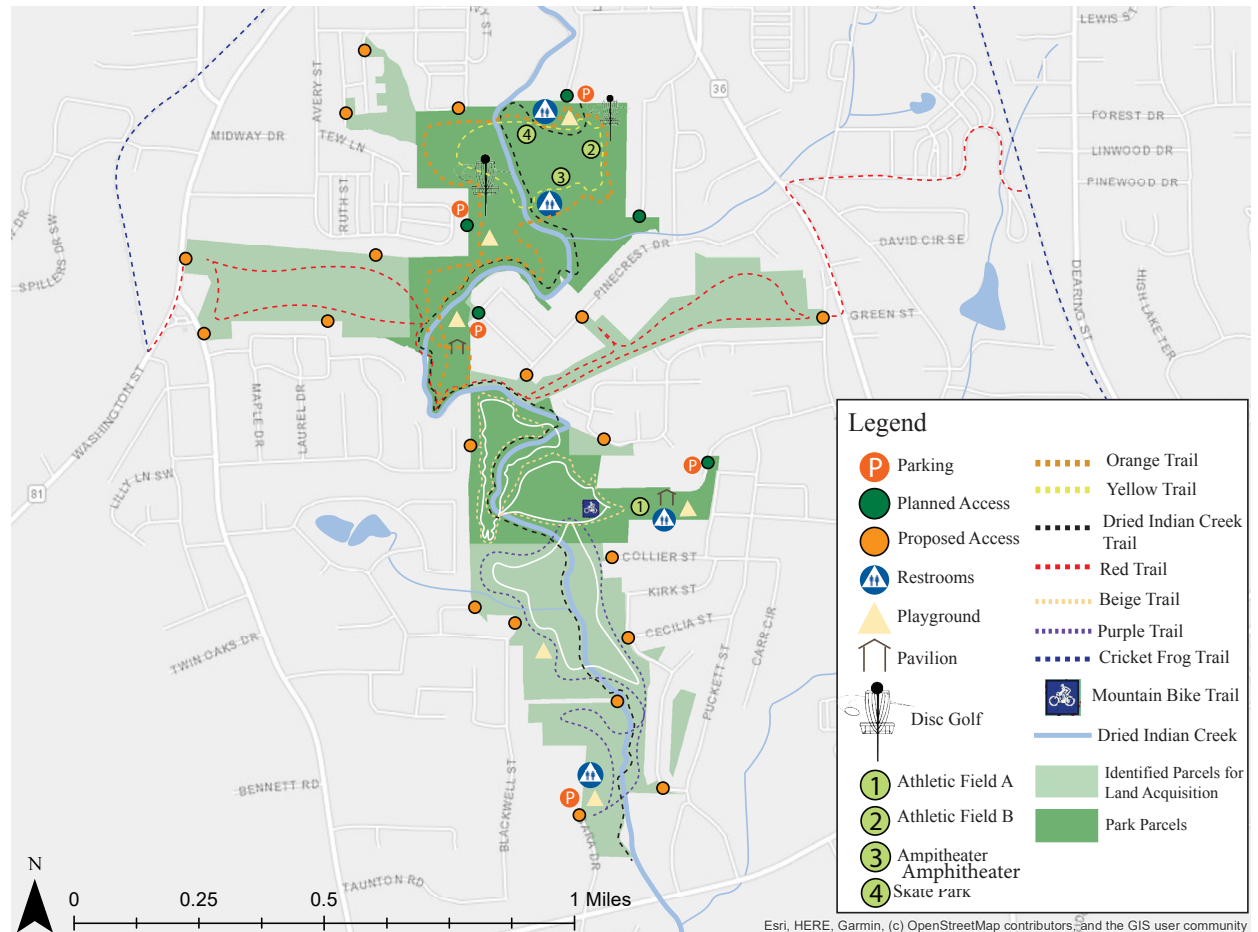
Central Park City of Covington Vision, 2020

Recommendation 1-1: To expand the park an additional 170.5 acres to the East, West, and South. All of the identified land parcels are vacant and some are already owned by Newton County and the City of Covington. Most of the parcels are zoned either conservation or residential. The addition of these identified parcels to the park would allow for Covington to have a vibrant and stunning Central Park that has the ability to be the Central Park for Newton County. The proposed land acquisition parcels will allow Covington's Central Park to be connected to the Cricket Frog Trail, creating a system of greenspace and greenways that will allow for the community to become more walkable.

In order to achieve the goal of accessibility to the park for all of Covington's residents, we have proposed 16 pedestrian and biking access points throughout the Central Park. Increasing pedestrian and biking entry points will decrease the need for cars and increase mobility and connectivity throughout each neighborhood and corridor within Covington. We have recommended one access point in the South with the ability to have parking attached.

The identified key parcels that would unite the east and west and north and south corridors provide

countless opportunities to expand amenities into these new areas. The identified key parcels that would unite the east and west and north and south corridors provide countless opportunities to expand amenities into these new areas. The park amenities within the initial park parcels (dark green) are identical to those in the initial Covington Park Plan. These include two disc golf courses, four playgrounds located at each entry point, two pavilions located at two of the entries, two athletic fields, an amphitheater, and a skate park. Our recommendation is to expand the original amenities to the newly identified southern portions of the park adding two playgrounds and one restroom to the area located directly beside the southernmost parking access point.



Big Idea 1 (continued)

Central Park For All Recommendations

In our Central Park Vision Map, we have kept the original three walking trails, along with the mountain bike trail.

Recommendation 1-2: Expand the mountain bike trail south, rather than north, to prevent the trail from crossing the walking paths and ensure safety to pedestrians.

Recommendation 1-3: Expand the trail network to include:

- The Dried Indian Creek Trail that runs North to South
- The Red Trail that runs East to West;
- The Purple Trail for those entering the park from the South;
- Trail interconnected opportunities to allow each walking path to connect to either the Red Trail or the Dried Indian Creek Trail;
- And lastly, to connect the Red Trail to the Cricket Frog Trail.

These recommendations will ensure that each neighborhood is able to have access to the benefits of greenspace. In order to create a space where everyone feels welcome, at every stage in the Central Park decision-making process there must be public engagement with the residents of Covington. These public engagement meetings must be guided to figure out what the community envisions this park to look like and what amenities residents would like to see implemented. The park should amplify these voices and create a space where all people are proud to be a part of the Covington community.

Our recommendations may not be exactly what the residents in Covington believe should be their Central Park, but we hope that our ideas and recommendations serve to be idea-provoking conversations between stakeholders, residents, and the City of Covington.

Recommendation 1-4: Storytelling Through Local Art

The idea of storytelling through local art uses blank spaces within the park (sides of infrastructure, streets, etc.) to create a mural. Local artists will lead the design of the mural and will engage with the community on ideas and elements that should or should not be included. The design is encouraged to tell the story of Covington and incorporate elements from the past, present, and future that defines the community as a whole. The art could also have an interactive aspect to it. For the implementation step of painting the mural, the local artists will lead the community members in helping paint and create this piece of art. This can take form in any way the community and local artists see fit.

Big Idea 1 (continued)

Central Park For All Recommendations

Recommendation 1-5: Water Balloon Skate Park Art

The idea of the water balloon skate park is adopted from the Waterworks Park placemaking activity in Berkeley Park, Atlanta, GA. On opening day of Waterworks Park, community members were given the opportunity to throw paint filled water balloons at a wall. This artwork became a staple in the community. We envision this opening day activity could be implemented to decorate the skate park to give it a unique flair. For this activity, all members of the community can participate and enjoy a little water balloon paint fun.

Recommendation 1-6: Park Square

The idea of a park square is ideally implemented in focus area 1, which is located at the main entrance to the park. This idea implements a central park square directly in the middle of the playground, skate park, athletic field, and the amphitheater. The park square is a twist on the common central plaza gathering point of parks found in cities across the globe. Its purpose is to be multifaceted and have a multitude of applications. Our idea is that this area will have the ability to be an exhibition space, outdoor cinema, concert space, local market area, theater space, as well as a skating rink in the winter months. This park square could become the main attraction to the park, having local events hosted every few months.

Recommendation 1-7: Adult and Senior Citizens Playground

This idea is geared more towards the aging population in Covington. Our goal through this idea is to promote intro- and intra-generational growth, while also addressing the needs of the aging population. According to the AAA State of Play, senior citizen playgrounds contain features that are safer for joints and promote core muscle strength. Some types of equipment include stationary bicycles, cross-trainers, sit-up machines, treadmills, and other activities that promote flexibility, strength, and aerobic activities. These playgrounds can also include equipment for those with limited mobility or who are wheelchair-bound. Not only are these playgrounds enjoyable and lively, they also provide many health benefits to the community.

Recommendation 1-8: Annual Festival Ideas

Chalk Festivals have been implemented throughout the United States and are a powerful, low-cost placemaking tool for the community. Covington's Central Park is a great place to host an annual chalk festival event. The event can be shaped to what the community envisions, and the park could partner with local restaurants and retail entities to bring in shops, food, and more entertainment to the festival.

Big Idea 2

Increase Pedestrian Network

Covington has a walkable historic downtown with an interconnected sidewalk system; however, the rest of the city lacks efficient pedestrian and bicycle connectivity. The existing sidewalks outside of the historic district are narrow, fragmented, and in many cases, absent. There are several locations that limit pedestrian mobility, including US 278, where the sidewalk is discontinued east of Mill Street; Washington Street, where there are narrow sidewalks with no buffer to protect pedestrians from fast-moving traffic, and in general, limited opportunities to safely cross major roads. Furthermore, the existing bicycle facilities are severely limited compared to the size of the overall street network. This idea aims to promote walkability in Covington by improving the existing poor pavement conditions, pedestrian and bicycle facilities along the roadway, and roadway user safety.

First, existing sidewalk and bike plans were analyzed to identify gaps in the pedestrian and bicycle network. Then, we created comprehensive pedestrian and bicycle network maps with subsequent recommendations to promote safe pedestrian movement and circulation. The recommendations include:

