

Destination Downtown

Long known as “The Electric City” for its history of being one of the first sites of practical hydroelectric power in the world, Anderson is now generating a new kind of electricity and that’s downtown Anderson.

1992 Downtown Vision Process

In 1992, the citizens of Anderson began in earnest to plan a vision for a revitalized downtown. That visioning process established the goal of hiring a downtown manager to focus full-time on the redevelopment of downtown. Once the downtown manager was hired, the Anderson City Council sought additional professional assistance to help create a master plan for downtown. The design team and city staff held numerous public sessions and settled on the following major revitalization activities:

- Construction of streetscape improvements for a pedestrian friendly downtown
- Development of greenspace for beautification and leisure activities
- Provision of additional public parking, more attractive public parking
- Development of gateways into Downtown
- Establishment of east/west initiatives, i.e. an entertainment district

1996

City Council, with much public support adopted the Downtown Master Plan in 1996 and established the Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District as the funding source to implement the plan.

1997-1999

Phase I

With the implementation of the Downtown Master Plan, Phase I improvements (\$3 million) were completed in 1999, and included major streetscape improvements on Main Street from Market Street on the south to Earle Street on the north (town center and one block north and south on Main Street). The redevelopment of the former Belks 100-space public parking lot and new lighting, landscaping and irrigation, brick and granite sidewalks, street furniture, and paving helped to complete the initial drive.

The City continued its philosophy of creating the public investment first as a commitment to spur the private sector efforts. A partnership among the City of Anderson, Anderson County, and the Anderson County Arts Center resulted in the establishment of the Farmers Market and the Electric City Depot. These improvements provided the impetus for the Arts center to initiate the Arts Center Warehouse project.

2001 – Master Plan Update

Again, the public's involvement in support of the master plan identified the Phase II priorities: a continuation of the streetscape improvements along South and North Main Street, improved parking facilities on East Church Street as well as improvements to leased parking areas (First Baptist and St. John's), including lighting, landscaping, irrigation, and paving. In 2001, the City re-visited the 1996 plan with a two-day public design charette. The focus of the charette was to build upon the successes and foundations created with the master plan and the Phase I and II improvements and to identify opportunities for future improvements. More than 40 local citizens and design professionals attended the charette. The format divided the Downtown into three areas wherein three groups of citizens developed recommendations for improving each area. Trolley tours of each area gave participants a front row look at the assigned areas.

Each of the three areas identified gateways as important features framing the downtown. Transportation issues are challenges and opportunities. The adopted Recreation Master Plan touches each of the three areas in different ways allowing for the coordination of resources and planning. The process and its results represented the collective interests and visioning of a diverse group of people who see intrinsic value in the reinvestment of Downtown Anderson. The update solidified the next course of action:

- Continue the improvements identified in Phases I and II (streetscape north and south on Main from Greenville to River Streets)
- Develop additional partnerships to leverage resources
- Establish new programs and guidelines that further encourage Downtown development (design guidelines, historic districts)
- Expand Downtown marketing and promotions

2001-2004

Continuing with improvements to off-street parking facilities, the City improved the lighting, added landscaping, installed irrigation, and added spaces to the East Church Street parking lot between Main, Market, and McDuffie Streets. Improvements to the leased parking lots of St. John's Methodist Church, and first Baptist Church included lighting, irrigation, landscaping, and paving. The City's commitment to public spaces and facilities was enhanced by the redevelopment of City Hall and the addition of new office space and the creation of a public plaza. This construction was completed in 2003 and provides a substantial focal point on South Main Street. This phase also continued the streetscape from Market Street south to John Street and was completed in 2004.

Small Steps

Investments in downtown have seen resurgence in both new construction and restoration activity. Even small incentives such as the Façade Grant program have reaped rewards. An initial public investment of \$200,000 over 8 years encouraged over \$1 million worth of private investment in the restoration of 90 downtown buildings. This continues to reap rewards with as many as 12 participants annually.

Additionally, a new emphasis is in place for marketing and promoting downtown businesses and downtown as a destination, evident by the debut of the 2005 downtown website. The 2004 “Big Fish” public art campaign provided a tourism side to downtown and assisted in the completion of the Arts Center Warehouse and establishment of new office space there for the Convention and Visitors Bureau. The City continues to partner with organizations on downtown activities such as public art projects, the performing and visual arts and other cultural activities. Our growing slate of special events includes Soiree in April, the Main Street Car Show in June, the October Chili Cook-off, and the December Holiday Walk and Tree Lighting festivities.

2005-2006

The focus for 2005-2006 public improvements is the construction of the streetscape north on Main Street from Earle Street to just beyond Federal and Sharpe Streets. The extension of the streetscape to the south from City Hall to just beyond River Street is planned as part of the construction of the new Municipal Business Center at the corner of River and Main Streets. Other streetscape improvements along the east-west thoroughfares are in the planning and/or design stage for Earle, Whitner, Benson, Church, Federal, and Sharpe Streets. These improvements were planned to support and leverage private investment projects now in progress and anticipated.

