A SUBURBAN RETROFIT FRAMEWORK:

# ROCKY CREEK AREA SOUTH AUGUSTA, GA

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# Acknowledgments

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*Chandler Hawes*

# Table of Contents

# Introduction

## What is a Suburban Retrofit?

Across the United States, many suburban communities are dealing with the decline of large commercial sites that once served as economic anchors. Regional shopping malls, in particular, have struggled to keep up with changes in retail, shifting consumer behavior, and broader economic trends. As these properties lose tenants and investment, they often leave behind large vacant areas and underused infrastructure that can negatively impact surrounding neighborhoods.

A suburban retrofit is a planning and design approach focused on adapting existing suburban development patterns to better align with current economic, social, and environmental conditions. Many suburban areas were built around automobile access, separated land uses, and large commercial sites that are now underperforming. Instead of expanding outward, suburban retrofit strategies emphasize reinvesting in existing land, infrastructure, and buildings that no longer function as intended.

The concept emerged as suburban areas began to experience commercial decline, demographic change, and shifts in market demand. Enclosed shopping malls, office parks, and wide arterial corridors have been especially affected. Retrofit strategies range from the reuse of individual sites to coordinated changes across entire districts. These efforts often introduce new land uses, improve connectivity, and strengthen the relationship between buildings, streets, and open space, while working within the constraints of existing suburban form.

Suburban retrofit approaches are inherently context-sensitive. They recognize that different places require different levels of change based on market conditions, infrastructure capacity, and community priorities. This flexibility allows redevelopment to occur incrementally and reduces reliance on large, speculative projects that may be difficult to implement (Dunham-Jones and Williamson, 2011).

## Project Purpose

South Augusta, Georgia contains many of the physical characteristics that suburban retrofit strategies are designed to address. Much of the area developed during a period of automobile-oriented growth, resulting in large blocks, limited pedestrian connections, and commercial centers oriented toward regional retail demand. Over time, the viability of many of these sites has been reduced.

This practicum focuses on the Rocky Creek Neighborhood, an area within South Augusta that contains a concentration of underperforming commercial land, including the 65-acre abandoned Regency Mall site.

A suburban retrofit framework offers a different way to approach redevelopment in this context. By emphasizing incremental change, reuse of existing assets, and phased investment, this approach allows redevelopment to respond to existing constraints while still advancing long-term goals.

Therefore, the purpose of this practicum is to identify suburban retrofit opportunities that can guide reinvestment within the neighborhood. The project identifies key areas of opportunity across the study area and then applies targeted design strategies to demonstrate how these locations could be transformed. In doing so, it considers the area as a connected system of sites, corridors, neighborhood, and nodes. The Framework focuses on transforming existing suburban land into more walkable, connected, and resilient environments that support local economic activity and better serve the surrounding community.

To achieve this, the practicum combines planning research, case study review, GIS-based analysis, and site evaluation. The resulting recommendations are intended to be realistic, flexible, and capable of being implemented both in the short term and over time. The overall goal is to provide a planning framework that can inform future public and private investment decisions in the Rocky Creek study area.

# Study Area Background

## Augusta-Richmond County

Augusta–Richmond County is located along the Savannah River near the South Carolina border and has long served as a regional economic and cultural center. Historically supported by military, manufacturing, and medical institutions, the city experienced steady growth through the mid-twentieth century. Like many Southern cities, its postwar development was shaped by suburban expansion, highway construction, and patterns of racial and economic segregation, contributing to uneven growth across different areas.

## South Augusta

South Augusta developed largely during this period of suburban expansion. The area saw the construction of new neighborhoods, commercial corridors, and major retail destinations, including Regency Mall in 1978. Over time, however, population growth and economic activity shifted westward. Newer suburban areas attracted higher-income households, updated commercial development, and continued public and private attention.

As these patterns continued, South Augusta experienced declining property values, aging infrastructure, and reduced access to jobs and services. Today, the area continues to face higher poverty rates and fewer economic opportunities compared to other parts of the city, contributing to long-standing perceptions of decline.

## Rocky Creek Enterprise Zone

In response to these conditions, the City of Augusta designated portions of South Augusta as the Rocky Creek Enterprise Zone, which serves as the study area boundary for this practicum and follows the Rocky Creek natural corridor. Originally established in 2002 and later reauthorized, the designation focuses on areas experiencing long-term economic challenges

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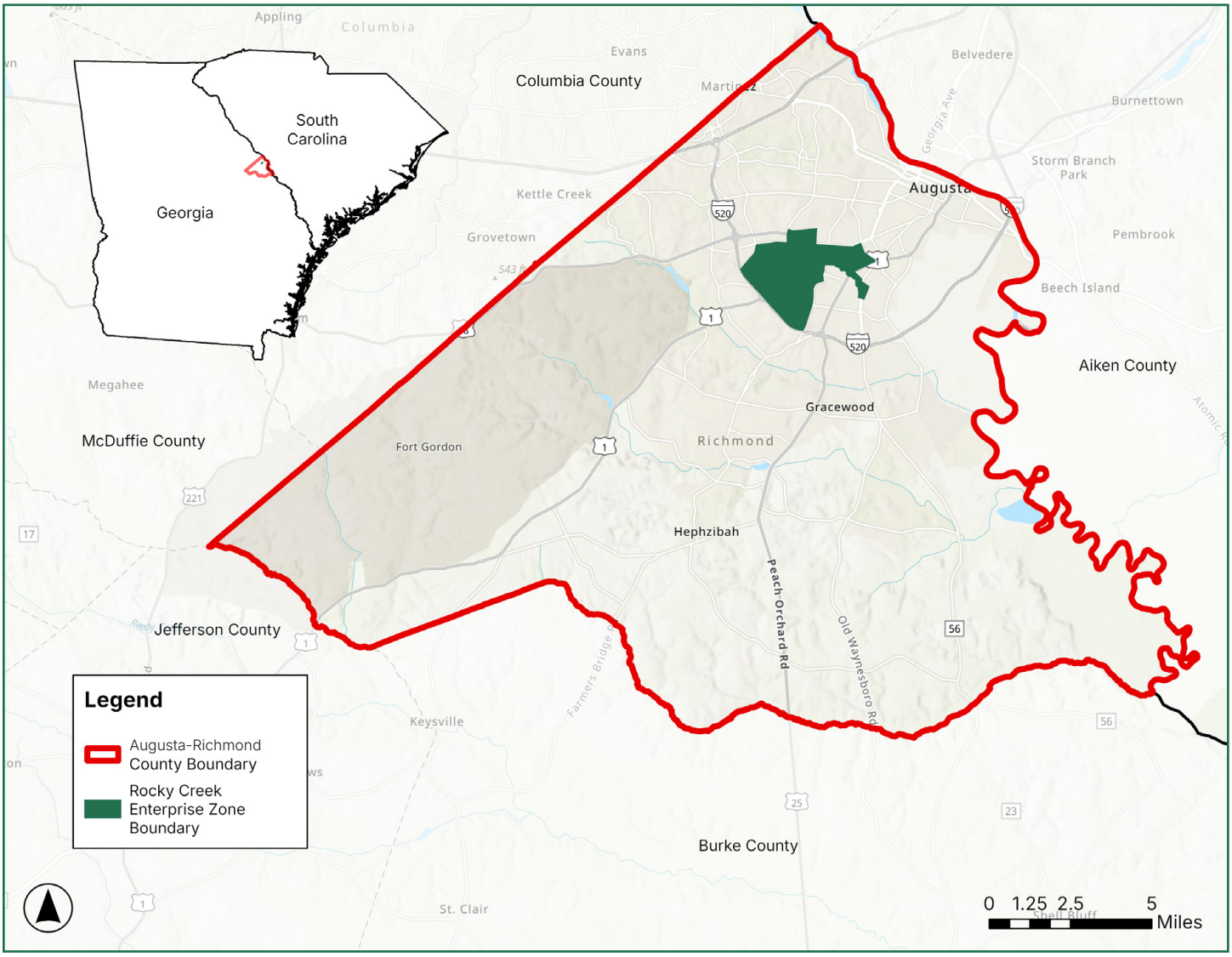
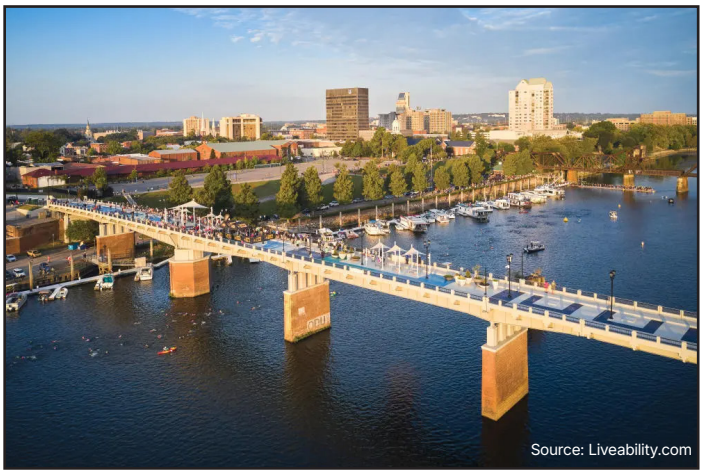
The Enterprise Zone supports economic activity by offering incentives that reduce barriers to development. These include property tax abatements for businesses that create new jobs, as well as incentives that encourage residential improvements. Together, these tools aim to support job creation and improve housing conditions within the area.

The Rocky Creek Enterprise Zone includes a mix of vacant, commercial, and light industrial properties and has been identified as a priority area for continued growth and change.

## *Study Area Context Map*




*Downtown Augusta from Savannah River, with the newly retrofitted pedestrian only "Freedom Bridge" in the foreground.*


*Gordon Hwy in the Rocky Creek Enterprise Zone*

## Regency Mall

The traditional American shopping mall, once a symbol of postwar prosperity and suburban expansion, is in steep decline. First appearing in the mid-20th century, indoor malls flourished as developers sought to replicate the vibrancy of urban retail in car-centric, climate-controlled environments. These centers became not only retail destinations but also cultural landmarks, spaces where generations of Americans socialized, consumed, and congregated. However, by the early 2000s, cracks began to emerge in the mall model as economic, technological, and social shifts began eroding its dominance.

Several factors have contributed to the steady decline of traditional indoor shopping malls. First, the initial suburbanization that enabled mall growth eventually led to over-saturation. As suburban sprawl continued outward, retailers moved further away, leaving behind first-generation malls to deteriorate. Additionally, the rise of e-commerce in the 2010s disrupted brick-and-mortar retail. Online shopping grew from just 5 percent of total retail sales in 2011 to 15 percent by 2020, with projections to exceed 25 percent in the near future (Díaz-Gutiérrez, 2024). This shift was driven by consumer demand for convenience, greater selection, and ease of price comparison.

The COVID-19 pandemic acted as an accelerant to this trend. Public health concerns, lockdown mandates, and widespread changes to daily routines drastically altered shopping behaviors. Consumers increasingly turned to online platforms not only for goods, but also for groceries and restaurant meals. Research found that individuals with higher perceived risk of COVID-19 exposure, especially older adults and racial minorities, reduced in-store shopping at significantly higher rates (Díaz-Gutiérrez, 2024).

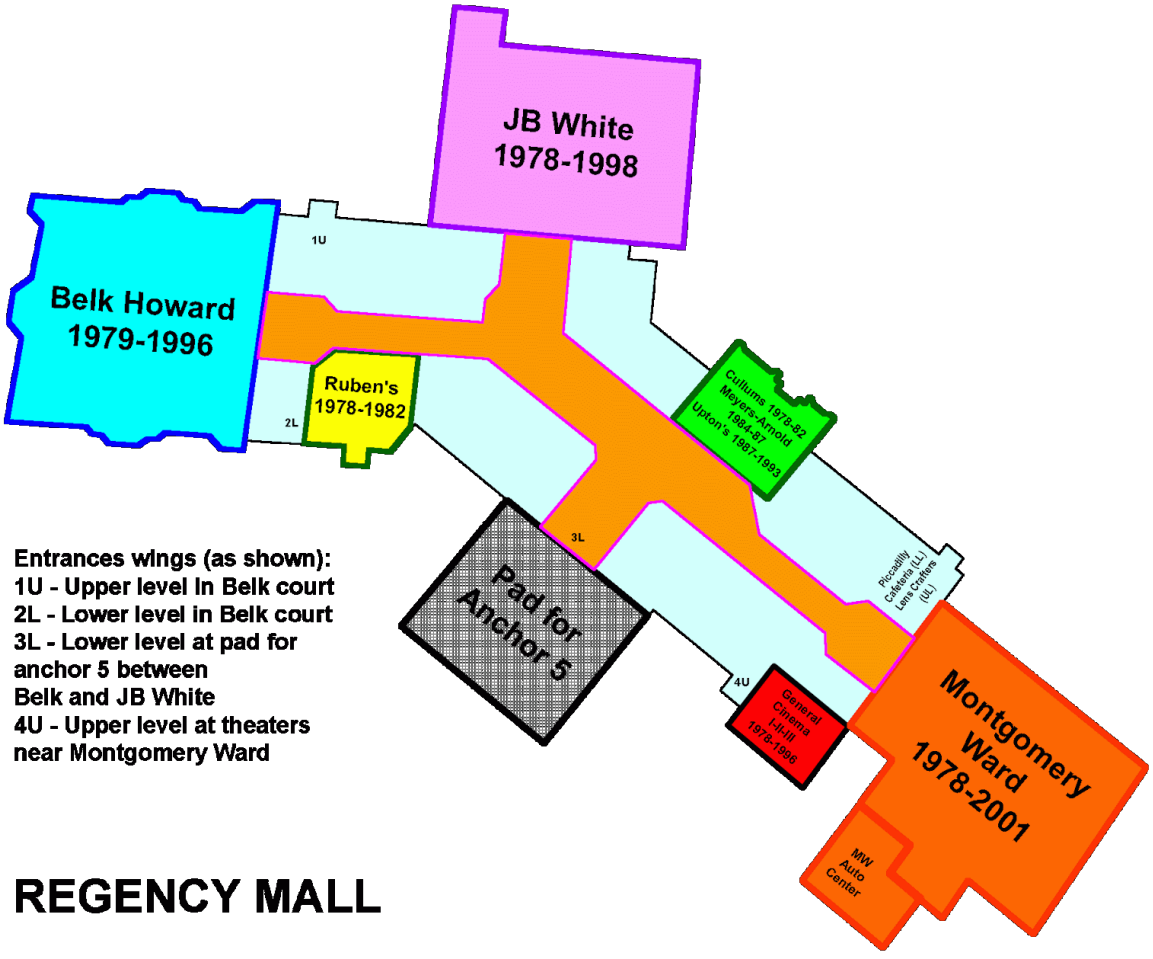
Transition to online shopping has been reinforced by broader changes in consumer values. Where malls once represented novelty and access to national brands, many now appear generic, aging, or irrelevant. Today's consumers, particularly younger generations, tend to value experience, walkability, and authenticity over the sterile predictability of enclosed retail centers. As a result, malls that failed to evolve with these preferences now stand as underused properties in need of reinvention.

Source: Augusta Chronicle

Regency Mall opened on July 27, 1978. At the time, it was the largest indoor shopping mall in the state and was expected to be a major retail destination for the area. The mall was built by developer Edward J. DeBartolo and had a unique Y-shaped design with two floors. It was anchored by four major department stores: Montgomery Ward, J.B. White, Belk, and Cullum's. Inside, the mall had a modern look with tile floors, brown accents, and even live trees planted along the lower level. However, just one week later, Augusta Mall opened in West Augusta and quickly overtook Regency Mall in popularity due to a better location, stronger management, and more attractive store offerings (Kirby, 2020).

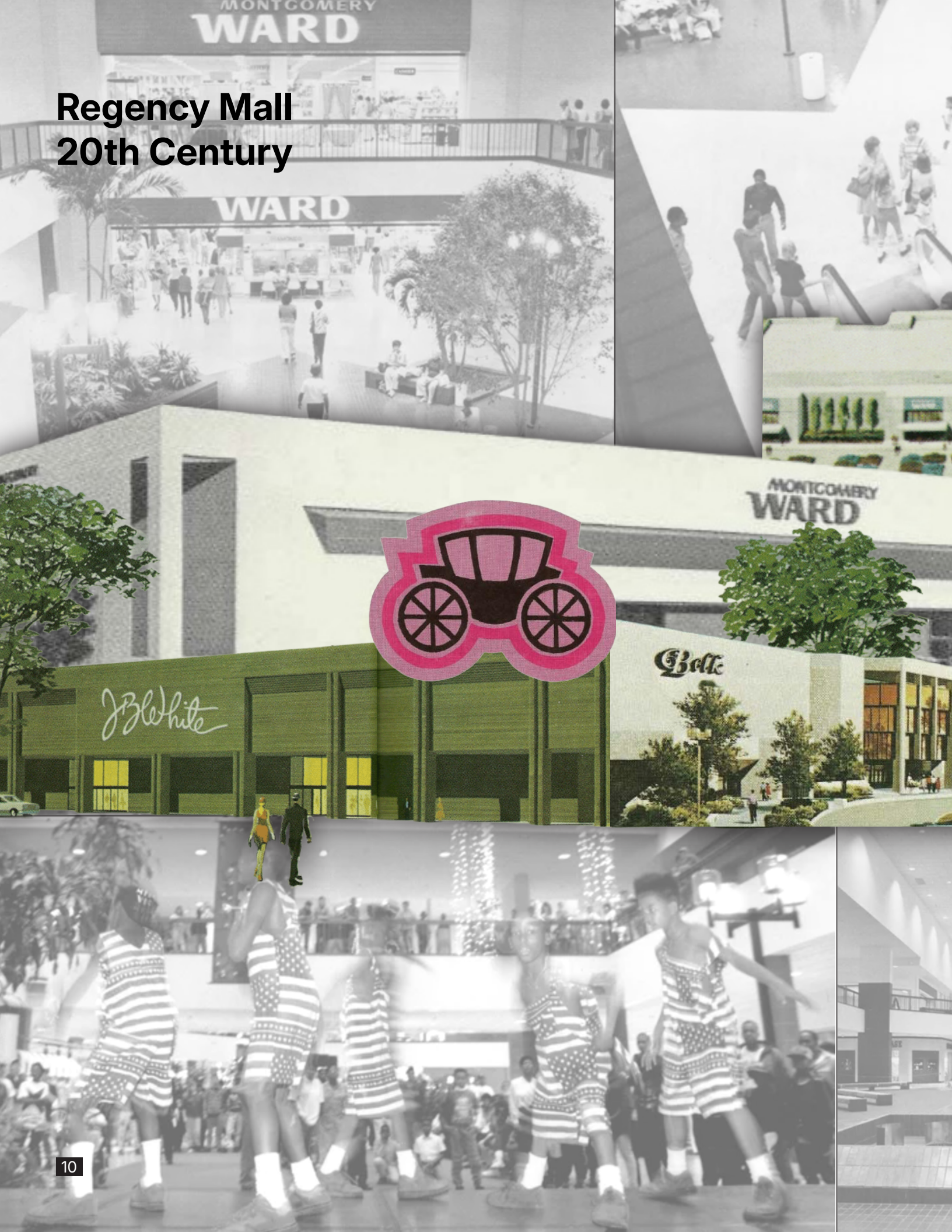
Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Regency Mall began to decline. Crime, including high-profile murders, assaults, and robberies, became associated with the site, driving away customers and retailers. The mall's location also played a role in its struggles. Regency Mall was isolated compared to Augusta Mall, which thrived due to its better access to interstates, proximity to West Augusta's growing suburban areas, higher household incomes, and ongoing property improvements. As a result, many shoppers and businesses shifted their focus to Augusta Mall, leaving Regency Mall with fewer stores and fewer visitors.

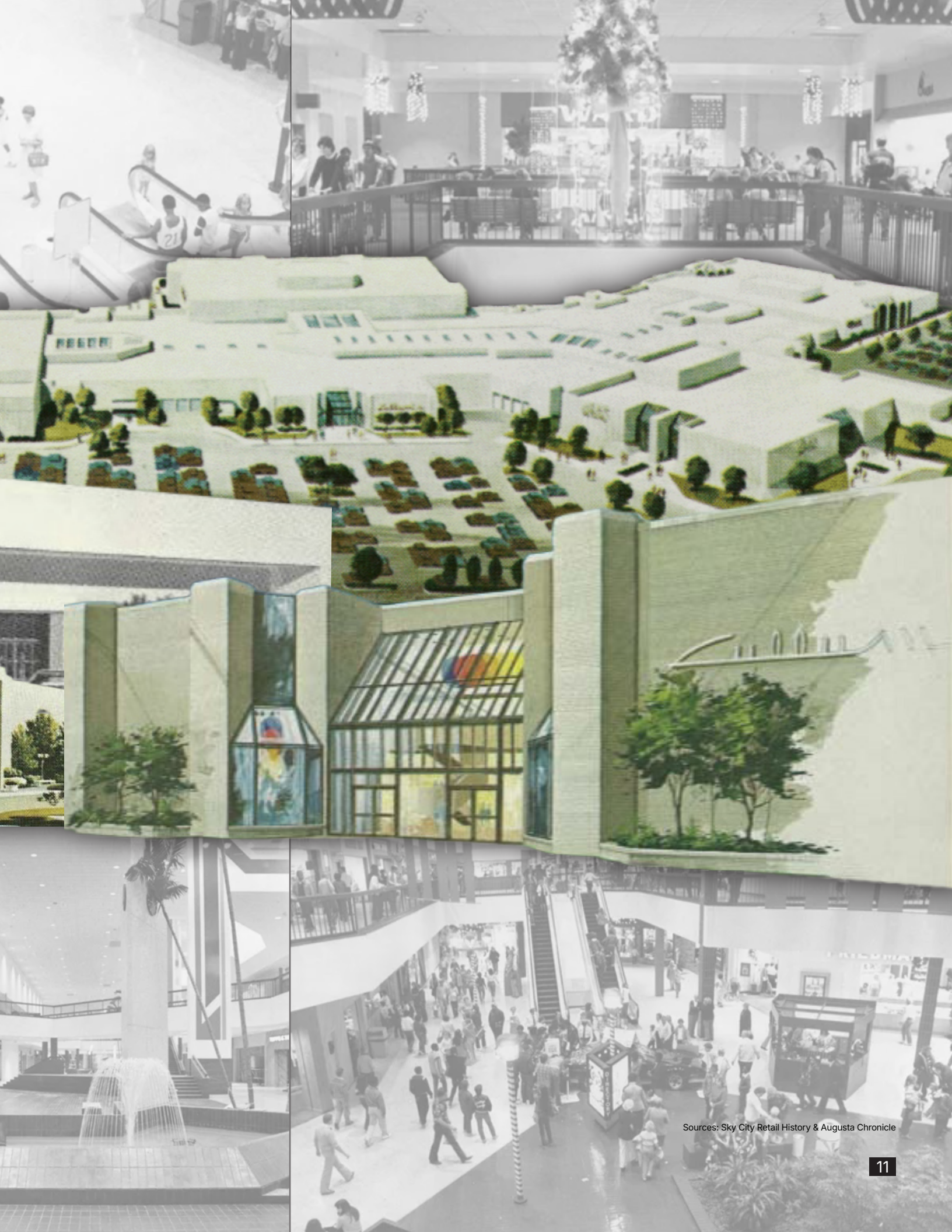
As major stores left, the mall struggled to stay open. Upton's, one of the smaller department stores, shut down in 1993. Belk left in 1996, followed by J.B. White in 1998, when it moved to Augusta Mall. Montgomery Ward was the last anchor store to remain, but it went out of business in 2001. With no major stores left, Regency Mall officially closed in March 2002. Since then, the site has mostly sat empty (Sky City, 2011).




Source: Sky City Retail History

# Regency Mall
# 20th Century





Sources: Sky City Retail History & Augusta Chronicle

This long period of vacancy has had lasting effects on South Augusta. The mall's decline mirrored and possibly accelerated broader patterns of disinvestment in the surrounding area. As Regency Mall emptied out, nearby shopping centers lost tenants as well, leading to an increase in vacant storefronts along Gordon Highway and Deans Bridge Road. In 2012, the mall was cited for being a firetrap after officials discovered the loosely secured mall's fire alarm and sprinkler systems were inoperable. Owners chose to gut the mall, removing all combustible materials from the vacant building instead of repairing the alarm systems (McCord, 2013). In 2018, the mall owners avoided roughly $65,000 in annual Augusta stormwater fees by removing asphalt parking lots to reduce the property's impervious surface area. This action changed the site from impervious to pervious, mitigating the city-imposed fees on runoff-generating surfaces (Edge, 2021).

The socioeconomic impact has been significant. South Augusta, historically home to more working-class and Black communities, has seen slower growth and less public and private investment than other parts of the city. According to U.S. Census data, median household incomes in South Augusta census tracts remain well below the countywide average. Residents have expressed frustration over the lack of retail, amenities, and quality food options. "Quality" being the key word here, as what you will find in South Augusta is an abundance of fast-food restaurants. For young people in the area, the abandoned mall has also represented a loss of safe spaces for gathering and recreation.

Over the years, many redevelopment proposals have been brought forward, but none have come to fruition. One of the most talked-about efforts was the idea to move the James Brown Arena from downtown to the Regency Mall site. Supporters of this idea rallied behind the notion that relocating the arena here could jumpstart South Augusta's economy by drawing events, restaurants, and hotels to the area. However, the proposal faced strong opposition from downtown stakeholders and civic leaders who favored reinvestment in the city center. After much debate, the Coliseum Authority voted in 2021 to build a new arena in the current downtown location, effectively ending the Regency Mall option.