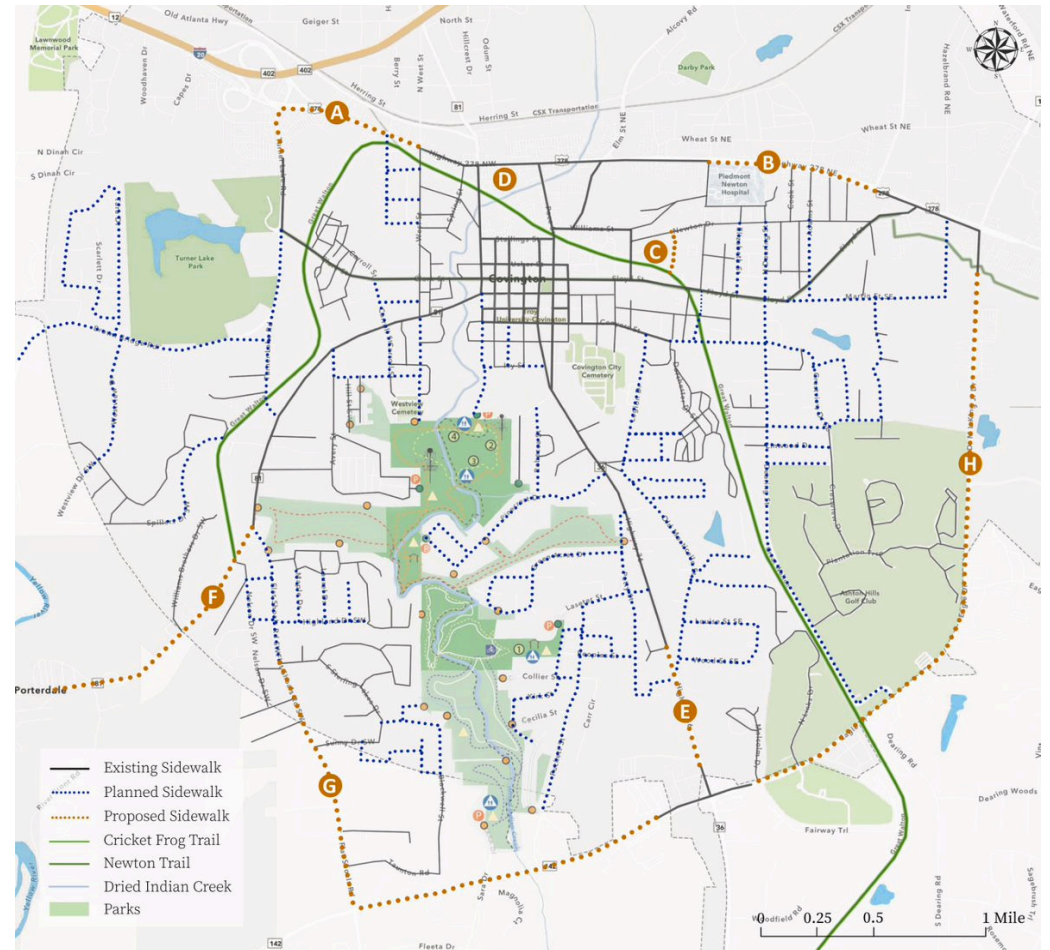
Recommendation 2-1: Expand the sidewalk network by filling in missing sidewalks and installing new sidewalks to encourage walkability

Filling gaps and expanding on these existing networks in places with dense development is often a very cost-effective way to gradually increase pedestrian use in an area. When prioritizing missing sidewalks, we gave importance to providing sidewalks to fill gaps on arterials and collectors at the locations near the activity areas, such as schools, parks, shopping districts, medical complexes, and recreational areas. Sidewalk improvements in these targeted locations will not only provide more opportunities for walking but also boost the economic activities in these areas. The locations that we identified for sidewalk constructions are as following:

Big Idea 2 (continued)

Increase Pedestrian Network

- A** Connect US 278 and Turner Lake Road by constructing new sidewalks
- B** Fill in the missing segment on US 278 between Mill Street and Floyd Street
- C** Provide direct pedestrian access to Legion Field from Newton Drive and Cricket Frog Trail
- D** Create a connection between US 278 and Downtown
- E** Fill in the missing gap on Jackson Highway
- F** Extend the existing sidewalks on Washington Street to Porterdales
- G** Install sidewalks on Flat Shoals Road and connect with Covington Bypass
- H** Install a continuous sidewalk along Covington Bypass Road



Proposed Sidewalk Plan

Big Idea 2 (continued)

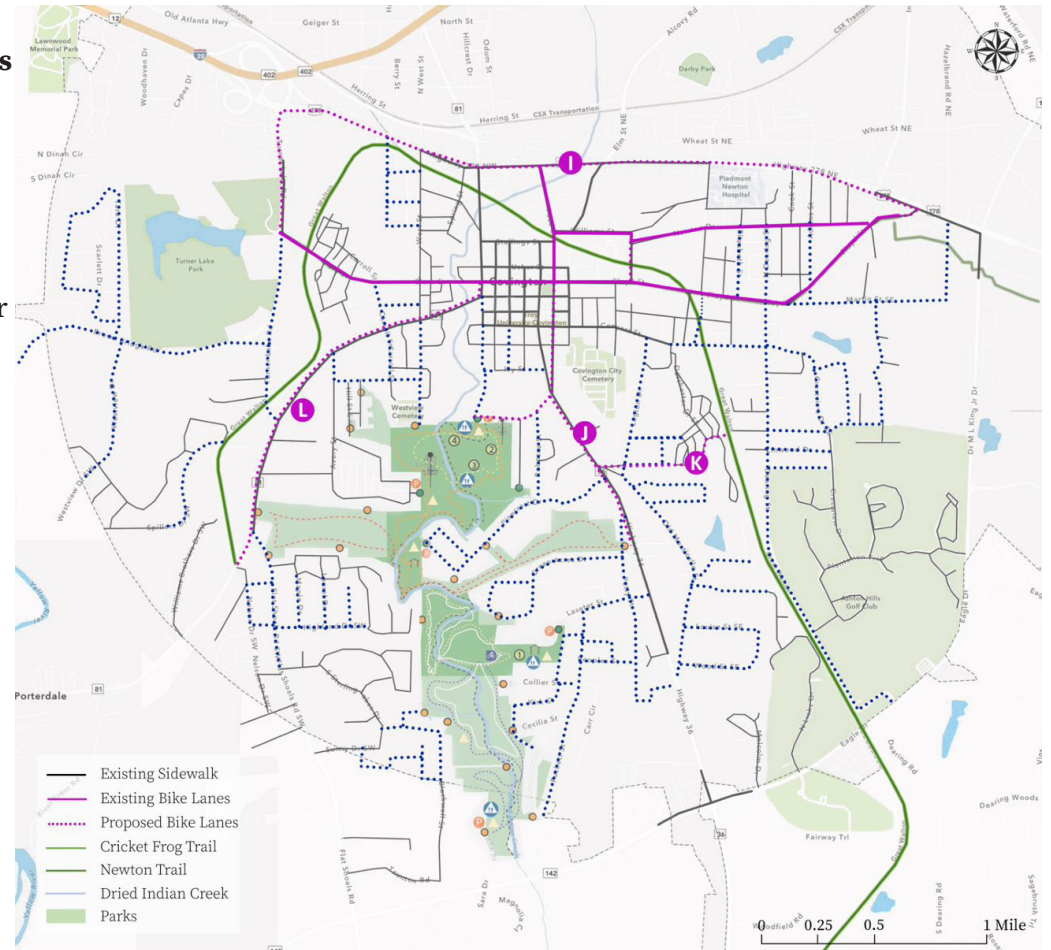
Increase Pedestrian Network

Recommendation 2-2: Expand the City's existing bike infrastructure network to provide direct, convenient connections to public spaces

Particularly, the bike lanes from Pace street should be continued along Church Street and Jackson Street to connect downtown with the proposed Central Park. Also, installing new bike lanes along Washington Street, US 278, and Turner Lake Road will allow the bicyclists to access the Cricket Frog Trail, Newton Trail, and Turner Lake Park more easily. However, this needs further study with the GDOT to identify the potential location of high priority bike lanes.

Our bike lane recommendations are:

- I** Install a new bike lane along US 278 and Turner lake road to provide equitable access to nearby commercial areas
- J** Connect downtown to the Central park by continuing the existing bike lane from Pace Street along Church Street and Jackson Street
- K** Enhance the east-west connectivity between Central Park and Cricket Frog trail through King Street
- L** Install bike lanes along Washington Street, which will provide access to Downtown, Central Park, and Cricket Frog Trail
To promote and facilitate biking in Covington, adopting a bike-share system would be beneficial, as it eliminates the need for personal bike ownership and offers free or affordable access to bicycles for short-distance trips. This will provide the local residents as well as tourists more opportunities for biking trips and allow them to take advantage of the proposed multi-modal trails.



Proposed Bike Plan

Big Idea 2 (continued)

Increase Pedestrian Network

Recommendation 2-3: Enhance the streetscape to create a high-quality pedestrian environment that increases pedestrian safety and comfort

The vibrant character of sidewalks in the Covington Square gradually became bleak and unappealing to pedestrians. An attractive streetscape not only encourages walking but also provides a layer of safety. Covington has several locations where the Cricket Frog Trail and Newton Trail will cross the major roads, and improved streetscapes at these intersections will ensure pedestrians' safety. We recommended node improvements at the major intersection points of streets and trails by adding high-visibility crosswalks, pedestrian gates/bollards, pedestrian crossing signs, and electronic signals at signalized intersections to organize safe crossings for pedestrians. We also recommend adding more directional signage and wayfinding to important destinations and logo motifs at trail crossings as trail branding.



(Source: Newton Trails)



Existing Sidewalk Along US 278
Source: Google Earth



Potential Sidewalk Improvements Along US 278
(Source: Perkins and Will)

Big Idea 3

Model Trail Activation

Being Covington's newest community asset, the Cricket Frog Trail can be one of the City's most impactful projects. Now, with the completion of the Trail's construction, Covington is in a special position. As the City continues to grow, future developers have the potential to activate the trail and fully utilize the benefits that civic greenways have to offer.

The City can encourage this type of development pattern in many ways. It can establish and adopt design standards, implement a trail overlay zoning district, or even create a Trail Master Plan that developers could refer to for inspiration. But most importantly, with any form of new and innovative project, comes skepticism from the community - you may see advocated resistance and push back, development that faces away from the Trail, or properties that limit access. That's why it's important to facilitate a model opportunity that will introduce the benefits of trail-activated-development to the community.

A key characteristic of most rail to trail projects, such as the Cricket Frog Trail, is the abundance of adjacent dilapidated or underutilized adjacent properties. Oftentimes, one will find industrial structures on these parcels that are ripe for repurposing.

Consequently, many developers and city officials are brought to consider ideas of taking these old buildings or sites and repurposing them to encourage new opportunities of economic growth while also optimizing the operational and commercial performance of built assets, otherwise known as Adaptive Reuse.



*Cricket Frog Trail
(Source: Rails-To-Trails Conservancy)*



Cricket Frog Trail Map

Big Idea 3 (continued)

Model Trail Activation

Consequently, many developers and city officials are brought to consider ideas of taking these old buildings or sites and repurposing them to encourage new opportunities of economic growth while also optimizing the operational and commercial performance of built assets, known as “adaptive reuse.”

There are a plethora of examples of adaptive reuse within the Metro Area. The most well-known is the Atlanta BeltLine and its impact on surrounding properties. There are the Eastside and Westside developments, as well as the Krog Street Market and Ponce City Market. Another, more recent, example is The Works, an 80-acre adaptive mixed-use development in Atlanta’s Upper-Westside. As well as Armour Yards, a collection of railroad industrial buildings repurposed for office and commercial space.

For Covington, a great place to start for adaptive reuse opportunities, is by looking for potential infill sites in proximity to the Trail. The Adaptive Reuse map highlights two sites with the potential for redevelopment.

Recommendation 3-1: OCHO Property Reimagined

Given the property’s industrial character, it has a lot of potential to follow similar concepts such as Krog St. Market or Common Ground on the Eastside of the Beltline. It is recommended that the City partners with a local developer to establish a site plan to create a project that is revered as a strong community asset. In order to match community standards and characteristics, a design survey should be executed to gather community input. The developer should consider this information as it will be crucial to the overall success of the project.



Adaptive Reuse Plan



*Armour Yards Rendering
Source: What Now Atlanta*

Big Idea 3 (continued)

Model Trail Activation

Recommendation 3-2: Pharmacy Lot Reimagined

At the intersection of Emory St. and US 278 is a dilapidated and underused pharmacy lot. Given the parcel and structure's nucleated character, this property may require some creative thinking to fully utilize the trail, but still has a lot of potential. It is advised that the developer append this property to the site plan as it could be considered a complimentary piece of the project. As a design recommendation, this parcel could be utilized as a gateway from pedestrian traffic onto the trail from US 278.

