



THE BLUEPRINT FOR SPRING HILL

January 2008

THE BLUEPRINT FOR SPRING HILL

was created by:

The Village of Spring Hill, Inc.

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**Alabama Department of Economic and
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

research & analysis	1
creating the plan	2
first principles	3
details of the plan	4
market analysis	5
getting there	6

*The mission of the Village of Spring Hill, Inc., is
"to make Spring Hill Village a neighborhood center by improving the
pedestrian, aesthetic and commercial amenities of the area."*



research & analysis 1

What do you want your community to be when it grows up?

Located at the top of the highest hill overlooking Downtown Mobile, Spring Hill is treasured for its natural beauty, elegant residences, and its abundance of civic amenities such as parks, schools, museums, and universities. Once a summer retreat for residents of Old Mobile, Spring Hill today has truly come into its own as a well-established community with a storied past.

In recent years, residents of Spring Hill have taken a critical look at their commercial properties and their public infrastructure and have found that they do not live up to the charming character of the village's residential and civic properties. *The Blueprint for Spring Hill* provides a framework for mixed-use, commercial growth and redevelopment that reflects the ambiance of the area and supports a walkable, sustainable pattern of settlement.

The Blueprint for Spring Hill is the culmination of many years of community involvement and coordination with key stakeholders such as property owners, developers, business owners, City officials, and residents. In November 2007 the Village of Spring Hill, Inc., along with the town planning firm of Dover, Kohl & Partners, gathered to create a plan for the area. The planning process began with a thorough evaluation of the study area. This chapter provides an overview of the historic and existing conditions that shape the area; the chapters following describe the charrette and resulting plan.

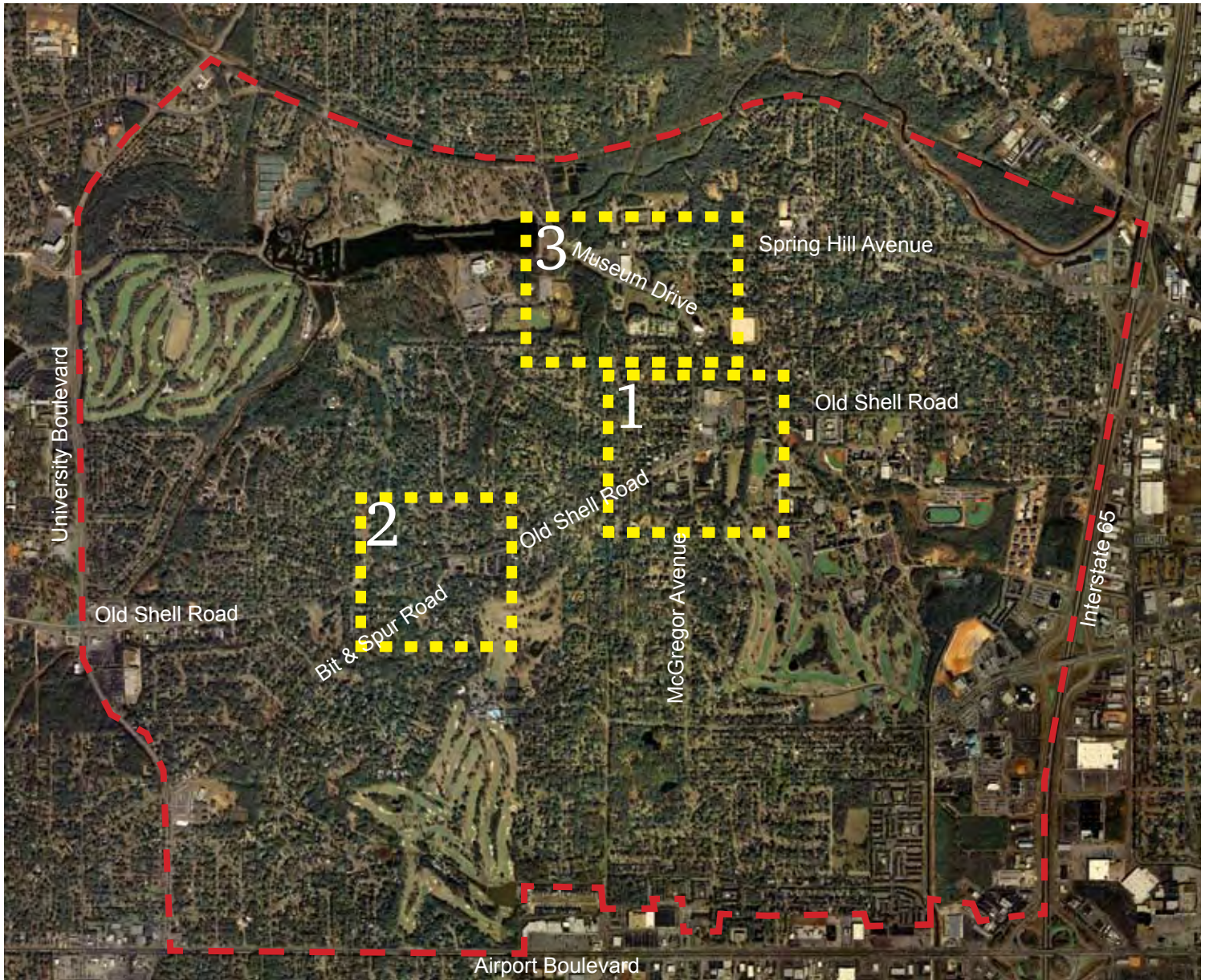


The Village of Spring Hill (shaded in red) comprises approximately 6½ square miles near the physical center of the City of Mobile.

SPRING HILL ANALYSIS

Spring Hill is a community located within the City of Mobile, Alabama, on the western shores of Mobile Bay, north of the Gulf of Mexico. It is situated on the top of a hill overlooking Downtown Mobile and the Bay, a busy waterway that strongly influences the character of the city. Spring Hill is bounded by I-65 to the east, University Boulevard to the west, Spring Hill Avenue to the north, and to the south, the residential areas just north of the commercial parcels on Airport Boulevard. The study area defined for *The Blueprint for Spring Hill*

consists of three prominent intersections within Spring Hill. These key intersections serve as the commercial, civic, and cultural centers of the community. The study area includes the intersection of Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue; the intersection of Old Shell Road and Bit & Spur Road, and extending to Lavretta Park; and the intersection of Museum Drive and McGregor Avenue.



KEY INTERSECTIONS

1. Old Shell Road & McGregor Avenue
 2. Old Shell Road & Bit & Spur Road
 3. Museum Drive & McGregor Avenue
- — Spring Hill Boundary

Spring Hill Study Areas

STUDYING THE PAST*

Spring Hill was settled in the early 1800s by residents of Old Mobile as a temporary, summertime escape from the heat of the low-lying city. Its cool breezes were seen as valuable protection from the yellow fever-carrying mosquitoes of Mobile Bay, and the hilltop views added to the area's appeal. The abundance of natural springs, flowing freely from the lower levels of "the Hill," led the area to be named Spring Hill.

Throughout the 1800s Spring Hill was discovered and shaped by successions of prominent citizens, from the first Roman Catholic Bishop of Mobile, who built Spring Hill College, to members of the Vine and Olive Colony, exiled members of Napoleon's "Old Guard," who settled there. In the 1850s, affluent cotton merchants discovered Spring Hill and began building large mansions. The area was also a popular destination for pleasure outings such as picnics.

As Spring Hill increased in popularity, the path leading from Mobile became more permanent, and was paved with crushed shells. This "Old Shell Road" served as the main access to the area and all successive development in the area fed off of this road. Hotels such as the stately Spring Hill Hotel housed vacationers and pleasure seekers during their stay at the top of the hill. Over the years Spring Hill developed from a summer vacation destination to a permanent, elegant home for many Mobile residents. Stately homes on landscaped lots were built along winding streets that fed off of Old Shell Road and followed the steep topography of the hill.

**Much of the information included in "Studying the Past" is taken from Historic Mobile: An Illustrated Guide, published by The Junior League of Mobile, Alabama, Inc. in 1974.*



Harper's Weekly image of travellers on Old Shell Road, September 8, 1866



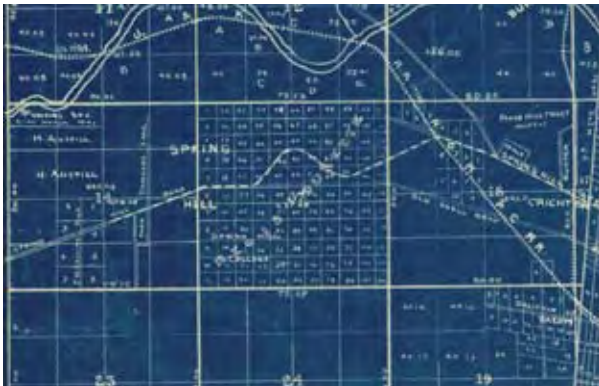
Old Shell Road



The Country Club of Mobile



Reference Map of Mobile and Vicinity, 1889. Image courtesy of University of Alabama Historical Map Archive



Reference Map Showing Original Subdivisions in Mobile, 1913
Image courtesy of University of Alabama Historical Map Archive



Spring Hill College Historic Quadrangle



The Spring Hill Hotel, built in 1906

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Spring Hill today continues to be characterized by its stately residences and lush landscaping. Single-family homes are located both on the historic streets that feed into Old Shell Road, as well as in newer neighborhoods. There are some areas of smaller, more modest homes, which help to house a variety of incomes. Many attractive new townhouses and small apartment buildings have been built as well, catering to a wider range of family types and income levels. Whether old or new, residential development in Spring Hill is built along narrow, winding streets with dense foliage, and limited connections—most streets lead directly into Spring Hill's two main streets, Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue.

Spring Hill's commercial areas, in stark contrast to its residences, are considered an eyesore by the community. The current commercial properties were developed within the past 50 years under conventional zoning regulations, and as such, they are set back far from the street with large asphalt parking lots in front. The architecture of these buildings is haphazard, generic and often built of inexpensive materials. The commercial areas are primarily automobile-oriented and do not cater to pedestrians. The pedestrian realm of Spring Hill is substandard, hindering comfortable pedestrian movement in the commercial areas and impeding pedestrian connections between residential and commercial areas. Sidewalks are narrow and discontinuous, and pedestrians often have little protection from sun, rain, and speeding traffic. Furthermore, the sidewalks in commercial areas are fronted by parking lots and interrupted by numerous curb cuts, making the pedestrian experience unpleasant.

Residential



Flemish style house



Contemporary style Second Empire residence



Georgian style house

Commercial



Gas station on the NW corner of Old Shell and McGregor



Parking lot at the corner of Bit & Spur Road and Old Shell Road



Strip commercial development along Museum Drive



Historic building fronting Old Shell Road



Spring Hill Village shopping center



Narrow sidewalks and Bradford Pears along Old Shell Road



New BankTrust building on the SE corner of intersection



Baptist Church on the SE corner of intersection



Power lines and utility poles dominate the roadway

Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue

The intersection of Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue is the main crossroads of Spring Hill and is its commercial center. The area is characterized by a large-scale shopping center, Spring Hill Village, on the northeast corner of the intersection, BankTrust and Spring Hill Baptist Church on the southeast corner, and a number of small businesses along Old Shell Road. The Monte L. Moorer Spring Hill Branch of the Mobile Public Library is located adjacent to the Spring Hill Baptist Church. Large parking lots are located in front of the strip shopping center and the Spring Hill Baptist Church, while smaller, disconnected parking lots are found in front of the small businesses strung along Old Shell Road.

The immediate intersection of Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue is defined on its four corners by two banks, a gas station, and a vacant property. These existing buildings are pulled away from the intersection behind parking lots, leaving the main intersection of Spring Hill defined by parked cars rather than memorable architecture. Finally, Bradford pear trees are planted inconsistently along Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue. These trees have reached the end of their life span and their low-hanging branches often block the views to businesses and obstruct the pedestrian realm of the sidewalk.

Bit & Spur Road and Old Shell Road

The intersection of Bit & Spur Road and Old Shell Road is a small-scale commercial node that was the location of a local grocery store in the first half of the twentieth century. Bit & Spur Road intersects Old Shell Road at a sharp angle, and traffic is controlled by stop signs, giving the intersection a feeling of a rural crossroads. Today the intersection is defined by two small rectangular buildings that house a salon, restaurant, uniform shop, and other businesses. Informal asphalt parking lots front the street while the buildings are set back on their lots, doing little to define the intersection and the unique geometry of the streets. Farther west along Old Shell Road is Lavretta Park. This neighborhood park has undergone dramatic improvements in recent years with the construction of a high-quality playground and the general clean-up of the area. The properties fronting adjacent to the park that front Old Shell Road are an eclectic mix of a convenience store, the Spring Hill Masonic Lodge, the Country Club Village Civic Association building on the western side of the park, and empty lots on the east side of the park.



Parking lot fronting Bit & Spur Road



Restaurant and barber shop at Bit & Spur Road



Intersection with parking lots fronting Bit & Spur Road



Commercial building with parking lot fronting Bit & Spur Road



New playground at Lavretta Park



Convenience store fronting Lavretta Park



View north towards Museum Drive and McGregor Avenue



View north towards McGregor Avenue and Spring Hill Avenue



Fire Station at Museum Drive and McGregor Avenue



View west towards Joseph Langan Park



View south along McGregor Avenue, past the water tower



Interrupted sidewalk along McGregor Avenue

Museum Drive and McGregor Avenue

The area defined by Museum Drive, McGregor Avenue, and Spring Hill Avenue is currently comprised of The Mobile County Water and Sewer property, Joseph Langan Park, and *ad hoc* commercial development that is oriented towards regional users from Spring Hill Avenue. A fire station, water tower, and strip shopping centers are located in the area. The intersection of Museum Drive and McGregor Avenue is a Y-shaped intersection that is considered dangerous by residents. Speeding is common along Museum Drive. Museum Drive serves as the gateway to the park and civic facilities, such as the Mobile Museum of Art and the Playhouse-in-the-Park. A sidewalk follows Museum Drive and leads to the park, however it ends abruptly in front of the Mobile County property, and does not connect to the commercial heart of Spring Hill at Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue. The area is characterized by chain link fences around the Mobile County property and Joseph Langan Park.

ANALYSIS DIAGRAMS*

In addition to photographing the study area, the team assembled maps to analyze the physical qualities of the study area, including topography, building density and orientation, and zoning designations. Using the City of Mobile's Geographic Information Systems (GIS) data, the team created a series of analysis diagrams to better understand the dynamics of the planning area.



Aerial photograph of Spring Hill

Five-minute Walk

If streets are walkable, most people will walk a distance of approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ -mile (1320 feet) or 5 minutes before turning back or opting to drive or ride a bike rather than walk. This dimension is a constant in the way people have settled for centuries. The $\frac{1}{4}$ -mile radius is a benchmark for creating a neighborhood unit that is manageable in size and feel and is inherently walkable. Neighborhoods of many shapes and sizes can satisfy the $\frac{1}{4}$ -mile radius test. The three study areas each satisfy the five-minute walk radius, indicating that a more comfortable pedestrian environment would result in walkable neighborhood centers.



**The analysis diagrams are based on December 2006 GIS information provided by the City of Mobile; any inconsistencies with this data should be brought to the attention of the City.*



Zoning Districts

Spring Hill is zoned primarily R-1 (one-family residence.) Pockets of R-2, (two-family residence), and R-3, (multiple-family residence), parcels are located along main roads such as Spring Hill Avenue and Old Shell Road. B-1, (buffer business), B-2, (neighborhood business), and B-3, (community business) commercial zoning is focused on main intersections such as Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue, and between Museum Drive and Spring Hill Avenue. The existing zoning code requires that a high percentage of this commercial property be dedicated to off-street parking, landscaping, and generous setbacks, leaving a limited amount of space for retail and office development, and creating disconnected, automobile-oriented commercial properties.

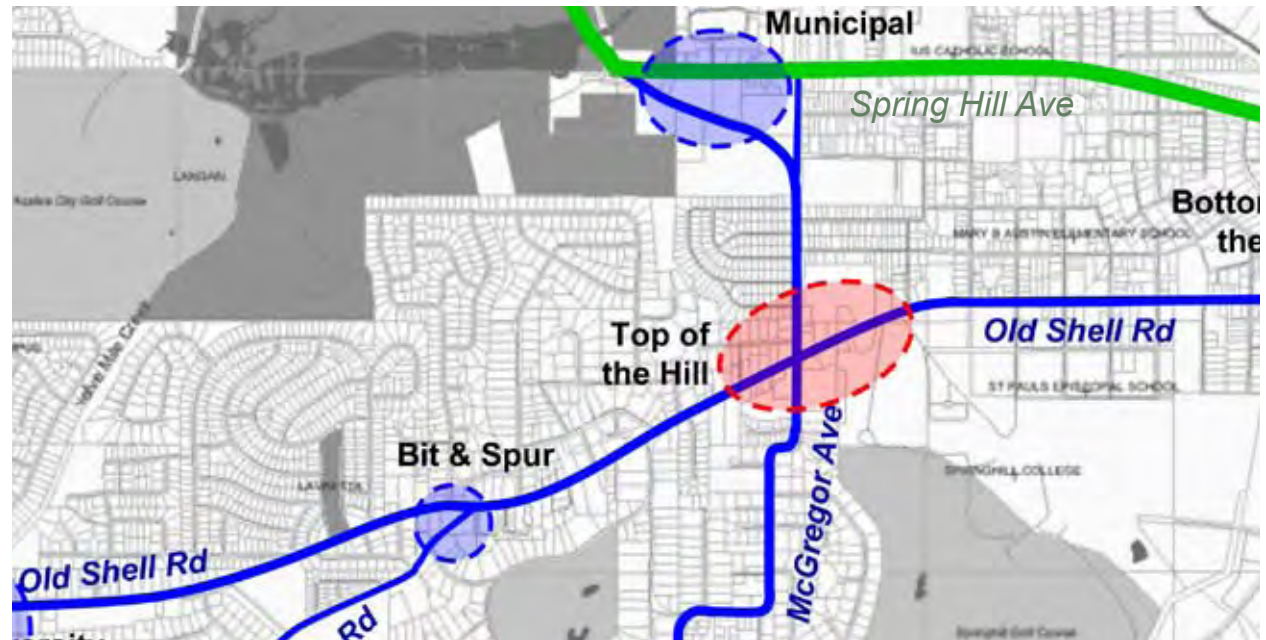


Topography

Located on the highest hill in Mobile, Spring Hill's development has been shaped by its topography. Old Shell Road runs along the highest ridge. The main crossroads of the area are located along this ridge. The intersection of Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue is located at the "top of the hill," while Museum Drive leads down the hill on a significant slope. Residential development in Spring Hill generally responds to the topography, and roads curve and twist along the edge of the hill.

Street Map

The three main study areas for *The Blueprint for Spring Hill* are located on Spring Hill's primary internal intersections. The residential street network feeds into Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue, with secondary connections along Bit & Spur Road and Spring Hill Avenue.



Building Coverage

This diagram simplifies Spring Hill into its built and un-built parts. Black signifies buildings and roads while white signifies all other land, including parking lots, right-of-way, setbacks, gardens and private yards. Spring Hill has a high percentage of white area due to the primarily low-density, single-family development in the area. Commercial areas are similarly spread apart and consist of a high proportion of underdeveloped developable white area due to the high parking requirements and excessive setbacks.



VILLAGE OF SPRING HILL, INC. INITIATIVES

The Village of Spring Hill, Inc., is a non-profit organization created by a group of dedicated Spring Hill residents and business owners. The organization was created in order to raise and manage funds for community improvements in Spring Hill, particularly in the commercial districts. The mission statement of the organization is “To make Spring Hill Village a neighborhood center by improving the pedestrian, aesthetic and commercial amenities of the area.” Since its incorporation in 2005, The Village of Spring Hill has successfully undertaken a number of initiatives with the goal of promoting responsible development, encouraging small businesses, enhancing pedestrian connections, and preserving historic sites. All of these goals will ultimately help to enhance the local character and the quality of life in Spring Hill. A few of the Village of Spring Hill’s recent initiatives include building sidewalks along Old Shell Road, improving street trees in commercial areas, and working to remove overhead power lines at prominent intersections.

The Village of Spring Hill applied for and received a \$379,000 Transportation Enhancement Grant from the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) to construct sidewalks along Old Shell Road from Spring Hill College to University Boulevard. In November 2007, the City of Mobile committed an additional \$113,000 in matching funds for engineering costs. The sidewalk will run along the southern side of Old Shell Road and will provide a much-needed pedestrian link through Spring Hill. The construction of the sidewalks is currently underway.

The Village of Spring Hill has worked to improve the street trees along roads such as Old Shell Road, McGregor Avenue, and Museum Drive. In

January 2007, the Village received 122 live oak trees through a Keep Mobile Beautiful grant and enlisted the help of over one hundred volunteers to plant these shade trees along Spring Hill’s major roads. The Village has recently been working with the City and business owners to replace the aging Bradford Pear trees around the McGregor Avenue and Old Shell Road intersection, and is working with the Mobile Tree Commission and Keep Mobile Beautiful to coordinate the removal and replacement of these trees with a more appropriate street tree.

When the Village of Spring Hill held one of its first community meetings, it took a survey of resident’s concerns about their community. Number three on the list (after sidewalks and street trees) was the overhead power lines in the community that create visual clutter at main intersections, prevent tree planting, and are susceptible to hurricane damage. The Village of Spring Hill has worked on an initial project to relocate overhead power lines at Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue from the intersection to the rear of businesses adjacent to the intersection. Board members have met with the affected utility companies and have received quotes for the relocation of the lines. Once these quotes were received, the Village worked with the City to commit over \$200,000 to the project. Moving these utility poles from Spring Hill’s main intersection and eliminating the overhead lines will allow the Village to plant street trees, have unobstructed sidewalks, and will reduce the visual clutter at the intersection. Board members have finalized plans to relocated the overhead power lines with Alabama Power and all affected utility companies and relocation will begin in 2008.



Sidewalks will be reconnected to improve walkability



Aging Bradford Pears will be replaced



Overhead utility lines will be relocated

SCALE COMPARISONS

Scale comparisons helped the planners and community participants to better understand the scale of Spring Hill in relation to other great places in the South. To the right is Spring Hill at the same scale as other well know towns in Alabama and beyond. The scale comparisons demonstrate the single-family, residential character of Spring Hill and the potential for a more compact town center.

The intersection of Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue has the potential to become a more street-oriented, pedestrian-friendly village center, such as Mountain Brook or Fairhope. In order to achieve the character of these places, however, buildings must be oriented toward the street, and surface parking should be transformed into vibrant public space or new blocks and streets.

The area around Museum Drive, Spring Hill Avenue, and McGregor Avenue has a limited amount of development on the north side of Museum Drive. This development consists of a strip shopping development that is automobile-oriented. Compare this development pattern with the finely-grained, walkable patterns on the right.

Finally, the area around the intersection of Bit & Spur is characterized by low-density, detached buildings, with primarily residential uses. The commercial uses clustered at the intersection do not define the street but rather are pulled away from the street. Here, the development patterns at Rosemary Beach and Mountain Brook provide examples of how to create an informal, yet distinct, village center.



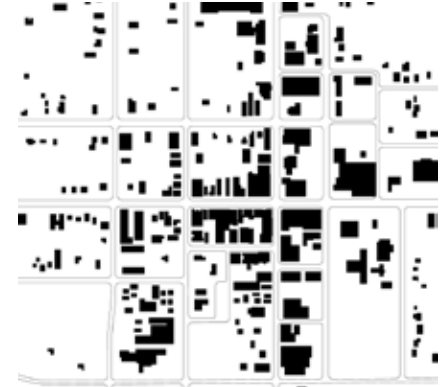
Spring Hill



Washington Square, Mobile



Charleston, SC



Fairhope, AL



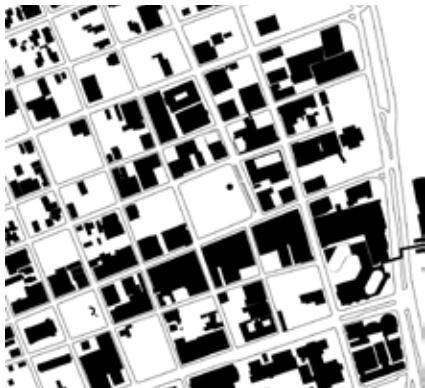
Dauphin Street, Mobile



Mountain Brook, AL



Winter Park, FL



Downtown Mobile



Rosemary Beach, FL



Savannah, GA



creating the plan 2

COMMUNITY INITIATIVE

The *Blueprint for Spring Hill* demonstrates the power a community can have when it decides to take control of its future and work together. In recent years, Spring Hill residents became concerned about their community and decided to take action. They formed a volunteer non-profit organization– The Village of Spring Hill, Inc.– in 2005 and in two years initiated a community planning process, landed two sizable grants, and hired a planning team led by Dover, Kohl & Partners to help create a vibrant and concrete vision for the future.

Realizing a need for improvement, the local Merchants' Association in Spring Hill began meeting to discuss the deteriorating condition of the main retail corridors within the community. Feeling that the issues were larger than the Association, they invited the community to attend their meetings to discuss their concerns. After a few meetings, it was clear that the merchants and residents knew what they wanted and knew that they needed to work as a community to achieve built results. The Village of Spring Hill, Inc. was formed to address the aesthetic concerns of the merchants and community, and Linda St. John became the first president of the organization.

The new organization understood that they would need money to begin improving their community, and the only way to attract the money was to become a non-profit corporation. They immediately applied for non-profit, 501(c)(3) status, and within 6 months they became the Village of Spring Hill, Inc. The Village of Spring Hill, Inc. Board knew that they needed a vision on paper to gain credibility as an organization committed to making change. In response, the Village of Spring Hill, Inc. created the following mission statement: *To make The Village of Spring Hill a neighborhood center by improving the pedestrian, aesthetic and commercial amenities of the area.* The Village of Spring Hill, Inc.

The Blueprint for Spring Hill was created through teamwork and collaboration.

also realized that significant public involvement was needed throughout the planning process, and that support from the City of Mobile would be crucial to achieving the vision for the future of Spring Hill.

Within two years of its formation, The Village of Spring Hill, Inc. embarked on a community-based planning initiative to create a detailed plan to guide their efforts. The organization hired Dover, Kohl & Partners, town planners, to lead the planning effort. In order to fund the planning process, The Village of Spring Hill, Inc. sought out grant money and was guided by Senator Hap Myers, a resident of Spring Hill. The Village of Spring Hill, Inc. applied for, and secured, a \$200,000 grant from the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA) to pay for Dover, Kohl & Partners to conduct an intensive week-long planning session, or *charrette*, in Spring Hill.