The repeated failure of redevelopment plans has created skepticism among residents and officials, and now many view the site as politically toxic. **Several key barriers continue to stand in the way of redevelopment:**

• **Ownership:** The mall is owned by Cardinal Management, a group based in New York. As an out-of-town owner, there is limited direct connection to local conditions and priorities, and communication with city leaders has reportedly been limited, making coordination and redevelopment efforts more difficult.

• **Lack of Infrastructure Investment:** Although the site has road access, its surrounding infrastructure, such as sidewalks, transit stops, and lighting, has not been maintained. This makes it harder to attract developers focused on walkability or mixed-use projects.

• **Negative Perception:** The site is still heavily associated with crime and decay, making it a hard sell for potential tenants and investors. This stigma has contributed to a sense that South Augusta is risky or undesirable.

• **Uncertain Funding:** Large redevelopment projects often rely on public-private partnerships, tax incentives, or infrastructure grants to succeed. So far, the city has not been able to identify or commit the funding needed to make the site "shovel-ready."

In addition to these barriers, the repeated failure of redevelopment efforts reflects a broader disconnect between large, outside-led proposals and the local conditions of South Augusta. Many past plans were ambitious and expensive, but did not fully align with the area's market, community needs, or funding realities. As a result, they struggled to gain long-term support and were never implemented. This pattern helps explain why redevelopment has been difficult and highlights the importance of more realistic, locally informed, and incremental approaches moving forward. Some of these past efforts are examined in more detail in the Planning Context and Previous Plans section of this practicum.

# Regency Mall
# 21st Century

## 2000s


Source: Sky City Retail History


Source: Sky City Retail History

## 2020s


Source: Reddit


Source: The Augusta Press


Source: The Augusta Press

# Methodology

This practicum uses an applied planning methodology designed to identify suburban retrofit opportunities within the Rocky Creek Study Area of South Augusta. The methodology integrates local knowledge, policy review, planning literature, spatial analysis, and site evaluation to support place-based and implementable recommendations.

The practicum author's familiarity with Augusta provides valuable insight into how different parts of the city have evolved over time and where redevelopment challenges are most visible. This local knowledge helped shape the focus of the study and identify key areas of concern. These insights are supported by publicly available data, adopted plans, and established planning practices to ensure a clear and consistent analysis.

## 1. Review of Planning Context and Past Redevelopment Efforts

A review of the planning context and past redevelopment efforts was conducted to establish a foundation for identifying realistic and implementable redevelopment opportunities. Understanding prior plans, policies, and proposals, even  or especially those that were not implementable, was important for recognizing long-standing goals, recurring challenges, and institutional constraints that continue to shape redevelopment outcomes in the area.

This review included adopted comprehensive plans, area plans, and site-specific redevelopment proposals affecting the study area. Each document was examined to understand its intended scope, primary objectives, and assumptions related to land use, infrastructure, economic development, and environmental conditions. Particular attention was given to how these plans addressed large commercial sites, corridor development, and reinvestment in underperforming areas.

Past redevelopment proposals were also reviewed to identify patterns in scale, phasing, and implementation approach. This included examining whether strategies relied on single, large-scale projects, long-term market shifts, or significant public investment. The review helped highlight why many previous efforts struggled to move beyond conceptual stages and informed the need for more flexible and incremental approaches to redevelopment.

Rather than evaluating these documents for consistency or compliance, the review focused on extracting lessons relevant to future planning efforts. These lessons informed how redevelopment opportunities were framed, which types of strategies were prioritized, and how proposals were shaped to better align with existing conditions and implementation realities.

By grounding the practicum in the existing planning context, this review ensured that subsequent analysis and recommendations build on established goals while responding to documented limitations. This step provided an important link between past planning efforts and the identification of new suburban retrofit opportunities across the Study Area.

## 2. Literature Review

An analysis of many sources, including Retrofitting Suburbia by Ellen Dunham-Jones and June Williamson was conducted to inform how redevelopment opportunities should be evaluated and prioritized. Literature focused on strategies for reinvesting in aging suburban commercial areas, with particular attention to approaches that emphasize reuse, adaptability, and long-term feasibility.

Themes that emerged across the reviewed sources included the importance of environmental performance, the role of public space and connectivity in supporting community life, and the need for redevelopment strategies that align with market conditions and implementation capacity. These themes reflect widely accepted planning principles and are relevant to a range of suburban contexts.

Based on this review, a theoretical framework was developed to structure the analysis and proposal development in this practicum. The framework organizes planning considerations into three interconnected dimensions: environmental sustainability, social sustainability, and economic sustainability. Together, these dimensions provide a consistent way to evaluate existing conditions, compare potential sites, and guide redevelopment decisions.

## 3. Case Study Review

A case study review was conducted to inform the development of the suburban retrofit framework by examining comparable projects that address the transformation of suburban landscapes. The purpose of this review was to identify strategies, design approaches, and implementation methods that could be adapted to the Study Area.

Case studies were selected based on their relevance to key components of the Framework, including mall redevelopment, community-centered planning, housing diversity, and greenway integration. Rather than focusing on a single precedent, a range of case studies was chosen to reflect the interdisciplinary nature of suburban retrofit, which requires coordination between land use, housing, economic development, and environmental systems.

The selected case studies include the Highland Mall redevelopment in Austin, Texas; the Eastland for Everyone Plan in Columbus, Ohio; MicroLife Institute communities in Atlanta, Georgia; and the Euchee Creek Greenway and Trail System in Grovetown, Georgia. Each case study was chosen to represent a specific aspect of the Framework, and the findings from the case study review were used to inform the three primary strategies used in the “Regency” design proposal.

# 4. Existing Conditions Analysis

An existing conditions analysis was conducted to understand how social, environmental, and physical factors shape redevelopment potential within the Study Area. The analysis was organized into four complementary lenses: context and community, landscape systems, movement and infrastructure, and built form. Together, these lenses provide a complete understanding of current conditions and help identify both constraints and opportunities for suburban retrofit strategies.

The **context and community** analysis examined the broader social and regulatory setting influencing redevelopment. This included a review of the area's history, demographic characteristics, and zoning framework. Demographic data was used to understand population trends, income levels, and household characteristics that may affect redevelopment outcomes. Zoning and land use regulations were reviewed to identify permitted uses, development constraints, and opportunities for reuse or change. Public facilities and institutions, such as schools, civic buildings, and community services, were also mapped to understand their role as anchors within the area and their relationship to surrounding land uses.

The **landscape** analysis focused on environmental systems that influence where and how development can occur. This included an assessment of slope, land cover, and the presence of green and blue infrastructure. Data from the National Land Cover Database was used to identify developed areas, vegetated areas, and existing open space. Water bodies and drainage patterns were examined to understand flood risk and opportunities for stormwater management. Together, these factors helped distinguish areas constrained by environmental conditions from those where natural systems could be leveraged as assets.

The **movement and infrastructure** analysis evaluated how people and goods move through the Study Area and how existing infrastructure supports or limits access. The roadway network was analyzed to identify major corridors, access points, and connectivity gaps. Public transportation routes and stops were reviewed to understand transit availability and coverage. This analysis highlighted areas where auto-oriented design, limited transit access, or disconnected networks create barriers to mobility, as well as locations where improved connectivity could support redevelopment.

The **built form** analysis examined the physical pattern of development across the study area. This included block size, street layout, building footprints, and existing land uses. Large blocks, single-use sites, and low-intensity commercial development were evaluated in terms of their adaptability and relationship to surrounding neighborhoods. Building patterns and uses were analyzed to identify areas where redevelopment could improve integration with adjacent land uses.

## 5. Suitability Analysis

A GIS-based suitability analysis was conducted to help identify areas within the Rocky Creek study area that are more appropriate for redevelopment. Using a weighted overlay method, the analysis considered factors such as zoning, land cover, parcel vacancy, environmental constraints, and proximity to transit. This process was used as an exploratory tool to understand where redevelopment potential is strongest, rather than to justify a predetermined site. The results then informed the selection of sites for further design and provide a clear basis for why those sites were chosen. A more detailed explanation of the analysis is provided in a later section.

## 6. Design Proposals

Following the suitability analysis, areas identified as more suitable for suburban retrofit were used to guide the selection of sites for design exploration. Rather than attempting to develop proposals for every suitable location, the smaller number of sites were strategically chosen to demonstrate how the suburban retrofit framework can be applied under different conditions within the Rocky Creek study area.

The selected sites are located within areas that scored highly in the suitability analysis, reflecting favorable zoning conditions, lower environmental constraints, proximity to infrastructure, and the presence of underutilized or vacant land.

The design proposals were developed to reflect the guiding principles of the suburban retrofit framework. While the specific design solutions vary by site, they all respond to existing conditions.

The Regency Mall site serves as the primary and most detailed proposal due to its scale, visibility, and catalytic potential within South Augusta .

Because this project is intended as a framework, these proposals are not presented as final development plans. Instead, they function as illustrative applications of the broader strategy, showing how data-driven analysis and design principles can guide future redevelopment efforts. Each site would require further evaluation, stakeholder engagement, and detailed planning before implementation, but together, these proposals provide a vision for how suburban retrofit can be realized across the Rocky Creek area.

# Planning Context & Previous Plans

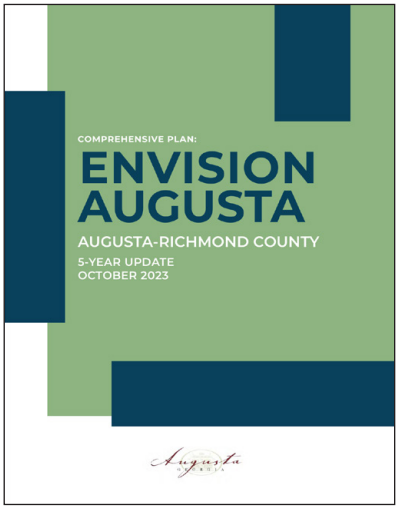
Redevelopment in South Augusta and the Rocky Creek Study Area has been shaped by a series of adopted plans, policy documents, and redevelopment proposals over the past two decades. These efforts reflect ongoing recognition of the area's challenges as well as its strategic importance within the city. Together, they provide insight into past priorities and recurring barriers that continue to influence redevelopment outcomes.

## CSRA Regional Plan 2040 (2018-19)


The CSRA Regional Plan 2040 is a long-range planning document prepared by the Central Savannah River Area Regional Commission in 2018 and 2019 to guide growth and development across the 13-county CSRA region, including Augusta-Richmond County. The plan focuses on broad regional priorities rather than site-specific projects and covers topics such as economic development, housing, land use and transportation, community facilities, and natural resources. Its overall purpose is to coordinate growth, improve quality of life, and support a more connected and resilient region. Across these areas, the plan calls for more walkable and mixed-use development patterns, a wider range of housing options, better coordination between land use and transportation, and investments in infrastructure such as sidewalks, transit, and utilities.

The plan highlights the importance of reinvestment in underperforming commercial areas, infill development, and the reuse of grayfield sites such as aging shopping centers. It also supports improved pedestrian and bicycle connectivity, shared paths, and the integration of green infrastructure into redevelopment projects. The plan also recognizes the role of tools such as Enterprise Zones to encourage investment in distressed areas (CSRA Regional Commission, 2019).

## Envision Augusta Comprehensive Plan (2023)




The Envision Augusta Comprehensive Plan is the primary planning document for Augusta-Richmond County. The plan addresses key topics such as land use, housing, transportation, economic development, and infrastructure, while also identifying place-specific strategies for different parts of the county through a detailed character area framework.

Within this framework, South Augusta is defined as a largely suburban area characterized by low-density, single-family neighborhoods, curvilinear street patterns, limited sidewalks, and auto-oriented commercial corridors along major roads. However, one comment received during a community engagement public meeting noted "South Augusta is not an 'urban' area but it is being developed that way" (City of Augsuta, 2023).

According to the plan, **the recommended development patterns for South Augusta focus on reinforcing existing neighborhood character while guiding strategic growth and reinvestment.** In areas where single-family housing is already the dominant land use, development should remain low-density to preserve neighborhood stability. At the same time, opportunities for infill housing should be encouraged, provided that new development is compatible with surrounding densities, site design, and architectural character.

**Targeted redevelopment should be prioritized in underperforming neighborhoods and at vacant or underutilized commercial and industrial sites.** These areas present opportunities to introduce new housing, support economic activity, and reuse land more efficiently. Additional commercial and retail development should be directed to major intersections, particularly those located near underserved neighborhoods, to improve access to goods and services.

This plan also emphasizes reducing reliance on automobiles by **expanding sidewalks, bike lanes, and multi-use trails.** These connections are intended to link residential neighborhoods with schools, parks, community facilities, greenways, and local businesses. In addition, transit service should be expanded in high-demand corridors, where there is strong potential for increased ridership.

These development patterns support the Georgia Department of Community Affairs' Quality Community Objectives, including **economic prosperity, resource management, efficient land use, sense of place, housing options, transportation choices, local preparedness, educational opportunities, and community health.**


*Regency Mall in the Rocky Creek Study Area*


*Downtown Augusta*


*Townhomes in South Augusta*

While Augusta-RIchmond County does not have a future land use map (the creation of one was postponed in 2023 due to under staffing—the character area map currently serves as an alternative), the plan also specifies recommended land uses and zoning districts for the area. Residential development should include a **mix of zoning districts** such as R-1 (single-family), R-2 (two-family), R-3 (multi-family), and R-MH (manufactured housing), with limited expansion of manufactured housing areas. **Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) are also encouraged** to allow for more flexible, mixed-use development patterns. Commercial and professional uses should be accommodated through P-1 (office), B-1 (neighborhood business), and B-2 (general business) zoning districts. Industrial uses, including light and heavy industrial, should be maintained but with limited expansion. Additional land uses should include institutional uses as well as **parks, recreation areas, and conservation lands** to support environmental and community goals.

Implementation of these strategies identified include public investments and improvements to infrastructure and transit facilities, offering incentives to encourage desired development, and updating development regulations to better support the vision for South Augusta.

Additionally, in the work program project section, the plan highlights that a Rocky Creek Flood Hazard Mitigation Project was completed in 2023, helping with stormwater management problems that were persistent in the area (Augusta-Richmond County Planning Commission, 2018).

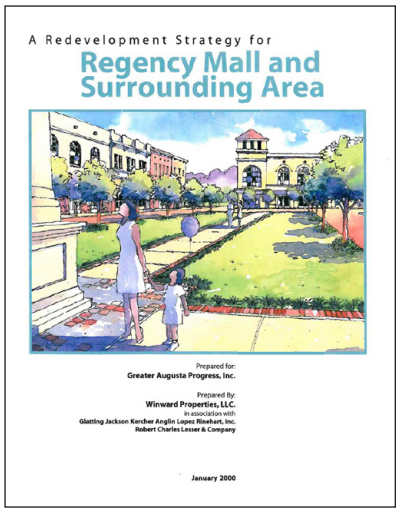
Within the Rocky Creek Study Area, the Regency Mall site stands out as the most prominent example of suburban commercial decline, and it will serve as the “catalytic opportunity” of this practicum. Developed as a regional shopping destination during South Augusta’s period of growth, the mall once served as a central economic and social hub. Today, the site is largely vacant and surrounded by barren land. However, its size, infrastructure, and location along a major corridor create both constraints and opportunities.

The redevelopment of this site has been the subject of wide-ranging speculation. First, a mixed-use development in 2000. In 2008, a baseball stadium. In 2010, Rocky Creek Park. In 2014, using SPLOST dollars so the city can buy it. In 2015, a water park. In 2016, a tech innovation center. In 2016, movie studios. In 2017, a cyber corridor or the new James Brown Arena. In 2018, a James Brown Museum. In 2018, a movie set. Another mixed-use development in 2022 (Harris, 2022).

As shown, many of the previous redevelopment efforts have often relied on large, comprehensive proposals that proved difficult to align with local market conditions and financing realities. While these proposals generated public interest, none advanced to full implementation. This history suggests that the primary challenge at the site has not been a lack of ideas, but difficulty translating vision into phased, financially viable development.

Two major efforts stand out for their scope and influence: A Redevelopment Strategy for Regency Mall and Surrounding Area (2000) and the Cardinal Town Square proposal (2022).

# A Redevelopment Strategy for Regency Mall and Surrounding Area (2000)

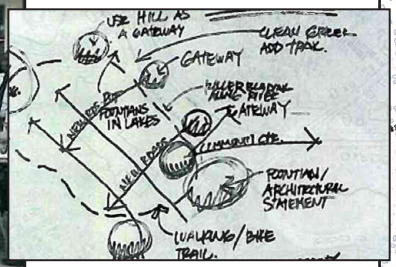



Prepared in January 2000, this strategy was the first comprehensive effort focused specifically on the Regency Mall site and its surroundings. Developed before the mall's complete closure, the plan combined market analysis, urban design, transportation, and public engagement to argue that Regency could no longer succeed as a traditional retail mall because population and growth had shifted northwest toward Augusta Mall, leaving Regency with declining traffic and a largely vacant structure.

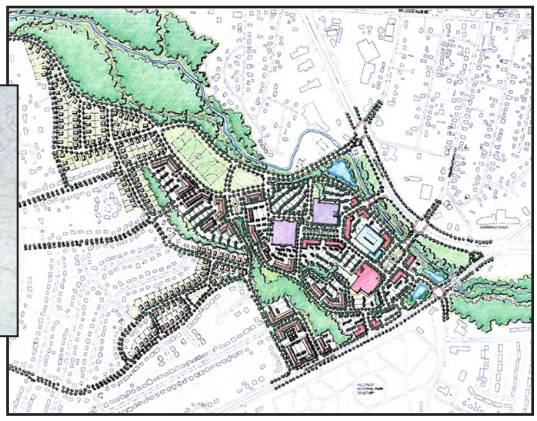
The process was fairly comprehensive for its time. According to the report, the consultant team first completed site visits, interviews, case studies, and traffic studies, then led a four-day public design charrette called "Rethinking Regency" in an empty storefront inside the mall. More than 200 people participated, including local business owners, neighbors, the mayor, city-county commissioners, and government staff. The meetings began with presentations on initial market findings and site context, then participants broke into eight facilitated groups to discuss desired uses, atmosphere, building placement, the future of the mall structure, surrounding neighborhoods, and Rocky Creek. The team then combined the market analysis, site analysis, design principles, and public input into the master plan.

The main issues and community concerns were clear. People repeatedly raised concerns about safety and security, negative media coverage, and the fact that the mall felt physically cut off from surrounding neighborhoods. At the same time, **the public wanted neighborhood services, retail, recreation and park space tied to Rocky Creek, civic space, housing, and walkable neighborhood connections.** The context and results of the analysis pushed the plan toward a phased mixed-use redevelopment strategy. The first phase, a 5-year plan, emphasized converting former mall anchor buildings to back-office and call center space in addition to commercial outparcels. **Housing was treated as a later possibility** after the project had established itself, being introduced in the 10-year and long term plans which focused on entertainment retail, outlet retail, and civic space.

*Design Charrette*




*Charrette Bubble Diagram*



*Final Long Term Plan*

Sources: A Redevelopment Strategy for Regency Mall and Surrounding Area

This strategy also identified what was probably the **single biggest structural obstacle: fragmented ownership.** At the time, the mall building itself was controlled by three different owners, and surrounding land had three additional owners. The plan directly states that successful redevelopment would require all of these parties to commit to the same vision, and it recommends trying to get the mall under single ownership first. It even notes that lease structures and ownership arrangements could prevent anchor stores from participating in a mixed-use redevelopment or from sharing parking.

The reason this strategy was never implemented is complex, however, the **implementation barriers were substantial**: weak market fundamentals, the need for major public investment, a long implementation horizon, the site's poor regional growth position, negative perceptions of the property, and especially the fragmented ownership and lease constraints.

Later official and news sources suggest those problems never fully got resolved. Augusta's 2004 comprehensive plan said Regency Mall was a unique case because of its size and high redevelopment cost. Also, some accounts note that owners in the early 2000s were not willing to risk the tens of millions of dollars that substantial renovation would have required.

**The 2000 strategy seems to have failed not because it lacked vision, but because it depended on a combination that did not materialize at the time**: unified ownership, strong developer leadership, public-sector partnership, upfront civic investment, zoning changes, and enough market demand to carry a very large and complicated site over many years. The plan was realistic enough to recognize those needs, but not enough of them lined up to make the project happen.

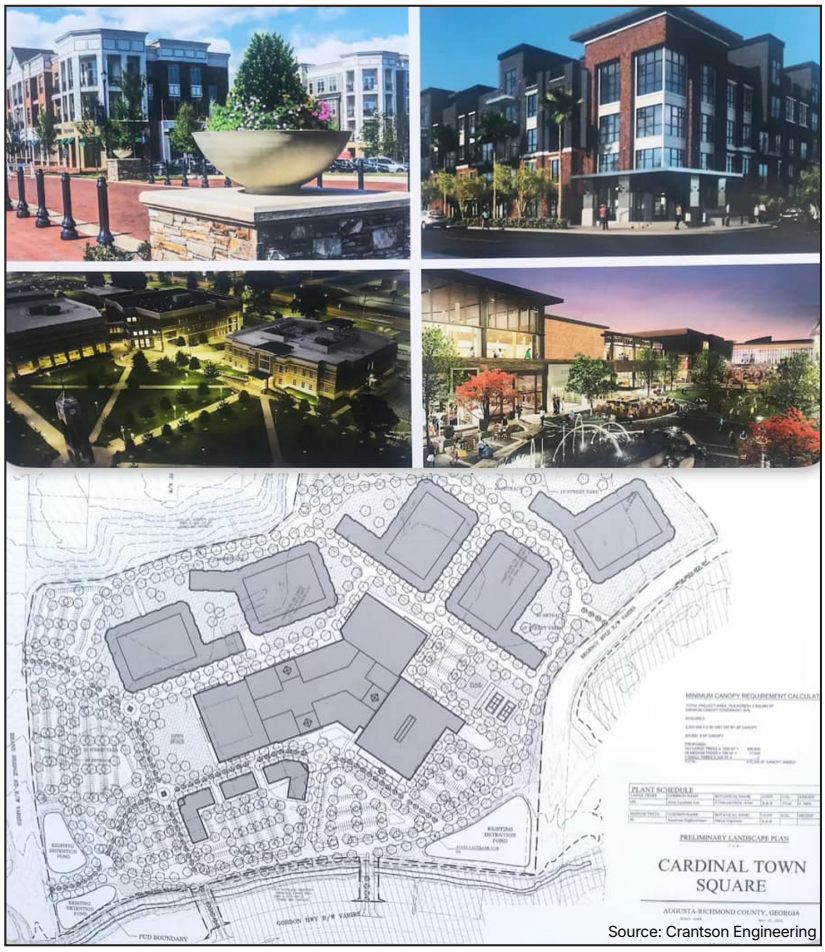
The plan applied strong urban design principles that remain relevant today. **Its emphasis on walkability, open space, and creating a more human-scaled, connected environment reflects approaches that continue to guide successful suburban retrofit and redevelopment efforts** (Winward Properties LLC, 2000).

## Cardinal Town Square Proposal (2022)

The Cardinal Town Square proposal represented one of the most ambitious attempts to redevelop the Regency Mall site, but from the outset, it was widely understood as an overly optimistic vision relative to the realities of the South Augusta market. Introduced around 2022 and approved through a Planned Unit Development (PUD) rezoning, the project proposed a large-scale, mixed-use transformation intended to reposition the site as a new regional activity center (Andrews, 2022). However, similar to earlier redevelopment efforts, the proposal reflected a pattern of highly aspirational planning that did not fully align with local economic conditions, development demand, or feasibility.

The site plan called for a significant reconfiguration of the mall property, including the partial retention and conversion of the existing mall structure into new commercial uses alongside market-rate apartments with surface and structured parking. The plan did include other civic uses such as open space and a performing arts center. While visually compelling, this approach introduced major feasibility concerns. Retaining and retrofitting a large, aging mall building is typically more expensive and complex than demolition and new construction, particularly when the structure was not originally designed for adaptive reuse. In addition, the scale and type of development proposed did not reflect the surrounding context. The multifamily housing was not positioned as affordable or workforce-oriented, limiting its accessibility in an area with lower incomes, and the amount of retail space appeared excessive given existing market demand and the continued decline of large-format retail. As a result, the proposal prioritized a bold, transformative vision over a realistic, phased approach grounded in local conditions.

Ultimately, the project stalled and has not moved forward. The estimated cost of the project, exceeding $100 million, combined with the challenges of financing, tenant recruitment, and site complexity, made implementation unlikely from the beginning. In this sense, Cardinal Town Square reflects a continuation of past redevelopment attempts that have struggled to materialize.



Source: Crantson Engineering

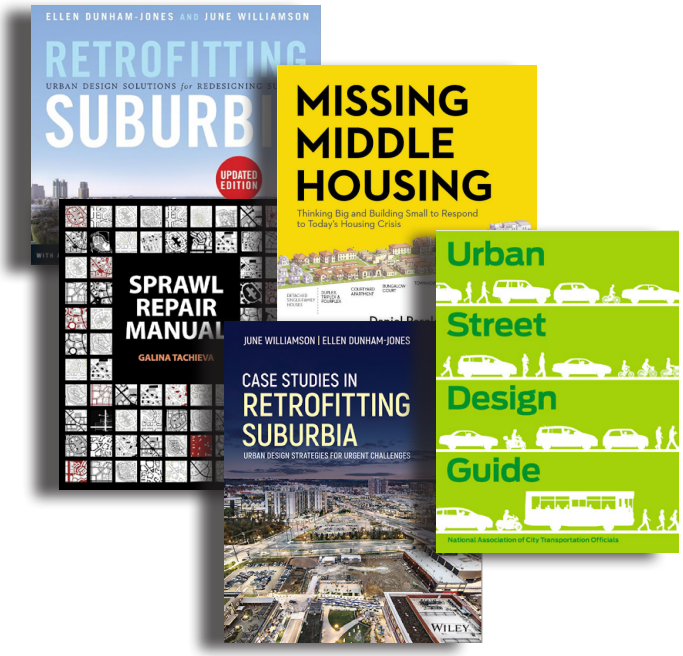
# Literature Review & Guiding Principles

## Introduction

Redevelopment challenges in South Augusta reflect conditions common to many aging suburban commercial areas across the United States. Large sites shaped by automobile-oriented design, separated land uses, and single-purpose retail formats often struggle to adapt to changing economic conditions and evolving community needs. Planning literature addressing these environments provides guidance on how reinvestment can build on existing assets while avoiding large-scale replacement strategies that are difficult to implement.