Recommendation 3-3: Community Church Partnerships

It has been noted that churches make for excellent partners when it comes to community projects; whether that be opportunities for agriculture, public greenspace, or affordable housing. Additionally, the facilitation of such a relationship should be considered as a way to help manage the impacts that the greenway will have on the properties. With that said, it is recommended that the City reach out to the churches in order to gather input about any questions or concerns they may have about future development that will encroach their properties. Thinking mutualistically, the developer should consider incorporating their land into the overall project as it could contribute to the final product as well as create improvements for the church properties. Any open discourse between the developers and the churches should be maintained and constantly reviewed as the project advances.

Project Vision

Given their proximity to the trail and built characteristics, these properties make ideal candidate sites to model development types that activate the use of the Cricket Frog Trail. To help realize what this development pattern may look like, the following figure is a plan view that illustrates how future development can interact with the trail. As shown, the OCHO property conserves and utilizes the primary structure as part of the final product while also incorporating new construction that capitalizes on the available land abutting the trail. Additionally, the pharmacy's parcel was reimagined in a way that leverages the use of the trail while also accounting for vehicular traffic from US 278 and Emory Street. While parking on these properties is still available, the primary goal is that the community will prioritize the use of the Cricket Frog Trail to access these businesses.

Recommendation 3-4: Examples of Trail-Activation

The following is a couple of successful examples of trail activation. While development doesn't have to be as aggressive as some of the ideas shown below, it is worth reviewing successful examples of greenway developments and tailoring them in a way that fits the scale and characteristics of Covington.

Big Idea 4

Housing Stock

The vast majority of housing stock in Covington are single-family detached units which have long supported the City's families. Covington now has an opportunity to broaden housing choice to support vulnerable populations and the next generation of residents. We heard from stakeholders that there is a need to diversify Covington's housing portfolio in order to increase housing affordability. By increasing housing affordability, Covington could attract young professionals, nearby university students, and retirees who may not be able to afford, or may not need a single-family detached home. The goal of this big idea is to **expand the variety of housing stock to increase housing affordability**.

The following ideas are visionary, but by varying the housing stock, Covington will become more accessible to people who may prefer proximity to Atlanta but enjoy the small-town charm of Covington.

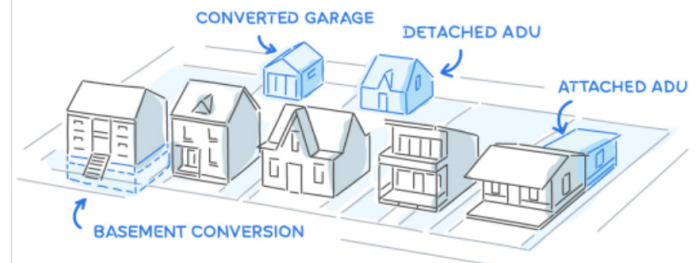
We identified five possible tools to expand the variety of housing stock to increase housing affordability. The five tools are:

1. Permit and encourage Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)
2. Increase Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) housing units
3. Consider and propose inclusionary zoning
4. Review possibility of Tax Allocation District (TAD) implementation
5. Prepare and examine modern modular housing as a future tool

Recommendation 4-1: Permit and Encourage ADUs

Currently, local regulations in Covington prohibit ADUs. However, ADUs may work well in Covington's R-1 (low-density single-family residences) and possibly R-2 (medium-density single-family residences) zones. ADUs are a great option to promote housing accessibility for young professionals or students who do not need as much space.

There are many types of ADUs. For example, there is a type of ADU that is a basement conversion. There is also a converted garage, a detached ADU, or an attached ADU. These ADUs commonly go by the names: mother-in-law apartment, a carriage house, granny flats, etc. Below is an example, from the City of Spanish Fork, as to what ADUs could look like in Covington.



*Practical application of ADUs
(Source: City of Spanish Fork)*

Big Idea 4 (continued)

Housing Stock

Recommendation 4-2: Increase LIHTC Housing Units

LIHTC units are built by developers who have received a tax incentive to construct or rehabilitate affordable rental housing units for low-income tenants. Generally, these units are used as an “affordability bridge” for 10 to 15 years, as that is the duration owners must sustain affordability. In Covington, multiple LIHTC developments are already underway and under construction. Although the City of Covington and the Housing Authority of Covington are familiar with LIHTC, this may continue to be an important tool as the City supports low-income residents and maintains housing affordability. In the future, The City could facilitate the development of LIHTC housing by inviting LIHTC developers from across Georgia and the Southeast to come to Covington. The City could then create a packet of ideal LIHTC development sites to these developers to initiate LIHTC development.

Recommendation 4-3: Consider and Propose Inclusionary Zoning as a Tool

Inclusionary zoning has been adopted in over 500 municipalities across the country, including two cities in Georgia – Atlanta and Decatur. Inclusionary zoning can be controversial. Many developers protest mandatory inclusionary zoning due to its impact on their profit as well as the potential to make a project financially infeasible. The benefit of inclusionary zoning, especially related to Covington, is that can be used to spur market rate residential development through the use of density bonuses and expedited permit processing. Implementing inclusionary zoning also would embed affordable housing within neighborhoods and protect the City’s existing character. Inclusionary zoning is generally targeted to those whose household incomes are 80% of the area median income (AMI). Inclusionary zoning could be a good tool for Covington to maintain and attract college students from nearby Oxford as well as those who will be working at Three Ring Studios and may want a different style of housing that is affordable for entry-level salaries. Source: Lincoln Institute of Land Policy

Recommendation 4-4: Review Possibility of TAD Implementation

TADs are used to attract housing or commercial development to a specific neighborhood or area for redevelopment. Also called tax increment financing districts in other states, a city typically issues TAD bonds to pay for infrastructure and improvements in a specified area and then over a set period of time defers the revenue from increased property values to buy back the bonds. A TAD could be useful in Covington to signal to developers the city’s support for redevelopment. Deciding where to implement a TAD is incredibly complex and generally contracted to a private firm. TADs must go where there is a large economic tax base but it cannot make up more than 10% of the political subdivision’s total assessed tax revenue. With the large economic tax base, the district must meet one of the following 3 requirements: the area must be blighted, the area must be deteriorating relative to a larger political subdivision, or the area must lack infrastructure. When private firms review TIFs to create the boundary, private firms review and analyze: the age of the building(s), parcels that have smaller assessed values in comparison to others, a contiguous boundary, any clusters of older buildings, and areas with low rent or high vacancy rates.

Big Idea 4 (continued)

Housing Stock

Should the City move forward with this tool, it is important to keep in mind that the TAD must go in the same area in which the affordable housing would go. There are benefits to TADs, but it is also important to note that there could be drawbacks – such as temporary impacts to Newton County Schools’ budget. Again, TAD implementation is a visionary option or tool to increase housing variety and affordable housing options. If the City wishes to pursue this route, it would be recommended that they review the use of TADs throughout Georgia and contract with a private firm that specializes in TADs.

Recommendation 4-5: Prepare and Examine Modern Modular Housing as a Future Tool

Modern modular housing is a new type of housing that allows for the housing unit to grow as the household grows. This is possible due to the fact that modern modular housing is made for the purpose of easy additions to the house. An example image of modern modular housing is to the right.

Although this tool is new and not yet widespread, it could be interesting to utilize in the future as an affordable housing option, but also as an option for middle- or high-income households. For example, on the module housing website there are currently three different model options, with at least one option in the low \$180,000s and other models in the range of \$450,000. Clearly, modular housing offers a range of affordability, and it can adapt based on the household’s income.

Benefits of modern modular housing include cheaper construction costs, energy-efficiency, and faster construction times. Modern modular housing is normally built off-site and brought to the land parcel and is six to ten weeks faster than traditional residential development. Another benefit of this tool is that it could address shortages in the labor market and labor cost. With these benefits, we believe that modern modular housing is worth considering in the future. This tool would be utilized by the Covington Housing Authority with support from the City. Walkers Bend could be considered a potential site for the Modern Modular Housing prototype.



*Example of modular housing
(Source: Module Housing)*

Big Idea 4 (continued)

Housing Stock

Opportunity: Washington/Turner Lake

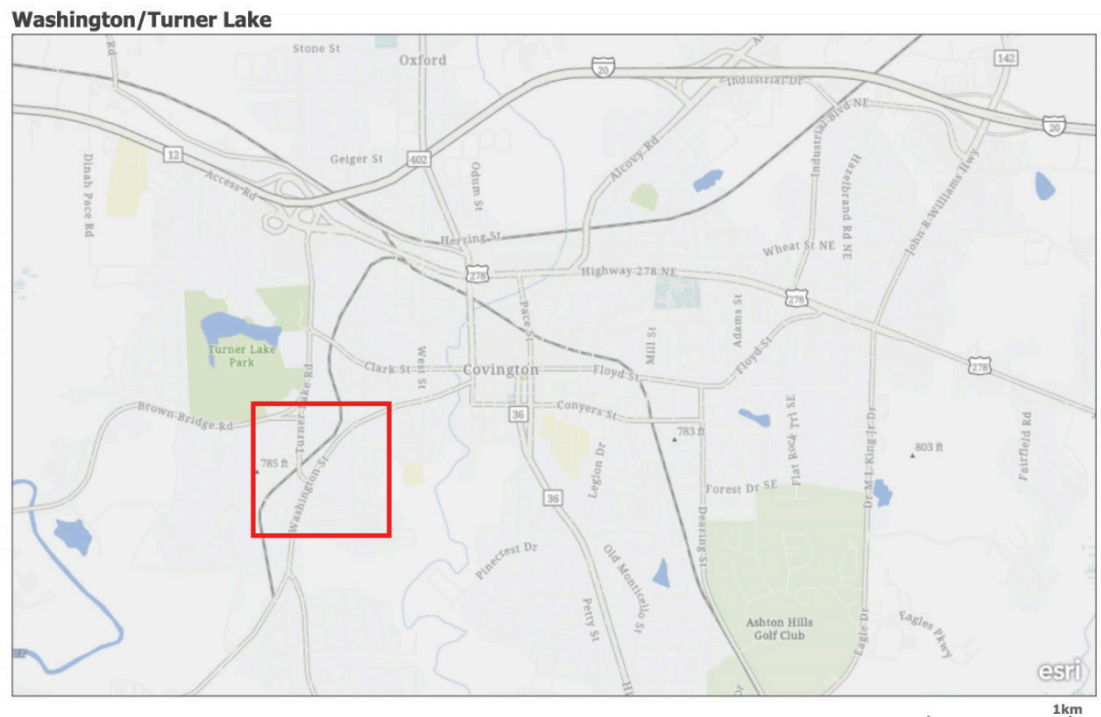
An area of opportunity for diversified housing would be the area by Washington and Turner Lake. This is an ideal location as the specified location is next to the Cricket Frog Trail and where the corridors of Turner Lake Road, Cricket Frog Trail, and Washington Street intersect. The location would be ideal to add more diverse housing options, as seen below. This is what Modern Modular Housing could look like in the future in the City of Covington.

Timeline for Possible Tools

A timeline is important as the City of Covington considers each possible tool that they may implement. On the following page is an example of an approximate timeline for each tool. Again, these are meant to be approximate; however, this will give the City a sense of the time commitment for each of these possibilities.