With the former Belks site cleared, Requests for Interest and Qualifications (RFIQ) on the development of the site are anticipated in early 2006, as well as RFIQs for the design of a new parking structure near the Chiquola Hotel site.

The atmosphere of partnerships grows stronger with efforts to capitalize on opportunities such as residential space; increased retailers and services; pedestrian-friendly green space; an arts center and entertainment corridor; a convention and visitor’s bureau; and a full service hotel and conference center.

2006

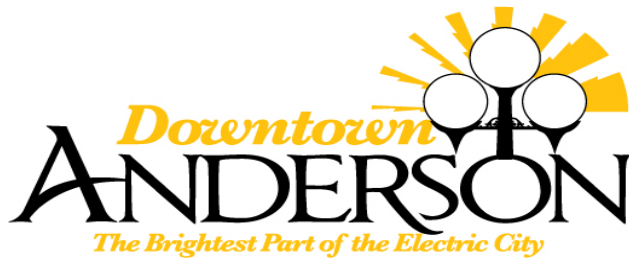
Based upon public support and continued private investment, the City contracted with Chandler Construction in September 2006 for the construction of the streetscape improvements on North Main from Earle to Tribble Street, West Earle from Main to its intersection with West Orr, Federal Street and Sharpe Street for \$1,984, 525. In December 2006, the City added West Whitner Street between Main and Murray, and East Benson Street (south side of street only) from the mid-block crosswalk to McDuffie Street bringing the total contract to \$2.7 million+. Construction is expected to be completed by the end of 2008.

2007

Marketing Efforts

A Downtown Market Assessment and Marketing Plan was prepared by Arnett Muldrow & Associates.

A Downtown Anderson brand and logo was also launched. The Downtown brand uses images similar to the City of Anderson's brand which is already familiar to our citizens. The Downtown brand creates a distinct "consumer" brand that separates Downtown from official government functions. The tagline "The Brightest Part of the Electric City" relates to the light standard used in the brand and communicates excitement about all downtown has to offer. The Downtown website was redesigned implementing the brand and logo.



Generator Park

The park was developed with private and public collaboration. tba (to be announced) is a group of anonymous private investors interested in improving unattractive spaces through public art or beautification projects. The park is located at the corner of E. Whitner St and McDuffie St. A century old generator that once produced electricity for the Anderson area at the Portman Power Plant was refurbished and transformed into a piece of public art which sits on public owned greenspace.

2008

Downtown Development Commission

The Downtown Development Commission (DDC) established. The DDC is a nine-member board of directors appointed by the Anderson City Council to serve as advocates and advisors to the City Council on issues related to economic growth and sense of place in downtown Anderson. The DDC is not a regulating or approving body. The DDC serves at the pleasure of and in concert with the City Council to assist in implementing Council's defined goals.

Beautification

Transitioned the contracting of downtown beautification/maintenance into full-time staff dedicated to daily downtown. This has made a tremendous difference in the visual appearance and the presence of beautification staff conveys a sense of pride and dedication.

Former Belk Site

Request for Qualifications were received in January, 2007 and David Agnew, Civic Square, was selected as the developer for this site. After intense study and analysis, David presented a proposed 50-room, high-quality hotel with a 5,000-sq.-ft. meeting facility, restaurant, and retail spaces. In April 2008, City Council voted to support this concept and requested a more formal plan from Agnew. If the plans are finalized, the hotel could be operational by fall 2010.

Parking Garage

Request for Proposals were received for a parking garage to be located at the intersection of W. Whitner St and Murray Ave. The City contracted with McCrory Construction as the design/builder along with design partner MCA Architecture (Greenville) and engineering partner H2L (Greenville) in August, 2007.

Demolition was completed in December 2007, site clearance in January, and groundbreaking in February, 2008. Construction is underway for the parking garage which is slated to contain between 230-250 spaces. Other facts about the garage include:

- 10,000+ sq. ft. of retail space
- Streetscape improvements to West Whitner Street and Murray Avenue
- Projected completion date: January 2009
- Garage construction cost: about \$8 million

Streetscape

Streetscape improvements on Main St to the south of City Hall and just beyond River St as well as W. Earle St, Federal St and Sharpe St have been completed. These improvements included paving, new sidewalks, lighting, street furniture and landscaping.

2009

Former Belk Site

In early 2009 David Agnew accepted a job in Washington, D.C. as an advocate for municipalities. The City of Anderson remains committed to the redevelopment of the former Belk site in Downtown Anderson. The time and efforts spent by David Agnew (Civic Square) and his team produced viable concepts of how this urban site can be redeveloped. These efforts also produced a vital and dedicated level of community interest showing support for a phased mixed use development. Most importantly, the thought process involved in redeveloping this acre plus urban site resulted in ideas that advance the whole downtown with uses:

- having a sensitivity to our civic presence
- exhibiting an awareness of our historic character and structures
- designed to create and advance a 24 hour vibrancy
- intended to stimulate additional private sector investment

The City may choose to issue new “Requests for Qualifications” being cognizant of the economy and timing of this market opportunity.

West Whitner St. Parking Garage

The construction of the 250 space garage and 11,000 sq ft of retail space began in early 2008 and the Parking Garage opened in February, 2009. The Parking Garage structure has certainly changed the landscape of Downtown and is a major development in furthering our Downtown revitalization efforts.

Parking is free after 5 pm and on weekends. The parking meter system for the garage will be pay by space stations; not individual space meters. There will be 8 pay by space stations with 2 on each floor at the access points. The daily rate is \$.50 an hour; you may pay at any pay stations. The pay stations will accept coins, tokens, debit cards, and credit cards.

The pay stations are user friendly and will guide you on how to pay for parking much like an ATM or paying for goods with a debit or credit card at a store.

Downtown Security

Due to the number of events and activities that are occurring we are seeing an increased number of people in Downtown. An evening patrol during the spring and summer months was implemented; this police presence added a safe environment for everyone to enjoy.

Downtown Parking Plan

In keeping with Downtown's ever changing parking needs, a new level of service within the Downtown Parking Plan was implemented. The new service level provides monthly parking options and it will continue to contribute to the success of Downtown by providing adequate, accessible and safe parking to the residents, employees and visitors of Downtown.

Four off-street parking areas are available for the Monthly Parking Program: West Whitner Parking Garage, Belk Lot (at McDuffie & Earle), E. Church St Lot and the Orr/Earle Lot. Rates were established for covered spaces at \$35 per month and uncovered spaces at \$30 per month. Discounted group rates, garage token bulk rates and annual payment rates are also offered to those who wish to take advantage of them.

Marketing

A Welcome to Downtown Brochure as well as a Parking Brochure and a self guided tour of the attractions in Downtown were created and disseminated to various locations.

Our downtown marketing and promotional efforts were expanded to include social media. The Downtown Diva Facebook was launched to reach those who choose to communicate through social media. Our Downtown Diva keeps her Facebook Fans updated on new businesses, upcoming events, and interesting trivia questions. We also partnered with the Main Street Program in providing a workshop to our downtown businesses on setting up Facebook sites for their own use.

Wise Walks

Wise Walks is a public/private art initiative and collaborative project between the City of Anderson and the Anderson Arts Center. An epigram is any witty, ingenious, or pointed saying tersely expressed. The epigrams are etched on granite tiles and are placed in the sidewalks in various locations in Downtown.

Wayfinding Plan

The wayfinding system begins with the creation of an area identify, the definitions of the boundaries for the area and then direction of vehicles and pedestrians to specific destinations within that area. The goal is to promote the use of public facilities, visitor oriented businesses, recreational amenities and parking. A directory kiosk has been installed at the West Whitner Parking Garage. Parking directional signs have been installed at the Whitner St and Main St intersection for the parking garage and at the former Belk parking lot. Also locations have been identified for vehicular directional signs from I-85 exits and Highway 29 from Georgia to Downtown.

Hospitality Program

This program is a marketing initiative directed to hotel guests. Downtown Brochures, restaurant menus and driving directions to downtown have been provided to Hotels so they may suggest our unique offerings to their guests. Hoteliers were invited to our Hospitality Nights so they could experience Downtown firsthand. They visited our cultural attractions, retail stores and were provided taste samplings from our restaurants.

Economic Restructuring

Retention Resources

A series of webinars were made available to our Downtown Businesses to provide them with helpful resources in surviving a slow economy. The topics included Tips For Retailers, Business Recruitment and Retention – Two Sides of the Coin, Why Tourist Shop and Thriving in a Slow Economy.

Available Properties

We collaborated with the Economic Restructuring Committee of the Main St Program in organizing an Open House for Downtown Properties for sale by owner. Realtors were invited to tour featured properties with an emphasis on buildings that renovations have been completed.

An Available Properties Listing is maintained and available on the Downtown website; the visual appearance of this relates to the Connections document which is a user-friendly guide for use in investing and locating in downtown.

Streetscape

Streetscape improvements on a portion of E. Benson St as well as W. Whitner St, Murray Ave and Townsend St (along the perimeter of the Parking Garage) have been completed. These improvements included paving, new sidewalks, lighting, street furniture and landscaping.

2010

A Little Birdie Told Me: A Bird's Eye View of Downtown

Another collaboration with the tba private investors brought to us a special installation of a basalt rock fountain and a boy and a girl bronze statue that has been incorporated in our streetscape at the corner of River St and S. Main St. Additionally, several bronze Carolina wrens were placed in various locations throughout Downtown.