This practicum draws from Retrofitting Suburbia: Urban Design Solutions for Redesigning Suburbs, Case Studies in Retrofitting Suburbia: Urban Design Strategies for Urgent Challenges, and many other sources. Together, these works examine how postwar development patterns can evolve through reuse, rebuild, and regreening. Rather than advancing a single development model, the literature emphasizes flexible, place-based approaches that respond to local context, market conditions, and long-term community priorities.

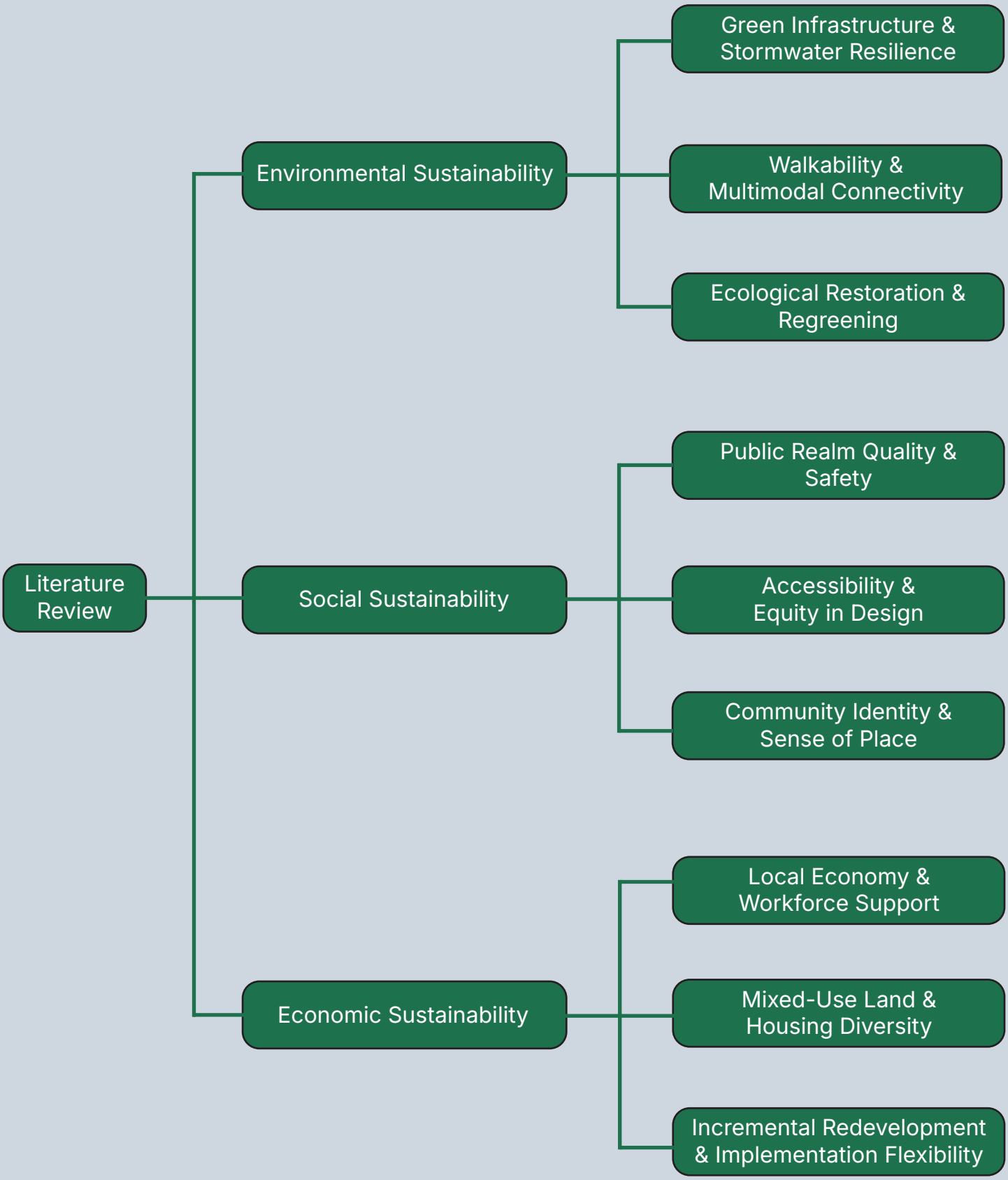
Building on this body of work, the practicum applies a theoretical framework organized around three interconnected dimensions of sustainability: environmental, social, and economic. These dimensions are treated as overlapping considerations that shape how redevelopment opportunities are evaluated within the Rocky Creek Study Area. From this framework, guiding principles were derived which translate planning literature into practical criteria that inform site analysis, opportunity identification, and the planning and design proposals presented in this practicum.




*Sample of Reviewed Literature*


*Theoretical Framework Diagram*

*Literature Review Map*



# Environmental Sustainability

## Green Infrastructure and Stormwater Resilience

Environmental sustainability begins with improving how land and infrastructure interact with natural systems. Many suburban commercial sites are dominated by impervious surfaces that increase stormwater runoff and place stress on drainage networks. Integrating green infrastructure, such as bioswales, rain gardens, retention areas, and permeable surfaces, allows redevelopment efforts to improve stormwater performance while reducing environmental impacts.

These systems can serve more than a functional purpose. When incorporated into the public landscape, stormwater features can enhance site character, support recreation, and provide educational value. Combined with strategies such as energy-efficient building design, reduced heat island effects, and material reuse, green infrastructure strengthens environmental performance while reinforcing a clearer relationship between built form and natural processes (NACTO, 2017).

Example: Bioswale
A bioswale is a shallow, planted landscape feature designed to capture, slow, and filter stormwater runoff. Instead of directing water immediately into pipes, it allows rainwater to soak into engineered soil while vegetation removes pollutants such as sediment and oils. Bioswales reduce flooding, improve water quality, support groundwater recharge, and enhance streetscapes by integrating green infrastructure directly into the public realm.

Source: UN-Habitat

## Walkability and Multimodal Connectivity

Improving environmental performance also involves reducing reliance on automobile travel. Large block sizes, limited street networks, and isolated land uses restrict pedestrian movement and reinforce car-oriented patterns. Introducing smaller block structures, additional street connections, and continuous pedestrian networks improves access and supports safer, more comfortable movement.

Complete Streets that include sidewalks, street trees, lighting, and bicycle facilities support a wider range of users and encourage everyday walking and cycling. In areas with existing or potential transit access, organizing higher-density and mixed-use development around these connections strengthens the relationship between land use and mobility. Reconfiguring oversized parking areas allows land to be used more efficiently for active, people-centered purposes (NACTO, 2013).

Example: Mobility Hub
Mobility hubs are connected locations where multiple transportation options are brought together in one place, making it easy for people to transfer between different modes. They allow users to plan and select the most convenient, efficient, sustainable, and affordable way to complete their trips (ARUP and Go-Ahead, 2019).

Source: Regional Transportation Authority

## Ecological Restoration and Regreening

Ecological restoration plays an important role in improving environmental performance and overall livability. Regreening strategies focus on reclaiming underused land to restore vegetation, improve drainage, and expand access to open space. Native plantings, green corridors, and restored waterways help reconnect fragmented ecological systems and reduce environmental stress.

These landscapes can also function as flexible community spaces that support recreation and informal gathering. Integrating ecological systems into everyday environments strengthens environmental health while enhancing the usability and identity of redeveloped areas.

Example: Mini Forest
Mini-forests, often created using the Miyawaki method, are small, densely planted areas of native vegetation designed to rapidly restore ecological function in urban environments. These forests are typically established on compact sites such as vacant lots, schoolyards, or underutilized urban land, making them well suited for cities with limited space. The planting approach emphasizes high species diversity and close spacing, which encourages faster growth, improved soil conditions, and the development of a layered forest structure in a relatively short period of time. Beyond ecological benefits such as increased biodiversity, carbon sequestration, and stormwater absorption, mini-forests also serve as visible community assets that enhance neighborhood identity and provide opportunities for environmental education and stewardship (Hitchings, 2025).

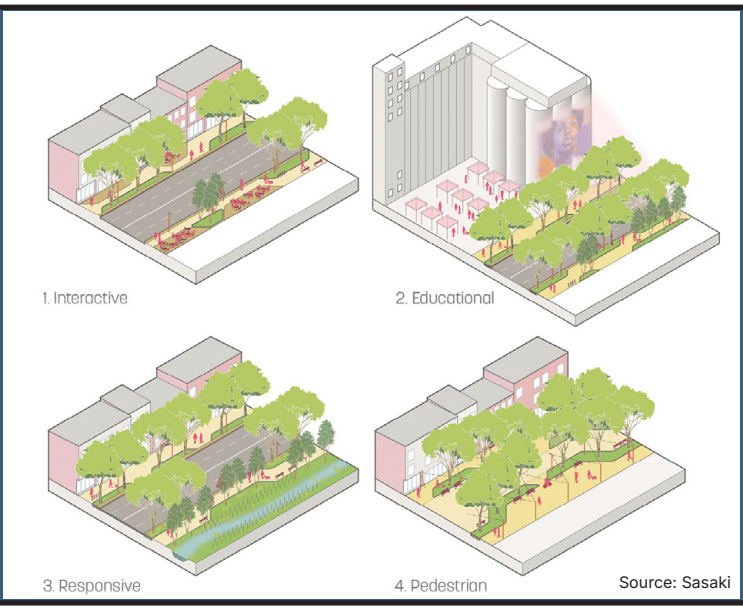
# Social Sustainability

## Public Realm Quality and Safety

A strong public realm is essential to creating socially sustainable environments. Streets, parks, and plazas serve not only as circulation spaces, but also as settings for daily interaction and community life. Pedestrian-oriented design with active building frontages and clear sightlines encourages use and increases comfort.

Safety is supported through visibility, appropriate lighting, and a mix of uses that keep public spaces active throughout the day. These qualities promote walking, support social interaction, and foster a sense of shared ownership, contributing to healthier and more connected communities.

Example: Streetscape Improvements
Streetscape improvements refer to physical enhancements made within the public right-of-way to improve the function, safety, comfort, and visual quality of a street. These improvements typically include upgrades to sidewalks, street trees, lighting, crosswalks, curb extensions, bike facilities, planting areas, street furniture, and wayfinding elements. The goal is to create a more pedestrian-oriented environment while still accommodating necessary vehicular movement (NACTO, 2016).



Source: Sasaki

## Accessibility and Equity in Design

Social sustainability requires that redevelopment benefits a broad range of residents and does not exclude existing communities. Equitable design focuses on improving access to housing, employment, services, and public amenities while reducing physical and social barriers. Introducing a range of housing types and improving pedestrian and transit connections helps ensure that redevelopment responds to diverse needs.

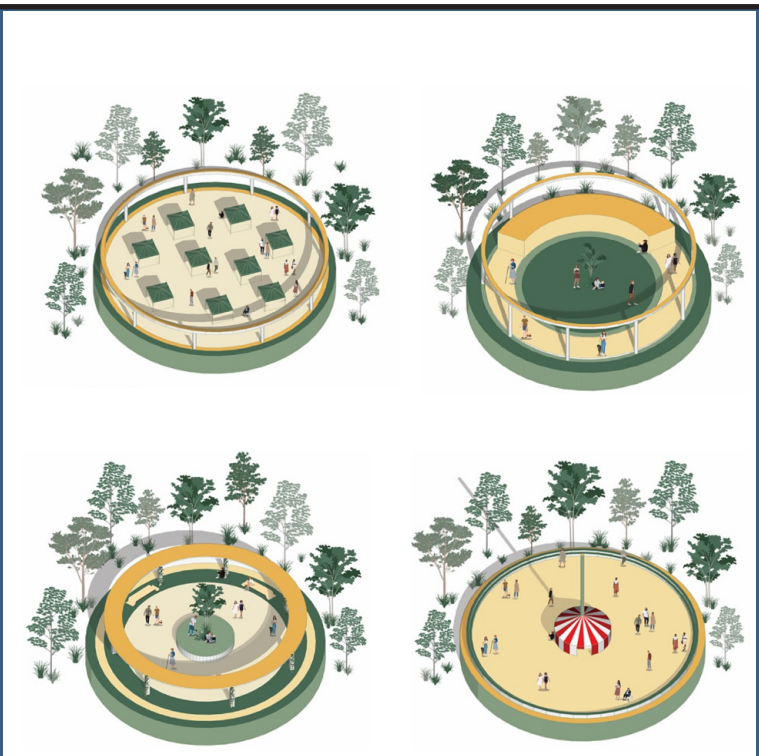
Universally accessible public spaces and equitable distribution of parks and services support inclusion and long-term community stability. Addressing accessibility and equity through planning and design also helps ensure that reinvestment aligns with local priorities.

## Community Identity and Sense of Place

Many suburban commercial areas lack a clear sense of identity due to their scale and single-use design. Redevelopment efforts can establish recognizable places by organizing development around public spaces, using human-scaled design, and incorporating local context. Streets and plazas that encourage gathering support social interaction and civic life.

Providing spaces for community uses, such as markets, libraries, and civic facilities, reinforces local identity and fosters a sense of belonging. These elements help transform underperforming sites into places that reflect community values and support everyday life.

Example: Urban Plaza/Flex Space
An urban plaza or flexible public space can serve as a central organizing feature that strengthens community identity and creates a recognizable sense of place. These spaces are designed to accommodate a range of uses, from everyday activities such as seating and informal gathering to programmed events like markets, performances, and community events. By incorporating elements such as shade structures, seating, landscaping, and open paved areas, plazas can adapt to different needs throughout the day and across seasons. When located near commercial and civic uses, they help activate surrounding development and encourage social interaction (Dunham-Jones and Williamson, 2021).



Source: Studio Articulation

# Economic Sustainability

## Local Economy and Workforce Support

Economic sustainability emphasizes reuse and diversification rather than complete replacement. Underutilized commercial buildings can be adapted to support employment, education, and community services. Flexible zoning and building design that accommodate small businesses and local entrepreneurship help strengthen local economic activity.

Integrating residential, commercial, and employment uses within walkable distances supports balanced development and reduces reliance on long-distance commuting. These strategies encourage reinvestment while supporting long-term economic stability.

## Mixed-Use Land and Housing Diversity

Mixing land uses and housing types contributes to economic resilience by supporting activity throughout the day and reducing dependence on a single market sector. Vertical and horizontal mixed-use configurations allow sites to adapt over time as needs change.

Providing housing options for different income levels and life stages supports affordability and diversity. When combined with public amenities and open space, mixed-use development enhances livability while strengthening economic performance.

Example: Missing Middle Housing

Missing Middle Housing describes housing types that provide moderate density while maintaining the scale and character of detached homes. Rather than high-rise apartments or single-family houses on large lots, missing middle housing consists of compact, multi-unit buildings designed to fit within walkable neighborhoods, such as duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, townhouses, cottage courts, and small courtyard apartments. The concept emphasizes “gentle density,” meaning incremental increases in housing supply that support affordability, walkability, and neighborhood diversity without dramatically altering physical scale (Parolek, 2021).


Source: Opticos

## Incremental Redevelopment and Implementation Flexibility

Incremental change is often more effective than large, single-phase redevelopment efforts. Phased implementation allows investment to respond to market conditions and reduces financial risk (Tachieva, 2010). Designing sites to accommodate future growth and reusing existing infrastructure supports long-term adaptability.

Incremental approaches also encourage coordination between public and private actors and allow strategies to evolve over time. This flexibility is especially important in historically disinvested areas, where sustained progress depends on realistic pacing and long-term commitment.

# Case Studies

## Highland Mall, Austin, Texas

Highland Mall opened in 1971 as Austin's first enclosed shopping mall. At its peak, the 81-acre site featured over 1.2 million square feet of commercial retail space. However, like many first-generation malls, it began to decline in the early 2000s due to competition from newer shopping centers, the loss of anchor tenants, and changing consumer habits. By 2010, much of the mall was vacant, and it officially closed in 2015.

Rather than let the space sit empty or fall into disrepair, Austin Community College (ACC) stepped in with a bold adaptive reuse vision. In partnership with RedLeaf Properties, ACC aimed to convert the failed mall into a vibrant mixed-use, transit-oriented development anchored by a new regional education center. Starting in 2010, ACC acquired the site in six phases for approximately $41 million. The community college funded the project using publicly approved bond measures, while RedLeaf leveraged private equity and loans to finance the commercial and residential components.

The redevelopment strategy integrated both adaptive reuse and mixed-use planning principles. ACC repurposed the mall's interior into modern classroom and study spaces. This required extensive environmental remediation, including asbestos removal and full HVAC and lighting upgrades. The mall's outdated roof was replaced with one that allowed for natural daylight, and walls were demolished to create large, flexible spaces. Rather than demolish the structure entirely, ACC retained much of the mall's shell, demonstrating a cost-effective and environmentally conscious approach to adaptive reuse.

Surrounding the new campus, RedLeaf Properties created a walkable district with housing, office space, retail, parks, and hotel accommodations. The whole project includes: 1.3 million sq ft of institutional space (ACC campus), 1,200 housing units in which 10% are affordable, 100,000 sq ft of retail, 800,000 sq ft of office space, a 200-room hotel, and three public parks with 1.25 miles of walking trails.

What made the redevelopment especially effective was its alignment with Austin's land use and zoning framework. The site had already been designated as a Neighborhood Urban Center, a zoning classification that supported higher-density, mixed-use development. This eliminated major entitlement hurdles and allowed the project to move forward without the delays common to mall reuse efforts elsewhere.

The economic and social impacts of the project have been significant. The introduction of ACC's campus brought thousands of students, faculty, and staff to the site daily, creating a reliable base of foot traffic and demand for nearby services. RedLeaf's residential and office components have attracted long-term tenants and businesses, helping to revitalize the surrounding neighborhood. The area, once characterized by retail blight, now serves as a dynamic hub of education, employment, and housing. Additionally, the inclusion of parks and trails has improved public space access and encouraged a more active and connected community.


ACC and RedLeaf worked closely not only with one another but with local government and community stakeholders to ensure the site met regional planning goals. Public investment through ACC bonds and infrastructure upgrades was critical in enabling RedLeaf to attract tenants and secure financing. The phasing strategy also allowed for flexibility, responding to market demand while maintaining a long-term vision (Beske, 2019).


Sources: Kut News

## Eastland for Everyone, Columbus, Ohio

The Eastland for Everyone Plan in Columbus provides a comprehensive example of how a declining mall site can be reimagined through a community-centered and equity-driven approach. Developed as a strategic framework for the former Eastland Mall site and surrounding area, the plan focuses on addressing long-standing social, economic, and physical challenges through coordinated redevelopment efforts.

At the core of the plan is the recognition that mall decline is not only a physical issue, but also a reflection of broader patterns of disinvestment. Similar to the Rocky Creek area in South Augusta, the Eastland community has experienced declining retail activity, limited access to quality services, and a need for reinvestment in housing, infrastructure, and public amenities. Both areas are characterized by suburban development patterns, aging commercial corridors, and communities that have historically been underserved despite their proximity to regional assets.

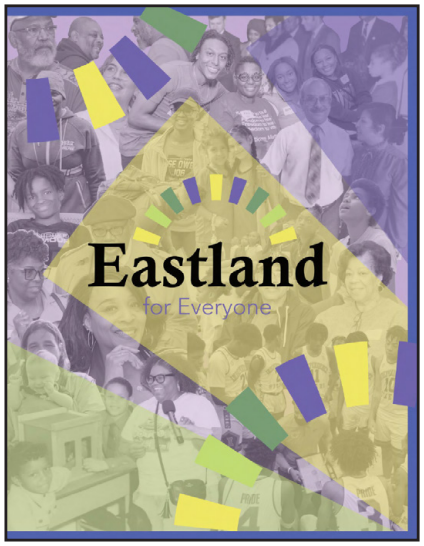
The Eastland plan is organized around a series of guiding ideas that focus on housing, economic development, education, mobility, and community well-being. These ideas emphasize creating a more complete community by introducing a mix of housing types, supporting small businesses, improving access to services, and enhancing public spaces. Rather than relying solely on market-driven redevelopment, the plan prioritizes community needs and long-term resilience, ensuring that redevelopment benefits existing residents.

One of the most significant components of the plan is the Eastland Prosperity Center, which serves as a central anchor for community services and economic opportunity. The center includes a range of integrated programs, such as access to fresh and healthy food, healthcare services, workforce training, and assistance with public benefits. By bringing these resources together in one location, the prosperity center addresses multiple barriers faced by residents and creates a centralized hub for support and opportunity.

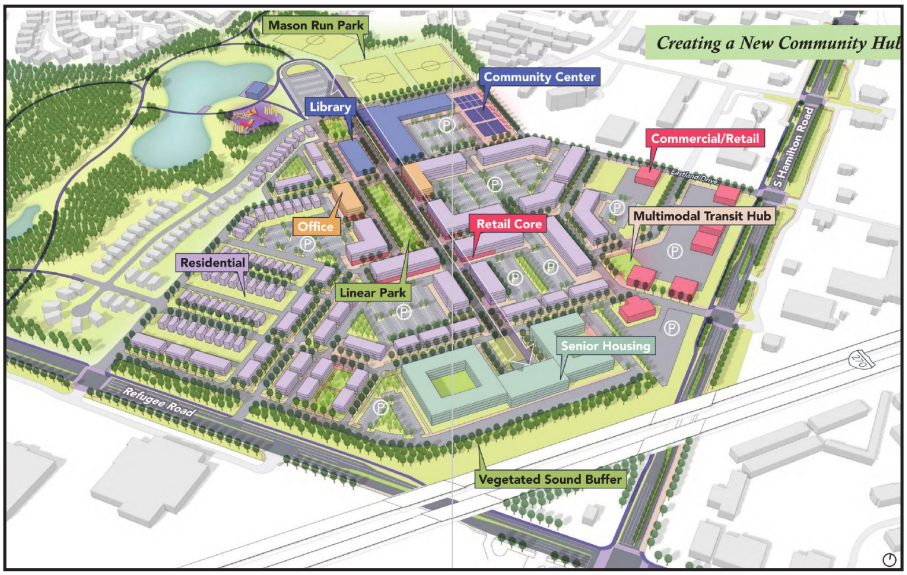
In addition to the prosperity center, the Eastland plan identifies a series of catalytic opportunities, including the creation of new housing typologies, the development of community hubs, improvements to mobility infrastructure, and the expansion of parks and green space. These strategies are designed to work together, creating a network of investments that reinforce one another and support long-term growth.

This case study is particularly important to the suburban retrofit framework because it expands the definition of redevelopment beyond physical design. The Eastland plan demonstrates the importance of integrating social infrastructure, community services, and equitable investment strategies into redevelopment efforts.

Overall, the Eastland for Everyone Plan provides a model for how suburban retrofit can be used to address both physical and social challenges, offering valuable insight into how redevelopment can create more inclusive, resilient, and community-focused environments (City of Columbus, 2025).






Sources: Eastland for Everyone

## MicroLife Institute, Atlanta, GA

The MicroLife Institute, based in Atlanta, provides a relevant example of how innovative housing models can address the growing need for attainable and diverse housing options in urban and suburban contexts. Founded with a focus on small-scale, high-quality living environments, MicroLife communities are designed to offer alternatives to conventional single-family and large multifamily development.

A key focus of the organization is addressing the gap in “missing middle” housing, which includes housing types such as small homes, cottage-style units, and compact multifamily arrangements that fall between single-family homes and large apartment complexes. These housing types have historically been limited by zoning restrictions, financing challenges, and development patterns that favor either low-density suburban housing or large-scale multifamily projects.

MicroLife communities respond to this gap by creating compact, thoughtfully designed neighborhoods that maximize land efficiency while maintaining a strong sense of place. Their developments often include small-footprint homes arranged around shared open space, with an emphasis on walkability, community interaction, and efficient use of infrastructure. By reducing unit size and land consumption, these communities are able to offer more attainable housing options without sacrificing design quality.

What distinguishes MicroLife from conventional development approaches is its emphasis on intentional design and community structure. Rather than treating housing as isolated units, MicroLife organizes development around spaces and cohesive layouts that encourage interaction and connection among residents. This approach aligns with broader goals of suburban retrofit, which seek to create more connected, human-scaled environments within previously auto-oriented landscapes.

These housing types provide opportunities for individuals, smaller households, and those seeking more attainable housing options, while also contributing to a more diverse and balanced neighborhood structure.

This case study is also significant in demonstrating how design can work within and challenge existing zoning frameworks. By introducing higher-density, small-scale housing in a way that remains compatible with surrounding neighborhoods, MicroLife communities provide a model for how missing middle housing can be integrated into suburban areas without disrupting existing character.

Overall, the MicroLife Institute demonstrates how innovative housing design can address critical gaps in the housing market while supporting more efficient and community-oriented development patterns (MicroLife Institute, 2026).