The community and team of design professionals worked to create *The Blueprint for Spring Hill* over the course of seven days in November 2007. “Designing in public,” Spring Hill residents and stakeholders were offered the opportunity to give continual input on the plan. Over 700 interested residents and stakeholders participated in the planning process, including property owners, neighbors, business people, developers, elected officials, Village of Spring Hill Board members, and community leaders. The visualizations, plans, and recommendations found in *The Blueprint for Spring Hill* are the result of extensive public input.

CHARRETTE PREPARATION

The Village of Spring Hill, Inc. worked hard to get as many people as possible to participate in the planning process. In order to ensure the greatest amount public participation, a number of relatively inexpensive, community intensive marketing strategies were employed. A website was created to provide up-to-date information on Village of Spring Hill, Inc. activities and the overall planning process. Two rounds of emails were sent to 500 people prior to the start of the charrette. Yard signs were printed and posted in front of houses, businesses, and at prominent intersections. A banner was hung across the public design studio on Old Shell Road. Residents, property owners, and merchants received phone calls from Village of Spring Hill, Inc. Board members encouraging all to attend. The Village of Spring Hill, Inc. dedicated their bi-annual newsletter to explaining the process, and created a tri-fold brochure with bullet points to further raise awareness. After the opening presentation of the charrette, a newspaper article ran in the *Mobile Press-Register* describing the first meeting and the schedule for the remainder of the process.



A variety of marketing tools informed residents about the process.

Members of Dover, Kohl & Partners' team visited Spring Hill in late September 2007 and met with The Village of Spring Hill Board, City officials, property owners, merchants, residents, developers, and other local stakeholders in preparation for the charrette. The meetings and interviews helped the team to better understand the dynamics of Spring Hill and gain full appreciation for the challenges and opportunities facing the community in its revitalization efforts. Team members met with the Mayor and City staff to review previous planning efforts and met with the Village of Spring Hill, Inc. Board to hear firsthand their vision and ideas for the future of their community. An evening reception was held to introduce the Spring Hill community to the Dover-Kohl team. During the reception, Linda St. John described the role and mission of the organization. Victor Dover, principal of Dover, Kohl & Partners, gave an animated talk on the potential of Spring Hill and what the community could be in the future, inspiring the attendees to participate in the planning process.



The Village of Spring Hill, Inc. Board members led the team on a tour of Spring Hill.

DESIGN TEAM ORIENTATION

When the design team arrived in Spring Hill, they spent many days studying and touring Spring Hill, Mobile, and its surroundings. The team visited two well-loved, small towns located across Mobile Bay – Daphne and Fairhope. Team members explored Spring Hill, Downtown Mobile, Daphne and Fairhope, studying characteristics such as building form and placement, architectural elements, street design, and natural features. While in Fairhope, the planners met with a local architect, Catherine Hall-Pate of Walcott Adams Verneville Architects, who led a guided tour of Downtown Fairhope, the surrounding residential neighborhoods, and public parks. The visit to Downtown Mobile, Daphne, and Fairhope provided local examples of traditional cities and towns undergoing revitalization and reinvestment, while accommodating historic preservation and appropriate infill development.

The study tours offered insight into the complex set of existing conditions within Spring Hill. With base maps in hand, team members documented potential areas for infill development, street improvements, and unique conditions and characteristics of Spring Hill, primarily at the three study areas.



The team examined new mixed-use development in Fairhope.



The team visited Downtown Mobile's Bienville Square.



Team members measured sidewalk dimensions in Old Mobile.



The design team toured Downtown Fairhope.

KICK-OFF PRESENTATION

On Tuesday, November 6th, 2007, a Kick-off Presentation marked the start of the week-long charrette. Approximately 250 Spring Hill residents and local stakeholders gathered at St. Paul's Episcopal School Auditorium for an evening presentation. An introduction was provided by Linda St. John as she welcomed the Dover-Kohl team and emphasized the importance of community participation in the planning process. Margaret Flippen, Senior Project Director for Dover, Kohl & Partners, outlined the challenge for citizens during the charrette week. Victor Dover then provided background information in a "food for thought" presentation on traditional town planning, redevelopment, Smart Growth principles, and preserving community character. At the end of the presentation attendees asked the planning team questions about the process and project and completed one word cards describing how they envision Spring Hill now and in the future.



Residents studied base maps before the presentation began.



Participants signed in and mingled in the lobby.



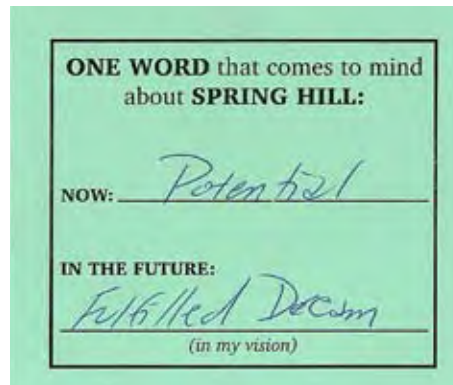
Victor Dover explained the importance of town building.



Margaret Flippen outlined the challenges for participants.

What Is A Charrette?

Charrette is a French word that translates as "little cart." At the leading architecture school of the 19th century, the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, students would be assigned a tough design problem to work out under pressure of time. They would continue sketching as fast as they could, even as little carts, *charrettes*, carried their drawing Boards away to be judged and graded. Today, "charrette" has come to describe a rapid, intensive and creative work session in which a design team focuses on a particular design problem and arrives at a collaborative solution. Charrettes are product-oriented. The public charrette is fast becoming a preferred way to face the planning challenges confronting American communities.



Participants completed "one word cards."



Residents shared ideas at the Kick-off Presentation.



Citizens shared their ideas for the future of Spring Hill.



Residents drew their ideas for the three intersections.



A representative presented each table's five big ideas.

Big Ideas

Widely shared ideas at the Hand-on Design Session:

Overall:

- Increase pedestrian connectedness and friendliness by adding sidewalks and street trees.
- Improve aesthetics by removing overhead power lines and unsightly trees, and adding decorative street lights and flowers.
- Create more mixed-use buildings and bring them closer to the street.
- Rethink current parking solutions to include on-street parking and parking behind buildings.

Old Shell Road & McGregor Avenue:

- Create a Village Center that enhances Spring Hill's identity.

Old Shell Road & Bit & Spur Road:

- Realign the intersection to create a perpendicular connection at Old Shell Road.
- Encourage village center development around Lavretta Park and Bit and Spur Road.

Museum Drive & McGregor Avenue:

- Improve the intersection to include a roundabout or 4-way stop.
- Transform Museum Drive into a boulevard with a landscaped median.



Participants listened as neighbors shared their ideas.

HANDS-ON DESIGN SESSION

On Thursday, November 8th, over 100 community members gathered at Spring Hill Baptist Church for the Hands-on Design Session. The event began with a surprise for the Village of Spring Hill Board. Smart Coast, an organization that supports regional dialogue about growth and development in the coastal region of Alabama, presented the Village of Spring Hill, Inc. Board with the Giraffe Award. The Board received the award for “sticking their necks out” to promote the revitalization of Spring Hill. The event continued with a short briefing by Victor Dover to explain the goals for the session, introduce participants to the base maps, and set ground rules for the evening. Working in small groups of approximately eight people, participants gathered around tables to draw and share their varied ideas for the future of Spring Hill.

Each table was given a base map of one of the three main study areas, the intersection of Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue, the intersection of Old Shell Road and Bit & Spur Road, and Museum Drive between McGregor Avenue and Spring Hill Avenue. In addition, each table was equipped with markers, scale bars, and aerial photos of the study area. A facilitator from the Dover-Kohl team or a local planning volunteer was assigned to each table to assist participants in the design exercises. During the table sessions, participants actively drew on the maps to illustrate how they might like to see their selected study area develop and evolve in the future by describing the design and placement of buildings, preferred uses, the location of open spaces, street and streetscape improvements, and transportation concerns for Spring Hill. At the end of the workshop, a spokesperson from each table reported their table's five big ideas for their intersection to the entire assembly.

OPEN DESIGN STUDIO

From Friday, November 9th through Tuesday, November 13th the design team continued to work with the community in an open design studio in a storefront at 4415 Old Shell Road. Residents, merchants, property owners, and all those interested in the future of Spring Hill were encouraged to stop by the studio throughout the week to check on the status of the plan, provide further input, and to make sure the design team was on the right track.

The convenient location of the studio at the intersection of Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue, as well as the immense community interest, led over 100 people to participate throughout the week. The table drawings and plans from the Thursday night Hand-on Design Session were placed around the room for easy review as new people became involved. While community members visited the studio, the design team continued to analyze the information gathered at the Hand-on Design Session and site analysis in order to formulate the initial concepts for the plan.

The team was tasked with synthesizing the many ideas heard from the community throughout the week into a plan that addresses all ideas but also illustrates different options on how plans could be implemented. The planners and designers created diagrams, drawings, computer visualizations, and plans, working to combine and refine the ideas. Working in Spring Hill allowed the design team ready access to the study area during all hours and on different days of the week. The planners observed day-to-day traffic patterns, public uses, and other details of everyday life in Spring Hill.



The studio was located at a busy intersection in Spring Hill.



Residents shared their ideas with the designers as they work.



As the designers developed plans, residents gave input.



The design team created several plans for each intersection.



Hand-drawn renderings of the proposed plans were created.



The team met with utility companies to discuss power lines.



Local merchants met with the team to explain their needs.



Meetings were held with local civic institutions.



The team met with City of Mobile transportation engineers.



Review meetings were held every night to direct the plan.



Neighbors met throughout the week to discuss the plans.

STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS

In addition to the public design studio, members of the design team met with specific stakeholders, City officials, and experts in scheduled technical meetings. The meetings were used to answer design questions, discuss the draft plan, and further gain input in regards to details associated with the redevelopment of Spring Hill's key intersections. The scheduled technical meetings included sessions with the City's Urban Development Department staff, City transportation staff, members of the Water Board Commission, the Parks and Recreation Department, various utility companies, Spring Hill College, Spring Hill Baptist Church, merchants and key property owners. The technical meetings helped to further shape the elements of the plan and to ensure that the ideas being processed were balanced by awareness of many viewpoints.

WORK-IN-PROGRESS PRESENTATION

The charrette week ended with an evening “Work-in-Progress” presentation on Tuesday, November 13th at St. Paul’s Episcopal School. Over 550 citizens filled the auditorium, sitting in the aisles, standing in the back, and gathering in the lobby, eager to hear and see the vision for the future of Spring Hill. The Mayor of the City of Mobile, Samuel L. Jones, was in attendance and welcomed the crowd by commending the Village of Spring Hill for their hard work and initiative. Mayor Jones stressed the importance of community-based planning and encouraged other neighborhoods in Mobile to work together to plan the future of their communities. He expressed his support for the Village of Spring Hill and at the conclusion of his remarks, Mayor Jones received a standing ovation.

After the Mayor’s address, Victor Dover, Margaret Flippen and James Dougherty presented a summary of the week’s events, and then presented drawings, sketches and computer visualizations illustrating the hypothetical build-out of the three study areas. The audience was walked through a “future tour” of Spring Hill, showing the possibility for both short and long-term changes. Renderings showed “before and after” illustrations of different redevelopment scenarios. Transportation and streetscape improvements were illustrated, demonstrating how a balance can be reached to support multi-modal transportation options – walking, driving, cycling, and using transit. At the end of the presentation, a survey was distributed to gauge the community’s opinion on the ideas presented that evening.

At the conclusion of the charrette, the design team departed Spring Hill and returned home to their offices. Over a period of six weeks the illustrative master plan produced during the charrette was refined and this report was created.



Over 550 residents attended the Work-in-Progress presentation, filling the auditorium.



Mayor Jones commended residents for their initiative.

Exit Survey Result of 213 received surveys

Are we on the right track?

YES - 96% NO - 1% MAYBE - 3%

Top Priorities

Walking :	33%
Beautification:	25%
Character:	19%
Mixing Land Uses:	11%
Business:	10%
Other:	3%



Everything Alabama, November 18, 2007



first principles 3

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Through the charrette process, the community and design team arrived at a series of basic urban design and policy principles to guide appropriate infill development and streetscape improvements along Spring Hill's main commercial intersections. Shaped from public input during the charrette, the "First Principles" embody the citizenry's vision for the future of their community. While the specifics of each principle reflect Spring Hill's unique needs, these principles are essentials for good planning in any town. The principles summarize the results of the public planning process and promote responsible growth, planning, and development.

This chapter presents the broad scope of the vision for the future of Spring Hill; specific design components of each principle are further described and illustrated in Chapter 4. General guidance on implementing each principle is included in this chapter; detailed implementation strategies can be found in Chapter 6.

FIRST PRINCIPLES

1. *Walkable street scenes*
2. *Connectedness*
3. *Compact, mixed uses*
4. *Street-oriented buildings*



New development in Spring Hill should follow the First Principles described in this chapter, including creating walkable street scenes, forming an interconnected network of streets, constructing compact, mixed-use neighborhoods, and utilizing street-oriented buildings to define public spaces and enhance the pedestrian realm.

WALKABLE STREET SCENES

One of the key desires of Spring Hill residents is increased walkability. Residents would love the freedom and convenience of leaving their cars at home and walking to make purchases, go to the park with their children, or meet friends at a neighborhood restaurant or coffee shop. Today, activities such as these are difficult, if not impossible, to achieve due to the current state of Spring Hill's street network and streetscape.

The existing designs of Spring Hill's main thoroughfares – Old Shell Road, McGregor Avenue, Bit & Spur Road, and Museum Drive – do not feature a comfortable pedestrian environment. These primary roads lack key elements for walkability, such as continuous sidewalks, appropriate street trees, and pedestrian-oriented destinations, thus limiting the vibrancy of the community. Spring Hill residents have already begun serious work to improve walkability, securing funding to build sidewalks and replace street trees. These efforts should continue to be coordinated with the overall plan for streetscape and walkability improvements.

One of the first considerations in achieving a walkable system is to ensure that a mix of housing, retail, office space, civic institutions, and public open space are located within a five-minute walk of one another. The second step is to ensure that an interconnected street system binds these uses together, so that pedestrians can choose the most convenient path. Finally, the streets that connect these various destinations must be designed for pedestrian use, with generous sidewalks, shade trees, protection from passing cars, and street-oriented buildings rather than parking lots. A detailed, 10-step plan for achieving walkable streets is outlined in the following pages.



This illustration of how Bit & Spur Road could look in the future demonstrates the role of sidewalks and streetscape in making an attractive pedestrian realm. Comfortable sidewalks and street-oriented buildings encourage walkability.



Street-oriented buildings support a vibrant sidewalk life, as seen on Park Avenue in Winter Park, FL.



Destinations such as corner stores, cafes and restaurants make walking enjoyable.

10 Steps for Making Great Streets

1. Design for pedestrians first.

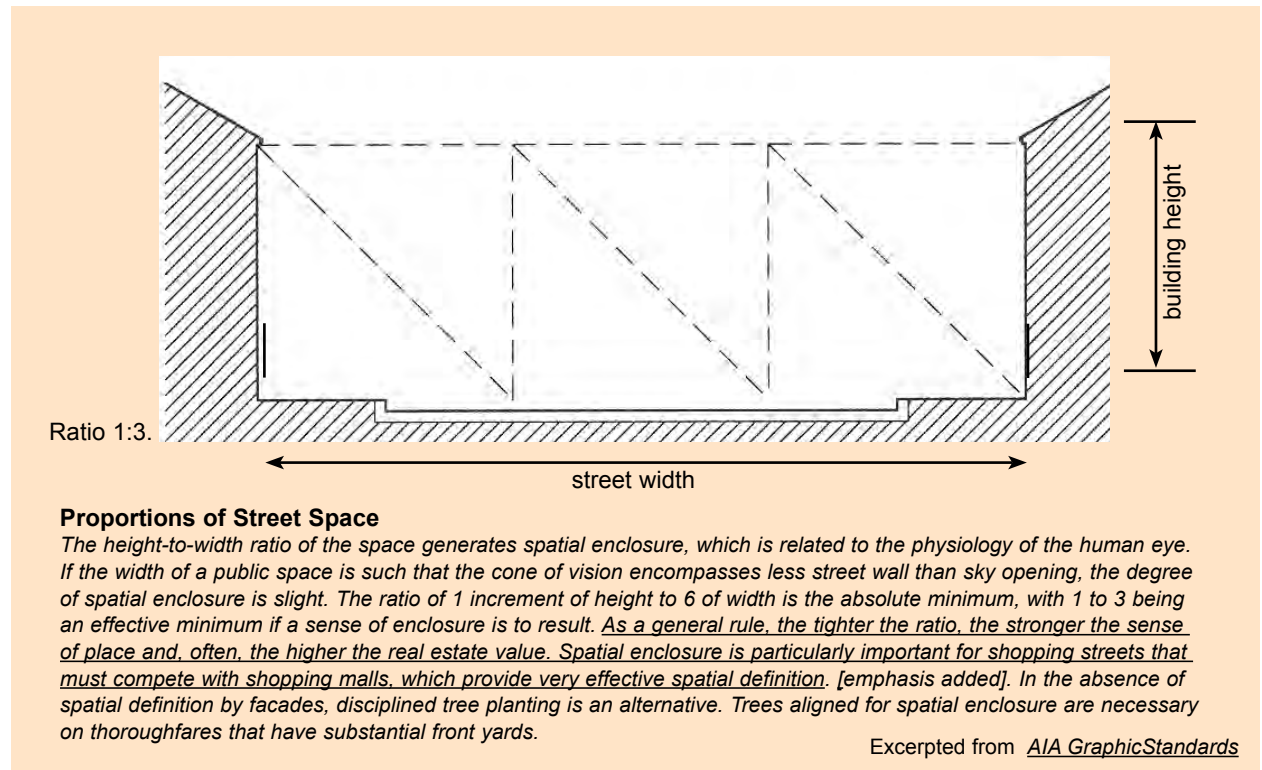
Great streets are designed to provide a high-caliber experience for pedestrians; once this is accomplished, they go on from there to accommodate all other required modes of travel.

2. Proportions matter.

A street should function as an outdoor room, surrounding its occupants in a space that is welcoming and usable. A 1:3 ratio for building height to street width is often cited as a minimum section for a sense of enclosure. Creating this sense of enclosure involves more than just narrow street width, however. There are well-defined eight-lane roads just as there are two-lane roads that seem to be impassable. Streets must be sized properly for their use and should be defined with appropriate building sizes. Street trees and furniture such as lighting also play a critical role in defining the space of the street.

3. Design the street as a unified whole.

An essential distinction of great streets is that the entire space is designed as an ensemble, from the travel lanes, trees and sidewalks, to the very buildings that line the roadway. Building form and character is particularly important in shaping a sense of place. The best streets invariably have buildings fronting them, with a particular height and massing that creates an appropriate sense of enclosure. The random setbacks generated by conventional zoning rarely produce this effect; form-based regulations must be put in place to control building form and placement. Furthermore, urban buildings must front the street with frequent thresholds such as doors, windows, balconies, and porches. These thresholds promote a lively streetscape, and ultimately provide passive security for pedestrians by focusing “eyes on the street.”



4. Include sidewalks.

Appropriately designed sidewalks are essential for active pedestrian life. Pedestrians will be more willing to utilize sidewalks if they are protected from automobile traffic. One of the simplest ways to buffer the pedestrian is to place street trees between the street and the sidewalk. Other street furniture such as streetlights, bus shelters, and benches occupy wider sidewalks and provide additional separation between pedestrians and automobile traffic. The width of the sidewalk will vary according to the location. On most single-family residential streets, five feet is an appropriate width,

but streets with rowhouses and multi-family buildings requires a more generous sidewalk. On Main Streets, fourteen feet is an ideal sidewalk width, which must never fall below an absolute minimum of eight feet.

5. Provide shade.

Motorists, pedestrians, and cyclists typically prefer shady streets. Shade provides protection from heat and sun and contributes to the spatial definition of a street. Shade can be provided with canopy trees or architectural encroachments over the sidewalk. Canopy trees should be planted in a planting strip

between the sidewalk and the street in order to provide continuous definition and shade for both the street and the sidewalk. Architectural encroachments over the sidewalk such as awnings, arcades, and cantilevered balconies are another way to protect pedestrians from the elements and meanwhile shield storefronts from glare.

6. Make medians sufficiently wide.

Where divided thoroughfares are unavoidable, the medians must be generous enough to serve as a pedestrian amenity. A minimum median width of 8' will accommodate a row of street trees and will provide adequate refuge for pedestrians crossing a wide roadway.

7. Plant the street trees in an orderly manner.

Great streets are typically planted with rows of regularly-spaced trees, using consistent species. This formal tree alignment has a powerful effect; it at once shapes the space and reflects conscious design. More importantly, the shade produced by the trees will be continuous enough to make walking viable. Furthermore, the spatial impression of aligned trees also has a traffic calming effect.



Charleston, SC

8. Use smart lighting.

Streets should be appropriately lit for automobile and pedestrian safety. Pedestrians naturally avoid streets where they feel unsafe. Loosely-spaced, highway-scaled “cobra head” light fixtures do not provide appropriate light intensity and consistency for pedestrian well-being. More frequently-spaced, shorter fixtures more appropriate, and provide light beneath the tree canopy as street trees mature.

9. Allow on-street parking in suitable locations.

On-street parking buffers pedestrians from moving cars and calms traffic by forcing drivers to stay alert. Parallel parking is the ideal arrangement, because it requires the least amount of space and allows pedestrians to easily cross through the thin line of cars. Diagonal parking is acceptable on some shopping streets, as long as the extra curb-to-curb width is not achieved at the expense of sidewalk width. Parking located in front of a street-front business encourages people to get out of their cars and walk, and is essential to leasing street-oriented retail space.



Savannah, GA

10. Resist parking lots in front of buildings.

The bulk of a building’s parking supply should occur behind the building. The conventional practice of placing surface parking lots in front of buildings results in a disconnected pedestrian environment. If current zoning regulations are reformed to provide “build-to” lines rather than mandatory front setbacks for commercial buildings, parking will be forced to the interior of the block. As a result, the pedestrian realm of the sidewalk will be defined by shop fronts and building entrances rather than parking lots.

It is not surprising that, given their multiple roles in urban life, streets require and use vast amounts of land. In the United States, from 25 to 35 percent of a city's developed land is likely to be in public right-of-way, mostly streets. If we can develop and design streets so that they are wonderful, fulfilling places to be, community building places, attractive public places for all people of cities and neighborhoods, then we will have successfully designed about 1/3 of the city directly and will have an immense impact on the rest.

- Allan Jacobs, *Great Streets*



Alexandria, VA

CONNECTEDNESS

While Spring Hill has ample park space, shopping centers, and well-loved community centers such as churches, museums, schools and a library, residents find it difficult to get to these places from their homes. Many residents feel that its commercial centers are unattractive and in need of repair, in sharp contrast to the elegant character of Spring Hill's residences. In order to improve access to neighborhood centers and to create a cohesive character for Spring Hill, greater connectivity should be a top priority.

Strong communities are well-connected in many ways. Having an interconnected web of streets is the most basic and effective form of bringing a neighborhood together. Spring Hill lacks such an interconnected street network, with main roadways such as Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue serving as the only through roads. This leaves few alternate routes for drivers, bicyclists and pedestrians to access commercial areas and parks, resulting in traffic congestion and separation between residential and commercial areas. One way to improve connectivity around Spring Hill's main intersections is to introduce a network of new streets. A network of streets will help to distribute traffic away from key intersections, and will help to reduce congestion. Creating pedestrian connections between residential neighborhoods and public spaces, and evolving Spring Hill's commercial centers to become pedestrian-oriented will also improve connectivity.

Spring Hill's commercial centers, parks, and civic institutions should also be integrated into the community with streetscaping and architecture that reflects the elegant character of the residential neighborhoods. Improved standards to encourage mixed-use development in Spring Hill's will help to create a cohesive character for the area, and will increase community pride.

Page 3.6



Proposed new connections at Bit & Spur Road and Old Shell Road include a new street and intersection, as well as a system of alleys behind street-front buildings. These new connections will improve residents' access to this neighborhood center.



Excellent pedestrian and street connections in Fairhope, AL allow residents to access a vibrant downtown.



The absence of sidewalks and lack of street connections often deter walking to the commercial centers of the community.

New Connections in Spring Hill*



① Existing street network



② Proposed streets



③ Proposed streets and secondary circulation (including interconnected parking aisles and service alleys)



④ Proposed streets, secondary circulation, and pedestrian network

LEGEND

- Existing Streets
- Proposed Streets
- Secondary Circulation
- Pedestrian Network

**Note: Many of the proposed street connections occur on private property; coordination between the City of Mobile and private property owners will be necessary to create a connected street network in Spring Hill. The diagrams illustrate the possible locations of new streets, circulation routes, and pedestrian connections, but the exact location of each will need to be determined as properties are redeveloped.*

COMPACT, MIXED USES

During the charrette, the residents of Spring Hill asked for the main intersections in the community to be transformed into vibrant, mixed-use centers. In contrast to the existing strip shopping centers, the creation of neighborhood centers, whether large or small, would serve as desirable gathering places that enhance the identity of the community. These places could contain a variety of cafes, restaurants, offices, residences and shops, and most importantly, public gathering spaces. Such spaces within the neighborhood centers could host community events and become the “postcard” image of Spring Hill.

The Blueprint for Spring Hill illustrates the hypothetical transformation of Spring Hill’s main intersections into neighborhood centers. Understanding that complete change will not happen overnight, the plan is designed to be implemented one piece at a time, as opportunities arise. The Village of Spring Hill, Inc. and property owners should work closely together to ensure that all changes and improvements support the creation of vibrant neighborhood centers.

Successful neighborhood centers are best achieved through compact, mixed uses. Ground-floor retail and services ensure that the street front is active and pedestrian-oriented. A strong residential presence can be achieved with apartments above shops, low-scale apartment buildings, and townhouses. Office space similarly can be accommodated in the upper floors of retail buildings. Finally, civic uses such as churches, community centers, and parks and plazas can be integrated into the center and can become focal points for community events. By introducing residential, office, and civic space into a neighborhood center, the area remains lively and bustling with activity throughout the day and during the weekend. Furthermore, a strong residential population will support local businesses and help to ensure their success.



The proposed mixed-use center at Old Shell and McGregor incorporates Spring Hill Village shopping center and transforms it into a vibrant community center through a series of steps.

Dense, mixed-use centers help to relieve traffic congestion, reduce parking needs, and improve walkability. This is possible because neighborhood centers provide a range of goods and services, amenities, and housing in close proximity to one another, eliminating the need to drive within that area. In order to fully achieve the benefits of a mixed-use center, streets and buildings must be designed to support walkable street scenes. Streets must be interconnected and buildings must be street-oriented in order to support walkability and shape comfortable gathering places.



Mixed-use buildings, such as this apartment building and shop in Fairhope, AL, allow residents to live, work, and shop in their neighborhood.