(above) Modular house rendering
(right) Focus area



Esri Community Maps Contributors, Esri, HERE, Garmin, SafeGraph, INCREMENT P, METI/NASA, USGS, EPA, NPS, US Census Bureau, USDA

Big Idea 4 (continued)

Housing Stock

	ADUs	LIHTC	Inclusionary Zoning	TIF District	Modern Modular Housing
0 - 12 Months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Begin discussing with other City staff and officials (Planning Staff) - Research other cities' regulations (Planning Staff) - Receive public input through online surveys, focus groups, etc. (Planning Staff) - Analyze public input results (Planning Staff) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continue to adopt property tax incentives (Local Departments of Finance, Revenue, or Taxation) - Work to continue to incentivize/recruit nonprofits and mission-driven developers (along with Covington Housing Authority if HCV used) to apply for LIHTC subsidy (Planning Staff) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Begin discussing with other City Staff and officials (Planning Staff) - Research other cities' regulations, such as Decatur and Atlanta (Planning Staff) - Receive public/stakeholder input (Planning Staff) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Begin discussing with other City staff and officials (Planning Staff) - Research other cities' TIF districts (Planning Staff) - Hire a firm to facilitate public engagement, study parcels, provide evidence for legal justification for TIF (Private Firm) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Construction currently limited geographically, but likely to expand as demand grows - Research other cities' regulations and examples (Planning Staff)
13 - 24 Months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Craft the ordinance (Planning Staff) - Propose to Planning Commission and City Council (Planning Staff) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Developers, sponsors, owners, development team, and professionals work to plan and begin construction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Craft the ordinance (Planning Staff) - Propose to Planning Commission and City Council (Planning Staff) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continue public input (Private Firm) - Apply/Propose to Planning Commission and City Council 	
25 - 36 Months		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Construction of LIHTC housing units 			

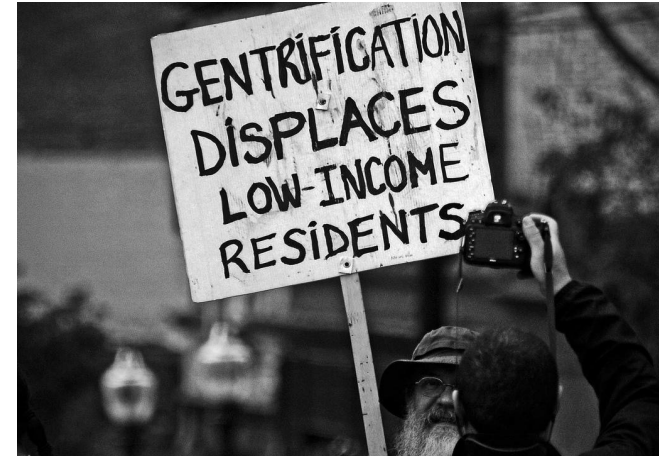
Big Idea 5

Anti-Displacement Plan, Community Land Trust, and Community Engagement Plan

While this plan provides many innovative and creative Big Ideas for Covington, it is important to consider the effects these potential projects will have on the existing residents and communities. Thus, this Big Idea focuses on mitigating potential negative effects regarding future growth and development in the city. Our goal of “Equity in All” is at the core of these concepts in this big idea.

Recommendation 5-1: Create an Anti-Displacement Plan

Often, growth and new developments in communities lead to the displacement of current residents. The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development defines displacement as the occurrence of current, usually low-income, residents facing housing cost burdens due to new developments in the area. Often residents incur increased costs of living, rents, or property taxes, which potentially forces residents to move out of the area. Displacement occurs as a result of gentrification. HUD defines gentrification as “a form of neighborhood change that occurs when higher-income groups move into low-income areas, potentially altering the cultural and financial landscape of the original neighborhood”. Gentrification can also occur from various “green” developments like parkways or trails, for example the Atlanta BeltLine.



(Source: EdLanta)

Anti-displacement planning and policies must be put in place to prevent these negative outcomes from development within Covington. This year, San Jose, California, adopted a Citywide Anti-Displacement Strategy. At its core, the strategy focuses on the production of new affordable housing. The establishment of a Community Land Trust, is a model that can provide a sustainable affordable housing solution for Covington. Other recommended suggestions from the San Jose’s Citywide Anti-Displacement Strategy include:

- Establish a neighborhood tenant preference for affordable housing.
- Explore a Community Opportunity to Purchase Program or Ordinance.
- A Community Opportunity to Purchase gives qualified non-profits the first right to purchase or refuse certain properties for sale in the City.
- Increase equitable representation of underrepresented communities on city boards and commissions.
- Prevent code enforcement-related displacement.

At the core of the creation of an anti-displacement plan should be the residents of the community. Community members must work alongside those creating the anti-displacement plan to ensure that their needs are being met. Big Idea 5-2: “Create a Community Engagement Plan” provides more recommendations on how to ensure active and meaningful community engagement.

Big Idea 5 (continued)

Anti-Displacement Plan, Community Land Trust, and Community Engagement Plan

Recommendation 5-2: Create a Community Engagement Plan

Many of the Big Ideas posed in this plan, from the Central Park to the sidewalk network focus on physical design. However, Covington residents should play a central role in bringing these ideas to life. Active and robust community engagement is necessary to ensure the voices and input of all Covington residents are heard, and the outcomes of these Big Ideas are equitable for all. Therefore, it is recommended that a community engagement plan be created to help instill the role of the community in the planning process. Community engagement must be robust, and go beyond the traditional public meeting or design charrette. Community residents must have an active and decision-making role in the planning, design, and implementation of any project or idea posed in this plan. The following are suggestions and examples of more robust and creative community engagement strategies:

- Go beyond the traditional public meeting or open house:
 - However, if holding an in-person meeting provide childcare services and provide food from local caterers/restaurants, and live-stream events for those who cannot attend in-person;
 - For virtual meetings ensure that the platform used has a dial-in option for non-internet users and closed captioning.
- Meet people where they are:
 - Attend other organizations' events or meetings to learn more about residents and communities they belong to;
 - Use common destinations like grocery stores and schools to advertise events and ask for residents' feedback on certain plans/projects;
 - Establish a City Walks program to enhance placemaking and the power of storytelling to better understand Covington's history and its residents.
- Develop a social media presence:
 - Use social media to identify community leaders and stakeholders;
 - Create a hashtag, for example #CovingtonCommunity to both promote engagement events, as well as interact with residents virtually and more often.



Community walking tour
(Source: UNC-Charlotte Urban Institute)

Big Idea 5 (continued)

Anti-Displacement Plan, Community Land Trust, and Community Engagement Plan

Many of these strategies above were derived from the Vision Zero Dignity-Infused Community Engagement (DICE) Strategies utilized by the Los Angeles Department of Transportation. Dignity-infused community engagement is defined as a “planning process that intentionally and holistically incorporates the viewpoints, lived experience, and perspectives of those most impacted by a planning project. It seeks to restore and atone for historic, systematic and institutional injustices.” DICE Approach strategies include:

- Conduct a Social Climate Analysis that considers:
 - Cultural identity
 - Socio-economic dynamics
 - Social services needs
 - Environmental factors
 - Infrastructure conditions
 - Resident oral histories
 - Resident leaders
- Create Community Teams
 - Community-based organizations, residents leaders, advocacy groups work alongside city staff as paid partners to inform and implement the planning and engagement process
- Conduct Capacity Building Trainings
- Have Street Team Deployment
 - Support engagement efforts through canvassing, phone banking, attending neighborhood meetings, community events, and town halls
- Establish Resident Advisory Councils
- Conduct Restorative Justice Sessions
- Conduct Community Engagement Events
 - Both large and small scale events to begin building trust and community
- Share Formal Public Comment Opportunities
 - Ensure residents are aware of formal public comment options

Big Idea 5 (continued)

Anti-Displacement Plan, Community Land Trust, and Community Engagement Plan

Recommendation 5-3: Establish a Covington Community Land Trust

Community Land Trusts (CLTs) have been proven to be an effective affordable housing strategy that can combat threats of displacement by providing homeownership opportunities for historically-marginalized groups. While Covington has low-income rental opportunities, a CLT can also provide low-income homeownership opportunities.

How a CLT works:

A local non-profit owns the land and the owner of the structure on that land, in this case, a house, is an individual homeowner or family. The homeowner signs into a 99-year ground lease with the CLT non-profit that allows them to exist on that property while also abiding by any rules regulating use, maintenance, financing, etc. Once the family decides to sell the home, the CLT arrangement ensures that the property is sold to another qualified low-income family and the sellers retain the equity they invested. This sort of arrangement ensures that public and private investments not only stay within the community, but also regenerate further support for future families, creating a sustainable cycle of affordable housing owned by the community.

Challenges:

Some of the common challenges to establishing a CLT are typically found with funding and land acquisition. With that in mind, CLTs typically target blighted properties as a way to acquire cheaper land while also investing in local neighborhoods through renovations and refurbishment. When it comes to funding, there are a variety of different avenues that CLT organizations can pursue. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) have federal grant opportunities such as Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) and the Community HOME investment Program. Additionally, there are a myriad of private organizations who take part in housing philanthropy. It is also worth looking into local partnerships for community-based funding sources such as banks or local businesses. This is recommended as it is less likely for a CLT to be constrained by funding restrictions that control the use and spending of money, which is typically found with federal grants. Moving forward, it is more advantageous to explore all options and receive money from multiple sources, as diversifying spreadsheets will reduce dependencies and ensure resiliency.

Big Idea 5 (continued)

Anti-Displacement Plan, Community Land Trust, and Community Engagement Plan

A final key characteristic to note is the fact that CLTs are versatile affordability mechanisms. They don't just have to focus on housing opportunities, they can focus on entrepreneurship by providing affordable business tenancies or ownerships, and they can also focus on community greenspace and agriculture, pretty much whatever the CLT mission is, they can apply the model to those ideas.

Lastly, when analyzing the BeltLine, the project has been a staple of economic development and rising property values in Atlanta. CLT's can also be used as a preventative measure against gentrification and displacement. Additionally, it will be much easier to establish this model when the property values are cheaper. As time goes on, it will be much more difficult to acquire land as property values increase.



*CLT symbolic drawing
(Source: Oakland Planning and Development Corporation)*

Big Idea 6

Attract Community Desired Services

We recommend the city undergo a community services planning and community engagement process to determine the services most needed by underserved neighborhoods. In Covington, economic activity is centered in the town square and along U.S. 278. Restaurants and retail represent the majority of activity in the town square alongside some government services while big box retail, grocery stores, and medical care are found along U.S. 278. The concentration of services in this area can be attributed to the automobile accessible market pressures within suburban areas.

This big idea is focused on supporting equity in all and increasing interconnectivity. Community engagement will be critical to connecting with the city's vulnerable residents, including senior citizens, low-income neighborhoods, and children and teens. Many of these populations do not have regular access to a car making it difficult to fulfill their daily needs with limited transportation options.