Sources: MicroLife Institute

## Euchee Creek Greenway & Trail System, Augusta, GA

The Euchee Creek Greenway and Trail System in Augusta serves as a local precedent for how greenway infrastructure can connect suburban environments while supporting recreation, mobility, and environmental restoration. As part of the broader efforts led by Augusta Regional Transportation Study (ARTS), the project reflects a growing emphasis on expanding bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure across the Augusta region.

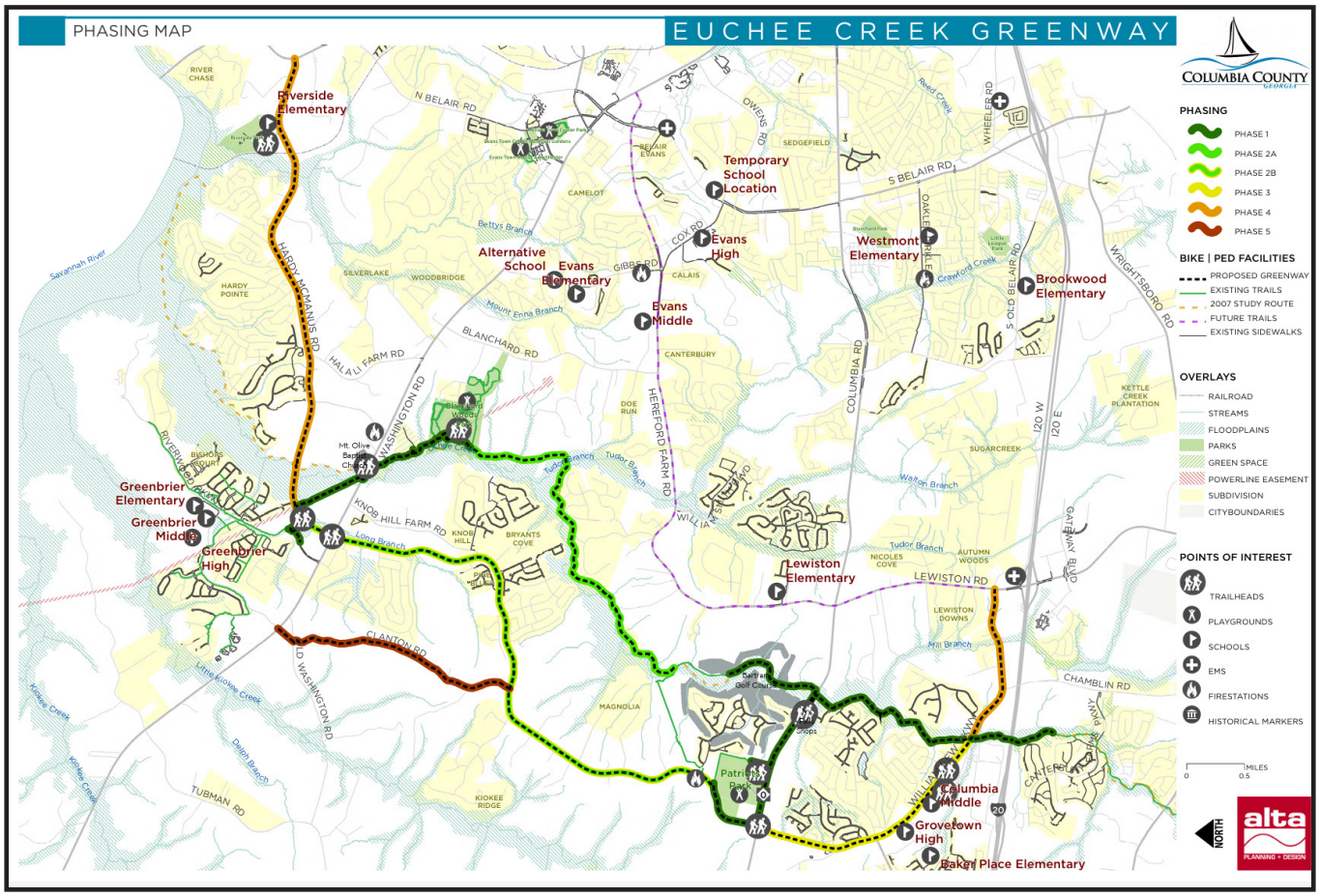
The Euchee Creek Greenway follows a natural creek corridor, transforming underutilized and environmentally sensitive land into a continuous multi-use trail. This approach allows the greenway to serve multiple functions, including stormwater management, habitat preservation, and passive recreation, while also creating a safe and accessible route for walking and biking.

A strength of the project is its ability to connect suburban neighborhoods that are otherwise disconnected by conventional road networks. In many suburban areas, development patterns are defined by cul-de-sacs and limited street connectivity, making it difficult to travel between neighborhoods without using major roads. The greenway addresses this issue by providing an alternative network that links residential areas to parks, schools, and community destinations.

This strategy aligns closely with the goals of the ARTS Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, which emphasizes improving connectivity, expanding multimodal transportation options, and reducing reliance on automobiles. By integrating trails into existing suburban landscapes, ARTS demonstrates how green infrastructure can function as both a transportation system and a recreational amenity.

The Euchee Creek Greenway is directly relevant to the Rocky Creek Study Area, where similar conditions exist. Like the Euchee Creek corridor, the Study Area contains fragmented natural systems, disconnected neighborhoods, and limited pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure.

Overall, the Euchee Creek Greenway demonstrates how trail systems can be used to reconnect suburban environments, enhance environmental performance, and support healthier communities (ARTS,2023).




Sources: Columbia County, GA

# Community Profile & Existing Conditions


Unless otherwise noted, all of the following maps in this section were created using data from Augusta, GA's GIS open data portal.


South Carolina
SUMMERVILLE
HARRISBURG
DOWNTOWN AUGUSTA
PENDELTON KING
PINE VALLEY
Regency Mall Site
Southgate Plaza
Hillcrest Memorial Cemetary
NORTON ACRES

# Context and Community

**Understanding existing conditions begins with an examination of the broader context in which the Rocky Creek Area functions. This section situates the study area within South Augusta and outlines the regulatory and civic framework that shapes everyday life.**


## History

Augusta–Richmond County was established in 1736 by James Oglethorpe along the Savannah River, where it developed as an early trading post and transportation hub. Its riverfront location supported trade and industry throughout the nineteenth century, allowing the city to grow as a regional commercial center. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Augusta expanded through industrial activity, rail connections, and river-based commerce, strengthening its role within eastern Georgia and western South Carolina.

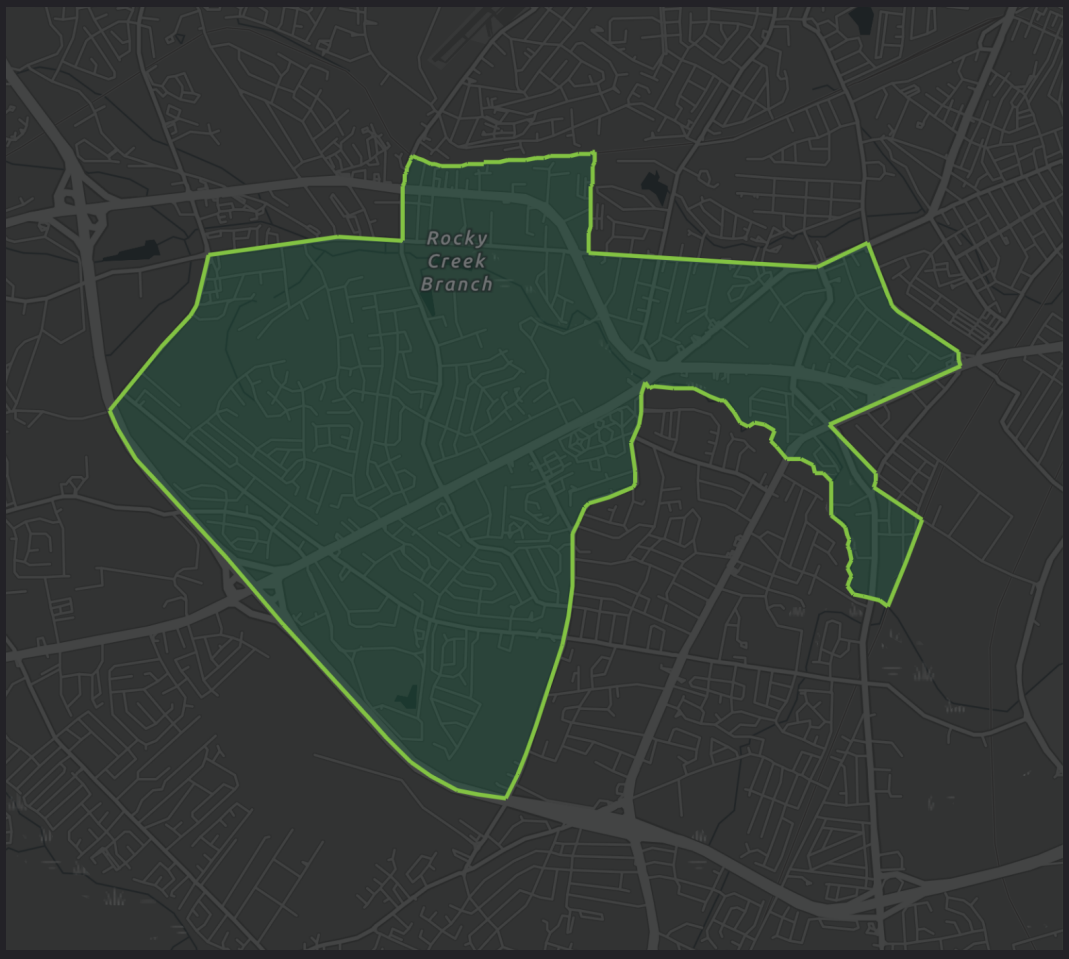
By the mid-twentieth century, Augusta had also emerged as a regional center for healthcare and military activity. The expansion of medical institutions and the presence of Fort Gordon contributed to population growth and economic stability. Like many cities during this period, Augusta experienced suburban expansion driven by automobile use, highway construction, and new commercial development outside the historic core.

Today, Augusta functions as a metropolitan area with a diverse economic base that includes healthcare, military, education, and industry. Ongoing growth and redevelopment efforts reflect the city's continued evolution and its focus on balancing new development with reinvestment in existing areas.

Augusta is also historically known as the "Garden City," a nickname that reflects the city's early emphasis on tree-lined streets, parks, and landscaped neighborhoods. This identity highlights the long-standing relationship between natural features and the urban environment. While development patterns have changed over time, the idea of integrating landscape and urban form remains an important part of Augusta's character and continues to inform contemporary planning and redevelopment efforts.

With a population of roughly 200,000 residents, Augusta is generally considered the second-largest city in the state, behind Atlanta and comparable in size to Columbus (Augusta-Richmond County, 2026).

# Demographic Snapshot




## EDUCATION

13.3%

No High School Diploma

43.

High Sc
Gradu

## EMPLOYMENT

White Collar

Blue Collar

Services

12,558

Population

5,306

Households

## RACE

70.5% Black

20.9% White

4.5% Multiple Races

3% Other Race

0.6% Asian

0.4% Native American

51.3
Diversity Index

3%
chool
uate

33.3%
Some College/ Associate's Degree

10.1%
Bachelor's/Grad/ Prof Degree

45.8%

32.3%

21.9%

13.2%
Unemployment Rate

## KEY FACTS

38.8
Median Age

$31,373
Median Disposable Income

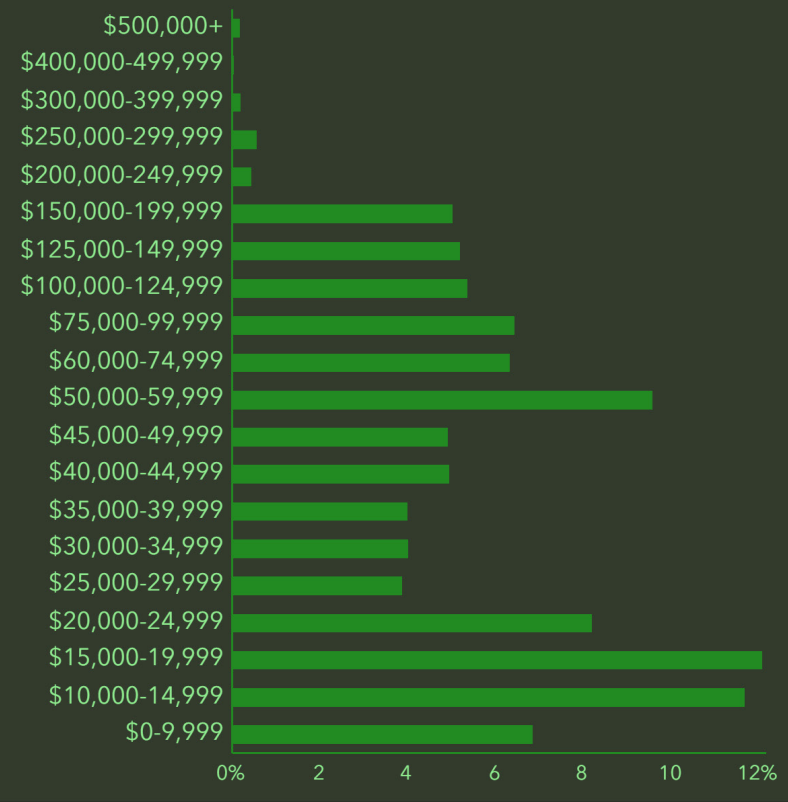
## INCOME

$38,948
Median Household Income

$23,682
Per Capita Income

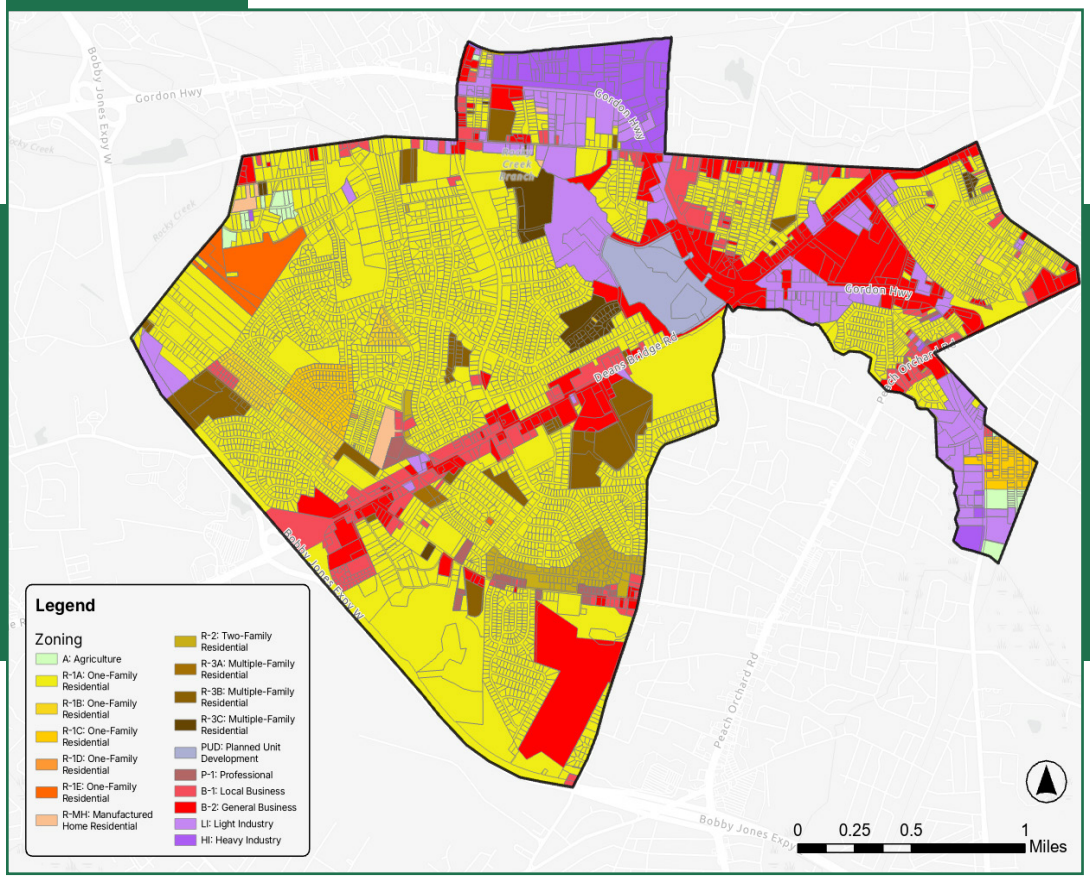
$24,659
Median Net Worth

## HOUSEHOLD INCOME




Esri data (2025,2030).

## Zoning Map




**Observations**

• Single-family residential zoning districts (primarily R-1 variants) account for the majority of land area, resulting in extensive subdivisions characterized by curvilinear street patterns and limited internal connectivity. Residential zoning is largely separated from nonresidential uses.
• Commercial zoning (B-1 Local Business and B-2 General Business) is concentrated almost exclusively along major arterial corridors, including Deans Bridge Road and Gordon Highway. These commercial corridors function as the primary locations for retail, service, and auto-oriented commercial uses within the study area.
• Industrial zoning (LI and HI) occurs in several discrete clusters, typically adjacent to major roadways.
• Planned Unit Development (PUD) zoning is present at the Regency Mall site, following its rezoning in 2022 from the B-2 classification.

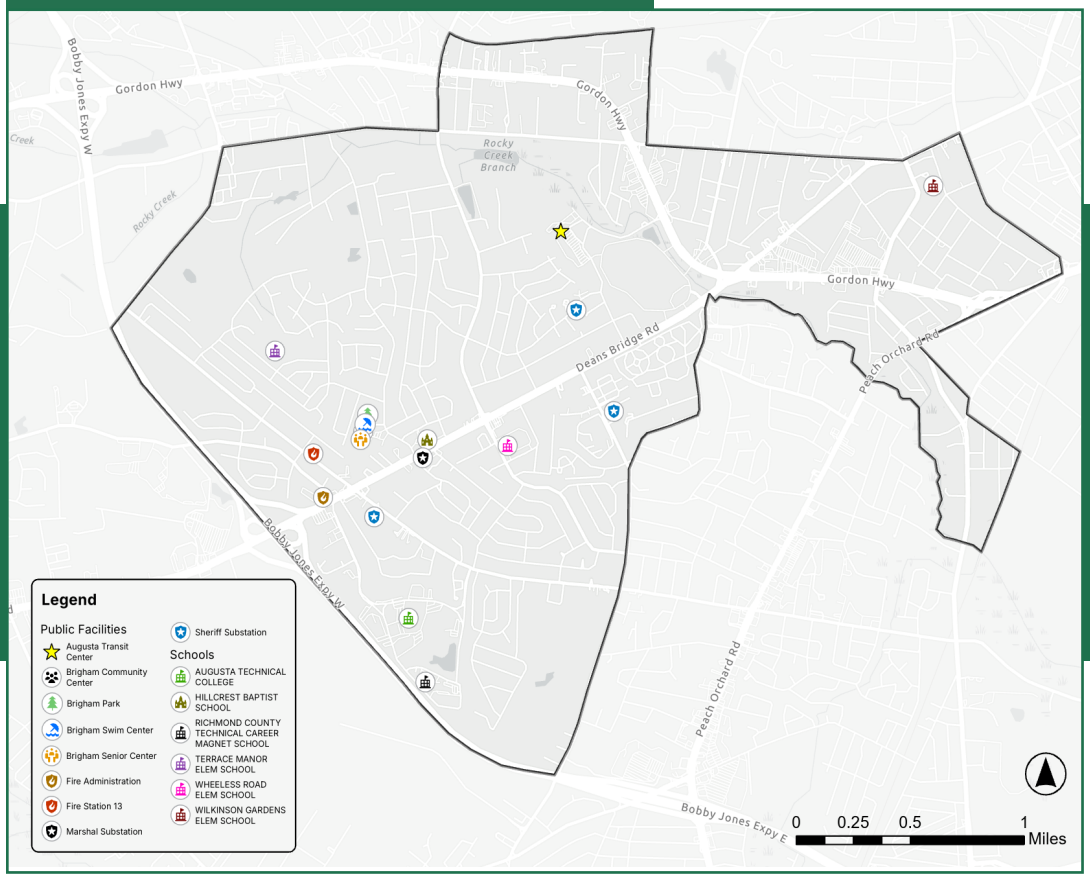
**Constraints**

• The overwhelming dominance of single-family residential zoning limits opportunities for incremental infill, mixed-use development, and housing diversity.
• Strict separation between residential, commercial, and industrial uses reduces walkability and reinforces auto dependency.
• Commercial zoning is largely corridor-based, encouraging strip development rather than cohesive centers or nodes.
• Industrial zoning lacks clear transitions to adjacent residential areas, which can generate land-use conflicts and discourage reinvestment.

**Opportunities**

• The concentration of commercial zoning along major corridors presents opportunities for targeted corridor retrofits.
• An existing PUD area demonstrates that regulatory flexibility is already an accepted precedent within the study area.
• Large expanses of single-family zoning near commercial corridors may be suitable for gentle density transitions and missing middle housing, such as small-scale multifamily, townhomes, or neighborhood-serving uses, if regulatory adjustments are made.

## Public Facilities & Institutions Map




### Observations

- Public facilities are present and relatively numerous.
- Many civic assets are auto-oriented in siting, relying on arterial road access rather than neighborhood-scale connectivity.
- Community and recreational facilities are clustered rather than evenly distributed, resulting in areas of high civic presence and other areas with limited access.
- Schools function as some of the most stable and embedded institutions in the area.

### Constraints

- The separation between civic facilities and other areas limits opportunities for shared-use, joint programming, or civic-oriented redevelopment.
- Auto-oriented siting patterns reduce the ability of public facilities to act as catalysts for walkable centers or mixed-use environments under current conditions.

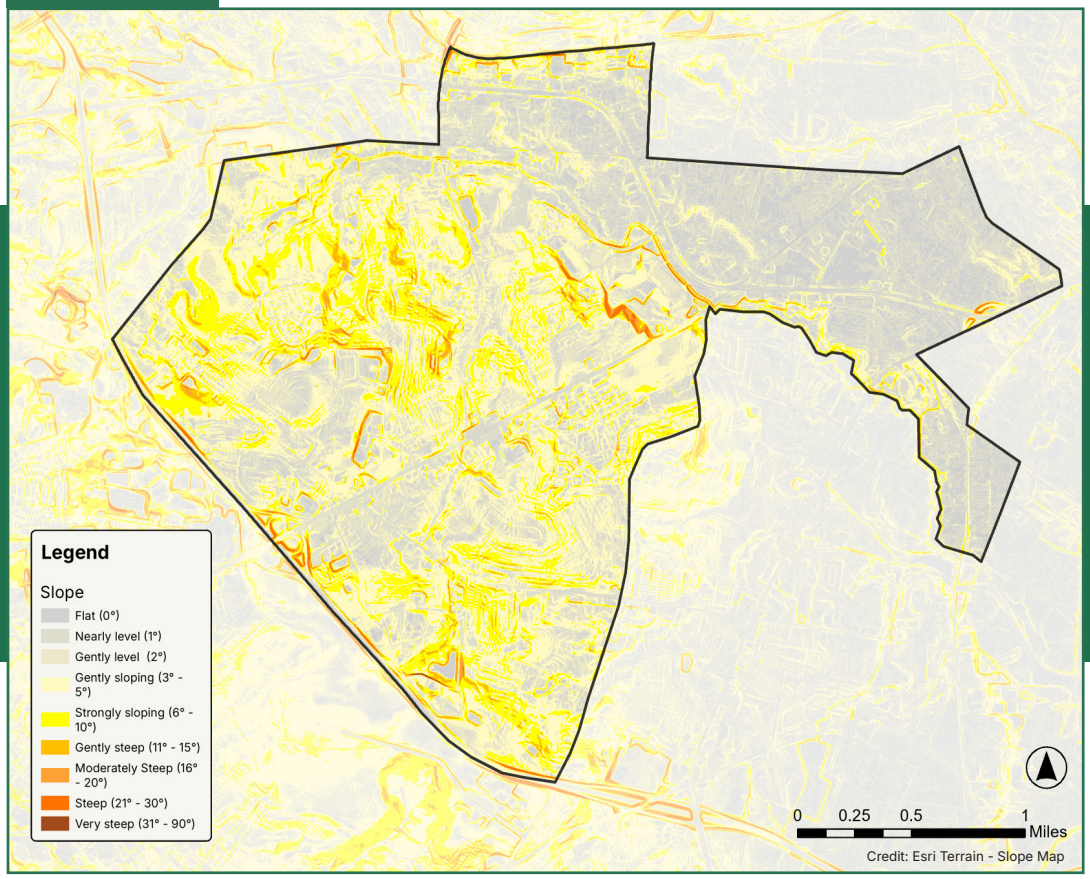
### Opportunities

- Existing clusters of community facilities present opportunities to strengthen civic nodes, where incremental improvements to sidewalks, crossings, and adjacent land uses could enhance accessibility and visibility.
- Public safety and civic facilities could be better integrated into future land-use strategies to reinforce community identity and improve perceptions of safety and stability.

# Landscape

**The landscape of the Rocky Creek Area forms a foundational layer that influences development patterns, infrastructure, and environmental performance. This section introduces the physical and ecological conditions that shape the area, emphasizing the relationship between natural systems and the built environment.**

## Slope Map




**Observations**

• Large portions of the study area fall within flat to strongly sloping categories, indicating that steep topography alone is not a significant barrier to redevelopment in many locations.
• Steeper slopes are generally concentrated along natural drainage features.
• Existing development patterns largely respect steeper slopes, with residential subdivisions and road networks avoiding the most constrained areas.