Creating a Village Center in Phases



① Spring Hill Village shopping center- existing conditions



② New street trees and wider, continuous sidewalks, are added to Old Shell Road. A new street is added along the existing shopping center drive aisle; a new parking garage and additional square footage is a potential first phase for shopping center enhancements.



③ A new parking garage replaces existing surface parking; additional surface parking lots can be reclaimed as space for new street-oriented buildings, and a new public green.



④ The transformation continues: additional properties redevelop along Old Shell Road, creating a complete, pedestrian-oriented Village Center.

LEGEND

- Existing Buildings
- Proposed Buildings
- Pavement
- Green Space
- Street Trees

STREET-ORIENTED BUILDINGS

A unique, vibrant, and pedestrian-oriented neighborhood center is difficult to achieve without the support of street-oriented buildings. Buildings with street-oriented architecture shapes the public space of the street and create comfortable, engaging public spaces. This is in sharp contrast to the conventional commercial strip method of fronting the street with blank walls and parking lots. Street-oriented architecture has the added benefit of improving neighborhood safety by providing natural surveillance through doors and windows facing the street, better known as “eyes on the street.”

In order to create a continuous and comfortable pedestrian realm, buildings should be multi story and built close to the street. Parking should be located on-street and in mid-block parking lots or parking garages that are lined with buildings. Buildings should front the street with primary building entrances, and generous shopfronts or windows, which serve to engage the pedestrian and promote street activity.

Once the correct placement and orientation of a building is achieved, materials and architectural details can enhance and support street life. Windows should be abundant and generously sized, and relate to the human scale. Brick or stonework, window and door surrounds, and intricate cornices can be used to express local architectural styles and to contribute to the liveliness of the public streetscape. Awnings, balconies, porches, and colonnades can serve to provide shelter from the sun and rain in a manner that contributes to the aesthetic of the street.



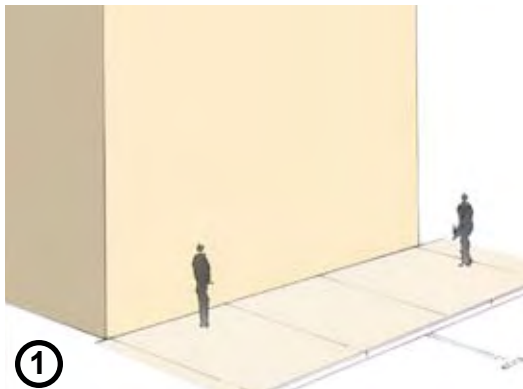
New street-oriented buildings at Old Shell and McGregor create a sense of place that can become a source of community pride.

The best way to ensure that new development is street-oriented and contributes to the creation of a neighborhood center is to implement a form-based zoning code. In contrast to conventional zoning, which uses abstract formulas to control development, a form-based code is a land development regulatory tool that places primary emphasis on the physical form of the built environment with the end goal of producing a specific type of “place.” The City of Mobile’s zoning ordinance should be amended to include a form-based code that will support appropriate infill development in Spring Hill over time.

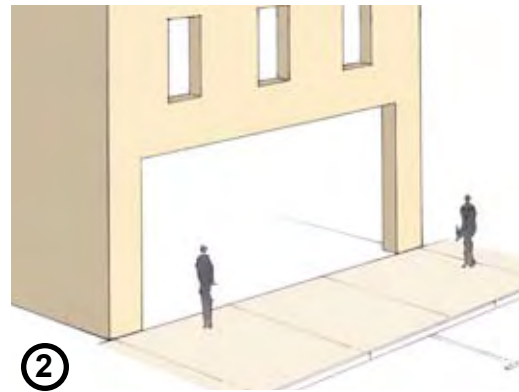


Distinctive, street-oriented architecture such as this Tudor-style building in Mountain Brook, Alabama, enhances the character of the community.

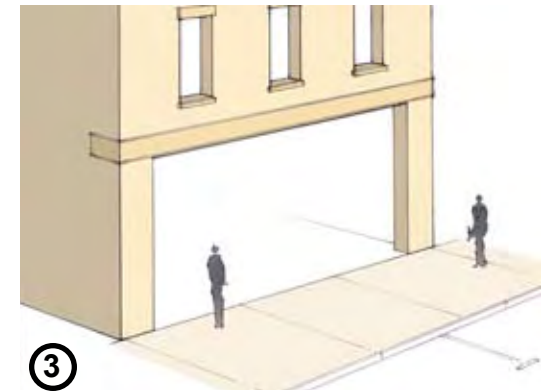
The Anatomy of a Storefront



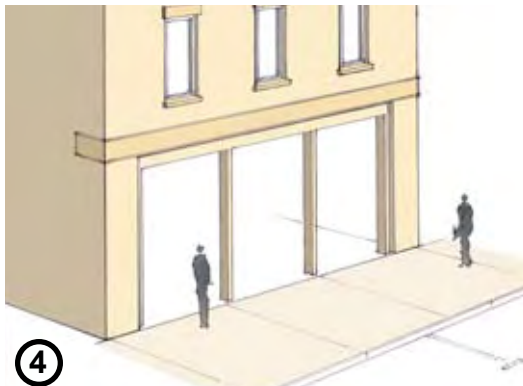
① The basic building mass - placed close to the street



② Generous shopfront with vertically-oriented windows above



③ Lintels and window sills provide a sense of structure



④ Columns sub-divide the shopfront opening



⑤ Transoms help achieve well-proportioned shopfront windows



⑥ Cased windows sit atop knee-height bulkheads



⑦ Pedestrian-oriented entrance, signage and lighting



⑧ Awnings provide shade and rain protection



⑨ A gallery provides a second floor terrace

FIRST PRINCIPLES – GETTING THERE

The following steps are necessary to achieve the first principles of the plan:

- a. Submit *The Blueprint for Spring Hill* to the City of Mobile for adoption.
- b. Reform the existing Mobile Zoning Code to allow street-oriented development. Either create a zoning overlay district for the area or incorporate the reform into a wider-reaching form-based code for the City of Mobile.
- c. Continue to work with the City of Mobile to garner municipal support for plan implementation, including streetscape improvements such as new street trees, sidewalks, pedestrian-scaled lighting, on-street parking, and crosswalks..
- d. Continue to seek funding for planning initiatives.
- e. Work with residents, private property owners and developers to coordinate new development.
- f. Establish a review committee to evaluate all new development in the area and ensure that buildings are street-oriented with ground floor retail.

Additional implementation strategies are included in Chapters 4 and 6.



details of the plan 4

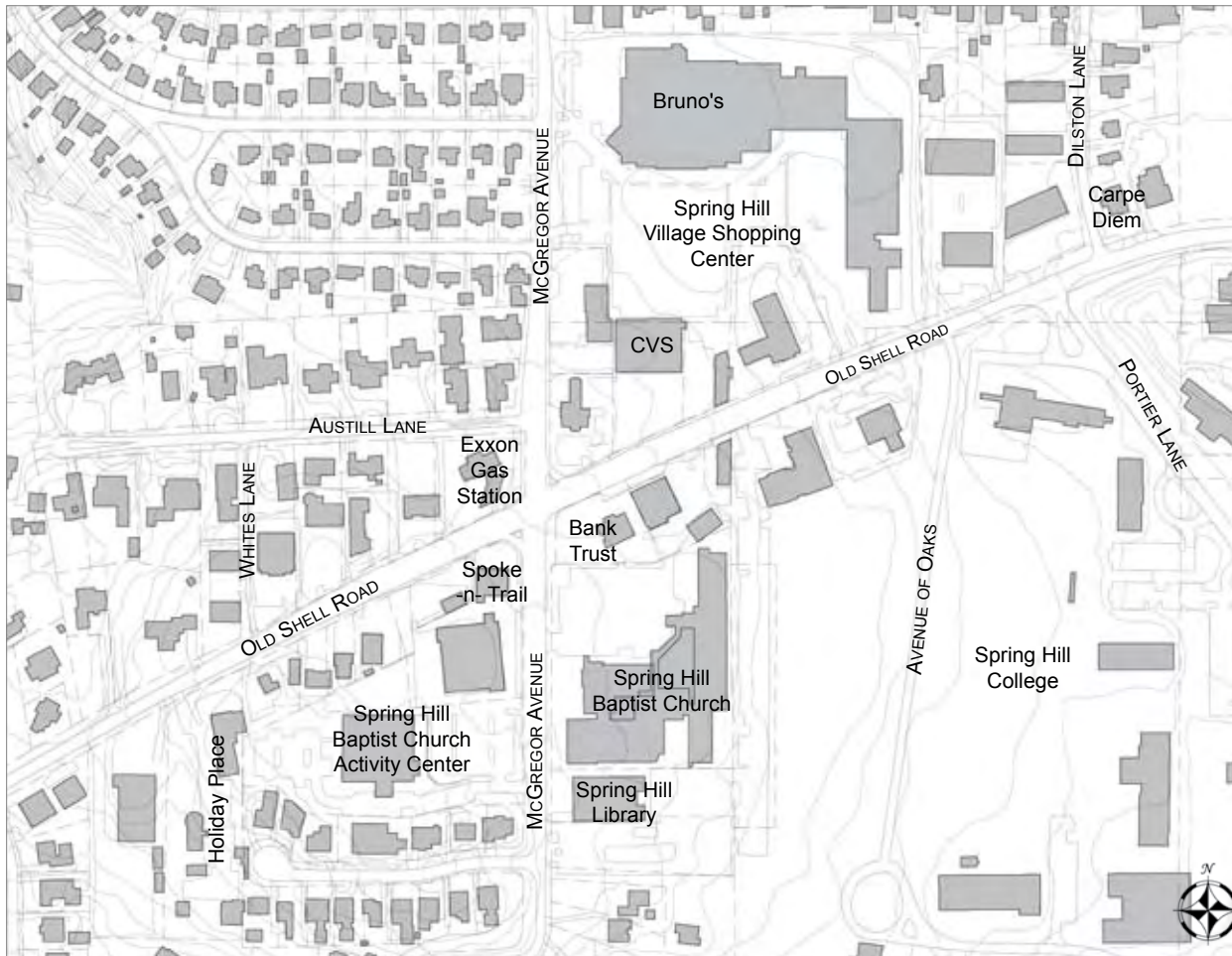
Blueprint for Spring Hill Illustrative Plan

The *Blueprint for Spring Hill* provides a comprehensive strategy for creating well-loved centers that connect to one another and to the surrounding residential neighborhoods. Fundamental to the plan is the transformation of Spring Hill's existing strip commercial intersections into vibrant, mixed-use centers with comfortable sidewalks, street trees, on-street parking, and mixed-use, street-oriented buildings. The plan is comprised of three distinct study areas, each of which is an under-utilized commercial crossroads that has the potential to become a great neighborhood center. These crossroads include the intersection of Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue, the intersection of Old Shell Road and Bit & Spur Road, including Lavretta Park, and the intersection of Museum Drive and McGregor Avenue.

This chapter explains the intended evolution of these crossroads and recommends specific steps to implement *The Blueprint for Spring Hill*. For each intersection, key public improvements and desired private investments are detailed. Many of these improvements are small, incremental steps that will transform Spring Hill's commercial intersections over time. Each step will be a success in its own right, and they can build upon one another to achieve a vibrant center for Spring Hill. Implementation steps can be found at the end of each section; a detailed guide to implementation is provided in Chapter 6.



An illustrative plan for three key intersections in Spring Hill was created during the charrette. The plan synthesizes residents' ideas and depicts the idealized build-out for these centers of the community. This map is for illustrative purposes and is not a regulating document. *The Blueprint for Spring Hill* Illustrative Plan identifies key opportunity parcels for infill development, redevelopment, and conservation.



Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue - existing conditions

OLD SHELL ROAD & MCGREGOR AVENUE

The intersection of Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue has historically been the heart of Spring Hill; most residents pass through this intersection at least once a day. The existing physical appearance of this area does not reflect its position and importance within the community. Through the charrette process, the community and design team envisioned a new future for this important intersection. The plan proposes the transformation of this area into a walkable, village center, bridging the gap between the residential neighborhoods and commercial areas of Spring Hill.

The plan for the areas surrounding the intersection of Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue provides a workable strategy to redevelop parcels over time. There are many issues affecting the redevelopment of this area, including long-term leases and multiple property owners, yet if the Village of Spring Hill, property owners, and City of Mobile work together, the plan for the future of this important crossroads can be realized.

The first steps to creating a village center at this intersection is already in place, with high quality, popular destinations located in close proximity to each other, including Holiday Place to the west and Carpe Diem to the east. As properties between redevelop and buildings replace parking lots along the sidewalk, new destinations will be added to the mix. As new buildings fill in the gaps between existing buildings, a continuous streetwall of shopfronts will be created, to nurture pedestrian activity. The large surface parking lot in front of the Spring Hill Village shopping center can be in-filled with new mixed-use buildings lining structured parking, and a new village green can be created to enliven the streetscape and reduce large uncomfortable walking environments.

Proposed Streetscape Improvements and Infill Development

Proposed street and intersection improvements, such as on-street parking, street trees, wide sidewalks, decorative paver crosswalks, and new traffic lights are the foundation for the new pedestrian-friendly village center.

If redeveloped, the gas station can add to the pedestrian environment by locating its convenience store along the sidewalk and gas pumps to the side.

New street connections will create smaller blocks and improve access.

The proposed removal and relocation of overhead power lines, along with fewer curb cuts will allow for a continuous row of street trees to be planted.

As properties redevelop buildings should be placed at the edge of the sidewalk, with parking provided at the interior of the block.



The addition of public greens and pocket parks will create community gathering spaces and help create a sense of place.

As development increases around the intersection, structured parking will provide a more efficient use of land than the existing surface parking lots, and can allow more redevelopment and new park spaces to occur on existing parcels.

On-street parking is essential to creating a successful pedestrian-friendly retail area; it is proposed to be added to Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue, as well as on new streets.

Spring Hill Baptist Church enhancements may include the addition of a new green for gathering, a prominent new entrance off the green, and new street-oriented buildings in place of surface parking lots.

LEGEND	
	Proposed Buildings
	Civic Buildings
	Existing Buildings
	Green Space

PUBLIC IMPROVEMENTS

In order for the commercial area around Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue to evolve into a village center, the existing commercial area should be redesignated as a "walkable district". All streets located within this walkable district should be subject to new design standards that support walkability, including on-street parking, wide sidewalks, pedestrian-oriented street lighting, street trees, and street-oriented buildings.

On-street parking is necessary for street-oriented retail; it provides parking adjacent to storefront locations and buffers pedestrians on the sidewalk from traffic, making them feel more comfortable when walking along the street. Wide, continuous sidewalks along all streets are essential for encouraging residents to walk to the village center, as well as convincing visitors to park their cars in one place and explore the area by foot. Attractive, pedestrian-scaled lighting helps evening visitors to feel comfortable and safe in the area. Street trees provide shade for pedestrians during the hot summer months, and enclose the street, encouraging drivers to move through the area more slowly. Street trees, along with street-oriented buildings, also enhance the sense of enclosure on the sidewalk, creating a small "outdoor room" for pedestrians and enhancing their experience.

While streetscape improvements help to enhance a walkable district, it is essential that the road network itself also support walkability. Currently, the intersection of Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue is the only vehicular connection through the district, and consequently, it is subject to high traffic volumes. These volumes have impelled traffic engineers in the past to widen the intersection in an attempt to increase capacity and ease congestion. Widening the intersection has done little to improve traffic congestion and instead

has impaired pedestrian movement by making the roadway too wide to cross comfortably. Instead of widening the road to accommodate vehicular flow, motorists should instead be encouraged to slow down through the village center. The design of the street should accommodate both vehicular and pedestrian movements.

The fastest way to ease traffic congestion at the intersection of Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue is to reform the existing traffic signal intervals, as the current intervals are not calculated for maximum efficiency. An improved traffic signal interval will reduce traffic pressure. Once the signal improvements have been made, more

holistic changes should be undertaken. One of the most effective ways to improve vehicular and pedestrian movement around the intersection of Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue is to provide additional street connections throughout the district. This can be achieved by creating secondary connections, known as "square backs", around the intersection. These connector streets will allow the intersection of Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue to have fewer lanes and smaller turn radii by spreading turning movements out over several locations. This will better distribute traffic through the district, and the reduced intersection dimensions will facilitate pedestrian crossing.



Proposed revisions to the intersection of Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue include eliminating the right turn lane (creating a shorter crossing distance for pedestrians), and adding on-street parking, defined crosswalks, wider sidewalks, and new street trees.

These network improvements will ease the traffic pressure on the intersection, allowing surplus lanes to be re-used for on-street parking. First, the existing right-hand turn lanes on Old Shell Road can be eliminated. Careful observation of the intersection during the charrette indicated that the right turn lanes were rarely used and were not contributing to overall traffic flow. In place of the right turn lanes, on-street parking can be provided along Old Shell Road. This parking can be configured in several ways, whether as reverse angled parking as found in downtown Mobile, conventional-angled parking, or parallel parking. The final choice of parking configuration will be based on the expected intensity of development in the village center. Another improvement to the intersection includes the extension of the curbs on the northeast and southwest corners of the intersection. This will reduce the width of the intersection, therefore

slowing down turning drivers and creating a safer, shorter crossing distance for pedestrians. Whenever possible, street improvements along Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue should retain the existing curb, in order to reduce construction infrastructure costs.

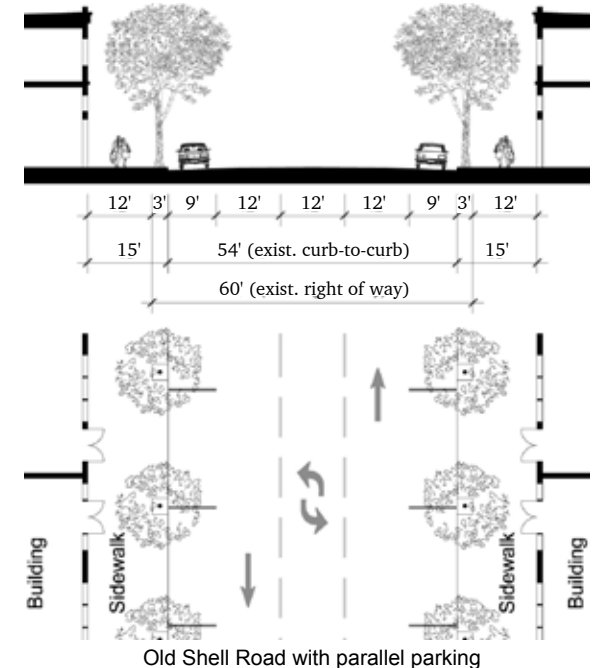
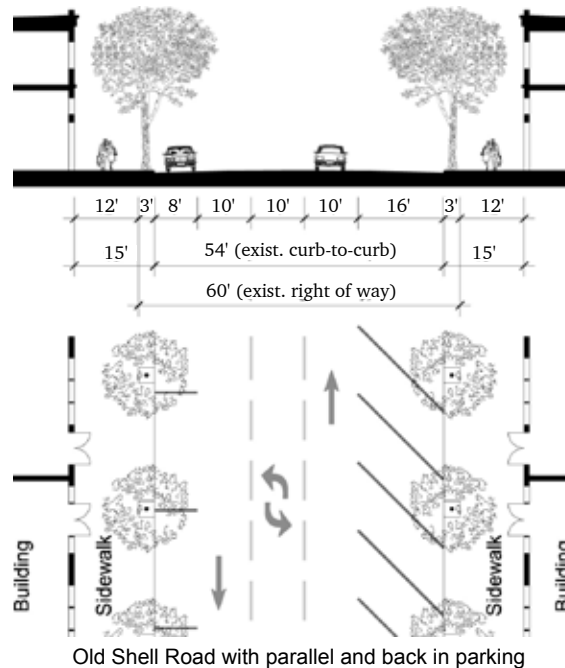
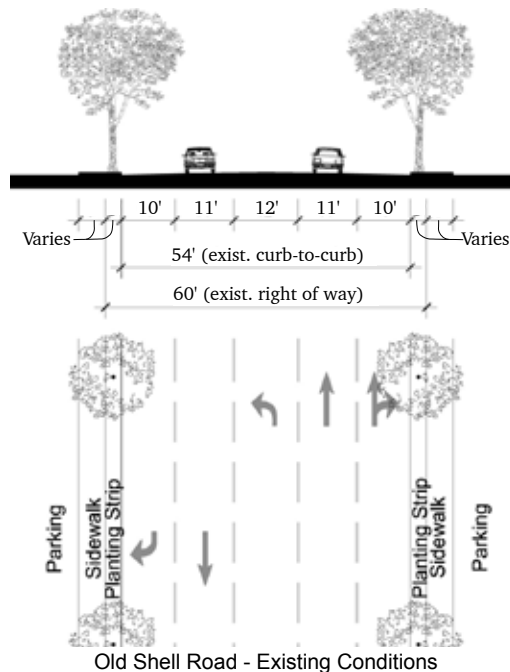
All of the proposed intersection improvements were analyzed for effectiveness using Synchro™, a micro-simulation program from TrafficWare, Inc., version 7. The analysis indicated that with current traffic volumes and lane arrangements the intersection operates at a level of service (LOS) E. With the recommended modifications, including improved traffic signal timing, the removal of the right turn lane, and the addition of on-street parking, the intersection will continue to function at LOS E.

What is LOS?

For traffic analysis, the two primary effectiveness measures are the intersection level of service and the arterial level of service. These are letter-grade measurements of how well the intersections and arterials function. The level of service (LOS) is a single letter that reflects a variety of different measurements, including traffic travel delay, queuing at intersections, vehicles versus capacity, travel speed, and many others.

The LOS letters, which range from A through F, are similar to but not analogous to letter grades on a school report card. Essentially, LOS A indicates a street or intersection that is lightly used and possesses much more capacity than is needed for existing traffic. LOS B and C indicate progressively busier intersections or streets that may also have greater capacity than is needed for current traffic demands. LOS D and E indicate intersections or streets that are approaching or have reached their traffic-handling capacity. These intersections or streets are very busy and move higher volumes of traffic. Operating at LOS D or E ensures that streets and intersections are performing at their most effective traffic-handling capacity.

Source: Hall Planning & Engineering, Inc.





Old Shell Road Transformed

The following visualization illustrates the potential appearance of Old Shell Road, over-time, as redevelopment occurs; the view is looking west along Old Shell Road toward McGregor Avenue.

Existing conditions: Overhead wires dominate the street view, traffic signals and street lights are similar to those typically found on suburban arterial roads, buildings are set back from the intersection, and street trees are approaching the end of their life span.



Step 1: Overhead power lines are removed from the intersection and relocated behind adjacent buildings. The traffic signals supported by span wires should be replaced with urban mast-arm signals, including crosswalk signals.

Step 2: Curb cuts along Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue are reduced in size and minimized to allow the construction of wide sidewalks and pedestrian-scaled street lights to increase walkability. Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue are re-striped, allowing for on-street parking. Pedestrian crosswalks at the intersection are defined with pavers and inappropriate street trees are removed.



Step 3: Proper urban street trees are planted along the sidewalk, offering a clear view to signage and storefronts. The parking lot on the left is replaced with a small park, creating a gathering place at the village center.



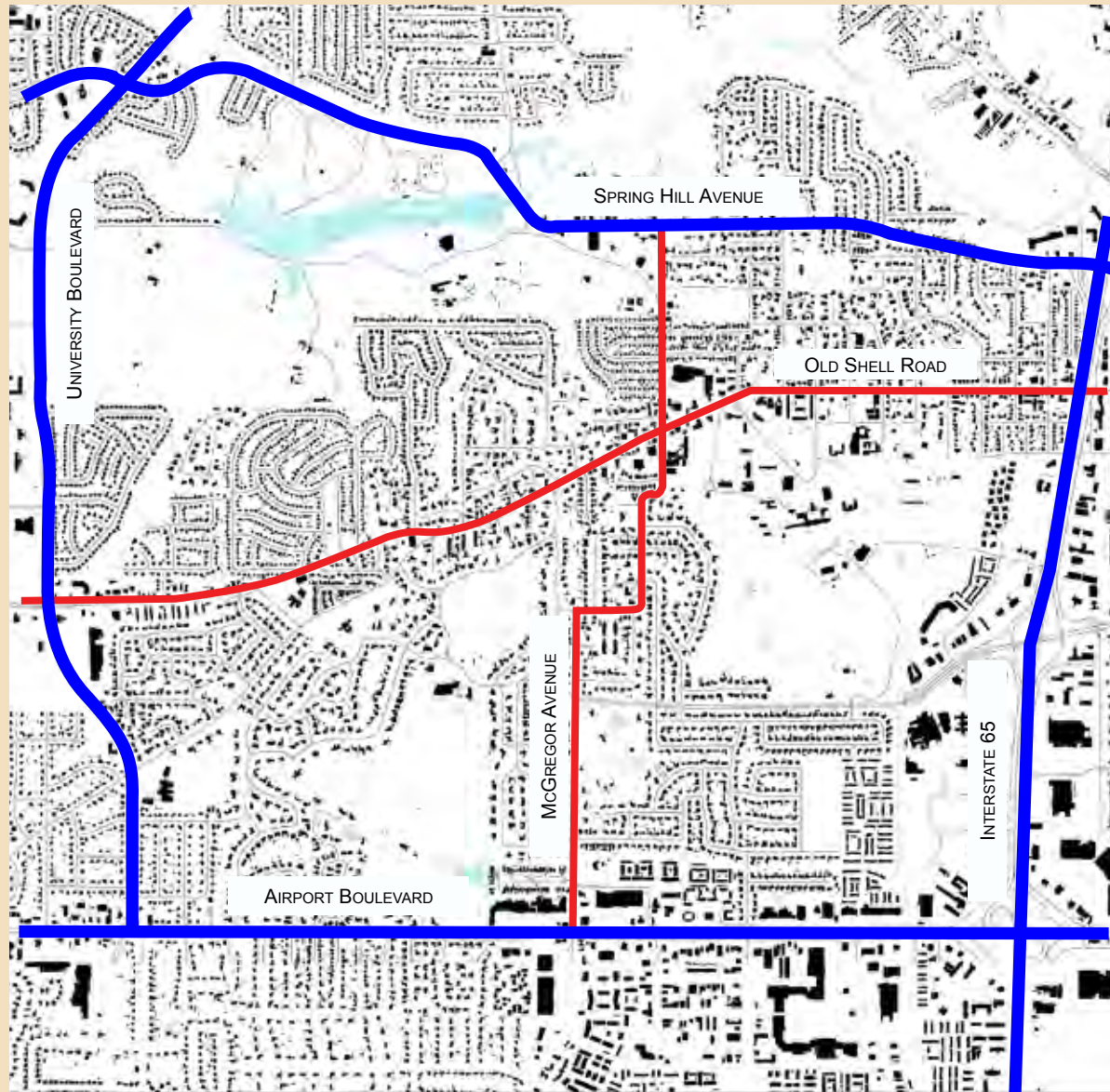


Step 4: As properties redevelop, multi-story, street-oriented buildings frame the street. Unnecessary curb cuts are removed, adding the final component to the streetscape. Old Shell Road is transformed into a walkable street and the area becomes the vibrant center of Spring Hill.