To enhance local economic development, the City can utilize creative financing and technical assistance to support local entrepreneurs in establishing their own businesses and work with residents to determine what larger scale services, like healthcare, are needed in currently underserved parts of the city. Potential financing options the city could explore to support entrepreneurs or attract new firms include:

Recommendation 6-1: Mobilize an Awareness Campaign to educate local businesses to the State and Federal Opportunity Zone program

Federal opportunity zones were created in 2017 and allow for capital gains tax incentives for investment and development in qualified census tracts. As seen on the next page, Covington has one census tract designated as a federal opportunity zone, representing an opportunity to invest where most needed in the City. The state opportunity zone program began in 2009 and provides the maximum job tax credit of \$3,500 per job for businesses that locate and create at least two full-time positions in a designated area. The City is a valuable resource for working with entrepreneurs and expanding firms to best leverage these development opportunities. Of note, the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) has Covington's state opportunity zone expiring in 2020 so the City may need to work with DCA to extend the opportunity zone designation. (see "Appendix, Big Idea 6" for state opportunity zones)

Recommendation 6-2: Establish a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI)

CDFIs take on multiple forms, including banks, credit unions, and non-profits. There are 25 CDFIs in Georgia but none in Covington. Existing CDFIs may be willing to incorporate Covington into their service area or there may be an opportunity to develop Covington's own CDFI to provide loans, low-interest mortgages, and credit building opportunities to underserved areas and residents. (see "Appendix, Big Idea 6")

Big Idea 6 (continued)

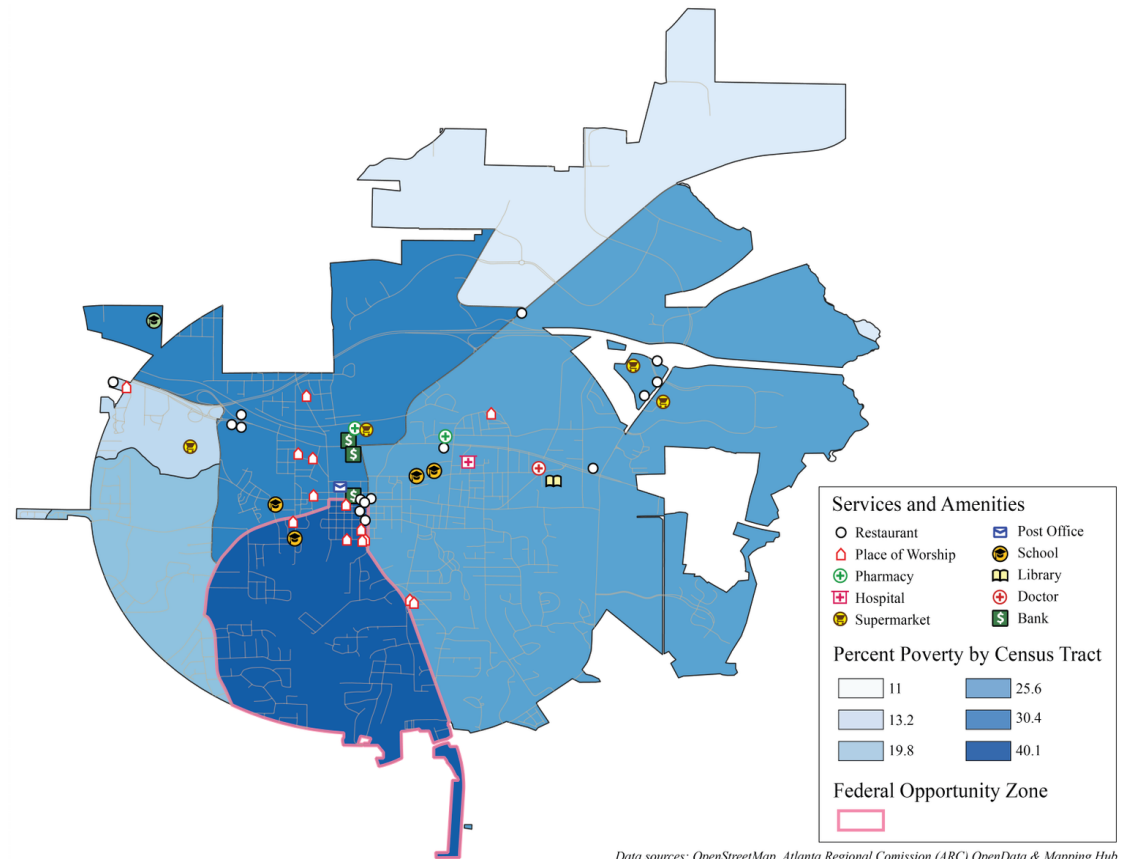
Attract Community Desired Services

Recommendation 6-3: Microfinancing

With origins in global development, microfinance involves small loan amounts to help entrepreneurs bridge the gap in starting or expanding their business. Ranging from a few hundred dollars to a few thousand, microloans provide access to capital for those who may not qualify for large loan amounts or do not need a large injection of cash.

Recommendation: 6-4 Loan Matching

Similar in the dollar amounts of microfinance, the City could explore a loan matching program to support entrepreneurs or expanding firms who have difficulty accessing capital from traditional lenders. A loan matching program could signal to lenders the support of a local municipality and lessen the perceived risk of lending to a small business.



Demographic and strength mapping of Covington

Big Idea 7

Placemaking

With a few simple placemaking initiatives, the character of Covington can be reinforced. These initiatives are relatively low in cost and in difficulty to implement but have the potential to have a large positive impact on the community for residents and visitors, alike.

Recommendation 7-1: Unique crosswalk designs for each of Covington's neighborhoods, or a single design that can be applied throughout the city limits. Also, textured intersections can be implemented on intersections with heavier traffic. Both the crosswalks and textured intersections can be used as placemaking tools, as well as traffic calming and pedestrian safety measures. For both of these initiatives, it would be a great opportunity to team up with local artists, students, and other residents to create designs that represent Covington well. This could also be an opportunity for a design competition, which could get residents excited about and involved with these new placemaking initiatives.



(top)

An example of creative crosswalk design in Madrid, Spain

(bottom)

*A textured intersection in Bowling Green, Ohio
(Source: Municipal websites)*

Big Idea 7 (continued)

Placemaking

Recommendation 7-2: Designing and installing streetlight banners, either for individual neighborhoods or for the entire City is another way to reinforce the sense of place in Covington. Additionally, hand painted “Welcome to Covington” signs would create a gateway at Covington’s city limits. These, too, offer great opportunities to team up with local artists.

Recommendation 7-3: Placing engraved plaques around the city is a great way to honor people and places that are important to the City of Covington’s history. To establish where these plaques should be placed, it is important to walk around and speak with various residents, in order to gauge what is important to them. An online nomination program would also be a useful method to get the input of Covington residents.



(top, left)
*An example of decorative banners at the University of Waterloo,
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada*



(top, right)
Gateway signage in Milford, Pennsylvania



(bottom)
*An engraved historical plaque at a historic landmark in
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
(Source: Municipal websites)*

Big Idea 8

Downtown Rebranding

The goal of this big idea, Rebranding Downtown, is to promote inclusivity while creating opportunities for the local population. Covington has a diverse population which should be well served and represented in the City's Downtown. With this in mind, we have formulated four recommendations to help alter the Downtown fabric with the aid of planning tools. They are as follows:

Recommendation 8-1: Replacement of Confederate Statue

While the case for taking down the Confederate statue in the Downtown Square is currently being fought in court, this recommendation is meant to serve as a suggestion, if and when, the statue is scheduled for removal. In order to enhance the character of the City and strengthen the sense of belonging amongst the residents, the process could involve their input. This can be done through surveys, flyers, meetings and other forms of community engagement to decide about the new central monument in Covington. A suggestion on our part – it could be a piece that combines the various neighborhood flags and symbols, an amalgamation representative of the Covington community as a whole. This is an opportunity to involve local artists as well.



(left)
*An example of a creative sculpture in
Dallas, Texas*



(bottom)
*A sculpture depicting Downtown Dallas
embedded into the hardscape, Dallas,
Texas*

Big Idea 8 (continued)

Downtown Rebranding

Recommendation 8-2: Engraved Plaques Installation Initiative

This recommendation about the engraved plaques installation initiative, in and around the Downtown Square, is a more Downtown-focused version of the recommendation in the last big idea. Residents would be welcome to make donations to have engraved plaques installed in the sidewalks, benches, and walls in and around the Square. This would enable them to commemorate or celebrate a person, an event, or something of importance, which in turn is a great boost when it comes to calling the City their own. Another benefit of this recommendation is that these donation funds can be redirected towards other programs in Covington.



(top)
Engraved honorary pavers in North Carolina

(bottom)
*Engraved stone 9/11 memorial plaques in Crestwood Park
in Allendale, New Jersey*

(Source: Municipal websites)



Big Idea 8 (continued)

Downtown Rebranding

Recommendation 8-3: Convert out-of-use structures/ Propose new structure in Downtown

The City of Covington has substantial surface parking scattered throughout the downtown area along with closed down business structures. The figure to the right shows some of these relatively large parking spaces currently present in Downtown.

This recommendation recognizes the need for supporting and encouraging the local populace, while striving to bring business diversity in the City. Out-of-use structures can be converted, or new structures can be proposed on one of the many parking blocks to serve as a co-working space. It could alternatively be divided into smaller parts and be leased out on a short-term basis, encouraging local entrepreneurs to set up shop with relatively low risk and cost than opening a convenience store.

Recommendation 8-4: Provision of a new event space

Legion Field is the space in Covington that presently holds the majority of events, which gives way to this recommendation – an opportunity to recognize another space, closer to Downtown, that can serve the purpose. The block consisting of the City Hall building is a suitable location for a new event space. The scattered government buildings on this block are one- or two-stories high with large surface parking lots around them.



(left)

Locations of large surface parking lots in Downtown Covington

(right)

Conceptual open space siting north of downtown

These can be consolidated, and the space could be repurposed into a new event space for Downtown Covington, close to the attractions and amenities. The figure shows a preliminary reorganization of the block which will be highlighted in the next big idea.

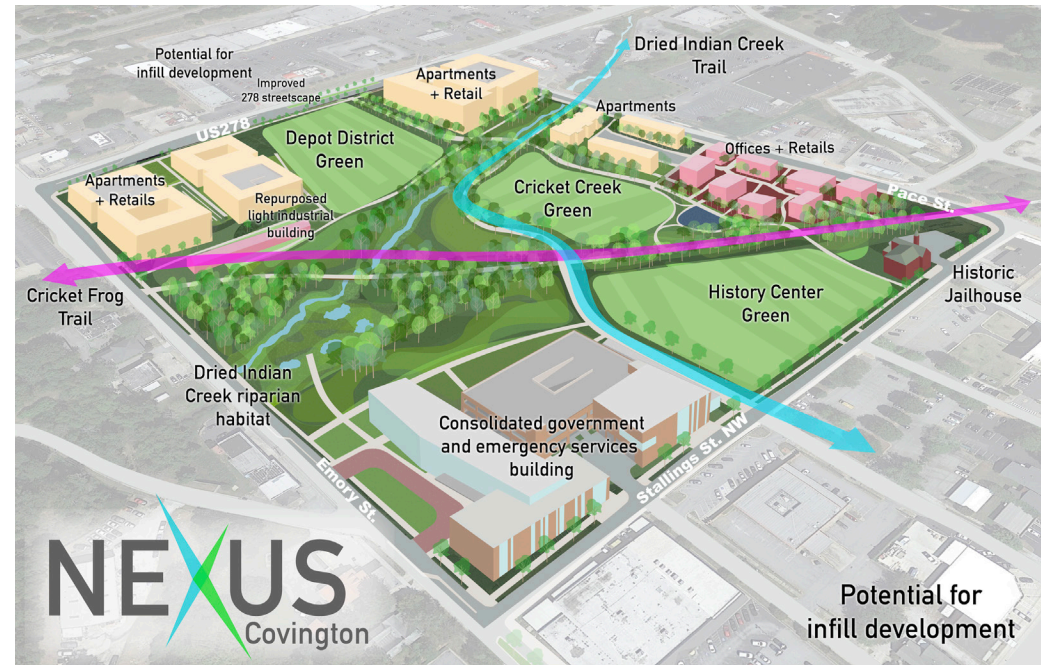
Big Idea 9

Connect US 278 and Downtown

Serving as the connection between the main access of the City, US 278, and Downtown Covington, the strategic location bound by US 278, Stallings, Emory, and Pace Streets, presents a unique development opportunity. By phasing in mixed-use residential buildings along US 278 and Pace Street, and consolidating government buildings along Stallings and Emory Streets, an enclosure for a dynamic central recreational and natural space can be created. The building setbacks from the street frontage can mitigate an “urban canyon” form and enclose the green space with active, complementary structures.