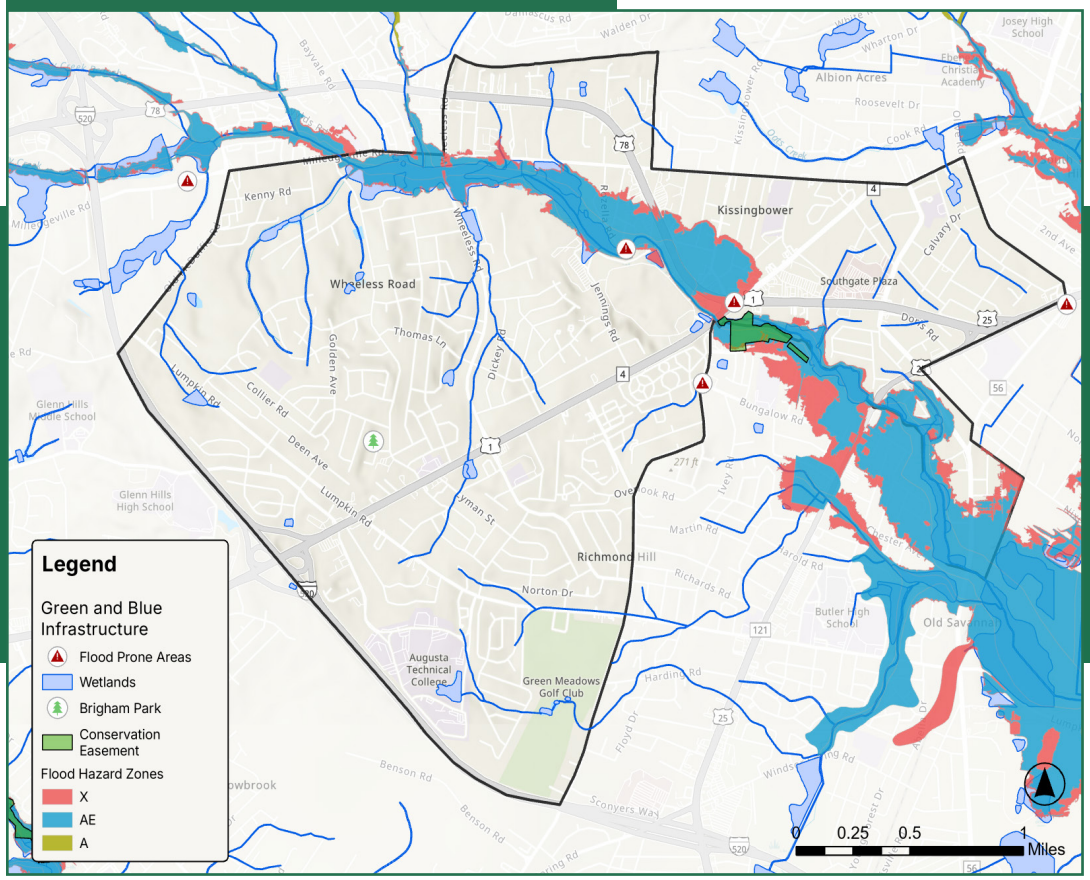
**Constraints**

• Moderately steep and very steep slopes increase construction costs, limit building footprints, and complicate stormwater management.
• Development on steeper terrain poses higher risks of erosion, runoff, and infrastructure strain if not carefully managed.
• Retrofitting existing developed areas with steep slopes may be more challenging due to limited space for grading or mitigation.

**Opportunities**

• Flat and gently sloping areas, particularly near existing commercial corridors and large parcels, present strong candidates for infill, redevelopment, and adaptive reuse.
• Steeper slope areas can be leveraged as natural assets, supporting green infrastructure, open space networks, and stormwater management strategies.

## Green & Blue Infrastructure Map




**Observations**

- The study area contains a well-defined hydrological spine centered on Rocky Creek, with numerous streams.
- Flood hazard zones are continuous and extensive, particularly along Rocky Creek.
- Existing development patterns largely avoid the most flood-prone areas, though major transportation corridors intersect these zones at multiple points.
- Conservation lands align with floodplain areas.

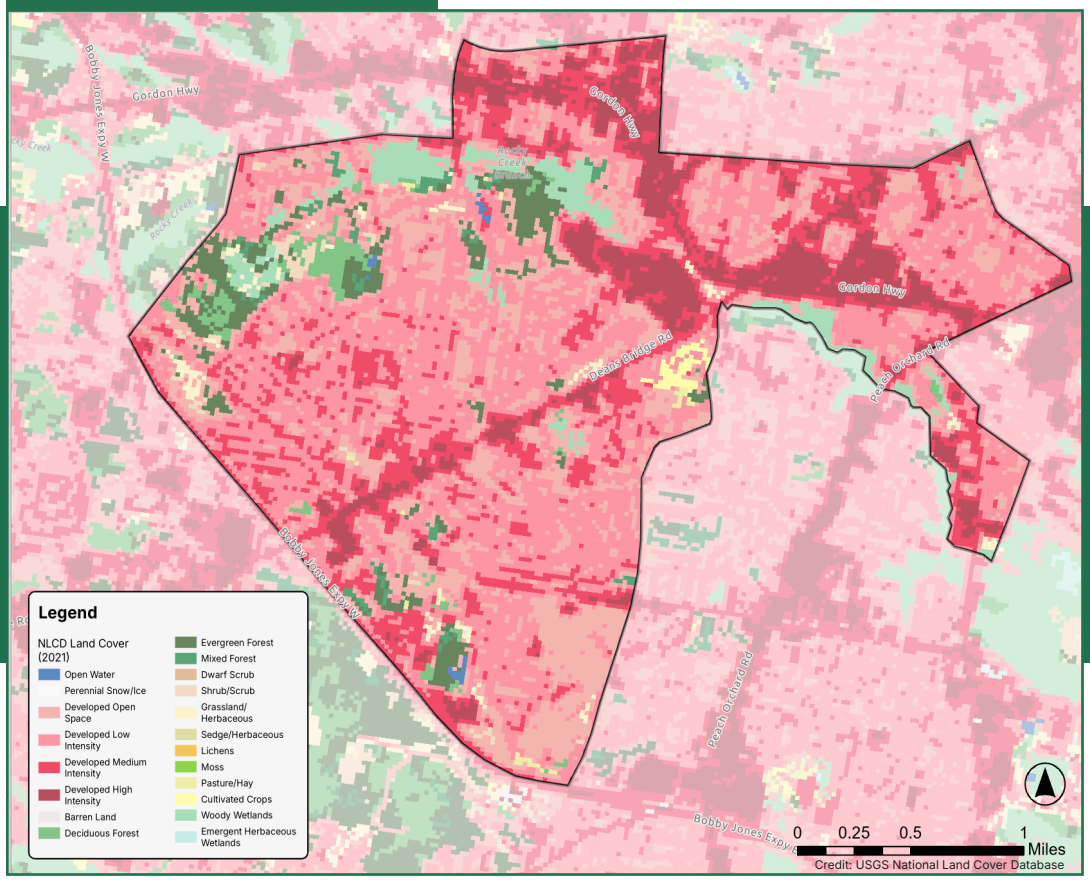
**Constraints**

- Flood Hazard Zones A and AE impose significant limitations on new development, including the ability to get financed, particularly for structures requiring large footprints or intensive infrastructure.
- Wetlands and flood-prone areas increase regulatory complexity, construction costs, and long-term maintenance considerations.
- Retrofitting existing development adjacent to flood-prone corridors requires careful attention to stormwater management, erosion control, and environmental compliance.

**Opportunities**

- The Rocky Creek natural corridor presents a strong opportunity to function as a landscape framework rather than a development barrier, supporting greenways and stormwater-based amenities.
- Flood-prone and wetland areas can be leveraged for nature-based solutions, including flood storage, water quality improvement, and heat mitigation.

## NLCD Land Cover Map




**Observations**

• Development intensity increases along major corridors, while interior neighborhoods are largely characterized by low-intensity residential land cover.
• Natural land cover is concentrated in environmentally constrained areas.
• High-intensity development is spatially limited but highly influential.
• Open space within developed areas is present but fragmented and primarily ornamental rather than functional.

**Constraints**

• High levels of impervious surface, particularly in medium and high intensity developed areas, exacerbate stormwater runoff and environmental stress.
• Fragmentation of natural land cover reduces ecological connectivity, prohibits wildlife travel, and limits the effectiveness of green infrastructure systems.
• Retrofitting existing developed areas requires working within tight physical and regulatory constraints.

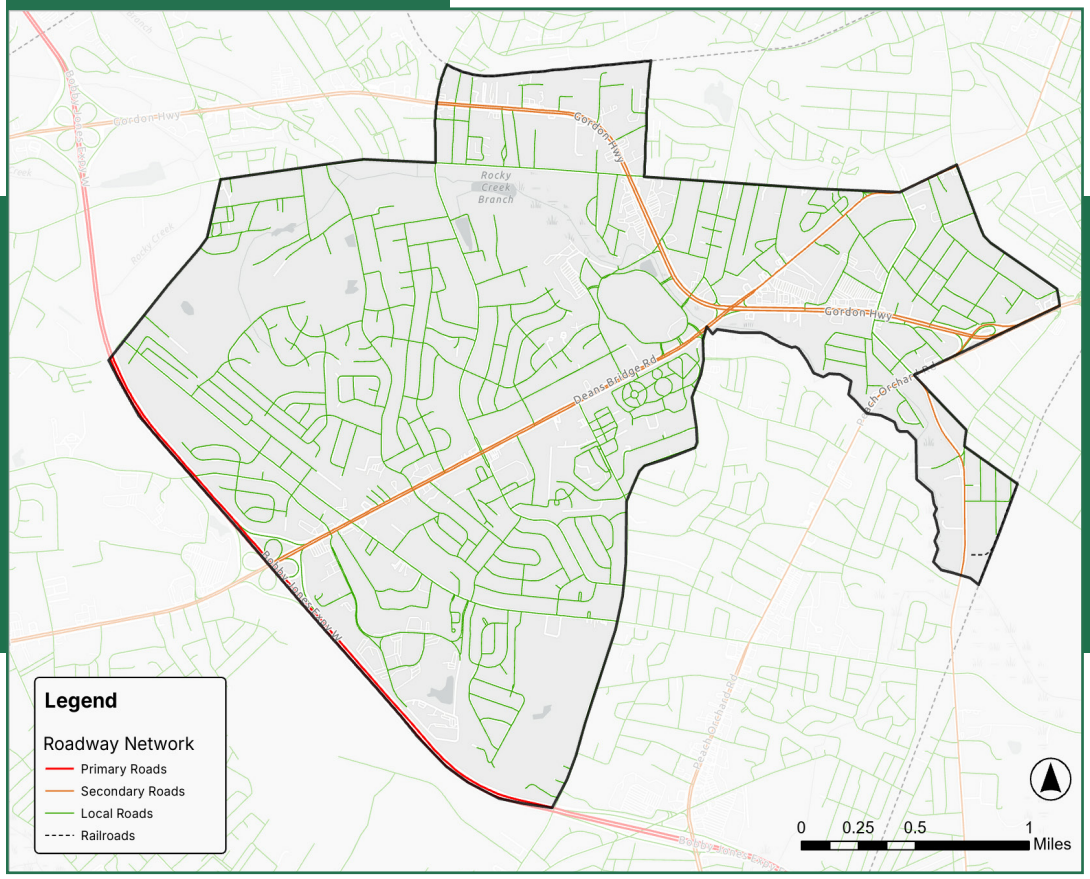
**Opportunities**

• Underutilized parcels within medium and high intensity developed areas, such as large parking lots or aging commercial sites, present opportunities for redevelopment that improves land efficiency and environmental performance.
• Natural land cover areas along Rocky Creek can serve as the backbone of an expanded green infrastructure network.
• Increasing tree canopy, green space connectivity, and stormwater features within developed open space areas offers a feasible strategy for improving environmental outcomes without major land-use changes.

# Movement & Infrastructure

**Movement and infrastructure define how people and goods travel through the Rocky Creek study area and how the area connects to the wider region. This section introduces the transportation framework that supports daily mobility, access to services, and economic activity. Examining these systems provides insight into how the area functions today and how mobility shapes land use and development patterns.**

## Roadway Network Map




**Observations**

• The transportation network prioritizes vehicular throughput over connectivity, particularly along primary corridors.
• Major arterial roads act as both access points and barriers, separating neighborhoods from commercial and employment areas.
• Local street networks are highly internalized, limiting direct connections between adjacent neighborhoods.

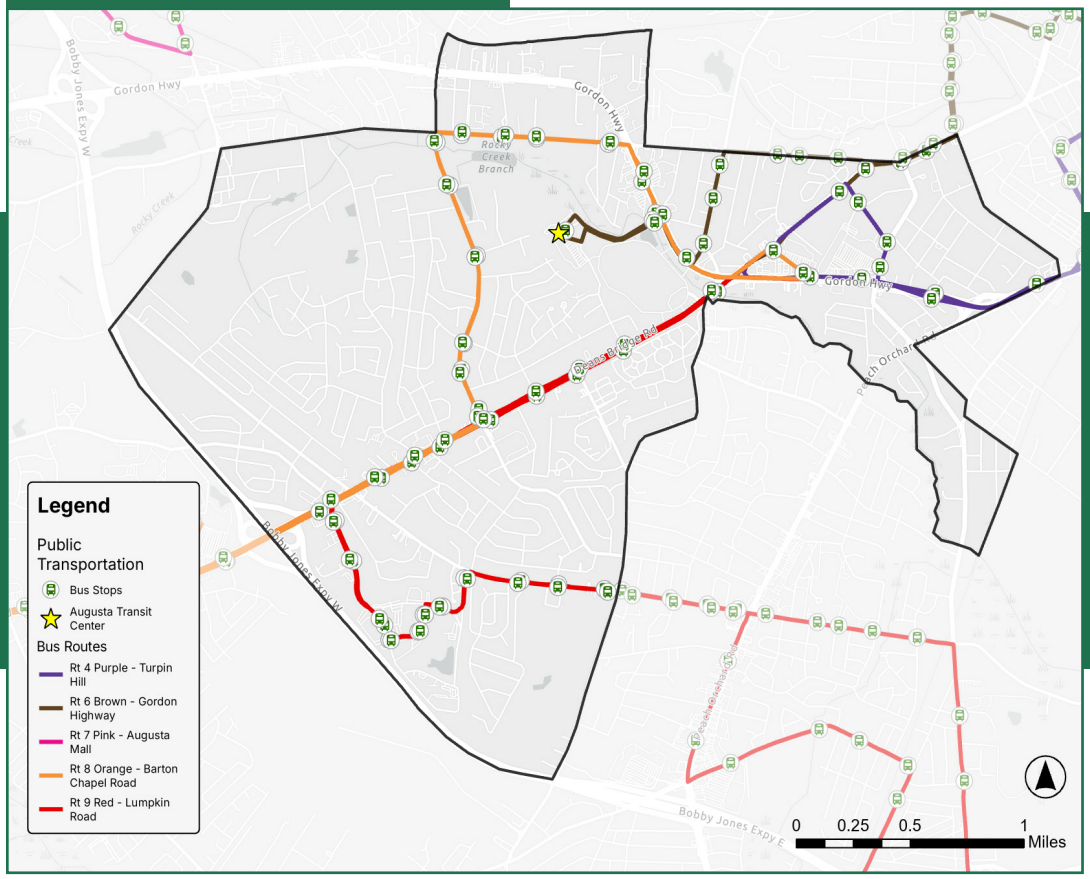
**Constraints**

• Limited connectivity between local streets reduces route choice, concentrates traffic on arterials, and discourages walking or biking.
• The dominance of wide, high-speed corridors creates challenging conditions for pedestrian crossings and multimodal access.
• Cul-de-sac–oriented subdivision design makes incremental redevelopment more difficult, as parcels are often disconnected from surrounding areas.
• The existing network limits the feasibility of traditional grid-based or transit-oriented development without significant intervention.

**Opportunities**

• Secondary corridors present strong candidates for corridor-based retrofit, including streetscape improvements.
• Strategic improvements to secondary and local connections, such as short street extensions or multimodal paths, could significantly improve neighborhood connectivity without entire reconstruction.
• The hierarchical network offers opportunities to reassign street roles, allowing select corridors to evolve into more balanced “complete streets” while preserving regional mobility elsewhere.
• Large redevelopment sites, including the Regency Mall area, provide rare opportunities to reconfigure internal circulation, improve block structure, and reconnect isolated street networks.

## Public Transportation Map




**Observations**

- Transit service is concentrated along major arterials.
- Interior neighborhoods are largely transit-adjacent rather than transit-served, requiring residents to walk, bike, or drive to access bus routes.

**Constraints**

- Limited street connectivity and discontinuous sidewalks reduce effective access to bus stops, particularly for residents located away from arterial corridors.
- Auto-oriented land uses and large setbacks along corridors weaken the pedestrian environment around transit stops.

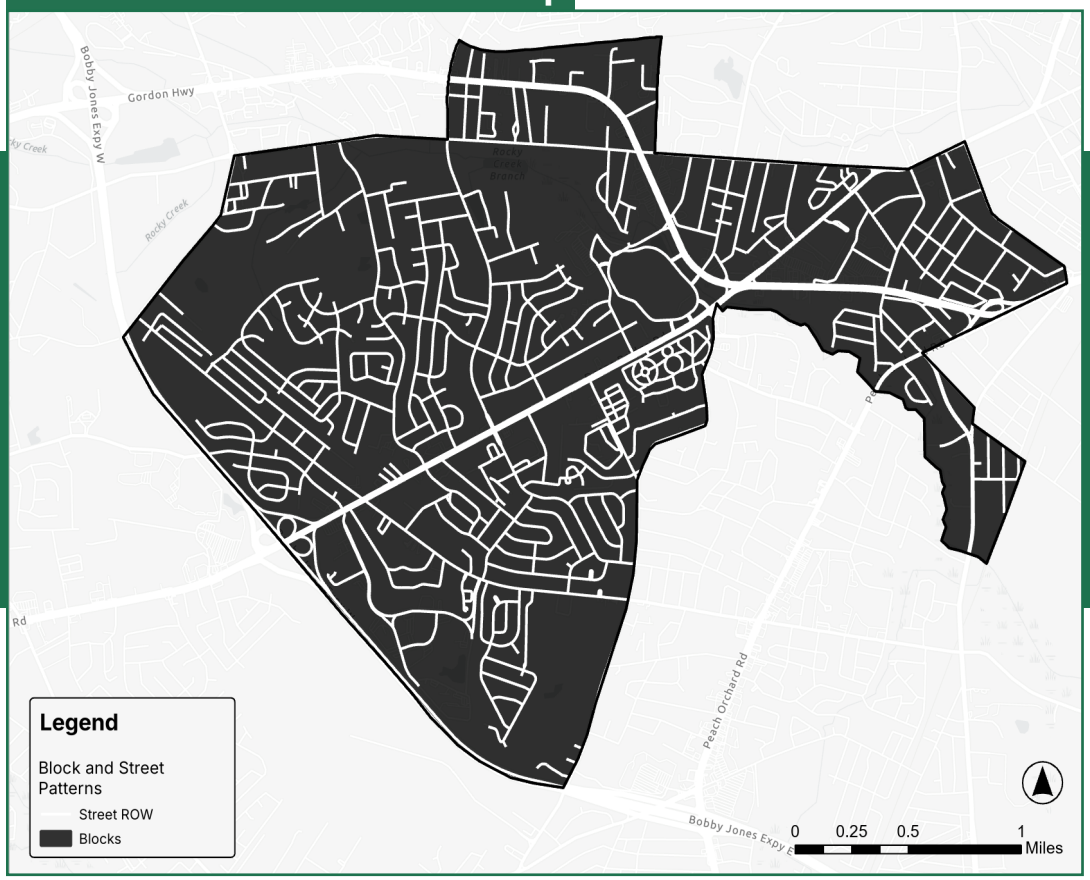
**Opportunities**

- Existing bus corridors provide a strong foundation for incremental transit-supportive improvements, including enhanced stops, safer crossings, and improved pedestrian access.
- Concentrations of bus stops along Deans Bridge Road and Gordon Highway suggest opportunities to align future redevelopment intensity with existing transit access.
- Improving sidewalks, crossings, and neighborhood connections to existing bus stops could significantly increase transit use without requiring major changes to the current transit system.

# Built Form

**Built form reflects how development has taken shape over time and how space is organized and used across the study area. This section introduces the physical structure of streets, blocks, and buildings that defines the character of the area.**

## Block and Street Patterns Map




**Observations**

- The street network is highly hierarchical, with few direct connections between neighborhoods.
- Large block sizes increase travel distances for all modes.
- Cul-de-sac–oriented design isolates residential areas from nearby commercial corridors and civic destinations.
- Arterial corridors act as strong edges rather than integrative streets, reinforcing separation between land uses.

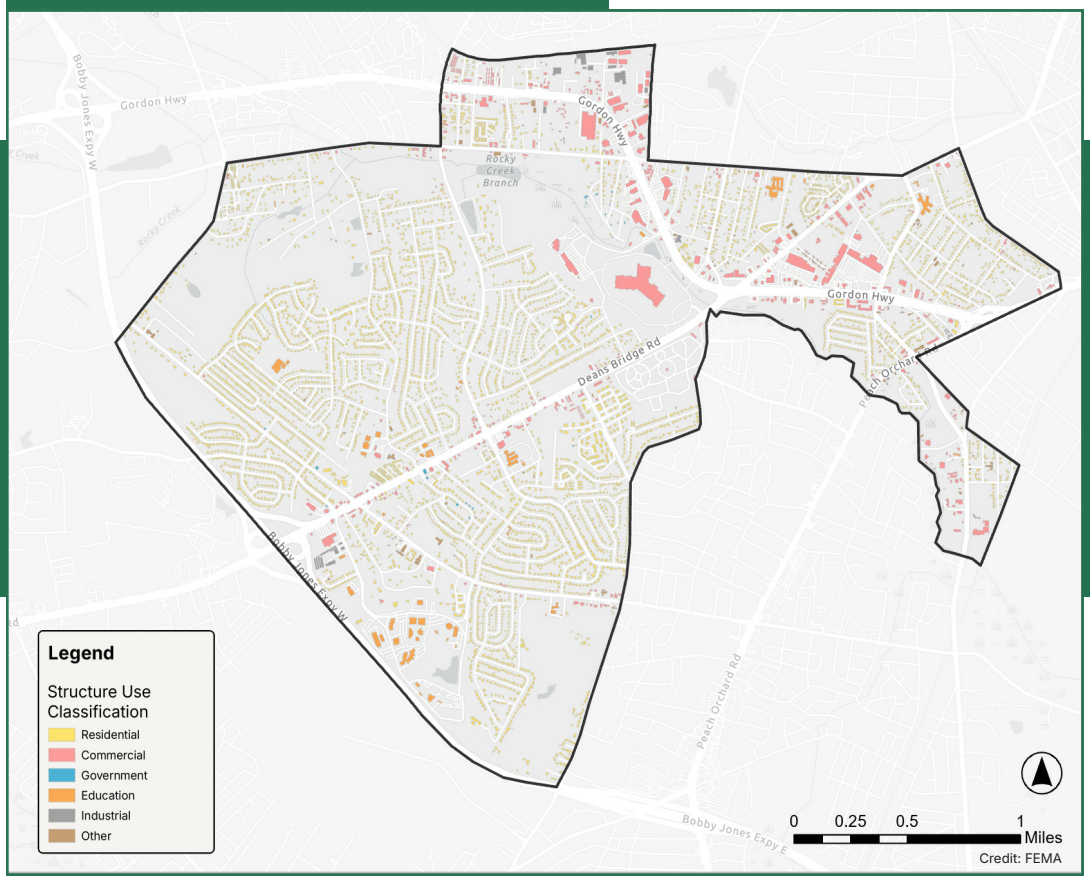
**Constraints**

- Large and irregular blocks reduce the feasibility of walkable environments and limit pedestrian route choice.
- Retrofitting connectivity is challenging where existing subdivisions lack stub streets or logical extension points.
- Emergency access, transit routing, and service delivery are more complex in disconnected street systems.

**Opportunities**

- Large redevelopment sites, including aging commercial centers, present opportunities to introduce new internal block structures that improve connectivity without disrupting established neighborhoods.
- Oversized blocks along arterial corridors offer potential for block subdivision.
- Future redevelopment can prioritize human-scaled block lengths, aligning with transit access and improving multimodal circulation.

## Building Patterns and Uses Map




**Observations**

- Residential uses are continuous but inward-focused, with minimal integration of neighborhood-serving commercial or civic uses.
- Commercial activity is concentrated along corridors rather than distributed as nodes or centers.
- Institutional uses are present but operate largely as single-purpose destinations rather than mixed-use anchors.

**Constraints**

- The strong separation of uses increases dependence on automobiles for nearly all daily trips.
- Corridor-based commercial clustering creates long, linear activity zones rather than walkable centers.

**Opportunities**

- The extensive residential fabric provides a stable base population that could support neighborhood-serving uses if land-use transitions are carefully introduced.
- Retrofit strategies can focus on intensifying existing clusters rather than dispersing development.