Step 4, Alternate: A second option showing a different type of architecture on the southwest corner, and alternative street striping utilizing back-in angled parking similar to that used in Downtown Mobile. An alternative median design that increases the street beautification is also illustrated.

STREET NETWORK IMPROVEMENTS



Spring Hill is served by two internal through streets, Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue, as well as four high-capacity roadways, Interstate 65, University Boulevard, Spring Hill Avenue, and Airport Boulevard.

In order for Spring Hill's commercial intersections to achieve their potential as neighborhood centers, an important first step is to address the existing road network in Spring Hill. It is essential that vehicular and pedestrian connectivity be improved throughout the district in order to enjoy walkability at the street level.

The existing street network in Spring Hill is comprised of a historic, rural road system that has grown over time with the addition of limited-access residential streets. There is currently only one east-west through street, Old Shell Road, and only one north-south through street, McGregor Avenue, that serves drivers passing through Spring Hill. Limited connectivity exists between these streets, such as Hillwood Road between Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue, as well as several circuitous residential streets. As a result of this limited network, Old Shell Road experiences high levels of traffic during most of the day and an extended pm peak period. The City of Mobile's traffic profiles, provided at the charrette, indicate a pm peak usage period extending from 3-6 p.m. During this time, left-turn access onto Old Shell Road between Bit & Spur Road and McGregor Avenue can take longer than is comfortable for many residents.

Although there are a limited number of through streets in Spring Hill, there are high-capacity, alternative routes to the north, south, east and west of Spring Hill. These roads are Airport Boulevard to the south, Spring Hill Avenue to the north, University Boulevard to the west, and I-65 to the east. These roads provide high capacity

for regional through movement, leaving Spring Hill's internal road network to provide primarily local circulation.

Given the availability of regional roadways around Spring Hill, the existing internal roads, Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue, should be maintained at their existing capacity and should be reconfigured as highly-connected, walkable thoroughfares that serve local, neighborhood uses. Rather than adding traffic lanes to these internal roads, efforts should focus on adding continuous, wide sidewalks and bike paths to encourage walkability. At main intersections, rather than adding multiple turn lanes for the movement of through traffic, efforts should focus on providing on-street parking to serve shoppers and visitors, and to create a local, "Main Street" atmosphere.

An important first step to promote Spring Hill's internal roads as local, well-connected streets, will be to work with the City of Mobile to designate both McGregor Avenue and Old Shell Road as walkable thoroughfares. Currently, McGregor Avenue between Dauphin Street and Spring Hill Avenue is designated as a Major Street on the City of Mobile's Major Street Plan. This designation prevents McGregor Avenue from becoming a walkable street, and at the intersection of Old Shell Road, the designation impedes the development of a walkable village center. This is because design standards for a Major Street, such as additional lanes and wider right-of-ways, are incompatible with those of a walkable street.

Interestingly, the portion of McGregor Avenue that passes through Spring Hill is not shown on the City of Mobile's 2030 Transportation Plan as a needed or programmed road improvement, which may indicate that rebuilding this section of McGregor Avenue as a Major Street is considered inappropriate. In keeping with the 2030 Plan, McGregor Avenue between Dauphin Street and Spring Hill Avenue should be removed from the City of Mobile Major Street Plan, and instead be designated as a walkable thoroughfare under the *The Blueprint for Spring Hill*. This designation will allow the application of design standards consistent with walkability and the development of connected neighborhood centers.

The primary purpose of walkable thoroughfares is to encourage pedestrian mobility while serving motor vehicle movement. Pedestrians flourish where vehicle speeds are low, usually between 15 and 30 mph. Because the primary purpose of walkable thoroughfares is to promote pedestrian mobility, the design of these streets is controlled by reducing traffic speed. Reduced traffic speeds can be achieved with narrow lanes, on-street parking, street trees, and reduced curb radii. This is in contrast with contemporary transportation planning which looks to estimates of future vehicle demand to determine roadway design. Walkable thoroughfares are designed as two-lane or in rare instances, four-lane roads. Higher traffic demand is addressed not by adding additional lanes to a road, but by increasing the number of streets available and by encouraging walking, biking, and transit. Additional interconnected streets and increased modes of transportation allow multiple ways to get to a destination. As

part of *The Blueprint for Spring Hill* adoption process, the City of Mobile should adopt the use of walkable thoroughfares within the three neighborhood centers. This will provide a much-needed alternative design standard for local streets and will support the development of walkable, mixed-use centers.

Parking Structures

The majority of the developable land at Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue is taken up by surface parking lots. The high percentage of surface parking in the commercial center is due to high off-street parking requirements that are enforced for each individual parcel. These requirements result in an inefficient use of commercial property, and diminish the aesthetic and pedestrian qualities of the area. The requirements also constrain small business owners and prevent them from expanding, because they cannot provide the required parking on their small sites. These parking requirements are based on automobile-oriented, single-use development, and do not account for the mixed-use, pedestrian center envisioned for Spring Hill. In order to achieve this vision, one of the most important steps will be to reform the existing parking standards in the neighborhood centers. The best method of parking reform would be to abolish minimum parking requirements for mixed-use, multi-story buildings, as well as for historic buildings on small or irregular parcels. In all other cases, the required minimum number of parking spaces be reduced from the amount required by the current City Zoning Code in order to encourage shared parking, on-street parking, and pedestrian oriented use. These reductions in required parking should be available only to development that complies with the vision of *The Blueprint for Spring Hill*.

Shared parking is a system in which a range of business types and land uses, from retail stores and restaurants to offices and apartments, share a designated number of parking spaces. The number of parking spaces is calculated based upon the shifting needs of each use throughout the day. By allowing for and encouraging shared parking, the total number of spaces required can decrease for



A lined parking structure absorbs surface parking allowing additional development and green space.



Existing aerial photograph showing large surface parking area of the Spring Hill Village shopping center.

mixed-use developments or single-use developments in mixed-use areas. Spring Hill's neighborhood centers will have a mix of uses that share the parking supply. These uses will experience their peak demand for spaces at different times of day, making efficient use of the spaces provided. This shared-parking arrangement is most effective in highly walkable settings of the type envisioned for Spring Hill. There will be an interconnected network of streets and paths with comfortable sidewalks, small blocks that are easy to walk around, and enjoyable attractions and places worth walking to. Thus the development will form a "park-once" district in which many residents (and visitors once they arrive) can live, work, shop, be entertained, visit friends, and attend cultural events without using a vehicle. This further reduces the parking demand, in addition to the many other town-wide benefits such as reducing traffic congestion, reducing air pollution, and creating a stronger sense of place.

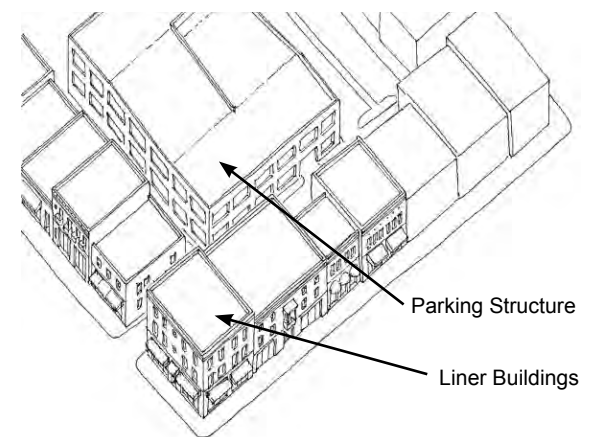
In addition to reformed parking calculations, parking can be addressed in Spring Hill's neighborhood centers through a combination of mid-block parking and newly-created on-street parking. At the intersection of Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue, a large portion of the parking will need to be absorbed into parking structures in order to achieve the walkable district envisioned by residents. As larger parcels such as the Spring Hill Village shopping center redevelop, parking can be centralized within parking structures. These parking structures must be lined with habitable space in order to be integrated into the village center. This habitable space can consist of retail space on the ground floor, and apartments or office space in the upper levels. Liner buildings may be attached to the parking structure structure when space and construction budget requires, however it is prefera-



This parking structure is lined with an attached mixed-use building; habitable space along the street edge is crucial for natural surveillance and street character.

able that the liner buildings are detached structures built around the parking structure. This provides greater flexibility over time for redevelopment, allowing either the liner building or the parking structure to be redeveloped without requiring the entire structure to be demolished.

Once the parking structures are built, smaller parcels can share the parking structure space with the larger tenants through a shared parking arrangement. This will allow them to dedicate their own property to retail, office, or residential uses. Smaller parcels will benefit from this arrangement with increased development opportunities, while larger parcels will benefit from the increased foot traffic from visitors walking throughout the area.



Parking structure liner buildings can also be detached structures.

PRIVATE INVESTMENT

The intent of *The Blueprint for Spring Hill* is to encourage redevelopment of private properties in an organized manner. It provides a unified vision, and each redevelopment project is a positive addition to achieving that vision. Although the master plan shows most parcels in a different configuration than what currently exists, it is understood that redevelopment will happen over time and may not happen exactly as shown. Redevelopment should, however, follow the basic principles illustrated and described throughout this report. Each corner at the intersection of Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue has a special character and different challenges are associated with the redevelopment of each. Possibilities for infill development and redevelopment of these areas include:

Northeast Corner Properties

The northeast corner of the study area contains a shopping center that in its current configuration includes a grocery store, hardware store, boutiques, several eating establishments, and other small retail stores. The shopping center is surrounded by a series of smaller parcels that contain two banks, a historic building housing a jewelry store, a convenience store, a power sub-station, and other small community businesses. Farther to the east, away from the intersection, there are offices and the local coffee shop, Carpe Diem. Cooperation between these many property owners will assist in proper development and plan implementation. Although the shopping center today receives a fair amount of customers, the plan envisions this area further enhanced, with better utilization of its parking area, and even higher profitability.



Northeast quadrant, proposed: Street improvements, mixed-use street-oriented buildings, and the addition of public greens help to unify the village center.

This area has the opportunity to become much more than a strip commercial shopping center. With appropriate, phase-able planning and development, Spring Hill Village shopping center and its surrounding businesses can be transformed into a mixed-use center of streets and blocks.



Existing Conditions, northeast quadrant of Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue

Northeast Corner Proposed Infill



Potential Redevelopment of the Spring Hill Village shopping center

The Spring Hill Village shopping center occupies a large parcel of land and has great potential for redevelopment. If such a large parcel were to be redeveloped it could act as a catalyst for the surrounding businesses to redevelop as well. As it redevelops, a few key elements should occur to be in keeping with *The Blueprint for Spring Hill* – the addition of a new street connection between Old Shell Road and North McGregor Avenue, a parking structure to accommodate excess parking, and the creation of a new public space.

A new street functioning as a "square back" can provide new connections between Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue by following the existing drive aisle in front of the shopping center. This would bisect the property allowing the current shopping center to remain while the other side of the street can be developed with new buildings.

Between the existing CVS and the Bruno's grocery store sits a portion of parking lot that is under-utilized. With minimal interruption to the existing businesses, this section of parking could be redeveloped to include a parking structure, liner buildings, and additional retail, office, and/or residential space. The new parking structure would eliminate the need for the existing parking lot, and a central green could be created as a community gathering space.

Supporting Businesses

A second new street connection between the existing CVS and Private Collection (a jewelry store within a historic building) would increase connectivity and create greater visibility into the heart of the village center. On-street parking along the new street, as well as shared parking, will accommodate the parking needs of Private Collection.



Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue redevelop with new street connections, street improvements, street-oriented architecture, parking structures, and a new community green.

With shared parking accommodating parking needs and street improvements in place, businesses around the shopping center can more easily redevelop with additional square footage and bring the buildings closer to the street.

A few existing buildings within the village center are already oriented toward the street and should remain. The two historic buildings that house Private Collection and Starbucks, as well as the vacant retail building next to the Starbucks, former home of Five Gold Monkeys, could remain and serve as examples for proper urban development.



Spring Hill Village shopping center- existing conditions

Southeast Corner Properties

The southeast corner of the intersection of Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue includes the Spring Hill Baptist Church, the Monte L. Moorer Spring Hill Branch Library, and BankTrust.

Spring Hill Baptist Church

Spring Hill Baptist Church is one of the largest property owners in the area, and it is continuing to grow. The church already has plans for redevelopment that include creating a public gathering place next to the sanctuary, adding new buildings, and constructing a prominent entrance. As the church continues to grow, managing the parking issue will remain important. The church currently plans to create additional surface parking lots, which will provide necessary parking but does not necessarily enhance the physical appearance of the church facility. If the church was to build a structured parking lined with habitable space, the land reserved for surface lots could be put to better use. For example, the new public green next to the sanctuary could have a new building to its north as well, to create a better defined and more memorable gathering space. The property to the south of the church could remain as open space, but serve as overflow parking or space for community events such as pumpkin and Christmas tree sales; this would be appropriate adjacent to the residential homes further to the south. The habitable space lining the parking structure could be used to accommodate the additional facility space that the church needs. Parking demands for church functions are often at hours that differ from other land uses, making the church an ideal candidate for a shared parking solution with nearby buildings. As part of a shared parking agreement, the church could use the new parking structure as a revenue source. Nearby businesses could pay to use the facility, and benefit by having more of their own property open for redevelopment.



Monte L. Moorer Library

During the charrette, residents expressed concern for the future of the Monte L. Moorer Spring Hill Branch of the Mobile Public Library. The current building is unable to expand on its site due to limited land availability and parking constraints. This inability to expand prevents the library from adding new volumes or incorporating new technologies. Several options have been presented for the future of the Spring Hill Library. The options include finding a new site for the library within Spring Hill, preferably within close proximity to its current location, or for the library to expand at its current location. Many Spring Hill residents prefer for the library to remain at the Old Shell and McGregor intersection, as it is at the center of Spring Hill and next to Spring Hill College. The library could remain in its existing location, and join in a partnership with the church to build a shared parking structure that would cover a portion of both of their properties, as shown in the plan. The increased parking on less land would allow the library to expand by adding a second level, or by negotiating with the church to build an addition to the south, on what is today church property. Other alternatives include the purchase of another parcel in the vicinity for this important public purpose, or a creative public/private partnership to combine the library redevelopment and accompanied parking with mixed-use development nearby.

BankTrust Property

The BankTrust building was completed in August 2006. The bank graciously worked with the Village of Spring Hill to design a building that fits within the desired character for the area. While many of the architectural details reflect the desires of the community, the building is placed towards the back of the lot with parking in front of the build-



Monte L. Moorer Spring Hill Branch of the Mobile Public Library - existing conditions

ing. With the incorporation of on-street and shared parking in structures, the BankTrust property has the opportunity to be of even greater importance within the Spring Hill community. By adding a small street connection through the property to connect with the church property, a village green could be created at this corner. Spring Hill residents have expressed a desire to have an area to hold public gatherings and holiday ceremonies in the heart of their community. If located at this prominent corner, it would become an amenity for the community to enjoy everyday.

The BankTrust property currently extends to include a vacant store, previously Five Gold Monkeys, up to the parking of the historic building that today contains a Starbucks. Although these buildings are older, they already front the street, with doors that open to the sidewalk. The buildings could be saved or replaced with a new mixed-use building; additional leasable square footage could be added by adding a new story or additional building footprint in the vacant gap between the buildings (as illustrated in the plan).

West of McGregor Avenue

The Southwest corner of the intersection includes the former Spoke 'n Trail at the corner, Spring Hill Baptist Church activity center, Holiday Place, and several other small businesses. The Northwest corner includes a gas station and a variety of small business front the north side of Old Shell Road.

Spring Hill Baptist Church Activity Center

The Spring Hill Baptist Church Activity Center is located across the street from the actual church. The opportunity exists to create a stronger physical connection between the activity center and sanctuary by adding a public green in front of the activity center. It is important to spatially enclose the green with buildings that frame and face it, and to complete the transition from the neighboring houses and the mixed-use area. This may also offer a way for the church to provide townhomes or condominiums for elderly members of the congregation; the church has expressed interest in this concept. As the area develops it will become a desirable place for seniors to live within close proximity to the commercial center, allowing them to remain independent without driving.

Former Spoke 'n Trail Property

The former Spoke 'n Trail property is currently vacant and is a key site for redevelopment. The proper redevelopment of this site will set a high-quality precedent for future development within Spring Hill. The property should be developed to include a multi-story, mixed-use, set-forward, street-oriented building. This new building could be developed in conjunction with a greater mixed-use development that includes a mid-block parking structure that is set behind street-oriented buildings. A public plaza could be located at the corner of Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue to serve as a civic space.



Holiday Place

The character of Holiday Place helps to set the tone for the rest of the village center. It is comprised of several small buildings with a serene residential feeling. Improved connections between Holiday Place and the existing church activity center parking lot would improve circulation and visibility for the small businesses in the area. Additional buildings could be incorporated to complete this charming anchor for the village center.

Exxon Gas Station

The Exxon gas station serves a vital role in Spring Hill. The service station includes gas pumps and service bays facing Old Shell Road. As storage tank and pump replacement becomes necessary, this station should be redesigned to become an urban gas station. By placing the pumps away from the intersection and pulling the store towards the street, the corner will be strengthened.

Supporting Businesses

At present, the row of small lots along Old Shell Road west of McGregor Avenue have irregular sizes and shapes and are at a point of maximum build-out due to current parking, landscape, and drainage requirements. The small businesses on these lots will benefit from proposed zoning reform, which will reduce the current parking, landscaping, and stormwater requirements for each property and will re-distribute these uses more efficiently throughout the district. Furthermore, on-street parking and streetscape improvements along Old Shell Road will increase foot traffic and create a more attractive pedestrian environment, making these properties more attractive for street-oriented, Main Street-style development. As these properties become more desirable and reach the point of redevelopment, property owners will have to



Southwest quadrant, proposed: Including a new public building on the corner helps to unify the village center.

accommodate increased square footage on their properties to make redevelopment financially feasible. *The Blueprint for Spring Hill* suggests two strategies for providing increased square footage on these properties: replacing single-story buildings with street-oriented, multi-story buildings on existing properties, or assembling multiple parcels together. Each of these strategies will allow existing businesses to expand in place, and will result in street-oriented development that supports the walkable village center.



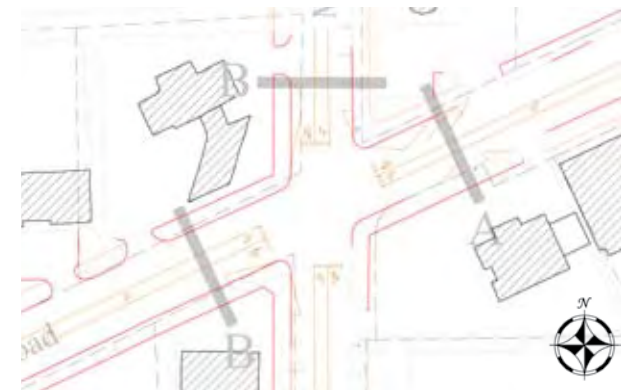
Existing Conditions, southwest quadrant of Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue



Southwest Quadrant, proposed: Alternative option for redevelopment showing a mixed-use building on the corner.

IMPLEMENTATION

Even before the charrette the Village of Spring Hill, Inc. was hard at work to make improvements around this important intersection. As discussed in Chapter 1, the Village of Spring Hill has succeeded in planning and funding sidewalk improvements, the removal of Bradford Pear trees, and replacement with proper street trees, and the relocation of unsightly power lines. The next step for Spring Hill is to continue streetscape improvements for the intersection of Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue. The design team created a detailed street improvement plan for the area that details the location of sidewalks, street trees, and roadway re-striping which includes parallel parking. The design team worked to provide a plan which achieves the goals of the Village of Spring Hill, while accommodating the short-term needs of existing businesses within the village center.



Phase 1 - street implementation plan

OLD SHELL ROAD & MCGREGOR AVENUE – GETTING THERE

The following steps are necessary to implement the plan for Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue:

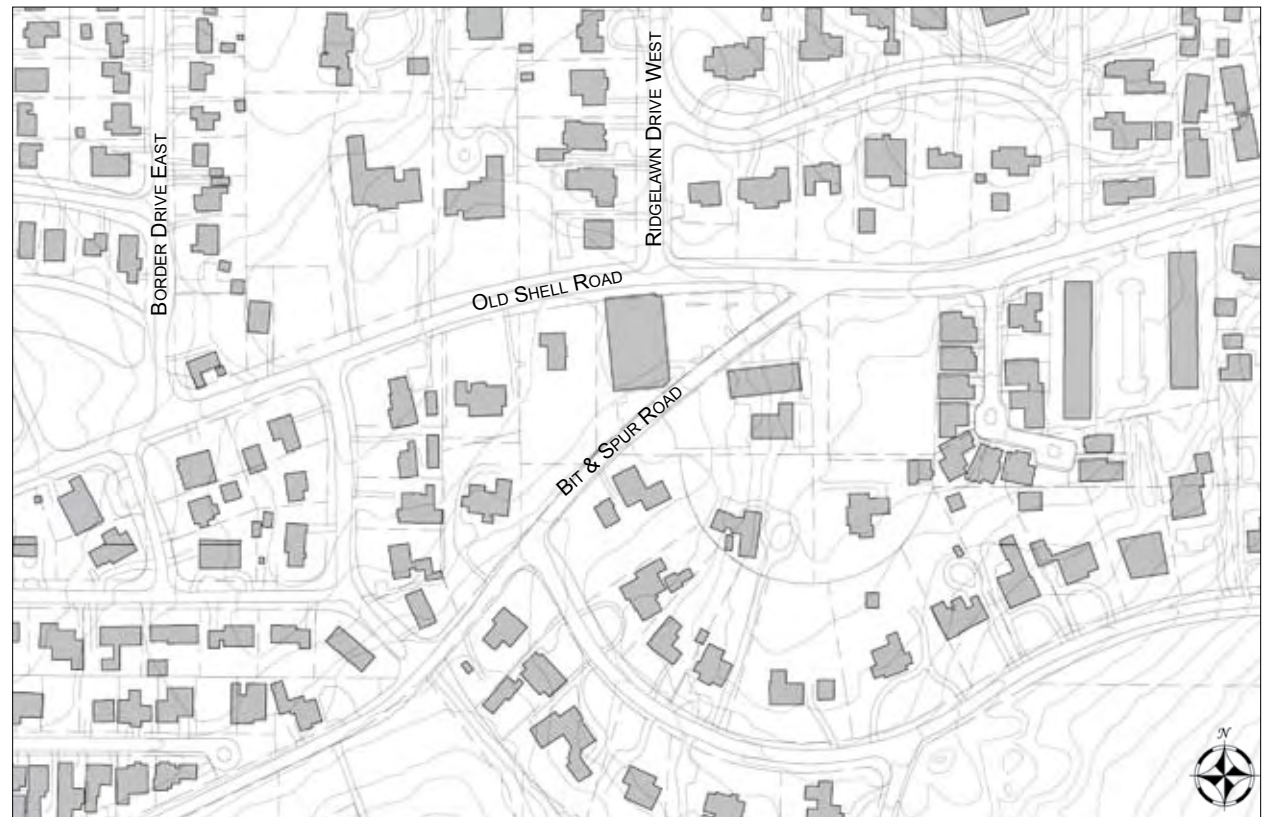
- a. Submit *The Blueprint for Spring Hill* to the City of Mobile for adoption.
- b. Reform the existing Mobile Zoning Code to include an overlay for Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue so that it can become walkable district. Either create a zoning overlay district for the area or incorporate the reform into a wider-reaching form-based code for the City of Mobile.
- c. Continue to work with the City of Mobile to garner municipal support for plan implementation, including streetscape improvements such as new street trees, sidewalks, pedestrian-scaled lighting, on-street parking, and crosswalks.
- d. Continue to seek funding for planning initiatives.
- e. Work with the City on funding mechanisms such as tax increment financing to provide public improvements, including parking.
- f. Consider on-street metered parking to fund area maintenance, with parking proceeds going to the needs of the business district rather than the general fund.
- g. Work with the City to provide a long-term parking construction and management plan and eliminate specific on-site parking requirements for individual properties in favor of a district strategy.
- h. Work with residents, private property owners and developers to coordinate new development.
- i. Once the intersection is established as a community gathering place, continue to enhance the area with special pavement, and focal points such as statues, fountains or clocks.
- j. Remove McGregor Avenue between Dauphin Street and Spring Hill Avenue from the Major Street Plan for Mobile and re-designate it as a walkable thoroughfare.
- k. Designate Old Shell Road between Dilston Lane and Whites Lane as a walkable thoroughfare.
- l. Work with the City on a village center storm drainage plan to eliminate specific on-site requirements.

Additional implementation strategies are included in Chapter 6.

BIT & SPUR & OLD SHELL ROAD

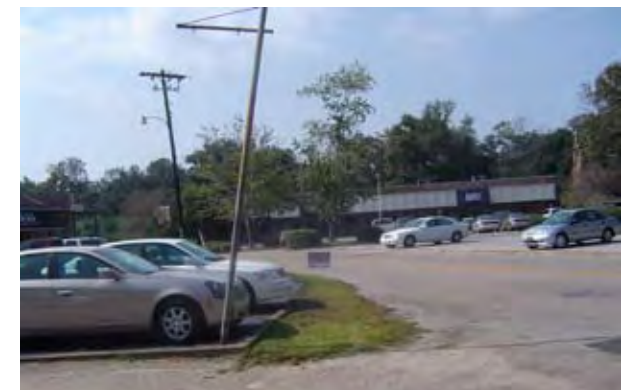
As described in Chapter 1, Bit & Spur Road and Old Shell Road constitutes one of Spring Hill's most important intersections. The area has developed from a rural crossroads to a small complex of shops. Despite the convenience of the commercial establishments at this location, most residents feel that the intersection does not fulfill its potential within the community. The irregular angle of the intersection makes vehicular movements dangerous, as cars waiting to turn on both Old Shell Road and Bit & Spur have a difficulty seeing oncoming vehicles. The angle of the intersection allows drivers to speed through the right turn while oncoming traffic is obstructed behind the curve on Old Shell Road. Furthermore, the intersection is regulated by only one stop sign at Bit & Spur, complicating left hand turns during peak hours.

Although the intersection is within convenient walking distance of many Spring Hill residences, there are currently no sidewalks along Old Shell Road or Bit & Spur to facilitate walking or biking to the shops at this neighborhood center. The properties themselves are automobile-oriented, with informal asphalt parking lots fronting the street and the buildings pushed to the back of the lot. Both Old Shell Road and Bit & Spur Road seem to merge with the parking lots, creating a confusing wasteland of asphalt at the intersection. Landscaping, pavement, and streetscape are inconsistent and do little to contribute to the sense of place of the area. Finally, the architecture at the intersection consists of two rectangular buildings, with older homes serving as offices and small businesses around the intersection.