Recommendation 9-1: Phase in denser mixed-use multifamily development

The zoning and the surrounding the area allows a 3-5 story wood-frame development for a potential total of 400+ residential units, 130,000 + square feet of retail, and 100,000 + square feet of office space. The cluster of office and retail buildings with pedestrian-friendly pavements provides a vibrant place near the Cricket Frog Trail for residents, workers, and visitors.



» History Center Green: Green space facing government complex for spontaneous activity and varied programs

- » Consolidated Government Facilities:
- » City Government
 - » Engineering Department
 - » Newton County Sheriff's Office
 - » Fire Department

(right)
Proposed park and infill development

Big Idea 9 (continued)

Connect US 278 and Downtown

Recommendation 9-2: Consolidate current government buildings scattered along Stallings Street into a multi-story government and emergency services complex

Land can be used more effectively and provide easier access to government services for citizens. Consolidate the parking lots to a parking deck to fulfill parking needs of government employees, citizens, and visitors to the retails and green spaces.

Recommendation 9-3: Create central green spaces and preserve the natural habitat for the City

Utilize stormwater management techniques and preserve riparian habitats along Dried Indian Creek to enhance the resilience of the City. Next to the government complex, History Center Green serves as an event venue for spontaneous activities and varied programs. With Depot District Green and Cricket Green, US 278 and downtown Covington are connected. Cricket Frog Trail and Dried Indian Creek Trail improves the walkability and bike-ability of the City as well as bringing in visitors to support local businesses.



(top)
An example of a mid-density, mixed-use development in Atlanta, Georgia



(right)
An example of programming that can be implemented in new green and open spaces
(Source: Citylab)

Big Idea 10

Enhance Downtown Activation

Downtown's Square is an anchor for commercial and recreational activity, hosting countless festivals, film tours, lunchtime concerts, shared space markets, and more throughout the year. However, much of this activity does not extend far beyond the Square.

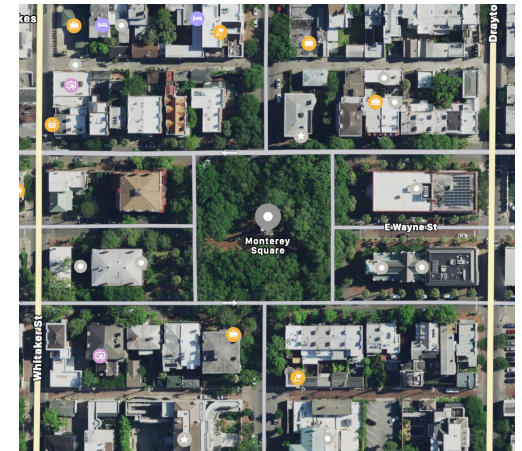
Part of this disparity of activity can be traced to the built form of the Downtown outside of the Square; many of the lots have extensive surface parking lots, large setbacks from sidewalks, and frequent curb-cuts. Other architectural elements of Downtown discourage pedestrian activity, such as sparse window coverage on front façades, an incomplete tree canopy, disjointed public space, and a lack of cohesive design in newer buildings. Downtown Covington also has an imbalance of uses due to few residential units, limiting the diversity of activities in the district.

As Downtown Covington seeks to strengthen its appeal, it is vital to review examples of successful downtown spaces within the Covington and elsewhere. In Covington, the Lula Building and the adjacent Scoops building exhibit pedestrian-focused design in keeping with the local historic architectural context, modeling successful redevelopment with a focus on pedestrian-scale design and integration of mixed-use spaces. The historic squares in Savannah also provide strong examples of downtown spaces built to serve pedestrians and incorporate greenspaces in the district, with cafes and offices built on the same block as rowhouses and apartment buildings.



(top)
Covington's Lula (left) and Scoops (right) buildings

(bottom)
Covington's Central Square (left) and Savannah's Monterrey Square (right)
(Source: Google Earth)



Big Idea 10 (continued)

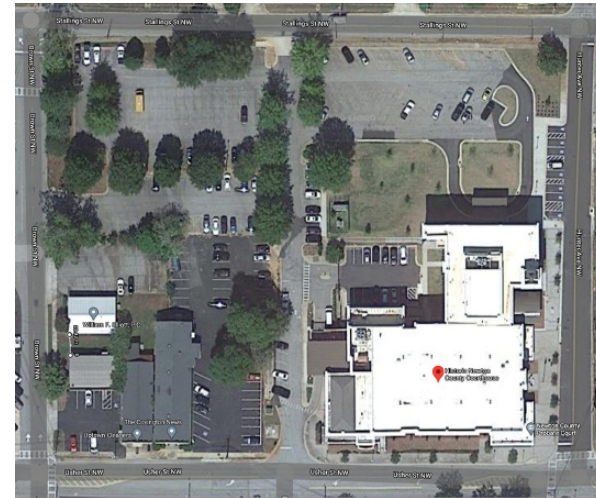
Enhance Downtown Activation

The following recommendations should be considered to replicate the success of these examples:

- Encourage infill development on surface parking lots with low demand
- Break up blocks in the downtown too large for pedestrian activity
- Plant street trees for shading and visual appeal
- Replace excess parking with new squares or pocket parks
- Orient new buildings to activate adjacent sidewalks and public spaces
- Incorporate the 2015 *Proposed Design Guidelines for Historic Districts of Covington, GA* into the city's zoning code to preserve historic character of the downtown district

The block between Usher, Brown, Stallings, and Hunter Streets is well-suited to model these infill strategies by implementing the following design features:

- Break the block up into 4 smaller blocks.
- Plant street trees along the new streets.
- Convert the NW block into a square with shade trees, brick paths, and statue.
- Construct townhomes and mixed-use or commercial buildings with little to no setback from the sidewalks.
- Move car access to the properties to the alleyway behind the properties.
- Preserve existing structures and trees wherever possible.



Big Idea 11

US 278 Urban Boulevard

US Route 278 serves as the de facto main corridor for the City of Covington and boasts a high concentration of commercial activities. Despite its role as the foremost hub for commercial and service-based activity for the City, the design of the roadway and the buildings interacting with it creates a barrier between Downtown Covington and the Oxford and Covington neighborhoods to the north. The wide, fast-moving roadway paired with sprawling commercial buildings with large parking lots creates an unpleasant and dangerous environment for pedestrians and cyclists traversing the corridor.

In its current form, US 278 features two vehicular travel lanes in each direction with a middle turn lane. Near major intersections and entrances to shopping centers, an additional right turn lane is sometimes present. Sidewalks are not universally present throughout the corridor and large gaps exist; notable gaps include the roadway section between Mill Street and Industrial Boulevard, the roadway east of the Martin's Crossing Shopping Center, and the stretch between Robinson Avenue and Turner Lake Road. Where sidewalks are present along US 278, the sidewalks are narrow and lack a buffer between the 45 miles-per-hour traffic on the roadway; the prevalence of curb cuts also makes for more potential conflict points between vehicles and pedestrians. The timing of traffic signals further discourages non-motorized transportation modes, as long green lights for drivers along US 278 increase the average wait time for pedestrians crossing north-south.



*Current streetscape scenes along US 278
(Source: Google Earth)*

Big Idea 11 (continued)

US 278 Urban Boulevard

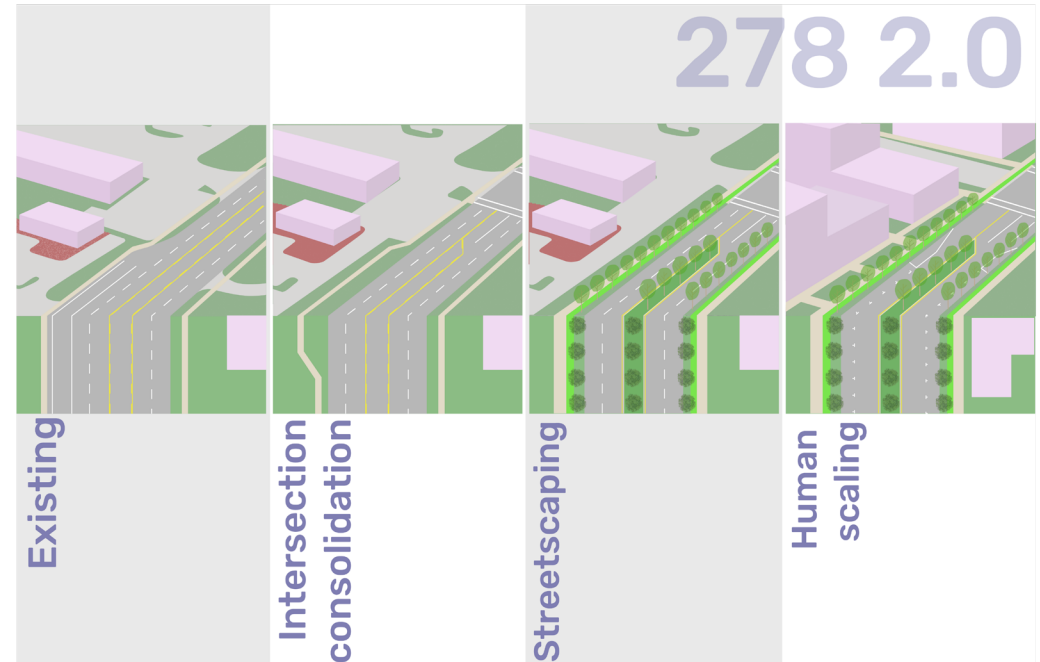
As Covington continues its growth, the development of its core neighborhoods will be essential in sustainable and equitable growth. The high quantity of surface parking along US 278 north of downtown also presents opportunities to gradually introduce infill development; however, the design of the public realm limits the potential for infill. Redesigning US 278 as an urban boulevard in order to accommodate multiple transportation modes safely and comfortably will be key in attracting sustainable growth.

Introducing a more multimodal street design to US 278 will be a phased process of piecemeal interventions and improvements. These alterations to the streetscape will take place in tandem with GDOT transportation improvements to the Corridor in the form of roundabouts. The proposed phasing of interventions is as follows:

Recommendation 11-1: Completion of sidewalk network in the short term from Mason Drive on the eastern end to Turner Lake Road on the west.

Recommendation 11-2: Reduction of curb cuts in the short term, working with property owners to consolidate means of vehicular ingress and egress and require consolidation in new developments.

Recommendation 11-3: Updating zoning along the corridor in strategic locations that allows for the development of denser building nodes that better support a multimodal urban boulevard.



Phasing of the urban boulevard concept

Recommendation 11-4: Widening of sidewalks and addition of buffers to improve pedestrian experience along the corridor and potentially add off-street cycle paths.

Recommendation 11-5: Streetscaping the Corridor, adding trees to the buffer and adding a landscaped median to calm traffic, allow for pedestrian refuges, and mitigate roadway noise.