S

## Strengths

- Large underutilized sites, including the Regency Mall, provide significant redevelopment potential
- Predominantly flat terrain reduces construction complexity
- Existing commercial corridors (e.g., Gordon Highway, Deans Bridge Road) provide visibility and access
- Presence of transit routes along major corridors offers a foundation for transit-supportive development
- Rocky Creek corridor provides a continuous natural system that can support green infrastructure and open space
- Existing civic and institutional uses

O

## Opportunities

- Redevelopment of underutilized commercial sites into mixed-use, walkable environments
- Introduction of missing middle housing to diversify housing options
- Corridor retrofits to support complete streets and improve multimodal access
- Expansion of green infrastructure, including bioswales, tree canopy, and stormwater systems
- Development of a greenway to enhance connectivity and ecological function
- Leveraging transit corridors to support more compact, connected development patterns
- Use of tools such as Enterprise Zones and PUD zoning to support flexible redevelopment

## Weaknesses

- Auto-oriented development pattern with limited walkability and poor pedestrian infrastructure
- Large block sizes and cul-de-sac networks restrict connectivity and limit access
- Strict separation of land uses
- Aging and underperforming commercial properties, including vacant structures
- Negative perception of the area associated with decline
- Limited internal access to transit due to poor pedestrian connections
- Fragmented open space and high levels of impervious surface
- Primarily low density single family residential, limiting housing options

## Threats

- Absentee ownership limiting coordination and redevelopment progress
- Floodplain constraints and environmental regulations increasing development costs and complexity
- Continued disinvestment and negative perception discouraging private investment
- Market limitations that may not support redevelopment without incentives
- Infrastructure deficiencies requiring significant upfront investment
- Political and community skepticism due to past failed redevelopment attempts

# Suitability Analysis

To support the suburban retrofit framework, a suitability analysis was conducted to identify areas within the Rocky Creek study area that are most appropriate for redevelopment and reinvestment. Rather than selecting sites arbitrarily, this analysis uses a ArcGIS-based weighted overlay method to evaluate multiple physical and regulatory factors that influence redevelopment potential.

**A suitability matrix was developed to assign relative importance to key variables associated with suburban retrofit. These variables include proximity to transit, flood risk, parcel vacancy, land cover, and zoning**, each of which plays an important role in determining whether a site can be feasibly and sustainably redeveloped.

Zoning (30%) and land cover (25%) were given the highest weights, as these factors directly influence what can be built and how easily a site can be transformed. Areas already designated for commercial, mixed-use, or planned unit development (PUD) were prioritized because they allow greater flexibility and reduce regulatory barriers to redevelopment. Similarly, developed or disturbed land cover types were rated more suitable, as they require less environmental disruption compared to forests or wetlands.

Vacant parcels (20%) were strongly weighted, as they present immediate opportunities for redevelopment with fewer barriers such as displacement or demolition. However, because suburban retrofit focuses on reusing and intensifying existing development, NLCD land cover data was used to balance this by prioritizing already developed areas, ensuring growth is directed toward underutilized sites rather than undeveloped green space.

Environmental constraints were incorporated through flood hazard (15%), where areas outside of flood zones were considered most suitable. This ensures that redevelopment avoids high-risk areas, supports long-term resilience, and reflects financial realities, as development within flood zones is often difficult to finance. Proximity to bus stops (10%) was included to promote transit accessibility and reduce reliance on automobiles, supporting more connected and walkable development patterns.

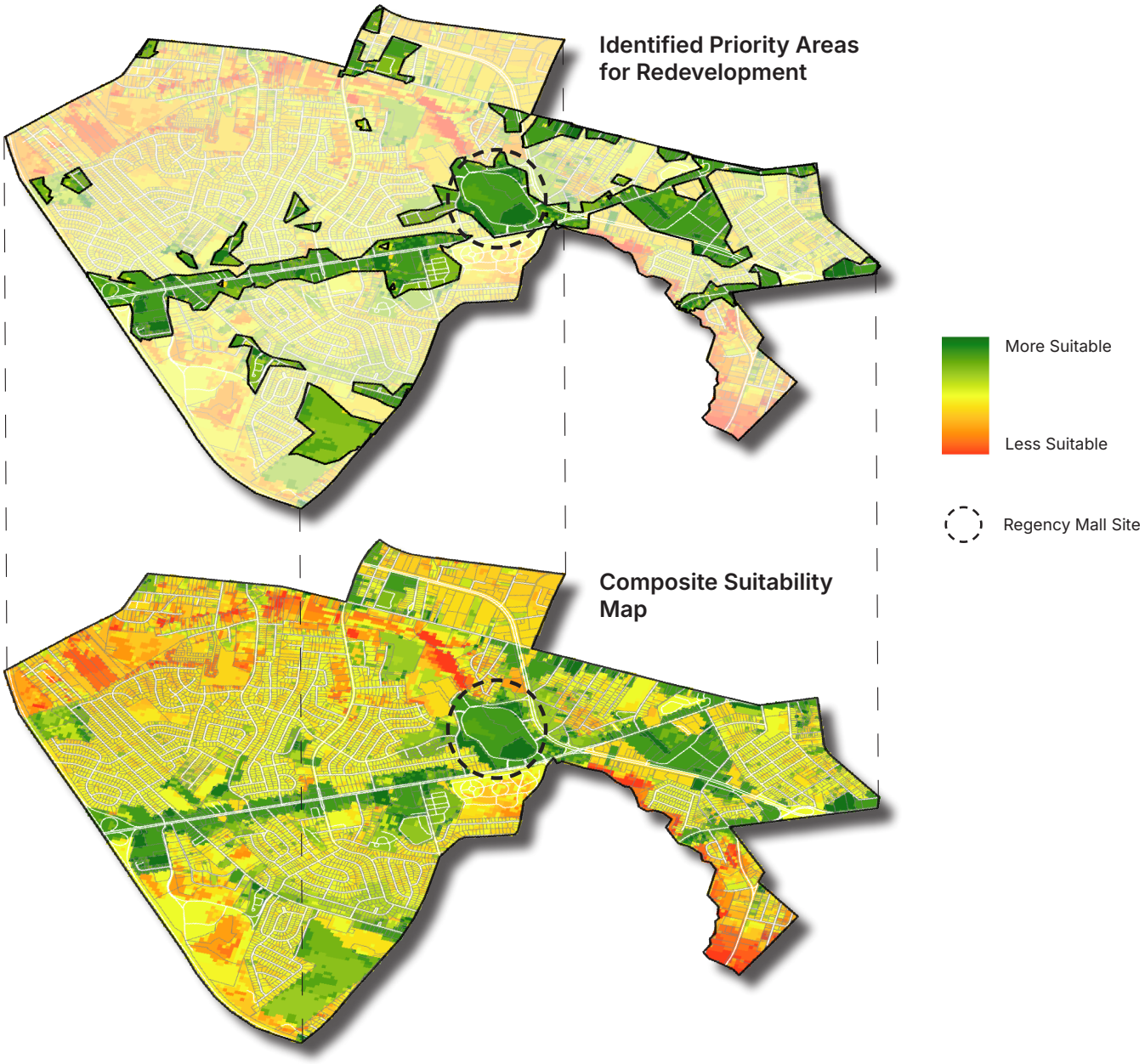
**Each factor was reclassified on a scale from 1 (least suitable) to 5 (most suitable), and combined using a weighted overlay to produce a composite suitability surface. The resulting map (bottom of next page) highlights areas across the study area that are more or less appropriate for suburban retrofit based on these criteria.**

**From this output, areas identified as more suitable were selected and highlighted as priority areas for potential redevelopment.** These areas generally confirmed the initial assumption that redevelopment potential is concentrated along major corridors and within underutilized commercial areas such as the Regency Mall site. They generally consist of underutilized land, favorable zoning conditions, and lower environmental constraints, making them strong candidates for intervention.

Because this project is structured as a Framework, the suitability analysis is not intended to determine exact development locations. Instead, it serves as a decision-making tool to identify where suburban retrofit strategies may be most effective. **From the priority areas identified, a smaller number of sites were selected for design proposals,** reflecting the scope of the project and time constraints. These sites were chosen to demonstrate how the Framework can be applied in practice, while recognizing that other locations within the highlighted areas could also be considered for future redevelopment and should be explored by the City of Augusta, private developers, and stakeholders.

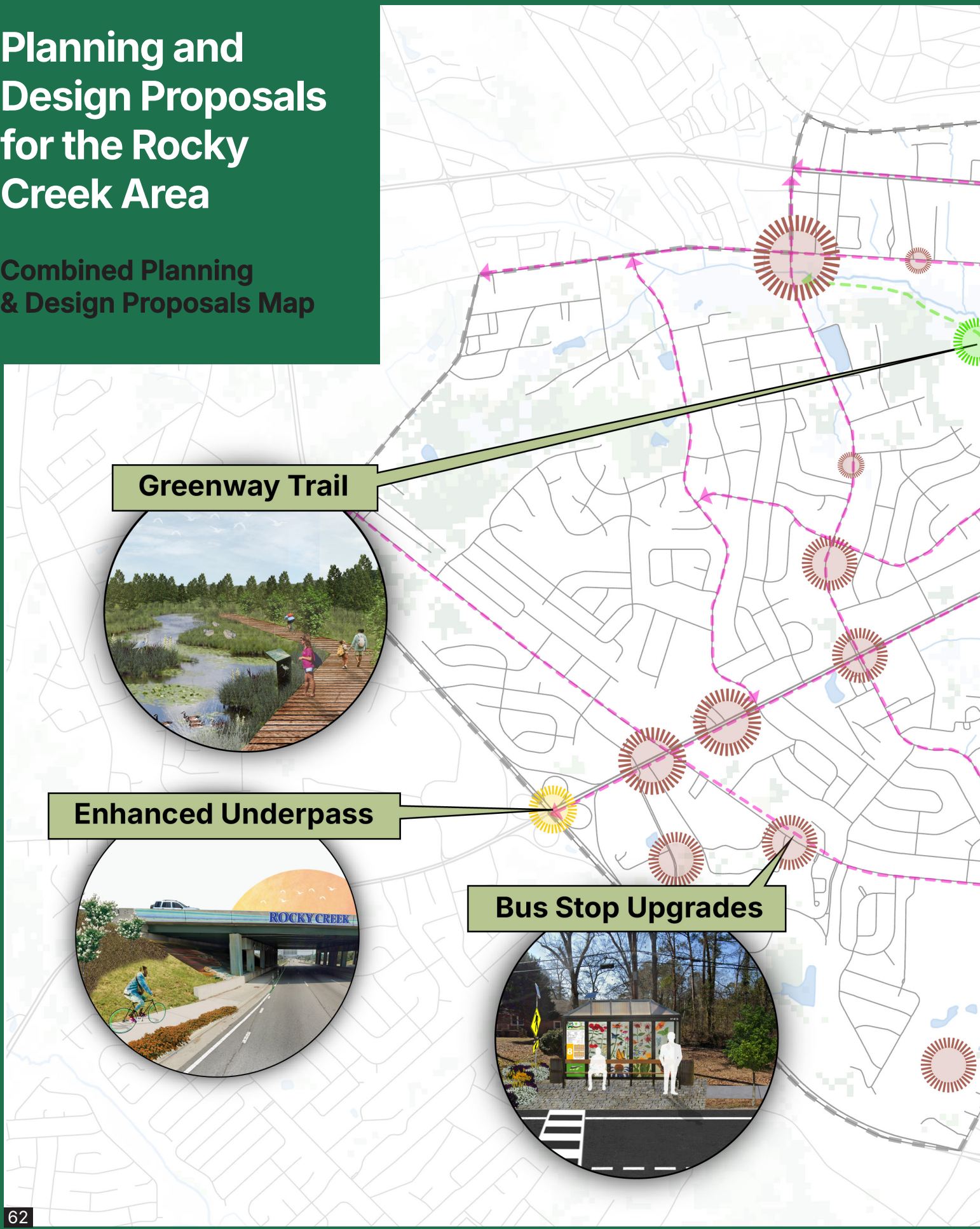
## Suitability Matrix

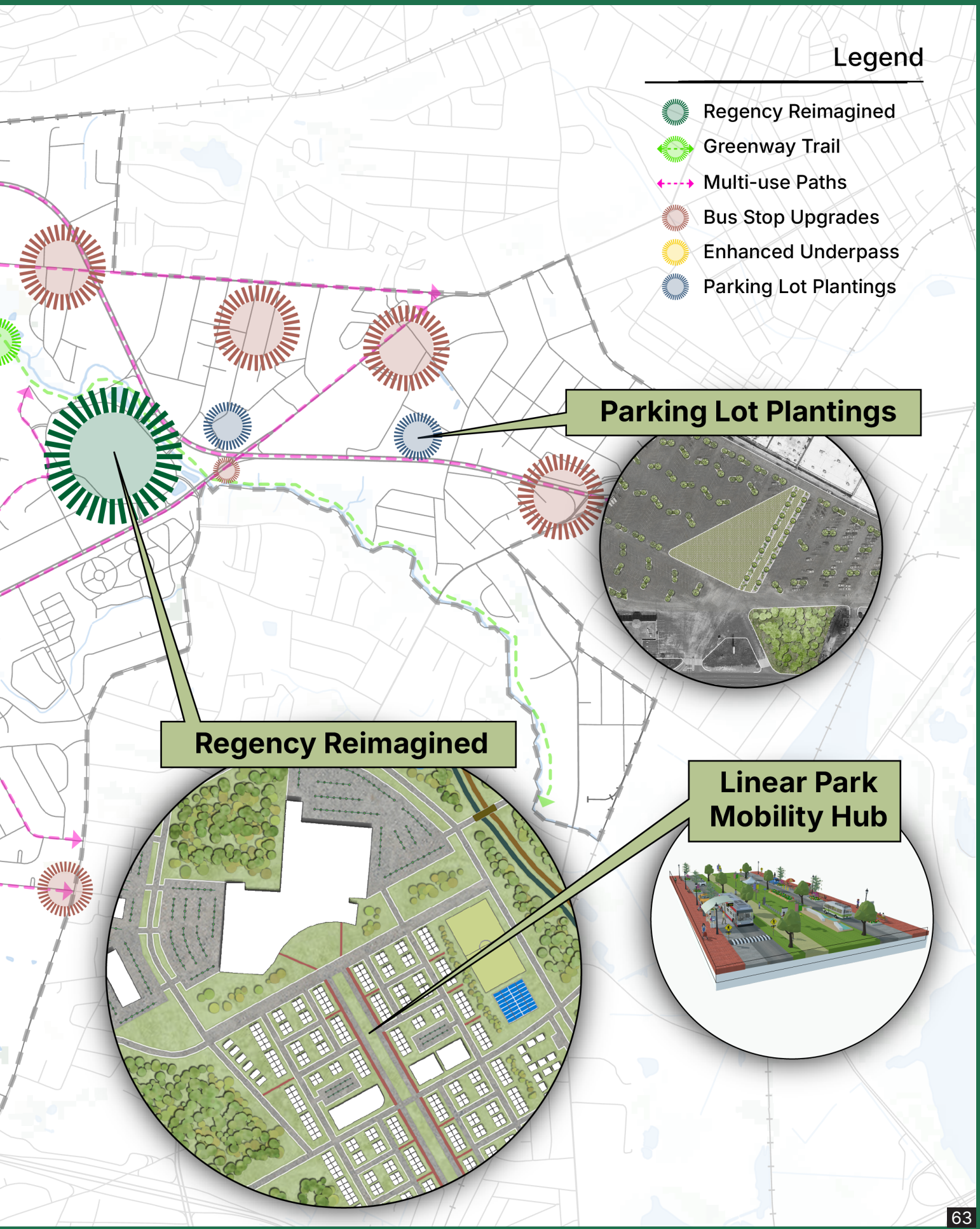
| Influencing Factor | Highest rating (5) | High Rating (4) | Medium Rating (3) | Low Rating (2) | Lowest Rating (1) | Weight |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Proximity to Bus Stop** | 0-1,320ft (1/4 mile) | 1,320-2,640ft (1/4-1/2mile) | 2,640-3,960ft (1/2-3/4mile) | 3,960-5,280 (3/4-1mile) | >5,280ft (1mile) | 10% |
| **Flood Hazard Zone** | Outside Flood Zone | null | 0.2% Flood Zone | 1% Flood Zone | Regulatory Floodway | 15% |
| **Vacant Parcels** | Parcel is Vacant | null | null | Not Vacant | null | 20% |
| **Land Cover** | Developed High, Medium, Low | Developed Open Space, Barren Land | Pasture/Hay, Cultivated Crops, Grassland/Herbaceous | Deciduous Forest, Evergreen Forest, Mixed Forest, Shrub/Scrub | Woody Wetlands, Emergent Wetlands, Open Water | 25% |
| **Zoning** | B-1, B-2, PUD | P-1, R-3A, R-3B, R-3C | R-2 | R-1A, R-1B, R-1C, R-1D, R-1E, R-MH | Agriculture, LI, HI | 30% |



# Planning and Design Proposals for the Rocky Creek Area

## Combined Planning & Design Proposals Map




Legend
Regency Reimagined
Greenway Trail
Multi-use Paths
Bus Stop Upgrades
Enhanced Underpass
Parking Lot Plantings
Parking Lot Plantings
Regency Reimagined
Linear Park
Mobility Hub

**CATALYTIC OPPORTUNITY**

# REGENCY REIMAGINED

Transforms Regency Mall into a walkable, mixed-use neighborhood centered on missing middle housing and civic uses

# Design Strategy 1: Reuse

The Regency Mall site is not a blank slate. While much of the property has declined, portions of the existing structure remain and represent an opportunity for adaptive reuse rather than complete demolition. This design prioritizes repurposing part of the 800,000 square foot existing mall structure to establish immediate community anchors and reduce redevelopment costs.

A portion of the existing mall, specifically the former JB White and Belk anchor buildings, is transformed into a new civic and educational hub. The JB White structure is reused to house **Rocky Creek Charter Academy**, a tuition-free public school that is currently located behind the site in the former Sears Call Center. The original plan was for the school to be located at the Regency site as noted in the Cardinal Square redevelopment proposal, but that plan never materialized so the school had to pivot. The current building that houses the school lacks the space needed to grow, but in this design the school would occupy approximately 150,000 square feet, allowing it to expand over time from an elementary model to a full K–12 campus, like they envision. By relocating the school into the site, the development introduces a long-term, stable anchor that brings daily activity and investment back to the area.

In addition to the school, approximately 70,000 square feet of the existing Belk anchor is repurposed into a **prosperity center** that directly addresses community needs in South Augusta. This space is designed to provide access to essential services, including fresh and healthy food options, healthcare support, workforce training, and social services. The center could partner with local organizations, such as Goodwill, to support job training and employment opportunities, helping to strengthen economic mobility in the surrounding community.

These reuse strategies transform a vacant and deteriorating structure into a place of opportunity and service. Instead of removing all traces of the mall, the framework builds upon what remains, using existing infrastructure to support education, health, and economic development. This approach establishes a strong foundation for redevelopment while reconnecting the site to the needs of the Rocky Creek community.

This reuse strategy directly supports UN Sustainability Goal 4: Quality Education by expanding access to a tuition-free public charter school designed to grow into a full K–12 campus. By providing a larger, more permanent facility, the design creates opportunities for long-term educational advancement, career preparation, and improved outcomes for students in South Augusta.

It also supports UN Sustainability Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth through the introduction of the prosperity center, which offers workforce training, job placement support, and access to essential services. By connecting residents to employment resources and economic opportunities, the design helps strengthen local workforce development and promote upward mobility.

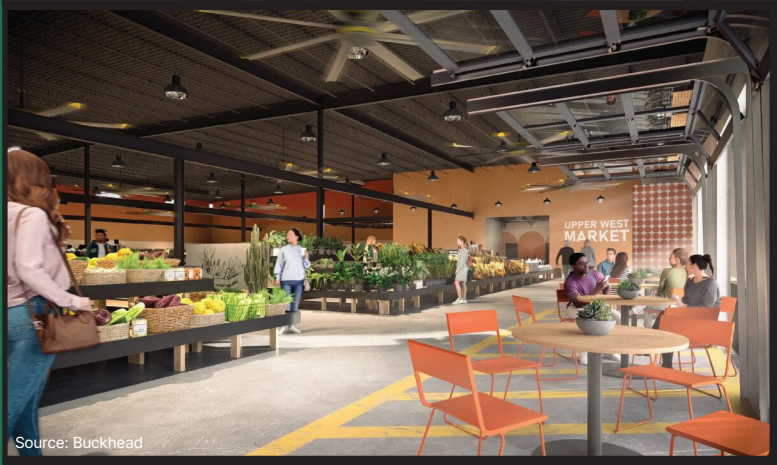
ROCKY CREEK
PROSPERITY CENTER

A GSIC School of Excellence
ROCKY CREEK
CHARTER ACADEMY

# Reuse Precedence Imagery


Source: One Workplace


Source: One Workplace



Source: Buckhead


Source: Kent State University


Source: iStock


Source: SmithGroup


Source: One Workplace


Source: Global Giving

# Design Strategy 2: Rebuild

While portions of the existing mall can be reused, the original structure was not designed to support housing or the diverse needs of a modern community. This design responds by rebuilding the site as a connected, mixed-use missing middle neighborhood that introduces a range of housing types, supports local economic activity, and prioritizes walkability.

To the northwest of the site, **four multifamily apartment buildings** establish a higher-density residential area. Each building is approximately five stories and contains around 80 units, offering a mix of one and two-bedroom apartments. These buildings have the potential to include ground-floor retail or amenity areas, allowing small businesses and neighborhood services to be integrated directly into the environment.

Surrounding the center core of the site, a variety of **missing middle housing types creates a gradual transition in scale and density**. The design includes approximately **27 townhome buildings, each with five units, totaling 135 units**. These two-story units are approximately 1,400 square feet and provide three and two bedroom options for families. In addition, approximately **44 duplex buildings introduce 88 units**, also offering two-and three-bedroom layouts in a compact and efficient form. Smaller-scale housing is provided through **14 cottage court homes**, each around 600 square feet, as well as **13 single-family homes**, creating opportunities for individuals, small households, and first-time homebuyers.

Beyond housing, the design introduces spaces that support economic activity and daily life. **Five buildings are designated for mixed-use, commercial, or maker space**, allowing for small businesses, local entrepreneurship, and flexible community uses. Also, space is given to a local grocer to help combat food access issues in the Study Area. These uses are strategically located near the central spine to increase visibility and accessibility.

The design also incorporates a range of community amenities that support an active and connected neighborhood, including a **public flexible open space, athletic field, and eight pickleball courts** that offer recreational opportunities for residents of all ages. These elements help establish the site as a place not only to live, but also to gather and engage.

To support these uses, the site is restructured with a new street network that breaks down the existing superblock and improves connectivity. New streets, sidewalks, and pedestrian-oriented corridors create a more walkable environment and better integrate the site with surrounding roads and neighborhoods.

The Regency Mall site is currently zoned as a Planned Unit Development (PUD), which was established in anticipation of the Cardinal Square redevelopment proposal that was never realized. While the site remains undeveloped, the PUD designation provides important flexibility that allows for a mix of land uses, housing types, and site design approaches that would not be permitted under conventional zoning districts.

In Augusta, the PUD district is intended to support innovative and high-quality community design by allowing greater flexibility in layout, density, and land use. In return, developments are expected to deliver cohesive design, protect environmental resources, incorporate creative site planning, and ensure compatibility with surrounding areas. This designation is especially appropriate for large, complex sites like Regency Mall.

While the PUD allows flexibility, this design is still informed by existing zoning standards to ensure compatibility with surrounding neighborhoods. The layout and scale of the missing middle housing draw from Augusta's R-1E (One-Family Residential) and R-2 (Two-Family Residential) districts. For example, the design reflects typical setbacks, building heights, and residential patterns found in these zones, while introducing a greater mix of housing types within a unified development.

At the same time, the project highlights opportunities for future zoning updates. Current requirements, such as parking minimums of two spaces per unit, may limit the ability to create more compact and walkable development. Adjustments to these standards could support increased density, reduce unnecessary impervious surfaces, and better align with the goals of sustainable development.

This framework also aligns with the Augusta-Richmond County Comprehensive Plan for South Augusta, which calls for a mix of housing types, targeted infill development, and the redevelopment of large abandoned commercial sites.

This strategy supports UN Sustainability Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities by transforming a vacant, single-use site into a compact, mixed-use neighborhood that promotes walkability, housing diversity, and access to daily needs.

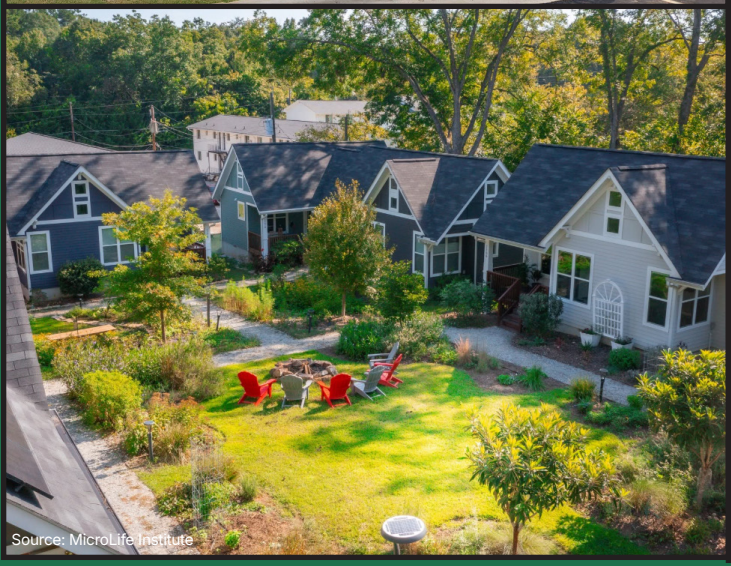
# Rebuild Precedence Imagery


Source: Plant a Seed & See What Grows Foundation


Source: Visit Columbia County


Source: True Homes

Source: Hammond's Ferry


Source: MicroLife Institute


Source: Apartment Guide

# Design Strategy 3: Regreen

While the impervious parking lots were removed in 2018, the site is still dominated by the impervious roof the mall, fragmented open space, and barren land. This design repositions landscape as a primary organizing element, using ecological restoration and green infrastructure to transform the site into a more resilient and environmentally responsive community.