Bit & Spur Road and Old Shell Road - existing conditions

The following recommendations are based on two different scenarios for Bit & Spur that support the first principles of the plan. Each recommendation should be considered as one step towards achieving a walkable, connected, mixed-use, and street-oriented neighborhood center. These recommendations are interchangeable, independent pieces that can be implemented incrementally, and be used to build upon one another.



The intersection of Bit & Spur and Old Shell Road is currently defined by surface parking lots and aging buildings.

Scenario A – Re-aligned Intersection



Small, detached buildings front the street and serve as incubators for small businesses.

On-street parking and galleries are introduced along Bit & Spur Road, providing convenient parking for visitors and creating a comfortable pedestrian environment.



A special site is reserved for civic purposes.

Parking lots are relocated behind buildings, allowing the street front to be dedicated to sidewalks, retail and restaurants.

Flatiron buildings front the intersection, making use of odd-angled parcels.

Alleys are created behind the lots in order to improve connectivity around the neighborhood center.

LEGEND

-  Proposed Buildings
-  Civic Buildings
-  Existing Buildings
-  Green Space

Scenario B – New Street Connection



A new street is created between Old Shell Road and Bit & Spur Road, creating a safer 90 degree intersection with a traffic light.

New multi-family housing built adjacent to the neighborhood center in order to provide smaller, more walkable housing options in Spring Hill.

Small village green created to define the neighborhood center.

A special site is reserved for civic purposes.

New multi-story detached buildings front the street and create a sense of place.

The Madison is re-oriented toward Old Shell Road, providing a public courtyard that will contribute to the streetscape.

As described in Chapter 1, Lavretta Park is an important community gathering place located just west of Bit & Spur Road along Old Shell Road. The playground, playing fields, and community classroom building are important civic spaces that serve the surrounding neighborhood and all residents of Spring Hill, particularly families with children.

The entrance to the park along Old Shell Road is fronted by two crescent-shaped blocks. The eastern block has a vacant lot fronting a triangular right-of-way that currently serves as an informal dirt parking lot with large oaks trees. The western block has a convenience store, a Masonic Lodge, and a neighborhood association building fronting a similar triangular right-of-way that currently is an irregular and badly-maintained asphalt and dirt parking lot. These two blocks are strategically placed to become elegant entrances to the park and to the surrounding neighborhood; however, at present they are characterized by haphazard parking lots, uninspiring architecture, and vacant lots.

At present, getting to Lavretta Park can be a challenge: visitors who do not live in the adjacent neighborhood are forced to risk walking along or crossing Old Shell Road in precarious conditions—no sidewalk, no crosswalks, and no traffic light to control vehicular movement. Most families are forced to drive to the park, and ultimately need parking spaces. This parking must be accommodated within the existing right-of-way around the park in a manner that will be safe for children.

The following recommendations are based on two different scenarios for Lavretta Park that support the first principles of the plan.



Lavretta Park - existing conditions



Lavretta Park's popularity has created a need for parking.

Scenario C – New Streets Around Lavretta Park



Commercial and civic buildings front the crescent around the park, creating a small-scale neighborhood center.

On-street parking, sidewalks, and street trees are implemented along the new streets in order to create a comfortable pedestrian environment.

Adjacent lots along Old Shell Road developed with townhouses and mansion apartment buildings.

Traditional farmer's market built in public open space can become a community focal point.

New road created along the crescent at Lavretta Park will create an address for the properties around the park.

LEGEND

-  Proposed Buildings
-  Civic Buildings
-  Existing Buildings
-  Green Space

Scenario D – New Access Road Along Lavretta Park



Access lane created to fulfill parking needs without a parking lot.

New townhouses front park crescent providing a range of housing options in the neighborhood.

Existing public space in front of the crescent lots preserved as open park space.

Historic crescent lots defined with a new sidewalk, landscaping and buildings fronting the curve.

New gateway structures built at the entrances to Lavretta Park and the neighborhood create a sense of place.

PUBLIC IMPROVEMENTS

An important step in improving walkability and creating a sense of place at Bit & Spur and Old Shell Road is the provision of additional connections through the area, both as additional ways to move between Old Shell Road and Bit & Spur Road, but also as new ways to connect to the surrounding neighborhoods. Square backs, as proposed for the Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue intersection can also be used at the Old Shell and Bit & Spur intersection. These square back connections are illustrated in both Scenarios A and B. The benefits of square backs include making the main intersection easier to cross by spreading turning movements out over several locations. These square back streets could be created in the form of alleys that run behind the buildings along Bit & Spur and Old Shell Road. These alleys would provide access for service and parking to shops and residences. Additional ways of connecting the neighborhood center to the surrounding neighborhood, whether pedestrian or vehicular should also be explored.

The revitalization of Bit & Spur Road and Old Shell Road as a neighborhood center could commence with the redesign of the intersection to improve traffic flow and facilitate street-oriented development. One way of doing this is illustrated in Scenario B, where Bit & Spur Road is re-directed north to intersect Old Shell Road at a 90 degree angle. A traffic light would aid traffic movements and improve pedestrian and driver safety. In this scenario, the existing Bit & Spur alignment would be left in place as a one-way, northeast-bound segment.



This close-up of the plan for Bit & Spur demonstrates a new street connection to Old Shell Road and a triangular public park that can become a focal point for the neighborhood center.

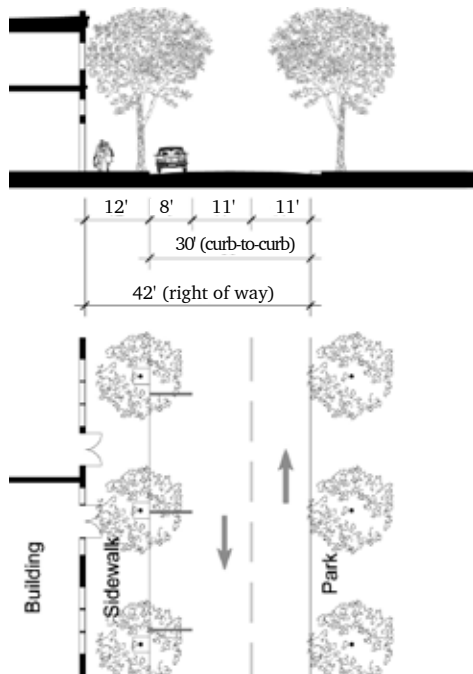
A village green, illustrated in Scenario B, could be created at the intersection of Bit & Spur Road and Old Shell Road. This green could be used as a focal point of new street-oriented development, and would become a civic open space with a statue or fountain that reflects the character of this more rural neighborhood center. This open green, over time, could become the location for a “postcard view” of Spring Hill, where neighborhood events and celebrations could be held.

Bit & Spur Street Improvements

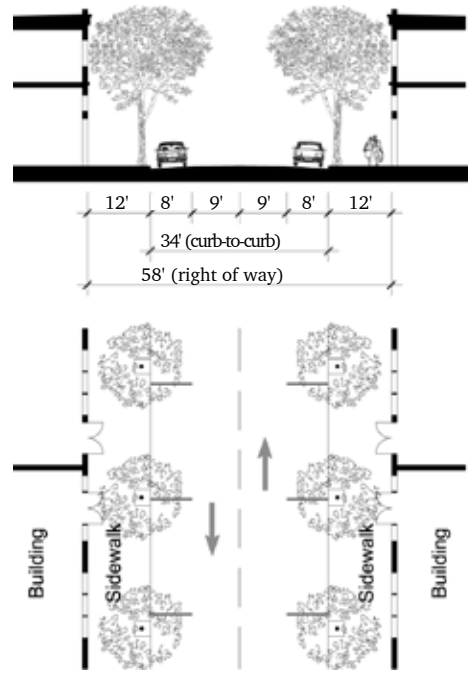
Whether a new street connection is created at Bit & Spur or the existing street design is kept, walkable street standards should be applied around the intersection. Old Shell Road, Bit & Spur Road, and the new connecting road should be redesigned to have on-street parking, street trees, wide sidewalks, and street-oriented buildings. The street sections below illustrate a few ways that the streets around Bit & Spur Road can be improved to contribute to a walkable neighborhood center.

The first illustration explains the configuration of the proposed new street connection between Bit & Spur Road and Old Shell Road. This street is intended to be a one-sided Main Street, with retail and housing fronting the street on one side and a newly created public park across the way. On-street parking is provided adjacent to retail to support the businesses and shield pedestrians from passing cars. A generous 12-foot sidewalk can accommodate outdoor dining or sidewalk sales. Street trees provide shade for pedestrians.

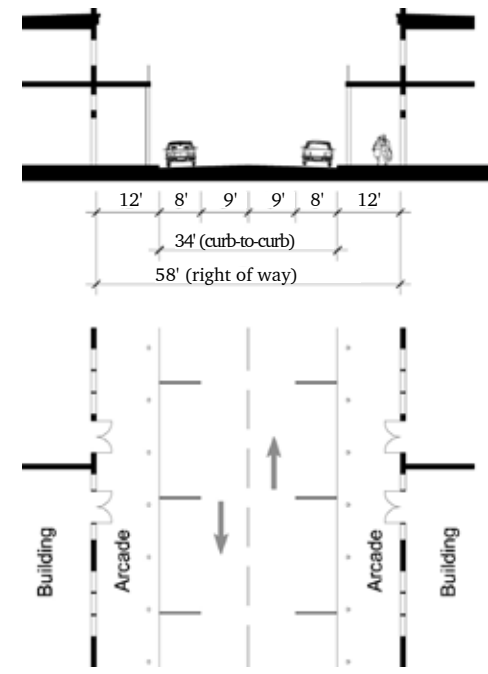
The following two street sections illustrate alternative designs for Bit & Spur Road as it redevelops as a walkable street within the neighborhood center. Each alternative provides generous sidewalks and parallel parking, however the last alternative proposes the use of galleries to shelter the sidewalk. These galleries are in keeping with the Mobile tradition of architecture, and create both a comfortable sidewalk space as well as a usable terrace for the second floor of the building.



New street between Bit & Spur Road and Old Shell Road



Improved two-way section of Bit & Spur Road



Improved section of Bit & Spur Road with galleries

Lavretta Park Street Improvements

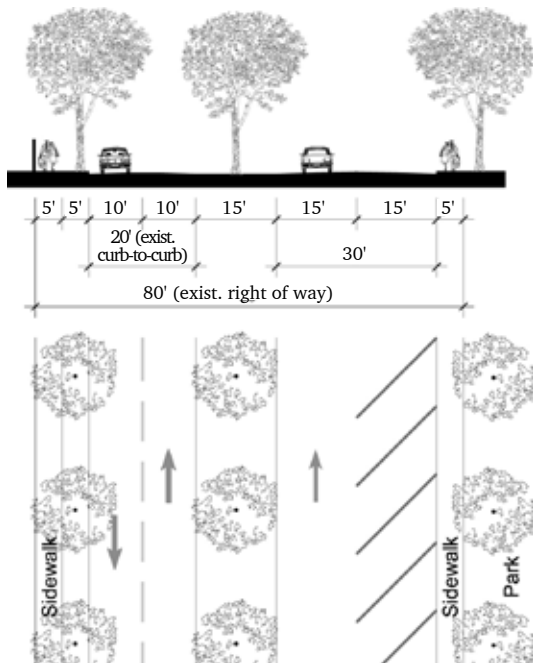
Lavretta Park can be better defined as both a community destination and as a neighborhood entrance by highlighting the historic crescent-shaped right-of-way at the entrance of the park. One of the first steps for improving the park is to provide additional parking that is convenient, safe, and attractive. This can be accomplished by creating an access road parallel to Old Shell Road. A 15 foot, tree-lined median should separate the access road from the existing lanes of Old Shell Road. Many of the existing trees along Old Shell Road can be kept, as they fall within this 15 foot area. The access road will contain a slow-moving one-way lane with diagonal parking fronting the park for three blocks.

A sidewalk can be placed in front of the diagonal parking to allow easier access into the park. This road can serve the parking needs of both the playground and the Food Pak store, allowing the crescent-shaped right-of-way in front of the store to be transitioned from a parking lot to usable open space.

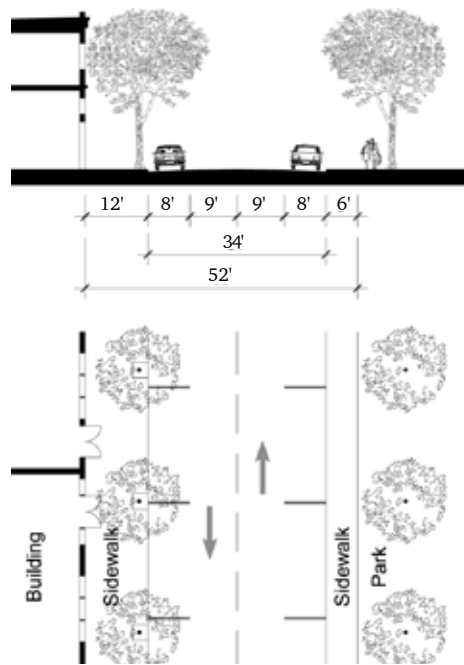
Another possibility at Lavretta Park is the creation of new roads running along the front of the crescent-shaped lots at the entrance of the park. This will allow these lots to be developed with street-oriented buildings. These new roads should be two-way, with parallel parking on both sides.

Generous sidewalks, landscaping, and pedestrian-scaled lighting should be provided along these streets. This will encourage development that will complement the park.

New gateway structures can be built at the entrances to Lavretta Park and the neighborhood. These gateways will mark an entrance into a unique place, giving the park a sense of identity. Other possibilities for development include the creation of an attractive, permanent open-air farmer's market pavilion that will provide additional uses for the park.



Access lane with angled parking parallel to Old Shell Road



New road aligned with the crescent shaped right-of-way



Gateway structures marking the entrances to Coral Gables, FL.

PRIVATE INVESTMENT

Once public improvements have begun and the vision for the Bit & Spur neighborhood center is in place, private investment can proceed to shape the intersection into a well-loved place. The existing parcels can be redeveloped over time with street-oriented buildings that will define the intersection and the proposed public green. Parking should be relocated from street-front parking lots to lots that are tucked behind the buildings, at the back of the lots. This will allow the street to become an attractive and pedestrian-friendly destination.

The parcels closest to the intersection can be developed with two to three-story, mixed-use buildings and should include ground-floor retail with residences or office space in the upper stories. Galleries should be permitted on these multi-level buildings as an additional method of providing shade and shelter for pedestrians.

As the neighborhood center transitions into the surrounding residential areas, smaller, detached buildings are recommended; these buildings can be mid-density multi-family buildings, such as mansion apartment buildings (multi-unit building with a street façade resembling a large detached house, hence "mansion") and townhouses currently found in Spring Hill. These multi-family units will provide additional residences close to the neighborhood center. The general character of the area should remain that of a small crossroads as opposed to the denser development of the village center found at Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue.

Bit & Spur Road



This illustration, looking south on Bit & Spur and Old Shell Road, describes a place where Spring Hill residents can live, work, shop and celebrate their community in a hamlet-style crossroads.

Lavretta Park



Lavretta Park - existing conditions include an asphalt parking lot, an irregular mix of community buildings, a convenience store, empty lots, and an informal parking lot for the park

A new vision for Lavretta Park includes an access road along Old Shell Road that will provide parking for the playground, and new development that fronts the crescent around the park. This development can house the existing convenience store and Masonic Lodge, but will also provide space for new multi-family housing units, townhouses, and additional retail space for uses such as ice cream shops and cafes.

Once public improvements are made around Lavretta Park, private investment can take the appropriate cues and begin to develop street-oriented buildings that shape the crescent and define the park. The western crescent, which is already defined with buildings, can be redeveloped over time with street-oriented buildings that house ice cream shops, cafes, and other uses that will complement the family nature of the park. These can be two to three-story buildings with apartments or offices in the upper floors. Parking for these buildings will be on-street, either in the access lane along Old Shell Road, on the newly-created crescent road, or behind the buildings, within the existing alley right-of-way.

The eastern crescent, currently a vacant lot, can be developed with multi-family housing units that will anchor the entrance to the park and define the other half of the crescent. The units will provide housing options for the residents of Spring Hill close to the amenity of the Lavretta Park and the neighborhood center around Bit & Spur Road. These housing units can be street-oriented townhouses or mansion-style apartment buildings and can either be rented or owned. Private parking for these units can be provided on the rear alley, and visitor parking can be located along the crescent street running in front of the buildings. Adjacent lots along Old Shell Road can also be developed with attractive, compatible multi-family housing.

Change Over Time



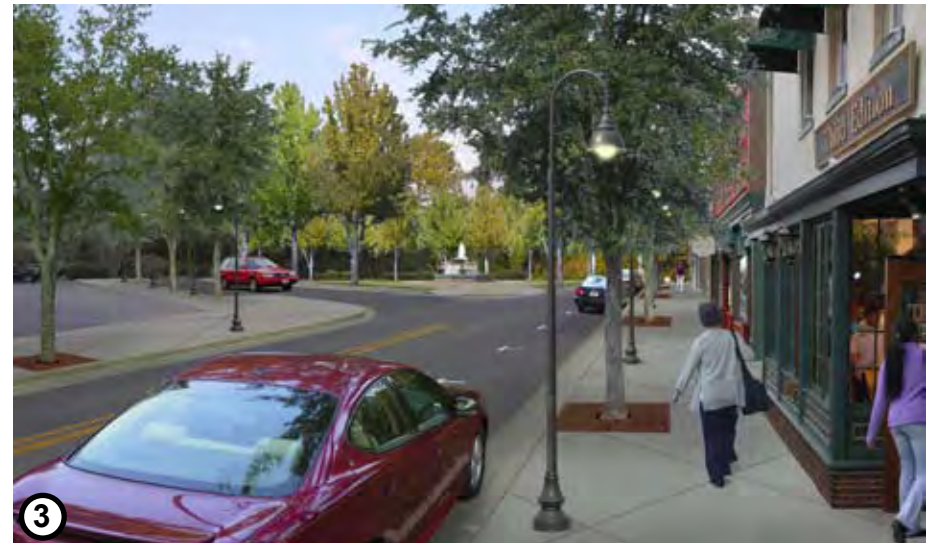
Existing Conditions - Bit & Spur is currently defined by irregular asphalt parking lots, inconsistent landscaping, and uninspiring architecture.



Step 1: Public improvements set the stage for a walkable neighborhood center. Overhead utility lines are removed, generous sidewalks are built, pedestrian-scaled lighting is provided, and on-street parking, a new safer intersection, and a neighborhood green are implemented.



Step 2: Street trees are planted along Bit & Spur in order to provide shade for pedestrians and to define the street.



Step 3: New mixed-use, street-oriented development defines the public realm. Traditional multi-story buildings with doors and windows facing the street make the pedestrian realm interesting and attractive. Parking lots are hidden behind the buildings.



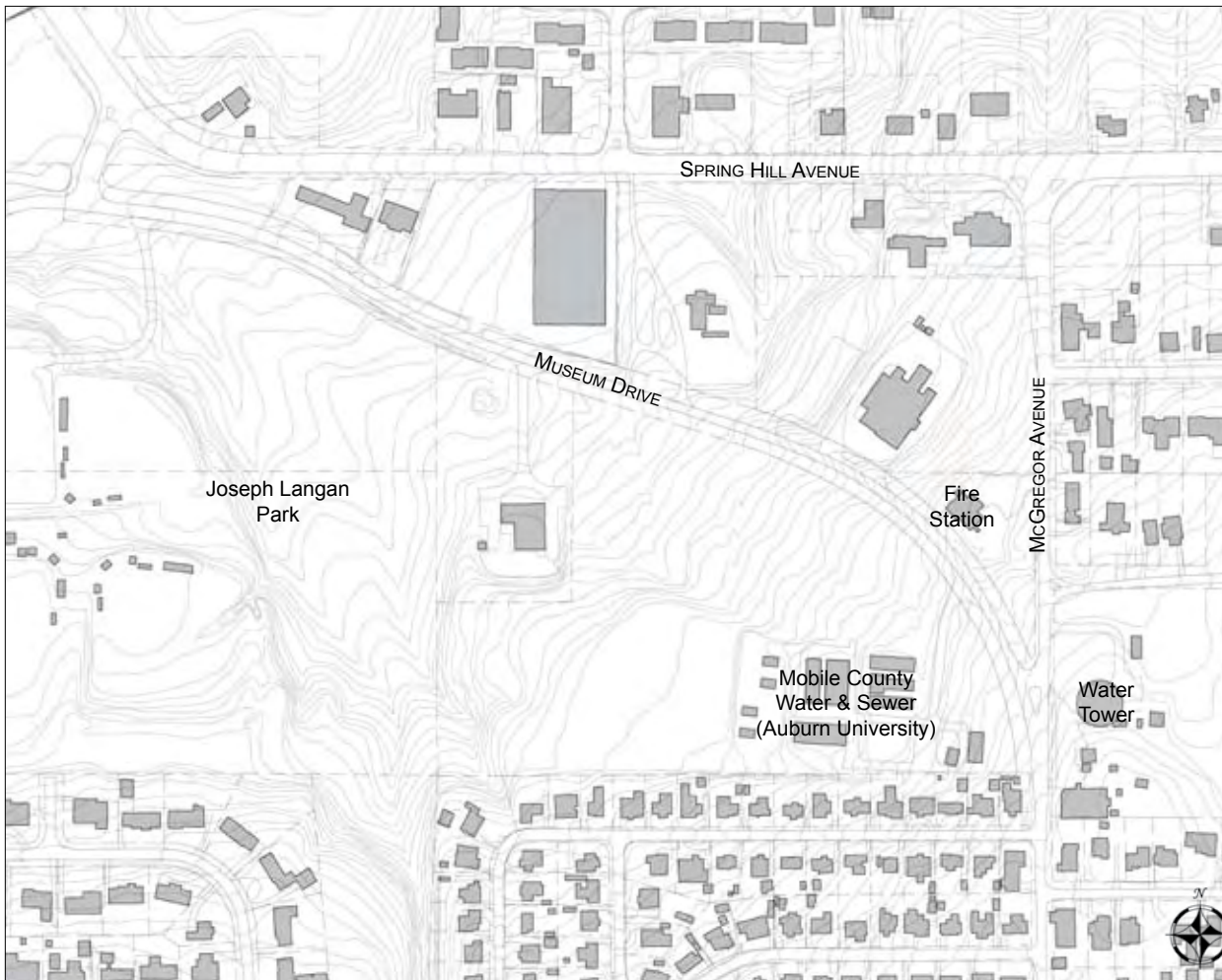
Step 4: Additional development occurs, creating an enclosed street space and defining the new corner neighborhood park. As the area becomes a well-loved neighborhood center, new features such as cobbled streets can be introduced.

BIT & SPUR ROAD AND LAVRETTA PARK – GETTING THERE

The following steps are necessary to create a well-loved neighborhood center at Bit & Spur Road and Lavretta Park:

- a. Submit *The Blueprint for Spring Hill* to the City of Mobile for adoption.
- b. Reform the existing Mobile Zoning Code to allow street-oriented development along Bit & Spur Road. Either create a zoning overlay district for the area or incorporate the reform into a wider-reaching form-based code for the City of Mobile.
- c. Continue to work with the City of Mobile to garner municipal support for plan implementation, including streetscape improvements such as new street trees, sidewalks, pedestrian-scaled lighting, on-street parking, and crosswalks..
- d. Continue to seek funding for planning initiatives.
- e. Work with the City on funding mechanisms such as tax increment financing to provide public improvements, including parking.
- f. Work with residents, private property owners and developers to coordinate new development.
- g. Select a preferred alternative for the re-design of the intersection of Bit & Spur Road and Old Shell Road, to improve safety and functionality.
- h. Add on-street parking along Bit & Spur Road, and complete streetscape improvements such as sidewalks, street trees, and pedestrian-scaled lighting.
- i. Once the Bit & Spur intersection is established as a community gathering place, continue to enhance the area with special pavement, and focal points such as statues, fountains or clocks.
- j. Provide additional connections around Lavretta Park with a new access road and a street running in front of the crescent-shaped lots.
- k. Fulfill parking needs with on-street parking on all new streets around Lavretta Park.
- l. Preserve the crescent-shaped rights-of-way at the entrance of Lavretta Park as public open space, for informal celebrations and gatherings.
- m. Once the park is established as a community gathering place, continue to enhance the area with special gateway buildings or a permanent farmer's market pavilion.
- n. Work with the City on a neighborhood center storm drainage plan to eliminate specific on-site requirements.

Additional implementation strategies are included in Chapter 6.



Museum Drive & McGregor Avenue - Existing Conditions

MUSEUM DRIVE & MCGREGOR AVENUE

The area defined by Museum Drive, McGregor Avenue, and Spring Hill Avenue is currently characterized by civic amenities such as the Fire Station and Water Tower, the nearby recreational areas of Joseph Langan Park, auto-oriented buildings with parking lots which meet the street, and surrounding neighborhoods.

At the start of the planning process, the design team was faced with the objective of creating a plan for the area that:

- Provides direction to create a pedestrian-friendly environment, including recommendations for pedestrian improvements to the public rights-of-way and private properties;
- Offers a new design solution for the intersection of Museum Drive and McGregor Avenue, identified as dangerous by residents;
- Responds to the topography;
- Enhances connections (both vehicular and pedestrian) to Joseph Langan Park; and,
- Includes design guidance for properties in the area which are ready for redevelopment.

In turn, the team created three plan scenarios which illustrate possibilities for both public and private improvements in the area. The plans contain interchangeable parts; many of the individual ideas can work with each of the scenarios. These plans provide multiple design solutions for comparison and evaluation, and can be used to guide future improvements in this area.

Scenario A – Neighborhood Open Space

New neighborhoods contain multi-family and single-family homes to accommodate a diverse range of family incomes, sizes, and types.

New street connections respect the existing topography and form walkable-sized blocks onto which new street-oriented buildings can face.

A new tower could terminate the view along Museum Drive and act as a clue to drivers of the deflection in the road.

The Fire Station can be repositioned to create a formal civic presence, and mark the entrance to Joseph Langan Park and area museums.



Connections are created between Joseph Langan Park and the surrounding area.

Open space can be located in this area.

Museum Drive can be improved with sidewalks, bike paths, and street trees and other landscaping, and serve as a parkway entrance to Joseph Langan Park and area museums.

A modern roundabout is one alternative for redesign of the intersection of Museum Drive and McGregor Avenue.

Scenario B – Museum Parkway



Scenario C – New Residential Neighborhood

A slight kink in the road will help to calm traffic as it comes around the curve and will manage speeds.

New buildings are oriented toward the street; parking is located to the rear, and may be accessed via alleys.



A new hotel/ bed and breakfast and Children's Museum Activity Center are potential new amenities that can be located in this area.

