

New 'Gateway' for Augusta, Georgia

Golf enthusiasts might flock to Georgia's second largest city every spring for the Masters Tournament, but not far from the famed Augusta National Golf Club is a blighted thoroughfare that few would have reason to visit. Now, a major effort is under way to revitalize the 4.5-mile corridor—with new transportation options, affordable housing, retail, public green spaces, and businesses—making it a more fitting gateway to downtown.

The corridor, running mainly along 15th Street but including stretches of three other streets, is the main route north to downtown and the medical center at Georgia Regents University Augusta, the region's second largest employer. But it's littered with "dilapidated and abandoned buildings, substandard housing, and an aging housing project," not to mention hazardous street and sidewalk conditions, says Adam Williamson, AICP.



A project proposed by the city on the site of the now-abandoned Regency Mall and surrounding parcels at the corridor's south end would include a city park, ponds to alleviate flooding near Rocky Creek, senior and traditional housing, two commercial areas, and a school.

"There hasn't been any new development of any consequence in this area in the last 20 to 30 years," says Williamson, a principal at Atlanta-based TSW, the planning firm heading up the project known as the Augusta Sustainable Development Implementation Program. Funding comes from the state department of transportation and a \$1.8 million planning grant from the federal departments of Transportation and Housing and Urban Development.

At a five-day charrette in November, community members asked for more bus routes, pedestrian paths, sidewalks, bicycle lanes, and widened, landscaped thoroughfares. For the surrounding neighborhoods, the group envisioned a farmers market, traditional grocery stores, business incubators, the repurposing of significant buildings, and replacing the long-abandoned Regency Mall at the corridor's southern terminus with a mixed use development.

The underused industrial lands along the route are well suited to recycling and materials management facilities, organic urban agriculture, and indoor fish farming, according to the city's Sustainability Agenda. Planners also see opportunities to implement green infrastructure techniques to improve stormwater management, particularly flooding problems associated with a nearby creek.

Funding is already in place to demolish a 300-unit Augusta Housing Authority project and replace it with a mixed income community with a senior housing component, Williamson says. A new form-based code for the area should make it easier to attract development, he adds.

The team, which includes Dover, Kohl & Partners, ARCADIS, and W.R. Toole, expects to have preliminary plans by spring.

—Meghan Stromberg

Stromberg is Planning's senior editor.