A key component of this strategy is the **preservation and enhancement of existing forested areas, particularly along the Rocky Creek natural corridor**. These areas are protected and expanded to create a continuous ecological buffer that supports habitat, improves water quality, and reinforces the natural identity of the site. Rather than developing up to the creek's edge, the design respects this system and uses it as a defining feature of the overall design.

**The Rocky Creek Greenway Trail** is introduced as a multi-use path that runs along the site, providing a continuous connection between neighborhoods. This trail supports walking and biking while also serving as a social space that encourages outdoor activity and community interaction.

Tree canopy expansion is a central part of the regreening strategy. Augusta has experienced significant canopy loss in recent years, including widespread damage from Hurricane Helene. In response, this design prioritizes large-scale tree planting throughout the site, including within residential areas, along streets, and in former parking lots. Increasing canopy coverage helps reduce the urban heat island effect, improves air quality, and creates shaded, comfortable outdoor environments for residents.

Green infrastructure is integrated throughout the site to manage stormwater more sustainably. **Retention ponds and landscaped drainage areas** are strategically located to capture and slow runoff, reducing flooding risks and improving water infiltration. These features are designed not only for function but also as visual amenities that enhance the character of open spaces.

In addition to ecological systems, the design provides multiple green spaces for the community. The flexible open spaces can accommodate activities such as markets, events, and community gardens.

Through regreening, the site shifts toward a landscape centered on ecology, recreation, and human experience. This approach restores environmental function while creating a healthier and more livable community for South Augusta.

This strategy supports UN Sustainability Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities by improving access to green space, enhancing environmental quality, and creating healthier living environments. The integration of parks, trails, and tree canopy contributes to a more livable and resilient community.

# Regreen Precedence Imagery

The design strategies for “Regency Reimagined” are directly informed by the project’s theoretical framework of environmental, social, and economic sustainability, as well as the guiding principles that structure each category.

**Environmental sustainability** is addressed through green infrastructure, ecological restoration, and regreening efforts that enhance stormwater management, expand tree canopy, and restore the Rocky Creek natural corridor.

**Social sustainability** is supported through improvements to public realm quality, accessibility, and community identity, with the introduction of walkable streets, connected open spaces, and civic anchors such as the charter school and prosperity center that foster daily activity and a sense of place.

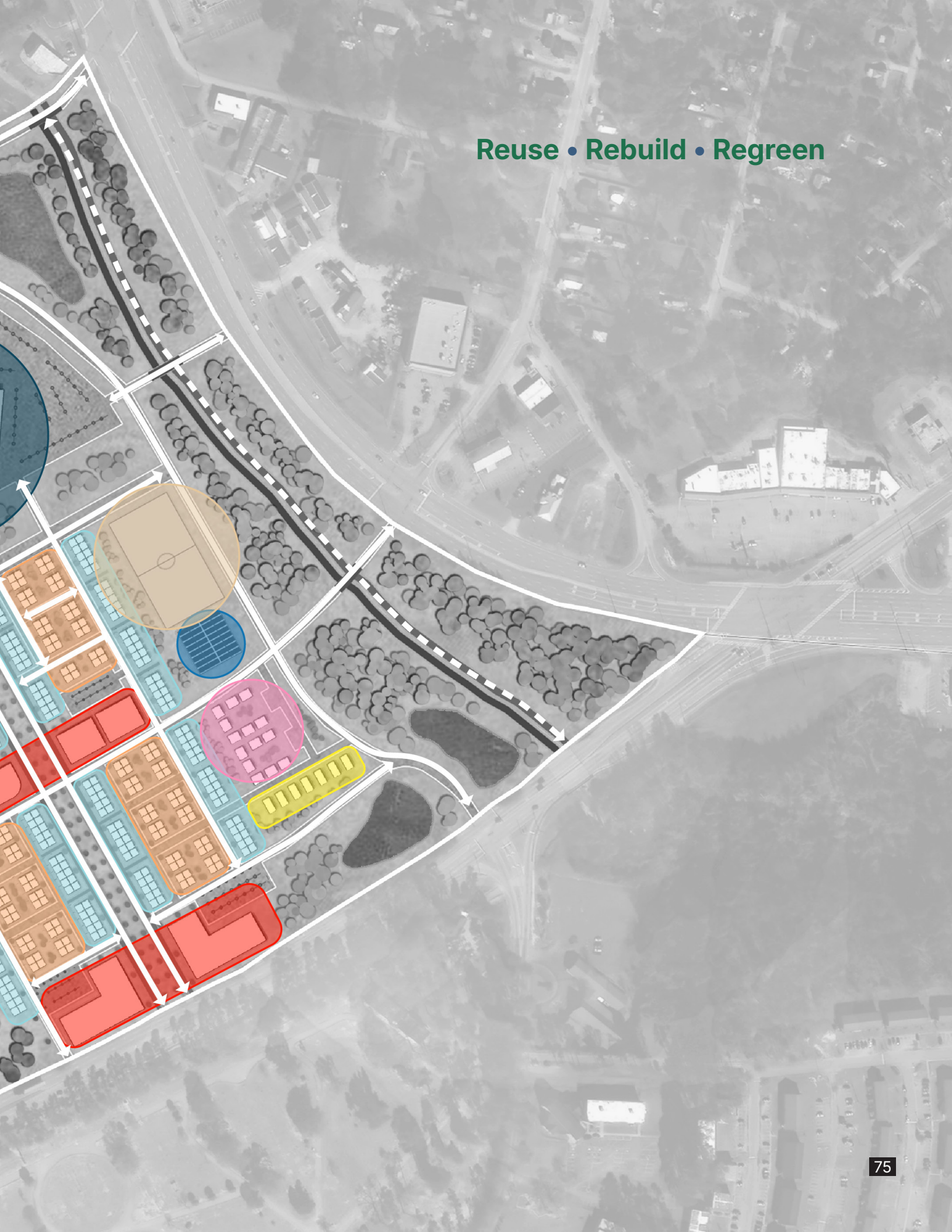
**Economic sustainability** is advanced through a mix of housing types, local commercial opportunities, and flexible redevelopment strategies that allow the site to evolve over time while supporting workforce development and local investment.

Together, these strategies translate the guiding principles into a cohesive design framework that transforms the site into a connected, adaptable, and community-centered environment.

In addition to meeting the guiding principles of the Framework, “Regency Reimagined” also aligns with broader, well-established global sustainability frameworks, including the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These goals reinforce the project’s focus on environmental, social, and economic sustainability by connecting it to widely recognized benchmarks for measuring long-term community well-being.

CATALYTIC OPPORTUNITY

# Regency Reimagined Functional Diagram



CATALYTIC OPPORTUNITY

# Regency Reimagined Site Plan


## Legend

1. MF Residential Apartments
2. Flex Open Space
3. Detached SF
4. Prosperity Center
5. School
6. Linear Park Mobility Hub
7. Commerical/ Makerspace
8. Duplexes
9. Townhomes
10. SF Cottage Courts
11. Athletic Field
12. Pickelball Courts
13. Retention Pond
14. Rocky Creek and Greenway

0 Miles

0.25 Miles


## Design Strategy - Three R's

**Reuse:** Repurpose existing mall structures into a civic hub with a school and prosperity center that brings services, education, and activity back to the site.

**Rebuild:** Transform the site into a mixed-use neighborhood with diverse housing, local businesses, and a connected street network.

**Regreen:** Restore ecological systems through the greenway, expanded tree canopy, and green infrastructure that supports recreation and resilience.

## UN Sustainabiliy Goals

4 QUALITY EDUCATION

8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

ONE STRUCTURE. MULTIPLE USES.

# Rocky Creek Prosperity Center and Charter Academy Design Language

# Linear Park Mobility Hub

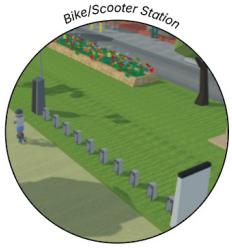
The Linear Park Mobility Hub was designed to merge the continuous green structure of a linear park with the connective function of a mobility hub. This design strategy serves as the central organizing spine of the “Regency Reimagined” plan, extending from Deans Bridge Road through the site and terminating at the school and Prosperity Center. Positioned at the heart of the development, it connects surrounding townhomes, commercial buildings, and adjacent missing middle housing, creating a cohesive and accessible framework for daily movement.

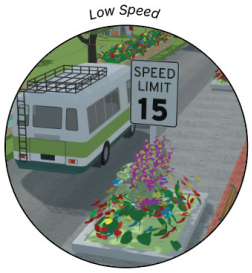
The linear park component establishes a planted corridor that prioritizes pedestrians and cyclists while providing shade, improving thermal comfort, and supporting stormwater management. The mobility hub anchors this corridor as a key node of activity, where walking, biking, transit, and micromobility meet, offering seamless transitions between modes and reinforcing the site’s connectivity to the broader South Augusta network.

Streetscapes play an important role in shaping how people experience and move through a place, functioning not only as infrastructure but as shared public space. In this design, the streetscape is intentionally structured to serve all users (residents, students, families, and visitors) regardless of age, ability, or mode of travel. Wide, shaded sidewalks, protected bike routes, accessible crossings, and integrated seating areas ensure that the corridor is comfortable, safe, and inclusive.

Together, these elements transform the street into a multifunctional landscape that not only facilitates movement but also supports social interaction, ecological performance, and neighborhood identity.


*Perspective View*





Street Lamp

Raised Crosswalk

Sidewalk

Furniture

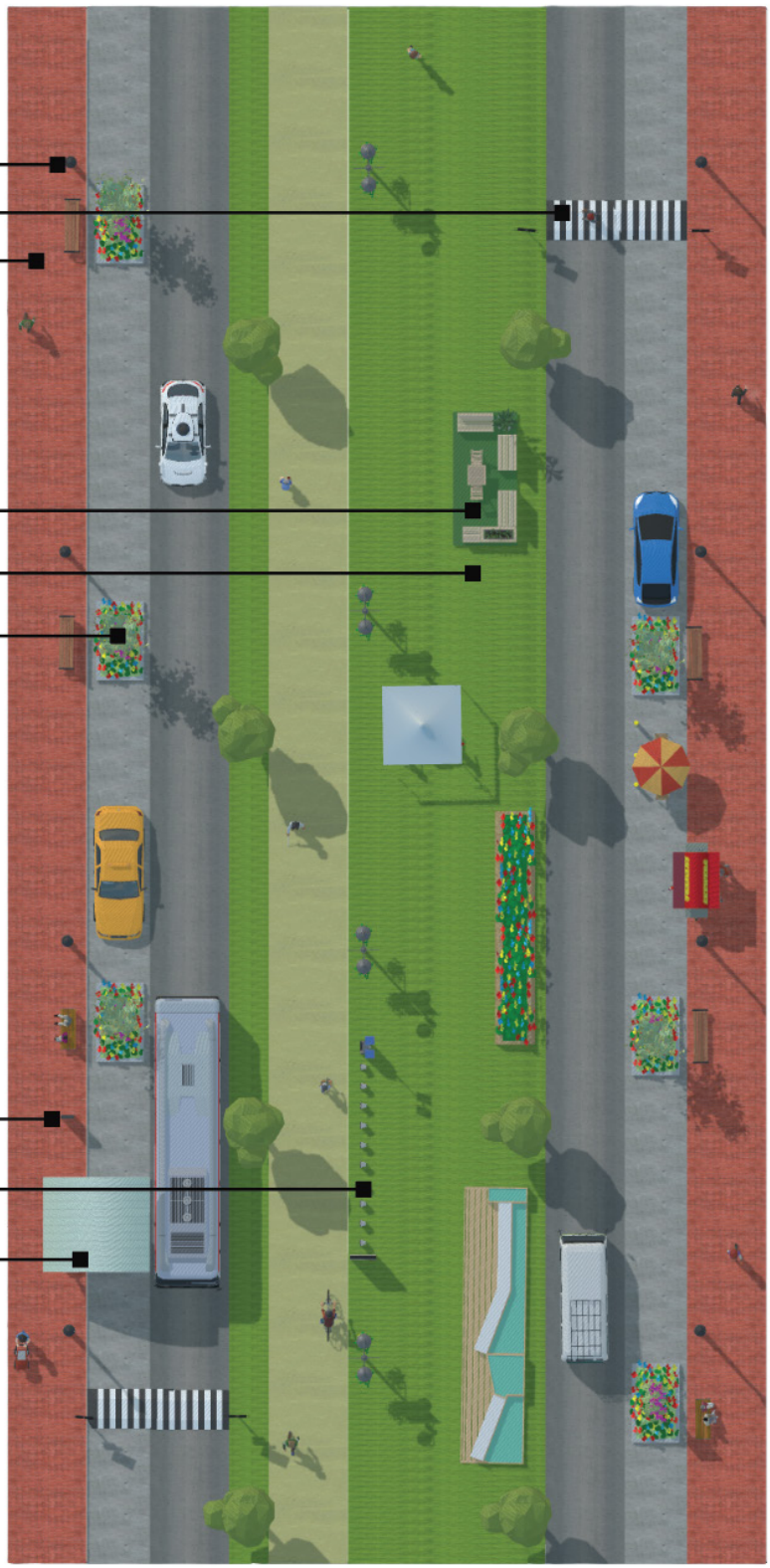
Open Lawn

Curb Planter

Wayfinding Sign

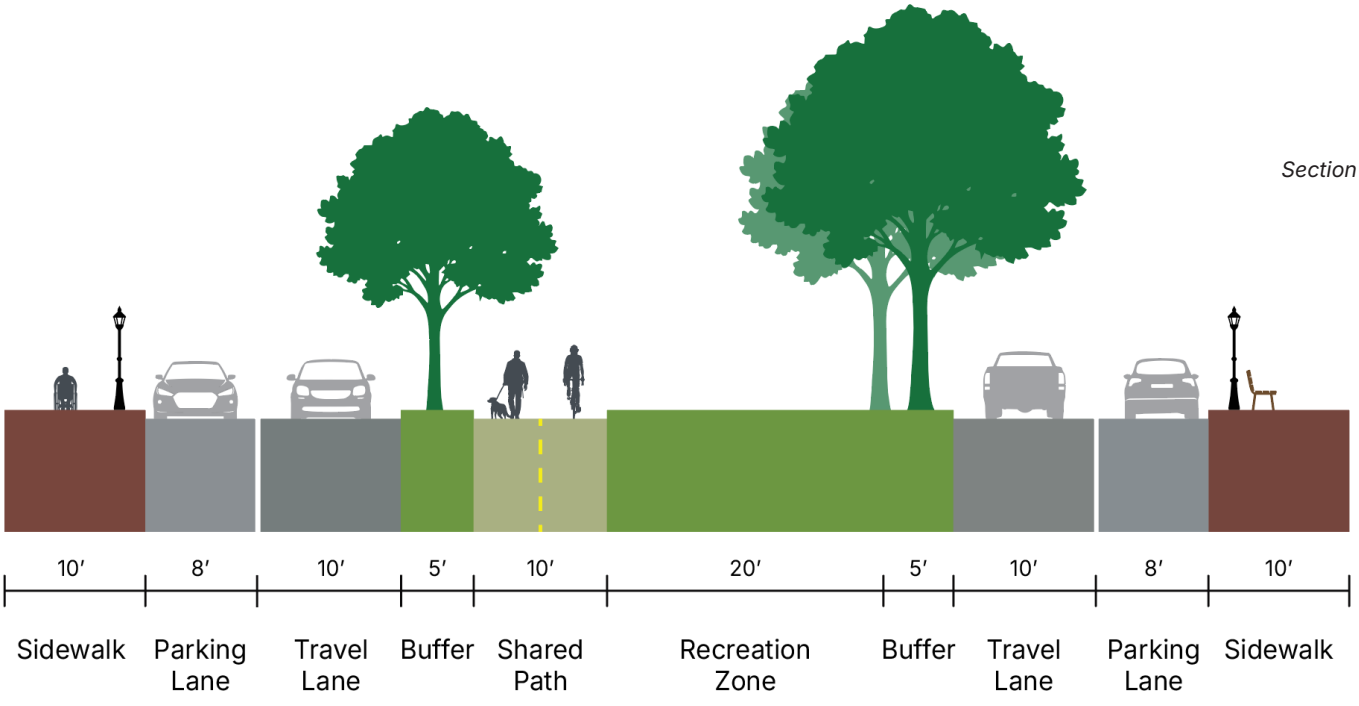
Bike/Scooter Station

Covered Bus Stop



*Plan View*


*Bird's Eye View*




*Section*

# Regency Reimagined
# Bird's Eye View


Athletic Field
Pickleball Courts
plexes
Greenway Trail
SF Cottage Courts
Linear Park Mobility Hub
erical

# CONNECTIVITY PROPOSALS

CONNECTIVITY PLAN

ROCKY CREEK GREENWAY

BUS STOP IMPROVEMENTS

ENHANCED UNDERPASS

PARKING LOT PLANTINGS

# Connectivity Plan

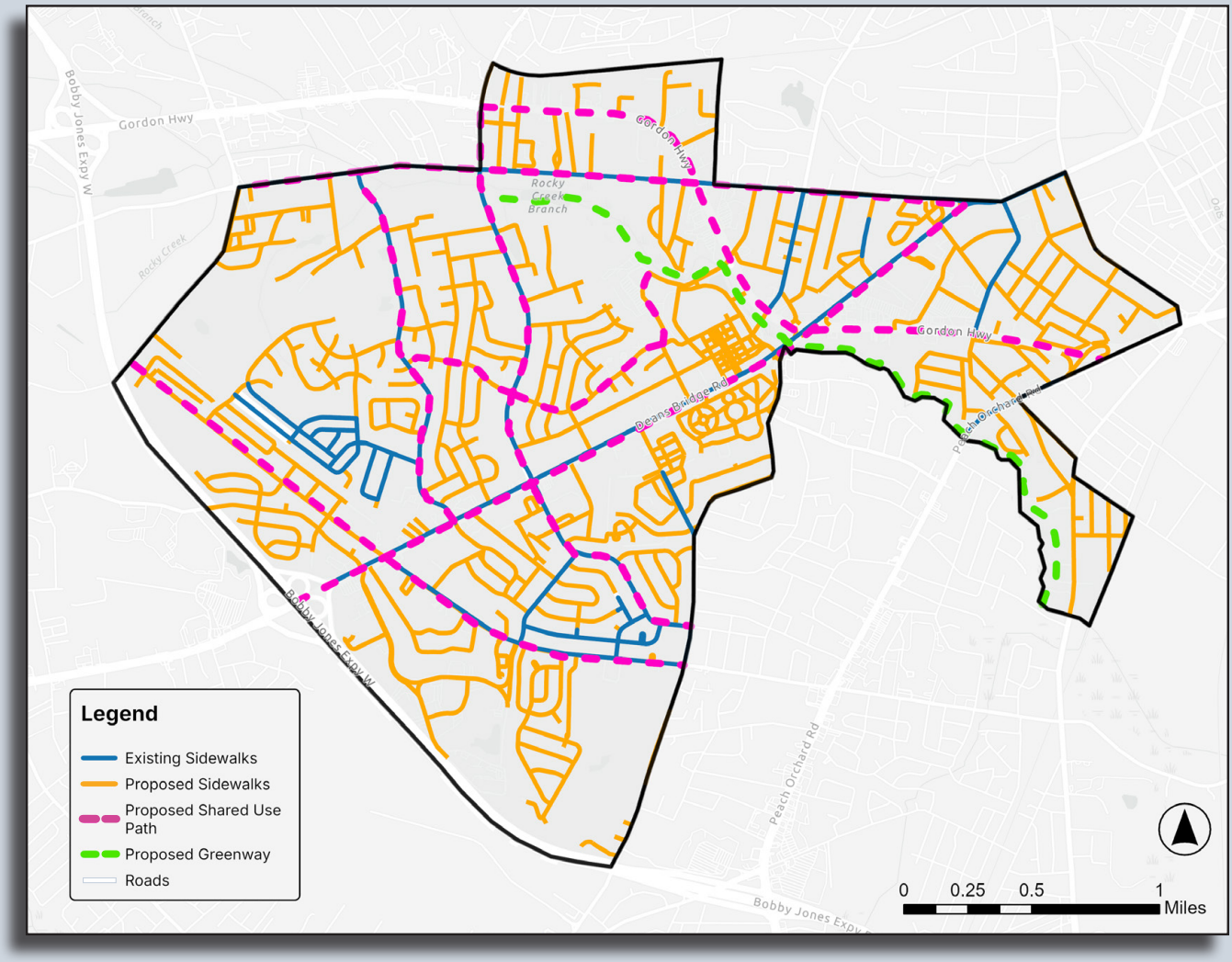
The connectivity plan for the Rocky Creek study area is designed to strengthen mobility by prioritizing a multimodal transportation network rather than relying solely on vehicular movement. Guided by the Augusta Regional Transportation Study (ARTS) 2023 Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, this framework integrates existing infrastructure with targeted improvements to create a more connected, accessible, and resilient system.

The existing road network provides the structural foundation for movement throughout the study area; however, it currently prioritizes automobiles and lacks sufficient pedestrian and bicycle accommodations. To address this, the Regency Reimagined proposal introduces strategic new road connections that improve circulation and reduce fragmentation, particularly around the former Regency Mall site.

Building upon this framework, this plan enhances pedestrian accessibility through a comprehensive network of proposed sidewalks that fill critical gaps in the existing system. These improvements aim to create continuous, safe, and comfortable walking routes that connect neighborhoods to key destinations.

To further expand mobility options, a network of proposed shared-use paths is introduced to support both cyclists and pedestrians along major corridors. These paths provide higher-capacity, more efficient routes for non-motorized travel and serve as primary connectors across the study area. Complementing this system is the proposed greenway, which follows the Rocky Creek natural corridor to create a recreational and ecological spine.

Together, these layers form an integrated network that improves access, supports active transportation, and aligns with regional planning efforts. This approach shifts the focus from car-dependent design toward a more balanced and sustainable mobility system that better serves the needs of the community.