A formal entrance to Joseph Langan Park can be a part of the redevelopment of the Mobile County Water & Sewer property.

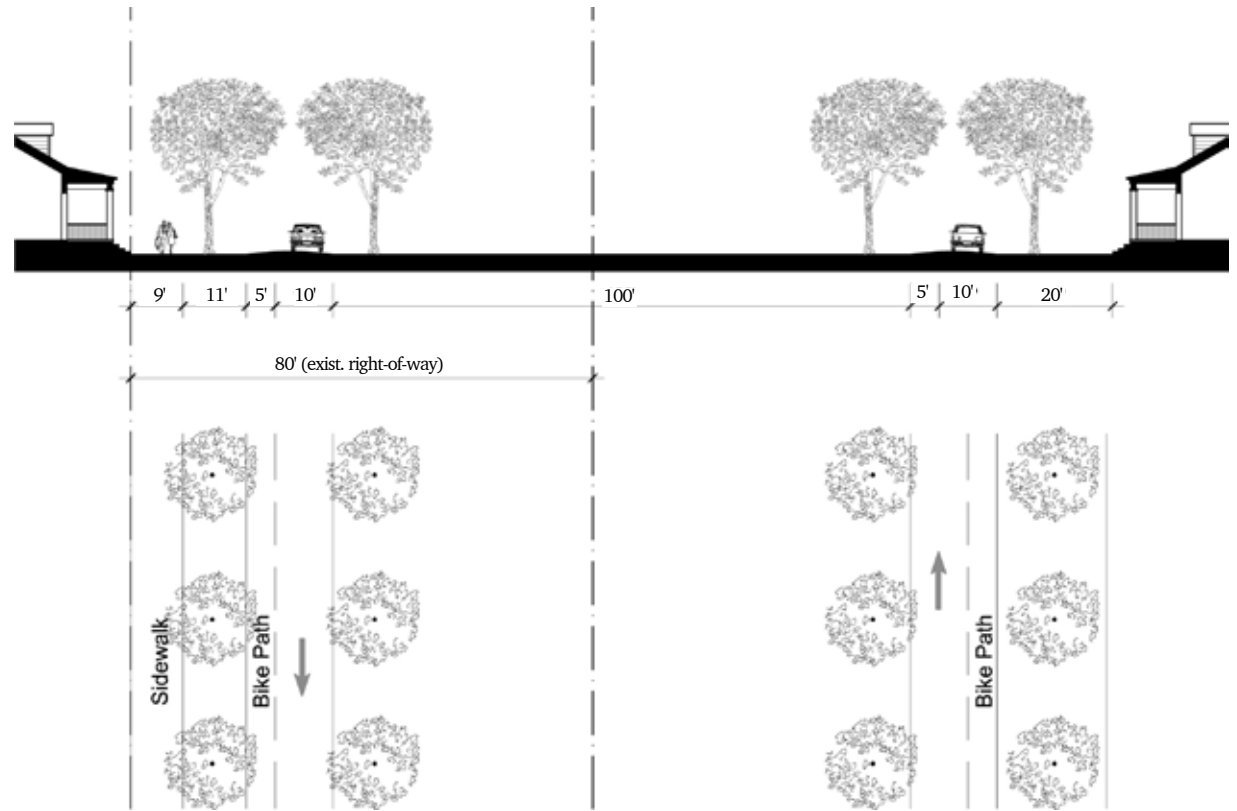
The intersection of Museum Drive and McGregor Avenue can be resolved as a "T" intersection, which can help to improve safety.

PUBLIC IMPROVEMENT

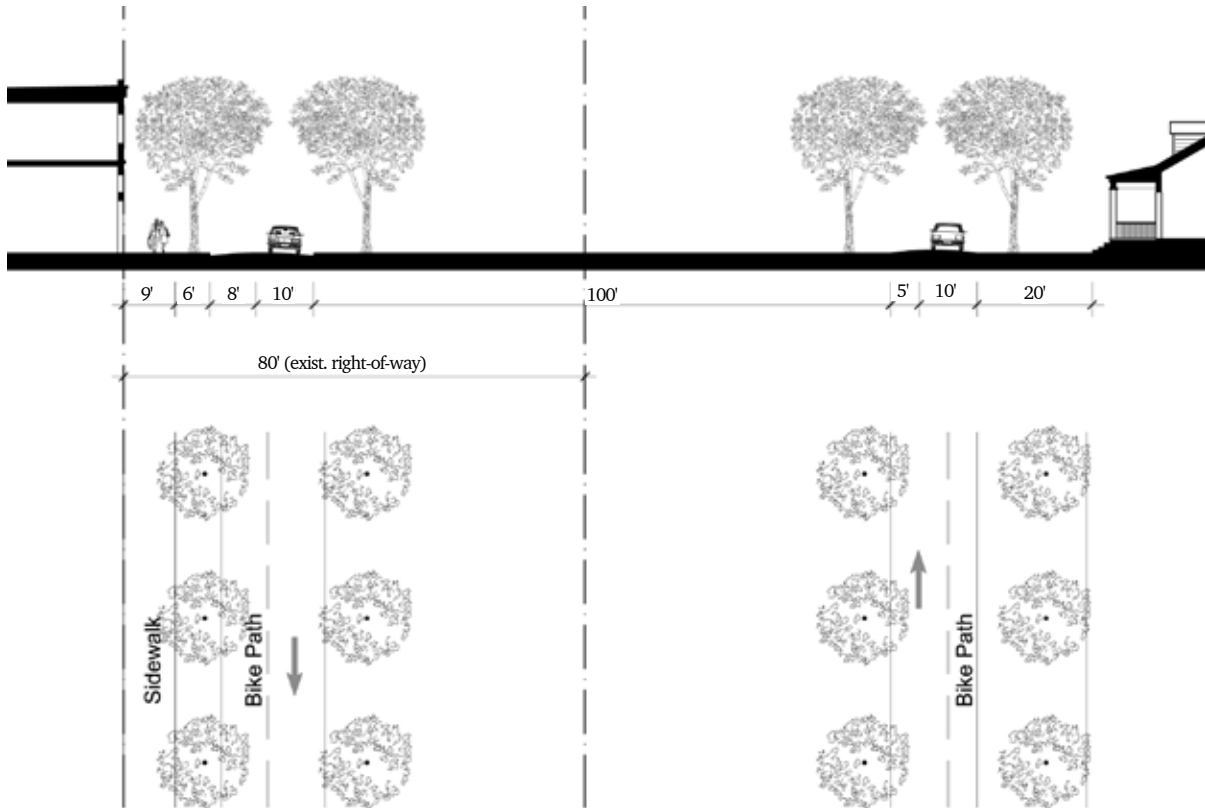
A potential first step to the transformation of this area is street infrastructure improvements along Museum Drive. These improvements may include the addition of street trees, additional sidewalks, pedestrian-scaled lighting, crosswalks, and bike lanes. All of these improvements would improve walkability, and set the stage for additional pedestrian-friendly redevelopment of this area.

There were two design options for improvements to Museum Drive explored; the first is a “parkway” section which includes new sidewalks, and street trees to calm traffic and enhance the walkability of the existing right-of-way. As Museum Drive approaches the fire station, the road should be realigned within the right-of-way to have a slight kink in the road. This will allow for a terminated vista (perhaps a new fire hose tower at the fire station) and to slow traffic by reducing the gentle curve that promotes high traffic speeds today. The second is a “grand parkway”, with a wide landscaped median, and one-way traffic on each side. This would create a formal entrance to Joseph Langan Park and the Museum area. This design can either have an urban configuration, with curb-and-gutter and on-street parking on the north side of the street, or a rural configuration with a bike path, swale, and no parking. The urban section should be used near more intense development (such as a hotel, townhomes, etc), and the rural where lower intensity uses (such as single-family detached housing or open space) are planned.

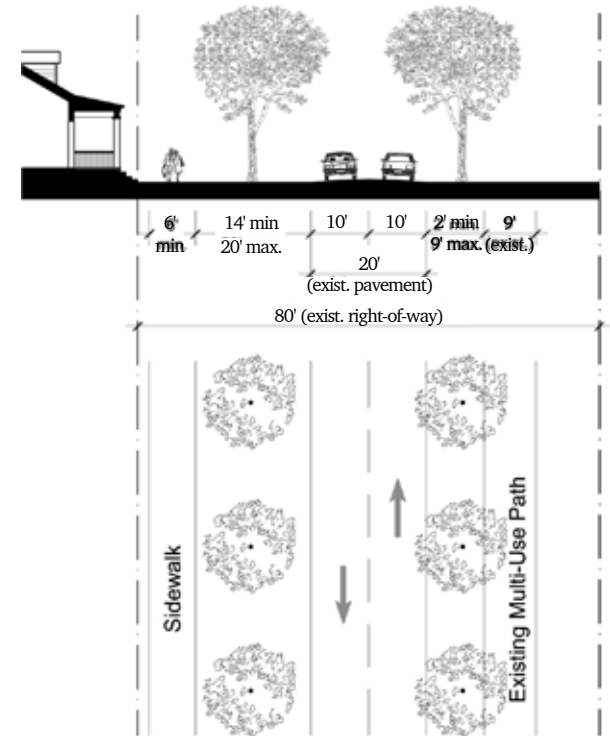
Both the “parkway” and “grand parkway” options include the necessary elements to encourage pedestrian activity, and promote street-oriented redevelopment of surrounding parcels.



Museum Drive - "Grand Parkway" Rural Section



Museum Drive - "Grand Parkway" Urban Section



Museum Drive - "Parkway" Section



A "T" intersection design could simplify the traffic pattern and create a safer intersection.



Existing Conditions: Museum Drive and McGregor Avenue

Intersection Design

The intersection of Museum Drive and McGregor Avenue serves a gateway to Spring Hill and Joseph Langan Park. The existing configuration allows high-speed travel through the intersection, and was identified by the community as a safety problem. In order to enhance the safety of the intersection while continuing to handle traffic flow, two options for redesign of this intersection were explored: a "T" intersection and a modern roundabout.

"T" Intersection

A "T" intersection design would involve re-alignment of Museum Drive to meet McGregor Avenue at a 90 degree angle, as illustrated at right. This design would simplify traffic flow, by providing a conventional intersection design, and provide some traffic calming by requiring traffic along Museum Drive to come to a full stop before entering McGregor Avenue. The alignment of Museum Drive could align with Mordecai Lane, to further simplify circulation and reduce potential vehicular conflict points.

Modern Roundabout

A modern roundabout accommodates traffic flow and capacity while creating a greater sense of place and allowing safer conditions for pedestrians. Walkability at a roundabout is increased because traffic speeds are lower as vehicles approach and exit the roundabout, and pedestrians have fewer lanes of traffic to cross at one time. Roundabouts provide a greater sense of place because of their distinctive design and greater opportunities for urban design. Statuary, fountains, or landscaping can be placed in the center of the roundabout, although care must be taken to preserve adequate sight lines.

Roundabouts have been designed for other streets in Mobile to introduce this efficient, and increasingly common, intersection type. Dramatic reductions in fatalities (down 90%) and decreases in pedestrian accidents (down 30 to 40%) have been achieved elsewhere. Based on traffic volumes, a single-lane roundabout is recommended for this intersection; the outside diameter analyzed was approximately 120 feet. Each approach must have a splitter island that turns the entering vehicles to the right, thus assuring lower entry speed. A conceptual design for the alignment and design of the roundabout at Museum Drive and McGregor Avenue is included at right.

The design team analyzed the function of this roundabout using Synchro™, a microsimulation program used to analyze traffic flow and capacity. Approach volumes were provided by the City of Mobile. Since this intersection represents an area that is not currently built out, existing traffic counts were inflated by 50% to simulate additional development traffic. The analysis indicated that a roundabout would function well at this intersection, even with the projected increased traffic.



A single lane modern roundabout can manage traffic speeds and circulation, increase safety for vehicles, and is pedestrian-friendly.



Detailed conceptual plan view of the new roundabout intersection at McGregor Avenue and Museum Drive

TRAFFIC CIRCLES VS. ROUNDABOUTS

A modern roundabout is not the same as the traffic circles common in the northeastern United States. Traffic circles do not contain many of the pedestrian-friendly elements of the roundabout:



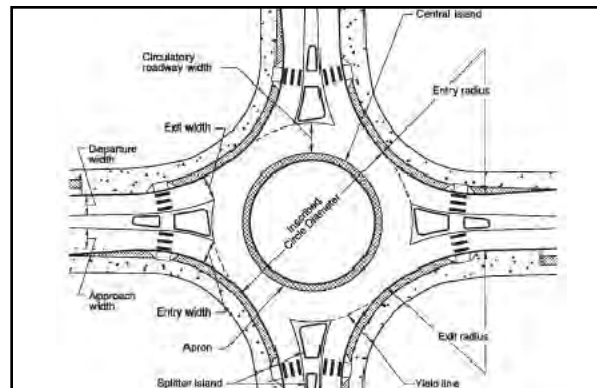
TRAFFIC CIRCLES:

- large (300' to 800' diameter)
- fast (30 to 50 mph)
- scary
- high speed merge
- dangerous (6x more crashes)



ROUNDABOUTS:

- smaller (110' to 180' diameter)
- slower (15 to 25 mph)
- friendly
- yield at entry
- safer



The basic features of modern roundabouts are displayed in this drawing from the FHWA document "Roundabouts: An Informational Guide" (FHWA RD-00-067)

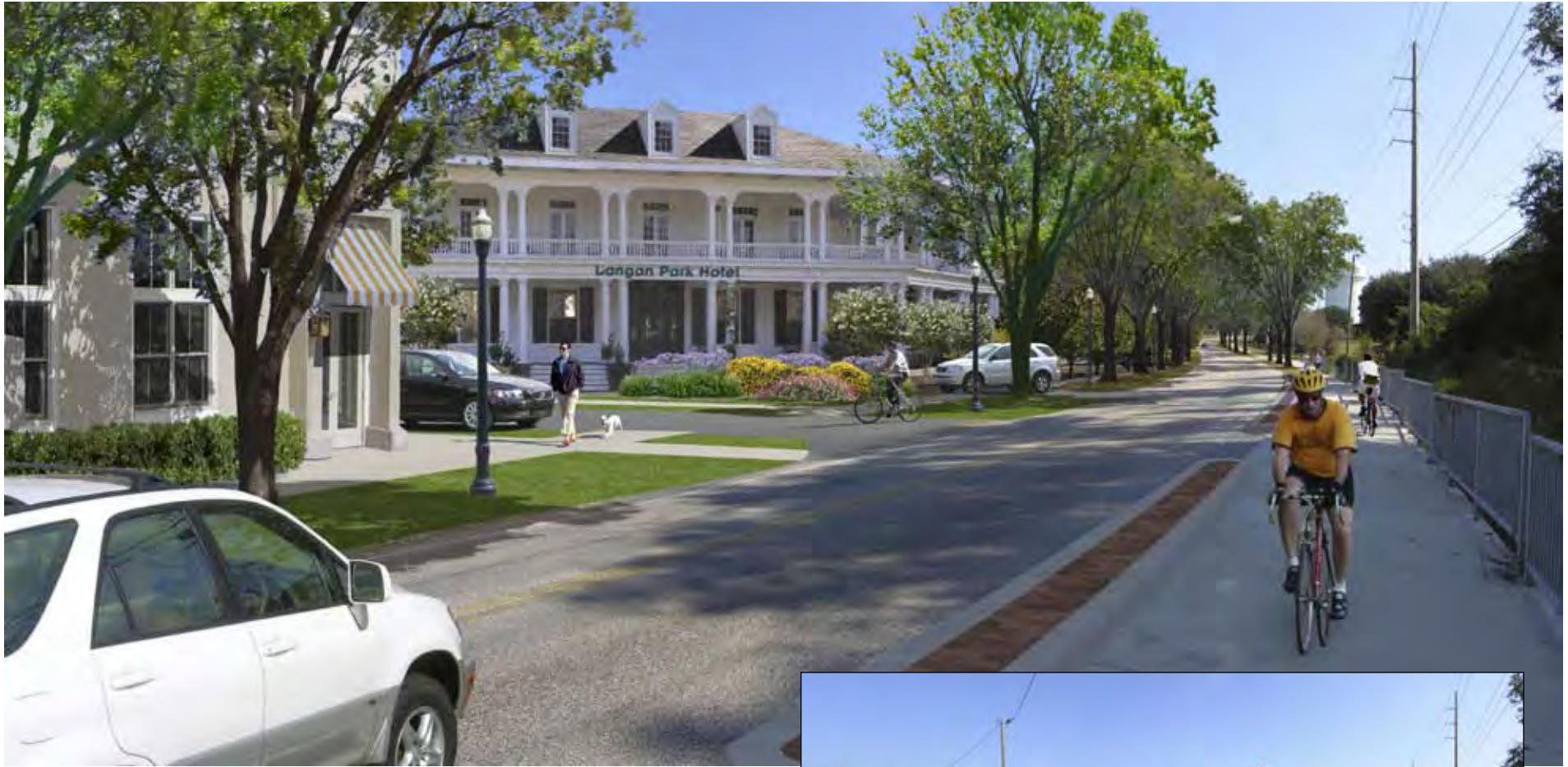
Pedestrian and Bicyclist Considerations

Pedestrians

Roundabouts are designed to achieve a consistent, low vehicle speed (15 to 25 mph) to minimize crash potential; this by nature renders them pedestrian friendly. When traffic volumes are light, many gaps are available for pedestrian crossing. When vehicle volumes are high, more vehicles pause at the yield line, allowing pedestrians to cross safely behind the first vehicle. The pedestrian crosswalk should occur one car length back (approximately 20 feet) from the yield line to place the pedestrian safely in view of the second waiting vehicle's driver. Again, an appropriately low speed is the key pedestrian safety element of roundabout design.

Bicyclists

Bicyclists are sometimes concerned about travel through a roundabout, especially if they have experience with the much larger and faster traffic circles found in New England. In fact, modern roundabouts such as those proposed for the Museum Drive/ McGregor Avenue intersection are much safer for bicyclists than traffic signals. This is due to the slower traffic speeds found in a roundabout. Entering and circulating at 25 mph or less, automobiles can easily share space with bicycles traveling through a roundabout. To traverse the roundabout, the cyclist simply travels through in the vehicle lane just like an automobile. Cyclists who are uncomfortable sharing the road with automobiles may, alternatively, go around the roundabout using the sidewalk system as a pedestrian.



View of potential redevelopment along Museum Drive. Street improvements, such as street trees, additional sidewalks, pedestrian-scaled light fixtures, and bike lanes provides visual cues to slow traffic and create a walkable environment. Redevelopment of private parcels according to the vision of *The Blueprint for Spring Hill* can complete this transformation. For example, buildings are placed at the edge of the sidewalk with parking located behind. New buildings have doors and windows that face the street, rather than the existing blank façades. New land uses, such as a new hotel, can better serve existing community needs.



Existing Conditions, Museum Drive looking east



The area between Museum Drive, McGregor Avenue, and Spring Hill Avenue can be redeveloped as a new neighborhood.



The Fire Station at the intersection of Museum Drive and McGregor Avenue could become a prominent landmark building for the Village of Spring Hill.

PRIVATE INVESTMENT

As part of the redevelopment of the Museum Drive area, a new neighborhood can be created. The different plan scenarios illustrate possible layouts for the streets and buildings of this neighborhood; following are the key principles for new neighborhood design.

Walkable Size

A walkable neighborhood is approximately one-quarter mile from center to edge; this is the approximate distance of a five minute walk. Areas larger than one-quarter mile should be designed as multiple neighborhoods. The Museum Drive area could form one complete neighborhood.

Mix of Land Uses and Building Size

A mix of uses provides shops, offices, and amenities within walking distance of residences. A mix of building sizes provides homes that can accommodate a diverse population. Generally, the mix of land uses and buildings sizes is most diverse at the center of the neighborhood, and least at the edges.

Integrated Network of Walkable Streets

Neighborhood streets should form an interconnected network of walkable blocks. In the Museum Drive area, the existing street network can be supplemented with new street connections to create a fine-grained network, and allow options for both vehicular and pedestrian travel.

Special Sites for Civic Purposes

Civic buildings should be designed with extra care and ornament, and be sited in locations of prominence. These buildings form the landmarks that make the neighborhood memorable. The Fire Station at the intersection of Museum Drive and McGregor Avenue is one such building; it could be repositioned to formally meet the street and provide a visual terminus at this prominent gateway.

Although street infrastructure improvements within the public right-of-way can be implemented by the City of Mobile, the new neighborhood improvements will rely on private investment. There are many possible configurations of future development on these parcels that could meet the goals of the master plan; what has been illustrated is just an example to be used as guidance. The Village of Spring Hill should work with current and future property owners to ensure that redevelopment meets the goals of the plan, including:

- New residential neighborhoods should meet the principles identified for neighborhood design, including maintaining a walkable size, mixing the land uses and building size, creating an interconnected network of walkable streets, and creating special sites for civic purposes.
- Additional open space could be provided in this area, to supplement the existing park open space and recreation areas. Connections to the park (both pedestrian and vehicular) should be enhanced with new development.
- New commercial centers should be designed with street-oriented architecture (including doors and windows which face the sidewalk), to provide destinations within walking distance of local residents.
- A new hotel can be included among the redevelopment plans for this area, to meet an existing need for lodging of visitors to the Mobile Tennis Center, the University of South Alabama, and Spring Hill College.



The Mobile County Water & Sewer Property (currently occupied by Auburn University) could form part of the new neighborhood.



An alternate plan option for this property depicts open space, which would fit appropriately with adjacent Joseph Langan Park.



① Existing conditions



② Street improvements



③ Museum Drive / McGregor Avenue intersection re-design



④ Beginning a new neighborhood



⑤ Completing the neighborhood



⑥ Additional open space south of Museum Drive

IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation of ideas contained within this chapter is expected to occur incrementally, over time. Certain ideas, such as streetscape improvements for Museum Drive, or the intersection re-configuration at Museum Drive and McGregor Avenue, occur within the public rights-of-way and could begin first, once funding sources have been identified and final plans produced. Redevelopment of the private properties adjacent to these roadways may take more time, as individual property owners are ready to make improvements to their properties.

Illustrated in this section is one possible sequence of redevelopment according to the vision of the community master plan. Although some improvements may occur immediately, and others take more time, it is important that the pieces be designed in a form that allows fulfillment of the overall plan. For example, portions of neighborhoods that are built first should be designed to allow future connectivity on adjacent parcels. New buildings should be placed close to the sidewalk with parking behind. Once implemented on several adjacent parcels, this will create a continuous pedestrian environment.

In addition to the ideas and guidelines for implementation contained in this report, a new form-based code could be created to guide the redevelopment of private properties in the Village of Spring Hill. The code would illustrate the desired form of redevelopment, and provide specific guidance for property owners. The form-based code would give assurance of outcome to the Spring Hill community, and would likewise give potential developers predictability of what will occur on adjacent parcels.

MUSEUM DRIVE & MCGREGOR AVENUE – GETTING THERE

The following steps are necessary to achieve a neighborhood center at Museum Drive and McGregor Avenue:

- a. Submit *The Blueprint for Spring Hill* to the City of Mobile for adoption.
- b. Reform the existing Mobile Zoning Code to allow street-oriented development. Either create a zoning overlay district for the area or incorporate the reform into a wider-reaching form-based code for the City of Mobile.
- c. Continue to work with the City of Mobile to garner municipal support for plan implementation, including streetscape improvements such as new street trees, sidewalks, pedestrian-scaled lighting, on-street parking, and crosswalks..
- d. Continue to seek funding for planning initiatives.
- e. Work with the City on funding mechanisms such as tax increment financing to provide public improvements, including parking.
- f. Work with residents, private property owners and developers to coordinate new development.
- g. Select a preferred alternative for the re-design of Museum Drive as a traffic-calmed entry to Joseph Langan Park and the Museums.
- h. Select a preferred alternative for the intersection of McGregor Avenue and Museum Drive. Identify financing sources to fund engineering plans and implementation of the preferred design.
- i. Work with the City on a neighborhood center storm drainage plan to eliminate specific on-site requirements.

Additional implementation strategies are included in Chapter 6.



market analysis 5

As Spring Hill developed from a summer refuge into a permanent suburb of Mobile, the intersection of Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue became the main commercial center for the area. Bit & Spur Road at Old Shell Road was a smaller commercial crossroads, with a grocery store and several shops. While the grocery store is gone, shops and a small number of commercial buildings remain. Like many towns in the United States, Spring Hill's retail and commercial development following the Second World War was keyed to automobile access. While the neighborhoods of Spring Hill developed gracefully in traditional styles, most post-war commercial development consisted of boxy buildings set behind large parking lots. While the quality of commercial development was in keeping with standards at the time, residents now desire a public realm that reflects the charm of their graceful neighborhoods.

During the week of the charrette, residents spoke about their desires for Spring Hill. Among the requests were alternative housing types, mixed-use development, more pedestrian-friendly commercial areas, and better retail options. These requests suggest that the vision for Spring Hill is in keeping with traditional patterns of development. Given this vision, a series of plan elements were created to promote a traditional Main Street quality. Planning efforts were focused on three main intersections: Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue, Bit & Spur Road and Old Shell Road, and Museum Drive and McGregor Avenue. To understand the development possibilities in these areas, and to plan for the best way to implement the goals of residents and business owners, Urban Advisors looked at demographic change and the market potential for retail and services, office space, and new housing in Spring Hill.



Spring Hill Village shopping center - existing automobile-oriented conditions



New "Main Street" infill development at Old Shell and McGregor



A new neighborhood in the Museum Drive area

Demographic Change

Demographic change in the Spring Hill area and in the region is shown in Table 1. The 5-year projection for Spring Hill shows modest growth based upon the recorded trends of 103 selected households. Because these calculations are based upon Spring Hill's existing conditions rather than on future changes, they do not reflect the impact of increased housing and services proposed by *The Blueprint for Spring Hill*. To evaluate the market for increased housing and services, a wider market area was assessed, as shown in Tables 2, 3 and 4.

Within Spring Hill, households are increasing in number. Within a 10-minute and 20-minute driving radius from the intersection of Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue, households are also increasing in number, but the average income for these households is almost half of those in Spring Hill. In Spring Hill, as well as in those areas within a 10 and 20-minute driving radius of Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue, average household size is declining slightly, and the number of non-family households is rising. This trend does not necessarily mean that young singles and non-traditional households are more prevalent, as many non-family households consist of widows. As the population ages, additional non-family households will be present in Spring Hill. The Mobile Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) shows similar trends for the areas surrounding Spring Hill; households are increasing in number, aging slightly, and non-family households are increasing in proportion to traditional households.