Big Idea 11 (continued)

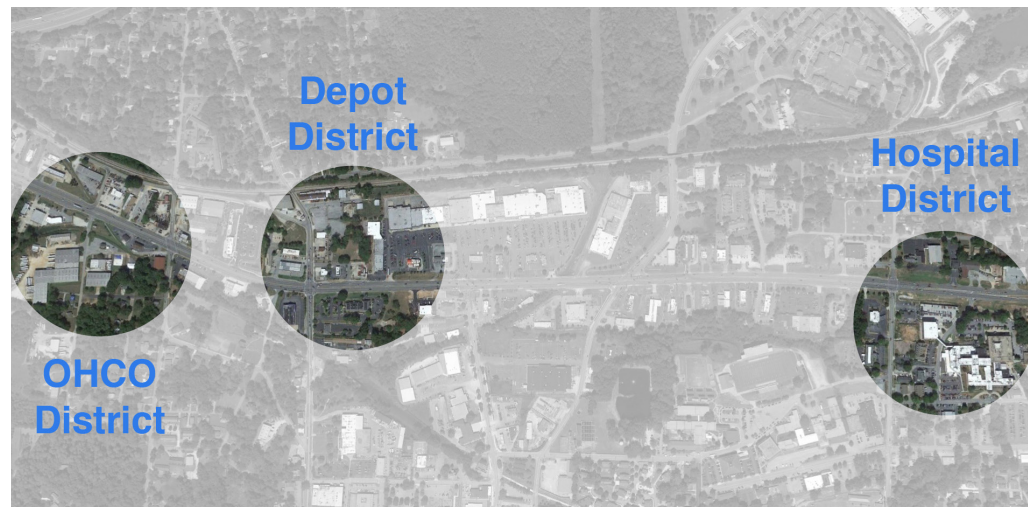
US 278 Urban Boulevard

As US 278 transforms into a denser multimodal corridor, the strategic locations for the intensification of land uses will aid Covington in accommodating future growth and promoting walking and cycling with small, neighborhood-scale mixed-use nodes.

Three sites, The OHCO site, Depot site, and Hospital site, present an opportunity to create a walkable corridor with a mix of uses. The nascent districts in which these sites are located determine the potential land use orientation of the dense nodes; located on the fringe of a residential area, the OHCO site lends itself to residential and service uses, whereas the Covington Hospital site lends itself to the development of office and other hospital-complimentary uses. The site containing Covington's 1916 railroad depot, however, provides the most potential for a mix of uses.

The railroad depot, currently repurposed as a restaurant, is located adjacent to a rail corridor that connects Covington to Madison, Social Circle, Conyers, Stonecrest, Stone Mountain, and Atlanta and that may be well-served by a form of commuter rail in the future. For this reason, Covington should be proactive in its planning of the adjacent area in preparation for future railroad service by rezoning the area to accommodate mixed uses that are well-suited for transit-oriented development. While preserving the high-grossing retailers at Newton Plaza, the out lots along US 278 make for ideal sites for infill development that interacts with the street and bolsters a potential future Dried Indian Creek trail. On the western side, closer to Emory Street, detached retail can be redeveloped into mixed-use, mid-rise housing and offices. The plan envisions the eastward extension of Old Atlanta Highway into the Newtown Plaza shopping center, creating a retail corridor from Emory Street to the shopping center and anchoring a green space or plaza along Emory Street that emphasizes the Depot building.

The construction of the Depot District should emphasize the heritage present on North Emory Street. As the connective spine between historic Downtown Covington and Oxford and its historic Emory campus, future redevelopment along this corridor should preserve the remaining historic landmarks along the North Emory Street Corridor.



Nascent districts well-suited for infill development

Big Idea 11 (continued)

US 278 Urban Boulevard

The 1916 depot is the most recognizable landmark between the railroad and 278 and it currently stands preserved and reused as a restaurant; this station will play a major role in setting a dramatic and historic backdrop to the green space. The adaptive reuse of this structure has kept it well preserved and the City of Covington should consider eventually buying a small portion of the depot back for a small train ticketing facility.

To the west of the Depot and its green exist two more structures important to the heritage of Covington. A former warehouse, now home to SpendThrift, at 4125 Emory Street predates the depot by about 20 years; this 1896 industrial building has been repurposed into a retail space; however, it will likely need new ownership or municipal assistance to return the building to its historic glory. The City of Covington can aid in this effort by providing a small façade grant as well as actively aiding the building owner's search for tenants. Due to its proximity to both downtown Covington and the Oxford Campus of Emory University, the building lends itself to incubator, dining, and/or entertainment uses and a partnership with Emory University. These renovations can improve town-gown relations while also providing an amenity to draw students to the Oxford campus. With the proper updates to this building, the centuries-old energy centered around the railroad could once again return, as two of Covington's oldest railroad buildings will return as hubs of activity and vitality.



Conceptual plan for the Depot District, with US 278 to the south and Emory Street to the east

Big Idea 11 (continued)

US 278 Urban Boulevard

The Pure gas station, in front of the 1895 at the corner of Old Atlanta Highway and Emory Street (4111 Emory Street) is also an iconic and well-preserved building dating back roughly 90 years that lends itself to creative forms of adaptive reuse. The Emory Street Pure station is well suited to serve as an outdoor dining café or bar. Through the introduction of vibrant commercial uses on both sides of Emory Street, a more eclectic and interesting community identity can be realized and a new commercial corridor in Covington can be molded. With a new commercial anchor displaying the rich architectural, industrial, and transportation heritage of Covington, a unique and well-defined mixed-use corridor can emerge.



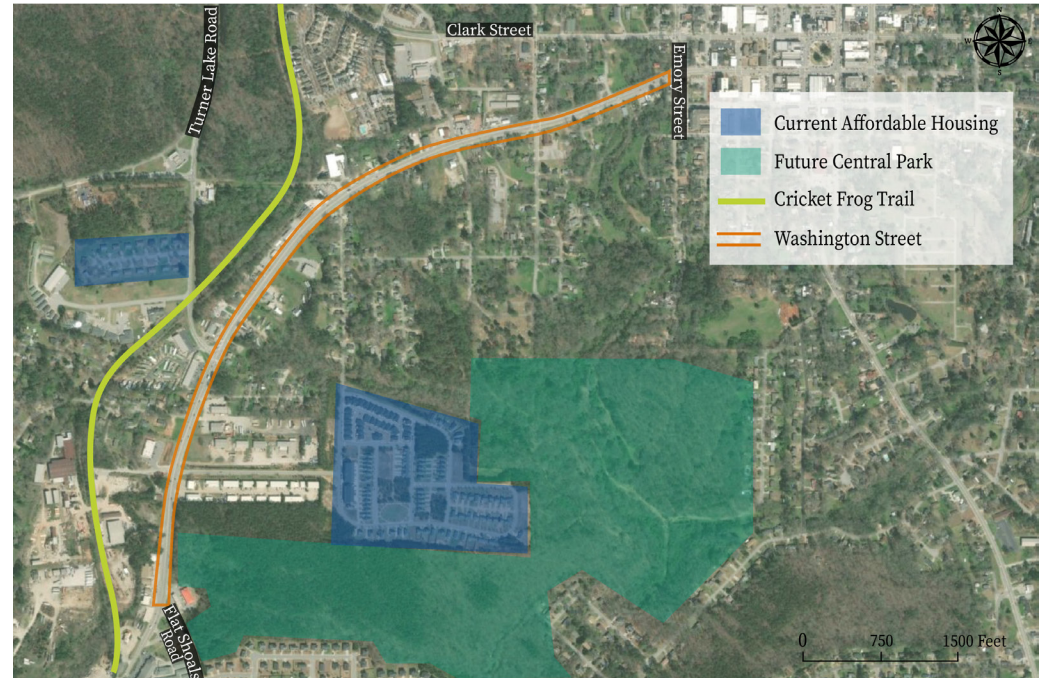
Conceptual Emory Street

Big Idea 12

Implement Washington Street Road Diet

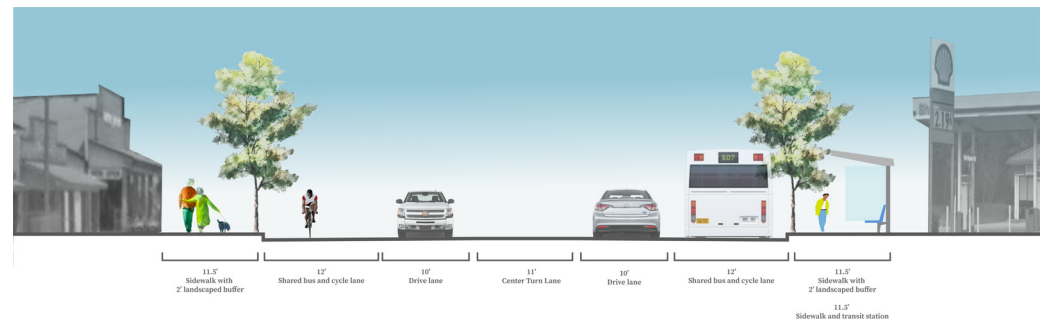
Road diets reduce the number of lanes in favor of enhancing the character of the road, improving amenities for pedestrians and cyclists, and creating safer driving conditions. Washington Street's position as a major thoroughfare makes it an ideal candidate to shape the development of the west side of Covington. A road diet on Washington Street brings together many of the outlined big ideas, including pedestrian networks, housing, and placemaking. The proposed road diet, shown in orange on the map, extends from Emory Street on the edge of downtown Covington to Flat Shoals Road near the terminus of the Cricket Frog Trail. Further studies and stakeholder involvement could extend it to the Trail's terminus near Nelson Drive.

Implementing a road diet on Washington Street would connect affordable housing to green space and Downtown, create a gateway to Covington for those traveling from the southwest, improve east/west connectivity for pedestrians, and provide space to prioritize a transit system.



(above) Extent of road diet

(below) Road diet concept



Big Idea 12 (continued)

Implement Washington Street Road Diet

Recommended components include:

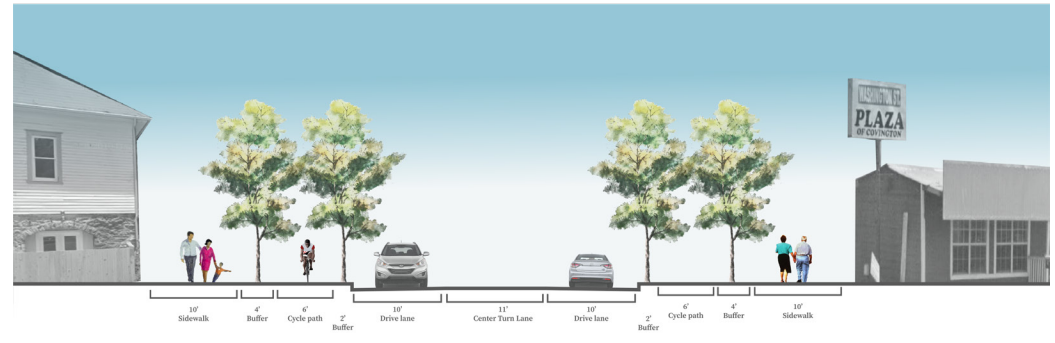
Recommendation 12-1: Reduce lane number and width, improving safety without interrupting current traffic flow. Reducing lane widths from their current 12' to 10' promotes safer driving and helps keep traffic to the posted 35 and 45 mph speed limits. One potential arrangement, seen in the maps to the right, aligns with AASHTO guidance for posted speed limits and available GDOT traffic counts.

Recommendation 12-2: Streetscape the corridor with street trees, curb extensions, and other design elements to enhance pedestrian experience and make speed limits intuitive. An access management study will help strategically reduce curb cuts, one of the City of Covington's current goals.

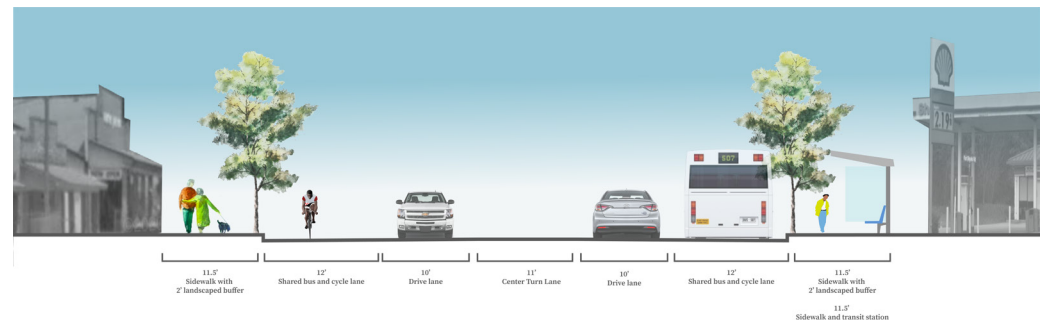
Recommendation 12-3: Widen sidewalks and expand the pedestrian network along Washington Street, Turner Lake Road, and into the neighborhoods.

Recommendation 12-4: Separate bike lanes from vehicle traffic and pedestrians to keep all travelers safe.

Recommendation 12-5: Enact anti-displacement practices along Washington Street and surrounding areas to ensure advantages from the road diet are seen by the people living there.



Washington Street streetscape, West Street to Emory Street



Washington Street streetscape, Flat Shoals Road West Street

Working with stakeholders and community members is vital to guarantee that a road diet meets their needs for Washington Street. Gathering vehicle counts and conducting access management and intersection studies will pave the way for a holistic design. Draw from other Big Ideas (including Big Idea 5: Anti-Displacement Practices and Big Idea 7: Placemaking) throughout the process.

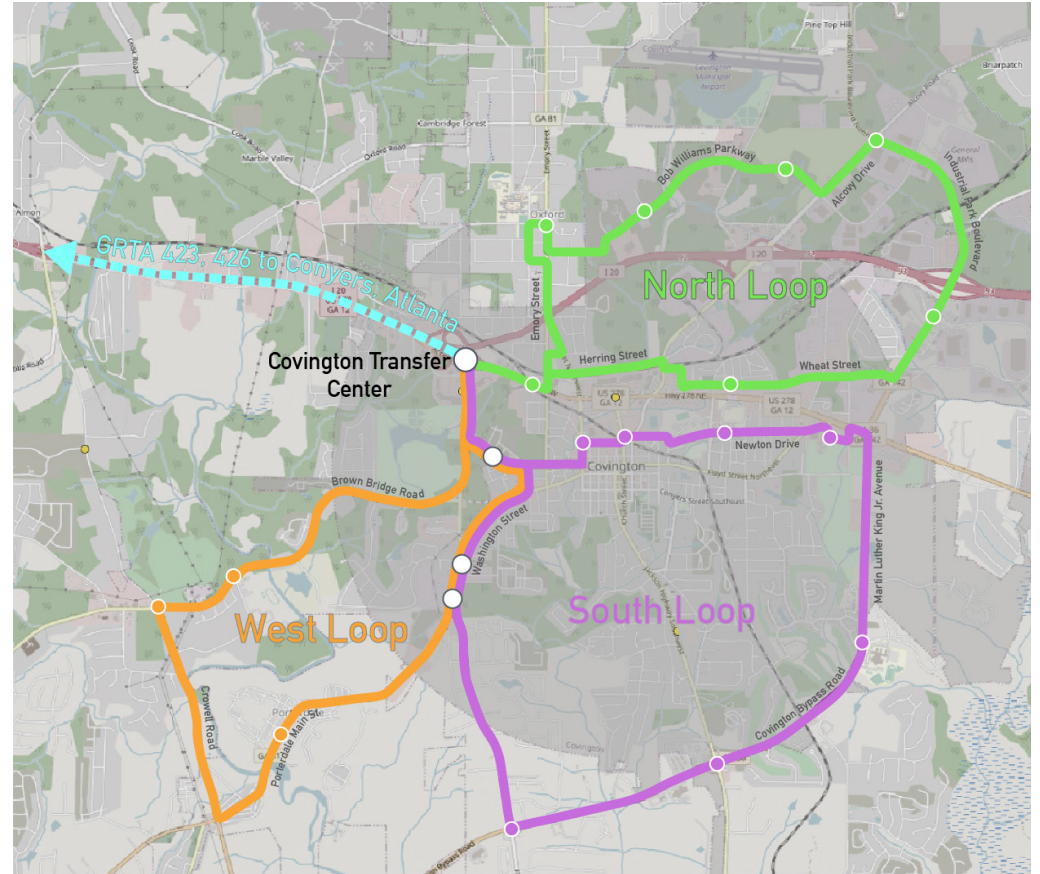
Big Idea 13

Explore Public Transit

Covington currently follows a typical autocentric development pattern that reinforces the need for the automobile as the primary source of transportation. The City of Covington lacks any major pedestrian, bicycle, or public transit infrastructure, or systems, that would offer a variety of mode choices to its citizens. This lack of mode choice severely impacts those in Covington who are unable to drive, cannot afford a vehicle, or would prefer to get around town in another manner.

Creating alternative modes of transportation would help Covington to become a more equitable, connected, and sustainable community. In addition to creating new mode choices, a public transit system would also aid in creating new east-west connections in the city, which Covington severely lacks. The majority of the major corridors, trails, and paths follow a north-south direction, or do not have an adequate length to effectively connect the east and west parts of the city. A public transit system would be an opportunity to improve these conditions in Covington. We recommend that the City of Covington invest in transit services that are designed to serve the needs of its citizens.

Based on traffic count data from GDOT, and the city's geographic location, we have identified a bus-based system as the most effective transit mode option to improve transportation options and increase interconnectivity in the city. Bus systems are significantly cheaper than rail alternatives in both construction and operation costs.

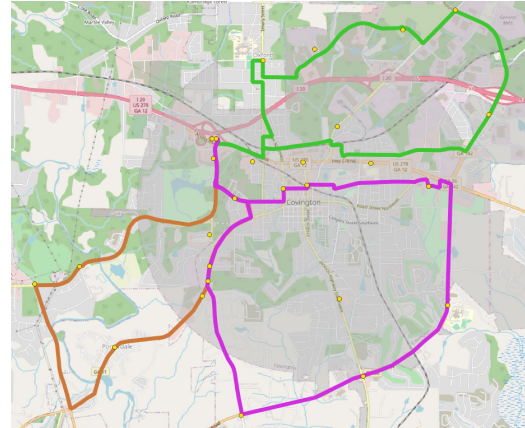


Proposed network of bus routes

Big Idea 13 (continued)

Explore Public Transit

After understanding the current conditions of transportation in Covington we identified nodes, potential transit lines, and a potential bus depot location. We identified nodes in Covington through interviews with stakeholders, site visits, and community engagement. We were able to create possible bus routes within the existing roadways to access the identified nodes. After creating the exemplary routes, we were able to identify a central bus depot location at the current park-n-ride lot at the intersection of Highway 278 and I-20. The park-n-ride areas will need some additional infrastructure to effectively serve as a bus depot. The example system, including nodes, we have created can be seen on the right.



(left)
*Proposed bus network with
identified nodes in yellow*

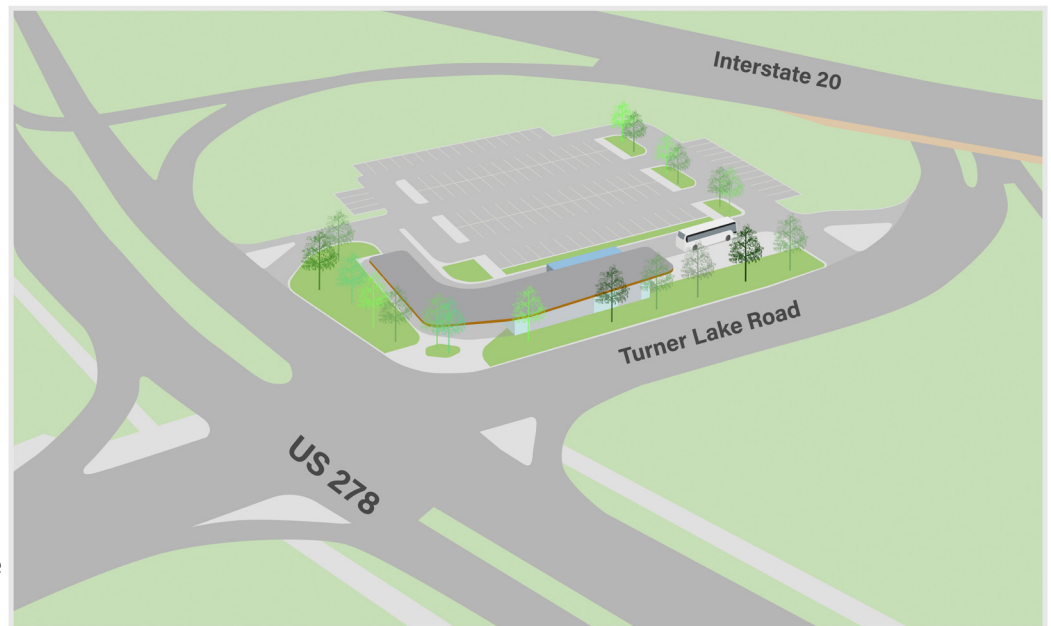
(below)
*Proposed transit center at US 278
and Interstate 20*

Recommendation 13-1: Establish a local bus system. A simple bus system will improve connectivity, offer additional mode choice, improve equity, and improve mobility.

Recommendation 13-2: Utilize a Bus Rapid Transit during peak morning and afternoon hours along major corridors. Implementation of this idea will be most effective in tandem with the Washington Street road diet.

Recommendation 13-3: Extend the GRTA's Xpress bus into Newton County and the City of Covington. The expansion of this existing service will improve Covington's connectivity with the overall Atlanta-metro region and other transportation services such as MARTA.

Recommendation: 13-4 Establish an additional Paratransit service to offer mobility to those who are unable to drive in Covington. Paratransit services follow an on-demand schedule and do not follow fixed routes or schedules.



Appendix

Big Idea 2: Increase Pedestrian Network



Improved Intersection of Elm St and Cricket Frog Trail

Appendix

Big Idea 5: Anti-Displacement Plan, CLT, and Community Engagement Plan

Case Study: Athens Land Trust

The ALT is able to make an impact on the Athens community in 3 ways: land conservation, housing, and community agriculture.

Land Conservation

- 17,836 acres permanently protected by ALT conservation easements
- In 36 of GA's 159 counties

Housing

- 49 families have become first time homeowners
- 16 families are lease-purchasing homes
- 6 families rent affordable apartments on Waddell St.
- 370 low-income individuals are residents of Fourth Street Village apartments

Community Agriculture

- 12 gardens participate in ALT's Community Garden Network
- 2 urban farms operated by ALT in Athens, GA

As you can see, the organization has been able to not only provide first time homeownership opportunities but also protect over 17,000 acres of greenspace and not all of it is in Clarke County. Additionally, they have also partnered with a dozen community gardens and operate 2 Urban farms; the produce of which contributes to the West Broad Farmers Market, which then promotes local economic development and community wellness.

Appendix

Big Idea 6: Attract Community Desired Services