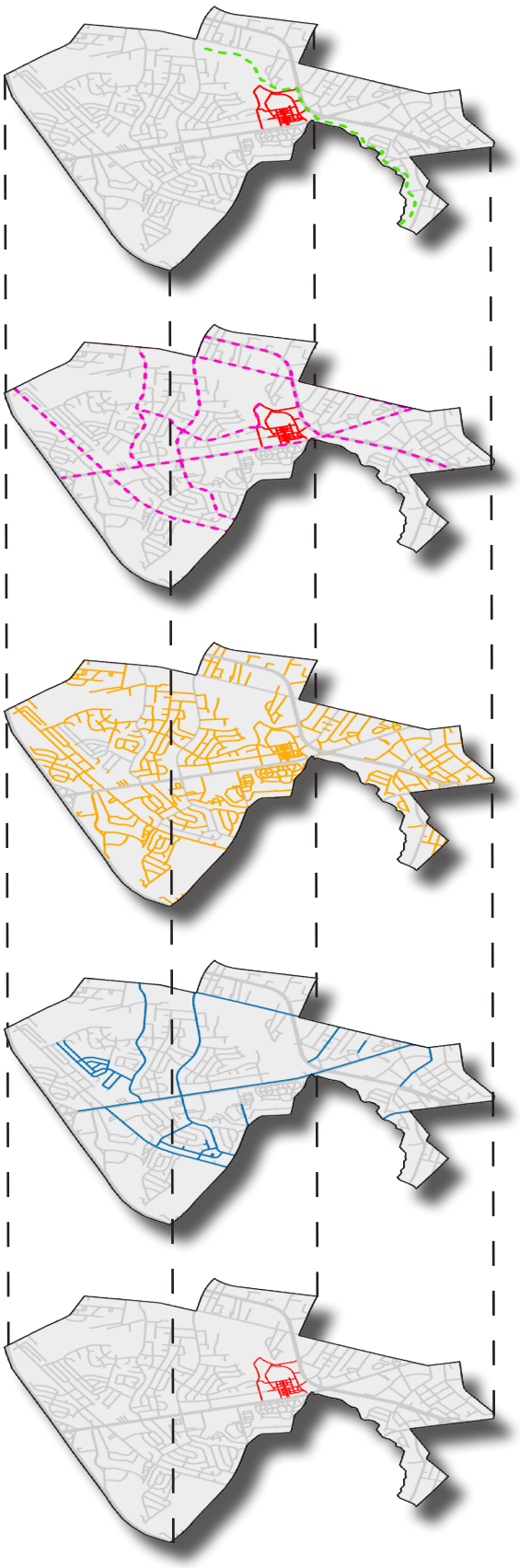
Proposed Greenway
Regency Reimagined Proposed Roads

Proposed Shared-Use Path
Regency Reimagined Proposed Roads

Proposed Sidewalks

Existing Sidewalks

Existing Roads
Regency Reimagined Proposed Roads



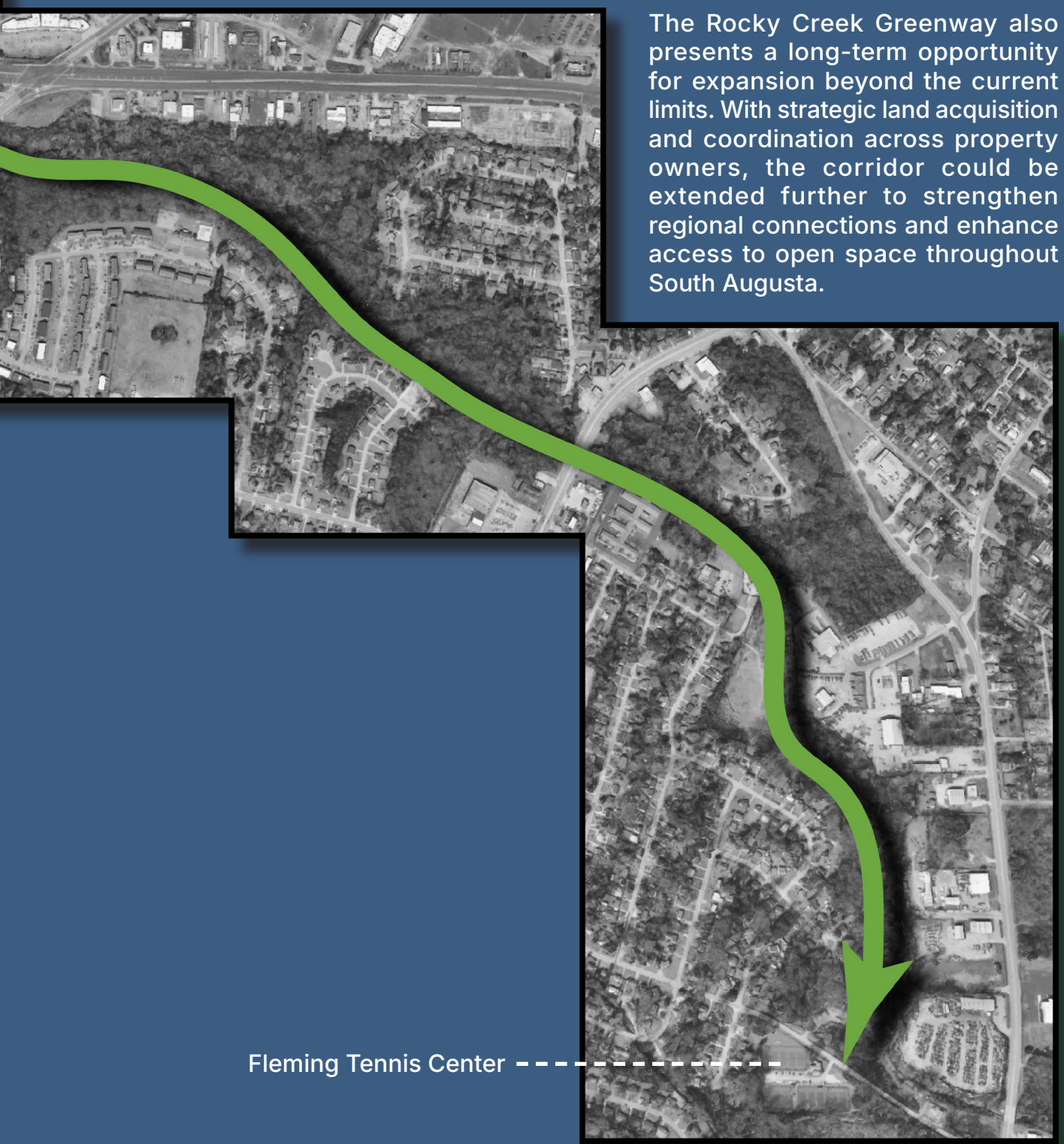
# Rocky Creek Greenway Trail


This design proposal, the Rocky Creek Greenway, is a continuous multi-use trail corridor of approximately three miles that follows the natural alignment of Rocky Creek, connecting Wheeless Road through the “Regency Reimagined” site and extending south to Chester Avenue, ending across from the Fleming Tennis Center. Positioned as both a recreational amenity and a transportation corridor, the greenway provides a safe, off-street route for walking and cycling while linking surrounding neighborhoods to key destinations within the study area.

The trail is designed to integrate seamlessly with the broader multimodal network, intersecting with proposed shared-use paths, sidewalks, and new street connections. This strengthens overall connectivity by offering an alternative to vehicular travel and creating direct, comfortable routes between residential areas, commercial centers, and community amenities.

Beyond mobility, the greenway serves as a framework for ecological restoration and environmental performance. The corridor prioritizes the preservation and enhancement of existing natural systems through native planting, stream buffer restoration, and stormwater management strategies. Following rain events, the creek and adjacent floodplain expand, allowing the landscape to absorb and convey water naturally while supporting habitat for local wildlife. Elevated boardwalks and carefully designed crossings maintain access while minimizing disturbance to sensitive areas.

The Rocky Creek Greenway also presents a long-term opportunity for expansion beyond the current limits. With strategic land acquisition and coordination across property owners, the corridor could be extended further to strengthen regional connections and enhance access to open space throughout South Augusta.



# Bus Stop Improvements

Public transit plays an important role in mobility within the Rocky Creek study area. According to the 2022 Augusta Transit Bus Stop Inventory, five of Augusta's nine fixed bus routes pass through the study area (Routes 4, 6, 7, 8, and 9). These routes serve 85 bus stops within Rocky Creek, representing a significant share of the 617 stops located throughout the county. Route 6 Brown Line/Gordon Highway recorded the highest ridership in the system with 135,881 unlinked passenger trips in 2019, demonstrating the importance of reliable transit infrastructure in the study area.

Despite the level of transit activity, the bus stop inventory revealed that many stops lack basic amenities and safety features. Across the system:

- 85% of bus stops do not have shelters
- Of the shelters that exist, approximately 60% are in poor condition
- Many stops lack lighting, relying only on nearby streetlights
- Some routes have very low rates of seating and trash receptacles
- Several stops lack clearly visible bus stop signage
- A large share of stops present ADA accessibility challenges

These findings indicate a clear need for improvements that increase comfort, safety, and visibility for transit riders in the Rocky Creek area.


## Option 1: Simme-Seat

This option provides a basic but important improvement to existing stops that currently consist only of a pole and faded sign.

Improvements include: New clearly visible bus stop signage, a simple two-person seat, and improved stop identification and wayfinding.

This approach provides a cost-effective solution that increases comfort for riders while ensuring each stop is properly identified, addressing a key recommendation from the Bus Stop Inventory report.

## Option 2: Enhanced Bus Shelter

For higher ridership stops or priority corridors, a more comprehensive transit stop design is proposed. This option transforms a basic roadside stop into a safe, comfortable, and identifiable transit waiting area.

Features include: Covered bus shelter with seating, solar-powered lighting to improve visibility and safety, public art panels, trash and recycle receptacles, route information and wayfinding signage, improved sidewalk access, landscaping to enhance the public realm, and a marked crosswalk with solar-powered LED warning sign.

These improvements align closely with the recommendations from Augusta Transit's bus stop inventory, particularly the need for lighting, signage, and improved rider amenities.

*Existing Condition*

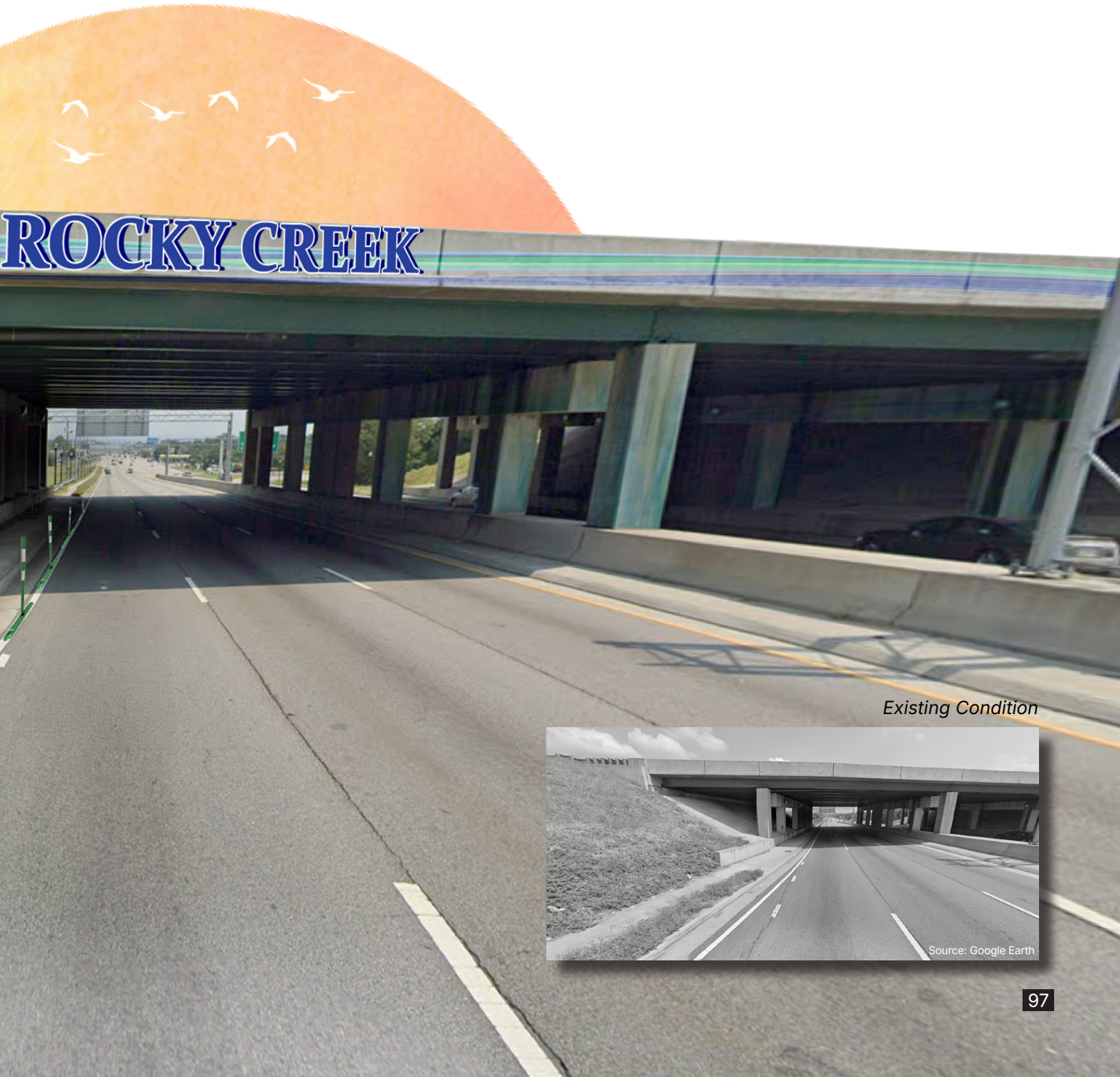

# Enhanced Underpass

Deans Bridge Road passes beneath Interstate 520 (Bobby Jones Expressway) and serves as one of the primary entry points into the Rocky Creek study area from the west. This corridor carries high volumes of traffic and currently functions primarily as an automobile-oriented space with limited pedestrian comfort and little visual identity.

This proposal reimagines the underpass as a gateway into the Rocky Creek area through placemaking and streetscape improvements. Brand identity signage and wayfinding elements introduce visitors to the district while reinforcing a recognizable identity for the Rocky Creek area. Public art is incorporated onto bridge columns and sloped retaining walls to reflect local culture and create a more visually engaging environment.

Pedestrian safety and comfort are improved through the addition of landscaped buffers between the sidewalk and roadway where space allows. In constrained areas beneath the bridge, protective bollards provide separation between pedestrians and traffic. Lighting improvements further enhance visibility and safety while creating a more welcoming experience for people walking, biking, or driving through the corridor.

Together, these interventions transform the underpass from a purely infrastructural space into a recognizable entrance that strengthens identity, improves safety, and enhances the experience of entering the Rocky Creek community in order to help mitigate negative perceptions of the area.




*Existing Condition*

# Parking Lot Plantings

Large surface parking lots are a defining feature of many suburban commercial corridors, including areas within the Rocky Creek study area. While parking is necessary to support retail and services, large expanses of impervious pavement create environmental and design challenges. These areas often lack shade, contribute to excessive heat, generate stormwater runoff, and create an uncomfortable pedestrian environment.

Parking lot design therefore presents an opportunity to improve environmental performance while enhancing the public realm. Introducing tree canopy and green infrastructure into parking areas can reduce heat, manage stormwater, and create more comfortable and visually appealing spaces for people.

Trees can break up large expanses of pavement, provide shade and enclosure, reduce noise, and create a more human-scaled environment. Vegetation can also help slow traffic within parking areas by visually narrowing travel aisles and directing circulation.

Trees also release moisture through evapotranspiration. Studies show that trees can moderate local temperatures by 9–27°F, which can significantly reduce the urban heat island effect created by large areas of asphalt and concrete.

This issue is particularly relevant in Augusta, Georgia, where summer temperatures are high and extended heat periods are common. Large parking lots often absorb and radiate heat throughout the day, making these environments uncomfortable for pedestrians and increasing cooling demands for nearby buildings.

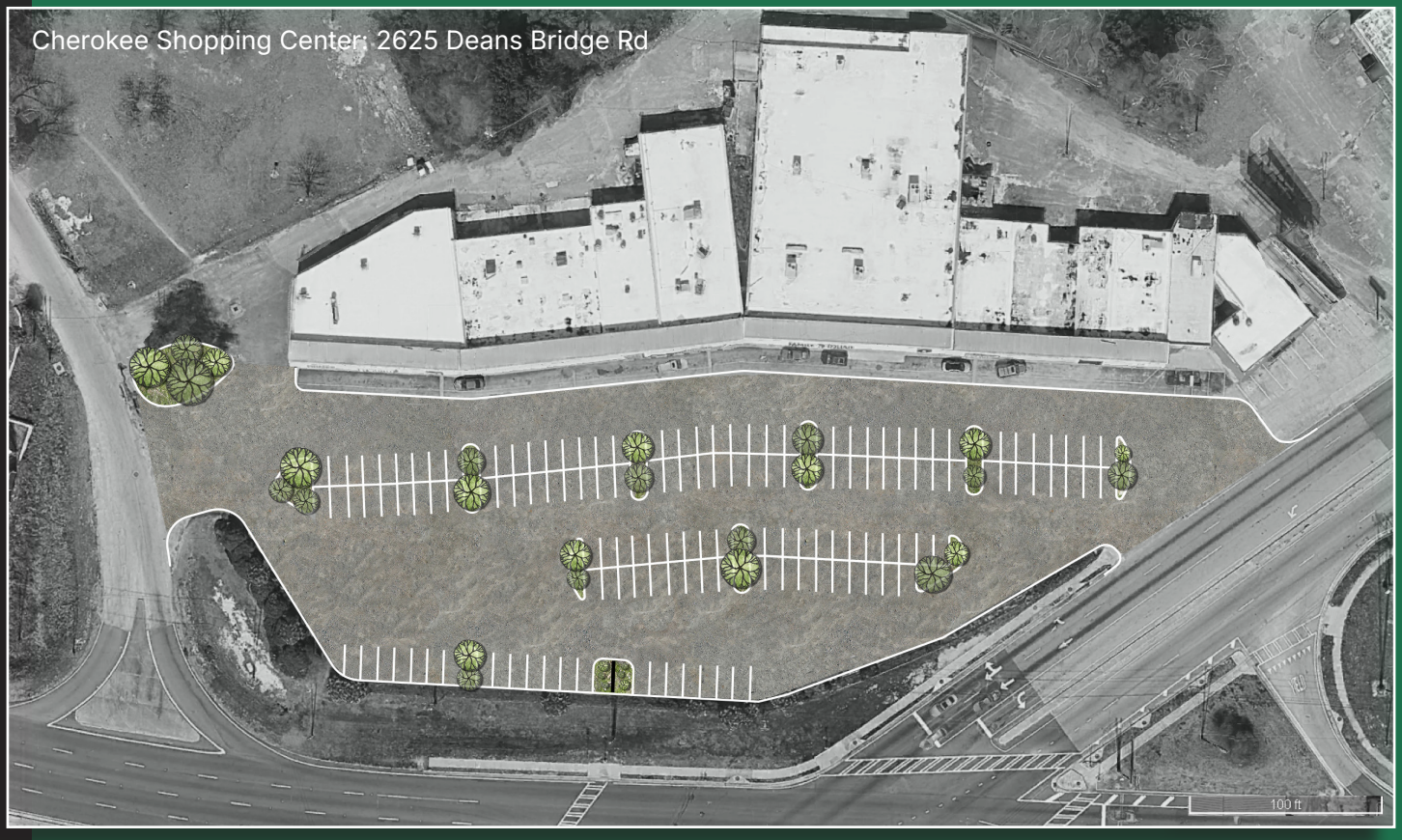
Trees also provide ecological benefits. Vegetation can filter pollutants from stormwater runoff, stabilize soil, and help reduce flooding and erosion. While planting trees within highly impervious sites can require careful planning and investment, including site preparation, installation, and long-term maintenance, the long-term environmental and community benefits often outweigh these costs as trees mature and provide increasing canopy coverage.

Tree canopy improvements also support existing local regulations. The Augusta Tree Ordinance requires landscaping within parking lots to ensure adequate tree coverage and shade. Under this ordinance: Parking lots providing more than five parking spaces must contain interior landscaped areas, no more than twelve consecutive parking spaces are permitted between planting islands, and planting islands must include large canopy trees.

# Option 1: Increased Tree Canopy

The first design is intended to be a low cost option that can be implemented quickly. This design focuses on increasing tree canopy coverage within existing parking lots. Planting islands and canopy trees are introduced throughout the parking area to break up large expanses of pavement and provide shade for parked vehicles and pedestrians.

*Existing Condition*

# Option 2: Urban Plaza and Stormwater Reslience

The second design option builds upon the tree canopy strategy by incorporating additional green infrastructure and public space elements. In this concept, the parking lot is redesigned to include increased tree canopy, bioswales, a mini forest planting area, and a flexible public space/ urban plaza with permeable paving.

Stormwater from the adjacent building roof is directed through downspouts into the bioswales located within the parking lot landscape areas. These bioswales slow and filter runoff while transporting water toward the lower edge of the site into the mini forest, where dense vegetation helps absorb and manage stormwater while creating a shaded ecological landscape.

*Existing Condition*

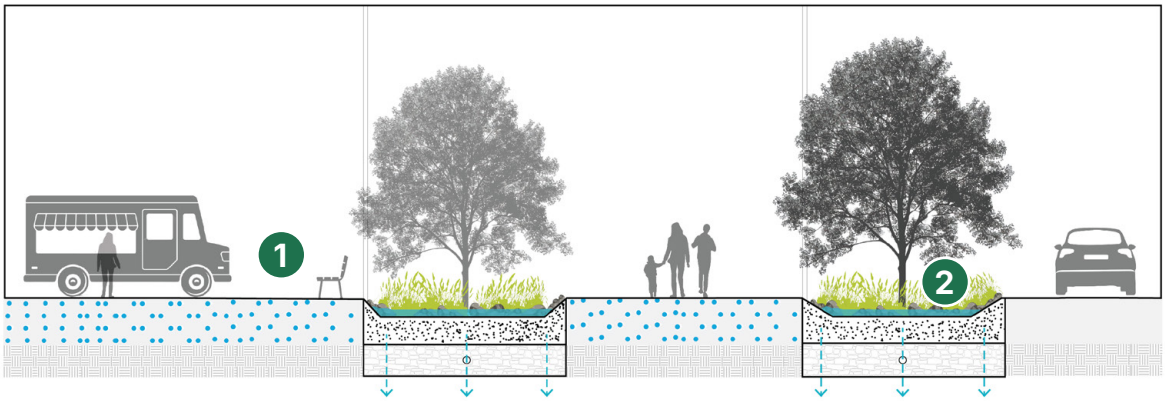

1. Flex Space
2. Bioswale
3. Mini Forest

Flex Space Use Precedence Imagery:


*Food Truck Friday Event in Augusta*


*Augusta Market Event in Dwtn. Augusta*

**Parking Lot Section**




Additional parking lots in the Rocky Creek study area that would benefit from parking lot planting designs include: Gordon Village at 1755 Gordon Highway and the commercial center across the street at 1760 Gordon Highway.

# Framework Application

| Theoretical Framework Lens | Guiding Principle | Design Response |
|---|---|---|
| **Environmental Sustainability** | Green Infrastructure & Stormwater Resilience | Retention ponds and parking lot retrofits (including bioswales and mini forest) manage stormwater and reduce runoff |
| | Walkability & Multimodal Connectivity | Connectivity Plan including sidewalk improvements, trail connections, and enhanced bus stops improve mobility and access |
| | Ecological Restoration & Regreening | Rocky Creek greenway and creek restoration enhance ecological function and resilience |
| **Social Sustainability** | Public Realm Quality & Safety | Linear Park Mobility Hub and Enhanced Underpass improve safety and comfort |
| | Accessibility & Equity in Design | Improved transit access, walkability, and community-serving uses including the Charter Academy increase accessibility for residents |
| | Community Identity & Sense of Place | Creation of a flex plaza, civic spaces, and gathering areas establishes a new identity for the area |
| **Economic Sustainability** | Local Economy & Workforce Support | Prosperity Center provides workforce training, healthcare access, and community services |
| | Mixed-Use Land & Housing Diversity | Introduction of missing middle housing, apartments, and mixed-use development |
| | Incremental Redevelopment & Implementation Flexibility | Phased redevelopment strategy allows the site to adapt to market conditions over time |

# Limitations

This practicum has some limitations. The suitability analysis is based on a limited set of GIS variables due to time and data constraints. The project focuses primarily on spatial and design strategies, with more detailed market and financial analysis identified as an area for future research. The design proposals are conceptual and are not intended as construction documents. Implementation in practice will depend on a variety of factors, including ownership, funding availability, and political support. While community input from previous plans was reviewed and considered, this practicum did not include a formal community engagement process. Finally, the framework is intended to identify opportunities for redevelopment, but it does not guarantee that redevelopment will occur.

# Conclusion

This practicum presents a Framework for rethinking struggling suburban areas in South Augusta, using the Rocky Creek Area as a case study. Rather than relying on large, singular redevelopment efforts, the approach emphasizes coordinated, incremental interventions that respond to existing conditions, local needs, and realistic market constraints. Within this broader framework, the Regency Mall site serves as a key catalytic opportunity for demonstrating how these strategies can be applied in practice.

The framework highlights several consistent priorities: improving connectivity, introducing a wider range of housing options, integrating green infrastructure, and bringing essential services closer to residents. At the Regency Mall site, these priorities are reflected in a redevelopment approach that differs from past proposals by focusing on attainable, community-oriented outcomes. In particular, the introduction of missing middle housing provides more affordable and diverse housing options, while civic uses such as the Prosperity Center and charter school establish a strong community anchor and support long-term stability.

Ultimately, this Framework is intended to guide decision-making rather than prescribe a fixed outcome. It positions redevelopment as an ongoing process that builds on existing assets, supports local needs, and adapts to changing conditions over time. While it does not resolve every challenge facing South Augusta, it offers a more flexible, grounded, and implementable approach to reinvestment aimed at improving quality of life in the Rocky Creek Area.

# Implementation & Planning Recommendations

While many of the connectivity proposals were designed to be lower cost and implementable in the short term, the "Regency Reimagined" proposal is intended to occur incrementally. This approach allows the project to respond to market conditions, funding availability, and community needs over time by breaking the site into manageable phases that build on one another and establish momentum for continued reinvestment.

Phase 1 should focus on catalytic, lower-cost interventions that improve perception, access, and immediate usability of the site. This includes selective demolition of portions of the mall, stabilization and adaptive reuse of viable structures, and the introduction of early public realm improvements such as streetscape upgrades, lighting, and temporary or flexible open spaces. Enhancements to pedestrian infrastructure and transit stops, particularly along major corridors such as Gordon Highway, can begin to address long-standing connectivity issues. Early implementation of green infrastructure, including bioswales and tree planting, can also improve environmental performance while signaling visible change.

Phase 2 would introduce anchor community-serving uses within the retained mall structure, including the proposed Prosperity Center and charter academy. These uses are important to establishing a new identity for the site and generating consistent daily activity. At this stage, additional site circulation improvements and internal street networks can be developed to break down the superblock and support walkability.

Phase 3 can expand residential and mixed-use development. Small-scale commercial spaces and recreational amenities will help create a more complete and balanced environment. As development continues, the extension of the Rocky Creek greenway and integration of open space networks can further connect the site to surrounding areas and enhance overall quality of life.

The Rocky Creek Enterprise Zone designation provides a key implementation tool to support these phases. By offering incentives such as tax abatements, fee reductions, and streamlined permitting, the Enterprise Zone can help lower barriers to redevelopment and attract both public and private investment. These tools include property tax abatements, which reduce taxes on the increased value of a property after redevelopment for a set period, often up to 10 years, helping offset upfront development costs. Additional incentives, such as state tax credits tied to job creation, can further encourage private employers to locate within the area. Leveraging this designation alongside partnerships with local institutions, healthcare providers, and educational organizations will be important to advancing the proposed uses within the Prosperity Center and school, while also supporting workforce development and community services.

In addition to the Enterprise Zone, tools such as Planned Unit Development (PUD) zoning can support flexible, mixed-use development by allowing more adaptable site design and land use configurations. Updates to development regulations that currently emphasize separation of land uses could further support walkable, mixed-use redevelopment patterns across the study area.

Additional implementation strategies may include the use of public-private partnerships to improve access, visibility, and long-term project viability. Securing grants and funding for green infrastructure, health services, and community development can further support early phases of the project. Addressing long-term vacancy will also be critical, and the county could consider stronger policies or incentives to discourage prolonged underutilization of key sites and encourage reinvestment.

Developing a more detailed future land use framework for the area could provide clearer guidance for long-term redevelopment compared to the broader character area approach currently in place.

Overall, the long-term goal is to transform the site into a fully connected, walkable, mixed-use neighborhood that supports ongoing reinvestment and serves as a catalyst for broader revitalization in South Augusta.

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