Table 1: Demographic Change in Spring Hill

	2007	2012	Increment of change
Population	12,698	12,801	103
Households	5,142	5,211	69
Families	3,205	3,172	(33)
Non-Family Households	1,937	2,039	102
Percent Non-Family	38%	39%	148%
Average Household Size	2.30	2.29	1.49
Owner Occupied HUs	3,557	3,594	37
Renter Occupied HUs	1,584	1,617	33
Percent Renter HUs	31%	31%	48%
Median Age	38.5	39.5	NA
Average Household Income	\$97,954	\$109,373	NA

Source: ESRI BIS

Table 2: Demographic Change within a 10-Minute Drive from Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue

	2007	2012	Increment of Change
Population	142,831	143,105	274
Households	57,910	58,338	428
Families	35,612	34,946	(666)
Non-Family Households	22,298	23,392	1,094
Percent Non-Family	39%	40%	256%
Average Household Size	2.39	2.38	0.64
Owner Occupied HUs	34,819	34,782	(37)
Renter Occupied HUs	23,092	23,556	464
Percent Renter	40%	40%	108%
Median Age	35.1	35.9	NA
Average Household Income	\$51,016	\$55,904	NA

Source: ESRI BIS

Table 3: Demographic Change within a 20-Minute Drive from Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue

	2007	2012	Increment of Change
Population	317,125	321,199	4,074
Households	122,208	124,337	2,129
Families	82,428	82,259	(169)
Non-Family Households	39,780	42,078	2,298
Percent Non-Family	33%	34%	108%
Average Household Size	2.54	2.53	1.91
Owner Occupied HUs	81,018	82,164	1,146
Renter Occupied HUs	41,190	42,173	983
Percent Renter	34%	34%	46%
Median Age	35.5	36.1	NA
Average Household Income	\$52,066	\$57,955	NA

Source: ESRI BIS

Table 4: Demographic Change in Mobile MSA

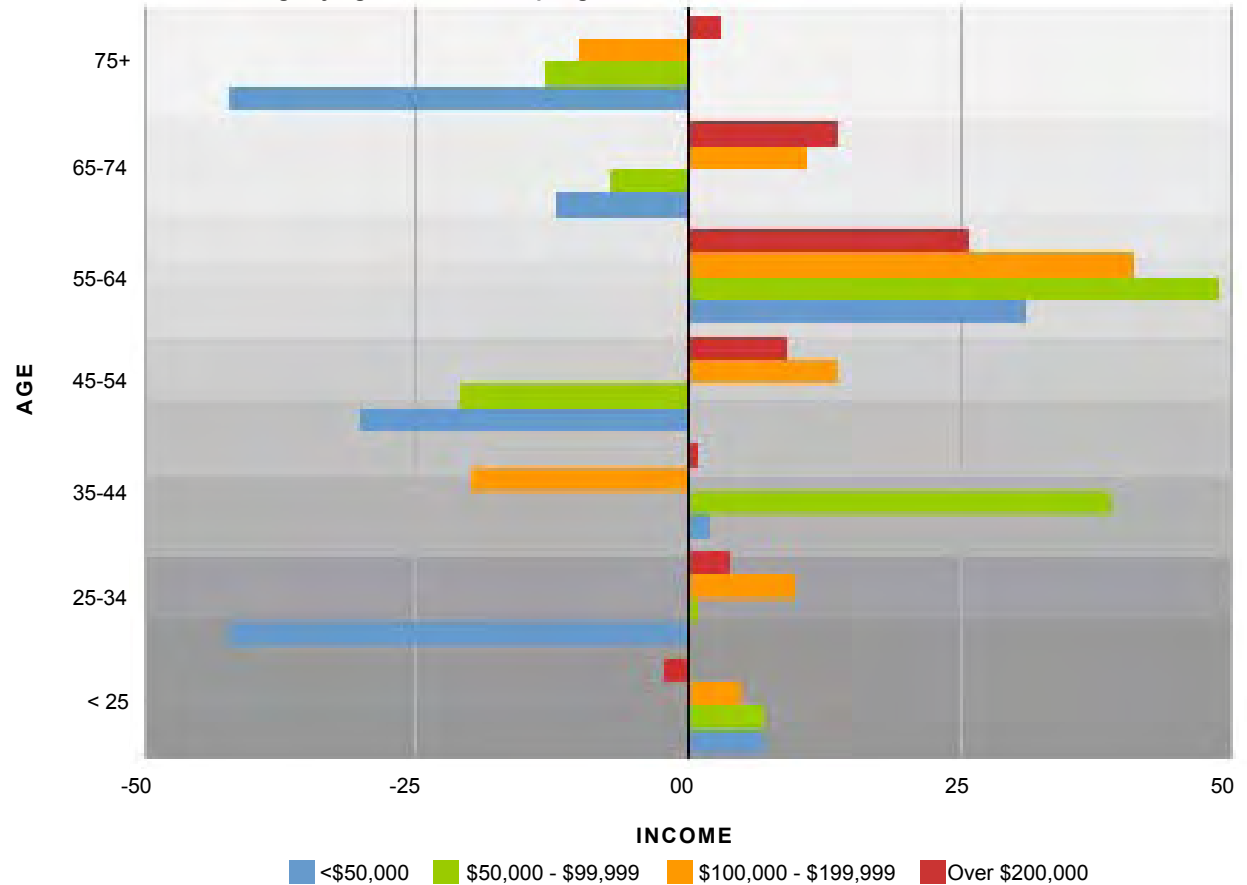
	2007	2012	Increment of change
Population	409,542	416,382	6,840
Households	154,868	158,178	3,310
Families	108,066	108,446	380
Non-Family Households	46,802	49,732	2,930
Percent Non-Family	30%	31%	89%
Average Household Size	2.30	2.29	2.07
Owner Occupied HUs	109,108	111,243	2,135
Renter Occupied HUs	45,760	46,935	1,175
Percent Renter HUs	30%	30%	35%
Median Age	35.7	36.4	NA
Average Household Income	\$52,229	\$58,204	NA

Source: ESRI BIS

Change by Income and Age

When examining change by household age and income (Chart 1), it is evident that Spring Hill households between 45 and 64 years of age with a household income over \$50,000 are changing the most dramatically. In all age categories, except the 55 to 64-year-old group, households below \$50,000 are decreasing in number. The chart shows that average household income and age is increasing in Spring Hill and not being replaced by lower age groups. A possible conclusion is that Spring Hill is aging in place as household incomes increase, a situation that may indicate a need for housing that accommodates younger households. This conclusion is supported by older residents who report that their children are being priced out of the neighborhood they grew up in. Senior households over 65 are declining as well; this may indicate a lack of local housing options at appropriate income levels. The trend in age, income, and decreasing household size seems to indicate a need for new housing that serves two ends of the age-income scale. There is a need for housing for empty nesters and seniors who want smaller homes near amenities, as well as appropriate units for younger, starter households.

Chart 1: Household Change by Age and Income - Spring Hill Area



Source: ESRI BIS

Looking regionally, the demographics of the area within a 20-minute driving radius of Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue (Chart 2), and of the Mobile MSA (Chart 3) show that the shift of higher-income households is spread more evenly across age groups than in Spring Hill. One trend that stands out is that Mobile is not growing significantly in young and child-raising age families; the population is shifting toward older age groups. Because Spring Hill is a desirable neighborhood, and since local and regional trends show a concentration of growth within upper income groups, it can be concluded that there should be a reasonable demand for upper income units in Spring Hill over the next five years if there is a way to provide additional product in a mostly developed area. *The Blueprint for Spring Hill* provides two strategies for providing new housing. The first strategy is to supply more urban housing on infill sites next to walkable shops and services, for non-family households, empty nesters and seniors. This will also free up units on larger lots for the move-up market. The second strategy is to create a new neighborhood in the Museum Drive area with housing for diverse age groups and preferences. The goal of the plan is not to supply only high-income units, but to create a sustainable mix of housing types that accommodates the life cycle of households in Spring Hill. This will allow young people to remain residents of the neighborhood while providing options for seniors who want to downsize.

Chart 2: Household Change by Age and Income - 20-Minute Drive from Old Shell Road & McGregor Avenue

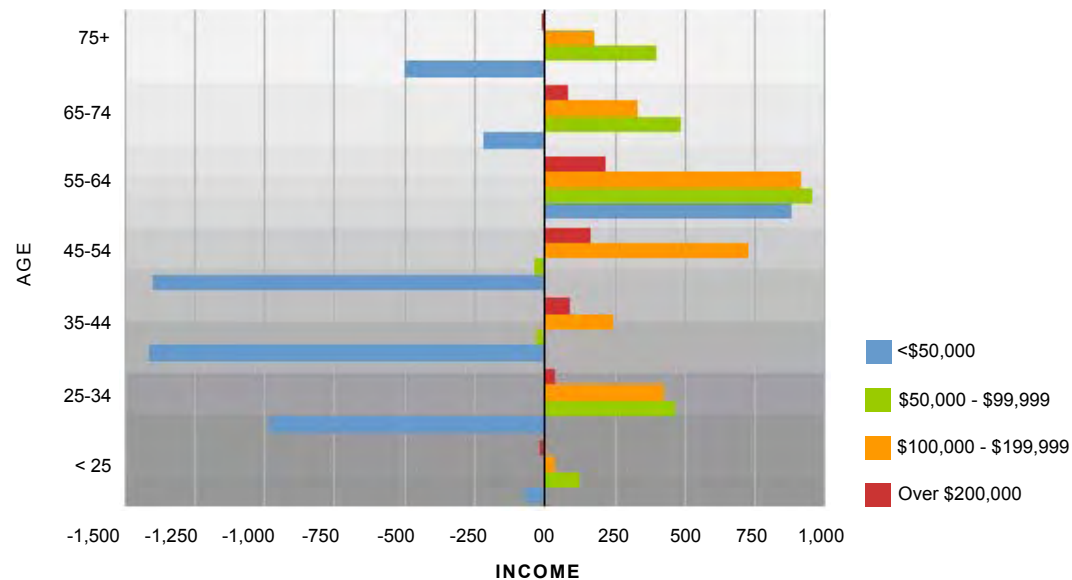
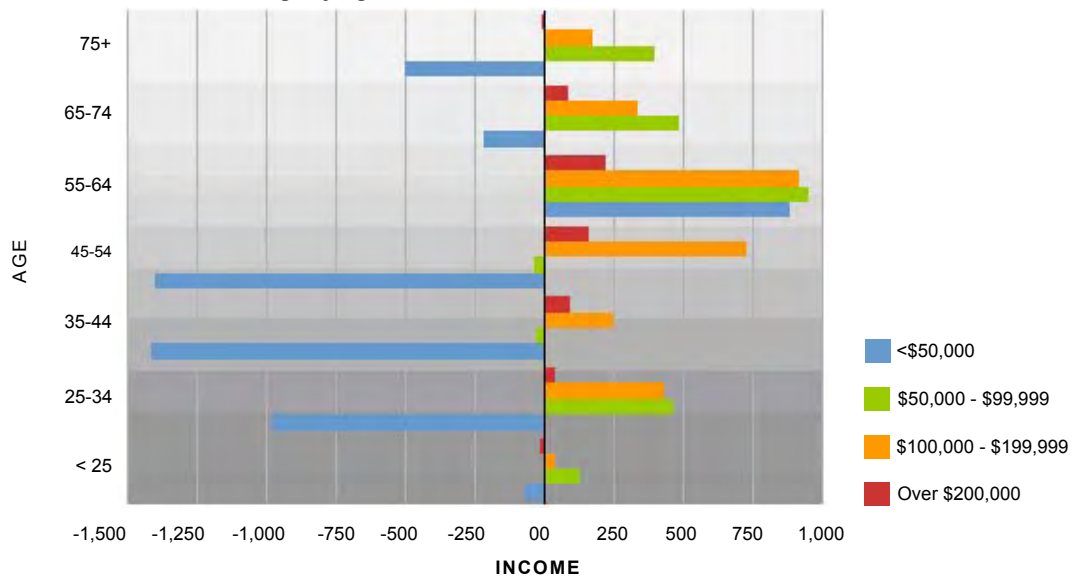


Chart 3: Household Change by Age and Income - Mobile MSA



Charts 2 & 3 Source: ESRI BIS

Retail Potential in Spring Hill

There are several factors for evaluating retail capture in Spring Hill, including utility, proximity, and frequency. Utility is a measure of how useful shoppers find a particular shopping area. A high utility area is one that satisfies many needs at one location. Proximity is how close the shopping area is—the closer the shopping, assuming equivalent utility, the higher the capture. Frequency is how often people need to buy what is for sale—appliances are a low frequency use, while a grocery store is a high frequency use. The way that frequency affects capture is that people will drive long distances for low-frequency items, but tend to stay within a very short drive for high-frequency uses. Low-frequency uses under a single roof, such as big-box retailers, will tend to locate at major road intersections because access and high traffic counts are primary to this business model and proximity is not important. For Spring Hill, there is another model that uses the advantages of high utility and proximity and also serves to capture a wider market area: a Main Street destination.

Main Streets succeed by providing high utility through more intensive land use, pedestrian amenities, organized parking for a one stop experience, and high quality public space, including streets and sidewalks. Main Streets are supported by the surrounding community, yet they also become destinations. Main Streets do not compete by emulating modern strips; they thrive by providing a pleasant, convenient destination that people want to visit. Because Main Streets generate higher foot traffic, they produce higher sales per square foot and allow for a mix of large and small retail outlets. Main Streets also engender customer loyalty from local residents and thus capture retail based upon proximity while also drawing from a wider market area due to their physical appeal.



Fairhope, Alabama, pictured above, is a local precedent for Main Street oriented, retail development.

Urban Advisors examined spending change for Spring Hill, for 10 and 20-minute drive areas from Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue, and for the Mobile MSA as a whole. In order to calculate retail demand, it is also necessary to compare spending with sales. Unfortunately, the city, county and state do not keep information on retail sales other than aggregate filings of taxes on sales. In the absence of detailed information on retail sales, Urban Advisors examined the U.S. Census (2002 Business Survey) and discovered that the Mobile MSA captures approximately 35 percent more in sales than total spending by residents. This indicates that the City of Mobile captures substantial sales from outside of the Mobile MSA.

Tables 5 and 6 outline consumer spending and potential sales in Spring Hill, the areas surrounding Spring Hill, and the Mobile MSA. These tables show that there is a significant increase in consumer spending in the Mobile MSA, \$387 million. The tables also indicate that Spring Hill is unlikely to support a great deal of new retail by itself, even though total 2012 projected spending is over \$141 million. Because we do not have sales figures, and cannot calculate leakage, Tables 7 and 8 were prepared to understand the range of potential for Spring Hill.

Table 5: Non-Auto Consumer Spending by 2012 - Mobile (in 1,000s of dollars)

	Spring Hill	10 Min	20 Min	MSA
Apparel and Services	19,356	113,722	248,362	313,765
Computers and Software	1,952	11,225	24,368	30,582
Movie/ Ent Admissions	1,234	6,803	14,485	17,608
TV/Video/Sound	9,003	54,286	118,840	150,899
Pets	3,325	18,731	42,832	57,260
Toys, Sports Equip	2,948	16,833	37,863	49,401
Photo	1,075	6,120	13,591	17,260
Reading	1,775	9,728	21,197	26,542
Food/Beverage at Home	46,251	277,410	610,174	784,786
Restaurant	26,124	155,175	339,935	432,380
Drug	5,527	33,127	74,444	98,685
Eyeglasses	666	3,722	8,320	10,746
Household Furnishings/ Equipment/ Supplies	10,719	58,829	130,956	167,102
Lawn & Garden	3,452	18,534	43,112	58,441
Personal Care Products	3,616	21,817	47,791	60,977
School Books and Supplies	905	6,049	12,587	15,513
Smoking Products	3,555	23,716	52,181	68,338
Total Consumer Spending	141,484	835,827	1,841,037	2,360,287
Outside Spending Ratio for the MSA				135.1%
Estimated Total MSA Sales in 2012				3,189,012

Source: ESRI BIS

Table 6: Non-Auto Consumer Spending Change 2007 to 2012 - Mobile (in 1,000s of dollars)

	Spring Hill	10 Min - less Spring Hill	20 Min - less 10 Min	Rest of MSA	Total MSA
Apparel and Services	2,250	8,454	18,353	9,044	38,102
Computers and Software	227	830	1,794	863	3,714
Movie/ Ent Admissions	143	497	1,054	443	2,138
TV/Video/Sound	1,047	4,063	8,794	4,420	18,324
Pets	387	1,377	3,248	1,942	6,953
Toys, Sports Equip	343	1,242	2,845	1,569	5,999
Photo	125	451	1,014	506	2,096
Reading	206	709	1,564	743	3,223
Food/Beverage at Home	5,377	20,735	45,275	23,912	95,300
Restaurant	3,037	11,569	25,164	12,734	52,506
Drug	643	2,476	5,591	3,274	11,984
Eyeglasses	77	273	623	332	1,305
Household Furnishings/ Equipment/ Supplies	1,246	4,291	9,784	4,970	20,292
Lawn & Garden	401	1,343	3,299	2,053	7,097
Personal Care Products	420	1,633	3,538	1,813	7,405
School Books and Supplies	105	464	903	411	1,884
Smoking Products	413	1,819	3,873	2,194	8,299
Total Consumer Spending	16,449	62,228	136,717	71,224	286,619
Outside MSA Sales Ratio					135.1%
Total Change in MSA					387,254

Source: ESRI BIS

Table 7: Spring Hill Capture of Change (in 1,000s of dollars- not including outside MSA)

	Spring Hill	10 Min - less Spring Hill	20 Min - less 10 Min	Rest of MSA	Total	Sales/ SF	SF Based on change
Ratio	40%	15%	7%	2%			
Apparel and Services	1,216	1,713	1,736	244	4,910	350	14,028
Computers and Software	123	168	170	23	484	1500	323
Movie/ Ent Admissions	78	101	100	12	290	350	828
TV/Video/Sound	566	823	832	119	2,340	650	3,601
Pets	209	279	307	52	848	350	2,422
Toys, Sports Equip	185	252	269	42	748	350	2,138
Photo	68	91	96	14	269	500	537
Reading	112	144	148	20	423	350	1,210
Food/Beverage at Home	2,906	4,202	4,282	646	12,037	650	18,518
Restaurant	1,641	2,345	2,380	344	6,710	750	8,947
Drug	347	502	529	88	1,466	350	4,189
Eyeglasses	42	55	59	9	165	350	472
Household Furnishings	673	870	925	134	2,603	350	7,437
Lawn & Garden	217	272	312	55	857	350	2,448
Personal Care Products	227	331	335	49	942	350	2,691
School Books and Supplies	57	94	85	11	247	350	707
Smoking Products	223	369	366	59	1,018	1500	678
Totals	8,890	12,611	12,930	1,925	36,357		71,173

Source: ESRI BIS

Table 8: Spring Hill Share of Total Spending (in 1,000s of dollars- not including outside MSA)

	Spring Hill	10 Min - less Spring Hill	20 Min - less 10 Min	Rest of MSA	Total	Sales/ SF	Spring Hill SF
Ratio	40%	15%	7%	2%			Total
Apparel and Services	\$7,743	\$14,155	\$9,425	\$1,308	\$ 32,630	\$350	93,229
Computers and Software	\$781	\$1,391	\$920	\$124	\$3,216	\$1,500	2,144
Movie/ Ent Admissions	\$494	\$835	\$538	\$62	\$1,929	\$350	5,512
TV/Video/Sound	\$3,601	\$6,792	\$4,519	\$641	\$15,554	\$650	23,929
Pets	\$1,330	\$2,311	\$1,687	\$289	\$5,617	\$350	16,048
Toys, Sports Equip	\$1,179	\$2,083	\$1,472	\$231	\$4,965	\$350	14,185
Photo	\$430	\$757	\$523	\$73	\$1,783	\$500	3,566
Reading	\$710	\$1,193	\$803	\$107	\$2,813	\$350	8,037
Food/Beverage at Home	\$18,501	\$34,674	\$23,293	\$3,492	\$79,960	\$650	123,016
Restaurant	\$10,450	\$19,358	\$12,933	\$1,849	\$44,589	\$750	59,453
Drug	\$2,211	\$4,140	\$2,892	\$485	\$9,728	\$350	27,794
Eyeglasses	\$266	\$458	\$322	\$49	\$1,095	\$350	3,129
Household Furnishings	\$4,287	\$7,216	\$5,049	\$723	\$17,276	\$350	49,359
Lawn & Garden	\$1,381	\$2,262	\$1,720	\$307	\$5,670	\$350	16,200
Personal Care Products	\$1,446	\$2,730	\$1,818	\$264	\$6,259	\$350	17,881
School Books and Supplies	\$362	\$772	\$458	\$59	\$1,650	\$350	4,714
Smoking Products	\$1,422	\$3,024	\$1,993	\$323	\$6,762	\$1,500	4,508
Totals	\$56,594	\$104,152	\$70,365	\$10,385	\$241,495	\$511	472,702

Source: ESRI BIS

Table 7 presents a conservative estimate of what is possible for Spring Hill, showing a demand for 71,000 square feet of retail space at sales rates that match national figures for high quality development. Table 8 presents a more optimistic picture, showing a demand for almost 473,000 square feet of retail space. The second figure includes sales from existing retail establishments. The figure is also based upon the assumption that there is significant leakage of sales to areas outside of Spring Hill, and that most of Spring Hill's existing retail is not performing at the sales level used for calculations of space. The true space demand for the next five years is uncertain but lies somewhere between the two estimates. *The Blueprint for Spring Hill* deals with this uncertainty in several ways. First, it creates a street and pedestrian environment that will help existing retailers capture new sales. Second, it does not mandate replacement of existing business, but proposes phased infill over time to enhance the retail environment and add economic utility and increase capture. Many of the commercial structures in the area are considered obsolete by modern retailing standards, and the phased infill will allow the use of these existing structures until they are ready to redevelop. Since much of the plan will consist of replacement rather than new competitive space, prospects for retail revitalization over time are much better than if the plan relied upon new centers while the older centers remained.

Spring Hill should be able to support infill over the next five years of at least 71,000 square feet, and where an owner is replacing existing space, even more. Even at the lowest estimate, 15,000 square feet of new retail at Bit & Spur Road and 66,000 square feet of infill retail at Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue would be a significant short-term improvement. With replacement space the

square footage is higher. There are some challenges to implementing this retail model in Spring Hill. First, Old Shell Road is not currently amenable to pedestrians, even though it has traffic counts that make it desirable for retail. Second, parking, setback and storm drainage regulations make the sort of development proposed in the plan illegal. In order for Spring Hill to progress over time, these obstacles must be mitigated or removed.

Office Space in Spring Hill

To understand the potential for increasing employment space in Spring Hill, Urban Advisors looked at occupation and industry projections from the State of Alabama and estimated the square footage demand based upon occupations that use office space or its equivalent (Table 9).

Table 9: Employment Series

Mobile Employment 2004 to 2007 (numbers in 1,000s)

	2004	2005	2006	Mid 2007	Change 04 to 07
Total Nonfarm	170.2	175.6	179.8	185.4	15.2
Total Private	142.8	147.9	152.1	156.9	14.1
Goods Producing	26.9	28.6	29.9	30.4	3.5
Service Providing	143.4	147	150	155	11.6
Private Service Providing	116	119.3	122.3	126.5	10.5

Mobile Employment in Selected Sectors

	2004	2005	2006	Mid 2007	Change 04 to 07
Transportation and Utilities	7.8	8	8.6	8.7	0.9
Information	2.4	2.6	2.7	2.7	0.3
Financial Activities	9.3	9.9	9.7	9.9	0.6
Professional Business Services	21.6	22.3	22.2	23	1.4
Education and Health Services	20.7	21.5	22.5	23.7	3.0
Totals	61.8	64.3	65.7	68	6.2

Source: ESRI BIS

To evaluate future potential, Urban Advisors looked at the rate of change in employment for the Mobile MSA. The trends shown in Table 10 were extended to 2014, therefore providing an optimistic estimate. Trended Mobile MSA employment must be broken into sectors to understand the demand for office space. Table 11 looks at growth in office-using sectors in order to understand total demand for space. By itself, such trending is too optimistic. Since the economy is shifting, the trend for space demand was lowered by 40 percent to account for a slowdown in growth. Employees in utilities and health services were only estimated at 20 to 30 percent office occupation. Based upon this estimate, Table 12 shows there could be demand for more than a million square feet of office space in the Mobile Metro area.

Urban Advisors also looked at occupational projections for Mobile by the State of Alabama. According to these projections, office occupations could expand by around 600 positions annually. This expansion could create demand for approximately one million square feet in the same time period. There is no doubt that some of this demand will be met in existing buildings. Nevertheless, this projection and the optimistic estimate seem to indicate that there is a market for office and that if the right environment is created in Spring Hill, it may be possible to capture some increment of overall growth.

The proposed improvements at the Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue intersection could create a conducive environment for office development. Spring Hill is in a favorable position because it has both a supportive market, and its higher-income residents are more likely to choose their office location. If the plan is implemented, Spring Hill should be able to add 76,000 square feet of office space in five years.

Table 10: Employment Trended - Mobile MSA

	Projections							Change 07 to 14
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	
Total Nonfarm	187.7	192.3	197.0	201.8	206.7	211.8	217.0	31.57
Total Private	159.0	163.3	167.7	172.2	176.9	181.6	186.5	29.62
Goods Producing	30.9	32.0	33.1	34.3	35.5	36.7	38.0	7.63
Service-Providing	156.7	160.2	163.8	167.4	171.2	175.0	178.9	23.85
Private Service Providing	128.1	131.2	134.5	137.8	141.3	144.8	148.3	21.84

Source: ESRI BIS

Table 11: Sector Trends - Office Using Sectors (numbers in 1000s)

	Projections							Change 07 to 14
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	
Transportation/Utilities	8.8	9.1	9.4	9.7	10.0	10.3	10.6	1.93
Information	2.7	2.8	2.9	3.0	3.1	3.2	3.3	0.65
Financial Activities	10.0	10.2	10.3	10.5	10.7	10.9	11.1	1.21
Professional Business Services	23.2	23.6	24.0	24.5	24.9	25.4	25.8	2.82
Education and Health Services	24.2	25.1	26.1	27.1	28.1	29.2	30.4	6.65
Totals	68.94	70.84	72.80	74.82	76.90	79.05	81.26	13.26

Source: ESRI BIS

Table 12: Potential Employment Space Demand - Office Using Sectors

	Change 07 to 14	% Office	Optimistic Space Demand	Space Demand 40% Decline
Transportation and Utilities	1.93	20%	96,403	57,842
Information	0.65	100%	162,485	97,491
Financial Activities	1.21	100%	302,308	181,385
Professional Business Services	2.82	100%	705,644	423,386
Education and Health Services	6.65	30%	498,781	299,269
Totals	13.26	53%	1,765,620	1,059,372

Source: ESRI BIS

Housing in Spring Hill

A projected market for housing in Spring Hill was created by analyzing demographics and by considering the market segmentation in relation to the housing types proposed in the plan. Because the plan calls for a mix of housing types, much of the new housing will give young families and seniors the option to join or remain in the community. The proposed housing types include multi-family units, both rental and condominium, townhomes for downsizing empty nesters, small lot homes for young families and active seniors, and larger homes for upper-income families.

Of the approximately 3,300 projected new households in the Mobile MSA, around 1,600 are projected to have the income, resources, and preferences that fit the profile for the proposed new housing in Spring Hill. Approximately 75 percent of that demand is for single-family houses (approximately 1,200 units). The remainder is for townhomes and multi-family units with urban amenities (approximately 400 units). In addition to these projections, there is also the issue of pent-up demand, which could increase the market for housing in Spring Hill.

There is likely pent-up demand for single-family housing in Spring Hill. Because the plan proposes single-family housing in the Museum Drive area, households which might live elsewhere will be able to come to Spring Hill. The total households in this sector are over 43,000 households. If only one percent make a move-up decision, this would create a demand for over 400 units in Spring Hill in the next five years. There may also be pent-up demand for a more urban lifestyle within Spring Hill. The data on preference suggests that the pent-up demand for multi-family units and townhomes could be over 400 units in five years.



New townhomes in East Beach - Norfolk, VA



New live/work units in Habersham - Beaufort, SC



A mansion apartment in Spring Hill



New cottage homes in Palmetto Bluff - Bluffton, SC

The total demand for units in Spring Hill will be less than the demand for Mobile, but Spring Hill is more desirable than many other neighborhoods. Based upon the projected 1,600 households with the ability to move to Spring Hill, and the percentage capture of pent-up markets, it is not unreasonable to posit a goal for Spring Hill of 200 single family units, 100 multi-family units and 70 townhomes in the next five years. This comes to around 11 percent of total city demand over the next five years.



getting there 6

The vision for Spring Hill has been documented in the preceding chapters of this report through plans, illustrations, and text. This chapter identifies the necessary steps for realizing the place depicted in the imagery, transforming the community vision into a built reality. The following steps address policy recommendations, regulatory changes, planning strategies, priority capital improvement projects, economic development goals, and funding options. Implementation strategies that are future or long term strategies as well as strategies that may be beyond the scope of the Village of Spring Hill, Inc. and would be more effective if implemented on a larger scale have been included as additional strategies.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND REGULATORY CHANGES

1. Submit *The Blueprint for Spring Hill* to the City of Mobile for Adoption.

The Village of Spring Hill, Inc. should submit *The Blueprint for Spring Hill* to the City of Mobile for adoption, giving the plan official standing. Adopting the plan sends an important message to property owners and residents that the political decision makers support *The Blueprint for Spring Hill*. The plan should be adopted by the Planning Commission and City Council and included in the City's Comprehensive Plan.

2. Work with the City of Mobile to Create a Zoning Overlay District

It is important in the implementation of *The Blueprint for Spring Hill* that the City update their land development regulations so that they are more specific in their outcomes. The current zoning in

Spring Hill's commercial areas often limits appropriate infill development. The Village of Spring Hill, Inc. should work with the City of Mobile to create a zoning overlay district for the three key intersections in Spring Hill. This Overlay District should incorporate the ideas of form-based codes and should replace the existing City of Mobile zoning for these areas. This overlay district should include reforms that address existing parking, setback, building orientation, landscaping, streetscape, and storm drainage regulations for the area in order to allow appropriate Main Street development to be built by-right.

Appropriate regulations that are supportive of community-endorsed planning policies can encourage development by providing clarity and certainty. A zoning process that requires additional hearings and variances increases the risk of time and money to developers but has not proven effective in guaranteeing the desired results. By establishing clear standards that support Spring Hill's vision and provide a visual guide to design criteria, investors can be certain that their project will be approved if they follow the rules. Neighbors can also be assured that what will develop will be desirable, and not harmful, to the Spring Hill community.

3. Create a Forum for Discussion between Developers and the Village of Spring Hill, Inc.

In order to improve communications between community members and prospective developers, a formal, regularly-held round table meeting process should be established in Spring Hill. This round table would be a voluntary but recommended forum for developers to inform community members about their proposed projects, and to receive community feedback on proposed designs. This

round table will help to improve community trust in new development in Spring Hill, and will reduce uncertainty for developers by providing them with community feedback early in the process.

What is a Form-Based Code?

Form-Based Codes are a method of regulating development to achieve a specific urban form. Form-based codes create a predictable public realm by primarily controlling physical form, with a lesser focus on land use, through city or county regulations.

A Form-Based Code is a land development regulatory tool that places primary emphasis on the physical form of the built environment with the end goal of producing a specific type of "place". Conventional zoning strictly controls land use, through abstract regulatory statistics, which can result in very different physical environments. The base principle of form based coding is that design is more important than use. Simple and clear graphic prescriptions for building height, how a building is placed on its site, and building elements (such as location and configuration of porches, windows, doors, etc.) are used to control development. Land use is not ignored, but regulated using broad parameters that can better respond to market economics, while also prohibiting incompatible uses.

For more information about form-based codes, refer to the Form-Based Code Institute website at <http://www.formbasedcodes.org/>

PLANNING STRATEGIES

4. Make Streetscape Improvements a First Priority

Continue to raise money and build support for street improvements, such as new sidewalks, pedestrian-scaled lighting, on-street parking, the replacement and maintenance of street trees, replacement of existing traffic signals with urban-mast arm signals, the addition of decorative crosswalks, and the relocation of overhead power lines. These public improvements will enhance the pedestrian environment, and encourage the private investment and redevelopment of adjoining properties. An improved pedestrian environment along Old Shell Road will increase foot traffic and make it desirable for retail businesses to be located closer to the sidewalk, encouraging redevelopment. Part of this strategy will involve working with the City of Mobile to allow on-street parking along Old Shell Road, McGregor Avenue, and Bit & Spur Road in designated areas.

5. Use Smart Parking Strategies

When planning for the future of Spring Hill's neighborhood centers, it is important to provide an adequate supply of parking to accommodate future growth and development. Appropriate management is necessary; parking is handled differently in mixed-use, walkable districts. Spring Hill's neighborhood centers will not be malls, strip shopping centers, office parks, or apartment complexes. These districts will be unique centers of activity where parking is merely one of many important considerations. Partnering with the City on funding measures such as Tax Increment Financing (TIF – see #19) may be necessary to implement areas of shared parking or parking structures.



On-street parking must be encouraged.

On-street parking must be encouraged wherever possible, and private and/or public parking facilities must be located behind buildings, toward the interior of blocks, making parking compatible with pedestrian-oriented streets. On-street, parallel parking is the most pedestrian-friendly form of parking. It provides direct access to the adjacent commercial establishments and provides a traffic calming effect on urban streets.

Parking regulations within Spring Hill's neighborhood centers should be reformed to reflect more urban, walkable districts. Minimum parking requirements should be abolished for mixed-use, multi-story buildings, as well as for historic buildings on small or irregular parcels. In all other cases, the minimum number of required parking spaces should be set at 75% of the values required by the current City Zoning Code in order to encourage shared parking, on-street parking, and pedestrian oriented use. These reductions in required parking should only be available to development that complies with the vision of *The Blueprint for Spring Hill*.



Parking should be located behind buildings, in mid-block.

Surface parking lots along prominent streets disrupts the urban fabric. Parking lots should not be placed between buildings and the street, along the street edge within a property, or at the corner of a lot facing a prominent intersection. Parking lots need to be located away from the sidewalk, so that the valuable street edge can be recaptured for urban architecture or green space. Where possible, parking lots should be lined with buildings or otherwise screened so that parking does not become a prominent part of the street scene. Lining parking structures with habitable space along the street edge is crucial to maintaining the natural vibrancy of the street. These “liner buildings” provide an opportune location for affordable housing, offices, and small businesses. Liner buildings are particularly well suited for live-work units or artist studios.

Shared parking is an efficient method for handling parking in mixed-use centers. Businesses and churches may be able to use certain parking spaces during the day while these same spaces are then used by residents at night. Shared parking works

in a mixed-use, park-once, pedestrian-friendly environment, all of which are key elements in *The Blueprint for Spring Hill*. The Village of Spring Hill, Inc. and the City of Mobile should work together to identify sites for shared parking and meet with property owners to set the terms of use.

Shared parking will be particularly important around the intersection of Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue, where a variety of small businesses are located on oddly-shaped parcels. This shared parking can be provided in lots or in strategically placed parking structures. The use of shared parking and shared parking structures in Spring Hill's village center will relieve small parcels of the burden of supplying parking on an already limited site. This will allow businesses on these small parcels to expand or redevelop without having to supply additional parking on-site. Ultimately, this arrangement will benefit small businesses and will add to the vibrancy of Spring Hill.

6. Create Community Gathering Places

Establish new parks and plazas and enhance existing public open space to become focal points within the community, and appropriate places for informal gatherings and celebrations. Once these focal points are established, they can be further enhanced with special pavement, gateway buildings, statues, fountains, or clocks that will help unify Spring Hill.

7. Provide a Range of Housing Options

The Village of Spring Hill, Inc. can assist in the creation of appropriate new housing shown in the plan in two ways. One is to assure that housing is compatible with the existing neighborhoods but also follows the plan so that it acts as a transition between purely residential areas and the denser mixed-use neighborhood centers. Another is to



New parks and plazas should be a part of redevelopment.

partner with the City to encourage appropriate development with a strategy for allocating infrastructure funding to enable the production of housing that will support future employment and retail uses.

Homebuyers can be assisted in purchasing new homes within Spring Hill by utilizing a number of lending programs provided through the federal government, including a first-time homebuyer program through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Mortgage guarantee programs, which have a series of grants for guaranteeing mortgages on single-family and multi-family housing in order to reduce local lender risk.

TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENTS

8. Reform City of Mobile Major Street Plan

Work with the City of Mobile Transportation Department to reform the street designations in Spring Hill. Remove McGregor Avenue between Dauphin Street and Spring Hill Avenue from the Major Street Plan for Mobile. This will allow the street to be incorporated into plans for a walkable district, with narrower lanes, sidewalks, street



A mix and range of housing options should be provided.

trees, and on-street parking.

9. Designate Walkable Districts

Work with the City of Mobile to adopt walkable thoroughfare standards within the proposed zoning overlay districts. Redesignate all roads within these districts as walkable thoroughfares and create alternative design standards for these streets, including narrow travel lanes, on-street parking, street trees, wide sidewalks, pedestrian-scaled lighting, generous crosswalks, minimal setbacks, and street-oriented buildings.

10. Improve Safety at Main Intersections

Improve safety at main intersections in Spring Hill by regularizing acute angles and implementing 90 degree intersections with traffic lights, or where appropriate, a modern roundabout. As one plan suggests, this would improve the intersection of Old Shell Road and Bit & Spur Road by re-aligning the roadway to create a 90 degree intersection, and add a traffic signal at the intersection. The intersection of Museum Drive and McGregor Avenue can be redesigned as a T-intersection or as a modern roundabout.

11. Improve Connectivity

Work with the City of Mobile and with private property owners to create new vehicular and pedestrian connections around neighborhood centers. The Village of Spring Hill, Inc. and the City of Mobile Urban Development Department should work with property owners to coordinate the creation of an interconnected system of streets, alleys, and parking lots that run along the back of each lot. These rear alleys should eventually form a system of “square-backs”, or connector streets, that relieve pressure from main intersections.

12. Create a Continuous Pedestrian Network

Continue to create a continuous pedestrian network throughout Spring Hill that will connect residents to their neighborhood centers. Raise funds for property acquisition, engineering, and construction. Work with private property owners who have encroached into the right-of-way with fences, landscaping, and buildings to assemble a continuous right-of-way that will accommodate a generous sidewalk and a bike path or bike lane. This is particularly important along Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

13. Use Smart Phasing and Incremental Steps

Spring Hill was not built in a day; it grew organically over the last two hundred years. *The Blueprint for Spring Hill* is designed to allow property owners to participate as the market matures through incremental steps. For retail areas, this starts with infill of under-utilized property and proceeds to a higher intensity of use with parking decks as market changes take place. In the short term this may

mean strategies such as evaluating projects and allowing surface parking as land banking to assure that room is reserved for future development.

14. Promote the Formation of Small Business Investment Corporations

One of the difficulties in producing change in older areas is the potential gap between the cost of new construction and the current market rents available to pay for space. One mechanism that can help is a Small Business Investment Company. Small Business Investment Companies (SBIC's) are business development venture funds for business creation and development that are regulated by the Small Business Administration (SBA). The federal government will match local funding at a two to one ratio. What this means is that if local investors, banks and others form a SBIC with \$5 million in start-up funding, it may be possible to get grants of up to \$10 million to match. The formation and operation of a Spring Hill SBIC could be a means for creating and retaining business in the area. SBIC's are allowed to use funds for investment in small business and to act as an advisory resource. This means that the SBIC employees could fund and advise businesses on issues such as effective use of information technology, effective retailing practices, financial management, employee management, efficient use of resources, etc.

It is suggested that The Village of Spring Hill, Inc. and local investors and financial professionals collaborate in the formation of an SBIC. Because of the federal program offering two -to-one leveraging of local funding, SBIC's can be more effective in using local funds than business assistance organizations that do not have access to the program. In funding new or existing business, the investing capital can be used for market rate investment

while the SBA matching can be used to provide below market financing in the form of loans.

15. Create Destinations that are Walkable, Complete and Sustainable

To make change in the critical areas of Spring Hill that are economically viable and attractive to new business, *The Blueprint for Spring Hill* prescribes neighborhood centers that will become catalysts for economic development. Having complete destinations means creating an attractive environment for retail and office locations near housing. These elements work to reinforce one another. Intensified housing provides opportunities to live near work and services that are attractive to young people, empty nesters and seniors. The intensified housing provides support for retail and services and guarantees the sort of lively environment in retail areas desired by residents. As a short term goal, plan on 15,000 sq ft of new retail at Bit & Spur Road, 66,000 sq ft of new retail at Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue, 200 new single family units (most likely at Museum Drive), 100 multi-family units and 70 town homes at Museum Drive, Old Shell and McGregor, and Bit & Spur, and 76,000 sq ft of new office space at Old Shell and McGregor by 2013.

FUNDING MECHANISMS

Funding is an essential part of any community improvement effort. The Village of Spring Hill, Inc. has already demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of the money needed and the funding sources available for streetscape improvements and planning initiatives. Additional sources should be sought for continued improvements, and a new funding strategy should be developed as Spring Hill's improvements transition into private investment.

Public funding mechanisms for streetscape improvements and infill development can be secured from a variety of sources; the Village of Spring Hill, Inc. has already established a wide variety of funding sources for its efforts to date, including two grants from the State of Alabama, a Keep Mobile Beautiful donation of street trees, and dedicated funding from the City of Mobile for sidewalk and intersection improvements. The Village of Spring Hill, Inc. should continue to work with the City of Mobile to ensure that an appropriate percentage of municipal funds from the General Fund and Capital Improvement Program are dedicated towards streetscape improvements in Spring Hill. Funding can also be secured through grants from public and private sources, general obligation bonds approved by the public, donations, and general fund expenditures.

Funding assistance for private development and economic development includes Federal Loan Guarantees to financial institutions, revolving loan funds set up by local financing institutions for redevelopment and business, and, last but by no means least, standard financing for market rate development. The following descriptions provide addition-



Selling personalized bricks is a proven strategy for funding street improvements.

al details about potential financial assistance for both public and private development projects.

16. Streetscape Sponsorship

Raise funds for streetscape enhancements such as special pavers, attractive streetlights, decorative benches, trashcans, and street trees by enlisting local businesses and residents to buy a brick, bench, or any other streetscape element. The name of the sponsoring party can then be engraved into the brick or placed on a plaque on the respective bench, streetlight, or tree grate. This will serve as way for local businesses and residents to make a visible and measurable contribution to street improvements.

17. Adopt-A-Road, Plaza, or Park

Enlist the help of local businesses, churches, schools, and service organizations to sponsor the maintenance of specific streets, plazas and parks. This will help to make streetscape improvements seem more attractive to the City, as the burden of maintenance for the Parks, Public Works, and



The Village of Spring Hill, Inc. has secured funding from the State of Alabama and the City of Mobile for streetscape improvements.

Urban Forestry Departments will be reduced. Furthermore, the sponsor organizations will take pride in the upkeep of these public places. Attractive plaques or signs can be placed in prominent locations in each public space to recognize the sponsoring organization.

18. Grants

Private grants from foundations are available through application by the Village of Spring Hill, Inc. and the City of Mobile on behalf of Spring Hill. Finding grants can be daunting as there are literally thousands of foundations and grant givers; most organizations that rely upon such funding hire what is termed a "development specialist" to research grants and write proposals.

It is suggested that the Village of Spring Hill, Inc. appoint a board member who will be responsible for grants research and proposal writing. Another possibility will be to work with the City of Mobile and their existing grant-writers, or to lobby for the creation of a grant-writing position at the City.

19. Institute a Tax Increment Financing District for Old Shell Road

As Old Shell Road redevelops, values in the area will increase. Tax increment financing (TIF) allows the change in property tax revenues to be bonded to provide funding for the construction of public improvements without adding any tax rate increases or diminishing the amount of revenue flowing to the General Fund of the City. A TIF district focusing on the Old Shell Road corridor as it runs through Spring Hill would provide some of the funding to build pedestrian improvements and parking without placing a new burden on existing property owners along the corridor.

ORGANIZATIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS

20. Continue the Use of a Coordinating Organization

The Village of Spring Hill, Inc. should remain a central entity to aid in the coordination of property owners, developers, small business owners, and residents as Spring Hill develops into a more walkable, better connected community, and to ensure consistency with the vision of *The Blueprint for Spring Hill*.

21. Create a Streetscape Beautification Committee

Create an entity dedicated to coordinating the funding and maintenance of decorative landscape elements such as seasonal flowers in planters along main streets, unique trashcans, benches, and street lights. This committee could be a special sub-committee within the Village of Spring Hill, Inc. could be part of the duties of a Spring Hill Business Association, or could be a stand alone organization.



Streetscape beautification can be coordinated to unify Spring Hill with seasonal flowers, unique trashcans, benches, and pedestrian scaled street lights.



Highlight elements in Spring Hill that make it unique and give Spring Hill its character.

PROMOTE SPRING HILL

22. Promote *The Blueprint for Spring Hill*

Continuing to spread the word about this plan and successful initial projects is vital for implementation. A variety of media should continue to be used: brochures and informational flyers should continue to be posted in local businesses and community buildings around Spring Hill, and the website should continue to be updated. Promote the plan so that it will take on a life of its own and continue to work for Spring Hill for years to come. The Village of Spring Hill, Inc. should host its own promotion efforts, as well as work with local churches, schools, social clubs and service organizations.

23. Celebrate Spring Hill's Unique Character

It is important to celebrate Spring Hill's strong community and discover ways to promote its genteel character in its public spaces. With a high degree of community input in the charrette process, the message is clear that Spring Hill residents are

proud of their community. *The Blueprint for Spring Hill* should help to channel this community pride into the creation of vibrant neighborhood centers. The Village of Spring Hill, Inc. and other local organizations should promote the high quality of life of living, working, and shopping in Spring Hill's neighborhood centers.

The Village of Spring Hill, Inc. plays a significant role in the promotion of Spring Hill as a place worthy of renewal and improvement. The organization should continue to promote Spring Hill throughout its public improvements and should play a key role in attracting private investment. A special sub-committee should be formed to promote Spring Hill. As redevelopment progresses and Spring Hill's neighborhood centers become community destinations, this "promotions" sub-committee can increase awareness of special events, retail establishments and art galleries through flyers, community calendars, and the existing website.

ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES

- **Create a Local Improvement District for the Museum Drive Area**

Alabama law allows local improvement districts for the creation of infrastructure and other improvements in new subdivisions. The enabling legislation requires that 100 percent of the property owners sign a petition to form the district which is then approved by the municipality in which the district is created. Once the district is formed, bonds may be issued based on the plans for build-out, and the bonds are paid by assessments levied on the future property owners in the subdivision. Such a district is not practical in existing built neighborhood areas with hundreds or thousands of property owners, but for new subdivisions with just a few land owners who want improvements that have not yet been built, the Local Improvement District enables development by funding community needs for streets, sidewalks, sewer and water infrastructure and even parks and recreation facilities that the city would otherwise be unable to supply. The relevant code is 11-99A-1 et al.

- **Form a Spring Hill Business Association**

The Village of Spring Hill, Inc. represents the broader interests of the community. To achieve implementation, a full partnership with area business owners and commercial property owners is essential because they are the sector of the economy providing the vital services and development that create the public character of Spring Hill. For this reason it is suggested that The Village of Spring Hill, Inc. collaborate with local business interests to form a Spring Hill Business Association. The Business Association can act to represent Spring Hill businesses and keep its members up to date on planning and development initiatives. One of



GIS data for land uses should be up-to-date and accurate, and readily available on the web.

the major goals of this plan is to remove obstacles that impede market improvement and the business community has a vital interest in ensuring that planning enables better use of the land resources to achieve higher market capture and more profitable businesses. The advantage for the Village of Spring Hill, Inc. is that a unified community that addresses business owners, is far more likely to achieve the goals of *The Blueprint for Spring Hill*.

- **Develop an Infill Development Strategy**

A strategy should be developed to target vacant, underutilized or "soft" properties around Spring Hill's commercial centers that detract from the quality of the area. Vacant land and derelict buildings offer opportunities for change and redevelopment. In order to seize these opportunities it is necessary to inventory and map the locations of vacant land and derelict buildings and then target new users and promote the inventoried opportunities to new investors. The Village of Spring Hill, Inc. can solicit help from the City of Mobile Urban Development Department to use its extensive GIS system to begin to identify a list of properties that



Metered on-street parking can generate valuable funding for street maintenance.

might benefit from infill development; this can be done as a part of the annual inventory of land use.

- **Establish a Parcel Assembly Program**

Parcel assembly can be especially useful in areas where lots are too small or oddly shaped to permit efficient development. To accomplish such assembly a land bank should be established through the Village of Spring Hill, Inc. The land bank should be chartered as a 501(c)(3) non-profit for the purpose of encouraging the objectives of *The Blueprint for Spring Hill*. Such parcels can be identified by the use of GIS. It is suggested that the Village of Spring Hill, Inc. use two strategies for parcel assembly. After identifying such parcels, approach the current owners and seek to partner with them. The land bank could then be used as a guarantor of purchase should the owners agree to participate while adjoining parcels are assembled and a project is being developed. If participation in a larger development is not an attractive option for the owners, then the land bank should purchase parcels outright when possible.

- **Confirm Physical and Regulatory Conditions**

The Blueprint for Spring Hill was created with limited information and accuracy regarding rights-of-way, property lines, existing building locations, easements, utility limitations, and covenants tied to individual properties. As site-specific applications come forward and public improvements are undertaken, modifications will be necessary due to accurate surveys and specific site analysis. Part of the process of carrying out *The Blueprint for Spring Hill* should involve regular updates to the City of Mobile's GIS system with information on the physical conditions of individual properties as development occurs.

- **Business Re-location**

As each component of *The Blueprint for Spring Hill* is implemented, the Village of Spring Hill, Inc. should create and update a detailed list of the businesses and services to target for locating (or relocating) to Spring Hill. Local Mobile tenants should be contacted and invited to return or to open a second location in Spring Hill. For example, perhaps a successful restaurant would be willing to open a second location in Spring Hill. These successful business owners could ride the popular support for their current location into a new venue.

- **Use Metered On-street Parking at Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue**

Other cities have used metered parking revenue to generate funding for maintenance and improvements in retail districts. While the amounts of revenue are not large, having a viable funding source devoted to keeping sidewalks safe, clean and attractive has paid off elsewhere. In addition, metering ensures viable parking for customers as opposed to employees. According to some estimates, a viable, non-employee occupied on-street

space can be worth as much as \$200,000 in retail sales. This is not to suggest that parking revenue accrue to the General Fund, but that it will be escrowed and used for the benefit of the local business district.

- **Create a Senior Housing Partnership**

Create a partnership between the Village of Spring Hill, Inc., Spring Hill College, and Spring Hill Baptist Church to develop senior housing around the intersection of Old Shell Road and McGregor Avenue. This housing can be smaller-unit, multi-family housing that can either be owned or rented and managed by a management company. Senior housing within the village center of Spring Hill will be an asset to older residents and will add to the vibrancy of the district.

- **Partner with University of South Alabama Technology and Research Park on Employment Placement in Spring Hill**

One of the goals of the plan is to increase employment within Spring Hill. As the Tech Park becomes successful, Spring Hill has an opportunity to support the University mission by partnering to bring associated businesses to the area by creating a supportive environment for these businesses with amenities and services close-by. When marketing to potential businesses, Spring Hill should promote the presence of the University and its Tech Park and Cancer Research Center.

- **Create Civic Places**

Additional measures can be taken, such as creating a permanent, first-quality Farmer's Market building in Lavretta Park to enhance the existing playground uses and create a family-oriented gathering place. Celebrate the Spring Hill Branch of the Public Library as the important community asset.

Move the Library to a more prominent location, or work on a shared parking arrangement with the Baptist Church to allow the library to expand in place and occupy a civic-quality building with the appropriate architectural dignity.

- **Technical Assistance for Businesses and Retailers**

Small start-up retail businesses typically need expert assistance in areas such as store layout, lighting design, inventory controls and information systems for understanding consumer preferences. Programs could also include assistance with design and permitting to redevelop property in accordance with the proposed Form-Based Code. These initiatives should be coordinated through the City, the Small Business Administration, and the Chamber of Commerce. Small Business Administration funding and assistance from the National Main Streets program are available and should be sought. Business assistance is a task that could be undertaken through a Small Business Investment Company (SBIC), or the Chamber of Commerce.

TIMELINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION*

	6 Months	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Years 5+
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS & REGULATORY STRATEGIES						
Adopt <i>The Blueprint for Spring Hill</i>						
Create an Overlay District						
Create a Forum for Discussion Between Developers and the VSH						
PLANNING STRATEGIES						
Streetscape Improvements						
Use Smart Parking Strategies						
Create Community Gathering Places						
Provide a Range of Housing Options						
TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENTS						
Reform the City of Mobile Major Street Plan						
Designate Walkable Districts						
Improve Safety at Main Intersections						
Improve Connectivity						
Create a Continuous Pedestrian Network						
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES						
Use Smart Phasing and Incremental Steps						
Promote the Formation of SBICs						
Create Destinations that are Walkable, Complete & Sustainable						
FUNDING MECHANISMS						
Buy-A-Brick						
Adopt-A-Road, Plaza, or Park						
Grants						
Institute a TIF						
ORGANIZATIONS & PARTNERSHIPS						
Continue the Use of a Coordinating Organization						
Create a Streetscape Beautification Committee						
PROMOTE SPRING HILL						
Promote <i>The Blueprint for Spring Hill</i>						
Celebrate Spring Hill's Unique Character						
ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES						